

# absolute india

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# STOP HATE SPEECHES

**INDIA'S OMICRON TALLY CROSSES 1,000-MARK, MAHA TOPS WITH 450 CASES**

## Is it Third Wave?

SEVENTY-SIX ADVOCATES OF THE SUPREME COURT HAD ALSO WRITTEN TO CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA NV RAMANA, ASKING THE SUPREME COURT TO TAKE SUO MOTO COGNISANCE OF THE CALLS TO VIOLENCE.

NAMING A LIST OF PEOPLE WHO HAD GIVEN THE CALL, THE ADVOCATES HAD WRITTEN THAT IN ABSENCE OF POLICE ACTION, "URGENT JUDICIAL INTERVENTION IS REQUIRED TO PREVENT SUCH EVENTS THAT SEEM TO HAVE BECOME THE ORDER OF THE DAY".

THE CONCLAVE IN HARIDWAR WAS ORGANISED BY YATI NARASIMHANAND, A RELIGIOUS LEADER WHO HAS BEEN ACCUSED IN THE PAST OF INCITING VIOLENCE WITH HIS INCENDIARY SPEECHES.

*"We cannot allow such incitement to violence together with public expressions of hate - which not only constitute serious breaches of internal security but which could also tear apart the social fabric of our nation. One speaker made a call to the army and police to pick up weapons and participate in the cleanliness drive (safai abhiyan). This amounts to asking the army to participate in the genocide of our own citizens, and is condemnable and unacceptable."*



**UP SCHOOL KIDS MADE TO TAKE PLEDGE FOR 'HINDU RASHTRA'**



Sonbhadra: School children in Uttar Pradesh's Sonbhadra district were reportedly made to take a pledge to make India a 'Hindu Rashtra'. A video of the incident has gone viral on social media, creating a fresh controversy. The children, dressed in their school uniforms, had gathered in the park after school hours. Some kids visiting the park with their parents, were also part of the oath-taking event. The students were made to repeat the pledge to make India a Hindu nation. The pledge stated: "We promise to work towards making and keeping India a Hindu Rashtra. We will fight for this, die for this, and if required, kill for this. But we will not back down even for a moment, no matter the sacrifice. May our ancestors, teachers, Mother India give us enough strength so that we can fulfil our pledge. May they give us victory." The oath was administered to school children at Nehru Park in Sonbhadra district and ended with slogans of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai", "Vande Mataram" and "Jai Hind."



Team Absolute | New Delhi

**NO SCIENCE BEHIND NIGHT CURFEWS IN INDIA: WHO'S SWAMINATHAN**

New Delhi: "Things like night curfew, there is no science behind it. One has to take evidence-based measures. There is a whole list of public health measures. Entertainment venues are places where these viruses spread the most. It's natural to bring in some restrictions there. What we can expect to see in India is a surge of Omicron cases, I think it is just beginning now in some of the cities and is going to infect a lot of people."

With 309 new cases of highly transmissible Covid variant Omicron detected in the last 24 hours, India's Omicron tally on Friday rose to 1,270 cases. Of total, 374 have been discharged.

Among the 23 states and UTs that have reported the Omicron infection so far, Maharashtra tops the list with 450 cases of this variant. Of them, 125 patients have been discharged as per the health ministry data.

Delhi has the second highest cases of Omicron infection at 320. However, 57 of them have been discharged from the hospital. Delhi is followed by Kerala with 109 Omicron cases. The Union health ministry on Friday morning said that the Omicron infection has so far spread into 23 states and UTs.

Among other states, Gujarat has so far reported 97 Omicron cases and Rajasthan has a total of 69 cases. In Telangana, 62 people have so far tested positive for Omicron while in Tamil Nadu the count stands at 46. Karnataka has logged 34 cases and Andhra Pradesh so far has 16 cases of this variant. Haryana and Odisha have 14 Omicron cases each while West Bengal has reported 11 cases so far.

However, the Omicron case count is in single digit for Madhya Pradesh at 9 and Uttarakhand at 4 cases while Chandigarh and Jammu & Kashmir have 3 cases each. Uttar Pradesh and Andaman and Nicobar Islands have 2 cases so far. Meanwhile, Goa, Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh, Manipur and Punjab have one case each so far.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Five former chiefs of staff of the armed forces and over a hundred other people including veterans, bureaucrats, and prominent citizens have written to President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding "open call of the genocide of Indian Muslims" at various events, most recently in Uttarakhand's Haridwar and Delhi. The letter also mentions targeting of other minorities like Christians, Dalits, and Sikhs. The letter made a reference to the current situation on our borders warning that such calls for violence can cause disharmony internally, and also embolden external forces. "Any breach of peace and harmony within the nation will

**KALICHRAN SENT IN JUDICIAL CUSTODY TILL JAN 13**

Raipur: Hindu religious leader Kalicharan Maharaj, arrested over alleged derogatory remarks about Mahatma Gandhi, was on Friday sent in judicial custody by a court in Chhattisgarh's Raipur district. The police produced him in the court a day ahead of the expiry of his police remand, saying they had questioned him and did not need his further custody. After his arrest from neighbouring Madhya Pradesh on Thursday early morning by Raipur police, the Raipur court had sent him in police custody for two days. District Prosecution Officer Hina Yasmin Khan said "He was scheduled to be produced again on Saturday. But police completed the questioning and presented him before Judicial Magistrate First Class Chetna Thakur on Friday and requested that he be sent in judicial custody." The court sent him in judicial remand till January 13.



embolden inimical external forces. The unity and cohesiveness of our men and women in uniform, including the Central Armed Police

Forces (CAPFs) and Police Forces, will be seriously affected by allowing such blatant calls for violence against one or the other community

in our diverse and plural society," it said. Making a direct reference to the "Dharma Sansad" in Haridwar where direct calls for violence against Muslims were made, it said, "We are seriously perturbed by the content of speeches made during a 3-day religious conclave called a Dharma Sansad, of Hindu Sadhus and other leaders, held at Haridwar between 17-19 December 2021. There were repeated calls for establishing a Hindu Rashtra and, if required, picking up weapons and killing of India's Muslims in the name of protecting Hinduism," the letter said. The letter also mentions an event in Delhi when a large number of persons gathered in Delhi and publicly took an oath resolving to make India a Hindu nation, by fighting and killing if necessary. "More such seditious meetings are being organised in other places," it said.

## India Inc welcomes deferment of GST hike on textiles

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India Inc on Friday welcomed the GST Council's decision to defer the proposed GST hike on textiles. According to reports, the council has deferred the proposal on the back of reservations from state governments and industry. The proposal intended to hike GST rate on apparel from 5 to 12 per cent.

"A big relief to the textile and clothing industry - we enter 2022 with a fresh bout optimism as the big fear recedes - AAa great and timely gift by the GST Council," said Sanjay K. Jain, ICC National Textiles Committee Chairman and MD, TT Limited. "Cannot express in words the big relief we are feeling, after living in fear from September."

According to Bimal Jain, Chair of IDT Committee PHDCCI said the deferment will give a much needed impetus and support to the sector.

"Large number of small and medium scale



taxpayers were worried with the proposal to hike GST rates and this decision of GST Council is in the right direction and it is advisable to build confidence among traders before hiking GST rates in future."

Besides, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has also hailed the decision. Furthermore, the confederation urged to postpone the decision to increase the GST rate on footwear as well.

## RESIDENT DOCTORS' STRIKE CALLED OFF

New Delhi:

Resident doctors, who have been protesting against the delay in NEET-PG counselling, called off their strike at 12 pm on Friday, and returned to work in hospitals in Delhi and across the country. Representatives have reportedly said that two of their demands have been met, and that they would wait for the Supreme Court hearing on 6 January. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) said that they met with Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Mansukh Mandaviya, on 30 December, and that that they were given an assurance by the Health Minister that the NEET-PG counselling would begin before 6 January. The president of the Federation of Resident Doctors' Association (FORDA), Dr Manish, had earlier announced that they would call off their strike against the delay in NEET 2021 counselling at 12 pm on Friday. The withdrawal, however, is conditional. Representatives said that if the counselling dates were not announced after the SC hearing, the doctors would reassess their plans.



## 100% VACCINATION TARGET IN 2021 TURNED OUT TO BE 'JUMLA': RAHUL

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday criticised the Central government for "missing" the double vaccination target, saying the government's claims to achieve 100 per cent vaccination turned out to be "Jumla".

"The Central government had promised 100 per cent vaccination by the end of 2021... today is the last day of the year, the country is still far from the vaccination target. One more 'Jumla' got shattered," the Congress leader tweeted. Claiming there is a



scarcity of Covid vaccines, the Congress said 47,95,00,000 Indians need 59,40,00,000 vaccination doses.

"Besides, 25,70,00,000 senior citizens and corona warriors need the vaccine while those in the 15-18 age group need another 35,70,00,000 doses," Congress spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala said.

## MAHA APPROACHING TOWARDS LOCKDOWN: MINISTER



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The stage of imposing a fresh lockdown is approaching in Maharashtra but Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray will take a call on it, state minister Vijay Wadettiwar said here on Friday. Maharashtra recorded 8,067 new coronavirus cases during the day, a rise of 2,699 compared to Thursday, and eight deaths. The stage of lockdown is approaching.

But the chief minister will take a decision on when to impose it, Wadettiwar, the minister for disaster management, told reporters. Decision on restrictions on travel and colleges will be taken together, he added. Maharashtra has seen a sharp rise in new daily coronavirus cases in the last 11 days of 2021.

The state government, in fresh guidelines issued on Thursday night, capped the attendance at gatherings in open or closed spaces at 50.

## I-T RAIDS AT CELLPHONE MANUFACTURING COMPANIES ACROSS INDIA

One of the companies utilised the services of another entity located in India but did not comply with the provisions of tax deduction. The quantum of liability of TDS on this account could be around Rs 300 crore.

One Indian company which was raided on Friday, had no role in management and was being controlled by a neighbouring country. It transferred Rs 42 crore out of India without payment of due taxes. "We had information that they are involved in tax evasion. After gathering more information we conducted searches at their premises," said an I-T official.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Income Tax Department (IT-D) on Friday carried out searches across India against the foreign-controlled cellphone manufacturing companies for their alleged involvement in tax evasion. "Certain foreign-controlled mobile communication and mobile hand-set manufacturing companies and their associated persons were raided by our team. The raids were conducted in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Assam, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Delhi-NCR," said an I-T official. The Income Tax searches revealed that two major companies have made remittance in the nature of royalty, to and on behalf of its group companies located abroad, which aggregates to more than Rs 5,500 crore.



It was found that these companies had not complied with the regulatory mandate prescribed under the Income Tax Act, for disclosure of transactions with associated enterprises.

"Such lapse makes them liable for penal action under the Income Tax Act, the quantum of which could be in the range of more than Rs 1,000 crore," an official said.

"Foreign funds have been intro-

duced in the books of the Indian company but it transpires that the source from which such funds have been received are of doubtful nature, purportedly with no credit worthiness of the lender. The quantum of such borrowings is about Rs 5,000 crore," said the official. The official said that they have collected evidence with regards to the inflation of expenses, payments on behalf of the associated enter-

prises, which led to the reduction of taxable profits of the Indian mobile handset manufacturing company. This amount could be in excess of Rs 1,400 crore. Samajwadi Party Chief and former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav is also in Kannauj. As soon as the news of the I-T raid spread, a number of Samajwadi Party workers gathered outside Pampi Jain's house.

