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Govt seeks 5 names from agitating farmers for committee on MSP, Other Issues

DIVIDE AND RULE

After making the announcement on November 19 that his government had decided to repeal the three farm laws, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also announced to form a committee comprising representatives of the Centre, state governments, farmers, agriculture scientists and agriculture economists to discuss how Minimum Support Price (MSP) can be made more effective, how zero budget farming can be promoted and how crop patterns can be changed in a scientific manner.

- ▶ As per sources, this is a part of back-channel talks between the Centre and the farmers' union spearheading the ongoing agitation.
- ▶ The back-channel talks were initiated after PM Narendra Modi's November 19 announcement to repeal the three farm laws.
- ▶ Sources said that the Samyukt Kisan Morcha is likely to send a list of names of candidates.
- ▶ Farmer leaders from Punjab are pushing for two names for the committee from the state.
- ▶ Farmer leaders from Haryana will sit down with CM Manohar Lal on Wednesday. One of the key issues to be discussed during this meeting will be the withdrawal of police cases filed against protesting farmers in the state over the course of the past year.
- ▶ The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has even sent a proposal to all states/UTs, asking them to consider the withdrawal of all cases filed against farmers who were part of the agitation.



seemed divided over the issue as sources from the Singhu border camp site on Delhi outskirts - the headquarters of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, the consortium of farmers' organisations that spearheaded the agitation to demand repeal of the three farm laws for over a year - said conflicting things.

One of the SKM leaders, Darshan Pal confirmed that there was a communication that sought five names for SKM to be included in the committee for MSP. He, however, expressed dismay that the government had not directly approached the SKM either for

five names or for withdrawing cases against farmers from Haryana. But a number of other farmers' leaders said there was no official word from any government or political functionary. The SKM had declared that day that they would wait for the laws to be formally repealed and the government gave a legal standing to MSP. The farmers had also announced to continue their agitation till all their demands - apart from the main demand of repeal of the three laws - are met. Those demands included withdrawal of

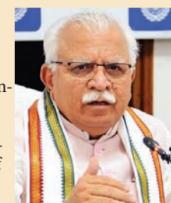
cases against all the farmers lodged during the year-long agitation. Meanwhile, the SKM has clarified that all constituent organisations will take stock of the situation and take decisions about the next steps in the farmers' struggle on December 4, as announced earlier.

No data on farmers who died, so no compensation: Govt

New Delhi: The government on Tuesday said it has no data pertaining to either cases against or the number of farmers who died during the year-long agitation demanding repeal of the three contentious farm laws and hence there was no question of providing financial assistance to anyone. Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar said this in reply to questions on 'Agitation of Farm Laws' raised by a bunch of MPs in the Lok Sabha.

Now, companies will buy produce directly from farmers in Haryana

Chandigarh: Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Tuesday said continuous efforts are being made to strengthen the economic condition of the farmers and encourage them towards trade and market. He said 29 MoUs have been signed to give direct benefits to farmer producer organisations. Their objective is to collect produce from the farmers and provide them maximum value for it. The Chief Minister said now the buyers will also benefit as the prices in the market will be less. These companies will directly procure fruits, vegetables and honey from the farms.



"The person who called said the Haryana Chief Minister has called a meeting tomorrow to discuss the withdrawal of cases against farmers from Haryana. Don't know why the government is acting like this?"

Darshan Pal, Farmer Leader

"The date of this SKM meeting remains unchanged. This meeting will take place at the Singhu Border. In this meeting, there will be discussion on the various points raised in the letter to the Prime Minister and future decisions will be taken."

Statement from SKM

Centre's new advisory to states amid Omicron threat



- New Covid variant Omicron doesn't escape the Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test and Rapid Antigen Test, Indian Council of Medical Research Director General, Dr Balram Bhargava, said on Tuesday.
- Currently available vaccines for Covid-19 could likely be less effective against the new Omicron variant, the chief executive of US drug maker Moderna has said.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre on Tuesday advised the states and UTs to ensure preparedness of health infrastructure like availability of ICU, O2 beds, ventilators, etc. and to implement ECRP-II, with focus on rural areas and for paediatric cases.

It emphasised on the early implementation of sanctioned PSA plants, along with ensuring seamless supply of logistics, drugs, O2 cylinders amid looming threat of Omicron infection.

In a virtual meeting with states and UTs on the public health response measures and preparedness amid reports of Omicron variant, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan advised states to not to let their guards down and keep a strict vigil on the international passengers coming to the country through various airports, ports and land border crossings. The states have been advised to undertake effective surveillance of international passengers. The testing of samples of international travelers coming from "At Risk" countries on first day and of specified category of passengers on eighth day needs to be scrupulously

done. The states have been asked to send all positive samples for genome sequencing to INSACOG Labs promptly. States will undertake contact tracing of positive individuals and follow up for 14 days.

Mandatory isolation for int'l passengers from 12 countries in Goa

Panaji: International passengers arriving in Goa from any of the 12 countries affected by the Omicron variant of the coronavirus will have to stay in isolation for 14 days, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said on Tuesday. Sawant also said that according to central government guidelines, inbound passengers from the 12 countries on arrival in Goa will have to isolate themselves and get themselves tested after 7 days. "If they are negative there will be some relaxation for the remaining seven days," he said.

25 who underwent cataract operation in Bihar's Muzaffarpur lose eyesight

PATNA | Agencies

At least 25 persons got severe infection in their eyes and eventually lost their eyesight after they underwent a cataract operation at a hospital in Bihar's Muzaffarpur, an official said on Tuesday. The incident took place at an eye hospital in Juran Chapra locality of the city on November 22. Muzaffarpur civil surgeon Vinay Kumar Sharma confirmed the incident.



gested the removal of the infected eye. We have constituted a three-member committee headed by the blind-ness control in-charge of the district to probe the incident in a time bound manner and submit a report. Prima facie, it appears that the doctors of the hospital had not followed the operation protocols," Sharma said. "We will take strict action against the hospital and doctors for such serious negligence," Sharma said.

"We learnt that 25 persons, who underwent cataract operations, are suffering from severe infection in one eye. The doctors have now sug-

FACE MASK IS MANDATORY IN BHOPAL

BHOPAL: District collector, Avinash Lavania, on Tuesday announced the penalty for not wearing masks and not maintaining social distancing norms at public places to Rs 500.

In the past 24 hours, a total of 14 new positives have been reported in the city. According to new guidelines, those found without wearing masks will have to pay Rs 500 as penalty. Besides, those government and private organizations, where employees will be found working without complete vaccination, will be seized. "The corona positive patients will not be allowed for home isolations. They will be admitted to Katju hospitals, as of now," the district collector told journalists. He, however, said that decisions on public functions were not taken, so far.

'Waited for long', SC to decide punishment for Vijay Mallya in Jan

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it has waited for sufficiently long, and the process to award punishment to Vijay Mallya in a contempt of court, in which he was held guilty in July 2017, must get over. The top court has scheduled the matter for disposal in January, where it will decide the quantum of punishment for him.

A bench headed by Justice U.U. Lalit, citing the note, said that Mallya's extradition proceedings have attained finality, as he has exhausted all avenues of appeal in the UK. However, certain confidential proceedings are going on and the UK has not disclosed the details of these proceedings. The top court noted that due to these proceedings Mallya's presence could not be secured, despite its



directions. The bench said the process to award sentence to Mallya in the contempt of court matter must get over, as the top court has waited sufficiently for long. The top court said it is up to Mallya to appear in person or advance arguments through his counsel.

LIQUOR BOTTLE FOUND 50 M AWAY FROM CM'S CHAMBER IN BIHAR ASSEMBLY

PATNA | Agencies

Opposition leaders in Bihar demanded resignation of the Chief Minister after an empty bottle of liquor was found inside the premises of the state assembly on Tuesday.

Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Yadav inspected the place and demanded resignation of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

"The empty bottle of liquor was found just 50 meters away from the chamber of the Chief Minister inside Bihar Vidhan Sabha. It shows the reality of the liquor ban. The liquor was either consumed in a



high security restricted area inside Bihar Vidhan Sabha or someone came with the empty bottle. Nitish Kumar is taking high moral ground on liquor ban but his police are unable to check consumption," Tejashwi Yadav said. Sunil Kumar, cabinet minister of liquor prohibition department said: "It is a very serious issue that a bottle of liquor was found inside the premises of Bihar Vidhan Sabha. We have initiated a high level inquiry into the matter and the truth will come out very soon. The investigators will scan all available CCTV cameras."

ADMIRAL R. HARI KUMAR TAKES OVER AS INDIAN NAVY CHIEF

New Delhi:

Admiral R. Hari Kumar, a Gunnery specialist and an advocate of integrated theatre commands, took over as Chief of the Naval Staff. He succeeds Admiral Karambir Singh, who retires upon superannuation, after an illustrious career, spanning over forty years, in the Indian Navy.

Admiral Kumar is an alumnus of the prestigious National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla. He was commissioned into the Indian Navy on January 1, 1983. A Gunnery specialist, he has held several key appointments, including Fleet Operations Officer and Fleet Gunnery Officer of Western Fleet, Executive Officer of INS Vipul, Gunnery Officer of INS Ranjit, commissioning GO of INS Kuthar and commissioning crew of INS Ranvir.



BLOOD GROUPS A, B AND RH+ ARE MORE PRONE TO COVID

The study was conducted on 2,586 Covid-19 positive patients tested through real-time PCR who were admitted at SGRH from April 8, 2020 to October 4, 2020.

- In the 2,586 Covid-19-infected patients, the frequencies of A, B, O, and AB were 29.93 per cent, 41.80 per cent, 21.19 per cent, and 7.98 per cent, respectively.
- Of the patients, 98.07 per cent were Rh positive. Blood group A and B are observed to be significantly associated with Covid-19 susceptibility, whereas blood group O and AB have low risk of Covid-19 infection.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

People with blood groups A, B and Rh+ are more susceptible to Covid-19 infection whereas O, AB and Rh- are at lower risk of infection, according to a study released on Tuesday by Sir Ganga Ram Hospital (SGRH).

The research, published in the journal Frontiers in Cellular and Infection Microbiology, showed that male patients of blood group B are more prone to Covid-19 than the female patients with blood group B.

People less than 60 years with blood group AB were found to be more prone to Covid infection.

However, the study found no association between blood groups and susceptibility to severity of disease as well as mortality. "Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) is a new virus, and it is unclear whether blood groups



have any impact on Covid-19 risk or progression. Therefore, we investigated the association of ABO and Rh blood group with Covid-19 susceptibility, prognosis, recovery time, and mortality in this study," said Dr. Rashmi Rana, Consultant, Department of Research, SGRH, in a statement. Further, the research found people with blood group A and Rh+ types are associated with a decrease in recovery period, whereas those with blood group O and Rh- could recover fast.



TRIPURA TRIBAL PARTIES STAGE DEMONSTRATION OVER 'GREATER TIPRALAND' DEMAND

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Two tribal-based parties including ruling BJP's ally IPFT on Tuesday began their two-day demonstrations in the national capital demanding "Greater Tipraland" (a greater territory for the tribals). Bharatiya Janata Party's junior ally Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) and TIPRA (Tiphra Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance) headed by Tripura's royal scion Pradyot Bikram Manikya Deb Barman started their two-day sit-in at Jantar Mantar Delhi.



demand but Prime Minister's Office indicated that PM Narendra Modi "has expressed his desire to meet the tribal leaders".

Led by their leaders, hundreds of members of the two tribal based parties took part in the demonstrations where Congress' Rajya Sabha Member Jairam Ramesh and Shiv Sena's Deputy Leader in the Rajya Sabha Priyanka Chaturvedi took part.

TIPRA's spokesman Kamal Koloj said that they earlier planned to meet union Home Minister Amit Shah to apprise him about their

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal might come to the demonstration site on Wednesday to express his solidarity, Koloj told reporter over phone.

