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NATION > 02

Amit Shah asks Nishads to defeat SP, BSP in UP polls...



HOLLYWOOD > 06

Isabelle Huppert to receive Berlin Film Festival's honorary Golden Bear...



SPORTS > 07

Maxwell should get more Test cricket opportunities...

66 INDIAN-ORIGIN TERRORISTS OPERATING ABROAD WITH IS, ALSO IN INDIA

IT IS DANGEROUS

Within India, "through the end of September, the NIA (National Investigation Agency) had investigated 34 terrorism cases it indicated were related to ISIS and arrested 160 persons. Although ISIS lost its territory in Syria, new branches that surfaced in 2019 in Pakistan and India continued to operate," the report said, adding that "other IS-affiliated groups claimed responsibility for attacks in the Maldives and Bangladesh in 2020".

- ▶ AS AN INCIDENT OF CROSS-BORDER TERRORISM, IT MENTIONED THE ATTACK ON MAY 2 LAST YEAR FOR WHICH LET AND ITS OFFSHOOT, THE RESISTANCE FRONT, TOOK RESPONSIBILITY.
- ▶ ARMED MEN INFILTRATED FROM THE PAKISTAN-CONTROLLED PART OF KASHMIR TOOK CIVILIAN HOSTAGES IN A VILLAGE AND TWO ARMY OFFICERS AND THREE POLICE PERSONNEL WERE KILLED DURING THE HOSTAGE RESCUE OPERATION, IT SAID.
- ▶ THE RESISTANCE FRONT ALSO TOOK RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE KILLING OF A KASHMIRI POLITICIAN, HIS FATHER AND HIS BROTHER AT THEIR HOME, THE REPORT SAID.



Thursday. Globally, the tentacles of IS and Al Qaeda have spread leading to a spike in terrorism, according to John Godfrey, the Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

its regional affiliate, Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) "continued to operate from remote locations that have served as safe havens," the report said. The report noted Pakistan's links to terrorism: "Groups targeting India, including LeT and its affiliated front organisations, and JeM continued to operate from Pakistani territory. Pakistan did not take action against other known terrorists such as JeM founder and UN-designated terrorist Masood Azhar and 2008 Mumbai attack 'project manager' Sajid Mir, both of whom are believed to remain free in Pakistan." But it also said that Islamabad had at the same time taken "steps in 2020 to counter terror financing and restrain India-focused militant groups from conducting attacks".

"Pakistan convicted Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Saeed and four other senior LeT leaders in multiple terrorism financing cases," it said.

Surveying India's counterterrorism efforts, it said India has made "significant efforts" in its campaign against major international terrorist groups like the LeT, the JeM, Hizbul Mujahideen, AQIS and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen and the IS that have been active in the country. The NIA arrested 10 alleged Al Qaeda-affiliated operatives from Kerala and West Bengal on September 19 and 26 last year, according to the report.

Overall, the report said that "the Indian government made significant efforts to detect, disrupt, and degrade the operations of terrorist organisations within its borders".

Terrorists came over from Pakistan last year to attack Indian targets, the report said mentioning two incidents in which the LeT and its offshoot, the Resistance Front took responsibility.

On terrorism emanating from India's eastern border, the report said that the Kolkata Police counterterrorism Special Task Force arrested Abdul Karim, the second-in-command of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, on May 29 last year on suspicion of involvement in a 2013 bombing in Bodh Gaya. But the biggest toll the report lists was taken by Maoists who killed 17 members of Chhattisgarh's District Reserve Guards and counterterrorism Special Task Force officials in an ambush in Sukma on March 21 last year.

Arul Louis | New York

Sixty six Indian-origin terrorists were operating abroad with the global terrorist organisation Islamic State (IS) which is also present in India, according to the US State Department. The number was as of November and none of the foreign terrorist fighters was repatriated to India last year, said the annual Country Reports on Terrorism for 2020 issued by the department's Bureau of Counterterrorism on

"IS's so-called physical caliphate has crumbled, (but) it remains a determined and dangerous enemy," he told reporters. "A particular concern is IS's increased focus on branches and networks outside of Iraq and Syria," he said. The report's statistical information section shows that both the number of terrorist attacks and the overall number of fatalities resulting from those attacks increased by more than 10 per cent in 2020 compared with 2019, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. Though the other major terrorist organisation, Al Qaeda, has weakened,

MADHYA PRADESH PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS

Should be conducted according to the constitution: SC



Team Absolute | Bhopal

The strict attitude of the petitioners, the Supreme Court has directed the State Election Commission to conduct elections only if they are according to the Constitution. It has been told that the Supreme Court has asked to issue a notification in the case of Other Backward Classes. Along with this, it has also been said that if the law is not followed, then the elections can also be canceled. The next hearing on the matter will be held on December 27. It is to be known that earlier the Supreme Court had asked the Jabalpur High Court to hear the petitions including Syed Jaffer and Jaya Thakur filed for non-compliance of rotation in the reservation. These petitions reached the High Court on Thursday. Syed Jaffer said on Friday, citing the direction of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court today directed the Madhya Pradesh government and the State Election Commission to conduct elections to the Gram Panchayat and Municipal Corporation, Municipality as per the Constitution. It has also been said that if it is according to the constitution, then keep the process and if it is against the constitution, then cancel the election. This decision is to be taken by the State Government and the State Election Commission.

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CCI fines Amazon Rs 202 cr, suspends approval for deal with Future Coupons

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has imposed a penalty of Rs 202 crore on Amazon and suspended its approval for the e-tailer's deal with Future Coupons seeking more information.

In an order on Friday, the CCI said Amazon ought to have notified the combination and Future Retail (FRL) shareholding agreement for the purpose of acquisition of strategic rights over FRL through FCPL shareholders' agreement (SHA); and commercial agreements between Amazon and Future groups, for the purpose of establishing strategic alignment and partnership between Amazon Group and FRL as well as have a 'foot-in-the-door' in the India retail sector. Amazon failed to notify FRL SHA and the commercial arrangements, as part of the combination between the parties, and suppressed the actual purpose and particulars of the combination, as discussed above, in contravention of the obligation contained in sub-section (2) of Section 6 of the Companies Act read with Regulation 5 and

sub-regulations (4) and (5) of Regulation 9 of the Combination Regulations, the CCI said.

Given that the combination is between players who are known in the online marketplace and offline retailing, and they have contemplated strategic alignment between their businesses, the Commission considers it necessary to examine the combination afresh based on a notice to be given with true, correct and complete information, as required therein. Accordingly, in exercise of the powers conferred under sub-section (2) of Section 45 of the Act, the Commission directed Amazon to give notice in Form II within a period of 60 days from the receipt of the order, and, till disposal of such notice, the approval granted vide order dated November 28, 2019, in Combination Registration shall remain in abeyance, the CCI said. As regards failure to notify combination in terms of the obligation cast under Section 6(2) of the Act, Section 43A of the Act enables the Commission to impose a penalty, which may extend to 1 per cent of the total turnover or the assets, whichever is higher, of such a combination.

"INDEFENSIBLE": PRIYANKA GANDHI CONDEMNS CONGRESS MLA'S "ENJOY RAPE" REMARK

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Soon after Union Minister Smriti Irani took a jab at Priyanka Gandhi Vadra over Congress MLA KR Ramesh Kumar's outrageous "enjoy rape" remark in the Karnataka assembly, the Congress leader has tweeted saying she "wholeheartedly condemns" the statement. "I wholeheartedly condemn the statement made earlier today by K.R. Ramesh Kumar. It is inexplicable how anyone can ever utter such words, they are indefensible. Rape is a heinous crime. Full stop," she said in a tweet.

Minister of Women and Child Development Smriti Irani had strongly criticised Kumar's remark and called it "shameful". She had also made a veiled attack at Congress General Secretary



Vadra, referring to her women's outreach program ahead of the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. "Congress should first suspend their leader before talking about women empowerment and raising slogans like 'Ladki Hoon, Lad Sakti Hoon' in Uttar Pradesh," she had said.

K.R. Ramesh Kumar has been criticised by several leaders, including from his own party. Samajwadi Party's Rajya Sabha MP Jaya

Bachchan said the Congress party must take strict action against the MLA.

Mr Kumar had posted an apology on Twitter following massive backlash. He called his remarks "indifferent" and "negligent", and asserted that it was an "off the cuff" remark.

The Congress leader offered another apology when faced with protests from women MLAs in the assembly today, saying: "If it hurts the sentiments of women, I've no problem apologising. I apologize from the bottom of my heart." The Speaker then said: "He has apologised, let's not drag it further."

The Congress MLA made the comment during a discussion on farmers in the Karnataka assembly yesterday.

SC STAYS BENGAL PANEL INQUIRY INTO PEGASUS SNOOPING CASE

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the state appointed commission led by former top court judge Madan B. Lokur, to conduct an inquiry into the Pegasus snooping allegations.



A bench headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana also issued notice to the West Bengal government on a plea, which questioned the commission. The bench remarked, "How can there be a parallel probe?" Senior advocate Harish Salve, appearing for the petitioner NGO 'Global Village Foundation Charitable Trust', submitted before the bench also comprising Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli that the petitioner is challenging the proceedings of the West Bengal commission. On October 27, the top court had constituted an independent committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice R.V. Raveendran to probe into the Pegasus allegations.



DEFYING HARYANA CM, NAMAZ OFFERED IN OPEN IN GURUGRAM

Gurugram: Despite Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar's announcement that "offering namaz in public places cannot be tolerated", it was again offered at six places under heavy police deployment in Gurugram on Friday. On December 10, during his visit to Gurugram, Khattar had asserted that offering namaz in the open "will not be tolerated" and an amicable solution to the matter would be found in a fresh approach. The Chief Minister had said that the government has withdrawn the permission given to offer Friday prayers at certain designated sites. Offering public prayers is leading to clashes and that should not happen, he had said. Earlier, Hindu and Muslim organisations had agreed on 18 new sites for open Friday prayers, including 12 mosques, dargahs, Waqf board properties and six public areas.

A runny nose and itchy throat? It may be Omicron

▶ The most common signs of the virus reported between December 3 and 10 were a runny nose, headache, fatigue, sneezing, and a sore throat, the Daily Mail reported.

▶ The study suggests that the super mutant virus is more akin to a cold than Covid.

▶ On the contrary, typical Covid symptoms include a continuous cough, high temperature or change/loss of their sense of taste and smell.

London | Agencies

If you are having cold-like conditions such as sniffles, headaches, and tiredness, you are likely to be positive for Covid's Omicron variant, according to a UK study. The Zoe Covid study app asked hundreds of thousands of people to log their symptoms and the investigators have been looking at ones linked to both the dominant Delta variant and the new highly transmissible variant Omicron. Epidemiologist Professor Tim Spector, lead scientist of the ZOE Symptom Tracking Study said, "Omicron symptoms are predominantly cold symptoms, runny nose, headache, sore throat and sneezing, so people should stay at home as it might well be Covid. Ahead of



Christmas, if people want to get together and keep vulnerable family members safe, I'd recommend limiting social contact in the run up to Christmas and doing a few Lateral Flow Tests just before the big family gathering." The warning comes alongside numerous reports that Omicron causes milder illness than past variants but scientists are still

trying to untangle whether it is intrinsically weaker or if the population has higher levels of immunity, or even both. In separate comments this week, Professor Spector said "classic" Covid symptoms like a fever, cough, or loss of smell, are now only present in the minority of cases.

He added that Omicron appears to be chipping away at the UK's vaccine protection from infection, but that jabs were still critical to protecting people.

Data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) also shows that the number of Covid positive cases which are so mild they show no symptoms have also steadily increased since vaccines started being rolled out on mass earlier this year.

INDIA'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES DIP DOWN BY \$77 MN

Mumbai:

India's foreign exchange reserves inched lower by \$77 million during the week ended December 10. The Reserve Bank of India's forex reserves decreased to \$635.828 billion from \$635.905 billion during the week ended December 3.

India's forex reserves comprise foreign currency assets (FCAs), gold reserves, SDRs, and the country's reserve position with the IMF.