Sources have said that they have recovered a few incriminating documents from during the search operation. The department officials are also questioning the staff of Babu Mian and Pammaji Jain. Their statement is being recorded in connection with tax evasion. The I-T official will share the information with other financial intelligence agencies too. The raids come days after a tax raid on Uttar Pradesh businessman Peeyush Jain uncovered piles of cash and gold.



# INDIAN WATCHDOG CCI ORDERS ANTI-TRUST PROBE INTO APPLE APP STORE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) on Friday ordered a thorough anti-trust investigation into Apple over its App Store business practices.

The order came at a time when the Indian watchdog is fighting the same battle with Google over its Play Store policies that may hamper third-party app developers and the entire ecosystem.

"The third-party app stores are not allowed to be listed on Apple's App Store as the developer guidelines as well as agreement prohibits app developers from offering such services... These restrictions imposed by Apple foreclose the market for app stores for iOS for potential app distributors," the 20-page order read. According to the CCI, prima facie, the relevant market for the examination of app store policies of Apple would be 'market for app stores for iOS in India'.

"It is noted that Apple makes it mandatory to use Apple's proprietary in-app purchase system (IAP) for distribution of paid digital content and it charges app developers commission of up to 30 per cent on subscriptions bought through the mandatory IAP. Further, Apple prohibits app devel-



opers from informing app users about the ability to purchase on the web. Thus, Apple prohibits app developers to include a button/link in their apps which take/steer the user to a third party payment processing solution other than Apple's IAP," said the CCI order. "This prima facie results in denial of market access for the potential app distributors/app store developers in violation of competition norms."

Apple was yet to comment on the CCI order. Apple had faced anti-trust investigations by the European Union and

the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) over its app store policies.

In the Google Play Store investigation, the CCI has told Karnataka High Court that there will not be any precipitative action on the matter. Amid the growing debate over its Play Store rules, Google earlier this week filed a writ in the high court, asking for more time to reply to the anti-trust investigation by the CCI. The plea for interim relief was filed by the Alliance of Digital India Foundation (ADIF) in the CCI in October.

## 3 TERRORISTS KILLED IN SRINAGAR ENCOUNTER

Srinagar: Three terrorists were killed and four security forces personnel, including three policemen and one CRPF personnel, were injured in an encounter between the former and the latter at Pantha Chowk area in central Kashmir's Srinagar district, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Police officials said on Friday.

"Three unidentified terrorists killed. Incriminating materials, including arms and ammunition recovered. Search going on," J&K Police quoting Inspector General of Police, Kashmir Vijay Kumar tweeted.

The firefight between terrorists and security forces took place after a joint team of the police and the security forces cordoned off the area and launched a search operation on the basis of specific information about presence of terrorists.

As the security forces zeroed in on the spot where terrorists were hiding, they came under a heavy volume of fire that triggered the encounter.

# Tax raid at Samajwadi Party MLC Pampi Jain's premises in UP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Income Tax department on Friday conducted raids at 50 premises belonging to Samajwadi Party MLC Pushapraj Jain (Pampi Jain), who also deals in the perfumery compounds business, and another businessman Babu Mian in Uttar Pradesh's Kannauj.

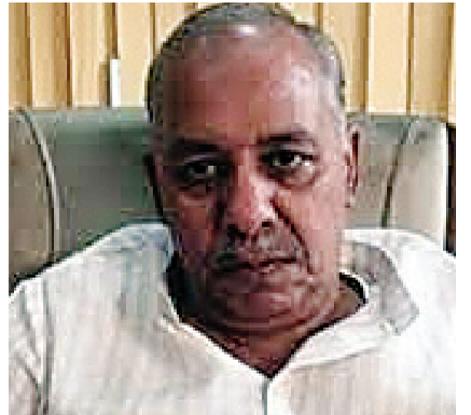
Babu Mian also deals in the perfume business and lives in Kannauj.

A team of the Mumbai Income Tax Department is conducting the raids.

The names of Pampi Jain and Babu Mian cropped up during the raid at Peeyush Jain's premises who was arrested by the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) from Kannauj.

"We had information that they are involved in tax evasion. After gathering more information we conducted searches at their premises," said an I-T official.

Samajwadi Party Chief and former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav is



also in Kannauj.

As soon as the news of the I-T raid spread, a number of Samajwadi Party workers gathered outside Pampi Jain's house. Sources have said that they have recovered a few incriminating documents from during the search operation. The department officials are also questioning the staff of Babu Mian and

Pampi Jain. Their statement is being recorded in connection with tax evasion. The I-T official will share the information with other financial intelligence agencies too.

The raids come days after a tax raid on Uttar Pradesh businessman Peeyush Jain uncovered piles of cash and gold.

## CRPF CoBRA commando injured in IED blast in Chhattisgarh's Sukma

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A commando of the Central Reserve Police Force's (CRPF) elite CoBRA unit was injured in an IED blast triggered by Maoists in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Friday, officials said.

On details of the incident, the CRPF officials here said that the blast was followed by an exchange of fire between the patrol and the Maoists around 1 p.m. along the Palodi-Kistaram axis of the district.

A trooper of the 208th battalion of the Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) has been injured during the operation and was evacuated from the site, the officials further said.

CoBRA is the CRPF's specialised operational unit, highly trained in jungle warfare and guerrilla tactics and is considered among the best operational units against the Maoist.



A hotbed of Maoist activities, Sukma, 400 km away from state capital Raipur, is a hotbed of Maoist activities and several battalions of the CRPF have been deployed there and its adjoining areas in south Bastar.

# HC ALLOWS GIRL WITH 91.5% TO CHANGE COLLEGE UNDER DU

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday directed a college under the Delhi University to provide admission to a girl who scored 91.5 marks by changing her allotted college.

The girl was denied admission in B.A as the seats were allotted to ineligible candidates who had scored less than her. She also qualified for the seat under reservation for children of Armed Forces.

After going through her scores and related documents, Justice Anu Malhotra directed the Sri Guru Nanak Dev Khalsa College authorities to allow admission to the girl who wants to change her present institution Shyama Prasad Mukherji College (SPM).

Petitioner's counsel submitted that



two students who scored less were on the eligibility list denying the admis-

sion to the petitioner girl. One among them had scored just 80.5 per cent, he

said. The court observed that nobody appeared for the respondents--the students who secured the admission. While directing to take forward the admission procedures, the Court enquired when can be the candidate admitted to the college.

As the college admission is winding up today at 5 p.m., she could fill the application and pay the fee today itself, the counsel representing the college responded.

He also informed that the girl should first cancel her current admission in SPM college before applying to Khalsa College.

Delhi University has provisions for children or widows of Personnel of the Armed Forces and also for the wards of ex-servicemen and serving personnel who are in receipt of Gallantry Awards.

# PARTS OF TN MAY SEE HEAVY RAINFALL, WARNS IMD

LONDON | Agencies

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted extremely heavy rains in one or two areas of Tamil Nadu's Nagapattinam district in the next couple of days.

Heavy rains are also likely in the delta districts and in Villupuram, Chengalpattu, Cuddalore, Kancheepuram, Chennai, and Tiruvallur districts over the next few days. The regional meteorological centre has also predicted moderate to heavy rains with thunderstorms for the next five days in the Union Territory of Puducherry, in Karaikkal area, and most coastal districts of Tamil Nadu. The interior districts of the state will also experience heavy rains in the next couple of days. Chennai on Thursday witnessed heavy and uninterrupted rains due to



a cloud burst for six hours, which the weathermen had not predicted, leading to heavy water-logging. Three people were electrocuted in the waterlog-

ging in Chennai and adjoining districts of Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu. Chief Minister, M.K. Stalin declared a holiday for all

schools and colleges and non-essential government offices in the capital city and adjoining districts on Friday owing to incessant rains.

# Multani wants Punjab as a new country: NIA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday said that they have lodged a separate case against Jaswinder Singh Multani, a Sikh for Justice (SFJ) member who has been arrested in Germany for conspiring against India.

"The case was registered on Thursday under sections 120B, 121A of IPC and sections 10, 13, 17, 18 & 18B of UAPA Act, A against Jaswinder Singh Multani, a Germany-based operative of Sikhs for Justice (an unlawful

association), and his other associates," said an NIA official.

The official said that this case was of criminal conspiracy hatched by Multani with several other pro-Khalistani elements located abroad for radicalising, motivating and recruiting youths in Punjab on ground and online through social media platforms to propagate their ideology with the aim to secede Punjab from the Union of India.

"They have been involved in raising funds to procure arms, ammunition and explosives by using smug-

gling networks in Punjab to revive terrorism in Punjab. Jaswinder Singh Multani has also been in contact with ISI operatives to carry out terror attack in Mumbai and other parts of India," the NIA official said.

The NIA official said that a team of elite officials was formed to look into the matter.

Since Multani's arrest in Berlin following Indian intelligence inputs, a team is likely to visit Germany.

The NIA officials said that they want to bring back Multani to India to prosecute him for his offence.

# UP girl found dead under mysterious circumstances

KANPUR | Agencies

A 19-year-old M.Sc student of a local college in Kanpur has been found dead under mysterious circumstances.

The girl was found lying in an unconscious state near the COD bridge. After being informed, her family rushed her to the Kanshi Ram Hospital, where the doctors declared her brought dead. The family members have accused the victim's classmate of killing her.

Her father, Surdarshan Yadav, told the

police that his daughter was pursuing M.Sc (first year) from a local degree college. On Wednesday, she had left home saying that she was going to fill a form to procure a laptop. "Usually, after returning from college, she used to take tuition in two houses, and return home every day by 7 p.m. However, on Wednesday evening, when she did not return home, we started contacting her on her phone, but none of our calls were answered. Later in the wee hours of Thursday, someone picked up the phone and informed us that she was lying under the COD bridge.

# MODULE HACKING SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS BUSTED IN DELHI, 3 HELD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Police has busted a module of cyber criminals and arrested three people, including a highly proficient hacker, who used to hack social media accounts of people, and cheat their friends and family members.

The three accused have been identified as Abhishek alias Ravan, who was the mastermind in hacking social media accounts, Deepak Panchal and Sumit Panwar.

Furnishing details about the module, Gaurav Sharma, Deputy Commissioner of Police (south-west district), said that on December 25, a complaint was received at National Cyber Crime Reporting portal wherein a complainant reported



that her Instagram ID has been hacked by some unknown person. The accused have also changed her registered email ID and mobile number of her Instagram account and sent money requests to her friends. Subsequently, the police registered a case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code

and the IT Act, and an investigation was initiated.

A police team was constituted which obtained details from PayTm regarding the PayTm wallet wherein the amount was transferred by the friends of the complainant. Following this, the police identified a suspect Deepak Panchal and apprehended him. He disclosed that his friend Sumit got issued one Vodafone Idea SIM card on his ID and further asked him to open one PayTm account using the card. Sumit further gave the SIM card to his friend Abhishek. Subsequently at Deepak's insistence, co-accused Sumit Kumar Panwar and Abhishek were apprehended, the police said, adding that during interrogation, Sumit disclosed that his friend Abhishek was the mastermind.

