

absolute india

VOL. 9, ISSUE 71, MUMBAI | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2021 | ₹5 | PAGE 08

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Centre launches study to determine need for booster dose

The Centre has initiated a study of 3,000 individuals who received their both doses of Covid vaccines to determine the need for booster dose amid the looming scare of Omicron.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre has initiated a study of 3,000 individuals who received their both doses of Covid vaccines to determine the need for booster dose amid the looming scare of Omicron.

The study will be conducted by the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI) under the Department of Biotechnology. The participants who have already received their both doses of Covid vaccines will be given booster doses to determine the impact on their immunity level. The study is expected to cover all three vaccines used in India -- Covishield, Covaxin and Sputnik V.

According to a source, the study will include people above 40 years of age, below 40 years of age, people infected with Covid-19 prior to vaccination, and people with comorbid conditions. The hospitals involved in the study will be submitting the report on blood samples along with the analysis on the requirement of booster doses in India, said the source.

Amid the everyday rise of Omicron cases in India, the need for booster dose has been voiced by many institutions. Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya had earlier said that the decision on booster dose in India will be taken based on scientific data and analysis. The National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) is expected to meet in the first week of January to take a call on the same.



BOOSTER PROTECTION FADES WITHIN 10 WEEKS AGAINST OMICRON

London: While countries are racing to administer booster shots to protect against the Omicron variant of Covid-19, a new study released by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has shown that protection wanes even after taking the third dose of a vaccine within 10 weeks. Scientists at the UKHSA noted that protection against Omicron appears to wane more rapidly than Delta among people who are boosted. They found 15 to 25 per cent reduction after 10 weeks. "Repeated vaccine effectiveness analysis continues to show lower for symptomatic Omicron disease compared to Delta. There is evidence of waning of protection against symptomatic disease with increasing time after second dose, and by 10 weeks after the booster dose, with a 15 to 25 per cent reduction in vaccine effectiveness after 10 weeks," the UKHSA wrote in its latest technical brief. "This waning is faster for Omicron than for Delta infections."

RIISING OMICRON RISKS DO NOT DISSUADE 58% INDIANS FROM TRAVEL: SURVEY

New Delhi: The rising risks associated with Covid-19's Omicron variant has not dissuaded holiday makers from their plans this season, as 58 per cent citizens still plan to travel during December to March period, the latest survey by LocalCircles showed on Friday. The survey received more than 19,500 responses from citizens

residing in 320 districts. It indicated that while such a large number of people have travel plans, only 18 per cent of citizens have made their bookings so far. Besides, the survey showed that of those who plan to travel in the next 90 days, the highest number, 49 per cent are likely to visit family, friends and also undertake

other miscellaneous travel while 21 per cent have plans to travel to a holiday destination. Further, a comparative analysis of the latest survey with the one conducted in March 2021 showed that the enthusiasm level of citizens to travel despite the Omicron threat is higher than what it was before Delta and the second wave.



SECOND COVID WAVE STYLE CURBS RETURN IN MAHARASHTRA

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government late on Friday clamped prohibitory orders banning assembly of 5 or more persons from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. with effect from Saturday. The measure comes in the wake of increasing Covid-19 cases and galloping Omicron infections - the latter soaring to 108 since the first case recorded on December 4. Besides, the government has reintroduced restrictions on different types of gatherings at open or closed venues, and in all public places. Restaurants, gyms, spas, cinemas, theatres shall be allowed to operate at only 50 per cent of their capacity. For social, religious or political events not more than 100 people shall be permitted in closed spaces and upto 250 persons, or 25 percent, whichever is less, of the capacity in such open spaces. For other crowd-puller events like sports or games, 25 per cent seating capacity of audiences shall be allowed. Local Disaster Management authorities and District Collectors shall be empowered to make these restrictions even more stringent depending on the local situation, said an official notification.

Hindutvavadis spread hatred: Rahul Gandhi

The incident was reported to have taken place in Haridwar during an event held from December 17 to 20. The video clips circulated on social media say that "Hindus should arm themselves like those seen in Myanmar, every Hindu must pick up weapons and conduct a Safayi Abhiyan."

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said that all the religions pay a price for the violence propagated by hate-mongers. In a tweet after the Haridwar incident came to light, Rahul said, "Hindutvadis always spread hatred and violence and Hindus Muslims Sikhs and Christians pay the price but not any more."

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had sought action against those people who incited hatred and called for 'unleashing violence against followers of a particular religion'. Priyanka said, "Strictest action should be taken against those who incite hatred and violence of this kind. It is despicable that they should get away with making an open call to murder our respected ex-PM and unleash violence against people of different



communities." "Such acts violate our constitution and the law of our land," she added. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said, "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas is total Bakwas as far as the Prime Minister and his drumbeaters are concerned. It's only an empty slogan! Why the thundering silence on the atrocious hate speech made in Haridwar? Why the paralysis from the Home

Minister & Uttarakhand CM?" The three-day event was organised by Yati Narasimhanand, a controversial religious leader who has been accused in the past of inciting violence. The Uttarakhand police have lodged an FIR in the case against Jitendra Narayan Tyagi, who was former Shia Waqf board chairman and recently converted to Hinduism.

All students failed in Class II declared passed

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

The Telangana government on Friday decided to pass all students who failed in the intermediate first year (11th class) examinations.

Education Minister P. Sabitha Indra Reddy announced that keeping in view the students' future, the government decided to pass all the failed students with minimum passing marks.

The decision will benefit over 2.35 lakh students who had failed in the exams, results of which were declared last week.

The decision came amid the continuing protests by student groups and opposition parties over the alleged irregularities in evaluation of answer sheets and suicide of at least six students over their failure in the examination.

The Telangana State Board of Intermediate Education (TSBIE) had conducted the exams for the first year from October 25 to November 3. A total of 4,59,242 students had appeared in the exams (both general and vocational courses) and only 49 per cent (2,24,012) students passed the exams.

Ganga was dumping ground for dead bodies: Clean Ganga chief

Team Absolute | Lucknow

The Ganga became an "easy dumping ground for the dead" during the devastating second Covid wave and the problem was confined to UP, according to a new book that was launched Thursday. Rajiv Ranjan Mishra, the director general of National Mission for Clean Ganga and head of Namami Gange, and Puskal Upadhyay, an IDAS officer who has worked with the NMCG. In one section titled "Floating Corpses: A River Deified", the book provides a chilling account of the pandemic's

impact on the Ganga, and states that five years of intense work to "save" the river appeared to be coming undone in days.

"As the number of bodies swelled and multiplied because of the Covid-19 pandemic, overwhelming district administrations and stretching the functional limits of crematoria and burning ghats of UP and Bihar, the Ganga became an easy dumping ground for the dead," reads the book. But it cites data provided by districts to state that "no more than 300" bodies were dumped in the river and "not the 1,000 plus reported".

Rs 150 cr recovered as CGST raids Shikhar pan masala manufacturers in Kanpur

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Directorate General of GST on Friday said that they have launched searches in Kanpur following a tip-off against the manufacturers of Shikhar pan masala and tobacco products.

A senior official said that the search operations covered the factory premises of Ms Trimurti Fragrance Pvt Ltd, the manufacturers of Shikhar brand pan masala and tobacco products and the office, godowns of Ms Ganpati Road Carriers, Transport Nagar, involved in transportation of the goods.

"They were busy in clandestine supplying goods without making payments of applicable tax. The transporter reportedly used to generate multiple invoices in the name of non-existent



firms, all below Rs 50,000 for one full truck load, to avoid generation of e-way bills while moving the goods. The transporter was also collecting the sale proceeds of such clandestine supply in cash and handing it over to the manufacturer, after deducting his commission," said a GST official.

Based on the information, the GST officers were able to intercept and seize

four such trucks outside the factory premises, cleared from the factory without invoices and e-way bills.

The official said that during physical stock taking, shortage of raw materials and finished products was noticed as the finished products had been cleared clandestinely.

During the questioning the authorised signatory of the company admitted to have cleared the goods without GST.

The official said that at the premises of the transporter, Ms Ganpati Road Carriers, more than 200 fake invoices used in the past for transportation of goods without payment of GST were recovered. The transporter also admitted that goods were being transported without e-way bills under the cover of fake invoices and also the sale proceeds was being collected in cash.

TOP PUNJAB POLICE OFFICIAL HAD WARNED ABOUT POSSIBLE TERROR STRIKE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A day after the Ludhiana court blast, a letter written by a top Punjab Police official, alerting police and security agencies about a possible strike by Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists on key defence and other installations accessed.

This alert was sent on November 30 by the Deputy Inspector General, Internal Security, "had indicated the possible target of the terrorists could be defence, Central armed police force, police establishments and courts," a source said. "According to a fresh input shared by a central agency, ISI has tasked Lashkar-e-Taiba to infiltrate five terrorists under the garb of Sikh individuals through Kartarpur Corridor into India after two weeks of commando training in Shakargarh (Pakistan) with directions to move to either Pathankot or Gurdaspur for further tasking," read the input. Revealing the identity of two ultras as Mohd Gulzar Maghre and Mohd Sahjada Bande, the letter had mentioned the planning of a grenade attack against the security forces camp in Jammu and Kashmir by Islamic terrorist outfit, Muslim Janbaaz Force. A highly-placed source, citing the letter, said that the police was advised to immediately take robust round-the-clock counter measures and suitable preventive and precautionary steps.

MILITANT INVOLVED IN SEVERAL KILLINGS SHOT DEAD IN J&K'S ANANTNAG

Srinagar: A terrorist, involved in a spate of killings including of a police inspector and three BJP workers and other attacks, was shot dead in an encounter at Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag on Friday, after he refused to surrender and instead opened fire at the security forces, police officials said. Based on a specific input regarding the presence of a terrorist in Mominhall Aarwani village of Bijbehara area in Anantnag, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by the police, the army's 1st Rashtriya Rifles and Central Reserve Police, the police said.

In the ensuing encounter, the terrorist identified as Shahzad Ahmad Seh, a resident of Sehpora in Kulgam, and active since September last year, was killed and his body was retrieved from the site.

West Bengal mulls replacing Governor with CM as varsities' Chancellor

Team Absolute | Kolkata

In an unprecedented move, the West Bengal Education Department is mulling to replace Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar as the Chancellor of different state universities with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in a break with the long-established custom.

Interacting with the media in a programme, state Education Minister Bratya Basu said: "The Governor does not extend any cooperation and unnecessarily holds back files, thus my department is constrained to consider replacing the Governor with the Chief Minister as the Chancellor of different universities."

The reactions came after the Governor came into direct conflict with the state government, alleging: "Education scenario @MamataOfficial worrisome as no Chancellor & VC of Private Universities turned up for meeting with Governor-Visitor. Shocking unionism".

The Governor had, on December 20, invited Chancellors and Vice Chancellors



of 11 private universities to discuss the avenues of improving the education system in the state. However, they refused to attend the meeting and sent a letter to the office of the Governor expressing their inability to attend the meeting in the current Omicron situation.

The Governor again convened the same meeting on December 23, and assured the Chancellors and Vice Chancellors that the meeting will be conducted after maintaining Covid-19 protocols but still no one turned up.

FARMER ACQUITTED AFTER 400 HEARINGS IN 35 YRS

IN NOVEMBER 1986, THANA BHAWAN POLICE BOOKED TWO BROTHERS, DHARAMPAL AND KUNWARPAL, AND ONE LIYAQAT ALI FOR ALLEGEDLY MAKING PESTICIDE WITHOUT LICENCE. POLICE HAD ALSO CLAIMED TO HAVE RECOVERED 26 BAGS OF PESTICIDE WHILE THEY WERE BEING LOADED INTO A TRUCK.