On a weekly basis, FCAs, the largest component of the forex reserves, edged lower by \$321 million to \$572.860 billion. However, the value of the country's gold reserves rose by \$291 million to \$38.709 billion.

The SDR value fell by \$37 million to \$19.089 billion, and the country's reserve position with the IMF slipped by \$10 million to \$5.170 billion.





FRENCH DEFENCE MINISTER FLORENCE PARLY IN INDIA, REVIEWS MILITARY TIES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his French counterpart Florence Parly reviewed their existing military-to-military cooperation, which has increased in spite of pandemic challenges, on Friday.

The discussions were held during third annual Defence Dialogue in New Delhi wherein a wide range of bilateral, regional, defence, and defence industrial cooperation issues were taken up, including the situation in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover and India's border issues with China and Pakistan.

The two ministers also discussed ways to increase defence cooperation in all domains.

India and France had recently concluded their annual bilateral army exercise, Shakti, with focus on counter-terrorist operations, in France in November 2021.

About her visit to Delhi, the French Minister said: "I am delighted to be here. The friendship between France and India is very precious. The trust we have in each other has developed in recent years to such an extent that distance between the Ganga and the Seine seems to be lessened."

She also said that France truly understands the necessity of Indian



content. "We are fully committed to the 'Make in India' initiative. 'Make in

India' has been a reality for the French industry, particularly for

defence equipment like submarines," Parly said.

She also said that France is ready to supply more Rafale jet fighters if India wants.

"We're ready to answer any additional needs or requests that could be made by India. We know that an aircraft carrier will soon be delivered. Aircraft are needed. So we're open and ready to provide any more Rafales if this is India's decision," she said. Defence industrial cooperation was discussed with focus on future collaborations and co-production between the two countries.

The ministers acknowledged their convergences on a number of strategic and defence issues. They expressed commitment to work together to enhance cooperation in bilateral, regional and multilateral forums.

France is the current chair of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and shall take over the Presidency of the European Union from January 1, 2022. The two Ministers decided to work closely on a number of issues during the French Presidency.

Earlier, Parly called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. She is expected to meet other Indian dignitaries during her visit also.

Amit Shah asks Nishads to defeat SP, BSP in UP polls

LUCKNOW | Agencies

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday asked the Nishad community in Uttar Pradesh to ensure defeat for the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party and also make sure that the Congress does not open its account in the upcoming Assembly elections scheduled early next year.

"What have these parties done for you? Did they give you gas connection, water facilities and health cards? They ruled the state for years but did nothing for the backward and weaker sections of the society. They only worked for the welfare of their own families," Shah said while addressing the joint BJP-Nishad Party 'Sarkar Banao, Adhikar Pao' rally in Lucknow.

The rally was the first event after the BJP announced its alliance with the Nishad Party.

Shah said that people gave majority to the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra



Modi laid the foundation of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

He said that while other parties worked in self-interest, Modi worked for all with his concept of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas'.

He said that for the Nishad community, Modi had set up a separate fisheries ministry that has a budget of Rs 3,000 crore.

"In 2019, the Nishad party was with us in the alliance. During that time world's biggest alliance of 'Babua and Bua' (read Akhilesh and Mayawati) was formed but we defeated them and got a huge majority. We are together again and you must give us more than 300 seats in Uttar Pradesh," he said. Lauding Chief Minister

Amarinder announces party's alliance with BJP

CHANDIGARH | Agencies

Punjab Lok Congress (PLC) chief Amarinder Singh on Friday announced his party's alliance with the BJP for the 2022 Assembly polls in Punjab.

"Met union minister & @BJP4India incharge for Punjab, Shri @gssjodhpur in New Delhi today to chalk out future course of action ahead of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections. We have formally announced a seat adjustment with the BJP for the 2022 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections," the former Congress leader two-time Chief Minister said in a tweet, after



meeting Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, who is also the state BJP incharge. Before the end of the farmers' protests on the borders of the national capital against three agricultural laws, Amarinder Singh had said any seat arrangement he made with the Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP) would be subject to a resolution of the farmers' issues in their interest.

On November 2, Amarinder Singh had resigned from the Congress and sent a seven-page letter to interim party President Sonia Gandhi.

FOUR KILLED IN KARNATAKA ROAD ACCIDENT

Bengaluru: Four persons including three women were killed and another person sustained severe injuries after the car in which they were travelling collided with a bus in Karnataka's Davangere district on Friday, officials said.

The accident took place near Savalanga village in Nymathi taluk in Davangere district. The deceased have been identified as Dakshayamma (40), Suma (45), Sharadamma (65) and car driver Sunil (30). The condition of the injured individual -- Asha, is said to be serious. The victims were travelling in a car which collided with a Karnataka Road Transport Corporation bus approaching from the opposite direction.

Preliminary investigations cited speeding as the reason behind the accident. All victims hailed from Edehalli village near Bhadravathi town in Shivamogga district. They were travelling towards Halejoga village in Davangere district to attend a function. The police personnel rushed to spot following the accident, and shifted the bodies to a hospital.

Modi asks mayors to celebrate their cities

VARANASI | Agencies

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asked mayors to celebrate their cities and highlight their unique characters.

Virtually addressing the All India Mayors Conference here, the Prime Minister said that there is a need for evolution and not revolution.

"We should preserve the old and adapt to the new. Varanasi is a perfect example of this. This ancient city has not cast aside its ancient character but has also woken up to a new Kashi by adopting technology and new ideas," he said.

The Prime Minister asked the mayors to find the date of birth of their respective cities and commemorate it.

"There can be a beauty competition between cities with parameters like cleanliness, colours of a market, signages, among others. You can hold rangoli competitions on the theme of Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav. There can be competition of lullabies sung by the eld-



erly and these can also be composed by young citizens about what they want for the future of their children," he said. Modi also advised the mayors to use rivers as the focal point of celebration in cities that have water bodies.

White Christmas likely in Kashmir, Ladakh this year

SRINAGAR | Agencies

Intense cold wave continued in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh on Friday even as the weather office forecast moderate to heavy rain/snow between December 23 to December 25.

Sonam Lotus, director of the Meteorological Department (MeT) told reporter, "Hopefully we are going to have a white Christmas mass this year."

"Moderate to heavy snowfall is likely to occur in the Valley and Ladakh between December 23 to December 25". Cold wave continued to sweep J&K and Ladakh with the minimum temperatures remaining below the freezing point in the Valley and Ladakh as these dropped to season's lowest in Jammu city. Srinagar had minus 3.8,



Pahalgam minus 5.6 and Gulmarg minus 8.6 degrees Celsius as the minimum temperature. Drass town of Ladakh had minus 18.1, Leh minus 12.1 and Kargil minus 11.6 as the minimum. Jammu

city had 4.0, which is the lowest recorded this season so far. Katra had 3.5, Batote minus 1.5, Banihal minus 3.6 and Bhandarwah minus 2.2 as the night's lowest temperature.

West Bengal ranks first among larger states in primary education

KOLKATA | Agencies

The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) has named West Bengal as the best among the large states in the field of primary education.

The honour for the state came a day after the UNESCO added the state's Durga Puja to its 'Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity', a first of its kind in Asia.

According to an official release, West Bengal topped the chart while Bihar languished at the bottom in the 'large states' category in the 'Index on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy' -- an indicator of literacy among children below 10 years. In the 'small states' category, Kerala grabbed the top spot and Jharkhand was adjudged the worst performer in the index.

Congratulating the parents and the teachers of the state, Chief Minister



Mamata Banerjee tweeted: "Great news for West Bengal! We have secured the top rank among larger states on the Foundational Literacy & Numeracy Index. I congratulate all teachers, guardians and members of our Education Department for this outstanding achievement!"

There were four categories in which the regions were divided -- large states, small states, Northeast and Union Territories. The report on the 'Index on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy' was prepared by the 'Institute for Competitiveness'. The index includes five pillars

comprising 41 indicators. The five pillars are -- educational infrastructure, access to education, basic health, learning outcomes, and governance. The statement said that out of the five pillars, it has been observed that states have performed particularly poorly in governance.

"More than 50 per cent of the states have scored below the national average, i.e. 28.05, the lowest across all pillars," the statement said.

"The top-scoring regions are Kerala (67.95) and West Bengal (58.95) in small and large states category, respectively," the EAC-PM statement said. Lakshadweep (52.69) and Mizoram (51.64) are top-scoring regions in the Union Territory and Northeast state category, respectively.

As far as worst performers are concerned, Ladakh has featured at the bottom of the list of UTs, while Arunachal Pradesh came last in the Northeast category.

NSF DEMANDS COURT MONITORED PROBE INTO NAGALAND FIRING

KOHIMA | Agencies

Protest rallies were organised by the influential Naga Students' Federation (NSF) in Kohima on Friday demanding repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) and a court monitored probe into the killing of 14 civilians by armed forces personnel due to "mistaken identity" in Nagaland on December 4.

The NSF in a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanded to constitute a court monitored committee headed by a retired Supreme Court or high court judge to ensure free and fair probe into the matter.

"The Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted by the Nagaland government to probe the December 4 incident would not do justice to the wilful acts of the armed forces under the protection of the repressive AFSPA," the memorandum said.

Thousands of men and women took part in the protests displaying banners and placards that read "how many times bullets will be fired before repealing AFSPA", "AFSPA rears devil in the Indian armies" and "ban AFSPA, not our voice" etc.

Protests are continuing in different parts



of Nagaland since the December 4 firing by the security forces, and the biggest protest rallies were organised in the capital city on

Friday. Various Naga civil society organisations, including the Konyak Union and the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation

(ENPO), have been spearheading the agitations, while the NSF took the lead in Friday's protest rallies. Demanding immediate arrest of the soldiers involved in the December 4 firing, the protesters also demanded to withdraw Home Minister Amit Shah's "false and fabricated" statement given in the Parliament on December 6. Shah in his statements in both the Houses of Parliament had said that during the ambush in Mon district in Nagaland, a vehicle reached near the barricade and the army soldiers tried to stop the vehicle, but it did not stop.

"On suspicion of the vehicle having insurgents, it was attacked in which six out of eight people were killed and several were injured," the Home Minister had said.

The NSF in its memorandum to the Prime Minister demanded repeal of AFSPA, justice for the victims and arrest of the jawans who were involved in the firing.

Detailing the incidents of "killing and torture by the security forces since 1960", the memorandum said that the "government of India continued to suppress the legitimate people's movement through military means even after having realised that the same would not reap the desired dividends".

Gang-rape victim dies during delivery, accused govt official held

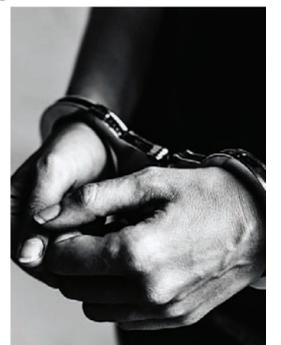
KANPUR | Agencies

Alekhpal (revenue official) has been arrested in connection with the gang-rape of a minor girl, who died while giving birth to a stillborn baby.

The girl died on Tuesday night and the lekhpal was arrested and subsequently suspended on Thursday.

In October, a case had been filed under relevant sections of IPC and POCSO act against the lekhpal Ranjit Barwar, Karan and two unidentified persons for gang-rape of a 15-year-old girl. The accused allegedly threatened to kill her when she became pregnant.

The police did not take any action against the accused lekhpal. On Monday night, the girl's health deteriorated following which her family rushed her to Shivrajpur CHC on Tuesday morning.



After giving her first aid the doctors referred the girl to LLR's maternity and child care wing where she delivered a stillborn and died a short while later.

On Thursday, SDM Gulab Chandra Agrahari, suspended the accused lekhpal and said that the action has been taken after getting information about his arrest from the police.



GROUP CAPT VARUN SINGH'S LAST RITES HELD WITH FULL MILITARY HONOURS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Group Captain Varun Singh, who succumbed to his injuries sustained in the crash of the IAF helicopter, carrying CDS General Bipin Rawat and others, in Tamil Nadu last week, was cremated with full military and state honours here on Friday.

