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VOL. 9, ISSUE 87, MUMBAI | MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 2022 I₹5 I PAGE 08

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, BHOPAL AND NEW DELHI

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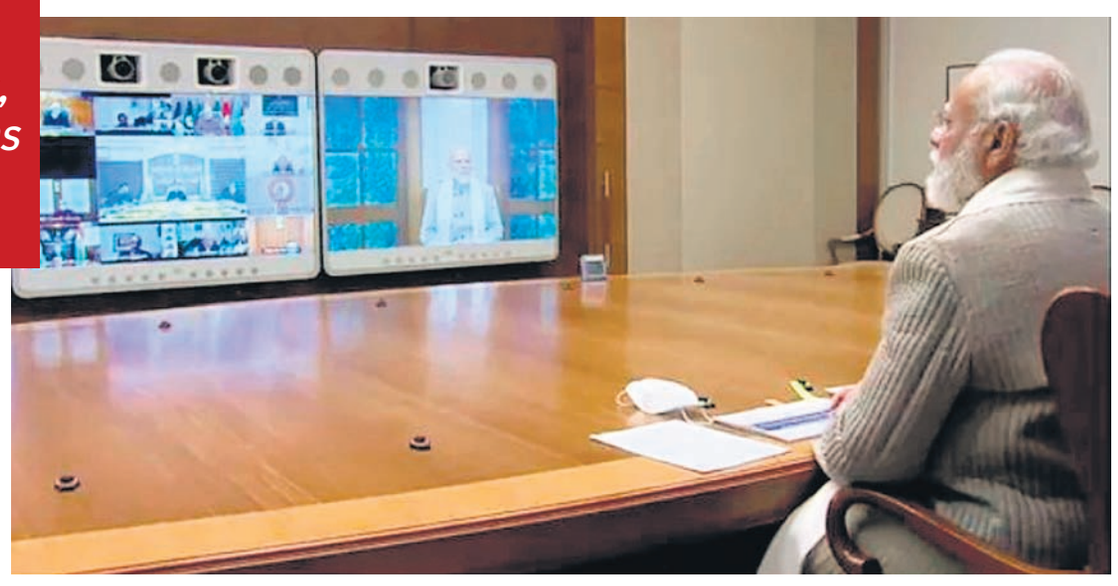
# PM MODI REVIEWS COVID-19 SITUATION AMID SURGE OF INFECTIONS

***This is the first major Covid meeting of PM Modi as states are bringing back night curfews, weekend lockdowns to contain the spread of Omicron.***



**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

As the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 continues to fuel a surge in the infection count across the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday chaired a meeting through video conferencing to review the situation.

Modi held a high-level meeting of officials to review the pandemic situation of the country. The last meeting by PM Modi was held on December 24. Since then, the pandemic situation in the country has changed with daily cases recording a massive surge, Omicron being the dominant variant in many cities.

Just ahead of the Budget session of Parliament, which usually begins in the end of January, nearly 400 staffers working with Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha secretariats and allied services have tested positive for Covid-19 in the last few days, triggering a move to impose curbs on employees' attendance.

India's Covid-19 tally is on an upward trend increasing exponentially in the past few days. On Sunday, India reported 1.59 lakh cases, taking the active caseload to around 6 lakh. Several states have brought back weekend curfew, night curfew and other restrictions to contain the spread of Omicron, which is believed to be driving the present surge.

However, according to scientists, India is witnessing the third phase of the pandemic which is different from the first two phases because of the wide vaccination coverage and fewer restrictions. The situation is dynamic and India may reach the peak of the wave later this month, experts said.

An IIT-Kanpur professor and mathematician, Manindra Agrawal, has predicted that in major cities like Delhi and Mumbai, the sharp rise in Covid cases could be arrested very soon, perhaps by the middle of this month. He also stated that the peak of the ongoing third wave in the country could go as high as 8 lakh cases in a day - almost twice the peak of the second wave. "The third wave (for the country) is expected to peak somewhere in the beginning of next month or even slightly earlier...By middle of March, the third wave of the pandemic should be more or less over in India," Agrawal said.

India reported over 1.5 lakh daily infections for the second consecutive day, taking the active caseload to 5,90,611. According to the Union Ministry of Health, the country recorded 1,59,632 fresh Covid-19 cases and 327 deaths in the last 24 hours ending Sunday, 9 am. The daily positivity rate stood at 10.21 per cent.

Meanwhile, the Omicron tally in India has reached 3,623, with Maharashtra (1,009) continuing to top the count.

# Omicron maybe '1st ray of light' against Covid: UK scientist

**LONDON** | Agencies

The emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant could be "first ray of light" that in the future there may be a less severe coronavirus variant that is similar to the common cold, according to a UK scientist.

According to Dr Mike Tildesley, a member of the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (Spi-M) and a University of Warwick professor, Omicron could be an indicator that people can live with Covid as an endemic disease, the Guardian reported.

But as Covid cases continued to rise in the UK and hospitalisations at their highest in almost a year, he said "we're not quite there yet".

"The thing that might happen in the future is you may see the emergence of a new variant that is less severe, and ultimately, in the long term, what happens is Covid becomes endemic and you have a less severe version. It's very similar to the common cold that we've lived with for many years," he was quoted as saying to Times Radio on Saturday.

"We're not quite there yet, but possibly Omicron is the first ray of light there that suggests that may happen in the longer term. It is, of course, much more transmissible than Delta was, which is concerning, but much less severe."

A total of 18,454 people were in UK hospitals with Covid on January 6, according to government figures. This marks a 40 per cent week-on-week rise and the highest number since February 18.

"On the slightly more positive side, so it doesn't sound all doom and gloom, what we are seeing from hospital admissions is that stays in hospital do appear to be on average shorter, which is good news, symptoms appear to be a little bit milder, so this is what we are seeing consistently with the Omicron variant," Tildesley said.

Meanwhile, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has advised against giving a second booster, or a fourth dose, of the vaccine to care home residents and people aged 80-plus even after figures showed it was 90 per cent effective at preventing hospital admission.

Instead, experts want to prioritise the rollout of the first booster dose and encourage those who are still unvaccinated to have first and second doses.

# New algorithm can predict Covid complication risk

**LONDON** | Agencies

An algorithm that can accurately predict the risk of developing severe complications due to Covid-19, including hospitalisation and death, has been developed by Dutch researchers.

The algorithm can be applied to identify persons with highest risks from data in the electronic health records of general practitioners.

The Covid algorithm performed well to predict the risk of severe complications of Covid-19 in the first and second waves of Covid-19 infections in the Netherlands, the team from VU University Medical Center Amsterdam (VUmc) wrote in the peer-reviewed British Medical Journal.

The algorithm was developed from a training data set comprising 70 per cent of the patients and validated in the remaining 30 per cent.

Potential predictor variables included age, sex, chronic co-morbidity score based on risk factors for Covid-19 complications, obesity, neighbourhood deprivation score, first or second Covid-19 wave, and confirmation test.

The team collected information from a database of Covid-19 diagnoses and co-morbidities in the country.

Some 264 general practitioner practices reported 6,074 Covid-19 cases between April 10, 2020, and January 21, 2021.

About 291 patients had severe complications, 181 of these were hospitalised, while 59 were treated in a nursing home and 51 died.

According to the researchers, the algorithm can be used to identify persons at especially high risk of developing severe complications based on medical records, which could help prioritise these persons for vaccination.

However, they added the caveat that "the regression estimates can and need to be adjusted for future predictions."

# Congress to go without CM face in state polls

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

In the upcoming five state elections, the Congress has decided to go without declaring the chief ministerial face despite having incumbent face in Punjab as a chief minister.

Sources in the Congress say that it will only be decided after the results and Congress legislative party will decide the new leader with the consent of the high command, except at few occasions the party does not project a chief minister's face.

The Congress leaders in Punjab and Uttarakhand want that Chief Ministers should be projected. Supporters of Harish Rawat, former CM and Navjot Singh Sidhu, Punjab Congress chief want to be projected as Chief Minister's face. But party says it will not take risk to alienate other factions ahead of polls. The Congress faces major challenge of retaining power in Punjab, and to come up with a credible show against the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur. Except in Uttar Pradesh, the party is in direct contest with the BJP in three states, while in Punjab, it faces the Akali Dal-BSP and Aam Aadmi Party. Though it is not the main challenger in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress wants to be ahead of the BSP in the contest. The Congress is faced with a crisis in Goa, where almost all the MLAs have deserted the party, the party has three former Chief Ministers -- Digambar Kamat, Pratap Singh Rane but has not decided to project anybody as the face though former Chief Minister Francisco Sardinha is one of the contender for the top post.

In Manipur too, the Congress has faced an exodus ahead of the polls. But there Okram Ibobi Singh, the former Chief Minister could be given one more chance if the party comes to power but won't project anybody. The party is paying special attention to the northeastern state and has appointed Jairam Ramesh as the senior observer. In the last elections in Manipur, the Congress could not form the government despite emerging as the single largest party.

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who is top choice of the party in UP, but it's unlikely that anyone could be projected as CM though party has very less chance in the state compared to other election going states.

# BULLI BAI APP CREATOR'S ARREST LED TO SULLI DEAL ACCUSED: POLICE

**New Delhi:** In a key development in the probe of Sulli Deal and Bully Bai controversy, the Special Cell of Delhi Police has finally found that both are connected to each other.

As of now the police had said they hadn't found any solid proof but now the cops have found few things which connect both the cases. In fact, now the police has made it clear that it was the arrest of Niraj Bishnoi which led them to Sulli Deal creator. It was Niraj Bishnoi, the creator of Bulli Bai who was in touch with Aumkareshwar Thakur, the creator of Sulli Deal. The Special Cell of Delhi Police have found that Niraj Bishnoi, the creator of Bulli Bai used to interact with various virtual identities on social media and used to engage in group discussions. In the month of July 2021, in one of the group in which Niraj Bishnoi was a member, the other group members shared the details of Sulli deal app. That was the first time, Niraj Bishnoi or other group members had heard about the Sulli deals app on GitHub. The said twitter handle was backtracked and it was learnt that after Sulli deal uproar, the said twitter handle and other foot prints were erased from various social media platforms. Niraj Bishnoi told the cops that the said twitter handle belongs to a person who stays in Indore. Based on backtrack analysis and archive data, one twitter handle in the name of Aumkareshwar Thakur was identified on January 8.

Aumkareshwar Thakur was found residing at New York city Township, Indore, MP. He was examined and his technical gadgets were subjected to preliminary analysis.

He was made to join the investigation and was subjected to interrogation, in which he confessed that he had created Sulli deal app. The necessary digital foot prints in his laptop and on the cyber space are being probed.

# TEMPERATURE TO DIP IN NW INDIA INCLUDING DELHI: IMD

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The cold weather is likely to intensify in northwest India, including Delhi, during the next three days while isolated areas of some states may witness foggy mornings and evenings. According to India Meteorological Department (IMD), the ongoing intense precipitation spell over Western Himalayan Region & adjoining plains will continue during the next 24 hours and significantly decrease thereafter. The weather agency said that Western Disturbance as a cyclonic circulation lies over north Pakistan & neighbourhoods in lower and middle tropospheric levels. It also said the induced cyclonic circulation lies over northeast Rajasthan and neighbourhood at lower tropospheric levels.

The confluence of winds from Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal at lower tropospheric levels is very likely over central & East India during next 4-5 days. "Under its influence, scattered to fairly widespread light/moderate rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Western Himalayan Region till 10th and decreases significantly thereafter. Isolated heavy rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Himachal Pradesh on January 9," the IMD said.

It further forecasts that isolated to scattered rainfall is very likely to continue over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh & Delhi and West Uttar Pradesh on Sunday and decrease thereafter. Scattered to fairly widespread rainfall very likely over East Uttar Pradesh, East Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh during January 9-12. For Bihar, West Bengal, Sikkim, and Odisha, the IMD predicted scattered to fairly widespread rainfall during January 11-13. In north east India, scattered to widespread rainfall is very likely over Arunachal Pradesh during January 11-13 and scattered to fairly widespread rainfall may occur over Assam & Meghalaya and Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram & Tripura on January 12-13. For the past 24 hours, the IMD informed that isolated hailstorms occurred over Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and Vidarbha while minimum temperatures remained above normal by 3-5 degrees Celsius over many parts of Northwest and central India and near normal over the remaining parts of North India.

# *Akhilesh to file FIR against BJP's Amit Malviya for 'misleading tweet'*

**Team Absolute** | Lucknow

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav has said that his party's legal cell will lodge an FIR against Amit Malviya, in-charge of BJP's IT department for allegedly spreading misinformation through his tweets to malign the image of the party leadership. Amit Malviya had tweeted a photograph of Akhilesh Yadav along with his wife Dimple, former Uttar Pradesh Minister Abhishek Misra and MLC Pushparaj Jain among others. The caption of the photo said, "In 2015, Akhilesh Yadav had led a delegation to Grasse in France on grounds that a perfume park has to come up in Kannauj. In this photograph, his perfume businessman friend can be seen from whose house stacks of currency notes were found buried under the floor and hidden inside the walls. This was the wealth that was robbed from the people of UP."

