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## WILL THE PANDEMIC BECOME ENDEMIC IN 2023?

**The chief of the World Health Organization (WHO) has said that he hopes that Covid-19 will no longer be a global health emergency sometime next year. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that the WHO Covid-19 Emergency Committee will discuss next month the criteria for declaring an end to the Covid-19 emergency.**

▶ ACCORDING TO HEALTH EXPERTS, IT IS HARDER TO PREDICT IF COVID-19 WILL BECOME ENDEMIC IN 2023 BECAUSE IT IS A RESPIRATORY VIRUS THAT TENDS TO MUTATE, SIMILAR TO OTHER INFLUENZA VIRUSES.

▶ IT IS UNCERTAIN WHEN OR IF COVID-19 WILL BECOME ENDEMIC, BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO COMPLETELY ELIMINATE IT.

▶ EXPERTS SAID THAT WE MAY SEE OCCASIONAL OUTBREAKS, PARTICULARLY DURING FLU SEASON OR IF NEW MUTATIONS EMERGE, AS IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING IN CHINA.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

With Covid infections once again surging in several countries, especially in China which saw over 250 million cases in just 20 days in December, fresh Covid wave fears linger across the world, including in India. While the BE.7 variant of Omicron virus is a cause of concern in China and India, the Omicron sub-variant XBB accounts for 18.3 per

cent of the Covid-19 cases in the United States, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This marks an increase of 11.2 per cent as the XBB variant continues to drive up cases in Singapore. Omicron subvariants BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 accounted for about 70 per cent of new cases in the US. The total number of confirmed Covid cases in the US has surpassed 100 million, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, since the pandemic broke out almost three

years ago, with a total of more than 1 million deaths. Japan is facing an ongoing eighth wave of the pandemic and the country registered 206,943 new cases. South Korea's new Covid cases remained below 70,000 for the second straight day on Saturday, while new coronavirus-related deaths hit a three-month high. "We're hopeful that at some point next year, we will be able to say that Covid-19 is no longer a global health emergency," adding that however, SARS-CoV-2 virus, the culprit behind

the Covid-19 pandemic, will not go away, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. Kirti Sabnis, Infectious Disease Specialist at Fortis Hospital in Kalyan, Mumbai, told reporter that when a pandemic becomes endemic, it means that the disease is present in a particular community or globally, and there is enough immunity among the population to control outbreaks. "Also, the infections can continue to affect vulnerable members of the community. While an endemic may not experience large outbreaks, it also means that it will not be completely eradicated," she said. "If multiple mutations change the virus's protein structure or its ability to attach to cells, it could give rise to new strains. However, if the current protection of the immunity to the virus is sufficient to prevent severe disease or reduce transmission, then definitely Covid can become endemic," Sabnis said. "The transmission of the virus in India and the level of immunity acquired through previous vaccination and community transmission will also influence its potential to become endemic. However, it seems unlikely that there will be significant new outbreaks or that the virus will become endemic in the next 2-3 months," Sabnis said.

## China will reopen borders, abandon Covid quarantine from January 8

Hong Kong | Agencies

China will reopen borders and abandon quarantine after it downgrades its treatment of Covid-19 on January 8, media reports said on Monday. The decision is the country's last step in shedding three years of zero-Covid and pivoting to living with the virus, the South China Morning Post reported. Covid-19 has been managed as a top category A infectious disease since 2020, putting it on par with bubonic plague and cholera. When the declaration was made to do so, authorities said it would be administered according to the Frontier

Health and Quarantine Law. Under Chinese laws, authorities must impose the toughest restrictions such as quarantine and isolation of the infected and their close contacts, and citywide lockdowns to contain those diseases. At the border, the infected must be isolated and those who might be infected quarantined, depending on the incubation period. But three sources from provincial health authorities and hospitals in Guangdong, Fujian and Jiangsu said they were notified by the National Health Commission on Sunday, asking them to prepare for the downgrade to category B management from January 8, the SCMP

reported. That category means Covid-19 only requires "necessary treatment and measures to curb the spread". Strict control measures including compulsory quarantine for travellers coming to China will also be removed after the downgrade, since it is no longer a compulsory requirement in the category B management. There are signs that China has been preparing for the pivot, with PCR testing no longer mandatory and Vice-Premier Sun Chunlan, who has been in charge of the Covid-19 response, urging lower level authorities to focus on treatment instead of infections, the SCMP reported.

## HIMACHAL SUSPENDS STAFF SELECTION COMMISSION

Shimla | Agencies

The Himachal Pradesh government on Monday suspended the functioning of the state Staff Selection Commission, Hamirpur, in view of the instance of leakage of question paper for the post of Junior Office Assistant (IT). Interacting with the media, Principal Advisor (Media) to Chief Minister, Naresh Chauhan said it was also apprehended that this malpractice was going on for

quite sometime and prima facie, it appears that the commission has not discharged its duties and responsibilities in a transparent manner. Chauhan said the government led by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu was committed to ensure zero tolerance against corruption and has taken this decision to ensure complete transparency in functioning of the commission. He said this would also help instilling faith of the job-seeking youth in recruitment agencies.

## Coast Guard, Guj ATS seize 40 kg drugs from Pakistani boat, arrest 10 crew

Okha (Gujarat) | Agencies

The Indian Coast Guard and the Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS), in a joint operation early on Monday, apprehended a Pakistani boat with 10 crew members from Indian waters and found 40 kg narcotics on board it, an official statement said. "During intervening night of December 25/26, on a specific intelligence input, ICG strategically deployed its Fast Patrol class ship ICGS Arinjay for patrolling in area close to notional International Maritime Border Line (IMBL). During early hours of Monday, Pakistani fishing boat Al Soheli was observed moving suspiciously in Indian waters. On being challenged by the ICG ship, the Pakistani boat started evasive manoeuvring and did not stop even on firing of



warning shots. ICG ship in pitch darkness manoeuvred and stopped the boat," a Coast Guard statement said. It said that after an extensive search of the boat, some arms, ammunition, and approx 40 kg of narcotics, valued at about Rs 300 crore, were found concealed. The boat, along with its crew, has been apprehended and is being brought to Okha for further investigation.

This is the seventh joint operation by the Indian Coast Guard and ATS, Gujarat in last 18 months and first wherein arms and ammunitions were being infiltrated, along with the drugs. During this period, a total 346 kg of heroine, valued at Rs 1,930 crore has already been seized along with apprehension of 44 Pakistani and 7 Iranian crew members.

## ACTRESS TUNISHA SHARMA SUICIDE Cops discount 'love jihad' angle

Team Absolute | Palghar (Maharashtra)

The police have ruled out any potential 'love-jihad' angle to the December 24 purported 'suicide' of actress Tunisha Sharma, days after a break-up with boyfriend actor Sheezan Khan, official sources said here on Monday. The Mira Bhayander-Vasai Virar Police which is probing the case, arrested Khan, 27, on Sunday and he has been remanded to police custody till Wednesday on charges of abetment to suicide, with some politicians claiming a 'love-jihad' angle to the case. During his questioning, Khan reportedly informed the investigators that he was very dis-



turbed by the recent Shraddha Walkar-Aaftab Poonawala case and hence decided to end his relationship with Tunisha. After the 'suomo' breakup, a stressed

Tunisha had lapsed into depression that may have led to her taking the extreme step on the eve of Christmas. When contacted, the MBVV's Assistant

Commissioner of Police Chandrakant Jadhav declined to comment on the case and its related aspects as "the investigations are still going on". Soon after her body was found, Tunisha's uncle Sanjeev Kaushal informed the media that almost two weeks ago, she suffered an anxiety attack and was admitted to a Mumbai hospital. She informed him and her mother how she was wronged and cheated and the Sharma family has demanded that the culprit responsible for the state of affairs should not be spared. Later, Tunisha's mother said in a video-statement that Sheezan had betrayed her daughter, promised to marry her and then used her for 3-4 months before abruptly breaking up.

## PEOPLE PAY TRIBUTE TO 2004 TSUNAMI VICTIMS

**Chennai:** The people of Tamil Nadu on Monday, in large numbers, have paid tribute to the victims of the 2004 Tsunami. People living in the coastal areas of the state were most affected by the tragedy that struck 18 years ago. Several people took silent processions across the coastal areas of Chennai to Kanyakumari. A massive earthquake struck the Indian Ocean, near Sumatra island in Indonesia leading to huge waves, which triggered a Tsunami on December 26, 2004. Thousands of lives were lost in the disaster. The people took out a silent march in their memory from the shrine to the main road in the district. In Nagapattinam, 6,065 people died in the Tsunami and many families were destroyed. Several organisations, churches, and temples conducted programmes to pay tributes to the victims. Fishermen and local people at Cuddalore, Kanyakumari, and Thoothukudi paid floral tributes to the victims. People also poured milk into the sea as a mark of respect to those who passed away in the tsunami.



## NIRMALA SITHARAMAN ADMITTED TO AIIMS WITH MILD FEVER, RECOVERING

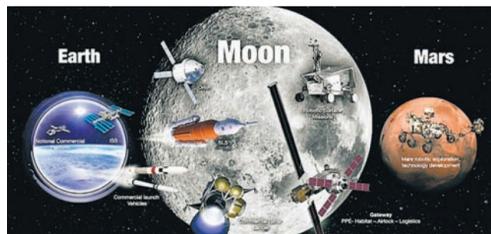
**New Delhi:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has been admitted to AIIMS with symptoms of viral fever and is recovering, sources aware of the developments said. Earlier on Monday afternoon, Sitharaman was admitted to AIIMS' private ward. She is scheduled to present the Union Budget for 2023-24 likely on February 1, 2023.

## From NASA mission to private trips, humankind gets closer to Moon

**FROM A CREWED NASA MISSION TO PRIVATE SPACECRAFT ROARING TO EXPLORE THE MOON, THE YEAR 2023 PROMISES TO BE THE FINAL LAP TOWARDS SENDING HUMANS, INCLUDING A WOMAN AND A PERSON OF COLOUR, TO THE LUNAR SURFACE IN 2024.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

On November 28, Orion spacecraft reached its maximum distance from Earth during the Artemis I mission when it was 268,563 miles away from our home planet. Among the accomplishments for NASA's human spaceflight programmes, the agency successfully launched, for the first time, its Space Launch System (SLS) rocket, which put NASA's Orion spacecraft on a path that travelled farther than any spacecraft built for astronauts has been before. The US space agency has completed manufacturing the booster segments and delivered the engine section to Kennedy for the Artemis III mission, which will be humanity's first return to the lunar surface in more than 50 years and



land the first woman on the Moon. The agency has also completed numerous key Artemis milestones that will ensure not only a human return to the lunar surface, but long-term exploration on and around the Moon in preparation for sending the first astronauts to Mars. To date, the agency has identified 13 candidate landing regions

near the lunar South Pole where the next American astronauts on the Moon could land during Artemis III, selected Axiom Space to provide the moonwalking system, including spacesuits, that astronauts will use during Artemis III, as well as awarded a task order to Collins Aerospace to develop new spacesuits for the International Space Station. NASA also awarded a contract

modification to SpaceX to further develop its Starship human landing system to meet agency requirements for long-term human exploration of the Moon, including a second crewed landing demonstration mission during Artemis IV, and announced a call to companies to provide proposals for sustainable lunar lander development as the agency works toward a regular cadence of Moon landings beyond Artemis IV. It has issued a draft request for proposals for Lunar Terrain Vehicle services to solicit companies' feedback and completed desert analog missions with crew in a simulated lunar environment to test pressurized rover operations and moonwalks for future Artemis missions. Meanwhile, private Moon missions are also shaping up, slowly but steadily.

