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As BJP begins its 2024 countdown, major revamp on cards in party, govt

Santosh Kumar Pathak | New Delhi

The BJP high command will be finalising the preparations for the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections as well as the Assembly elections slated for this year.

In view of these, a major revamp is expected within the party, and the government, and preparations are being made to implement it in the coming days.

While implementing the said changes, the Assembly elections to be held in 10 states/Union Territories, such as Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Jammu and Kashmir, will be kept in mind.

In view of this, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with the BJP high command, aim to make the government and the organisation more youthful, active and inclusive, wherein maximum attention will be on the leaders of important and electoral states. The term of BJP President J.P. Nadda is also coming to an end in January. A National



Executive meeting will be held this month. An official announcement to extend Nadda's term is also expected to be made this month.

According to sources in BJP, a major change in the office bearers and state-in-charges and co-in-charges is likely even if Nadda's term is extended.

At the same time, it is being said that Modi will reshuffle his cabinet anytime after Makar Sankranti i.e. January 14, which will be both "expansionary and transformational". Sources said that new and young MPs can be included in the government like earlier.

The date for the Parliament's

budget session has not been decided yet but is expected to start on January 30-31, which leads to the belief that the reshuffle could be done between January 15-30.

The party has based its strategy to win the Lok Sabha elections for the third consecutive time, majorly on the planned revamp.

New Year celebration: 156 people caught for drunk driving in Mumbai

Mumbai: Police caught 156 people for drunk driving and 2,465 people for riding motor-bikes without wearing helmet during the New Year celebrations in the city, an official said on Sunday.



A large number of police personnel were deployed across the city for the safety of citizens during the celebration and a campaign was conducted from late Saturday night till the wee hours of Sunday to check people violating traffic norms. Traffic police had put up check points on various roads in the city to keep an eye on those not following road rules, the official said. The city police caught 156 drunk drivers, while action was also taken against 66 people for rash driving, he said.

The official said action was also taken against 2,465 people for riding motorbikes without wearing helmet and challans were imposed on 274 people for triple riding on two-wheelers.

The police also took action against 679 drivers for jumping traffic signals and fines were imposed on 3,087 vehicles after being found parked in no-parking areas, he said.

Onus is on Congress to save Constitution, and democracy: Kharage

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharage on Sunday said that the party workers have the responsibility to save the Constitution and democracy in the country.

"Let this be the year that we work hard to raise the voice of every Indian, especially the weakest. The onus is on us to save our Constitution and the democratic ethos. Let us be united and preserve our shared values, envisioned by our forefathers," he said in a New Year message.

Kharage said that every Indian should feel that Congress is the medium and vehicle in realising their dreams and aspirations of a secular, progressive, and liberal India. "Congress has always stood for India, and we need to strengthen this ideological bond and invaluable relationship."



"Let us resolve to make the year 2023 - a year in which every Indian comes together and strengthens the bonds of amity and brotherhood," he said in the message to Congress workers.

He appealed to the people that its time to shed the barriers, "which divide us and rekindle in ourselves the values of love, compassion, tolerance and fraternity".

"This is the time to unify each aspiration and reinforce the civilisational ideals that bind us together. Let us reclaim the ideas and ideals of an inclusive society where peace and harmony prevail," he added.

Japan reports 247 Covid deaths, 86,924 new cases

Tokyo | Agencies

Facing the eighth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, Japan on Sunday reported the number of coronavirus-related deaths at 247. The country reported 86,924 new coronavirus cases, down 20,541 from Saturday, reports Japan Today. Tokyo, the capital, reported 9,186 new cases, down 2,003 from Saturday.

The number of infected people hospitalised with severe symptoms in Tokyo was 45 while the nationwide figure was 592, up four from Saturday, according to health officials.

The number of people dying from Covid-19 over the last three months in Japan is nearly 16 times higher than during the same period in 2021. According to the country's national daily The Mainichi, 2022's numbers are on a different scale compared to the 2021. "Taking a wider look at the most recent three-



INDIA REPORTS 265 NEW COVID CASES

New Delhi: India reported a marginal rise of 265 new Covid cases in the last 24 hours against 226 cases recorded the previous day, said the Union Health Ministry on Sunday. The active caseload has declined to 2,706 cases accounting for 0.01 per cent of the country's total positive cases. The weekly positive rate currently stands at 0.15 per cent,

month period from October 1 to December 29, there were 744 deaths during that time frame in 2021. In 2022, the figure is 11,853," the report mentioned.

COMMERCIAL COOKING GAS PRICES UP BY RS 25, RATES WERE HIKED 4 TIMES LAST YEAR

New Delhi: The oil marketing companies (OMCs) on Sunday raised the price of commercial liquid petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders by Rs 25 with immediate effect on the first day of the New Year 2023. The decision of the OMCs will pinch the pocket of those who dine out at restaurants, hotels, orders, etc.

With this price hike, a 19-kg commercial cylinder in Delhi will cost Rs 1,769, Rs 1,721 in Mumbai, Rs 1,870 in Kolkata and Rs 1,971 in Chennai. However, there would be no change in the prices for domestic LPG. Oil marketing companies increased domestic cylinder prices last time on July 6, 2022.

Prices were hiked four times during last year. These oil marketing companies, for the first time in the year, had increased domestic gas prices by Rs 50 in March 2022, and consequently raised it by Rs 50 and Rs 3.50 in May. Finally, it hiked the prices of domestic cylinder by Rs 50 in July last year.

TUNISHA SHARMA DEATH

Sheezan Khan sent to 14-day judicial custody

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Sheezan Khan, who is charged with allegedly abetting the suicide of his ex-girlfriend and co-actor Tunisha Sharma, was produced at the Vasai Killa court on Saturday and remanded to jail custody for 14 days. Khan's lawyer Shailendra Mishra told the court that the allegations by Sharma's mother Vanita and her uncle Pawan were false and baseless. Vanita had claimed that Khan had cheated on her daughter and even slapped her on sets. Mishra, however, claimed that Sharma had moved on from Khan, and was in a new relationship.

Though the police demanded Khan's custody for further investigation, the court, after hearing both arguments, sent him to judicial custody. Speaking to mediapersons, Mishra later said, "Tunisha had a secret boyfriend. We have already submitted all proofs to the police and they are investigating it. My client is innocent and he should be released. We are trying to get him out of jail and will apply for bail. We are also holding a press conference on Monday and the truth will come out," he said,

adding, "My client is also not safe in jail and is currently under trauma."

In the investigations so far, the police learnt that Sharma had been suffering from anxiety and OCD disorder and was receiving treatment for the same. The break-up with Khan, the police suspect, had left her vulnerable.

Shailendra Mishra, Sheezan's lawyer, filed four applications on his client's behalf

▶ SEEKING PERMISSION TO EAT HOME-COOKED MEALS ON JAIL GROUNDS

▶ SHEEZAN IS REQUESTING PERMISSION TO USE AN INHALER FOR HIS ASTHMA

▶ PERMISSION FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND LAWYERS TO VISIT HIM WHILE HE IS IN CUSTODY

▶ SHEEZAN HAS ALSO REQUESTED THAT HIS HAIR NOT BE CUT WHILE HE IS IN CUSTODY, AS WELL AS INCREASED SECURITY WITHIN THE JAIL.



5 KILLED, 10 INJURED IN SOLAPUR CRACKER FACTORY BLAST

Solapur: In a New Year Day tragedy, at least 5 persons are feared dead and 10 others injured when a major blast, followed by a fire, swept through a firecrackers factory at Barshi village on Maharashtra's Solapur on Sunday, officials said.

Four fire tenders, and police and rescue teams have rushed to the spot for relief operations. Eyewitnesses said that a huge blast rocked the vicinity followed by flames in the unit, where at least 40 workers were engaged in making firecrackers there at the time. Locals claimed that at least 9 bodies were recovered from the site, but officials have not confirmed this.

Twitter bans 48,624 accounts for policy violations in India

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Elon Musk-run Twitter banned 45,589 accounts in India between October 26 and November 25, for promoting child sexual exploitation and non-consensual nudity.

The micro-blogging platform, going through a churning under its new owner, also took down 3,035 accounts for promoting terrorism on its platform in the country.

In total, Twitter banned 48,624 accounts in the reporting period in India.

Twitter, in its monthly report in compliance with the new IT Rules, 2021, said that it received 755 complaints from users in India in the same time-frame through its grievance redressal mechanisms, and took action on 121 of those URLs.

These include complaints received from individual users

with accompanying court orders.

Most complaints from India were about abuse/harassment (681), followed by IP-related infringement (35), hateful conduct (20), and privacy infringement (15).

In its new report, Twitter said that it also processed 22 grievances which were appealing account suspensions.

"These were all resolved and the appropriate responses were sent. We overturned none of these account suspensions after reviewing the specifics of the situation. All accounts remain suspended," said the company.

"We also received 1 request related to general questions about Twitter accounts during this reporting period," said the company. Under the new IT Rules 2021, big digital and social media platforms, with more than 5 million users, have to publish monthly compliance reports.

'Physical activity must to reduce mental stress'

Hyderabad | Agencies

People, especially those in the 20-50 years age group must resolve in the New Year to lead a stress-free life and do everything possible to remain active, say healthcare professionals.

Numerous studies over the past couple of decades have highlighted the fact that stressful living is a major concern among Indians. This problem is more visible in urban areas and among city dwellers, due to change in their lifestyles or due to fast-paced living.

Some estimates indicate that at least 50 per cent of the adult populations are under some form of stress due to personal or professional reasons.

Dr Abhinay, CEO, KIMS Hospitals, underlined the need to remain active.

"Many individuals do not believe that physical activities help in reducing mental stress. But many scientific studies have established the fact that individuals can burn their stress out. While excessive gym might be harmful to stressful minds, moderate exercise helps reduce the mental stress and help them go longer," he said.

"Ever better is an easy jog in the morning or a brisk walk. It is important, people plan their morning routines in a manner



which would include physical activities. It is also a fact that prolonged social isolation, and other factors during the pandemic had a negative impact on working professionals across India," he said.

Stress distracts people from their life, their family, and above all, from their goals, observed Dr. B. Kishore Reddy, MD Amor Hospitals.

"I come across many young victims who suffer fatal accidents due to the distractions caused by stress. It is important,

people strive to lead a stress-free life, and ensure their mind remains calm at least while driving vehicles. At certain times, an individual's stressed behaviour might cause irretrievable damage to another person, and that would certainly be a wrong situation to ever get into," he said.

"The stress levels for working people in India have been very different over the past three years, starting from the early days of the pandemic. Even working from home was a very big change for most peo-

ple in India, while it was not such a new thing in the western world and hence not such a big transformation for them. Considering these changes, one must try to take positives out, instead of worrying over the changes," concluded Dr Hemant Kulkarni, CEO Century Hospital.

"Work and career matters, but what matters more is life and family. It is important people prioritise what they want from life, and must act responsibly to ensure they do not enter into the stress zone ever. While many professions demand working at odd hours, such individuals must ensure they work on their body and mind to stay physically and mentally calm," added Dr Gouri Shankar, Senior Consultant, Internal Medicine, SLG Hospitals. Mental health issues are a big taboo among Indians. It is unfortunate that people do not discuss stress in their mind among family members, unlike in the Western world. The stigmas attached to mental illnesses ensure that people sweep things under the carpet and suffer in silence instead of speaking out and seeking help.

Many studies shockingly show that a majority of Indians still do not talk about the problems, and even if they do, they use terminology associated with stigma and prejudice to describe mental illnesses.



HARYANA SPORTS MINISTER BOOKED FOR SEXUALLY HARASSING WOMAN COACH, STEPS DOWN

Chandigarh | Agencies

Haryana Sports Minister and Olympian Sandeep Singh on Sunday stepped down after being booked by Chandigarh Police for sexually harassing junior athletics coach.

He said he handed over his Sports portfolio to Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. However, he has not resigned from the Cabinet. Former captain of the Indian national hockey team, Sandeep Singh has rubbished the charges as "politically motivated".

"I hope there will be a thorough investigation into the false allegations levelled against me. I hand over the responsibility of the Sports department to the CM until the report of the investigation comes out," he told the media here.

The first information report (FIR) against the 36-year-old minister, who is also a former Indian hockey team captain and a first-time MLA, was registered on Saturday.

Acting on the complaint, an FIR



under Sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 354-A (sexual harassment), 354-B (assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent

to disrobe), 342 (wrongful confinement) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was registered. The case is being investigated at the Sector 26 police

station here.

