

absolute india

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INDIA'S OVERALL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY REMAINS STRONG DESPITE THIRD WAVE: RBI

▶ **THE RBI POINTED OUT THAT AGGREGATE DEMAND CONDITIONS HAVE STAYED RESILIENT. 'THE ISSUANCE OF E-WAY BILLS - AN INDICATOR OF FREIGHT MOVEMENT - SURGED TO 7.2 CRORE IN DECEMBER, THE SECOND HIGHEST IN ITS HISTORY. THIS IS INDICATIVE OF THE LIKELIHOOD OF ROBUST COLLECTION OF THE GOODS AND SERVICES TAX (GST) IN JANUARY 2022.**

▶ **'WITH A STRONG PICK-UP IN MANUFACTURING AND CONSTRUCTION, HIGHWAY TOLL COLLECTIONS SOARED BY 16 PER CENT MONTH-ON-MONTH IN DECEMBER. POWER CONSUMPTION ROSE BY 4.5 PER CENT TO 110.3 BILLION UNITS IN DECEMBER.'**

“Overall economic activity in India remains strong, with upbeat consumer and business confidence and upticks in several incoming high frequency indicators. As the world stepped into the new year, the path of the recovery in India as in the rest of the global economy encountered headwinds from a rapid surge in infections due to Omicron.”



Team Absolute | Mumbai

India's overall economic activity remains strong despite facing headwinds from a rapid surge in Omicron infections, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its monthly bulletin for January 2022.

"On the vaccination front, India has made rapid strides. On the Omicron variant, the recent data from the UK and South Africa suggest that such infections are 66 to 80 per cent less severe, with a lower need for hospitalisation. This has brightened near-term prospects and financial markets reflect this optimism."

Alongside, monetary and credit conditions are improving with bank credit picking up in a gradual but sustained manner, it said. Besides, the RBI said that manufacturing and several categories of services remain in expansion mode.

It said that increase in mobility in December 2021 increased fuel consumption, with the consumption of petrol surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) and diesel consumption also exhibited sequential improvement though ATF still remains below the pre-pandemic levels.

On the supply front, the bulletin said: "On the supply side, aggregate supply, as measured by gross value added (GVA) at basic prices, increased by 8.6 per cent in 2021-22, as against a contraction of 6.2 per cent a year ago.

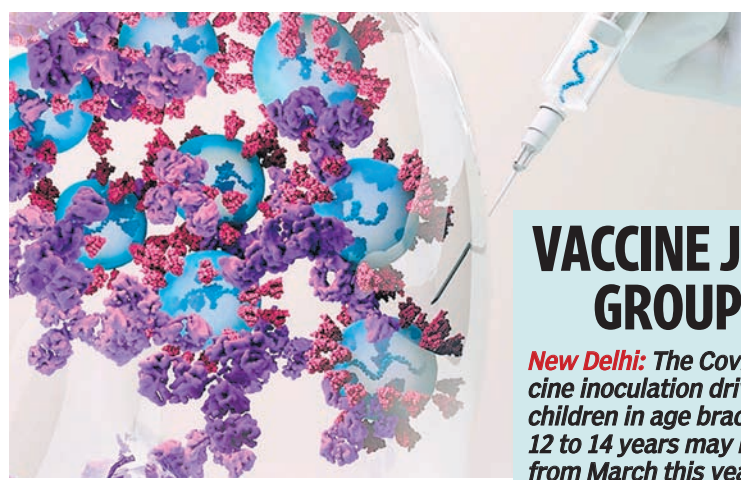
"The acceleration in GVA growth was facilitated by robust growth in agriculture, coupled with recovery in industry and in several constituents of services, albeit, on a favourable base."

INDIA'S FIRST MRNA COVID VAX

▶ **THE MRNA VACCINES CARRY THE MOLECULAR INFORMATION TO MAKE THE PROTEIN IN THE HOST USING THE SYNTHETIC RNA OF THE VIRUS. THE HOST BODY PRODUCES THE VIRAL PROTEIN THAT IS RECOGNISED BY THE IMMUNE SYSTEM, THEREBY ENABLING THE BODY TO FIGHT AGAINST THE DISEASE.**

▶ **MRNA VACCINES ARE CONSIDERED SAFE AS MRNA IS NON-INFECTIOUS, NON-INTEGRATING IN NATURE, AND DEGRADED BY STANDARD CELLULAR MECHANISMS. THEY ARE HIGHLY EFFICACIOUS BECAUSE OF THEIR INHERENT CAPABILITY OF BEING TRANSLATED INTO PROTEINS IN THE CELL.**

▶ **THESE VACCINES ALSO REPRESENT A PROMISING ALTERNATIVE TO CONVENTIONAL VACCINE APPROACHES BECAUSE OF THEIR HIGH POTENCY, CAPACITY FOR RAPID DEVELOPMENT, AND POTENTIAL FOR LOW-COST MANUFACTURE AND SAFE ADMINISTRATION.**



Pune-based Gennova Biopharmaceuticals is making India's first mRNA vaccine known as HGC019, in collaboration with US-based HDT Bio Corp.

In August, the Drug Controller General of India had approved the Phase 2 and 3 clinical trials.

"The Vaccine Subject Expert Committee (SEC) reviewed the data, and found HGC019 to be safe, tolerable, and immunogenic in the participants of the study," the company had said in a statement.

The company will start testing the vaccine on humans for efficacy and immunogenicity from next month. The mRNA vaccine is also reportedly effective against the new Omicron variant. Researchers have been studying and working with mRNA vaccines for decades. It can be developed in a laboratory using readily available materials, meaning the manufacturing may allow for one vaccine to provide protection against multiple diseases, thus decreasing the number of shots needed for protection against common vaccine-preventable diseases.

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virus and others, especially in recent years. It has also been employed in numerous cancer clinical trials, with some promising results showing antigen-specific T cell responses and prolonged disease-free survival in some cases. Future mRNA vaccine technology may allow for one vaccine to provide protection against multiple diseases, thus decreasing the number of shots needed for protection against common vaccine-preventable diseases.

VACCINE JABS TO 12-14 YRS GROUP FROM MARCH

New Delhi: The Covid vaccine inoculation drive for children in age bracket for 12 to 14 years may begin from March this year, sources said on Monday. As per the Health Ministry report, over 45 per cent of adolescents of 15 to 18 years have received their first dose of vaccines. According to a source, the decision to inoculate the children aged 12 to 14 could be taken in the next National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation in India's (NTAGI) Covid-19 group meeting which is scheduled to be held next month. As India has enough vaccine production capacity, the decision is likely to be taken in the next meeting, the source said.



Cryptocurrencies could attract tax rates similar to lottery, TDS provisions

Sanjeev Sharma | New Delhi

If the government does not prohibit Indians from dealing in cryptocurrencies, it could introduce a regressive tax regime for cryptocurrencies, according to Taxmann.

Taxmann said in a note that a Bill was expected to be presented during the Winter Session of Parliament to regulate cryptocurrencies. However, it was not introduced, and it is now expected that the government may take up this Bill in the upcoming Budget Session.

Considering the size of the market, the amount involved, and the risk coupled with cryptocurrencies, some changes may be brought in the taxation of cryptocurrencies in the Union Budget 2022-23, Taxmann said.

Among the TDS/TCS provisions, both sale and purchase of cryptocurrencies above the threshold limit should be brought within the ambit of TDS/TCS provisions. This will help the government get the footprints of the investors, Taxmann said.

It could lead to reporting in Statement of Financial Transactions (SFT). Both sale and purchase of cryptocurrencies could be brought within the ambit of reporting in the SFT. The trading companies already do similar reporting of sale and purchase of shares and units of mutual funds.



It could also lead to higher tax rates. Similar to winnings from lottery, game shows, puzzle etc., a higher tax rate of 30 per cent is expected to be levied on the income arising from the sale of cryptocurrency.

The losses from the sale of cryptocurrency may not be allowed to be adjusted from other income and should also not be allowed to be carried forward, Taxmann said.

Among other measures, as per the provisions of Section 201(1A) of the Income Tax Act, in case of failure to deduct TDS, interest is to be paid at the rate of 1.5 per cent from the date of deduction to the date of payment. Any part of the month shall be considered as one full month. So, the understanding should be that if TDS is deducted on April 23, 2017 and payment is made on May 8, 2017, interest should be paid for one month.

ECI shifts poll date in Punjab from Feb 14 to February 20

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Election Commission of India on Monday changed the February 14 date of polling in Punjab to February 20 after request from the political parties due to Sri Guru Ravidas Jayanti.

After a detailed meeting on the rescheduling of the poll date, the Commission changed the poll schedule as announced by it on January 8.

According to the new schedule for Punjab assembly polls, now the date of notification will be January 25 (Tuesday), 2022, last date of nomination will be January 22, 2022 (Tuesday), date of scrutiny - February 2, 2022 (Wednesday), date of withdrawal would be February 4 (Friday) and date of polling



will be February 20, 2022 (Sunday). Counting of Votes will be taken up on March 10, 2022 (Thursday).

The Election Commission received several representations from State Government, Political Parties and other organizations drawing attention regarding movement of a large number of devotees from Punjab to Varanasi for participation in Sri Guru Ravidas Ji Jayanti celebrations, which is observed on February 16, 2022, the EC said in a statement.

KATHAK'S LIVING LEGEND, PANDIT BIRJU MAHARAJ, DIES AT 83

New Delhi: The living legend of Kathak, Birju Maharaj, who had been diagnosed with kidney disease a few days ago and put on dialysis, died at his home here late on Sunday. He was 83. Maharaj ji, as he was popularly known, was said to be playing with his grandsons when his health unexpectedly deteriorated, requiring him to be rushed to the hospital, where he died of a heart attack.

A recipient of the country's second highest civilian honour, Padma Vibhushan, Maharaj ji was also a lifelong Kathak guru as well as a talented Hindustani classical singer and percussionist. He will be remembered by cinema buffs for the two period dance sequences in Satyajit Ray's historical drama 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi' (for which he sang as well) and for the 'Kaahe Chhed Mohe' track picturised on Madhuri Dixit in the 2002 version of 'Devdas'.

Maharaj ji won the National Award for choreographing 'Unnai Kaanadhu Naan' in the Kamal Haasan multi-lingual megahit 'Vishwaroopam' and the Filmfare Awards for the Bajirao Mastani number 'Mohe Rang Do Laal'.



NW, Central India see cold to severe cold days, rain likely this week

- ▶ Isolated hailstorm activity is also likely over east Rajasthan and east Madhya Pradesh on January 21 night and 22.
- ▶ Minimum temperatures are likely to rise by 2-4 degrees Celsius over northwest India during the next five days.
- ▶ Dense to very dense fog in isolated parts in night/morning hours is very likely over Rajasthan, east Uttar Pradesh, west Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal during next two days.
- ▶ Cold day to severe cold day conditions in some/isolated pockets is very likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan during next two days and abate thereafter.



above normal over Madhya Pradesh.

The IMD bulletin said that there were cold day conditions in many parts with severe cold day conditions in isolated pockets over west Madhya Pradesh and east Rajasthan, cold day to severe cold day conditions in some parts of Uttar Pradesh and east Madhya Pradesh, and also in isolated pockets over Punjab and northwest Rajasthan, while cold day conditions were observed in some parts of Haryana and Delhi.

