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Third wave of Covid-19 is over in Metros, says CSIR's Top Scientist

BACK TO NORMAL!

Team Absolute | New Delhi

New Delhi: The third wave of Covid-19 seems to be over in the metros of India and the coming months should be peaceful, India's top genome sequencer and director of CSIR Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, Dr Anurag Agarwal, told a News Channel.

According to him, there are no reasons to expect a further jump in the number of cases until the virus shows any major change.

On January 10, Omicron coverage in India had exceeded 90% and by February, Delta must have reduced to just a few per cent across cities in India, at most, he claimed. "Very little Delta variant is left in circulation in India." With chances of infection going down, the top scientist believes that the requirement of the booster doses in the current situation is low for the general population. "Also, boosters are not required for everyone. Those who were in need of urgent boosters, the high-exposure health



care workers, the vulnerable population above 60 years, have already been getting the doses."

Scientifically, he explained that the boosters are given to reduce the risk of infection as well as severe disease. Going by the public health considerations, only people who are vulnerable and have high risk of exposure need additional vaccine doses right now, he said.

"The likelihood of any major change in India's Covid-19 scenario seems low but as we know that the virus is circulating in the environment, it will keep mutating and dodging the immunity. The chances of causing severe disease are low, however, following basic Covid-19 appropriate behaviour remains advisable, especially in a poorly ventilated environment."

India records 30,615 new Covid cases, 514 deaths

New Delhi: India reported 30,615 fresh Covid infections in a span of 24 hours, a marginal rise from 27,409 cases reported on the previous day, said the Union Health ministry on Wednesday morning. A total of 514 deaths were registered in the 24 hour span, taking the toll to 5,09,872. The active Covid cases have reduced to 3,70,240, which constitutes 0.87 per cent of the country's total positive cases.

Amend additional Covid curbs as cases declining, Centre to states

New Delhi: The Centre on Wednesday asked states and UTs to review and amend the additional Covid-19 restrictions that were imposed after a sudden surge in infections. Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said in a letter to states and UTs, "With the changing epidemiology of Covid-19 pandemic globally and in India, existing guidelines aimed at minimising the transmission and circulation of the virus have been reviewed and updated." Highlighting that the Union Health Ministry has revised guidelines for international arrivals, he asked states to amend the additional restrictions they had imposed too. "Presently, as the case trajectory across the nation are showing a sustained downward trend, it will be useful if states/UTs review and amend/do away with the additional restrictions so imposed after considering the trend of new cases, active cases and positivity," he said.

RAJ UNLOCKS COMPLETELY, SCHOOLS FROM CLASS 1 TO 5 OPEN



Jaipur: After almost two years since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and the third wave also subsiding, Rajasthan on Wednesday completely lifted all restrictions and totally unlocked the state. As per the latest guidelines announced on February 14, schools for children studying in Class 1 to 5 have been opened, however, parent's consent is required for the offline classes. Children will not be called to the school against the will of the parents and the option of online class will continue. The schools from Class 6 to 12 had opened earlier. The new guidelines have come into effect from Wednesday. However, for those travelling from foreign nations, institutionalised or home quarantine for seven days is a must and they have to undergo RT-PCR test thereafter. Once they test negative, their quarantine period will be ended.

Hijab row: K'taka colleges reopen amid tight security

Barring students, teachers and staff of colleges, movement of other persons have been restricted in the surrounding areas of the colleges.



Home Minister Araga Inanendra warned that the court order on uniform has to be strictly followed and that there is no question of students or anyone demanding wearing hijab or saffron shawls. "There will be an action on such persons. There will be serious consequences if the law of the land and constitution is not respected," he stated, only once.

rounding all schools and colleges as a preventive measure. Udupi district from where the hijab row began has virtually been converted into a police fortress.

Eight platoons of District Armed Reserve (DAR), two platoons of Karnataka State Reserve Police (KSRP) and 700 police officers have been deployed on the premises of all colleges and schools in Udupi. MGM College of Udupi which witnessed high-drama regarding hijab earlier has declared holiday for indefinite period. The college administration has decided to take online classes. Hijab-clad students of Kundapur PU Government College returned home after they were not allowed to attend classes. The students were given a separate room to remove their hijab. The students maintained that they would wait for the final order of the court and until then not attend classes. Tight security arrangements were in place in Rakbavi Banhatti town of Bagalkot district where violent incidents were reported. Four students were injured and a teacher was attacked earlier and police resorted to lathi charge following stone pelting incidents. The students attended classes without hijab. Students in Yadgiri, Ramnagar and Bengaluru Rural districts returned to their homes when they refuse to remove their hijab.

BENGALURU | Agencies

Amid the hijab crisis, the Karnataka government on Wednesday reopened pre-university, degree and diploma colleges under tight security arrangements. Though the majority of students attended classes as per the guidelines of education institutions, many of them who refused to take off their hijab were sent back.

Several Congress workers were taken into custody for encouraging students to wear hijab. Education Minister B.C. Nagesh requested the students to attend classes and focus on studies by following state guidelines. Mandya and Davanagere district authorities have clamped prohibitory orders sur-

VOTE FOR BJP OR FACE CONSEQUENCES: BJP MLA

Hyderabad | Agencies

BJP MLA from Telangana, T. Raja Singh, has sparked a controversy with a video in which he could be heard threatening the voters in Uttar Pradesh that if they don't cast their votes for the BJP, their houses will be demolished and they will be driven out of the state.

A video of the member of the Telangana Legislative Assembly went viral on social media in which he warned the UP voters of dire consequences if they voted against the saffron party. The controversial MLA from Goshmahal constituency in Hyderabad voiced concern over 'huge voter turnout in some areas' of Uttar Pradesh during the second phase of polling on Monday.

"To those who don't vote for BJP, I want to tell you that Yogi ji has called for thousands of JCBs and bulldozers. They



are on the way to Uttar Pradesh. After the elections, those who did not support Yogi ji will be identified. You know what JCBs and bulldozers are used for," the MLA said. "I want to tell those traitors in Uttar Pradesh who don't want Yogi ji to become the Chief Minister again, 'beta', if you want to live in Uttar Pradesh, you will have to say 'Yogi Yogi', or else you will have to leave the state," Singh added. The MLA has drawn flak for the video with many netizens calling for action against him for making open threats.

EC issued notice to MLA for threatening UP voters

The Election Commission on Wednesday issued a show-cause notice to Telangana's BJP MLA T. Raja Singh for threatening Uttar Pradesh voters of dire consequences if they don't vote for the saffron party. Taking a note of the controversial video of the MLA circulated widely on social media platforms, it observed that prima facie he violated the Model Code of Conduct, sections 171 C and 171 F of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and the Representation of the People Act, 1951. The Election Commission asked him to show cause within 24 hours as to why appropriate penal action under criminal law should not be initiated against him and also to why appropriate action for violation of Model Code of conduct should not be taken against him.

RENOWNED MUSIC COMPOSER BAPPI LAHIRI PASSES AWAY

Mumbai: Veteran singer-music director Bappi Lahiri -- who wielded the baton at the age of 17 -- passed away here in the early hours of Wednesday, an official said. He was 69 and breathed his last in the Criticare Hospital where he was admitted for certain post-Covid issues. Born in West Bengal, Lahiri first composed music for a Bengali film 'Daadi' and launched his Bollywood career with a film, 'Nanha Shikari'. He shot to global fame with his chart-busting music for "Disco Dancer" and the song "Jimmy, Jimmy, Aaja, Aaja...", and later the superhit music for "Zakhme", "Lahu Ke Do Rang". Prominent Bollywood personalities have expressed shock and condoled the demise of Lahiri, who was fondly known as 'Bappi Da' in the industry.



Helmet, safety harness must for kids below 4 yrs on bike, says Govt



For children below four years, a safety harness shall be used for attaching the child to the driver of the motorcycle.

The safety harness is a vest to be worn by the child, which shall be adjustable, with a pair of straps attached to the vest and forming shoulder loops to be worn by the driver. This way, the upper torso of the child is securely attached to

the age of four years being carried on the pillion will not be more than 40 kmph. These rules will come into force after one year from the date of publication of the Central Motor Vehicles (Second Amendment) Rules, 2022.

"The ministry of road transport and highways, vide notification dated February 15, 2022 has amended Rule 138 of CMVR, 1989 and has prescribed norms related to safety measures for children below four years of age, riding or being carried on a motorcycle," the ministry of road transport and highways said in a statement. "This has been notified under Section 129 of the Motor Vehicles Act, which mandates that the central government may, by rules, provide for measures for the safety of children below four years of age, riding or being carried on a motorcycle. Further, it specifies the use of a safety harness and crash helmet. It also restricts the speed of such motorcycles to 40 kmph," the ministry said.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The road transport ministry on Wednesday notified new rules to make the use of safety harness and crash helmets mandatory for children below the age of four years on motorcycles.

The new rules state that the speed of a motorcycle with a child up to

WE DON'T SEE RUSSIAN WITHDRAWAL YET: UKRAINE PRESIDENT

New Delhi: Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky has given his first reaction to reports from Russia that the latter is pulling some of its troops back from the borders, BBC reported.

Speaking to the BBC at a military training ground in western Ukraine, Zelensky said: "To be honest, we react to the reality we have and we don't see any withdrawal yet. We just heard about it."

He said he thinks "all normal people expect de-escalation". "As for the threat, I have said many times that we are calm about any threats because we remember that all this did not start yesterday. This has been happening for many years," he added, BBC reported.

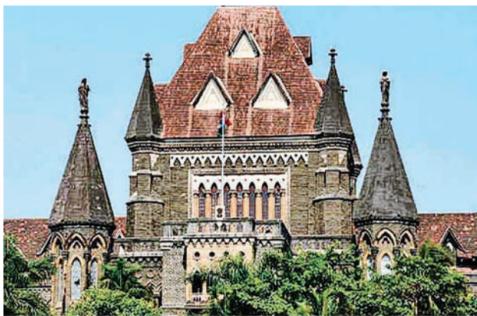
Zelensky said that when troops do withdraw, "everyone will see that" -- not only the military or reconnaissance.

Second wife not entitled for dead husband's pension: Bombay High Court

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday said that a second wife is not entitled to receive her dead husband's pension in cases where the second marriage had taken place without legal dissolution of the first one.

A division bench of Justices S J Kathawalla and Milind Jadhav dismissed a petition filed by Solapur resident Shamal Tate, challenging the state government's decision denying her pension benefits. As per the High Court order, Tate's husband Mahadeo, a peon in the office of the Solapur district collector, died in 1996. Mahadeo was already married to another woman when he married the petitioner. After his death, Tate and Mahadeo's first wife came to an agreement that the former would receive almost 90 per cent of the dead person's retire-



ment benefits, while the latter would get monthly pension.

However, after Mahadeo's first wife died of cancer, Tate wrote to the state government seeking that she be given Mahadeo's pension dues henceforth. After much deliberation, the state government rejected the four applications made by Tate between 2007

and 2014. The court also said that Ms Tate had not approached it with "clean hands", since as per the agreement between her and Mahadeo's first wife, she had explicitly relinquished her rights to the monthly pension. "In view of the findings, this writ petition stands dismissed," it said.

'ADULTERY IS NOT MISCONDUCT'

Ahmedabad: An extra-marital relationship might be "an immoral act" in the eyes of society, but it can't be construed as "misconduct" from the prism of police service rules and treated as an offence deserving of dismissal, the Gujarat high court said while ordering the reinstatement of an Ahmedabad constable sacked for adultery. The court also directed the city police to pay 25% back wages. "It is true that the petitioner is a part of a disciplined force. However, it would be difficult for this court to bring his act within the purview of misconduct, considering the fact that it was a private affair and not the result of any coercion or exploitation," the court said, quashing the dismissal order.

SC collegium recommends 16 lawyers as judges of Bombay, Madras HC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Collegium, headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana, has recommended the appointment of 10 advocates as judges to the Bombay High Court and six advocates as judges to the Madras High Court. A statement published on the website of the top court said: "The Supreme Court Collegium in its meeting held on 16th February, 2022 has approved the proposal for elevation of the following advocates as judges in the Bombay High Court: Kishore Chandrakant Sant, Valmiki Menezes SA, Kamal Rashmi Khata, Sharmila Uttamrao Deshmukh, Arun Ramshant Pednekar, Sandeep Vishnupant Marne, Gauri Vinod Godse, Rajesh Shantaram Patil, Arif Saleh Doctor, and Somasekar Sundaresan."