The coach from Haryana on Thursday levelled allegations of sexual harassment against the minister and filed a police complaint a day later. The woman, who participated in the 2016 Rio Olympics, was recruited as a junior coach in the Sports Department in September. In her complaint, she alleged Sandeep Singh sent her messages on Instagram and Snapchat.

"On July 1, he made a Snapchat call and asked me to visit his residence in Sector 7, Chandigarh, for verification of documents. Around 6.50 p.m., he called me to his office and molested me. My T-shirt was torn. I managed to push him aside and ran out of the room as the door was unlocked," she alleged.

Former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda has demanded an impartial inquiry into the allegations levelled by the woman, whereas the Indian National Lok Dal has demanded that the government sack Sandeep Singh.

SC grants interim protection from arrest to man accused of raping minor

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court has granted protection from arrest to an accused facing allegations of raping a minor girl.

A bench comprising justices A.S. Bopanna and Dipankar Datta said: "Issue notice to the respondent. In the meantime, there shall be interim protection against arrest of the petitioner subject to the petitioner diligently participating in the investigation and complying with the requirements of Section 438 (2) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973."

The FIR was registered under 366(A) and 376 of Indian Penal Code, 1860 and Section 4 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 alleging that the accused owns and works in a clothing shop adjacent to that of complainant's, and in April and June 2021, after learning that the victim was alone in her house, the accused entered the house and allegedly raped her, on the pretext of false assurance of marriage.

Appearing for the accused, advocate Namit Saxena argued that the FIR is completely false and added that the records reflect that the accused, a public servant then, was at the government office on both dates of the alleged crime. Saxena further submitted that the progress report filed by the investigating officer had found that no offence was made out. After hearing arguments, the top court



issued notice to the Bihar government and also granted interim protection from arrest to the petitioner. The petitioner moved the apex court against Patna High Court order passed in November 2022.

The plea contended that the high court without looking into the facts and circumstances of the case and without considering that nothing could be found against the petitioner, which might indicate his guilt, dismissed his anticipatory bail application.

"That the case at hand is an unfortunate one where the petitioner, a government servant at the relevant time, has been roped into a conspiracy of committing rape upon the victim by the complainant/father of victim and his family, and now he has an apprehension that he shall be arrested by the police, despite his non-involvement in the alleged crime as mentioned in the FIR," said the plea.

PREGNANT WOMAN SHOT AT BY BLUE DUCK HUNTERS IN UP

Mahoba | Agencies

In a shocking incident, a pregnant woman suffered serious injuries after she was accidentally shot at by men hunting for blue duck. The woman, Vandana (30), was working in the fields when she was shot in her stomach.

She was rushed to a health centre from where she has been referred to a district hospital in Jhansi for treatment. She is said to be in a critical condition.

Vandana's husband, Bhupendra Singh Rajput, said he was working in the

field along with his wife when she was shot in the stomach by two men who had come into the vicinity to hunt down a blue duck.

He said he rushed towards his wife as soon as he heard the gunshot and saw her gasping for breath.

Meanwhile, the two men fled the spot, he said.

According to a statement by an official at the hospital, Vandana and her unborn baby are in a critical condition. A police official said, a case has been registered against the accused and a hunt has been launched to nab them.

NEW YEAR SHOCKER: GIRL DIES A PAINFUL DEATH, BODY FOUND ON ROAD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a shocking incident, a girl died a painful death after her scooter met with an accident and her clothes got entangled in the wheel of a car due to which she was dragged for a few kilometers in Outer Delhi area in the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday.

The girl's clothes were torn in the incident, and later her naked body was found by the police.

Earlier, it was suspected that she was first raped and then killed before being dragged, but now the police have made it clear that it was an accident in which she was killed and her body got entangled to a car.

A senior police official said that they got a call at around 3.24 a.m. in this matter.

"The caller said that the body of a female was tied to a Baleno car and it was being dragged. The caller was constantly contacted over his mobile number by the team of Kanjhawala Police Station. Later on the caller identified the vehicle as a grey colour baleno car," the official said.

After receiving the PCR call, a police team was immediately



sent to the spot and staff deployed at pickets were alerted. The message was also flashed across to search for the vehicle. Later on, the police got a second PCR call at around 4.11 a.m. regarding a body that was lying in the Kanjhawala area.

On reaching the spot, the Crime Team, Rohini district was

also called to the spot. The crime team inspected the spot and photographs were taken from different angles as well as exhibits were lifted from the scene of crime. Thereafter, the body of the deceased was sent to SGM, Hospital, Mangolpuri wherein the doctor declared the patient brought dead. The official said that the car was traced and during enquiry, the occupants of the vehicle were traced and they stated that the car met with an accident in the area of PS Sultanpuri.

"In the area of PS Sultanpuri, SHO during night patrolling had already noticed a scooter in an accidental condition and this information was lodged in the PS at 3.53 a.m. With the scooter number further investigation was conducted and it was found that it belonged to the victim," the police said.

The police said that spot inspection revealed that after the accident, the victim got entangled in the wheels and was dragged for quite some distance.

The police said that they have arrested five persons, who were in the car. They were identified as Deepak Khanna, Amit Khanna, Krishan, Mitthu and Manoj Mittal.

Further investigation in the matter was on.

NIA CHARGE SHEETS 14 MAOISTS FOR KILLING TWO JHARKHAND COPS IN ATTACK ON EX-MLA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Sunday said that they have filed a supplementary charge sheet in a case pertaining to an attack on former MLA, Gurucharan Nayak by CPI-Maoist at Project +2, High School Jhijhrua on January 4, which left two policemen dead.

The charge sheet was filed in a special NIA Court in Ranchi.

The case was initially registered at the police station Goukera in West Singhbhum district and later on the probe was taken over by the NIA.

"Investigations have revealed that the accused persons are members of CPI-Maoist and they participated in meetings in which a conspiracy was hatched to target former MLA Gurucharan Nayak.

"They also participated in the crime which resulted in injury and



death of police personnel and looting of arms and ammunition.

Investigations also brought out that the accused persons were involved in recruitment of members for the commission of terrorist acts and organised Training Camps for carrying out terrorist activities," the NIA has said in the charge sheet.

Further investigations in the matter are on.

Fire tragedy: Delhi Police to check fire NOC of old age home

Team Absolute | New Delhi

After two senior citizens were killed in a fire in an old age home in Delhi's Greater Kailash-2, the police said on Sunday that they will check the fire no objection certificate (NOC) of the centre.

Two women were killed while 17 others were rescued after the fire broke out in the centre on Sunday morning. Chandan Chowdhary, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) said that they were checking about the NOC.

The deceased were identified as Kanchan Arora (86) and Kamal (92). The fire department rescued Avatar Kaur (86), Sarifa (59), Alizabeth (69), Nayan Saha (89) and 13 other women.

According to the information, the fire department got a call about the



fire at around 5.15 a.m. after which four fire engines were rushed to the spot. "The fire was on second and third floor of the building. An old age care centre was being run there. Two persons were killed in the incident and many were rescued from the site," said the fire official.

Meanwhile, the local police team also reached the spot and helped

the fire fighters in the rescue operation. The police said that around 17 injured were removed to a nearby hospital by them.

The rescue operation was still going on. The fire department said that the fire was under control. The cause of fire was not yet known while a short circuit was suspected.

Tripura Minister N.C. Debbarma dies at 80

Agartala | Agencies

Senior Tripura Minister and president of Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) Narendra Chandra Debbarma died here on Sunday following prolonged illness, family and hospital sources said. He was 80. Debbarma, who held the Revenue and Forest Departments, is survived by four sons, three daughters and wife.

The veteran tribal leader suffered from a severe brain stroke on December 30 and was admitted to the government run Govind Ballabh Pant Medical College and Hospital, where he breathed his last. Chief Minister Manik Saha and other leaders condoled the death.

Before joining politics,



Debbarma was the Station Director of the All India Radio for many years.

He played a very significant role in installing the BJP-IPFT alliance government in the state in March 2018 after defeating the CPI-M led Left Front.

Delhi man held for killing wife, childhood friend for having affair

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Solving a double murder case within six hours of the incident, the Delhi Police on Sunday said that they have arrested a man for allegedly killing his wife and his childhood friend after discovering they were having an affair. DCP, Southwest, Manoj C. said that the accused was identified as Gandharv alias Sunny, 22.

"The deceased was accused's wife and childhood friend. His wife was having affair with his childhood friend and it led to the double murder," he said.

The DCP said that on December 30, the duty constable at Safdarjung Hospital received information that a youth and a woman are lying in a pool of blood on a footpath near the hospital's gate no 2 on Aurobindo Marg.

Both of them were admitted to the hospital with critical injuries from a sharp-edged weapon. The youth was identified as Sagar while the identity of the woman, who had a deep sharp injury on right cheek, was withheld. Sagar succumbed during the course of treatment, and shortly after, so did the



woman. During investigation, it came to be known that the woman and Sunny had a love marriage around one and a half year back.

After their marriage they started living together in Noida and worked in a local hospital. Meanwhile, the woman came in contact with Sunny's childhood friend Sagar and she started having an affair with him.

The police learnt that Sunny was making threats to Sagar for many weeks.

Teams conducted raids at Sunny's possible hideouts at

Noida, Gokulpuri, Kusumpur Pahari, Karkardooma and other adjoining areas and succeeded in nabbing the accused from Karkardooma.

During interrogation, Sunny disclosed that Sagar was his childhood friend and residing in same locality. He developed friendship with his wife and it changed into an affair.

Sunny warned Sagar to get keep away from his wife. He admitted that he assaulted both of them with a knife which he was already having with him.

80 tribal students quit school in TN's Thanjavur after harassment by classmates

AT LEAST 80 TRIBAL STUDENTS IN TAMIL NADU'S THANJAVUR DISTRICT STOPPED GOING TO SCHOOL AFTER THEY WERE ALLEGEDLY INSULTED AND MOCKED BY THEIR CLASSMATES.

Chennai | Agencies

The students belong to the Narikkurava community. According to an officer with the District Education department, they were mocked regularly by other students for their peculiar diction as well as mannerisms and this led to the students opting out of the school.

According to the Thanjavur district officials, the students were identified after a survey was carried out in the district with the support of Anganwadi staff, police, childline, the Integrated School Education department, and Block Resource Teachers.

The team in a detailed study on the dropouts in the district found that 1,700 students had dropped out of school in the last academic year. The team could identify that 80 students from the Narikkurava community had stopped coming to the school.

The teachers could find that the students were from Mela Ulloor Village in a Narikkurava settlement and they were studying in the primary section.

The students had to travel through



forest and cross water streams and brave wild animals to reach the school, but with their fellow students insulting and rebuking them they stopped going to school. Sources in

the Thanjavur district administration said that the district authorities are planning to set up a school in their habitat. According to the information available, there was a school in the

vicinity of their habitat but it was shut down during Covid-19 pandemic and the authorities are now trying to revive this school so that the students get a proper education.



CM CHOUHAN INVOKES GHALIB TO SLAM RAHUL GANDHI'S POLL VICTORY CLAIM

Team Absolute | Shirdi

Day after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi proclaimed his party's "landslide victory" in the next Madhya Pradesh Assembly polls, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday retorted with "mann behlane ko khyal achha hai" (it is a good idea to humour oneself).

Chouhan who was in Shirdi on the first day of the year, said in Maharashtra, "Mann behlane ko Rahul khyal achha hai... Go ahead humour yourself. I am also ready to write in the papers that BJP will make a clean sweep in the upcoming elections in Madhya Pradesh". On Saturday, in a press conference in New Delhi, the Congress MP said "I can give this in writing that Congress is going to sweep the Madhya Pradesh elections. BJP will be reduced to nothing, they will be nowhere to be seen. I can



guarantee this for you. Every person in MP knows that BJP has formed its government using money power." The Wayanad MP said, "There is a huge undercurrent against Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The fight between BJP and Congress is no more a tactical political fight." "The opposition needs a central ideological framework that only Congress can provide but our role is also to make sure that opposition parties feel comfortable,"

Rahul Gandhi said at the press conference on Saturday. "If the opposition stands effectively with a vision, what I hear from the ground, it will become tough for BJP to win the elections. But the opposition has to coordinate properly and the opposition has to go to the people with an alternative vision," the Congress leader said. Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections will be held this year.

Consolidation of public sector banks leads to 4,837 branches being shut down

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Efforts to connect the poorest of the poor with banks are underway throughout the country, so that the amount of subsidies provided by the government can go directly to their bank accounts. However, it is surprising that 4,837 branches of several banks have been closed in the last two financial years.

