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India's Nov wholesale price inflation rises to over 14%

Higher prices of commodities, food items and manufactured products lifted India's November wholesale inflation on both sequential and year-on-year basis. Accordingly, the annual rate of inflation, based on wholesale prices, rose to 14.23 per cent last month from 12.54 per cent in October. Similarly, on a YoY basis, the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) data furnished by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has risen exponentially over November 2020, when it stood at 2.29 per cent.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's wholesale inflation quickened to the fastest pace in three decades on input costs fueled by high commodity prices and supply constraints, according to Bloomberg. Wholesale

prices rose 14.2% in November from a year earlier, data released by the Commerce Ministry showed today. That's faster than the median estimate of an about 12% gain in a Bloomberg survey of 19 economists, and is the highest level since December 1991 when the print came in at

14.3%.

Factory-gate inflation has stayed in double digits this financial year that began in April as companies pay more for raw materials amid a rally in global commodity prices and a supply crunch.

Prices of food articles rose 4.9%, fuel and power prices jumped 39.8%, and manufactured products posted an increase of 11.9%.

The spike "has come as a shock," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist at ICRA Ltd., the Indian unit of Moody's Investors Service. Most non-core categories displayed "an inflation rate that was much steeper than expected," she said.

Elevated prices at the wholesale level could be passed onto retail consumers, "posing upside risks to our forecast CPI trajectory in the coming months," Barclays said in a note.



Data released separately on Monday showed retail inflation inched closer to 5% in November, amid rising costs of food and commodities.

"The high rate of inflation in November 2021 is primarily due to rise in prices of mineral oils, basic metals, crude petroleum and natural gas, chemicals and chemical products, food products, etc., as compared to the corresponding month of the previous year."

Ministry of Commerce

LAKHIMPUR KHERI INCIDENT WAS WELL PLANNED: SIT

LAKHIMPUR KHERI | Agencies

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the October 3 Lakhimpur Kheri violence, has filed an application before the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) to include new sections against the 13 accused to make their offence punishable under attempt to murder charges. Vidhyaram Diwakar, the SIT investigating officer, filed the application



"So far, it has been proved from the analysis and collected evidence that the accused did not commit the criminal act out of negligence and disregard, but intentionally, with the motive of killing the farmers according to a pre-planned strategy, due to which five people have died."

Vidhyaram Diwakar, SIT Chief Investigating Officer

last week in the CJM's court for adding new sections in the warrant, replacing sections 279, 338 and 304A of the IPC. In his application, the investigating officer pointed out that the incident was well-planned and a deliberate act, and not of negligence or callousness. The investigating officer has requested to add Sections 307 (attempt to murder), 326 (Voluntarily causing grievous hurt by dangerous weapons or means), 34 (Acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) of the Indian Penal Code after replacing sections 279 (Rash driving or riding on a public way), 338 (Whoever causes grievous hurt to any person by doing any act so rashly or negligently) and 304A (Causing death by negligence) of the IPC. On October 3, eight people, including four protesting farmers, died after being mowed down by a SUV belonging to Union Minister Ajay Mishra Teni's son Ashish Mishra. A local journalist was also killed in

the violence. The SIT has so far arrested Ashish Mishra, Luvkush, Ashish Pandey, Shekhar Bharti, Ankit Das, Latif, Sishupal, Nandan Singh, Satyam Tripathi, Sumit Jaiswal, Dharmendra Banjara, Rinku Rana and Ullas Trivedi. They are lodged in the Lakhimpur Kheri district jail. Meanwhile, the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court has given two weeks' time to the state government to file a counter-affidavit on Ashish Mishra's bail application. During the hearing of the case, additional advocate general Vinod Shahi apprised the court about the ongoing investigation. Shahi said that statements of a large number of witnesses were still to be recorded. Meanwhile, political parties have demanded the removal of the MoS, Home. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and Congress UP president Ajay Kumar Lallu have demanded that Teni be sacked immediately to ensure a fair investigation in the case.

Lakhimpur Kheri SIT investigation vindicates our stand: SKM

New Delhi: Taking cognizance of the SIT's latest report into the Lakhimpur Kheri massacre on Tuesday, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha said it reaffirmed the stand of protesting farmers that the incident was pre-planned. "The chief mastermind of the incident, Ajay Mishra Teni continues to roam free, and hold his position in the Union Government. In the light of the latest findings, SKM demands that the Modi government stop shielding this 'conspirator of the Kisan massacre in Lakhimpur Kheri,'" a statement from the SKM said. Reiterating its demand for dismissal and arrest of senior Mishra, the SKM said that it shall continue its struggle on this issue. "Indian farmers shall not forget this massacre, till we secure justice for the victims."

8 new Omicron cases in Mumbai, Palghar, Maha tally zooms to 28

- The cases include seven in Mumbai and one in Palghar. Of these, three are women and five men, but none of them have a history of international travel though one had gone to New Delhi and another to Bengaluru.
- One patient hails from Rajasthan, and seven out of the new infectees have been fully vaccinated.
- Three of them are asymptomatic and five have mild symptoms. Two have been admitted to hospital for treatment and the rest are in home care under quarantine.



said on Tuesday. Presently, Maharashtra's Omicron cases are spread in several regions including Mumbai and Pune districts with 12 patients each, and Palghar, Thane, Latur, and Nagpur with one infectee each. Intensive surveillance of passengers arriving at the three international airports - Mumbai, Pune and

Nagpur - is currently underway since December 1. A total of 13,615 have reached here from the "high risk" countries of which 30 have tested positive and 8 from other countries, with all their reports sent for genomic sequencing to confirm if they are afflicted by Omicron, said the officials.

VACCINE FOR 3+ KIDS BY MID-2022: ADAR POONAWALLA

Mumbai: The Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII) will launch Covavax -- its vaccine for children aged above 3 years -- in the next six months, SII CEO Adar Poonawalla said here on Tuesday. Covavax is currently under trial and has shown excellent results down to the age of 3 years, Poonawalla said while addressing an event at the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII). While not commenting on what would happen with the Covid-19 variant Omicron, Poonawalla said so far children have not been affected by it very badly. He advised people to get their children vaccinated as the vaccines are safe and effective. Presently, India has approved only one vaccine for children above 12 years, manufactured by Zydus Healthcare, for emergency use.



At least 60 "Burned Alive" in Haiti gas tanker explosion

Port-au-Prince: At least 60 people were killed when a gas tanker truck exploded in the Haitian city of Cap-Haitien on Tuesday morning, a local official said, with overwhelmed medics saying the toll was feared to rise. The blast is the latest disaster to hit the poverty-racked Caribbean nation, where violent gangs have triggered crippling fuel shortages by choking off supply, and the president's assassination five months ago has yet to be elucidated. "We have now counted 60 deaths," Deputy Mayor Patrick Almonor said, adding that authorities were still searching for additional victims amid the charred debris in Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second-largest city located on the northern coast. According to Almonor, the truck is believed to have flipped over after the driver lost control while swerving to avoid a motorcycle taxi. Fuel spilled onto the road and pedestrians apparently rushed to collect the tanker's gas. Almonor said around 20 houses in the area were also set ablaze, but that no details were yet available on possible victim numbers inside the homes.

Sonia meets opposition leaders to chalk out common strategy

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress President Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday met opposition leaders of DMK, NC, Shiv Sena, NCP to chalk out parliamentary strategy and how the like minded parties can work together. The meeting comes in response to Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee who categorically said that there is no UPA now. The leaders present in the meeting include Sharad Pawar, T.R. Baalu, Farooq Abdullah and Sanjay Raut. Rahul Gandhi was also



present in the meeting. After the meeting, Baalu said, "we discussed the suspension of the MPs from Rajya Sabha," while Farooq Abdullah of the National Conference said that a consensus has been built to devise common strategy to move forward. "We talked about the current state of the nation and how we can work together and move forward in the interest of the nation," Abdullah added. The crucial importance of having double-lane roads for swift movement of the Armed Forces. A bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud emphasised that it is essential to strike a balance, when there is need to widen strategic roads, important for national security, and the principle

the MPs. In the meeting it has been decided that the MPs will not offer apology as the government has demanded from them. The like minded opposition leaders of both the houses of Parliament met in the office of Leader of opposition Mallikarjun Kharge. The opposition leaders took out a march in solidarity with the suspended MPs. The opposition and the government are on loggerheads on the issue and on Monday the upper house witnessed disruptions with opposition demanding revocation of the suspension.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Veteran RSS preacher and BJP leader Bhagwat Sharan Mathur took his last breath on Tuesday. He was a key strategist and counselor of BJP. Hailing from Rajgarh Madhya Pradesh, Mathur served BJP as a Sambhag Sangathan Mantri, Pradesh Sangathan Mantri, Haryana and Sah-Sangathan Mahamantri to Madhya Pradesh BJP. He was ill from months. Mathur's demise is a blow to BJP and RSS. Prominent leaders paid their condolences on his demise. Mathur's body will be kept today from 11.00 AM at state BJP office for last condolences and cremated Post Meridian, at Subhash Vishram Ghat.



'Fulfilling security concerns'

SC allows double lane roads on Chardham highway project

- In 2018, the Centre's notification said that the road width cannot exceed 5.5 meters in the hilly terrains like the one through which Chardham project is proposed. In September 2020, the top court directed the government to keep the width of the Chardham road at 5.5 meters.
- In December, 2020, the Defence Ministry had sought permission from the top court to widen roads for national security, and contended that three national highways -- Rishikesh to Mana, Rishikesh to Gangotri and Tanakpur to Pithoragarh -- lead up to the northern border with China, which act as feeder roads.
- The Chardham highway is a 900-kilometre road project to provide all-weather connectivity to the four Hindu pilgrimage centres in Uttarakhand.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday allowed double lane paved shoulder configuration for Chardham road project, a prestigious project of the NDA government, taking into consideration the recent security challenges, at India-China border, and the strategic importance of having double-lane roads for swift movement of the Armed Forces. A bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud emphasised that it is essential to strike a balance, when there is need to widen strategic roads, important for national security, and the principle



sustainable development, which is crucial to protect the environment. The bench said this court can't second-guess the infrastructural needs of the Armed Forces. The top court also constituted an oversight committee, led by former Supreme Court judge Justice A.K. Sikri, to ensure all remedial measures are taken in the interest of the environment and the

recommendations of the high-power committee are implemented in the project. The top court pointed out that there is no mala fide in the application filed by the Ministry of Defence to widen the roads for the operational requirement of the Armed Forces. The bench said the highways, which are strategic roads for the forces, cannot be compared to any other hilly or mountainous roads. The top court was hearing a plea filed by an NGO 'Citizens for Green Door' seeking direction to stop felling of trees without clearances on the Ganeshpur-Dehradun Road (NH-72A), which is a part of the Delhi-Dehradun expressway.



PM ASKS CMS TO FOCUS ON GOOD GOVERNANCE

Varanasi | Agencies

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday asked the Chief Ministers of BJP ruled states to focus firmly on good governance and maintain a connect with party workers.

Addressing a four-and-a-half hour marathon meeting of 12 Chief Ministers and Deputy Chief Ministers from Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura, Modi underlined the need to remain focussed on good governance in order to ensure re-election.

He also asked them to make sure that implementation of welfare schemes was done in a proper manner and the benefits reached the target groups.

