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COLD DAY CONDITIONS TO CONTINUE IN PUNJAB, HARYANA, UP, RAJ FOR NEXT 2 DAYS: IMD



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday said that Cold Day to 'severe' Cold Day conditions are likely to continue over some parts of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan during next two days and decrease thereafter. The IMD further predicted that dense to very dense fog is likely to continue over some parts of plains of Northwest and East India during the next three days and gradually decrease, while a fresh spell of rainfall with isolated heavy rainfall is likely over extreme south Peninsular India during next four to five days. The weather forecast agency said the

minimum temperatures ranged between 4-8 degree Celsius over most parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, West Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan and in range of 9-12 degree Celsius over Delhi, East Uttar Pradesh, north Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and south Rajasthan. "These are above normal by 2-4 degree Celsius over many parts of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, East Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat. Today, the lowest minimum temperature of 1 degree Celsius was reported in Sikar (East Rajasthan)," the weatherman said in its daily bulletin. The IMD said that dense to very dense fog conditions are very likely to prevail for a few hours at night/morning in some parts over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh,

Uttar Pradesh, East Rajasthan during Thursday to Saturday and in isolated pockets on Sunday. "Dense to very dense fog conditions are very likely to prevail for a few hours in the morning in isolated pockets over West Rajasthan on Friday and Saturday and in isolated pockets on Sunday," said the IMD.

"Dense to very dense fog conditions are very likely to prevail for a few hours in the morning in isolated pockets over Bihar on Friday and dense fog in some parts on Saturday and Sunday."

The IMD also predicted that dense fog conditions very likely to prevail for a few hours in morning in isolated pockets over Jammu division, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura during Friday and Sunday and over north Madhya Pradesh on Friday.

"Cold Day to severe Cold Day conditions are very likely to continue in some parts over Punjab, Haryana Chandigarh during Thursday and Saturday and Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan on Thursday and Friday," said the IMD.

It further predicted light to moderate rainfall at some places is very likely over south Tamil Nadu, south Kerala and Lakshadweep during the next four to five days.

INTENSE DRY COLD WAVE GRIPS KASHMIR AS PEOPLE PRAY FOR SNOWFALL



Srinagar: With the weather office giving little hope of snowfall in sight, Kashmiris on Thursday started looking up to the heavens for a beautiful snowfall. The Meteorological (MeT) Department outlook for the next 10 days does not give any hope of snowfall in the plains of Kashmir and this has forced locals to look to the heavens for help. "If it does not snow sufficiently during the remaining part of the 'Chillai Kalan' then we are heading straight for a disaster", said Shabir Ahmad Bhat, who lives in Ganderbal district.

With most water bodies partly frozen in the Valley, potable water demand has gone up manifold. Srinagar had minus 3.8 degrees Celsius as the minimum temperature on Thursday while Gulmarg and Pahalgam had minus 4.2 and minus 5.1 respectively. Leh town in Ladakh region had minus 14.1, Kargil minus 14.3 and Drass minus 12.1 as the night's lowest temperature. Jammu city had 4.7, Katra 6.2, Batote 3.1, Bhaderwah 1.1 and Banihal minus 0.4 as the minimum temperature.

A 40-day long period of harsh winter cold known locally as the 'Chillai Kalan' started on December 21 and will end on

SA vs IND Cape Town Test scripts history to become shortest-ever red-ball match



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Cape Town Test between South Africa and India created history on Thursday as it became the shortest-ever red-ball match. India won the match by seven wickets as the game

concluded in just one and a half days with just 107 overs (642 balls) being bowled. South Africa lasted 24 overs for 55 runs in their first innings and 37 overs in their second essay for 176. India scored 153 in 35 overs and then raced to 80 runs in 12 overs.

SHORTEST DECIDED TEST MATCHES IN TERMS OF OVERS

- 642 balls (107 overs): South Africa v India, Cape Town 2023/24
- 656 balls (109.2 overs): Australia v South Africa, Melbourne 1932/33
- 672 balls (112 overs): West Indies v England, Bridgetown 1934/35
- 788 balls (197 four-ball overs): England v Australia, Manchester 1888
- 792 balls (198 four-ball overs): England v Australia, Lord's 1888

Gold prices likely to move towards a new high of Rs 70,000

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Gold prices are likely to move towards a new high of Rs 70,000, as per a report by ICICI Direct, while silver, remaining supported amid rising industrial demand, may edge higher towards Rs 85,000.

Gold prices are likely to rise further on the back of weak dollar and decline in US treasury yields. Dollar and yields have nosedived in anticipation that US Fed will start cutting rates as soon as March 2024. Concerns over slower global economic growth and



escalating geopolitical tensions in Middle East may continue to make gold valuable as hedge against uncertainties, the report said. Additionally, central banks are likely to continue with their buying spree, diversifying their reserves. Crude oil to face hurdle near \$90 on weaker demand, the report said.

Crude oil prices are likely to remain in a range of \$60-\$90 as market may remain in balance as it is less likely that OPEC may extend the voluntary output cuts combined with rising production in non-OPEC countries.

