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NATION

> 02

Cloth markets shut in Delhi to protest GST hike on textiles...



HOLLYWOOD

> 06

'The Rock' turns down Vin Diesel's invitation to rejoin 'Fast & Furious'...



SPORTS

> 07

World No. 11 tennis player Pavlyuchenkova tests positive...



OMICRON TO 'SOON' REPLACE DELTA AS DOMINANT GLOBAL STRAIN

SURGE OF COVID WITH CONFUSION

Amid the surge of Covid-19 cases and new variant 'Omicron', different studies creating more confusion. The World Health Organization (WHO) has cautioned that the more transmissible Omicron together with the currently circulating Delta variants might lead to "a tsunami of cases," putting immense pressure on health systems. Meanwhile, According to John Bell, regius professor of medicine at the Oxford University, the fast-spreading Omicron variant is "not the same disease we were seeing a year ago" and high Covid death rates in the UK are "now history". Bell, who is also the government's life sciences adviser, said that although hospital admissions had increased in recent weeks as Omicron spreads through the population, the disease "appears to be less severe and many people spend a relatively short time in hospital". On the other hand, US-based doctor claims that Omicron variant is "nothing more than a seasonal cold virus" and there is little we can do to stop this virus from infecting people. Afshin Emrani, MD, who holds a Fellowship in the American College of Cardiology (FACC) from the US, said that people who are vaccinated have a much lower chance of dying or getting hospitalised. But there is little it can be done to stop this virus from infecting over 80 per cent of the population, he said. "Masks, vaccine card mandates will make no difference,"

► IN INDIA, THE OMICRON INFECTION TALLY HAS CLIMBED TO 961, OF WHICH 320 PATIENTS HAVE BEEN DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITALS. INDIA ON THURSDAY REGISTERED 13,154 FRESH COVID CASES AND 268 DEATHS IN A SPAN OF 24 HOURS.

► BRITAIN REPORTED A NEW RECORD INCREASE OF 183,037 CORONAVIRUS CASES IN THE LATEST 24-HOUR PERIOD, BRINGING THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CORONAVIRUS CASES IN THE COUNTRY TO 12,559,926.

► THE US, REPORTED OVER 5,12,000 CASES ON TUESDAY, THE HIGHEST SINGLE-DAY SPIKE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC IN 2020.

► THE COVID-19 INFECTIONS WITH THE OMICRON VARIANT IN GERMANY INCREASED BY 2,686, WITHIN ONE DAY TO A TOTAL OF 13,129.

► CANADA REPORTED 23,585 NEW COVID-19 CASES, THE FIRST TIME TO RECORD MORE THAN 20,000 CASES ON A DAILY BASIS.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The fast-spreading Omicron variant is likely to soon replace the Delta strain globally, experts in Singapore have warned, as countries after countries have reported a record surge in Covid cases. "From current data, it looks like Delta will go down over time relative to Omicron," Dr Sebastian Maurer-Stroh, executive director of the Agency for Science, Technology and Research Bioinformatics Institute in Singapore, told The Straits Times on Wednesday. Professor Dale Fisher, a senior consultant at the National University Hospital's Division of Infectious Diseases, said that Omicron is already dominant in Australia, India, Russia, South Africa and the UK. "We are seeing a global transition from Delta to Omicron because with a greater transmissibility,

DELHI SEES 1,313 NEW COVID CASES, INFECTION RATE RISES TO 1.73%

New Delhi: Delhi on Thursday reported 1,313 fresh Covid cases, the highest single-day number since May 26 when the tally was 1,491, but no death was reported, as per the Health Department bulletin. Meanwhile, the Covid infection in the city has crossed 1 per cent and currently stands at 1.73 per cent, the highest in last seven months. According to the Delhi Health department, the city had recorded 1.93 per cent positivity rate on May 26. With the new cases, the cumulative total has risen to 14,46,415, while the death toll remains at 25,107. The number of active Covid cases have crossed the 3,000 mark and stands at 3,081, highest since June 14 when there were 3,226 active cases. The capital has, so far, detected 263 cases of new Covid variant Omicron. Of these, 57 have been discharged from the hospital.

ty, the virus is fitter and has a reproductive advantage," Fisher was quoted as saying. A Covid-19 tracker, developed by UK's University of Cambridge, has predicted that India

MAHA SEES FIRST OMICRON DEATH AMID HUGE SURGE IN COVID-19 CASES

Mumbai: Maharashtra on Thursday saw its first death of an Omicron patient, while it continued to report a massive spike in Covid-19 cases for the second consecutive day, leading to prohibitory orders clamped in Mumbai till January 7 and appeals to people to avoid New Year parties. The state notched a staggering 198 new cases of Omicron, taking up the state tally from 252 to 450, with Mumbai accounting for the highest number, at 190, health officials said. The others are from Thane (4), Pune (2) and Satara and Nanded (1 each). A 52-year-old chronic diabetic man, who had recently arrived from Nigeria, passed away following a heart attack, at the Y.B. Chavan Hospital, in Pimpri Chinchwad (Pune) on Tuesday and his reports on Thursday confirmed he was afflicted by Omicron.

CENTRE WRITES TO 8 STATES, UTS FOR PREVENTIVE MEASURES

New Delhi: The Centre on Thursday wrote letters to eight states and union territories (UTs) over the rise in number of new Covid cases. The letter has been addressed to those states reporting increased numbers of Covid and Omicron variant cases. The letter has been written to the health secretaries of Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. These states have been told to enhance testing, strengthen hospital-level preparedness, increase pace and coverage of vaccination.

China renames 15 places of Arunachal Pradesh in its map



Sumit Kumar Singh | New Delhi

► THE LAW COMES AMID BORDER DISPUTE WITH INDIA. EXPERTS STATED THAT BEIJING IS LIKELY TO DIG IN ITS HEELS AT THE CURRENT POSITIONS AT THE LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL.

► INDIA CLAIMS THAT CHINA IS ILLEGALLY OCCUPYING ABOUT 38,000 SQ KM OF INDIA'S TERRITORY IN AKSAI CHIN, WHICH BORDERS EASTERN LADAKH. PAKISTAN Ceded To CHINA ABOUT 5,180 SQ KM IN 1963 FROM THE INDIAN TERRITORY ILLEGALLY OCCUPIED BY IT.

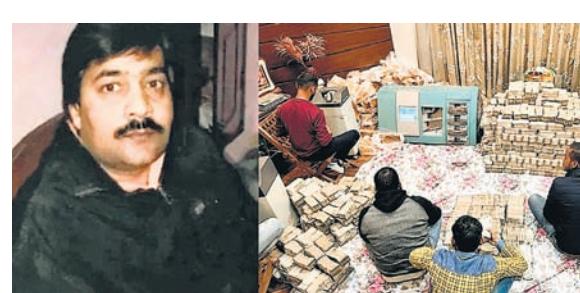
The new border law has 62 articles and seven chapters. As per the law, People's Republic of China shall set up boundary markers on all its land borders to clearly mark the border.

The law prohibits any party from indulging in any activity in the border area which would "endanger national security or affect China's friendly relations with neighbouring countries". It includes construction of any permanent buildings by any person without authorisation from the concerned authority.

Rs 197.49 cr seized from Peeyush Jain is case property, not turnover: DGGI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGII) on Thursday said that total cash recovered from the two premises of Kanpur businessman Peeyush Jain was Rs 197.49 crore and it is a case property and not the turnover of his company. "Investigations are being carried out in a most professional manner based on specific intelligence. Cash in the ongoing case from the residential and factory premises of Peeyush Jain has been kept as case property in the safe custody of the State Bank of India and further investigation is pending. No deposit of tax dues has been made by Odochem Industries from the seized money to dis-



charge their tax liabilities and their tax liabilities are yet to be determined," said a DGII official.

Earlier, it was reported that the DGII had decided to treat the cash recovered from the premises of Peeyush Jain as the turnover of his company. It was also stated that after admitting his liability, Peeyush Jain has, with the approval of the DGII, will

deposit a total amount of Rs 52 crore as tax dues and will be freed from all allegations. It was also learnt that the DGII department has agreed with the deposition of Peeyush Jain and finalised the tax liability accordingly.

However, on Thursday the DGII made it clear that there was nothing going like that. The DGII refuted all the claims.

PM WANTED BJP-NCP TIE-UP FOR MAHA GOVT, I REJECTED OFFER: PAWAR

Quaid Najmi | Mumbai



A fresh political row erupted after Nationalist Congress Party President Sharad Pawar reiterated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was keen for an NCP-Bharatiya Janata Party alliance government in Maharashtra after the October 2019 Assembly polls threw up a fractured verdict. Pawar referred to his meeting with the PM on November 20, 2019. At that time, Pawar had confirmed how Modi wanted NCP-BJP to "work together" and even offered a central Cabinet berth to his daughter and Baramati MP Supriya Sule. "There was a discussion about an alliance... I had told the PM right in his office that it was not possible... I would not like to keep them in the dark," Pawar recalled the incident. NCP National Spokesperson and Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik endorsed the statement saying it happened in Parliament House and he was also present then.

Kalicharan sent to 2-day police remand, charged with sedition

Team Absolute | Raipur

Religious leader Kalicharan Maharaj, who was arrested on Thursday and charged with sedition for allegedly abusing Mahatma Gandhi, has been sent to police remand for two days by a court. The self-proclaimed godman was arrested from Madhya Pradesh by the Chhattisgarh police in the early hours of Thursday. He was later brought to Raipur and presented at a local court. Kalicharan had used abusive language against Mahatma Gandhi while praising his assassin Nathuram Godse at a religious event -- "Dharma Sansad", on December 25-26, in Raipur. He made the derogatory remarks



against Mahatma Gandhi at the event in which leaders of both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were invited.

Kalicharan's remarks against the Father of the Nation hadirked Chhattisgarh's ruling Congress party, and Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel instructed the police team to arrest the godman.

An FIR was lodged against him at Raipur's Tikrapara police station.

After days of intense search, Raipur police finally picked him on Thursday from Bageshwar Dham, about 25 km from Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh and brought him to Raipur by road. The arrest, however, has sparked a political row.

ALL PARTIES IN UP WANT POLLS ON TIME: CEC



Lucknow | Agencies

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sushil Chandra on Thursday said that representatives of all political parties who met him during his visit to Lucknow, have said that the Assembly elections should be conducted on time following all Covid-19 proto-

cols. This is an indication that there will be no postponement of the elections in the poll-bound states.

Addressing the media at the end of his three-day visit, the CEC said that Uttar Pradesh now has 52.08 lakh new voters who will exercise their franchise in the upcoming assembly elections.

The CEC said that some political parties said that the number of rallies should be limited in view of the pandemic and some wanted deployment of paramilitary forces. "We received some complaints about officers being biased and we have noted all complaints and suggestions," he said.