Modi asked the Chief Ministers to make sure that



they remain connected with party cadres and also ensure communication between legislators and party workers. According to sources, the Prime Minister took feedback from each of the Chief Ministers about the state of development in their states. He patiently heard out the problems and hurdles of various states.

The Chief Ministers gave their report about the state of affairs in their respective states and also the steps

taken to resolve issues.

Modi was particularly concerned about states that are going to polls next year and gave inputs on how to further improve the situation. "The Prime Minister was perfectly clued in with ground realities in each state and gave us valuable advice on key issues. The marathon meeting gave all of us ample opportunity for discussion," said one of the Chief Ministers who did not wish to be named.

Nagaland violence: Naga body imposes 'curbs' of army, para-military movement

Kohima | Agencies

Naga civil society organisations have continued to impose "total restrictions" on the movement of the army and para-military in the Konyak tribal dominated areas of Nagaland, tribal leaders said on Tuesday.

Konyaks are one of the prominent among the 16 tribes in Nagaland, where over 86 per cent of the two million population is from the tribal community.

Konyak Union President S. Howing Konyak and other tribal leaders said that according to a resolution adopted during the KU advisory board meeting on Sunday, the civil society organisations (CSO) under the banner of the KU's "Non Cooperation" move against the Indian military and para-military forces would continue until the guilty were punished.

"Total restrictions on Indian military force convoys and patrolling within Konyak's soil continue until justice is delivered against the killing of 14 innocent Konyak youths on December 4," he told the media in Kohima.



The KU President said that no military recruitment rally within Mon district would be allowed and no Konyak youth would participate in any recruitment rally.

The KU, in a statement, said that the CSO would continue their agitation in various forms in support of the four point demands including repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958.

It said that the first phase of agitation against the "tyranny" of the Indian armed force shall begin on

December 16 with a public rally in Mon district.

"... as a sign of resentment, hoisting of black flags on every vehicle, black badges to be worn by all and flags at half mast in offices shall be continued until justice is delivered," the statement said.

Since December 4, the CSOs have been organising various commemorative and protest events across Nagaland, including in capital city Kohima.

Konyak civil society organisations

here on Monday said that no ex-gratia or compensation from the government would be accepted until justice was delivered to all the 14 victims, including the survivors and family members of the December 4 incident. The Central government and the state government had earlier announced a total ex-gratia of Rs 16 lakh and Rs 1.5 lakh to the kin of the slain and injured civilians, respectively, after the December 4 firing by the security forces that left 14 civilians killed and 30 others injured in Mon district of northern Nagaland.

Meanwhile, the Special Investigation Team (SIT), constituted by the state government to probe the December 4 incident, continued their investigation.

The 5-member SIT continued its investigation under the overall supervision of Additional Director General of Police, Law and Order, Sandeep M. Tamgadge and submit its report within January 4.

The Nagaland government last week has decided to hold a special session of the Assembly on December 20 to discuss and pass a resolution for repealing the AFSPA.

Mandatory for int'l passengers to pre-book RT-PCR tests: Centre

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre on Tuesday made it mandatory for international passengers arriving in India to pre-book RT-PCR test.

The international passengers arriving at six major Indian airports would be required to pre-book their tests.

"The 'Air Suvridha' portal would be modified to allow the passengers to pre-book their RT-PCR test if they are coming from the 'AT RISK' countries or have visited 'AT RISK' countries in the last 14 days," Ministry of Civil Aviation said in an office memorandum on Tuesday.

"Link to the concerned airport website would be provided on the Air Suvridha platform, which would be displayed to the passengers while they fill up the self-declaration form



(SDF)," it added. As per the memorandum, to standardise the system and to ensure that the passengers do not face any

problem in pre-booking, it may be implemented in six Metro cities, namely Delhi, Mumbai Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad in the first phase.

"Considering the convenience of the travellers, a lead time of a week would be provided, i.e., for the new system to come into effect on December 20," the statement said.

"DGCA is requested to issue an advisory to all the airlines to check mandatory pre-booking of their passengers before they board the flight," he added. The memorandum also said that in case any passenger is having any difficulty in pre-booking, he/she may not be denied boarding, but it would be the responsibility of the airlines to identify and accompany such passengers to the registration counter at the airport for testing.

Drunk cop held in Bihar's Gopalganj, suspended from service

Patna | Agencies

An Assistant Sub-Inspector of the Bihar Police was arrested after he was found in an allegedly drunken stage in Kateya village under same police station area of Gopalganj district, an official said on Tuesday.

The incident came to the light after the officer named Chandrama Ram went to the village to search liquor in a house, and allegedly harassed women.

The act of Chandrama Ram made the villagers angry. When they objected, he shouted at them and



asked them to stay away from the search operation of police. However, the villagers detected the smell of liquor from his mouth, overpowered him and also made the video of the inci-

dent.

The video went viral on social media and clips were also sent to district SP Anand Kumar and other officers. "We have learnt about the incident through video sent by the villagers. Accordingly, the SHO of Kateya police station arrested the ASI. He found positive in the breath analyser. We have immediately suspended him and an FIR has also been registered against him," Anand Kumar said.

Meanwhile, the Home Department has given charge to senior IPS officers to strictly implement liquor prohibition law in the state.

6 killed, 3 injured in road accident in J&K's Ramban dist

Srinagar | Agencies

At least six people died and 3 were injured on Tuesday in a road accident in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district.

Police sources said the accident occurred near Chichater in Rajgarh area of Ramban district.

"Six people are feared dead while 3 were injured in this accident that involved a tempo vehicle", sources said.

Senior civil and police officers have rushed to the accident site to supervise rescue and relief operation there.



BJP's sunset will begin from Goa, says Mamata after alliance with MGP

Panaji | Agencies

Reinvigorated by her party's alliance with the Maharashtra Gomatant Party (MGP) in Goa, West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee said on Tuesday that the sunset of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party would begin from Goa, which is headed for polls in early 2022.

Addressing a public meeting near Panaji to formally announce the party's alliance with the regional political outfit, Banerjee also slammed the BJP for trying to 'communalise' issues ahead of the elections, while keeping mum on key issues like inflation and rise in prices of essential commodities in the country.

"Goa is India, do not think Goa is very small. Sunrise happens from Goa. When Goa smiles, India smiles. BJP's sunset will also begin from Goa, from UP, Punjab... throughout the country," Banerjee



said at the public meeting. "To usher in a new dawn in Goa, we will have to say no to 'dadagiri' from Delhi. Say no to BJP. Only Trinamool and MGP," Banerjee added. Slamming the BJP for trying to

'communalise' the atmosphere ahead of elections, Banerjee said: "The Hindu, Muslim rhetoric is raised only during elections. Riots occur only during elections. But after elections, the dead bodies flow in the Ganga. No one remem-

bers that," Banerjee said.

She also questioned the BJP's silence over critical issues like price rise as well as the incident in Lakhimpur Kheri in which farmers were trampled by a vehicle, in which a Union minister's son is the prime accused.

"The BJP has a standard narrative. They do not speak about real issues. How many times have you (BJP) raised your voice about the price of petrol? How many times have you raised the issue of diesel price? How many times have people had to face harassment due to demonetisation," Banerjee asked.

"What have you done in Goa and India? Now you are targeting the Railways. The public sector is being shut down now. BJP minister's son trampled farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri. The SIT has submitted its report to the court and said that the incident was pre-planned. Should the UP minister not resign? Should the Home Minister not resign? Should the PM not speak about this," she asked.

On average 31 minors died everyday by suicide in 2020: Govt in LS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As many as 11,396 children (below 18 years) have died by suicide in the year 2020, taking out an average of 31 minor deaths per day, according to the data furnished by the government in Parliament on Tuesday. "As per available information [by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)], the total number of suicide committed by children (below 18 years) during the last three years were 9431 in 2018, 9613 in 2019 and 11396 in 2020," Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Kumar Mishra said in a written reply in Lok Sabha. The government did not furnish the data of suicide by minors in the current year. The Minister said the Education Ministry has undertaken a proactive initiative, named 'Manodarpan' covering a wide range of activities to provide psychosocial support to students, teachers and families for Mental Health and Emotional Well being during the Covid outbreak and



beyond. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP from Tamil Nadu, T. R. Paarivendhar, in his question, had asked the government whether there was any rise in the cases of child suicide in the past three years. Minister Mishra informed that a webpage for 'Manodarpan' has been created on

the website of the Ministry of Education, which contains advisory, practical tips, posters, videos, do's and don'ts for psychosocial support, FAQs and online query system. Further, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has started 'NCERT

Counselling Services for School Children' in April, 2020 to help school students across the country share their concerns. This service is provided free of charge by about 270 counsellors across different regions of the country, the government added. The Minister further stated that mental healthcare services have also been added in the package of services under Comprehensive Primary Health Care under Ayushman Bharat-HWC Scheme. Operational guidelines on Mental, Neurological, and Substance Use Disorders (MNs) at Health and Wellness Centres (HWC) have been released under the ambit of Ayushman Bharat. Mishra apprised that the Ministry of Women and Child Development has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NIMHANS to establish a National Initiative & Integrated Resource Centre for Child Protection, Mental Health, and Psychosocial Care named "SAMVAD" at NIMHANS, at Bangalore.

Covid: Over 55% of India's eligible population fully vaccinated

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India on Tuesday achieved another milestone in its fight against Covid-19 pandemic with the administration of vaccines to over 55 per cent of the eligible population so far. In total, the country has administered 134 crore jabs under the mass vaccination drive. "With over 55 per cent of the eligible population fully vaccinated now, India has achieved another milestone in its fight against Covid-19," Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya tweeted. "Prime Minister's Har Ghar Dastak campaign has further strengthened the nation's collective fight against Covid-19," he further tweeted. As per the Health Ministry data on Tuesday morning, over 11.87 crore (11,87,51,430) people above the age of 60 years have



been administered with the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine and 8,65,53,818 people in this age group are fully vaccinated. A total of more than 1.03 crore (1,03,85,716) healthcare workers have been administered first dose, while over 96.07 lakh (96,07,316) are fully vaccinated. A total of more than 1.83 crore (1,83,83,175) frontline workers have been inoculated with the first dose, while more than 1.67 crore (1,67,05,166) have the second dose. Among the age

group of 18-44 years, over 47.99 crore (47,99,75,118) people were jabbed the first dose while 27,39,51,712 with the second dose. In the age group of 45-59, a total of over 18.99 crore (18,99,59,003) people have been administered the first dose while over 1.3 crore (13,45,40,063) are fully vaccinated. India reported 5,784 fresh Covid cases in the last 24 hours, which is the lowest in 571 days, taking its overall tally to over 3.47 crore (3,47,03,644), it said.



12 MAHA BJP MLAS SUSPENSION: SC ISSUES NOTICE TO LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Team Absolute | Mumbai | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday issued notice to the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly through its secretary on a petition filed by 12 BJP MLAs challenging their suspension for a year from the Assembly in July for misbehaving with the presiding officer in chair both inside and outside the Assembly.

A bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar said the notice or the pendency of these court proceedings will not come in the way of the suspended MLAs move to urge the House to consider reducing the tenure of their suspension.

The 12 suspended members are - Sanjay Kute, Ashish Shelar, Abhimanyu Pawar, Girish Mahajan, Atul Bhatkalkar, Parag Alavani, Harish Pimpale, Yogesh Sagar, Jay Kumar Rawat, Narayan kuche, Ram Satpute, and Bunty Bhangdia. The MLAs have termed their suspension as politically motivated to whittle down the number of the opposition party. In the Supreme Court, senior



advocates Harish Salve, Mukul Rohatgi, Neeraj Kishan Kaul, and Siddharth Bhatnagar appeared for the petitioners assisted by advocates Siddharth Dharmadhikari and Abhikalp Pratap Singh.

