

# absolute india

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## COLD WAVE LIKELY IN NORTH INDIA FOR NEXT FEW MORE SAYS: IMD



▶ **IMD HAS ALSO SAID THAT MINIMUM TEMPERATURES ARE ABOVE NORMAL BY 5-7°C OVER GUJARAT; 3-5°C OVER RAJASTHAN, PUNJAB, HARYANA AND MADHYA PRADESH AND BY 1-2°C OVER UTTAR PRADESH, BIHAR, ODISHA, CHHATTISGARH, JHARKHAND AND WEST BENGAL AND NEAR NORMAL OVER REST PARTS OF NORTH INDIA.**

▶ **IMD HAD ALSO PREDICTED NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN MINIMUM TEMPERATURES OVER MOST PARTS OF NORTHWEST INDIA AND MADHYA PRADESH DURING THE NEXT TWO DAYS AND FALL BY 4-6°C THEREAFTER.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The national weather forecasting agency, India Meteorological Department (IMD), has predicted cold wave conditions over Delhi, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh for the next few days. As per the agency, heavy rainfall or snowfall has been predicted over Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and

Uttarakhand. Light intensity rain/drizzle has been predicted over parts of Uttar Pradesh. The met department has said that the national capital recorded nearly 70 mm of rainfall in January this year, the highest in the month in the last 32 years. IMD has said that fairly widespread/widespread light/moderate rainfall accompanied with isolated thunderstorm/lightning/hailstorm is very likely over Punjab, Haryana-Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar

Pradesh. Meanwhile, a cold wave also prevailed in Uttar Pradesh Kanpur. People were seen comforting themselves around bonfires. The met department said that dense fog prevailed in isolated pockets over East Uttar Pradesh. Several parts of Jammu and Kashmir also received fresh snowfall. Because of the prevailing weather conditions, at least 13 trains are running late and therefore arriving late in Delhi.

## GLOBAL CONDITIONS IDEAL FOR MORE COVID VARIANTS TO EMERGE: WHO

**'COVID HAS STILL GOT A 'LONG, LONG WAY' TO GO'**

**New Delhi:** Covid has still got a "long, long way" to go and is "still very serious" despite some optimism the end is in sight in Europe, the World Health Organisation's special envoy on the virus said, Sky News reported. Dr David Nabarro said "it's as though we're just passing the halfway mark on a marathon" and it is still not clear how long it will take to reach the end because of the way coronavirus "challenges and surprises", the report said. He also criticised politicians and those who continue to make "amazing predictions" claiming Covid should be treated like the flu - while the WHO has said global governments "should not suggest to people" that the "virus has suddenly got incredibly weak". Covid is a "new virus, and we must go on treating it as though it is full of surprises, very nasty and rather cunning," he warned, Sky News reported.

It's true that we will be living with Covid for the foreseeable future. It is dangerous to assume that Omicron will be the last variant, or that we are in the endgame. On the contrary, globally the conditions are ideal for more variants to emerge, the world cannot "gamble on a virus whose evolution we cannot control or predict."



**IS OMICRON SUBVARIANT BA.2 MORE TRANSMISSIBLE?**

**Brussels:** Even as Omicron has been showing signs of peaking, some European countries are seeing the rise of Omicron subvariant BA.2, sparking concern among the scientific community. The subvariant BA.2, dubbed with the moniker "Stealth Omicron," appears to be gaining ground in certain parts of the world, including Denmark and the UK, Euronews reported. It is rapidly outpacing other Omicron subvariants, and sparking fears that a more transmissible strain of Covid is actively spreading through the community. The UK Health Security Agency, recently, designated the BA.2 as a variant under investigation. "53 sequences of the BA.2 sub-lineage of Omicron had been identified in the United Kingdom," it said in a statement. Omicron, which is also referred to as B.1.1.529, has three main substrains, BA.1, BA.2, and BA.3, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Up until now, it has been BA.1 that has been dominating with the WHO estimating it makes up a large majority of all Omicron cases. However, in some places, the BA.2 has begun to spread faster, the report said.

Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Omicron, which was first identified in late November, has spread to 171 countries. More than 80 million cases of the highly contagious variant have been reported to WHO, more than the Covid cases reported in the whole of 2020, he said.

However, he noted that the "exploration in cases" has so far "not been matched by a surge in deaths". Ghebreyesus said that the pandemic is not going to end, rather new variants will emerge. He noted that the world must learn to live with it, which doesn't "mean that we give

**INDIA LOGS 3.06L COVID CASES**

**New Delhi:** India has registered a substantial decline in the Covid-19 cases with 3,06,064 new infections surfacing in past 24 hours, as per the Health and Family Welfare Ministry data on Monday. In the same period, a total of 439 deaths were reported pushing the total fatality count to 4,89,848. Meanwhile, the active caseload has jumped to 22,49,335 which constitute 5.69 per cent of the country's total positive cases.

this virus a free ride". He also recommended strong clinical management, equitable access to diagnostics, oxygen and antivirals at the point of care; boosting of testing and sequencing rates globally to track the virus closely, and monitor the emergence of new variants.



## Air India divestment set to take place on Thursday

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The divestment of national carrier Air India will take place on Thursday (January 27). In a communication to the airlines employees, a senior company official wrote: "The divestment of Air India is now decided to be on January 27, 2022. "The closing balance sheet as on January 20 has to be provided today, i.e., January 24, so that it can be reviewed by Tatas and any changes can be effected on Wednesday." The communication, which was reviewed by correspondent, was sent to the employees by Director of Finance, Vinod Hejmadi. The communication further read: "The next three days will be hectic for our department and I request all of you to give your best in these last three-four days before we get divested. We may have to work till late in the night to complete the task given to us." Last month, the Competition Commission of India approved the acquisition of Air India, Air India Express and Air India SATS Airport Services by Talace,

which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tata Sons.

The acquisition envisaged 100 per cent equity share capital of Air India and Air India Express, and 50 per cent for that of Air India SATS Airport Services by Talace.

The airline, along with AIXL, is primarily engaged in the business of providing domestic and international scheduled air passenger transport service, along with air cargo transport service.

Air India SATS Airport Services is engaged in the business of providing ground handling services at Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mangaluru and Thiruvananthapuram airports, and cargo handling services at Bengaluru airport.

Tata Sons' subsidiary Talace had emerged as the highest bidder for the national carrier under the divestment process.

It had quoted an enterprise value of Rs 18,000 crore for 100 per cent equity shareholding of the Centre in Air India along with that of Air India Express and AISATS.

On its part, the Centre had stipulated a reserve price of Rs 12,906 crore.

**RECEIVED REQUEST FROM PAK PM TO TAKE SIDHU IN MY CABINET: AMARINDER**



**New Delhi:** Former Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh on Monday said that he received a request from Pakistan Prime Minister to take Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu in his cabinet. Amarinder Singh made this disclosure

while addressing a joint press conference with BJP chief J.P. Nadda and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa's Shiromani Akali Dal (Sanyukt) here. Singh called Sidhu a totally incompetent, incapable and useless man as a minister. "I removed Sidhu from my cabinet because that man is totally incompetent, incapable and totally useless. Sidhu was looking after local self-government. For 70 days he did not complete a file. I called him a few times and offered to give him more power if he wanted, which Sidhu denied," Singh said. "After two or three weeks, I got a message from somebody whom we both (Sidhu and Singh) knew, saying that he (Pakistan Prime Minister) requested me to include Sidhu in my government and remove if it doesn't work," Singh said. Talking about the message he received, Singh said, "Message was that the Pakistan Prime minister has sent a request that if you can take Sidhu in your cabinet he will be grateful. He (Sidhu) is an old friend of mine (Pakistan Prime Minister) and if he doesn't work then you can remove him."

**DELHI COURT ORDERS FRAMING OF SEDITION CHARGE AGAINST SHARJEEL IMAM**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Court on Monday ordered the framing of sedition among other charges against JNU scholar and activist Sharjeel Imam in a 2019 case, in which he allegedly delivered an inflammatory speech inciting violence at Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh and Jamia area in the national capital during the CAA-NRC protests in 2019.



Additional sessions judge Amitabh Rawat framed the charges under sections 124A (sedition), 153A (Promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence), 153B (Imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration), Section 13 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, and 505 of IPC, which deals with statements related to public order.

**Bank servers hacked in Hyd, Rs 12 crore transferred**

**Hyderabad:** Cyber criminals hacked the servers of the A.P. Mahesh Cooperative Urban Bank and allegedly transferred over Rs 12 crore to different accounts. The cyber crime wing of Hyderabad police registered a case and took up investigation on Monday after the bank officials lodged a complaint. Some persons hacked into the servers of the bank and transferred the huge amounts to about 100 different bank accounts. The bank officials lodged a complaint

with the police after the fraud came to light during internal verification. A police team visited the main branch of the bank to launch the probe. The team gathered details of the cyber security system of the bank. With its headquarters in Hyderabad, Mahesh Bank has 45 branches across four states. In 2018, hackers had siphoned off Rs 94 crore from Pune-based Cosmos Bank, India's second largest cooperative bank, by cloning thousands of credit cards.

## Measures to widen tax base could be focus area in Union Budget

It is expected that against contraction in revenues, increase in expenditures could collectively revive the aggregate demand in the economy. This could lead to a high growth in the near future, henceforth, reducing the fiscal deficit (estimated to be 6.8 per cent in 2021-22) both in absolute terms and as a percentage of GDP.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The decline in the tax-GDP ratio over the years and declining share of direct taxes in total tax revenue, clearly suggest that the Central government should emphasize in the Union Budget 2022-23 on substantially improving the tax revenue, Primus Research said in a note.

The policies regarding 'tax effort' could be designed through various ways such as, rationalising tax rates, policies regarding widening tax base and net, and improving tax compliance and tax administration.

This process would have enormous implications on ameliorating economic growth, deficit (in both the absolute term and as per cent to GDP) would come down.

It added that the Budget for FY 2022 should continue to provide more support on the demand side than the supply side by reviving the informal sector and MSMEs.

In this regard, it is expected that central government would re-assess its ministry-wise allocations, and increase spending on social and economic sectors to boost aggregate demand in the economy.



# SC JUNKS PLEA FOR CLARIFICATION ON ITS ORDER ON SHAHEEN BAGH PROTESTS

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi  
The Supreme Court on Monday declined to entertain an application seeking clarification on its judgement of October 7, 2020, in which the top court had said that public roads can't be blocked indefinitely. The apex court had passed the order in connection with a road blockade by protesters at Shaheen Bagh, against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and M.M. Sundresh told the intervenor's counsel that the issue is already over, and wondered what clarification is sought on the judgment. "The judgment speaks for itself", noted the bench, adding that no clarification is necessary. The counsel, representing an intervenor, sought a short adjournment on the ground that the arguing counsel is not well. The bench said: "such applications are not maintainable". The top court reiterated that judgment has already been passed and it will not entertain applications in already disposed of matter. The top court judgment had come on a petition filed by advocate Amit Sahni, where it held that public roads and spaces can't be occupied in an indefinite manner for protests, causing inconvenience to the people. The top court had observed that demonstrations expressing dissent must be organised at designated places only.



Sahni had sought removal of the protesters, who had occupied a public road at Shaheen Bagh. The protesters later moved out of the site in the backdrop of Covid pandemic.

## SC ALLOWS PETITIONER TO FILE REJOINER ON GOVT'S RESPONSE

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court on Monday allowed the petitioner, seeking probe into recent communal violence in Tripura, to file a rejoinder to the state government's response, which urged the court to dismiss the plea. Advocate Prashant Bhushan, representing advocate Ehtesham Hashmi, submitted before a bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud that "C" grade TV channels indulge in such whataboutery, but this is not expected from a state government in such a sensitive case of communal violence. The Tripura government, in an affidavit, had asked why public-spirited citizens who filed PIL, were silent on West Bengal violence. Citing the state's response, Bhushan said this does not show it in a good light. After hearing arguments, the bench, also comprising Justice Dinesh Maheshwari, asked the petitioner to give their rejoinder in the matter and scheduled the matter for further hearing on January 31. The Tripura government said: "No individuals or group of individuals professionally functioning as public-spirited persons can selectively invoke the extraordinary jurisdiction of this court to achieve some apparent but undisclosed motive." It also claimed that allegations against it started with planted and pre-planned articles in tabloids. The state government further added that these people were selectively outraged with it, though they remained silent on large-scale post-poll violence, which occurred in West Bengal.