THE THREE WERE BOOKED UNDER VARIOUS SECTIONS OF IPC, INCLUDING SECTION 420, AND ARRESTED THEM. AFTER SPENDING 18 DAYS IN JAIL, THE THREE WERE RELEASED ON BAIL.

Team Absolute | Shamli (UP)

Dharampal Singh, 85, has finally been acquitted for want of evidence by Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate.

It took him 35 years of a legal battle and more than 400 hearings to prove his innocence. He was booked in 1986 for allegedly making pesticide illegally in his house. Dharampal Singh, a farmer from Haran village in Shamli district, said after his acquittal, "It feels like a huge burden has been lifted from my shoulder."

His brother, Kunwarpal, was a co-accused but he died five years ago. Another person, Liyaqat Ali, booked in the case was earlier declared an absconder



by court. "I have lost my reputation, money and mental peace during the long legal battle. It took long to get justice, but now I am happy that truth has prevailed. I would like to

thank the honourable court for giving me relief. I have lost a lot of money and time making rounds to court for appearing in nearly 400 hearings in the case," he told reporters.



GOVERNMENT DECLARES SOYA MEAL ESSENTIAL COMMODITY, PUTS STOCK LIMIT TILL JUNE 2022

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a bid to cool down domestic prices of soya meal, the government has brought it under the ambit of Essential Commodities Act and also imposed a stock limit till June 30, 2022.

Under the Soya Meal Stock Control Order, 2021, issued with immediate effect from December 23, the stock limit has been set in consultation with the Central Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, wherein plant/miller/processors are allowed a maximum stock of 90 days production.

They would also have to declare storage locations.

"For trading companies/traders/private chaupals, only government registered enterprises, a maximum stock of 160 MT with a defined and declared storage location is allowed," said a release from the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.

In case the stocks held by respective legal entities are higher than the prescribed limits, that will be needed to be declared on the designated portal (http://evegoils.nic.in/soya_meal_Sto



ck/login) maintained by the Department of Food and Public Distribution and bring it to the prescribed stock limits within 30 days of the issue of the notification, the release said. The government wants to ensure that soya meal stock is regularly declared and updated on the above portal and announced that the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying will regularly monitor

the same and, if needed, can take follow-up action.

"The above measures are expected to stop any unfair practices (like hoarding, black marketing, etc.) in the market having the potential to hike the prices of soya meal. Consequently the market price of soybean oil will cool down," the release claimed.

Meanwhile, the government also

notified an order under the Essential Commodities Act to declare soya meal as an essential commodity up to June 30, 2022, by amending the Schedule of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

"The decision would empower the Union government and all states/UTs to regulate production, distribution etc. of soya meal and to smoothen the sale and availability of this item in the market. It will stop unfair market practices and enhance the availability for consumers like poultry farms and cattle feed manufacturers," the release added. Earlier this week, the Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI) had banned futures and options trading for various agriculture commodities that also included soya bean, for a period of one year in an apparent move to curb inflation.

Soybean meal is the by-product of the extraction of soybean oil.

According to media reports, soya bean farmers and poultry farmers were at loggerheads over import of soya meal. While the farmers protested continuation of imports as it has suppressed domestic prices by almost 40 per cent, the Poultry Breeders' Association had wanted an extension to the import deadline.

Maoists' plan to kill cops foiled in J'khand's Latehar, 25 bombs recovered

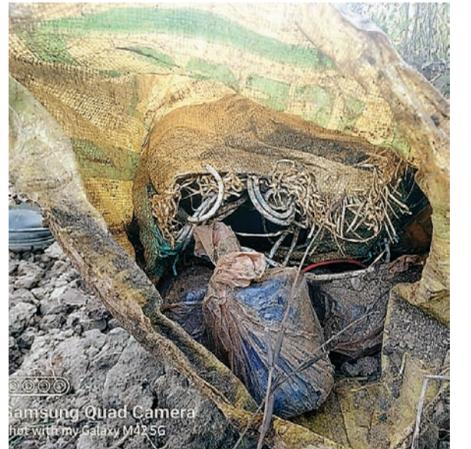
RANCHI | Agencies

A conspiracy hatched by Maoists allegedly to kill police personnel was thwarted in Jharkhand's Latehar on Friday as the state police recovered 25 tiffin bombs from the Bairyra jungle in the Manika police station area and destroyed them on the spot.

Latehar Superintendent of Police, Anjani Anjan said that she had received information that explosives had been laid on the way to kill police personnel deployed to guard the jungle area.

A search operation was conducted by the Jharkhand police on Friday during which they recovered 25 bombs planted in the ground. Each bomb weighed nearly 20 to 25 kg.

If the plan of the Maoists had been successful, it could have led to heavy casualties among police officials. Usually policemen walk on foot in the forest areas so the Maoists had planted bombs in a series to kill police officials in large numbers.



The police took charge of the surrounding area before defusing the explosives. At the time of defusing them, there was a massive explosion that shook the whole area.

Assistant Commandant of CRPF 11 Battalion, Chandrashekhar Singh Kushwaha, Station House

Officer Shubham Kumar and police and CRPF personnel were involved in the search operation. Earlier on December 21, nearly 50 kg of explosives containing ammonium nitrate were recovered by the police from the Sadar police station area of Lohardaga district and two people were arrested.

First in NE region, School of Business opens in IIT-Guwahati

Guwahati | Agencies

The Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, (IIT-G) has started admitting the first batch of students under its flagship programme -- Master of Business Administration (MBA) -- at the newly opened School of Business, the first of its kind in the northeastern region, officials said on Friday.

The officials of the IIT-G said the admission process for the MBA programme would open in January and the first batch is expected to begin their studies from July 2022.

The admission to the MBA programme will be in line with the admission process adopted by other IITs in the country offering MBA programmes, with the requirement of opening this programme to prospective applicants who have qualified the Common Admission Test-



2021. An official statement said the admission process will take place in two stages -- shortlisting of applications for the personal interview followed by the final selection based on the personal interview along with a few other parameters.

IIT-G Director, T. G. Sitharam highlighted that the establishment of the School of Business at the institution was motivated by the idea of promoting and contributing to the subjects of manage-

ment and entrepreneurship, among other emerging subjects, the statement said.

The Head of the school, Laishram Boeing Singh said that the primary goal of this newly established school is to impart business and management knowledge in conjunction with the right skills, to empower individuals striving towards achieving tangible entrepreneurial goals and utilise the diverse ecosystem existing at IIT Guwahati, the statement added.

OF 183 OMICRON CASES ANALYSED, 87 FULLY VACCINATED: GOVT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Out of the total 183 Omicron cases in India analysed so far, 87 cases have been found fully vaccinated and out of these, three were also given the booster dose, the Union Health Ministry announced on Friday.

Of the total, 61 per cent of the Omicron cases analysed were male and 39 per cent were female.

Addressing a press briefing on the current Covid pandemic situation in the country, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said that India has so far reported 358 cases of Omicron and out of these, 114 have recovered.

He further added that an analysis of 183 Omicron cases was done which revealed that 121 cases had history of foreign travel, 44 had no foreign travel history, but the majority of them were in contacts of the foreign travellers. However, 18 patients have no travel information yet, he said.

About the vaccination status of these analysed Omicron cases, Bhushan said that 87 patients were fully vaccinated and out of these, three were inoculated with the booster dose. Out of these three with



booster dose, two patients are from Delhi and one from Maharashtra.

Seven patients were unvaccinated and two were partially vaccinated

and 16 were ineligible to take the job. The vaccination status of 73 patients is unknown, he said.

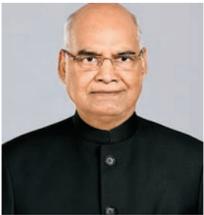
"The world is witnessing the fourth surge and the overall positivity is 6.1 per cent. Therefore, we have to be on guard and we can't afford to loosen our guards", said Bhushan, adding that while Europe, North America and Africa are seeing an increase in Covid cases week-on-week, Asia is still witnessing a decline in Covid cases week-on-week.

About the government's preparations, he said that, as on Friday, 18,10,083 isolation beds, 4,94,314 oxygen supported beds, 1,39,300 ICU beds, 24,057 paediatric ICU beds and 64,796 paediatric non-ICU beds available across the nation. He said that India has administered the first dose to 89 per cent of the adult population and 61 per cent of the eligible population has received the second dose of vaccines.

On the question of national policy on booster dose, Indian Council of Medical research Director General, Dr Balram Bhargava, said that the deliberations are underway and the scientific data is being reviewed to formulate a policy.

PRESIDENT GREETES PEOPLE ON CHRISTMAS

New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday extended his warm greetings and wishes to all fellow citizens, especially Christians, for Christmas. The President, in his message, said: "Christmas is celebrated on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Lord Jesus Christ. This festival instills peace, harmony and compassion in the lives of people and also promotes unity and fraternity amongst members of the society. Jesus Christ's message of love and compassion continues to inspire the entire humanity even today." "On this occasion, let us resolve to build such a society that is based on the values of justice and liberty by adopting the ideals and teachings of Jesus Christ in our lives," he said, as per a communique from the Rashtrapati Bhavan.



New washroom for Kerala Minister costs more than home under govt scheme

Thiruvananthapuram | Agencies

The Kerala government has sparked off controversy for sanctioning Rs 4.10 lakh for a new washroom in a minister's office when it grants only Rs 4 lakh to build a house for the poor under its "Life Mission project". The order from the General Administration Department came out on December 21 sparking discussions all around.

State Fisheries Minister Saji Cherian, for whom the amount has been sanctioned, is a two-time legislator of the CPI-M and was a surprise choice for a



Cabinet Minister post in the second Pinarayi Vijayan government. There

were several seasoned legislators more experienced in race for their post. Cherian, 56, won his first Assembly election when he was fielded by the party in the Chenganoor Assembly seat in Alappuzha district after sitting party legislator K.Ramachandran Nair passed away in 2018.

In the April 6 Assembly polls, he retained his sitting seat and was made a State Minister. This expensive bathroom for Cherian is being built at a time when the state is passing through one of its worst financial crisis. A political observer said this is a recurring phenomenon.

FIVE HELD FOR BID TO BLACKMAIL MOS HOME AJAY MISRA TENI

New Delhi: The Delhi Police have arrested five people for allegedly trying to blackmail Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ajay Misra Teni, an official said on Friday. "Five people, including four from Noida and one from Seeraspur in Delhi, were arrested in this matter for making extortion calls," the official told reporter.

The complaint was lodged by the Personal Assistant of the Union Minister, saying that he received phone calls from some unidentified people demanding money. The Police is yet to furnish details about why they tried to blackmail Teni.



Health care for underprivileged at Atal Health Fair

Lucknow | Agencies

An artificial limb measurement and distribution camp for underprivileged differently-abled people was held in Lucknow during the two-day Atal Health Fair to mark the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The camp was held by Narayan Sewa Sansthan (NSS) with the collaboration of the UP Health Department.

The two-day Atal Health Fair saw people with disabilities and those who are differently-abled get free tricycles, wheelchairs, prostheses, callipers. Prostheses were also distributed amongst the orphans, poor people with disabilities and the underprivileged. The Narayan Sewa Sansthan offered 15 tricycles, five wheelchairs, 15 crutches, 15 callipers and 110 OPD.

Senior Orthopaedic Surgeon of the NSS, Dr VR Shinde, Prosthetics and Orthotics Neha Agnihotri and Camp In-charge Hari Prasad



Ladda who participated in the fair, said that despite the pandemic, they have been regularly organising camps for free food distribution, medicines, blankets, school books, artificial limbs and distribution camps across India for the destitute. Prashant Agarwal, president, NSS, said, "Uttar Pradesh Health Department is proposing major aid to assist differently-abled by organising the health care camps on the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Since 1985, NSS Team is offering free of cost medical treatment, skill development, mass marriage, and physiotherapy and free school education to the underprivileged and differently-abled individuals." Before the pandemic, the NSS has distributed 2,74,603 wheelchairs, 2,64,422 tricycles, 2,97,789 crutches, 3,61,997 blankets among the needy and underprivileged individuals through various camps.