Additionally, global oil demand growth is likely to slow given uncertainty over economic growth. Escalating tension in Middle East may prevent oil prices from dipping below \$60. MEX Crude oil prices may dip further towards Rs 5,000 levels in coming month, the report said.

GWALIOR TRADE FAIR WILL GET INTERNATIONAL FORMAT: CHIEF MINISTER MOHAN YADAV

Gwalior: While inaugurating the Madhavrao Scindia Trade Fair which has been going on for almost a hundred years in the historical city of Gwalior of Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that the Gwalior Trade Fair will be given an international format. Necessary steps will be taken for this. The country's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also taken interest in encouraging trade fairs.



He said that the fair is a symbol of our civilization and culture. Fairs also connect us with ancient times. This fair will be made more historical. Former Union Minister Madhavrao Scindia has made an important contribution in the development of Gwalior Fair. Provided a new direction and Gwalior Trade Fair became a symbol for the people of the area. There will be 50 percent discount on sales tax in the fair.

I am a Ram bhakt; will organise Ramotsav: K'taka Cong MLA Ansari

Ramanagar | Agencies

Stated on Thursday that he was a Ram bhakt and would organise the Ramotsav ceremony in Ramanagar with all devotion.

Speaking to reporters in Channapatna town, Ansari stated, "I am also a devotee of Lord Ram. I worship all gods. From childhood, I have been worshipping all gods. Likewise I also worship Ram."

"Others might use the issue of Ram mandir for political reasons. We will not use it for political gains. A few are pursuing politics by dividing people," Ansari stated.

"The Congress party has its own ideology and commitment. It is left to the BJP to use it for Lok Sabha elections. But, we worship Lord Ram like a family deity. The worshipping of Ram might be new to them, but not for us. They are using it politically for the same reason," he stated, slamm



ming the BJP. Ansari represents Ramanagar constituency dominated by the Vokkaliga community. He defeated former Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy's son Nikhil Kumaraswamy as the Vokkaliga community votes shifted to the Congress from the JD(S) in the backdrop of Dy Chief Minister Shivakumar being projected as the chief ministerial candidate during the Assembly election.

India reports 760 new Covid cases, two deaths

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India has recorded 760 new Covid-19 cases and two deaths in the past 24 hours, said the Union health ministry on Thursday.

Two new fatalities -- one each from Kerala and Karnataka -- were reported in the span of 24 hours, according to the ministry's data. On Wednesday, five deaths were reported, one each from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Punjab, two from Kerala.

The number of new Covid infections reported in the last 24 hours was 158 more compared to a day before, however, the total number of active cases marginally fell to 4,423 from Wednesday's 4,440.

The country had recorded 865 new cases on May 19, 2023.

As of now, the total number of coronavirus cases in India, since the outbreak in January 2020, has reached 4,50,15, 843. The death toll related to



Covid cases in the country has risen to 5,33,373.

The new variant, JN.1 subvariant is descendent of the Omicron subvariant known as BA.2.86 or Pirola, with Kerala being the first state to report a case.

Kerala and Karnataka continue to witness JN.1 variant cases, with other affected states being Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Telangana, Odisha, and Haryana, as per the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG).

These states collectively reported 511 cases of the sub-variant by Tuesday, with Karnataka leading with 199 cases, followed by Kerala with 148 cases. INSACOG's data revealed that 239 Covid cases in December 2023, and 24 in November 2023, were identified with the presence of the JN.1 variant.

"A total of 511 cases of the JN.1 series variant have been reported from 11 states till January 2. Karnataka has reported 199 cases of the sub-variant. Kerala has reported 148 cases. 47 cases have been reported from Goa, 36 from Gujarat, 32 from Maharashtra," the health ministry has said.

The overall recovery from Covid has reached over 4.4 crore individuals, reflecting a national recovery rate of 98.81 per cent.

The country has administered a total of 220.67 crore doses of Covid vaccines, as per the available data.

Kuki groups ask centre to remove Manipur Cops, re-impose AFSPA

Guwahati | Agencies

Kuki groups have refuted Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh's allegations that foreign insurgents could be involved in the attacks on police commandos and the Border Security Force (BSF) in the border town Moreh.

After a 24-hour shutdown in areas where the Kuki tribes live, the Kuki groups led by the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) and the Committee on Tribal Unity (CoTU) have demanded the Centre to remove the Manipur Police and keep only central



forces in the hill areas, where the Kukis are settled.

The Kuki groups have alleged the Manipur Police of bias in how they operate.

They appealed to Home Minister Amit Shah to reimpose the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the entire Imphal valley.

The Chief Minister has said he was "highly upset" with the

ongoing violence in Manipur and elements who engage in it will be held responsible for any stringent government action, including reimposition of the AFSPA.

Meanwhile, the Manipur government on Thursday constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to conduct a probe into the firing incident on January 1 in the minority community-dominated Lilong area in Thoubal district that resulted in casualties, an official said. The death toll from the incident has risen to five as one of the injured succumbed to his injuries on Wednesday night.

