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INDIA MAY WITNESS OMICRON OUTBREAK VERY SOON, SAYS REPORT

"INTENSE BUT SHORT"

Paul Kattuman, professor at the Judge Business School at the University of Cambridge which has developed a Covid-19 India tracker, wrote in an email that India may see a spurt in the Covid-19 growth rate within days and head into an intense but short-lived virus wave as the highly-infectious omicron variant moves through the crowded nation of almost 1.4 billion.

“It is likely that India will see a period of explosive growth in daily cases and that the intense growth phase will be relatively short. New infections will begin to rise in a few days, possibly within this week, it was hard to predict how high the daily cases could go.”



MUMBAI'S DAILY TALLY SHOOTS UP 70%

Mumbai: Mumbai reported 1,377 new coronavirus cases on Tuesday, a 70 per cent jump over a day ago, and one death. The city had recorded 809 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday along with three deaths. The surge comes amid increasing cases of Omicron - the highly infectious variant whose numbers are steadily going up in the country.

The Cambridge India tracker had correctly called the peak of this devastating second wave in May and also forecast in August that India would see a slow burn in its Covid infections curve until the vaccination coverage was sufficiently high. India crossed 1 billion administered vaccine doses in October and new cases plunged in tandem with that milestone.

DCGI NOD FOR MERCK'S ANTI-COVID PILL IN INDIA

New Delhi: Sun Pharmaceutical Industries on Tuesday announced that one of its wholly owned subsidiaries has received emergency use authorisation (EUA) from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) to manufacture and market a generic version of Merck's anti-Covid pill Molnupiravir in India. Sun Pharma will launch Molnupiravir under the brand name Molxvir in India, within a week, the company said in a statement. The DCGI, based on the review of clinical data of molnupiravir has approved molnupiravir for treatment of adult patients with Covid-19, with oxygen saturation less than 93 per cent and who have high risk of progression of the disease, including hospitalisation or death.

NO PRESCRIPTION REQUIRED FOR 60+ WITH COMORBIDITIES FOR PRECAUTION DOSE

New Delhi: The Union health ministry on Tuesday said that no doctors certificates would be required for persons aged 60 and above with comorbidities to be produced at the time of administration of precaution doses. Such persons are expected to obtain the advice of their doctors before deciding to avail of the precaution dose, said the ministry. During a workshop with states and union territories to review the rollout of vaccination for the age group 15-18 and precautionary third dose for vulnerable categories, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said that the doctor's prescription and certificates are not mandated to be produced at the center for administration of the precaution dose. The CoWIN will send reminder messages to all those eligible for the precaution dose and the dose will be reflected in the digital vaccination certificates, he added.

"INSURER CAN'T REFUSE CLAIM AFTER...": SUPREME COURT ON MEDICLAIM POLICY



“If the insured suffers a sudden sickness or ailment, which is not expressly excluded under the policy, a duty is cast on the insurer to indemnify the appellant for the expenses incurred thereunder.”

The bench said

circumstances concerning the proposed insurance, it added.

While the proposer can only disclose what is known to him, the proposer's duty of disclosure is not confined to his actual knowledge, it also extends to those material facts which, in the ordinary course of business, he ought to know, the court said.

"Once the policy has been issued after assessing the medical condition of the insured, the insurer cannot repudiate the claim by citing an existing medical condition, which was disclosed by the insured in the proposal form and which condition has led to a particular risk in respect of which the claim has been made by the insured," the bench said in a recent judgment.

The Supreme Court was hearing an appeal filed by Manmohan Nanda against an order of the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC), rejecting his plea seeking a claim for medical expenses incurred in the United States.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Kattuman and his team of researchers, developers of the India Covid tracker, are seeing a sharp rise in infection rates across India. The tracker spotlighted six states as a "significant concern" in a Dec. 24 note, with adjusted growth rate of new cases exceeding 5%. This had expanded to 11 Indian states by Dec. 26, according to the tracker, which corrects for "day of the week effects" and other variations. India, which has confirmed 34.8 million infections and 480,290 deaths so far, is already gearing up to deal with another massive outbreak even though only 653 cases of the highly-mutated omicron have been identified so far. Last week, it allowed booster shots and included teenagers aged 15 to 18 in the inoculation program. Two more vaccines as well as Merck & Co.'s antiviral pill molnupiravir were approved by the local drug regulator Tuesday.

These policy decisions underscore hard lessons India learned after a deadly delta-led virus wave in April and May that pushed infections to a record-beating 400,000-plus each day. It overwhelmed the

496 NEW COVID CASES IN DELHI, NEARLY 50% JUMP IN A DAY

New Delhi: Delhi recorded a massive spike in Covid cases just hours after the imposition of a set of restrictions under the "Yellow Alert" -- 496 new cases and one death have been recorded in the last 24 hours, a 50 per cent jump. This is the biggest single-day spike since June 2. The positivity rate stands at 0.89 per cent -- the highest since May 31. Under the new restrictions, schools, colleges and educational institutions, cinema halls and gyms will be shut and malls and shops will open on an odd-even basis within fixed hours. Delhi Metro will run with 50 per cent seating capacity. Night curfew between 10 pm and 5 am has already started. Private offices are permitted to function with 50 per cent capacity from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Only 20 people will be allowed to attend weddings and funerals.

country's hospitals and crematoriums and left its citizens pleading for oxygen and other medical resources on social-media platforms.

Madhya Pradesh panchayat elections cancelled

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The State Elections Commission (SEC) has cancelled the panchayat polls slated to be held in January-February, SEC Secretary BS Jamod informed on Tuesday.

The panchayat elections were scheduled to be held in three phases on January 6, 28 and February 16.

The development comes just two days after the state cabinet decided to withdraw an ordinance brought to annul the process of delimitation and reservation rotation set by the previous government in 2019. The cabinet's decision to withdraw the ordinance paved the way for cancellation of the panchayat



poll process in the state. The Shivraj Singh's government had brought the ordinance last month to annul the process of delimitation and reservation rotation set by the previous Congress-led government in 2019.

On the basis of this ordinance, the panchayat election process was started as per the delimitation and reservation rotation of 2014. "After the

Supreme Court's decision, the state cabinet has decided to request the governor to withdraw this ordinance," said MP Panchayat Minister Mahendra Singh Sisodiya. The Supreme Court earlier this month stayed the poll process on seats reserved for OBCs in the panchayat elections in MP and re-notified these seats for the general category.

FORCED BY MAHA ATS TO NAME YOGI ADITYANATH, RSS LEADERS: MALEGAON BLAST WITNESS

Mumbai: A witness in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, whose statement was recorded by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad, claimed before a court that the ATS had threatened him to name Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and four other RSS leaders. Notably, former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh, currently facing multiple cases of extortion, was the Additional Commissioner of the ATS when it probed the Malegaon blast case. The witness was deposed before the special National Investigation Agency court today. His statement was recorded by the ATS when it probed the case before the NIA took over.

During his deposition, the witness told the court that the then senior ATS officer Param Bir Singh and another officer had threatened him to name Yogi Adityanath, and four other RSS leaders, including Indresh Kumar. He claimed that the ATS tortured him and made him sit (at their office) illegally. After his deposition, the court declared the witness hostile for making allegations against the ATS and denying that he made any statement before the anti-terror agency.

As many as 220 witnesses have been examined in the case till now and 15 of them have turned hostile.

On September 29, 2008, six people were killed and over 100 injured when an explosive device strapped on a motorcycle went off near a mosque in Nashik's Malegaon town, located about 200 km from Mumbai.

Doctors to take final call on protest after RDA's meeting

Team Absolute | New Delhi

After meeting Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Tuesday over demands to expedite NEET-PG Counselling, the Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA) said that they will take the final call on ongoing protest after consulting all RDAs.

The representatives of Federation of All India Medical Association (FAIMA), FORDA and all RDAs are likely to hold a meeting at 8 p.m. on Tuesday to decide further course of action. Dr Manish Nigam, FORDA President, said that the strike is still going on. We demand a written apology for police action. "The further



course of action will be decided in the meeting tonight," he added. Earlier, Mandaviya urged protesting resident doctors to call off their strike in the public interest. According to a doctor who was present in the meeting, Mandaviya assured

to submit all documents before the court on January 6 when the matter will come up for hearing. He said that the matter is sub-judice before the Supreme Court. However, he said he was hopeful that the NEET-PG counselling will start soon.

HAILSTORMS IN CENTRAL INDIA, WET SPELL FOR NORTHWEST TO CONTINUE

“The Western Disturbance seen as a cyclonic circulation over north Pakistan and neighbourhood at lower tropospheric levels with a trough aloft roughly at middle tropospheric levels, an induced cyclonic circulation that lies over southwest Rajasthan and neighbourhood and a trough that runs from the cyclonic circulation to north Telangana at lower tropospheric levels, and a cyclonic circulation that lies over central parts of Uttar Pradesh at lower tropospheric levels - all together combined brought in the unseasonal rains and hailstorms.”

India Meteorological Department

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Scores of places across multiple districts of Maharashtra witnessed hailstorm, thunderstorms, and lightning on Tuesday evening with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicting similar weather for Wednesday over Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and large parts of Uttar Pradesh. Wet spell for several states of northwest India will continue

ue for next two days.

Narkhed, Akola, Murtijapur, Aurangabad, Vajapur, Paithan, Jalna, Srirampur, Jalgaon are some of the Maharashtra areas that witnessed heavy hailstorm almost spreading a sheet of white. Lightning and thunderstorm activities were witnessed in several districts of Madhya Pradesh too.

Light/moderate isolated to scattered rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Uttarakhand on December 29,



scattered to fairly widespread rainfall is likely over Uttar Pradesh on December 29, the IMD said, adding, light/moderate isolated to scattered

rainfall is very likely over Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, and Chhattisgarh, and scattered to fairly widespread rainfall

over Bihar, Jharkhand, and sub-Himalayan West Bengal and Sikkim till December 30.

Isolated thunderstorms, lightning & hailstorms are also likely over east Madhya Pradesh, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Chhattisgarh on December 29, over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Meghalaya till December 30 and over Nagaland on December 30.

Meanwhile, cold wave conditions are likely to prevail over Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh between December 31 till January 2 and over north Rajasthan on January 1 and 2. Cold day conditions are likely to prevail over Bihar on December 29 and 30.

Dense fog in isolated pockets is very likely over Punjab, Haryana, and north Rajasthan in night/morning hours during next three days, over Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh on December 30 and 31, and over east India on December 31 and January 1.

KEY CONSPIRATOR OF LUDHIANA COURT BLAST ARRESTED IN GERMANY

New Delhi: Jaswinder Singh Multan, a top member of Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), has been arrested in Germany for allegedly being the main conspirator of the December 23 blast in the Ludhiana district court complex which killed one person and injured five others, sources said. He was arrested in the city of Erfurt after India shared evidence to counter-terror agencies in Berlin.

"We shared all the evidence that we gathered on the blast spot and also how the conspiracy by Multan was hatched," said one of the sources. Multan was conspiring to bring in more explosives from Pakistan in India through the international boundary and was also planning to carry out similar blasts in other parts of the country.

The source said that Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) were in touch with Multan. On December 23, the explosion took place in a washroom on the second floor of the District and Sessions court complex in Ludhiana at around 12.22 p.m.



EXPLOSIVES FOUND IN BANGLADESH, NEAR TRIPURA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Indian security agencies are concerned after a recovery of huge quantity of military-grade explosives and arms in Bangladesh, abutting Tripura, and are in contact with their Bangladeshi counterparts to know where these explosives were planned to be used, sources said on Tuesday.

According to the reports, the Bangladesh Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit on Monday recovered the large cache of military-grade explosives and ammunition at Satchhari National Park in Habiganj, a spot four km away from India-Bangladesh border in Tripura.

