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IN INDIA, INCREASED AIR POLLUTION CAUSES DEATHS 2.5 TIMES IN TWO DECADES

- ▶ **PM2.5 REFERS TO FINE PARTICLES WHICH PENETRATE DEEP INTO THE BODY AND FUEL INFLAMMATION IN THE LUNGS AND RESPIRATORY TRACT, LEADING TO THE RISK OF CARDIOVASCULAR AND RESPIRATORY PROBLEMS, INCLUDING A WEAK IMMUNE SYSTEM.**
- ▶ **DEATHS ATTRIBUTABLE TO OZONE IN INDIA HAS INCREASED BY 2.9 TIMES - FROM 43,200 IN 1990 TO 1,68,000 IN 2019, IT SAID.**
- ▶ **HOWEVER, DEATHS DUE TO HOUSEHOLD AIR POLLUTION IN THE COUNTRY DECREASED BY OVER 40 PER CENT - FROM 10,41,000 IN 1990 TO 6,06,900 IN 2019, THE DATA SHOWED.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi
Deaths attributable to PM2.5 pollution in India have increased by 2.5 times over the last two decades, according to a new report by the Centre for Science and Environment. The report released by Union

Environment Minister Bhopender Yadav on Tuesday said India accounted for one out of every four deaths due to air pollution in 2019. Data collated by green think-tank Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), and presented in its "State of India's Environment Report", showed that 6.67 million people died

due to air pollution in the world. Of these, 1.67 million deaths occurred in India. China saw 1.85 million deaths due to air pollution. The report said 4,76,000 infants died globally in their first month of life from health effects associated with air pollution exposure in 2019. Of these, 1,16,000 deaths occurred in

India. Poor air quality was the fourth leading risk factor for early death worldwide in 2019, surpassed only by high blood pressure, tobacco use and poor diet. "Over the last two decades, deaths attributable to ambient PM2.5 in India has increased by 2.5 times -- from 2,79,500 in 1990 to 9,79,900 in 2019," the report read.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ACCEPTED UKRAINE'S APPLICATION TO JOIN THE EUROPEAN UNION

HEAVY ARTILLERY FIRING

▶ **VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY HAS MADE AN EMOTIONAL APPEAL FOR UKRAINE TO BE ADMITTED TO THE EU AS HIS PEOPLE WERE KILLED IN AN INCREASINGLY BLOODY ONSLAUGHT BY RUSSIA, RAISING A ONE-FISTED SALUTE AND DECLARING 'GLORY TO UKRAINE' AS THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT GAVE HIM A LONG ROUND OF APPLAUSE.**

▶ **THE UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT - WHO HAS BECOME A SYMBOL OF COURAGE, COMPOSURE AND DEFIANCE IN RECENT DAYS - ADDRESSED PARLIAMENTARIANS IN BRUSSELS VIA VIDEO-LINK FROM KYIV, WHICH IS CURRENTLY FACING DOWN A 40-MILE CONVOY OF RUSSIAN TANKS AND ARTILLERY SEEMINGLY INTENT ON SURROUNDING AND BOMBING THE CITY INTO SUBMISSION.**

▶ **ZELENSKY URGED THE EU TO RECOGNISE UKRAINE AS A MEMBER - A MOVE SURE TO INFURIATE VLADIMIR PUTIN - SAYING HIS NATION HAS 'PROVED THAT WE ARE YOUR EQUALS' AND IT IS NOW TIME TO 'PROVE THAT YOU ARE AT OUR SIDE'. IT CAME AS UKRAINE CLAIMED THAT BELARUSIAN TROOPS HAVE NOW ENTERED THE WAR, AS RUSSIA'S CLOSE ALLY HELPS TIGHTEN THE NOOSE.**

“We recognize the European perspective of Ukraine. And, as the resolution (which the European Parliament plans to adopt) clearly states, we welcome the application of the President of Ukraine for candidate status, and we will work towards that goal. Because we want and we must meet the future together.”

Robert Metzol, President, EU



Kyiv TV tower attacked; Closed-circuit television footage showed a fireball engulfing the street in front of the building, with a few cars continuing to roll out of the billowing smoke. An emergency official said the bodies of at least six people had been pulled from the ruins, and at least 20 other people were injured.

INDIAN STUDENT KILLED IN SHELLING IN KHARKIV



New Delhi: An Indian student, Naveen Shekarappa Gyanagouda, was killed in Ukraine's Kharkiv on Tuesday morning in shelling as the war between Russia and Ukraine reached big cities' streets. Naveen was killed when he stepped out of his bunker to exchange currency and fetch some food, his uncle Ujjanagouda claimed. Ujjanagouda said Naveen along with others from Karnataka was stuck in a bunker in Kharkiv. India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said, "With profound sorrow we confirm that an Indian student lost his life in shelling in Kharkiv this morning. The Ministry is in touch with his family." India's foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla is calling in Ambassadors of Russia and Ukraine to reiterate India's demand for urgent safe passage for the Indian nationals who are still in Kharkiv and cities in other conflict zones.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The European Parliament accepted Ukraine's application to join the European Union on Tuesday. A special admission procedure has begun to admit Ukraine to the EU.

INDIAN EMBASSY IN UKRAINE SHUT DOWN

New Delhi: The Indian embassy in Ukraine's capital Kyiv has shut down and the Ambassador and the staff are on their way to the western part of the country, sources have said. India has been advising students and others to move to the western borders, a process that has been extremely challenging given the security situation. The embassy in Kyiv shut down after it did its best to ensure there are no Indians left in the city. Satellite imagery indicates that the city is facing a large incoming Russian invasion force.

The European Parliament does not have the power to take any decisions in the process of candidate status and the process of joining the EU, these decisions are entirely within the competence of the EU member states. The European Parliament's voice is a recommendation, and its position remains the same:

for many years now, it has been recommending that Ukraine be granted candidate status and start accession negotiations. On February 28, Volodymyr Zelensky signed an application for Ukraine's accession to the EU.

90% studying Medicine abroad fail to clear qualifiers in India: Minister Pralhad Joshi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi has controversially claimed that "90 per cent of Indians who study medicine abroad fail to clear qualifying exams in India". The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, however, told Times of India that this is "not the right time to debate why students are moving out to study medicine". Those who get a medical degree abroad, have to pass the Foreign Medical Graduates Examination (FMGE), to practice medicine in India.

Joshi's comment comes as thousands of Indian students remain stranded in Ukraine, which is currently fighting a bitter war with invading troops of Russia. Since Thursday, when the hostilities between Ukraine and Russia started, videos have been pouring in from students desperate to leave the country.

Seeking urgent help, the



students are heard saying that they are not being allowed to board trains. They say they are being manhandled and physically thrown out of trains.

At the border, where many reached after walking miles in the sub-zero temperature, they are being made to wait for hours without food or water, the students have said.

As the opposition criticism of the government sharpened over what it called a slow pace of evacuation, many on social media argued that the students were given timely warning

by the government, but chose to disregard advice to evacuate. Many also made snide comments about "NIFT rejects" -- those unable to pass the all-India medical entrance exam -- going to Ukraine to study.

Others have argued that India does not have enough medical seats to accommodate all deserving aspirants. They have also cited the poor doctor-patient ratio in the country, pointing out that without foreign university graduates who come back to practice, the situation would have been far worse.

WHATSAPP BANS OVER 1.8 MN BAD ACCOUNTS IN INDIA IN JAN

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Meta-owned WhatsApp on Tuesday said that it banned 1,858,000 bad accounts in India in the month of January in compliance with the new IT Rules, 2021. The company said that it also received 495 grievance reports in the same month from the country and took action on 24 of those in January. "In accordance with the IT Rules 2021, we've published our eighth monthly report for the month of January 2022," a

WhatsApp spokesperson said in a statement. "As captured in the latest Monthly Report, WhatsApp banned over 1.8 million accounts in the month of January," the spokesperson added.

The company said that data shared highlights the number of Indian accounts banned by WhatsApp between January 1 to January 31 using the abuse detection approach, which also includes action taken in furtherance to negative feedback received from users via its "Report" feature.

JEE (MAIN) WILL BE HELD IN TWO SESSIONS, IN APRIL AND MAY



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Ministry of Education has declared new sessions of JEE (main). This year's exams will be conducted in two sessions -- in April and May. During the registration, in the first session, only Session 1 (April) will be visible, and Session 2 (May) will be visible when the window will be opened again. Officials said that, authentication of Mobile Number and e-mail address will be done only when candidates register. They have to enter OTP received at their registered mobile number and before submitting fees, they have to enter the OTP.

The Joint Entrance Examination, JEE (Main) comprises two papers. Paper 1 is conducted for admission to Undergraduate Engineering Programs (B.E,

B.Tech.) at NITs, IITs, other Centrally Funded Technical Institutions (CFTIs), Institutions, Universities funded by participating state governments.

JEE (Main) is also an eligibility test for JEE (Advanced), which is conducted for admission to IITs. Paper 2 is conducted for admission to B. Arch and B. Planning courses in the Country.

National testing agency (NTA) has been established as a premier, specialist, autonomous, and self-sustained testing organization to conduct entrance examination (JEE (Main)-2022) for admission to Undergraduate Engineering Programs at NITs, IITs, other Centrally Funded Technical Institutions (CFTIs), Institutions, Universities funded and recognized by participating State.

Higher probability of heat wave over west-central, some parts of NW India: IMD

▶ **THE MINIMUM TEMPERATURE DURING MARCH TO MAY 2022 IS EXPECTED TO BE ABOVE NORMAL FOR MOST PARTS OF NORTH-WESTERN, WESTERN, NORTH-EASTERN INDIA, AND THE EAST COAST, WHILE NORMAL TEMPERATURE IS EXPECTED OVER EASTERN INDIA, FROM SOUTHERN PART OF WEST BENGAL UP TO SOUTHWEST UTTAR PRADESH, NORTHERN PARTS OF MADHYA PRADESH, AND INTERIOR AND SOUTHERN PARTS OF THE PENINSULAR INDIA.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As part of its Seasonal Outlook for March to May 2022, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Tuesday forecast a higher probability of occurrence of heat wave over west central and some parts of northwest India.

The Indo-Gangetic plains, however, will have below normal temperature probabilities and hence, heat wave conditions are not likely higher than the normal over the region.

For the rainfall in March 2022, the IMD said it, averaged over the country, most likely to be normal (83-117 per cent of Long Period Average). Below normal rainfall is most likely over most areas of northwest and central India



and some parts of northeast India. Normal to above normal rainfall likely over many parts of the south peninsula.

As the changes in the sea surface temperature (SST) conditions over the Pacific and the Indian Oceans are known to influence the Indian climate, the IMD carefully monitors the evolution of sea surface conditions over these ocean basins. Accordingly, currently, La Nina conditions are prevailing over the equatorial Pacific region. The La Nina is likely to weaken during the northern hemisphere spring season and to reach cold ENSO neutral conditions during the second quarter

of 2022.

Since 2016, the IMD has been issuing seasonal forecast outlooks for sub-division scale temperatures over the country for both hot and cold weather seasons. These predictions are based on the Monsoon Mission Coupled Forecasting System (MMCFS) Model developed under Ministry of Earth Science's monsoon mission project. Last year 2021, IMD has adopted a new strategy for issuing monthly and seasonal outlooks of rainfall and temperature over the country. The new strategy is based on the newly developed Multi-Model Ensemble (MME) based forecasting system.

SWAMI PRASAD MAURYA'S CONVOY ATTACKED, DAUGHTER SUPPORTS HIM

Kushinagar (UP) | Agencies

Violence erupted in UP's Fazilnagar Assembly constituency on Tuesday when the convoy of SP candidate Swami Prasad Maurya was attacked by assailants during a roadshow. Several vehicles in the former minister's convoy were



damaged in stone pelting that took place in Khalwa Patti village.

While Maurya accused the BJP supporters of attacking him with the intention of killing him, the BJP leaders said that it was Maurya's men who initiated the attack. Surendra Singh Kushwaha is the BJP candidate from here.