Owaisi alleges part of his speech being quoted out of context

Lucknow | Agencies

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) president, Asaduddin Owaisi, said on Friday that a clipped video footage of his speech was being circulated on social media to trigger controversy.

The speech he made was in reference to the alleged provocative and communal statements made against minority communities during a three-day 'Dharma Sansad' in Haridwar. "A clipped one-min video is being circulated from a 45 min speech I gave in Kanpur. I have shared my entire speech on Twitter now. The context to my speech is amply clear. I was talking about cops who torture 80-year-old men. I was talking about cops who watch silently as mobs thrash a rickshaw driver in front of his daughter. Also, cops who rained lathi blows on a man as held his child in his arms," Owaisi said.

He further said: "I said we will remember these police atrocities. Is this objectionable? Why is it offensive to remember how police have treated Muslims in UP? We cannot forget the oppression that was meted out to Anas, Suleiman, Asif, Faisal, Altaf, Akhlaq, Qasim, and hundreds of others," he asked in another series of tweets. Owaisi clarified: "I did not incite violence or make threats. I talked about



police atrocities." The event in Haridwar that Asaduddin Owaisi was referring to in his speech was attended by several Hindu religious leaders, who allegedly called upon the community to take up arms against Muslims as they gave a clarion call for a 'Hindu nation'.

The three-day religious assembly was organised by Yati Narsinghanand, a controversial Hindutva figure known to make communal statements. Yati Narsinghanand reportedly said that "arming the Hindu brigade with bigger and better weapons" would be the "solution" against the "threat of Muslims."



MAHA COUNCIL PASSES BILLS PROVIDING FOR OBC QUOTA IN LOCAL BODIES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra Legislative Council cleared two Bills that provide 27 per cent reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBC) in urban and rural local bodies in the state.

Earlier, the state government had issued ordinances that gave reservations to OBCs in local bodies. The ordinances were later stayed by the Supreme Court. Rural Development Minister Hasan Mushi tabled the Bills which had been cleared by the Legislative Assembly on Thursday.

As a result of the stay granted by the apex court, there would have been virtually no reservation for OBCs in coming local body polls. The opposition BJP and ruling Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress alliance had blamed each other for failing to secure quota for these communities. On September 23, the state prom-



ulgated an ordinance to amend the Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samitis Act, 1961, and Maharashtra Village Panchayat Act for Zilla Parishads, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayats, to ensure up to 27 per cent quota for OBC candidates. The ordinance was issued after the apex court struck down a legal provision that granted similar

reservation on the ground that it exceeded the 50 per cent ceiling on quota. On October 1, the state promulgated a second ordinance to amend the Mumbai Municipal Corporation Act, Maharashtra Municipal Corporations Act, and Maharashtra Municipal Councils, Nagar Panchayats and the Industrial Townships Act.

These three Acts govern urban local bodies. The Bills amend these Acts so that there is 27 per cent quota for OBCs in the forthcoming elections. During a discussion, the BJP's Parinay Phuke said, "This is a political bill and not meant for addressing the issues of OBCs. The government has not given enough funds to OBC Commission for gathering empirical data (which the SC had sought)." The Bills were passed unanimously. They will now be sent to Maharashtra Governor BS Koshiyari for approval.

Maharashtra: 1,078 farmers commit suicide in June-Oct 2021

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra recorded as many as 1,078 cases of suicide by farmers in just five months -- June-October 2021, Relief and Rehabilitation Minister Vijay Wadetiwar said here on Friday.

Replying during the Question Hour in the Maharashtra Legislature, he said that of these, 491 cases were declared eligible for and provided the benefits under the state government's Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Loan Waiver Scheme by the respective district level committees.

Citing the causes, Wadetiwar said that the farmers' suicides are reported due to the high debt-burden on their inability to repay, damage caused due to natural calamities, soil infertility and also personal/family reasons.

The government is serious about tackling this issue and presently provides financial assistance of Rs 100,000 to the survivors of the deceased farmers, he said.

"However, in my view, farmers suicides should be included as 'disaster' so that the heirs of the deceased farmers can be given aid



of Rs 400,000. I shall bring up this proposal before the state cabinet," said Wadetiwar.

He said that the state cabinet has asked him and Agriculture Minister Dadaji Bhuse to study Telangana's 'Rythu Bandhu Programme' which proposed investment support to agriculture and horticulture crops by way of grants of Rs 5,000/acre for each farmer in the Kharif and Rabi seasons. This can be utilised for agriculture inputs like seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, labour and other investments in the field chosen by the farmers for the particular crop season for their welfare.

Pune shocked as wrestler shot dead inside vehicle in public view

Pune | Agencies

In a shocking case, a wrestler was shot multiple times leading to his death as he was preparing to sit in his vehicle, police said here on Friday.

The incident happened around 10.40 p.m. on Thursday in Chakan on the outskirts of the city when the victim Nagesh S. Karale was getting into his SUV to go somewhere.

Suddenly, his vehicle was surrounded by a gang of at least four and they started firing bullets at him, hitting him several times, before disappearing from the crime spot. The entire incident was captured on local CCTV cameras in which the assailants are also clearly seen shooting the 37-year old well-built wrestler.

Several people are said to



have witnessed the chilling crime near the road with Karale lying in a pool of blood in the vehicle, and someone later called up the police who rushed there.

The wrestler was immediately taken to a nearby hospital where he was pronounced dead by the doctors. The Pune Police have

MUMBAI'S DARWIN PLATFORM INFRA LTD WINS BID FOR PUNE'S LAVASA CITY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

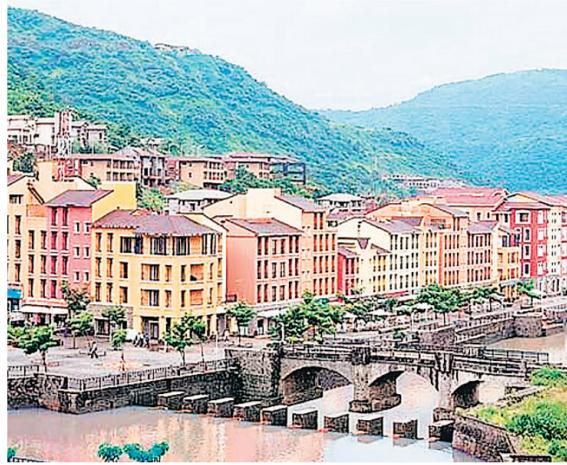
Mumbai-based Darwin Platform Infrastructure Ltd (DPIL) has bagged the bid for Lavasa Corporation, India's first privately-built smart city near the Lonavala hillstation in Pune, officials said.

The Committee of Creditors (CoC) of Lavasa Corporation voted and accepted a Rs 1,814 crore final Total Resolution Plan to revive the city.

Darwin Platform Group of Companies Group Chairman Ajay H. Singh said that his company has an ambitious and long-term plan for Lavasa smart city.

"DPIL has capabilities and resources to meet the expectations of the CoC. We are committed to executing the Plan as per the schedule proposed to the CoC," he said, lauding the CoC move expressing full confidence in the company.

Last month, the DPIL had submitted a revised bid on its Resolution Plan and this month the CoC initiated the process to finalise the deals submitted by various applicants, including DPIL.



CoC sources said that among other things, the DPIL has proposed payment plan and schedules that include upfront payment of around Rs 100 crore, payment to home buyers (RERA) within two years of receipt of EC, construction and deliv-

ery of homebuyers' properties, redemption of the secured NCDs at the end of 108 months, and as these would incur a cost of Rs 1,466.50 crore, adding working capital, repairs/refurbishment and other works, the company had offered a total plan of Rs 1,184 crore for the project.

Vineet Tulsyan of R3 Corporate Advisors, which guided the Darwin Group for its winning bid, said after considering all the complexities and hurdles to the projects, they negotiated a well-balanced plan with the lenders.

"Homebuyers are the biggest sufferers here besides the secured financial creditors and we will understand their concerns and involve them in the revival process," he said.

The first challenge before the new entity would be securing various environment clearances once the NCLT approves the revival plan, but the DPIL is confident of getting the same. The Lavasa, work on which was started by Hindustan Construction Company Chairman Ajit Gulabchand in the early 2000s, was billed as India's first privately developed hill station coming upon over 25,000 acres of land near Pune.

However, over the years it faced several environment-related issues, political problems and other hiccups and finally it went into insolvency before the NCLT in August 2018.

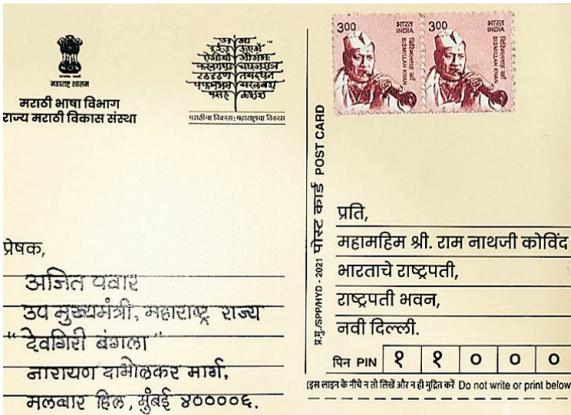
Ajit Pawar sends a postcard to President

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In the 21st century era of e-mail and instant messaging, Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has relied on a nearly two-century-old means of communication to draw the attention of the President Ram Nath Kovind.

The oft-maverick Ajit Pawar - nephew of Nationalist Congress Party supremo Sharad Pawar - on Friday shot off a humble postcard to the Rashtrapati Bhavan on the long-pending issue of accord the "classical language" status to Marathi.

In the neatly-typed postcard, Pawar has pointed out that although the Centre had taken the decision in 2004 to confer the "classical language" status to various languages, the Marathi language has been ignored despite repeated requests. Even a high-



level committee of language experts appointed by the Centre had unanimously approved a proposal to this effect seven years ago, but there has been no further

progress in the matter, he said.

Pawar exhorted the President that it was necessary to grant the status of a "classical language" to Marathi as recommended even by the Sahitya Akademi, at the earliest.

"Marathi is not only an ancient language but also the state language, used by litterateurs, intellectuals, by people of religion besides the common masses, and ranks among the major languages in the world," he pointed out.

Citing how there many documents which provide testimony that Marathi is a "classical language", he urged the President to accord the status on priority.

Then, Pawar personally signed the postcard in green ink, mentioned his full residential address, affixed 2 stamps of Rs 3 each with the picture of the shehnai maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan, and it was 'posted'. Last year, the Maharashtra Legislature passed a unanimous resolution recommending to the Centre to accord the "classical language" status to Marathi.

Kareena Kapoor's genome sequencing report for Omicron comes negative

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The genome sequencing report of Bollywood actor Kareena Kapoor Khan for Omicron variant of COVID-19 has come negative, confirmed the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Friday.

The 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham' actor has been in quarantine ever since she had tested positive for COVID-19 earlier in December after attending a gathering at filmmaker Karan Johar's house. She had released a statement confirming that she is in isolation. Her post read, "I have tested positive for Covid. I immediately isolated myself while following all medical protocols. I request anyone



who has come in contact with me to please get tested. My family and staff are also double vaccinated. They are currently not showing any symptoms. Thankfully, I am feeling ok and hope to be up and about soon."

Amrita Arora, Seema Khan and Maheep Kapoor, who too were present there had also

Four Babies Die in 4 Days at BMC Hospital in Bhandup

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Four infants died in four consecutive days at Bhandup's Savitri Bai Phule Maternity Hospital run by the BMC. Their parents of the newborns have alleged that the death was caused due to septic shock after a short-circuit took place in the air-conditioners of the hospital. The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in the BMC-run hospital has been outsourced to a private medical company. Despite repeated complaints by local corporators, Sakshi Dalvi and Jagruti Patil, about the NICU, but no steps were taken by the hospital and local administration. BJP's Prabhakar Shinde accused the Shiv Sena of negligence.