AYODHYA TO HOST INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL FROM JAN 9 TO 21

The Ayodhya Development Authority (ADA) has initiated preparations for the festival, which is likely to take place between January 19 and 21, providing renowned kite flyers from both within the country and around the world with an opportunity to showcase their art. The ADA will engage a private agency to give concrete shape to the event, said a government spokesman.

Ayodhya | Agencies

The Uttar Pradesh government is formulating a plan to host the International Kite Festival in Ayodhya, ahead of the consecration ceremony scheduled for January 22.

The Ayodhya Development Authority (ADA) has invited applications through the Request for Proposal format to appoint an agency for the conceptualisation, designing, execution, and supervision of event management, as well as the development of temporary structures and related infrastructure for hosting the International Kite Festival in Ayodhya.

The agency that will carry out this programme will be chosen based on the applications received



through this process. The entire selection process is scheduled to be completed by January 8, following which a comprehensive plan for organising the International Kite Festival will be formulated. It is

noteworthy that to organise this event on a grand scale, inspiration is being taken from various kite festivals being held in the country and abroad.

A visitor area will be made with seating arrangements for 750 people. A lounge with 50 VVIP sofas will be constructed to accommodate the special invitees at the event. Arrangements for 350 cushioned chairs and 350 other chairs will also be made in the programme. Volunteers will be deployed to ensure that the competitors and spectators have a pleasant experience. The food counter will feature dishes made from millet with local flavours.

Attendees will have the opportunity to savour Awadhi cuisine. Precautionary measures will be taken to safeguard tents and equipment from monkeys during the event.



SCIENTIFIC FEAT: SUN WILL APPLY 'TILAK' ON LORD RAM ON RAM NAVAMI IN AYODHYA

Ayodhya | Agencies

On each Ram Navami, the Sun will do the 'tilak' of the idol of Ram Lalla installed in the sanctum of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

This scientific feat will be achieved with the aid of sunlight, mirrors, and lenses, all thanks to the scientists at Roorkee's Central Building Research Institute (CBRI) who have crafted a unique system for the newly-constructed Ram temple.

The first display is scheduled for Ram Navami on March 29, marking Ram's birth anniversary according to the Hindu lunar calendar.

The project - 'Surya Rashmiyon Ka Tilak' (anointment by sun rays) - is a mechanical system requiring no electricity or battery and is made exclusively using brass instead of iron or steel.

SK Panigrahi, the Chief Scientist and principal investigator of the project, said, "We used only brass in making our manually-operated system."



The circular 'tilak', measuring 75 mm, will grace Lord Ram's forehead at noon for three to four minutes on Ram Navami in the Chaitra month, using

sunlight redirected by the system.

This arrangement is planned only for the occasion of Ram Navami every year.

The optomechanical system, set to be installed on the temple's third floor, incorporates high-quality mirrors (M1 and M2), a lens (L1), and vertical piping with lenses (L2 and L3) fixed at specific angles. Ground floor components include mirrors (M3 & M4) and a lens (L4). Panigrahi said, "Sunlight falls on M1, travels through L1, M2, L1, L2, M3 (installed outside the garbhagriha), and finally on M4, bringing a 'tilak' on the forehead of the idol."

The Bengaluru-based Optics & Allied Engineering Pvt Ltd has handled the fabrication of mirrors, lenses, and tilt mechanism for the temple at no cost. The Indian Institute of Astrophysics provided consultancy to CBRI for the optical design.

The CBRI team developed the mechanism to adapt to the changing position of the Sun in the sky on Ram Navami.

Mimicry episode over, Trinamool MP gets dinner invitation from VP

Kolkata | Agencies

The bad blood between Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee over the latter's mimicry of him during the recent Winter Session of the Parliament seems to be over.

Dhankhar not only wished Banerjee on his birthday on Thursday but had also invited him along with his wife for dinner at his official residence.

Banerjee himself confirmed the development, saying that he was overwhelmed that the Vice President personally had a telephonic conversation with his wife where he conveyed his blessings to the entire Banerjee family. Banerjee also confirmed the dinner invitation from Dhankhar to him and his wife. The three-time Trinamool MP from Sreerampore constituency in Hooghly district sparked off



controversy after he was spotted mimicking the Vice President within the Parliament premises.

Dhankhar himself took strong objection and said that such an insult of the chair of the Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman was totally unacceptable. Banerjee, on his part,

claimed that mimicry is a form of performing art.

President Droupadi Murmu also condemned the manner in which the Vice President was insulted within the Parliament premises. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also called up Dhankhar and expressed his concern.

Cow vigilante Monu Manesar granted bail in attempt to murder case

Gurugram | Agencies

A Gurugram court on Thursday granted bail to self-proclaimed cow vigilante Mohit Yadav also known as Monu Manesar, in an attempt to murder case.

The case was registered against him at Pataudi police station in Gurugram.