"The impugned resolution has been passed in abject violation of Article 14 of the Constitution of India in as much as no opportunity

of hearing or at least furnishing their written explanation was given to the petitioners. Further, a perusal of the impugned resolution shows that there has been utter non-application of mind in as much as there was no material available for identifying the 12 MLAs from a large crowd of people", said the plea, filed through Singh.

The plea urged the top court to pass a direction to quash the resolution for the suspension of the MLAs.

The top court has scheduled the matter for further hearing on January 11. The plea contended that the resolution does not show as to what was the material relied on while identifying 12 MLAs from a huge crowd of people while bringing the action of suspension. "The impugned resolution alludes to unruly behaviour on the floor of the House and outside the Chamber of the Speaker. The video footage of the alleged incident, which is in public domain shows a large crowd of people and there is absolutely no way of identifying the 12 MLAs who have been suspended", added the plea. The chaos had begun when Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) Minister Chhagan Bhujbal had stood up to introduce a resolution in the Assembly seeking the release of empirical data on the OBCs by the Centre for providing political reservation in the local bodies in the state.

BJP BAGS AKOLA, NAGPUR MLC ELECTIONS

Nagpur/Akola | Agencies

On anticipated lines, the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party bagged the Local Authority constituency polls in Akola and Nagpur seats, an official said here on Tuesday.

The BJP candidates Chandrashekhar Bawankule and Vasant Khandelwal emerged winners in Nagpur and Akola respectively in the elections held last Friday.

Khandelwal trounced his main rival, Maha Vikas Aghadi supported Shiv Sena nominee Gopikisan Bajoria in Akola. In Nagpur, Bawankule romped home after defeating his nearest rival, MVA supported independent candidate Mangesh Deshmukh, after the Congress dumped its official nominee Dr. Ravindra Bhojar at the last minute.

Besides, the BJP and Sena bagged one seat each in Mumbai, BJP also netted Dhule seat and Congress secured Kolhapur, all four unopposed owing to local-level political understandings in the biennial polls.

Riding high on the party's victory in the Maharashtra Legislative Council polls, the BJP on Tuesday said that the 'unholy alliance' of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in the state has been rejected. The saffron party has won four out of the six seats in the Council polls for which elections were held last week.

Bharatiya Janata Party national general secretary and Maharashtra in-charge C T Ravi told IANS that the message is loud and clear that people and elected representatives of the local bodies are against the MVA. "It's a strong message to the MVA leadership that no one in Maharashtra accepts their 'unholy alliance' of



three parties, Shiv Sena, Congress and NCP. Unholy alliance of MVA has been rejected in the Legislative Council polls," Ravi said.

Ravi claimed that the MVA is trying to present a strong mathematical position in the elections but the results show a different picture. "The MVA partners did everything to win the Maharashtra Legislative Council election. But despite being three parties coming together, the MVA was not able to defend Dhule where the mathematics was in their favour. They are concentrating on mathematics but the BJP is focusing on winning people's support through its developmental agenda," Ravi said. He claimed that there is strong resentment within the cadres of the MVA partners and the results are a reflection of that resentment. "Leaders of Shiv Sena, Congress and NCP joined hands to form the MVA government in the state while the cadre is against the unethical alliance formed for the sake of power," he said.

NCB seizes drugs hidden in grocery, stethoscope, helmet, oven, pipes

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Cracking the whip, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has seized banned drugs of different kinds concealed in strange places like grocery and eatables, stethoscope, helmet, oven and pipes, in the past four days, and arrested an Ivorian national, a top official said here on Tuesday.

In total, 2.29 kg Amphetamine, 3.90 kg Opium, and 2.52 kg Zolpidem tablets have been seized, which were bound for various international destinations like Switzerland, Australia, the US, Dubai, Maldives and New Zealand, said NCB Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede.

A consignment of 490 gm Amphetamine from Dongri (South Mumbai) was found



concealed in a stethoscope at Andheri, and another 941 gm of Amphetamine was hidden in bicycle helmets and bangles, both bound for Australia. The NCB seized 3.90 kg Opium stashed in a microwave destined for Maldives, and 2.52 kg Zolpidem tablets concealed in eatables and groceries intended for the US, he said.

Another parcel originating

from Dongri to Dubai and New Zealand revealed 848 gm Amphetamine concealed in hose pipes and tie box, while 17 gm Amphetamine were found in a 1TB computer hard disk bound for Switzerland. "Cases have been registered in all these cases of seizures and further investigations are underway," said Wankhede on the series of swoops.

KAREENA, AMRITA ARORA'S APARTMENT BUILDINGS SEALED

The BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation has sealed four apartment buildings in Bandra-Khar after Bollywood actresses Kareena Kapoor and Amrita Arora tested Covid-19 positive and organised testing camps there, officials said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The development comes a week after Bollywood director Karan Johar threw a private bash for around a dozen people at his home following which the two actresses tested positive on Sunday.

With both showing mild symptoms, the actresses have been shunted to home quarantine and treatment in their sealed flats while the BMC H-West Ward has taken up sanitisation of the four buildings.

In a simultaneous exercise, the civic health authorities have managed to trace around three dozen contacts of the celebs who attended the party at Johar's home last Wednesday and they have been sent for tests, with their reports expected



shortly.

Among others who were present at the party was Seema Khan, wife of actor Sohail Khan whose infection status is not clear, though the host Johar has tested negative.

The buildings which faced the BMC action under the Covid-19 protocols are Satguru Sharan where Kareena Kapoor lives, Sarkar Heritage where Amrita Arora has a flat, Karan Johar's Residency Building, and Seema Khan's Kiran Apartments, besides conducting Covid-19 testing camps as a precaution.

Presently, 15 buildings in the city have been sealed after Covid-19 cases were detected but not a single slum or chawl anywhere is under the BMC's lock.

ANIL DESHMUKH NEVER ASKED FOR MONEY: WAZE

▶ SUSPENDED COP OF MUMBAI POLICE, SACHIN WAZE, ON TUESDAY CLEARED FORMER MAHARASHTRA HOME MINISTER ANIL DESHMUKH'S NAME IN THE EXTORTION CASE AND SAID THAT NO MONEY WAS DEMANDED BY HIM OR HIS STAFF DURING HIS TENURE AT THE OFFICE.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The former home minister and the suspended cop appeared before the Chandival commission of inquiry yesterday.

During the interrogation by Anil Deshmukh's lawyer, Girish Kulkarni, Sachin Waze said that no money was demanded by the former home minister or his staff.

When asked about whether Anil Deshmukh had demanded extortion money from a beer bar in the city during his tenure in the office of the home minister, Sachin Waze said that he did not remember.

Now the next hearing of the Chandival Inquiry Commission will be on December 21. Inquiry commission fined Rs 15,000 to former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh for seeking time.



Notably, Sachin Waze was arrested in the Antilia case.

Both Anil Deshmukh and Sachin Waze are in judicial custody in separate cases of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the



Enforcement Directorate (ED), respectively.

The Commission is probing the allegations of corruption levelled by former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh.

Sonu Sood appears in court in 2014 firing case

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Sonu Sood on Tuesday appeared as a witness before a special court in a case pertaining to firing at producer Karim Morani's bungalow in 2014, and said he had received a threat call from gangster Ravi Pujari asking him not to participate in promotion of the film 'Happy New Year'.

According to police, the firing was carried out by members of the Ravi Pujari gang.

The prosecution has claimed a conspiracy was



hatched to target Morani over overseas promotion rights of the Hindi film.

Besides Sood, the 2014 film also starred Bollywood actors like Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone in lead roles. According to special public prosecutor

Pradeep Gharat, the actor fully supported the prosecution case and recording of his evidence was completed on Tuesday before the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) court, which is hearing the case.

During his deposition, Sood told the court that in 2014, he had received a threat call from Pujari, asking him not to participate in promotion of 'Happy New Year'.

The 48-year-old actor said he got to know from media reports that there was a firing at Mr Morani's home in Mumbai.

Maha stunned by 2 grisly 'beheadings' of recently-wedded women

▶ TWO GRUESOME CASES OF 'BEHEADING' OF RECENTLY-MARRIED YOUNG WOMEN, INCLUDING ONE WHO WAS PREGNANT AND ANOTHER ALLEGEDLY A VICTIM OF DOWRY, IN JUST A WEEK HAVE ROCKED THE STATE, OFFICIALS SAID HERE.

Matheran Police Station Assistant Police Inspector Sanjay Bangar told correspondent.

Early on Sunday the accused -- Ramsilochal Pal, 30, hacked off the head of his wife, Poonam Pal, 27, left her naked body in the bathroom of the homestay and decamped from there under cover of darkness.

After he was nabbed from Panvel, during police interrogation, Pal revealed the spot where he had hurled his wife's head and a local trekker helped the police recover it from the deep valley.

A local resident said that there was another family living in the homestay but they had checked out early on Sunday, leaving the Pal couple alone.

"The Pals had checked in on December 11 (Saturday) evening without prior booking. They appeared like a happy and normal, recently-married couple on a honeymoon... Nothing appeared amiss till around 3 a.m. on Sunday morning when the man left the place for some urgent work," the local told IANS, requesting anonymity.

It was only around 9 a.m. when a friend of the homestay owners reached the place to find the Pal couple's room locked, indicating they had checked out.

Only much later, when they opened the door for the daily housekeeping chores did the ghastly crime come to light, jolting the tourists and hundreds of weekend tourists thronging the sleepy hill resort, barely 90 kms from Mumbai.

Bangar said the names and addresses they provided were fake, but they zeroed in on Pal after scanning the CCTVs in the vicinity and swooped on him in Panvel, and also located Poonam's purse in which a Goregaon address was found.

"The accused has confessed to the crime, he will be produced before the Karjat Court later today (December 14)... Further investigations are on," the police official said.

Detailing the probe so far, he said the couple hailed from Sant Ravidas Nagar district in Uttar Pradesh, and the victim Poonam was working as a nurse in Goregaon, north-west Mumbai.

The duo had been married in May, but the post-nuptials rituals and wedding con-

summation had not taken place.

During this period, Pal suspected his wife of adultery, while the woman's family has alleged that despite spending nearly a million rupees on their wedding, the boy's side demanded expensive gifts and other articles as dowry.

According to Bangar, with the dowry angle surfacing alongside infidelity, Pal's family would also be made part of the investigations.

Investigators said the cold-blooded murder was apparently pre-planned as the accused had visited Matheran a few days earlier and conducted a recce of various spots.

This is the second such incident, coming a week after the murder and beheading of a 19-year-old pregnant woman, Kishori alias Kirti Thore, with a sickle in Goygaon, Aurangabad, by her mother Shobha S. Mote and younger brother Sanket S. Mote.

After committing the heinous, premeditated deed of 'honour-killing', the mother later clicked selfies with Kirti's severed body, placed her head outside her home before surrendering to the Vajapur Police.

SENA ASKS DELHI POLICE COMMISSIONER TO CANCEL CASE AGAINST SANJAY RAUT



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena delegation met Delhi Police Commissioner Rakesh Asthana today, demanding the cancellation of a case registered against party MP Sanjay Raut for allegedly using abusive language.

