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NATION > 02

Other MPs fear losing ticket, so they do not speak: Varun Gandhi...



HOLLYWOOD > 06

Ellen Pompeo is ready for 'Grey's Anatomy' to end...



SPORTS > 07

Serie A: Bernardeschi inspires Juve to conquer Cagliari...



INDIA CURRENTLY FACING 3RD COVID WAVE, TO HIT PEAK IN FEBRUARY, SAYS SCIENTISTS

ALARMING BELL

Amid the growing Omicron cases, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a review meeting today on the Covid related situation in the country.

- ▶ DAILY COVID-19 CASELOAD IN INDIA IS EXPECTED TO INCREASE ONCE THE OMICRON STARTS DISPLACING DELTA AS THE DOMINANT VARIANT. MEDIA REPORTS QUOTED MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COVID-19 SUPERMODEL COMMITTEE AS SAYING.
- ▶ ACCORDING TO THEIR PREDICTION, THE THIRD WAVE OF COVID WAVE IN INDIA IS SET TO BEGIN "EARLY NEXT YEAR".
- ▶ HOWEVER, THEY NOTED THAT THE INFECTION RATE WILL BE Milder THAN SEEN IN THE SECOND WAVE, DUE TO A LARGE-SCALE IMMUNITY AND VACCINATION PRESENT IN THE COUNTRY NOW.

The report forecasts India's third wave of Covid-19 to start around mid-December 2021 and the cases to peak in the beginning of February 2022."

Subhra Sankar Dhar, Associate Professor, Department of Mathematics and Statistics

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A slew of studies by Indian scientists show that amid rising cases of Omicron, the third wave of Covid-19 has set in India from mid-December, and it may hit its peak in February next year. A yet-to-be peer reviewed study led by a team of researchers from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), Kanpur used a statistical methodology based on the fitting of a mixture of Gaussian distributions - based on an algorithm for clustering to estimate the parameters. The third wave was forecast using the data on the first two waves of pandemic. The team also utilised the data of different countries that are already facing the third wave, modelling their daily cases data and predicting the impact and timeline for the third wave in India. A separate study led by a joint team from the IITs Hyderabad and Kanpur is based on the Sutra model, which tracks the country's Covid-19 trajectory.

UNVACCINATED, DELTA SURVIVORS HAVE NO PROTECTION AGAINST OMICRON

London: While it is known that Covid infections give natural antibodies, a new study has shown that people who are unvaccinated but were previously infected by the Delta Covid variant may have very little protection against the new vaccine-evading Omicron. To measure antibody levels, researchers from the Medical University of Innsbruck, in Austria, compared the blood of those who had beaten Delta against Omicron, Daily Mail reported. Only one out of seven samples produced enough of the infection-fighting proteins to neutralise Omicron. On the contrary, Covid survivors who were also fully vaccinated showed an increased ability to combat the strain, suggesting that prior infection alone offers virtually no protection against catching Omicron, the report said. Overall, the best results were found in five samples taken from those who had both survived a previous Covid infection and then later got a vaccine - a group of people the researchers dubbed the 'super-immune', the report said.



YEAR-END CELEBRATIONS BANNED IN DELHI; CURBS TIGHTENED

New Delhi: In view of the rising cases of Omicron in Delhi, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) has put a ban on all kinds of gatherings on Christmas and New Year in the national capital. The DDMA has directed all the district magistrates and DCPs to ensure that no cultural events, gatherings or congregations take place for celebrating Christmas or New Year in the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi. Also, capacity at public places like restaurants, auditoriums and assembly halls has again been reduced to 50 per cent, while gatherings at wedding functions have been capped at 200 persons to curb the spread of the new Covid variant.

US ARMY CREATES A SINGLE VACCINE AGAINST ALL COVID VARIANTS

New Delhi: Within weeks the scientists at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research of the US Army are expected to announce that they have developed a vaccine that is effective against Covid-19 and all its variants, even Omicron, as well as from previous SARS-origin viruses that have killed millions of people worldwide, Defense One reported. The Walter Reed Army Institute of Research is the largest biomedical research facility administered by the US Department of Defense. The achievement is the result of almost two years of work on the virus. The US Army lab received its first DNA sequencing of the Covid-19 virus in early 2020.

I-T raids on Chinese mobile firms, Xiaomi, OPPO say cooperating

▶ IN A STATEMENT, A XIAOMI SPOKESPERSON SAID THAT AS A RESPONSIBLE COMPANY, "WE GIVE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE TO ENSURING THAT WE ARE COMPLIANT WITH ALL INDIAN LAWS. AS AN INVESTED PARTNER IN INDIA, WE ARE FULLY COOPERATING WITH AUTHORITIES TO ENSURE THEY HAVE ALL THE REQUIRED INFORMATION."

▶ OPPO SAID: "WE HIGHLY RESPECT AND ABIDE BY THE LAW OF THE LAND. WE WILL CONTINUE TO FULLY COOPERATE WITH AUTHORITIES CONCERNED AS PER PROCEDURE."



Team Absolute | New Delhi

With the Income Tax department conducting searches at several premises of Chinese mobile companies across the nation, leading smartphone brands Xiaomi and OPPO said on Wednesday they continue to cooperate with authorities as per the law of the land. According to sources, the smartphone companies were allegedly violating rules and norms to evade taxes and were on the radar of several probe agencies, including the I-T Department. Earlier, some Chinese firms which were allegedly running mobile loan application and transport business, were raided by the government agencies. Now, few more firms have come into their radar. According to

sources, several teams were formed by the I-T Department to conduct searches which started around 9 a.m. on Wednesday, and were likely to continue till late in the day. Reliable sources had earlier told reporter that in the case of Xiaomi, routine IT procedure was being carried on, and there was no I-T raid at its premises or at its distributors' places. According to an official, basically the manufacturing units were being raided along with a few corporate houses. "Few teams also raided the godowns (warehouses) of the Chinese mobile companies. The officials have recovered incriminating documents," said the source. The raids took place at the offices of state-distribution partners of OPPO, including in Hyderabad, the source added. ZTE, a Chinese firm which deals in telecom equipment manufacturing in Gurugram, was on the radar of the IT Department.

MPC MEMBERS AGREE ON REPO RATE, DIFFER ON ACCOMMODATIVE STANCE

Mumbai: The six-member Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India had unanimously agreed on retaining the repo rate at its last meeting, but not all members favoured continuation of the "accommodative stance". According to the minutes of the MPC meet which took place from December 6 to 8, all six members unanimously voted to retain the RBI's repo rate, or short-term lending rate, for commercial banks, at 4 per cent. Likewise, the reverse repo rate was kept unchanged at 3.35 per cent, and the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the Bank Rate at 4.25 per cent. All members, except Prof Jayanth R. Varma, voted to continue with the accommodative stance.

Parl Houses adjourned sine die a day ahead of schedule

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The proceedings of the Lok Sabha were adjourned sine die on Wednesday, a day ahead of schedule. Soon after the House resumed at 11 a.m., Speaker Om Birla said that the House was heading towards the closure of the winter session. Addressing the members, he said that during this session, the House had 18 sessions with 83 hours 12 minutes. The productivity of the House was recorded at 82 per cent while 18 hours and 46 minutes were lost due to protests. Similarly, Rajya Sabha on Wednesday was adjourned sine die, a day ahead of its schedule. The house was adjourned just after proceedings commenced on Wednesday. Chairman M. Venkiah Naidu said that the house could not function properly and every-



one should cooperate and then adjourned the house sine die. During the winter session, the opposition and the government had been at loggerheads on suspension of 12 MPs which could not be resolved and on Tuesday another MP of the Trinamool Congress Derek O'Brien was suspended. The opposition alleged that the government wanted to push bills in the house, so it suspended the MPs.

'IT'S TIME TO REST', HARISH RAWAT TARGETS PARTY AHEAD OF POLLS

New Delhi: Congress Campaign committee chief in Uttarakhand, Harish Rawat has targeted the party for not giving him a free hand in the party affairs and in a series of tweets he said that "it's time to rest, it has been enough." The new barb from the former Chief Minister will create trouble for the party in the state as it doesn't have a face apart from Rawat who has pan state presence, after the demise of Narayan Datt Tiwari and Indira Hridayesh. Sources say that the former Chief Minister is upset over the ticket distribution and that he wants more say in the party affairs. The Congress which is going for the collective leadership into the polls has not declared Rawat as the Chief Minister candidate which is the prime demand of his supporters.

GOVT ORDERS PROBE INTO HACKING OF INSTA ACCOUNTS OF PRIYANKA'S CHILDREN



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Taking suo motu cognizance, the government on Wednesday ordered a probe into allegations of hacking of Instagram accounts of Priyanka Gandhi and Robert Vadra's children. According to sources, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology approached Instagram taking suo motu cognizance of the allegation made by Priyanka Gandhi of the hacking of the Instagram accounts of her children. Instagram has informed the ministry that the allegation is false and no complaint has been lodged from the Gandhi family or on behalf of anyone so far. According to sources, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has asked the Computer Emergency

Response Team to investigate the matter. Under the protocol, the team can also speak to Priyanka Gandhi and her children if required.

'MERE PAS BAHNE HAIN'

New Delhi: Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in a tweet on Wednesday said that sisters of the state will bring change in UP politics. Quoting from the famous Amitabh Bachchan blockbuster 'Deewar' she said, "I have sisters who will bring change in politics." She said that Congress doesn't believe in politics of caste and religion and has targeted the fairer gender in her campaign and had promised 40 per cent ticket for the women. The Congress general secretary has been focussing on women power and the party is organising Marathon of girls in the theme of -- 'Ladki hun lad sakti hun'.

FEMALE COMMANDOS TO GUARD AMIT SHAH, SONIA, PRIYANKA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A maiden contingent of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) women commandos trained in VIP security will soon be deployed with Home Minister Amit Shah, Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and other high-risk facing personalities for multiple duties, including accompanying them during the upcoming polls in five states, official sources said on Wednesday. The CRPF has raised its first-ever contingent of 32 women commandos in its VIP security wing and they will now be tasked to guard its protectees, based in Delhi, who receive the top Z+ cover. Sources said these women commandos have just completed their 10-week training in

rendering VIP security duties, unarmed combat, body frisking and special weapons firing, and will now be deployed on the ground sometime in January. Initially, the women commandos will be deployed with its Z+ category protectees based in Delhi like Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the first family of Congress that includes party president Sonia Gandhi, her children Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Rahul Gandhi, and former prime minister Manmohan Singh as well as his wife Gursharan Kaur, they said. These protectees also are provided with an advanced security liaison protocol due to their high-risk profile. About a dozen other Z+ category CRPF protectees will have this women commando contingent on a rotational basis, sources said.

Centre cuts over 25,000 compliances for 'Ease of Living', 'Ease of Doing Business'

▶ ADDRESSING THE SESSION, THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION AND TEXTILES PIYUSH GOYAL SAID INDIA'S COMPLIANCE SYSTEMS FOR CITIZENS MUST BE BASED ON THE BASIS OF TRUST, WHILE CALLING FOR A FOCUS ON INITIATIVES WHICH CAN REDUCE THE COMPLIANCE BURDEN TO PROVIDE TIMELY DELIVERY OF SERVICES.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

To promote 'Ease of Living' as well as 'Ease of Doing Business', the Centre has reduced more than 25,000

compliances. The figure was furnished by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry after the valedictory session of the "National Workshop on the next phase of reforms to reduce Compliance Burden" which was held here. Goyal said that infinite possibilities in technology should aid the Centre's initiatives and not just further complicate the system. He also stressed the need for indigenous solutions to problems facing the country. "The Minister asked policy makers to consider the wide disparity in income, literacy level and the gaps in infrastructure, especially connectivity, while planning the delivery of services, especially if technology is involved," the ministry said in a statement. Goyal spoke of the need to combine

various services like the 'Digi locker' and the 'National Single Window System', so that repetitive processes are rationalised, gaps are bridged and redundancies are eliminated when it comes to applying for approvals and permissions. Additionally, he called for the creation of a single identification number for businesses and individuals by merging the several identification numbers that exist presently, such as 'Aadhaar', 'PAN', 'TAN' so that delivery of services becomes smoother and faster. "He also called for promotion of self-attestation, self-certification and self-regulation. He added that it is high time that compliance systems were built on trusting the integrity of the citizens," the statement added.