The mortal remains, wrapped in tricolour, were brought to the cremation ground at Bairagarh area in an Army truck amid slogans.

A ceremonial guard of honour was accorded by state police and an army contingent at the cremation ground. Senior services officers laid floral wreaths on the coffin.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, along with other cabinet ministers and politicians, also paid their tributes to the departed soul.

Rituals were performed by a group of priests in the presence of his family, including his children and wife.

Group Captain Singh died at a military hospital in Bengaluru on December 15 after surviving the December 8 helicopter



crash in Tamil Nadu's Coonoor area that killed General Rawat, his wife and 11 armed force personnel.

Conferred with the Shaurya Chakra, India's third highest peacetime gallantry award in August this year, he is survived by his wife, 11-year-old son and an eight-year-old daughter along with his parents.

His younger brother Tanuj Singh is an Indian Navy officer, while his father is a retired Army official.

CM attended the last rites of Group Captain Varun Singh PAID TRIBUTES BY LAYING WREATH ON MORTAL REMAINS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan attended the last rites of martyr Group Captain Varun Singh. Chouhan laid a wreath on the mortal remains of martyr Group Captain Varun Singh at Sant Hirdaram Muktidham. The last rites were performed with full military honours. Chouhan met the family members and expressed condolences and consoled them. Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang, MLA and former Protom Speaker Rameshwar Sharma, MLA PC Sharma, officers of the Air Force,



Navy and Army, officers of the district administration, family members and acquaintances were present.

Toddler rescued from 80-ft deep borewell in MP after over 10 hrs of effort

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After more than 10-hour long effort by police and the State Disaster Emergency Reserve Force (SDERF), a one-and-half-year-old girl was rescued from an 80-feet deep borewell in Madhya Pradesh on Friday.

The girl had fallen in the borewell at 3:30 p.m. on Thursday and was rescued at 1 am on Friday.

"Rescue operation successful. Baby girl rescued safely from borewell and rushed to the hospital for medical treatment," said a tweet from Chhatarpur District Collector.

The incident occurred at 3:30 p.m. on Thursday in Naugaon police station in Chhatarpur district, nearly 350 km away from Madhya Pradesh's capital Bhopal. The girl was identified as Divyanshi. Divyanshi had fallen into an 80-feet deep borewell, which was uncovered at a field where she had gone with her mother. As per police, the mother was busy working at the field and the girl was playing at some distance away. After few minutes, the mother noticed that Divyanshi was not there and



the former started searching for her daughter. After few minutes of search, she heard some sound coming from a borewell located nearby.

Hearing the mother's loud crying, people nearby rushed to the spot, but they were helpless to do anything to rescue the girl so they alerted the local police. The police rushed to the spot immediately and the rescue operation was started.

Police noticed that Divyanshi was stuck around 15-feet depth of the 80-feet deep borewell. However, she was alive and soon oxygen support was provided to her.

Meanwhile, the district administration was informed about the incident. Later, a SDERF team from Gwalior district also reached the spot

and joined the rescue operation with technical equipments. The rescue team then inserted a CCTC camera to capture the movement of the girl and found that the girl was alive. At same time, rescue team started digging a hole using a couple of JCB machines parallel to the borewell. Amid the rescue operation continued, the girl's family members and locals gathered at the spot and continued to pray for her safety.

"The girl was crying till next few hours, but later she stopped. Fortunately, she was alive as her movement was live through CCTC, which kept encouraging rescue team to continue the operation," a police official told IANS.

CM pays homage to saint poet Rahim on his anniversary

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to the saint poet Rahim on his anniversary. Chouhan garlanded his portrait in the auditorium at his residence office.

Abdur Rahim Khan-e-Khana, popularly known as the saint poet Rahim, was a medieval poet, charity, multilingual, art lover, scholar and rich in multiple talents. He was a dedicated worshiper of Indian culture and a sincere seeker of respect for all sects. Poet Rahim ji was one of the great poets of Hindi literary world. Despite being a follower of the other



religion, the expressions of Hindu life he depicted are a sign of his big heart. Throughout his life, he considered Hindu life as the reality of Indian life. Rahim chose the plots of texts like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas and Gita as examples in poetry. Poet Rahim was born on December 17,

1556. He has composed poems in both Awadhi and Brajbhasha, which is simple, natural and flowing. In the poetry of poet Rahim, mainly the expressions of romance, policy and devotion are found. Saint poet Rahim died in October 1626 AD at the age of seventy.

CM EXPRESSED GRIEF OVER THE DEMISE OF POET, LYRICIST ANIL GOYAL

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed grief over the demise of filmmaker Anil Goyal, brother of Vidisha's senior journalist Kamal Goyal.

Anil Goyal used to reside in Bhopal. Poetry compositions centred on the mother were the identity of lyricist, poet Anil Goyal. He was also the best exhibition coordinator. Chouhan has prayed to God to grant peace to the departed soul and strength to the bereaved family members to bear this loss.

CM PLANTED KARANJ AND ARJUN SAPLINGS IN SMART GARDEN

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Karanj and Arjun in Smart Garden today. Siddharth Tiwari, Priya Tiwari and Prakhar Kochar, activists of Dharmashree Foundation working with the objective of "No one should remain hungry in my Bhopal", were present on this occasion. Chouhan is planting saplings every day as per his resolve. In order to make tree plantation a mass movement, Chief Minister plants saplings every day with social and voluntary organisations and people working in the field of environmental protection. Chouhan discussed with the members of Dharmashree Foundation and got information about the activities.

During the last two years, Dharmashree Foundation distributed food and food items to the poor, helpless and needy by visiting different places of



Bhopal under the mission "No one should sleep hungry in my Bhopal" during the Corona period. The organisation

also distributed free of cost materials like masks, sanitizers, hand gloves etc. required for protection against corona. In both the waves of Covid, the members of the organisation selflessly provided essential materials to the needy without caring about their own self. Even in the second wave of corona, beds were provided by the institution to corona infected patients by contacting hospitals. Along with this, necessary injections were also provided to the infected patients along with oxygen, plasma and blood donors by the institution in case of need in serious cases.

Karanj plant is considered important in Ayurvedic medicine. Karanj is also used in religious works. Arjun tree is a medicinal tree, the use of its bark and juice is beneficial in diseases like heart and tuberculosis. This evergreen tree is found in the foothills and dry places of the Himalayas. Arjun tree is also found in large numbers in Madhya Pradesh.

MP Follows UP and Haryana, To Have Property Damage Recovery Law

▶ TWO OTHER BJP-RULED STATES, HARYANA AND UTTAR PRADESH, HAVE ALREADY ENACTED SIMILAR LAWS.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh cabinet on Thursday approved a bill relating to recovery and redressal of damage to public and private properties during strikes, protests, communal riots, or any congregation of people. It allows for the recovery of damages from perpetrators.

The state cabinet meeting chaired by chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday gave its nod to the proposed draft of Madhya Pradesh Lok Evam Niji Sampati Ka Nuksan Nivaran Evam Nuksani Ki Vasuli (Redressal and Recovery of Damages to

Public and Private Properties) Bill 2021. The Bill will be introduced in the winter session of the Vidhan Sabha, starting from December 20.

Home minister Narottam Mishra, said, "The proposed Bill, after it becomes a law, will pave the passage for recovery of damages caused to public and private properties (during violent protests, processions, bandhs, strikes, and communal riots) from the protestors/rioters who caused the damages and from those who provoke protestors/rioters for causing the damage."

Two other BJP-ruled states, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, have already enacted similar laws.

According to the bill, the state government can form a claims tribunal headed by a retired district judge or a retired secretary of the state government for affected areas and relevant durations. Affected parties can file an application within a month. The tri-

bunal can appoint a claims commissioner to help in the investigation of claims.

During a trial, once the prosecution succeeds in proving that public property was damaged in direct actions called by an organisation in which the accused also participated, the court can draw a presumption that the accused is guilty of destroying public property too. The onus of proving innocence will be on him or her from this stage of trial onwards, officials told media persons.

Along with those who damage properties, the bill also allows for the same penalties from those who encourage and abet such acts. The tribunal can award compensation of up to twice the value of the damages. If the compensation decided by the tribunal is not paid within 15 days, the accused will be liable to pay interest over the compensation amount and also pay for the amount spent by the affected party in the process of the

application. The tribunal, which will be accorded the same powers as a civil court, must decide on the claims within three months.

The bill allows for the seizure of assets to pay the compensation in case the accused doesn't pay within 15 days. It also proposes a provision that "specified categories" of leaders of the organisation which gave the call for direct action resulting in damage to public property shall be deemed guilty of abetment.

At the same time, no innocent person, in spite of being a leader of the organisation, shall be made to suffer for the actions of others, the bill said. The principles of absolute liability shall apply once the nexus with the event that precipitated the damage is established, the bill stated.

The liability will be borne by the actual perpetrators of the crime as well as organisers of the event.

Boy Injured As Mobile Explodes During Online Class

The boy, Ramprakash Bhadauria, a student of Class 8, was attending the school classes online when the mobile phone suddenly exploded.

Team Absolute | Satna

A 15-year-old boy was injured after his mobile phone exploded when he was attending his school classes online in Satna district of Madhya Pradesh, police said on Friday.

The incident occurred in Chandkuiya village, some 35 km off the district headquar-

ters, on Thursday afternoon, they said. The boy, Ramprakash Bhadauria, a student of Class 8, was attending the school classes online when the mobile phone suddenly exploded. He suffered injuries to his jaw, Nagod police station inspector R P Mishra told PTI over phone. He was alone at his home when the incident took place as his parents and other family members had gone out for work. But the blast created such a loud sound that the boy's neighbours rushed to his place to see what happened, the police official said. He was then rushed to the Satna district hospital from where he was referred to Jabalpur for advanced treatment, he added.

Womens safety, drug mafia and cyber crime are major challenges of Madhya Pradesh Police: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that women's safety, complete elimination of drug mafia and effective action on cyber crimes are the major challenges before the Madhya Pradesh Police. Whatever responsibility has been entrusted to the Madhya Pradesh Police, it has been fulfilled with full efficiency, firmness, devotion to duty and responsibility. Chouhan was addressing the Madhya Pradesh Police Foundation Day celebrations. Chief Minister first paid tributes by laying a wreath at the Shaheed Smarak at Motilal Nehru Stadium. Chouhan, after inspecting the parade and march past, presented medals to the police officers for their excellent service. Madhya Pradesh Police song was also dedicated by Chouhan.

Chouhan congratulated everyone on Madhya Pradesh Police Foundation Day. He said that there are not one but many achievements in the account of the police, for which I as the Chief Minister and the people of the state are proud of the police. Chouhan said that 877 personnel have given martyrdom from the year 1956 to 2020, while discharging their duties with indomitable courage and devotion. These police personnel established a great tradition of keeping the people of the state safe.

Chouhan said that it is the result of the policemen treading on the duty-path that now the guns of dacoits do not fire in Chambal region, a new story of development is being written

there. The network of Naxalites has been broken. SIMI's network has also been demolished. In Simhastha also, the police set a wonderful example in discharging of civil duties along with law and order. During the crisis of Corona, the policemen risked their lives to protect the lives of the people of the state and many of our comrades sacrificed themselves. Chouhan said that the police administration was successful in evacuating people by risking their lives in the devastating floods in Chambal. Be it in times of crisis or law and order situation or to maintain order during festivals, the police are involved in every difficult situation and are on duty.

Chouhan said that a prosperous, glorious, rich and thriving India is being built under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But the first condition of development and progress is peace. It is necessary to maintain law and order. If the law and order situation is not good then all development becomes meaningless. The Chief Minister said that Madhya



Pradesh is called the island of peace. We have not allowed any major law and order problem to remain unsolved in the state. Chouhan said that some incidents keep happening in the living society. Police deserve congratulations for the swift action taken even in such incidents.

Chouhan said that many new schemes have been started by the state government. Dial-100 is one of these. This has made quick action possible. Along with this, an initiative to reserve 30% posts in police for daughters was taken by Madhya Pradesh in the country. Bringing a large number of daughters back home safely is a major achievement of the police in Operation Muskan. Crime is under control in the state. Along with the police, the role of SAF jawans and home guards is also very important.