The Samajwadi Party chief said that perfumer from whose possession the cash has been seized and who was subsequently arrested is Piyush Jain who is not in the photograph. "BJP se jhoota koi nahi hai Jhoot baantne wala koi nahi (There is no bigger liar than BJP, they spread lies)," Akhilesh said.

He said BJP leaders sitting in Delhi are spreading rumours in Uttar Pradesh to vitiate the atmosphere ahead of the elections.

Replying to a question, Akhilesh said the complaint will be filed soon. "Action, however, will follow after the SP government is formed because in the BJP government no action is initiated against anyone who targets me. However, if anyone dares to write anything about their (BJP) leaders, the police come calling," he said.

## SP SEEKS REMOVAL OF 4 TOP OFFICERS IN UP

***Lucknow: The Samajwadi Party (SP) has written a letter to the Election Commission of India, seeking the removal of two IAS and two IPS officers in order to ensure free and fair elections in Uttar Pradesh. The letter sent by SP secretary Rajendra Chaudhary alleges that these officers were working like "BJP workers." The officers named in the letter are Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Avanish Awasthi; Additional Chief Secretary (Information) Navneet Sehgal; Additional Director General (ADG) Law and Order Prashant Kumar; and ADG Special Task Force Amitabh Yash. The letter further states that since these officers are holding influential positions, free and fair elections would not be possible unless they are removed.***

# 'SULLI DEALS' MAKER DELETED SOCIAL MEDIA FOOTPRINTS TO AVOID ARREST: POLICE

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Aumkareshwar Thakur the alleged creator of "Sulli Deals", knew that police would be on his trail after the uproar over the app to "auction" Muslim women and had deleted all his social media footprints in a bid to escape detection, police sources said on Sunday.

"He is very sharp and technically sound. He had deleted a lot around 10 GB data. We have hope that we will be able to find more evidence once the data is retrieved," said a source. Thakur, who holds a BCA degree from IPS Academy, Indore, was held from the city by a team of the Delhi Police's Special Cell.

During preliminary interrogation, he had admitted that he was a member of a "Trad" group on Twitter where the idea to defame and troll Muslim women was shared.

Joining the group "Tradmahasabha" in January 2020 using the Twitter handle @gangescion, he participated in various group discussions about trolling Muslim women.

He had developed the code on GitHub, which could be accessed by all the members of the group. He had shared the app on his Twitter account, and photos of the Muslim women were uploaded by the group members. After the uproar regarding the app, he had deleted all his social media footprints.

The Special Cell is further analysing the technical gadgets to find out the codes/images related to the "Sulli Deals" app.

The police sources also claimed that they have identified a few people who were assisting him.

# PM to inaugurate, address 25th National Youth Festival on Jan 12

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate and address the five-day 25th National Youth Festival in Puducherry on January 12 on the occasion of 159th birth anniversary of spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda.

Taking to twitter on Sunday, Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur said: "My young friends, Do you have a great idea that you'd like PM @narendramodi ji to speak about? Share your ideas for PM Modi's speech at 25th National Youth Festival on 12th January 2022."

Youth across the country can share suggestions and innovative ideas for the Prime Minister's speech on the occasion. The Prime Minister may include some of the suggestions in his speech. Attended by youth representing every district of India, the Festival aims to galvanise, ignite, unite and activate the young citizenry towards nation building, to unleash the true potential of our demographic dividend.

A National Youth Summit will be organised on January 13 that aims to bring diverse cultures of India and integrate them into a united thread of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat', through an immersive and interactive approach. Idea exchange Youth Summit Sessions will be held with homegrown and global icons and experts to disseminate knowledge and shaping intellect.

# UP polls: BJP to showcase law & order, Hindutva to woo voters

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

With the announcement of polling dates for the assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, all major political parties have intensified their campaign, apart from taking pot-shots at one another. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is confident of making a comeback in the state despite the opposition parties -- the Congress, Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party, giving the saffron party a tough fight. The party has been sounding confident on the issues it has taken up for the elections, as well as on the popularity of its faces in Delhi and Lucknow.

In fact, the BJP veterans have been continuously claiming that the party will repeat its last election's performance. The party which has often backed the idea of "a double engine government", is constantly putting forth the issues and agendas related to Hindutva along with the development work. According to party sources, the BJP leaders will try to woo people on the basis of this strategy. Apart from listing the achievements of the public welfare work of the Narendra Modi and Yogi Adityanath governments, the BJP leaders will also discuss the issue of Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura, its core agenda. Terming the issue of law and order as the biggest achievement of the Yogi Adityanath government, the BJP leaders are likely to be seen appealing to people to vote in favour of the party to keep the momentum going. The BJP has also prepared a blueprint for the digital campaign in an attempt to reach out to the voters amid restrictions imposed by the Election Commission following rise in the number of Covid cases. A BJP leader associated with the election campaign told IANS the party would be making an effort to woo every section of the electorate to vote in favour of the party. Hence, "the party has taken special care of the youth, women, elderly, the workers as well as the voters associated with the party over the Hindutva ideology." The party will continue to focus on its core agenda of "Ayodhya-Kashi-Mathura" as well, he said.

# AAP LIKELY TO FACE FUND CRUNCH IN UPCOMING ASSEMBLY POLLS

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

After limiting fund collection from abroad, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) may face a financial crunch for campaigning in four of the five poll-bound states it is contesting in the February-March elections.

Two days ago, the Election Commission increased the expenditure limit from Rs 28 lakh to Rs 40 lakh in candidates in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and from Rs 20 lakh to Rs 28 lakh in Goa.

Earlier, the NRI wing of the party, which was considered very strong in Punjab, used to donate crores of rupees to the party's coffers. During the 2017 Punjab elections, NRI Joban Randhawa was the Youth Deputy Convener of the NRI cell of the AAP.

As many as 30,000 NRI supporters had registered themselves with the party for campaigning and around 2,000 NRI supporters reached Punjab that year. However, the support for the party in Canada, California, New York, New Jersey is not very aggressive this year, giving rise to a financial crunch. Former co-ordinator of AAP's Fund Raising and NRI Wing Hoshiarpur, Varinder Singh Parihar had accused party leaders of transferring Rs 200 crore to Rs 500 crore, collected from NRIs living in the US, from Punjab to Delhi. He alleged that party MP Bhagwant Mann had gone to Vancouver, while Sukhpal Singh Khaira went to the US and held meetings with NRIs in Seattle, California, New York, New Jersey and other places. "Therefore, the party has millions of dollars donated by the NRIs stored and does not need to focus on overseas fund this year," Parihar said.

Even after investigations into its foreign fund-collection were conducted by the Home Ministry under both the UPA and the BJP government, the AAP has received a clean chit on both occasions.

According to the party, despite having complete control over the Central Bureau of Investigation, Income Tax Department, Enforcement Directorate, Intelligence Bureau, and Delhi Police, the BJP government did not find anything wrong in the AAP funding process. Delhi Environment Minister, Gopal Rai, said: "The AAP had launched a nationwide campaign called 'Aap ka Daan, Rashtra ka Nirmaan' a few years ago to solve its ongoing financial crisis. That's how it will be contesting the Assembly elections. The party is accepting donations from our home-grown traders." Talking to IANS, AAP MP Sanjay Singh, said: "This year, we are focusing on issues, not funds. So, there is nothing to worry about." Highlighting the party's plans to raise money through crowdfunding, AAP Rajya Sabha member Sushil Gupta told IANS: This time the party is working to collect funds by meeting traders in all states including Punjab, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Goa. Along with this, separate meetings will be organised to collect donations from the general public and party workers as well."

"This time, the party is collecting less foreign donations. As far as election announcements are concerned, after the party comes to power, the government's tax collection money will be used to fulfil the promises made to public. When AAP came to power in Delhi, there was a tax turnover of Rs 35,000 crore, which we increased to more than Rs 65,000 crore," he added.

# DELHI POLICE GETS 90 DAYS TO FILE CHARGESHEET AGAINST ISI-TRAINED TERRORIST

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The Special Cell of Delhi Police, which arrested ISI-trained Mohammed Asraf alias Ali Ahmad Noori, a Pakistani national for allegedly planning terrorist attacks across the country, has got extension of 90 days to file the charge sheet 'as the investigation was continuing'.

The special cell moved the court seeking the extension. Advocate Deepak Tyagi opposed the move and said that not more than 15 to 20 days extension should be given. The court after hearing the whole argument agreed to the Delhi Police's demand and granted more time. The investigation so far has revealed that Mohammed Asraf travelled to Thailand and UAE which showed that he was not only in touch with the ISI but had links with others who wanted to create a riot-like situation in India.

The Special Cell has made the sketches of his associates, who are said to be living in India. The cell conducted raids at their premises but failed to get anything.

ISI-trained Asraf was held in October last year from Delhi's Laxmi Nagar. The special cell found that he had been illegally residing in India since 2004 and was involved in espionage and supplying arms.

Mohammed Asraf was working at the behest of Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) with the sole purpose of spreading terrorism across India. Asraf was in constant touch with his Pakistani handler, Nasir, who had been giving him directions to do spying and anti-India activities.

Asraf confessed to the Special Cell that he had been involved in terror activities, including transporting illegal weapons.The special cell had said that the accused was in advance stage of procuring arms and explosives to carry out terrorist attacks in Delhi and several other states. The special cell has so far recorded the statement of seven persons who testified against Asraf.

The special cell had recovered a hand grenade, one AK-47 assault rifle with its 2 loaded magazines, two pistols and a bag containing 50 live cartridges. The Special Cell took the help of National Security Guards (NSG) Gurugram to dismantle the hand grenade. It was then sent to CFSL, CBI for expert opinion.

The Special Cell also conducted Asraf's Polygraph test at CBI's CFSL, Narco test and Brain Mapping test at FSL Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

The cell has said that they have identified a lot of suspects and are in process of busting the ISI-sponsored terror module.

# PM greets Indian diaspora on Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday greeted everyone, especially the Indian diaspora on Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas.

In a tweet, the Prime Minister said, "Greetings to everyone, especially the Indian diaspora on Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas. Our diaspora has distinguished itself all over the world and has excelled in different spheres. At the same time, they have remained connected to their roots. We are proud of their accomplishments." On January 9, the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas is observed to strengthen the engagement of the Indian community overseas with the India government and reconnect them with their roots. It is celebrated to mark the contribution of the Indians living abroad in the development of the land of their ancestors. Union Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan will address a virtual youth Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas conference on 'the role of Indian diaspora' with regard to innovation and new technologies.

January 9 was chosen as the day to celebrate this occasion since, in 1915, Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi, had returned to India from South Africa, on this day, and led the country's Freedom Struggle which changed the lives of Indians forever.

Started in 2003, these conventions provide a platform to the Indian community overseas to engage with the government and the people from the land of their ancestors, for mutually beneficial activities. These conventions are also very useful in networking among the overseas Indian community residing in various parts of the world and enable them to share their experiences in various fields.

# Woman sets herself on fire to protest against UP Police inaction

**Mathura** | Agencies

A 45-year-old woman set herself on fire in front of a police station in Mathura's Raya to protest against inaction against her alleged molesters.

The incident happened on Saturday. The woman has suffered 96 per cent burn and has been admitted to a hospital in Agra in a critical condition.

The woman was allegedly being harassed by the accused to withdraw her five year old complaint against them. According to her family members, she took the extreme step as the police were not taking action against those who molested her in 2017. They had been, in fact, harassing her to withdraw her complaint.

However, police claimed that the woman had come with her husband to give an application regarding a dispute with some people on the issue of flooding in their field.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Gaurav Grover said, "This was a separate dispute from her 2017 FIR. In the earlier case, the accused, Harish Chand, was arrested under IPC section 354 (assault on woman, intending to outrage modesty) and a charge sheet was filed against him. On Saturday, the woman along with her husband had come to file a complaint. The matter is being probed in detail now."

The SSP added that an FIR will be registered as per the complaint given by the victim's husband.

# BJP enjoys definite edge in virtual campaigning

**Lucknow** | Agencies

The ongoing pandemic situation has thrown political parties in Uttar Pradesh into chartered territory with virtual campaigning.

Even though the Election Commission has assured that it would review the pandemic situation later this week, the increasing Covid cases indicate that the situation is unlikely to ease soon.

When it comes to virtual campaigning, most parties - though they may not admit it -- are, undoubtedly, wary of this new form of electioneering. The BJP has a definite edge in the situation. The party has been focussing on social media since the past few years and almost all their leaders are tech-savvy when it comes to ensuring their presence on the social media. The BJP plans to use a 3D technology for 'virtual rallies'. The BJP plans to use 3D Studio Mix technology through which leaders sitting at two different places can be shown on a podium.

The party already has more than 1.5 lakh booth level WhatsApp groups in the state, which will be used to hold these virtual rallies.

