

# absolute india

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## 2021 set the stage for revolutionary 2022 for space players

# THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH

The year 2021 will go down as a landmark year for the space industry players in the private sector and a forgettable one for the government owned Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), said industry officials. "2021 is the year where a framework has been established for sharing the facilities and expertise of ISRO with startups. This started with the landmark MoU signed between ISRO and Skyroot Aerospace in September. This framework is going to benefit several startups to gain competitive advantage in the commercial space world," Pawan Kumar Chandana, CEO and Chief Technology Officer, Skyroot Aerospace, told correspondent.

CHENNAI | Agencies

2021 was a time when startups proved their capability with successful technology demonstrations and forward looking policies were drafted by the Department of Space (DoS) and also the appointment of Pawan Kumar Goenka, former Managing Director, Mahindra & Mahindra, as the Chairman of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe) -- the regulator for private players in the space sector.

The IN-SPACe will also enable use of ISRO's facilities by the private players. "So, 2021 set the stage for a revolutionary 2022. We at Skyroot successfully demonstrated all propulsion technologies in the Vikram Series of launch vehicles and are gearing for a launch next year," Chandana said.

Concurring with him was Dr Chaitanya Giri, Founder, DAWON Advisory & Intelligence, a consultancy firm. "The IN-SPACe got strong leadership from India Inc, which is a welcome move on the part of the central government. The central government was able to galvanise ISRO to understand the needs of startups in the space sector," Giri told correspondent.

The private sector rocket makers -- Agnikul Cosmos and Skyroot Aerospace -- are testing their rocket engines and have signed agreements with the Department of Space to test their rocket systems at ISRO's facilities.

The year also saw Agnikul Cosmos and Skyroot Aerospace raise additional funding from investors.

The Bengaluru based Syzygy Space Technologies Pvt Ltd,



commonly known as Pixxel, has built one satellite and expects to put that into orbit next year.

However, for the government owned ISRO, it is a year that it would like to forget quickly.

Opening the year with a successful commercial launch, charting the decadal plan, coming out with the Draft National Space Transportation Policy, transferring medical equipment technologies, ISRO suffered a serious setback in the second half of 2021.

On August 12, ISRO's Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV-F10) rocket, due to a problem in its cryogenic engine, failed to orbit the 2,268 kg Geo-Imaging Satellite-1 (GISAT-1) or EOS-3. While ISRO said a failure analysis committee will look into the reason

For ISRO, this is the second and last space mission in 2021

after the successful launch of Brazilian satellite Amazonia-1 by its rocket Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) earlier this year.

According to ISRO Chairman K. Sivan, the Covid-19 lockdown had crippled space activities.

### Other developments:

- ISRO successfully conducted the first hot test of the System Demonstration Model of the Gaganyaan Service Module Propulsion System. Gaganyaan is the name of India's first human space mission.
- ISRO successfully carried out the third long duration hot test of the liquid propellant Vikas Engine for the core L110 liquid stage (engine) of the human rated GSLV Mk III rocket.
- ISRO demonstrated free-space Quantum Communication over a distance of 300 metre with several technologies developed within the country.
- Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter completed two years going around the moon.
- The four Indian astronauts returned to India last month after completing their training in Russia and will undergo different kinds of training in India.
- NewSpace India Ltd (NSIL) will launch the 4-ton communication satellite GSAT-24 for Tata Sky in 2022.
- Government approved the procurement of GSAT-7C satellite for the Indian Air Force.

## 5G roll-out to drive mobile gaming in India in 2022

India is currently home to over 430 million mobile gamers and the number is estimated to grow to 650 million by 2025, according to latest data provided by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI).

As the Indian gaming market is poised to hit \$3.9 billion (in value) by 2025, over 40 per cent of hardcore mobile gamers are paying for their games with an average spend of Rs 230 per month.



years ahead, even budding gamers from tier 3 or 4 cities can rise to fame with the right set of skills and efforts. According to experts, the launch of the 5G data network will further boost the mobile gaming sector in India.

India is one of the most important gaming markets among developing economies in the world. With over 75 per cent of the population under age 45, it is one of the most promising online gaming marketplaces.

As developers focus on creating more women and child-led games, the gaming community is expected to grow by several folds from more exposure and innovations in the field.

Indian gaming has joined the mobile gaming bandwagon due to the rapid increase in smartphone penetration in the country, with large console and PC games now being curated for mobile platforms. The sector is also attracting investments, with nearly \$1 billion being invested in the sector in the last six months.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With cutting-edge technologies now available in smartphones, the mobile gaming industry is among the fastest booming segments in India. The whole scenario is set to witness a sea change with the roll out of 5G technology in smartphones which are already 5G-enabled.

The pandemic has accelerated the organic growth of digital games as mobile app downloads grew by 50 per cent and user engagement went up by 20 per cent, the IMAI report said.

At nearly 500 million, India is currently second in terms of smartphone users in the world after China.

The opportunities in the gaming industry are enormous in India, and, in the

## PRIYANKA CHOPRA LOOKS BACK AT HER 18-YEAR JOURNEY IN BOLLYWOOD

New Delhi: She has been in the acting business for 18 years and it has not been easy. Indian actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who is currently creating waves internationally with her powerful performances, says she is a sum of all her decisions and is proud to be where she is today.



Priyanka made her Bollywood debut in 2003 with 'The Hero: Love Story of a Spy'. She was later seen in movies such as 'Fashion', 'Krrish', 'Barfi!', 'Agneepath', 'Dil Dhadakne Do', 'Bajirao Mastani' and 'Mary Kom'.

It was in 2015, when she made her debut in Hollywood with the show 'Quantico' and since then there has been no stopping her. Her latest international release is 'The Matrix Resurrections' starring Keanu Reeves. Talking to reporter about her over a decade-long-journey, Priyanka said: "It's been a lot of walking, I can tell you that."

She shared that she had her share of ups and downs. "It's been a lot of walking forward. It's been a lot of ups and downs. It's not been easy. I am a sum of all my decisions and I am very proud to be where I am," Priyanka added.

Looking forward, Priyanka has recently wrapped up shooting for the series 'Citadel'. It also stars Richard Madden and Roland Moller.

## OPEN HYBRID CLOUD, AI WINNING MANTRAS FOR INDIAN FIRMS IN 2022

Sandip Patel | New Delhi

Digital Transformation, particularly post-pandemic, is pervasive and fast accelerating. It is a business imperative for maintaining competitive parity in today's digital economy. As innovation, ecosystem partnerships, and integrated customer experiences become increasingly important, leaders need to move quickly to stay relevant.

The choices - and investments - they



make today will define, in part, how they will compete in a fast-moving global market.

Our recent Institute for Business Value study highlighted that nearly 6 out of 10

Indian CEOs expect cloud computing to deliver results in the next 2-3 years, and 45 per cent of CEOs in India expect AI/machine learning to deliver results in the next 2-3 years.

### The Rise of 'Industry Clouds'

Data Governance is another critical piece. According to the IBM Institute of Business Value 'Unlock the business value of hybrid cloud' in India report, 74 percent of the respondents consider their ability to run governance and compliance tools across multiple clouds and industry-related regulatory compliance as important or extremely important to the success of their digital initiatives.

### Security top priority as cyberthreats grow

An important factor leading to the acceleration in adoption of a hybrid and multi-cloud approach is the need to mitigate vendor concentration risk as cyberthreats grow. Data protection is critical and enterprises will need to prioritize security designed on an open architecture with a single point of control. The aim is to gather a holistic view of threats and proactively mitigate attacks. Focus on cybersecurity as a systemic control is no longer only a business continuity issue - it is fast becoming a Board level topic that requires a robust plan with quarterly reviews and updates.

### HYBRID CLOUD

As organisations progress their hybrid and multi-cloud journeys, their focus will shift towards determining which workloads go where. Today, they are evaluating the migration of more mission-critical, complex workloads as they embrace modernization. In the year ahead, they will need to take inventory of their IT environments to select which workloads and applications are best suited for the cloud and which should remain on-premises.

### AI

Virtual assistants became a critical tool for large organisations and governments during the pandemic. In 2022, consumers will witness more personalised and fully realized interactions with their preferred retailers and service providers as AI assumes a bigger impact on the customer care journey, particularly with increasing digitally connected consumers. AI will play a key role in helping businesses achieve sustainability benchmarks through greater measurement, data collection, and carbon accounting, as well as improved predictiveness and greater supply chain resiliency. Predictive maintenance that reduces the need to replace parts and equipment, AI that analyses satellite imagery of storms and wildfires, and other such innovations will play a critical role in preparing companies to better meet their sustainability agenda. As stewards of an organization's digital infrastructure, CIOs in 2021 were tasked with moving their workforces remotely, managing new types of security concerns as a result, and making sense of the explosion of data produced by modern applications, monitoring solutions and increased use of digital channels by employees and consumers.

## AFTER HIGH OF 2021, HOCKEY TEAMS GEAR UP FOR MAKE-OR-BREAK YEAR

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Their fans' appetite whetted by a historic bronze medal they won in the Tokyo Olympic Games, the Indian hockey teams step into 2022 with a lot of stuff on their plate. It could be a make-or-break year for the teams and stern test for their talent and consistency.

### MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2021:

- Men's team wins bronze in Tokyo Olympics
- Women's team finishes fourth in Tokyo Olympics
- Men's team bags bronze in Asian Champions Trophy
- India finish fourth in Junior Men's World Cup in Bhubaneswar
- India sweeps FIH Star Awards 2021 with Harmanpreet Singh and Gurjit Kaur claiming the Player of the Year awards in their respective categories.



2022 will be a busy year for the Indian hockey teams as they now have to prove that success at the Tokyo Olympics in July-August 2021 was not a flash in the pan and that they can successfully replicate the results in the upcoming events.

The Asian Games are a qualifying event for the Paris Olympics with the men's and women's win-

ners clinching a direct berth to the mega event in 2024.

The women will also have their World Cup in Terrassa, Spain, and Amstelveen, the Netherlands, from July 1-17 -- the Indian team thus playing three major events in three months. The women's team will begin the crowded calendar with the 2022 Asia Cup, a qualifying

event for the World Cup, from January 21-28 in Bangkok, Thailand. The men's team will start its 2022 schedule with the Pro League matches in February and end its campaign in June -- this will be followed by the Commonwealth and Asian Games in quick succession. Both the Indian men's and women's teams will step into the 2022 season on the back of a brilliant 2021.

### KEY DATES IN 2022:

- January 21-28: 2022 Asia Cup in Bangkok, Thailand
- January-June: FIH Pro League (men and women)
- July 1-17: Women's World Cup at Terrassa, Spain and Amstelveen, Netherlands
- July 28-Aug 8: Commonwealth Games in Birmingham (men and women)
- September 10-25: Asian Games in Hangzhou, China (men and women)

## Apple told to listen to dating app developers or pay hefty fine

LONDON | Agencies

Dutch regulators have asked Apple to either allow dating app developers to offer non-Apple payment systems for in-app purchases or face a penalty of up to 50 million euros.

The Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) ordered Apple to adjust the unreasonable conditions in its App Store that apply to dating-app providers. "Dating-app providers are currently not able to choose freely a payment system for purchases made in their dating apps by consumers. If Apple does not adjust the unreasonable conditions within two months, it will have to pay a periodic penalty of 5 million euros per week up to a maximum of 50 million



euros," the ACM said in a statement late on Friday.

This decision by the Dutch authority doesn't apply to other app categories like games or productivity apps in the country. The regulator has been probing Apple's App Store practices since 2019. Some app providers are dependent on Apple's App Store, and Apple takes advantage of that dependency, according to Dutch regulators. "Apple has special responsibilities because of its dominant

position. That is why Apple needs to take seriously the interests of app providers too, and set reasonable conditions. That is what we are forcing Apple to do with this order," said Martijn Snoep, Chairman of the Board of ACM. App providers pay \$99 each year for using the App Store. Almost 85 percent of app providers pay only this fee. On iPhones, dating apps can only be offered through the App Store, which makes dating-app providers highly dependent on Apple.