Additional District and Session Judge Jasbir Singh approved the bail application of Monu Manesar who is currently in judicial custody at Bhondsi jail.

However, the police had opposed the bail application of the 32-year-old Manesar, saying over 20 suspects in the matter are yet to be arrested and Manesar can flee or pressurise the witnesses. The court, however, accepted his bail plea on Thursday. The case pertains to



a bullet injury to Mohin, a resident of Ward No. 9 in Pataudi, on February, 2023. A complaint was filed by Mubin Khan, a resident of the same locality, who alleged his son was shot at during firing between two groups.

Following the complaint, an FIR was registered under section 307 (attempt to murder) against Manesar at Pataudi police station. Gurugram

Police had arrested Monu Manesar on September 11 in connection with the riots in Nuh during the Brij Mandal Jalabhishek rally organised by the Vishva Hindu Parishad on July 31.

After presenting him in court, Rajasthan Police took him on production remand in the murder case of two Muslim men -- Nasir and Junaid.

Sexual harassment case: Delhi Police resume arguments on charges against Brij Bhushan

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi Police on Thursday resumed arguments on whether to frame charges against BJP MP and former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh in an alleged sexual harassment case lodged by six women wrestlers.

The police presented their submissions before Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Priyanka Rajpoot, claiming that there is sufficient prima facie evidence to proceed with trial against Singh and co-accused Vinod Tomar, suspended Assistant Secretary of the WFI.

Singh was granted exemption from personal appearance for the day.

The court will continue hearing the case on Saturday. The fresh hearing stemmed from the transfer of Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Harjeet Singh Jaspal of the Rouse Avenue Court, who had previously presided over the case.

As the predecessor judge had already heard extensive arguments, the court had, during the last hearing,



stressed the need for a fresh hearing, especially on the framing of charges.

The matter was at the stage of clarification before an order could be reserved when the transfer occurred. Earlier, the Delhi Police had filed written arguments presenting their stand as to whether to

frame charges against Singh. ACMM Jaspal had handed the copy of the arguments to the counsels of the accused and the complainant. Advocate Harsh Bora, representing the complainants, had earlier filed written arguments. On October 30 last year, the court had granted three weeks to the counsels in the case to file their written arguments, and had stressed before the parties that the arguments shall be concluded in a systematic manner.

Singh's counsel had filed the written arguments on November 22, 2023.

The BJP MP had earlier questioned the jurisdiction of Delhi court trying a sexual harassment case against him lodged by six women wrestlers, claiming that there was no action or consequence which happened in India. The prosecution, however, had said that the act of sexual harassment of the victims was a continuing offence, as it did not stop at any particular time.

Delhi Police had also told the court that Singh never missed an opportunity to sexually harass women wrestlers, adding that there is sufficient evidence to frame charges against him and proceed with the trial.

Defence Ministry inks pact worth Rs 802cr to procure military equipment

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has signed two important contracts worth Rs 802 crore for procurement of 697 Bogie Open Military (BOM) wagons and 56 Mechanical Minefield Marking Equipment, an official said on Thursday.

The MoD said that BOM wagons, designed by Research Design and Standard Organisation, are specialist wagons used by the Indian Army for mobilisation of Army units.

BOM wagons are used to transport light vehicles, artillery guns, engineering equipment etc. from their peacetime locations to operational areas, the official said. "This critical rolling stock will ensure speedy and simultaneous induction of units and equipment into operational areas during any conflict situation besides, facilitating their



peace-time movement for military exercise and movement of units from one station to another," a statement noted. The Defence Ministry said that the equipment is based on an in-service High Mobility Vehicle having

advanced mechanical and electrical systems which will reduce the timings for minefield marking during operations and will enhance the operational capability of Indian Army.

The Ministry said that the contract

procurement of 697 Bogie Open Military (BOM) wagons at a cost of Rs 473 crore BOM contract has been signed with Jupiter Wagons Limited.

The second contract for procurement of 56 Mechanical Minefield Marking Equipment (MMME) Mark II at a cost of Rs 329 crore is with BEML Ltd, under the Buy (Indian-IDDMM) category. The MoD said that the BOM Wagons and MMME will be produced with equipment and sub-systems sourced from indigenous manufacturers, giving a boost to the indigenous manufacturing and participation of the private sector in defence production, realising the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat. MMME has been designed to operate cross country with a complete load of stores and carry out marking of minefields with minimal time and manpower employment, the official added.

We will not let Godhra-like incidents happen: K'taka Home Min

Bengaluru | Agencies

Karnataka Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara stated on Thursday in Bengaluru that the Congress Government would not let incidents like the Godhra carnage take place in the state.

Commenting on the controversial statement by Congress MLC, CBK Hariprasad that a Godhra-like incident was being planned in Karnataka and the government should ensure safety and security of those travelling to Ayodhya, Parameshwara stated, "The Home Ministry does not have any information in this regard. If any information is received, the department is capable of handling the situation."

"If the need arises, let us call Hariprasad and ask him about the statement. Our depart-



ment knows how to handle the situation. Hariprasad is a senior leader. If he is making a statement, he should have information in this regard," Parameshwara added.

