

absolute india

VOL. 9, ISSUE 79, MUMBAI | SUNDAY, JANUARY 02, 2022 ₹5 | PAGE 08

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, BHOPAL AND NEW DELHI

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WHO chief optimistic that pandemic will be beaten in 2022

India has registered a substantial spike in daily Covid cases at 22,775 in a span of 24 hours. Also, 406 deaths were reported in the same time span pushing the toll to 4,81,486.

However, the active caseload jumped to 1,04,781 which constitute 0.30 per cent of the country's total positive cases.

Meanwhile, the Omicron infection tally has increased to 1,431 across the nation. However, of the total cases, 488 have been discharged from hospitals. So far, 23 states have reported Omicron infections.

GENEVA | Agencies

The World Health Organisation (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that he is optimistic that the Covid-



19 pandemic will be defeated in 2022, provided countries work together to contain its spread.

Ghebreyesus warned against "narrow nationalism and vaccine hoarding" in a new year statement, reports the BBC.

His comments come two years since the WHO was first notified of cases of an unknown pneumonia strain in China.

He warned that continuing inequity in vaccine distribution was increasing the risk of the virus evolving.

"Narrow nationalism and vaccine hoarding by some countries have undermined equity and created the ideal conditions for the emergence of the Omicron variant, and the longer inequity continues, the higher the risks of the virus evolving in ways we can't prevent or predict," he said.

"If we end inequity, we end the pandemic," he added.

Global Covid caseload tops 288.1 mn

Washington: The global coronavirus caseload has topped 288.1 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 5.43 million and vaccinations to over 9.14 billion, according to Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Saturday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and the death toll stood at 288,173,131 and 5,436,175, respectively, while the total number of vaccine doses administered has increased to 9,144,469,281.

The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 54,743,982 and 825,536, according to the CSSE.

The second worst hit country in terms of cases is India (34,838,804 infections and 481,080 deaths), followed by Brazil (22,291,839 infections and 619,334 deaths).

EYES ON INDIA'S DEEP OCEAN MISSION SAMUDRAYAAN, SLATED FOR 2024

On a trial basis on November 5, the autonomous National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) under the MoES, developed and tested a 'personnel sphere' for a manned submersible system for 500 metre water depth rating. Now, a Titanium alloy personnel sphere for manned submersible system for 6,000 metre water depth rating, is under development in association with the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram.

Nivedita Khandekar | New Delhi

The launch of Samudrayaan, India's manned scientific submersible under its ambitious Rs 4,077 crore Deep Ocean Mission was the hallmark of the Ministry of Earth Sciences' (MoES) work in the year 2021.

The Deep Ocean Mission is a resolute plan to explore and harness the deep-oceanic resources and support



the 'Blue Economy Initiatives' of the Central government with the MoES being the nodal Ministry implementing this multi-institutional ambitious mission.

The best part is that the Indian

Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is helping to build a specialised sphere for the manned mission to reach 6,000 metres deep into the ocean. The MoES is looking at 2022 as a step closer to the Samudrayaan

as this will be the basic building block for the Mission where scientists sort out the nitty-gritties regarding a programme that less than 10 countries across the globe carry out.

One of the many aims of the Deep Ocean Mission is to study the sea surface temperatures and then also study deep ocean thermal vents, all that can have a bearing on the changing climatic conditions.

Apart from looking at and within the ocean, the MoES also has a primary weather forecaster, i.e. the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

There have been significant improvements in forecasting accuracy with respect to severe weather events, including tropical cyclones, heavy rainfall, fog, heat wave, cold wave, thunderstorms.

And among the most exciting yet least talked about is India's scientific expeditions to Antarctica.

3,000 religious outfits seek land in Magh Mela township

PRAYAGRAJ | Agencies

Even as the land for the Magh Mela township has shrunk due to the Ganga changing its course, there are more than 3,000 religious, social and spiritual organisations who have sought land to set up their respective camps at the 47-day long event.

Officials said that the problem of soil erosion was still persisting forcing the Magh Mela authorities to make alternate arrangements.

District Magistrate (Magh Mela) Shesh Mani Pandey said that the work of land allotment was underway in all five sectors.

He, however, said all sorts of facilities would be given to pilgrims, devotees and visitors in the coming month-long event and all depart-



AS ARTISTES, WE SHOULD KEEP GROWING: SUBHASH GHAI

Mumbai: Filmmaker Subhash Ghai has revealed on the show 'Sa Re Ga Ma Pa' that he will make his debut as a music composer at the age of 76 with his upcoming movie '36 Farmhouse'. He will be appearing as a special guest on the singing reality show. "When I was finalising the story of the film ('36 Farmhouse'), I thought that I should create a song for it too. So, I took some help from the students of Whistling Woods International and created two songs from scratch. The idea was to see if I could also be a music composer. As artistes, I feel we should always grow, and see what we can do with our capabilities," he says. "Hence, this was my attempt at rediscovering myself as a music composer. When the songs come out, you all will be able to tell me how I fared," he adds. The singing reality show 'Sa Re Ga Ma Pa', judged by Himesh Reshammiya, Vishal Dadlani and Shankar Mahadevan, airs on Zee TV.



In 2022, the Women in Blue will be looking to go one step further and claim their first ICC trophy.

Avinash Kr Atish | New Delhi

The year 2022 presents a golden opportunity to the Mithali Raj-led Indian women's cricket team to leave behind the narrative of 'yet so close yet so far' and script a memorable and historic tale of success with a title win in the ICC Women's ODI World Cup, to be held in New Zealand from March 4 to April 3. Having tasted

ODI World Cup in NZ

Chance for India eves to change fortunes



defeat by just nine runs in the final of the 2017 World Cup against England, India went on to reach the T20 World Cup decider in 2020.

However, once again they faltered at the last hurdle, losing to a strong Australian side at the iconic Melbourne Cricket

Ground (MCG) by 85 runs.

While skipper Mithali and seamer Jhulan will be key to India's success at the World Cup in New Zealand, the veteran duo will need plenty of support from India's rising stars like Shafali Verma, Yastika Bhatia, Richa Ghosh

and Sneha Rana, among others. Overall, India have a good mix of youth and experience, and when they open their World Cup campaign against Pakistan on March 6 at Tauranga, they will be one of the title contenders in the quadrennial event. England and Australia have been India's nemesis in the ICC events, but as they say, "If it doesn't challenge you it doesn't change you," and the Mithali Raj-led side will look to change their fate and grab their first ICC silverware.

A World Cup title in New Zealand and the women's IPL could be the icing on the cake for women's cricket in India in 2022.

'NEW NORMAL' MOST USED PHRASE IN 2021, REVEALS GOOGLE

- According to Ngrams, it's been in use since at least the year 1800, which is how far the tool's data goes back, and has gently, steadily risen since.
- Google's 'Ngrams' tool (launched in 2009 by part of the Google Books team) has revealed how words and phrases have fallen and risen in popularity over time.
- And then, "new normal" just sort of faded away, only to return big amid the pandemic.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

While the phrase "now more than ever" was the one mostly searched and used in 2020, it was the turn of "new normal" amid the Covid-19 pandemic that was used the most in 2021, according to Google.

Ngrams shows how books and other pieces of literature have used certain words or phrases over time, and we can chart their popularity throughout the years.

This isn't the first time "new normal" appeared in the lexicon, though.

"It began to see small bursts of usage in literature and other writ-



ing in the mid-19th century -- though if you use Ngrams to see some of the examples of how it showed up, 'anew normal' was often in reference to types of academic institutions," said Molly

McHugh-Johnson, Contributor, The Keyword (Google Blog).

Lastly, she took a look at "hybrid," as hybrid workplaces are becoming the norm in the pandemic and Google has also adopted this. What "hybrid" means hasn't really changed, but it's the situations we're applying it to that have -- there's a much wider scope of daily life that falls under this category. "Hybrid" didn't change, but how we live has 2020 felt in many ways like a pause in life, and this year we began finding new, creative ways to adapt, a little of our old methods, mixed with the new," said McHugh-Johnson.

10th pass Jharkhand Education Minister to appear for intermediate exam

RANCHI | Agencies

Jharkhand Education Minister Jagarnath Mahto, who missed the last year's intermediate examination after he contracted Covid-19, is going to appear for the exam this year to be conducted by the Jharkhand Academic Council.

The 54-year-old minister is a Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) MLA from Dumri assembly constituency and is just matriculate. "Age doesn't matter. There is no age for study," he said.

Mahto said he has the resolve to answer the critics and complete his study with pride. In December 2019, when the new government was formed in Jharkhand under Hemant Soren, he was given the charge of Education Ministry. Several people raised questions over his academic qualification, but Mahto said that he discharges his duty with utmost seriousness. Mahto hit the headlines when he resolved the issue of service conditions of more than 65,000 teachers

working temporarily for more than two decades. Mahto had taken admission in intermediate arts at Nawadah Inter College in his own Assembly constituency in August 2020, but a month later he was hit hard by Covid-19. He remained in coma for a long time. He was airlifted to Chennai where he had successful lung transplant and returned to Jharkhand after nearly nine months of treatment. Since then he is discharging his duties of Education Minister.

RS 20K CRORE UNDER KISAN SAMMAN NIDHI RELEASED, PM STRESSES ON NATURAL FARMING

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday released the 10th instalment of over Rs 20,900 crore of financial benefit to over 10 crore farmers under the 'PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana'.

Under the scheme, Rs 6,000 per annum is provided to each eligible farmer family in three instalments.

In a virtual programme wherein tens of hundreds of farmers joined in from across India, the Prime Minister also released over Rs 14 crore grants to 351 Farmers' Producer Companies (FPOs).

The formation and promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) Scheme in February 2020 is aimed at empowering farmers and provided for a budget of Rs 6,866 crore for the same till 2027-28. The Prime Minister said the FPOs help the small farmers in five ways: Better bargaining power, increase to large scale trade, innovation, better risk management and making changes and bringing around changes according to the market demand. "Our farmers are benefiting from the



FPOs in organic, bamboo, honey etc production. But we still import a lot of things that are in demand in the country. For example edible oil which needs a lot of foreign exchange. With an aim to help the local farmers, we have embarked on the National Palm Oil Mission, which will not just make us 'atmanirbhar' but also help our farmers earn more," he said. Modi also listed the achievements of his government in the year 2021 and said, the world saw how major achievements are possible when all Indians come together. Among the achievements listed were 1.45 crore vaccination doses, Olympic performances by Indian sportspersons, formation of startups and India's role as a global

leader when it comes to climate change. Modi urged all the farmers to turn to natural farming. He also reiterated the 'vocal for local' slogan that will benefit Indians and give a global identity to Indian products and services. "In this new year, and in the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, it is the innovation that will help us tide over the difficult times," the Prime Minister said and appealed to people to keep their surroundings clean. Modi also used Sanskrit slokas and mantras in his speech and also explained their meaning in Hindi. Before his speech, the Prime Minister interacted with representatives of FPOs from Punjab, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu

and Gujarat. The highlight of this was the interaction with Veer Pandi Kalanjiyam Jeevit FPO from Tamil Nadu which is run entirely by women. Two short films - one on FPOs and another on Natural Farming - were also shown during the programme. Earlier, Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Narendra Singh Tomar termed Modi as modern day Bhagirath, who brought water to parched Gujarat. Tomar also mentioned how being a chief minister for 13 years helped Modi appreciate the difficulties that state has while dealing with the Centre and how that helped him plan schemes better when he became the Prime Minister.