BJP MP Sanghamitra Maurya, who is Swami Prasad Maurya's daughter, came out in support of her father and said: "The BJP talks about peace, riot free state, but the BJP candidate attacked my father, who had a miraculous escape. I appeal to the people of Fazilnagar to show their support by voting for my father. The people will teach BJP a lesson on March 3."

This is the first time that Sanghamitra has supported her father's candidature.

She further said: "My father is not claiming that he was attacked. It is visible on the road. How are the cars broken? How blood is pouring out of people's heads. How people have broken legs. How was my father injured?"

Swami Prasad Maurya told reporters that the route of his roadshow was fixed by the Returning Officer.



BJD MAKES LANDSLIDE VICTORY IN RURAL POLLS IN ODISHA

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) led by Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has made a landslide victory by winning 90 per cent Zilla Parishad seats in the three-tier Panchayat elections, whose final result was declared on Tuesday.

Out of the total 853 Zilla Parishad (ZP) zones in the state, elections were held on 851 seats and the BJD won 765. Of the remaining two seats, a BJD candidate won one ZP seat uncontested while the election for another seat was contested. So in total, the BJD was able to grab 766 ZP seats. mBJD's principal rival BJP could manage to secure only 42 seats, followed by Congress with 37 seats. Independent candidates won three seats while others got four seats, the State Election Commission



(SEC) said on Tuesday.

BJD, the ruling party in Odisha, has gained 290 more seats as compared to its performance in the previous Panchayat polls of 2017. The party had won 476 ZP seats in the last poll. The BJP, which had won 297 ZP seats in 2017 elections, has now come down to 42. The Congress party's performance has also remained poor as its tally came down to 37 from 60 ZP seats it had

secured in 2017. The ZP seats won by independents and others have also come down to 7 from 16 in the 2017 polls. Out of 2.10 crore valid votes polled in the rural polls, the BJD has got 1.10 crore votes (52.73 per cent) while BJP got only 63.23 lakh votes (30.07 per cent), Congress got 28.54 lakh votes (13.57 per cent). The other party and independent candidates got 3.16 per cent votes. With 52.73 per cent vote share in the 2022 panchayat polls, the BJD created a sort of record as it is the highest ever vote share in any election the party has fought so far. With its landslide victory, the BJD is now all set to form the council in all 30 districts of Odisha. The BJP, which had formed the Zilla Parishad in eight districts in 2017, is not in a position to form the council in any district.

As per the final result, the BJP has failed to win any of the ZP seats in 10

districts while the Congress party got zero in 18 districts.

BJD President Naveen Patnaik has thanked the people of Odisha for their support that led to the massive victory of his party in the election. "This massive mandate has further strengthened our commitment to public service. My congratulations to the winning candidates and all party workers who turned the BJD into a movement through dedicated work," Patnaik said in a tweet.

He congratulated the elected BJP candidates, party workers and expressed his gratitude to the 63.23 lakh voters, who have voted his party in the three-tier Panchayat elections.

Admitting his party's defeat in the poll, State Congress president Niranjan Patnaik alleged that the BJD has taken advantage by spending funds through various government schemes.

'Illegal and arbitrary': SC quashes Bihar notification declaring 'Lohar' STs

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court has termed the decision taken by the Bihar government in 2016 to declare 'Lohar' caste as Scheduled Tribe as illegal and arbitrary.

A bench of Justices K.M. Joseph and Hrishikesh Roy said: "What is the basis for the respondent state to take it upon itself to issue the impugned notification by which referring to the 2016 amendment repealing the 2006 Act, it proceeded to give approval to caste certificate of Scheduled Tribe to Lohara, Lohar community? Lohar is not the same as Lohara. Including Loharas alongside Lohara is clearly illegal and arbitrary." The top court had held that Loharas are, admittedly, blacksmiths, a



backward community in Bihar, whereas Loharas are Scheduled Tribes in Bihar.

However, the state government's order allowed the 'Lohar' to invoke the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, which affected the fundamental rights of other citizens.

The bench emphasised that it is important to realize the impact of a decision on the rights and what is more, fundamental rights of the citizens flowing from the government's action, and the need to increasingly evolve a system, whereby decision making promotes and strengthens the rule of law.

GURUGRAM: GRENADES FOUND IN UNOCCUPIED HOUSE, DEFUSED

Gurugram: A large cache of arms and ammunition, including two live hand grenades, was recovered from the bathroom of an unoccupied house in Sector 31 here on Tuesday, the police said.



The police said that during the five-hour-long operation which started at around 9.30 am, a bomb disposal squad managed to successfully diffuse two hand grenades, while two polythene bags -- one filled with 15 MK 90 practice grenades and one with Bicait strip -- were recovered from the spot. The team also recovered 43 used cartridges from the spot. "A bomb disposal squad was called after a tip-off was received, which successfully defused the grenades and MK practice grenades and Bicait strip, which were found in the bathroom of the house. The house owner, who is residing in Delhi, has been traced by the police," said Subhash Boken, spokesperson for Gurugram Police. The owner of the house has been identified as Ravinder Aggarwal. An official said that to defuse the bombs, a seven feet trench was dug and a few blocks of cement bags were used to stop any further explosion. During the operation, a loud sound was heard when the bombs were being defused.

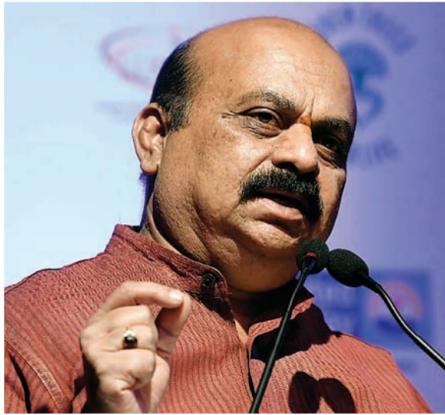
Bommau urges Centre to retrieve body of K'taka student killed in Ukraine

Bengaluru | Agencies

Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said on Tuesday that if the body of Naveen Shekarappa Gyanagoudar, a medical student from the state studying in Ukraine who was killed in Russian shelling in Kharkiv on Tuesday, cannot be retrieved immediately, the External Affairs Ministry should try to bring back his mortal remains in the next two to three days.

"I am saddened by the turn of events," he said.

Speaking to reporters, Bommai said that Naveen from Haveri was pursuing his fourth year in medicine in Ukraine. He was staying in a bunker since last week. On



Tuesday, he came out to join others but got killed in an air strike, becoming the first Indian casualty in the ongoing war in Ukraine. Two other boys who were

with him also belong to Challageri village in Haveri district. One was hurt in the incident.

"Another student has escaped unhurt. The information has come from them while I have also spoken to the Ministry of External Affairs on the matter," Bommai said.

"Naveen's father is known to me and I have spoken with him. I know his family members as well. I am in touch with the Ministry of External Affairs to get complete information on chances of recovering the body. It is a war zone, and we do not yet have any information on the condition of the body of the deceased," he said.

BIHAR STUDENT BORROWS \$50 TO RETURN HOME FROM UKRAINE

Patna: A medical student returned home in Bihar's Saharsa district on Tuesday after borrowing \$50 from her friends in Ukraine.

Akta Khurshid returned home through Hungary border. While sharing her plight, she said it was extremely difficult for students to reach Ukraine's border with Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania. "My university was in western part of Ukraine. So, I did not see any explosion or missile attack, though, I saw some aircraft flying in the air. Living in a war zone was extremely tough for us as everything has become so expensive there. The transport vehicles are not available too," Khurshid said. "As I ran out of money, I borrowed \$50 from a senior student of my university to pay my bus fare. I travelled standing in a packed bus to reach Hungary border," she said. She further pointed out that those students who are in the western part of Ukraine managed to reach the borders of Romania, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, but those living in the central or eastern parts of Ukraine like Kiev and Kharkiv are in grave danger. At least 8 students of Saharsa are still trapped in Ukraine. "After reaching Hungary border, I struggled for hours to enter into the country. I am thankful to the Indian government which facilitated a flight from Budapest. They did not charge air fare to Delhi," Khurshid said. hurshid was welcomed in Saharsa by District Magistrate Anand Sharma and SP Lipi Singh.

'Disturbed Area' status extended in Assam for 6 more months

Guwahati | Agencies

Amidst opposition in the entire northeastern region and almost all political parties, the Assam government on Tuesday, under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, extended the "Disturbed Area" status in the entire state for another 6 months, an official notification said.

Announcing the extension, the notification said that after reviewing the law and order situation in Assam in the past six months, the state government has declared the entire state of Assam as "Disturbed



Area" up to six more months with effect from February 28. The AFSPA was enforced in Assam in November 1990 and has been extended every six months. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma recently said that some "rationalisation" regarding the contentious act is expected in the current year. He had said that the Army, which deployed in the disturbed areas under the AFSPA, has virtually withdrawn from Assam, except for five-six districts. He claimed that militancy was on the wane in Assam, with all tribal militant groups already coming forward for talks and depositing their arms and ammunition.

Parental consent not needed for offline classes in Delhi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The consent of parents for attending offline classes or exams for students of class 10 and 12 in the national capital will not be mandatory any more.

In an order issued by the Directorate of Education, the Delhi government has allowed all government schools to conduct offline classes and exams for students of class 10 and 12. The order says that the con-

sent of parents will not be required to attend the offline classes for students.

"Schools may also deploy transportation facilities for the convenience of students and parents with Covid appropriate behaviour as notified from time to time", the order reads further.

However, the hybrid mode of classes and exams -- offline as well as online -- will continue as before for classes up to 9 and class 11 till March 31, the order reads. The government has

also allowed all schools to go offline from April 1. The decision has been taken by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority.

Meanwhile, the daily Covid caseload has been witnessing declining trend in the national capital. Delhi on Monday reported considerable decline of nearly 46 per cent in daily Covid cases at 258 fresh infections. The city reported no Covid related death for the first time after December 31.

Google analyst held for posting nude pics of women on Instagram

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A 33-year-old man was arrested for allegedly creating fake Instagram accounts and posting nude images of women on it, an official said on Tuesday.

The accused, identified as Mohit Sharma, a resident of Noida, UP, holds a B.Tech Degree in Mechanical Engineering and also a post graduation in Business Management. He was working with Google as Market Research Analyst, Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operation (IFSO) unit of Delhi Police informed.

DCP (IFSO) K P S Malhotra told IANS that a woman had lodged com-



plaint in 2020 stating that someone created fake Instagram account with username Archudnes and posted

naked pictures of her. Based on her complaint, the police registered a case under section 67 of

the IT Act and investigation was taken up.

During investigation, digital footprints were collected from Instagram and Hotmail which provided the IP addresses of the alleged user at the time of offence.

The IP addresses of the alleged Instagram account and the Hotmail ID linked with it were found to be linked with an Airtel broadband WiFi connection installed at the residence of the accused in Noida.

"The suspect was examined but he denied his involvement and claimed that his WiFi was hacked by someone and he has given a complaint in this regard," the DCP said.

9 buses gutted in fire in Andhra town

Amaravati | Agencies

Nine private Volvo buses were completely gutted in a huge fire in Ongole town of Andhra Pradesh's Prakasam district on Tuesday, police said. The incident occurred near Ongole Urban Development Authority (OUDA) Complex area where private travel operators had parked their vehicles.

Fire fighting personnel doused the fire with the help of six fire tenders. The municipal authorities also deployed their water tankers to douse the fire. Huge flames engulfing the buses sent panic among people in nearby areas. A police officer said the fire fighting personnel prevented fire from spreading to 20 other buses parked in the area. All buses gutted in the fire belonged to



Kaveri Travels. The loss is estimated to be Rs 6 crore. The operator said they had parked buses there due to the drop in demand due to Covid-19 pandemic. The cause of the fire was not known. Police have initiated an investigation into the incident.

K'TAKA HIJAB ROW: PETITIONER GIRL BLAMES COLLEGE AUTHORITIES OF 'SOWING' HATRED

Udupi (Karnataka) | Agencies

Three girl students from Udupi Girls Pre-University College, who have moved to the High Court to seek consent for attending classes with hijab, were denied entry to sit for practical examinations while wearing hijab.

Later, one of the students released a video slamming the college authorities "for sowing the seeds of hatred against the hijab". The video has gone viral on social media.

