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Doctors express concern over unwarranted medication, hospitalisation during Covid

DANGEROUS PRACTICE

The doctors have identified three main issues of unwarranted medication, unwarranted tests and unwarranted hospitalisation.

- *India on Friday reported 2,64,202 fresh Covid-19 infections, a rise of around 17,000 cases from the previous day, said the Union ministry of health and family welfare. Also, 315 deaths were recorded taking the toll to 4,85,350.*
- *Meanwhile, the active caseload has jumped at 12,72,072 which constitute 3.48 per cent of the country's total positive cases.*
- *The Omicron infection tally has climbed to 5,753 across the nation, an increase of 4.83 per cent from Wednesday. So far, 28 states have reported Omicron infection, the ministry said.*

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A group of around 35 doctors from across the country have written an open letter to the union health ministry over the unwarranted testing, medication and hospitalisation during the ongoing Covid pandemic and sought urgent intervention for an evidence-based response to the current wave.

The letter says that the vast majority of patients with Covid-19, with asymptomatic and mild symptoms, will require little to no medication. "Most prescriptions we have reviewed in the past two weeks include several Covid-19 "kits" and cocktails. The prescribing of vitamin combinations, azithromycin, doxycycline, hydroxychloroquine, favipiravir, and ivermectin for treating Covid-19 is irrational practice. Such wanton use of drugs is not without harm as the Delta wave has shown. Outbreaks of opportunistic fungal infections like mucormycosis in India, and aspergillosis in Brazil were attributed to the widespread abuse of inappropriate medications", said the letter.

In the open letter, they have appealed to the central and state health authorities to stop these "unwarranted" practices and promote evidence-based medicine. It has suggested to update the evidence-based June 2021 DGHS guidelines. Through public education and professional training, discourage the use of medications that have no supporting evidence for the treatment of Covid-19, the doctors said.

The doctors have also suggested to discourage the use of unwarranted diagnostics, especially for asymptomatic and mild cases, where none are required, except for confirmatory Antigen or PCR tests and to publish guidelines in local languages. Stop any state-sponsored promotion or distribution of medications, cocktails, alternative therapies or potions that are not scientifically proven therapies, suggests the letter.

OPEN LETTER

"While there continues to be much uncertainty amidst the outbreak of this novel disease, there is now substantive high-quality scientific literature that provides unequivocal guidance on the clinical management of Covid-19. Despite the weight of this evidence and the crushing death toll of the delta wave, we find the mistakes of the 2021 response being repeated in 2022."

WHO recommends two new drugs to treat patients with Covid-19

Geneva: A World Health Organization (WHO) panel on Friday strongly recommended baricitinib, a drug used for treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, for patients with severe or critical Covid-19 in combination with corticosteroids.The WHO experts noted that baricitinib, a type of drug known as a Janus kinase (JAK) inhibitor, has similar effects to other arthritis drugs called interleukin-6 (IL-6) inhibitors. The health body advised not to use both drugs at the same time, but to choose one based on cost, availability, and clinician experience.Further, the expert panel also advised against the use of two other JAK inhibitors -- ruxolitinib and tofacitinib -- for patients with severe or critical Covid-19. While trials have not shown any benefit, they have suggested a possible increase in serious side effects with tofacitinib.

Police and NSG defuse IED, avert major attack in Delhi ahead of R-Day

Ujwal Jalali | New Delhi

The National Security Guard and the Special Cell of the Delhi Police on Friday averted a major terror attack in the Ghazipur Flower Market area of the national capital by defusing a 3-kg Improvised Explosive Device planted in the crowded market. The IED, which was found concealed in an unattended bag at the Ghazipur Flower Market, triggered panic among the residents of the capital less than a fortnight ahead of January 26, Republic Day.

How did the police find it?

The bag was first spotted by a local vendor, however, he did not pay any heed to it and left. When he returned after sometime, the bag was still there after which he informed a civil defence volunteer in the area who then made a PCR call around 10.16 a.m. The Delhi Fire Service (DFS) was also informed at the same time. With suspicions mounting the Delhi Police alerted the anti-terror force -- NSG -- about the suspicious object around 11 a.m. which sent its bomb disposal squad equipped with a bomb disposal container called Total Containment Vessel (TVC). The NSG bomb disposal squad with the help of the police personnel dug an approximately 8 feet ditch in an open ground where the bag carrying the IED was dumped. At sharp 1.30 p.m. a loud thud was heard after which everybody heaved a sigh of relief. The NSG conducted a controlled explosion of the recovered IED in that ditch, saving several lives that could have been snuffed out if the bomb had not been found and defused in time.National Security Guard Director General MA Ganapathy speaking exclusively to IANS said that the explosives-laden bag contained a mixture of RDX and Ammonium Nitrate. "Prima facie it looks like RDX & Ammonium Nitrate mix weighing around 3 kgs," Ganapathy informed.

GOVT MAKES SIX AIRBAGS COMPULSORY IN VEHICLES CARRYING UP TO 8 PASSENGERS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre on Friday approved the draft notification of General Safety Regulations (GSR), making minimum of six airbags compulsory in vehicles carrying up to eight passengers.

In a series of tweets, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, said, "In order to enhance the safety of the occupants in motor vehicles carrying up to 8 passengers, I have now approved a draft GSR notification to make a minimum of 6 airbags compulsory."

"The ministry already mandated the implementation of fitment of the driver airbag w.e.f. July 1, 2019 and front co-passenger airbag w.e.f. January 1, 2022," Gadkari said.Gadkari said the move is aimed at minimising the impact of frontal and lateral collision to the occupants seated in both front and rear compartments.

"To minimise the impact of frontal and lateral collisions to the occupants seated in both front and rear compartments, it has been decided that 4 additional airbags be mandated in the M1 vehicle category, i.e., two side/side torso airbags and two side curtain/tube airbags covering all outboard passengers. This is a crucial step to make motor vehicles in India safer than ever," Gadkari said.

SAMYUKT KISAN MORCHA MEET TODAY AT SINGHU BORDER

New Delhi: The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) will hold a review meeting at their Singhu Border camp site to decide the future course of action for the agitation that was suspended after three farm laws were repealed in December first week.

The SKM, a consortium of 40-odd farmers' organisations, had on December 9, 2021 declared to suspend their 15-month long agitation that was started to protest the three contentious farm laws passed by the Parliament in 2020.

The agitation had continued even after the three laws - the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020 - were repealed by the Parliament as the farmers' stuck to their other demands vis-a-vis legal backing for minimum support price (MSP) for all farmers being the prime demand after repeal of the three laws.

Almost six weeks after that, there has been "no word" about the formation of the committee on MSP and other issues. "The meeting will be held at 11 am tomorrow," a SKM spokesperson confirmed on Friday.

Chopper carrying CDS crashed due to entry into clouds: Inquiry report

'No foul play'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian Air Force said on Friday that the Court of Inquiry constituted to probe the military chopper crash in Tamil Nadu on December 8 has ruled out mechanical failure, sabotage or negligence as cause of the accident.

The country's first Chief of Defence Staff, General Bipin Rawat, his wife Madhulika and 12 armed forces personnel were killed in the crash near Coonoor in Tamil Nadu.

Sharing preliminary findings of the tri-services Court of Inquiry report, the IAF said the chopper crash was a result of entry into clouds due to unexpected change in weather conditions in the valley.The inquiry team analysed the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder, besides questioning all available witnesses to determine the most probable cause of the accident.The Court of Inquiry has ruled out mechanical failure, sabotage or negligence as a cause of the accident.The accident was a result of entry into clouds due to unexpected change in weather conditions in the valley, which led to spatial disorientation of the pilot.

Richest 1% in Asia Pacific own more wealth than the poorest 90%

- The additional wealth they accrued in this time ($1.88tn) is more than double the total wealth owned by the poorest 20 per cent of people in the region.
- The World Bank estimates that coronavirus and rising economic inequality pushed 140 million additional people into poverty in Asia in 2020, and 8 million more in 2021. New variants alongside higher inequality levels than expected7 mean these figures are likely to be underestimates.
- Yet, while lockdowns and economic stagnation destroy the livelihoods of many poor and 'just managing' families, the region's richest elites have recovered and even increased their fortunes.

Sanjeev Sharma | New Delhi

The number of billionaires in Asia Pacific has expanded significantly since the pandemic began. It reached 1,087 in November 2021, an increase of almost a third on pre-crisis figures, Oxfam said in a new report.

Even more striking is the extreme and increased concentration of wealth at the top during this prolonged health and economic crisis. In November 2021, the richest 1 per cent owned more wealth than the poorest 90 per cent in Asia Pacific, and the region's billionaires had increased their wealth by 74 per cent since the start of the pandemic.

Some billionaires have also benefited directly from the pandemic. As Credit Suisse notes in the 2020 World Wealth Report, one of Malaysia's billionaire glove manufacturers doubled their wealth between February and June 2020.

Others became billionaires because of pandemic profits. By March 2021 there were 20 new Asian 'pandemic' billionaires (from China, Hong Kong, India and Japan) whose wealth came from equipment, pharmaceuticals and services needed for the pandemic response.

Covid-19 has unleashed a health and economic crisis that is exposing and exacerbating high levels of economic inequality in Asia. While rich elites are able to protect their health and wealth, the poorest people and minorities face a greater risk of illness, death and destitution, according to Oxfam.

Coronavirus has widened the cracks in this unequal system, fuelling a pernicious cycle of poverty and economic inequality in Asia.

BATTLE FOR UP: MAURYA JOINS SP, VOWS TO 'FINISH' BJP

LUCKNOW | Agencies

Former BJP ministers Swami Prasad Maurya and Dharam Singh Saini along with other MLAs, on Friday, formally joined the Samajwadi Party along with their supporters.

Maurya accused the BJP of coming to power in 2017 by duping backward castes. He said that the BJP had projected Keshav Maurya as chief minister, but then brought 'someone else from Gorakhpur like a Skylab'.

Maurya said that all his efforts would be to free Uttar Pradesh from the misrule of the BJP. He said that the Yogi Adityanath government has misled the people of the state."I want to tell the BJP that its countdown to failure begins today," he said.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, while welcoming the leaders into his party, said that the BJP was robbing the poor to give benefit to the rich.

FIR against SP for model code violation

Lucknow: An FIR has been lodged at the Gautam Palli police station in Lucknow against the Samajwadi Party for violation of model code of conduct as well as Covid protocols.

The action was taken after a huge crowd gathered at the SP office on Friday afternoon for the joining of former BJP minister Swami Prasad Maurya, Dharam Singh Saini and other legislators in the party.

Lucknow District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash said that the Samajwadi Party's virtual rally was held without prior permission. The Election Commission of India (ECI) had on January 8 announced a ban on physical rallies in light of the surge in Covid cases in parts of the country.

Dirty game of tax evasion

Team Absolute | New Delhi

It seemed more like a crime investigation thriller when the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) busted a planned all-India tax evasion racket and unearthed Rs 4,521 crore of tax evasion.

A series of raids and investigation landed the DDGI to Kolkata finally, once infamous as den of fake companies' racket, in the post demonetisation period. It all started with a case, booked by the DGGI against some fake firms, which were found non existing at their principal place of business.

To trace the real persons behind these fake firms, the physical address from where GST returns were actually filed was ascertained. A search was conducted on January 6 at that premises in Delhi. During search, it was found that the proprietor is engaged in providing services of 'Cloud Storage' on his servers to various customers for maintaining their financial accounts.They have issued invoices involving taxable value of approximately Rs 4,521 crore having ITC implication of approx Rs 741 crore. The mastermind behind the whole racket has been arrested and further investigation in the case is under progress.

EC REDUCES NOTICE PERIOD FOR REGISTRATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Election Commission of India on Friday reduced the notice period from 30 days to seven days for registration of political parties under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, in view of the ongoing third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The EC had announced the poll schedule for Assembly elections in five states -- Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Goa, Uttarakhand and Manipur -- on January 8.