On the one hand, a cyclonic circulation lies over Kerala and neighbourhood in lower tropospheric levels while on the other, a fresh Western Disturbance is likely to affect Western Himalayan region from January 18 night. A fresh active Western Disturbance is likely to affect north-

west India from January 21 onwards. An induced cyclonic circulation is very likely to form over southwest Rajasthan on January 22.

The IMD forecast said that there will be isolated light/moderate rainfall over north coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema, interior Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Mahe during next 2-3 days, and light to moderate rainfall at a few places with isolated heavy rainfall likely over north coastal Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and adjoining south coastal Andhra Pradesh during next 24 hours.

Scattered to fairly widespread rainfall is likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi, West Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan during January 21 to 23 with maximum intensity on January 22.

NURSE KEPT VACCINES THAT KILLED 3 BABIES IN HOTEL FRIDGE

Bengaluru | Agencies

The probe into the deaths of three babies after measles-rubella (MR) vaccination in Belagavi district of Karnataka has revealed that the nurse had obtained the vaccination vials one day earlier from the pharmacist and had kept them in a hotel fridge along with food items, violating all protocols.

This led to bacterial infection and after the administration of these vaccines the three babies died due to 'aseptic shock syndrome'. Two deaths were reported after being vaccinated at Bochagala camp on January 12 while one death was reported from Mallapura camp on January 11. As many as 17 babies were vaccinated at Bochagala and four babies had received shots at Mallapura in Ramdurg taluk. Two

girls, one 18 months old and the other 12 months old are recovering in hospitals.

Karnataka Health Minister K. Sudhakar stated on Monday that directions have been given to immediately suspend nurse Salma and pharmacist Jayaram. He said he had ordered another probe into the incident and directions have been given to submit the report within two days.



AAP CANDIDATE FROM FEROZEPUR RESIGNS, JOINS CONGRESS

CHANDIGARH | Agencies

Hours after quitting as the Aam Aadmi Party candidate from Ferozepur (Rural) constituency in Punjab on Monday, Ashu Bangar was inducted into the Congress by party Chief Minister Charanjit Channi.

Channi in Chandigarh announced that Bangar would be party's candidate from the Ferozepur (Rural) seat as he is young with dreams to serve society.

Earlier, poll debutant Bangar told the media in Ferozepur that he was being "humiliated and pressurised" by the AAP leadership to spend more on electioneering.

He alleged AAP is being run like a private company by leaders from Delhi. "Candidates are pressurised with threats that their ticket would be cancelled, so no one speaks up."

He said AAP was functioning like a private company under state in-charge Raghav Chadha, "who was behaving like a dictator and mentally torturing AAP volunteers". "All decisions are being taken from Delhi without taking local Punjabis taken into confidence." He also took objection to the AAP's



charge that Balbir Singh Rajewal-led Samyukt Samaj Morcha is in league with the BJP. He said people were angry with Chadha over his remarks against farmers when they refused to support the AAP.

U'KHAND CONG DIVIDED ON HARAK SINGH'S ENTRY INTO PARTY

New Delhi: Congress leaders in Uttarakhand are divided over the induction of expelled BJP leader Harak Singh Rawat into the party with former Chief Minister Harish Rawat putting a condition on his entry into the 'Grand Old Party'.

Harish Rawat, a Congress veteran, has demanded apology from Harak Singh for switching to the BJP when the Congress led by Rawat was in power in the hill state. Meanwhile, another Congress leader, Preetam Singh, one of the contenders for the post of Chief Minister, has left the issue on party leadership. The Congress leaders, however, are tight-lipped on the issue. Harak Singh Rawat was sacked on Sunday by the Pushkar Singh Dhami-led BJP government in Uttarakhand. He was also expelled from the BJP for six years for indiscipline.



Bihu festivities triggers massive Covid surge in Assam



GUWAHATI | Agencies

Assam witnessed a 158 per cent increase in Covid positive cases in the past 24 hours as the northeastern state celebrated harvest festival 'Bhogali Bihu', also called 'Magh Bihu'.

An analysis by IANS of Assam's National Health Mission (NHM) reports said that the daily positivity rate of 7.87 per cent on Thursday, a day before the Bihu festivity, rose to 10.75 per cent on

Monday night while it was only 0.77 per cent on January 1.

According to the NHM reports, the active Covid cases stood at 918 on January 1 and rose to 13,785 on Thursday last week, and further to 23,948 on Monday night. As many as 6,982 fresh Covid cases were reported on Monday night against 2,709 on Sunday - the biggest single-day spike since the pandemic began in 2020, raising the tally of positive cases to 6,53,717 with 6,217 deaths.

Assam has been witnessing a surge in Covid-19 cases since the beginning of the new year with nearly 25,000 fresh cases in the past fortnight.

Of its 34 districts, Kamrup (Metro) district, where the state capital Dispur and northeastern region's main commercial hub Guwahati falls, registered highest Covid positive cases of 1,491 on Monday followed by Dibrugarh (489), Tinsukia (407) and Cachar district (372).

84% households' income declined; no relief for middle class: Congress

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Days ahead of the Union Budget announcements for FY23, the Congress on Monday alleged that due to the Centres' "bad economic policy, unemployment rate in the country has gone up to 7 per cent, wholesale inflation rose to 13.56 per cent, rupee fell to 74+ against the US dollar, income of 84 per cent households declined in 2021 while the wealth of some individuals multiplied nine times.

The Congress demanded that like corporate tax was slashed from 30 per cent to 22 per cent, similar reliefs should be provided to the middle and lower-income groups. The party demanded that the government should reduce petrol and diesel prices by Rs 25 per litre, while GST rates on essential items should be



either exempted or rationalised as high rates on these items are 'regressive'.

Addressing a virtual press conference, Congress spokesperson Gaurav Vallabh said, "The income of 84 per cent of the households in the country declined in 2021, but at the same time the number of Indian billionaires grew from 102 to 142 (39 per cent growth). The richest 98 Indians own the same wealth as the bottom 55.2 crore people. During the first two waves of the pandemic, the wealth of Indian billionaires increased

from Rs 23.14 lakh crore to Rs 53.16 lakh crore. This growth in the wealth of billionaires (Rs 30.02 lakh crore) is 86 per cent of the Union Budget for FY 21-22 (Rs 34.83 lakh crore)." He alleged that due to Narendra Modi government's pro-rich policies, there has been continuous increase in indirect taxes (GST), while there has been constant increase in additional tax imposed on fuel, which rose 33 per cent in the first six months of 2020-21 compared to the last year, 79 per cent more than pre-Covid levels.

'Wrong precedent': Centre on row over R-Day tableaux

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Central government on Monday came out strongly against the criticism by state governments over the non-inclusion of their tableaux in the forthcoming Republic Day celebrations.

The Centre said this is a wrong precedent adopted by the Chief Ministers to portray an outcome of an objective process as a flashpoint between the Central and states governments.

The Centre claimed that this goes a long way in harming the country's federal structure.

"We have recently seen letters being written by chief ministers of some states about the exclusion of their state's tableaux in the Republic Day Parade. This is unmistakably linked to regional pride and projected as an insult to the people of the state by the Central Government. This script also plays out almost every year. Perhaps the Chief Ministers have no positive agenda of their own when they have to resort to the same old trick using misinformation year after year," government sources said.

Talking about the tableaux selection process, sources pointed out that "first of all, it is not the Narendra Modi government which decides on the tableaux".



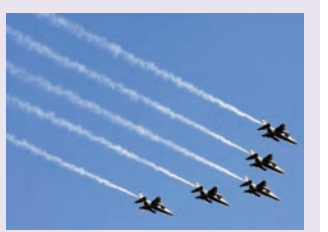
"The tableaux proposals received from various states and central ministries are evaluated in a series of meetings of the Expert Committee consisting of eminent people in the field of art, culture, sculpture, music, architecture, choreography, etc. The Expert Committee examines the proposals on the basis of theme, concept, design and visual impact before making its recommendations," they said.

Government sources explained that due to time constraints, only some of the proposals can be accepted.

75 AIRCRAFT TO FLYPAST RAJPATH ON REPUBLIC DAY

New Delhi: A total 17 Jaguars will roar above the Rajpath in the national capital this Republic Day in the grandest flypast comprising 75 aircrafts from Air Force, Army and Navy. This year MiG 29K and P 8i will make an entry while Tejas will be missed.

"The grandest flypast ever will take place over Rajpath during the Republic Day parade with 75 aircraft, including the planes from IAF, Army, and the Navy. This is in line with the 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav' celebrations," Indian Air Force officer Wing Commander Indranil Nandi said. The officer said that five Rafale will also fly over the Rajpath in the 'Vinaash' formation. The navy's MiG 29K and P-8i surveillance aircraft will fly in the 'Varuna' formation. The Rafale will be seen in three formations. The Vinash formation will have five Rafale jets, Baaz formation will have one Rafale, flanked by two Jaguars, Su 30s and two Mig 29s.



Six held in K'taka for assaulting Dalits who came to eat 'panipuri'

MYSURU | Agencies

Karnataka police have arrested six persons for allegedly assaulting five members of a Dalit family, including a woman, for eating 'panipuri' at Arasinakere village in Mysuru district, the police said on Monday.

According to the police, the accused barged inside the residence of the victims and assaulted them. The injured persons, including Soubhagya, Dileep, Chandan, Madhukar and Prasanna, have been admitted to a local hospital.

The arrested persons have been identified as Murthy, Sachin, Naveen,



Mahadevaswamy, Chandan and Santhosh.

According to the complaint, Dileep, Prasanna and Madhukar had gone to eat

'panipuri' in a locality with majority upper caste population.

The accused had objected to it and Murthy and Sachin

had assaulted the victims.

The elders of the village held a panchayat and brokered peace between them. However, the accused later barged into the residence of the victims and attacked Dileep, Prasanna and Madhukar. Soubhagya and Chandan, who were at home and came to the rescue of victims, were also beaten up, the police said.

The victims filed a complaint alleging atrocity, abuse and life threat at the Jayapura police station.

The police went to the village and spoke to the victims and assured them of security. They also warned that such incidents should not be repeated in the village.

MILITANTS HURL GRENADE AT SRINAGAR POLICE CONTROL ROOM, NO DAMAGE CAUSED

Srinagar: Militants

hurling a grenade on Monday at the police control room (PCR) in Srinagar city but it exploded without causing any damage.

Police sources said militants hurled a grenade at the 6th India Reserve Battalion at the PCR in Batmaloo area of Srinagar.

"The grenade exploded without causing any damage. The area has been surrounded for searches," a source said.

On Sunday, a civilian and a policeman were injured when militants hurled a grenade at a party of the security forces in Safa Kadal area of Srinagar.

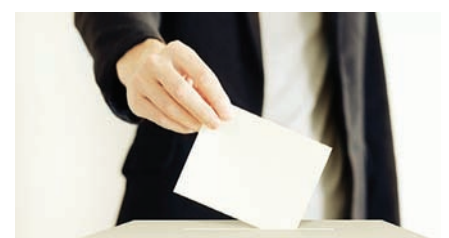
EC allows persons deployed in essential services, media to cast votes via postal ballot

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Election Commission of India on Monday issued a notification allowing the persons deployed in essential services and media to cast their votes through postal ballots in the forthcoming Assembly elections in five states.

According to the notification, the personnel employed in Information and Public Relation Department, Health and Family Welfare Department including emergency and ambulance services, Postal and Traffic departments, Railway, Electricity, Civil Aviation Departments, Metro Rail Corporation of Uttar Pradesh, Doordarshan, All India Radio and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited are eligible to exercise their franchise using postal ballots as 'Absentee Voters' in the Assembly elections of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur.

