

# absolute india

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## NATION

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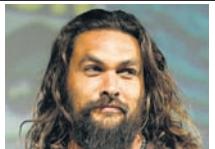
Andhra CM urges PM to retain provision for state's NOC...



## HOLLYWOOD

&gt; 06

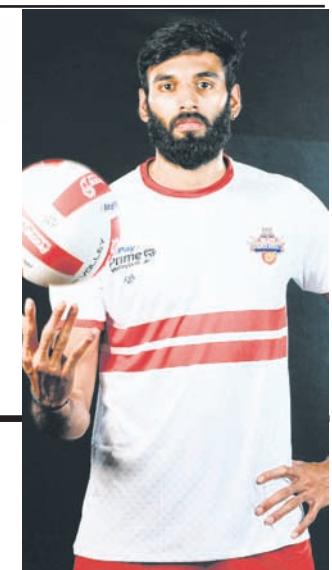
Jason Momoa joins 'Fast and Furious 10' cast...



## SPORTS

&gt; 07

Ashwal Rai to lead Kolkata Thunderbolts...



## India bought Pegasus spyware from Israel in 2017 as part of a defence deal: Report

**India bought Pegasus spyware from Israel as part of a defence deal worth \$2 billion in 2017, The New York Times has reported.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India bought Pegasus spyware from Israel as part of a defence deal worth \$2 billion in 2017, The New York Times has reported. Through a series of new deals, Pegasus was helping to knit together a rising generation of right-wing leaders worldwide, the report said. "In July 2017, Narendra Modi, who won office on a platform of Hindu nationalism, became the first Indian prime minister to visit Israel. For decades, India had maintained a policy of what it called 'commitment to the Palestinian cause', and relations with Israel were frosty. The Modi visit, however, was notably cordial, complete with a carefully staged moment of him and Prime Minister Netanyahu walking together barefoot on a local beach. They had reason for the warm feelings", the report said.

NYT reported, "Their countries had agreed on the sale of a package of sophisticated weapons and intelligence gear worth roughly \$2 billion - with Pegasus and a missile system as the centerpieces. Months later, Netanyahu made a rare state visit to India. And in June 2019, India voted in support of Israel at the UN's Economic and Social Council to deny



observer status to a Palestinian human rights organization, a first for the nation."

A year-long New York Times investigation, including dozens of interviews with government officials, leaders of intelligence and law-enforcement agencies, cyberweapons experts, business executives and pri-

vacy activists in a dozen countries, shows how Israel's ability to approve or deny access to NSO's cyber-weapons has become entangled with its diplomacy.

"The combination of Israel's search for influence and NSO's drive for profits has also led to the powerful spying tool's ending up in the hands

of a new generation of nationalist leaders worldwide. Though the Israeli government's oversight was meant to prevent the powerful spyware from being used in repressive ways, Pegasus has been sold to Poland, Hungary and India, despite those countries' questionable records on human rights", NYT reported.

## EC announces two-phase biennial election for 36 MLC seats in UP

**The Election Commission on Friday announced biennial election for 36 constituencies of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council in two phases, on March 3 and 7.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Election Commission on Friday announced biennial election for 36 constituencies of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council in two phases, on March 3 and 7.

The term of 36 sitting members of the state legislature's upper house from 35 local authorities' constituencies is going to expire on March 7.

According to the EC, the notification for the first phase will be issued on February 4, the last date of making nominations will be February 11, scrutiny of nominations will be on February 14, and the last date of the withdrawal of candidature will be on February 16.

For the second phase, the notification will be issued on February 10, last date of making nominations will be February 17, scrutiny of nominations will be on February 18, and last date for withdrawal of candidatures will be February 21.



Lucknow-Unnao, Rae-Bareli, Pratapgarh, Sultanpur, Barabanki, Bahrampur, Azamgarh-Mau, Ghazipur, Jaunpur, Varanasi and Mirzapur-Sonbhadra will elect one candidate from each constituency.

In the second phase, the local authorities of Gonda, Faizabad, Basti-Siddharth Nagar, Gorakhpur, Rampur-Bareilly, Budaun, Pilibhit-Shahjahanpur, Hardoi, Kheri, Sitapur,

## T'GANA COPS BUST TELUGU CALL CENTRE SCAM IN JHARKHAND

**Hyderabad:** Telangana police have busted a group running an elaborate call centre racket targeting Telugu speakers operating from Jharkhand. The police unearthed the scam on Friday following the arrest of nine persons in Dhanbad, Jharkhand.

The arrested have been identified as autorickshaw drivers Katravath Raju, K Santosh, and D Srinivasulu; students E Ganesh, M Venkatesh, K Harilal, K Ganesh, M Ganesh; and farmer K Raju, police officials said. According to the police, Katravath had struck up a friendship with Vikram Thakur from Jharkhand, who used to engage the former's autorickshaw whenever he used to visit Hyderabad.

Thakur told Katravath about his difficulty in finding Telugu manpower for his cyberfraud operations under the guise of offering loans and other services to people in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

## Dazzling drones steal show at Beating Retreat Ceremony

**Over 1,000 drones, dazzling in different colours, lit up the sky over the Lutyens' Delhi on Saturday during the Beating Retreat Ceremony.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Over 1,000 drones, dazzling in different colours, lit up the sky over the Lutyens' Delhi on Saturday during the Beating Retreat Ceremony. The ceremony was held in the presence of President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The drone show was organised by a startup 'Botlab Dynamics' which was supported by Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi, and Department of Science & Technology. The show continued for around 10 minutes involving around 1,000 drones fabricated through indigenous technology.

A synchronised background music was also played during the drone show. Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh said it was a world record created by India by flying 1,000 drones during the ceremony.

"Proud that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India creates record of fly-

## 'Backdated' appointment of four NGT judicial members

**In an unprecedented move, the government has issued a notification for appointment of four retired judges as judicial members to the National Green Tribunal with each having an appointment date from the year 2021.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In an unprecedented move, the government has issued a notification for appointment of four retired judges as judicial members to the National Green Tribunal with each having an appointment date from the year 2021. The notification dated December 21, 2021 issued on Friday mentions that all four appointments are made in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-sections (1) and (3) of section 6, read with section 7 of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 (19 of 2010).

Justice Sudhir Agarwal, former Judge of High Court of Allahabad has been appointed as the Judicial Member of the National Green Tribunal with effect from April 6, 2021 for a period of four years or till he attains the age of sixty-seven years or till further orders, whichever is earliest.

Justice M Sathyaranayanan, Judge of High



Court of Madras has been appointed as the Judicial Member of the National Green Tribunal with effect from May 17, 2021 for a period of four years or till he attains the age of sixty-seven years or till further orders, whichever is earliest.

Justice B. Amit Sthalekar, Judge of High Court of Allahabad has been appointed as the Judicial Member of the National Green Tribunal with effect from April 7, 2021 for a period of four years or till he attains the age of sixty-seven years or till further orders, whichever is earliest.

Justice Brijesh Sethi, Judge of High Court of Delhi has been appointed as the Judicial Member of the National Green Tribunal with effect from April 6, 2021 for a period of four years or till he attains the age of sixty-seven years or till further orders, whichever is earliest. Legal experts have expressed apprehension about the appointment. "I have never heard of such a thing. There is no logic to it," said Ritwick Dutta, environmental lawyer and founder of Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE).

## 'India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2022' approved in 2nd ASEAN Digital Ministers meeting

**Telecom Ministers of 10 ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) countries - Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam - and dialogue partner countries - Australia, Canada, China, EU, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Russia, UK and US - have jointly approved the India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2022 in the second ASEAAN Digital Ministers (ADGM) meeting which was held virtually.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

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Australia, Canada, China, EU, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Russia, UK and US - have jointly approved the India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2022 in the second ASEAAN Digital Ministers (ADGM) meeting which was held virtually.

The India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2022 includes system for combating the use of stolen and counterfeit mobile handsets, WiFi Access network interface for nationwide public internet, the capacity build-

ing and knowledge sharing in emerging areas in the field of Information and Communication Technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT), 5G, Advanced Satellite Communication, Cyber Forensics, informed the ministry of communications in a statement.

The ongoing and proposed projects in ICTs, will strengthen collaboration between India and ASEAN by leveraging complementary strengths of each other. The meeting discussed and deliberated vari-

ous matters relevant to strengthening regional digital cooperation in the spirit of digital inclusion and integration.

Addressing the august gathering of Digital Ministers, the minister of state for communications, Devusinh Chauhan, emphasised that Information and Communication Technologies enable and strengthen democratic systems and institutions through enhanced engagement between citizens and the state.

He added that use of ICTs promote free speech, human rights and the free flow of information besides expanding citizens' opportunities to participate in decision-making process and have potential to transform lives of people living in rural areas.

Chauhan stated that Covid is not only a challenge for the public health system, but it is also shaking the economic and social orders of the countries. In this scenario, Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) have emerged as powerful tools to mitigate the effects of pandemic in different spheres of public life and they are foundations of the global economy.

# MAHA SHOCKER: IAS OFFICER ARRESTED IN TET EXAMS SCAM CASE

In a shocking turn, the Pune Police have arrested an IAS officer in connection with the sensational state-wide Teachers Eligibility Test (TET) that was unearthed last year, officials said here on Saturday.

**Team Absolute |**Pune

In a shocking turn, the Pune Police have arrested an IAS officer in connection with the sensational state-wide Teachers Eligibility Test (TET) that was unearthed last year, officials said here on Saturday. The IAS officer is Sushil Khodwekar, currently posted as Agriculture Department Deputy Secretary at Thane and functioned with the same designation in the School Education & Sports Department when the alleged TET irregularities were being perpetrated. Khodwekar, 43, of the 2011 IAS batch in the Maharashtra cadre, was pro-



duced before a local court and remanded to police custody till Monday, January 31, with the total number of arrests going up to more than 30 so far comprising officials and private persons. Besides Khodwekar, the Pune Police had earlier arrested Maharashtra State Council of

Examinations (MSCE) Commissioner Tukaram Supe, former MSCE Commissioner Sukdeo Dere, education consultant Abhijit Sawrikar, and Director of GA Software Pritesh Deshmukh, which had been awarded the contract for the TET and other government exams. Police investiga-

tions have revealed that the marks of at least 7,880 candidates appearing for the TET in 2018 and 2020 had allegedly been 'increased' by manipulating the entire evaluation process, against huge monetary gains. The sleuths found that the accused persons serving the company had access to the TET website which was misused for the huge malpractices, with Khodwekar, Savrikar and others allegedly working in tandem.

The probe has revealed that amounts ranging from Rs 35K - Rs 200K were collected from the desperate candidates to hike their TET scores and improve their job prospects. Raids have been carried out at various locations of officials, coaching classes, agents, some candidates and assets worth over Rs 7 crore have been seized. The police are likely to submit a list of all such 'taunted' candidates to the state government for further action and further arrests are not ruled out, besides linking the probe with other government examinations or paper leaks that occurred last year.

## Andhra CM urges PM to retain provision for state's NOC in proposed amendments to IAS rules

**Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has urged the Prime Minister to reconsider proposed changes in the IAS (Cadre) Rules, 1954 and retain the existing process of requiring the state NOC to officers going on Central deputation.**

**Team Absolute |**Agencies

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has urged the Prime Minister to reconsider proposed changes in the IAS (Cadre) Rules, 1954 and retain the existing process of requiring the state NOC to officers going on Central deputation.

Responding to the Central government's proposal to amend the rules, Reddy cited "practical issues" arising from implementation of the proposed changes to the rules pertaining to deputation of IAS officers. In his letter addressed to the Prime Minister on Friday, Reddy expressed reservations over certain clauses of the proposed amendment.

As per one of the clauses,

the Central government can override the state government in case of disagreement over deputing an IAS officer in the state. The Chief Minister observed that generally the state government issues a no objection certificate (NOC) to such requests after evaluating the officer's skill set and the state's requirements. However, the proposed amendment could jeopardise the state government's projects, he pointed out. "The proposed amendment may take away such an important flexibility from the state government to plan such deputation of officers.