"After considering all aspects of the matter, the Commission has given a relaxation and reduced the notice period from 30 days to 7 days for parties which have published their public notice on or before 08.01.2022," an EC statement said.

"For all parties, including of those parties which have already published the public notice in less than 7 days prior to 08.01.2022, objections, if any, can be submitted latest by 5.30 PM on 21st January, 2022, or by the end of the originally provided 30 days' period, whichever is earlier," it added.

"As per the existing guidelines, the applicant association is inter-alia asked to publish the proposed name of the party in two national and two local dailies on two days for submitting objections, if any, with regard to the proposed registration of the party before the Commission within 30 days from such publication," the EC said.

OBSERVERS ARE EYES AND EARS OF EC: CEC

New Delhi: *Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sushil Chandra on Friday said that the 'poll observers' are the eyes and ears of the Election Commission of India and they should be visible, accessible, neutral and ethical in their functioning. Addressing over 1400 poll observers via hybrid mode, he said that they should be totally in command with eagle eyes to ensure free, fair, transparent and safe elections. While advising them to be updated on all the electoral processes, including the postal ballot facility for absentee voters in the category of senior citizens, persons with disabilities and Covid-19 suspects or affected persons, Chandra said that they should be vigilant about any lapses in the Model Code of Conduct and other ECI guidelines, strict enforcement of extant Covid guidelines as also counting procedures.*

Delhi records cold, longest foggy day : IMD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With a maximum temperature dipping to 15.4 degrees Celsius -- five notches below normal, Delhi recorded a cold and long foggy day on Friday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The city's minimum temperature was recorded at 6 degrees Celsius -- a degree below the normal.

As per IMD, there was a layer of dense fog in the morning and moderate fog during the day over Delhi NCR, and also over Punjab, Haryana, west UP, and north Rajasthan.

Also, light north westerlies are blowing over the region. These conditions led to a cold day.

As per airports 1 hourly visibility data of today, Safdarjung and Palam had dense fog from 4.30 and 7 a.m. till 9.30 and 11 a.m., respectively.

While Safdarjung visibility did not cross 400 metres and main city fog coverage remained till evening, IGI Palam only could reach 1,000 metres at 3.30 pm. It is the longest foggy day over Delhi for this season.

"Today was the longest foggy day over Delhi for this season. It also caused a cold day due to the absence of sunlight in the day and also a little windy from northwest of 8-12 kmph towards noon," IMD said.

This week, the national capital will continue to have foggy mornings and a maximum and minimum temperature that will hover around 16 and 6 degrees Celsius, as per the IMD forecast.

Bag full of gold, fake currency valued at Rs 18L seized

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Customs officials at the Indira Gandhi International airport here have seized a trolley bag and arrested two persons for smuggling gold and fake currency, officials said on Friday. As the case is related to FICN (Fake Indian Currency Notes), the National Investigation Agency (NIA) was also informed to investigate any possible terror funding links. As per the Customs department, an Indian passenger arrived at Terminal-3 of IGI airport from Ras Al Khanimah International Airport, UAE on January 12. While scanning his luggage, the customs officials found gold valued at Rs 7,65,000, and 2,000 fake Indian currency notes of Rs 500 denomination, worth Rs 10 lakh. The customs officials also arrested one person from the arrival gate of IGI Airport who came to receive this passenger, to take the delivery of these goods. "The gold weighing 175 grams and FICN of face value Rs 10,00,000 were concealed by the passenger in his trolley bags and the same were seized under Section 110 of the Customs Act, 1962, on January 12. The passenger and his receiver have been placed under arrest in terms of Section 104 of the Customs Act, 1962. Further investigation is under progress," the office of the commissioner of customs, IGI Airport, said in a statement.

TELE-CONSULTATION A BOON DURING COVID: MANDAVIYA

New Delhi: Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Friday said in pandemic situations like Covid-19, tele-consultation is a boon, especially for the primary health care, while noting that going to a doctor is not always possible during the pandemic .

Highlighting the services being provided through the digital platform of tele-consultation, Mandaviya said that E-Sanjeevani is a revolution in the health sector in the country.

It is providing affordable and accessible health care as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He also emphasised that PM Modi in review meeting with the Chief Ministers of States on Thursday, had highlighted that tele-medicine facilities will help a great deal in providing healthcare services to the needy. Mandaviya was on a visit to the eSanjeevani teleconsultation facility at the CGHS headquarters, here on Friday, and observed the consultation being provided by doctors through tele-consultation.

7 killed after car rams into road divider in K'taka

DAVANAGERE | Agencies

Seven people were killed after a car they were travelling in rammed into a road divider in Karnataka's Davanagere district on Friday. According to Superintendent of Police C.B. Rishyanth, who reached the accident spot, the car driver was drunk and had dozed off while driving near the Kananakatte Toll Gate on National Highway 13.

Due to the impact, six people died on the spot while another succumbed to injuries in the hospital.

The deceased were identified as Mallangowda (22), Santhosh (21), Sanjeev (20), Jaibheem (18), Raaghu (23), Siddesh (20) and Vedamurthy (18). Among the dead, four were from Shahapur taluk in Yadgir district, another two from Kudligi taluk in Vijayanagar district. The seventh victim was a resident of Talikoti in Vijayapur district.

The bodies of the deceased were shifted to the government hospital mortuary in Jagalur.

GURUGRAM: THREE BROTHERS KILLED IN ROAD ACCIDENT

Gurugram: *Three brothers have been killed in a road accident after the motorcycle they were riding was hit by an unknown vehicle here in Sector-92, the police said on Friday. The deceased individuals have been identified as 30-year-old Sudhir Pandit, 28-year-old Randhir Pandit and 25-year-old Sanjay Pandit -- all from Madhubani district of Bihar. According to the police, the brothers used to run utensils and mobile shops in Hayatpur village, and were returning to their home in Tajnagar village when the accident took place on Thursday night.*

No evidence of rape so far in Alwar case: Police

JAIPUR | Agencies

Fresh findings have revealed that the mentally-challenged girl, who was found in a distressed state with injuries on her private parts in Alwar district, had travelled on her own, police said on Friday.They said they are yet to ascertain how the 14-year-old sustained such serious injuries.

The girl was found lying on a bridge near Tijara Fatak on Tuesday night.

She was bleeding and was admitted to the district hospital. Later, she was referred to the J K Lone Hospital in Jaipur.According to doctors, her rectum was displaced and she underwent a two-and-a-half-hour surgery.

The police earlier said it appeared to be a case of rape but maintained that anything conclusive could only be said after the report of the medical jurist was out.Alwar Superintendent of Police Tejaswani Gautam told reporters that the girl travelled around 25 km from her village and reached Alwar city in an auto-rickshaw.She then walked towards the Tijara Fatak bridge 'on her own'.

"We have been able to track the girl's movements and traced the auto-rickshaw in which she travelled with 8-10 other passengers."A team of forensic experts have not found anything suspicious in the auto-rickshaw. The driver was interrogated and her co-passengers will be questioned," the SP said.

Gautam said the girl's medical report is yet to be out and teams have been investigating the case based on the FIR.

CCTV footage collected from various locations showed her walking in many areas of Alwar and on the bridge, but no camera found her in a distressed condition on the bridge, police said.

Meanwhile, a child psychologist and experts also interacted with the girl.

Police said they are preparing a questionnaire for the experts so they could seek answers from the girl.

'STAND UP FOR FRIENDS', CONG SLAMS CENTRE OVER REPORTS OF CHINESE CONSTRUCTION IN BHUTAN

New Delhi: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday slammed the Centre over reports of China constructing villages in disputed Bhutan territory, which is less than 30 km from the trijunction Doklam plateau. The former Congress President alleged that the government has already surrendered its land, but it is not standing for 'friends' like Bhutan. As per reports, China is constructing villages in a disputed territory in Bhutan, which is less than 30 km from the trijunction Doklam plateau. The revelation came after high-resolution satellite imagery surfaced with the security establishments. "(The) Modi government first surrendered our land and has now jeopardised our close neighbours by its inaction in pushing back China. If you don't stand up for yourself, how will you stand up for your friends," Rahul Gandhi tweeted. Sources said the Chinese villages within the disputed territory in Bhutan are likely to be used for both military and civilian purposes. Doklam plateau was in limelight in 2017 when the Indian Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) were locked in a bitter standoff for over 70 days. The Chinese had to finally retreat from the area after the Indian troops contested the plateau.

5-kg IED recovered near Indo-Pak border in Punjab

Team Absolute | Chandigarh

Just a month ahead of the Assembly polls in Punjab, a special task force (STF) of Punjab Police on Friday recovered a 5-kg improvised explosive device (IED) and Rs 1 lakh in cash near the India-Pakistan border.

The seizure from the outskirts of Dhanoa village in Ajnala subdivision close to the Attari border was made on a tip-off about the smuggling of arms and ammunition from across the border. STF Assistant Inspector General Rashpal Singh told the media: "On a specific alert our teams started a search operation and found a suspected packet in fields." Initially, the packet seemed to be carrying a consignment of drugs. "Sensing explosives, a bomb disposal squad was summoned. The 5-kg IED along with Rs 1 lakh was found in the packet.

A day earlier, Punjab Police recovered 2.5 kg RDX, one detonator, codex wire, five explosive fuses along with wires, 12 cartridges of AK 47 Assault Rifle.

Director General of Police (DGP) V.K. Bhawra said the recovery of RDX was made on the interrogation of Amandeep Kumar, the prime accused in the two recent incidents of grenade attacks in Pathankot.

THREE SSB PERSONNEL DIE OF ELECTROCUTION IN BIHAR

Team Absolute | Patna

Three personnel of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) died of electrocution on Friday in Bihar's Supaul district, officials said. Besides, nine other personnel of the border guarding force were also injured.Supaul Superintendent of Police D. Amarkesh said the casualties happened after the SSB personnel had come in contact with a high tension wire.They were posted in the 45th battalion of SSB in Birpur.

According to an official of the 45th battalion of SSB, a team of 12 personnel were patrolling in the area when the mishap took place.

The injured personnel later contacted the battalion office in Birpur followed which their colleagues arrived at the spot for help and assistance.

"We have found three individuals dead on the spot while other nine personnel were critically injured. We have rescued them and admitted them to a hospital where four of them are in critical condition," an official said.

Last surviving independent Tibet official dies at 102

Team Absolute | Dharamsala

One of the longest serving civil servants and the last surviving government official of independent Tibet, Tsedrung Gyaltsen Choden, passed away in the United States at the age of 102, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) said on Friday.

A prayer service to mourn his demise was held at the Kashag Secretariat here on January 12, which was attended, among others, by CTA President Penpa Tsering.

Delivering the eulogy for the deceased, Tsering said: "We have gathered here today to mourn the demise of Kungo Gyaltsen Choden la who was perhaps the last surviving government official of an independent Tibet before 1959."

He served the Tibetan government from a young age. After coming into exile, he served the exile government in various capacities for the entirety of his life, he added."He was one of the longest serving Tibetan civil servants and we offer our deepest condolences to his family members. We believe that he has lived a truly meaningful life serving the Tibetan people and fulfilling the aspirations of His Holiness the Dalai Lama."

According to the CTA, Choden was born in 1920 at Medo Gongkar near Lhasa. He was third among the four children born to father Jangchup Phuntsok and mother Kelsang Dolma. He started his schooling from 1930.

In 1935, he joined Tashi Lhunpo monastery to study Buddhist theology and philosophy.

In 1946, he was selected as an accountant. He came into exile in 1959 and retired from active service in 1992.

The Dalai Lama has been living in India since fleeing his homeland Tibet in 1959. The government-in-exile is based in this northern hill town of Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh.

MP govt orders to shut schools till Jan 31

PROHIBITORY ORDER IMPOSED WITH NEW GUIDELINES FOR CORONA CONTROL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The state government has issued new guidelines in view of the rapid increase in the number of positive and active cases of Covid-19.

As Covid-19 cases are surging in Madhya Pradesh, the state government has ordered the closure of all schools from classes 1-12 till January 31, a notification issued on Friday by the home department said.