# Explore public-private partnership models to augment Covid testing, states urged

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre on Friday asked states/UTs to explore appropriate public-private partnership models to augment testing in an expeditious way amid the Covid surge across the country.

"Appropriate public-private partnership models may also be explored to establish innovative and convenient testing centres to augment testing in an expeditious way. RATs (rapid antigen tests) must be conducted in accordance with the RAT algorithm defined by the ICMR," the joint letter from the Health Ministry and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said.

Appropriate measures must be taken to ensure adherence to physical distancing norms at all testing centres to minimise possibility of transmission there, it said.

The states have been asked to institute emergency procurement procedures to facilitate unhindered supply of diagnostic commodities amid surge in the Covid cases. Citing the delay in RTPCR-based testing in confirming diagnosis due to its turnaround time of about 5-8 hours, the Health Ministry has asked states to increase use of rapid antigen tests in



such specific situations where RTPCR testing poses challenges.

The Health Ministry has said to consider any individual presenting with fever with or without cough, headache, sore throat, breathlessness, bodyache, recent loss of taste or smell, fatigue and diarrhoea as suspect Covid-19 case unless proven otherwise by confirmation of another etiology.

While awaiting test results, people should be advised to immediately isolate themselves and follow the home isolation guidelines of the Health Ministry, it added.

The states have been told to set up multiple RAT booths in identified geographies and operationalised on a 24x7 basis to offer widespread testing and easier access to all citizens. RATs may be allowed at government and private health care facilities including all hospitals, dispensaries, nursing homes, clinics, district hospitals, primary health centres etc. No accreditation is required for undertaking rapid antigen testing by any healthcare facility, the states were told.



# HOURS BEFORE NEW YEAR EVE PARTIES, MUMBAI POLICE CLAMP TIGHTER CURBS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Hours before the New Year Eve festivities, the Mumbai Police clamped further restrictions on people till January 15 to prevent further spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, here on Friday.

Effective 1300 hrs Friday (1 p.m. - December 31, Friday), Deputy Commissioner of Police (Operations) Chaitanya S. has banned people from going to any public places from 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. daily.

These include beaches, open grounds, gardens, sea faces, promenades, parks, or any other such public venues and violators shall face stringent action under the relevant laws, warned the police.

For celebrations like weddings, the attendance has



been limited to 50 invitees only whether being conducted in open spaces or closed venues.

Similarly, for any public gatherings or programmes, whether social, cultural, religious or political, any

open or closed venues, only 50 persons shall be permitted.

For funeral ceremonies, a maximum of only 20 mourners shall be allowed, and all other restrictions earlier announced shall also

be enforced, said the DCP's notification.

Earlier, the authorities had imposed prohibitory orders till January 7 with appeals to people to avoid any big and small New Year parties, which have now

been enhanced to restrictions akin to the first wave and extended by another week till January 15.

The police order came a day after Mumbai Omicron cases shot up by 190 to touch a whopping 327, and the state reported its first Omicron-related death with the tally shooting to 450.

Similarly, the Covid-19 cases have also shot up phenomenally by more than 10 times in the last 10 days of December, sparking worries among the state health authorities.

Meanwhile, Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar on Friday paid a visit to some mega-malls in the western suburbs to get an overview of how Covid-19 protocols are being adhered and appealed to citizens to follow the norms strictly as the infections are increasing rapidly in the country's commercial capital.

# NIA to lodge case over intel inputs of terror attack in Mumbai

Team Absolute | Mumbai/New Delhi

The NIA may lodge a case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in connection with the inputs received by the intelligence agencies that Khalistani terrorists may strike at several places in Mumbai.

The input was received by intelligence agencies few days ago and it was shared with the Mumbai Police.

Now, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) can take over the matter as the Home Ministry has reportedly asked it to look into the case.

The Home Ministry has asked to lodge a new case against Khalistani operatives.

The NIA will now form a team to look into the mat-



ter. Meanwhile, the Mumbai Police cancelled all leaves and weekly offs of

its personnel after a high alert was sounded in the financial capital.

# Man beats minor son to death for allegedly stealing Rs 50: Police

Team Absolute | Thane

A man from Kalwa in Thane district was arrested on Friday for allegedly beating to death his 10-year-old son after accusing him of stealing ₹ 50 from home, police said.

Police were alerted by residents of Waghoba Nagar slum colony on Thursday evening that Sandeep Bablu Omprakash Prajapati (41) had beaten his son, who was lying motionless on the floor, an official said.

"A police team rushed the child to a nearby hospital where doctors declared him dead on arrival. His sister,



who was also in the room, told us the child was hit by the father. We also found he hit his son for allegedly stealing ₹ 50 from home," he said. The Kalwa police station

official said Prajapati has been charged with murder, while inquiries are on with the victim's mother, who was not at home when the incident took place.

# 5,428 NEW COVID CASES IN MUMBAI 47% HIGHER THAN THURSDAY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai today saw a massive 47% jump in daily Covid cases as 5,428 infections were reported from the financial capital in 24 hours. At 8,067 Covid cases, Maharashtra saw a 50% spike in daily cases. Eight deaths were reported in the same period.

Maharashtra on Friday reported four cases of the highly transmissible Omicron variant, taking the total case count of the 'variant of concern' in the state to 454.

With Mumbai continuing to produce a tidal wave of cases believed to be fuelled by Omicron, beaches, sea faces, promenades, parks and other public places of the metropolis have been made off-limits to the general public between 5 pm to 5 am till January 15.

Large gatherings have also been banned under an order of the Mumbai Police which came into force from 1 pm today and will remain till January 15, unless withdrawn earlier, senior police officer S Chaitanya said. Fearing a third wave of the coronavirus, Mumbai's civic body has reactivated its



ward-level war rooms to tackle the surge. The War Rooms will manage hospital admissions, oxygen and medicine requirements and vaccination

On Thursday, Maharashtra reported 5,368 new coronavirus infections in the last 24 hours, 37 per cent higher than the day before. Of them, 198 were Omicron. Mumbai too saw a massive 46 per cent jump with 3,671 infections. At 190, the city also registered most of the state's new Omicron patients.

At Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's meeting with the state's Covid task force yesterday, one of the key discussions was on the new variant that is believed to be driving up the infections in the state and across the globe. Maharashtra has the highest overall cases of Omicron in the country.

Mumbai has seen a five-fold increase in daily cases over the last week - the city had logged 683 infections last Friday.

At least 37 per cent of the Covid samples collected in Mumbai between December 21 and December 22 were detected to be of the Omicron variant and none has any history of travel, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) said on Friday.

Maharashtra is among the eight states that the Centre had written to on Thursday urging them to take immediate measures to check the sudden surge. "Take steps now to avoid increased mortality," was the Centre's advice, sources had said.

Currently, there are 24,509 active cases of coronavirus in Maharashtra, with 16,441 in Mumbai alone. 1,75,592 people are in home quarantine and 1,079 in institutional quarantine.

# 'Trinamool outsourced polls to event agency': Fadnavis takes dig at Prashant Kishor

Team Absolute | Panaji

The Trinamool Congress has virtually outsourced elections to an event management agency, BJP's Goa poll in-charge and former Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Thursday, taking potshots at the Prashant Kishor-led Indian-Political Action Committee, without naming him.

"For them, elections are an event. They have outsourced elections to an event management company. Now elections are also being outsourced," Fadnavis told the public meeting in the Mayem assembly constituency in North Goa.

"In the BJP, workers fight elections, workers make efforts, plan. Leaders contest elections on the faith of these workers. They (Trinamool), on the other hand, outsource elections to an agency. This agency fights elections on their behalf and are keeping their bags open to buy and sell. They are trying to catch whichever goat comes their way and take him along. Such



attempts are happening," he added.

Fadnavis also took on the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party, claiming that the former was crumbling across the country, while accusing the latter's national Convenor and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of

merely posturing. "The mask behind the Delhi model fell when during Covid, not a single patient visited Arvind Kejriwal's mohalla clinic, because the mohalla clinics do not treat anything other than common cold, fever and dysen-

try. When people started dying one after the other they realised that the mohalla clinic is an eyewash and nothing else," he said.

"No one speaks about the grand old party, Congress, these days. Because no one is willing to stay in that party. I feel barring Digambar Kamat the party does not have a single MLA.

"Pratapsingh Rane has announced that he will not contest. So there is only one MLA. This is the state of the Congress," he said.

He claimed that the Congress' top leaders did not inspire faith anymore.

"This is the state of the Congress in the entire country, not just Goa. Everybody is deserting Congress because no one has faith in the Congress leadership. Congress has part-time leaders, not full-time leaders. They go to Italy, England, London, Malaysia, Thailand and in the remaining time they indulge in politics. As a result no one has faith in the Congress party," Fadnavis said.

# Visica production launched with announcement of slate of Films and Web series

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A grand launch of production house 'Visica Films' had been organised in Mumbai followed by the press conference and announcement of the films which will be produced and released by banner. C B Kulkarni is the Managing Director of Visica Films and Charan Suvarna is the Director of Visica Films.

Starting with the announcement of the Saajan Chale Sasural 2, the sequel of 1996 Govinda, Karishma starrer Blockbuster film Saajan Chale Sasural, Sarojini- Biopic of Sarojini Naidu, released in Hindi, Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, an Experimental Hindi Film Hide & Seek, a Hindi OTT Film Geeta Govinda, a Kannada-Hindi film Bhairava and Redrum. C B Kulkarni is also the founder of Caru OTT. Caru OTT has overcome many obstacles and has set the OTT media house to provide new version of entertainment. Many web and movie which will be produced by Visica films will be released on Caru OTT.

From Glamour and Political world many celebs like Niharica Raizada, Hiten Tejwani, Sunil Pal, Shakti Kumar, Divya Rai, Advocate Manoj Vyavhare, Kripa Shankar Singh,



Mansoor Ahmed Siddiqui, Milind Kamble, Bapi Tutul, Dhanjaya, Rashmi Mohapatra, Rajiv Ruia, Dhiraj Mishra, Vinay Chandra, Ashok Devanamprya, Anand Gupta and Dr Shilesh Jadav, director Visica Films, had graced the event.

On this occasion, CB Kulkarni, Managing Director of Visica films seemed extremely excited and blissful. He explained that the Production House will not be limited to any single language but will welcome all the different languages and different genres of the film production and Visica Films will also indulge in film releases. Charan Suvarna quoted Visica films will bring the complete package of entertainment for the audience of all age groups.

# I-PAC survey says 60% Goans undecided on which party to vote: Goa MGP leader

Team Absolute | Panaji

With the Assembly polls less than two months away, nearly 60 per cent Goan voters are still undecided as to which party to vote for, former Deputy Chief Minister and Maharashtra Gomantak Party (MGP) leader Sudin Dhavalikar said on Friday quoting a survey conducted by the Prashant Kishor-led Indian-Political Action Committee.

Dhavalikar, who's MGP is in alliance with the Trinamool Congress (TMC), whose political outreach is being managed by I-PAC, also blamed the indecision on the poor governance of the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government.