The delegation termed the registration of the case against the party leader an "illegal" move.

The Delhi Police has booked Raut for allegedly

using objectionable language against BJP members in a TV interview. The first information report was registered based on a complaint submitted by BJP national general secretary Deepti Rawat Bhardwaj on December 9 at the Mandawali police station.

The Shiv Sena delegation, including MPs Arvind Sawant, Gajanan Kirtikar and Pratap Jadhav met the Delhi Police commissioner and submitted a memorandum contending that the dictionary meaning of the "so-called" objectionable word was "stupid".

"In our opinion, Sanjay Raut has not named any male or female leader in his statement, nor has he violated any law," the Shiv Sena said in its memorandum to Asthana. The FIR was registered under sections 500 (punishment for defamation) and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the IPC, a senior Delhi Police officer said.



EDITOR'S SPECS

FULLY VACCINATED, STILL NOT SAFE

The hyper mutated Omicron Covid variant, known to evade vaccine efficacy, cannot be deterred with two doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 shots, scientists at Oxford University have found. The yet to be peer-reviewed study, published on the preprint server MedRxiv, used blood samples from 28 individuals who had previously received two doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, and a live virus isolate to explore Omicron's vaccine efficacy. They found "substantial decrease in neutralising titres" — a measure of the level of neutralising antibodies generated in responses to vaccination against, or infection from, Covid-19. The results indicated that the Omicron variant has the potential to drive a further wave of infections, including among those already vaccinated, although the researchers highlight that there is currently no evidence of increased potential to cause severe disease, hospitalisations or deaths in vaccinated populations. These findings also align with recently published data from the UK Health Security Agency, showing reduced effectiveness of two doses of these vaccines against symptomatic disease due to the Omicron variant compared to Delta. Importantly, this effectiveness was improved by a third dose of vaccine. Further, the researchers said they did not yet assess the impact of a "third dose" booster, "which we know significantly increases antibody concentrations, and it is likely that this will lead to improved potency against the Omicron variant," said Matthew Snape, Professor in Paediatrics and Vaccinology at the University. Elsewhere, an Israeli study published on Saturday also found that a three-dose course of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine provided significant protection against the omicron variant.

INDIA'S GREATEST DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY TRIUMPH

Ashis Ray



There were essentially three reasons why Prime Minister Indira Gandhi waited nine months, despite millions of refugees from East Pakistan pouring into India (12 million ultimately), before unleashing the country's armed forces to liberate the territory and give birth to Bangladesh. The Pakistani military's brutal crackdown on the majority Bengali population in this wing of their country, codenamed 'Operation Searchlight', began on March 25, 1971. But the Indian Army and Air Force did not accelerate action until December 4. The reasons were, firstly, the Indian Army needed time to reach a state of perfect readiness for a water-tight assault. Secondly, in the event hostilities dragged, there was a need to avoid the monsoon, so as not to get bogged down in East Pakistan's low lying, river-infested terrain. Lastly, it was necessary to launch a diplomatic offensive to get international opinion onside. In that Cold War era, the US and the erstwhile Soviet Union were the superpowers. The former had been lukewarm when Pakistan attacked India in 1965. In contrast, during the same war, Moscow had warned China, a close ally of Pakistan, that if it interfered in the conflict, the Soviet Union would move against it. So, Indira Gandhi embarked on consolidating ties with the Soviet Union. This crystallised on August 9, 1971 in a

'Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation' between the two governments, signed by then Indian External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh and his Soviet counterpart Andrei Gromyko. Article VIII in the Agreement said the two Parties "shall not enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other Party". Article IX stated: "In the event of either Party being subjected to or a threat thereof, the parties "shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to remove such threat and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and the security of their countries". What was unwritten, but understood was that Moscow would veto any move to censure India at the UN Security Council. When Indira Gandhi met the then Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev and Premier

Alexei Kosygin in September, she was assured of the Soviet Union's military aid should India be compelled to go to war. Armed with the pact, she travelled westward in October-November. She adopted classical tactics of appealing over the heads of British Prime Minister Edward Heath and US President Richard Nixon directly to the people of these countries so as to build public opinion in these countries in India's favour. The BBC reported that she told Heath, Nixon's friendly overtures to the Chinese, and their closeness to Pakistan, had made it necessary for India to sign a treaty with the Soviet Union. She, then, expressed anguish in a television interview by saying: "What we get outside (meaning the West) is to equate us (India) with a government which had killed more than a million people, which has created conditions of barbarity which the world has seldom seen." Before departing Delhi, she told The New York Times in an hour-long exchange: "The (Pakistani) military regime has let loose a war on its own people, and there is no knowing what it will do next." She cited "threatening statements from Pakistan which we (India) feel cannot be entirely ignored". Nixon was unsympathetic to her argument that "the problem (of millions of people fleeing to India after facing persecution by the Pakistani military in East Pakistan) is an international one". Thereafter, in a public speech in Washington she stressed: "I have come here looking for a

deeper understanding of the situation in our part of the world." A Gallup poll in the US voted her the most admired person in the world. On December 3, the Pakistani Air Force pre-emptively bombed nine Indian air bases. The same night in a broadcast to the nation, Indira Gandhi indicated India needed to act against a "war forced on us". The next morning, she informed Parliament: "We repeatedly drew the attention of the world to this annihilation of a whole people, to this menace to our security. Everywhere the people showed sympathy and understanding for the economic and other burdens and danger to India. But governments seemed morally and politically paralysed." That night, December 4, 1971, timed to take advantage of a full moon, the Indian Army surged, pin-cer-like into East Pakistan. At 5 p.m. on December 16, General Sam Manekshaw, Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army, rang Indira Gandhi to convey that Indian forces guided by the Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini had liberated Dhaka and Pakistani troops (93,000 of them, officers and men) had unconditionally surrendered. Nixon had despatched the US 7th Fleet into the Bay of Bengal in an attempt to unnerve India. But this is where the Indo-Soviet Treaty kicked in. A Soviet fleet tailed the American navy into the Bay to checkmate the US. The liberation of Bangladesh half a century ago this month remains by a considerable distance India's greatest diplomatic and military triumph.

Handloom cloth for school uniforms mooted to save sector in TN

Arun Lakshman

The Covid-19 pandemic and incessant rains have badly affected almost all business sectors of Tamil Nadu just like the rest of the country, but the weavers of the state are one of the hardest hit with many ending their lives and several changing their profession. Handlooms, according to a study by the Tamil Nadu labour department, is the second major job provider in the state next to agriculture but the sector is now dogged by poverty and desperation. Tamil Nadu based social organization and think tank, Centre for Policy and Development Studies (CPDS), has mooted a proposal to the Tamil Nadu government and the Centre to make handloom cloth mandatory for school

uniforms. A study conducted by the organization, according to its office bearers, has found that there are more than 2.5 lakh weavers in Tamil Nadu and the number of school-going students in primary, secondary and higher secondary classes in the state is around 1.25 crore. C. Rajeev, Director of the Centre for Policy and Development Studies and a researcher on the handloom industry, told IANS that the "Handloom sector is the second-largest employment provider in Tamil Nadu in the unorganized sector maybe after agriculture and the people who have unique talents in craft, art and making of the cloth are in bad shape. While they were never rich, the sector was surviving as the quality of work from Tamil Nadu was excellent and matching global

standards. However, the closure of the sector due to the Covid pandemic and the incessant rains of 2021 have put the weavers in dire straits. Some people died, several quit the profession. The government has to intervene." He said that according to his study, if the state government makes it mandatory that all the schools buy only handloom cloth for uniforms, there will be a surge in demand and the sector could be lifted up. When the industry was slowly looking up, rains came and again we have suffered. I am seriously thinking of quitting this and try my luck as a helper to a mason or something like that." The CPDS is conducting an awareness campaign in association with the Tamil Nadu Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society (Co-

optex) among the weaving community not to quit the profession and to develop an alternative for their survival. Rajeev said that these cooperative societies are employing more than 3 lakh people directly and 15 lakh people indirectly in the sector and if the sector is given regular orders from schools, it can be saved. The CPDS has presented a detailed report on the proposal to the state government and is working on the intricacies regarding the implementation of the scheme during the next academic year. Rajeev said if the schools provide regular work to the handloom workers, they would become more confident. After the school season from

February till June, the rest of the time the sector can easily produce different clothing lines that could be tapped into the international market. The CPDS in its appeal to the state industries minister has proposed a presentation to this panel so that the sector can produce material according to the preference of the consumers in those countries. This, according to Rajeev, can be done after the school year ends in June. From July onwards if the weavers are engaged in producing unique Tamil Nadu style clothlines, the takers will be plentiful and the sector will be reinvigorated.

international

7.4-MAGNITUDE QUAKE HITS INDONESIA, MINOR TSUNAMI DETECTED

Jakarta | Agencies

A minor tsunami was detected on Tuesday after a massive 7.4-magnitude earthquake jolted Indonesia's East Nusa Tenggara province, the country's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency said. While one person was injured in Mangarai district, several houses were damaged in Selayar Island of South Sulawesi province, Richard Elt, head of East Nusa Tenggara's emergency unit, told Xinhua news agency. "The quake triggered panics. One man was wounded as he fell down when he was rushing outside a building. Our colleagues in South Sulawesi informed us that scores of houses were damaged in the Selayar Island district," he said. The quake struck at 10.20 a.m., with the



epicentre at 113 km northeast of Larantuka sub-district in East Flores district and the depth at 10 km under the seabed, the Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency said. The earthquake previously triggered a tsunami warning, but it was lifted about two hours later. The tremors triggered a minor tsunami, as the seawater surface rose by 7 cm in the districts of Nagekeo and Mangarai, the agency's head Dwikorita Karnawati told a press conference.

VOLCANO ERUPTION ON SPANISH ISLAND HITS NEW RECORD

Madrid | Agencies

The eruption of the Cumbre Vieja volcano in the Spanish island of La Palma has continued for 87 days, has hit a new record of being the longest than the previous one in 1585. The eruption began on September 19, three-days longer than the 84-day record set in 1585, reports Xinhua news agency. Only two eruptions in the archipelago had lasted longer, with one in 1798 on the island of Tenerife lasting for 99 days, and the second of the Timanfaya volcano inn Lanzarote in 1730 that continued for six years. On Sunday, explosive activity was again noticed from the Cumbre Vieja volcano after several days in which the eruption appeared to have died down, with reductions in seismic activity and the amount of lava being ejected. The mountain emitted lava, ash and gas (mainly Sulphur Dioxide), badly affecting air quality and leading the Canary Islands regional government to issue an order to confine around 30,000 residents of the municipalities of Los Llanos de Aridane, El Paso and Tazacorte. The latest data issued by the Copernicus satellite shows that around 1,226 hectares of land have now been covered by lava on La Palma, while 2,910 buildings have been destroyed. Meanwhile, around 50 hectares of new land have been created where the lava has reached the Atlantic Ocean off the west coast of the island.



5 DEAD IN B'DESH FACTORY FIRE

Dhaka | Agencies

At least five people were killed on Tuesday after a fire ripped through a factory in Bangladesh's Bogura district, some 197 km northwest of Dhaka. The blaze was brought under control after hectic efforts of about three hours, reports Xinhua news agency. Rafi Al Faruk, duty officer of the Fire Service and Civil Defense Headquarters in Dhaka, said the fire sparked suddenly and spread quickly. "Bodies of five persons were retrieved after 10 fire-fighting units doused the blaze at around 2 p.m.," he said. The official said that the cause of the fire and the extent of damage to the factory could not be ascertained immediately.

