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TURF WAR IN OPPOSITION BETWEEN CONGRESS AND TMC

UPA DON'T EXISTS: DIDI

West Bengal's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urged the need for creating "a firm alternative course" as nobody is fighting "ongoing Fascism" in the country. She said, "If all regional parties come together, it would be easy to defeat the Bharatiya Janata Party. We want to say BJP hatao, desh bachao. I don't want my opposition to make their own strategy. So, I am not revealing much."

Team Absolute | New Delhi

It is now an open turf war in the Opposition with TMC leader Mamata Banerjee claiming that the UPA, in which she was the cabinet minister of Railways under Manmohan Singh, is now non-existent. With this, the Congress will have a tough time to retain the leadership of the Opposition. However, the Congress insists that no front can come up without it. Though the TMC has charted its own course and maintained a distance from the Opposition meetings, the surprise entry is the TRS which has often been seen with the government and was a fence-sitter. Its leader K Keshav Rao has now joined the meetings called by Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge of the Congress.



Maharashtra Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray called on her. However, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray could not meet her as he is currently convalescing after a spine surgery last month. Meanwhile, Shiv Sena MP Arvind Sawant said, "The Opposition does not need a face to be united, ideas are needed. Uddhav Thackeray's name is counted in 4-5 chief ministers who are said to be good. We also feel that Uddhav Thackeray should become the Prime Minister of the country. What is wrong with it?" The meeting was the prime political highlight of Banerjee's two-day Mumbai trip but she could not meet Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray as he is currently convalescing after undergoing a spine surgery last month.

The change of heart is due to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) asserting itself in the state, becoming the main rival in Telangana. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday met NCP leader Sharad Pawar and said that no United Progressive Alliance (UPA) is left now and all the like-minded Opposition parties must untidely fight the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Banerjee discussed the strategy for all Opposition parties to take on the BJP untidely in the next elections. Pawar, who met Banerjee along with his senior party leaders, said that they held a long discussion on various political issues. The meeting was the prime political highlight of Banerjee's two-day Mumbai trip when Shiv Sena leaders, MP Sanjay Raut and

"We agreed upon the need to strengthen the collective efforts and commitment towards safeguarding democratic values and ensuring the betterment of the people. In the current situation, all like-minded forces must unite together at the national level and set up a collective leadership to tackle the BJP."

Sharad Pawar, NCP Chief

"She has secured a historic win in West Bengal, where not only the BJP, but also the Left and the Congress have been wiped out. All those who left the Trinamool to join the BJP are now coming back."

Sanjay Raut, MP, Shiv Sena

"It is a dream if someone thinks it can fight the BJP alone."

KC Venugopal, General Secretary, Congress

Global vaccination plan only way to stop pandemic: UN Chief

United Nations | Agencies

UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres has said that "the only way out of a global pandemic and out of this unjust and immoral situation is through a global vaccination campaign."

The Secretary General was speaking at a meeting at the UN headquarters in New York of Foreign Ministers of the Group of 77 (G77) and China, where he noted that the Covid-19 pandemic "continues to wreak havoc" on developed and developing countries alike.

He added that the UN stands behind the vaccination strategy set out by the World Health Organization, with the goal of getting vaccines into the arms of 40 per cent of people in all countries by the end of 2021, and 70



per cent by the middle of 2022. The world economy is expected to grow by 5.9 per cent in 2021, but the pace of recovery is extremely uneven, Guterres added.

BLANKET TRAVEL BANS NOT A SOLUTION: WHO

Geneva: The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that blanket travel bans will not prevent the international spread of the Covid-19 Omicron variant, even as dozens of countries have already introduced such restrictions. Although Omicron has been labeled a "variant of concern" by the WHO, it said on Tuesday that blanket travel bans will only place a heavy burden on lives and livelihoods, while also "disincentivizing countries to report and share epidemiological and sequencing data."



72 NURSING STUDENTS TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19 IN MYSURU

Bengaluru: A high alert has been sounded in Mysuru district after 72 students from Kerala, undergoing nursing courses in the city, tested positive for Covid-19, health department officials said on Wednesday. Deputy Commissioner Bagadi Gautham has ordered conducting of as many as 5,000 Covid tests in Mysuru to detect the cases early and prevent spreading of the virus. About 43 students of Kaveri Nursing hostel and 29 students of Saint Joseph College tested positive creating panic among people and health authorities. According to the officials, the district administration has implemented strict measures at the entry points to Mysuru from Kerala. RT-PCR test negative results have been made compulsory for travellers.

PETROL PRICES CUT BY RS 8/LITRE IN DELHI

New Delhi: Petrol prices in national capital fell by Rs 8 per litre on Wednesday after the Delhi government cut down Value Added Tax (VAT) on the fuel to 19.40 per cent from earlier 30 per cent. New rates will come into effect from midnight. This decision came after Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal chaired a Cabinet meeting this morning. Currently, the petrol is being sold at Rs 103.97. In early November, the Centre had reduced petrol and diesel rates by Rs 5 and Rs 10 per litre respectively. Post the move, the Opposition parties in Delhi have been urging the AAP-led state government to cut VAT on petrol by at least Rs 10 per litre. In India, fuel prices differ from state to state depending on the local taxation (VAT) and freight charges. Besides, the central government charges an excise duty on auto fuels. After adding excise duty, dealer commission and VAT, the retail selling price of the petrol gets nearly doubled.

IMD issues 'pre-cyclone watch', Odisha on alert

Team Absolute | Bhubaneswar

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday issued "pre-cyclone watch" for north Andhra Pradesh-Odisha coasts as a cyclonic storm is likely to approach around December 4 morning. In a special bulletin, the IMD's Bhubaneswar centre said the low pressure formed on Tuesday over south Thailand and neighbourhood emerged into central Andaman Sea in the same evening. "It is likely to move west-northwestwards and concentrate into a depression over southeast and adjoining east-central Bay of Bengal by tomorrow (December 2) and intensify into a cyclonic storm over central parts of the Bay of Bengal during the subsequent 24 hours," the weather bulletin said. Subsequently, the system is likely

to move northwestwards, intensify further and reach near north Andhra Pradesh-Odisha coasts around December 4 morning, it said. However, the Met department is yet to predict the possible location of landfall of the impending cyclone. Under its impact, heavy to very heavy rainfall would occur in many parts of coastal and interior Odisha from December 3 to 6 morning. The sea condition will be rough to very rough over along and off north Andhra Pradesh- Odisha coast from December 3 midnight and become high to very high from December 4 afternoon, for the subsequent 12 hours. In view of this, the fishermen are advised not to venture into the sea and those who are at mid sea have been advised to return to the coast by the morning of December 2.

IMAGES, VIDEOS BANNED ON TWITTER WITHOUT PEOPLE'S CONSENT

New Delhi: Twitter has announced to ban sharing of private media, such as photos and videos, without permission from the individuals that are shown in those images. The micro-blogging platform already covers explicit instances of abusive behaviour under its policies, the expansion of the policy will allow the platform to take action on media that is shared without any explicit abusive content, provided it's posted without the consent of the person depicted. "The misuse of private media can affect everyone, but can have a disproportionate effect on women, activists, dissidents, and members of minority communities. When we receive a report that a Tweet contains unauthorised private media, we will now take action in line with our range of enforcement options," the company informed. Under the existing policy, publishing other people's private information, such as phone numbers, addresses, and IDs, is already not allowed on Twitter. This includes threatening to expose private information or incentivising others to do so. This policy is not applicable to media featuring public figures or individuals when media and accompanying Tweet text are shared in the public interest or add value to public discourse.

AMU student lands in controversy for praising PM Narendra Modi

Team Absolute | Aligarh (UP)

The Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) has landed in social media controversy after one of its students alleged that he was being denied a PhD degree for praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the media. Seeking the Prime Minister's urgent intervention, AMU student Danish Rahim said, "AMU asked me to return degree in linguistic and to get one in Language in Advertising and Marketing (LAM) course instead. It is happening to me because I praised Modi." He claimed that he was reprimanded by the Chairman of the Department of Linguistics for praising Modi while giving a byte on a news channel. Rahim said that he was asked to refrain from doing such things that were against the University culture. AMU spokesperson Shafey Kidway, however, denied the claims of prejudice by the student.

"The allegations are totally baseless. He did his MA and PhD in LAMM (Language of Advertising & Marketing) course of the Department of Linguistics, which also offers a PhD degree in Linguistics. Since he did his MA in LAM, he should get PhD degree in LAM. By mistake, he was given PhD degree in Linguistics. The mistake will be rectified. This incident has nothing to do with politics," Shafey Kidway said. The Aligarh Muslim University had asked Danish Rahim to return the 'incorrect degree' for replacement within 7 days of the issuance of the letter. "The whole matter was examined and put up before the Vice-Chancellor who has ordered that you deposit the incorrect PhD degree already issued to you in Linguistics so that the correct PhD degree in LAMM be issued to you," the varsity said.

Mahasabha retracts on Mathura issue, Maurya tweets for temple

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Even as the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha called off its proposed march to the Shahi Eidgah here to install an idol of Lord Krishna, Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya quered the pitch by tweeting that "a grand temple in Ayodhya and Kashi is under construction; preparations are on for Mathura". The Mahasabha had planned to install an idol of Lord Krishna at the Shahi Eidgah after elaborate rituals on December 6, following which the district administration was put on high alert. The UP Police said that they have banned large gatherings in Mathura ahead of the Babri Masjid demolition anniversary (December 6). "Section 144 is in



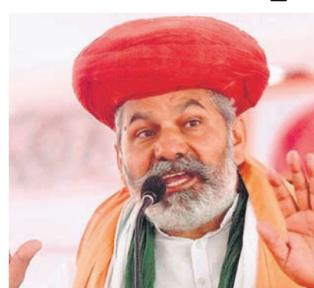
place here and if any person from any religion or community uses social media to spread rumours or incites religious passion, we will take very strict action," Mathura SP Gaurav Grover said in a video statement. Maurya's tweet, which is being seen as a call for a temple in Mathura, appears to be designed to fan sentiments on the issue. The BJP, so far, has avoided raking up the issue politically and the government's efforts are to ensure that there is no communal trouble in the state ahead of the Assembly elections scheduled next year. When contacted, none of the party leaders were willing to comment on Maurya's tweet.

LPG price rise: Commercial cylinder to cost Rs100 more

New Delhi: The price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders for commercial usage was today hiked again. The price of the 19-kg commercial cylinder has been increased by ₹100 per cylinder, news agency ANI reported. This is a second hike after the price was increased on November 1. Following the hike, the price of the 19-kg commercial cylinder will now cost ₹2101 in Delhi. The price of LPG commercial cylinder in Mumbai is ₹2,051 per cylinder. In Kolkata, the price is ₹2,174.50 per cylinder. The LPG commercial gas cylinder price in Chennai is 2,234.50 per cylinder. However, there is no increase in prices of other domestic cylinders weighing 14.2kg, 5 kg, 10kg composite or 5kg composite cylinders. Presently, a 14.2kg Domestic cylinder in the national capital cost ₹899.50 and the 19kg cylinder commercial cylinder is costing ₹2,101.

Farmers don't want to return home after laws repealed: Tikait

Farmers have lost 150 tractors during the stir. Can such a strong Prime Minister not provide new tractors to the farmers who have lost them. When Narayan Datt Tiwari was the (UP) Chief Minister he had compensated to the farmers who had accrued losses during the Muzaffarnagar agitation. When Congress can do it, why not BJP? Let the Prime Minister say that the government can't compensate the losses, go the Congress if you want.



Arvind Maiguri | New Delhi

to correspondent after reports emerged that 32 farmers groups want to wind up the agitation as their major demand has been met. Alleging that the government is spreading rumours to divide farmers, he said the future course of agitation will be decided in the meeting of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) to be held on December 4. He urged the farmers to remain united with the SKM and not issue any statement without the organisation's approval. Tikait accused the government of not wanting to hold talks with the farmers. Asked if it is not blackmail not to end the agitation when the government has repealed the three contentious farm laws, he said there are other issues which need to be discussed. Tikait urged the government to take back all cases filed against the farmers during the agitation.