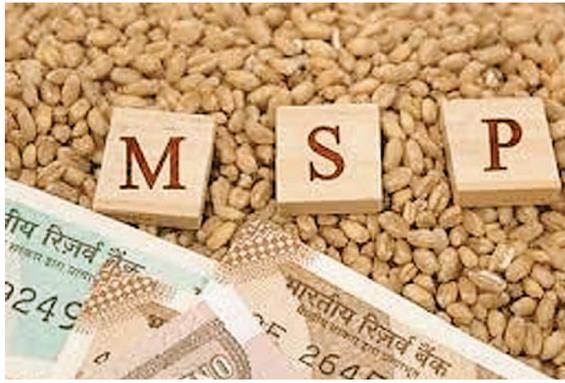
CABINET APPROVES HIGHER MSP FOR COPRA FOR 2022 SEASON

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday gave its approval to an increase in the minimum support price (MSP) for copra for 2022 season.

The MSP for fair average quality (FAQ) of milling copra has been increased to Rs 10,590 per quintal for 2022 season from Rs 10,335 per quintal in 2021 and the MSP for ball copra has been increased to Rs 11,000 per quintal for 2022 season from Rs 10,600 per quintal in 2021.

This is to ensure a return of 51.85 per cent for milling copra and 57.73 per cent for ball copra over the pan India weighted average cost of production. The increase in



MSP for copra for 2022 season is in line with the principle of fixing the MSP at a level of at least 1.5 times the all India weighted average cost

of production as announced in the budget 2018-19, a release from the Agriculture Ministry said.

The decision is based on recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).

It assures a minimum of 50 per cent as margin of profit as one of the important and progressive steps towards making possible doubling of farmers' incomes by 2022.

The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd and National Cooperative Consumer Federation of India Ltd will continue to act as Central nodal agencies to undertake price support operations at the MSP in the coconut growing states, the release added.

Cop, civilian shot dead in two separate attacks in Kashmir

Srinagar | Agencies

A civilian was shot dead in Srinagar's downtown area and a policeman in Anantnag district in two separate terror incidents in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday evening, police said.

Police said a civilian, identified as Rouf Ahmad Khan, was fired upon by terrorists outside his home in Nawa Kadal area. He was taken to a hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Additional forces have reached the spot and an operation has been started to nab the attackers.

"Terrorists fired upon a civilian namely Rouf Ahmad at Merjanpora, Eidgah PS Safakadal Srinagar. The



injured was shifted to SMHS hospital where he was declared dead. Case registered, investigation going on," police said.

In Anantnag, Assistant Sub-Inspector Mohd Ashraf of Police Station Bijbehara was injured after terrorists fired upon him indiscriminately in Bijbehara. He was taken to a hospital in Srinagar where he succumbed to his injuries.

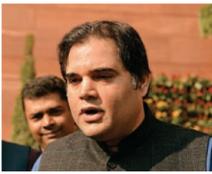
"Injured ASI Mohd Ashraf succumbed to his injuries and attained martyrdom. We stand by his family at this critical juncture," police said.

Security forces have surrounded Bijbehara town to trace the assailants.

Other MPs fear losing ticket, so they do not speak: Varun Gandhi

Pilibhit (UP) | Agencies

BJP MP Varun Gandhi has said that he is the only one who raises the issue of increasing the MSP (Minimum Support Price) for sugarcane, but other MPs and MLAs do not have the courage to talk about it. He said his party colleagues do not raise such issues as they fear that they will not be given tickets in the next election. Varun is in his constituency Pilibhit and was talking to local reporters in Bahedi assembly segment. "Those leaders fear that they will not get (poll) tickets. If the voice of the people is not raised by the public representatives, then who will raise it? It makes no difference to me if



I do not get a poll ticket. My mother has won elections as an independent candidate. I will only say the truth while governments come and go," he said. Varun further said he is a 'revolutionary' leader in the sense that he cannot see injustice being done to people. "Whatever help I extend to people is from his own money, be it giving sports equipment to youngsters in villages or giving financial assistance to temples," he said. Meanwhile, in

a letter to Pilibhit district magistrate Pulkit Khare, Varun Gandhi alleged that money is being extorted from traders for the 'Bansuri Mahotsav' (flute festival) being organised in the district. The district magistrate has not reacted so far on the issue. Traders have alleged that the local administration has taken money from them to organise the festival. The BJP MP said the traders met him in Delhi recently and briefed him on the issue. "I am strongly against the practice of organising such events while banking on traders. Traders now are in a very bad shape. I and my mother have always considered the people of Pilibhit as our family members," he said."

INDIA SUCCESSFULLY TESTS 'PRALAY' MISSILE

Balalore (Odisha): India today successfully test fired the short-range, surface-to-surface guided ballistic missile 'Pralay' off the Odisha coast in Balalore, DRDO sources said. The solid-fuel, battlefield missile developed by the Defence Research Development Organisation is based on the Prithvi Defence Vehicle from the Indian ballistic missile programme. The missile, launched from the APJ Abdul Kalam Island around 10:30 am, met all the mission objectives, the sources told news agency Press Trust of India. "Pralay is a quasi ballistic surface-to-surface missile. The advanced missile has been developed in a way to able to defeat interceptor missiles. It has the ability to change its path after covering a certain range midair," sources told news agency. A battery of tracking instruments monitored its trajectory along the coast line, they said. "Pralay" missile is a 350-500 km short-range, surface-to-surface missile with a payload capacity of 500-1,000 kg. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Twitter, "Congratulations to the DRDO and associated teams for the maiden development flight trial." My compliments to them for the fast-track development and successful launch of modern Surface-to-Surface Quasi Ballistic missile. It is a significant milestone achieved today," he added.



Delimitation Commission proposals can't be challenged in court: Sajad Lone

Srinagar | Agencies

Sajad Gani Lone, chairman of People's Conference (PC) said on Wednesday that the leaders of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) were lying when they told the media that they will challenge the delimitation commission proposals in the court. Commenting on Tuesday's media conference of PAGD leaders in which they said if the Delimitation Commission does not change its draft proposals, the PAGD would challenge it in the court, Sajad said on his twitter page, "Will somebody please enlighten them (PAGD). This report cannot be challenged in court. It is legally unchallengeable. Heavens sake. Stop lying



through your teeth." Article 329 (A) in The Constitution of India says that the validity of any law relating to the delimitation of constituencies or the allotment of seats to such constituencies, made or purporting to be made under Article 327 or Article 328, shall not be called in question in any court. Article 329 (A) of Constitution of India bars challenge to delimitation of constituencies or allotment of seats in any court of law. "Going by sub-section 2 of section 10 of Delimitation Act, the orders of the Commission have force of law and shall not be called in question in any court.

Dead woman given second dose of Covid vaccine in Bihar

Patna | Agencies

In a major goof-up, a woman, who died two months ago, has been sent the message of successful administration of second dose of corona vaccine. Her husband saw the message. Lalo Devi's husband Ram Udgar Thakur said: "My wife died due to illness in village Kharmauli under Veerpur block on September 19. The Planning and Development Department of Bihar has also issued death certificate on the same date. Now, we have received Corona vaccination certificate from health department, two months after her death," Thakur said.

On November 25, primary health centre of Veerpur had organised a corona vaccination camp in Kisan Bhawan. After the camp, the health officials issued the vaccination certificate in the name of



Lalo Devi. The vaccination certificate issued to a dead person was uploaded on social media and is a talking point in Begusarai district. Many people are saying that it is a "ploy" to "increase" the data of corona vaccination in Bihar.

Akhilesh promises caste census within 3 months if voted to power

Mainpuri | Agencies

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav has promised a caste census to give people their rights in accordance with their share in the population. He said that the census would be held within three months if his party is voted in power in the state. Akhilesh, who was addressing people during his Vijay Yatra in Mainpuri, which is also his father Mulayam Singh Yadav's parliamentary constituency, on Tuesday evening, said, "We all are accused of snatching someone's else's rights, but things will become clear once the caste census is done." He said that



his party would fulfil all its promises as it had done earlier. "Netaji (Mulayam Singh Yadav) is known for mincing no words; his actions speak," said Akhilesh. Mounting a blistering attack on Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, he said the chief minister is good only in changing colours and names of institutions, for laying foundation stones and inaugurating already inaugurated projects. "Do

you need Yogi or 'yogya' (deserving) government?" he asked. Talking about his recent poll alliance with his estranged uncle Shivpal Yadav of Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party Lohia (PSP), Akhilesh said, "Since I took 'chacha wali' (uncle's) party along, BJP's I-T, CBI and ED cells have become active from Delhi. As elections near, these agencies will become more active because the fear of defeat haunts BJP." Referring to the recent income tax department's raids at the premises of some SP leaders, he said, "Samajwadis are not scared of anything 'jo dar gaya woh mar gaya' (one who's afraid is dead)".

AFTER KTR'S OPEN INVITE, MUNAWAR FARUQUI ANNOUNCES SHOW IN HYDERABAD

Hyderabad | Agencies

Hyderabad: Days after Telangana's Industry and Information Technology Minister K.T. Rama Rao extended an open invitation, stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui announced that he will be performing in Hyderabad on January 9. Faruqui took to social media to announce his show titled 'Dhandho'. However, the venue of the show is yet to be announced. The stand-up comedian had earlier tweeted that he was receiving several calls and mails from Hyderabad to perform in the city. Last week, K.T. Rama Rao, who is also the son of Chief Minister N. Chandrababhan Rao, had extended an open invitation to comedians to perform in Hyderabad saying the city is truly cosmopolitan. KTR, as the minister is popularly known, took a jibe at the BJP government in Karnataka, after stand-up comedians Munawar Faruqui and Kunal Kamra's shows were cancelled in Bengaluru over threats from some right-wing groups. "In our city, stand-up comedians get an open invite. We don't cancel shows of Munawar Faruqui and Kunal Kamra just because we are not aligned with them politically," KTR had said at an event on Friday. "You claim to be a cosmopolitan city, and then you end up taking comedy very seriously. I don't understand that at all."



Wet spell over Western Himalayan region till December 29: IMD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday forecast a wet spell over Western Himalayan region between December 22 and 29 and over plains of northwest India during December 26 and 29.

Besides, there would be abatement of cold wave conditions from northwest & central India over next three days.

While cold wave conditions prevailed in some parts over Odisha and in isolated pockets over Punjab, West Uttar Pradesh, East Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha and Telangana, cold day conditions were experienced in isolated pockets over Madhya Pradesh, the IMD said in a release on Wednesday.

Under the influence of a Western Disturbance as a cyclonic circulation over north Pakistan & neighbourhood at lower tropospheric levels, isolated rainfall or snowfall is very likely over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan & Muzaffarabad and Himachal Pradesh on Thursday.



Thereafter, two Western Disturbances in quick succession, the first from December 24 and second from December 26 are very likely to influence northwest India. "Under their influence, light isolated to scattered rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Western Himalayan region on December 24 and 25 and light isolated rainfall is expected over northern parts of Punjab & Haryana during same period," the IMD said, adding, "Thereafter, under the influence of intense fresh Western

Disturbance from December 26, precipitation activity is very likely to increase further over northwest India with light/moderate scattered to widespread rainfall/snowfall over Western Himalayan region during December 26 to 29 with possibility of isolated heavy falls over Kashmir region and Himachal Pradesh on December 27. "Light/moderate isolated to scattered rainfall is also likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh & Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan during December 26 to 29 and over Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Jharkhand during December 27 to 29. Meanwhile, gradual rise in minimum temperatures by 3-5 degrees Celsius is very likely over most parts of Northwest & Central India during next three days and no significant change thereafter. "No significant change in minimum temperatures over most parts of East India during next 24 hours and rise by 2-4 degrees Celsius thereafter. Cold wave conditions in isolated pockets are very likely over Odisha during next 48 hours and over East Madhya Pradesh during next 24 hours and abatement thereafter.