The Home Minister also announced that no notice would be issued to Hariprasad over his statement.

"There is no necessity to issue a notice to him for ques-

tioning. If notices are given to all those who make statements, where will it end?" he questioned. "Since it is a sensitive matter, we will see it through. Our intelligence sources will look into it and if they gather information in this regard, action will be initiated," he stated. The Karnataka BJP has demanded the arrest of Hariprasad for his remarks.

K'taka Govt sends Inspector who arrested Kar Sevak on compulsory leave



Hubballi | Agencies

The Karnataka Government has sent on compulsory leave the police Inspector who arrested an alleged Kar Sevak in Hubballi, stirring up a huge controversy in the state.

Inspector Mohammad Rafeeq attached to the Hubballi Shehar police station had arrested Srikanth Poojari on December 29, in connection with an arson case reported 31-years-ago. Poojari was sent to judicial custody and sources said that a special team was also formed to reopen the pending cases lodged during the Ayodhya Rath Yatra.

Hubballi-Dharwad Police Commissioner, Renuka Sukumar, has handed over charge to BA Jadhav, police sources stated.

The BJP staged a protest across the state on Wednesday condemning the arrest of Poojari in connection with a case of arson during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.

Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra has given a deadline of 48 hours to the state government to release Poojari.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah issued a press statement over the arrest turning into a major controversy, saying that assigning caste and religious labels to criminals is extremely dangerous.

AIR QUALITY DIPS TO 'SEVERE' LEVEL IN PARTS OF DELHI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Days after GRAP-III was lifted as the AQI slightly improved and entered into 'very poor' levels, the air quality in the national capital on Thursday afternoon again deteriorated with several monitoring stations entering into 'severe' category.

The air quality at Anand Vihar plummeted in the 'severe' category with PM 2.5 at 428 and PM at 433 while the NO2 reached 103, in the 'moderate' category while NO2 was at 68 or 'satisfactory', as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

The Air Quality Index (AQI) at ITO also remained in 'severe' category with PM 2.5 reaching at 447 and PM 10 at 403. The CO was recorded at 79 or 'satisfactory'.

The particulate matter (PM) 2.5 at Punjabi Bagh also reached 441 while PM 10 was at 407, both in the 'severe' category. The air quality at Jahangirpuri air quality monitoring station also entered into 'severe' category with PM 2.5 at 466 and PM 10 444. The Carbon Monoxide (CO) was also reached at 101 or 'moder-



ate'. The PM 2.5 at Okhla Phase-II was recorded at 411 and PM 10 at 405 both in the 'severe' category. The CO was at 106, in the 'moderate' levels.

At Mundka the AQI remained in the 'severe' category with PM 2.5 at 401 and PM 10 at 303, in the 'very poor' category. The AQI between zero and 50 is considered

'good'; 51 and 100 'satisfactory'; 101 and 200 'moderate'; 201 and 300 'poor'; 301 and 400 'very poor'; and 401 and 500 'severe'. However, at Bawana, the air quality was in the 'very poor' category with PM 2.5 at 375 and PM 10 at 282, in the 'poor' category.

The AQI monitoring station at Dwarka sector 8 recorded

PM 2.5 at 400 and PM 10 was at 321, both in the very poor category.

The AQI at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport station plummeted with PM 10 at 377, in the very poor category while PM 2.5 was at 288, in the poor levels. The CO was recorded at 21, or 'good'.

BJP wants me arrested: Kejriwal on ED's third summon

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Day after skipping ED's third summon in connection with the excise policy case, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Thursday that BJP wants him arrested, so that he can't take part in campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls.

"My biggest asset is my honesty. These people (BJP) want to malign my image by making false allegations and sending false summons," he claimed.

While addressing the media, the CM said, "My lawyers told me that the summons sent to me by ED are illegal. I have sent a detailed reply to ED that why is this summon illegal. But they did not answer even a single thing of mine. This means that they do not have an answer to what I say, and they also believe that this summon is illegal." The CM asked whether he should follow an 'illegal notice'. He said, "If a legally correct summon comes, I will comply with it.

Their (BJP) purpose is not to investigate. Their motive is to stop me from campaigning in the Lok Sabha elections," Kejriwal added.



He said that it has been two years since this investigation started but now just before the Lok Sabha elections, summons have been sent to me. Their (BJP) aim is not to interrogate me, their aim is to call me on the pretext of questioning and arrest me so that I can't campaign in the Lok Sabha elections."

"In the last two years, the investigating agency has conducted several raids and arrested many people. But till now not a single penny has been found embezzled, not a single penny has been recovered from anywhere," he claimed. Kejriwal said, "If corruption has happened then where these crores of rupees have gone. The truth is that there was no corruption; if it had happened then money would have been recovered."

He said that they (BJP) have kept many Aam Aadmi Party leaders in jail in such fake cases and there is no evidence against anyone.



