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INDIA SEEING COVID CASES RISE NEARLY MANIFOLD IN DAYS

THIRD WAVE STARTED?

The virus has shown the potential for mutating itself and spreading more. Early accounts from other countries have shown the Omicron wave is more contagious than the Delta wave, infecting more people in a shorter period of time. The recent relaxations in travel, opening of schools and other workplaces, complacency among public -- overcrowding and avoidance of vaccination, are other key reasons for the steep rise in cases in the country. However, the data on Omicron from various show that it causes only mild illness, and patients are not sick and so hospitalisation is still very low.

- ▶ **INDIA ON MONDAY LOGGED 33,750 NEW COVID-19 CASES IN A SPAN OF 24 HOURS. WITH AN ADDITIONAL 123 FATALITIES, ACCORDING TO THE UNION MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE.**
- ▶ **MEANWHILE, THE NATION-WIDE OMICRON INFECTION TALLY REPORTED FROM 23 STATES INCREASED TO 1,700, THE MINISTRY SAID.**
- ▶ **EXPERTS STATED THAT A THIRD WAVE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC MAY HAVE ALREADY STARTED IN INDIA AND IS YET TO BE DECLARED OFFICIALLY.**



Rachel V. Thomas | New Delhi

The sudden spike in the number of Covid cases in India is driven by an increased spread of Omicron variant in the country, which may have already started the third wave, experts said on Monday. Most states and large cities in India have observed a sharp increase in Covid cases, which was not noticed even during festival seasons. On December 31, India recorded 16,764 new Covid cases, up 27 per cent from the previous day. The average number of cases increased in the last week of December after dropping steadily since mid-May. "According to statistics from Global Initiative on sharing all Influenza Data (GISAID) - an open-access resource for viral genomic data - Omicron has surpassed all other variants as the most common in India. The Omicron variant was discovered in almost 60 per cent of the samples sequenced in India dur-

"In my opinion, the third wave has started in India. It's pretty evident with the doubling rate of Covid-19 cases in less than 72 hours. Also, clinicians believe the number of patients tested and reported may be just the tip of the iceberg."

Dr Prashant Borade, Head of Critical Care at Global Hospital, Parel, Mumbai

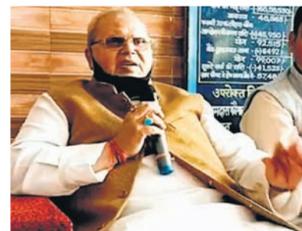
ing the last few days of December," Dr Dipu T.S., Associate Professor, Division of Infectious Diseases, Amrita Hospital, Kochi, said.

OMICRON: HOW TO PREVENT INFECTION?

New Delhi: Even as India is seeing a steep rise in Covid cases driven by infections caused by the Omicron variant, there's an urgent need to scale up preventive measures such as masks, vaccinations, social distancing and not to be complacent. India on Monday reported 1,700 cases of Omicron variant from 23 states and Union territories, while also logging 33,750 new Covid-19 cases in a span of 24 hours, taking the active caseload to 1,45,582. The letter by Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan and ICMR Director General Dr Balram Bhargava urged Chief Secretaries of all states/UTs to set up round the clock functional RAT booths at different locations, engage medical and paramedical staff, and encourage the use of home test kits.

- ▶ **"IT IS ESSENTIAL TO MASK YOURSELF PROPERLY, TAKE BOTH DOSES OF VACCINES (IF NOT YET VACCINATED), MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING AND MAINTAIN GOOD VENTILATION TO THE MAXIMUM POSSIBLE," THE GUIDELINES SAID.**
- ▶ **"ANY PERSON WHO HAS A FEVER WITH OR WITHOUT COUGH, HEADACHE, SORE THROAT, BREATHLESSNESS, BODY ACHES, OR OTHER SYMPTOMS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A SUSPECTED CASE OF COVID-19 UNLESS PROVEN OTHERWISE," IT WROTE IN A LETTER TO STATES.**

PM was arrogant on farmers' issue, Shah acknowledged it: Meghalaya Governor



Team Absolute | New Delhi

When Meghalaya Governor Satya Pal Malik went to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss the farmers' issue recently, he says he ended up fighting with the PM, who was "very arrogant", within five minutes into the conversation. While addressing a function in Haryana on Sunday, Malik said, "He (the PM) was very arrogant. When I told him that 500 of our own farmers had died, he asked, 'Did they die for me?'" "I told him yes, since you are the king. Anyway, I ended up having a fight with him. He told me to meet Amit Shah and so I did," the Governor said, adding that when a dog dies, the PM sends letters to offer condolences. In a video of the statement on Twitter, in which Malik can also be heard saying, "When I met Amit Shah, he told me 'Satya, he has lost his mind. You be carefree

CONGRESS ATTACKS PM

The Congress, while sharing Mr Malik's video on its official Twitter account, said, "Vanity... cruelty... insensitivity. In BJP Governor's statement, these 'qualities' of PM Modi's personality are mentioned. This is a matter of concern for a democracy."

BJP REFUSES TO RESPOND

BJP leaders have refused to respond to the comments and the message down the line seemed to be not to react in any way to the Meghalaya Governor's remarks.

and keep meeting us." Home Minister Amit Shah was allegedly referring to PM Modi, according to Malik.

Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge on Twitter wrote, "Meghalaya's Governor Sri Satya Pal Malik is on record saying PM was 'arrogant' on the issue of Farmers & HM Amit Shah called the PM as 'mad'. Constitutional authorities speaking about each other with such contempt! Narendra Modiji is this true?"

Dense to very dense fog over Indo-Gangetic plains

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Dense to very dense fog was reported from many pockets of east Uttar Pradesh, dense fog at isolated pockets over southwest Uttar Pradesh and sub-Himalayan West Bengal while moderate fog prevailed at isolated pockets over northwest Madhya Pradesh on Monday morning. Starting late Sunday evening, dense fog conditions prevailed over the entire Indo-Gangetic Plains with several places in Uttar Pradesh witnessing visibility down to less than 100 metres overnight and on Monday morning and zero visibility at one place at least. Sultanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi (Babatpur) had 0-25 m each of visibility, Lucknow, Bagdogra (West Bengal) 50 m each while Agra's was down to 100 m and



Gwalior to 200 m. Dense to very dense fog in isolated pockets in night/morning hours is very likely over east Uttar Pradesh and dense fog in isolated pockets very likely over west Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura during next two days, the IMD said. Meanwhile, minimum temperatures are near normal over most parts of north India.

China flag unfurled in Galwan wasn't close to area of clash: Army Sources

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A video from an official Chinese media handle on twitter, which shows a Chinese flag being unfurled in Galwan valley, does not violate the demilitarised zone between the two countries in the area, according to Army sources, NDTV reported.

In other words, the flag is being flown in undisputed Chinese-held areas, and not near the bend of the river where Indian and Chinese soldiers had clashed in June 2020. The video and the tweet says, "China's national flag rise over Galwan Valley on the New Year Day of 2022."

The tweet claims that this flag is special since it once flew over Tiananmen Square in Beijing. In July last year, India and China



This national flag is very special since it once flew over Tiananmen Square in Beijing.



agreed to mutually withdraw 2 km from the clash site. This followed talks between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Subsequent satellite images from July last year confirmed the disengagement of Indian and Chinese soldiers from the Galwan clash site by 2 km on either side. This took place after special representative-level talks between Doval and Yi. The new video shown, sources say, is not within the area where this disengagement took place.

Twenty Indian soldiers were killed in action in the Galwan clash. They were honoured for their bravery with their names installed in memorials. China claimed it lost four soldiers; however, the Indian Army maintains China suffered more casualties.

LAKHIMPUR KHERI CASE SIT FILES 5,000-PAGE CHARGE SHEET, TENI'S KEY ACCUSED

Ashish Mishra, the son of Union Minister of State for Home Ajay Kumar Mishra Teni, has been named as a key accused in the case, according to sources. Further, the number of accused in the case increased to 14 as another name has been added.

- ▶ **The SIT had said in a report submitted to the court that the four farmers and the journalist were killed in the violence as part of a "pre-planned conspiracy".**
- ▶ **The SIT wrote in the report that the deaths "did not happen due to negligence or callousness" and that that accused persons' actions were "deliberate with an intention to kill".**

Team Absolute | Lakhimpur Kheri (UP)

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the October 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence case, on Monday filed a nearly 5,000-page charge sheet.

According to the police sources, the charge sheet that runs into 5,000 pages



has named 17 persons, including Ashish. As many as 14 of them have been arrested and were currently lodged in jail.

"Ashish Mishra has been made the key accused in the case," said a senior police official in Lakhimpur Kheri.

"The name of one more person, Virendra Shukla, has been added in the charge sheet. He has been charged under Section 201 of IPC," the prosecution lawyer said.

A total of eight people were killed in the Lakhimpur Kheri violence incident which took place on October 3, 2021 during a farmers' protest against the now-repealed three controversial farm laws. Among the dead were four farmers, a journalist, two BJP workers and a driver.

A total of 13 persons are accused in the case, including Ashish Mishra and former Union Minister Akhilesh Das's nephew Ankit Das.

The court had admitted the SIT's plea and ordered the addition of the charges, including under sections of the Arms Act.

Desh Bhakti 'Offer': Lava Mobile will replace 'Chinese Phone' For Free



Domestic smartphone brand Lava Mobiles has introduced a new kind of marketing offer for those owning a particular handset from leading smartphone brand Realme. Playing the 'Desh Bhakti' card, Lava Mobiles has announced that it will exchange the 'Realme 8s for free' with Lava AGNI 5G handset for those who register by January 7, 2022 on the official website of Lava Mobiles.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Calling Realme a Chinese brand and suggesting buyers to "Choose A Side" Lava Mobile said that Indians should buy mobiles from Indian brands only. "India is my country. But my smartphone is Chinese. Is that the real me?" said Lava in a tweet. Lava also

claimed that its AGNI 5G is 'India's first 5G smartphone'.

What's interesting to note is that while the parent company of Realme - BBK - may be based out of China, Realme already makes phones in India at its shared facility in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. And not just that Realme is also exporting its made in India phones to countries like Nepal. In fact, not just Realme, almost all Chinese smartphone brands in India have assembly lines in the country for local sales,

employing lakhs of people. Soon after Lava Mobiles had posted this offer on Twitter, social media users were not pleased much as they felt Lava was simply using the "Proudly Indian" tag to sell products instead of focusing on the actual capability of Lava's smartphones. "Let products speak for itself," said a smartphone enthusiast on Twitter responding to Lava's offer. The smartphone was launched on the Lava Mobiles India website as well as e-commerce platforms like Amazon and Flipkart for Rs 19,999.

Withdraw cases against farmers, implement MSP: Cong

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Congress on Monday demanded withdrawal of cases against farmers and implementation of MSP as soon as possible.

Addressing a press conference, party spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said, "We demand that today, please, come forward and announce compensation for next of the kin of each one of the 700 farmers who died, announce a government job for them, and also

announce withdrawal of every single criminal case registered falsely from UP to Haryana."

He said the government should announce constitution of the committee to decide on the compulsory MSP architecture and ensure that not only the committee is constituted within 24 hours, but it delivers a report within next 30 days, so that farmers of India know, what is the possibility or what is the way forward about grant of Minimum Support Price for their produce to them.

IT'S TIME TO ACT: RAKESH TIKAIT

The issue of Minimum Support Price (MSP) is pending for a long time, and it is time that the government takes an early decision on it. A meeting of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) will be held on January 15 in which further strategy on MSP will be decided.



TELANGANA BJP CHIEF SENT TO JUDICIAL CUSTODY FOR 14 DAYS

HYDERABAD | Agencies

A court in Telangana's Karimnagar town on Monday sent state BJP chief and MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar to judicial custody for 14 days for attacking police personnel and violation of Disaster Management Act during a protest on Sunday night which was foiled by the police.

The magistrate dismissed the bail petition of Sanjay and remanded him and four others to judicial custody. They were all later shifted to Karimnagar jail.

Sanjay's counsel raised objection to police booking a case under section 333 of Indian Penal Code (IPC) without following due procedure.

The police, however, defended its action and in its remand report cited 10 cases booked against the MP in the past.

A BJP leader said Sanjay may approach High Court for bail.