These bank branches have either been completely shut down or have been merged with another bank branch. Chandrashekhar Gaur, a Right to Information (RTI) activist from Madhya Pradesh's Neemuch district, had sought information from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) as to how many public banks had been closed in the last two financial years of 2020-21 and 2021-22.

The details given by the RBI, while replying to Gaur are surprising. It stated that 4,837 bank branches were either merged or closed in the last two financial years.

Details of the closed and merged



branches of Bank of Baroda, Bank of India, Bank of Maharashtra, Canara Bank, Central Bank of India, Indian Bank, Indian Overseas Bank, Punjab and Sind Bank, Punjab National Bank, State Bank of India, UCO Bank,

Union Bank of India were provided. According to RBI, a total of 2,271 bank branches were closed in 2020-21, out of which 86 were completely shut, while 2,185 branches were adjusted to another branch. In the

same period, 27 branches were closed in metropolitan areas, 24 in rural, 22 in semi-urban and 13 in urban areas.

At the same time, 721 branches in metropolitan, 147 in rural, 696 in semi-urban, in rural areas and 621 branches in urban areas have been accommodated in another branch. In 2021-2022, nine branches were completely shut, while 2,557 were merged.

Out of the total 2,566 bank branches, five in metropolitan, two in rural, two in urban areas have been completely closed while 736 in metropolitan, 155 in rural, 947 in semi-urban and 719 in urban areas have been adjusted. According to the RBI, rural branches are the ones with a population of less than 10,000, semi-urban with a population of more than 10,000 and less than one lakh, and urban with a population of more than one lakh and less than 10 lakh.

A metropolitan city branch is one that has a population of more than 10 lakh, based on the 2011 census.

MP Cong to build on momentum of Bharat Jodo Yatra, urban local body polls

Team Absolute | Bhopal

As Madhya Pradesh is gearing up for a heated Assembly polls in 2023, former Chief Minister Kamal Nath-led Congress has decided to kick start its campaign focussing on public issues and not to fall in BJP's 'communal' trap.

Congress had witnessed a massive political jolt in March 2020, when its elected government was toppled by the BJP.

The Congress claimed that the ruling BJP had contested recently concluded urban body polls on development works done in the last 18 years, but their development agenda was exposed, that is why people ousted the BJP from as many as Municipal Corporations. As the BJP's state-level agenda did not work out, they will be totally reliant on Centre's schemes and therefore there is no doubt that a hype will be created on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and other sensitive issues, said a Congress functionary. Sources said the Congress has decided to maintain a silence on these issues so as not to fall into the BJP's 'communal trap'.

A Congress leader, requesting anonymity, said: "The state BJP unit wants to implement the Centre's



agenda and to create a hype on that. But, the Congress has decided to let them do so. It seems Home Minister Narottam Mishra has started leading the state unit BJP, instead of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. But, the Congress leadership has given a clear mantra that not to fall in BJP's communal trap." Instead, the Congress has planned to follow mantras of -- Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'. The urban local body poll results and then Bharat Jodo Yatra have given momentum to the Congress and the party will try to maintain this

momentum.

"The Congress has strengthened itself both in urban and rural areas. Tribal people have stood with the Congress. BJP relentlessly makes attempts to gain tribal support through implementing schemes, but many of them are on paper only. Overall, the state BJP unit is struggling to come out with some different strategies to lure the voters during the Assembly elections," said Mithun Ahirwar, a Congress spokesperson.

This time, the Congress also felt relief to some extent due to escalating factionalism within the ruling BJP. During the winter session of state assembly recently, a BJP minister said the Congress had won 2018 elections because Jyotiraditya Scindia was made Chief Minister's face. Replying to that, a senior Congress leader said, "Now, you can make him (Scindia) CM's face, and you will find better results." The BJP, however, maintains that the party will contest 2023 assembly elections on development issues. "The Congress is in daydream mode these days, so let them be," a BJP spokesperson said. "The people know what has happened during the 15-month Congress government in Madhya Pradesh.

Together we will build self-reliant MP - CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has extended New Year greetings to the people of the state. During his stay in Shirdi, CM Chouhan said in a message issued on social media to the people of the state that this is the wish that the New Year brings Riddhi-Siddhi (prosperity and spiritual power) in your lives, your homes and courtyards are filled with joy. You are not only for yourself, but also for your state, country and society. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is a great Karmyogi, has taken a pledge to build an Atmanirbhar Bharat. He is busy day and night in the accomplishment of his resolution. To build a self-reliant India, we also have to make a



self-reliant Madhya Pradesh. For this I will work day and night to the best of my ability. But not me, together we will make self-reliant Madhya Pradesh. I appeal to you, whatever work you are doing, do it not only for yourself but also for your state. Atmanirbhar Madhya

Pradesh will be made only through hard work, honesty and devotion to duty. Dedicate yourself and work with full potential to build a self-reliant Madhya Pradesh. With this, our country can become according to the dreams of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Muslim man donates blood to save life of ailing Hindu baby

Team Absolute | Chhatarpur

In a selfless act, a Muslim man donated blood to save the life of a 60-day-old baby boy suffering from anaemia in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur district. When he received a phone call about the baby on Saturday, Rafat Khan, 36, did not hesitate even for a second and raced his motorcycle to the district hospital.

Khan was about to leave his house to offer namaz when he received a call about Vikas Gupta who was in desperate need of a positive blood. The baby suffered from

anaemia, a condition caused due to deficiency of healthy red blood cells that carry adequate oxygen to body's tissues. "Without a second thought, I picked up my motorcycle and rushed to the district hospital to donate blood to the ailing child," Khan said on Sunday.

Khan said the baby's father Jitendra, who is a resident of Manoria village, had contacted him after he failed to source blood and was cheated by a tout.

The tout allegedly took Rs 750 from Jitendra on the pretext of arranging for blood, he said.

Jitendra said, "My son's condition has improved now after Khan donated blood. He came like an angel and donated blood with a smile when my child needed it desperately." Paediatrician Dr Mukesh Prajapati, who is in-charge of the special newborn care unit at the district hospital, said the baby's condition was stable after he received blood.

Khan is not a first-time donor and has donated blood at least 13 times in the span of one year. The noble act gave him joy and satisfaction, he said.

Three in fray for the post of sarpanch in Barkhedaloya gram panchayat

Team Absolute | Garoth

With an announcement of the poll schedule, three candidates entered into the fray for the post of sarpanch in Barkhedaloya gram panchayat in Garoth tehsil of Mandasaur district. For the post of gram panchayat Barkhedaloya sarpanch, Bahadur Singh, a resident of Bawdikhedha and Satyanarayan Patidar and Vishnu Banshilal Patidar, both from Barkhedaloya are in the fray. With three candidates in the fray, villagers expect tough contest between the trio.

In Barkhedaloya gram panchayat, three villages including



Barkhedaloya, Varakhedi and Bawdikhedha are in this panchayat. The panchayat includes, 1009 male voters and 979 female voters, this combines a total of 1988 voters who will exercise their franchise for sarpanch post on January 5 at the three polling stations in the village. Counting of votes will be done on January 9. Earlier in gram panchayat Barkhedaloya, no one had submitted the nomination form for sarpanch election due to the reservation of Scheduled Tribes (ST). Reservation of unreserved seats has been done here.

PIPALRAWAN STILL WAITS FOR PUBLIC SERVICE CENTRE TO BEGIN

Pipalrawan: Locals of Pipalrawan and nearby 20-25 villages still wait for a Public Service Centre (PSC) to open in Pipalrawan village despite, located just 30 km away from Sonkatch tehsil office. People in remote villages of the district have to go to Sonkatch tehsil, about 40 km away, to get official work done. Through public service centre, citizens will be able to take advantage of various governmental schemes, apart from official works including caste certificate, pension and other works.

Local residents and 20-25 villagers have to go to Sonkatch to avail benefits of the schemes. Taking cognisance of the matter, municipal president Kavita Devnarayan Sharma has written a letter of concern to Sonkatch sub-divisional officer (SDO) on December 28. In the letter, it was urged to begin a public service centre in Pipalrawan at the earliest, facilitating its residents.

Radha Mahant, SDM Sonkatch, said that the residents have to face hardships while availing benefits of governmental schemes, travelling a 30 km distance. An application has been made to the SDM office with a demand to open a public service centre. The administration is trying its best to do the needful. Soon, Dewas collector and Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will be apprised of and urged to begin the PSC.

Speculation about MP BJP adopting Guj model gathers wind in election year

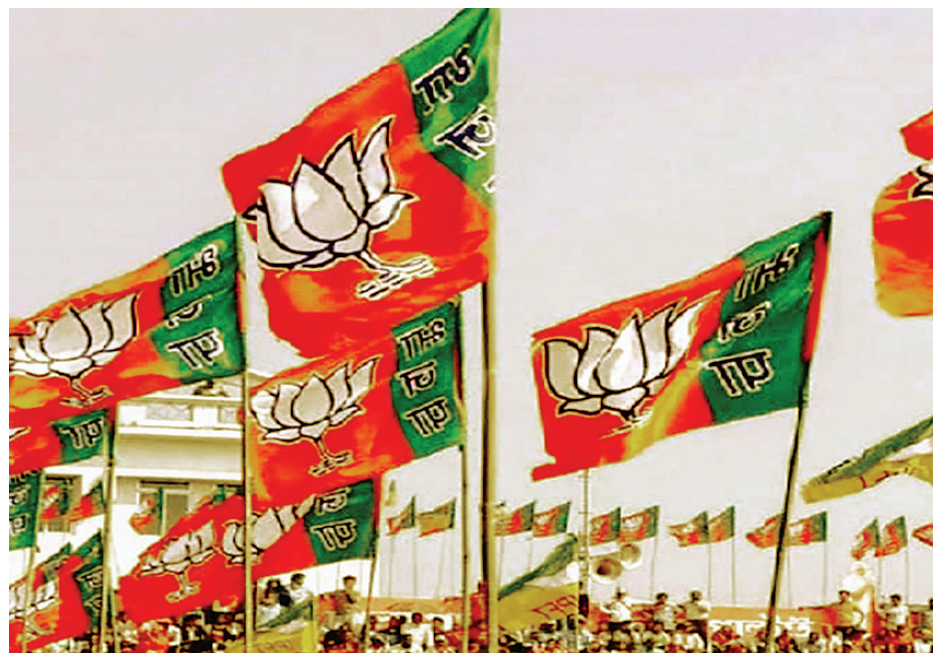
Team Absolute | Bhopal

With Madhya Pradesh entering election year, speculation over the implementation of the Gujarat model or a major reshuffle in the state BJP unit has intensified. The ruling BJP is maintaining a silence on a possible move from the party's central leadership; however, this silence is only leading to more speculation.

Reliable sources in the Madhya Pradesh BJP said that what experiments will take place is unclear as the decisions will be taken by the Central leadership -- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah -- but some major changes are expected.

"Whether the ministers and some sitting MLAs will be given tickets for the next election or not, is a different issue. It happens in every election in all political parties, but that will not change the atmosphere. A major reshuffle is likely to take place at the top level of the sangathan (party), and it is expected to happen by mid-January," a senior BJP functionary said, requesting not to be named.

Murmurs about the execution of a Gujarat model in poll bound Madhya Pradesh began after the BJP's plan for a major or complete reshuffle was successful and the BJP retained power in Gujarat recently. The BJP had experi-



mented with the same method in the Delhi Municipal Corporation (MCD) elections in 2017 and had won despite facing huge anti-incum-

bency. All 250 sitting municipal councillors were replaced with new faces and the BJP's plan was successful against the wave of the rul-

ing Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

Senior Congress leader and former minister P. C. Sharma, who was the in-charge of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra' leg in Madhya Pradesh, speaking on the BJP executing the Gujarat model said, "I don't know which model is coming. I can only say that no model is going to save the BJP's corruption model' for the last 18 years in Madhya Pradesh. For the last several years people have been hearing about the propagated development model of Madhya Pradesh - then where has MP's development model gone? It shows that the Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led BJP government has accepted its failure. People of MP want their own model (MP model). The Gujarat model came in 2014 and since then government properties have been sold off one by one."

When asked what if the so-called Gujarat model' is followed with a strong entry of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Madhya Pradesh?, Sharma said, "Let them speculate, those who are hoping so, but MP will be between the BJP and the Congress only. No one can dent the Congress' votes this time. People of Madhya Pradesh have decided to say goodbye to the BJP. Congress workers are working hard to ensure that the party under Kamal Nath forms the government in Madhya Pradesh."