## 104 to 135 militants waiting across LoC to sneak in: BSF



SRINAGAR | Agencies

About 104 to 135 militants are ready to sneak into the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC), Raja Babu Singh, Inspector General (IG) of Border Security Force (BSF) said on Monday. The IG BSF said that post ceasefire agreement last year, the overall situation on Kashmir LoC remained peaceful, but the fresh intelligence inputs suggest that 104 to 135 militants are ready to sneak into this side. "Some guides have crossed over to the other side of LoC to facilitate the infiltration of the waiting militants. Their movement is being tracked and their families are under constant watch of security agencies," the IG said while addressing the annual conference at the BSF headquarters

in Humhama on the outskirts of Srinagar city. The IG BSF Kashmir Frontier said, "Our inputs suggest that there are 104 to 135 militants at the launch pads who are ready to infiltrate into this side". "Their movement is being tracked. The primary job of the guide is to bring groups of militants along", he said. Asked about the drone threats on LoC, the IG BSF said that it guards 96 kms of LoC in Kashmir and the drone threat was real. "We are procuring our own drones to counter the drone threat. Besides, a series of measures are in place to deal with drone threats," he said. He said that last year 17.3 kg heroin worth Rs 88 crore was seized on the LoC by BSF and all efforts are being made to foil bids aimed at transporting narcotics from LoC.

## MASSIVE PROTEST IN PATNA, ARRAH AGAINST RRB EXAM MOVE, RAIL TRACKS BLOCKED

**Patna:** Thousands of aspiring candidates of the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) blocked the Kolkata-New Delhi main railway line at Rajendra Nagar terminal in Patna and Arrah district on Monday evening to protest its move to have two exams. The agitating students went on the tracks and stopped the passage of various trains including Rajendra Nagar-New Delhi Tejas Rajdhani express, the Sampurna Kranti express, South Bihar express and many more. A large number of trains were diverted towards Gaya and Patliputra rail sections to go towards Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Guwahati and other parts of north Bihar. "There was only one examination mentioned in the RRB notification 2019. Now, RRB has issued fresh notifications where it mentioned two examinations. Many of the selected candidates are disqualified in the second examination. This is complete cheating by RRB. Its officials are playing with the futures of the students," said Randhir Sahay, a student, protesting at Rajendra Nagar Terminal, Patna. Another student Rohan Rajput said: "We will not vacate railway tracks unless and until the Railway Minister announces one examination for Group-D." Due to massive protests, a large number of police of Patna and Bhojpur reached at Rajendra Nagar Terminal and Arrah junction respectively and carried out a baton-charge to disperse the protesters. They also fired tear shells. Still, the aspirants sat on the track and had not left till late evening.

## Patna police crack jewellery shop robbery case, arrest five



PATNA | Agencies

Patna police managed to crack the case of the sensational jewellery heist in the Bihar capital with the arrest of five accused, including the son of a jewellery shop owner, officials said on Monday. Five persons executed the broad daylight robbery in Bakarganj wholesale market on Friday, and had codenamed their operation "Ek Glass Pani". Patna SSP Manavjeet Singh Dhillon said: "One of the accused was already arrested on the day of crime. He revealed the name of the other accused. All of them are natives of Jehanabad and one of them is a son of jewellers based in

Jehanabad." The accused are identified as Nitesh Prasad, the kingpin of the gang and son of Ranjeet Prasad who is an owner of Raj Laxmi Jewellers of Jehanabad. The other accused are Akash Ojha, Sonu Kumar, and Raju Kewat. Rajesh Ram alias Sadhu was arrested with the help of local traders on the day of the incident on Friday. All are professional robbers and have served jail terms in the past. The accused committed the robbery in a successful manner but when they were fleeing from the spot, alert traders of Bakarganj pelted stones and bricks on them, lead to Rajesh Rai being injured and overpowered. He was later on handed over to the police.

## G-23 leaders Azad, Hooda & Raj Babbar find place in Cong star campaigners' list

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Congress on Monday released a list of star campaigners for the first phase of elections in Uttar Pradesh and the G-23 group leaders have found a place in the list, including former J&K Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad. Others in the list from G-23 are former Chief Minister of Haryana Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Raj Babbar, former state Congress President. But Kapil Sibal, who is an MP from the state, has not been given importance. Azad and Sibal were the leaders who raised voice against the party leadership and demanded elections, which are now an ongoing process with membership drive. The list also has Sonia Gandhi, Manmohan Singh, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. From the younger lot Hardik Patel and Kanhaiya Kumar have found place with Sachin Pilot and Deepender Singh Hooda. Varsha Gaekwad, Supriya Shrinete and Praneeti Shinde are among the young women leaders who have been placed in the list with Chief Ministers Bhupesh Baghel and Ashok Gehlot.



The Congress has named 66 women out of the declared of 166 candidates, which is marginally higher than the 40 per cent as promised by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra party General Secretary and In-charge UP. Last week the party had declared the names of 125 candidates in which 50 are women, constituting 40 per

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

## BANK SERVERS HACKED IN HYD, RS 12 CRORE TRANSFERRED

**Hyderabad:** Cyber criminals hacked the servers of the A.P. Mahesh Cooperative Urban Bank and allegedly transferred over Rs 12 crore to different accounts. The cyber crime wing of Hyderabad police registered a case and took up investigation on Monday after the bank officials lodged a complaint. Some persons hacked into the servers of the bank and transferred the huge amounts to about 100 different bank accounts. The bank officials lodged a complaint with the police after the fraud came to light during internal verification. A police team visited the main branch of the bank to launch the probe. The team gathered details of the cyber security system of the bank.

## RJD leader slams Nitish govt over Bihar's law and order

Patna | Agencies

RJD vice president Shivanand Tiwari criticised Nitish Kumar government over rise in crime in Bihar. Reacting to the loot in a jewellery shop in Patna's Bakarganj on Friday, Tiwari said that such a loot had not happened in Patna in the past. "Crime rate in Bihar has reached to the highest level but Nitish Kumar and officials of his government are busy in the search of liquor. People are laughing when they see that senior officials in the rank of chief secretary and DGP in Bihar are searching for liquor bottles," Tiwari said. "The entire police and civil administration of Bihar are in the search of liquor in the state. Every time, when a liquor related incident comes to light, they use to suspend sub-inspectors or SHOs but they never held any police officer accountable for other heinous crimes like murder, gang rape, rape and loot. For Nitish Kumar, liquor consumption is the only crime in the state," he said.



"The awareness policies to avoid consumption of liquor not effective in the state too. The local police, on the ground, either having links with mafias or are scared of their liquor operations," Tiwari said.

## Charge sheet filed against SP, BSP leaders in gang-rape case

Lalitpur (UP) | Agencies

The Lalitpur police have filed a charge sheet against former district presidents of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj (BSP), among others, in connection with the alleged gangrape of a 17-year-old girl. The teenager had registered a police complaint in October last year, alleging that she had been sexually assaulted for over four years. Her father, who used to run a transport business, is among 10 family members booked for the alleged crime. "On the basis of the evidence collected, we filed a charge sheet recently against 19 persons, including the girl's father and local political leaders. Except for two accused, 17 persons are lodged in jail," a sen-



ior police officer said. The police said the teenager came to the police station along with her mother on October 12 to file the complaint. According to the police, she alleged that her father raped her when she was 14 years old after forcibly showing her pornographic videos. He then allegedly started taking her to different hotels and fields where multiple people raped her. The girl told the police her father had threatened her to remain mum.

## TN FISHERMEN THREATEN TO GIVE UP CITIZENSHIP IF LANKAN CAPTIVES NOT FREED

**Chennai:** Fishermen from Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu have threatened to relinquish all documents relating to Indian citizenship by February 2 if the union government fails to bring back the fishermen who are languishing in Sri Lankan jails for crossing International Marine Boundary Line (IMBL). The fishermen also demanded the Central government to stop the Sri Lankan fisheries department from auctioning the fishing boats of Tamil Nadu fishermen that were seized by the Lankan Navy between 2015 and 2018. A meeting held by All Mechanised Boats Fishermen associations on Monday condemned the move of the Sri Lankan authorities to auction the fishing boats of Indian fishermen seized by the Lankans for crossing the IMBL.

## 17-YR-OLD DIES AFTER ALLEGED POLICE TORTURE IN UP

LAKHIMPUR KHERI | Agencies

A 17-year-old boy, who was allegedly beaten mercilessly by his uncle and three cops inside a police outpost on suspicion of mobile theft, died at a hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri. Three policemen, including an office in charge of the outpost, have been suspended. The boy's family alleged that cops were "directly involved in the assault". Lakhimpur Kheri SSP Sanjeev Suman said: "We are investigating the complaint against the policemen and no one will be spared if found guilty." A video, now viral on social media, has the boy's family showing external injuries on his body to a senior policeman. Palia Circle Officer (CO), Sanjay Nath Tiwari said: "The post-mortem will be conducted on Monday and the report will help us to ascertain the reason of death." "The boy's family has filed two complaints and we have registered an FIR under section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of IPC against his uncle Ram Bahadur and neighbour



beaten mercilessly by cops and my uncle. They brought him home and when his condition deteriorated, he was admitted to a hospital in Palia town where he succumbed during treatment." The boy was the only son of farmer Laxmi Ram and youngest amongst four siblings. On January 17, the mobile phone of his cousin went "missing" and his uncle Ram Bahadur lodged a police complaint and the cops reached the house on January 19 and took him to Khajuriya police outpost where the incident took place. The incident comes three months after another alleged custodial death in Kasganj where Mohammad Altaf, 22, who was held by police for "kidnapping" a minor Hindu girl, was later found "hanging" from a tap inside a washroom in the lockup. The missing girl turned out to be an adult and later told police that she was never kidnapped. In another such incident, a sanitation worker, Arun Valmiki, who was held by police for allegedly stealing Rs 25 lakh from the strong room of Jagdishpura police station, had died in police custody.

## 46% of girls under 15 anaemic in India: Report

Team Absolute | New Delhi

About 46 per cent of girls in India under the age of 15 are anaemic, according to a report released on Monday on the National Girl Child Day, annually observed on January 24 to raise awareness to promote the rights, education, health, and nutrition of the girl child across the country. The findings by SRL Diagnostics is based on a total of 8,57,003 haemoglobin tests conducted in the past 7 years, between January 2015 and November 2021. The study shows that 63 per cent of all samples, across all age groups of women, tested positive for anaemia. But in girls less than 15 years, the percentage of samples positive for anaemia was 46 per cent. Of these, 13 per cent were severely anaemic. Further, the study also showed that Assam is the worst affected with 72 per cent of married women being anaemic, followed by Haryana (69.7 per cent) and Jharkhand (68.4



per cent). Globally, anaemia affects 1.62 billion people, which corresponds to 24.8 per cent of the population. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-(III), more than half of women in India (55 per cent) have anaemia. Anaemia is a condition in which there is a decreased number of circulating red blood cells and/or haemoglobin contained therein and is the most prevalent nutritional deficiency disorder in the world.