Deb Barman, head of erstwhile royal house of Tripura, on Tuesday said that for the all round socio-economic development and the protec-

tion of the traditional life, culture and customs the "Greater Tipraland" is necessary and this can be done under the Indian constitution.

Most of the national parties including the BJP, CPI-M and the Congress, have been opposing the "Greater Tipraland" demand, while the demand triggered huge doubts and fears in the mixed populated Tripura.

"Delhi listen to us! We are here to ask for our constitutional rights!

Everyone is welcome to Greater Tipraland," Deb Barman tweeted. "Under the 'Greater Tipraland' concept, a powerful council would be constituted for the all-round socio economic development of the indigenous tribals residing in the eight northeastern states and the neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh. Such councils exist in European countries. We want to resolve the tribals' basic problems permanently," Deb Barman had earlier told reporter.

he IPFT, which has been agitating since 2009 for the creation of a separate state by upgrading TTAADC, which has a jurisdiction on over two-thirds of Tripura's 10,491 sq. km. area and is home to over 12,16,000 people, of which 90 per cent are tribals.

The TTAADC, which was constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in June 1985 for the socio-economic development of the tribals, is considered as a mini-legislative assembly of

Explosive tweet of Tathagata Roy jolts BJP again

Kolkata | Agencies

An explosive tweet from senior BJP leader Tathagata Roy rocked BJP yet again. In his tweet, Roy quoting a BJP supporter, said that there are many people in BJP who are working for TMC in disguise and they are all employed by Prashant Kishor (PK). In a tweet written in Bengali, the former governor of Tripura and Meghalaya said that he got the information from one of the dedicated supporter of the BJP where he claimed that an educated youth of his neighbouring village was called by Team-PK and was asked to join the BJP but work for the Trinamool Congress and for that he would get Rs 13,000 per month. Roy in a following tweet also in Bengali said, "I believe there are many grassroots level workers in BJP who are employed by PK. So far we can't identify them. It is impossible for BJP to win in Bengal". Roy who has been continuously attacking the BJP for quite some time, allegedly because according to him BJP workers were more interested in their personal benefits. In a tweet earlier he had said, "I have not written all these things to get accolades from anybody. Some top leaders were so much involved in women and wealth, I wanted to alert the party about that.



A tree is known by its fruit. I shall wait for the results of the civic polls. For now, adieu West Bengal BJP". Earlier the veteran BJP leader said, "BJP's well-wishers say my complaint about money and women should be made within the party, not publicly. I politely say that time has passed. The BJP can do whatever it wants to. But if they do not radically reform their behaviour, then the extinction of the party in West Bengal is inevitable." Reacting to Roy's tweet, a senior BJP leader said, "Tathagata Roy is a senior leader. He knows best what he is saying. We cannot react to comments made on a public platform. If he has anything to say he will have to say it to the BJP leadership".

Govt yet to decide on nationwide NRC: MoS Rai

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The government on Tuesday informed the Lok Sabha that it has not taken any decision yet to prepare a nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC).

In a written reply to a question asked by Congress MP Hibi Eden, Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) was notified on December 12, 2019 and had come into force on January 10, 2020. The persons covered under the CAA may apply for citizenship after the rules are notified under the CAA. The Minister also said that as far as Assam is concerned, the hard copies of the supplementary list of inclusions and online family-wise list of exclusions in NRC have been published on August 31, 2019 following the directions of the Supreme Court.

He also said that as per information available with the Ministry of External



Affairs (MEA), a total of 1,33,83,718 Indian nationals are living in foreign countries.

According to the information available with the MEA, in the year 2017, a total of 1,33,049 Indians gave up Indian Citizenship and took citizenship of other countries. Similarly 1,34,561 in 2018, 85,248 in 2020 and 1,11,287 in 2021 gave up Indian citizenship as on September 30, 2021.

1,300 year-old sculpture of Goddess recovered in J&K

Srinagar | Agencies

The Jammu and Kashmir Police in the Union Territory's Budgam district have recovered an ancient sculpture of Goddess Durga from Khag area, the police said on Tuesday.

"A team of officials from the Department of Archives, Archaeology and Museums were called for examination of the recovered sculpture at district police office, Budgam," the police said.

"During examination, it was revealed that the recovered sculpture of Goddess Durga dates back roughly to 7th AD (about 1,300 years old)." The sculpture is carved in a black stone with Goddess Durga seated on



lion throne. However, some part of the left side arm is missing. Moreover, the sculpture is having the influence of Gandhara School of Art. The recovered sculpture was handed over formally to Mushtaq Ahmad Beigh,

Deputy Director Department of Archives, Archaeology and Museums and his team by Tahir Saleem Khan, SSP Budgam. This is the second sculpture of Goddess Durga recovered in Kashmir in 2021.

K'taka: 15 nursing students from Kerala test Covid positive

Bengaluru | Agencies

A 'high alert' has been sounded in Tumakuru district of Karnataka on Tuesday after 15 students from Kerala studying nursing course tested positive for Covid-19 there, officials said.

All the 15 individuals have been housed at a quarantine centre and their swab samples sent to Bengaluru for further tests, District Commissioner Y.S. Patil said. The students belonged to Siddaganga, and Vadiraj nursing institutes in Tumakuru. The increasing number of clusters in the state have become a cause of worry for the Health Department.



The state government has initiated stringent measures along the border areas of Kerala and Maharashtra to contain the spread of the virus. Health Minister K. Sudhakar has chaired a high-level meeting on Tuesday to chalk out the measures following the emerging situation in the backdrop of the detection of Omicron -- the new Covid variant.

K'taka sex CD scandal: Semi-naked man appears during virtual hearing

Bengaluru | Agencies

The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday directed the police to find out and slap a notice on a person who appeared semi-naked during a video conference. The court also asked that the electronic data in this connection be retrieved.

The divisional bench headed by Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi and Sachin Shankar Magadam gave the order after senior advocate Indira Jaisingh, representing the victim in the sex CD case, brought this matter to the notice of the court dur-



ing the hearing of the alleged sex CD scandal involving a former minister of the ruling BJP.

Indira Jaisingh brought to the notice of the court that the man was visible semi-

naked for about 20 minutes at a time when the bench heard PILs filed in connection with the alleged sex CD scandal.

The bench took the matter seriously as more than 80

people were logged into the hearing at that time. The semi-naked man was visible and even found bathing, she said. She complained that she was exposed to it for about 20 minutes and she opined that the act seemed to be intentional and deliberate.

She said that such offensive behaviour should not occur again and it also amounted to contempt of court. She informed that she would provide digital evidence of the act and mentioned the person's name as Sridhar Bhat, SDMC Ujire, as per the zoom meeting details.

Priyanka attacks Yogi govt over law and order

Lucknow | Agencies

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Tuesday slammed the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh over the poor law-and-order situation.

She said that the BJP may paint a rosy picture but the factual crime statistics in the state are 'scary'.

Priyanka's attack came amidst media reports of seven murders taking place in seven days in Gorakhpur district which is the home district of the chief minister. She tweeted: "Law and order in the chief minister's area stands surrendered to



criminals, you can well imagine the condition in the rest of the state." The Congress leader has been attacking the state government over the issue of law and order, alleging that criminal activities are rampant, a claim denied by the Yogi Adityanath government.

BODIES OF LOVERS FOUND HANGING IN ORCHARD IN UP

Unnao | Agencies

The bodies of a young couple were found hanging from a tree in an orchard in Mishri Ganj village under Aajnain police circle in Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday.

The police identified the bodies as that of Saurabh, 21 and Kishori.

The two were in love but their respective families were against the relationship.

According to police reports, Saurabh went to Kanpur on Monday and took Kishori with him. On Tuesday, their bodies were found hanging in the orchard and the police spokesman said that it appears to be a case of a suicide pact.

The bodies have been sent for post-mortem and their families have been informed.

10 water bodies in Delhi to be declared wetlands

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As many as 10 water bodies in the national capital would be declared wetlands by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).

The identified water bodies are: Sanjay Lake, Hauz Khas Lake, Bhalswa Lake, Smriti Van (Kondli), Smriti Van (Vasant Kunj), Najafgarh Jheel, Welcome Jheel, Daryapur Kalan, Sultanpur Dabas, Poth Kalan (Sardar Sarovar Lake), says a report by the Delhi Parks and Gardens Society.

According to the report, the water quality of these water bodies will be assessed by land agencies that need to do water testing or sampling of all water bodies every month or at least eight times in a year as per Indicative Guidelines for restoration of water bodies of Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

One time assessment of water quality was done from March to May, 2020.

As per the report, of the total sampled water bodies, 115 met the



water quality criteria of Class D (Propagation of Wildlife and Fisheries).

Meanwhile, master trainers were created towards the celebration of Bharat Ka Amrut Mahotsava in which 787 school teachers trained on wetland values.

Besides, eco clubs were organised in which 2,000 plus schools and colleges participated. Along with that wetland mitras -- 27 in total, will assist the authority in conservation on pro-bono basis.

The first meeting of Wetland Mitras was convened on August 31, 2021. They will identify neighbourhood waterbodies and their threats or challenges for Wetland Authority will take up remedial action.

In addition to these, seven districts identified model ponds (North, North West, South, South West, New Delhi, North East and West).

The benchmarks for model ponds have been prepared and sent to all district magistrates, the report claimed.

13 held for lynching AASU leader in Assam

GUWAHATI | Agencies

Thirteen people, including the key accused, have been arrested in connection with the alleged lynching of All Assam Students' Union (AASU) leader Animesh Bhuyan in Jorhat city.

The students' body has announced to continue their protests until the perpetrators were given "exemplary punishment".

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday asked the police to file a charge-sheet within a month for a speedy trial of the case in a fast-track court and directed Special Director General of Police, Law and Order G. P. Singh to personally supervise the case and take prompt actions against the attackers. A magisterial probe was also ordered into Monday's horrific incident.

On the instructions of the Chief Minister, Education Minister Ranaj Pegu visited Bhuyan's house in Dergaon on Tuesday and assured the family of according strict



punishment to the perpetrators.

The Chief Minister also announced an aid of Rs 5 lakh for the family of the 30-year-old AASU leader.

According to police, on Monday around 50 people following an argument attacked AASU leader Animesh Bhuyan, his associate Pranay Datta, and jour-

nalist Mridusmanta Baruah when they tried to assist an elderly accident victim while many people were onlookers, who did nothing to stop the lynching and others captured the incident on their mobile phones. Police said that the prime accused Neeraj Das and 12 others have so far been arrested and a probe is on.



POLITICS HEATS UP AS MAMATA ARRIVES TO MEET SENA-NCP, INDIA INC HONCHOS IN MUMBAI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's two-day visit to Mumbai from Tuesday has generated immense political interest as she is scheduled to meet top Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party leaders, besides leading industrialists.

They include NCP President Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena's Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray and MP and chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut, both members of the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance which comprises Congress as the third partner.

"The CM of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee will pay a courtesy visit to our party President Sharad Pawar Saheb tomorrow, 3 p.m. at his residence 'Silver Oak', in Mumbai," said NCP national spokesperson and Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik said.

This evening, Raut and Thackeray Jr. were slated to call on Banerjee - who is also the Trinamool Congress chief - at a five-star hotel in Nariman Point, south Mumbai, though the meeting agenda is kept under wraps.

Banerjee landed here this evening and drove down to the famed Shri Siddhivinayak Ganptai Temple at Prabhadevi - which has deep religious significance for Maharashtrians - to offer prayers.

From there, she proceeded to Girgaum Chowpatty Beach and paid homage at the memorial of the 26/11 hero - policeman Tukaram Omble, who caught the Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Amir Kasab alive there early on November 27, 2008 at the height of the Mumbai terror attacks.