"Around 15 rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), 510 rounds of machine gun ammunition and 25 boosters which is used as a propelling charge in RPG launchers, were found during the special drive at a place that is around 3-4 km off the border with Tripura," a source in the Indian security grid said. Indian intelligence agencies have recently already submitted a report to the government that terror outfits like Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) have been planning to



carry out terror attacks not only in Bangladesh but also in India. They have also

reported that on behest of Pakistan's ISI, the JMB also planning to destabilise the Sheikh Hasina government which has also adopted zero tolerance to the terrorism. The agencies also alerted the government that the ISI has been supplying terror outfits in Bangladesh with arms and ammunition, the sources in the security set up said, adding that all this was duly shared with Bangladesh intelligence on a regular basis.

The Bangladesh CTTC is also probing the target of these arms and explosives and sharing details with Indian agencies.

The security agencies in the neighbouring country have a close coordination with Indian agencies and they have always acted swiftly on the Indian inputs on terrorism, drug trafficking and smuggling of the counterfeit currency, the sources said. Meanwhile, the Indian security agencies have tightened the vigil on the border, especially the sections where the fence is yet to come up, as well as boosting the Border Security Force's night patrol on the border areas in Tripura and other states.

Recently, the BSF has said that the fencing of 67-km-long stretch of the India-Bangladesh border in Tripura would be complete in 2022.

Bihar BJP MLA forced to leave native village for not helping rape victim's family

BJP MLA Lakhendra Kumar Raushan was forced to leave his native village in Bihar's Vaishali district on Tuesday as local residents strongly protested his lack of concern towards a case of rape and murder there.

Patna | Agencies

Raushan went to his native village Shahpur Bijrauli, under his constituency Patepur (SC), to console the family of rape-cum-murder victim three days after the incident.

But, his tardy arrival evoked resentment, with villagers saying that he hailed from the village but did not come there for three days.

A video of this incident, going viral on social media, shows the villagers shouting "go back" slogans at the MLA, and forcing his convey to return. There is no place for him in the village, the villagers were saying in the video. The victim, a Dalit teenager, went missing from her house a week ago, and her family members alleged that she was kidnapped by a strongman of the village. "We requested the strongman to return my daughter and he assured us to

send her back home after couple of days. He did not... Her semi-naked body was found near the pond of the village three days ago," said a family member of the victim. Following the incident, the villagers conducted candle march in the village and also requested the local administration to take action against the accused. RJD leader Shiv Chandra Ram and RJD MLA from Rajapakad constituency Pratima Kumar had visited the village and consoled the family members after the incident. "When the victim was kidnapped by that strongman, the incident came in the knowledge of all district administration and public representatives. Raushan is a local MLA and also a native of this village, still, he did not come. If he would have taken initiative earlier, the life of the victim could have been saved," said another relative of the victim.

PM Modi inaugurates Kanpur Metro with a ride

Kanpur | Agencies

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the completed section of Kanpur Metro Rail Project on Tuesday when he boarded the metro train at IIT Kanpur metro station and became the first passenger of the service. He was accompanied by Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The Kanpur Metro Rail Project comprises two corridors and has a total length of 32.5 km. The first corridor from IIT-Kanpur to Naubasta is 23.8 km long while the second corridor from Chandrashekar Azad Agriculture University to Barra-8 is 8.6 km long. The daily metro services will be available from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. from Wednesday. Initially, ticketing with QR code will be available and later on, smart cards will also be introduced for commuters. The Kanpur Metro will run on the Priority Section from IIT-Kanpur to Motijheel with three coaches. Due to its stringent compliance with the green building codes and parameters, it has been certified with the ISO-14001 certification for environment management and ISO-45001 certification for



safety management. The entire stretch has been developed in accordance with the green building codes, which makes it safe for the environment.

All the nine stations of the Priority Corridor have been certified with platinum rating by the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC). It was on November 15, 2019 that Yogi Adityanath had inaugurated the civil construction work of Kanpur Metro. A trial run of the metro was held on November 10 this year.

CONGRESS TURNS 137 WITH LESS THAN 90 MPS IN PARLIAMENT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

While the Congress on Tuesday celebrated its 137th foundation day across the country, the grand old party's presence has been reduced to just three states -- Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Rajasthan -- besides being part of the coalition government in Maharashtra and Jharkhand.

Alarming, the party now has less than 100 MPs -- 87 -- in both Houses of the Parliament.

As per the Lok Sabha website, out of the 542 members in the Lower House, Congress has only 53 MPs as against BJP's 301. In the Rajya Sabha, the Congress has 34 MPs besides having the leader of opposition status, though the party is completely outnumbered by BJP's 97 members in the Upper House.

The Congress has around 764 MLAs across the country, as against around 1,432 of the BJP. Moreover, it has been reduced to single digits in the politically important state of Uttar Pradesh (7), while it managed to win just 19 seats in Bihar in 2020. In Odisha, it has 9 MLAs while it failed to open its account in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Delhi. Notably, the party was in power in all these states before except for West Bengal.

On the occasion of the party's 137th foundation day, interim party President Sonia Gandhi said in a video message that the Congress is committed to protecting the ethos of the country despite elec-



toral setbacks. Though the Congress has faced electoral defeats, the party will continue to fight, Sonia Gandhi said, adding that electoral ups and downs are inevitable, but what is enduring and lasting is her party's commitment to the service of all the people of the country.

'Not welcome': K'taka BJP Muslim leader to skip Executive Committee meet

Bengaluru | Agencies

BJP's senior Karnataka leader Anwar Manippady on Tuesday said that he will not be attending the two-day state Executive Committee meeting being held in Hubballi, despite being a member because of the attitude of the party leaders. "I am an invitee also. I am the Executive Committee member of the party. I just returned from Mangaluru and at the last moment, I thought I will not go (to the meeting) because the attitude of them is not welcoming for us to go there. So, I won't go there," Manippady



told reporter. "I have written enough and I have passed on the message to the seniors of the party... they do not seem to be taking care. I am not

bothered about being thrown out of the party. I have not come to politics to make money. I have been always an open person. I was never scared of anybody and in future also, I will be never scared of anybody," he asserted.

Asked about the present BJP government in the state, he stated it has totally failed in the concept brought out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The concept of 'Sab ka Saath, Sab ka Vikas' is totally been neglected and not happening at all... such a good concept has gone. In fact, they are going against it by totally neglecting minorities, especially Muslims."

5 CHARRED TO DEATH IN BIHAR FIRE ACCIDENT

Patna | Agencies

Five children of a family died on Tuesday in Bihar's Banka district after a fire broke out at their house following a leakage in the pipe of an LPG cylinder, the police said.

The incident took place in Rajawar village. The deceased have been identified as Ankush Kumar, Shivani Kumari, Seema Kumari, Soni Kumari and Ansu Kumari.

Senior officials including the district magistrate and the superintendent of police had rushed to the spot along with the firefighters.

Banka Superintendent of Police, Arvind Kumar Gupta said the mishap took place around 6 p.m. at the house of one Ashok Paswan.

"Paswan's wife Sarita Devi



was cooking when the leakage appeared in the pipe. Soon, a fire broke out and it spread across the area where the children were present," Gupta told reporter. Sarita Devi managed to escape to safety but her children were trapped inside. The cylinder, however, did not explode.

"We are taking statements from the victim's family members. The FSL team is also collecting samples from the house to ascertain the actual cause of the incident. The bodies were recovered and sent for post-mortem," Gupta said.

Rajasthan I-T raid reveals 2 firms hid undisclosed income of Rs 300 cr

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Income Tax Department on Tuesday conducted searches at fifty premises of two business groups of Rajasthan for their involvement in alleged tax fraud. They were hiding undisclosed income of Rs 300 crore.

The search so far has resulted in total seizure of unaccounted cash and jewellery worth Rs 17 crore from both the firms.

A senior income tax official said that one group is engaged in the business of manufacturing electrical switches, wires, LEDs, real estate and hotel business in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand, whereas the other group is engaged in money lending business in Jaipur and in nearby areas.

Raids were conducted at fifty locations in Jaipur, Mumbai and Haridwar.

A large number of incriminating documents and digital data were seized during the search operations.

"A preliminary analysis of seized evidence revealed that several entities, engaged in the business of manufacturing switches, wires, LEDs, have been selling such goods which are not recorded in the regular books of account," said a senior income tax official.

During investigation, it was also noticed that the business firms were claiming bogus expenses to reduce taxable income. The trail



of receipt of cash component on unaccounted sale of goods has also been found.

"In the first case, the company which deals in electric equipment, the team found that the firm was hiding undisclosed income of around Rs 150 crore. The key person of the group has admitted Rs 55 crore as undisclosed income and has offered to pay taxes," said the official.

The official said that the second firm which deals in loan was also hiding undisclosed income of Rs 150 crore.

"We found that most of the loans were given in cash and a relatively high rate of interest was charged. Neither the loans advanced nor the interest income earned thereon, was disclosed in the returns of income of the persons engaged in this business. They hid income of Rs 150 crore," claimed the official.

Further probe in the matter is on.

45% women in UP's Bundelkhand anaemic: Report

Jhansi | Agencies

Nearly 45.41 per cent women in the age group of 15-49 years have been found iron deficient in Bundelkhand region.

According to the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS), the national average is 53.8 per cent while that of Uttar Pradesh is 50.1 per cent, which shows that the region is comparatively in a better position though half of the women in this age group are anaemic.

This raises serious concern not only for the health issues but for the women's mental health issues too.

However, the figures in all the districts of the Bundelkhand region, barring Banda district, have improved from the previous survey of 2015-16.

As per the survey reports, Jhansi has 41.3 per cent anaemic women in this age group while earlier the figure was 51.3 per cent.

Chitrakoot has 46.6 per cent anaemic women, compared to the earlier 61.4 per cent.

Lalitpur now has 38.1 per cent



which is an improvement from the previous 49.8 per cent.

The data shows that Chitrakoot and Mahoba districts have performed extremely well and so have the others, except Banda where the figures have increased.

According to experts, anaemia

leads to change in behaviour of adolescents. It is also the root cause of anxiety, depression, anger and frequent headaches in them.

"Anaemic girls have low self-esteem and cannot concentrate on their studies. It is important that it should be detected at an early stage by checking haemoglobin which can be improved by medicines and proper diet. It is not that only girls from poor families are anaemic. Free iron supplement medicines and blood check-up facilities are available in all district hospitals, PHCs and CHCs. In addition, regular awareness camps are also being conducted in the schools," said a senior health official.

He further informed that iron tablets are available in hospitals and also with Anganwadis, ASHA and ANM workers. Tablets are also being made available in schools.

"The red tablet is for pregnant women which are to be taken for 180 days during pregnancy period while the blue tablet is for girls aged between 10-19 years to be taken once a week," he said.



MVA DROPS PLANS TO HOLD SPEAKER'S ELECTION

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maha Vikas Aghadi government dropped plans to conduct the election to the post of Speaker, on the final day of the weeklong Winter Session which ended here on Tuesday. The move came amid speculation that Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari had reportedly rejected the MVA's plea to hold the elections through a voice vote instead of secret ballot. The Governor is said to have indicated that the amendments in the rules to the effect were in violation of the Constitution, though the MVA leaders have contended



that it was within the laws and the government's jurisdiction. Earlier in the day, the MVA allies Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress leaders met and decided not to pursue the issue to avoid yet another collision with the Raj Bhavan, besides the possible legal or Constitutional implications. Now, the MVA leaders have hinted that the

Speaker's election may be held only during the Budget Session as the issue remained unresolved despite three letters being sent to the Raj Bhavan. On the other hand, the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party has stoutly opposed the amendments to the rules of holding the elections by voice vote instead of secret ballot on various grounds right from the beginning. Some leaders, including state BJP President Chandrakant Patil, have warned that if the government insisted on going ahead with the polls, it could lead to imposition of President's Rule in the state a possibility that the MVA would not exactly relish.

MUMBAI: 40 RESCUED FROM BURNING BUILDING, 5 HURT

Mumbai: In another heroic effort, the Mumbai Fire Brigade rescued more than 40 persons trapped on the terrace of a building which caught fire here on Tuesday morning, officials said. The conflagration is said to have erupted in the electric metre room on the ground floor of an old seven-storied MHADA building in Jankalyan Nagar in Kandivali west suburb around 10.15 am, according to BMC Disaster Control. As the flames and smoke spread upwards, many of the panicky residents climbed up and ended up on the terrace while the fire brigade was summoned. The MFB firefighters hoisted ladders and rescued at least 40 persons trapped on the terrace and others continued battling the blaze.

