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INDIA LOGS 2,47,417 NEW COVID CASES, ACTIVE INFECTION TALLY TOPS 11 LAKH



SINCE THE BEGINNING OF VACCINATION DRIVE FOR CHILDREN AGED BETWEEN 15 AND 18 YEARS ON JANUARY 3, OVER 3 CRORE TEENS OF THIS AGE BRACKET HAVE BEEN VACCINATED WITH THE FIRST DOSE SO FAR.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In the last 24 hours, India registered 2,47,417 new Covid-19 cases, a significant spike of over 50,000 since the previous day, taking the active infection tally to more than 11 lakh, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Thursday. According to the Ministry, the 11,17,531 active cases currently account for 3.08 per cent of the country's total positive cases. Also in the same period, 380 more people succumbed to the virus, increasing the nationwide death toll to 4,85,035.

Meanwhile, the Omicron caseload has climbed to 5,488, of which 2,162 patients have been discharged from hospitals. So far, a total of 28 states have detected the new highly-transmissible variant, the Ministry said.

OMICRON 91% LESS LIKELY TO CAUSE DEATH IN INFECTED PATIENTS: CDC

Washington: The Omicron variant is significantly less severe than other strains of Covid-19, according to a report from the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). According to the agency, the risk of hospitalisation from Omicron was half compared to the risk from the Delta variant, Daily Mail reported. Among people hospitalised, they were 75 per cent less likely to require intensive care, and even the rate of mortality was 91 per cent lower than that of Delta. While it has long been known by health officials and experts alike that the Omicron variant is not as deadly as its predecessor, it has led to some deaths in the UK, Australia, the US, and India.

'OMICRON RAPIDLY REPLACING DELTA'

"This huge spike in infections is being driven by the Omicron variant, which is rapidly replacing Delta in almost all countries. However, the number of weekly reported deaths has remained stable since October last year, at an average of 48 thousand deaths a week. But for those who are unvaccinated "Omicron remains a dangerous virus."



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, DG, WHO

CHINA CONSTRUCTING VILLAGES AT DISPUTED BHUTAN TERRITORY

New Delhi: China is constructing villages in disputed Bhutan territory, which is less than 30 km from the tri-junction Doklam plateau, sources said. The revelation came after high-resolution satellite imagery surfaced with the security establishments.

Sources said the Chinese villages within the disputed territory in Bhutan are likely to be used for both military and civilian purposes.

Doklam plateau was in limelight in 2017 when the Indian Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) were locked in the bitter standoff for over 70 days. The Chinese had to finally retreat from the area after the Indian troops contested the plateau. Doklam is an area of 100 sq km comprising a plateau and a valley at the tri-junction between India, China and Bhutan. The plateau is circled by the Chumbi Valley of Tibet, Bhutan's Ha Valley and India's Sikkim. In 2017, China was carrying out infrastructural development work at Doklam, to which India had objected. China then claimed that there was a boundary dispute between Bhutan and China and to which India had no claims. However, India refuted and stood its ground, matching the deployment of the Chinese troops for 73 days.

THE TRAIN THAT STARTED FROM BIKANER IN RAJASTHAN WAS HEADING TO GUWAHATI IN ASSAM VIA PATNA WHEN THE ACCIDENT TOOK PLACE NEAR MAINAGURI IN JALPAIGURI AROUND 5.15 P.M. ON THURSDAY. MAINAGURI WAS NOT ONE OF THE TRAIN'S 34 STOPPAGES AND THE BIKANER EXPRESS WAS MERELY PASSING JALPAIGURI AT THE TIME OF THE INCIDENT.

THERE WERE A TOTAL OF 1,200 PASSENGERS ON BOARD, INCLUDING 177 WHO BOARDED THE TRAIN FROM BIKANER AND 98 PASSENGERS WHO BOARDED THE TRAIN FROM PATNA JUNCTION.

THE RAILWAY AUTHORITIES HAVE ANNOUNCED A COMPENSATION OF RS 5 LAKH FOR THE FAMILIES OF THOSE KILLED, RS 1 LAKH FOR THE SERIOUSLY INJURED AND RS 25000 FOR THE LESS SERIOUSLY INJURED.

Team Absolute | Kolkata

At least six people are feared dead while around 67 persons have been injured after 12 coaches of Guwahati-Bikaner Express derailed in Domohani area in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district on Thursday afternoon.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was chairing a virtual meeting with the chief ministers on the Covid situation at the time of the accident, took information about the mishap from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

The Indian Railways said that 12 coaches have been affected, adding that the DRM and ADRM have rushed to the site along with the accident relief train and medical van. According to railway authorities, 4 of the 12 coaches have been fully damaged and the rescue teams, including that from NDRF and BSF, are trying to cut open the coaches with gas cutters. "If there are people inside the fully-

damaged coaches, the number of deaths will increase. One coach is reported to have fallen into the water. We are trying to find out the condition of the coach. It has become dark, so the rescue operation is getting delayed," a senior railway official said.

As per sources, there were around 1,200 passengers on board the ill-fated train.

According to the railway authorities, the reason behind the accident is yet to be determined but there was no problem regarding signal, and it is feared that the derailment took place because of some problems on the track.

"The state rescue team along with three teams from NDRF are working on the rescue operations. The injured persons are being transferred to the Jalpaiguri Super Speciality Hospital, while the seriously injured people are being sent to the North Bengal Medical College," said the District Magistrate of Jalpaiguri, Moumita Godara Basu.

RAIL MISHAP IN WEST BENGAL: 6 DEAD



India may evade US sanctions for buying Russian defence gear

James O'Brien, the nominee for Coordinator for Sanctions Policy, said on Wednesday that in considering sanctions on India, "there are important geostrategic considerations, particularly with the relationship to China" and "so, I think, we have to look at what the balance is".

YOUNG SAID THAT INDIA IMPORTING THE S400 SYSTEM HAS "LED SOME OF MY COLLEAGUES TO CALL FOR SANCTIONS UNDER CAATSA" BUT DECLARED THAT HE WAS AGAINST TAKING ACTION AGAINST NEW DELHI.

"INDIA'S VITAL ALLY IN OUR COMPETITION AGAINST CHINA, AND THAT'S WHY I BELIEVE WE SHOULD RESIST TAKING ANY ACTIONS THAT MIGHT DRIVE THEM AWAY FROM US AND THE QUAD. I'M THEREFORE STRONGLY SUPPORTIVE OF WAIVING CAATSA SANCTIONS AGAINST INDIA, GIVEN OUR SHARED FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS."

Arul Louis | New York

US President Joe Biden's nominee to be the top official dealing with sanctions has hinted that India may be spared sanctions for buying the S400 Triumf anti-missile defence system from Russia. When he appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for his confirmation hearing, Republican Senator Todd Young asked O'Brien about sanctioning India under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) which requires sanctions against countries buying Russian defence equipment. Young noted that Washington has



imposed sanctions on Turkey's defence establishments for buying the S400 system and asked if that provided "any warning or lessons for how to proceed with India".

"I believe they're very different circumstances and of course different security partnerships," he added.

O'Brien said: "As you say, I think it's difficult to compare the two situations ½ with a NATO ally (Turkey) that is breaking with legacy defence procurement systems, and then it is India, a partner of growing importance, but that has legacy relationships with Russia."

"The administration made clear that it is discouraging India from proceeding with the acquisition of Russian equipment," he said, but added that there were "important geostrategic considerations. It'd be premature to say more, but this is something I look forward to work-

ing with you and other interested members," he said.

India, along with the US, Japan and Australia, is a member of the four-nation group that is known as the Quad, which is emerging as a key component in Washington's strategy against China's growing aggressive posture in the Indo-Pacific region.

"Indians have a lot of legacy systems from previous decades and they are interoperable with the Russians systems and the Indians seek to defend their land border from Chinese incursions and defend the Indian Ocean from an increasingly adventurous and lawless blue ocean (Chinese) Navy and the People's Liberation Army," Young said. The S400 system and navy frigate ships India is acquiring from Russia are both "important systems for the Indians", he said.

HARIDWAR DHARM SANSAD ROW: WASIM RIZVI ALIAS JITENDRA TYAGI ARRESTED

Haridwar | Agencies

Recently converted Muslim religion to Hinduism, Wasim Rizvi alias Jeetendra Tyagi was arrested on Thursday. Along with arresting Rizvi, Yeti Narasimhanand has also been taken into custody. Rizvi was arrested in Roorkee. The former chairman of Shia Waqf Board Rizvi to Jitendra Tyagi is alleged that he made this provocative speech at Haridwar's Dharma Sansad. The arrest of Rizvi and the detention of Yati Narasimhanand has also been confirmed by Haridwar Superintendent of Police Nagar (SP City Haridwar) Swatantra Kumar Singh. According to SP City, both the people were caught on Thursday at the Narsan border located on the Uttarakhand-Uttar Pradesh. Till the time of writing the news, both the people have been kept in police custody at Haridwar Kotwali. Police is interrogating both. Karan Singh Naganyal, DIG Garhwal Division said, "Wasim Rizvi alias Jitendra Narayan Tyagi has been arrested from Narsan Border. The interrogation of the accused is going on in Haridwar Kotwali. He will be produced in the court on Friday." Yati Narasimhanand Saraswati was present with Jitendra Singh Tyagi at the time of his arrest. He opposed the arrest. Therefore, the police took him also into preventive custody for the time being, in a view that the peace order is not disturbed. However, Haridwar Police has confirmed the arrest of only Jitendra Tyagi.



BSF Commandant, 3 others held for duping people of Rs 125 cr

Gurugram | Agencies

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Gurugram police have arrested a Border Security Force (BSF) Commandant, his wife, sister and one more person for allegedly cheating of Rs 125 crore in the name of getting a construction tender at the National Security Guard (NSG) campus, Manesar in Gurugram.

The police said on Thursday, a total of Rs 13.81 crore and 6 high-end vehicles (Tata Harrier, Range Rover, Jeep Compass, BMW, Safari and Volvo) were recovered from their possession. The culprits have been identified as BSF Deputy Commandant Praveen Yadav, his wife Mamta Yadav, sister Rituraj Yadav who was a manager at a private bank, and Dinesh. According to the police, the complainant Moneish Israni and three others filed separate written complaints with the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Manesar, Gurugram on January 8 that Praveen Yadav, posing as the Deputy Commandant, Dinesh Mohan Sorkhi and Kamal Singh in connivance with other associates had cheated them of Rs 125 crore in the name of getting the construction tender of Perifill Road, STP and housing flats in the NSG campus, Manesar. Acting promptly, Commissioner of Gurugram police constituted an SIT led by ACP (crime), Preet Pal Sangwan including Inspector Sandeep Kumar, Incharge Manesar crime branch, who with the lead inputs arrested the alleged criminal on Thursday. During police interrogation, they disclosed that Yadav was the mastermind of this fraud. Yadav works as a Deputy Commandant in the BSF and was on deputation and was stationed till the last year-2021 at the NSG campus, Manesar.

'INDIA'S RECOVERY IS ON A SOLID PATH', IS WORLD'S TOP ECONOMIC PERFORMER: UN

United Nations | Agencies

India's recovery is on a solid path", the UN said on Thursday reporting that the country recorded the highest estimated growth rate among the major economies last year and is set to be on the same trajectory during this year and the next. The UN's annual World Economic

Situation and Prospects (WESP) report estimated the growth rate of India's gross domestic product (GDP) at 9 per cent last year and forecast it to moderate to 6.7 per cent this year and 6.1 per cent next year but still retain the highest growth rates among the large economies. The growth projections are 4 per cent this year and 3.5 per cent in 2023. The report said: "India's economic recovery is on a solid path, amid rapid vaccination progress, less stringent social restrictions and still supportive fiscal and monetary stances." The WESP raised India's growth estimate for last year by 1.7 per cent and the growth projection for this year by 0.8 per cent from the expectations in its report a year ago. It ascribed slowing down of growth from 9 per cent last year to 6.7 per cent this year to waning base effects. The report estimated India's consumer price inflation at 5.9 per cent last year and projected to go down to 5.6 per cent this year and 5.3 per cent next year.