The party has already set up war rooms for campaigns at the local level and its teams are connecting with voters through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, among others. Talking to IANS, a senior party functionary said: "We started preparing when the pandemic began because we knew that physical campaigning would be severely hit and virtual campaigning would be the only option. We have our blueprint in place and also the election material." The Samajwadi Party is also planning virtual rallies to reach out to voters. However, for the moment, the party is relying on social media. Its social media war room has been working since the last assembly elections but the problem that the party faces is that its vote base is largely in the rural interiors and a sizeable number of voters may not be on the social media. The party is inviting people to join its WhatsApp groups and its workers have been asked to go to the rural interiors and connect with voters. Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has also decided to connect with people digitally. Priyanka launched her virtual campaign from Saturday, almost at the same time when the Election Commission announced the poll schedule. "We will be conducting more live and interactive sessions so that Priyanka can directly talk to people," said Congress spokesperson Surendra Rajput. He said that the Congress party was first to decide about stopping the public rallies and conduct small meetings and door-to-door campaigns. The party will further expand the virtual campaign through dialogue series on social media platforms and WhatsApp group communication. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is comparatively lagging in the virtual campaign and the party apparently does not have a dedicated team to take care of the social media.

BSP leader Satish Chandra Mishra is currently using Facebook to hold live rallies but sources claim that there is no plan yet to connect on other platforms in the virtual world. "We will show videos using vans and trucks with LED screens across the state, especially in rural areas. The work done by the BSP governments will be displayed through these vehicles," said a BSP leader.

The problem with the BSP is that a chunk of its core voter is not tech savvy and almost unaware of the virtual world and the party is yet to find ways to connect with this group.

Smaller parties like the Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP) are not depending on virtual campaigning. "My society does not wait for the elections to come and is already prepared," said SBSP president Om Prakash Rajbhar.

# MAHARASHTRA REVISES COVID RESTRICTIONS; SALONS, GYMS TO FUNCTION WITH 50PC CAPACITY

Only people fully inoculated with Covid-19 vaccine shall be allowed to use these services, the Maharashtra government said.

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government on Sunday revised coronavirus-related restrictions across the state. Beauty salons and gyms are allowed to remain open with 50% capacity. Only people fully inoculated with Covid-19 vaccine shall be allowed to use these services, the Maharashtra government said.

The state government has imposed a night curfew between 11 pm to 5 am from Monday. According to the new Covid guidelines, the movement of people in groups of five or more has been restricted from 5 am to 11 pm and no movement has been allowed from 11 pm to 5 am, except for essential services. Schools, colleges and coaching institutes will remain closed till 15 February, with few exceptions in Maharashtra. In addition, the state government has now asked the private offices to operate at a 50% capacity and only fully vaccinated employees' can attend the office physically. In Maharashtra, hotels, restaurants, cinema halls, auditoriums will operate at 50% seating capacity till 10 pm. The hair cutting salons and malls will operate at 50% capacity. "Restaurants will operate between 8 am and 10 pm with mandatory disclosure of full capacity and the present number of visitors on a notice board. Home delivery is allowed every day. The same rule is for cinema theatres as well," it said. A maximum of 50 persons allowed in marriages, 20 in funerals and last rites, 50 in social, religious, cultural, political gatherings. The guidelines further said that only fully vaccinated persons will be allowed in public transport. According to the new rules, for domestic travel, double vaccination or mandatory negative RT-PCR test report is required. Meanwhile, Maharashtra on Saturday reported 133 new infections of the Omicron variant of coronavirus which took the total of such cases in the state to 1,009, health officials said. As many as 439 patients have been discharged after recovery in the state to date. Of 133 new cases, reports of 130 infections were received from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, while three reports were received from labs in Gujarat, officials said. Of new cases of the Omicron variant, 118 were reported from Pune city, eight from neighbouring Pimpri-Chinchwad, three from Pune rural, two from Vasai-Virar and one each from Ahmednagar and Mumbai. Mumbai has reported the highest 566 Omicron cases in the state so far, followed by 201 in Pune city.

# Don't Want to Impose Full Lockdown, Clarifies CM Thackeray as Maha Tightens Curbs to Fight Omicron

*Thackeray said he had directed the authorities to take strict action against those who violate Covid appropriate behaviour (CAB) norms.*

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

After imposing fresh restrictions in the face of surging COVID-19 cases, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday said his government wanted to prevent health services from coming under excessive pressure. The state government earlier in the evening banned movement of people in groups of five or more during daytime and prohibited all movement in public at night except for essential services with effect from January 10 midnight. Thackeray said he had directed the authorities to take strict action against those who violate Covid appropriate behaviour (CAB) norms. He appealed to people not to become "corona messengers" and endanger lives of others. "We have been fighting the virus for the last two years and have successfully dealt with two waves of the pandemic by taking cautious steps. The virus, in a different avatar, has been spreading rapidly," the CM said."Instead of discussing whether it is mild or serious, we need to take steps to stop it, else our health infrastructure will be under tremendous pressure," he said. He did not wish to impose a complete lockdown, Thackeray said. "We don't want to harm livelihood but want to prevent crowding. When restrictions were eased last year, some people continued to follow health protocols but others were complacent and irresponsible. This will not be tolerated," the CM said. There was enough medical infrastructure in place, but if doctors and nurses fell sick, "where do we bring human resources from," he asked. Referring to the closure of educational institutions, he said steps are being taken to ensure that education is not hampered, and online education will continue. Thackeray also appealed to people to get vaccinated at the earliest. Curbs can be made stricter in districts where vaccination is low, he warned.

# Plan to raise penalty if Covid norms flouted: Tope

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

State health minister Rajesh Tope on Saturday said that the state government was contemplating to further increase the amount of fines slapped on people violating the Covid protocols. He said that though the state was not considering a lockdown, local authorities must ensure that the existing regulations, including social distancing norms, were strictly adhered to and lodge FIRs against violators, especially those not following restrictions related to social gatherings. "Besides FIRs registered for violation of Covid rules, a further increase in fines too is being considered," he added.

The fines are currently Rs 500 for not wearing a mask and Rs 1,000 for spitting in a public place. He said that he would be discussing with all cabinet members regarding increasing the fine for not wearing mask as well as those not following social distancing rules, especially at gatherings. He explained that FIRs would be registered against organisers of social events if they do not follow the rules and regulations and local authorities should ensure that action is initiated. Existing rules state that the total number of attendees should not exceed 100 for enclosed place and 250 for open to sky spaces or 25% of the capacity of such spaces. The police have been directed to take action by imposing fines. "There are orders on paper but these needs to be implemented in letter and spirit," he said.

# WR LAUNCHES AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON COVID-19 AT MUMBAI STATIONS

*In view of the rise in Covid cases in Mumbai, Western Railway (WR) is taking necessary steps to make the commuters aware of the necessary precautions to control the spread of the pandemic*

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Western Railway Protection Force (RPF) has launched a Covid-19 awareness campaign in Mumbai. This campaign aims to sensitise the passengers on the need to follow Covid appropriate behaviour.

"In view of the rise in Covid cases in Mumbai, Western Railway (WR) is taking necessary steps to make the commuters aware of the necessary precautions to control the spread of the pandemic," said WR chief spokesperson Sumit Thakur.

"Mumbai local trains are known as the lifeline of the city as most of the city's population use them to reach their workplaces or other destinations. Hence, a large number of passengers travel daily in the local trains. To increase awareness among the passengers, RPF is conducting a massive awareness campaign at major stations in Mumbai division of WR for sensitising passengers regarding measures to prevent the spread of Covid," he said.

The RPF staff will sensitise passengers regarding use of masks, hand sanitisation and social distancing. The staff was seen using banners, pamplets and loud hailers in coordination with various NGOs. "WR appeals to its commuters to follow Covid appropriate behaviour at all times during travelling," Thakur added.

# FIRST IVF CALF OF PUNGANUR BREED BORN IN MAHARASHTRA

**New Delhi:**Among the shortest in the breeds of cattle in the world, there are less than 500 cows of the Punganur breed. Year 2022 brought cheer for the breed and the Animal Husbandry Department as the first IVF calf of the Punganur breed was born on Saturday. "India's first IVF calf of Punganur cattle was born at Ahmednagar in Maharashtra," according to the Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying (DAHD). The DAHD, under the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, has embarked on a project that upholds the potential to give a significant boost to national dairy production with the aim of conserving the indigenous cattle. "Milk from the indigenous cattle contains higher nutritional value to fight diseases," said an official. For multiple reasons, India has seen a decline in indigenous cattle over the last several decades. Now the Department of Animal Husbandry is promoting uses of IVF for cattle to preserve the indigenous, rare bovines. The DAHD has been carrying out similar efforts for Banni, Tharpakar and Ongole breeds too. Earlier in October, India's first Banni buffalo IVF calf was born in Gujarat's Somnath district while Suratgarh in Rajasthan recorded the birth of the first female calf of Tharpakar breed, conceived through IVF technology.

# Central Railway's 58 stations awarded with tag 'Eco Smart Stations' by National Green Tribunal

*Currently there are around 750 eco-smart stations on Indian Railways based upon footfall and station earnings.*

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Out of 79 stations of Central Railways Mumbai division 58 stations now becomes 'Eco Smart Stations'. "These stations have been awarded the eco-smart tag by the National Green Tribunal recently" said an officials of CR on Sunday.

Ambernath, Ambivli , Badlapur, Bhandup, Bhiwandi, Byculla, CSMT, Chembur, Chinchpokli, Cotton Green, Currey Road, Dadar, Diva, Dombivali, Ghatkopar, Govandi, GTB Nagar, Kalwa, Kalyan, Kanjurmarg, Karjat, Kings Circle , Kurla, Lonavala, LTT, Mankhurd, Masjid, Matunga, Mulund, Mumbra, Nahur Panvel, Parel, Shahad, Sandhurst Road, Sewri , Sion, Thakurli, Thane, Tilak Nagar, Titwala, Ulhasnagar, Badlapur, Vikhroli, Vidyavihar, Vithalwadi, Airoli, Belapur, Ghansoli, Juinagar , Khandeshwar, Kharghar, Koper Khairane , Mansarovar, Nerul, Sanpada, Seawoods Darave and Vashi station of Mumbai Division are part of Central Railway 'eco smart stations' list. Currently there are around 750 eco-smart stations on Indian Railways based upon footfall and station earnings. Of these, CR has the maximum number - 87- such stations, including the 58 of Mumbai Division. "According to guidelines set by NGT (National Green Tribunal), for waste management, garbage is being segregated into dry waste, wet waste and hazardous waste before being disposed. Also, for energy saving, solar panels and LED lights have been installed at these stations" said an official of CR adding that, those found littering and dumping garbage at these stations will now have to pay fines instantly. "Notified officials like ticket checkers and RPF personnel have been authorised to recover the cost of restoration of the damage to the environment from the polluters in accordance with the law" said officials. Other steps towards better hygiene and clean environment includes sanitization of station premises by battery operated sprayers, provision of foot operated water taps in some coaches for hygiene of passengers, cleanliness through mechanized techniques like battery operated scrubber, High jet pressure, battery operated single disc scrubber drier, Vacuum cleaners also being taken.

"Central Railway has a total of 87 Eco-smart stations which is the maximum number of Eco- smart stations on Indian Railways. It has also managed to get ISO certification for 87 % of its Eco smart stations till Dec 2021. (Presently 76 out of 87 Eco smart stations are ISO certified). It has also obtained consent from the State/Central Pollution Control Board under The Water Act and Air Act for 74 stations out of 87 eco-smart stations of Central Railway which is a herculean task in terms of earning a satisfactory score complying with pollution norms" said Shivaji Sutar, CPRO CR adding that out total 87 stations, Mumbai division has 58 'eco smart stations' alone. "Consistent efforts towards promoting and ensuring cleanliness at work places and railway premises and adopting various measures in conservation and protection of environment has enabled Central Railway to win the prestigious Environment and Cleanliness Shield at the 66th National Railway Award 2021" further added Sutar. Central Railway has been instrumental in setting up large number of renewable energy solar and wind energy plants and Self sustainable green stations. It has also been successful in fitting 100% of its coaches with bio-toilets thus ensuring hygiene and preventing corrosion of tracks. Aart from that Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, Nagpur and Solapur stations and other units like Central Railway school at Kalyan and workshop units have also got the IGBC gold certification.

# DAYLIGHTING OF COASTAL ROAD TUNNEL TOMORROW

*A function will be held at 3.30 pm to mark the daylighting of the tunnel. The BMC is constructing 2.07-km twin tunnels between Priyadarshini Park to Girgaon Chowpatty passing under Malabar Hill and the Arabian Sea near the coast.*

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) will conduct the daylighting of the tunnel between Priyadarshini park and Marine Drive on the coastal road on Monday and this will be a major breakthrough in the project.

As part of the 10.58-km coastal road project from Princess Street Flyover at Marine Lines to the Worli end of Bandra-Worli Sea Link, the civic body is constructing 2.07-km twin tunnels between Priyadarshini Park to Girgaon Chowpatty passing under Malabar Hill and the Arabian Sea near the coast.

A function will be held at 3.30 pm to mark the daylighting of the tunnel.

Municipal commissioner IS Chahal said: "It is a very important development for us. There is light at the end of the tunnel and the road will be completed in record time. We started work in June 2020 and will be completed by 2023."

The Marine Drive-Worli road will be of eight lanes and will connect to the Worli Bandra sealink. The road will start near the Princess Street flyover in south Mumbai.

The next stretch from Bandra to Versova is being handled by Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation.

