

absolute india

VOL. 5, ISSUE 49, NEW DELHI | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2021 | ₹5 | PAGE 08

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OMICRON MAY DO GOOD BY REPLACING DELTA FROM WORLD, SAYS EXPERTS

HAIL OMICRONE!

The overall risk associated with the Omicron variant remains 'very high' which could cause widespread disruption to health systems and other critical services, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has warned. In its weekly epidemiological update, the WHO said on Tuesday that "The overall risk related to the new variant of concern Omicron remains very high". The warning comes as the new Omicron variant in the US has driven daily Covid-19 new cases to a record high of over 510,000.

“Omicron is a milder wave and will replace Delta, and may be good for the world, more transmissible, and it could also be immune-evasive (cause breakthrough infections in previously infected or vaccinated). But so far, there is no proof that it produces more severe infections.”

Dr. Vasant Nagvekar, Covid task force member, Maha Govt



MAHARASHTRA RECORDS MASSIVE SPIKE IN COVID-19, OMICRON CASES

Mumbai: Maharashtra on Wednesday reported a massive spike in Covid-19 and Omicron cases, even as the state announced fresh curbs for celebrating New Year and contemplated further restrictions. Maharashtra on Wednesday notched a whopping 85 new cases of Omicron, taking the state's tally of the latest Covid variant to 252, health officials said here. Of the fresh cases, Mumbai reported the most at 53, followed by Thane (13), Pune (11), Nagpur (3), Palghar and Raigad (2 each), and Kolhapur and Buldhana (1 each). Among the infectees, 47 have recent travel history to foreign countries, while 4 were their

close contacts, and the rest emerged from community surveillance but had no international travel history. Intensive surveillance of passengers arriving at the three international airports - at Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur - is currently underway since December 1. Besides, 879 samples from field surveys conducted since November 1 have been sent for genomic sequencing with results of 176 awaited, the officials said. Mumbai, Pune and Thane remain at the top with the highest number of active cases, which shot up from 11,492 a day before to 14,065 on Wednesday, with a recovery rate of 97.61 per cent.

Omicron is known to cause only mild disease, Delta has been more lethal leading to increased hospitalisation with drop in oxygen levels, pneumonia, and death. The early data from South Africa has shown that most patients are younger and the variant produces milder infections. Meanwhile, what we

need is vigilance, improving border surveillance, genomic sequencing, as well as vaccination cover. Meanwhile, with more than 30 mutations on its spike protein, Omicron has the potential of evading vaccines as well as previous Covid infection induced immunity. Several studies have shown that two

MP REPORTS 48 NEW COVID CASES

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday reported 48 new Covid cases in the last 24 hours, out of which 32 new infections were registered in Indore alone, while capital city Bhopal reported in single digit (6). Detailed report on Madhya Pradesh page

INDIA REPORTS 9,195 NEW COVID CASES, OMICRON TALLY REACHES 781

New Delhi: In the last 24 hours, India registered 9,195 fresh Covid-19 cases, a significant spike from the previous day's figure of 6,358, and 302 deaths, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Wednesday. With the fresh fatalities, the death toll climbed to 4,80,592. The recovery of 7,347 patients in the same period has increased the cumulative tally to 3,42,51,292. Consequently, India's recovery rate stands at 98.40 per cent, highest since March 2020. Meanwhile, the Omicron infection tally has climbed to 781 across the nation.

doses of existing Covid vaccines may not be effective against Omicron, while booster doses have shown promise. India has also announced the roll out of booster doses, starting with healthcare workers from January next year. India will also start vaccinating children aged 15-18 from January.

Russia offers India its cutting-edge Armata tank technology

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Taking the Military-Technical Cooperation (MTC) between the two countries to a new high, Russia has offered India "new areas of work", including developing together new armoured vehicles based on the T-14 Armata tank platform.

The Armata uses unprecedented design solutions, in particular, the T-14 tower is uninhabited. The crew is placed in an armoured capsule, separated from the ammunition. The original silhouette, combined with the use of a special coating, significantly reduces the visibility of the vehicle in the thermal and radar spectra of observation. It is capable of withstanding any existing anti-tank weapon hit. The tank is equipped with active and dynamic protection, equipped with a remotely controlled combat module with a powerful cannon and an automatic reloading system. Optical-electronic devices for observation, aiming and threat detection are installed along the perimeter of the tower and



INDIA STOPS IMPORT OF 2,851 COMPONENTS USED IN DEFENCE PLATFORMS

New Delhi: India has decided to stop import of 2,851 components used in defence equipment manufacturing with the expectation of saving foreign exchange worth approximately Rs 3,000 crore every year. The defence ministry on Wednesday notified a positive indigenisation list of sub-systems, assemblies, sub-assemblies and components to achieve self-reliance in defence and minimise imports by Defence Public Sector Units. The list contains 2,500 imported items which have already been indigenised and 351 imported items which will be indigenised in the next three years. These items will only be procured from the Indian Industry.

the hull. The Russian Defence Ministry says that the main combat characteristics of the Armata T-14 tank are a high degree of passive and active armour protection, which is superior to any other types of armoured vehicles; as well as high cross-country mobility and great firepower. It is armed with a 125-mm new generation tank gun with a prospective ammunition load and a digital fire control system.

NAGALAND KILLINGS: SIT QUESTIONS ARMY PERSONNEL, LOCALS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The special investigation team probing killing of locals in Nagaland grilled 14 Indian Army personnel and a few locals, sources said on Wednesday.

The SIT, comprising of local police and Army officers also held meeting with Konyak Union and Konyak Students Union along with relatives of the deceased and village representatives. The team reached

Oting village of Nagaland where the incident took place for forensic details. Last week, the Indian Army said its inquiry into the December 4 incident of Civilian killings in Nagaland is progressing expeditiously and all efforts are being made to conclude it at the earliest. The Indian Army is also said that they are fully cooperating with the Special Investigation Team (SIT) inquiry ordered by State Govt and required details are being shared in timely manner.

Minority panel takes cognisance of Haridwar hate speeches

SEER KALICHARAN BOOKED FOR ABUSING GANDHI JI

Maharashtra minister and Nationalist Congress Party leader Jitendra Awhad on Wednesday filed a police case in Thane against religious leader Kalicharan Maharaj for using an expletive against Mahatma Gandhi. Kalicharan had made the remark while hailing Gandhiji's assassin Nathuram Godse at a dharm sansad in Raipur in neighbouring Chhattisgarh on December 26.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The National Commission for Minority has taken cognisance of the alleged hate speeches delivered at religious conclaves in Haridwar and Raipur recently and sought reports from Uttarakhhand and Chhattisgarh governments, its chairman Iqbal Singh Lalpura said on Wednesday. The Commission has also taken note of an



ongoing row in Gurgaon over offering Namaz in open spaces and called for a report on the issue from the Haryana government, he told a press conference. Later in a statement, the NCM said it has also taken "suo motu" cognisance of "attacks on churches" in different parts of the country and will send teams to enquire into the matter as well seek reports from authorities concerned. "Appropriate action" will be taken by the commission "accordingly", it said

Hyderpora encounter: SIT warns political leaders of penal action

Team Absolute | Srinagar

The special investigation team (SIT) formed to probe the November 15 Hyderpora encounter on Wednesday warned the political leaders of penal action against 'speculative statements'. In a statement, the SIT said the investigation is still underway and appropriate penal action can be taken against leaders who make speculative statements regarding the encounter.

Many mainstream political leaders had called the SIT report on Hyderpora encounter as 'concocted cover up story', 'ornamental probe', 'clean hit to killers', 'fair tale of police'.

The DIG, who was heading the SIT into the Hyderpora



encounter, said in a press conference that CCTV footage shows that Dr Gul was travelling with the foreign militant in his vehicle in Srinagar.

"The footage and other evidence show that Magray had accompanied the foreign militant during Jamalata Srinagar attack. Magray would often travel to Bandipora and Gurez, an

angle which is still under investigation," he said.

He said prima facie evidence shows that Dr Gul was shot dead by the foreign militant on the directions possibly from across.

"The investigations reveal that the building owner, Altaf Bhat was made human shield by foreign militant and that he was killed in the crossfire," the DIG said.

5 SP WORKERS HELD FOR ATTEMPTING TO DISRUPT PM VISIT TO KANPUR

Team Absolute | Kanpur

Five Samajwadi Party workers have been arrested in connection with the Tuesday's violence in Kanpur. According to an FIR, one SP worker, identified as Sachin Kesarwani has been arrested. Sachin

Kesarwani is a worker of the Samajwadi Chhatra Sabha. The others arrested include Ankur Patel, Nikesh Kumar, Shukant Sharma and Abhishek Rawat.

According to police, a conspiracy was being hatched to create unrest in Kanpur ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit on Tuesday. Police said that SP workers vandalised a car that

had flags of the BJP and a poster of PM Modi. They also burnt an effigy of PM Modi on a roadside in the city.

The video was then widely circulated on social media platforms with an intention to irk BJP workers and create unrest at the Prime Minister's event.

However, during the investigation, it was revealed that the SP workers vandalised their own car after decorating it as a BJP car. Police said that further investigation into the matter will continue and those behind the violence will face action.

After this SP in official statement declared that it has expelled the conspirators from the party.

Rishi Sunak not out of running to be UK PM if Boris is ousted

► In fact, historically persons of Indian origin in the United Kingdom felt more at home with the Labour party and virtually voted en mass for it. Beginning with giving Keith Vaz a ticket in 1987, the Labour party had steadily increased its number of MPs of Indian descent by 2010, at which point Cameron, an Indophile, decided to correct the imbalance by making two of the current cabinet ministers in the British government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson -- Priti Patel and Alok Sharma -- first-time MPs. ► Five years later, he awarded a seat to Rishi Sunak, now Chancellor of the exchequer.

“We were the first party to have a woman Prime Minister (Margaret Thatcher) - (there has been a second one since in Theresa May) - we were the first party to have a Jewish Prime Minister in (Benjamin) Disraeli, and when I look at the talent behind me, I think we are going to be the first party to have a British Indian Prime Minister.”

David Cameron had said

Ashis Ray | London

In 2012, two years into his premiership, David Cameron had said that his Conservative party will be the first in Britain to have a Prime Minister of Indian-origin. Speculation is mounting about the future of Johnson - he



having condoned sleaze among his colleagues, been allegedly corrupt himself, and 10 Downing Street, his office-cum-residence, apparently serially breaching Covid lockdown rules (which were legislated in Parliament and were therefore law) by having not exactly work gatherings in the premises last winter. These included at least one in which the Prime Minister himself participated on-screen from his private flat in the building, so seemingly with his knowledge and approval. Ordinary citizens have been prosecuted and punished for similar violations during the same period. The pro-Conservative Daily Mail reported: "Boris Johnson has slumped to his lowest ever popularity rating among Tory members, a poll has found." It added: "The Prime Minister is the most unpopular member of the Cabinet, according to the Conservative

Home survey, with a net approval score of minus 34 per cent." The British public is clearly livid. Another quite comprehensive opinion poll indicated that if a general election is held now, the Conservatives would lose 111 seats in the House of Commons, including Johnson's. And the Labour party would emerge as the largest single party, with in striking distance of an absolute majority. In such a climate, discussion is rife as to who could succeed Johnson in the event he is ousted by his party.

The Daily Mail again provided an indication. It published that until recently, Sunak was leading the pack within the party. Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has, however, according to the Daily Mail quoting Conservative Home, "leapfrogged the Chancellor". But it's close. Truss is preferred by about 23 per cent and Sunak by around 20 per cent.



