



COVID SUBVARIANT SURGING IN CHINA MAY BE EVOLVING TO ATTACK THE BRAIN

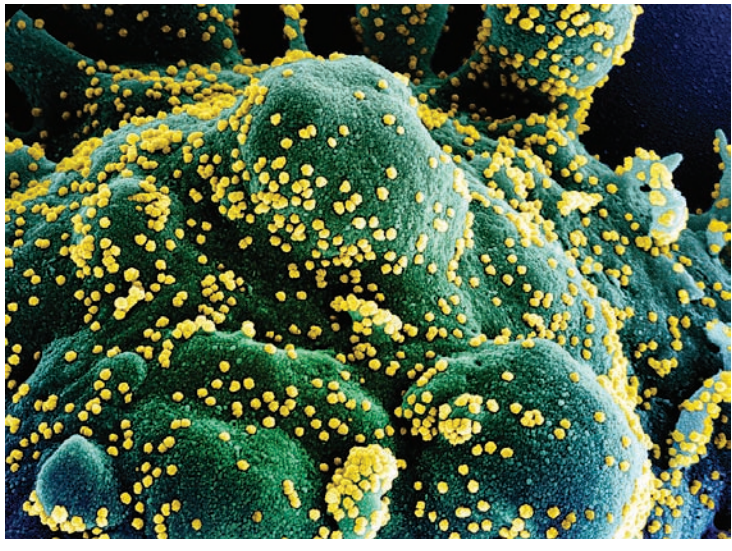
Team Absolute | New Delhi

The coronavirus subvariant surging in China may be evolving to attack the brain, feel researchers, according to a media report.

The study challenges previous assumptions that viruses usually evolve to become less dangerous, South China Morning Post reported. New research on the Omicron subvariant of the coronavirus has suggested the pathogen could be changing how it attacks the human body - shifting from infecting respiratory systems to increasingly targeting the brain.

Researchers from Australia and France found BA.5 - the coronavirus subvariant driving what is now the world's biggest surge of infections in China - did much more severe damage to mouse brains and cultured human brain tissues than the previous BA.1 subvariant, leading to brain inflammation, weight loss and death, South China Morning Post reported.

"Compared with BA.1, we found that a BA.5 isolate displayed increased pathogenicity in K18-hACE2 mice with rapid weight loss, brain infection and encephalitis, and



mortality. In addition, BA.5 productively infected human brain organoids significantly better than BA.1," a manuscript of the research said.

The manuscript has been uploaded to the preprint platform bioRxiv, and will receive peer review for publication. "These results suggest that the

Omicron lineage is not evolving towards reduced pathogenicity," wrote the team, which was led by virologist Andreas Suhrbier from the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute in Queensland, Australia, South China Morning Post reported.

However, other experts have sounded a note of caution, noting that a major limitation of the study

was the mouse model it had used, which they said probably did not apply to human beings.

"They showed that all the mice died from brain infections of BA.5, which is apparently very different from human infections that we know of," said Jin Dongyan, a virologist at the University of Hong Kong, the report said.

Jin said it was widely accepted that BA.5 did not cause more brain abnormalities in humans than previous subvariants, adding that the World Health Organization has said the pathogenicity of Omicron variants has not increased.

In a paper published in the journal Nature last month, a team of Japanese and US scientists reported that BA.5 seemed to have inherited the reduced pathogenicity of Omicron subvariants, SCMP reported. Multiple studies have shown that BA.5 is more transmissible than other Omicron subvariants and can evade a human immune system with a previous Covid-19 vaccination or infection. The strain has been detected in more than 100 nations and was the dominant strain in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom a few months ago.

PM's mother admitted at Ahmedabad hospital, likely to be discharged in two days

Ahmedabad | Agencies

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday visited his mother Heeraben Modi at the U.N. Mehta Hospital here, where she was admitted earlier in the day for treatment. Heeraben had turned 99 in June this year.

The Prime Minister spent almost one-and-a-half hours with his mother, brothers and discussed her health issues with the doctors along with the future course of action to be undertaken.

After he left the hospital, BJP's Rajya Sabha member Jugalji Lokhandwala told mediapersons that Heeraben is recovering fast, and is likely to be discharged from the hospital in a day or two.



According to sources, Heeraben had fallen ill on Tuesday night. She was first taken to the Gandhinagar Government Hospital, from

where she was referred to the U.N. Mehta Hospital in Ahmedabad for further treatment.

RAHUL, OTHER CONGRESS LEADERS WISH PM'S MOTHER A SPEEDY RECOVERY

New Delhi: Congress leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, wished a speedy recovery to Prime Minister's mother Heeraben, after she was admitted to U.N. Mehta Hospital in Ahmedabad. In a tweet, Gandhi wrote that the love between a mother and son is eternal and priceless and extended support to Modi in his difficult times. He expressed hope that Heeraben will get well soon.

Catholic priest in Kerala sentenced to 7 years in POCSO case

Kochi | Agencies

A special Pocco court in Kerala's Trissur on Wednesday sentenced Catholic priest Raju Kokan to seven years imprisonment for sexually assaulting a minor girl in his diocese.

The incident occurred in 2014 and after the incident became public, Raju was on the run. However, the Kerala Police soon traced him to Tamil Nadu's Nagercoil and arrested him.

The girl, hailing from an impoverished background, was lured by Raju, the parish vicar at a Trissur church on promises of new clothes and he also took pictures of the girl.

During the trial, the fast track court heard 18 wit-



nesses and looked into 24 documents besides the mobile phone.

The court held that whatever has happened should

never have happened, and that too, by a priest, and he doesn't deserve any consideration.

POLICE OPEN FIRE ON BANGLADESHI MISCREANTS ALONG BORDER IN ASSAM

Guwahati: Police opened fire at some Bangladeshi miscreants along the India-Bangladesh border in Assam's Karimganj district to chase them away, officials said on Wednesday. The incident happened in the Nilambazar area of the district, at a distance of one kilometre from the international boundary, on Tuesday night. Deputy Superintendent of Police, Karimganj, Githartha Sharma said that police received secret information about a few Bangladeshi miscreants who were trying to enter India for stealing cows in the village area.

Based on the tip-off, a police team led by Sharma went on a search operation to nab the Bangladeshi miscreants.

"We could see the miscreants while they were stealing the cows, but they immediately tried to flee from the spot. They were asked to stop, however, they did not listen. We had to open fire then," said the police officer. Yet, all the Bangladeshi miscreants managed to escape unhurt as no casualties have been reported.

CBI reopened case against Lalu as he came with us in Bihar, says Nitish

Patna | Agencies

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday attributed the CBI's move to reopen a case against RJD national President Lalu Prasad Yadav to his joining hands with his party to form the Mahagathbandhan government in the state.

"You would see what is happening here. Lalu ji and I joined hands together and formed the government in Bihar. Hence, the CBI reopened a case against him. You better know who is behind it," he said during an event organised here to pay respect to former Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on his birth anniversary.

Besides Lalu Prasad Yadav, his son and present Deputy Chief Minister Tejayshwi Yadav, and two



of his daughters Chanda Yadav and Ragini Yadav are co-accused in the case related to various railway project allotments to a Delhi-based real estate company during the tenure of RJD as Railway Minister. The case was registered in 2018 and closed in May 2021. Earlier, Tejayshwi Yadav had already said that CBI would not get anything by reopening the case. "The life of Lalu Ji and our family members are like an open book. We have not hidden any-

thing. They are free to reopen the case but they would not get anything," Tejayshwi Yadav said.

Nitish Kumar, who is also going for Samaj Sudhar Yatra part 2 from January 5, said that the routes of the Yatra will be finalised in the next couple of days. It will be the 14th yatra of Nitish Kumar starting from Vaishali. On not attending the Namami Gange programme, to be chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Kolkata, Nitish Kumar said that the minister of the department concerned used to go to such events in the past and the same will be done this time too.

The name of Tejayshwi Yadav and Water Resource Development Minister Sanjay Kumar Jha is already announced by the Bihar government to take part in the event.

Cong Foundation Day: Kharge hoists flag as Sonia, Rahul attend party event

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a clear message that Mallikarjun Kharge is in command, former Congress chiefs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi attended the party's foundation day programme where the current party president hoisted the flag at the headquarters here on Wednesday.

Apart from Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, scores of Congress leaders were present. Since 1998 Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi had been presidents, so this was the first time that a non-Gandhi hoisted the flag. However, when Sonia Gandhi was unwell during her tenure, on three occasions A.K. Antony, Motilal Vora and Ambika Soni



had hoisted the flag at the party headquarters.

In his speech after the flag hoisting programme, Kharge hailed Rahul Gandhi for his Bharat Jodo Yatra and accused the Central government for dividing the nation and "not bothering about the

sufferings of the people".

"Indian National Congress has always worked for the well-being & progress of the people of India. We firmly believe in equality of opportunity guaranteed in political, economic & social rights, enshrined in the Constitution

of India," said Kharge in his tweet.

Rahul Gandhi in his tweet in Hindi said, "I am proud to be a part of such an organisation which chose the path of truth, non-violence and struggle in every situation and always took every step in public interest." K.C. Venugopal, party general secretary said in his tweet: Congress' legacy is burnished with stories of sacrifices. As @INCIndia celebrates the 138th Foundation Day, we salute the great sacrifices made by our founding fathers. We continue to be the proud torchbearers of that legacy through #BharatJodoYatra."

Kharge will address a public rally in Mumbai later in the day.

FIVE OF A FAMILY CHARRED TO DEATH

Mau: Five members of a family, including a woman and three minors, died in a house fire in Uttar Pradesh's Mau district.

Fire tenders were rushed to the house located in Shahpur village under Kopaganj police circle to douse the flames.

The bodies have been sent to a hospital for post-mortem.

The exact cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained. District Magistrate Arun Kumar said that as per initial report the fire began from a stove.

"An assistance of Rs 4 lakhs will be given per person," he added.

Jharkhand actress shot dead on Bengal highway

Kolkata | Agencies

Riya Kumari, reportedly an actress from Jharkhand, was shot dead at point blank range on Wednesday on a highway in West Bengal.

As reported by her husband Prakash Kumar, who claimed himself to be a film producer from Jharkhand, the incident took place at around 6 a.m. while they were travelling to Kolkata from Ranchi.

Prakash Kumar was driving the vehicle and the couple's three-year-old daughter was also travelling with them.

According to his statement given to the police, he stopped the vehicle near Mahishrekh bridge at Bagnan under Uluberia sub-division of Howrah district to attend to nature's call.

Then, three miscreants with firearms approached them with the intention of robbing them of money and other valuables. When the couple tried to resist, one of the



miscreants shot at Riya from point-blank range and she immediately fell down bleeding profusely.

The miscreants, as per Prakash Kumar's statement, immediately fled from the spot and he drove to a nearby locality and informed the locals about the incident.

On being informed by the local, the police reached the spot and immediately rushed Riya to the Uluberia sub-division hospital. However, she had died by then.

BABY JESUS STATUE VANDALIZED, MONEY ROBBED FROM CHURCH IN K'TAKA



Mysuru (Karnataka): A statue of Baby Jesus was damaged and money robbed from the offering box of a church in Periyapatna town of Karnataka's Mysuru district, police said on Wednesday.