# NCP WELCOMES THACKERAY AT NATIONAL LEVEL TO FIGHT BJP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A day after Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said that Shiv Sena has wasted 25 years with BJP, the NCP which is an alliance partner in the state, has welcomed him to the national secular front and said he would be helpful in fighting the BJP. Majeed Memon, NCP leader said, "If Maharashtra CM believes 'Hindutva' as a way of life where there is no religious discrimination and does not agree with what Dharam sansad proclaims, he would be welcome in secular confederation to fight BJP at national level." The MVA which is running the government in Maharashtra has been critical to the BJP and the party leader Nawab Malik too



echoed the line and alleged that BJP wants to finish the party which allies with them and it's good to have pride in their own religion but should not have hatred towards others. The MVA has Shiv Sena, Congress and the NCP in the government but the alliance could not be repeated in Goa despite efforts from Sena and NCP as Congress did not listen for alliance call, but NCP's acknowledgement of

Shiv Sena outside Maharashtra could be a bigger political move to hit BJP on hindutva. But the Congress will have to rethink its strategy as it may be difficult for the grand old party to clarify Shiv Sena's past work and ideology. Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray, said he will step out and go across the state and show the power of Shiv Sena. He said the party nurtured the BJP for 25 years and they tried to finish Sena. He also said that BJP's Hindutva is hollow and Shiv Sena has not left Hindutva. He also said that BJP was opposed to emergency but is now creating situation like that.

# SHARAD PAWAR TESTS COVID POSITIVE

Mumbai: Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar

announced that he has tested Covid-19 positive on Monday, and has started the necessary treatment. "I have tested Covid positive, but there is no cause for concern. I am following the treatment as suggested by my doctor," said the 81-year-old leader. He called upon all who had been in contact with him in the past few days to get themselves tested, and take all necessary precautions. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called up Pawar to enquire about his health. "I am thankful to his (PM's) concern and good wishes," acknowledged the NCP supremo. Earlier this month Pawar's daughter and NCP MP Supriya Sule and her husband had also tested Covid positive and later recovered.



# Sena took BJP from bottom to top: Sanjay Raut

► CHIEF MINISTER AND SHIV SENA CHIEF UDDHAV THACKERAY ON SUNDAY SAID THAT HIS PARTY "WASTED" 25 YEARS BEING IN AN ALLIANCE WITH THE BJP, AND THOUGH SENNA HAS LEFT THE SAFFRON CAMP'S SIDE, IT HASN'T LEFT HINDUTVA.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Monday doubled up the party's attack on former ally Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), saying that it took the saffron camp from

"bottom to the top" in Maharashtra. In reference to Shiv Sena supremo and Maharashtra chief minister's recent "wasted 25 years with the BJP" jibe, Raut said that following the Babri Masjid incident in Uttar Pradesh's Ayodhya, there was a "Shiv Sena wave in northern India. If we had fought polls at that time, there would have been our (Shiv Sena's) PM in [the] country but we left it for them." The Shiv Sena leader further stated that the saffron party only

"used Hindutva" for power. Thackeray further stated that Shiv Sena backed the BJP "wholeheartedly" to allow the latter to fulfil their "national ambitions." However, the understanding the two parties had, the CM said, about the BJP going national and Sena leading in Maharashtra was ruined. "We were betrayed and attempts were made to destroy us in our home. So, we had to hit back," Thackeray said, adding that the Sena "wasted" 25 years being an ally of the BJP. The Shiv Sena and the BJP parted ways after the 2019 Maharashtra assembly elections owing to which President's Rule was imposed in the western state for the third time in its history of existence. Later, the Sena joined hands with the Indian National Congress (INC) and the NCP to form the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, which currently rules the state.

# NCP SUPPORTS THACKERAY OVER HIS COMMENTS ON HINDUTVA

► IN HIS ADDRESS TO SHIV SAINIKS ON SUNDAY, WHICH WAS ALSO THE BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS FATHER AND PARTY FOUNDER BAL THACKERAY, MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER UDDHAV THACKERAY SAID THE SENNA HAS LEFT THE BJP AND NOT HINDUTVA.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Backing Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray for his comments on Hindutva, the NCP on Monday said everyone should be proud of the religion they profess, but it is wrong to spread hatred in its name and the Shiv Sena president has given the same mes-

sage. In his address to Shiv Sainiks on Sunday, which was also the birth anniversary of his father and party founder Bal Thackeray, the chief minister said the Sena has left the BJP and

not Hindutva. The Chief Minister had also said, "I believe that BJP's opportunistic Hindutva is only for power. The Shiv Sena had aligned with the BJP as it

wanted power for Hindutva. The Sena never used Hindutva for the sake of power." Reacting to the comments, state minister and NCP's chief spokesperson Nawab Malik said, "Everyone should be proud of their religion, but it is harmful if there is hatred against others." "The Shiv Sena is trying to say the same thing that one must be proud of their religion and propagate it, but it is wrong to spread hatred against others. We think Uddhav Thackeray ji has said the same thing," said Malik, whose party shares power with the Shiv Sena and Congress in Maharashtra. Hitting out at the Election Commission, Malik said seeking votes in the name of religion is a violation of the Code of Conduct. "But, since the last seven-eight years, the Election Commission has been mum when votes are being canvassed in the name of religion. This is the helplessness of the Election Commission. We feel the poll body should think about it or else it will lose its credibility," he said. Five states Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur - are going to polls starting next month.

# 'Stop lecturing us:' BJP tells Shiv Sena after Maharashtra CM Thackeray's 'Hindutva' remark

BJP leaders remarks came hours after Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday said that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has used Hindutva for power and asserted that it will not leave Hindutva.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The BJP on Monday reacted sharply to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's remark that the saffron party uses 'Hindutva' for power and reminded the latter to introspect whether Shiv Sena is following late Bal Thackeray's ideology. "Before lecturing on Hindutva, Uddhav Thackeray

should introspect whether Shiv Sena is following late Bal Thackeray's ideology, who had said that in politics and life his party will never join Congress, & if such circumstances arise, he would prefer locking party (office)," Ram Kadam of the BJP said. Former Maharashtra chief minister and state BJP chief Devendra Fadnis hit back at the Sena, saying that the latter has become "number four" party in the state. He added that till the time the

Sena was the saffron party's ally, it used to be either "number 1 or 2." "I want to remind them that their party (Shiv Sena) was not born at a time when BJP corporator was there in Mumbai," Fadnis said. The BJP leaders remarks came hours after Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday said that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has used Hindutva for power and asserted that it will not leave Hindutva.

# After unseasonal rain, Mumbai under a thick haze layer

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A day after a western disturbance and cyclonic circulation over Rajasthan brought unseasonal rains it, Mumbai on Sunday had a thick layer of haze settled over it. According to weather experts, the haze was attributed to "dust-raising winds", brought as a result of the same Western Disturbance which caused Saturday's rains and a drop in Sunday's temperature. It was further said that since everybody was wearing mask due to Covid-19, no other precautions were required. "This haze consists of mainly sand because it originates from the Middle East where the conditions are sandier. It cannot be defined as smog, which comprises a more complex mixture of pollutants," said Gufran Beig, Project Director, SAFAR. The Weather Department



said that the dust winds phenomenon is going to last for Sunda only, but again from Monday onwards, there is a possibility of a dip in temperature in Maharashtra for the next few days. The maximum temperature of Mumbai's Santacruz stood at 23.8 degrees Celsius, which is lowest in the last 10 years. The dip in temperature was a result of the cloudy sky over north Konkan. It brought day time temperatures to as low as 23-24 degrees Celsius, which is the lowest maximum temperature in the last 10 years or maybe more, for the month of January.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Saturday said that after affecting normal life in Karachi, a massive dust storm headed towards Gujarat and south Rajasthan on Saturday evening and it may continue to have an effect till next 12 hours. Karachi was caught off guard on Saturday morning when a dust storm that travelled from Pakistan's west disturbed the normal life there with visibility reduced to less than or about 500 metres. "Saurashtra coast has been getting dust rising winds from afternoon. Dwaraka station reported 400 m visibility, at Porbandar, wind speed was more than 10 km per hour with visibility of less than 1 km," the IMD said. Winds carrying dust blew from south Pakistan areas and adjoining the Arabian Sea towards Kutch and Saurashtra towards evening.

Stay indoors and avoid long walks, SAFAR said in its health advisory as Pune's air quality slipped to the 'very poor' category.

Team Absolute | Pune

Pune's air quality on Monday was worse than that of Delhi as the city's Air Quality Index (AQI) soared to 374 and remained in the 'red' category of 'very poor', data showed. In one of the rare instances, the city has been shrouded by a strong dust storm that originated from Saudi Arabia and continued to affect the city on Monday as well. Mumbai and the northern Konkan regions, too, have been badly affected by this passing storm for the past two days. Parts of Delhi also are presently under the influence of this storm. "It is very rare that Pune's air quality has slipped to 'very poor' category as normally it remains either in satisfactory (AQI below 100) or moderate (AQI between 100 and 200). The dust



storm continues to prevail over Maharashtra and Gujarat on Monday," said BS Murty, senior scientist at the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research (SAFAR) at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune. Gujarat and Maharashtra are the worst affected because of the north-westerly direction of the winds. The situation in Mumbai and Pune will improve only after 5.30 pm on

Monday when the winds are likely to change their direction, align in the northeasterly fashion and will shift towards the Arabian Sea instead, added Murty. "From Tuesday onwards, the air quality could see a gradual improvement. Still, local weather conditions will have an influence," he said. Low temperatures and low convection are also adding to the overall poor air. Experts said the situation will continue for at least two to

three days before returning to normal in Pune, Mumbai and neighbourhood areas. Particulate Matter (PM) 10 and PM2.5 recorded across Shivajinagar, Hadapsar, Bhosari, Bhumkar Chowk, Nigdi, Kothrud and Lohegaon ranged between 200 and 300 or between 'poor' and 'very poor' categories. Pashan remained severely affected with PM10 recorded at 418 and PM2.5 at 408 on Monday-categorised as 'very poor'. As Pune's air quality deteriorated further on Monday, many residents complained of a runny nose, itchy eyes and throat. The SAFAR health advisory issued by the IITM warned residents from stepping out unless absolutely necessary. If they need to go out they must wear N95 masks or P-100 respirators, according to the advisory. Short walks instead of jogging or running have been advised on Monday. Those venturing out must return indoors at the earliest if they develop wheezing, persistent coughing or are facing difficulty in breathing or fatigue, the advisory also said. Asthmatics and those with compromised respiration have been asked to keep energy medicines handy.

# Stamp duty cut spurs huge property sales in MMR, shows study

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The decision taken by the Maharashtra government in September 2020 to slash stamp duty on residential properties from 5 per cent to 2 per cent has given a big boost to property sales in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), including luxury and affordable segments, an industry study released on Monday said. The year 2021 witnessed a sale of 2,42,000 units (homes) -- a sharp increase of 53 per cent compared to 2020, and a 20 per cent jump over 2019, said the research report by CREDAI-MCHI, Colliers and CRE Matrix. The state's move, coupled with reduced home loan rates, nearly stable prices and other factors have proved a boon for the realty industry in the past 15 months, said the study. CREDAI-MCHI Incoming President Boman Irani said that a series of positive actions by Maharashtra government ensured that the realty sector and the overall economy got a boost, doubling the number of flats sold. "Residential flats worth around Rs 1.30 lakh crore were sold between October 2020 and March 2021, in turn leading to an indirect collection of GST, of which the state received 9 per cent on the construction costs and another 2.5 per cent on the apartments' value," said Irani, terming it as a win-win situation for all. He said the rationalisation of charges/taxes is resulting in total growth and the overall services and employment industry will also benefit from this spillover effect. As per the report, Central Mumbai comprising Dadar-Lower Parel-Worli-Sewri-Mahim-Matunga-Parel-Wadala saw the highest revival in 2021 with registrations rising 93 per cent from 2019 and 71 per cent as compared to 2020.



Adjoining Thane accounted for the highest number of registrations with 42 per cent share, and highest stamp duty collection, said the report.