The Chief Ministers of neighbouring states like Telangana, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala have written to the Centre expressing their dissatisfaction with the proposed changes to the rules.

The veteran leader, who was instrumental in cementing communal ties after a period of strife along with former Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, said he has always stood alongside Badal, who is a symbol of unity, and would also stand alongside Sukhbir Badal, who is carrying forward the same legacy.

He also lauded the SAD President for fast-tracking development during his stint in the government as Deputy Chief Minister as well as for bringing

**Chandigarh |**Agencies

Veteran Punjab BJP leader and former minister Madan Mohan Mittal on Saturday joined the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in the presence of party President Sukhbir Singh Badal here.



in massive investment into the state.

Mittal, who was accompanied by his son Arvind Mittal and the entire rank and file of the BJP of the Anandpur Sahib constituency, said he is also resigning from the BJP to fight the injustice being done to the constituency.

He said while all projects have been taken away from Anandpur Sahib during the Congress regime, the local BJP leadership has failed to safeguard the rights of the people.

"We have seen rampant illegal mining in the Anandpur Sahib constituency, which needs to be stopped. Truckers and truck unions have also been robbed of their livelihood. I have stepped forward to work for the welfare of Anandpur Sahib and end the discrimination being meted out to it," he said.

Sukhbir Badal, while welcoming Mittal into SAD, appointed him as the party's 'halqa in-charge' for Anandpur Sahib constituency.

He also announced the appointment of Mittal as the senior vice-president of the party.

When queried whether Mittal would contest the forthcoming elections from Anandpur Sahib, Sukhbir Badal said this decision would be left to the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), an ally of SAD.

The 117-member Punjab Assembly will go to the polls on February 20, while the counting of votes will be taken up on March 10.

# KEJRIWAL FAILED DELHI'S SLUM DWELLERS: BJP

**Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta said that the Arvind Kejriwal-led government has never fulfilled its promises made to the slum dwellers in the national capital.**

**Team Absolute |**New Delhi

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta said that the Arvind Kejriwal-led government has never fulfilled its promises made to the slum dwellers in the national capital. "Kejriwal had made lot of promises to JJ dwellers but has not fulfilled even one of them. But our party will



open the Namo sewa kendras in all JJ basties (clusters) so that they all are benefited and their problems are solved," Gupta said while inaugurating the first such centre at a jhuggi camp near Chilla Yamuna Khadar on Friday evening. These centres will be opened near other jhuggi camps as

well and will aim at spreading awareness about the social welfare schemes introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the slum dwellers in Delhi. These centres will help 24 lakh slum dwellers in the national capital, the party said in a statement. Gupta credited the Delhi

BJP's 'Jhuggi Samman Yatra' that he carried out last year as the reason behind understanding the people's needs. The 'Jhuggi Samman Yatra' was launched on the occasion of Vijayadashami on October 14 last year to reach out to the slum dwellers in the city ahead of the corporation polls.

Delhi has roughly 30 lakh people living in 675 slum clusters.

The MCD polls for 272 seats are scheduled in April.

The State Election Commission on Tuesday announced the list of reserved seats for elections to 272 wards of Delhi's three municipal corporations -- East, South and North.

The civic body is being ruled by the BJP since 2007.

## BJP, JD(U) agree on 12:11 seat-sharing formula for Bihar MLC polls

**Team Absolute |**Patna

Ahead of the MLC elections to 24 seats in Bihar, the ruling alliance of Janata Dal (United) and Bharatiya Janata Party on Saturday agreed on a seat-sharing formula. Accordingly, the BJP will contest 12 seats, while the JD-U will field candidates in 11 seats. The remaining one seat will be contested by the Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party (RLJP) led by Pasupati Kumar Paras, Union Minister Bhupendra Yadav and Bihar Education Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary of the

JD(U) jointly announced the seat-sharing arrangement in Patna after a meeting with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Interestingly, both the parties did not allocate any seat to alliance partners Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) and Vikassheel Insaa Party (VIP). "After a meeting with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, we have decided that BJP will contest 12 seats while JD(U) will contest 11 seats. One seat has been given to RLJP," said Yadav, BJP leader and Union Minister. At present, BJP has 13 MLCs and the party wants to contest similar number of

seats. The JD(U) has only 8 seats but its leaders demanded a 50:50 ratio for this election. Sources said that one seat is being considered by the RLJP to elect Bahubali leader Surajbhan Singh.

BJP will contest in Rohtas, Aurangabad, Saran, Siwan, Darbhanga, East Champaran, Kishanganj, Katihar, Saharsa, Gopalganj and Begusarai.

JD(U) will contest in Patna, Bhojpuri, Gaya, Nalanda, Muzaffarpur, West Champaran, Sitamarhi, Bhagalpur, Munger, Nawada and Madhubani. RLJP will contest the Vaishali seat.

## NCPCR chief to visit Thanjavur on Jan 30, 31 to probe TN girl suicide

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) chairperson Priyank Kanoongo will visit Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu on January 30 and 31 to inquire into the suicide of a plus two girl. The NCPCR in a statement said that the girl committed suicide after she was forced by her school management to convert to Christianity. The NCPCR will visit the school, meet the parents of



the girl, doctors, and her classmates. The Child Rights Body in the statement also said that the state government has not extended any support to the commission citing election protocol as the state is going for Urban local body polls on February 19 and the notification for the same has been released. Meanwhile, the residents of Michaelpatti in Thanjavur where the Holy Trinity school is situated petitioned the Thanjavur district collector that the school was doing a yeoman service to the people of the area without any considerations on religious lines.

The villagers said that the school had more than 60 per

cent of the students from the Hindu community and the school hostel also has a majority of Hindus. The residents in the petition said that vested interests were trying to dislodge the communal harmony in the village. Azeez, a farmer in the village while speaking to IANS said: "We are 'practicing Muslims' and my children are studying in the school but there has never been any allegation that the school is trying to convert the students' religion. The school has been functioning in this village since the past 163 years and has helped a lot of people from down-trodden backgrounds to come up in life and the BJP and the Hindu outfits are trying to give a communal angle to the unfortunate incident of the Plus two student committing suicide."

The teachers and parents in unison said that the school never attempted any conversion and that the issue has to be nipped in the bud to prevent any communal disharmony in the village. The NCPCR in a statement said here on Saturday that the National

Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) announced on Friday that it will observe January 31 as a 'Day of Betrayal' across India with large-scale protest demonstrations at district and block levels.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) announced on Friday that it will observe January 31 as a 'Day of Betrayal' across India with large-scale protest demonstrations at district and block levels.

In the protest demonstrations on January 31, a memorandum will also be submitted to the Union government. The preparation for this programme was reviewed during the meeting, the statement said. The SKM had taken a decision to this effect in its review meeting held on January 15. The farmers claimed that the government has handed them deceit. The farmers had agitated for more than a year, demanding repeal of the three contentious farm laws.

After the agitation was called off following the government's decision to repeal the three farm laws, SKM had declared that the agitation could

resume if the government fails to meet their other demands, prominent being legal backing for Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all farmers.

The anti-farmer stand of the government is evident from the fact that even after the meeting of SKM on January 15, the government did not fulfil any of the promises made in its letter dated December 9, 2021. "No action has been taken in the last two weeks on the promise of immediate withdrawal of cases filed against the protesters, or on compensation to the families of the martyrs (who died during the yearlong agitation). The government has not announced the formation of a committee on the issue of MSP either," SKM said, adding, "Therefore, the Morcha has called upon the farmers across the country to convey their anger to the government through the 'Day of Betrayal'." The SKM also made it clear that 'Mission Uttar Pradesh'

will continue, through which "this anti-farmer regime will be taught a lesson".

"A call will be made to the people of Uttar Pradesh to punish the Bharatiya Janata Party for not sacking and arresting Ajay Mishra Teni, whose son was allegedly involved in the tragic incident at Lakhimpur Kheri last year," the SKM statement said.

To operationalise this campaign, a new phase of the mission will be announced through a press conference on February 3. Under this, a message to punish the BJP will be conveyed by all the organisations under SKM through literature distribution, press conference, social media, and public meetings throughout Uttar Pradesh.

The first phase of voting for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections is to be held on February 10.

The SKM reiterated that it fully endorses and supports the nationwide strike called by the Central Trade Unions on February 23 and 24 for issues such as the withdrawal of four anti-labour codes, as well as for MSP for farmers.

The SKM also reiterated that the name, banner or platform of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha will not be used by any political party or candidate in the run-up to the Assembly polls in Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh, scheduled on February 20.

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
My old name was Rita Upadhyay. I have changed my name, my new name is Rita Rajora D/o Shyam Singh Rajora. I will be known by my New name Rita Rajora. Address : C-401, 4th floor, Kilandev tower, Shivaji Nagar, Bhopal (M.P.) - 462016

## Samyukt Kisan Morcha to observe 'Day of Betrayal' on Jan 31



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## FIRE ERUPTS IN GANDHIDHAM-PURI SUPERFAST EXPRESS, NO CASUALTIES

A fire broke out in the pantry car of the Gandhidham-Puri Weekly Superfast Express near Nandurbar around 10.30 a.m., here on Saturday.

Nandurbar | Agencies

A fire broke out in the pantry car of the Gandhidham-Puri Weekly Superfast Express near Nandurbar around 10.30 a.m., here on Saturday.

There are no passenger casualties in the incident, said the Western Railway.

WR Chief Spokesperson Sumit Thakur said that the blaze was noticed in the pantry car of the train running from Gandhidham (Gujarat) to Puri (Odisha), after it departed from Nandurbar station, around



10.15 am.

"The WR officials, local fire brigade and the train staff immediately got on to extinguishing the fire and detached the affected pantry car to prevent the flames spreading to adjoining coaches," Thakur told IANS.

There were no passenger casualties in the incident and the localised conflagra-

tion was brought under control a short while later, he added.

Local eyewitnesses claimed that there was panic among the passengers as smoke from the burning pantry car entered the air-conditioned coaches, but it was not clear if any other bogies were also affected by the flames.

The ED is trying to know whether money was collected from the police officials for their choice of posting, or was there any other form of money

**The Enforcement Directorate (ED) in its supplementary charge sheet filed against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh and his two sons Hrishikesh and Salil, in 100 crore PMLA case, has alleged that Deshmukh used to prepare a list of his choice of police officials for transfer and postings. This list he would share with then additional chief secretary Sitaram Kunte and Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh.**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

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The list of 12 Mumbai Police officials including IPS officers is under the scanner of the ED.

The ED is trying to know whether



transaction. Kunte and Singh have told in their statement recorded by ED officials that they were receiving unofficial list of police officials for posting and transfer from Deshmukh. However, Deshmukh has said that he was given the said list by a Maharashtra cabinet minister.

Singh had stated that Deshmukh, a

cabinet minister, used to meet him at Sahyadri Guest House where he was given list of officials for transfer and posting. Param Bir Singh had issued transfer order of 10 DCPs which was stopped by Deshmukh and transport minister Anil Parab. Sachin Vaze who has also been arrested in the case has alleged that Rs 40 crore were collected by the officials who were on that list. This allegation is being looked into. Sachin Vaze was taken back into Mumbai Police after the suspension of 16 years. Deshmukh reportedly played a vital role in his rejoicing. Vaze was given a lot of sensational cases so that he could collect money, it has been alleged. Deshmukh and Vaze used to talk on phone frequently. Between December 2020 and February 2021, Vaze collected around Rs 4.70 crore from the owners

of Orchestra bar situated across Mumbai. Deshmukh's PA Kundan Shinde allegedly collected the said amount from Vaze. Deshmukh's PS Suryankar Palande allegedly passed instructions on behalf of Deshmukh.

The supplementary charge sheet running over 7,000 pages was filed before the special PMLA court of Mumbai in December.

Former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh had accused Deshmukh of misusing his post. He had alleged that it was Deshmukh who was forcing him to collect Rs 100 crore every month from bars and restaurants in Mumbai. He made these allegations when he was removed from police commissioner post after Antilia case. Deshmukh has denied all the allegations levelled against him.