Modi declares trinity of environmental efforts for improving global commons

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The three global alliances floated by India as part of climate action -- CDRI, IRIS and LIFE -- will form the trinity of India's environment efforts for improving the global commons, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday. "Coalition of Disaster Resilient Island States (CDRI), Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS) and LIFE, the one-word mantra of 'Lifestyle for Environment', will be a coalition of like-minded people across the world who will promote sustainable lifestyle."

"I call them 3Ps -- pro-planet people. This global movement of pro-planet people is the coalition for life. These three global coalitions will form the trinity of our environment efforts for improving the global commons," Modi said.

India launched CDRI at the UN Climate Action summit in September 2019 while IRIS was launched at the COP26 in Glasgow last year, where



Modi also gave the LIFE mantra as an appeal for combined climate action.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the inaugural event of the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS2022) organised by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI).

The theme for this event is "Towards a Resilient Planet: Ensuring

a Sustainable and Equitable Future'. Equitable energy access to the poor

has been the cornerstone of India's energy policy. Environmental sustainability can only be achieved through climate justice.

Stating that energy requirements of the people of India are expected to double in the next 20 years, the Prime

Minister said, "Denying this energy to them will be denying life itself to millions."

Successful climate action policy needs adequate finance for which every country needs to fulfil their commitments on finance and technology, he said.

For this, developed countries need to fulfil their commitments for climate finance and technology.

Modi also recounted the various steps taken by India as part of its climate action. They are land restoration, Ujwala Yojana, LED bulbs, renewable energy, including solarisation of agriculture pumps, among others. He also spoke of a whole of the world approach and highlighted the International Solar Alliance. Modi reminded the world about how India's tradition ensured living life in harmony with nature.

Earlier, Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said that despite the adverse impacts of the pandemic on the economy, India has enhanced its climate ambition.

Navodaya students in J'khand shut themselves for hours against poor food

Ranchi | Agencies

Students of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya in Jharkhand's Simdega on Wednesday locked themselves up in a hall for hours in protest against poor food quality and other problems in the school.

A total of 176 students shut themselves in a hall of the school saying they would not come out until the Deputy Commissioner listens to them and take steps to resolve their problems. After about six hours, the students withdrew their agitation only when Deputy Commissioner Sushant Gaurav reached the school and assured of taking action. On Wednesday morning after breakfast, all the students of class 9 to 12 gathered in a hall and accused the school management of giving them poor quality food. They said, there are several other problems, but despite repeated complaints, no one has listened to them. After they shut themselves in a hall, the school manage-



ment tried to persuade the children but they remained adamant on their demand to call the Deputy Commissioner. It was only after about six hours when the Deputy Commissioner arrived and convinced the children that their problems will be heard, the students opened the door. The children complained that the food provided to them in the mess was of very poor quality. There are several other problems related to their education and hostel, but they said the school management does not pay any heed to them. After interact-

ing with the students, the Deputy Commissioner said that necessary steps would be taken to resolve their problems and action would be taken against those who were responsible. Later the Deputy Commissioner said that the students may have some problems, but the manner in which they were instigated is highly objectionable. Those who misled the students will be identified and action will be taken against them. He said that the entire issue would be discussed with the students as well as their parents and all the stakeholders.

FIVE-TIME MLA MUKHTAR ANSARI GETS BAIL AFTER 17 YEARS

Mau (UP): Jailed mafia don and MLA, Mukhtar Ansari, has been granted bail after spending almost 17 years in jail. He was given bail by the MP-MLA court here which ordered his immediate release. The court has ordered his release on a personal bond of Rs 1 lakh.



Mukhtar Ansari was arrested in 2005 for his alleged role in the murder of BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai, and he has been behind the bars ever since. Since his release was delayed, Mukhtar's son Abbas Ansari is contesting his Mau seat in the ongoing Assembly elections. Mukhtar Ansari, who was lodged at the Banda jail, is a five-term MLA and has been representing the Mau Sadar seat since 1996.

Hyd police book Assam CM for remarks against Rahul Gandhi

Hyderabad | Agencies

Hyderabad police on Wednesday registered a case against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for his offensive remarks against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

Acting on a complaint of Telangana Congress leaders lodged two days ago, a First Information Report (FIR) was registered against Sarma at Jubilee Hills police station under sections 504 and 505 (2) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

A team of police officers went to the residence of Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) chief A. Revanth Reddy to inform him about the FIR booked against Sarma as the Congress leader was preparing to leave his residence to lead a protest demanding action on his complaint.

Revanth Reddy, however, expressed his dissatisfaction over the sections



invoked in the FIR and lodged a fresh complaint with the police. He said the sections applied in the FIR have lessened the gravity of the crime committed.

He wanted the police to book a case against Sarma under IPC sections 153 (A), 294 and 509 as well.

The Congress leader also demanded

that Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao ensure stern action against Sarma by consulting advocate general and legal experts.

The TPCC chief made it clear that they will not keep quiet till action is taken against Sarma. "If no action is taken, we will approach the court of law," he said.

MAN WHO BROKE INTO NSA DOVAL'S RESIDENCE, IS MENTALLY ILL: POLICE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

An unidentified person was on Wednesday detained by the Delhi Police after he tried to enter National Security Advisor Ajit Doval's residence. According to a police source, the man appears to be mentally ill. During

interrogation, he said that a chip was implanted in his brains and he is being controlled by a remote control. "The man tried to enter the NSA Ajit Doval's residence. However, he was stopped by security forces. His questioning is on," the source said, adding that he hails from Bengaluru.



Complaint filed against Arvind Kejriwal for alleged sedition

Team Absolute | New Delhi

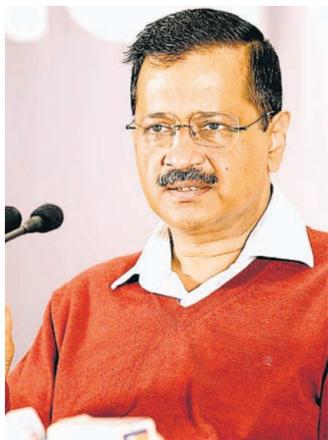
A complaint has been filed against Delhi Chief Minister and AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal at a police station in Mohali in Punjab for his alleged collaboration with Khalistani separatists.

The complainant, Congress leader Sandeep Dixit, in his complaint quoted an interview former Aam Aadmi Party leader, Kumar Vishwas.

As put forth by Dikshit, Vishwas in the interview had spoken about his and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's conversations during the 2017 Assembly elections in Punjab. Vishwas had warned Arvind Kejriwal in 2017 against increasing Khalistani separatists. The complainant further read that Kejriwal had ignored the warnings, and said that he will manage them.

"...Thereby accepting that he was in contact with separatists for the Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections," the complaint read. It further said that Kejriwal did not express any opposition to the idea of Khalistan and instead supported it, stating that in the said case, "he will happily become the Prime Minister of an independent state of Khalistan".

"The statements were made with an inten-



tion to cause, or most likely to cause, fear or alarm within the public. In view of this, a case of sedition has been lodged against Kejriwal," Dikshit's complaint read.

Pertinently, no FIR was registered in connection with this till now.

Assam govt proposes to rename places that do not reflect state's tradition, culture

Guwahati | Agencies

The BJP-led government in Assam has decided to rename places in the state that do not reflect Assam's tradition and culture.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday tweeted that the government would soon launch a portal to invite suggestions on change of names of cities, towns or villages that are "contrary to our civilisation, culture and derogatory to any caste or community".

"There's much in a name. The name of a city, town or village should represent its culture, tradition and civilisation. We shall launch a portal to invite suggestions on change of names across Assam which are contrary to our civilisation, culture and derogatory to any caste or community," Sarma said in his tweet.

Responding to the Chief Minister's tweet, social media users opposed the idea of changing some British-era names of places such as Digboi and Margherita that have been associated



with the name and fame of the oil and coal industry in Assam for centuries.

Digboi, known as one of the world's oldest operational oil refineries, is said to have derived its name from "dig, boy, dig", while some historians attribute the name to Diboi Nallah, a stream passing through the oil town.

Similarly, Margherita is a town named by Italian railway engineer

Chevalier Roberto Paganini in honour of his country's queen.

Opposition parties said the Assam Chief Minister followed the strategy of his Uttar Pradesh counterpart, Yogi Adityanath, trying to woo people's sentiments by changing names of places.

Congress' chief spokesperson Bobeeta Sharma said that each name that was given at a particular time and situation has a history and rea-

son behind it.

"Naming of a place has some relevance. The names given might be related to some iconic personality or local issue or can even have some interesting incident attached to it. I strongly oppose such a move to change history," she told mediapersons. Bobeeta Sharma suggested that the BJP or the party-led government should focus on scripting new history by achieving some success for the state of Assam and the country that would remain etched in the minds of the people, rather than meddle with what is already existing.

Assam Jatiya Parishad leader Jagadish Bhuyan said that they (BJP government) should concentrate only on the basic problems people are facing in their daily lives.

"Changing name of a place or an institution is not a fundamental issue in the prevailing situation. If we consider the Assam CM's plan, how is Deendayal Upadhyaya relevant to the tradition and civilisation of Assam," asked Bhuyan.

4 STUDENTS KILLED, 2 INJURED IN ROAD ACCIDENT



Bengaluru: Four college students, including a girl, were killed and two others critically injured in a road accident on National Highway 75 in Bengaluru Rural district of Karnataka on Wednesday. The deceased have been identified as Vaishnavi, Bharath, Siril and Venkat. The injured have been identified as Siri Krishna and Ankita Reddy. According to police, the incident took place when the students of Garden City College in Bengaluru were returning from a cafe centre in Kolar. As the car driver lost control over the vehicle, it hit the road divider, crossed over to other side and came under a truck. The police said the accident occurred due to over speeding. Police had to struggle to extricate the bodies from the mangled car. Hosakote police are investigating the case.

Bihar heading for mid-term polls, says Chirag Paswan

Patna | Agencies

Lok Janshakti Party (R) president Chirag Paswan has again said that Bihar is heading for mid-term poll.

"Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is looking for issues to separate from the BJP. The situation is similar to 2017 when he separated from the Mahagathbandhan. At that time, he was saying till the last moment that there was no dispute with the RJD. His operation was so secret that many veterans learnt about the development when his convoy went to Raj Bhavan for resignation," Paswan said.

"Every time he makes a surprise decision, he goes to Rajgir, Paswan said. Sources



have said that Nitish Kumar is waiting for the Uttar Pradesh election result. If BJP loses, the chances of mid-term poll will be high in Bihar. The relation between

JD-U and the BJP is at its lowest ebb and this is obvious from the statements by leaders of both parties. Chirag Paswan said: "Nitish Kumar can go anywhere to retain the

chief minister's post. If he negotiates with other parties, he will replicate his move of 2017." Nitish Kumar always blames the 15 years rule of Lalu Prasad. I believe that this is a decade old story. If we live in the past, we cannot secure our future. I firmly believe that we have to live in the present to make our future better. There are so many challenges like unemployment, inflation, law and order situation which need to be addressed to make our present and future better," Paswan said. "We have started Bihar Bachao Yatra from Tuesday and will go in every district to inform people about the failure of Nitish Kumar government," Paswan said.

GILOY SAFE IN APPROPRIATE DOSES, MISLEADING TO LINK IT TO LIVER DAMAGE: AYUSH

New Delhi: The Ministry of Ayush clarified on Wednesday that Giloy has been falsely linked to liver damage, adding that Giloy/ Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia) is safe and as per available data, it does not have any toxic effect if taken in appropriate doses. The ministry said, "In Ayurveda, it is said to be the best rejuvenating herb. Acute toxicity studies of aqueous extract of Guduchi reports that it does not produce any toxic effect. However, the safety of a drug depends on how it is being used. Dosage is one of the important factors that determine the safety of a particular drug." The Ministry referred to a study, which states, "Lower concentration of Guduchi powder is found to increase the life span of fruit flies (Drosophila Melanogaster). At the same time, higher concentration progressively reduces the life span of flies. This clearly indicates that an optimum dosage should be maintained in order to get the desired effects. This infers that the medicinal herb has to be used in an appropriate dose as prescribed by a qualified physician to get medicinal effects." It said that with the wide range of actions and abundant components, Guduchi is a real treasure among herbal drugs source. A special focus has been given on its health benefits in treating various metabolic disorders and its potential as an immune booster. It is used as a major component of therapeutics for ameliorating metabolic, endocrinal, and several other ailments, aiding in the betterment of human life expectancy, the ministry said.