Sanjay was arrested on Sunday night when police foiled his protest to demand the state government to amend an order relating to transfer of government employees and teachers. Amid high drama and tension, the police foiled Sanjay's 'Jagran Deeksha' at his camp office. The MP, who was kept at Manakondur Police Station overnight, was on Monday shifted to Police Training Centre in Karimnagar town.

Tension prevailed at Police Training



Centre as large number of BJP workers gathered there to protest over Sanjay's arrest. They raised slogans against Chief Minister K. Chandrababbarao and Karimnagar police commissioner.

The protesters entered into an argument with the police officers. Amid the tension, police arrested the protesters.

Karimnagar Police Commissioner Satyanarayana told reporters that two FIRs were registered at Two Town Police Station.

In one case, 21 persons and some others were booked under section 51 (B) of Disaster Management Act and section 188

of Indian Penal Code (IPC) for not maintaining social distancing and for not wearing masks. He said 70 people were arrested and were released after issuing notices to them. In another case, 16 persons and others were booked for rioting and attacking police personnel besides violation of DM Act. Five persons including Sanjay have been arrested. The police invoked IPC sections 188, 332, 333, 149, 147, 188 and section 5 (B) of the DM Act. The police chief said several policemen including an Assistant Commissioner of Police and a Circle Inspector were injured in the attack. He said

despite repeated requests to abide by the Covid regulations which are in force, the MP and others went ahead with their programme violating rules and then resorted to rioting and attacking police personnel performing their duty.

Police had refused permission for the Karimnagar MP's protest citing the orders in force banning meetings, rallies and other public gatherings. The party had set up a stage outside the MP's office for the 10-hour long protest. Sanjay, however, managed to enter into his office along with his supporters, and locked it from inside to stop police from entering the premises. High tension prevailed as the MP's supporters threatened self-immolation if the police foil their protest. The police personnel broke into the office. The MP and his supporters tried to resist the arrests. Police has to use the force to arrest Sanjay and 170 others and shift them to waiting police vehicles. While Sanjay was taken to Manakondur Police Station outside the town, other arrested BJP leaders and workers were shifted to other police stations.

Meanwhile, BJP leader and former minister Eatala Rajender has condemned Sanjay's arrest. He termed the arrest as undemocratic. He said the MP was sitting on the protest peacefully in his office but the police resorted to high handedness at the instance of the state government.

Late Karnataka Congress MLA's kin arrested for suspected IS links

National Investigation Agency (NIA) sleuths on Monday arrested the granddaughter-in-law of former Karnataka Congress MLA B.M. Idinabba for her alleged Islamic State (IS) links.

DAKSHINA KANNADA | Agencies

Late Idinabba was a three-time Congress MLA of Ullal constituency in Karnataka's Dakshina Kannada district. He was a prominent Kannada poet, journalist, freedom fighter and Kannada activist who sought merger of Kerala's Kasargod district with Karnataka.

The NIA team who came from Delhi, conducted a surprise raid on the residence of Idinabba's son B.M. Basha and questioned Idinabba's granddaughter-in-law Deepthi Marla a.k.a Mariyum. The team, headed by Assistant Investigating Officer, DSP Krishnakumar, along with PI Ajay Singh and Monika Dhikwal, questioned her for three hours and then took her into custody, according to sources.

She has been subjected to medical tests and will be taken to Delhi after being produced in the local court, sources said.

The NIA had earlier conducted raids on late Idinabba's residence in the first week of August 2021. After two days of inquiry, the sleuths had picked up Basha's younger son Amar Abdul Rehman.

During investigations, the role of Deepthi and her husband Anas Abdul Rahiman came under scanner. The team had questioned her for two days but did not take her into custody.

However, her movements were closely watched and she was arrested on Monday.

Deepthi, a Hindu girl fell in love with Rahiman while studying in BDS. After her wedding, she converted into Islam and changed her name to Mariyum.

Later, she allegedly came in contact with IS cadres and got connected with few elements in Jammu and Kashmir during a visit there in August 2020. She has been alleged of recruiting local youths into the terror outfit.

BJP targetting Jain community through raids: Akhilesh Yadav

Lucknow | Agencies

The tax raids on perfumers in Kannauj and Kanpur has finally taken a casteist colour. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav has said that the BJP was targeting the minority Jain community.

Both the perfumers -- Piyush Jain and Pushpraj Jain -- who have been raided, belong to the Jain community.

"There are around 50 lakh Jains who are known for their hard work, but the BJP is targeting them and conducting raids to harass them," Akhilesh said.

"That is not all. Another minority -- the Anglo-Indians -- had a single seat reserved for them in the UP Assembly, but the chief minister has done away with it too," he said.

Akhilesh, who began his 10th leg of Vijay Yatra on Sunday, said that the BJP government's approach has created a situation where every section of the society is looking for a change in the government. During the



yatra, Akhilesh offered prayers at the newly constructed temple of Lord Parshuram at Mahurakalan village along Purvanchal Expressway. He said the BJP leaders and the chief minister were targeting only the Samajwadi Party in their speeches instead of showcasing the development works done under the BJP government.

Man held for cheating over 100 people at Delhi airport in past 5 years

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Police have arrested a man for cheating over 100 people at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in the national capital for the last 4-5 years, an official said here on Monday.

The accused, identified as Modela Venkata Dinesh Kumar, a resident of Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, was arrested under the relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code for posing as a student who missed his flight and cheating people.

According to the official, on December 19, a complaint was lodged by a man stating that when he arrived at Delhi from Baroda, one man around 25-30 years of age approached him and said that he is a student of a reputed university. The accused also showed him a ID card of the university and told the complainant that he had missed his connecting flight to Vishakhapatnam.



The accused induced the complainant and showed him that a flight ticket to Vishakhapatnam is costing Rs 15,000 and he only had Rs 6,500 with him. He convinced the complainant to pay the remaining amount and promised to return the money once he reached his destination. The complainant paid him the amount and after a few days, the accused refused to return the money.

Based on this complaint, the police registered an FIR under relevant sections of the IPC and began probing the matter.

A police team was constituted which monitored the CCTV footages of the terminals and located one suspect visiting the airport frequently.

"On December 30, the suspect was apprehended from IGI Airport T-2 when he was trying to cheat another passenger," the police said.

During interrogation, it was revealed that the accused used to visit different airports to cheat the passengers.

MeT issues advisory for moderate to heavy snowfall in J&K, Ladakh

SRINAGAR | Agencies

Weather office on Monday issued an advisory forecasting moderate to heavy snowfall in Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, and warned about surface and aerial transport disruption from January 3 to January 9.

A statement issued by the local MeT office said, "Two successive Western Disturbances (WDs) are most likely to affect Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh and adjoining areas from January 3rd (Late Night) to January 9th (Forenoon)."

"Under the influence of these weather systems widespread moderate rain and snow is expected in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh regions. Light rain/snow would commence at a few places



of Kashmir from January 3 evening and thereafter increase in intensity and distribution, reads the statement.

TERRORIST KILLED IN SRINAGAR ENCOUNTER IDENTIFIED

Srinagar: A foreign terrorist has been killed in an encounter between militants and security forces in Srinagar. The slain terrorist was involved in the killing of two policemen, officials said on Monday. "Second terrorist killed in Srinagar encounter identified as Hafiz alias Hamza of Pakistan. He was involved in the killing of two policemen in Bandipora after which he shifted to the Harwan area of Srinagar," Jammu and Kashmir police tweeted quoting IGP, Kashmir zone, Vijay Kumar.

The police said that the terrorist was killed in an encounter between near the Shalimar area in Srinagar district on Monday. This was the second encounter in Srinagar in quick succession on Monday. Earlier, the police had said that one dreaded terrorist of proscribed terror outfit LeT Salim Parry has been neutralised.

Centre suspends biometric attendance for employees amid Covid spread

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre on Monday suspended the biometric attendance marking for all its employees, till January 31, as a precautionary measure to curb the Covid infection.

All the employees have, instead, been asked to mark their attendance in attendance registers to be maintained manually.

"As a precautionary measure, it has been decided to suspend the marking of biometric attendance in Aadhaar-based biometric attendance system in all ministries, departments of the government of India, including its attached and subordinate offices, with immediate effect till January 31, 2022," an order issued by the Department of Personnel



said. The guidelines from the ministry has also asked all the heads of departments shall to ensure that all employees wear masks at all times and follow Covid-appropriate behaviour strictly. India on Monday registered single-day rise of 33,750

Covid cases in a span of 24 hours. The active caseload has also jumped to 1,45,582 which constitute 0.42 per cent of the country's total positive cases. With 123 new deaths on Monday, the total death toll has climbed to 4,81,893.

'SC STAYS BAIL OF ACCUSED IN COP'S KILLING AMID COW SLAUGHTER PROTEST

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday stayed the bail granted to an accused in the 2018 alleged mob lynching incident at Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr, which led to the death of a policeman. A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and M.M. Sundresh said: "The matter is quite serious where under the pretext of the cow slaughter, a police officer has been lynched. Prima facie, it is a case of people taking law into their own hand."

The top court's observation came as it stayed the bail granted to accused Yogeshraj.

The bench noted that it appears that even the charges have not been framed and there is thus no question of even examining the independent witnesses. "At this stage, while one of the accused Lokendra.. is in custody, other accused who has been enlarged on bail is Yogeshraj and 10457/2019, filed by the wife of the deceased police officer," it said.

In the order, the top court said: "We are of the view that Yogeshraj should be asked to surrender within a period of seven days from today and thus to that extent, the impugned orders granting him bail are stayed. We call for a report from the trial court, Bulandshahr as to how much time do, they need to frame the charges and to record the testimonies of the independent witnesses. List after three weeks."

66 passengers onboard Mumbai-Goa cruise ship test positive for Covid

PANAJI | Agencies

Out of the nearly 2,000 passengers travelling onboard a Mumbai-Goa luxury cruise liner, 66 have tested positive for Covid, Health Minister Vishwajit Rane said on Monday.

The minister also said that four persons across the state have tested positive for Omicron, taking the total count of Omicron cases in the coastal state to five.

"Out of 2000 samples tested from the Cordelia cruise ship, 66 passengers tested positive for #COVID19 Respective collectors & MPT (Mormugao Port Trust) staff have been informed. The government will take appropriate measures to discuss disembarking of passengers," Rane tweeted on Monday.

After arriving in Goa's waters on Sunday, the ship was not allowed



to anchor at the Mormugao Port, after one crew member had tested positive for Covid initially.

Official sources said that Covid negative passengers would be allowed to disembark soon, while the rest would be taken to an isola-

tion facility. "Out of four new Omicron positive persons, one is from within the state with no travel history, indicating indigenous spread to be further examined by experts," Rane said.

Fake currency found in RBI chest in Lucknow, FIR lodged

LUCKNOW | Agencies

Fake Indian currency, with a face value of Rs 47,710, has been found in the Reserve Bank of India chest during an audit in Lucknow.

RBI Assistant Manager Satyavir Singh has lodged a case with Mahanagar police about the recovery of 454 counterfeit currency during the checking of notes.

"These fake notes comprised a Rs 10 rupee note, 18 notes of Rs 50, 443 notes of Rs 100, one note each of Rs 500 and Rs 2,000," he stated in the FIR.

Singh wrote to the officials to conduct a checking and also take legal action before returning the notes to the RBI.

He said circulation/printing of fake currencies was a serious crime. He added that police may send the fake currencies to the currency printing press or forensic lab during the investigation of the case.

Station house officer, Mahanagar, Dinesh Chandra Mishra, said an FIR under the charges of using forged or



counterfeit currency-notes or bank-notes as genuine has been lodged.

Last year, 44 fake currency notes of Rs 20 and Rs 100 denominations were found in April-May during the checking by the RBI. In 2020, the Reserve Bank of India had lodged an FIR stating that Rs 1.5 crore in demonetised currency were found in the bank chest deposited by various state banks between October 2017 and March 2018.



Covid Vaccination:

CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN'S APPEAL AS JABS BEGIN FOR 15-18 AGE GROUP

CHIEF MINISTER SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN SOUGHT THE PARTICIPATION OF THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES, VOLUNTEERS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO GET VACCINATED.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Amid a surge in COVID-19 cases, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan laid emphasis on conducting vaccination against the viral infection on a war footing as the drive to inoculate children in the 15 to 18 years age group began on Monday.

Chouhan also sought the participation of the elected representatives, volunteers and religious leaders to encourage children to get vaccinated.