## Maharashtra govt can't distance itself from MLAs' suspension, should apologize: Fadnavis

Fadnavis termed as "not convincing nor acceptable" the Maha Vikas Aghadi government's "attempt to distance itself from its wrong conduct" by projecting the suspension as the Assembly speaker's decision.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The BJP has demanded the Maharashtra government apologize in the wake of the Supreme Court's revocation of the suspension of its 12 MLAs, and warned that any "attempt to disrespect" Friday's court verdict would be tantamount to "breakdown of Constitutional machinery." The MVA government should unconditionally apologize to the people of Maharashtra for abusing the power and indulging in an unconstitutional and undemocratic act," Opposition leader Devendra Fadnavis told reporters on Friday.

"The decision to suspend the 12 BJP MLAs was taken by the three-party (Congress, NCP and the Shiv Sena) coalition government. The government moved a resolution in the state Assembly and got it passed forcibly through voice vote. The opposition was not even allowed to speak on the matter,"

## After seven years, Maha NCC wins PM's Banner at R-Day Camp

After a gap of seven years, the Maharashtra Directorate of National Cadet Corps (NCC) won the prestigious Prime Ministers Banner at the just-concluded Republic Day Camp (RDC), officials said here on Friday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After a gap of seven years, the Maharashtra Directorate of National Cadet Corps (NCC) won the prestigious Prime Ministers Banner at the just-concluded Republic Day Camp (RDC), officials said here on Friday.

Cadets from 17 NCC Directorates across states took part in the month-long RDC this year, in which Maharashtra bagged the PM's Banner for the first time since 2014. The state had sent a contingent of 57 cadets, both girls and boys, from various districts for the RDC 2022. Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented the PM Banner to Major General Y.P. Khanduri, Additional Director-General, NCC

Direktorate Maharashtra, with Senior Under Officer Siddhesh Jadhav as the Banner Bearer and Cadet Captain Nikita Khot as the Trophy Bearer. "Your efforts and resolve and the fulfilment of those resolutions will be the achievement and success of India," said Modi, noting the young profile of the cadets, mostly born in the current century. Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray complimented the Maharashtra NCC Directorate for the honour and said the "state's flag has fluttered again in Delhi." In his address, Modi added that no power in the world can stop the country whose youth start moving ahead with the thinking of nation first, and India's success in the playfield and

the startup ecosystem clearly exemplify this. The PM also elaborated on the measures taken to open the doors of the defence establishments for girls, and said that the presence of a large number of female cadets is a symbol of the 'changing attitude of the nation'.

"The country needs your contribution and there are ample opportunities for that," Modi said. The month-long RDC comprised various competitions like drill, marching on Rajpath, guard of honour to PM, PM's rally line layout, flag area briefing and cultural events in which the Maharashtra contingent performed consistently well.

Brig RK Gaikwad, Commander, NCC Group Pune, complimented the contingent that was led by Lt. Col. The government had unveiled the

new Caravan Tourism policy in March last year but the decision on exempting caravans and campervans was still to be officially cleared.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a bid to promote caravan tourism, the Maharashtra Government has made caravans used for tourism service tax free. The Transport department has decided to do away with the tax imposed under Maharashtra Motor Vehicles Tax Act on all caravans or camper vans that have been registered as tourism entities with Directorate of Tourism (DoT). The government says caravan tourism has immense potential in Maharashtra and this measure will make it more lucrative to tour operators in the state. The government had unveiled the

new Caravan Tourism policy in March last year but the decision on exempting caravans and campervans was still to be officially cleared. In July last year, the Vehicle Transport Department of Maharashtra government amended the rules to exempt caravans or camper vans from taxes imposed on them if they are registered under the new policy. Last week, on the occasion of National Tourism Day, stakeholders who have contributed to the promotion of adventure tourism and caravan tourism in the state were felicitated by Tourism and Environment Minister Aditya Thackeray and Minister of State for Tourism, Aditi Tatkare. The caravans were flagged off in September 2020.

"Flagged off MTDC and Motohom's caravan vehicles for those who love their holidays in the outdoors and independently. Inviting those who want to spend their 'me time' in the wilderness, exploring the beauty of Maharashtra, Aditya Thackeray had tweeted at the time. Medium car-

vans or camper vans have been paying Rs 5,500 per square metre tax to the state government annually. The tax amount for bigger vans used to be around Rs 1.4 lakh. The Tourism department says this move will boost tourism in the post-Covid era and will benefit all the caravan and camper van operators who have registered themselves. Speaking on the move, Lt. Director, Directorate of Tourism, Dr Dhananjay Sawalkar said, "Tax exemption for caravan comes as a big step to support the operators. This

will change the course of travel in Maharashtra and help in establishing Caravan ecosystem in the State. I'd like to urge the operators to come forward, register themselves to reap the benefits of the policy." Motohom Caravan was the first caravan to register under Maharashtra's caravan tourism policy. On National Tourism Day this year, Motohom caravan was flagged off by Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray and Minister for State Aditi Tatkare, at Sahyadri guest house, Mumbai.

## After Sep, Covid deaths zoom past 100-mark, Omicron crosses 3K

For the first time in nearly five months, Maharashtra recorded a massive spike in Covid-19 deaths and Omicron cases crossed the 3,000-mark, though infections continued to fall and Omicron seemed under control, officials said here on Friday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

For the first time in nearly five months, Maharashtra recorded a massive spike in Covid-19 deaths and Omicron cases crossed the 3,000-mark, though infections continued to fall and Omicron seemed under control, officials said here on Friday.

The state on Friday notched 103 deaths -- after the previous high of 183 on September 1, during the second wave -- and marking a new peak in the ongoing third wave.

With the fatalities shooting up to more than double from 42 on Thursday to 103 on Friday, the mortality rate remained stable at 1.86 per cent.

After the peak of 416 Omicron cases (January 22) the state recorded



110 infections of the variant today, compared with 72 on Thursday, taking up the total from 2,930 to 3,040 on Friday.

Omicron has now spread extensively across several districts in the state, and out of the 3,040 cases till date, 1,603 have recovered, with 6,603

positive samples sent for testing from which 187 results are awaited.

The number of people sent to home quarantine declined sharply -- dropping from 15,31,108 on Thursday to 14,61,370 now, and another 3,200 have been shunted to institutional quarantine.

Pune, Nagpur, Thane, Nashik, and Mumbai remain at the top with the highest number of 'active cases' currently in the state, but the afflictions went down from 287,397 a day before to 266,586 on Friday, and the recovery rate improving from 94.32 per cent to 94.61 per cent.

The state's cumulative figures of Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 now stands at 76,55,554 cases and 142,461 deaths, while a total of 72,42,649 patients have fully recovered till Friday.

## NGT asks 100 industrial units in Maharashtra to pay Rs 186 crore compensation for water pollution; raps ED, MPCB

The amount shall be utilised for the restoration of environment and healthcare activities of people in the area under the guidance and supervision of a committee, it said

Palghar | Agencies

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has ordered around 100 industrial units in Tarapur MIDC area of Maharashtra's Palghar district to collectively pay around Rs 186 crore as environmental compensation for polluting water bodies in the region by releasing untreated effluents into them. In the order passed on January 24, the tribunal also pulled up the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for failing to take action under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) against the industry

units despite offences like releasing untreated pollutants into water bodies, and said this "inaction" has encouraged them to continue with the violations "with impunity". It said the ED was taking action under the PMLA in a "narrow sphere" although the scope of the law was widened in 2013 after amendments. Criticising the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) officials for their "extremely negligent and lax approach, careless attitude, non-bona fide conduct and lack of devotion to duty", the tribunal also said that the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) has contributed in causing pollution "by failing to ensure its functions of

## EDITOR'S SPECS

## LONG COVID: VERY DANGEROUS

**P**eople with even mild Covid infections are likely to have hidden damage to their lungs after an initial bout of illness, a small pilot study in the UK has shown. While earlier long Covid was seen among people with severe Covid, the study posted pre-print and not yet peer-reviewed showed that the condition -- which majorly includes fatigue, shortness of breath and even trouble concentrating -- was seen even among people infected with Covid who did not require hospitalisations. In the study, researchers from the Universities of Oxford, Sheffield, Cardiff and Manchester, used a novel xenon gas scan method to pick up lung abnormalities not identified by routine scans, the BBC reported. The team compared xenon gas scans and other lung-function tests in three groups of people. This included people with long Covid and breathlessness who had not been admitted to hospital when infected, 12 people who had been admitted to hospital with Covid but did not have long Covid, and 13 healthy people as "controls". All participants inhaled xenon gas during a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan. The gas behaves in a very similar way to oxygen but can be traced visually during scans, so scientists were able to "see" how well it moved from the lungs into the bloodstream -- a crucial step in transporting oxygen around the body, the report said. Researchers found for the majority of people with long Covid, gas transfer was less effective than in healthy controls. People who had been admitted to hospital for Covid had similar abnormalities. According to lead researcher and lung specialist Dr Emily Fraser, it was frustrating having people coming into the clinic and not being able to explain to them exactly why it was that they were breathless. Often X-rays and CT scans show no abnormalities.

## absolute edit



# 1,500 SAPLINGS PLANTED TO OFFSET CARBON FOOTPRINT OF UPCOMING NOVEL

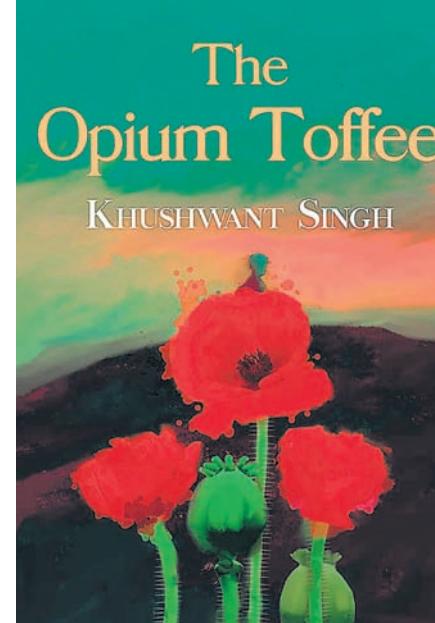
In a first-of-its-kind initiative, the Hoshiarpur Literary Society has collaborated with the Punjab Forest Department to plant saplings in their endeavour to eliminate the carbon footprint of Khushwant Singh's upcoming novel, 'The Opium Toffee'.

Every publishing activity leads to the release of greenhouse gases, and the major contributors are carbon dioxide and methane.

The Forest Department carried out the plantation drive at its nursery in Muallanpur, near here. The department planted 1,500 saplings, including species like Shishma, Kanakchampa, Rajhain, Sukh Chain, Australian Kikar, and Kaindu.

According to author Singh, this noble idea came from a conversation with a friend from the organisation, Sustain to Survive.

"Once he made me aware and calculated the kind of CO<sub>2</sub>e (carbon dioxide and other gases) a book produces, I wanted to mitigate the carbon footprint of the novel and approached the Hoshiarpur Literary Society



and the Forest Department to help me in taking this initiative. "The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests was very receptive to this idea, and I am sure that the step that we have taken will find roots, and many such initiatives will follow. Steps like using recycled paper, energy-efficient printing methods and usage of less toxic printing ink are some of the immediate remedies that the publishing industry can adopt," Singh said. "Even though it's challenging to arrive at an exact figure, rough estimates suggest that 15 trees over their lifecycle can offset one tonne of CO<sub>2</sub>e. Keeping in mind the various steps involved in writing and publishing, the morality of plants in forest conditions etc., I figured that 1,500 trees would be a safe figure to plant," he added.

"The Opium Toffee" will be formally released in February. It is a love story set in Punjab and London of the 1980s. It is a story that traverses through love, drugs, betrayal, politics and fanaticism and opens a window to that disturbing phase in India's history.