## Mother Dairy hikes milk price by Rs 2 per litre, starting Today

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Mother Dairy has increased milk prices by Rs 2 per litre, effective from Tuesday. The reason behind the hike has been cited as an increase in cost. Mother Dairy, which is a major supplier of milk in Delhi-NCR, has increased price for the 5th time this year, with prior hikes recorded in the months of March, August, October and November. The price of a litre of full cream milk will now be Rs 66, while toned milk will be sold at Rs 53 per litre. The price of double toned milk



has been increased from Rs 45 to Rs 47 per litre. The company has not increased the prices of cow milk and other types of milk. According to the information, the increased prices will be applicable from December 27. The price of full cream and toned milk was earlier increased by Rs 2 per litre on November 21.



# TO FULFIL AILING MOTHER'S LAST WISH, DAUGHTER GETS MARRIED IN HOSPITAL

Manoj Pathak | Gaya

A critically-ill mother's last wish to see her daughter getting married in front of her was literally fulfilled. However, the mother unfortunately died hours after the marriage.

The unique wedding took place outside the ICU of a private hospital in Bihar's Gaya where the woman tied the knot with a man her family had arranged for her. Now this marriage has become a talk of the town.

The mother Poonam Kumari Verma, wife of Lalan Kumar, a resident of Bali village of Guraru block, was undergoing treatment at the private hospital located in Magistrate Colony of Gaya. Her condition was said to be critical. The doctors had advised the family members to be prepared for any eventuality.

Given the situation, Poonam made a request to her family that her last wish was to see her daughter Chandni, aged around 26, getting married before her.

Notably, Chandni's marriage was fixed with Sumit Gaurav (aged around 28), a resident of Salempur village of Guraru police station area. The date of December 26 was fixed for the engagement ceremony of



both. When Poonam told her last wish, Sumit's family members were informed about it. After this, both the families on mutual consent decided to arrange the marriage in the hospital itself to fulfil Poonam's last wish.

Thereafter, Sumit Gaurav and Chandni got married outside the

ICU in the hospital itself. It was said that without any frills, the bride and the groom garlanded each other. During this, two to four people from both the sides were present.

Happy with the marriage, Chandni Kumari said that her mother Poonam was working as a Auxiliary Nurse and Midwife (ANM)

in Magadh Medical College and Hospital and was keeping continuously ill after the Corona period. She was suffering from a heart disease.

Chandni Kumari said that she got married in the hospital to fulfil her mother's wish. The mother passed away just two hours after the marriage.

## Delhi govt approves Rs 104 cr for state-run hospitals ahead of any Covid emergency

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Following the surge in Covid cases globally, the Delhi government has alerted all its hospitals and directed them to ramp up the preparations for potential Covid cases that might be reported in the future.

The city government has approved a budget of Rs 104 crore for government hospitals for procurement of general medicines and preparation for any Covid emergency situation.

The funds were approved by Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, who also holds the Finance portfolio, in a meeting held on Monday with the Directors and Medical Superintendents of hospitals along with senior officials of the Health Department.

"This amount of Rs 104 crore has been approved by the government to ensure that there is no shortage of any medicines in the government hospitals and they are well prepared for any situation of emergency in advance," he said.

Sisodia directed the hospi-



tal heads to assess all the Covid-related requirements at their hospitals in accordance with the guidelines of the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry and share the updated list with the Health Department.

"Surge in Covid cases globally is a matter of concern for everyone. Following the situation, hospitals need to prepare themselves well in advance. They have been directed to share the details of the bed capacities, ventilators, facilities in the ICU,

number of doctors and nurses, oxygen plants, field staff and permitted medicines with the health department by this evening," he said.

Sisodia said that as per the directions of the Centre, a mock drill will be organised in all the hospitals on Tuesday, to ensure operational readiness of these health facilities for the management of Covid. In case of any gaps, the matter will be undertaken immediately by the Health Department officials concerned.

## First batch of Agniveers from J&K joins army for training

Srinagar | Agencies

The first ever batch of Agniveers selected under the Agnipath scheme from the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir joined the Indian Army for training in different Agniveer positions, the Army said on Monday.

"Approximately 200 candidates selected after rigorous tests including physical tests, medical tests, written examination and document verification, were sent from Army Recruiting Office, Srinagar to about 30 training centres of various regiments of the Indian Army on December 24," a statement said.

The candidates will report for training between December 25-30, 2022 and



their training shall commence with effect from January 1, 2023.

"The selection and despatch of candidates through all stages has been possible due to the concerted and synergised efforts of the civil administration helmed by Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir and his team, constant support of Chinar Corps

and the dedication of the aspirants to contribute to nation building. In spite of the road traffic movement conditions and sub-zero winter conditions, candidates have displayed zeal and enthusiasm in joining their training centres by due date and adorn their new role of Agniveers within the next six months," the army said.

## DU STUDENT JUMPS OFF 4TH FLOOR TO ESCAPE HARASSMENT, SERIOUSLY INJURED

New Delhi: A 19-year-old Delhi University (DU) student was seriously injured as he jumped off from the fourth floor of a PG hostel in Delhi's Mukherjee Nagar area to escape harassment, police said.

The incident occurred on the intervening night of December 20-21. Police said that the student was harassed by some men at a get-together at the flat of someone he had met through 'Blued', a social network app for the LGBT community.

According to a senior police official, the flat belonged to the victim's friend whom he had met through the dating app.

"After being in touch through the dating app, the duo had planned to meet each other and on December 20, the student went to the person's flat to meet him," the official said. However, on his arrival, he came across other men already sitting there and they started manhandling and harassing him.

"He tried to flee but his way was blocked, which forced him to jump from the fourth floor of the PG," said the official, adding that he was rushed to the hospital by local residents and now his condition is stable. Two men have been arrested in the case and further investigation is going on.

## PM takes part in programme marking 'Veer Bal Diwas'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday took part in 'Veer Bal Diwas', a programme organised in the remembrance of Sahibzadas, sons of Guru Nanak Dev, at Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium in New Delhi.

Prime Minister Modi participated in a 'Shabad Kirtan' performed by 300 'Baal Kirtanis' approximately.

He is also scheduled to flag off a march-past led by 3,000 children. On the historic occasion, the Centre has organised an interactive and participative programmes all over the country to inform and educate the citizens, especially the young children, about the story of



exemplary courage of the Sahibzadas. Prime Minister tweeted, "On Veer Baal Diwas, we recall the courage of the Sahibzades and Mata Gujri Ji. We also remember the courage of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji".

Essay writing, quiz competitions and other activities have been organised in schools and

colleges across the country to mark the day. Digital exhibitions have also been set up at public places like railway stations, petrol pumps, airports, among others. Programmes have been organised across the country where dignitaries will narrate the life story and sacrifice of the Sahibzadas.

## Covid fear: Masks made mandatory in K'taka, new guidelines released

Belagavi (Karnataka) | Agencies

The Karnataka government on Monday made wearing of masks in public places compulsory as a preventive method to tackle the evolving Covid situation in the state.

It also has also released guidelines for the New Year, limiting the celebration time.

Revenue Minister R. Ashoka, talking to reporters after holding a meeting with the officials of the Health and Disaster Management Departments, announced the decision of making wearing of masks compulsory. "However, fines will not be imposed for not wearing masks as



of now," he said. "In the interest of the people, wearing masks is made mandatory," he added. He government has also made

two doses of vaccination and wearing of masks compulsory for the staff of all theaters, malls, hotels, restaurants, indoor programmes, public meetings

and schools and colleges, the Minister said. "Taking a booster dose is recommended. The hotels and pubs should operate with the present seating capacity and they should not increase it. During the celebrations of New Year, wearing of masks has been made compulsory at M.G. Road, Brigade Road and other places in Bengaluru and other cities," Ashoka said.

The celebration time on the occasion of New Year is limited to 1 a.m. and celebrations will not be allowed after it. It is advised that the senior citizens, pregnant women, and children should remain indoors and not participate in celebrations in crowded areas.

## Six held for cheating HDFC Bank credit card holders

Gurugram | Agencies

Six men were arrested from a hotel located on the Mehrauli-Gurugram road for allegedly cheating HDFC Bank credit card holders of Rs 1.61 lakh, the police said on Monday.

A complaint in this regard was lodged by a 70-year-old senior citizen in October with the cyber crime police station (east), the police said. The accused have been identified as Sandeep Saini, Suhel, Mukesh, Sunil Saini, Pritam and Sushil.

The police have also recovered 10 mobile phones and a tablet from the accused persons. During the probe, the accused revealed that they created a fake website similar to the website of HDFC Bank, targeting the bank's credit card holders. "The culprits used to send a link to redeem bonus points and when the



card holders clicked on that link and put their card details, the accused got all their details on the backend of the website and transferred money from the victim's credit cards and withdrew cash from ATMs," said Subhash Boken, spokesperson of Gurugram police.

During the investigation, it was also found that the accused used to book rooms in 3-star and 5-star hotels and carry out fraudulent transactions from there.

## 20 cars gutted in fire at multi-level parking in Delhi, one held

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As many as 20 cars were gutted after a fire broke out in a Municipal Corporation's multi-level parking in Delhi's Subhash Nagar area in the wee hours of Monday.

Police said that they have arrested the accused, who had set a car on fire following a personal enmity with one man. However, the fire spread and caught other cars in the parking lot.

According to a senior police official, around 4:30 a.m., a police control room (PCR) call regarding fire in a MCD multi-level parking at Subhash Nagar, Delhi was received at Rajouri Garden police station following which a police team rushed to the spot. "Around seven fire tenders also came in to action immediately and extinguished the fire, where 20 cars were found burnt, third basement of the parking, out of which some vehicles were completely burnt, merely chassis of the vehicles can be

seen," said the official. Police have also registered an FIR in the connection. "To ascertain how the incident occurred, a police team was formed and CCTV cameras installed at MCD parking were checked wherein a person was seen lighting fire in the tyre of an Ertiga car and after that other parked car also caught fire," said the official.

Police also found that the accused had come in a Honda CRV car and after the incident he left the spot in the same car. The car route was followed with the help of CCTV cameras installed in the area and the culprit identified as Yash Arora, a resident of Subhash Nagar, was nabbed. "On interrogation, he disclosed that he has personal enmity with Ishan, who is the owner of Ertiga, over some personal issues and to take revenge from Ishan, he burnt his car, which was parked at MCD multi-level parking, Subhash Nagar," said the official.

## Sudden surge in demand for vaccine leads to shortage in Gujarat



Gandhinagar | Agencies

Since the BF-7 variant of Coronavirus has been spreading rapidly in Gujarat and the Indian government is appealing to people to take requisite precautions, there has been a sudden surge in the demand for Covid vaccines, the state government said.

Due to sudden surge in demand for vaccines, some health centres ran short of it. The supply of vaccines is said to increase soon.

Additional Director (Health), government of Gujarat, Nilam Patel, told media-

persons on Monday in Gandhinagar: "Since the Covid cases had dropped drastically, people had started taking Covid-19 lightly and were less enthusiastic in taking booster dose, so the government, too, was keeping a low stock. As on Monday, there are 35,000 vaccine bottles available with the state government." Patel said that since the last few days, there has been a surge in the number of people taking booster dose. "Till the first week of December, on an average 3,000 vaccinations were taking place on a daily basis but since December 15, all of a sudden people,

were turning up in large numbers to take the booster dose," Patel added.