'Opposition unity' on menu at Maharashtra-Telangana CMs' Sunday lunch

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray invited his Telangana counterpart K. Chandrashekar Rao for lunch on Sunday with a power menu comprising national affairs and opposition unity, officials said.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray invited his Telangana counterpart K. Chandrashekar Rao for lunch on Sunday with a power menu comprising national affairs and opposition unity, officials said.

Earlier on Wednesday, Thackeray called up KCR, as Rao is popularly known, and lauded his efforts to rally the country's regional and Opposition parties and forge a united challenge to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party at the Centre.

Thackeray is understood to have conveyed to KCR the need to "save the country" from BJP's divisive political agenda for which the Shiv Sena would extend full support.

KCR is expected to fly down from

Hyderabad on Sunday morning and drop in at the CM's official residence 'Varsha' at Malabar Hill for the 'lunch pe charcha', an official indicated.

However, ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi's (MVA) other constituents - the Nationalist Congress Party and Congress - told IANS that "as of now, no meetings are scheduled between their leaders and KCR." Key states like Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu or even Delhi - where the BJP has lost elections since the 2019 Lok Sabha polls - are considered critical in its ambitions to ensure maximum leverage for the 2024 Lok Sabha or even the future Rajya Sabha polls.

Since the past few weeks, the Telangana CM has been zipping around the country, meeting top leaders of various national and regional Opposition parties to rally them for a united front against the BJP before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Among the leaders he has already met are Tejaswi Yadav, his Tamil Nadu counterpart M.K. Stalin, and is likely to meet Thackeray and Sharad Pawar last December, and the upcoming discussions with KCR are likely to move these even further. On Tuesday, Sena Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut launched a scathing attack on the state BJP functionaries, Enforcement Directorate and other central agencies, on how they have been harassing people on flimsy reasons to target the top leaders. He also charged the Central agencies of going all out against the Opposition leaders, but not displaying the same vigour when BJP leaders are accused of graft charges despite providing evidence repeatedly.

anti-communal agenda and the duo are slated to have a meeting shortly. Most states ruled by Opposition or regional parties have been strongly protesting at the BJP's continuing "destabilising" efforts or "toppling attempts". They have also been accusing the BJP of misusing power and government machinery by letting loose various Central investigating agencies against their top leaders and even family members to make them "bend" or "break." Among the parties that are considered the prime targets include Shiv Sena, the NCP, the Trinamool Congress, and certain other parties, too. A MVA leader said that similar issues had come up during Banerjee's confabulations with Thackeray and Sharad Pawar last December, and the upcoming discussions with KCR are likely to move these even further. On Tuesday, Sena Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut launched a scathing attack on the state BJP functionaries, Enforcement Directorate and other central agencies, on how they have been harassing people on flimsy reasons to target the top leaders. He also charged the Central agencies of going all out against the Opposition leaders, but not displaying the same vigour when BJP leaders are accused of graft charges despite providing evidence repeatedly.

ED again summons Shakeel's aide Salim Qureshi for questioning

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has again summoned Salim Qureshi, the alleged aide of Chhota Shakeel to join the investigation in connection with Prevention of Money Laundering case involving underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has again summoned Salim Qureshi, the alleged aide of Chhota Shakeel to join the investigation in connection with Prevention of Money Laundering case involving underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.

On Tuesday, the ED had questioned Qureshi for around nine hours. But he was again summoned as he remained silent on a number of questions and was evasive throughout the probe.

"He was confronted with various documents and digital evidence collected by the probe agency. He was evasive throughout the questioning and tried to evade a lot of questions," said a source.

The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday morning had conducted raids at multiple locations linked to underworld don Dawood Ibrahim in Mumbai and nearby areas.

The house of late Haseena Parkar, the sister of Dawood



Ibrahim, was also raided by an elite team of the ED.

The ED recovered a few incriminating documents during the raid. A politician of Maharashtra is also under the lens of ED for his connection with Dawood Ibrahim.

"We conducted raids at ten locations in Mumbai and surrounding areas. These raids were related to a Prevention of money laundering case involving gangster Dawood Ibrahim and his associates. A property deal is under scanner, wherein a senior politician from Maharashtra is also allegedly involved along with others," the source had said on Tuesday.

The ED is currently scanning the money transactions of the politicians and alleged

aides of Dawood. They said that they had been working on the case for a long time.

The source said that Dawood is still controlling the real estate business through his middlemen. The money is sent to him and his aides through the Hawala network. This money is further allegedly being used by the different terror modules to spread anti-national and terrorist activities across India. It is learnt that Pakistan's ISI is supporting Dawood in running his business and to spread terror activities from money earned from from the business.

A property deal had come on ED's radar after which the agency initiated a money laundering probe.

After 44 days, Mumbai records zero deaths, Maha's Omicron cases zoom

After 44 days, Mumbai recorded zero Covid-19 deaths even as the Maharashtra's Omicron infections suddenly rocketed, health officials said on Tuesday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

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BrihanMumbai Municipal Commissioner I.S. Chahal announced that the country's commercial capital

recorded zero deaths for the first time since January 2, and the civic body was "proceeding in the right direction" in controlling the coronavirus pandemic.

Simultaneously, the city was unshackled from the containment zone or sealed tags in any buildings or localities, said the civic chief.

After recording the first Covid-19 cases in March 2020, the city recorded nil fatalities on October 17, 2021 for the first time ever, in wake of the second wave of the pandemic.

December was better with zero deaths notched 7 times even as the third wave set in and now the pandemic curve is apparently waning.

The state position worsened with 2,831 new infec-

tions on Tuesday - compared with 1,966 a day before, while the number of deaths almost tripled from 12 to 35.

The worrisome factor was a sudden spurt in Omicron infections - from 8 on Monday to 351 - sounding fresh alarm bells - though none reported from Mumbai.

The state has reported 4,345 Omicron cases since December 1, while 3,334 have been fully cured and sent home, while 8,904 positive samples have been sent for genome sequencing. The results of 1,046 are awaited.

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, the state has recorded a whopping 78,47,746 cases and a total of 143,451 fatalities.

Role of Dawood's brother emerges during questioning of Qureshi in PMLA case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has moved an application before the concerned court seeking permission to question Dawood Ibrahim's brother Iqbal Kaskar in money laundering case.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has moved an application before the concerned court seeking permission to question Dawood Ibrahim's brother Iqbal Kaskar in money laundering case.

Iqbal Kaskar has been made an accused in the case. Sources have claimed that ED is planning to arrest him. The court will decide their plea



in coming days.

Salim Qureshi, the aide of Chhota Shakeel is currently being interrogated by a team of elite officials of the probe agency. Iqbal Kaskar was placed under arrest in 2017 by Thane Police in connection with an extortion case. An FIR under section 384 (extortion), and other relevant sec-

tions of the IPC was lodged by Thane Police against Anees Ibrahim, Iqbal Kaskar and others. The ED has taken all the documents from Thane Police pertaining to the case.

The National Investigation Agency too had lodged a case of terror activities on the basis of the FIR of Thane Police and other relevant documents.

The ED lodged an ECIR of Money Laundering on the basis of the case lodged by the NIA.

Sources have said that it was learnt that Qureshi went to Pakistan several times using forged passport. He also allegedly works at the behest of Dawood and Shakeel. The ED has collected the information regarding his bank accounts, properties and other income sources. Sources have claimed that they used to collect extortion money, and also earned through settlement (solving disputes after creating it themselves), and through drugs. Later this money was allegedly used to spread terror activities across India. On Wednesday, Qureshi was asked to join the investigation by 11 a.m. The ED had asked him to come with a set of documents pertaining to financial matter. Further investigation is underway.

Former CBI official gets bail in Maha Minister document leak case

A court here has granted bail to former CBI Sub-Inspector Abhishek Tiwari, who was arrested in connection with a case of alleged leaking of confidential documents to divert the probe against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh in a corruption case.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

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Special CBI Judge Sanjeev Aggarwal of Rouse Avenue Court, while granting bail, noted that Tiwari is a former CBI official and has roots in the society. The court, in its order dated February 11, observed that the allegations of the present case do



not pertain to economic offenses of huge magnitude, therefore, it cannot be said to be falling under the category of grave offenses. It also pointed out that other accused persons having almost similar roles have already been released on bail recently.

It was also directed that Tiwari furnish a personal bond of Rs 1,00,000 with one surety of the like amount.

On January 31, the same court had granted bail to Deshmukh's lawyer Anand Daga and his social media manager Vaibhav Gajendra Tumane in the

case. Opposing the bail plea, the CBI argued that Tumane was the one who collected the sensitive report from Daga, prepared its copies, and sent them through courier to various addresses in Delhi. As per the FIR, Investigating Officer Tiwari, who was assisting the Enquiry Officer in the preparation of the probe report, was in possession of sensitive documents.

He allegedly shared copies of different documents like memorandum of proceedings, sealing-unsealing memorandum, statements, seizure memos etc, related to the investigation of the case with Daga through WhatsApp on many occasions.

The CBI said that the investigation has revealed that Tiwari and Daga met in Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune in person, and had been in regular touch through WhatsApp calls and messages and SMS after April 14 last year. The probe has revealed that Daga had bought an iPhone worth Rs 95,000 for the CBI official and gave it to him as illegal gratification in lieu of sharing case sensitive and confidential documents. The CBI had arrested Daga from Mumbai and Tiwari from Delhi. Later, Daga was shifted to a Delhi jail on transit remand.

Rani Mukerji: Bappi uncle will always be Indian cinema's most iconic music personality

Actress Rani Mukerji, whose mother Krishna Mukherjee was a childhood friend of Bappi Lahiri, has mourned the death of the late veteran music composer, who is popularly called as the 'Disco King', and said that he will always be the most iconic musical personality of Indian cinema.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Rani Mukerji, whose mother Krishna Mukherjee was a childhood friend of Bappi Lahiri, has mourned the death of the late veteran music composer, who is popularly called as the 'Disco King', and said that he will always be the most iconic musical personality of Indian cinema.

Rani said: "India has again lost one of her

precious gems... Bappi uncle is and will always be the most iconic musical personality of Indian cinema." "His music was legendary, his versatility as a composer was unmatched," she added. The actress called Lahiri, who passed away aged 69 in a hospital in Mumbai, "a truly self made man, a great son to his parents, a wonderful husband and a great dad."

Rani shared that Lahiri's death is a loss for her family. "My Mum and Bappi uncle were childhood friends from Calcutta. It's a personal loss for our family... My mother is devastated."

She added: "While the whole world mourns his loss, I can't help but think of all the memories I have of him from my childhood. Will miss him dearly. His smiling face and kind personality will always be a happy memory... I pray that Chitrani Aunty, Rema, Bappa and the entire Lahiri family finds strength to go through this loss. It's too sad. He went too soon. Bappi uncle rest in peace. The heavens have earned an angel today!"

YES BANK CO FOUNDER RANA KAPOOR, TWO OTHERS GRANTED BAIL

A Mumbai court on Wednesday granted bail to Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor and Avantha Group's Gautam Thapar and B. Hariharan of Avantha Group in a money laundering case.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A Mumbai court on Wednesday granted bail to Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor and Avantha Group's Gautam Thapar and B. Hariharan of Avantha Group in a money laundering case.

Additional Sessions Judge MG Deshpande granted



them bail.

Senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani appeared for Thapar and Sandeep Kapur for Hariharan.

The case pertains to criminal conspiracy for obtaining illegal gratification to the tune of Rs 307 crore by Rana Kapoor, the then MD & CEO of Yes Bank Ltd by acquiring a property located at New Delhi's Amrita Shergill Marg at a price of Rs 378 crore against the alleged declared value of Rs 685 crore.