Kerosene Films has already optioned 'The

'Opium Toffee' for a cinematic experience. This is Singh's third book to be optioned for a movie. Omung Kumar is adopting his biographical work on veteran marathon runner Faaju Singh into a biopic. At the same time, his previous novel 'Maharaja in Denims' is being adapted into a film by Guneet Monga, the producer of 'Lunch Box' and 'Gangs of Wasseypur 2'.

Singh has also authored 'The People's Maharaja', the authorised biography of former Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh.

"We are very proud of this initiative. The Hoshiarpur Literary Society has always taken the lead in bringing important narratives to the society," said Sanna K. Gupta, President of the Hoshiarpur Literary Society.

"Through this tree plantation drive, we plan to sensitise the writers and the publishing community about GHG emissions that the publishing industry creates. We will soon hold a seminar as well as write to all the stakeholders in the writing industry to consider the options to help build a carbon-neutral world," Gupta added.

## BHU DEVELOPS ONBOARD CHARGERS FOR E-VEHICLES

R esearchers at the department of electrical engineering, Indian Institute of Technology (Banaras Hindu University) have developed a new technology for onboard chargers for vehicles.

They have claimed that this technology costs about half of the current onboard charger technology and can reduce the cost of two and four-wheeler electric vehicles.

Dr Rajeet Kumar Singh, associate professor and chief project investigator, said: "Amid the rising cost of petroleum products and rising pollution levels, electric vehicles (EVs) are the best alternative to conventional IC engines, but lack of high-power offboard charging infrastructure forces automakers to incorporate on-board chargers into the vehicle itself. The vehicle owner can charge the vehicles through the outlet. In such a situation, electric vehicles become very expensive."

He said that with the new technology developed in the institute,



the cost of on-board charger can be reduced by about 50 per cent.

"This will also significantly reduce the cost of electric vehicles. The technology will be completely indigenous and will have a significant impact on driving electric vehicles on Indian roads in a big way," he said. "Lab scale development has already been done at IIT (BHU) and upgradation and commercialization are in progress. A country's leading electric vehicle manufacturer has also shown interest in this new technology and is ready to develop a full-fledged commercial product that can be applied to existing electric vehicles.

Experts from IIT Guwahati and IIT Bhubaneswar have also collaborated for this technology development," he added. Dr Singh said that this research is financially supported by the ministry of electronics and information technology. This innovative technology of the institute will also contribute to the e-mobility mission of the government. With the help of this new technology, the charging infrastructure of vehicles in the country will be improved and the access of the general public to electric vehicles will be possible easily. He explained that the electric vehicle contributes to sustainable development as it improves community health by eliminating tailpipe emissions, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and, with the integration of renewable energy into existing electricity networks.

IIT (BHU)

director Prof Pramod Kumar Jain said: "The technology will help in production of cheap electric vehicles, which will be beneficial for the common man. The technology will support the government's mission to bring electric vehicles on Indian roads in a big way." Prof Jain added that a few projects on developing autonomous vehicle, connected vehicles are already underway at IIT (BHU). One such project is Averera, that has already won first prize globally in the Shell Eco Marathon last year. He further said that the IIT (BHU) is planning to set up an interdisciplinary centre on EV technologies to carry out design, fabrication, and testing of battery management systems, commercialise research, provide solutions to R&D problems and develop human resources in area.

## international

# RUSSIA BANS MORE EU OFFICIALS FROM ENTRY

Moscow | Agencies

T he Russian Foreign Ministry announced that an additional number of officials from some European Union (EU) member states have been barred from entering the country for their actions against Moscow.

These "representatives of law enforcement agencies, legislative and executive authorities" are personally responsible for promoting anti-Russian policies and measures that infringe on the legitimate rights of Russian-speaking residents and the media, the Ministry said in a statement. It did not specify who and what countries are targeted, reports Xinhua news agency. The entry ban also applies to the leaders of some European private military companies operating in various regions of the world,



the statement added, without disclosing details.

The Russian Foreign

Ministry has sent a note about the restrictions to the EU Delegation in Moscow.

## DOZENS OF PALESTINIAN PROTESTERS INJURED IN WEST BANK

**R**amallah: Dozens of Palestinian protesters were injured during clashes with Israeli soldiers near three West Bank cities. Witnesses told Xinhua news agency that fierce clashes broke out on Friday between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli soldiers in villages south and east of the northern West Bank city of Nablus. Ahmad Jibril, emergency director in the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, told reporters that Israeli soldiers shot and wounded 13 demonstrators with rubber-coated metal bullets during the clashes. Clashes also broke out in the southern West Bank city of Hebron and the northern West Bank city of Qalqilya, said medics and eyewitnesses, adding that Israeli soldiers fired teargas and rubber bullets to disperse the demonstrators. There has been no immediate comment of the Israeli army on the clashes that broke out during protests and demonstrations against the confiscation of Palestinian lands and expansion of settlements in the West Bank.



## Global Covid caseload tops 369.4 mn

Washington | Agencies

A mid an ongoing resurgence across the world, the global coronavirus caseload has topped 369.4 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 5.64 million and vaccinations to over 9.92 billion, according to Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Saturday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and the death toll stood at 369,440,775 and 5,648,611, respectively, while the total number of vaccine doses administered has increased to 9,926,334,578.

The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 74,058,529 and 882,275, according to the CSSE.

The second worst hit country in terms of cases is India (40,622,709 infections



and 492,327 deaths), followed by Brazil (25,050,601 infections and 626,170 deaths).

The other countries with over 5 million cases are France (18,596,157), the UK (16,447,349), Turkey (11,343,693), Russia (11,217,423), Italy (10,683,948), Spain (9,779,130), Germany (9,524,797), Argentina (8,271,636), Iran (6,293,695) and Poland (104,636).

## IRAN NUKE TALKS PAUSED, 'POLITICAL DECISIONS' NEEDED: EU

Brussels | Agencies

Talks on the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), were paused temporarily, the European Union (EU) has said. The European External Action Service (EEAS) said in a statement that the 8th round of negotiations in Vienna will "take a break," giving participants time to go back to their capitals for consultations with their respective governments, Xinhua news agency reported. "The talks will reconvene next week," it said. "Participants will continue the discussions on the prospect of a possible return of the United States to the JCPOA and how to ensure the full and effective implementation of the agreement by all sides." Enrique Mora, EEAS Deputy Secretary-General, tweeted that participants will go back to their capitals "for consultations and instructions" to come back next week. "Political decisions are needed now," Mora said. Iran and the five other remaining signatories to the JCPOA, namely China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany, have held rounds of talks in Vienna in a bid to revive the deal, which Washington quitted in 2018 under former President Donald Trump.



## Faced with starvation, Afghans sell kidneys: Report

Kabul | Agencies

Faced with starvation amid the prolonged humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and the subsequent economic collapse, some people in Herat province are being forced to sell their kidneys in order to feed their families, a media report said. According to the TOLO News report, these residents from Injil district have sold their kidneys in the black market for little money in order to survive amid the dire poverty. "We sell our kidneys if someone buys in order to bring something for our children to eat," said one of the residents. Among those who have been selling their kidneys are children and women. According to the law of the country, selling organs or



parts of the body is illegal, but these families say that they have no other options to survive. "We are happy, the security situation is good, but prices are a bit high in the country," another resident told TOLO News. The sale of kidneys due to poverty in some parts of Herat made headlines last year also. But now as a catastrophic human-

itarian crisis looms in Afghanistan, world leaders and officials are taking the warning seriously.

The UK's foreign secretary Liz Truss said: "We are working very hard first of all to bring people out of Afghanistan, and we are using various routes to do that, we are also putting in additional humanitarian aid into

Afghanistan." When asked, she said reports of selling kidneys "are very concerning." Economic analysts say the lifting of sanctions and the release of billions of frozen dollars of the country's assets from world banks would be effective ways to improve the lives of the people of Afghanistan. "The price of goods rose sharply and caused the most vulnerable sections of society to suffer more," said Abdul Nasir Reshtial, economist. "The UK's foreign secretary Liz Truss said: "We are working very hard first of all to bring people out of Afghanistan, and we are using various routes to do that, we are also putting in additional humanitarian aid into

## US FED'S INFLATION MEASURE HITS NEARLY 40-YR HIGH

Washington: A key inflation measure closely watched by the US Federal Reserve rose at the fastest pace in nearly 40 years in December 2021, reaffirming market expectations that the central bank will begin raising interest rates in March to tame inflation.

The personal consumption expenditure (PCE) price index, the Fed's preferred inflation measure, jumped 5.8 per cent in December from a year ago, the fastest annual pace since mid-1982, the Commerce Department announced on Friday. The so-called core PCE price index that strips out volatile food and energy prices, rose 4.9 per cent from a year ago, the fastest annual pace since September 1983, well above the Fed's inflation target of 2 per cent, Xinhua news agency quoted the Department as saying. The latest inflation data came after the Fed on Wednesday signalled that the central bank is ready to raise interest rates as soon as March to combat surging inflation as it exits from the ultra-loose monetary policy enacted at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The central bank has pledged to keep its federal funds rate unchanged at the record low level of near zero for roughly two years. But many Fed officials have expressed in recent weeks that they would be comfortable with a rate increase in March due to elevated inflation pressures.



## ED STARTS PROBE IN MP'S SHRADHA SABURI CHITFUND SCAM

**THE ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE (ED) HAS STARTED PROBING CHITFUND SCAM OF RS 80 CRORE PERTAINING TO A MADHYA PRADESH BASED INVESTMENT COMPANY, ITS DIRECTORS AND OTHER PERSONS INCLUDING BHARTIYA JANATA YUVA MORCHA LEADER ABHISHEK BHARGAVA, THE SON OF STATE MINISTER GOPAL BHARGAVA.**

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has started probing chitfund scam of Rs 80 crore pertaining to a Madhya Pradesh based investment company, its directors and other persons including Bhartiya Janata Yuva Morcha leader Abhishek Bhargava, the son of state Minister Gopal Bhargava. Three persons including the youth

BJP leader are the alleged accused in the case.

The ED had written to Raisen Police of Madhya Pradesh to hand over the copy of the FIR, charge sheet and other relevant documents so that they could proceed with the investigation.

Around 400 investors most of them retired officials and women were allegedly cheated to the tune of Rs 80 crore on the pretext of doubling their money. The victims are from Bhopal, Raisen, Sagar and other nearby cities.

The accused were the board members of Shradha Saburi Commodities Private limited. "The victims approached the concerned police stations in Bhopal, Sagar, Raisen alleging that they invested in the company which had promised to double their money in a short span of time. But nothing happened and they were cheated of their hard earned money," said a source.

Vasant Upadhyay, the manager of Shradha Saburi Commodities Private Limited, too had filed an application before a Sessions Court against the board directors on the basis of which a non bailable warrant was issued against all the accused including the youth BJP leader. Later the court granted him bail. He was

asked by the court to furnish a bail bond of Rs 50,000 and a fixed deposit of Rs 20 lakh. Abhishek Bhargava had said that he was being framed and allegations against him were false. He in fact demanded a CBI inquiry into the matter. He said that he had no knowledge about the company with which he was being linked to. He even threatened to end his life by self immolating if charges against him are proven. He said that he is being targeted as he is the son of a minister. The first arrest in the case was made in 2015. The person who incorporated Commodities was placed under arrest by Raisen Police. He was earlier running a company in the name of Real Bazar, later he set up Shradha Saburi Commodities Private Limited. As per police, he has been living in Raisen for over thirty years while originally hailing from Ghazipur of UP.

In 2016, arrest warrants were issued against three board members and in 2017, the court order was challenged before the Jabalpur High Court which allowed the move against the lower court. Now, the ED has started probing the matter, they can summon the alleged accused to join the probe in coming weeks. The central probe agency will record their statements.

## HONORING MARTYRS FAMILIES UNDER SHAT-SHAT NAMAN PROGRAM



**Bhopal:** Under the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', the family of the martyrs is being honored all over the country by organizing the Shat-Shat Naman Program to pay tribute to the martyrs. In the same series, one MP CTR in Bhopal honored the family of three martyrs Grenadier Tej Singh, Captain Devashish Sharma and Grenadier Dilip Singh Lingwal by giving mementos.