ED to file supplementary charge sheet against Anil Deshmukh

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has collected more evidence in connection with the Rs 100 crore money-laundering case involving former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh, and according to the sources, the agency is likely to file the supplementary charge sheet on January 3. Deshmukh was arrested by the ED on November 2. After the interrogation he was sent to judicial custody by the concerned Mumbai Court on ED's request. ED sources said that the supplementary charge sheet is ready and they are taking legal opinion to file it before the concerned court. They are examining the evidence collected by

them and cross checking all the testimonies to collaborate them with the evidence. "We have testimonies of 12 IPS officials, Anil Parab, the Maharashtra State Transport Minister, former Mumbai Police Commissioner Parambir Singh, and former Maharashtra chief secretary Sitaram Kunte," said the source. It was alleged that the officials were given favourable posts following the recommendation of Anil Deshmukh. The sources said that with the help of evidence they will be able to prove their case before the court. If ED fails to file the charge sheet within 60 days Anil Deshmukh will get default bail which ED doesn't want to happen, sources said. On August 24 this year the ED

had filed its first charge sheet. Anil Deshmukh had gone missing soon after the case was filed against him. Later on he appeared before the probe agency to join the probe on November 2 and was placed under arrest. After the interrogation he was remanded to judicial custody. The ED case is based on the CBI's FIR. Deshmukh had reportedly told the now dismissed Mumbai Police's Assistant Inspector Sachin Vaze to collect Rs 100 crore every month from bars and restaurants of Mumbai. There are also allegations that Deshmukh gave favourable transfer postings to a few IPS officers. The ED is investigating whether money was offered in such transfer and postings.

Raids in 3 Maha districts detect over Rs 210 cr tax evasion

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Income Tax Department raided 25 premises of two unnamed business groups in Maharashtra and detected huge tax evasions, besides affecting seizures, all totalling to over Rs 210 crore, an official said here on Tuesday. The swoops took place on Dec 22 in at least 25 properties spread across Nashik, Dhule, and Nandurbar on the two entities engaged in realty development and civil constructions, said the Department. During the raids, the I-T Department unearthed and seized many incriminating documents, loose papers and other digital evidence from both the

parties pointing to their financial hanky-panky. For one entity engaged in civil constructions, the I-T Department said the documents seized reveal that they had resorted to large-scale suppression of taxable income by inflating expenses, mostly through fake claims of sub-contract expenditures and payments to unverifiable old sundry creditors. The sleuths also detected that those sub-contracts were mostly awarded to family members or their employees who had not rendered any services in this regard, and also found evidence about the unrecorded cash expenditures incurred. As per the preliminary probe, the group has evaded

income tax to the extent of Rs 150 crore due to such malpractices, the ITD said. As far as the land developer was concerned, the central probe agency detected that a substantial part of the company's land transactions were done in cash and were not accounted for in the regular account books. Documents proving receipt of 'non-money' on such land deals and cash loans exceeding Rs 52 crore were seized, besides unaccounted cash of over Rs 5 crore and jewellery worth around Rs 5 crore. With the detection of these irregular deals, the I-T Department said further investigations are underway into both the groups whose identities have not been revealed.

CLOSING SCHOOLS, COLLEGES; DECISION IN 15 DAYS: ADITYA THACKERAY

Maharashtra Schools, Colleges to be closed or not - the decision to be taken in 15 days time. Check the latest updates and news regarding the Maharashtra Schools, Colleges, campuses here.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Decision to close schools and colleges of Maharashtra would be taken after assessing the situation in the state after 15 days. Speaking to the reporters, State Minister Aditya Thackeray shared that the government would be reviewing the situation and take the decision on schools and universities after reviewing. He was attending the convocation ceremony of Mumbai University. Speaking to the media, the minister said, "People need to stay masked up. The decision regarding school and college will be taken after looking at the situation 15 days from now. This is anyway the holiday season. It is not a great idea to close down the campuses." Earlier last week, Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad had also assured that the government was keeping a close eye on the situation. She had mentioned



that should the cases rise the schools would be closed. Meanwhile, Maharashtra has been witnessing a moderate rise in the number of cases since the Christmas weekend, with nearly 900 cases reported only from

Mumbai. Omicron cases are also steadily rising in the state, with new 26 cases reported yesterday, taking the tally up to 167. On Monday, an Engineering College in Pune reported that 13 students of a single batch were

found to be COVID positive and were placed under home isolation. In another incident, 28 more students in an Ahmednagar school testes positive, taking the tally of the institution to 82 in last one week. Parents in Mumbai, especially, are raising concern over the quick spread of Omicron. There is hope at the corner as the country readies to begin vaccination for 15 to 18 year olds from January 3. Children would have to register on the CoWin platform to get the dosage. Government has also allowed 'precaution' dose for the frontline workers, the elderly and those with comorbidity. As for schools and colleges, no state has announced any closure as yet. The institutions continue to operate in hybrid mode at present. Delhi, which is the second worst affected by Omicron, would be closing down the schools and colleges for Winter Vacation from January 1 to January 15.

MORE CURBS IN MAHARASHTRA?

CM Thackeray to Meet Task Force Soon After Warning of January Surge

Maharashtra government on Friday imposed night curfew to prevent the spread of infections and Omicron variant cases.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As Maharashtra tops the Omicron tally in India with 167 cases, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said a meeting will be held with the state Covid-19 task force "in the next two days" to take a call on more curbs. Thackeray's announcement came after the state health department, in a presentation before the state cabinet on Monday, warned of a surge in active cases by mid-January. Dr Pradeep Vyas, additional chief secretary, said active cases have increased by nearly 61% in the last 20 days. Maharashtra had 6,200 active cases on December 6, and the number reached 10,000 on December



26. "Although the number of tests conducted have also increased, the rate at which cases have surged is a cause of concern. A state task force meeting will be convened in the next two days." Maharashtra government on Friday imposed night curfew to prevent the spread of infections and Omicron variant cases. The state government announced fresh curbs including ban on gatherings of more than five people

in all public places from 9 pm to 6 am. Citing doubling of Covid-19 cases, especially in Europe as well as in the UK, due to the Omicron variant, the state government observed Omicron has spread to 110 countries around the world. Thackeray said that due to the high rate of spread of the virus, some restrictions should be imposed at present and further restrictions should be considered in the future. The Chief

Minister also called for caution and asked people to follow Covid appropriate behaviour and use masks properly. The department, meanwhile, said that the daily detection in cases has tripled in the last six days from 544 cases on December 20 to 1,648 on December 26. The state's positivity rate was 1.06% as of Monday. In a sort of redux of the second wave in the state, more than 88% of Covid cases in the city last week came from high-rises and not slums, civic data shows. Seeing the surge in cases, the corporation carried out an analysis of the 3,300-odd positive cases reported in the previous week. "Almost 88% cases were from buildings. Most wards are not finding many cases from slum pockets," said additional municipal commissioner Suresh Kakani. During the second wave, a similar trend was noted, the reasons for which were attributed to higher exposure among slum dwellers to better immunity and testing bias.

School Education Minister Tests Positive, Attended Assembly Session Yesterday

Maharashtra School Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad who contracted the viral infection last year also, had been attending the ongoing winter session of the state Legislature.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra School Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad on Tuesday said she has tested positive for coronavirus. The minister, who contracted the viral infection last year also, had been attending the ongoing winter session of the state Legislature and replied to various questions

pertaining to her ministry in the state Legislative Council on Monday. "I learned today that I tested positive for COVID-19 after first feeling symptoms yesterday evening. My symptoms are relatively mild. I'm fine and have isolated myself. Request those who met me the past few days to take precautions," tweeted the Congress leader, who recently also visited Uttar Pradesh.

18 medical students test Covid-19 positive in Sangli; Mumbai accounts for 55% of state's Covid tally

In the last 10 days, active cases in Mumbai have increased by 128%. On December 18, the city had 2,081 active cases, which surged to 4,765 on December 27.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

At least 18 female MBBS students of the Government Medical College at Miraj in Sangli district have tested positive coronavirus infection, PTI reported. According to a senior offi-

cial, all the infected students were fully vaccinated. Meanwhile, Maharashtra School Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad on Tuesday said she has tested positive for coronavirus. The minister, who contracted the viral infection last year also, had been attending the ongoing winter session of the state Legislature and replied to various questions pertaining to her ministry in the state Legislative Council on Monday. Mumbai has become the major contributor to the state's Covid-19 tally, accounting for over 55 per cent of the cases reported on Monday. Maharashtra on

Monday registered 1,426 cases, of which Mumbai contributed 788 cases. On December 26, the state reported 1,648 Covid-19 cases of which 896 were from Mumbai. Similarly, on December 27, out of the 1,426 cases reported in the state, Mumbai reported 809. In other news, the Maharashtra government is working on holding the Assembly speaker's election on Tuesday, the last day of the ongoing winter session, sources said on Monday. The development comes amid reports that Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari has not accepted the state government's plea for holding the legislature.

BJP MLA SEEKS PRE-ARREST BAIL IN MURDER ATTEMPT CASE

BJP MLA Nitish Rane has filed a pre-arrest anticipatory bail application in an attempt to murder case. The plea is scheduled to be heard by the Sindhudurg district court later today.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Nitish Rane, son of Union Minister Narayan Rane and a Bharatiya Janata Party MLA from Maharashtra's Kankavli, has filed an anticipatory bail application in an attempt to murder case. The application was filed yesterday and special judge SV Hande of the Sindhudurg

sessions court issued the notice to the prosecution. The plea will be heard by the Sindhudurg district court later on Tuesday. Advocates RV Raorane and Sangram Desai will represent Nitish Rane while special public prosecutor Pradeep Gharat will appear for the prosecution. Rane is seeking relief from any coercive action against him in an attempt to murder complaint that was registered against him in Kankavli, the home turf of the Ranes. The complaint is linked to an alleged attack on 44-year-old Santosh Parab. According to the complaint, Parab was travelling on a bike when an Innova without a number plate hit him in Kankavli. The complaint states that after the accident, a person came out of the car and stabbed him in the



chest. Parab got himself treated and told the police that when the assailants fled, one of them was heard saying, "Should inform Goyta Sawant and Nitish Rane." Based on the complaint, a First Information Report was registered by the Kankavli police under sections 307 (attempt to murder) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code. The police

issued a notice to Nitish Rane under Section 160 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and he appeared before them and gave his statement. The Ranes have alleged a political conspiracy over the case and have said that the case is linked to the upcoming elections for the board of directors of the local district bank, which are to be held on December 30. In his court plea, Nitish Rane has said that he is canvassing for candidates put up by the BJP for the polls, and his work will be impacted if any coercive action is taken against him. The plea states that he will cooperate with the police investigation when needed. The plea also states that the police investigation has not yet found anything that points to his involvement in the attempt to murder case.

MAHARASHTRA ATS FORCED ME TO NAME YOGI ADITYANATH, RSS LEADERS: MALEGAON BLAST WITNESS

Former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh, currently facing multiple cases of extortion, was the Additional Commissioner of the ATS when it probed the Malegaon blast case.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A witness in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, whose statement was recorded by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad,

claimed before a court that the ATS had threatened him to name Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and four other RSS leaders. Notably, former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh, currently facing multiple cases of extortion, was the Additional Commissioner of the ATS when it probed the Malegaon blast case. The witness was deposed before the special National Investigation Agency court today. His statement was recorded by the ATS when it probed the case before the NIA took over.



During his deposition, the witness told the court that the then senior ATS officer Param Bir Singh and another officer had threatened him to name Yogi Adityanath, and four other RSS leaders, including Indresh Kumar. He claimed that the ATS tortured him and made him sit (at their office) illegally. After his deposition, the court declared the witness hostile for making allegations against the ATS and denying that he made any statement before the anti-terror agency. As many as 220 witnesses have been examined in the case till now and 15 of them have turned hostile.