The vaccination for this age group is to be held in the premises of schools only, the CM said in a statement.

"We have to hold the vaccination drive on a war footing. Crisis manage-



ment committees, MPs, MLAs, social workers, volunteers, religious leaders, all are requested to appeal to the children to get vaccinated," he said.

In Bhopal, the administration has planned to provide jabs to over 40,000 students in this age group between January 3 and 6 across 1,086 schools

of the district, Collector Avinash Lavania said on Sunday.

Madhya Pradesh Immunisation Officer Dr Santosh Shukla had earlier said there are 36 lakh registered school children in the 15-18 age group in the state.

"We have plans to administer doses

to 12 lakh children on Monday. The state had earlier set a record of 30 lakh doses in a single day. But, with children we can't be hasty. After covering school children, we will target school dropouts," he had said.

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Sunday advised states and Union Territories to provide separate vaccination centres, session sites, queue and different vaccination teams for the 15-18 year age group to avoid the mixing-up of vaccines.

The vaccine option for this age group would only be Covaxin, according to guidelines issued by the Union Health Ministry on December 27.

The Drugs Controller General of India granted emergency use authorisation to the indigenously-developed Bharat Biotech's Covaxin for children above 12 years with certain conditions on December 24.

On Sunday, Madhya Pradesh reported 151 new COVID-19 cases, taking the infection tally in the state to 7,94,240, while the death count remained unchanged at 10,533.

The recovery count stood at 7,83,099, leaving the state with 608 active COVID-19 cases, as per official statistics.

MP logs 222 new Covid cases; around 7 lakh children vaccinated on day 1

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh registered 222 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, pushing the total active cases in the state to 774, according to the data shared by the state health department on Monday.

Indore, which was a hotspot during the previous two waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, has registered around 50 per cent (110) cases of the total, while capital city Bhopal reported 54 new infections.

In Bhopal, 11 members of a family, including a four-month-old child, were found Covid positive.

With a whopping number of daily Covid cases, Indore district administration has recommended imposing restrictions in the city.

District Collector (Indore) Manish Singh said, "Increasing trend of Covid-19 cases is alarming and imposing restrictions on public moments has become the need of hours now. Number of guests in marriages and other functions and public gatherings will be reduced."

As per the officials till Sunday, state has reported as many as 11 cases of Omicron



variant and all have recovered.

Sources in the health department told IANS that more than 200 samples that have been sent to Delhi for genome sequencing test are still pending.

Meanwhile according to the department, on the first day of vaccination for children in the age group between 15-18 years, till 5:30 pm on Monday, around seven lakh children were administered the first dose of anti-Covid vaccine across the state. Earlier on Monday, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that a total 8,667 vaccination centres have been set up in all 52 dis-

tricts in the state especially for children. All these centres are set up in both government and private schools, where only children between 15-18 age groups will be administered Covaxin.

The Madhya Pradesh government has set a target to provide first dose Covid vaccine to all children between 15-18 age groups by January 20. "We have adequate number of Covaxin for children. I would appeal to the children across the state to reach the nearest vaccination centre and receive their first dose," the Chief Minister said while inaugurating a vaccination centres for children at a school in Bhopal on Monday.

CM plants Karanj and Gular saplings in Smart City Park

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Monday planted saplings in Smart City Park with the girls of Baba Nagar of Shahpura Bhopal working with the spirit of 'Return Gift to Mother Earth.' Chouhan planted Karanj and Gular saplings along with Kumari Preeti Bharti, Deepthi Bharti, Aarti Sen, Jyoti Bharti, Rachna Sen and Aarti Chadha.

These girls are working in the activity of gifting manure made out of wet waste to Mother Earth. In this, the wet waste generated from households is considered as a resource, not just garbage. The wet waste is collected in a pot and turned into manure and this manure is presented



as an offering to Mother Earth. So far, the girls, along with making 15 to 18 kg of manure, are motivating neighbors and people from adjoining areas to create pot manure (Matka Khaad).

Karanj plant is considered important in Ayurvedic medicine. It is also used for religious purposes. The fruits of Karanj are like figs, this is also an important tree from the point of view of Ayurveda.

Contracts of Pvt hospitals in MP extended till March 31 to prepare for 3rd Covid wave

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government has extended contracts of private hospitals in the state till March 31 to strengthen its medical facilities amid warning of a third Covid wave.

In view of rapidly increasing Covid-19 cases, the government has directed district administrations in the state to be ready with all arrangements required to protect the lives of people. They have been asked to engage private hospitals and medical institutions to ensure adequate numbers of beds.

The government has directed the district administrations to prepare at least 25,000 beds in both government and private hospitals in every district. Private hospitals, which are not ready to engage with the government, will not be forced. They would be permit-



ted to admit Covid patients, but charge as per the government's rules. Hospitals found over-charging may face strict action. "Under the Mukhyamantri Covid Upchar Yojana, the contract of private hospitals has been extended till March 31. All private hospitals, whether they are engaged with the government or not,

will be liable to provide accurate data pertaining to the number of patients admitted and the number of beds available. Private hospitals will have to share the number of beds and patients with the government which will be updated in the government-run Sarthak portal," Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said. On

Sunday, reviewing the government's preparation for the third wave, Chouhan had directed district administrations to set up Covid care centres, isolation centres in wards and villages. "The current situation in other states and overseas countries badly affected by the third wave of the pandemic, indicates that the majority of the people will not need hospitalisation. But, we will ensure that people in isolation are monitored and provided all necessary support to recover," Chouhan added. Village, Panchayat and Ward level committees should take cough, cold, mild fever seriously. If there are such symptoms, then the sample should be taken immediately and a test conducted. Make arrangements for treatment. Get health information by keeping an eye constantly on the patients in home isolation, the Chief Minister stated.

Increase use of information technology, so that revenue may also increase: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that Commercial Tax Department has an important role to play in achieving the goal of self-reliant Madhya Pradesh. Along with work in other areas, revenue growth is also necessary, for which measures should be found. Along with work in other areas, revenue growth is also necessary, for which measures should be found. Make concerted efforts to increase revenue through effective control on tax evasion, continuous action in cases of illicit liquor, simplification of rules, departmental computerization, use of portals for receiving and redressal of applications for all types of licenses, making government personnel efficient in Information Technology, strengthening of internal audit system, modernizing the processes of the department.

Chouhan was reviewing the works of Commercial Tax Department in Mantralaya on Monday.

Chouhan said that attention should be paid to implementation of Bhama Shah Yojna, making businessmen friends and making them partners in the development of the state and adopting best innovations of other states. Efforts should be made to increase revenue by identifying the items in which revenue is being received less. Receive suggestions from trade and consumer associations and implement them. Efforts should also be made to increase the contribution of the state in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve to make five trillion dollar economy. Establishment of two pilot distilleries through tribal self-help groups in Dindori and Alirajpur districts, plans to make tribal youths as master trainers for entrepreneurs and other research and training schemes were also discussed in the meeting. It was told that in the current financial year, about seven thousand crore rupees have been earned from excise. 39 services of the department are registered under Public Service

Guarantee Act. Processes have been simplified in Ease of Doing Business. Under good governance, training programmes are being conducted for e-excite from user manual and video module. Work has been started in the department on the Departmental Inspection Portal developed from Map IT. Arrangements are also being made to receive RTI applications online. The process of regular review of pension cases and writing confidential character sheets and annual immovable property sheets has been started from the NIC portal. The long-term goals of the department include rationalization of liquor duty, checking collection, transportation and sale of illicit liquor along with increase in revenue collection. In the budget estimate for the year 2022-23, the target of excise revenue has been kept at about 12 thousand crores. Five critical modules have been customized in e-Abkari. The heritage policy is focusing on employment generation in tribal areas.

CONTROL ON TENDENCY OF ANIMALS TO HARM HUMANS MUST: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed displeasure over the incident of stray dogs injuring a girl in Bag Sewania area of Bhopal. Chouhan said that the concerned agencies should ensure that all possible arrangements are made with immediate effect so that such an incident is not repeated in the entire state including Bhopal. The tendency of animals to harm humans has to be controlled. Chouhan also gave instructions for the treatment of the girl child.

Divisional Commissioner Bhopal, Collector Bhopal along with officers of Municipal Corporation and Hamidia Hospital were present in the meeting at Mantralaya.

"Kediyu or Jhooladi" is January's First Exhibit of the Week at IGRMS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Under the Latest and popular online series of Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) entitled 'Exhibit of the Week' the 'Kediyu or Jhooladi,' (flared jacket for male child) collected from 1996is on display. The Community of Rabari, Kutch, Gujarat. It's Measurement Max. Height- 46 cm and Max. width with sleeves- 146 cm, displayed in the audience as the first Exhibit of the month of January, 2022 through official website, Facebook, Instagram and twitter page of the IGRMS. In this regard Praveen Kumar Mishra, Director, IGRMS said that The Kutchi Rabari wear a white cotton flared jacket locally known as Kediyu or Jhooladi as

upper garment. It has long tapering sleeves with multiple gathers on the chest and at the back. The sleeves are much longer than the length of the arm and when worn, are wrinkled upwards to form circular folds round the wrist. The ends of the sleeves have embroidered bands. The upper fold of this double-breasted jacket is placed over the lower one and is tied on the one side by strings or buttons. The upper front and back portion of the jacket is elaborately embroidered with floral and geometric patterns designs in colourful thread. The upper flap and end of the border is decorated with golden border.

Visitors can see this object from home through the Official site (https://igrms.com/wordpress/?page_id=8169) and Facebook site (<https://www.facebook.com/NationalMuseumMankind/>), Instagram and twitter page of the IGRMS.



CM PAYS TRIBUTE TO SAVITRIBAI PHULE

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to the great social reformer Smt. Savitribai Phule on her birth anniversary. Chouhan paid floral tributes by offering garland at her portrait in the auditorium at his residence office. Savitribai Phule was born on January 3, 1831. She was the first principal of India's first girls school and the founder of the first farmers school. Smt. Savitribai lived her life as a mission, whose aim was to get widow remarriage, eradicate untouchability, women's emancipation and educate Dalit women. Savitribai Phule, along with her husband, founded the Girls School in Pune on January 3, 1848 with nine girl students of different castes. There were social restrictions on the education of girls at that time.

RECITATION OF VANDE MATARAM AT MANTRALAYA

Bhopal: The mass recitation of the national song Vande Mataram and the national anthem "Jana Gana Mana" was organised with the melodious tune of the police band at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Park situated at Mantralaya. Minister of Tourism, Culture and Spirituality, Usha Thakur and Minister of Commercial Taxes, Finance, Planning, Economics and Statistics Jagdish Deora, Additional Chief Secretary Vinod Kumar, Agriculture Production Commissioner Shailendra Singh and officers-employees of Mantralaya, Satpura and Vindhychal Bhawan were present during reciting of Vande Mataram.



DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THE THIRD WAVE OF COVID-19, FIGHT AND WIN: CM

By January 20, all the children of 15 to 18 years of the state will be inoculated. School and economic activities will continue as usual in the state. Children should motivate family members, relatives and acquaintances for vaccination. Chief Minister launched the vaccination mega campaign for children of 15 to 18 years. Motivated children for vaccination.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the third wave of Covid-19 is on the way, we should not be afraid of it, we have to fight it. Vaccination gives us protection.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the third wave of Covid-19 is on the way, we should not be afraid of it, we have to fight it. Vaccination gives us protection. The first dose of vaccine has been administered to 95 percent of the eligible population of the state and the second dose to 92 percent of the people. The target of the state government is to immunize all the children of 15 to 18 years of the state by January 20 and provide them with a protection cycle. Chouhan was launching the vaccination mega campaign of 15 to 18 years old children at the state level at Government Subhash Higher Secondary School of Excellence, Bhopal. Chief Minister extended New Year greetings to all the students.

Chouhan while expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and scientists said that so far more than 140 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccine



have been administered in the country. Today, the campaign to vaccinate children of 15 to 18 years is starting. For immunization of children of this age group, 8 thousand 667 centres have been set up. Providing safety to children is our top priority. We have to face the situations ahead with courage and understanding. Doctors and scientists of the world believe that the mask provides up to 90 percent protection from the virus. Vaccination is the effective protection cycle. Therefore, it

is necessary that every person eligible for vaccination should get vaccinated, wear a mask and follow corona appropriate behaviour. Chouhan said that economic activities and education of children cannot be stopped. School and commercial activities will continue as normal in the state. Therefore, it is necessary that we make it a habit of our life to wear masks and follow all the precautions and continue with our studies and normal activities of life. Chouhan appealed to the students to get themselves vaccinated and ensure vaccination of all eligible persons in their families and relatives. Former Pro-tem Speaker and MLA Rameshwar Sharma and MLA Krishna Gaur were present in this state level programme.