CENTRAL VISTA DOESN'T CAUSE AIR POLLUTION, FOLLOWS WASTE MANAGEMENT RULES, CENTRE TO SC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre has told the Supreme Court that the construction activities for the new parliamentary building and the Central Vista avenue site comply with construction and demolition waste management rules, and do not cause any pollution.

It also termed both "projects of national importance".

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Centre to explain within two days, why Central Vista project construction should carry on, despite severe air pollution in the capital. Senior advocate Vikas Singh, representing petitioner Aditya Dubey, had urged a bench headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana to stop construction activities

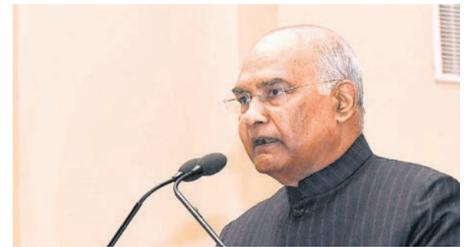


at the project site.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, in an affidavit, said: "So far as parliamentary building and the Central Vista avenue site is concerned, it complies with construction and demolition (C&D) waste management rules and each and every condition which is put to ensure that it does not cause any pollution."

The affidavit further added that all measures contemplated under C&D waste management rules have been taken, which, inter-alia, includes measures like use of anti-smog gun, mist spray system, use of dust suppressants like magnesium chloride, use of conveyor belt to transfer construction material, and keeping all construction material in wet condition.

Farm Laws Repeal Act 2021 gets Presidential assent



Team Absolute | New Delhi

President Ram Nath Kovind on Wednesday gave his assent to the Farm Laws Repeal Act 2021 that was passed by both houses of Parliament by voice vote on Monday.

First, the Lok Sabha and then the Rajya Sabha passed The Farm Laws Repeal Bill 2021 by voice vote sans a debate amid heavy sloganeering by the opposition that wanted a discussion on the issue. In both the houses, the Bill was passed within minutes of introduction by the government. The three bills

that Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced to repeal on November 19 are: Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 and Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill 2020.

Farmers across the country under the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) banner had been agitating since last one year demanding repeal of the three farm laws and legalising minimum support price (MSP) among other issues.

CPWD ISSUED NOTICES FOR CONTINUING CONSTRUCTION AT CENTRAL VISTA SITE

New Delhi: Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Wednesday issued two separate notices to the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) for carrying out construction work at the Central Vista construction site despite a blanket ban on all construction and demolition (C&D) activities in the wake of bad air quality in the national capital.

"We were repeatedly getting calls informing us that despite the ban, construction activities were in full swing at the Central Vista site. Hence we have come here today for an inspection, and can see what all work is in progress here, in spite of the ban on construction and demolition activities in Delhi. Keeping this violation in mind, we are issuing notice to CPWD to ask them on what basis and on whose orders are they still operating," Rai said in a statement. The minister has since ordered Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) to issue two separate notices to the concerned agency CPWD - one, for ignoring the ban which was imposed to reduce pollution in the city and two, for violating anti-dust guidelines while construction is in full swing. "CPWD must respond to these notices by tomorrow and further action will be taken on the basis of their response," he informed.

Control inflation or leave your Chair: Youth Congress to PM Modi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Protesting against inflation, the Indian Youth Congress on Wednesday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to control it or leave his chair.

The protest, which started from Raisina Road, was not allowed to march towards Parliament. Police stopped the protestors by barricading the road and detained some of them.

Youth Congress national president Srinivas BV said: "Skyrocketing petrol-diesel prices and unbridled inflation have become the hallmark of the Modi government. Every effort is being made to squeeze the pockets of the public. The loot of Modi gov-



ernment stops during elections and starts as soon as the polls are over. The Prime Minister is not concerned about people but only about elections." The IYC said the people of the country have understood the chronology of

the BJP's electoral gimmicks. Srinivas alleged that the Modi government is looting the public by increasing the prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas and is not bothered about how people will sustain themselves.

WOMAN BRUTALLY THRASHED WITH STICKS IN DELHI, 2 HELD

New Delhi: A woman and her daughter were brutally assaulted by four people, including two women, at the city's Shalimar Bagh area, Delhi Police sources said here on Wednesday.

The sources told IANS that the incident took place on November 19 at around 10.10 p.m. when a 38-year-old woman and her daughter were attacked mercilessly by four people. "An FIR was lodged on the complaint of the victim," the source said, adding that the two women who were involved in the attack were arrested by the police on November 22. Both the accused, identified as Neha, 20, and Megha, 20, were then produced before a local Court which sent them to police custody. "They are currently lodged at Tihar jail," the source said. As per the FIR, the complainant woman alleged that the accused also took her gold chain, a ring and also molested her. The FIR was lodged under sections 323, 341, 354, 506, 509, and 34 of the Indian Penal Code. The entire act, caught on a CCTV camera, went viral on Wednesday.

Parliamentary panel recommends reconstitution of Press Council

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology has suggested reconstitution of the Press Council of India into a comprehensive media council for the print, electronic and digital media to perform various roles including ensuring ethical standards in news coverage.

The Committee, while recommending to the government to explore the possibility of setting up a reworked council, underlined that the council should also have the legal authority to enforce its orders so that it maintains the highest ethical standards and credibility of the media while also ensuring its freedom. A report tabled in the Lok Sabha on Ethical Standards in Media Coverage by the Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology, headed by MP Shashi Tharoor, talks about the loss of credibility and integrity of the media, including freedom as well as compliance with standards in electronic and digital media, grievance redressal system, monitoring mechanism, self-regulation by TV channels, TRP, social media, paid news, fake news and FDI in media as well as many other



issues. Referring to the Law Commission's report in its recommendation, the Parliamentary Committee has asked the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to discuss with the Ministry of Law and Justice the early implementation of the Law Commission's recommendations to make paid news an electoral offence. The committee recommended to the ministry to be alert to viral videos and news, while recommending a broader definition of the term 'Fake News'.

'Deprivation of liberty cannot be unduly long': SC grants bail to septuagenarian Maoist

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said deprivation of liberty cannot be unduly long, as it granted bail to a Maharashtra-based Bengali engineer, Ashim Kumar Haranath Bhattacharya, accused of helping Maoists to manufacture a rocket launcher.

A bench of Justices Ajay Rastogi and Abhay S. Oka said: "While deprivation of personal liberty for some period may not be avoidable, period of deprivation pending trial/appeal cannot be unduly long. At the same time, timely delivery of justice is part of human rights and denial of speedy justice is a threat to public confidence in the administration of justice."

The bench noted that the appellant was 74 years of age and he was arrested in July 2012.

"It is clearly demonstrated from the instant case that after the charge sheet came to be filed in the year 2012, charges have been framed in June 2019 and looking to the voluminous record and number of the prosecution witnesses which are to be examined, it may take its own time to conclude and



indeed, the undertrial prisoner cannot be detained for such a long period of incarceration noticed by us in the instant case," it said. "Once it is obvious that a timely trial would not be possible and the accused has suffered incarceration

for a significant period of time, the courts would ordinarily be obligated to enlarge him on bail," it said.

The apex court pointed out that though charges against accused are serious, but it needs to be balanced with factors like the period of incarceration undergone and the likelihood period within which the trial is expected to be completed.

The top court also directed the Centre and West Bengal government to ensure setting up of more designated special courts in the state for day-to-day trials.

"This court has consistently observed in its numerous judgments that the liberty guaranteed in Part III of the Constitution would cover within its protective ambit not only due procedure and fairness but also access to justice and a speedy trial is imperative and the undertrials cannot indefinitely be detained pending trial," it said.

The top court also directed the Centre to take up the matter with the state government after consultation with the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, for setting up more special courts for speedy trial in such cases.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

WhatsApp on Wednesday said that it banned over two million accounts in India in October in compliance with the new IT Rules 2021.

The Meta-owned platform also received 500 grievance reports in the same month, and took action on only 18 of those.

"In accordance with the IT Rules 2021, we've published our fifth monthly report for the month of October. This user-safety report contains details of the user complaints received and the corresponding action taken by WhatsApp, as well as WhatsApp's own preventive actions to combat abuse on our platform," said a



WhatsApp Spokesperson. "As captured in the latest monthly Report, WhatsApp banned over 2 million accounts in the month of October," the spokesperson added. WhatsApp has over 400 million users in India. Meta, the newly-formed parent company of Facebook and its family of apps, on Wednesday said that it has

removed more than 21.8 million pieces of content in October on Facebook and Instagram in India, as it faces intense scrutiny over user data privacy.

In September, more than 2.2 million Indian accounts were banned by WhatsApp while 560 grievance reports were received by the messaging app. About 2 million Indian accounts were banned by WhatsApp while 420 grievance reports were received by the messaging platform in August. The new IT rules -- which came into effect in May -- require large digital platforms (with over 5 million users) to publish compliance reports every month, mentioning the details of complaints received and action taken.

November breaks record for 'heavy', 'very heavy' rainfall

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Thanks to the series of low pressure areas coupled with active northeast monsoon in November in south India, as many as 645 stations across India recorded "heavy" rainfall while 168 stations received "very heavy" rainfall - the maximum in the last five years, the IMD said on Wednesday.

As per the IMD, "heavy" rainfall is between 64.5 to 115.5 mm while "very heavy" rainfall means 115.6 to 204.5 mm.

As many as 11 stations recorded "extremely heavy" rainfall (more than 204.5 mm), same as that in 2020, India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General, Dr Mrutyunjay Mahapatra told a media conference.

In November, the country, as a whole, received 56.5 mm rainfall as against 30.5 mm (a departure of 85.4 per cent) and the maximum departure of 160 per cent was in the south peninsula which received 232.7 mm rains against the 89.5 mm normal. Further, the IMD has predicted that the



monthly rainfall for December 2021 over the south peninsula India is most likely to be above normal (over 132 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA)). The LPA of rainfall over south peninsula India during December based on the data of 1961-2010 is about 44.54 mm.

Apart from the extremely heavy rainfall recorded at 11 stations in 2020, there were 98 stations that recorded very heavy rains and heavy rains was 247 the same year. In 2019, 116 stations recorded heavy rainfall, 24 recorded very heavy rainfall, and none recorded extremely heavy rainfall. Year 2018 saw 135 stations record heavy rainfall, 36 witnessed very heavy rainfall while just four stations recorded extremely heavy rainfall. In 2017, the respective numbers were 139, 26 and just 1, respectively, IMD data showed.

The post-SW monsoon rains (from October 1 till November 30) for the country as a whole was recorded at 157.2 mm as against 106.4 mm (a departure of 48 per cent). Of this, northwest India showed maximum departure (107.0 per cent) with 72.2 mm rains as against 34.9 mm normal.

6 KILLED, 25 INJURED AFTER BUS-TRUCK COLLISION IN MADHYA PRADESH

Betul: Six persons were killed and 25 others injured, five of them seriously, when a passenger bus carrying them collided with a truck in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday, a police official said. The accident occurred around noon near Narkhed village on Multai-Prabhatpattan road, some 65 kms from the district headquarters.

"A private passenger bus travelling from Prabhatpattan to Multai collided with a truck coming from the opposite direction. Both the vehicles overturned after the collision," Multai police station in-charge Sunil Lata said. Six persons, including the driver of the bus, died on the spot, while around 25 passengers were injured, five of them seriously. Those five grievously-injured passengers were rushed to Warud town in neighbouring Maharashtra for the treatment, he said. The dead were identified as bus driver Sheikh Rashid (65), Chhaya Patil (40), Sunil Piparde (45), Bhimrao Dhote (60), Devraj Pandole (60) and Tejasvi (19), he said. Expressing grief over the incident, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said he has directed the officials to ensure that the injured be given medical treatment and that all help to the relatives of the dead be extended.