INDIA'S FIRST 'DISCO-KING' BAPPI LAHIRI PASSES AWAY AT 69

Veteran singer-composer Alokesh alias Bappi Lahiri - nephew of the legendary trio of late Ashok Kumar, Kishore Kumar and Anoop Kumar - passed away around midnight due to multiple health issues, his family said here on Wednesday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Veteran singer-composer Alokesh alias Bappi Lahiri - nephew of the legendary trio of late Ashok Kumar, Kishore Kumar and Anoop Kumar - passed away around midnight due to multiple health issues, his family said here on Wednesday. Wielding the baton



from the age of 19, Lahiri, 69, and breathed his last at the Criticare Hospital, Juhu, said the hospital Director Dr Deepak Namjoshi. "He had been admitted to the hospital for a month and was discharged on Monday. But his health deteriorated on Tuesday and his family called for a doctor to visit their home, after which he was brought to the hospital," said Dr Joshi. He suffered from several health complications and

died due to OSA (obstructive sleep apnea) last night, the medico added. Lahiri - who attained fame as India's first 'Disco King' - is survived by his wife, Chitrani, daughter Rema and a son Bappa, who has taken to his dad's musical career. In a statement later, the Lahiri family said: "It's a deeply sad moment for us. We are seeking love and blessings for his soul." The Lahiris said that the music maestro's cremation will take place

after the arrival of his son Bappa from Los Angeles around Thursday midnight. Born in West Bengal, Lahiri's first composition was for a Bengali film, 'Daadu' (1972), followed by a Bollywood film 'Nanha Shikari' (1973). He arrived on the musical scene in a crescendo with 'Zakhmee' (1975) for which he composed music and also sang, pushing him to upper echelons at a very young age of barely 22. During his career, he directed top legends like Mohammed Rafi, Lata Mangeshkar, his 'Mama' Kishore Kumar, Asha Bhosale, Usha Uthup and many more to create waves with soulful, racy, vibrant and rhythmic music. Lahiri created musical tsunamis with his compositions in 'Chalte, Chalte' (1976), 'Suraksha' with the pacy 'Gunmaster G9' becoming as popular as 007, and "Lahu Ke Do Rang" (both 1979). Then followed 'Manokaamna' (1980) with several

liting numbers, 'Wardat' (1981), the raging music of "Disco Dancer" that had the nation dancing to his tunes with 'Jimmy Jimmy, Aaja Aaja', and 'Namak Hala' (both, 1982), the foot-tapping 'Himmatwala' (1983), 'Sharaabi' (1984) with the unforgettable 'Log Kehte Hain, Main Sharaabi Hoon', 'Adventures of Tarzan' (1985) in which Kimi Katkar cavorted onscreen crooning 'Tarzan, O My Tarzan', 'Dance Dance' (1987). Other films for which he composed memorable songs include 'Commando' (1988), 'Prem Pratigya' and 'Guru' (both, 1989). In 1990, he took the industry by storm with superb hit music for 'Naakabandi' like the ever-green 'Naakabandi-Naakabandi' sung by Usha Uthup and Bappi himself, 'Ghayal', 'Aaj Ka Arjun', 'Thanedar', 'Ilaab'. Later came films like 'Dushman Devta', 'Sae Crore', 'First Love Letter' (all, 1991), 'Shola Aur Shabnam' Police.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Why Rahul is not campaigning in UP

Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi has not stepped in UP so far after two phases of voting in politically crucial Uttar Pradesh. The firefighting in UP has been left to Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra who is Incharge in the state. Though Rahul Gandhi has been named star campaigner in UP elections by the party, but he is keeping safe distance as sources say that party's prospects are not good and the Congress may not win seats as it expects. The party is contesting all the seats in the state for the first time in two decades as it is not in alliance with any political party. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has now emerged as the main campaigner for the party in the state and outside UP, however Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi are scheduled to attend the Ravidas Jayanti program in Varanasi on Wednesday but there is no campaign schedule given by the party yet. However, the Congress sources say that Rahul Gandhi will step in the state after Punjab elections and that the party has high stakes in the state where the Congress is expecting to return to power. The Congress in 2017 fought elections in alliance with the Samajwadi Party but failed miserably and could only win 7 seats and in 2019 even Rahul Gandhi lost election in the state from the home turf of Amethi. Rahul Gandhi last visited Amethi in December 2021 and participated in a march of Pratigya Yatra along with his sister Priyanka Gandhi. Rahul Gandhi said, this is his home, and no one can force him to go out of here. He first fought elections in 2004 from Amethi and won till 2014 but lost in 2019 to Smriti Irani but won from Wayanad in Kerala.

CHINESE APP BAN ESSENTIAL TO PROTECT INDIA'S DATA SOVEREIGNTY

Khushbu Jain

India once again tightened up its digital borders and asserted sovereignty in the digital space with its latest move to ban apps belonging to large China tech firms such as Tencent, Alibaba and NetEase and re-branded versions of apps already banned by India in 2020 among others.

The lack of transparency about the data-sharing norms under a Chinese law, that requires companies of Chinese origin to share data with that country's intelligence agencies, irrespective of where they operate, necessitates that in the interest of sovereignty, integrity, defence, security of state, friendly relations with foreign states and public order the government of India invokes Section 69A of the Information Technology Act to restrict public access on these apps.

To understand the entire picture, it is pertinent to glance at the existing regulations in China specially: the National Intelligence Law 2017 and the Counter Espionage Law 2014. Article 7 of the National Intelligence Law 2017 authorises the Chinese government's deliberate integration of the public and private digital landscape, which requires Chinese citizens and organisations to cooperate with state intelligence work. As it is, the law remains obscure and vague in terms of national security and intelligence work, Article 11 further adds to the risk associated with Chinese entities or companies operating overseas.

Article 11 authorises the Chinese intelligence agencies to collect and process information about any activities of "overseas entities or individuals" which jeopardize the national security and interests of China. The Counter Espionage law 2014 states that when the state security organ investigates and understands the situation of espionage and collects relevant evidence, the relevant organisations and individuals shall provide it truthfully and may not refuse. In a nutshell, it appears that organisations and individuals don't have a choice when it comes to helping the government. The Chinese government, with this vaguely-defined "intelligence work," could force companies to hand over network data whether they want to or not. This concern was also raised by Amnesty International thereby stating that the national security legal architecture poorly defines concepts of "intelligence work", making it prone to risk and violation of human rights. China



has accused India of discriminatory practices that violate World Trade Organization rules after India banned Chinese mobile apps and on the contrary China's nation-scale firewall, colloquially referred to as the 'Great Firewall of China', put into action numerous kinds of content filtering and censorship to control the internet traffic of China. The data suggests that China accounts for three quarters of the takedown requests between July 2018 and July 2019 and approximately 85 per cent of apps removed from the Apple's App Store.

A scrupulous attention to the data collected by Apps would give us a coup d'oeil into the possible threats from a geopolitical perspective. The apps on your cell phone collect data such as:

- (a) Who you are: Which includes biometrics like retina and fingerprints, a person's physical characteristics and other personally identifiable information.
- (b) What you do: Your activities like travel and GPS location, a person's behaviour and movement patterns.
- (c) What you know: Entailing information known only to the beholder personally, like personal identification number (PIN), usernames and access tokens.
- (d) What you have: This includes documents

and numbers such as a national identity number, passport, bank account numbers, etc.

While European apps have to be compliant with its data protection law- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the US tech ecosystem is also democratically regulated (you can go to a court). The principles of Data protection in totalitarian states like China are highly apocryphal. With respect to Chinese apps there exists no transparency and information about the data subjects' rights, one knows nothing about principles of consent and other legitimate grounds for the processing of personal data. Similarly, data transfers and processing by third parties is also opaque thereby leaving Indian citizens vulnerable to exploitation by a totalitarian non-democratic state, which puts surveillance and censors its citizens around the clock. The lines between government and business interests, in a totalitarian state, are opaque. Apple can resist the US government (supposedly) and decline to share data on the grounds of individual privacy, but the same cannot be said for China.

The Internet has no boundaries, de facto and de jure, hence hundreds of millions of Indians today are subscribers

of apps made worldwide. The Cambridge Analytica scandal has proved beyond doubt that data can be put to use for sinister purposes. Little bits and bytes of data leak information about individuals but if this is accumulated, it can have perilous national security implications. In his book Data and Goliath, Bruce Schneier discusses the "hidden battles to collect your data and to control your world". In 2015, this thought did not seem so sinister. The ephialtes unfolded so slowly that the world missed the horror since. A variety of data are used for corporate and government surveillance around the world including but not limited to identity, transaction, location, activity and communication details. Sources of these data points include social media platforms, email accounts, desktop computers, networks and now the most potent source are our mobile devices. During the act of warfare and conflict between China and other countries, data from these apps will put the Chinese regime to a great geopolitical advantage. It can get a real-time picture of the other country's varied strategic and tactical initiatives for defence and combat preparedness.

international

RUSSIA APPEARS TO BE CONTINUING MILITARY BUILD-UP AROUND UKRAINE: NATO

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg says it appears Russia is continuing its military build-up on the border with Ukraine, despite Moscow's claim it was sending some troops back to base, media reports said.



that Russia continues the military build-up," Stoltenberg said on Wednesday, CNN reported.

"We will continue to convey a very clear message to Russia that we are ready to sit down and discuss with

them, but at the same time, we are prepared for the worst."

Stoltenberg's remarks come just a day after Russia announced that some troops from its southern and western military districts had begun

returning to their bases following exercises, although Moscow has said that military drills will continue to be held, CNN reported.

Ahead of a meeting of NATO defense ministers on Wednesday, Stoltenberg had stressed that NATO remains hopeful that Russia will engage in "meaningful dialogue" and choose to pursue diplomacy rather than confrontation. "We are closely monitoring and following what they're doing," he said. "If they really start to withdraw forces, that's something we will welcome, but that remains to be seen," he said. The Secretary General noted that NATO has observed a steady increase in Russia's military capabilities near the Ukrainian border over the last few weeks and months, with "well over 100,000" troops believed to be near the border. "Russia retains the capability of a full-fledged invasion of Ukraine, without any warning time," he added, the report said.

Airlines to raise fuel surcharges on int'l routes in March

South Korean airlines are set to raise fuel surcharges on international routes next month as jet fuel prices rise at a faster pace, industry people said on Wednesday.



Seoul | Agencies

South Korean airlines are set to raise fuel surcharges on international routes next month as jet fuel prices rise at a faster pace, industry people said on Wednesday.

Starting March 1, the surcharge for one-way tickets on international routes will range from 18,000 won (US\$15) to 138,200 won, depending on the routes, Yonhap news agency reported citing a Korean Air official said. The planned hike will raise the surcharges to the highest Level 10 from the current Level 6, which ranges from 10,800 won to 80,400 won. In April 2021, rising jet fuel prices prompted local carriers to begin imposing fuel surcharges after a one-year hiatus. Fuel surcharges on international routes had stayed at zero since April 2020 due to low oil

prices sparked by the Covid-19 pandemic. Local carriers' surcharges vary depending on the level of jet fuel prices traded on the Singaporean market. If the average jet fuel price on the Singapore spot market rises over \$1.50 per gallon during the past month, South Korean airlines are allowed to impose fuel surcharges starting one month later. Jet fuel prices averaged at \$2.43 per gallon on the Singapore market for the one month from January 16 to February 15. The average price is the basis for setting jet fuel surcharges for March. If jet fuel prices drop below the threshold, no surcharge is collected. There are 10 levels of surcharges, depending on the length of the route. On the domestic routes, fuel surcharges will rise to 8,800 won next month from 5,500 won this month.

Israel sends officials to Vienna during nuclear talks

Israel has sent envoys to Vienna during the nuclear talks to meet with official negotiators of several world powers.

Jerusalem | Agencies

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Head of the Israeli Foreign Ministry's strategic department Joshua Zarka talked with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi on Monday, Xinhua news agency reported citing Israel's state-owned Kan news TV. Mikhail Ulyanov, head of Russia's delegation to the nuclear negotiations, tweeted that he met with "Israeli colleagues" in Vienna on Tuesday, and "discussed IAEA-related issues."

The Israeli officials also met US negotiator Rob Malley and the negotiators of the remaining parties to the nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as



per the reports in Israeli media. The Israeli Foreign Ministry has not immediately commented on the meetings. The nuclear talks in Vienna, which started last April to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, don't include Israeli representatives.

It was the first time Israel has sent diplomats to Vienna since the talks began. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who is on a visit to Bahrain, said on Tuesday that a return to the 2015 deal would be "a strategic mistake." Iran stresses that its nuclear program is peaceful.

UN rapporteur discusses N.K. human rights issues with S Korean officials

The UN special rapporteur for human rights in North Korea met with South Korean officials on Wednesday to discuss the reclusive state's humanitarian situation, officials in Seoul said.

Seoul | Agencies

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Tomas Ojea Quintana arrived in Seoul on Tuesday for a nine-day visit, during which he plans to meet South Korean government officials, politicians, as well as civic groups and North Korean defectors to prepare



an annual report to be submitted to the UN Human Rights Council next month.