BATTLE FOR UP: CONG 1ST LIST OF 125 CANDIDATES INCLUDES 50 WOMEN

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday announced the first list of candidates of her party and declared the names of 125 candidates in which 50 are women, constituting 40 per cent of the candidates.

The women have been chosen from diverse backgrounds. These include the mother of Unnao Rape Survivor; Poonam Pandey an Asha Worker; Nida Ahmed, a journalist; and social activist Sadaf Jafar from Lucknow who was at forefront of anti-CAA protests.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had earlier announced that 40 per cent of the tickets would be given to women and had coined a slogan - 'girls can fight'.

Priyanka said, "We wanted to give a chance to the people who have been fighting for their rights, so the real people will get the chance to fight for their cause." She said that political rights need to be given to the women.

The Congress leader said that the party has tried to change the political narrative of the state and wants that there should be dis-



BJP LIKELY TO RELEASE 1ST LIST ON FRIDAY

New Delhi: BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting to select candidates for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, concluded on Thursday and the first list is expected to be released on Friday, party sources said. A total of 172 candidates have been finalised for three of the seven-phased polls in the state. For the first time, saffron party held a hybrid meeting, which was attended virtually by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Dinesh Sharma, election in charge and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, General Secretary (organisation) B.L. Santhosh were present at the headquarters in the national capital.

cussion on employment, health, law and order and other women related issues.

Rahul Gandhi after the announcement of the first list said, "The daughter of Unnao who faced injustice at the hand of BJP will fight for justice and win."

On Thursday, Priyanka Gandhi announced the first list of 125 candidates.

These include Aradhna Mishra the CLP leader; Ajay Kumar Lallu State President; Suhail Akhtar sitting MLA; Ajay Kapoor, former MLA; Akhilesh Pratap Singh, national spokesperson of the party; Vivek Bansal party In-charge of Haryana; Louis Khurshheed, wife of Salman Khurshheed and former MLA.

The Congress has focused on women in the ticket distribution and have fulfilled the promise of 40 per cent in the first list. The party said it has given 40 per cent tickets to the youth in the party.

The Congress leader said that the party has tried to change the political narrative of the state and wants that there should be discussion on employment, health, law and order and other women related issues.

BJP, NISHAD PARTY AND APNA DAL FINALIZE SEAT SHARING FORMULA

New Delhi: Seat sharing formula between BJP and its alliance partners, Nishad Party and Apna Dal has been finalized. Both the Apna Dal and Nishad party are likely to contest a dozen seats each. Sources said that the formula for seat sharing was decided after a meeting of leaders of both the alliance partners with union home minister Amit Shah on Wednesday night. "Last night, Nishad Party chief Sanjay Nishad, union minister and Apna Dal chief Anupriya Patel separately met Shah and discussed the formula for seats sharing. In the meeting the seat sharing formula was finalized," sources said. It is learnt that Nishad party will contest about 15 to 18 seats and Apna Dal will contest 10 to 14 seats. "Couple of candidates of both the parties may contest on the BJP symbol," sources said.

India, UK Start Major Trade Talks



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Britain and India began hammering out a post-Brexit trade deal on Thursday, with London seeking a cut in tariffs on Scotch whisky and greater access to the Asian giant's services and tech sectors.

New Delhi, which is notoriously reticent about lowering trade barriers and was dubbed the "tariff king" by former US president Donald Trump, wants in return to make it easier and cheaper for Indians to obtain British visas.

A joint statement after Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and British Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan formally launched the talks in Delhi reiterated a target of doubling bilateral trade volumes by 2030.

"Both sides have agreed that we will focus initially on areas which are of mutual benefit and where there is

less disagreement, and for which we have set a very aggressive timeline of next few months," Goyal told reporters.

"We feel confident that there is so much complementarity between the two economies that we should easily be able to come up with a very substantive agreement in the initial phase... I think we are committed to concluding this negotiation in about a year's time," he said.

"The UK has world-class businesses and expertise we can rightly be proud of, from Scotch whisky distillers to financial services and cutting-edge renewable technology," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a statement.

"We are seizing the opportunities offered in growing economies of the Indo-Pacific to cement our place on the global stage and deliver jobs and growth at home," he said.

SP-RLD RELEASE FIRST LIST OF 29 CANDIDATES FOR UP POLLS

Lucknow: The Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Lok Dal, on Thursday, released their first list of candidates for the UP Assembly elections. The two parties jointly released a list of 29 candidates - nine from the SP and 20 from the RLD.

Prominent SP candidates include Nahid Hasan from Kairana, Pankaj Malik from Charthawal, Shahid Manzoor from Kithor, and Rafiq Ansari from Meerut. Other are Zafar Alam from Aligarh, Salman Saeed from Kol, Amarpal Sharma from Sahibabad, Aslam Chaudhary from Dhaulana, and Kunwar Singh Wakil from Agra Cantt. The RLD candidates are Prasann Chaudhary from Shamli, Anil Kumar from Purkazi, Rajpal Saini from Khatauli, Munshi Ram from Nahthaur, Ahmad Hamid from Baghat, and Madan Bhaiyya from Loni.

The RLD has also named Gajraj Singh as its candidate from Hapur. Singh had joined the party on Thursday morning. Avatar Singh Bhadana has been named as the candidate from Jewar. He had crossed over from the BJP on Wednesday.

Minor girl kidnapped, forced to marry drug addict, 3 held

A 15-year-old girl who was kidnapped from the national capital by a woman for getting her married to her drug addict brother, was rescued and the accused were arrested.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The woman along with her boyfriend kidnapped the girl finding her as a soft target. Additional Commissioner of Police, South East Delhi, Surendera Chaudhary told IANS that the accused were identified as Ranjan Kumar, Dileep Kumar and Jyoti.

"With their arrest, one minor girl has been emancipated and reunited with her family. They had even performed the marriage of the girl with one of the accused," the police said.

In August 2021, a complaint was received at Kalkaji Police Station with regard to the kidnapping of a 15-year-old girl. The police after lodging a case started the

investigation. During the probe, the team came to know that the family of victim originally belongs to Rajasthan's Ajmer and are of tribal caste.

The police team scanned a lot of CCTV cameras to get a clue about the kidnapers which led the police to Sangam Vihar but after that there was no progress.

NEET-UG COUNSELLING TO BEGIN FROM JAN 19

New Delhi: Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday said NEET-UG counselling will commence from January 19. He extended his best wishes to students.

"Dear students, counselling for NEET-UG is being started by the MCC from January 19.

"You all are the future of the country and I hope that all of you will give a new direction to your career with the mantra 'service is religion'. I extend my best wishes to all," Mandaviya tweeted.

2.5 KG RDX, ONE DETONATOR SEIZED IN PUNJAB

CHANDIGARH | Agencies

Close on the heels of terror module backed by the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) busted, Punjab Police on Thursday said it has recovered 2.5 kg RDX, one detonator, codex wire, five explosive fuses along with wires, 12 cartridges of AK 47 Assault Rifle.

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



six operatives of ISYF arrested on Monday. He confessed

to have carried out two grenade attacks in Pathankot, including at an Army camp in Pathankot. Senior Superintendent of Police Kanwardeep Kaur said following revelations of Amandeep teams were sent to Gurdaspur district and recovered the explosive material, which according to Amandeep was to be used in assembling of IEDs. She said the assignment was provided by self-proclaimed chief of ISYF (Rode) Lakhbir Singh Rode, presently residing in Pakistan, to Amandeep through his associate and handler of this terror module, Sukhpreet Singh.

K'TAKA CONG POSTPONES MEKEDATU PADAYATRA



BENGALURU | Agencies

After criticism by the Karnataka High Court and crackdown by the BJP government for conducting 'Mekedatu padayatra' amid Covid crisis, the state Congress unit has announced temporary withdrawal of the 10-day padayatra.

Announcing the decision in the press conference, Opposition leader Siddaramaiah said, "after the relaxation of Covid guidelines, padayatra would be taken up again from Ramanagar, where it is being stopped for now," he said. State President D.K. Shivakumar announced that it is a sacrifice the Congress party is making

in the interest of public health. "It is a temporary break in the interest of people and the decision was taken respecting the sentiments of the court," he said. "It is a temporary stop, not a permanent stop," he added. Siddaramaiah explained that this is the fifth day of padayatra and they

were supposed to begin from Ramanagar to Bidadi. After reaching Kengeri the rally would have reached Bengaluru city. "Since more than 15,000 infections are reported in Bengaluru, we are a responsible political party and at this juncture we are taking decision in the interest of people," he stated.

Plea in HC seeks regulation of protests blocking Delhi roads

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A petition has been filed in the Delhi High Court seeking regulation of protests by various political parties, blocking roads and causing inconvenience to the commuters and general public.

The petition, which was in the nature of a Public Interest Litigation, will be heard on January 24.

The plea, filed by advocate Ankur Bhasin, contended that the protests lead to traffic jams, cause great noise and air pollution, and are a form of public nuisance which needs to be curbed by the relevant authorities.

"The genre of protest referred to the present writ petition, if left unregulated, would render nation's loss and leave an irreparable adverse impact upon the global image of the nation," the plea stated.

It said since the petitioner's and other common citizens' fundamental right of Right to Life (Article 21) has been violated, and as such the present petition is filed before the court to secure the roads from being blocked



for the purposes of protest since this not only cause hardships to the general public but also to emergency services such as ambulance and fire fighters. Narrating a personal ordeal he faced while he was going to the hospital after falling ill, the lawyer said he faced hardships at Azadpur flyover which was choked by protestors of a political party that caused traffic jams in the locality.

Wet spell over east, central India, dense fog over north: IMD

Cold wave conditions in isolated pockets are very likely over northeast Rajasthan, west Uttar Pradesh, and west Madhya Pradesh during next three days while cold day conditions in isolated pockets are very likely over Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, west Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and north Rajasthan during next two days.

Meanwhile, no significant change in minimum temperatures is very likely over north-west and central India during next 4-5 days, no significant change in minimum temperatures over Gujarat the next two days and a gradual rise by 2-4 degrees Celsius thereafter.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday predicted a wet spell over east and adjoining central India during next two days, which will decrease significantly thereafter, and dense to very dense fog over North India during next 4-5 days.

A Western Disturbance (WD) would affect northwest Himalayas on January 16 and 17 and another WD would affect northwest India from January 18 to 20.

There is a feeble Western Disturbance, seen as a trough in upper tropospheric levels, and there is another trough that runs from north interior Karnataka to north interior Odisha in lower tropospheric levels. A cyclonic circulation lies over south Konkan in lower tropospheric levels. Under the influence of above systems, isolated light rainfall/snowfall is very likely over higher reaches of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Muzaffarabad on Friday.

Fairly widespread to widespread light/moderate rainfall is very likely over Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Sikkim, Telangana, and coastal Andhra Pradesh on



Friday and isolated to scattered light/moderate rainfall over Vidarbha and Chhattisgarh on Friday, the IMD said.

Isolated rainfall is likely over Arunachal Pradesh on January 14 and 15, and very likely over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura till January 15. "Under the influence of a cyclonic circulation over southwest Bay of Bengal and another over south Tamil Nadu in lower tropospheric levels, there will be isolated light rainfall/thunder-shower over Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala, and Mahe during next five days," the IMD said.

"Two fresh Western Disturbances are very likely to affect northwest India, first from January 16 and likely to cause isolated to scattered precipitation on January 16 and 17, and second from January 18 and likely to cause light/moderate scattered to fairly widespread precipitation over Western Himalayan Region and light isolated to scattered rainfall over adjoining plains for subsequent 2-3 days."

Similarly, there is likely to be no significant change in minimum temperatures over east India during the next three days and fall by 2-3 degrees Celsius thereafter, the IMD bulletin



ALL PREPARATIONS COMPLETED TO DEAL WITH THE THIRD WAVE OF CORONA

Public Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr. Prabhuram Choudhary Inaugurated SNCU and LMO Plant at JP Hospital

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Public Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr. Prabhuram Choudhary has said that all the preparations of the Health Department are complete to deal with the third wave of corona. Adequate arrangements for oxygen supported beds and oxygen supply have been made in the hospitals. Health Minister Dr. Choudhary gave this information after dedicating the newly constructed SNCU and LMO plant at JP Hospital on Thursday.