"Sixty per cent of Goans cannot decide whom to vote for. If they cannot decide with elections just around the corner, it is because of the poor governance, poor administration by the BJP government in Goa," Dhavalikar told reporters at a press conference in Panaji.

"This is the IPAC survey report from yesterday. And this is the situation just a month and



a half ahead of elections," the MGP leader also said.

The MGP-TMC alliance was sealed earlier this month, but leaders from both parties are expected to thrash out its seat sharing arrangements over the next "seven to eight days" Dhavalikar also said.

"We are going with TMC. All alliance related issues and seat sharing will be discussed and finalised over the next seven to eight days," Dhavalikar also said.

# Global Best: Indian stock markets delivered over 20% return in 2021

Rohit Vaid | Mumbai

India's key equity indices - S&P BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty50 -- delivered some of the best returns globally in 2021.

The Nifty50 gained over 24 per cent, while Sensex gave a return of 22 per cent in 2021 on a year-on-year basis. Faster economic recovery as well as low interest rates and lower number of Covid infections have been cited as reasons for the exponential growth.

Besides, higher exports, pent-up demand and healthy future prospects were pointed out by analysts as the other reasons for the growth.

However, returns could have been even higher but for the largest ongoing FPI



outflows of around \$12 billion, which severely harmed the equities post November 2021.

"Despite global challenges, Indian indices did well in 2021 driven by ample

liquidity, low interest rates, heightened interest from retail investors and rising GDP, among others," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

"Flows from DIIs and retail/HNI investors remained resilient and offset the selling pressure from FPIs in the second half of the calendar year," Jasani added. Globally, only CAC40 and

S&P 500 were ahead of Nifty in terms of returns, while Sensex featured among one of the best performers in the world.

"Indian indices have outperformed almost all global peers in 2021 on a YoY basis," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. "Healthy returns were supported by robust retail participation, economic recovery, vaccine coverage and rising appetite for Indian exports," he added.

In 2021, the two indices touched a high on October 19 with Nifty at 18,604.45 points and Sensex at 62,245.43 points, whereas Nifty fell to a low of 13,596.75 points and Sensex to 46,160.46 points on January 29.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Fate of G-23

The members of the G-23 group, who wrote the letter of dissent to Sonia Gandhi seeking sweeping reforms in the Congress party, are fighting for survival as team Rahul is taking key party decisions and have full say in the appointments and nominations.

2022 AIMS TO SEE WORDS TURN INTO CLIMATE ACTION, ACCELERATE ENERGY TRANSITION

VISHAL GULATI

2021 is a wrap despite a year scarred by the pandemic and vagaries of extreme weather, fueled by climate change, that not only grappled the developing but also plagued much of the developed world, this year helped lay the groundwork for a global shift toward sustainable development and a more equitable society in 2022.



The buzzword for 2021 was net-zero in climate policy as countries struggled to pull together long-term economic strategies.

The latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) signalled a "code red" for humanity, according to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

For India, it was the whirlwind year for climate crisis with bouts of extreme rain and flooding with exceptionally temperamental monsoons, besides wildfires in North America, floods in China, across Europe and parts of Africa, and heatwaves in Siberia

The planet can't wait. Keeping this urgency in forefront, Britain, the host to the just concluded UN Climate Change Conference named COP26 in Glasgow after a year of delay owing to the pandemic, negotiated tough with governments and businesses of nearly 200 nations to increase climate ambition and take immediate action to help halve global emissions in the next decade and reach net-zero emissions by mid-century in order to create a more sustainable world.

So what about life moves forward from the 2021 Glasgow Climate Pact, a 'fragile win' amongst all the parties at COP26 to have to halve emissions and shift to a nature-positive economy by 2030 on the path to reaching net zero by 2040 with a commitment to phase down unabated coal power and phase out inefficient fossil subsidies, to COP27 that will take place in Egypt in November 2022.

Despite Europe set its all-time record for the hottest summer in 2021, the roadmap for 2022 is the world's most pressing questions:

How to accelerate the energy transition and build more resilient communities? Will net-zero climate commitments become more credible by making meaningful investments into climate action? What will happen to the bold commit-

ments to end deforestation, the surge in electric vehicles, and much more?

The big question is: Will they deliver?

The powerful words from Sir David Attenborough say, "It is why it will be so important for countries to follow through in 2022 on the commitments to climate action they made at COP26".

Climate veterans told IANS a transition to a carbon-free economy is impossible without transforming the way globe generates its energy.

Though the world still mostly reliant on fossil fuels to power lives, in the past decade solar and wind power alone have grown from 1.7 per cent of global electricity generation to around 8.7 per cent. This upward trend is expected to continue in 2022 and beyond.

"A net-zero future is possible, but first we need to flip a mental switch to truly understand that we can stop the climate crisis if we try," says Nobel laureate Al Gore.

However, many world leaders were left disappointed by finance negotiations held in Glasgow with no commitment to give \$100bn a year to developing countries as pledged in 2009.

Bhutan, representing the group of Least Developed Countries (LDC), lamented that public statements made by countries often differ to what is heard at the negotiations.

"We came to Glasgow with high expectations. We need strong commitments to ensure the survival of the billion people living in the LDCs in the

future", said the country's representative on 'adaptation day'.

The annual UN Climate Change Conference (COP27), expected to take place in Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt in 2022, is expected to see more access of adaptation finance as annual costs in developing countries alone are estimated at \$70 billion. According to the UNEP, this figure is expected to reach \$140-300 billion in 2030 and \$280-500 billion in 2050. An increase in financing will be critical for countries to meet their adaptation goals.

With the urgency for adaptation in the developing world, the next UN climate negotiations are expected to advance the climate talks, mobilize action, and provide a significant opportunity to look at the impacts of climate change in Africa.

A newly-released report by the World Meteorological Organization and partners, the State of the Climate in Africa 2020, warned of the continent's disproportionate vulnerability, estimating that by 2030, up to 118 million extremely poor Africans will be exposed to drought, floods and extreme heat.

With 2021 full of climate effort, what needs to be done in 2022 to keep holding governments to account in 2022?

The world needs a catalytic shift toward climate action with a cut in greenhouse gas emissions, ending fossil fuel subsidies and new fossil fuel projects, cutting methane, the second largest contributor to global warming, stopping deforestation and finance must be the golden thread for climate diplomacy.

DOCTORS' STAFF LEAKING PATIENTS' DATA IN REMOTE HEALTH CHATS: REPORT

Nearly 30 per cent of healthcare providers have experienced cases where their employees compromised customers' personal information during remote consultations, a new report revealed on Thursday.



In addition to this, almost half of providers believe that their clinicians don't clearly understand how patients' data is

protected. However, 67 per cent of them believe it is important for the healthcare sector to collect even more personal information to further industry development, according to researchers from cyber-security firm Kaspersky.

Since the recent mass transition to digital health further increased the burden of responsibility on medical providers, the researchers surveyed healthcare decision makers around the globe to gain insights into current security-related telehealth issues and find ways to tackle them.

The findings showed that only 17 per cent of healthcare providers are sure that most of their clinicians that conduct remote sessions have clear insight into how their patients' data is protected. "This is despite the fact that 70 per cent of medical organisations have dedicated IT security awareness training," said the researchers.

According to Professor Chengyi Lin, Affiliate Professor of Strategy at INSEAD and a leading expert on digital transformation, to accelerate the evolution of digital health, we have to carefully curate, manage and govern sensitive health data. "This information is also valuable to individuals and the healthcare system to improve outcomes and reduce costs. We have already seen encouraging results from using big data for better clinical trial design and reducing both time and costs," Chengyi said.

Nearly 54 per cent of respondents admit that some of their clinicians conduct remote sessions using apps not specifically designed for telehealth, such as FaceTime, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Zoom, and others.

"The more complex and critical technology is, the more awareness it requires from people who work with it. This is particularly important for the healthcare industry entering the new digital stage and increasingly facing issues connected to privacy and security," commented Denis Barinov, Head of Kaspersky Academy.

Physicians believe that data collection is one of the most important aspects of medical technology development, despite the existing difficulties with data safety.

Almost seven in 10 (67 per cent) respondents agree that the industry needs to collect more personal information than they currently hold, to train AI and ensure a reliable diagnosis.

international

Taliban stop Pakistani military from fencing Durand Line in Nimroz

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Taliban security forces have stopped the Pakistani military from fencing part of the Durand Line in south-western Nimroz province of Afghanistan, Pajhwok News reported.

A source wishing not to be named said on Thursday the Pakistani military was planning the installation of a fence on Durand Line in the Chaharboluk district's Dak locality. Pakistani forces entered 10 to 15 metres inside Afghanistan territory and were planning the establishment of a military base and erect a fence which was thwarted by Taliban security personnel, the report said. Fencing related materials had been seized by Afghan security personnel, the source said. Pajhwok reached to provincial officials about the issue but they could not be contacted for comment.

Earlier, there were reports that Pakistan and the Taliban government have reached an understanding to resolve the issue of border fencing



through talks after Taliban soldiers last week tried to disrupt the fencing along the eastern province of Nangarhar, Express Tribune reported.

A local intelligence chief of the Taliban tried to remove the fence and it was not a decision approved by the Taliban leadership, the report said.

Soon after the incident Pakistan and the Taliban established contact at the

highest level and agreed to resolve the issue through talks. "Both sides have reached an understanding not to escalate the situation," the official said, adding that there were some issues of alignments about the border fencing and the two sides would resolve this mutually. "Afghan side was requested to coordinate border alignment before fixing the fence," the official said.

Iran announces successful launch of research rocket

Tehran: Iran announced the successful launch of a domestically-built satellite carrier rocket into space, carrying research devices.

Defence Ministry spokesman Seyyed Ahmad Hosseini was quoted by the official IRNA news agency as saying that the mission's intended research objectives were met, without specifying when the rocket, dubbed as Simorgh (Phoenix), was launched or what devices it carried, reports Xinhua news agency. The space centre that launched the rocket worked flawlessly, he said, adding the stages of the satellite carrier's launch proceeded as planned.

For the first time, three research devices were launched simultaneously to an altitude of 470 km at a speed of 7,350 metres per second during the mission, Hosseini said.

California declares state of emergency for winter storms

Los Angeles | Agencies

California Governor Gavin Newsom has issued a state of emergency in the wake of recent winter storms, which caused power outages, damaged structures, uprooted trees and barricaded roads across the state.

The order said that starting from December 10, a series of winter storm systems struck the Golden State, bringing substantial precipitation, including record-breaking snowfall, damaging winds, and flooding, reports Xinhua news agency.

As the storms are continuing to impact significant portions of California, a lot of communications and other critical infrastructure were impacted, it said.

Power outage affected thousands of households and



businesses, while dozens of major highways and local road were forced to closure, including primary corridors into the Tahoe Basin, a famous vacation destination in the US. These storms also had resulted in the threat of mud and debris flows, particularly on burn scars from recent wildfires, it said, listing 20 counties that need emergency response, including Los Angeles. In Northern California, hundreds of vehicles

were trapped on key routes in mountain regions, and the state's Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is urging people to avoid travelling to the Sierra Nevada.