Lord Ram's 'non-veg diet' remark by NCP Gen Secy stirs up unsavoury political-religious row

Quaid Najmi | Mumbai

Barely three weeks ahead of the Ayodhya Temple inauguration, a senior Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader has stoked up a massive controversy on the alleged 'non-vegetarian' diet of Lord Ram, with political and religious leaders crying foul and demanding strict action, here on Thursday.

At an event in Shirdi, Ahmednagar on Wednesday, NCP (SP) National General Secretary Jitendra Awhad called Lord Ram a 'meat-eater' when he was exiled from the Ayodhya Kingdom, leaving devotees and politicians across the country aghast.

"Lord Ram was never a vegetarian. Where will a person living in the forests for 14 years find vegetarian food? He was a non-vegetarian... Is it correct or not..." said Awhad, citing ancient scriptures and also the Valmiki version of Ramayana epic.

As his comments kicked up a massive row, an unfazed Awhad on Thursday told the media that he stood by his remarks but softened to add: "I express regrets if it has hurt the religious sentiments of anyone."

Reiterating that he did not say any-



thing without a proper research and study as "He is my Ram, too, he was a Kshatriya, he was a 'Bahujan' and would be appalled at the status of the country today", but would not like to aggravate the issue in view of public emotions and wanted to end the row. Awhad said that he spoke on the issue from his heart and with proper references to ancient writings on Lord Ram, but "if some persons feel

offended, I regret it". Earlier, the political spectrum went on a boil with calls ranging from 'arrest Dr. Awhad' to 'send him to 14 years vanvas (jail)', with at least one religious leader joining the fracas. Nashik's Shri Kalaram Temple Trust's chief priest Mahant Sudhirdas Maharaj said he was going to lodge a police complaint against Awhad for his "blasphemous" statements.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesperson Ram Kadam demanded Awhad's arrest, while party MLA Nitesh Narayan Rane asked "whether he would have been spared alive if he had spoken against any other community". Maha Vikas Aghadi ally Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aditya Thackeray said it was "not proper" to make any controversial remarks on any gods-goddesses, even as the issue was hotly debated on social media, with pro-and-anti Awhad comments.

Ruling Shiv Sena of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's party activists staged massive protests in Thane outside Awhad's residence, and other places like Pune, Nashik, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar and other districts, slapped with shoes or burnt effigies of the NCP(SP) leader, raised slogans and demanded strict action.

Defending his observations, Awhad said in an X post: "The juveniles who are ignorant of Lord Ram's history must first study it. Shri Ram accepted the 14 years' exile only to give the throne to his brother Bharat, as agreed upon by his parents," and Emperor Bharat ruled the kingdom by placing Shri Ram's sandals ('padukas') on the throne.

Rashmi Shukla appointed as first woman DGP of Maharashtra

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After days of dilly-dallying, the Maharashtra government on Thursday appointed senior IPS officer Rashmi Shukla as the new Director General of Police (DGP) of the state, the first-ever woman to occupy the coveted post.

Shukla, a 1998 batch IPS officer, currently the Director-General of Seema Sashastra Bal (SSB), replaces DGP Rajnish Sheth, who retired on December 31.

She has also been a former Director of the State Intelligence Department (SID) and held other prestigious state and central postings. She had earned the ire of the erstwhile Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government for the alleged phone-snooping cases involving certain leaders.

Mumbai Commissioner of Police, Vivek



Phansalkar, was handling the additional charge as DGP, as per an official announcement.

The move to appoint Shukla as the top cop came more than three months after the Bombay High Court in September 2023 quashed the two

phone-tapping cases lodged against her in Mumbai and Pune during the previous government.

The first case pertained to allegedly tapping the phones of Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Uddhav Thackeray, and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Eknath Khadse, while the second complaint involved tapping the phone of state Congress President Nana Patole.

She was also accused of leaking a secret report exposing an alleged nexus between some police officers and middlemen involved in a cash for transfers-promotions racket, which was prepared in 2020 when she headed the SID.

However, Shukla had rejected all the allegations of any wrongdoings and claimed that she acted in the interests of national security and public service.

Maha cabinet nod for Old Pension Scheme to state employees who joined service after Nov 2005

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra cabinet Thursday cleared a proposal that offers an option of availing the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) to the state government employees who joined the service after November 2005.

The Maharashtra cabinet decision comes days after the government as well as semi-government employees and officials went on a strike to press for their demand of restoring the OPS, a newswire reported.

The cabinet gave its nod to the proposal that offers an option of the OPS to the state employees who joined the service post-November 2005, the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said.

Talking to newswire, Vishwas Katkar, general secretary of the Maharashtra state employees' confederation, said, "The Maharashtra cabinet's decision will benefit some 26,000 state government employees who were selected before November 2005 but received joining letters later. This decision



will benefit only these 26,000 state employees." There are as many as 9.5 lakh state employees who joined the service before November 2005 and they already enjoy the benefits of the OPS.

Under the OPS, a government employee gets a monthly pension equivalent to 50 per cent his/her last drawn salary. There was no need for contribution by employees. The OPS was discontinued in the state in 2005.