Pregnant woman fights stray dogs to save her 3 kids in UP

Pilibhit | Agencies

A pregnant woman and her five-year-old daughter have been admitted to a hospital in a critical condition after being attacked by a pack of stray dogs.

The incident took place on Tuesday at the Barha village on the outskirts of Pilibhit city under Sungadi police circle.

The woman, Seema, was cooking when she heard her screams of her three children, who were playing outside.

She rushed out and saw a pack of six dogs dragging away her daughter Pallavi, 5, while two dogs were mauling her sons, Anuj, 10, and Monu, 3.

Seema fought with the pack of stray dogs single-handedly and she was scratched and bitten by the pack, but she pushed and kicked the dogs till they retreated. All three children have received injuries, but the condition of Seema and



Pallavi is critical. The dogs had ripped off flesh from Pallavi's head and arms and Seema was also severely bitten by the canines. Seema and all three children were taken to the community health centre from where mother and daughter were referred to the district hospital. Doctors said Pallavi was suffering from trauma and was critical. Her husband Danveer Singh, a farmer, had gone out for work when the incident took place.



MAHA BJP: REPLACE THACKERAY AS CM; MVA SPURNS DEMAND

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party on Wednesday demanded that the Maha Vikas Aghadi should replace Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray since he is indisposed and the state administration is allegedly at a standstill, but the ruling coalition of Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress dismissed the suggestion.

Ahead of the start of the Winter Session of Maharashtra Legislature here, state BJP President Chandrakant Patil and other leaders raised the issue of "the CM's long absence" and urged that he should be replaced by either his wife Rashmi or son and Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray in the post.

"The people of the state have not seen the CM for a long... It's understandable that he is unwell. As per tradition, the charge should have been handed over to someone else. It is possible that he has no faith in the two allies (NCP-Congress), and if



he has no faith even in his own partymen (Sena), he can at least give charge to Aditya Thackeray," Patil said.

The Sena-NCP hit back with ministers Aditya Thackeray and Jayant Patil assuring that the CM's health is fine and he is likely to attend the House.

Rejecting the opposition's contentions, they also said the CM, the cabinet and the government are performing very well and there should be no cause for anyone to worry.

Sena MP Sanjay Raut took a swipe at Patil by saying that "he should concentrate on the Opposition" instead of doling out advice to the MVA government. CM Thackeray, who underwent a cervical spine surgery on November 12, has been recuperating at his official residence 'Varsha' since the past over a month.

However, he has been regularly conducting important meetings related to the Covid-19 and Omicron health crises, the cabinet meetings and other major meets online.

Stormy start to winter session in Maharashtra

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra Legislature's Winter session in Mumbai got off to a stormy start with the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) and the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party clashing on various issues on the opening day of the session on Wednesday.

The week-long Winter session is being held in Mumbai instead of the traditional venue Nagpur, on account of the health condition of Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray currently recuperating from a cervical spine surgery he underwent at the Sir HN Reliance Foundation hospital on November 12. The first day witnessed uproarious scenes by the opposition party on several issues like the recent leaks of some government examination papers, revocation of suspension of 12 BJP MLAs during the Monsoon session in July, inflated electricity bills, farmers' compensation package, the absence of Chief Minister from the House, etc.

Led by Leaders of Opposition Devendra Fadnis (Assembly) and Pravin Darekar (Council) besides BJP State Chief Chandrakant Patil, the legislators squatted outside the legislature building at Nariman Point shouting slogans against the government, and some BJP leaders also demanded a change of Chief Minister from the MVA.

Among the 26 bills to be taken up, the high-



light will be the Shakti Legislation besides the election for the post of Speaker that is likely on the final day of the session on December 28. On the contentious issue of taking the one-year long suspension of 12 BJP MLAs since July 21, the MVA -- irked over the delay in clearance of the nomination of 12 MLAs by the Governor -- is unlikely to oblige as the matter is being heard by the Supreme Court. The suspensions came after the legislators had misbehaved with the then Speaker-in-Chair, Bhaskar Jadhav for refusing them sufficient time to speak. The suspended BJP legislators include - Ashish Shelar, Girish Mahajan, Atul Bhatkalkar, Jaykumar Rawal, Yogesh Sagar, Narayan Kuch, Abhimanyu Pawar, Sanjay Kute, Ram Satpute, Parag Alvani, Kirtikumar Bhangadiya and Harish Pimpale.

Security tightened as Maratha activists threaten to cross K'taka border

Belagavi | Agencies

The Karnataka Police on Wednesday made elaborate security arrangements in the Belagavi district in view of the Maratha activists from Maharashtra threatening to cross the border and hold protests here. Police sources said the activists had made statements regarding the border crossing while condemning desecration of the Shivaji Maharaj statue in Bengaluru. "We do not want to take any chances and security has been tightened in the border areas to prevent Maratha activists from entering the state to stage protests," police said.

The police also said that the Maratha activists have gathered in Maharashtra on the other side of the Kagavand border and police are on a high alert to prevent any untoward incident. Meanwhile, the Karnataka government has



slapped sedition charges and invoked the Goonda Act on miscreants who vandalised freedom fighter Sangolli Rayanna and desecrated Shivaji and Basavanna statues. The government has also warned that it will spare anyone

trying to disturb the law and order situation in the state. The police department has taken extra measures as the 10-day winter session of the Assembly session is being held in the border town of Belagavi.

"EXPLOSIVE" IF UNVACCINATED PEOPLE USE PUBLIC TRANSPORT: MAHA GOVT TO HC

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government told the Bombay high court on Wednesday that allowing unvaccinated people to mix with others by using public transport will endanger the lives of others, and invite 'explosive transmission' of the coronavirus and its variants.

The decision to prohibit people, who were yet to receive both doses of COVID-19 vaccine, from using public transport in the state had been taken to ensure those unvaccinated do not endanger the lives of others, it said.

"Allowing unvaccinated persons to mix with other people by using public transport will only endanger the lives of others, and will invite explosive transmission of the coronavirus and its subsequent variants," the government said in the affidavit filed through its chief secretary.

The Maharashtra government told a bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice M S Kamik that such a decision was 'reasonable', and not discriminatory or in breach of a citizen's fundamental rights.

The unvaccinated people were prohibited from the use of public transport to ensure they do not mingle with other citizens and add to the spread of the coronavirus, it said.

The state government filed its affi-



idavit in response to two public interest litigations filed by one Firoze Mithiborwala, and one Yohan Tengra, claiming the state's circular prohibiting unvaccinated people from travelling in local trains in Mumbai was without logic and in breach of such citizens' right to equality. Last week, the HC had directed the Maharashtra government to file an affidavit explaining the rationale behind such prohibition. On Wednesday, the state said unvaccinated people were prohibited from not just the use of local

trains, but from all modes of public transport in the state. The decision had been taken after consultation with experts and members of the state's special task force for tackling COVID-19, it said. The state government submitted that as on December 20 this year, a total of 54 people in the state had been infected with the Omicron variant of the virus. It further said that as per data available till December 20, there were 544 new cases of COVID19 infections, and four deaths due to the viral infection.

"Unfortunately, the problem is not over yet. There is likelihood of a third wave and also the likelihood of spread of the new variant, Omicron," the affidavit said. "The government of Maharashtra, therefore, cannot take any risk and would like to err on the safer side on the issue of public health," it added. The state also submitted data on the devastating second wave of COVID-19 that hit people earlier this year, and how state authorities struggled to ensure adequate medical aid, hospital beds and oxygen supply for citizens. The government said it did not want a repeat of such dire situation. There was adequate research to prove that those who had taken both the doses of vaccine were less likely to contract severe COVID-19 or to require prolonged hospitalisation, it said. It urged the HC to dismiss the PILs, saying such a prohibition on the unvaccinated people was reasonable. The state government further said the petitioners themselves had received both the doses of vaccine.

While taking the vaccine is not mandatory for citizens in the country, adequate vaccine doses and slots are now available across the state for those interested in taking the vaccine, the state said. The HC will hear the matter further on January 3, 2022.

IIT-BOMBAY RECORDS HIGHEST, MOST LUCRATIVE PLACEMENTS THIS YEAR

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The IIT-Bombay has notched an all-time record in the number of placement offers along with lucrative pay packages for its students at the end of the first phase of recruitments in the current season, officials said on Wednesday.

This year (2021-2022) has seen a total of 1,382 offers accepted compared with 973 last year and 1,172 the year before that, comprising both pre-placement and campus placement offers.

The IIT-B has also received the highest domestic CTC package of Rs 1.68 crore annually, the top-most international package is around Rs 2.17 crore per year, and the average CTC of all recruitments this year stands at around Rs 25



lakh per annum. The lion's share of the placements came from the engineering and technology sector,

ascertaining the technical proficiency of IIT-B students. In terms of the average CTC, the

finance sector topped with Rs 28.40 lakh per year, followed by IT-Software (Rs 27.05 lakh pa), R&D (Rs 25.12 lakh pa), Engineering & Technology (Rs 21.54 lakh pa) and Consulting (Rs 18.02 lakh pa).

The number of international and domestic offers above Rs 1 crore per annum are 7 and 5 respectively, as the IIT-B Placement Office focused on connecting with growing start-ups and industry with diverse roles to tackle the market slowdown. A total of 315 companies participated in the first phase, including 2 PSUs with 9 offers, and more PSUs are likely to join in the second phase of the placement season many as 45 international offers were received from countries like the US, Japan, UAE, Singapore, The Netherlands, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

IDBI Bank-diamantaire group issue: 'Disturbed' AIBOA seeks RBI probe

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a significant development, the powerful All India Bank Officers Association (AIBOA) on Wednesday demanded a probe by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) into the IDBI Bank Ltds recent disclosure of a diamantaire groups loan default.

AIBOA General Secretary S. Nagarajan has said that bank officers are "seriously disturbed" over the public notices issued by the IDBI Bank Ltd vis-a-vis the wilful defaulter diamantaire, Sanghavi Exports International Pvt Ltd, its group companies, factories, office, besides promoters/directors/guarantors.

In a letter to the RBI Governor, it has been pointed out how the IDBI Bank Ltd's first public notice (dated December 19) mentioned a huge amount of over Rs 6,700 crore, plus a foreign currency (USD) loan equiva-

lent to around Rs 1.20 crore. Earlier, the Bank of India, as the leader of a consortium, had taken over possession of the diamantaire's property for failure to repay loans worth Rs 468 crore in 2018, said Nagarajan.

"The wilful defaulter should not be a repeat action of the infamous Nirav Modi of Punjab National Bank. It is also intriguing that in 2018 itself, there was a recovery step made by another public sector bank, so how come the IDBI Bank was unknown of the developments," Nagarajan asked.

Meanwhile, banking circles have slammed IDBI Bank's clarification as "blatantly dishonest, without mention of the shocking, bumbling and wrong info in its public notice" dated December 21, and demanded a separate probe by concerned agencies to reveal the exact truth.

Drug regulator seizes Medicine that claims to "Cure" Diabetes

Thane | Agencies

The Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has seized stocks of a medicine that makes misleading claim to cure diabetes after raiding the premises of a pharma distributor, FDA officials said on Wednesday.

Assistant Commissioner of FDA RP Chaudhari said drugs inspectors from the agency raided the premises of the distributor at Dombivli on Tuesday on a tip-off and seized stocks worth ₹ 25,000 of Amrit Noni D-plus, a medicine whose manufacturer makes unverified claims on its label about curing diabetes.

The action was taken under the Drugs and Magic Remedies (objectionable advertisement) Act, 1954, he said.