Meanwhile, after the matter was raised in the winter session of the state assembly, Maharashtra urban development minister Eknath Shinde announced the suspension of a medical officer of the hospital and a high-level inquiry



into the matter. The report is scheduled to arrive in five days.

The BMC's Health Committee chairperson Rajul Patel, also a Sena corporator, visited the maternity hospital in Bhandup and met the bereaved parents. A video of her conversation with them went viral and triggered an outrage. Patel was seen telling the parents that they should take responsibility of what had happened as they did not ask them before getting the infants admitted in the hospital. After the footage sparked a row she later apologised. "Yesterday I visited the maternity hospital where four newborns died in a mat-

ter of four days. To get more information on how the incident took place, I went to meet the parents and one of them said 'you should take responsibility'. So, I responded that it's not about taking responsibility, we should collectively ensure such a thing doesn't happen ever. We will take action against those who are found guilty in this matter. Still, in some way I have hurt their sentiments, I apologise," Patel said.

According to Patel, the babies were brought from maternity hospitals in Mumbai to the Bhandup facility in non NICU ambulances, looking at their condition and complications, "they were highly prone to infection, so they could have been infected in transit". "A detailed inquiry is underway. I have written to the BMC in the past to upgrade and ramp up the paediatric care facility, to start infant care facility at Cooper Hospital, and requested for NICU ambulance vans," she said.

Why the luxury tourism industry is latching onto Blockchain technology

Team Absolute | Mumbai

With the number of global crypto-millionaires increasing to more than 100,000 in 2021, there is a sizeable interest displayed by this ever-growing community in using their crypto gains to indulge in new experiences.

The travel and tourism industry stands to benefit the most from this growing class of investors who want to fulfill their travelling desires with highly personalized services enabled through the use of popular cryptocurrencies as legal tender.

Moreover, with millennials representing more than 50 per cent of the global luxury market potential and 58 per cent of the crypto investor community by volume, brands, and services involved in the global luxury tourism market are increasingly adopting crypto today.

In a bid to attract this growing class of investors and to make their systems more efficient, travel firms are augmenting efforts to adopt Blockchain technology that lies at the core of crypto assets. As a tech-



nology, Blockchain will enable tourism-focused companies to facilitate crypto transactions in place of services, create efficient loyalty programs that reward their users, and even tokenize physical assets such as resort spaces in the form of Non-fungible Tokens (NFTs). In fact, with the rise of the Metaverse, Blockchain technology will be instrumental in converting popular and niche travel destinations into their digital avatars.

The possibilities are endless and are the primary reason why many luxury tourism players are jumping onto the crypto bandwagon.

Recently, global platform LynKey, that powers luxury resort and vacation property with blockchain and AI technology, today announced a project for tokenizing and offering NFT solutions of over \$8 billion for travel and tourism using smart contracts to digitize luxury resorts and properties at multiple destinations,

offering them over its blockchain-powered token marketplace and ecosystem, seeking to tokenize all aspects of property development -- purchases, leases, land use, and related tourism entertainment -- in an international blockchain-powered ecosystem. As global vaccination coverage improves by the day and the intent for travel increases proportionately, the global luxury tourism industry is set to witness high double-digit growth rates in the foreseeable future. Companies that are Blockchain and crypto ready will no doubt be in a better position to capitalize on the increased demand from crypto users along with the traditional travel community. Additionally, with most cryptocurrencies amid an epic bull run, companies can earn even more from crypto-based payments by capital appreciation on the underlying assets. In summary, faster and borderless transaction ability, more lucrative reward mechanisms, and a growing younger consumer class are just a few of the reasons why this trend is here to stay.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Clean Ganga

The work of cleaning of the Ganga -- under the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) -- should sustain till 2050 and beyond so that the river remains clean and free-flowing forever, Director General of National Mission for Clean Ganga, Rajiv Ranjan Mishra said. Just as one needs to clean his or her house regularly, not that you do it once and leave it, similarly, Ganga too needs cleaning regularly. For instance, one installs a sewage treatment plant with a life of 15 years. What happens after that? Therefore, our aim is to keep working at it and ensure that the river remains clean till at least 2050 so that its chances of being clean forever increase. The book - 'Ganga: Reimagining, Rejuvenating Reconnecting' - penned by Mishra and Puskal Upadhyay, who has had a stint with the NMCG and currently with the New Delhi Municipal Council, was released by Bibek Debroy, who is the chairperson of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. In fact, it is the participation of these 'people' - as documented in the book as case studies - that Debroy spoke of citing an example from Prime Minister's one of the Maan Ki Baat and linking it with the current status along the Ganga. Cleaning up Ganga or cleaning up of rivers is not going to happen only because of what governments do. The first attempt to clean up the Ganga was by the citizens of Kashi in 1886. There is a broader issue of the environment and the kind of premium we place on the environment as citizens, as countries, as per capita GDP comes out. There is clearly a co-relation between per capita GDP and environment. As per capita GDP increases, so does the quality of the environment."

NAGA PEACE TALKS, AFSPA

IS THE BALL FINALLY IN THE COURT OF THE PM?

Nirendra Dev

Things have perhaps started falling in their places. Have they? Close on the heels of Foreign Secretary Harsh V Shringla taking up with Myanmar's military rulers on the now infamous Churachandpur ambush in Manipur, Union Home Minister Amit Shah held a crucial late night meeting with Chief Ministers of Assam and Nagaland Himanta Biswa Sarma and Neiphiu Rio, respectively.

Home Minister Shah is likely to brief Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his talks with the northeastern leaders especially in the context of security implications in taking any decision on AFSPA. Assam Chief Minister Sarma has favoured continuing with the enforcement of AFSPA in his state.

Recently, RSS leader Indresh Kumar told reporters that even in Kashmir the deployment of forces were automatically minimised once situation improved and the Article 370 was abrogated. Sources close to the NNPGs, an umbrella of 7 militant groups, leadership have said only a final peace pact can bring a 'natural end' to all controversies pertaining to AFSPA and deployment of security forces in Nagaland and other Naga inhabited areas.

Tangkul Nagas of NSCN (IM) leader Thuingaleng Muivah have substantial presence in Manipur, which again goes to the polls by February-March along with Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Goa.

BJP floor leader in Nagaland and Deputy Chief Minister Y Patton and a former Chief Minister T.R. Zeliang (of NPF) were also present in the meeting with Shah. Patton is also the state Home Minister and a section of BJP leaders in Delhi were not impressed with his performance especially in the context of Oting shooting down.

The deliberations between Shah and northeastern leaders were vital as these took place days after the Nagaland assembly adopted a resolution for repeal of the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA). The summoning of the leaders from Nagaland especially on the eve of Christmas and their arrival in the capital along with Assam Chief Minister and NEDA convener Himanta Biswa Sarma signified that talks were sensitive and essential. The meeting between Mr Shah and the northeastern leaders took place within hours India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla on a two-day visit to Myanmar raised matters relating to India's security with Myanmar military rulers espe-



cially in the light of the "recent incident in Churachandpur" district in southern Manipur.

The ambush on November 13 claimed the lives of Col Viplab Tripathi, his wife and nine-year-old boy and four jawans. Subsequently, the killing of Naga civilians by security forces in Mon district in a botched up anti insurgency operation has now led to demand for the withdrawal of the AFSPA from Nagaland.

"Entire Naga society has been calling for repeal of AFSPA and that voice is at its loudest today," said Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on December 20 while piloting forcefully an official resolution in the Assembly seeking immediate repeal of the controversial law that gives some impunity to armed forces.

Assam Chief Minister Sarma for his part, however, said AFSPA will continue in his state. The argument being the withdrawal of AFSPA cannot be a call of the government alone. It has to depend on the overall situation, law and order situation of the state.

"Now suppose I withdraw, will that be reciprocated by the militant organisations?" he said in Guwahati a few days back.

The Oting killing of Konyak Naga civilians and subsequent violence in Mon town on December 5 have led to the demand for withdrawal of the AFSPA, considered an essential piece of legislation for army operations in north east and in Jammu and Kashmir.

In the Churachandpur ambush on

November 13, one colonel Viplab Tripathi, his wife and nine-year boy were killed along with four jawans. Six others were injured when PLA and little known Manipur Naga People's Front militants attacked the forces at Behiang in Churachandpur district.

Apprehensions were expressed in certain quarters that Oting killing and subsequent developments could even lead to derailment or stalling of the hard-earned Naga peace talks that had begun in August 1997.

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As it is the NSCN (IM) has stuck to its demand for Flag and a Separate Constitution that has only lingered the peace talks.

In 2019, the then Nagaland

Governor R N Ravi had said the peace talks were over and final pact was to be inked. However, the NSCN (IM)'s twin demands have posed hurdles although NNPGs, a conglomeration of 7 Naga groups operating in Nagaland, were keen for an early signing of the peace agreement.

Meanwhile, a four-member panel of party leaders Gaurav Gogoi, Jitendra Singh, Ajoy Kumar and Anto Antony submitted a report on Nagaland situation to Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

Notably, K. Therie, the president of the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee, has blamed Chief Minister Rio for the recent Oting incident. "It is a game plan to derail the peace process," Therie has alleged.

"Nothing can happen in the state without the knowledge of the Chief Minister and state Home Minister as the law and order is a state subject," he said and maintained the movement of 21 para troopers from Assam in Nagaland on the fateful day, December 4, was not possible without the knowledge of authorities in Nagaland.

(Nirendra Dev is a New Delhi-based journalist. He is also author of books, 'The Talking Guns: North East India' and 'Modi to Moditva: An Uncensored Truth')

international

38 DEAD IN B'DESH FERRY FIRE

Dhaka | Agencies

At least 38 people were killed and 100 others injured when a passenger ferry caught fire in Bangladesh's Jhalokati district on Friday, a senior official said.

Md Nazmul Alam, Jhalokati district's additional deputy commissioner, told Xinhua news agency that the vessel was carrying nearly 1,000 people from Dhaka to Barguna district.

He said the fire broke out in the engine room at about 3 a.m. due to a technical glitch, forcing the Barguna-bound "MV Abhijan-10" vessel to drop anchor on the banks of the Sugandha River. "Thirty-eight bodies have so far been recovered following the fire accident," he told Xinhua.

Most of the passengers were asleep when the acci-



dent occurred, said the official.

He said a search operation is still underway for an unknown number of missing persons.

"We've come to know that the ferry was carrying about 1,000 passengers," he said, adding that it has been dragged to the bank.

Survivors told local media that many of the passengers jumped into the river to

swim ashore in a desperate bid to save their lives as the devastating fire ripped through the vessel for about three hours.

The vessel was reportedly excessively overloaded.

The ferry services in Bangladesh, a key means of transport in the country, usually do not maintain a list of passengers and none can exactly say how many passengers are aboard a ferry.

55 PEOPLE ON US CRUISE SHIP TEST COVID POSITIVE

Washington: A total of 55 people aboard a Royal Caribbean International cruise ship have tested positive for Covid-19 after it set sail on December 18 from the US state of Florida, the company said.

The infections on the Odyssey of the Seas cruise ship included passengers and crew members, and all are fully vaccinated, the operator said in a statement.

The ship, which was on an eight-night cruise, will not sail to the Caribbean islands of Curacao and Aruba as scheduled, the statement said, adding that the vessel will remain at sea until it returns to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on December 26, reports Xinhua news agency.

According to US media reports, there are over 3,500 passengers and around 1,600 crew members on board. This is the second coronavirus outbreak on a Royal Caribbean cruise ship in less than a week. Last week, the Symphony of the Seas cruise ship returned to the port of Miami with 48 Covid-19 patients on board after a seven-day trip in the Caribbean.