Rajasthan police conduct identification parade of 'Chintu, Pintu and Kalu' as 70 donkeys go missing

► WHILE CONDUCTING THIS SEARCH, THE POLICE CAUGHT 15 DONKEYS AND BROUGHT THEM TO THE POLICE STATION, BUT THEIR OWNERS REFUSED TO TAKE THEM AS THE ANIMALS DID NOT RESPOND TO THEIR NAMES.

► THE OWNERS SAID THAT THE NAMES OF SOME DONKEYS WERE CHINTU, PINTU AND KALU AND WHEN THEY CALLED THEM BY THESE NAMES, NONE OF THESE ANIMALS RESPONDED WHICH PROVED THAT THEY WERE NOT THEIR ANIMALS.

Archana Sharma | Jaipur

In a bizarre case reported from Hanumangarh district of Rajasthan, police have had to conduct an identification parade of donkeys at a police station after 70 donkeys went missing and their owners lodged complaints of theft in the district in Khuriyan town area.

In the meantime, police found 17 donkeys and conducted their identification parade. However, their owners said they were lookalikes of their animals and refused



to take them. Earlier, soon after the complaints were registered, the police allegedly preferred to sit on them. However, a protest staged by the owners and CPI(M) workers at the police station on Tuesday evening forced the police to go in search of the missing donkeys.

The owners staging a sit-in asked the police to leave the donkeys from where they had brought them and again asked them to get their own animals.

They said that the donkeys are their means of livelihood.

They informed that the price of a donkey is about Rs 20,000 and 70 stolen donkeys means it is a theft of Rs 14 lakh. The owners said that the donkeys carry loads and their means of livelihood ended after their donkeys were stolen.

Khuiyan police station SHO Vijendra Sharma told the media, "We have formed teams to trace these animals." CPI (M) leader Mangej Choudhary said that the reason they have to stage a sit-in is that complaints of missing animals are rising by the day.

CLOTH MARKETS SHUT IN DELHI TO PROTEST GST HIKE ON TEXTILES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Cloth markets in the national capital were shut on Thursday in protest against the Goods and Services Tax (GST) hike on textiles.

Cloth markets of Chandni Chowk, Karol Bagh, Pitampura, Lajpat Nagar, among others, were shut.

Besides Delhi, markets in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra were also shut. Though some markets were shut for two hours only, others were closed for the entire day.

The traders have threatened that if the government does not roll back the hike, they will go on an indefinite strike.

Disappointed with the hike in GST, the Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI) and other associations of cloth traders called for the closure of textile and garment markets on Thursday.

The Delhi Mercantile Association said: "From January 1, 2022, the GST on textiles will be 12 per cent. The Union government increased the GST from five to 12 per cent. Everybody knows that



traders have not been faring well during the past two years due to the corona pandemic."

On Wednesday, various traders' organisations led by the CTI, staged a protest at Connaught Place.

The traders said that if 12 per cent

GST is implemented, then they will not have capital due to which all small workshops will face closure and many people will evade tax.

In such circumstances, it would be very difficult to compete with China and Bangladesh, the traders added.

BIHAR DGP ASKS GIRLS TO GO FOR ARRANGED MARRIAGE

Patna: Bihar DGP S.K. Singhal on Thursday suggested girls to marry with the consents of their parents. He also said that love marriages have bigger consequences for girls in the society. Addressing a gathering as part of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's 'Samaj Sudhar Abhiyan' (social reforms campaign) in Samastipur, Singhal said: "The daughters should go for arranged marriage with the consent and blessings of their parents. We have witnessed a large number of cases where girls took decisions for marriage on their own, leading to unpleasant consequences."

"We have seen cases where girls went for love marriage and then got killed, while many were also forced into flesh trade. It is the parents who have pay the price for such decisions," Singhal said.

Heavy to extremely heavy rainfall warning for Chennai, surroundings

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Several places across Chennai and three surrounding Tamil Nadu districts witnessed over 100 mm of rainfall through the day on Thursday and are expected to receive similar heavy to extremely heavy rainfall for next three days.

Apart from Chennai, Tiruvallur, Kanchipuram, and Chengalpattu districts received heavy to extremely heavy rains, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said, adding, from 8.30 a.m. till 7.45 p.m., the MRC Nagar, Chennai received 198 mm, Chennai Nungambakkam AWS saw 159.5 mm, YMCA Nandanam 152 mm, Anna University 121 mm, ACS Medical college (Kanchipuram district) - 108.5, Meenambakkam ISRO AWS 108 mm, Satyabhama University 58.5 mm, and Tirur KVK



(Tiruvallur district) 46.5 mm.

"Isolated heavy to very rainfall activity is likely to continue over north coastal Tamil Nadu and adjoining areas of south coastal Andhra Pradesh during next three days and decrease thereafter," the IMD said.

"There will be increased

rainfall activity over south-east peninsular India during next three days and decrease thereafter. There will be isolated heavy rainfall over coastal Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal on Friday and Saturday and over south coastal Andhra Pradesh till January 1," the forecast added.

Unable to bear insult, college student ends life in Chennai

CHENNAI | Agencies

First-year student of M.A. at Presidency College, Chennai, M. Kumar ended his life by jumping before a double-decker train after sending an audio message to his friends and family, stating that he did not want to live a life given as alms by the students of Pachiyappa's college, Chennai and that he did not want to live a life given as alms by the rival students.

He apologised to his mother and friends and the audio clip ended with the rumbplings of a train. Kumar, who returned home after attending classes on Tuesday after-

noon, told his mother that he has to attend a wedding and will come back home late.

Initially, Kumar's family and friends dismissed the audio clip but when he did not return home till

Wednesday morning and search was conducted, police found his body on the railway track. Thiruninravur police, which is investigating the case said that Kumar jumped before the double-decker train around 8.40 p.m., a few metres from the

"Based on several global and Indian scientific researches, if you get an infection, you are generally protected for 9 months," he said at press briefing on the Covid situation.

Immunological memory to SARS CoV2 lasted for 8 months in the natural settings as per a study in the US, published in journal Science. Another study from China says that antibody and cellular immune responses per-



MUMBAI ON HIGH ALERT AFTER INTEL OF KHALISTANI ATTACK ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

- Mumbai has been put on high alert in view of intel of Khalistani attack
- Mumbai Police has cancelled all pre-approved leaves, weekly offs of officials
- Central agencies alerted Mumbai of Khalistan attack on New Year's eve

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai Police on Thursday issued high alert after it said information was received that Khalistani elements could carry out terrorist attacks in the city. Giving details to news agency ANI, Mumbai Police said all the police holidays and weekly holidays have been cancelled for Friday and every policeman posted in Mumbai will be on duty.

Mumbai Police has cancelled all holidays or weekly offs for December 31 over security concerns in the city. The decision was taken after an alert was received from central agencies over Khalistani elements planning to target Mumbai on New Year's eve.



As per reports, extremely high security is expected to be witnessed especially in the congested area of Mumbai on December 31.

Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) is already in place in Mumbai, though it's in view of Covid.

In addition to this, the police order prohibits all New Year celebrations, programmes, functions and gatherings in any closed or open space, including

hotels, restaurants, banquet halls, bars, pubs, orchestras, resorts, clubs and rooftops. Quaiser Khalid, Commissioner of Police, Mumbai Railway, said in view of the alert in Mumbai, tight security has been deployed at the major stations of Mumbai, Dadar, Bandra Churchgate, CSMT, Kurla and other stations.

He also added that more than 3000 railway officers will be deployed on Friday at various sensitive places.

NO BAIL FOR UNION MINISTER NARAYAN RANE'S MLA SON

Sindudurg: In a huge setback for BJP lawmaker and Union Minister Narayan Rane's son, Nitesh Rane, a local court in Maharashtra's Sindudurg on Thursday rejected his anticipatory bail application. His lawyer Sangram Desai said that since the bail application has been declined, they would move the Bombay High Court soon after getting the copy of the court orders. Along with Nitesh Rane - who is currently "missing", the bail plea of one of his associates and co-accused was also rejected in the assault case against them. The court order came after a tough legal battle between the prosecution lawyers and the defence team before the judge since Tuesday. However, advocate Desai said it was wrong to term Nitesh Rane as an "absconder" even as the Maharashtra Police are now likely to step up efforts to arrest him.

3,671 New Covid Cases In Mumbai on Thursday, 46% Higher Than Wednesday



India Covid Cases: Delhi, Gurgaon, Kolkata, and Bengaluru are among the other big cities that have witnessed an uptick in infections over the last week.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai saw a massive surge in fresh coronavirus cases yet again today with 3,671 infections - 46% higher compared to yesterday - amid concerns over Omicron, the new variant which has been labeled as "highly infectious" by experts and has sparked worry over a third wave in the country. India's financial capital has seen a five-fold increase over the last week in the daily surge in Covid cases - the city logged 683 infections last Friday. Fearing a fresh coronavirus wave, the city's civic body - the Brihanmumbai Municipal

Corporation - has reactivated its ward-level war rooms to tackle the increasing number of cases. These war rooms are set up in all 24 wards to manage hospital admissions, oxygen and medicine requirements and vaccination as well.

The war rooms - that follow the "test, trace and treat" strategy - also keep a track of patients isolated at their homes. While cases have been rising, the Mumbai civic body has said, more than 90 per cent of the cases are asymptomatic.

This afternoon, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray met the state's Covid task force. One of the key discussions at the high-level meet-

ing was on the new variant that is believed to be driving up the infections in the state, which has the highest overall cases in the country (66,65,386).

In Mumbai, despite a ban on large gatherings ahead of the New Year's celebrations, the streets are still witnessing huge crowds.

Across India, so far 961 Omicron cases have been logged so far, the government said today, stressing the country is prepared to tackle the spike and there is "no need to panic".

Delhi, Gurgaon, Kolkata, and Bengaluru are among the other big cities that have witnessed an uptick in infections over the last week.

MALEGAON 2008 CASE: END THREATS, ENTICEMENT OF WITNESSES, URGES CONGRESS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a significant development, the Maharashtra Congress on Thursday urged the Maha Vikas Aghadi government to ensure that the witnesses in the sensitive Malegaon 2008 blasts case "are not pressurised, threatened or enticed".

In a letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Home Minister Dilip Walse-Patil, Congress state Working President Arif Naseem Khan said the terror case has prominent names as prime accused, including Bharatiya Janata Party MP Sadvi Pragya Singh Thakur, Col. P.S. Purohit, retired Major Ramesh Upadhyay, Dayanand Pandey and several others.

"I have learnt that in order to save all these accused in the Malegaon 2008 bomb blast case, some organisations and individuals are threatening, pressurising and luring the witnesses to make them 'hostile' before the court," Khan said.