The EC, in a separate notification to the poll-bound states under Section 60(c) of the RP Act, 1951 for the purpose of voting through postal ballot for Absentee voters in the category of persons employed in essential services-regarding said that "the notification issued on January



14, needs to be published in the State Gazette immediately and a copy of the same may also be forwarded to the Commission". Directing the Chief Electoral Officers of all the five poll-bound states, the Commission said that the concerned departments of the notified category of electors may be informed accordingly, and may be asked to nominate "Nodal Officer" for this purpose of the postal ballot facility. "The Nodal Officer may be briefed about the facility and responsibilities and duties to be carried out by him/her. Copies of Form 12D appended to the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 may be made available to the Nodal Officer and the Nodal Officer should inform the electors concerned about the facility," the EC stated in the notification.

Telangana to introduce English medium in govt schools

HYDERABAD | Agencies

The Telangana government on Monday decided to bring a legislation to introduce the English medium in government schools from the next academic year and regulate fees in private schools and colleges.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the state Cabinet chaired by Chief Minister K. Chandrababu Naidu. A cabinet sub-committee has been constituted to prepare guidelines after a detailed analysis of the two proposals.

To be headed by Education Minister P. Sabitha Indra Reddy, the sub-committee will have 10 other ministers as members. They included information technology and industry minister K.T. Rama Rao and finance and health minister T. Harish Rao.

The Cabinet decided that the bill will be introduced in the next legislature session.



The Cabinet also approved a scheme 'Mana vouru mana badi' (our village our school) at a cost of Rs 7,289 crore for providing quality education and basic amenities in schools. The Cabinet also approved a proposal by the education minister to set up a university exclusively for women.

Chief secretary Somesh Kumar was directed to prepare a detailed proposal in this regard for the next Cabinet meeting.

The Cabinet also gave its nod to set up Telangana Forest University. The forest department officials were asked to prepare a detailed report in this regard by the

RIFT BETWEEN BJP AND JD(U) IN BIHAR WIDENS

PATNA | Agencies

Relationship between the BJP and its ruling alliance partner JD(U) in Bihar appears to be souring by the day with the leaders trading barbs on the social media platforms and threatening to part ways.

Taking a dig at the JD(U), national general secretary of BJP OBC wing Nikhil Anand tweeted: "The smaller groups cannot understand the working style of big parties. They are not clear about their own identity whether they belong to a small or a big group. The day doesn't seem far when they would have to search for a new place."

Anand's statement meant that the BJP which has 74 seats in Bihar Legislative Assembly have employed Nitish Kumar-led JD(U) to run the government in the state despite the latter having only 45 seats. However, he refrained from naming any leader in his tweet.

In a prompt retort, Abhishek Jha, the youngest spokesperson of JD(U) said: "@Nikhil Anand Ji: People should give statements according to



their stature. If you spit at the sky, it falls on you. Please clean it up. God may help you."

Jha had targeted BJP state chief Sanjay Agrawal on January 12 when he raised questions over his visit in a village in West Champaran to con-

sole family members who lost their loved one in a poisonous liquor tragedy.

After a liquor tragedy in chief minister's district Nalanda on January 15 which claimed 13 lives, state BJP president Sanjay Jaiswal

had slammed Nitish Kumar government for the failure of his pet project liquor ban in the state.

He said that the nexus of senior officials, police and mafias are responsible for the failure of liquor ban in the state.



MP GOVT RETURNS POWERS TO PANCHAYATS IN VIEW OF COVID

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh Government on Monday announced to return administrative and economic power to the representatives of three-tier panchayats -- gram, janapad and zila panchayats again.



demetic and therefore they should be brought into action again as the Covid cases have reached rural areas across the state.

The decision to return administrative powers was announced by Chief Minister Shivraj Shingh Chouhan while addressing a digital meeting with the representa-

tives of the panchayat committees on Monday.

"The administrative power of panchayats that was dissolved now will be returned to you (panchayats). A notification in this regard will be issued. Covid-19 cases are increasing rapidly and like urban parts, cases are also increasing in rural parts of

the state. Panchayat committees or the representatives now have to play a crucial role to ensure the safety of the people," Chouhan said. He also said that there is uncertainty over when panchayat elections will be held in Madhya Pradesh, but until the fresh elections are held, panchayats will continue to function with full powers to ensure the development in rural areas.

The elections for three-tier panchayats, which was scheduled between January 6 and February 16 was cancelled due to controversy over reservation of Other Backward Classes (OBC) following the Supreme Court's decision in the matter earlier on December 17.

Solution to Many Problems Lies in Knowledge - Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan

Dream of One Narendra Ji Is Being Fulfilled By Another Narendra Ji, Chief Minister Addressed National Sahodaya Conference

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the solution of many problems of the world lies in knowledge. The kind of education that Swami Vivekananda had talked about, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has resolved to implement it through the New Education Policy. Swami Vivekananda considered character-building as the main thing in education. The aim of education is to impart knowledge and skills as well as the culture of citizenship.



Chouhan was addressing the 27th Annual Sahodaya Conference sponsored by CBSE and Ministry of Education as the chief guest today. Schools, officials and public representatives of Sahodaya Parivar participated in the conference in both actual and virtual form. Principals, teachers, parents and students of about 7 thousand schools were associated with it. Union Minister of State for Education Dr. Subhash Sarkar also addressed the conference. Swami Supradiptananda of Ramakrishna Mission Gwalior was also

present. Chief Minister said that the education system of ancient India is developing into modern education system. Digital infrastructure is being used in almost all areas of education. The concept of school campuses has strengthened over the past decade. The number of campuses of schools registered with the CBSE Board has increased manifold. CBSE is playing a leadership role for education. Chief Minister Chouhan said that the responsibility of organising the 27th Annual Sneh Sammelan has been given to Sahodaya Samiti of Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, which is a matter of happiness. One of the few major Sahodaya committees in India, this committee is a platform for multifaceted education. The committee has been successful in necessary coordination in the schools of Gwalior-Chambal region.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that there is a resolve to take the new education policy on the ground in Madhya Pradesh. Simultaneously, CM Rise Schools are also being set up, which will be equipped with necessary facilities like library, laboratory. Global Skill Park will help the youth for employment by making them accomplished in skills.

Indore gang rape: Police demolish accused's farm house

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Day after the alleged brutal gang rape of a 32-year-old woman came to light in Madhya Pradesh's Indore district, the state police on Monday claimed to have demolished the illegal farmhouse of the main accused in the case.

The main accused is the victim's husband, who along with four associates allegedly sexually abused the woman and brutalized her private parts. The victim in her complaint to the police has claimed that she was brutalized by her husband and his friends who performed unnatural sex. She claimed that her husband forced her at knife point to perform unnatural sex with his friends. The victim, who is a teacher by profession and hails from the neighbouring state of Chhattisgarh, told the police that she got married to the

accused through a matrimonial site. However, later it emerged that he was already married. After marriage he took her to a hotel for a few days and later shifted her to his farmhouse. The complainant claimed that after shifting to the farmhouse, her husband forced her to perform unnatural sex and recorded it on his mobile phone. But, it was not the end and the husband forced her to perform unnatural sex with his friends also. The victim told the police that she somehow managed to escape from the farmhouse and went to her parents house in Chhattisgarh. But her husband sent one of his friends to her parents home. That person asked her to come back to Indore, otherwise her video and photographs will go viral on social media. However, she refused to return with him and instead went to the police station and lodged a complaint.

CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN CONDOLES THE DEATH OF PT. BIRJU MAHARAJ

Bhopal : Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has made an invaluable contribution in establishing the Kathak style of Indian dance on the world stage and keeping the youth connected with dance and classical music. His passing away from the world is an irreparable loss to the entire art world.

Chief Minister Chouhan has said in his tweet that "The country has lost one of its precious gems in the form of Padma Vibhushan Pandit Birju Maharaj, the Kathak legend who ensured Indian dance-art a unique place in the world and brought reputation to it. His passing away is an irreparable loss to the entire art world. May God give him a place at his lotus feet."

Make Effective Arrangements of Home Isolation for the Corona Infected: Chief Minister

Held Virtual Dialogue with the Patients of Home Isolation, Chief Minister Demonstrated Anulom-Vilom and Pranayama

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that administrative officers, doctors, public representatives and vigilant citizens should keep an eye on all the works related to home isolation system. Regular communication should also be done with patients taking treatment by staying in Covid Care Centre and home isolation at homes. Along with the treatment to these patients, the work of giving necessary guidance should also be done by the doctors. Chief Minister Chouhan was interacting virtually with the corona infected living in home



isolation from Mantralaya. MP Ramakant Bhargava was also virtually present.

Dialogue boosts morale: Chief Minister

Chouhan said that it is necessary to discuss with the corona infected citizens who are taking rest due to the home isolation system in the state. Boost their morale by talking to them. Chief Minister Chouhan held discussions with officials and boosted their morale. Free medical kits are being provided to isolated persons. Instructions have been given for such arrangements in the entire state. The Chief Minister wished everyone a speedy and full recovery. The Chief Minister also urged all citizens to follow Covid friendly behaviour.

TAKE ACTION TO LEGALIZE UNAUTHORISED COLONIES IN TIME FRAME Urban Development and Housing Minister Gave Instructions

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Take action to legalize unauthorised colonies in time frame. In this regard, Madhya Pradesh Nagarpalika (Colony Development) Rules-2021 have been issued. Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhupendra Singh has given these instructions to the concerned officers. He has said that this will benefit about 6 thousand citizens living in unauthorised colonies.

Singh has said that before making the rules, a detailed discussion was held with the representatives of all the concerned parties and public representatives. Objections and suggestions were taken from citizens regarding the draft. After this the final Nagarpalika (Colony Development) Rules-2021 were published.

Regarding authorised colony

With regard to the external development, it has been clarified that permission will be given by the competent authority to connect the basic infrastructure of the colony with the water supply, sewerage system and drainage system of the city. The reimbursement of the expenditure incurred in this will be done by the colonizer. It is proposed to validate a

single registration of colonizer for the entire state. This arrangement will be done online. Madhya Pradesh Housing Construction and Infrastructure Development Board, Development Authorities, Smart City Corporation Limited and Municipalities have been exempted from the obligation of registration of colonizers. The need for police verification of colonizers at the time of registration has been done away with. At various stages, provisions for appeal have been made on the decisions of the competent authority. Development permission is not necessary for the proposed city development scheme, but permission for colonization is necessary on the final plot. While rationalizing the permission fee for the development of the colony, it has been linked to the collector guideline price prevailing at that time. An option has been proposed to give permission for the development of the colony phase wise. Provisions have been made to refund the fee deposited by the colonizer if he does not start the development work of the colony. Provisions have been made to change the option of providing shelter fee / plot / unit for weak income group. While rationalizing the additional shelter fee, it has been linked to the collector

guideline price prevailing at that time. The time period for completing the development work of the colony has been proposed to be increased from 3 years to 5 years, in which there is also a provision for renewal of one year. Step-wise provisions have been made to release the mortgaged plots proportionate to the development work. Bank Guarantee option can be availed at any time in the above steps. On the land marked for roads, open spaces and other public areas, provisions have been made for registering an FIR against the colonizer for use other than the fixed use or for transferring the land.