Chief engineer Vijay Nighot of the coastal road project said: "On Monday, the excavation work on the Priyadarshini Park to Marine Drive tunnel will be completed. Thereafter, we will dismantle the tunnel boring machine and use it to dig the Marine Drive - Priyadarshini Park tunnel and the second tunnel will be completed by November or December 2022. The BMC is spending Rs 12,721 crore on this project and there will be no toll for this road. The project, which was the brainchild of former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan, had faced a lot of opposition from certain south Mumbai residents citing environmental destruction, backed by the 'Save Aarey' activists.

# Sixty-two workers at railway workshop test positive for Covid-19

*Mumbai logged 20,318 fresh Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, said the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Saturday. During the last 24 hours, 71,019 samples were tested in the capital city of Maharashtra. With this, the total count of Covid-19 cases in Mumbai has gone up to 8,95,098.*

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

A total of 62 workers of a railway workshop in Mahalaxmi area of Mumbai have tested positive for Covid-19 during the last four days, as per Western Railway PRO. The workshop has a total of 500 workers, said the PRO. The sample testing of other workers is underway.

Meanwhile, Mumbai logged 20,318 fresh Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, said the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Saturday. During the last 24 hours, 71,019 samples were tested in the capital city of Maharashtra.

With this, the total count of Covid-19 cases in Mumbai has gone up to 8,95,098.

A total of 6,003 people recovered from the infection during the last 24 hours, taking the total recoveries to 7,70,056. live people lost their lives to the deadly virus during the last 24 hours, taking the death toll due to the virus in Mumbai to 16,399. There are currently 1,06,037 active Covid-19 cases in the state.

# MAHARASHTRA COASTLINE WITNESSES INCREASE IN MARINE ANIMALS GETTING STRANDED

*Marine animals who were stranded included four baleen whales, nine Indian Ocean humpback dolphins, one striped dolphin, two Indo-pacific Finless porpoises and one dwarf sperm whale. All had washed ashore dead.*

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

An increase was recorded last year in marine animals getting stranded along the Maharashtra coastline. In 2020-21 alone, 109 incidents of strandings were recorded of which 27 animals washed ashore dead. Between 2016 and 2018, the state coastline had recorded 143 cases of beaching or stranding. Live stranding, when a marine animal comes ashore and is unable to return to the sea, occurs in two forms - single stranding and mass stranding. In some cases, the dead animal also washes ashore.

According to experts, continuous heavy to moderate rainfall during the monsoon of 2020, along with cyclones, could be the reason behind the increase in the number of strandings. During monsoon, because of changes in sea currents, choppy waters and high tides, turtles or small cetaceans that are either injured or too weak to swim get washed ashore. In some cases, these mammals are also found entangled in ghost nets - nets that are discarded and left by fishermen in the sea. Funds have also been set aside for building a marine animal rescue centre to deal with stranded animals, for which the Konkan Cetacean Research Team has conducted a few workshops with the Mangrove Foundation and the forest department. In July 2020 alone, the Mangrove Foundation or the Mangrove Cell, under the state forest department, rescued 42 sea turtles from beaches along the Konkan coast. According to the annual report of the Mangrove Foundation, of the 109 cases of strandings in 2020-21, while 80 Olive Ridley turtles were rescued, nine stranded animals died. Marine animals who were stranded included four baleen whales, nine Indian Ocean humpback dolphins, one striped dolphin, two Indo-pacific Finless porpoises and one dwarf sperm whale. All had washed ashore dead. As there was no database of stranded marine animals, the frequency of strandings and the hotspots of such animals could not be identified for setting up rescue centres. As per the last year's data, majority of the strandings - 35 - were recorded in Ratnagiri district, followed by Sindhudurg at 31. Both districts are in the southern part of Konkan. Currently, the Mangrove Foundation has a marine animal transit and treatment centre at Airoli, Navi Mumbai, which is over 400 km from Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg, which have recorded high number of strandings. To improve the response time, the Mangrove Cell plans to develop such centres in Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg. The Cell also has a marine respondent's group in coastal districts of Mumbai, Thane, Palghar, Raigad and Ratnagiri. The respondents are mostly fishermen and local residents, who alert and assist the forest department in the rescue of stranded animals.

Further, the Foundation and the state fisheries department have come up with a joint compensation scheme under which fishermen, who release protected marine animals such as sea turtles entangled in their fishing nets, are given monetary compensation up to Rs 25,000. Experts believe that the monetary compensation and awareness programmes in coastal districts have helped in reporting such incidents.

EDITOR'S SPECS

# Where is BSP in UP?

*Ahead of the Uttar Pradesh polls the political parties have now shifted to the virtual mode but missing in action is Mayawati. The BSP supremo has not started her campaign but all the other political parties are active in poll campaigning. Mayawati's inaction has led to some serious contenders throwing their hat into the ring for the Dalit votes, especially the Jatavs who have been with the Bahujan Samaj Party and did not desert during the bad times. But the silence of the BSP on core issues has led to suspicions in the minds of its leaders and almost all the big leaders including the legislative party leader have left the party and joined the Samajwadi Party. But the BSP seems unfazed with the exit of its leaders and except for Satish Chandra Mishra no other leader is seen at its forefront. The four time Chief Minister of UP has been active only on Twitter. She sometimes issues a press note. In her absence most of the BSP leaders are joining the SP and mostly Brahmins are choosing it over the BJP. Bahujan Samaj Party leaders say that the party has finalized candidates for a majority of the seats and the names of the selected candidates are being announced in meetings organised by the party leaders in various districts. The BSP president has been accused of staying away from the political arena and has been limiting her activities to press statements and tweets. Party national general secretary Satish Chandra Mishra has refuted this. The BSP had managed to win only 19 seats in the 2017 assembly polls and is now left with merely six legislators since the others have either left or have been expelled.*

# PAST AND NO PREJUDICES: SECURITY BREACHES OF PMS

**Nirendra Dev**

The fall of the I.K. Gujral government was perhaps the most impactful result of Rajiv Gandhis assassination. Gujral, a suave politician who survived and went on to become Prime Minister because of his non-confrontation style, finally had to put in his papers on Nov 28, 1997. Rajiv Gandhi was killed on May 21,1991.Security analysts would always say the intelligence inputs, however mild or seemingly 'unconfirmed or weak', about VVIPs should never be ignored. Even till day, people debate why Indira Gandhi continued with her Sikh bodyguards despite warnings after Operation Blue Star.Security breaches vis-a-vis Prime Ministers, both categories - incumbent Narendra Modi and his predecessors including the likes of Manmohan Singh and Indira Gandhi - do keep happening. In the case of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination too, there were alerts and warnings of some attempts being made by the LTTE. But before anything concrete could be done, the damage was done. In fact, Rajiv Gandhi reportedly asked the SPG personnel to allow his assassin Dhanu to come near him on the fateful evening. When Rajiv Gandhi reached the campaign rally site in Sriperumbudur on the fateful evening of May 21, 1991, along the way to the stage, he was garlanded by many well-wishers and Congress party workers. The assassin Dhanu (Thenmozhi Rajaratnam) approached and greeted him. She bent down pretending to touch his feet and then detonated the RDX. First major assassination by a suicide bomber in India. Subsequently, accusations of conspiracy have been addressed by two commissions of inquiry. In November 1997, the I.K. Gujral government had to step down.

On 28 August 1997, the Jain Commission report was submitted to the government and was leaked on November 16. The commission had inquired into the conspiracy aspects of the Rajiv Gandhi assassination and criticised the DMK. The Congress withdrew support from the Gujral government on November 28 after Gujral sent a letter to the then Congress President Sitaram Kesri, saying he will not dismiss any DMK ministers. Gujral resigned following the withdrawal, and sent a letter to then President K.R. Narayanan that read: "My government has lost its majority and does not want to continue in office on moral grounds."

Some breaches of PMs had also resulted in overhauling of Prime Ministers' security apparatus, especially during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure in 1988. On June 2, 1988, the Parliament passed the Special Protection Group Act to protect the Prime Ministers. The move came as four years earlier on Oct 31, 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her own bodyguards. With Narendra Modi, there have been four such security breaches beginning December 2014, but security experts point out only the January 5 (2022) episode in Punjab as 'major lapse'.In December 2014, three policemen, including a police inspector and two constables, were found guilty on allegations of negligence that led to breach of security cover for Modi at the swearing-in ceremony of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on October 31. A former BJP activist, Anil Mishra, was 'able' to reach the podium, almost a few metres from Modi. Mishra was arrested by Marine Drive police of Mumbai. In December 2017, two policemen 'made a mistake' and came in front of PM's convoy and the Prime Minister was caught in 'traffic' for two-three minutes near the Mahamaya Flyover, Noida. Two cops were suspended.In February 2019, an apparent security breach was reported at Prime Minister Modi's rally in Ashoknagar in North 24 Parganas in West Bengal. The breach led to a stampede-like situation and Modi had to cut short his speech and was quickly whisked away by the SPG.In May 2018, a man claiming to be a 'fan' of the Prime Minister reportedly infiltrated the security cover of SPG at the Vishwa Bharati's convocation ceremony, also in West Bengal. Among the past such breaches which made headlines were one each with Indira Gandhi (in 1967) and the other with her son Rajiv Gandhi on Oct 2, 1986.On February 8, 1967, Indira Gandhi was attacked with a brick during an election rally in Bhubaneswar, but she continued her speech. Of course, this was prior to the days of militancy that hit Punjab and other states.On October 2, 1986, Rajiv Gandhi continued his Rajghat visit on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti despite three shots being fired at him. With Manmohan Singh, security breaches were reported from Kerala more than once. In December 2010, a private vehicle almost 'entered' the road from where the Manmohan Singh's convoy was passing.

The Kerala government denied that there was any security breach during the Prime Minister's visit.In November 2006, the PrimeMinister's Office (PMO) had actually sought an explanation from the Kerala government about the security breach that took place when Manmohan Singh's convoy stopped after the pilot vehicle was on the 'wrong route'. The alleged security breach happened in Thiruvananthpuram between airport and Raj Bhavan.The National Security Guards (NSG) also had called for an explanation from the Director General of Kerala Police, Raman Srivastava, on the same.According to a book, 'Journalism Through RTI' penned by journalist Shamlal Yadav, while "most curious" foreign trips were undertaken by Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Vice President Rahul Gandhi during the 10 years of UPA rule, "information of none of the foreign trips except that of Sonia Gandhi's Bangkok trip was available to the PMO, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs or the National Advisory Council (NAC) as per their responses (to a series of RTI queries)".On queries pertaining to foreign visits by the Members of Parliament, the Lok Sabha Secretariat had said: "As per the convention, the members of Lok Sabha inform the Honourable Speaker about their foreign visits private or official. However, there is no rule available in the Rules of Procedure or Direction by the Lok Sabha or any other document in the Lok Sabha Secretariat, whereby it has been made mandatory for the members to give prior or subsequent information about their foreign visits to the Speaker, Lok Sabha."The book further says that the Lok Sabha Secretariat has also informed that both Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi were never part of any parliamentary delegation to foreign countries from 2004 to 2012, therefore political clearance for them was never sought from the Ministry of External Affairs.As to whether there was any 'exemption' for SPG protectees from getting MEA clearance, the Ministry of Home Affairs for its part had forwarded the RTI application to the Cabinet Secretariat and National Security Guard (NSG) to provide the information, if any.Yadav in his book further refers to a response from the PMO on this, which had said, information regarding overseas travel by the top Congress leaders "does not form part of records held by the PMO". However, the PMO had said that between July 14 and 17, 2004, Sonia Gandhi had visited Bangkok to attend a conference on AIDS. In 2019, the Centre decided to change the security mechanism for Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi. A high-decibel controversy broke out over the withdrawal of Special Protection Group cover to the members of the first family of the Congress. Home Ministry sources had claimed the Gandhis had made 'undesirable' remarks against SPG and also charged the elite force with collecting their 'personal and confidential information.' "Since May 2014, Priyanka Gandhi has often levelled allegations that SPG officials were collecting her personal and confidential information and sharing it with unauthorised persons. She even threatened to drag top officials of the SPG to court," one source said. In another instance, Rahul Gandhi, during his visit to Banaskantha in Gujarat in 2017, 'violated security norms' himself which could have endangered his life.

**(Nirendra Dev is a New Delhi-based journalist. He is also the author of books, 'The Talking Guns: North East India' and 'Modi to Moditva: An Uncensored Truth'. The views expressed are personal)**

## international

# Armed bandits kill 58 people in Nigeria

**Lagos** | Agencies

At least 58 people were killed by armed bandits who attacked villages in northwest Nigeria's Zamfara state, an official said. Ibrahim Bello Zauma, a spokesperson for the governor of Zamfara state Bello Matawalle, told Xinhua news agency that the attacks took place on January 5 and 6 in the villages in the Anka and Bukkuyum areas.

"We recorded 36 (deaths) at Bukkuyum and 22 (deaths) in Anka so far," Zauma said.

He said the state Governor has visited the affected areas to condole with the people over the tragic incident of bandit attacks in the areas. According to local media reports, at least four villages were burnt down in the attacks which started on January 5.

Local vigilantes who tried to repel the attacks were among those killed.