The blast occurred in Malegaon on September 29, 2008, near a mosque when Muslims were offering prayers,



and left at least nine dead and another more than 80 injured, and the subsequent probe revealed the involvement of what was called 'saffron terror groups'.

Khan urged Thackeray and Walse-Patil that such groups or persons should be investigated by a high-level committee and stringent action must be initiated against them for influencing or harassing the witness-

ees.

The case was probed by the Maharashtra Anti Terrorist Squad and later taken over by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), and has a total of 495 witnesses.

From these, 220 witnesses have already testified, of which 15 have already been declared 'hostile', with the likelihood of more witnesses going against the probe agency

owing to pressures exerted by some organisations and persons, Khan pointed out. The Congress leader said that Walse-Patil had assured he would do the needful in the matter in order to ensure a free and fair trial at the day-to-day hearing before a Special Court. Khan's letter assumes significance, coming a day after a witness in the case made a shocking claim that he was allegedly detained for a week by the ATS in 2008 and then compelled to name five RSS leaders, including Yogi Adityanath, who is now Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. The witness, who is one of the trustees of Abhinav Bharat, a right-wing group, also contended that the ATS did not record his statement though the agency had attached his purported five-pager statement in its charge sheet filed in 2009. During the cross-examination, the witness named Adityanath, Swami Aseemanand, Indresh Kumar, a Prof. Deodhar and one Kakaji, whose names he was allegedly forced to take by one police official Chavan, DCP Shrirao and an IPS officer Param Bir Singh.

Last weekend, at a two-day religious congregation (Dharam Sansad) held in Chhattisgarh, Kalicharan Maharaj had allegedly made certain derogatory statements against the Father of the Nation and also eulogised his assassin Nathuram Godse, which kicked off a major political row in different parts of India.

Multiple police complaints have been lodged against him in Maharashtra in Pune, Akola, including

Maha police team in Chhattisgarh to seek custody of Kalicharan

Team Absolute | Pune

The Pune Police has rushed a team to Chhattisgarh to seek custody of the arrested preacher, Kalicharan Maharaj who is accused of making objectionable remarks against Mahatma Gandhi, official sources said here on Thursday.

Last weekend, at a two-day religious congregation (Dharam Sansad) held in Chhattisgarh, Kalicharan Maharaj had allegedly made certain derogatory statements against the Father of the Nation and also eulogised his assassin Nathuram Godse, which kicked off a major political row in different parts of India.

Multiple police complaints have been lodged against him in Maharashtra in Pune, Akola, including

one by Nationalist Congress Party Dr Jitendra Awadh in Thane, seeking to book Kalicharan Maharaj - who hails from Akola in Maharashtra - for his utterances. The police arrested him from Khajuraho on Thursday morning, even as Maharashtra Police waits to book him under various charges, as descendants of

Gandhi have also flayed him. The matter also figured in the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly which ended on December 28, when the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi and Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party leaders had slammed Kalicharan Maharaj for his statements, and had demanded stringent action against him.

CRIME CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN MAHARASHTRA: STATE HOME MINISTER



Patil also warned people of the increasing COVID-19 infection in Maharashtra. He said, "Before welcoming the new year, we all should keep in mind that COVID-19 is increasing a lot in our Maharashtra and throughout the country."

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A crime conference will be held with all Maharashtra officials to apprise them of the safety procedures which will be operational from the next year, said Maharashtra Home Minister

Expect 150% more cases in third wave compared to second in Maharashtra: Centre



Alarmed by a massive surge in Covid-19 cases in more than half a dozen districts across the state, more stringent norms are on the cards to tackle the pandemic.

Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray is expected to take a task force meeting in a day or two and declare measures.

The state feels the situation in Mumbai, Thane, Nashik, Pune, Solapur, Sangli and Satara is disturbing owing to a lack of discipline and non-adherence to norms. The number of active cases increased from 6,481 on December 14 to 11,492 on December 28 in the state. In Mumbai, active cases increased from 1,769 to 5,803 during the same period.

According to the Centre, during the third wave, there will be 150% more cases compared to the second wave in the state. "Under such circumstances, we have no option but to tackle the situation on a war footing. We will have to enforce Covid norms. The Centre has asked us to make preparations," a senior public health official said.

The official said a provi-

sion of Rs 4,235 crore has been made for providing medicines and infrastructure. Out of this, the state will contribute Rs 1,100 crore, Centre Rs 1,185 crore, and SDRF and DPDC Rs 2,000 crore. The fund will be at the disposal of the public health department. "We have taken note of the shortcomings during the first and second wave. We are sure we will

not face that problem now. We have adequate funds and manpower to tackle the situation," he said.

During the peak of the second wave, total cases in the state stood at 8.63 lakh.

As per estimates for the third wave, total cases in the state may cross 13 lakh. Of this, eight lakh are expected to be home-quarantined and five lakh hospitalized.

'BANDRA WONDERLAND' CLOSED FOR VISITORS TILL JANUARY 2 AMID COVID SURGE



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bandra Wonderland in Mumbai, which was inaugurated a few days back, has been closed for visitors from today i.e. December 30 till January 2, due to rising COVID-19 cases in the city. In the wake of the alleged third wave of Covid-19, the Maharashtra government has not only put restrictions on the grand New Year's celebrations but also closed Mumbai's Bandra Reclamation area which was lit up for the New Year. As per the report, a huge crowd was gathering in the area, violating the Covid norms.

According to the media reports, Mumbai police have banned New Year celebrations and gatherings in any closed or open space. No celebrations have been permitted in hotels and restaurants, as descendedents of

an official said on Thursday.

These orders have been issued under Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) Section 144 by Deputy Commissioner of Police (operations) S Chaitanya, and will be in force till January 7, 2022.

Mumbai reported 2,510 on Wednesday

On Wednesday, Mumbai reported 2,510 fresh coronavirus cases, the highest daily addition since May 8, and one death. This has taken the total tally to 7,75,808 and the death toll to 16,375, a civic official said. Around 85 new cases infected with the Omicron variant were detected in the last 24 hours.

Four including auto-rickshaw driver arrested for stealing Rs 2.5 lakh from commuter



Team Absolute | Mumbai

An auto-rickshaw driver and three others were arrested for allegedly stealing Rs 2.50 lakh from a commuter in Mumbai. The accused had used a fake number plate to avoid getting caught.

On December 12, the complainant, who works as a real estate developer in Andheri, left for work from his home in Santacruz with a bag containing Rs 2.50 lakh. He had returned to India from Italy just a week ago.

One of the arrested accused Muzzamil Mansuri, 34, a rickshaw driver offered to drop him to Andheri in his share rickshaw for Rs 20. Two other accused were already seated in the rickshaw.

The complainant sat in the rickshaw and at some distance, the fourth accused came and sat on the front seat with the driver. At some distance, Mansuri asked him to go and sit at the back as cops may catch them at the traffic signal. The accused told the complainant to keep his bag in the rear as there was no space for them.

As the complainant kept the bag behind, one of the accused kept his shoulder around it and another replaced the money in the

Top Maharashtra leaders who attended Assembly, weddings test positive for Covid-19

The leaders who attended the winter session of the Maharashtra Legislature Assembly and weddings have tested positive for Covid-19.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Many top Maharashtra leaders, including ministers, have tested positive for Covid-19 in the last couple of days.

Apart from mingling during the winter session of the Maharashtra Legislature, most of these leaders have attended the reception of NCP state president and minister Jayant Patil's son's marriage and BJP leader Harshvardhan Patil's daughter's marriage to Bal Thackeray's grandson. NCP leader Supriya Sule who attended both functions has tested positive along with husband Sadanand. Harshvardhan Patil has tested positive. Jayant Patil's nephew and minister Prajakta Pawar has also been found infected with Covid-19. Other leaders who tested positive during the winter session include

Tribal Development Minister KC Padavi, Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad, BJP MLA Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil, BJP's Hingana MLA Sameer Meghe, and BJP MLA from Parvati, Pune, Madhuri Misal. Two staff members of Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis's office have also been infected with Covid-19 during the session. These leaders who have tested positive have attended the session and the functions. In the last week, there have been at least five VIP marriages in the state. Apart from Jayant Patil's son and Harshvardhan Patil's daughter, Shiv Sena MLC Ravindra Fatak's son Shiv Sena MLA from Kannad in Aurangabad Uday Singh Rajput's son, and Former BJP MLA Shivajirao Kardile's son got married. Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut who attended a marriage ceremony in Nashik on

Wednesday said that these marriages were decided long ago. "Covid numbers are doubling up and it's a cause for concern. CM has called for new restrictions during night these restrictions should not be extended to day time if it happens, it will bring the economic wheel of the state to a standstill. If this has to be avoided, everyone should take care." Raut also blamed PM Modi for not wearing a mask and said that he also follows the PM in not wearing a mask. "The PM says use a mask, but he himself doesn't wear one. So, we will listen to the PM and follow him and hence I don't use a mask. The CM uses a mask, but the nation's leader doesn't use a mask. People haven't seen him wearing a mask. The PM should himself wear a mask in public functions." State administration should take care. As far as marriages

are concerned, there will be a way out soon. Still, I have seen that people have followed rules. Supriya Sule attended marriages, I also attended a few, Prajakta Pawar, Varsha Gaikwad have tested positive. Everyone should take care," Raut said. Meanwhile, Deputy CM Ajit Pawar while talking to reporters in Pune appealed to everyone to take care. "It is not only marriages of politicians, even when you have a marriage in your house, you invite us and tell us that Covid guidelines will be followed, but the actual picture there is different. If this keeps happening frequently, we will have to think about getting out. But if we as politicians don't venture out, then you (media) will only say that we are not going out. Covid rules should also be followed. We as rulers should not only be telling about it, but we also should follow them."

EDITOR'S SPECS

HEAT OF DECEMBER CONTINUES

This is the third December in a row that the government is facing protests in the country specially in the national capital with resident doctors on strike over the issue of NEET PG counselling. The doctors strike comes at a time when the threat of a third wave of Covid-19, especially the Omicron variant, looms over the country. In 2020 it was the farmers' agitation which had made the government uneasy and in 2019 it was the countrywide agitation over NRC-CAA in which Delhi's Shaheen Bagh became the epicentre of the protest. The government this year resolved the farmers' protest by withdrawing the contentious farm laws but now it has to tackle the resident doctors' protest over NEET. The Health Minister and the Resident Doctors Association could not reach a consensus on Tuesday over the issue. The resident doctors have been protesting for the past 13 days over the delay in NEET-PG 2021 counselling. The government did not focus on the issue initially and now the agitation has spread from Delhi to other parts of the country. The 15-month-long farmers' agitation started against the three contentious farm laws after they were passed in 2020. The agitation petered off after the three laws -- the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill 2020 -- were repealed by Parliament. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) was notified on December 12, 2019 and came into force on January 10, 2020. The persons covered under the CAA may apply for citizenship after the rules are notified under the CAA. There were huge protests in several parts of the country following the government's announcement that the nationwide NRC will be done in late 2019 and early 2020.

absolute edit



Big response but bigger challenges before Akhilesh Yadav in 2022

Swelling crowds, enthused cadres, increasing ground support and a cleverly stitched up alliance may seem a perfect recipe for elections for the Samajwadi Party, but this picture perfect cannot hide the challenges that Akhilesh Yadav faces in the 2022 polls.