Since Friday, 10,000 persons were vaccinated daily because of which some health centres were facing a shortage of vaccines.

The Additional Director (Health) said that a fresh order for Covid-19 vaccines have been placed and he was hopeful that soon, the supply of vaccines will be restored and people will not have to return without getting the vaccine.

Rajkot District Collector, Arun Mahesh Babu took stock of the situation and preparedness to Covid-19 challenges as well as visited government hospitals, oxygen plants and Covid wards. Later, he told the media about the vaccine stock and supply issue which he will discuss with the District Development Officer and Rajkot Municipal Commissioner, and will put up a request to increase vaccine supply for the district. In Ahmedabad, District Education Officer Hitendra Padheria held a video conference with the school management and have instructed them to take precautionary measures like making masks mandatory for students and following Covid guidelines in schools such as keeping sanitisers and ensuring that no events or gathering are organised inside the school premises or outside.

## TN temple sealed after Dalits entry prevented



Chennai | Agencies

October 31.

Revenue officials sealed the Sakthi Mariamman Temple at Virudasampatti in Tamil Nadu's Salem district after caste Hindus prevented the entry of Dalits into the temple.

Police said that the temple, under the control of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment (HR&CE) Department, was recently renovated and consecration was conducted by the caste Hindus. However after this, Dalits were not allowed entry to the temple and a meeting was held by the revenue officials on

After the meeting, Dalits were allowed into the temple. However, Dalits were again not allowed to enter the temple on Sunday evening when upper caste women prevented their entry. Tension prevailed in the temple premises as both groups assembled and police and revenue officials arrived but the caste Hindus were adamant that the Dalits would not be allowed entry to the temple. This created a tense situation and revenue officials shut down the temple by night. Heavy police contingents are being deployed to prevent any untoward incidents in the area.



# TILL SC VERDICT, DECLARE DISPUTED BORDER AREAS AS UNION TERRITORY: THACKERAY

Team Absolute | Nagpur

As the Maharashtra-Karnataka boundary row continues to burn, former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Monday demanded that the disputed areas around the borders should be declared as 'Union Territory' till the Supreme Court delivers its verdict.

Speaking in the Maharashtra Legislative Council, the Shiv Sena (UBT) President said though Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai has adopted an aggressive stance on the issue, the Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde remains silent. He said it is not just a case of language and border, but of "humanity", Marathi-speaking people have been residing in the border villages from generations. Their daily life, language and lifestyle is Marathi, he said.

"Until the apex court takes decision in the matter, the areas of Belagavi (Belgaum), Karwar, Nippani should be declared as a UT. This point must be included in the resolution that is passed in the legislature," said Thackeray.

Later, speaking to the media out-



side the house, Thackeray accused Karnataka of harassment of the Marathi-speaking population on the borders, which has never happened with the Kannada-speaking people in Maharashtra.

"This is not just a question of two languages but of humanity. The people living in the border areas have

been suffering for decades and generations. It is high time for the Centre to intervene and take firm steps to resolve the grievances of the affected people for their future," the former CM said.

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi allies Congress, Nationalist Congress Party and Sena (UBT) and

the Leader of Opposition Ajit Pawar have been continuously targeting the Shinde-Fadnavis government of going 'soft' on Karnataka on the prickly border problems and have demanded a tough stand against Bommai.



Replying to the issue, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis assured that "under any circumstances, Maharashtra will not desert our people residing in the disputed borders areas." "We shall fight for every inch of land with the Centre or the apex court... We shall not relent and tackle any injustice meted to the people living there," Fadnavis declared.

# Police chief asked to appoint senior officer to probe 2021 rape case

Team Absolute | Solapur

Bombay High Court directed the Maharashtra state director general of police (DGP) to appoint a senior IPS rank officer to carry out investigations into an alleged gang rape case in Solapur after the rape survivor approached the Court with her plea to transfer her case, accusing the present investigation team of protecting the accused.

The alleged gang rape took place on October 31, 2021 in Maharashtra's Solapur area. Police recorded the victim's statement in January 2022 and filed the charge sheet in February 2022.

The victim in her plea submitted on May 9 stated that police sidelined the statement of the victim recorded under Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and have relied on an alibi of the accused while filing the charge sheet.

The HC bench has asked the magistrate court not to take any step on the charge sheet filed till further orders and has also directed DGO to conduct an inquiry against the investigating officer (IO) of the Solapur police.

The HC has also directed its registry to hand deliver a copy of the order to the Home Minister, Law minister of Maharashtra and State women's commission for their information and record.

While passing the order on December 21, Bombay HC has observed that it is very



unhappy over repeated cases of such nature where the police are allegedly involved in protecting the rape accused. "It clearly appears to us that, the Investigating Officer with a view to protecting both the accused persons from the crime of higher degree has indulged into the said act. It further appears that he is interested in protecting the accused in such an offence of serious nature. The facts as unfurled are not only astonishing but flabbergasting and shake the consciousness of this court."

"In the circumstances, we hereby direct the Director General of Police, Maharashtra to personally peruse the record of the investigation and transfer the investigation of the present crime to a Senior Officer of the IPS Cadre to further investigate the present crime. The DGP is also directed to instruct the concerned Officer not to relegate his powers further to any subordinate officer, taking into consideration the serious nature of the case"

# Tunisha Sharma tried suicide before, claims Sheezan. "Never," says her uncle

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Sheezan Khan, the boyfriend of actor Tunisha Sharma, has claimed that she tried to die by suicide a few days before she was found hanging on the sets.

"Tunisha had recently tried to commit suicide a few days before her death, but at that time I saved her and told Tunisha's mother to take special care of her," a police source quoting Sheezan Khan said.

The actor told the police he broke up with Tunisha Sharma after he was "so disturbed by the atmosphere in the country that emerged after the gruesome murder of Shradha Walkar" allegedly by her live-in partner Aaftab Poonawala. Rightwing groups have alleged 'love jihad', which they claim is the act of Muslim men luring Hindu women to convert, in the macabre Shradha Walkar murder case.

Tunisha Sharma's uncle, Pawan Sharma, said to a news channel that she came to know Sheezan Khan has been going around with other women, which put her in a lot of stress. "Both ate at the makeup room. No one knows what happened after that. We got a call asking us to come," Pawan Sharma said.

He denied Sheezan Khan's claim that Tunisha Sharma tried to die by suicide in the



two weeks before she was found dead on the sets.

"Never, never. She never tried to commit suicide," her uncle said. "She was in a lot of stress. That's why her mother was worried about her," Pawan Sharma said. The police are now investigating the reason behind her alleged suicide. They have recorded statements from her mother Vanita Sharma and her uncle.

# Cops stop to watch kesariya played by artist, Anushka Sharma reacts

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A video shared by the Mumbai Police has gone viral where two of its officers are seen attending an impromptu music session on the roadside at night.

Uploaded on Instagram, the video shows a boy sitting on a parked scooter. He is playing the guitar and singing the hit track Kesariya from the 2022 film Brahmastra: Part One - Shiva. As the camera pans, we see a police officer on a bike and the other official standing patiently to enjoy the music. "Mumbaikar Mumbai Police - a great 'love story' indeed!" the caption read. As the video did rounds on social media, a user, who seemed impressed by the police's gesture, asked, "Can we get Mumbai Police in Chennai too?" Responding to the tweet, the Mumbai Police wrote, "We are here for you online, 24/7. Else, you



are always welcome to our fine city of Mumbai! We assure you we will be there to protect and serve." The video amassed more than 5 lakh views on



Instagram and even caught the attention of Bollywood actor Anushka Sharma who shared it in her Stories with a red heart emoji.

Other users too lauded the Mumbai Police. "Man, I love Bombay and the police there! Y'all make us feel so safe and secure!" a user wrote. Another said, "Mumbai police deserve this. Also, as our city has different cultures, I hope every officer will try to make a more peaceful environment around them and will try their best to make people feel safe. Proud of our Mumbai police!"

"Hands down, nothing like Mumbai Police! We thank you for keeping us safe," a comment read. One asked, "Can we get Mumbai police in Punjab too?"

Earlier this month, the Mumbai Police had come up with a witty video to create awareness about online scams. In the clip, two people are seen facing each other. The text on one of them reads, "Scammers asking you for OTP" while on the other it reads, "You giving scammers your OTP?"

# 19-YEAR-OLD YOUTH KILLED HIS UNCLE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A 19-year-old youth allegedly killed his uncle (husband of his mother's sister) over a quarrel between the two. The youth allegedly attacked his uncle with knife at his house in Malvani Rathodi area on December 26, and escaped after the incident. The deceased -- identified as Raju Kanojia -- was rushed to hospital by the accused's mother and other relatives but was declared dead before the admission in the Dr. Babasaheb Shatabdi Hospital at Kandivali in the wee hours of Monday.

During the interrogation, it is revealed that the accused and deceased -- the duo were residing at the same locality and that they often used to visit each other's house. According to police, as Kanojia visited the accused youth's house along with his brother in law, the accused and deceased had an argument over some issue, during which the accused youth abused him. The deceased slapped the accused in anger, and the accused attacked Kanojia with knife, said an officer.



"The accused is at large since we have registered a case of murder and searching the accused," said DCP Ajay Kumar Bansal.

# THREE HELD FOR THEFT AT CONSTRUCTION SITE

Thane: Three persons have been arrested for allegedly stealing materials from a construction site in Maharashtra's Thane city, police said on Monday.

Two women and an autorickshaw driver allegedly broke into a godown at a construction site in Majiwada around 7 am on Sunday and were stealing materials worth Rs 20,000, an official said. An offence under sections 380 (theft) and other relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code was registered against the accused who were caught red-handed by the staff at the site, inspector Sanjay Nimbalkar of Kapurbawdi police station said.

# Paragliding tourist, falls hundreds of feet to death as harness fails

Team Absolute | Mumbai/Manali

A 30-year-old tourist from Maharashtra fell to his death during paragliding in the Dohbi area of Kullu district on Saturday. According to eyewitnesses, the victim fell hundreds of feet possibly due to harness failure during a tandem flight. While the tourist died on the spot, the pilot of the paraglider was safe.

The victim was identified as Suraj Sanjay Shah (30) of Shirval village in Maharashtra's Satara district. He was visiting Manali with his friends. Superintendent of Police, Kullu, Gurdev Sharma said on Sunday that police received information that a person had fallen from a paraglider that was flying at a very high altitude in the Dohbi area. "The pilot is safe but the passenger (tourist) suc-



cumbed to injuries on the spot," he said "A case of negligence act has been registered under sections 336 (act endangering life or personal safety of others) and 304A (causing death by negligence) of the IPC Act," the SP said. A number of people have either died or sustained injuries during tandem paragliding in Himachal Pradesh. Paragliding and all other adventure sports activities in the state were banned by the Himachal Pradesh High court in January

this year after taking strict note of the death of a 12-year-old boy from Bengaluru due to an accident near Bir Billing paragliding site. The court had ordered the setting up of a technical committee to inspect the adventure activity sites. Most of the equipment was found to be not approved by the technical committee and the registration of many operators was faulty. Only those operators were allowed in April who could fulfil the required parameters.

# MTHL races towards completion, hybrid crash barriers come up

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As the upcoming Mumbai Trans Harbour Link hurries towards completion, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) has started installing vehicle crash barriers on the outer side of the carriageway, officials said here on Monday.