The state government is putting in place strategies to halt bandit attacks in the state, Zauma said. Armed bandits have been a primary security threat in Nigeria's northern and central regions, leading to deaths and kidnappings in recent months.

## SHOOTER AT LARGE AFTER KILLING 1 PERSON IN TEXAS CLUB

**Houston:**A suspected gunman is at large after shooting one person dead while leaving two others wounded at an club in Houston, the largest city in the US state of Texas, authorities said. The shooting took place at around 8 a.m. on Saturday, according to Houston police. About 10 minutes before the shooting, a commotion happened inside the club and the DJ stopped the music, Xinhua news agency quoted report from local news outlet ABC13. It was at that point that several people were removed from the club. The suspect opened fire in the parking lot before fleeing, wounding a customer, a security guard and an employee at the club. Houston police later confirmed the customer died from his injuries. Cities across the US are experiencing a rise in homicides and gun violence incidents. In Houston, homicides rose 18 per cent last year from 2020, according to local media reports.

# Unvaccinated Citigroup workers may lose jobs by month end

**Washington** | Agencies

Citigroup, the American multinational investment bank, has reiterated its Covid-19 vaccination mandate and told its US-based workers to be inoculated before January 14, or they will be fired by the end of the month, according to media reports. Bloomberg cited a Citigroup spokesperson as saying that the company will place workers who refuse to get vaccinated against the virus by January 14 on unpaid leave, then their employment will be terminated at the end of the month, reports Xinhua news agency. Headquartered in New York, the bank rolled out the vaccination mandate two months ago, requiring all of its US-based employees to be vaccinated as a condition of their employment. Citi's Head of Human Resources Sara Wechter wrote on LinkedIn in October 2021 that there were two key factors behind the mandate: the bank has an obligation to comply with the White House mandate that individuals supporting government contracts be fully vaccinated; a vaccinated workforce ensures the health and safety of Citi staff when returning to the office. She also explained that Citi will assess all requests for religious, medical or any other accommodation required by state or local law on a case by case basis. Citigroup has some 70,000 US employees, and so far about 95 per cent of them have been vaccinated, according to media reports quoting sources. The Supreme Court has heard arguments concerning President Joe Biden's mandate that all US companies with at least 100 employees have them either be vaccinated or subjected to weekly tests. Many of the large companies including Delta Airlines, Ford, GE and Wall Street giants have tightened their restrictive measures against Covid-19 since the breakout of the Omicronvariant, and most of them have announced their own vaccination policies either mandating vaccination or prohibiting entry into .offices by the unvaccinated.

## AU CHIEF COMMENDS RELEASE OF OPPN POLITICAL FIGURES IN ETHIOPIA

**Addis Ababa:**Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat hascommended the release of senior opposition political figures detained in Ethiopia. "The Chairperson welcomes this important gesture of appeasement of the political situation in Ethiopia," an AU statement read. The statement came a day after the Ethiopian government on Friday released high-level and senior opposition party members who were in prison over the past years, reports Xinhua news agency. Among those released include Sibhat Nega, former senior leader of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a rebel group currently engaged in a deadly conflict with the Ethiopian government. Nega was detained during the early days of the ongoing conflict that started in November 2020. According to the chairperson of the pan African bloc, the move will trigger a political process, paving the way for the implementation of a genuinely inclusive national dialogue process for the peaceful and consensual solution to the political and institutional problems facing the federation. Mahamat further encouraged all the actors to engage in it with courage and determination while assuring them, to this end, of the resolute support of the African Union. Among the released also include Jawar Mohamed, Eskinder Nega and Bekele Gerba -- influential opposition political figures in Ethiopia. Upon announcing the decision, the Ethiopian government said "the key to lasting unity is dialogue. Ethiopia will make any sacrifices to this end". It said Ethiopia's problems need to be addressed in a comprehensive dialogical approach. "The government took the initiative to pardon some prisoners for the betterment of the political situation," the statement from the Ethiopian Government Communications Service read. It said that a National Dialogue Commission has been set up to deal with contemporary political issues in the country and unresolved discourses in the East African country.

# *Iran blacklists 51 Americans over Soleimani's assassination*

**Tehran** | Agencies

Iran's Foreign Ministry has blacklisted 51 more US individuals for their "roles" in the assassination of former military commander Qasem Soleimani.

In a statement on Saturday, the Ministry said the new list of sanctioned American individuals, including Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley and former National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien, was in line with implementing Iran's law on "combating human rights violations and the adventurous and terrorist acts of the US in the region", reports Xinhua news agency.

"The designated persons, as the case may be, have taken part in decision-making, organising, financing, and carrying out the terrorist act or have otherwise justified terrorism which is a threat to the international peace and security through supporting such egregious terrorist attack," it said. Former US President Donald Trump and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, among others, were previously listed to be sanctioned for the same reason, according to the statement. A US drone strike on a convoy killed Soleimani, former commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, along with an Iraqi militia commander near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020. In a public address here on January 3 to mark Soleimani's second death anniversary, President Ebrahim Raisi said that Trump and Pompeo must be "prosecuted for their criminal activity" through a fair mechanism, warning Iran's revenge in case those involved in and behind the "criminal act" are not punished.

# Taliban acting FM arrives in Tehran for talks

**Tehran** | Kabul

With a 26-member delegation, the Taliban's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi arrived in Tehran for talks with Iranian officials on political, economic and transit issues, as well as on the Afghan refugees in Iran, media reports said. This is the first official visit of a high-ranking Taliban delegation to Iran since it took over Afghanistan in August 2021. in November 2021, an Iranian delegation had visited Kabul during which the two sides discussed bilateral issues. "What is most emphasised in Afghanistan by Iran and neighbouring countries is the formation of an inclusive government that reflects the ethnic and demographic diversity of Afghanistan," Xinhua news agency quoted Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh as saying to reporters on Saturday hours before the Taliban delegation's arrival in Tehran.

The Iranian government will hand over the Afghan embassy in Tehran to the Taliban, Asr Iran news said in a report. "The Iranian government has not yet recognized the Taliban government, but it will hand over the Afghan embassy in Tehran to the Taliban to look after the affairs of Afghan citizens in Iran," it said. Before leaving Kabul, Mutaqqi told reporters earlier on Saturday that "we will try to form agreements with Iran on trade, economic, and political issues and we hope to have a fruitful visit", TOLO News reported. Meanwhile, acting Minister of Industry and Commerce Nooruddin Azizi said they will talk with Iranian officials on importing gas and fuel from Tehran to Kabul and will sign large contracts in this regard. "We will work to sign big contracts on fuel so our private sector can buy and import goods to meet the demands in the market and decrease the prices," TOLO News quoted Azizi as saying. "The private sector is also included in this visit and Iran will invest in Afghanistan's energy and mining sector," Sakhi Ahmad Paiman, deputy head of the Chamber of Industry and Mines.

# CM Instructs Immediate Survey of Damage to Crops

*Chouhan has directed the officers that wherever the damage has occurred, a survey should be conducted immediately. Also, after assessing the damage, arrangements should be made for payment of relief amount.*

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that an early survey should be conducted for the damage caused to the crops of farmers due to the recent untimely rains and hailstorms in the villages of some districts of the state. Chouhan has directed the officers that wherever the damage has occurred, a survey should be conducted immediately. Also, after assessing the damage, arrangements should be made for payment of relief amount.

Chouhan has directed to also ensure to provide the benefit of crop insurance scheme. Chouhan said that the State Government is always with the farmers in the hour of crisis. Chief Minister said that those farmers whose crops have been damaged now are in trouble, but work will be done to get them out of this crisis. Farmers need not be worried.

Chouhan today discussed with the senior officers of the concerned departments and collectors of the affected districts and obtained information regarding the crops.

# Survey work of Sickle Cell Anemia should be done intensively: Patel

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that the survey work for the prevention of sickle cell anaemia should be done at an intensive level. The results of sickle cell anaemia test should be compiled at the state level by various institutions from all the regions of the state. Efforts should be made to estimate the number of sickle cell patients and carriers in the state in 6 months. He has said that the efforts to prevent sickle cell disease should be reviewed every month. The report should be presented in the Raj Bhavan. The Governor will review the situation during his visit to the affected areas.

Governor Patel was discussing about the activities being undertaken under Madhya Pradesh Sickle Cell Anaemia Project for disease prevention and management at Raj Bhavan on Sunday. Medical officers of National Health Mission and Pt. Khushilal Sharma Ayurveda College were present on the occasion. Patel said that the prevention and management of sickle cell anaemia should be done with concerted efforts by all. There is a need for cohesive, coordinated efforts for prevention and management. Coordinated support of Allopathy, Ayurvedic treatment, institutions, individual, society and government are must. He said that efforts should be made to make provision in the upcoming budget to ensure the availability of necessary funds for prevention and management. Along with arrangements at primary, community and district level for disease testing, initiative should also be taken for mobile testing. He said that the possibilities of using Allopathy, Ayurveda should also be explored in the efforts for the treatment of patients in Jhabua and Alirajpur. Describing the need for extensive research and research in the field of treatment, he told to highlight the immense store of knowledge of Ayurveda. Traditional knowledge of herbs and tribal community should also be compiled. Governor Patel said that life is invaluable. Money, not resources, is the key to survival. Sickle cell anaemia is a matter of concern and concern for the safety and protection of thousands of lives. Considering the service of suffering humanity as divine good fortune, one gets the blessings of God. There is need to work with a mission spirit. Sensitive action results in spiritual happiness. Deputy Director National Health Mission Dr. Archana Mishra, Dr. Ruby Khan, Dr. Shwetal Shivhare and Dr. Vivek Sharma of Pt. Khushilal Sharma Ayurveda College, gave details of departmental action.

# NAME CHANGING SPREE IN MP TO WOO THE ELECTORATE

***The name changing spree started on November 15, the birth anniversary of tribal leader Birsa Munda. It was announced that November 15 will be observed as Tribal Pride Day. On the same day, Habibganj railway station was renamed Gond Rani Kamlapati station.***

**Team Absolute** | Bhopa

It is said what's in a name, but in Madhya Pradesh the name says it all. The entire politics in the state is revolving around rechristening government buildings, railway stations, bus stands and universities with the intent to woo the electorate.

The name changing spree started on November 15, the birth anniversary of tribal leader Birsa Munda. It was announced that November 15 will be observed as Tribal Pride Day. On the same day, Habibganj railway station was renamed Gond Rani Kamlapati station.The Indore Patalpani railway station has been renamed after tribal icon Tantya Bheel.The Minto hall, the old vidhan sabha (legislative assembly), has been renamed after the Bharatiya Janata Party's founder member Kushabhau Thakre and will be known as Kushabhau Thakre hall.

Minto Hall was constructed by Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum, the fourth and the last begum of Bhopal.

She named the Hall as Minto Hall to felicitate Lord Minto, the then viceroy of India. In 2018, Minto Hall was reconstructed and is currently being used as a convention centre.

The previous Kamal Nath government had started Chhindwara university in Chhindwara which has been renamed as Raja Shankar Shah University Chhindwara.

As per the latest decision, the Spiritual department will be renamed as 'Dharmik Nyas and Dharmik Vibhaag' (Department of Religious Trust and Religious Affairs). The state has also formed a Happiness Department.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has announced the renaming of Hoshangabad district as Narmadapuram.Former Congress Minister Sajjan Verma has advocated renaming Indore along with Gwalior.Many leaders have demanded renaming Indore as Ahilya Bai Nagar. The Municipal Corporation has passed a proposal and sent it to the state government to rename Bhopal as Bhojpal.

Similarly, there was a demand to change the name of Idgah Hills to Guru Nanak Hills. It is said that Guru Nanak Dev ji, the first guru of the Sikhs, stayed here and the place houses his footprints.

Former chief minister Uma Bharti has already demanded the renaming of Halali dam.Bhopal MP Pragya Singh Thakur has demanded changing the names of Islam Nagar, Lalghati, Halali Dam and Halapura bus stand in Bhopal.Some Congress leaders have also demanded renaming a few other places. Some prominent opposition leaders have been questioning the name changes, but the BJP is moving ahead with changing the names of places that are reminiscent of slavery.

# 'Sulli deals' app creator nabbed from Indore

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The creator of the derogatory app 'Sulli deals' was apprehended from Indore in Madhya Pradesh nearly six months after the registration of the case in Delhi, officials said Sunday. The accused mastermind has been identified as Aumkareshwar Thakur, a resident of Newyork City Township, Indore.

According to the police, the 25-year-old accused admitted that he was member of a trad- group on Twitter that defamed and trolled Muslim women. "He had developed the code on GitHub. The access of GitHub was with all the members of the group," the police said.

It further said that the accused had also shared the Application on his Twitter account. "The photos of the muslim women were uploaded by the group members," said the police.

The derogatory 'Sulli Deals' mobile app had surfaced in July last year where photos of Muslim women were displayed without their consent.

Apart from Sulli deals, another shocking incident of harassment and insulting women of the minority community on social media came to light on January 1 after a Delhi-based woman journalist lodged a complaint with the Delhi Police stating that she was being targeted by some unidentified group of people on a mobile application, this time named as 'Bulli Bai', yet again created on GitHub platform.