4 FOREIGN KIDS KILLED, 2 WOUNDED IN APARTMENT FIRE IN ISTANBUL



Four foreign children were killed and two people wounded when a fire broke out in the wee hours of Tuesday at an apartment building in Turkey's biggest city Istanbul, the Governor's office announced. The office said in a statement that the fire broke out at around 2.50 a.m. local time (2350 GMT on Monday) in the basement of a five-story building in the Esenyurt district located on the European side of the city, Xinhua news agency reported. Four children with foreign nationality lost their lives in the blaze, while their mother and another kid were rescued and rushed to a nearby hospital, it added. "A judicial and administrative investigation has been initiated regarding the issue," the statement noted, without revealing further details.

SMASH-AND-GRAB ROBBERIES HIT MULTIPLE US CITIES

Washington | Agencies

Smash-and-grab robberies are heading toward crisis levels in some US cities, with gangs of thugs rampaging unchecked through stores and grabbing anything in sight. On December 11, two robbers walked into a Chicago store wielding hammers and a gun, smashing through display cases and stealing several watches valued at \$2 million, Xinhua news agency quoted local media reports as saying. A security guard was shot and killed last month during a smash-and-grab robbery in Oakland, near San Francisco. He was protecting a local news crew while they covered the uptick of looting in the city. Outside Chicago, thugs recently stampeded through a Louis Vuitton store, filling large plastic bags with merchandise worth over \$120,000, the media reported. A string of violent robberies took place all in one weekend in the San Francisco Bay Area. Those included an incident whereby thieves with hammers ransacked several clothing, jewellery and sunglasses stores. On the same weekend, as many as 80 bandits carrying crowbars hit a



Nordstrom department store outside San Francisco, attacking one employee with pepper spray and stealing as much merchandise as they could get their hands on. The group fled via waiting getaway cars. The same weekend saw roving groups of criminals carrying crowbars and hammers attack multiple luxury retailers, including Burberry, Louis Vuitton and Bloomingdale's, all around San Francisco's Union

Square, media reported. The recent surge in online shopping, due to the pandemic, has given criminals a vast marketplace in which to sell stolen goods. Senior executive vice president for public affairs at the Retail Industry Leaders Association Michael Hanson said, "Criminals saw that (increase in online shopping) and said, 'Oh, my gosh. More people are shopping online. Let's go get more and more

product to sell on marketplaces because we can make a lot of money", as reported by The Hill, a political newspaper. Critics said radical city officials are responsible for implementing policies that encourage smash-and-grab robberies. Those include downgrading offenses from felonies to misdemeanors. According to the New York Post, over a dozen suspected looters in Los Angeles were arrested but rapidly released due to zero-bail policies that allow suspects to go free after arrest. The 14 arrests followed a "rash" of 11 "flash-mob type" raids in which nearly \$350,000 in goods was swiped in just 10 days last month in Los Angeles, with the most recent on November 28, city Police Chief Michel Moore said, as reported in the New York Post. California last year implemented a no bail policy for what the state called misdemeanors and lower-level felonies, in a bid to tamp down the prison population during the pandemic. While the policy was supposed to be rescinded, it was kept in place in Los Angeles County.

Global Covid caseload tops 270.7 mn

Washington | Agencies

The global coronavirus caseload has topped 270.7 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 5.31 million and vaccinations to over 8.47 billion, according to Johns Hopkins University. In its latest update on Tuesday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and the death toll stood at 270,726,491 and 5,311,574, respectively, while the total number of vaccine doses administered has increased to 8,477,027,948. The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 50,119,422 and 798,710, according to the CSSE. The second worst hit country in terms of cases is



India (34,697,860 infections and 475,636 deaths), followed by Brazil (22,177,059 infections and 616,457 deaths). The other countries with over 5 million cases are the UK (10,935,244), Russia (9,871,229), Turkey (9,060,945), France (8,363,479), Germany (6,559,860), Iran (6,157,519), Argentina (5,358,455), Spain (5,339,992), Italy (5,238,221) and Colombia (5,095,821), the CSSE figures showed. The nations with a death toll of over 100,000 are Mexico (296,672), Russia (284,909), Peru (201,770), the UK (146,935), Indonesia (143,948), Italy (134,929), Iran (130,764), Colombia (129,163), France (121,424), Argentina (116,771) and Germany (105,873).



GEN RAWAT'S BROTHER-IN-LAW ACCUSES GOVT OF BULLDOZING 'SAMADHI' ON HIS ANCESTRAL LAND

▶ A WEEK AFTER INDIA'S FIRST CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF (CDS) GENERAL BIPIN RAWAT, HIS WIFE MADHULIKA RAWAT AND 11 OTHER ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL DIED IN A CHOPPER CRASH NEAR COONOOR IN TAMIL NADU ON DECEMBER 8, HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW (BROTHER OF MADHULIKA RAWAT) YASH VARDHAN SINGH LEVELLED SOME SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS AGAINST THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.

Praveen Dwivedi | Bhopal



A week after India's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat, his wife Madhulika Rawat and 11 other armed forces personnel died in a chopper crash near Coonoor in Tamil Nadu on December 8, his brother-in-law (brother of Madhulika Rawat) Yash Vardhan Singh levelled some serious allegations against the Central government. Singh, who is a native of Madhya Pradesh's Suhagpur town in Shahdol district, on Tuesday wrote in his Facebook account that a road was constructed on his land in his home town (Suhagpur) without consulting him. Singh alleged that for the road construction, the administration has bulldozed a 'Samadhi Sthal' of his

ancestors and also cut down a number of trees.

"While the funeral process of my Jijaji (brother-in-law Gen. Rawat) and Didi (sister) was going on in Delhi, at the same time on the direction of the Centre, the construction of a national highway was carried out without consulting me. Besides this, an order has been issued to register a case against me if I object to this road construction," Singh's Facebook note read.

However, Singh did not specifically mention which department has ordered the registration of a case against him if he objected.

To ascertain the authenticity of the issue, IANS spoke to Shahdol district collector Vandana Vaidya. "Yes,

Vardhan Singh had given a portion of his land for road (National Highway) construction in 2016. He has received a compensation of Rs 2,77,000 for his land. Further, during the widening of the road, another portion of land was required and a notification was issued to acquire 0.56 hectare land."

Vaidya continued, "This happened before my posting here in Shahdol. During the investigation, it has emerged that some trees were also supposed to be cut for the road construction. However, some other trees were also cut and this was the main issue. I have spoken to Yash Vardhan and have requested him to visit the office whenever he comes to Shahdol from New Delhi."

Replying on bulldozing a 'Samadhi Sthal', Vaidya said, "That portion was also part of the land given to the government for the road construction. But what went wrong was that the portion of 'Samadhi Sthal' was very shabby and therefore workers carrying out the digging did not notice it."

General Bipin Rawat's wife belonged to a royal family in Shahdol district of Madhya Pradesh. Her father (late) Mrighendra Singh was the Riyasdar of Shahdol district's Suhagpur town. Her father was also elected Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA- Congress) from the Suhagpur constituency in 1967 and again in 1972.

Public cooperation is important in the success of Madhya Pradesh: Chief Minister Chouhan

Success is being achieved under the leadership and guidance of Prime Minister Modi. Presentation by Chief Minister Chouhan in Chief Ministers Conclave.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that public cooperation has been important for better implementation of PM Swanidhi Yojna, Ayushman Bharat Yojna, Housing Scheme and Swamitva Yojana in Madhya Pradesh. Even during both the waves of Covid, containment efforts with participation of citizens yielded good success. If other states have considered this work done in Madhya Pradesh as a model, then the main role behind it is the cooperation of the common people as well as the guidance received from Prime Minister Modi.

Chief Minister Chouhan was giving a presentation about the innovations and implementation of schemes in Madhya Pradesh at the conclave of Chief Ministers convened by Prime Minister Modi in Varanasi. Chouhan also informed about the creative activities of the Anand Department started a few years back in Madhya Pradesh and efforts to keep the common people happy by keeping them away from depression.

People's participation is the model of good governance

Chief Minister informed that public participation is being obtained in policy making, decision making and monitoring. Under policy making, suggestions were received from the public in different categories of the Panchayats. Ladli Laxmi, Sambal Yojana, Mukhyamantri Teerth Darshan Yojna are the outcomes of Panchayats. The plans were made based on the suggestions received. All this came to fruition in the earlier years. During the era of Covid, 30 thousand 600 Crisis Management Groups were formed at the district level, development block, gram panchayat and ward level for the management of the pandemic and vaccination, which included religious leaders, public representatives, citizens, doctors and represen-



tatives of sanitation organisations. Similarly, about 1.5 lakh volunteers joined the "I Corona Volunteer" awareness campaign. In the "Yoga-Se-Nirog" programme, lakhs of Covid patients received online training from three thousand yoga instructors. In "Yuva Shakti - Corona Mukti Abhiyan", more than 10 lakh college students were trained for vaccination and Covid friendly behaviour to protect against Covid.

The work of vaccination has been very successful. 94 percent eligible people of the state have got the first dose and 77 percent have got the second dose. The public has given full cooperation in covid management.

Public participation in the implementation and monitoring of plans

Chouhan informed that monitoring of ration distribution, mid-day meal programme, Janani Suraksha Yojana, Ladli Laxmi Yojana, social security pension, scholarship distribution and Sambal Yojana is being done with public cooperation. Deendayal Antyodaya Samiti monitors the implementation of government schemes and programmes. These committees have been constituted at the gram panchayat, development block, municipality, municipal corporation, district and state levels. The ministers in charge of the district nominate the government members in the committees.

Energy saving is must for a better future: CM Chouhan

CM Chouhan appeals on Energy Conservation Day, Chouhan himself also tries to save electricity, Urja Saksharta Abhiyan going on in state for energy conservation

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has appealed to the people of the state to make every effort to save energy. Chouhan has tweeted on the occasion of National Energy Conservation Day on December 24 that - "Conservation of energy is the creation of energy." Chief Minister has requested the people of the state to resolve to stop unnecessary consumption of energy in every sphere of daily life, conserve energy sources and make people aware about its importance and provide a better future to the coming generation. Urja Saksharta

Abhiyan has been started on November 25 to encourage the people of the state to save electricity. The campaign aims to save 10 percent electricity with the cooperation of the people. Chouhan also, personally makes conscious efforts to save electricity. In this regard, in a program organized in Delhi on December 3, he had said - "If I see a tube light or bulb burning in vain at my residence, I turn it off myself." Chouhan has instructed all the officers and employees of his residence office to ensure conservation of power. All the officers and employees posted in the residence have been instructed to turn off

unnecessary burning lights, use room heater or AC only as per requirement. These instructions are being followed with utmost sensitivity. Under the Urja Saksharta Abhiyan, work is being done to make all the citizens of the state energy literate according to a time bound action plan. In the campaign, activities are being conducted with the objective of providing information about conventional and alternative sources of energy and their impact on the environment to develop an understanding of the expenditure and wastage of energy among the general public.

CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN PLANTS SAPLINGS IN BANARAS



Bhopal : Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a lemon plant in Hotel Taj Complex, Banaras. Chief Minister Chouhan is planting saplings every day as per his resolve. Tree plantation is being done every day by Chief Minister Chouhan to encourage people's participation in the activities of environmental protection and to connect the general public with plantation activities.