On September 29, 2008, six people were killed and over 100 injured when an explosive device strapped on a motorcycle went off near a mosque in Nashik's Malegaon town, located about 200 km from Mumbai. The accused in the case include Lok Sabha MP Pragna Singh Thakur, Lieutenant Colonel Prasad Purohit, Shudakar Diwedi, Major Ramesh Upadhyay (Retired), Ajay Rahirkar, Sudhakar Dwivedi, Sudhakar Chaturvedi, and Sameer Kulkarni, all of whom are out on bail. They are facing trial under provisions of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the Indian Penal Code.



EDITOR'S SPECS

IITs SHOULD BOOST THEMSELVES

All eight Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) were unable to attract a sufficient amount of non-government-sponsored research projects, take land for ensuring facilities to students, or attract students for higher research, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) said in a recent audit report. In IIT Hyderabad, an inordinate delay of three years in utilising available funds of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) loan was noticed which resulted in non-achievement of the intended objective of advancement of academic and research activities in the campus in a timely manner, pointed out the report tabled in the Parliament on December 21. It was noticed that in the IITs at Bhubaneswar, Gandhinagar, Mandi, and Ropar, issues in allotment and transfer of land persisted even after a decade of their establishment, and the lack of requisite land was a major impediment for the IITs in providing planned facilities to the students. The report said that the ratio of non-government-funded projects ranged from 3.5 per cent to 14.31 per cent in terms of project funds. Though a number of patents were filed, no patents were obtained in five IITs during 2014-19, indicating the need for improvement in the outcome of research activities, it said. The audit noticed that proportion of the internal receipts -- fees, interest, consultancy works, publications -- to the recurring expenditure of the IITs was very low even after having been established over a decade, and forced them to be heavily dependent on Central government grants for meeting recurring expenditure. The non-achievement of targets of infrastructure development in a timely manner affected student intake in all eight IITs, along with the timely installation of equipment and proper fund management, as per the report. This also necessitated a revision of the capital outlay from Rs 6,080 crore to Rs 14,332 crore and the project period to 13 years, it said.

IT BUDGETS ARE EXPECTED TO GO UP IN 2022, MANY TO PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

Salil Ravindran

Digital disruption has led the way in global economic growth as technology has taken a pervasive nature in the global economy, job market and everyday life. Companies with technology as a central part of their identity have contributed 52 per cent of total market value growth since 2015, while another 20 per cent of market value growth has come from companies with a tech-led strategy. The technology sector continues to reveal a strong and positive growth outlook. IDC estimates the technology industry to exceed \$5.3 trillion in 2022 and to go back to a 5 per cent-6 per cent annual growth rate. Companies are accelerating their digital transformation projects and adoption of the cloud. IT budgets are expected to increase in 2022, many to the pre-pandemic levels. On the other hand, IT vendors are compelled to pivot to new business models to ensure industry relevance, competitive differentiation and innovation. The approach to software development continues to change with companies relying on open source,

microservices, and agile and low code methodologies. Enhanced investments in AI and Blockchain will lead to more digitization and innovation. Data is the new oil and work involving embedded systems and analytics is the focus of all technology development. As a result, there is a tech talent shortage and we are witnessing the "Great Resignation" happening right now. Tech employment is expected to grow at about twice the rate of overall employment, with many skills like data science growing at 4x-5x the average rate. Curtailing of business travel has led to many new innovations, Teams meetings, webinars, online conferences, to name a few, which are now expected to continue post-pandemic. However, it is not all rosy and there are many headwinds that the industry is facing. Having learned to deal with the uncertainty arising due to the pandemic, companies are still struggling to define whether employees should work remote, hybrid or on-premise. The secure work environment has eroded as work has moved remote to cloud systems and mobile devices, and has led to challenges of data security and breach.

The global chip shortage is expected to continue to hinder smartphones, computers, automobiles, and other chip-dependent industries. Cyber-attacks also continue to increase every year causing security budgets to balloon. Led by Bengaluru, the silicon valley of India, Karnataka is the fourth largest technology cluster in the world. Karnataka's IT Policy 2020-2025 is guided by a vision to transform the state into an ecosystem of sustainable growth and to simultaneously elevate it to the global platform. Many new business opportunities in Karnataka are emerging in auto, electronics, and food processing, heavy machinery and textiles industries. Karnataka is well connected to all the major markets with two international airports, 14 national highways and 115 state highways, and a rail network of 3,250 km. Ease of doing business in Karnataka is always a priority as the state is the top recipient state during the year 2021-22 (up to June 2021) with a 48 per cent share of the total FDI equity inflows. Karnataka stands fourth in merchandise exports in the national export basket. Karnataka stands first in the world to set up a



2,000 MW Solar Park at Pavagada, the largest in the country of which 1,400 MW is operational. In recent times, Bengaluru has emerged as the startup capital of the country, both in terms of new companies being incubated and the quantum of funds raised by these entities. From being the front-runner of just tech-driven start-up ecosystem, Bengaluru has now graduated to become a thriving hub for all kinds of start-ups. Future innovations are likely to be conceived and developed in Bengaluru and also be first used in Bengaluru. Over 67 per cent of Karnataka's

population is in the working-age group of 15-59 years, which gives it a huge demographic advantage. With more than 200 engineering colleges in the state, Karnataka probably has the highest number of IT engineers in the world and any company in the world that wants to set up an IT team cannot ignore Karnataka. Many believe that the salubrious climate of Bengaluru also helped in the growth of the software industry there. (The writer is an adviser, mentor and independent board member to many startups in India and overseas)

SOARING HIGHER: OMICRON A CONCERN BUT UNLIKELY TO HINDER AVIATION'S 2022 FLIGHT

Rohit Vaid

India's aviation sector is expected to maintain its high growth altitude in 2022 on a year-on-year basis, despite fears triggered by the new Omicron Covid-19 variant. Accordingly, the domestic passenger traffic is expected to inch even closer to the pre-Covid levels, whereas the Omicron variant, while remaining a major concern, might not substantially impact operations. Lately, passenger traffic has witnessed a strong month-on-month recovery with 10.5 million being carried in November 2021 as compared to 12.3 mn passenger carried in February 2020 (pre-Covid). As per data, during January-November 2021, the airline players carried 72.4 million passengers, a growth of 30 per cent YoY. However, the domestic passenger traffic at 104-105 lakh in

November 2021, continues to be lower by around 19 per cent compared to the pre-Covid levels. "With regards to year 2022 as a whole, we should see healthy demand panning out both in the domestic and international market starting from second quarter of the calendar year," said Jagannarayan Padmanabhan, Director and Practice Leader, Transport and Logistics, Crisil Infrastructure Advisory. "Impact of Omicron will be felt more in the international traffic and substantially lesser in the domestic circuit. Having said that these are still early days, if the number of cases increases substantially then there could be an impact on non-essential travel even in the domestic routes." Post the second wave of the pandemic, overall passenger traffic has witnessed a strong month on month recovery. Besides, passenger traffic in FY21 had declined to the levels lower than that of FY11

level. It, however, clawed back in FY22. "We estimate FY22 traffic should be better than FY16 levels of around 85 million. We believe the growth momentum is likely to continue with higher number of offices opening up and employees returning to office; expectations of gradual increase in the business travel. Besides pick-up in in the leisure travels is also likely to ensure healthy demand going forward," said Rabin Bihani, Senior Analyst, India Ratings and Research. "Unless there is spike in Omicron or third wave, we believe, demand momentum shall continue to remain healthy. Government has also allowed airlines to operate at 100 per cent capacity now. "Nonetheless, higher fuel prices will remain a significant challenge for the aviation

industry, given that it constitutes for over a third of the revenue. In 2021, ATF prices have witnessed a substantial increase. During April-November 2021, average ATF prices have increased by about 80 per cent on a YoY basis. Apart from higher fuel prices, competitive intensity is also likely to intensify with a new airline entering the sky and an expected return of an old player. "Industry earnings are expected to be adversely impacted in FY2022 due to lower revenues and higher ATF costs - Given the onset of Covid-19 2.0, the demand recovery will be delayed for FY2022," said Suprio Banerjee, Vice President & Sector Head, ICRA.

international

GERMAN COMPANIES MOSTLY OPTIMISTIC FOR 2022: SURVEY

Berlin | Agencies

German companies are mostly optimistic about the coming year despite the Covid-19 pandemic and supply bottlenecks, the German Economic Institute (IW) said. Most of the country's trade associations reported an improved business situation compared to the end of 2020 and feel confident about the new year. Xinhua news agency quoted a survey conducted by the IW as saying. None of the 48 associations surveyed expected a decline in production, and 39 of them even expected production to increase. After a 4.6 per cent drop in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020 and a project-



ed 2.7 per cent growth in 2021, the German Council of Economic Experts (GCEE), an official advisory body to the government, said it expected GDP to grow by 4.6 per cent in 2022. The IW survey found that the most of the "pessimists" are companies that have

been "severely affected" by the Covid-19 pandemic. Rubber and paper companies, as well as glass and leather industries, have been heavily affected by a shortage of raw materials. The country's trade show industry is even worse off than in 2020 and it is "still not foreseeable when the situation will normalize again", the IW noted. Many other sectors and industries, such as the services sector and the steel, chemical, metal, mechanical and construction industries, reported an improvement compared to 2020, according to the survey. Germany's construction industry in particular has "very good business prospects" as the country's new government aims to build 400,000 new homes per year, the IW noted.

S KOREA TO BECOME 9TH LARGEST DONOR TO 2022-24 UN BUDGET

Seoul | Agencies

South Korea will become the ninth-largest contributor to the UN's regular and peacekeeping budgets starting next year, the Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday. The UN General Assembly on December 24 approved the budget obligations for 193 member states, setting South Korea's share at 2.57 per cent of the total funding for the 2022-24 period, reports Yonhap News Agency. The ratio was up from 2.27 per cent for the 2019-21 period, moving the country's rank up two notches from the current 11th place. The Ministry said South Korea's assessed contribution was set at a higher level in the upcoming three-year period in line with its economic growth in the previous years. Assessments of the budget obligations for UN member states are based on a complex formula that factors in gross national income and population. The US and China will remain the world body's top two financial contributors in the next three years.



N KOREA SLAMS US' STATE SPONSORS OF TERRORISM LIST

Seoul | Agencies

North Korea hit back on Tuesday at a recent US decision to retain Pyongyang on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, accusing Washington of having engaged in terrorist acts under the pretext of "counter-terrorism". Earlier this month, the State Department unveiled its annual Country Reports on Terrorism 2020, which kept the North on the list, along with Iran and Syria, reports Yonhap News Agency. In a post on its Foreign Ministry website, Pyongyang criticized Washington for posing as the "judge of terrorism", cataloguing a number of past US-involved wars and lambasting them as "large-scale acts of state terrorism". "The US is the criminal state of terrorism which did



not hesitate to commit acts of terrorism," read the post, claiming that Washington carried out terrorist operations targeting political figures and government officials in foreign countries. It added that Washington's denunciation of others as "terrorist states" is the "worst

case of a guilty party filing suit first". North Korea has been on the US list of state sponsors of terrorism since 2017, when North Korean agents assassinated leader Kim Jong-un's half brother, Kim Jong-nam, using a chemical agent in Malaysia.

3 teens killed in Texas shooting



Houston | Agencies

Three teenagers were killed and another one was injured during a shooting incident at a gas station in the US state of Texas over the Christmas weekend, police said. The suspect, a 14-year-old boy, was arrested on Monday afternoon, Xinhua news agency quoted Police Chief Jeff Bryan in the Dallas suburb of Garland as saying. In a surveillance video of the shooting, which took place on Sunday night, the shooter got out of the passenger side of a pick-up truck, walked up to the front door and opened fire into the gas station convenience store from the doorway. Police said he fired more than 20 rounds from a .40 cal-

iber pistol. The shooter then got back into the pick-up and fled with a male driver, whom police said they are still searching for. The victims were three boys aged 14, 16 and 17, police said. The youngest, identified as Xavier Gonzales, was ordering tacos for his family when he was killed. Bryan said it appears Gonzales was just at the "wrong place at the wrong time". The injured person, a 15-year-old store employee who just started to work in the store last week, was hospitalised and in stable condition, said the police. Investigators are still trying to determine a motive, according to local media reports.