Currently, Caltrans has staff in the mountains clearing roadways and is deploying more than 600 snowplows across the state, according to California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES).

Colorado's most devastating wildfire torches 600 structures

Denver | Agencies

The Marshall wildfire in Boulder County, Colorado, dubbed as the most devastating in the US state's history, torched some 600 structures just after five hours it erupted, according to the National Weather Service (NWS).

Wind blasts of 110 miles per hour took down power lines and ignited parched field grass below on Thursday, Xinhua news agency quoted the NWS as saying.

As winds continued throughout the day, the blaze swept unchecked through affluent subdivisions in the Louisville area before heading south to nearby Superior, according to fire officials, who admitted the speed had caught them unprepared.

Colorado Governor Jared Polis has declared a state of emergency as thousands of local residents were ordered to evacuate.



"Tens of thousands of people in the area have been evacuated and hundreds of structures, both homes and businesses, were lost," Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle told a press conference, adding the blaze has consumed 1,600 acres.

No casualties had been reported as of 6 p.m., but Pelle warned that with a fire of this magnitude and speed, he would not be surprised if injuries or fatalities were later

discovered. Fire crews from metro Denver and Boulder have been called into the Boulder County area to assist. US media estimated that homes in the Louisville area averaged \$862,000, while the median Superior home cost is \$775,000.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency said it has authorized the use of federal funds to help with fire-fighting costs, according to NBC News.

BIDEN URGES PUTIN TO DE-ESCALATE TENSIONS WITH UKRAINE

Washington | Moscow | Agencies

In a year-end phone call, US President Joe Biden urged his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to de-escalate tensions with Ukraine, while making it clear that Washington and its allies will "respond decisively" if Moscow "further invades" Kiev.

In a statement, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said that during the call on Thursday, the US President also expressed support for diplomacy, starting early next year with the bilateral Strategic Stability Dialogue, at NATO through the NATO-Russia Council, and at the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe.

"President Biden reiterated that substantive progress in these dialogues can occur only in an environment of de-escalation rather than escalation," Psaki added.

A senior administration official said the "tone of the conversation between the two Presidents was serious and substantive" and they also discussed the importance of "pragmatic, results-oriented diplomacy". On it part, the Kremlin said Biden and Putin "discussed agreements reached during their previous



consultations on December 7, including the decision to launch negotiations on the provision of legal guarantees aimed at ensuring Russia's security".

It was emphasized that the outcome of joint cooperation should yield legal guarantees against NATO's eastward expansion and the alliance's deployment of weapons systems near Russia's borders.

Putin and Biden agreed on the importance of serious and meaningful dialogue on these matters, and confirmed that upcoming security talks between Moscow and Washington would be carried out in three formats. The first round of negotiations will take place in Geneva on January 9-10, 2022. They will later continue in Brussels within the framework of the NATO-Russia

Council on January 12, and within the OSCE on January 13.

During the talks, Putin noted that imposing wide-ranging sanctions against Moscow in case of a possible escalation of events would be a "grave mistake" and could lead to a major "rupture in Russia-US ties", the Kremlin said. Both Presidents agreed to continue the dialogue and closely monitor all upcoming nego-



# WILL SAVE THE PUBLIC FROM THE NEW VARIANT-CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN

## Gave the message to the people of the state to stay alert during the inspection of Hamidia Hospital. Oxygen plants and other equipment checked. State government committed to stop Omicron infection

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the state government is committed to protect the citizens of the state from Omicron, the new variant of Covid. The Chief Minister said that this variant has knocked not only in Madhya Pradesh but also in the country. The number of citizens infected with Omicron is coming to the fore in every state. In Madhya Pradesh also 77 cases have reported positive. Most of them are in Indore. We are making all the arrangements in time so that we are ready to deal with any situation. Along with this, it is also necessary that the general public stays alert by following all the guidelines. Precautions like use of face mask, mutual distance should be taken care of. Chief Minister Chouhan informed that at present about 60 thousand bed capacity is available in various government and private hospitals in the state. Instructions have also been given to keep the Covid Care Centres ready.

Chouhan after inspecting various wards of Hamidia Hospital in Bhopal today gave a message to the people of the state. He said that the Madhya Pradesh government is determined to stop the Omicron infection. Chief Minister said that along with inspecting the biggest hospital of the capital, he himself



is constantly reviewing for better health and treatment facilities in the entire state, this will continue even further.

**Oxygen should be used as per requirement**

Chief Minister Chouhan said that necessary arrangements have been made after assessing the requirement of oxygen. Usage of oxygen will also be audited so that it is not consumed unnecessarily. Together with the general public, Omicron will be tackled with full force.

**Variant can change form, let us all stay alert**

Chief Minister Chouhan said that instructions have been given to inspect the necessary arrangements in all the hospitals in the state. It has been told to make arrangements of adequate medicines. The infection status is being reviewed daily. Keeping in mind the possibility of the variant changing its form, necessary work is being done by taking stock of the increasing number of patients and the arrangements required for their treatment.

We all have to remain alert.

**Called on doctors and staff**

Chief Minister Chouhan called upon all the doctors and paramedical staff of the state be ready to discharge their duty once again. This is the time of test, we all have to come together to bring the public out of the crisis safely.

**Vaccination work has gained momentum**

Chief Minister Chouhan said that Madhya Pradesh is dynamic in the work of vaccination. About 5.25 crore people of the state have received the first dose and about five crore people have received the second dose of the vaccine. The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has ensured the safety of everyone's health by providing free vaccines to the countrymen. Now the work of vaccinating children from the age group of 15 to 18 years and citizens above 60 years of age suffering from diseases is starting. Vaccination centres will be run for children in the schools of the state. For this also the work of imparting necessary training to health workers has been done. Keeping an eye on the arrangements, we all have to be alert and active.

**celebrate New Year with precautions**

Chief Minister Chouhan said that celebrate New Year avoiding the crowd. Dont lose sight of the excitement of the new year. With this we will succeed in controlling the risk of infection.

# NHAI official, 4 others held in bribery case

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The CBI on Friday arrested a Bengaluru-based NHAI official, and four others of a private company in a Rs 20 lakh bribery case.

According to a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) official, a case against the NHAI official and two contractors was lodged earlier this month. Later, raids were conducted on the premises of the accused, including in Delhi, Bengaluru, Kochi, Gurugram, and Bhopal.

The accused were identified as Akil Ahmad, Regional Officer, National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), Bengaluru and Dilip Buildcon Ltd's Executive Director Devendra Jain, General Manager Retnakaran Sajjal, official Sunil Kumar Verma, and Anuj Gupta.

All the arrested will be produced before a competent court, the official said, adding that the agency "will seek custodial remand to

unearth the larger conspiracy".

"We have to recover a lot of evidence. The accused will also be confronted with each other," the official said.

Ahmad had allegedly demanded an 'illegal gratification' from the General Manager of the private company to clear the project under Bengaluru-Chennai Expressway Package 1 and 2, executed by the company in Karnataka. The CBI got a tip-off and laid a trap to catch all the accused red-handed.

Rs 20 lakh was recovered from a private person in Delhi. The amount was received on behalf of the NHAI official.

A CBI official said the agency conducted raids and carried out searches at the premises of the accused at several places in multiple cities - Delhi, Bengaluru, Cochin, Gurugram and Bhopal, which led to the cash seizure of Rs 4 crore from the premises of private persons, and Rs 4 lakh from the NHAI official's premises.

# Chief Minister plants Maulshree, Peepal and Saptaparni saplings in Smart Park and Hamidia Hospital premises

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today planted Maulshree and Peepal saplings in Smart Park located in Shyamala Hills. Along with Chief Minister Chouhan, members of Kunjal Welfare Society RN Patil, Prabha Gaur, Shailesh Kumar, Sushri Kunjal, Sushri Priyala also planted saplings and informed about the activities of the organisation. Under skill upgradation and training activities in the state, more than five thousand women have been given skills to prepare paper bags, envelopes, file folders. Samples of some products were also presented to Chief Minister



Chouhan. During the inspection of Hamidia Hospital, Chief

Minister Chouhan also planted Saptaparni plant in the hospital premises.

# CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN GREETS ON THE NEW YEAR

Bhopal : Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has extended warm greetings to all the citizens on the arrival of New Year 2022. While wishing everyone to be happy and prosperous in the New Year, Chief Minister Chouhan said that we will all work together to get rid of the corona crisis.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that in order to realise Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve of self-reliant India, all of us should participate in the building of self-reliant Madhya Pradesh. Chief Minister Chouhan has called for participating in the programmes on the New Year with full precautions to prevent corona.

# COMPENSATION OF 15 LAKHS INSTEAD OF 10 LAKHS TO EVERY FAMILY THAT ACCEPTS VOLUNTARY RESETTLEMENT: FOREST MINISTER DR. SHAH

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A provision of Rs 15 lakh per family has now been made to the family units accepting voluntary resettlement from the protected areas and villages of the Tiger Reserve Corridor area of the state. Giving information about the decision taken by the State Government, Forest Minister Kunwar Vijay Shah has said that before this, from the year 2008, compensation amount for displacement from protected villages was Rs 10 lakh per family unit.

Forest Minister Dr. Shah said that in this period of 13 years, considering this amount is not sufficient over time, the State has requested the Central Government to take into account the proposal to increase it

through various formal and informal forums. On the proposal, the National Tiger Conservation Authority, New Delhi, under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, gave its approval to the proposed compensation amount. The Forest Minister informed that in the meeting of the Council of Ministers held on 7th December 2021, the continuation of scheme No 5109 including increase in compensation package for rehabilitation was approved.

**Provision of Rs 300 crores**

Forest Minister Dr. Shah informed that a provision of Rs.300 crore has been kept for resettlement in the year 2022-23. In this, Rs 285 crore has been approved from CAMPA head and Rs 15 crore for resettlement in

plan number 5109. With this arrangement, families living near Sanjay Tiger Reserve, Nauradehi Sanctuary and Ratapani Sanctuary will be able to be resettled.

The Forest Minister said that the increase in the compensation package would encourage the villagers living within the inaccessible forest areas to be resettled and connected with the mainstream of development. At the same time, human-wildlife conflict will also be reduced by reducing human interference in inaccessible forest areas and wildlife conservation will be strengthened further. He said that the villagers living in such forest areas have voluntarily opted for resettlement, in which 16 thousand family units have been relocated to new habitations.

# Governor greets the people of the state on New Year

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has extended warm greetings to the people of the state on New Year. May the New Year be a year of happiness, peace, harmony, prosperity and success for all, he said. While wishing for the happiness and prosperity of the state, he has appealed to the citizens to contribute their best in the efforts of building a strong, capable and prosperous nation.

Governor Patel has said in his New Year's greetings that the country is progressing rapidly. Welcome the New Year with the resolve to build a clean, self-supporting, capable, prosperous New Nation. Cooperate in the



efforts of education, health and self-reliance for prosperity in the life of people of rural, inaccessible areas, poor and deprived sections of the state. Build an inclusive society with Sabka Saath, Vishwas and Prayas (everyone's cooperation, trust and effort).