Apart from schools, hostels will also remain closed.

However, the notification does not specify whether coaching classes will also remain shut on not.

It stated that the state education department will issue fresh guidelines regarding the pre-board exams for classes 10 and 12 scheduled to start from January 20.

Schools authorities have also been instructed to prepare for online examinations. However, the state government will issue a separate guideline in details.

The notification applies to all private and public schools and the fresh directive will come into effect from Saturday.

All kind of fairs, public gatherings, political rallies will also remain prohibited.However, social, religious, economic, entertainment, political gatherings with a limit of 250 people will be allowed, the notification stated.

Sports activities in stadiums will remain functional with 50 per cent capacity.Daily Covid cases in the state have crossed the 4,000 mark in just four days.Over 100 teachers and students have so far tested positive for the virus.More than 100 police officials, employees in state government departments and cabinet ministers have also been infected in the last few days.Notably, Immediately after the deliberations in the virtual meeting of Crisis Management Groups held by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday, Additional Chief Secretary Home Rajesh Rajoura issued prohibitory orders with immediate effect to all the collectors and directed them to follow orders strictly.

Rajoura informed that all types of fairs (religious, commercial), in which large groups of people gather, will be prohibited. All rallies and processions will be banned. The presence of more than 250 people will be restricted in all political, cultural, religious, social, educational and entertainment events. Events/programmes can be held in closed halls with less than 50 percent attendance in the hall. Events with more than 50 percent attendance of the stadium's capacity will be prohibited for sports related activities.

Rajoura told that it will be mandatory to follow the Covid appropriate behaviour like use of mask, social distancing etc. Action should be taken to recover the fine from the persons who do not apply masks as per rules.

Do Not Bring Tears to Your Eyes, Government Will Compensate the Losses: Chief Minister

- HAVE BECOME CHIEF MINISTER ONLY TO SUPPORT IN CRISIS
- RELIEF OF 30 THOUSAND RUPEES PER HECTARE WILL BE GIVEN FOR MORE THAN 50 PERCENT CROP LOSS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday inspected the crops damaged due to untimely rains and hailstorm in village Khistone of Prithvipur tehsil of Niwari district and the Chief Minister also reached the fields to see the affected crops. He said that the crops look green from outside, but if you go inside the field and look, there is nothing left. Chouhan said that wherever crops have been damaged, including Prithvipur in the state, they will be compensated. He directed the officers to get the relief amount paid to the farmers expeditiously. He said that the survey work is nearing completion in Niwari.After taking stock of the crops in the fields, Chief Minister Chouhan, while discussing with the farmers, said, "do not panic we will face the situation together. Don't bring tears to your eyes. I'll get you out of trouble. Wherever there is damage due to hailstorm, including Prithvipur in the state, the government will compensate for it. If there is a loss of more than 50 percent of the crop, then for this relief amount will be given at the rate of 30 thousand rupees per hectare". He said that the benefit of crop insurance would be made available separately. Along with this, the recovery of short term loans will be postponed and short term crop loans will be converted into medium term loans.

Chouhan said that Rs 4 lakh will be given for loss of life, 30 thousand rupees on the death of cow and buffalo and relief amount will also be given for small animals like calf, goat and rooster-hen. Apart from this, if the houses have suffered damage, then the amount will also be given for this.

During the visit to the hailstorm affected farm in village Khistone, he met the woman farmer and instructed the officials to pay Rs 50,000 to the victim woman. He met Makhan Bai Rajak, a woman farmer of Mabai village of Madiya Halka and said, "There is no need to worry, your brother is the Chief Minister." He instructed the officers to give an amount of 50 thousand rupees to

CM Planted Peepal and Karanj Saplings in Smart City Garden

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday planted saplings of Peepal and Karanj in the Smart City Garden. Along with Chouhan, office bearers of Team Clean and Green Sanstha also planted saplings. The organisation presented a plant to the Chief Minister in an artistic pot. The pot is made from waste material.

Chouhan inquired from the organisation about their activities. The office bearers of the organisation told that they prepare pots using unusable material through jugaad (improvisation) from junk. The central verge of Indrapuri four-lane has also been made green and lush by the organisation. The organisation is also active in the development of the garden in Govindpura industrial area.Peepal is a shady tree. It purifies the environment. It also has religious and

Ayurvedic significance. Seeing the positive energy of this tree, the sages and Mahatmas meditated sitting under the Peepal tree and acquired knowledge.

Special Campaign in Urban Bodies to Give Benefit of Compounding in Building

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A special campaign will be launched in urban bodies from January 15 to 31 to provide the benefit of compounding to the citizens in cases of building permissions. It is noteworthy that the Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhupendra Singh had instructed to run a special campaign to ensure that the citizens get the benefit of increasing the limit of compounding to 30 percent by the government. Singh has appealed to the citizens to take advantage of the 20 percent exemption in the compounding fee if they apply by February 28, 2022.

Commissioner Urban Administration and Development Nikunj Kumar Srivastava has informed that citizens are taking advantage of this facility of government. Due to this, an amount of more than 62 crores has been received so far by the urban bodies in the form of compounding fee. He said that in type-1 (building more than building permission) type of cases, online applications of the building owners are required and the compounding fee is deposited by the applicant by doing self-assessment. In this remarkable work has been done by Indore Municipal Corporation. Good efforts have also been made by Bhopal Municipal Corporation in this direction.

The progress of compounding by urban bodies in Type-2 (construction without building permission) type of cases is very less. Whereas there is clear participation of bodies in such matters and these issues are prepared by the body itself. In this, instructions have been given to the concerned urban bodies to take prompt action as the remarkable work is not being done.The 20 percent relaxation in compounding fee will be applicable only on the cases applied till 28 February 2022. Therefore, all the urban bodies have been directed that by 31 January 2022, by running a special campaign, more and more building owners should be encouraged to get the benefit of exemption in compounding fee through posters, advertisement notices etc. Along with this, make sure to complete the process of mitigation of Type-2 (construction without building permission) cases available in the body by the stipulated date so that even in such cases the building owners can get the benefit of exemption.

The nodal officer of this campaign will be Devendra Vyas, Assistant Director, Urban Administration and Development and Controlling Officer will be Gajendra Nagesh, Additional Commissioner, Urban Administration and Development. They can be contacted for any information and resolution of queries.

Actor Raza Murad dropped as cleanliness ambassador on minister's order

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Noted film actor Raza Murad was removed as brand ambassador of the Bhopal Municipal Corporations swachhata abhiyan on Friday on the order of Madhya Pradesh Urban Development Minister Bhupendra Singh, a day after the announcement of his appointment was made.

In a letter to the Bhopal civic chief, Singh said Murad should be dropped as brand ambassador as his contribution in the field of cleanliness was not known.A brand ambassador should be such a person who has contributed in a major way in the field of cleanliness or who is well-versed with Bhopal's culture.

"A brand ambassador should be such a person who has contributed in a major way in the field of cleanliness or who is well-versed with Bhopal's culture. Therefore, the order in this regard should be cancelled with immediate effect. Instead, nominate a prestigious person/institution who has made noted contributions in the field of cleanliness," the minister's letter said.

However, Murad said he was well-versed with the city as he had kin hailing from here and had also completed his schooling in the state capital. "No one can be a bigger Bhopali than me as my mother, wife and many other members of the family belong to Bhopal. I did my schooling from the Cambridge School here. I am well versed with the city, its roads, its typical language, its tea, paan and gutkha, so the charge that I don't know the culture of the city holds no ground," Murad said.

"Secondly, the minister also said the brand ambassador should be such a person who has done commendable job in 'swachhata.' But, when you do not give me an opportunity to prove (my credentials in the field), then how can you decide I have not done anything," he asked.

Murad also said he had already started work on the subject on Thursday in the city's Chowk area by telling people to segregate solid and liquid waste, adding that "if the minister doesn't want my services, so be it, as they (powers that be) are maalik (all powerful)." BMC public relations officer said the 100-150 people chosen as cleanliness ambassadors on Thursday were those had made a name in their respective fields. Meanwhile, the Congress hit out at the BJP government in the state and said Murad being dropped from the brand ambassador list was "Sanghi thinking." In a tweet in Hindi, Congress spokesperson KK Mishra said Murad was removed as he was Muslim.

Cylinder Blast In Asaram Ashram Kills One & Injures Four

In a tragic incident, there was a huge explosion in the Asaram Ashram of Chhindwara district, Madhya Pradesh, on Friday, January 14.

Team Absolute | Chhindwara

A huge explosion was reported in the Asaram Ashram of Chhindwara district, Madhya Pradesh, on Friday, January 14. According to recent updates, one person is reported dead while four others are left injured. Currently, the injured individuals are receiving treatment in the hospital.

In its immediate aftermath, the explosion resulted in mass chaos and the scope of the explosion was evident as it damaged the property and left a big hole in the wall with bricks scattered all around. The police administration team has reached the spot and is currently investigating the accident.

Additional SP Sanjeev said, "Asaram's ashram in which about 300 children study witnessed a gas explosion. The gas cylinder exploded while cooking, due to which a person who came from Ahmedabad has died. Four women are also injured. At present, the matter is being investigated from all angles".

Darshana, the director of Asaram Ashram, said "There has been a boiler blast in the morning. Due to which 4 women have been injured, who have been admitted to the hospital. He said that the boiler was not working, for which a mechanic was called to fix it. The mechanic was repairing the boiler, during which the explosion took place. Due to which he died.".Former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Kamal Nath expressed his condolences over the incident and wrote on Twitter, "In Chhindwara, tragic news of one person killed and some injured in a boiler burst at Asaram Gurukul. Condolences to the victim's family and wish God speedy recovery to the injured."

CM OFFERS PRAYERS AT BAGHAMBARI DEVI TEMPLE ON MAKAR SANKRANTI

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday offered prayers on the occasion of Makar Sankranti after reaching Baghambari Devi temple at 1250 Tulsi Nagar with his family members. Chief Minister Chouhan was accompanied by Sadhna Singh and Kunal Chouhan.

ASSISTANT GRADE-3 DILIP JETHANI DISMISSED FROM GOVERNMENT SERVICE

Bhopal: Director Women and Child Development Ram Rao Bhonsle has dismissed Dilip Jethani Assistant Grade-3 (Suspended) of Child Development Project Chandbad District Bhopal from government service. This action has been taken against Jethani due to serious financial irregularities in respect of irregular and double withdrawal of honorarium.

Will stop the third wave with public cooperation model : CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the Public Participation model of Madhya Pradesh will work in the third wave also in the control of Covid. Once again the government and citizens together will defeat the third wave in the same way that work was done when dealing with crisis situations with public cooperation in the first and second wave of Covid. Joint efforts will be successful, humanity will win.

Chouhan was seeking information about the status of Covid and efforts being made in the districts of the state, from his residence through video conference today. Chouhan interacted with the members of Crisis Management Group and receive their suggestions.

Chouhan said that maximum number of people will remain in home isolation, who should be taken care of and made aware of precautions. This is important. At present, 21 thousand 394 patients are in home isolation in the state. Necessary facilities are being given to them. Chouhan will review the re-vaccination work and infection control in the Collectors' conference on January 17. Chouhan has said that a big challenge is in front of us in the form of third wave. Do not panic, be alert and cautious. There is also a possibility of Corona cases increasing rapidly. A fact has come from all over the world that those who get infected in this wave are less serious. Therefore, the cases of hospitalization are now a little more than about three percent.