According to police, the incident took place in the Saint Meriyamma Church located on Gonikoppal Road on Tuesday. The miscreants barged inside the church and vandalized the Infant Jesus idol installed for the celebration of Christmas festival. The incident took place when the church was closed after morning prayers. The miscreants had broken the door and also robbed money from the offering box.

Father John Paul had lodged a complaint in this regard with the Periyapatna police station. The police officers rushed to the spot and conducted an inspection.

Man thrashes wife for failing to conceive a child

Lucknow | Agencies

In a shocking incident, a 30-year-old man allegedly thrashed his wife and caused severe trauma to her private parts as he was upset with her for "not being able to conceive a child".

The alleged incident took place under the Mohanlalgaon police circle and the victim, who was bleeding profusely, is undergoing treatment at a private hospital.

The accused husband is absconding. The matter was reported to the police on Tuesday by the victim's brother.

Manisha Singh, Lucknow's additional deputy commissioner of police (ADCP South), said, "The complainant informed us that the accused married her sister around six years ago.

However, the victim was living with her parents for three months as the accused was upset with her for not being able to conceive a child. The woman returned to her in-laws' house only on Monday after the accused took her in."

The ADCP added, "The crime took place within hours of the woman going back to her in-laws' house."

The police official said that the accused first had unnatural sex with the woman and then attacked her with a shaving razor. The injured woman, somehow, informed her brother who got her admitted to a hospital.

"Further probe into the case is underway. Meanwhile, the accused has been booked under relevant sections for causing injuries, domestic violence, and threatening," said the official.

Girl pushed into Devadasi system in K'taka, parents & kin arrested

Koppal | Agencies

Karnataka Police have arrested the parents, sister and her husband here in connection with pushing a girl into Devadasi system which is prohibited by law, police said on Wednesday.

According to police, the accused had performed the ceremony of dedicating their daughter to the service of the god. The ceremony took place in the Huligemma temple in Huligeri near Koppal.

The ceremony was held in May and after the incident came to light lately, a complaint was lodged against the accused persons in the police station.

The Munirabad police station, which had lodged a complaint in this regard, have arrested the accused persons. The police



action was taken following the complaint by Devadasi Rehabilitation Project officer

Poornima. Devadasi was earlier known to be a female artiste, dedicated to

the service of god and art. However, the system became a tool for the exploitation of women and the society used them as prostitutes.

In Karnataka, the Devadasi system was practiced for over 10 centuries. The movement against the Devadasi system started in the country as early as 1882. The first legal initiative to outlaw the Devadasi system dates back to the 1934 Bombay Devadasi Protection Act, and in 1947 the Madras Devadasi (Prevention of Dedication) Act. (The Devadasi system was formally outlawed in whole of India in 1988.

The Devadasi system still exists in Karnataka as well as other parts of the country under the guise of rituals in spite of the awareness programmes and dedicated projects.



VOTE AS PER YOUR INTEREST: UMA BHARTI TO LODHI COMMUNITY

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Former Union Minister Uma Bharti, who has been taking on Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led BJP government on liquor issue, apparently has expressed her anger once again and has urged people to 'vote as per their own choice' in the upcoming 2023 Assembly elections.

Bharti, who has been striving hard to find her place in Madhya Pradesh's politics, especially when the elections are less than one year away, addressed a gathering of people from the Lodhi community. She said, "As a true soldier of the party, she will ask people to support the BJP during the Assembly elections, but people are free to decide their own."

Notably, Bharati made this remark while addressing the function in Bhopal on Tuesday. Bharati also belongs to the Lodhi community from Chhatarpur district.

During the address, Bharati said that the people of Lodhi community were insulted by the BJP. She made this remark, indirectly referring to the



expulsion of Pritam Lodhi from the BJP for his alleged anti-Brahmin remarks earlier in August this year.

Preetam Lodhi was expelled by State BJP president V.D. Sharma. Sharma is the state president of the party, a prominent Brahmin face and an MP from the Khajuraho constituency.

Khajuraho falls under Chhatarpur district, and Uma Bharti has represented the same constituency several times.

"I am a true soldier of the party and during the elections, I will appeal to vote for the BJP, but it's up to you to decide. Those who have

insulted you, then you should decide. I would appeal not only to the Lodhi community but all communities to support the BJP in 2023 elections, but people are free to decide their own. You have seen the political scenario, and if the people from your community (Lodhi) are not given importance, then you will be free to make your own decisions," Bharti said during her address.

Bharti also claimed that the BJP seeks Lodhi community's vote, but did not give them the place and insulted them instead. Earlier in August, Bharti had defended Preetam Lodhi saying that he had been targeted. The expulsion of Lodhi has created controversy in Madhya Pradesh and Bharti had said that the social structure of the MP BJP needs to be changed otherwise the party will face repercussions in the 2023 elections.

Bharti's remarks came when the Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh were less than one year away from now and the state BJP unit was preparing for 2023.

CM ordered the removal of Niwari Collector and Orchha Tehsildar from the stage

Team Absolute | Niwari/Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is in full action these days. He is also taking on-the-spot decisions to rectify the glitches and tighten the government machinery. Something similar happened at Gadhkundar Mahotsav in Niwari district, where on receiving complaints from Collector Tarun Bhatnagar and Orchha Tehsildar Sandeep Sharma, both were ordered to be removed. Chief Minister Chouhan had arrived on Wednesday to participate in the Garhkundar festival on the birth anniversary of Maharaja Khersingh Khangar. On this occasion, he said, when I came here, I got some complaints. Maharaja Kher Singh Khangar also used to serve his people better. In a democracy, we are the servants of our people. I made Niwari a district. This district is dear to me.

Taking his point forward, Chouhan said, we try to provide better service to the people here. But I have received some serious complaints from the public. I do not insult anyone, but action will be taken against those who create mess. I remove the collector of Niwari district with immediate effect.

He further said, the work of purchasing land is going on in Orchha, there is also a Tehsildar, the news of this also comes to me. I will also get them investigated, this Tehsildar is also removed with immediate effect. If there is a



mess here, then it is also the duty of the commissioner to investigate. Also, referring to the complaint of asking money for the installations of PM Awas Yojana, gave instructions for investigation. Referring to Maharaja Kher Singh Khangar, Chouhan said, he was a wonderful warrior. When Mohammad Tughlaq invaded here, the Maharaja had set his teeth sour. To protect their self-respect, the Khangar Kshatriyas had sacrificed themselves in the fire pit built in the fort. I bow down to him. Veerangana Kesari also surrendered herself in the fire pit after fighting valiantly. The Chief Minister further said that Garhkundar is the land of heroes. This is the land of the brave, this is the land of sacrifice, I bow down to this land again and again. It is said that when Maharaja Khersingh used to use his sword, even a stone would crack.

Shivraj seeks cooperation from youth for implementation of PESA law

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In order to make the tribal class more capable and empowered in Madhya Pradesh, the state government has implemented the PESA Act with changes in it. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan claims that people are being empowered by implementing the PESA Act in the notified areas of the state. Chief Minister Chouhan has sought cooperation from the youth for its implementation. Chief Minister Chouhan called upon the youth to implement the PESA Act in a better way in the youth dialogue pro-

gram at his residence on Tuesday night. He said that the Gram Sabha will have the right over water, forest and land. Gram Sabha has been empowered to ensure that the money of the village stays in the village. The Gram Sabha will plan the works for the year. Only Gram Sabha will provide employment to the people. If someone comes to the village from outside, then his information will also have to be given to the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha will also have the right to open a new liquor and cannabis shop in the notified village. Gram Sabha can also impose restrictions

in public places. A peace and dispute resolution committee will be formed in the village. There will be no need to go to the police station for minor quarrels and disputes. There are many such provisions in the PESA Act. PESA Act is a social revolution. Chief Minister Chouhan said that the youth should go to every village and explain to the people about the PESA Act. I need youths like you for this. Mama is standing with you. Chief Minister Chouhan said that cooperate seriously in the implementation of the PESA Act. We will be economically empowered by bringing social revolution.

ENCROACHMENT REMOVED FROM GOVERNMENT LAND WORTH CRORES

Team Absolute | Bhopal

As per the instructions of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, strict action against the anti-encroachment campaign is going on in the state. More than 11 acres of government land in Khargone has been freed from encroachment by running a campaign. The cost of freed land is more than Rs 60 crore.

According to the information received, Yogesh Thakkar has unauthorizedly constructed Maa Bageshwari Agricultural Farm on 11 acres 76 decimal land registered in the name of Manager-Collector on Khasra No.-102 and 104 of Patwari Circle No.-5 on Mangrul Road, Khargone. was captured. Collector Khargone Kumar Purushottam, Superintendent of Police Dharamveer Singh have



removed the illegal encroachment by running a joint operation. The agricultural farm and tin shed built on the encroached land have been demol-

ished. The municipality officer has been instructed to take the land under his possession. It has been told that since 2017, cases have been registered

against the encroacher in several sections in the Mungaon police station of the district. Action will be taken after reviewing the matter.

CCTV cameras will be installed in each room of all examination centers of universities and colleges

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Higher Education Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav has given instructions to install CCTV cameras in each room of the examination centers for transparency in the conduct of examinations. He said that the duties of the teachers involved in monitoring/supervision work at the examination centers should be changed continuously. Minister Dr. Yadav said that the duty of teachers posted in colleges located at divisional, district and tehsil headquarters should be shifted from one college to another for academic work. If a teacher's duty is posted in a college for one year, it should

be ensured that his duty is not posted again in the same college in the next year and posted in another college. In the examination centers set up in aided colleges, the work of supervisors should be done by the teachers of government colleges only. In case of shortage of speculum, work of speculum should be taken from research scholars also. Minister Dr. Yadav said that duty of executive officers related to revenue and police department should also be ensured at each examination center and sufficient number of flying squads should also be formed at the district level. He said that strict action should be taken on cases related to copying at examination centres.

Voting in 19 urban bodies on January 20 Model Code of Conduct in force in the concerned area

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The State Election Commission has released the program for the elections of 19 urban bodies. With this, the Model Code of Conduct has become effective in the concerned constituency. Voting will be held on January 20 from 7 am to 5 pm with EVMs.

State Election Commissioner Basant Pratap Singh has informed that the work of publication of election information and nomination papers will start from December 30, 2022. Nomination papers will be taken till January 6, 2023 (up to 3

pm). The nomination papers will be scrutinized on January 7. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is January 9, 2023. Election symbols will also be allotted to the contesting candidates on the same day. Voting will be held on January 20.

The counting of votes and the announcement of election results will be done on January 23 from 9 am.

Secretary State Election Commission Rakesh Singh has told that elections will be held in Municipal Council Raghogarh-Vijaypur of Guna district, Barwani, Sendhwa of Barwani district

and Dhar, Manawar and Pithampur of Dhar district. Similarly, elections will also be held in Municipal Council Jaithari in Anuppur district, Omkareshwar in Khandwa district, Khetiya, Pansemal, Palsud, Rajpur, Anjad in Barwani district and Municipal Council in Dhar district Dharampuri, Dhamnod, Kukshi, Rajgarh, Sardarpur and Dahi.