Chouhan oversaw the arrangements made at Subhash School, discussed with the students and also took selfies with the students at the selfie point at the centre.

CM SEEKS SUGGESTIONS FROM PEOPLE FOR 2022-23 BUDGET

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that budget is not just the details of income and expenditure. It is the medium of fulfilment of the aspirations of the people. A prosperous and developed Madhya Pradesh is built only through the budget. The purpose of our budget is to build a Atmanirbhar Madhya Pradesh for an Atmanirbhar Bharat and fulfil the aspirations of the people. The government is making continuous efforts in this direction. We are also holding talks with experts. But I agree that no one is a better expert than the public. Chouhan has issued a message regarding the budget of Madhya Pradesh and said that "I appeal to all the people of the state that our budget for the year 2022-23 should be such that it can build a prosperous and developed Madhya Pradesh.



EDITOR'S SPECS

VAX TO INDIA TEENAGERS

Amid rising Omicron cases, the Centre on Monday rolled out Covid vaccination for children aged 15-18. Over 4.5 lakh teenagers have, received their first jab against the infectious disease so far. Last week, Government of India had announced that Covid-19 vaccination for children between 15-18 years of age will be rolled out from January 3. According to official estimates, there are approximately 10 crore children in this age group. On January 1, Union Health Minister had requested people to register eligible children in their families. Over 8,00,000 children have already registered for their dose in the past few days. According to the guidelines, children can self-register online through an existing account on CoWIN or can also register by creating a new account through a unique mobile number or using their parent's accounts. Children can also get registered onsite by verifier or vaccinator; and they can walk in to take their shots. Out of the 10 crore children eligible for the Covid vaccination, over 4.5 lakh teenagers have already received their first shots. The vaccine used for inoculating children is Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, according to a set of new guidelines issued by the Union health ministry. On December 24, the Drugs Controller General of India (DGCI), granted emergency use authorisation to the indigenously-developed Covaxin for children above 12 years of age. Most of the schools and other educational institutions are being used as inoculation centres as well. To avoid mixing-up of Covid vaccines for children and adults during administration, Mandaviya has also advised states and Union territories to make separate Covid vaccination centres (CVCs), separate session sites, separate queue (if adult vaccination is going on at the same centre) and separate immunisation team (if at same session site) for adults and children.

Climate Justice: As flag-bearer for global south, India to push for 'Samagrata' at home

Nivedita Khandekar

Two global platforms - UNFCCC COP and UNSC - witnessed India's prowess as not just good negotiators for safeguarding her own interest but also for the global south. In a way, what India has been advocating all along vis-a-vis climate change, came to fruition in November and December 2021. Year 2021 saw a steady stream of UN-backed reports reinforcing a stark message: man-made climate change is an urgent and even existential threat to life on Earth. Will the international community's efforts to tackle the crisis, as seen at the Conference of Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Conference (UNFCCC), result in meaningful action? said the UN release on the last day of 2021. In November, at Glasgow, the UK, the last day of the COP was when India - ably led by Union Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav - insisted on the use of the term 'phase down' coal instead of 'phase out' in the Glasgow Climate Pact that 190 plus nations agreed to. It was necessary insertion as the rich nations, the principal polluters and high energy consumers, wanted just the coal to phase out leaving other energy sources in the fossil fuel basket untouched. It would have meant that poorer countries that are dependent on coal will have to forsake it at the same time that richer countries do but sans the option of oil and gas as they have. It is not that India only preached but not practiced, unlike much of the western world that may have cleaned up their air but have an energy-intensive lifestyle leading to highest per capita energy consumption. Offering a new mantra and raising its pledge for combating climate change, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced at the COP26 that India will target a net zero goal by the year 2070 and aim at increasing its non-fossil fuel energy to 500 GW in its energy mix by 2030. Terming it as 'Panchamrut Ki Saugat' - India's contribution to climate action called as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Modi had said, India will reduce its carbon intensity by



45 per cent by 2030 starting with reducing projected carbon emission from now till 2030 by 1 billion tonnes and committed to have renewable energy component of 50 per cent by 2030. Modi gave a new mantra for sustainable development through sustainable lifestyle, LIFE - 'Lifestyle for Environment' which, he said, can be a mass movement wherein instead of mindless and destructive consumption, there should be mindful and deliberate utilization. The other platform was not a regular climate change related but the prestigious United Nations Security Council (UNSC) where in December, India - with support of Russia and China - shot down a proposal to 'Integrating Climate-Related Security Risk into Conflict-Prevention Strategies.' While stressing that India is 'second to none' in addressing climate action and climate justice, India stated that the Council is not the place to discuss either issue. "Today's attempt to link climate with security obfuscates a lack of progress on critical issues under the UNFCCC process. The text would constitute a step backward from collective resolve to combat climate change," India's permanent representative at the UN had said and also made it clear that "including climate change within the UN Security Council's mandate would exclude most developing countries from discussions." Unlike the UNFCCC - which works on consensus and gives equal weightage to each and every country that is party to it - the UNSC is dominated by rich nations. Therefore, India putting its foot down came as a godsend for the global south - comprising mostly poorer and developing countries from South Asia,

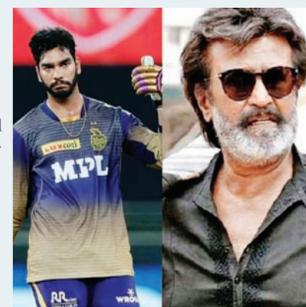
Africa and Southern America. Having done all that, India now has the onus to put into domestic actions whatever it has said on global platforms. Much is left to be done for the poorest of the poor that is inevitably the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. India is committed to green energy as it acknowledges that the solution to climate related problems is within the renewable energy. India has already committed to its expansion. "India will be carrying out the promises that the Prime Minister made at the COP. Our programmes such as railways on renewable energy, cutting down on carbon emission and increasing share of renewables in the energy mix are on track but at the same time we also believe that the developed countries need to enhance climate finance and technology transfer," Yadav told correspondent. Resilient infrastructure, adaptation, agriculture and afforestation are focus areas with Nagar Vans (City Forests) function as carbon sinks in view of increasing urbanization and outside, maintenance of wetlands/Ramsar Sites in rural areas, increasing forest cover for mitigation are few others focus areas for the Ministry. But going beyond this, Yadav brought in clarity on the regular conflict between his Ministry and that of Tribal Affairs as he said, "We believe that we cannot save our forests without public participation. Livelihood of the local community, sustainability of the local flora and fauna and protection of the wildlife are all interdependent, not independent. So, we move ahead with Samagrata (comprehensiveness). Our ideology too believes in Samagrata and not in separatism."

'DON'T MIND IT, IT'LL BE ANOTHER YEAR OF 'STICKING TO MY PROCESS'

Chetan Sharma

The 2021 was nothing short of a movie blockbuster

year for Venkatesh Iyer - he took Kolkata Knight Riders to IPL final, made his India debut, and last month dedicated his brilliant ton to superstar Rajinikanth. The young man doesn't want to change anything and stick to the same



"process" in his cricketing journey in 2022. An MBA in Finance, Iyer is a big fan of Rajinikanth, admirer of Alastair Cook and his favourite batter is Sourav Ganguly. Notably, they all are left handers and Venkatesh's liking is quite understandable, since the 27-year-old stylish all-rounder, too, is a southpaw. He has a DP (Display Picture on WhatsApp) of Kaala - Rajinikanth's character in a movie named Kaala and he displayed his love for the legendary actor, last year as well, by dedicating his sensational century to Rajinikanth on Thalaivar's 71st birthday during the 2021-22 Vijay Hazare Trophy. When IANS enquired about the reason for it, the humble boy replied, "Oh, I am a big fan of Rajini sir." It seems the cricketer has adapted Rajini's style in his batting as well and the way he hammered bowlers in the IPL 2021, while playing for KKR in the UAE, was the glimpse of it. The young star may have an aggressive approach in the field, but off it, he is very calm. Asked about his new year thoughts, he answered in a stylish way: "Just another year where I've to keep sticking to my process." Following Venkatesh's stunning show in IPL 2021, the all-rounder has gone on to make his international debut for India. He was part of the Indian T20 team against New Zealand and played all three matches. And now, the all-rounder has been named in India's 18-member squad for the upcoming three-match ODI series in South Africa. The Madhya Pradesh cricketer will hope to make an impression with both bat and ball in the upcoming series. "I am extremely happy. Obviously if you are a part of your country's team that's something to be happy about. I look at it as an opportunity to go and perform. I first informed this news (ODI selection) to my family and they were extremely happy. They blessed me and then they asked me to again concentrate and focus on my game to go and do well for the country. Asked if his strength is batting or bowling, the all-rounder said, "I think as an all-rounder it's important for me to contribute in both the departments so I won't pick one. I want to perform equally in both departments of the game."

international

US could be under right-wing dictator by 2030: Canadian Prof

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The US could be under a right-wing dictator by 2030, a Canadian political science professor has warned, urging his country to protect itself against the "collapse of American democracy", The Guardian reported. "We mustn't dismiss these possibilities just because they seem ludicrous or too horrible to imagine," Thomas Homer-Dixon, founding director of the Cascade Institute at Royal Roads University in British Columbia, wrote in the Globe and Mail. "In 2014, the suggestion that Donald Trump would become president would also have struck nearly everyone as absurd. But today we live in a world where the absurd regularly becomes real and the horrible commonplace." Homer-Dixon's message was blunt: "By 2025, American democracy could



collapse, causing extreme domestic political instability, including widespread civil violence. By 2030, if not sooner, the country could be governed

by a rightwing dictatorship," the Guardian reported. The author cited eventualities centred on former President Donald Trump returning to the White House in 2024, possibly including Republican-held state legislatures refusing to accept a Democratic win. Trump, he warned, "will have only two objectives, vindication and vengeance" of the lie that his 2020 defeat by Joe Biden was the result of electoral fraud, the report said. A "scholar of violent conflict" for more than four decades, Homer-Dixon said Canada must take heed of the "unfolding crisis". "A terrible storm is coming from the south, and Canada is woefully unprepared. Over the past year we've turned our attention inward, distracted by the challenges of Covid-19, reconciliation and the accelerating effects of climate change.

SINGAPORE'S ECONOMY GREW BY 7.2% IN 2021

Singapore: Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry announced on Monday that based on advance estimates, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 7.2 per cent in 2021, rebounding from the 5.4 per cent contraction in 2020. In the fourth quarter of 2021, Singapore's GDP grew by 5.9 per cent year on year, moderating from the 7.1 per cent growth in the previous quarter, reports Xinhua news agency. On a quarter-on-quarter seasonally-adjusted basis, the economy expanded by 2.6 per cent in the fourth quarter, faster than the 1.2 per cent growth in the preceding quarter. In a breakdown, Singapore's manufacturing sector expanded by 14 per cent year on year in the fourth quarter and 12.8 per cent in the whole year of 2021.

South African Parliament 'extensively destroyed' by fire

Cape Town | Agencies

The interior of South Africa's National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament, was "extensively destroyed" by a fire, a local official said on Monday. As of 6.50 a.m. (local time) Monday, firefighters have been working at the fourth floor of the National Assembly building, which is still smouldering, Xinhua news agency quoted Jean-Pierre Smith, Cape Town's mayoral committee member for Safety and Security, as saying. The fire, which erupted on Sunday, has affected both the Old Assembly Wing and the National Assembly Wing Parliament, which also houses the upper house,



National Council of Provinces. The blaze at the rest of the building has been brought under control and the number of firefighters has been reduced from 20 to 10, he said, adding that he hopes the fire would be put out over the next two to three hours. No one is injured, he said. The cause of the fire is still unknown, while one person has been arrested in connection with the fire. Initial reports indicated that the fire started at the hall of the Old Assembly building, then spread to the National Assembly, President Cyril Ramaphosa told reporters. He promised an extensive investigation into the fire when visiting the scene.