Five die in firecracker unit blast near Sivakasi in TN



CHENNAI | Agencies

At least five people died in a blast at a firecracker unit in Pudupatti near Sivakasi on Saturday morning. Ten people are seriously injured in the blast.

The accident took place in Saturday morning and fire and rescue personnel are working to douse the flame.

The firecracker unit is owned by Murugan of Pudupatti and the explosion took place at the chemical blending unit.

Sivakasi fire station officer,

K.P. Balamurugan who is leading the rescue operations, said that the fire and rescue personnel have retrieved three bodies and are searching under the debris. Two people died in the hospital and the condition of ten others who are admitted with injuries is serious. Fire force teams from Sivakasi and Vathairairuppu stations are leading the rescue operations and 20 units are at the premises. The Nathampatti police have registered a case and commenced investigation.

TERRORIST KILLED IN ENCOUNTER AT KUPWARA IN KASHMIR

Srinagar: One terrorist has been killed in an encounter between terrorists and security forces at Jumagund area of North Kashmir's Kupwara district, officials said on Saturday.

"One unidentified terrorist killed in an encounter at Jumagund area of Kupwara. Army and Police are on the job," police said.

The firefight between terrorists and security forces took place after a joint team of the police and the security forces cordoned off the area and launched a search operation on the basis of specific information about presence of terrorists.

As the security forces zeroed in on the spot where terrorists were hiding they came under a heavy volume of fire that triggered the encounter.

Large cache of explosives recovered in Mizoram

AIZAWL | Agencies

The security forces have recovered a large cache of explosives and war-like stores in Saita district bordering Myanmar in southern Mizoram, officials said on Saturday.

Defence and police sources said that acting on secret information, the Assam Rifles troopers and the police in a joint operation made the recovery from an abandoned location near the Mawhre village in Saita district late on Friday evening.

The recovered explosives include 81 kgs of liquid explosives, 94 kgs of Belox granular explosives, 395 kgs of Gelatin sticks, 356 rounds of 12-gauge, large cache of 70 mm cartridges, one Improvised Explosive Device, Lead acid batteries, two detonators and other stores, including foreign origin communication equipment. The recovered explosives and other stores have been handed over to the police for further legal proceedings. No one has yet been arrested in connection with the recovery.



A defence statement said that the ongoing smuggling of explosives, weapons and war-like stores is a major cause of concern for the state of Mizoram, especially along the India-Myanmar Border.

The security forces are in relentless pursuit to ensure peace and harmony in the region by negating any nefarious design of the insurgents, the statement said.

Police officials suspect that the

explosives were smuggled from Myanmar, which shares 510 km unfenced and mountainous border with Mizoram, which also shares 318 km unfenced border with Bangladesh.

Assam CM to reduce security entourage by 50%, PSOs of politicians to be cut drastically

GUWAHATI | Agencies

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Saturday that his security entourage would be reduced by 50 per cent and the personal security officers (PSOs) of many politicians, officials and others would also be reduced by half to minimise government expenditure.

The Chief Minister said that over 4,240 PSOs are now being posted with the politicians, in-service and retired officials, businessmen, surrendered militants, tea estate owners and others. According to Sarma, who also holds the home portfolio, of the 4,240 PSOs, 2,526 PSOs are deployed with the politicians of different parties, 854 with in-service and retired civil officials and 546



with judicial officers. "We have formed a security review committee to examine the necessity of PSOs for different persons. We want to reduce the number of PSOs by half. Except those people holding constitutional posts, PSOs for others would be reduced drastically," the Chief Minister told the media after the New Year's first Cabinet meeting. Noting that the Assam government has been spending around Rs 400 crore every

year to provide PSOs to the politicians, officials and others, Sarma said that currently there are around 22 vehicles in his security entourage which would be reduced by seven to eight soon. "PSOs should not be the status symbol... It will be based on the necessity of the person concerned," he said. Sarma had recently courted a controversy by saying that PSOs are a "Congress culture". Slamming the Chief Minister over his "the PSO system is a Congress culture" remark, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee President Bhupen Kumar Borah and Congress' Rajya Sabha member Ripun Bora had asked the Chief Minister to surrender his huge security cover."

INDO-B'DESH BORDER IN TRIPURA TO BE TOTALLY FENCED BY 2022: BSF

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Border Security Force (BSF) said on Saturday that the India-Bangladesh border in Tripura will be totally fenced by 2022 to ensure full-proof security.

The Inspector General of BSF, Sushanta Kumar Nath, said that over 80 per cent of the fencing work on the 856 km India-Bangladesh international border in Tripura has already been completed.

He also said that substantial fencing work has been completed last year in Tripura's eastern sector and the remaining work on a 31 km porous patch has been taken up on a priority basis wherein the single row fencing has gained momentum in the state and 10 km was fenced in last year. Nath also said that setting up of floodlights is going hand-in-hand with the fencing work.

"We are hopeful of completing fencing and setting up of floodlights along the entire stretch of the India-



Bangladesh border in the state by 2022," he added. He also said that 218 people have been arrested for sneaking across the international border,

Free power supply for irrigation, households: Akhilesh Yadav

LUCKNOW | Agencies

A head of the crucial Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday promised 300 units of free electricity to households, if voted to power.

The former chief minister also promised free electricity for irrigation purposes.

Wishing the people a happy New Year, Yadav tweeted in Hindi, "2022 will be a new year with new light for a new Uttar Pradesh. Three hundred units of electricity for households (domestic consumers) will be given for free and electricity for irrigation will be free." A similar promise was made by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in September 2021.

The Arvind Kejriwal-led party had promised 300 units of free electricity to all domestic consumers, waiver of outstanding bills of 38 lakh



families and 24-hour power supply. AAP leader and Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia had also announced free electricity to

farmers. The AAP has made similar promises in Punjab, Uttarakhand and Goa where Assembly polls are due this year.

NEW YEAR HIGH: TELUGU STATES SELL LIQUOR WORTH RS 300 CR

HYDERABAD/AMARAVATI | Agencies

The New Year celebrations in Telugu states saw liquor sales of nearly Rs 300 crore.

In Telangana, tipplers guzzled liquor worth Rs 172 crore in a single day, while in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, New Year liquor sales netted an estimated Rs 124 crore for the state treasury.

According to sources, this is only the preliminary estimates and the final figures could be higher.

In Hyderabad and in the rest of Telangana, the authorities had extended the timing for pubs, bars and liquor shops, which further contributed to the jump in sales.

The Prohibition and Excise Department of Telangana permitted licence holders of bars, licensees of event permit managements and in-house licensees of Telangana Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) to serve liquor up to 1 a.m. on the intervening night of December 31, 2021 and January 1, 2022.

Relaxing the rules, the government also allowed liquor shops to sell booze till 12 midnight of December 31. Hyderabad and neighbouring



Ranga Reddy districts recorded the highest sales.

In December, Telangana earned a record Rs 3,459 crore from liquor sales. According to officials, the liquor sales during December 2020 were Rs 2,765 crore. For the entire 2021, liquor sales in the state are expected to be Rs 30,222 crore.

The Excise Department recently approved 104 more shops and 159 bars in Telangana. The state presently has 2,220 liquor shops and 1,500

pubs, bars, restaurants and tourism hotels.

Andhra Pradesh too extended timings for bars and liquor shops and availability of premium brands at retail shops led to massive sales on New Year eve.

The government of Andhra Pradesh also earned record revenues of over Rs 12,000 crore from liquor sales in the first eight months of 2021. For the entire calendar year, the sales are expected to touch the Rs 20,000

crore-mark. The YSR Congress Party government in Andhra Pradesh has come under criticism over the increase in liquor sales. The opposition parties have questioned the government's commitment for total prohibition in phases. The state government, which is the sole wholesaler and retailer of liquor, has claimed that the consumption of liquor has come down over the last two-and-a-half years. It also claimed that it stands by its word to impose prohibition.

Man held for posting pvt pics of Delhi girl on social media

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Police on Saturday said they have arrested a man for allegedly posting private pictures of a girl on social media and blackmailing her for the same.

The accused, identified as Rajesh Singh Suman, a resident of Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh, was arrested under sections 354D (stalking), 384 (extortion), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code. According to an official, a complaint was received at Dwarka South police station in which a girl levelled allegations against the accused for stalking, blackmailing and threatening her. She alleged that she came in contact with the accused through a matrimonial website and also met him a couple of times. The complainant informed that she had shared her personal photographs with the accused. The marriage proposal was somehow later cancelled after which the accused started blackmailing and threatening the complainant to post her private photos on social platforms and share her photographs with multiple acquaintances. She further



alleged that the accused made her fake Facebook and Instagram accounts in which he was posting her pictures.

Based on the complaint, police registered an FIR and arrested the accused from Aligarh. During interrogation, the accused disclosed to have committed a number of such offences with various victims and the same were being analysed.

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GUWAHATI | Agencies

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"We have formed a security review committee to examine the necessity of PSOs for different persons. We want to reduce the number of PSOs by half. Except those people holding constitutional posts, PSOs are a 'Congress culture'. Slamming the Chief Minister over his 'the PSO system is a Congress culture' remark, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee President Bhupen Kumar Borah and Congress' Rajya Sabha member Ripun Bora had asked the Chief Minister to surrender his huge security cover."

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"We are hopeful of completing fencing and setting up of floodlights along the entire stretch of the India-



Bangladesh border in the state by 2022," he added. He also said that 218 people have been arrested for sneaking across the international border,

while contraband items worth Rs 35.64 crore have been seized last year. The BSF IG informed that two militants of the proscribed outfit National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) surrendered to the BSF on Saturday and one of them took arms training in the neighbouring Bangladesh.

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VOL. 9, ISSUE 79, MUMBAI | SUNDAY, JANUARY 02, 2022 ₹5 | PAGE 08

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, BHOPAL AND NEW DELHI

12 DEAD, 14 INJURED IN STAMPEDE AT MATA VAISHNO DEVI SHRINE



LONDON | Agencies

Twelve people were killed and 14 injured on Saturday in a stampede at the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district.

The stampede was triggered by a "minor altercation among some young boys" amid a massive rush of devotees on New Year's Day, officials said today. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "personally monitoring and keeping track of the tragic situation," a minister in his office said.