Chouhan said that crisis management committees of wards and district panchayats along with blocks are associated in this discussion today. Chouhan said that the members of the Crisis Management Committee should decide that the infected should be admitted to the Covid Care Center. The important work of the District Level Crisis Management Committees is to get the people to follow Covid appropriate behavior. Make everyone aware that you must wear a mask when you step out of the house. Also, see that there is no overcrowding in any place and tests should be conducted regularly. Chouhan instructed all the commissioners to ensure that the test report is received within 24 hours. Monitor the labs in medical colleges. The work of uploading the necessary information on the Government of India portal and keeping all other arrangements in the public domain should also be done. The Crisis Management Committee of the district has to see to the arrangements for smooth operation of Covid Care Centers in their district. The arrangements for civil hospitals, district hospitals and medical colleges should be appropriate. We have sufficient number of ICU beds, oxygen beds and general beds. ICU beds, oxygen beds, general beds of Covid Care Centers must be checked. Ensure that the oxygen plants are in running condition. Check the arrangements of all the necessary equipment including ventilators, concentrators. There should be no shortage of resources. Our top priority is to save the lives of the people and stand by them in their time of crisis.Chouhan said that arrangements for testing should be made at railway stations, bus stands and airports. Talk to patients living in home isolation. Private hospitals should be kept under contract under the Chief Minister's Covid Treatment Scheme. The hospital management should not take more money than the package that has been fixed for the private hospital. Oxygen cylinders should be available and functional. Arrangements of one month's medicines should be ensured.

EDITOR'S SPECS

BJP'S REACH OUT FOR OBC

Amid the exodus of OBC leaders in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP has launched 'Samajik Samark Abhiyan' to reach out to the community to lessen the impact of the leaders leaving the party. The Uttar Pradesh BJP unit has witnessed a string of defections over the last few days, starting with Cabinet Minister Swami Prasad Maurya and most of them are from the OBC communities. Uttar Pradesh BJP OBC Morcha president Narendra Kashyap said that starting January 14 party leaders will reach out to the backward communities in all the 403 Assembly constituencies of the state telling people about the welfare measures taken by the BJP government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the last seven years. The morcha leader will reach out to the community members across the state and welfare measures taken under Modi and Yogi Adityanath government in the state. Party workers in small groups meet OBC community members in all the 403 Assembly constituencies and explain them about the initiatives like 27 per cent reservation for OBC category and 10 per cent reservation for the economically weaker sections in All India Quota Scheme in undergraduate and postgraduate (PG Medical/Dental courses) in the field of medical education. It will be pointed out that the Modi government has given Constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes, passed the 127th Constitution Amendment that allowed states and Union territories to prepare their own list of backward classes and picked 27 OBC ministers for his government. The OBC plays an important and decisive role in Uttar Pradesh politics and constitutes over 50 per cent of the total electorate of the state. While the non-Yadav OBCs constitute around 35 per cent of the state's total electorate, they are eyeing to win the election for a second consecutive term.

QUIETLY FLOWS THE GANGA

Sukant Deepak

She has vivid memories of going to the Ganga ghats in Kolkata every year. She might have been six or seven-years-old but the subtle yet imposing images never leave her -- diyas on leaves moving gently with the river's rhythm, men doing push-ups, shattered bangles being thrown in the water, people staring into nothingness, a group performing yoga poses. "The sheer theatre in Ganga's embrace got imprinted in my mind. The river ceased to be just an element for me. It became greater than everything and consumed me. The excitement and awe towards it have only grown over the years," says artist Jayasri Burman whose latest exhibition 'River of Faith' opened in the national capital recently and has now shifted to Gallery Art Exposure in Kolkata (till March 1).

This solo exhibition by Burman after more than a decade is an ode to the Ganga -- a 'subject' she has been working on since 2004. She says is a way of reminding us to have faith in nature and its immense power. "We all saw how the bodies were dumped in the river during the peak of the second wave. The river took it all. Nothing changed its course, its purity, the belief people have in her... Even in the most traumatic of times, she did not disappoint anyone," she tells correspondent.Pointing towards the 84X216 canvas, she adds that if she could paint sound, she would try and capture the mystical notes of the river... But how does one express the many facets of the mighty river -- its tranquillity, wilderness, movement and immortality. "Ganga is how I attempt to compose the balance between its fluidity and the rootedness of the faith it evokes. Over 2020 and 2021, in the pandemic gloom, I have witnessed the abuse faced by Ganga on multiple occasions. Through my work, I wish to spread the message that it is a circle we all inhabit, and only if we nurture nature and not make her suffer, will humanity be able to live harmoniously," says the artist who has observed Ganga at various places she flows. Talking about the huge sculptures in the exhibition, Jayasri says while it took multiple years to conceive, she spent a year putting them together. First made with clay, they were moulded in fibreglass and later put in wax mould before the casting was done with bronze, she said. For someone whose work is not characterised by one particular style but is in fact an amalgamation of her numerous influences, she smiles that this has to do with the urge to learn constantly and evolve every day. "How can one be a fulfilled artist? Every line I draw introduces me to a new facet of my skill and thought process. There is awe in every moment. Even a slight change in my life is reflected in my art." Talking about her fascination with mythology, she attributes it to the elaborate 'pujas' and 'katha' recitals at home when she was growing up. "I would always wonder about the characters, did those things really happen? Slowly, they seeped into my art in one form or the other," she remembers. In these highly polarised times, when talking about mythology and Hindu gods and symbols can easily get someone branded, Burman stresses, "I live in India where every morning I wake up to my staff chanting. Dashboards on cars have idols of different gods. I strongly believe everyone likes to visualise the 'power' in the shape one likes to see and derive the strength. I was born in a spiritually awakened family." And when it comes to the Ganga, she says that she is attracted to it both as a believer and artist. "In Benaras, I saw several foreigners doing the same rituals which we do. Now, many of them might not know the philosophy behind the ritual, but who are we to say that doing that they were not drawing a certain peace from doing that? Belief works in different ways. As an artist, the colours, the many hues, different shapes of objects, the figures of people from varied walks and their expressions out there narrate a little story to me."

Samajwadi party faces problem of plenty

The Samajwadi Party, which has been happily inducting leaders from other parties, is now facing the problem of plenty.

Too many claimants on every seat and the threat of the seat going to a new entrant is bound to create problems for SP president Akhilesh Yadav who will have a tough time handling the dissent in party ranks.

The eleven legislators who have walked in from BJP, and the nine legislators who came in earlier from BSP and others who have been joining the SP over the past months, are all claimants for tickets. "Till now there are around four dozen leaders from other parties who have joined SP and want tickets. Besides, the party is giving around 60 tickets to the allies, including Rashtriya Lok Dal. This implies that around 100 tickets are not available to those party leaders who have worked relentlessly in their respective constituencies in the past five years," said a senior party functionary. The entry of top leaders like Swami Prasad Maurya, Dara Singh Chauhan, Dharam Singh Saini of BJP, Imran Masood of the Congress and Ram Achal Rajbhar and Lalji Verma of BSP, has left the SP workers in their constituencies worried. "Inducting leaders, just weeks or months before the elections, is unethical and unfair for those who have worked on the ground. We toil for five years and then a leader walks in from another party and takes away the ticket. What are we expected to do in such a situation?" asked a SP ticket aspirant from Ambedkar Nagar. He said that he had met a senior party leader in this regard and was told, "wait for next time". "The next time is five years away," he said. Samajwadi Party MLA Manoj Pandey, for instance, is the sitting MLA from the Unchahar seat for the second consecutive term. He had defeated Swami Prasad Maurya's son Utkasrh Maurya twice-once, when he contested on the BSP ticket and on the BJP ticket. Pandey has been on tenterhooks ever since Maurya switched to Samajwadi Party this week. Akhilesh will have a tough time taking a call on this seat. Sources said that he has offered a seat to Maurya's son from Prayagraj but the decision is still pending.

In Saharanpur, the SP has two new leaders - Dharam Singh Saini and Imran Masood. Their decision to join the SP has already unsettled few leaders and their supporters in Saharanpur not only from the SP but its alliance partner RLD which wields its influence over west UP.

"The Samajwadi Party has a very committed cadre but if they get upset, it would not augur well for the party. The cadres have faced adverse circumstances in the past five years but have remained loyal to the leadership which will now have to assuage feelings on these 100 seats," said political analyst and senior journalist R K Singh.

international

N.KOREA FIRES 2 SUSPECTED BALLISTIC MISSILES: SEOUL

Seoul | Agencies

North Korea fired two suspected ballistic missiles eastward on Friday, after Pyongyang publicly warned earlier in the day of a "stronger and certain" response to the new US sanctions, South Korea's military said. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said the short-range projectiles were launched from Uiju in North Pyongan Province, a northwestern region bordering China, and that they flew around 430 km at an altitude of 36 km, reports Yonhap News Agency.

It detected one of the missiles at 2.41 p.m and the other at 2.52 p.m.

The missiles flew at top speed of around Mach 6, six times the speed of sound, according to officials. The intelligence authorities of South Korea and the US are conducting a detailed analysis for more information, the JCS said. The North's latest firing marks its third show of force this year. The North fired what it claimed to be hypersonic missiles on January 5 and Tuesday. South Korea's military is monitoring related North Korean movements and maintaining a firm readiness posture, the JCS said. Earlier in the day, Pyongyang issued the warning after Washington slapped the sanctions on six North Koreans involved in the regime's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the US Indo-Pacific Command said that it is aware of the missile launches, but assessed they do "not pose an immediate threat to American personnel or territory or to our allies".

RUSSIA, WEST DISAGREE ON ESSENTIAL ISSUES DURING NEGOTIATIONS: KREMLIN

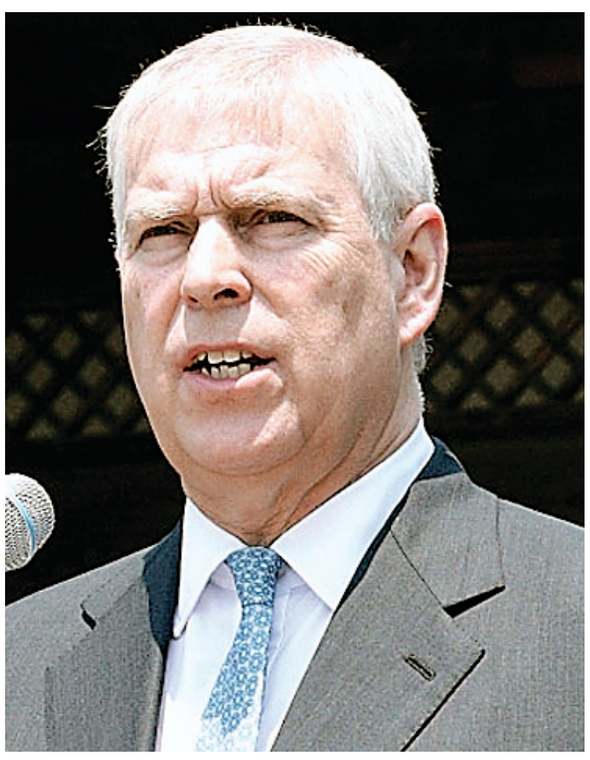
Moscow: Russia and the West disagreed on essential issues during this week's negotiations in Geneva and Brussels, the Kremlin has said. "Negotiations were initiated in order to get specific answers to specific fundamental questions raised. It is on these fundamental issues that disagreements have been recorded," the RIA Novosti news agency quoted Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying on Thursday. "This is bad. This can only be counted in the negative points of the two rounds that took place," he added.
A round of security talks between the US and Russia concluded Monday evening in Geneva without yielding any diplomatic breakthrough, and talks between representatives of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and Russia wound up on Wednesday in Brussels also without a clear outcome, Xinhua news agency reported.

UK's Prince Andrew loses military titles, royal patronages

London | Agencies

The Buckingham Palace has announced that Duke of York Prince Andrew's "military affiliations and royal patronages have been returned to the Queen"

In a brief statement issued on Thursday, the Palace said that the 61-year-old Prince Andrew "will continue not to undertake any public duties and is defending this case as a private citizen", reports xinhua news agency. The announcement came as Prince Andrew faces a civil case in the US over claims he sexually assaulted a woman when she was 17, which he has consistently denied. The Duke of York held several honorary military titles following a 22-year service in the Royal Navy, Sky News reported. Andrew is the third child and second son of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.