EDITOR'S SPECS

GOLD & SILVER LIKELY TO SEE SIGNS OF EXHAUSTION IN 2023

A roller-coaster ride may have less ups and downs than what the gold market has had in 2022, industry experts said while looking back at the year that is set to end soon. There are few factors which triggered volatility in the market like, move in Dollar Index and yields, aggressive monetary policy stance from major central banks, rising inflationary concern, geo-political tension, which led to this volatility. Pointing out the repo rate hikes by the RBI and the US Federal Reserve, the two experts said the action resulted in the flight of money from risky assets to the US dollar as the real interest rates turned positive for the first time in two years in May 2022. According to the Quantum AMC report, there can be another 50-75 basis points hike in the first half of 2023 by the US Fed which in turn could result in bouts of volatility in both risk assets and gold as real rates rise in an environment of cooling inflation and higher nominal rates. The gold's domestic story is quite different, as even after such macro happenings there was not a great on the MCX, amidst factors like sharp depreciation in the rupee coupled with hike in basic customs duty by five per cent on gold. Along with Russia-Ukraine tensions, inflationary concerns and Covid scare in China, market participants will also carry the baggage regarding slower global growth into the next year. There seems some signs of exhaustion in gold and silver and dips could be used as buying opportunities for any medium-to long-term investor for the target of Rs 58,000 in gold and Rs 73,000 followed by 82,000 in silver.

POLITICAL NARRATIVE OF 2023 WILL SET THE TONE FOR LOK SABHA POLLS

Deepika Bhan

Year 2023 is going to be a period of extremely intense political activities across the country. It is the springboard year for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections that will witness the BJP fighting to retain its third term at the Centre and the Opposition wanting to dislodge Narendra Modi at any cost. The fight will be to the finish between Modi's BJP and the rest of the Opposition. Whether the Opposition unites for a combined fight against Modi or individual aspirations sees them divided, remains to be seen. And for the BJP, Narendra Modi continues to be the sole power point. The New Year is sure to be full of theatrics - rhetorics, charged-up speeches, stinging quotes, allegations and accusations. Narratives and counter-narratives will be built up, and allegations and accusations will rant in the air. For the 2024 elections, the agenda will be played out in 2023, a very crucial year for the political parties. 2023 will see Assembly elections in nine states and possibly the union territory of J&K. These state polls assume importance because they will set the tone and mood for the Lok Sabha elections. The ruling BJP has a lot to feel concerned about. In the nine states that are going to polls, the surveys have not been very exciting for the party, but then in politics everything is unpredictable. The Gujarat Assembly elections produced a shocking result where the BJP's victory has been declared as an unenviable example of Modi's efforts. PM Modi led the party's campaign in the state where despite anti-incumbency, the BJP performed spectacularly - it broke all records and won 156 of the 182-member Assembly seats, decimating the Congress. Some call it Modi magic, but his supporters say it is his hard work. The BJP is heavily banking upon this 'Modi magic-hard work' formula to get the right numbers in the Lok Sabha. Whether it is magic or hard work, either way it is a carefully crafted formula at the core of which is the Hindu assertion, nationalism and patriotism. What is likely to be seen in 2023 is a lot of action that propounds nationalism. And



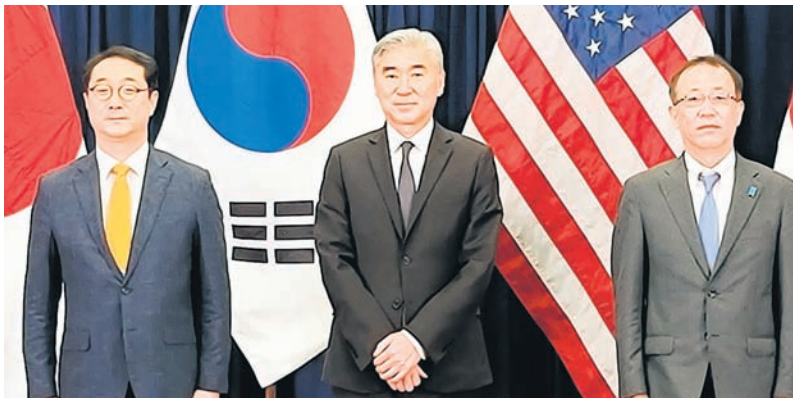
helping in this will be the G20 exercise that will portray Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the 'Vishwa Guru'. With India the president of the G20, foreign policy is likely to drive the BJP's narrative this year. Adding to the tone and helping build the mood will be international diplomacy and the G20 Group activities. Along with the G20, the countdown for the Ram temple inauguration will also begin as it is set to open in January 2024, a few months before the big elections. The 'Jai Shri Ram' slogan is the quintessential catchphrase for the saffron party. The opposition fears that there may be some additions to it in the form of the Gyanvapi mosque and the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi. Recently, a Mathura local court passed an order in the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah case to survey the disputed site. The order is on the same lines as the Varanasi court that ordered a videography survey of the Gyanvapi Masjid. The BJP has said that such issues would be settled in accordance with the Constitution and decided by the courts, but the Opposition fears that other right-wing groups may gradually launch movements to emotionally align the majority. The Opposition understands the price they have paid because of the Hindu assertion formula and the minority appeasement politics. From two seats in the Lok Sabha in

1984 to winning two back-to-back general elections, the BJP with its right-wing Hindutva ideology is today firmly rooted at the country's political landscape, and the Opposition is in tatters. Hence, the fear that the agenda may dominate political discourse. Then there are issues like Uniform Civil Code, population control and religious conversion. China and Pakistan, too, will be on the election agenda of all the parties, big or small. While the Modi government has been adopting a cautious approach on China, its stance in the election-year will put pressure on its nationalism portrayal. The Opposition, the Congress in particular, will try to needle the government and the BJP on this. The country is sure to see a lot of politicking around these. In 2019, the saffron party ended with a tally of 303 seats giving it a single majority in the 543-member House. The party is aiming to exceed this number. The major effect of the 2023 Assembly polls will be upon the Opposition parties. The outcome, if positive for the Opposition, can galvanise the parties to plan aggressively for the 2024 battle. The results can also help lend some clarity as to which leaders have the most bargaining power to be the prime ministerial candidate from the opposition. So

far, the aspirants are many - Rahul Gandhi, Arvind Kejriwal, K. Chandreshekar Rao, Mamata Banerjee, etc. Of these, KCR has taken a step by converting his TRS into BRS; Kejriwal is trying to showcase his performance in each and every state. Rahul Gandhi is on the Bharat Jodo Yatra, which he desperately wants to convert into a major political rallying point. The Congress has planned to keep up the momentum of the Yatra by taking similar yatras (Bharat Jodo Yatra and 'Hath Jodo' Yatra) at the local and booth level throughout the year. If the Congress does well in the Assembly polls, then its performance will automatically be linked to its former president Rahul Gandhi, thereby elevating his position in the opposition camp. A lot is at stake for the Gandhi scion. This year is crucial for political parties and they will come out with all the cards they have in their bags. The BJP will try to set the agenda with G20, the Ram temple, Uniform Civil Code and religious conversions. The Opposition will try its best to stop Modi from becoming India's political Pied Piper and repeating the Gujarat landslide across the country.

international

S.KOREA, US, JAPAN CRITICISE N.KOREA'S PUSH TO BOLSTER 'SELF-DEFENSIVE' CAPABILITIES



Seoul | Agencies

The chief nuclear envoys of South Korea, the US and Japan decried North Korea's renewed push to strengthen "self-defensive" capabilities as a "challenge" to the international community on Sunday, Seoul's foreign ministry said. Seoul's top nuclear negotiator, Kim Gunn, and his US and Japanese counterparts, Sung Kim and Takehiro

Funakoshi respectively, held three-way phone talks after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un called for increasing its nuclear arsenal and developing a new intercontinental ballistic missile during a key ruling party meeting, Yonhap news agency reported. Their talks also followed the North's firing of shots from what it claimed to have been a super-large multiple rocket launcher on Saturday and Sunday. "The North's statement on spurring efforts to strengthen

so-called self-defensive capabilities in response to moves to isolate it is illogical and this would pose a challenge to the international community and only worsen the situation," the ministry said in a press release. The North's proclaimed push to strengthen defense raised concerns that it would continue to engage in military provocations. The three countries warned that the North's provocations would further deepen its isolation and make it face a stronger combined defence posture between the South and the US, and cooperation among the allies and Japan, and a "unified, stern" response from the international community, according to the ministry. The three envoys also stressed that the "only" way for the North to ease its people's economic pain is to stop its provocations, return to dialogue, restore engagement with the outside world and channel resources -- splurged on its nuclear and missile programs -- into stabilising people's livelihoods. They also reaffirmed the door for dialogue remains open, the ministry said.

AT LEAST NINE KILLED IN NEW YEAR STAMPEDE IN UGANDA



Kampala: According to the police, the incident involved several juveniles who were attending a music show, Xinhua news agency reported. "It is alleged that the incident occurred at midnight when the event's Master of Ceremonies encouraged attendees to go outside and watch the fireworks display," the police said. "After the display ended, a stampede ensued, resulting in the instant deaths of five people and injuries to several others," the police said, adding that four others were confirmed dead after the injured were rushed to hospital. "Emergency responders arrived on the scene and transported the injured individuals to the hospital," the police said, adding that more information would be availed in the course of the day.

RUSSIA WAGING WAR SO PUTIN CAN STAY IN POWER 'UNTIL THE END OF HIS LIFE': ZELENSKY

Kiev | Agencies

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of "following the devil" and waging a war to ensure that its President Vladimir Putin remains in power "until the end of his life", a media outlet reported. Zelensky switched to speaking Russian in his nightly address to send a message to the Kremlin and Russian citizens, as Moscow launched a series of deadly strikes that swept several regions of Ukraine ahead of New Year, CNN reported. "All this war that you are waging, you - Russia, it is not the war with NATO, as you propagandists lie," Zelensky said. "It is not for something historical. It's for one person to remain in power until the end of his life. And what will be with all of you, citizens of Russia, does not concern him," he was quoted as saying by CNN. Zelensky said "Russian leader is hiding behind the troops, behind missiles, behind the walls of his residences and palaces" and behind his people. "He hides behind you and burns your country and your future. No one will ever forgive you



for terror," Zelensky emphasised. Zelensky said "most of the Russian missiles intercepted by air defence forces." "If it were not for air defence, the number of casualties would have been different. Much bigger," he stressed. "And this is yet another proof for the world that support for Ukraine must be increased." Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal earlier said Moscow wants to cause darkness and leave the country "in the dark for the New Year." Moscow intends to "intimidate, leave us in the dark for the new year, cause as much damage to civilian infrastructure as possible," Shmyhal said on Telegram.

BLAST OUTSIDE MILITARY AIRPORT INFLECTS CASUALTIES IN KABUL



Kabul: A blast rocked Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul on Sunday, causing some casualties, Interior Ministry Spokesman Abdul Nafi Takar said. "A blast took place outside the gate of a military airport this morning and unfortunately killed and injured some of our citizens," the spokesman told Xinhua news agency on Sunday. Without providing more details, he said that an investigation has been initiated into the incident.

Dutch welcome new year without national fireworks show

The Hague | Agencies

The Dutch are welcoming the turn of the year with disappointment as national fireworks shows planned at major cities have been scrapped because of strong wind and rain. The municipality of Rotterdam announced on Saturday that a national fireworks show in the city centre has been cancelled due to wind gusts of around 75 km per hour, Xinhua news agency reported. The national children's fireworks show, which was supposed to start at 6 p.m. local time in Rotterdam, had also been cancelled. Shows planned at two other locations in the broader Rotterdam region were also dropped. In the Hague, the municipal authorities also withdrew a traditional fireworks show at the Hofvijver next to the national parliament due to strong wind and rain. Two fireworks shows were cancelled in Hilversum, a city in the province of North Holland, and a drone and laser show in Apeldoorn in the province of Gelderland, had been dropped by the authorities, citing heavy rains which affect the visibility of laser beams. In capital Amsterdam, a fireworks and drone show that was to be held at the A'DAM Tower on Saturday evening had been cancelled.