'WHERE IS UPA?': MAMATA TAKES JIBE AT CONGRESS, BUT MOOTS OPPOSITION UNITY

Taking a broad swipe at the Congress, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said that there is no UPA left now but called upon all the like-minded Opposition parties to unitedly fight the Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After much-anticipated meeting with Nationalist Congress Party President Sharad Pawar, Banerjee discussed the strategy for all Opposition parties to take on the BJP unitedly in the next elections. Pawar, who met Banerjee along with his senior party leaders, said that they held a long discussion on various political issues. "We agreed upon the need to strengthen the collective efforts and commitment towards safeguarding democratic values and ensuring the betterment of the peo-



ple," he said. Banerjee urged the need for creating "a firm alternative course" as nobody is fighting "ongoing Fascism" in the country. "Sharadji is the senior most leader and I have to come to discuss our political strategies. I am fully agreeable with whatever Sharadji has said," said Banerjee, who is also President of the Trinamool Congress. She said the Shiv Sena is a strong regional party which is fighting

the BJP and all such parties must post a collective challenge to the saffron party in the 2024 elections. Lauding Banerjee for sweeping the April-May Assembly polls in her home state, Pawar said her intention for the 2024 elections is clear. "In the current situation, all like-minded forces must unite together at the national level and set up a collective leadership to tackle the BJP." He said the need was to provide a

strong alternative leadership, not just today, but for the future election and in this background Banerjee visited to hold "very positive discussions" with all the

leaders. Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut, who along with Tourism Minister Aaditya Thackeray, met Banerjee last night, said that she is a product of the Congress and has left the party for whatever differences they may have had. "Its their mutual matter and they will sort it out. She has secured a historic win in West Bengal, where not only the BJP, but also the Left and the Congress have been wiped out. All those who left the Trinamool

to join the BJP are now coming back," Raut pointed out. The meeting was the prime political highlight of Banerjee's two-day Mumbai trip but she could not meet Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray as he is currently convalescing after undergoing a spine surgery last month. Banerjee said she was very keen to meet the CM and was unable to do so, but said she prayed for his quick recovery and looked forward to meeting soon in the future.

Centre opposes Mah gov't's mandatory RT-PCR for Int'l passengers

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre on Wednesday opposed the Maharashtra government's order of mandatory RT-PCR testing of all international travellers at the Mumbai airport irrespective of the country of origin.

In a letter to the Additional Chief Secretary of Maharashtra government, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said: "This is in divergence with the SoPs and the guidelines issued by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India."

The Maharashtra government has made it mandatory for intra-state travellers to either be fully vaccinated or hold valid RT-PCR tests and for inter-state travellers to produce RT-PCR tests (48 hours), without exception. The 14-day home quarantine for all international passengers has been made mandatory despite being testing RT-PCR negative upon arrival.

For international passengers with connecting flights to any other airport in India, an RT-PCR test at the first arrival



airport in Maharashtra will be mandatory. They will be allowed to board the connecting flight only if the test result is negative, as per the order.

The Maha government has taken the measures amid the looming threat of new Covid variant Omicron which has been detected in many countries. Health Secretary said in the letter, "This is in divergence with the SoPs & guidelines issued by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India. I would, therefore, urge you to align the orders issued by the state with

the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, so that uniform implementation of the guidelines may be ensured across all states and UTs."

"I would also advise that such modified orders of the State Government are given wide publicity to obviate any inconvenience to travellers," the letter read.

The Union Health Ministry has issued a revised guidelines for international travellers coming to India in the wake of Covid variant Omicron.

Koregaon-Bhima case: HC grants bail to activist Sudha Bharadwaj

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday granted bail by default to lawyer-activist Sudha Bharadwaj, one of the accused in the 2018 Koregaon-Bhima and Elgar Parishad caste violence case.

A division bench comprising Justice SS Shinde and Justice NJ Jamadar has directed that Bharadwaj should be produced before the Special NIA Court next Wednesday which will impose the bail conditions and finalise her release.

The National Investigation Agency, which had opposed her bail plea, has sought two weeks' time stay on the order, hinting it may challenge the high court decision.

Bharadwaj becomes the first accused to get a default bail. Earlier some accused like P. Varavara Rao were granted bail on medical grounds while one accused Fr. Stan Lourduwamy passed away in custody in July after a prolonged illness. Hailing from Chhattisgarh, Bharadwaj, 60, has been in jail since August 2018 after her arrest from New Delhi by the Pune Police which was probing the twin case. A lawyer-activist and working for tribal rights, Bharadwaj was teaching at the National Law University when she was nabbed. A few months ago, through her lawyer Yug Chaudhry, Bharadwaj filed a plea for bail,



contending that after a lapse of 90 days of detention, there was no valid or lawful order extending the time for filing of the charge sheet and hence she was entitled to a default bail. Opposing the plea, the Maharashtra government argued that till the investigations were not assigned to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the proceedings on the probe could continue before the regular courts.

The NIA also contended that there was a judgement of the Bombay High Court that the NIA Court comes into the picture only after the central agency takes over the case probe.

However, the division bench has declined the applications of eight other co-accused in the same case including P Varavara Rao, Sudhir Dhawale, Rona Wilson, Advocate Surendra Gadling, Prof. Shoma Sen, Mahesh Raut, Arun Ferreira and Vernon Gonsalves.

After 6 infectees, Mumbai airport 'segregates' passengers from 'high-risk' countries

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In view of the threat from Covid-19 variant Omicron, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport on Wednesday started segregating passengers arriving here from the 'high-risk' countries, after six were found infected in the past few days, an official said.

The new exercise was implemented after six international passengers have tested positive for Covid-19, including two from South Africa and the rest from other high-risk countries in the past few days.

According to a state government official, one each was found positive in Mumbai, Kalyan-Dombivali and Mira-Bhayander, while one is from Pune and two others from Pimpri-Chinchwad.

Though all have tested positive, they are asymptomatic or displaying mild symptoms, but their samples have been sent for genetic sequencing and their contact tracing has been taken up.



As per the current guidelines, all passengers arriving from Europe and 11 other nations will be tested and samples of those found positive will be sent for genomic sequencing.

Those found negative shall also undergo quarantine for seven days

before testing again, and random tests on 5 per cent of all passengers landing here shall be conducted with positive reports to be sent for genetic sequencing.

The CSMA has also made adequate RT-PCR testing facilities at 48

registration counters and 40 sampling booths for international arrivals.

Besides three labs have been set up Lifenity, Suburban Diagnostics and Acu-MDx (Mylabs) for the testing purposes.

Besides the existing regular RT-PCR, 30 Rapid PCR machines are made available for the passengers intending to catch connecting onward flights with short gaps, and the facilities shall be upscaled further if required.

For those passengers who have not pre-booked online RT-PCR tests, QR codes are displayed at various locations in the arrival corridor.

Physical arrival for RT-PCR registration are available to the passengers on board which they can fill up before disembarking from the flight to avoid queues on arrival.

"The CSMA has undertaken all necessary precautions to mitigate the spread of the new covid variant. For CSMA, passengers safety, well-being, and security is of utmost importance," said a spokesperson.

'At-Risk' Nations' Fliers To Pay For 7-Day Quarantine In Maharashtra

International passengers from "at-risk" countries will have to take Covid tests thrice - on the second, fourth, and seventh days after arrival.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government on Tuesday said that all international passengers arriving from "at-risk" countries will have to undergo a mandatory seven-day institutional quarantine.

Sources at Mumbai airport say that the order to place passengers into compulsory isolation facilities will be implemented immediately. Travellers will be required to pay for the quarantine at designated hotels, a source added. The order may cause confusion at state airports as many passengers are mid-air on the way to the state, and would possibly be unaware of mandatory institutional quarantine rules and the hotel charges they would be required to pay.



These passengers will also be required to take RT-PCR tests for Covid thrice - on the second, fourth, and seventh days after arrival. Travellers who test positive will be shifted to a hospital while those testing negative will have to undergo an additional seven days of home quarantine, the government order said. The state government said that travel guidelines issued by the Centre on November 28 in view of 'Omicron', the new strain of Covid that has been designated a variant of concern, will act as "minimum restrictions".

International passengers travelling to the state will have to submit a declaration detailing the

countries they have visited in the last 15 days; this will be cross-checked by immigration on arrival. Incorrect information will make passengers liable to action under sections of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. Passengers from countries other than those designated "at-risk" by the union government will have to compulsorily undergo RT-PCR tests at the airport on arrival and undergo two weeks of institutional quarantine at home if the test is negative. If positive, they will be shifted to a hospital.

The list of countries deemed "at-risk" for now includes the United Kingdom, all 44 countries in Europe, South Africa, Brazil, Bangladesh, Botswana, China, Mauritius, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Israel. For international passengers who have connecting flights to other airports in India and don't need to leave the airport at all, they will undergo an RT-PCR test at the first arrival airport in Maharashtra and will be allowed to board the flight only if they test negative. If such a passenger has a connecting flight within the state, they will be subjected to quarantine rules that apply to all

Lockdown in Maharashtra? CM Uddhav Thackeray makes BIG statement as Omicron fears rise

Maharashtra CM Thackeray also asked government officials to take steps in order to check the spread of Omicron in the state.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amid growing threats of new COVID-19 variant Omicron, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has appealed to the people of the state to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour or else the government will be forced to impose another lockdown. CM Thackeray also asked the government officials to take steps in

order to check the speed of Omicron in Maharashtra. The Maharashtra chief minister made the statement while addressing a meeting with divisional commissioners and district collectors. The virtual meeting was held to discuss the coronavirus scenario in the state. "Get started without waiting for central government's directives," CM Thackeray directed the officials. "Citizens need to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour to prevent another lockdown in the state," he added. In today's meeting, CM Thackeray also asked the authorities to keep a vigil on all travellers landing at the state airports, the chief minis-



ter's office (CMO) said in a statement. Meanwhile, a person who had recently returned from South Africa has tested positive for COVID-19 in Dombivili area of Thane district in Maharashtra, as per media reports. The samples of the South Africa returnee has been sent to a genome sequencing lab to test if he is carrying the newly detected COVID-19 variant, Omicron, which was initially detected in South Africa. If the new variant is detected, the man will be the first Omicron positive person in India. The patient has been placed under isolation for now at the Art Gallery isolation centre of the Kalyan-Dombivili Municipal Corporation (KDMC). The man had travelled recently travelled to Mumbai after arriving in Delhi from South Africa on November 24.

40 Bangladeshis arrested for illegal stay in Bhiwandi; fake passports, Aadhaar cards recovered

Team Absolute | Thane

An officer said on Tuesday that 40 Bangladeshis were arrested in and around Bhiwandi city in Maharashtra's Thane district for staying illegally. They lived in three different police limits in Bhiwandi. Yogesh Chavan, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) of Zone 2, Bhiwandi, told reporters that the arrested men were working as labourers at different locations. They did not have any valid documents to stay in India, he said. A case was filed under the Indian Passport Act and the Foreign Nationals Act. Several raids were carried out in and around the powerloom town, he said, leading to the arrests.

A total of 20 Bangladeshis were arrested in Shanti Nagar, and 10 arrests each were made within the bounds of Bhiwandi town and Narpoli police station.

Police have seized fake passports, Aadhaar cards, PAN cards and 28 mobile phones worth Rs 94,000. Documents found from these Bangladeshis nationals contained addresses of Mumbai, Gujarat, and Bhiwandi. Police claimed that these Bangladeshis used the IMO App to communicate with relatives in the neighbouring country and with the person who reportedly assisted them in crossing the border. Last week, the Karnataka Police had arrested five Bangladeshis residing illegally on Bengaluru's outskirts.

Araga Jnanendra, the Karnataka Home Minister, responded to the arrests by saying that illegal immigrants can threaten the country's security. Jnanendra said all police stations have been ordered to identify and arrest illegal immigrants. The immigrants worked on coffee plantations and on construction sites. "We will get the facts out from them as to how many have sneaked into our state," said Jnanendra. They have obtained Aadhaar cards, ration cards, and have received the benefits reserved for the poor people of the state, said the Home Minister, adding: "We will track those people who are bringing them into our country."

Mumbai Starts December on Wet Note; Coastal Maharashtra Under Alert for Next 48 Hours

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Last month, significant wet weather conditions prevailed over Mumbai as the city witnessed the second-highest rains in a decade in November. Now, after a brief hiatus, wet weather conditions have made a brief comeback across the west coast of India, including the financial capital of India, Mumbai. Mumbaiers woke up to cloudy skies and moderate rainfall as a persistent cyclonic circulation started to affect the region. The regional met department has forecast moderate rain accompanied by thunderstorms in the city and suburbs during the next 48 hours. There are also high chances of heavy rains at a few places in Mumbai.