The height of these vehicle crash barriers is 1,550 mm comprising a concrete-metal combination in a hybrid design, in compliance with the International Standard EN1317.

The hybrid carriers have carried out physical crash tests on the crash barrier as stipulated by international safety standards, said

MMRDA Metropolitan Commissioner S. V.R. Srinivas.

The material for the items of the post-and rail system above and the base plate are also made of galvanised steel sections, complying with world norms and crash testing of the new design was done successfully in the UK and South Korea. Along with safety, the crash barriers are designed such that the commuters can enjoy the view of the sea, the wetlands with pink flamingos and other natural beauty as the vehicles zoom from one end to the other on the MTHL which will link the Mumbai island with the mainland.

The MTHL will be almost 22 kms long, including 16.5

km over the sea and 5.5 km on land, and around 120 metre wide, to provide links to the upcoming Navi Mumbai International Airport, the hinterland, Konkan and other regions.

It will be a six-lane bridge, 3+3, plus two emergency lanes, with several interchanges on both sides, and is coming up with a loan from Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Incidentally, the MMRDA had originally planned to erect a 5-feet wall as a crash barrier on either side for the entire 22-km length.

However, since it would block the sea view of the Mumbai Harbour besides creating a 'tunnel effect' while driving, the proposal was dropped for the hybrid

# MOBILE SNATCHER HELD, COPS RECOVER 15 PHONES

Team Absolute | Byculla

Police on Monday said that after days of studying the pattern of multiple mobile phone snatchings in south Mumbai they have finally nabbed a 19-year-old suspect they had been looking for the past several days. According to the police, a fresh incident of mobile phone snatching had come to light on December 21 after a complainant reached out to the Byculla Police and told them that he was walking on the street while talking on his phone when a man on a bike snatched his mobile. A team under the guidance of Senior Inspector Chimaji Adhwa immediately began to look for technical clues and found that the suspect had a pattern of targeting people walking on streets while talking on their phones.

"The team checked multiple CCTV footage and found that the suspect had fled away towards the Saat Rasta Junction in Agripada area of



Mumbai. Further, the officials in the team activated their sources network to gather information on the suspect and learnt that he was a resident of Dhoi Ghat area but when the officials conducted checks to find him, it was learnt that after the incident he had not returned to his home," said a police official. The police said, the

team kept working on every piece of information they got from their sources and on December 24, they learnt that the suspect was to reach near Dockyard Road railway station. Accordingly, a trap was laid and the suspect was nabbed. "He has been identified as Shubham Babulal Diwakar. After his arrest, the police

have recovered as many as 15 phones from him. Investigations have revealed that he was involved in at least 5 cases of mobile phone snatching under the jurisdiction of Byculla police station alone, further investigations are going on to identify if he had been involved in other similar cases in different parts of the city," the official said.



EDITOR'S SPECS

## The two faces of 'The Serpent'

After spending over 19 years in Kathmandu jail, notorious criminal Charles Sobhraj (78), also known as 'The Serpent' and the 'Bikini Killer', was freed from jail and deported to Paris by the Nepali authorities on Friday. On Wednesday, Nepal's Supreme Court had ordered the release of Sobhraj on health and age grounds. Sobhraj, who was charged with several cases of murder, mostly of women, served the longest time in jail in Nepal, but those who came close to him in recent days, said that they found a "different" Sobhraj while interacting with him on different occasions. Chintan had filed a case in the Supreme Court for his release owing to his age factor and health issues. Sobhraj underwent a heart surgery in 2017 in Kathmandu and also had a cataract operation. Ramesh Koirala, who conducted the heart surgery, later came up with a book titled 'Charles Sobhraj: Inside the Heart of the Bikini Killer', and also narrated his interface with Sobhraj. According to Chintan, Sobhraj seemed to be a learned person. Through a lady lawyer in France, Sobhraj sent a message to Chintan on Saturday that he had safely reached Paris. After the Nepal government did not allow him to stay for a few more days in Kathmandu, Sobhraj was deported to Paris on Friday. Sobhraj spent 19 years and two months in the Kathmandu central jail. Sobhraj argued in his petition in Nepal's Supreme Court that he has already served 19 years in jail and that he is 78 years old. Suave and articulate, Sobhraj used to befriend unsuspecting Western backpackers and upon earning their trust, drugged and murdered them, and fled with their cash, valuables and passports. Having spent 43 years of his life in jail, Sobhraj is perhaps the world's only convict who has served life sentences in two different countries during one lifetime.

# What colour is freedom of expression?

Vinod Mirani

The 'Pathaan' controversy has snowballed. But, in this case, to call it a fireball would be more apt. It all started with the depiction of a song in the film, 'Besharam Rang'. I have heard of a voluptuous song or a scene related to a certain character's portrayal in many films. Sadly, in this case, it is nothing of that sort.

The term voluptuous fits a performer, not the act. And the performer here has nothing of that voluptuousness to boast of. The number is full of suggestive moves; it is provocative and reeks of vulgarity.

Whoever thinks that exposing will lure the audience has some very wrong ideas about our moviegoers. If it were so, Sunny Leone would have been the biggest star in our cinema universe and at least she has the body to flaunt. (Now, of course, she insists on a certain dress code before she signs a film.)

'Pathaan' reminds me of a book, 'The Afghan' (2006), by Frederick Forsyth. It was a book worth remembering by all counts. But my memory was revived when Kamal Haasan copied the subject to make his own version, Vishwaroopam (2012). To say the least, Haasan's version was funny for those who had read the book.

In Haasan's version, as in the original, an Al Qaeda man, who resembles Haasan, is captured by the US and Haasan impersonates him with the aim to bring down Al Qaeda! Shah Rukh Khan's 'Pathaan' is a patriotic film. The public perception about a Pathan or an Afghan is that of a solidly built six-foot-plus man. Kamal Haasan did not fit that image. Don't know if Shah Rukh Khan will!

The very initial response to the song's release on YouTube was negative. If a star or a maker needs such a prop as 'Besharam Rang', it shows lack of confidence. The religious factions joined the bandwagon only later. That helped, the controversy caught on, if that is what the makers



wanted. The song shows the dancer, Deepika Padukone, in various flimsy bikinis and one of them happens to be in saffron or 'bhagwa', a colour with which the country's majority community identifies with.

Looks like thanks to the vulgarity of the choreography, coupled with the saffron and the lyrics, 'Besharam Rang' has touched some raw nerves. On the other hand, Islamists have a problem with how a Pathan is depicted in the film.

If the makers added this song to the film only to roll it out as a promo with plans to withdraw it when the time for the film's release came, it has backfired. Yes, the makers will make a lot of money from YouTube, where all links to the songs, including the one put up by YRF, are crossing millions of hits (some 113 million at last count).

When such things happen, certain people, especially film stars, raise the issue of freedom of speech and expression. Aamir Khan,

Naseeruddin Shah and Javed Akhtar, among others, have resorted to airing such thoughts while they continue to enjoy all the freedom they could ask for.

Yet, a statement by Amitabh Bachchan during the inauguration of the Kolkata Film Festival last week was most curious. He said, "Even now, questions are being raised on civil liberties and freedom of expression." Yes, they are being raised, but is he also raising it?

Bachchan's statement made no sense as to why he said it and for whom it was directed at. There was no preamble or conclusion to his comment. Also sharing the stage with him at the event was Shah Rukh Khan, whose 'Pathaan' is in the news. Was it meant to please Khan or was it directed at the West Bengal Chief Minister, who was also on the stage?

Bachchan also made a reference to the Cinematograph Act of 1952 vis-a-vis the Censor Board. Why it

merited a mention also was left unsaid. He should know that the Act has been amended from time to time and efforts have often been made to appoint a film industry person in the Chair.

By the way, the Bachchan-starrer 'Sholay' was the victim of the Censor Board and so was 'Inquilaab', among other films, but there is no record of his observations on freedom of speech and expression when this happened.

After all these years in the film industry, one is expected to know that everything does not start and end with the Censor Board. There are other local authorities, down to a District Collector, who have the power to stop a film's screenings if they fear that a film may hurt people's sentiments or it may create unrest in his area.

But, most of all, India being the democracy that it is, the masses have freedom of speech and expression. Only, their way of demonstrating or expressing that freedom may not suit everybody. What a senior star should be asking is, why is there censorship for films but none for the digital media, such as YouTube, where the song 'Besharam Rang' was released. In a country where six-and-eight-year-old girls are kidnapped, raped and killed, we can certainly do without more provocation to fuel the perversion of such people. 'Besharam Rang' is just that fuel.

'Cirkus' second preference; cinema stay with 'Avatar'

Rohit Shetty's 'Cirkus', which released on Friday, December 23, was the major Hindi release of the Christmas week. The holiday season was expected to help it make the most of its potential at the box office. What more can a maker ask for? With such an opportune release week for a film, that too one coming from a director reputed for giving mass-oriented blockbusters, the release should have been smooth, a cakewalk.

Here, things got a bit complicated. Though riding on the film is the director

Rohit Shetty's reputation and that of a sellable star, Ranveer Singh, the makers had to face a hard time. To make the most of the Christmas holidays, the film needed an extensive release with as many screens as possible. This should have been easy. As there is no other Hindi release to compete with, it could be considered an open week. In normal circumstances, the exhibitors should be chasing the film's distributors, but, surprisingly, it was the other way round!

'Cirkus' was not getting the prime multiplex cinemas and even the single screens equipped with 2K screening facility were out of bounds. The problem was the continuation of the Hollywood hit, 'Avatar: The Way Of Water'. All the best cinemas have been booked by the 'Avatar' distributors, Disney, who are bound by a two-week contract. Besides the contract, the cinema managements had no reason to discontinue 'Avatar' and accommodate a new film because 'Avatar' was doing exceedingly well.

Yes, luckily for 'Cirkus', the film is being distributed by PVR, who have granted more shows to the film at their cinemas by reducing the screening of 'Avatar: The Way Of Water'. The new age makers may not be aware, but asking cinemas to discontinue a screening is considered a sacrilege and has always backfired. For the rest of the cinema chains, it looks like they trust Hollywood more than the Hindi film industry now. Last Christmas, too, there was a contest for screen time between the Hindi film, '83', and the Hollywood global hit, 'Spider-Man: No Way Home'. If the cinemas count more on Hollywood today, they cannot be blamed because the Disney banner itself has given them five hits in row, all making money for them.

And now it looks like the exhibitors who stuck with 'Avatar: Way Of Water' have made the right decision, taking into account the reports about 'Cirkus'!

## international

## CHINA STAGES BIG MILITARY INCURSION, SAYS TAIWAN

Taipei | Agencies

China is staging one of its biggest incursions so far in the seas and skies around Taiwan, according to data from the island's Defence Ministry, media reports said.

It said that 71 Chinese air force planes, including fighter jets and drones, had entered Taiwan's so-called air defence identification zone, the BBC said.

Taiwan is self-ruled - but China sees it as a breakaway province with which it will eventually reunite.

Tensions between the two sides have steadily increased in recent months, BBC reported. In August, Beijing was enraged by a visit to the island by US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the most senior US politician to visit Taiwan in 25 years.

China responded to that visit by holding what was then its biggest-ever military exercises in the seas around Taiwan, and also blocked



some trade with the island.

Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu condemned China's action then as highly provocative. China has never said it would not use force to bring Taiwan under its control. On Monday, Taiwan's Defence Ministry said 43 Chinese aircraft had crossed over the so-called median line, an unofficial buffer separating the two sides inside the air defence zone, BBC reported.