"The MMR residential market has shown a revival. New launches also rose 3 per cent in 2021 as developers launched projects to avail the discount premium while the market was on an uptick," said Colliers CEO and Managing Director, Ramesh Nair. He said if the demand persists in a similar trend led by the huge propensity to purchase, the market will experience a better demand-supply equilibrium this year, with overall 2-5 per cent increase in prices in the latter half of 2022. The state government's collections swelled on spurring sales despite rate cuts and discounts leading to 81 per cent higher stamp duty collections YoY, almost touching 2019 levels. It benefited even the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) which collected premiums worth over Rs 11,000 crore by December 2021, compared to its average collection of Rs 3,500-4,000 crore in the past 10 years. Simultaneously, in 2020-2021, property tax collections hit a 10-year high -- Rs 5,135 crore or 98 per cent of the targets -- which is the second biggest source of BMC's revenues after GST. Affordable housing and lower-mid segments sales also saw a fillip with registrations in 2021, up by 22 per cent compared to 2019, and accounting for 39 per cent of the total sales, with deals mainly in Thane, followed by the Western suburbs. The demand for the luxury housing segment -- for residential properties worth more than Rs 3 crore -- returned after several years with sales doubling in 2021 compared to 2019, and accounting for the highest share of 28 per cent in the past three years, with pickups in Central Mumbai and Western suburbs, said the research report.



## EDITOR'S SPECS

## Kashmiri Handicrafts in European markets

Jammu and Kashmir is ready to showcase its potential for a necessary boost to the handicrafts sector in the post-pandemic world. Germany is the largest consumer of Kashmiri carpets and in addition imports Chain Stitch, Papier-mache, and Walnut furniture from Kashmir. The country's cold winters make it an ideal destination for the use of Kashmiri shawls, rugs and carpets. This liaison will also help to build a community of art lovers - handicraft importers of Germany with exporters from Kashmir - and result in shared knowledge pool to achieve master craftsmanship and connect with art connoisseurs through digital platforms, ensuring long term sustainability for arts like Papier-mache, Sozni, Kani shawl, basket weaving, Khatamband, wood carving, silver and copper carving, carpet weaving, leather, silk and Pashmina weaving amongst other crafts that Kashmir is celebrated for in German markets. Carpets in the historical backdrop of Kashmir go back to the time of the renowned Sufi Saint, Hazrat Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (1341-1385 AD) of Persia. When he came to Kashmir, he carried alongside him exceptionally talented craftsmen and laid the base for the cottage industry in Kashmir. Kashmiri carpets are considered to be the finest carpets in the world second only to Persian carpets. In the previous years, 'Made in Kashmir' fairs, culture, crafts and handicrafts shows and exhibitions organized by Safeways Exhibitions in collaboration with the Impact International, a Germany-based company have also proven beneficial. With promising propositions from various parties Kashmir art exporters are expecting booming sales in 2022 after witnessing a sluggish market for the last few years. This season both production and conceptualisation of new designs is being undertaken which will aid the sales and earn international recognition. Participation of Kashmir art contributors will also be ensured at Asia's largest gifts and handicrafts fair held biannually and organised by Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH).

# NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY GO TOGETHER

DC Pathak

India got its Independence some 75 years ago but it still looks like a 'nation in making', judging from the in-ter-mine debate on 'the idea of India', narratives built on the charges of 'majoritarianism' and abandonment of 'secularism' against the Narendra Modi government and perpetuation of anti-India lobbies that deprecated the very concept of 'patriotism' -- the sentiment fostered by the Indian Constitution itself when it commended respect for National Flag and National Anthem.

All this is happening because of injection of 'party politics' in the interpretation of nationalism and the imparting of 'communal tint' in the practice of known democratic norms. This needs elaboration. It was in October 1945 -- after the Nazis had already surrendered in May, effectively ending the Second World War -- when the United Nations was established with the express aim of not letting another war inflict the world, and encouraging sovereign nation states to exist in harmony with commitment to global peace.

It was universally accepted that democracy was the best form of internal governance for a nation -- big or small -- and that any international disputes would better be resolved through a UN mediation. The Cold War soon setting in because of the tense ideological and military divide between the two rival Superpowers representing International Communism and Western Capitalism, did not take away from the merit of democracy over dictatorship as a system of governance.

Independent India began its innings on a note of complete democratic freedom by decreeing 'one man one vote' for election -- abolishing at one stroke distinction of caste, community or gender among citizens -- something that developed democracies of the West would achieve only after lengthy internal struggles.

It is a matter of concern that distorted politics came in the way of

India, the largest democracy in the world, flourishing as a nation state -- even after the lapse of several decades. Divisions of caste, community and region that India inherited as a legacy of the past were going by political parties for vested interests, in clear violation of the Directive Principles of the Constitution pertaining to socio-economic equality, abolition of Untouchability and adoption of a Uniform Civil Code.

India's political parties providing the very substratum of democracy fell for the temptation of appealing to minority sentiments, catering to caste groupings and fomenting regional identity, to gain numbers. The history of Partition kept alive the Hindu-Muslim discord in India, particularly because the Muslim elite and Ulema continued to politically lead the community on the basis of communal identity.

India witnessed communal riots in one sensitive town or the other right till the Eighties, and in the Nineties a new trend arose of organised militancy emerging out of communal divisions -- thanks to the doings of pro-Pak elements in India.

The advent of Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) as an offshoot of Jamaat-e-Islami based at AMU illustrated this. SIMI went on to link up with some Pan-Islamic militant outfits of the Muslim world outside and formed Indian Mujahideen (IM), the self-professed Islamic 'warriors' -- later found involved in acts of serious violence.

Congress, the leading national level party that ruled for long after Independence, succumbed to playing minority politics in elections -- as Lohaites rose with their base among the Backward Castes and there was consolidation of Dalits under separate political banners like the BSP in Uttar Pradesh.

An ascendant BJP criticised the Congress for indulging in 'appeasement' in the name of secularism. In the South, anti-Hindi agitation of mid-Sixties propelled by DMK -- that followed the Dravidian separatist sentiment of Ramaswamy Naicker -- laid the base of a strong regional movement.

Fortunately, the latter did get assimilated in the democratic main-

stream later. Significantly, in what is typically an Indian phenomenon, castes and communities are concentrated in geographical areas -- Jats and Yadavas in UP, Lingayats in Karnataka, and Thevars in Tamilnadu -- converting them into political forces influencing electoral outcome in the concerned territories.

All in all, Indian democracy sustained itself through credible Parliamentary elections held every five years but the growth of nationalism as a builder of the democratic state remained somewhat in the background.

The Constitution had laid strong foundations of a secular democratic state by prescribing adult franchise, equality before law and non-discriminatory economic opportunities for all and totally rejecting the possibility of any national government of India carrying a denominational stamp.

Democracy here was inherently secular and welfare-oriented, without tilting towards any 'ideology'. When in 1976 the Preamble of the Constitution was amended to add the adjectives 'secular' and 'socialist' to the Republic, it was perhaps compelled by the need to redefine India in the days of 'non alignment'. It was also interpreted as a move to claim that the regime was particularly protective of its minority as well as the economically weak.

In reality, secularism was built into the Constitution through the universal adult vote and 'welfare of the masses' was promoted through stipulation of free education, categorisation of the Dalits and Tribes as Scheduled groups and commitment of the regime towards eliminating grave inequalities -- all of that without putting the stamp of 'socialism' on the state.

The Modi government has professed 'development for all', launched special schemes to bring economic benefit to the doors of the ordinary citizens and not interfered with the power of the state government to sternly deal with a case of planned public violence against any individual or group by communally motivated elements.

Equality before law is to be enforced by the states which were



autonomous in matters relating to law and order. Since political parties have viewed incidents of violence and commission of a 'crime', with tinted glasses out of vested interest, a corrective on this should come from the state governments. The Centre being blamed for inadequacy of law and order is itself a politically driven trend.

In a country like India where 'diversity' takes the unhealthy form of divisions of caste, creed and region, the cause of democracy was best served by 'one man one vote' so thoughtfully laid down by the makers of our Constitution.

It was an invitation to the political parties to cut across these divides and reach out to the citizens at large with an appeal that treated the country as one nation.

Universal adult franchise meant that the majority community will return more candidates in spite of its internal splits but to blame a party for indulging in 'majoritarianism' just on the count of numbers that it had secured from one community is untenable particularly when the Constitution prohibits labelling the government with the stamp of 'religion'.

Hindu-Muslim polarisation can get

accentuated if parties flaunt their exclusive claim on the minority votes and what is worse, start depicting the sentiment of 'nationalism' on the ground of 'sensitivities' of the minority. A dangerous upshot of this kind of politics here is that Pakistan is encouraged to fish in our troubled waters. Some sections of the opposition have made 'nationalism' look like a politically illicit word and gone to the extent of justifying refusal to honour the national flag or sing national anthem as an exercise of 'freedom of choice'.

All parties must keep nationalism and national security above politics. Nationalism -- as it is normally understood -- would never detract from the merit of democracy, sovereignty and international peace.

In fact, the cause of both nationalism and security is served well if there was enhancement of awareness of citizens about the external and internal dangers facing the country and about their Constitutional responsibility of safeguarding the nation against them.

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

## international

## KIN OF US EMBASSY STAFF IN UKRAINE ASKED TO LEAVE OVER RUSSIAN THREAT

Washington | Agencies

The US Department of State has ordered the departure of eligible family members of staffers at the from American Embassy in Kiev due to the "continued threat of Russian military action."

In a statement on Sunday, the Department said it "authorised the voluntary departure of US direct hire employees (USDH) and ordered the departure of eligible family members (EFM) from Embassy Kiev due to the continued threat of Russian military action".

It further said that American citizens in Ukraine "should consider departing now using commercial or other privately available transportation options".

"There are reports Russia is planning significant military action against Ukraine. The security conditions, particularly along Ukraine's borders, in Russia-occupied Crimea, and in Russia-controlled eastern Ukraine, are unpredictable and can deteriorate with little notice."

"Demonstrations, which have turned violent at times, regularly occur throughout Ukraine, including in Kiev."

"US citizens in Ukraine should be aware



that Russian military action anywhere in Ukraine would severely impact the US Embassy's ability to provide consular services, including assistance to US citizens in departing Ukraine," the Department's statement added.

In its latest update, the State Department has advised US citizens not to travel to Ukraine "due to the increased threats of Russian military action and Covid-19".

"Exercise increased caution in Ukraine due to crime and civil unrest. Some areas have increased risk," said the advisory.

## SOUTH KOREAN PRESIDENT'S APPROVAL RATING RISES TO 41%: POLL

Seoul: South Korean President Moon Jae-in's approval rating rose 0.7 percentage points to 41 per cent last week, a weekly survey showed on Monday. The negative assessment on Moon's conduct of state affairs shrank 1.6 percentage points to 55.1 per cent, according to the Realmeter survey.

Support for Moon's ruling Democratic Party added 0.6 percentage points to 31.9 per cent last week, reports Xinhua news agency. The main conservative opposition People Power Party won 38.4 per cent of support last week, down 0.6 percentage points from the previous week.

The minor centre-right People's Party garnered an 8.7 per cent of approval score, trailed by the minor centre-left Open Democratic Party with 4.9 per cent and the minor progressive Justice Party with 3.8 per cent. As for the approval rating of presidential candidates, support for the Democratic Party's Lee Jae-myung gained 0.1 percentage points over the week to 36.8 per cent last week.

Support for the People Power Party's Yoon Suk-yeol increased 1.4 percentage points to 42 per cent last week. The country's presidential election is scheduled for March 9.

## Japan to ignore Seoul's objection to push for controversial mine listing

Tokyo | Agencies

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi on Monday said his country will ignore South Korea's objection when deliberating a contentious plan to nominate a gold and silver mine site on Sado Island in Niigata Prefecture for the 2023 Unesco World Heritage list.

"We are not giving any diplomatic consideration to South Korea. We are comprehensively considering within the government what would be most effective in seeking the Unesco World Heritage designation," Xinhua news agency quoted Hayashi as saying. Hayashi's controversial remarks were made at a lower house of parliament session after the South Korean side said it was "deplorable" that Japan was seeking the listing of the mine, where Korean nationals were forcibly subjected to brutal labour during Japan's 1910-1945 colonisation of the Korean Peninsula.