Japan urged not to list forced labour linked mine as World Heritage site

Tokyo | Agencies

South Korea on Tuesday urged Japan to retract its push to list a former mine linked to wartime forced labour as a Unesco World Heritage Site, calling the move "very deplorable". Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs has reportedly been pushing to register the Sado mine on the coveted list where Koreans were forced into hard labour during Tokyo's 1910-45 colonization of the Korean Peninsula, reports Yonhap News Agency. The move came as Seoul has repeatedly taken issue with Tokyo's failure to properly fulfil its pledge to honour forced labour victims at an information centre on its industrial revolution sites designated in the list in 2015. "It is very deplorable that (Japan) has decided to push for the World Heritage designation of the mine, another site where Koreans were forced into labour, and we call for the immediate retraction



of it," Choi Young-sam, the spokesperson of Seoul's Foreign Ministry, said. "Our government will sternly respond with the international community to prevent a site where workers were forced into toil against their will from being designated as a Unesco World Heritage site without enough explanation," he added. Later in the day, Kyun Jong-ho, the Ministry's director general in charge of cultural affairs, called in Kazuo Chujo, director of Public Information and Cultural Centre at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, to protest Tokyo's move related to the

mine, according to the ministry. The Sado mine originally operated as a gold mine in the 1600s, but it was turned into a facility to produce war-related materials, such as cooper, iron and zinc, during World War II. It was shut down in 1946. According to historical documents, at least 1,200 Koreans were forced into labour at the mine under harsh conditions during the war. The latest move has added to historical tensions between the two neighbours. It remains unclear whether Tokyo will mention the wartime history in its recommendation of the mine for the

heritage designation. If it is selected, the Japanese government is expected to submit a letter of recommendation to Unesco by February 1, after which the UN body will make a decision in 2023. In addition to calling in the Japanese diplomat, Korea's Foreign Ministry has communicated with Unesco officials on several occasions and plans to form a task force with experts and related agencies to deal with the issue, a Seoul official said. The Ministry also called on Japan to fulfil an earlier pledge to inform people about the forced labour of Koreans on Hashima Island, also known as Battleship Island, which was recognised as a Unesco World Heritage site in 2015. Upon the 2015 designation of 23 Meiji-era sites, including the island, Tokyo promised to install an information centre to provide sufficient explanations of the forced labour, but it only highlighted achievements of Japan's industrial revolution.

ISRAELI MISSILE ATTACK TARGETS SYRIAN SEAPORT



Damascus: A fresh Israeli missile attack targeted the commercial port of Syria's coastal city of Latakia on Tuesday, state media reported. The Israelis fired their missiles from the Mediterranean against the commercial port of Latakia, hitting the container terminal and igniting a fire, Xinhua news agency quoted the state media report as saying. The attack caused big damage as firefighters are working to put out the fire, it added. It is the second such attack on the port this month. The previous one was reported on December 7. Israel usually fires missiles on Syria on the pretext that it targets positions of the Iranian-backed militia, mainly those affiliated with the Lebanese Hezbollah group.



NO MORE COVID RESTRICTIONS IN MP FOR NOW: GOVERNMENT

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government on Tuesday said no more Covid-related restrictions will be imposed in the state for now.

A decision in the regard was taken during a review meeting chaired by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to review the Covid-19 situation in the state. "A mass campaign to vaccinate the youth between 15 to 18 years will be started soon across the state and they will be administered Covaxin only. Observing the current situation of Covid-19, the government, as of now, has decided not to impose more restrictions. All activities continued to run at its full length in the state," the state government said in an official communication on Tuesday. During the meeting, Chouhan directed the officials to ensure people maintain social distancing and wear masks. He also instructed



ed the police to ensure that people do not gather unnecessarily at any public place.

Following the direction of the Centre, the Madhya Pradesh government has imposed night curfew between 11 p.m. to 5 a.m.

The state has seen an increasing trend of daily Covid cases. In the last one week, Madhya Pradesh has registered as many as 236 new Covid cases.

In December (from Dec 1-Dec 27), a total of 583 Covid cases were registered in Madhya Pradesh of which

Indore reported highest cases - 247, and Bhopal reported 205 cases.

As per official reports, on Monday, the state had reported 42 new Covid cases, while the number of Omicron cases remained at nine. The state has reported nine cases of Omicron on Sunday in Indore.

However, other districts have not reported Omicron related Covid cases so far. Seven persons who were infected with the Omicron variant have reportedly recovered.

Congress attacks BJP after two MPs caught in corruption row

Ratlam Jhabua MP named in Rs Six hundred crore scam; Rewa MP 'justifies' graft up to Rs fifteen lakhs

Team Absolute | Bhopal

With two BJP MPs caught in corruption related controversy, the state Congress has launched an attack on the party seeking response from Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and even questioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The parliamentarians in the centre of the row are Ratlam-Jhabua MP Guman Singh Damor and Rewa MP Janardan Mishra. State BJP chief Vishnu Dutt Sharma told THE WEEK that both of them have clarified to him about the respective issues. The party stands for zero tolerance for corruption, he said.

In the first case, Damor has been served a notice by an Alirajpur court in an alleged corruption case of Rs 600 crores. The matter pertains to work under fluorosis control programme in 2006-07 in Jhabua district when Damor was executive engineer with the state public health engi-

neering department (PHED).

The court of Alirajpur judicial magistrate first class (JFMC) has issued notices to Damor, erstwhile Jhabua district collector Ganesh Shankar Mishra and two other erstwhile officials of the PHED on the basis of a petition filed by a Mhow-based journalist. Alirajpur was then a part of Jhabua district.

The court also ordered to file an FIR against the said persons under Section 197 (issuing or signing a false certificate), 217 (public servant disobeying a direction of law with intent to save person from punishment), 269 (unlawfully does any act), 403 (misappropriation of property), 406 and 409 (criminal breach of trust), 420 (cheating) of IPC, sources said.

Damor was summoned to the BJP state headquarters on Monday, but he could meet state president VD Sharma only for a few minutes. When returning, media persons tried

to question him, but the MP jostled against them and went away without replying. Later, when the video of this jostling went viral, Damor returned to the BJP office and tendered apologies to the media persons. He also called the allegations against him baseless and said he was never posted in Jhabua/Alirajpur and wasn't involved in any scam. He also said no FIR has been registered against him yet.

The other controversy is related to Janardan Mishra's statement that no one should complain to him if panchayat representatives like sarpanchs were engaged in corruption up to Rs 15 lakh. Complaints should only be made if the corruption amount was more than this because the sarpanch needed about Rs 7 lakh to win the polls and had to prepare for the next poll too. A video of this statement, made in Rewa, went viral, following which he too was called for clarification by the BJP

state chief.

Congress spokesman KK Mishra tweeted on the issue saying, "PM says na khaunga, na khaane dunga (won't engage or allow corruption). Shivraj ji threatens to bury corrupt people in 10-foot deep craters. But Rewa MP Janardan Mishra justifies corruption up to Rs 15 lakh and Ratlam-Jhabua MP GS Damor gets FIR registered in a Rs 600 crores scam. Mr PM, these two MPs share the floor of Parliament with you?"

Another spokesman Narendra Saluja tweeted with a video of Damor jostling with media persons to say, "Accused of Rs 600 crore corruption, BJP MP Guman Singh Damor is running away from media, not even able to give replies. It seems he had come to wash himself clean in the washing machine of the BJP office. Entire BJP is silent on his corruption. Why hasn't he resigned yet?"

Catholic priest, 2 others held under anti-conversion law

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Police have claimed to have arrested three persons, including a Catholic Church priest and a Pastor allegedly for luring tribals to convert to Christianity.

As per the police, they were allegedly involved in luring the tribals in a village in Jhabua district, one of the key tribal populated areas in the state, for conversion.

Police said the action came on the basis of an FIR registered at a local police station in Jhabua district, which claimed that Father Jam Singh Dindore, Pastor Anshing Ninama and a person named

Mangu Mehtab Bhuriya lured tribal villagers to convert to Christianity by promising them free education and treatment in the missionary-run school and hospitals.

Police said the person who filed the complaint was identified as Tetiya Bariya, a tribal. The complainant has mentioned that "On December 26, Father Jam Singh Dindore called me and Surti Bai (another villager) to his prayer room and made us sit in a weekly meeting called for conversion. They sprinkled water on us and read the Bible."

All three of them have been charged under the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2021,

which is known as the anti-conversion law, police said.

The complainant further added that he was asked to convert to Christianity with an offer of free health and education for his children, which he declined and informed the police.

Acting on the complaint, a case was registered and a team of local police reached Dindore's residence on Sunday afternoon and detained him. Later, the police arrested two more persons involved in the matter. However, Christian Missionaries in Jhabua district have alleged that a smear campaign was being run in the tribal-dominated areas of Madhya Pradesh against them.

SATELLITE CAMPUS OF IIT INDORE WILL OPEN IN UJJAIN: YADAV

Bhopal: Higher Education Minister Mohan Yadav said that according to the ancient glorious knowledge tradition, efforts are being made to establish Ujjain of Malwa region as a major learning centre of technology and knowledge-science. Under this the satellite campus of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Indore will be opened in Ujjain. This campus to be established on 100 acres of land will provide international standard research centre and higher education at par with standards. It will be the first educational institute of its kind in the country. This campus will also play an important role in promotion of employment and self-employment.

49 lakh teenagers to get vaccinated from January 3

Team Absolute | Bhopal

All children whose year of birth is 2007 or later, will be eligible for the job to protect against Covid-19 starting January 3. Registrations will be online or onsite walk-in, according to government guidelines issues on Monday.

Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, would be available for vaccine with emergency use listing (EUL) for the age-group 15 to 18 years of age. Guidelines will come into effect from January 3 and will be reviewed from time to time. Those above 60 years of age can get the third jab from January 10 on doctors advice.

"About 49 lakh people are estimated to be in the population 15 to 18 years in MP. Double dose will also be administered. An online meet with state government representatives is slated for Tuesday to work out the logistics," said MP immunization officer, Dr Santosh Shukla.

The legal eligible age to buy a SIM card in India is 18 years. As such, Union health ministry guidelines-specified beneficiaries can self-register online through a unique mobile number. Dr Shukla said, "Ultimately the youngsters will have to be linked to their parents' mobile num-

ber." About 6% of the population is estimated to be in the new beneficiaries aged 15-18 years. All those aged 15 years or more will be able to register on app. In other words, all those whose birth year is 2007 or before, shall be eligible, the guidelines stated.

Beneficiaries can self-register, online through an existing account on Co-WIN or can also register by creating a new account through a unique mobile number, this facility is available for all eligible citizens presently. Option for vaccination would only be Covaxin as this is the only vaccine with EUL for the age-group 15-17.

Woman gangraped, brutalized in Dhar

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A 35-year-old woman was abducted, gangraped and brutalized in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh, police said on Tuesday.

According to police, the incident occurred on Saturday night when the woman and her husband were returning home on a bike. As the couple reached at a bridge in Manawar town in Dhar district, three unidentified persons started pelting stones at them and forced them to stop.

They overpowered the couple, tied up the man (husband) and snatched their wallet and jewellery. "After that the assailants tore the woman's clothes and

brutalized her. They fled from the spot after committing the crime," the police said. Police further said that a passerby noticed the couple crying for help and informed the local police. The police rushed to the spot and the woman was taken to a nearby hospital for treatment. "She has suffered serious injuries in her private parts," said a police official in Dhar district. It has been more than two days of the brutal incident, the perpetrators are still on the run. "Several teams of police have been deployed to arrest them (accused). Search operations are being carried out in adjoining district also," a senior police official told IANS on phone on Tuesday.

Saving trees from being felled is equal to planting trees: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday planted saplings of Karanj and Gulmohar in Smart Park. Along with Chief Minister Chouhan, Yogendra Saxena, environmental scientist involved in the promotion of Gau-kasht model (cow dung wood), with Prachi and Manya also planted saplings. After getting information about the manufacture and use of Gau-kasht, Chouhan appreciated these efforts. He said that saving a tree from being cut is equivalent to planting a tree.