PIYUSH JAIN SOLD PERFUME COMPOUNDS TO 50 COUNTRIES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Financial intelligence teams probing the recovery of around Rs 200 crore during raids in Kanpur-Kannauj have now found that perfume and compound businessman Piyush Jain has links across 50 countries. The teams have also taken around 100 samples of compounds which will be sent to the lab for tests.

"Around 100 samples of compounds have been taken by the financial intelligence teams from the premises of Piyush Jain. He used to sell the compounds to different foreign clients. Our probe has suggested that he has links in around 50 countries," said a source.

Sources further said that the team has recovered a few documents which suggest that he used to send the compounds to different foreign clients in lieu of money and gold. To



make the compounds he reportedly used to buy different chemicals from different countries.

The team said that the chemicals recovered from his house were brought from Iran, France, Germany, Australia, Japan, Kuwait, Indonesia, Nepal, China, UAE and Teran.

"He has a lab at his premises where he used to make inventions of different compounds. Once the compound was ready he used to sell it to his clients across the world and in India. His clients are manufacturers of tobacco, soaps, perfumes and likewise products. He used to sell compounds at exorbitant rates," the source said.

The teams are gathering information about his clients and soon they will be asked to join the probe. His Indians clients will be contacted by the team to record their testimonies.

The raid is still underway at different places.

Piyush Jain was remanded to judicial custody by a court after the probing team said he wasn't required for interrogation.

As of now the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) and Income Tax teams are probing the matter. The DGGI is making a report which will be handed over to the Enforcement Directorate (ED). There are possibilities that a prevention of money laundering probe will be initiated by the ED after getting the report.

Ex-Cong leader Sodhi given 'Z' category security after joining BJP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Like in West Bengal, the Centre has accorded 'Z' category security cover to Punjab politician and former Congress leader Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi after he joined the Bharatiya Janata Party recently.

Sodhi, who joined the BJP on December 21, will be getting this security cover both in Delhi and Punjab, to be provided by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), sources in the security set up said here on Wednesday.

A four-time MLA who won the last Assembly elections from Guruhar Sarai, Sodhi is said to be close to former Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh. He has already announced his resignation from the Congress on social media, where he posted his resignation letter addressed to interim Congress President Sonia



Gandhi. The Union government had provided central security cover to 79 BJP leaders in West Bengal including Trinamool turncoats and the new joiners during the West Bengal assembly elections in February-March this year. The VIP security of many of them was withdrawn immediately after they returned to the TMC.

The Central government withdrew the 'Z' category

security of former West Bengal minister Rajib Banerjee on December 22, after he returned to the TMC fold following a brief stay in the BJP. Banerjee had contested the last West Bengal assembly elections on a BJP ticket from Domjur in Howrah district but lost to Trinamool Congress leader Kalyan Ghosh. He was accorded 'Z' category security in West Bengal and 'Y' category cover across India.

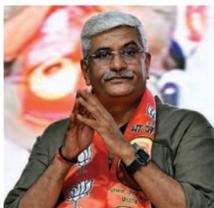
BJP prepared to hold virtual rallies: Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

Team Absolute | New Delhi

While the Election Commission (EC) is yet to decide on holding the assembly elections in the five poll-bound states amid the rising cases of Covid, Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat on Wednesday said the BJP is prepared to hold virtual rallies.

Talking to the media, Shekhawat said that EC will decide guidelines for election rallies and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will follow them.

"The BJP is ready for virtual rallies. We held virtual rallies in West Bengal assembly polls. During the first and second wave of Covid when all the political parties went into hibernation, the BJP was active at booth level through virtual platforms," he said. He pointed out that con-



ducting election is the responsibility of EC and the poll body is in touch with health secretary and experts over the current situation of the pandemic.

Assembly polls are scheduled to be held in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur in February-March next year.

On Tuesday, the EC team met the representatives of all the political parties in Uttar Pradesh. It is learnt that some political parties in Uttar Pradesh urged the EC to not postpone the assembly polls.

CJI's remark on Nitish Kumar's liquor ban has a little injustice to it: JD-U leader

Patna | Agencies

Janata Dal United (JD-U) spokesperson Ajay Alok has said that Chief Justice of India NV Ramana's remark on Nitish Kumar's liquor ban in Bihar has a little injustice to it. "I firmly believe that a law was passed unanimously by 243 MLAs and 75 MLCs of the Bihar Vidhan Sabha followed which it was also accepted by the governor of Bihar and the President of India. Still CJI had said short-sighted decision, it is a little injustice to it," Alok said while interacting with media persons in Patna on Wednesday.

"I also believe that if legislators would do their work under the limits of the Constitution, the comment of the judiciary is not right.



When it comes to pending cases, I must say that pending cases were there in the court before the implementation of the liquor ban in Bihar," Alok said.

"We should pay attention to how the hearing of the cases and their decisions

would come in quick time. There is a phrase in English called justice delayed is justice denied. There are 4 lakh cases pending in the courts of the country," he said.

"If bureaucracy, judiciary and legislature comment on each other, it would create

confusion in society. The Chief Justice of India is an institution which is respected by everyone in the country. If my point is wrong by any means, I am also apologizing for it," he said.

"As a citizen of the country, I firmly believe that bureaucracy, judiciary and legislature should not interfere in their respective work and avoid commenting on each other," Alok said.

The Chief Justice of India had said that decisions like the liquor ban in Bihar in 2016 "put a huge burden on courts."

"There are three lakh cases pending in the courts. People are waiting for justice for a long time and now the excessive cases related to liquor violations put additional burden on courts," he said.

ACTION AGAINST RESIDENT DOCTORS NOT RESUMING DUTY, WARNS RML HOSPITAL

New Delhi:

Amid the ongoing doctors protest, the RML Hospital administration on Wednesday warned its resident doctors of action if they don't resume their duties.

In a circular issued, the administration said that in the continuation of the order dated December 27 and the yellow alert being announced in Delhi regarding Covid-19 and Omicron case upsurge, all the resident doctors are hereby directed to resume their duty from the ongoing strike in the interest of patient care services. Appropriate action will be taken against resident doctors not reporting for duty, it said.

However, the RDA representative told IANS that there is no question of resuming the duty as "our protest is still going on and will continue till our demands are met".

Federation of Resident Doctors Associations President, Dr Manish Nigam, said: "We held a meeting with all RDAs today (Wednesday) also and have agreed to continue the protest till our demands are met.



BABY GIRL IN CHANDIGARH SAVES FOUR ORGAN FAILURE PATIENTS

Chandigarh | Agencies

A baby girl became a ray of hope for four in-waiting organ failure patients with her parents' generous decision of organ donation amid their own grim tragedy.

Those who got a second lease of life through transplantation as an outcome of this gesture of organ donation included recipients in Mumbai, Delhi, and two at the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) in Chandigarh.

An official statement quoting PGIMER Director Surjeet Singh said: "It is an extremely hard decision, but the donor families are a silver lining in the dark lives of organ failure patients. It is through their generous acts of organ donation that hundreds of people each year are given a second chance at life.

"At the same time, we cannot underestimate the commitment of the entire team of the PGIMER involved in the process right from neurosurgeons, brain death certification committee, transplant coordinators, testing labs, treating doctors and especially intensivists who maintain the potential donor in the best condition for optimum usage of organs and transplant surgeons who save precious lives with their skill and synergy."

It was an ill-fated day of December 22 when the five-year-old girl became unconscious due to fall



from a height and was rushed to a nearby civil hospital.

However, due to a worsening prognosis, she was shifted to the PGIMER in an extremely critical condition the same day.

But all efforts of the family and friends could not deter the dark tragedy as the girl's week-long struggle between life and death came to a halt as she

could not be revived and subsequently, after following the protocols was declared brain dead.

When it became clear that the girl would not come out of her precarious condition, the transplant coordinators at the PGIMER approached the grief-stricken father, to request if he could consider organ donation. He father showcased immense grit and consented for organ donation.

Teacher held for marrying her 17-yr-old student in TN

Chennai | Agencies

A woman was arrested under POCSO for marrying her 17-year-old student at Perambalur district of Tamil Nadu.

The Perambalur police arrested the woman from her residence on Monday night.

According to the prosecution, the woman as part of her teacher training course had gone to a Government High School at Vickramangalam two years ago where she fell in love with a 15-year-old student.

Even after she went back, the duo continued their relationship and on October 22, 2021, they got married at Gangaikondacholapuram without their parents knowledge.

The boy later took his new



bride to his grandmother's home at Moongilapadi which was lying vacant. Though the house was closed, the boy knew where his grandmother hid the keys and entered the home and spent time there.

When the boy failed to return home by sunset, his

mother called him up on his phone. The boy confided in his mother that he was in love0 with a woman and had taken her to his grandmother's place. At this, she reprimanded him and told him that his family will not allow them to live together.

Women should unite, fight for their rights : Priyanka

Firozabad | Agencies

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said on Wednesday that if women become aware of their rights and unite, the day is not far when they would have a sizeable presence in the Parliament.

Speaking at a 'Shakti Samvad' programme here, Priyanka said that leaders know that they would get votes in the name of caste, and hence they do not bother about fulfilling their promises.

The Congress leader said that after she launched the campaign for women, other political parties have begun recognising the power of female votes.

"The time has come to elect a party that does not talk about caste and wants to empower you. If you unite and vote on issues, leaders



will also stop taking you for granted," she said.

Priyanka said that the government is increasingly opting for privatisation, which means that the benefits of reservation will slowly dry up. "The government is working for the benefit of its rich friends, while the poor are suffering. Farmers and

women are suffering because prices are rising," she said.

The Congress leader further said that if women vote for Congress, they will be voting for their empowerment.

Earlier, Priyanka had visited the home of a woman who makes bangles. She chatted with the women there and had tea with them.

Now, controversy dogs 'Prithviraj' over the great king's legacy and clan

Archana Sharma | Jaipur

The Gurjars in Rajasthan have threatened to stop the screening of Bollywood flick 'Prithviraj' starring Akshay Kumar if the movie continues using the term 'Rajput' for Prithviraj Chauhan.

The community claimed that Prithviraj was from the Gurjar community and he was not a Rajput. However, leaders from the Rajput community have strongly rejected their claim and said that Gurjars were initially 'gauchar', who then converted into Gujjars and then Gurjars. They basically come from Gujarat and hence got this name, claimed Shri Rajput Karni Sena national spokesperson Vijendra Singh Shaktawat. This is a place-related term and not a caste-related term, he added. Two days back, members of the Gurjar community had staged a protest in Ajmer, threatening to stall the screening of the film if Prithviraj Chauhan is not shown as a Gurjar king. Gurjar leader Himmat Singh said, "#Prithviraj Movie is made on the basis of Prithviraj Raso written by Chand Bardai and the same was shown in the teaser of Prithviraj movie.. After studying the inscriptions available in history, researchers have believed that Chand Bardai wrote it around 400 years back after the reign of Prithviraj Chauhan. In the 16th century, the Raso epic was written which is fictional. The epic is written by Chand Bardai in Pringal language which is a mixture of Bajra and Rajasthani language. During the reign of Gurjar emperor Prithviraj Chauhan, the Sanskrit language was used but not the Pringal lan-



guage which has been used by the poet, said Himmat Singh. These are historical proofs that Rajputs were never in existence before the 13th century, we have proved this from historical facts and it has also been accepted by the people of Rajput caste at present and hence they claimed themselves as Kshatriya and not as Rajputs. In fact, even during a dispute, after the unveiling of Gurjar emperor Mihir Bhoj's statue in Dabri and Gwalior, Rajputs submitted their caste as Kshatriya in the Madhya Pradesh High Court, said Singh. The con-

trovery over the movie is because the word Rajput was used at the time of Chand Bardai and not during the reign of Prithviraj Chauhan, he said adding "Prithviraj Chauhan's father Shomeshwar has been connected with the Gurjar caste, and hence the son should himself be a Gurjar," he added. Shaktawat said that it's true that Rajput is a title and not a caste. But then it is also a fact that Rajputs symbolize those who are connected to the land, which means sons of the soil who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their land.