Choudhary said that a plant of 6 thousand liters of liquid oxygen capacity has been made at JP Hospital in Bhopal. Its cost is Rs 75 lakh. He said that a 10-bedded Paediatric Intensive Care Unit has been set up at JP Hospital at a cost



of Rs. 5 lakh 32 thousand. An 18 bedded Covid ICU ward has also been prepared at a cost of Rs 1 crore 18 lakh. He informed that oxygen plants of capacity 18 thou-

sand 830 LPM (Litre Per Minute) have been set up in Bhopal district itself. In an informal discussion with the media regarding the preparations to deal with the third

wave of corona, Choudhary said that regular follow-up of patients is being done in home isolation. He said that the corona infected patients who have been advised for home isolation are being contacted twice a day for follow-up. For this, doctors have been appointed in the control room. Prescribed medicines are also being made available for home isolation patients. Choudhary said that patients with mild symptoms of corona, whose homes do not have enough space for isolation, are being admitted to Covid Care Centres and being treated. Choudhary said that remarkable work has been done in the state in the field of Covid vaccination. With the cooperation of all sections of the society and community, the state has made significant achievements in vaccination.

MP govt to bring Act to control online gaming

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government is soon going to introduce an Act pertaining to online gaming, which will have a set of guidelines for the companies, said state Home minister Narottam Mishra on Thursday.

The minister said that many children have lost their lives while gaming online and it has become a serious concern for the parents. The government is soon going to bring an Act to control online gaming, he said. "We prepared a draft for online gaming and it will be introduced soon. Once the law comes into force, the activities related to online gaming will be controlled and the companies operating online gaming can be tightened. Apart from all these, action can be taken against those conducting such activities without permission,"



Mishra added. In an incident on Wednesday, a 12-year-old boy committed suicide by hanging due to the Free Fire game. He was fond of playing this game. Referring to the incident, the Home Minister said that this was a serious matter. "Sad incidents are happening because of this type of game. To prevent such incidents, the law will be implemented soon," he said. Recently, a teenager in Ujjain created a false story of his own kidnapping after being scolded by his parents for spending Rs 1,500 on a mobile game. A similar case happened in

Dewas district where a Class 11 student died while playing a game on his mobile. While playing the game, he fell from his bed and when the family members took him to the hospital, the doctors declared the student brought dead. During the winter session of Parliament, Rajya Sabha Chairman and Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu on December 3, 2021 had called online games a "big menace" and had directed the Minister for Electronics, Information and Technology to examine the possibility of regulating them.

48 cops in Bhopal test Covid positive

Team Absolute | Bhopal

At least 48 police personnel, including senior officials, have tested positive for Covid-19 in Bhopal in the past one and a half week, officials said.

According to Bhopal Police, majority of the Covid positive personnel are from special armed forces. Of them, seven are serving in district police force and two are Additional Commissioner of Police (ACPs) of the traffic department.

In many cases, family members of the Covid infected police officers have also tested positive. The district police has, therefore, directed officials to strictly follow Covid protection norms and asked them to maintain social distancing



during field work.

The Additional Commissioner of Police (Bhopal), Sachin Atulkar said: "The cops are advised to be careful while going home after field work and follow Covid norms to keep their families safe. Police stations

are being sanitised daily and other Covid protection norms are being followed strictly to ensure the safety of people personnel as well as the general public."

Bhopal district police have set up a special control room to communicate with Covid

infected cops and to monitor their health conditions regularly and reach out to them, if needed. Most of these cops are recovering under home isolation.

As of now, no quarantine centre has been set up specially for the police, however, the system would be in place soon. Madhya Pradesh is witnessing an exponential growth in daily Covid-19 cases over the last one week and on Wednesday a total of 3,639 new infections were reported.

In the last 12 days, the state has registered a total of 16,741 Covid infections, majority of them in Indore and Bhopal.

However, other districts such as Gwalior, Ujjain, Jabalpur and Sagar have also witnessed a surge.

CM TO RELEASE MAGAZINE "SUSHASAN DIGEST"

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will release "Madhya Pradesh Good Governance and Development Report" and magazine "Sushasan Digest" at Kushabhau Thakre Hall (Minto Hall) on January 14 at 6 pm in orientation programme of Chief Minister Young Fellowship Development Programme. Chouhan will discuss with about 15 MoU partners of Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Good Governance and Policy Analysis and 52 selected candidates in orientation programme of Chief Minister Young Fellowship Development Programme. In the second session of the programme, there will be a panel discussion on "Madhya Pradesh Good Governance and Development Report."

Bamboo crop is safer and more profitable than other crops: Varnwal

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Bamboo crop is safer and more profitable compared to other crops. The specialty of bamboo crop is that it does not get damaged in any season. Principal Secretary, Forest Ashok Varnwal said this in a one-day workshop of farmers for bamboo plantation in Harda.

Varnwal said that bamboo crop is also better in the sense that once planted, its production is obtained every year. Along with the low cost, it also involves less human labour. As many as 625 saplings can be planted in one hectare. Farmers can buy bamboo plants from government nurseries. He said that bamboo crop is



beneficial for the environment, increases greenery and helps in balancing the temperature.

State Bamboo Mission CEO UK Subudhi informed that bamboo plantation is done by farmers on private land under the State Bamboo Mission

Scheme. For the planted bamboo saplings, a grant is given to farmers at the rate of Rs 120 per plant in 3 years. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief of Forest Force RK Gupta, Collector, other officials and farmers were present.

ANNUAL REVISION OF VOTER LIST OF URBAN BODIES-22 WILL BE DONE

Bhopal: The programme for the annual revision of photo voter list has been fixed by the State Election Commission for the election of urban bodies on the basis of the reference date of January 1, 2022. Secretary State Election Commission BS Jamod has informed that registration and appointment of assistant registration officers, master trainers, determination of claim-objection centres and district level training will be done from January 14 to 17. A meeting will be held on February 14 to resolve disputes related to shifting of voters. A separate programme will be announced regarding the draft publication of the voter list.

Remote Control Operation System Based Sub-centres Will Be Made: Tomar

MADHYA PRADESH POWER TRANSMISSION COMPANY WILL NOW MAKE NEW SUBSTATIONS BASED ON REMOTE CONTROL OPERATION SYSTEM. ENERGY MINISTER PRADYUMAN SINGH TOMAR HAS INFORMED THAT EFFORTS WILL BE MADE TO CONVERT THE EXISTING SUB-STATIONS INTO REMOTE CONTROL OPERATION SYSTEMS.

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This will improve the maintenance and operation of transmission lines. Tomar has informed that in view

of the wide expansion in ultra-high-pressure substations and transmission lines, test and communication circles have been formed in Guna and Mandasaur districts in the setup of field offices for operation of ultra-high-pressure substations. Besides, testing divisions have been made in Narsinghpur and Singrauli and 400 KV sub-station divisions at Ujjain, Mandasaur and Badnawar. Temporarily functional 400 KV sub-station divisions at Ashta, Pithampur and Julwania have been converted into regular divisions. For the maintenance of very high-pressure lines, in addition to the 3 very high-pressure maintenance circles currently operating, a very high-pressure divisional circle Gwalior has been created. Simultaneously, in addition to the 8 operational very high-pressure maintenance divisions, 4 ultra-high-pressure maintenance divisions Ujjain, Barwah, Bina and Seoni have been created.

CM PLANTS GULMOHAR SAPLING IN DELHI MP BHAWAN COMPLEX



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a sapling of Gulmohar in the premises of Madhya Pradesh Bhawan during his visit to Delhi on Thursday. Chouhan is continuously planting saplings every day as per his resolve. Last year on February 19, 2021, Chief Minister had taken this pledge while planting saplings in Shambhudhara area of Amarkantak. Today on January 13, 2022 is the 329th day of planting saplings by Chouhan. Gulmohar is considered one of the most beautiful trees in the world. Flowers blooming in big bunches among the leaves of Gulmohar give a distinct attraction to this tree. In summer, instead of leaves, Gulmohar trees are laden with flowers. It is also rich in medicinal properties.

MPHC reaffirms Choudhary as State Bar Council Chairman

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High Court of Madhya Pradesh on Thursday reaffirmed Vijay Kumar Choudhary (Advocate, Ex-Judge) as the rightful Chairman of the State Bar Council of Madhya Pradesh.

A Writ petition of Quo Warranto titled Vijay Kumar Choudhary and ors. v. Shailendra Verma and anr. (W.P. No. 29267/2021) was moved by 13 members of the State Bar Council of MP against Shailendra Verma who usurped the office of the Chairman of State Bar Council, acting beyond his legal capacity as a member of the State Bar Council on 12.12.2021.

Bar Council of India took notice of the controversy and dispute going on at the State Bar in a Revision petition filed by a member and granted an interim order on 15.12.2021 directing the Committees of State Bar Council to continue functioning as before 12.12.2021. The division bench of the High Court of Madhya Pradesh constituting of Chief Justice Ravi Malimath and Purushendra Kaurav J interpreted



the order dated 15.12.2021 of the Bar Council of India and clarified the stance of the Bar Council of India as maintenance of status quo ante 12.12.2021 regarding all matters of the State Bar Council MP and effectively reaffirmed the position of Choudhary as the Chairman of the State Bar Council of Madhya Pradesh.

Give top priority to construction works: Prabhuram Chaudhary

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Public Health and Family Welfare Minister Prabhuram Choudhary has said that in this era of Corona, top priority should be given to the construction works of the Health Department, so that the infrastructure can be used to provide maximum health facilities to the general public. Choudhary was reviewing the construction works of Health Department in Mantralaya on Thursday. Health Commissioner Sudam Khade, Director Health Ravindra Choudhary and officials of the concerned construction agencies were present.

Choudhary asked the officials of the construction agencies to direct the construction agencies to complete all the work with quality within the stipulated time frame. He said that expansion of ICU beds in hospitals, SNCUs, PICU wards, oxygen supported beds, beds in

health centres, liquid medical oxygen tanks, construction of new buildings in primary health centres, community health centers and district hospitals, etc. and other facilities are being expanded in SNCU, PICU, Liquid Medical Oxygen Tanks and in Hospitals. We must understand the seriousness of the works approved to strengthen health facilities during the Corona period. It is not advisable to keep the works pending due to minor shortcomings. He told to fix the time period to complete the incomplete works and also ensure to complete them within the stipulated time period. Where there is any obstacle including availability of land for construction works, then contact the Collector of the concerned district and remove it without delay. In case of any problem, head the Health Commissioner should be informed so that the work can be speeded up and

resolve immediately.

Choudhary told the officials of the construction agencies that it is not proper to keep the construction works pending. He warned the careless and apathetic officials and said that they would review the progress of construction works from time to time. The responsibility of the officers will also be fixed in case of pending works.

It was informed in the meeting that against the provision of ICU, HDU beds in various hospitals for the year 2021-22, 670 new ICU, HDU beds were made available by achieving 100 percent target. A target of 3063 oxygen supported beds was set in the year 2021-22. Against the target, 2882 Oxygen Supported Beds have been set up so far and the rest will be ready by the month of February. Similarly, 300 PICU beds have been made available in hospitals against 310 PICUs. The rest will be completed by the end of January.

I am not anti Hindu: ATTEMPTS BEING MADE TO BRAND A COMMUNITY AS 'VILLAIN': DIGVIJAYA SINGH

The Congress veteran also said he had never used terms like "saffron terrorism or Hindu terrorism", but has instead spoken about "Sanghi terrorism"

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Congress Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh on Wednesday said attempts are being made in the country to brand a particular community as a villain and emphasised that the word 'Hindutva' does not exist in ancient religious books as the term was coined by freedom fighter VD Savarkar and it has political connotations.