South Korea has demanded that Japan's plan for the site to be nominated for the 2023 World Heritage list be immediately revoked.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, meanwhile, during the same parliamentary session, said, "We place emphasis on issues pertaining to historic understanding. Japan will firmly respond to unjust slanders."



Despite South Korea's objections, the push towards mine listing reportedly gathered momentum among the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) conservative members.

"This is a situation that relates to the state's honour. We should nominate the site in fiscal 2021," Policy chief of the LDP, Sanae Takaichi, said of the matter in parliament.

Last month, the mine was picked as a candidate for submitting a recommendation to Unesco by Japan's Council for Cultural Affairs.

Niigata Prefecture has claimed the mine has "a history of outstanding mining technology development before and after industrialization and became one of the world's largest producers of gold in the 17th century", local media reported.

## BURKINA FASO IMPOSES NATIONWIDE CURFEW AFTER UNREST

Ouagadougou: A nationwide curfew was imposed in Burkina Faso following reports of gunfire in some barracks, according to a decree signed by President Roch Marc Christian Kabore.

Another statement from the minister of national education announced the closure of schools on Monday and Tuesday, reports Xinhua news agency. The curfew imposed from 8.30 p.m. on Sunday night to 5.30 a.m. was imposed hours after gunshots were heard earlier in the morning in barracks in the capital Ouagadougou and other cities.

Burkina Faso's government confirmed the gunfire but denied the information on social media about the army takeover. Defence Minister General Barthelemy Simpre declared on state television that the situation was under control, denying rumours that the President had been detained by soldiers. According to local sources, later in the day, the headquarters of Burkina Faso's ruling party in Ouagadougou was set on fire by protesters.

Internet was partially cut off. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has called for calm and reaffirmed its support for President Kabore.



## Indian-American cop hailed as hero for neutralising gunman who killed officer

New York | Agencies

An Indian-American police officer, who has been on the job for just over six months, is being hailed a hero for rushing to neutralise a gunman who shot a police officer and wounded another.

Sumit Sulan, 27, shot the assailant who surprised the officers opening fire on them in his mother's flat on January 21 where police were called because of a domestic dispute.

Jason Rivera, 22, was killed and Wilbert Mora, 27, was wounded, but Sulan who was in the police party advanced and shot the alleged gunman, Lashawn McNeil, 47, according to police.

McNeil is in hospital with serious injuries. Before taking on the gunman, Sulan had moved the mother and her other son to safety, police said.

Sulan and his two colleagues had gone to the flat in the Harlem neighbourhood in response to a call by McNeil's mother that her son was threatening her.

He had a close escape when he rushed to take on McNeil as the man allegedly was fir-



ing with a super-charged weapon - a modified Glock pistol fitted with a high-capacity drum with 50 rounds, turning it into a virtual machine gun.

His mother Dalvir Sulan told the New York Post: "I'm proud. Everyone (says) he did good." She said that he was still struggling to deal with the events and "his brain is stuck on the situation". According to her, the family

had immigrated to the US about 15 years ago from India.

Sumit Sulan, who entered the police force only in April 2021, has been nicknamed "Super Rookie", according to the Post.

He had worked for the city as a taxi and limousine inspector before joining the police.

Sumit Sulan had responded earlier this month to a domestic violence incident during which a gun was seized, his police station tweeted with a picture of him holding the weapon.

In a city caught in a wave of escalating violence, Friday's incident was the third gun attack on police officers this month.

They are a direct challenge to Mayor Eric Adams, a former police captain, who took office on New Year's Day with a promise to crack down on crime.

He called the shooting of the police officers an "attack on the city."

Police have come under sustained attack around the country from the Democratic Party's left and its supporters with a sustained movement to either abolish or cut the police force in a campaign that started in

May 2020 after the killing of an African-American by police in Minnesota.

While Adams, who is a Democrat, has pledged to take a hard line against crime, others in his party have taken the opposite tack.

His party colleague Avin Bragg, who was elected the public prosecutor for Manhattan, where the January 21 attack took place, has announced that he would not prosecute several categories of offences like most assaults; theft without guns that would affect Indian news-stand operators and Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants running grocery stores; not paying fares on the metro rail system, and resisting police, which in effect would decriminalise them.

So far the Black Lives Movement and the Democratic party's left have been silent on Sumit Sulan and have not attacked him for shooting McNeil, who is African-American, as they often do when a Black person is shot by police.

The slain officer and his wounded colleague are both Latinos, members of a minority community.



# INDORE LAB DETECTS 21 COVID-19 CASES CAUSED BY OMICRON SUB-LINEAGE BA.2

▶ TWENTY-ONE COVID-19 PATIENTS IN INDORE - INCLUDING SIX CHILDREN, THE YOUNGEST A DAY OLD - WERE ON SUNDAY FOUND TO BE INFECTED WITH THE BA.2 SUB-LINEAGE OF OMICRON.



Team Absolute | Indore

Twenty-one COVID-19 cases caused by the Omicron variant's sub-lineage known as BA.2 have been found in tests conducted over the past 18 days in the laboratory of a private medical institute in Indore.

Those infected with this sub-lineage of Omicron variant include six children, an official from the private facility said on Monday.

"Since January 6, a total of 21 cases of BA.2 sub-lineage of the Omicron variant have been found during tests conducted in our Molecular Virology Diagnostic and

Research Lab, which is recognized by the Centre," Vinod Bhandari, founder chairman of Sri Aurobindo Institute of Medical Sciences (SAIMS) said while talking to media persons on Monday. "Lung involvement ranging from 1 per cent to 50 per cent was observed in six out of 21 patients of this Omicron sub-lineage. Three patients are still hospitalized, while 18 have been discharged. Of the 21, a total of 15 adults have

taken both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine," Bhandari informed. "This lung involvement might be a cause of worry. Interestingly, a few of the remaining 13 adults have taken their precaution dose and show only 1-5% lung involvement, which is not very significant. Because of this, I appeal to all those eligible for the precaution dose to take it on priority," added Dr Bhandari. While the BA.2 sub-lineage has caused some

concern, doctors and experts are divided over its severity and virulence. Some say it can cause severe symptoms while others say there is no significant difference from the original Omicron variant.

New sub-lineage BA.2 found in 16 persons Dr Bhandari said. "There are two new sub-lineages found in Covid-infected persons in the district, the latest being BA.2, which has been detected in 16 persons." Three cases of BA.1 sub-lineage were detected in the district on Sunday.

MGM Medical College dean Dr Sanjay Dixit said, "BA.2 and BA.1 are new sub-lineages or siblings of Omicron variant. There is no significant difference between all these sublineages in terms of severity or contagious natures." Lung involvement of less than 50% is not very serious, he added.

Dr Salil Bhargava, HoD of the chest and TB department at MGGMC, said, "If there is the slightest lung involvement in a Covid patient, they are closely monitored."

Indore, the worst coronavirus-hit district in Madhya Pradesh, has a caseload of 1,86,216, including 1,409 deaths.

# Congress, BJP leaders from State fail to get chance to campaign in UP

▶ CONGRESS HAS RELEASED THE LIST OF STAR CAMPAIGNERS FOR THE UTTAR PRADESH ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS ON MONDAY WHILE ITS ARCH POLITICAL RIVAL THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY HAS RELEASED ITS STAR CAMPAIGNERS LIST EARLIER. BUT IN THIS LIST OF STARS, LEADERS FROM MADHYA PRADESH HAVE NOT BEEN MADE STAR CAMPAIGNERS BY BOTH THE PARTIES.



Zafar Alam Khan | Bhopal  
www.absoluteindianews.com

Political activity has intensified for the assembly elections being held in Uttar Pradesh. BJP and Congress have released the list of star campaigners for the first phase of election campaign in UP. The special thing is that big leaders of BJP and Congress also come from MP, but the names of leaders of Madhya Pradesh are not included in the list of star campaigners of both the parties. However, Congress has given place to the leaders of Chhattisgarh.

Actually, BJP and Congress have released a list of 30 star campaigners for the first phase of the UP assembly. Where BJP has given place to many leaders including PM Modi, JP Nadda, Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari. But no BJP leader from Madhya Pradesh has been included in the star campaigners.

Similarly, in the list of Congress, leaders like Sonia Gandhi, former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, Rahul Gandhi, Ashok Gehlot, Bhupesh Baghel, Sachin Pilot have been made star campaigners. But apart from Kamal Nath Digvijay Singh from MP, no other leader has been given a place.

In such a situation, discussions are also taking place in the political corridors that whether BJP Congress leaders in MP will not be able to woo the voters. Because everyone is surprised by the disappearance of the names of veteran leaders including the Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan coming from Madhya Pradesh, while MP leaders could play a big role in the assembly constituencies of Uttar Pradesh adjoining Madhya Pradesh. Whereas Congress leaders also live in this situation.

But due to the absence of the names of these leaders in the list of star campaigners, questions are being raised that the BJP-Congress has not found any leader in Madhya Pradesh who can woo the voters of Uttar Pradesh. Although this is the list of star campaigners of the first phase in UP, it is believed that MP leaders can be given place in the upcoming lists.

Although the Congress may not have given MP leaders a chance as star campaigners, the party has reposed faith in the leaders of Chhattisgarh. Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel and Rajya Sabha MP Phulo Devi Netam have been made star campaigners among the 30 star campaigners of Congress for the Uttar Pradesh elections.

# Daughters Fly High, Touch the Sky, I Am Always With You: CM

- Why Should Only One Day of the Year Belong to Daughters, Every Day-Every Moment Belongs to Daughters
- State Government Committed to Make Daughters Strong and Self-Reliant
- CM Chouhan Congratulates on National Girl Child Day



his feelings on the occasion of National Girl Child Day through a tweet, Chief Minister Chouhan has said that - "The daughters of India are boosting the country's pride in every field by facing many challenges with courage. Be it a playground or the heights of infinite sky, our daughters are creating a new history of success. We are proud of our daughters, daughters are our pride and self-respect." Giving affection and blessings to the daughters, Chief Minister has tweeted that - "On National Girl Child Day, let us take a pledge to make every effort to empower daughters and provide them a safe environment. Be it the service of the parents or the service of the nation, today daughters are bringing glory to the country and society by moving ahead in every field. State government is also making daughters empowered and self-dependent with schemes like 'Ladli Laxmi.' Daughters, you fly high, touch the sky, I am always with you."

Let the daughters feel that this world is theirs and that all possible opportunities for progress are available to them. Chief Minister was discussing with media representatives after planting saplings at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Good Governance and Policy Analysis. Chouhan said that the state government is making all possible efforts for the welfare of daughters. Expressing

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has congratulated the people of the state on National Girl Child Day. Chouhan has said that why only one day of the year should be for daughters, it is our endeavour that work should be done every day every moment for the betterment of daughters.

# BMC TO UPGRADE BRTS CORRIDOR

Bhopal: Bhopal Municipal Corporation has decided to upgrade the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) corridor in the city after several complaints of its mismanagement came out through the media in the past week. The corporation has set a target of nine months to complete the work. The route from Habibganj to MP Nagar and Roshanpura Square to Kamala Park will be developed in a new form, for which the management is preparing a detailed project report (DPR). The maintenance and renovation of the 24-kilometer BRTS route from Misrod to Bairagarh are pending, for which BMC floated a tender worth Rs 26.34 crore on Saturday evening. The BRTS corridor was constructed at the cost of Rs 329 crore and at least Rs 25 crore is spent every year on its maintenance. The corridor from Ganesh temple to MP Nagar will be upgraded and reworked as the metro and flyover construction has finished off the BRTS corridor in the area.