For the first time in his two-decade long political career, Akhilesh is leading a campaign single-handedly with almost no back-up mechanism in the party.

Party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav is conspicuous by his absence from the campaign and his health issues may not permit him to address more than one or two meetings. In 2012, when Akhilesh led his party to a comfortable majority, he was firmly backed by his father, while he travelled across the state. Mulayam would carefully chart his programme, identify leaders who would accompany him and also decide on issues that had to be addressed in different regions.

This time, Akhilesh is the sole campaigner and star attraction of his party and this naturally adds to the challenge and the burden. Since he took over as the party president in 2017, Akhilesh has not allowed second rung leadership in the party to develop and, today, he runs a one-man army with not even his cousins taking part in the political exercise.

The Samajwadi Party also lacks mature leaders who can deal with situations in the absence of Akhilesh. Party veterans have either passed away -- like Beni Prasad Varma, Bhagwati Singh -- or are completely side-lined. The BJP, on the other hand, has a



galaxy of campaigners that simultaneously hold fort. On any given day -- as elections draw close -- there are, at least, six BJP leaders addressing meetings in the state. Another challenge that Akhilesh faces is to rein in overzealous party workers. Buoyed up by the people's response in Akhilesh's rallies, the untamed cadres often go overboard leading to major embarrassments for the party. For instance, a group of party workers in Kanpur were arrested on Wednesday for attempting to create ruckus during the Prime Minister's visit on Tuesday. As the BJP underlined the incident as an example of 'SP's goondaism', Akhilesh was compelled to expel the five party workers. Akhilesh also faces the challenge of striking a perfect balance between his Muslim and Hindu supporters.

The BJP has forced him to abandon the policy of Muslim

appeasement -- or at least, not be vocal about it -- and peddle soft Hindutva. As Akhilesh cautiously moves ahead, trying to balance the two ideologies, his Muslim leaders tend to act as irritants.

For instance, the recent statements made by SP MPs Shafiqur -- Rehman Barq and S.T. Hasan, embarrassed the SP to such an extent that Akhilesh was forced to disassociate himself from his own MPs. Meanwhile, as the time for ticket distribution draws near, Akhilesh will also face a situation when he will have to handle discontent within his own party. Seats that are given away to multiple allies, will leave the SP workers on these seats simmering with anger. The party could face internal sabotage and it will be testing time for Akhilesh to deal with the situation because the SP leaders have been working for five years in their respective constituencies to contest elections. Akhilesh has never dabbled in coalition politics and his new allies like Om Prakash Rajbhar, are known to drive a hard bargain in politics. How he keeps all his allies in good humour, remains to be seen. Another problem that Akhilesh has is his inaccessibility. He mostly remains unavailable to party workers and also the media and no one in the party is authorised to take a call on his behalf. Unlike Akhilesh, Mulayam Singh Yadav -- despite his advancing years, still picks up the phone on random basis and talks to senior journalists and party workers, especially old timers. It is this that keeps still Mulayam clued into ground realities and also tuned in to emerging situations.

A wish for transforming healthcare in India

P. Raghu Ram

Most health care in India is presently provided by the private sector, principally funded via out-of-pocket payments. The once upon a time ubiquitous 'Family doctor' concept in the country has almost disappeared and has become extinct.

Most 'worried well' who are asymptomatic, and equally, those with minor common ailments rush to hospitals. It may be pertinent to point out here that it is all the more important that patients with simple non urgent ailments are kept away from hospitals, which until recently, were stretched to their limits & overwhelmed with managing Covid suspect/Covid positive patients.

According to a report published by the Medical Council of India in 2020, around 44,000 Postgraduate seats are available for 55,000 doctors who graduate every year. In other words, the vast majority will become Specialists. Although "Family Medicine" DNB Courses conducted by the National Board of Examinations are available, there are very few applicants because the number of centres

accredited to train doctors wishing to pursue a career as a Family Physician, are few and far between.

The concept of visiting the 'Family doctor' before a patient sees a Specialist is the standard practice in the UK. In Britain, the General Practitioner (GP) is the principal treating doctor who is able to manage most minor issues sensibly based on evidence and refer patients to Specialist Centres only when needed. The NHS model of providing universal primary health care through public-private partnership (PPP) may be appropriate for adaptation in the Indian context. The three primary elements of primary care that have a bearing on improving healthcare outcomes are:

- Preventive care (such as vaccination, Screening, measuring blood pressure)
- Care of chronic disease (Most of the chronic illness can be managed effectively outside hospital)

Diagnostic triage and control of hospital referral (effective primary care sorts the serious from the non-serious by speedy and accurate diagnosis, directs hospital referrals to

the most appropriate speciality and ensures that expensive hospital resources are expended on those who will benefit most).

India has about 8,00,000 medical doctors of which about 6,00,000 are GPs. But more than three quarters of these are in urban centers which make up only about 20 per cent of India's population. Access to a doctor in urban India is about the same as it would be on average in the US. However, the ratio of GPs to patients outside these metro areas is about 1 GP for every 7,500 patients on average and as low as 1 for every 25,000 people in more remote areas. General Practitioners must be "gatekeepers" of our healthcare system. They should be the first point of contact for patients for any sickness or preventive visit. India must invest in training GPs in addition to popularising and sensitising young impressionable students who have joined MBBS Course about the Family Medicine concept. Furthermore, Primary Healthcare infrastructure in rural India (where more than 70 per cent of our population resides) must be strengthened so that more

patients are served locally by GPs, thus obviating the arduous & time consuming task of travelling long distances for assessment / treatment.

It is my heartfelt desire that the Government of India and powers that be initiate concrete and implementable measures to ensure that the 'Family Doctor' concept is revived. We, as a country, must switch from the doctrine of practising the more aggressive "Americanised Medicine" to "British Medicine", which is far more conservative and evidence-based. An important component of the Hippocratic oath is to "keep the good of the patient as the highest priority" and this landmark step would pave the path in this direction by ensuring well controlled uniform effective healthcare to the citizenry.

(The writer is an eminent breast cancer surgeon, Padma Shri awardee and Director, KIMS-Ushalakshmi Centre for Breast Diseases, Hyderabad)

international

PROTESTERS SET FIRE TO AUSTRALIA'S OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

Canberra | Agencies

Protesters on Thursday set fire to the Old Parliament House in Australia's capital city of Canberra, which badly damaged the front entrance of the building.

Firefighters were called to the site at about 11.30 a.m. (local time), reports Xinhua news agency.

Video footage by local media showed protesters at the front of the building.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported that the Old Parliament House, which now houses the Museum of Australian Democracy, was forced to close last week when protesters started a fire at the door, which was later believed to be a ceremonial blaze.

ABC reported that crowds began gathering last week as the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, a site on the lawns outside the Old Parliament House for the political rights of the indigenous Australians, is to celebrate its 50th anniversary.

The Old Parliament House was used for parliamentary purpose from 1927 to 1988, when a new building was inaugurated.

Ben Morton, special minister of state and

US TO APPOINT 2 FEMALE DIPLOMATS TO REPRESENT WASHINGTON IN KABUL

Washington | Agencies

The deteriorating situation in reference to the rights for women in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule has prompted US President Joe Biden's administration to appoint two senior female diplomats, assigned to represent Washington in Kabul.

In a release on Wednesday, the State Department said that Special Envoy Rina Amiri and Senior Advisor Stephenie Foster "bring decades of public policy, diplomatic, and advocacy experience to the Department". While, Amiri had previously served as a US special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan during former President Barack Obama's administration, Foster has earlier worked for the State Department. "I welcome Rina Amiri back to the Department as the Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights, with her breadth and depth of expertise and strong track record advising governments, the US, peacebuilding organisations, and think tanks," Secretary of State Antony Blinken was quoted as saying in the release.

Blinken said that Amiri will "work on issues of critical importance to me, this administration, and US national security: the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women, girls, and other at-risk populations in all of their diversity."

"We desire a peaceful, stable, and secure Afghanistan, where all Afghans can live and thrive in political, economic, and social inclusivity."



Special Envoy Amiri will work closely with me toward that goal," he added.

Regarding Foster, the Secretary of State said her "diverse public and private sector experiences, including at the Department, and her passion for advancing women and girls' safety and equality will help advance around-the-clock relocation and resettlement efforts on behalf of our Afghan allies and their families."

Afghanistan is currently in the midst of severe economic and humanitarian challenges which have further deteriorated since the fall of the country to the Taliban on August 15. According to the UN, Afghan women and girls are paying an especially high price for the ongoing poverty and hunger in the country.

Following the political change, secondary girls' schools have remained closed in most of the coun-

try's provinces, including Kabul.

Earlier this week, the Taliban-led government's Ministry of Virtue and Vice issued a new directive that orders women who are travelling long distances by road should be accompanied by a male relative, and they should wear a hijab, to cover their head and face. The directive also banned playing music in the vehicles.

It also ordered shops not to show the heads of female mannequins as it is against the Islamic Sharia law.

Many human rights activists have condemned the rigid laws imposed by the Taliban. On Tuesday, Kabul also witnessed women led rally to protest against the latest travel bans imposed by the Taliban, demanding and calling on the global community to come to their rescue.

"I want to tell the world, tell the Taliban to stop killing. We want freedom, we want justice, we want human rights," said Nayera Koahistani as she along with dozens of other women protest on the streets of Kabul. The Biden administration has been criticised for not prioritising the safe passage for women, rights activists and others who had been targeted by the Taliban in the past.

Even though, Biden maintained that his decision to withdraw from Afghanistan was the right thing to do; concerns over women rights and an inclusive government in Afghanistan would remain as part of Washington's demands with the Taliban, if the latter wants global recognition.

AUSTRALIA JOLTED BY INDONESIAN EARTHQUAKE

Canberra: Parts of northern Australia was jolted by a 7.4-magnitude earthquake that hit off the coast of Indonesia on Thursday, with no immediate reports of damage or injuries.

The tremor was felt at about 3.55 a.m. in Darwin, capital of Northern Territory, Xinhua news agency quoted the local media reports as saying.