EGYPTIAN PREZ BACK UN'S ROLE IN COMBATING CRIME, TERRORISM

Cairo: Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi has stressed his country's support for the role of the UN (UN) in facing global and regional challenges related to combating crime, terrorism and drug menace. Sisi made the remarks during his meeting with Under-Secretary-General of the UN and Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Ghada Waly in Cairo, the Egyptian presidency said in a statement. The President also stressed support for strengthening existing efforts to exchange expertise in areas related to the office's work, with the aim of activating UN programs related to drugs and crime, Xinhua news agency quoted the statement as saying. For her part, Waly affirmed the office's reliance on Egypt's continued support for its efforts during the coming period to maximize the capabilities of the international community to address the threats posed by transnational organised crime.



She also stressed the necessity for more global efforts to combat corruption, its negative impact on communities, crime prevention efforts, and building effective criminal justice systems. Waly also reviewed the axes of international cooperation under the umbrella of UNODC, in light of the recent regional developments in Afghanistan, especially with regard to arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and the aggravation of terrorism and refugees.

3 FEARED DEAD IN DEVASTATING COLORADO WILDFIRE

Denver | Agencies

Three people were reported missing and "feared dead" due to a devastating wildfire that swept through two suburban communities in the US state of Colorado, officials said. A total of 991 homes and businesses were destroyed by the fire - 553 in Louisville, 332 in Superior and 106 in unincorporated Boulder County, reports Xinhua news agency. Another 127 structures were damaged, according to the Boulder Office of Emergency Management. Currently, two people are missing in Superior and another is missing in the Marshall area, according to Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle, who said the missing people's homes were engulfed by fire. The search has been hampered by "eight inches of snow" that covered the smouldering debris, Pelle said in a press conference, and that "cadaver dogs" would be used to search for bodies. "Their homes are destroyed, potentially there are human remains in those homes," Pelle said. "The debris is hot, it's all fallen in and it's now covered with 20.3 cm of snow." The cause of the 24.3 square km wildfire remains under investigation, the Sheriff said, and that contrary to initial reports investigators have found no evidence indicating that downed power lines sparked the blaze. The rapidly-



spreading infernal, added by 106.2 kph winds, swept across a 10 square km area and through affluent housing communities in a matter of hours, leaving hundreds of families homeless, and many spent the national holiday in make-shift relief centres throughout Boulder County. Since Friday, 12.7 cm of snow has covered the Denver metropolitan area, according to the National Weather

Service, effectively extinguished flickering fingers of fire and leaving behind a smouldering, charred, bleak landscape on Saturday, the first day of 2022. In a phone call with President Joe Biden, who declared a state of emergency, Colorado Governor Jared Polis has secured the release of immediate federal money and assistance for the hundreds who lost their homes.

Low-cost carriers in S.Korea reschedule int'l flights



Seoul | Agencies

South Korea's low-cost carriers on Monday announced that they have delayed or reduced their flights on international routes due to the spread of the Omicron Covid-19 variant. Air Seoul Inc., a budget carrier unit of Asiana Airlines Inc., has delayed its planned flights to Guam from January 29 to March 27, reports Yonhap News Agency. Air Seoul has offered one flight a week, respectively, on the routes from Incheon to Qingdao and Yantai in China since the summer of 2020 to meet business travel demands. Jeju Air Co., the country's biggest low-cost carrier, said it will continue to provide two flights a week on the Incheon-Guam route until February 26. It had originally planned to provide four flights a week on the route from January 27. It also plans to operate flights on the Busan-Saipan route until January 12, though the route resumed services on December 29, 2021. T'way Air Co. has provided two flights a week on the Incheon-Saipan route but decided to suspend them until January 28. South Korea has two full-service carriers - Korean Air Lines Co. and Asiana Airlines Inc. - and 10 LCCs, including Jin Air Co., Air Busan Co., Eastar Jet Co., Fly Gangwon, Air Premia Co. and Air Incheon Co. Air Incheon is a cargo-focused carrier, and the nine other low-cost ones are passenger carriers.



MUMBAI SCHOOLS, EXCEPT CLASSES 10, 12, SHUT TILL JANUARY 31

AMID THE RAPID SPREAD OF COVID-19 AND OMICRON INFECTIONS, THE BRIHANMUMBAI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (BMC) ON MONDAY ANNOUNCED SHUTTING ALL SCHOOLS FROM CLASS I TO 9 AND CLASS 11 IN-LAW IN A DRUGS CASE.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Classes 10 (SSC) and 12 (HSC) will not be closed considering the crucial board examinations which are due to start around a month later.

However, BMC Commissioner I.S. Chahal said despite the schools for the other classes remaining, the online classes will continue as in the past for all the students. The move came barely a couple a

few weeks after the BMC and state government took decision to reopen schools - shut since March 14, 2020, with only online classes permitted - in stages in October and December 2021 - as the effects of the first and

second waves of the Covid pandemic subsided. Classes 8 to 12 were allowed to resume from October 4, and on December 15, the remaining - Classes 1 to 7 also started functioning offline, with a majority of the students turning up in schools.

With the spread of the third wave now, the Education Department discussed the measures keeping in mind the health and safety aspects before deciding to close all physical classes from Classes 1 to 9 and Class 11, till January 31. School authorities rue that many had discontinued full-fledged online classes as students started attending the classes physically in large numbers with full Covid protocols implemented.

Presently, Mumbai is the worst-hit in terms of both Covid-19 and its variant Omicron cases in the past couple of weeks. The Covid cases are jumping up by a few thousands daily in the state which also leads in Omicron tally with 328 infected so far, though death rate is low.

Maharashtra Sees 11,877 New Covid Cases:

Mumbai logs 8,082 fresh Covid-19 cases with positivity rate of 16.39%

Mumbai is one of the major cities besides Delhi that are witnessing a massive surge in coronavirus cases believed to be driven by the Omicron variant. However, Amid sudden rise in Covid-19 cases in Mumbai, BMC-run schools will remain closed for classes 1 to 9 and class 11 till January 31.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra logged 11,877 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, 29 per cent higher than yesterday, with Mumbai registering 8,063 of the fresh infections (27 per cent higher than yesterday). The state saw nine Covid deaths since yesterday.

Mumbai on Monday reported 8,082 fresh Covid-19 cases with a test positivity rate of 16.39 per cent. The city also recorded two related deaths in the past 24 hours, a BMC health bulletin said. At present there are 37274 active Covid infections in Mumbai. However, 90% of the patients are asymptomatic, the bulletin further noted. On Sunday, Mumbai had



recorded 8,063 Covid-19 cases.

Amid sudden rise in Covid-19 cases in Mumbai, BMC-run schools will remain closed for classes 1 to 9 and class 11 till January 31.

However, online classes will continue, said Raju Tadvi, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's education offi-

cer. Mumbai on Monday began Covid-19 vaccination drive for children aged 15-18. Vaccination for this age bracket is being carried out at nine jumbo centres, with each centre having a capacity to vaccinate 1,500 children daily, said Dr Mangala Gomare, executive health officer, BMC.

Sameer Wankhede operates hotel, bar in Mumbai, alleges Nawab Malik

Team Absolute | Mumbai

More controversy surrounds IRS officer Sameer Wankhede after Maharashtra minister and bete noire Nawab Malik complained that Wankhede holds a bar licence in Mumbai.

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Malik has sent a complaint to Suchitra Sharma, Director General, Vigilance, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) against former Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Mumbai head Sameer Wankhede. Malik said Wankhede is holding a permit room and bar licence in his name from 1997 onwards till date. Wankhede is operat-



ing a hotel and bar named Sadguru Hotel in Vashi, Navi Mumbai, Malik said. "Is a Central government servant eligible to hold and operate a permit room and bar licence in his name," Malik asked in his complaint. Malik has asked the CBIC to note the administrative misconducts by Wankhede and conduct an inquiry. Copies of the complaint are marked to CBIC Chairman

and DG, NCB. Malik also said that Wankhede has not declared the properties and businesses held in the name of his wife, Kranti Redkar. Only one joint property has been declared while others in the name of Redkar and other relatives have not been disclosed by Wankhede in his annual property statements, Malik claimed.

Malik also said that Wankhede has made a wrong disclosure and misrepresented to hide facts by stating that the bar and hotel was inherited on the demise of his mother, Zahida Dyandeo Wankhede. Malik said the licence stood in Wankhede's name since 1997 while his mother expired much later in 2015.

Why the Maharashtra government is uncertain about lockdown?

Topo said that lockdowns have severe impacts on the economy and people who earn daily wages suffer the most

Zafar Alam Khan | Bhopal www.absoluteindianews.com

A fear of third wave looms large, the Maharashtra government is uncertain about imposing a lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19 and Omicron in the State. While State Health Minister Rajesh Topo has said that there is no need to impose lockdown based on the rise in the number of patients, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar said that if the

number of cases continues to rise the government will have to take "tough" decisions. "The State government and the Chief Minister will have to take tough decisions if the numbers (of Covid-19 and Omicron patients) continue to rise," said Pawar speaking to reporters in Satara on Monday while answering the question on lockdown. He added that everyone will have to follow the State government's orders. "You asked this question (about lockdown). In West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee has imposed lockdown. Some States have already imposed night lockdowns," he added.

However, Topo recently announced that the State government is not at all considering imposing lockdown, even as the number of Covid-19

patients is on the rise.

Speaking to reporters in Mumbai, Topo said, "Positivity rate, bed occupancy, and oxygen consumption are parameters to take further decisions. Lockdown is not on agenda now. It is not an issue now and the media should not create fear about the lockdown. During the (recent) two-hour meet between Chief Minister and the State Task Force lockdown was not even discussed."

Topo said that lockdowns have severe impacts on the economy and people who earn daily wages suffer the most. He said that everyone has witnessed what impact lockdowns during the first and second waves had on the economy and people. "Consumption of 700 MT oxygen

will be the parameter for lockdown. Now there is no lockdown issue even as the number is rising" said Topo. He added that the government has already imposed restrictions that will be strictly implemented.

Government sources said that Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had detailed discussions with the Covid-19 Task Force about possible steps to curb the spread of the virus.

Industry and business establishments have opposed lockdown saying that already the sectors have suffered heavily in the last two years and new lockdown would cripple the economy. Maharashtra has 42,024 active Covid-19 cases in the State with a total of 510 patients infected with the Omicron variant.

Lakhs of spirited kids aged 15-18 queue up vaccination

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As the state stands on the threshold of a 'third wave' of Covid-19, lakhs of school and junior college children in the 15-18 age enthusiastically thronged vaccination centres to get their jabs in Mumbai and rest of Maharashtra, officials said here on Monday.

As per the Centre's policy, the government launched the inoculation drive for the 15-18 age groups and over 8,00,000 have already registered for their dose in the past few days. Since dawn, the children, many sporting their school uniforms, lugging school bags, clutching their I-cards and other necessary documents, made a beeline at the vaccination centres in Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur and other cities, towns and villages.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray exhorted children to go for their doses, while at many centres there were VIPs



waiting to welcome the kids, like Health Minister Rajesh Topo in Jalna, Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray and Mayor Kishori Pednekar in Mumbai, other ministers in other districts, parliamentarians or legislators in different areas.

Some big schools in the urban centres have decided to arrange the vaccination drive at their own campuses to

ensure all the children in the 15-18 age group are covered.

At several centres, excited and giggling young boys and girls arrived either with their families or neighbours or friends, eagerly awaiting the experience of a Covid-19 dose, and they urged their reluctant pals or classmates to join them. "There is apprehension among us as the Covid-19 and Omicron cases have suddenly increased... We all have taken our parents' and teachers' advice to register and take the precautionary jab when called," said Manthan Joshi, an SSC student of Gokhale High School in Borivali.

In Mumbai, the doses are being administered at the 9 Jumbo vaccination centres across the city and suburbs. They are the Richardson & Cruddas, Byculla and Mulund, Somaia Grounds, Sion, NSCI Dome, Crompton & Greaves, Kanjurmarg, Worli, NESCO Centre Goregaon, Malad Centre, Malad, and Dahisar Centre, Dahisar.

WILL REPLICATE MAHA'S MVA ALLIANCE FORMULA IN GOA POLLS TOO: SANJAY RAUT

Panaji: The Shiv Sena will try to replicate Maharashtra's "successful" Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance formula for the upcoming Goa polls, Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut said on Monday.