There are 343 wards and 720 polling stations in these urban bodies. Total voters are 5 lakh 7 thousand 308. Out of these, there are 2 lakh 60 thousand 301 male voters, 2 lakh 46 thousand 969 female voters and 38 other voters.

NIA POLICE STATION IN BHOPAL, NOTIFICATION ISSUED

Bhopal: The state government has issued a notification for the National Investigation Agency (NIA) police station in Bhopal. The NIA Police Station will be on the

third floor of the Old Crime Investigation Department in Jahangirabad. The jurisdiction of the police station will be the whole of Madhya Pradesh.

BONES FOUND IN VEG BIRYANI IN INDORE RESTAURANT

Indore: Madhya Pradesh police have registered a case against a restaurant owner in Indore following allegations of serving non-vegetarian food to a vegetarian.

The complainant Akash Dubey had ordered veg biryani but spotted bones on his plate at the restaurant in Vijay Nagar area.

He complained about it to the restaurant manager and staff, after which they apologised to him. Akash then registered a case at Vijay Nagar police station.

"Vijay Nagar police has registered an FIR under Section 298 against the restaurant manager Swapnil Gujrati. At present, the matter is being investigated, after which further action will be taken," Deputy Commissioner of Police, Sampat padhyay said.

FROM CM TO GENERAL PUBLIC ALL ENGAGED IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Madhya Pradesh is playing an important role in environmental protection and tackling the global challenge of climate change.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is planting saplings daily from February 19, 2021. No matter which part of the world Shri Chouhan stays, his resolve is not broken even for a single day.

As is the ruler, so are the people

Chief Minister Chouhan also involved the people of the state in this campaign of plantation. From June 5, 2021, World Environment Day, "Ankur Programme" was started in the state. So far, 15 lakh 87 thousand 674 citizens of the state have registered in the programme operated through "Vayudoot App". Photos have been uploaded by the participants after planting 36 lakh 94 thousand 569 saplings. Citizens have shown interest in the plantation programme on a large scale in all the districts.

Photos of saplings are being uploaded on the app

Mobile App- Vayudoot (Ankur) is available on Google Play Store and Apple Store for easy participation of people in Ankur programme. Participants plant at least one sapling from their resources and upload its photo on the Vayudoot app. For the encouragement of the citizens, facility has been given to download the participation certificate by uploading a new photo of the same sapling planted on the app after 30 days of plantation. For the purpose of motivating people to take care of the



planted saplings, there is also a facility to upload the third photo on the app after 6 months of plantation. There is a provision for

honouring the urban and rural participants with Pranavayu Award selected and verified by district-wise computer lottery with the title of

Vriksha-Veer and Vriksha-Veerangana. Mass plantation became a mass movement In the programme, from March 1 to 5, 2022

and from July 28 to August 15, 2022, the mega plantation drive was conducted. In the first plantation mega drive, 8 lakh 97 thousand 590 people planted saplings and uploaded their photos. This figure had almost doubled to 17 lakh 28 thousand 77 in the second mega campaign in July-August. In both the campaigns, citizens, students, government departments and voluntary organisations have converted the Chief Minister's tree plantation resolution into a grand campaign.

Corona made us realize the importance of oxygen

In the second wave of Corona, the world realised with great intensity the priceless gift of oxygen provided by nature. Initiated by the Chief Minister, the Ankur programme is enriching the environment with vital oxygen along with increasing the green cover of the state, which is a unique gift for the coming generations.

1175 participants honoured with Pranavayu Award

In the first phase of the Ankur programme, 1175 participants selected and verified district-wise by computer lottery have been awarded the Pranavayu Award among the participants who uploaded the second and third photos by February 15, 2022. Mobile app is being used to mark and verify the geo-tagged location of plantation done in the campaign.



EDITOR'S SPECS

People from smaller cities flying high on UDAN

The Centre's ambitious regional connectivity scheme, *Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrak* or UDAN, is going to add more feathers in its cap in the coming year. As many as 453 routes have already been flagged off under the scheme connecting cities across the country, and 70 airports operationalised, and moves are afoot to add more routes and airports to the list to cater to the rising demand for affordable air travel. UDAN envisages providing connectivity to unserved and under-served airports of the country through revival of the existing airstrips and airports. UDAN is a demand driven scheme, wherein airline operators assess the feasibility of operation on a particular route and bid under the scheme from time to time. Officials informed that after four rounds of bidding under UDAN, 455 routes have commenced, operationalising 70 airports, including two water aerodrome and nine heliports. More than 2.15 lakh UDAN flights have operated and over 1.1 crore passengers have availed the benefits so far. Places like Rupsi, Jorhat and Lilabari in Assam; Meghalaya's state capital of Shillong; Tezu in Arunachal Pradesh; and Pakyong in Sikkim have come into the air-map of the country after these airports were operationalised under UDAN in the northeastern region for connecting remote and inaccessible areas. Similarly, two advanced landing grounds namely Pasighat and Ziro have also been operationalised in Arunachal Pradesh under the scheme "Providing Air Connectivity and Aviation Infrastructure in NER (North Eastern Region)". Under UDAN, the Centre has targeted an indicative airfare at Rs 2,500 for a distance of 500 km to 600 km per seat under the Regional Connectivity routes -- equivalent to a one-hour flight. Selected Airline Operator is required to provide upto 50 per cent of the aircraft seating capacity or maximum 40 seats, whichever is lower, as Seats in a fixed wing aircraft under UDAN.

Indian Americans turn to 'assertive Hinduism' to define identity

Yashwant Raj | Washington

Assertive Hinduism was the most visible US import from India in 2022, courtesy the Indian American community. An event to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Indian Independence at US Capitol, home to US democracy and Congress, was turned into a celebration of their Hindu faith by organisers and attendees as groups after groups lustily chanted "Jai Sri Ram". It wasn't the wine that was being served. A bulldozer rolled along a parade organised by a separate bunch of Indian Americans in New Jersey, in an unmistakable nod to its emergence as a symbol of oppression of minorities in India. The backlash continues to this day, with a coalition of Muslims, African Americans and civil rights groups calling for the US authorities to investigate its organisers, which included the Overseas Friends of BJP. This import from India was also seen in other countries with significant presence of the Indian diaspora in 2022. Indian-origin Britons chanting "Jai Sri Ram" marched through the streets of Leicester in the UK in September, which was noted with much alarm by British authorities and media. Some Hindu-Americans have been quietly promoting their faith and cultural accoutrements for decades. Vishwa Hindu Parishad America, for instance, was founded in 1970 to, in the words of its website, "preserve, promote and practice those great universal and eternal values which were discovered and prac-

ticed by the Sages of Bharat". But this in-your-face Hindu assertion is new and has surprised and embarrassed more moderate sections of Hindus. "I was shocked by the naked display of this Hindu assertion at the US congress event," said one of the people who attended, speaking on condition of anonymity to be able to express his views freely. Attendees posed for pictures in groups chanting "Jai Sri Ram" as members of US congress arrived, spoke and left with aides. Slogans were also raised about India - "Bharat Mata Ki Jai", which may have been appropriate given the occasion, the 75th anniversary of Indian independent. US Congress, incidentally, was a favoured venue for many of these public display of assertive Hinduism. Another group of Indian

Americans hosted two events at the Capitol in 2022 to register their desire to shunt the generic name of the community from Indian American, as the nearly 4 million Americans of Indian extraction have been called for decades, to Hindu American as some in the community have been advocating for long, but unsuccessfully until now. One of the events was hosted by a group of prominent Indian Americans who said they were disappointed by the Indian government's refusal to offer a robust criticism of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and, they further argued, they did not want to take the backlash they suffered on behalf of the Indian government. These events were also motivated by a desire to project Hindu Americans -- and not Indian

Americans -- as a political force in US politics, which was cited as a reason by the organisers for hosting at the US Capitol, to deliver the message directly to US lawmakers. The Indian diaspora in the US has been debating this name change for a while, and among community members who vote and support both the Democratic and the Republican parties. India-born immigrants continued to feel a strong link with their country of origin, but the second generation of Indian Americans feel less committed to this political part of their heritage -- they feel they are American, born and raised in the US unlike their parents, uncles and aunts. The name Hindu American for Hindus in the diaspora makes more sense. But this is not a debate that has been settled yet.

PUTIN HAS BUILT A POWER STRUCTURE THAT ONLY TELLS HIM WHAT HE WANTS TO HEAR

Russian President Vladimir Putin expected the war in Ukraine to be swift, popular, and triumphant. For months, he struggled to come to terms with what instead became a costly quagmire, and found himself isolated and distrustful at the pinnacle of a power structure designed to reinforce his belligerent worldview and shelter him from discouraging news, media reports said.

Through the summer, delegations of military experts and arms manufacturers emerged from presidential meetings questioning whether Putin understood the reality on the battleground, according to people familiar with the situation. The Wall Street Journal reported. And while Putin has since then gone to lengths to get a clearer picture of the war, they say, the President remains surrounded by an administration that caters to his conviction that Russia will succeed, despite the mounting human and economic sacrifices.

"The people around Putin protect themselves," said Ekaterina Vinokurova, a member of his hand-picked human-rights council until Putin removed her in November. "They have this deep belief that they shouldn't upset the President,"

Wall Street Journal reported. The resulting mistakes have shaped Russia's disastrous invasion of Ukraine -- from the initial days, when Putin thought his soldiers would be met with flowers, to recent humiliating withdrawals in the northeast and south. Over time, Putin, who has never served in the military, has become so wary of his own command structure that he has issued orders directly to the front line. The President, these people said, spent 22 years constructing a system to flatter him by withholding or sugarcoating discouraging data points, Wall Street Journal reported.

US officials said they have struggled to find a Kremlin insider who both has influence over Putin and also isn't wrapped up in his narrative of Russian grievance. The President increasingly speaks of Russia in near-religious terms, as a 1,000-year-old civilisation waging a holy struggle that will right historical wrongs and elevate him into a pantheon of conquering czarist leaders such as Peter the Great, Wall Street Journal reported. Putin wakes daily around 7 a.m. to a written briefing on the war, with information carefully calibrated to emphasize successes and play down setbacks, according to the

former Russian intelligence officer and current and former Russian officials, Wall Street Journal reported. He has long refused to use the internet for fear of digital surveillance, Russian and US officials have said, making him more dependent on briefing documents compiled by ideologically aligned advisers. Battlefield updates can take several days to reach Putin's desk, leaving them often out of date, people familiar with the matter said. Front-line commanders report to the Federal Security Service, or FSB, the successor to the KGB, which edits reports for experts at the Security Council, who pass them to Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, the arch hawk who helped persuade Putin to invade Ukraine. He, in turn, passes the reports to Putin, Wall Street Journal reported.

Putin, current and former Russian officials and people close to the Kremlin say, remains fully committed to bringing Ukraine to heel and is ready to mobilise Russia's economy and population for years to succeed. If Western arms shipments and economic support flag, and Ukrainian morale dips, he could still emerge, on balance, as the victor in what is already the largest war in Europe

since World War II, Wall Street Journal reported. For months, a trickle of Russian officials, pro-government journalists and analysts tried to bring word in person to their President about how his invasion was floundering, according to people familiar with the matter. When one longtime pollster reached out to Putin's office about a survey showing lower-than-expected public support soon after the invasion, his office responded, using Putin's first name and his patronymic middle name, "Vladimir Vladimirovich doesn't need to be upset right now," according to a person familiar with the exchange, Wall Street Journal reported.