Under the New Pension Scheme (NPS), a state government employee contributes 10 per cent of his/her basic salary plus dearness allowance with the state making a matching

contribution. The money is then invested in one of the several pension funds approved by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) and the returns are market-linked.

The cabinet gave its nod to the proposal to issue Rs 5 per litre subsidy to the milk producers in the state. The decision was announced in the winter session of the state legislature held last month. In another proposal okayed by the Maharashtra cabinet, the clerks-typists working in the Mantralaya will be given a monthly allowance of Rs 5,000 over and above their current remuneration, the CMO said.

Case against man for duping private firm of Rs 50 lakh

Team Absolute | Thane

A case has been registered against man for duping private firm of Rs 50 lakh.

The Navi Mumbai police have registered a case against a 45-year-old employee of a private company engaged in selling mobile phones for allegedly duping it of Rs 50.01 lakh, an official said on Thursday, reported a news agency.

The accused took orders from various customers in Nerul and Seawoods area of Navi

Mumbai for supply of 206 mobile phones.

But, he allegedly sold the mobile phones directly in the market and kept the amount received with himself instead of depositing it with the company, the official from APMC police station said, adding the accused committed the fraud between August and December 2023.

A case on charges of criminal breach of trust was registered against the accused on Wednesday and a probe was on into it, he said.

Massive fire breaks out at chemical factory

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A fire broke out in a chemical company in Pavane MIDC of Navi Mumbai on Thursday morning. The fire spread due to the explosion of chemicals, and no casualties were reported.

As per the eye witness, the fire was reported in Mehak Chemical company around 7:30 am. The company is located at plot numbers W5 and W6. As soon as the fire started workers ran out of the company, said locals.

Navi Mumbai Fire Brigade reached the spot, and a team

of fire bridge tried to control the fire, but the fire spread due to the chemical explosions. After 10 am, the fire brigade team took the fire under control.

The exact cause of the fire is not clear. A few days ago there was a fire in a company in Taloja.

Maharashtra Minister asks cops to "break bones" of crowd at dance show

Team Absolute | Aurangabad

A video has surfaced showing Maharashtra Minister Abdul Sattar purportedly asking police to lathi-charge and "break the bones" of revellers to control them during a dance show organised on his birthday in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (Aurangabad) district.

The incident took place on Wednesday night in Sillod town when popular dancer Gautami Patil's performance was underway.

Sattar, who belongs to the Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, represents the Sillod assembly constituency in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar. He is the Minority Development Minister of the state.

The incident prompted the opposition to target Sattar over the use of his language.

The video shows Sattar giving instructions to police using the microphone from the stage. The clip also shows police mildly lathi-charging some viewers.



Patil is popular among the youth of Maharashtra for her performances of Lavani dance numbers. Her dance show was organised in Sillod to celebrate the birthday of Sattar. A large number of people attended the programme.

But as the viewers went berserk and chaos prevailed, Sattar took the mic in hand.

In the video that went viral, Sattar can be seen initially appealing to the viewers to sit down, but as the situation failed to improve, he instructed the police to start hitting them with their batons.

"Those indulging in drama, beat them like dogs...Baton-charge the people at the back (of the programme venue). Beat them so much that the bone of their bottom is broken," he asked the police. Addressing one of the viewers in the crowd, Sattar asked, "Has your father seen such a programme? Are you a demon? You are the son of a human being, so behave like one and watch the programme. Sit down and enjoy the show."

Leader of Opposition in Maharashtra Legislative Council Ambadas Danve, who belongs to the Uddhav Thackeray led Shiv Sena (UBT), attacked Sattar over the language he used during the programme.

"The kind of language that Sattar used suits his culture and this has also been accepted by the Shinde faction and the BJP that are ruling the state," he quipped.

Mumbai Trans Harbour Link toll Rs 250 per car for one year

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The much-awaited showpiece Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL) will be opened this month, and the toll for cars has been fixed at Rs 250 for the first year, officials said here on Thursday.

The state Cabinet presided over by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and attended by Deputy CMs Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar and other ministers accorded approval for the toll proposal of Rs 250 per car for the opening year.

Shinde said the toll is 50 per cent lower than the rate charged for vehicles as per the general rules of road tax and it will be reviewed next year.