Chouhan said that we are working with full efficiency. It is also necessary to solve the problems encountered during the work. Efforts are being made by the state government to control the crimes and find solutions to the difficulties of the police and the police family. Many times policemen are forced to live in unhygienic conditions in rented accommodation. A campaign to build police houses has been started by

the state government. Innovations are also being started in this direction. Under this, if a policeman has a plot, then he can get a house built according to his wish by taking a loan from the bank. The state government will provide this house on rent to other policemen. The state government will give its guarantee. This house will become his when the landlord retires. The state government is also sensitive for the education, health etc. of the children of the police family. I consider it my duty to remove the difficulties of the life of the policemen who are engaged in the work of protecting the people.

Chouhan said that the nature of crimes is changing with the changing times. Training is essential for enhancing the technical proficiency of policemen. Training is a continuous process. The process of training, from jawans to officers in the police, must continue, such a system is necessary. At the same time, there is a need to adopt various methods to keep the policemen free from stress and ensure that they are never lonely. The state government will work in this direction to ensure that the policemen work more diligently, and how they can lead a better life. Chouhan said that there is a need to connect people with programmes like Madhya Pradesh Police Foundation Day. Such programmes should be organized amidst the public. Connecting the police with the public and organizing such programmes amidst them will yield good results in the implementation of community policing. It is necessary to make the public feel that the "police is my friend".



EDITOR'S SPECS

THE WORD 'VAX' IN OXFORD DICTIONARY

V'ax' has been chosen as the word of the year by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the media reported. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, words related to vaccines spiked in frequency in 2021, with double-vaxxed, unvaxxed and anti-vaxxer all seeing a surge in use, the BBC reported. Vax was an obvious choice as it has made "the most striking impact", OED senior editor Fiona McPherson was quoted as saying. "It goes back at least to the 1980s, but according to our corpus it was rarely used until this year," she said. Vax and vaxx are both accepted spellings but the form with one x is more common. In September usage of the word "vax" was up more than 72 times from its level last year, OED said. The word, and others related to vaccination, had also been broadened into a wider range of contexts including "fully vaxxed" and "vax cards", the Guardian reported. Use of the word 'pandemic' has also increased by more than 57,000 per cent this year, the report said. Vax derived from the Latin word vacca, which means cow, was first recorded in English in 1799. Its derivatives vaccinate and vaccination both first appeared in 1800. According to the OED, this is due to English physician and scientist Edward Jenner's pioneering work on vaccination against smallpox in the late 1790s and early 1800s. Oxford Languages and Collins each decide their own word of the year, and in 2020 Collins chose "lockdown". But Oxford decided it was an unprecedented year with too many contenders, so expanded its award to encompass a handful of newly key words including lockdown, bushfires and Covid-19, as well as Black Lives Matter, WFH (working from home), keyworkers and furlough, the report said. Oxford Languages says its corpus, or language resource, gathers news content, which is updated daily and contains over 14.5 billion words for lexicographers to search and analyse.

EMPOWERED STEP IN RAISING GIRL'S MARRIAGE AGE

Lalit Garg

Priime Minister Narendra Modi has seen the dream of women's empowerment not with closed eyes in the dark of night, but with open eyes in the light of day. In his dream, there is a knock of equality of man and woman with the idea of all-round development of women. Modi had announced in his 2020 Independence Day address that the minimum age of marriage for girls in the country would be raised from 18 to 21. They do what they say, that is why after almost a year, and the Prime Minister has implemented his announcement. The Union Cabinet has approved a proposal to increase the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years. Now it will be introduced in Parliament. Surely with the formation of this new system, a new light will come in the life of women. One destination, one direction and one way, yet there have been many inequalities in the life of man and woman, two forces of society were moving back and forth. To remove such discrepancies and inequalities, there was a knock on the door of thinking many times, whenever the door was opened, and the knocker appeared to return from there. But Modi also knocked and made it a reality, which should be welcome. Because with this, women will be able to see many discrepancies in their lives being removed while developing rapidly. But the benefit of making a law is only when it is implemented in its entirety. The family and society are expected to think more honestly and sympathetically for the larger interest of the daughters. Now the minimum age of marriage for both men and women in India will be 21, which will shape the structure of an ideal and egalitarian society. The question of the age of marriage of girls is not only related to a balanced social system but it is also related to their health, thinking, security and development. Every country, society and class wants to develop. Why did women lag behind in the race for development? This question is not meaningless, but keeping many points in front of its solution, Modi has thought and presented a new society and nation. The Prime Minister had then said, "The government is concerned about the health of daughters and sisters. To save daughters from malnutrition, it is necessary



that they get married at the right age. For this a task force was set up, which included senior officials of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Law. The task force had strongly stated that a woman must be at least 21 years of age at the time of her first pregnancy. The financial, social and health condition of the families is strengthened when the marriage takes place at the right time. The biggest advantage of getting married at a mature age is that girls get a chance to study more and choose a career. She also becomes skilled and efficient to run a family. It is well known that the responsibility of a large number of girls' education, employment, and family management has been hampered due to marriage at an early age. In every field of life be it personal or professional; women's role is main. Her progressive and nurturing nature makes everything better and proved. So, it's the high time to think about women empowerment in every field of life. After increasing the age of marriage, the Modi government will now introduce amendments to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 and consequently will bring amendments in personal laws such as the Special Marriage Act and the Hindu Marriage Act 1955. In December 2020, the recommendations were submitted to the NITI Aayog by the Task Force of the Centre headed by Jaya Jaitley. This task force was set up to examine matters related to the age of motherhood, the imperative to reduce maternal mortality, and improve nutrition. On the basis of these recommendations, the Union Cabinet has approved the proposal to

increase the marriage age of girls. The minimum age of marriage for girls is 21 years, there are many benefits, and the biggest advantage will be that the confidence and morale of the girls will increase. They will be able to make effective decisions for their career and life. She will dare to raise her voice against injustice like child marriage. Fight against tyranny and exploitation. The family and society will have to wait for the daughter to turn 21. Women have to raise their standard of living, they have to become a tree which gives shade and gives fruit. They remain useful. In passing, they have learned to wear beautiful clothes, to look beautiful and attractive, to decorate a beautiful house, to speak beautiful things of knowledge and science. Its usefulness cannot be denied, but now they have to stand on their own feet and contribute to the development of society and nation while building them. For this it is necessary that they get freedom from the bondage and tradition of marriage at a young age. There is no guarantee that they will be free from these customs and shackles even after the enactment of law. Even today, the laws made for the respect and rights of women in the country and the world are seen flying. A large section of the society still considers women to be of second status. Such orthodox thinking thinks that girls mature quickly, so the bride should be younger than the groom. At the same time, it is also said that since we have a patriarchal society, then when the husband grows up in age, his honour does not get

hurt if the wife obeys him. But social workers and health experts have from time to time called for a rethinking of the marriage age of girls. After the year 1929, by amending the Sharda Act, in 1978, the age limit for marriage of women was increased from 15 to 18 years. According to the World Health Organization, the maternal mortality rate is one lakh women die every year due to pregnancy due to its infectious causes. Younger marriages are the major cause of maternal mortality. That is why there has been a discussion on increasing the age of girls all over the world, changes are also being made. The minimum age of marriage in China is 22 years for men and 20 years for women. In Pakistan and many other Muslim countries, the age of marriage is 18 years for men and 16 years for women. The minimum age for marriage of girls in Iran is 13 years, but girls are also married at the age of 9 if the court and the girl's father allow. In Iraq, the age of marriage for girls is fixed at 18, but if the parents allow, marriage can take place even at the age of 15. Even in the US there is no upper limit. There were more than two lakh valid marriages of minors registered between 2000 and 2015. But it is a rich educated country with a different social structure, whereas India has a different social structure, here only by making laws and implementing them properly, ideal equality, co-living and development can be ensured. As India progresses, so too are opportunities for women to advance in education and career. Therefore, it is necessary to reduce the female mortality rate and improve the levels of nutrition. While listening to the knock of time, it is necessary to look at the whole issue related to the age of a girl child with a sensitive point of view. Everyone should participate in shaping this new dream arising in the heart and mind of the structure of a healthy and egalitarian society, so that a new era of women's life-building can begin.

(Lalit Garg is Writer, Journalist, Columnist based at Delhi. The views expressed are personal)

international

SENATE DEMOCRATS ABANDON EFFORTS TO PASS BIDEN'S SOCIAL SPENDING BILL THIS YR

Washington | Agencies

US Senate Democrats are abandoning efforts to pass President Joe Biden's roughly \$2 trillion social spending and climate bill this year, delivering a political blow to the White House, local media reported. Citing two people familiar with the matter, a Bloomberg report said on Thursday that the delay risks solidifying the intra-party divide on the legislation, which many Democrats consider key heading into the 2022 midterm elections, reports Xinhua news agency. Progressives and moderates have disagreed publicly on the size and scope of the package for months, although House Democrats were able to pass its version of the bill last month, the report said. Passage of the bill in the Senate will require unani-



mous support from the Democratic caucus, but Joe Manchin of West Virginia, the key moderate Democratic senator, has yet to give his full public support. Days of private talks between Manchin and Biden still have produced no truce, illustrating the widening gap between the moderate lawmaker and many in his party, according to The Washington Post. Manchin has raised concerns for months that the \$2 trillion

package could add to higher inflation and debt. "Make no mistake, we must get our fiscal house in order, and I am committed to making sure we are not spending beyond our means," Manchin said on Tuesday in a statement. The US consumer price index (CPI) rose 6.8 per cent in November from a year earlier, the fastest annual pace in almost 40 years, according to the Labour Department.

3 DEAD IN JAPAN BUILDING FIRE, ARSON SUSPECTED

Tokyo | Agencies

Three people were killed and 28 others severely injured after a fire broke out in a building in Japan's Osaka prefecture on Friday, with the police suspecting arson as the cause of the blaze. Of the 28 injured, 17 men and 10 women were in cardiopulmonary arrest, according to firefighters. The injured were brought out from the fourth floor of the eight-storey multi-tenant building located near JR Osaka Station, reports Xinhua news agency. As of now, three deaths have been confirmed by doctors at a hospital. After receiving a report of fire at around 10.20 a.m., the local fire department sent about 70 fire engines and ambulances to the scene. The fire was extinguished by around 10.45 a.m. after burning across an area of approximately 20 square metres for about 30 minutes. It was reported that the fire started within a medical clinic that provides psychosomatic and psychiatric treatments on the fourth floor. The Osaka police have begun investigating what might start the fire since there was a suspicion of arson based on the situation at the scene. There is a report that a "man lit fire" in the building in Kita Ward in the western Japanese city, local media reported, citing investigative sources. The police were also informed that the fire had been started from liquid dispersed from a paper bag held by a man who appeared to be in his 60s. "I saw smoke coming out and there were a lot of fire trucks and ambulances. People were being rescued by a ladder truck. At one point, there was a power outage in the surrounding area," a witness working at a nearby restaurant said. The fire occurred in Osaka's Kitashinchi district where a number of bars and nightclubs are located.



Hanoi to spend \$80mn in 5 yrs to alleviate traffic congestion

Hanoi | Agencies

The Vietnamese capital of Hanoi will spend \$80 million to alleviate traffic congestion and ensure road safety in the 2021-2025 period, according to a target plan recently approved by the municipal legislature, local media reported on Friday. With the money allocated from its budget over the five-year term, Hanoi targets to resolve seven to 10 traffic congestion hotspots each year, reports Xinhua news agency. It will timely eliminate black spots in traffic accidents to cut traffic accidents by between 5 and 10 per cent per year in terms of cases, number of deaths and injuries, Xinhua news agency quoted Vietnam News as saying. To achieve the goals, local authorities figured out solutions including relocat-



ing residents out of urban areas in order to reduce population density, improving public transport capacity, gradually limiting private vehicles in the long term, as well as applying technologies in traffic management. Notably, industrial production sites causing environmental pollution, universities, vocational schools, and administrative

units are set to be relocated out of the city's centre to increase land funds for traffic activities. Also, Hanoi will build an online digital traffic map to serve the management, operation and regulation of traffic and develop a smart parking spot search software to help people find and pay parking spots conveniently, according to the plan.