THREE GET 5YR-RI IN VYAPAM SCAM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A special CBI court in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday awarded five years rigorous imprisonment to three persons in connection with Vyapam Scam related to admission in MBBS course.

The court awarded sentences to Saurav Kumar Singh, Umesh Shrivastava and Pravin Singh Rathore and slapped a fine of Rs 8,000 on each of them.

The case was against four accused but the fourth accused has been missing since the beginning of the case.

According to the information, the case was initially lodged with Sanyogita Ganj Police Station and later transferred to the CBI.

The complaint against the accused read that they had cheated a doctor (complainant in the case) to the tune of Rs 13 lakh by promising to help his son in getting admission in MBBS course at Indore Medical College through Management Quota. The CBI after taking over the matter formed an elite team of investigators to bring home the guilt of the accused.

Investigations revealed that the accused entered into a conspiracy to cheat the complainant and assured him that they would arrange a seat in MBBS course under Management Quota through PMT and initially took Rs 6.5 lakh in cash from him. It was further alleged that the accused took photograph, marksheet of 10th grade and signature of his son on a paper for filing up PMT-2011



application form, which was filled up by one of the accused. In pursuance of the said conspiracy, the accused sent the scanned copy of the said PMT-2011 application form along with admit card to email ID of doctor's son. Thereafter, all the accused again visited the doctor's house twice before examinations and took remaining Rs 6.5 lakh in cash.

After getting the whole amount, the accused started ignoring the complainant.

The CBI did a thorough investigation and was able to get scientific evidence. The handwriting of the accused was matched with those on the form of complainant's son's admission form.

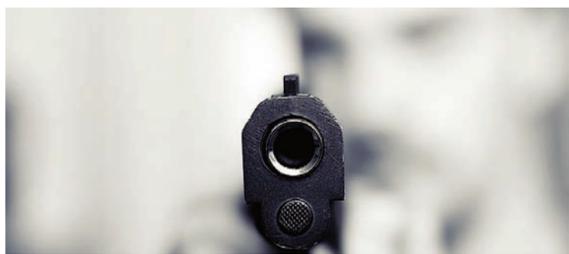
EX-SARPANCH SHOT DEAD AT WEDDING FUNCTION IN MANDSAUR

A former Sarpanch was shot dead when a group of men opened fire at a wedding function in Mandasaur district.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The victim was a follower of jailed self-styled godman Rampal and had organised a marriage function.

The incident was reported on Monday afternoon when the men allegedly shouting 'Jai Shri Ram', barged into the marriage venue. The men are reported to have objected to



the function alleging that such weddings were being organised illegally.

"A group of assailants barged into a marriage function and created ruckus there. Hearing the commotion

among the people gathered at the marriage function, the organiser tried to control the situation and heated arguments were exchanged. In the meantime, one of the assailants put

out his gun and opened fire on the function organiser. The victim was rushed to a nearby hospital and was declared dead," Mandasaur district police told reporter.

The deceased has been identified as Devilal Meena, a two-time former village sarpanch supported by the ruling BJP. Being an ardent follower of the self-styled godman Rampal, he was the main organiser of the marriage.

"A murder case has been lodged against 11 identified accused and other unidentified accused. Three of them have been arrested," Mandasaur Additional Superintendent Amit Verma said. Further investigations are on.

The kin of the deceased in the sewage project accident will get Rs 10 lakh each

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Development and Housing Minister Bhopendra Singh has directed the Commissioner Municipal Corporation to give Rs 10 lakh each to the kin of the two deceased in the Bhopal sewage project accident at Laukheri last day. He has also directed to impose penalty as per the contract for not implementing adequate safety standards by Ankita Construction Company and not providing safety equipment to its employees. Urban

Development and Housing Minister Singh has written a letter to Police Commissioner Bhopal that in the preliminary investigation conducted by the Commissioner Municipal Corporation Bhopal on the death of two employees of Ankita Construction in the sewage project, prima facie the incident was found to be due to lack of safety standards. It has also come to the fore that the deceased labourer was a minor. From this it is clear that a criminal act has been committed by Ankita

Construction Company. Therefore, in view of the seriousness of the incident, action should be taken by registering an FIR against the responsible officers of the company for committing serious offence and employing a minor worker. It is noteworthy that in the accident that took place last day, field engineer of Ankita Construction Company Deepak Kumar Singh, resident of Kushinagar and labourer Bharat Singh, resident of Jhabua, had died after falling into the sewage main hole.

192 CANDIDATES FILED NOMINATION PAPERS ON 14 DECEMBER



Bhopal : For the first and second phase of Panchayat elections 2021-22, 192 candidates submitted their nomination papers on December 14. Out of these, there are 101 nomination papers of women candidates.

State Election Commission Secretary B.S. Jamod has told that as per the information received till 6 pm, 7 nomination have been filed for District Panchayat member, 10 for Janpad Panchayat member, 158 for the post of Sarpanch and 17 candidates submitted nomination papers for the post of Panch. The nomination papers for phase one and two will be filled by December 20. The scrutiny of nomination papers will be held on December 21. The last date for withdrawal of candidature and allotment of election symbols will be December 23. The first phase of voting will be held on January 6 and the second phase will be held on January 28, 2022 from 7 am to 3 pm.

RESCUED AILING ELEPHANT IN MP NEEDS REHABILITATION TO RECOVER

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Laxmi, a 30-year-old emaciated female elephant, rescued from a group of individuals two weeks ago in Chhatrapur district of Madhya Pradesh, would need special care along with medical help to recover from multiple illnesses.

Photographs of the ailing elephant, which is currently sheltered at the forest department's premises in Bada Malhera under the observation of veterinarians and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India, shows that animal is in agonising pain and is experiencing debility caused by long-term deprivation of food and water.

PETA-India chief advocacy officer Khushboo Gupta, to whom the forest department has entrusted the responsibility to take care of the elephant, told IANS that Laxmi has so far known only cruelty, misery and neglect. "She has suffered multiple diseases but her condition has improved in the last one week and we are hoping that she will be able to roam, bathe in ponds, and be



in the company of other elephants," Gupta said.

Gupta said that the ailing elephant would need special care, at least for a few months to recover from her multiple illnesses and it would be possible when she is under the observation of wildlife veterinary experts.

"She needs to be sheltered at a rehabilitation centre, but none exists for animals in Madhya Pradesh. We have recommended to the authorities to transport the elephant to Karnataka wildlife rehabilitation centre.

PETA will bear all the expenses of transporting the elephant to Karnataka," Gupta added. The elephant was rescued while begging for food on December 1, and has been found to be suffering from chronic arthritis and joint deformities. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Alok Kumar has entrusted PETA India with the responsibility of ensuring that India's thinnest elephant, Laxmi, receives much-needed veterinary treatment, food, water, and other essential care. PETA-India had called for urgent

intervention by the forest department, Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI), and Project Elephant division of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The pachyderm is being treated for joint pain and abscesses on her hips. Deep wounds on her left ear are being cleaned and dressed. The injuries were likely to have been caused by an elephant gourd or 'ankus', a hooked iron rod used by mahouts to control elephants. Laxmi was rescued by PETA activists and local residents.



Zendaya steals the show

Leggy web-printed gown and mask while Tom Holland tries to reach her height in heeled boots at Spider-Man: No Way Home premiere



Los Angeles | Agencies

Zendaya and Tom Holland naturally stole the show as they attended the screening of their latest Marvel film. The Euphoria star showed off her modelsque 5'7" physique in a plunging dress with bedazzled webs, while at Holland looked dapper in a chocolate suit, with the 5'8" actor adding to his frame in heeled boots.

alongside one another at the Regency Village theatre, where they beamed bright ahead of the screening of their latest Marvel film.

The Euphoria star showed off her modelsque 5'7" physique in a plunging dress with bedazzled webs, while at Holland looked dapper in a chocolate suit, with the 5'8" actor adding to his frame in heeled boots.

Zendaya - who never misses in the style department - rocked a plunging custom Maison Valentino dress which featured an exaggerated slit up the left leg.

The nude dress was nearly backless with the exception of thin black criss-cross straps and was adorned with ornate black beads fashioned to resemble a spider's web, reports daily-

mail.co.uk.

The Emmy-winning actress paired the dress with Christian Louboutin pumps which also sparkled, and wore her hair in scalp braids which extended past her waist.

On her head she rocked a beaded and lace eye mask which was fashioned to resemble a black spider for more over the top glamour.



'BELFAST', 'THE POWER OF THE DOG', 'SUCCESSION' LEAD GOLDEN GLOBES NOMS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Despite the threat of celebrities, publicists and the American television network NBC boycotting the 79th annual Golden Globes, the show will go on - although it's unclear in what form, reports "Variety".

On Monday, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HSPA), which has been under attack ever since the Los Angeles Times reported last winter that it did not have a single Black member, announced its nominations for its January 9 dinner. The event does not have a broadcast partner at present because of scrutiny over the glaring lack of diversity among its voters.

The organisation's interim President Helen Hoehne informed viewers on YouTube, where about 10,000 people were watching, according to "Variety", that the HSPA had instituted changes to reform its outdated practices, including adding 21 new members.

Hoehne then introduced a surprise presenter - American rapper Snoop Dogg -- to kick off the nominations. And in the words of "Variety", wearing dark sunglasses just after 6 a.m. in Los Angeles, Dogg struggled with the teleprompter, butchering many of the nominees' names.

In the end, Kenneth Branagh's "Belfast" and Jane Campion's "The Power of the Dog" led all films, with seven nominations each. On the TV side, HBO's corporate family drama "Succession" picked up five nominations, more than any other show.

For Campion, it was her second Golden Globe nomination for Best Director after 1993, when she made the cut with "The Piano". The only other woman on the list is Maggie Gyllenhaal for "The Lost Daughter".

The nominations' only Indian connection - although a tad distant - is for the Best Actor in a Television Drama for the French-Moroccan Tahar Rahim, who essayed the character of the notorious Charles Sobhraj in the Netflix series, "The Serpent".

Stand up for what you believe in: Michelle Mone

Los Angeles | Agencies

Michelle Mone has shared a stunning new snap in a navy corset on Instagram after racist allegations against her came to light.

The former lingerie tycoon, 50, looked sensational in the strapless lace number which she paired with some gold printed trousers that showed off her sculptured legs.

Baroness Mone teamed the ensemble with gold strappy heels that elevated her height and opted for understated jewellery, reports dailymail.co.uk.

She captioned the gorgeous snap: 'One of the lessons I learned growing up was always stay true to yourself, and stand up for what you believe in. Investing in yourself and your values will provide the greatest rewards!' It comes after Michelle claimed a man of Indian heritage put a Native American style headdress on her during a day of 'drinking and partying', just weeks before he accused her of racially abusing him. The businesswoman risked being accused of 'cultural insensitivity' by donning the headdress made of black feathers during an al fresco lunch at an expensive restaurant on the French Riviera.

She was pictured in the controversial headgear just three weeks before she allegedly sent the offensive WhatsApp message to financial consultant Richard Lynton-Jones, describing him as being a 'waste of a man's white skin'.



KEVIN SPACEY MARKED SAFE FROM TESTIFYING IN DEPOSITION ABOUT SEXUAL PARTNERS

Los Angeles | Agencies

The request of Anthony Rapp's attorneys to question actor Kevin Spacey about his sexual partners or allegations against him from anonymous accusers, has been turned down by U.S. District Judge Lewis Kaplan. The actor's legal representatives argued that it would be improper for Rapp's lawyers to ask about his relationships with consenting adults.