China said it had conducted "strike drills" around Taiwan on Sunday in response to what it said was provocation from the island and the US.

Washington has always walked a diplomatic tightrope over the issue of Taiwan.

On the one hand it adheres to the One-China policy, a cornerstone of its relationship with Beijing. Under this policy, the US acknowledges that there is only one Chinese government, and has formal ties with Beijing rather than Taiwan.

But it also maintains close relations with Taiwan and sells arms to it under the Taiwan Relations Act, which states that the US must provide the island with the means to defend itself.

## 6 DEAD, 19 MISSING IN PHILIPPINE FLOODS

Manila | Agencies

At least six people have died and 19 others are missing due to flooding triggered by heavy rain across the Philippines over the weekend, the government said on Monday. In a report, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said two died in the Bicol region on the main Luzon island, while four died in northern Mindanao, reports Xinhua news agency.

For the missing people, the agency said 10 were in the Bicol region.

Three others were reported injured. The agency said the flooding affected over 100,000 people in five regions, mainly in the central and southern Philippines.

Nearly 45,000 evacuated people spent Christmas holidays in at least 27 government shelters while the rest stayed with relatives.

The NDRRMC added that almost 50 houses were either totally or partially damaged by heavy rain and flooding.

The floods also rendered at least 14 roads impassable.

On Monday, the state weather bureau warned that the shear line will bring "moderate to heavy rains with, at times, intense rains over central and southern Philippines".

"Flooding and rain-induced landslides are likely," the weather bureau warned, urging the public and government agencies "to take all necessary measures to protect life and property".

## 5 Pak soldiers dead as 7 separate blasts rip through Balochistan

Islamabad | Agencies

Five soldiers were killed and more than a dozen others injured as seven separate blasts ripped through Balochistan -- three in Quetta, two in Turbat, and one each in Hub and Kohlu districts, officials said.

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that on Sunday during an intelligence-based clearance operation, which is underway since December 24, an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded near a "leading party" in Kohlu district's Kahan area, reports Geo News.

Describing the incident as an "externally perpetrated threat of terrorism", the ISPR said that "such cowardly acts by inimical elements cannot sabotage the hard-earned peace and prosperity in Balochistan".



The military's media wing said that the security forces remain determined to challenge their nefarious designs, "even at the cost of blood and lives".

Following the incident, according to the ISPR, a sanitisation operation was launched in the area to apprehend perpetrators.

Unidentified men threw a grenade at a police checkpoint in Quetta's Satellite Town, injuring eight -- three on-duty men and five citizens, the police said.

Hours before this inci-

dent, a grenade blast took place within the premises of Hub's Sadar Police Station, injuring three people, police said.

The rescue sources said the injured people were to the city's civil hospital.

In the sixth attack, a hand grenade exploded at Saryab Road in Quetta's Musa Colony. Fortunately, police said, no casualties were reported as a result of the attack.

The seventh attack -- a hand grenade blast -- hit Turbat's Josak area, police said; however, no injuries were reported, Geo News reported.

## 38 dead as severe Arctic storm batters US, Canada

Washington | Agencies

At least 38 people have died due to a severe Arctic storm that has continued to batter parts of the US and Canada, with some areas recording temperatures as low as -45 degrees Celsius, authorities have confirmed. Of the 38 victims, 34 were reported across the US, majority of them being in Buffalo, New York, the BBC reported.

New York State Governor Kathy Hochul, a native of Buffalo, said: "This will go down in history as Buffalo's most devastating storm."

Storm-related deaths were also reported in Vermont, Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin, Kansas, and Colorado.

The other four deaths occurred in Canada when a bus rolled over on an icy road near the town of Merritt, in



the western province of British Columbia.

The storm has also left tens of thousands of households in both the

countries without electricity.

As of Sunday afternoon, less than 200,000 customers in the US were without power, down from a peak of

1.7 million.

In Canada, the provinces of Ontario and Quebec were the worst affected by the power outages, reports the BBC.

In Quebec, almost 120,000 customers were without electricity as of Sunday, with officials saying that it some could take days for some households to be reconnected.

Meanwhile, thousands of flights have been cancelled and more than 55 million Americans still remain under wind chill alert.

The reach of the blizzard conditions has been unprecedented, stretching from Canada as far south as Texas.

The US state of Montana has been the worst hit by the severe winter storm, with temperatures dropping to -45 degrees Celsius.

London | Agencies

An Indian student from Bengaluru has won a prestigious scholarship worth 5,000 pounds, which is awarded to an undergraduate pursuing any of the 24 subjects offered at the University of Dundee, UK.

Rajvir Singh, 18, who studies Psychology and French at the University of Dundee, will receive the 2022 Jaijai Dass Sagar Memorial Scholarship for Excellence, which supports a student who aims to give back to their community. The award which, is given to one aspiring student from India each year, honours Scotland's first non-white elected politician and doctor Jaijai Dass Sagar, who travelled all the way from Punjab to study at the University over 100 years ago.

Sagar went on to use his medical education to help transform the lives of people living in the city of Dundee, and served as the city councillor for 18 years until his death in

1954. Singh, who was "grateful" to have been awarded the scholarship, said that his personal experiences with mental health lay behind his choice of course. "I wanted to study psychology because, like many others, I have struggled with mental health. Even though support is available in India, there's a lot of social stigma around it... I'm very grateful to have been awarded the Sagar Scholarship," Singh said in a statement. "My hope is to use my education to become a therapist, so I can be the kind of support for others that I didn't always get," he added. Singh has also been awarded the Global Excellence Scholarship worth 6,000 pounds per year, which is given to students who show excellence through their academic activities and have travelled internationally to study in the UK. "The UK is really good for psychology. The BPS (British Psychological Society) accredited courses are amongst the best in the world, so I wanted to come to the UK," he added.



## SPORTS MIN ANURAG THAKUR VISITS SAI NCOE BHOPAL, INTERACTS WITH ATHLETES AT MP HALL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Sports minister Anurag Thakur paid a visit to the Sports Authority of India (SAI) National Centre of Excellence in Bhopal on Monday and interacted with athletes as well as took a tour of the various facilities in the centre.

The visit took place hours before the Minister was present to launch the Khelo India Youth Games Madhya Pradesh logo in the presence of Chief Minister of MP, Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Anurag Thakur visited the MP Hall at the SAI centre which features the Sports Science departments as well as the Judo, Wushu, Boxing and the Hockey Field of Play (FOPs). The SAI NCOE Bhopal covers the following sports disciplines: Athletics, Boxing, Hockey, Judo, Wushu and Kayaking and Canoeing.

"What the Sports Authority of India is doing to maintain close to 100 acres big centres and campuses is also noteworthy. I congratulate the authorities who do so many programs as well for athletes, coaches, support staff and so on," Anurag Thakur mentioned. Earlier in the day the



Minister visited the para canoeing facility in the state and was accompanied by Yashodhara Rajee Scindia, Minister of Sports and Youth Welfare, MP, as well as other officials from the Madhya Pradesh government. They interacted with a few athletes, including para-Canoeist Prachi Yadav, who scripted history by becoming the first Indian to win a medal (bronze) at the Paracanoe World Cup in Poland earlier this year.

Commenting on the sports infrastructure available across the State, the Minister added, "Bhopal has one of the best shooting and equestrian ranges. It is close to world class. The State of MP is also prepared very much for the Khelo India Youth Games." MP is slowly becoming a hub of Indian sports. I wish if all other States and UTs follow the example, India will become a sporting superpower soon," he added.

## Performance of state ministers worries BJP as MP enters poll year

Praveen Dwivedi | Bhopal

With the elections for the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly getting closer and the preparations to speed up by the beginning of 2023, the state's ruling BJP does not want to repeat the mistakes it made in 2018.

Therefore, along with over 60 sitting MLAs, over a dozen cabinet ministers, whose performances were found poor in the internal survey reports, have been given an ultimatum for the next three months to rework on their performances, highly placed sources told correspondent.

In the last Assembly elections (2018), all sitting ministers were given tickets, of which 13 had lost, which was also one of the key reasons the BJP could not reach a majority mark of 116 to form the government.

This time, the top leadership of the state BJP seems not to be confident of over a dozen sitting ministers, and therefore to remain in power, the safe party does not want to make the same mistake in the 2023 elections.

Sources said that Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan during a meeting with his cabinet ministers recently has given an ultimatum to over a dozen ministers; including those who are loyalists of the Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia. The



performance of the ministers, who have been given an ultimatum, will be reviewed again after three months.

"The situation is very different for the BJP, and it is because of various reasons. Therefore, the party will take every step strategically. At least, 13-14 sitting ministers and 60 MLAs are likely to be denied tickets in the 2023 elections," a trusted source told correspondent.

At present, the worrying situation for the ruling BJP has arisen due to an internal survey report, which found performance of about 40 per cent MLAs as poor and unsatisfactory. The list includes some ministers also.

"The party has given a last warning to the MLAs to improve performance or face denial of party ticket for the Assembly polls," BJP functionaries said, seeking anonymity.

The MLAs and Ministers have been given three months to improve their perception among people. "We are clear that we will not give tickets to MLAs whose performance is poor. There is a clear cut question - can you win the election? The party has a long queue of eligible candidates and why should they not be given a chance to perform well enough," a BJP functionary said, wishing not to be named.

However, some party functionaries were also of the view that internal survey isn't the main reason of worry for the BJP, but various other reasons, which is why the BJP did want to leave any loophole ahead of the elections.

"Shivraj Singh Chouhan would have confidence in all his cabinet ministers, had it (cabinet) been fully selected on his own choice. Those who have not followed Chouhan's instructions, despite his repeated instructions in the last two years, can't make their performance better in next three or six months," a BJP functionary told correspondent.

## Madhya Pradesh leading in many fields has to be made an ideal state: Chief Minister Chouhan

For better implementation of schemes, CM Fellows will be associated in all districts. Mission Karmayogi Yojana Important step of Government of India.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that several measures of good governance have been implemented in Madhya Pradesh to provide better benefits to the general public through the implementation of schemes. Madhya Pradesh is the first state to constitute the State Statistics Commission in the context of the use of statistical data in development plans. In this sequence, now one CM Fellow will be associated in each district, who will also provide necessary support to the minister in charge of the district. Madhya Pradesh is leading in many fields. Now the effort is to make Madhya Pradesh an ideal state. The citizens of the state will be benefited by the nectar that emanates from today's brainstorming. Team Madhya Pradesh will bring better results in future as well. The Madhya Pradesh government will also enter into an agreement with the Capacity Building Commission of the Government of India. In this, the focus will be on the training program. Mission Karmayogi Scheme Officials of Ministries and Departments It is a concrete step taken by the Government of India in the direction of increasing the efficiency of In this direction, Madhya Pradesh will work



to increase the efficiency of human resources in the government sector by assessing them. Chief Minister, while addressing the closing session of "Chitan Shivir Amrit Kaal Mein Atmanirbhar Madhya Pradesh" in the presence of ministers, senior administrative and police officers in the hall of Samatva Bhavan of Chief Minister's residence, said that review of welfare programs every month at the department level. Chouhan said that information about the implementation of the schemes will be obtained by giving responsibility to fifteen CM public service friends in each development block. Work of case study

of schemes with very successful implementation will also be done. With this, the message of the best works of Madhya Pradesh will reach other states. Four permanent groups of ministers related to physical infrastructure, good governance, health, education and economy and employment will work continuously towards better results and increasing the pace of development works. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that after the science policy, the state's youth policy is coming out on January 13, after that the cooperative policy will also come soon.