MI5 ALERTS ON CHINESE WOMAN SPY INFILTRATING UK PARLIAMENT

New Delhi: MI5, the UK's domestic intelligence agency, has warned British lawmakers that a woman connected to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been working to interfere in the political process, CNN reported.
MI5 alleges in an alert that Christine Ching Kui Lee has "acted covertly in coordination" with the United Front Work Department (UFWD), of the CCP and is "judged to be involved in political interference activities in the UK", the report said. The MI5 "interference alert" said: "We judge that the UFWD is seeking to covertly interfere in UK politics through establishing links with established and aspiring Parliamentarians across the political spectrum."
The alert also added that Lee has been facilitating "financial donations to political parties, Parliamentarians, aspiring Parliamentarians and individuals seeking political office in the UK, including facilitating donations to political entities on behalf of foreign nationals", CNN reported.
The UK Company Register lists Lee as a British citizen.
MI5 said that while Lee has said her UK-based activities are "to represent the UK Chinese community and increase diversity", that those activities have "been undertaken in covert coordination with the UFWD, with funding provided by foreign nationals located in China and Hong Kong".

Nationwide protest held in Lebanon against long-term economic crisis

Beirut | Agencies

Lebanese held a nationwide protest against soaring prices and deteriorating living conditions caused by the long-term economic crisis.

Drivers and citizens took to the streets on Thursday in the capital Beirut, Tripoli, Khalde and other cities and towns, parking their cars in the middle of the streets and burning dust bins to blockade main roads, Xinhua news agency reported.

Fadi Abou Chakra, Spokesman for Lebanon's fuel stations union, told Xinhua that the collapse of the Lebanese currency has impacted every aspect of life in the country. "People can no longer afford their most basic needs, let alone to fill their cars with petrol which has increased in price following the hike in the price of US dollar while people's salaries have remained the same," he said. Ali Bazzi, a taxi driver, said he can no longer afford fuel for his car but still cannot charge his clients more as they have already become too poor to take a taxi.

Lebanon has been suffering from an unprecedented financial crisis amid shortage of US dollars which has caused a collapse in the local currency, plunging over 78 per cent of the population into poverty. The cabinet formed in September 2021 has not met for three months, as political rivals have been differing on the issues of investigation into the 2020 Beirut port blast.

The Lebanese pound, which was pegged to the US. dollar at a rate of 1,500 pounds per $ until the crisis erupted in 2019, has collapsed and was trading on the parallel market on Thursday at about 31,500 pounds against 1$.

GLOBAL COVID CASELOAD TOPS 319.8 MN

Washington: Amid an ongoing resurgence across the world, the global coronavirus caseload has topped 319.8 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 5.52 million and vaccinations to over 9.55 billion, according to Johns Hopkins University.
In its latest update on Friday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and the death toll stood at 319,871,018 and 5,520,191, respectively, while the total number of vaccine doses administered has increased to 9,552,790,916. The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 64,044,568 and 846,371, according to the CSSE.
The second worst hit country in terms of cases is India (36,317,927 infections and 485,035 deaths), followed by Brazil (22,822,177 infections and 620,830 deaths).
The other countries with over 5 million cases are the UK (15,064,590), France (13,348,154), Russia (10,541,870), Turkey (10,273,170), Italy (8,155,645), Spain (7,930,528), Germany (7,805,161), Argentina (6,793,119) Iran (6,214,781) and Colombia (5,440,981), the CSSE figures showed. The nations with a death toll of over 100,000 are Russia (312,733), Mexico (300,574), Peru (203,157), the UK (151,833), Indonesia (144,155), Italy (140,188), Iran (132,002), Colombia (130,625), France (127,519), Argentina (117,808), Germany (115,172) and Ukraine (104,367).

17% LOWER THAN YESTERDAY

MUMBAI REPORTS 11,317 NEW COVID CASES, NINE DEATHS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai reported 11,317 fresh Covid-19 cases and nine deaths on Friday. Out of these, 84 per cent of the patients were asymptomatic. The total number of active Covid cases stood at 84,352 as of Friday evening.

With 13,702 cases, Mumbai recorded a drop of 16.55% in daily Covid-19 cases on Thursday from the previous day. However, this drop didn't reflect in the state's tally as Maharashtra again reported over 46,406 cases on Thursday. However, the city also conducted nearly 13 per cent fewer tests than yesterday 54, 924. On Thursday, the city had recorded 13,702 cases and six Covid deaths. While India's financial capital is witnessing a drop in cases, other big cities are still recording a huge jump in cases every day. Meanwhile, the Maharashtra government on Thursday demanded 40 lakh Covaxin and 50 lakh

Covishield doses from the Centre to increase the vaccination coverage in the state during a meeting of the chief ministers with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the prevailing Covid-19 situation. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, however, skipped the meeting called by the PM citing health reasons. Meanwhile, After the Pune division of the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) asked chemists to keep a record of people buying home antigen test kits to ascertain Covid-19 infection, the commissioner of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) Thursday issued similar orders and asked chemists and others to share the data with the FDA and the BMC's Epidemiology Cell via email every day in the evening. This comes amid a surge in the number of Covid cases and rise in cases of the Omicron variant, many in Mumbai are reportedly purchasing home testing kits. The circular issued by municipal commissioner I S Chahal Thursday stated that all manufactures, distributors, chemists, dispensaries should maintain records of sale of home testing antigen kits.

BMC cracks the whip on 'unreported' home Covid test reports

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Taking a serious view of the massive spike in Covid-19 cases in the past fortnight, the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has cracked the whip on "unreported" home tests that prevent tracking of infected persons or their contacts, officials said here on Friday.

The BMC has ordered all retail manufacturers/distributors of such home testing kits sold to pharmacies, chemists or dispensaries to inform the Food & Drugs Commissioner and the civic body's Epidemiology Cell of the same. The civic authorities said that all Covid-19 positive tests either through Rapid Antigen Test Kits or Home Test Kits, were expected to be reported to the ICMR by the concerned laboratory or the individuals who are found infected.

However, there are suspected to be instances of persons testing positive on Home Test Kits which have not been brought to the notice of ICMR. This has resulted in no tracking of such patients and the infection keeps spreading through their contact, making it difficult to contain the spread of the virus, said BMC Commissioner I.S. Chahal.

The BMC has also ordered all chemists/pharmacies/medical stores/dispensaries to provide details of such Home Test Kits sold to the customers to the FDA and Epidemiology Cell in a prescribed format.

The retailers shall also issue a bill to the concerned buyer and maintain a record of such sales. The FDA Commissioner is entrusted with monitoring the sales and distribution of the Home Test Kits and informing the persons concerned to report the test outcome on a given App. The Epidemiology Cell will collate the data received through email from the manufacturers/distributors, forward them to the concerned BMC Ward Medical or Health Officers for further actions like monitoring the health of the person/s testing positive and uploading their data on ICMR or App. The latest BMC orders came as the state remained in the 46K range of daily Covid-19 infections in the ongoing third wave, with the infection spreading at a much faster rate than the two previous waves, despite the vaccination going on rapidly.

Maha Congress to appoint women as 'working chiefs' in 60 districts

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Taking a cue from party General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi, the Congress's Maharashtra unit on Friday announced that it will appoint a woman as Working President in all the party's districts in the state.

"The Congress has a progressive tradition of giving important responsibilities to women in politics at all levels. Women leaders of Congress have held top posts like Prime Minister, President, Speaker, Governors, Chief Ministers, ministers, and other important positions. Taking ahead this glorious tradition, we shall now appoint a woman Working President in each of the 60 District Congress Committees (DCCs) in the state," said state Congress President Nana Patole.

The move on Makar Sakaranti day follows the decision by Priyanka Gandhi to

give 40 per cent representation to women candidates in the upcoming Assembly elections with her slogan "Ladki Hoon, Lad Sakti Hoon".

Patole added that the party has always respected women, given them equal opportunities and this measure would give a more active political participation to women in the state."It was during the Congress government that the revolutionary decision to reserve 50 per cent seats for women in local bodies elections and other landmark developments came," he said.Even now, Priyanka Gandhi has set a new standard with 40 per cent representation to women candidates for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls which is a major step towards the empowerment of the women, he said.Though there are only 36 administrative districts in the state, the party has a total of 60 DCCs including four in Mumbai, three in Pune, two in Nanded, Parbhani, etc, said a spokesperson.

BMC gets 'smarter', launches WhatsApp Chatbot for civic services

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Brihan Mumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) - the country's biggest and richest civic body - just got smarter, too, with the launch of a WhatsApp chatbot to deliver various services to 1.80 crore people under its jurisdiction.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray unveiled the chatbot offering 80 citizen-related services, 24x7 in Marathi and English, in an easy-to-access format - the first of its kind in the country, and only the third in the world after Dubai and Singapore.Mumbai city and suburban Guardian Ministers Aslam Shaikh and Aditya Thackeray, Mayor Kishori Pednekar, BMC Commissioner I.S. Chahal, WhatsApp India's Director Shivnath Thukral and Infobip Managing Director India Harsha Solanki were among those present at the virtual launch. "The BMC chatbot will provide at least 80 important services like water and electricity bill payments, house rent payment, licences renewal and various other essential municipal services for the benefit of the people. The model is of a transparent and accountable corporation taking advantage of information technology," Chief Minister Thackeray said at the unveiling. "I have always believed that 'ease of living' must be one of the top priorities of any government and this initiative brings it to the forefront. Though Covid times have pushed people to Work From Home, they are still compelled to visit BMC offices for their works," said Aditya Thackeray. The new facility not only enables WFH but also empowers the citizens in a transparent, accountable, easy to use and time-bound quality municipal services at the click of a button, he added. Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai in India besides Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo in South America, had earlier launched a similar WhatsApp service but these were limited to Covid-19 and Covid vaccination purposes only, a WhatsApp spokesperson told IANS. However, the BMC has packed in a huge range of services in its Chatbot - developed by Infobip - to streamline and make citizen engagement more inclusive and accessible, akin to Singapore and Dubai, said the spokesperson. "MyBMC Assist" chatbot is free to use and built on the WhatsApp Business platform to serve multiple use-cases that cater citizens, tourists and businesses, ensure quick and easy realtime answers to multiple queries, send alerts and reminders to enable BMC remain on its toes 24x&," said a BMC officer.

"Intuitive technologies like WhatsApp have made critical contributions in helping governments to deliver citizen-centric services in a simple, safe and secure manner. This (MyBMC Assist) chatbot is a testament to the effective and scalable, transformational power of technology put to use by the BMC," commented WhatsApp India Public Policy Director Shivnath Thukral. Citizens can get started on the chatbot MyBMC Assist with just a 'Hi!' on the number - +918999228999 - to get information on their wards, nearby amenities like schools/hospitals, a range of civic services, BEST services, tourist destinations, directly lodge complaints, apply for festival permissions, licences renewals, payments and a lot more, from the comfort of their homes - a 'boon' with the civic elections round the corner. Now, the government plans to take this model and replicate it in other cities and districts of Maharashtra to promote a paperless, form of e-governance coupled with ease-of-living, and prove a game-changer, assured Minister Aditya Thackeray.

New road safety measures must focus on reducing fatalities: Parab

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra transport minister Anil Parab directed government t officials to ensure that saving lives should be the main concern while planning new road safety measures for 2022.

Parab was speaking at the state road safety council's 11th meeting at Sahyadri guest house.

Additional chief secretary (transport) Ashish Kumar Singh, transport commissioner Avinash Dhakne, MSRTC managing director Shekhar Channe, joint transport commissioner (road safety) JB Patil were among those present in the meeting. "Due to crashes, several innocent people are killed and it is a financial and mental trauma for his or her entire family for life. So. it is imperative that we focus on saving lives and reducing fatalities on the road," Parab said at the meeting, adding that the officials should seek cooperation from local NGOs in curbing mishaps on highways.

Parab further said the the road signs on traffic rules, especially speed limits at various locations, should be conspicuous. He also said there should be trauma centres and health care facilities close to highways so that victims can be rushed during the golden hour and his or her life can be saved.