# State is proud of its talented children: CM congratulates children who interacted with PM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan expressed happiness over the warm conversation of three children of Madhya Pradesh with Prime Minister Narendra Modi today and congratulated them. Praising the talents of Master Avi Sharma of Indore, Anuppur's Banita Das and Harda's Anuj Jain, the Chief Minister said that the interaction with the Prime Minister has given a lot of encouragement to the children. The state is proud of these children. The efforts of children matter in realizing their interests in

various fields. It is also the duty of all of us to encourage these children. The important guidance of the Prime Minister will definitely inspire these children to move forward. Chouhan has also congratulated the children and wished them success in life. Chief Minister said that Indore's child writer Master Avi Sharma is amazingly talented. At such a young age, he wrote the Balmukhi Ramayana of 250 verses. Also, Avi has the art of speaking Sanskrit verses fluently. Avi Sharma has also received many national and international awards. Similarly, Anuj Jain of

Harda has represented India in various competitions of International Earth Science Olympiad and received many awards. Banita Das, a student of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya Amarkantak, Anuppur, discovered an asteroid in January 2021, a mission by NASA's Space Foundation and International Astronomy. This asteroid will be named after her. It is also true that talent does not have any age limit, whenever, wherever it gets a chance, it makes its own place. These talented children of Madhya Pradesh have proved this point.

# WINTER CHILL LIKELY TO RETURN FOR THE NEXT 2 DAYS: IMD

Senior meteorologist PK Saha of IMD's Bhopal office said the cloud cover shielding MP from cold and light rainfall was expected to start departing from Monday, though rains or thunderstorms are likely to occur in isolated places in Rewa, Sidhi, Satna, Singrauli, Shahdol, Umaria, Anuppur, Mandla, Balaghat, Sagar, Seoni, Morena, Datia and Bhind districts.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Winter chill is likely to return to Madhya Pradesh after a brief spell of rains in several districts and temperatures could fall by 4 to 6 degrees Celsius in the next three days, a senior India Meteorological Department official said.

The maximum (day) temperature has started dipping already, and was 21 degrees Celsius, 5 degrees Celsius below normal, in Bhopal, 19.3



degrees Celsius or 8 degrees Celsius below normal in Indore, 22.7 degrees Celsius or 2 degrees

Celsius below normal in Jabalpur and 19.8 degrees Celsius in Gwalior, which is 4 degrees Celsius below normal, the official informed.

Senior meteorologist PK Saha of IMD's Bhopal office said the cloud cover 3. shielding MP from cold and light rainfall was expected to start departing from Monday, though rains or thunderstorms are likely to occur in isolated places in Rewa, Sidhi, Satna, Singrauli, Shahdol, Umaria, Anuppur, Mandla, Balaghat, Sagar, Seoni, Morena, Datia and Bhind districts. "Weather is likely to remain dry in the remaining 38 districts. Moderate to dense fog is likely to envelop isolated places in districts of Rewa, Sagar, Jabalpur, Gwalior and Chambal divisions. Shallow to moderate fog may be seen in some areas of districts of Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain and Shahdol divisions," he said. The senior meteorologist said an east-west trough was running from the above cyclonic circulation over Haryana and neighbourhood to north Chhattisgarh across south Uttar Pradesh. "The lowest minimum temperature of 8 degree Celsius was recorded in Nowgong area in Chhattarpur district. Some parts of Madhya Pradesh received rainfall in the last 24 hours," he added.

# Institute of Good Governance Is Working in a Well Thought-Out Manner: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a banyan sapling at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Good Governance and Policy Analysis. Along with Chief Minister Shri Chouhan, the officers and employees of the institute planted saplings of Neem, Mango, Peepal, Jamun, Karanj, Amaltas, Palash etc. in the campus. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan administered pledge to the officers and employees for commitment to environmental protection, creating awareness among the masses and to make their contribution towards making the earth green by planting more and more saplings.

Chouhan also inaugurated the Reader's Corner for the research scholars in the institute. Chief Minister said that this institute is working in a well-planned manner for making the state self-reliant, for coordinated development and good governance. The institute has engaged experts from different fields with the government. The purpose for which this institute was created, now that purpose is being fulfilled. Chouhan expressed happiness over the continuous expansion in the activities of environmental protection and plantation in the state.



Chouhan took information about the activities of the institute from the officials. Vice Chairman of Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Good Governance and Policy Analysis Sachin Chaturvedi, Chief Executive Officer GV Rashmi, Additional Chief Executive Officer Lokesh Sharma and other officers were present.

# "DEEPA RANI" IS FOURTH EXHIBIT OF THE WEEK AT IGRMS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Under the Latest and popular online series of Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) entitled 'Exhibit of the Week' the "Deepa Rani" (A big brass lamp) collected from 2008 is on display from Monday. The Community of Karmakar, Bankura, West Bengal. It's Measurement Height 92.5 cm, width - 41.5 cm, displayed in the audience as the fourth Exhibit of the month of January, 2022 through official website, Facebook, Instagram and twitter page of the IGRMS. In this regard Praveen Kumar

Mishra, Director, IGRMS said that The Karmakar community of Bankura, West Bengal, owns Deepa Rani, a dokra lamp. It is an impressive lamp with a profusion of intricate elements that explains their mastery over the craftsmanship. The lamp has an oval-shaped flat base where a standing elephant is depicted. A woman in an elegant gesture stands on this elephant by holding five wicked lamps while the sides of the vertical pole depict two musicians in niches with projected elephant heads. The feminine figure that impressively adorns three peacocks on the head, allows to balance the structure and its composition. Deepa



Rani means "queen of the lamp," and the craft truly reflects the inner essence of being reckoned by this inscription. It is lit during rituals and celebrations to bring prosperity and fortune. Visitors can see this object from home through the Official site ([https://igrms.com/wordpress/?page\\_id=8243](https://igrms.com/wordpress/?page_id=8243)) and Facebook site (<https://www.facebook.com/NationalMuseumMankind>), Instagram and twitter page of the IGRMS.

- ▶ INSTITUTE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE FOR THE COORDINATED DEVELOPMENT OF STATE AND BUILDING SELF-RELIANT MP: CHOUHAN
- ▶ CHIEF MINISTER PLANTS BANYAN SAPLING IN THE INSTITUTE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE
- ▶ READERS CORNER STARTED FOR RESEARCH SCHOLARS IN THE INSTITUTE CAMPUS
- ▶ CHIEF MINISTER ADMINISTERED THE OATH OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



# 'HARRY POTTER' STAR JASON ISAACS WAVERS ON J.K. ROWLING CONTROVERSY

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Jason Isaacs, best known for his role as Lucius Malfoy in the 'Harry Potter' films, addressed the controversy swirling around J.K. Rowling in an interview published regarding the author's statements on the transgender community. In the past, Rowling has publicly stated that "sex is real and has lived consequences", reports deadline.com.

Her statements caused great division in the Harry Potter community, and resulted in cast members such as Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint issue statements amid the backlash.

Last week in 'The Times' interview, Grint expressed that though he doesn't "necessarily agree with everything my auntie says, she's still my auntie" in reference to the author. When asked about the Harry Potter creator, Isaacs refused to sound off on the mounting criticism and pointed to the positive humanitarian efforts Rowling has championed.

"There's a bunch of stuff about Joa I don't want to get drawn into the trans issues, talking about them, because it's such an extraordinary minefield," Isaacs said. "One of the things that people should know about her too, not as a counter-argument, is that she has poured an enormous amount of her fortune into making the world a much better place, for hundreds of thousands of vulnerable children through her charity Lumos. And that is unequivocally good. Many of us Harry Potter actors have worked for it, and seen on the ground the work that they do," he added. Isaacs believes he should only take a stance only after a frank, open exchange with Rowling.

"So for all that she has said some very controversial things, I was not going to be jumping to stab her in the front, or back, without a conversation with her, which I've not managed to have yet."



# Bella Hadid quits drinking after seeing her brain scan

Los Angeles | Agencies

Supermodel Bella Hadid vows to never drink alcohol again. Bella shared in a new interview that she had decided to stop drinking, explaining that it had something to do with how alcohol has affected her health, reports aceshowbiz.com.

Speaking with InStyle, Bella shared that her decision to give up on alcohol was made six months ago.

The 25-year-old divulged that it became "hard to pick a lot harder to pick up the glass" after her doctor and medical advisor for her non-alcoholic beverage brand Kin Euphorics showed her the effects of alcohol on her brain.

"I have done my fair share of drinking," the daughter of Yolanda Hadid claimed.

"I loved alcohol and it got to the point where even I started to, you know, cancel nights out that I felt like I wouldn't be able to control myself."

She said: "I don't feel the need (to drink alcohol) because I know how it will affect me at 3 in the morning when I wake up with horrible anxiety thinking about that one thing I said five years ago when I graduated high school."

Bella continued, "There's just this never-ending effect of, essentially, you know, pain and stress over those few drinks that didn't really do much, you know?"



# 'Encanto' soundtrack reclaims No. 1 spot on Billboard 200 albums chart

Los Angeles | Agencies

The soundtrack of the animated film 'Encanto' has returned to the top of Billboard 200 albums chart. The soundtrack of the Disney+ animated flick is back atop the tally for a second non-consecutive week after earning 104,000 equivalent album units in the US in the week ending January 20, according to MRC Data, reports aceshowbiz.com.

Of the number, SEA units comprise 84,000 which is equaling 125.33 million on-demand official streams of the set's songs. Meanwhile, 17,000 units are album sales with the rest being in the form of TEA units.

Last-week chart topper's 'DS4Ever' by Gunna slips one rank to No. 2 in its second week with 96,000 equivalent album units.

The Weeknd's 'Dawn FM' also falls down from Number 2 to Number 3 in its second week after earning 61,000 units. Trailing behind is Adele's '30' which stays steady at No. 4 with 43,000 units earned. As for Morgan Wallen's former leader 'Dangerous: The Double Album', it is also a non-mover at No. 5 after earning 41,000 units.

Serving as this week's newcomer, The Lumineers' 'Brightside' bows at No. 6 on the Billboard 200 chart with 37,000 equivalent album units.

The set marks the act's fourth consecutive and total Top 10 album after 'III' (No. 2 in 2019), 'Cleopatra' (No. 1, 2016) and their self-titled full-length debut (No. 2, 2013).

The Weeknd's 'Highlights', meanwhile, dips one spot from No. 6 to No. 7 after earning 34,000 equivalent album units.

Stationary at No. 8 is Drake's 'Certified Lover Boy' which earns nearly 34,000 units. As for Olivia Rodrigo's 'Sour', it falls from No. 7 to No. 9 with 33,000 equivalent album units.

Rounding out the Top 10 is Doja Cat's 'Planet Her' which collects 32,000 equivalent album units.



# 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' becomes sixth-highest grossing movie ever

Los Angeles | Agencies

Tom Holland-starrer 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' has become the sixth-highest grossing movie in history with \$1.69 billion at the worldwide box office.

According to variety.com, it passed 'Jurassic World' (\$1.67 billion) and 'The Lion King' (\$1.66 billion) to secure the spot. Despite concerns about Covid-19, specifically its more transmissible Omicron variant, 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' has stayed a box office force across the globe.

The movie has been so popular, 'Saturday Night Live' poked fun in a skit with US President Biden (portrayed by

James Austin Johnson) practically begging people to stop seeing 'Spider-Man' in order to curb the virus.

'Spider-Man: No Way Home' next box office challenge may be harder to surpass.

That's because spots one through five on all-time box office charts, consisting of 'Avatar', 'Avengers: Endgame', 'Titanic', 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' and 'Avengers: Infinity War', have each cracked \$2 billion.

Without China, it may be unrealistic for 'No Way Home' to reach that benchmark.

The superhero epic, starring Holland as Marvel's neighbourhood web-slinger, opened in December 2021 and has gen-

erated \$721 million at the domestic box office and \$970.1 million international.

Outside of the US, where 'No Way Home' ranks as the fourth-biggest movie ever, Spidey's latest adventure has done especially well in the UK -- Holland's birthplace -- amassing \$116 million to date.

Other top-earning territories include Mexico with \$73.4 million, South Korea with \$60.6 million and France with \$59.9 million.

It's notable that 'No Way Home' has managed to shatter records and smash expectations without playing in China, which is the world's biggest moviegoing market.