Raut, who arrived in Goa for a four-day visit to the poll-bound state, also said that he would be speaking to the Congress and Nationalist Congress Party leaders in the state on Tuesday to discuss the formation of the alliance.

"Definitely Shiv Sena will fight some seats in Goa and we are trying to make an alliance. Tomorrow we will be speaking to Congress leaders, NCP leaders and we will try to make a new alliance," Raut told reporters after his arrival at Goa's Dabolim international airport.

"It is a successful formula in Maharashtra, we will use it in Goa," Raut also said, adding that the seat sharing modules would be discussed in his meetings with state Congress and NCP leaders beginning on Tuesday.

Wankhede's tenure ends at NCB, will report to DG DRI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Narcotic Control Bureau's Mumbai Zone head Sameer Wankhede will report to DG, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI). His tenure at NCB ended on Monday.

IRS Sameer Wankhede faced a lot of flak after arresting Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan in connection with a drug case.

During Aryan Khan case, Sameer Wankhede was given four months extension which ended on December 31. Sameer had said that it was for the government to decide his next posting.

NCP leader Nawab Malik who held several press conferences against Wankhede had even alleged that because of lobbying by BJP leaders, Wankhede was not transferred from NCB. On the request of Sameer Wankhede the probe of Aryan Khan case was given to senior officials of the NCB. As soon as the Wankhede's tenure at NCB ended, the matter start-

ed trending on social media, some requesting the home ministry to give him another term. Earlier, during the probe in Aryan Khan case, when Wankhede was visiting his mother's grave he was followed by two people who later turned out to be cops. Wankhede had been visiting his mother in cemetery everyday since 2015. Some individuals went to cemetery and took CCTV footage of him. Allegations were that those two individuals are Mumbai cops. Matter had been flagged off to the Mumbai Police Commissioner also.

Meanwhile, the charge sheet in Aryan Khan case is yet to be filed before the Mumbai Court. The NCB sources said they have prepared a draft charge sheet and that they wished the charge sheet would be filed by Wankhede, but now other officials will file it. The source said they have digital evidences, testimonies, and drug sample collected during raid. The NCB is hopeful that their case is strong and will win in the court.

Maha 'Mad Doc's' battle for 'beti bachao' turns robust 10 years

Team Absolute | Pune

Exactly 10 years ago today, a mild-mannered Pune medico Dr. Ganesh Rakh launched his unique 'Beti Bachao' crusade coinciding with the birth anniversary of the legendary social reformer Savitribai Jyotirao Phule (1831-1897).

A decade since, the movement has bloomed into a worldwide campaign spanning over a dozen countries and more ready to join the initiative to strengthen the cause of the so-called 'weaker sex'.

Nobody took the good doctor seriously when 10 years ago, he announced 'free delivery' of all female infants born at his Rakh's Medicare Hospital (RMH), and his family, society and medical fraternity uncharitably labelled him as a 'Paagal doctor' (Mad Doctor)! Undeterred, he passionately continued his small initiative at the RMH, which has till date recorded 2,014 deliveries of baby girls, and the 'Beti Bachao Jan Andolan' (BBJA), gradually drawing attention all over the country and even internationally. It was irrespective of the mother/family's financial status, whether normal (Rs 25,000), caesarian or complicated deliveries (Rs 60,000), all followed by a big celebration, besides free follow-ups and other medical treatment for the mother-female



launched the laudable 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' to uphold the importance of the girl child... However, six years later, the concerns have increased and become more daunting, despite the NFHS-5 Phase II results," a worried Dr. Rakh told IANS. Like many experts, Dr. Rakh feels that the survey outcome is tentative and the real data can be expected only after the Census, which was postponed owing to the Covid pandemic last year. Nevertheless, he cautioned that "a depleting sex-ratio at birth would prove counter-productive in the long run on the socio-economic fronts with 'irreversible consequences' if not arrested promptly. He cites the Indian Economic Survey report (2017-2018), stating an estimated 63 million female fetuses in India (pre-birth), the Lancet Medical Journal's 2018 report, saying that 'gender bias' killed over 2.40 million girls in the 0-5 age group (post-birth) in a 10-year period, merely because they were born females, and the 1998 Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen's statement of 37 million 'missing women' way back in 1990. At 10, the BBJA today has over 4,00,000 private Indian doctors, more than 13,000 NGOs/organisations and 26-lakh plus volunteers who are directly or indirectly striving to save the girl child, says Dr. Rakh proudly. "In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had

Maharashtra govt to observe 'Bal Thackeray Jayanti' on January 23

The Maharashtra government will officially observe the birth anniversary of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray as 'Bal Thackeray Jayanti' on January 23.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government will officially observe the birth anniversary of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray on January 23 this year.

As per the circular issued by the Maharashtra government on December 31, 2021, 'Bal Thackeray Jayanti' will now be officially observed in Maharashtra on January 23. Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's grandfather, Keshav Setearam alias Prabodhankar Thackeray's birth anniversary will also be

observed on September 17.

Last year, late Bal Thackeray and his father Keshav Sitaram Thackeray were included in the list of eminent personalities whose birth anniversaries are to be commemorated in government offices. A circular by state government dated December 31, 2021, lists more than 30 eminent personalities. "In the year 2022, the anniversaries of great persons and national day programs should be celebrated in the Ministry and in all government / semi-government offices. The events will be held on all Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays / local holidays and should be celebrated as suggested by the Central Government in this regard, otherwise the events should be celebrated on the same day. The Ministerial Department / Divisional Commissioner / Collector should issue the necessary instructions regarding the organization of the program in all the government / semi-government offices in their department / district and take appropriate action regarding their implementation," the letter reads.



WILLOW SMITH FELT 'BRAINWASHED' DURING HER YOUNGER YEARS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Pop star Willow Smith suffered anxiety attacks after releasing the hit single 'Whip My Hair' in 2010, and she has confessed to feeling overwhelmed by the situation at the time.

Willow said: "That was crazy. I was brainwashed into thinking, 'No, you're being a brat, suck it up.' Then I grew up, and I realised it was something that needed to be dealt with."

However, the 21-year-old pop star found that exercise helped to improve her mental health amid the coronavirus lockdown, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She told The Independent: "I became a little obsessive with physical exertion, I didn't allow myself to feel (anxiety), I just wanted to run it out. Sometimes the body is so intelligent."

Willow's parents, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith, have both been candid about their personal struggles over recent years.

The singer doesn't have any worries about them oversharing.

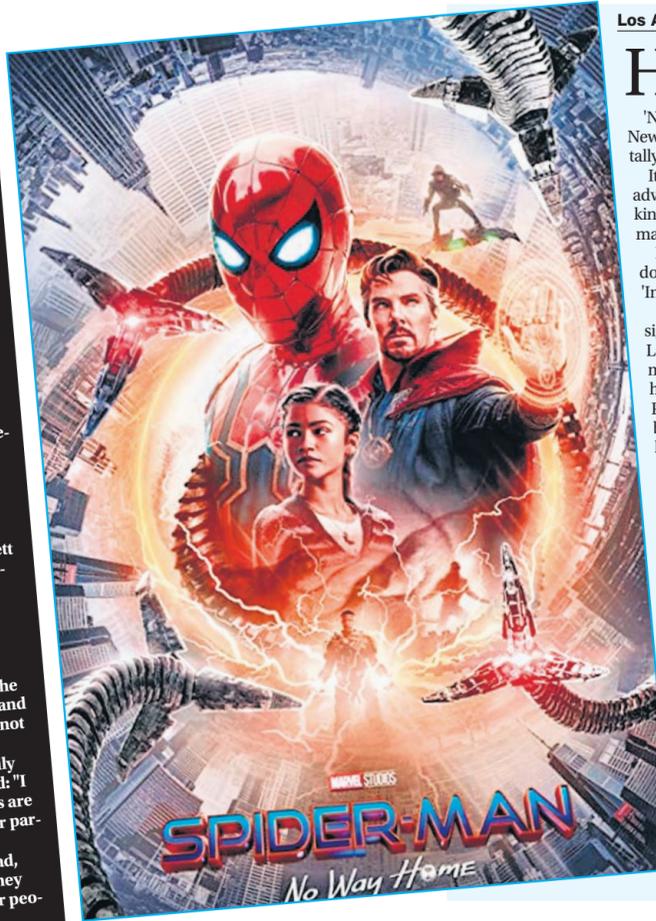
Willow, who has co-hosted the Facebook Watch talk show 'Red Table Talk', said: "Everyone is going through something and the biggest disservice you could do (to yourself and others) is put up a facade and be like, that's not the case (here). That sounds wrong to me."

Asked if she ever feels as though her family are too open with the public, Willow replied: "I feel I've always understood that my parents are their own people. A lot of kids think of their parents like 'Your whole identity is for me'."

"(But) seeing them in this lifestyle we had, from a very young age it was clear to me they weren't just my parents. They're full, other people who have their own emotions."

'Spider-Man: No Way Home' crosses \$600 million in North America

Los Angeles | Agencies



Hollywood star Tom Holland's 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' towered over domestic box-office charts for the third weekend in a row. 'No Way Home' minted \$52.7 million over the New Year's holiday frame, boosting its domestic tally to \$609 million, reports variety.com.

It extends an epic streak for the latest Spidey adventure as the lone blockbuster to deliver the kind of ticket sales it would have been expected to make in pre-pandemic times.

It now ranks as the 10th-highest grossing domestic release in history, supplanting Disney's 'Incredibles 2' (\$608 million).

'Spider-Man: No Way Home' currently has its sights on spots eight and nine, 'Star Wars: The Last Jedi' (\$620 million) and 'The Avengers' (\$623 million). Globally, 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' has grossed \$1.37 billion, passing 2018's 'Black Panther' (\$1.34 billion) to become the 12th biggest film in history. International ticket sales have accounted for a bulk of that haul, with overseas revenues at \$759 million. 'Sing 2' enjoyed another relatively strong weekend. The film, which features an all-star voice cast of Matthew McConaughey, Reese Witherspoon, Scarlett Johansson and more, earned \$19.6 million from 3,892 cinemas between Friday and Sunday, down a scant 12 per cent from its debut.

Since landing on the big screen in advance of Christmas, the well-reviewed 'Sing 2' has generated an impressive (for pandemic times) \$89.6 million.

To illustrate the headwinds still facing movies that aren't of the superhero variety, though, the follow-up is pacing significantly behind its predecessor. The original 2016 film 'Sing' sold far more tickets, ultimately grossing \$270 million worldwide and \$634 million worldwide. 'The King's Man', a prequel to the 'Kingsman' series, landed in third place with \$4.5 million from 3,180 theatres.

Bryan Adams wants to direct a film

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Bryan Adams thinks his photography work has given him some of the skills he would need to direct a movie. Adams said: "I would indeed be interested (in making a film). I can easily see myself as a cinematographer, maybe even a director. I remember working with Laszlo Kovacs, who did 'Easy Rider', on one of my early videos."

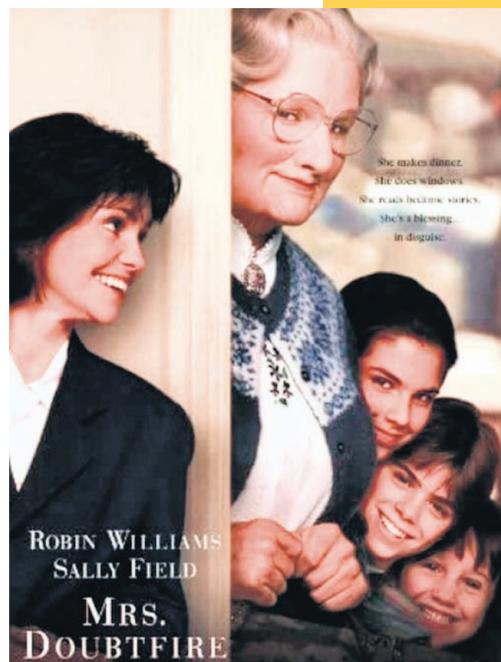
"He had a glass round his neck and was constantly looking at the cloud formations waiting for the right light. Pure genius!"

He thinks technological developments have completely changed the landscape for photography, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The singer told Ramp Style magazine: "With smartphone cameras that can capture every moment, everyone can be a photographer. The future will be more interactive and intense, and there will be more cameras documenting everything all the time."