In a lawsuit filed against the actor, Rapp has alleged that Spacey groped him and laid on top of him in 1986, when Rapp was 14 years old. In a ruling on Monday, the District Judge held that such inquiries could violate Spacey's and his sexual partners' right to privacy, as reported by Variety.

However, Rapp's lawyers will be able to ask questions to any accusers, who have publicly identified themselves provided they don't force Spacey to disclose details of anonymous claims or accusations that are not already public. The judge wrote in his statement, "Any such Subject, and the defendant, have substantial privacy interests in their most intimate personal relationships that outweigh any legitimate interest of the plaintiff in pursuing those matters."

In addition, Rapp's attorneys won't be able to question Spacey about an ongoing police investigation in London. They have also been blocked from inquiring about accusations brought by an individual identified as 'C.D.' who anonymously joined Rapp in suing Spacey, but dropped out of the case after the judge ruled he could not proceed on anonymous grounds. After Rapp first came forward in 2017 accusing Spacey of sexual misconduct, numerous allegations against the actor came to light. But most of the accusers have



remained anonymous. Spacey has also been investigated in Los Angeles and criminally prosecuted in Nantucket, but those cases have each been dropped.

TEAM 'BATWOMAN' REUNITES FOR UPCOMING SERIES 'GOTHAM KNIGHTS'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Writers Natalie Abrams, James Stoteraux, and Chad Fiveash are coming together for TV series 'Gotham Knights' based on DC characters created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger. While James and Chad will also double up as executive producers for the show in tandem with Greg Berlanti, Sarah Schechter, and David Madden of Berlanti Productions, Natalie will serve as co-executive producer on the show, under Warner Bros Television Studios, reports Variety.

The team has earlier worked on 'Batwoman' but, 'Gotham Knights' won't be a 'Batwoman' spin-off nor does it have any relation with the upcoming video game 'Gotham



Knights'. The show, which currently in works at the CW Television Network, will follow the events after the murder of Bruce Wayne, as his rebellious adopted son strikes an alliance with the children of Batman's enemies when they are all framed for killing the Caped Crusader. In the absence of the Caped Crusader, Gotham spirals into chaos as crime lays siege to the city with the only hope coming from unexpected quarters, the team of Wayne's adopted

son and the children of the Dark Knight's enemies, who emerge as the Gotham Knights, the saviors of the fictional city. 'Gotham Knights' is the latest DC show from the Berlanti camp, which currently produces 'The Flash', 'Legends of Tomorrow', 'Stargirl' and 'Superman and Lois' for The CW Television Network.



Madison Beer



ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY

DEFENSIVE KOREA DENY INDIA A WIN; DRAW 2-2 IN OPENER

Dhaka | Agencies

Indian men's hockey team were denied a winning start to their campaign at the Hero Men's Asian Champions Trophy with a spirited Korean team holding the defending Champions to a thrilling 2-2 draw at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium here on Tuesday. For India, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay (3') and Harmanpreet Singh (33') scored while Jang Jong-hyun (42') and Kim Hyeon-jin (46') scored in Korea's resurgence. Although it was India who dominated the proceedings in the first and second quarters with better ball possession (58 per cent) and a higher number of circle penetrations (14 for India and 8 for Korea), the Korean side rallied on a strong defensive structure in the third and fourth quarters to deny India any opportunity to score. Upadhyay put India ahead early in the game with a fine field



goal. After the ten-minute half-time break, India extended their lead to 2-0 in the 33rd minute with a fiercely struck penalty corner converted by Harmanpreet Singh. It was India's third take of the PC after the first two were blocked by Korea's first rusher. Even though India cre-

ated several chances in the following minutes, they could not find success even as Korea had successfully begun to make inroads into India's circle. Their tactic to force India to make infringements in defence worked, as India conceded the first PC of the

match in the 42nd minute. After two retakes, Jang Jong-hyun successfully put the ball past India's goalie Krishan Pathak. This goal boosted the Korean attack, which had seemed rather listless in the first two quarters. They continued to challenge the Indian defence in the final quarter and even found success in the 46th minute when Kim Hyeonjin converted a fine field goal which could not be stopped by India's young keeper Suraj Karkera. The final few minutes saw India create PCs but could not convert, thus settling for a 2-2 draw. Incidentally, India had drawn against Korea 1-1 at the same venue in 2017 during their successful campaign at the Hero Asia Cup. Korea was the only team India had not beaten in that victorious outing. Post-match, Skipper Manpreet Singh expressed his disappointment but at the same time was confident the team would bounce back from this draw.

Badminton worlds: Sindhu, Srikant, Lakshya advance to third round

Huelva (Spain) | Agencies

Defending champions PV Sindhu, former World No 1 Srikanth Kidambi, and young Lakshya Sen cruised into the semifinals of the BWF World Championships here on Tuesday. While Sindhu won her women's singles second round match in straight games, Lakshya Sen and Srikant had to go through three games to advance into the men's singles third round. Sindhu, who had got a bye in the first round, defeated Martina Repiska of Slovakia 21-7, 21-9 in just 24 minutes. Things proved a bit difficult for Sen and Srikant.

Sen quelled a second game fightback to defeat Kenta Nishimoto of Japan 22-20, 15-21, 21-18 in one hour and 22 minutes and reach the third round while Srikant came back after losing the first game to overcome Li Shi Feng of

China 15-21, 21-18, 21-17 in one hour and nine minutes and advanced to the next stage.

India's top men's doubles pair of Ritwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty too advanced to the next round, defeating Lee Jhe-Huei and Yang Po-Hsuan of Chinese Taipei in the second-round match, winning 27-25, 21-17. However, there was no luck for the mixed doubles pair of Saurabh Sharma and Anoushka Parikh as they were ousted in straight games by Malaysia's Tan Kian Meng and Ai Pei Jing 21-8, 21-18.

It was Sindhu who came up with the best performance among the Indian players, cruising past Martina in two games. Sindhu took lead but Martina bridged the margin at 4-5. But Sindhu, the 26-year-old World No 7, won 12 consecutive points to extend her lead to 17-5 before going on to wrap up

the game at 21-7. The second game followed a similar script as Sindhu opened a 6-0 early lead. She maintained her upper hand and won it 21-9.

Things were a lot difficult for former World No. 1 Srikant as he lost the first game. The 28-year-old remained neck-and-neck with his Chinese opponent in the first game before Li Shi Feng four points consecutively in the end to win the first game 21-15.

In the second game, the shuttler born in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, broke away from 9-8 to open a handy lead at 16-8 lead and then went on to win the level scores by winning the second game 21-18 after the Chinese players made it a closer affair.

In the decider, Srikant trailed Li Shi Feng by a few points at the change of end and reduced the margin to 13-12 before wrapping up the match at 21-17.

Virat Kohli to miss South Africa ODI series

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's star batter Virat Kohli may skip the forthcoming ODI series against South Africa, report said.

While injured Rohit Sharma will miss the Tests in South Africa, the ODIs after that will see Kohli being unavailable for the Indian team.

It is learnt that Kohli has already informed the BCCI about his decision.

India and South Africa will play three ODIs after the Test series.

As per a TOI report, "Kohli is going to miss the ODIs as he is taking time off to cele-



brate his daughter Vamika's first birthday. Vamika was born on January 11 last year and Kohli is planning a holiday with his family after the conclusion of the Test series. "Last year, when Vamika was born, Kohli had gone on paternity leave after the first Test in Australia in

Adelaide. India had lost that game before the stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane led the side to a historic series win against Australia. The final Test of the tour will begin on January 11 with the ODIs set to commence from 19. The ODI squad is yet to be announced for the series.

AFGHANISTAN CRICKET TEAM TO PLAY THREE ODIs AGAINST INDIA IN 2022

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Afghanistan men's cricket team will face India in a three-match ODI series away from home in March next year, as per their Future Tour Program (FTP) schedule for 2022-23.

According to their schedule, the national side is slated to play 52 international matches -- 37 ODIs, 12 T20Is, and three Test matches during the next two-year time period.

In those two years, Afghanistan will play in the Asia Cup in 2022 and the ICC T20 World Cup in the same year, followed by the Asia Cup and the ICC 50-over World Cup in 2023.

"If we bifurcate the tally into limited-overs cricket and the Test format, it clearly shows that Afghanistan's focus will be on the shorter formats of the game," the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) said in a release on Monday night.

"Considering the fact that Afghanistan will be playing seven



ODI series in the ICC Cricket World Cup Super League, as well as will participate in four major limited-overs events such as Asia Cup 2022

(T20 format), ICC T20 World Cup 2022, the Asia Cup 2023 (ODI format) & the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023," it added. Afghanistan will start

the next year with an ODI series versus the Netherlands and end the year with a three-format series against Zimbabwe.

SR MEN'S HOCKEY NATIONALS

GUJARAT, UP, KERALA, TAMIL NADU WIN ON DAY 4

PUNE | Agencies

Hockey Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh Hockey, Kerala Hockey, Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu, Hockey Bihar, Hockey Maharashtra were among the winners on Day Four of the 11th Hockey India Senior Men National Championship Pimpri Chinchwad 2021 in Pune.

In the days' opener from Pool F, the Hockey Association of Odisha and Hockey Bengal played out a hugely entertaining 3-3 draw. In the topsy-turvy game, it was Odisha who struck first. Abhijeet Swain (12'), Sibren Lakra (15'), and Rahul Ekka (28') scoring to give them a comfortable lead going into half-time. At that time, it seemed like the result was in no doubt. However, two minutes into the third quarter, Raushan Kumar struck to give Hockey Bengal hope, and a brace by Nitish Neupane (46', 53') ensured they completed a fine turnaround to split the points. The two teams are locked on points at



the top of the table. In the second game in Pool F, Hockey Gujarat beat Goans Hockey 4-3 in a close affair. Goals for Hockey Gujarat were scored by Poonam Thakor (6'), Ajaykumar Thakor (18'), Dharmesh Mir (24'), and Divyesh Miyatra (45'). Goans Hockey's goal scorers were Dattesh Priolkar (17'), Issub Sayyed (41'), and Abbasaliya Havaldar (54'). Uttar Pradesh Hockey beat Hockey Jharkhand 3-0 in Pool G. A brace for Ajay Yadav (15', 56') and a goal by Faraz Mohd (4') gave Uttar

Pradesh Hockey a comfortable victory, as they kept up their perfect start at the top of the table. Kerala Hockey beat Assam Hockey 2-1 in a tense Pool G encounter. Goals by Athul Shaju (22') and Muhammed Siyas K (28') gave Kerala Hockey a comfortable lead as the teams went into the break. Right at the end of the third quarter though Prashant Kabear Sen's 43rd-minute strike gave Assam a lifeline and set up the final quarter perfectly. Kerala Hockey held on to take the three points. Hockey Unit of

Tamil Nadu trounced Telangana Hockey 7-0 in their Pool A match. Goals for the Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu were scored by S Karthi (12', 26', 57'), Sundarapandi (2'), Pruthvi GM (32'), Mareeswaran Sakthivel (37'), and S Silver Stalin (44'). In Pool H, Hockey Bihar beat Hockey Mizoram 6-1. A hat trick by Subash Sanga (34', 37', 57') and goals by Mukesh Lakra (4'), Sujit Roshan Tigga (40'), and Samuel Topno (54') gave Hockey Bihar a comfortable victory. Hockey Mizoram's goal was scored by Lamremdika in the 60th minute. In the last game of the day, Hockey Maharashtra beat Chhattisgarh Hockey 9-2 in Pool H. Goals for Hockey Maharashtra were scored by skipper Taleb Shah (4', 30', 55'), Venkatesh Kenche (11'), Tikaram Thakulla (15'), Pratap Kishanrao Shinde (34', 42') and Mohd Nizamuddin (47', 50'). Goals for Chhattisgarh Hockey were scored by Karik Yadav (16') and Junaid Ahmed (35').