Smoke from volcano affects flights in Colombian capital

Bogota | Agencies

The direction of flights to and from the Colombian capital of Bogota will be modified due to smoke from the Nevado del Ruiz volcano and it may cause delays, the state-run Civil Aviation Authority announced.

"Because of the smoke from the Nevado del Ruiz volcano reaching 27,000 feet high, the Civil Aviation Authority informs that air traffic to and from Bogota, and from southern and western parts of the country, will be redirected," Xinhua news agency quoted the Authority as saying in a tweet.

The agency also said that itineraries may be affected, so it asked travellers to contact their respective airlines



for more information.

"The Civil Aviation Authority, along with operators, are working in coordination to minimise the impact that this natural phenomenon may have for the safety of air operations and service to users," it said.

The Nevado del Ruiz is a volcano on the border of the departments of Caldas and Tolima in Colombia, about

129 km west of Bogota.

On November 13, 1985, a small eruption produced an enormous lava flow that buried and destroyed the town of Armero in Tolima, causing an estimated 25,000 deaths. The volcano continues to pose a threat to the nearby towns and villages, and it is estimated that up to 500,000 people could be at risk from future eruptions.

Guterres appoints new head to monitor ceasefire in Yemen



United Nations | Agencies

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has announced the appointment of retired Maj. Gen. Michael Beary of Ireland as head of the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) and chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee. Beary succeeds retired Lt. Gen. Abhijit Guha of India, reports Xinhua news agency. Major General Beary has had a long career since joining the Irish Army as an Infantry Corps Officer in 1975, serving from 2016 to 2018 as Head of Mission and Force Commander of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon

(UNIFIL) having previously served there in 1982, 1989 and 1994-95. He further served as General Officer commanding Second Brigade Irish Defence Forces from 2013 to 2016 with a wide variety of assignments, holding command and staff officer appointments, including at the unit, brigade and defence force headquarters levels. He spent 10 years on overseas deployments, including in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia and Uganda. Since his retirement from the Irish Army in 2018, General Beary has lectured at universities in Ireland, authored publications on international peacekeeping, while also having led UN Boards of Inquiry in Africa.

Dozens injured in West Bank clashes with Israeli soldiers

Ramallah | Agencies

Dozens of Palestinian protesters were injured in clashes with Israeli soldiers in a village northwest of the West Bank city of Nablus, according to medics and witnesses.

At least 42 Palestinians, including a local journalist, were injured by rubber-coated metal gunshots and 83 others suffered from suffocation after inhaling tear gas fired by the Israeli soldiers in the village of Burqa, northwest of Nablus, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said in a statement on Thursday.

Witnesses in the village told Xinhua news agency that clashes between the demonstrators and the Israeli soldiers broke out earlier on Thursday.

They added that the protesters organised a demonstration against Israeli set-



tlers' assaults and expansion of settlements.

The clashes broke out in the village shortly after hundreds of Israeli settlers, under the protection of Israeli soldiers, attempted to break into the village, the official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported.

In the past few days, the tensions between Israel and the Palestinians have been flaring in the West Bank over

the Israeli measures. Two Palestinians were killed on Tuesday and Wednesday. Meanwhile, Saleh al-Aroui, deputy chief of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) told the pro-movement Al-Aqsa TV channel that there is a clear ascending trend of tension in the West Bank as a result of the Israeli occupation practices. Diplomatic ties between Israel and the

Palestinians were interrupted in 2014 due to the latter's rejection of the Jewish state's policies of expanding settlements in East Jerusalem.

The Palestinians want to establish an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel on all the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel in 1967, including the entire West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

SAUDI-LED AIRSTRIKES HIT HOUTHIS TARGETS IN SANAA

Sanaa: Overnight airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition hit a military camp and destroyed a bridge in Yemen's Houthi-held capital Sanaa.

The warplanes on Wednesday night launched three airstrikes on the Central Security Camp and another airstrike on a nearby bridge linking public roads, Xinhua news agency quoted the Houthi-run al-Masirah TV as saying in a report on Thursday.

The camp and nearby bridge are located in the al-Sabeen neighbourhood in the southern part of Sanaa.

Explosions were heard in the camp and residents in the neighborhood said windows of their houses smashed. The residents also told Xinhua that the traffic movement stopped on four main roads after the destruction of the al-Sabeen bridge.

Meanwhile, the coalition said in a statement reported by the Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya TV that it targeted weapons depots in the camp.

"The airstrikes came in immediate response after the coalition forces intercepted and destroyed a bomb-laden drone launched by the Houthi militia towards the Saudi city of Jazan." The coalition statement however, did not mention the airstrike on the bridge as claimed by the Houthi group. The Iran-backed Houthi militia has recently intensified cross-border drone and missile attacks against Saudi cities. In February, the rebel group began a major offensive against the coalition-backed Yemeni government army to capture the oil-rich province of Marib.





ENSURE BETTER MEASURES FOR CORONA PREVENTION: CM

Ensure proper arrangements to prevent possible third wave of Corona. CM reviews Corona through video conferencing

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that best of arrangements should be made to prevent the rise of Corona cases in the state. All preparations with past experience should be done well in advance to prevent a possible third wave.

Chief Minister Chouhan was taking a review meeting of Corona through video conference at Mantralaya. Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang, Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains, Additional Chief Secretary Health Mohammad Suleman, Collectors of all districts, Superintendents of Police etc. were present.

People have to be saved from third wave
Chief Minister said that the danger of third wave is constantly on the rise. Positive cases in the state have also exceeded 200. Earlier cases of Corona were coming only in Indore and Bhopal, now gradually cases are coming in other districts also. At present there are no active cases in 34 districts. Cases are coming up in the surrounding states of Maharashtra and Gujarat. We must not forget our previous experience. Cases of Corona are coming up in almost all the states. Caution and safety measures are essential. All measures



must be taken to protect the lives of the people.
Control on Covid must with top priority
Chouhan said that the target of Corona test should be increased. Too many cases are surfacing in America, England. Let us assume that Omicron is amidst us. Only citizens who have got both the doses of vaccine in the state will be able to go to gym, cinema hall and other places. It should also be ensured that economic activities are not adversely affected. There should be no shortage of oxygen. Take it on priority. Wearing a

mask is a must. People should be appealed to get vaccinated and tested. Take control of the whole situation.

Avoid unnecessary gatherings

Chouhan said that a meeting should be held with the Crisis Management Committees. Ministers in-charge also join the meetings. To effectively prevent infection, avoid wearing masks, social distancing and unnecessary gatherings. Collector should make people follow it.

Activate Crisis Management Group

Chief Minister said that positive cases are coming up. Testing should be continued daily according to the target. In case anyone tests positive, contact tracing of 30 people should be done. If there is no arrangement for home isolation, get admitted to the hospital. There should be adequate arrangement of ventilators and beds in the hospitals. Oxygen lines should be maintained. Check isolation beds, PSA plant should be in running condition. Try turning on the concentrator. The power system should be fine and the generator should also be arranged. Keep at least one month stock of essential medicines. Re-mark the Covid Care Center. The contract has been extended till March 31 in the Chief Minister's Covid Treatment Scheme.

Chief Minister planted saplings of Karanj and Gulmohar in Smart Garden

MEMBERS OF JEEVAN SARTHAK FOUNDATION ALSO PLANTED SAPLINGS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan along with the members of Jeevan Sarthak Foundation planted Karanj and Gulmohar saplings in Smart Garden today. Shailendra Dubey, Rajendra Dubey and Lucky Negi of the organisation were present. Chief Minister Chouhan plants saplings every day with social organisations, voluntary organisations and people active in the field of environmental protection, with the aim of connecting people in the campaign of plantation.

This foundation is the largest voluntary blood donor network in Central India formed by associating students of various colleges. The organisation has 25 to 30 thousand members. Chief Minister Chouhan launched the foundation's



campaign "Every drop of blood in the name of nature - need blood plant sapling". Every person in need of blood will be motivated to plant saplings in the campaign. The organisation has issued mobile numbers 8878629324 and 85178 02326 for those needing blood and

for donating blood. Free service will be available 24 hours a day on these numbers. Chief Minister Chouhan expressed gratitude towards the organisation on behalf of the people of the state for these activities and extended his best wishes for the expansion of activities.

Skinniest elephant rescued in MP will be shifted to UP rehabilitation centre

Team Absolute | Bhopal

India's skinniest female elephant, Laxmi, that was rescued in an emaciated condition from Madhya Pradesh's Chhatrapur district, will be shifted to Wildlife (Elephant) Conservation and Care Centre in Uttar Pradesh's Mathura.

The elephant is currently sheltered and recovering at the forest department's premises in Bada Malhera under the observation of veterinarians and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India. An order in this regard was issued by a sessions court on Tuesday. Principal Chief Conservator in Madhya Pradesh, Alok Kumar told reporter on Friday that the elephant is recovering under



the protection of the forest department. "The female elephant would be shifted to the Mathura rehabilitation centre. The order has been issued and further process for shifting will be initiated," Kumar added.

In the first week of December, following complaints by PETA India and local activists, the forest department registered a preliminary offence report under

Section 42 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, against Laxmi's custodian for illegally keeping her and abusing her for begging. Upon hearing from PETA India, the Animal Welfare Board of India and the Project Elephant division of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change had asked the forest department to take immediate steps to rehabilitate the elephant.

CHIEF MINISTER WILL INAUGURATE TANSEN SAMAROH

Bhopal: Tansen Samaroh, a prestigious event of the Culture Department, is starting from December 25. In this five-day-long musical fair, the singers of the country and the world will present Khirje Akeedat (pay their respect) to Tansen, the king of music. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will inaugurate this function. Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia will be present as special guests. Culture Minister Usha Thakur will preside over the programme.

Ustad Alauddin Khan Sangeet and Kala Academy has told that the Tansen festival will start on 25th with Purvarang Gamak. The famous Wadali brothers will perform in this festival of semi classical and Sufi music. The formal opening of the ceremony will take place on Sunday December 26 at 6 pm. National Kalidas Awards will be presented in the inauguration ceremony. The festival will begin with the decoration ceremony. It has been told that the Kalidas National Awards, given in the field of music from 2013 to 2020, are being given this time on the stage of Tansen Samaroh. These honours will be given every day in some assembly and the ministers of the state government or senior officers of the culture department will be present to give them.

HM in favor of postponing Panchayat elections

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In Madhya Pradesh, the possibility of postponement of panchayat elections has started amidst increasing patients of corona infection and fear of new variant Omicron. State Home Minister Dr. Narottam Mishra is of the opinion that Panchayat elections should be postponed. State Home Minister Dr Mishra has said that elections are not bigger than anyone's life, people's lives are the first priority for us.

He further said that during the Corona period, the Panchayat elections held in other states had a great impact on the health of the people. Therefore, my personal opinion is that in view of the increasing threat of Corona, the Panchayat elections should be postponed.

It is to be known that in the last few days, the infection of corona has increased rapidly in the state, along with the patients of Omicron, a new variant of Korena, have also been found in neighboring states. Since then the state government has been alert. With the imposition of night curfew in the state, strict guidelines have also been issued.

There has been a political riot in the state for the past several days regarding OBC reservation in panchayats. The State Election Commission has already decided not to hold elections on seats



reserved for OBCs on the directions of the Supreme Court. Along with this, voting, counting of votes will take place in other places, but it has also been decided not to declare the results. At the same time, the Congress has been continuously demanding the cancellation of the election itself. On one hand, while the matter regarding OBC reservation is in the Supreme Court, the infection of Corona is increasing. Overall, the situation is becoming such that elections can be postponed. Meanwhile, the statement of the Home Minister of the state has come, which has further strengthened the apprehensions.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTS CHIEFS OF BOARDS AND CORPORATIONS

THE MADHYA PRADESH GOVERNMENT ON FRIDAY APPOINTED 25 BJP LEADERS, INCLUDING SEVEN SUPPORTERS OF UNION CIVIL AVIATION MINISTER JYOTIRADITYA SCINDIA WHO LOST BYPOLLS, TO THE POSTS OF CHAIRPERSON AND VICE CHAIR PERSON OF BOARDS AND CORPORATIONS OF THE STATE.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The appointments were announced by chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, official sources said.