'Bulli Bai' had a number of pictures of women, including journalists, social workers, students and famous personalities, accompanied by derogatory content. The app listed hundreds of Muslim women for "auction".

However, the creator of the Bulli Bai app, Niraj Bishnoi, was also arrested by the Delhi Police on January 6.

# Chief Minister pays tribute to Sant Sepoy Guru Govind Singh

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to Sant Sepoy Guru Govind Singh on his anniversary. Chouhan paid floral tributes by garlanding his portrait in the auditorium of the residence office.

Guru Govind Singh Ji was the tenth Guru of the Sikhs. He was born on December 22, 1666 in Patna. He became the tenth Guru on November 11, 1675 after the martyrdom of his father, Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji. He was a great warrior, poet, devotee and spiritual master. In 1699, on the day of Baisakhi, Guru Govind Singh Ji founded the Khalsa Panth. He fought 14 battles against external invaders to end tyranny, sin, protect the poor and protect religion. He sacrificed the whole family for the sake of religion, for which he is also called Sarbansdani i.e. the giver of the whole family. Guru Govind Singh ji was a great writer, original thinker and had knowledge of many languages including Sanskrit. He was a unique amalgamation of devotion and power, due to which he is also called Saint Sepoy. Guru Govind Singh Ji completed the holy scripture of the Sikhs (Guru Granth Sahib) and adorned it as a Guru.

Chouhan said in a tweet that- "When you remove the ego from your inner self, only then you will get real peace. Guru Govind Singh Ji, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs who laid down his life for the protection of religion and welfare of humanity, Sahib-e-Kamaal, profound homage on the Prakashotsav of revered Guru Govind Singh ji."

# Constable suspended for keeping long moustache

***The constable was posted as the driver of Special Director General, Cooperatives Fraud and Public Service Guarantee section of the Madhya Pradesh Police.***

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh Police have suspended a constable for indiscipline as he grew his hair and moustache despite being told to trim it, an official said on Sunday. The suspension order issued on Friday to constable Rakesh Rana, posted as a driver in the police's motor transport wing, surfaced on various social media platforms on Sunday.

Assistant Inspector General, Cooperatives Fraud and Public Service Guarantee, Prashant Sharma, who issued the order, told PTI that Rana was suspended as he did not follow his senior's order about correcting his appearance.

"When his appearance was checked, the constable was found with hair grown and a moustache till the neck. He was directed to trim the hair as his turnout was awkward, but he did not follow the directives," the official said.

Sharma also claimed the constable was adamant on keeping long hair and moustache, which was not in accordance with norms for the uniformed personnel. Hence, he was suspended as part of disciplinary action, the official said.

The constable was posted as the driver of Special Director General, Cooperatives Fraud and Public Service Guarantee section of the Madhya Pradesh Police. He told a TV channel that he will continue to keep a moustache as it is a matter of "self-respect" for him. Claiming that he always wore a proper uniform, Rana said he will not compromise on this issue despite the suspension as he had been keeping the moustache since a long time.

# CM PLANTS SAPLING OF MOLSHREE AND SAPTAPARNI

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Molshree and Saptaparni saplings along with the office bearers of Excelventure Educational Health and Welfare Society in Smart Udyan on Sunday. The Chief Minister also sought information about the activities of Excelventure Society. Shrikant Gangwar of the organization told that they gift saplings in marriage ceremonies, birthdays and other occasions. The organization has also started a seed bank. The institution is also associated with research activities in the field of environment. Chouhan appreciated the efforts of the organization.

Molshree is also called Kesava in Sanskrit, Molsari or Bakool in Hindi. The tree has medicinal importance, which has been used in Ayurveda for centuries. Saptaparni sapling is an evergreen medicinal tree, which has great importance in Ayurveda. This plant is used in the manufacture of various medicines.

# *CM Chouhan pays tribute to Kale*

**Bhopal:** Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today paid tribute to senior office bearer of All India Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Shri Prakash Tryambakar Rao Kale. Kale's services were remembered in the condolence meeting held in the auditorium of Samanvay Bhawan. Various speakers mentioned the major works of Kale's life. Kale passed away on December 25 last. Chief Minister Chouhan offered floral tributes on the picture of Prakash Tryambakar Rao Kale. Suhas Bhagat also attended the tribute meeting.

Chouhan said that Prakash Tryambakar Kale had a unique personality. He cared lifelong for the development of the tribal community. He was also among those who initiated the idea of organizing Tribal Pride Day on November 15. About one and a half dozen points were prepared for tribal welfare in the state, in determining which, Prakash ji has also contributed. Chief Minister said that whenever any responsibility was given to Prakash ji, he had the passion and hard work to complete it. He was always ready for the tribal community. The wonderful talent he had for service in social life cannot be forgotten. At the same time, his spontaneity, simplicity and amazing ability to love everyone were also unique. He showed the way to many people to work for the benefit of the society. He was a man without any ego and full of patience. He was very enthusiastic.

# Efforts for Development of Soya Industries in Madhya Pradesh will Be Stepped Up: CM

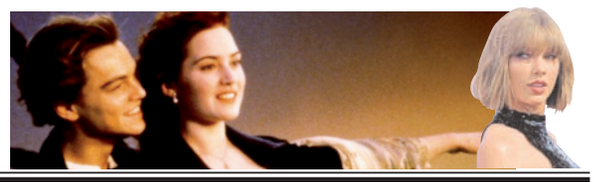
**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that efforts will be stepped up to establish soya industry in Madhya Pradesh. Soya industries have to be revived in the interest of farmers. Steps will be taken in the direction of benefitting the farmers by increasing soyabean production, selling the produce and setting up of processing units. Efforts will be made that farmers get full value for their hard work, so measures will be taken in the field of exports as well. At present, the capital of the nation is being spent due to the increase in the import of soya oil. Therefore the introduction of soya processing units assumes significance. Establishment of such units will be encouraged to provide benefit to farmers by taking raw material from them and adding value to their products. Chouhan was addressing the Bhoomi-Poojan programme of soya plant costing about 360 crores in village Khairwas of Badnawar tehsil of Dhar district on Sunday. Chief Minister participated virtually in this programme of IB Group. Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion Minister Rajvardhan Singh Dattigaon performed bhoomi-pujan of the plant on the spot. The work of this plant, which will give direct employment to about 500 people, will be completed in the next 18 months. Production will be done with a capacity of about 3000 metric tonnes. Local farmers will get adequate price for soyabean crop.

Chouhan said that Madhya Pradesh has received Krishi Karman Award seven times due to the hard work of the farmers. Now we are moving rapidly from agriculture to food processing. There is an investment friendly environment in Madhya Pradesh. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also wants to double the income of farmers. To fulfil their resolve, such plants will be helpful which will benefit the farmers. In the state, facilities like zero percent loans are being made available along with the system to increase production, reduce cost and providing fair price. Earlier, through Bhavantar Yojana, farmers were provided the difference between the prices of the crop in the market. The selection of Madhya Pradesh for soya processing unit is also justified, because consumers will get edible oil at a lower price and soyabean growing farmers will also be benefitted. Incentives will be given by the State Government for setting up such units. Chief Minister said that new investments are also necessary for employment generation. Policies have also been amended from time to time to create a conducive environment for the establishment of industries in Madhya Pradesh.

Chouhan said that there are 11 climatic zones in the state. Madhya Pradesh is world famous in terms of production and quality of wheat. We have also left Punjab behind in wheat production. Similarly, we have come ahead in the production of pulses and oilseeds. Not only this, Madhya Pradesh is also making progress in the production of fruits, vegetables and medicinal plants. At one time, Madhya Pradesh was at number one in soyabean too. It is called yellow gold. Work was done to change the economic condition of the farmers, but the damage to the crops was also considerable. In this regard, the cooperation of the experts of the Agricultural University will be obtained. Three government and six private universities are doing agricultural research in the state.

Chouhan said that Madhya Pradesh is the most favourable state for investment. There is also adequate land availability along with industrial peace. The citizens of the state are cooperative in nature. It has an investor friendly industry promotion policy. This is the reason that in the first 9 months of the financial year 2021-22, new investment of Rs 27 thousand 856 crore has come. The path of direct employment has been opened for about 70 thousand people.



# 'And Just Like That...'

## SARAH JESSICA PARKER WEARS A LEHNGA, CALLS IT A SARI

**New York** | Agencies

In a recent episode of the reboot of the cult classic 'Sex And The City' christened 'And Just Like That', actress Sarah Jessica Parker was seen sashaying a lehenga by Indian designers Falguni and Shane Peacock.

The actress kind of had an oops moment in the episode, where she called the Indian attire a saree.

In an episode revolving around the festival of Diwali, Sarah's iconic character Carrie Bradshaw wore a Falguni and Shane Peacock lehenga and called it a saree in the show, which is known for dressing the actresses in some of the most iconic and memorable ensembles.

In the episode, Seema, played by English actress with Indian roots Sarita Choudhury, invites Carrie to her intimate family Diwali party and takes her shopping to a luxurious Indian boutique in New York.

She completed her look with a floral mohawk for the Diwali party.

In the episode, Carrie was also seen getting surprised when Seema talks about Diwali, the festival of lights celebrated by Hindus across the globe.

Carrie sports the Falguni and Shane Peacock ensemble and calls it a "saree".

Another interesting thing is that the show plays the track 'Humma Humma' by Oscar-winning music director A.R. Rahman as the actress steps out of her apartment building.

# Kristen Stewart has chosen her wedding outfit

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Actress Kristen Stewart got engaged to her girlfriend Dylan Meyer in November after two years together and although she is unsure how many "traditions" they will follow on their big day, she's already chosen her clothes but wants to keep the details a surprise.

She told 'Entertainment Tonight': "You're supposed to, I mean, I guess traditionally speaking and in this case, I mean, who knows how many ... I don't even know detail-wise, I don't know how many traditions we're going to follow.

"But I know what I'm gonna wear, and I can't tell you. Like, the whole thing, we kind of have to do the surprise thing."

Stewart said portraying Princess Diana in 'Spencer' was "such a trip" and a very unique role because there are so few people like the late royal, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She said: "The most resounding takeaway that I have from making this movie was probably how big and how small I felt as her. I've never felt so big and so small at the same time.

"And I don't know, just to sort of be aware of there are certain impactful and, you know, touching people that exist and they're sort of lightning in a bottle, one-in-a-million special, but their inner lives are maybe not sometimes what it feels like for everyone outside, do you know what I mean?

# ISABELLE FUHRMAN SIGNED ON FOR 'SHEROES'

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Hollywood actress Isabelle Fuhrman, who is known for psychological horror 'Orphan' and the queer drama 'The Novice', has come on board for 'Sheroes', helmed by Jordan Gertner.

The action-adventure film will be shot in Thailand later this month, reports Deadline.

The film written by Gertner tells the story of four girlfriends, who set out for a hedonistic adventure. The narrative takes a sharp turn when each girl is called upon to employ her own unique set of skills, doing whatever it takes to come out alive and, if possible, remain friends.

As per Deadline, Isabelle will essay the role of Ezra, a burgeoning actress leaving behind a trail of mayhem and chaos on this wild ride in the film. Gertner is going all out with 'Sheroes' as he will also be producing the film, which also stars Wallis Day (Batwoman, Krypton), Skai Jackson (The Man in the White Van, Dragons: Rescue Riders), Sasha Luss (Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets) and Jack Kesy (Claws, Deadpool 2).

Fuhrman's casting in the film comes amid awards buzz for her performance in 'The Novice' directed by Lauren Hadaway. The drama based on Hadaway's personal experiences, features Isabelle as a queer college freshman Alex Dall, who joins her university's rowing team and undertakes an obsessive physical and psychological journey to prove herself.

# *James Bond vrooms past Spidey in UK-Ireland market*

**London** | Agencies

The Tom Holland-led 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' may be leaping from one box-office record to the next in this time of the pandemic, but audiences in the UK and Ireland have shown their loyalty to their favourite spy, James Bond, by ensuring that British actor Daniel Craig's final outing as 007, 'No Time to Die', tops the 2021 charts.

According to data released by the media measurement and analytics company, Comscore, and reported by 'Variety', the year's UK and Ireland box-office was led by 'No Time to Die', which is the No. 3 film of all time with 96.5 million pounds, behind 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' (123.2 million pounds) and another James Bond movie, 'Skyfall' (103.2 million pounds).

'Spider-Man: No Way Home', which is still running in cinemas, is No.10 in the all-time chart with 74.8 million pounds and is most likely to overtake 2019's 'The Lion King' (76 million pounds) and will then challenge 'Titanic' (80.2 million pounds) for the eighth position, reports 'Variety' quoting Comscore data.

Cinemas in the U.K and Ireland were closed for the first 19 weeks of 2021 and allowed to reopen from May 17, but unlike 2020, which had repeated closures, 2021 did not see any enforced shutdowns since reopening.

The final 2021 admission numbers are not yet available, but Comscore, according to 'Variety', expects the UK total to be around 74 million and some six million in Ireland, almost 70 per cent up from 2020's figures of 47.6 million for the UK and Ireland combined, which represented a steep fall from 2019's total of 191.1 million.