The content of the label on Amrit Noni D-plus contravenes the provisions of the Act, the FDA official said, adding further investigation was underway.

"One cannot make claims for curing certain health disorders. Making such claims amount to violation of regulations," Chaudhari said.

RBI to the rescue: Sizeable intervention seen to arrest rupee fall

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Likely Reserve Bank of India's intervention via a recent US dollar sale worth around \$4 to \$5 billion has arrested the sharp slide in rupee value, cited analysts.

The RBI is known to enter the markets via intermediaries to either sell or buy US dollars to keep the rupee in a stable orbit.

However, the decline might trigger again on the back of continuous selling by FIIs in the secondary market. Lately, growing cautiousness over a US Fed's tapering measures as well as scare around the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 impacted investors' sentiments.

Notably, tighter liquidity controls in the US tempts global investors to pull-out money from the emerging markets such as India.

The rupee on Wednesday closed at 75.55 to a greenback. Last week, the rupee closed at



76.09 to a USD weakening significantly on a weekly basis.

The Indian rupee has stabilised this week after hitting its lowest level of 20 months.

"Recent correction in rupee seems to have been triggered as an overreaction to the Omicron variant," said Sajal Gupta, head of forex and rates at Edelweiss Securities.

"The RBI did intervene in the market when the rupee hit a year-to-date low of 76.31 last week. However, RBI is not expected to take further action as the flow picture seems quite favourable in the

medium term."

Recently, the rupee has been under pressure after the RBI refrained from raising reverse repo rate and also as the Federal Reserve decided to increase its pace of tapering. On the domestic front, FIIs have been net sellers in the recent past and restricted weakness for the currency suggests that RBI has actively intervened to curb the volatility. "The suspected RBI intervention could be to the tune of \$4-5 billion and market participants expect that the current market swings could still continue until the

fear of the omicron variant does not dim," said Gaurang Somaiya, Forex & Bullion Analyst, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

"Latest data released by the RBI showed reserves currently stand over \$635 billion suggesting that the central bank has enough cushion to deal with short term volatility." According to Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities: "Along with growth, the RBI started looking on liquidity and inflation aspect after FOMC meeting and from start of the week, they might have heavily intervene by selling dollar to curb the imported inflation and introducing 'VRRR' facility to remove extra liquidity from the system." "In the next couple of days, we could see the rupee oscillating in the range 75.10 to 75.70 in the absence of fresh global cues and selling of foreign institutions could be lower ahead of the Christmas holiday."



EDITOR'S SPECS

WOMEN AND MEDIA

Stereotyping and objectification of women in the media narrative is a universal truth that needs to be addressed, questioned and reversed as the media in general, especially advertising, has failed to a large extent to understand and assimilate a definite social shift and the changing status of women in the society per se, says industry expert Jaishri Jethwaney in a new book that examines how objectification, sexualisation and patriarchy loom large in advertising across societies. The findings are not any different from the ASCI's Gender Next Report, 2021 that reflects that women are stereotyped and projected sensually, with the "average ads featuring an unrealistic and unobtainable standard of beauty... There emerges a gap between the intent to create more positive depictions of women and the current reality of depictions", the report says. Going back into time, Jethwaney writes that the feminist thought in the 1960s in retrospect, drew attention to the representation of women in media and called for a systematic investigation into the area of female role stereotypes in popular media. The research in different countries and at various points of time is reflective of the exclusive and gender insensitive nature of societies. Critics believe that it is inevitable because, in general, social thoughts like philosophy, history, science, even theory are also gender insensitive, which has a concomitant impact on the policies as well as on governance and justice. Media, a part of the social milieu too remains largely gender insensitive in its approach and narrative. Advertising, as a marketing tool, draws its references from various persuasive theories that look for appeals and symbols that largely cater to men and male gaze, she writes. Advertising is criticised for voyeurism, misogyny, objectification of women's body and for following a patriarchal approach in its discourse.

J&K TO HOLD PARTY OF THE DECADE ON HIMALAYAN SNOW PEAKS!

Srinagar | Agencies

Jammu and Kashmir achieved a remarkable feat of entertaining 1,27,605 tourists in the single month of November 2021, the highest number in the past 7 years versus 6,000 tourists in November 2020. It is a turning point for the tourism industry which is presently planning a grand expansion and promotion of the UT given the stabilised political climate. Tourists are choosing to celebrate Christmas and New Year's Eve in the picturesque snow peaks under a blanket of stars for the first time in Sonamarg which earlier saw isolation from civilization for 5 months of winter. This year more than 5.49 Lakh tourists visited Kashmir up till December first week. Among other reasons, early snowfall in the Valley has definitely pushed more people to cash in on Gulmarg's best reserved ski resort, health resorts, and hotels. Only by December 6, 26,000 tourists have visited! October, a supposed lean month for visitors, witnessed an astonishing footfall of 91,000! It is predicted that with the full house at Gulmarg and Sonamarg at this time of the year, the figure for December alone will touch the 2 Lakh milestone. On the International Mountain Day, 11th December, the Tourism Department inaugurated trekking trails for virgin, lesser-known destinations and arranged mountain biking and cycling events at Zabarwan, Pahalgam, Gulmarg, Naranag, Nowgam. A much-awaited wall climbing event at Nowgam was also organised. Kashmir has a huge potential for rock climbing and is observing the most lively winter season with a particular focus on the local and domestic tourists as the upgraded National Highway to



the valley has made travelling possible in such harsh weather conditions. The UT government is enthusiastic about its 75 new and exclusive tourist spots with infrastructure having provisions for recreational activities, eateries, and other amenities. The Tourism Department is holding road shows across major cities like Chennai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, New Delhi, Pune, Hyderabad, and Lucknow to raise awareness about the same. On account of Azadi Ka Amrit Mohatsav, the Tourism Department assembled an iconic week-long celebration in the October 2021 including performances on Hafiz Nagma, Kalam-e-Khusroo, Kalam-e-Baba Fareed, Qawwali, Baul Sufi folk, Darvish Sufi dance, and Haziri Kathak, and literary seminar on Sufism, exhibition of local arts,

calligraphy, and houseboat festival. The festivals organised so far are -- Gurez festival, Monsoon festival, Patnitop & Kashmir, Lolab festival, Wular festival, Aharbal festival, Tosamaidan festival, and Verinag festival. Under this banner, the Department will also organise the Jammu festival, White water rafting championship, Christmas arrival, Winter carnival, Gulmarg snow festival, Lohri festival, Mata Vaishno Devi Sangeet Sammelan, and numerous others, as its year-round activities. This aggressive promotion is being carried to preserve, restore, and promote the cultural and heritage threads of Jammu and Kashmir. Other new activities include Zorbing, Hydro Zorbing, Snow Mobile, ATV, Paragliding, Motor Boating, Bathing Boats, Flat Water Rafting, Paddle Boat Riding, Bungee Jumping,

Trampoline, Zip Line, Hot Air Balloon, Battery Operated Vehicles at Sonmarg, Shikara rides at Dal, Nigeen and Manasbal lakes, pony rides on various tracks including Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonmarg, Yousmarg, Doodpathri, and Ahrabal. Palpable excitement is bubbling in the rural areas as well. Rural tourism will also be heavily pushed under the same agenda, in the rural circuits of Hokersar-Parihaspora-Gohan in Gulmarg, Waderbala, Nowgam Mawar-Lolab in Kupwara, Chari-Sharief-Doodhpathri-Yousmarg in Budgam, Saderkoot-Payeen-Watlab in Bandipora, and Bani-Basohli-Sarthal and Billawar Duggan in Kathua, to name a few. The Gulmarg saucer is jam-packed with hundreds of tourists enjoying the Gandola cable car, ice skating, skiing, snowboarding, and sledge rides, as Gulmarg has some of the best slopes in south Asia for these sports. The tourism department is prepared to provide the best facilities and hospitality to visitors as Kashmir is seeing its greatest revival post Article 370. In an attempt to make the holiday experience more wholesome, local holidaymakers and service providers are working in collaboration with hotel associations in Gulmarg, Sonamarg, and Pahalgam to cope with the enthusiastic tourist turnout, with facilities such as constant water, power supply, and snow clearance mechanisms. In another news film contracts are also underway as seeing the easy mobility, infrastructure, and stability in the state, Jammu and Kashmir is again climbing the charts in the film industry. And to support this promotion, concessions will be given to film producers by the government. Looks like it will be Christmas all year round for the UT, to say the least!

CRIES OF BOOKSELLERS, DISTRIBUTORS GO IN VOID AS GOVT TURNS DEAF EAR

Radhika Tiwari

Hit severely by the first and second wave of the pandemic, the plight of Delhi's booksellers and distributors continues to go unnoticed as their sales hit a low due to Covid-19, online competition, piracy and absence of any aid from the government. Since the outbreak of pandemic in India, followed by the subsequent lockdown for 21 days that was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 24, the Delhi State Booksellers and Publishers' Association (DSBPA) has written several letters to the authorities, including Union State Minister of Culture and Tourism Prahlad Singh Patel, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and former

finance secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey to bring their attention to the core problems of the industry. In April, the association sought financial assistance for booksellers and publishers having an annual turnover of Rs 50 lakh or less for the period of second lockdown along with some kind of grant for books to be purchased in government schools and universities. Among those badly affected by the pandemic-induced lockdown, independent booksellers and small scale book distributors that are not owned by big corporations and usually survive on very finite resources are suffering the most, those from the industry told correspondent. The distributors, as the name suggests, act as intermediaries among the publishers, retailers and customers. Most of their business comes

from libraries, especially, school libraries and when all the schools were closed abruptly due to coronavirus scare earlier this year, they were left in a state of confusion and uncertainty for what would future hold for them. Sharing the plight of small-scale book distributors, Founder of Aakar Books -- a publishing house and book distribution business, Anand Saxena said: "There is a cut-throat competition among the distributors for even a small order and while publishers still have a chance to sail through these difficult times, many distributors will not be able to make it." However, Vaishalik Jain who owns Jain Book Agency in Connaught Place opines that it is unfair to blame pandemic for the deteriorating state of the

bookstores across India: "We have suffered a lot since the advent of e-commerce websites that sell books at or more than 50 per cent discount which is just not possible for us as we do not receive more than 40-45 per cent discount on our orders." "This is the reason why bookstores are dying in India... 80 to 100 years old bookstores have shut down in the capital. The only benefit book trade has received till now is that books are exempted from Goods and Services Tax (GST), but we get no rebate," he says, adding that they are planning to continue JBA for another 25 years so as to complete a centenary.

international

1 DEAD, DOZENS MISSING AS REFUGEE BOAT SINKS OFF GREEK ISLAND

Athens | Agencies

A man lost his life and dozens were missing after a boat carrying unknown number of refugees and migrants sank off the island of Folegandros, Greece's Coast Guard said on Wednesday. Twelve persons have been rescued, including seven men, a woman and four minors. The rescue operation was underway to locate the missing, Hellenic Coast Guard spokesperson commander Nikos Kokkalas told Greek national news agency AMNA. The vessel had probably set sail from the nearby Turkish coast and the destination was Italy, Xinhua news agency reported. Some survivors told authorities that a total of 32 people were on board, while others raised the number to



50, according to an e-mailed official press statement. Their nationalities have not been clarified so far. Greece has been at the

forefront of the refugee and migrant influx since 2015 and hundreds have perished in the Aegean Sea in the past six years.

56 INJURED IN ZAMBIA BUS CRASH

Lusaka | Agencies

Lusaka: At least 56 people were seriously injured when a military bus carrying them crashed into a stationary minibus in the Zambian capital Lusaka, local police said. Police spokesperson Rae Hamoonga said the accident happened early Tuesday when the driver of the military bus misjudged clearance and rammed into the minibus, Xinhua news agency reported. Road traffic accidents are common in the African country. The southern African nation witnessed more than 8,000 road traffic accidents in the third quarter of 2021, which resulted in 585 deaths and 3,561 injuries, according to police figures.