Collector Bhopal Avinash Lavanina told Chief Minister that women of self-help groups are contributing in the manufacture of Gau-kasht. The use of Gau-kasht has proved effective in protecting the environment. Chouhan said that saving the forest from cutting is the work of saving environment and saving lives.



Environmental scientist Saxena told Chief Minister that now Gau-kasht is being used in works like Holika Dahan and funeral rites. He also showed samples of Gau-kasht to Chouhan. He said that the Pollution Control Board is active in the efforts regarding immersion of the Plaster of Paris idol of Lord Ganesha

using a scientific method. Such a single-use plastic free sanitary napkin has also been prepared, which will not be harmful to the environment if thrown, buried or burnt in the open place. It has become possible to destroy single use plastic free sanitary napkins in incinerators like bio medical waste. For the purpose of Deepdan, lamps made of cow dung, pulses and porridge are being used in rivers, which are edible for fish and effective in saving the environment of rivers. Karanj sapling is considered important in Ayurvedic medicine. Karanj plant is also Gulmohar is considered one of the most beautiful trees in the world. Flowers blooming in large clusters amidst the tidy green glimmering leaves of Gulmohar give a distinct charm to this tree. In summer, Gulmohar trees are laden with flowers instead of leaves. It is also rich in medicinal properties.

CM INQUIRES ABOUT WELL BEING OF ROAD ACCIDENT VICTIMS



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed grief over the road accident in Sehore district on Tuesday. Chouhan inquired about the health of accident victims admitted to a private hospital in Bhopal. Today about a dozen persons were injured in a bus accident near Rehti. Chouhan directed the doctors of the hospital to ensure proper treatment of the injured in the accident and wished speedy recovery. An assistance amount of Rs. 4 lakh has been sanctioned to the family of Jagdish Maheshwari, a resident of Nasrullaganj, who died in the accident. Giving instructions for proper treatment of the injured, an assistance amount of Rs 50 thousand was sanctioned. The partially injured people will also be given assistance of Rs 5 and 10 thousand.

CM PAID HOMAGE TO GREAT PERSONALITIES



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage by garlanding the pictures of senior leader Late Kushabhau Thakre, former Union Minister and former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Late Sunderlal Patwa and former Union Minister Late Arun Jaitley in the auditorium of his residence on Tuesday.

Today is the death anniversary of Late Kushabhau Thakre and Late Sunderlal Patwa and the birth anniversary of Late Arun Jaitley. Chief Minister Chouhan also remembered the contribution of the three personalities.

DM Cancels Own Salary as Complaints Under CM Helpline Not Resolved Quickly

COMING DOWN HEAVILY ON THE SLACK FUNCTIONING OF THE MUNICIPAL CORPORATION, THE COLLECTOR HAS ORDERED WITHHOLDING SALARIES OF ALL THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONERS.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Bureaucrats often punish subordinates for poor performances but a collector from Jabalpur district in Madhya Pradesh has issued an order stopping his own salary as the district fared poorly in terms of resolving complaints lodged with the Chief Minister's helpline. The order has been issued by district collector Karmveer Sharma, who has also withheld salaries of officers from other depart-

ments that have fared poorly in addressing these complaints. The collector's response came during the time limit (review) meeting in the city on Monday.

Those officers sitting on complaints pending for over 100 days won't get any salaries next month, as ordered by the collector. Coming down heavily on the slack functioning of the municipal corporation, the collector has ordered withholding salaries of all the deputy commissioners.

The collectors not only withheld salaries of tehsildars and deputy commissioners of municipal corporation but also ordered stopping their one salary increment each for slowness in duty.

During the time limit meeting on Monday, the collector ordered issuing a notice to district marketing officer who was absent from the meeting. Most of the department heads bore the brunt of collector's wrath during the meeting on Monday.

Role of sports and sportspersons in building society is important: Sarang

- Prize distribution and concluding ceremony of State Level Cross Country Competition
Selected players to participate in national competition to be held in Nagaland

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang has said that sports and sportspersons play an important role in building a strong society. Sports and society both are must for an individual. Sarang was addressing the concluding ceremony of the State Level Cross Country Competition and the prize distribution programme. The players selected in this competition organized by Athletic Union Madhya Pradesh will participate in the national competition to be held in Nagaland.

Sarang said that sports provide us mental and physical strength. At the



same time, a rich and powerful society is proud of talents like you. He congratulated and extended best wishes to the selected players. Cricketer JP Yadav, Union Vice President Vishnu Tripathi, Secretary Suresh Prajapati, Naval Prajapati were also present. In the programme, the selected players were awarded for the 56th National Cross Country Championship 2022 in Kohima capital of Nagaland on 15

January 2022. In the boys 16 years category, Prince Kumar of Jabalpur won the first prize, Rishab Kose of Jabalpur second and Ashwin Satnami of Vidisha got third prize. In the 16 year girl category, Kashak Gaur of Hoshangabad was given first prize, Vidhi Malviya of Hoshangabad got second prize and Roshti Gaur of Damoh was given third prize. Similarly, Sakshi Yaduvanshi of Hoshangabad got first prize and

Kanak Gaur of Hoshangabad got second prize in the 4-km Girls' 18 Years Competition.

In the boy 18 years category, Pratham Chaudhary of Vidisha was given the first prize, Pavil Atri of Bhopal second and Shivam Patel of Damoh was given the third prize. Sakshi Gurjar of Bhopal was given the first prize in the girl's 20 years category, second prize to Pooja Prajapati of Sehore and third prize to Shivali Malviya of Sehore. In the boys 20 years category, Shival Patel of Raisen got first prize, Ajit Singh of Damoh got second prize and Virendra Bahadur of Jabalpur got third prize. In the same sequence Narendra Rajput of Shajapur got first, Golu Dhakad of Raisen second, Krishna Kumar Patel of Damoh third, in the women's category, Priyanka Patel of Bhopal first, Salita Yaduvanshi of Hoshangabad second and Pratima Yadav of Jabalpur stood third in 10 kilometer men's category. Yadav was awarded the third prize. Cash prizes and certificates were given in different competitions of different categories.



Prosthetics gave me 'energy' to perform: Jessica Chastain

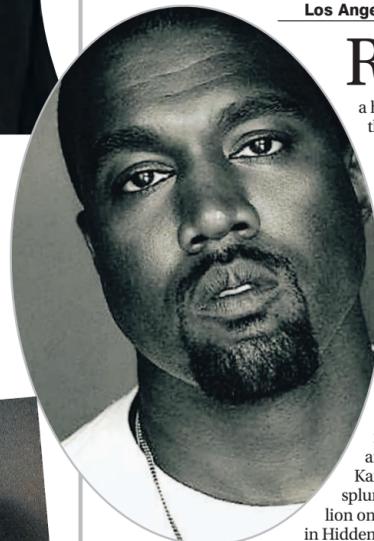
Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Jessica Chastain found wearing prosthetics in her new movie 'The Eyes of Tammy Faye' made her bring "more energy" to her performance. The 44-year-old star shared that the wig, fake teeth and other physical changes she needed to play the lead role in 'The Eyes of Tammy Faye' made it "difficult" to connect with the audience but they also had the benefit of making her work harder to avoid being "upstaged" by her own appear-

ance, reports femalefirst.co.uk. She told Total Film magazine: "It's very helpful because you look so much like the character. But it's also difficult because you have to act through it, right? How are you going to reach people through all of that stuff? How are people going to see behind my eyes when my eyes are the only things exposed, you know?" Chastain added: "But I think it actually helped free me in a way. It made me aware that I needed to bring a lot more energy than I thought was humanly possible because I couldn't walk into a room and then just get upstaged by the look." The actress thinks her approach helped as it made her more like the real TV evangelist Tammy Faye Bakker. She added: "I had to be beyond it, which is what she was. Yeah everyone makes fun of her make-up and talks about how larger-than-life she was with her costumes, and her clothing, and her make-up. But her personality was much bigger than her make-up

Kanye West buys house across street from Kim Kardashian

Los Angeles | Agencies



Rapper Kanye West has bought a house across the street from Kim Kardashian. Although the former couple, who have four children together, are currently going through a divorce, they have remained amicable and Kanye has splurged \$4.5 million on the property in Hidden Hills California, in order to remain close to his family, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Kanye, who has officially changed his name to Ye, paid \$421,000 more than the original asking price so that he could purchase the home directly across from where Kim lives with their children North, eight, Saint, six, Chicago, three and Psalm, two. Kim, 41, and Kanye previously agreed to seek joint legal custody of the kids in their divorce, with a source explaining: "(Kim) wants Kanye to be a big part of the kids' lives. He will be invited to all holidays and family celebrations." Earlier this month, Kim filed legal documents asking to be declared legally single as she and Kanye have finished dividing up their assets. She stated: "Irreconcilable differences have existed and continue to exist between (West) and me, which have caused our marriage to irretrievably break down. No counseling or reconciliation effort will be of any value at this time." There will be no prejudice to (West) if our marriage is immediately dissolved, especially given the fact that throughout our marriage, we adhered to the terms of our premarital agreement and maintained the separate property character of our assets."

Singer J Balvin admits he's not Afro-Latino

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer J Balvin has acknowledged that he is not Afro-Latino despite winning the Afro-Latino Artist of the Year award at the 2021 African Entertainment Awards.

Following his controversial win, the so-called Prince of Reggaeton has clarified his race, reports aceshowbiz.com.

"I am not Afro-Latino," the 36-year-old Colombian singer/rapper posted on his Instagram Story in Spanish after winning the award on December 26. "But thank you for giving me a place in the contribution to Afrobeat music and its movement."

Meanwhile, the AE Awards has put out a statement explaining that the award is not exclusively given based on race, but an artiste's contribution to "pushing the African culture on the world stage."

The statement posted on the organisation's official Instagram account read: "The Afro Latino category (AFRO-BEAT LATINO ARTIST) is for any artiste based in Latin America that is contributing to the African culture especially the Afro-beats sound globally. It is not based on race but more importantly based on pushing African culture forward on the world stage."

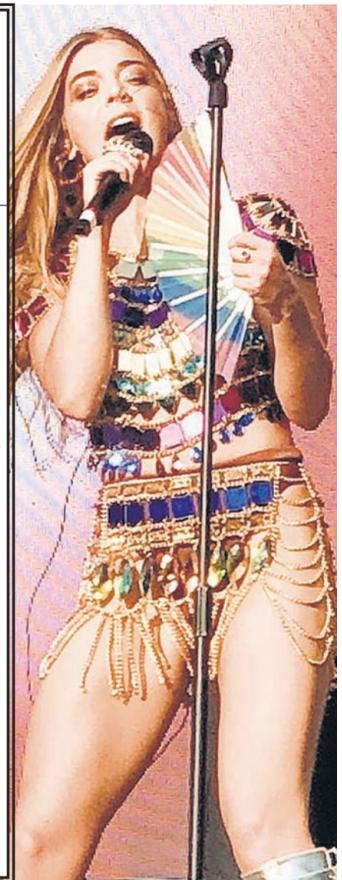


BECKY HILL WANTS TO WORK WITH DJ CALVIN HARRIS

Los Angeles | Agencies

British singer-songwriter Becky Hill wants to work with "amazing" Scottish DJ Calvin Harris because he's always been a big influence on her. The 'Wish You Well' singer said the 'Acceptable in the 80s' hitmaker has been a big influence on her career so she'd jump at the chance to get into the studio with him. She said: "I'd love to work with Calvin Harris, I think he's amazing. He's always been around in me growing up and has been a huge influence in my dance music career and I'd love to sit with him and pick his brain and write a song with him."

Hill recently performed at Capital's 'Jingle Bell Ball' and the gig marked a major milestone for her because she was booked as a solo artiste in her own right. Asked her career highlight so far, she said: "I would definitely say being booked under my own name at 'Jingle Bell Ball' with nobody else with me, no Jonas Blue or Sigala trying to make a name for myself doing one song with them. I've got five songs, co-written and sang by myself, which is really lovely, so this has been the highlight for me." Hill first found fame when she competed on 'The Voice' and she would love to return to the singing competition next year. She told BANG Showbiz: "I would love to go back on 'The Voice', next year will be my 10th year since I left the show so I'd love to go back and provide insight on how to build a career." The 26-year-old star has a busy 2022 planned and joked she's well on her way to "world domination".