# ODD-EVEN SCHEME IMPLEMENTED IN DELHI'S SAROJINI NAGAR MARKET, CURB ON GATHERINGS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid the increasing threat of Covid-19, a video of people thronging Delhi's Sarojini Nagar market in large numbers has gone viral after which the market will now remain open on the basis of the odd-even scheme on December 25 and 26, officials said. The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) on Saturday morning also began a crackdown on encroachments in the posh market. The goods of all those shopkeepers having shops on encroached land in the market have been confiscated. The Delhi Police has also swung into action trying to control large gatherings. The NDMC and Civil Defence staff together are making sure that people strictly follow Covid protocols as well as making announcements asking the people to follow the Covid norms. Earlier, NDMC had held a meeting with the market office-bearers after the Delhi High Court expressed concern over the rising Covid-19 cases in the national capital. The court expressed dis-



pleasure over people flouting Covid protocols and had summoned the Sarojini Nagar Police Station House Officer. Expressing concern over large gatherings, the court said such a situation will lead to the deaths of

a large number of people due to Covid-19.

## AT 249, DELHI REPORTS HIGHEST SINGLE-DAY COVID TALLY SINCE JUNE 13

New Delhi: Delhi on Saturday reported 249 fresh Covid-19 cases, the highest since June 13, with a positivity rate of 4.46 per cent, taking its overall tally to 14,43,062, data issued by the health department showed. According to the official data, this rise is the highest since June 13 when the national capital had reported 255 cases with a positivity rate of 0.35 per cent. Meanwhile, one patient succumbed to the dreaded virus on Saturday, pushing Delhi's cumulative death toll to 25,104 with a fatality rate of 1.74 per cent. On the vaccination front, 1,14,311 beneficiaries were inoculated against the virus on Saturday, taking the cumulative figure to 2,54,48,583. As many as 52,444 tests were conducted in the past 24 hours.

# Minimum temperature above freezing point in Srinagar



SRINAGAR | Agencies

The minimum temperature in Srinagar remained above the freezing point on Saturday as the weather office has forecast moderate to heavy rain/snow between December 26 and 28 in

Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. An official of the Met Department said the minimum temperature also remained above the freezing point in some other places of the Kashmir Valley. Srinagar recorded 1.7, Pahalgam minus 5.1 and Gulmarg minus 6.5 as the

minimum temperature. Drass town of Ladakh had minus 17.5, Leh minus 10.5 and Kargil minus 6.8 as the minimum. Jammu city registered 7.6, Katra 7.2, Batote 1.7, Banihal 3.0 and Bhandarwah minus 0.2 as the night's lowest temperature.

## Assam CM asks BJP leaders to give up their PSO

Sarma, who also holds the Home portfolio, said: "I will ask the state BJP president (Bhabesh Kalita) to impress upon the party leaders to give up PSOs."



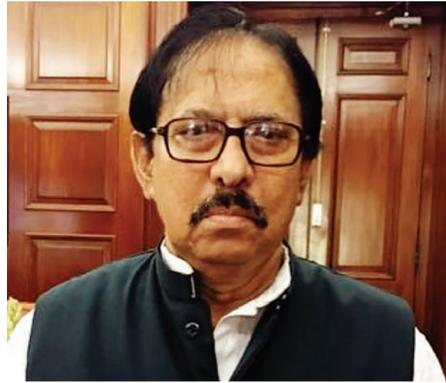
Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee's 97th birth anniversary. He said: "We do not need PSO to open the doors of the cars, we have the strength to open our doors. I was in the Congress party. I have a list of such types of practices which the Congress party patronage." Referring to Vajpayee, the Chief Minister said that his contribution in Assam and the northeast region's development would always be cherished.

# Bengal Speaker writes to President against Guv

Intensifying the ongoing conflict, West Bengal Legislative Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee has written a letter to President Ram Nath Kovind alleging hindrances created by Governor Jagdeep Thakur in the smooth running of the House.

KOLKATA | Agencies

Though Banerjee was not ready to divulge the details, but sources in the Assembly said the letter also addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi have mentioned several instances when Thakur delayed the process of legislation. Sources close to the development said that Banerjee strongly alleged that the Governor was taking the opportunity to undermine the position of the Speaker among the people and that is creating a wrong precedent in the democratic infrastructure. Though there are several instances when the Governor of a state has developed differences with the ruling party, it is a rare instance when the spill-over effect of the differences between the ruling party and the Head of the State has reached the corridors of the state legislative assembly. Besides giving a graphic detail of several instances when Thakur overstepped his limits and tried to interfere in the legislative process, the Speaker said that though the duties and responsibilities of the Governor and the Speaker have been clearly spelt out in the Constitution, but the Governor has tried to put a hand on the legislative process and in a way



creating a wrong impression among the people. Besides mentioning the instances of appointment of Mukul Roy incident after he was made the PAC chairman and the unprecedented situation created during the oath taking ceremony of the new members of the legislative assembly the Speaker alleged that the Howrah Municipal Corporation had been delayed only because governor refused to sign the Bill to detach 16 wards from Howrah Municipal Corporation and form Bally municipality. The Speaker was referring to the Bally Municipality Bill which moved in the Assembly to detach 16 wards of former Bally Municipality that is presently annexed with Howrah

Municipal Corporation. The Bill was tabled and passed in the Assembly but sent back to the Governor seeking further clarification from the government. As the formation of the Bally Municipality was jeopardised, the state government had to suspend the Howrah Municipal Corporation election and conduct only the Kolkata Municipal Corporation election. Not only that, Banerjee also mentioned the letter he had written to Speaker of the Lok Sabha Om Birla where he complained of "excessive interference" of the Governor in matters related to parliamentary democracy and functioning of the House. The Speaker also mentioned several Bills like The West Bengal (Prevention of Lynching) Bill 2019 and The Dunlop India (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertaking) Bill 2016 on the which the Governor sat for years without signing it jeopardising the process of development of the state. The Speaker alleged that though all the required documents including the English translation of the documents had been sent to the Governor, the latter delayed the process of development only undermining the duties and responsibilities of the legislation and the elected government. In the ongoing session, the Speaker disallowed the entry of the central forces in the Assembly. In the letter he also mentioned the Governor's role in the process, mentioning the incident that happened with the central forces present with the Leader of the Opposition. The Speaker said that he had worked with two former Governors- M.K. Narayanan and N.K. Tripathy -- in his 10-year tenure but he has never faced this kind of a situation before.

## Man abducted with 'toy gun', released after Rs 50 lakh ransom in Delhi

LONDON | Agencies

A man was abducted in the national capital with the help of a toy gun and a ransom of Rs 50 lakh was taken from his father, the police said on Saturday. The police informed that four people, including two women were arrested for the abduction of the man, identified as Kinshuk, a resident of Shalimar Bagh in Delhi. Deputy Commissioner of Police Priyanka Kashyap said on December 18, a call was received in which the caller identified as Vikas Aggrawal stated that his son Kinshuk had been kidnapped at gunpoint from Flower Market, Gazipur and was later released after paying a ransom of Rs 50 lakh. On being contacted, Kinshuk informed that he along with his employee Richa Sabarwal, who works as flower decorator at his father's banquet hall and driver Jitender went to the flower market at Gazipur to purchase flowers. After finishing the work at the Flower Market, when they stepped into the car, a person wearing a black hood jacket, cap and mask held them at



gun point and asked the driver to take the car towards Ashok Vihar. On the way to Ashok Vihar, the kidnapper made a WhatsApp call on the mobile of Kinshuk's father Vikas Aggrawal and demanded Rs 1 crore. Following brief negotiations, Vikas Aggrawal paid Rs 50 lakh in Ashok Vihar, Delhi. Thereafter, the kidnapper released Kinshuk, Richa and the driver Jitender and asked Vikas Aggrawal to drive the car. The victim's father Vikas reported the matter to the police the next day. Based on this information, a case under sections 346 A, 25 and 27 of the Indian Penal Code was registered an

investigation was taken up. A police team was constituted which checked the CCTV footage of the area. "In this mammoth task, around 150 CCTV cameras were checked by the team by covering approximately 70 km distance," the DCP said. During the CCTV footage analysis, a suspected scooter was seen, following which one man named Kamal Bansal was arrested and interrogated who disclosed the name of his friend Gurmeet Singh, a resident of Onkar Nagar. "Immediately, Gurmeet Singh was also arrested and on his disclosure, other co-accused person Richa, who was the mastermind of the crime and staged her abduction along with the victim, was apprehended," the official said. On sustained interrogation, it was revealed that Gurmeet Singh, Richa Sabarwal and Anita (mother of Richa) hatched a plan to kidnap Kinshuk and extort money from Vikas Aggrawal. Accordingly, they bought a toy gun and executed the plan on December 17. An amount of Rs 36 lakh has been recovered so far from the accused and a further probe is on, the police added.

## NO NEED OF NIGHT CURFEW IN BIHAR: NITISH KUMAR

JAIPUR | Agencies

Patna: Amid rising Covid-19 cases, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday announced that no night curfew is needed in Bihar as the situation in the state is much better than the rest of the country. Addressing the media, he said: "The situation in Bihar is better than many states right now. There is no need to impose night curfew here." The Chief Minister had arrived to garland the statue of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary, when he put an end to the possibilities of a night curfew. So far, Bihar has not reported any case of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. However, Health Minister Mangal Pandey said that all guidelines of the Centre are being fully followed in the state and the Nitish Kumar government is continuously urging people to follow Covid guidelines. Sources in the Health Department have confirmed that even though night curfew will not be imposed at the moment, the Bihar government is planning to prepare Covid guidelines for everyone.

## Rajasthan plans to make Covid vaccination mandatory

JAIPUR | Agencies

Amid rising Covid-19 cases, Rajasthan is planning to soon issue new guidelines to make vaccination against the virus mandatory in the state, and remove those from under the state government's beneficiary list who refuse to get inoculated. Officials confirmed that the state government is preparing a list of those who are refusing to get vaccinated. Furthermore, other initiatives such as strict enforcement of night curfew from 11 p.m. to 5 p.m. and wearing of masks will also be made mandatory. In a meeting held on Friday with doctors and the state's Home Department officials, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said: "Night curfew is already in place in the state, we have never lifted it. It should be strictly followed from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m." Urging officials to encourage people



ple to get inoculated, he said: "Officials should contemplate on motivating people to get vaccinated. Those refusing it will be removed from the beneficiary list. This we need to do for our own interest. In Punjab, the salaries have been stopped for those refusing vaccination. Tamil Nadu has also made it compulsory." The state government has to make vaccination compulsory."

## ATM uprooted in Patna; three shops burgled in Nalanda

PATNA | Agencies

Unidentified miscreants, after failing to steal cash from an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM), uprooted the kiosk from Bihta town in Patna district late on Saturday night. The ATM kiosk located at Amraha locality of Bihta, belonged to IDBI bank. The incident came to light on Sunday morning when passersby spotted the shutter of the building, where the ATM machine was installed, broken. Shanu Kumar, manager of the Amraha IDBI bank branch said: "We have been informed about the incident by local residents. I immediately rushed to the bank gave a written complaint in the local police station." "The kiosk contained Rs 5.5 lakh cash," he said. Bihta SHO Atulesh Kumar



confirmed the incident. "Scanning of CCTV footage is underway to identify the robbers," he said. "Preliminary investigation reveals that the robbers first tried to cut the cash section of the machine but failed. Hence, they uprooted the kiosk and took it away," he said. This is the second such incident in last 10 days. Earlier, a group of robbers had uprooted the ATM machine in Phulwari Sharif

## 3 GIRLS DROWN AT ABANDONED CONSTRUCTION SITE IN HYDERABAD

HYDERABAD | Agencies

Tension prevailed at the KPHB police station in Hyderabad on Saturday as BJP workers staged a protest demanding justice for the families of three girls, who drowned in a water body formed at an abandoned government construction site. Family members and relatives of the three girls and BJP workers led by Medchal urban district president Harish Reddy staged the protest outside the police station. They demanded Rs 12 lakh ex-gratia, two-bedroom houses each for the families of the deceased. Police shifted the mother of one of the victims to her house. Later, a senior official of the Housing Board reached there and assured the protesters that they would convey the demands to higher-ups. Sangeeta (12), Sofia (10) and Ramya (seven) drowned while playing at the construction site in KPHB Colony's phase IV on Friday afternoon. Police with the help of NDRF teams and expert swimmers pulled



out the bodies on Friday night. The bodies were shifted to the government-run Gandhi Hospital and after autopsy, they were handed over to their families on Saturday. According to the police, a group of five girls entered the government trench on the site and drowned. Two others who had stayed out ran out to inform their families. The deceased were students of a government school. Three of them entered the flooded

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We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far.