Putin vows response to Western 'aggressive' policy

Moscow | Agencies

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that his country will take countermeasures if the West continues its "aggressive" policy, but remains ready for negotiations. "If our Western colleagues continue their clearly aggressive line, we will take adequate retaliatory military-technical measures to respond firmly to hostile actions," Putin said at an expanded meeting of the Russian Defense Ministry Board. "We have every right to do so, to take actions aimed at ensuring the security and sovereignty of Russia," he said, expressing concerns over the deployment of the US missile defense systems near Russian borders, including in Romania and Poland, Xinhua news agency reported. He warned if the US and the North Atlantic Treaty



Organization (NATO) deploy missiles in Ukraine, they would reach Moscow in only seven to 10 minutes, and in just five minutes if they are hypersonic weapons. "They must understand that we simply have nowhere to retreat," Putin said. Russia has recently sent a draft agreement to NATO and a

draft treaty to the US both on security guarantees in Europe for the Western countries to consider. Putin reiterated that Russia stands against armed conflict and bloodshed and wishes to resolve issues through diplomacy, but there must be clear legal guarantees.

Over 80 missing in landslide at jade mine in Myanmar

Yangon | Agencies

Over 80 people went missing in a jade mine landslide in Myanmar's Kachin state in the early hours of Wednesday, a local village administration official said. "According to witnesses at the scene, the landslide left over 80 people missing and the rescue operation is being carried out," U Kyaw Min, an official of a village administration office, said. The landslide took place at around 4 a.m. local time, burying nearly 100 people including jade scavengers and vendors, a Hpakant township police officer told Xinhua news agency.



"There is no data about the exact number of the missing jade scavengers," the police officer said. The authorities and local rescue organisations are conducting the search and rescue operation in the slide-stricken area. Deadly landslides are frequent in Kachin state, especially in Hpakant mining region. Many locals make their living by jade scavenging in the region and most of the landslides are caused by the partial collapse of tailings heaps and dams. A major fatal landslide occurred at a jade mining site in Hpakant township in July last year, leaving 174 dead and 54 others injured.

Biden announces 500 mn free at-home Covid test kits to fight Omicron

Washington | Agencies

Amid rising cases of the highly transmissible Omicron variant of Covid, US President Joe Biden has announced 500 million free at-home test kits, even as he urged people to get vaccinated as well as take a booster shot. The at-home tests will be available for purchase online as well as at the local pharmacy from January, which will be "reimbursed". "Because Omicron spreads easily, especially among the unvaccinated, it's critically important that we know who's infected. That means we need more testing," Biden said at the White House on Tuesday during a speech outlining the new coronavirus-response measures. "The federal government will purchase one half billion... additional at-home rapid tests, with deliveries starting in January. We'll be



getting these tests to Americans for free. And we'll have websites where you can get them delivered to your home," Biden said. The free testing will help reduce the waiting lines, as well as reduce the burden of healthcare systems. The President also noted about over 20,000 free testing sites in the country. In addition, 1,000 military doctors, nurses, and medics will be deployed to help staff local hospitals and

expand capacity, Biden said. Omicron, first detected from southern Africa in late November, has so far spread to 106 countries, and has become the dominant strain in both the US and the UK, among other countries, outpacing the previously dominant Delta variant. The US has reported one death due to Omicron to date, while the UK has 12. People who remain unvaccinated are the reason

behind its fast spread, Biden said. Besides being at serious risk of getting infected and dying, they are also likely to overwhelm an already burdened healthcare system, the President said. "Please get vaccinated. It's the only responsible thing to do. And those who are not vaccinated are causing hospitals to overrun - become overrun again. "Omicron is serious, potentially deadly business for unvaccinated people. If you are not fully vaccinated, you have good reason to be concerned. You're at a high risk of getting sick. And if you get sick, you're likely to spread it to others, including friends and family. And the unvaccinated have a significantly higher risk of ending up in a hospital or even dying," he noted. Biden also urged those vaccinated to get booster shots, adding that it will protect against the vaccine evading the Omicron variant.

AFGHAN POLICE BUST KIDNAPPERS' GANG, RESCUE HOSTAGE

Farah | Agencies

Farah: Police in Afghanistan's western Farah province have busted a gang of kidnappers and secured the release of a hostage, a statement of the provincial police released here on Wednesday, said. "The security personnel of Islamic Emirate during operations launched last night arrested five kidnappers and rescued a hostage from their clutches," Xinhua reported citing the statement. All the kidnappers have been taken into custody for investigation. Police in Farah's neighbouring Herat province arrested 147 suspects on the charge of involvement in a variety of crimes ranging from robbery, theft to drug smuggling over the past month. The Taliban-led administration has vowed to crack down on criminals in an effort to ensure law and order in the country.





IT IS BETTER TO GET VACCINATED RATHAR THAN GOING ON VENTILATOR: CHIEF MINISTER

Getting vaccinated is not a matter of your own choice, now it is a social responsibility. Do not endanger the life of others by careless behaviour of not getting vaccinated. It is necessary to take precautions to protect against the third wave of corona. Wear a mask, follow social distance and mandatorily get vaccinated against Covid. So far 9 crore 91 lakh vaccine doses have been administered in the state. Chief Minister Chouhan appreciates the efforts of health workers, ASHA-Anganwadi workers. Inspected the vaccination centre at Rashidia School. Girl students did Swastivachan in the presence of Chief Minister.



people by our careless behaviour. America, England and many countries of Europe are being affected by the third wave of corona infection. The death toll from corona in America has exceeded eight lakh. In view of these circumstances, caution is necessary to prevent the third wave of corona. We all have lost our loved ones in the first and second waves of corona. In view of the possibility of the third wave, it is necessary that we become alert early. Wear a mask, follow social distance and most importantly get the Covid vaccine mandatorily. Chouhan was taking stock of the vaccination centre set up at Rashidia School, Barkhedi, Bhopal during the vaccination mega campaign. Chouhan reviewed the

arrangements of the vaccination centre and interacted with the people who came for immunization regarding vaccination. Chouhan also put the mark of "I am vaccinated" to Mohammad Alim Qureshi after vaccination at the vaccination centre. In the presence of Chief Minister, Swastivachan was done by the girl students of Government Model Residential Girls Sanskrit Vidyalaya (Gargi) Bhopal located in the school premises. Chouhan said that so far 9 crore 91 lakh vaccine doses have been administered in the state. If the people of the state, being a little more aware and active, come forward for vaccination, then we will be successful in providing protection shield to all the eligible brothers and sisters of the state. Chouhan

said that it has been scientifically proven that vaccination is effective in saving lives. Therefore, it is not wise to risk your life by being careless in getting vaccinated. Let us all motivate our relatives and acquaintances to get vaccinated and ensure that all eligible people around us must get vaccinated. Chouhan has requested all religious leaders, social workers, political parties to motivate the people of the state for vaccination. Chief Minister appreciated the continuous efforts being made by the health workers, ASHA-Anganwadi workers in the vaccination campaign. Chief Minister Chouhan said that apart from ensuring cent percent immunization in the state, the arrangement of hospitals is also being beefed up to face the possible third wave of Covid. Oxygen system, oxygen plant, beds, medicines, equipment, trained staff etc. are being arranged in hospitals.

We have crossed the important milestone of protecting citizens from Covid: CM

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that with the cooperation of all sections in Madhya Pradesh, we have achieved the feat of administering 10 crore vaccine doses. Chouhan said that in this way we have crossed an important stage of protecting the people of the state from corona. Free vaccine has been given under the able leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. I am grateful to him. Chouhan has congratulated and thanked the people of the state for completing 10 crore vaccine doses in the state.

Panchayat elections will be held, but the results will be postponed

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The State Election Commission has taken a big decision regarding the upcoming Panchayat elections in Madhya Pradesh. According to this, the election process will be conducted on time, but the results will not be declared. This is happening because of the lack of elections in the seats reserved for the Other Backward Classes. State Election Commission secretary B.S. Jamod has informed that as per the directions of the Supreme Court, the process of tabulation of counting of votes and declaration of election results for all the posts in the three-tier Panchayat elections will be postponed. Separate instructions will be given by the commission in this regard.



He further said that in case of uncontested election to any post, neither the candidate will be declared elected nor the certificate of election will be issued by the Returning Officer. Instructions have also been given to the District Election Officers to give wide publicity to this order.

After the decision of the State Election Commission regarding the election process, former Chief Minister Kamal Nath said, "Now the State Election Commission has postponed the action related to tabulation of counting of votes and declaration of election results in the three-tier Panchayat elections. It is not known that Panchayat elections in the state." But when will the confusion and uncertainty end.

He further said, "The government had assured in the house that without OBC reservation, Panchayat elections will not be held in the state, due to the new orders, the atmosphere of confusion is increasing. But what step is it going to take, when is the court going to go, what decision is it taking."

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that getting corona vaccine is better than going on ventilator. Wearing masks, following social distancing and getting vaccinated are no longer matters of our choice. Now it is the social responsibility of the person. We have to make sure that we do not endanger the lives of other

Chief Minister Chouhan planted Gulmohar and Kachnar saplings in Smart Garden

Members of the organisation Book Wala also planted saplings along with the Chief Minister

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Kachnar and Gulmohar along with members of Book Wala Sanstha Amitesh Mishra, Chandan Mishra and Sushri Sonali Pandey and public representative of Nimar region Harsh Singh in Smart Garden.



The work of providing books to many students has been done by the organisation even during the time of Covid-19. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan has appreciated this important effort being

made by the members of the organisation. Among the saplings planted, Gulmohar is considered one of the most beautiful trees in the world. Flowers blooming in big bunches

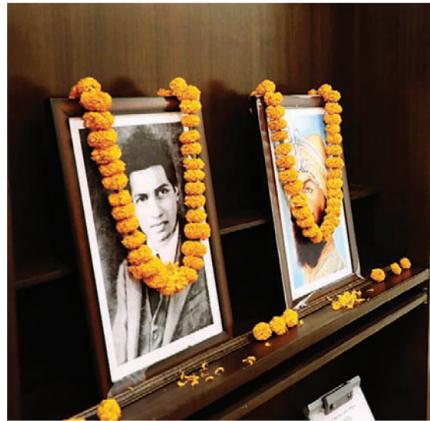
among the leaves of Gulmohar give a distinct attraction to this tree. In summer, Gulmohar trees are laden with flowers instead of leaves. It is also rich in medicinal properties.

Chief Minister pays tribute to Sant Sepoy Guru Gobind Singh and mathematician Ramanujan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to Sant Sepoy Guru Gobind Singh on his birth anniversary. Chief Minister Chouhan paid floral tributes by garlanding his portrait in the auditorium of the residence office.

Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth Guru of the Sikhs. He became the tenth Guru on 11 November 1675 after the martyrdom of his father Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur. He was a great warrior, poet, devotee and spiritual master. On the day of Baisakhi in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa Panth. Guru Gobind Singh fought 14 battles. He sacrificed the whole family for the sake of religion, for which he is also called Sarbansdani i.e. the donator of the whole family. He was born on December 22, 1666 in Patna. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid obeisance to Srinivasa



Ramanujan Iyengar on his birth anniversary. Chief Minister garlanded his portrait in the auditorium at his residence office. Ramanujan was a great Indian mathematician. He is

counted among the greatest mathematical thinkers of modern times. He did not receive any special training in mathematics, yet he made extensive contributions in the areas of analysis

and number theory. Ramanujan not only made wonderful inventions in the field of mathematics with his talent and dedication, but also gave incomparable pride to India.

Congress registered its presence on OBC reservation in MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After being out of power in Madhya Pradesh, the Congress has made an active presence in the dispute over the reservation of Other Backward Classes in the Panchayat elections. The result of his efforts is that the government has agreed to go to the Supreme Court on the issue of reservation of OBCs by mutual consent. It is to be known that on the instructions of the Supreme Court, the elections to the Panchayat in the reserved areas for the OBC category were postponed. The Congress was a constant aggressor and petitions have been filed from the High Court to the Supreme Court in the matter of rotation and limitation in reservation. Along with this, there is a demand for postponement of the election process.