STUDENT OF SHAHEED HEMU KALANI EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY SELECTED FOR INTERNATIONAL KARATE CHAMPIONSHIP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The students and teachers of Shaheed Hemu Kalani Educational Society performed outstandingly in Okinawa Kubudo Federation National Karate Championship. It was organized on 27, 28 & 29 November in Gantok, Sikkim. I.T. Teacher Renu Tirthani of Navnidh Hassomal Lakhani Public School and Student Shilpa Mewada of Sant Hirdaram Girls College won a gold medal. Master Jigar Tilwani Class II Mithi Gobindram Public School was awarded silver medal. The selected participants were invited to compete for International Karate Championship, Russia. All the participants won the awards under the guidance and coaching of Deewan Ahuja.

The selected candidates were honoured and motivated by Shradhdey Siddh



Bhauji, Hero Gyanchandani, A.C. Sathwani and Principals of Mithi Gobindram Public School, Navnidh Hassomal Lakhani Public School and Sant Hirdaram Girls College. All the management heads extended their Well Wishes to the Winners.

US Open champ Raducanu tests COVID positive, withdraws from Abu Dhabi event

Abu Dhabi | Agencies

US Open champion Emma Raducanu has tested positive for Covid-19 and withdrawn from the Mubadala World Tennis Championship exhibition event in Abu Dhabi.

"I was very much looking forward to playing in front of the fans here in Abu Dhabi, but unfortunately after testing positive for Covid, I will have to postpone until the next opportunity," Raducanu said on Monday. "I'm isolating as per rules and hopefully will be able to get back soon," she added. The event scheduled from December 16-18 was set to see Britain's 19-year-old star take on Olympic champion Belinda Bencic in Abu Dhabi on December 16. After her exit, organisers said



that they are looking at 'alternative top female competitors' to replace Raducanu at the event. Men's world number six Rafael Nadal and last year's US Open winner Dominic Thiem are set to return from their injury layoffs in Abu Dhabi. Britain's Andy Murray, Russian Andrey Rublev, Norway's Casper Ruud and Canadian

Denis Shapovalov will also participate in the event before the 2022 competitive season kicks off in Australia. A statement from the tournament organisers said, "Emma is now isolating and following all necessary protocols. We wish her a quick recovery and hope to see her back on the court soon."

AZHAR QUESTIONS TIMING OF KOHLI-ROHIT'S BREAK, CAUSES MASSIVE UPROAR

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former India skipper Mohammad Azharuddin's claim of alleged rift between Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli has caused a massive uproar in the country's cricketing circle ahead of the crucial South Africa tour.

If reports are to be believed, all is not well between the two senior pros, right from the day the Indian cricket board decided to separate the leadership roles in white-ball and red-ball cricket. Now, the latest development of Rohit missing the three Tests in South Africa due to a hamstring injury and Kohli's reported plan to skip the three ODIs due to personal reasons, has put Indian cricket in a turmoil kind of situation. And now Azharuddin's tweets, in which he said the timing of breaks of the two stalwarts of Indian cricket could have been better, adding fuel to fire.

"Virat Kohli has informed that he's not available for the ODI series and Rohit Sharma is unavailable for the upcoming Tests. There is no harm in taking a break, but the timing has to be better. This just substantiates speculation about the rift. Neither will be giving up other forms of



cricket," Azhar tweeted on Tuesday. The reports of rift between Kohli and Sharma, two giants of the game in the country, isn't new but there hasn't been a massive public uproar, especially on social media.

Things started becoming ugly between the fans of the two star cricketers on social media after the BCCI separated the leadership roles in white-ball and red-ball cricket.

With Kohli stepping down as T20I captain, the board was unwilling to have two different captains in the limited-over formats. And when BCCI tweeted to say Rohit Sharma has been named captain of India's ODI and T20I sides going forward, it came as a shocker for Kohli fans.

Notably, just a few weeks back, Kohli had asserted his wish to stay on as skipper in the longer formats and here, it was being taken away from him in a terse, one-line tweet.

Later, BCCI President Sourav Ganguly said the board had requested Kohli to stay on as T20I captain, and that the selectors were not in favour of splitting the captaincy in the shortest format. It was understood thereafter that losing the ODI captaincy then was a foregone conclusion for Kohli.

Meanwhile, former India cricketer Kirti Azad feels that as a responsible administrator of a cricket association, Azhar shouldn't have made such comments publicly.



AAMIR KHAN GOES THE LONG MILE FOR LAAL SINGH CHADDHA

Superstar Aamir Khan is all set to treat the audiences once again with the cinematic magic on screen with Laal Singh Chaddha.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A passion project that took a great deal of commitment and planning from the actor and producer, Laal Singh Chaddha was shot for nearly 200 days, making it the most number of days Aamir Khan has shot for a film since Lagaan. Filmed in over 100 locations across India, the film takes audiences through events in India's history that unfold through the

perspective of Laal Singh Chaddha, a man who has a great understanding of emotions.

Naturally, the long schedule was bound to take a toll on the superstar's future commitment but nonetheless worth the wait!

Says a source, "Laal Singh Chaddha has been shot extensively across the country. While Aamir is known to go all out for his characters and disconnect

from the rest, this commitment was truly significant as it required 200 days of his time, not to mention traveling to across 100 locations. The superstar has never compromised on the quality and output of his content and films and went the extra mile for Laal Singh Chaddha."

Aamir Khan Productions has given Indian audi-

ences immensely memorable films over the years and after films like Lagaan, Taare Zameen Par and the most recent, Dangal among others comes the highly anticipated project Laal Singh Chaddha directed by Advait Chaudhan from a screenplay written by Eric Roth and Atul Kulkarni.

Starring Aamir Khan, Kareena Kapoor Khan and a talented ensemble cast, the film is nothing less than Aamir's labour of love.

Laal Singh Chaddha is produced by Aamir Khan Productions, Viacom18 Studios and Paramount Pictures and will release Baisakhi 2022.



200 DAYS AND 100 LOCATIONS



'KatVic' return to Mumbai, to resume work soon

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Newly-wed celebrity couple Vicky

Kaushal and Katrina Kaif returned to Mumbai on Tuesday from an undisclosed location after a week of wedding festivities.

The two were photographed at the Mumbai airport as they wore outfits complimenting each other.

While Katrina wore a pink coloured salwar kurta, Vicky sported an ivory coloured shirt paired with beige coloured pants. Katrina rounded her look with open tresses, vermilion, red bangles and big earrings as they were welcomed to the city by the fans.

The actors tied the knot on December 9 in an intimate ceremony that was marked by the presence of family and close friends. The wedding celebrations began from December 7 and saw ceremonies of 'Mehendi', 'Haldi' and 'Sangeet'. Post their marriage, the two have been sharing heartwarming pictures from the wedding celebrations.

The actors will soon resume on their respective projects. While Katrina has 'Phone Bhoot' and 'Tiger

3' in the pipeline, Vicky has 'Govinda Naam Mera' and 'Sam Bahadur' up his alley.



SALMAN KHAN TO HOST IIFA 2022 IN ABU DHABI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The 22nd edition of the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Weekend & Awards will be held at the Etihad Arena on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi on March 18 and March 19, 2022, to celebrate the best of Hindi cinema.

The awards night will be hosted by superstar Salman Khan.

Apart from celebrating and lauding cinematic excellence, the awards held in collaboration with the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), will also commemorate the 75th year of India's independence and the UAE's year-long Golden Jubilee celebrations, marking its 50th anniversary, and strengthen the cultural ties between India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as it will see global dignitaries, fans and film enthusiasts from across the world. Talking about the highly anticipated awards, event host Salman Khan said, "I have always enjoyed being a part of the IIFA Family and travelling to some great destinations but this year I am super happy that we are headed to one of my personal favorites, Yas Island, Abu Dhabi." Salman continued, "IIFA is always a memorable time and this year it will be an even bigger celebration as we celebrate the 75th year of India's independence and UAE's 50th Anniversary-Golden Jubilee celebration."

'PITIFUL COWARDS'

Siddharth on trolls attacking his mother on social media

Team Absolute | Chennai

Actor Siddharth, who's hugely popular among both Tamil and Telugu-speaking audiences, and is also known to be a critic of the BJP, lashed out at trolls on Tuesday, saying that people who repeatedly abused his mother out of hatred for him were the ones who were pretending to respect goddesses.

Talking to Twitter, Siddharth said: "Disturbing realisation. The people who have repeatedly abused my mother out of hatred for me ... pretend to respect Sita Maiyya, Durga Mata and Maa Santoshi. My country, my religion, my culture ... All hijacked by a bunch of pitiful, woman-hating cowards. Poor #Mother India." The actor, who is known to voice his thoughts boldly and stand by them, has often been the target of attacks on social media. But that hasn't stopped him from expressing his thoughts without fear.



On another note, earlier in the day, the actor offered comforting words to one of South India's leading music directors, Devi Sri Prasad, who was remembering his dad who had passed away six years ago.

Responding to a tweet put out by the music director, Siddharth said: "Love you Devi. Can't believe it's already 6 years. Wish uncle was with us today ... I know how proud he must be, smiling at his amazing boy from the heavens above. Hugs, love and prayers brother."

Rashmika Mandanna on 'Pushpa': Allu Arjun monitored each shot

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Rashmika Mandanna has spoken about her upcoming movie 'Pushpa' and her leading man Allu Arjun's dedication for each shot of the film.

As 'Pushpa' is all set for its release in a couple of days, she Rashmika has been busy promoting Sukumar's directorial.

Starring beside Allu Arjun in 'Pushpa', Rashmika thinks Sukumar is one of the most talented directors she has worked with. "Pushpa" is a raw, rustic movie, which requires

detailing minute things, which Sukumar is famous for. I was amused when I got this offer," she said.

Talking about how she was roped in for the movie, Rashmika said, "The makers of 'Pushpa' wanted an actress who would also be familiar with the Chittoor accent. So, I had given three look tests before we shook hands for the movie."

As Rashmika spoke about her experience as an actress, Rashmika stated that she had to unlearn many things for this role, as director Sukumar wanted to bring an organic appeal to it.

"We actors never got to learn our dialogues beforehand, as we had to go unprepared. Under Sukku sir's

direction, he keeps everything organic. We walked into the sets, where we are given our dialogues. We had to pick up the scenario on the spot," explained the 'Dear Comrade' actress.

The actress mentioned that it was quite difficult for her to shoot for the 'Saami Saami' song. "We shot it in a remote area and we worked really hard on it. Allu Arjun would monitor each shot after it was done, and he gives the best suggestions," she said.

The songs, trailer, and posters for 'Pushpa' have been received well as she said, "I love the way people have responded to them."

Rashmika said that despite living out of a suitcase, she has been enjoying her life.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Janhvi Kapoor