# RICKY GERVAIS WILL CONTINUE TO EXPLORE 'TABOO' TOPICS

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Comedian Ricky Gervais will continue exploring "taboo subjects" in his comedy because he thinks it is important to challenge his audiences.

The 60-year-old star doesn't think he needs to stay clear of controversial topics to avoid the risk of offending people because he feels it is important to push boundaries and confront audiences with new ideas, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

He said: "It depends on what the joke is. I can't stress that enough. I'll carry on exploring taboo subjects because I like taking the audience to a place they haven't been before."

The star is also behind the hit black comedy series 'After Life', in which he stars as newspaper writer Tony Johnson who loses his wife to breast cancer and as a result goes on to punish the world around him by saying and doing whatever he feels.

Ricky claimed that although the series has been a hit around the world, he "doesn't care" about any legacy it may leave him when he has passed on simply because "I'll be dead." He told Britain's OK! Magazine: "I don't really think about [my legacy]. I'll be dead so I won't care how I'm remembered, except that I've always tried to be a good person." Ricky shared his opinion changed over the years when he realised "character" was much more important than "reputation".

## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Rebecca Gormley

Ashes, 4th Test:

# TAIL-ENDERS SAVE THE DAY FOR ENGLAND AS MATCH ENDS IN A DRAW

**Sydney** | Agencies

England tail-ender Stuart Broad hung on for 35 deliveries on the fifth and final day of the fourth Ashes Test to miraculously draw the game along with Jimmy Anderson to deny Australia a 4-0 series lead at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) here on Sunday.

Staring at an almost certain defeat with Australian quicks Pat Cummins and Scott Boland running riot, Broad negotiated the final hour of play with utmost concentration, holding on for a good 50 minutes for his eight runs (35 balls) as the Joe Root-led England have something to look forward to going in the fifth Test at Hobart from January 14.

England's score in the second innings read 270/9 in 102 overs.

In a tense final hour at the SCG, Australian skipper Cummins had to turn to Steve Smith's leg breaks as the skies darkened and he delivered with a wicket, his first in six years, to leave England needing to play out two overs with just one wicket left. Anderson and Broad then held on for two overs to deny Australia a win at the SCG.

Earlier in the day, resuming on 30/0, England made merry early on with Zak Crawley playing some big strokes to kick start the morning. However, the opening partnership itself did not last too long with Haseeb Hameed dismissed in single digits for the sixth successive time.

While Crawley (77 off 100 balls) flourished, Australia managed another breakthrough from the other end, with Nathan Lyon cleaning up Dawid Malan. Root, England's highest run-scorer in the series by a long way, walked in to join Crawley. The England opening batter compiled his first fifty of the tour and first since February 2021 to give England a reasonably solid start to the day.

But the partnership did not last long as the latter was trapped in front for 77 by Cameron Green's yorker. Despite Crawley's enterprising knock, at 96/3, England's morning didn't quite go to plan. Ben Stokes and Joe Root took the team to lunch with England's chances of pulling off a draw not too slim.

The visitors started strong after the break with Root and Stokes finding a boundary apiece in the first three overs. The latter pulled Mitchell Starc for a six and soon followed it up with a drive through cover off Green.

The duo took England past 150, but once again, it was Scott Boland who brought Australia back in the game. For the third successive time in the series, Boland had Root, leaving England in a spot of bother at 156/4.Stokes and Jonny Bairstow resurrected the innings with a promising stand that lasted more than 15 overs. But just as it seemed like England had found a way to survive the day, Lyon struck.

Stokes edged him to Steve Smith in the cordon after a vigilant 60. To compound England's problems, the new ball was due soon and Australia made it count.Jos Buttler and Mark Wood were dismissed by Cummins in the same over, the former with a superb in-swinger that crashed into his pads. The on-field call was not out, but Australia overturned it with a review and struck again two balls later, this time with another toe-crusher, to leave England seven down.

This left first-innings centurion, Bairstow stranded with the tail. The England batter had his slice of luck next over when he was dropped off Starc's bowling by Smith at second slip. An edge the following over also eluded the slip cordon as Bairstow continued to wage a lone battle.

With less than an hour to stumps, Australia crowded the slip cordon and zoned in on the stumps with the new ball, but the wicket did not come. Reviews were wasted and the captain was done with his spell.

Cummins turned to Boland to give the breakthrough and he didn't disappoint. In his second over, Boland forced an inside edge onto the pads off Bairstow with Marnus Labuschagne snapping up the catch at silly point to leave England's tail to battle for the draw.

Jack Leach and Stuart Broad denied Australia for eight overs before Smith's vital breakthrough, but the last wicket eluded the Aussies in the final two overs.

***Brief scores :***

Australia 416/8 declared and 265/6 declared draw with England 294 and 270/9 (Zak Crawley 77, Ben Stokes 60, Jonny Bairstow 41; pat Cummins 2/80, Scott Boland 3/30, Nathan Lyon 2/28).

# Rising Covid-19 cases raise question over scheduling of India-WI series

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The rapid rise of Covid-19 cases in the country has raised the question over the scheduling of the upcoming white-ball series between India and the West Indies.As of now, six games are originally spread across six centres from February 6 to 20 with the first match, an ODI, at Ahmedabad followed by games in Jaipur, Kolkata, Cuttack, Visakhapatnam, and Thiruvananthapuram.

However, with the third wave of Coronavirus gripping the country and cases multiplying rapidly, BCCI may consider reducing venues for the series, and the matches can be played at one or two centres to avoid too much travelling and cut the risk factor.

According to the Cricbuzz report, BCCI officials are saying that planning for the six-match white-ball series is underway and nothing has been finalised yet.

Meanwhile, Cricket West Indies (CWI) has said that it is open to the idea of playing the whole series in fewer centres."A request for such a change has not been reached to me as yet. But we accept such operational actions by local boards in the interest of what is best for implementing health protocols," CWI chief Ricky Skerritt said.

As per the information from the BCCI, the West Indies team is scheduled to arrive in Ahmedabad on February 1 and undergo a three-day isolation period till February 3. The teams are to have nets for two days, on February 4 and 5, before the first game on February 6.Earlier in the month, BCCI postponed the several domestic tournaments -- Ranji Trophy, Col CK Nayudu Trophy, and senior women's T20 League for the 2021/22 season due to raging Covid-19.

# FOCUS IS TO HOST IPL IN INDIA, BUT BCCI EXPLORING OVERSEAS OPTION AS WELL, SOURCES

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Following a sudden rise in Covid-19 cases in India yet again, there are several reports coming in that the Indian Premier League 2022, scheduled to take place in April, might move out of the country once again.

Meanwhile, a Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) official on Sunday said that the board is prioritising holding the tournament in India but the decision will be dependent on what the state governments decide.

As per a Sports Tak report, the board is monitoring the Covid-19 situation closely and no decision has been taken as of now with regards to venues for the tournament.

"BCCI is exploring all options which include overseas IPL as well. But the focus is to host the IPL in India for sure. As of now the priority is the auction, and the board will soon take a call," it said.

The 2020 edition was entirely held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While the 2021 IPL was initially scheduled to be held in India behind closed doors, the league had to be postponed halfway through due to a rising number of cases within the bio-bubbles amidst the deadly second wave of the virus in the country.

It was then resumed and completed later in the year in the UAE.

Recently, the Indian cricket board recently postponed all upcoming domestic tournaments, including the Ranji Trophy, due to the pandemic.

# REAL MADRID CRUISE TO WIN; BARCA HELD IN GRANADA

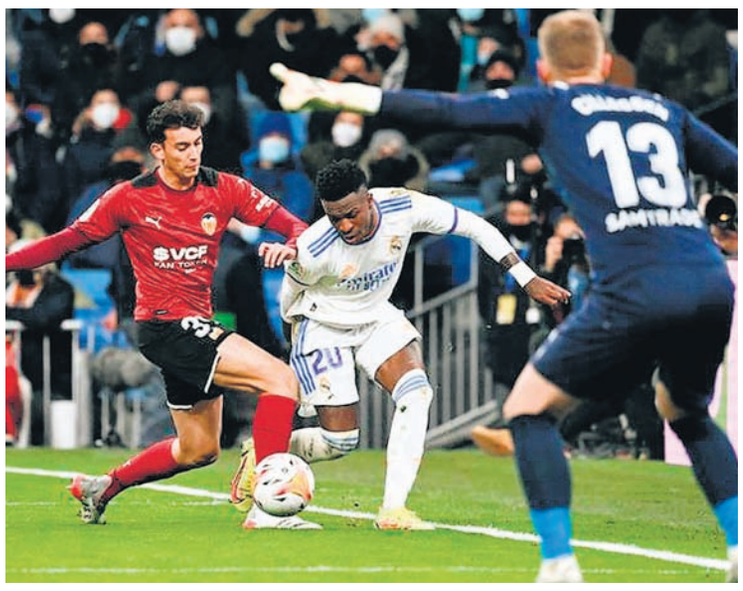
**Madrid** | Agencies

Real Madrid recovered from last weekend's defeat to Getafe with a comfortable 4-1 win at home to Valencia. Karim Benzema and Vinicius Jr both scored twice as the duo again showed their importance to their side against a rival that disappointed once again in the Bernabeu.

Benzema opened the scoring from the penalty spot after Casemiro was controversially adjudged to have been brought down after a slight contact. The striker hit a powerful shot into the corner of the net.

Vinicius made it 2-0 10 minutes into the second half after skipping through some half-hearted challenges and the Brazilian added a third after Asensio's shot was parried into his path.

Goncalo Guedes pulled a goal back after Thibaut Courtois had blocked his initial penalty, but there was still time for Benzema to add his second of the night two minutes from time.



Luuk de Jong's second goal in two games looked as if it was going to give Barca a 1-0 win away to Granada in what ended up being a bad-tempered game, Xinhua reports. The big striker headed home a Dani Alves cross in the 57th minute, after seeing another header ruled out for a narrow offside before halftime.

Barca youngster Gavi was sent off for two yellow cards in the 78th minute and after pressing hard for an equaliser, Granada claimed a point when Antonio Puerta fired a left-foot shot into the corner of the net following a corner.

Mikel Oyarzabal's 13th minute goal ended Real Sociedad's six-game run without a win as they beat a disappointing Celta Vigo 1-0 in the Reale Arena. Aritz Elustondo had a second effort for the home side ruled out for a tight offside.

Goals from Roberto Soldado and a late finish from Jose Luis Morales gave bottom of the table Levante their first win of the season in a game where Levante keeper Aitor Fernandez saw a penalty and Fer Nino had a goal ruled out for Mallorca with the score 1-0.

Sunday's games see Atletico Madrid visit Villarreal, while second-place Sevilla have to overcome a host of absences when they entertain Getafe.

# HALEP STORMS PAST KUDERMETOVA TO CLINCH MELBOURNE SUMMER SET TITLE

**Melbourne** | Agencies

Former world number one and No. 2 seed Simona Halep clinched the Melbourne Summer Set 1 women's singles title after beating No 3 seed Veronika Kudermetova 6-2, 6-3 in the final, here on Sunday.

It was the 23rd career WTA singles title for Halep, who struggled with her calf and knee injuries in 2021 and missed many important tournaments.

The 30-year old Halep started slowly in both sets. She double-faulted to go down 2-1 in the first, and again to pave the way to a loss of serve in the first game of the second. But Kudermetova was unable to take advantage either time. The World No 31 committed 27 unforced errors over the course of the match, three of which immediately handed the first-set break back. Halep needed further encouragement to settle, and did not permit Kudermetova to even reach a game point for the remainder of the set. Kudermetova held three break points to take a 3-0 double-break lead in the second set, but Halep saved the first two with service winners. A backhand wide wasted the third for Kudermetova, who then netted an easy putaway to allow Halep to hold.

Once again, it was the two-time Grand Slam champion who was able to seize momentum. Halep rattled off five of the last six games and converted her first championship point as Kudermetova sent another backhand wide.

"The body is great, I feel good. I had a tough five matches, and my body is good. I don't feel that tired. Physically I'm in the right place. Confidence is growing. I feel confident. I feel that I have the game to win matches," said Halep after her win.

"I'm not that scared when I lose serve because I often lose the serve, but I am confident in my return. I'm not getting scared there. I didn't even think that I lost the serve, I just focused on the return. I just focused on every game I played. I was very positive," she added.

Meanwhile, No. 2 seeds Asia Muhammad and Jessica Pegula captured their first doubles title as a team after defeating the unseeded Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini 6-3, 6-1 in the final.

Muhammad and Pegula played one ITF tournament together in 2012, but have only been a semi-regular partnership since reaching the 2020 Roland Garros quarterfinals. The Americans only dropped one set in Melbourne, in their 6-3, 6-7(2), 10-6 semi-final defeat of No. 3 seeds Viktoria Kuzmova and Ver Zvonareva.The title is Muhammad's seventh at WTA level with six different partners and preserves the 30-year-old's unbeaten record in WTA finals.

# Rohan Bopanna and Ramkumar Ramanathan win Adelaide doubles title

**Adelaide** | Agencies

India's doubles pair of Rohan Bopanna and Ramkumar Ramanathan defeated top-seeded Ivan Dodig of Croatia and Brazil's Marcelo Melo 7-6 (6), 6-1 to win the Adelaide International title on Sunday.