The prominent faces who lost bypolls after quitting the Congress and joining the BJP, and who have been now appointed chairpersons of different corporations are Imarti Devi, Girraj Dandotiya, Aidal Singh Kansana, Ranvir Jatav, Munna Lal Goyal, Raghuraj Kansana and Jaswant Jatav.

Among these seven, Imarti Devi, Aidal Singh Kansana and Girraj Dandotiya were ministers when they lost the bypolls.

Imarti Devi has been appointed chairperson of Laghu Udyog Nigam, Aidal Singh Kansana has been made chairperson of Madhya Pradesh State Agro Industries Development Corporation, Ranvir Jatav chairperson of Sant Ravidas Madhya Pradesh Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corporation, Girraj Dandotiya chairperson of Madhya Pradesh Urja Vikas Nigam and Munna Lal Goyal is now chairperson of Madhya Pradesh Rajya Beej Evam Farm Vikas Nigam. Jaswant Jatav was appointed chairperson of Rajya Pashudhan Evam Kukkut Vikas Nigam, while Raghuraj Kansana will head Madhya Pradesh Backward Class and Minorities Finance

Development Corporation, party sources said.

Shailendra Sharma is now chairperson of Madhya Pradesh Kaushal Vikas Evam Rojgar Nirman Board, Vinod Gotiya will head MP State Tourism Development Corporation and Ashutosh Tiwari will be chief of MP Housing Board.

The others are Amita Chapra, who has been made chief of Women's Finance and Development Corporation, Nirmala Barela, who will head MP SC/ST Finance Development Corporation and Jaipal Chavda, who has been appointed chairperson of Indore Development Authority, the sources said.

Shooting of the film 'Love All' concluded in Bhopal

Shutler Tanishka Mihi Varma will be seen in this film with actor Kay Kay Menon

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Shooting of the film 'Love All,' which is based entirely on Badminton, was recently completed in Bhopal. The story of this film revolves

around the city of Bhopal and the film has been shot at various locations in the city. Famous actor Kay Kay Menon played the pivotal role in the film while many local actors have played supporting roles.

Another interesting feature of the film is that about 100 talented badminton players of M.P. took part in the film to put life in high-quality sports sequences on screen.

Recently the shooting of the film has been completed and soon the film will be released in cinema halls. At the moment, post production work of the film is moving on full swing. The music of film is another highlight, which is recorded and ready with top singers Sonu Nigam, Papon, Jubee Nautiyal, and Javed Ali rendering their lovely voices for some mesmerizing poetry.

CAG raises concern over pending dam repairs in MP

Team Absolute | New Delhi / Bhopal

Of the 28 dams that were found to have major deficiencies of multiple kinds, deficiencies in 20 are to be rectified even after 11 to 69 months of their being pointed out, a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has found.

The rectification of deficiencies of dams has a direct bearing on the safety of these dams.

"Estimates for repairs of only eight dams were prepared but estimates of the seven of them were not even sanctioned by the higher officials," the CAG report on economic sector for the year ended March 31, 2019, Government of Madhya Pradesh, said.

The Water Resources Department (WRD) of Madhya Pradesh government is the principal agency for construction and maintenance of large and small dams. There were 4,523 (906 large and 3617 small) dams in the state as of December 2019.

The State Dam Safety Organisation (SDSO) had inspected 510 dams during the years 2016-17 to 2018-19 and reported 73 dams (72 dams under category II and one dam under Category I), which needed immediate repairs.

There is a three-stage dam inspection system and on the basis of the degree of emergency envisaged for attending and executing remedial measures, dams have been categorised into



four types. Category I has dams having major deficiencies, which may lead to complete failure or mere (partial) failure and need attention at

once while category II has dams with minor to medium deficiencies, which are rectifiable but need immediate attention. The CAG had select-

ed only 16 divisions for audit and the report brought out alarming statistics from the areas pertaining to only those divisions.

In the selected 16 divisions, 28 dams under Category II had major deficiencies, viz. heavy leakage from central masonry/dam body, chocking of seepage drains, water pooling near downstream toe drains, formation of weed growth, disturbance of pitching, erosion of top width, leakage from sluice and damage of sluice, etc. For rectification of these deficiencies, estimates should have been prepared immediately.

Audit noticed that out of these 28 dams, estimates of only eight dams were prepared (February 2018-May 2019) by the Executive Engineers concerned, and of these, only one estimate (that of Chandora) was sanctioned (April 2018) under Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP-II); estimates of the remaining seven were not sanctioned by the Chief Engineers concerned even after eight to 24 months of their submission.

"Deficiencies in the remaining 20 dams have not been rectified even after 11 to 69 months of their being pointed out. Government replied (September 2020) that the estimates are being framed as per observations of SDSO and discussions to take up under DRIP-II were in progress," the CAG report released earlier this week said and warned, "The government needs to act quickly, as delay in preparation of estimates delayed the process of rectification of deficiencies of dams, which will affect the safety of these dams."



Jay Z compares Beyonce to Michael Jackson

Los Angeles | Agencies

Music producer Jay Z compared his singer-wife Beyonce to the late 'King of Pop' Michael Jackson in a recent chat with Alicia Keys on Twitter Spaces, saying Beyonce has surpassed Jackson with her iconic 2018 Coachella performances.

He said: "Bey's gonna be mad at (me) for saying this but Michael Jackson never had a Coachella. The kids are the same. Find me a concert that's as culturally relevant and thrilling as Coachella. Beyonce is gonna be one of the best singers we ever heard because she is such a student."

Back in 2015, Charlamagne Tha God also compared Beyonce and Jackson, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Charlamagne Tha God had said: "I think she's the greatest entertainer that our generation has seen. I mean, the previous generation had Michael Jackson. But for our generation I think it's Beyonce."

"And I even put you can't compare anybody to anybody. Michael Jackson is a god. He's legendary. He's on a totally different level."

"But Beyonce, if she's not already, she absolutely will be on that same level."

She will be looked upon in the same regards, if not more, as Michael Jackson was. That's just the truth to the matter. People hate when I say that, but you'll see in the future. It's gonna happen."



JESSICA ALBA: I DIDN'T ENJOY BEING AN ACTRESS WHEN I WAS YOUNGER

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Jessica Alba, who landed her first film role in 'Camp Nowhere' in 1994 when she was just 13, didn't have "fun" as an actress when she was younger, because she was "wildly insecure" about her abilities and didn't feel "worthy" of attention.

She said: "(I was) so wildly insecure about my abilities as an actress. I felt so judged. I was my worst critic. I think I didn't feel worthy."

The actress shared that she was left "paralyzed with fear" during the early stages of her career, and said she "never had a real liberating, fun experience" while shooting some of her earlier films, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Speaking about her co-stars, she added: "I just admired people who just were swaggy on set. It felt like they were just in the zone, and you could tell when someone is in the zone and when they just feel good."

The 'LA's Finest' actress eventually took a break from acting, and said the hiatus has brought her "real joy".

She said: "I think taking a break for so long from it and literally having no consequence to whether it works or not, it allows me to have the freedom as a storyteller to just be completely present and try things and I really love it. And it's brought me real joy."

Alba also said it wasn't until she was 30 that she felt she was able to focus more on her life journey and less on the outcome.

She told the aLet's Be Real with Sammy Jaye' podcast: "I just think all of the outcomes were so disappointing, in Hollywood especially. I was like, 'This is so out of my control! Why?'"

"You would have a big weather issue and if 80 per cent of the country is frozen, guess who's not going to the movie theatre that opening weekend? But you're slotted for that certain opening weekend a 10 years, someone had spent on this project."

Peter Dinklage: People should 'move on' from 'Game of Thrones' finale

Los Angeles | Agencies

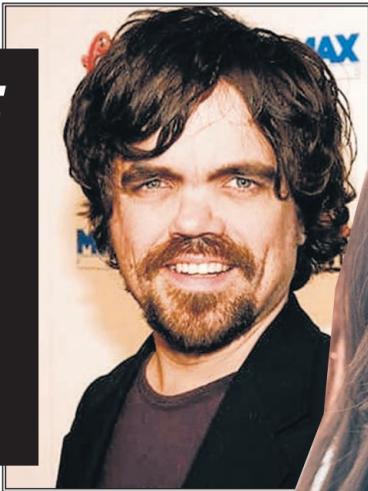
Actor Peter Dinklage wants people to "move on" from the 'Game of Thrones' finale, as he believes the series did a good job of "subverting" people's expectations.

A Change.org petition was launched when the show wrapped calling for a re-do, but Dinklage says people just wanted to see "the pretty white people" have a happy ending, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

He said: "They wanted the pretty white people to ride off into the sunset together. By the way, it's fiction. There's dragons in it. Move on."

The 'Cyrano' actor also said the fantasy series was good at "subverting" viewer expectations, and said he particularly liked the scenes in which a dragon burned the iron throne - as it signalled that no-one would be crowned King or Queen of Westeros at the end of the series.

He added: "No, but the show subverts what you think, and that's what I love about it. Yeah, it was called 'Game of Thrones', but at the end, the whole dialogue when people would approach me on the street was, 'Who's going to be on the throne?'. I don't know why that was their takeaway because the show really was more than that."



Lost 'too much weight': HoYeon Jung

Seoul | Agencies

'Squid Game' star HoYeon Jung said she shed eight pounds in 10 days as she was promoting Netflix's hit series 'Squid Game' in the US. "There was no time to eat," the 27-year-old South Korean actress told Star News (via AllKpop) in a recent interview about her hectic schedule while visiting America, reports pagesix.com. "I lost way too much weight," she admitted. "All the clothes that used to fit me when I first came (to America) are too loose now."

The interview comes as fans took to Instagram to comment on her weight loss

in a series of photos taken from recent events she posted on social media last week.

"I don't want to come off negative at all, just want to say that seeing you in the black dress makes me a bit worried," one fan commented, adding: "I know how it is for models to obtain a certain weight standard, but please make sure you are eating well." Another added: "You are getting skinnier and skinnier. Hope you are happy and keeping well with your general health."

"Plz take care of your health and nutrition e. ur beautiful anyway," a third wrote. Despite the concerned comments, many fans praised the actress, who played Kang Sae-byeok in the hit show.

'Don't Look Up': Mirrors the dysfunctional state of politics and media



TROY RIBEIRO

(Streaming on Netflix)

Director: Adam McKay

Cast: Leonardo DiCaprio, Chris Evans, Jennifer Lawrence, Meryl Streep, Rob Morgan, Jonah Hill, Cate Blanchett, Tyler Perry, Mark Rylance, Timothee Chalamet.

Duration: 138 minutes.

Ratings: **1/2 (two and half stars)

Director Adam McKay's 'Don't Look Up' is a sci-fi-based goofy satire that gets uncomfortably real. At its core, it delivers a very sharp treatise on the dysfunctional state of affairs in politics and media, in which everyone is so short-sighted as to be unable to focus on an existential threat.

The film begins with a pair of Michigan State astronomers, Randall Mindy (Leonardo DiCaprio), and his Ph.D. student Kate Dibiasi (Jennifer Lawrence) discovering a huge comet. But the excitement of the discovery soon fizzles out when they realise that the comet's trajectory leads to a direct collision with Earth in a little over six months, and it will cause an extinction-level event.