US Senate confirms Burns as new envoy to China

Washington | Agencies

The US Senate has confirmed President Joe Biden's nomination of Nicholas Burns as the new Ambassador to China. The Senate voted 75-18 to confirm Burns, 65, a career diplomat who has served under both Democratic and Republican Presidents, reports Xinhua news agency. Burns is currently a professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Relations at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. He is also Executive Director of the Aspen Strategy Group and Security Forum and Senior Counselor at the Cohen Group. During his State Department career, Burns served as under secretary of State for Political Affairs, Ambassador to NATO and to Greece, State Department spokesman



and on the National Security Council staff on Soviet and Russian Affairs. Burns first went to China in 1988 accompanying Secretary George Shultz and in 1989 accompanying President George H.W. Bush. He visited China several times as spokesman with Secretaries Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright. Burns earned his B.A. degree from Boston College and an M.A. from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

UN ADOPTS RESOLUTION ON N KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Washington | Agencies

The UN has adopted a resolution on North Korean human rights, condemning systematic and gross human rights violations in the reclusive nation. It marks the 17th consecutive year the UNSC has adopted a resolution on North Korean human rights, reports Yonhap News Agency. Thursday's resolution was adopted by consensus at the UN General Assembly and its passage came about a month after the UN General Assembly Third Committee passed it. The resolution says the UN "condemns in the strongest terms the long-standing and ongoing systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights in and by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including those that may amount



to crimes against humanity". It also expresses serious concerns over "the persistence of continuing reports of violations of human rights" that include "torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment".

The resolution calls on the North Korean government to immediately halt its "systematic" and "widespread" violations and abuses of human rights and to also shut down its political prison camps. It also calls on Pyongyang to work with international

organisations, including the Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX), to ensure the "timely delivery and distribution of Covid-19 vaccines" to its people, noting the North's dire humanitarian situation has been exacerbated by natural disasters and the pandemic.

Schools across US cancel classes over shooting threats on TikTok

Washington | Agencies

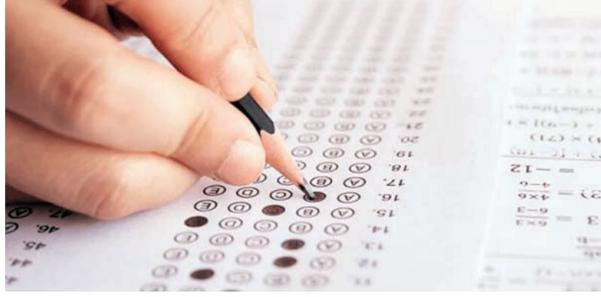
In a frightening incident, school districts across the US decided to cancel classes on Friday owing to reports of threats being made on short-video app TikTok that children and teachers should skip school due to "supposed threats of shootings or bombings". The schools cancelled classes in response to those supposed threats, as a new wave of videos popped up with additional warnings based on both the supposed claims and the actual, factual cancellations of some school classes, reports The Verge. Districts in California, Texas, Minnesota, and Missouri said they planned to close down schools on Friday in response to the threats. "Elsewhere, districts have said they plan to have heightened police presence or have emailed parents to say they've been investigating the allegations," the report said late Thursday. Several districts

and law enforcement divisions said that the threats are not credible or even real. "Law enforcement agencies have investigated this threat and determined that it originated in Arizona and is not credible," Baltimore County Public Schools posted on Twitter. "Currently, there have been no threats to any of the schools in Mexico, (Missouri)," wrote a Missouri school district. "There have been no local, credible threats," Ohio's Milford Exempted Village School District wrote to parents. In New Jersey, Governor Phil Murphy tweeted: "There are no known specific threats against New Jersey schools." TikTok said it has not identified any videos making specific threats. We have not found evidence of such threats originating or spreading via TikTok," the company tweeted. TikTok said it is working with law enforcement to look into the warnings with "utmost seriousness", nonetheless.



QUESTION PAPER LEAK: PUNE POLICE NAB MAHA COMMISSIONER OF EXAMS

IN A BIG SWOOP, THE STATE CYBER POLICE HAVE ARRESTED THE COMMISSIONER OF MAHARASHTRA STATE COUNCIL OF EXAMINATION (MSCE) FOR ALLEGED MALPRACTICES IN THE TEACHERS ELIGIBILITY TEST (TET), OFFICIALS SAID HERE ON FRIDAY.



(MHADA) that was scheduled for December 12. After the leak came to light Housing Minister Dr. Jitendra Awhad announced the postponement of the exams even as the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party slammed the government for the lapses. At least six persons have been arrested in connection with the MHADA paper leak and the investigations also threw up the TET matter while Supe was picked up on Thursday. Police said that hall tickets of some TET candidates were recovered from an accused in the MHADA exams scam case, Dr. Pritesh Deshmukh, Director,

GA Softwares, which was entrusted with the work of preparing the question papers and related works. In the past few months, the state has witnessed exam paper leaks of at least three government exams of the health department, the MHADA and the TET, with some comparing it to the infamous Vyapam Scam in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. Further investigations are underway into the TET and MHADA exam paper leaks with further arrests not ruled out as the government has decided certain changes to prevent more such leaks in future.

Pune | Agencies

The MSCE Commissioner Tukaram Supe has been arrested by the Cyber Cell of Pune Police following his questioning in the alleged malpractices in the TET exams, Police Commissioner Amitabh Gupta told mediapersons. The TET exam malpractices came to the fore during the probe into the leak of an exam paper of the Maharashtra Housing & Area Development Authority

MAHA'S MGL HIKES GAS PRICES FOR 2ND TIME IN 3 WEEKS



Mumbai: For the second time in 3 weeks, the Mahanagar Gas Ltd (MGL) has hiked the prices of CNG and PNG with effect from midnight, an official said on Friday. The basic price of CNG is increased by Rs 2/kg and domestic PNG by Rs 1.50/SCM for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). Accordingly, the revised all-inclusive prices of CNG that fuels vehicles will go up from Rs 61.50/kg to Rs 63.50/kg, and home use PNG shall shoot up from Rs 36.50/SCM to Rs 38/SCM, said an MGL spokesperson.

Shirdi Temple readies to receive Amit Shah on Saturday

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The world famous Saibaba Temple at Shirdi in Ahmednagar is all set to receive Union Home Minister Amit Shah who arrives on a two-day visit to Maharashtra starting Saturday, officials said here on Friday.



A trust official said Shah is likely to take 'darshan' of Saibaba Samadhi Temple prior to the pre-noon 'aarti' to ensure there is no disturbance to the regular devotees who throng here from all over the country daily.

The trust is planning to felicitate the Union Home Minister -- who has been a frequent visitor to the temple in the past -- in Maharashtra traditions with a shawl, coconut, Saibaba's 'vibhuti' (holy ash) and a miniature statue of the saint revered by all communities. Several other engagements are lined up for Shah in Mumbai, Pune and Ahmednagar during his trip.

Besides the Shirdi Temple, Shah who is also the Union Cooperatives Minister will attend an event at the Padmashri Dr. Vithalrao Vikhe-Patil Cooperative Sugar Factory at Loni in Ahmednagar before attending the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) awards function in Mumbai. On Sunday, December 19, Shah will go to Pune where he will inaugurate the new building of the Central Forensics Science Lab

at its sprawling 30-acre complex in Chakan and later have lunch with NDRF personnel. Subsequently, he will attend the VAMNI-COM convocation ceremony and lay the foundation stone for a large statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj coming up at the Pune Municipal Corporation lawns, and unveil a bust of Dr. Babasaheb R Ambedkar there. Shah is also scheduled to meet the Bharatiya Janata Party Pune leaders and workers and then visit the home of the renowned historian and theatre personality Balwant Moreswar alias Dr. Babasaheb Purandare who passed away on November 15 aged 100.

CBI chargesheets ex-top officials of Corporation Bank in 2017 fraud case

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed a charge sheet against three top executives of the Corporation Bank in connection with a Rs 79 crore fraud case, before the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court at Esplanade Court, an official said here on Friday.

The accused are: the then Chairman-and-Managing Director Ramnath Pradeep, the former Chief Manager SN Murthy Shankar and the ex-Senior Manager AP Shiva Kumar.

Following a complaint by Corporation Bank against a private company engaged in manufacturing aluminium foil containers, and its directors and Chartered Accountant

and others, the CBI lodged a case on June 16, 2017.

As per the complaint, the directors, CA and others of that company - against whom the CBI lodged its charge sheet on December 28, 2020 - conspired to avail various credit facilities to the tune of Rs 60 crore from the e-Corporation Bank (now, UBI).

They allegedly diverted the funds to real estate and other unrelated businesses by way of loans/advances, causing a loss of more than Rs 79 crore to the Corporation Bank.

The complaint said the Corporation Bank officials conspired with the Managing Director of the private company and allowed disbursement of Rs 59 crore without confirming the drawing power from the lead bank, the IOB, and made no efforts to

become a member of the consortium to protect the bank's interest.

The Corporation Bank officers repeatedly extended the time limits to the private company for seeking NOC from the lead bank inducting Corporation Bank in the consortium, and later the NOC condition was dispensed.

Investigations found that the e-Corporation Bank had allegedly sanctioned a working capital limit of Rs 60 crore to the private company on the pretext of refusal by 3 banks of the consortium to share the enhanced limits.

The accused did not ensure confirmation from those 3 banks on the reasons for refusing to share the increase in the limits, and sanctioned it without ascertaining the factual

position of financial closure and the tie-up status.

The officials had flouted the sanction limits, waived the NOC conditions and other irregularities that benefited the private company while causing a loss to the Corporation Bank. Two of the accused, Shankar and Kumar were said to have appraised the sanction proposal of the company though fully aware that the loan applicant was neither a director nor authorised signatory of that company.

The accused trio were allegedly associated in preparing the memorandums for modifications of the sanction terms for that private company without verifying the full details and disbursed the loan without informing the lead bank of the same.

IIT-Madras, Centre join hands to add road safety features on MapmyIndia App

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Union Ministry of Road Transport & Highways and IIT-Madras joined hands with MapmyIndia on Friday to enhance the road safety and driving features on free-to-use navigation App for India, officials said here.

In the presence of Union MoRTH Minister Nitin Gadkari, the three authorities signed an MoU for collaboration on driver and road safety technologies for the App that will be available to all Indians free.

With the tie-up, MapmyIndia app will provide voice and visual alerts about upcoming accident-

hazard zones, speed breakers, sharp curves, potholes, accidents, etc., to enable them navigate carefully and to drive safely avoiding crashes.

Through the App, users and authorities shall be allowed to report and broadcast accidents, unsafe areas or road conditions and traffic issues to help benefit other users, which will further enhance road conditions in future after analysis.

The MapmyIndia, which won the Government of India's Aatmanirbhar App Innovation Challenge in 2020, additionally offers a myriad of mapping, navigation, safety and hyper-local

features to help users in their day to day lives as they move around their city or across the country. While citizens are encouraged to download the free App, all government departments at the centre, state and local levels are urged to report and broadcast information on accidents, bad traffic or poor road conditions, road works, etc., to alert users about potentially risky areas.

Founded in 1995, MapmyIndia provides advanced digital maps, geospatial software and location-based IoT technologies and won the Aatmanirbhar App Innovation Challenge-2020.

Tata Motors joins hands with Maharashtra govt to set up vehicle scrappage facility

The auto major has inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the state government to help set up the scrappage centre with a recycling capacity of up to 35,000 vehicles a year for end-of-life passenger and commercial vehicles.

The state industries, energy and labour department will support in facilitating the necessary approvals as per the rules and regulations for setting up of the facility, the company said.