# PANCHAYATS WILL BE DELIMITED AGAIN IN MADHYA PRADESH

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Panchayat elections in Madhya Pradesh seem to be postponed for a long time because now there will be delimitation of panchayats once again. An ordinance has been issued in this regard. In the information given officially, it has been told that the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj and Gram Swaraj (Second Amendment) Ordinance, 2021 has been approved by the Governor of Madhya Pradesh on Thursday. Through this ordinance, the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj and Village Swaraj Act, A new section 10 has been added in 1993. It is hereby provided that if, for any reason, notification of election is issued by the State Election Commission within eighteen months from the date of publication of the delimitation or division of Panchayats or their wards or constituencies done before the expiry of the tenure of Panchayats, is not made, such delimitation or partition shall be deemed to have been canceled on the expiry of the period of eighteen months. In such a situation the delimitation



or division of these Panchayats and their wards and constituencies will be done afresh.

Delimitation proceedings were taken in September 2019 for the general election of

Panchayats for the year 2020 in the state, which has been canceled as a result of this ordinance. Now the process of delimitation and division of Panchayats and their wards and constituencies will be done again, on the basis of which the pending process of election will be completed.

The process of Panchayat elections was started in the state on December 4, after which the matter reached the High Court and the Supreme Court. After the directions of the court, the State Election Commission decided not to hold elections in the reserved areas for the Other Backward Classes, but decided to hold elections at other places, but had stayed the declaration of elections after the counting of votes. During this, a resolution was also passed in the assembly not to hold elections without reservation for OBCs. The state government had also passed a resolution in the cabinet to postpone the elections. After the advice of legal experts, the State Election Commission had already announced the cancellation of the election.

# PROVISION OF RS 28 THOUSAND 94 CRORE FOR THE STATE IN THE REVIVAL PLAN

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The central government has approved a reform-based and outcome-linked recovery delivery sector scheme for the entire country at a cost of Rs 3 lakh 3 thousand 758 crore over a period of five years from FY 2021-22 to FY 2025-26. Energy Minister Shri Pradyuman Singh Tomar has informed that the objective of the scheme is to further improve the quality, reliability and affordability of power supply to consumers through efficient distribution sector by improving financial stability and operational efficiency.

A provision of Rs 28 thousand 94 crore has been made for Madhya Pradesh under the scheme. In this, a provision of Rs.14 thousand 886 crore is made for pre-paid smart metering and system monitoring and Rs.13 thousand 208 crore for upgradation of distribution infrastructure, which includes works to reduce distribution losses and strengthen and modernize the distribution system. Out of the provi-



sioned amount of Rs.28 thousand 94 crore, a grant of Rs.9 thousand 318 crore will be received by the Government of India. The state government will give Rs 5 thousand 283 crore as share capital.

**Salient Features of the Scheme**

It is a reform based and result linked scheme. The objective of the scheme is to improve operational efficiency and financial stability of all DISCOMS/Power Departments except Private Sector Discoms. The scheme envisages strengthening of supply infrastructure and provision of conditional financial assistance to DISCOMs for the same. This financial assistance will be based on meeting the pre-qualification criteria and achievement of the basic minimum benchmark.

The implementation of the scheme will be based on an action plan prepared for each state rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Rural Electrification Corporation and Power Finance Corporation have been made the nodal agencies to facilitate the implementation of the scheme.

# MP gets Rs 876 crore from the Center for Bharatmala project

Team Absolute | Bhopal

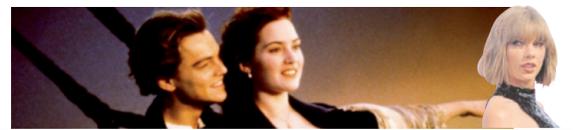
Part of the roads being built under the Bharatmala project of the central government is also passing through Madhya Pradesh. The Central Government has approved an amount of 876 crores for the road passing through Madhya Pradesh. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has thanked the central government for sanctioning this amount.

Chief Minister Chouhan has informed that the Central Government has approved an amount of Rs 876 crore for four laning of 47.80 km length under Bharatmala project in Madhya Pradesh.

Chief Minister Chouhan has thanked Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari for the approval of four lane high quality road construction in a length of 47.80 km from Khedakhjuria in Ujjain district to Suhagadi in Mandsaur district. A total budget of Rs 876.37 crore has been approved for this work.

Chief Minister Chouhan has informed that more than three thousand crore rupees have been approved by the high level committee of the Central Government for Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Uttarakhand and West Bengal including Madhya Pradesh for various natural calamities in the year 2021. This is a humane and timely step of the Central Government.



**JESSICA HENWICK ALMOST QUIT ACTING BEFORE LANDING 'MATRIX' ROLE**

London | Agencies

Actress Jessica Henwick has shared that she was in a "weird space" prior to finding stardom and almost gave up on her acting dreams just before taking on the role of Bugs in 'The Matrix Resurrections'. She said: "I just took a second to think, 'Am I doing this because I still want to do it and I love it, or am I doing this because it's what I'm used to?' And so, I stopped and I decided to get out of town and I bought a one-way ticket to France. And then, I just started walking."

The 'Knives Out 2' star took herself on a 40-day hike in an effort to clear her head when in-between acting roles, just before receiving the offer to star alongside Keanu Reeves in the latest 'Matrix' movie, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She told Film: "I just started hiking and I was halfway through a 40-day hike. I turned on my phone, it was near my birthday and I wanted to tell everyone I was alive, and I got an email saying, 'Would you like to audition for the Matrix?' And I just said no, because I hadn't finished the hike and I hadn't come to an answer yet of what I wanted to do in my life. "I turned it down. (So I) made a self tape, flew to America a couple days later, tested with Yahya (Abdul-Mateen II, who plays a "completely different" version of Morpheus in 'The Matrix Resurrections'), and had the phone call from (director) Lana Wachowski a few days after that."

Meanwhile, Henwick recently revealed she took a part in 'Knives Out 2' so she could study Rian Johnson's filmmaking style.



**NICOLAS CAGE DOESN'T CONSIDER HIMSELF AN ACTOR**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Academy Award winner Nicolas Cage manages to surprise and find completely original ways to approach roles and yet he doesn't prefer the term "actor".

"For me it always implies, 'Oh, he's a great actor, therefore he's a great liar,'" Cage said, reports variety.com.

"So with the risk of sounding like a pretentious asshole, I like the word 'thespian' because thespian means

you're going into your heart, or you're going into your imagination, or your memories or your dreams, and you're bringing something back to communicate with the audience."

Cage speaks extensively about his career on the latest episode of Variety's Awards Circuit podcast, from being born into a family of artists (his uncle is Francis Ford Coppola) to his current film, 'Pig'.

He knows that his unique acting choices can sometimes be perceived as broad.

When asked about the term "over the top", he replies, "Well, when they say that to me, I say, 'You tell me where the top is and I'll tell you whether or not I'm over it.'"

Cage notes that his choices have been by design -- trying to break form with what audiences have been used to seeing. The actor admits he was looking to return to a more subtle style.

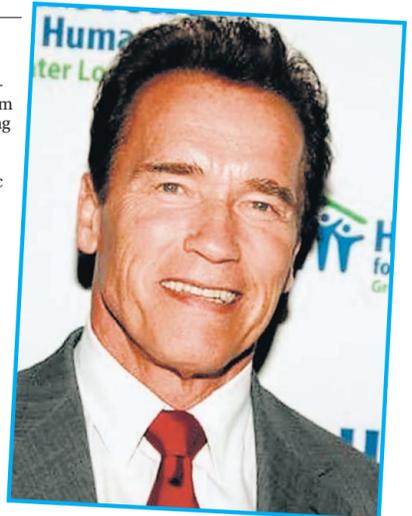
# Arnold Schwarzenegger donates 25 houses to homeless veterans

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Arnold Schwarzenegger has donated 25 houses to homeless veterans in Los Angeles, after teaming up with the Village for Vets programme. Schwarzenegger paid \$250,000 to purchase the structures, located in West Los Angeles, according to Fox11, and donated them to those who previously fought in the US armed forces but are now facing homelessness, reports femalefirst.co.uk. The 74-year-old actor tweeted about it. He wrote: "Today, I celebrated Christmas early. The 25 homes I donated for homeless veterans were installed here in LA. It was fantastic to spend some time with our heroes and welcome them into their new homes."

"I want to thank @villageforvets for arranging the homes and being a fantastic partner, @secvetaffairs, @amvetshq and everyone who worked with us and made this possible. We proved that when we all work together, we can solve any problem." One veteran named Bruce Henry Cooper told Fox11 the project had been a "life-saver" for him and other homeless veterans this Christmas. He added of the 'Kindergarten Cop' actor: "He has not forgotten us." The Village for Vets project has been working with retired service members who have resorted to living on the streets since 2016, by setting them up with tiny houses that are fully equipped with water, heating, electricity and air conditioning.

Schwarzenegger also told Fox11 in an interview that he considered the joy he felt after his charitable deed to be "the greatest Christmas gift" he could have received.



# Chrishell 'upset' and tries to 'be positive'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Chrishell Stause has been trying to remain positive since announcing her split earlier this month from Jason Oppenheim.

The 40-year-old reality star and Jason, 44, broke up only five months after going public with their romance.

'She's upset still. She feels like life has kicked her down quite a few times these past years, and that's been a hard feeling,' a source told People in an article Thursday.

'She wants marriage and a family, so the fact that the journey hasn't gone as planned has made her feel like life hasn't always been fair to her. It's like a cycle of happiness, curve ball, happiness, curve ball,' the insider added.

The source said Chrishell has been 'trying really hard to be positive' and remains a 'positive human by nature'. 'Despite the public breakups and divorce, she won't let that stop her from living her life and going after what she wants,' the insider said. Chrishell on the 'bright side' will be heading into 2022 with a 'blank slate and a refreshed mindset.'

# Shawn Mendes having a 'hard time' with social media

Los Angeles | Agencies

Award-winning singer Shawn Mendes is having a "hard time" with social media, just days after his former girlfriend Camila Cabello announced she was taking a break from social media.

Mendes said: "I'm having a little bit of a hard time at the moment and just kind of my relationship with it."

However, the singer is grateful to his fans for sending him their feedback about his new song 'It'll Be Okay',

reports femalefirst.co.uk.

He added: "But I have lots of people sending me videos and telling me what's going on. I think that when I make music, the ultimate goal is to kind of be sitting there and have my own truth revealed to me."

"A lot of the time when I'm writing songs, I'm using music as a platform to be able to get to a place inside myself that I wouldn't be able to get to by just talking to people or thinking about it."



# Anthony Hopkins-starrer 'The Father' gets top award at Chinese film fest

Los Angeles | Agencies

The Chinese government-backed Golden Rooster Awards honoured Oscar-winning drama 'The Father' with the event's first-ever prize for best international film in the coastal city of Xiamen.

Beijing hopes that its star-studded awards ceremony can surpass the Taipei-based Golden Horse Awards, once known as the "Oscars of Asia" for Chinese-language content. This year,

the Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film Festival, which kicked off Tuesday, added the international film competition category for the first time, reports variety.com. This year's 34th iteration honors films screened theatrically in China between July 1, 2020 and July 15, 2021.