Grenadier Tej Singh was part of an attacking contingent in the 1971 war and laid down his life fighting valiantly. Captain Debasish Sharma was part of an ongoing operation against terrorists in 1994. Even after being seriously injured, he did not care for his life, giving treatment to his comrades, got out safely and himself sacrificed his life. For this bravery, he was awarded the Kirti Chakra. Similarly, Grenadier Dilip Singh Lingwal in 3 Grenadiers sacrificed his life while protecting the mother land on the Line of Control.

## Pace of Corona Infection Is Slowing In the State: CM

Chouhan said that the opinion of the Central Government will be taken in the matter of opening of schools. He said that any step would be taken only after taking information from experts. Decision on opening the schools will be taken afterwards.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that now the pace of corona infection has slowed down in the state. He gave credit to the efforts of the state government. The Chief Minister said that "I am not very stress-free about this, but my opinion is being formed that the peak has gone. Cases have started decreasing continuously. I will do a detailed review in this matter in the meeting on January 30 and 31."

Chouhan said that the opinion of the Central Government will be taken in the matter of opening of schools. He said that any step would be taken only after taking information from

experts. Decision on opening the schools will be taken afterwards.

Chouhan claimed that this time Corona had no fatal power in the state. In Madhya Pradesh, 97 percent have been administered the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine, 93 percent the second dose and 73 percent of adolescent children have been administered the dose. During the last 24 hours, 7,763 new cases of corona infection have been reported in the state, while 10 thousand 16 people have recovered. At present, the recovery rate of the state is 90.08 percent. There are now 67 thousand 945 active cases in the state.

## CM plants Maulshree and Almond saplings at Smart Udyan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan along with Parivarjan Mitras Prakash Malviya, Shri Yash Jain and Sumit Malviya planted saplings of Badam and Maulshree in Smart Udyan on Saturday. Senior journalist Girja Shankar was also present.

Workers of Seva Sankalp Yuva Sangathan, Bhopal are active in the field of environmental protection. They save their pocket money and do the work of planting trees. In view of Corona, the general public is constantly being motivated by the organization to wear masks. At the same time, they motivate people by honouring those wearing masks and by providing free masks to those who are not wearing masks. The members of the organization presented Chief Minister Chouhan with



a handmade picture of him while planting saplings.

Almond is a fruit. Technically, it is the seed of the fruit of the almond tree. The almond tree bears pink and white fragrant flowers. It grows more in mountainous areas. In Asia, it occurs in large quantity in Iran-Iraq. Almonds are helpful in digestion as they contain fibre,

almonds are useful in the treatment of high blood pressure, constipation and heart diseases. It is rich in potassium, magnesium, calcium and Vitamin E. Maulshree sapling planted today is also called Kesav in Sanskrit, Molsari or Bakool in Hindi. It is a tree of medicinal importance, which has been used in Ayurveda for centuries.

## Agri Minister Interviews Crorepati Farmer. In Loss, Say Others

In contrast, in many districts across the state, farmers are dumping tomatoes on the road due to low prices.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh farmer claims to have sold tomatoes worth eight crores this year. This prompted a visit to his house by the state Agriculture Minister Kamal Patel. However, in contrast, in many districts across the state, farmers are dumping tomatoes on the road due to low prices.

Patel arrived at the Sirkamba village in Harda district, which also happens to be his home district, to interview Madhusudan Dhakad, the wonder farmer.

Dhakad says he planted chilli in 60 acres of his land, tomato in 70 acres and ginger in 30 acres. He abandoned

traditional crops like wheat and soybeans, hinting to the minister that this is what worked for him.

The minister's interview with the farmer hit the headlines, but farmers from other districts haven't been so lucky.

Meanwhile, Sadu Verma, a farmer, said, "Exports are blocked that's why the prices are down. We are not even getting 20% price, incurring heavy losses. We have sold tomatoes for Rs 600-700 per carat. Today we are getting Rs 80-90 per carat; we are in loss for 2 years now." In Jhabua, farmers are upset due to low price and have dumped tomatoes on roads.

Not only tomato, papaya is also being sold for Rs 3 to 4 kg. Farmers

say, forget the profit, they can't even recover input costs.

Kalim Sheikh from Khargone is upset over his bumper Papaya.

"Production is good but we are getting Rs 4-5 per kg, we can't export. For us it's a big loss, unable to even get the input cost," said Sheikh.

A state-of-the-art mega food park was built in Khargone in 2016 at a cost of 127 crores, but farmers say it has been of little use.

Senior Horticulture Development officer PS Badole from Khargone said, "Because of coronavirus we are unable to export. That's why farmers are not getting the desired price."

Dinesh Patidar, a local farmer, said in Khargone farmers are in trouble.

"We do have a food park but it's of no use for us."

The problem is also one of storage.

Production of fruits and vegetables has increased by six to eight per cent each year. But there has been no increase in the capacity to store these items which perish easily, they say.

There are 163 cold storages in Madhya Pradesh with a capacity of 10 lakh tonnes but the fruit production is more than 75 lakh tonnes and in 31 districts out of 52 there are no cold storages at all.

In 2018 under Operation Greens scheme, there is a provision of grant of up to 50 per cent for cold storage, but only 15 proposals from the state have been sent to the Centre so far.

## WATER WILL REACH EVERY HOUSEHOLD THROUGH TAP IN JAL JEEVAN MISSION: CM



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the State Government has included the work of providing water from tap to every household in rural areas of the state under the Jal Jeevan Mission. In Rajgarh district also, works worth Rs. 1200 crore are being done in the mission expeditiously. By March 22, the work of 3 out of 5 schemes will be completed. Chief Minister was addressing the inauguration of development works and beneficiary conference programme at village Pipali Kalan in Khilchipur tehsil of Rajgarh district. Chouhan dedicated seven construction works worth Rs 29 crore 72 lakh 75 thousand. He also announced the construction of Higher Secondary School building at Pipaliyan Kalan.

Chouhan directed to get the work of right wing of Kundliyan Dam done at the earliest, so that irrigation facility should be available in the entire area. He said that after the new survey of Pradhan Mantri Awas Plus Yojna in Rajgarh, one lakh new houses would be sanctioned in a phased manner.

Chouhan said that the state government is dedicated to the poor. Under the Mukhyamantri Bhu-Adhikar Awas Yojana, such joint families who are living in the same house will be made the owner of the residential land family-wise. Chief Minister instructed to run a special campaign to give the card of Ayushman Bharat Yojana to every poor. He assured the farmers that the amount of last year's crop insurance would be received from next month. The Chief Minister directed the district administration to ensure that every eligible farmer gets the benefit of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi and Mukhyamantri Kisan-Kalyan Yojana. Chouhan also visited the exhibition of materials produced by livelihood group Khilchipur and

## Three sentenced to six years of imprisonment in Bhaiyyu Maharaj suicide case

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Three years after model-turned spiritual leader - Bhaiyyu Maharaj died by suicide, a district court in Madhya Pradesh on Friday sentenced three convicts, including a woman for six years of imprisonment in the case.

Three persons - Palak Puranik, Vinayak Dudhade and Sharad Deshmukh have been convicted for abetment of suicide criminal conspiracy and extortion of money by an Indore district court.

In a 50-page judgment, additional sessions judge Dharmendra Soni observed that the submission of prosecution witnesses proved that Puranik, Dudhade and Sharad Deshmukh were "mounting pressure" on Bhaiyyu Maharaj to marry Puranik. They were also "mentally torturing and threatening" him for money.

Bhaiyyu Maharaj had shot himself with his licensed with licensed pistol at his bungalow in Silver Springs township in Indore on June 12, 2018. Seven months later, his three close aides (con-



victims) were arrested by Indore police. Puranik was an attendant of Bhaiyyu Maharaj, and therefore their relationship was that of master-servant, but she used to keep her dresses in his almirah and share the room with him. Puranik also dissuaded him from marrying another woman, which showed that she was in the position to exert pressure on him," the court observed. "A servant prevails over the will of his master only when he or she is aware of his weakness," the court added. The suicide had made headlines as Maharaj was a high-profile spiritual figure and some prominent politicians from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra

were among his followers. He was among those five "spiritual leaders", who were accorded with cabinet minister rank by the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government.

The prosecution probed that the accused used to give sleeping pills or sedative drugs besides his regular medicines to Bhaiyyu Maharaj, the court said. "Hence, it can not be expected that he wrote the suicide note in a sound state of mind as he was already under the influence of sleeping pills and also facing pressure from the accused," the court said.

The suicide note recovered from his house then had mentioned that he was ending life due to enormous stress, and his financial rights, assets and bank accounts be entrusted to Vinayak Dudhade, Puranik, Dudhade and Sharad Deshmukh were arrested seven months after his death.

After judgement was pronounced, a group of advocates appearing for convicts said the court has set aside the suicide note and therefore they would challenge the judgement before the High Court.

## February will be observed as 'Swachhata Sankalp Month'

Team Absolute | Bhopal

As per the instructions of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, February-2022 will be observed as 'Swachhata Sankalp Month.' Chouhan has said that the objective of 'Swachhata Sankalp Month' is to bring the state to the highest position in the country by completing the preparation of Swachh Survekshan-2022.

Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhupendra Singh has informed that 'Swachhata Sankalp Month' will be organized from February 1 to 28. He said that Chief Minister has given directions to all bodies to get ODF++ certification in Swachh Survekshan-2022. 5-star for municipal corporations in star rating of garbage-free city and minimum 3-star for other urban bodies. Along with this, instructions have also been given to all the bodies to get at least gold / silver in the motivational race category of Swachh Survekshan. Minister Singh has said that District Collectors should also be rewarded in the Swachh Survekshan-2022. He has given instructions to ensure that all activities related to cleanliness are completed as per the prescribed calendar before February 28. In the calendar released for 'Swachhata Sankalp Month-2022', theme star rating will be done from February 1 to 5, ODF++ from February 6 to 10, Citizen Feedback and Engagement from February 11 to 15 and all infrastructure construction activities from February 16 to 20. In the meantime, the construction work of material recovery centers, composting units and community and public toilets of FSTP will be completed from February 16 to 20.

## SHWETA TIWARI APOLOGISES AFTER MP POLICE LODGE FIR

Hours after the Madhya Pradesh Police registered an FIR against television actress Shweta Tiwari for allegedly referring to God while making a statement about her innerwear, she apologised on Friday.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Hours after the Madhya Pradesh Police registered an FIR against television actress Shweta Tiwari for allegedly referring to God while making a statement about her innerwear, she apologised on Friday.

In a statement by her spokesperson, Tiwari said that it was a statement referring to one of her colleague's previous roles which has been taken out of context and has been misconstrued. Tiwari added that the 'bhagwan' she was referring to was her co-star Sourabh Raaj Jain, who has played the role of Lord Krishna on TV earlier.

"When put in context, one will understand that the statement in reference to 'Bhagwan' was in context with Sourabh Raaj Jain's popular role of a deity. People associate character names with actors and hence, I used that as an example during my conversation with the media," Tiwari said.