The municipality of Tilburg in the province of North Brabant also announced that four fireworks shows in the city will not take place due to strong gusts of wind. Tilburg Mayor Theo Weterings has expressed his disappointment. "It goes without saying that safety comes first... but it is necessary." Similar shows have also been cancelled in other Dutch

cities such as Apeldoorn, Zoetermeer, Katwijk and Akkrum. Across the Netherlands, strong winds and rains accompany an unusually warm weather with the maximum temperature passing 15 degrees Celsius in several places. It is reportedly the warmest New Year's Eve ever measured since the start of measurements by the weather institute KNMI in 1901.

Indian national dies in Singapore fire mishap



Singapore | Agencies

A 38-year-old Indian national died on the spot after a fire broke out in Singapore, making him the 46th workplace casualty of 2022, a media report said. The Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) said it was alerted to the fire at 21 Tuas Avenue 3, located west of Singapore, at about 9.05 a.m. on Friday and put out the blaze using a water jet, The Straits Times reported. The man was pronounced

dead on the scene by a paramedic. According to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the fire was triggered by the uncontrolled release of acetylene, a flammable gas, from cylinders on the premises. "When dealing with gas cylinders that contain flammable gases, measures must be put in place to prevent any accumulation of such gases as well as ensuring that the work environment is free from ignition sources," MOM said in a statement published in The Straits Times.



GOVT'S HEALTH SCHEME TO INCLUDE MORE AILMENTS FOR NEEDY PATIENTS: CM SHINDE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Sunday said the state government will revisit its health scheme to cover additional ailments under it for the benefit of maximum number of the needy people. He was speaking at a midnight blood donation camp organised by the Thane unit of the Balasahabnchi Shiv Sena here. The CM also donated blood at the camp. Shinde said the government will include additional ailments for patients under the Mahatma Jyotirao Phule scheme, while some other illnesses which are not relevant will be removed from the scheme, he said. "We want to see that this scheme benefits maximum number of needy persons



and those who cannot afford costly treatments," he said. Shinde also said the chief minister's relief fund "which was closed for two-and-a-half years", has been started and a sum of Rs 11 crore disbursed to more than 1,000 people in the last five months. The CM said the state government and his party, because of their work, have become popular

among people in the last five-six months. "We work on the principles and guidelines of Shiv Sena founder late Bal Thackeray and (late Sena leader) Anand Dighe," he said. At the camp, Shinde also lauded a physically challenged man who had donated blood 121 times in 25 states.

"If Rahul Gandhi's 'Aura' Continues This Year...": Sanjay Raut's 2024 Hint

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday claimed last year gave a new "aura" to Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's leadership and if the trend continues in 2023, the country may see a political change in the next general elections. In his weekly column 'Rokhthok' in the Sena mouthpiece 'Saamana', Raut also said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah should not sow "seeds of hatred and divisiveness." The Rajya Sabha member said the Ram temple issue has been settled, so no votes can be sought on the matter. "Hence, a new 'love jihad' angle is being explored. Is this weapon of 'love jihad' being used to win elections and create fear among Hindus?" he asked. Referring to the death of actor Tunisha Sharma last month and the murder of Shraddha Walkar allegedly by her boyfriend, Raut asserted these were not cases of "love jihad", but maintained that no woman from any community or religion should face atrocities. Raut said he hopes the country is



"free of fear" in 2023. "What is going on is politics of power. Hope Rahul Gandhi's yatra is successful and achieves its objective," he said. Gandhi started the Bharat Jodo Yatra, a mass

contact initiative, from Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu on September 7, 2022, and it is likely to culminate in Srinagar this month-end. "The year 2022 has given a new shine and aura to the leadership of Rahul Gandhi. If it remains the same in 2023, we can see a political change in 2024 (general elections)," Raut said. He further wrote that Prime Minister Modi says "we need to do away with the narrow-minded attitude". But, the fact is this attitude has grown in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) rule, the Rajya Sabha member claimed. "Today's rulers don't want to acknowledge the existence and rights of opposition parties," he said. Sanjay Raut further claimed that creating divisions among Hindus and Muslims will lead to "a new partition". "Modi and Shah should not sow seeds of hatred and divisiveness," he said. Awakening Hindus is the BJP's agenda, but this does not mean creating hatred and divisiveness in society, Raut said, and targeted the government while claiming that issues of unemployment and price rise have been brushed aside.

Two workers killed in Nashik factory blast and blaze, 14 injured

Nashik | Agencies

At least two persons were killed and 14 others injured when massive fire, following by a deafening blast, engulfed a factory in Igatpuri in Maharashtra's Nashik district on Sunday, officials said. The explosion and fire, reportedly in a boiler, in the Jindal Polyfilms Company's plant at Gonde village, was reported around 11.30 a.m., as people were waking up after the New Year celebrations. Local eyewitnesses claimed that at least 250 workers were working in the premises but a majority of them managed to escape to safety. Firefighting teams managed to



rescue at least 14 injured and recovered the bodies of two workers. The condition of at least four of the injured is described as critical, as per a medical officer. Nashik Collector Gangatharan D. and Superintendent of Police, Rural, Sachin Patil reviewed the situation. Around a dozen fire tenders reached the spot to battle the conflagration. Huge clouds of grey and white smoke were visible from long distances and the huge

explosion shook many residents on the New Year Day in at least two dozen villages. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Rural Development Minister Dada Bhushe - who is the Guardian Minister of Nashik district reached the tragedy site. Shinde announced a compensation of Rs 5 lakh each to the families of the two deceased and that the government will bear the full treatment expenses of the injured. "This is a very big tragedy... I have ordered a high-level investigation into the incident," he said. Later, the CM and Bhushe along with other officials visited the local hospital where the injured are admitted and spoke with them.

21 HELD IN 16 TRAPS BY ACB IN PALGHAR IN 2022

Mumbai: The Maharashtra Anti Corruption Bureau laid 16 traps and arrested 21 persons in bribery cases in Palghar district in 2022, an official said on Sunday. The traps comprise four related to the revenue department, three to police, two each to MSEDCL and forest department and one each to agriculture, rural development, health and education departments as well as one on a private individual. "The biggest amount in a trap was Rs 1 lakh. This happened in two traps in which MSEDCL staffers and police personnel were held," he said. Overall, the agency's Thane region, which includes Palghar, saw 85 cases in which 128 persons were charged, said an official. "In 83 successful traps, a total of 124 persons were arrested," Thane ACB Superintendent of Police Sunil Lokhande said. As per the Maharashtra ACB website, the total number of cases statewide in 2022 stood at 744, in which 1,083 persons were charged.

Lok Sabha elections: Nadda to launch BJP's pre-poll campaign from Maharashtra

Team Absolute | New Delhi

BJP National President J.P. Nadda will launch the party's pre-poll campaign for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra on Monday. Nadda will visit the Chandrapur Lok Sabha constituency, and hold a series of party and public meetings during his day-long stay under 'Lok Sabha Pravas Yojana'. Although, the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are scheduled for April-May, the BJP has started preparations across the country. Nadda will do 'pravas' (stays) in



every state to kick-start pre-poll campaigns. Of total 545 Lok Sabha constituencies, the party has shortlisted 160 constituencies where it may face a tough contest. Maharashtra has 144 constituencies of which 18 are tough for the saffron party.

Man loses 2.10 lakh in lottery fraud: police

Team Absolute | Mumbai

An offence has been registered against an unidentified person after a man from suburban Borivali here was allegedly duped of 2.10 lakh in a lottery scam, police said on Sunday. Based on a complaint, the MHB police recently registered a first information report (FIR), an official said. The complainant had purchased an appliance from an online store in 2019. Two years later, he received a letter from West Bengal, which was allegedly from the store stating that he had been chosen for a lucky draw, he said. The victim received a scratch card, which revealed that he had won a car worth 10.4 lakh as the first prize and he received a call from a man posing as a senior executive



with the online store, the official said. The caller gave the victim the option of collecting the car or having the amount transferred to his account, and he chose the latter, he said. However, to claim 10.4 lakh, the unidentified accused asked the victim to

deposit 2.10 lakh as processing fees and other charges, the official said. Despite depositing the amount, the caller started demanding more money and the complainant sensed something amiss and demanded a refund, which he did not get, he added.

MAN SETS GODOWN ON FIRE IN THANE DISTRICT; NO CASUALTIES

Thane: A godown was allegedly set on fire by a man in Maharashtra's Thane district, and no casualties were reported, police said on Sunday. A blaze erupted at the godown of a decorator in Bharat Nagar area of Shelar Naka in Dombivili around 12.45 am on Saturday, an official said. Based on a complaint, an offence under section 435 (mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to cause damage) of the Indian Penal Code was registered against a man who allegedly set the premises on fire, inspector Pandurang Tithe of Tilak Nagar police station said. The godown was completely gutted in the blaze and materials worth Rs 60,000 were destroyed, he said. The police have identified the accused based on the CCTV footage from the area and further probe is underway, the official said.

Crowd gathers at Jay Stambh to mark 205th anniversary of Bhima-Koregaon battle

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Massive crowd gathered at Maharashtra's Pune to mark the 205th anniversary of the Bhima-Koregaon battle. A large crowd of people gather at 'Jay Stambh' to visit Koregaon Bhima village to offer their tributes on the anniversary of the battle, which was fought on January 1, 1818, between the British East India Company and the Peshwa faction of the Maratha Confederacy. Violence broke out during the bicentenary celebrations of the Bhima Koregaon battle on January 1, 2018, in which one person was killed and several others were injured. The police had filed 58 cases against 162 people. This violence erupted after some people, reportedly with saffron flags, pelted stones at cars heading towards the village to commemorate the 200 years of the Bhima-Koregaon war on New Year's Day. Dalit leaders and workers at the village had alleged that Hindutva activists Milind Ekbote and Sambhaji Bhide instigated the violence. The Supreme Court on August 10, 2022, granted regular bail to activist and poet P Varavara Rao on medical



grounds as he was accused in the 2018 Bhima Koregaon violence case. He was arrested on August 28, 2018, from his home in Hyderabad and was an under-trial in the Bhima Koregaon case for which an FIR was lodged by the Pune Police at Vishrambagh Police Station on January 8, 2018, under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and several other provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Meanwhile, on November 10, 2022, the top court in an interim order permitted the accused Gautam Navlakha to be placed under house arrest for a period of one month considering his

health condition and old age. However, the apex court was told by the counsel appearing for Gautam Navlakha, on November 17, 2022, that its order was not being complied with by the State authorities. Navlakha, one of the several civil liberties activists in the Bhima Koregaon case, has been booked under stringent provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for an alleged conspiracy to topple the government. Notably, the Bombay High Court on November 18 granted bail to Anand Teltumbde in the Bhima Koregaon case on the surety of Rs 1 lakh.

MAN STABBED TO DEATH, ONE ARRESTED



Mumbai: Police on Sunday said they have arrested a man for allegedly stabbing a 29-year-old to death following an altercation here in Gilbert Hill area of Andheri. According to the police, after the murder, the accused threw the body of Sanjay Kamble, in a public toilet and fled from the spot. Police have identified the accused as Salman Shaikh. "There was an altercation between the deceased, Sanjay Kamble, and the accused, Salman Shaikh, following which the accused attacked him with a knife on the throat and stomach and killed him," the police said. A case has been registered under section 302 (Murder) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) at the DN Nagar police station, it added.

MHADEI ORDER IN KARNATAKA'S FAVOUR OPENS UP DAM OF CONTROVERSIES IN GOA

Team Absolute | Panaji

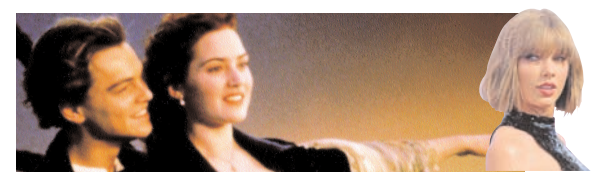
After Belagavi led to the BJP-ruled Maharashtra being pitted against Karnataka, a political storm has erupted in Goa, another BJP state, after Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai announced that the Centre has cleared the disputed Kalasa-Bhanduri dam project on the Mhadei River. Opposition parties in Goa, along with civil society groups, have targeted the BJP government, saying that the 'double engine' has failed. The saffron party, meanwhile, has moved fast to counter the Opposition. The BJP government in Goa has decided to hold an urgent cabinet meeting on Monday and also meet senior leaders in Delhi seeking their intervention to withdraw the approval granted by the Central Water Commission to Karnataka. The social media is flooded with messages of Save Mhadei and criticizing the politicians in power for allegedly failing to place facts before the concerned authorities at the Centre. Environmentalists have expressed the fear that water diversion would lead to heightened salinity in the Mhadei. This would also cause ecological imbalance with the wildlife suffering. Goa and Karnataka have been battling over the Kalasa-Bhanduri dam project across the Mhadei river before a central tribunal. The Mhadei river originates in Karnataka and meets the Arabian Sea in Panaji. While the river traverses 28.8 km in Karnataka, it has a length of 81.2 km in Goa. Karnataka plans to construct dams on the river, aimed at diverting the waters into its water-starved Malaprabha basin in north Karnataka.