There was speculation - in some circles - of a possible meeting with Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, but it was categorically ruled out as he presently convalescing after a spinal surgery, though she enquired after his health from Raut. On Wednesday, Banerjee is expected to meet several top industrialists and corporate honchos to lure them for investments in her state, and invite them for the upcoming Bengal Global Business Summit in April 2022. However, the Congress' Maharashtra General Secretary and Media

Coordinator Zakir Ahmed slammed Banerjee's style of politics, saying she has failed to assess the ground reality and must discard a neo-political novice like Prashant Kishore. "The Congress and Rahul Gandhi fight the RSS, BJP and (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi - (Home Minister) Amit Shah. But Mamta will challenge Rahul Gandhi and the Congress. Knowingly or unwittingly, she is helping the saffron groups and committing the same blunders that people like Mayawati, Mulayam Singh Yadav and others did in the

past," Ahmed contended.

At the same time, NCP's Malik said that Pawar has repeatedly stressed the need for all opposition parties to unite, but such an alliance was not possible without the Congress.

"We feel that if the Sena-NCP-Congress could join hands in Maharashtra, then even the AITC can cooperate with the Congress... If there are some differences, these can be hammered out, let's see," Malik said.

On a new high after sweeping the West Bengal Assembly elections last May, Banerjee is currently flapping her wings for a national political flight. Last April, Pawar was planning to campaign for Banerjee during the Assembly elections but was unable to do so owing to certain constraints, while the Sena had decided against putting up candidates there to avoid damaging the Trinamool's prospects.

Since the past couple of years, both Pawar and Banerjee are keenly making efforts to engage the national opposition parties and provide a united front to the Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Besides Pawar, Banerjee enjoys a great rapport with Uddhav Thackeray, whom she has met in the past, though her relations with the Congress - the MVA's third partner here - continue to be strained owing to political reasons in her home state. Akin to the NCP and Congress, the Sena and the Trinamool are avowed political rivals of the BJP, with Thackeray and Banerjee famed as fiery fighter-orators who are also powerful on their respective home-turfs.

Omicron concerns: Mumbai, Pune, Nashik postpone schools' reopening

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amid concerns of the Covid-19 variant Omicron, the reopening of schools from Class 1 to 7 has been postponed by 10-15 days in Mumbai, Pune and Nashik, officials said here on Tuesday.

The BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation Commissioner I.S. Chahal and Pune Municipal Corporation Mayor Murlidhar have said that schools in the two cities -- both among the worst-hit in the Covid-19 two waves in 2020 and 2021 -- will now reopen from December 15.

Similarly, the Nashik Municipal Corporation, which was also among the badly-hit cities in the past two years of the pandemic, has also postponed the schools reopening plan to December 10. However, all schools in the rest of Maharashtra are likely to reopen from December 1, for Class 1 to 5 in the rural areas and 1-7 in the urban areas with full Covid protocols, as announced earlier by School Education Minister Prof. Varsha E. Gaikwad. Taking precautions, the BMC is currently tracking all passengers who have arrived in the city from the 12 Omicron-hit nations since



November 10 to detect if any of them are infected by the new strain. The state government has also sought information on all passengers landing at the three international airports in the state in Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur, besides those arriving from other states, by flights originating from the 12 nations. The BMC has already announced that a 14-day institutional quarantine regime will be compulsory for all such passengers and home isolation will not be permitted under any circumstances. The state, major cities and district health authorities are gearing up to face the challenge of Omicron by readying hospitals, beds, ICUs, liquid medical oxygen stocks, medicines, doctors, para-medical and non-medical staff, and other health infrastructure to cater to a possible patient rush in the coming weeks, even as Covid-19 vaccination drive has gained momentum.

Maha probes accused duo Param Bir Singh-Sachin Vaze 'meet'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Home Minister Dilip Walse-Patil announced that a probe has been ordered into the Monday 'meeting' between the former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh and his former associate and sacked cop Sachin Vaze, here on Tuesday.

"Both are accused and one is in judicial custody. It was improper... They cannot meet without the court's permission. I have directed the Mumbai Police Commissioner (Hemant Nagrale) to probe the issue and submit a report. After that, the necessary action will be taken in the matter," Walse-Patil told mediaper-



sions. Simultaneously, the administrative process is underway to suspend Singh - who was 'untraceable' for nearly six months till he surfaced in Mumbai last Thursday. To a query on the IPS officer reportedly taking charge of his posting as Commandant-General, Maharashtra State Home Guards, Walse-Patil said Singh did not re-join office but waited in the reception area of his office on Monday. The Singh-Vaze meet

raised eyebrows in political circles and sparked off a major row yesterday with the state Congress crying foul and demanding a probe into it. State Congress Spokesperson Atul Londhe said the duo -- accused in multiple cases by several state and central agencies -- had a meeting Monday afternoon, ahead of their appearance before the retired Justice K.U. Chandival Commission of Enquiry, set up by the Maharashtra Government.

Zambia returnee tests Covid positive, sample sent for genome sequencing amid Omicron scare

▶ THE COVID-19 PATIENT WHO TESTED POSITIVE IS AROUND 60 YEARS AND IS STABLE, ASYMPTOMATIC AND IN HOME ISOLATION FOR NOW

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A person, who had returned to Pune from Zambia on November 25, has tested positive for Covid-19, according to reports on Tuesday. He had returned from Zambia to Mumbai on November 20 and then travelled to Pune by taxi.

The patient's sample has been sent for genome sequencing and the report on the same is awaited. Pune Municipal Corporation had conducted RT-PCR tests of his family members and the driver who travelled with him from Mumbai to Pune. All of them

have tested negative. The Covid-19 patient who tested positive is around 60 years and is stable, asymptomatic and in home isolation for now.

Amid rising concerns over Omicron variant of coronavirus, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has expressed concern over tracking those international passengers who don't land directly in Mumbai but then travel to the state using other means.

He said it will be easier to stop the spread of coronavirus infection if information about such travellers is shared. The issue of

the new variant was also discussed in the Cabinet meeting here.

"The meeting also discussed the issue of how to check the passengers arriving from abroad without landing directly at Mumbai or other airports in Maharashtra and then travelling at other places in the country by domestic airlines, road or rail. The question is how to test such people and the prime minister should be apprised of this," a statement quoting Thackeray said. "Information of the passengers coming from abroad should be received regularly so that they

can be monitored and the infection can be prevented in time," the statement added. No confirmed case of the Omicron variant is detected so far in Maharashtra.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra on Monday reported 536 fresh coronavirus positive cases, the lowest in a single day after April 27 last year, and 21 fatalities, a state health department official said.

On April 27, 2020, Maharashtra had logged 522 cases. With the latest additions on Monday, Maharashtra's tally of infections rose to 66,34,980 and the COVID-19 death toll to 1,40,962.

Traders oppose new penal provisions in Covid guidelines issued post Omicron alert

The Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (MCCIA), which claims to represent 700,000 traders, has written to the chief minister, Uddhav Thackeray, opposing the new guidelines.

Team Absolute | Pune

Traders in Maharashtra have urged the state government to withdraw the new Covid-19 guidelines that were issued in the wake of the Omicron variant, saying the penal provisions will lead to an increase in corruption like that witnessed during earlier lockdowns.

As the scare of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 spread, the state government on Saturday tightened Covid-19 prevention and control guidelines and said organisations and establishments where people not fully vaccinated are found will be penalised.

The Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (MCCIA), which claims to represent 700,000 traders, has written to the chief



minister, Uddhav Thackeray, opposing the new guidelines.

Lalit Gandhi, president, MCCIA, said "the trading community is facing innumerable challenges due to the lockdowns imposed in the last two years."

"Many small traders have committed suicides. We have already seen corrupt practices during earlier Covid restrictions. Now, the new provisions will only fuel the corrupt practices," said Gandhi.

Thackeray had directed the state's bureaucracy to take all necessary precautions in the wake of the new Omicron variant of Covid-19 without waiting

for directions from the central government. According to the new guidelines, an adult who has missed a vaccine dose will be fined Rs 500, while a shopkeeper or the owner of an establishment/organisation/office on whose premises a customer not fully vaccinated is present, will be fined Rs 10,000. If the establishment itself is found not adhering to the Covid appropriate behaviour (CAB), it will be fined Rs 50,000.

Gandhi said the new guidelines will put a break on the recovery in businesses, which has started only recently. "Traders are angry, and we may have to resort to protest if this provision is not repealed," said Gandhi. Fatehchand Ranka, president, Pune Traders Association, called the new provisions coercive. "Traders have always supported use of masks and have pasted posters saying 'no mask no entry' outside their shops. If the new penal provision is implemented, it will lead to corruption," Ranka said. "We do not understand why the government would promote corruption. We request the government to immediately withdraw this guideline and stop the plunder of the people." Ranka also demanded that the fine should be restricted to the individuals and not charged on the establishments.

Online approvals for building projects soon: Shinde

CREDAI Maharashtra president Sunil Furde demanded a dialogue committee be set up between the government and CREDAI Maharashtra to quickly address the queries and problems faced by the builders' community.

Team Absolute | Pune

Permissions for construction projects will soon be approved online, Maharashtra minister for urban development and public works Eknath Shinde said.

Speaking at the general body meeting of CREDAI Maharashtra, Shinde said: "Soon we will begin the process of approval of construction projects permission through online mode. It will greatly reduce the stress on the developers."

CREDAI Maharashtra president Sunil Furde demanded a dialogue committee be set up between the government and CREDAI Maharashtra to quickly address the queries and problems faced by the builders' commu-

nity. Furde said, "At present, there are difficulties in getting building permits online. On the occasion, he enumerated their demands of realtors which they have from the Urban Development Department.

Speaking on the Unified Development Control and Promotion Regulations (UDCPR), Shinde complicated rules have been made simpler for the benefit of people. After unveiling a Frequently Asked Questions booklet on UDCPR, Shinde said: "The demand for the implementation of new UDCPR for PMRDA will definitely be considered. The developmental projects like Pune Metro, Ring Road, Samrudhi Highway are very beneficial for the progress. The country progresses faster when its transport and communication systems are well developed. Maharashtra is the first state to formulate such an integrated development plan for the entire state, which is why it is a matter of great pride for us that other states are also seeking the help of their state authorities to follow suit."

He also addressed the issues of developers on Floor Area Space Index (FSI), build-up area, green building, among others.

MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT INITIATES LEGAL ACTION, SUSPENSION PROCEEDINGS AGAINST PARAM BIR SINGH

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government is in the process to initiate legal action against former Mumbai Police commissioner Param Bir Singh. The government has also initiated a process for the suspension of the officer citing indiscipline and other irregularities.

"We are in the process to take legal action against former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh for his indiscipline & other irregularities. The process for his suspension is also underway," Maharashtra Home Minister Dilip Walse told media persons.

Mumbai cancelled the non-bailable warrant (NBW) against Param Bir Singh. The warrant was issued against Param Bir Singh in connection with an alleged extortion case registered at the Marine Drive police station. The NBW was issued earlier this month after Singh failed to report to work and join the ongoing probe

against him. Declared absconding by the court, Param Bir Singh surfaced in Mumbai last week on Thursday after remaining non-traceable for almost six months. The former top cop disclosed his location after the Supreme Court gave him protection from arrest. He clarified that the reason behind remaining incognito was because his life was under threat.

Param Bir Singh has at least five cases of extortion against him. He is being probed by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and also being questioned by the Chandival Commission that has been constituted by the Maharashtra government to probe the extortion allegations.

Singh was removed as Mumbai Police commissioner and transferred to DG Home Guards after he levelled serious charges of extortion against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh.

Fadnavis Lambasts Curtailed Winter Session; Avers 'MVA Can't Face Questions'

Former Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis on Monday slammed the state government for holding a "curtailed" Winter session of the Assembly from December 22-28.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Former Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis on Monday lashed out at the state government for holding a "curtailed" Winter session of the Assembly from December 22-28. State Parliamentary Affairs Minister Anil Parab had stated that a total of 12 bills including an appropriation bill will be tabled in this session.