Swami Vivekananda

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## CENTRAL TEAMS TO BE DEPLOYED IN 10 STATES AS COVID CASES RISE

# BE CAREFUL AND ALERT

As per the government notice, these teams will be deployed in Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Mizoram, Karnataka, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Punjab and for three to five days working with the state health authorities.

### VAX FOR THE AGE OF 15-18 FROM JAN 3: PM

Today, many countries are facing the threat of Omicron. In India too, many people have been found to be infected with Omicron. I would urge all of you not to panic, be careful and alert. Use of masks, hand sanitisation must be followed. Nasal vaccine, world's first DNA vaccine against Covid will soon start in India. Vaccination for children in the age of 15-18 years will begin from January 3, 2022.



### COVAXIN GETS DCGI NOD FOR EMERGENCY USE FOR CHILDREN AGED 12-18

New Delhi: Amid growing concern over the new Covid variant Omicron, Hyderabad-based vaccine manufacturer Bharat Biotech's Covaxin on Saturday got approval from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for emergency use for children aged between 12-18 years. The vaccine manufacturer had submitted data from clinical trials in the 12-18 years age group for COVAXIN (BBV152) to Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO). Bharat Biotech had said earlier that the data was reviewed by the CDSCO and Subject Experts Committee (SEC) and has provided their positive recommendations. This makes Covaxin the second vaccine cleared for use for children in India. Earlier, Zydus Cadila's three-dose DNA vaccine was allowed to be used on adults and children over the age of 12.



gen etc and vaccination progress, the notice stated. "The state level central teams will assess the situation, suggest remedial actions and submit a report every evening by 7 p.m. on the public health activities being undertaken to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) besides submitting the same to the state government," it said.

India's Covid-19 caseload has surged to 3.47 crore with 7,189 cases in 24 hours. India reported 387 Covid-19 related deaths and 7,286 recoveries during the same time frame. Meanwhile, the daily active cases have declined to 484. The total number of deaths due to the virus has surged to 4,79,520, which accounts for 1.38 per cent of the total caseload.

## NITI Aayog comes up with health index

New Delhi: To track the progress on health outcomes and health systems performance across country, the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog has come up with a health index. Health Index is a weighted composite score incorporating 24 indicators covering key aspects of health performance. The domains covered in the report are health outcomes, governance and information, and key inputs and processes, and the Aayog said in a statement. The think tank of India will release the fourth edition of "The Healthy States, Progressive India" ranking States performance on December 27. "The objective of the Annual Health Index is to track progress on health out-

comes and health systems performance, develop a healthy competition and encourage cross-learning among states and UTs," the statement read. Health Index Scores and rankings for states and UTs are generated to assess incremental performance (year-to-year progress) and overall performance (current performance). The exercise is expected to help drive state and union territories' efforts towards the achievement of health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including those related to Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and other health outcomes. The report has tried to shift the focus from budget spending, inputs, and outputs to outcomes.

## WHO EXPERTS WARN TN OF SUDDEN SPURT IN OMICRON CASES

Chennai: Experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), including Chief Scientist Soumya Swaminathan, has warned the Tamil Nadu Health Department against the possibility of a sudden spurt in Omicron cases. The WHO Chief Scientist, according to the state Health Department officials, warned that the Omicron variant has a high transmission rate and it evades antibodies and immunity. The experts cautioned the government to be prepared with more beds, oxygen cylinders, drugs and testing kits.



The overall recoveries have increased to 3,42,23,263 while the active cases climbed to 77,032.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In the wake of the rising Covid-19 cases, the Centre has deployed multi-disciplinary teams to ten identified states which are reporting an increase in the number of positive cases or slow vaccination pace to aid the efforts of states. The teams will contact tracing, including surveillance, containment operations along with Covid-19 testing including sending of adequate samples from clusters to Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) network for genome sequencing. Covid appropriate behaviours and its enforcement, availability of hospital beds, sufficient logistics including ambulances, ventilators, medical oxy-

## 22 farmer unions form political front for Punjab polls

Team Absolute | Chandigarh

Twenty-two unions of farmers, which were part of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) to protest three contentious farm laws, on Saturday announced to form a political front 'Samyukta Samaj Morcha' to contest the 2022 assembly elections in Punjab on all 117 seats.

Chief Minister's face Balbir Singh Rajewal, however, clarified there was no alliance as of now with any political party, not even with AAP.

But at the same time he didn't rule out any future possibility.

Rajewal told the media here that they were doing it on public demand. "Some of the unions are against it but won't oppose," he said.

Ten other unions belonging to the state and were part



of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha have refused to be part of the political front.

They comprised the Krantikari Kisan Union (Darshan Pal), the BKU Krantikari (Surjit Phool) and the BKU Sidhupur (Jagjit Dallewal).

Responding to the announcement of the political front, farmer leader Darshan Pal said, "Most of

the demands of the farmers like the MSP (minimum support price) are yet to be accepted. By launching the political front, the movement of farmers might be weakened." Earlier this month, BKU (Haryana) President Gurnam Singh Chaduni announced his political outfit Samyukta Sangharsh Party, saying the party will fight the upcoming Punjab elections.



## FIVE TIHAR INMATES DEAD IN 8 DAYS, PROBE ORDERED

New Delhi: Five prisoners at the high-security Tihar Jail in the national capital have died in the past eight days, a Delhi Police official said here on Saturday.

Despite all the deaths appearing to be from natural causes, the official said that a "Magisterial inquiry under Sec 176 of the CrPC has been initiated in all the fatalities".

On Friday also, an inmate's death was reported in Tihar Jail no 3. The official said that the prisoner was found unconscious in his cell and was immediately taken to a hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

He also allegedly died because of health issues. The deceased prisoner was identified as Vikram alias Vicky. Director General (Prisons) Sandeep Goyal told reporter that these deaths of the prisoners took place in different jails and "none were related to any kind of violence".

"In all these, the circumstances indicate natural causes like old disease or other unknown reason," Goyal said, adding as per rules, inquest proceedings are being conducted by Metropolitan Magistrate in each case.

## Ludhiana blast accused had links with pro-Khalistan elements of Pak: Punjab DGP

Team Absolute | Chandigarh

Punjab Police on Saturday claimed to have cracked the Ludhiana court bomb blast case after identifying the accused-cum-victim, Gagandeep Singh (31), who reportedly had links with Pakistan-based pro-Khalistan elements. A high intensity explosion occurred in a public toilet at the district court complex in Ludhiana on Thursday, which left one person dead and six others injured. As per the police, Singh was the person who died while planting the bomb. Singh, a former head constable with Punjab Police who was dismissed in August 2019 after heroin was recovered from his possession, had



reportedly strapped the bomb around his stomach to give the security personnel a slip.

Singh also reportedly conducted a recce of the court complex to execute his plan. The Punjab Police have found that ISI was helping a

German-based radical Khalistani group which helped in execution of the blast. The probe of Punjab Police has also revealed that Khalistani operatives are working with the drug mafia and Pakistan-based arms and narcotic dealers.

## Gang selling newborn babies busted in Delhi; 2 infants rescued, 6 women held

New Delhi: An inter-state gang involved in kidnapping and trafficking of newborn babies has been busted by the police in the national capital and six women have been arrested in this connection, the police said on Saturday. Acting on the tip-off, a team was constituted and a raid was conducted. Three among the accused, Priya Jain, Priya and Kajal, who had brought a baby boy aged around 7-8 days along with them, were apprehended from the spot.

According to the police, the gang had developed a unique modus operandi -- they would identify a pregnant woman belonging to the poor strata and strike a deal with her and her husband, and as soon as the child was born, they would take him/her away from the parents and keep the child in their custody. They would simultaneously identify several possible buyers and circulate the child's photograph among all touts through WhatsApp and subsequently sell the child.



## 4 TERRORISTS KILLED IN 2 SEPARATE ENCOUNTERS IN KASHMIR IN 12 HRS

Team Absolute | Srinagar

Four terrorists were killed in two separate encounters between terrorists and security forces in South Kashmir within 12 hours on Saturday. Police and security forces neutralized two terrorists in an anti-terrorist operation in Tral area of Awantipora while two terrorists were also killed in an encounter by Police and security forces in Shopian, taking the toll to four in the last 12 hours.

In the ensuing encounter, two terrorists were killed and their bodies were retrieved from the site of encounter. They have been identified as Nadeem Nazir Bhat, resident of Koil Shikargah, Tral and Rahi Rasool Bhat alias Adil, resident of Kanipora Dadsara. Incriminating materials, arms and ammunition



including two AK series rifles were recovered from their possession. Meanwhile, IGP Kashmir Vijay Kumar has congratulated the joint teams of Police and security forces for eliminating five terrorists within 48 hours in three successful operations without any collateral damage. Police have registered case under relevant sections of law and investigation has been initiated.

## Ganga changes course, leaves less land for Magh Mela in Prayagraj

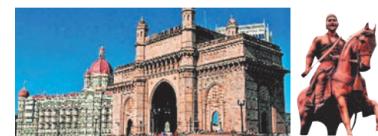
THE MAGH MELA, IS AN ANNUAL RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL HELD IN THE MONTH OF MAGH (JANUARY/FEBRUARY) NEAR RIVERBANKS AND SACRED TANKS NEAR HINDU TEMPLES. EVERY 12 YEARS, MAGHA MELAS TURNS INTO THE KUMBH MELA. LAKHS OF DEVOTEES CAMP ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVERS AND TAKE A HOLY DIP EVERY DAY WHILE RELIGIOUS OUTFITS AND SECTS SET UP THEIR CAMPS ON THE RIVER BANKS DURING THE PERIOD. THE MELA, IN 2022, WILL BEGIN ON JANUARY 14 AND END ON MARCH 1.



Team Absolute | Prayagraj

With the Ganga having changed its course by shifting westwards, there is now less land left for the upcoming Magh Mela in Prayagraj. The decrease in land that has to be allotted to seers and different religious organisations for the month long fair, has put the Mela authorities in a piquant situation. In 2004, the river had shifted towards the east and pilgrim had to walk

a longer distance to reach the Sangam-the confluence point of Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati. Water carpenters, known as 'Bind-Mallaha', have been asked to make crates with bamboo and place the same at carefully selected points at the banks where the river is causing erosion. The JCB will be pressed into service which is making points for fixing the crates to check the erosion. What is making erosion a major problem this year is the increased water level in the river, compared to previous years. "It has become challenging for the mela authorities to control the currents of the river and with Ganga known for strong and unpredictable direction of its current, there needs to be continuous efforts to face the challenge," said Mahant Hari Chaitanya Bhramchari, known for fighting for the cause of clean Ganga.



# 'MAHARASHTRA WILL FACE LOCKDOWN IF...': MINISTER'S WARNING AMID OMICRON RISE

Maharashtra has already brought back some restrictions limiting the number of people attending events as it became the first state to have crossed 100 Omicron cases on Friday. On Saturday, Mumbai reported 757 new Covid-19 cases.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope on Saturday said statewide lockdown will be imposed only if the demand for medical oxygen touches 800 metric tons per day. The state government does not want people to face more restrictions, the health minister said urging people to follow Covid appropriate behaviour strictly. Maharashtra has 108 cases of Omicron, the highest in the country, while the countrywide tally of Omicron has reached 415.

On Saturday, Mumbai added 757 fresh Covid cases in a marked surge.