He paid a courtesy call to Vice Unification Minister Choi Young-jun and discussed pending humanitarian issues, including the reunions of families separat-

ed by the 1950-53 Korean War, Yonhap news agency reported citing the Ministry of Unification.

"The vice unification minister said efforts to improve inter-Korean relations and establish peace on the Korean Peninsula should

make progress based on cooperation with the international community to actually promote North Koreans' human rights," the ministry said in a press release.

Quintana also had a meeting with Second Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-moon to exchange opinions on diplomatic efforts to promote human rights in North Korea, the foreign ministry said. On Thursday, the UN expert is scheduled to meet the brother of a South Korean fisheries official who was killed by North Korean troops near the inter-Korean sea border in 2020 and the son of the North's 1969 plane hijacking victim. It is Quintana's seventh trip to South Korea since taking office in August 2016 and the last before his term ends in August. The rapporteur will hold a press briefing on his findings and recommendations on the last day of his stay here.

US AIR FORCE DEPLOYS 4 B-52 BOMBERS TO GUAM

Seoul: The US has deployed four B-52 nuclear-capable bombers to Guam to demonstrate America's "commitment to the region," its military said on Wednesday, amid concerns that Pyongyang could conduct provocative acts in time for key political events.

The US Pacific Air Force said the bombers and more than 220 Air Force personnel have arrived at Andersen Air Force Base on the Pacific Island to support training efforts with allies and partners, Yonhap news agency reported. Speculation has lingered that Pyongyang could stage another show of force to mark the 80th birthday of his late father, Kim Jong-il, on Wednesday and the 110th birthday of his late grandfather Kim Il-sung on April 15.

The late leader's birthday this week has, so far, been largely uneventful, with the North's state media highlighting his legacies, such as improvement in the country's ties with China. The US military said the arrival of the bombers demonstrates the US' security commitment to the Indo-Pacific region.

"Put simply, we are here to support a stable, secure, and free Indo-Pacific region," Lt Col. Christopher Coleman, the commander of the 96th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron, was quoted as saying.

Last month, Pyongyang ratcheted up tensions with seven known rounds of missile launches, including the test of an intermediate-range ballistic missile capable of targeting Guam.

Meanwhile, the US Air Force was also said to have flown an RC-135V surveillance jet over the greater Seoul area on Wednesday, possibly to monitor activities in the North on Kim Jong-il's birthday.



'Opposition unity' on menu at Maharashtra-Telangana CMs' Sunday lunch

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray invited his Telangana counterpart K. Chandrashekar Rao for lunch on Sunday with a power menu comprising national affairs and opposition unity, officials said.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

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Earlier on Wednesday, Thackeray called up KCR, as Rao is popularly known, and lauded his efforts to rally the country's regional and Opposition parties and forge a united challenge to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party at the Centre.

Thackeray is understood to have conveyed to KCR the need to "save the country" from BJP's divisive political agenda for which the Shiv Sena would extend full support.

KCR is expected to fly down from

Hyderabad on Sunday morning and drop in at the CM's official residence 'Varsha' at Malabar Hill for the 'lunch pe charcha', an official indicated.

However, ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi's (MVA) other constituents - the Nationalist Congress Party and Congress - told IANS that "as of now, no meetings are scheduled between their leaders and KCR." Key states like Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu or even Delhi - where the BJP has lost elections since the 2019 Lok Sabha polls - are considered critical in its ambitions to ensure maximum leverage for the 2024 Lok Sabha or even the future Rajya Sabha polls.

Since the past few weeks, the Telangana CM has been zipping around the country, meeting top leaders of various national and regional Opposition parties to rally them for a united front against the BJP before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Among the leaders he has already met are Tejaswi Yadav, his Tamil Nadu counterpart M.K. Stalin, and is likely to meet Thackeray and Sharad Pawar last December, and the upcoming discussions with KCR are likely to move these even further. On Tuesday, Sena Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut launched a scathing attack on the state BJP functionaries, Enforcement Directorate and other central agencies, on how they have been harassing people on flimsy reasons to target the top leaders. He also charged the Central agencies of going all out against the Opposition leaders, but not displaying the same vigour when BJP leaders are accused of graft charges despite providing evidence repeatedly.

anti-communal agenda and the duo are slated to have a meeting shortly. Most states ruled by Opposition or regional parties have been strongly protesting at the BJP's continuing "destabilising" efforts or "toppling attempts". They have also been accusing the BJP of misusing power and government machinery by letting loose various Central investigating agencies against their top leaders and even family members to make them "bend" or "break." Among the parties that are considered the prime targets include Shiv Sena, the NCP, the Trinamool Congress, and certain other parties, too. A MVA leader said that similar issues had come up during Banerjee's confabulations with Thackeray and Sharad Pawar last December, and the upcoming discussions with KCR are likely to move these even further. On Tuesday, Sena Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut launched a scathing attack on the state BJP functionaries, Enforcement Directorate and other central agencies, on how they have been harassing people on flimsy reasons to target the top leaders. He also charged the Central agencies of going all out against the Opposition leaders, but not displaying the same vigour when BJP leaders are accused of graft charges despite providing evidence repeatedly.

ED again summons Shakeel's aide Salim Qureshi for questioning

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has again summoned Salim Qureshi, the alleged aide of Chhota Shakeel to join the investigation in connection with Prevention of Money Laundering case involving underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

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On Tuesday, the ED had questioned Qureshi for around nine hours. But he was again summoned as he remained silent on a number of questions and was evasive throughout the probe.

"He was confronted with various documents and digital evidence collected by the probe agency. He was evasive throughout the questioning and tried to evade a lot of questions," said a source.

The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday morning had conducted raids at multiple locations linked to underworld don Dawood Ibrahim in Mumbai and nearby areas.

The house of late Haseena Parkar, the sister of Dawood

Ibrahim, was also raided by an elite team of the ED.

The ED recovered a few incriminating documents during the raid. A politician of Maharashtra is also under the lens of ED for his connection with Dawood Ibrahim.

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recorded zero deaths for the first time since January 2, and the civic body was "proceeding in the right direction" in controlling the coronavirus pandemic.

Simultaneously, the city was unshackled from the containment zone or sealed tags in any buildings or localities, said the civic chief.

After recording the first Covid-19 cases in March 2020, the city recorded nil fatalities on October 17, 2021 for the first time ever, in wake of the second wave of the pandemic.

December was better with zero deaths notched 7 times even as the third wave set in and now the pandemic curve is apparently waning.

The state position worsened with 2,831 new infec-

tions on Tuesday - compared with 1,966 a day before, while the number of deaths almost tripled from 12 to 35.

The worrisome factor was a sudden spurt in Omicron infections - from 8 on Monday to 351 - sounding fresh alarm bells - though none reported from Mumbai.

The state has reported 4,345 Omicron cases since December 1, while 3,334 have been fully cured and sent home, while 8,904 positive samples have been sent for genome sequencing. The results of 1,046 are awaited.

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, the state has recorded a whopping 78,47,746 cases and a total of 143,451 fatalities.

Role of Dawood's brother emerges during questioning of Qureshi in PMLA case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has moved an application before the concerned court seeking permission to question Dawood Ibrahim's brother Iqbal Kaskar in money laundering case.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has moved an application before the concerned court seeking permission to question Dawood Ibrahim's brother Iqbal Kaskar in money laundering case.

Iqbal Kaskar has been made an accused in the case. Sources have claimed that ED is planning to arrest him. The court will decide their plea



in coming days.

Salim Qureshi, the aide of Chhota Shakeel is currently being interrogated by a team of elite officials of the probe agency. Iqbal Kaskar was placed under arrest in 2017 by Thane Police in connection with an extortion case. An FIR under section 384 (extortion), and other relevant sec-

tions of the IPC was lodged by Thane Police against Anees Ibrahim, Iqbal Kaskar and others. The ED has taken all the documents from Thane Police pertaining to the case.

The National Investigation Agency too had lodged a case of terror activities on the basis of the FIR of Thane Police and other relevant documents.

The ED lodged an ECIR of Money Laundering on the basis of the case lodged by the NIA.

Sources have said that it was learnt that Qureshi went to Pakistan several times using forged passport. He also allegedly works at the behest of Dawood and Shakeel. The ED has collected the information regarding his bank accounts, properties and other income sources. Sources have claimed that they used to collect extortion money, and also earned through settlement (solving disputes after creating it themselves), and through drugs. Later this money was allegedly used to spread terror activities across India. On Wednesday, Qureshi was asked to join the investigation by 11 a.m. The ED had asked him to come with a set of documents pertaining to financial matter. Further investigation is underway.

Former CBI official gets bail in Maha Minister document leak case

A court here has granted bail to former CBI Sub-Inspector Abhishek Tiwari, who was arrested in connection with a case of alleged leaking of confidential documents to divert the probe against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh in a corruption case.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A court here has granted bail to former CBI Sub-Inspector Abhishek Tiwari, who was arrested in connection with a case of alleged leaking of confidential documents to divert the probe against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh in a corruption case.

Special CBI Judge Sanjeev Aggarwal of Rouse Avenue Court, while granting bail, noted that Tiwari is a former CBI official and has roots in the society. The court, in its order dated February 11, observed that the allegations of the present case do



not pertain to economic offenses of huge magnitude, therefore, it cannot be said to be falling under the category of grave offenses. It also pointed out that other accused persons having almost similar roles have already been released on bail recently.

It was also directed that Tiwari furnish a personal bond of Rs 1,00,000 with one surety of the like amount.

On January 31, the same court had granted bail to Deshmukh's lawyer Anand Daga and his social media manager Vaibhav Gajendra Tumane in the

case. Opposing the bail plea, the CBI argued that Tumane was the one who collected the sensitive report from Daga, prepared its copies, and sent them through courier to various addresses in Delhi. As per the FIR, Investigating Officer Tiwari, who was assisting the Enquiry Officer in the preparation of the probe report, was in possession of sensitive documents.

He allegedly shared copies of different documents like memorandum of proceedings, sealing-unsealing memorandum, statements, seizure memos etc, related to the investigation of the case with Daga through WhatsApp on many occasions.

The CBI said that the investigation has revealed that Tiwari and Daga met in Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune in person, and had been in regular touch through WhatsApp calls and messages and SMS after April 14 last year. The probe has revealed that Daga had bought an iPhone worth Rs 95,000 for the CBI official and gave it to him as illegal gratification in lieu of sharing case sensitive and confidential documents. The CBI had arrested Daga from Mumbai and Tiwari from Delhi. Later, Daga was shifted to a Delhi jail on transit remand.

Rani Mukerji: Bappi uncle will always be Indian cinema's most iconic music personality

Actress Rani Mukerji, whose mother Krishna Mukherjee was a childhood friend of Bappi Lahiri, has mourned the death of the late veteran music composer, who is popularly called as the 'Disco King', and said that he will always be the most iconic musical personality of Indian cinema.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Rani Mukerji, whose mother Krishna Mukherjee was a childhood friend of Bappi Lahiri, has mourned the death of the late veteran music composer, who is popularly called as the 'Disco King', and said that he will always be the most iconic musical personality of Indian cinema.

Rani said: "India has again lost one of her

precious gems... Bappi uncle is and will always be the most iconic musical personality of Indian cinema." "His music was legendary, his versatility as a composer was unmatched," she added. The actress called Lahiri, who passed away aged 69 in a hospital in Mumbai, "a truly self made man, a great son to his parents, a wonderful husband and a great dad."

Rani shared that Lahiri's death is a loss for her family. "My Mum and Bappi uncle were childhood friends from Calcutta. It's a personal loss for our family... My mother is devastated."

She added: "While the whole world mourns his loss, I can't help but think of all the memories I have of him from my childhood. Will miss him dearly. His smiling face and kind personality will always be a happy memory... I pray that Chitrani Aunty, Rema, Bappa and the entire Lahiri family finds strength to go through this loss. It's too sad. He went too soon. Bappi uncle rest in peace. The heavens have earned an angel today!"

YES BANK CO FOUNDER RANA KAPOOR, TWO OTHERS GRANTED BAIL

A Mumbai court on Wednesday granted bail to Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor and Avantha Group's Gautam Thapar and B. Hariharan of Avantha Group in a money laundering case.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A Mumbai court on Wednesday granted bail to Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor and Avantha Group's Gautam Thapar and B. Hariharan of Avantha Group in a money laundering case.

Additional Sessions Judge MG Deshpande granted



them bail.

Senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani appeared for Thapar and Sandeep Kapur for Hariharan.