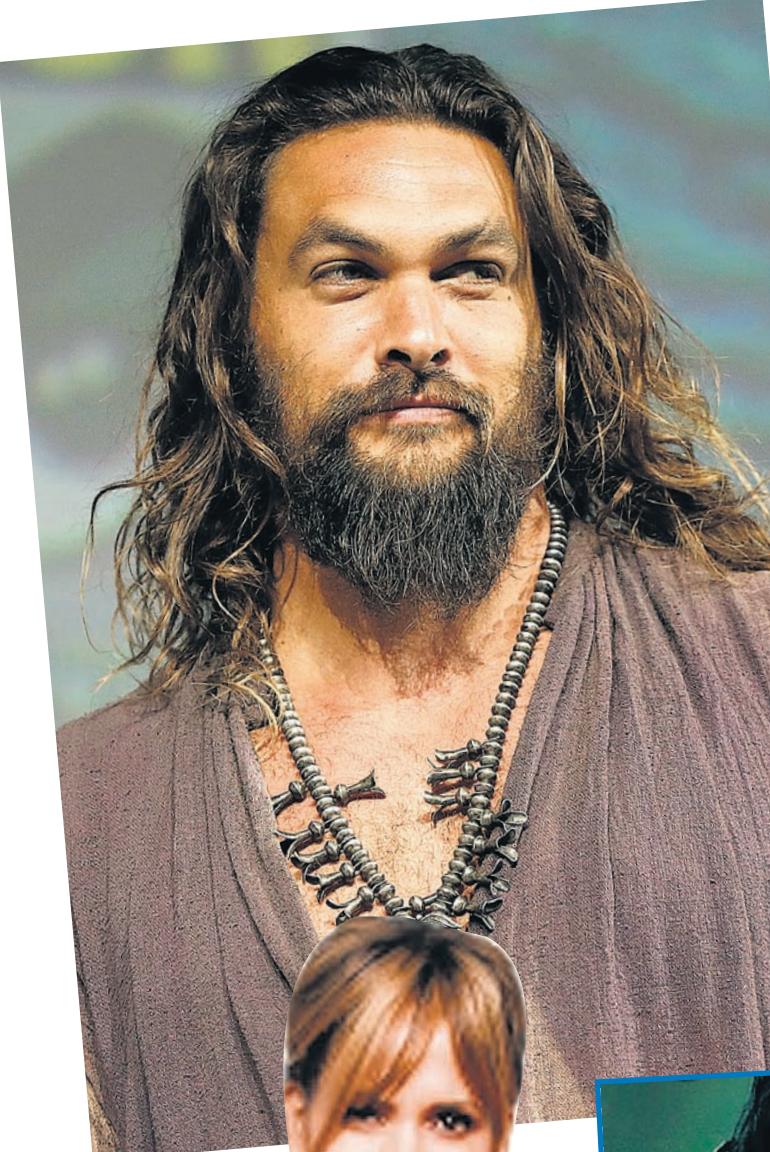


"However, it has been completely misconstrued which is saddening to see. As someone who has been a staunch believer in 'Bhagwan' myself, there is no way that I would

intentionally or unintentionally hurt feelings of people," her statement read. "Please be assured that it has never been my intention to hurt anyone, with my words or actions. Hence, I would humbly apologise for the hurt my statement has unintentionally caused to a lot of people," her statement concluded. The apology came after the Madhya Pradesh Police on Friday lodged an FIR against Tiwari for her alleged controversial remarks during the launch of a web series at an event organised in Bhopal on Wednesday. During the conversation at the event, while replying to one of her colleagues, Tiwari had said, "Mere bra ki size bhagwan le rahe hai (God is measuring my bra)." Her statement created a controversy and the Madhya Pradesh Home Minister on Thursday directed the police to lodge an FIR against the actress for hurting people's sentiments. As per the police, an FIR against Tiwari was lodged in the Shyamla Hills police station on Friday morning.



# Jason Momoa joins 'Fast and Furious 10' cast



Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Jason Momoa has officially been initiated into the 'Fast and Furious' family. Hollywood star Jason Momoa has officially been initiated into the 'Fast and Furious' family. According to Variety, Momoa will star opposite Vin Diesel's Dominic Toretto and the 'Fast and Furious' crew in the upcoming 10th installment of the high-octane franchise.

The team officially welcomed Momoa into the crew via social media late Friday, with a post captioned, "The Fast Fam keeps getting bigger".

Directed by Justin Lin, the film is tentatively titled 'Fast and Furious 10', with the entire crew expected to return, including Michelle Rodriguez, Tyrese Gibson, Ludacris, Sung Kang and Charlize Theron, whose villainous Cipher has loomed large over the films since 2017's 'The Fate of the Furious'.

The movie is due in theatres on May 19, 2023.

After directing the third through the sixth installments of the series, Lin returned to the franchise to helm 'F9: The Fast Saga', which opened in theaters last summer.

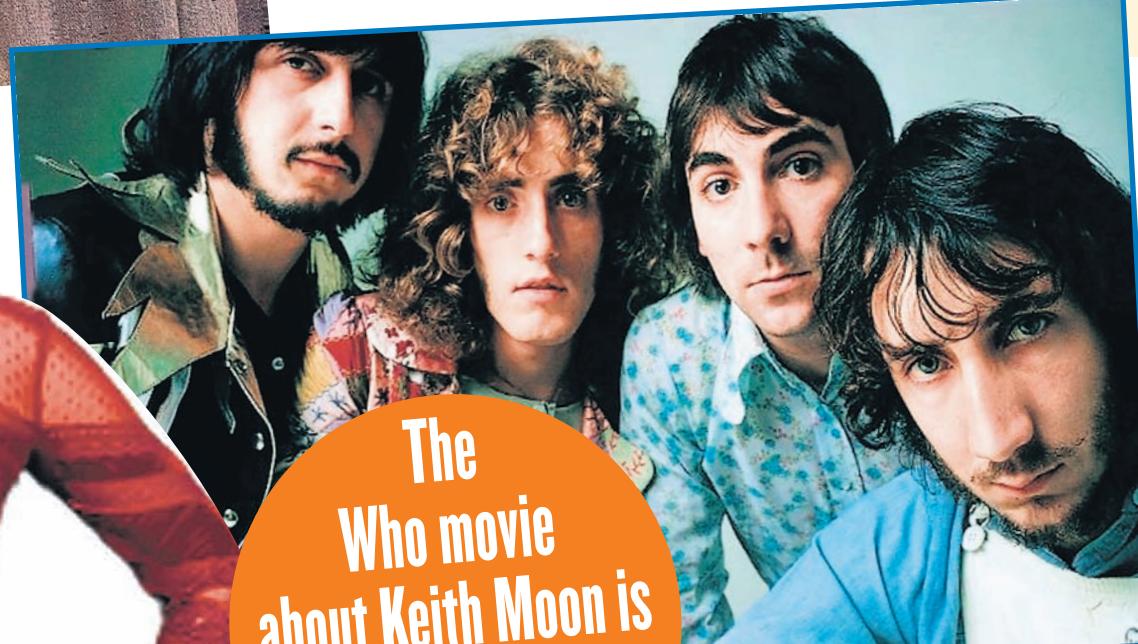
The movie made \$726 million globally, despite having its release delayed by the Covid pandemic. The upcoming movie is expected to be the penultimate outing for Toretto and his crew, which is set to wrap up with the 10th and 11th films.

Momoa would be the latest superstar to join the 'Fast' franchise, which has been revving its engines since 2001. Over the years, the action films have brought in big names to fill out the ensemble, including Dwayne Johnson, Jason Statham, Luke Evans, Kurt Russell, Helen Mirren and John Cena, who featured in 'F9' as Mia and Dom's long-lost brother Jakob Toretto.

Before she became Wonder Woman, Momoa's 'Justice League' co-star Gal Gadot starred in three of the 'Fast' films, beginning with 2009's 'Fast & Furious'.

While Momoa is arguably best known as Arthur Curry, also known as Aquaman, in the Warner Bros. and DC superhero franchise, the actor has been steadily building a massively successful resume, with standout performances as Duncan Idaho in 'Dune' and Khal Drogo on 'Game of Thrones', plus fronting the Apple TV Plus series 'See'.

Earlier this month, the actor wrapped filming on 'Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom', directed by James Wan.



The Who movie about Keith Moon is finally underway

## HALLE BERRY: I ALWAYS HAVE SOMETHING TO PROVE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Oscar-winning actress Halle Berry is one of the best-known and best-paid stars in Hollywood, but she still feels like she needs to keep proving herself. In a clip from 'Screen Queens Rising', which has been shared with People, the actress said: "I feel like I'm someone who is always asked to prove themselves, over and over and over and over again. I'm always having to prove."

Berry, 55, believes she has faced constant obstacles during her time in the movie business, reports [femalefirst.co.uk](#).

The acclaimed actress said: "The fight has been consistent. Obstacle after obstacle, fight every single day." In December, meanwhile, the actress revealed she set her Razzie Award "on fire".

The movie star won the Worst Actress gong at the parody awards ceremony for her performance in 'Catwoman', which was released in 2004, and Berry explained what she did with her Razzie.

She said: "I went to the Razzies (Awards) because I feel like we all take ourselves so seriously."

"If we get an award, if we get the Oscar, we somehow are made to feel like we're somehow better than everybody else, but we're really not."

"You were just chosen that year by your peers, and you were acknowledged for doing what they considered stellar work, if you find yourself face to face with a Razzie, does that mean you're the worst actor there ever was? Probably not."

"You just got the p\*\*\* taken out on you that year by a group of people that can."

The actress won the Academy Award for Best Actress for her performance in 'Monster's Ball'.

And she compared that experience to being handed a Razzie.

She said: "If I can show up to collect an Oscar when you're honouring me, I can certainly show up to collect a Razzie when you say, good try, but do better."

Kyle Allen to play He-Man in live-action 'Masters of the Universe'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Kyle Allen will be seen in the live-action 'Masters of the Universe' film based on his iconic 1980's muscular action figure 'He-Man'. Actor Kyle Allen will be seen in the live-action 'Masters of the Universe' film based on his iconic 1980's muscular action figure 'He-Man'. After being in development with Sony for quite some years, the feature project is now moving over to Netflix for a summer start. There was buzz about this some time ago, but Sony would not confirm then. That rumour now is a reality. Sony, meanwhile, will keep rights to the film in China, reports [deadline.com](#). Adam and Aaron Nee ('The Lost City') remain attached to direct with a screenplay they wrote with David Callahan ('Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings', 'Wonder Woman 1984'). Kyle Allen, who plays one of the Jets in Steven Spielberg's 'West Side Story', will star as Prince Adam/He-Man.

In 'Masters of the Universe', an orphan named Adam discovers he

is a prince destined to be the savior of a faraway land and must quickly learn of his power and the importance of saving his true home from an evil force.

"Masters of the Universe is an iconic property that shaped the imaginations of an entire generation of kids with the message of becoming the best version of your self," said Robbie Brenner, executive producer of Mattel Films. "With our partners at Netflix, we look forward to showing audiences that anything can happen in Eternia. We are continuing to unlock this global franchise in new ways, and we can't wait to see Kyle battle it out with Skeletor in this epic live-action saga." Producers Todd Black, Jason Blumenthal and Steve Tisch, said: "We've always been inspired by the fantastical world of Eternia. This movie has been 14 years in the making for us and our partners and we are so excited to tell an entirely new story for Masters of the Universe with the Nee Brothers and Dave Callahan for Mattel and Netflix and share it with a global audience."



**ADAM BRODY JOINS LIMITED SERIES 'FLEISHMAN IS IN TROUBLE'**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Adam Brody is set to star alongside Jesse Eisenberg, Lizzy Caplan and Claire Danes in the limited series 'Fleshman Is in Trouble'. Actor Adam Brody is set to star alongside Jesse Eisenberg, Lizzy Caplan and Claire Danes in the limited series 'Fleshman Is in Trouble'. It is an adaptation of Taffy Brodesser-Akner's bestselling debut novel. Maxim Jasper Swinton and Meara Mahoney Gross will also be featured in the series, reports [deadline.com](#). Created by Brodesser-Akner, the story is based on recently separated forty-something Toby Fleishman (Eisenberg), who dives into the brave new world of app-based dating with the kind of success he never had dating in his youth, before he got married at the tail end of medical school. But just at the start of his first summer of sexual freedom, his former wife, Rachel (Danes), disappears, leaving him with the kids and no hint of where she is or whether she plans to return.

As he balances par-

enting, the return of old friends, a promotion at the hospital that is a long time coming and all the eligible women that Manhattan has to offer, he realizes that he'll never be able to figure out what happened to Rachel until he can take a more honest look at what happened to their marriage in the first place.

Brody plays Seth, an old friend of Toby's. Swinton and Gross play the Fleshman's children Solly and Hanna, respectively. Caplan plays Libby, the show's narrator and Toby and Seth's friend.