Alamas A.H., Hazra Shifa and Bibi Ayesha, the three petitioners among the six college students who are study-

ing in science stream, were denied entry on Monday. Expressing their displeasure over social media platforms, one of the students put out a video in Kannada and Urdu languages, alleging that they were "ruthlessly asked to get out from the college premises by the Principal of the college and were warned of slapping cases against them".

The three students had come to the classroom with hijab to appear for a practical examination on Monday. The Principal of the college Rudre Gowda asked them to take exams without hijab and when they refused to take off their hijab, asked them to

leave the place. The students had also made representations to the Pre-University education department requesting to postpone the practical examinations. Almas, one of the students, stated, "Today was our final practical exam. We had completed our record books and went in great hopes to attend the practical exam. It was so disheartening when our principal threatened us saying 'you have 5 minutes to leave, if you don't leave, I will file a police complaint.' Right now, we should have been in our labs attending the practicals, not compelled to leave. The hopes I had from my college and my dreams are getting shat-



tered due to the hatred sowed against hijab," she said. However, the Principal Rudre Gowda has denied the allegations. The education department has made it clear that about 80,000 Muslim girl students are studying in Pre-University Colleges in the state and only a handful of them are objecting to attend classes without hijab. The state government has stated that they suspect the role of an organisation behind these students and the police department is probing the matter. Meanwhile, the larger bench of the High Court constituted to look into the issue of hijab has heard the matter and posted the matter for judgment.



NAWAB MALIK PLEAS HC TO QUASH MONEY LAUNDERING CASE AGAINST HIM

Maharashtra Minister and NCP leader Nawab Malik, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on February 23 in connection with a Prevention of Money Laundering case involving underworld Don Dawood Ibrahim, has moved to the Bombay High Court against his arrest.



Malik in his plea has urged the Court to quash the PMLA case lodged against his arrest. He has also mentioned his plea by the central probe agency. He has also mentioned his plea that his arrest was illegal and sought

to be released immediately. Malik is in the ED custody till March 3. The ED had on February 18 arrested Dawood's brother Iqbal Kaskar in the matter. Salim Qureshi, an aide of Chhota Shakeel, was also interrogated in the matter. On February 3 the NIA had received an information that Dawood Ibrahim was raising terror funds and was working with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Al Qaeda (AQ). He was controlling criminal activities in India through his close aides. The ED filed a PMLA case against Dawood. Another case was lodged against his brother Iqbal Kaskar, Iqbal Mirchi and 19 others. Later both the cases were merged by the ED. The Central probe agency conducted nine raids and recovered incriminating documents from the premises of Dawood's aides. Chhota Shakeel's relative Salim Fruit told the probe agency that in 2006 he met Chhota Shakeel three to four times during his Pakistan visit.

ED summons Nawab Malik's son in PMLA case connected to Dawood

In a latest development in the PMLA case involving underworld Don Dawood Ibrahim and unknown Mumbai-based politician, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has now summoned Faraz Malik, son of NCP leader and Maharashtra Minister Nawab Malik, who is already in police custody.

Team Absolute | Mumbai



In a latest development in the PMLA case involving underworld Don Dawood Ibrahim and unknown Mumbai-based politician, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has now summoned Faraz Malik, son of NCP leader and Maharashtra Minister Nawab Malik, who is already in police custody. The ED wants to confront him with his father Nawab Malik and also a few documents and other evidence collected by them. On February 23, the ED arrested Nawab Malik and later got his custodial remand till March 3. ED sources have claimed

Ibrahim was raising terror funds and was working with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Al Qaeda (AQ). He was controlling the criminal activities in India through his close aides. The ED filed a PMLA case against Dawood. Another case was lodged against his brother Iqbal Kaskar, Iqbal Mirchi and 19 others. Later both the cases were merged by the ED. The central probe agency conducted nine raids and recovered incriminating documents from the premises of the aide of Dawood. Chhota Shakeel's relative Salim Fruit told the probe agency that in 2006 he met Chhota Shakeel three to four times during his Pakistan visit.

Manukumar Srivastava is new chief Secretary of Maharashtra

Manukumar Srivastava, an officer of the 1986 batch, is the senior-most officer in the state. He is likely to get a tenure of over a year before retiring in April 2023.



likely to get a tenure of over a year before retiring in April 2023. He was to become the Chief Secretary after S J Kunte retired on November 30, but the state government decided to make Chakrabarty the Chief Secretary. The others in the race were additional chief secretary (finance) Manoj Saunik and additional chief secretary (general administration department) Sujata Saunik of 1987 batch, but appointing either of them would have meant superseding Srivastava. Srivastava has

worked as collector of Kolhapur and was also the additional commissioner (projects) in Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation. He also headed the urban development department, revenue department and the home department. Srivastava was presently the additional chief secretary of the home department. The general administration department has asked additional chief secretary (appeals and security) Anand Limaye to take additional charge of the home department. The additional chief secretary of the education department, Vandana Krishna, also retired on Monday. The state is expected to announce a reshuffle of senior IAS officers in the coming days.

Congress Demands Probe Into Devendra Fadnavis' Role In Tapping Phones Of Maharashtra Netas

In a fresh faceoff with BJP, Congress demanded an inquiry to ascertain the role of former Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis in phone tapping of MVA leaders.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a fresh faceoff with BJP, Congress demanded an inquiry to ascertain the role of former Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis in the phone tapping of MVA leaders. This came after the Pune Police registered an FIR against IPS officer Rashmi Shukla under Section 26 of the Indian Telegraph Act. She was accused of tapping the phones of leaders such as Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole, Bachchu Kadu, Sanjay Kakade and Ashish Deshmukh on the basis of a report submitted by a committee comprising former DGP Sanjay Pandey, the state intelligence commissioner and the additional CP (special branch). Addressing a press conference on

Monday, state Congress spokesperson Atul Londhe stressed that Fadnavis had a key role to play in approving phone tapping in his capacity as the Home Minister. Taking a dig at the erstwhile government, he asserted that MVA will not allow the 'Gujarat model' of surveillance to prevail in the state anymore. On this occasion, he announced that Congress will officially seek a probe during the upcoming Budget session of the Maharashtra legislature. Maharashtra Congress spokesperson Atul Londhe stated, "Using democratic institutions to finish off opponents, conducting surveillance on common persons- this Gujarat model was seen in Maharashtra during the previous government. Maharashtra Congress president

Nana Patole had demanded an inquiry into phone-tapping in the last Assembly session. A committee headed by the then DGP Sanjay Pandey was constituted and it handed over its report to the government. As a result of this, a case has been registered against former Pune Police Commissioner Rashmi Shukla. "We feel that a serious crime has been committed by an Additional DGP-rank IPS officer in tapping the phones of politicians instead of following the procedure on the issues on which tapping can be done as per the Indian Telegraph Act. What was the role and position of then Home Minister Devendra Fadnavis, ACS (Home) and the DGP Sanjay Jaiswal? Why was this done? That's why Congress demands that an inquiry

should be conducted against them too. Congress will raise this issue in the upcoming Budget session and will seek an inquiry," he added. On December 15, 2021, the Bombay High Court quashed Shukla's plea to quash the FIR on the leaking of confidential information about police postings in Maharashtra and to alternatively transfer the probe to the CBI. The Cyber Crime Police Station in Mumbai had registered a case against unknown persons on March 26, 2021, alleging that her confidential letter to the DGP and concerning the police force was obtained and supplied to an unauthorized person. As per the police, this constituted offences under the Indian Telegraph Act, Information Technology Act and the Official Secrets Act.

Maharashtra HSC Exams begin March 4, students turn to board counsellors to combat exam stress, anxiety

As the date for the Maharashtra HSC Exams comes closer, students have been feeling examination stress, feelings of anxiety. Due to this, many have turned to the board counsellors to help them cope and understand these feelings. For higher secondary students, Maharashtra Board Exams begin on March 4 and will conclude on March 30, 2022

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Higher Secondary Exams, HSC Exams are scheduled to begin from March 4, 2022. But as the date comes closer, many students have been experiencing examination stress and anxiety. Students have been reaching out to the helplines and list of trained counsellors offered to them by the education board in the state. Earlier on, State Minister of Education, Varsha Gaikwad announced the introduction of counsellors approved and selected by the Maharashtra State Board of

Secondary and Higher Secondary Education, MSBSHSE, to help students cope with examination stress and anxiety that may occur as they prepare for their board exams. Similarly, helpline numbers and list of trained counsellors were released by the State Council of Education Research and Training, SCERT Maharashtra. In the past few days, reports suggest that students have been utilising both these services to cope with stress and anxiety they are experiencing while preparing for the Maharashtra Board Exams 2022. As per counsellors, the calls have been focused on students who feel they are underprepared for

their exams and parents who want techniques or a 'quick fix' to make sure the students score well in the exams. Counsellors have also suggested that a large number of calls received by them as been from Higher Secondary Students, particularly the science stream. "They are very stressed. The syllabus is vast and not everyone has been able to understand well during online classes. They feel that whatever they have studied is not enough," Yashwant Ambedkar, counsellor and teacher said. "On the other hand, parents keep asking us if parents will have questions only from the question

bank issued by SCERT, they want to know how their child can score good marks," he added. Counsellors have also been working to build confidence in the students. Many teachers have claimed that students from the slum areas of economically weaker sections have been struggling with exam stress due to them not being able to attend online classes properly. The concept of 'self-study' is also new to many students resulting in them not being able to create a revision or study routine fellow classmates. Maharashtra HSC Exams 2022 will begin on March 4 and conclude on March 30. The Maharashtra SSC exams will begin on March 15 till 4, 22.

182 students return safely from war-torn Ukraine

An Air India Express flight carrying 182 students stranded in the war-hit Ukraine reached here on Tuesday morning as part of the Operation Ganga evacuation process, officials said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

An Air India Express flight carrying 182 students stranded in the war-hit Ukraine reached here on Tuesday morning as part of the Operation Ganga evacuation process, officials said. The AIE flight IX-1202 arrived here from the Henri Coanda Airport in Bucharest (Romania) and the evacuees -- including around 24 from Maharashtra -- were welcomed by Union MSME Minister Narayan Rane. This is the second flight airlifting Indian nationals from Ukraine that has reached Mumbai, the first



arriving here on February 26 with 219 relieved evacuees from the war-raged nation, besides other flights to New Delhi in the past few days. Hundreds of anxious parents and relatives waiting outside the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport had a tearful reunion with their children. Around 1,200 persons

from Maharashtra, mostly students, are among the large number of Indians, who have been stuck in Ukraine after Russia launched its military operations on Europe's second biggest country from February 24. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has directed the state authorities to coordinate with the Centre on the evacuation operations and extend all help to the evacuees returning here. issued SOS via social media, desperately seeking help and evacuation as the situation continued to worsen with shortages of even basics like food-water-medicines.

MAN KILLED FOR TRYING TO BLACKMAIL OVER MOBILE PHONE THEFT IN MUMBAI: POLICE

Mumbai: A man has been arrested in Mumbai for allegedly killing a friend as the latter tried to blackmail him over the theft of a mobile phone, city police said on Tuesday. The incident took place at CPWD godown in Antop Hill area early Saturday morning, said a police official. The half-burnt body of Abdul Sayyad (29), who worked with a civil contractor, was found, and initially it was suspected that he was a pavement dweller whose bed sheet caught fire accidentally when he was drunk. But CCTV footage of the area showed there was another person with him and autopsy showed that his head had been smashed. Following the questioning of Sayyad's employer, the man seen in the CCTV footage was identified as Ashkuddin Shaikh (27), a house painter. He was arrested on board Mumbai-Howrah Gitanjali Express near Dadar station in Mumbai on Monday. During interrogation, Shaikh, a resident of Kismatnagar in Bangalpur, allegedly told police that he had stolen a mobile phone from Pune. Sayyad knew about it and demanded Rs 3,000 from Shaikh for not reporting the matter to police, the official said. On Saturday, Shaikh took Sayyad to the CPWD godown after they drank liquor together, and allegedly smashed his head with a stone and later set fire to the bed sheet and wrapped the body in it before fleeing. Further probe is on.