MP REPORTS 48 NEW COVID CASES, 66% IN INDORE ALONE

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday reported 48 new Covid cases in the last 24 hours, out of which 32 new infections were registered in Indore alone, while capital city Bhopal reported in single digit (6). The remaining 10 cases were reported in districts -- Ujjain, Jabhua and Jabalpur each reporting two cases, while Narsinghpur, Gwalior, Khargone and Ratlam reported one case each. As the state government reviewed the situation on Tuesday, Madhya Pradesh's commercial capital -- Indore witnessed a slight surge in new cases, especially in the last one week. As per the official data, in the last one week (between December 22 and December 28), a total of 139 Covid cases were registered in Indore and 65 in Bhopal. Similarly, in the



month of December so far, a total of 631 people were found infected with Covid-19, of which 279 were reported in Indore and 211 in Bhopal. Information, nine cases of new variant, Omicron were reported alone in Indore, of which 7 are reported to have recovered so far. On Tuesday, the state reported 42 new cases, of them 27 were in Indore. The total active cases of Covid-19 in Madhya Pradesh has risen

to 307, so far, as per the state government's data. Since the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, a total of 7,98,809 people were found infected with the Coronavirus out of which 7,82,969 have recovered, till date. A total of 10,533 people have lost their lives due to Covid in the state so far. The government has imposed a night curfew (between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m.) on December 23.

UNIT-4 OF SANJAY GANDHI THERMAL POWER HOUSE WILL BE UPGRADED

Bhopal: Energy Minister Pradyuman Singh Tomar has informed that old Control and Instrument System and Flame Scanner of Unit No-4 of Sanjay Gandhi Thermal Power House, Birsinghpur will be upgraded. The estimated cost of this work is Rs 24 crore 13 lakh. Tomar has told that this unit was established in the year 1999. Its control and instrument system and flame scanner have become old, making it difficult for smooth functioning. Their upgradation will facilitate measurement and recording of all types of parameters. The operation of valves, motors and pumps will be safe and fast. Autoloop, which is very important to control any parameter, will become more stable. With the coming of the newly proposed control and instrument system on one platform, the upkeep and maintenance of the parts will be easy.

MP Govt recommends CBI inquiry into Nemawar killings

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday recommended a CBI inquiry in the 'Nemawar massacre' case in which five persons of a Dalit tribal family were killed in Dewas district in May this year. The recommendation for the CBI probe came more than six months after the skeletons of all the five persons who were murdered by strangulation were exhumed from a 10-feet-deep pit in Nemawar town of Dewas district. The police had to employ a JCB machine to dig out the bodies. The incident had then not only shaken the entire tribal dominated areas in the state but led to political barbs between the ruling BJP and the opposition Congress. The Congress had been demanding a CBI probe in the case. So far, the case was being handled by the state police. The decision to hand over the case to the CBI has come at a time when the lone survivor from the victims' family, Bharti Kasde has announced a 'Nyay



Yatra' (March for justice) from January 1. "A CBI inquiry has been recommended in the matter but it is only half justice to my family. Nyay Yatra to be launched from January 1," said Bharti Kasde. The five persons whose skeletons were recovered from a pit were identified as Mamta Bai Kaste (45), her

daughters Rupali (21) and Divya (14) along with relatives Puja Oswal (15) and Pawan Oswal (14). The police had arrested six persons in the case. The state government has given Rs 41 lakh as compensation to the family of the victims. As per the police, prime accused Surendra Chauhan had an affair with Rupali and he also used to visit their home in Nemawar. Chauhan convinced Pawan to get Rupali and his family members to the spot where they were stripped, killed and buried inside a pit. The police said the killers covered the bodies of the accused with salt and urea to ensure they decomposed at the earliest. "Surendra had an affair with Rupali but he was about to marry someone else. When Rupali came to know about it, she posted a picture of Surendra's fiancée on a social networking site along with her number, which infuriated Surendra. He then planned to eliminate her and others as he suspected that all of them were conspiring to break his engagement," the police had stated earlier.

Economic activities should be conducted with necessary precautions to prevent infection: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan during the review of Covid control directed that in view of the cases of infection that are coming to the fore currently, proper arrangements should be made for isolation and treatment of those patients. The focus should be on curing the infected persons as soon as possible. Use of face masks and roko-toko campaign should be continued without break. Such efforts should be made that the situation of overcrowding should not be created. In marriage and other functions, care must be taken of the mutual distance between the people. With all the necessary precautions, the work of smooth conduct of economic activities should be done. Vaccination of adolescents in the age group of 15 to 18 years is starting from January 03 in the state. Such children who are born



in the year 2007 or earlier, their registration will start from January 01. It should be conducted in the form of vaccination campaign. Apart from night curfew, there will be no other restrictions in the state. Social activi-

ties will operate with necessary measures to prevent infection. Everyone must get corona test done when in doubt. Chouhan said that arrangements for attendance of students should

continue in schools with 50 percent capacity. The situation may not be serious right now, but all necessary precautions should be taken. The Education Minister and Additional Chief Secretary Health should also review the situation daily. Chief Minister also reviewed the preparations started in Madhya Pradesh after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of vaccination for the age group of 15 to 18 years. Chouhan also congratulated the Health Department of Madhya Pradesh for the best vaccination work in the country. Chouhan took detailed information regarding 9 cases of Omicron in the state. Out of these infected patients, in 7 cases the patients have become completely healthy. The other two are also recovering. Serious symptoms have not been found in the patients. Chief Minister said that contact tracing must be monitored.

CM PAYS TRIBUTE TO TRIBAL HERO MARTYR BHIMA NAYAK

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today paid tribute to the tribal hero martyr Bhima Nayak on his death anniversary. Recalling the contribution of martyr Bhima Nayak, Chouhan said that Bhima Nayak, who looted the British treasure and distributed it among the poor, was a die hard patriot. Even the harsh punishment of Kalapani could not weaken his resolve to serve the motherland. The state and the country will always be proud of the tribal hero. Chief Minister said that I bow down at the feet of revered Bhima Nayak ji, a tribal hero who gave the British a tough fight for ten years on his Balidan Diwas.

Man Arrested For Attempting To Rape 4-Year-Old

THE ACCUSED, A STUDENT OF A PRIVATE COLLEGE, ALLEGEDLY LURED THE CHILD, WHO WAS PLAYING OUTSIDE HER HOUSE, TO HIS ROOM. HE ALLEGEDLY TRIED TO RAPE THE GIRL, BUT WHEN SHE STARTED CRYING, THE ACCUSED OUT OF FEAR, DROPPED OFF THE CHILD AT HER HOME, AN OFFICIAL SAID.

attempting to rape a four-year-old girl in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur city, police said on Wednesday. The incident occurred in the Vijay Nagar area of the city on Monday, City Superintendent of Police (CSP) Tushar Singh said. The accused, a student of a private college, allegedly lured the child, who was playing outside her house, to his room, he said. He allegedly tried to rape the girl, but when she started crying, the accused out of fear, dropped off the child at her home, the official said. The girl later narrated the ordeal to her family members, who filed a complaint on Tuesday, following which the accused was arrested under relevant sections of the IPC and POCSO Act, he added.

Team Absolute | Jabalpur

CM CONDOLES DEATH OF NAVY JAWAN MANOJ VERMA

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has condoled the death of Manoj Verma, a resident of Shajapur, Madhya Pradesh, a soldier posted in the Indian Air Force at Visakhapatnam. Chouhan has tweeted and said that - 'The news of the death of Indian jawan, Manoj Verma of Shajapur who was injured in a road accident is shocking. God bless the divine soul and grant strength to the bereaved family to bear this loss'.

CM PLANTED MANGO SAPLING IN PACHMARHI



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today planted a mango sapling in the Ravi Shankar Bhawan complex at Pachmarhi in Hoshangabad district and gave a message of environmental protection. In fulfillment of his resolve to plant saplings every day, Chouhan along with wife Sadhana Singh and son Kartikeya Singh planted saplings. Chouhan also inspected the plants planted earlier by him in Ravi Shankar Bhawan Complex, Pachmarhi.

"SCHOLARSHIP" PROCESS STARTS FOR GAON KI BETI

Bhopal: In the academic session 2021-22, the application process has been started on the scholarship portal 2.0 for the newly admitted girl students to apply in the 'Gaon ki Beti' and Pratibha Kiran scheme. The last date to apply for the scholarship has been set as January 20, 2022. Offline applications for the scholarship will not be valid. Under the 'Gaon ki Beti' scheme started by the Higher Education Department, a scholarship is provided annually for 10 months at the rate of Rs 500 per month to encourage rural girls for higher education. Under the scheme, meritorious girl students residing in urban areas of Madhya Pradesh state who are living below poverty line and have passed class 12th with good marks, a scholarship of Rs. 5 thousand is provided annually to such girl students.

CHILD RIGHTS OBSERVATORY'S CALENDAR FOR THE YEAR 2022 RELEASED



Team Absolute | Bhopal

The 'Turning Point' calendar of the year 2022 of the Child Rights Observatory was released on Wednesday by Director, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) PK Mishra. This calendar has been done jointly by the Art Design Teachers Forum and Ankur Kala Kendra under the guidance of the Child Rights Observatory. Mishra, while appreciating this effort of the Child Rights Observatory, said

that scholars have connected art by working on the sacred topics like child rights. Artworks of eminent artists of the country have been included in the calendar. This is possible only when there is a feeling in the heart, then the aspirations and feelings of the child can be understood and this expression is reflected in this calendar. He also assured to organize workshops in the museum premises for the up-gradation of art of art teachers working in schools and colleges under the guidance of museum artists and tribal artists. The

artists whose paintings have been published in the calendar include Prayag Shukla Delhi, Shivani Dubey Mumbai, Sushma Sindore Vadodara, Navina Ganju Indore, Awadhesh Vajpayee Jabalpur, Sunita Verma Bhillai, and Bhuri Bai from Bhopal, Vinay Sapre, Suchita Rawat, Swati Jain, Sushma Srivastava and Diana Tomar. Dr. Mishra honored all these artists by presenting them with certificates and calendars. In this program, Rashmi Sharswat said that the voice of education, health, nutrition, participation, working for the rights of children, is a good medium to express the right, its inspiration came from the former Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh, Nirmala Buch and three when the organization came to the fore, it was named Turning Point. Sushma Srivastava said that if artists give due importance to their art, then school principals will also give importance to art integrated learning. Devi Lal Patidar said that the art subject has been given a very important place in the new education policy, in order to make it the best, it is necessary to include various aspects of the country's traditions, culture and current events. Painters included in the calendar, officials of museums and publishing houses were present.

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SOCIETY TO MAKE DISABLED REALIZE THEIR DIVINE POWER: GOVERNOR

Bhopal: Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that every disabled has divine-powers and divya-ang. It is the responsibility of the society to make them aware of their special abilities in their rehabilitation. Assistance should be given to enhance their competence and efficiency. He said that after Class XII, the differently-abled, society and government should contemplate together and take initiative to take up the challenge of making special arrangements for the higher education. Patel was addressing separate introductory meetings of Madhya Pradesh Blind Welfare Association Indore and Madhya Pradesh The Blind Relief Associations today. Officers of the institution, Additional Secretary to the Governor Manoj Khatri and other officers of Raj Bhavan were present in the meeting. Patel has said that proposals should be presented to the government by the institution regarding future action plan and expectations. He has told the need to do this work at the earliest, so that planning can be done according to the need and priority in the coming year's plan. Patel got introduced to the members. He sought point wise information about the work being done by the organization. The Governor discussed in detail about the achievements of the organization, available resources, requirements and future plans.