# Kanye West's documentary directors refuse to 'sugarcoat'

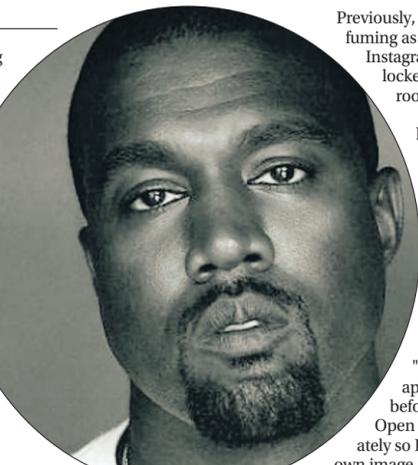
Los Angeles | Agencies

Directors of Kanye West's upcoming documentary have responded to his demand to have a say on the final version of the project.

Stopping by IndieWire's Studio for an interview during the 2022 Sundance Studio on Friday, January 21, "jeen-yuhs: A Kanye Trilogy" co-directors Clarence Coodie Simmons and Chike Ozah chose to stay "true to the story" instead of pleasing the rapper, reports aceshowbiz.com.

"We have to be true to the story. We can't sugarcoat nothing. Everybody is going to have their own opinion," Coodie said.

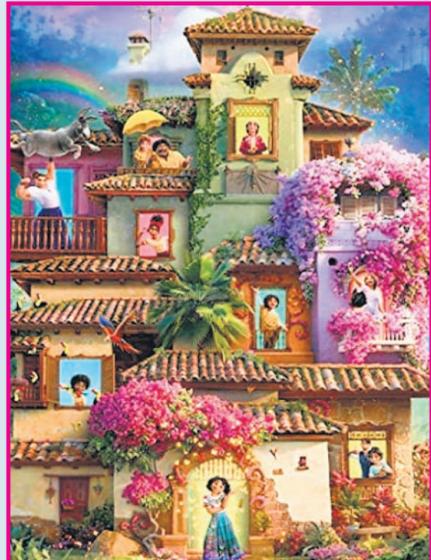
Ozah, who directed Kanye's "Through the Wire" music video, added: "Every single time, the climaxes were right there. We just had to place them."



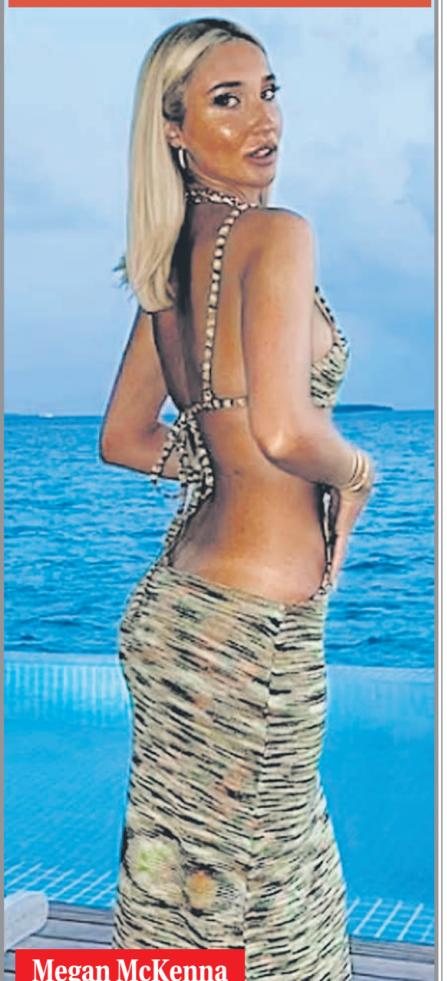
Previously, Kanye appeared to be fuming as he claimed on his Instagram post that he has been locked out of the editing room.

"I'm going to say this kindly for the last time," he wrote on Friday ahead of the premiere of the three-part documentary at the Sundance Film Festival on Sunday, January 23.

The rapper apparently wants to control the narrative in his own documentary as adding, "I must get final edit and approval on this doc before it releases on Netflix. Open the edit room immediately so I can be in charge of my own image. Thank you in advance."



## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Megan McKenna



## SMRITI MANDHANA NAMED ICC WOMEN'S CRICKETER OF THE YEAR FOR 2021

Smriti stock continued to rise this year, scoring 855 runs in 22 international matches at an average of 38.86 with one century and five half-centuries.

Dubai | Agencies

India opener Smriti Mandhana on Monday was named ICC women's Cricketer of the Year for 2021. After being named in the ICC's women's T20I team of the year, Smriti has now won the Rachael Heyhoe-Flint Trophy awarded to the ICC women's cricketer of the year for the second time after 2018.

The left-handed opener beat competition from Tammy Beaumont of England, Lizelle Lee of South Africa and Gaby Lewis of Ireland to clinch the honour. Smriti has also become the second women's cricketer after Australia's Ellyse Perry to win the honour more than once.

In the limited-overs series against South Africa where India won just two of the eight matches at home, Smriti played a major role in both wins.

Smriti then played a sublime knock of 78 in the first innings of the one-off Test against England at Bristol that ended in a draw. Smriti was in good touch in the multi-format series against Australia, starting with the ODI series where she scored 86 in the second match.



She made India's first-ever pink-ball Test even more memorable by smashing her maiden century in the longest format. The left-hander played her natural game to begin with, and scored a run-a-ball half-century, playing with caution under the lights. The match ended in a draw, and Mandhana was declared the Player of the Match.

### Shaheen Afridi: ICC men's Cricketer of 2021

Pakistan left-arm pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi on Monday was named as the ICC men's Cricketer of the Year for 2021. At 21 years, Afridi is the youngest cricketer ever to get the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy and is the first Pakistani player to receive the honour as well. It is also the fourth individual trophy bagged by Pakistan in this edition of the ICC awards. The tall Pakistani quick was on fire throughout 2021, knocking some of the best batters over across all three formats of the game. Afridi had a year to remember in Tests and T20Is, reaching his peak during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in UAE where he impressed one and all with his sheer speed and skills.



### Lizelle Lee: ICC women's ODI Cricketer of 2021

South Africa opener Lizelle Lee on Monday was adjudged as the ICC women's ODI Cricketer of the Year. Lizelle beat the challenge from England's Tammy Beaumont, West Indies' Hayley Matthews and Pakistan's Fatima Sana to be the first player from South Africa to win the award. Lizelle was in a league of her own in ODIs in 2021, finishing as the highest run-scorer in the format, scoring 632 runs in 11 matches at an average of 90.28 with one century and five half-centuries.

### Joe Root: ICC Men's Test Cricketer of 2021

England captain Joe Root on Monday has been named as the ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year for 2021. Root beat stiff competition from New Zealand pacer Kyle Jamieson, Sri Lanka opener Dimuth Karunaratne and India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin to clinch the award. The magnitude of Root's sublime form in 2021 can be summed up by one simple stat -- he has become only the third player in history to aggregate over 1700 runs in Test cricket in a calendar year. Only Mohammad Yousuf and Sir Vivian Richards stand ahead of him. Though England won just four of 15 Tests in 2021, including losing the Ashes in Australia and series against India and New Zealand, Root stood tall and a class apart in his side's batting order.



### Babar Azam: ICC Men's ODI Cricketer of 2021

Pakistan captain Babar Azam on Monday was named as ICC Men's ODI Cricketer of the Year for 2021. Azam beat competition from Bangladesh's Shakib al Hasan, South Africa's Janneman Malan and Ireland's Paul Sterling to win the award. Earlier, in this edition of the

### Australian Open

## Swiatek gets past Cirstea; Cornet in Grand Slam QF for first time

Melbourne | Agencies

Polish tennis ace Iga Swiatek dropped her first set of the Australian Open, but rallied to beat Sorana Cirstea of Romania 5-7, 6-3, 6-3 to reach her first quarterfinal at Melbourne Park here on Monday.

Swiatek, the 2020 French Open champion and No.7 seed here, is into her first Grand Slam quarterfinal outside of Paris, where she also reached the quarterfinal in 2021. However, world No.38 Cirstea competed well before the 20-year-old Swiatek ultimately triumphed in a 2-hour and 28-minute contest.

Swiatek was the only player last season to make the fourth round or better at all four Grand Slam events. Despite being pushed hard by Cirstea, Swiatek now has a 29-2 win-loss record against opponents ranked outside the top-30 in her Grand Slam history. French tennis stalwart Alize Cornet finally reached a major quarterfinal in her 63rd Grand Slam, defeating Simona Halep of Romania 6-4, 3-6,



6-4, to achieve the long-awaited feat in Rod Laver Arena. This was the fourth time in five career meetings that Cornet defeated Halep, breaking a winless streak in fourth-round showings at majors dating back over a decade. She will face No.27 seed Danielle Collins of the US, who defeated No.19 seed Elise Mertens of Belgium 4-6, 6-4, 6-4, in the last-eight.

### LUCKNOW IPL FRANCHISE TO BE CALLED LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

New Delhi: The official IPL team of Lucknow, owned by RPSG Group, named its side Lucknow Super Giants on Saturday ahead of the mega auction. The announcement was made by Sanjiv Goenka on social media on Monday.

Interestingly, RPSG's previous Pune franchise had the same suffix during their two-year stint, which will now carry forward to Lucknow with KL Rahul as skipper. The new IPL teams from Lucknow and Ahmedabad had already announced their coaching staff, captains and the three new signings. However, Ahmedabad are yet to unveil their name. The Lucknow franchise was purchased by the Sanjiv Goenka-owned RPSG group for an amount of Rs 7090 Crore and Ahmedabad was bought by the Irelia Company Pte Ltd. (CVC Capital Partners) for Rs 5635 Crore. On January 21, the Lucknow franchise signed KL Rahul for Rs 17 crore, Australia all-rounder Marcus Stoinis for Rs 9.2 crore and uncapped leg spinner Ravi Bishnoi for Rs 4 crore.

Ahmedabad picked all-rounder Hardik Pandya and Afghanistan star spinner Rashid Khan for Rs 15 crore each while shelling out Rs 7 crore for stylish young batter Shubman Gill.



## England score dramatic one-run win against West Indies, level T20I series

Bridgetown (Barbados) | Agencies

Jason Roy's middle-order flurry and plenty of luck helped England claim their first win in any format since November 1, defeating hosts West Indies by a single run in the second T20 International at the Kensington Oval here on Monday (IST).

With the victory, the Eoin Morgan-led tourists have levelled the five-match series 1-1. England had lost the opening match at the same venue by nine wickets. In spite of a sluggish surface, Roy's middle-over flourish -- the batter slammed six boundaries and two sixes -- gave the tourists a fighting 171/8, which the Kieron Pollard-led West Indies almost chased down, thanks to an unlikely enterprising ninth-wicket stand between Akeal



### Brief scores:

England 171/8 in 20 overs (Jason Roy 45, Moeen Ali 31, Chris Jordan 27; Jason Holder 2/25) beat West Indies 170/8 in 20 overs (Nicholas Pooran 24, Darren Bravo 23, Romario Shepherd 44 not out, Akeal Hosein 44 not out) by one run.

Hosein (44 not out) and Romario Shepherd (44 not out).

Requiring 15 an over from the last five overs, the duo combined for 72 runs, of which 28 were scored in the final over.

Hosein moved from 18 (10 deliveries) to 44 (16) in the final over bowled by Saqib Mahmood, hitting sixes off the final three deliveries. Shepherd at the other end finished

unbeaten on 44 (28 balls). Runs came in spurts at the Kensington Oval, with Roy and Moeen Ali making a middle-over acceleration for the visitors earlier. Roy moved from 17 not out from 23 balls to 41 off 29 in England's 11th over, building a platform for his teammates, who helped in compiling 107 runs in the second half of the innings.

## Athapaththu leads Sri Lanka in winning ICC Commonwealth Games Qualifier 2022

Kuala Lumpur | Agencies

Sri Lanka captain Chamari Athapaththu produced a superb all-round effort to help her team defeat Bangladesh by 22 runs and win the ICC Commonwealth Games Qualifier 2022 at the Kinrara Oval in Kuala Lumpur on Monday.