'The Father' beat out animation 'Wolfwalkers', World War II drama 'Persian Lessons', Italy's live-action 'Pinocchio' and the Thai drama 'Happy Old Year'.

The film grossed \$4.14 million in China in June nearly double the \$2.12 million it

earned in the US.

Veteran helmer Zhang Yimou was the most decorated of this year's ceremony, with his two films 'Cliff Walkers' and 'One Second' bringing home four of the top prizes.

Zhang won best director for his work on spy thriller 'Cliff Walkers', which also netted a best actor win for his lead, Zhang Yi. Beijing had selected the film as this year's submission to the Academy Awards. The director's Cultural Revolution-set 'One Second' won best supporting actor (Fan Wei) and best sound.



Rihanna





## U19 Asia Cup Final

# INDIA CLINCHED TROPHY BEATING SRI LANKA BY NINE-WICKETS

Dubai | Agencies

An outstanding show by the bowlers followed by an unbeaten half-century from opener Angkrish Raghuvanshi led India to an easy nine-wicket win over Sri Lanka in a rain-hit final of U19 Asia Cup at the Dubai International Stadium here on Friday. The win also meant that India clinched the U19 Asia Cup trophy for the eighth time out of nine editions.

After restricting Sri Lanka to 106/9 in 38 overs, India had to chase 102 in the same allotted overs. Sri Lanka struck an early blow as Hamoor Singh was trapped plumb lbw by Yasiru Rodrigo for just five. But his partner Raghuvanshi, who was hit early on the helmet, was unfazed in shot selection. He got his first boundary of the match with a lovely back-foot punch and followed it with a pull over square leg.

His partner Shaik Rasheed kept the scoreboard ticking by rotating the strike and hitting a boundary. The duo's efforts meant that they brought up the half-century of their stand for the second wicket. After that, Raghuvanshi brought out his stroke-play, smashing boundaries while using his feet, and found gaps with ease. Raghuvanshi completed his impressive fifty in 64 balls with a single through on-side. The Indian batters were also aided by the fact that



the Sri Lanka bowling attack was too wide or gave too much room to effortlessly play their shots. It was fitting that Raghuvanshi hit the winning runs, a late squeeze on a Matheesha Pathirana yorker through the third man to help India maintain a clean slate in the finals of the tournament. Earlier, India's bowling attack, with immaculate line and length and discipline, did exceedingly well to keep Sri Lanka to just 106/9. The fantastic show with the ball was started by pacers Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Ravi

Kumar, and Raj Bawa. The trio pushed Sri Lanka on backfoot in the first ten overs, giving very little breathing space for the batters. It took almost two and a half hours for the rain to relent before Sri Lanka could bat for five more overs to finish their innings. After the match re-started, a brilliant direct hit from Rasheed caught Raveen de Silva short of the crease. Rodrigo and Pathirana hit a couple of boundaries before the latter pulled straight to a diving Raghuvanshi at deep backward

square leg to give Hangargekar a wicket on the last ball of the innings, ending Sri Lanka's misery with the bat.

### Brief scores

Sri Lanka 106/9 in 38 overs (Yasiru Rodrigo 19 not out, Raveen de Silva 15; Vicky Ostwal 3/11, Kaushal Tambe 2/23) lost to India 104/1 in 21.3 overs (Angkrish Raghuvanshi 56 not out, Shaik Rasheed 31 not out; Yasiru Rodrigo 1/12)

# KL Rahul to lead India in South Africa ODIs, injured Rohit misses out

The BCCI on Friday announced the India squad for three-match ODI series against South Africa, with KL Rahul leading the 18-member side in absence of injured Rohit Sharma's absence.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The 34-year old Sharma was appointed captain of the ODI team earlier this month as he replaced Virat Kohli, who had stepped down from the role of T20I captaincy as well.

However, Rohit suffered a hamstring injury during a net session ahead of India's departure for South Africa and was ruled out of the Test series. The star batter is now doing his rehab at National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru and will miss the upcoming ODI series. Rahul, who is currently the vice-captain of the Test team in South Africa, will now lead the ODI team in absence of Rohit while pacer Jasprit Bumrah will be his deputy.

Meanwhile, the likes of Ruturaj Gaikwad and Venkatesh Iyer, who did well in the recently-concluded Vijay Hazare Trophy 2021, have been picked for their maiden overseas assignment.



### India squad:

KL Rahul (Capt), Shikhar Dhawan, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Virat Kohli, Surya Kumar Yadav, Shreyas Iyer, Venkatesh Iyer, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ishan Kishan (wk), Y Chahal, R Ashwin, W Sundar, J Bumrah (VC), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Deepak Chahar, Prasidh Krishna, Shardul Thakur, Mohd. Siraj

# Quinton de Kock announces retirement from Test cricket

Johannesburg | Agencies

South Africa wicketkeeper-batter Quinton de Kock on Thursday announced his retirement from Test cricket with immediate effect.

The announcement comes after the Proteas' first Test match against India in Centurion, where the visitors won by 113 runs and took a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. As per Cricket South Africa (CSA), the 29-year old De Kock cited his intentions to spend more time with his growing family for the timing and reason for his relatively early retirement from the format. "He and his wife, Sasha, are anticipating the imminent birth of their first-born child in the coming days," the CSA said in a statement.



Meanwhile, De Kock said, "My family is everything to me and I want to have the time and space to be able to be with them during this new and exciting chapter of our lives," he added. The wicket-keeper batsman made his

Proteas Test debut against Australia in 2014. In 54 matches, he amassed 3 300 runs with a high score of 141 not out, at an average of 38.82 and strike rate of 70.93. He also has six centuries and 22 half-centuries under his belt.

# UNFORTUNATE WE LOST TO ARGENTINA, PAIN WILL REMAIN FOREVER: RANI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India women's hockey team captain Rani Rampal said on Friday that her team was "100 per cent" confident about defeating Argentina in the Tokyo Olympic Games semi-final and win a medal, but the side conceded a number of penalty corners which led to the defeat.

"I feel 100 per cent we could have won the semifinal match against Argentina. We took an early lead in the match and put them under pressure. We executed everything (the) coaches told us but conceding PCs (penalty corners) cost us," Rani said on Friday.

"But I think it was a huge learning experience for all the players in the team who will get an understanding of how to remain calm in knockout matches of big tournaments. We will surely get better the next time," a confident Rani said.

Rani, however, said that the pain of not being able to win a medal will remain with the team forever. "2021 proved to be a good year



for us. We could have won a medal at the Tokyo Olympic Games. We will always feel the pain of not being able to do that, because we

were so close. It was not hard to accept it at first," she said. "But we finished 12th in 2016 when we went to Rio Olympics and

this time at Tokyo Olympics we finished 4th. So, it has been a big growth for women's hockey. When we returned, the Indian fans appreciated our efforts. We felt that we did something good that fans are giving us so much love and respect. This gives us confidence to do even better in future," Rani added.

The captain said that doubts had crept in among the players ahead of the Olympics as they were under pressure physically and mentally because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and at times, it felt it was "becoming difficult" to push oneself.

"For every athlete in the world, the past two years have been quite challenging due to COVID. Most of the athletes were at their peak before the Tokyo Olympics were postponed. A lot of doubts crept up in athletes when we were placed in the bio-bubble. It was becoming difficult to push yourself mentally, physically, emotionally, at that time," Rani said.

# INDIA FINED, DOCKED WTC POINT FOR SLOW OVER-RATE IN FIRST TEST AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA



Dubai: Team India has been fined 20 percent of their match fee and penalised one ICC World Test Championship (WTC) point for maintaining a slow over-rate against South Africa in the first Test held in Centurion, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Friday.

ICC match referee Andrew Pycroft imposed the sanction after India was one over short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration.

"In accordance with Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined 20 percent of their match fees for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time," the ICC said in a statement.

"In addition, as per Article 16.11 of the ICC Men's World Test Championship Playing Conditions, a side is penalised one point for each over short. Consequently, India will lose one point from their points tally for this offence," it added.

India captain Virat Kohli pleaded guilty to the offence and accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing.

Umpires Marais Erasmus, Adrian Holdstock, Allahudien Paleker, and Bongani Jele leveled the charge.

India registered a 113-run win over South Africa in the first Test at SuperSport Park, Centurion on Thursday to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

# ROHIT, ASHWIN, PANT, AXAR IN CRICKET AUSTRALIA'S TEST XI OF 2021

Melbourne | Agencies

Star opener Rohit Sharma, spinners Ravichandran Ashwin, and Axar Patel, and wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant were the four Indian cricketers who featured in Cricket.com.au's Test team of the Year for 2021, which was revealed on Friday.

Having dominated white-ball cricket and his home conditions for years, the 34-year old Rohit Sharma conquered his final frontier this year by proving he can score big Test runs outside of Asia. And a strong 2021 that saw him finish second behind Joe Root in the list for leading run-scorers in 2021.

It could have been even better if the classy right-hander had translated multiple strong starts into big hundreds. He



reached 20 or more in 14 of his 19 completed innings but posted two centuries -- 161 in a total of 329 to set up a win in Chennai and a patient 127 at The Oval, his maiden Test hundred away from home. On the other hand, one century and an average below 40 completely undersell Rishabh Pant's impact this year, especially in the first three months

of 2021. The dynamic left-hander's numbers would have looked considerably better if he'd been able to turn scores of 97 (in Sydney), 89 not out (in Brisbane) and 91 (in Chennai) into hundreds but, as ever with a player as destructive as Pant, the numbers only tell half the story anyway.

The way he dismantled the bowling attacks of Australia and England at the start of the year rightfully earned him comparisons with the great Adam Gilchrist and while his tour of England was one he'd rather forget, 2021 may one day be viewed as the year a modern great truly arrived on the world stage.

Meanwhile, this year also showed how prolific Ravichandran Ashwin has become as he took more Test wickets (54) than anyone else.

# GANGULY TESTS NEGATIVE FOR OMICRON, DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL

Kolkata: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) president Sourav Ganguly was on Friday discharged from hospital here after testing negative for the new variant of COVID-19, Omicron.

According to doctors, the former India captain had mild symptoms of COVID-19 and is doing fine and would stay in home isolation. The 49-year-old Ganguly, who had undergone treatment for a heart condition earlier this year, was admitted to hospital on December 28. Ganguly had twice been admitted to hospital in January this year after complaining of chest discomfort. He later underwent two angioplasty procedures. Earlier, family sources were quoted as saying that the hospitalisation was a precautionary measure and there was no cause for alarm. Ganguly is fully vaccinated against COVID-19. His brother Snehashish Ganguly had also tested COVID-19 positive earlier this year.



# Indian athletes' top sporting moments in 2021

India fared really well in sports and it was not just cricket. We look at the top sporting moments of Indian athletes in 2021.