"Besides the well-known benefits that appropriate vehicle scrapping offers boosting the setup of a circular economy, this initiative will also help in reiterating our commitment to strengthen our leadership in the sustainable mobility space. We are proud to partner with the policymakers on this initiative of setting up scrapping facilities across the country. It is the beginning of a new chapter and a step in the right direction for India's transportation sector," Tata Motors Executive Director Girish Wagh said in a statement. Tata Motors had earlier signed an MoU with the Gujarat government for setting up a scrapping facility in Ahmedabad.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Tata Motors on Friday said it has joined hands with the Maharashtra government to support setting up of a registered vehicle scrapping facility (RVSF) in the state.

The auto major has inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the state government to help set up the scrappage centre with a recycling capacity of up to 35,000 vehicles a year for

PUBLIC SHOULD KNOW TRUTH ABOUT ANTI-DRUGS OFFICER: MALIK

MAHARASHTRA MINISTER NAWAB MALIK SAID HE WANTED PEOPLE TO KNOW THAT SAMEER WANKHEDE, ZONAL DIRECTOR OF THE NARCOTICS CONTROL BUREAU IN MUMBAI, WAS LEADING A "DUAL LIFE" AS "A HINDU AND A MUSLIM."

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik has stated before the Bombay High Court that he spoke out against anti-drugs officer Sameer Wankhede as people have the right to know how the NCB official "lied" about caste to get his job.

He wanted people to know that Sameer Wankhede, zonal director of the Narcotics Control Bureau in Mumbai, was leading a "dual life" as "a Hindu and a Muslim", the NCP leader said in an affidavit filed two days ago. "The materials published by me show the illegal manner in which Sameer Wankhede acquired his job and the illegalities committed by him during the discharge of his official duties," it said. "Thus, the public has a right to know the



truth related to the same," the affidavit added. Malik's affidavit was in response to a defamation suit filed against him by Sameer Wankhede's father Dnyandeve.

Dnyandeve filed the suit in November after Malik posted a series of tweets claiming, among other things, that Sameer Wankhede was born a Muslim but submitted a false caste certificate declaring that he belonged to a scheduled caste to secure a central govern-

ment job. Dnyandeve denied the allegation and claimed that Malik was targeting him and his family because the minister's son-in-law had been arrested by NCB officials led by Sameer Wankhede in a drugs case.

Last month, a single HC judge rejected Dnyandeve's request for an interim order to Nawab Malik not to make statements against the Wankhede family during the defamation suit's pendency.

The suit and interim relief prayer will now be heard afresh by another judge after Christmas vacation as both the parties have agreed to a fresh hearing.

The minister also denied that he was making statements against the Wankhede family because of his son-in-law's arrest in January 2021. He had been speaking out about the NCB's illegal actions since November 2020, before the arrest and subsequent release on bail of his son-in-law, Mr Malik said.

The minister said he started criticizing the central agency after noticing that it was going after celebrities for publicity instead of busting big drug syndicates.

"Various illegalities have been committed by him (Sameer Wankhede) in raids conducted under his charge, which included high profile cases and cases involving Bollywood celebrities," the affidavit said.

"The material available also shows that Sameer Wankhede is leading a dual life, as a Muslim and a Hindu. He has illegally obtained his job under the SC category," the minister alleged.

The NCB official had found himself amid controversy recently over 'irregularities' during the arrest of Aryan Khan, the son of Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan, in an alleged drugs case. Malik has also attached copies of Sameer Wankhede's purported birth certificate, school leaving certificate and other documents in support of his allegations.

Renowned poet Natiq's memorial losing sheen, couplets engraved on stone barely visible now

UNIQUE MEMORIAL THAT SHOWS CITY'S LOVE FOR LITERATURE NEEDS RESTORATION AND ATTENTION OF CIVIC BODY, CITIZENS

Shams Ur Rehman Alavi | Nagpur



It's a memorial for the famed poet and a classical master poet of yore. His couplets and his poetry engraved on stone, is getting eroded with time. Located in the heart of Nagpur is the spot where these nazms and his Urdu couplets have draw attention of the literature lovers for decades.

The small corner dedicated to his memory is situated at Naatiq Chowk, close to Gandhisagar Lake, also termed as Shukrawari Lake [Juma Talab previously]. Some of the couplets are not easy to decipher, as the words have faded. Sample a 'sher': Khud apna rasta sidhaar Naatiq, fikr na kar Sheikh o

Brahman ki Waheen to jaate hain raaste sab, koi kahaa.n jaayega bhaTak kar

Natiq Gulaothi also known as Natiq Nagpuri was a master poet and apart from his stature and popularity in the world of literature, he was also involved in freedom movement. Born Abul Hasan, he and his family had come to Nagpur district in the aftermath of 1857, as his uncle was hanged by the British for his role in the first war of independence (termed as mutiny by British) in Meerut. The family had come to Kamptee. He was born on November 11, 1886. In his childhood, he was sent to Gulaothi town in Western UP where he learnt Arabic and Persian. He returned to Kamptee and then settled in Nagpur. Natiq was a disciple of the legendary Dagh Dehli. His poetry got recognition early and his ghazals were published across the country. Dedicated to literature, he too had numerous disciples. Apart from poetry, Natiq had immersed himself in national movement. He was politically active and was a member of civic body in Nagpur for three decades. He also went on to become member of provincial assembly of Central Provinces (CP) in 1926. However, it was



his poetry and his authority over the language that brought him nationwide fame. Once in a mushaira, he had expressed dismay at Bollywood lyricist and poet Shakil Badauni's particular lines as there was a poetic fault.

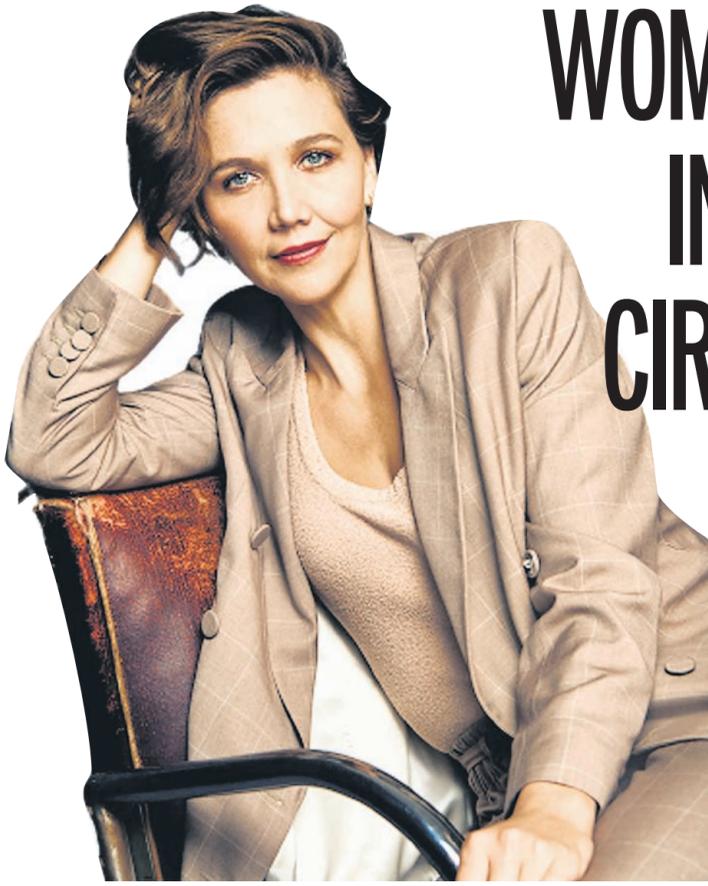
Shakil admitted that in order to suit the tune of the song as per movie's demand, he had made the adjustment. Subsequently, Natiq recited

a couplet on the spot that highlighted how important it is for poets to remain true to art and never compromise on language, meter and prosody. No wonder, Natiq, a poet of Dagh school of poetry, was respected widely. There is documented record of Dagh's letter to him and the letter(s) have been published. Dagh praised him for using the idioms in his couplets. Natiq wrote several books including his commentary on Ghalib's poetry that was published nearly forty years after he wrote it. One of his collection of Nazms was published in his life time. He also wrote Kanzul matalib, the 'Sharah' of Ghalib's divan, written in 1926, that got published decades later in 1968. The next year he passed away. He breathed his last on May 27, 1969. Eight years after his demise, his diwan was compiled and published by his

admirer Md Abdul Haleem. Dr Sarosha Nasreen Quazi has written a book on Natiq's life and works. In this book, she has focused on his entire life and also mentioned that in events he was addressed by poetry lovers as 'raunaq-e-bazm-e-sukhan', 'ustazi al asa'atiza' and 'umdatush shuara' i.e. radiance of the poetic world, master of the masters [of poetry] and 'best among poets'. The magazine, Qirtas' special issue in 2009 was dedicated to Natiq, who is also termed Natiq Nagpuri in central India. Elsewhere, he is known as Natiq Gulaothi and Natiq Gualothwi. The special issue mentions that Natiq had also translated Shelley and Longfellow's verses in Urdu. It's time his memorial gets due attention and is refurbished.

Some of his couplets:

Ham wahaan hain ke jahaa.n husn ka jalta hai chiraaGh Shamaa is bazm mein aa jaye to parwaana bane Jis ki hasrat thi use paa bhi chuke, kho bhi chuke ab kisi cheez ka hamko nahin armaan hota mere sabr ne bhi ghazab kiya ke adoo ki jaan pe ban gayi ye kahaa.n ki choT kahaan lagi, ye kahaan ka dard kahaan uthaa Kahne wala woh, sunne wala main Ek bhi aaj doosra na hua Firdaus ko abhaab ki mehfil to bana do Pahle meri khoi hui dunia mujhko laa do



WOMEN LEAD THE WAY IN LONDON CRITICS' CIRCLE NOMINATIONS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Women filmmakers had a field day in the London Critics' Circle nominations, with Jane Campion, Maggie Gyllenhaal and Joanna Hogg seeing their movies being picked up to be in the race for top awards. Campion and Hogg have also been nominated for the best director trophy alongside Celine Sciamma, who's French, for 'Petite Maman'. According to 'Variety', Campion ('The Power of the Dog') scored the most nods with nine nominations, followed by Gyllenhaal ('The Lost Daughter') with six and Hogg ('The Souvenir Part 2') with six. Ryusuke Hamaguchi of 'Drive My Car' fame is this year's single most

nominated individual. He's got nominations for best film, director, screenwriter and foreign language film of the year. 'Drive My Car' most recently bagged the New York Film Critics Circle's top award for best film. Olivia Colman, Penelope Cruz, Renate Reinsve, Joanna Scanlan and Kristen Stewart are all in the running for the actress of the year award. Benedict Cumberbatch, Adam Driver, Andrew Garfield, Oscar Isaac and Daniel Kaluuya will battle it out for actor of the year. Voted for by more than 180 critics from print, online and broadcast media, the nominations were announced on Thursday afternoon in London. The ceremony will take place on February 6, 2022.



BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN SELLS HIS ENTIRE MUSIC CATALOG FOR \$500 MN

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rock legend Bruce Springsteen has sold the master recordings and publishing rights for his life's work to Sony for a reported \$500 million. The deal gives Sony ownership of his 20 studio albums, including classics like 'Born To Run', 'The River' and 'Born In The USA', according to multiple US reports, according to bbc.com. A 20-time Grammy winner, Springsteen's music generated about \$15 million in revenue last year. His deal follows similar sales by Bob Dylan, Blondie and David Bowie. Warner Music bought the worldwide rights to Bowie's music in September, and Dylan sold his catalogue of more than 600 songs in December last year to Universal Music Group at a purchase price widely reported as \$300 million. The deals provide immediate financial security to the artists and their estates, while the rights-holders hope to profit by building new revenue streams for the music via film and TV licensing, merchandise, cover versions and performance royalties. At an investor relations meeting in May, Sony Music's chief executive, Rob Stringer, said the company had spent \$1.4 billion in acquisitions over the previous six months. That included a multi-million dollar deal to obtain the rights to Paul Simon's back catalogue. Springsteen's deal would be the most expensive so far, if the numbers reported by music industry bible Billboard are correct. Springsteen is one of the most successful rock musicians of all time, and has recorded for Sony's Columbia Records imprint for the duration of his career.