Regarding unauthorised colony

Provisions have been made for the development of unauthorised colonies, removal of construction and lodging of complaints in the concerned police stations. Provisions have been made to supply urban infrastructure in unauthorised colonies that came into existence by December 31, 2016. Provisions related to building permit, water supply, sewerage and electricity connection in unauthorised colonies have been simplified. Penal provisions have been made stringent to check the trend of development of unauthorised colonies.

Even in Covid era, the well-offs got wealthier: Yechury

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury on Sunday that even during the pandemic, some companies have earned billions of dollars through vaccines.

Inaugurating the 16th state convention of the CPI-M here, Yechury said: "The rich countries of the world are endangering humanity for the sake of their own, and their companies' profits. Even in the times of Covid pandemic, instead of reducing the patent royalties from the vaccine, they are making it so expensive that many poor countries are unable to buy it. As a result, during this pandemic, poverty and



unemployment have increased. "Including in India, there has been a massive increase in the wealth of some of the world's richest individuals." He said that the relief package -- stimulus package -- which the governments are

announcing to come out of such a situation, is "also going directly into the vault of these trillionaires". Due to this, hunger and deaths are increasing on one hand, while on the other, the betting market is flourishing, he said.

BJP, Cong now trade barbs on compensation for damaged

After over a month long battle over the OBC reservation issue, now the ruling BJP and the opposition Congress in Madhya Pradesh have sharpened their attack on each other over the compensation for the damaged crops of farmers due to the unprecedented rain and hailstorm in the state.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Over the last two weeks, the Congress led by former Chief Minister Kamal Nath has been targeting the Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led BJP government over its failure to provide compensation to the farmers whose crops were damaged due to the hailstorm and heavy rain. The Congress leadership has been highlighting the farmers' grievances, especially the damaged crops and demanding immediate action from the government.

"Crops on over one lakh hectares have been damaged due to heavy rain and hailstorm, directly affecting their livelihood. Even after over a week, they are still looking at the government with hopeful eyes for relief and compensation and in return they are getting only false assurances," Nath said.

Veteran Congress leader and two-time Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh also accused the state government of not taking an appropriate decision on the com-



pensation to the farmers whose crops got damaged. Singh on Sunday wrote a letter to Chouhan to apprise him about crop

damage and sought 20 minutes time to discuss the issue with the Chief Minister. Digvijaya Singh also threatened that if

Chouhan does not meet him by January 20, he will sit on protest at the Chief Minister's office.

On the other hand, BJP leaders, including Chief Minister Chouhan have been visiting different areas to inspect the damage to the crops and assuring farmers of compensation. In some cases, Chouhan has handed over cheques to the farmers during his visit. Last week, Chouhan directed the district administrations to launch an inspection drive in the areas where the crops were damaged and prepare an assessment report as soon as possible. Meanwhile, state home minister Narottam Mishra, who is also the spokesperson of the Madhya Pradesh government, alleged that the Congress leaders always do politics sitting at their homes, instead of visiting the people during natural calamities. "Kamal Nath is the first such leader of opposition who does not go to the public at the time of natural calamity, and he only keeps doing politics on social media," Mishra added.

CHIEF MINISTER SHRI CHOUHAN PLANTED GULMOHAR AND SAPTAPARNI SAPPLINGS



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Gulmohar and Saptaparni saplings in Smart City Park today. On this occasion the office bearers of Muskaan Sanstha also planted saplings and offered Shramdaan. Chief Minister Chouhan received information regarding the works of the organisation and extended his best wishes.

Importance of plants Gulmohar is considered one of the most beautiful trees in the world. Flowers blooming in large bunches among 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 plant is an evergreen medicinal tree, which has great importance in Ayurveda. This medicinal plant is used in the manufacture of various medicines.



EDITOR'S SPECS

BJP is not worried from farmers' stir

The farmers' agitation against the three contentious farm laws, which were later revoked, will not impact BJP's victory in the upcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections as the peasants of western part of the state will vote in favour of the party, a veteran BJP leader said. In the first phase on February 10, polling will be held for a total of 58 seats and in the second phase for 55 seats on February 14. The Braj region is said to be the stronghold of farmers. National spokesperson of Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) Rakesh Tikait also hails from this region and it is being believed that the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) alliance has also weakened the chances of BJP's win. However, contrary to the claims of SP president Akhilesh Yadav and RLD chief Jayant Choudhary, the BJP veteran claimed that the farmers' agitation will have no effect in the first two phases of elections and the party will win equal or more seats than it did in 2017. In the first two phases, a total of 113 seats will be up for grabs. Of this, the BJP has announced its candidature in 105 seats and will declare the candidates for the remaining 8 seats soon. Meanwhile, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, a skilled election strategist of the BJP, will be in Uttar Pradesh again from January 23. It is being said that Shah has plans to tour the entire state, including the west and the Braj region, to woo the farmers back. As part of the election campaign, Shah is also likely to meet leaders of the Jat community in the western part of the state. Moreover, the party is also expecting a huge public support in Braj on the issue of Mathura.

SP-NCP ALLIANCE IN UP WITH EYE ON BMC AND 2024 ELECTIONS!

Manish Kumar Gupta

Entry of the senior leader of the Nationalist Congress Party and former chief minister of Maharashtra Sharad Pawar into the electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh has got something more to do with the bigger political alignment than contesting just a few seats in the biggest state of the country in terms of electorates. Pawar is a seasoned politician and is known for his political maneuvering skills and the latest example being bringing the two political diametrically opposite ideologies - the Shiv Sena and the Congress - on one platform as the part of Maha Vikas Aghadi government. Suddenly the NCP leader started showing interest in Uttar Pradesh and predicted that 13 MLAs of the BJP would part ways from the saffron camp to join the SP. NCP leader Nawab Malik has not only confirmed the alliance but has also revealed that the party has already got one seat and talks are on for some more seats. UP NCP chief Umashankar Yadav met Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on January 12, 2022 on this issue. Immediately after the meeting, the SP tweeted from its handle that NCP



leader KK Sharma will be the alliance candidate from Anupshahar Assembly constituency of Bulandshahr district. But suddenly the NCP plunging into the election battle in a state where it does not have any political base raises many questions. Moreover, the party that has been behaving miserly as far as seat sharing was concerned when it gave just 8 seats to Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party which has been in alliance with the SP for long and has a sizable support base. In such a situation giving even couple of seats to the NCP is surprising. But there are various reasons that might have forced the SP to give some concession to

the NCP. The SP that is in dire need of money to bear the cost of contesting Assembly elections may get some assistance from the NCP. Some strategic maneuvering that might also send the BJP on the backfoot as Pawar has been outsmarting the BJP in Maharashtra. The alliance could be futuristic as well for 2024 Lok Sabha elections and immediate BMC elections in Mumbai. The tie-up is also likely to remain in place for the Goa elections as well. Just a couple of days back, Pawar had also said that NCP was considering allying with like-minded parties in Goa, which also goes to polls together with the UP. The SP may give one or two odd seats to the Shiv Sena as well or may allow friendly contest. Back in Uttar Pradesh, Akhilesh Yadav is putting up a brave face but UP elections need huge resources and the SP is certainly facing some resource crunch. The NCP may help the party to deal with this crisis. BMC elections are forthcoming, so the MVA may seek Akhilesh Yadav's help in those elections in lieu of these helps as there are huge number of north Indian voters in Mumbai. On certain seats, they are decisive. The MVA may take the services of Akhilesh Yadav in BMC elections. This is just one issue but actually there is hid-

den desire in some of the regional Shatrapas to lead the united opposition against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Some of the leaders like Sharad Pawar, Mamata Banerjee, Akhilesh Yadav and even Nitish Kumar have been nurturing this desire from very long but none of them have been able to realise the common dream with uncommon agenda. The Congress is another player that wants to unseat Modi and claims to have the only party with all India presence but Mamata Banerjee denies the very existence of UPA. Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut has already expressed his opinion in July 2021 that the Maharashtra Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray has all the quality to lead the country and he will one day lead the country as the Prime Minister. There is a dormant desire of leading the United opposition in many other leaders that erupts quite often but some others don't express and wait for the right time. Pawar doesn't say anything but he is active in politics as ever. So, allying with the SP is apparently a well thought out decision of the NCP. The SP too understands it very well that alliance at the last moment will not work and such parties must start early. Is it preparations for BMC and 2024 LS elections, some more time to get the answer!

'AROMA, LAVENDER CULTIVATION POPULAR OPTION FOR AGRICULTURAL STARTUP IN J&K'

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Jitendra Singh on Sunday said here that aroma/lavender cultivation has become a popular option in farming for agricultural startups in Jammu and Kashmir. Noting that the 'Purple Revolution' is J&K's contribution to 'Start-ups India' -- an initiative that was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016, he said that the Aroma Mission launched by the Union Ministry of Science & Technology through the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), which has led to the well-known 'Purple Revolution' in India. The Minister also informed that the CSIR had, to begin with introduced high-value essential oil bearing lavender crop through its Jammu based laboratory, Indian Institute of Integrative Medicines (IIIM) for cultivation in districts Doda, Kishtwar, Rajouri and later also in the other districts including Ramban, Pulwama, etc. In a brief span of time, aroma/lavender cultivation has become a popular option in farming for agricultural start-up, he added. Sharing a lesser known fact, Singh disclosed that a youth called Bharat Bhushan hailing from remote village Khillani in district Doda has become a role model success



story. Bhushan started lavender cultivation in just about 0.1 hectare of land with the support of CSIR-IIIM but as profits started showing, he converted a larger area of maize plantation around his house also into lavender plantation. Today, he has 20 others working on his lavender fields and Nursery while around 500 farmers from his district

have also followed him by switching over from maize to perennial flowering lavender plant, he said. He also informed that Indian Institutes of Integrated Medicine (IIIM) Jammu was helping the Start-ups in aroma and lavender farming to sell their produce wherein the prominent companies like Mumbai based Ajmal Biotech Private Limited, Aditi International and NavnaitriGamika, etc. are the primary buyers. The Ministry of Science and Technology said that Aroma Mission is attracting Start-ups and agriculturists from across the country, and during Phase-I CSIR helped cultivation on 6000 hectares of land and covered 46 Aspirational districts across the country. More than 44,000 persons have been trained and several crores of farmers' revenue generated. In the second Phase of Aroma Mission, it is proposed to engage over 45,000 skilled human resources with the aim of benefiting more than 75,000 farming families across the country, the Ministry said.

international

UK MAKES MORE ARRESTS AFTER HOSTAGE TAKER KILLED IN TEXAS SYNAGOGUE STANDOFF

London | Agencies

Two teenagers have been arrested in England as part of the investigation into a hostage-taking incident at a synagogue in Texas, the BBC reported. British citizen Malik Faisal Akram, 44, from Blackburn, was shot dead late Saturday night after a standoff with police in Colleyville, the report said. Details of the ages or genders of the pair arrested in south Manchester on Sunday evening were not revealed. Greater Manchester Police said it was liaising with local communities and continuing to assist in the US inquiry. The force said the two teenagers were arrested "as part of the ongoing investigation into the attack" and were being held in custody for questioning. According to US police sources, Akram arrived in the country via New York's JFK International Airport two weeks ago. Akram's brother Gulbar confirmed his death in a statement



carried on the Blackburn Muslim Community Facebook page. He apologised to the victims and said his brother had been suffering from mental health issues, the report said. The hostage-taker was heard demanding the release of Aafia

Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist who is currently serving an 86-year term in a prison in North Worth, Texas, about 20 miles away from the synagogue, law enforcement officials told local media. President Joe Biden appeared to confirm the attacker had

been seeking her release, saying the Texas attack was related to "someone who was arrested 15 years ago and has been in jail for 10 years", the BBC report said. The President said the attacker had apparently bought weapons after he landed in the US.