The state government has already imposed some restrictions, including restrictions on any gathering of more than five persons between 9pm to 6am and a cap on the number of people attending public events in the state. Omicron cases were increasing "rapidly", but in general such patients were not ending up in ICU nor did



they need supplementary oxygen, the health minister said, speaking to reporters in Jalna. "There will be

statewide lockdown only if the demand for medical oxygen rises to 800 metric tons (per day). We do not

want people to face more restrictions, therefore I am making an appeal to people to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour. Wearing a mask is very important," he said.

According to scientists who have been tracking Omicron cases it is unlikely that Omicron might lead to any breathing difficulties as the variant is believed to be multiplying in the throat. However, as the variant is spreading faster, it will eventually lead to pressure on the healthcare system, as seen in other countries.

Seeing the surge of Omicron, experts have projected a third wave of the pandemic in the country at the beginning of 2022 -- in January and February. The severity of the projected wave is unlikely to be intense.

As the Centre has urged all states and Union territories to be alert amid the festive season, the Mumbai civic authorities have already banned New Year celebration parties, gatherings in closed or open spaces.

# Maha: Dubai-returnee among 2 new Omicron cases, night curbs start

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra on Saturday reported 2 new cases of the Covid-19 variant Omicron and the state tally zoomed to 110, as the state entered a series of restrictions including prohibitory orders banning assembly of 5 or more persons between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. from this evening. Mumbai, Dec 25 (IANS) Maharashtra on Saturday reported 2 new cases of the Covid-19 variant Omicron and the state tally zoomed to 110, as the state entered a series of restrictions including prohibitory orders banning assembly of 5 or more persons between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. from this evening. Of the 2 new cases, both are from Aurangabad and fully vaccinated, and one had a history of recent international travel to Dubai, from where all the incoming passengers are being subjected to enhanced health scrutiny. While one patient is aged 50, the other is his close contact aged 33, one has mild symptoms and the second is asymptomatic, said the state health department. Intensive surveillance of passengers arriving at the three international airports - Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur - is currently underway since December 1. A total of 24,922 travellers have landed here from the 'high risk' countries of which 153 have tested positive and 55 from other countries, with all their reports sent for genomic sequencing to confirm if they are afflicted by Omicron. Besides,

729 samples from field surveys conducted since November 1 have been sent for genomic sequencing with the results of 162 awaited, said Health Department officials. The current spread of Omicron is extensive in the state, with the maximum - 46 cases - in Mumbai, followed by 41 in Pune, 5 each in Satara, Osmanabad and Thane, 2 each in Nagpur and Aurangabad, 1 each in Palghar, Latur, Ahmednagar and Buldhana. On the Covid-19 front, Mumbai, Pune and Thane remain at the top with the highest number of 'active cases' of the total 9,102 ill patients currently in the state, with a recovery rate of 97.68 per cent. As the state entered into 'night-curfew' style restrictions from 9 p.m. on Saturday night, the Hotels and Restaurants Association of Western India and Federation of Hotels and Restaurants Association of India have resented the cancellation of New Year and festival season events. "This is a huge disappointment to the industry which has borne the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns. Our staffers are fully vaccinated, follow full Covid appropriate behaviour, we are operational and ready to welcome guests," urged HRAWI and FHRAI office-bearer Pradeep Shetty. Meanwhile, police fanned out onto the streets and in public areas, erected checkpost at various points to implement the new restrictions that became effective tonight amid increasing Covid-19 and Omicron cases.

# Second Covid wave style curbs return in Maharashtra

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government late on Friday clamped prohibitory orders banning assembly of 5 or more persons from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. with effect from Saturday.

Mumbai, Dec 24 (IANS) The Maharashtra government late on Friday clamped prohibitory orders banning assembly of 5 or more persons from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. with effect from Saturday. The measure comes in the wake of increasing Covid-19 cases and galloping Omicron infections - the latter soaring to 108 since the first case recorded on December 4. Besides, the government has reintroduced restrictions on different types of gatherings at open or closed venues,



and in all public places. Restaurants, gyms, spas, cinemas, theatres shall be allowed to operate at only 50 per cent of their capacity.

For social, religious or political events not more than 100 people shall be permitted in closed spaces and upto 250 persons, or 25 percent, whichever is less, of the capacity in such open

spaces. For other crowd-puller events like sports or games, 25 per cent seating capacity of audiences shall be allowed. Local Disaster Management authorities and District Collectors shall be empowered to make these restrictions even more stringent depending on the local situation, said an official notification.

# Maha's Omicron tally crosses the 100 mark

A day after notching the highest number of Omicron cases, Maharashtra on Friday reported 20 cases of the new Covid-19 variant and the state's tally zoomed above the 100 mark to touch 108, creating huge concerns in health circles.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai, Dec 24 (IANS) A day after notching the highest number of Omicron cases, Maharashtra on Friday reported 20 cases of the new Covid-19 variant and the state's tally zoomed above the 100 mark to touch 108, creating huge concerns in health circles.

Of the 20 new cases, 12 are fully vaccinated, seven are not inoculated while one is a minor not eligible for the jab.

The new infectees comprise 15 with a recent history of international travel, one domestic trip, and 4 are their close contacts. One is aged below 18, and 6 are senior citizens above 60 years of age.

The new lot of Omicron patients include 11 from Mumbai, seven from Pune, two from Satara, and one from Ahmednagar and all



are said to be asymptomatic. Intensive surveillance of passengers arriving at the three international airports - Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur - is currently underway since December 1. A total of 23,933 travellers have landed here from the "high risk" countries of which 127 have tested positive and 49 from other countries, with all their reports sent for genomic sequencing to confirm if they are afflicted by Omicron. Besides, 722 samples from field surveys conducted since November 1 have been sent for genomic sequencing with the results of 157 awaited, said Health Department officials. The current spread of Omicron is extensive in the state, with the maximum - 46 cases - in Mumbai, followed by 41 in Pune, five each in Satara, Osmanabad, and Thane, two in Nagpur, and one each in Palghar, Latur, Ahmednagar, and Buldhana.

# On 60th b'day, visionary Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar gifts 'eyesight'

Turning 60 today (December 25), Mumbai's busy-bee Mayor Kishori Pednekar did not celebrate her birthday alone - but saw to it that around 100 unfortunate "sightless" people could look forward to a better life.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Dec 25 (IANS) Turning 60 today (December 25), Mumbai's busy-bee Mayor Kishori Pednekar did not celebrate her birthday alone - but saw to it that around 100 unfortunate "sightless" people could look forward to a better life. In a unique gesture, Pednekar made a personal donation of Rs 1,00,000 to the Vision Foundation of India (VFI), to perform free eye surgeries that can benefit upto 100 persons, said officials.

The amount will be utilised by 28-year-old VFI for its Rashtriya Netra Yagna - launched in 2015 - under which it has already performed over 5,60,000 eye surgeries for the less privileged in 19 states and 2 Union Territories, with a target of 11-lakh in 11 years. "I turn 60 today. Recently, I have been blessed with a grandson. In the spirit of serving the people as I am graced with the double joy, I have taken this step to give 'Drishhti Sanjeevani' to the needy persons," said a smiling Pednekar, a trained nurse-turned-Shiv Sena



politician who earned accolades for her work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Handing over a cheque for the amount to VFI Managing Trustee Dr Kulin Kothari, in presence of Joint Municipal Commissioner Chandrashekhar Chore on Friday, the Mayor lauded the services of the VFI which has been performing all types of surgeries and providing eye-care to the underprivileged all over the country. "The less privileged persons suffering from cataracts, glaucoma, poor eyesight or other vision problems shall get the necessary treatment at VFI without discrimination. All necessary pre-examinations, surgeries, things like contact lenses or

spectacles shall be provided to the patients by VFI," Pednekar said. Dr Kothari said VFI was founded in 1993 and is engaged in providing medical treatment, surgery, medicines, etc to the underprivileged people of society who are unable to access proper eye treatment, especially people in remote villages and tribal communities through its 60-plus collaborative centres around the country.

"The VFI aim is to diagnose the problem of blindness in time and provide eye resuscitation to the patients. Though we work all over India, 20 per cent of our work is done in Maharashtra alone," Dr Kothari added. VFI Manager Afzal Varaliya said besides the flagship Rashtriya Netra Yagna, the NGO has other major initiatives like Sugar N Sight for Diabetics, Mumbai Urban Slum Eye Care for the hutment dwellers in half a dozen slum-pockets, Child Eye for children and one Mobile Eye Clinic for people in slums or remote areas around Mumbai. The VFI has performed around 1,000 eye surgeries on police and conducted eye checkups for more than 10,000 cops, it runs the Navneet Shah Eye Bank where retina donations are received regularly and there is a Primary Rural Vision Care Center each in Thane and Palghar districts, all offered as free services. Varaliya said the VFI teams help out with other social or charitable groups or corporates to conduct eye camps in hospitals or outside to bring the benefits of best eye-care to the poor.

# Rahul Gandhi to pick Maharashtra Speaker candidate

Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole said it is the high command's prerogative to decide the candidate.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

None of the Congress ministers are willing to take up the post of Speaker of the Maharashtra Assembly. Reason? To be eligible for the post, one has to step down as minister. Election for Speaker in scheduled for December 28.

Taking note of this, Rahul Gandhi has sought a list of Maharashtra ministers. It has been learnt that he will choose one and make him the Speaker candidate.

After Nana Patole resigned as Speaker and became state head of Congress last year, the post is vacant. Congress has to nominate the candidate for the Speaker's post. Congress has 10 cabinet ministers and two ministers of state in the Maha Vikas Aghadi coalition. "No one wants to step down as minister and become the Speaker," said a Congress source requesting anonymity. He added that these ministers were pushing the names of former



CM Prithviraj Chavan and MLA Sangram Thopate.

"Our Delhi leadership is reluctant to go ahead with these names. Rahul Gandhi has decided to take it up address the issue amicably."

Maharashtra Congress president Patole said it is the high command's prerogative to decide the candidate.

# A one-stop shop in your Mumbai neighbourhood for culinary needs!

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Dec 25 (IANS) Urban Platter, the one-stop shop for all gourmet and culinary needs in every cuisine and category, offers clients convenient options for culinary and luxury culinary needs, with an online retail presence in over 700 locations across India. They have opened their first store under the Urban Platter name and brand in Mumbai's Bandra neighbourhood. "The reason we are launching a retail store is that we want to provide the full experience of a physical store and allow people to try and taste our products - to give them the touch and feel aspect," said Chirag Kenia, co-founder of Urban Platter. "While we launched as an e-commerce portal predominantly, we realised that providing people with all their needs under one roof is also an opportunity we want to provide to gourmet culinary food lovers, hence the idea of opening a store." he further added. Christmas gift box by Urban Platter Bandra will be home to the first-of-its-kind store, which will house 1000 culinary products



under one brand. All of the goods are vegan, and most importantly, they will give you with a complete gastronomic experience. "Since a large chunk of the target audience resides in shops in Bandra, which is also the heart of the city, it is definitely the best place to get an idea of customer requirements." We will be showcasing about 900 to 1000 products, and we expect people to come and try our products. The goal is to build a strong brand presence and understand our consumer behaviour better," said Kenia at the store launch.

# MAHARASHTRA UTILISED ONLY 20% OF NCAP FUNDS

As of November 2021, Maharashtra has spent just about 20% of the funds it has received under the Centre's National Clean Air Program (NCAP)

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai As of November 2021, Maharashtra has spent just about 20% of the funds it has received under the Centre's National Clean Air Program (NCAP). A total of ₹11.27 crore has been spent so far across 17 non-attainment cities, leaving an unspent balance of ₹39.98 crore, according to data available with the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB). The majority of the funds have been spent in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Pune and

Nagpur, while in two cities (Akola and Amravati), zero funds have been spent. Dr VM Motghare, joint director (air quality), MPCB, could not be reached for comment on Saturday. However, Motghare had presented these numbers at an MPCB review meeting on November 23, a recording of which is available online. "Maharashtra is lacking in fund utilisation of the NCAP program," Motghare had said. A sub-regional officer with the MPCB, who did not wish to be named, explained that the unspent balance is currently lying with ULBS, and that they are expected to be used to bolster city-level action plans against air pollution, with a focus on measures like dust mitigation, traffic regulation, waste management and so on.