### CHIEF MINISTER MET PRIME MINISTER IN NEW DELHI



Bhopal : Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today met Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence 7-Lok Kalyan Marg in New Delhi and discussed various contemporary issues related to development and public welfare of Madhya Pradesh. Chief Minister Chouhan sought guidance from Prime Minister Modi by discussing the meetings of Pravasi Bharatiya Sammelan and Global Investors Summit, G-20 Summit to be held in Indore in January 2023 and Khelo India Youth Games in Madhya Pradesh.

## 5 Elephants brought to Pench Tiger Reserve from Karnataka



Team Absolute | Seoni

Five elephants have been brought to the Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) in Madhya Pradesh for the protection of tigers, an official said on Monday. The jumbos are given the task of patrolling the forest areas to guard the tigers.

The five elephants started their journey via road in trucks from Dubare Elephant Camp at Coorg in Karnataka on December 22 under the supervision of the Satpura Tiger Reserve's staff, PTR deputy director Rajneesh Singh said. They reached the Kurai Mowgli

Sanctuary of PTR on Sunday after travelling via Nagpur, he said.

Their food items were also transported in a truck, the official said. The forest staff was taking care of the five elephants, named General Cariappa, General Thimayya, both 8 years old, Bali (40), Lava (21) and Maruti (20), he said. Currently, the PTR has five elephants, including Saraswati, the oldest of them whose service tenure has ended, the official said.

Madhya Pradesh has a number of tiger reserves, including Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Satpura, Pench, Panna and Sanjay-Dubri.

## College student found hanging in Congress MLA's Bungalow in Bhopal: Cops

Bhopal: A college student committed suicide by hanging inside the official bungalow of Congress MLA Omkar Singh Markam in Bhopal. The Police have also recovered a suicide note from the spot.

The student named Tirath Singh was studying at the MLA's bungalow for the last four years. The incident took place in the Shyamala Hills area. Police said that prima facie evidence point that the student committed suicide since he was suffering from

cancer. The suicide note has been sent to the handwriting experts to match it with that of the deceased. Umesh Yadav, the SHO of Shyamala Hills Police Station said that they have started an investigation into all the aspects that could have led to the student's death. "Information was received about a youth committing suicide at the official residence of Didori MLA Omkar Singh Markam, located in Professor Colony. A suicide note has also been found," he said. The body has been sent for post-mortem.

Police said that they spoke with a person who was staying with Tirath at the Government Bungalow, and learned that the deceased was suffering from Cancer and was also undergoing treatment in Bhopal. "It is clear from the suicide note and the family's statement that he was suffering from cancer due to which he committed suicide." "We are investigating all the aspects and will soon come to a conclusion soon and action will be taken accordingly," he added.

## Beating up girlfriend Police arrest man, raze his house

Team Absolute | Rewa

The police have arrested a 24-year-old man who was caught on camera brutally beating up his girlfriend in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district, an official said on Sunday.

The police had registered a case against the accused after a video of the attack, which took place earlier this week, surfaced on social media, an official said.

The house of the accused has been demolished and the police station in-

charge has also been suspended for dereliction of duty, he said.

The accused, who is employed as a driver, was arrested from Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh on Saturday night, Superintendent of Police (SP) Navneet Bhasin said.

The 19-year-old victim was admitted to a hospital in a critical condition and she is undergoing treatment, he said. In-charge of Mauganj police station Shweta Maurya has been suspended for dereliction of duty, and the authorities have also demolished the house of the accused in Dhera village

under Mauganj police station, the official said. Taking to Twitter, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the accused man's driving license has been cancelled. Anyone who commits atrocities on women in Madhya Pradesh will not be spared, Chouhan tweeted. In a video of the incident, the woman is seen asking the accused to marry her. The man initially gets irritated and then proceeds to kick and slap her repeatedly in the face and keeps attacking the victim even after she faints. The victim had come to the police station to inform about the

incident, but she refused to lodge a complaint. The accused was detained under section 151 (disturbing public peace) of the IPC and later released, an official had said earlier. However, when a video of the attack surfaced, the police registered a case under section 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 366 (abduction) and other relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code.

The victim has lodged a complaint against the person who shot and circulated the video and a case has been registered under Information Technology (IT) Act, the official said.

## 5 FILMS AND 2 WEB SERIES WILL BE SHOT IN THE STATE

MoU signed between M.P. Tourism Board and Om Sport, Rs 50 crore will be invested in five years

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In Madhya Pradesh, developed as Madhya Pradesh Central Hub for the shooting of film-web series, famous filmmakers-directors of the country are getting inspired for shooting by being influenced by the State Film Tourism Policy. In this sequence, the production house Om Sport will shoot 5 films and 2 web series in the state. The company has signed Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board and M.P. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed with the Tourism Development Corporation. The production house will also invest Rs 50 crore in these projects in 5 years.

Shooting of the first film 'Children of God' in January-2023 Company's producer Radhika Khetrapal said that today's MoU is a matter of pride for us. The tourism department has always been of commendable cooperation to the filmmakers.



We will shoot 7 projects in the state. Everyone's script is ready. The shooting of the first film

'Children of God' will start in January-2023 and will be released in October.

## New record of maximum supply and demand of electricity re-established in state

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The demand for electricity in Madhya Pradesh reached 16 thousand 996 MW on 25 December. This is the highest demand for electricity in the history of Madhya Pradesh. On the other hand, on December 23, maximum 3183 lakh 52 thousand units of electricity were supplied in the history of the state. This is a new record of maximum power supply in the history of the state. Earlier on December 21, 3163 lakh 28 thousand units of electricity was supplied in the state. Energy Minister Pradyuman Singh Tomar has congratulated all the

officers and employees on this achievement.

How was the demand for electricity in the state? When the demand for electricity in the state was recorded at 16 thousand 996 MW, 4640 MW in Madhya Pradesh East Kshetra Vidyut Vitran Company (Jabalpur, Sagar and Rewa divisions), 5376 MW in Madhya Pradesh Central Kshetra Vidyut Vitran Company (Bhopal and Gwalior divisions) and In Madhya Pradesh Paschim Kshetra Vidyut Vitran Company (Indore and Ujjain divisions), the maximum demand for electricity was recorded at 6622 MW. Railways were given 359 MW power.

How was the power supply in the state? On December 26, when the demand for electricity in the state was 16 thousand 996 MW, at that time the production share of Madhya Pradesh Power Generating Company's thermal and hydro power plants was 4034 MW, the share of Indra Sagar-Sardar Sarovar-Omkareshwar Hydroelectric Project in the supply of electricity, 1403 MW, Central Sector's share was 4029 MW, Sasan's share was 1120 MW and IPP's share was 1677 MW. The state got 4732 MW electricity from other sources including renewable sources and banking.

**Nicolas Cage wants to try musical**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Nicolas Cage has starred in a range of film genres throughout his career but one thing that he hasn't done so far is star in a musical.

The 'National Treasure' actor is now talking about what character he would like to play if he were able to be in a musical.

"I haven't done a musical yet," he told a magazine in an interview. "I'd like to try that. I'm not much of a singer. I did sing okay in Wild At Heart, I thought, but I've since blown my voice out singing 'Purple Rain' incorrectly in karaoke bars." As far as the musical Cage would like to participate in, he said, quoted by Deadline: "I think I'd make a good Pontius Pilate in 'Jesus Christ Superstar'."

As per the magazine, Cage also noted that he channeled Elvis Presley adding: "I was trying to approximate what it felt like to see Warhol's marvelous collages of Elvis Presley as a cowboy with a six-shooter. I wanted to see if you could do that with a film performance. Plus, I think if David Lynch could cast anyone in any of his movies he would have wanted to have cast Elvis, so I think he was excited to roll with it when I suggested it."

Jerry Bruckheimer recently teased that he is working on a third installment of the 'National Treasure' franchise.

News of the film came as the producer was promoting the Disney+ spinoff series 'National Treasure: Edge of History'.



North West sings 'Snowman' with Sia, Kim shares video



Los Angeles | Agencies

Kim Kardashian's daughter North West was treated to a Christmas present at the Kardashian family holiday party this year - singing with Sia.

During the lavish party on Christmas Eve, the kid joined the Australian singer to perform her wintry track 'Snowman' as the pair stood inside a life-sized gift box, reports. Proud mom Kim Kardashian shared videos on her Instagram Story of daughter north enjoying her time in the spotlight, singing next to Sia with a microphone in hand. While Sia dressed elegant in a long, white tulle gown with a matching headpiece, North looked chic in a shimmering black ensemble.

"Sia music and North performing Snowman," wrote Kardashian, while her sister, Khloe Kardashian shared similar footage, writing: "We love you sia music." Along with North, the SKIMS founder is also mom to daughter Chicago, and sons Saint, and Psalm, with ex-husband Kanye West. Earlier this week, north decided to cause a little mischief on behalf of her youngest brother's Elf on the Shelf for a TikTok video.

Setting her video to the track 'Let It Snow', North used a KKW Beauty black liquid eyeliner to draw all over Psalm's face as he slept. After giving him a monocle, a curly moustache, a soul patch and drawings on his forehead, north carefully placed the eyeliner in the elf's arm next to her brother. "Elf on the shelf ha ha ha," she captioned the video.

Deadpool, Wolverine 'hates each other' in the movie: Hugh Jackman



Los Angeles | Agencies

Australian actor Hugh Jackman is set to draw the Wolverine claws out as he is teasing 'Deadpool 3' by spilling some tea about the relationship the superheroes will have at the beginning of the new movie he's filming with co-star Ryan Reynolds, as per reports.

In a recent interview, Jackman was asked to categorise the status of the relationship between the two superheroes. "How do I categorise it? Ten being really close, zero being the reality, we're zero, we're opposites, hate each other," he said.

"I'm just talking from my perspective; (Logan's) frustrated by him, wants to be a million miles away from him or wants to punch him in the head.

Unfortunately, he can't be a million miles away from him in this movie, so I'm probably going to punch him in the head a lot," he further said.

He recently talked about how they were able to bring back Wolverine, and now integrate him into the MCU, assuring fans that 'Deadpool 3' wouldn't mess with the Logan timeline.

"All because of this device they have in the Marvel world of moving around timelines, now we can go back because, you know, its science, so I don't have to screw with the Logan timeline, which was important to me. And I think probably to the fans too," Jackman said on 'The Jess Cagle Show'.

Jackman's return as Wolverine was announced during Disney's fan convention. 'Deadpool 3' is scheduled to be released on November 8, 2024.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Paris Hilton

**Izabel & Kevin gets in the Christmas spirit on the beach**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Izabel Goulart was in a festive mood Christmas day as she frolicked in the warm waters of the Caribbean. The Brazilian beauty displayed her toned and tanned body in a very tiny red thong bikini while reveling in the white sands and crystal blue waters of St. Barts, where she and her fiancé, Kevin Trapp have been enjoying a tropical vacation.

The island is popular with the rich and famous, according to Travel and Leisure. Many visitors arrive there via yacht or private jet. She and the German soccer player spent an energetic day on the mostly secluded beach.

The goalkeeper showcased his muscular form going shirtless in a pair of white swim shorts. Both wore red and white Santa hats as they put on an athletic display.