Speaking to the media after the meeting of the Business Advisory Committee, the Leader of Opposition in the Maharashtra Assembly demanded that the session should resume in January after taking a short break from December 29-31. "Fadnavis remarked, "The meeting of the Business Advisory Committee concluded. In line with this government's approach of not

conducting the Session, this time also they are going to have a curtailed 4-5 days session. Out of the 5 working days, the first day is spent on obituary references. So this is a session for 4 days. A decision has been taken to allocate only one day for the discussion and passage of supplementary demands. We demanded an extension of this session." "We told them that you can

take a break of three days and hold a session again. Who has stopped you from doing this? So, this session can be held in January for 5-7 more days. But the mindset of the government is to not hold the session. It can't face questions. After my insistence, they assured us that we will hold another BAC meeting on 23rd (December) and discuss whether it can be extended," he added.

On this occasion, Fadnavis also expressed displeasure over the fact that even unstarred questions haven't been answered in the last two years. He said, "The dignity of this state Assembly is on the wane. You don't require a Session to answer unstarred questions. When these questions are raised, action is usually taken." Moreover, he cried foul over the fact that the Winter session is being conducted in Mumbai instead of Nagpur.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Don't panic or get anxious due to Covid

The Covid-19 pandemic has left behind a trail of cases, related to depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders that have gone up manifold among people of all age groups. A medical expert, said, "Students have got addicted to screens and have shown changes in behaviour much to the dislike of parents. Now, parents have to play a greater role in diverting the child's energy into activities that give a similar kick to the brain as does mobile phones." He added that during the first and second waves of Covid-19, many people lost their kin and many are still facing financial crisis. "Even after the Covid period, people have been suffering from sleeplessness, irritability. We get frequent calls from such people," the doctor said. About 20-30 per cent of the people, who have been affected with Covid, were found to experience post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. People are unable to sleep properly because of stress. Among elderly, the key issue is loneliness. During the pandemic, they were virtually locked up inside their houses and even today, the risk of getting infected is keeping them restricted from walking in parks or open spaces. With a long spell of isolation, the impact upon mental health has been tremendous. The pandemic has made us all realise that mental health issues are real and everyone faces them at some point in their life. It is very important to take care of your brain just like it is important to take care of other body parts. The important thing is that family members should extend emotional support to each other to tide over the times.

WHO SPL SESSION SEEKING 'PANDEMIC TREATY' AMID OMICRON CONCERNS

A special session of the World Health Assembly (WHA) kicked off here amid growing concerns over the latest Omicron coronavirus variant, where the participants aim to negotiate a new "pandemic treaty." Legally binding pandemic treaty

The WHA May session this year decided to set up a working group to consider the findings and recommendations of a number of panels and committees on global preparedness for Covid-19 before starting their discussions on the potential new "legally binding agreement between nations," on Monday, Xinhua news agency reported. "Covid-19 has exposed and exacerbated fundamental weaknesses in the global architecture for pandemic preparedness and response," said the World Health Organisation (WHO)

Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at the opening of the special session. "The best way we can address them is with a legally binding agreement between nations, an accord forged from the recognition that we have no future but a common future," he said. According to Tedros, the new "pandemic treaty" is expected to address Covid as "a crisis of solidarity and sharing." "The lack of sharing of PPE (personal protective equipment), tests, vaccines, technology, know-how, intellectual property and other tools hindered our collective ability to prevent infections and save lives," he said, noting the lack of a consistent and coherent global approach has resulted in "a splintered and disjointed response, breeding misunderstanding, misinformation and mistrust." "Get prepared for Omicron

The WHA special session coincides with the emergence of the highly mutated Omicron virus variant, which was designated by the WHO as a "variant of concern" (VOC) just three days ago. Though the WHO has said it is not yet clear whether Omicron is more transmissible or causes more severe disease than the other known variants, including Delta, concerns over its impact on the efficacy of existing vaccines and treatments have been growing. A number of countries have already introduced entry bans on travellers from South Africa, where Omicron was first confirmed on November 9 and has been identified in multiple European countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK, Portugal, and Sweden. Sweden's Public Health Agency on Monday confirmed its first case of the Omicron variant, after a traveller

who returned to Sweden last week from South Africa was tested. Portugal's National Institute of Health Doctor Ricardo Jorge (INSA) on Monday confirmed 13 cases of the Omicron variant in Portugal among players and staff members of the football club Belenenses SAD. he INSA said that the samples were collected and analysed on Sunday, and that one of the players who tested positive had recently returned to the country from South Africa. In Germany, the Covid seven-day incidence rate climbed to a new all-time high of 452.4, up from 386.5 a week ago, the Robert Koch Institute for infectious diseases announced on Monday. German virologist Christian Drosten told the broadcaster ZDF on Sunday that he was "quite concerned at the moment. I am surprised to see so many mutations in the virus." In Cyprus, new

anti-coronavirus measures relating to young school children came into force on Monday, with most Covid clusters currently being found in schools. In addition to banning direct arrival from the eight African countries, most affected by the Omicron variant, all travellers coming from other destinations will also be tested for the coronavirus at airports, said Michalis Hadipantelas, Cyprus' health minister. Polish Health Minister Adam Niedzielski said on Monday that the country's government is set to announce new restrictions to cope with the new variant, including tightened flight rules on seven southern African nations. "Omicron demonstrates just why the world needs a new accord on pandemics: Our current system disincentivises countries from alerting others to threats that will inevitably land on their shores," said Tedros.

As Twitter CEO, IIT grad Parag Agrawal joins array of Indian-origin tech leaders

Arul Louis

Twitter has appointed Parag Agrawal, who has pledged to "reshape the future of public conversation," as its CEO succeeding Jack Dorsey, the embattled social media company announced on Monday. The IIT Bombay graduate ascends to one of the most powerful roles in the social media universe that is facing criticism from different political forces around the world for its capacity to control discourses and while also being sometimes a conduit for disinformation. He will face the challenges of navigating the political minefields of social media and setting right the company's faltering financial performance. Agrawal joins a select group of CEOs of Indian origin heading technology companies in the US. They include Sundar Pichai, who heads Google and its parent company Alphabet, Microsoft's Satya Nadella, IBM's Arvind Krishna, and Adobe's Shantanu Narayen. Agrawal said, "I am incredibly energised by the opportunities ahead. By continuing to improve our execution, we will deliver tremendous value for our customers

and shareholders as we reshape the future of public conversation." According to the Twitter announcement, Agrawal has a PhD from Stanford University and joined Twitter in 2011 becoming its Chief Technology Officer in 2017. Dorsey said, "My trust in Parag as Twitter's CEO is deep. His work over the past 10 years has been transformational. I'm deeply grateful for his skill, heart and soul. It's his time to lead." Brett Taylor, who will be taking over as the Twitter board Chairman, said, "Parag understands Twitter and appreciates the company's unique potential. He has been instrumental in tackling our most important priorities, including accelerating our development velocity, and I know he'll hit the ground running to strengthen execution and deliver results." Twitter founder Dorsey, who is stepping down as CEO, has courted controversy in India and the US. During a visit to India, he posed with a poster displaying a caste-based message, "Smash Brahminical Patriarchy". Later, Twitter dissociated him from the sentiments in the poster. Twitter had posted a cautionary note on a video on the Ayodhya temple, "The following media includes potentially sensitive content,"

but allowed without any caution a post from protesters against the temple containing offensive words. Agrawal will be descending into the worldwide political controversies that have arisen during Dorsey's tenure that have tested the limits of free speech, election propaganda and corporate control of public discourse, even as it has become the primary platform for governments, corporations and newsmakers to make their announcements first directly to the public, leaving most media to follow-up the posts. Twitter has banned former President Donald Trump accusing him of creating a "risk of further incitement of violence" and questioning the legitimacy of the election of President Joe Biden. But Twitter allows other controversial characters like Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and organisations like the Taliban to use its service. Republicans have accused Twitter of censoring conservative and right-wing voices, while Democrats have accused it of amplifying questionable right-wing points of view. "Impartiality is our guiding principle," Dorsey asserted at a Congressional hearing and added, "We don't consider polit-

ical viewpoints, perspectives or party affiliation in any of our policies or enforcement decisions. work to improve development velocity while advancing the state of machine learning across the partisanship. Another challenge for Agrawal is that Twitter has not been able to monetise the nearly 400 million users to the same degree that some other social media platforms like Facebook has. Twitter, which despite its ubiquity has not turned in the stratospheric stock performance of other tech companies like Facebook, and after closing at its highest mark of \$77.06 on February 26, 2021, it was trading at the \$46 range on Monday afternoon. Twitter is also facing new challengers like 'Koo' in India, where Twitter has the third-biggest number of users at 22.1 million, behind the US and Japan. Koo is trying to become an alternative to Twitter with its perceived control of the media by being more open to more points of view and reaching out to countries like Nigeria.

international

CHINA SAYS IT IS READY FOR OMICRON WITH TESTS, ZERO-COVID STRATEGY

Beijing | Agencies

China on Tuesday said it is ready to tackle the newly-detected Omicron coronavirus variant, and it is confident that the country's zero-Covid response along with the mainstream tests will block community transmission, media reports said. According to Xu Wenbo, from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the vaccines developed in China remain effective against the new mutated variant, yet to better cope with it, it has made technological reserve preparations in vaccine development, Global Times reported. Producers of inactivated vaccine, protein subunit vaccine, or adenovirus vector vaccine have set about studying the new variant and they are in the process of gene sequencing design, Xu Wenbo, head for National Institute for Viral Disease Control and Prevention with



the China CDC, said at a press conference on Tuesday.

Xu said that even though Omicron's mutations have raised concern, current vaccines, either inactivated, mRNA or protein subunit technologies or the second-generation vaccines, are still effective and can reduce the proportion of a severe disease and death. It is because Omicron belongs to SARS-CoV and thus cannot completely break the immune barrier and in addition to antibody immunity,

there is also T-cell immunity. Further, Xu said that while Omicron may enter China, its zero-Covid response as well as the design of Covid tests, would easily detect the variant, touted as more virulent, and will prevent community transmission, the South China Morning Post reported. China's nucleic acid test kits can also cope with Omicron as its mutation is mainly concentrated on the neutralising antigen spike protein, he said, adding that the mainstream tests in China were based on a design by the Chinese CDC that targeted the open reading frame (ORF) group of genes and the N gene, and therefore the sensitivity and specificity of the tests would not be affected by the Omicron variant. "Omicron was present not only in Africa but also (many countries outside Africa) and might possibly have spread in the community, which means the variant has a high chance of being introduced to

China," Xu, the chief of the National Institute for Viral Disease Control and Prevention, was quoted as saying to state broadcaster China Central Television. "The mainstream test kits in China can deal with the introduction of the Omicron variant," he added. Moreover, China's existing Covid-19 responding strategy should be sufficient for tackling the new Omicron variant as under this strategy the country will continue to conduct detailed surveys on epidemiological studies and gene testing, he said. Previously, the National Health Commission (NHC) also said that the new variant does not affect the sensitivity of China's mainstream nucleic acid testing kits. The NHC said that apart from Hong Kong, no other places in China have detected the variant. Yet China's current strategy of preventing imported cases and domestic flare-ups is still effective in fending off the variant, the report said.

UN condemns acts aimed at jeopardizing integrity of Libyan elections

Tripoli | Agencies

The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has condemned acts intended to jeopardize the integrity of the elections in Libya.

"UNSMIL strongly condemns all acts aimed at jeopardizing the integrity of the electoral process, preventing Libyans from exercising their democratic rights in safety and in dignity," UNSMIL said in a statement on Monday.

It said that an armed group, allegedly affiliated to forces controlling the southern city of Sebha, has reportedly again violently obstructed the work of the Court of Appeal in Sebha, Xinhua news agency reported.