NCAP does not have a legal mandate but aims to achieve a 20% to 30% reduction in PM 2.5 (respirable pollution particles) concentrations

over 2017 levels in over 100 cities by 2024. "The ULBs have been slow to utilise the funds. Covid has been a major hurdle, and most municipal councils and corporations have focused their attention on dealing with the pandemic. But yes, there is also an issue of lack of expertise and technical knowledge on the part of the ULBs, which slows things down. As far as possible, when dealing with contractors and vendors, we have to follow Make in India guidelines and work with Indian companies, so it can take longer to outsource the work," said the MPCB official cited above. "We will aim to use all the funds before the financial year ends," they added. This issue isn't just restricted to Maharashtra, according to data released by the environment ministry during the first meeting of the NCAP's National Apex Committee on December 17. A total of ₹375.44 crore was provided under

NCAP to 114 cities from 2018-19 to 2020-21, and ₹290 crores were allocated to 82 cities for 2021-22. The Centre will be providing a further ₹700 crores for the 2021-26 period. Although utilisation of the ₹375.44 crore given in the past two years has been low by most states, according to the data, with 22 states under NCAP collectively utilising only 33.53% of the amount. Bihar and Chandigarh utilised 77% and 82% respectively of the fund, but Punjab and Uttar Pradesh utilised only 17%, Chhattisgarh 21%, Andhra Pradesh 10%, Assam 4%, Himachal Pradesh 2%, and Jammu & Kashmir 1%. The utilisation by Uttarakhand and West Bengal was 53% and 58% respectively. Maharashtra has also been allotted a total of ₹2,981 crore, at the recommendation of the 15th FC, specifically to address air pollution in the state. The funds are to be utilised by the end of the financial year 2026.



### MP WILL BE MADE THE NUMBER ONE STATE OF THE COUNTRY IN THE FIELD OF CLEANLINESS: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that Madhya Pradesh should be made the number one state of the country in the field of cleanliness. This is possible only when every city plays an active part in the field of cleanliness and makes their city the most beautiful and clean city. The Chief Minister administered the pledge to the citizens to make the state the number one state of the country in cleanliness, said that every city should be proud of its heritage. To carry forward this legacy and ensure public participation in development, all cities should celebrate their foundation day.

Chouhan was addressing the state level Swachhata Prerna Mahotsav in Indore today. In the festival, preparations for Swachh Survekshan-2022 were also started in all the urban bodies of the state. Swachhata Prerna workshop was also held in the festival, which was broadcast live in all the urban bodies.

Chouhan said that Madhya Pradesh has made achieved amazing feat of cleanliness. A large number of cities of the state have made remarkable achievements in the field of cleanliness in the country. This is not a halt for us, it has to be taken further



and the state has to be made the most beautiful and clean city of the country. For this everyone needs to work together. Let us all take a pledge that we will make our cities beautiful and clean. If the city will be beautiful and clean, then the state will also become clean and beautiful.

Chouhan congratulated and extended his best wishes for Indore staying at top in cleanliness for the fifth time in a row. He said that Indore is the pride of the country. Indore is a school of cleanliness. He said that it is a firm belief that Indore will remain number one in the country

in cleanliness even for the sixth time. Indore has embraced cleanliness wholeheartedly and has included it in its nature, feelings, thoughts and deeds. Many congratulations to the people of Indore for this achievement. He said that other cities should take inspiration from the cleanliness works done in Indore. Indore truly deserved this cleanliness programme. All the representatives who came here in this conference should visit Indore and see cleanliness, learn the lesson of cleanliness. Chouhan said that our Madhya Pradesh is currently ranked third in the country in

the field of cleanliness, now we have to make it the number one state. For this, all should work unitedly and take cleanliness as a challenge.

Referring to the former Prime Minister Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Chief Minister said that he increased India's honour and respect in the world. Showed a new direction of good governance. Laid the foundation of a mighty India. Reiterating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to cleanliness, Chouhan said that the Prime Minister has made cleanliness a part of our nature. India is writing a new chapter in the field of cleanliness. Chouhan said that all parameters of cleanliness should be adopted. Everyone should join in making their respective cities beautiful and clean and make a new achievement in the year 2022.

Chouhan said that all cities have their own heritage. We should be proud of this heritage. To carry forward this heritage and ensure public participation in the field of development, all the cities should celebrate their foundation day. Cities should be decorated on this day. Invite distinguished people who have brought laurels to the cities in various fields, benefit from their experiences and give a new direction to the development.

### Students should become friends, philosophers, guides of deprived class: Governor Patel

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has asked the students to cooperate with the scheduled tribes, villagers, residents of backward areas, weaker and deprived class as their friend, philosopher and guide. Help them in getting the benefits of development programmes and schemes, Digital India, Startup India, Swachhata Abhiyan, Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao etc.

Patel was addressing the second convocation ceremony of Atal Bihari Vajpayee Hindi University today. It is worth mentioning that this is the first convocation held in the newly constructed campus of the university.

Governor Patel said that universities should become centres of imparting strength, skills and values to the students to face the challenges of life. The most powerful tool to change the world, education is useful for the individual and the nation only when it is based on the national philosophy of life. He said that this university should become a model of human environment friendly lifestyle. Strengthen the culture of tree plantation and their care in the students. Keeping in mind the basic sentiments of the Indian Sanatan culture of the Prime Minister, cooperate in the work of development with everyone, with everyone's efforts through the new National Education Policy.

The Governor has requested the students that youth should not be job seekers but become job givers. Contribute to the making of a capable and prosperous new India by building a self-reliant India. Visit the villages, help the villagers in their efforts for cleanliness and self-reliance, make the villages such that the soul of the village is preserved and they have the facilities of the city. He remembered and paid tribute to Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Bharat Ratna Madanmohan Malviya on their anniversary. He said that the birth anniversary of great men is a matter of taking inspiration from their lives and bringing them to life. The Governor also congratulated and extended best wishes to the students, who received degrees and medals and the parents and teachers. Member of Parliament Pragna Singh Thakur said that Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, established in the name of the Ajatshatru (having no enemy) of politics Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who has a unique identity in the world, should become the centre of Indian knowledge, tradition and culture. She said that it is the responsibility of the students who are educated today to spread the fragrance of their abilities and values in the whole world. A person imbued with values is respected in the society. She exhorted the students to go to any walk of life but not forget their values. Acquire a special place in the society with merit and humility.



Lions Club Majestic Bhopal distributed copies, pen, pencil, rubber, sharpeners, sanitizer bottles, fruits and biscuits and face masks to the 175 Primary students of Naveen School at Misrod on 22/12/21. Club president Lion Renu Nayak, treasurer Lion Prachi Mundra along with Lion Shashi Budholia, Lion Anita Mishra, Lion Sonia Gulati and Lion Ujjwala Rao were present there. The stationary was sponsored by Nishitha Tiwari. The school staff and Principal were also present.

### Atal ji was an endearing personality and was an advocate of development: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Saturday garlanded the statue of former Prime Minister Late Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary near Shaurya memorial square. Many public representatives were present on this occasion.

Chouhan said that Atal ji was a unique leader who took the pledge to build a powerful nation. He was an Ajatshatru (had no enemy), a national hero, an original thinker and a skilled organizer. He was an outstanding



speaker. His personality was mesmerizing. He was full of compassion, love and intimacy. He was also a writer and poet. Atal ji considered everyone like himself. He has done amazing work of development in various fields.

Chouhan said that when Shri Narasimha Rao was the Prime Minister, he sent Atal Ji to UNO as the leader of Indian team. This is not an ordinary matter. Trust was reposed in him. He put India's side strongly in the

United Nations. He also worked with Shyamaprasad Mukherjee. Today, without Atal ji, the Parliament seems forsaken. When he used to stand in the House, everyone became silent. Everyone listened him intently. There was a lot of respect for Atal ji in everyone's heart. He had resolved to make India a nuclear powerful nation. Through Golden Quadrilateral Scheme and Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana, he worked to establish a network of rural roads in the country. This was an important contribution of Atal ji.

### Now it will be easier to set up wood based industries: Shah

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A big step has been taken by the state government to establish wood based industries in the state and to provide more and more opportunities for self-employment to the wood craftsmen. Forest Minister Vijay Shah has described the amendment made in section 4 of Madhya Pradesh Wood Chiranj (Regulation) Act 1984 as historic.

Shah said that after the amendment made in the Act, wood based commercial activities will increase, due to which the government will get value addition and additional revenue from GST. Farmers in the private sector will be encouraged to take up plantation and their income will also increase. He

said that 30 percent of the state is forest land, in which the state government gets income of 800 crores and GST of 160 crores along with employment to forest dwellers due to wood production activities.

After the amendment in Section-4 of the Wood Regulation Act, it will no longer be necessary to obtain a license for a circular saw machine with a diameter of less than 30 cm. Small craftsmen will not need a license from the Forest Department to use wood in finishing and fashioning. Industries using salvaged wood, cane, bamboo, plywood, veneer or imported wood will not require a license. Also, the processing plants will be allowed to take license after the changes made in this Act.

### MP SCHOOL ISSUED SHOW CAUSE NOTICE FOR QUESTION ON KAREENA AND SAIF ALI KHAN'S SON

Asking the name of the son of Bollywood actors - Kareena Kapoor and Saif Ali Khan by a private school in Madhya Pradesh during an examination has snowballed into a major controversy. The school has been issued a show cause notice now.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Asking the name of the son of Bollywood actors - Kareena Kapoor and Saif Ali Khan by a private school in Madhya Pradesh during an examination has snowballed into a major controversy. The school has been issued a show cause notice now.

The controversy erupted after the question figured in the current affairs section of the General Knowledge part of class 6 during the annual exams. In its question paper, 'Academic Heights Public School' in Madhya Pradesh's Khandwa district asked the students to write the full name of the son of



Bollywood actors couple (Kareena Kapoor and Saif Ali Khan). The current affairs section of the test in part B carried as many as five questions, the first - Who was the first Grand Master of Chess in India? While the second question was -- Write the full name of the son of

of Kareena Kapoor Khan and Saif Ali Khan?

Three other questions on the same set are - Name the IAF Pilot whose fighter plane crashed in Pakistan? Which team won the IPL Cup in 2019? And the last question was - Who is the dictator of North Korea?

Once the test was over, the question number 2 (Write the full name of the son of Kareena Kapoor Khan and Saif Ali Khan?) did not go down well with some of the parents who objected to it saying the current affairs section should have questions related to freedom fighters that can help students enhance their general knowledge and not the name of the son of any Bollywood actors.

Later the parents association of the school complained to the district education department in Khandwa, which further proceeded to the Madhya Pradesh School Education Department. Subsequently, the department issued a show-cause notice to the administration of 'Academic Heights Public School' and has sought its response on the matter.

District parents' association president, Anish Jharjhare expressed concern at the incident. "How can the school administration ask the students such non-serious questions? Instead of asking students about historical icons and other legends, they asked for the full name of the son of a Bollywood couple."

"A show-cause notice has been issued to the school. Further action will be initiated on the basis of their (school) reply," said a senior official in the school education department.

### Work on ways to strengthen the economy with the spirit of nature conservation: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the three-day seminar being held in Bhopal will prove to be important to provide the light of development to various dimensions of the economy and the lives of the poor, increasing per capita income. Eminent economists are participating in this, whose measures will be useful in determining the economy of the country as well as Madhya Pradesh. Various dimensions of economy will be discussed in the seminar. There will be consultation sessions. This seminar will prove to be helpful for tourism, industry, agriculture, service and how new projects should be run for inclusive development of environment. Madhya Pradesh will definitely get the benefit of the nectar that comes out after contemplations, deliberations.

Chouhan was inaugurating the one hundred and fourth National Convention of the Indian Economy Association (IEA) in the Golden Jubilee meeting hall of RCVN Noronha Academy of Administration today. He welcomed the invited participants on behalf of eight and a half crore people of Madhya Pradesh.