Some of Putin's allies concede that information reaching the President was flawed and attribute military failures to poor planning by government officials. Konstantin Zatulin, a senior lawmaker from the ruling United Russia party who supports the war, said in an interview that the President "proceeded from an incomplete understanding of the situation and in some ways not fully correct". The war planners, he said, "clearly underestimated the strength of the enemy and overestimated their own". The system of self-deception was decades in the making, said Boris Bondarev, a career diplomat who resigned from his longtime post at Russia's permanent mission to the United Nations in Geneva after the invasion, Wall Street Journal reported.

Diplomats at the mission learned during Putin's two-decade rule to feed Moscow the story it wanted to hear, he said. Junior officials and senior directors knew that to win plaudits and promotions they should exaggerate good news and play down the bad, for fear of upsetting "papa", a nickname for Putin, once used for Russian czars, Wall Street Journal reported.

international

US SC KEEPS TRUMP-ERA BORDER POLICY IN PLACE

Washington | Agencies

The US Supreme Court has voted to keep in place a Trump-era asylum-limiting measure, blocking thousands of people from crossing the country's border with Mexico. Tuesday's 5-4 decision reversed lower court decisions that the so-called Title 42 policy, applied about 2.5 million times since March 2020, had to end December 21, reports Xinhua news agency. This means that the policy will remain in effect until a final ruling. Title 42, which came into effect in spring 2020 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, allows US border officials to automatically expel undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers seeking entry



into America. The court's decision was in response to an emergency appeal from some Republican-led states who had asked for the policy to remain in place. Also on Tuesday, the Supreme Court scheduled arguments in the case for February 2023, with a final decision expected later in summer. The White House responded in a statement that the Supreme Court's order "keeps the current Title 42 policy in place while the Court reviews the matter in 2023". "We will, of course, comply with the order and prepare for the Court's review... We are advancing our prepara-

tions to manage the border in a secure, orderly, and humane way when Title 42 eventually lifts and will continue expanding legal pathways for immigration," it said in a statement. The Department of Homeland Security also weighed in on the Supreme Court's order on Tuesday, saying that "individuals who attempt to enter the US unlawfully will continue to be expelled to Mexico or their home country". The Department also said the "decades-old" immigration system is broken while urging Congress to pass comprehensive reform legislation. About two million people have been expelled under Title 42 in fiscal years 2021-22, according to US Customs and Border Protection's data.

Washington-Moscow relationship at its lowest point: Russian FM

Moscow: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said that the Washington-Moscow relationship is at its lowest point. "Indeed, Russia-US relations are in an extremely poor state. They have become practically frozen through the fault of Washington. Its confrontational anti-Russia policy is becoming increasingly exacerbated and comprehensive. It is objectively impossible to maintain any kind of normal communication with the Biden administration..." Lavrov told TASS news agency in an interview. "Undoubtedly, our relations with the European Union have deteriorated to a historic low. The reasons for this are well known. Since the beginning of the special military operation, Brussels, following the US and NATO, has declared a hybrid war against Russia. EU chief diplomat Josep Borrell was among the first to voice the opinion that Russia must be defeated on the battlefield," he added. The Russian minister further claimed that the US is the "main beneficiary of the military conflict as it seeks to reap the biggest benefits from it in economic and military-strategic terms. At the same time, Washington is addressing an important geopolitical goal, which is to destroy the traditional ties between Russia and Europe and to overpower its European satellites even more".



INDIAN SCIENTIST HONORED AS ONE OF EUROPE'S TOP TALENTS IN BIOLOGY

London | Agencies

An Indian scientist has been chosen to join the prestigious European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) Young Investigator network, recognising her as one of the top talents in biology in Europe. Dr Mahima Swamy, who hails from Bengaluru, is one of the University of Dundee's most revered experts within their School of Life Sciences where she heads a research group that investigates immune responses in the intestine. Based within the University's Medical Research Council Protein Phosphorylation and Ubiquitylation Unit (MRC-PPU), Mahima joins 23 other researchers to become a part of the network of 135 current and 390 former members of the EMBO programme. "I am really excited to be a part of this network and meet all the dynamic young scientists doing cutting-edge research across Europe. I believe that being a part of this esteemed group will help our research immensely, and I am very grateful to my lab and my mentors for the support that got me this award," Mahima said in a state-



ment. A key part of her work is the study of inflammatory bowel diseases and how these can be prompted by the body's immune system attacking the gut lining in the absence of infection. Her research aims to address how one can better harness the gut immune system to protect against harmful invasion, but also prevent it from damaging the gut. The EMBO Young Investigator programme supports the scientific endeavours of researchers who have become laboratory group leaders in the last four years. EMBO Young Investigators receive an award of 15,000 euros in the second year of their tenure and can apply for additional grants of up to 10,000 euros per year.

Nearly 4,900 flights cancelled in US due to deadly winter storm

Washington | Agencies

As a deadly winter storm continues to wreak havoc across the US, nearly 4,900 flights were cancelled, with more than 4,400 others delayed in the last 24 hours, the media reported. Southwest Airlines was the hardest hit as it cancelled over 60 per cent or 2,500 of its flights on Tuesday, reports the BBC. More than 3,500 flights scheduled to leave Wednesday have already been cancelled, according to flight tracking service FlightAware. Since the storm began on December 22, nearly 20,000 flights have been cancelled across the US, the service added. The US Department of Transportation (DOT) has said that it is "concerned by Southwest's unacceptable rate of cancellations and delays (and) reports of lack of prompt customer service". In a tweet on Tuesday, President Joe Biden said that his administration is



"working to ensure airlines are held accountable" for disruptions. He urged passengers to check whether they are entitled to compensation. Southwest, for its part, has repeatedly apologised and said the disruptions caused by the winter weather are "unacceptable". On its website, the airline said that it will honour "reasonable requests" for reimbursement for meals, hotel and alternate transportation for those who have had flights cancelled or delayed between December 24, 2022 and January 2, 2023, the BBC reported.

BRITISH INDIAN ARMY MEMORIAL COMING UP IN GLASGOW

London: A city council in the UK has approved plans to erect a memorial in Scotland to recognise the service and sacrifice of more than four million Indian soldiers in the British Army. The plans for the memorial, which will come up near Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow, were submitted by Colourful Heritage -- a group that captures first-hand accounts of first-generation South Asians in Scotland, The Glasgow Times reported. The Glasgow City Council approved the plan subject to conditions, which include full details of the designs and content of carvings into the stone. Samples of the materials for the pavilion and surrounding blocks have also been submitted for approval, according to the paper. The upcoming structure will feature a 'Chattri' (dome) design for the roof and Locharbriigs sandstone columns, matching the Kelvingrove architecture. Pillars will be carved creating a South Asian design, and cherry trees will be planted along with benches for people to sit and reflect. The Indian Army soldiers in the UK were from modern day Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.



UNSC reiterates call for women's equal participation in Afghanistan

United Nations | Agencies

The UN Security Council has reiterated its call for full participation of women and girls in the Afghan society, expressing concern about the Taliban's latest ban on female students from going to universities. "Deeply alarmed" by reports that the Taliban have suspended access to universities for women and girls, the Council on Tuesday reiterated its concern over the suspension of school beyond the sixth grade and its call for "the full, equal and meaningful participation of



women and girls in Afghanistan", Xinhua news agency. The Council called on the Taliban regime "to reopen schools and swiftly reverse these policies and practices", which represent "an increasing erosion of the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms". Council members are "furthermore profoundly concerned" by reports that the Taliban have banned female employees of non-governmental

organisations (NGO) and international organisations from going to work, which would have a significant and immediate impact on humanitarian operations in the country, including those of the UN, and the delivery of aid and health work. These restrictions contradict the commitments made by the Taliban to the Afghan people and the expectations of the international community, the council said. On December 20, the Taliban's Education Ministry announced the indefinite suspension of university education for female students all across the war-torn nation.



EX-MINISTER ANIL DESHMUKH WALKS OUT OF JAIL TO A HERO'S WELCOME

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh walked out of the Arthur Road Central Jail here on Wednesday on bail after spending nearly 14 months behind bars, to a hero's welcome.

Deshmukh, 73, was released after the Bombay High Court on Tuesday refused a Central Bureau of Investigation plea to extend the stay on its order granting bail.

A single-judge vacation bench of Justice Santosh Chapalgaonkar declined to entertain the CBI plea against the backdrop of the regular court's previous order that no plea for further extension of custody will be entertained, thus paving the way for his release.

As Deshmukh stepped out of the prison gates around 4.55 pm, sporting his trademark dark waist-jacket and white kurta-pyjama, he was greeted with loud cheers, clapping, garlands and showers of flower petals by the hundreds of Nationalist Congress Party activists and top leaders present



to receive him.

State NCP President Jayant Patil, Leader of Opposition Ajit Pawar, MP Supriya Sule, senior leader Praful Patel, ex-ministers Dilip Walse-Patil,

Chhagan Bhujbal, several MPs and MLAs, Deshmukh's family members with tears of joy streaming down their cheeks, and well-wishers were waiting for over two hours as the release

formalities were completed by the ARCJ authorities.

Many NCP activists, men and women were seen dancing, a band played drums to salute the end of his incarceration and others distributed sweets on the road outside the ARCJ.

Appearing overwhelmed at the tumultuous welcome, a cheerful but weary Deshmukh initially folded his hands in acknowledgement at the gathering, declining comments.

Later, at the prodding by NCP leaders and the media, he finally offered a few reactions on his incarceration, stepping onto an open vehicle flanked by several party leaders.

Deshmukh later went for darshan at the famed Siddhivinayak Temple in Prabhadevi in a vehicular procession waving NCP flags, and thereafter he is likely to call on NCP President Sharad Pawar. Similar scenes were witnessed at Deshmukh's Nagpur residence with hundreds of supporters and party workers dancing with joy, sprinkling 'gula', and distributing sweets, as they watched the live telecast of his release in Mumbai.

Police search for man involved in baby boy trafficking

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Police were searching for a man who was involved in a case of human trafficking involving an infant boy.

Maharashtra's Nagpur police had arrested a man and woman with an infant from a train, and during primary questioning it was found that they were trafficking the baby to Vijayawada. The case was transferred to Ahmedabad city.

According to the criminal complaint filed with the Kalapur Railway police station on Tuesday evening, the Nagpur police had arrested Mumbai resident Chandrakant Patel (40) and woman Draupadi Meshram, a resident of Nagpur with the baby from Navjivan Express train.

The police during primary questioning and checking of their mobile phones and



WhatsApp chats, had found that the man and woman were handed over the infant outside the Kalapur railway station by a person named Krunal. He had paid Rs 5,000 to the duo and had asked them to deliver the baby in Vijayawada.

Investigation officer I.B. Gamit said that the complaint has been lodged. The police were searching for a person named Krunal, and were checking CCTV footage as the child was handed over on the road outside the railway station.