Mukesh Singh, the Additional Director General of Police or ADGP, confirmed that 12 pilgrims have died and at least 14 are injured in the stampede. "All the injured have been taken to a hospital," he added. The incident occurred outside the sanctum sanctorum of the shrine on Trikuta hills. Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha said that a high-level inquiry has

been ordered into the stampede. "Preliminary information from the scene suggests that a minor altercation among some young boys led to the stampede at the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in which 12 people unfortunately died," Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police Dilbag Singh said.

"Police and officials from the civil administration were quick to respond, and the order within the crowd was immediately restored, but by that time, the damage had been done," he told Press Trust of India. He further said that all those injured have been taken to hospitals, where the condition of some is stated to be "serious".

Officials of the shrine said the stampede occurred when a large number of devotees entered the Mata Vaishno Devi Bhawan without permission slips.

"It took place outside the sanctum sanctorum of the shrine. Senior offi-

cials of the government and the shrine board are on the spot.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi is personally monitoring the relief and rescue operation," officials said. "Extremely saddened by the loss of lives due to a stampede at Mata Vaishno Devi Bhawan. Condolences to the bereaved families. May the injured recover soon. Spoke to JK LG Shri @manojsinha_ji, Ministers Shri @DrJitendraSingh Ji, @nityanandraiabjp Ji and took stock

PM announces ex-gratia

The Prime Minister's Office also announced an amount of Rs 2 lakh each for the dead from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund. The PMO said that the amount would be given to the families of those who lost their lives due to the stampede. The injured would be given Rs 50,000, the PM's Office added.

of the situation", Modi said on his official Twitter handle.

YATRA RESUMES AFTER STAMPEDE INCIDENT

Jammu: Yatra at the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine resumed Saturday afternoon after stampede at the shrine in the early hours of Saturday. Divisional Commissioner (Jammu) Raghav Langar told media at Katra (Yatra base camp) that the Yatra, halted for a brief period after the stampede, resumed at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi shrine. He said that an inquiry was ordered to ascertain the reasons behind the incident. Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha ordered a high level inquiry into the stampede incident which will be headed by principal secretary home with divisional commissioner Jammu and Additional DGP Jammu as members.

Case against Narasimhanand Yati for Hate Speech

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Uttarakhand police have filed a hate speech case against Yati Narasimhanand - the organiser of a 'dharam sansad', or 'parliament of religions', in Haridwar last month that triggered outrage after some Hindu religious leaders urged people to take up arms against Muslims and called for genocides. Narasimhanand - who has previously also been accused of inciting violence with incendiary speeches - was one of those who spoke at the event. He is the fifth person to be named in a FIR (first information report) that was filed four days later and only after public calls for action.

The others named in the FIR are Sagar Sindhu Mahajar, a woman identified as 'Sadhu Annapurna' and a man named Dharam Das, as



well as a Wasim Rizvi aka Jitendra Tyagi. All five have been charged with promoting enmity between religious groups and defiling a place of worship. Clips from the event - held from December 17 to 20 - were circulated on social media and drew sharp criticism from former military chiefs, activists and even tennis legend Martina Navratilova. According to a police complaint filed by Trinamool Congress leader and RTI activist Saket Gokhale, others at the gath-

ering were the Hindu Raksha Sena's Prabodhanand Giri, BJP women's wing leader Udit Tyagi, and BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay, who is out on bail in a hate speech case. However, the organisers and speakers at the event have insisted they did nothing wrong. Speaking to NDTV, Prabodhanand nonchalantly said: "I am not ashamed... I am not afraid of police. I stand by my statement... If anyone tries to kill me, I will fight back. I am not afraid of the law."

Before New Year celebrations, 46.11 lakh filed ITR

New Delhi: The announcement by Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj on the last day of 2021 seems to have worked, as 46.11 lakh Income Tax Returns (ITRs) were filed on December 31, 2021, taking the overall total to 5.89 crore for the 2021-22 assessment year (AY). Bajaj had announced that the government will not extend the due date for ITR filing, as it did in 2020 when the ITR filing due date was extended till January 10, 2021, which witnessed 31.05 lakh ITRs being filed on the last date. In 2020-21, the total number of ITRs filed was 5.95 crore, a bit higher to 2021-22, which stood at 5.89 crore. Out of 5.89 crore ITRs filed for AY 2021-22 as on December 31, 2021, 49.6 per cent are ITR-1 (2.92 crore), 9.3 per cent are ITR-2 (5.48 lakh), 12.1 per cent are ITR-3 (71.05 lakh), 27.2 per cent are ITR-4 (1.60 crore), and 1.3 per cent are ITR-5 (7.66 lakh).

5,789 NGOs' licence under FCRA cancelled as on date, MHA clarifies

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) clarified on Saturday that only 5,789 NGOs' licences to get donations from abroad under Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) have been cancelled.

Reacting to reports that over 12,000 non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) FCRA licences have been revoked for not meeting the renewal criteria, officials in the Home Ministry said this was not correct as only 5,789 licences under FCRA were not renewed.

They also said that these associations did not apply for FCRA renewal despite the reminder of the ministry, so naturally their FCRA licences automatically got cancelled on January 1, 2022.

"Out of the 18,778 NGOs whose FCRA licences were supposed to be renewed between September 30, 2020 and December 31, 2021, only 12,989 associations applied for scrutiny before the competent authority under MHA. Therefore, the authorisation to receive foreign donations for 5,789 NGOs has been cancelled as of now, because of



non-renewal of FCRA," the officials explained.

The officials added that during the process of scrutiny of 12,989 NGOs, 179 were rejected because of non-compliance with the criteria of the amended FCRA provisions.

As on date, there are 16,829 NGOs active with their FCRA valid documents,

they further said. Earlier on Saturday, it was reported that applications for renewal of over 12,000 NGOs, including Oxfam and the Jamia Millia Islamia, were not cleared by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The MHA did not disclose the names of the prominent NGOs which have been denied the renewal of FCRA licence.

More rains for coastal Tamil Nadu, cold wave to continue in NW India: IMD

Cold day to severe cold day conditions prevailed in isolated pockets over Punjab and Madhya Pradesh.

Dense to very dense fog occurred in isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, west Madhya Pradesh and East Rajasthan and moderate fog in isolated pockets over west Uttar Pradesh and east Madhya Pradesh.

Scattered to fairly widespread light/moderate rainfall is likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Delhi, north Rajasthan and west Uttar Pradesh during January 5 to 7 and light isolated rainfall is also likely over west Madhya Pradesh on January 5.

Another day of isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall activity is in store for coastal Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and Karaikal even as northwest India would continue to witness cold wave conditions, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicted on Saturday.

"A cyclonic circulation lies over southwest Bay of Bengal, off south Sri Lanka coast at middle tropospheric level. Under its influence, scattered to fairly widespread rainfall with isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall activity is very likely to continue over coastal Tamil Nadu, Puducherry & Karaikal on Sunday and isolated heavy rainfall over the same region during subsequent 24 hours and decrease thereafter," the IMD said.

A fresh active 'Western Disturbance' and its associated induced cyclonic circulation is likely to affect northwest Indian region from January 3, and under its influence, fairly widespread to widespread rainfall/snowfall is likely dur-



ing January 3 to 7 with possibility of isolated heavy rainfall over Jammu and Kashmir on January 4 and 5 and over Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand on January 5, the IMD said, adding, isolated hailstorms are also likely over Jammu and Kashmir on January 4 and 5 and over Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand on January 5. Isolated thunderstorms activity is likely over Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan, accompanied with hail storms over Punjab on

January 5. Earlier on Friday, the minimum temperatures were in the range of 2 to 6 degrees Celsius over Punjab, north Rajasthan, Haryana and adjoining west Uttar Pradesh. Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions prevailed in over isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana and northeast Rajasthan and cold wave conditions were also witnessed in isolated pockets over Himachal Pradesh, east Uttar Pradesh and northwest Rajasthan.

Delhi: Mob attacks police team out to nab drugs supplier, 6 including 4 cops hurt

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Four Delhi Police personnel were injured while two others, of which one has been identified as a notorious criminal, received bullet injuries on Saturday when a police team had gone to nab a drug supplier in the Indrapuri area of the national capital.

Furnishing details about the encounter, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North District), Brijendra Kumar Yadav, told reporters that the incident took place at around 8.30 a.m. when a narcotics team reached Indrapuri to arrest drug smuggler Dharamveer alias Palla and conducted a raid at his house. However, the accused was not present there at the time of the raid.

"As the police team came out of the house, Dharamveer came from the front with about 50-60 people carrying sticks and stones. The mob attacked the police team and pelted stones on them," the DCP said.

Seeing the furious mob, the police retaliated and fired shots in the air. However, Yadav said, the rioters also opened fire on the police party. During the exchange of gunfire, two rioters received bullet injuries.

"In an attempt to defend the police party, Inspector Brijpal opened fire by aiming at the feet of the attackers," Yadav said.

The two injured persons have been identified as Amit and Shoaib. Amit, who is a rela-



tive of drug kingpin Dharamveer, was involved in six criminal cases in the past, including cases of robbery, dacoity and attempt to murder. The injured have been admitted to the hospital. The condition of Shoaib is stated to be critical. "Both Amit and Shoaib were active part of the mob that attacked the police," the DCP said, adding that the police are currently collecting more details about Shoaib. The four police personnel injured in the incident are Brijpal, ASI Rajesh, and Constables Rinku and Vinod. Meanwhile, Dharamveer took advantage of the chaos and fled from the spot, the senior official added.



MP LOGS 124 COVID CASES, INDORE REMAINS HOTSPOT

Team Absolute | Bhopal

With 124 new Covid-19 cases reported in the last 24 hours, Madhya Pradesh joined the list of states reporting over 100 cases daily. According to the state government's data, out of the total, 62 cases were reported in Indore alone while the capital city Bhopal registered 27 new cases.

The other districts where new Covid cases were reported are - Jabalpur (8), Ujjain (6), Khargone (4), Hoshangabad (3), Shahdol (3), Narsinghpur (2), Ratlam (2), while one case was reported in each district of Khandwa, Rajgarh, Betul, Chhindwara, Gwalior, Sagar and Vidisha.

With this the tally of active cases in Madhya Pradesh has reached close to 500 (497). However, no Covid related fatality was reported in the state in the last 24 hours. The daily positivity rate was reported at 0.2 per cent



The count of recoveries rose to 7,83,059, after 34 people were discharged from hospitals, while the toll stood at 10,533, as no fresh casualties were reported during the day, the official said. The state government said that the vaccination for 36 lakh school children in the 15-18 age group in Madhya Pradesh will begin

from Monday, with plans afoot to administer doses to 12 lakh beneficiaries in this segment on the first day.

As per the government, there are 36 lakh registered school children in the 15-18 age group in the state and the vaccination drive for them will start from January 3. "We have plans to administer doses to 12 lakh chil-

dren on Monday. The state had earlier set a record of 30 lakh doses in a single day. However, with children we can't be hasty. After covering school children, we will target school dropouts," said state Immunisation Officer Dr Santosh Shukla.