"Police body cameras have infrared capabilities to check your body temperature, there will be more drones... these are just some examples. That's not to say it's a bad thing, because we are now seeing the world like never before."

"One of the most profoundly important things is people using their cameras to document atrocities. Everyone is a photojournalist. From eco-terrorism to George Floyd, photos and videos have completely changed our world overnight."



'Mrs Doubtfire' Broadway musical stalled by Covid-19 spike

Los Angeles | Agencies

The producers of 'Mrs. Doubtfire' will pause performances of the musical until March 14 as the show struggles to find a way to survive during the Covid-19 resurgence that has imperiled Broadway's tentative recovery.

The show's producers didn't mince words when they described the financial stakes that lie at the heart of their dramatic decision to take a nine-week hiatus, reports variety.com.

The first few months of a brand new Broadway show are an extraordinarily delicate and important period of time. With the pervasiveness of the Omicron variant of Covid-19, 'Mrs. Doubtfire' would have to close permanently if the production didn't take drastic, proactive measures," Kevin McCollum, a producer on the show, said in a statement.

The stage show is based on the 1993 comedy blockbuster of the same name and is directed

by Jerry Zaks. The hiatus will begin from January 10.

'Mrs. Doubtfire' features a book by Karey Kirkpatrick and John O'Farrell and music and lyrics by Wayne Kirkpatrick and Karey Kirkpatrick.

New York City is grappling with huge surge in Covid cases due to the emergence of the highly contagious Omicron variant. With the public health crisis worsening, Broadway has begun to sink under the weight of cancelled shows and skittish tourists.

Last month, five Broadway shows a group that includes 'Waitress', 'Jagged Little Pill', 'Thoughts of a Colored Man', 'Diana' and 'Ain't Too Proud' announced they would close for good. Several other shows such as 'The Music Man' and 'Hamilton' have had to cancel performances due to breakthrough cases of Covid in their companies.

'Mrs. Doubtfire' also was forced to cancel shows due to positive tests.

Omarion: I'm an artiste, not a Covid variant

Los Angeles | Agencies

R&B singer Omarion has responded to the Covid jokes that have been circulating online, the B2K member playfully reminded his fans that he's "an artiste, not a variant."

Making use of TikTok, he shared a video of him wishing his followers a Happy New Year, reports aceshowbiz.com. "Hi everybody, this is Omarion. I am an artiste, not a variant," he first quipped, referring to the new Covid variant Omicron.

"So please be aware that if you just so happen to run into me on the street, you don't have to isolate for five days, nor do you have to have a negative test result in order to dance to my music," the 37-year-old continued. "So please, be safe, be healthy, Happy New Year."

Many have since reacted to the comical video. "He is sick and tired of being sick and tired of us," one person wrote alongside a series of crying laughing emojis. Another individual then suggested: "He better use this pandemic to his advantage all 2022." Someone else, on the other hand, chimed in, "Somebody said the virus has spoken."

Omarion's post came a few days after LaKeith Stanfield (Keith Stanfield) poked fun at him in an Instagram DM. "You ruining Christmas for everybody smh," the 'Get Out' actor told the 'Love & Hip Hop: Hollywood' alum.



Georgia May Foote



SA v IND, 2nd Test

SOUTH AFRICA REACH 35/1 AFTER BOWLERS RESTRICT INDIA TO 202

Johannesburg | Agencies

Dean Elgar and Keegan Petersen ensured South Africa did not major damage on Monday as the hosts reached 35/1 at stumps, after their bowlers came up with a fine performance to bundle India off for 202 on the opening day of the second Test here.

At stumps, South Africa were still trailing India by 167 runs at the Wanderers here on Monday. On a day on which eleven wickets fell for overall 237 runs, South Africa kept themselves on top after a solid bowling performance helped them restrict India to 202.

After being bowled out for a modest score, Mohammed Shami gave India the first breakthrough as Aiden Markram was trapped plumb in front of the wicket. Shami got the ball to skid in from a good length and Markram tried to defend but was beaten and struck on the pads.

Shami continued to trouble captain Dean Elgar, beating and squaring him up on multiple occasions as Jasprit Bumrah kept the pressure up from the other end. Keegan Petersen collected two fours off Shami to get going. During the 18-over spell, Elgar and Petersen were beaten on multiple occasions but did well to survive. Bumrah almost had the wicket of Petersen if Rishabh Pant had caught a tough catch with his right glove. Elgar was beaten four times in an over by Mohammed Siraj. But an



over before stumps, Siraj walked off midway from his over, clutching the right hamstring. Earlier, India, who were 146/5 at tea, added 56 runs for the loss of five wickets to finish at a modest total of 202. Pant and Ravichandran Ashwin added ten more runs to their partnership in the second session to stitch a stand of 40 runs off 48 balls for the sixth wicket, with the off-spinner being the more aggressive of the two. Ashwin survived a chance at 44 when Bavuma almost pulled off a screamer at deep cover. But on the very next ball, Ashwin backed away to upper-cut a short ball from Jansen and miscued it completely to Petersen at point.

Bumrah brought out the long handle to smash Rabada for 14 runs, including two fours and a six to take India past 200. Rabada then wrapped the Indian innings by strangling Mohammed Siraj down leg.

Brief scores
India 202 all out in 63.1 overs (KL Rahul 50, Ravichandran Ashwin 46; Marco Jansen 4/31, Kagiso Rabada 3/64) against South Africa 35/1 in 18 overs (Keegan Petersen 14 not out, Dean Elgar 11 not out; Mohammed Shami 1/15), South Africa trail by 167 runs

KOHLI RULED OUT OF 2ND TEST DUE TO UPPER BACK SPASM

Johannesburg: India captain Virat Kohli had been ruled out just before the start of the second Test against South Africa at the Wanderers due to an upper back spasm. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), in a release, said Kohli will be monitored by the medical team during the proceedings in the second Test.

RAHUL REPLACES KOHLI AS CAPTAIN

Johannesburg: India captain KL Rahul, stepping in for Virat Kohli, has won the toss and elected to bat first against South Africa in the second Test at the Wanderers here on Monday. India is 1-0 up in the three-match series. Rahul has now become the 34th cricketer to captain India in Test cricket.



Premier League

Chelsea rally to hold Liverpool to a 2-2 draw

London | Agencies

Chelsea came back from two goals down at home to Liverpool as the Premier League's second- and third-placed teams drew 2-2 at Stamford Bridge.

The only real winners of the game were Manchester City, whose lead at the top of the table has opened to 10 points after their 2-1 win away to Arsenal on Saturday.

Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel left striker Romelu Lukaku out of his side on Sunday evening after the Belgian's recent declarations that implied he wasn't happy in London and would like to return to Italy, but he soon found his side 2-0 down after Sadio Mane and Mohamed Salah struck for Liverpool.

However, in a high-energy match, Chelsea were level thanks to two goals in three minutes before the break. Mateo Kovacic scored with a



stunning volley from outside the area, before Christian Pulisic levelled the scores in first-half injury time after a pass from N'Golo Kante, Xinhua reports. Two goals from Alexis Mac Allister helped Brighton to a 3-2 win away to Everton, to pile the pressure on Rafa Benitez ahead of next weekend's FA Cup visit to Hull City.

Mac Allister opened the scoring in the third minute, and Dan Burn doubled Brighton's lead on 20 minutes. Leeds United claimed a vital 3-1 win at home to Burnley to lift them away from the danger zone. Jack

Harrison, Stuart Dallas and Daniel James scored for Leeds, while Maxwell Cornet's 54th minute free-kick briefly gave the visitors hopes of a point. Danny Ings put Villa ahead on 16 minutes after being set up by Emiliano Buendia, but Yoane Wissa drew injury-hit Brentford level before the break, and although Steven Gerrard's side had some sterile dominance after half-time, Brentford wing-back Mads Roerslev won the game in the 83rd minute, smashing home after Emi Martinez had saved his original shot.

I-LEAGUE POSTPONED FOR SIX WEEKS DUE TO RISING COVID-19 CALLS

New Delhi: Considering the rising cases of COVID-19 due to the Omicron variant of the Novel Coronavirus, the All-India Football Federation (AIFF) and the participating clubs have unanimously decided to postpone the I-League 2021-22 for six weeks.



The move was proposed during a meeting of the AIFF League Committee, chaired by Subrata Dutta, senior vice-president, held via video conferencing on Monday. The clubs unanimously ratified the proposal put forth by the AIFF.

The League will have a review meeting after four weeks to take stock of the situation, the AIFF informed in a release on Monday. The proposal for postponing the league for six weeks was put forth by Dr. Harsh Mahajan, a member of the AIFF Sports Medical Committee.

Dr. Mahajan informed the clubs that with the number of positive cases rising all over the country exponentially, the new COVID norms and restrictions being implemented by the Government of West Bengal, and with AIFF not allowing any compromise with the health and safety of the players and officials, it's prudent that the I-League 2021-22 be postponed by at least six weeks, a fact which was corroborated by all the participating clubs in the meeting.

Mominul, Liton Das's century stand gives Bangladesh 73-run lead against Kiwis

Mount Maunganui | Agencies

Bangladesh skipper Mominul Haq (88) and wicketkeeper-batter Liton Das (86) strung together a century partnership as the tourists amassed 401 for six at the end of Day 3 in the first Test against New Zealand here on Monday.

Bangladesh have taken a crucial 73-run first-innings lead with four wickets still intact in reply to New Zealand's total of 328.

In a slow-moving first session, Bangladesh could manage to add just 45 runs to their overnight total of 175/2 and lost two wickets.

Neil Wagner grabbed the wicket of Mahmudul Hasan Joy in the third over of the day with Henry Nicholls taking a sharp catch at gully. Joy went for a hard-fought 78 off 228 deliveries.

New Zealand bowlers were relentless, chipping at Bangladesh's resistance. Liton



hit a flurry of fours and inspired Mominul to break the shackles as well. Jamieson and Wagner, in particular, bore the brunt of their assault.

The host bowlers were left frustrated as the duo added 87 runs before tea break without losing a wicket and trailing by only 21 runs. Yasir Ali (11 not out) and Mehidy Hasan (20 not out) negotiated the remaining overs in the day without further hiccups as Bangladesh ended day three on 401/6.

Brief scores

Brief scores: New Zealand 328 in 108.1 overs vs Bangladesh 401/6 in 156 overs (Mahmudul Hasan Joy 78, Najmul Hossain Shanto 64, Mominul Haque 88, Liton Das 86; Trent Boult 3/61).

Barty backs Australian Open decision on vaccination

Melbourne | Agencies

World No. 1 Australian tennis player Ashleigh Barty backed Australian Open organisers to make the correct decision on whether to let unvaccinated players compete in the first major amid doubts over Novak Djokovic's chances of playing in the event. Barty's support came after tournament organisers stated that players wanting to compete at the Grand Slam must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Djokovic, however, has repeatedly refused to reveal his vaccination status, leading many within the tennis world to think he will be unable to defend the crown he won in 2021. Ahead of the Australian Open, many players have shared their views on the controversy including Barty. "It's a tricky one for me, because it's not my decision. We put trust in those people who are making those decisions. They have the correct information. That's what it is -- that's all



it is. There's nothing else to it," she said. However, Barty said she has no problem about competing against players who are unvaccinated. "That's the very last thing I'm thinking of when I'm on the court; is the medical history of the

player on the opposite side," the 2019 French Open winner said. Earlier, World No. 1 tennis player and defending champion Novak Djokovic had added further mystery to his participation in the Australian Open.

PUJARA, RAHANE MIGHT JUST HAVE ONLY ONE MORE INNINGS FOR THEIR TEST CAREERS: GAVASKAR

Johannesburg:

Legendary Sunil Gavaskar has predicted that under pressure Indian batsmen Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane might just have only one more innings to save their Test careers.

Pujara and Rahane got out off consecutive deliveries from South Africa's pacer Duanne Olivier on Day 1 of the second Test in Johannesburg on Monday. "After those two dismissals one can say that they probably have just the next innings, both Pujara and Rahane, to save their Test careers," said Gavaskar during the commentary. Gavaskar said that there have been questions raised about their place in the playing XI after their repeated failures. "There have been questions asked about their place in the team and now with these two dismissals, they have just one innings left. If there is another innings and the way India is going, it looks like there will be another for them to score something and maybe keep their place in the team," the former India captain said. Olivier celebrated his comeback in international cricket after dismissing Pujara. And then made it double with Rahane's wicket. Pujara scored three runs off 33 balls while Rahane was out for a duck.