Coming into this tournament, the Indian duo had played just one Davis Cup match together against Finland. World No. 43 Bopanna claimed his 19th tour-level title while Ramanathan, No. 144 in the ATP rankings, captured his first tour-level crown.

The first set was a see-saw affair as the Indian pair had to dig deep for a 7-6 set win. In the second set, the Croatian and Brazilian pair succumbed to the pressure and gave away the set and the match 6-1 without much resistance. In the semifinals, Bopanna and Ramanathan upstaged fourth seeds Tomislav Brkic and Santiago Gonzalez in straight sets 6-2, 6-4.

# World No. 1 Ash Barty wins Adelaide International

**Canberra** | Agencies

World No.1 Ash Barty had a perfect start to the new season ahead of the home Grand Slam -- the Australian Open --, winning the Adelaide International in dominant fashion by crushing world No. 14 Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan 6-3, 6-2 in Sunday night's final.

This was Barty's 14th career singles title and second in Adelaide. The victory underlined Barty's status as the favourite to win the Australian Open, where she is aiming to become the first home-grown champion since 1978.

Barty, 25, beat American prodigy Coco Gauff, 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin and 2020 French Open winner Iga Swiatek of Poland en route to the title in Adelaide, without dropping a set or a service game against Rybakina, Kenin or Swiatek.

It takes Barty's record against fellow top-20 players to 17-1 since the start of 2021 and means she has won 21 of her last 25 matches on Australian soil.

"It's been a challenging 18 months, two years for all of us and it's so nice to be here to enjoy a fantastic week," she said on court after the match.

"You guys, the fans have made this week exceptional for me, you've made it so much fun and you've brought that spark back to my tennis and I thank you so much for that." Reigning Wimbledon champion Barty was challenged early but didn't look back after breaking Rybakina's serve at 3-3, closing out the first set in 29 minutes.Having seized the advantage, Barty was at her dominant best in the second set, racing to a 4-0 lead and going on to win the final in 64 minutes. Barty and Storm Sanders will face Darija Jurak Schreiber and Andreja Klepac in the Adelaide doubles final before she heads to the Sydney Tennis Classic, ahead of the Australian Open on January 17.

# TEAM INDIA BEGINS TRAINING IN CAPE TOWN

**Cape Town (South Africa)** | Agencies

Aiming to win their maiden Test series in South Africa, India began their preparations for the third and final Test against hosts in Cape Town on Sunday.

"We are here at the picturesque Cape Town. #TeamIndia begin preparations for the 3rd Test #SAvIND," BCCI tweeted with a photo of the Indian team. The third and final Test against South Africa will be played at Cape Town from January 11- 15.

Dean Elgar spearheaded a record chase of 240, helping South Africa clinch a series-levelling win in the second Test at the Wanderers. Out of the action due to an upper back spasm, India Test captain Virat Kohli could return to the squad.

After the defeat in the Johannesburg Test, head coach Rahul Dravid said that he is hopeful of seeing Kohli return for the third Test.

"Virat Kohli should be fine from all accounts, he should be fine. He has had the opportunity to run around a little bit, he has had the opportunity to test it a little bit," Dravid had said during a virtual press conference. Earlier, Kohli had seen receiving throwdowns from Dravid during the warm-up of the team ahead of the third day's play of the second Test. Kohli was looking fit as he had faced a few deliveries from the Indian bowlers.

The Johannesburg Test was supposed to be Kohli's 99th in the format, making the Cape Town match his 100th. According to India's schedule, if all goes well, then Kohli might play his 100th Test at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru, where the first Test against Sri Lanka is scheduled from February 25.

# 'Shyam Singha Roy' to stream on OTT from Jan 21

**Team Absolute** | Hyderabad

Nani and Sai Pallavi's hit movie 'Shyam Singha Roy' will start streaming on OTT from January 21.

'Shyam Singha Roy', which was released in theatres on December 24, is still running and earning good numbers.

The Nani-starrer is a time-travel story, with the '70s-era Bengal and contemporary Hyderabad backdrop. Nani has played the role of a social reformer, while Sai Pallavi allured the audience in the role of a devadasi.

Rahul Sankrityan's second directorial venture features Nani in a dual role. Nani, Sai Pallavi, Krithi Shetty, and Madonna Sebastian have been receiving critical acclaim ever since the release of the movie.

As the Sankranti season is to bring in new releases, the makers of 'Shyam Singha Roy' have taken this decision to start streaming the movie on OTT.

Nagarjuna and Naga Chaitanya's 'Bangarraju' is slated for release on January 14, which would have an impact on 'Shyam Singha Roy'. So, the OTT option is one better way to catch up with digital viewers.

# BHAVINI PUROHIT: ACTORS TAKE RISKS TO PURSUE A PRETENTIOUS LIFE

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

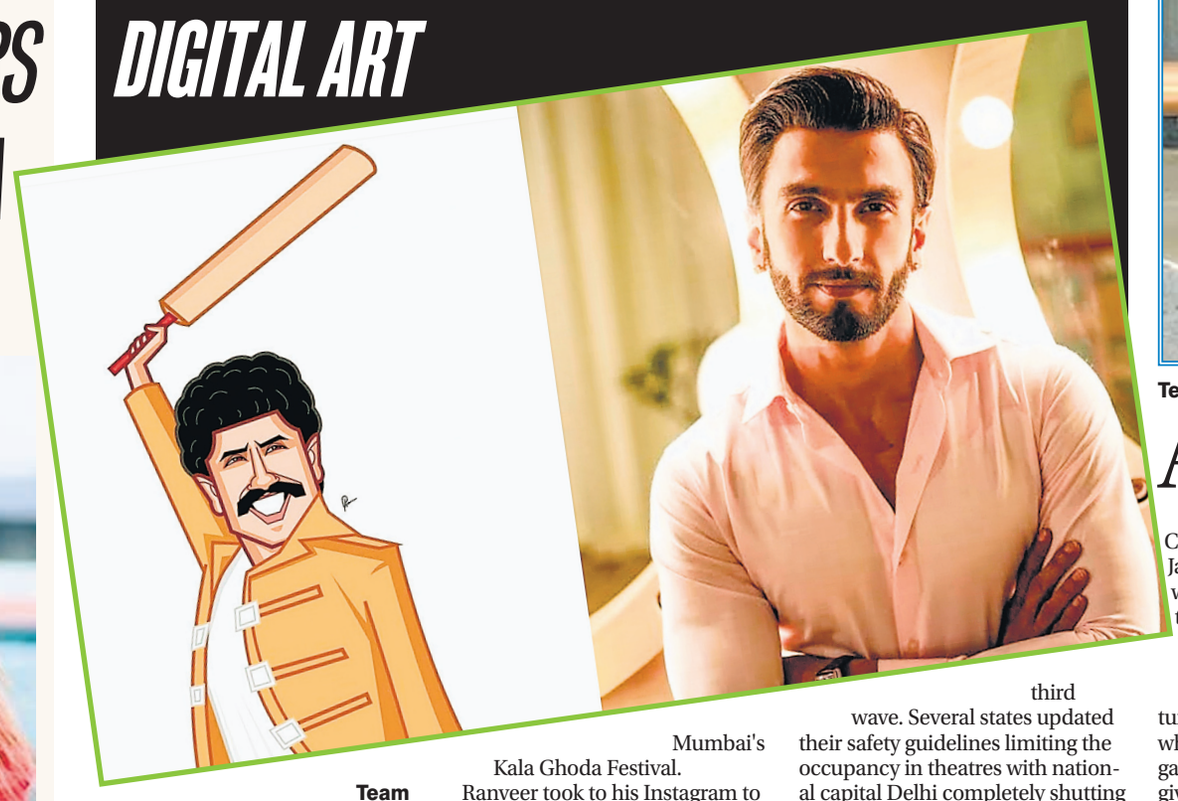
Actress Bhavini Purohit feels an actor always learns from the process of auditioning for roles.

She says: "I enjoy auditioning for roles. The more auditions you attend, the more experience you'll have with the process of trying out for roles. This experience can give you the confidence to continue auditioning or performing best after you are assigned for the role. Once you've gained experience and improved your acting abilities, it becomes easy to achieve success in showbiz. I feel auditioning for acting roles for commercials is great too as such projects can give you valuable on-screen experience that can add to your resume."

The actress who rose to fame after playing the role of Radha, an antagonist in family drama 'Saath Nibhaana Saathiya' feels actors are now pressured to market themselves to get a role.

The actress adds: "Nowadays there is a new strategy for finding a role in TV shows, is to market yourself. We are somehow pressured to use online presence, social media and networking skills to establish yourself to pursue in the showbiz industry. It results in the lifestyle of an actor that lacks depth or is pretentious." The actor who featured in 'Jana Na Dil Se Door', continues to share the risk of acting pretentiously.

# PLAYING THE GAME: RANVEER SINGH SHARES QUIRKY DIGITAL ART



**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Bollywood star Ranveer Singh, who recently portrayed cricket icon Kapil Dev in the Kabir Khan directorial '83', shared a digital art on his social media.

The caricature is designed by renowned artiste, Graphicurry's Prasad Bhat, who's a regular at Mumbai's Kala Ghoda Festival.

Ranveer took to his Instagram to share the art, which blends together the essence of Kapil Dev, Ranveer himself and 'Bohemian Rhapsody' hitmaker Freddie Mercury. Ranveer captioned the picture, "Ranveer x Kapil x Freddie".

'83', which was released on December 24 suffered a major jolt with the pandemic returning for a third wave. Several states updated their safety guidelines limiting the occupancy in theatres with national capital Delhi completely shutting cinema halls in order to curb the spread of the contagion.

The film, which was touted to be one of the biggest hits suffered invariably because of the social and medical condition of the society, at large, grossing only Rs 97 crore across India, in all languages.

# Nia Sharma grooves to peppy track 'Phoonk Le'

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Actress and model Nia Sharma says her latest track 'Phoonk Le' comes as the most awaited project for her as she was always willing to work in an item number.

She says: "I grew up watching item songs like 'Chaiyaa Chayiaa', 'Chamma Chamma', 'Bidi Jalaile', 'Munni' ,'Sheela ki Jawani' and always swooned over how stunning all those women looked in the songs. I never knew I'd be the one getting an item number like ' Phoonk Le' . I was killing myself thinking how I'd even pull it off, I rehearsed day and night as I am not a professional dancer."

She further shares on how she prepared herself to be featured in the dance number and adds: "I went to extreme levels where I worked out immensely, stopped eating much and gave it my all. I am nervous, I hope my audience likes it and gives all their love and support to this song. I have jitters in my body and I am tripping on my own song, I can't stop humming and dancing to the tunes."

'Phoonk Le' is a Hindi single track written by Meer and Lado Suwalka and sung by Nikhita Gandhi. The number is composed by music composer Rangon and directed by Prince Gupta. Singer Nikhita shares her experience of singing the song and says: "'Phoonk Le' was a very fun song to sing. It has the spiciness, the tadka that you seek in a desi track. Moreover, Rangon has composed the music so beautifully, I couldn't have asked for a better song to start my new year with." Rangon, who has composed the music for this peppy track says working on this song was not only challenging but exciting too.

# Madhur Bhandarkar tests positive for Covid despite double vax

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Filmmaker Madhur Bhandarkar reported on Saturday that he has tested positive for Covid-19 despite being double vaccinated. The 'Fashion' director, who is experiencing mild symptoms, has urged his social media followers to not take the virus lightly. He also notified people, who have come in contact with him in the recent past, to get themselves tested.

Taking to Twitter, Bhandarkar said: "I have tested positive for Covid. Been fully vaccinated but experiencing mild symptoms. Have isolated myself. Those who came in contact with me kindly get yourself tested. Please be safe and follow Covid-19 protocols." As Mumbai registered 20,971 additions to its caseload on Friday, Bollywood celebrities have been coming down with Covid with alarming regularity. Those who have tested positive include the veteran Prem Chopra as well as Boney Kapoor, Ekta Kapoor, John Abraham, Vishal Dadlani, Swara Bhaskar, Mrunal Thakur, Arjun Kapoor, Alaya F, Ranvir Shorey, Amrita Arora, Prateik Babbar and Kubbra Sait.

# *Ayushmann reflects on message of inclusivity in 'Chandigarh Kare Ashiqui'*

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Actor Ayushmann Khurrana has shared that the intention behind making 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui' was to talk about the concept of gender inclusivity.

The film, which was released on OTT after a successful theatrical run recently, became the most streamed content within 24 hours of its digital release.

Commenting on the same, the actor said, "We wanted to talk about the need for gender inclusivity and for that to happen, it was important that a critical number of people saw and engaged with the film."

He further said, "From the get go, we wanted to make a film that touches as many people as possible. It is really heartwarming to see that 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui' became the number one streamed content within 24 hours of its drop." He added, "'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui' has been made with a lot of love, soul and heart. the fact that it is entertaining so many people and delivering an important, positive message for social good is really, really humbling."

'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui', directed by Abhishek Kapoor, which also stars Vaani Kapoor, touches upon the subject of transgender inclusivity and has received a positive response from the audience.

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Mouni Roy

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