The last match of the five-team tournament, played to secure the final qualifying spot at this year's Commonwealth Games, saw Chamari score 48 runs to propel Sri Lanka to 136/6 before returning figures of 3/17 to restrict Bangladesh to 114/5. It comes as a consolation for Sri Lanka, who missed the bus for the 2022 women's Cricket World Cup in New Zealand.

The Commonwealth Games



Federation (CGF) will announce the cricket line-up in due course, once Sri Lanka are officially confirmed as the eighth team in Birmingham, joining England, New Zealand and South Africa in Group B while Australia, Barbados, India and Pakistan will be

in Group A for the games in August. This will be the first time women's cricket will be a part of the Commonwealth Games in the T20 format.

Chamari, on her part, did everything right on Monday right from

winning the toss in the crucial fixture for Sri Lanka. Unsurprisingly, the fall of Chamari wicket allowed Bangladesh's spinners to claw back before Nilakshi de Silva and Anushka Sanjeevani helped Sri Lanka accumulate 42 runs in the last five overs to take the score to 136/6.

In reply, Bangladesh at 71 for two after 12 overs, requiring a further 66 runs off 48 balls for victory but unable to fight back as Sri Lanka completed a comfortable victory.

### Brief scores:

Sri Lanka 136/6 in 20 Overs (Chamari Athapaththu 48; Nahida Akter 2/34) beat Bangladesh 114/5 in 20 Overs (Murshida Khatun 36; Chamari Athapaththu 3/17) by 22 runs

### Women's Asian Cup

## AFC clarifies situation arising out of India's withdrawal

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After India's inability to put up a team for the match against Chinese Taipei and subsequent withdrawal from the Women's Asian Cup 2022, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has clarified that matches involving three of the four teams in other groups will be considered for deciding the quarter-final spots.

India could not put up the minimum required 13 players for the match

against Chinese Taipei at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai on Sunday as the 23-member squad was devastated by Covid-19 and injuries.

On Saturday, India had 13 players for the Group A match against Chinese Taipei the next day but two of them were injured -- one with a fractured wrist -- while two others were showing symptoms of fever and coughing.

On Sunday morning, those two players returned Covid-19 positive results, thus reducing

the number of players available to only nine. The rules specify that a team has to name 13 players to participate in a match and thus India had to withdraw from the event.

The AFC has now clarified that as all matches of India are cancelled and considered null and void, for the avoidance of doubt, all points and goals in those matches shall not be taken into consideration when determining the final rankings in the group.

## SA ODI series has been a "good eye-opener" for us: Dravid

Cape Town | Agencies

After suffering a crushing 3-0 loss against South Africa, head coach Rahul Dravid on Sunday said that this series is a "good eye-opener" for the team but there is still a lot of time before the 2023 ODI World Cup and India will get better in the near future.

Fighting fifties by Virat Kohli (65), Shikhar Dhawan (61), and Deepak Chahar (54) went in vain as South Africa completed a hat-trick of wins with a four-run victory in the thrilling third and final ODI to seal a 3-0 series whitewash against India in Cape Town on Sunday.



"I think this ODI series has been a good eye-opener for us. We have not played a lot of ODIs, this has been my first stint with the ODI side. Even the team itself has not played many ODIs after the

2019 World Cup. Luckily, we have got time to go before the 2023 World Cup. There is going to be a lot of cricket from now until then in white-ball format till 2023," Dravid said in the post-match press conference. "It is going to be a good opportunity for us to really reflect and learn and keep getting better. We will get better, there is no doubt about that," he added.

Impressed by Deepak Chahar's batting ability, Dravid said that the all-rounder has shown his quality in the limited opportunities he has gotten and the team would like to give him a more consistent run in the playing XI.

## Squash: Ministry approves hiring of Chris Walker to pursue better returns in Asian Games

Team Absolute | New Delhi

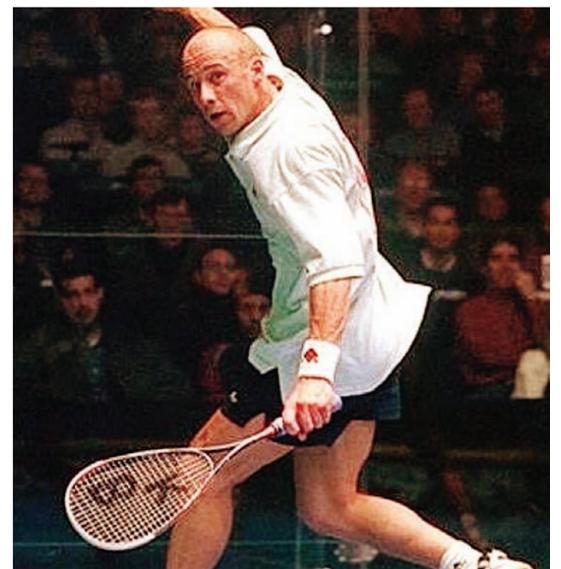
The Sports Ministry has approved the engagement of two-time World Squash Championships medallist Chris Walker as Foreign Coach for the Indian team for the Asian Games later this year.

Walker, who represented England in Squash and Cycling, will be engaged for 16 weeks.

A former England captain, Walker's appointment was recommended by the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Selection Committee and officials of the Squash Racquet Federation of India. With Mark Cairns, he won the inaugural World Doubles Squash Championships in 1997. Having moved his base to the United States, he rose to be the National Coach of the American team. "I couldn't be more excited about

working with Team India in such an important year with the run-up to the World Doubles, Commonwealth Games and Asian Games," he said in a statement. "I will be working closely with the Federation, and I want to help all the Indian Squash team players prepare absolutely the best they can to play their best squash at these upcoming events. I am really looking forward to the year ahead."

He won bronze medals in the 1993 and 1996 World Open Squash Championships and was part of the England teams that claimed silver medals in the World Team Championships in 1995 and 1997. He has Commonwealth Games doubles bronze medals in 1998 and 2002. He also represented England in Cycling in the Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur in 1998.





# Urvashi Rautela: Nationwide ambassador for 'Mission Paani Jal Shakti'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctress Urvashi Rautela has been named as the nationwide ambassador for the 'Mission Paani Jal Shakti' water conservation campaign.

The actress has fought against the water crisis through her Urvashi Rautela Foundation, the organisation she co-founded with her parents and which has helped hundreds of communities in Uttarakhand, Pauri, Garhwal and Haridwar to gain access to clean and safe water and sanitation.

Urvashi said: "I'm thankful to be receiving all these world class

opportunities in my life starting with judging Miss Universe 2021 to becoming a Jury at Dada Saheb Phalke international film festival & finally now. "With a

population of 1.38 billion people, India is the second most populous country in the world. More than 6 per cent of this population lack access to safe water and about 15 per cent of India's population practice open defecation. The actress said that her wish this year is to mobilise resources and share knowledge to increase access to improved sanitation and safe water as water is the Driving Force of All Nature.

She also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi on social media for giving her this opportunity.

She wrote: "Thank you Prime Minister of India @narendramodi Ji & Minister of Jal Shakti Water Conservation @gssjodhpur Ji for giving me this world class opportunity."

On the work front, Urvashi was last seen judging the Miss Universe Pageant 2021, and also bagged appreciation for her international song 'Versace Baby' alongside Arab superstar Mohamed Ramadan.

Urvashi will be soon seen in the Jio studios web series 'Inspector Avinash' opposite Randeep Hooda in a lead role.

The actress is going to play the lead role in a bilingual thriller 'Black Rose' along with the Hindi remake of 'Thiruttu Payale 2'.

Urvashi will be making a Tamil debut with 'The Legend' opposite Saravana and has also signed a three-film contract with Jio Studios and T-Series.

"In India and around the world, millions are navigating the Covid pandemic with the added challenge of living without access to safe water. Now more than ever access to safe water is critical to the health of families in India."

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## AYUSHMANN CALLS FOR ENDING PREJUDICES, SEXIST COMMENTS AGAINST WOMEN

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctor Ayushmann Khurrana on National Girl Child Day on Monday has requested fellow citizens to be more responsible towards breaking gender stereotypes so that a girl can truly get equal access as a boy.

Ayushmann says, "Each of us have the responsibility of making gender-based discrimination a thing of the past and ensuring that every girl is regarded by families and communities with the same value and worth than any boy."

"This National Girl Child Day let's start by breaking the gender stereotypes in our personal lives. Small actions count and contribute towards positive change in the long run." He adds, "It cannot be done without active involvement of men. So this message is also for you: Men and boys, let us pledge to call out sexist comments, jokes and prejudices whenever we come across them and ensure that girls and women are valued and respected everywhere."

Ayushmann is currently busy shooting for 'An Action Hero', directed by debutant Anirudh Iyer. It will see Ayushmann essaying the role of an action star, who indulges in real-life action for the reasons that will be revealed during the course of the film.

He will also be seen in 'Anek' and 'Doctor G'.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

**F**ormer beauty queen and debutante Manushi Chhillar is launching a social media property named 'Limitless' that will see her speak to the country's most inspiring women icons. Manushi wants to bring out the backstories of these influential women and also find out what motivates them to constantly shatter gender stereotypes.

Manushi says: "Growing up and even now, I've been in awe of so many women icons who are working incessantly to break the glass ceiling. They inspire fellow women across the world to dream big."

"I always harboured the thought of creating a digital property that enables me to talk to these icons and help me get to know more about their lives, how their mind works and what inspires them."

She added: "And what better day than National Girl Child Day to launch this project, which is really close to my heart, with the hugely decorated athlete and an icon in every sense of the word, Geeta Phogat."

"We hail from the same state and her contribution towards making women aware that they are capable of wonderful things. She changed the discourse of women rights in our state and country." Manushi further states that it her absolute honour to start this special project titled 'Limitless' with Geeta and hopes that everyone will like what their conversation has touched upon.

"I have always wanted to create a platform that brings women icons from across our country together."

## MANUSHI CHHILLAR: WANTED TO CREATE PLATFORM TO BRINGS WOMEN ICONS TOGETHER



## Kapil Sharma loves one thing more than comedy!

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**S**tar comedian and actor Kapil Sharma has opened up about one thing he loves more than comedy and that is his wife Ginni. He is gearing up for his comedy special 'Kapil Sharma: I'm Not Done Yet' on Netflix and spilled the beans on how he met the love of his life and what brought the two together. The duo tied the knot in 2018 and ever since then have been giving us major couple goals. The couple welcomed their first child in 2019 and their second was born last year.

In a candid conversation, Kapil talked about their romantic tale and revealed why he initially felt it won't work out between them.

Kapil said: "Ginni Jalandhar ke girls' college mei thi and was 3-4 years younger to me. Mai apna PG Diploma commercial arts mein pursue kar raha tha and was in need of pocket money (I was doing my PG Diploma in commercial arts and I was in need of pocket money)." "I was always participating in theatre and visiting other colleges. Ginni was my student and really bright."

"She was good at histrionics and skits and so I made her my assistant. Also, she hailed from a well-to-do family. I remember she would come in an expensive car every day to college and I would ride my scooter."

Kapil revealed that it was his wife, who fell in love first.

## Sonakshi's quirky reply about getting married



Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctress Sonakshi Sinha gave a witty answer when she was asked about tying the knot during a question and answer session on social media. Sonakshi treated her fans with an interactive session, where she asked her fans "what did you get upto this weekend?" A user asked her: "Mam everyone is getting married when will you get married?"

To which, Sonakshi gave a quirky reply: "Everyone is also getting Covid? Should I get that too?" Speaking about her upcoming work in cinema, Sonakshi was last seen in Ajay Devgn-starrer 'Bhuj: The Pride Of India'. The film also features Sanjay Dutt and Nora Fatehi.

The actress is all set to make her web series debut with 'Fallen', where she plays a cop and will also be seen in 'Bulbul Tarang'.

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Puja Banerjee