The Weather Channel's forecast predicts during the night hours of December 1, there is a 100% chance of rain with the possibility of 25-50 mm of showers. Come December 2, the rainfall prediction is noted around 80% (12 mm approx) during the daytime with 40% probability during the night hours. Light to moderate would also grip the



adjoining districts of Mumbai like Thane, Raigad and Palghar on Wednesday and Thursday. Accordingly, India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a yellow watch over Mumbai for today, which urges residents to 'be updated'. However, no alert has been issued by the met department for December 2. Despite that, it is advisable to stay cautious of the weather conditions. Earlier, forecasts suggested the possible formation of a low-pressure area over the east-central Arabian Sea off the Maharashtra coast. In addition,

a trough at mean sea level runs from this aforementioned system to Kutch in Gujarat. As of Monday morning, it looks like the cyclonic circulation is unlikely to strengthen any further, limiting the possibility of very heavy rains. Current meteorological conditions are set to produce fairly widespread to widespread rain or thunderstorms with isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall across the subdivisions of Maharashtra, particularly north Madhya Maharashtra and north Konkan over the span of the next 48 hours. Mumbai, however, is likely to witness partly cloudy sky with one or two spells of rain or thundershowers throughout this week till Sunday, December 5. The daytime temperatures in the city are also likely to remain lower than normal at below 30°C till Thursday. Over the last two months (October 1 to November 30), Mumbai city has recorded 52 mm of rain-34% less than normal. Suburban Mumbai has also witnessed 55% less than normal rains at 38.1 mm. Overall, Maharashtra recorded 108 mm rainfall in this same time frame.



EDITOR'S SPECS

UP BJP in yatra

The Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttar Pradesh is getting into the yatra mode by rolling out six yatras that will pass through all 403 Assembly constituencies in the state that goes to the polls early next year. The party had taken out similar yatras ahead of the 2017 state elections as well. "The previous yatras were aimed at exposing the previous government, but this yatra would be to tell the cadres about our achievements and seek people's blessings," said a party functionary. The yatras, beginning on December 7, will be co-ordinated by Vidya Sagar Sonkar, a Dalit leader of the party. They will likely start from six different places from each of the six organisational regions and end at Lucknow with a rally, likely to be addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Leaders who would lead these yatras are yet to be decided, but the motorised chariots will have cut outs of Modi and Yogi who remain our star campaigners. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), ideological mentor of the BJP, will also be involved in galvanising the masses for these yatras that would also focus on the 78 seats that the BJP failed to win in 2017 polls. The party will also focus on constituencies where the anti-incumbency factor is palpable. These yatras will be held before ticket distribution and will help the party assess the popular mood. To beat anti-incumbency, the BJP is expected to change almost half of the sitting lawmakers in various Assembly seats where it gets adverse feedback. Interestingly, the yatras will especially focus more on opposition bastions like Rae Bareilly, the parliamentary constituency of Congress president Sonia Gandhi, as well as Azamgarh, the Lok Sabha constituency of Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav.

SECURITY GOES BEYOND DETERRENCE OF UNIFORM

D.C. Pathak

Whenever there is mention of a threat to national security, people think of our defence forces in their glorious battle dress -- protecting the country on our borders against external attacks and winning the war for us. Security has for long been an issue of war and peace and all countries, big or small, maintained an army and sought alliances to defend themselves against their known enemies. In the days of Cold War, the two superpowers tried to outdo each other militarily and their race for superiority in the use of missiles produced the ultimate deterrence - the system termed as Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) built by the US.

Even as the open warfare was kept in check, there were attempts to cause ideological subversion and foment armed insurgency to weaken the adversary. It is, however, the rise of the phenomenon of 'covert' offensives witnessed in the post-Cold War period - after the success of the anti-Soviet armed campaign in Afghanistan had resulted in the dismemberment of USSR ending the Cold War - that brought in the era of 'asymmetric' warfare. Significantly, it is Afghanistan again that became the territory where - after one superpower was vanquished - the new global terror of Islamic radicals rooted in faith-based motivation would emerge to challenge the US, the other superpower. Use of terrorism for covert offensives across geographical boundaries helped replace open attacks with 'proxy wars' - with India becoming the biggest victim of cross-border terror instigated by Pakistan in Kashmir and elsewhere. 6/11 became India's 9/11 as Pakistan's ISI used terrorists to carry out an unprecedented covertly planned attack on Mumbai from the sea front. This war by stealth has set apart the distinct dimensions of 'defence' and 'security', calling for new measures to cope up with the advancement of weaponry in one case, and the technology used by terrorists in the other. The Sino-Pak axis has aggravated the threat of Pak-sponsored proxy war against India as cross-border terrorism was now sustained by the use of drones - a product of Chinese technology - for surreptitious dropping of arms and ammunition in the Kashmir Valley and drugs in the bordering areas of Punjab. Emergence of social media as an instrument of combat and use of internet for spreading 'radicalisation' and facilitating recruitment of potential terrorists have made the work of the adversary easier and the task of countering it so much more difficult. The threats in the cyber space are in prime focus of the security strategy in both the US and India. Importance of cyber security was highlighted at the recently-held DGPs'



conference in Lucknow, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi was himself present at the entire session for two days.

The threat of terrorism has resulted in two new developments - induction of Army in counter-terror operations on our own soil taking the challenge of civil-military cooperation to an entirely different plane, and opening of the ground for para-military forces of the Centre and Army to work together for the security of our borders. The Army trained in inflicting maximum casualties on the enemy attacking the country had to specially train itself for keeping collateral damages in counter-terror operations to its minimum, and presenting before the population the image of an empathetic force. Intelligence-based operations help in this and that is why the role of our intelligence infrastructure for the maintenance of internal security has become extremely critical. Security is protection against covert actions of the unseen enemy and is therefore anchored entirely on timely information on the plan and location of the latter which is precisely what intelligence was. An entirely new extension of 'proxy war' aimed at 'winning the war by other means' is the use of civil rights forces to run down a democratically elected government by building narratives for influencing the unsuspecting people against the ruling dispensation.

Majoritarianism, authoritarianism and treatment of minorities are 'issues' that could be easily built on vague grounds for creating the impression that Constitutional mandate was not being followed by the ruling regime.

Influencing the political outcome through non-governmental bodies linked to lobbies at home and abroad is a new age phenomenon -

it uses 'human' channels that supplemented what was being attempted through 'technology' on the internet. The significance of the recent address of National Security Advisor Ajit Doval at the 'passing out' function for new IPS officers at the National Police Academy in Hyderabad can be grasped in this context.

He pointed out that civil society was the new frontier of war as it can be manipulated to hurt a nation's interests. He aptly described it as 'fourth generation' warfare -- it certainly represented the finer realms of 'proxy war'.

Those who are to safeguard internal security - and police is often the first responder there - needed to be made fully aware of this challenge that went beyond the conventional law and order. The strategy of internal security has to shift in favour of enlarging the intelligence capability of our police organisations. There is strong presence already of armed forces in the border states of India, including the Northeast, and the deterrence of the uniform exists but only to an extent - the enemy agents learn to operate by going round the 'pickets'. Visibility of force gave confidence to the law abiding that the state is there to protect them and this could possibly also encourage them to be bold about doing their bit to contribute to national security. However, it is the success of the adversary in creating an underground network of agents and operators that needs to be thwarted. Efforts of the central intelligence agencies to unearth this hidden danger have to be augmented by the intelligence produced by state and district intelligence machineries in operational cooperation with the former.

Technology for improving policing has to be developed on

a priority basis and this precisely was the message that Prime Minister Modi gave to the recent conference of DGPs at Lucknow. In vulnerable border states such as J&K, Punjab, Arunachal, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur, a greater proportion of state police personnel should be seconded to intelligence function. Even policemen in uniform should be sensitised to take note of activities of fora that are playing 'politics by proxy' in collaboration with external lobbies. This should be done without prejudice to legitimate media activity and philanthropic missions, and action should be initiated only where there is a clear violation of the country's laws. In essence, the three contemporary features of India's internal security scenario are the adversary's attempts to use radicalisation for trapping vulnerable elements into becoming a part of the underground terror network, accentuate the majority-minority divide to feed communal militancy, and float civil society platforms to run down India on issues of governance.

Intellectualised debates have been sponsored on matters ranging from putting a question mark on Indian identity to advocating a place for China in Indo-Pak talks on Kashmir, because of the Chinese claim on the territory of that state. The challenge on internal security front is to draw in the police as a responder without permitting any scope for politicisation of the same.

(The writer is a former Director of Intelligence Bureau; the views expressed are personal)

international

EU investment plan to rival China's Belt and Road

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The EU is to reveal details of a global investment plan that's widely seen as a rival to China's Belt and Road initiative, BBC reported.

It's regarded as part of the West's efforts to counter Chinese

influence in Africa and elsewhere. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will present the "Global Gateway" initiative on Wednesday. The EU is looking at how it can leverage billions of euros, drawn from

member states, financial institutions and the private sector, the

report said. Von der Leyen said in her State of the Union speech in September: "We want investments in quality infrastructure, connecting goods, peopled services around the world." Wednesday's 14-page document isn't likely to explicitly pitch itself as a rival to



China's strategy. The Commission also studiously avoided mentioning China when pressed about the plans on Tuesday, the report said. But Andrew Small, a Senior Transatlantic Fellow at the German Marshall Fund, says the backdrop is inescapable: "Global Gateway wouldn't exist if you didn't have Belt and Road." For him it marks "the first serious effort from the European side to put packages together and figure out

financing mechanisms, so countries considering taking loans from China have an alternative option", the report said. Belt and Road has been a centre-piece of Chinese foreign policy; developing trade links by ploughing money into new roads, ports, railways and bridges. The strategy has reached into Asia, the Indo-Pacific, Africa and even into the EU's nearer neighbours in the Western Balkans.

Global campaign under Xi Jinping to exploit extradition treaties

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A new report documents hundreds of cases of the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) international harassment campaign against Taiwanese nationals via deportations and extraditions. The report by Safeguard Defenders presents the fullest picture to date of this alarming trend. "This international persecution of Taiwan nationals amounts to an assault on Taiwanese sovereignty, and is part of the larger global campaign under Xi Jinping to exploit extradition treaties, mutual law enforcement agreements, and other multilateral institutions for the Chinese Communist Party's political objectives," it said. China has increasingly shown that it has no regard for the rule of law, and will violate international norms without hesitation in pursuit of its opponents around the world. Through transnational repression and formal extraditions, China is pursuing economic fugitives, Uyghur refugees, human rights defenders, and fleeing Hong Kongers. But one group that has



received far less attention to date: hundreds of Taiwanese nationals have been detained and forcibly extradited to mainland China from around the world, the report said. International extradition and human rights norms set out clear conditions on acceptable extraditions and grounds for automatic of non-refoulement, which simply dictates that no country is to send anyone to another country where they are at risk of persecution or gross human rights abuses.

Conditions in China are such that fundamental human rights are wantonly denied, with impunity. These human rights abuses are both widespread and systematic as Safeguard Defenders has reported elsewhere. The extradition of Taiwanese nationals to the PRC under pressure from Beijing should very much be seen as a violation of their human right to a fair trial, and their right to be free from torture, the report said. Safeguard Defenders has document-

ed over 600 cases between 2016 and 2019 of Taiwan nationals abroad who have been extradited or deported from countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe. However, they have not been returned to Taiwan. Under increasing pressure from Beijing, foreign governments are instead forcibly sending them to China where they have no roots and no families. These forcible transfers are also often taking place following the denial of access to Taiwanese consular support or communication in the sending country, and sometimes followed by ongoing denial of contact with Taiwanese officials or family members once they are in China. These forced transfers put Taiwanese nationals at risk of severe human rights abuses. This pressure from Beijing is furthermore a direct refutation of China's obligations under the Cross-Strait Agreement on Joint Crime-Fighting and Judicial Mutual Assistance Agreement. Just as much as it is being used to bolster Beijing's influence abroad, it is being used as a tool to undermine Taiwan's sovereignty.