Brody is known for his starring role as Seth Cohen on 'The O.C.', which ran for four seasons. He recently was seen in crime thriller 'Promising Young Woman', alongside Carey Mulligan, Bo Burnham and Laverne Cox and as well as the lead actor and producer in Evan Morgan's 'The Kid Detective'. His other recent credits include miniseries 'Mrs. America' and thriller 'Ready or Not'. Recently, he also starred as the adult/superhero version of Freddy in DC's box office hit 'Shazam!' and next will be seen in the sequel hitting theatres in 2023.

Los Angeles | Agencies

A movie about The Who's late drummer Keith Moon is finally moving ahead, with plans in place to shoot in Britain this summer. A movie about The Who's late drummer Keith Moon is finally moving ahead, with plans in place to shoot in Britain this summer. The project, which is tentatively titled 'The Real Me', has Moon's former band members Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend on board as executive producers, reports [variety.com](#).

The biopic is directed by Paul Whittington with a script from prolific British screenwriter Jeff Pope, who was Oscar-nominated for 'Philomena'.

The outfit is best known for seminal Martin Scorsese documentary 'George Harrison: Living in the Material World', as well as Ron Howard's Beatles documentary 'Eight Days a Week: The Touring Years'. Founders Nigel Sinclair and Guy East are also known independently for movies like 'The Ides of March' and 'Rush'.

Shooting is set to begin on the biopic in June, and the casting process has been rumbling along for a few months already. Producers on the movie are Sinclair, Oliver Vevesy and Jeanne Elfant Festa, along with The Who's long-time manager Bill Curbishley. The fact that production is actually going forward on 'The Real Me' is a milestone for Who frontman Daltrey, who's been

keen to make a film on Moon for years. A movie about the drummer has been in the works for well over a decade with various partners, and it's believed Daltrey first discussed his ambitions for such an undertaking in the early 2000s. The Wembley-born Moon joined the British rock outfit behind monster tracks such as 'Pinball Wizard' and 'Won't Get Fooled Again' in 1964.



## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Lori Harvey



## AUSTRALIAN OPEN

# BARTY OUTPLAYS COLLINS, BECOMES FIRST HOME CHAMPION SINCE 1978

Melbourne | Agencies

**A**dding another feather to her cap, world No. 1 Ashleigh Barty outplayed Danielle Collins in the final to win the 2022 Australian Open women's singles title, ending her country's 44-year wait for a home Grand Slam champion, here on Saturday.

Top seed Barty overturned a 5-1 deficit in the second set to defeat No. 27 seed Collins 6-3, 7-6(2) in the final, becoming the first home champion at the tournament since Chris O'Neil in 1978.

The title is Barty's third Grand Slam crown, and second out of the last three, following Roland Garros 2019 and Wimbledon 2021. The 25-year-old becomes the second active player to claim major titles on all three surfaces, alongside 23-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams.

Barty is also the eighth WTA player in the Open Era to win Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the Australian Open. Appropriately, the only other woman to capture her first three majors at each of those was fellow Indigenous Australian Evonne Goolagong Cawley, who presented Barty with the trophy afterward. It is World No 1 Barty's 15th title overall, fourth on home soil and second in a row following her Adelaide triumph in the first week of 2022. She has won 12 of her past 14 finals dating back to Miami 2019, with her only losses coming to Naomi Osaka at Beijing 2019 and Aryna Sabalenka at Madrid 2020. Barty, who is now on an 11-match winning streak, is the first player to win the



Australian Open without dropping a set since Serena Williams in 2017. "First and foremost, I have to say congratulations to Danielle and your team. I know you'll be fighting for many more of these in the future," said Barty.

"To my team, wow. I said numerous times I'm so lucky to have so many people here that love and support me. We started right together from the start in the second part of my career. I love you guys to death, you're the absolute best in the business."

"As an Aussie, the most important part of the tournament is being able to share it with so many people. This crowd is one of the most fun I've ever played in front of. You brought so much joy, you relaxed me and forced me to play my best tennis. This is just a dream come true for me and I am so proud to be an Aussie," she added.

In the first set, Barty won 15 out of 16 first-serve

points and faced only one break-point at 2-2, which she saved with a clinical one-two punch. Collins' return had been lethal against Iga Swiatek in the semi-finals, but the American was only able to put 11 out of 30 back in play against Barty in the first set. Having saved that break-point, Barty pounced immediately in the next game, bringing up her first of the match by powering away from a forehand winner, and converting it as Collins double-faulted for the first time, a wtatennis.com report said.

An undaunted Collins mounted a strong response in the second set. Barty opened the door with a series of forehand errors, and Collins landed an emphatic overhead -- accompanied by a trademark fiery exhortation -- to break for 2-1. Barty's edgy play continued as she threw in a pair of double faults two games later, and a ferocious Collins return sealed the 5-1 double break lead.

With a third set seemingly inevitable, Barty loosened up again. Her tight forehand errors were replaced by a series of precise winners off that wing to gain one of the breaks back, and from that point, the comeback was on. Collins, serving for the set for the second time at 5-3, reached 30-0, only to be denied by another trio of Barty forehands.

If there was any doubt that Barty's nerveless first-set form had returned, it was exemplified as she took control of the ensuing tiebreak. Cool-headed point construction with a drop shot-forehand-smash combination put her up 4-0, and five points later she sealed her first championship point with a precise forehand pass.

## Lakshya, Malvika to lead Indian team in Badminton Asia Team Championships

*In the absence of senior players including PV Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth, India Open champion Lakshya Sen and Syed Modi International finalist Malvika Bansod will lead the Indian men's and women's teams in the Badminton Asia Team Championships to be played at Shah Alam, Malaysia from February 15-20.*

Team Absolute | New Delhi



Riza Mahreen would look to make a mark in women's doubles.

**Men:**  
Singles: Lakshya Sen, Mithun Manjunath, Kiran George, Raghu M; Doubles: PS Ravi Krishna/Uday Kumar Shankar Prasad, Amsakaran Hariharan/Ruban Kumar, Dingku Singh Konthoujam/Manjit Singh Khwairakpam  
**Women:**  
Singles: Malvika Bansod, Akashri Kashyap, Ashmita Chaliha, Tara Shah; Doubles: Simran Singh/Khushi Gupta, V Nila/Arubala, Aarthi Sara Sunil/Riza Mahreen.

## Odisha Open badminton: Unnati Hooda stuns Malvika Bansod to reach final

Teenager Unnati Hooda reached the finals of the 2022 Odisha Open badminton tournament after beating Malvika Bansod in the women's singles semi-final match, here on Saturday.



Though she won in straight games, Unnati, the world No. 418, had to save three match points to overcome Malvika, who is ranked 67th in the current BWF Rankings. Unnati also saved a game point in the opening game. Unnati, who had made the final on her senior international circuit debut at the India International Challenge in October last year, will be facing 21-year-old Smit Toshniwal in the summit clash for her first Super 100 title. The world No. 163 Smit defeated world No. 69 and another pre-tournament

ment favourite Ashmita Chaliha 21-19, 10-21, 21-17 in a 61-minute semi-final. In the men's singles semi-finals, Priyanshu Rajawat registered a straight games win over Kaushal Dharmamer. Priyanshu, who won last year's Ukraine International, cruised to a 21-17, 21-14 win. In the final, he will take on Kiran George, who defeated Ansal Yadav 19-21, 21-12, 21-14 in the other semi-final.

In the mixed doubles, Treesa Jolly-MR Arjun defeated compatriots Balkeshari Yadav and Swetaparna Panda 21-9, 21-9. The pair will face Malaysia's Nur Mohd Azriyn Ayub and Lim Khim Wah in the final on Sunday. The women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand defeated Arul Bala Radhakrishnan and Nila Valluvan 21-9, 21-6 to set up a title clash against Sanyogita Ghorpade and Shruti Mishra.

start against Maldives' Radu Albot and Ricardas Berankis of Lithuania. The Indian pairs will be hoping to keep up the Indian record of going into the later rounds. Top seeds Luke Saville and John-Patrick Smith of Australia will open a campaign

## Tata Open Maharashtra: Bopanna-Ramkumar to open campaign against American pair

*Rohan Bopanna, who won the men's doubles title here with Divij Sharan in 2019, and his new partner Ramkumar Ramanathan will open their campaign in the 2022 Tata Open Maharashtra with a match against Jamie Cerretani and Nicholas Monroe of the United States in the opening round.*

Team Absolute | Pune

**R**ohan Bopanna, who won the men's doubles title here with Divij Sharan in 2019, and his new partner Ramkumar Ramanathan will open their campaign in the 2022 Tata Open Maharashtra with a match against Jamie Cerretani and Nicholas Monroe of the United States in the opening round.

The draw for men's doubles was announced on Saturday for the ATP Tour 250 event that will be held from January 31 and February 1.

The Indian duo is seeded second and will be favourite to win the title and was on Saturday drawn to meet Austria's Alexander Erley and the Czech Republic's Jiri Vesely, the defending singles champion when the event was last held in 2020 before the Covid-19 pandemic break if they get the better of French pair Hugo Grenier and Quentin Halys in the first round.

Indian world cards, Yuki Bhambhani and Divij Sharan who will open against Dennis Novak of Austria and Joao Sousa of Portugal; while another wild card entrants Arjun Khade and Purav Raja will



start against Italy's Stefano Travaglia and Bernabe Zapata Miralles of Spain in the first round.

Fourth seeds Marc Polmans and Matt Reid of Australia will start against the Italy-Finland combination of Gianluca Mager and Emil Russuvori.

## NETHERLANDS' BEN COOPER RETIRES FROM INTERNATIONAL CRICKET

Amsterdam | Agencies

**T**he Netherlands batsman Ben Cooper on Saturday announced his retirement from international cricket after eight years in Orange. "Today, I announce my retirement from international cricket. It has been an absolute honour and privilege to don the oranges and represent the Netherlands for the last eight years," Cooper posted on Twitter.

"It's been a time filled with amazing highs, special moments and tough lows. There's nothing I would change about it and will look back at my time with very fond memories," he added. Cooper, who was born in New South Wales, made his interna-



tional debut for the Netherlands in an ODI in August 2013, against Canada. In all, he played 71 white-ball internationals for the Netherlands, scoring 1426 runs. He retires as the Netherlands' highest run-getter in T20I cricket, with 1239 runs at an average of 28.15 and a strike rate of just under 125.

The 29-year-old thanked the Netherlands cricket board, his teammates, coaches and parents for everything.

"@kncb\_cricket thank you for the opportunity to live out a childhood dream. To my Netherlands teammates and coaches (past and present)

I thank you all for the amazing memories and couldn't ask for better people to share the field and change rooms with," he wrote.

"To my parents and family who have supported me endlessly. Travelling across the world to watch live and never stopped believing in me, thank you so much," he added. Cooper, who played his last game at the 2021 T20 World Cup in the UAE, believes upcoming talented players will achieve great things for Dutch cricket. "I have no doubt the current squad and the talent coming through will continue to achieve great things for Dutch cricket," he said.

## Indian golfer Aditi cards even-par stays in Top-5 at Gainbridge on LPGA

Boca Rio | Agencies

**T**here were no fireworks from Aditi Ashok, who after a 6-under 66 on the first day, carded a sedate even par 72 on the second at the Gainbridge LPGA here.

As per a report on the website golfxyz.in, Aditi, who began the day at third, slipped a little to tied-fifth, as Danielle King (68) moved into the lead at 11-under alongside Lydia Ko (70). Aditi, fourth at the Tokyo Olympics, bogeyed second and seventh holes and birdied fifth and eighth and parred the entire back nine of the course. This is Aditi's first start in 2022 and a good finish and being in contention will help her build on to a fine

season on the LPGA. Meanwhile, Nishtha Madan, making her LPGA debut, exited early with rounds of 77-80. Ko had four birdies for a 2-under 70 in the second round, while Kang had five birdies against one bogey.

Two players are four shots back of Kang and Ko at seven-under including Jodi Ewart Shadoff (69), who will round out Saturday's final grouping off the No. 1 tee.