The controversy over Maharashtra Governor's remark on Shivaji Maharaj

The Indian Express explains how the controversy has erupted and why various political parties and organizations have objected to Koshiyari's remarks on Shivaji Maharaj.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari's remarks that Samarth Ramdas was the 'guru' of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, who is revered by all the communities across the state, has stirred controversy in the state. The descendants of Shivaji Maharaj, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the Congress, the Shiv Sena and other organizations have condemned Koshiyari's remarks and sought his removal from the post of Governor.

The Indian Express explains how the controversy has erupted and why various political parties and organizations have objected to Koshiyari's remarks on Shivaji Maharaj. Koshiyari, during a programme in Aurangabad on Sunday, underlined the role of the guru (teacher) while speaking about Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Chandragupta Maurya. "Many maharajas and chakravartis (emperors) were born on this land. But, who would have asked about Chandragupta had there not been Chanakya? Who would have asked about Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj had there not been Samarth (Ramdas)," said Koshiyari. "I am not attempting to lower the personality of Chandragupta and Shivaji Maharaj. Like a mother who plays a key role in shaping her child. Similarly, the role of guru (teacher) has a big place in our society," he had added. The Governor's remarks on the Maratha warrior king have

attracted criticism from the political parties and various organizations asking him to offer an apology and asking the Centre to recall him. Also, the activists of Congress, NCP and various organizations such as Sambhaji Brigade, Maratha Mahasangh and others held protests in various parts of the state to condemn Koshiyari's remarks and sought his resignation. BJP MP Udayanaraje Bhosale, who is the direct descendant of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, asked Koshiyari to withdraw his remarks which have angered the sentiments of the followers of the Maratha warrior king and Maharashtra. "Rashtramata Jijau (the Maratha king's mother) was the guru of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Yet, Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari had remarked that Ramdas was the guru of Maharaj. By making such a statement, Koshiyari has hurt the sentiments of the followers of Shivaji and of entire Maharashtra.

The Governor should withdraw his statement immediately," said Bhosale in a tweet. NCP MP Supriya Sule also cited the July 2018 order of the Aurangabad Bench of the Bombay High Court that said that there is no evidence to show that Shivaji Maharaj had met Ramdas. Historians and researchers say that the issue of calling Samarth Ramdas guru of Shivaji Maharaj is more about the supremacy of Brahmins over non-Brahmins but there is no such records or evidence available to show the same. The Brahmanical system has the disadvantage of not having a great man like Shivaji Raj in our caste. So, to ensure supremacy, they have brought Ramdas to take credit for Shivaji's," said Shrimant Kokate, a historian. Kokate further said that even though Shivaji Maharaj and Samarth Ramdas were contemporary, there are no records or texts that show that they ever met. "So, the issue is more about the

supremacy of Brahmins over others and nothing else," he added. "But, the records also show that the Maharaj has given donations to temples of other people and religions. That does not make anyone guru of Maharaj," said Sonawani. After attracting criticism from various quarters of the society, the governor took a cautious stand on Monday stating that he would verify the facts regarding his remarks. "Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is the source of inspiration for the nation. From what I knew and what I had read in the early days, I knew that Samarth Ramdas Swami was his guru. But the people have told me some facts about history. I will verify those facts further," said Koshiyari while speaking to the media persons in Jalgaon. The various organisations and the political parties have demanded an apology from the governor and they are likely to continue with the agitation for the next couple of days.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Its BSP vs BSP

Rebel leaders of the Bahujan Samaj Party are posing a major problem for the party in the last two phases of elections in Uttar Pradesh. BSP president Mayawati has clearly instructed her party cadres to 'teach the rebels a lesson and ensure their defeat' but it is easier said than done. Most of the senior rebel leaders of the BSP are contesting on SP tickets now. Ambedkar Nagar, which is regarded as a BSP bastion, now has Lalji Varma, Ram Achal Rajbhar and Tribhuvan Dutt -- all BSP rebels -- contesting elections from the district, known as the birthplace of socialist Ram Manohar Lohia, on a Samajwadi Party (SP) symbol. Lalji Varma, a Kurmi and five-time MLA, was the BSP's legislature party leader in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly. Ram Achal Rajbhar, also a five-time MLA, is a former BSP state president and a key OBC face in the region. Tribhuvan Dutt is a Dalit, is a former two-time MLA and a former Lok Sabha MP. The fourth SP candidate, Rakesh Pandey, is the father of sitting BSP MP from Ambedkar Nagar, Ritesh Pandey but he is contesting on a SP ticket. The defection of these BSP leaders to SP has undoubtedly bolstered the prospects of Samajwadi Party in the district. The SP hopes to challenge the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the cost of the BSP in Ambedkar Nagar, where four out of its five candidates are former BSP leaders. Mayawati, at a recent rally, explained to voters why she had to 'throw them out' of the BSP. She accused the rebels of encouraging factionalism in the party. The BSP, and the BJP, are now working overtime to ensure the defeat of Swami Prasad Maurya, another BSP rebel, who joined and quit the BJP.

A LOT ON STAKE FOR BJP; AKHILESH MAY FACE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS ON DRUBBING

Vinod Kumar Shukla

In the battleground Uttar Pradesh, out of 403 Assembly seats just 111 are left to be voted for before a new Assembly is constituted after March 10, 2022 results. But the last two phases are very significant where elections are scheduled for March 3 and March 7, 2022. These are the areas where the BJP's performance was not at par with the rest of the state in 2017 especially in the areas going for election in the sixth phase. The performance of the BJP was the worst among all the seven phases in 2017. This time round the BJP has lost an alliance partner in the name of Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) led by Om Prakash Rajbhar which has good influence over the Rajbhar community but the BJP has got NISHAD Party led by Dr Sanjay Nishad as its replacement. The Congress is replaced by Rashtriya Lok Dal of Jayant Chaudhary who is trying to cash in on the anger of farmers' protest in Western UP. But leaders like Swami Prasad Maurya, Dara Singh Chauhan and O P Rajbhar are a big challenge for the BJP in the Poorvanchal region. The BJP plans to counter them with Prime Minister Narendra Modi camping in Varanasi for three days besides Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath leading from the front in Gorakhpur and adjoining districts and for OBC voters deputy chief minister Keshav Prasad Maurya and Union minister Anupriya Patel are put into the services. Another Union minister Sadhvi Niranjani Jyoti is among Nishad voters. In these two phases in 2017, the BJP managed to win 75 seats, BSP 11 out of 19 it contested from the region, SP 13 out of 47 fielded by the party, Apna Dal (Sonelal) 05, SBSP 04, Congress 01, NISHAD Party 01 and Independent 01. Strategy of the SP alliance has been to win over OBC and Dalit votes all



through, so it brought in the party fold leaders like Swami Prasad Maurya and Dara Singh Chauhan and also O P Rajbhar as alliance partner. The Samajwadi Party constituted an organisation called Samajwadi Baba Saheb Ambedkar Vahini under Mithai Lal Bharati who is a former BSP add of Mayawati to woo Dalit voters of the Poorvanchal region. So, the BJP alliance has the real challenge of retaining its voters that had voted for it in 2017 elections. Being 18 per cent of the total OBC population, the Nishad community has its influence over 152 seats out of 403 while Bhadohi, Jaunpur, Azamgarh, Kushinagar, Ghosi, Deoria, Basti, Domariyaganj, Salempur, Varanasi, Ballia and Sultanpur are the district with sizeable population of the community. The BJP has sent two members from the Nishad community to the Rajya Sabha - Jai Prakash Nishad

and Vishambhar Prasad Nishad. They are local leaders and canvassing for the party in the areas dominated by the Nishad community. Rajbhar community too constitutes around 18 per cent of the OBC population. Ayodhya, Ambedkar Nagar, Gorakhpur, Sant Kabir Nagar, Mahrajganj, Kushinagar, Basti, Bahraich, Siddharth Nagar, Balrampur and Shravasti are some of the districts where they can be counted as influential community. The SBSP chief was part of the Yogi Government when it was formed in 2017 but Rajbhar was sacked for speaking against the government. The BJP leadership tried to pacify Rajbhar not to speak against the government but of no avail. His subsequent efforts to re-join the NDA bandwagon in Uttar Pradesh was vetoed by the chief minister for using rough language against him. The BJP has not only working

and Vishambhar Prasad Nishad. They are local leaders and canvassing for the party in the areas dominated by the Nishad community. Rajbhar community too constitutes around 18 per cent of the OBC population. Ayodhya, Ambedkar Nagar, Gorakhpur, Sant Kabir Nagar, Mahrajganj, Kushinagar, Basti, Bahraich, Siddharth Nagar, Balrampur and Shravasti are some of the districts where they can be counted as influential community. The SBSP chief was part of the Yogi Government when it was formed in 2017 but Rajbhar was sacked for speaking against the government. The BJP leadership tried to pacify Rajbhar not to speak against the government but of no avail. His subsequent efforts to re-join the NDA bandwagon in Uttar Pradesh was vetoed by the chief minister for using rough language against him. The BJP has not only working

its own by inaugurating a memorial in the name of Raja Suheldev in Bahraich district but has sent Sakaldeep Rajbhar to the Rajya Sabha as well. So, the real battle in Uttar Pradesh is where allies are at play that is the first phase and the last two phases. It is perceived that Jats have damaged the BJP considerably on which BJP grossly disagrees. Some of the earlier mentioned districts in Poorvanchal area have sizeable number of SC voters and despite Mayawati being silent, her voters are active on the ground. Not only the SP but the BJP too is trying to win them over as both the parties are anticipating erosion in BSP's vote share. The top leadership of the BJP will be in the Poorvanchal region and Akhilesh Yadav too has a hectic schedule for

(The author is freelance journalist based in Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)

international

PAK REFRAINS FROM TAKING SIDES ON RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS

Pakistan has decided to refrain from taking part in the emergency session of the UN General Assembly, which was convened to discuss the Russia - Ukraine crisis.

Islamabad | Agencies

Pakistan has decided to refrain from taking part in the emergency session of the UN General Assembly, which was convened to discuss the Russia - Ukraine crisis. Diplomatic sources in Pakistan maintained that while Islamabad supports a peaceful resolution finalised through negotiated understanding between Russia and Ukraine; it would not take sides and would prefer not to be part of discussion on the conflict at global forums like the UNGA. Pakistan's decision comes at a time when Prime Minister Imran

Khan defended his decision to not take sides, stating that his visit to Moscow was to discuss bilateral issues only. Prime Minister Imran Khan had landed hours before Moscow launched its military offensive on Ukraine, targeting the air defence system and military installations. While Pakistan has opted not to participate in the all-important discussion on the conflict at the UNGA, over 100 countries would have addressed the emergency session of the UNGA, which is expected to conclude on Tuesday. The US has put forward a resolution, demanding Russia's immediate withdrawal from Ukraine. It should

be noted that UNGA has held only 10 emergency sessions since 1950 under the provision known as "Uniting for Peace" resolution. There are at least 1,500 Pakistani families and students stranded at the Ukraine - Polish border, who have been criticising the Pakistani embassy in Ukraine for failing to facilitate and help them in reaching the border and being able to pass through into Poland to seek refuge. Many Pakistani students and families have complained about the mistreatment and what they called ignorance of the Pakistani embassy officials, who they say left them at least 20 miles before the Ukraine-Poland border.

"We were left on the road 20 miles before the border in the blistering cold weather. We had to walk by foot all the way to the border. It has been miserable how we have been treated by our own embassy," said a Pakistani student stuck at the Ukraine-Poland border. The other major issue that the Pakistanis and others are facing is the refusal of Ukraine border security forces, who are not allowing them to cross the border. "The forces are not allowing us to cross the border. That's because we are not Ukrainian. They prefer sending Ukrainian nationals first and have stopped us," said another Pakistani student.

Iran says not to wait 'forever' for nuke deal if US fails to make decision

Tehran will not wait "forever" for a possible nuclear deal if the US fails to make a decision, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Tuesday.