"UNSMIL is also alarmed by increasing reports of intimidation and threats against judges and judicial employees, particularly those



dealing with electoral-related complaints, as well as against candidates, in a number of locations in Libya," it added.

The UN mission warned against any action that could serve to deprive Libyans of their right to democratically elect their representatives and undermine the holding

of free, fair, inclusive, credible, and transparent elections. The parliamentary and presidential elections, scheduled for December 24, are part of a roadmap adopted by the UN-sponsored Libyan Political Dialogue Forum with the aim to bring stability to Libya.

Ecuador enforces controversial tax reform

Quito | Agencies

Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso mandated into law a controversial tax reform bill aimed at raising more than \$1.9 billion over the next two years to alleviate the country's economic crisis.



Xinhua news agency reported.

"The bill takes effect by mandate of the Constitution," the presidency's General Secretariat of Communication said in a statement, adding that the law "means building a new path towards the country's recovery and generating jobs for the Ecuadorians who need it most."

The bill was submitted to the National Assembly (Congress) on October 28, giving lawmakers a 30-day period ending on Sunday to pass or amend it. However, the legislature, where the opposition holds a majority, failed to approve the bill,

According to the Ministry of Economy and Finance, 96.6 per cent of the economically active population will not be affected by the new law, which mainly applies to large companies, and those earning more than 5,000 dollars a month or having more than 1 million dollars in equity.

The law is the first of three urgent reforms the Ecuadorian executive branch plans to submit to Congress to alleviate the country's economic crisis aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

OLI RE-ELECTED UML CHAIRMAN BY HUGE MARGIN

Kathmandu | Agencies

Former Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli was elected as Chairman of the Nepal Communist Party-UML for the second time on Tuesday, defeating senior party leader, Bhim Bahadur Rawal, by a huge margin.

The party is currently holding the 10th national Congress to elect the new party leadership where Oli had imposed his decision on the selection of a new leadership without voting. As past party Chairman, he read out the list of the party office bearers and the central committee on Sunday.

But a section of the party leaders opposed Oli's single decision to nominate the party's office bearers and Central Committee members and demanded the elections though they knew that they were sure to lose.

After strong reservations from party leaders to his actions, Oli finally agreed to go for elections. As many as 2,175 representatives from across the country voted to elect 301 members for the new Central Committee.

As per the election results that are all set to be announced by Tuesday

evening, Oli had secured 1,840 votes while his rival, Rawal has obtained just 223 votes, according to the CPN-UML leader, Rajan Bhattarai.

The final announcement will be made after completing the counting of votes for different posts but Oli's camp is set to make a sweep.

Oli's aides have won the rest of the office bearers' posts including to the Central Committee.

Insiders say even though elections happened, it is certain that everyone proposed by Oli is going to win, which will establish Oli's grip on the party. Earlier, Oli who was elected as party Chairman in 2016, tried to pick all posts - one Senior Vice Chairman, six Vice Presidents, one Secretary General, three Deputy Secretaries General, seven Secretaries, and 301 Central Committee members through consensus or without voting.

He had proposed consensus candidates for the Central Committee as well, but since nominations have been filed by aspirants, there will be voting only in groups where the number of candidates/aspirants is more than the positions on offer.

Oli, who raised the nationalist

plank in the 2017 elections against India in the wake of the blockade in the Nepal-India border, won the elections and merged his party with another communist party, Nepal Communist Party-Maoist Centre, and became the Chairman of Nepal Communist Party.

As soon as Oli became the Prime Minister in 2018, the relations between Oli and the Maoist Centre Chairman, Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda deteriorated.

And as relations between Oli and Prachanda eroded further, several other party leaders also supported Prachanda and joined the anti-Oli camp. Later a case was filed in Nepal's Supreme Court against the merger between Oli's UML and Prachanda's Maoist Centre, and in March 2021, it invalidated the merger. Both parties revived as older, separate entities. But Oli did not welcome the UML leaders who supported Prachanda's bid to unseat him, and these leaders in August formed the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Socialist, whose Chairman was Oli's long-time aide, and former Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal.

PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT WARNS ISRAEL NOT TO UNDERMINE TWO-STATE SOLUTION

Ramallah | Agencies

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has warned Israel not to undermine the vision of the two-state solution, which is backed by the international community. "Undermining the two-state solution would motivate the central council of Palestine Liberation Organisation to take decisive decisions," Abbas said in a televised speech on Monday. According to Israeli media, the warning came just days after Israel approved the construction of 372 settlement units in the southern West Bank city of Hebron, Xinhua news agency reported. The Palestinians "won't accept the continuation of the (Israeli) occupation of the land and the Palestinian people forever," he added. "The Palestinian side is still extending its hands to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in accordance with the two-state solution and the international resolution under the auspices of the international Quartet," Abbas said. "Persistent violations of the rights of Palestinians along with the expansion of settlements risk eroding the prospect of a two-state solution," said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday, while addressing a meeting marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Direct peace talks between Israel and Palestine came to a halt in late March 2014, following deep differences on issues related to Jewish settlements and the recognition of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders.



COVID-19 SENDS FRESH JITTERS AS BHOPAL RECORDS 14 CASES IN 24 HOURS

▶ THE STATE, IN AN ALARMING SIGN, HAS REPORTED 20 FRESH CASES OF INFECTIONS IN THE LAST 24 HOURS INCLUDING 14 IN THE STATE CAPITAL, FIVE IN INDORE AND ONE AT JABALPUR.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A sudden spike of Covid-19 cases has sent shockwaves in the state as Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan convened a hurriedly organised meet to review the situation after the State capital reported 14 cases in the last 24 hours on Tuesday. The State has recorded 20 cases in the duration. Addressing the senior officers at Mantralaya, Chouhan directed officers on measures like compulsory usage of masks, increasing tests, constituting small containment zones and practising social distancing at public places. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed concern over 14 cases of Corona infection being reported in different areas in Bhopal. He has stressed on measures like use of face masks, mutual distancing and frequent hand washing. He said that today in an emergency meeting for Corona control, instructions have been given to senior officers of Bhopal in this regard. Along with Bhopal, there is a need to increase the number of tests and isolate positive people at various places in the state. There is safety in caution. Chouhan said that it is very important to be careful and aware of the new variants. Very much like previous occasions of the pandemic, the CM affirmed that he would take to the streets and will



urge people to use masks and practice social distancing. The hospitals have been directed to ensure proper amenities ahead of any possible surge in cases of infections.

The officers have been directed by the Chief Minister to assess the availability of paediatric wards, oxygen plants and ventilators. He asked his officers to expedite Roko-Toko Abhiyan (for vaccination) in the state and asked everyone not to underreport cases. The State, in an alarming sign, has reported 20 fresh cases of infections in the last 24 hours including 14 in the state capital, five in Indore and one at Jabalpur. The administration has been asked to ensure testing at railway stations and airports. The health officers claimed that health workers are carrying on with rapid antigen tests at railway stations. The Chief Minister stressed the fact that there is no ban on public programmes but asked everyone to use masks and practice social distancing to prevent the rapid spread of infection.

Testing will be increased once again from the present 53,000 daily to around 70,000 in the next few days. The Chief

Minister has allowed containment zones and if the need is, small containment zones could be constituted.

Chouhan has urged the administration to keep the focus on Bhopal and Indore which again have led the pack of cities with higher cases of infections.

Violation of not using facial masks has been hiked to Rs 500 from the existing Rs 100. Organisations with employees not having two doses of the vaccine will be penalised by the administration during inspections.

The MP government had lifted all Covid-19 prohibitions from November 17 onwards which perhaps led to a surge in fresh cases. Between November 1 and 15, the State reported 123 fresh cases while from November 17 to 29, the same was 169.

The health officers in Indore are busy locating around 157 persons who arrived in the city from overseas destinations between November 1 to 29. The matter has certain glitches as several of these returnees have moved to other places after landing in Indore.

Officers said that most of these persons have returned from countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, US and UK.

Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister State Cabinet approves construction of 6 medical colleges

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A meeting of the Cabinet was held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. The Cabinet approved the construction work of 6 new medical colleges in the state with an investment of Rs 1547 crore 45 lakh.



It was decided by the cabinet that Madhya Pradesh State Institute of Educational Management and Training (SIMET) would be established as an independent unit by separating it from the Academy of Administration at present. The main objective of the establishment of SIMET is to determine and develop the proper process regarding educational planning and development of educational managerial capacity and its decentralisation. For this, cooperation in the development of professional competencies, conducting courses in educational management, capacity building of officers associated with education and building a training environment is included. In SIMET, the officers of Tribal Affairs Department associated with Department of School Education and School Management, the Scheduled Castes Welfare Department and Labour Department will be given training.

The Cabinet decided that in order to pay one-time settlement amount of Rs. 90 crore to SIDBI, financial assistance of Rs. 90 crore would be sanctioned to Madhya Pradesh Finance Corporation in the form of short term loan. Interest will be levied on this at the rate fixed by the Finance Department from time to time. The newly constructed commercial office complex of Madhya Pradesh Finance Corporation in Indore will be sold through Public Asset Management Department. After adjusting the

expenses incurred in the sale process with the amount received from the sale of the premises, the short term loan sanctioned by the State Government will be paid in one lump sum along with interest. Loan of Rs.25 crore 76 lakh received earlier from the government will be paid with interest. The Corporation will pay off its remaining liabilities from the balance amount after payment. At present MOIL Limited holds one crore 28 lakh 13 thousand 840 shares, which is 5.40 percent of the share capital of MOIL Limited. In the buyback proposal presented by MOIL Limited, due to the attractive rate of buyback shares, the proposal to buyback up to 25 lakh shares will be given by the state government to MOIL Limited. By participation of Madhya Pradesh government in the share buyback being offered by MOIL Limited, the government is likely to get revenue ranging from Rs 37 crore 46 lakh to Rs 51 crore 25 lakh. The Council of Ministers approved this proposal.

For the financial year 2021-22, the total cost of the projects of MP Power Generating Company Limited, MP Power Transmission Company Limited and all three power distribution companies was Rs. 1818 crore 47 lakh and the required amount (share capital and

loan) from the state government for the continuous / ongoing sub-transmission and distribution system strengthening scheme to be received through the budget and implemented by the three power distribution companies in the financial year 2020-21 amounting to Rs 230 crore for which the Cabinet gave the approval.

The Cabinet sent the Central Act of Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018 (No. 22 of 2018) in relation to the Criminal Law (Madhya Pradesh Amendment) Bill 2017 (No. 26 year 2017) for the assent of the President to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India as a result of its enactment, approval was given to withdraw the said protected bill.

The Cabinet has approved the provision of facilities in the Madhya Pradesh Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Policy 2021 to set up their own Sortex Plant for the units doing paddy milling work under technical upgradation in paddy mills with a view to quality upgradation and value addition of agricultural products and it was decided to amend the policy to provide benefits. With this decision, high quality of rice will be achieved and the objective of value addition of agricultural products will be fulfilled.

Bird flu confirmed in dead crows in Agar Malwa; govt asks bordering districts to be vigilant

■ 48 crows and a cockle were found dead in the Agar Malwa district in the last four days, said Agar Malwa district collector Avdresh Sharma.

Team Absolute | Agar Malwa

The presence of the H5N8 virus (bird flu) has been confirmed after at least 48 crows were found dead in Agar Malwa district, a senior official said on Tuesday. These crows had died in the last four days in Agar Malwa, located 180 km away from the state capital Bhopal. "We had sent the samples of the dead crows for a laboratory test. The examination of these samples confirmed the presence of H5N8 virus (a variant of avian influenza or bird flu)," Agar Malwa district collector Avdresh Sharma

told reporters. He said 48 crows and a cockle were found dead in the Agar Malwa district in the last four days. "We have taken the samples of poultry. Officials of the departments concerned have been directed to follow the guidelines (of the Union Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying)," the collector said.