Understandably alarmed, they rush to the White House to inform President Orlean (Meryl Streep), who along with her son and chief of staff Jason Orlean (Jonah Hill), does not take the duo seriously. The astronomers struggle to get their message across because no one



wants to hear bad news. So, they then attempt to break the news of their findings via the media. They appear on the morning news talk show anchored by Jack Bremmer (Tyler Perry) and Brie Evantee (Cate Blanchett), who stand out as self-absorbed TV anchors. Here they are told to keep things light. When Kate explodes in frustration and tells the hosts that doomsday is near, she becomes a meme.

Then there is a tech billionaire Peter Isherwell (Mark Rylance), who sees opportunities to cash in on the comet's natural resources.

The premise of the film may sound absurd - if it did not feel so close to reality. The narrative races with a scathing indictment of everything about our

media and political ecosystem. It makes you open your eyes at; the erosion of our ability to react in time, to understand that something awful could happen, and it is happening right now.

The seriousness of the issue gets thawed with the piling up of celebrities in minor roles with their specific agenda or subplots who basically serve as flashy and somewhat unnecessary window dressing. So, what starts on a serious, hot-dramatic note gradually becomes a lukewarm comedic flawed tale. While Meryl Streep and Jonah Hill act as caricatures, the rest of the entire cast delivers an earnest performance.

Overall, the title 'Don't Look Up' aptly implies the Ostrich syndrome, which we humans often indulge.

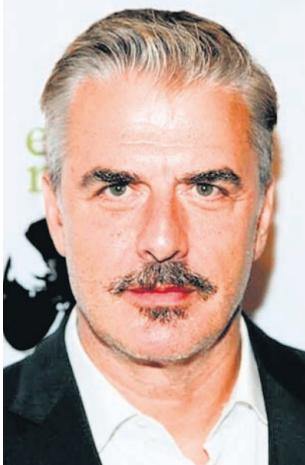
CHRIS NOTH ACCUSED OF SEXUAL ASSAULT BY 5TH WOMAN

Los Angeles | Agencies

Another woman has come forward with allegations against actor Chris Noth, becoming the fifth person this month to accuse the 'Sex and the City' and 'Law and Order' star of sexual assault.

In a press conference with her attorney Gloria Allred, singer-songwriter Lisa Gentile claimed she was "sexually victimised" and "sexually abused" by Noth in 2002. She claimed Noth forcibly pulled her, kissed her and touched her breasts, reports variety.com. "I was trying to get him to stop," Gentile said. The day after the alleged incident, Gentile claims Noth called her and said if she "ever told a soul about what happened the night before, that he would ruin my career, I would never sing again and he would blacklist me in the business". Noth has previously denied all other allegations, calling them "categorically false". Gentile says she first met Noth in 1998 at a restaurant in the theater district of New York City where the actor was a regular and she was friends with the owner. Eventually, she and Noth

became acquaintances and would chat about music and show business. One night in early 2002, Noth offered her a ride home from the restaurant, and she accepted, since the two were friendly. She says Noth asked if he could come up, and said he just wanted to see where she lived.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Helen Flanagan



HARBHAJAN SINGH HANGS UP HIS BOOTS FROM ALL FORMS OF CRICKET

The 41-year old represented India in 103 Tests, 236 ODIs and 28 T20Is, picking up 417, 269 and 25 wickets respectively. His overall tally of 707 international wickets is the second-highest for India, behind Anil Kumble's 953. He was also a handy contributor with the bat, scoring 3,569 runs with two centuries and nine fifties.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Veteran India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh on Friday announced his retirement from all forms of cricket, bringing an end to a glorious career spanning 23 years. Harbhajan, who became the first Indian to take a hat-trick in Test cricket -- against Australia at Eden Gardens in 2001 -- took to social media to announce his retirement. Harbhajan made his Test debut against Australia in Bangalore back in 1998 and Greg Blewett turned out to be his maiden Test scalp. In the same year, he earned his maiden ODI cap when India played against New Zealand in April in Sharjah. Matt Horne was his first ODI wicket.



"All good things come to an end and today as I bid adieu to the game that has given me everything in life, I would like to thank everyone who made this 23-year-long journey beautiful and memorable. My heartfelt thank you, Grateful."

The legendary off-spinner last turned out for India in March 2016, in a T20I against the UAE in Dhaka in that year's Asia Cup. In an international career that lasted from 1998 to 2016, the veteran cricketer had some memorable moments and was a part of the 2007 T20 World Cup and 2011 World Cup-winning squad. Harbhajan has had great success in the IPL too, taking 150 wickets in 163 matches, fifth on the all-time list. His best season in the IPL came in 2013 when he took 24 wickets at an average of 19 for the Mumbai Indians. He made his first-class debut in the 1997 season for Punjab versus Services, also played 198 first-class matches, snaring 780 wickets.

Santosh Trophy: Platinum Jubilee edition to be held in Kerala from Feb 20

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The 75th edition of the senior men's national football championship for the Santosh Trophy will kick-off on February 20 and will run till March 6 in Kerala, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) announced on Friday. The Kerala government is hosting the ten teams that have qualified for the final round of the Santosh Trophy. The draw for the tournament will be held in the first week of January, next year. "The Santosh Trophy is an integral part of the Indian Football calendar and the AIFF values the passion surrounding the tournament. This is the Platinum Jubilee year, and as we look back at the majestic history of the tournament, together with the support of the Government of Kerala, we aim to make it a grand suc-



cess," said AIFF general secretary Kushal Das in a release. The AIFF had earlier announced a collaboration with the Kerala government on multiple football development projects including the successful hosting of the senior women's national championships which concluded earlier this month. "We are grateful to the Government of Kerala for their exceptional support in

taking Indian Football forward together. The AIFF values support coming in from the state governments, and we look for a long-term fruitful relationship," the general secretary said. The Indian senior women's national team is also currently undergoing preparation in Kochi for the forthcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 with infrastructural aid coming in from the Kerala government.

Long jumper Shaili Singh, backstroke swimmer Riddhima selected for TOPS support

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The 17-year-old Shaili Singh, silver medallist in the long jump at World U-20 Athletics Championships earlier this year, has been selected among the Core Group of athletes for support under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) at a meeting of the Mission Olympic Cell (MCO) here on Thursday. The MOC on Thursday also picked 50 athletes in the Core Group and 143 in the Development Group across eight disciplines in the second list. The MOC has thus increased the count of total sportspersons in the list to 291, including 102 in the Core Group. Athletes from as many as 13 Olympic disciplines and six Paralympic



disciplines have been identified so far for support in their preparation for the 2024 Games. Among the youngest of those identified for support is swimmer Riddhima Veerendra Kumar, the 14-year-old who won a clutch of medals in the National Junior Championships in October and also made waves in the senior nationals at the same venue a week later. She was named among the 17 swimmers in the Development Group in addition to the two

identified earlier for Core Group, the Sports Ministry informed on Friday. The MOC accepted a recommendation by a sub-committee that a review of the swimming list is undertaken after the World Championships in June next year and of the archery list after the National Ranking tournament next month. Some other sports like equestrian, golf, gymnastics, judo, and tennis will be taken up later.

PREMIER LEAGUE: BURNLEY-EVERTON BOXING DAY GAME POSTPONED

London | Agencies

Everton's Boxing Day match at Burnley has been postponed due to Covid-19 cases and injuries in the club, the Premier League announced on Friday. Everton had made an initial request to postpone the game however, it was rejected despite head coach Rafael Benitez claiming he only had nine fit players for the match. Everton on Friday confirmed the development, saying, "Our Premier League fixture at Burnley on Boxing Day has been postponed due to the number of Covid-19 cases and injuries in our squad." The Premier League said that it has taken the "regrettable" decision to postpone the game following a meeting of its Board on Friday. "The Board reviewed the club's request today to postpone the match following further injuries to their squad," Premier League said in a statement. "The club will not be able to fulfil their fixture this weekend as a result



of an insufficient number of players available to play due to Covid-19 cases and injuries." Benitez said on Thursday that he was "surprised" the game had been expected to go ahead, after two

matches -- Liverpool v Leeds and Wolves v Watford -- were postponed due to Covid cases. Liverpool's clash with Leeds and Watford's trip to Wolves, also scheduled for Sunday, had already been

postponed due to coronavirus outbreak. A total of 13 matches have now been called off in the past two weeks as Britain battles record numbers of positive Covid cases due to the Omicron variant of the virus.

SA vs IND: We are slightly better prepared than the last time, says KL Rahul

Johannesburg | Agencies

India opener and vice-captain KL Rahul has stated that the team is better prepared than their last tour of South Africa in 2018. He added that coming in early has helped in making a good preparation. India will begin their tour of South Africa with the first Test at SuperSport Park in Centurion from Sunday. "We understand that in any foreign series, getting the team off to a good start is the most important thing as a batsman. Last time I came here was three-four years ago and it was my first tour to South Africa. So, I didn't really know what to expect and how to handle these conditions. But this time around, having played two Test matches here before and having watched lots of videos on how the



conditions are here, we are slightly better prepared than the last time. "We have had a great preparation

going into the Test matches and really excited about 26th. Hopefully, me and Mayank will get the team off to a

good start and give the team a good platform to try and win the game," said Rahul in the virtual press conference. This is the second time Rahul has come to South Africa after 2018 and the right-handed batter believes that the pitches in the country will pose a challenge. "It's the pace and bounce in the pitches here which are very different to any other country. That's why I think it was important that we came here a bit early and try to get adjusted to the pitches." "We have had a great week of preparation and had a lot of sessions in the middle with match stimulations for batters and bowlers. We practised here with a lot of intensity and tried to get used to the conditions as best we can. We had a great week of preparation. Hopefully, we will have a great series here in South Africa this time.

Root dismissive about captaincy rumours, says worried only about winning at MCG

Melbourne | Agencies

England skipper Joe Root was on Friday dismissive about rumours circulating that he might lose his captaincy after the Ashes series here, saying that he was only worried about winning the next game at the MCG, commencing on December 26. The tourists are 0-2 down in the five-Test series and the hopes of regaining the urn are fading as the team figures out its winning combination after losing the opening Test at the Gabba by nine wickets and the second Test at the Adelaide Oval by 275 run. During a media interaction on Christmas eve, Root said, "The only thing I'm worried about is winning. "Starting well (in Melbourne) and



making sure we get that first hour right. It's hard to look beyond that at the minute." The captain also clarified his comment post the Adelaide loss where he had blamed the pacemen, espe-

cially Stuart Broad, Jimmy Anderson and Ben Stokes, for fruitlessly bowling a barrage of short-pitched deliveries, even though he himself had set the field for them to bowl the short stuff.

As England hit a new low, McGrath says IPL, BBL denting competitive spirit

Melbourne | Agencies

Former Australian pace bowling great Glenn McGrath is not happy with the players of rival teams "joking around" on the field during the Ashes and blames the Indian Premier League (IPL) and the Big Bash League (BBL) for the friendly chatter replacing "emotions out in the middle". England players were seen casually ribbing home team spinner Nathan Lyon, while pace bowling stalwart Stuart Broad chatted with rival team bowler Mitchell Starc even as the tourists slumped to another ignominious defeat to go 0-2 down in the five-Test series. "With the IPL (Indian Premier League) and the Big Bash (League), these players know one another well. You see batsmen and bowlers joking around. I'd like to see some emotion out in the middle," McGrath, the second-highest wicket-taker among pace bowlers in the



world, was quoted as saying by smh.com.au on Friday. "Every time you hear one of the English or Australian players interviewed, they use a nickname. 'Broady, Jimmy, Kez. I was asking the other day, 'Who's Kez?' 'Oh, Alex Carey.' They're a lot more familiar with each other than we were when I played," added McGrath. McGrath said all these niceties were taking the competitive spirit away from the Ashes, which are one of the most fiercely-contested cricket series in the world. "It can be a little bit too nice sometimes. That's the way everything's going, isn't

it? There's a lot of political correctness. People are a bit nervous about being aggressive and playing hard. I remember, when (former England skipper) Nasser Hussain came out here with England; they weren't even allowed to talk to us or say 'G'day'," said McGrath, who is second after England's James Anderson for the most number of wickets by pacemen in Test cricket at 563. The pace bowler said England, who are down 0-2 after losing the Gabba and Adelaide Tests, need to really do some introspection as they are representing their country.