Tehran | Agencies

Tehran will not wait "forever" for a possible nuclear deal if the US fails to make a decision, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Tuesday. The US has already "walked away" from the 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Khatibzadeh tweeted in response to his US counter-

part's remark on Monday that Washington is ready to withdraw from the Vienna talks if Tehran becomes tough, Xinhua news agency reported. "Everyone has its own plan B, though US' has proven hollow. Blusters and bluffs have/will not work. Decisions do," he noted. "A deal is at hand, if the White House makes its mind. Iran is willing, but will not wait forever," he added. Iran signed the original nuclear deal with world powers in July 2015. However, then US President Donald

Trump pulled the US out of the agreement in May 2018 and reimposed Washington's unilateral sanctions on Tehran, which prompted the latter to drop some of its nuclear commitments and advance its halted nuclear programme. Since April 2021, eight rounds of talks have been held in Vienna between Iran and the remaining JCPOA parties, namely Britain, China, France, Russia plus Germany, with the US indirectly involved in the talks, to revive the landmark deal.

Pakistan sees major surge in offences against women

The year 2021 has seen a major surge in cases related to harassment and abuse of women, as at least 34,000 women registered complaints in connection with various types of offences.

Islamabad | Agencies

The year 2021 has seen a major surge in cases related to harassment and abuse of women, as at least 34,000 women registered complaints in connection with various types of offences. As per data, rape, honour killing, burning of women, sexual harassment and abuse cases were reported majorly from Pakistan's

Punjab province, while similar cases were also reported from Sindh and Khyber Pukhtunkhwa provinces. The data from Balochistan was not available for reference. "Due to increased education and awareness among women, they are asserting their rights and challenging the male dominance," said Afzal Shigri, former IGP of Sindh province. As per statistics on provincial basis, Sindh reported a total number of 6,842 offences, while women in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa filed 2,766 complaints. Other than the above mentioned, at least 12,975 additional complaints were also lodged by women regarding their education and health. The increasing cases of violence against women in Pakistan have tainted the very claim of Prime Minister Imran Khan,

who has time and again emphasised his government's vision of ensuring equal rights for women. It is pertinent to mention the upcoming event 'Aurat March', a women-led rally demanding rights and co-existence of women in Pakistan, taken out every year on International Women's Day (March 8), will also highlight the issue of increasing cases of violence against women in the country, and has received widespread criticism for its agenda and aims. The Pakistani society, which has a history of male domination, of Islam and the basic principles of human rights. This is why the religious hardliners in the country have vowed to take a stand against the upcoming Aurat March, to be held countrywide on March 8.

South Korea to end transactions with major Russian banks under US sanctions

South Korea said Tuesday it plans to suspend financial transactions with seven major Russian banks and their affiliates in a bid to join global efforts to impose financial sanctions against Moscow over its attack on Ukraine.

Seoul | Agencies

South Korea said Tuesday it plans to suspend financial transactions with seven major Russian banks and their affiliates in a bid to join global efforts to impose financial sanctions against Moscow over its attack on Ukraine. The government said it will also "strongly" recommend local public and financial institutions halt their investment in Russian government bonds that will be issued starting Wednesday, Yonhap news agency reported.



The decision came as Seoul decided to join the multinational move to remove Russia from the SWIFT international settlement network over its invasion of Ukraine. The banks include Russian top lender Sberbank and state-owned banks VEB and PSB. But the government said it will also apply the same standards as the US when it comes to transactions that will be exceptionally allowed, such as in agriculture, Covid medical support, and energy supplies. South Korea said it plans to

immediately implement the SWIFT-related sanctions once the European Union unveils a detailed action plan. The US and its allies have tightened sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, as they agreed to exclude some Russian banks from SWIFT, an international settlement system where trillions of dollars change hands for cross-border payments. But a list of selected Russian banks subject to the sanctions and the timing of the implementation of the punitive actions have yet to be announced. Earlier,

First Vice Finance Minister Lee Eogweon met his US counterpart, Wally Adegemo, in Washington and said South Korea is reviewing imposing additional sanctions against Russia. "As a member of the international community with responsibility, the South Korean government actively supports major nations' efforts to solve the crisis," Lee said. "Starting with export ban of strategic materials to Russia, we are reviewing additional sanction measures." On Monday, the Foreign Ministry announced exports of strategic will be banned. Seoul's additional measures are expected to be related with export controls regarding advanced technologies and high-tech products. The government has already said it plans to finalise a decision on possible steps it can take in connection with US stand-alone export curbs against Russia on dozens of items, such as semiconductors, computers, telecommunications, information security equipment, lasers, and sensors.



GOVT TO ARRANGE FOR STAY, FOOD & TRANSPORTATION OF STUDENTS RETURNING FROM UKRAINE: CM

Chouhan has asked state officials to make arrangements for students' accommodation, food, and transportation upon their return to India from the war-torn Ukraine. More than 180 students stranded in Ukraine have contacted a helpline set up by the Madhya Pradesh chief minister.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

During the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, a large number of students are returning to India from there. These include students from Madhya Pradesh. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has instructed the officials to make necessary arrangements for these students to get proper facilities in Delhi.

Chouhan has asked state officials to make arrangements for students' accommodation, food, and transportation upon their return to India from the war-torn Ukraine.

In the information made available officially, it has been told that on Monday, Chouhan discussed with the senior officials of the Central and Madhya Pradesh government



regarding the children trapped in Ukraine during their stay in New Delhi and took detailed information about the updated situation. According to a state government official, more than 180 students stranded in Ukraine have contacted a helpline set up by the Madhya Pradesh chief minister.

After meeting with the state resident commissioner and other officials on Monday night, Chouhan issued an official statement

saying that 29 Madhya Pradesh natives had returned from Ukraine.

After the students arrive in India, the officials should make arrangements for their stay, food and transportation to their homes. The students should not face any problems, Chouhan said.

He said more students hailing from Madhya Pradesh are scheduled to arrive in Delhi and Mumbai on Tuesday by flights

bringing back Indian nationals from Ukraine, where Russia has launched a military offensive. "The MP government is in touch with officials in the Ministry of External Affairs, who are communicating with the Ukrainian embassy officials to ensure the well-being of our students there," a government official said. Chouhan directed the Housing Commissioner, Madhya Pradesh and other officers that the children of Madhya Pradesh who are reaching New Delhi from Ukraine through various means, should be ensured, accommodation, food and other arrangements should be made. Make necessary arrangements for the children by making them worry free.

Chouhan said that all such children should be assured that they will not be allowed to face any problem.

It is noteworthy that since last 4 days the office of the residential commissioner of Madhya Pradesh government located in New Delhi is working day and night. Responsibility has been entrusted to each officer for this important task. The office located in New Delhi is in constant touch with the Chief Minister's Office, Bhopal.

Ukrainian guards beat up Indians trying to flee war zone: Medical student on return

Videos of a purported security officer hitting a student had gone viral a couple of days ago as the stranded students tried to reach Ukraine's western borders after Russia launched an invasion of the country.

Team Absolute | Guna

A medical student who returned to her home in Guna district from Ukraine earlier this week claimed that Ukrainian guards were beating up Indian students who were fleeing the war zone.

Videos of a purported security officer hitting a student had gone viral a couple of days ago as the stranded students tried to reach Ukraine's western borders after Russia launched an invasion of the country. Shrutika Nayak, a third year MBBS student at Ivano National Medical University, reached her home in Guna after being evacuated by an Air India flight.

The situation in Ukraine is very bad, she told reporters. "Ukrainian guards were harassing Indian students who were fleeing the war zone and even beating them up," she claimed.

"I am fortunate enough

that I reached India and now meeting family members," she said.

Nayak had booked a return ticket for February 16, but the flight was cancelled.

She then booked a ticket for March 3, but it too got cancelled, she said.

Nayak then travelled 400 km on a bus to reach Romania on February 26 and the government there helped Indian students, she said, while also thanking the Indian government.

She boarded a special Air India flight for evacuees on February 27 from Romania and reached New Delhi at 6.30 pm IST the same day.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had said earlier that more than 180 students stuck in Ukraine contacted a helpline set up by the state government. So far, 29 persons from Madhya Pradesh have returned from Ukraine, Chouhan stated on Monday night.

CM Planted Bel Patra and Shami Saplings in Smart Garden

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday planted Belpatra and Shami saplings in Smart Garden on the occasion of Mahashivratri. On this occasion, Sanskriti Khare, Venu Pillai, Bhavesh Choudhary and Abhishek Sahai of Help Age India also planted saplings.

Help Age India has been working for the senior citizens in India for the last 40 years. This organisation works to improve the quality of life and care of underprivileged elderly persons. Help Age India has planted about 500 saplings in Bhopal's schools, colleges and roadside vacant places for environmental protection. More than five thousand neem and fruit trees have been planted by the organisation in 17 villages including Punasa in Khandwa district. Along with the operation of Health Care Mobile Units by Help Age India organisation, works like Cataract Surgery Helpline, Senior Citizen Home Care, Day Care, Physiotherapy, Elderly People Self-Help Group etc. are being done prominently. The organisation also conducts advocacy and awareness programmes on rights and policies relating to senior citizens. Along with this, 'Elder Line-14567 (National Senior Citizen Helpline)' of Government of India is being operated by HelpAge India in five other states including Madhya Pradesh.

Bale and Shami planted today on the occasion of Mahashivratri have an important place in worship. Shami is considered very beneficial from the point of view of Ayurveda. Also, the use of Samidhas of Shami tree in Yagyas is considered auspicious. Bel leaves are also called bilva tree. Research has found information about its various medicinal properties.



CM OFFERED PRAYERS ON MAHASHIVRATRI

- Chief Minister Chouhan Took Part in the Procession by Pulling the Chariot of Baba Bateshwar at Badwale Mahadev Temple
- Chouhan Prays for Welfare of Everyone

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today reached Badwale Mahadev Temple near Bhavani Chowk, Somwara, Bhopal on Mahashivratri and prayed for the welfare of the world by performing puja-archana of Adi Dev Bhagwan Baba Bateshwar. Chouhan performed Shiv Abhishek with his wife Sadhna Singh. On this occasion, Chief Minister Chouhan met the devotees in the temple premises and congratulated them on the occasion of Mahashivratri.

Chouhan participated in the procession of Baba Bateshwar wearing a safa and pulled a chariot. General Salute was given by Police Band. Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang, former mayor Alok Sharma, former minister PC Sharma, Rahul Kothari, Sumit Pachauri and many public representa-



tives and a large number of devotees were present on the occasion.

Chouhan, through the media personnel present at the venue, extended warm wishes to the people of the state on the occasion of Mahashivratri. Chief Minister said that Lord Shiva is a benevolent, his blessings are with all. Today all of us are worshipping the Bhole

Bhandari Lord Shankar with full faith and devotion. There is enthusiasm in the whole state, may his grace remain, the state may flourish, the people may be happy, may all thrive, may all be well, may Lord Bhole Bhandari fulfill everyone's wishes. Sarva Dharma Sambhav is our sentiment, praying to God, everyone should be happy.

MP Weather : Rain alert in some districts, farmers problems may increase

Team Absolute | Bhopal

There is a change in the weather once in Madhya Pradesh. Because the feeling of slight cold is still being felt in the state. At the same time, due to strong winds in some districts, the Meteorological Department has also issued a rain warning. Due to which the concern of the farmers seems to be increasing. Because the crop of farmers is being cut or is about to be cut in the state, in such a situation rain can increase the problem.

The Meteorological Department has predicted light rain with thundershowers in some districts of Madhya Pradesh. These districts include Dindori, Chhindwara, Anuppur, Mandla and Seoni districts. In these districts, an alert has been issued for light rain or showers with hot flashes. Apart from this, there is a possibility of light rain in some parts of the state including the capital Bhopal, Indore. Actually, at this time Ravi's crop is completely ripe. Crops like mustard, lentil, gram are on the verge of being cut, while the wheat crop has also started ripening. In such a situation, the forecast made by the Meteorological Department regarding the rain is worry-



■ The Meteorological Department has predicted light rain with thundershowers in some districts of Madhya Pradesh. In such a situation, the problems of the farmers may increase.

ing the farmer. If it rains at this time, the problems of the farmers may increase.