Environmentalist Rajendra Kerkar has said that the water of the Mhadei keeps salinity of the sea under control, and if the water is diverted then it will have a bad effect. "Salinity of the sea remains in control with fresh water of Mhadei. If this water is diverted then it will affect severely," he said. "The Goa government should put the facts properly before the central government. Though Karnataka has got approval from the CWC, it needs a NOC from the Environment Department and the National Board of Wildlife to go ahead with the project. The Goa government should see how they can be stopped from diverting water," Kerkar said.

Union Minister of State for Tourism and Ports Shripad Naik on Saturday said he has no problem tendering his resignation if the Centre fails to withdraw the approval granted to Karnataka's 'Detailed Project Report' for the Kalasa-Bhanduri Nala projects. "The Goa Chief Minister was present at a high-level meeting in Delhi, which was attended by BJP's senior leader C.T. Ravi, and the Karnataka Chief Minister. He was clearly told that the Central government is approving the DPR of the Karnataka government with regard to the Kalasa-Bhanduri Nala project. This means the lifeline of Goa is gone." "This is the New Year gift of the spineless Chief Minister, who to save his chair didn't utter a single

word in this high level meeting. He had gone to the (Delhi) lobby for the induction of some defectors whom he had taken into the party," Sardesai said. He added: "If we have such a type of spineless Chief Minister then we are going to sell Goa to anyone who comes for the auction. He will sacrifice all the interests of Goa to save his chair. Mhadei is gone. He should resign and save Goa." Responding to allegations by the opposition, Goa's Water Resources Minister Subhash Shirodkar said that the CWC has taken the decision without taking the state government into confidence. "We will meet the Union Minister concerned in Delhi and will also try to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi over this issue.



"It was really exciting but I think for me it's, like, baby steps"

Mumbai | Agencies

Seems like songstress Dua Lipa is hanging up her microphone and putting on her finest acting face as she plans to conquer the world of moving pictures - and bag herself an Oscar. The chart topping star will make her acting debut in Matthew Vaughn's upcoming spy drama 'Argylle', which co-stars Henry Cavill, Sam Rockwell and Bryce Dallas Howard, reports Mirror.co.uk.

The singer also hopes to investigate the business side of the acting world and produce projects for her to star in. An industry source told The Sun, on Sunday: "Dua's received a tonne of scripts and is most interested in taking on serious drama that will receive Oscars buzz."

The insider further said quoted by Mirror.co.uk: "She wants to really start pursuing acting. She is planning to set up her own TV and film production company so she and her team can option stories she believes in and take them to market with bigger studios."

While little is known about her upcoming project - as 'Argylle' is based on a book that hasn't even been released yet and was penned by a seemingly unknown author named Elly Conway - the star herself has teased her involvement.

According to Mirror.co.uk, Dua Lipa recently said about filming the spy drama: "It was really exciting. But I think for me it's, like, baby steps."

She continued: "That's also the best way to discover yourself, rather than throwing yourself in the deep end with something that maybe you can't completely tackle head on."

She added to her iHeartMedia podcast: "My biggest fear would be taking on a really big role and being, like, f***, now I have to be an actor and feel these emotions and feelings on camera, when I haven't brought myself up to that point yet."

Away from acting and singing, Dua drew attention last year as speculation swirled that she was dating talk show host Trevor Noah - but she dismissed the rumours herself in October.

Dua Lipa shares her experience about filming the spy drama



FOO FIGHTERS BAND CONFIRMED TO CONTINUE AFTER TAYLOR HAWKINS DEATH

Los Angeles | Agencies

American rock band Foo Fighters confirmed that they will continue after drummer Taylor Hawkins, death in March, telling fans that they will see them "soon".

Their post stated: "As we say goodbye to the most difficult and tragic year that our band has ever known, we are reminded of how thankful we are for the people that we love and cherish most, and for the loved ones who are no longer with us," reports Variety.

"Without Taylor, we never would have become the band that we were - and with-

out Taylor, we know that we're going to be a different band going forward," the statement reads.

"We also know that you, the fans, meant as much to Taylor as he meant to you. And we know that when we see you again - and we will soon - he'll be there in spirit with all of us every night," the statement added.

This marks the Dave Grohl-led band's

first public acknowledgement that it will continue without Hawkins, who died in March at 50 while the band was on tour in Colombia.

According to Variety, Hawkins joined Foo Fighters in 1997 after two years as the drummer for Alanis Morissette, and quickly became an integral part of the rock band's sound and image.

'Miley Cyrus has a New Year gift for all her fans'

Cyrus's new single 'Flowers' all set to blossom on Jan 13

Los Angeles | Agencies

Miley Cyrus has a New Year gift for all her fans. The singer-actress will be releasing a new single, titled 'Flowers' on January 13. The announcement came when a video showing Cyrus strutting through a street played after a commercial break, reports People magazine.

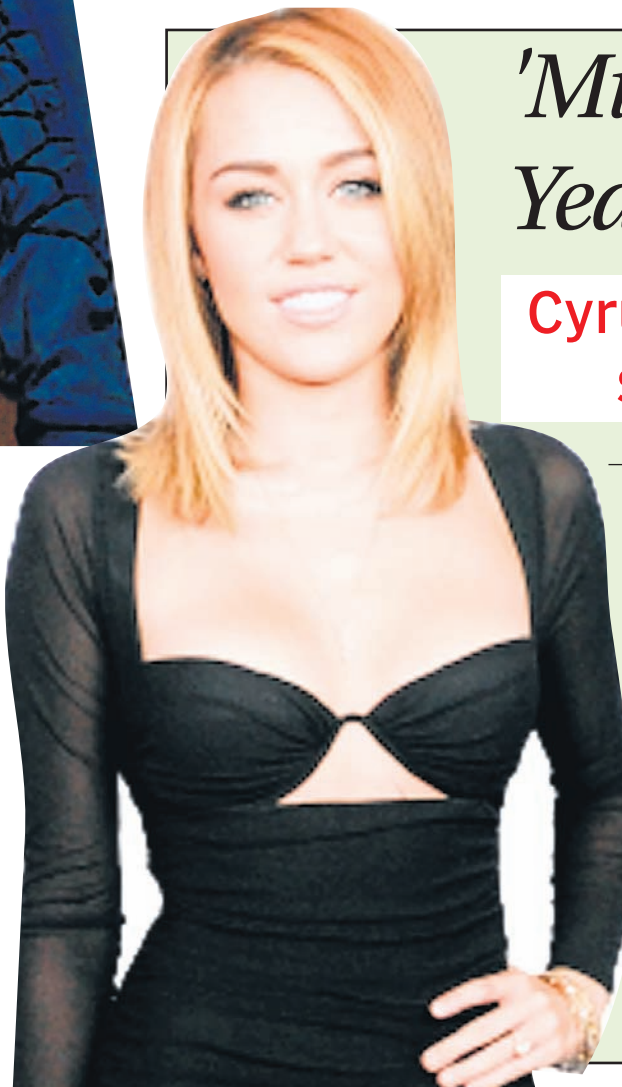
In the clip, the 'Prisoner' singer wore a gold mini dress that exposed her stomach, as a snippet of the upcoming tune played. "NEW YEAR, NEW MILEY, NEW SINGLE. FLOWERS JANUARY 13 (sic)," then flashed across a black background in white lettering.

As per People magazine, back in November, talk about new music from Cyrus began to circulate online after the 'Angels Like You' songstress reunited in the studio with music producer Mike WILL Made-It, with whom she worked on her fourth studio album Bangerz in 2013.

At the time, hip-hop duo Rae Sremmurd shared a series of photographs on Instagram from a studio session, where Cyrus appeared to be making some new music. "Ear Drummers & Head Bangerz!" the post was captioned.

Cyrus has released seven studio albums over the years: 2007's 'Meet Miley Cyrus', 2008's 'Breakout', 2010's 'Can't Be Tamed', 2013's 'Bangerz', 2015's 'Miley Cyrus & Her Dead Petz', 2017's 'Younger Now' and 2020's 'Plastic Hearts'.

She has released two EPs, 2009's 'Time of Our Lives' and 2019's 'She Is Coming', and has also put together a live album, 'Attention: Miley Live!', in April 2022.



'I've ditched my big knickers and finally feel sexy again!'

Amazing weight loss by Ola Jordan in just 4 months

Los Angeles | Agencies

Ola Jordan has dropped from a size 14 to an eight in just four months as she and husband James show off their stunning weight loss - after shedding a combined 6.5 stone.

The ex-Strictly professional admits she yearned for her former dancer body and doubted if she would ever have a flat stomach again after becoming a mum for the first time in 2020 and gaining weight during the pandemic.

Her self-esteem was so low that Ola would refuse to leave the house and she felt a shadow of her former self compared to the confident pro who would compete on strictly every Saturday night in glitzy, revealing dresses.

After posting a photo on Instagram and admitting she was 'horrified' and 'disappointed' by her figure, Ola and James vowed to overhaul their lives - and now they're feeling better than ever. Ola told MailOnline: 'I feel like I've lost a whole person.'

'A size 14 was my biggest. I'm quite short as well so a size 14 for some people isn't big and that's the problem with weight and sizes because some people say a 14 isn't big. But being 5ft3 and a size 14 is big.'

'I'm a size eight now. I missed my old self. There's nothing wrong with admitting it.'

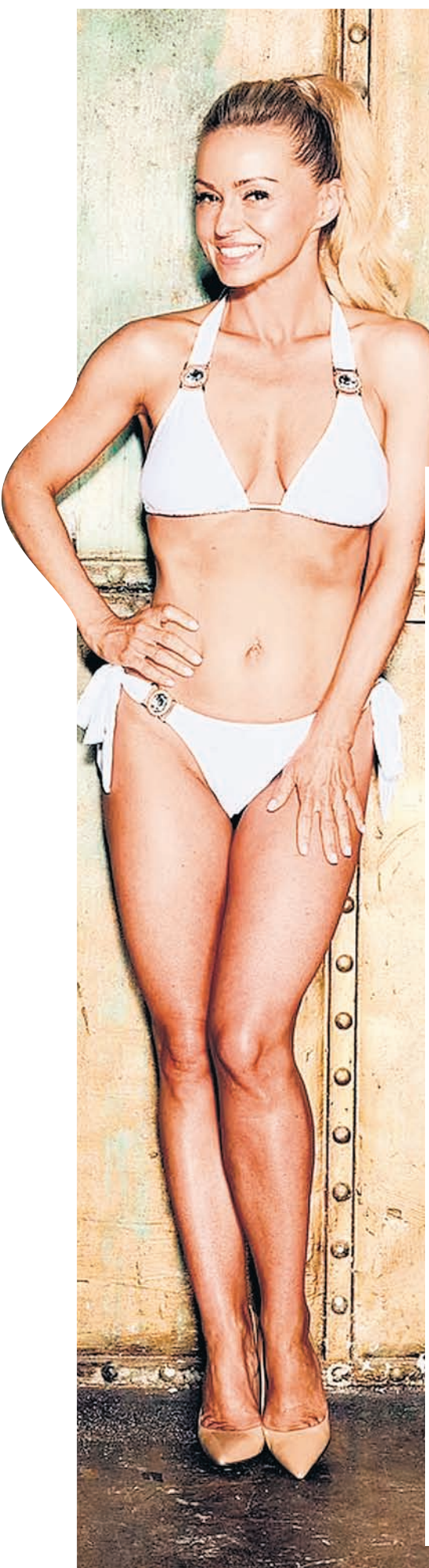
'People now preach body positivity and they accept it, but I really missed my old self and that's not just my body it was with dance and everything else. Health is important for me, and I want to stay healthy for as long as I can.'

Ola, who shows off her figure wearing a white bikini in new photos for MailOnline, admits her sex life with husband James has improved since they slimmed down because she's finally feeling better in her own skin.

She said: 'It's amazing. I am much more confident. I didn't want to be seen before if I'm really honest with you.'