15 POSTS; 11000 APPLICANTS: A WORSIOME REALITY

Over 32 lakh are registered as unemployed in the state even though around 1 lakh government jobs are lying vacant.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Fifteen job openings for peons, drivers and watchmen in Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior saw nearly 11,000 unemployed young men flock to the city on Saturday and Sunday not just from within the state but also neighbouring Uttar Pradesh. Although the jobs needed candidates who had cleared the 10th-grade exams, applicants included graduates, post-graduates, engineers, MBAs, and even civil judge aspirants. One of the candidates, Ajay Baghel, said, "I am a science graduate. I have applied for a peon. People who have PhD are in the line here." Jitendra Maurya, a law graduate, said, "I have applied for the post of driver. I am also preparing for the judge's exam. I am from Madhav College. The situation is such that sometimes there is no money to buy books. So, I thought I will get some work." Some like Altaf have even come from



other states. "I am a graduate and I have come from Uttar Pradesh for the peon's job," he said. The massive crowd called into question the tall claims by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan on government recruitment in recent months. "We will recruit one lakh in a year. We will leave no stone unturned to fill the backlog posts," he said a few days ago, adding, "Everyone wants employment in government services but I want to tell you the truth is that each and every student can't get a government job." But numbers tell a different story. The total number of unemployed in the employment registration offices of Madhya Pradesh is 32,57,136. This is in spite of the fact that the School Education Department has 30,600 vacant

posts, Home Department has 9,388, Health Department has 8,592, and the Revenue Department has 9,530 vacancies. Around one lakh posts are vacant in different departments of the state government. Job seekers say this is the reason why thousands are turning up even for low-paying government jobs like in Gwalior. A recent street vendor scheme of the government saw 15 lakh applications; of the 99,000 selected, almost 90 per cent are graduates. The Congress has turned up the heat on the state's job crisis with party spokesperson Narendra Saluja saying, "This shows what the development of 17 years of Shivraj government actually looks like. Who talked about filling 1 lakh posts in a month? Where are those leaders? When will they come on the streets?" According to the think tank Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), the unemployment rate in Madhya Pradesh in November was only 1.7 per cent - far less than in other states.



EDITOR'S SPECS

WHY DOCTORS' ARE IN STRIKE?

Soon after resident doctors protesting in front of the Safdarjung Hospital were allegedly roughed up by Delhi Police, Federation of All India Medical Association (FAIMA) President Dr Rakesh Bagdi tweeted: "Depressed, exhausted, cheated now arrested. Thank you Nation for ur repay for all services we had given in this hard time (sic)." That summed up the mood of the doctors protesting since November 27 but became the talking point across India only when they took to the streets. The resident doctors' demands are simple: Conduct counseling for NEET-PG examination, the National Eligibility Entrance Test for entrance to post-graduate courses, so that those selected will add to the strength of existing inadequate number of resident doctors across medical institutions in India. Since March 2020, it has been the resident doctors that have borne the maximum load of the pandemic with long hours of duties, endless time away from families and, in several cases, facing the wrath of relatives of the patients who succumbed to coronavirus. The resident doctors were hoping to get additional hands once the NEET PG admissions were done. The examination that was scheduled in April 2021 was postponed due to the second wave that time. In September, finally the written examination was conducted but the interviews/counseling sessions have been pending. The government has been delaying it as it claimed the matter about Economically Weaker Section (EWS) quota is sub judice and hence it cannot go ahead with the admissions. At a time when India and the whole world is starting at a possible third wave thanks to the Omicron variant, the doctors can always do with additional hands. With the government not relenting, the resident doctors across India started the protests since November 27.

INDIA NEEDS TO ACCEPT TECH ADVANCEMENT AS THE NEW FORM OF EVOLUTION

Dr Ritesh Malik

The '2020 Depression' was caused not only due to just Covid-19 but also by the world leaders' inability to contain the virus and a lack of foresight. While the personal loss suffered by the victims and their loved ones is incalculable, the damage to the global economy has not been anything shy of disastrous either. During the pandemic, the entire value-chain that is the backbone of an economy was disrupted, the labour force was drastically cut down and as the developed countries faced an economic downturn, a domino effect, combined with a vicious cycle that continuously shrank economic output, led to a global depression. The tech industry, however, didn't just endure this affair, but thrived. With an urgent need to maintain distance for consumers and businesses alike, a need to adapt to the network and be a part of the IoT emerged. For businesses, having to reconsider and invest in technology was nothing short of an ultimatum against their very survival. The second half of 2021 saw a boom for tech industry entrepreneurs to aid in the movement of conventional businesses to integrate technology into their business in

the form of communication, manufacturing and distribution development. These immense opportunities for tech founders and unicorn companies do, however, come with accompanying execution pressure. In India, profitability is still a far-fetched goal for most startups despite witnessing decent growth in revenue. It is essential not to let the desire for short-term profitability and a quick payout hinder the development of what could prove to be the pioneers of the next industrial revolution. It is essential during this period that founders and investors look towards long-term profitability. Very few Indian unicorns



so too, will the demand for short-term negative cash flow to ensure maximum utilisation of finances. As 2022 approaches, we are experiencing more and more need for new talent and

have touched \$100 million revenue and there will be immense pressure on these companies to perform. We have all seen that private markets & public markets treat valuations differently. IPOs will likely prove to be a truly vital element of investment and long-term growth for private institutions. As the need for capital increases, unorthodox approaches towards development. This will also require the government to alleviate the restrictions for the business industry. The government holds a responsibility to its citizens to ensure that they opt to create and add value to goods and services in India only, instead of migrating to and working for other countries they believe will recognise their talents better. With the second-biggest network of web users with over 680 million subscribers, India will prove to be extremely friendly to creative and talented founders, provided that we, as a country, start accepting technological advancements as the new form of evolution, and ethically work as a community to nurture creativity and intelligence. Also, large businesses will need to be agile and adopt/acquire the DNA of what we call the 'RESPONSIVE OS' to ensure they sustain else we'll have massive loss of value in conventional businesses. In my opinion, by 2030, 40 per cent of Nifty 50 would be young dynamic technology startups, displacing conventional companies. (Dr Ritesh Malik is a famous doctor-turned-entrepreneur, investor, storyteller and philanthropist. He can be reached at info@drriteshmalik.com. The views expressed are personal)

Defining challenges await Indian football in New Year

Ishwar Nath Jha

From individual achievements to collective accolades, the Indian men's football team had a thriving yet underwhelming 2021. Winning a record-extending eighth SAFF Championship title in Maldives, but failing to qualify directly for the AFC Asian Cup 2023 scheduled in China were the highlights for the Sunil Chhetri-led team in 2021. An important 2022 with new challenges is awaiting Indian football as the country looks set to host the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in October. Before that, they will fight for a place in the AFC Women's Asian Cup in January while the Chhetri-led men's team will play the qualifiers for the AFC Asian Cup. Indian footballing stalwarts such as Chhetri, Sandesh Jhingana, Manisha Kalyan and Bala Devi re-wrote their career-defining scripts this year. The skipper of Indian Super League (ISL) club Bengaluru FC, Chhetri imprinted his name in the history books after

becoming the first Indian footballer to receive the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award, while Manisha Kalyan became the first Indian to score a goal against any Brazil side. The 20-year midfielder from Punjab received the AIFF Emerging Player of the Year award. Chhetri, 37, had earlier been conferred with the Padma Shri Award and the Arjuna Award. In his 19-year-long career, Chhetri has scored 80 international goals (125 matches) and is currently tied with Argentinian great Lionel Messi at second place in the all-time goal-scorers' list among active footballers, with Cristiano Ronaldo leading the chart with 115 goals. One of the best centre-backs and a regular in the national team, Jhingana secured a move to Croatian top-flight club HNK Sibenik. Jhingana chose to move to Europe to play at a higher level in order to develop his game. Women's team striker Bala Devi hogged the limelight after signing a professional contract with the Scottish side Rangers. She is also the first Indian woman to score in European football. The All India Football

Federation (AIFF) conferred Bala Devi with the Women's Footballer of the Year award. After the high of the eighth SAFF Championship title, it was a disappointing outing for the Indian men's team as they failed to directly qualify for the AFC Asian Cup. The national team played 12 international matches, including two friendlies -- against Oman and the UAE -- in Dubai. Although coach Igor Stimac's men managed to hold Oman to a 1-1 draw, they were hammered 0-6 by the UAE. The matches were in preparation for the remaining joint qualifiers for the 2022 FIFA World Cup and AFC Asian Cup, but India ended their campaign at the third position in Group E. And now they will have to play the third-round matches for qualification scheduled from February to September 2022. The Blue Tigers will be looking to qualify and advance through the knockouts. As far as Indian clubs are concerned, they are busy playing in the two major leagues -- Indian Super League (ISL) and I-League. In ISL, ATK Mohun

Bagan sacked the most successful coach of the league, Antonio Habas, mid-season after suffering too many defeats. Troubled by the dipping standards of refereeing, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) announced an investment of Rs 10 crore over the next three years under the 'Elite Referee Development Programme' to produce and develop the elite-level referees. The football governing body also extended national team head coach Stimac's contract till September 2022.

- Key achievement in 2021:**
Eighth SAFF Championship title, beat Nepal 3-0 in final
- Key dates in 2022
 - January: AFC Women's Asian Cup; Hosts: India
 - February to September: AFC Men's Asian Cup Qualification 2022
 - October: FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup; Hosts: India

international

COMMIT TO MAKING 2022 A YEAR OF RECOVERY FOR EVERYONE: GUTERRES

United Nations | Agencies

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday suggested that the world should commit to making 2022 as a year of recovery for everyone. In his year-end message to the world, Guterres said: "The world welcomes 2022 with our hopes for the future being tested by deepening poverty and worsening inequality... An unequal distribution of Covid vaccines... climate commitments that fall short, and by ongoing conflict, division, and misinformation." He added that these are "not just policy tests", but "moral and real-life tests". However, these are exams that all of humanity can pass "if we commit to making 2022 a year of recovery for everyone", said the UN chief. Guterres went on to detail how best the recovery should be done on each front. The pandemic requires "a bold plan to vaccinate every person, everywhere", he said. And for an economic rescue, the UN chief flagged that wealthier countries must support the developing world with "financing, investment and debt relief". Meanwhile, to heal from mistrust and division, he affirmed that a new emphasis must be placed "on science, facts and reason". At the same time, recovery



from conflicts calls for "a renewed spirit of dialogue, compromise and reconciliation" while restoring our planet takes "climate commitments that match the scale and urgency of the crisis", said Guterres. The UN head also acknowledged that "moments of great difficulty are also moments of great opportunity to come together in solidarity". This is because they offer the chance "to unite behind solutions that can benefit all people. And to move forward together, with hope in what our human family can accomplish". "Together, let's make recovery our resolution for 2022. I wish you all a happy and peaceful New Year," concluded the Secretary-General.