Violent volcanic eruptions have significant impact on Tonga

Nuku'alofa | Agencies

The eruptions of the Hunga Ha'apai volcano in Tonga over the weekend have had a significant impact on the South Pacific island country, especially its capital Nuku'alofa, according to authorities. According to Tonga's news website Matangi Tonga Online, the violent volcanic eruption on January 14 continued for over 12 hours and it again erupted for eight minutes the following day sending massive plumes of ash into the sky, reports Xinhua news agency. The Royal Palace grounds, the waterfront and main street were flooded in Nuku'alofa, but information about the extent of damage in the island country is unavailable because its communication with the outside world has been cut off since

January 15 as a result of the volcanic eruptions. According to Radio New Zealand, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the country's High Commission in Nuku'alofa was in contact with local authorities and that damage assessments were underway. She said that the New Zealand High Commission said the tsunami waves had a significant impact on the foreshore on the northern side of Nuku'alofa, with boats and large boulders washed ashore. Shops along the coast were damaged, and there would be a need for a major cleanup. The undersea cable has been impacted, probably because of power cuts, and the Tongan authorities have been trying to restore communications, according to her. Ardern pledged that New Zealand will provide aid to Tonga and

if necessary, New Zealand is ready to send planes and naval vessels. Reconnaissance flight will be useful in viewing the impact of the volcanic eruptions on the low-lying islands. Meanwhile, in Fiji, airborne ashes from Tonga are seen over the southernmost islands from Vatoa southward, with the ashes floating as far north as Tubou and Moala, and about to move to the island of Kadavu. Fiji's National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) said on Sunday that if the prevailing winds continue at the current level, airborne ashes could reach Lau and Viti Levu. The NDMO and the Fiji Meteorological Service have advised the people living on islands in the eastern area of the country to take necessary precautionary measures to avoid any exposure to the airborne volcanic ashes from Tonga.

N.KOREA FIRES 2 MISSILES FROM PYONGYANG AIRFIELD: SEOUL

Seoul: North Korea fired two suspected short-range ballistic missiles eastward from an airfield in Pyongyang on Monday, South Korea's military said. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said it detected the projectiles fired from the Sunan airport at 8.50 a.m. and 8.54 a.m., respectively, and that they flew about 380 km at an altitude of 42 km, reports Yonhap News Agency. "For more specific information, the intelligence authorities of South Korea and the US are conducting a detailed analysis," the JCS said in a statement without further details. The latest firing came just three days after the North launched two suspected short-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea that it later claimed to be guided missiles fired by a railway-borne regiment during a firing drill. Monday's firing from Pyongyang appears to underscore the North's evolving capabilities to launch missiles from various platforms, including trains, subsurface assets and land-based facilities. Last week, Pyongyang warned of a "stronger and certain reaction" to the US' recent imposition of fresh sanctions on six North Koreans involved in the regime's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs. The North also test-fired its self-proclaimed hypersonic missile on January 5 and 11, ratcheting up tensions amid an impasse in nuclear negotiations with the US.



95% Afghan journos cannot cover events independently

Kabul | Agencies

A new survey has revealed that 95 per cent of Afghan journalists cannot cover events independently and also have a problem of accessing information. The Afghanistan's National Journalists' Union conducted the survey, which was released here on Sunday, across all the 34 provinces of the country during which 500 mediapersons were questioned, Khaama Press reported. According to the survey, 90 per cent of the journalists are facing serious problems in collecting information as there is no specific law of access to the information after the Taliban took over Afghanistan last August. The poll also found that 30 per cent of the journalists find it difficult to interview Taliban authorities, while 50



per cent said that they have problems while speaking to the general public. Masroor Lutfi, head of the Union, said 90 per cent of the ones surveyed think that media is censored in Afghanistan by the Taliban

authorities. The Union also said in the survey that it does not have a legal document and guideline for media coverage set by the Taliban, Khaama Press reported. It said that during the past 20 years there was a legal

document for the activities of media in Afghanistan that had facilitated media coverage and access to information. "Absence of a legal document and guideline is a serious problem that has made people cover stories by themselves and based on their interests. We cannot address incidents happen to journalists until we have a guideline by the Taliban," Lutfi said. Union members believe that the lack of a document and guidelines will definitely lead to the collapse of Afghan media outlets. They said that after the Taliban takeover, the life of Afghan journalists is getting worse day by day and more restrictions are being imposed on access to information. More than 70 per cent of Afghan media outlets have closed due to economic woes after the Taliban.

GLOBAL COVID CASELOAD TOPS 325.7 MN.

Washington: Amid an ongoing resurgence across the world, the global coronavirus caseload has topped 327.7 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 5.53 million and vaccinations to over 9.62 billion, according to Johns Hopkins University. In its latest update on Monday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and the death toll stood at 327,729,989 and 5,539,053, respectively, while the total number of vaccine doses administered has increased to 9,620,454,823. The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 65,698,495 and 850,605, according to the CSSE. The second worst hit country in terms of cases is India (37,122,164 infections and 486,066 deaths), followed by Brazil (23,015,128 infections and 621,327 deaths). The other countries with over 5 million cases are the UK (15,316,457), France (14,283,514), Russia (10,621,410), Turkey (10,459,094), Italy (8,706,915), Spain (8,093,036), Germany (7,991,373), Argentina (7,094,865) Iran (6,218,741) and Colombia (5,543,796), the CSSE figures showed. The nations with a death toll of over 100,000 are Russia (314,838), Mexico (301,334), Peru (203,376), the UK (152,483), Indonesia (144,167), Italy (141,104), Iran (132,044), Colombia (130,996), France (127,957), Argentina (118,040), Germany (115,624), Ukraine (104,663) and Poland (102,305).





MAHA ASKS SC TO RECALL DIRECTION ON RE-NOTIFYING OBC SEATS IN LOCAL POLLS

New Delhi | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government has moved the Supreme Court seeking recall of its order directing the State Election Commission (SEC) to renotify 27 per cent seats reserved for OBCs in the local body polls, as general category seats. A bench, headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, agreed to examine the plea on Wednesday this week. Senior advocate Shekhar Naphade, representing the state government, asked the bench to hear the state government's application for recall of the court's order. On December 15, the Supreme Court ordered the SEC and the state government to convert 27 per cent seats in zila parishads and panchayat samitis reserved for OBC into general category, and issue fresh notification. On December 6, the Supreme Court stayed the Maharashtra government decision to grant 27 per cent reservation for the OBC, which was brought by an ordinance, in the local body elections until further orders. A batch of pleas had been filed in



the top court challenging the state government's ordinance to provide 27 per cent reservation for OBCs. A bench headed by Justice Khanwilkar had directed the SEC to renotify the OBC seats as general category, so that polls for those seats can take place as per law along with elections for remaining 73 per cent

and the results for both polls can be declared simultaneously. On December 6, the top court had observed that 27 per cent OBC reservation could not be implemented without setting up a commission and also without collating data for inadequacy of representation in local government. "Without setting up the

Commission and collating contemporaneous empirical data to ascertain the extent of reservation required to be provided local body-wise, it is not open for the State Election Commission to provide reservation for OBC category despite the statutory provision in that regard," it said in its order.

Bombay HC rejects Nitesh Rane's anticipatory bail plea

Team Absolute | Mumbai



In a massive setback, the Bombay High Court on Monday dismissed an anticipatory bail plea filed by Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Nitesh Rane, son of Union MSME Minister Narayan Rane - in an attempt to murder case. Kept in reserve last week as Nitesh Rane was granted continued interim protection from arrest, the much-anticipated order was pronounced by Justice C.V. Bhadang. However, on the court's request, the prosecution assured it will continue its earlier commitment and refrain from any coercive steps against Nitesh Rane till Jan 27. Among other things, Nitesh Rane, 39, has been accused as the key conspirator behind an attempt to murder case against a ruling Shiv Sena leader Santosh Parab - which allegedly took place on Dec 18 (2021) - in Kankavli town of Sindhudurg district, considered the politi-

cal bastion of the Rane family. On Dec 30, the Principal Judge of Sindhudurg District & Sessions Court Shirishkumar V. Hande had rejected the legislator's anticipatory bail plea which was challenged by Rane on Jan 4 in the Bombay High Court. The Kankavli Police lodged an FIR against Rane Jr following a complaint by Parab, but the BJP legislator claimed that he was being targeted for allegedly mocking Tourism Minister Aaditya Thackeray and to prevent his participation in the Sindhudurg District Cooperative Bank elections held on Dec 30. Nitesh Rane's lawyer, Nitin Pradhan contended before the court that his client had been cooperating with the investigators and had been

questioned for four hours last month. The Special Prosecutor Sudeep Pasbola said that they needed Nitesh Rane's custodial interrogation to corroborate the circumstantial evidence collected in the case, various transactions like who had paid and how much for the attempted contract killing, plus the forensic reports of the confiscated phones of the accused. Meanwhile, BJP Leader of Opposition (Council) Pravin Darekar slammed the Maha Vikas Aghadi government for allegedly misusing the official machinery and pursuing vendetta against Rane Jr, but said they respect the court verdict. The Shiv Sena has demanded that now with the Sindhudurg District & Sessions Court and Bombay High Court have rejected the anticipatory bail plea, Nitesh Rane - who was 'incommunicado' for several weeks - should gracefully go and surrender before the police.

Depressed IIT Bombay student from MP jumps to death from hostel

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A postgraduate student of IIT Bombay in Powai jumped off the 7th floor terrace of his hostel and ended his life, officials said here on Monday. The victim, identified as Darshan Malviya from Madhya Pradesh was said to be battling depression for long and was under treatment. In a purported suicide message penned on a board in his fourth-floor hostel room, he said nobody should be blamed for his act before jumping off the terrace around 4.30 a.m. A security personnel on duty heard the loud thud and ran to investi-



gate and found Malviya lying there in a pool of blood, and alerted the concerned hostel authorities and co-students. They immediately rushed him to the government-run Rajawadi Hospital where he was pronounced dead and informed the Powai Police

who lodged an accidental death report. As per preliminary investigations, Malviya was suffering from depression prior to getting admission in IIT-B in mid-2021 and had been under treatment from inhouse and external experts and doctors.