LORCAN TUCKER'S BLAZING 84 HELPS IRELAND LEVEL T20I SERIES VS USA

Lauderhill (Florida) | Agencies

Lorcan Tucker's 56-ball 84 effort saw Ireland come back from a shocking defeat to the United States in the opening T20I to defeat the hosts by nine runs in the second game to level the two-match series 1-1 here. Setting the hosts 151 for victory, thanks to a lone hand from the 25-year-old wicketkeeper-batter, Ireland turned the screws with a strong bowling performance, headlined by a calm final over from the experienced Mark Adair. In a change from the opening match of the series where they won by 26 runs, USA skipper Monank Patel opted to bowl first, bringing Vatsal Vaghela into debut in place of Xavier Marshall. Going into the second match with an unchanged lineup from their first-up defeat, Ireland captain Andrew Balbirnie walked out with Paul Stirling, though lost his partner by the end of the first over. Opting for the spin of Nisarg Patel in the opening over, Monank's plan delivered immediate dividends, with Stirling adjudged lbw for 5. Backing up his unbeaten 57 from 49 balls in the first match, Tucker looked in imperious form, hitting his first ball for a boundary off left-arm Saurabh Netravalkar. Captain



Balbirnie looked in good touch with two early boundaries of his own, only to pick out Sushant Modani at deep backward square-leg. Tucker and Curtis Campher countered during the powerplay, moving the Irish to 59/2, though the work was undone in the first ball of the seventh over, with Campher miscuing a slog to Marty Kain at long-on for 17 (11 balls). Tucker continued in his push despite the loss of partners at the other end, moving to 50 from just 32

balls despite the loss of Shane Getkate (5) and Neil Rock in the 12th over for four. He then moved into the seventies with a six off American spearhead Ali Khan. USA began their chase emphatically through left-hander Ryan Scott, slapping boundaries off consecutive balls of the opening over. Moving the score to 19/0 inside the first two overs, the USA looked to have taken an early hold of the match, only for Scott to be run out by Curtis Campher for 11.

The wicket of Scott halted the hosts, scoring just seven runs from the next two overs. The lack of runs heaped pressure on Ritwik Behera and Monank Patel, eventually leading to the wicket of Behera for a 23-ball 16.

Brief scores
Ireland 150 in 18.5 overs (Lorcan Tucker 84; Saurabh Netravalkar 3/33) beat USA 141/7 in 20 overs (Sushant Modani 27; Curtis Campher 4/25) by 9 runs.



Tiger Shroff drops special motion poster from 'Ganapath'



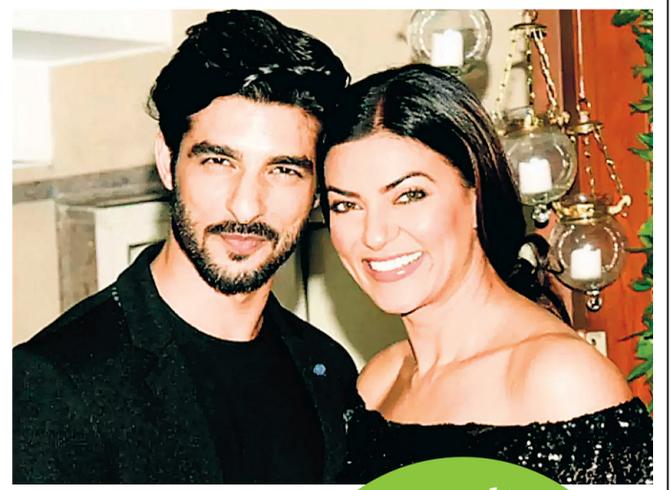
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Action star Tiger Shroff has shared the special motion poster from his film, 'Ganapath', setting the ball in motion for the countdown of the film which will arrive in theatres after a year on December 23, 2022.

Tiger took to his Instagram to share the countdown motion poster as he captioned the asset: "Taiyyar Rehnaa !!! God ke Aashirwad Se Janta ko Milne Aa Rela Hai #Ganapath Next Christmas in cinemas near you! #23rdDecember #1YearToGanapath". The motion poster features Tiger at

his usual self of pulling off acrobatics with a chiseled body. Tiger's sister, Krishna Shroff commented under the video, "There's nobody doing it like you... No f***** body."

'Ganapath', is a dystopian thriller directed by Vikas Bahl (Queen, 2014), which also stars Kriti Sanon and boasts of high-octane action sequences choreographed by international stunt directors. The film, produced by Vashu Bhagnani, Vikas Bahl, Deepshikha Deshmukh, and Jacky Bhagnani, has almost reached the finishing line in London after an extensive schedule.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Putting all speculations to rest, actress and former beauty queen Sushmita Sen in a social media post has confirmed about her break-up with her beau Rohman Shawl and said that the relationship was long over.

Sushmita shared a picture with Shawl on Instagram and shared: "We began as friends, we remain friends!! The relationship was long over, the love remains!! #nomorespeculations #liveandletlive #cherishedmemories #gratitude #love #friendship I love you guys!!! #dugadugga."

Earlier this year, speculations about them separating started doing the rounds when Sushmita made a post on Instagram and mentioned walking out of

Sushmita Sen confirms break-up with beau Rohman Shawl

a futile relationship.

On the work front, Sushmita was recently seen in the second season of the International Emmy nominated series 'Aarya', directed by Ram Madhvani.

Akshay Kumar: I don't ever worry about work pressure

Team Absolute | Mumbai

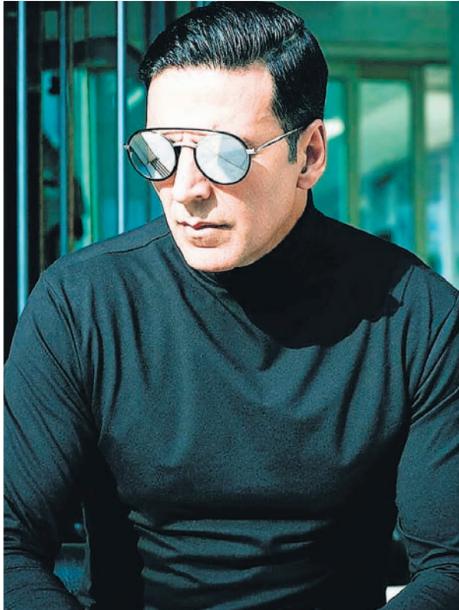
In his over a three-decade-long journey in Hindi cinema, superstar Akshay Kumar has been a part of many blockbusters and has given several iconic characters.

However, the National-Award winning actor does not think about burdening himself with the thought of competing with himself and says that he wants to do films with simplicity and not in complications.

Akshay has given some unforgettable characters to cinema such as Raju from 'Hera Pheri', Raj Malhotra in 'Aitraaz', Makrand 'Mac' Godbhole from 'Garam Masala', Happy Singh from 'Singh is Kinning', DCP Veer Sooryavanshi from 'Sooryavanshi' and Sajjad Ali Khan from his latest release 'Atrangi Re' to name a few from a bag full of blockbuster hits.

Does it get pressurising to taking up the game higher every time he comes on screen?

Akshay in a chat with IANS said: "No, I don't have any kind of thing which... For me, I don't have any burden... I don't think about it. There is no pressure. I don't want think about it also... I just want to think about what kind of films I am doing in the future, tomorrow what shooting I have to go for, what role am I doing. I just want to think that. I want to do films with simplicity and not in complications."



Dhvani Bhanushali calls 'Vaaste' part of her identity

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Dhvani Bhanushali, whose song 'Vaaste', became a hit, has credited the number for her success calling it a part of her identity.

The song, released in 2019, recently entered the Global Top 100 list of YouTube's Most Liked music videos clocking more than a billion views over a period of two years.

Talking about the chartbuster track, Dhvani says, "'Vaaste' has given me so much love from across the spectrum. I have seen youngsters and even older people come up and hum the song for me, which for me is the biggest compliment, to be able to connect with the people who have made me what I am, my

audience."

She speaks about the song's impressions over the Internet: "From the reels that were made around it to all the covers and the phenomenon it created, it's been a part of my very identity. The cherry on the cake is surely the fact that it has been selected for the Top 100 Global list of songs."

Sharing what she feels about her song being featured in YouTube's Global Top 100 list, she adds: "When you know that you are selected on a global platform and you see your name against stalwarts in the industry such as Justin Bieber, Linkin Park, Ariana Grande and more big international pop artist, it's a totally surreal feeling. If there was any song that could have done this for me, I knew it had to be the one that made me, 'Vaaste'."

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Kangna Sharma

'83' delivers an unforgettable experience

FILM REVIEW

TROY RIBEIRO

(Showing in theatres)

Director: Kabir Khan

Cast: Ranveer Singh, Deepika Padukone, Pankaj Tripathi, Tahir Raj Bhasin, Saqib Saleem, Neena Gupta, Boman Irani, Ammy Virk, Chirag Patil, Dinker Sharma, Nishant Dahiya, Harrry Sandhu, Sahil Khattar, Adinath Kothare and Dhairya Karwa.

Duration: 163 minutes.

Ratings: **** (four stars)



Director Kabir Khan's '83' is a recreation of a momentous event - the Indian cricket team's first-ever World Cup victory in 1983. Despite being predictable, the film offers an exhilarating and occasionally touching experience that has viewers leaving the auditorium caught up in an afterglow of excited patriotism.

The film mounted like a brilliantly restored or recreated documentary, captures the three and a half months of - 'the may or may not win' drama, where the actors and few of the

actual players seamlessly weave in and out of the narrative.

The film focuses only on cricket and has everything that cricket fans could have possibly hoped for. The narrative - highlights and flashes the crucial matches and the moments in-between them, bringing back memories to the big screen after nearly 38 years. As you are transported back in time, you witness how the 'underdog' Indian team was treated

with disdain, and despite all odds, how they emerged as winners. It is invigorating to witness the matches once again and your mood swings like Kapil's bat. You cheer for him when he creates history with a fabulous 175-not out against the Zimbabwe team, and your blood boils when you realise that the legendary game was not recorded on camera because BBC did not think it was important enough.

What you see on screen is Kapil's charisma, the locker-room banter, the occasional tension and problematic behaviour between the teammates, the strategy they planned during the matches and above all, the anguish and thrills of the matches played during that unforgettable summer.

Casting is another aspect of the film that could not have been better either. Ranveer with his prosthetic dentures - oddly resembles Kapil Dev, but he slips into his shoes effortlessly delivering a brilliant performance that tugs at the heartstrings. While he emulates the captain of the team, Saqib Saleem plays Mohinder Amarnath, Tahir Raj Bhasin essays Sunil Gavaskar, Jatin Sarna is Yashpal Sharma, Jiiva is K. Srikkanth, Harrry Sandhu is Madan Lal, Nishant Dahiya is Roger Binny, Ammy Virk plays Balwinder Sandhu, Adinath Kothare is Dilip Vengsakar, Dhairya Karwa is Ravi Shastri, Chirag Patil is Sandip Patil.

Boman Irani as the commentator Farrokh Engineer, Pankaj Tripathi as PR Man Singh, Neena Gupta as Kapil's caring and supportive mother, and Deepika Padukone as Kapil's wife Romi have their moments of on-screen glory.

The film is astutely mounted, with ace production values.

Overall, the narrative - like most of Kabir Khan's films - is unabashedly manipulative, but this one delivers a cinema experience one won't be able to forget about anytime soon.