Meanwhile, Shukla said 98 per cent of eligible beneficiaries, or 5.22 crore out of 5.49 crore, have got the second dose of the vaccine in the state.

With the addition of 61,440 samples tested during the day, the total number of tests conducted in the state went up to 2,37,53,449, the official added. As per a government release, 10,24,38,430 COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered so far in the state, of which 39,468 jabs were given on Saturday.

Coronavirus figures in MP are as follows: Total cases 7,94,089, new cases 124, death toll 10,533, recovered 7,83,059, active cases 497, number of tests so far 2,37,53,449.

MP High Court Decides To Increase Court Working Hours By 30 Minutes

Team Absolute | Jabalpur

In an attempt to deal with the vast number of pending cases before it, the Full Court of the Madhya Pradesh High Court has decided to increase its working hours by 30 minutes and has made amendments to this effect in the Madhya Pradesh High Court Rules, 2008.

Earlier, the working hours of the High Court were from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm, with a recess from 1.30 pm to 2.30 pm. Post the amendments, the High Court of Madhya Pradesh will now function from 10.15 am to 4.30 pm, with the recess

Will make efforts together for fulfilment of Prime Ministers resolve for welfare of farmer: CM

- PM Modi transferred 20 thousand crores to 11.37 crore farmers of the country
- Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan acknowledges gratitude of PM Modi

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, during his stay at Shirdi Dham in Maharashtra on Saturday virtually listened to the address of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the occasion of transfer of 10th instalment of Kisan Samman Nidhi. Chouhan has tweeted and said that "I and the farmers of Madhya Pradesh are determined to make every possible effort together to fulfill the resolutions taken by PM Modi for the welfare of farmers. Chief Minister expressed heartfelt gratitude to PM Modi for transferring an amount of 20 thousand crores online to 11 crore 37 lakhs farmers of the country in the form of 10th instalment on the first day of the New Year today in PM Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme launched for the economic empowerment of farmers. Chouhan said that every effort is being made to promote organic farming in



BJP, CONGRESS CONTINUE POLITICAL SLUGFEST OVER OBC QUOTA IN MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Though local body elections in Madhya Pradesh have been cancelled, both the Congress and the BJP continue to attack each other over the OBC reservation issue, with an eye on the next Assembly polls scheduled in 2023.

In a fresh twist, former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Kamal Nath on Saturday accused the BJP government of trying to suppress the people belonging to Other Backward Class (OBC). He alleged that the state government is using its power to threaten the members of the OBC community.

Nath said that the OBC community was to launch a protest at Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's residence on January 2, but the BJP government threatened them by issuing notices.

"OBC people said they are being intimidated, notices are being served to them. They are being made to sit in



police stations. Why is the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government so afraid of the OBC community," Nath asked.

He further said that the BJP government is neither doing anything for the OBC community, nor is it willing to listen to them.

The OBC Mahasabha has decided to launch a protest on Sunday for excluding them from reservation in panchayat polls and many other

issues related to the community. However, there is uncertainty whether the protest will be held.

The state government on Friday (Dec 31) issued the Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj and Gram Swaraj Amendment Ordinance (II), annulling Kamal Nath government's ordinance of 2019. The move came days after the Shivraj government withdrew its ordinance on panchayat

elections. The fresh ordinance stated that if notification of election is not issued for any reason by the State Election Commission within 18 months from the date of publication of the delimitation or division of panchayats or their wards or constituencies done before the expiry of the term of panchayats, such delimitation or division shall be deemed cancelled on the expiry of the period of 18 months.

In such a case, the delimitation or division of these panchayats and their wards and constituencies will be done afresh. Delimitation proceedings were held in September 2019 for the election of panchayats for the year 2020 in the state, which has been cancelled as a result of this ordinance. Now, the process of delimitation and division of panchayats and their wards and constituencies will be done again, on the basis of which the pending process of election will be completed.

GOVERNOR EXTENDS NEW YEAR GREETINGS



Bhopal: Governor Mangubhai Patel exchanged New Year greetings at Raj Bhavan on Saturday. He congratulated all the officers and employees and wished the family a healthy and long life. Governor Patel was also greeted by the teachers and children of Raj Bhavan Kumarpura School. Additional Chief Secretary Horticulture and Food Processing JN Kansotia, Principal Secretary to the Governor DP Ahuja, Additional Secretary Manoj Khatri, Law Officer DPS Gaur, Aides-de-camp Subhash Anand, Agam Jain, Security Officer Inderjit Singh Chavda, Controller Surbhi Tiwari, BK Srivastava, Sangeeta Jain, Geeta Sukumar, Hospitality Officer Shilpi Diwakar, Secretariat of Raj Bhavan, Horticulture, all officers and employees of Police Barracks, Public Works Department and Press Cell greeted the Governor and congratulated him on the new year.

5-year-old boy invents a unique bottle design, receives patent

The bottle is especially designed for the use of sportspersons and travellers.

Team Absolute | Indore:

A 5-year-old boy in the city, Yatharth Jain is the youngest boy in the country to have registered a patent for his invention.

Yatharth has invented a unique convenient bottle design and his work has been registered as a patent by the Government of India. The bottle is especially designed for the use of sportspersons and travellers. It is designed on the physics concept of 'controlled pressure' and the aim is to provide spill proof bottles to users.

According to reports, the bottle is made of soft & safe plastic and there is a tap on the top of the bottle. In order to use the bottle, the users have to open the tap and squeeze the bottle to let the water come out of the bottle. The water supply would be continued till the bottle was squeezed and as soon as the squeeze pressure is released



the water supply will be stopped. One had to put pressure then only water would be released.

Yatharth is a student of Upper KG at the Mini Heights School, Indore. He lives with his mother Dr. Charul Jain. She is a head of department of School of Interdisciplinary

Sciences at a private university in Indore. Yatharth's mother also holds three international copyrights and is an IPR practitioner. Apart from the invention, Yatharth said that he helped to relieve the back-ache and headache of his mother, his nanaji and naniji. He is fond of gardening. Since early age, he has a habit of waking up at 7:00 AM. He waters his plants every morning and trims them every Sunday with help of his mother. He has grown 4 varieties of chillies in his home : Red Bell pepper, Yellow Bell pepper, Cherry Bomb pepper and African Devil (which we call Peri-Peri chillies).

He is passionate about keeping the city neat and clean. Yatharth is concerned for the birds and animals.

Yatharth's mother says that she is proud of him and she considers him to be the happiness of her life by saying "Mere Jeewan ka Yatharth".

36 lakh schoolchildren in 15-18 age group to be covered

CM appeals to get kids in 15-18 years age group registered

The campaign to introduce Covid-19 vaccine to adolescents of 15-18 years of age will start from January 3 in the state. Registration has started on Cowin App / Cowin Portal from January 1. Children born on or before the year 2007 will be eligible for registration.

Team Absolute | Bhopal



registration. The vaccination against COVID-19 of 36 lakh schoolchildren in the 15-18 age group in Madhya Pradesh will begin from Monday, with plans afoot to administer doses to 12 lakh beneficiaries in this segment on the first day, a senior health official said.

There are 36 lakh registered schoolchildren in the 15-18 age group in the state and the vaccination drive for them will start from January 3, Madhya Pradesh Immunisation Officer Dr Santosh Shukla said on Saturday.

"We have plans to administer doses to 12 lakh children on Monday. The state had earlier set a record of 30 lakh doses in a single day. However, with children we can't be hasty. After covering schoolchildren, we will target school dropouts," he explained.

Madhya Pradesh for the last several years under the guidance of the illustrious Prime Minister, organic Farming is being done on 16 lakh hectare area in the state and export of organic products has been more than 2.5 thousand crore rupees in 2020-21. Along with this, continuous work is being done for the progress of the farmers. Under the Mukhyamantri Kisan-Kalyan Yojna, Samman Nidhi of Rs 4,000 per year in two instalments, and loan at zero percent interest rate and assistance for the purchase of agricultural machinery are being given to the farmers.

Chouhan said that under the leadership of Modi, plantation and production and use of solar energy is being promoted in the Ankur Abhiyan for environmental protection in Madhya Pradesh. Chief Minister said that Madhya Pradesh will make all possible contributions for the fulfilment of Modi's resolve to protect the environment.

Chouhan said that Prime Minister Modi's mantra of "Beti Bachao- Beti Padhao" has given new energy to the country. Our daughters are reaching the top in every field, the credit goes to Modi. Many crucial schemes are going on in Madhya Pradesh for daughters including Ladli Laxmi.

Villagers fulfil 'vow' by shaving their heads for no Covid-19 fatality in 2021

They danced to the tune of religious songs while holding religious flags in their hands

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Over 90 residents of a village in Madhya Pradesh's Neemuch district got their heads tonsured and held a mass feast at a temple to thank the deity for ensuring "zero fatality" due to Covid-19 in their village in the year 2021.

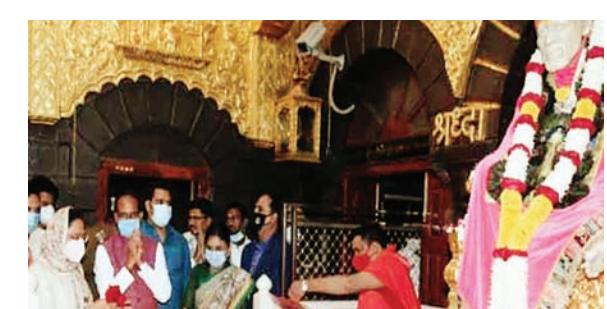
The ritual was held on Friday to fulfil the vow taken by villagers at the Devnarayan temple when the pandemic was at its peak, a resident said.

MAN SHOOTS AT NEIGHBOUR'S DOG; CANINE UNHURT: POLICE

Gwalior: The incident took place in Vijay Nagar area here and the person who fired from a country-made pistol has been identified as Upendra Jadoun, an official said. A man allegedly shot at a dog after the canine, which was not hurt in the incident, bit his son in Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, police said on Friday. The incident took place on Thursday evening in Vijay Nagar area here and the person who fired from a country-made pistol has been identified as Upendra Jadoun, an official said.

Villagers, including women, took out a procession in Devri Khawasa village in the Neemuch district, around 400 km away from Bhopal. They danced to the tune of religious songs while holding religious flags in their hands. About 25-30 villagers were infected when the coronavirus pandemic was at its peak. At that time, people had taken a 'Mannat' (vow) in the ancient temple of Devnarayan ji to tonsure their heads and hold a 'bhandara' (mass feast) if no fatality is reported due to the pandemic in 2021," Ambala Patidar, a villager, told reporters. Another resident Amit Gurjar said that in a bid to thank the deity, 90 villagers shaved their heads and organised a feast. "We thanked the deity as no death due to Covid-19 was reported in our village with a population of 2,500 even though some of the infected villagers were critically ill," he claimed.