The runway veteran appeared to be doing push ups as she grabbed her beau's hands as Kevin lay on the sand, holding her in a plank while sharing a long kiss. hey later posed in a head stand as Izabel leapt on the footballer's extended foot and turned herself upside down. Both shared the photo on social media, with Izabel



writing in English and Portuguese, 'With love, from St Barths we wish you all a merry Christmas.' They challenged their followers to try the same move and share it with them. They later engaged in a passionate make out session on the sand. The Sports Illustrated model speaks three languages, Portuguese, French and English.



**Luca Bish and Andrew Le Page suffered an awkward blunder**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Stars from all ends came together for charity talent competition Britain Get Singing on Saturday evening - including many from this year's Love Island. But it wasn't smooth sailing for all the contestants, as Luca Bish and Andrew Le Page suffered a blunder while losing their song timings during the festive performance.

Joining co-stars Antigoni Buxton, Paige Thorne, Tasha Ghouri and Danica Taylor for the singing performance, the duo appeared slightly lost as they struggled to keep up with the girls. It didn't go unnoticed by fans either, with many taking to social media to share their opinion on the moment - noting that the reality stars 'looked mortified'.

The group took to the stage to sing their own rendition of George Michael's Last Christmas, all sporting festive ensembles for the performance. And while they got off to a strong start, the boys appeared to let the team down as they lost track of the song during the middle section.

Walking towards the front of the stage, Andrew broke the song to wish the audience a Merry Christmas - before Luca appeared confused at what his line was.

The former fishmonger began to sing: 'I wrapped it up and sent it, with a note,' before he and Andrew shared an unsure look towards one another while attempting to keep up the lyrics. They attempting to bring it back as luca let out a smile, with judge Jason Manford helping them out as he began to sing along and keep them on track.

Alesha Dixon was also on the panel and began to giggle at the blunder, before Antigoni took over from the boys with her section - leaving them in an awkward laugh.



## PAK VS NZ TEST SERIES

# BABAR'S UNBEATEN 161 LEAD PAKISTAN TO 317/5 AGAINST NEW ZEALAND



### BABAR AZAM BREAKS MULTIPLE RECORDS IN KARACHI TEST

**Karachi:** Pakistan skipper Babar Azam on Monday set a couple of records as he struck a half-century to rescue the hosts from a precarious position in the opening Test of the series against New Zealand. He now holds the record for the most runs scored by a Pakistan batter in a calendar year and the most fifties or more scored in a calendar year.



The Pakistan captain broke the 16-year-old record for most runs scored by a Pakistan batter in a season held by Mohammad Yousof in the first innings of the opening Test against New Zealand.

He now holds the record for the most runs in a calendar year by a Pakistan batter, going past Mohammad Yousof's aggregate of 2435 runs in 2006. Batting on 54 not out at the end of the first session, Babar has 2477 runs across all formats in 2022. In third place is Saeed Anwar, who scored 2296 runs in 43 matches in 1996.

The half-century also means he now holds the record for most scores of 50 or more in a calendar year. This was Babar's 25th 50+ score, surpassing Ricky Ponting's record of 24 in 2005.

Despite the contrasting fortunes of the team in Test cricket this year, the skipper has shown in the format with more than 1000 runs in nine matches. In this calendar year, only three other batters have managed to hit the three-figure mark in Tests. The player is the top batter on the ICC Test batting record, holding on to the No. 1 position in the list.

### Brief scores

Pakistan 317/5 in 90 overs (Babar Azam 161 not out, Sarfaraz Ahmed 86, Michael Bracewell 2/61, Ajaz Patel 2/91) against New Zealand.

session off Bracewell. He and Sarfaraz would get majority of their runs through the leg-side though the latter was also hit by a hip injury.

Babar survived an lbw decision six balls before stumps, when he reviewed off Patel and replays showed the delivery to be bouncing and going over the stumps. He would then walk off the field unbeaten an 161 on stumps, with Agha Salman by his side on three not out.

Pakistan opener was out caught - giving New Zealand an excellent start to the Test match and to the series on a flat pitch.

Bracewell could have got Azam out in the 15th over had Daryl Mitchell held on to a regulation catch at first slip that would have sent the Pakistan skipper on his way to the pavilion for 12.

Babar then stitched a 62-run stand with Saud Shakeel to get Pakistan past hundred. But the latter fell for 22 on the stroke of lunch, giving a catch to gully off Southee. From there, New Zealand were sent on a leather hunt as Babar and Sarfaraz, batting in Tests for the first time since January 2019, joined forces for a mammoth partnership.

Babar would get his century by swinging across the line for a six over deep midwicket in the second

### Karachi | Agencies

Pakistan captain Babar Azam slammed his ninth Test century, also his third in Karachi, and remain unconquered on 161, propelling the hosts to 317/5 at the end of day one's play in the series opener against New Zealand.

Apart from him, a returning Sarfaraz Ahmed shined in his 50th Test appearance and first at home with a gritty 86 off 153 balls. Ahmed, coming in for Mohammad Rizwan to get a Test appearance after almost four years, shared a mammoth 196-run partnership for the fifth wicket with Babar lasting 56.3 to put Pakistan in a position of strength and demoralise New Zealand.

Bracewell went on to dismiss the usually reliable left-handed batter Imam-ul-Haq shortly after - the

## I love playing Test cricket & felt we could do something different: Stokes

Team Absolute | New Delhi

England Test skipper Ben Stokes said the secret behind leading the turnaround of the side was that he loves playing the longest format of the game and with him being the captain, something different could have been done to change the fortunes of the team. "Test cricket has been spoken about in a way I don't like. It is losing the attention of the fans with all the new formats and franchise competitions. We understand there are so many opportunities for players away from Test cricket. But for me, it is so important for the game. I love playing Test cricket and felt we could do something different."

"Taking the result away from the mindset is a great starting point. Putting the focus on making every day entertaining. Not allowing people to know what is going to happen. If people turn up excited about what they are going to watch you've already won before a



ball has been bowled," said Stokes.

The fast-bowling all-rounder hopes his experiences with mental health would encourage others to come out and help change the narrative around taking breaks for mental well-being, something which was showcased through his documentary titled 'Ben Stokes: Phoenix From The Ashes', which was released earlier this

year. "It is perceived that men shouldn't be seen to show weakness, but I have never had an issue with expressing my feelings and opening up about it. I can't tell you how much pride I had in myself for doing that after the messages I got from people I had never met."

"I was really blown away by the effect that section of the documentary had on their lives, it pushed them to go and get help. Some of the messages were very emotional to read."

## TEST CRICKET: K.L. RAHUL'S AVERAGE AS AN OPENER IS NOT ACCEPTABLE: DINESH KARTHIK

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Though India ended 2022 on a bright note with a hard-fought three-wicket win against Bangladesh in the second Test at Dhaka, the questions around stand-in captain K.L. Rahul's form with the bat cannot be ignored. Rahul averaged only 14.25 across four Test innings -- scoring 22, 23, 10 and 2 - in the 2-0 series sweep over Bangladesh.

Veteran wicketkeeper-batter Dinesh Karthik believes Rahul's average in Test cricket, which currently is at 34.26 from 45 Tests since his debut in 2014, is unacceptable for an opener in the longest format of the game. "I would give K.L. those couple of Test matches, but if things don't



go K.L. Rahul's way. The one thing that does go against him is the fact that he has played over 40 Tests and his average is just mid-30s. That is not acceptable for an opener. That is one of the lowest among Indian players for sure, who have played 35 Test matches," Karthik said.

"That is something that he needs to definitely work on. That will be on his mind. If he wants to cement his place in the Test team, he needs to get a couple of hundreds against Australia. Otherwise, you can definitely see a change, with Shubman Gill doing so well," added Karthik.

## Elite Women's National Boxing: RSPB lifted the trophy with ten medals

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Living up to their favourites tag, Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist Lovlina Borgohain and the reigning world champion Nikhat Zareen registered contrasting victories to clinch the titles while Railway Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) lifted the team trophy with ten medals at the 6th Elite Women's National Boxing Championships.

While the Assam boxer Borgohain beat Arundhati Choudhary of Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) quite comfortably by 5-0 margin in the 75kg final, Zareen faced a stiff challenge from RSPB's Anamika in the 50kg gold medal match before the 26-

year-old Telangana pugilist tilted the match 4-1 in her favour to successfully defend her title.

Players received the medals in the presence of Sports minister Anurag Singh Thakur along with the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) officials. Another highlight of the day was Manju Rani, who led the domination of RSPB on the final day. The 2019 World Championships silver medalist handed RSPB its first gold after outpunching Tamil Nadu's S Kalavani 5-0 in the 48kg final. Shiksha (54kg), Poonam (60kg), Shashi Chopra (63kg) and Nupur (+81kg) were the other gold medalists for RSPB, who also bagged three silver and two bronze medals.

Madhya Pradesh, with one

gold, two silver and five bronze, and Haryana (two gold and two bronze) claimed second and third position respectively.

Manipur's young boxer Sanamacha Thokchom Chanu, who won gold medal at the 2021 Youth World Championships, also put up an impressive show to secure the title in the 70kg by beating Madhya Pradesh's Shruti Yadav 3-2 in the thrilling final.

Haryana's Manisha (57kg) and Saweety (81kg), SSCB's Sakshi (52kg), Madhya Pradesh's Manju Bamboria (66kg) also clinched gold medals in their respective categories at the prestigious tournament which witnessed participation of 302 boxers fighting in 12 categories.

## India to host FIDE Women's Grand Prix in Delhi next year

**Chennai:** India will be hosting prestigious chess tournament FIDE Women's Grand Prix early next year, a top official of the All India Chess Federation (AICF) said on Monday. Another Asian level chess tournament will also be held in India next year, AICF President, Dr Sanjay Kapoor said. "We are going to organise the FIDE Women Grand Prix in March 2023 and an Asian calendar event later in 2023," he said. The event is expected to be held in Delhi.

This will be the second major international event being held in India after the Chess Olympiad that was held in Chennai this year. The FIDE Women's Grand Prix Tournament consist of four tournaments spread of two years 2022-23. The Women's Grand Prix Series 2022-23 will feature a total of 16 players, and each one of them will participate in three out of four tournaments.

Each Woman's Grand Prix tournament is played with twelve players in a round robin format.

The total prize fund for each one of the four events is Rs 80,000, with another Rs 80,000 being distributed among the top 8 finishers in the overall standings for the Grand Prix series. The two players who score more cumulative points in the WGP series qualify for the FIDE Women Candidates Tournament 2023-24.

## Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing: Madras International Circuit to host final three rounds

Chennai | Agencies

The Madras International Circuit here will host Rounds 2, 3 and 4 this week as the curtains come down on the MMSC fmsci Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship 2022 here from Tuesday till Friday.

While the first round of the four-round Championship was held in July, the subsequent outings could not be held as scheduled due to monsoon rains and the Mandhus cyclone that severely impacted the region. Because of this, the promoters, Madras Motor Sports Club, decided to bunch the remaining three rounds and complete the championship.

Tuesday has been set aside for practice sessions, while the following three days will witness final runs in Rounds 2, 3 and 4 at the end of which the National Champions will be declared.

As has been the trend in the championship, close to 150 entries, across eight categories, have been received with MMSC incentivizing the riders to compete in all three rounds this week. Headlining the highly-competi-



tive field is reigning national champion Hemanth Muddappa representing the Mantra Racing team from Bengaluru. In the first round in July, Muddappa won two National championship races and one support race, and he is expected to extend his domination this week. On view, this week would be an

array of superbikes, ranging from the Suzuki Hayabusa to Triumph to BMW, besides a host of modified Indian bikes. In fact, Bengaluru is very strongly represented in all the categories while riders from Mumbai, Hyderabad and Chennai, fill up the rest of the grids.