Maha sees drop in Covid cases, but Omicron infections shoot up

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra notched a significant drop in Covid-19 cases but Omicron infections again shot above the 100-mark and deaths remained in double-digits, health officials said here on Monday. After a record high of 46,723 on January 12, the number of daily Covid infectees fell for the fourth day, from 41,327 on Sunday to 31,111 on Monday. However, the fatalities increased from 29 a day earlier to 24. After notching a peak of 238 Omicron cases on January 14, the state infections of the variant went down to 122 for the day, but a huge spike compared with 8 on Sunday. The government is continuing the intensive surveillance of passengers arriving at the three international airports - Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur -



since December 1. A total of 289,893 travellers have landed here, including 44,494 from the "high risk" countries from where 548 have tested positive and another 639 from other countries, with all their reports sent for genomic sequencing to confirm if they are afflicted by Omicron. Another staggering 4,986 positive samples from field surveys conducted since November 1 have been sent for

genomic sequencing with the results of 67 are awaited, the officials said. Omicron has spread extensively across several districts in the state, and out of the 1,860 cases till date, 959 have recovered. Pune district led the state with 742 cases of the variant, followed by 656 in Mumbai, 130 in Thane, 116 in Nagpur, 59 in Sangli, 25 in Amravati, 19 each in Kolhapur and Aurangabad, 18 in Raigad, 14 in Satara, 11 each in Osmanabad and Akola, six each in Palghar and Buldhana, four in Ahmednagar, three each in Nanded, Latur, Nashik, Jalna, and Gondiya, two each in Solapur, Gadchiroli, and Nandurbar, and one each in Jalna, Bhandara, and Wardha. Of the 31,111 new Covid-19 cases on Monday, Mumbai Metropolitan Region showed a sharp drop from 17,384 a day earlier to 12,885, while Mumbai city came down from 7,895

to 5,956. The next is Pune circle's 8,707 infectees, Nashik circle's 3,136, Nagpur circle's 2,857, Kolhapur circle's 1,177, Latur circle' 1,049, Aurangabad circle's 709 and Akola circle's 591. The number of people sent to home quarantine shot up hugely - from 21,98,414 on Sunday to 22,64,217 now, and another 2,994 have been shunted to institutional quarantine. Mumbai, Pune, Thane, Raigad and Palghar remain at the top with the highest number of active cases currently in the state, with the afflictions shooting up from 265,346 a day before to 267,334, with the recovery rate remaining steady at 94.03 percent. The state's cumulative figures of Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 now stands at 72,42,921 cases and 141,832 deaths, while a total of 68,29,992 patients have fully recovered till date.

AFTER KEJRIWAL, NOW SHIV SENA MAKES OVERTURES TO PARRIKAR'S SON

Team Absolute | Panaji

A day after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal opened the doors of the Aam Aadmi Party for former Chief Minister late Manohar Parrikar's son Utpal to join his party, Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut on Monday urged non BJP parties to jointly support Utpal's candidature for the upcoming assembly polls. "If #UtpalParrikar contests Independent from Panaji seat, I propose all non-BJP parties including @AamAadmiParty @INCIndia @AITCofficial @Goaforwardparty shd support his candidature & not field a candidate against him. This will be a true tribute to ManoharBhai!" Raut tweeted. The overtures from Kejriwal and Raut come at a time when Utpal Parrikar has been at loggerheads with the BJP leadership over his demand for a ticket for the Panaji state assembly seat, which was represented by his father since 1994. Even as Utpal has been sidelined in the BJP's affairs,



ex Maharashtra CM and BJP's Goa in-charge for the assembly polls Devendra Fadnavis, has also said that



being Parrikar's son cannot be the only credential to demand a ticket from the BJP.

65-Year-Old Rajasthan Man Held With Heroin Worth Rs 3 Crore In Mumbai

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A 65-year-old man from Rajasthan has been arrested in Mumbai with heroin worth Rs 3 crore by the Anti-Narcotics Cell (ANC), a police official said today. The accused, identified as Pyare Amanulla Khan, is a native of Rajasthan's Pratappgarh. Khan was arrested by the Mumbai Police's ANC on Saturday, he said. The ANC intercepted the man after receiving a tip-off that drugs in large quantities are being supplied in Mumbai from Rajasthan through rail and road routes. Acting on the information,



an ANC team laid a trap in suburban Borivali and caught the man with a kilogram of heroin when he came to deliver the drug, the official said. Khan was

arrested under relevant sections of the NDPS Act and produced before a court, which remanded him to police custody till January 19, he added.

Goa Raj Bhavan shuts down for public after staffers test positive

Team Absolute | Panaji

The Raj Bhavan in Goa has been closed for visitors until January 23 after several staffers at the Governor's official residence tested positive for Covid-19, an official communique said on Monday. "In view of rising Covid-19 cases and many staff of Raj Bhavan testing positive, it has been decided that the Raj Bhavan will remain closed to visitors for one week until January 23, 2022," the statement said. "All letters, files and correspondence will be received only at the main gate. In case of any exigencies or urgent matters, the visitors/pub-



lic may contact the office at Raj Bhavan for further guidance in the matter," it added. Goa has been witnessing a steep rise in Covid cases over the last few weeks. The state presently has 18,597 active Covid cases.

BMC SUSPENDS MARRIAGE REGISTRATION SERVICE DUE TO COVID SITUATION

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Due to the current Covid-19 situation in Mumbai, marriage registration service has been temporarily stopped in Mumbai, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) said, news agency ANI tweeted. The service will be restarted soon with the facility of appointment, date and time. Mumbai civic body is also exploring the provision of a video KYC option. "Marriage registration service temporarily stopped due to current #COVID19 situation in Mumbai; service will be restarted soon with the facility of appointment, date & time. Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation is also exploring the provision of a video KYC option," said BMC Mumbai reported 7,895 new cases of COVID-



19 out of 57,534 tests conducted during the last 24 hours. According to Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) bulletin, the total number of cases of the disease in Mumbai has gone up to 9,99,862. Eleven people lost their lives due to the virus during the last 24 hours and the death toll has gone up to 16,257. The city has 60,371 active cases. Meanwhile, India reported 2,58,089 fresh COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare informed on Monday. With this, the total number of COVID-19 infections in the country moved up to 3,73,80,253 including 16,56,341 active cases. Active cases account for 4.43 per cent of the total infections. Of the total cases, 8,209 total Omicron cases have been detected so far which is an increase of 6.02 per cent since yesterday.

Massive fire in cloth factory in Bhiwandi

Thane | Agencies

A fire broke out on Sunday night. Property worth crores was destroyed in the fire. Several fire tenders reached the spot as soon as the fire was reported. However, nothing is yet clear about the cause of the fire. There is no report of any casualty in this accident so far. Significantly, last week, a massive fire broke out in a warehouse located in Bhiwandi area of Thane. Three people were badly burnt in this accident. The fire was so severe that five fire tenders were sent to the spot to control it. A



week ago, a major incident was averted at the Mumbai International Airport. In fact, the vehicle that gave

the pushback to the plane caught fire. A fire broke out in the aircraft tug that pushed Air India flight AI-647 from

behind. Passengers were present in the plane when the accident happened. About 85 passengers were to go to Jamnagar in this plane. A video of the incident had surfaced. In which the team of fire brigade is seen extinguishing the fire on the tug. The PRO of Mumbai Airport said that 85 passengers were on board the Mumbai-Jamnagar flight. Then suddenly the pushback tug caught fire. Soon after the incident, firefighters started extinguishing the fire. It is being told that the fire was brought under control within 10 minutes. No person has been harmed in this incident.

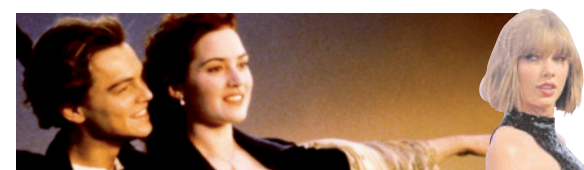
VETERAN PWP LEADER PROF N.D. PATIL DIES AT 93

Kolhapur (Maharashtra) | Agencies

Veteran political leader of Peasants & Workers Party (PWP), an ex-cabinet minister and a four-time legislator, Prof Narayan Dnyandeo Patil passed away following a brief illness, party leaders said here on Monday. Battling from a recent brain haemorrhage, he breathed his last at a private hospital here early on Monday, aged 93. Earlier, the fiery leader - who spent over seven decades in public life - was infected by Covid-19 and had recovered from it despite his advanced age. He dedicated his life to the cause of farmers, peasants, mill-workers, casual labourers, the deprived and down-trodden in society and served as Maharashtra Member of Legislative Council for four terms,



and served as a minister from 1978-1990.



ANGELINA JOLIE CALLS HER 'ETERNALS' CHARACTER A TROUBLED SOUL

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Angelina Jolie, who essays the role of Thena in Chloe Zhao's superhero film 'Eternals', describes her character as someone who is not very comfortable during peace time and this trait emanates from the moral injury of the character.

Due to her special ability to manipulate cosmic energy to augment her life force which grants her virtual invulnerability and immor-

tality, Thena is known for being a social misfit. Commenting on this, Angelina says, "Thena is like a soldier who is affected by the memories of battle and has PTSD or moral injury to live with. Thena just assumes that a fight's coming at her rather than care and kindness." Talking about the complexities of her character, Angelina says, "So she's quite wired, and a lot of her struggle is just holding on to her mind and her center and her peace. I understand her, and how she feels."

She further adds, "Thena

is not comfortable in peace time. She doesn't know how to exist as a civilian or as a lover or as a friend, but she does know war. She knows who she is in combat. But she doesn't know how to go to a party or socialise. She just doesn't have those skills." The film, which features an ensemble of Salma Hayek, Kit Harington, Gemma Chan, Richard Madden and Kumail Nanjiani, is available to stream on Disney+ Hotstar in English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam.



Indian American R&B singer Raveena releases Bollywood-inspired track

New York | Agencies

New York-based R&B singer Raveena Aurora, who got the attention of the music industry with her debut album 'Lucid' (2019), has released what V Magazine calls an "upbeat track (that) merges Bollywood influences with psychedelic imagery".

Taking to Twitter to share her excitement over the music video shoot for 'Rush', which is what the new track is called, Raveena commented: "I really felt like a real life Bollywood princess in this music video shoot."

'Lucid', incidentally, was named one of the best best albums of 2019 by the music staff of NPR, America's public radio broadcasting corporation.

"I wrote 'Rush' a couple years back and the song was the genesis of me exploring a more intense marriage between Bollywood sounds and the pop/R&B music that I grew up on in America," the singer, who was born and raised in Queens, said in a statement.

According to V Magazine, "Rush" marries Raveena's delicate vocals with thumping, Indian-inspired production.

Accompanying the newly-released song, is a music video that sees the singer take on the persona of Asha, a Punjabi space princess. V Magazine describes the "must-watch" video as "glorious" and "hypnotising".

"The song and video are centred around a character I created named Asha, a Punjabi space princess," the singer, a graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, explained in her statement. "(Asha) is transported to a distant planet and learns highly advanced spiritual intelligence from the beings that live there."

The singer concluded: "I wanted to create a campy ode to the colourful '80s Bollywood movies and '70s Western sci-fi movies that I'm obsessed with, complete with a choreographed dance sequence alongside Asha's alien friends."

'Rust' row: Alec Baldwin hands over his phone to authorities for probe

New York | Agencies

Almost a month after investigators obtained a search warrant to seize Hollywood star Alec Baldwin's phone with regards to the fatal shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins on the sets of 'Rust', the actor surrendered his device to law enforcement authorities in Suffolk County, New York.

They will download the data and provide relevant material to Santa Fe County (New Mexico) Sheriff's Office, Juan Rios, a sheriff's spokesman told 'Variety'.

The device in question will help the sheriff's office seek information that will be necessary to piece together a timeline leading up to the October 21 incident, when Baldwin (allegedly unaware) fired a live round during the set-up for a scene from 'Rust', killing Halyna Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza.

Aaron Dyer, who is Baldwin's civil attorney, said in a statement quoted by 'Variety': "Alec voluntarily provided his phone to the authorities this morning so that they can finish their investigation. But this matter isn't about his phone, and there are no answers on his phone."

He added: "Alec did nothing wrong. It is clear that he was told it was a cold gun, and was following instructions when this tragic accident occurred. The real question that needs to be answered is how live rounds got on the set in the first place."

The investigators from Santa Fe had asked Baldwin to surrender his phone voluntarily, but his attorney advised them to get a warrant, according to the search warrant affidavit.