Chouhan said that the suggestions of the participating economists of the seminar would be important for the Madhya Pradesh government. We will also implement these. For economists, it is worth considering that we should work on the methods of strengthening the

economy with the protection of nature. Today, problems like Covid have come to the fore due to the neglect of nature. Chouhan expressed hope that this seminar will be a guide for self-reliant India. The discussions in the symposium on other important topics including global trade will be useful in the national interest.

Chouhan said that the model of development adopted in India was not our own. The assumption that other countries were superior to us was the biggest tragedy after Independence. We had to prepare a model according to the conditions of our country. In the West, democracy arose against the monarchy. Along with this, we all know that communism was also abandoned by many countries, because the people were not happy with the implementation of that system. Chouhan said that important works are being done in the field of economy under the leadership of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Efforts are being made for holistic development. It has also been said that such development is not enough if there is no prosperity in the lives of common people. The work of strengthening the economy has been done by the efforts of Modi. Prime Minister Modi has given an important mantra of Atma-nirbhar Bharat.

Chouhan said that the direction of the econ-



omy should be such that we can also save the Earth and see a happy society on Earth. Chouhan said that the world cannot run without money. Also, the scarcity of money is not considered good for the individual and the nation. It is said that even the effect of money is not the best. Actually it is necessary. Today or tomorrow the world will also accept the India's philosophy of creating harmony and balance in production, distribution and consumption and not earning money through improper means. Funds are important for individual as well as social life. No one has any objection to the increase in the growth rate. We have to bridge the gap of equitable distribution of resources and inequality. Conference President Indian Economic Association and NITI Aayog member Prof. Ramesh Chandra said that Madhya

Pradesh was once a BIMARU state, but now it is a Sucharu (properly run) state. Good governance is helpful in this, which has been made possible by the leadership ability of Shivraj Chouhan. Prof Ramesh Chandra said that due to the reforms made in the field of agriculture, irrigation, facility to farmers to sell produce at support price and adoption of means like Bhavantar, the growth rate of Madhya Pradesh increased. Agriculture was not neglected in the state, but it was made the base of the economy.

Vice Chairman of Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Good

Governance and Policy Analysis economist Sachin Chaturvedi said that this seminar is a medium to reflect on important aspects of the economy. After the circumstances of corona, everyone is looking at the new economic possibilities in the world. Today we are expecting 5.9 economic growth. Along with this, efforts are being made to re-enable the areas which were more affected by Covid. These include the hotel, hospitality, tourism and industry sectors. The strength of Madhya Pradesh is also the self-help groups working here. The economic sector is being enabled in the state by promoting agriculture and food processing and MSME sector. Efforts have also been made for self-employment. These topics will be kept at the centre of discussion in the sessions of this seminar. The role of banks, efforts to benefit people in Mudra

and other schemes will also be discussed. Despite Madhya Pradesh being land-locked, efforts are important to achieve the desired progress in the trade and commerce sector. In the post-Covid era, the increase in vaccination and its equity were also kept central in the planning of the conference. This is also the priority of the Prime Minister. Chaturvedi said that according to an estimate, 10 percent global trade growth is expected in 2021 globally. World trade is estimated to be 5.6 trillion dollar this year, which will be a significant opportunity for us. There is also the challenge of keeping inflation manageable. For example, in Madhya Pradesh, the decision to reduce tax on fuel was taken immediately without worrying about loss of revenue. Various scholars will reflect in the seminar sessions on the topic of the challenge of the employment sector.

Prof. VK Malhotra of IEA, DK Madan and other office-bearers were present on the dais in the inaugural session of the seminar. Madan highlighted the objectives of the seminar. It is noteworthy that the 104th Annual Conference of Indian Economic Association in Bhopal will continue till December 27. It is being organised by Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Good Governance and Policy Analysis. Around 300 participants from 17 states are taking part in the seminar, both actually and virtually. Earlier, Chief Minister Shiv Chouhan was welcomed by presenting plants of medicinal importance. The Chief Minister inaugurated the seminar by lighting the lamp.



# FREIDA PINTO RECALLS SHOOTING CHRISTMAS MOVIE

## 'AT THE HEIGHT OF SUMMER'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Freida Pinto shot her new festive film in New York and London "at the height of summer", but the cast were forced to bundle up in warm clothing to make the scenes seem realistic. Speaking to HELLO! magazine, Pinto said: "We were shooting a Christmas movie in jackets and scarves at the height of summer."

Pinto found some benefits to her roomy winter costumes as they helped conceal her baby bump because she was pregnant with her and husband Cory Tran's son Rumi-Ray - who was born in November - at the time, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She said: "The genius costume design

helped with that."

The movie 'A Christmas No. 1' sees the actress play music manager Meg, who flees New York for London and, while tasked with finding a Christmas chart topper for a boy band, she comes across a track written by an ill teenage girl.

However, she clashes with the youngster's uncle, who is played by Iwan Rheon. She said: "They're at loggerheads and don't even like each other to begin with. But that's how all romances begin - at least in the movies."

The actress' next project is 'Mr. Malcolm's List' and she's thankful she'll be given loose-fitting Regency outfits to wear.

She said: "I love the period costumes but don't think corsets are my go-to."

# Kylie Jenner returns to Instagram

# 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' becomes biggest movie of the year worldwide

Los Angeles | Agencies

Tom Holland-starrer 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' has become the biggest movie



club even without China, the largest box-office market in the world.

'No Way Home' made \$29.3 million domestically on Thursday, bringing its seven-day gross to \$385.8 million, the third-highest seven-day gross of all time, the highest seven-day gross in the 'Spider-Man' franchise, and the second-highest seven-day gross ever for December and for a superhero film. The Thursday earning is the third-highest Thursday gross of December of all time, and the highest Thursday take for Sony, the 'Spider-Man' franchise and for a superhero film. Internationally, it brought in \$32.2 million on Thursday, bumping its overseas total to \$490.2 million and global haul to \$876.0 million. The 'Matrix Resurrections', meanwhile, made \$6.4 million on Wednesday and \$4.1 million on Thursday from 3,552 venues in North America for a two-day total of \$10.5 million. Picking up 20 years after 2003's 'The Matrix Revolutions', the sci-fi adventure is expected to finish the holiday weekend with \$40 million to \$50 million. If it hits the higher end of estimates, 'Resurrections' would beat 'Dune' (\$41 million) to become Warner Bros.' top opening of the year. Another sequel, 'Sing 2', earned \$8.1 million on Wednesday and \$7.5 million on Thursday at 3,892 North America locations for a total of \$15.6 million. Including ticket sales from Thanksgiving weekend advanced screenings, it's grossed \$17.2 million so far. The family-friendly musical is on track to rack up at least \$40 million by Sunday. In total, seven new films opened this weekend, including 'The King's Man', 'The Tender Bar', 'A Journal for Jordan', 'American Underdog' and 'Licorice Pizza'. But none of them will top 'Spider-Man: No Way Home', which debuted to a record-breaking \$260 million last weekend.

of the year worldwide. It's set to cross the \$1 billion mark on Christmas Day, reports variety.com.

At 11 days, it would be the second-fastest to hit that milestone (behind 2019's 'Avengers: Endgame' at five days and tied with 2018's 'Avengers: Infinity War'). It would also be the first theatrical release of the pandemic to join the billion-dollar

of the year worldwide. It's set to cross the \$1 billion mark on Christmas Day, reports variety.com. At 11 days, it would be the second-fastest to hit that milestone (behind 2019's 'Avengers: Endgame' at five days and tied with 2018's 'Avengers: Infinity War'). It would also be the first theatrical release of the pandemic to join the billion-dollar

Los Angeles | Agencies

Kylie Jenner broke her seven-week pause from Instagram on Friday when she wished her 292-million followers a Merry Christmas Eve. The image was of her mother Kris Jenner in her youth as she wore a red dress at Christmas time. The photo has been used to promote Kris' Jingle Bells song with Travis Barker.

The last time Kylie posted to Instagram was on November 4.

'Merry christmas eve,' was all Kylie wrote as she added a gift emoji and three black hearts.

Kylie took a break from Instagram as her partner Travis Scott reels from the horrific Astroworld tragedy that resulted in 10 deaths in Houston, Texas.

A crowd surge saw hundreds injured and 10 spectators lost their lives.

Earlier this month, it was confirmed all 10 victims had died from 'compression asphyxia'.

One person also had another cause of death listed as 'combined toxic effects of cocaine, methamphetamine and ethanol'.

# DANIEL CRAIG DOESN'T WANT JAMES BOND TO BE STREAMED

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Daniel Craig has urged people not to stream James Bond films because "event movies" deserve to be seen on a big cinema screen. Craig said: "One of the greatest things that's happened is we got this movie into the cinema. That's where Bond movies should be. They don't look so good on a phone. They look great on an Imax screen. It looks great on a 30ft screen. And they are family events. It gets the family out. As long as there's event movies like this then cinemas got a chance of surviving."

While Daniel's Bond successor has yet to be announced, the 'Knives Out' star has offered some tips for whoever takes over as the suave spy, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

He told The Sun newspaper: "There's a couple things I'd say. One is don't be s\*\*\*. I would say you have to grab it and make it your own."

For the new Bond, Craig thinks the franchise is in a



"good place" and he believes there are still a lot of good stories to be told.

He added: "I hope I've left it in a good place and I hope the next person can just make it fly. It's an amazing franchise. I still think there's a lot of stories to tell."

He recently shared that he thought it was "very satisfying" that Bond was apparently killed at the end of 'No Time To Die' after he sacrificed himself to save partner Madeleine (Lea Seydoux) and his daughter Mathilde (Lisa-Dorah Sonnet).

Reflection on the dramatic finale, he said: "There were lots of different ideas that came and went and some of it stuck. The through line of this is family (and) love, plus the fact we had an end so it was about hanging the film off that."

# TOM HOLLAND DEFENDS MARVEL MOVIES AS 'REAL ART' AFTER SCORSESE CRITICISM

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Tom Holland has defended the Marvel Cinematic Universe from legendary filmmaker Martin Scorsese's criticism.

The 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' actor shared that Marvel films are "real art" when firing back at Scorsese's claims in which the celebrated director had said that they're "not cinema", reports aceshowbiz.com.

In a new interview with The Hollywood Reporter, the 25-year-old English actor sarcastically said: "You can ask Martin, 'Would you want to make a Marvel movie?' But he doesn't

know what it's like because he's never made one."

He went on to say: "The way I break down the character, the way the director etches out the arc of the story and characters, it's all the same, just done on a different scale. So I do think they're real art."

"I've made Marvel movies and I've also made movies that have been in the conversation in the world of the Oscars, and the only difference, really, is one is much more expensive than the other," Holland continued explaining.

The 'Cherry' star added that some of his Marvel co-stars would agree with his comparison. He said: "When you're making these films, you know that

good or bad, millions of people will see them, whereas when you're making a small indie film, if it's not very good no one will watch it, so it comes with different levels of pressure."

He added: "I mean, you can also ask Benedict Cumberbatch or Robert Downey Jr or Scarlett Johansson, people who have made the kinds of movies that are 'Oscar-worthy' and also made superhero movies."

"They will tell you that they're the same, just on a different scale," he elaborated further.

The actor portraying Todd in 'Chaos Walking' also joked that "there's less Spandex in 'Oscar movies.'"



# ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Imogen Thomas



## SA VS IND: INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS ARE NOT GOING TO COME OUT IN MEDIA, SAYS DRAVID ON CAPTAINCY

Centurion | Agencies

Dec 25 (IANS) India head coach Rahul Dravid on Saturday declined to reveal details of any internal conversations he might have had with the selectors on Test captain Virat Kohli's white-ball captaincy, saying they are not for public purpose. Dravid's comments come after Kohli gave up T20I captaincy post the end of the Mens T20 World Cup and had been removed from ODI captaincy just before leaving for South Africa, with Rohit Sharma being made white-ball captain.