Describing himself as a very religious person, the Congress veteran said he had never used terms like "saffron terrorism or Hindu terrorism," but has instead spoken about "Sanghi terrorism." An atmosphere is being created in the country these days in which a community is being termed as a villain. (Hindutva ideologue) Savarkar has said in his book that only those people have a right to stay in this nation whose religion took birth in this land (India) and that all other faiths are foreign. "But if this concept is followed then what will happen to NRIs working in the USA, the Middle East? It is a frustrated ideology and nothing, Singh told reporters at his residence here on the occasion of Swami Vivekanand Jayanti. The



former CM said some people have started treating Hindutva as a religion which is not correct. The word Hindutva is not seen anywhere... be it the Vedas, the Upanishads or the Puranas. This word was coined by Savarkarji with political identity in mind. He himself has written in his book that Hindu religion has nothing to do with Hindutva. "But we have started treating Hindutva as a religion though it is against Sanatan Dharam, traditions and Hindu religion... I am ready to debate on this," he said. Earlier, in his opening remarks before the press meet, Singh clarified that he or his father had never joined the RSS as claimed by some people and highlighted the history of his ancestral town Raghogarh, a former princely state. The former chief minister said he was not

inclined towards politics during his student life and never voted in student union elections. Singh said he had been a very religious person since the beginning of his life and his ancestral town has temples of different deities and even in those days (pre-independence) Dalits were allowed to enter them. The Congress MP said he is against those who use religion as a political tool and added that as the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh he had acted firmly against radical forces irrespective of their religion. He said Sanatan Dharam treats everyone with equality and it is the biggest strength of India. The same thing was stated by Swami Vivekanand at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago and also other forums. If you want to make this country Vishwa Guru, then you have to take everyone with you. There are different religions and sects in the country, but never ever these kinds of things took place. We are against the use of religion as a political tool, Singh said. Singh recalled former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's advice of "Rajdharm (duty of a ruler) given to then-chief minister Narendra Modi in the backdrop of the 2002 Gujarat riots. "Rajdharm" means taking along everyone, the Congress leader said. To a question, Singh said, I was never against Hindus, I am a Hindu... I am a totally religious person and will never use religion in politics. For me, religion is not a political weapon, but a matter of faith. But I will always be against fanaticism.



EDITOR'S SPECS

MUSICAL CAMPAIGNING IN UP

Political parties have now started making music for electioneering after the Election Commission imposed restrictions on physical campaigning. This has given an opportunity to the local talent to showcase their skills. UP BJP's social media head, Ankit Chandel, said the party had not officially commissioned any song but the members had come forward to release songs on their own. These songs are being played in various programmes and functions, including weddings. Bhojpuri singer, Suraj Mishra Vyas, of Gorakhpur has released a song in support of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Bhojpuri singer Dinesh Lal Yadav a.k.a. Nirahua has also released a song, 'Ayenge to Yogi hi'. Sandeep Acharya's song, 'UP mein gundai karoge to aukaat dikha denge, Gorakhpur wale Baba hain, ghar nilaam kara denge', has also become popular. The Samajwadi Party has also stacked up its music library. SP leader Sunil Yadav has released a song that says, 'Chinta chhodo 22 ki, taiyyari karo safai ki'. President of Samajwadi Party's cultural cell, Dharmendra Solanki said, "Some of the songs we have released so far for this election include 'Button dabega cycle ka, Sultan badalne wala hai, 22 mein UP ka parinam badalne wala hai' and 'Aayega jab natija to akhbar dekh lena, iss baar cycle ki raftar dekh lena'. He also has a song on the stray cattle menace in the state which says, - 'Chahe kuchh bhi tum kar lo jugaad Babaji, tumko wapis karenge tere saand Baba ji'. Former SP MLC Ashu Malik, who has composed at least five songs, said party workers were composing songs on their own for the campaign and the trend was catching on. The Congress, meanwhile, is banking largely on the 'Ladki hoon, lad sakti hoon' theme song that is already popular on the social media.

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY IN PERIL?

Asad Mirza

It seems a paradox. But one of the oldest democracies of the world, the US which has the habit of preaching the world about democracy and democratic traditions, including to the largest functioning democracy of the world i.e. India, it itself is facing a democratic crisis. A debate is currently on in the US whether the American democracy is floundering or it faces challenges or will it be turned into a despotic government in the next 20-25 years.

Capitol riots' anniversary

On January 6, the first anniversary of the rioting at Capitol Hill, President Joe Biden implored Americans to defend their institutions and reject the political violence that engulfed Congress exactly one year ago.

Standing in the Statuary Hall overrun by pro-Trump rioters during the Capitol riots, Biden declared that the former president bore "singular responsibility" for the insurrection attempt.

"His bruised ego matters more to him than our democracy, our Constitution," Biden said of Trump, without naming him. Trump, he added, is "not just a former President. He's a defeated former President, defeated by a margin of over seven million of your votes in a full and free and fair election".

In his remarks, Biden defended the integrity of the 2020 election and directly refuted the long-running effort by Trump and his allies to sow doubt about the vote. The president also countered Republicans who have urged Democrats to move past the insurrection and focus on the future.

On his part Trump repeated his claim that the election was "rigged" and responded with a twisty statement that blasted Biden for having "used my name today to try to further divide America" and went after the president's approach to inflation, Afghanistan and immigration.

But one of the former president's fiercest foes took a notably different tack. After attending a moment of silence in the House, Dick Cheney offered sharp words for his party.

"It's not a leadership that resembles any of the folks I knew when I was here for 10 years," the former vice president told reporters, when asked about how Republican leaders were handling the Capitol attack.

House speaker Nancy Pelosi in an interview with CNN said, "(democrat) isn't dying, but it needs attention".

But while the emotional aftershocks in the



Capitol remained a key focus, Biden and many Democrats also sought to demonstrate the stark contrast between their party and the Republicans, most of whose members remain deeply loyal to Trump.

American perceptions
Meanwhile, several surveys conducted after January 1, 2022, by some newspapers in collaboration with different universities across the US, predicted a bad case future scenario for the US democracy.

A USA Today-Suffolk University poll found that Americans by overwhelming margins see the nation's democracy as in peril, more than eight in 10 Republicans, Democrats and independents say they are worried about the future of America's democracy.

An NPR-Ipsos poll, found most respondents saying that American democracy, and America itself, is in crisis and at risk of failing. Overall, 64 per cent agree that American democracy is in crisis and at risk of failing. Even more, 70 per cent feel the same about America itself.

A Washington Post-University of Maryland poll said that the percentage of Americans who say violent action against the government is justified at times stands at 34 per cent, which is considerably higher than in past polls by The Post or other major news organisations dating back more than two decades.

In the fall of 2002, a year after the attacks of September 11, 2001, 90 percent of adults

expressed pride in the workings of American democracy. Twelve years later, it had fallen to 74 per cent and, in the fall of 2017, it had dropped again to 63 per cent.

Also, a Canadian political science professor has warned that the US could be under a right-wing dictatorship by 2030, urging his country to protect itself against the "collapse of American democracy". As in all fascist movements, contemporary forces have found a popular leader unconstrained by the rules of democracy, this time in the figure of Donald Trump.

"We mustn't dismiss these possibilities just because they seem ludicrous or too horrible to imagine," Thomas Homer-Dixon, founding director of the Cascade Institute at Royal Roads University in British Columbia, wrote in the Globe and Mail.

Homer-Dixon's message was blunt: "By 2025, American democracy could collapse, causing extreme domestic political instability, including widespread civil violence. By 2030, if not sooner, the country could be governed by a right-wing dictatorship."

Homer-Dixon said he even saw a scenario in which a new Trump administration, having effectively nullified internal opposition, deliberately damaged its northern neighbour i.e. Canada. All this leads one to believe that all is not hunky-dory with the

American society or democracy per se, and before the American leadership continues to preach the others, it should set its own house in order, though it might be asking for too much.

Biden has repeatedly made a case that the like-minded allies and US need to show the world that democracies are a far better vehicle for societies than autocracies. It is a central tenet of Biden's foreign policy outlook. But his first year in office has been a period that he says has been marked by a "backward slide" for democracy around the globe.

What most political analysts fear is that a constant barrage of lies is being fed to the American citizens. A proof of this is that from amongst those who participated in the Capitol riots, a year ago, 69 have been nominated for gubernatorial posts, 55 for the Senate, 13 for different states' Attorney General slots and 10 as House candidates. The scenario emerging after their possible win does not bode well for the American democracy, as then these people will be in power and able to harm it much more, so to defeat them the Democrats need to up their game.

(Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi)

international

SAUDI ARABIA TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR POWER PROGRAMME

"We do have a huge amount of uranium resource, which we would like to exploit and we will be doing it in the most transparent way," said Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud.

Riyadh | Agencies

Saudi Arabia aims to take advantage of its uranium resources to develop its nuclear power program, Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud revealed. During the International Mining Conference in Riyadh, he highlighted the importance of energy flexibility to face the transition to clean energy, Xinhua news agency quoted Al Arabiya News as saying. The Minister said that the kingdom wants to benefit from nuclear technology to diversify its energy mix. "We do have a huge amount of uranium resource, which we would like to exploit and we will be doing it in the most transparent way," he said.



UN REPORTS SIGNIFICANT SPIKE IN TERROR ATTACKS IN CAR

United Nations: UN peacekeepers have reported a significant increase in terrorist attacks in the Central African Republic (CAR), a spokesman for the world body said.

"Our colleagues at the peacekeeping mission there said they have noted a significant increase in the number of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), especially in the northwest of the country," Xinhua news agency quoted Stephane Dujarric, the chief spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, as saying. Among the IEDs found since the beginning of the year, "three out of five devices exploded on vehicles belonging to our peacekeepers or to the country's army", Dujarric added. He said the mission, known as MINUSCA, believes the armed Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation group active in the area is deliberately targeting UN peacekeepers and CAR armed forces with the devices. On the humanitarian side, the UN deputy special representative and humanitarian coordinator for the CAR, Denise Brown, visited Ouaka prefecture in the country's midsection a few days ago and expressed her concerns about the situation, notably in the town of Boyo, the spokesman said. "She said that following the arrival of armed combatants in the town, there are allegations of killings, houses burned down and agricultural supplies stolen," Dujarric said, adding that MINUSCA deployed peacekeepers there to protect the population. ere were no reports of casualties.

Israel grants ID cards to 1,000 Palestinians in West Bank

Ramallah | Agencies

Israeli authorities have granted identification cards to 1,000 Palestinians living in the West Bank, allowing them to continue to stay without fear of being deported, a Minister said.

The move "came in light of the understandings on August 30, 2021 between the Palestinian and Israeli sides which allowed the resumption of work on these family reunification applications for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip", Xinhua news agency quoted Hussein al-Sheikh, Palestinian minister of civil affairs, as saying. The Minister said that his office could get Israel to approve the applications for citizenship and will continue to follow up on thousands of other names sent to the



Israeli side. The applications included requests for identity cards and the issue of changing addresses between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, he said.

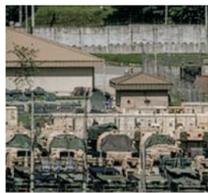
Israel occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which are claimed by the Palestinians, in the 1967 Middle East war, and has controlled them ever since.

Israel has full authority over issuing Palestinian ID cards and passports, said a Palestinian official, adding

that Israel had stopped processing requests for Palestinian family reunification since 2009. "Thousands of Palestinians had been left without legal status and unable to travel or access healthcare, jobs, education, or the legal system, including for divorces," an official said. Many avoid travelling from one town to the next for fear of facing arrest at Israeli military checkpoints where their IDs are checked.

S KOREA, US MULL DELAYING DRILLS DUE TO PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Seoul: South Korea and the US are considering postponing their combined spring-time military exercise due to the March 9 presidential election and the Covid-19 pandemic, multiple sources said on Thursday.