38 KILLED IN GOLD MINE COLLAPSE IN SUDAN

Jerusalem | Agencies

Khartoum: At least 38 people have been killed after a gold mine collapsed in West Kordofan state in southern Sudan, a government company announced in a statement. "The General Manager of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company Limited mourns the death of 38 miners who died as a result of the collapse of Umm Draisaya mine," the statement said on Tuesday. The collapsed gold mine lies near El Nuhud town in West Kordofan state, nearly 500 km west of Sudan's capital Khartoum. The government of West Kordofan state and the state's security committee previously issued a decision to close the mine, citing that it was not suitable for mining, according to the company. However, the miners infiltrated into and worked in the mine again despite the decision, it said. About 2 million Sudanese employees are working in the traditional mining industry across Sudan, including the states of Red Sea, Nahr al-Neel, South Kordofan, West Kordofan and Northern, Xinhua news agency reported. According to official statistics, traditional mining contributes nearly 75 per cent of the total gold production in Sudan, which exceeds 93 tons a year.



Israeli researchers develop way to harvest electrical current from seaweed

Jerusalem | Agencies

Israeli researchers have developed a new method for harvesting electrical current directly from seaweed, the Israel Institute of Technology (Technion) has announced. Researchers from Technion and the national research institution, Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research (IOLR), both in the northern city of Haifa, created the method, which was published in the principal international journal Biosensors and Bioelectronics. According to Technion, the method could generate electricity in an environmentally friendly and efficient manner, Xinhua news agency reported. In the latest study, the researchers used the Ulva seaweed species,



popularly known as sea lettuce, as a new photosynthetic source for the current, producing molecules that transmit the electrons to an electrode. It produced currents 1,000 times greater than those produced by cyanobacteria, which are on par with those obtained by standard solar cells. In the dark, the seaweed produced currents that were about half as much as those obtained in the light. The new method uses no additional chemicals and is deemed as "carbon negative," because the seaweed does not emit carbon during the day and even absorbs carbon from the atmosphere while growing and releasing oxygen. The researchers then built a prototype device that collects the electrical current in the Ulva growth vat directly.

4 KILLED AFTER SMALL PLANE CRASHES IN CALIFORNIA



San Francisco: Four people were killed after a small plane crashed in California, according to authorities. "A Learjet 35 business jet crashed in a residential San Diego neighbourhood around 7:15 p.m. local time Monday. Four people were aboard," said the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in a statement on Tuesday. It added that the flight departed John Wayne Airport in Orange County and was headed to Gillespie Field Airport in San Diego, reports Xinhua news agency. Police and firefighters responded to the scene after the crash. Firefighters were not able to find any survivors at the crash scene, according to the San Diego County Sheriff's Department. The Learjet 35, which could carry up to eight passengers, is a type of multi-role twin-engine business jet manufactured by Learjet. The plane was scheduled to land at Gillespie Field Airport when the accident happened.

NYE events scaled back, cancelled in US amid Covid surge

New York | Agencies

As the new Omicron Covid-19 variant is increasing single-day cases to the highest level in the US, major cities, including New York, have scaled down or cancelled New Year's Eve events for a second consecutive year. The fuelling record surges has prompted government to "reinstate travel restrictions, mask mandates and bans on large gatherings", Xinhua news agency quoted The New York Times as saying in a report on Tuesday. Fox News has cancelled "New Year's Eve Toast & Roast 2022" live broadcast from Times Square, as the network said in a statement issued on Tuesday that "the recent velocity of the spread of Omicron cases has made it impossible to produce a live special in Times Square that meets our standards". The annual celebration in Times Square in New York will go on, with attendance capped at 15,000, nearly a quarter of the usual amount. Attendees will be required to wear masks and show proof of full vaccination. The Space Needle's fireworks show



In California, several Los Angeles County holiday events have been cancelled, including the New Year's countdown in Grand Park, which will now be streamed. The Space Needle's fireworks show in Seattle will also be streamed. Over the past three weeks, as Omicron-related cases soared in New York City and elsewhere, the number of children hospitalised in New York with Covid-19 quadrupled.

'GERMANY'S POWER SUPPLY SECURE DESPITE NUKE PHASE-OUT'

Berlin | Agencies

Berlin: The power supply in Germany is secure despite the country pushing ahead with its nuclear phase-out, Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action Robert Habeck said. At the end of this year, the operating licenses for the last three nuclear power plants in Germany will expire, and the facilities will be shut down permanently, reports Xinhua news agency. The shutdowns are scheduled for the end of 2022 at the latest. "This will complete another important stage of the nuclear phase-out agreed in 2011 and significantly increase nuclear safety in this country," the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWi) said. "Security of supply in Germany continues to be guaranteed," Habeck added. In the wake of the Fukushima disaster in 2011, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel launched a nuclear moratorium, including a safety inspection of all nuclear power plants. This led to Germany accelerating its phase-out of nuclear energy. However, this has not affected the reliability of the power supply, BMWi said, which "has increased in recent years and is very high by international standards". "It will remain at this high level in the future with the nuclear phase-out."





Zooming Covid-19 cases 'alarming:' Tope Maha curbs New Year festivities as Mumbai Covid cases shoot up

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Termining the sudden spike in Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra "alarming", Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday said that the infections are multiplying with the positivity rate also shooting up, with the added complications of Omicron.

"On December 20, there were around 6,000 active cases in the state, now it has doubled, and is likely to touch 20,000 today or so. Increasing number of active cases is a matter of concern," he said.

Tope said Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray will hold a top-level review meeting with the Covid-19 Task Force either Wednesday evening or on Thursday to chalk out future action plans.

The minister added that barely a week ago, the number of daily infections recorded was less than 1,000 (December 21, 825 cases), which has now shot upto over 2,000 (December 28, 2,172 cases).

"We have maintained the daily testing levels, but stricter Covid Appropriate Behaviour like wearing masks, sanitisation, hygiene, no overcrowding, etc, must be adhered to and the vaccination drive needs to be enhanced," Tope urged.

In this context, he said the state plans to take up



the vaccination drive to schools for inoculating children in the 15-18 age group, as approved by the Centre last week. Presently, the state has recorded 167

Omicron cases and now the government is contemplating stricter restrictions to control crowds in public transport, weddings, events, etc, the Minister said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Uddhav Thackeray-led government announced several fresh restrictions on gatherings at public places with the rise of Omicron cases in the state. The government had already imposed a night curfew from 9pm to 6am from December 25 in view of the recent surge in coronavirus cases.

Omicron is the newest variant of SARS-CoV-2 which is spreading faster than Delta, though its impact is not as severe as Delta, according to researchers.

Worried with the spike in Covid-19 and Omicron cases, the Maharashtra government on Wednesday clamped fresh restrictions on all New Year celebrations, advising people above 60 and kids below 10 to remain indoors, as Mumbai tally shot above 2,500.

Public events will be allowed upto 50 per cent capacity in closed halls or auditoria, and upto 25 per cent of capacity in open spaces, and no bursting of fire-crackers to

welcome the New Year 2022 on Friday/Saturday.

All care must be taken to ensure social distancing is maintained and crowding is avoided at public places of New Year celebrations like Gateway of India, Marine Drive, Girgaum and Juhu beaches and all other beaches, gardens, grounds, etc, besides use of face masks and sanitisers, said an official notification.

While citizens aged 60 and above or kids of 10 years and less have been advised to remain indoors for health and safety reasons, the government has barred any kind of religious or cultural events or processions attracting crowds, or avoid visiting religious places on New Year Day, said an official notification. Mumbai presented a shocker with nearly doubling of new Covid-19 infections - from 1,333 on Tuesday to 2,510 within 24 hours, besides one death and a recovery rate of 97 per cent. The number of buildings sealed is now 45 and one slum area has also become an active containment zone with the increasing number of cases.

Supriya Sule, 2 Maha ministers, MLA test Covid positive ED charge sheets Anil Deshmukh, sons, in bribery, money-laundering case

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Several Maharashtra leaders, including Nationalist Congress Party MP Supriya Sule, two state ministers and at least one legislator, have tested positive for Covid-19.

Supriya Sule - daughter of NCP supremo Sharad Pawar and cousin of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar - made the announcement via social media on Wednesday. Her husband, Sadanand Sule has also tested positive.

She said there is no cause for concern but urged all those people who had come in contact with her to get themselves tested.

The affected ministers are School Education Minister Prof Varsha Gaikwad, who has been afflicted for the second time, and Tribal Development Minister K.C. Padvi.

Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party legislator from Nagpur Sameer D. Meghe also tested positive and has gone into isolation for treatment.

Around five dozen persons including min-



isters, legislators, staffers, security and police personnel have been infected by Covid-19 during the weeklong Winter Session of the legislature which ended here on Tuesday.

With a sharp spike in Covid-19 cases in the past one week, the state stands on the threshold of the third wave, plus a growing number of the Coronavirus variant Omicron that has the health authorities on their toes.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday filed a supplementary charge sheet against former state Home Minister Anil Deshmukh and has named his two sons, Hrishikesh and Salil, in the alleged bribery case lodged against him, officials said here.

The supplementary charge sheet running into several thousands pages was filed before the Special PMLA Court and among other things, has accused Deshmukh of corruption and money-laundering.

A senior Nationalist Congress Party leader, Deshmukh was arrested on November 2, a day after he appeared before the ED offices in Mumbai, and has remained in custody since then.

The ED has claimed that Deshmukh was the prime beneficiary of the laundering of the bribe monies allegedly collected by dismissed policeman Sachin Vaze, who is also an accused in the same case.



In the earlier charge sheet filed in August, the ED had named 14 accused, including Deshmukh's private secretary Sanjeev Palande and personal assistant Kundan Shinde, a trust run by the Deshmukh family in

Nagpur, and others. The ED has contended that the Deshmukh family was controlling or managing the activities of over two dozen companies that were used to launder the bribe money by showing them as

donations for CSR activities. Denying the allegations, Deshmukh has countered the ED claiming that the money was loans and CSR funds received from various companies. The supplementary charge sheet includes statements of Deshmukh, former Mumbai police commissioner Parambir Singh, ex-Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunte, certain IPS officers, police officials and other witnesses in the case, besides various documents and other evidence that came up during the probe. The ED probe started after this the Central Bureau of Investigation filed its FIR against Deshmukh on April 21 accusing him of graft and misusing his official position as minister, but he has consistently refuted all the allegations against him. The central agencies said that as the Home Minister, Deshmukh had allegedly directed Vaze to collect Rs 100 crore per month from hoteliers and had collected Rs 4.70 crore from various bar owners in Mumbai which was then laundered through his trusts.

MAHARASHTRA GOVERNOR UNDER PRESSURE FROM UNION HOME MINISTRY: SHIV SENA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Shiv Sena on Wednesday slammed Maharashtra governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari for not allowing the elections of the speaker of the assembly and not appointing 12 members to the legislative council as recommended by the state cabinet.

The party said that the governor was under pressure from the Union home ministry and was saddened by the constant pressure.

Party MP Sanjay Raut said, "The governor is saddened by the constant pressure. The people of Maharashtra, including us, share in his pain. He should name which leader at the center is pressuring him. The process of appointing 12 MLC's as governor's nominees has been pending for over a year. Is anyone pressuring him to not appoint these members? He should explain this."

Raut said that the governor has not yet appointed these 12 MLCs due to pressure from the Union Home Ministry. After the letter sent by CM Uddhav Thackeray to the governor for



the election of the speaker of the assembly, Koshiyari reportedly expressed his displeasure and said that no one can put pressure on him.