"To be honest, that's the role of the selectors and I am not going to get into individual conversations that I might or might not have had. It's not the place and the time to be doing that and discussing that. And what internal conversations I have had with people is certainly not going to come out in the media and I am not going to start telling people publicly what conversations I have had," said an assertive-yet-gentle Dravid in the pre-series virtual press conference.

In the pre-departure press conference, Kohli had directly contradicted the words of BCCI President Sourav Ganguly on being asked to continue as T20I captain for the reason that there cannot be two white-ball captains. Dravid, himself a former India captain, chose to shift his focus on the Test series against South Africa, starting from Sunday in Centurion, terming it as 'first challenge away from home'



under his coaching stint.

"From a Test team's perspective, there are series to win and it starts with this one. We had a good series against New Zealand. But this is our first sort of challenge away from home. It's an important series from that perspective to try and put our best foot forward and play some good cricket. In the larger scheme of things, it counts for World Test Championship points. That's a goal, not immediate but in the long term, it is something to keep in the back of the mind and keep to push towards. This team wants to keep improving and become better as a group." Dravid praised Kohli's efforts in making India a top team in Test cricket. "Virat has played a huge role in that. As a player and as a leader, he has

been fantastic. So, certainly looking forward to him carrying that forward to pushing and challenging this team. He's one of those players who really love Test cricket and looks forward to compete and play in it. Hopefully, he has a great series and will benefit the team as well."

Dravid further said that chats with Ajinkya Rahane have been nice and he was in good mental space. "Conversations with Ajinkya Rahane have been very positive and very good. He has trained really well this week and practised really well. It's been no different to actually have any conversation with most of the players. He seems to be in a really good space." The 48-year-old highlighted the mantra of batting contributions from

everyone in the playing eleven. "One of the things we are trying to talk to the group is these kinds of series are actually won by good team performances. Everyone needs to play their part. You can't just rely on a Virat Kohli or (Cheteshwar) Pujara or one of the guys to do the job. If you want to be successful here, you need contributions from everyone in our top seven and even from the lower order, as we know the value of their contributions." "In games that can be slightly more low-scoring than other parts of the world, every sort of contribution is going to be important. Pujara is an important part of that line-up, as is anyone else. It is not a focus on one name, be it be Kohli, Pujara, Rahane, Iyer, Rahul, or Agarwal, every one of them is going to have a role to play in the series if we have to be competitive. It's very rare that in a series like this, one player is going to score in every single game and dominate the series." "I would love for that to happen from our side. But I know it's rare to happen and we know we will need contributions from everyone, even the lower order as well. So, that is what we are looking forward to, instead of focusing on one or two individuals. The form that they are in, we know their quality, ability and a lot of them have contributed and played a big part in lots of overseas wins for India over the last few years. So, hopefully, all of that can come together and we can see some good performances over the next couple of weeks, three weeks rather," concluded Dravid.

## ISL 2021-22: Kerala Blasters' face stern test against Jamshedpur FC

The Kerala Blasters FC will face a stern test from Jamshedpur FC when the two sides meet in a 2021-22 Indian Super League match, here on Sunday.

Vasco de Gama | Agencies

Dec 25 (IANS) The Kerala Blasters FC will face a stern test from Jamshedpur FC when the two sides meet in a 2021-22 Indian Super League match, here on Sunday. The Boxing Day blockbuster at the Tilak Maidan Stadium will see two sides who are not only in the top four but also in supreme form, riding on some free-scoring attackers and well-oiled defence in the last few matches. Kerala have been unbeaten in six games while Jamshedpur haven't lost their last two. Jamshedpur shared the points in a 0-0 draw against Bengaluru FC in their previous engagement but the Men of Steel have been prolific in front of goal with Greg Stewart being at the

heart of their success. Kerala have been spectacular so far, putting behind disappointments of previous years with a collection of players who have dazzled, especially in front of goal. They won 3-0 against Chennaiyin FC in their last game, making light of an obdurate Chennaiyin defence. Among the players who have risen to the occasion for Kerala, Sahal Abdul Samad has been brilliant, scoring in back-to-back games. Before the start of the 2021-22 ISL, the youngster had just one goal to his name. But in seven games this season, he has managed to score thrice, including one each in the last 2 games. His defensive game has also been encouraging this season. He has 13 successful tackles, the second-highest among Kerala players after Adrian Luna (15). Sahal's 11 blocks this season are bettered only by Marko Leskovic's 14 among Kerala players. Luna has been the creative spark in Kerala's attacking arsenal. He has three assists in the league until now, only Ahmed Jahouh (5), Roy Krishna (4), and Greg Stewart (4)

have more. His passing, vision, and ability to pick out players perfectly is one of the reasons why Kerala look so comfortable in creating chances in open play. "We have been consistent and the players are working hard. That's how you get better in football," said Kerala head coach Ivan Vukomanovic. ukomanovic added that they are taking it one game at a time and building on the momentum. "Our goal this season is to work hard. We finished second from bottom last season, so we need to keep working hard and build on the momentum. In football, it's about momentum and playing game by game." Kerala have scored 12 goals in their first seven games, including an own goal in the game against Bengaluru FC. For the first time in their Hero ISL history, the club have scored more than 10 goals after seven opening league games and that is a testament to their teamwork. For Kerala, nine different players have had a goal or an assist this season. Only Jamshedpur FC (11) and Hyderabad FC (10) have more players contributing to a goal or an assist.

## Jr national hockey: Chandigarh to meet UP in final

Kovilpatti | Agencies

Hockey Chandigarh and Uttar Pradesh registered victories in contrasting styles to advance to the final of the 11th Hockey India Junior Men National Championship 2021. Hockey Chandigarh defeated Hockey Unit of Odisha in tiebreak shoot-out while Uttar Pradesh Hockey outplayed Hickey Haryana 8-3 in the semifinals to set up a mouth-watering clash for the title. In the first semifinal between Hockey Association of Odisha and Hockey Chandigarh, there was nothing to separate the two sides in regulation time as the match ended 2-2 after 60 minutes. In the shoot-out,



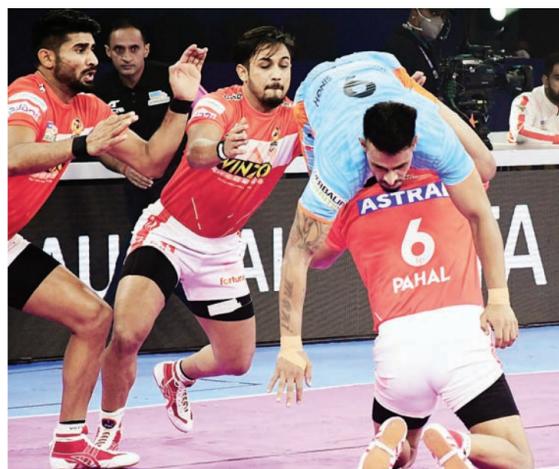
Hockey Chandigarh held their nerves to secure a 3-0 win. After Sudeep Chirmako (11') gave Hockey Association of Odisha the lead, Hockey Chandigarh responded with two quick-fire goals from captain Rahul (17') and Raman (18') in the second quarter. Prasant Lakra equalised for Hockey Association of Odisha in the

37th minute, and the match then proceeded to the shoot-out to decide a winner. The second semifinal was a picture in contrast as Uttar Pradesh Hockey recorded a comprehensive 8-3 victory over Hockey Haryana. Junior World Cupper Sharda Nand Tiwari (13', 16', 28'), who has been in red-hot form throughout the competition, became the leading scorer of the tournament with yet another hat-trick on the big stage. His efforts were supplemented by another hat-trick from Arun Sahani (31', 35', 47') and a brace from Uttam Singh (23', 60'). Pankaj scored a treble for Hockey Haryana (38', 43', 60+') but that proved insufficient to stop Uttar Pradesh Hockey.

## PKL 8: DABANG DELHI, BENGAL WARRIORS SEEK TO MAINTAIN PERFECT RUN

Bengaluru | Agencies

The first double-header Sunday of Pro Kabaddi League Season 8 will see Dabang Delhi K.C. led by the brilliant Naveen Kumar take on Gujarat Giants' experienced defence at the Sheraton Grand, Whitefield. The match will be followed by defending champions Bengal Warriors' face-off against Bengaluru Bulls. Dabang Delhi K.C. have begun the tournament just like they left in Season 7, picking up important victories in their first two matches. Naveen Kumar already has two Super 10s (10 points or more) in the tournament and became the fastest raider to cross 500 points in PKL history. Naveen will however face a defence manned by the likes of Ravinder Pahal, Girish Ernak, and Parvesh Bhainswal when Delhi lock horns with the Gujarat Giants on Sunday. The Giants lost their previous match against a well-oiled Bengal Warriors side but it only feels a matter



of time that their cover and corner defenders get their combinations right. And once they do, Gujarat will be a formidable side.

U Mumbai had a game plan to stifle Naveen Kumar in Delhi's last match, but the younger raider proved his versatility to overcome a strong chal-

lenge. His pace and agility will once again be Delhi's main attacking weapon with Vijay and Ajay Thakur assisting. Manjeet Chhillar has been error-prone in the first two matches and it will be interesting to see if he continues to be selected in the starting 7. Gujarat's lack of a top raider might afford Delhi defence some breathing space, however. Warriors keep marching on Defending champions Bengal Warriors might not have dominated in their first two matches but they still secured two vital wins. Captain Maninder Singh and all-rounder Mohammad Esmail Nabilakhsar will once again be the key figures for the Warriors who will also have the tactical acumen of coach BC Ramesh to rely on. Raider Pawan Sehrawat hasn't got the flying start he would have expected but with Chandran Ranjit and young Bharat chipping in, the Bulls have looked like a solid unit. If the Bulls can keep the Bengal raiders quiet, the match will certainly turn in their favour.

## ASHES: ENGLAND HOPE TO LAND A PUNCH IN BOXING DAY TEST

Melbourne | Agencies

England Test captain Joe Root would be hoping that the four changes he has effected in the playing XI on the eve of the Boxing Day Test help his side claw back and make a fresh bid to regain the urn, which looks as good as lost after the humiliation in the first two Ashes games. The tourists lost the opening Test at The Gabba by nine wickets, which was followed by a 275-run humiliation at the Adelaide Oval. And, going into the traditional Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) from December 26, Root's men are staring down the barrel of losing the series within 14 days of play. Despite the efforts put in by Root and No.3 batter David Malan, runs have been scarce for the tourists, giving their bowlers little chance to



claw things back. With Pat Cummins returning to lead Australia after a Covid-enforced quarantine break, England will once again be at the mercy of a potent bowling attack that will have the likes of the captain himself, Mitchell Starc, Test debutant Scott Boland, Cameron Green and spinner Nathan Lyon. England will hope to emulate their batting form from the 2017 Boxing Day Test if they are to nurture any

hopes of denying a series-deciding result to the hosts. With the ball, there have been glimpses of quality, even if tactics and execution have been wayward. Spoiled by poor discipline and dropped chances, the likes of Stuart Broad, James Anderson and Ollie Robinson have provided highlights despite the disappointing start. On the Australian side, they'll be the favourites to win at the MCG and retain the Ashes, with only a historically docile MCG wicket seemingly in their way. The Ashes Test four years ago saw the now-retired Alastair Cook smash an unbeaten 244 across Day 2 and 3. Either side of Cook's fifth and final Test doubleton, David Warner and Steve Smith also made hundreds, with the match ending in a tame draw. After missing the Adelaide Test, Cummins will return as captain, taking back the reins from Smith, who

will move back into the vice-captain's role. Smith with the bat looked in good touch even with the burden of captaincy, making 93 in the first innings in Adelaide, complementing the work of David Warner (95) and Marnus Labuschagne (103), who also made a half-century in the second innings. The performance moved Labuschagne to the ICC Test No.1 ranking for batting. England pushed the Adelaide Test into the final session of Day 5, though the late finish belied Australia's dominance, with the hosts winning by 275 runs after not enforcing the follow-on. Labuschagne is almost in his own world at the moment. The fifth-fastest player to 2,000 Test runs, the right-hander provides stability at No.3 in the batting order, blunting the new-ball threat and moving up the gears through shots around the wicket with compact technique.