The case pertains to criminal conspiracy for obtaining illegal gratification to the tune of Rs 307 crore by Rana Kapoor, the then MD & CEO of Yes Bank Ltd by acquiring a property located at New Delhi's Amrita Shergill Marg at a price of Rs 378 crore against the alleged declared value of Rs 685 crore.

INDIA'S FIRST 'DISCO-KING' BAPPI LAHIRI PASSES AWAY AT 69

Veteran singer-composer Alokesh alias Bappi Lahiri - nephew of the legendary trio of late Ashok Kumar, Kishore Kumar and Anoop Kumar - passed away around midnight due to multiple health issues, his family said here on Wednesday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Veteran singer-composer Alokesh alias Bappi Lahiri - nephew of the legendary trio of late Ashok Kumar, Kishore Kumar and Anoop Kumar - passed away around midnight due to multiple health issues, his family said here on Wednesday. Wielding the baton



from the age of 19, Lahiri, 69, and breathed his last at the Criticare Hospital, Juhu, said the hospital Director Dr Deepak Namjoshi. "He had been admitted to the hospital for a month and was discharged on Monday. But his health deteriorated on Tuesday and his family called for a doctor to visit their home, after which he was brought to the hospital," said Dr Joshi. He suffered from several health complications and

died due to OSA (obstructive sleep apnea) last night, the medico added. Lahiri - who attained fame as India's first 'Disco King' - is survived by his wife, Chitrani, daughter Rema and a son Bappa, who has taken to his dad's musical career. In a statement later, the Lahiri family said: "It's a deeply sad moment for us. We are seeking love and blessings for his soul." The Lahiris said that the music maestro's cremation will take place

after the arrival of his son Bappa from Los Angeles around Thursday midnight. Born in West Bengal, Lahiri's first composition was for a Bengali film, 'Daadu' (1972), followed by a Bollywood film 'Nanha Shikari' (1973). He arrived on the musical scene in a crescendo with 'Zakhmee' (1975) for which he composed music and also sang, pushing him to upper echelons at a very young age of barely 22. During his career, he directed top legends like Mohammed Rafi, Lata Mangeshkar, his 'Mama' Kishore Kumar, Asha Bhosale, Usha Uthup and many more to create waves with soulful, racy, vibrant and rhythmic music. Lahiri created musical tsunamis with his compositions in 'Chalte, Chalte' (1976), 'Suraksha' with the pacy 'Gunmaster G9' becoming as popular as 007, and "Lahu Ke Do Rang" (both 1979). Then followed 'Manokaamna' (1980) with several

liting numbers, 'Wardat' (1981), the raging music of "Disco Dancer" that had the nation dancing to his tunes with 'Jimmy Jimmy, Aaja Aaja', and 'Namak Hala' (both, 1982), the foot-tapping 'Himmatwala' (1983), 'Sharaabi' (1984) with the unforgettable 'Log Kehte Hain, Main Sharaabi Hoon', 'Adventures of Tarzan' (1985) in which Kimi Katkar cavorted onscreen crooning 'Tarzan, O My Tarzan', 'Dance Dance' (1987). Other films for which he composed memorable songs include 'Commando' (1988), 'Prem Pratigya' and 'Guru' (both, 1989). In 1990, he took the industry by storm with superhit music for 'Naakabandi' like the ever-green 'Naakabandi-Naakabandi' sung by Usha Uthup and Bappi himself, 'Ghayal', 'Aaj Ka Arjun', 'Thanedar', 'Ilaab'. Later came films like 'Dushman Devta', 'Sae Crore', 'First Love Letter' (all, 1991), 'Shola Aur Shabnam' Police.



JISOO'S FAVOURITE PROP FROM 'SNOWDROP' SYMBOLISES HER CHARACTER IN THE SHOW

Seoul | Agencies

South Korean singer and actress Jisoo, who is also a member of the girl group BLACKPINK, is currently enjoying a positive response to her show 'Snowdrop'. She recently spoke about her favourite prop from the show.

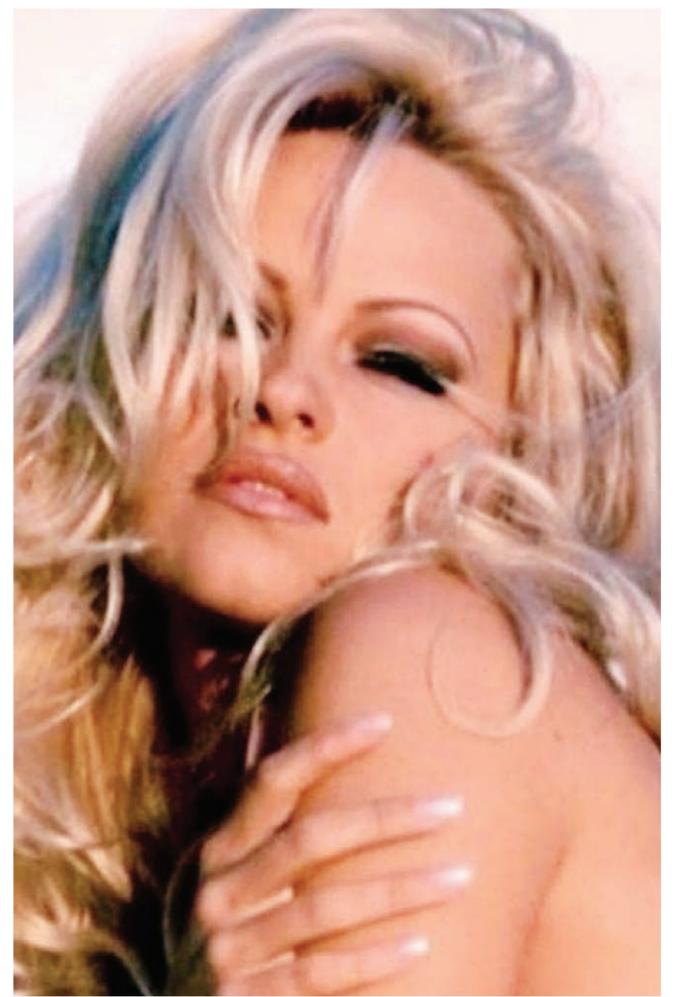
Elaborating on the same, she implied that her favorite props, the paper airplanes symbolise her character, "The most memorable prop for me was

the paper airplanes. Yeong-ro flies a lot of them, uses a lot of them, and folds a lot of them to the point where it almost symbolises her, which is why it's significant to me."

She also mentioned her favourite costume from the show, "My favorite costume is the fur slippers that Yeong-ro wears everywhere. I thought it was the only pair they had and did my best not to wear them out, but they eventually became tattered. Later on, I went into the prop

room and found a hundred of them there. I was so shocked, I still remember those slippers."

In addition, 'Snowdrop' also stars 'Something In The Rain' star Jung Hae-in. The series, which explores the forbidden love between a South Korean girl and a North Korean spy during the June 1987 Democracy Movement in South Korea, has been written by Yoo Hyun-mi and directed by Jo Hyun-tak. 'Snowdrop', is currently streaming on Disney+ Hotstar.



Pamela Anderson will never watch 'Pam and Tommy'

Hollywood star Pamela Anderson will "never watch" 'Pam and Tommy', the dramatisation about the release of her sex tape with former husband Tommy Lee, says a source close to the 'Baywatch' star.

Los Angeles | Agencies

The Hulu series tells the story behind the theft and release of the 'Baywatch' star and her then-husband Tommy Lee's sex tape - with the pair played by Lily James and Sebastian Stan respectively, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The insider told Entertainment Weekly: "I do know that she'll never, never watch this. Not even years from now. Not even the trailer." Both Lily and show officials have spoken

about how they contacted Pamela about the series but did not receive a response and the insider confirms that she was asked a number of times - firstly "years ago" long before filming commenced and again when the show was "in post-production".

The source confirmed that her approach differs to Tommy - who previously spoke to Stan about the series.

It said: "Tommy doesn't get it. He's in the same mindset he was at the time: that any publicity is good publicity."

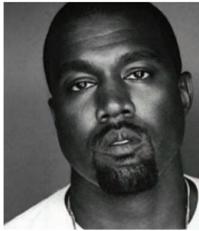
Kanye apologises for 'harassing' Kim

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Kanye West has issued an apology to his former wife Kim Kardashian and has said that he has "taken accountability" for "harassing" her.

It comes after the 44-year-old rapper shared a motley of Instagram posts over the weekend and yesterday, slamming her boyfriend Pete Davidson and posting screenshots of private messages between himself and the couple, reports mirror.co.uk.

While attending the Super Bowl with his children, Kanye found himself at the centre of scrutiny after he was booed by thousands of fans after his social media rant. Kanye has now deleted all of his posts, including those declaring that he will bring his family back together again, and shared another contemplating on his actions over the last few days. He wrote: "I've learned that using all caps makes people feel like I'm screaming at them. I'm



working on my communication. I can benefit from a team of creative professionals, organizers, mobilizers and community leaders. Thank everybody for supporting me. I know sharing screen shots was jarring and came off as harassing Kim. I take accountability. I'm still learning in real time.

"I don't have all the answers. To be good leader is to be a good listener."

The rapper was recently forced to tell his fans not to "hurt" Davidson after sharing a private message between himself and Kim, in which she expresses her concern that the SNL comedian will be targeted.

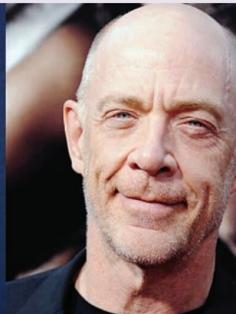
Ryan Kwanten and J.K. Simmons come onboard for 'Glorious'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Australian actor-producer Ryan Kwanten and Academy Award winner J.K. Simmons will be starring in supernatural horror movie 'Glorious', reports Deadline.

The film, which is in final stages of production, is being directed by Rebekah McKendry with script by Todd Rigney, Joshua Hull and David Ian McKendry. As per Deadline, the film has an interesting premise.

Kwanten plays a young man who is spiralling out of control after a bad breakup, finds himself locked inside a rest stop bathroom with a mysterious figure played by J.K. Simmons, who speaks with him from an adjacent stall. While planning his escape, he realizes he is an unwilling player in a situation bigger than he could have imagined. The film is a co-production with Fallback Plan, in association with



Mississippi-based Eyevox Entertainment, with Rick Moore from Eyevox executive producing alongside James Norrie and Nina Kolokouri at AMP.

In addition, Ryan Kwanten, Barbara Crampton, Mark Cartier, Gaba Gavi and Kevin Kale will also serve as executive producers along with Jessica Taylor as an associate producer. Producers are Bob Portal and Inderpal Singh from AMP; Joe Wicker

and Morgan Peter Brown from Fallback Plan Productions, Jason Scott Goldberg and Christian Armogida.

James Norrie of AMP International, said in a statement accessed by Deadline, "Buyers are always asking for films that can stand out from the crowd. Well, your wish is granted. 'Glorious' is so deliciously bonkers that people are going to be talking about it for years."

Sarah talks about absence of Samantha

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Sarah Jessica Parker addressed Kim Cattrall's absence in the 'Sex And The City' reboot titled 'And Just Like That'.

Without even mentioning Cattrall's name amid their feud, Parker discussed the matter during her appearance on 'Watch What Happens Live with Andy Cohen', reports aceshowbiz.com. In a recent episode, Cohen asked the actress about it.

"I loved how the show handled Samantha's absence, and every time a text came though I felt like the heart of Samantha came through - she had a lot of heart. How did you feel in the end about how you all handled that? You kept her alive," he said. To that, the actress responded: "Yeah, well, I think... I can take no credit to how we handled it, except that I got to convey the messages since they're not spoken." She added, "But it is Michael Patrick King who is our showrunner and our head writer, and his extraordinary group of amazingly talented writers." The actress continued, "It was an idea because Samantha is not gone. The actress that played the role is no longer playing that role, but... people aren't absent from your life when you don't want them to be, you know?" Jessica Parker said that Michael handled Samantha's absence "with grace and dignity and respect, and love and affection for that character." She added, "I thought it mimicked many friendships that, you know, challenge each other, and struggle, and want to remain connected in a way, because it's too painful."