The allies have been discussing the possible delay in consideration of the virus' unabated spread and the need to ensure South Korean troops can exercise their voting rights in the election unhindered by the round-the-clock command post training. Yonhap news Agency quoted the sources as saying, "There have been discussions on the possible postponement due to the election season and the coronavirus woes," an informed source told Yonhap. Seoul and Washington conduct two major regular joint exercises each year -- one in March and the other in August -- to reinforce their defense capabilities against possible North Korean aggression. For past major allied exercises, South Korea's presidential election hardly affected their timing as voting took place in December. But Election Day changed to March 9 in 2017 following the ouster of former scandal-hit President Park Geun-hye. Incumbent President Moon Jae-in began his single, five-year term in May that year, two months after the election. Asked to confirm the allies' discussions on the exercise, the South Korean Defence Ministry said the two sides were still in talks over the details. he US Forces Korea (USFK) refused to comment on the exercise plans.

US sanctions 6 N.Koreans over ballistic missile programmes

Seoul | Agencies

The US has announced that it sanctioned six North Korean individuals related to Pyongyang's ballistic missile programmes and weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The Department of Treasury said on Wednesday it is designating five North Korean individuals -- one based in Russia and four in China -- for illegally procuring materials for the North's WMD and ballistic missile programs, Yonhap News Agency reported on Thursday.

The State Department is also designating an additional North Korean individual based in Russia for a similar reason.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated



five Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) individuals responsible for procuring goods for the DPRK's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missile-related programs," the Department said in a statement, referring to North Korea by its official name. "These actions are in

line with US efforts to prevent the advancement of the DPRK's WMD and ballistic missile programs and impede attempts by Pyongyang to proliferate related technologies. They also follow the DPRK's six ballistic missile launches since September 2021, each of which violated multiple

UN Security Council Resolutions," it added.

North Korea claims to have successfully test fired a new hypersonic missile last September, a second on January 5 and a third earlier this week. State department spokesperson Ned Price said the designations sought to constrain North Korea's weapons programs.

"These are important these are important measures to constrain North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear programme," he said in a press briefing. "It's important that the international community send a strong unified message that the DPRK must hold provocations, it must abide by its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions and engage in sustained intensive negotiations."

North Korea has boycotted denuclearization negotiations since late 2019.

SENATE MINORITY LEADER REJECTS REQUEST SEEKING COOPERATION IN CAPITOL RIOT PROBE

Washington: US House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy has rejected a request from the chamber's Capitol riot probe committee seeking his cooperation in the ongoing investigation. The rejection from McCarthy, the top Republican in the House, came just hours after the panel sent a letter notifying him of an intention to interview him and acquire records in his possession related to the deadly attack on January 6, 2021, reports Xinhua news agency. "This committee is not conducting a legitimate investigation," McCarthy said in a statement, citing the fact that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has rejected his nominees to serve on the committee as the reason for the illegitimacy of the probe. He said the committee "is not serving any legislative purpose," and that the "only objective" of the committee's investigation is "to attempt to damage its political opponents". In the letter to McCarthy, Chair Bennie Thompson, Democrat of Mississippi, said the committee wanted the congressman to share information about his communications with then-President Donald Trump "before, during and after" January 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump's supporters besieged the Capitol in an attempt to stop Congress from certifying the 2020 presidential election results. It also wanted to learn about how McCarthy interacted with Trump, White House staff and others in the week after the riot, "particularly regarding President Trump's state of mind at that time". McCarthy, a Republican of California, said he has "nothing else to add." "Considered one of Trump's most loyal allies in Congress, McCarthy is the third Republican member of the House with whom the committee has sought cooperation on a voluntary basis, after two similar requests were turned down by representatives Scott Perry of Pennsylvania and Jim Jordan of Ohio.



MAHA CONGRESS ACCUSES NIA OF 'WEAKENING' MALEGAON 2008 BLAST CASE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As several witnesses in the Malegaon 2008 blast case are turning 'hostile', the Maharashtra Congress accused the National Investigation Agency (NIA) of allegedly 'weakening' the case by not pursuing it with 'honesty and sincerity', here on Thursday.

State Congress Working President M Arif Naseem Khan also urged the Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS) - which originally probed the case under the Martyr Hemant Karkare - to take necessary steps to monitor the developments in the case. Submitting a memorandum to the ATS Chief, Additional Director-General of Police Vineet Agrawal, Khan said that the witnesses who turned hostile are invoking the names of Bharatiya Janata Party-RSS to "malign the Maharashtra government and ATS" to gain political mileage in the Uttar Pradesh elections next month, and urged the probe agency (ATS) must take note of this.



The September 29, 2008 (Malegaon 2008) bomb blast was allegedly engineered in this minority-dominated Nashik town by Hindu fundamentalists, killing 6 and injuring over 100 others, during Ramadan month when Muslims were breaking their fast. The Maharashtra Police and then the ATS probed the case and in 2011 it was taken over by the NIA, and the trial is being conducted on a daily basis at the Special NIA Court in

Mumbai. "Of the 223 witnesses examined, 16 have turned, claiming that the ATS tortured them to give evidence against the accused. We feel the presence of the ATS in the court is inevitable to protect the image of the Maharashtra government and the ATS," Khan added. Among the accused in the sensational Malegaon 2008 case are Sadhvi Pragna Singh Thakur, Swami Amritananda Dev Teerth, Dayanand Pandey, Lt Col

Prasad S. Purohit, and others. The Congress leader said that the ATS was being sought to be tarnished as an 'anti-Hindu' agency with the witnesses, allegedly influenced by the accused, are deliberately naming BJP-RSS people for political gains in the upcoming UP assembly polls. "The NIA is not prosecuting all the accused with honesty and sincerity. Out of 223 witnesses who deposed so far, 16 important ones have turned hostile and over a 100 more are still left to be examined. These witnesses are crucial and need to be protected. The NIA has not challenged any orders passed in favour of the accused which shows their intentions clearly," Khan said. Some of the witnesses in Malegaon 2008 case even went beyond their recorded statement mentioning names like UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, but the NIA's Special Public Prosecutor took no objection, and another witness said he was tortured and threatened by the ATS to take names of Yogi and 4 RSS leaders.

Mumbai logs 13,702 new Covid cases, 6 deaths in last 24 hours

Earlier today, in view of the Covid surge, several curbs have been imposed at hill stations like Matheran, Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani, with local authorities closing down some of the popular tourist spots.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai on Thursday reported 13,702 fresh cases of Covid-19 and 6 deaths in the last 24 hours. According to data shared by the BMC, the number of active cases in the city stands at 95,123. On Wednesday, the city had recorded 16,420 infections.

Earlier today, in view of the Covid surge, several curbs have been imposed at hill stations like Matheran, Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani, with local authorities closing down some of the popular tourist spots. The Sanjay Gandhi National Park, the Karnala sanctuary, all tiger reserves, national parks and sanctuaries have also been closed for visitors. In other news, former



MLA Vijay Gavhane from Parbhani district in the Marathwada region on Thursday quit the BJP to join

NCP in the presence of its chief, Sharad Pawar. He blamed the BJP's state leadership for sidelining OBCs.

Maharashtra staring at more curbs as oxygen demand rises due to covid surge

- The daily requirement of medical oxygen in Maharashtra has witnessed a rise, adding that the present demand is 400 metric tonnes. If the oxygen demand rises to 700 metric tonnes, then stricter curbs will be required, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra is expected to see a spike in hospitalisation of COVID-19 patients this month-end or in the first week of February, according to the state health department. The state cabinet expressed concern after the health department made this projection during a presentation before it on Wednesday, a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said. The daily requirement of medical oxygen in the state has witnessed a rise, it said, adding that the present demand is 400 metric tonnes. "If the oxygen demand rises to

700 metric tonnes, then stricter curbs will be required. Considering this fact, the district administrations should expedite vaccination and take necessary steps," Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said during the meeting. Along with the urban centres, rural parts of the state are also affected by COVID-19, he said. "Fully vaccinated COVID-19 patients don't require medical oxygen. But, people need to be vigilant as the UK and the US are witnessing a strain on their health infrastructure," the CM said. The state on Wednesday recorded 46,723 fresh coronavirus cases, a jump of 12,299 infections from a day ago, and 32 fresh fatalities. The new cases included 86 Omicron infections. Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday cautioned that the coronavirus curve in the state is not flattening despite a dip in the number of daily COVID-19 cases in the last couple of days. There is a silver lining that out of the 2.25 lakh active cases, only 14 per cent are under hospitalisation, he told reporters. Tope said he doesn't expect the situation to stabilise by January-end or by early February, and urged those who have not undergone vaccination to take jabs, besides masking-up by all.

'Graveyard' of illegally-aborted foetuses found in Maha's Wardha

Wardha | Agencies

In a macabre development, the police have dug up a "graveyard" of illegally-aborted foetuses in the compound of a private maternity hospital in Arvi town of Maharashtra's Wardha district, pointing to a massive racket of secret unauthorised abortions, officials said here. The mortifying revelations came up during the investigations of an illegal abortion of a 13-year-old girl, who became pregnant after an alleged affair with a 17-year-old boy living in the vicinity. The probe led the police to the premises of the private Kadam Hospital where a dozen skulls and over four dozen bones of illegally aborted foetuses were found buried in a biogas plant. Police also recovered stained clothes, bags, some spades used for digging and dumped there and other evidence which have been collected and sent for forensic analysis.

According to a team of woman Investigation Officers, Assistant Police

Inspector Vandana Sonune and Police Sub-Inspector Jyotsna, the Arvi police had received a tip-off on the January 4 incident but without any names. The team got cracking with local sources and finally tracked down the minor girl and confronted her parents who were threatened against speaking out by the boy's family. "We gently counselled them, assured that they will be given full protection and finally, they opened up, and even agreed to lodge the first information report on January 9, five days after the girl underwent the secret, illegal abortion," API Sonune told IANS. Armed with the complaint, a police team swooped on the Kadam Hospital and arrested its Director, Dr Rekha Niraj Kadam, 43, and nurse Sangeet Kale, 38, who helped in the act and charged Rs.30,000.

The police also nabbed the boy's parents - Krishna Sahare, 42, and his wife Nallu, 40 - for compelling the minor girl to undergo the abortion and intimidating her family with dire consequences if they spoke about it. While the four accused were remanded to police custody for two days this week, the investigations led them to the biogas plant and its vicinity where the veritable 'graveyard' with buried foetuses was unearthed. "This is extremely serious... We suspect there may be bigger ramifications. We are probing the case from all angles, the involvement of others, doctors, nurses, agents, etc," said API Sonune. Renowned Pune gynaecologist Dr Ganesh Rakh - who pioneered the 'Beti Bachao' campaign here in 2012 - condemned the incident strongly and said it must be thoroughly probed as it could be a female foeticide racket run at the Kadam Hospital.

"What has accidentally stumbled out through the illegal abortion on a minor girl may actually have larger consequences. The male-female ratio in the country is falling at an alarming rate and this will be known in the near future," Rakh told IANS. Shiv Sena leader Kishore Tiwari said: "The Maha Vikas Aghadi government should take strong cogni-

sance of this. I request Home Minister Dilip Walse-Patil and Director General of Police Sanjay Pandey to form a Special Investigation Team and get to the root of these murky goings-on here, and not to spare anybody." Medical fraternity sources claimed that the hospital enjoyed a dubious reputation for a long time, attracting patients not only from Wardha, but also neighbouring districts like Yavatmal, Amravati, Nagpur and Chandrapur, besides Arvi - which has a population of around 60,000. "There were murmurs of alleged shady goings-on there, like illegal abortions, banned sex-determination tests and even female infanticide, but nobody dared to complain or speak about it in open," revealed a local doctor, requesting anonymity. In a guarded reaction, Indian Medical Association Maharashtra President Dr. Suhas Pingle said: "IMA believes in quality, safety and ethicality in the medical profession and practice of medicine. In this matter, law should take its own course."