CM HAD DARSHAN IN SHIRDI



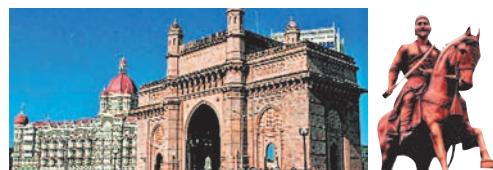
Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan along with family had darshan at Sai Baba Temple of Shirdi in Shirdi Dham,

CM PLANTED SAPLING IN SHIRDI DHAM

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is giving the message of conservation and promotion of nature by planting saplings every day. In this sequence, Chouhan and his wife Sadhna Singh planted a mango sapling in Shirdi Dham on Saturday. Chief Minister Chouhan also performed Shramdaan. Mango is called the king of fruits because of its taste, aroma and colour. It is the easily available fruit of India and found in almost every state. Dussehra, Langda, Chausa, Fajri, Alphonso, Totapuri, Bombay Green etc. are the major varieties of mango. Nur Jahan, found in Kathiwada of Alirajpur district in Madhya Pradesh, Sundarja of Rewa have their own unique identity. The bark of the mango tree is full of special medicines. On auspicious occasions, mango leaves are decorated at the entrance of the houses.





MAHA WARNS OF MONSTROUS SURGE IN COVID CASES, FATALITIES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a New Year shocker, the Maharashtra government has warned of the possibility of 80 lakh Covid-19 cases and 80,000 deaths as the third wave has apparently set in the state.

"Number of Covid infections in the third wave is going to be very huge," said Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Dr. Pradeep Vyas in a misive to all top government and health officials late on Friday.

"If there are 80 lakh Covid cases in third wave..., even if 1 per cent case fatality is presumed, we can land up with 80,000 deaths," said Dr. Vyas in the grim communication.

He called upon the officials "not to be lulled" by the narratives that the third Covid / Omicron wave is mild and not fatal.

"It is equally fatal for those who are not vaccinated and have comorbidities. So please improve vaccination coverage and save lives," appealed Dr. Vyas.

Cracking the whip, he asked offi-



cials "not to be complacent" based on media reports suggesting that the Omicron variant is mild and said "we need to think rationally and scientifically".

Dr. Vyas pointed out that genomic sequencing results show that we still have the Delta variant in more than 70 per cent cases and the figures vary from district to district.

Referring to the US, Europe and South Africa where the hospitalisation rate is lesser compared with the rapid increase in the Covid cases, Dr. Vyas said medical opinion is divided on whether this is owing to the inherent nature of Omicron or due to the vaccination which was not available in the first and second waves.

"There are studies to show that



Covid disease even in the present wave has been severe in unvaccinated persons... who are at as much risk (or rather more) as in the second wave (last year)," Dr. Vyas cautioned.

The letter has been sent to all Divisional Commissioners, District Collectors, Municipal Commissioners and CEOs of Zilla Parshads.

Many leaders 'promise moon, stars' during elections, forget later: Thackeray

Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray, without taking names, said 'some leaders' promise stars and the moon to the common man during elections and later back out



Taking a veiled dig at the BJP, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said some leaders promise the moon and the stars to voters ahead of elections and then back out but Shiv Sena is not like others. "Many leaders are such that promise stars and the moon to the common man

during the elections and then later forget about the promises. When people ask that you had promised stars and the moon, then these leaders say that such things are said during elections," he said in a meeting with state officials. Further, he said that the Shiv Sena is not like that and it will never offer promises that cannot be fulfilled. "This is how Shiv Sena has

Maharashtra:

OVER 30 MINISTERS, LAWMAKERS TEST COVID POSITIVE IN A WEEK

Team Absolute | Pune

Making an alarming revelation, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar said on Saturday that more than 10 state ministers and over 20 legislators, besides at least one MP - Supriya Sule - have tested Covid positive in the past few days.

He also warned that stringent restrictions could be clamped if the new Covid cases or Omicron infections continue to spurt in the state, and appealed to people to follow Covid protocols.

"We recently curtailed the Maharashtra Legislative session. Since then, over 10 ministers and at least 20 legislators have tested positive," a grim Pawar Jr said.

He was interacting with media persons in Pune after visiting the Victory Monument at Koregaon-Bhima on the 204th anniversary of the Anglo-Maratha War.

Saying that everyone wanted to celebrate New Year, birthday, weddings or other occasions, he said people bear in mind that the Omicron variant



India's Q2FY22 current account deficit at \$9.6 bn

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Wider merchandise trade deficits pulled India's Q2FY22 current account into the negative territory, official data showed on Friday.

The current account swung into negative territory with a deficit of \$9.6 billion in Q2FY22 from a surplus of \$6.6 billion in the preceding quarter.

On a YoY basis, the country's Balance of Payments was in surplus of \$15.3 billion in Q2FY21.

"The deficit in the current account in Q2:2021-22 was mainly due to widening of trade deficit to \$4.4 billion from \$30.7 billion in the preceding quarter and an increase in net outgo of investment income," the RBI said in a statement.

"Net services receipts decreased marginally over the previous quarter but increased on a year-on-year (YoY) basis, on the back of robust performance of the exports of computer and

business services."

However, private transfer receipts, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, amounted to \$21.1 billion, an increase of 3.7 per cent from their level a year ago.

"Net outgo from the primary income account, mainly reflecting net overseas investment income payments, increased sequentially as well as on a YoY basis."

In the financial account, net foreign direct investment recorded an inflow of \$9.5 billion, lower than \$24.4 billion a year ago.

"Net foreign portfolio investment was \$3.9 billion as compared with \$7 billion in Q2:2020-21."

"Net external commercial borrowings to India recorded inflow of \$4.1 billion in Q2:2021-22 as against an outflow of \$3.7 billion a year ago."

The net inflow on account of non-resident deposits decreased to \$0.8 billion from \$1.9 billion in Q2FY21.

After Hindustan Unilever, Colgate items to go off shelves in Maharashtra

Distributors in state to stop supplying Colgate products in phases from January 1

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After Hindustan Unilever, it is now Colgate Palmolive India.

Distributors have decided to stop supplying products of Colgate Palmolive India (Colgate India) in Maharashtra in phases from January 1 owing to the issue of price disparities between the traditional trade and organised channel, which includes players like Jiomart, Metro Cash & Carry, and commerce B2B companies like Udaan, and Elastic Run.

This move is similar to the action the traditional distribution channel will take on Hindustan Unilever's (HUL's) products in the state. Distributors will first stop procuring Colgate MaxFresh from the company and stop supplying it to retailers from January 1, and eight days later they will stop supplying Colgate Vedshakti also. Mid-January onwards, they will stop supplying Colgate toothbrushes, said at least two distributors.

Traditional distributors in the state will stop the supply of all Colgate products from February 1. Colgate India, in response to Business Standard's query, said: "Our strong relationship with distributors, developed over the past eight decades, has been based on mutual trust and transparency. We continue to keep the best interests and growth of our partners as a key priority, irrespective of their size or scale."

"We have engaged with our distributor network and are looking to address their challenges..." According to a distributor, the toothpaste major had told its traditional distributors in the state at a product launch event in Pune that the company sold its products across all channels at the same price. The distributors, however, do not agree. Distributors resorted to this move after their apex body sent two letters to FMCG companies, complaining about the price disparities between traditional distributors and other organised business-to-business (B2B) distribution firms, both online and offline, which

Stricter restrictions if Covid cases keep rising: Pawar

► MAHARASHTRA DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER AJIT PAWAR SAID THE STATE GOVERNMENT IS KEEPING A TAB ON THE INCREASING NUMBER OF PATIENTS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra' Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar sounded a warning on Saturday to the people of Maharashtra as the state is recording a steep increase in the daily Covid-19 cases.

He said that strict restrictions may be clamped if the new cases continue to rise in the state as reported by news agency PTI. On Friday, Maharashtra reported 8,067 new Covid-19 cases which was as much as 50% rise compared to a tally the day before.

Keep in mind that the new variant (Omicron) spreads fast and hence caution is needed. PM Narendra Modi has appealed and some states have announced a night curfew. In Maharashtra, cases are increasing in Mumbai and Pune," he told reporters.

The minister also said, "We cut short the Assembly session recently. So far, over 10

ministers and over 20 MLAs have tested positive for coronavirus.

Pawar said the state government is keeping a tab on the increasing number of patients. "If the number of patients continues to rise then there will be strict restrictions. To avoid strict restriction everybody should follow norms," he said. Maharashtra has seen a sharp rise in new daily coronavirus cases in the last 12 days of 2021.

Earlier, another Maharashtra state minister Vijay Wadettiwar said on Friday that the stage of imposing a fresh lockdown is approaching in Maharashtra but Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray will take a call on

"The stage of lockdown is approaching. But the chief minister will take a decision on when to impose it," Wadettiwar, the minister for disaster management, told reporters.

Decision on restrictions on travel and colleges will be taken together, he added.

In an another related development, the Nagpur Municipal Corporation on Friday said curbs announced by the Maharashtra government to check the spread of COVID-19 amid the Omicron scare will come into force from midnight. The order by NMC commissioner Radhakrishnan B said attendance at marriages and social, cultural, political and religious events will be restricted to 50, while the limit would be 20 for funerals.

Maha sees no let-up in Covid cases, Omicron spread eases on New Year's Day

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Of the new 9,170 new Covid-19 cases, Mumbai Metropolitan Region alone accounted for 8,077 including 6,180 from the country's commercial capital, followed by Pune circle's 686, Nashik circle's 162, Kolhapur circle's 82, Nagpur circle's 62, Latur circle's 58, Aurangabad circle's 31, and Akola circle's 12. The state's cumulative figures of Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic stands at 66,87,991 cases and 141,533 deaths, and another 65,10,541 patients who have fully recovered.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra again notched a sharp increase in Covid-19 cases on Saturday though Omicron infections remained in single digits even as the government warned of dark days ahead in the third wave.

For the fourth consecutive day, the state reported a massive spike in Covid-19 cases and suspects whose samples have been sent for genome sequencing.

The state Covid-19 count shot up significantly - from 8,067 on Friday to 9,170 now - though fatalities dropped from 8 to only 7, while the mortality rate remained steady at 2.11 per cent.

After recording only four Omicron infections, the state logged six more cases of the variant, taking up the state tally from 454 to 460, with

Mumbai spared of any fresh cases for the second day, health officials said.

All the six cases are from Pune district, which is ranked as the second hotspot after Mumbai as in the previous two Covid waves.

Intensive surveillance of passengers arriving at the three international airports - Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur - is currently underway since December 1.

A total of 30,728 travellers have landed here from the "high risk" countries of which 272 have tested positive and 135 from other countries, with all their reports sent for genomic sequencing to confirm if they are afflicted by Omicron.

Besides, another 1,806 samples from field surveys conducted since November 1 have been sent for genomic sequencing with the results of 102 awaited, the officials said.