'It's confidence and even with dressing now I'll wear nicer clothes. I feel sexy again. I don't wear my big knickers anymore and I'm wearing my sexier stuff.'

'I have worked hard and I'm really pleased with myself. I'm really happy.'



First look out of Lady Agatha Danbury from 'Queen Charlotte'

Los Angeles | Agencies

The first-look picture of young Lady Agatha Danbury from the upcoming 'Bridgerton' prequel series, 'Queen Charlotte', was unveiled on Sunday. Played by Arsema Thomas, Agatha uses Charlotte's ascent to the throne to forge her way into society while under the thumb of a much older husband. Strapped with a sharp understanding of the once-divided social scene and the intricacies of marriage, Agatha becomes a guiding light for the new Queen, all while finding her own voice and power.

The logline of the limited series describes the show: "Centred on Queen Charlotte's rise to prominence and power, this Bridgerton-verse prequel tells the story of how the young Queen's marriage to King George sparked both a great love story and a societal shift, creating the world of the Ton inherited by the characters in 'Bridgerton'."

As per Variety, Golda Rosheuvel, Adjoa Andoh and Ruth Gemmill will reprise their roles from 'Bridgerton' as Queen Charlotte, Lady Agatha Danbury and Lady Violet Bridgerton, respectively.

India Amarteijo stars as young Queen Charlotte. Michelle Fairley plays Princess Augusta, while Corey Mylchreest plays young King George. Sam Clemmett rounds out the cast as young Brimsley along with Freddie Dennis as Reynolds, Richard Cunningham as Lord Bute, Tunji Kasim as Adolphus, Rob Maloney as the Royal Doctor, Cyril Nri as Lord Danbury and 'Bridgerton' alum Hugh Sachs as Brimsley.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Ekin-Su Culculoglu



YO-YO TEST AND DEXA WILL NOW BE PART OF SELECTION CRITERIA

Barca, Espanyol draw in La Liga

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amongst the key recommendations which have come from the senior men's team review meeting convened by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) in Mumbai on Sunday, the yo-yo Test and DEXA will now be a part of the selection criteria.

BCCI also said the issues of player availability, workload management and fitness parameters were also discussed at length during the meeting along with the roadmap to the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023, which will be hosted by India later in October and November. Incidentally, India's last ODI World Cup title came in 2011 at home. As per a report in Crickbuzz, the BCCI has shortlisted 20 players who will be on the radar and will be rotated for proper preparation for the ODI World Cup 2023. "It was a very constructive and fruitful meeting where we reviewed the past performance and planned for future events, including World Cup and World Test Championship (WTC)." "We will give preference for international cricket while making sure the IPL is not diluted," a BCCI source, who attended the meeting, was quoted as saying in the report. BCCI added in its official statement that keeping in mind the Men's FTP and preparations for ICC CWC 2023, the National Cricket Academy (NCA) will work in tandem with the



IPL franchisees to monitor the targeted Indian players participating in the IPL 2023. Apart from this, the emerging players will have to play a substantial domestic season to be eligible for selection to the national team. The meeting was attended by BCCI

President Roger Binny, Honorary Secretary Jay Shah, Captain Rohit Sharma, head coach Rahul Dravid, Head of Cricket (NCA) V.S. Laxman and Chairman of Senior Men Selection Committee Chetan Sharma, whose panel was sacked in November.

Madrid | Agencies

FC Barcelona and Espanyol drew a tense game 1-1, with Marcos Alonso scoring for Barca in the 6th minute, before Joselu's second half penalty saved a point for Espanyol.

Barca paid the price for not taking their first half chances in a game that will also be remembered for a chaotic performance from referee Mateu Lahoz, who lost control of the game in the closing minutes, showing seven yellow and three red cards in a late 10-minute spell, although the VAR corrected a direct red he showed to Espanyol defender Leandro Cabrera, reports Xinhua news agency.

Barcelona is now level on points with Real Madrid, who won 2-0 away to Valladolid on Friday with two goals from Karim Benzema -- the first of which came from the



penalty spot. Real Sociedad strengthened their position in third with a 2-0 win at home to Osasuna thanks to an opening goal from Brais Mendez in the 22nd minute. Mendez then set up Alexander Sorloth for La Real's second in the 64th minute. Juan Foyth's 88th minute header gave Villarreal a 2-1 win in a tight derby against Valencia.

Edinson Cavani put Valencia ahead in the 21st minute of an entertaining match, but Samuel Chukwueze scored after an excellent counter-attack on the stroke of halftime. Both sides had chances after the break, but Foyth's header after an error from Valencia keeper Giorgi Mamardashvili decided the game.

Tata Open Maharashtra

Ramkumar enters main draw with impressive win

Pune | Agencies

India's Ramkumar Ramanathan posted a brilliant victory against Mattia Bellucci to enter the singles main draw in the fifth Tata Open Maharashtra at the Balewadi Stadium here on Sunday.

The Indian, who came as a wildcard, put up a spectacular show in the final round of the qualifiers to secure a comfortable 6-3, 7-5 wins over the No. 3 seed Italian.

Ramkumar will be the fourth Indian to feature in the singles main draw at the ongoing edition of South Asia's only ATP 250 event, which is being conducted by the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association (MSLTA) in association with the Government of Maharashtra for the fifth year in Pune. India No. 1 Mukund Sasikumar, Sumit Nagal and 15-year-old Manas Dhame are the other three Indians that will compete in the main draw. Meanwhile, in another qualifying match, Yuki Bhambri's challenge came to an end after he suffered a 1-6, 4-6



loss against the last edition's semifinalist Elias Ymer, the organisers informed in a release on Sunday. Maximilian Marterer and Flavio Cobolli were the other two players to progress into the main event. While Marterer beat Nikola Milojevic 6-2, 6-3, Cobolli got the better of Zdenek Kolar by 6-4, 6-4. The Pune-born tennis prodigy Dhamne is set to kickstart India's challenge in the main draw on Monday when he takes on the American player Michael Mmoh in the singles opening round match. Olympian Sumit Nagal will also be seen in action against Filip Krajinovic.

Adelaide International 1

Bianca Andreescu overcomes Muguruza in dramatic comeback win

Adelaide | Agencies

Bianca Andreescu launched her 2023 season in a dramatic style at the Adelaide International 1, here on Sunday. In a blockbuster meeting between two former Grand Slam champions, Andreescu recovered from 0-6 2-5 deficits to beat Garbine Muguruza in three hard-fought sets.

The 22-year-old from Canada defeated the World No.55 Spanish opponent 0-6, 7-6 (3), 6-1 in the Round of 32 match.

Victory certainly seemed unlikely when the world No.46 from Canada trailed by a set after just 24 minutes on court in her season opener.

Muguruza is a former world No.1, who lifted major trophies at 2016 Roland Garros and 2017 Wimbledon.



The Spaniard, now ranked world No.55, reminded of those heights as she fired 10 winners and recorded

only three unforced errors in an efficient first set. But as errors crept in for

Muguruza, Andreescu found some rhythm. A break of serve early in the second set signalled a comeback, and while the Spaniard wrestled momentum back and took a 5-3 lead, the hard-hitting Canadian began to compete with more freedom. Serving for the match, Muguruza was two points from victory when Andreescu completed a stunning turnaround, extending the set to a tiebreak that she was able to seize.

With scores levelled, Andreescu took control in the third set, allowing Muguruza just one more game as she completed her memorable win in two hours and 14 minutes.

She finished the match with 28 winners against 23 unforced errors, compared to 37 winners and 39 errors from Muguruza.

Mark Taylor urges Australia to use five bowlers in practice tour of India

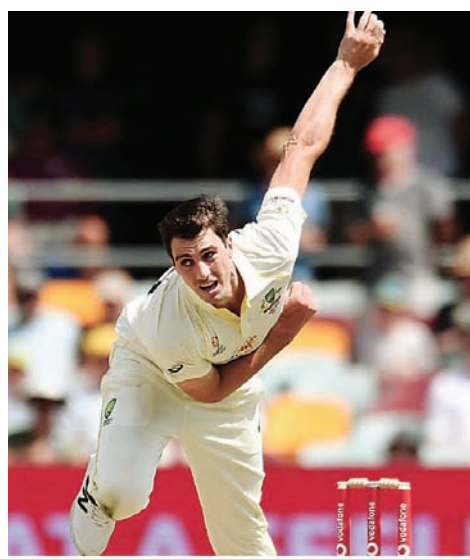
Sydney | Agencies

Former Australia captain Mark Taylor has urged the Pat Cummins-led side to use five bowlers in the upcoming Sydney Test against South Africa as practice for the tour of India, which will happen in February-March.

In place of injured duo Mitchell Starc and Cameron Green, who sustained finger injuries during Australia's win by an innings and 182 runs at the MCG, Australia have given a call-up to Matthew Renshaw and Ashton Agar, with the latter widely expected to be partnering with premier off-spinner Nathan Lyon.

With the hosts' already holding an unassailable 2-0 lead heading into the final? Test of the series at Sydney, there is a unique opportunity for Australia, the current World Test Championship toppers, to look into options ahead of touring India for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"They've got an opportunity in Sydney to try a



few things. I know people say you shouldn't try things in Test matches, but with Cameron Green not playing, I'd really like to see Alex Carey bat at six and Australia picks five bowlers."

"They can go all out attack with the ball and rely on their top five and Carey to make enough runs to win the Test match," Taylor was quoted as saying by Wide World of Sports.

While teams have traditionally opted against playing five bowlers at the SCG, Taylor remarked the fragile nature of South Africa's batting lineup should encourage the move to play five bowlers.

"I think with the bowling they've got there, with whoever those quicks are going to be, you've got enough guys there to take the 20 wickets. South Africa only just made 200 in the final innings in Melbourne for the first time in four Test matches; their batting is very gettable at the moment." "So I'd be looking to attack with the ball and back you in to make enough runs with only five specialist batters," he concluded.

Performances in white-ball cricket upstaged achievements in red-ball cricket: Babar Azam

Karachi | Agencies

Reviewing 2022, Pakistan men's cricket team skipper Babar Azam said the side's performances in white-ball cricket upstaged the achievements of red-ball cricket. The men's side played a total of 44 international matches comprising nine Tests, nine ODIs and 26 T20Is.

Under Azam, Pakistan reached the finals of the T20 Asia Cup in the UAE and the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in Australia. They also hosted Australia, West Indies, England and New Zealand (currently), but did not win a Test match at home in 2022. "Our performances in white-ball cricket upstaged our achievements in red-ball cricket. We reached the finals in the UAE and Australia, and though we didn't perform the way we had expected in red-ball cricket, three sides ranked above Pakistan played in Pakistan that provided us a huge learning opportunity and also entertained our fans," said Azam in a special edition of the PCB Podcast. "In T20 cricket, my favourite match was the win against India in the repeat fixture



of the Asia Cup as it was a crucial game for us in terms of a place in the final. In Test cricket, victory in the first Test against Sri Lanka in Galle was outstanding as we chased down 342 for the loss of six wickets on a difficult track. Abdullah Shafique was magnificent in the second innings when he scored 160 not out."

Azam has also earned nominations for ICC Men's ODI Player of the Year and ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year awards for 2022. Pakistan will now begin 2023 with the second Test against New Zealand at Karachi, starting from Monday.

Messi pens emotional message for family and supporters

Team Absolute | New Delhi

On the eve of New Year, Lionel Messi penned an emotional note, thanking his "wonderful family" and friends for supporting him as he achieved his dream of clinching the FIFA World Cup at the 2022 Qatar event.

The World Cup win completed Messi's trophy cabinet. He inspired Argentina to overcome the French challenge in the penalties 4-2 in the World Cup final.

"Ends a year I will never forget. The dream I always chased finally came true. But that wouldn't be worth anything either if it wasn't because I can share it with a wonderful family, the best one can have, and friends who always supported me



and didn't let me stay on the floor every time I fell," Messi wrote on Instagram.

Messi further thanked his supporters, especially in Argentina, Paris and Barcelona, for following him and encouraging him.

"I also want to have a very special memory for all the people who follow me and bank with me; it's amazing to be able to share this path with all of you.