There was no tsunami threat, said the Australian Bureau of Meteorology on Twitter.

Many local residents were woken up by the shake. "I woke up at about 4 a.m. at the strong quake, which then lasted for another 20 seconds," Ben, a Darwin resident, told Xinhua. "I could hear dogs barking and my neighbours getting up as well." Some people took to social media to talk about the quake.

"The ground just shook for a full minute in Darwin," Zizi Averill tweeted. "Nothing like a possible 4am earthquake to remind you 2021 isn't done with us yet."

"It was a long earthquake and quite strong, too, but for some reason, not many people in our building fled to the lobby," said Jacinth Tome. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) said no damage or injuries were reported yet. The ABC quoted Geosciences Australia senior seismologist Hadi Ghasemi as saying that their modelling and first reports all suggested a "moderate to light level of ground shaking". "We don't expect any damage to well-built structures," said Ghasemi.

Punjab-origin realtor, scientist honoured with Order of Canada

Toronto | Agencies

Two Indo-Canadians -- top realtor Bob Dhillon of Calgary and clean energy scientist V.I. Lucky Lakshmanan of Mississauga -- have been honoured with the Order of Canada by Governor General Mary Simon. The award citation says Dhillon has been awarded for "his achievements in business, and for his unwavering commitment to philanthropy and higher education", and Lakshmanan for "his philanthropy and for his expertise in hydrometallurgy and business, which have greatly benefited his profession, community and Canada-India relations".

Dhillon, who founded the real estate group Mainstream Equity, is the biggest landlord in Canada in the mid-segment rental market today.

His group owns more than 15,000 units across the country. One of the richest Indo-Canadians, Dhillon comes from a family from Tallewal village near Barnala in Punjab. Lakshmanan is an internationally renowned clean energy scientist and innovator in sustainable development. Born in Chennai, he went to the UK for higher studies and came

to Canada in 1974. He founded Process Research ORTECH which is a global leader in sustainable process technologies. It runs its laboratory and pilot plant in Mississauga on the outskirts of Toronto. He is currently the CEO of the company.

Another Indo-Canadian, Pradeep Merchant of Greely in Ontario, has been appointed Member of the

Order of Canada "for his long-standing contributions to his community, including his philanthropy and his leadership in the promotion of bilateral ties between Canada and India". The Order of Canada is one of the highest civilian awards in Canada, recognising outstanding achievement, dedication to the community and service to the nation.

PAK HINDU COUNCIL INVITES PILGRIMS TO ENCOURAGE 'FAITH TOURISM'

New Delhi: The Pakistan Hindu Council (PHC) has invited a group of 250 pilgrims, including from India, to visit the country in an attempt to encourage "faith tourism", Dawn news reported.

The group will visit the shrine of Paramhans Ji Maharaaj, a saint who had died at Teri village, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Karak district in 1919. "A number of Hindu pilgrims from India, the United Arab Emirates and the US will arrive in Peshawar on Jan 1 to visit the Samadhi at Teri," PHC patron Ramesh Kumar Vankwani told Dawn news. The Hindu Council has arranged the programme in collaboration with Pakistan International Airlines. "This is the second time that the council has invited Hindu pilgrims from other countries so that they can see for themselves the existence of a tolerant and pluralistic society in Pakistan," Vankwani added. Fifty-four Hindus from India, Canada, Singapore, Australia and Spain had visited the country last month. The group was led by Shri Satguru Ji Maharaaj Ji, the fifth successor of Paramhans Ji Maharaaj. Chief Justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmad had celebrated Diwali at Teri temple last month to express solidarity with local members of the Hindu community and to welcome pilgrims from other parts of the country. According to Vankwani, the PHC invited the Chief Justice only to give a message to "hate-mongers that the state is determined to foil their nefarious designs". In his speech at the temple, he had assured the Hindu community that they enjoyed the same rights as other Pakistanis.



KALICHARAN HELD FROM KHAJURAO OVER REMARKS AGAINST MAHATMA GANDHI

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Hindu religious leader Kalicharan was arrested from Khajuraho on Thursday for allegedly making remarks against the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

Kalicharan made controversial speech at a 'dharma sansad' or religious gathering held in Raipur on December 26.

Kalicharan's derogatory remarks against Mahatma Gandhi prompted chief patron Mahant Ramsundar Das to disown the event and walk out.

Later, Congress leader Pramod Dubey filed a police complaint against Kalicharan, accusing him of promoting enmity between communities.

As per police, Kalicharan booked a guest house in Khajuraho but did not stay there, instead went to a rented house, some 25 km from Khajuraho. To evade arrest, all his close aides had also switched off their mobile phones, sources said.

On Thursday morning, a team of 10 policemen tracked him down, arrested him and took him back to Chhattisgarh's capital Raipur. "Kalicharan has been arrested from Khajuraho area and taken to Raipur," said a senior police official from Chhattisgarh on condition of anonymity.



senior police official from Chhattisgarh on condition of anonymity.

The police official also said that Kalicharan will be produced before a court by Thursday evening.

In a video clip that was widely circulated on social media, Kalicharan declared that "the aim of Islam is to capture the nation through politics." "Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi destroyed the country. Salutations to Nathuram Godse, who killed him," he added. During his speech, Kalicharan was also heard urging people to elect a staunch Hindu leader to protect Hinduism.

HOSHANGABAD HAS ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES OF TOURISM: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that there are endless possibilities of tourism in Hoshangabad. Tourist places like Pachmarhi, Tawa, Saptara etc. are amazing. The world should be familiarized with our natural, religious, cultural and historical richness. It should be marketed on a large scale, so that Hoshangabad can get its name embedded on the global platform in the field of tourism. Chouhan on Thursday reviewed the District Tourism Plan prepared by the district administration in detail at Ravi Shankar Bhawan in Pachmarhi of Hoshangabad district. Collector Neeraj Kumar Singh informed Chief Minister in detail about 52 weeks 52 events organized to promote tourism in the district under Atmanirbhar Madhya Pradesh campaign.

Chouhan said that evening tourism activities should also be organized along with daytime activities for the tourists visiting Hoshangabad. Evening time is very important from the point of view of tourism. Explore possibilities of what the evening activities can be. Promote these activities in PPP mode by better planning. In the evening, activities like folk dance, light and sound show, army band can be planned. Chouhan said that only car proposal should be sent to go to Chauragarh temple. Religious tourists will get a different experience only by car. Tourists will be able to enjoy the natural beauty of the hills, rare flora etc. He said that Pachmarhi also has immense potential to promote



golf, which will attract tourists.

Chouhan said that Madhya Pradesh is the birthplace of brave tribal heroes who played their important role in the freedom struggle. It is a matter of pride for us. It is our responsibility to give full respect to the tribal heroes and make the future generations aware of their heroic tales. He said that the place of tribal pride Raja Vibhut Singh located near Madhai should be made a center of attraction. Statue of Raja Vibhut Singh should be installed and his history should also be mentioned here.

Chouhan said that Hoshangabad is prosperous from the point of view of religious tourism. An integrated route of religious tourist places like Chauragarh, Baramahadev, Bandrabhan, Sethanighat, Ramji Baba Samadhi, Salkapur etc., should be made so that tourists can reach these places in one day. He said that the stories of Lord Shiva related to this place should also be mentioned in Chauragarh temple, Bada Mahadev, Pandav cave

etc. Chouhan said that Hoshangabad is also rich from historical point of view. The history of human civilization and their development journey, rock painting etc. should be promoted effectively.

Display boards of information about such places should also be put up. He said that the biodiversity of Pachmarhi is unique. The trees here have their medicinal value along with natural beauty. Chouhan said that Hoshangabad, situated on the banks of Holy river Narmada, is the most important city of the state. The Sethani Ghat here is the center of religious faith. Propose to perform Maha Aarti of Narmada Maiya daily at the ghat. The Chief Minister said that Hoshangabad should be made a center of religious tourism. Chouhan said that 52 weeks 52 events initiated by the district administration should be launched on a large scale in the month of January itself. Tourism, Culture and Public Relations Department should also be involved in promoting tourism activities on a large scale in Hoshangabad district. Popular artists and public representatives should be invited at the launch of these activities. Extraordinary efforts should be made to give shape to these activities, so that employment can also be created through tourism in the district. Chouhan visited Champak lake with officials and inquired about the proposed camping activities here. He said that even the general category can enjoy camping activity. Chouhan directed for deepening and beautification of Champak lake and said that the lake should be made an example of cleanliness.

Energy Minister takes part in special cleanliness drive



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Energy Minister Pradyuman Singh Tomar made citizens aware of cleanliness by offering Shramdaan himself during a special cleanliness drive in Shinde

ki Chhawni area of Gwalior. He said that cleanliness is the daily work of all of us. We should not feel any kind of shame in this. He appealed to the citizens to take care of cleanliness around them and stay healthy.

During the special cleanliness drive run by the Municipal Corporation from Shinde ki Chhawni Square to Ramdas Ghati, Tomar cleaned the nullah of Shinde ki Chhawni and removed the silt of the nullah. He said that we have to take the responsibility of keeping our city clean. Only then there will be cleanliness around us and our city will become clean.

Tomar has urged that there is a big traffic problem in the area, so all the handcarts and those doing business on the footpaths should do business only in the designated zone. This will also be helpful for the citizens. Tomar visited on foot at Khalasipura in Shinde ki Chhawni area and discussed with the general public and directed the officials on the spot to solve their problems.

CM PLANTS LITCHI SAPLING IN PACHMARHI



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is giving the message of conservation and promotion of nature by planting saplings every day. In the same sequence, Chouhan planted a litchi sapling in the Ravi Shankar Bhawan complex at Pachmarhi in Hoshangabad district today. Chief Minister also offered Shramdaan. The bark, seeds, leaves as well as the fruit of the litchi tree have innumerable properties. Litchi seeds have antibiotic and pain-relieving properties. Litchi is beneficial in oral diseases and helps in controlling diabetes. Its leaves also have properties to cure insect bites.

Vishwas Sarang inspects Subhash Nagar ROB

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang inspected the under construction Railway Over Bridge (ROB) at Subhash Nagar Railway Crossing in Bhopal city. He expressed displeasure over the shortcomings noticed during the inspection and instructed the concerned to rectify them.

Sarang said that preparations should be made from now to make the movement and traffic system easier. He directed to conduct trial runs between January 5 and 12. Sarang said that he himself would be present along with senior officials during the trial run. After the trial run, necessary changes will be



made after consultation on diversion, wall, road, rotary, traffic signal etc. He directed to work on these changes between January 12 and 23.