"Vehicles such as tractors should have radium stickers on the rear side so that it is visible to oncoming vehicles and there is no collision," he said. Singh said that though there is a dip in number of mishaps across state now as compared to a year ago, there is still need to reduce the fatalities and number of injuries in road crashes. He added that there should be efforts to ensure good drivers on road who not only follow rules but also ensure safety of fellow motorists and pedestrians.

"Wherever the mishap occurs, the local administration has been asked to find out the cause and inform the same to all government departments involved in road safety measures," he said. The meeting was attended by representatives from PWD, health, transport, MSRTC, SAVELife Foundation, Parisar among others.

GOVERNMENT OF MAHARASHTRA
Office of the Executive Engineer,
Presidency (P.W.) Division, Mumbai
Email : presidency.ee@mahapwd.gov.in
E- TENDER NOTICE NO 46 FOR 2021-2022

Online E- Tenders in B-1 Form For the Following Work are invited by the Executive Engineer, Presidency Division, PWD, 2nd floor Bandhakam Bhavan, 25 Murzban Road, Fort, Mumbai-400 001 (Tel. No-22016975/22016977) from Majoor Sahakari Sanstha in appropriate class of the Public Works Department. Right to reject/accept of all or one tender is reserved by the undersigned.

Sr No	Name Of Work	Amt.
1	Repairs to Servant Qtrs. at Govt. Bunglow Agradoot at Malbar Hill, Mumbai.	21.87
2	Repairs to Doors & Windows, Repairs of Damaged Internal Plaster, Storage unit, Renovation of Toilets & Internal Painting in Bandman's Qtrs. Building 1, 2 & 3 at N.D. Road, Mumbai.	15.10
3	Repairs to drainage line, Plaster work repairs toilet block Roof at C.M.M Court, Mumbai.	22.49
4	Repairs to Crime Office Building (Annex I) at C.P. Compound Mumbai	19.99
5	CR to Repairing of Pump Room and Welfare Office at Insitute of Science Building and CR to shifting of pipe line and painting at New City Civil Court, Mumbai.	12.87
6	Repairs to Plaster & painting of "B" building at MRA Police station Campus.	13.57
7	Renovation of flooring & false ceiling in sydenham collage 'B' Road Churchgate, Mumbai.	11.41
8	Repairs, Plastering, C.C. Flooring, Door & Windows to Servants Qtrs. Chawl No. 8, 9, 10 at Madam Cama Road, Mumbai.	11.28
9	CR to Polymer micro concret and plastering in N C C Building at New City Court Building, Mumbai.	17.25
10	Repairs to passage, compound wall and terrace waterprofing at Forzet Manzil, Mumbai.	17.67
11	Repairing damaged flooring, internal plaster, leakage toilet bath, Doors & window, storage unit in Bandmans Qtrs. 3/1 at Walkeshwar, Mumbai.	26.39
12	Renovation of false ceiling in Ground floor Kitchen and Misc work at Sahayadri State Guest house, Malbar Hill, Mumbai.	22.09
13	Repairs to Door & Window repairs of Damaged Internal Plaster, Replace of European W C Pans in Nilima Building at Malbar Hill, Mumbai.	15.14
14	Repairs to toilet block Plumbing fitting partition and false ceiling work, plaster and paint to wall at C.P. Office Mumbai.	21.98
15	Repairs to door and windows of Old Custom House Building,Mumbai	17.69
16	Repairs to toilet block at New Applied art Building & Drainage line & Inpection Chamber at priting Technology building & Replastering & painting to Shilpkala Department of Main Building at J J School of Arts Campus.	22.49
17	Repairs, Plastering, C.C. Flooring, Door & Windows to Servants Qtrs. Chawl No. 2, 3, 4 at Madam Cama Road, Mumbai.	11.28
18	Repairs to doors & window & Polishing, wall paneling at 3rd floor of Sydenham Collage at Churchgate, Mumbai.	13.27
19	structural repairs to staircase and overhead water tank and painting of entire overhead RCC water tank at M.R.A. Police Station Compound.	29.99
20	CR to Plastering and painting, ineternally at Old Secretariat Main Building at City Civil Court, Mumbai.	11.98
21	Repairs to draninage line PVC pipe line C.I pipe & precoated sheet at Vistarit MLA,s Hostel, Mumbai.	16.79
22	Renovation of toilets, replacing of sanitary & plumbing fitting, providing and fixing alluminium silding window, grill work, dado & sill, flooring and plastering, painting, Painting of flat no 502 at Rocky Hill Tower, N D Road, Mumbai.	13.26
23	Repairs to pvement and flooring at open space in the compound of Administrative Staff collage.Mumbai.	12.30
24	Repairs to door window, watersupply and sanitary fitting at administrative staff collage campus. Enshatment compund and police station building, Mumbai.	25.00

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Opening Date :- 2.2.2022
All the corrigendum/Changes pertain to notice will not published in newspapers that will published in E-tendering process.
All the detail Information is available on following websites
1) www.mahapwd.com
2) www.mahatenders.gov.in

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Office of the Executive Engineer,
Presidency Division, P.W.D., 2nd floor,
Bandhakam Bhavan, 25, Murzban Road,
Presidency Division, Mumbai.
Fort, Mumbai 400 001
Date: 10/1/2022

(C.T.Naik)
Executive Engineer
Presidency Division Mumbai.

ROC-2021-22/No – 5/C 3694

Anjana Vasan joins 'Killing Eve' cast

Los Angeles | Agencies

Indian-born Singporean actress Anjana Vasan, whom many will remember from 'Spider-Man: Far From Home', has been newly cast in Season 4 of the BBC America action thriller series 'Killing Eve'. Season 4 will debut on February 27.

Camille Cottin, the French actress most recently seen in Ridley Scott's 'House of Gucci', has been upped to a series regular and the Royal Shakespeare Company's Robert Gilbert finds himself in the cast, where French celebrity actress Marie-Sophie Ferdane will now be a recurring guest star, reports 'Variety'.

The series follows MI6 spy Eve Polastri (Sandra Oh) as she chases down international assassin Villanelle (Jodie Comer). Cottin plays Hélène, the highest-up revealed member of The Twelve, an organisation that hires assassins to commit murders.

Vasan will play Pam, a young new assassin in training whose work in the family funeral business granted her solace from her relationship with her bullying brother, notes 'Variety'. Vasan is best known for starring in the Channel 4 sitcom 'We Are Lady Parts' as Amina, and has also appeared in 'Cyrano' and 'Mogul Mowgli'.

Gilbert will play Yusuf, a warm and charismatic ex-army bad boy who works to help Eve on her mission of revenge. He recently appeared as Angus in 'The Tragedy of Macbeth' with other previous credits including 'Star Trek: Lower Decks' and 'Ready Player One'.

Limited re-release to mark 'The Godfather' 50th anniversary

Los Angeles | Agencies

The trailer for the 50th anniversary limited theatrical re-release of Francis Ford Coppola's classic 'The Godfather', starring Marlon Brando and some of the greatest actors of all times, "is, if nothing else, a reminder that the great mobster movie unleashed some of the most memorable lines of dialogue in Hollywood history," reports 'Deadline'.

The one that is most often repeated: "I'm going to make him an offer he can't refuse." Only Brando could have made this line sound so sinister. Or the lines delivered by a young Al Pacino: "Don't ever take sides against the family again." And to Diane Keaton's character: "Don't ask me about my business, Kay."

Paramount Pictures released the new trailer on Thursday (U.S. Pacific Time) with the announcement that the film will have a limited 50th anniversary theatrical release in Dolby Vision beginning from February 25, exclusively in Dolby Cinema at AMC Theatres in the U.S. and international territories around the world.

A statement from Paramount Pictures introducing the trailer reads: "No movie changed Hollywood more than The Godfather. From the bestselling novel by Mario Puzo to box-office blockbuster, its influential legacy endures to this day."

The statement notes: "Starring Marlon Brando in his Oscar-winning performance as the patriarch of the Corleone family, this first instalment in the three-movie saga paints a dramatic portrait of the Sicilian clan's rise and near fall from power in America.

'Vanity Fair' puts Priyanka on its cover

Los Angeles | Agencies

New York: Priyanka Chopra has achieved what every star anywhere in the world aspires for -- to be on the cover of 'Vanity Fair'. She's on the cover of the February 2022 edition of the magazine celebrated internationally as much for its in-depth articles as for its cutting-edge photography.

Unveiling the cover, 'Vanity Fair' tweeted: "After a journey into 'The Matrix', the actor enters 2022 with her cup overflowing -- reflecting on her storied Hindi film industry career, marriage, and creating a path for herself in Hollywood." Looking artfully messy, a sultry Priyanka appears on the cover in an off-shoulder, off-white ruffled dress from Fendi.

The magazine, previously edited by celebrity journalists such as Tina Brown and Graydon Carter (who's played by Jeff Bridges in the film 'How to Lose Friends and Alienate People'), is now helmed by Radhika Jones, an Indian American.

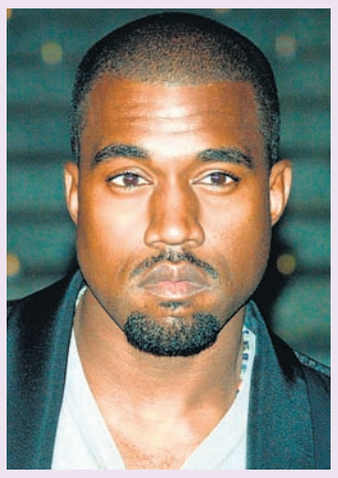
Describing her as "a driven woman who has transcended what's previously been possible for an Indian actor in Hollywood," the 'Vanity Fair' cover story goes on to say: "She is an outsider who broke down barriers and built a place for herself within the walls of Hollywood. Now she's on a mission to welcome others in."

Priyanka, notes the article that traces her life's story from her days at the Army Public School, Bareilly, will finally be playing lead film roles as she had in India" with the rom-com 'Text for You' and Amazon's ambitious spy series 'Citadel' later this year.

'OUTSIDER WHO BROKE DOWN BARRIERS'

KANYE WEST NAMED IN 'BATTERY' REPORT BEING PROBED BY LAPD

Los Angeles | Agencies



Influential American rapper and fashion icon Kanye West has been named as a suspect in a battery report taken by the LAPD's Newton Division early on Thursday morning (US Pacific Time), 'Variety' has confirmed. He was not arrested; a rep for West did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

According to LAPD spokesperson Redina Puentes, quoted by 'Variety', the incident occurred around 3 a.m. at South Santa Fe Avenue and Bay Street in downtown Los Angeles. The location is outside of Soho Warehouse, a members-only club.

Online newspaper TMZ first reported the news, citing police sources as saying that the incident is being investigated as misdemeanour battery, which carries a maximum jail sentence of 6 months.

TMZ also posted a secretly filmed video of West, which it says was "shot some time between Wednesday night and Thursday morning," in which a clearly aggravated West is heard yelling, "Did y'all say that or not? Did y'all say that or not? ... Cuz that's what happened right f...ing now."

BRITNEY HITS BACK AT SIS JAMIE LYNN AFTER HER ABC INTERVIEW

Los Angeles | Agencies

Britney Spears has responded to her sister (and 'Steel Magnolias' star) Jamie Lynn Spears's recent ABC News interview, in which she spoke about their relationship and defended her role in the pop star's 13-year conservatorship.

In a series of Notes app screenshots posted to Twitter on Thursday (U.S. Pacific Time), reported by 'Variety', the pop icon wrote about how she watched the interview, parts of which aired on both 'Good Morning America' and 'Nightline', while she had a 104-degree fever. "It was actually kind of nice having a fever so high cause I had to surrender to not caring," Britney wrote. She then explained, according to 'Variety', why she took issue with some things her younger sister said in the interview, which was to promote her new memoir, 'Things I Should Have Said'.

This included Jamie Lynn Spears describing some of her past behaviour as "erratic" and defending her tribute performance at the 2017 Radio Disney Music Awards, during which she sang remixes of Britney's songs.

"She was never around me much 15 years ago at that time ... so why are they even talking about that unless she wants to sell a book at my expense???" Britney wrote about her sister, who's 10 years younger to her.