"It is not acceptable for the state government to put pressure on the governor of Maharashtra. If there is pressure from the Center on the gover-

nor and he is sad because of this, then the entire people of Maharashtra share his grief. The governor himself was the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand. So he knows the workings of the cabinet. The governor should cooperate with the government. We have always respected the governor. No action has been taken by the government or any of the cabinet ministers to disrespect the governor. The governor is a fatherly figure," Raut said. "When the governor came to Maharashtra, we welcomed him with respect. He also treats us with respect when we visit the Raj Bhavan. But he should be clear about who is putting pressure on them. It would have been better if he told us who the leader is who is putting pressure? The matter has been pending for over a year with regard to 12 MLCs. There is a rift from that time... Our constitution states that the recommendations made by the cabinet are to be accepted by the governor. This is the case for members appointed by the President and the members appointed by the governor. Is there any pressure from the Center on the governor? It is not right to put pressure on the governor like this," Raut said.

SBI staffer killed trying to stop heist in Mumbai branch

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A staffer of State Bank of India was shot dead when he attempted to foil a daylight heist at its Dahisar branch and the two robbers grabbed around Rs 2.50 lakh and fled, police said.

According to the MHB Colony Police, the incident occurred just after 3.30 p.m. when the staffer, Sandesh Gomare, 25, was sitting outside the branch and noticed two suspicious-looking masked men entering the bank.

Sending something amiss, Gomare demanded their identity cards at which one of the robbers shot at the official in his chest with a country-made revolver.

As panic spread among the 8-9 staffers inside the branch, the robbers threatened them at gunpoint, grabbed all the cash they could manage on the

premises, and fled the scene within a matter of a couple of minutes before an alarm could be raised.

Bank staffers summoned the police and also rushed the bleeding Gomare to Shatabdi Hospital where he was declared dead on admission.

Gomare is said to be a resident of Virar town in Palghar district and worked as a contract staffer with the SBI branch.

Police surmise that the robbers had planned the strike well as it was nearing closing hours with limited staff on duty and less surveillance outside as the bank is in a relatively non-crowded area of the suburb. The police have managed to collect CCTV grabs of the robbers and have deployed roadblocks in the different parts and the highway besides the district border checkpoint at Dahisar to nab the culprits.

Arjun Kapoor, sis Anshula, cousin Rhea and Karan Boolani test Covid positive

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Arjun Kapoor, who was most recently seen in 'Bhoot Police', tested positive for Covid-19 on Wednesday.

Also testing positive were his sibling Anshula Kapoor, cousin Rhea Kapoor, who got married not long ago, and Rhea's filmmaker hubby Karan Boolani. Arjun's girlfriend Malaika Arora will also undergo a test for the virus. Arjun, Anshula, Rhea and Karan are presently in isolation in their respective homes and are following all the precautions under the guidance of doctors. The news came on the day when Anshula

was supposed to celebrate her birthday. This is the second time that Arjun has got Covid. He had earlier tested positive back in September 2020, but recovered without complications.

Arjun had earlier taken to Instagram to put up a heartwarming note wishing his sister on her birthday. He shared a video of themselves dancing to the beats of Badshah's track 'Jugnu'. He captioned the video: "Remain kind, be the best version of yourself everyday. Stay happy, always smile and remember Mom and I have got your back, no matter what. Happy Birthday @anshulakapoor. May you get all that you want and deserve this year. Love you."

NO PROPERTY TAX ON RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES UP TO 500 SQ FT: MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT

Maharashtra Urban Development Minister Eknath Shinde said the property taxes have not been increased so that the general public is not burdened in view of COVID-19 pandemic.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In good news to Mumbaiaiks, the property tax on residential properties measuring up to 500 square feet has been completely waived off by Maharashtra government. The announcement was made by the state government on Tuesday.

The decision comes during a discussion in the state assembly on a bill for not increasing property tax on residential buildings and plots.

"The opposition has raised the issue about waiving off the property



tax of residential properties of 500 sq

ft that includes general tax and other service taxes. The government's stand is also of the same view. It is under process and the decision will be taken soon," Maharashtra Urban Development Minister Eknath Shinde said. Earlier, Former Maharashtra CM and Leader of the Opposition, Devendra Fadnis, said that only general tax of property tax bills were waived off and not the entire property tax as promised by the then Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray.

There are eight components in the property including general tax, edu-

cation cess, water tax, sewerage tax, tree cess and water benefit tax. The general tax consists of 10-30 per cent of the total property tax.

Shive Sena had faced criticism for waiving only general tax and not the entire property tax as promised by the party in its 2017 Mumbai civic polls manifesto. According to Eknath Shinde, the decision to not increase the taxes has been taken so that general public are not burdened in view of COVID-19 pandemic. The minister that the tax waiver will incur a loss of Rs 1042 crores to BMC.

GOVERNOR KOSHYARI CALLS CM THACKERAY'S LETTER 'INTEMPERATE, THREATENING'

Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari termed the letter written by CM Uddhav Thackeray as a piece written with 'intemperate tone and threatening tenor.'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The 'letter war' between Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray seems to have no end. The latest episode over the Assembly Speaker's elections has only added fuel to the already raging fire. The governor has termed the letter written by CM Thackeray as a piece written with 'intemperate tone and threatening tenor.'

Replying to Uddhav Thackeray's letter requesting the governor to hold Speaker's election, Koshiyari has written a hard-hitting reply to Thackeray. Koshiyari mentioned that he was per-

sonally pained and dismayed to see the intemperate tone of the chief minister's letter. He said the letter belittled and denigrated the office of governor. After the Rules Committee changed the rules for holding elections of the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker from Secret Ballot to Open voting, Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government sought the consent of the governor to hold election on the last day of the assembly session.

On Sunday, three senior ministers of the MVA met Governor Koshiyari at Raj Bhawan to accord consent to the election procedure. In his first reply, the Governor sought more time for legal opinion. Thackeray and his colleagues had gone into a huddle after that and shot off another letter to Koshiyari asking him to reply at the earliest. Thackeray in his letter said the decisions unanimously passed by the house did not come under the purview of the governor's office.

The demand to reply within a specified time-frame was seen as an ultimatum by the MVA gov-



ernment and "angered" the governor.

The letter read, "You have mentioned that the said rules have been framed under Article 208 of the Constitution. It would be pertinent to mention the same article clearly elucidates that a

house of the legislature of a state may make rules for regulating, subject to the provisions of this constitution, its procedure and the conduct of its business." "I have taken the solemn oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution under Article 159 of the Constitution. Consent for holding of this election under the amended rules which prima facie appear to be unconstitutional and illegal cannot be given at this stage."

Koshiyari said, "It is also noteworthy to mention that you have taken nearly 11 months to initiate the process of election of speaker, and the Maharashtra Assembly Rules 6 and 7 have been amended drastically. Thus the impact of these far-reaching amendments needs to be examined legally." "I have never questioned the prerogative of the house in the matter office procedures/proceedings. However, I cannot be pressurized to give consent to a process which prima facie appears to be unconstitutional and illegal as enshrined in the Article 208 of the Constitution."

The Speaker's election could not take place in the Winter Session because of the objections raised by the governor. "If the governor is pained, we are with him in this hour of grief," Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut replied mocking the letter.

This is not the first time that Governor Koshiyari and CM Thackeray have dashed off such letters to each other. During Covid-19, the governor wrote a letter to the chief minister over reopening of temples questioning whether Uddhav Thackeray had become "secular". Uddhav Thackeray wrote a hard-hitting reply saying that he did not need his Hindutva credentials certified by Koshiyari. In September 2020, Thackeray wrote to Koshiyari saying the governor should write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for convening a special session of Parliament on women's safety in the country. Koshiyari had asked Thackeray earlier to convene a session in Maharashtra over women's safety.



Jessica Henwick on Priyanka: She's very talented, professional, stylish

London | Agencies

British star Jessica Henwick has heaped praise on her 'The Matrix Resurrections' co-star Priyanka Chopra Jonas and called her very professional, talented and stylish. Reminiscing about meeting Priyanka on the sets of the film, starring Keanu Reeves, Henwick in a conversation with reporter said: "I love her. She is so sweet. Bless her, her first day on set was not easy."

The 29-year-old actress said that Priyanka had to deliver a 10-page monologue, which she described as not easy.

"They (makers) gave her like a 10-page monologue and it was just her talking in front of us and she knocked out the part she absolutely smashed it. She is very talented, professional, very stylish

and very lovely," Henwick added.

Henwick's filmography boasts of projects such as 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens', 'On the Rocks', 'Love and Monsters' and 'Game of Thrones' to name a few.

How different was to work on a film like 'The Matrix Resurrections'?

"How different: A lot of the worlds I have played in have to give thanks to the Matrix.. The Matrix changed film and style music and the lexicon.. It impacted everything so... Yes, it is different but I am sure a lot of my work has been paying homage to the Matrix.

Distributed by Warner Bros Pictures, the film also stars Carrie-Anne Moss, Lambert Wilson, Jada Pinkett Smith, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Jessica Henwick, Jonathan Groff and Neil Patrick Harris.



David Guetta predicts bright future for dance music

Los Angeles | Agencies

French DJ David Guetta believes that the coming years will be the "best years for dance music in history" as clubbers return to partying following the pandemic.

Guetta told the Evening Standard: "I think it is part of human nature to take things for granted after a while." "I think people were taking life they way it was for granted. After Covid, parties are now actually insane. It's a whole different thing, when we get on stage it is a madhouse. I think the next few years will be the best years for dance music in history."

The superstar DJ shared that some of his biggest hits have been released in times of

global unrest and believes that the public like to seek escapism through the medium of dance music, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

He said: "Every time there is a big crisis, it is good for dance music. People just need to forget everything and have a good time and let go and dance. As a music producer, my experience shows me that the biggest hits that I have had in my career - the biggest hit was 'I Gotta Feeling' (with the Black Eyed Peas) and that was in the middle of the financial crisis."

The French DJ continued: "With Covid, dance music was not hot anymore, but now it's back so strong. I think there is a connection with people going through crisis and the need of gathering together and forgetting about everything." Guetta has worked with some of music's biggest stars but has revealed that he is desperate for a collaboration with Adele.



Reese Witherspoon, Shailene Woodley, Denis Villeneuve mourn Jean-Marc Vallee

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood stars Reese Witherspoon, Shailene Woodley and Denis Villeneuve have remembered Canadian director Jean-Marc Vallee who died on Saturday.

Vallee, who directed films such as 'Dallas Buyers Club' and 'Wild' and helmed TV projects including 'Big Little Lies' and 'Sharp Objects', died suddenly at his cabin outside Quebec City, Canada on Saturday. He was 58 years old, reports variety.com.

"I am in shock. Complete

and utter shock," 'Big Little Lies' actress Shailene Woodley wrote in an Instagram story.

"I guess somehow I know you will turn it into a grand adventure and one of the books, one I can't wait to read and watch when my time comes. It doesn't make sense though, dude. It doesn't make sense. Maybe when we wake up tomorrow you'll be there laughing saying it was just a satirical short film you made. That it's not real."

Canadian director Tanya Lapointe shared a tribute from her husband, fellow Quebecois filmmaker Denis

Villeneuve, on Instagram.

"How must I forget these lonesome tears in my eyes? As you told me before: go out there and shine, crazy diamond!" wrote Villeneuve.

"I love you my friend." "Jean-Marc Vallee's passion for his work is equally matched by the care and consideration he showed to everyone he collaborated with," Endeavor Content said in a statement.

The production company had partnered with Vallee's Crazyrose on 'Lady in the Lake' and 'The Player's Table'.