Sarang informed that Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan would dedicate the Over Bridge on January 23, the birth anniversary of Subhash Chandra Bose. This will provide convenience to about 5 lakh people of the city. The length of the over bridge constructed at a cost of Rs. 28 crore is 641.800 meters including return wall. The width is 15 meters and the railway portion is 64 meters. Public Works Department portion is 318 meters and return wall is 559 meters. Sarang directed to remove illegal encroachments around and under Railway Over Bridge at the earliest. Officers of the department including Chief Engineers of Public Works Department Shri Sanjay Khande and Ravi Shukla were present.

New record set in Covid vaccination in the state

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Today, on December 29, a new record has been set again in the vaccination programme being run to prevent Corona in Madhya Pradesh. Out of the total eligible citizens, second dose of vaccines have been successfully administered to 5 crore people. So far 10 crore 20 lakh 92 thousand 641 vaccine doses have been administered. In this, 5 crore 20 lakh 77 thousand 158 citizens have received the first dose of vaccine and 5 crore 15 thousand 483 citizens have received both doses of vaccine. Madhya Pradesh is first in the country in administer-

ing the second dose of the vaccine. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has also appreciated the interest being taken by the people of the state in the vaccination work and thanking them for their alertness. Chouhan said that in order to protect the state from Corona, it is very important to take all necessary precautions and get vaccinated. A series of immunization campaigns were conducted with public participation to ensure that the target group gets 100 percent vaccine, as a result of which Madhya Pradesh has also made many records in vaccination.

Bhima Nayak's image is in our hearts and not on paper: Governor

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The image of freedom fighter martyr Bhima Nayak is in our hearts and not in papers. He and other freedom fighters have a great contribution in the freedom struggle of the country. Amrit Mahotsav is being celebrated on the completion of 75 years of independence to remember the martyrdom of freedom fighters. We should take inspiration from the valour of freedom fighters by remembering them every day.

Governor Patel addressed the programme on Balidan Diwas of martyr Bhima Nayak at Barwani on Wednesday. Appreciating the ongoing Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao campaign in the country, Patel said that he feels very happy when he goes to the convocation ceremony of a university and finds more number of girls among those who take 'Deeksha'. It is known from this that the Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao cam-



paign is proving its significance in the country. Expressing concern about Sickle Cell disease in tribal areas, he said that it is necessary for us to be aware of this disease and take the right treatment. Only then can you come out of the vicious cycle of sickle cell disease. Paying tributes to martyr Bhima Nayak, Animal Husbandry, Social Justice and Disabled Welfare

Minister, Prem Singh Patel said that the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav is being celebrated in the country to honor freedom fighters. Freedom fighters of the country who are lost in the pages of history are being remembered and the coming generation is being made aware of their heroic acts.

Lok Sabha MP Gajendra Singh Patel, while narrating the story of

martyrdom of Bhima Nayak, said that by celebrating the Azadi ke Amrit Mahotsav, we are paying homage to the freedom fighters. We should take inspiration from his life and have the passion to do something for the motherland. He also apprised the attendees of the stories of freedom fighters. Patel was welcomed by youth and girls by presenting a beautiful tribal dance on the beats of Dhol-Thapli. Patel honored Chunilal Nayak and Shri Shravan Kumar Nayak, the descendants of martyr Bhima Nayak, with shawl and shirphal. Governor Patel also unveiled the statue of Bhima Nayak in the college premises. He raised his hands with the public representatives and also chanted Bhima Nayak Amar Rahe. We have always heard that flowers can bloom even among stones. Giving an embodiment to this, the Barwani collector has gifted the district a tourist spot by covering the greenery in Shiv Kunj built with public cooperation.

MP, CG govts spar over arrest of religious leader

► THE ARREST OF HINDU RELIGIOUS LEADER KALICHARAN MAHARAJ FROM MADHYA PRADESH ON THURSDAY HAS TRIGGERED POLITICAL BARBS BETWEEN THE RULING PARTIES IN CHHATTISGARH AND MADHYA PRADESH.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Kalicharan was arrested by a team of Chhattisgarh police from Madhya Pradesh's Khajuraho this morning and taken to Raipur.

The arrest by Chhattisgarh police did not go down well with senior BJP leader and Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narottam Mishra who accused the Congress-led Chhattisgarh government of "breaching inter-state protocol."

Mishra has also directed Madhya Pradesh Director General of Police (DGP) Vivek Johri to speak with Chhattisgarh DGP on the matter of breach of inter-state protocol. "I have an objection to the manner in which Chhattisgarh police arrested Kalicharan. They (CG police) could have informed the Madhya Pradesh police prior to arresting Kalicharan. It is a complete violation of interstate protocol. I have directed MP DGP to speak with Chhattisgarh DGP to seek an expla-



nation from them," Mishra said addressing a press conference.

In response to Mishra's statement, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said: "MP Home Minister should clarify whether he is happy or not with the arrest of Kalicharan. Why is he upset?"

Kalicharan Maharaj was arrested for his derogatory remark on Mahatma Gandhi at a 'dharma sansad' or religious meeting in Chhattisgarh's capital Raipur a couple of days ago. His disrespectful statement had promoted chief patron Mahant Ramsunder Das disowning the event and walking off the stage in anger at

the same event.

"Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi destroyed the country. Salutations to Nathuram Godse, who killed him," he was heard saying during his speech at a religious meeting in Raipur.

As per police, Kalicharan booked a guest house in Khajuraho but did not stay there, instead went to a rented house some 25 km from Khajuraho to evade the police. To evade the police from tracking, all his close aides had also switched off their phones, sources said.

On Thursday morning, a team of 10 policemen tracked him down, arrested and took him back to Chhattisgarh's capital Raipur. A senior

police officer told reporter that Kalicharan has been arrested. "Kalicharan has been arrested from Madhya Pradesh's Khajuraho area and taken to Raipur," said a senior police official from Chhattisgarh requesting not to be named.

The police official also said that the Kalicharan will be produced before a court in the evening. A video clip, being widely circulated on social media, Kalicharan Maharaj can be seen declaring that the aim of Islam is to capture the nation through politics.

"Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi destroyed the country. Salutations to Nathuram Godse, who killed him," he had said during his speech at a religious meeting in Raipur.

Speaking to reporter on Thursday, Dube said that he was present in the meeting when Kalicharan made derogatory remarks on Mahatma Gandhi. "As per the 'dharma sansad' rules, each speaker had to give a speech on five subjects pertaining to the Hindu religion. The idea of organising 'dharma sansad' was to talk on Hindu religion like how to encourage more number of youth toward the Hindu religion.

However, Kalicharan's speech was totally different. Instead of talking about Hindu religion, he focused on abusing the father of the nation - Mahatma Gandhi. He justified the killing of Gandhi by Nathuram Godse. It hurts me, not because of a politician from the Congress but as a citizen of India. And therefore, I decided to lodge an FIR against Kalicharan. His speech was not like that of a religious saint," Dube said.

CM EXPRESSES GRIEF OVER THE BETUL-INDORE ROAD ACCIDENT

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed grief over the untimely death of four people in a horrific road accident on the Betul-Indore National Highway. Chouhan has prayed to God to grant peace to the departed souls and strength to the family members to bear this loss. Chief Minister Chouhan has given instructions for better treatment of the injured and to provide proper help to the families of the victims.

CM GAVE INSTRUCTIONS AFTER DISCUSSING WITH THE OFFICIALS IN PACHMARHI

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan discussed with the officials at Ravi Shankar Bhawan in Pachmarhi and got information about the development plans. Chouhan directed to ensure the welfare of the people by completing all the works promptly within the time-limit. Along with this, information was also received about the arrangements for corona control and vaccination work.



JUSTIN, HAILEY BIEBER ARE 'READY FOR PARENTHOOD'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Pop singer Justin Bieber and supermodel Hailey Bieber think it's their "destiny" to have kids together. A source told Us Weekly: "Babies are definitely on the brain." Bieber, who previously dated fellow pop star Selena Gomez, and Baldwin are both keen to start a family, and they are "definitely ready" for the challenge of parenthood, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The insider explained: "They both feel like it's their destiny to have kids together and they are definitely ready."

The 'Sorry' hitmaker has earlier spoken about his ambition to become a dad one day.

Bieber admitted earlier this year that he hoped to "squish out a nugget" before the end of 2021.

Bieber said: "My intention for 2021 is to continue to set goals and have fun while doing them. Make sure I put my family first and hopefully we squish out a nugget."

Bieber subsequently said that he wanted to "start trying" at the end of 2021.

And in response, his wife said: "We shall see."

Baldwin has also spoken of her ambition to have kids with Bieber.

However, in an interview in 2018, the model insisted that they weren't in a rush to start a family.

She explained at the time: "I love kids and I can't wait to have my own, I would say that now, that's a closer reality, but definitely not anytime soon."



KANYE WEST TRYING VERY HARD TO REKINDLE ROMANCE WITH KIM

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Kanye West is desperate to rekindle his romance with Kim Kardashian and he recently bought a \$4.5 million home on the same street as his estranged wife.

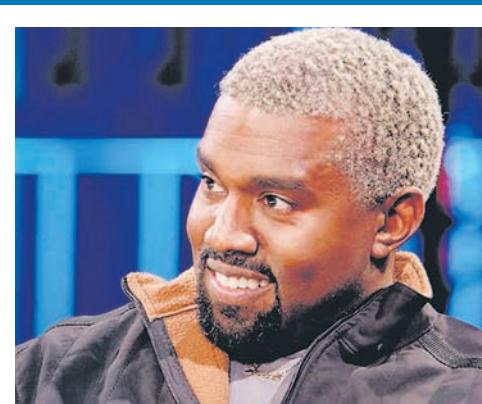
A source told 'Entertainment Tonight': "Kanye really wanted to buy a home near Kim and their kids to be close to them. Kanye saw a house on Kim's block was on the market and jumped at the chance to get it."

He feels it will be "easier to co-parent with Kim if they live close to each other", reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The 'Stronger' hitmaker also "wants to win" Kim back. The source added: "Kanye believes he still has a chance. Kim is fine with Kanye buying the home because she feels like it will be easier to co-parent and watch their kids in privacy."

Kim is currently dating comedy star Pete Davidson, and their burgeoning romance is said to have "escalated quickly" in recent weeks.

Kim and Davidson started dating earlier this year after meeting on the set of 'Saturday Night Live' and their relationship is said to be "getting serious".



A source recently explained: "Kim and Pete are getting serious. Things have definitely escalated quickly but in a healthy, fun way. Right now, they are just enjoying their time together and seeing where things go."

"Kim doesn't want to rush into anything too serious but she is enjoying the early stages (of her new relationship with Pete). They are super smitten over each other though, that's for sure."

'The Rock' turns down Vin Diesel's invitation to rejoin 'Fast & Furious'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Dwayne Johnson has publicly declined 'Fast & Furious' series actor Vin Diesel's request to rejoin the action franchise for its upcoming 10th mainline entry.