In the last 24 hours, Khargone recorded the highest temperature of 36.5 Celsius, while the lowest temperature was recorded in Nagaon. On behalf of the Meteorological Department, it was told that a new system seems to be active in the state. Due to the winds coming from Pakistan side, there is a possibility of rain in some parts of the state.

At the same time, due to the decrease

in temperature, the night temperature is continuously falling. Due to which, apart from Gwalior Chambal zone of MP, the districts of Bundelkhand and Madhya Bharat zone also felt mild cold. The night temperature reached below 3 degrees in many places.

The Meteorological Department says that a little moisture is being seen right now, but in the coming few days the temperature will increase and then there will be a feeling of heat.

State's first Skydiving Festival begins in city. Five slots on inaugural day Top Babus fly in air, land on ground

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Principal Secretary of tribal affairs, Pallavi Jain Govil was the first person to skydive on the inaugural day of the two-day Skydiving festival at the RGPV Ground in the city on Tuesday. Dressed in the skydiving kit, she jumped from the aircraft along with an expert from a height of 10,000 feet. Govil was spotted smiling and showing the thumbs up sign during the free fall in the pictures. She told the Free Press that her experience was 'awesome'. She said that the team was 'very professional' and the event was well organised. The tandem divers were quite experienced. "It was great," she said. The two-day event has been organised by the MP Tourism Board (MPTB) in collaboration with a private agency.

The event was held for the first time in the state. The five tandem skydivers on Tuesday



included Principal Secretary of Energy department, Sanjay Dubey and S. Vishwanathan, managing director, MP Tourism Development Corporation.

After landing on the ground, Sanjay Dubey said that it was a wonderful experience and he enjoyed every minute of it. "I have frequently travelled on aircraft and choppers but flying at a considerable height in a small plane with the door open was an altogether different experience. Then, when you are in free fall for about 30 seconds you are hurtling

towards the ground at the speed of 240 km per hour without any parachute. It is very enjoyable and it is safe. I will urge everyone not to miss this opportunity," he said.

Earlier, Home Minister Narottam Mishra inaugurated the event. Tourism minister Usha Thakur joined in virtually. After the formal inauguration, two divers jumped from the aircraft holding the Indian tricolour and the flag of the MPTB.

The fest will be held from March 3-6 at Ujjain. There are around 44 slots in Ujjain,

all of which have been booked. In Bhopal, there are 14 slots spread over two days. The divers will jump from a height of 10,000 feet. After a free fall for around 6,000 feet, they will deploy parachutes.

Deputy Director, adventure tourism board, Umakant Choudhary said that all the 14 slots in Bhopal for March 1 and 2 have been booked. He said that for want of free air space, the number of slots in the city is limited. "Several flights take off from and land in Bhopal every day, hence availability of free air space is limited," Choudhary said.

World record made in Ujjain, City of Baba Mahakal lit up with 21 lakh lamps

The world record for lighting maximum number of lamps simultaneously in Ujjain was made on Mahashivratri. This was followed by fireworks at Ramghat. This program was organized on the lines of Ayodhya. 21 lakh Lamps lightened on the banks of Shipra river in Ujjain

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The world record for lighting maximum number of lamps simultaneously in Ujjain was made on Mahashivratri. This was followed by fireworks at Ramghat. This program was organized on the lines of Ayodhya.

History was also created today on the ghats of Mokshadayini Shipra. Here 14 lakh lamps were lit simultaneously, while 21 lakh lamps have been installed in the entire city. The volunteer did the work of wicking oil in the lamps. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan lit the first lamp. The certificate of world record was handed over to the CM.

He also observed the construction work of Mahakal temple. The CM said that the grand, divine and supernatural form would emerge after the completion of the expansion work of Shri Mahakal Maharaj



temple complex in Ujjain. Devotees will also get more facilities than before in the expansion of the temple complex. Pray to Shri Mahakal ji to keep his grace on all of us.

He reached the Mahakal temple and had darshan. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan also

inspected the work being done under Mahakal temple expansion. In the evening, the Chief Minister lit the first lamp amid chants. 11 Batuks were present on the occasion for chanting the mantras. Here on Mahashivratri, thousands of devotees are reaching the Mahakal temple to have darshan.

By noon 1.50 lakh visitors had visited. Let us tell you that this time Ujjain's Mahashivratri has become very special. Along with the discharge of tradition in other major temples and pagodas including Mahakal temple, Deepotsav is being celebrated. Its name is Shiva Jyothi Arpanam. First there was a

musical presentation of Bhajan etc. After this other events also took place.

Administrative staff is deployed at the ghats. With the CM lighting the first lamp at 6.35 minutes, volunteers lit 14 lakh diyas all over the ghat. The lights of the ghat area were switched off at 7 pm. After

this video shooting was done with the drone camera. After this the world record will be announced.

Here on Mahashivratri, there is a gathering of people in the Mahakal temple area. Thousands of people reached the temple to have darshan of Baba Mahakal. According to the data received from the temple management committee, 1.50 lakh people had visited till 2.30 pm. A visitor is getting darshan in 45 to 50 minutes. The channel gate at the other end of the Kartikeya Mandapam has been opened by changing the philosophy.

This has made the traffic more smooth. In view of the preparations for Deepotsav, the roads leading to the major ghats like Ramghat etc. have been sealed by installing barricades. Now only volunteers who light the lamp are being allowed here. Due to this there are problems in crowd management in the area.



Michael Douglas to play Benjamin Franklin in limited series

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Michael Douglas will star as US Founding Father Benjamin Franklin in a new limited series. According to Variety, the yet-untitled series is based on the book 'A Great Improvisation: Franklin, France, and the Birth of America' by Pulitzer Prize winner Stacy Schiff. Kirk Ellis, the writer behind 'John Adams' series, will write the show for Apple and serve as an executive producer.

Emmy-winning director Tim Van Patten will direct and executive produce. Douglas will executive produce in addition to starring. Richard Plepler will executive produce via EDEN Productions, which is currently under an overall deal at Apple. Tony Krantz of Flame Ventures and Mark Mostyn also executive produce, with Schiff co-executive producing. Apple Studios and ITV Studios will co-produce.

The series will explore the story of one of the greatest gambles of Franklin's career. At age 70, without any diplomatic training, Franklin convinced France - an absolute monarchy - to underwrite America's experiment in democracy. By virtue of his fame, charisma, and ingenuity, Franklin outmanoeuvred British spies, French informers, and hostile colleagues, all while engineering the Franco-American alliance of 1778 and the final peace with England of 1783.

The eight-year French mission stands as Franklin's most vital service to his country, without which America would not have won the Revolution.



AUNJANUE ELLIS PENS LETTER TO DAUGHTERS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Academy Award-nominee Aunjanue Ellis has written a letter to her daughters, whom she has lovingly called her bright, black future. The letter was published on Variety, it reads: "A Letter to My Daughters Dear Exquisites:

So an errant fake lash led me to a Google search. This search led me to the L'Oreal Beauty Blog. Always looking for makeup wisdom, I glanced over their other articles and saw a piece called "How to Make Your Lips Smaller." The artwork for the piece featured a Black woman who looked like me. "Lips like mine. Skin like mine. Body like mine. I looked at this woman -- my own reflection. I questioned my sight. I looked for the date thinking surely this article was a fossil from a more unenlightened time. Circa 1950. No. It was written and posted in 2021. Months ago. I sent the image to other Black women friends who were equally stunned. According to this article, my lips -- replete, ancestral, a remnant of my majestic mother -- were a thing to be made "small."

Now, right now! Black women's bodies, STILL, for all the veneration (often thinly masked appropriation), remain a place of conflict in American culture. More upsetting, they remain mere material, a commodity to be diminished, or erased at will. A thing that services. The expression "Black Is Beautiful" feels anachronistic now. Cringey. Regressive. But when I saw this article, I am cannon-shot back to the need for this rallying cry. That, in 2022, "Black Is Beautiful" are still words we need to guard us against the blows of a beauty company, a beauty industry, that tell us our lips, our bodies' glad claim to African shores, are not only not beautiful, but undesirable, something to be erased like the lancing of a pimple.



'EUPHORIA' IS HBO'S SECOND-MOST WATCHED SHOW AFTER 'GAME OF THRONES'

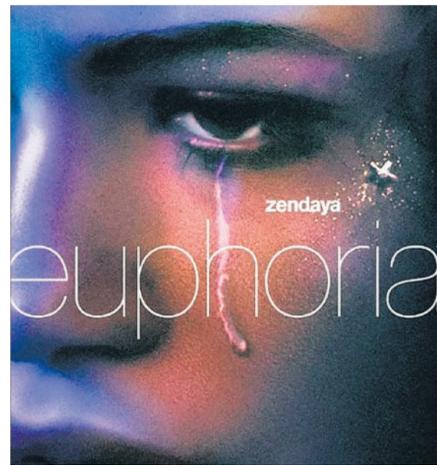
Los Angeles | Agencies

American teen drama show 'Euphoria' is now HBO's second-most watched show since 2004 behind only 'Game of Thrones', per the pay TV channel.

The Zendaya-led drama hit yet another series high with its Season 2 finale episode Sunday, drawing 6.6 million viewers. According to HBO, 'Euphoria' Season 2 episodes are now averaging 16.3 million viewers, the best performance for any season of an HBO series over the past 18 years, other than 'Game of Thrones'. To date, the Season 2 premiere's viewership is approaching 19 million viewers in the US, reports variety.com. 'Euphoria' was once again the top title on HBO Max in the US for the seventh week in a row, as well as the top series for the week in both Latin America and Europe.

As 'Variety' exclusively reported February 1, 'Euphoria's per-episode-viewership average was already up nearly 100 per cent from its first season after airing just its first four episodes of the second season. The show also hit a new series high when it aired opposite Super Bowl LVI on February 13.

'Euphoria' is also now the most-tweeted about show of the decade -- so far -- in the US with 34 million tweets.



Russia to miss 'The Batman' as Hollywood boycotts invader

Los Angeles | Agencies

Warner Bros. has announced that it has halted its plans to release the Robert Pattinson-starrer, 'The Batman', in Russia. The DC adaptation was set to release in the country on Friday (March 4).

"In light of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, WarnerMedia is pausing the release of its feature film 'The Batman' in Russia," a spokesperson for the company said in a statement quoted by

'Variety' in its report. "We will continue to monitor the situation as it evolves. We hope for a swift and peaceful resolution to this tragedy."

Later on Monday evening (U.S. Pacific Time), Sony Pictures also paused its plans to release 'Morbius', its upcoming solo film for the Marvel antihero, and all other upcoming theatrical releases in Russia.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have been impacted and hope this crisis will be resolved quickly,"

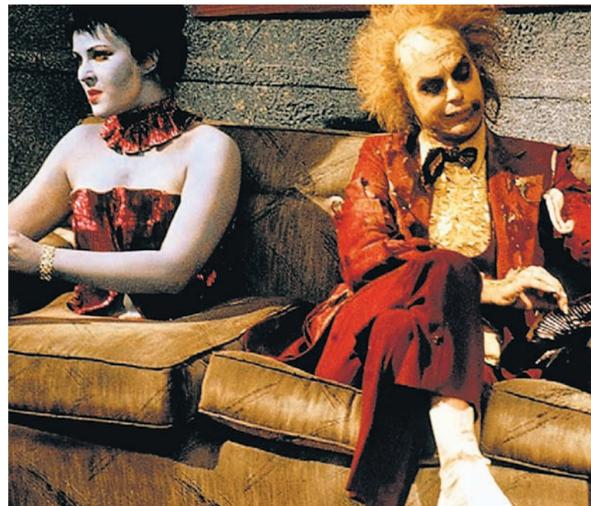
a Sony Pictures Entertainment spokesperson said, according to 'Variety'.

Warner Bros. and Sony's decisions to halt the rollout of their respective superhero films in Russia followed an announcement by Disney to pause its own theatrical releases in that country, beginning with Pixar's 'Turning Red'. The animated film was set to premiere on March 10 in Russia.

'Beetlejuice 2' in works at Brad Pitt's Plan B production firm

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Brad Pitt's production company Plan B has boarded 'Beetlejuice 2', bringing a new



sense of life to a project that has long been in the works at Warner Bros.