Yohan Blake named International Event Ambassador for Mumbai Marathon 2023



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Yohan Blake, the youngest 100m world champion ever, has been named as the International Event Ambassador for the 18th edition of the Tata Mumbai Marathon to be held on January 15 next year, the race promoter Procam International announced on Wednesday. Ranked among the top 10 marathons in the world, the iconic Tata

Mumbai Marathon is a USD 405,000 prize fund World Athletics Gold Label Road Race.

According to organisers, the race embodies the city's unique spirit -- encouragement for all and that unshakeable belief in oneself -- #HarDilMumbai.

Jamaica's Blake is the second fastest man of all time and famously finished behind countryman and training partner Usain Bolt in the 100m and 200m before

teaming up with the sprint legend for the 4x100m relay gold in a world record at the 2012 London Olympics.

Nicknamed 'The Beast' by Bolt for his ruthless training regimen, Blake overcame a string of injuries to win a second 4x100m relay gold at the 2016 Rio Olympics. At the 2011 World Championships in Daegu, Blake took the gold in 9.92 to become the youngest 100m world champion, after Bolt was disqualified for the final for a false start. That same year he ran the second-fastest 200m of all time -- 19.26 in Brussels in September -- and beat Bolt in both 100m and 200m in the Jamaican Olympic trials the following year.

After the London Olympics, Blake signed off a spectacular 2012 by running 9.69 in the 100m at the IAAF meeting in Lausanne, the second fastest time in history, behind only Bolt.

Tunisha Sharma Case EX BOYFRIEND'S CHATS WITH WOMAN UNDER SCANNER



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Sheezan Khan, who has been arrested as part of an investigation into the death of his co-actor and former girlfriend Tunisha Sharma, was in touch with another woman who was his ex-girlfriend, the police claimed today.

The police said Sheezan was talking to his another ex-girlfriend on WhatsApp but later deleted all

his chats with her. The police found 250 pages of WhatsApp chats from Sheezan's mobile phone which will be studied and further analyzed.

The cops have written to WhatsApp to retrieve all of Sheezan's chats with his another ex-girlfriend and are probing why he deleted the messages.

Tunisha, 21, allegedly died by suicide on the sets of her TV show 'Alibaba - Dastaan-e-Kabul' in

Vasai near Mumbai on December 24.

Tunisha reportedly broke up with Sheezan 15 days before her death. The lead actor has been arrested on Tunisha's mother's complaint on charges of abetment to suicide. The actor will remain in police custody till Friday, a court near Mumbai said today. He was presented before the court by the police after his custody expired.

'WE WILL MISS YOU TUNNU': SHIVIN NARANG SHARES PIC FROM TUNISHA'S FUNERAL

Mumbai: Late actress Tunisha Sharma's 'Internet Wala Love' co-star Shivin Narang, who attended her last rites, shared a picture from her funeral and remembered his close friend.

Tunisha was cremated in Mumbai on December 27 and her last rites were attended by her family members as well as well-known names from the entertainment industry.

Shivin was present to say a final goodbye to his close friend with whom he worked most recently on an upcoming music video. It was to see them reunite on screen after their last show, 'Internet Wala Love', which dates back to 2018.

He posted a picture of Tunisha's funeral from the cremation ground on his Instagram stories and wrote in the caption: "We will miss you Tunnu. Take care." Shivin was quite close to Tunisha and her mother. All through the cremation, he stood beside Tunisha's mother.

"Declare Disputed Areas As Union Territory": Maharashtra MLA on border row

Team Absolute | Nagpur

Legislator Jayant Patil on Wednesday said in the Maharashtra Legislative Council that the Centre should immediately intervene into the border row between Maharashtra and Karnataka and declare the disputed area as a Union Territory.

Jayant Patil (from the Peasants and Workers Party of India) was speaking in the House during a discussion.

His demand came a day after the Maharashtra legislature unanimously passed a resolution to "legally pursue" the inclusion of 865 Marathi-speaking villages in Karnataka into the western state.

The state government will legally pursue in the Supreme Court the case to include (in Maharashtra) "every inch" of the land of Belgaum, Karwar Bidar, Nipani, Bhalki cities and the 865 Marathi-speaking villages in Karnataka, said the resolution moved by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde in both the Houses.

The Maharashtra resolution said when the



chief ministers of the two states had met Union Home Minister Amit Shah, it was decided that till the Supreme Court gives its judgement on the matter, it should be ensured the issue does not flare up any further. However, the Karnataka government took a contrary stand by passing a reso-

lution in its state Assembly.

The Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray faction) on Tuesday demanded in the Maharashtra Assembly that the 865 villages be declared as a Union Territory till the top court gives its verdict on the issue. However, it did not figure in the resolution. On Wednesday, MLC Patil said, "The Centre took an immediate decision on Jammu and Kashmir and divided it into Union Territories. Prime Minister Narendra Modi should take a stand and declare the disputed area (pertaining to Maharashtra-Karnataka border row) as a Union Territory." The Lok Sabha has the power to take a decision. Therefore, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders should immediately approach the Union government, he said.

The Karnataka Legislative Assembly last Thursday unanimously passed a resolution on the border row with Maharashtra, resolving to protect the southern state's interests and not to cede even an inch of land to its neighbour. The resolution also condemned the border dispute "created" by Maharashtra.

MAHAASSEMBLY PASSES LOKAYUKTA BILL

Nagpur: Maharashtra assembly today passed the Lokayukta Bill 2022, which brings the Chief Minister and Council of Ministers under the ambit of the anti-corruption ombudsman. The bill was passed without discussion as the opposition had staged a walkout over the alleged scam in the Teachers Entrance Test. Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis termed the bill a historic legislation, adding Maharashtra is the first state to have such a law. As per the bill, prior approval of the Assembly has to be obtained and the motion has to be placed before the immediate session of the House before initiating any inquiry against the Chief Minister. Such motion shall be passed by not less than two-thirds of the total members of the assembly, states the bill, which was tabled in the House on Monday.

Maharashtra seeks proposal to rename Ahmednagar as 'Ahilyadevi Nagar'

Nagpur | Agencies

The Maharashtra government has asked the district administration to submit a proposal to rename Ahmednagar as 'Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Nagar', it told the Legislative Council in Nagpur on Wednesday.

Education Minister Deepak Kesarkar made the statement in reply to a question during Question Hour.

He, however, did not specify whether the government intended to rename the city of Ahmednagar in central Maharashtra or the district of which it is the headquarters, or both. The name Ahmednagar is derived from its 15th-century ruler Ahmed Nizam Shah I. The directives were issued on September 7 to Ahmednagar district collector



as well as the concerned divisional commissioner, Kesarkar said. The government has also written to the commissioner of the Ahmednagar municipal corporation, divisional railway manager, senior post master and tehsildar for sending such proposals, the minister said. After receiving the proposal, it will be tabled before the state cabinet for approval and later forwarded to the Union government for final decision, Kesarkar added.

FIRE IN CHEMICAL TANKER ON MUMBAI-AHMEDABAD HIGHWAY, NO CASUALTY

Palghar: A chemical-laden tanker caught fire on Mumbai-Ahmedabad highway in Maharashtra's Palghar district on Wednesday, disrupting traffic movement on the busy route for a couple of hours, police said.

No one was injured in the blaze which erupted at around 3.30 am in the tanker in Medhvan Khind area, an official from Kasa police station said.

The vehicle's driver and cleaner jumped out to safety, he said.

Local fire personnel rushed to the spot and doused the blaze in about two hours, the official said.

The tanker was completely destroyed, the official said, adding it was not yet known which chemical the vehicle was carrying.

The cause of the blaze was yet to be ascertained, he said.

Flying and sale of lanterns in prohibited in Mumbai till January 29

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai Police on Wednesday issued an order banning the flying and sale of lanterns in the city till January 29, 2023.

An order issued by Vishal Thakur, DCP (Operations), Mumbai Police said, as reports have been received that due to the situation prevailing in the areas under the jurisdiction of Mumbai Police, it is noticed that use, sale and storage of lanterns during December 31, 2022 to January 29, 2023 in the Mumbai Police jurisdiction may cause grave danger to human life, safety and injury to public property.

It said, it is necessary that some checks should be put on flying lanterns activities, use, sale and storage of them in the Mumbai Police



Commissionerate, to prevent the activities of antisocial elements through such type of lanterns during the said period in Mumbai and that immediate action is necessary to prevention of the same. It further said, the

police order that during the period of 30 Days i.e. December 31 to January 29, no flying activities of such type of lanterns and no use, sale and storage is to be allowed in the jurisdiction of Mumbai Police.

An official said, "It is a routine order which is reviewed and issued every 30 days."

The order said, any person contravening this order shall be punishable under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code.

NCB SEIZES CHARAS WORTH RS 8 LAKH

THE NARCOTICS CONTROL BUREAU (NCB) HAS EXPOSED AN INTER-STATE DRUG NETWORK WITH THE ARREST OF TWO PERSONS IN THANE AND RECOVERY OF 4 KG OF CHARAS WORTH ABOUT RS 8 LAKH FROM THEM.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Drugs are sent in large quantities to Mumbai and Goa during New Year, said an NCB official.

The NCB official said the network was sending drugs from Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand to destinations across the country.

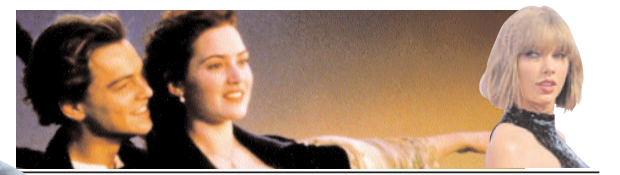
The anti-drug agency had got inputs about a carrier coming to Mumbai with a drug consignment, said the NCB official.

On Tuesday, NCB learnt that the carrier was heading to the Thane station on a train to hand over the drugs to a local distributor. A team of NCB officials reached Thane station to intercept the carrier. They also learnt that a local distributor was on his



way to the railway station. The carrier arrived at Thane station on the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday. With the help of information gathered

through intelligence and technical data, the NCB team ascertained the identities of the duo and arrested them. It recovered 4 kg of charas from them.



'Is it that hard to take a picture together?'

Kim Kardashian is accused of 'photoshopping' her entire FAMILY in a group snap from their festive bash

Los Angeles | Agencies

Kim Kardashian has been accused of photoshopping her family together after they appeared to pose for a festive group snap during their annual Christmas Eve bash. The reality star, 42, had taken to Instagram to share a gallery of snaps with her famous siblings and mother Kris Jenner, but eagle-eyed fans were quick to notice a series of distortions that hinted the photos were edited.

Kim had taken to social media on Monday to share a slew of behind-the-scenes images from the family's annual Christmas Eve party, after donning a series of stunning red and white gowns for their lavish celebra-

tion. Among the images Kim posted was a gorgeous group snap of herself alongside her mother Kris, and her sisters Kourtney, 43, Khloe, 38, Kendall, 27, and Kylie, 25.

While Kim looked ravishing in a gorgeous silver gown, and Kourtney donned a skintight white ruched dress, Kris, Khloe and Kendall all wowed in stunning red looks. However, in the comments section of Kim's post, viewers were quick to accuse the star of editing the images, with one claiming it looked as if different photos of Kim and her sisters had been cut together to give the illusion of a group snap. Several fans also noted that the placement of Kendall's feet gave the illusion that the snap had been edited.