## Cricketer Abid Ali begins rehabilitation after undergoing angioplasty

Karachi | Agencies

Pakistan Test cricketer Abid Ali has begun rehabilitation after undergoing an angioplasty procedure following complaint of chest pain during a Quaid-e-Azam Trophy fixture recently. The 34-year-old Central Punjab player had complained of chest pain twice while batting against Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at the UBL Cricket Ground here on December 21. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had then issued a statement saying that the batter had been diagnosed with acute coronary syndrome. "As part of his rehabilitation process, he (Abid) did light walking in the morning without showing any discomfort. He will continue his rehab in the hospital until he is discharged early next week," a PCB statement said. After undergoing the procedure, Abid had recorded a video message where he requested fans to pray for him. "I am thankful to God as I am faring well. I request all of you to pray for me as I have a small medical procedure tomorrow. So I request all my family



members, fans and all my well-wishers to pray for me," Abid had said. Abid Ali returned to play for his domestic side Central Punjab after a brilliant outing in the two Tests against Bangladesh. He scored 133 and 91 in the two innings of the first Test in Dhaka and was awarded the 'Player of the Match' in Pakistan's eight-wicket win. In the second Test, he scored 39 in Pakistan's only innings as the visitors secured a thrilling innings win by eight wickets to finish a clean sweep. He finished as the highest run-getter in the series and took home the 'Player of the Series' award.

## Pakistan spinner Shadab Khan joins Sydney Sixers in BBL

Sydney | Agencies

Pakistani leg-spinner Shadab Khan has joined two-time defending champions Sydney Sixers for the remainder of the Big Bash League- 11 season. Shadab has joined the Sixers as an overseas player and comes following a season-ending neck stress fracture for 24-year-old Australian off-spinner Ben Manenti and short-term calf strain to veteran spinner Steve O'Keefe. The 23-year-old Shadab made his debut for Pakistan in all three formats while still a teenager and now has 64 T20I matches under his belt, having taken 73 wickets at an economy rate of 7.11. He also averages 18.33 with the bat at a strike rate of 136.81. At the 2021 ICC T20 World



Cup, Shadab played in all six matches for Pakistan, taking nine wickets, including a haul of 4/26 and the scalps of Dave Warner, Mitch Marsh, Steve Smith and Glenn Maxwell in their five-wicket loss to Australia. Shadab played three matches for the Brisbane Heat in the middle of BBL-7, snaring two wickets in each of his outings. Sixers head coach Greg Shipperd said he was excited at the prospect of working with Shadab. "Shadab joins us as cover for

the bowlers we have lost and comes together with two other young and exciting spinners in Lloyd Pope and Todd Murphy (both Australian)," Shipperd said. "All three young men are still learning their craft but have shown at various levels that they can be world class. We welcome Shadab's skills in all three facets of the game and can't wait to see him get an opportunity in coming matches." The Sixers next play the Sydney Thunder in the Sydney Smash on Boxing Day at Sydney Showground Stadium, followed by the Brisbane Heat at the SCG on December 29. They then head on a five-match road trip that includes two big fixtures at their second home, Coffs Harbour on January 1 and 9.

## NFT Auction: Bat signed by 2011 World Cup winning team fetches USD 25,000

A bat signed by the 2011 World Cup-winning Indian cricket team was sold for USD 25,000 (Rs 18,76,000), while Australia batter David Warner's 2016 IPL-winning signed SunRisers Hyderabad jersey fetched the highest bid of USD 30,000 (Rs 22,51,200) in a non-fungible token (NFT) auction in Dubai.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

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Friday. With an exclusive collection of 23 rare artifacts of world cricket, includ-

ing the official souvenir and team autographs from India's maiden tour to England in 1932 were sold for

USD14,500 (INR 10,88,080) and USD14,000 (INR 10,50,560) respectively. The auction roaster also saw the Don Brandman signed NFT stamp being sold for USD 26,600 (INR19,96,064). Lata Mangeskar's concert recording for the 1983 World Cup-winning team was bought for USD 21,000 (Rs 15,75,740) while Balasaheb Thackeray cartoons and autographs from India's first tour of Pakistan in 1952 were auctioned for USD 15,000 (Rs 11,25,528). Meanwhile, the digital rights of India's first-ever Test skipper CK Nayudu's collection, including his original bank account book and passport, were sold for USD 7500 and USD 9800 respectively. Veteran India pacer Jhulan Goswami's 2017 World Cup semi-final jersey fetched USD 10,000. It was also the first-ever NFT from the women's cricketing world.



## 'Bigg Boss 15': Salman Khan celebrates pre-birthday bash with 'RRR' team



Team Absolute | Mumbai

**B**ollywood superstar Salman Khan is turning 56 on Monday and he had a pre-birthday celebration on the sets of 'Bigg Boss 15' with the team of the upcoming pan-India epic 'RRR'.

In the upcoming episode, Salman will be celebrating his birthday in advance. Actors Alia Bhatt, Jr NTR, Ram Charan and director S.S. Rajamouli visited the sets to promote their upcoming film 'RRR'. Alia took this opportunity to wish Salman in her own style.

She opened the episode herself by greeting the viewers and welcomed host Salman by singing a birthday song for him with a live band. To amp up the celebrations and entertainment, Salman invited filmmaker Rajamouli, actors Jr NTR and Ramcharan on the stage to join Alia. To make Salman's day even more special, Alia informs him that the contestants have a surprise for him in store. As all of them virtually meet the contestants through 'MeTV', the housemates give a power-packed performance on Salman's super hit songs which brought a big smile to his face. Salman too was seen grooving along with the housemates and even performed his hook steps. Concluding the celebrations on a sweet note, Rajamouli got a cake for Salman, calling it a small gift from the cast.

Overwhelmed by the gestures, Salman thanks the 'RRR' cast and cuts the cake with them as well as the housemates.

## Hrithik, Deepika welcome Anil Kapoor to 'Fighter'

**Mumbai:** As actor Anil Kapoor joined the cast of 'Fighter', actors Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone gave him a warm welcome. The news about Anil joining the

film was revealed on his 62nd birthday on Friday. Hrithik posted a picture posing with Anil and the film's director Siddharth Anand. He captioned the image: "Happiest Birthday to

the man who grows younger each year in spirit and health, @anil Kapoor! Best wishes to you Sir. From witnessing your legendary presence on sets as a mere assistant, to finally having the opportunity of sharing the screen with you.. Super excited for #Fighter!." Deepika too shared the same picture on her Instagram story and wrote: "Welcome to 'Fighter' birthday boy." Touted as India's first aerial action franchise, 'Fighter' will see Hrithik collaborating with Deepika onscreen for the first time ever.



Kriti Sanon and Tiger Shroff recreate 'Heropanti' pose

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**K**riti Sanon and her 'Ganapath' co-star Tiger Shroff recently recreated the poster look from their debut film 'Heropanti'. The actress took to her Instagram and shared three pictures with Tiger with the first picture showcasing the recreated pose. Kriti wrote in her caption, "And we tried to recreate what we started with.. but as you swipe right, you'll see the warmth and fondness come alive! It's been almost 8 yrs since we started our journey together! We've both grown, evolved and come a long way (sic)."

She further adds, "but deep within, I guess we are still the same! (Just pretending to be more mature versions of the newbies we were) It was such a great feeling to be back on a set with you Tigy! @tigerjackieshroff, see you super soon for the next schedule #Ganapath".

The pictures show their evolution not just as actors but also as human beings in their own personal space.

'Heropanti', which released in 2014, was directed by Sabbir Khan and was a remake of Telugu film 'Parugu'. In addition to Kriti and Tiger, the film also starred Prakash Raj in a negative role. Talking about

'Ganapath', the film recently saw its schedule wrap in London. The makers also released a special countdown motion poster of the film

which is slated to arrive in theatres on December 23, 2022.

## SAYANTANI GHOSH COMPLETES ONE YEAR IN 'TERA YAAR HOON MAIN'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctress Sayantani Ghosh, who plays Daljeet Bagga in 'Tera Yaar Hoon Main', has completed a year in the light-hearted family show. Talking about her journey as Daljeet on the show, Sayantani said, "I still remember I was at home in Kolkata on a Christmas break when I got the call to play Daljeet... I got to be a part of Sony SAB for the first time in a light-hearted comedy genre and also play a Punjabi girl, which I've never done before, so it was a no-brainer for me and I jumped at the opportunity." She recalled receiving an award for 'The Most Popular Face' last week, so she is very grateful that the fans connected with Daljeet and showed her so much love. "My entire journey has been absolutely great, and I've juggled between two contrasting emotions - getting married in real life and being the happiest that I have ever been, as well as playing a distressed mother in real life. It was challenging yet a gratifying experience for me as an actor." Sayantani further talks about her character Daljeet: "What makes Daljeet so special is that she wears her heart on her sleeves and speaks her mind. She is a strong independent woman who brilliantly managed being a single mother and a career-oriented woman at the same time." "It was beautiful to see that when life gave her a second chance with love, she took it with a stride, and the fans really loved Daljeet and Rajeev's pair and called them Daljeev." 'Tera Yaar Hoon Main' airs on Sony SAB.

## Kareena comes out of isolation to attend Kapoor family Xmas bash

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**T**he Kapoor family attended the customary Christmas lunch at the residence of Kunal Kapoor in Mumbai's Juhu on Saturday.

Kunal, the son of the late Shashi Kapoor and Jennifer Kendal, continues to keep the spirit of the tradition alive, which was started by his mother over 30 years back.

Kareena Kapoor, who tested negative after contracting Covid and isolating herself for more than 10 days, attended the event with her husband Saif Ali Khan and their kids, Taimur and Jeh.

While Kareena donned a black T-shirt paired with leather pants, Saif too kept it casual with a blue T-shirt and a pair of denims. Matching Saif's colour palette was the couple's young son Jeh who was also seen wearing a blue shirt and denims. Taimur wore a light pink-coloured Kurta.

Apart from Kareena, Aadar Jain (son of Rishi Kapoor's sister Rima Jain) showed up with his plus one Tara Sutaria, who donned a white gown. Aadar's brother Armaan Jain came along with his wife Anissa.

In addition, the children of Shweta Bachchan Nanda - Navya Naveli Nanda and her brother Agastya Nanda were also a part of the family gathering.

Shweta Bachchan Nanda is married to Nikhil Nanda, who is the chairman and managing director of Escorts Limited. Nikhil is the son of Raj Kapoor's daughter Ritu Nanda and Rajan Nanda.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

**T**he audio-visual montage from Tovino Thomas-starrer 'Minnal Murali' was recently displayed at the Ain Dubai observation wheel.

Ain Dubai, which is located on Bluewaters Island, is known as the world's largest observation wheel.

Tovino, who plays the titular superhero in the film, took to his Instagram and shared a video of the same with the film's team enjoying the beam show. He wrote in the caption, "This video is proof that Minnal Murali can take you for a HUGE spin. Minnal Murali, now streaming in Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi and English."

The film, which was released on Friday, has garnered a positive response from the audience and critics alike.

Talking about the response to the film, director Basil Joseph said: "Hard work always pays off, and I am so glad our labour of love is being appreciated by the audience. I am overwhelmed with the kind of response and messages I have been receiving

since the launch of 'Minnal Murali'."

He added: "It's just been a day and my social media is flooded with messages. I couldn't have imagined anything better than this ever. Thank you to all the people who have loved and appreciated our work. A huge shoutout to Netflix and Weekend Blockbusters, our producers for always supporting us and helping us take this movie across the globe."

Expressing his excitement, Tovino Thomas said: "No words can express how I'm feeling at the moment, it's been a dream come true to see such a wonderful response from everyone around. Becoming 'Minnal Murali' was challenging but the output has been wonderful. Basil is a visionary and I'm thrilled that he trusted me with this role. I want to thank our producer Sophia Paul for backing us through this mammoth project and Netflix for taking this to the world."

'MINNAL MURALI' TELEPORTS TO UAE, FILM'S AV MONTAGE LIGHTS UP AIN DUBAI

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Mukti Mohan