The Supreme Court had combined and heard the petitions of other states including Madhya Pradesh regarding the Panchayat elections and made strong remarks about increasing the OBC

reservation. At the same time, the Congress's argument was that it had petitioned for delimitation and rotation in reservation, the government did

not put the argument in the Supreme Court, so the elections to the reserved areas for OBCs have been postponed. On the one hand, while the Congress constantly surrounded the BJP, while the BJP held the Congress responsible for this situation, on the other hand it was continuously said from the BJP that if the Congress did not go to court, then this situation would not have happened.

The petition was filed by spokesperson Syed Jaffer and social worker Jaya Thakur in the matter of rotation and limitation in reservation on behalf of the Congress. At the same time, the Supreme Court gave directions on OBC reservation. The political struggle intensified after the directions of the Supreme Court and the decision of the State Election Commission. The matter was raised in the Assembly. On behalf of Congress, Leader of Opposition in the House Kamal Nath and advocate Vivek Tankha took the front in the court. Congress's activism on this matter increased continuously.

Merchant Navy Officer, returned from Turkey tests Covid positive

Team Absolute | Jabalpur

A Merchant Navy officer who returned from Turkey tested positive for Covid-19 and has been admitted to a medical college in Jabalpur. His samples have been sent for genome sequencing, the administration said on Wednesday. The officer reached Jabalpur recently from Istanbul via Doha and Mumbai on December 12. He tested positive for Covid-19 on December 20 and was admitted to a medical

college in the city.

Amid the Omicron scare, the administration is keeping a watch on those returning from foreign locations. The 21-year-old Merchant Navy officer Tejaswi Palia a native of Sanjeevani Nagar in Jabalpur had gone to Turkey for a professional training programme. After his return, he complained of cough and cold and was tested for Covid-19 and his report was positive. The other three members of the family have been tested

and put under observation as a precaution. Those who travelled with Tejaswi also are being alerted by authorities.

Madhya Pradesh is yet to report any case of Omicron, the latest variant of Covid-19 as of now. The state has reported 345 fresh cases of Covid-19 in December as of now and Bhopal has reported the maximum cases, 137 out of them. The state is yet to announce any guidelines for Christmas and New Year's eve.

Kidnapped daughter's father climbs on water tank in Shivpuri

Team Absolute | Shivpuri

In Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh, the father of the kidnapped daughter climbed on the water tank to get his daughter. When Laxminarayan Ojha was assured that the daughter would be recovered in five days, he got down from the water tank somewhere.



The case is of Bairad town of Shivpuri district, where the girl of Laxminarayan Ojha is missing for 15 days. A missing report has also been lodged at Bairad police station, but the police have so far failed to trace the girl.

Therefore, Laxminarayan threatened to kill himself by climbing on the water tank. He was seeking to find his daughter. SDOP, Tehsildar and station in-charge

reached the spot to convince him. Finally, in this case, the police and the local tehsildar took the father down from the water tank, saying to bring the girl in five days. SDOP Niranjjan Singh Rajput told reporters that Laxminarayan had lodged a complaint with Bairad police station that a youth had

taken away his daughter, the police are constantly on the lookout for the accused. The police team also went to Jaipur, but did not get success. Today the girl's father climbed on the water tank, he has been assured that his daughter will be recovered soon.

Proposal for 10 years imprisonment on fetal sex test in Madhya Pradesh

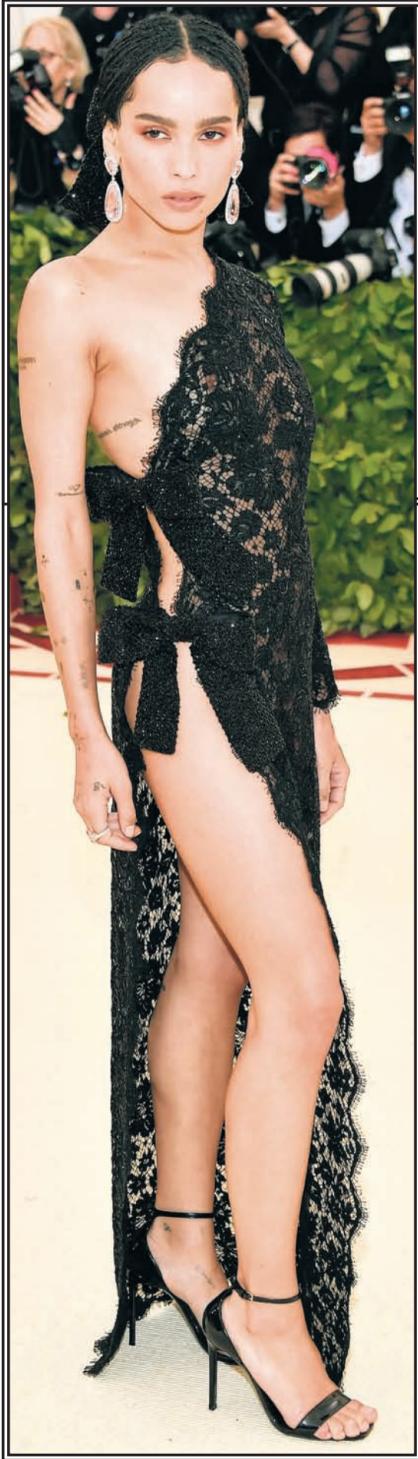
Team Absolute | Rewa

In Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh, the efforts of the district administration are going on to strictly ban the fetal sex test. Along with this, strict punishment is being advocated for the culprits of fetal sex test, which is why it has been agreed to send a proposal to increase the sentence from three years to 10 years to the administration. In the meeting of the District Level Committee constituted under the PC and PNDT Act, Collector Dr. Ilaiyaraaja T said that the members of the committee should inspect the nursing homes and hospitals and submit the report. As per the provisions of the Act, action should be taken against the nursing homes and sonography centers for not having arrangements.

Rewa District is on the border of Prayagraj District of Uttar Pradesh. Many people take advantage of this and are running sonography centers in the towns of Prayagraj. Regarding this, Collector



Ilaiyaraaja said that some sonography centers are operating in the border of the state of Uttar Pradesh, a little ahead of Chakghat, a town situated on the border of the district. Contact Prayagraj administration for permission to inspect these. In the meeting, the Collector said that there has been a significant increase in the sex ratio of the district due to continuous efforts and making people aware. Presently the sex ratio of Rewa district has become 954 per thousand. In the meeting, it was approved to send a proposal to the government to increase the punishment of the culprits of fetal sex test from three years to 10 years. He further said that a provision of giving an incentive of one lakh rupees to those who secretly inform about fetal sex test was made in the Informer Reward Scheme. Now this amount has been increased to two lakh rupees. In this, the name and identity of the person giving information about the fetal sex test is kept secret.



ZOE KRAVITZ STUDIED CATS, LIONS FOR HER 'CATWOMAN' ROLE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Zoe Kravitz, who plays Selina Kyle and her alter ego 'Catwoman' in Matt Reeves' upcoming blockbuster 'The Batman', which stars Robert Pattinson as Bruce Wayne and the Caped Crusader, has opened up on her research to help her add something special to her performance.

Speaking to Empire magazine about her work with stunt coordinator Rob Alonzo, she said: "We watched cats and lions and how they fight, and we talked about what is actually possible when you're my size, and Batman's so much stronger than me."

"What is my skill? It's being fast and tricky. So we did some really interesting floor work that incorporated different kinds of martial arts and capoeira and a

kind of feline, dance-like movement." Kravitz also described her character's portrayal in the film as an "origin story" as Selina starts to discover "who she is", reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She said: "So it's the beginning of her figuring out who she is, beyond just someone trying to survive."

"I think there's a lot of space to grow and I think we are watching her become what I'm sure will be the femme fatale."

Nicole Kidman took up smoking for film role

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actress Nicole Kidman plays the award-winning American star Lucille Ball in the new biographical drama film 'Being The Ricardos'.

Kidman has revealed that she turned to smoking in order to perfect her "deep voice", reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She shared: "They decided Lucy needed to have a deep smoker's voice, so I started smoking. If I warm up for a minute, I now can do her voice standing on my head."

Nicole also discussed how her age has impacted her career opportunities.

The actress, who is married to musician Keith Urban, told Dujour magazine: "There's a consensus in the industry that as a female actor, at about 40, you're done."

"I never sat in a chair and heard someone say, 'You're past your due date,' but I've had times where you're turned down and the door is shut on you."

Kidman made the comments shortly after conceding that she hasn't got the voice to star in a Broadway musical. The Oscar-winning actress is one of the most sought-after talents in Hollywood, but Kidman would feel "insecure" singing on Broadway.

Asked about the possibility, she replied: "I don't think my voice is strong enough. It's not strong enough. I mean, Broadway is like ... and also I just would feel so insecure." Kidman is a huge fan of Broadway musicals - but she doesn't feel ready to perform in one.



Early Oscars shortlists out

'NO TIME TO DIE', 'DUNE' LEAD MENTIONS; MAJOR NOMS YET TO BE RELEASED

Los Angeles | Agencies

The 25th James Bond film, 'No Time to Die', made a strong showing at the shortlists released on Tuesday for the 94th Oscars, with mentions in five categories such as Song, Score, Sound, Visual Effects, Make-up and Hairstyling to lead all films.

'Dune', with four mentions in the same categories except Song was close behind, reports deadline.com.

The Oscars shortlists cover 10 categories overall, including Documentary Feature; International Film; Animated, Live Action, and Documentary Shorts; Make-up and Hairstyling; Music Score; Original Song; Sound; and Visual Effects.

Denmark's 'Flee' made the cut for both Documentary Feature and International Film.

It is also eligible for Animated Feature (not a shortlisted category) this year, and should it eventually score final nominations in all three categories, it will set an Oscar record for that triple play, reports deadline.com.

French entry and Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or winner 'Titane' from Director Julia Ducournau missed the cut. Her film contains some extreme violence that might have turned off some Academy voters viewing the film on Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) digital platform. Home viewing probably hurt this one, as well as Romanian entry and Berlin Film Festival Golden Bear winner 'Bad Luck Banging' or 'Loony Porn', which opens with a hardcore sex tape for its first 10 minutes. It would be interesting to see how many voters got past that beginning for the critically praised Berlin winner. In terms of multiple mentions, which bode well for eventual nominations in other categories as well, the aforementioned Campion's 'The Power of the Dog' has three, and such big blockbuster titles like 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' and 'The Matrix: Resurrections' are among those with two.

It is a big day for Billie Eilish, who is the subject of a feature documentary that made the cut, as well as co-writer and singer of the shortlisted title song of 'No Time to Die'. In the latter category there are some big names competing for one of the five eventual slots, including Brian Wilson, Beyonce, Jay-Z, Sparks, Ariana Grande, Bono, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Jennifer Hudson, Carole King and perennial bridesmaid Diane Warren eligible to grab her 13th nomination in the category for 'Somehow You Do' from the little-seen 'Four Good Days'.

Final nominations will be announced on February 8. The Oscars are scheduled to take place on March 27 at the Dolby Theatre.

Ellen Pompeo is ready for 'Grey's Anatomy' to end

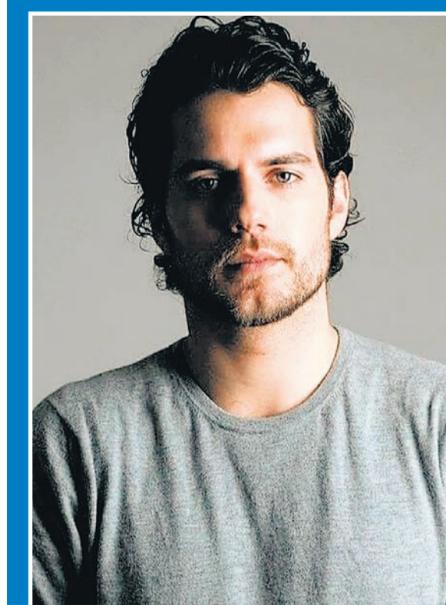
Los Angeles | Agencies

Ellen Pompeo, who plays Dr Meredith Grey in medical drama 'Grey's Anatomy', is trying to convince people that the show needs to come to a natural conclusion.