Zoe Kravitz reveals her cat co-stars in 'The Batman' were the biggest divas

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Zoe Kravitz, who plays Selina Kyle and her alter ego Catwoman in Matt Reeves' upcoming 'The Batman', said working alongside the fidgety cats was harder than any of the car stunts and chases because they had a mind of their own and the actors had to wait around for them to play ball.

"The Batman" stars Robert Pattinson as Bruce Wayne and the Caped Crusader.

Kravitz told Buzzfeed: "The funniest thing would be us getting ready to shoot and we'd have these cat wranglers come in who had these toys to make the cats stay on their marks, and it would kinda work, but not really. So, it ended up that we were always waiting for the cats - like we'd be ready to go, but then the cat would decide to move."

"People would have to hide behind the cabinets or in the corners, so me and Rob (Pattinson) would be doing a scene and there are these cat ladies tucked away and pretending not to be there. It was pretty funny because, at the end of the day, you cannot tell a cat what to do. Like, after all the car flips and fights and chases, one of the hardest things to do on set was getting the cats to stay put."

The 'Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald' star is well aware of the animal's traits as she recently revealed she studied lions and cats for the role, reports femalefirst.co.uk.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Sofia Vergara



ISSA RAE CALLS MUSIC BUSINESS 'THE WORST INDUSTRY I HAVE COME ACROSS'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Issa Rae, whose five-season run with the show 'Insecure' came to a close with a finale this weekend, has dipped more than a toe into the music business.

She's started her own record label, Raedio, and is producing a new show about aspiring rappers, using her existing career to help launch music ones. But rather than come off as thrilled about

branching out into another industry, Rae is making it sound like she's entered a den of vipers, reports variety.com.

Asked if the music business is "a place where good ideas flourish", Rae said: "Absolutely not."

"It's probably the worst industry I've ever come across," she told the Los Angeles Times' Mikael Wood in a Q&A about her personal and professional experiences with music.

"I thought Hollywood was crazy," Rae continued. "The music industry, it has to start

all over again. There are lots of conflicts of interest. Archaic mentalities. Villains and criminals! It's an addiction industry, and I really feel for artists who need to get into it... It was something shocking to discover," she said.

Rae did not get into her dismay with the music business beyond generalities, but indicated her feelings were based on a combination of her own experiences setting up soundtracks and hearing from artists about what they deal with on a regular basis.



1ST TEST, DAY 3

INDIA BUNDLE OUT SOUTH AFRICA FOR 197, TAKE 130 RUNS LEAD

Centurion | Agencies

India bowled out South Africa for 197 in their first innings, taking 130 runs lead on the third day of the first Test of the three-match series, at SuperSport Park, here on Tuesday.

South Africa, who were struggling at 109/5 in their first innings at tea, added 88 more runs in the third session and lost the rest of the five wickets. Mohammed Shami was the most successful bowler for India with 5/44 while Jasprit Bumrah 2/16, Shardul Thakur 2/51, and Md Siraj 1/45 were other wicket-takers. Resuming the session at 21 for 1, after lunch, Indian pacers resumed through the South African top order with some exceptional bowling. Having already lost skipper Dean Elgar before lunch, his opening partner Aiden Markram (13) and Keegan Petersen (15) also couldn't do much as both were cleaned up by Mohammed Shami. Soon Rensie van der Dussen (3) was sent back to the pavilion by Siraj,



Brief scores
India 327 in 105.3 overs (KL Rahul 123, Mayank Agarwal 60; Lungi Ngidi 6-71, Kagiso Rabada 3-72) lead South Africa 197 all out (Temba Bavuma 52, Quinton de Kock 34; Mohammed Shami 5/44) by 130 runs

whose full delivery drew him forward and had the edge caught at slip, leaving South Africa reeling at 32 for 4. From there on, Temba Bavuma and

Quinton de Kock stitched a 72-run stand for the fifth wicket to bail the Proteas out of a precarious position. However, de Kock (34) chopped a

Shardul Thakur delivery back on to his stumps only a few minutes before tea, allowing India to seize the momentum again. Earlier in the day, India had a dramatic collapse, triggered by the pace duo of Lungi Ngidi (6/71), Kagiso Rabada (3/72), the visitors losing seven wickets for 55 runs on Day 3 to get bowled out for 327 in the morning session. KL Rahul (123 off 260), who looked in fine touch on Day 1, was the first one to get dismissed. The opener tried to play a swivel-pull off Rabada but gloved the ball and 'keeper Quinton de Kock took an easy catch. Next was Ajinkya Rahane (48 off 102), who tried to play a cut shot off Ngidi, but was only able to give a catch to the wicketkeeper. Thereafter, the likes of Rishabh Pant (8), Ravichandran Ashwin (4), Shardul Thakur (4), and Md Shami (8) got out in quick succession. The last-wicket partnership of 19 runs between Jasprit Bumrah (14) and Md Siraj (4) gave some late flourish to the Indian innings.

Boland guides Australia to crushing win over England; hosts retain the Ashes

Melbourne | Agencies

Test debutant Scott Boland returned with figures of 6/7 in his four overs as Australia crushed England by an innings and 14 runs on Day 3 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) to retain the Ashes on Tuesday. The victory ensures Australia stay at the top of the World Test Championship standings with 100 per cent points, while England slip further. Already on the brink of humiliation after a sensational bowling performance from Mitchell Starc and Boland on Day 2, England needed a big performance from two of their best batters - skipper Joe Root and all-rounder Ben Stokes. A couple of flourishes and delectable drives from the duo would have given them a semblance of hope. But once the Australian bowlers found their rhythm again, the procession began. Starc got through the gates of Stokes with an absolute beauty. The all-rounder had no answers as the ball nipped back in, shattering his stumps, as he departed for 11. The Boland show then began as he embarked on a devastating spell that completely shattered the opposition. In the span of his three overs, he picked up four wickets. First, he trapped Jonny Bairstow in front of the stumps who then reviewed the call unsuccessfully. Then, the big wicket of Root followed with a fuller delivery, which nipped away from the England skipper. Root could only edge the delivery, departing for 28. Mark Wood was the next one to follow, with Boland taking a sensa-



Brief scores

England 185 and 68 all out in 27.4 overs (Mitchell Starc 3/29, Scott Boland 6/7) lost to Australia 267 (Marcus Harris 76, David Warner 38) by an innings and 14 runs.

tional caught and bowled. The crowd was up on its feet as Australia were now only two wickets away from a 3-0 victory in the five-Test series. Ollie Robinson was the next one to perish against Boland, as the pacer again got the delivery to move off the deck. It proved too good for Robinson, who was dismissed for a duck. By the end, Boland's figures read 6/7 in four overs. The final scalp was taken by Cameron Green, bowling Anderson for two as the MCG erupted with a big roar. England were bowled out for 68, losing the match by an innings and 14 runs. Australia have now taken an unassailable 3-0 lead, with the Ashes in the bag. The fourth Test is scheduled at the Sydney Cricket Ground from January 5. Root would be pondering where exactly things went wrong as their horrendous tour continued.

DOMINIC THIEM PULLS OUT OF AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Melbourne | Agencies

Struggling with a wrist injury, Dominic Thiem has pulled out of next month's Australian Open, World number 15 said on Tuesday. The 28-year-old, who has not played since suffering the injury at the Mallorca Open in June, was unable to defend his US Open title this year. Thiem reached the final at Melbourne Park last year before going on to win his maiden major title US Open. He will start his 2022 season in South America at the Cordoba Open in Argentina at the end of January. "I will miss the Australian fans, but I will be back (there) in 2023," he said on Twitter. "We believe this is the right decision in



order to have a good return to competition. For the moment I will remain in Austria for a few more days and then head to practice outdoors and get ready for my first event of the season," he said in a statement. "After the short holidays, my team and I have

assessed all matters and we have decided to make some changes to my initial tournament schedule: I will start the season in South America at the Cordoba Open in Argentina, end of January, and therefore I will not play this year at the Australian Open in Melbourne, a city that I love and where I have great memories of unforgettable matches in front of amazing crowds. I will miss the Australian fans but I will be back in 2023," the statement added. he has also withdrawn from ATP Cup and Sydney Tennis Classic, an ATP 250 event, and Mubadala World Tennis Championship exhibition event in Abu Dhabi, saying that he is not fully recovered from his injury.

U-19 Asia Cup: India face Bangladesh in semis

Sharjah | Agencies

India will face Bangladesh in the semi-finals of the U-19 Asia Cup after the final Group B match involving the latter team, and Sri Lanka was called off due to Covid-19 infection of two officials here on Tuesday. Ariful Islam (19) and Md Fahim (27) were unbeaten at the crease with Bangladesh at 130 for 4 in 32.4 overs when the players left the ground as the match was called off. "Asian Cricket Council and Emirates Cricket Board can confirm that the final Group B match of ACC Under 19 Asia Cup scheduled for play today has been called off," Asian Cricket Council said in a statement.



"It is confirmed that two Officials have tested positive for Covid-19. The Officials are currently safe and being treated in accordance with tournament protocols. All personnel associated with this match are undergoing testing protocols and isolating until results are returned," it added. Both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka had already qualified for the semi-finals and the match was to decide the group winner and runners-up. The abandonment means Bangladesh, whose net run-rate has improved, will face India in one semi-final, while Pakistan take on Sri Lanka in the other on December 30. The final will be held on December 31 in Dubai.

SOURAV GANGULY TESTS COVID-POSITIVE, ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL

Kolkata: Former India skipper and the current Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) president Sourav Ganguly has tested positive for COVID-19 and admitted to FO a Kolkata hospital. According to reports, Ganguly had mild fever on Sunday (December 26), and got the positive report on Monday evening (December 27). Ganguly, who had undergone treatment for a heart condition earlier this year, was admitted to Woodlands Hospital soon after his COVID-positive report came in. Family sources were quoted as saying that the hospitalisation was a precautionary measure and there was no cause for alarm. The 49-year-old cricketer-turned-administrator was advised not to isolate at home by medical experts because of his pre-existing heart condition. Ganguly is fully vaccinated against Covid-19. His brother Snehasish Ganguly had also tested COVID-positive earlier this year. The stylish left-handed batter had twice been admitted to hospital in January this year after complaining of chest discomfort. He later underwent two angioplasty procedures.



LYON AND PARIS FC EXPELLED FROM FRENCH CUP FOR FAN DISTURBANCE

Paris | Agencies

Lyon and second-tier Paris FC were both thrown out of the French Cup for the fan violence that forced their December 17 match to be called off at half-time. The disciplinary commission of the French Football Federation (FFF) announced the decision late on Monday after a meeting regarding the hooliganism in which the fans poured onto the pitch at Charley Stadium, launching flares and fighting each other when the two sides tied 1-1 into the break. The FFF statement said, "it had decided that the two clubs are responsible for the incidents" and both the sides would be expelled from the tournament, which means Nice, drawn to face the winner of the tie in the next round, go straight through to the last-16. Lyon would also not be allowed fans at away games in the Ligue 1 for the rest of the season and were fined 52,000 euros. The club themselves had already announced to temporarily ban all sup-



porters from away games, Xinhua reports. For hosts Paris FC, the FFF fined them 10,000 euros and punished them to play five matches behind closed doors. It was the second match this season that Lyon was involved in

fan riots as they had a point deducted in the league earlier after their home game against Marseille was abandoned after Marseille captain Dimitri Payet was hit on the head with a plastic bottle thrown from the stands.