13.8 MN MORE PEOPLE IN LATIN AMERICA SUFFERING FROM HUNGER IN A YEAR: UN STUDY

Santiago | Agencies

The number of people suffering from hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) rose by 13.8 million in 2020, or by 2 per cent points, to reach 59.7 million people, according to a UN study released in Santiago in Chile. The report titled "Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021: Statistics and Trends", published on Tuesday, shows regional hunger is at its highest level since 2000, following a 30 per cent jump from 2019 to 2020 in the number of people suffering from hunger, Xinhua news agency reported. "We must say it loud and clear: Latin America and the Caribbean face a critical situation in terms of food security," regional representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Julio Berdegue said in a statement on Tuesday. Rossana Polastri, the regional director of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), said that while the pandemic aggravated the situation, hunger in the region has been on the rise since 2014. "We must correct the deep vulnerabilities of our food systems, make them more inclusive and sustainable, and ensure that they provide well-being to the people who feed our societies," Polastri said.

UN chief urges action for green, inclusive recovery of tourism

United Nations | Agencies

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for a green and inclusive recovery of tourism, which has been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. "As we restart and recover from the pandemic, UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organisation) has a key role in rethinking tourism and its interaction with societies, economies and our natural resources and ecosystems. That means green tourism, with high-emitting sectors including air and sea transport aiming for carbon neutrality," the top UN official said in a video message to UNWTO's General Assembly on Tuesday. "It means inclusive tourism that benefits marginalised communities and contributes to gender equality and intercultural understanding. And it



means sustainable tourism, which builds resilience, protects our planet and delivers on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," said the secretary-general. The UN chief expressed the hope that the decisions taken at this Assembly "will help to

restore trust in travel and get the world moving safely, so that developing economies can reap the benefits of sustainable tourism," Xinhua news agency reported. UNWTO is holding the 24th General Assembly in Madrid, Spain, from November 30 to December 3. The General Assembly is UNWTO's main gathering and the platform for member states to approve UNWTO's programme of work and budget for the coming biennium (2022-2023). The coronavirus pandemic will likely cost the global tourism sector \$2 trillion in lost revenue in 2021, the UN's tourism body said on Monday, calling the sector's recovery "fragile" and "slow." According to UNWTO's latest forecast, the same amount was lost in 2020, making it one of the hardest hit sectors by the health crisis.

8 rebels killed in fighting in central Philippines

Manila | Agencies

At least eight rebels were killed when government forces clashed with the leftist New People's Army (NPA) members in the central Philippines on Wednesday morning, the military said. Major General Benedict Arevalo, commander of the army's third Infantry Division, said fighting broke out around 6 am local time between soldiers and up to 70 NPA rebels near Miagao town in Iloilo province. The gun battle continued until around noontime, Arevalo said, adding that a clearing operation is ongoing in the clash site, Xinhua news agency

reported. Troops rushed to the area after villagers tipped off the presence of guerrillas in the forested area to prepare for an attack on a military base. The bodies of eight rebels, Arevalo said the troops also seized three M16 assault rifles, an AK-47, four landmines, and grenades. There were no casualties on the government side, Arevalo said. Arevalo said the military sent a police team to the clash site to examine the bodies of the eight rebels. The NPA rebels, the party's armed wing, have been fighting the government since 1969. They concentrate their attacks in rural areas and small-scale skirmishes with the military.



Bhopal disaster

37 years after the World's worst industrial disaster, justice remains denied to its survivors

"We would like the world to know that 37 years after the World's worst industrial disaster, justice remains denied to its survivors in Bhopal, India." Said Rashida Bee, President of the Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationary Karmchhari Sangh and a Goldman Environmental awardee.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Addressing a Press Conference held on the occasion of the 37th Anniversary of the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, leaders of survivors' organizations condemned the state and central governments for denying justice and a life of dignity to the survivors. The organizations also shared information on their just concluded 37 day campaign: "37 Years - 37 Questions" directed at the state and central governments.

"We would like the world to know that

37 years after the World's worst industrial disaster, justice remains denied to its survivors in Bhopal, India." Said Rashida Bee, President of the Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationary Karmchhari Sangh and a Goldman Environmental awardee. "We regret to say that the reason, no Bhopali has received adequate compensation and none of the culprits have gone to jail for a minute till this day, is that our democratically elected governments continue to collude with the American corporations." She added. Said Shehzadi Bee of the Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Purush Sangharsh Morcha, "The crowds in the hospitals, uninformed and indiscriminate prescription of potentially harmful medicines and the helplessness of the patients remains the same as that on the morning of the disaster. Today there are no standard treatment protocols for chronic diseases of the lungs, heart, kidneys and the endocrine, nervous and immune systems caused by Union Carbide's gases. Because the government has stopped all research on the health impact of the disaster, it is Union Carbide alone that has all the medical

information and the corporation is still claiming them to be trade secrets." "Instead of claiming compensation from Dow Chemical, USA for the environmental damage caused due to contamination of soil and groundwater, the Madhya Pradesh government is planning to build a memorial on top of a Global toxic hotspot to help the corporation escape its legal liabilities in Bhopal" said Rachna Dhingra of the Bhopal Group for Information & Action. Nousheen Khan of Children Against Dow Carbide said, "The state and central governments have failed the generation born to half million survivors after the disaster. Scientific studies published in international peer reviewed journals show that the health of the children born after the disaster to gas exposed parents is indeed impacted. Tens of thousands of children had to drop out of school because of their parents' being affected by the disaster. Yet the governments have done next to nothing to seek compensation for them or to provide them with gainful employment."

Mother-child statue near Carbide factory epitomises Bhopal gas tragedy

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The iconic statue of a woman with a child on her lap gasping for breath some 200 meters away from Union Carbide factory's boundary wall in JP Nagar colony, encapsulates the pain and agony of every 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy victim.

It is a memorial dedicated to the victims by a Dutch sculptor Ruth Waterman, during a visit to Bhopal in 1985 and speaks volumes of the trauma and miseries endured by the victims. The gas leak tragedy happened on the intervening night of December 2 and 3 in 1984 when the people were fast asleep on a winter night in Madhya Pradesh's capital Bhopal.

Even before the city could wake up to a fresh morning, people living in colonies surrounding the carbide factory, had to run to save their lives amid shouts of "bhago- bhago, gas leak ho gayee hai" (run-run, gas is leaking).

Within the next few hours, before the Sun rose, many were lying unconscious or breathless, while others who were alive were still running aimlessly to escape the highly toxic methyl isocyanate gas that leaked from a tank in the Union Carbide factory located in JP Nagar, the area now known as old Bhopal. Sixty-year-old David (he goes by a single name), who lived hardly 200 meters away from the boundary wall of the factory, had a lot to share with IANS. Many of his descriptions seemed nothing less than a horror movie scenario.

His father, one of the employees of Union Carbide factory, was on duty at the site when the tragedy occurred. "My father lost his vision. His lungs were completely damaged and he died after three months at a hospital. He, along with many other workers, had left from the northwest side of the factory.



Three days later, he was found struggling for life in a government hospital," a choked David shared.

As many as 36 wards were bracketed as "gas affected areas" by the authorities. The tragedy affected over five lakh people in the city. Nearly every soul in the populated residential colonies faced the horror and has a tale to tell.

Eighty-year-old Bano Bi, who lost her husband and a brother-in-law in the tragedy said: "Around 2 p.m., I smelt a foul odour and along with it came a bout of coughing never experienced before. To beat the discomfort I stepped out. As I opened the door of my house, I choked and was breathless." "People were running helter skelter, screaming, crying. Immediately, I hastened back to my room only to find my husband coughing relentlessly. I caught his hand and dragged him out. After running for nearly 30 minutes, I collapsed and regained consciousness in a hospital ward. I could meet my family only after three months. Sadly, my husband passed away 6 months after the incident and my troubles continue."

Bhopal gas tragedy: A careless UCIL, but healthcare system during Covid still overburdened

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Leaked toxic Methyl IsoCyanate (MIC) gas from the Union Carbide of India Ltd (UCIL) factory started affecting the residents of Madhya Pradesh capital city Bhopal, especially those residing in the southeast direction from the factory, around 2 a.m. on the intervening night of December 2 and 3 in 1984. However, the leak was sensed hours before with technical failure in the factory during the process of controlling it, suggests a report prepared by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and released in 2010.

The UCIL, a pesticide plant, was established in JP Nagar area, now known as old Bhopal city to produce the pesticide 'Sevin' (brand name of US based company UCC) using Methyl IsoCyanate gas in 1969. The factory had housed three underground liquid MIC storage tanks - E610, E611 and E619. The liquid MIC production was in progress and being used to fill these tanks. Stainless steel tanks were pressurised with inert nitrogen gas, a process to allow MIC to be pumped out of each tank as needed, and also kept impurities and moisture out of the tanks. During the failure, tank E610 was containing around 42 tonnes of liquid MIC. An attempt to re-establish pressure in tank E610 on December 1 failed, so liquid MIC could not be pumped out of it.

During the late evening on December 2, water was believed to have entered a side pipe and into Tank E610 which started a runaway exothermic reaction, which was accelerated by contaminants, high ambient temperatures and various other factors such as the presence of iron from corroding non-stainless steel pipelines. Workers in the factory's MIC area started feeling the effects of minor exposure to the gas around 11.30 p.m. on December 2.

The supervisor on duty at the time



was informed immediately and it was decided that the problem will be discussed during a tea break after 12 a.m. In the meantime, workers were instructed to continue looking for leaks. After five minutes (at 12.40 a.m.), tank E610 reached a critical state at an alarming speed.

Subsequently, a concrete slab above tank E610 cracked as the emergency relief valve burst open, and pressure in the tank continued to increase. It could have been controlled using two technical processes -- either to cool the tank or to pass stored liquid MIC gas to the flare tower to burn it. "The refrigeration system established to cool the tanks was removed around six months before the disaster took place. The pipe of the flare tower meant to burn MIC gas was improperly sized to reduce a leak," reports analysed by IANS suggested.

"After the failure of hours of efforts to fix the technical problem, the factory's siren was sounded to alert the people around 2.30 a.m. and employees and workers left towards the north direction from the factory," said David, (goes by a single name) who claimed that his father was one of the workers in the factory during the disaster.

By 1.30 a.m. about 30 tonnes of MIC had leaked from the tank into the atmosphere and in the next two hours it reached the nearby residential colonies and the people in deep sleep

started inhaling the toxic gas. People started falling unconscious and the world's worst chemical disaster began in Bhopal, early on December 3.

"People started dying within hours. By 7 am on December 3, 70 people had died which increased to 260 by 9 am and thereafter the figure continued to rise," the ICMR report stated.

The situation for medical experts in Bhopal during the gas disaster in 1984 seems similar to the outbreak of the Covid pandemic in India by early 2020. The healthcare system was overburdened, breathless people were lying on the roads, hospitals were filled with bodies. A similar situation was witnessed in many parts of India during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021. VM Kathoch, the then secretary to the Government of India and the Director of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), wrote on a 'Preface' of 142 pages reports prepared by a team of medical experts, including some from Bhopal, which read, "Helpless doctors were neither aware about the nature of 'Killer Gas', which had escaped into the air from the Union Carbide India Ltd (UCIL) factory, nor did they have any idea about antibodies to be administered. Yet they did whatever they could by way of symptomatic treatment, to make the last minutes of the victims on earth more tolerable."

37 years after, ground zero continues to haunt

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Spread over 85 acres, the Union Carbide factory premises gives an eerie feeling with falling buildings and ever-growing shrubs, a remnant of an unparalleled tragedy that saw thousands die and lakhs suffer. Thirty-seven years after the Bhopal gas tragedy, December 3 is one of those blot marks of history that can never see closure.

Around half a dozen buildings, which include offices, guestrooms, canteen for employees and workers, etc, situated at different locations of the land are in a dilapidated state. Each one of these buildings had a specific role to play in the process of making and storing of the highly

toxic substances methyl isocyanate (MIC). Surrounded by dense bushes, and a warning note as a prohibited zone for general public, the only building appearing to be in a better condition -- is the three-storey structure, which used to be the office and the residence of senior employees of the Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), an American chemical corporation owned by Dow Chemical company. In other buildings, time and thieves have imprinted their mark.

Apart from the buildings, some other residues such as big size tanks, iron pipes along with flare towers and some other materials are also available. A heavily concrete portion of land within its boundary, located hardly 300-

350 meters away from the MIC production site, appeared to be a helipad.