'Billions' season seven gets a nod from television network

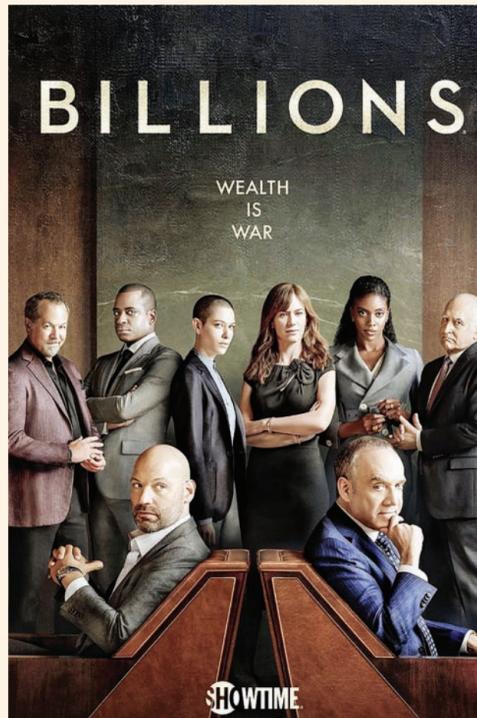
The seventh season of the American drama series 'Billions' has been greenlit at the Showtime television network.

Los Angeles | Agencies

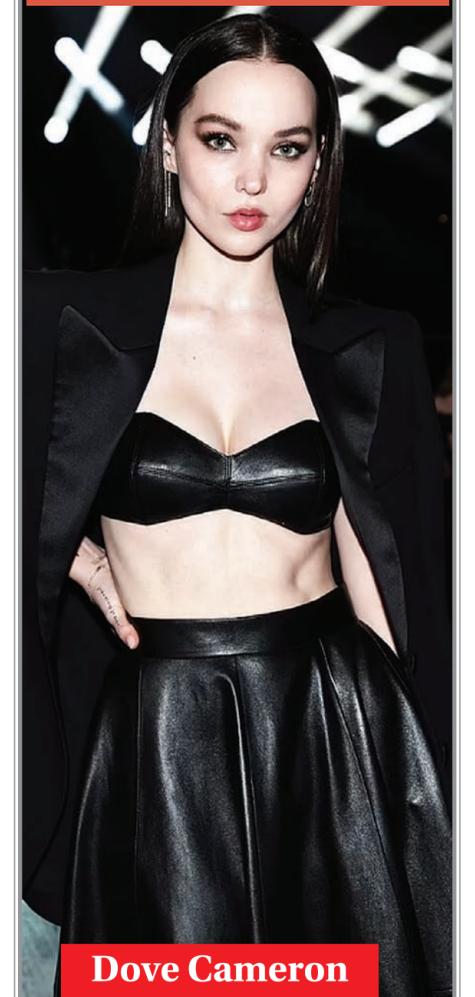
The 6th season of the show aired on January 23 with new episodes dropping every Sunday. In season 6, the dust of season five clears to reveal a world that has evolved. Daniel Breaker, who stars as Scooter, the brilliant and locked-down chief of staff for Prince, has been promoted to series regular going into Season 6.

As per Variety, the series was created by Brian Koppelman, David Levien and Andrew Ross Sorkin. Both Brian and David doubled up as executive producers and co-showrunners alongside Beth Schacter on the show.

'Billions' emerged as one of the longest-running shows in Showtime history, alongside series such as 'Homeland', 'Ray Donovan', 'Dexter',



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Dove Cameron



1ST T20I: INDIA BEAT WEST INDIES BY 6 WICKETS, TAKE 1-0 SERIES

Kolkata | Agencies

Solid bowling performance on his debut by leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi (2/17) followed by a quickfire knock by Rohit Sharma and a superb finishing effort from Suryakumar Yadav helped India thrash West Indies by six wickets in the first T20I and take 1-0 lead in three-match series on Wednesday.

Riding on Bishnoi and Harshal Patel's (2/37) superb bowling, India restricted West Indies to 157/7 in 20 overs despite an attacking fifty by Nicholas Pooran (61 off 43) at the Eden Gardens, here.

Chasing a competitive total, skipper Rohit Sharma gave India a flying start. He hit 22 runs off Odean Smith in the 4th over to get things going for India while his partner Ishan Kishan was slow off the blocks.

It was Roston Chase, who gave the West Indies the first wicket by getting rid of Rohit (40 off 19), who hit four fours and three sixes in his innings. Ishan Kishan, who struggled to get going, scored just 35 runs



Brief scores:
West Indies 157/7 in 20 overs (Nicholas Pooran 61, Kyle Mayers 31; Ravi Bishnoi 2/17, Harshal Patel 2/37) lost to India 162-4 in 18.5 overs (Rohit Sharma 40, Ishan Kishan 35; Roston Chase 2/14) by six wickets

in 42 balls becoming Chase's second victim of the night. Virat Kohli's poor form then continued as he fell for 17 off 13 balls to Fabian Allen.

West Indies spinners bowled some disciplined overs in the middle overs and it seemed that the visitors were on their way to pulling off

an extraordinary defence when vice-captain Rishabh Pant fell for eight runs off as many balls.

IPL 2022

Shreyas Iyer will lead Kolkata Knight Riders

Kolkata | Agencies

Two-time IPL champions Kolkata Knight Riders (KRR) on Wednesday have announced Shreyas Iyer as the captain of the side ahead of IPL 2022 season. This will be the second time Iyer will be captaining a side in the IPL after doing the same job for his former team Delhi Capitals from mid-2018 season till 2020. In the recent IPL Mega Auction, Iyer was bought by KKR for INR 12.25 crores after a fierce bidding battle. "I am extremely honoured to have gotten the opportunity to lead a prestigious team like KKR. The IPL as a tournament brings the best players from different countries and cultures together and I look forward to leading this great group of very talented individuals," said Iyer in a statement. Once KKR succeeded in acquiring Iyer's services, it



was a foregone conclusion that the right-handed batter would be made the captain of the side. A shoulder injury and subsequent surgery to Iyer meant Rishabh Pant captained Delhi in first half of IPL 2021. Though Iyer returned in the second half, Pant continued to remain the skipper. Iyer, who led Delhi to

runners-up finish in 2020, was not retained by the franchise during the retention period. Iyer will be the sixth player to lead KKR after Sourav Ganguly (2008-10), McCullum (2009), Gautam Gambhir (2011-17), Dinesh Karthik (2018-20) and Eoin Morgan (2020-21).

PRASIDH KRISHNA MAKES BIG GAINS IN ODI RANKINGS AFTER SERIES AGAINST WI

Dubai: India pacer Prasad Krishna has made big gains in the ICC Men's ODI Bowling Rankings after a 'Player of the Series' performance in the series against the West Indies in Ahmedabad. In the series where India won 3-0, Krishna took nine wickets in three matches at an average of just 7.55 and economy rate of 2.50. Krishna's performance -- he had emerged the leading wicket-taker across both sides -- has propelled him to jump 50 places from 94th to 44th in the ODI bowlers' rankings. For the West Indies, pacer Alzarri Joseph took two wickets in each of the three matches in the series to earn himself a place in the top-20 bowlers' list at 20th place. Another player from the series to make gains in the rankings is Rishabh Pant, who added a half-century in the third match to move to a career best of 469 points at 71st place. Shreyas Iyer, who made an 80 in the third match to help the home side complete a 3-0 series win, gained 13 places to be at 61st place in the rankings. India will now take on the West Indies in the T20I series starting later on Wednesday in Kolkata. In terms of Men's T20I bowling rankings, Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood has moved up to a career-high number two. Hazlewood returned his best-ever T20I figures in the series opener against Sri Lanka, taking 4/12 in a spell, before capping another haul of 3/22 last week, with a match-sealing Super Over that went for just five runs.



Domestic and international hockey is completely different: Forward Abhishek

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

Young Indian hockey forward Abhishek, who made his senior debut at the FIH Hockey Pro League in South Africa recently, has said that playing at the international level is a completely different cup of tea compared to competing at the national level.

India played hosts South Africa and France in the first round of Pro League games, defeating the hosts by big margins in both the games, while losing one of the two games to France. "I learned a lot playing during the matches. It is very different from the style of hockey that I have played before at the national level as it was a lot quicker



and more challenging. But I am happy with my performance and I feel I grew a lot as a player," said Abhishek on Wednesday. The 22-year-old forward played three matches and scored a goal as well. He said that being on target in his maiden international

assignment was a memorable moment. "It is always a matter of great pride representing your country on the international stage. I felt proud to wear the Indian jersey on the tour and it was a dream come true moment for me. As a player, you

always want to score as many goals in your career as you can. But you always tend to remember the first goal. I am pleased I was able to open my account against South Africa and I will never forget that moment," he said.

The Sonapat (Haryana) boy started playing hockey at the age of 11. "I found the sport quite interesting, so I developed an interest in it. Earlier, it used to be just friendly games with my schoolmates, but later, I decided to pursue a career in the sport as my interest kept growing," he said. At the start of his hockey career, Abhishek was helped by his school coaches who convinced his parents to allow him to pursue the sport, because of his skills.

QATAR OPEN: MURRAY SETS UP SECOND-ROUND CLASH AGAINST BAUTISTA AGUT

Doha: Andy Murray of Great Britain produced a strong first-round performance to brush past Taro Daniel of Japan 6-2, 6-2 to cruise into the second round of the Qatar ExxonMobil Open as a wild card here. Daniel had defeated the 34-year-old multiple Grand Slam winner in the second round of the Australian Open last month and the Scot had looked quite upset after the defeat.



Murray, who is a two-time champion and four-time finalist in Doha, looked happy to be back as he hit 11 winners and broke Daniel twice to win the first set. World No. 110 Daniel broke in the first game of the second set to momentarily halt Murray's charge. But a trademark backhand winner sealed an immediate break back as Murray went on to seal victory in one hour, 20 minutes. Murray now faces second seed Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain in the second round. The Brit will seek to increase his 3-1 ATP head-to-head series lead over the world No. 16, but will not be taking anything for granted despite his excellent record in Doha.

England women's team trying to refocus on World Cup after Ashes loss: Knight

Auckland | Agencies

England women's cricket captain Heather Knight has said that her team was trying to "refocus after an Ashes series that didn't go our way", and added that she was looking forward to the ICC Women's World Cup, scheduled to commence here from March 4.

In her column for the ICC on Wednesday, Knight said that the girls were looking forward to completing their mandatory quarantine and begin their training in right earnest for the showpiece event, to be held at six venues across New Zealand. "As a group, we need to reset and refocus after an Ashes series that didn't go our way. I was really pleased with how we started the series. We went toe



toe with Australia and heading into the ODI leg of the series, the scoreline could easily have been different to the 6-4 deficit we found ourselves facing. As it was, there just wasn't

enough mental energy to go back to the well and fight back in the ODI series," admitted the 31-year-old Knight.

Hosts Australia emerged 12-4 winners in the recently-concluded multi-format Ashes series and Knight said the aim now was to do well in the upcoming cricketing carnival despite a far-from-normal scenario.

"It's pretty surreal to feel so near to a World Cup and yet so far away! Throwing rolled up socks into your bed to keep ticking over wasn't how I imagined our build-up for this tournament back in 2017 but an awful lot has happened in the world since then. As I write this, we're on day five of our quarantine and we're not far away from being let out, thanks to the New Zealand Government's change of isolation rules!

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Ranji Trophy, the backbone of India's domestic cricket scene, is all set to begin from Thursday after an absence of a season due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Come Thursday, the sight of cricketers featuring in India's premier first-class competition with the red cherry would be a sight to behold.

Pushed from its original starting date of January 13 due to the third wave of Covid-19 cases in India, the stage is now set for Ranji Trophy to happen. Amidst a drop in cases, nine centres will host 57 league stage matches featuring 38 teams. The teams have been divided into eight elite groups and one plate group and will be staying in the bio-secure environment (bio-bubbles). The league stage will have just three matches for most of the teams, which means that there is very little margin of error in order to progress to the knockouts.

Senior Test batters Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane will be



seen in action on day one of the Ranji Trophy when their respective sides Saurashtra and Mumbai squaring-off in Ahmedabad. The duo, under pressure due to a lean patch in Test cricket, will have to get big runs as the squad announcement for Tests against Sri Lanka in March is expected soon.

The focus will also be on other Test players like Hanuma Vihari (Hyderabad), Navdeep Saini (Delhi), Mayank Agarwal (Karnataka), Prithvi Shaw (Mumbai), Jaydev Unadkat (Saurashtra), Jayant Yadav (Haryana) and Umesh Yadav (Vidarbha).