THE ASHES: ROOT & CO GET TROLLED ON SOCIAL MEDIA, FANS SHARE HILARIOUS MEMES

London: Following England's humiliating defeat in the third Ashes Test in Melbourne on Tuesday, cricket fans posted hilarious memes mocking the Joe Root-led side. The visitors slumped to a crushing defeat on Day 3 of the Boxing Day Test, bowled out for 68 as hosts Australia moved into an unassailable 3-0 lead and retained the Ashes. England's second innings total of 68 is their lowest score in Australia since 1904. And cricket fans have taken to social media to mock England with several creative memes. One of them tweeted a photo of the wagon wheel for all 11 of England's players in Melbourne with a straight line from the crease to the pavilion. England have scored 54 ducks in Test cricket this calendar year. To this, a fan tweeted a photo of the England team, comprising a raft of ducks. Meanwhile, Australia have claimed both the Ashes and the T20 World Cup title in just six weeks, bouncing back from the 1-2 Test series defeat to India. They will head into the final two matches of the series hopeful of sweeping the Ashes for the first time since 2013/14.



Congrats on Ashes win, hope you have a good IPL auction, SRH to Warner

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Sunrisers Hyderabad on Tuesday congratulated in-form opener, David Warner, for Australia's Ashes win and hoped that the left-hander has a good IPL 2022 auction when he goes under the hammer next year. Warner was removed as the SRH captain midway through the IPL 2021 season, with Kane Williamson replacing him. He was subsequently even dropped from the SRH playing XI as well. Later, the franchise released him before the mega auction. On Tuesday when Australia retained the Ashes after beating England to take a 3-0 lead in the five-Test series, the official Twitter handle of SRH reacted to their win and congratulated Warner for being a part of the victorious side. "Congrats on the Ashes win Davey -- Looks like you are back to form and enjoying the after-party! On the other hand, we hope you have a good auction," tweeted the official Twitter handle of SRH. The SRH tweet came after the batter mocked SRH head coach Tom Moody when a fan suggested that the franchise has a good auction next year. "Baha doubt it," Warner had tweeted while replying to a fan's tweet which read: "How



about having a good auction for SRH Tom? Please." SRH finished at the last spot in the points table in the 14th edition of the IPL.

PKL 8: All eyes on UP Yoddha in clash with Gujarat Giants

Bengaluru | Agencies

UP Yoddha take on Gujarat Giants in a key match of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) Season 8 at The Sheraton Grand, Whitefield, on Wednesday, with both teams hoping to improve their position in the standings. Pardeep Narwal has struggled to make an impact since joining UP from Patna Pirates and will be up against an experienced Giants defensive unit in what has the makings of an exciting match. Both UP Yoddha and Gujarat Giants have struggled in the first week of the season despite recruiting big names at the auctions. Giants coach Manpreet toughened his defence with the acquisition of Ravinder Pahal and Girish Maruti Emak while UP Yoddha paid Rs 1.65 crore to get the services of star raider Pardeep Narwal. But both the Gujarat defence and the UP



attack have lacked the necessary sharpness required in PKL. Narwal's lack of confidence will be a big worry for UP who will need either Surender Gill or Shrikanth Jadhav to pick up their game. In fact, it was young Rohit Tomar who impressed for UP in their loss against Jaipur which should spark an interesting team selection. One nail-biting win and two narrow losses after a spirited performance has denied UP Yoddha a better rank on the points tally as they

would have hoped for. But head coach Jasveer Singh is confident about the possibilities and is leaving no stone unturned to address the team's lingering issues to overcome the slow start. The Giants will be well-rested as they are taking the mat after a two-day break while UP will be back on the mat after just a day's break and will be looking forward to consolidating their position on the points table. The game is expected to be a high-voltage one given that both

the teams will be eager to earn their second win in the tournament so far. UP Yoddha, put up a spirited display in a close encounter against Jaipur Pink Panthers but narrowly missed out losing the game 29-32. Ahead of the match against the Giants, Jasveer Singh, Head Coach, UP Yoddha said, "We have had really close games so far and I am happy with both our defenders and raiders, but I also realise that we cannot leave the game till the final moments and that's we will have to address in the season ahead. As a team, we need to press hard right from the start and I am confident that we will be able to do so from our next game." UP Yoddha's performance against the giants statistically isn't the best, but what definitely comes to their advantage is the fact that the last time they locked horns with Gujarat Giants, the Yoddha's dominated the game with a comfortable 33-26 win.

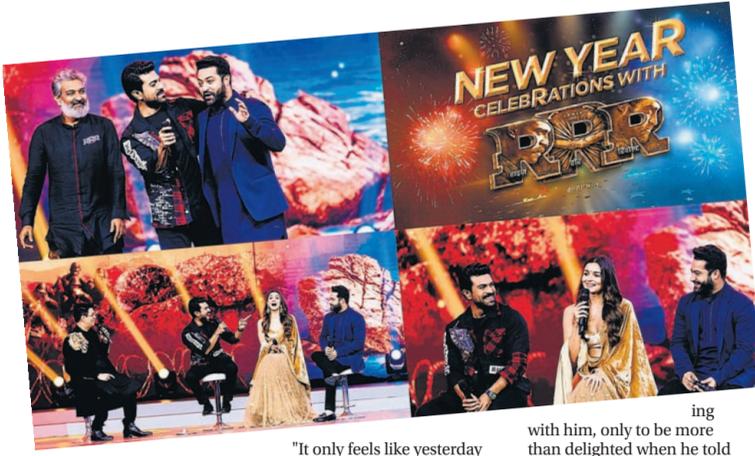


'RRR' TEAM MARKS NEW YEAR WITH BOLLYWOOD BIGGIES AT GRAND EVENT

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

The team of S.S. Rajamouli's highly anticipated magnum opus 'RRR' is engrossed in promoting the movie. Juggling between back-to-back events and interviews, the team held a celebration to mark the New Year on a grand note. The celebration brought together the biggest stars across India under one roof. Termed as the 'Glorious Chapter of Indian Cinema', the commemoration was laced with a star-studded stage. Rajamouli, and 'RRR' stars Ram Charan, Jr NTR, Alia Bhatt, Shriya Saran, and others indulged themselves in the jamboree.

The grand gala night, with the presence of Salman Khan as chief guest and hosted by



Karan Johar, was attended by a huge crowd with the happy camaraderie on the stage.

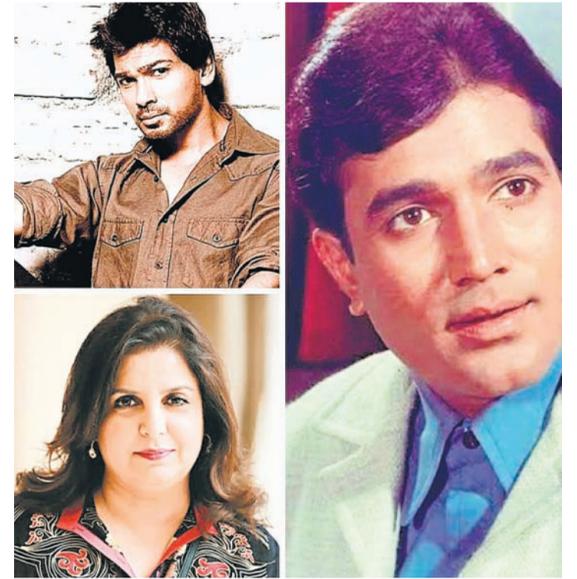
"It only feels like yesterday when I met Rajamouli sir at the Hyderabad airport when I expressed my dream of work-

ing with him, only to be more than delighted when he told me that he has something that I can work on," Alia Bhatt said.

The excited actress said, "It calls for a celebration, as that project turned to be one of the biggest movies of India. There couldn't have been a better way to end the year than this, on such a monumental note."

Jr NTR and Ram Charan also expressed their happiness and shared their experiences working for the most awaited movie. The duo also conveyed that they feel lucky to have got an opportunity to celebrate the New Year at the gala.

Topped with high-octane performances and a resplendent set-up, the New Year celebration event of 'RRR' will be simulcast on Zee Cinema, Zee TV, &TV, Zing and Zee Cinemalu at 11 p.m. on December 31.



Nikhil Dwivedi to produce Rajesh Khanna biopic

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Producer-actor Nikhil Dwivedi is all set to bankroll a film based on the life of superstar Rajesh Khanna. The producer has acquired the rights to Gautam Chintamani's book 'Dark Star: The Loneliness Of Being Rajesh Khanna'. The screen adaptation will be directed by Farah Khan, who will also script the film along with Gautam Chintamani. However, the casting of the film is underway. Shedding light on the development, Nikhil Dwivedi said: "Yes, I've acquired the rights to Gautam Chintamani's book, 'Dark Star', and I'm in talks with Farah Khan to make the film. That's all I can say for now. As and when any major development happens, I'll be happy to share because I'm really very excited about bringing Rajesh Khanna's story to the big screen."

Born Jatin Khanna, and affectionately called 'Kaka' by his industry friends, he was quite a complex personality, and unfortunately, misunderstood by many. The actor is known for delivering 17 mammoth blockbusters in succession, which resulted in mass hysteria, especially among his female followers, back in the 1970s. Talking about the project, Farah Khan said: "Yes I have read Gautam's book and it's very fascinating. It's definitely an exciting story."

However, she declined to enlist the details of the project, saying, "We are in a conversation over this but I cannot comment more."

Asim Riaz takes a dig at Shehnaaz Gill's dance videos with cryptic message



taunt to someone who's try to move on from bad days... I'm very happy to see her like this because I also going through from this pain of losing someone. Shame on

Asim Riaz. Another said: "You are the least deserving guy to judge someone's love/care for him. Just saying. "Oh so @imrealasim saw the few seconds of dancing but he forgot the unimaginable pain for months she went thru after losing a loved one? And rather than helping a colleague move on, speaking such words to get some attention? Waah! #AsimRiaz #ShehnaazGill #ShameOnAsimRiaz," one simply wrote. Shehnaaz was reportedly in a relationship with late actor Sidharth Shukla, whose sudden demise in September left everyone in shock.



'Human' trailer shines a light on the dark underbelly of medical drug trials

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The trailer of medical drama thriller 'Human', which stars Shefali Shah and Kirti Kulhari, was released recently. The film explores the story of fast-tracked drug trials and their ramifications on public health and human lives.

Directed by Vipul Amrutlal Shah and Mozez Singh, the series, will be released on OTT on January 14.

Shefali Shah, who plays the character of Dr Gauri Nath, gives an insight into the series. "Human" as a series is extremely relevant and relatable in today's time. When I read the script, I couldn't help but imagine our current scenario, a world of hospitals and vaccine trials. It makes one question humanity and everything that transpires to keep it intact."

She added: "Gauri Nath is someone you rarely come across. It's one of the most complicated characters I've ever played, and completely out of my comfort zone. She is unpredictable and indecipherable. 'Human' is a Pandora's box of emotions, actions and consequences. And you'd never know what hit you from the dark depths of its complexities (sic)."

A video of Punjabi actress Shehnaaz Gill happily dancing at an engagement party went viral on social media. However, it seems it did not go down with her 'Bigg Boss 13' co-housemate Asim Riaz, who seemed to have taken a dig at her with a cryptic post on social media saying that "people get over loved ones so soon".

Without naming anyone, Asim wrote: "Just saw few dancing clips ... seriously people get over loved ones so soon. Kya baat kya baat... #Newworld."

What led next was fans slamming Asim for his tweet. A fan wrote: "Genuinely, not expected this from you Asim. I was your die hard fan from last 2 years. Seriously giving

I thank viewers for approving Kavya: Madalsa Sharma

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Madalsa Sharma is riding high on the success of her character Kavya Shah in Rajan and Deepa Shahi's 'Anupamaa'. Though the actress plays an antagonist in the show, the audience is in love with her grace, beauty and acting chops.

The show has been topping TRP charts since the very beginning and Madalsa couldn't be happier. She said, "I feel proud and elated to be a part of this show. Hats off to the writers for this magic. And I also thank viewers for approving my character and appreciating my efforts to make Kavya what she is on-screen."

"Anupamaa" recently saw Aneri Vajani coming on-board as Malvika, who is Anuj Kapadia's younger sister and Vanraj Shah's business partner.

Speaking of the latest addition, she said, "A new entry in a show means a new twist, more excitement with added drama. I am sure our team of 'Anupamaa' will reach a new horizon."

So what changes are we going to see in your character now? "Whatever change will happen to Kavya, it will definitely bring more drama," Madalsa concluded.



Kaainat Arora