Several Bengal Ranji players test COVID-positive, training sessions cancelled

Kolkata | Agencies

Several players in Bengal's Ranji Trophy squad and the team's assistant coach have reportedly tested positive for COVID-19, prompting the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) to cancel the training sessions and review the scheduled travel to Bengaluru for the Elite Group B game on January 8.

"Keeping in mind the current pandemic situation, CAB had conducted RTPCR Tests of all Bengal cricketers. The results have come & it has been found certain players had tested positive. CAB is taking all necessary precautions & actions in this regard." Hony Secy #SnehasishGanguly, tweeted CAB late on Sunday. A report by ESPNcricinfo quoting CAB joint secretary Debabrata Das said that the "positive results came up after the players and support staff were tested over the weekend keeping in mind the pandemic situation in the country as a whole and the state of West Bengal in particular."



Bengal's warm-up games against Mumbai, who are playing their Group C matches in Kolkata, too have been cancelled in the wake of the COVID-positive cases.

According to the report by the cricket portal, "a senior member of the Mumbai playing group has also tested positive for COVID-19 prior to the team's departure for Kolkata today (Monday), and has not travelled with the team."

Meanwhile, CAB has issued a notice informing about an 'emergent meeting' on January 4 to review the current COVID-19 situation.

FIH PRO LEAGUE IDEAL PREPARATION FOR ASIAN GAMES: MANPREET

Bengaluru | Agencies

The Indian men's hockey team captain Manpreet Singh has said that the FIH Pro League will help the side gain "some really good experience" ahead of the Asian Games in Guangzhou (China), which will serve as the direct qualification event for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The Indian men's hockey team had missed out on direct qualification for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as they had finished third at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta and Palembang. They finally made the Tokyo 2020 grade in the Olympic qualifying tournament at Bhubaneswar in 2019.

"Asian Games will undoubtedly be the biggest event for us this year. The Asian Champions Trophy (in Dhaka recently) was a good tournament to see the progress other Asian teams have made and from what we got to see, surely the competition will be



quite tough at the Asian Games as all teams will be vying to make the Olympics cut," Manpreet opined.

Only the gold medal-winning team in men's and women's hockey earn direct Olympic qualification for the Asian Games. Manpreet, who is back in the national camp along with his team-mates after a short break following their Asian Champions Trophy outing in Dhaka, added on Monday that the Pro League will help the side try out different combinations to fine-tune its game ahead of the Asian Games. "I feel, the FIH Hockey Pro League will help us gain some really good match experience ahead of the Asian Games. Additionally, I feel the FIH Hockey Pro League matches will give us great opportunity to try out different combinations ahead of the Asian Games."

Manpreet said the team is upbeat and looking forward to an exciting yet hectic year.

Root shouldn't be forced to quit captaincy: Stokes

Sydney | Agencies

England all-rounder Ben Stokes has categorically said that he never "had an ambition to be a captain", adding that Joe Root "should not be forced into" relinquishing his captaincy in the wake of the Ashes debacle.

England are staring at a series washout after losing the first three Tests by huge margins. The tourists lost the opening Test at Brisbane by nine wickets, the second Test at Adelaide by 275 runs and the Boxing Day Test at the MCG by an innings and 14 runs, prompting several England greats to call for Root's ouster as captain and



Stokes's elevation. "I've never really had an ambition to be a captain," Stokes was quoted as saying on Monday by sen.com.au, two days before the start of the fourth Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground. "That's totally Joe's deci-

sion. He shouldn't be forced into doing it. Obviously this series hasn't gone too well -- not from a captaincy point of view, but from a team and results point of view. Unfortunately, the captain and coach bear the scrutiny for that, but there are 10 other guys out there in the field besides the captain," Stokes said.

While Root reached several milestones last year and notched up 1,708 Test runs, which is the third-most over a calendar year by any batsman in the history of the game, his leadership has come under scrutiny after a string of nine Test reverses in 2021.

AYUSHMANN REVEALS WHAT MAKES HIM SAY 'NO' TO A PROJECT

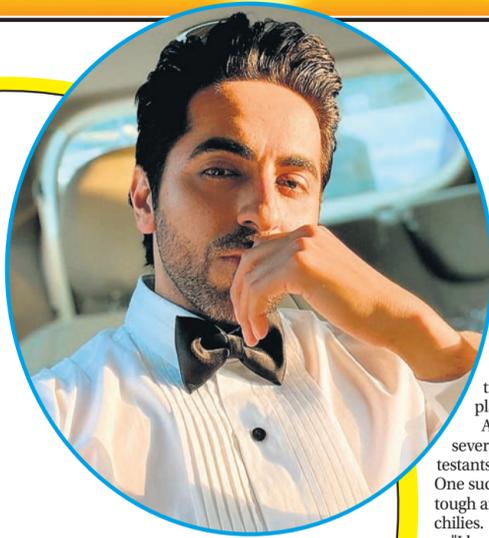
Team Absolute | New Delhi

Ayushmann Khurrana has delivered back-to-back hits in his journey in Hindi cinema. The actor has revealed how he picks up his projects and what makes him say 'no' to a script. Talking to IANS about what makes him decline a project, Ayushmann, who is called as the poster boy of content-driven cinema, said: "Anything that is mundane, generic or done-to-death or anything which is regressive is a complete 'no'."

Ayushmann made his acting debut in 2012 with 'Vicky Donor'. Since then, he has been a part of a string of hits such as 'Dum Laga Ke Haisha', 'Shubh Mangal Saavdhan', 'Bareilly Ki Barfi', 'Andhadhun', 'Badhai Ho', 'Article 15', 'Bala', 'Dream Girl' and 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui'.

He says while picking up a film, it's the story he looks at and not the character. "More than the character I look for the story. The story has to have a novel idea, a concept that is unexplored in Hindi cinema and it should hold the audiences for two hours and it should have something to say. It should have some value in the end and story," he concluded.

Looking forward, Ayushmann has a motley of films lined up such as 'Anek', 'Doctor G' and 'Action Hero'.



'BIGG BOSS 15'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Surbhi Chandna says she entered the 'Bigg Boss 15' house to make it more interesting and there is no one as such whom she supports. She calls Umar Riaz a strong contestant and Shamita Shetty a dignified player.

Surbhi Chandna, Vishal Singh, Akanksha Puri and Munmun Dutta have entered 'Bigg Boss 15' house as challengers.

She says: "I have not entered the house to support anyone but just to wake up the contestants and make them realise that now the finale is near so it's time to be in action. But, at the same place it is sad that we are approaching the finale and I can't comment on who will be the winner. Of course Shamita Shetty, Umar Riaz and Tejaswi Prakash are playing well. Shamita has no connection inside the house but still she is playing so well and with dignity."

As a challenger, Surbhi has performed several tasks and then given them to the contestants as a challenge to win Ticket To Finale. One such task that according to her was most tough and memorable for her was eating green chillies.

"I have eaten green chillies. Just to give them a challenge I had to do that. But that moment will always be with me forever."

The actress who has done shows like 'Ishqbaaz', 'Sanjivani' and 'Naagin 5' has been often asked by her fans if she wants to be part of 'Bigg Boss' as a contestant and she says she will love to be on 'Bigg Boss' whenever she is willing to show her real self.

"Right now I am happy to be on the show as a challenger but as a contestant will definitely come some time when I am open to show my real self and mentally prepared for that," she concludes.

**SURBHI CALLS
UMAR STRONG
CONTESTANT;
SHAMITA
DIGNIFIED**



LOVEY SASAN: EMBRACING MOTHERHOOD HELPED ME TO POLISH MY ACTING SKILLS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Lovey Sasan is fondly remembered for her role of Paridhi in TV show 'Saath Nibhaana Saathiyaa'. She reveals how embracing motherhood helped her to polish her acting skills. She says: "I personally feel emotional intelligence involves empathy and attuned communication, enabling me to tune into another's state of mind to establish interpersonal sensitivity and create a connection. This is probably the clearest category in which mothers blossom."

"One of the biggest brain boosts for moms is the ability to see the world through someone else's eyes. In many relationships, if you do not agree with a person, you can just walk away but you cannot walk away from your child. Instead, you have to stretch your mind to understand your child's point of view."

"As a mom, I'm learning to listen and be interested in what my child thinks and this makes me learn to get into his mind to fully understand the perspective of my child. These

skills of attuning to others will for sure help me in my work, as for an actor it is a must to get into the character assigned. So in a way I hope embracing motherhood will help me become a better actor." Lovey, who is married to Koushik Krishnamurthy, is the mother of two sons Royce and Prince. She claims being a mom is beneficial. "Motherhood is helping me to set my priorities. As everything else seems surprisingly petty in comparison to the well-being of my children. In a way, having children is making me more liberated, to think more boldly, more willing to take risks, and less hung-up on what other people think of me." Lovey is known for featuring in shows like 'Bade Achhe Lagte Hain', 'Kitani Mohabbat Hai 2', 'Kya Huaa Tera Vaada', and 'Love by Chance', among others.



BIG-TICKET RELEASES MAKE 2022 AN INTERESTING YEAR FOR KARTIK AARYAN

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Kartik Aaryan, who made an impressive OTT debut with 'Dhamaka', is excited for 2022 with the kind of projects that he has in the pipeline. The actor assures that his upcoming films will see him experimenting across genres.

Talking about his line up of films, Kartik enters 2022 on a happy note as he says, "I feel really grateful looking at the way 2021 ended in terms of work and with all different films lined up next, I am very excited for 2022."

He adds, "The way the audience accepted me in 'Dhamaka' as Arjun Pathak is just the validation I needed at this point because my next films see me experiment in genres I have never tapped before. Hence the love from fans is my motivation to keep pushing those boundaries."

The 'Dhamaka' star will be seen in multiple big-ticket films like 'Freddy', 'Captain India', 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2', 'Shehzada' and Sajid Nadiadwala's untitled next.



John Abraham, wife Priya test positive for Covid, have mild symptoms

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood action star John Abraham and his wife Priya have tested positive for Covid. The couple has mild symptoms are quarantined at home. John on Monday morning shared the news on his Instagram story. He wrote: "I came in contact with 3 days ago with someone who I later learned had Covid. Priya and I have tested positive for Covid. We have been quarantined at home so haven't been in contact with anyone else."

John added: "We are both vaccinated and experiencing mild symptoms. Please stay well and healthy. Mask up."

Talking about his upcoming slate of work, John recently unveiled the teaser of his upcoming film 'Attack', which also stars Rakul Preet Singh and Jacqueline Fernandez. It is scheduled to be released on January 28, 2022.

Apart from this, he will also be seen in Siddharth Anand's 'Pathan' sharing the screen space with Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone for the first time.

You've to work the hardest in television, says Sulagna Panigrahi

Team Absolute | Mumbai

TV and film actress Sulagna Panigrahi as Radhamani in historical drama 'Vidroh' is grabbing eyeballs. Radhamani is Buxi Jagabandhu's wife. Sulagna's look from the show is also getting much attention. The actress says she loves her look in the show and prefers to do her makeup on her own.

"Whenever I play a new character, I always want to look different. Makeup-wise it takes time. We have kept her eyes a little dramatic because it's based in the 19th century and Radhamani being the

Senapati's (commander) wife would dress up like any other women during those times. And yes, I love getting ready for Radhamani. "I do my own makeup so I enjoy the process. It does get me in the mood or gets me in the mindset of Radhamani once I get the hair makeup and costume. It doesn't take me more than an hour to get ready," says the actor, who enjoys wearing her sarees, which are mostly chanderi or organza.

So, what's the best compliment she has got for her role and look?

"I've got a lot of compliments but unfortunately I'm bad with compliments.

Yes, I do love compliments but they make me embarrassed and I don't know how to react to them. And, I'm mostly like 'accha sach mai accha tha kya?' (Was it really good?). That's the kind of reaction I usually give. So, yes I am happy that everyone's liking Radhamani's bindi, sarees, and the way she is. I am thankful for all the kind words," she adds. Panigrahi made her television debut with the show 'Amber Dhara', later she also played a negative role in the serial 'Bidaai'. Sulagna made her Bollywood debut with 'Murder 2'.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Nidhi Agerwal