One of the three iron tanks (Tank - E610), whose malfunctioning had resulted in the leakage of toxic MIC gas and caused deaths of around 3,000 people within the next few hours after the leak, is seen lying along the roadside within the premises. The reports suggest that the Bhopal UCIL facility had housed three underground 68,000 liters liquid MIC storage tanks, named -- E610, E611 and E612.

As per the government's data, over five lakh people were exposed to methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas, however, estimates vary on the death toll. A total of 2,259 deaths were immediate, the activists, however, said that around 8,000 peo-

ple died within two weeks, and another 8,000 or more died from gas-related diseases over the following years.

Underground tank E610, that had stored around 42 tonnes of MIC gas at the time of disaster the intervening night between December 2 and 3 was removed from its foundation and set aside later in 2010.

To protect the factory assets from thieves and to prohibit the general public's entry within its premises, the Madhya Pradesh government in 2010 set up a concrete boundary wall. The state government has also deployed Bhopal district police for security concerns. However, only three police personnel, who are permanently deployed for the security, could be seen playing

cards inside. The building, in which the police personnel are residing, is also in a poor state, with broken iron rods and damaged parts. "A total of 15 police personnel are deployed for security of the premises. Thieves would enter from the back side and break the iron rods to make a quick buck. No one is allowed to enter here without the permission from the state government," one of the police personnel told IANS, while enjoying cards with two other colleagues. The NPA rebels, the party's armed wing, have been fighting the government since 1969. They concentrate their attacks in rural areas and small-scale skirmishes with the military.

Administering second vaccine dose to all is the biggest task and first priority: CM



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that since the last few days, Corona positive cases are being reported off and on in Bhopal, Indore and Jabalpur. The number of Corona patients has increased. Patients have been found at different locations. This is enough to warn us. We are conducting Corona test on a regular basis. The symptoms that are visible are a sign of the impending crisis. It is necessary that we take utmost care.

Chouhan was addressing all collectors and members of Crisis Management Committees of the state through video conference

from his residence on Wednesday.

Chouhan said that I will go out to generate public awareness about wearing masks. You should also wear masks and urge people to wear masks. There are endless benefits of wearing mask. We will make arrangements for treatment, if we take these measures now, then the infection will not spread much. I want to appeal to the public representatives that you have to knock at every door to make people wear masks and get vaccinated. Today is the Maha Abhiyan.

Chouhan said that I instruct the collectors not to leave any stone unturned in their efforts. Public awareness must be maintained.

The members of the Crisis Management Committee should be called upon to play an active role with full honour. Chouhan said that caution is necessary regarding the new variant of Corona. I have given instructions to take all precautions and ensure arrangements. The concerned officials will go to the hospital and see the system there. There is no greater task for me than administering the second dose of the vaccine and get it completed in any case. We will leave no stone unturned in ensuring all the other arrangements. Inspect the hospitals and get information about the arrangement of medicines, availability of equipment and working of oxygen plants.

Chouhan said that the attendance of children in school has been decreased to 50 percent as they have not been vaccinated. I do not wish to impose any ban. There is no objection to marriage functions and market, but one must avoid unnecessary crowd. We have to educate people so that the infection does not spread.

CM STARTS PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TO WEAR MASKS



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan advised the general public in rural areas of Sehore district to use face masks. He started an awareness campaign on the use of face masks to prevent Corona infection. Chief Minister will also make people aware under the campaign in other cities and towns. Chouhan distributed face masks in Salkanpur and made people who were not using it, wear it with his own hands. Chouhan also urged them to maintain social distancing.

Chief Minister said that both doses of the vaccine must be administered to protect against Covid-19, only then will we be successful in preventing the third wave of Corona infection.

72nd meeting of Narmada Control Board held

Complete the work of irrigation projects at a fast pace: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the Narmada Valley Development Department should make efforts to complete the irrigation projects in the state at a faster pace. Projects whose work has not started yet should be started expeditiously. Our top priority is to increase the irrigation potential in the state. Chouhan gave these instructions while presiding over the 72nd meeting of Narmada Control Board in Mantralaya on Wednesday.

Chouhan said that Harda district should be made cent percent irrigated in the state. This will be a big achievement for the state. By becoming cent percent irrigated district, Harda will be able to become an ideal model for other districts. Water Resources Minister Tulsiram Silawat, Farmers Welfare and Agriculture Development Minister Kamal Patel, Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains and other officials were present in the meeting.



It was informed that under Chinki-Boras Barrage Joint Multipurpose Micro Irrigation Project, Chinki and Boras Barrage, Power House, Pump House etc. would be constructed. This project will benefit 396 villages of Narsinghpur-Raisen and Hoshangabad districts and irrigation facility will be available in one lakh 31 thousand 925 hectare area. Under the Sanwer Micro Lift Irrigation Project, a pressurized piped irrigation system will be constructed in Khargone-

Indore. 272 villages will be benefited by the project and irrigation facilities will be available in 80 thousand hectare area.

In the meeting, approval was given to extend the time limit for providing irrigation facilities through micro irrigation system in Khargone district till June 30, 2023 under Bhikangaon Binjalwara Micro Irrigation Project. On completion of the project, irrigation facility will be available in 50 thousand hectare area.



Nicolas Cage to play Dracula in 'Renfield' movie



Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actor Nicolas Cage will be seen playing the role of Dracula in the upcoming film 'Renfield', a monster movie centering not on the infamous vampire, but rather his notorious lackey. An origin story, the upcoming film is expected to take place in the present day. Its unclear how much it will stick to the source material, Bram Stoker's 1897 horror novel 'Dracula', reports variety.com. In the literary thriller, R.M. Renfield was an inmate at a lunatic asylum. He was thought to be suffering from delusions that compelled him to eat live creatures in the hopes of obtaining immortality, until it's later revealed that he's under the influence of one Count Dracula. Chris McKay is directing and producing 'Renfield', reports variety.com. Cage is known to be an intensely method actor, gorging on red meat to gain weight and connect as a carnivore in the 2013 crime drama 'Joe' and removing two of his teeth without anesthesia to inflict physical pain on himself before playing a Vietnam veteran in 1984's 'Birdy'. 'Renfield' is Universal's latest try to fashion a cinematic universe around characters from the studio's vast monster vault. After Tom Cruise's 2017 reboot 'The Mummy' flopped in theaters, the studio shifted its strategy away from interconnected stories and instead began to focus on standalone features.

RIHANNA DECLARED NATIONAL HERO BY BARBADOS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Rihanna was honoured by Prime Minister Mia Mottley at an event which marked Barbados's new status as a republic, which was attended by Prince Charles. Addressing the pop star by her real name, the PM said: "Robyn Rihanna Fenty tomorrow morning shall have conferred upon her the order of national hero of Barbados." Rihanna was then summoned from her seat to accept the honour, with the Prime Minister managing to rouse a laugh from the singer when she referenced her 2012 hit 'Diamonds', reports femalefirst.co.uk. She added: "On behalf of a grateful nation, but an even prouder people, we therefore present to you, the designee, for the national hero of Barbados." "And to accept on behalf of a grateful nation - you can come my dear - ambassador Robyn Rihanna Fenty, may you continue to shine like a diamond and bring honour to your nation." Rihanna, who was born in the St Michael parish of Barbados, found fame in 2005 after being spotted by a record producer and has since gone on to become one of the most successful female artists of all time with sales of over 250 million and recently reached billionaire status through her Fenty beauty brand.



HALLE BERRY SIGNS MULTI-PICTURE NETFLIX FILM DEAL

Los Angeles: Hollywood star Halle Berry, who made her directorial debut with the Netflix film 'Bruised', has signed a multi-picture film deal with the streaming giant. She has signed a deal with the service to produce and star in feature films, reports variety.com. Netflix said 'Bruised', which debuted in September at the Toronto International Film Festival, rated as its top film in the United States this week. It was also the No. 2 English language film around the globe, ranking as the first choice in 71 countries and was watched for 47.7 million hours in its first five days of release. "My directorial debut, 'Bruised,' was a labor of love and I knew that Scott and Ted would treat it with great care," Berry said of Netflix film head Scott Stuber and co-CEO Ted Sarandos. She added: "The Netflix team has not only been collaborative and creative, but extremely passionate and a delight to work with. I am beyond grateful for the partnership and look forward to telling more stories together." In the project, Berry plays an MMA fighter who reclaims her power in both the ring and in her



Priyanka Chopra says long-distance romance has been 'hard'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Priyanka Chopra Jonas has been filming her upcoming series 'Citadel' in London over the last 12 months, but the actress says it's been tough to be apart from her husband American pop singer Nick Jonas for so long. Priyanka shared: "This year has been really tough. It was really, really tough to be away from home for an entire year, especially at a time when you can't travel to see your family. I was just alone." The actress and Nick, 29, have needed

to quarantine before they've been able to spend time together at various points over the last year, reports femalefirst.co.uk. Priyanka concedes that it's made life "tricky" for the loved-up duo. She told the 'Ladies First With Laura Brown' podcast: "It was tricky but we managed." Priyanka and Nick are both understanding of their individual situations and their long-term career ambitions.



Riz Ahmed, Lulu Wang to produce comedy series 'Son of Good Fortune'

Los Angeles | Agencies

British-Pakistani actor Riz Ahmed and filmmaker Lulu Wang are joining hands to produce a comedy series 'The Son of Good Fortune'. Based on the novel of the same name by Lysley Tenorio, the series is about an undocumented Filipino teenager in the Bay area navigating a tumultuous relationship with his former B-movie action star mother, falling in love for the first time, and working out how to pay back a massive debt before his whole life crumbles, reports variety.com. Andrew Lopez will adapt the

book for the screen and serve as an executive producer. Ahmed will executive produce along with Allie Moore of Left Handed. Wang and Dani Melia executive produce for Local Time. Tenorio will serve as consulting producer, with Amazon Studios producing. The project is the first for Left Handed since it was announced that Ahmed and the company had signed a first-look TV deal at Amazon in January. He previously partnered with the streamer on the critically-acclaimed film 'Sound of Metal', for which Ahmed received an Oscar, BAFTA, and Golden Globe nomination for best actor.



Adele announces Las Vegas residency beginning in January

Los Angeles | Agencies

Grammy winning-singer Adele has announced an exclusive residency in the Colosseum of Las Vegas' Caesars Palace Hotel, beginning Friday January 21, 2022. Titled 'Weekends With Adele', she will perform two shows each weekend through Saturday April 16, 2022 for a total of 12 weeks, reports variety.com. The long-rumoured announcement comes on the heels of the singer's fourth studio album, '30', on Columbia Records, which debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 this week with by far the year's biggest first-week numbers, around 839,000 units. It debuted at No. 1 on album charts in 30 countries and is already one of the biggest selling albums of 2021; it became the top-selling album of 2021 in just three days, topping Taylor Swift's 'Evermore', which had sold 462,000 copies over 11 months. The Colosseum, which has an official capacity of 4,100, provides a relatively intimate environment for Adele's famously chatty concerts, which find her stately and often-sad songs contrasting with her bawdy humour and hilarious, self-deprecating banter. Adele's shows take place across consecutive weekends, except for February 18-19, when Van Morrison, who has taken an outspoken stance against the Covid-19 vaccine, is performing at the venue. Apparently, Caesars Palace has no vaccine requirement for these or any concerts.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Nicky Hilton



BWF WORLD TOUR FINALS

SINDHU, SRIKANTH WIN OPENER; PONNAPPA-SIKKI, CHIRAG-SATWIK LOSE

Bali (Indonesia) | Agencies

Acce Indian shuttlers PV Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth began their 2021 BWF World Tour Finals campaigns with wins while women's doubles pair of India's Ashwini Ponnappa-N Sikki Reddy and men's doubles duo Chirag Shetty-Satwiksairaj Rankireddy lost their opening matches, here on Wednesday. Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu beat Denmark's Line Christophersen 21-14, 21-16, in her first match of Group A in women's singles. Reigning badminton world champion's long reach and solid defence countered Christophersen's aggressive play in the opening game as she took an 11-9 lead into the break. After the restart, Indian shifted gears and easily wrapped up the game 21-14. In the second game, the 21-year-old Christophersen showed more maturity and gave competition to Sindhu. However, with the score at 13-13, the experienced shuttler forced the momentum in her favour with four back-to-back points and proceeded



to end the match in straight games. The 26-year old Sindhu will now take on Germany's Yvonne Li and Thai shuttler Pornpawee Chochuwong in the next two group matches on Thursday and Friday respectively. Notably, the participating players (in men's and women's singles) and doubles teams (in men's, women's and mixed doubles) are divided into

two groups of four each in every category at the 2021 BWF World Tour Finals. The top two from each group make the semifinals. Meanwhile, former world No 1 Kidambi Srikanth registered a comfortable 21-14, 21-16 victory over France's Toma Junior Popov in the men's singles Group B opener. Srikanth will face three-time junior

world champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn in his next group match on Thursday. However, in the women's doubles, India's Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy went down 14-21, 18-21 to the Japanese second seeds Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida. Up against Bulgaria's Gabriela and Stefani Stoeva on Thursday, the Indian pair will need to bounce back to keep their final four hopes alive. Later in the day, young Lakshya Sen, picked up valuable points in Group A after his opponent, world No 1 Kento Momota of Japan, was forced to retire with back pain shortly after the match began. On the other hand, Denmark's Rasmus Gemke also withdrew from the other group match against Viktor Axelsen with injury. With both Momota and Gemke withdrawing from the competition, Lakshya Sen and Viktor Axelsen will automatically progress to the knockout stage. In another clash, Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy lost 16-21, 5-21 to Danish pair Kim Astrup and Anders Skaarup Rasmussen in Group A men's doubles match.