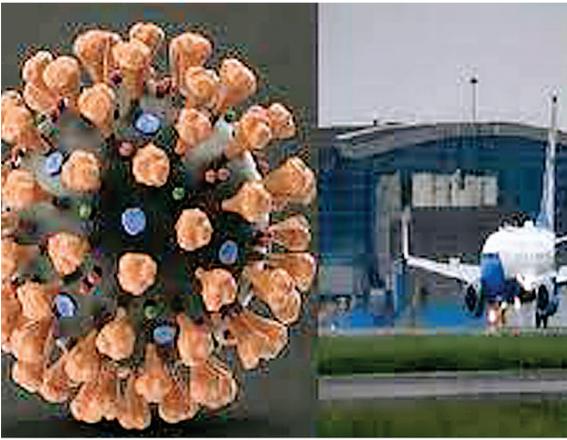
OMICRON COULD PUSH AIR TRAFFIC RECOVERY INTO FISCAL 2024: CRISIL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The ongoing third pandemic wave led by Omicron could pose fresh turbulence for air traffic, pushing its full recovery into fiscal 2024, ratings agency Crisil said on Thursday.

The agency had earlier expected the full recovery to happen in fiscal 2023. It said that a material impact on the credit quality of airport operators, however, is unlikely as the dip in revenue is expected to be limited by a likely strong rebound, and the operators have adequate debt servicing cushions, liquidity buffers and financial flexibility to absorb the blip in traffic.

An analysis of the top four private airports -- Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad -- which accounted for 90 per cent of air passenger traffic handled by private airports and 50 per cent of all passenger traffic last fiscal, indicates as much, the agency said. "The high infection rate of Omicron has resulted in several state governments and local authorities,



such as Delhi and Mumbai, announcing restrictions on movement," said Manish Gupta, Senior Director, Crisil Ratings. "In fact, domestic traffic is down by 25 per cent from the highs of December 2021 in the first week of

January 2022 itself. Both personal and business travel will take a hit in January and February, leading to air traffic plunging an estimated 30 per cent sequentially in the fourth quarter of this fiscal." This spill-over

impact, the agency said, is likely to delay recovery of air traffic from "our earlier expectation of it happening in fiscal 2023".

However, recovery is expected to be achieved within the early part of fiscal 2024.

"This is because air traffic is likely to rebound faster this time around, compared to the second wave, when it took from May to November 2021 to recover from 16 per cent to 85 per cent of the fiscal 2020 traffic," the agency said.

"The rebound confidence is underpinned by higher proportion of vaccinated populace -- over 71 per cent end May 2021 -- as well as learnings of governments and authorities from the past waves in implementing Covid-19 protocols for safe travel. The case load, too, is expected to peak in February and return to the December 2021 level by the end of March 2022," it said.

As a result, revenues for fiscal 2023 and 2024 are likely to remain stable, the ratings agency added.

Fire breaks out at Kalyan pet shop, several animals, birds charred to death

According to the officials of the Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation (KDMC), the fire broke out around 8 am Wednesday when the shop was shut.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A fire broke out at a pet shop in the Rambaugh locality of Kalyan township Wednesday killing several birds and animals kept for sale. While an investigation is on to ascertain the cause of fire, preliminary probe points at a short circuit. According to the officials of the Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation (KDMC), the fire broke out around 8 am Wednesday when the shop was shut. While the firefighting operation was initiated as soon as the fire brigade personnel reached the spot and some of the animals were rescued, most of them were charred to death. The shop had cats, rabbits, tortoises, parrots among other pet animals and birds. "There was



no human casualty and we are carrying out an investigation. Appropriate action will be taken once the report comes," said a KDMC official.

Meanwhile, local animal lovers said most of the pet shops in the area are illegal and sell animals and birds without permission.

CBI Won't "Get Carried Away": Court On Maharashtra Ex-Home Minister Case

In the FIR, the CBI had booked Anil Deshmukh and others unidentified for "attempt to obtain undue advantage for improper and dishonest performance of public duty."



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court Thursday said the CBI is a specialised and trained agency which would not "get carried away" by the allegedly prejudicial observations made against former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh in the trial court order directing probe against him in the case concerning alleged leak of the agency's preliminary enquiry (PE) purportedly giving clean chit to him. Justice Subramonium Prasad, who was hearing Mr Deshmukh's plea against the "shocking"

observations made against him in the trial court order, said that it was obvious that the CBI would act in an independent manner and conduct the investigation. Senior advocate Vikram Chaudhari, representing the petitioner, argued that the trial court order gave an impression that there was a mandate to the investigating agency to implicate the petitioner in the case. The trial court "pre-judged" the petitioner's role and went "overboard" when it could have simply directed investigation, he added. The court said the

CBI was a trained agency which would not get affected by the trial court's observations and the trial court judge only "gave reasons why he ordered further investigation". "It is needless to state that a specialised agency like the CBI will not get carried away by the observations made by the magistrate while ordering further investigation. It is obvious and needless to state that the CBI will act independently," Justice Prasad said. In view of the court's clarification, Chaudhari did not press the petition any further.

Amid Covid surge, curbs imposed at popular hill stations, national parks shut

Several hill stations like Matheran, Panchgani and Mahabaleshwar have imposed restrictions. Local businesses and hoteliers have raised concerns over the dip in footfall of tourists.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In view of the surge in Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra and in line with the state government's guidelines, several curbs have been imposed at hill stations near Mumbai, with the local authorities closing down some of the popular spots, including tiger reserves and national parks. The Matheran Municipal Council on Tuesday closed several tourist spots at the hill station. The order issued by Matheran Chief Executive Officer Surekha Bhangne included the Charlotte Lake, Alexander Point, Rambag point, Big Chowk Point,

One tree hill point, Eco point, Louisa point, Coronation point, Sunset point and the Monkey point for tourists. The mini-train from Aman Lodge to Matheran is still operational. At 800 metres above sea level, Matheran is one of the closest hill stations to Mumbai and is frequently visited by Mumbaiers.

Several hoteliers and allied organisations have written letters to the Matheran Municipal Council asking it to not take such drastic steps.

Bhangne confirmed that she had received representations from organisations, but the Collector's order regarding the closure was final. She added that footfall in Matheran reduced to 450 persons on Wednesday, as against the usual 2,500 per day. Asha Kadam, President of Ashvapal Sangathana, which represents horse owners of Matheran, said, "We are giving a letter to the CO to open all points. We have to dip in savings. Our incomes have dipped in the last two years and it is difficult to feed horses." Meanwhile, Panchgani and

Mahabaleshwar, the twin hill stations located in the Satara district of Western Maharashtra, have also introduced restrictions for tourists.

Girish Dapkekar, Chief Officer of Panchgani Municipal Council said that all four spots in his area were closed for tourists as a matter of precaution. Similarly, Pallavi Patil, Chief officer of the Mahabaleshwar Municipal Council, said that they have shut the Venna lake point for boating, a place where people congregate. "The forest department has closed down several of their points visited by tourists," she said.

Patil added, "All hotels in our areas are working with 100 per cent occupancy. Tourists have to show double vaccine certificates before coming to our hill station. We used to get 2,000 tourists every day and now we barely get 200 tourists."

Satara Collector Shekhar Singh said that he had issued an order regulating tourists points due to a state order banning entry to people in forts, museums and other places. Pune District Collector Rajesh

Deshmukh, meanwhile, said, "We have closed down points in Lonavala-Khandala and other places in the Pune district which are frequented by tourists and the order was issued by our district Disaster Management Authority. I had got a list of tourist points from our Superintendent of Police."

All tiger reserves, national parks and sanctuaries, including the Sanjay Gandhi National Park and Karnala sanctuary, have also been closed for tourists. A senior Indian Forest Service officer said, "We had to close down all protected areas as per government order. Whereas, a woman who runs a canteen service in Karnala said, "We have closed down our canteen from Monday and will have to spend a few more days without income." Elephanta Caves off the Mumbai coast have been closed, as well. Rajendra Padte, a former sarpanch of Gharपुरi village, where the Elephanta caves are located, said, "Now we get just one or two boats of tourists per day. Local businesses have suffered a lot."



'In a good place'

Larsa Pippen says she and Kim Kardashian have 'apologized' to each other after friendship fallout and public spat

Los Angeles | Agencies

Larsa Pippen said she and Kim Kardashian are 'in a good place' despite their friendship fallout. The 47-year-old Real Housewife of Miami divulged that they had 'apologized' to each other after their drama went public and were both 'living their best lives.'

'We've all apologized to each other. We're in a really good place,' Pippen told Us Weekly in an effort to bed chatter about

their fraught relationship.

Fans date the pair's drama back to April 2020, when they noticed the SKIMS founder and her family unfollowed the former NBA wife on social media.

Sources had said the Kardashians cut Larsa out of their lives because they thought she had 'toxic energy' while another source said they had simply 'grown apart.'

'I feel like we're in a really good place. You know, I feel like there was a lot [of] miscommunication at the time.'

'People have disagreements with their friends all the time, but because of who we are, it's just so magnified. In reality, it's like, you know, maybe I could have navigated it different. Someone else could have navigated [it] different,' she continued to say.

Larsa also seemed to take ownership over statements made on the Hollywood Raw podcast where she attested the rift in their friendship to Kim's ex Kanye West who had 'brainwashed' the family.



'Squid Game' makes history, 'Yellowstone' finally gets a nod

Los Angeles | Agencies

Netflix's blockbuster original show 'Squid Game' has made history at the 2022 Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards by becoming the first non-English-language (and first Korean) series to score a nomination, reports 'Variety'. The awards will be announced on February 27.

Another headline-maker in the nominations announced on Wednesday was 'Yellowstone', the Kevin Costner-led blockbuster series now in its fourth season. After being ignored by all major awards events in its three previous seasons, 'Yellowstone' picked up a

nomination in the company of 'Succession', 'The Morning Show' and 'The Handmaid's Tale'.

One of the biggest shows on television, streaming on Prime Video in India, Paramount Network's 'Yellowstone' is set for a fifth season. The series follows the conflicts along the shared borders of a large cattle ranch, an Indian reservation, and land developers.

Among films, Ridley Scott's 'House of Gucci', and Jane Campion's 'Power of the Dog' led all films with three nominations each. 'Power of the Dog', which has benefited from a big awards push from Netflix, according to 'Variety', failed to capture a best ensemble nomination. Nominees for that prize, considered to be the most prestigious handed out by the guild, included 'House of Gucci', as well as 'Belfast', 'CODA', 'Don't Look Up' and 'King

Richard'. Stars such as Will Smith ('King Richard'), Lady Gaga ('House of Gucci'), Olivia Colman ('The Lost Daughter'), Jeremy Strong ('Succession') and Jennifer Aniston ('The Morning Show') find themselves among the nominations. On the OTT/television front, 'Succession', a boardroom drama about the family behind a media conglomerate, and 'Ted Lasso', a feel-good soccer comedy, scored a leading five nominations. 'Mare of Easttown', 'The Morning Show', and 'Squid Game' landed four nominations apiece. Described by 'Variety' as a water-cooler phenomenon, 'Squid Game', in a first for a foreign-language production, picked up nominations for actor in a drama series (Lee Jung-jae), actress in a drama series (Jung Ho-yeon), and also stunt ensemble.

Pete Davidson to star in horror thriller 'The Home'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actor Pete Davidson has boarded filmmaker James DeMonaco's horror thriller 'The Home', to be produced by Miramax.

Pete, who is one of the youngest cast members of 'Saturday Night Live', will play the role of Max, a troubled man who starts working at a retirement home and realises its residents and caretakers harbour sinister secrets, reports Deadline.

The film will go on floors later this month, and will be Miramax's latest addition to their extensive roster of beloved horror films including 'Halloween', 'Scream', 'Hellraiser' and 'Dracula'.

As per Deadline, Miramax's Bill Block and Sebastian K. Lemercier will produce along with DeMonaco and Adam Canto serving as writers for the film.

Producer Bill Block told Deadline, "We're excited to be backing DeMonaco's brilliant vision. James' 'The Purge' horror franchise has grossed over \$450 million at the worldwide box-office. With his masterful storytelling abilities and Pete's versatility as an actor, this film will put audiences everywhere on the edge of their seats."



EVAN RACHEL WOOD OPENS UP ON MARILYN MANSON ABUSE IN UPCOMING DOCUMENTARY

Los Angeles | Agencies

Los Angeles: For more than two years, Oscar-nominated documentary filmmaker Amy Berg has been secretly working with Evan Rachel Wood on a documentary about the life of the Golden Globe-nominated actress, especially her emergence as an activist, reports 'Variety'.