## IND VS BAN TEST SERIES

### Ashwin shared how he handled the situation of the game

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's three-wicket nail-biting victory over Bangladesh at Dhaka on Sunday, Ravichandran Ashwin was solid in defence and brought out a slew of boundaries at the end to be 42 not out in successfully taking the visitors over the line.

"When I walked out, I thought we have to grind through the situation a little bit as we didn't have many batters behind. Usually, when I go out, I feel I have three more batters behind and can stitch up a partnership even if the batter gets out. I thought Shreyas showed really good composure and felt very calm."

"I just told him to get it done within ten overs or after lunch. My aim was to initially get through the lunch, but a couple of balls went here and there, and there was a catch which went to the short leg (and was dropped). I thought maybe I need to push up some intent and still have a good defence. We played it well and also pushed



the accelerator button at the right time." "I always felt I had some batting ability in me, but I felt along with power-hitting, I used to keep telling a lot of people that when asked about white-ball batting, I used to get ahead of the situation a little bit. If I used to hit, I wanted to do that on every single ball." "But I understand a little bit better with what comes in respect to batting - stay in the moment, pick your right moments, right ball and at the end of the day, bat and ball will remain the same, cricketers from both teams will remain the same. Only it is about picking crucial situations and playing it properly."

## NICHOLAS POORAN IS A DANGEROUS PLAYER: VIRENDER SEHWAG

**New Delhi:** Ahead of the inaugural edition of the IILT20 in the UAE, former India opener Virender Sehwag believes West Indies wicketkeeper-batter Nicholas Pooran is a dangerous player and if he comes in the form, then his team MI Emirates stands to benefit hugely.

"Nicholas Pooran is a dangerous player. While his performance in the ICC men's T20 World Cup was not up to the mark, he is a brilliant player. In the recent Abu Dhabi T10 innings, he scored 70-80 runs in mere 20-25 balls. If he comes in the form, it will definitely benefit MI Emirates."

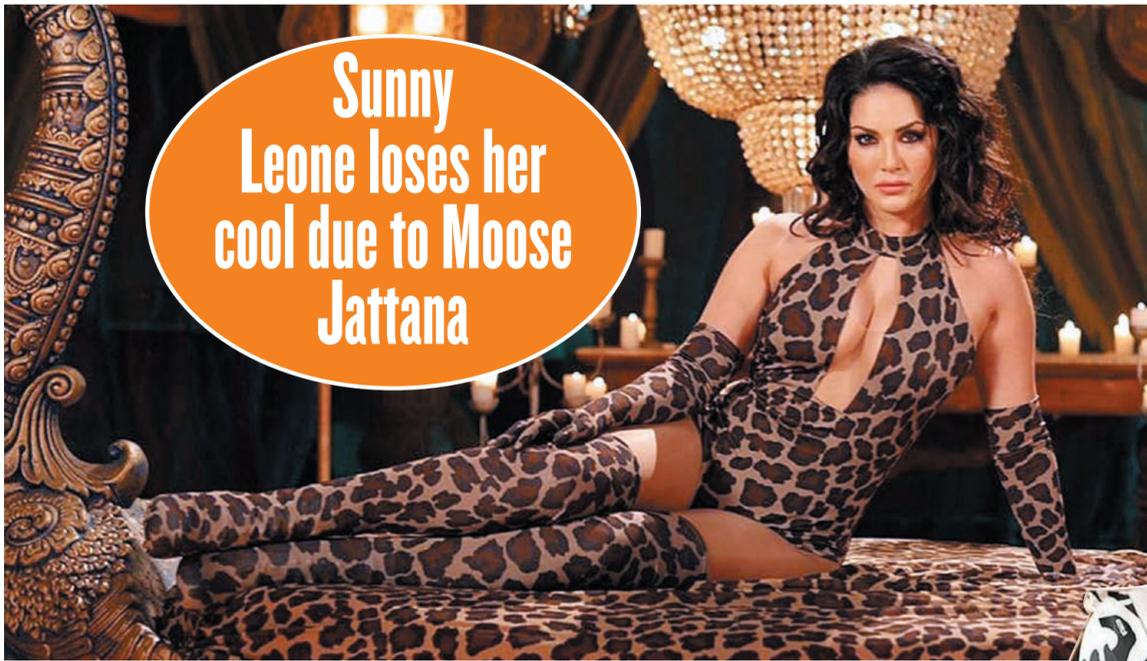
"And it is certainly good news that both all-rounders like Kieron Pollard and Dwayne Bravo who bat in the middle order are now playing in one team. It will definitely be a boost for MI because both are match-winners," Sehwag said. "The advantage Afghanistan players will have when they play IILT20 is that when they play with international players, they will learn and improve while enjoying the game. The experience will help build Afghanistan cricket as well."

"He will finish the game himself. We have witnessed it in the past that he has won matches in difficult situations. His bowling is always underestimated, but he bowls the best in death overs," concluded Sehwag.





## Sunny Leone loses her cool due to Moose Jattana



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Former 'Big Boss OTT' contestant and social media influencer Moose Jattana, who recently entered the dating-based reality show 'Splitsvilla X4', was seen getting into an argument with the host Sunny Leone.

Sunny got upset with the behaviour of the contestants and she discussed the same with them. However, Moose interrupted Sunny frequently.

Sunny tried to curb Moose's interruption but became visibly upset eventually. Sunny shouted at her and said: "Are you serious right now? If you want to come here, then come! You think that I need help? Can

you let me do my job?"

Moreover, Tara Prasad, who is an ex-boyfriend of Sakshi Shrivastava, is entering the show to make connections with her. However, she is already close to Justin on the show which led to a fight between Tara and Justin. Tara is a dancer, choreographer and was also seen on 'Roadies'.

## Instead of me, Tina should have been eliminated: Ankit Gupta



Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Big Boss 16' evicted contestant Ankit Gupta has said that he feels that instead of him, Tina Dutta should have been eliminated. He also said that he feels Shalin Bhanot is a genuine person in the house.

He said: "Instead of me, I feel Tina should have been eliminated. She's not contributing anything in the show. She's not straight forward or plays on the front foot, she has taken a backseat. Also, the only thing she does in the house is hide the ration of the house."

Talking about Shalin, he revealed: "Shalin was made a lot of fun of for his obsession with chicken but he did have a medical issue so that's not fake. Also, I feel Shalin is a very misunderstood contestant. He does overact a lot but I feel there's a point of commonality between us.

Whenever we would have conversations I realised he was a very sensible and genuine guy." He further spoke about his feelings for Priyanka: "Honestly, I think I wouldn't have survived so long without Priyanka, it's because of her I had been in the show. Priyanka and I have known each other for 2-3 years now. She's one of my closest friends."

Ankit added at last: "Also, Sajid sir saved me in between so I'm grateful to him too."

He appeared on the reality series hosted by Krushna Abhishek, 'Bigg Buzz' which streams on Voot.

## VIJAY DEVARAKONDA BECAME SANTA CLAUS FOR HIS FANS

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Come Christmas, and Tollywood star Vijay Devarakonda literally becomes Santa Claus for his fans. Clubbing Devara from his last name and Santa from Santa Claus, Vijay started the 'Devarasanta' tradition a few years ago. Vijay comes up with new and exciting gifts every year to make Christmas more special for his fans with Devarasanta. This year's Devarasanta 2022 plan is bigger as the star has planned to arrange all-expenses-paid trips for 100 fans.

This announcement, naturally, has come as a big surprise for his fans. The star raised the excitement with a poll on social media for his fans to help him choose the destination to offer to them. He wrote in the caption: "Devarasanta, a tradition I started 5 years ago. This year I have the nicest idea so far :) I am going to send 100 of you on an all-expenses-paid holiday. Help me in choosing the destination. Devarasanta2022" As the star dropped the poll, his fans start casting their votes to help him choose the right destination, the options being Mountains of India, Beaches of India, Culture Trip to India, and Desert in India. In the first year, Vijay had visited Jawaharlal Nehru Architecture and Fine Arts University in Hyderabad and personally gave away gifts to randomly selected 50 fans that followed him on social media.



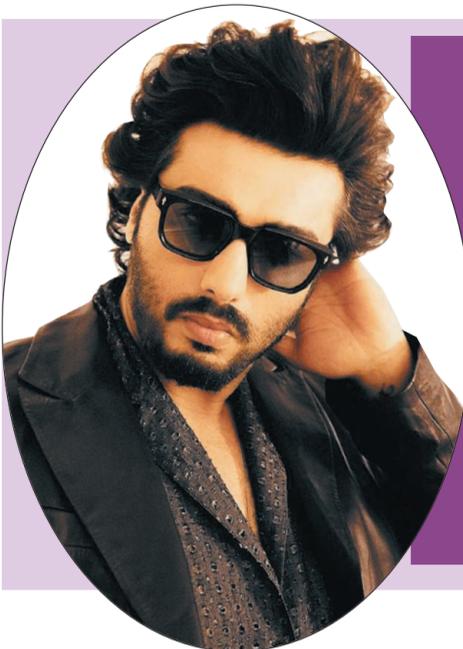
## PLAYING A COP IN THE MOVIE WAS A FULFILLING EXPERIENCE: ARJUN

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Arjun Kapoor, who is set to play a cop in the upcoming theatrical film 'Kuttey', feels that his role in the film brought in a sense of dichotomy as he is a law abiding citizen but his character is of a corrupt police officer in the film. Commenting on the same, the actor said: "For me to play a cop in 'Kuttey' was a fulfilling experience, because to be a law abiding person and to try and operate out of the law was an interesting dichotomy to have to play a corrupt official. It was very exciting to wear the uniform, wear the cap, and do the salute, look and feel the part." Arjun had earlier essayed the role of a cop in the Dibakar Banerjee

directorial 'Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar'.

"Playing a policeman in 'Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar' gave me a lot of love, invaluable appreciation and of course, some best actor awards! So, if I get the same respect and accolades by playing a cop again in 'Kuttey', I would happily take that because I'm also a greedy actor who wants to leave a mark in the films that I do," he added. He further noted: "I feel playing a cop could be a game changer for me, as one end of the spectrum I have played a suspended police officer, now I have played a not so nice police officer and I would like to put it out there in the world that I hope to play a positive difference making character who is in uniform too because our policemen constantly and unconditionally work to keep us safe day in and day out. I have huge respect for them and I want to show that on screen if given a chance."



## I love doing & learning everything that is creative: Bhuvan

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bhuvan Bam, who is one of the biggest YouTubers of India, is currently gearing up for his new streaming show 'Taaza Khabar' and he had a gala time since he got to juggle different roles of co-producer, lyricist, show developer along with Hussain Dalal and Abbas Dalal, and has also lent his voice to the track in the show. Talking about the same, Bhuvan said: "I love doing and learning everything that is creative and I am very greedy as an artist. 'Taaza Khabar' was such an interesting project that I could not let myself miss out on

this opportunity to be part of it in various ways. When you are acting, then the area of focus is on improving your part, but when I am co-producing, I have to see from all angles. There were certain parts where I related with the character on a very personal basis and music is the best way I could express that.

"The show tells the story of Vasant Gawde (played by Bhuvan), a Maharashtrian boy who gains a superpower that changes his life. The series is produced by Rohit Raj and Bhuvan under the banner BB Ki Vines productions.



## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Sakshi Malik