Priyanka lashes out at news article calling her 'wife of Nick Jonas'

Mumbai | Agencies

Indian actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who is currently busy promoting her upcoming Hollywood film 'The Matrix Resurrections', has lashed out at a news article calling her 'wife of Nick Jonas'. She asked for an explanation as to how this can still happen to women. Priyanka took to her Instagram stories, where she shared screenshots of the article and questioned if she should add her IMDb link to her bio. The article shared by Priyanka read: "The wife of Nick Jonas shared..." It quoted her speaking on Good Morning America about her co-star Keanu

Reeves. Highlighting it, Priyanka said: "Very interesting that I'm promoting one of the most iconic film franchises of all time, and I'm still referenced as 'the wife of...'" Tagging her husband Nick Jonas, the actress added: "Please explain how this still happens to women? Should I add my IMDb link to my bio?" The Matrix Resurrections' also features Carrie-Anne Moss, Neil Patrick Harris, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Jonathan Groff, among others. It is scheduled to hit the theaters on December 22.

DENZEL WASHINGTON LOOKING FOR NEW CHALLENGES

Los Angeles | Agencies

Oscar-winning actors Denzel Washington would need an "extreme challenge" to be interested in a new acting project. Speaking at the premiere of his new movie 'The Tragedy of Macbeth', Washington said: "I'm about the challenges. At this point, like the character, I'm in the yellow leaf of my career. To be quite honest, looking to do other things. So as far as acting, it's gonna have to be an extreme challenge for me to be interested. I've been talking to one or two of the top directors in the business, and we're talking about maybe doing something. There's not that much left for me to do as actor. Maybe Lear." In the adaptation of the Shakespearean story, Washington plays the titular power-hungry character and bailed working on the movie "a great ride", reports femalefirst.co.uk. He added to 'Entertainment Tonight': "It was just a great ride with a group of talented, talented young and older actors led by a brilliant, brilliant director." The movie comes out on Christmas Day, the same day as Washington's new directorial effort 'A Journal for Jordan' - which stars Michael B. Jordan - and he admitted the "tear-jerker" is very different to 'The Tragedy of Macbeth'. He said: "It's just a beautiful love story and a touching...what's the word. I don't want to say sappy, but it's a real tear-jerker. A little bit different than Macbeth, so I got 'em on both sides."



ISABELLE HUPPERT TO RECEIVE BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL'S HONORARY GOLDEN BEAR

Los Angeles | Agencies

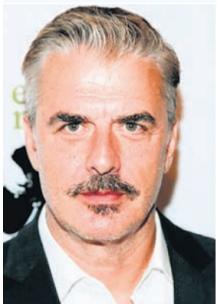
French actress Isabelle Huppert is set to receive the Berlin Film Festival's Honorary Golden Bear in February. Her films will also be honoured as part of a special Homage section, reports variety.com. Huppert will be awarded the prize for lifetime achievement. In conjunction with the awards on February 15 at the Berlinale Palast, the festival will screen her latest movie, Laurent Larivière's "A propos de Joan", unveiled on Wednesday in the fest's first batch of titles, as a special gala premiere. Huppert has a longstanding relationship with Berlin, and has starred in seven competition films to date. She was first a guest in Berlin with Jacques Doillon's 'La vengeance d'une femme' before appearing in Francois Ozon's '8 Femmes' as an unrepentant woman who emerges in the end as a confident beauty. The ensemble cast was awarded a Silver Bear for outstanding artistic accomplishment. Meanwhile, in 'L'Avenir' she plays a



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Tamara Francesconi



'Sex And The City' actor Chris Noth denies sexual assault allegations

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Chris Noth has insisted two sexual assault allegations made against him are "categorically false". Two women have alleged they were attacked by the 67-year-old actor in 2004 and 2015 respectively, but the 'Equalizer' star has insisted any sexual contact between the two was consensual, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

He said in a statement: "The accusations against me made by individuals I met years, even decades, ago are categorically false. These stories could've been from 30 years ago or 30 days ago - no always means no - that is a line I did not cross. It's difficult not to question the timing of these stories coming out. I don't know for certain why they are surfacing now, but I do know this: I did not assault these women." The first accuser, identified only as Zoe, alleged to The Hollywood Reporter the 'Sex and the City' star had "raped her from behind" in 2004 when she was just 22.

She claimed: "It was very painful and I yelled out, 'Stop!' And he didn't. I said, 'Can you at least get a condom?' and he laughed at me. I realised there was blood on my shirt (afterward). I got out of there. I went to my friend's apartment (in the same building). I walked right in and went to the bathroom and tried to get the blood out of my shirt. They wanted to know what happened. I said, 'I just want to go home.'" She claimed that after the incident, "two police officers" spoke to her in hospital but she "wouldn't say who it was" when asked who was involved.



ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY HOCKEY: INDIA BEAT ARCH-RIVALS PAKISTAN 3-1

Dhaka | Agencies

Indian Men's Hockey Team registered a thrilling 3-1 victory against nemesis Pakistan in the much-awaited encounter in the Hero Men's Asian Champions Trophy, here on Friday.

It was goals by Harmanpreet Singh (9', 53') and the experienced striker Akashdeep Singh (42') that ensured India remain in contention for their third consecutive title in the Asian Champions Trophy, having won the prestigious tournament in 2016 and joint winners in 2018. For Pakistan, Junaid Manzoor scored the lone goal in 45th minute. Earlier in the match, both teams lived up to the billing as they kept up the tempo from hooper to hooper. While it was India who drew the first blood through a penalty corner perfectly converted by Vice Captain Harmanpreet Singh to gain 1-0 lead in the 9th minute of the match, Pakistan denied any big opportunity for India in the following minutes to keep the scoreline in



check. After a goalless second quarter, the match took a thrilling turn in the third and fourth quarter respectively with both teams upping the ante. Though India made some potential circle entries, they could not finish

the task by converting the opportunities. However, young Shilanand Lakra broke the gridlock in the 42nd minute when he made a fine tackle to enter the attacking circle from the left flank. He teamed up with Sumit to assist

Akashdeep Singh who was poised in front of the goal-mouth to deflect the ball into the post, thus fetching India's second goal of the match.

Soon after, Pakistan scored in the 45th minute when they beat India's defence which had done well so far to restrict them to just three shots on goal. It was Junaid who successfully put the ball past India's goalie Krishan Pathak to narrow the deficit to 1-2. The final quarter remained tense with both teams increasing the tempo in their attempt to score. It was Lalit Upadhyay who worked a good attack to earn India a PC in the 53rd minute. To convert India's second PC of the match, Akashdeep ensured a perfect injection which was stopped on point by Sumit as Harmanpreet took a fierce drag flick to score. While India took their lead to a strong 3-1, Pakistan created two PCs in the final minutes of the match but the opportunity was denied by young India goalie Suraj Karkera who came up with brilliant footwork to made fine saves on both occasions.

BWF World C'ships

Srikanth, Lakshya assured of medals after reaching semis; Sindhu knocked out

Huelva (Spain) | Agencies

On a historic day for country's badminton, India were assured of at least two medals at the 2021 BWF World Badminton Championships after former world No 1 Kidambi Srikanth and young Lakshya Sen entered the men's singles semi-finals of the event, here on Friday.

However, it wasn't a good day for defending women's champion PV Sindhu, who lost to familiar foe Tai Tzu Ying in the women's singles quarter-finals and was knocked out of the tournament.

The top-seeded Tai Tzu beat Sindhu 21-17, 21-13 in the women's singles quarter-finals, which lasted 42 minutes, to end the Indian badminton ace's title defence.

Reigning world champion Sindhu had a nervous start with Tai Tzu rushing to the 9-3 lead in the first game. She amped her pace with aggressive cross-court shots but the Chinese Taipei shuttler was clever with her deceptions and managed to win the opening game.

In the second game, Sindhu gave better competition to her opponent but could not quite take a sizable lead at any point. Tai Tzu frequently employed her drop shots to catch the Indian out and after being tied 12-12 in



the second game, the Chinese Taipei shuttler surged ahead to wrap up the match. This is the first time that world No. 1 Tai Tzu has progressed past the quarters at the badminton world championships. She had defeated Sindhu in the semi-finals of the Tokyo Olympics earlier this year.

Meanwhile, ace Indian shuttler Srikanth beat Dutch badminton player Mark Caljouw 21-8, 21-7 to advance to the semi-finals in men's singles.

The 12th seeded Indian used his cross-court smashes to perfection and gave Caljouw no chance, winning the quarter-finals quite comfortably in just 26 minutes.

This is Srikanth's first semi-final appearance at the world championships. With this, he has now ensured his first and India's 11th medal at the World Championships.

Haryana beat Madhya Pradesh 5-1, secure quarterfinal berth

Pune | Agencies

Hockey Haryana completed the quarterfinal line-up in the 11th Hockey India Senior Men's National Championship defeating Hockey Madhya Pradesh 5-1 in the last Pool stage match of the competition here on Friday.

Sanjay (24th, 39th) scored a brace, while Joginder (20th), Bobby Singh (35th) and Deepak (38th) contributed a goal in Haryana's second win of the tournament. Ameen Khan (37th) scored the only goal for Madhya Pradesh in Pool B.

The quarterfinals will be played on Saturday. Quarterfinal line-up: Hockey Punjab vs Hockey



Chandigarh; Hockey Karnataka vs Hockey Bengal; Hockey Haryana vs Uttar

Pradesh Hockey; Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu vs Hockey Maharashtra.

Ashes, 2nd Test AUSTRALIA REMOVE ENGLAND'S OPENERS AFTER DECLARING AT 473/9

Adelaide | Agencies

Australia removed England openers Rory Burns and Haseeb Hameed to leave the tourists at 17/2 in 8.4 overs, trailing by 456 runs at stumps on day two of the second Ashes Test at the Adelaide Oval.

After Australia, on the back of counter-attack from the lower-order, declared at 473/9 in the first innings, Mitchell Starc and Michael Neser took out Burns and Hameed before a large lightning strike outside the venue forced early stumps to be called on a day thoroughly dominated by Australia.

In the final session, debutant Neser and Starc inflicted more misery on England with stunning late cameos. Neser and Starc shared a rollicking 58-run stand off just 51 balls as the hosts' lower-order, along with Jhye Richardson, added 89 runs in only 10 overs before captain Steve Smith



declared the innings. With the ball, Starc struck on the first ball of his second over as Burns edged a nipping away delivery straight to Steve Smith at second slip. Neser got his first Test wicket on just

his second ball as Haseeb Hammed chipped to mid-on. A massive flash of lightning outside the venue when Neser bowled the fourth ball to Dawid Malan prompted the umpires to take the players off the

field, eventually causing stumps. Earlier, Marnus Labuschagne completed his sixth Test century while Steve Smith fell short of his and Carey chipped in with a half-century as Australia piled on the runs on an improved yet hapless England bowling attack. Resuming from 221/2, Smith got the first boundary with a fierce cut through point off James Anderson. Labuschagne, who ended day one unbeaten on 95, reached his maiden century in the Ashes with a streaky edge past the slip cordon off Anderson for his eighth boundary in a gritty knock. Labuschagne reached the three-figure mark in 287 balls, making this his slowest century in Test cricket.

Brief scores
Australia 473 for 9 dec in 150.4 overs (Marnus Labuschagne 103, David Warner 95, Steve Smith 93; James Anderson 2/58) lead England 17/2 in 8.4 overs (Michael Neser 1/4, Mitchell Starc 1/11) by 456 runs.

FEDERER VOTED FANS' FAVOURITE FOR 19TH TIME IN ATP AWARDS

New York | Agencies

Swiss tennis ace and winner of 20 majors, Roger Federer has been voted as the "Fans' Favourite" for 19th time in ATP Awards.

Federer, who will be skipping the opening major of 2022 -- the Australian Open -- and is unlikely to return to competitive tennis until mid-2022 as he recovers from a knee surgery, has now won 40 ATP Awards.

Federer, who celebrated his 40th birthday in August, made his comeback to the ATP Tour in March this year in Doha after undergoing two arthroscopic right knee surgeries in 2020.