He said it was suggested in a meeting that markets selling mutton in the Agar Malwa district be closed as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of avian influenza. Another official said that after the mass death of crows, the samples were sent to the Bhopal-based National Institute of High-Security Animal Diseases (NIHSAD). A district-level control room, headed by deputy director, Animal Husbandry Department, Dr SV Kosarwal, was also set up and people were asked to inform about

the death of birds immediately, the official said.

Meanwhile, Additional Chief Secretary, MP Animal Husbandry and Dairy Department, JN Kansotiya issued directives to the districts, especially the bordering ones, to monitor the situation and immediately attend to any complaint related to the unnatural death of birds. "Migratory birds play a major role in spreading bird flu during the winter. Therefore, keep a special watch on the migratory birds coming to the water bodies and sanctuaries of the state," Kansotiya said.

He directed officials to collect the samples of migratory birds and from the chicken markets in the districts bordering other states and send them to the laboratory for testing. H5N8 is a subtype of the influenza A virus and is believed to be highly lethal to wild birds and poultry.

CM paid floral tributes to scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose on his anniversary by paying floral tributes on his picture in the auditorium.

Jagdish Chandra Bose was born on November 30, 1858 in undivided India in Bengal (now Memensingh of Faridpur in Dhaka district of Bangladesh).

Since childhood, Bose had great attachment with trees and plants. Along with this, he was also fond of reading Mahabharata, Gita and Ramayana. Bose was not only the first scientist to work on the optics of radio and microwaves, he had also proved that there is life in plants too.

Bose was a famous scientist of India, who had deep knowledge of physics, biology, botany and archaeology.



He was the first scientist to work on the optics of radio and microwaves. He made many important discoveries in botany. He was the first scientific researcher of India. Bose was the first scientist in India to obtain an American patent. He is also considered the father of radio science. Dr. Bose also used to write science fiction. He is also considered the father of Bengali science fiction.

Bose passed away on November 23, 1937 in Calcutta.

CM planted Saptaparni and Gulmohar saplings

■ Padmashri Kapil Tiwari also planted saplings along with Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday planted Saptaparni and Gulmohar saplings in Smart Park Shyamla Hills, Bhopal. Padmashri Kapil Tiwari also planted saplings on this occasion. Along with planting saplings, Chouhan also offered Shramdaan. Gulmohar is considered one of the most beautiful trees in the world. Flowers blooming in big bunches between the leaves of Gulmohar give a distinct attraction to this tree. In summer, instead of leaves,



Gulmohar trees are laden with flowers. It is also rich in medicinal properties. Saptaparni, an evergreen medicinal tree, has great importance in Ayurveda. This medicinal plant is used in the manufacture of various medicines. Litterateur Kapil Tiwari has been honoured with Padmashri in the year 2021. Tiwari was born in Sagar. Tiwari, associated with the field of literature and education, has edited 93 books related to folk culture literature. He has made significant contribution in the promotion of tribal and folk arts and folk artists in Madhya Pradesh. He edited two monographs specifically focused on

the Devaloka of tribal communities, which are centred on the Gauda and Kurku tribes. Tiwari has been the Director of Adivasi Lok Kala Academy Culture Department for 30 years. In the Department of Culture, Tiwari found promising folk artists from tribal dominated areas of undivided Madhya Pradesh and provided them national and international platforms. Due to the efforts of Tiwari, the folk culture and arts of Madhya Pradesh got a distinct identity. He has also written several books on folk arts. The Central Government has decorated Tiwari with Padmashri in 2021.

Drone technology will be promoted in MP: Scindia

▶ SCINDIA REACHED GWALIOR VIA REGULAR FLIGHT ON TUESDAY AND LEFT FOR SHIVPURI TO ATTEND PRIVATE FUNCTIONS THERE.



Team Absolute | Gwalior

Union Civil Aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has said that drone technology will be promoted in Madhya Pradesh.

Scindia reached Gwalior via regular flight on Tuesday and left for Shivpuri to attend private functions there.

"We are working to promote drone technology in Madhya Pradesh. On this issue, we will hold a programme, soon," Scindia said.

A couple of months back, the union

government framed a new drone policy.

Reacting to the Civil aviation department for new Omicron variants, Scindia said, "I have been keeping an eye on each development. The union government has issued a new travel policy. Today, I held a review meeting and instructed the officials to ensure COVID-19 protocol strictly," he added.

On former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijaya Singh's yatra against inflation, he said, "He is my senior. He should continue his yatra, we will focus on our development policy."

Suggestions will be taken from the general poor class to provide advantage of the schemes: CM

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan took meeting of MP State General Category Welfare Commission

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that social harmony is our basic mantra and it is our priority to provide justice to all sections. For this, the State General Category Welfare Commission will visit every division of the state and after taking suggestions from the general poor, an action plan will be made to benefit them. Chouhan was addressing the meeting of MP State General Category Welfare Commission at Mantralaya on Tuesday.

Chouhan said that people's participation will increase with the visit of the commission and their ideas will reach the government. He said that the rounds of seminars, dialogues, discussions and deliberations should be continued by the commission in every division. The work areas and schemes identified by the Commission include compilation of all welfare schemes of the government and identification of general category



beneficiaries in those schemes. To provide immediate assistance to the general category people by the government in the event of disaster. Assistance to encourage activities like agriculture, sports, cultural, bhajan mandli etc. To ensure the participation and representation of the general category elders in the Mukhyamantri Teerth-Darshan Yojna.

Regular review of the schemes identified by the General Category Welfare Commission by a committee constituted at the district level under the chairmanship of the Collector. Beneficiaries of general category to be given the help of coaching for various competitive examinations. All the sections are getting

the benefits of schemes and programmes run for the welfare of the people in all the departments of the government. Despite this, the people of the general category across the state can get proper benefits and the pending cases can be resolved, for this meaningful initiatives and efforts will be made by the Commission.

Chouhan assured to give a concrete shape to the action plan of the Commission. He said that every effort would be made to provide benefits of various schemes of the government to the general poor. Commission Chairman Shiv Kumar Choubey, Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains and other concerned officers were present in the meeting.

Waiting For Permission To File Chargesheet Against Comic: Cops

■ Munawar Faruqui was arrested on Jan 1 following a complaint by a BJP MLA's son that objectionable remarks about Hindu deities and Union Home Minister Amit Shah were passed during a comedy show.



Team Absolute | Indore

The Madhya Pradesh police have been waiting since late January this year for the state government's nod to file a charge sheet against comedian Munawar Faruqui in a case registered against him in Indore for allegedly hurting sentiments of Hindus during a stand-up act, an official said on Monday.

Faruqui and four others were arrested on January 1 following a complaint by a BJP MLA's son that objectionable remarks about Hindu deities and Union Home Minister Amit Shah were passed during a comedy show organised at a cafe in Indore on New Year's Day.

The comedian remained in the Indore's Central Jail for 35 days before he was released on February 6 after getting interim bail from the Supreme Court.

"We had sent a letter to the state government on January 29 this year for permission to present the charge sheet against Faruqui and four others in court. We haven't got approval yet," Tukoganj police sta-

tion-in-charge Kamlesh Sharma said when asked about the latest status of the comedian's case.

After getting the state government's nod, a charge sheet under section 295-A (outraging religious feelings) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) will be presented against Faruqui and others in the court as the police investigation in the matter has been completed, Sharma added. As per provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), it is necessary to take permission from the state government before a charge sheet is presented in the court in a case registered under IPC section 295-A, he explained. Faruqui was recently denied permission by the Karnataka police for a show in Bengaluru over law and order considerations as some right-wing outfits objected. Indore police officials said their counterparts from Karnataka had obtained information from them about the case registered here. "We shared the details of the case registered against Faruqui in Indore with the Bengaluru police," he said.



GOTHAM AWARDS



'THE LOST DAUGHTER' WINS TOP HONOUR, 'SQUID GAME' IS BREAKTHROUGH SERIES

New York | Agencies

Maggie Gyllenhaal's directorial debut 'The Lost Daughter' dominated the 2021 Gotham Awards and the popular Netflix survival drama was named as one of the Breakthrough series in the event.

'The Lost Daughter', which went into the event as a five-time nominee, won four awards, including the top prize of best feature, reports hollywoodreporter.com.

After a quick speech thanking her loved ones and collaborators for best screenplay, Gyllenhaal declared she'd deliver a "real speech" for her second

win of the evening, for breakthrough director. "It's expensive to make movies," said Gyllenhaal in her second acceptance speech.

On the TV side, the Gotham Awards honoured buzzy new series 'Squid Game' and 'Reservation Dogs' with its two breakthrough series awards.

When accepting the award, 'Squid Game' producer Kim Ji-yeon said: "We've experienced so many miracles since we launched this show and the biggest of them is how much love and support you all have shown to a foreign language series with a very strange title." Creator Hwang Dong-hyu reminisced about his long journey to get his series made and then how quickly it became a hit. On a more serious note, he called out the event venue, Cipriani Wall Street, urging the audience to remember the indigenous people who called Manhattan home.

Over the summer, the Gotham Awards made its acting awards gender-neutral, a move that was praised by non-binary 'Billions' actor Asia Kate Dillon as they presented the award for outstanding performance in a new series, one of



two awards that resulted in ties.

"I would first like to commend the Gotham Awards for eliminating gender from their awards categories because true talent shines through the constructs meant to separate us," Dillon said.

One of the category's two winners, Ethan Hawke, took a moment to talk about the value of being nominated alongside women.

The Gotham Awards also honoured 'Power of the Dog' director Jane Campion, 'Spencer' star Kristen Stewart, 'Magnolia' executive Eamonn Bowles, the cast of 'The Harder They Fall', The Actors Fund and, posthumously, activist and filmmaker Kathleen Collins with the Gothams' first Icon Tribute.

Bradley Cooper recalls being threatened at knifepoint

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Bradley Cooper was en route to collect his four-year-old daughter Lea when he was held up at knifepoint and the actor says the situation was "pretty insane". Cooper shared: "I used to walk around New York City all the time with these (headphones) on - this was pre-pandemic - I was on the subway (at) 11:45 to pick Lea downtown at Russian school and I got held up at knifepoint.

"It was pretty insane. I realised I had gotten way, way too comfortable in the city. My guard was down... I was all the way at the end of the subway." "Innately, I would just go all the way down to the end. I felt somebody coming up. I thought, oh they want to take a photo or something. As I turned, I'm up against the post like it's the 'French Connection' or some s***, and I turned. I looked down and I see a knife."

He recalled the knife being almost three inches long, reports femalefirst.co.uk. He joked: "I have my headphones on the whole time. I can't hear anything. I'm just listening to music. So it's scored, the whole thing was scored." "I can't remember (what I was listening to). I look up, I see the person's eyes, and I'm taken by how young they are." Cooper then started running towards an exit in a bid to escape.



'IT CATAPULTED MY CAREER AND CHANGED MY LIFE'

London | Agencies

Heather Young has revealed she posed for naked for Playboy before she found fame on Netflix realtor show Selling Sunset and has 'no regrets'.

The reality star, 34, first posed nude for the magazine ten years ago before she swapped the famous Mansion to sell swanky homes to Hollywood's elite at the

Oppenheim Group. She has described posing for the iconic publication as a 'defining' moment in her career and said it helped her to become famous. Heather told The Sun: 'It catapulted my career, it changed my life, it was the most defining moment in my life.'

The blonde beauty recently married Tarek El Moussa in a lavish ceremony and is now step mother to his two children Taylor, 11, and Brayden, six.

She went on: 'I'm still trying to figure out how I'm going to tell the kids I did Playboy.'

Heather also admitted that her days as a Playmate helped her with her estate agent career, as she had built up a lot of contacts consisting of a slew of wealthy people and celebrity, reports dailymail.co.uk.

'I channeled that into real estate and using my contacts. I sold over nine million dollars' worth of real estate within my first four months.' Heather also dished that the drama with ensues on the show is real and not just for the cameras.