Cameron trimmed 10 minutes of gun violence in 'Avatar: Way of Water'

Los Angeles | Agencies

A lot has been said about the length of James Cameron's long-awaited 'Avatar: The Way of Water'. The three-hour runtime has hardly stopped the film from topping box office charts around the world. Now Cameron has revealed the film would have run 10 minutes longer had he not cut out scenes with gun violence, reports Variety.

The filmmaker told 'Esquire Middle East' that he is no longer interested in fetishising guns in his action scenes given the rampant gun violence in the U.S.

"I actually cut about 10 minutes of the movie targeting gunplay action," Cameron said quoted by Variety. "I wanted to get rid of some of the ugliness, to find a balance between light and dark. You have to have conflict, of course. Violence and action are the same thing, depending on how you look at it. This is the dilemma of every action filmmaker,

and I'm known as an action filmmaker." As per Variety, Cameron said that he looks back on some films that he has made, and he doesn't know if he would want to make that film now.

"I don't know if I would want to fetishise the gun, like I did on a couple of 'Terminator' movies 30-plus years ago, in our current world. What's happening with guns in our society turns my stomach." "I'm happy to be living in New Zealand where they just banned all assault rifles two weeks after that horrific mosque shooting a couple of years ago," Cameron added as an aside. Given Cameron's comments, it's safe to assume that action scenes in 'The Terminator' franchise will look a bit different should it ever return to the screen.



'Glass Onion' director is unhappy about film's title

Los Angeles | Agencies

Director Rian Johnson is not too pleased with the title of his acclaimed 'Knives Out' sequel 'Glass Onion'. Johnson expressed frustration over having to add 'A Knives Out Mystery' to the film's title for marketing purposes, reports Variety. "I've tried hard to make them self-contained," Johnson said about his 'Knives Out' films, the only overlap between the 2019 original and its 2022 sequel being Daniel Craig's detective character. "Honestly, I'm pissed off that we have 'A Knives Out Mystery' in the title. You know? I want it to just be called 'Glass Onion'," he said, quoted by Variety.

"I get it, and I want everyone who liked the first movie to know this is next in the series, but also, the whole appeal to me is it's a new novel off the shelf every time," Johnson added. "But there's a gravity of a thousand suns toward serialised storytelling."

As per Variety, 'Glass Onion', which has been at the top of Netflix's daily most-watched chart since its streaming debut, features an entirely new mystery and ensemble of suspects, including Dave Bautista, Janelle Monae, Kathryn Hahn, Kate Hudson and Edward Norton, among others.



Simon Cowell to wed Lauren Silverman

Los Angeles | Agencies

Simon Cowell has opened up about his plans to enjoy a 'spontaneous' wedding day with wife-to-be Lauren Silverman. He has been in a relationship with 45-year-old Lauren since 2013 and they announced their engagement at the beginning of this year, reports Mirror.co.uk.

Media reports earlier this year suggested that the couple, who share an eight-year-old son named Eric, were set to tie the knot in London over the summer, but this failed to materialise.

As per Mirror.co.uk, Simon has claimed he is planning to have an almost unplanned wedding instead - saying he will whisk Lauren down an aisle at the drop of the hat rather than plan an over-the-top ceremony.

He told The Sun: "I like to make everything spontaneous, and doing that will make it a lot more fun."

He added, quoted by Mirror.co.uk: "I don't think we'll be getting married in Las Vegas, but whatever we do will definitely be fun."



ADELE ADDS \$13.8 MN TO HER FORTUNE AFTER RELEASING FIRST ALBUM IN 5 YEARS

Los Angeles | Agencies

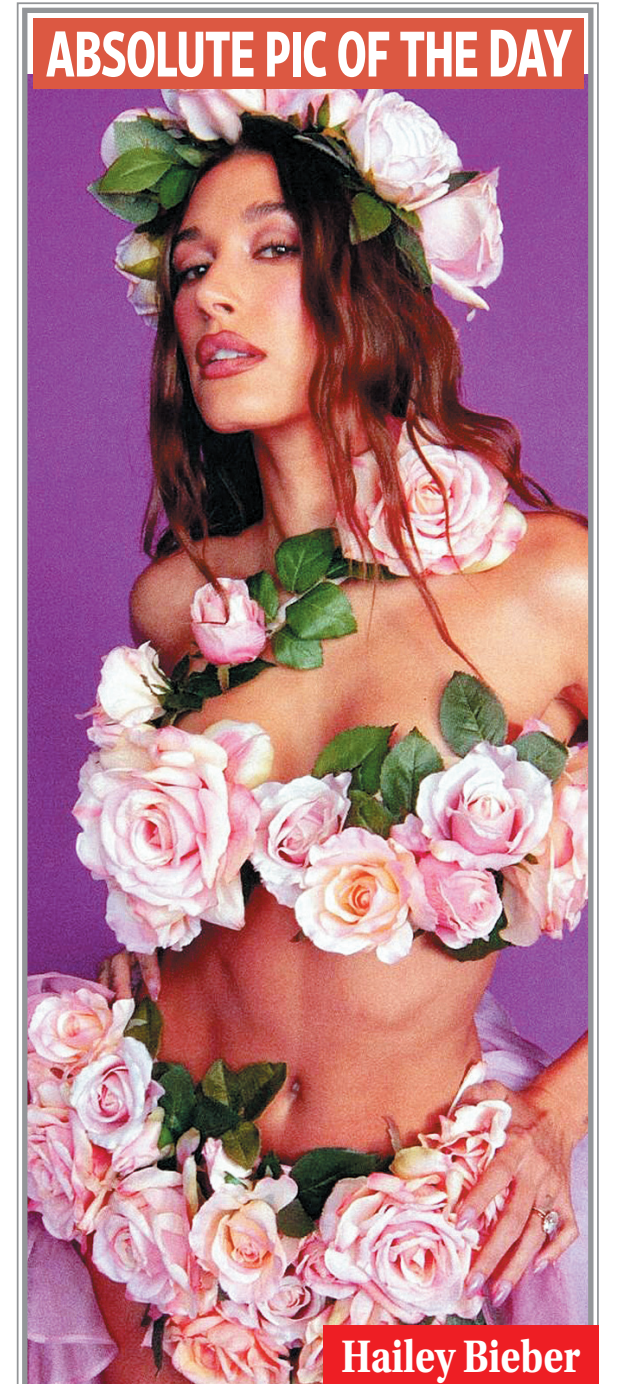
The 'Hello' singer Adele added \$13.8 million to her fortune last year after releasing her first album in five years. With cash pouring in from royalties, figures last week showed her company Melted Stone Ltd has reserves of \$18 million for 2021, up from \$4.2 million in 2020, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'. It takes the profits from 'Rolling In The Deep' star Adele's lyrics and sheet music and it is now worth \$4.2 million. Her firm A Adkins Touring Ltd, which looks after live music, made a loss of close to \$100,000.

As per 'Mirror.co.uk', it will have made millions this year, thanks to Adele's live shows in London's Hyde Park and her money-spinning residency in Las Vegas, which has been a huge success. Her latest album '30' came out in November 2021, to add to her hits 19, 21 and 25. Adele has been opening up to fans while on stage in Vegas. She wept this month as she spoke about the importance of having good friends "when relationships fall apart". The 'Rolling In The Deep' hitmaker said: "I just see so many groups of friends that come in here - loving an artist or loving a song that's how I became so close to some of my friends so watching you bring it all with your friends is just so moving to me."

SAM - BRITNEY SPRINGING NEW CONSPIRACY THEORY

Los Angeles | Agencies

Sam Asghari recently posed alongside his wife Britney Spears in a rare picture posted on his Instagram. This picture has led to conspiracy theories by the fans of his pop icon wife, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'. Fans are speculating that it's not them in the picture. Chart-topping songstress Britney, 41, is known for her questionable social media activity, but model husband Sam, 28, maintains a lower profile. As per Mirror.co.uk, despite boasting of more than 3 million followers, Sam rarely shares updates with his followers - but seemingly made an exception for the Christmas holidays. "Merry Britmas to you all from Samta & Britney," he posted yesterday, alongside a sweet snap of the pair on top of a hill with a scenic view. His update began: "A little hike and a little meditation on Christmas Day goes a long way my wife is really becoming a meditation guru and I love it." Fans had only recently claimed that Britney was no longer in control of her Instagram page after she switched off the facility to comment on her posts. Mirror.co.uk further states that in a new conspiracy theory, fans claim that it's not actually Sam or Britney in his latest picture, saying they look "nothing alike". Most were quick to snap back at the conspiracy theories, as fans urged others not to criticise the couple.



Hailey Bieber





ICC Test rankings

Ashwin moved up one slot to become joint-fourth ranked bowler



Dubai | Agencies
After helping India win the second Test against Bangladesh in Mirpur recently, off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin moved up one slot to become joint-fourth ranked bowler while Shreyas Iyer attained his career-best 16th spot in the latest ICC Mens Test Player Rankings. Ashwin has joint-fourth among bowlers along with Jasprit Bumrah after finishing with six wickets in the second match. He has also inched up three places to 84th among batters following a crucial knock of 42 not out in the second innings that enabled a three-wicket victory and won India crucial World Test Championship (WTC) points. The veteran spinner, who has been the No. 1 bowler and all-rounder

in the past, has also earned seven rating points in the all-rounders' rankings, which are led by his compatriot Ravindra Jadeja. Jadeja is currently on 369 rating points while Ashwin is on 343. On the other hand, Iyer, who partnered in an unbroken 71-run partnership with Ashwin that steered the team to victory, has attained a career-best 16th position. Iyer's scores of 87 and 29 not out have helped him progress from 26th position, his previous best in the rankings. Rishabh Pant remains the top-ranked Indian batter in sixth position after gaining three rating points courtesy his score of 93 in the first innings while fast bowler Umesh Yadav has gained five places to reach 33rd position after finishing with five wickets in the match.

ICC Emerging Cricketer of 2022

ICC Emerging Cricketer of 2022

ARSHDEEP NOMINATED FOR ICC MEN'S EMERGING CRICKETER OF THE YEAR



New Delhi | India's young left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh was on Wednesday nominated for the ICC Men's Emerging Cricketer of the Year 2022 award. Arshdeep has been the find for India in T20Is this year, stepping up admirably in Jasprit Bumrah's absence to pick ten wickets in the Men's T20 World Cup in Australia. Since his T20I debut against England in July this year, he has picked 33 wickets in 21 matches at an average of 18.12, strike rate of 13.30 and economy rate of 8.17. The left-arm pacer impressed everyone with his control, calm composure in death overs and ability to deliver pinpoint yorkers at will. Arshdeep was also handed an ODI debut on India's recent tour of New Zealand, and with him now in T20I and ODI squads against Sri Lanka, the future is bright for the player seemingly destined to take India's game forward. His memorable performance of 2022 came in the India-Pakistan match of T20 World Cup and in front of over 90,000 people, Arshdeep stood tall on the big stage. He removed Pakistan's prolific opening pair in the first six overs. He claimed Babar Azam with his first ball by trapping him lbw, before taking the wicket of Mohammad Rizwan at the end of his next over. Arshdeep returned at the death to curtail Asif Ali's plans of a late onslaught, finishing with 3/32 from his four overs.