According to deadline.com, the sequel remains in early development, with the script yet to be written. No other attachments have been disclosed at this time. 'Beetlejuice' is a classic film from director Tim Burton in which the spirits of a deceased couple are harassed by an unbearable family that has moved into their home, hiring a malicious spirit of the same name to drive them out. Michael Keaton played the title role in the original, with Alec Baldwin, Geena Davis, Catherine O'Hara, Winona Ryder and more rounding out the cast.

The film that Warren Skaaren adapted

from a story by Michael McDowell and Larry Wilson grossed nearly \$75M worldwide upon its 1988 Warner Bros release and won an Oscar in 1989 for Best Make-up, while securing two BAFTA Award noms and other accolades.

Pitt founded Plan B with Brad Grey and Jennifer Aniston in 2001 and now runs the company as CEO alongside co-presidents Dede Gardner and Jeremy Kleiner. Its recent releases include Jon Stewart's 'Irresistible', Miranda July's 'Kajillionaire', Lee Isaac Chung's Oscar-nominated 'Minari' and Barry Jenkins' series 'The Underground Railroad' for Amazon Prime Video.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Christine

Hollywood Critics Association Awards 2022: 'CODA' wins Best Picture

Los Angeles | Agencies

The Hollywood Critics Association held its fifth annual awards on Monday in-person at the Avalon Hollywood in Los Angeles, California.

Sian Heder's 'CODA', which won for outstanding performance by a cast in a motion picture at the SAG Awards Sunday, took the top award for best picture, with Heder winning for adapted screenplay and Troy

Kotsur winning for supporting actor, reports variety.com.

The HCA also honoured the cast of the film with a spotlight award, while the best cast ensemble award went to the cast of Kenneth Branagh's 'Belfast'.

'Dune' led the evening with four awards, including the best director tie between Denis Villeneuve and 'Power of the Dog' helmer Jane Campion. Additional 'Dune' awards included best score for Hans

Zimmer, best cinematography for Greig Fraser and best visual effects for Brian Connor, Gerd Nefzer, Paul Lambert and Tristan Myles.

Other notable winners included Ariana DeBose for 'West Side Story', following her wins at the Golden Globes and the SAG Awards. Kristen Stewart and Andrew Garfield won awards for their performances in 'Spencer' and 'Tick, Tick... Boom!', respectively.





BCCI ALLOWS 50 PERCENT CROWD FOR 1ST TEST BETWEEN INDIA AND SRI LANKA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Tuesday allowed a 50 percent attendance crowd for the first Test between India and Sri Lanka, which is scheduled to start on March 4 at PCA Stadium in Mohali.

The first Test against Sri Lanka will also be Virat Kohli's 100th match in the longest format of the game. He will become the 12th Indian to play 100 Tests after Sachin Tendulkar (200), Rahul Dravid (163), VVS Laxman (134), Anil Kumble (132), Kapil Dev (131), Sunil Gavaskar (125), Dilip Vengsarkar (116), Sourav Ganguly (113), Ishant Sharma (105), Harbhajan Singh (103), and Virender Sehwag (103). So, the BCCI's decision comes as welcome news for spectators who will have an opportunity to watch Kohli's 100th Test from the stands. A section of fans had earlier expressed their disappointment on



tors who will have an opportunity to watch Kohli's 100th Test from the stands. A section of fans had earlier expressed their disappointment on

social media on not having the crowd for the match. Notably, the Punjab Cricket Association (PCA) had confirmed last week that the 1st Test in Mohali will be played without spectators due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We got the communication from the BCCI about allowing of fans at 50% capacity for the first Test match between India and Sri Lanka at Mohali starting March 4. So far, we will allow the online sale of tickets from Wednesday onwards as it becomes crowded at the ticket counters at the stadium. Fans will be there to watch Virat Kohli play his 100th Test match and PCA will ensure that all Covid-19 protocols are followed," RP Singla, treasurer, PCA, told the Indian Express. Kohli, who made his Test debut against the West Indies at Kingston in 2011, has scored 7962 runs from 99 red-ball matches.

Shooter Saurabh Chaudhary strikes gold in Cairo

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's Saurabh Chaudhary struck his third individual International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Cup stage gold, his first in the new format, dominating Germany's Michael Schwald to win 16-6, in the final of the Men's 10M Air Pistol competition.

Shooting on competition day three of the year's first ISSF World Cup Rifle/Pistol in Cairo, Egypt, Saurabh's feat gave India their first medal of the tournament. Tokyo Olympic silver medalist Artem Chernousov of Russia won bronze.

Early on Tuesday, Saurabh had made it through to the first semi-final of the compe-



tion, finishing third in the 60-round qualification round with a score of 584. Chernousov topped the 92-strong field with a sublime 591. In the first semi-final where the first of four athletes are eliminated after 10-shots and the second after 15, Saurabh made it to the medal round along with Chernousov yet again for company as both notched up

38 points to eliminate Robin Walter of Germany first and then Emis Vasermanis of Latvia. In this round, the shooter with the highest single-shot score is awarded four points, while the others get three, two and one each respectively, as they move down the hierarchy. Points are split in case of a tie. This format continues till the medal round.

ISL 2021-22: East Bengal and NorthEast United share points after 1-1 draw

Vasco (Goa) | Agencies

NorthEast United played a 1-1 draw in their final league game of the season against fellow strugglers SC East Bengal in the Indian Super League (ISL) at the Tilak Maidan Stadium, here on Monday.

Goals from Marco Sahane and Antonio Perosevic managed to split the points either way as Khalid Jamil's men ended the season with only three wins. As for SC East Bengal, their winless run extended to seven matches. Marco Sahane (45+1) scored his first goal for NEUFC to give them the lead in the first half but the equaliser came through Antonio Perosevic (55' P) who scored from a precise penalty. Two good



chances fell East Bengal's way in the early stages with Lalrinliana Hnamte making the goalkeeper pull off a good save and Mahesh Naorem Singh hitting the crossbar from long-range. NEUFC survived another scare after the half-hour mark as a volley by Antonio Perosevic missed the target by a whisker. However, it was the

Highlanders that took the lead just a minute before the half-time whistle. A header from Deshorn Brown hit the left post and fell kindly to Marco Sahane who made no mistake and buried his left-footed shot into the bottom-right corner. Thanks to that goal, NEUFC went into the break with their noses in front.

Mandhana's 66 powers India Women to 81-run win over West Indies in warm-up

Rangiorai | Agencies

India batting stalwart Smriti Mandhana compiled a 67-ball 66 in the second warm-up game ahead of the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup as the last edition's runners-up defeated West Indies Women by 81 runs here on Tuesday.

After a narrow two-run win against South Africa on February 27, India thrashed the West Indies on Tuesday, with Deepti Sharma (51), skipper Mithali Raj (30) and Yastika Bhatia (42) coming good to compile 258 in the allotted 50 overs. Pooja Vastrakar then scalped three wickets while Meghna Singh got two as the Stafanie Taylor-led West Indies were restricted to 177/9 in the warm-up game. Mandhana seemed to have recovered from the blow she suffered on the head in the first warm-up game as she sizzled with a polished half-century which came with the help of seven boundaries and at a strike rate of nearly 100. Showing no inhibitions of the head-knock just two days earlier at the same ground, the left-hander played a composed innings as she set the platform for the middle order, with Deepti Sharma also reaching fifty. Seemingly set to



keep the No.3 spot, Sharma ticked things over in spite of hitting just the solitary boundary. Tried at No.5 after opening in the first fixture, Yastika Bhatia made another start of 42, with captain Mithali Raj compiling 30. After her century in the first fixture, Harmanpreet Kaur was rested from batting. Stafanie Taylor tried a number of options, also fin-

ishing with figures of 0/27 from five overs. Cherry-Ann Fraser, Karishma Ramharack and Hayley Matthews finished with a pair of wickets each.

After playing their last match at Lincoln Green, the West Indies found going tough with the new ball on a tricky surface. Jhulan Goswami caused headaches (0/14 from eight overs), though tied up the West Indies top order as wickets fell at the other end. Pooja Vastrakar (3/21) led the way with the ball, as the likes of Meghna Singh, Deepti Sharma and Rajeshwari Gayakwad collected a pair of wickets each. Hayley Matthews (44) looked in good touch as Shemaine Campbelle passed fifty.

Brief scores

India Women 258 in 50 overs (Smriti Mandhana 66, Deepti Sharma 51, Mithali Raj 30, Yastika Bhatia 42; Hayley Matthews 2/47, Cherry-Ann Fraser 2/24) beat West Indies Women 177/9 in 50 overs (Hayley Matthews 44, Shemaine Campbelle 63; Pooja Vastrakar 3/21, Meghna Singh 2/30, Rajeshwari Gayakwad 2/39, Deepti Sharma 2/31) by 81 runs.

ICC RANKINGS: HARMANPREET RISES ONE SPOT TO 20TH; DEEPTI 12TH AMONG BOWLERS

Dubai: India's Harmanpreet Kaur has gained a spot and risen to No.20 in the latest ICC Women's ODI Player Rankings for batters released on Tuesday after scoring a 66-ball 63 in the fifth and final ODI to roar back into form. Her knock helped India win the final ODI by six wickets.



Top India batters Mithali Raj and Smriti Mandhana continue to be in the Top-10 among batters, holding on to the No. 2 and No.8 spots respectively in the latest rankings led by Australia's Alyssa Healy. Among ODI bowlers, India pacer Jhulan Goswami is holding firm at No.4 with Australia's Jess Jonassen leading the table. Deepti Sharma also saw her position rise in the bowling charts, gaining one spot up to No.12. She returned with figures of 1/49 in four overs and 2/42 in 10 overs in the fourth and fifth ODIs, respectively. She only scored 9 runs in the fourth ODI and did not bat in the fifth match, which saw her lose one spot in the all-rounders' rankings, down to No.5. Meanwhile, New Zealand's star all-rounder Amelia Kerr continued her rise in the rankings. The 21-year-old Amelia starred in New Zealand's 4-1 ODI series victory at home against India, which has seen her rise to No. 4 in the all-rounders' ranking.

FIH HOCKEY WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

OPPONENT DOES NOT MATTER : SUSHILA CHANU

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

India Women's Hockey Team will open their campaign against England on July 3 in the Pool B match of the FIH Hockey Women's World Cup 2022 in Spain and Netherlands scheduled to begin from July 1.

India will next face off against China on July 5 and New Zealand on July 7. India Women's Team half-back Sushila Chanu addressed the media at a virtual press conference and said that the order of the matches does not change how the team will be preparing for the tournament.

"It does not matter against which opponents we start our campaign. We are not afraid of which team we are facing first as our mentality and our mindset is to take



each game as it comes and try and win every match," Sushila Chanu said. "We have faced China recently in Muscat, Oman, in the Women's Hockey Asia Cup

2022, and in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2021/22, and so it will be an advantage for us. We will be playing the FIH Hockey Pro League 2021/22 matches against England next month. We had last played New Zealand in 2020. So we know about all these teams quite well and we know how we have to prepare for the upcoming challenges," the veteran hockey player added. India competed against the Spain Women's Hockey Team at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar over the past weekend in a two-legged affair. While India won the first match 2-1, Spain won the second match 4-3. India forward Navneet Kaur also spoke on how the team has gained confidence in the past couple of years because of constantly facing higher-ranked opponents.

JASON ROY PULLS OUT OF IPL 2022; GUJARAT TITANS TO LOOK FOR REPLACEMENT

London: New Indian Premier League (IPL) side Gujarat Titans have reportedly suffered a setback ahead of the upcoming season, as England opener Jason Roy has pulled out of the tournament "citing the challenge of staying in the tournament bubble for an extended period". A report in espncricinfo said on Tuesday that the 31-year-old cricketer, who was signed by the Titans for his base price of Rs two crore at the IPL mega auction barely a fortnight ago, had informed the franchise of his decision to quit last week. The report said that the Titans are yet to finalise a replacement. The report said that Roy, who played in the recently-concluded Pakistan Super League (PSL) emerging as one of the top run-getters in the tournament for Quetta Gladiators, reportedly took the decision due a longer IPL season this time around, where, despite playing just six games for the Gladiators, he still managed to score 303 runs at an average of 50.50 and a strike rate of 170.22. Roy slammed two half-centuries and a hundred, but the Gladiators finished fifth in the six-team league. In 2020, Roy was picked by Delhi Capitals for a base price of Rs 1.5 crore but opted out citing personal reasons. This year's IPL league phase will take place in Mumbai and Pune and the teams will once again be confined to bio-bubbles throughout the duration of the tournament, which will run from March 26 till May 29. Roy had earlier represented Gujarat Lions (2017), Delhi Daredevils (2018) and Sunrisers Hyderabad (2021). Roy has a total of 329 IPL runs in 13 matches at an average of 29.90 and a strike rate of 129.01.