Chetan Sharma | New Delhi

- Neeraj Chopra strikes gold:** Star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra became the second Indian to win an individual gold at the Olympics, outperforming the field by quite a distance to notch up the first track-and-field Games medal for the country.
- Team India wins Gabba Test:** Team India fought and won against all odds to beat a formidable Australian squad on their home ground at The Gabba.
- Pramod Bhagat:** With badminton being introduced for the first time at the Tokyo Paralympics, ace shuttler Pramod Bhagat didn't disappoint and became the first Indian in the sport to



- win gold at the Paralympic/Olympics. His feat was followed by that of Krishna Nagar.
- Sumit Antil:** Following in the footsteps of Neeraj Chopra, Antil not just won gold in para-javelin but also dominated the sport with three of his throws shattering the world records.
- Saikhom Mirabai Chanu:** She overcame all odds and managed to win silver at the Tokyo Olympics in women's 49kg category.
- PV Sindhu:** Ace shuttler Sindhu creat-



- ed history by becoming the first Indian woman to win back-to-back medals in two Olympics. The Rio Olympics silver medalist won bronze at the Tokyo Olympics, beating China's He Bing Jao 21-13, 21-15 in the third-place playoff.
- Ravi Dahiya:** The Indian became the second Indian wrestler, after Sushil Kumar, to win the Olympic silver. That was after he lost the gold-medal match to a Russian.
- Avani Lekhara:** She became the first

Indian woman to win two Paralympic medals by claiming the 50m Rifle 3-Positions SH1 bronze to add to an unprecedented gold she had won earlier in the Games.

- Sukant Kadam:** The ace shuttler, who missed the Paralympics by a whisker, made amends by winning gold at the Uganda Para Badminton Championship and also won his first gold at the 4th National Para Badminton Championship.
- Punam Raut:** The Indian cricketer who has cemented her No. 3 position in the Indian batting line-up, held the spirit of the game against Australia. The star batter decided to walk even after the umpire gave her not out, holding the spirit of the game.
- Team India's Centurion Test:** At the start of the year, India breached The Gabba, they ended the year by breaching yet another fortress. India took a 1-0 lead over South Africa in the three-Test series with their first ever Test win at Centurion.



## RANVEER ON COMPLETING 10 YEARS IN BOLLYWOOD

# GRATEFUL I GOT A CHANCE TO BECOME AN ACTOR

Team Absolute | Mumbai

It has been a decade-long-journey for Ranveer Singh in the world of Hindi cinema. The Bollywood's livewire star says it has been a fulfilling one for him and that he was a different person 10 years ago. Ranveer made his acting debut with 'Band Baaja Baraat' in 2010, after which he starred in a slew of blockbusters such as 'Bajirao Mastani', 'Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela', 'Padmaavat', 'Dil Dhadakne Do', 'Simmba', 'Gully Boy' and '83'.

He says, "I have completed a decade and this journey has been

beyond my wildest imagination. I am so grateful that I even got a chance to become an actor and filled with gratitude every day. It's surreal for me to think that I am living my dream, I am so grateful for the opportunities, I value them tremendously.

"And what a journey it has been these 10 years - from 'Band Baaja Baraat' (BBB) to '83' and I am so happy that I got the opportunity to work with the best filmmakers, to show my repertoire as an actor, to explore my own craft in the diverse genres, to showcase my versatility."

The actor calls his journey a fulfilling one.

"This journey has been fulfilling but I was a different person I was 10 years ago. When I started with 'BBB' it was an overnight hit and I used to feel I can do anything. But as the years went on and I started gaining more experience and evolving as a person I realised I don't know anything and I was like man this craft of acting and performance is limitless."

He added: "There is no right or wrong of doing things - its just creation, its so free flowing, its literally infinite. And so, I realized that today I'm in a position where I don't know anything."

The actor shared that really just scratching the sur-



## ANKIT TIWARI: IT'S ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY THAT 2022 BEGINS ON A GREAT NOTE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Music composer Ankit Tiwari has gained a new perspective towards live concerts in the post-pandemic era. He opines that the energy and vibe of a live audience is completely on a different plane, something that a musician on stage feeds from.

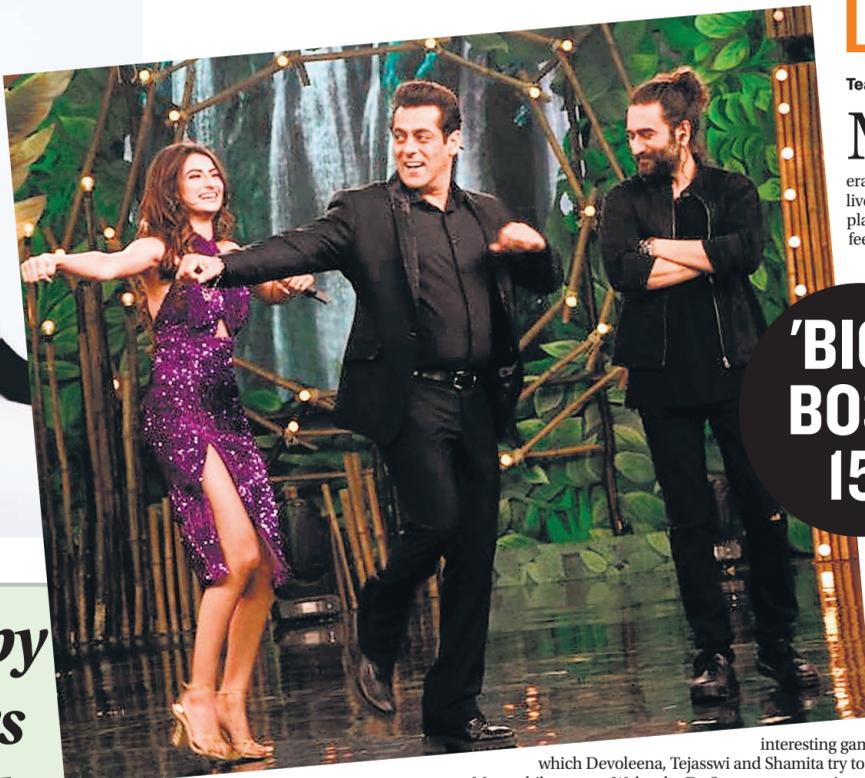
Ankit, who will be performing in the

Maldivian capital of Male on New Year's Eve, says: "I am so excited for my show in Male. I had agreed to do it long ago. After spending a year locked in at home, in the pandemic, concerts have a new meaning for us musicians and performers. The energy of a live audience is unmatched."

The musician is thrilled to be performing at all and on New Year's Eve. "It will be twice as

much fun. I have heard about the protests in the city. But that's the beauty of music. It heals people. Ideologically, one could be in different places but music has the power to unite people and make them come together.

"I am already getting fan mails where they are telling me how excited they are for the show. It will be a grand show indeed because we've all had a rough few years. It's absolutely necessary that 2022 begins on a great note," he added.



'BIGG BOSS 15'

## ANU MALIK, PALAK TIWARI, WALUSCHA DE SOUSA TO APPEAR ON NEW YEAR SPECIAL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

From Bharti Singh, Haarsh Limbachiyaa's fun banter to 'Bijlee Bijlee' fame Palak Tiwari teaching superstar Salman Khan her dance moves, 'Bigg Boss 15' will see New Year celebrations with a flurry of performances and games.

Salman will be sharing the stage and celebrating the New Year with special guests, including actress Waluscha De Sousa, Palak Tiwari, Anu Malik, Sheykh Ravjani, Siddharth Nigam and Jannat Zubair.

During the New Year special 'Weekend Ka Vaar', Bharti and Haarsh will play some interesting games with the housemates. They ask the female contestants to impress Abhijit Bichukale after which Devoleena, Tejaswi and Shamita try to woo him.

Meanwhile, actress Waluscha De Sousa too entertains everyone with her performance on the song 'Bollywood Wala Dance'. Later, Anu Malik and Sheykh Ravjani perform some of their popular songs.

Siddharth Nigam and Jannat Zubair also have some fun moments with Salman as they tell him about the ongoing social media trends.

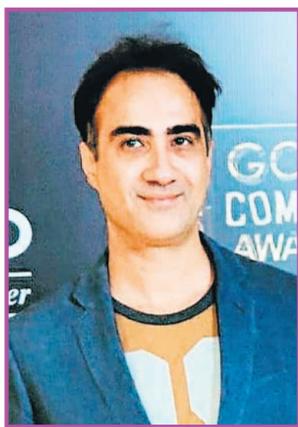
## Ranvir Shorey 'almost hounded out of hotel room' after posting about son's Covid diagnosis

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Ranvir Shorey has been hounded by fellow guests at a hotel in which they were quarantined after he revealed his son Haroon's Covid test report on Twitter. The actor shared a string of tweets as a follow-up to his main tweet where he had shared his son's diagnosis. He tweeted: "As a result of my SM post, meant for the common good, we were almost hounded out of our hotel

room, where we were quarantining, due to other guests pressuring the hotel about us staying here. Society's capacity for unscientific discrimination has been on full display." In the next tweet, he wrote: "People who wanted selfies until a day before were blackmailing the hotel for discounts and refunds, because we were in one of the rooms!"

"Will always remember this experience. It makes me wonder if the world deserves honesty at all," he said.



## HAPPY NEW YEAR: TV ACTORS SHARE THEIR HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS FOR 2022

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As the New Year is all set to begin, television actors went down the memory lane to share a few moments from 2021 and disclose their 2022 celebration plans and resolutions.

'Balika Vadhu' actor Samridh Bawa shared: "This year, I plan on catching up with a few friends and having 'me' time. However, I will avoid crowded places at all costs as a precaution and hope that everyone maintains social distance and avoids gathering in large numbers. To all our viewers, may you have a lovely New Year." Shrenu Parikh of 'Ghar Ek Mandir-Kripa Agrasen Maharaja Ki' talked about the best moments she had in 2021.

She shared: "After being affected by Covid, I was very demotivated and felt lost, but with the blessings of my family and fans, I had a great comeback this year. With God's grace in 2021, my family and I have been safe and healthy, and we have started practicing healthy



lifestyle habits. That change is the best moment of 2021 for me. As a resolution for 2022, I have decided to focus on health and lifestyle a notch higher by incorporating a proper diet plan for my family and me." Expressing her excitement for the upcoming year, 2022, 'Kaamna' actress Chandni Sharma said: "Well, my wish from 2022 is for everyone to stay healthy, safe and sound. I pray that we overcome all hardships, challenges that we are facing and hope that 2022 proves to be a happy, healthy, joyous and prosperous year for everyone. I am looking forward to 2022." Disha Parmar, who plays Priya in 'Bade Acche Lagte Hain 2', said it is time to start a new journey with a lot of positivity, energy and excitement. She said: "I wish my fans a very Happy New Year. I pray that 2022 becomes a year when all our lives change for the better and we strive and work hard to achieve our dreams."

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Sakshi Mailkk

## I'm single by choice, says Piya Valecha

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'Choti Sarraarni' fame Piya Valecha says that she is single not by chance, but by choice.

"I am single not by chance, but by choice. Marriage is not a plan for me as of now. I will think of it in future once I find someone eligible for me. But for now, my work is my topmost priority," she says.

The actress, who previously featured in shows like 'Maddam Sir - Kuch Baat Hai Kyunki Jazbaat Hai', says she learnt to deal with challenging situations in 2021.

"The year 2021 was full of ups and downs for me. But I learnt to deal with challenging situations and stay focused... Keeping myself all positive and motivated," she says.

"I learnt to take all the work opportunities and make them best for me," she adds.