Selling Sunset's Heather Young reveals she posed naked for Playboy before becoming a star and has 'no regrets'

'Spider-Man': New trilogy with Tom Holland in the works



Los Angeles | Agencies

It seems that Hollywood star Tom Holland isn't packing up his Spider-Man suit any time soon as Sony producer Amy Pascal says not only will Holland be back as the superhero, but another movie trilogy is in the works.

"This is not the last movie that we are going to make with Marvel - (this is not) the last Spider-Man movie," Pascal said in an interview published on

Monday, reports ew.com.

Pascal added: "We are getting ready to make the next Spider-Man movie with Tom Holland and Marvel. We're thinking of this as three films, and now we're going to go onto the next three. This is not the last of our MCU movies."

Pascal has been involved with the current era of Spider-Man films, from 'Spider-Man: Homecoming' to the 'Venom' movies to the animated 'Into

the Spider-Verse'.

In a profile on Holland published by GQ this month, the producer said she already spoke with the 25-year-old English actor about "doing, like, 100 more" movies.

"I'm never going to make Spider-Man movies without him," she said. "Are you kidding me?"

That same article quoted Holland questioning whether it was time for him to move on from the character.

KANYE WEST'S CAR BREAKS AUCTION RECORDS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Kanye West's old car broke records while up for auction in Wyoming.

The rapper's motor made history after his 2019 F-150 Raptor sold for \$86,900, including the 10% buyer premium, which made it the most expensive Raptor ever sold, at a sale at Musser Bros. Auctions that included a total of seven vehicles previously owned by the 44-year-old star, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Harold Musser, the owner of the auction house, told TMZ the sale generated a staggering \$434,780, and attracted 137,000 views and over 800 bids,

making it their biggest ever auction. As well as the record-breaking Raptor, a 2017 Ford F-250 sold for \$43,250, while the lowest amount was paid for a 2016 Ford F-250, which attracted 84 bids before going for \$39,250. Another 2019 Raptor, which had a slightly higher mileage, went for \$72,515, while a 2018 raptor sold for exactly \$1,000 less. Two 2020 Ford Expeditions went for \$62,250 and \$67,000 to complete the sale.

The cars were previously sold by the 21-time Grammy Award winner to the local Ford dealership in Cody, the city where Kanye, who has officially changed his name to Ye, has a ranch, which is currently on the market for \$11 million - who then put them up for auction.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Rochelle Humes



ITF WOMEN'S WORLD TOUR

JAGMEET CAUSES THE FIRST RIPPLE IN 15K EVENT IN BENGALURU

Team Absolute | Bengaluru

Jagmeet Kaur Grewal caused the first upset of the US\$ 15K KSLTA ITF Women's World Tour Championship by ousting the fancied fifth seed Mihika Yadav to make it to the pre-quarterfinals on the opening day of the tournament here on Tuesday. In a first-round 3encounter, wildcard Jagmeet, the 19-year-old from Delhi, won 6-2, 2-6, 6-3 in nearly two hours to advance to the next round where she will meet the winner of the match third seed Sowjanya Bavisetti and Snehal Mane slated for Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Soha Sadiq brought cheers to the local crowd when she outplayed American Shria Atturu in straight sets, 6-2, 6-2 to advance to the last-16 stage. Joining her was seventh seed So-Ra Lee of Korea who went past Ramya Natarajan 6-4, 6-2 while Vaidhehi Chaudhari outwitted Nidhi Chilumula 6-2, 6-2 in the last singles match of the day.

Jagmeet, a wild card entrant, admitted that she had to adjust to the



bounce due to the altitude. However, this did not show in her game as she was fast and furious to unsettle her opponent, who struggled to return to the other side of the court in the initial stages of the match. With breaks in the second and fourth games, Jagmeet, raced to a 4-0 lead before

Mihika showed signs of recovery by winning the next two games. However, her opponent returned the favour to wrest the first set.

The next set saw a reversal of roles as Mihika, with renewed energy, made her rival scramble for the ball on both the flanks and was off to a 4-0

lead with breaks in the second and fourth games. The players then held their serves as the match went into the decider. It was a different Jagmeet in the final set as she served better and moved faster and also augmented by her opponent's double faults at crucial junctures went 5-0 up before Mihika made a fightback, saving a match point on her serve.

Serving for the match, Jagmeet double-faulted twice to lose the game and Mihika held her serve at love, only to prolong the inevitable.

Soha who had won the Rs 1-lakh Women's Open at KSLTA in October, pierced through the defence of her rival, earning her a speedy 4-1 lead before capturing the set. The Bengalurean played some attacking tennis throughout the match and especially put her forehead to good use which broke through the defence of Shria. The American could just manage to hold her serve in the first and seventh games of the first set and the first and fifth in the second as Soha just breezed into the pre-quarters comfortably.

MESSI WINS RECORD SEVENTH BALLON D'OR AS PUTELLAS CLAIMS WOMEN'S AWARD

Paris | Agencies

Messi wins record seventh Ballon d'Or as Putellas claims women's award

Argentina's Lionel Messi has bagged the Ballon d'Or award for a record-extending seventh time, as his former club Barcelona's Alexia Putellas clinched the women's award after a stellar season with the Catalan club. Messi, 34, beat another favourite Robert Lewandowski of Poland to receive the trophy from his friend Luis Suarez late on Monday night. Now the Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) striker is two triumphs clear of arch-rival Cristiano Ronaldo as the five-time winner finished sixth this year, the first time that he was voted out of the top three since 2010.

Despite the shocking exit from Barcelona in August, he has ended the last season with the La Liga giants in style, scoring 38 goals in 48 games and winning the Copa del Rey. Bayern Munich forward Lewandowski came second with only 38 points behind Messi (613 vs 580). Lewandowski has been the favourite to claim the award in 2020, but the organisers finally cancelled the vote due to the coronavirus pandemic. Putellas, captain of Barcelona to a treble-winning season, won the third edition of the women's Ballon d'Or. Her Barcelona and Spain teammate Jennifer Hermoso was second, with Sam Kerr of Chelsea coming in third.

The 27-year-old Putellas was not the only Barcelona player to take a prize the night as



WINNERS LIST OF THE 2021 BALLON D'OR:

- Ballon d'Or - Lionel Messi, Paris Saint-Germain, Argentina
- Women's Ballon d'Or - Alexia Putellas, Barcelona, Spain
- Striker of the year - Robert Lewandowski, Bayern Munich, Poland
- Kopa Trophy - Pedri (Pedro Gonzalez Lopez), Barcelona, Spain
- Yachine Trophy - Gianluigi Donnarumma, Paris Saint-Germain, Italy.

the 19-year-old Pedri won the Kopa Trophy for the best player aged under-21.

Paris Saint-Germain's Gianluigi Donnarumma, who helped Italy win Euro 2020 in which he was named the best player, won the Yashin Trophy for the best goalkeeper.

By beating B'desh Pak take 1-0 lead in Test series

Chattogram | Agencies

Pakistan secured a convincing eight-wicket victory over Bangladesh in the opening Test here with skipper Babar Azam and Azhar Ali guiding the tourists to victory after fine half centuries by Abid Ali and Abdullah Shafique had laid the platform for a win on Monday evening.

Though Bangladesh claimed two big wickets -- of overnight batters Abid Ali (91) and Shafique (73) -- midway through the morning session, they still needed a miracle to deny the tourists victory early on the fifth day. And, Babar Azam (13 not out) and Azhar Ali (24 not out) completed the formalities in the morning session to help Pakistan take a 1-0 lead in the two-Test series.

Earlier, Pakistan resumed the day on 109/0, with only



93 needed and 10 wickets in hand. After scoring just one run in the first three overs, Abid struck a boundary off Taijul Islam. In the spinner's next over, the Pakistan opener smashed him for three fours in a row with victory in clear sight.

Abid was declared 'Player of the Match' for his contribution with the bat -- 133 and 91. Shafique, who made his Test debut, had scores of

52 and 73.

With the win, Pakistan collected 12 World Test Championship points and jumped to the second spot on the table. The second Test will be played in Dhaka from December 4.

Brief scores: Bangladesh 330 and 157 all out lost to Pakistan 286 all out and 203 for 2 in 58.3 overs (Abid Ali 91, Abdullah Shafique 73, Azhar Ali 24 not out).

STAFANIE TAYLOR, HAYLEY MATTHEWS MOVE UP IN LATEST ICC ODI RANKINGS

Dubai: West Indies women cricketers Stafanie Taylor and Hayley Matthews on Tuesday rose in the ICC Women's ODI batting and all-rounder rankings respectively.

The pair stood up for their side in Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifier action, with Taylor moving into the top-10 in batting (676) and holding on to her No.4 all-rounder ranking (319), as her teammate moved to equal eighth.

Matthews moved to her highest career rating (272) joining England player Katherine Brunt and Australia's Jess Jonassen in a three-way tie in the all-rounders ranking. Taylor is only bettered by South Africa's Marizanne Kapp (384), England's Natalie Sciver (372) and Australia's Ellyse Perry (365) in the all-rounders ranking.

JR HOCKEY WORLD CUP

INDIA UP FOR BELGIUM CHALLENGE IN QUARTER-FINALS

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

Having finished second in their preliminary round group following a defeat to France in their opening match, defending champions India take on top contender Belgium in the quarter-finals of the FIH Odisha Hockey Men's Junior World Cup here on Wednesday in a match that could make or break their fortunes in the event. Victory will take them into the semi-finals while defeat would bring to a premature end their defence of the title India won at home in 2016.

Belgium are ranked first in the World in Junior Rankings while India are fifth, the Red Devils are unbeaten so far in this event though being held to a draw by Malaysia is a blemish they have to carry into the match against India. India on the other hand have recovered well after the 4-5



defeat against France to comprehensively beat Canada (13-1) and Poland (8-2).

A strong and aggressive forward-line and abundant drag flickers have turned out to be the ace up the sleeves of the Indian team. Arajjeet Singh Hundal and Uttam

Singh have been India's most successful forwards in the event so far with five and four goals respectively. Hundal has scored both field goals and off penalty corners and India will depend on him and defender Sanjay to do the bulk of the scoring. Sharda Nand Tiwari is another

one who has been successful with his penalty corners. The Indians will have to guard against conceding early goals as they did against France and ensure that they defend deep and don't allow Belgium to take control of the midfield.

DJOKOVIC PROBABLY WON'T PLAY AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Melbourne | Agencies

World No. 1 tennis player Novak Djokovic "probably won't" play the Australian Open beginning January 17 next year as his father Srđjan feels the tournament organisers' decision to not allow unvaccinated players -- or players who don't share their Covid-19 vaccination status -- amounts to "blackmail".

Djokovic is keeping the Australian Open organisers and his fans guessing about his Covid-19 vaccination status, adding to the uncertainty over whether he will compete at next year's opening major. The Australian Open director Craig Tiley has categorically stated that only fully vaccinated players will be allowed to compete in the tournament. Djokovic, the nine-time and defending Australian Open champion, has refused to divulge his vaccination status, or whether he intends to get vaccinated before the event.



Recently, Tiley had said that, "He (Djokovic) has not shared his status with anyone."

In an interview with Serbian television programme TV Prva, which was later reported in English by B92, Srđjan Djokovic said that Djokovic's participation in the opening major of 2022 will "depends on how they (organisers) position themselves".

Djokovic had contracted Covid-19 during his Adria Tour event, which he organised in June 2020. He was asymptomatic.

Neymar ruled out for eight weeks with ankle injury

Paris | Agencies

Paris Saint-Germain striker Neymar will be out of action for at least eight weeks as he was forced to leave the field on a stretcher after landing awkwardly during the Ligue 1 clash with Saint-Etienne on Sunday.

When leaping over a challenge, Neymar planted his foot onto the outstretched leg of Yann Macon. As his ankle turned over, he screamed out in agony and immediately beckoned for medical assistance. He was later seen leaving on



crutches, sparking concerns he could be sidelined for a prolonged period of time.