Afghanistan move to fourth in ODI rankings after big win over Bangladesh

Chattogram (Bangladesh) | Agencies

Afghanistan have moved up to No.4 in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League table after their crushing seven-wicket victory over hosts Bangladesh in the third and final One-Day International here.



Though Bangladesh had clinched the series before the third ODI, taking an unassailable 2-0 lead, Afghanistan, thanks to the win in the final ODI, are now on 70 points, just nine short of India, who are at No.3.

Bangladesh continue to lead the table with 100 points, while England are second on 95.

In the final ODI, Afghanistan, after bowling out Bangladesh for 192, chased down the total effortlessly with 59 balls to spare.

Afghanistan's openers got off to a terrific start, displaying good form and picking boundaries right from the start of their innings. Openers Rahmanullah

Gurbaz (106 not out) and Riaz Hassan (35) added 57 runs in the first 10 overs and continued to carry on the momentum forward on Monday night.

Bangladesh knew they needed to do something special to defend the total, so they brought in the spinners early. Although the plan didn't work at the start, Shakib Al Hasan managed to break the 79-run opening partnership in the 16th over, stumping out Riaz Hassan for 35.

Gurbaz was joined in the middle by Rahmat Shah, and the two continued to play

sensibly, laying the foundation for an easy run chase. Gurbaz, who was lucky to get three lifelines, made full use of the reprieves as he got to his third ODI century.

Brief scores:

Australia 337/9 d in 104.1 overs and 216/7 d in 64 overs (Beth Mooney 63, Ellyse Perry 41; Katherine Brunt 3/24, Charlie Dean 2/24) drew with England 297 all out in 105.5 overs and 245/9 in 48 overs (Nat Sciver 58, Heather Knight 48; Annabel Sutherland 3/69, Alana King 2/39).

IPL 2022 captains named, RCB to announce leader 'real' soon

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With just few weeks left for the 2022 Indian Premier League to kickstart, Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) is yet to announce their captain of the season. However, if sources are to be believed, senior batter Faf Du Plessis is the front-runner to lead the side.

Notably, Virat Kohli had announced his decision to quit RCB captaincy at the end of IPL 2021. And since then there have been discussions among cricket fanatics about who could fit in Kohli's shoes.

After the mega auction, Faf, Glenn Maxwell and Dinesh Karthik's names started doing the rounds. However, Maxwell's availability in the season, because of personal commitments, is in doubt. So the franchise is likely to go for either Faf or Karthik. Karthik has played for RCB in 2015 and has led Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in the past. Whereas, Faf has a tremen-



dous experience of leading South Africa and his past batting record with Chennai Super Kings is also phenomenal. "We will announce that name real soon. Discussions are on as we have good options with

us," an RCB source close to the development said. Talking about the other nine teams, they have already appointed their skippers. Interestingly, out of nine captains (named so far), eight are Indians.

IPL 2022 CAPTAINS:

- Chennai Super Kings (CSK) - MS Dhoni
- Delhi Capitals (DC) - Rishabh Pant
- Gujarat Titans (GT) - Hardik Pandya
- Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) - Shreyas Iyer
- Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) - KL Rahul
- Mumbai Indians (MI) - Rohit Sharma
- Punjab Kings (PBKS) - Mayank Agarwal
- Rajasthan Royals (RR) - Sanju Samson
- Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) - Kane Williamson
- Royal Challengers Bangalore - Not yet announced



MUGDHA GODSE: COP FOR THE FIRST TIME

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Mugdha Godse has been in the news lately as she has signed up for a webseries. She will be playing the role of a fierce female cop named Sandhya Rathi. The most interesting takeaway here is it will be the first time everyone can see her in the police uniform. It is challenging for the audience to see how a female officer tackles various problems to ensure that she does justice to being a police officer. The shooting of the webseries is expected to begin soon.

In the webseries, Mugdha will be dealing with challenging cases and can be seen doing some action sequences. She has constantly been interacting with some real-life female police officers to prepare herself for the role and showcase their valor on the screen. Also, she was seen promoting the webseries through her social media and will be traveling more to promote it further. Mugdha looked very upbeat to play a female officer, and we spoke to her, and she says, "As an actor, I have always believed in challenging myself right from my first movie,

Fashion. So, it brought me immense satisfaction when this role came to me. We have seen so many beautiful actresses playing the role of a female police officer and I, too, wanted to do so. Besides, the role is quite demanding, and rightfully so since we are all aware of the responsibilities of a police officer. I hope to do justice to the role and would like to receive feedback on it." The feedback will come Mugdha's way, and looking at how eager she is to play a cop on screen, we can only expect an excellent performance from her.

'I don't want to be categorised as an actor': Rashmika Mandanna

Team Absolute | Chennai

Actress Rashmika Mandanna, who will next appear in the movie 'Aadvallu Meeku Johaarlu', stated that she doesn't want to get categorised as a North or South actress, but only wants to do content-rich movies. The 'Sarileru Neekevuru' actress, who spoke to the media said, "I don't want to be categorised in any industry like North or the South. I want to be an actor with a pan-India appeal."

The actress who has two big-ticket Hindi flicks, 'Mission Majnu' and 'Good Bye', starring Amitabh Bachchan, said that she is open to acting in any good movies, without considering the language barriers.

Rashmika, though, subscribes to the fact that her appearance in South Indian movies like 'Pushpa' and 'Geetha Govindam' has given her great visibility in Hindi. "People call me Srivalli (from Pushpa) or Geetha (from Geetha Govindam), etc. So the audiences remember my characters, which means they are watching all our content," she says.

As Rashmika gears up for her next release titled 'Aadvallu Meeku Johaarlu', she said she learned to conduct herself by seeing senior actresses working on the sets of the Sharwanand-starrer.

"To see women like Radhika, Khushbu, and Urvashi on the sets, knowing that they are such great actors, taught me how to conduct myself on the sets and how to treat others on the team," Rashmika said. Rashmika Mandanna and Sharwanand will be seen together in Kishore Tirumala's upcoming family entertainer.



Actors never chase the box-office, superstars do : Ajay Devgn

Durga Chakravarty | New Delhi

Ajay Devgn is all set to make his digital debut with the upcoming series 'Rudra - The Edge of Darkness', an Indian adaptation of the Idris Elba-starrer 'Luther'. The star has talked about how there is no pressure of chasing box-office figures with the massive growth of the web-space.

Ajay, who has entertained the audiences with his power-packed performances in his over three-decade-long journey in Hindi cinema, says actors never chase the

box-office, but superstars do.

Asked if there is no pressure of chasing box-office numbers anymore courtesy the massive growth of the OTT space and films taking the digital route for releases, Ajay in a conversation with IANS said: "Actors never chase the box office. Superstars do."

For Ajay, it is the audiences' love that matters.

"For me, a film's success is not always about the box office. I want appreciation. I want my honesty to get noticed. I strive for quality. Of course, the ticket

window sales do help. It's a bonus.

However, numbers alone can't dictate the way I work or what I strive for. As far as OTT's rise goes, it's phenomenal. Certain films will go directly to streaming platforms and even there you are anxious to know how it has been received. An actor or a performer is always anxious," added the 52-year-old star.

Ajay made his acting debut in

1991 with 'Phool Aur Kaante'. He then rose to prominence as an action hero starring in successful films such as 'Jigar', 'Sangram', 'Dilwale' and 'Diljale'. He went on to give blockbusters like 'Zakhm', 'Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam', 'Company', 'Golmaal' franchise, 'Singham' franchise, 'Bol Bachchan' and 'Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior'.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Music composer Ankit Tiwari, who has graced the show 'Smart Jodi', has been through the rocky roads of marriage with his wife Pallavi. He admitted that staying together in the marriage for the sake of their families felt hollow to the point that he even drew up divorce papers. The particular episode in his life has deeply affected him so much that he gets chills upon hearing the word 'separation'. Talking about a significant life lesson, the composer said, "My single most important learning in the last few years is that family is a priority. Very often we forget to balance the right things in our life. Silences give way to resentment." Sharing the memories of the unpleasant days gone by, Ankit said, "Pallavi and I came very close to letting things end. But we worked on it and got by. We knew that the love we share is more than the problems we are faced with." Through the new show, Ankit wishes to rekindle the relationship that he and his wife share, "On Smart Jodi, we hope to relive our happier times and rediscover our relationship. I feel so at home with Pallavi and our bond is truly for thick and thin. It took us truly adverse phases to cement our relationship. The word 'separation' today gives me the chills."

THE WORD 'SEPARATION' GIVES THE CHILLS TO ANKIT TIWARI



Tamil actress Akila Narayanan joins US Army as lawyer

Team Absolute | Chennai

Indian-origin Tamil film actress Akila Narayanan has made history by enrolling herself as a lawyer with the United States armed forces.

Akila Narayanan, who made her debut with director Arul's horror thriller 'Kadampari' last year, has now enrolled herself with the US Army.

Sources say that Akila had to undergo the US Army Combat Training to enter the armed forces that ran into several months. After having successfully completed the training, the actress has now joined the US Army as a lawyer. The actress of Indian origin who resides in the US made her debut in acting last year with 'Kadampari', which had music by Prithvi and cinematogra-



phy by V.T.K. Uthayan. Interestingly, Akila had also been running an

online school of music called the Nightingale School of Music.

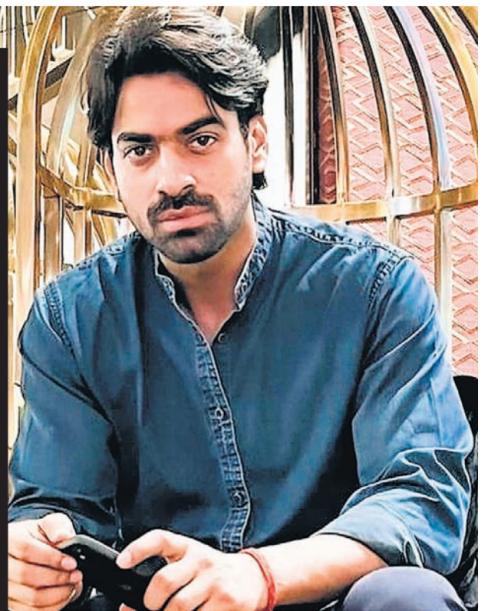
ADITYA OJHA: 'I NEVER QUIT BHOJPURI FILMS FOR TV'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Aditya Ojha, who was last seen playing the role of Yug Pratap in 'Namak Ishq Ka', has signed upcoming Bhojpuri film 'Sasui Tune Kadar Na Jaani' directed by Ajay Kumar Jha. It also stars popular actors like Sanchita Banerjee, Kiran Yadav, and Santosh Shrivastava.

Aditya says: "I'm really excited to play the hero in the upcoming Bhojpuri movie. It's a family story. I play a man who keeps juggling between his mother and wife. I'm my mumma's boy and a perfect husband as well. So, it will be exciting how I manage between both the relationships when they are not on the same boat."

The actor, who is popular for his action scenes in Bhojpuri films, made his television debut in 2020 with 'Namak Ishq Ka'. His father is the well-known Bhojpuri writer-director Ajay Ojha. Aditya began his acting career in 2011 with the Bhojpuri film 'Sugna'. He has also played lead roles in Bhojpuri movies such as 'Rihaai', 'Border' and 'Shadi Kar Ke Phas Gaya Yaar'. The actor says he never quit the Bhojpuri industry for TV.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Mrunal Thakur