United Cup MARTIC OVERCOMES PODOROSKA TO SEAL WIN FOR CROATIA OVER ARGENTINA

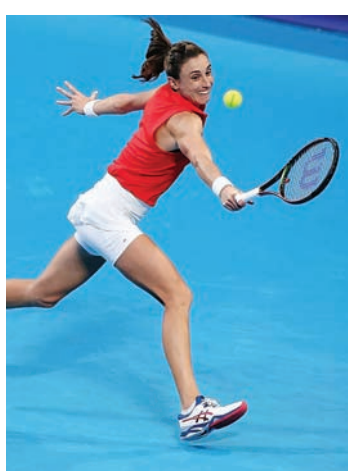
Perth | Agencies

Petra Martic notched a 6-2, 4-6, 6-1 win over Nadia Podoroska to give Croatia an unassailable 3-0 lead over Argentina at the United Cup.

The winner of Group F will be decided over the next two days in the third and final tie, as Croatia return to take on France.

In Martic's only previous encounter with Podoroska, she emerged a 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 winner in the third round of Rome 2021. Once again, she was able to triumph in three sets, losing the tightest but running away with the other two.

This time, Podoroska roared out of the blocks. The former WTA No.36 dazzled in the opening three games, breaking Martic straight away with a perfect lob and coming up with crowd-pleasing volley and drop-shot winners.



But Martic responded with the aggression of her own, and Podoroska proved unable to sustain her high level. The Croat reeled off seven straight games, breaking for 4-2 as Podoroska served consecu-

tive double faults and sealing the set with an exquisitely weighted drop shot of her own.

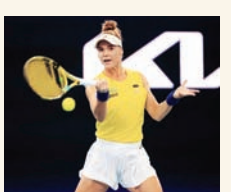
Both players settled into a groove on serve in the second set; the first eight games saw just one break-point between them, quickly snuffed out by Podoroska with a service winner. At 4-4, though, Martic blinked first. A dip in energy and execution saw her quickly lose the last two games of the set with a series of cheap errors, then go down a break at the start of the second set.

Encouraged by Captain Iva Majoli and Coach Michael Geserer, Martic gathered herself to reprise the arc of the first set. Having backed off her aggressive tactics, she upped the ante on serve and resumed her net-rushing approach in the decider, and was rewarded with another six-game streak to seal the victory.

PIGOSSI BEATS EIKERI TO CLINCH WIN FOR BRAZIL OVER NORWAY

Brisbane | No.118 Laura Pigossi defeated Ulrikke Eikeri 6-3 6-4 to clinch a win for Brazil over Norway at the United Cup, here on Sunday. Pigossi's victory gave the Brazilians an unassailable 3-1 lead over Norway, which they extended to 4-1 with an added mixed doubles win. Brazil will finish Group E with a 1-1 record.

With the pressure to close out the Brazilian victory, Pigossi put forth a physical effort to best No.388 Eikeri. Pigossi needed 1 hour and 50 minutes to close out the Norwegian, who counts doubles as her primary discipline. Last spring at Roland Garros, Eikeri became the first Norwegian man or woman to make a Slam final, doing so in mixed doubles. Ruud matched her feat a few days later when he made his first major final in Paris as well. But Eikeri could not upend Pigossi, who is coming off the best season of her career, having made her first WTA singles final in Bogota last spring. Pigossi's power and pressure kept Eikeri at bay, as the Brazilian generated 13 break points and converted six. She also kept the cleaner sheet, making 27 unforced errors to the Norwegian's 36. Brazil finished off the tie with another win for the mixed duo of Luisa Stefani and Rafael Matos, who defeated Eikeri and Viktor Durasovic 6-4, 7-5 to seal a 4-1 win. Norway will now prepare to face Italy in the last tie of the group stage.





Malaika welcomed 2023 with Arjun, Varun and Natasha

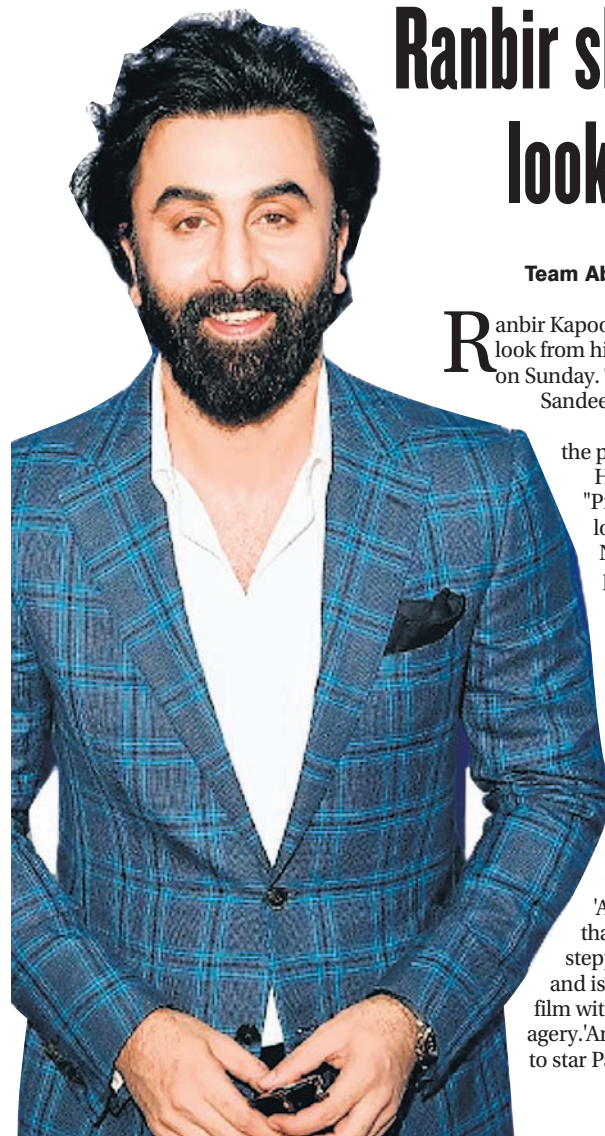
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Malaika Arora shared the New Year picture on Sunday with her beau Arjun Kapoor in which she can be seen giving a peck on his cheeks. She took to her Instagram on Sunday and shared a monochromatic picture with her fans which show her and Arjun dressed in winter-wear standing under a tree.

Malaika wrote in the caption, "Hello 2023 ... Love n light ... 01.01.23."

The two lovebirds rang in the New Year along with Bollywood star Varun Dhawan and his wife Natasha Dalal at an undisclosed location in Rajasthan. Varun also took to the story section of his Instagram and shared a group picture with Malaika and Arjun standing under the same tree.

Arjun and Malaika Arora have been dating for many years now. The two made their relationship Instagram official in 2019, when Malaika dedicated a romantic birthday post to Arjun. Malaika separated from her ex-husband in May 2017.



Ranbir shared his rugged, bloodied look from upcoming movie

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Ranbir Kapoor also shared the first look from his upcoming film 'Animal' on Sunday. The film's director, Sandeep Reddy Vanga took to his Twitter to share the picture.

He wrote in the caption: "Presenting you the first look of Animal. Happy New Year People". The picture features Ranbir in a bearded up avatar holding an axe while he lights up a cigarette. The actor sports long hair with a thick stubble and bruises and a bloodied wound standing out of the image.

The apparent violence as an inferred part of the film's theme, title and the first look of 'Animal' and the implies that the director hasn't stepped away from his views and is ready to serve another film with a higher degree of savagery. 'Animal' was earlier reported to star Parineeti Chopra as the

female lead but she later walked out of the project and was replaced by Rashmika Mandana.

The film, which also stars Anil Kapoor and Bobby Deol, has been filmed in Himachal Pradesh. The film will be released in theatres on August 11.

Also, Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor, celebrated their first New Year as a married couple on Sunday. On the occasion, Alia shared pictures from the pyjama party, hosted by her and Ranbir at their residence in Bandra area of Mumbai.

The party was attended by Aditya Roy Kapur, Ayan Mukerji, Shaheen Bhatt, Luvi Ranjan with his wife Alisha Vaid, and Rohit Dhawan with his wife Jaanvi Desai. Alia shared a set of three pictures on her Instagram handle.

She wrote in the caption: "Happy new new ... with my loveliest ones." In the images, Alia can be seen in a grey pyjama set while Ranbir is in a black pyjama set. Alia also shared two solo pictures of herself in which she is sitting in a balcony wearing a 2023 headband.

2022 had been a special year for Ranbir and Alia. Alia tasted success on the professional front with 'Gangubai Kathiawadi' and 'Brahmastra', Ranbir swung back to the top with 'Brahmastra' after the initial hiccup of his summer release 'Shamsherah'.

Arjun Bijlani gives Sakshi some well-meaning advice

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Arjun Bijlani, who co-hosts 'Splitsvilla X4' with Sunny Leone, consoled contestant Sakshi Shrivastava and helped her overcome her dilemma because of the entry of her ex-boyfriend Tara Prasad and the rift developing between him and her present connection Justin on the show.

After Tara Prasad's entry, Sakshi got emotional and Justin D' Cruz was shocked. Tara was constantly trying to speak to Sakshi and convince her because he wants to win her back at any cost. Justin did not like it and this led to an argument between him and Tara. And soon it escalated into a physical fight. Later, Sakshi was extremely stressed and cried because they both fought over her. So, Arjun intervened and checked with her. She again started crying.

Arjun then said: "I understand you are feeling very heavy because Tara has entered the show. This whole scenario is very awkward for you. You are not standing in a court where you must think of what's right or wrong before speaking. Please take your time and don't take any pressure."



Delnaaz Irani and Sayantani Ghosh revealed their goals for 2023

Aakruti Bagla | Mumbai

ANew Year marks the beginning of a new phase. It compels to improve ourselves and change your past habits. To do so, we often make a new year's resolution, which is a promise you make yourself to improve your life and work towards achieving a personal goal.

Talking about their New Year resolution, Delnaaz Irani and Sayantani Ghosh revealed that they are looking forward to a blissful 2023.

Revealing that main-

taining a healthy lifestyle is her priority, Delnaaz Irani said, "Every year, we anticipate new beginnings. And 2023 I'm hoping that Percy and I will be able to do a lot of good work. I don't set any personal resolutions when it comes to things like that. I only want to put effort into maintaining a healthy lifestyle in 2023. I've vowed to myself. It's high time I do it for myself because health is my biggest priority, because rest will follow and can wait."

While recalling the Tunisha Sharma incident, Sayantani Ghosh looks forward to peace and

happiness and strength to deal with stress and challenges. She shared, "I never make any specific resolutions for the new year because whenever I try to block my mind, it wants to escape. We are all aware that last year ended on a tragic and emotionally taxing note with the ongoing incident (Tunisha Sharma case) that happened. So all I am aiming for in 2023 is peace, happiness and good health for me, my family and my loved ones. I do want to strive to be the healthiest version of myself, both physically and from within."

I HAVE JUST SET ONE RESOLUTION & THAT IS TO ENTERTAIN MY FANS: NAMISH TANEJA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya' actor Namish Taneja got candid about the resolution he has made for 2023.

The actor added: "I have just set one resolution and that is to entertain my fans and followers with some good content and by doing some big projects. Also, to keep fit and fine."

He shared further: "The best memories are always made when we celebrate any occasion with our friends so whenever I have spent my new years with my friends I cherished them all and all those moments are still in my mind and those were the best celebrations I would ever have." On one lesson that 2022 has taught him, he replied: "Never stop, keep moving and always experience new things I released my first rap video which allowed me to learn so many things also the response of the viewers to that video motivated me to do more such individual work and entertain them." Sharing his plans for the coming year, the 'Swaragini - Jodein Rishon Ke Sur' actor said: "Some good and amazing new projects, also more music videos, as I love travelling, I will take out a little bit of time for myself and explore new places."



2022 WASN'T THAT GOOD FOR ME: KAUSHIKI RATHORE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actress Kaushiki Rathore, who is seen playing the role of Sumona in the show 'Durga Aur Charu', shared how 2022 was for her and what she wishes for the upcoming year.

Talking about the same, Kaushiki says: "Well, 2022 wasn't that good for me as I was majorly out of work for most of the time but I am glad that it is ending on a good note as my new show has been launched. Every year something good and bad happens so similarly, 2022 was also full of ups and downs for me, but I believe that it's a part of life. We can only hope to get stronger - physically, mentally and professionally, with each passing day."

Sharing the best thing that has happened to her in 2022, Kaushiki adds: "It would be none other than my show 'Durga Aur Charu'. I am glad that I got the opportunity to play a crucial character in the show and entertain the audience with my acting skills. People have been appreciating me a lot for my performance, which is surely the best thing for an actor."

Kaushiki has been seen in shows like 'Krishna Chali London', 'Gudiya Hamara Sabhi Pe Bhari' and many more.

When asked

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Ritika Khatnani