Lala Kent describes life as 'perfect'

London | Agencies

Lala Kent while hosting a party for her Give Them Lala Beauty brand described her life as 'perfect' on Tuesday's episode of Vanderpump Rules on Bravo. The 31-year-old reality star gave an short speech during the season nine episode that focused on her party. "Without you guys supporting me, the line, like, it would not happen, and I'm just like a b**** from Utah," Lala said after her then-fiance Randall Emmett rolled out a multi-tiered

cake for her. Lala was then shown in a confessional getting emotional as she reflected on her accomplishment.

"I started this brand from nothing. This is my baby. Life is perfect. How did I get here?," she said while fighting back tears.

Lala at the party was cheered on by her friends as she told them, "Thank you for celebrating with me. I love you all so much." The episode was filmed last summer several months before Lala called off her engagement with Randall, 50, amid cheating accusations.

'Don't Look Up' behind-the-scenes podcast series announced by Netflix

Los Angeles | Agencies

Streaming giant Netflix has announced 'The Last Movie Ever Made', an upcoming podcast series that will offer a behind the scenes look at writer-director Adam McKay's comedic disaster film 'Don't Look Up'. The podcast series will be composed of six episodes and will debut its first installment on January 7, 2022, reports variety.com.

Along with a glimpse into the film's production process and an argument regarding the story's parallels to how ruling institutions have mishandled the Covid pandemic, the podcast will also feature appearances by various members of its sizable ensemble cast, including Jennifer Lawrence, Leonardo DiCaprio, Meryl Streep, Tyler Perry, Ariana Grande, Timothee Chalamet, Rob Morgan and Himesh Patel.

"In early 2020, Adam McKay set out to make a comedy," reads the pod-



cast's tagline. "It was meant to make fun of, and point to, the forces stopping us from saving ourselves from climate change. 2020, of course, had other plans. This is what happened when a cast and crew came together to make a disaster comedy, while living through a series of very uncomical disasters."

After a limited theatrical release that began on December 10, 'Don't Look Up' became available to stream on Netflix on December 24. The film has been met by a mixed response, though it still seems poised as a formidable contender in this year's awards race, with some calling it "too funny to lose."

KIM KARDASHIAN AND PETE 'GETTING MORE SERIOUS' IN 2022

Los Angeles | Agencies

Kim Kardashian and Pete Davidson are 'really cuddly and affectionate with each other' as they continue to get to know each other. The 41-year-old star and Pete, 28, started dating earlier this year, and their burgeoning romance is showing no signs of slowing down as 2022 approaches. 'Kim is so into him. [Kim and Pete] are both really cuddly and affectionate with each other,' a source told People as another insider shared with UsWeekly that the unlikely pair are getting 'serious' with one another. The brunette beauty - who has North, eight, Saint, six, Chicago, three, and Psalm, two, with rap star Kanye West - and Pete are already very 'comfortable' with each other said the first source. And Kim is visibly 'very happy' with she's with the comedian. The insider told People: "They seem more comfortable than couples who have been together a long time. Kim is obviously very happy with him."



Lori Harvey



SA v IND, 1st Test

INDIA NEED SIX WICKETS TO WIN CENTURION TEST

Centurion | Agencies

Jasprit Bumrah produced scintillating show of pace bowling in the fog end of the day as India now need six wickets to win the first Test against South Africa. At stumps on day four, South Africa are 94/4 in 40.5 overs, still requiring 211 runs to win on day five.

After the final session began, Dean Elgar and Keegan Petersen began well with a boundary each. In the 13th over, Mohammed Siraj hit Petersen's pads on the knee-roll. Given not out, India took the review but umpire's call saved him. In his next over, Siraj got Petersen with an outswinger which squared him up and took the outer edge to the keeper Rishabh Pant's right.

Siraj and Jasprit Bumrah got a few lifters, leaving Elgar to be like a cat on a hot tin roof and be resistant against



VIRAT KOHLI'S DROUGHT CONTINUES

Indian Test skipper Virat Kohli ended the year 2021 without scoring a century in international cricket, following his twin failures in the ongoing first Test against South Africa, at SuperSport Park, here on Wednesday. The 33-year old Kohli, who departed for 35 in the first innings, could only score 18 runs in the second innings, getting out to youngster Marco Jansen.

With this, Kohli ends 2021 with 536 runs at a paltry average of 28.21 from 11 Tests. He has also managed just four fifties in Test cricket in 2021. The Indian skipper had last hit an international century on November 23, 2019, where he played a match-winning knock of 136 in the pink-ball day and night Test match against Bangladesh at the Eden Gardens.

everything coming at him. Elgar, along with Rassie van der Dussen, were stodgy and resolute in their partnership of 40 runs off 137 balls for the third wicket. It took a nip-backer from Bumrah to hit the top of off-stump as van der Dussen shouldered his arms, breaking a stubborn stand.

Elgar marched on to bring his half-century with a clip through square leg off Siraj. Bumrah closed day four with a perfect yorker to rattle nightwatchman Keshav Maharaj's stumps.

Brief scores

India 327 in 105.3 overs and 174 in 50.3 overs (Rishabh Pant 34, KL Rahul 23; Kagiso Rabada 4/42, Marco Jansen 4/55) against South Africa 197 in 62.3 overs and 94/4 in 40.5 overs (Dean Elgar 52 not out, Jasprit Bumrah 2/22), South Africa need 211 runs to win.

Salah misses penalty as Liverpool slip to defeat away to Leicester

London | Agencies

Liverpool remain six points behind Premier League leaders Manchester City after suffering a 1-0 defeat away to Leicester City here.

The team coached by former Liverpool boss Brendan Rodgers rode their luck on Tuesday night when Liverpool striker Mohamed Salah fired a penalty against the woodwork, before hitting the rebound wide and Ademola Lookman's 59th-minute strike decided the game.

Lookman had only been in the game for three minutes when he burst past Joel Matip and scored with a low shot, shortly after Sadio Mane had missed for Liverpool when he looked certain to score.

West Ham produced an impressive performance to win 4-1 away to relegation-threatened Watford with goals from Tomas Soucek, Said Benrahma, Mark Noble and Nikola Vlasic allowing them to bounce back after



Emmanuel Dennis' third-minute opener had given Watford a perfect start to the game, Xinhua reports. Soucek levelled from Jarrod Bowen's pass in the 27th minute and two minutes later Benrahma, who had earlier hit the woodwork, put West Ham in front. Southampton played with 10 men for 50 minutes but held on for a 1-1 draw at home to Tottenham. Finally, Crystal

Palace beat bottom of the table Norwich 3-0 thanks to first half goals from Odsonne Edouard, Jean-Philippe Mateta and Jeffrey Schlupp, who punished some poor defending from a rival that has lost five consecutive games. The scheduled games between Arsenal and Wolves and Leeds United and Aston Villa have been postponed due to outbreaks of COVID-19.

I-League December 30, 31 matches postponed, confirms AIFF

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) League Committee on Wednesday decided to postpone the I-League 2021-22 next round matches scheduled on December 30-31 after COVID-19 positive cases have been detected among participating teams.

"Acting on the advice, the Committee hence, unanimously decided to postpone the Hero I-League 2021-22 matches for the next round which were scheduled on December 30-31, 2021," the AIFF said in a statement.

"The Committee deliberated at length about the current situation wherein posi-



five cases have been detected among participating teams in the ongoing Hero I-League 2021-22, and also took into serious consideration Dr Mahajan's suggestions to adhere to medical parameters, and move forward together without making any compromise on the health of the players which is of paramount importance," The AIFF said. The

I-League tweeted on Wednesday, informing about the positive COVID-19 cases, saying, "There have (been) some positive cases reported among certain #HeroILeague teams. The League is keeping a close tab on it and have already spoken to the clubs. In addition, an emergency meeting of the League Committee has also been summoned in the afternoon. Further details soon." The I-League has reported "some positive" COVID-19 cases among "certain teams" and the League Committee has called an emergency meeting to decide the future of the tournament.

NO INDIAN NOMINATED FOR ICC T20I PLAYER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Dubai | Agencies

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday shortlisted England star batter Jos Buttler, Australia all-rounder Mitchell Marsh, Pakistan wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan and Sri Lanka spinner Wanindu Hasaranga for the ICC T20I Player of the Year award.

No Indian player figures in the list for the coveted award. The 29-year-old Rizwan ruled the roost in 2021 in the shortest format of the game, smashing a whopping 1,326 runs in 29 matches at an average of 73.66 and a strike-rate of 134.89.

He played a key role in Pakistan's run to the semifinals during the ICC T20 World Cup 2021. He also scored the maiden T20I century of his career against South Africa in Lahore earlier in the year and ended 2021 with a brilliant knock of 87 against West



Indies in Karachi. Wicketkeeper-batter Buttler made 589 runs in 14 matches at an average of 65.44 with one century and 13 dis-

missals in 2021. His great form continued against India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan and he ended the T20 World Cup as England's leading run-scorer

with 269 runs. Australia's T20 World Cup hero with the bat, Mitchell Marsh too has been shortlisted for the award after smashing 627 runs in 27 matches at an average of 36.88. He also took eight wickets at strike rate of 18.37.

Heading into the T20 World Cup tournament in the UAE, Marsh was in supreme confidence as he aggregated 185 runs in six matches at an average of 61.66 and a strike-rate of 146.82. He would reserve the best for the last, playing a match-winning 77 off 50 deliveries consisting of six fours and four sixes in the final against New Zealand. It was a breakthrough year for Sri Lankan Waniindu Hasaranga, who established himself as one of the best spinners in the shortest format, taking 36 wickets in 20 matches at an average of 11.63. He established himself as a player who could contribute with the bat, making 196 runs with one half-century in 2021.

DJOKOVIC PULLS OUT OF ATP CUP

Melbourne | Agencies

Melbourne: World No.1 Novak Djokovic has pulled out of the season-opening ATP Cup scheduled in Sydney from January 1-9, organisers confirmed on Wednesday. However, Serbia remains in the competition and will be led by World No. 33 Dusan Lajovic. The 34-year-old, who ended the 2021 season as world No.1 for a record seventh time to break the tie with American great Pete Sampras, has kept the ATP organisers guessing about his COVID-19 vaccination status and his pull-out of the multi-nation Cup has also made his Australian Open participation more complex.



Meanwhile, fellow grand slam champions Rafael Nadal and Dominic Thiem have also opted out of the ATP Cup. "Russia's Andrey Rublev, Aslan Karatsev and Evgeny Donskoy have also pulled out and Evgeny Karlovskiy will join the team. Team USA's Austin Krajicek has also withdrawn, and will not be replaced at this time," the ATP said in a statement. The ATP Cup will begin on January 1 at both Ken Rosewall Arena and Qudos Bank Arena, Sydney Olympic Park.

SCOTT BOLAND ENTERS MCG'S HONOUR BOARD

Melbourne | Agencies

Australian pace bowler Scott Boland on Wednesday entered the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) Honour Board with his name finding a place among the elite cricketers to have excelled in the Boxing Day Test.

The MCG posted images of Boland's name being etched on the Honour Board on Wednesday and tweeted, "Into the history books. @sboldand24 makes the MCG Honour Board."

The 32-year-old Boland claimed six second-innings wickets and conceded just seven runs as England were bowled out for 68, losing the third Ashes Test by an innings and 14 runs - and with it the series. The collapse for 68 was England's lowest innings score in Australia since 1904.

Boland's figures of 6/7 are the best by a debutant in the MCG in 144 years, and the only player to have taken more wick-



ets is Tom Kendall, who recorded 7/55 in 1877 -- five years before Australia's victory at The Oval gave life to the Ashes.

Boland has become only the second Indigenous male player to wear the baggy green after pace bowler Jason

Gillespie, who played 71 Tests between 1996 and 2006.