After 'Sulli Deal', now 'Bulli Bai' targets women of a community

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Six months after derogatory "Sulli Deals" site surfaced, a new controversy has emerged with the "Bulli Bai" targeting women of another religion.

"Bulli Bai" popped up on January 1, with a number of pictures of women including journalists, social workers, students and famous personalities, accompanied by derogatory content.

Hosting platform Github provided space to "Sulli Deals" and "Bulli Bai" is also created on Github. "Bulli Bai" was also being promoted by a Twitter handle with the name @bullibai, with its display picture of a "Khaliistani supporter", and saying women can be booked from the app. This handle was also promoting Khaliistani content at the same time.

Shiv Sena leader and Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi said that she raised the matter with Mumbai Police and the culprit should be arrested at the earliest. "I have spoken to Mumbai Police Commissioner and DCP Crime Rashmi Karandikar. They will

investigate the matter. I have also spoken to DGP Maharashtra for intervention. Hoping those behind such misogynistic and sexist sites will be apprehended," she said.

Mumbai Police said that they were looking into the matter and were taking legal opinion to lodge the case under relevant section of the IPC. When "Sulli Deal" appeared, two FIRs were lodged against unknown persons. However, no arrests were made and the culprits are still at large.

ITC, Dabur, and Marico have discussed the issue with traditional distributors, according to distributors, but the issue still remains unresolved. On Friday, HUL said in an exchange filing that it would ensure supplies of its products remain uninterrupted and that it had no engagements with the AICPDF so far. "HUL has a long-standing relationship with its distributors that is based on trust... Our distributors have overwhelmingly conveyed to us that they will rebuff any attempts to create a wedge between the company and our trusted distributors," HUL said in the exchange filing. The company also said it remained committed to enhancing capabilities in its GT (general trade) network and had taken action such as deploying technology for order placements through its eB2B app, Shikhar, and supporting its distributors to increase their direct reach, and introduced specially tailored programmes with reputed academic institutions to help them hone their business skills and become future-ready.



EMMA WATSON WANTED TO LEAVE 'HARRY POTTER' FRANCHISE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Emma Watson, who played the part of Hermione Granger in the 'Harry Potter' films, once considered leaving the franchise, reports Entertainment Weekly.

Emma with her co-stars from the franchise appeared on 'Harry Potter 20th Anniversary: Return to Hogwarts' special, where she opened up about going through a stressful time.

Emma said, "I did find a diary entry that was kind of like, 'I could see that at times I was lonely.' Later in the special, she mentions, 'The fame thing had finally hit home in a big way.' Director David Yates said that when he came on to direct

the remaining Harry Potter films starting with 2007's 'Order of the Phoenix', producer David Heyman and Warner Bros told him, "Emma is not sure she wants to come back to do another Potter." Tom Felton, who played Draco Malfoy in the film franchise said, "People definitely forget what she took on and how gracefully she did it. Dan (Radcliffe) and Rupert (Grint), they had each other. I had my cronies, whereas Emma was not only younger, she was by herself."

However, nobody had to convince her to stick with the franchise till the end as Emma said, "The fans genuinely wanted me to succeed and all genuinely have each other's backs."



WILL ARNETT REPLACES ARMIE HAMMER IN TAIKA WAITITI'S 'NEXT GOAL WINS'



Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Will Arnett will replace Armie Hammer in filmmaker-actor Taika Waititi's 'Next Goal Wins'.

Hammer's exit comes after the actor was accused by multiple women of sexual assault, reports variety.com.

He denies the claims and says the

sexual relationships were consensual, but the Los Angeles Police Department has launched an investigation.

In the wake of the scandal, Hammer was fired from several films and series, including the Jennifer Lopez rom-com 'Shotgun Wedding' and a Paramount Plus show about the behind-the-scenes action on 'The Godfather'.

Hammer also exited the upcoming Broadway production of 'The Minutes'. He will appear in the Agatha Christie adaptation 'Death on the Nile', which opens in February. 'Next Goal Wins' is based on the 2015 documentary of the same name, which follows the true story of Dutch coach Thomas Rongen, who attempts the nearly impossible task of turning the American Samoa soccer team from perennial losers into winners. Waititi also penned the script with Iain Morris. Searchlight Pictures will distribute the film. Arnett, best known for his work on 'Arrested Development',

Actor Will Arnett will replace Armie Hammer in filmmaker-actor Taika Waititi's 'Next Goal Wins'.

Executive at the Football Federation American Samoa. He recently reshoot Hammer's scenes.

Nicolas Cage felt 'marginalised' by movie studios after a couple of flops

Los Angeles | Agencies

Academy Award winner Nicolas Cage, who was feted with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1998, revealed how he decided to take a different approach to his career after he saw a change in attitude towards him as an actor.

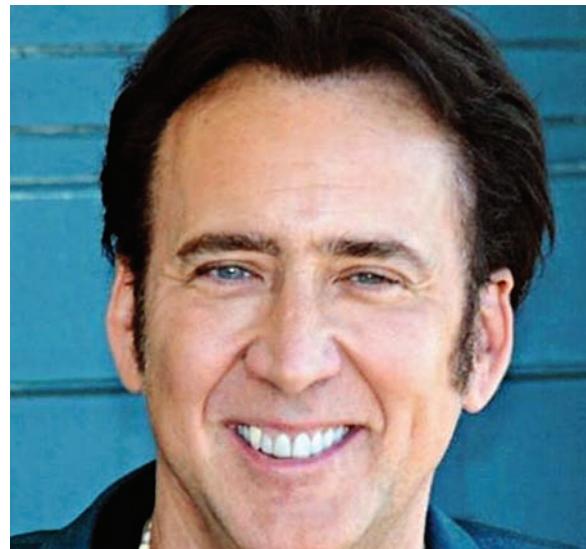
Cage said: "I knew after a couple of flops that I had been marginalised in the studio system and I wasn't going to get invited by them."

However, he heaped praise on 'Pig' director Michael Sarnoski, who is at the helm of a feature film for the first time with the emotional drama, for taking a chance, and described him as his "Archangel", reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Speaking on an episode of Variety's Awards Circuit Podcast, he added: "I always knew that it would take a young filmmaker who would come back or remember some movies I had made and know that I might be right for his script and rediscover me."

"And that's why he's not just Michael, he's Archangel Michael. This wouldn't be happening if he didn't have the open mind to say, 'Come with me.'"

Cage also recalled working on 1997 action thriller 'Face/Off'



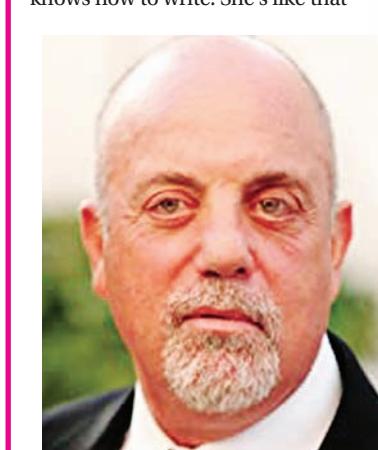
TAYLOR SWIFT IS THIS GENERATION'S BEATLES: BILLY JOEL

Los Angeles | Agencies

Piano Man' legend Billy Joel has compared Taylor Swift to The Beatles, and insisted the 'Shake It Off' hitmaker is this generation's version of the Fab Four.

Asked for his opinion on current artists, he told USA Today: "Adele is a phenomenal singer, kind of a (Barbara) Streisand throwback. Taylor (Swift) is also a very talented girl and she's productive and keeps coming up with great concepts and songs and she's huge."

He added: "You have to give her high marks. She knows music and she knows how to write. She's like that



knowing who he is, as a child he never listened to 'his parents' music'.

He said: "When I was a kid, my generation didn't take to my parents' music. They liked classical but also Sinatra and probably Perry Como and

cian said while he doesn't listen to much pop music nowadays, his kids keep him up to date and they love hearing contemporary stars referencing the 'Piano Man' legend.

He added: "My kids listen to pop music - I really don't too much - and I'll be in the car with them when they make me turn (the radio) on and I might hear a reference to me. Della came home from school one day and said, 'Daddy, everybody knows who you are!'" Joel shared that despite the younger generation



those kinds of singers. We kind of left them in the past and moved on to the new stuff, the Elvis generation and the Beatles generation and disco and the '80s."

"We weren't a back-looking generation and

there are a lot of younger people now looking backward and they like their parents' music, which is a strange phenomenon."

"I look out (in the crowd) and see so many young people. I'm grateful for it, especially because they make more noise. It's a great mix."

DANIEL CRAIG GIVEN SAME NEW YEAR'S HONOUR 'JAMES BOND' RECEIVED IN 007 FILMS

London | Agencies

Hollywood star Daniel Craig has been granted the same honour given to his secret agent character James Bond as the actor is recognised in the New Year's Honours list.

Daniel Craig has been made a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George - the same honour given to his character '007', reports mirror.co.uk.

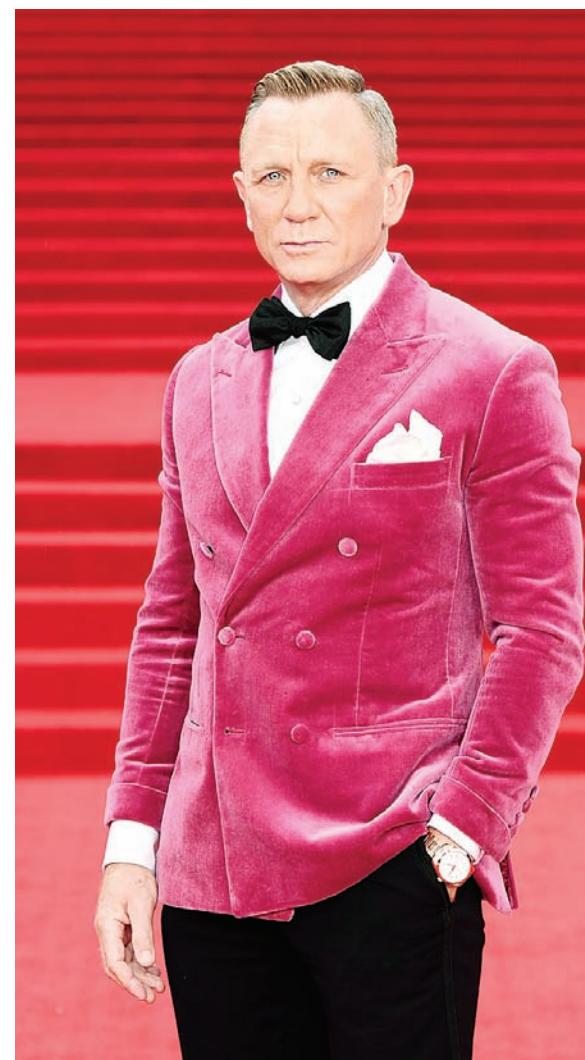
The actor, who took his final turn as Bond in 'No Time To Die', the latest instalment of the spy thriller, has been recognised for services to film and theatre in the New Year Honours list.