She concluded her Notes with a scathing indictment of her estranged family: "Hope your book does well, Jamie Lynn !!!! My family ruined my dreams 100 billion percent and tried to make me look like the crazy one while I have a 104 fever, not being able to move in my bed !!!! My family loves to pull me down and hurt me always so I am disgusted with them !!!!"

Korean rookie girl groups ready to heat up music market in 2022

Seoul | Agencies

Only less than two weeks have passed since the start of the New Year, but the K-pop scene is already busy with news of rookie girl groups getting global attention or preparing for their official debuts. One of the hottest is Ive, which made its debut on December 1 with the single 'Eleven', reports Yonhap News Agency. The group is composed of six members, including Yujin and Wonyoung from IZ*ONE, the now-disbanded popular project group formed through the local cable TV channel Mnet's audition show 'Produce 48'.

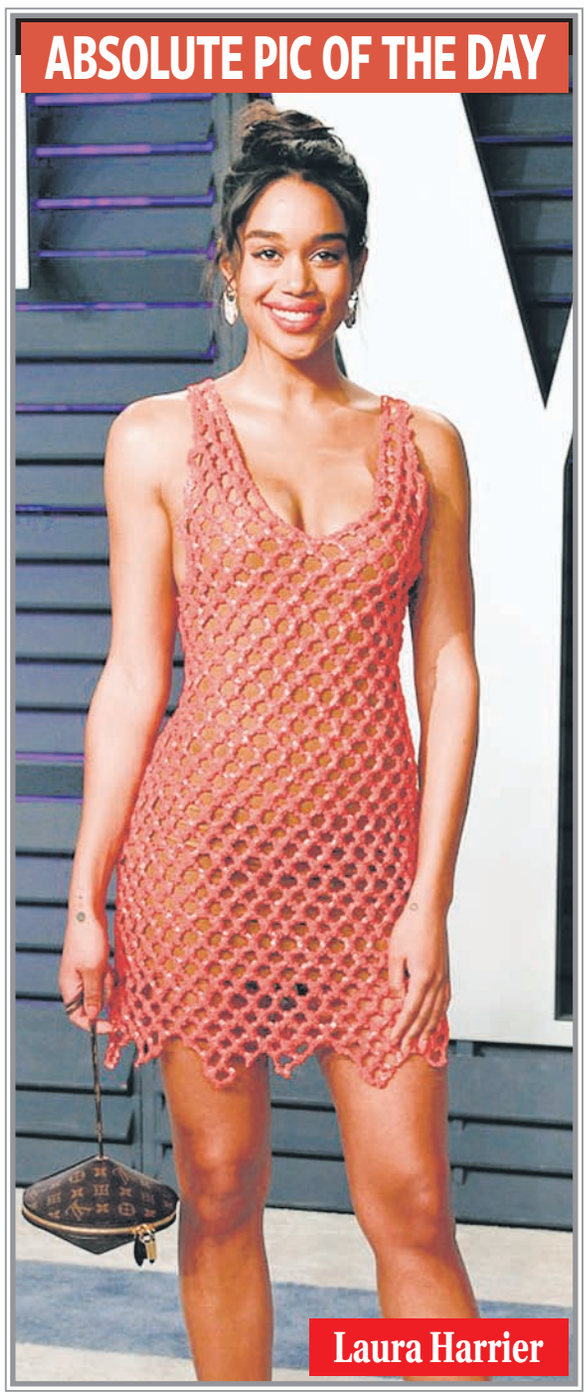
'Eleven' has since racked up wins on domestic weekly TV music shows and made it onto charts across the world, including Billboard, Spotify and China's QQ Music. After setting a record for the most first-week debut album sales by all K-pop girl groups, Ive's first single album of the same name had sold more than 260,000 copies as of the end of December, according to data from local music tracker Gaon.

Closely following in the footsteps of Ive is Kep1er, a girl group composed of the nine finalists of Mnet's audition show 'Girls Planet 999', which aired from August to October last year.

The multinational group with South Korean, Chinese and Japanese members made its debut on January 3 with its first EP, 'First Impact', and broke the first-week debut album sales record set by Ive.

The album has sold more than 200,000 copies in the first week of its release with slightly more than 150,000 copies selling on the day of release, according to local album sales tracker Hanteo Chart.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Laura Harrier

SA v IND, 3rd Test

PETERSEN SHINES AS SOUTH AFRICA COME FROM BEHIND TO WIN SERIES 2-1

Cape Town | Agencies

Keegan Petersen shined with a classy 82 as South Africa defeated India by seven wickets to win the series-deciding third Test at the Newlands Cricket Ground on Friday.

After Petersen fell, Rassie van der Dussen and Temba Bavuma combined for an unbeaten partnership of 57 off 105 balls to chase down 212, scripting a remarkable series victory from being 0-1 down, losing tosses to acing 200-plus chases twice to win by 2-1

The play on Day 4 began with Petersen reaching his second half-century of the match with a brace on thick edge going through third man. It also meant that Petersen has crossed fifty thrice in the series, including twice in the ongoing match. India pacers Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah asked many questions while beating the outer edges but co'ldn't get a wicket early on.

Petersen's knock of 82 off 113 balls, his career-best effort, comes after he made a sparkling 72 in the first innings. The 28-year-old signed off from the three-match series as the highest run-scorer with 276 runs in six innings, which should be good enough for him to seal the number three spot for himself in So'th Africa's Test eleven.

India, who were the overwhelming favourites to clinch a maiden series win in the Rainbow Nation, will be left wondering where they faltered after winning in Centurion.

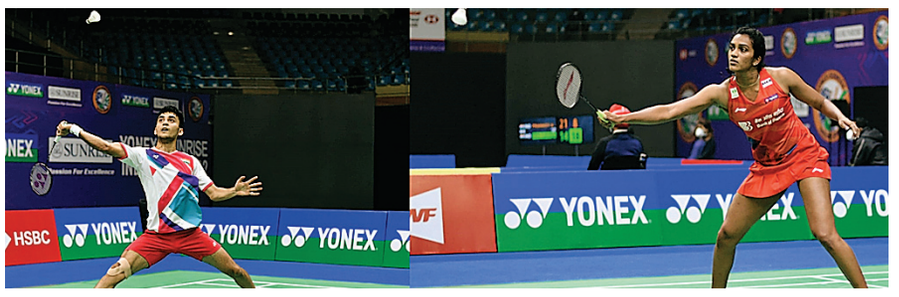
Brief scores

India 223 and 198 lost to South Africa 210 and 212/3 in 63.3 overs (Keegan Petersen 82, Rassie van der Dussen 41 not out; Shardul Thakur 1/22, Mohammed Shami 1/41) by seven wickets

BATTING HAS LET US DOWN: KOHLI

"The batting has let us down in the last two games. We needed to step up and there's no running away from that. Honestly, I can't sit here and talk about what will happen in the future. That's not for me to discuss. For that, you need to speak to selectors and ask what they have in mind because it's not my job. We have continued to back Cheteshwar and Ajinkya because of the kind of players they are."

India Open 2022: Lakshya overcomes Prannoy challenge, Sindhu beats Ashmita to reach semis



Team Absolute | New Delhi

World championships bronze medallist Lakshya Sen and top seed PV Sindhu advanced to the semi-finals after registering contrasting victories against HS Prannoy and Ashmita Chaliha respectively in the Yonex-Sunrise India Open 2022, here on Friday.

Sen rallied from a game down to beat compatriot Prannoy 14-21, 21-9, 21-14 in exactly an hour in the men's singles quarter-final.

In the two other all-Indian clashes of the day, Sindhu defeated Ashmita 21-7, 21-18 while Aakarshi Kashyap overcame the challenge of Malvika Bansod 21-12, 21-15 in the women's singles category. Sen, the third seed and the highest-ranked player in the fray after the top two seeds Kidambi Srikanth and B Sai Praneeth withdrew due to Covid positive tests, will now face Ng Tze Yong of Malaysia on Saturday.

Sindhu will take on Thailand's Supanida Katethong, who received a walkover in the quarter-finals after Singapore's Jia Min Yeo conceded the match due to a high fever. In the day's other key match, Sindhu looked like racing away to victory against Ashmita Chaliha when she pocketed the opening game 21-7. But if she was looking for yet another easy outing, her opponent wasn't ready to just surrender without a fight. Earlier, Aakarshi Kashyap ended Malvika Bansod's run in the tournament. Malvika, who had upset Saina Nehwal in the earlier round, looked nervous from the start and her opponent ensured that she could never settle down. In other men's singles matches played on Friday, world champion Loh Kean Yew defeated Russia's Sergey Sirant 21-16, 21-13. In men's doubles, top seeds Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan booked their semi-final berth with a 21-12, 21-14 over Norway's Torjus Flaaten and Vegard Rikheim. Second seeds Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also reached the last-four stage after defeating Singapore's Hee Yong Kai Terry and Loh Kean Hean 21-18, 21-18.

SYDNEY TENNIS CLASSIC

ANDY MURRAY MAKES FIRST ATP FINAL SINCE 2019

Sydney | Agencies

Andy Murray reached his first ATP Tour final for more than two years with a three-set 6-7(6), 6-4, 6-4 win over American Reilly Opelka at the Sydney Tennis Classic, here on Friday.

The former World No. 1 used his trademark returning prowess to effectively nullify the American's big serve and reach his first ATP Tour final since winning the title in Antwerp in 2019.

Despite Opelka serving 20 aces, Murray was still able to find the right moments to effectively counter-attack.Murray has always performed well against big servers, his great returns and ability to keep the ball in play making it a strong match-up for him. He holds a 7-0 record against Ivo Karlovic and an 8-0 against John Isner, and this win means he remains unbeaten against the giants of the game.

KREJCIKOVA DEFEATS KONTAVEIT, TO MEET BADOSA IN FINAL

Sydney: World No. 4 Barbora Krejcikova defeated World No.7 Anett Kontaveit 0-6, 6-4, 7-6(12) to reach the final in the Sydney Tennis Classic, here on Friday.

The 26-year-old Czech player will take on No.5 seed Paula Badosa for the title after the Spaniard delivered a performance of supreme quality to defeat Daria Kasatkina 6-2, 6-2 in 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Reigning French Open singles and doubles champion Krejcikova had to stave off a whopping seven match points before finally converting her fifth match point after 2 hours and 30 minutes of toe-to-toe tennis. The result moves the Czech into her sixth WTA singles final.

ASHES, 5TH TEST, DAY 1

Head's century puts Australia in control against England after early setback

Hobart | Agencies

A fine hundred by Travis Head (101) and a half-century by Cameron Green (74) put Australia in control as they reached 241/6 against England on a rain-hit day one of the fifth and final Ashes Test, here on Friday. A 121-run stand between Head and Green helped Australia rebuild from a tricky start on day one of the day-night Test in Hobart. Having been reduced to 12/3 in the first hour with David Warner (0), Usman Khawaja (6) and Steve Smith (0) dismissed, two of those accounted for by Ollie Robinson, the hosts were in trouble when Head walked in. However, with Marnus Labuschagne (44) for company, Head quickly put the pressure back on the visitors, adding 53 runs in the next 43 balls. Labuschagne was let off earlier in the day by Zak Crawley and made England pay with some exquisite shots. He was well complemented by Head, who also put the foot on the pedal, to push Australia into the driving seat. Before Labuschagne could get his fifty, however, Stuart Broad had him in a tangle with one that was directed straight at the stumps. Walking across, Labuschagne missed one headed for the middle stump and was down on all fours as soon as the stumps were uprooted.

The dismissal did not quite have the effect England were hoping for, however, as Green and Head took Australia to dinner with no further damage.After the break, the duo kept the scoreboard ticking. Head was in complete control and completed his fifty at nearly run-a-ball. Crunching anything too short or too full, the left-hander, who had started the series off with a blistering 148-ball 152 in Brisbane followed by a 54-ball 51 in Adelaide, made England pay with his aggressive approach again.