RENUKA THAKUR, YASTIKA BHATIA AMONG WOMEN'S NOMINEES



New Delhi | India duo of right-arm fast-bowler Renuka Thakur and left-handed wicketkeeper-batter Yastika Bhatia on Wednesday were named as nominees for the ICC Women's Emerging Cricketer of the Year 2022 award. Renuka claimed 40 wickets for her country in 2022 in just 29 matches across the two white-ball formats, filling the void of the legendary pacer Jhulan Goswami. Able to swing the ball or find deviation off the surface, Renuka will likely be one of India's most dependable bowlers in years to come. In the ODIs, Renuka was outstanding, claiming 18 wickets at an average of just 14.88, of which eight came in two appearances against England, and seven in India's series against Sri Lanka. Her best performance came against Australia on cricket's return to Commonwealth Games, taking 4/18 with 16 dot balls, and leaving them at 34/4, though the eventual champions chased down India's 154. She was a thorn in the Australian line-up in the seven T20I meetings across the year, taking eight wickets and her performances across the Commonwealth Games and Women's Asia Cup show she is no shrinking violet in tournament action, claiming 17 wickets in 11 matches, at an economy rate of just 5.21. A consistent performer in the 50-over game, Yastika set the platform for India's middle order throughout 2022 with a number of strong performances. She made scores of 41 and 31 in the lead-up to the Cricket World Cup, before strong half-centuries against Australia and Bangladesh in the tournament.

2nd Test Day 3

Carey's maiden ton carries Australia's domination over South Africa



Melbourne | Agencies

Left-handed batter Alex Carey slammed his maiden Test century to carry forward Australia's domination over South Africa on the third day of the second match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). When stumps were called early after an hour was lost to persistent light rain, South Africa were struggling at 15-1 having lost skipper Dean Elgar for a third-ball duck and still 371 runs shy of forcing Australia to bat a second time. At the start of the day's play, there was some help for pacers as a slight drizzle seemed to spruce up the pitch. Taking advantage of that, Anrich Nortje zipped one through half-century Travis Head's defences and knocked him over early on. Thereafter, double-centurion David Warner walked in to a standing ovation after having retired hurt last evening owing to cramps. However, he went back to the pavilion one ball later as

Nortje served him a fast full toss that hit the base of the stumps via his pads. Australia then sent another retired-hurt batter Cameron Green, despite his fractured finger and it proved to be an ideal foil for Carey, who reached to his half-century in 66 balls and Australia had added 93 runs in the session and their lead ticked towards 300. From there on, Green showed his batting skill and hit 170-ball half-century despite being ruled out of the next Test with a finger fracture sustained on Tuesday. No.10 Mitchell Starc pulled a six off Anrich Nortje before wearing another short ball on his helmet, which led to a brief stoppage in play owing to the mandatory concussion test.

Brief scores

South Africa 189 & 15/1 (Pat Cummins 1-0) trail Australia 575/8 decl (David Warner 200, Alex Carey 111; Anrich Nortje 3-92) by 371 runs.

MUKUND SASIKUMAR GETS WILDCARD FOR 5TH TATA OPEN MAHARASHTRA

Pune | India No. 1 Mukund Sasikumar was on Wednesday handed a wild card entry at the fifth edition of the Tata Open Maharashtra as the organisers assured India's presence in the singles main draw of home ATP event, scheduled at the Balewadi Stadium here from December 31 to January 7. The Chennai-born player will be the first wildcard entrant this year as the tough singles field consists of 17 top-100 players, including the former Grand Slam champion Marin Cilic and last year's runner-up Emil Ruusuvuori. In September, Mukund won the ITF Future event in Portugal -- his first title in five years, and also finished runner-up at an ITF 15 event in Egypt earlier this month. This will be Mukund's second main draw appearance at the Tata Open Maharashtra after his maiden outing in the third edition. The World No. 340 featured in the qualifiers last year. Yuki Bhambri will also play in the singles as he will compete in the qualifiers. The qualifiers will begin on December 31 while the main draw will be played from January 2-7.



PAK v NZ Test Series

LATHAM, WILLIAMSON HIT CENTURIES, PUT NEW ZEALAND IN LEAD

Karachi | Agencies

Left-handed opener Tom Latham smashed his 13th Test century while talismanic batter Kane Williamson registered his 25th hundred in the format as New Zealand were put in the lead against Pakistan on day three of the first Test at the National Bank Cricket Arena. Latham had started this morning at 78 and became one of the three Abrar Ahmed's victims after scoring 113, while Williamson was unbeaten on 105 - his first international century in 23 months and fifth against Pakistan in 14 Test appearances, and was accompanied by Ish Sodhi on one not out at stumps. Conway's 92 came off 176 balls and included 14 fours. Conway and Latham put on 183 runs for the first wicket, which was New Zealand's new



first wicket partnership record against Pakistan. Latham struck 10 fours in his 191-ball innings, also his third century against Pakistan in his 12th Test against them, second of the year in nine Tests and first since he scored a

mammoth 252 against Bangladesh in Christchurch in January. Kane's pristine knock was layered with signature strokes to all parts of the field, and was great with his footwork too. His 105 has

come from 222 balls and includes 11 fours. Williamson's first 50 runs came off 100 balls, while his next 50 runs came off 106 deliveries. Williamson added 48 runs for the second wicket with Latham, followed by putting 41 runs for the third wicket with Henry Nicholls (22), 65 runs for the fourth wicket with Daryl Mitchell (42 off 47 balls) and 90 runs for the fifth wicket with Tom Blundell (47 off 116 balls). New Zealand were strongly placed at 427 for four before Pakistan picked up two late wickets in the last 30 minutes to share day three's spoils.

Brief scores

New Zealand 440 for 6 in 136 overs (Tom Latham 113, Kane Williamson 105 not out, Abrar Ahmed 3/143, Noman Ali 2/137) lead Pakistan 438 in 130.5 overs by two runs.

CAREY BECOMES SECOND AUSTRALIAN WICKET-KEEPER TO HIT TEST CENTURY AT MCG

Melbourne | Left-handed batter Alex Carey on Wednesday scripted history as he became the second Australian wicket-keeper after legendary Rod Marsh to score a Test century at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), on the third day of the second Test against South Africa. Carey celebrated a brisk maiden Test hundred (111) in typically understated fashion. He carved a wide ball through the off-side with only an ear-to-ear grin giving away the fact he had just reached the rare milestone. In fact, his batting partner Cameron Green showed even more elation, raising both arms as he ran from the other end before exchanging an embrace with Carey. The player, who took 131 balls to bring up his century, was, however, visibly emotional after his achievement. It marks the first hundred by an Australian Test keeper in nearly a decade. Brad Haddin, who scored 118 in Adelaide during the 2013-14 Ashes, had been the last. No keeper, Australian or otherwise, had previously reached triple-figures in an MCG Test since Marsh's unbeaten 110 in the second innings of the 1977 Centenary Test, the first of his three international hundreds.



Our goal is to qualify for Paris Olympics: Ashalata Devi



Team Absolute | New Delhi

India women's football team skipper Loitongbam Ashalata Devi is currently on cloud nine and the reason is she just lived one of her dreams. Devi, also the captain of the Indian Women's League side Gokulam Kerala, is considered one of the finest defenders in Asia. The player has recently witnessed one of the greatest FIFA World Cup finals live at the stadium in Doha. Sharing her experience in Qatar, she said, "I cannot explain it in words; it is something that everyone should experience. It is unreal and it was one of my dreams which have come true. Ever since I started watching football, it was my dream to watch a World cup final. The atmosphere was fantastic; I have never experienced something like this ever before. Seeing Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe

playing so up close was out of this world. There is so much that I learned just by watching them and that is something that I would like to add to my game. This also has to be one of the best football matches I have ever seen. I hope that this atmosphere can somehow be translated into India also when we take the field. Football as a whole has a lot of scope to grow in India. I would like to thank Adidas and Abhishek Sharma's 'Athletes Today' for fulfilling one of my dreams. The Tokyo Olympics was heartbreak for us, as we lost on the berth to qualify for the third round of the 2020 Olympic qualifiers on goal difference after being held to a 3-3 draw by Myanmar. This time around we do not want to leave it to the last game and are training hard. The goal is to qualify for the Paris Olympics; the entire team is motivated and will put all their efforts to achieve it."

ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2023

India released squad for World Cup, tri-series in South Africa announced



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Harmanpreet Kaur will lead India in the tri-series in South Africa starting in January and the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2023. The ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2023 is set to begin on February 10, 2023, with Team India set to begin their campaign on February 12 against Pakistan in Cape Town. Team India is in Group 2 with England, West Indies, Pakistan, and Ireland. The top two teams in each group at the end of the group stage will

play in the semi-finals. The final will be held on February 26, 2023. Ahead of the T20 World Cup, Team India will play a tri-series tournament that will begin from January 19, 2023. India's squad for ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2023: Harmanpreet Kaur (Captain), Smriti Mandhana (Vice-Captain), Shafali Verma, Yastika Bhatia (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk) Jemimah Rodrigues, Harleen Deol, Deepti Sharma, Devika Vaidya, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Radha Yadav, Renuka Thakur, Meghna Singh, Anjali Sarvani, Shushma Verma (wk), Amanjot Kaur, Pooja Vastrakar, Sabbhineni Meghana, Sneha Rana, Shikha Pandey Pooja Vastrakar's inclusion in the squad is subject to fitness, the statement added.

Reserves: Sabbhineni Meghana, Sneha Rana, Meghna Singh. India's squad for Tri-series: Harmanpreet Kaur (Captain), Smriti Mandhana (Vice Captain), Yastika Bhatia (wk), Jemimah Rodrigues, Harleen Deol, Deepti Sharma, Devika Vaidya, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Radha Yadav, Renuka Thakur, Meghna Singh, Anjali Sarvani, Shushma Verma (wk), Amanjot Kaur, Pooja Vastrakar, Sabbhineni Meghana, Sneha Rana, Shikha Pandey Pooja Vastrakar's inclusion in the squad is subject to fitness, the statement added.

INDIA U-20 WOMEN CLUBBED WITH VIETNAM, SINGAPORE, INDONESIA



New Delhi | India has been drawn in Group F of the AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup Uzbekistan 2024 Qualifiers Round 1, where they will face Singapore, Indonesia, and hosts Vietnam. The draw was held on November 3, 2022. According to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) release, the eight group winners will progress to Round 2, where the four best sides will earn a spot in the Finals where they will join the three highest seeds from the AFC U-19 Women's Championship Thailand 2019 - champions Japan, DPR Korea and Korea Republic - and host nation Uzbekistan. Round 1 of the Qualifiers will be played on March 4-12, 2023 with Round 2 scheduled for June 1-11. The Finals are on March 3 to 16, 2024.





'Chiranjeevi flirts with Urvashi Rautela'

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Telugu megastar Chiranjeevi, who is gearing up for his film, 'Waltair Veerayya', happily flirted with Urvashi Rautela during a media event organised for the film in Hyderabad. The megastar praised Urvashi, as he said: "Urvashi has done a fantastic job in Boss Party. It's wonderful working with her. I didn't know who was doing the song, but when I got to know its Urvashi, I was very excited."