He enjoyed a run to the Wimbledon quarterfinals, where he showed his continued appreciation for the fans.

"(The) crowds were amazing," Federer had said. "The ovation was fantastic. I loved it. That's why I play.



That's why I still play now."

In addition to his 19 "Fans' Favourite Awards", Federer has also been voted by his peers as the recipient of the Stefan Edberg

Sportsmanship Award 13 times and 'Comeback Player of the Year' (2017). He has also been crowned ATP No. 1 five times and is a two-time winner of the Arthur Ashe Humanitarian

Award. In doubles, the French duo of Pierre-Hugues Herbert and Nicolas Mahut has been selected as "Fans' Favourite" for the first time.

Abhinav Bindra offers help to NRAI after four suicides in shooting community

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Beijing Olympic Games gold medalist in 10m air rifle, Abhinav Bindra, has offered help to the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) in the wake of incidents involving young shooters committing suicide.

A 28-year-old woman rifle shooter, who was the winner of gold and silver medals at the Jharkhand State Shooting Championship, allegedly committed suicide by hanging in a women's hostel at Bally, Howrah on December 15.

This is the fourth case of death by suicide in the last four months in the shooting fraternity, raising serious questions.

The Abhinav Bindra Foundation caters not only to the physical aspects of high-performance athletes but also lays emphasis on mental wellness, and the ace shooter wants to share his team's expertise with the NRAI to ensure no more lives are lost to suicide. In a letter addressed to NRAI president, Raninder Singh, Bindra has said, "I wish to offer the time and energy of my team to help



the athletes, coaches, administrators, parents, and others in the sporting ecosystem in need. I hope you will accept my proposal and allow us to conduct a few virtual sessions."

ENGLAND LOSE MORE WTC POINTS FOR SLOW OVER-RATE IN FIRST ASHES TEST

Dubai: England cricket team have been docked eight ICC World Test Championship points -- three more than previously stated -- for maintaining a slow over-rate in the first Ashes Test against Australia, the International Cricket Council (ICC) clarified on Friday. After the first Test in Brisbane, it was announced on last Saturday that England would be docked five WTC points, one for each over they were found to initially have fallen short by. However, it has since emerged they were eight overs short, and will therefore lose three additional points.

That left them with six points after five Tests in the ongoing 2021-23 cycle of the WTC, putting them at the 7th spot in the table, with a win percentage of 10 percent.

"England were eight overs short (not five overs short as previously announced) but were only fined 100 percent of their match fee due to the limit," the ICC said in a statement. "However, the points deduction for penalty overs is not capped and must reflect the actual number of penalty overs a team is short of the minimum requirement as per Clause 16.1.2 of the ICC Playing Conditions, hence they have been penalised one point for each over they were short," it added. England, who lost the first Ashes Test by nine wickets, were also penalised for poor over-rate in the home series against India in July-August, meaning they've now conceded a total of 10 points to slow over-rate.

Maxwell should get more Test cricket opportunities: David Hussey

Abu Dhabi | Agencies

Former Australian limited-overs cricketer David Hussey is surprised with the limited opportunities given to Glenn Maxwell in the Asian sub-continent despite the all-rounder being an asset in white-ball game for the country. The 33-year-old Maxwell has played just seven Tests since debuting in 2013, with the Cricket Australia selection panel citing his aggressive batting as the reason for his non-inclusion in the longest format.

But with the busy sub-continental schedule in 2022, where Australia play Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India in a variety of formats, Hussey, who is coach of Big Bash League (BBL) side Melbourne Stars, asked the selectors to give Maxwell more



opportunities in Tests as well. Maxwell averages 26 in Tests and it has been reported that the selectors will consider him to play Tests for Australia on the sub-continental tours.

Ferrari driver Leclerc tests positive for Covid-19

Abu Dhabi | Agencies

Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc has tested positive for Covid-19 after returning home following the post-season Abu Dhabi test, the club said in a statement.

"Charles has tested positive for Covid-19. In accordance with protocols required by FIA and the team, Charles was tested on his return from Abu Dhabi. He is currently feeling fine, with mild symptoms, and will self-isolate at home," Ferrari tweeted.

This is the second time that Leclerc has tested positive for the illness, having contracted it at the start of 2021 back in January. At that time, Leclerc also described his symptoms as mild, going on to make a full recovery.

On the track, it was a strong season for Leclerc, who twice claimed pole position in the Ferrari SF21, those arriving back-to-back at his home race in Monaco and then the Azerbaijan Grand Prix.



Leclerc finished 10th in the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, a result which

dropped him from position 5th to 7th in the drivers' standings.

'Bigg Boss 15': Sunny Leone, Kanika Kapoor to enter as guests

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sunny Leone and singer Kanika Kapoor are set to enter the show 'Bigg Boss 15' as a special guest for 'Weekend Ka Vaar' episode to promote their party number

'Madhuban'.

To make it more special the entire garden area in the house is turned into a pool. Moreover, a beach party has been organised and all the contestants wearing swim outfits will be seen dancing and enjoying mocktails.

Sunny asks the contestants to

pick up their mocktails and have a nice time.

Later, Shamita Shetty performs on the track, 'Chori Pe Chori'. Meanwhile, Sunny gives the contestants some tasks while handling them a beach basketball.

'Bigg Boss 15' airs on Colors.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As 2021 draws closer to an end, actress Alaya F, who made her debut opposite Saif Ali Khan in 'Jawani Jaaneman', looks back at the year as she calls it a professionally rewarding year. The actress has been busy with shoots throughout this year and she now opens up on how that feels.

Talking about her busy year, Alaya shares: "2021 was a very special year for me because I finally

got the opportunity to really work and be on sets non-

Alaya F : 2021 has been great, allowed me to be on sets non-stop

stop after a long break that the pandemic forced upon us!"

Working her way through lockdowns in projects one after the other, he says: "I was constantly shooting and in films back to back and even though it was very exhausting at times, it was so rewarding because all through the lockdowns that happened post my first release all I could think about was getting back to work. So finally being able to do what I had been dreaming of was incredible!" Shedding light on her learnings, the actress says: "In between all of this I also learnt important lessons on how to balance my time and conserve my energy and take breaks when necessary. Which is something I never used to do!" That's why this year was great, because it was incredibly productive but at the same time it taught me a lot about balance. I hope 2022 is full of lots of new learnings, lots of new opportunities and just a lot of success, love and happiness! I can't wait to see the work of this year translate into 2022", she concludes. Ekta Kapoor's 'U-Turn' and 'Freddy' starring Kartik Aaryan are some of the projects in her pipeline.

MEGHNA GULZAR A MAVERICK DIRECTOR, SAYS FATIMA SANA SHAIKH

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Fatima Sana Shaikh, who recently joined the cast of Meghna Gulzar's 'SamBahadur' along with her 'Dangal' co-star, Sanya Malhotra, has hailed the latter as a maverick director and feels blessed to be directed by her.

Talking about Fatima shares: "I feel truly blessed to have bagged this opportunity to work with Meghna Gulzar. She is a maverick of a director, whose work I have admired and followed since very long (sic)."

Calling the opportunity a milestone, the actress says, "I consider working with her a personal milestone. I'm super pumped to start shooting with her and I hope we have a blast on the sets of 'SamBahadur'".

In the film, which stars Vicky Kaushal in the titular role of Field Marshal and one of India's greatest war heroes, Sam Manekshaw, Fatima will be seen playing the role of Indira Gandhi, India's only female Prime Minister, till date.

This will be her third film with Sanya Malhotra after 'Dangal' and the Anurag Basu directorial 'Ludo'. In addition, Fatima will also be seen sharing the screen with Anil Kapoor in another project.

TEASER OF 'ATTACK' TO BE ATTACHED WITH 'SPIDER MAN: NO WAY HOME'



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The teaser of John Abraham-starrer 'Attack' will be seen with Marvel Studios' superhero film 'Spider Man: No Way Home' on the big screen. The makers of 'Attack' have pinned the teaser with the prints of the friendly neighbourhood superhero. The film, which also stars Jacqueline Fernandez

and Rakul Preet Singh, tells the story of a daring rescue mission led by a lone ranger officer, who undergoes cybernetic modifications to gain superhuman strength. The film, produced by Jayantilal Gada of Pen Studios, John Abraham (JA Entertainment), and Ajay Kapoor, and directed by Lakshya Raj Anand, will hit screens worldwide on January 28.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

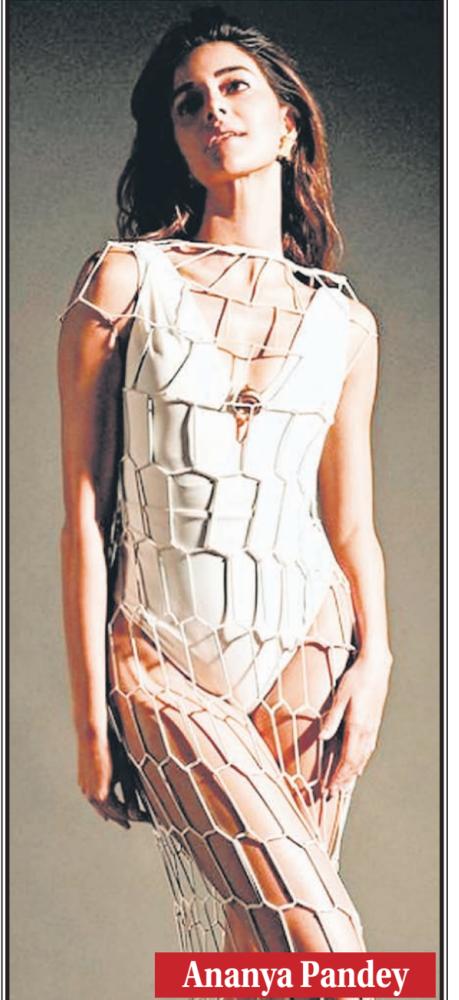
The producers of Arjun Kapoor-starrer 'Lady Killer', Tanmay Telang and Harsh Vardhan have said that the role was tailor-made for the actor.

The film, which will be helmed by 'B.A. Pass' director Ajay Bahl, tells the story of a small-town playboy, who falls in love with a 'self-destructive beauty'. Harsh Vardhan who is a co-founder of Polaroid Media spoke about his experience of working with Arjun as he said, "Lady Killer is a romantic thriller and who can we imagine in this avatar more than Arjun. I was excited for our first meeting. But it seemed smooth as if the role is custom-made for him." He is a great actor and when we met him we realised he is humble too. He too had a lot of questions about how we are going to treat the film and role, we had a healthy discussion. I am happy to say that it gives us immense pleasure to see our development in our project each day," he added.

Tanmay Telang said, "We are very excited for the journey ahead of us. We are currently doing our location hunting as the shoot is scheduled for early 2022. This is our dream project and nothing can be great than roping in Arjun Kapoor for the role. He is a really gentle man."

Polaroid Media is headed by Tanmay Telang and Harsh Vardhan and Sambhav Davar, who are bankrolling the project in association with T-Series and Shaailish R. Singh.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Ananya Pandey

Mithun Chakraborty plays pranks on 'Dance+ Season 6'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Mithun Chakraborty will be seen playing pranks and shaking-a-leg on the dance reality show 'Dance+ Season 6'.

Contestant Shivanshu Soni, who was pranked by him, shares his experience and how he felt when Mithun told him that he is upset with him.

He says: "My blood ran cold when Dada pranked me by acting like he was upset with me. To have upset India's biggest star that I was meeting

for the very first time, made my heart skip a beat."

"But in the end, it was just a prank, and to have him around and be so candid as well was such an honor. We learned so much from him. I am utterly thankful to the makers of the show for getting him on the show and I am hoping I can maybe even work with him someday," adds Shivanshu.

The dance reality show, 'Dance+ Season 6' has different teams of contestants with each having a captain including Shakti Mohan, Punit J Pathak, and Salman Yusuf Khan. Choreographer Remo D' Souza is called the super judge on the show. 'Dance+ Season 6' airs on Star Plus.