Junior Hockey World Cup

India edge past Belgium 1-0, to meet Germany in semis

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

Defending champions India registered a hard-fought 1-0 win over Belgium in the quarter-finals of the FIH Odisha Junior Hockey World Cup, here on Wednesday. The hosts will now face Germany in the semi-final on Friday, who defeated Spain 3-1 through penalties after the scores were level at 2-2 at the end of regulation time. S N Tiwary scored the only goal of the match through a penalty corner for India. In the 21 minutes, India got the first penalty corner of the match when Belgium players stopped Sanjay Singh in the circle. Tiwari did not make any mistake and converted it with ease to give India a one goal lead. However, Tiwari made another attempt to extend India's lead with the solo run but Belgium defence was up to the pace from there as they were getting closer and closer to the Belgian goal.



India missed another chance in 14 minutes when Uttam Singh invaded the strong Belgium defence from the left flank. He took a shot but the Belgium goalkeeper saved it nicely. After that, no real scoring chances were created by either team as the first half ended without any goal. In the second quarter, the Indian team played some brilliant hockey, got many chances to breach the Belgium defence, but failed to convert it. However, five minutes into the second quarter Belgium, too, got the penalty corner but failed to equalise the score. The drag-flick from Louis de Backer went narrowly wide off the mark from the left side of the goal. In the third quarter, the Indian goalkeeper rose to the occasion and saved at least two brilliant moves of Belgium. In the 42nd minute, Stockbroeck's attempt went narrowly over the goalpost, though Pawan was alert enough to see the ball go past the goalpost. India will now take on strong team Germany on Friday.

Former World No 4 Johanna Konta announces retirement

London | Agencies

Three-time Grand Slam semi finalist and former World No.4 Britains Johanna Konta has announced her retirement from professional tennis on Wednesday. Konta posted a message about her retirement on Instagram. "Grateful: This is the word that I've probably used the most during my career, and is the word that I feel explains it best at the end," she wrote. "My playing career has come to an end, and I am so incredibly grateful for the career that it turned out to be. All the evidence pointed towards me not 'making' it in this profession. However, my luck materialised in the people that came into my life and impacted my existence in ways that transcended tennis. I am so incredibly grate-



ful for these people. You know who you are." "Through my own resilience and through the guidance of others, I got to live my dreams. I got to become what I wanted and said as a child. How incredibly fortunate I count myself to be. How grateful I am," WTA

posted Konta's statement on their website. The Briton was a four-time WTA champion, with her biggest title coming at the Miami Open in 2017, where she defeated Simona Halep, Venus Williams and Caroline Wozniacki in the last three rounds.

'CHAPTER CLOSED', SAYS WARNER AS SRH RELEASE HIM FOR MEGA AUCTION

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The bittersweet relationship of Australian destructive batter David Warner with the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) has finally ended after he was released for the mega auction ahead of the upcoming season. Warner thanked all his fans and supporters for sticking by his side. He posted a picture of him with Rashid Khan and Kane Williamson and captioned it, "Chapter closed!! Thanks to all of the fans @srhfansofficial @sunrisersfansofficial for your support over all the years, it was much appreciated. #fans #loyal." A fan asked Warner on Instagram whether he would like to play for the franchise if they retained him. Warner confidently replied, "They won't, but I can't do anything about that." SRH had dropped Warner from captaincy during the India leg of the IPL and then the management kept him out of the playing XI and even the squad. Hence, his non-retention comes as no surprise to him as well as his fans.

2nd Test, Day 3: Sri Lanka 46/2 at stumps, trailing by 3 runs vs West Indies

Galle | Agencies

Sri Lanka were 46/2 at stumps in their second innings, trailing by 3 runs after bowling out West Indies for 253 on day three of the second Test, here on Wednesday. After being bundled for 204 in their first innings, spinner Ramesh Mendis (6/70) brought the hosts back into the game on Day 3. Resuming the day at 69/1, West Indies skipper Kraigg Brathwaite and Nkrumah Bonner started brilliantly in their effort to reduce the Sri Lankan lead. Batting sensibly, it looked like the pair would take the visitors past the lead as Brathwaite brought up his half-century while Bonner was starting to look more and more settled at the crease. But Ramesh proved to be the man with the golden



arm again in this series. Bowling from round the wicket, he got one delivery to fizzle off the pitch to trap Bonner lbw, bringing an end to his knock of 35. After Bonner's wicket, Brathwaite unleashed a few cracking shots against the spinners before Lasith

Emuldeniya came up with a peach of a delivery to end his stay at the crease. Beaten by the flight and trajectory, Brathwaite was bowled after an excellent knock of 72 on his birthday. In the final session with the lights fading away, Sri Lanka had to negotiate

through a tricky phase. They had to endure a major setback, as they lost skipper Karunaratne to a brilliant piece of fielding from Kyle Mayers. He picked the ball brilliantly and shot a rocket of a direct hit as the Lankan captain was left languishing short of his crease.

Juve conquer Salernitana in Serie A

Rome | Agencies

Juventus finished November with a win as a pair of strikes from Alvaro Morata and Paulo Dybala gave the Old Lady a 2-0 away victory over Salernitana in a late Tuesday game. Juve were desperate for a win after two consecutive defeats between the Champions League and the Serie A. Juve dominated the ball possession from the very beginning and broke the deadlock in the 20th minute with a great team move, as Dybala completed a give-and-go with Dejan Kulusevski before the Argentine drilled home on the edge of the box. The Old Lady continued its dominance and Giorgio Chiellini

found the net in the 28th minute, but it was cancelled as Moise Kean was offside during the play. The away side sealed the win in the 69th minute when Federico Bernardeschi squared for Morata to cushion into the net from close range. Dybala should have bagged a brace in the stoppage time, but he ballooned his penalty created by Morata over the bar. With the win, Juve ranks seventh with 24 points, 11 behind leader Napoli, 11 behind leader Napoli who visits Sassuolo later on Wednesday. Also on Tuesday, Mario Pasalic's hat-trick inspired Atalanta to humiliate Venezia 4-0, Fiorentina overturned Sampdoria 3-1, Hellas Verona shared the spoils with Cagliari 0-0.

Sportz Village Xp organizes Red Bull Shuttle Up 2021

The platform aims to encourage young girls to showcase their talent; reinforces Red Bull as a sports enabler brand

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Sportz Village Xp, India's premier sports management company successfully organized the third season of Red Bull's women's double badminton championship program called 'Red Bull Shuttle Up'. Shuttle Up is India's first exclusive women's double badminton open championship program and serves as a platform for budding female badminton players (age category 16+ years) to showcase their skills. Sportz Village Xp has had a long-established partnership with Red Bull since 2018 and this is the third consecutive year wherein the company has envisioned and executed the bad-

minton tournament for Red Bull. In 2020 when the pandemic hit, the entire country was under lockdown due to which all the sports events had halted. Post the COVID lockdowns, the Shuttle Up 2021 program marks the resumption of brand-led on-ground sports activation. With the growing popularity of the sport be it viewership or participation, Red Bull Shuttle Up, India's first-ever exclusive women's doubles tournament, aims to further boost and improve participation and popularity amongst aspiring women players. Adhering to all COVID and government-regulated protocols, this year's event was conducted in five cities Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Guwahati,

and Chandigarh. For the tournament, Sportz Village Xp ensured maximum participation by driving registrations in schools and colleges across major cities. With the action-packed season, the National finals were conducted at the Thyagaraj sports complex in Delhi. The winners of the tournament also got a chance to play against Ashwini Ponnappa, one of India's best doubles badminton players as she is the face of the program. Sportz Village Xp has been very actively organizing and managing many such customized Experiential Sports Marketing programs for leading brands like Boost, Tata Tea, Reliance Foundation, Skoda, and more.

EVERYONE IS BACKING RAHANE AND PUJARA, SAYS MHAMBREY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

India bowling coach Paras Mhambrey said on Wednesday that the team is backing senior batters Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara to come good ahead of the second Test against New Zealand on Friday. He believes that the duo is just one innings away from bouncing back in form. In Test matches in 2021, Rahane has amassed just 411 runs in 21 innings at an average of 19.57, including only two half-centuries. In the drawn first Test at Kanpur, Rahane registered scores of 35 and 4, resulting in his Test career average going below 40. Pujara, on the other hand, is yet to score a century since his knock of 193 against Australia in the 2019 Sydney Test. Just like Rahane, Pujara was unable to leave an impact in the Kanpur Test, making 26 and 22 in both innings.



2nd Test: India A restrict South Africa to 233/7 on Day 1

Bloemfontein | Agencies

Putting up an excellent performance with the ball, India A restricted South Africa to 233/7 at the end of Day 1 of the second four-day Test match, here on Tuesday. After electing to bat, South Africa A lost their skipper Pieter Malan as Arzan Nagwaswalla struck in the second over. Sarel Erwee and Raynard van Tonder then added 72 runs together before Ishan Porel struck in successive overs to dismiss the two. Navdeep Saini joined the



wicket-taking party as he got Tony de Zorzi out before left-arm spinner Saurabh Kumar gave India A their fifth success with the ball, dismissing Zubayr Hamza. Baba Aparajith then ended Sinethemba Qeshile's resilience and ended his 102-ball 32-run knock, having him caught behind the wickets. Saini then picked the last wicket of the day for India A as he got George Linde out for 44. Brief scores: South Africa A 233/7 (George Linde 44, Sarel Erwee 38; Ishan Porel 2/26, Navdeep Saini 2/54) vs India A

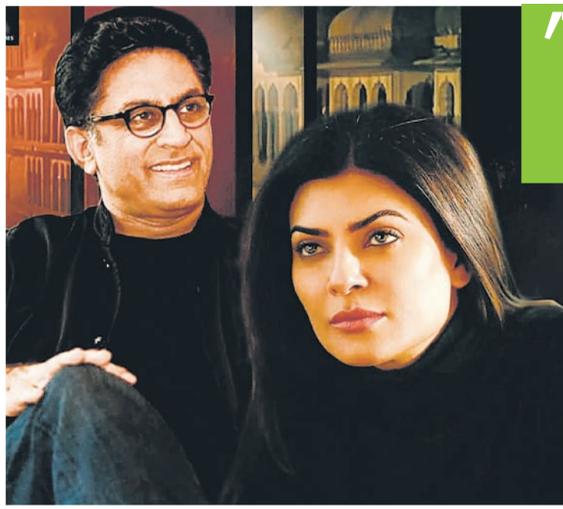
IND v NZ: Both teams reach Mumbai for the second Test

Team Absolute | Mumbai

What do you do when you are travelling from one bio bubble to another and are stuck at an airport? You play monopoly if you are the New Zealand cricketers moving from Kanpur to Mumbai for the second Test against India. Both the teams reached Mumbai late in the evening on a chartered flight for the second and final Test of the series to be played at the Wankhede Stadium from December 3. With the first match at Kanpur ending in a thrilling draw with the Black Caps surviving by the skin of their teeth, the match at Wankhede becomes the series decider with a lot riding on it for both teams. This will be the first Test at Mumbai after almost five years -- the last match played at this ground was the India-England Test in 2016. Just like the



Kanpur Test, the second Test will also be played in a stadium with reduced capacity as the Maharashtra government has capped the crowd capacity at 25 percent.