Berg also documents Wood's decision to come forward to allege that heavy metal artiste Brian Hugh Warner, better known by his stage name Marilyn Manson, had "horribly abused" her while they were in a relationship.

The result is 'Phoenix Rising', which was announced on Wednesday (U.S. Time) as part of this year's Sundance Film Festival lineup, and will air in two parts on HBO in the coming months.

Though Wood had spoken publicly about her experiences with domestic violence, and in 2019 created the Phoenix Act, a bill that extends the statute of limitations on domestic violence from three years to five -- which passed in California -- 'Variety' reports that it wasn't until February 1, 2021 that

she accused Manson as being the perpetrator of that abuse in a post on Instagram.

Manson has denied all wrongdoing -- and his representative had no further comment to 'Variety'. But in the aftermath of Wood's allegations -- which opened the floodgates of other Manson accusers -- his label, agent, manager and longtime publicist dropped him. Since then, Manson has been the subject of investigations by the 'Los Angeles Times' and 'Rolling Stone'.



'NO TIME TO DIE' JOINS AWARDS-CIRCUIT FAVOURITES

London | Agencies

The British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) has revealed its longlists of nominees across 24 categories for its upcoming film awards, reports 'Variety'.

As reported by 'Variety' on Monday, 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' was not included in any longlist after "failing to



'No Time to Die', 'Belfast', 'West Side Story', 'The Power of the Dog' and 'Don't Look Up' are among the leading films announced on Wednesday following the first round of votes. Of the 217 films submitted for consideration, 15 made the cut for Round Two.

meet eligibility criteria", according to BAFTA. The film's producers had originally sought that it be considered for the best picture and best special effects categories.

Among the 15 leading actresses who made it to Round Two, the prominent names include: Olivia Colman ('The Lost Daughter'), Lady Gaga ('House of Gucci'), Alana Haim ('Licorice Pizza'), Jennifer Hudson ('Respect'), Emilia Jones ('CODA') and Nicole Kidman ('Being The Ricardos').

The 15 actors in the longlist include two British Pakistanis -- Riz Ahmed ('Encounter') and Adeel Akhtar 'Ali & Ava' -- Mahershala Ali ('Swan Song'), Javier Bardem ('Being The Ricardos'), Daniel Craig ('No Time To Die'), Benedict Cumberbatch ('The Power of the Dog') and Leonardo DiCaprio ('Don't Look Up').

Round Two voting, to determine the nominations in the member-voted categories, will be open from January 14 to 27. The nominations will then be announced on February 3. This will be followed by Round Three voting, to determine the winners, which will open on February 9 and continue till March 8.



Lucy Hale



SA v IND, 3rd Test

MATCH EVENLY POISED AS PETERSEN LEADS CHARGE AFTER PANT'S HUNDRED

Cape Town | Agencies

In another day of see-saw action of the third Test between South Africa and India at the Newlands Cricket Ground, things are evenly poised. Keegan Petersen is unbeaten at 48 as South Africa lost Dean Elgar at the stroke of stumps to be 101/2 and need 111 runs to win the series. For India, Rishabh Pant's high-quality hundred was crucial in setting a target of 212.

South Africa began well with Aiden Markram getting some streaky boundaries through the off-side off Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah. Amid high chatter from the Indian team, Shami extracted outer edge twice from Markram. The first one went for a boundary between gully and backward point. But on the very next ball, Markram again went for the loose pull and outside edge flew to KL Rahul at third slip.

Petersen got off the mark with a well-timed off-drive off Bumrah. Petersen played some great-quality shots. He then picked a boundary past Pant off Shami followed by a drive through off-side to take South Africa past 100. Bumrah broke the 78-



run partnership as Elgar was strangled down leg and Pant dived to his right to take the catch at the stroke of stumps. Earlier, the day belonged to

Pant, who dug his heels, mixed control with aggression and stood tall to stitch a knock which was crucial in taking India's lead beyond 200. To put his high-quality century into context, no other Indian batter managed to get a score past 30 in the second innings. When he arrived at the crease, India were in trouble at 58/4. Pant had to weather the early storm and in the company of a patient Virat Kohli, he began to cut loose. He looked assured at the crease, mixing control with aggression and put away anything loose that was on offer from

South Africa's bowlers towards the boundary rope. Pant began by crunching Rabada for two boundaries off back-foot on both sides of the wicket. He drove well through off-side off Lungi Ngidi and smacked Duanne Olivier by coming down the pitch to loft over extra cover.

Post-lunch, Pant slog-swept Maharaj and then stepped out to smash one over long-off for consecutive sixes. Kohli's patient stay of 142 balls ended with him falling for the temptation of driving a wide outside the off-stump delivery. In a quest to score faster, Kohli gave a thick edge on the drive to a leaping Markram at second slip, ending the 94-run partnership as floodgates opened for South Africa.

Pant reached a well-deserved century with a pull through square leg off Jansen with every member of the Indian team applauding from the dressing room. Jansen ended the Indian innings as Bumrah gave a catch to Bavuma at cover-point to pick his fourth wicket of the match. With eight wickets in hand, South Africa go in as favourites to win on Friday.

Pant, first Indian wicketkeeper-batter to score Test ton in SA

Rishabh Pant became the first Indian wicketkeeper-batter to score a Test ton in South Africa during India's second innings in the third Test at Newlands Cricket Ground on Thursday. He has also become the first wicketkeeper-batter from Asia to get a Test hundred in South Africa. With his unbeaten 100 off 133 balls, Pant is now the only Indian wicketkeeper-batter to get Test hundreds in England, Australia and now South Africa. Before his high-quality knock, former captain MS Dhoni's 90 at Centurion in 2010/11 tour was the highest individual score by an Indian wicketkeeper in South Africa. In a knock where he mixed control and aggression, Pant delivered under pressure to take India's lead past 200.



Valverde on the break decides Supercup Clasico for Real Madrid

Riyadh | Agencies

Fede Valverde's goal in the first period of extra-time gave Real Madrid a place in Sunday's final of the Spanish Supercup with a thrilling 3-2 win over archrivals FC Barcelona. Valverde finished off a counter-attack launched by Casemiro to break Barca's hearts after they had twice come from behind to level the scores. Although the game ended in disappointment for Xavi Hernandez's men, they can take heart from an improved display and the impressive returns of Pedri and Ansu Fati after long injury layoffs. While Barcelona handed a first start to recent signing Ferran Torres, Real Madrid lost defender David Alaba to a muscle problem before kick-off and he was replaced by Nacho Fernandez.

Barca could have let their heads drop, but they got back into the game, with Ansu Fati producing a smart header seven minutes from time off Jordi Alba's cross. The game



could have gone either way in extra-time, but once again Real Madrid's effectiveness on the break would be decisive.

ANDY MURRAY BEATS DAVID GOFFIN TO REACH SEMI-FINAL

Sydney | Agencies

Britain's Andy Murray reached the Sydney Tennis Classic semi-finals after his opponent David Goffin was forced to retire in the middle of their last-eight match, here on Thursday. Former World No 1 won the opening set 6-2 against the former world No 7 before Goffin pulled out of the match, just a game after receiving treatment to the back of his knee.

It is the first time that Murray has reached a tour-level semi-final since Antwerp in 2019. The wild card will now play American Reilly Opelka in the semi-finals following the fourth seed's 7-6(4), 6-2 victory over countryman Brandon Nakashima in a 83-minute clash.

Meanwhile, top-seeded Russian Aslan Karatsev overcame Italy's Lorenzo Sonego 6-2, 3-6, 6-2 to reach



the semi-finals. Karatsev will now face Daniel Evans in the semis after the third seeded American Maxime Cressy 6-4,

7-6(5) in one hour and 52 minute match. Evans won his first tour-level title in Australia last season at the Murray River Open in Melbourne.

KASATKINA UPSETS MUGURUZA IN SYDNEY, TO FACE BADOSA IN SEMIS

Daria Kasatkina defeated No.2 seed Garbine Muguruza 6-4, 6-4 to reach the semifinal of the Sydney Tennis Classic, here on Thursday. Kasatkina will face No.5 seed Paula Badosa who overcame Belinda Bencic 7-6(6), 3-6, 6-3 in 2 hours and 35 minutes. In the second quarterfinals, Badosa has dominated their professional rivalry, led 5-3 in the first set, but ultimately needed six set points to close out Bencic, who was contesting her second match of the day after completing a rain-delayed comeback over Oceane Dodin earlier.



SA SKIPPER DANE VAN NIEKERK RULED OUT OF 2022 ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

Johannesburg: Skipper Dane van Niekerk has been ruled out of action for at least three months, including the upcoming West Indies ODIs at home and the 2022 Women's World Cup in New Zealand in March-April, following an ankle injury, Cricket South Africa (CSA) confirmed on Thursday.



The 28-year old Niekerk sustained a fracture on her left ankle after accidentally slipping on a wet surface at home last week. "South African captain, Dane van Niekerk has sustained a left ankle fracture in the last week, ruling her out for a minimum of three months and will be unavailable for the training camp, West Indies tour and the 2022 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup hosted in New Zealand from March 4," the CSA said in a statement. CSA has not named a replacement captain ahead of their training camp which starts on Friday before the four-match ODI series against West Indies in Johannesburg between January 28 - February 6.

Australian Open: Djokovic included in draw as uncertainty continues

Melbourne | Agencies

The Novak Djokovic visa saga in Australia continues even as World No 1 from Serbia was on Thursday drawn to start his campaign in the Australian Open against compatriot Miomir Kecmanovic, the World No 78.

Djokovic, who had reached Australia for the year's first Grand Slam with a certificate claiming exemption from vaccination as he had tested positive for Covid-19 in December, had his visa cancelled by the Australian government before a Federal Court in the country intervened to give him respite.

There were still doubts over his participation in the event and there was intense speculation on Thursday



when the draw ceremony for the event was delayed for some time. However, the organisers went ahead with the formalities with the

Serbian's name being included in the draw. Meanwhile, a decision is yet to come through from Australia's Minister of

Immigration Alex Hawke as to whether or not the top-seeded Serb and nine-time champion will be allowed to defend his title.

HOCKEY MIDFIELDER LILIMA MINZ RETIRES AT 27

New Delhi: One of the most experienced midfielders in hockey Lilima Minz decided to retire from the sport on Thursday. Lilima, who made her debut for the national side at the 4-Nation Women's Hockey Tournaments held in Argentina in 2011, has been part of many glorious moments with the Indian Women's Hockey Team.



The midfielder, who hails from the Sundargarh district of Odisha, scored 12 goals in 156 matches for India. She was part of the bronze medal-winning campaign at the Asian Games 2014, silver medal win at the 2018 Asian Games and the gold medal victory at the FIH Women's Series Finals at Hiroshima in 2019. Lilima was part of the squad when the Indian women qualified for the Olympics for the first time after 36 years and took part in the Rio Olympic Games in 2016. The midfielder was also part of the Indian team which booked a place in the Tokyo Olympics through the FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers 2019 in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

Inter overcome Juve in extra time to claim sixth Supercoppa title

Rome | Agencies

Alexis Sanchez became the hero for Inter Milan, as his last-gasp winner in the extra time helped the Nerazzurri come from behind to beat Juventus 2-1 and claim their sixth Supercoppa title in history.

The Supercoppa is a traditional clash between the previous season's Serie A and Coppa Italia champions. Juve are the winner of the last edition, while Inter's last victory in this competition came in 2010. With Matthijs de Ligt and Juan Cuadrado being suspended, Juve also had to play without an injured Federico Chiesa, and Mattia Perin got the nod to stand between the sticks as Wojciech Szczesny failed to get a green pass, while Inter was at relatively full strength.

Inter had a more aggressive start but it was the Bianconeri that broke the deadlock in the 25th minute when Alvaro Morata floated a cross from the byline and Weston McKennie steered his header into the net undisturbed.

The defending champion of Serie A got back on level terms 10 minutes later, as Lautaro Martinez turned up to convert the penalty after De Sciglio kicked down Edin Dzeko in the box.