In November, Diesel extended an invitation to Johnson on Instagram, imploring the latter to reprise his role as secret agent Lucas Hobbs for the next entry in the series, reports variety.com.

"The world awaits the finale of 'Fast 10',"

Diesel wrote.

He added: "As you know, my children refer to you as Uncle Dwayne in my house. There is not a holiday that goes by that they and you don't send well wishes but the time has come. Legacy awaits. I told you years ago that I was going to fulfill my promise to Pablo. I swore that we would reach and manifest the best Fast in the finale that is 10!"

In a new interview with CNN, Johnson responded to the request, criticising Diesel for voicing an invite on social media after the two had already reached an agreement in private.

"I told (Diesel) directly that I would not be returning to the franchise. I was firm yet cordial with my words and said that I would always be supportive of the cast and always root for the franchise to be successful, but that there was no chance I would return," Johnson explained.

"Vin's recent public post was an example of his manipulation. I didn't like that he brought up his children in the post, as well as Paul Walker's death. Leave them out of it. We had spoken months ago about this and came to a clear understanding."

However, Johnson went on to express his well wishes for the 'Fast & Furious' family ahead of their next, and ostensibly penultimate, outing.

"My goal all along was to end my amazing journey with this incredible franchise with gratitude and grace," Johnson said.

'Always want to drink wine and talk'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Dakota Johnson has spoken of how she had a 'wild time' with Olivia Colman while they were filming The Lost Daughter. The actress, 32, admitted she was initially nervous about meeting the Oscar winner, 47, thinking at the time: "I was just like s***, 'I wonder what she's going to be like?'" And now in a new interview with Elle, in which Dakota graces the front cover in a striking brown patterned suit, the Fifty Shades star talked all about her friendship with Olivia. Dakota told the publication: "Well, I was just like s***, 'I wonder what she's going to be like?'" But we loved each other, and she's a wild time. She's so maternal and embracing and always wants to hang out and drink wine and talk."

The actress also formed a close bond with Maggie Gyllenhaal. The Lost Daughter is the feature film directorial debut for Maggie who also wrote the screenplay and is a co-producer. "We went so immediately deep into the experience of being a woman, both in film and in this world. I was like: 'I'll do anything. I really wanted to follow her,' she said.

Dakota spoke of how she saw herself in Maggie- parts she didn't know she had before they met.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



'SQUID GAME' MAKER TEASES SEASON 2; THIRD MAY BE COMING SOON

Seoul | Agencies

Hwang Dong-hyuk, the writer and director of popular Korean survival drama 'Squid Game', has discussed the future of his hit Netflix series. During a new interview, Dong-hyuk teased that two more seasons of the thriller series are probably coming soon, reports aceshowbiz.com.

Speaking with KBS (Korean Broadcasting System), Dong-hyuk said that he is in talks with Netflix about Season 2 "as well as season 3." He went on to share: "We will come to a conclusion any time soon." Dong-hyuk added: "We know that many people are waiting, so everyone is working hard to prepare for the next season with a positive outlook." Netflix confirmed the claims on the same day.

"It's true that we are discussing a wide variety of possibilities for 'Squid Game', including the production of a Season 3, but nothing has yet been set in stone," the streaming giant said in a statement.

Back in November, Dong-hyuk shared that he had been working on a Season 2 storyline. "I do

have a basic storyline for Season 2 - it's all in my head - and I am currently in the brainstorming stage," the writer-director said during a special screening and Q&A. "It will happen, someday, but as for when I cannot tell you the details." Dong-hyuk didn't really say much about the potential plot in Season 2. However, he confirmed that the sophomore season would follow Seong Gi-hun (Lee Jung-jae) and his investigation of those behind the deadly, titular tournament. Debuting on September 27, 'Squid Game' tells "an imaginative, unorthodox story in which 456 contestants risk their lives in a mysterious survival game -- involving multiple rounds of childhood games -- for a chance to win 45.6 billion won." The show quickly becomes a global phenomenon.



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SA vs IND, 1st Test

INDIA BREACH FORTRESS CENTURION WITH 113-RUN WIN OVER SOUTH AFRICA

Centurion | Agencies

India signed off 2021 with a 113-run win over South Africa in the first Test at SuperSport Park here on Thursday. The win is also India's first-ever Test victory at the venue, which is largely considered to be a fortress for South Africa. With this win, India have also taken a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. It took only two overs after lunch for India to wrap a memorable win. Marco Jansen began the second session by taking two boundaries off Mohammed Shami. But on the fifth ball, Shami had the last laugh as he drew Jansen to defend on the front foot but nicked behind to keeper Rishabh Pant. Ravichandran Ashwin took the first wicket by a spinner in the match, offering Kagiso Rabada flight outside the off-stump. Rabada reached out for a drive but the outer edge flew to Shami at backward point. On the very next ball, Ashwin sealed India's win in just 10 minutes of the second session as Lungi Ngidi inner-edged to Cheteshwar Pujara at back-



ward short leg. Earlier, resuming from 94/4 under a clear bright sky, Bavuma and Dean Elgar struck crisply-timed boundaries to keep India frustrated. Shami dropped Elgar on 63 in a straightforward chance off his own bowling, further extending the wait of a breakthrough for the to'rists.

Shami's dropped chance cost India only 14 runs as the 36-run partnership was brought to an end by Jasprit Bumrah trapping Elgar plumb lbw. The left-handed batter shuffled in an attempt to flick but missed the in-ducker from Bumrah which crashed to his pads. He went

for the review, but replays showed the ball hitting the stumps. Quinton de Kock smashed some boundaries while sharing a stand of 31 with Bavuma before chopping on to his stumps while trying to cut off Siraj. Shami struck in his second spell of the session, getting a length ball to straighten after pitching and take a faint outer edge of Wiaan Mulder's bat to Pant. Bavuma lost partners but continued to hit boundaries. Along with Jansen, Bavuma ensured that South Africa didn't lose any more wickets before lunch. But on resumption after the break, it took just 12 deliveries for India to breach another fortress after Gabba in the beginning of the year despite a day washed out due to rain.

Brief scores

India 327 and 174 beat South Africa 197 and 191 all out in 68 overs (Dean Elgar 77, Temba Bavuma 35 not out, Jasprit Bumrah 3/50, Mohammed Shami 3/63) by 113 runs

BUMRAH ACHIEVES MILESTONE OF PICKING 100 TEST WICKETS AWAY FROM HOME



Centurion: Adding another feather to his cap, Jasprit Bumrah on Wednesday achieved the milestone of picking 100 wickets away from home in Test cricket. The pacer got to the feat on Day 4 of the first Test between South Africa and India at the SuperSport Park in Centurion.

Van der Dussen became Bumrah's 100th Test victim in overseas conditions. The 28-year-old now has 105 wickets, out of which 101 have come away from

home. Bumrah, who made his Test debut in South Africa in 2018, has played 25 Tests, 23 of which have come on the road. After dismissing van der Dussen, the pacer came up with a peach of a yorker that knocked over night watchman Keshav Maharaj in the penultimate delivery of the day on Wednesday.



World No. 11 tennis player Pavlyuchenkova tests positive for Covid-19

Melbourne | Agencies

World No. 11 and French Open 2021 finalist Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova has tested positive for Covid-19, casting doubt on her place in the Australian Open beginning from January 17. The 30-year-old Russian confirmed she has the coronavirus and is isolated after arriving in Australia on Tuesday.

"I was fully vaccinated and was preparing for the start of the season in Dubai," Pavlyuchenkova said on social media on Thursday.

"But we live in a very difficult and unpredictable time. Right now I am in complete

isolation, in a special hotel, and following all the protocols under the supervision of doctors. Now it's important to take care of yourself and the health of others. I'll be back on the court when it's safe for everyone."

After making her first Grand Slam final in June at Roland Garros Pavlyuchenkova is now ranked a career-high 11th. She led Russia to the Billie Jean Cup, formerly the Fed Cup, in November, and in August teamed with Andrey Rublev to win mixed doubles gold for Russia at the Tokyo Olympics.

Earlier, struggling with a wrist injury Dominic Thiem had pulled out of the Australian Open.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City open up 8-point lead at top; Chelsea held by Brighton



London | Agencies

Manchester City moved eight points clear at the top of the Premier League following their 1-0 win away to Brentford even as Chelsea were held 1-1 by Brighton.

The win for Pep Guardiola's side, coupled with Brighton's 1-1 draw away to Chelsea and Liverpool's surprise defeat away to Leicester on Tuesday, gives them a comfortable eight-point cushion going

into the New Year. Despite the result, Chelsea rose above Liverpool into second place having played a game more than them before the two teams meet in London on Sunday. Manchester City could take a huge step towards the title at the weekend as they visit Arsenal, whose coach Mikel Arteta is in isolation for Covid-19, while Chelsea are at home to Liverpool, in a game between their two closest rivals.

ICC announces nominees for Women's T20I Player of the Year, Smriti Mandhana included



run-scorer in T20Is this year. She scored 325 runs at 40.62 in 10 T20Is with a strike rate of 128.45, with one century and a half-century.

Twenty-year-old Lewis played a major role in Ireland's two series wins, bagging the Player of the Match award twice in Ireland's 3-1 series win over Scotland at home. She scripted history at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Europe Qualifier in August, becoming the first female cricketer from Ireland to score a T20I hundred. On the other hand, opener Tammy Beaumont was England's highest run-getter in the year in T20Is and third-highest overall in the world. She scored 303 runs in nine matches at an average of 33.66 with three half-centuries. In a low-scoring series against New Zealand away from home, Beaumont was the top scorer and was awarded the Player of the Series for 102 runs in three matches. Her 53-ball 63 in the second match put England in a winning position after they lost two wickets in the powerplay.

Another England cricketer Nat Sciver played a prominent role in all three of her team's series wins this year, finishing as their third-highest run-getter and wicket-taker in T20Is in 2021. Overall, Sciver scored 153 runs in nine matches at an average of 19.12 with one fifty; 10 wickets at an average of 20.20 and an economy rate of 6.51.

Credit to Mayank and KL for the way they set up victory: Kohli



Centurion | Agencies

India captain Virat Kohli credited openers KL Rahul and Mayank Agarwal for setting up the base for India's 113-run win over South Africa at SuperSport Park. He added that for him, pacer Mohammed Shami is one of the best three pacers in world cricket currently.

Rahul and Agarwal stitched an opening stand of 117 in the first innings total of 327, which was crucial in giving India a 130-run lead and kept them in pole position throughout the match. "The discipline that the batters showed. Winning the toss, batting first overseas is a tough challenge. Credit to Mayank and KL for the way they set it up. We knew we were in pole position with anything over 300-320," said Kohli in the post-match presentation ceremony.