The accolade is often given to diplomats, and fictional spy James Bond, who Craig played in five of the 25 films, is described as holding it in both the films and the books by Ian Fleming.

Ahead of the release of 'No Time To Die' in September, Craig was made an honorary commander in the Royal Navy, another rank held by James Bond.

The following month, he was honoured with a star on the Hollywood Walk Of Fame. The star was also recently named the year's highest-paid actor.

The 53-year-old's final outing as the secret agent also ended with a bang as 'No Time To Die' achieved incredible success at the box-office - making it the fourth most successful Bond film in history.



- in which he starred alongside John Travolta, revealed one particular moment where the lines of reality and fiction became blurred for him as he played serial killer Castor Troy.

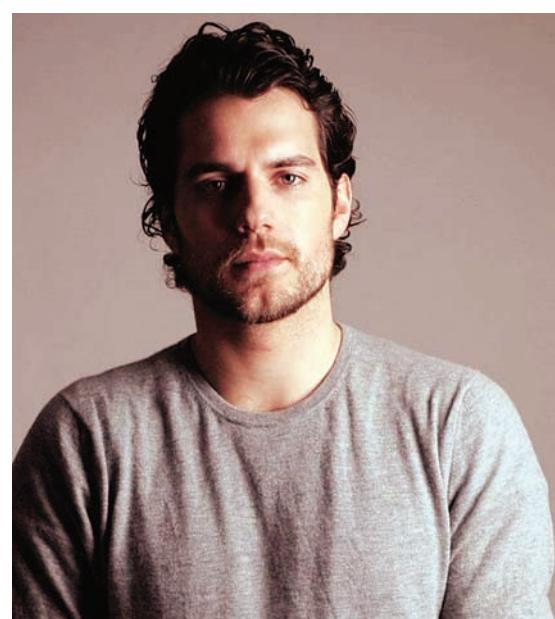
He said: "There was a moment in there where I think I actually left my body, where I just got scared. Am I acting or is this real? And I can see it when I look at the movie, that one moment, it's in my eyes."

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Anna Vakili

Henry Cavill wishes he'd torn his hamstring in a 'cool' way



Hollywood star Henry Cavill was filming Season two of 'The Witcher' in December when he suffered a medical mishap but he's joked it was a 'Red Riding Hood' way of getting hurt because he was doing nothing more strenuous than running through the woods.

Los Angeles | Agencies

He said: "Obviously we had that injury, which ironically came just from me running through the woods. It was a moment where my foot hit some dead wood and it slipped and over-contracted and just snapped."

"Thankfully, it didn't completely detach from the bone but it was a fairly serious injury. I wish it could be something cool like, 'I was fighting something monstrous', but instead I was running through the woods. It was a 'Red Riding Hood' injury."

Cavill has to maintain a high level of fitness all year round for the sake of his character, even though he only films for months at a time, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

He told SFX magazine: "It always takes a lot of work to stay in shape throughout production. It's not like one can get in shape, then not train for six months and keep on shooting throughout the long work day."

"Everything will start to fall apart. The maintenance of that is difficult. To make sure that the character is physically representative in a way which would represent a mutant who is capable of killing monsters takes a lot of work and prep."



TOP 21 MALE PERFORMERS IN SPORTS IN THE YEAR GONE BY

Team Absolute | New Delhi

ports in 2021 happened at a rapid pace. With the cloud of pandemic looming around, sportspersons faced challenges in mental, emotional and physical terms apart from on-field happenings. But some of them managed to overcome all sorts of obstacles and be great in their pursuit of sporting excellence. As we step into the new year, we look at the top 21 male sports performers of the previous year.

1. Neeraj Chopra (Athletics)

If there was a moment in Indian sports which will forever remain etched in the mind, it was star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra winning the gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics. Chopra became only the second Indian after shooter Abhinav Bindra to win an individual gold at the Olympics. Chopra's throw of 87.58m in the second round of the final all but sealed India's first-ever Olympics medal in track and field, sending the nation into a state of frenzy.

2. Bajrang Punia (Wrestling)

Bajrang Punia won the bronze medal in men's freestyle 65kg category after defeating Daulat Niyazbekov of Kazakhstan in the Tokyo Olympics. Punia, in the bronze medal bout, Punia earned India's sixth medal in the mega event with an 8-0 victory in the bronze medal match despite having suffered a knee injury weeks before the Olympics began.

3. Ravi Dahiya (Wrestling)

When the spotlight was firmly on Bajrang Punia to spearhead India's campaign at the Tokyo Olympics, Ravi Dahiya managed to steal the thunder from him. In the semifinal of the men's 57kg freestyle event, Dahiya was trailing 9-2 and with less than a minute to go against Kazakhstan's Nurislam Sanayev, he spectacularly turned the bout on its head and pinned his opponent down, thus winning by fall.

4. PR Sreejesh (Hockey)

One of the vital cogs in the wheel of the Indian men's hockey team winning an Olympics medal after 41 years, Sreejesh delivered the goods when it mattered the most. In the tournament, he made numerous saves but the one which ensured India's bronze-medal finish at the podium was the most important. With seven seconds left for the final hooter to blow, Sreejesh saved a drag-flick from Germany's Lukas Windfeder on a penalty corner to clinch a medal for India in hockey.

5. Suman Antil (Para Athletics)

Antil won gold in the men's javelin F64/44 category final with a massive world record throw of 68.55m at Tokyo. The 22-year-old bettered his own previous world record during the competition.

6. Pramod Bhagat (Para Badminton)

Living up to his top-seed billing in the competition, Bhagat added to India's medal tally in the Tokyo Paralympics by winning the gold



medal in the men's singles SL3 event. The Odisha-based shuttler defeated Daniel Bethell of Great Britain 21-14 and 21-17 to win the gold medal. In the process, Bhagat, a two-time world champion in his category, became the first Indian to win a gold medal for India in para badminton competition in the Paralympics history.

7. Krishna Nagar (Para Badminton)

The Jaipur-based para shuttler clinched India's second gold medal in the Tokyo Paralympics, after his compatriot Pramod Bhagat had earlier won a gold medal in the SL3 event. Nagar, second in the competition, beat Chu Man Kai of Hong Kong 21-17, 16-21 and 21-17 in the men's singles SH6 final.

8. Manish Narwal (Para Shooting)

The 19-year-old, who has a congenital impairment to his right hand and can't even raise it, won the gold medal in the P4 Mixed 50m Pistol SH1 event with a total of 218.2 to make his Paralympics debut a memorable one.

9. Kidambi Srikanth (Badminton)

Srikanth clinched a historic silver medal in the 2021 World Badminton Championships of men's singles. Srikanth's silver is the best ever performance by an Indian in the event of the prestigious tournament.

10. Ajaz Patel (Cricket)

The New Zealand left-arm spinner achieved a very rare feat in Test cricket, dismissing all 10 batters in an innings in the second Test against India at Mumbai, the city of his birth. The 33-year-old Patel, with his spell of 10/119 on day

two of the second Test, became the third ever bowler after Jim Laker and Anil Kumble to achieve the rarest of rare feat in the cricketing world.

11. Joe Root (Cricket)

Root ended 2021 as the third-highest run-scorer in a calendar year in history of Test cricket. Root amassed 1708 runs at an average of 61 in 2021, sitting just behind Pakistan's Mohammad Yousuf (1788 runs in 2006 at 99.33) and West Indies legend Vivian Richards (1710 runs in 1976 at 90).

12. Mohammad Rizwan (Cricket)

In 2021, Mohammad Rizwan became the first batter to breach the 1000-run mark in a calendar year in T20I cricket. In 26 innings, Rizwan has scored 1326 runs at an average of 73.66, including a century and 12 fifties. Rizwan also became the first batter to score ten-plus fifties and hit hundred-plus fours in one calendar year of T20I cricket.

13. Ravichandran Ashwin (Cricket)

He began 2021 with a resilient 128-ball 29 to draw the Sydney Test against Australia alongside Hanuma Vihari. Ashwin was in full form in the home series against England, picking 32 wickets in four matches at an average of 14.72 while scoring 189 runs with the bat, earning him 'Player of the Series' award. Despite not playing a single Test in a series against England, Ashwin bagged another 'Player of the Series' award at home, this time against New Zealand. The off-spinner picked 14 wickets in two matches with an average of 11.36 while

contributing some runs with the bat.

14. Axar Patel (Cricket)

If there was a debutant who made an immediate impact in Test cricket, it was left-arm spinner Axar Patel. In the series against England, Patel picked up 27 wickets in three matches at an average of 10.59, including four five-wicket hauls. Patel got a chance in the series against New Zealand, picking up nine wickets in two matches at an average of 15.67.

15. Max Verstappen (Formula 1)

The Dutchman was the toast of the Formula 1 world when he won the title decider at the Yas Marina circuit in Abu Dhabi, edging his rival Lewis Hamilton by a very narrow margin. It was a very thrilling win for Verstappen, who was behind Hamilton throughout the race. But once the safety car came into play and then got out for the final lap, Verstappen with his fresher tyres overtook Hamilton at turn five and clinched the title. After clinching his first-ever World Championship title, Verstappen was recently voted by F1's team principals as the number one driver of 2021 in the annual poll.

16. Novak Djokovic (Tennis)

The Serbian won three Grand Slam titles in Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon, surpassed Roger Federer for most weeks on world number one position and went past Pete Sampras' record of six-year end number one finishes.

17. Caeleb Dressel (Swimming)

Dressel was at a gold rush in Tokyo, collecting five medals to be at the top of the podium.

His first gold came in the 4x100m freestyle relay. He then went on to establish two new Olympics Records in 50m and 100m freestyle. He signed off from the mega event by setting two world record timings in 100m butterfly and 4x100m medley relay. By winning five gold medals in Tokyo, Dressel became the fourth male swimmer from the USA to achieve the feat in Olympics history after Mark Spitz, Matt Biondi, and Michael Phelps.

18. Max Whitlock (Artistic Gymnastics)

The artistic gymnast from Great Britain defended his gold medal in men's pommel horse which he had first claimed in Rio Olympics 2016. The gold medal at Tokyo Olympics, with a score of 15.583 gave him his third medal in the event (he had a bronze in London 2012) and his sixth overall at the Olympics, making him the most successful ever gymnast on pommel horse and from Great Britain.

19. Ma Long (Table Tennis)

The ace table tennis player from China re-earned his status as one of the greats of the game by defending his men's singles medal from Rio Olympics 2016. In an all-China final against compatriot Fan Zhendong, Long, the world number one, prevailed 4-2 (11-4, 10-12, 11-8, 11-9, 3-11 and 11-7). In the process of defeating Zhendong, Long 'The Dragon' became the most decorated male table tennis player in the history of Olympics with another gold medal from the men's team event, taking the total of gold medals from Olympics to five.