Created by award-winning director Ram Madhvani, Aarya 2 co-produced by Endemol Shine India and Ram Madhvani Films brings to light Aarya Sareen's journey from being powerless to fearless

'The signature element for both seasons of Aarya are the moral choices'

Team Team Absolute | Mumbai

After emerging as one of the most gripping thrillers from India with an International Emmy nomination for best drama series, Aarya is set to hit the digital scene with Season 2. What makes it one of the most anticipated OTT series is that its trailer is rife with surprising twists. The key question its trailer raised is - 'Can Aarya Sareen escape her past, or will her own family betray her, yet again?' Disney+ Hotstar, Endemol Shine India and Ram Madhvani Films are ecstatic to offer Aarya Season 2, starring Sushmita Sen in the role of an

unwilling outlaw. Conceptualised and created for India by Ram Madhvani, the series is an official adaptation of the hit Dutch series Penzoza by NL Film (Banijay Group). Aarya Season 2 will be available only on Disney+ Hotstar on 10th December 2021.

Ahead of the release of the second installment of Aarya, Ram Madhvani shares with us the special element of both seasons, "The signature element between Aarya 1 and Aarya 2 is really on one hand the moral choices and the moral conflict that Aarya faces. In Season 1, it was whether she should protect her own children. That's on the content front. On the form front, obviously we now shoot everything in 360. We

don't like to use three to four cameras. We are now comfortable with all the actors. I think the great thing is that all the actors knew their characters. That was a bonus I would say."

The second season of Aarya follows the journey of a mother combatting the dark world of crime and enemies closing in on her family and children. Will her family continue to be her strength or will her own trustworthy people turn against her? Sushmita Sen will be seen reprising the role of Aarya Sareen and she will be joined by actors Sikandar Kher, Vikas Kumar, Mayo Sarao, Ankur Bhatia, Akash Khurana, Dilnaz Irani amongst others.

FILMS FROM UZBEKISTAN, RUSSIA, IRAN, AUSTRALIA, AND SPAIN BAG TOP AWARDS AT KIDZCINEMA 2021

Team Absolute | Mumbai

KidzCINEMA 2021, last evening in an Award Ceremony announced the Gaja Awards for the 2nd edition of this inter-

national children's film festival in presence of well-known Bollywood actor Kannan

With the festival's theme "stories of positivity," the festival had received 1519 film entries from 93 countries, out of which 51 films were a part of official selection competing for awards. The films, which received Golden Gaja Awards are as follows:

Animation (Short): Girl and cloud - UZBEKISTAN
Live Action (Short): Georgy - RUSSIAN FEDERATION
Live Action (Long): A Tale of Flight - IRAN
Kidz Made Films (Juniors): The science of stress during remote learning - AUSTRALIA
Kidz Made Films (Youth): The Power of the Mirror - SPAIN



Arunachalam, as Chief Guest. KidzCinema2021 was kicked off Universal Children's Day, which is celebrated on 20th November each year to promote international togetherness, awareness among children worldwide, and improving children's welfare. The festival is available virtually for a month up to 19th December, through



MovieSaints, the streaming partner. This festival is supported by CIFEJ (Centre International de Film pour l'enfance et La Jeunesse i.e. The International Centre of Films for Children and Young People). Children from all over the world interacted with eminent directors, actors, and participate in various workshops on Filmmaking, Animation, Scriptwriting, Acting, Anchoring, and Theatre etc.

Super Encouraging

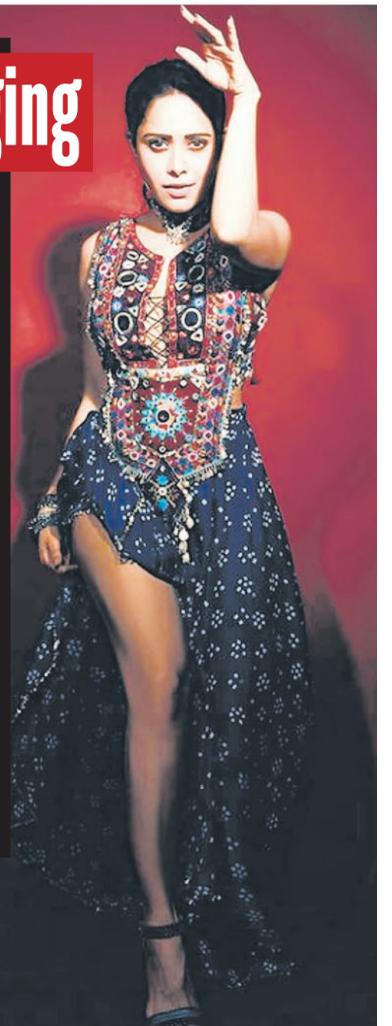
Nushratt Bharuccha on the massive response to her solo lead film, 'Chhorii'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Nushratt Bharuccha's recent outing as a pregnant woman in her first solo lead film, 'Chhorii', has been receiving massive applause and praises from the audiences and the critics alike. The performance of the actress is being touted as her career best till date. Nushraat chose to venture into a new genre and her bold career choice paid off as Chhorii truly proves her prowess as a performer.

Opening up about the overwhelming response to the film, Nushratt says, "Chhorii is indeed one of the most important films of my career, and the kind of love the film is receiving is super encouraging. I'm really glad that with Chhorii, I could put out a responsible message that is the need of the hour. It's not just any another horror film, it's a film with a perspective - one that brings to light a social evil, provoking thoughts that inspire us all to take responsibility in a manner that we move towards bringing about a change."

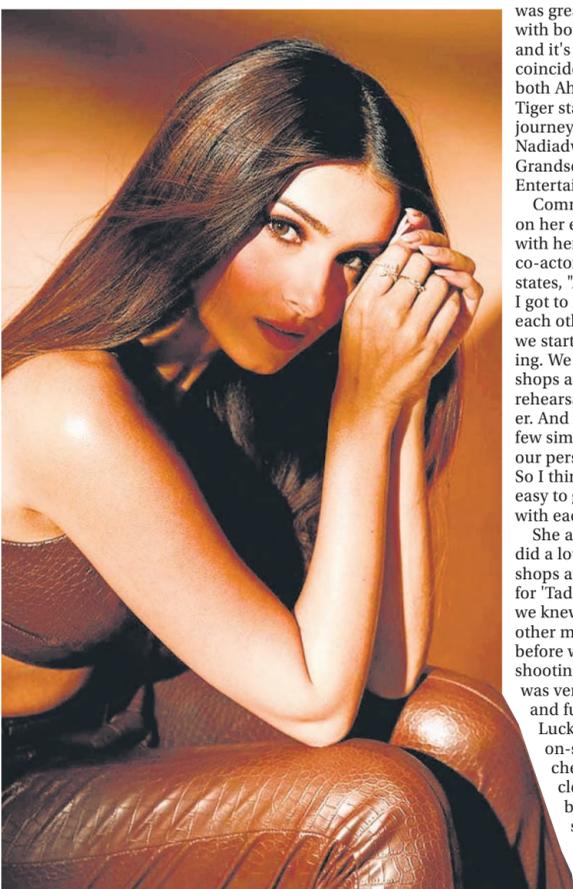
Opening about her Chhorii being her first solo lead film, Nushratt says, "It was equally daunting and enriching experience to single-handedly headline such a film. It will always remain one of the most difficult films I've done so far."



Tara Sutaria: 'Ahan and I have similar personalities while I'm closest to Tiger'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Tara Sutaria will soon be seen opposite Ahan Shetty in 'Tadap' which has been produced by Sajid Nadiadwala. Tara, whose chemistry with Tiger Shroff in 'Student of the Year 2' was talked about, recently spoke about her camaraderie with her two leading men. Sharing her experience of working with both of them, the actress says, "It was great working with both of them and it's a strange coincidence that both Ahan and Tiger started their journey with Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment".



Commenting on her equation with her 'Tadap' co-actor, she states, "Ahan and I got to know each other before we started shooting. We did workshops and rehearsals together. And we have a few similarities in our personalities. So I think it was easy to get along with each other."

She adds, "We did a lot of workshops and prep for 'Tadap' that we knew each other much before we started shooting. So, it was very easy and fun."

Luckily, the on-screen chemistry is clearly visible in our songs too."



Kriti Sanon joins the cast of 'Shehzada' in Delhi

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Fresh from the success of 'Hum Do Hamare Do', Kriti Sanon has joined the starcast of 'Shehzada' in Delhi for the film's second schedule. The film is being helmed by Rohit Dhawan, who flagged off its Delhi schedule a few days back with Kartik Aaryan and Paresh Rawal. After wrapping her work in London, Kriti Sanon joined the film

crew this morning. The actress made an announcement with regards to this through her social media as she shared a boomerang of the clapboard in her Instagram story and wrote, "Shehzadi in the house." Talking about the development, producer Bhushan Kumar said, "We are glad to have Kriti Sanon on our Delhi set. The actress has an infectious energy. She will essay a never-before-seen character in the film. I am sure the audience will enjoy her performance on screen."

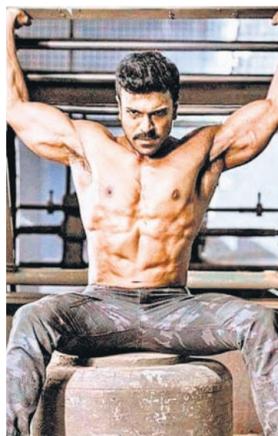
I'M HAVING A FANBOY MOMENT ON THE SETS: RAM CHARAN

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

'RRR' hero Ram Charan has spilled the beans on his upcoming movies, his interests, and more.

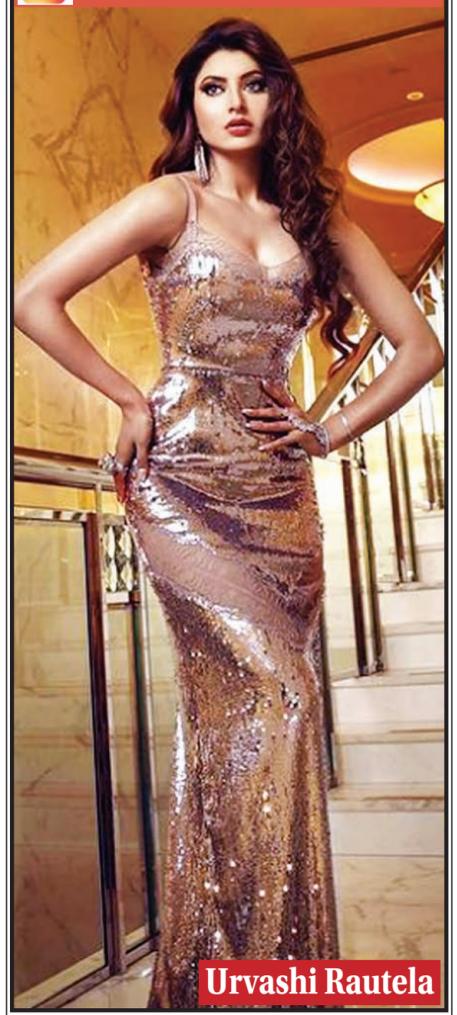
Ram Charan, who is the son of Telugu megastar Chiranjeevi, has a greater responsibility of carrying his father's cinematic legacy.

Being roped in for a couple of big-budget movies, Ram Charan's 'RRR' is slated for release in January. When quizzed about his experience working with ace director Shankar Shanmugam for his untitled film, Ram Charan said, "More than an actor I think I'm like having a fanboy moment/actor in this set. I



am amazed to see the way he works. And just to be seen in his film, in his script. It's a pleasure. An absolute pleasure." Ram Charan describes that working with Shanmugam is an experience, like watching his movies is. Billed to be a political drama, the yet-to-be-titled movie has Kiara Advani as the female lead and is due in February 2023 release. On the other hand, Ram Charan, who shares the screen space with his father Chiranjeevi in Koratala Siva's upcoming movie 'Acharya', shares his experience working for the movie.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Urvashi Rautela