The New Mexico prosecutor's office subsequently got involved in negotiations with Baldwin's attorney to obtain the phone after the warrant was issued on December 16.

Baldwin, who was told that the gun contained only dummy rounds, has said that he does not expect to face charges in the case. Prosecutors, however, have repeatedly said they have not ruled out charges against anyone.



'SHE'S VERY TOUGH, CLEVEREST PERSON IN THE ROOM'

Los Angeles | Agencies

British actress-producer Gemma Arterton, who essays the character of Polly, the nanny of Harris Dickinson's Conrad in the recently released spy action comedy 'The King's Man', describes her character as an alpha that heads the household.

Talking about her character, the actress says, "She is Conrad's nanny, so she's taken care of him. But she's sort of the boss of everyone, including Oxford. She's very tough. She doesn't take any crap. She's the cleverest person in the room. She's very, very smart. But also very funny. A wise-cracker." She continues, "And because she's a servant and part of the staff, she is from a different social background. She's working class. So she isn't posh. There are a lot of gentlemen in the film, and high society, and she's a bit more practical." Commenting on her preparations, Arterton decided that the character should hail from the North of England. "We decided that Harrogate was the perfect accent, because it's a soft Yorkshire accent, but it's quite muscular."

She adds, "We wanted it to sound like a period of the time, but I like it because it gives her a bit of sass. She sounds different to everybody else in the film. A little bit cheeky. A bit sassy." Producer Karl Gajdusek refers to her as a "crackshot nanny," explaining, "She's one thing in front of the world and another thing behind closed doors, or with a gun in her hand."

Matthew Vaughn, director of the movie adds, "Gemma is an incredible actor. She's funny, she can do any accent, she's good at action. She's the whole package. So we were extremely lucky that she said yes to this."

GEMMA ARTERTON ON 'THE KING'S MAN' CHARACTER



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Vanessa Hudgens



ISL TEAM MUMBAI CITY SET TO DEBUT IN AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) | Agencies

Indian Super League (ISL) defending champions Mumbai City are set to debut in the AFC Champions League 2022, after the draw for the event was completed in Kuala Lumpur on Monday, the club said in a statement.

The ISL 2021 champions are placed in Group B with Al Jazira of UAE, Al Shabab of Saudi Arabia and Air Force Club of Iraq. The fixture dates and the venue for Mumbai City's AFC Champions League group stage games will be announced in due course. "40 teams were drawn in 10 groups of four each at the draws, with five groups (A-E) in the west region and five groups (F-J) in the East region," said the club.

Debutants Mumbai City will be the second Indian side to qualify to



the AFC Champions League group stage, after FC Goa took the honours in the last edition and managed three draws and three losses, meaning the feat of a first Indian club to win an AFC Champions League

match is there for the taking. Four clubs are set to make their AFC Champions League debut, with Mumbai City joined by Saudi Arabia's Al Faisaly FC and Ahal FC of Turkmenistan in the West Zone,

while Australian A-League champions Melbourne City will feature in the East Region draw for the first time. Founded in 2014 ahead of the inaugural ISL season, Mumbai City have participated in every season of the domestic tournament, with the 2020/21 season bringing their first title after defeating ATK Mohun Bagan in the final. The 2022 edition of Asia's flagship club competition will follow the expanded format introduced in last season's tournament, with both the East and West Regions to feature five groups of four teams, and five group winners and the best three runner-ups from each region advancing to the Round of 16. Groups A, B and C will feature clubs from the West Zone and the ASEAN Zone will account for Groups H, I and J, while Groups E and F will be contested by teams from the Central Zone.

Djokovic's French Open participation uncertain

Paris | Agencies

World No.1 Novak Djokovic could now be barred from playing in the French Open after the country's sports ministry said that there would be no exemption from the new vaccine pass law and all the athletes must be vaccinated before entering the country.

The French Open is scheduled to take place in May.

Earlier, France's sports minister Roxane Maracineanu on January 7 said, "International Tennis Federation (ITF) protocols at major events meant an unvaccinated player would be entitled to enter France and participate in Roland Garros, which begins in May. Djokovic would not follow the same organisational



arrangements as those who are vaccinated," aracineanu told FranceInfo radio. "But he will nonetheless be able to compete (at Roland Garros) because the protocols, the health bubble, allows it." Djokovic has already been deported from Australia after

having his visa cancelled ahead of the Australian Open. As a result, Djokovic is now banned from Australia for the next three years, and he could now miss Roland Garros too. "The rule is simple. The vaccine pass will be imposed, as soon as the law is promulgated, in establishments that were already subject to the health pass," the French ministry quoted as saying dalystar.co.uk

"This will apply to everyone who is a spectator or a professional sportsperson. And this until further notice. Now, as far as Roland Garros is concerned, it's in May. The situation may change between now and then and we hope that it will be more favourable. So we'll see, but clearly, there's no exemption," the ministry said.

Atalanta end Inter Milan's winning streak

Roma | Agencies

Inter Milan saw their winning streak in Serie A end after a goalless draw with Atalanta, with Samir Handanovic making a string of result-saving saves.

Inter were in fearsome form as they had claimed eight consecutive wins in the league and were fresh from a Supercoppa win over Juventus last week. The Nerazzurri entered Sunday night's game with a relatively full squad to choose from, while La Dea missed several key players including Duvan Zapata and Jospil Ilicic.

Atalanta had more ball possession in the first half, but Inter were close to breaking the deadlock as Alexis Sanchez who scored the last-gasp winner in Supercoppa forced a one-handed save out



of Juan Musso. After the restart, Atalanta created a series of chances, but Handanovic performed well to keep the scoreline down as he used his leg to shield Matteo Pessina's strike, before getting down quickly to deny Luis Muriel's solo run, Xinhua reports. With a game in hand, Inter now lead the table with 50 points, two ahead of AC Milan who host

Spezia on Monday. Roma's new arrival Sergio Oliveira made seamless adaptation to his new club, as the Porto loanee converted a penalty created by himself in his debut, helping the Giallorossi beat Cagliari 1-0 on home turf. Also on Sunday, Hellas Verona sailed away with a 4-2 victory over Sassuolo, while Venezia shared the spoils with Empoli at 1-1.

IRELAND CLINCH HISTORIC ODI SERIES WIN AGAINST WEST INDIES 2-1

Kingston (Jamaica) | Agencies

Half centuries from Andy McBrine and Harry Tector helped Ireland defeat West Indies in a nail-biting third and final One-day International by two wickets to clinch the series 2-1 at the Sabina Park here on Monday (IST).

Set a modest target of 213 to win in 50 overs, the tourists survived a dramatic late batting collapse after McBrine (59) and Tector (52) had patiently scored their half-tens, to secure a famous series win.

Ireland lost four late wickets after being 190/4 and seemingly cruising to their required target. But the visitors held their nerve to complete one of the highest-profile series wins in the history of Irish cricket and collect 10 further ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League points to go to the third spot in the standings.

Earlier the West Indies had suffered a collapse of their own, losing six wickets for just 29 runs to leave their first innings in tatters after Shai Hope's early half-century, with McBrine taking 4/28. And while all-rounder Jason Holder inspired the tail to wag to lift the West Indies to 212 all out from 44.4 overs, it wasn't a high enough target to deny Ireland, with McBrine and Tector hitting half-centuries in what proved to be a nervy second innings. Ireland's five-wicket win in the second ODI on January 13 had set up a winner-takes-all series finale. And it was the West Indies who got off to a flier in the deciding ODI at Sabina Park, as Shai Hope brought up the fastest



half-century of his ODI career, reaching the landmark off just 37 balls. But Hope's departure in the 11th over sparked a collapse as the home side lost three wickets for four runs to heap the pressure on the middle order, with Craig Young and McBrine doing the damage with the ball. And when McBrine struck for the third time to have captain Kieron Pollard caught in the slips for 19, it looked like the West Indies were in danger of posting an uncompetitive total. A rear-guard effort, inspired by Holder (44), Akeal Hosen (23) and Odean Smith (20 not out) helped West Indies past 200. But Young returned to the attack to pick up his third wicket of the game to bring the innings to a close, finishing with figures of 3/43. A famous series win was within reach for Ireland, but their run-chase got off to the worst possible start when William Porterfield fell to the very first ball of the innings, caught on the boundary off

Alzarri Joseph. McBrine and Paul Stirling steadied the ship, with the latter taking the attack to the West Indies and ensuring that Ireland would always be ahead of the required rate with his 44 off 38 balls, featuring five fours and a six. McBrine and Tector added a further 79 runs for the third wicket, with McBrine continuing his outstanding contribution with a 59 off 100 balls before falling to Odean Smith to leave Ireland 152/3. The Irish seemed to be cruising to a comfortable win, but the wickets continued to fall at regular intervals, and when Tector was trapped LBW to Roston Chase for 52 -- his third half-century of the series -- West Indies saw a ray of hope that they may be able to pull off a turnaround. A huge heave saw Gareth Delany caught for a breezy 10 from five, and a catch in the slips by Holder accounted for George Dockrell to leave Ireland eight-down with five runs still required to win. But Ireland's tailenders Mark Adair and Craig Young held their nerve to get the team across the line, with Young's delicate cut for four sealing the two-wicket win.

Brief scores

West Indies 212 in 44.4 overs (Shai Hope 53, Jason Holder 44; Craig Young 3/43, Andy McBrine 4/28) lost to Ireland 214/8 in 44.5 overs (Paul Stirling 44, Andy McBrine 59, Harry Tector 52; Akeal Hosen 3/59, Roston Chase 3/44) by two wickets.

Important to perform well at the Women's Hockey Asia Cup: Deep Grace Ekka

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian women's hockey team has reached Muscat for the upcoming Asia Cup which is set to take place from January 21-28, 2022 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. With strong teams like China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand taking part in the tournament, Team India will have the challenging task of defending the Title in Oman.

Deep Grace Ekka, who will be leading the team as the Vice-Captain, highlighted the importance of the tournament and gave a brief description of the team's preparations.

"It is sort of a new start for us. This will be our first full tournament after the Tokyo Olympics as unfortunately, we could only play one game in Korea at the Women's Asian Champions Trophy 2021. We held a training camp at the Sports Authority of India in Bengaluru after our return and have been able to work on several aspects of



our game in attack and in defence. We are really pumped up to defend our Title at the Women's Hockey Asia Cup," Ekka said in a statement issued here. The top four teams from the tournament will qualify for the 2022 FIH Women's Hockey World Cup to be held in Spain & Netherlands. With FIH Pro League matches and Asian Games also scheduled to take place in 2022, Ekka believes that the tournament can set the momentum for the team. "It is important for us to perform well in the tournament as it will set the momentum for us for the upcoming chal-

lenges in 2022. It is a packed year for us, and the more games we play, the more we will be able to test ourselves and what we have been working on the training grounds," she said.

India had lifted the Women's Hockey Asia Cup trophy in 2017 to qualify for the Women's Hockey World Cup 2018, where they managed to reach the knockout stages. In 2018, India also went on to win the Silver medal at the Asian Games. Ekka believes that successful Title defence in Muscat can once again be the start of Team India's road to a successful

year. "Winning the Women's Hockey Asia Cup trophy in 2017 was a turning point for us and it really gave us the confidence that we can perform on the big stage if we play as a team. Winning the trophy once again can really motivate our players to perform even better this year and have an unforgettable 2022. It is very important for us to have a positive start," she said. Ekka also highlighted her role in the team as a senior player in the defence and the Vice-Captain of the team. "When you are a senior player, you not only have to ensure that you give your 100 percent at all times, but also motivate everyone else to do the same. I take this responsibility of being the Vice-Captain very seriously, and at any point in the game, I am required to contribute, I will do so. It is integral to remain tight in defence, and I will continue to communicate with others in the defence line as and when we need to change our tactics or formation on the field, depending on the situation in a match," she said.