On Tuesday, he was awarded the Johnny Mullagh Medal -- named after the Indigenous cricket great -- as the player of the match.

USA-IRELAND ODI SERIES CANCELLED

Lauderhill (Florida):

USA Cricket has said it is "devastated" by the news of the cancellation of the three-match One-Day International (ODI) series against Ireland due to several COVID-19 cases being reported in the visiting team's camp.



The first ODI, scheduled on December 26, was cancelled on the eve of the match due to positive COVID-19 cases in USA squad and the umpiring team for the matches.

The remaining two ODIs -- December 29 and 30 -- were also cancelled after two members of the Irish support staff tested positive. Several partners of players also tested positive for the virus. The Irish touring party is scheduled to depart Florida for Kingston, Jamaica on December 31 for their series against the West Indies. However, the two members of the support staff who have tested positive will complete their isolation in Florida before their onward travel arrangements are finalised.

BOYCOTT CALLS FOR ROOT TO STEP DOWN AS CAPTAIN

London | Agencies

Former England opener Geoffrey Boycott has called for Joe Root to step down as the captain of the Test team after the tourists lost the 2021/22 Ashes in 12 playing days of the series.

England were bowled out for 68 to lose the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) by an innings and 14 runs. The result meant Australia retained the Ashes with Root now under more pressure than ever to continue as captain.

"Nobody would want to give up the captaincy, but it is not about Joe -- it is about getting guys to perform better. At the end of this series the question should be asked: would England benefit from a change of captain? That's not me trying to be hurtful to Joe or just being controversial. We all love Joe," wrote Boycott in his column for The Telegraph.

Boycott slammed Root's captaincy, saying that he lacks the authority and skills to lead the Test side. Under Root, England have lost nine Tests this year and unable to win an Ashes series.

"Now Australia are 3-0 up and the Ashes have gone, will Root please stop saying Australia are not much better than us? I don't mind him living in cuckoo land but stop trying to kid us. If he really believes what he says then maybe it is time he gave up the captaincy of the England cricket team.



David Warner eyes series win in India, England before retiring from Tests

Melbourne | Agencies

Beating India in their home soil and an Ashes series victory in England are the two important milestones Australia opener David Warner is eyeing before he retires from Test cricket.

The attacking batter turned 35 in October during the 2021 T20 World Cup, where he won the Player of the tournament award in Australia's maiden title triumph. He will be nearing 37 by the time the next away series against England rolls around.

But after Australia clinched the home Ashes series 3-0 inside 12 days at the MCG on Tuesday, the left-handed batsman suggested there are few important goals he would like to achieve before hanging his boots in the longest format of the game.

"We still haven't beaten India in India. That would be nice to do. And obviously, England away, we had a



drawn series (in 2019), but hopefully, if I managed to get that chance and opportunity, I might think about going back," Warner was quoted as saying by 'ESPNcricinfo'.

The opener has played 13 and eight Tests across three series in England and two in India, respectively. But he has a poor record in both the

countries, averaging 26 and 24 respectively without a century. However, Warner, who has silenced his critics following sterling performances across the T20 World Cup and the first three Tests of the Ashes series, sees age as no barrier and feels he has an opportunity to score big in next year.



MANOJ BAJPAYEE TOPS LIST OF MOST POPULAR OTT ACTORS OF 2021

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Actor Manoj Bajpayee is the most popular OTT actor in India in 2021, according to an Ormax Media survey. In the survey, actor Manoj Bajpayee topped the list of the most popular OTT actors, followed by Pankaj Tripathi.

Nawazuddin Siddiqui grabbed third place in the list, while Samantha Ruth Prabhu, who captivated audiences as 'Raji' in 'The Family Man 2', was fourth. Radhika Apte, Kay Kay Menon, Saif Ali Khan, Sushmita Sen, Jithendra Kumar, and Tamannah Bhatia bagged spots in the top ten OTT actors.

Ormax Media took to Twitter to pub-

lish the results of the survey, "Most popular OTT actors in India (Sep-Nov 2021): @BajpayeeManoj stays at no. 1, @kaykaymenon02 (no. 6), @thesushmitasen (no. 8), and @tamannahspeaks (no. 10) make an entry in the Top 10 #OTT #Streaming."



AKSHAY KUMAR GETS POETIC FOR TWINKLE ON HER BIRTHDAY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood star Akshay Kumar, who was recently seen in 'Atrangi Re', wished his wife Twinkle Khanna on her birthday with a special social media post on Wednesday. The actor took to his Instagram and shared a picture of himself chilling with his wife in the Maldives.

He wrote in the caption, "With you by my side, even the blues are easy to take in my stride... Happy birthday Tina." In the picture, both Akshay and Twinkle can be seen resting on a hammock above the turquoise waters of the Maldives. While Akshay wore a dark blue coloured shirt and pants rounded with dark sunglasses, Twinkle sported a blue denim shirt, shorts and sunglasses of the same palette. Twinkle shares her birthday with her late father Rajesh Khanna, who is regarded as the first superstar of Bollywood. Recently a biopic of the actor was announced by actor-producer Nikhil Dwivedi, who is currently in talks with Farah Khan to adapt Gautam Chintamani's book 'Dark Star: The Loneliness Of Being Rajesh Khanna' for the screen.



AYUSHMANN: I'M DRAWN TO UNIQUE CONTENT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Ayushmann Khurrana, who is known for working in socially relevant films, doesn't pick a film considering the conversation that it would trigger.

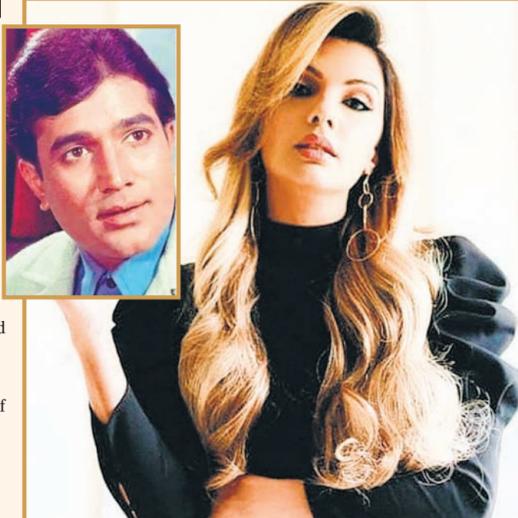
Instead, for him it's the content or the script and the filmmaker that seals the deal, rest everything that comes along with the film is a byproduct.

Ayushmann says, "I'm drawn to unique content, to scripts that have heart and soul, to subjects that I feel are important to be backed. I never choose a film thinking how much conversation it will generate. I'm essentially an artist who is trying to entertain people first with the best of films. Generating conversation is a byproduct of the quality of script that comes my way." He adds, "I only choose a film basis the script and what it has to offer to audiences. It needs to be fresh and novel and if it can propel people into thinking and questioning things about our lives as we know it, then it's a bonus. People don't come to see films because they want to start a conversation. They come to get entertained first and then converse about a specific message that is delivered to them in the freshest manner possible." The actor feels fortunate to have collaborated with filmmakers that have extracted the best out of him, "I'm fortunate that I have found filmmakers, storytellers and scriptwriters who are willing to take the plunge to say something new. Whatever I'm today, is also because of them, their hard work and their vision." "So, while I will keep scouting for best scripts, I also hope that I always get to collaborate with the best minds in Indian cinema," he concludes.

Somy Ali: My mom had a big crush on Rajesh Khanna

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Late Bollywood actor Rajesh Khanna's birthday is on December 29. He was called the first 'superstar' of Bollywood and there was a mad craze for him during the 1970s. On this special day, former Bollywood actress and social activist Somy Ali recalled how her mom had the biggest crush on the late actor. "My mom had the biggest crush on him and all she would listen to was his songs, the majority of them sung by Kishore da, which would blast over the tape recorder in our house when I was a kid in Pakistan," she reminisced. Her first memory of watching his film was 'Haathi Mere Saathi'. "I enjoyed it because of the love he had for animals and was furious at how cruel the leading lady was to him and jealous of his compassion and love for his elephant. Given I was five years old at the time and could not make the distinction between real life and a movie," said the actress who worked in movies such as 'Aao Pyaar Karen', 'Anthi', 'Chupp' and others. She also recalled watching 'Anand'. "I remember my mother crying profusely when Kaka ji died in the end. When I was seven years old, my father organised a trip for my mom and me to visit Mumbai," said the former Bollywood actress.



KAJAL PISAL WANTS TO DO REALITY TV SHOWS IN 2022

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Kajal Pisal, who is currently seen in 'Sif Tum', says she wants to do a reality TV show in the new year.

She says: "After working in television shows for years, now I wish to try my hand into reality shows. I want my audience to connect with me, Kajal in real life. I'm thankful that audiences have always appreciated my work in fiction. Now, looking at the trend I keep myself open to reality shows and challenge myself.

"I have understood one thing for sure, that such are a risk for an actor's career. Like if audiences start loving you, it makes you a star but in case things go negative, no maker would love to work with you. But I feel up to taking the challenge and keep myself open to such shows and to take up one in the coming year 2022."

Kajal who is mostly seen in grey character and turns up influencing viewers with her fashion and style now wants viewers to realise how simple she is in real life.

"I enjoy wearing fancy outfits to flaunt fashionable jewellery. People have always appreciated my on screen looks but now I wish they could meet the real me. After I act as a grey character they identify me in a wrong way. So I feel such shows will reveal how simple and joyful I'm actually in my real life."

Kajal is known for featuring in popular shows like 'Bade Achhe Lagte Hain', 'Saath Nibhaana Saathiyaa' and 'Naagin 5', among others.



Bollywood film planned on tax raids on Piyush Jain

Mumbai | Varanasi

Noted filmmaker Kumar Mangat Pathak has announced that he will make a film, titled 'Raid-2' on the recent Income Tax (I-T) raids in Kanpur and Kannauj on perfumer Piyush Jain. Pathak made the announcement during a panel discussion at the three-day 'Kashi Film Festival' in Varanasi on Tuesday evening.

Pathak, who had earlier produced the Ajay Devgn starrer 'Raid', said that this film only showed that money can come out of walls too, whereas in the recent I-T raids in Kanpur and Kannauj, the money actually started coming out of the walls.

He said that the scene of money coming out of the walls will also be shown in his film 'Raid 2'. Meanwhile, during the panel discussion, actor Anupam Kher praised the Uttar Pradesh government for the development of the film city in the state. He said that with the initiative of the state government, artists living in different cities of the state would also get a platform to showcase their talent. He further added that artists across the world will also get a chance to showcase their acting skills along with mastery of music and dance. Thousands of people joining the film industry will get employment opportunities.

'RRR' RELEASE ON SCHEDULE, FILM TO ROAR IN CINEMAS ON JAN 7

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Despite a spike in Covid cases and civil restrictions being reimposed, director S.S. Rajamouli has decided not to postpone the release of his period action drama 'RRR' which is scheduled to release on January 7. Film trade analyst Taran Adarsh took to Twitter and shared the news saying that the release date of the Ram Charan and Jr NTR-starrer remains unshakable. He wrote, "#Xclusiv... BREAKING NEWS... 'RRR' VERY MUCH ON 7 JAN 2022... SS RAJAMOULI OFFICIAL STATEMENT TO ME... No postponement.



#RoarOfRRRInKerala". With civil restrictions slowly being reintroduced and cinema halls being shut down in the national capital Delhi under the yellow alert, showbiz seems to be under threat once again with many producers reconsidering the release of their films across cinemas. The makers of Shahid Kapoor-starrer cricket drama 'Jersey' have already postponed the film's release.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Urvashi Rautela