Speaking to Insider whilst promoting her company Betr Remedies, Ellen said: "I've been trying to focus on convincing everybody that it should end."

"I feel like I'm the super naive one who keeps saying, 'But what's the story going to be, what story are we going to tell?' And everyone's like, 'Who cares, Ellen? It makes a gazillion dollars.'"

The show first aired back in 2005 and has recently concluded its 18th season as Pompeo aims to move on from the fake medical world to focus on the real one instead but the star is now focused on making an impact on healthcare in real life through her 'Healing Healthcare' Zoom calls, in which she featured in conversations with health workers and discusses issues such as "racism in healthcare", reports femalefirst.co.uk.



GAME ON: HENRY CAVILL WANTS TO SEE A 'RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2' MOVIE

Los Angeles | Agencies

The 'The Witcher' star Henry Cavill has admitted he'd love to see the video game 'Red Dead Redemption 2' adapted into a blockbuster Western.

Asked what game he thinks would make a great Netflix project, he told Gamereactor: "Well, that's a tricky one, 'cause you're tying both an IP and a company together, which is a tricky thing to do. So I certainly don't want to put myself in any corners with that, but there are plenty of games out there..."

"I've actually started playing 'Red Dead Redemption 2' - I know I'm a little bit late to that party - but I started playing it and I'm really enjoying it. And so, something like that I think would be fun to turn into a movie."

Meanwhile, Cavill has been very vocal about his love for 'Warhammer 40,000' and he thinks the franchise should be given 'Lord of the Rings level' treatment, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Asked if he'd like to play inquisitor Gregor Eisenhorn, he said: "I mean, I don't know about Eisenhorn necessarily, when you've got Valdor and Primarchs out there. It seems a shame to be a mere Inquisitor."

"But I would absolutely leap at that opportunity - it's something I'd be very, very excited to do."



Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Ryan Reynolds is a frequent visitor to a pizzeria in New York's East Village and though he's been a customer for several years, the staff who work there have never figured out who their famous customer really is.

Reynolds has never corrected them and instead happily answers questions

Ryan Reynolds gets mistaken for Ben Affleck

as if he was the 'Tender Bar' actor, who rekindled his

relationship with Jennifer Lopez earlier this year, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Appearing on the 'Dear Hank and John' podcast, Reynolds admitted: "They believe I'm Ben Affleck and I've never corrected them. I feel it would not go over well if I revealed. I do everything normal like everybody else."

"They just think I'm Ben Affleck and they'll ask how J-Lo is and I'm like, 'great, good.' I get the pizza and off I

go." The 45-year-old star recently announced he is taking a break from acting to focus on his family and he thinks now is the "perfect time" to do so. He said: "Well, I've done a lot of (acting). The biggest thing for me... is that I don't want to miss this time with my kids. When I'm shooting a film, I'm oftentimes in Europe, I'm away, there are incredibly long hours, it's a ton of constant, kind of requirement to be there the whole time a" not just because I'm performing but I'm also generally producing and writing on my movies as well.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Chrishell Stause



Asian Champions Trophy

INDIA BEAT ARCH-RIVALS PAKISTAN 4-3, WIN BRONZE MEDAL

Dhaka | Agencies

Indian men's hockey team won the bronze medal at the Asian Champions Trophy after beating Pakistan 4-3 in the third-place play-off match here on Wednesday. It was goals by Harmanpreet Singh (2'), Sumit (45'), Varun Kumar (54') and Akashdeep (57') that helped India beat Pakistan in a match that lived up to the billing with some tense moments. Earlier in the match, India was quick to get off the blocks in the first quarter, making inroads into the Pakistani circle with an intense attack. The tactic worked, as India successfully won a PC in the second minute of the game. Though Pakistani first rusher Ajaz Ahmad made an effective run-in to stop India from scoring, Harmanpreet Singh found the back of the net in his fourth attempt. However, India couldn't retain this 1-0 lead for long as Pakistan was quick to retaliate when a defensive error allowed their attacker Afraz to make a quick attempt on goal. He was successful in putting the ball past India's



goalkeeper, fetching his team the much-needed 1-1 equaliser. Pakistan found yet another opportunity to score in the 13th minute when they won their first PC of the match but an alert Krishan Pathak ward off the danger with a brilliant save. Having started the second quarter in a 1-1 stalemate, the two Asian heavyweights traded opportunities to score but neither was successful. It was

after the 10-minute half-time break that the teams returned with more fuel power in their attack. First, it was Pakistan who scored in the 33rd minute to claim a 2-1 lead with a brilliant goal by their young midfielder Abdul Rana, who led the Pakistani team at the recent FIH Odisha Hockey Men's Junior World Cup in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. He picked up a rebound off a PC to send the ball

swiftly past the Indian goalkeeper Pathak. Though India created a few chances to score in the later part of this quarter, they could not convert. But the defending Champions did well to hold their nerves and scored some sensational goals in the final moments of the match that saw them snatch the lead back from their opponents. It was midfielder Sumit who earned India an important goal in the 45th minute after he was tactfully assisted by forward Gursahibjit who beat three Pakistani defenders on the left flank to set up the goal. This helped India equalise the score to 2-2. In the 54th and 57th minute, India scored through Varun Kumar's PC and Akashdeep Singh's fine field goal that sealed the match in India's favour. Though Pakistan made great attempts in the dying minutes, they could only muster one goal in the 57th minute through Moin Shakeel but India's defence protected their 4-3 lead with all their might to ensure they returned home with a third-place finish in the Men's Asian Champions Trophy.

Serie A: Bernardeschi inspires Juve to conquer Cagliari

Rome | Agencies

Federico Bernardeschi took centre stage as his long-awaited goal and an assist helped Juventus dominate Cagliari 2-0 in Serie A. Juve entered Allianz stadium on Tuesday night without injured Paulo Dybala and Federico Chiesa with Moise Kean getting the nod to pair with Alvaro Morata upfront. The home side was close to breaking the deadlock in the 12th minute but Kean saw his header on Juan Cuadrado's floated pass rattle the upright, Xinhua reports. The goal eventually came in the 40th minute when Bernardeschi's cross-shot took a slight deflection, falling kindly into the path of Kean, who followed to head in. The away side created a couple of chances after the break as Dalbert surprisingly fired wide from a close range while Joao Pedro forced a stunning one-



handed save out of Wojciech Szczesny. Juve punished Cagliari in the 83rd minute through a counter, as Dejan Kulusevski started the move. Bernardeschi collected the ball before sweeping in a left-footed drive from a tight angle. It

is the maiden Serie A goal of the Italian international since July 2020. With the win, the Bianconeri temporarily moved to fifth place with 34 points, four points behind fourth-placed Atalanta who were held by relegation-battlers Genoa 0-0.

ANAHAT BECOMES FIRST INDIAN GIRL TO WIN US JR SQUASH OPEN

New Delhi: 13-year-old Delhi girl Anahat Singh became the first Indian to win the prestigious US Junior Squash Open at the Arlen Spectre Centre in Philadelphia. According to information received here, Anahat won the title in the Under-15 category, beating Jayda Marei from Egypt 11-9, 11-5, 8-11, 11-5. Earlier, in the semifinals, she had beaten US national champion Dixon Hill 11-8, 11-9, 11-5. More than 850 squash junior players, representing 41 countries, participated in the World's largest junior individual squash tournament.



Omicron: BCCI likely to discuss alternate plans with owners for IPL 2022

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The BCCI is likely to hold a meeting with Indian Premier League (IPL) team owners sometime next month to discuss the alternate plans of conducting the 2022 season of the lucrative league, amid the threat posed by the Omicron in the country. India is witnessing a rapid increase in the number of Omicron cases lately and is learnt that the board is understandably concerned about the COVID-driven health hazards nationwide in April/May, when the IPL 2022 is scheduled. According to a Cricbuzz report, the BCCI is likely to



discuss all the scenarios with the franchise owners. However, the option of going back to UAE, apparently, is off the drawing board. Notably, the original plan for the league, which is likely to kick off on April 2 in Chennai, is to hold the

games normally on home-and-away basis if there is no deterioration in the COVID situation in the country. But, if the situation doesn't allow it, then the alternative plans will be activated by the board. The organisers are also exploring the idea of holding the whole tourna-

ment just in Mumbai and Pune or in the Gujarat cities of Ahmedabad, Baroda and Rajkot if the Covid/Omicron situation worsens. And, the owners will be informed about the alternatives as well as things to look forward to in the mega auction. Earlier, the BCCI had to halt the IPL 2021 midway in May after multiple COVID-19 cases inside the league's bio-bubble came to light. Later, the second leg of the league was played in UAE. The 2022 season of IPL will be a ten-team affair after the addition of two new teams - Lucknow and Ahmedabad, who are making their debut in the lucrative league.

ISL: HYDERABAD FC EYE WIN AGAINST SC EAST BENGAL

Goa:

Hyderabad FC will look for a win against SC East Bengal when they meet in the Hero Indian Super League (ISL) match at the Athletic Stadium in Bambolim on Thursday. Currently third in the league table, Hyderabad FC are on a 5-match unbeaten streak and will look to build on their momentum when they face the Red and Gold Brigade who have not been in the best of form this season. Struggling at the bottom of the points table, East Bengal have picked up just three points in their seven games and are fresh from a 2-0 loss to NorthEast United in the last game. However, Hyderabad FC head coach Manolo Marquez believes that like every game, this will be a difficult one for his side.



All India Badminton Ranking tournament KIRAN GEORGE, AAKARSHI KASHYAP CLINCH MEN'S, WOMEN'S SINGLES TITLES

Chennai | Agencies

Kerala's Kiran George and women's top seed Aakarshi Kashyap of Chattisgarh registered straight games victories over their respective opponents to clinch the men's and women's singles titles at the All India senior ranking badminton tournament here on Wednesday. The men's singles final was a match-up against the aggressive 21-year-old and Dey, who has been known for his tenacity on and off the court. But if one expected a close encounter on Wednesday, Kiran doused those hopes pretty early when he opened up a 7-1 lead in the opening game and controlled the game with net exchanges and unleashing down the line smashes. World No. 57 Dey, who had to come through the qualifying rounds due to his lower domestic ranking, did manage to close the gaps but powerful smashes by Kiran were too good for Dey. Kiran defeated the experienced Subhankar Dey 21-17, 21-12 in 39 minutes. The women's singles final was



also a one-sided affair as Kashyap dominated qualifier Tanya, who had upset fifth seed Ashmita Chaliha in the semifinal, from the start. The champion had engaged her opponent in long rallies during the initial exchanges to open up a 11-4 lead. Though Tanya looked more comfortable in the second half of that game, she was never

really in contention and Kashyap needed just half an hour to bag the match 21-15, 21-12 in the women's singles final. National champions and women's doubles top seeds Shikha Gautam and Ashwini Bhat K got better of Uttar Pradesh's Shruti Mishra and Shailja Shukla 21-14, 21-16 while the unseeded combination of Rohan

Kapoor and Sanjana Santosh defeated S Sunjith and Gowrikrishna TR 21-18, 21-16 to clinch the mixed doubles title. In the men's doubles that saw two pairs who had to come through qualifying rounds, Hariharan Amsakarunan and Ruban Kumar R got the better of Ravikrishna P S and Sankarprasad Udaykumar 22-20, 19-21, 21-18.