The game was dragged into extra time after the two sides played out a goalless second half despite some genuine chances.

In the extra time, Sanchez's header following Hakan Calhanoglu's corner went wide while Paulo Dybala blasted it over, reports Xinhua.



As the game seemed to be heading to a penalty shoot-out, Sanchez showed up to hog the limelight in the dying seconds, as Alex Sandro's poor clearance went up into the air, which was tapped by Matteo Darmian for the Chilean to tap in before Daniele Rugani.

ance went up into the air, which was tapped by Matteo Darmian for the Chilean to tap in before Daniele Rugani.

Want to be the first ever women's MMA world champion from India: Ritu Phogat

Singapore | Agencies

Wrestler-turned-MMA (Mixed Martial Arts) fighter Ritu Phogat is still focused on her primary goal despite ending 2021 by bowing out of the ONE Women's Atomweight World Grand Prix Championship Final.

She suffered a second-round submission loss at the hands of former two-sport ONE World Champion Stamp Fairtex, but maintains she learned many lessons in defeat. Phogat said that the setback hasn't deterred her from continuing to chase her dreams. "I am here with one goal -- to be the first ever women's MMA world champion from India. I will do everything to make that happen," Phogat said.

"2021 was a rollercoaster of a year, with a lot of excitement, experience, learnings and setbacks. Overall when I look at things, I always look



at it in a positive way. World is going through a once in 100 years kind of pandemic, but we have learned so much as humans. 2021 was one of the best years so far for me as a martial artist and that will only help me to grow. The wins and losses all have taught me something."

Phogat fought a whopping five times in 2021, winning three and losing two. The

other defeat was to Vietnamese-American Bi Nguyen in April. After the loss to Nguyen, Phogat went on a tear, winning her next three while showcasing sharp improvement after each fight. She eventually reached the ONE Women's Atomweight World Grand Prix Championship Final opposite Stamp Fairtex, but ultimately fell short of victory.



'BIGG BOSS 15': PRATIK, TEJASSWI IN WAR OF WORDS DURING TICKET TO FINALE TASK

Team Absolute | Mumbai

It seems the fight in 'Bigg Boss 15' is not coming to an end. After the verbal spat between Tejasswi Prakash and Shamita Shetty, the upcoming episode will see Tejasswi squaring off with Pratik in the new cycle task.

In the last episode it was seen that Shamita has downgraded Tejasswi to a non-VIP contestant. Now, she is trying to get it back.

Both Pratik and Tejasswi are building their own cycles. Pratik tries to stop Tejasswi from putting the stand on the cycle, and Tejasswi angrily tells him: "Why you hate me so much?" She violently stops him from completing his task.

Pratik complains: "She is trying to hit me on my hand. She is Tejasswi Prakash. You are smacking my hand with an iron."

However Pratik Sehajpal is the new VIP contestant.

Meanwhile as soon as the task begins, Shamita Shetty and Nishant Bhat, who have been good friends throughout the season, also starts battling each other. Shamita angrily tells Nishant: "If you want to play, its fine otherwise go to hell." 'Bigg Boss 15' airs on Colors.



'Thanks for appreciation'

Hyderabad | Agencies

Rashmika Mandanna, lead actress of 'Pushpa: The Rise', is overwhelmed by the positive response garnered by the surprise blockbuster of 2021.

"I'm really grateful that all the hard work that the cast and crew had put in the film, is finally being seen and appreciated by viewers all across. There's so much love and positivity that the audience has showered upon the film, its characters, and the story, which is super encouraging".

Rashmika is also very happy to see the film, being appreciated by audiences from different regions of the country. Adding to this she says "The humongous applause that the film has received, only shows us that the culture and language barriers are now blurring and fading away." It seems the film has broken all the cultural differences and sets an example of unity in diversity. She promises that 'Pushpa 2' will be bigger than ever. Earlier, taking to social media, Rashmika wrote, "Thank you for all you love for Pushpa.. only makes us want to work harder.. and we promise you.. Pushpa 2 will only be better and bigger! ?????? Pc: @thisisdsp"

Having its roots in Telugu, 'Pushpa: The Rise' has made its mark in every corner of the country. Directed by Sukumar, it was released on December 17 and has scored massive success at the box-office with its collections. The sequel 'Pushpa: The Rule' is expected to go on floors in March this year.

Meanwhile, expressing concern over the rising cases of COVID in the country, the actress has urged the audience to be safe and take necessary precautions to avoid any kind of spread of the virus. Talking about the grave situation Rashmika says "Also, would urge everyone to take all the necessary precautions at this crucial point, and take good care of themselves and their loved ones".

The pan-Indian actress will now be debuting in Bollywood with 2 big-ticket films - 'Mission Majnu' and 'Goodbye'.



Rashmika Mandanna pens down a heartfelt note, thanking audiences on the massive response to Pushpa

Divyenndu: It's overwhelming when people address me by my character's name

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Divyenndu, who enthralled the audience with his performance of Munna Bhaiya in 'Mirzapur', feels overwhelmed when people address him by the characters that he has portrayed on the screen.

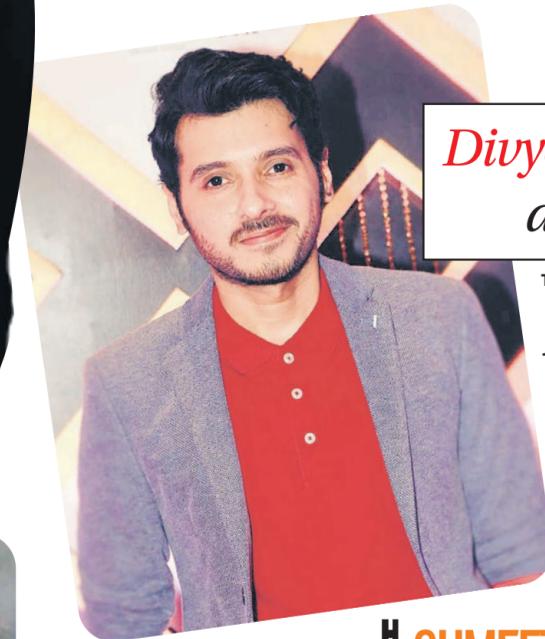
The actor also mentioned that more than the medium of exhibition, it's about the challenges that a character brings with itself. He always takes into consideration the relevance of the content before being a part of it.

Talking about the characters, Divyenndu said, "Munna Bhaiya and Akhil Shrivastav (Bichhoo Ka Khel) have become homegrown characters to me. and it is an overwhelming feeling when people address me as these characters wherever I go, or ask me about these shows because that means I have left an impact for a longer term than just those few hours of watching the series and that is satisfying."

He further mentioned that in the current times, content speaks for itself, "Shows like 'Mirzapur' and 'Bichhoo Ka Khel' have their content

speak for them. As an actor, it was never about the medium for me, it has always been about how much I am getting to challenge myself as an actor, how much relevance my content has and as long it doesn't harm anyone, I would always want to be a part of it."

"Both of these shows have broken all the shackles in terms of target audiences and have been liked by people from every strata of the society being OTT creations, and that is what proves what kind of groundbreaking hits these projects have been", he concluded.



Subhash Ghai: I have to fall in love with the actor I work with



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Filmmaker Subhash Ghai who is gearing up for his new web film titled '36 Farmhouse' shares his experience of working on a film from scratch to release during a pandemic and why it is important for him to be in love with actors he works with.

Known for showing beautiful landscapes in films like 'Taal', 'Pardes', 'Yaadein', Ghai opens up on how he actually utilised the time during lockdown by writing the story of a film, composing music and also poetry that is used as part of the narrative in '36 Farmhouse'.

Ghai told IANS: "It was quite a unique experience for me especially because I think when crisis comes, creativity flows. This time the challenge was we were locked in our house. We cannot go out for shooting whereas I am someone who has done a lot of outdoor shooting in my film. So I thought how about writing a story where everything happens in a farmhouse and tell an engaging story through characters in such a manner that we can turn it into a full-length film. So I started writing."

He went on adding, "I always believe that our kind of storytelling is incomplete without music, be it

background score or songs and poetry. During the lockdown, I wrote around 70 poems throughout the year. I also wrote two songs and made the tune of them. Then through virtual sessions with our music students, we created the music. Again, I had no idea that without going to the studio the way we used to record things earlier, now we can do everything like this! Then Sonu Nigam and Hariharan also joined and lent their voice for our song. I am fascinated."

The film '36 Farmhouse' is directed by Ram Ramesh Sharma and it features Amol Parashar, Barkha Singh, Sanjay Mishra, Vijay Raaz, Flora Saini and Ashwini Kalsekar among others.

As he worked with a bunch of new talents in the film, Ghai said, "I am so impressed by Amol and Barkha. Look I have to fall in love with the actor I work with and it is not just about following the script for their performance but having a great interaction with my actor is part of my process. So I build the relationship first with new actors. I am surprised to see how smart and sharp Amol is, to understand my mind. Earlier we used to explain actors a scene by acting it for them, but these kids are fantastic! I can say, I am ready to work with Amol again and he is going to be a star in the future."

The film releases on ZEE5 on January 21.

SUMEET RAGHAVAN: YOU NEED TO BE HAPPY, THAT'S THE KEY TO ALL THE LOCKS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Wagle Ki Duniya' actor Sumeet Raghavan spills the beans about how important it is to have a work-life balance and how he manages to keep it in check.

Talking about how to strike the right balance, Sumeet said: "I think you need to take out time for your life and your family because that's what I have always done. It is imperative to cultivate a hobby. More importantly, something that takes you off your mobile phone. Music is absolutely magical and is the best therapy for me. I always carry my harmonium with me in the make-up room as it helps me unwind and gets me rejuvenated. To me, home has always been about spending my time with my family, kids, and pets."

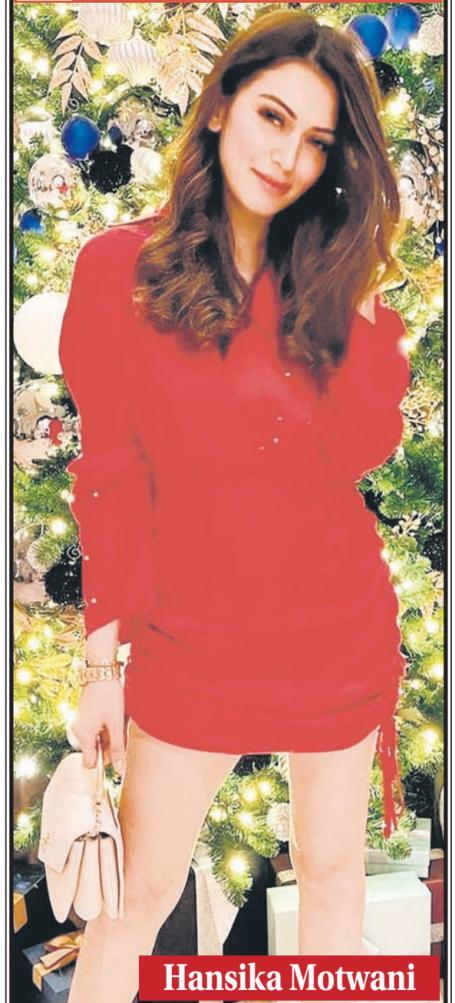
The ongoing track of 'Wagle Ki Duniya - Nayi Peedhi Naye Kissey' shows how Rajesh's (Sumeet Raghavan) company undergoes a merger, and his life has never been the same since then. Working in a highly stressful environment is leaving him exhausted and drained, his health too has started showing signals of this pressure.

Juggling between his personal and professional life, Rajesh makes constant efforts to strike a balance between the two.

The actor relates to the ongoing sequence and shared further that in 2020, he had focused on his family. He also emphasised the importance of mental health. He added: "I have always believed mental health is of utmost importance. You can go to the gym for your physical health, but the real question is, what do you do for your mental health? To maintain sound mental health, you need proper nourishment. You need to be in good company. I think family and close friends would always be the kind of people you can reach out to for any help." 'Wagle Ki Duniya' airs on Sony SAB.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Hansika Motwani