The other is Yuka Saso (70), the 2021 U.S. Women's Open champion. Saso has not missed a cut on Tour since accepting LPGA Tour Membership after that victory. A group of five individuals including Aditi share fifth at 6-under overall. As many as 74 players made the cut at 1-over.

## Medvedev fined USD12,000 for outburst against chair umpire

World No. 2 tennis player Daniil Medvedev has been fined USD 12,000 for his outburst during the Australian Open semifinal clash against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas, which the Russian won to set up a title clash with Spain's Rafael Nadal.

Melbourne | Agencies

**W**orld No. 2 tennis player Daniil Medvedev has been fined USD 12,000 for his outburst during the Australian Open semifinal clash against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas, which the Russian won to set up a title clash with Spain's Rafael Nadal. During the four-set victory, the reigning US Open champion called

the chair umpire Jaume Campistol a "small cat" and repeatedly said, "Are you mad?" "Are you mad?" "Are you mad?" (Tsitsipas') father can coach every point?" Medvedev shouted at Campistol. "Are you stupid? His father can talk every point? His father can talk every point? Answer my question? Will you answer my question? Will you answer my question? Can you answer my question? Can you answer my question, please? Can his father talk every point?" Not satisfied with Campistol's response, Medvedev retorted, "Oh my god! Oh my god, you are so bad, man. How can you be so bad in semifinal, your answer? Look at me. I'm talking to you!" Tennis Australia (TA) imposed a fine of USD 12,000 under two separate counts -- USD 8000 for visible obscenity and USD 4000, for unsportsmanlike conduct. "Along with Denis Shapovalov of Canada, who was fined a

## PRIME VOLLEYBALL LEAGUE

# Ashwal Rai to lead Kolkata Thunderbolts

Team Absolute | New Delhi

**K**olkata Thunderbolts' chairman Pawan Kumar Patodia on Saturday announced Ashwal Rai as the team's captain for the first season of the Prime Volleyball League, which begins on February 5 in Hyderabad.

The tournament will witness seven franchises Calicut Heroes, Kochi Blue Spikers, Ahmedabad Defenders, Hyderabad Black Hawks, Chennai Blitz, Bengaluru Torpedoes and Kolkata Thunderbolts compete with each other, will be played at the Gachibowli Indoor Stadium from February 5-27.

The Kolkata Thunderbolts Chairman Pawan Kumar Patodia also released the tag line -- "#KhetBeBanglaJitBeyBangla".

Speaking about being named captain of the Kolkata Thunderbolts, Ashwal said, "I am feeling really good about being given the responsibility of leading the Kolkata Thunderbolts team. The RuPay Prime Volleyball League is a big league and the tournament has provided a platform to many players. I would like to thank our owners Pawan Kumar Patodia and Vineet Bhandari for giving me this opportunity. We will try to win the competition. We have a good team and we are ready to compete in the tournament." The owners of the



looking for someone who has good fitness and Ashwal's physical fitness is immaculate. Ashwal is a very good leader and he is the most passionate volleyball player. He is only born to play volleyball and I am sure he will give his best. I also hope that our Indian players learn a lot from the foreign players in our side," said Pawan Kumar Patodia.

Whereas, Vineet said, "Our main expectation from Ashwal and the team is that they play their natural with best abilities in the tournament."

"The RuPay Prime Volleyball League has provided an opportunity to all players to build their careers. The head coach (Sunny Joseph) has done a fantastic job in building the team and has inculcated discipline in the side. As team owners, we are only expecting discipline and teamwork."

The Kolkata Thunderbolts head coach Sunny Joseph expressed that he is expecting great results from the team this season. "Ashwal is a terrific leader. Our main focus as a team will be unity. The team has to work together mentally and physically. We have prepared well for the tournament and all the players are cooperating well. The support staff and the management have provided excellent support. I am sure that we will do something special this season." The Kolkata Thunderbolts will play on Calicut Heroes in their first match of the season on February 7.



**Actor Indraneil Sengupta, who recently had two major releases 'Aranyak' and 'Human', says he tries to understand his director's vision and tries to do his best to fit into that.**



## Bhumi Pednekar on why she took up 'Badhaai Do' role

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actress Bhumi Pednekar has revealed why she took the decision to star in 'Badhaai Do'. She says her decision to do the film was based on the fact that she gets to sensitively portray a character and give voice to a subject that will be an eye-opener.

Bhumi said: "I'm really proud that content filmmakers, making differential and clutter-breaking subjects, feel I can helm a project that is unique and bring their vision to life."

"I thrive on pushing myself constantly and my decision to do 'Badhaai Do' was based on the fact that I get to sensitively portray a character and give voice to a subject that will be an eye-opener for India." The versatile actress added: "'Badhaai Do' is a hot franchise that balances commerce with content. It is really exciting to be an actor in these times because such subjects are being backed by big producers who want to create a change in society. As a 'human being, I'm drawn to subjects that can lead to a positive impact on people and be a

## I TRY TO UNDERSTAND MY DIRECTOR'S VISION: INDRANEIL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctor Indraneil Sengupta, who recently had two major releases 'Aranyak' and 'Human', says he tries to understand his director's vision and tries to do his best to fit into that.

is that she is a lovely human being. She has no air of seniority or stardom and is a very hardworking actor on set."

"Director Vinay Waikul was very clear about what he wanted and would push his actors to give their best for every shot. And the result is there for everyone to see as Aranyak has been lauded for the performances of the entire cast."

Talking about 'Human', the actor said: "I have got calls and messages from people I haven't been in touch with for 10-12 years and that tells me the appreciation is genuine!"

In 'Human', he was surrounded by

some great actors like Shefali Shah, Kirti Kulhari, Ram Kapoor, Vishal Jethwa, and Asif.

"I try to understand my director's vision and try to do my best to fit into that. I listen to my director, add a bit of my own understanding and feed off other actors. So, it always helps to observe someone like Shefali and Kirti, understand their approach and their process and just react to them,"

Indraneil said.



## SHANTHANU BHAGYARAJ ALERTS FANS ABOUT FAKE 'RAAVANA KOTTAM' VIDEO

Team Absolute | Chennai

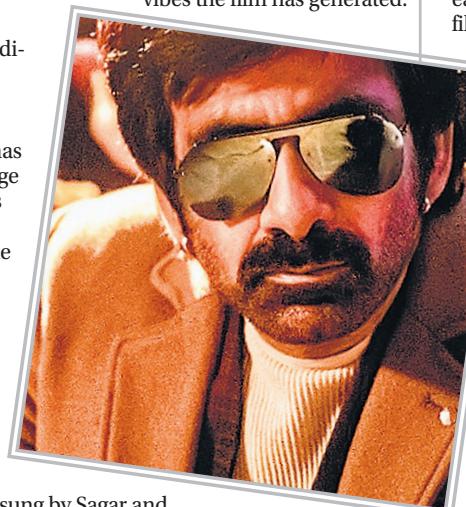
**C**laiming that the rights of his Telugu action entertainer 'Khiladi', featuring actors Ravi Teja, Dimple Hayathi and Meenakshi Chaudhary in the lead, had all been sold out, director Ramesh Verma Pennetsa has said that the film would release on February 11.

Taking to Twitter, Ramesh said: "Khiladi" rights have been sold out like a hot cake. Happy about the positive vibes the film has generated.

'Khiladi' will reach the audience on February 11, 2022."

The film has triggered huge expectations which is evident from the resounding welcome a single released from the film recently got. Titled 'Full Kick', the number sung by Sagar and Mamta Sharma, was released on Republic Day. The video has so garnered a whopping 4.4 million views in a matter of just three days. The makers of the film have also announced that they would be releasing the character poster of one lead artiste of 'Khiladi' every day, starting from Saturday.

Ramesh tweeted: "The Character - Lead posters of other lead cast of #Khiladi will arrive one every day starting from today! Stay tuned."



**Alerting fans and followers about a fake video that miscreants had put out claiming to be the trailer of his eagerly-awaited upcoming film, 'Raavana Kottam', actor Shanthanu Bhagyaraj on Saturday asked fans to ignore it.**

Produced by Kannan Ravi, 'Raavana Kottam' has been directed by Vikram Sugumar, known for having made the critically acclaimed hit film 'Madha Yaanai Kootam'. The film, which features Kayal Anandhi as the female lead, also has Prabhu, Ilavarasu, Sujatha Sivakumar, Aruldoss and Deepa Shankar in important roles.

Shanthanu is betting big on the film, which was completed in September last year and is all set for release.

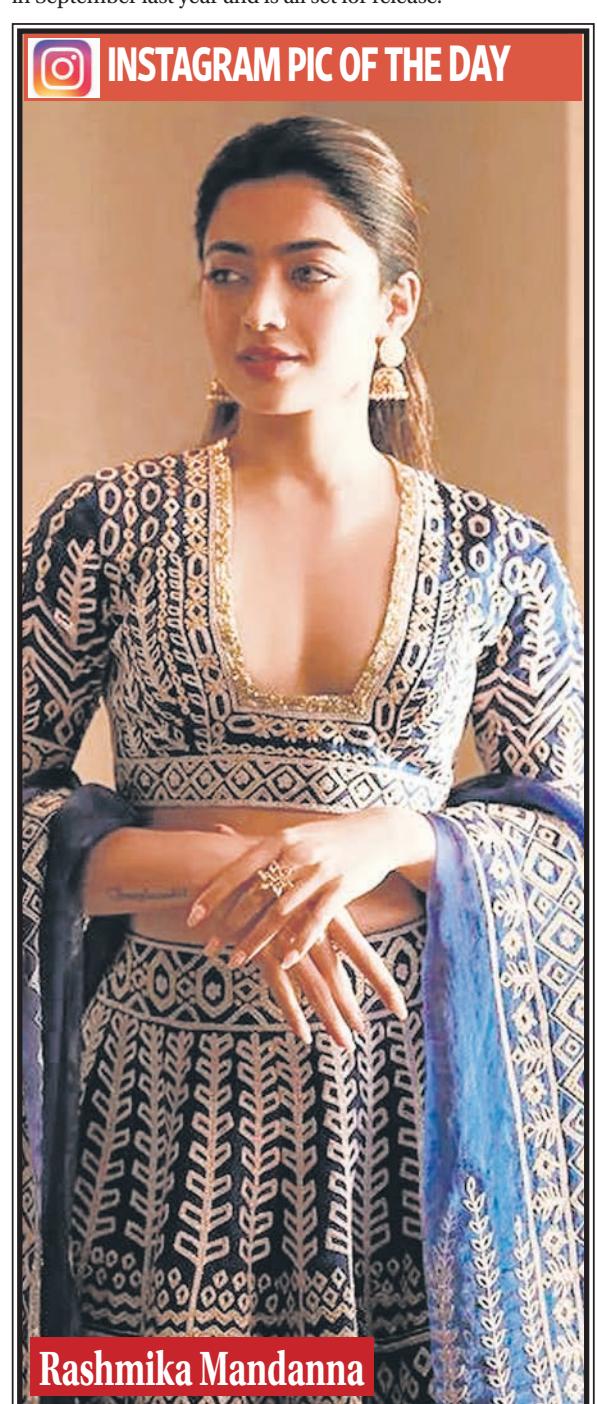
## Himanshi Khurana, Rohan Mehraa shoot song 'Aakad' in Russia

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctors Himanshi Khurana and Rohan Mehraa were spotted in the bylanes of Russia shooting for their upcoming song called 'Aakad'. The romantic song has been produced by RV Singh music and Saga music. The pairing is fresh. Himanshi said: "It was a great experience shooting for the song. Everyone had a great time be it the cast or the crew. We bonded really well in Russia and it's a beautiful place to be. I loved the experience. This is a lovely romantic track." The actress promises that the audience will enjoy it. "The audience surely are going to enjoy it. I am excited about it and you can see I can't contain that. Take care of one another and stay safe everyone. It's not a great time back home. We need to take care of protocols to the fullest," she added.



**Actors Himanshi Khurana and Rohan Mehraa were spotted in the bylanes of Russia shooting for their upcoming song called 'Aakad'.**



**Rashmika Mandanna**