Green, fresh off a half-century last Test, also looked in control and England failed to find the breakthrough they needed. The century stand came up with Head closing in on a hundred and Green nearing his fifty. The former got there first, slicing Chris Woakes behind point for a couple, but his joy didn't last long as he flicked the next ball straight to mid-on to depart for 101.

Green got to his half-century soon after, and at tea, despite the loss of Head, Australia seemed to be in a better position. Shortly after the break, Green pulled Mark Wood straight to deep mid-wicket to be dismissed for 74.

A drizzle broke out thereafter, interrupting play and dashing England's hopes of running through Alex Carey and the Australian lower-order.

Brief scores

Brief scores: Australia 241/6 (Travis Head 101, Cameron Green 74; Stuart Broad 2-48) vs England

Athletic Club rally against Atletico to reach Supercup final

Riyadh | Agencies

Athletic Club Bilbao qualified for their second Spanish Supercup final in two years as they came back from behind to beat Atletico Madrid 2-1.

The first half was a close, tactical affair, with both looking to cancel the other out and although Joao Felix had the ball in the net in the first minute, it was ruled out for offside on Thursday evening.

Both sides had early penalty appeals rejected by the VAR, with Thomas Lemar going down in the Athletic area, while Oihan Sancet went down at the other end after a challenge from Geoffrey Kondogbia.

Inaki Williams had Athletic's best chance, but couldn't beat Jan Oblak as he controlled a ball over the top,

while at the other end Yannick Carrasco, who was the pick of the bunch for Atletico, drove powerfully at Unai Simon, Xinhua reports.

Things looked good for Atletico when Joao Felix's corner bounced off the post and into the net off Unai Simon's back in the 62nd minute.

However that sparked a brave fightback from Athletic Club, who equalised in the 77th minute through Yeray Alvarez's powerful header, just minutes after Atletico keeper Oblak had stopped a powerful header from Inigo Martinez. A goal from 19-year-old Nico Williams completed the fightback with seven minutes left as the ball fell to him from another corner.He also saw Oblak produce another save from his powerful shot as Athletic ended up on top, while Atletico's night went from bad to worse in injury time when central defender Jose Gimenez was shown a direct red card for dangerous play as he caught Martinez in the head with a full set of studs.

Athletic will face Real Madrid, who beat FC Barcelona 3-2 on Wednesday, in the Spanish Supercup final on January 16.

Australian minister cancels Djokovic's visa

Melbourne | Agencies

World No. 1 tennis player Novak Djokovic will not be able to defend his Australian Open crown this year after the Australian Immigration Minister, Alex Hawke, annulled his visa on Friday afternoon.

The nine-time Australian Open champion, who has won consecutive titles at Melbourne Park since 2019, had initially been granted a medical exemption to compete in the tournament.

The 34-year-old Djokovic, winner of 20 Grand Slam titles, had earlier this week won the legal battle in his bid to remain

in Australia, with a court ordering his immediate release from immigration detention. However, lawyers for the federal government had told the court that the country's immigration minister was reserving the right to exercise his personal powers to again revoke Djokovic's visa.

Hawke used his discretionary powers on Friday to cancel the visa given to Djokovic, who has not declared his COVID-19 vaccination status despite a groundswell of demand for him to take the jab in the interest of public safety and his own health. In a statement issued on Friday, Hawke said, "Today I exercised my power under section 133C(3) of the Migration Act to cancel the visa held by Mr Novak Djokovic on health and good order grounds, on the basis that it was in the public interest to do so.

AFC Asian Cup quarterfinal spot our primary target: Dennerby

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Indian women's football team head coach Thomas Dennerby has set quarterfinals as the "primary target" for his side in the AFC Asian Cup India 2022 tournament, scheduled to kick off here on January 20, with the hosts playing Iran in the opener.

"We aim to get into the quarterfinals, which is our primary target. If we qualify to the last-eight... anything and everything can happen. The quarterfinals are a knockout stage, and all teams will be under pressure. Looking ahead, we feel it's a realistic target that we can achieve. But let's take it step by step," said Dennerby on Friday. "We have played different teams, different levels of teams, and different playing styles. We learned in

Brazil wherein we played three games in a span of seven days with two days in between -- a similar format to the group stage of the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022. It allowed us to regain 100 per cent of energy, and get back to prime fitness," the coach added.

The coach said that the defence will have to overcome its momentary lapse of concentration, for which the team had paid dearly during the games in South America.

TECTOR, MCBRINE GUIDE IRELAND TO 5-WICKET WIN AGAINST WEST INDIES IN 2ND ODI

Kingston | Agencies

An unbeaten half-century by youngster Harry Tector backed by a strong Irish bowling performance, especially Andy McBrine (4/36), helped the tourists clinch a five-wicket victory over the West Indies in a rain-curtailed second One-day International at the Sabina Park here on Friday (IST).

The tourists, thus, levelled the series 1-1, performing admirably despite missing several key players, including skipper Andrew Balbirnie due to COVID-19.

Led by stand-in skipper Paul Stirling, Ireland were particularly efficient with ball, as McBrine, Craig Young (3/42) and Josh Little (2/40) making significant contributions. McBrine also compiling 35 with the bat to help Ireland to victory in the match which had to be rescheduled due to several COVID-19 cases being reported in the touring side.

The teams will play the final World Cup Super League match on January 16 at the same venue.

ISL 2021-22:

Goa FC hold NorthEast United 1-1

Bambolin (Goa) | Agencies

NorthEast United FC played out a 1-1 draw with FC Goa in the 2021-22 Indian Super League (ISL) at the Athletic Stadium, here on Friday.

Hernan Santana's delightful free-kick in the second minute of the game failed to hand NorthEast United FC a win as Airan Cabrera's goal in the 39th minute helped Goa to draw the match. There were no goals in the second half, meaning Goa moved up a rung to eighth place with 13 points from 11 games while NorthEast United remained 10th with nine points from 11 games. It was a frantic start to the game and just the early push NorthEast United needed. Goa tried to settle down by playing more passes in midfield but NorthEast were not ready to rest on the slender lead as Deshorn Brown missed the target after beating two defenders. Goa relied on the excellent Jorge Ortiz to deliver the goods and the Spaniard got past Provat Lakra to send a teasing ball inside the box but Mirshad Michu was alert to avert the danger at the right time.

'BIGG BOSS 15': RAKHI PLAYS TRICKS TO CREATE A RIFT BETWEEN KARAN AND TEJASSWI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Rakhi Sawant is playing a pivotal role in sowing seeds of jealousy between Tejasswi Prakash and Karan Kundrra in 'Bigg Boss 15'.

Rakhi is taking advantage of a rift between them and trying to get in Tejasswi's head by hyping the friendship between Karan and Shamita Shetty.

In the upcoming episode of 'Bigg Boss 15', Rakhi teases Shamita that Karan has always had an eye for her but is simply stuck with Tejasswi at this point. Listening to this Tejasswi tells Karan that now even Rakhi can see your closeness with Shamita. "Whatever doubt I have, Rakhi told you on face," says Tejasswi.

Karan understanding the intention of Rakhi, replies: "She is saying this just to irritate you so that you start fighting with me."

Tejasswi confronts him and says: "The person whom I consider my boyfriend is being related to someone else and I will not react, how is it possible."

This annoys Karan and he responds: "Please don't teach me from today onwards what I have to do." Tejasswi continues to lecture him on how he should have reacted, to which Karan concludes: "I am done with people telling me what to do. You are not liking it? Back off!"

'Bigg Boss 15' airs on Colors.

Divya Dutta opens up on her book and her crush on Salman Khan

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Divya Dutta talks about her book 'The Stars in My Sky' and her crush on Bollywood superstar Salman Khan, on 'The Kapil Sharma Show'.

Divya along with famous singers Jaspinder Narula and Jasbir Jassi appear on the show on Lohri special episode.

She shares: "Honestly, I have been very lucky and blessed because I have received an opportunity to work with notable names in the entertainment industry. With my book 'The Stars in My Sky', there are mentions of many actors, directors and seniors with who I wanted to click pictures but eventually was blessed to work with them and today, I share wonderful relations with them."

During a conversation with Divya, host Kapil Sharma tells her that he recently came across a picture of her and her brother, when she was quite young, posing with Bollywood's superstar Salman Khan. He asks Divya if even today after being an established actor she is interested in clicking pictures with celebs. To this Divya replies: "With you Kapil Sharma".

Divya reveals: "I had a huge crush on Salman Khan and 'Maine Pyar Kiya' had just released and my uncle was a director. I requested him to get me a picture with Salman Khan and around that time, I also had a strong inclination towards becoming an actor. After many years, I shot with Salman Khan in a film." 'The Kapil Sharma Show' airs on Sony Entertainment Television.

Aparshakti to take classes to play a deaf-mute interpreter

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Aparshakti Khurana, who is gearing up for his next film 'Berlin', will be taking special training to play the character of a deaf and mute interpreter for the film.

Aparshakti said, "Playing someone like a sign language expert in a thriller is exactly the kind of work I had been looking forward to doing for a very long time. I will be soon starting to work to take classes to learn sign language. It will be extensive training and workshops with an expert and I want to make sure I do the needful to learn it in as much detail."

The film is directed by Atul Sabharwal and on working with the filmmaker, the actor added, "Atul expects you to be in top form with respect to the energy you bring to the set. It's amazing to see his conviction towards his writing and direction."

Produced by Zee Studios the film also features Ishwak Singh.

'Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhen': A teasing thriller that fails to deliver

FILM REVIEW

BY TROY RIBEIRO

'Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhen' (Streaming on Netflix)

Direction: Sidharth Sengupta

Cast: Tahir Raj Bhasin, Shweta Tripathi Sharma, Anchal Singh, Saurabh Shukla, Bijendra Kala, Surya Sharma, Anantvijay Joshi, Sunita Rajwar

Duration: Averages 40 minutes per episode

Ratings: * * * (three stars)

Designed as a pulpy thriller this eight-episode series is an engaging, psychological romance drama set in the backdrop of crime and power.

Based in the fictional town of Onkara, 'Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein' follows a recently graduated engineering student Vikrant who is the cynosure of Purva's eyes since her school days. Purva is the daughter of the local, all-powerful politician Akheraj Awasthi who would go to any length to keep his daughter happy.

Years later, circumstances make their paths meet when Vikrant after finishing his studies, is forced by his father to seek Akheraj's blessings and maybe a "job". Vikrant's father works as an accountant for Akheraj and is indebted to him on various grounds.

Vikrant unenthusiastically lands up at Akheraj's premise and by happenstance meets Purva, who ensures that her father offers him a job as the manager of her Zumba classes with a plump salary. Instead of getting elated, Vikrant is not happy because he can't fathom how he'd put his engineering education to use in a dead-end job.

Also, unbeknownst to his family, he is in love with his college mate Shikha Agarwal and dreams of settling with her in Bhilai, where he hopes to get a job.

So, the next day after promising Shikha that he would marry her, Vikrant goes to Akheraj's office intending to tell Akheraj that he is not interested in working for him. While he is there, he witnesses an event that repulses him. He then goes to Purva and tells her that he is not interested in working for her family, but the events that follow make it clear that he can't escape Purva's clutches.

So, he reluctantly accepts to work and later even marries Purva with the intention of revenge. How he attempts to break free from Purva and her family, forms the crux of the narrative.

The characters are all well-etched, and the lines they mouth are refreshing at times may even be soapy that drives too many aspects of the dramatic narrative.

Tahir Raj Bhasin as Vikrant is impressive. You feel and root for him as he takes you through Vikrant's emotional journey as a simpleton to a determined lover wanting to marry the person he loves. Similarly striking are Vikrant's friend Golden, and Bijendra Kala, who essays his father. For a change, Kala brings his character to life with his charged histrionics. The rest of the cast backed by familiarity are sincere but passable.

On the writing front, the plot of the series is straightforward, with the screenplay often teasing at some outlandish possibilities. The pace of the telling keeps you hanging to the ledge. It is only the final episode with its abrupt ending that leaves you a bit disappointed, for it does not fulfil the promise it assured us in the first episode.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Sargun Mehta

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