20. David Warner (Cricket)

Warner faced misery in IPL 2021, when he was removed as the captain of Sunrisers Hyderabad as the franchise won just one out of their six matches. But as the Super 12 stage began, Warner came into his own, scoring 289 runs from seven innings, at an average of 48.16 including three half-centuries. His efforts meant Australia clinched its maiden Men's T20 World Cup title and Warner was adjudged as the 'Player of the Tournament'.

21. Kevin Durant (Basketball)

Apart from signing a four-year \$198 million extension with the Brooklyn Nets and dishing out performances in the NBA, Durant led USA to a gold medal in the Tokyo Olympics. He was the only player from team USA to average more than 20 points in every match and in the final, scored 29 points with six rebounds and three assists.

During the course of the Olympics, Durant broke Carmelo Anthony's record of most career points, having 435 points in three Olympics appearances, surpassing Anthony's 336 from four Olympics appearances. Durant also joined Anthony for being the only three-time gold medal winners in USA's men's basketball Olympics history.

Pollard to lead West Indies in limited-overs series against Ireland, England

St John's (Antigua) | Agencies

Cricket West Indies (CWI) on Saturday announced the squads for the upcoming limited-overs series against Ireland and England, with Kieron Pollard as the captain for both the series.

Three players -- Keacy Carty, Sheldon Cottrell, Hayden Walsh Jr -- have been kept as COVID-19 reserves for the ODI series against Ireland, while Jayden Seales, Alzarri Joseph ad Devon Thomas are the COVID-19 reserves for the two T20I series. The West Indies will start the New Year at Sabina Park, Jamaica as they host Ireland in the three-match One-Day International series



and a one-off T20 International from January 8 to 16. The two-time world champions will then travel to Barbados to face England in five T20Is at Kensington Oval from January 22 to 30. The ODI series between West Indies and Ireland will be a part of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League, in which the top seven teams can secure automatic qualification for the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 in India.

Premier League: City overcome 10-man Arsenal with stoppage-time goal

London | Agencies

Defending champions Manchester City came up with a brilliant comeback in their first match of the New Year as they prevailed 2-1 over Arsenal at the Emirates here on Saturday. A stoppage-time goal from Rodrigo ensured City defeated 10-man Arsenal in a lively encounter to go 11 points clear at the top of the Premier League.

The Spaniard prodded home a loose ball from close range in the 93rd minute to complete a second-half fightback and secure their 11th consecutive victory in the competition. City's lead at the top of the table could be cut when second-placed Chelsea face third-placed Liverpool on Sunday and it looked as if City



were destined to leave North London with a draw that would have boosted their title rivals ahead of their meet-

ing at Stamford Bridge.

Pep Guardiola's side fell behind when Bukayo Saka swept home

Kieran Tierney's pass to finish a slick move during a first-half in which the Gunners were on the top.

BHAJJI BLAMES DHONI, BCCI FOR TEAM INDIA OUSTER

Days after retiring from all forms of cricket, former India spinner Harbhajan Singh has dropped a bombshell by claiming that some Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) officials and former skipper MS Dhoni were responsible for his ouster from the national team.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The 41-year-old last December announced his retirement from all forms of competitive cricket. The legendary spinner has opened up about the treatment he received from some BCCI officials.

"Luck has always favoured me. Just some external factors were not by my side and maybe, they were completely against me. This is because of the way I was bowling or the rate at which I was moving ahead. I was 31 when I took 400 wickets and if I would have played another 4-5 years, keeping in mind the kind of standards I had set for myself, I can tell you that I would have taken another 100-150 wickets or more," Harbhajan told Zee News.

"Yes. MS Dhoni was the captain then but I think this thing was above Dhoni's head. To a certain extent, there were some BCCI officials who were involved in this and they didn't want me and the captain may have supported that but a captain can never be above the BCCI. The BCCI officials have always been bigger than



the captain, coach, or the team," he revealed. Harbhajan further pointed out the unmatched support Dhoni enjoyed at the behest of the BCCI.

"Dhoni had better backing than other players and if the rest of the players would have got the same kind of backing, then they would have

played as well. It wasn't as if the rest of the players forgot to swing a bat or didn't know how to bowl all of a sudden," he added.

NZ vs B'desh, 1st Test

Conway century gives strong start

Mount Maunganui | Agencies

Devon Conway scored a patient century, while Will Young made a workman-like half century as New Zealand overcame the loss of skipper Tom Latham to score 258 for five on the opening day of the first Test against Bangladesh here on Saturday.

Despite the loss of Latham for one in the fourth over of proceedings, the home side dominated the first two sessions of the day, largely through a partnership between a returning Conway (122) and Young (52) in the first home series Test of the World Championship cycle.

The pair put on 138, before Young was run out by Najmul Hossain Shanto.

Brief scores:

New Zealand 258/5 in 87.3 overs (Will Young 52, Devon Conway 122, Ross Taylor 31, Henry Nicholls 32 not out; Shoriful Islam 2/53) vs Bangladesh.





SALMAN, DHARMENDRA RECREATE ICONIC BIKE SCENE OF 'SHOLAY'

'Bigg Boss 15'



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The latest promo of 'Bigg Boss 15' shows superstars of Bollywood Salman Khan and Dharmendra recreating the iconic bike scene of 1975 blockbuster 'Sholay' which featured Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra.

Both the actors are seen opening the 'Weekend Ka Vaar' episode sitting on the bike

and dancing to 'Shaam Shandaar' song. Dharmendra says: "I am here Gabbar." Salman replies: "Gabbar, I am coming."

Later, Bharti Singh is also seen having some fun banter with Dharmendra and enacting another famous scene of Ramesh Sippy's 'Sholay' in which Veeru (Dharmendra) threatens to jump off a water tank to force Basanti (Hema Malini) to accept his proposal. Bharti with a bottle in her

hand says: "If I am not your dream girl, at least I am your drum girl. You must be happy that the Pumpkin of your garden is dancing here." She adds: "Recently Salman cut his birthday cake and later a snake also bit him."

Dharmendra says: "Actually it was not male but a female snake." (usko saap ne nahi sapno ne kaata hai). And Bharti says: "It was sent by Colors as the 'Naagin' show is coming up."

Be gentle with yourselves; Samantha's in New Year wish



Chennai: | Agencies

wish her fans a happy new year, wrote, "If your biggest achievement this year was simply making it this far, simply waking up in the morning when you didn't want to face the day, simply surviving - that is something to celebrate, too.

"Keep finding the things that make you believe in your healing. Be gentle with yourself and never forget that even the smallest step forward is still a step towards who you are becoming. We are in this together. 2022 ??Stronger. Wiser. Kinder."

Alia posts vacation pictures with Ranbir Kapoor

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Alia Bhatt celebrated the new year with beau Ranbir Kapoor on a holiday. Taking to her Instagram, Alia posted a series of pictures from a location whose details she did not share.

One of which even has Ranbir sipping a beverage.

The actress captioned the pictures, "Giving 2022 some hakuna matata energy stay safe! smile .. be simple and love more!!!! happy new year (sic)." The pic-

tures show that the couple spent quality time with nature in the company of big cats.

Alia's comment section was flooded by reactions from her friends and family. While Ranbir's mom Neetu Kapoor put up heart emojis, Alia's mother Soni Razdan commented, "Wise words my darling." Arjun Kapoor called the couple, "#nadaanparindeys".

Earlier, the couple was papped at the Mumbai airport leaving for their vacation.

Tahir Raj Bhasin: A hattrick of romance coming up in 2022

Mumbai: Actor Tahir Raj Bhasin is looking forward to the new year as he has a hattrick of romance coming up in 2022 with 'Yeh Kaali Kaali Aankhein', 'Looop Lapeta' and 'Ranjish Hi Sahi'.

Talking about what he is looking forward to in 2022, Tahir in a conversation with IANS said: "I am very excited. It is a hattrick of romance coming up in 2022. All three projects 'Yeh Kaali Kaali Aankhein', 'Looop Lapeta' and 'Ranjish Hi Sahi' have me in romantic dramas. Two of them are love triangles."

'Looop Lapeta' directed by debutant writer-director Aakash Bhatia, is a remake of the cult classic 'Run Lola Run', and tells the story of a girlfriend, who's on a mission to rescue her boyfriend from a sticky situation. 'Yeh Kaali Kaali Aankhein' is a web series, which also stars Shweta Tripathi and 'Ranjish Hi Sahi' is set against the backdrop of the golden era of 70s' Bollywood. It revolves around the lives of struggling film director Shankar played by Tahir, diva Aamma played by Amala Paul and Shankar's wife Anju played by Amrita. He added: "Although I am trying it after a very long time and for the first time on OTT. It's just great to have a hattrick of romance going on. I am excited to see what 2022 brings in terms of new scripts and reactions from the audience."

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Aarti Chabaria

Actors go nostalgic as 'Aur Bhai Kya Chal Raha Hai?' hits 200 episodes

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Situational comedy 'Aur Bhai Kya Chal Raha Hai?' which is set against the backdrop of Lucknow has completed 200 episodes. It brings out the story of two culturally opposite families of the Mishras and the Mirzas who are forced to share one roof.

As the show has touched the milestone of 200 episodes, the lead cast goes down memory lane to share their journey so far.

Arshish Bobby, who essays the role of Ramesh Prasad Mishra, says: "Aur Bhai Kya Chal Raha Hai?" is the best thing that has happened to me in 2021. The opportunity to be a part of such an interesting show, find a wonderful family on the set, and get recognised for the show makes the journey extremely special. I was overwhelmed when I recently received an award from Kalakaar Association Uttar Pradesh for my performance as Ramesh Prasad Mishra." Farhana Fatima, seen as Shanti Mishra, shares: "It feels like we started the show yesterday. And here, we are celebrating 200 episodes already! I take immense pride to say that I am a part of such a beautiful show which brings together friends and family for a good laugh. People recognise me as Shanti and being an actor everywhere I go; that's my

biggest achievement. "I always knew this show has a lot of potential as it brings out the authentic Lucknowi vibe, which makes the viewers want to watch more of it. Also, the friendly bickering between Mishra and Mirza reminds everyone about their real-life bond with their neighbours making it more relatable." Pawan Singh, another lead actor says that when the story was narrated to him, he got interested and took the role. He plays Zafar Ali Mirza. The actor adds: "When I was offered the role, and the story was narrated, I was quite excited about and took it up in an instant. Since then, I have only thanked my stars for this huge opportunity. In addition to the show, I fell in love with the city and its people. The show has helped me grow both personally and professionally." Akansha Sharma, on the other hand, shares about her on-screen character Sakina Mirza. She says: "The day I entered the set of 'Aur Bhai Kya Chal Raha Hai?' was the day when my life took a 360-degree turn! The show and my character Sakina Mirza helped me garner a lot of love and attention from people across the country, which helped me reach 100k plus followers on Instagram. Thank you will be an understatement to express my gratitude towards the whole team of the show and my fans."