London | Agencies

Despite his team's 4-0 Ashes drubbing, Chris Silverwood has insisted that he wants to stay on as England's head coach.

Since winning the game against India in Chennai last February, England have lost 10 Tests out of 14 and won only one. And with a below-par performance Down Under recently, skipper Joe Root and Silverwood's position has come under intense scrutiny. "My job is going to be under scrutiny," Silverwood was quoted as saying by Daily Mail. "But I would love to help effect those changes within the county structures, and I would like to put some of this right." "I think I'm a good coach and I would love to be given that opportunity, but there are certain things that



are out of my hands at the moment." England lost the five-match Ashes series by losing the first three games back-to-back. The Root-led side lost the first match by nine wickets at the Gabba, the second by 275 runs at Adelaide Oval and the third

game by an innings and 14 runs in Melbourne. England managed to avoid a 5-0 whitewash with a hard-fought draw in the fourth Test at Sydney Cricket Ground. Also, England lost the last Test by 146 runs at the Bellerive Oval, Hobart.

India Open: BAI manages to pull off a successful event despite number of obstacles

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As the 10th edition of the Yonex-Sunrise India Open comes to a close, the Badminton Association of India's core group looking after the preparations can heave a sigh of relief that the tournament which kicked off the 2022 HSBC BWF World Tour season was completed successfully. The hiccups in conducting the 350,000 dollar prize money event started with uncertainty over the clearance for the tournament due to escalating Covid-19 cases in the National Capital at the start of the year. With several officials part of the organising committee testing positive in the precautionary procedures laid out as per guidelines before coming into the tournament. "By the time the tournament week started a small core group was responsible for pulling off this event and I am



deal with. The said players could not stay in the official hotel after testing positive and had to be accommodated elsewhere. "Sending them to a government hospital for quarantine was risky. But thankfully we somehow managed to convince a city hotel while most refused to host these players," Singhania added. The other major area of concern for BAI was hunting for a host broadcaster in a short span of time as the previous contract had expired. "Sony came on board to show the matches and we are grateful to them. It was a touch and go situation but things fell in place even if last minute," he added.

The action will now move to Lucknow for the Syed Modi International next week and then the Odisha Open. BAI is confident that the three-event Indian circuit would provide the perfect start to the new international badminton season despite the challenges of Covid in the country.

Australian Open: Azarenka, Krejckikova advance; Coco Gauff eliminated

Melbourne | Agencies

Two-time former Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka of Belarus, along with No.4 seed of the Czech Republic, Barbora Krejckikova, joined Japan's Naomi Osaka in the second round of the year's opening Grand Slam, scoring easy victories at the Melbourne Park on Monday. Azarenka, the Australian Open champion in 2012 and 2013, eased to her maiden win in six years here with a 6-3, 6-1 win over Hungary's Panna Udvardy, while Krejckikova, the winner of the singles and doubles titles at Roland Garros last year, needed just over an hour to secure her second-round spot at the expense of Andrea Petkovic of Germany, 6-2, 6-0.

Former world No.12 Wang Qiang of China surprised American teenager Coco Gauff 6-4, 6-2 in a first-round upset, and the tournament also lost its first top-10 seed as Ons Jabeur of Tunisia withdrew due to injury. Azarenka, seeded No.24, kicked off her 14th campaign here defeating Udvardy in 65 minutes. This was her first win at Melbourne Park since 2016, as she was beaten in the first round in each of her last two appear-



ances in 2019 and 2021. She missed the 2017, 2018 and 2020 editions of the tournament. Azarenka came at last year's Australian Open, where she fell at the first hurdle to American Jessica Pegula. On Monday, though Azarenka broke early in the first set, Udvardy went neck-and-neck with her over the first nine games. Playing a top-50 player for the first time, Udvardy

forced Azarenka to play some of her best tennis. Krejckikova and Petkovic traded breaks in the first two games of the match but it was the Czech player from then on. Krejckikova won 11 of the next 12 games to beat Petkovic at a major for the second time, having also beaten the German at Wimbledon in 2021. Two years ago at the Australian Open, Wang Qiang upset American legend Serena Williams en route to her best-ever Grand Slam result. Now outside the top-100, the former world No.12 showed she still has plenty left in the tank when she scored an emphatic upset win over No.18 seed Coco Gauff. Wang lost to Gauff twice in 2021 in back-to-back weeks, and the Chinese played just one more event -- the Tokyo Olympics -- after losing to Gauff in the second round of the French Open. Head-to-head history mattered little in the 73-minute victory, though, as Wang played a steady match all through. Wang's win is her first against a top-20 player since that career-defining win against Williams two years ago at this very venue. She had been winless in 2022 so far, losing to Aussies Destanee Aiava and Storm Sanders in Melbourne and Adelaide.



Subhash Ghai, Amjad Ali Khan, Hema Malini pay tribute to Birju Maharaj

Team Absolute | New Delhi

One of the first Bollywood personalities to tweet his personal tribute to Pandit Birju Maharaj was the veteran filmmaker Subhash Ghai. Remembering the days when he was organising a college festival where Maharaj ji was performing, Ghai remembered how he "expressed a romantic conversation" between Lord Krishna and Radha with his eyes doing the talking. "I learnt 'DANCE' means the body but the soul is in the eyes. That's why he was a Jagat Guru in Kathak," tweeted Ghai, who's back in the news for making his debut as music composer for the upcoming film '36 Farmhouse'. Among the cultural personalities who mourned the passing away of Maharaj ji was the sarod maestro, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan Saheb, who tweeted that it marked the end of an era for Indian dance and Kathak. "For me it's been a personal loss," Khan Saheb wrote. "He was loved immensely by my family and his memories live in our hearts forever. The heavens will dance for him today and everyday!"

Along with his tweet, he carried a rare picture of a young Birju Maharaj playing the tabla to his sarod. Besides being a renowned dancer, Maharaj ji was a talented percussionist and was also well-known for being a Hindustani classical vocalist. Maharaj ji, in fact, composed the



music and sang for the two period dance pieces in Satyajit Ray's historical drama 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi', starring Sanjeev Kumar, Saeed Jaffery and Amjad Ali Khan. Describing Maharaj ji as "a true legend" and "Kathak exponent par excellence", the Bollywood veteran and Lok Sabha MP from Mathura, Hema Malini,

tweeted: "His ghungroos were on his ankles till he breathed his last. I always admired and respected him as a giant of the medium of Kathak and will miss his presence on the firmament of dance." Maharaj ji was closely associated with the world of cinema. He choreographed the 'Kaahe Chhed Mohe' track picturised on Madhur

Dixit in the 2002 version of the Shah Rukh Khan-starrer 'Devdas'. And he won the National Award for choreographing 'Unnai Kaanadhu Naan' in the Kamal Haasan multi-lingual megahit 'Vishwaroopam' and the Filmfare Awards for the Bajirao Mastani number 'Mohe Rang Do Laal'.



Rasika Dugal to celebrate her birthday on sets

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Rasika Dugal, who is known for shows like 'Mirzapur', 'Delhi Crime', 'Humorously Yours', will ring in a working birthday as she is currently shooting for the second schedule of the sports drama series 'Spike' in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh.

Commenting on her plans for the day, the actress said, "Being at the center of a sports drama is very exciting for me. On my birthday, I will be shooting for the series 'Spike' in the mountains."

Rasika sees the set as a beautiful contrast for her special day, "The thrilling chaos of a set accompanied by the beautiful calm of the hills. What more could I ask for?"

'Spike' marks Rasika's foray into the genre of sports drama as she will be seen essaying the role of a volleyball coach in the show. As part of her prep, she underwent training for the game for three months in Mumbai.

In addition, Rasika's upcoming projects include the second season of the International Emmy winner 'Delhi Crime' and 'Lord Curzon Ki Haveli'.

AKSHAY KUMAR ON FAMILY HOLIDAY IN RANTHAMBORE TIGER PARK

Team Absolute | Jaipur

Bollywood star Akshay Kumar is in Rajasthan on a family holiday in Ranthambore Tiger National Park in Sawai Madhopur district. Kumar himself revealed this on his Instagram post and shared a video where his daughter is seen feeding cow and later hugging her father getting a little scared.

The Bollywood star on his post in Hindi said, "Mitti ki Khushboo, Gai ko Chara Dena Pedon ki Thandi Hawayen, Ek Alag hi Khushi Hai Apne Bachhon ko Yeh Sab Mehsos Karwane Mein." (The aroma of the soil, feeding the cow, the cool breeze... there is a different joy in making your child feel all this. Now just wish a tiger can be sighted in the forest tomorrow, then it will be icing on the cake!)"

Kumar further said, "Visiting the beautiful Ranthambore National Park. Thank God every day for incredible places like this."

While he posted the video on Sunday midnight, sources said that Kumar will be staying here for next three days.



Priyamani opens up on working with Rana Daggubati and Ajay Devgn

Team Absolute | Mumbai

National Award-winning actress Priyamani who gained pan-India popularity with the multiple award-winning web series 'The Family Man', opens up on her upcoming films 'Virata Parvam' and 'Maidaan'. She shares her experience of working with two much-loved actors - Ajay Devgn and Rana Daggubati. 'Baahubali' fame Telugu star Rana and Priyamani worked together in the film 'Virata Parvam', a Venu Udagula directorial based on a real-life incident.

Talking about working with the stars from two different film industries, Priyamani told reporter: "It is so exciting for me to work with both of them be it Ajay sir and Rana. I knew Rana for a long time and we met also socially but never worked together. Quite interestingly, in 'Virata Parvam' even though I am not playing the heroine of the film, I am playing a pivotal part."

The actress is also playing the wife of Syed Abdul Rahim, the coach and manager of the Indian national football team in the film 'Maidaan' and according to her, since the story of the film is set in a different era the world of that story was very different.

"This is a film I can't wait for it to release because it's filled with cute moments between Syed Abdul Rahim and his wife. Of course, Ajay sir is playing Rahim saab and it shows how his wife was his emotional support throughout the journey. As the story is set in Hyderabad, we spoke in Hindi with a Hyderabad accent...It is in the '50s era and there was an age gap between Rahim saab and his wife. Rahim saab used to teach his wife the English language and there are some moments in the film that would melt many hearts," shared the actress.



Raju Jeyamohan wins 'Bigg Boss Tamil 5'

Team Absolute | Chennai

Actor, mimicry artiste and assistant director Raju Jeyamohan on Sunday walked away with the much-coveted title of 'Bigg Boss Tamil' Season 5.

Actor and show host Kamal Haasan presented the title trophy and a winner's cheque for Rs 50 lakh to Raju Jeyamohan at the grand finale of the popular Tamil reality show.

Interestingly, TV anchor Priyanka Deshpande emerged the first runner up while TV actress Pavni Reddy ended up as the second runner up.

The five contestants to make it to the final round of this fiercely contested season were Raju, Priyanka, Pavni, Amir and Niroop.

Among the final five, Niroop was the first to be evicted, followed by Amir and Pavni.

Raju, who has been a part of television shows and a couple of films, has clearly been the audience's favourite all through the season.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Priya Banerjee