Others who were part of India's A trip to South Africa and will be itching to dish out good performances are Priyank Panchal (Gujarat), Abhimanyu Easwaran (Bengal), Sarfaraz Khan (Mumbai), Baba Aparajith (Tamil Nadu), KS Bharat (Andhra Pradesh), K Gowtham (Karnataka), Arzan Nagwaswalla (Gujarat), Devdutt Padikkal (Karnataka), Ishan Porel (Bengal) and Umran Malik (Jammu and Kashmir)

India's Shiva Keshavan among five included in Olympians For Life hall of fame

Beijing | Agencies

Indian Winter Olympics pioneer Shiva Keshavan has been inducted into the Olympians For Life hall of fame for his role in promoting the Winter Olympics, winter sports, luge and the spirit of Olympianism.

Keshavan is the first Indian winter-sport participant and second overall after boxer MC Mary Kom to be named Olympian For Life. Mary Kom was inducted in 2016 during the Rio Olympics.

Keshavan, the first Indian to represent the country in Winter Olympics and in luge in 1994, has participated in six Olympics, has won gold in the Asian Luge Cup and also held the Asian speed record.

He was on Tuesday among five Olympians who were inducted into the World Olympians Association's Olympians For Life hall of fame for the Beijing Winter Olympic Games



in an online function.

The Olympians For Life programme was launched by the World Olympians Association in 2016 during the Rio de Janeiro Olympics. As per this programme, five persons that have participated in the Olympics have declared Olympians

For Life during every Summer or Winter Olympics since 2016.

Apart from Keshavan, others that were named Olympians For Life for the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics are Simidele Adeagbo of Nigeria who participated in the skeleton; Alain Calmat of France who partici-

pated in figure skating; Clara Hughes, a speed skater from Canada and Ben Sandford of New Zealand, who participated in skeleton.

Keshavan is the first and only five-time Olympian to be included on the occasion of the Beijing 2022 Games.

Keshavan was inducted for his trailblazing achievements and initiatives in grassroots development programmes to grow winter sports within India.

"My experience as an Olympian gave me a great platform to help provide more opportunities for younger generations to get involved with sport. There is a lot of value that Olympians can add to a country's sporting success post their competitive career. The next ambition of mine is to continue to promote the Winter Games and the Olympian movement in India and the wider Himalayan region," Keshavan was quoted as saying on the occasion.

ISL 2021-22

Jamshedpur, Mumbai lock horns with aim to sharpen semifinal hopes

Bambolim (Goa) | Agencies

Two sides -- Mumbai City FC and Jamshedpur FC, who are aiming to secure a semifinal spot will pull no punches when they lock horns in a rescheduled 2021-22 Indian Super League match at the Athletic Stadium, here on Thursday.

Mumbai are placed fifth in the table with 25 points, same as Jamshedpur who are in the fourth spot but with a game in hand. A win for both teams will propel them to third place and help cut the gap on leaders Hyderabad FC and second-placed ATK Mohun Bagan.

Mumbai arrested their lean patch with two back-to-back victories to steady their ship and have looked good of



late with the likes of Bipin Singh coming good. Singh scored a brace and provided one assist in the Islanders' 4-1 win over Odisha. It is the most goal contribution he has managed in a match in Hero ISL 21-22 (3).

Jamshedpur has been in good goalscoring touch too, racking up three against

mighty Kerala Blasters the other day. Daniel Chima Chukwu can't stop scoring goals since joining their ranks as he made it three out of three with a goal in the previous game. Jamshedpur's strength lies in set-pieces too, the side scoring eight goals from free-kicks this season, the highest by any club.



'MAN OF INCREDIBLE MELODY'

Bollywood celebs mourn Bappi Lahiri's demise

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood celebrities have been mourning the death of India's 'Disco King' Bappi Lahiri since the news broke that he had passed away at the age of 69 at a suburban hospital in Mumbai's Juhu area in the early hours of Wednesday.

Akshay Kumar tweeted: "Today we lost another gem from the music industry... Bappi Da, your voice was the reason for millions to dance, including me. Thank you for all the happiness you brought through your music. My heartfelt condolences to the family. Om Shanti."

Ajay Devgn also took to Twitter

to say: "Bappi Da was so endearing in person. But his music had an edge. He introduced a more contemporary style to Hindi film music with 'Chalte Chalte', 'Suraksha' and 'Disco Dancer'. Shanti Dada, you will be missed."

Vidya Balan, on whom Bappi Lahiri's popular number 'Ooh la la' was picturised in the film 'Dirty Picture', posted on her Twitter handle: "I wish you joy wherever you go Bappi da because that's what you brought to the world through your music and your being. Love always, Bidda (as you'd so endearingly call me)."

Noted filmmaker Hansal Mehta recalled his personal association with Bappi Lahiri and said:



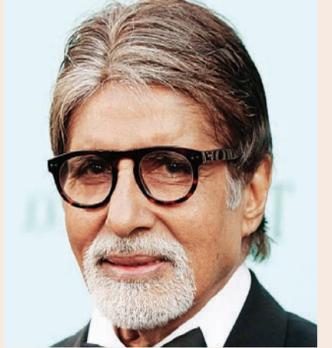
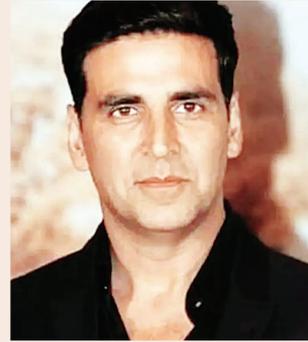
"Another legend gone. Had the good fortune of working closely with him when I shot an ad for P&G and then when I worked with White Feather Films for @_SanjayGupta. Man of incredible melody and talent."

Music composer Vishal Dadlani, spoke for his generation, when he tweeted: "Bappi Da was more than a legend. He was a friend. He was always kind to Shekhar and me and we shared mutual respect and admiration. Can't believe he isn't with us."

On a personal note, he added: "First my Dad, then Lataji, then Bappi Da. 2022 is really hitting hard. Far too hard. My deepest condolences to Bappa, Rema, Mrs Lahiri and the grandkids."

Bhumi Pednekar tweeted: "Complete Loss of Words. Heartbroken by the demise of the legendary Bappi Lahiri Ji. Truly a big loss. My condolences to his family and fans. Your music will live on forever, sir #RIPBappiLahiri."

BIG B, AKSHAY, PRABHAS, JR NTR TO DOMINATE MARCH WITH BIG RELEASES



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The month of March looks promising as some of India's biggest stars such as Amitabh Bachchan, Akshay Kumar, Prabhas, Jr NTR and Ram Charan are all set to light up the big screen after gloomy months due to the surge of Covid cases in the country.

The first movie to release in March is Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan's film 'Jhund'. The film is scheduled to hit the screens on March 4. 'Jhund' is a sports film based on the life of Vijay Barse, the founder of NGO 'Slum Soccer'. It also features Akash Thosar and Rinku Rajguru.

In the Nagraj Popatrao Manjule directorial, Bachchan will be seen playing a professor who motivates the street children to form a football team. Next to set the screens on fire is actor Suriya's action entertainer 'Eharkum Thunindhavan', which will release on March 10. The movie was earlier set for release on February 4. However, the makers chose to postpone its release after lockdown restrictions were imposed by the Tamil Nadu government to contain the spread of the third wave of the

pandemic. Then there is 'Radhe Shyam', where South sensation Prabhas plays a palmist, while actress Pooja Hegde will be seen as his love interest. The intense love story will light up the screens on March 11.

Alongside 'Radhe Shyam', filmmaker Vivek Agnihotri's directorial 'The Kashmir Files' will be seeing the light of day in the theatres. Postponed due to a significant spike in Covid cases in the country, 'The Kashmir Files' is based on the lives of Kashmiri Pandits. It boasts of an ensemble cast including names such as Mithun Chakraborty, Anupam Kher, Darshan Kumar and Pallavi Joshi among many others. Next up is Bollywood's 'Khiladi' star Akshay Kumar's film 'Bachchan Paandey'.

'Bachchan Paandey' has been blocked for a Holi weekend release and is scheduled to hit the big screen on March 18. The film, which also stars Kriti Sanon, Jacqueline Fernandez, Arshad Warsi, Pankaj Tripathi, Prateik Babbar and Abhimanyu Singh. The film is a remake of the 2014 Tamil film 'Jigarthanda'.

Bringing the curtains down with a bang for March is filmmaker S.S. Rajamouli's magnum opus 'RRR' on March 25.



BEING A POLITICIAN IN REAL LIFE IS TOUGHER: MAHIE GILL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Mahie Gill who has joined the Bharatiya Janata Party recently and also played a politician on-screen in the recently released web series 'Raktanchal 2' says encountering the real situation as a politician is very different from acting then in films and series. Asked about her new career choice as a politician and Mahie told reporter: "Firstly it is just a coincidence that in 'Raktanchal 2' I played a politician and in reality also I joined politics. The timing was not quite planned. But I must say that when an actress becomes a politician, people's attitude changes and not always fame helps to influence people to change their minds. Same people who love me for

my acting, not necessarily love and support me as a politician. Initially, people are interested to come and meet me for selfies and the fact that they are meeting an actress. So I would say that playing a politician on-screen and meeting real people and real issues as a politician is very different and rather tougher." In the show she plays the character named Saraswati Devi and the story is set in the '90s era. Drawing the similarity from the story of the show and the present time in Indian politics, Mahie said, "when it comes to the show, I was excited to play Saraswati Devi because of the very fact that the story was set in the 90s era and I never played a politician in my career before. Back in the day, female representation in Indian politics in higher positions was quite a power struggle."

'A Thursday': A derivative of 'A Wednesday' and 'Madaari'

FILM REVIEW

TROY RIBEIRO

(Streaming on Amazon Prime)

Duration: 130 minutes

Cast: Yami Gautam Dhar, Atul Kulkarni, Neha Dhupia, Dimple Kapadia, Karanvir Sharma, Maya Sarao, Kalyanee Mulay, Shubhangi Latkar, Micky Makhija

Director: Eight episodes, each lasting for roughly 40 minutes.

Rating: **1/2

'Thursday' is a suspense drama showcasing a citizen's desperate cry for justice.

The film revolves around how Naina Jaiswal (Yami Gautam Dhar), an enterprising teacher running her playschool called 'Little Dots' for young children in a flat belonging to her fiancé Rohit Mirchandani (Karanvir Sharma), resorts to desperate measures to make her voice heard and get justice.

It's a Thursday Naina cuts short her holiday and returns to work a day before her birthday with a motive.

After seeing off all adults from the playschool's premise, she calls up the police station and informs them that she is holding sixteen children as hostages, and she has a few



demands.

Much before the police could turn up, Naina manages to hold two more adults as hostages. One is the driver, who was assigned to bring in the cake and sandwiches for the party, and the other is Savitri, the assistant at the playschool, who had returned to pick up her phone, which she had forgotten.

The momentum of the story accelerates when a heavily pregnant and ruthless ACP, Catherine Alvares

(Neha Dhupia), lands up with her team at the doorsteps of the playschool. The atmosphere is tense, with concerned parents and the media curious to know Naina's demands.

Yami Gautam, as Naina delivers her chops earnestly. She is unimposing in her disposition which is why her character does not connect with the audience emotionally.

Neha Dhupia and Atul Kulkarni, as police personnel, play stereotypical

roles.

Dimple Kapadia as Prime Minister Maya Rajguru is a bit flat and muted. She is unimpressive and not convincing as the charismatic leader who can bring about a change in the country.

Coasting along on its stretched star cast and good intentions the 'stitched-together' plot is derivative, influenced by films like 2008 released 'A Wednesday' and 2016 released 'Madaari.'

ALI FAZAL ON WORKING WITH GAL GADOT: IT WAS TOO MUCH FUN



Mumbai: After working with names such as Dame Judi Dench in 'Victoria and Abdul' and Vin Diesel in 'Fast and Furious 7', Indian actor Ali Fazal has now shared screen space with star Gal Gadot in the murder mystery film 'Death On The Nile', based on the 1937 novel by Agatha Christie.

Ali will be seen playing the role of Gal's cousin and is also one of the suspects in the film, which tells the tale of a perfect couple's honeymoon on a cruise. Things take an awry turn after a murder takes place on the ship.

Talking to IANS about working with Gadot and others in the film, Ali said: "It was too much fun. It was lots of fun. She (Gadot) was very sweet. I think most of the actors were very sweet and gentle... Very giving actor herself (Gadot) and easy to talk to."

The 35-year-old actor revealed how the Branagh, who is also directing the film, broke the ice on set for everyone.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Urveshi Rautela