West Indies to play three T20Is in Pakistan in 2023

Lahore | Agencies

The West Indies men's cricket team will play three Twenty20 Internationals in the build up to the Pakistan Super League 2023, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said on Wednesday. The West Indies team is already scheduled to play the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League ODIs in June 2022 to make up for the postponed December 2021 matches due to an increased number of Covid-19 cases in their side. Recently, the One-day International (ODI) series between West Indies and Pakistan, which was scheduled to start in Karachi on December 18, was postponed and rescheduled for early June 2022 after five



more members of the visiting team tested COVID-19 positive. A total of nine members in the visiting team had tested COVID-positive since they had arrived in Karachi on December 9. The PCB and Cricket West Indies (CWI) had then issued

a joint statement, saying the ODI series will be postponed and rescheduled for early June 2022. The West Indies team had flown back after playing three T20Is in Karachi last week. Pakistan had made a clean sweep of the series.

TEAM INDIA CAN LEAVE EVEN IF BORDERS GET CLOSED DUE TO OMICRON CASES: CSA CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

Johannesburg | Agencies

The Cricket South Africa (CSA) has assured the BCCI that even if the borders of the country are closed due to rise in Omicron cases, the Indian cricket team would be permitted to fly out of the nation, said CSA's chief medical officer Dr Shuaib Manjra on Wednesday. "If there needs to be repatriation and the borders are closed, the government has given a guarantee that they will allow the players and the team to go back to India," South Africa outlet News 24 quoted CSA medical officer as saying. "I think we've taken whatever measures we can to ensure that the Indian team is not only safe here, but should they need to leave for whatever reason, that the path is open for them to leave at any point that they wish," Manjra added. India and South Africa will lock horns in three Tests and three ODIs. The Boxing Day Test will begin on December 26 at the SuperSport Park, Centurion. Earlier, CSA had revised the bio-bubble norms for the India tour starting from



December 26. With the entire touring party and the host contingent being fully vaccinated, positive COVID-19 cases, if any arise, will be allowed to complete their isolation inside the bubble itself, CSA had said.

Labuschagne displaces Root at the top in ICC Test rankings for batters

Dubai | Agencies

Australia's hero in the second Ashes Test at the Adelaide Oval, Marnus Labuschagne, and Pakistan captain Babar Azam have risen to the top of the ICC Rankings for batters in Tests and T20Is, respectively. Middle-order batter Labuschagne has climbed to the top of the ICC Test Player Rankings for batters for the very first time after sensational performances in the two matches of the Ashes so far. With career-best 912 rating points, he has gone past England captain Joe Root (897), who drops to the second spot. Ranked fourth before the series, Labuschagne rose two

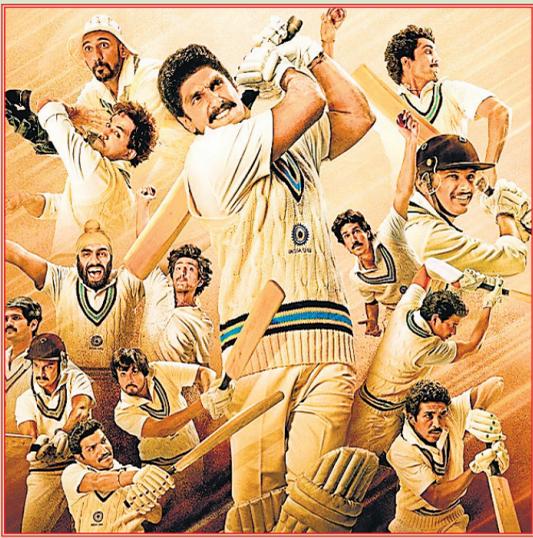


spots to No.2 after scoring 74 in Australia's win in the Brisbane Test. In the second Test at Adelaide, he scored a hundred and fifty (103 and 51) as Australia thrashed

England by 275 runs to go 2-0 up in the Ashes. His teammate Mitchell Starc broke into the top-10 for Test bowlers after returning figures of 6/80 in the sec-

ond Test, which included a four-for in the first innings that helped reduce England to 236. He moves up to the ninth spot. Starc was also quite handy with the bat in both the innings, scoring an unbeaten 39 and 19, which sees him climb a spot in the Test all-rounders' ranking to No.6. For England, captain Root attained his career-best rating in the rankings for all-rounders, rising two spots to No.10 after scoring 86 runs and picking three wickets in the second Test. In the Player Rankings for T20Is, Pakistan captain Babar Azam reclaimed the top spot in the list for batters after just one week of losing it.

With scores of 0 and 7 in the first two T20Is against the West Indies, Bazar dropped two spots to No.3 in last week's rankings update. He came roaring back and is now tied at the top of the rankings with England's Dawid Malan after a brilliant 79 in the final T20I that helped Pakistan complete a clean sweep over West Indies. His fellow opener Mohammad Rizwan, who has had a tremendous 2021, capped the year by climbing to No.3 in T20I batters' rankings with career-best ratings of 798. Rizwan was the 'Player of the Match' in the final T20I against West Indies, helping his side chase 208 in less than 19 overs with a 45-ball 87.



'83' to have grand premiere in Mumbai along with star cast and 1983 WC squad

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After its world premiere at the Red Sea International Film Festival, '83' directed by Kabir Khan, will have a grand premiere in Mumbai on Wednesday.

The star-studded event at 4:30 p.m. will be attended by the film's team and the 1983 World Cup-winning squad where they'll watch their labour of love before it makes its way to the theatres for public exhibition. The film, based on the win-

ning squad, narrates the story of underdogs, who nobody believed in. The team fought against all odds and clinched the title by defeating the mighty West Indies team.

For the film, Ranveer Singh has stepped into the shoes of legendary Indian captain and one of the greatest all-rounders, Kapil Dev.

In addition, the film also stars Tahir Raj Bhasin, Jiiva, Saqib Saleem, Jatin Sarna, Chirag Patil, Dinker Sharma, Nishant Dahiya, Hardly Sandhu, Sahil Khattar,

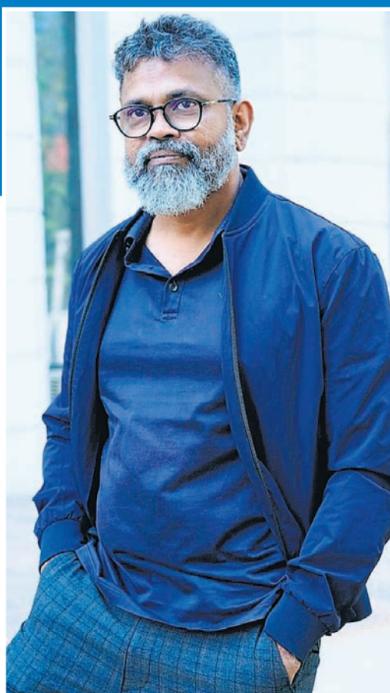
Ammy Virk, Addinath Kothare, Dhairya Karwa, R. Badree and Pankaj Tripathi. Deepika Padukone will be seen in a cameo avatar playing Romi, Kapil Dev's wife.

Earlier, the film received a standing ovation at its world premiere in Jeddah and also saw its trailer being projected onto the iconic Burj Khalifa in Dubai with Deepika Padukone, Kabir Khan, Ranveer Singh, Kapil Dev, Sunil Gavaskar and Mohinder Amarnath in attendance.

WORK ON 'PUSHPA: THE RULE' WILL BEGIN IN FEBRUARY: SUKUMAR

Team Absolute | Chennai

Director Sukumar, whose just-released Telugu film 'Pushpa: The Rise' has set the cash registers ringing, says he is yet to start work on the sequel 'Pushpa: The Rule' and that work will begin on it in February next year. Talking to reporter, Sukumar disclosed, "I have shot some portions for 'Pushpa: The Rule' but then, these will have to be reshot. I will have to shoot the entire film and we intend to start shooting in February next year. We intend to release the film on December 16 next year, just like how we released 'Pushpa: The Rise' on December 17 this year." Explaining what inspired him to come up with such a story, Sukumar said, "Six years ago, an encounter happened and that was in connection with the smuggling of red sanders. That incident became the headlines in all the media." It was after that we came to know of the magnitude and significance of the red sanders that was exclusive to the region. We got to know that the red sanders smuggling market was around a whopping Rs 2 lakh crore and we also realised that these trees grow only in the Chittoor belt of Andhra Pradesh. Nowhere else in the world can you find this wood. It was then that a thought struck me as to why not make a big commercial entertainer with this as the backdrop."



'Bhabiji Ghar Par Hai' bags four Gold Comedy Awards

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Comedy show 'Bhabiji Ghar Par Hai' has bagged four Gold Comedy Awards across various categories during the awards night in Mumbai.

'Bhabiji Ghar Par Hai' won the Best Comedy Show, while Aasif Sheikh (Vibhuti Narayan Mishra), and Shubhangi Atre (Angoori Bhabi) won the Best Actor and Best Actress awards, and Yogesh Tripathi (Daroga Happu Singh) won Best Supporting Actor.

On receiving the Best Actor award, Aasif Sheikh said: "I am grateful and delighted for this recognition. It truly means a lot. It feels great to see how the character of Vibhuti has etched a special place in the audience's heart and continues to be their absolute favourite. Vibhuti is nothing without the team behind him."

Winning the Best Actress award, Shubhangi Atre shared: "Nothing is as great as getting recognised for your hard work. I am thankful to the makers and the whole team for making Angoori a beloved character. Such achievements motivate us as artistes to work harder and continue on our efforts to do something different and entertain people."

Expressing his excitement on receiving the Best Supporting Actor award, Yogesh Tripathi added: "This award is an honour and a privilege for an iconic show like 'Bhabiji Ghar Par Hai'. I thank our producers, Sanjay Ji and Binaifer Ji for this, the cast and crew and my beloved fans." 'Bhabiji Ghar Par Hai' airs on &TV.



Samantha shuts down troll who accused her of 'robbing' Rs 50 cr from ex-husband

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu shut down a troll on social media who accused her of "robbing" Rs 50 crore from ex-husband and actor Naga Chaitanya as alimony after their divorce.

Samantha has been trending on social media ever since her item song 'Oo Antava' from 'Pushpa' was released.

While a huge section of the Internet was busy lauding the actress for the newest hat she has worn, one section has been degrading her for her 'boldness' in the song.

On Tuesday, one troll commented on her marital status, as he also accused her of robbing Rs 50 crore from a "gentleman". His comment implies that the actress had taken alimony from Naga Chaitanya, related to their separation.

Samantha, who usually ignores her social media trolls by simply blocking them, replied, "God bless your soul."

With this reply, the troll deleted his disrespectful comment soon. Samantha's subtle, yet hitting reply caught the attention of all. On the work front, Samantha Ruth Prabhu is to appear in Gunasekhar's directorial 'Shaakuntalam', while she has a couple of multilingual movies in her kitty. She also has a Hollywood movie titled 'The Arrangements Of Love' on her list.

Anupria Goenka calls 'Tiger Zinda Hai' a turning point in her career

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As Salman Khan's 'Tiger Zinda Hai' completes four years

on Wednesday, actress Anupria Goenka who played the character of Poorna, reminisces about her experience of working in the film, calling it a turning point in her career. While sharing her excitement, Anupria says, "'Tiger Zinda Hai' is very close to my heart because it was a turning point in my career. Poorna was a very nuanced character, and I am thankful to Yash Raj, Aditya (Chopra) Sir, and Ali Abbas Zafar for giving me the opportunity to play her."

Talking about the film's schedule, she says, "We had a lovely time shooting the film. We were in Abu Dhabi for two months, and I made some wonderful friends on sets. Working with Salman Khan, Katrina Kaif, and Kumud Mishra was a wonderful learning opportunity. It also marked my first collaboration with YRF, and they are like family now."

She also praises the director of the film, Ali Abbas Zafar as she adds, "I also found a lovely director in Ali Abbas Zafar. He is a one-man army and is always on his feet, ready to take on any challenge. For me, 'Tiger Zinda Hai' is a very important film. I still reminisce about the time I spent while shooting it."

The actress is currently gearing up for the second season of the much awaited show 'Asur' and another yet-to-be-titled series for Hotstar.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Mallika Shehrawat