Kohli was elated over India winning their first Test at a venue considered to be a fortress for South Africa.

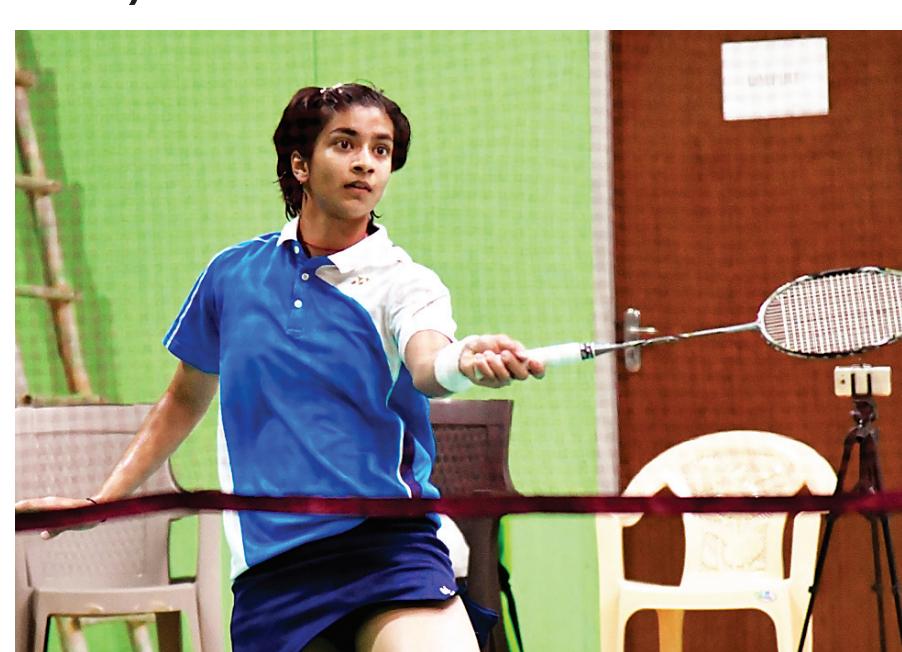
ALL INDIA SENIOR RANKING BADMINTON MALVIKA BANSOD, MITHUN MANJUNATH CLINCH SINGLES TITLES

Hyderabad | Agencies

Second seed Malvika Bansod and eighth seed Mithun Manjunath registered convincing straight games victories to clinch the women's and men's singles titles respectively while the mixed doubles combination of Rohan Kapoor and Sanjana Santosh bagged their second straight All India Senior Ranking Badminton Tournament crown here on Thursday.

In the women's singles final, Bansod upset top seed and last week's senior ranking tournament winner Aakarshi Kashyap 21-15, 21-9 in 42 minutes while Mithun stopped former world junior No. 1 Aditya Joshi's run from the qualifying round 21-15, 21-4 in the men's singles summit clash.

On a day when all the finals were decided in straight games, the wildcard



combination of Kapoor and Sanjana were the only winners from the Chennai leg last week to finish on the top of the podium once again as

they packed off Dhruv Rawat and Shikha Gautam 21-14, 21-13 in just 33 minutes to underline their overall development over the

tournament after the former's regular partner Ritika Thaker was ruled out due to an injury. Khushi and Simran defeated Telangana's Vennala K and Shriyanshi Valishetty 21-16, 21-13 to clinch their first senior national title. In the men's doubles final, Kerala's Ravikrishna PS and Sankarpuras Udayakumar made it to their second consecutive final after having to qualify for the main draw. But just like in Chennai, they failed to cross the final hurdle as the experienced combination of Krishna Prasad Gagara and Vishnuvardhan Goud P got the better of them 21-9, 21-12 in the last match of the day.

2012 Olympic medallist Saina Nehwal was present at the prize distribution as the champions received the overall prize money of 10 lac and the curtains were drawn in Hyderabad.



AJAY DEVGN-STARRER 'TANHAJI - THE UNSUNG WARRIOR' BIGGEST HIT OF THE LAST TWO YEARS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Filmmaker-actor Ajay Devgn's movie 'Tanhaji - The Unsung Warrior', which also stars Kajol and Saif Ali Khan, has become the biggest hit of the last two years with numbers closing at Rs 280 crore in the domestic market and it grossed Rs 3.67 billion worldwide. 'Tanhaji - The Unsung Warrior' in the last two years did the closing at Rs 280 crore in the domestic market, while Akshay Kumar's latest film

'Sooryavanshi' also touched Rs 195 crore, giving the Indian exhibitors reason to smile.

According to reports available, 'Tanhaji - The Unsung Warrior' grossed Rs 3.67 billion (\$49 million) worldwide and was declared a blockbuster at the box-office, thus having the distinction of being the highest grossing Bollywood film of 2020.

Talking about 'Tanhaji' dominating the box-office for two years, Ajay told reporter: "'Tanhaji' was special because it stayed true to the patriotic spirit, it had superb dialogue, it had awesome performances from Kajol and Saif Ali Khan. And I put in my sincere efforts." The star is happy that the warrior got his due.

He added: "I'm so happy this unsung warrior got his due at the Indian box-office and got appreciated globally as well."

Trade analyst Taran Adarsh shared with reporter that from the very beginning, Ajay Devgn's 'Tanhaji' promised to be a huge success.

"It had all the elements that pulled audiences to the theatre - great story, visionary execution, incredible star cast, class apart VFX and the list could just go on. The film grossed Rs 3.67 billion (\$49 million) worldwide and was declared a blockbuster."

Adarsh added that not only did it create a national stir but it also received international recognition.

Nora Fatehi tests Covid positive

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress-dancer Nora Fatehi has tested positive for Covid and is currently in quarantine under the doctor's observation. Nora's spokesperson said: "On behalf of Nora Fatehi, as her spokesperson, would want to inform that Nora Fatehi has been tested positive for Covid on 28th of December." "Abiding by the protocols, Nora has been quarantined under the doctor's observation since then and has been cooperating with BMC for the safety and regulations." The spokesperson confirmed that images of her being photographed are from earlier events and that Nora has 'stepped nowhere out recently'.

delighted that two of my special films 'Turtle' and 'Waah Zindagi' will be premiering on ZEE5. The entire team has put in a lot of hard work and it couldn't have been released at a better time than the eve of the New Year for the viewers. I am hopeful that people will take away something after watching these films and that they love the way we have presented them."

SANJAY MISHRA EXCITED FOR HIS TWO DIGITAL FILM RELEASES ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

Team Absolute | Mumbai



As two of his films - 'Waah Zindagi' and 'Turtle' - are releasing on OTT on Friday, actor Sanjay Mishra says it couldn't have been more exciting than this to end the year with. Both the films are releasing on ZEE5. 'Waah Zindagi' is a slice-of-life story about a fickle boy who is set to redeem his past. Besides being a quirky and unconventional love story, the film is a journey of a destitute farmer's son struggling hard to become an entrepreneur to win his childhood sweetheart. 'Turtle' is inspired by the real story of Ramkaran Choudhary (Bagod) from

village Dehlod, Rajasthan. The movie won critical acclaim at various film festivals and also received the award for Best Rajasthani Film at the 66th National Film Awards. Sanjay is playing a pivotal part in both films. Talking about the release, the actor said, "I am

Vaani Kapoor: Being a part of 'Shamshera' was nothing short of a dream team

Team Absolute | Mumbai



Actress Vaani Kapoor is happy how 2021 shaped up for her and is now looking forward to the New Year as her next movie 'Shamshera' is set to hit the screens. She says being part of the upcoming film was no shot of a dream team. Talking about 2021, Vaani said: "It's been a wonderful year for me as an artiste. 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui' gave me the love and appreciation of audience which has just elated my heart. And what a great high to finish 2021 on." "I am truly looking forward to my journey ahead in this world of

cinema that I now call home." Vaani will be seen next opposite Ranbir Kapoor in YRF's 'Shamshera' that is set to release on March 18, 2022. She said: "With 'Shamshera' set to release, I am very excited to bring another side of my acting forward for the audiences. Being a part of 'Shamshera' was no short of a dream team too. Working with a director like Karan Malhotra was just so great as an actor, I learnt so much from him. Vaani also heaped praise on her co-star Ranbir Kapoor. "Ranbir Kapoor my co-star, it was just beautiful working with an actor of his calibre. Working with YRF after a couple of movies also makes it even more special." Vaani added: "I cannot wait for people to watch 'Shamshera' and hopefully appreciate the work we have put forth as a team."



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The latest episode of 'Bigg Boss 15' saw Devoleena Bhattacharjee lashing out at Abhijit Bichukale and accusing him of betraying her during the 'Ticket To Finale' task. In the previous episode, Abhijit was seen flirting with Devoleena to which she strongly reacted. Now, in the recent episode, Abhijit formed a group with Rashami Desai and

Umar Riaz to cancel the 'Ticket To Finale' task. Devoleena got upset because of this and questioned the loyalty of Abhijit towards her. Later, Devoleena and Abhijit were seen getting into a verbal spat and she said: "You are worse than an animal." Abhijit asked her why she was saying this. To which she replied: "It is better to keep a donkey rather than having a friend like you." She continued: "You are a blot in the name of friendship."

Meanwhile, after Devoleena went out

'BIGG BOSS 15'

Another ugly spat as Devoleena calls Abhijit 'worse than animal'

of the room, Rashami, Nishant, Umar and Abhijit started making fun of her. Tejasswi Prakash told Devoleena to calm down. But, again Devoleena and Abhijit got into an ugly fight. Due to which Abhijit got irritated and threw a plate on the floor and it broke.

Furthermore, all the housemates went to control the situation and Shama Shetty asked Abhijit to calm down and advised him not to behave in this way inside the house.

Taapsee Pannu



Parineeti: 2021 has bolstered my belief

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Parineeti Chopra credits 2021 for bolstering her belief in picking subjects that are ahead of the curve as she showcased her acting prowess through films like 'Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar', 'The Girl On The Train' and 'Saina'. She said: "It's a year filled with gratitude for me. 2021 was the year I had been waiting for, having taken the biggest plunge of my career in the form of 'Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar', 'The Girl on The Train' and 'Saina' and thankfully, each one of them paid off." Parineeti added: "2021 made me realize that audiences expect me to be clutter-breaking and I couldn't agree with them more; I am more thankful to them for showering me with all the love for my performances."

"It's been a year that has bolstered my belief in picking subjects that are remarkably ahead of the curve and present me in the most unique way on screen."

Parineeti feels blessed that the makers, producers and her fans didn't give up on her, and pushed her to do her best work.

Parineeti will be seen next in films like 'Uunchai' with Amitabh Bachchan, and 'Animal' opposite Ranbir Kapoor.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