Hearing the words of praise, Urvashi stood up as a gesture and went ahead to shake hands with him.

What happened next was something

nobody expected - Chiranjeevi acted like his hand was stuck to Urvashi's. He then went on to say: "My hand got stuck because there's a magnet not in my hand but in my heart."

While the megastar showed up in all-black, Urvashi attended the event silver saree with a black floral print and a sleeveless blouse.

On the work front, Urvashi will be seen alongside Ram Pothineni. She will also play Randeep Hooda's co-star in 'Inspector Avinash'.

The actress is also making her Hollywood debut with Michele Morrone on Netflix. And, in an upcoming global music single, she will also be seen with Jason Derulo.



'Munni Badnaam' got my career back on track: Lalit Pandit

Aakruti Bagla | Mumbai

Lalit Pandit of the Jatin-Lalit duo has created chartbuster tracks for films like Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar, Khiladi, Raju Ban Gaye Gentleman, Kuch Kuch Hota Hai and many more in his career spanning three decades.

After working on Film Fanaa in 2006, the brothers parted ways professionally and have been working independently since then. Absolute India News caught up with the singer for an exclusive chat as he came up with his new single Zara Dil Khol Ke. Talking about the idea behind his new song, the singer said, "It is a pretty upbeat and easygoing song. I wrote and sang it as a tribute to my Panchgani boarding school, which just celebrated its 100th anniversary."

The singer also pointed out how their music of the '90s was original and way ahead of the time. "The songs I've composed for Jo Jeeta Wahi Sikander, DDLJ, and Kuch Kuch Hota Hai were years ahead of their time. Even now, you won't be able to hear that sound. These tunes were groundbreaking while being produced and made in a very different setup. Even the organisation in charge of managing the music claims that after R.D. Burman's music, it is the Jatin-Lalit



segment that has achieved cult status. It's because our music is being listened to by the younger generation, who were not even born at that time", said the singer. Lalit Pandit further spoke about the split with his brother Jatin Pandit and shared, "It took immense hard work to reach that point of stardom in music. During the music of Fanaa, we had already split and so I had it in mind that the music needed to give a respectable end to the brand name. It was in a way a tribute from my end." Prod him on the reunion, and Lalit says, "We did a show together in 2019. I was hoping that we could at least work together on a few things but unfortunately, it didn't work out. I could not cope with that situation and was com-

pletely convinced that I will not go back. I am happy and peaceful and not looking forward to changing that now. If change is required then it has to come from Jatin's side and not mine." Sharing how Munni Badnaam consolidated his career post-split, Lalit Pandit quipped, "Munni Badnaam got my career back on track post-Jatin-Lalit split. It won all possible awards and is the biggest hit of my career. Since then I have been progressing and have done 27 films individually."

On a parting note, Lalit Pandit seconded his thoughts on the song Besharam Rang row and averred, "I believe that people should leave the creativity to creative people."

I hope that this is a phase that will fade away. Certain decisions should also be left to the censor board as it is a body decided by the government comprising of knowledgeable people."

GURMEET CHOUDHARY & DEBINA ARE EXCITED FOR THE 'NEW YEAR'S EVE'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Bollywood actor Gurmeet Choudhary spoke about his New Year plans, resolutions, and his upcoming live performance with his wife and actress Debina Bonnerjee after two years of the pandemic. He said: "Debina and I both are very excited to perform on this New Year's Eve after two years of the pandemic. It's going to be very exhilarating to perform in front of a massive audience and I cannot wait to feel the positive energy of the crowd once again." The two are going to perform at the Country Club on the eve of December 31. While talking about his travel plans, he said: "So far I haven't thought much about my travel plans but there are some places on my wish list. If things work I would surely want to visit Switzerland, London, and Paris in 2023." Gurmeet, who made his Bollywood debut with the psychologi-

cal and horror thriller 'Khamoshiyan', has also worked in several TV shows. He is known for his portrayal of Rama in 'Ramayana', and also acted in 'Geet - Hui Sabse Parayi', 'Punar Vivaah - Zindagi Milegi Dobara', and also emerged as the winner of 'Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa 5'. The actor has always talked about his interest in Bollywood. On getting candid about his resolution for the coming year, he added: "I am starting the year working and my resolution is to continue doing the same. 2022 has been a fruitful year for me personally and professionally and would want to now just work harder and spend lots of time with my lovely family. My resolution is to keep focusing on the good and entertain my fans to the fullest." "I have a couple of interesting projects coming up which are really exciting and I am looking forward to the official announcement soon," he concluded.



SAI TAMHANKAR TO HOST A NEW 'DOCUMENTARY SERIES'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

From checking out the state's variety of cuisines to exploring its places of worship, forts, and historical monuments, the seven-part series 'Postcards from Maharashtra' gave the actress and show host Sai Tamhankar new insights into the people and cul-

ture of her state.

Sai was seen most recently in Subhash Ghai's crime thriller 'Black & White'. She made her Marathi cinema debut with 'Sanai Chaugade' and appeared in the Amir Khan-starrer 'Ghajini' as well. Talking about hosting the series, she said: "Through this opportunity, I got a chance to experience and rekindle my love for the mystic beauty, palatable delicacies, and the rich Marathi culture like a traveller.

Being part of the series made me feel proud to be a Marathi Mulgi and this series will always own a special place in my heart." Through the series, Sai will be seen talking about the ancient caves of Elephanta, UNESCO heritage sites in Aurangabad, and the temples of Pune and Nashik. Apart from exploring different places, forts, and temples, the audience will also get to see the host enjoying the local food of Maharashtra.

Namita Thapar named her sons after Jai & Veeru

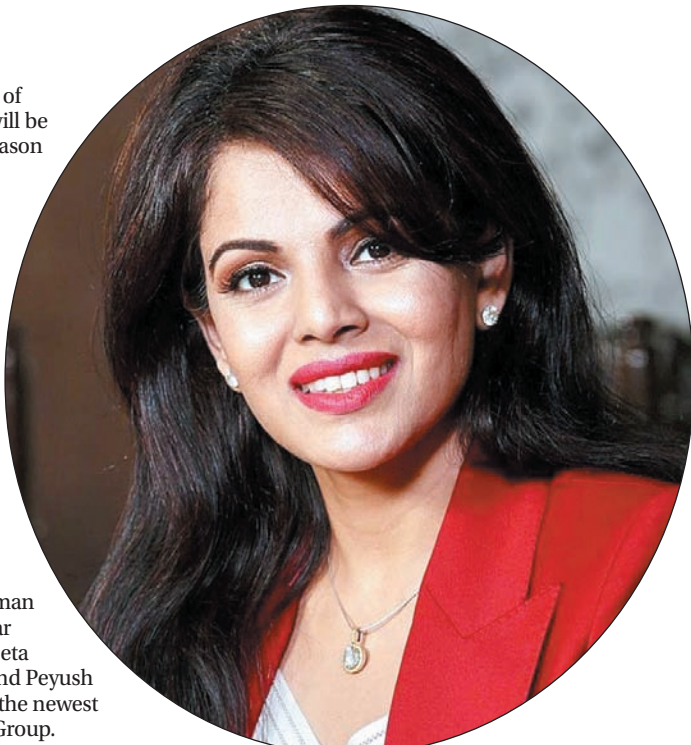
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Namita Thapar, executive director of Emcure Pharmaceuticals, who will be seen as a shark on the second season of 'Shark Tank India', took over the hot seat on 'Kaun Banega Crorepati 14'.

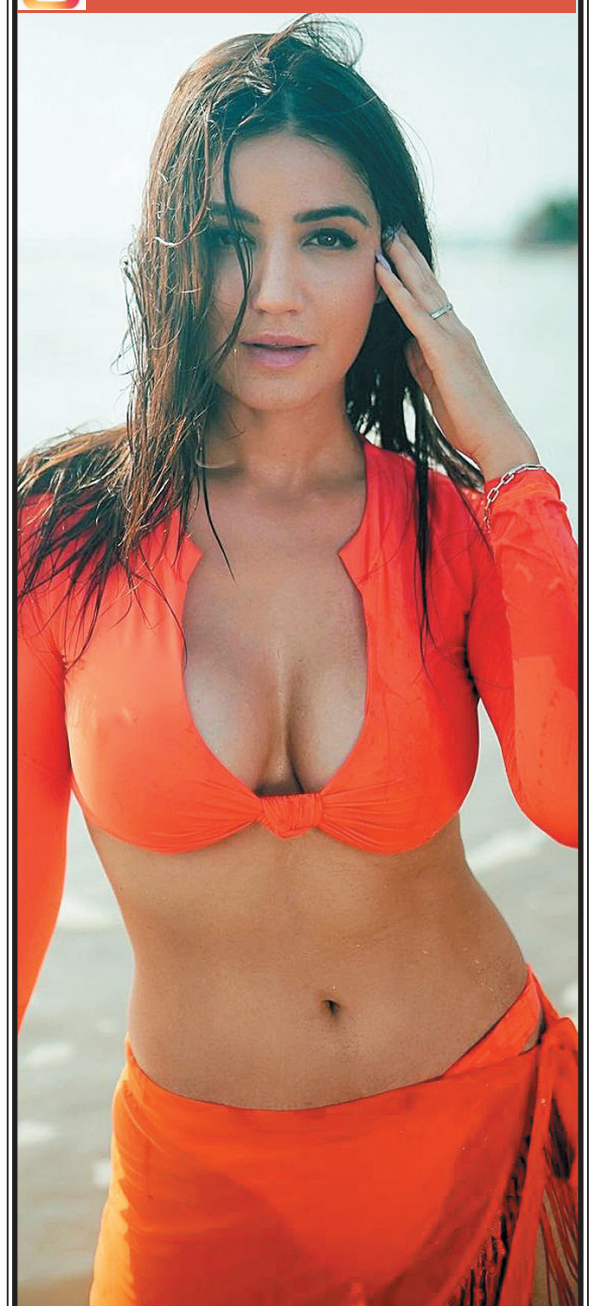
In a conversation with the host and megastar Amitabh Bachchan, she said not only is she a big fan of his, but she's married to one as well.

Thapar said: "I deserve to sit on the hotseat first because, I am such a big fan of yours that I got married to a man who is your fan as well, and I even named my sons Jay and Veeru." She was referring to the names of the characters Jai and Veeru, played by Bachchan and Dharmendra respectively, in the blockbuster movie 'Sholay'.

The 'Shark' then recited a poem she prepared for the host. For the 'Finale Week', a bunch of 'Sharks' from the upcoming season of 'Shark Tank India' will appear on 'KBC14'. They include Anupam Mittal (Founder and CEO of Shaadi.com - People Group), Aman Gupta (Co-Founder and CMO of boAt), Namita Thapar (Executive Director of Emcure Pharmaceuticals), Vineeta Singh (Co-Founder and CEO of SUGAR Cosmetics), and Peyush Bansal (Founder & CEO of Lenskart.com), along with the newest addition, Amit Jain CEO and Co-Founder, CarDekho Group.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Emy Aela