Reports in France were quick to suggest that the South American superstar will be missing until January, and that turned out to be the case.

If the 29-year-old is to miss the next six weeks, then he will be forced to sit out domestic meetings with Nice, Lens, Monaco, and Lorient before the Ligue 1 winter break, along with the final Champions League group stage clash with Club Brugge.

Neymar will likely return at the beginning of February, in time for the start of the Champions League knockout stages, with PSG already qualified as runners-up in Group A behind Manchester City.

Pune Open Golf Championship to be held from Dec 1



Team Absolute | Pune

The fifth edition of the Pune Open Golf Championship will be held at the Poona Club Golf Course from December 1-4, the organisers announced on Tuesday. The tournament, which carries a prize purse of Rs 40 lakh, will be the last full-field event of the TATA

Steel PGTT's 2020-2021 season before the season-ending TATA Steel Tour Championship. The Pro-Am event is scheduled for December 5. The event will feature leading Indian names such as defending champion Kshitij Naveed Kaul, Manu Gandas, Yuvraj Singh Sandhu, Om Prakash Chouhan, Akshay Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Shamim Khan, and Amardeep Malik, to name a few. The international challenge will be led by Sri Lankans Mithun Perera, Anura Rohana, N Thangaraja, and K Prabakaran, Bangladeshis Md Zamil Hossain Mollah and Badal Hossain as well as Australian Kunal Bhasin.

2nd Test, Day 2: West Indies 69/1 at stumps after bowling out SL for 204

Galle | Agencies

West Indies were 69/1 at stumps after bowling out Sri Lanka for 204 on a rain-curtailed Day 2 of the second Test at Galle International Stadium, here on Tuesday. Sri Lanka were 113 for 1 coming into the day but Veerasammy Permaul starred with a brilliant five-wicket haul for West Indies and bowled out hosts on a small total.

Beginning the proceedings on Day 2, West Indies opted for spin at both ends with the left-arm orthodox of Jomel Warrican matched with Roston Chase's off-breaks. Lanka batters Pathum Nissanka and



Oshada Fernando continued where they left off on Monday as runs flowed early, though they couldn't carry it longer with Fernando edging to wicketkeeper Joshua da Silva for 18. Rain persisted for the remainder of the day, which meant that no further play was possible. The visitors though would be happy with their showing on the day with a brilliant performance in the field followed by a steady outing with the bat as they trail the hosts by 135 runs.

Brief scores

Sri Lanka 204 (Pathum Nissanka 73; Veerasammy Permaul 5-35, Jomel Warrican 4-50) lead West Indies 69/1 (Jermaine Blackwood 44) by 135 runs.



Delhi teenager Mohak smashes triple ton

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Mohak Kumar of Delhi Capitals Bal Bhavan Cricket Academy smashed a quick-fire triple ton (331 runs off 125 balls) against Endurance Cricket Academy in the Dream Chasers Cup U-13 Cricket Tournament here, surprising the cricket fraternity in the capital recently.

An ardent fan of West Indian cricketer Brian Lara, Chris Gayle, and Indian wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant, Mohak who is barely 12-years old, is dreaming of playing for India as early as

possible. He admires left-handed batsmen more; this could be because he is always keen to watch Lara's cover drives, as well as Rishabh Pant hitting sixes over the cover. Mohak's immediate priority is to get selected for the Delhi U-14 team. He is preparing for the trials scheduled to be held in December.

Mohak who came in to bat at number four after his team lost both the openers with just five runs on the board, spent 137 minutes in the middle, smashing 28 fours and 30 sixes in his innings.



'IT HAS BEEN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY BEING ZARINA'

Says Richa Chadda ahead of the release of *Inside Edge* season 3

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Inside Edge season 3 is almost upon us and the excitement and hype is real. The game behind the game gets to a whole new level and the season 3 promises to be filled with more drama and surprises than before. Richa Chadda who plays Zarina in the show has had her say on season 3. Richa Chadda shares, "It feels surreal to know that we are already on the third season. As an actor, it has been incredible journey being Zarina, a layered and nuanced character, non-trapped by conventions which has kept it relevant over the seasons. As the game behind the game thickens into the third one, so does Zarina's urge to claim what is rightfully hers in this man's world. Inside Edge Season 3 is replete with similar elements of drama, suspense and excitement that has defined the series for the audience. But the stakes and proportions are higher, this time."

Yesterday ex Indian cricketer / coach, Ravi Shastri got the fans amped up as he showered some serious praise on Vayu, who is all set to lead his team in Inside Edge season 3.

Created by Karan Anshuman and directed by Kanishk Varma, Inside Edge will premiere on Amazon Prime Video on December 03.



SALMAN KHAN ORGANISES SPECIAL SCREENING OF ANTIM FOR THE UNDERPRIVILEGED KIDS IN GAIETY GALAXY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Salman Khan's latest film, Antim, came out on November 26, and has been doing well resonating superbly with fans and audiences. The film has been raking in large numbers, worldwide. Meanwhile it's impressive elevation in footfalls with each day passing by, Salman Khan organised a special screening for underprivileged kids just recently. Salman Khan, the bhai with a heart of gold organized an exceptional screening session for the underprivileged kids in Gaiety Galaxy for his film 'Antim - The Final Truth'. It has been a truly fortunate moment for them as

they never experienced watching film in the theatre ever before. The kids enjoyed this new experience and had a great fun together.

Antim : The Final Truth released on 26th November and stars Salman Khan, Aayush Sharma, Mahesh Manjrekar and Mahima Makwana.



ARTISTS LIKE ME, ASPIRE TO BE LIKE MADHURI DIXIT! : SHARVARI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Gorgeous debutant Sharvari has won unanimous praise for her acting skills in her big screen debut *Bunty Aur Babli 2*. A rank outsider to Bollywood, Sharvari has her eyes set on the prize to become a star who is known for her performances. Being a Marathi, she naturally aspires to follow the footsteps of the Maharashtrian icon Madhuri Dixit, who became a pan Indian sensation and was considered as big, if not bigger, than her male counterparts during her prime.

Sharvari says, "Being a

Maharashtrian, I have grown up idolising Madhuri Dixit. My family and everyone I know, is a huge fan of her. Hailing from our state, she became a pan Indian superstar who ruled the hearts of innumerable people. Artists like me, who are from Maharashtra, aspire to be like Madhuri Dixit and achieve the fame and have the brilliance of craft that she possessed. She is an inspiration to us all. I have danced on her songs, performed on her scenes since childhood."

About earning unanimous praise for her acting performance in *Bunty Aur Babli 2*, she says, "I'm truly humbled with

the way people have appreciated my performance in *Bunty Aur Babli 2*. For someone who doesn't belong to the industry, I have had my share of struggle and heartbreaks before I got this film as my debut and I cherish every bit of it. I know that I have poured my heart and soul into the film and I'm happy with the way people have received my performance and appreciated me. It truly means a lot."

Sharvari is happy to have been able to showcase her skills well in her debut because she feels as outsiders one has to deliver with their first film to get attention.

Sanjay Dutt signed as Arunachal Pradesh brand ambassador



Team Absolute | Itanagar

Bollywood star Sanjay Dutt has been roped in by the Arunachal Pradesh government to be the brand ambassador for the state.

Along with Sanjay, filmmaker Rahul Mitra has been roped in as the brand advisor on the occasion of the golden jubilee celebrations, marking the 50th year of the naming of the state.

The announcement was made by Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Assembly Speaker Pasang Sona Dorjee at a packed function in the presence of both Sanjay and

Mitra, who arrived from Mumbai by a chartered flight to Dibrugarh and then by helicopter to the picturesque valley of Mechuka on the afternoon.

A campaign executed by Rahul Mitra Films and shot by ad filmmaker Shiraz Bhattacharya was kickstarted on this occasion, featuring Sanjay catering to the target audience for Arunachal tourism.

In addition to the promotional films, the actor will also engage with the local youth of the state on a series of initiatives on substance abuse and other key issues that cause concern in the state.



Pooja Hegde: The idea is to do good work, prove your credibility

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After making her debut opposite Hrithik Roshan in Ashutosh Gowariker's 'Mohenjo-Daro', Pooja Hegde took the pan-India approach and worked in various regional film industries. The actress always wanted to be recognised as an Indian actor rather than an actor limited to just one particular industry.

Talking about being a part of different film industries across India, Pooja said, "God has been really kind to have given me the opportunity to showcase my talent in differ-

ent film industries and be given so much love by the audience. I always wanted to be known as an Indian actor and not let the barrier of language restrict my work. The idea is to do good work, work hard and prove your credibility."

Revealing as to how she progresses from one project to another, the actress said, "The big question that an actor always has to face is 'what next?'. One has to go by their instinct, give their 100 per cent and leave the rest up to the Almighty. I have been doing that ever since I started my acting career."



RANVEER BRINGS INDIA'S GREATEST CRICKET STORY ALIVE IN '83' TRAILER

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The trailer for Ranveer Singh-starrer '83' is finally unveiled bringing alive one of the most unforgettable moments of Indian cricket.

Ranveer stars as former star cricketer Kapil Dev in the film, which tells the story of how the Indian cricket team, "a team that no one believed in", brought the World Cup home in 1983 after

beating the champions, West Indies in a match.

The over-three-minute long trailer, started with the Indian team faltering on the field. Ranveer as Kapil declares at the press conference that they are 'here to win'.

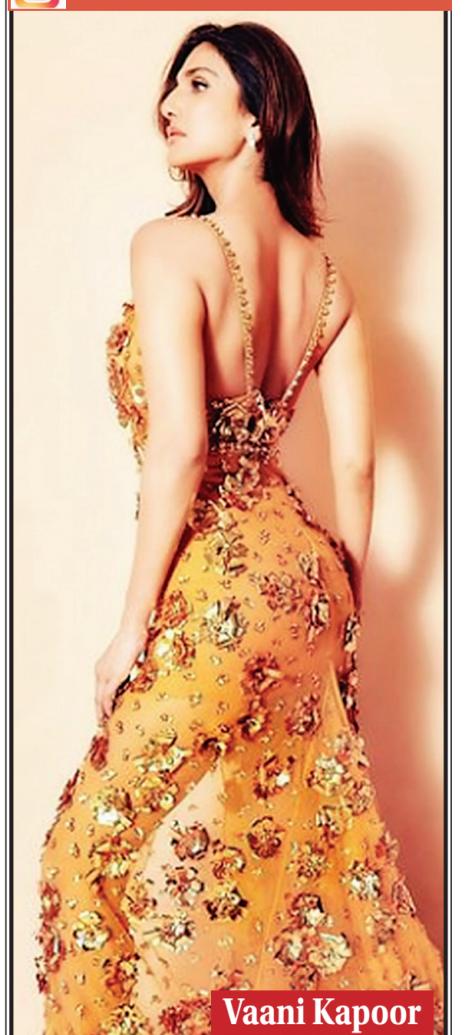
Acclaimed actor Pankaj Tripathi plays the then-manager of the team PR Man Singh, is seen telling Kapil, "35 saal pehle hum log azaadi jeete, magar izzat jeetna baaki hai, kaptaan (We won independence 35 years ago but we are yet to win respect, captain)."

The later half of the trailer, showcases how the Indian team makes an impactful comeback, with Kapil hitting back-to-back sixes, smashing dressing room windows, glasses and windscreens of cars.

Actress Deepika Padukone, who is essaying the role of Kapil's wife Romi Dev too makes several appearances in the trailer.

Other actors such as Tahir Raj Bhasin, Jivra, Saqib Saleem, Jatin Sarna, Chirag Patil, Dinker Sharma, Nishant Dahiya, Harrry Sandhu, Sahil Khattar, Ammy Virk, Addinath Kothare, Dhairya Karwa and R.Badree to make a appearances in the trailer.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Vaani Kapoor