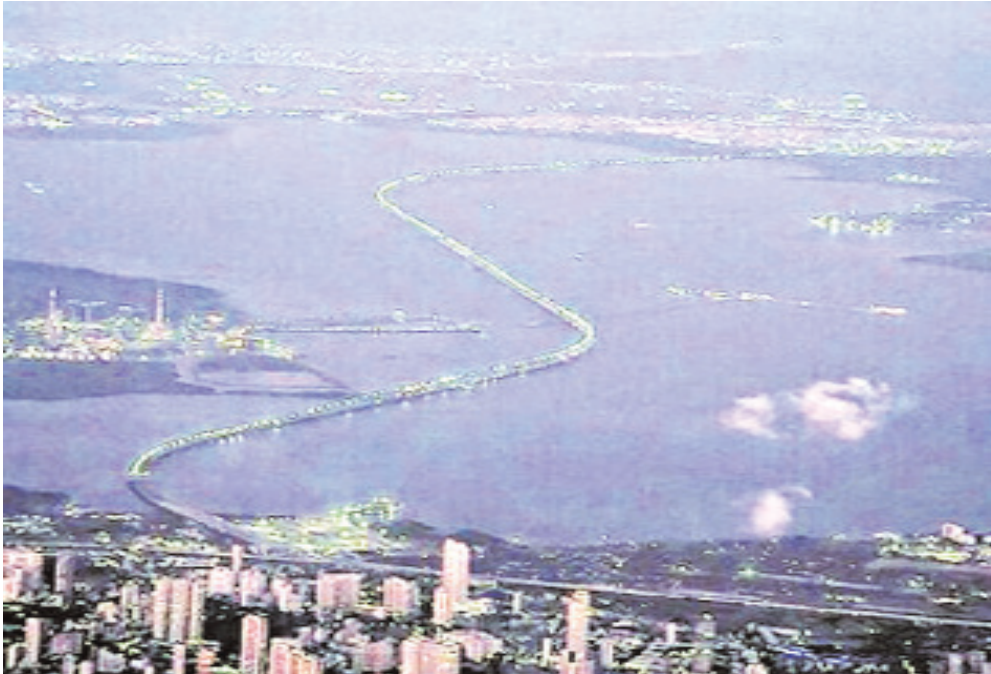
For frequent travellers, the return pass will come at a discount of 50 per cent of the one-way fare, the daily pass will cost 2.5 times the one-way fare, while the monthly pass will be 50 times of Rs 250.

The MTHL, officially 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Shivdhi-Nhavasheva Atal Setu', is likely to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the next few days, according to officials.

Post the Cabinet meeting, state minister Girish Mahajan informed mediapersons that the toll is very reasonable and lower than other highways for travel on the 21.8-km long MTHL, which has cost a total of Rs 21,200 crore, including a loan component of Rs 15,100 crore.

Mahajan said that in order to recover the mega-project costs, the toll will be levied for around 30 years by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), for which toll booths have been built at Chirle in Navi Mumbai.

The MTHL will slash the travel distance between Panvel and south Mumbai by around 15 km, and



save commuting time of almost 100-120 minutes during peak hours, enabling motorists to save hugely on fuel costs, reducing pollution, traffic and congestions.

In order to avoid disturbing the protected flamingo bird sanctuary at Sewri mudflats in the Thane Creek, a Ramsar wetland site, MTHL has installed sound-barriers on both sides.

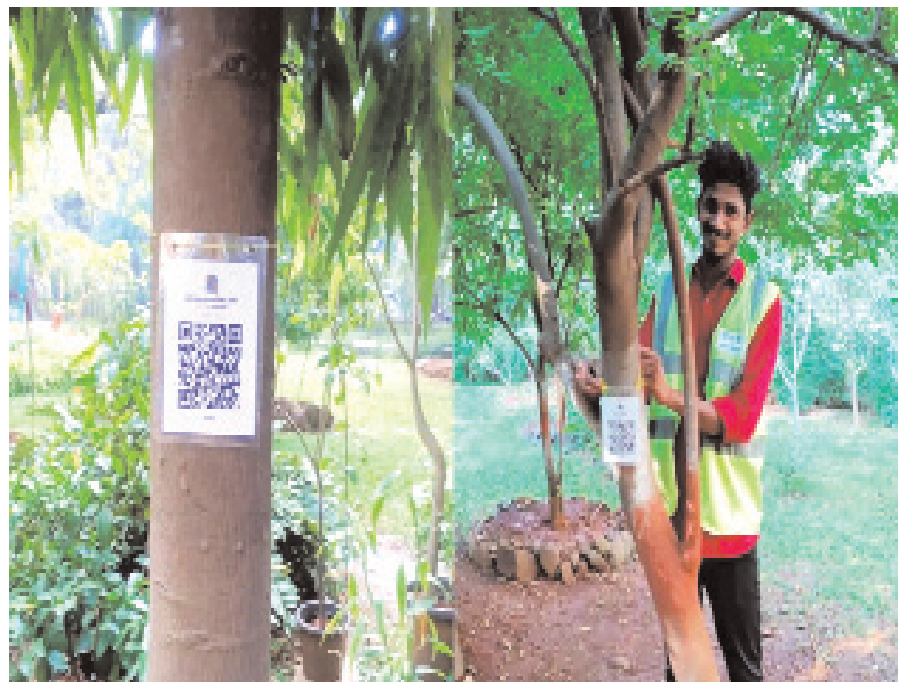
It also has visual barriers for the sensitive loca-

tions like the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and the Mahul Oil Refinery along the MTHL.

The MTHL will offer faster connectivity to the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, Mumbai-Nagpur Samruddhi Mahamarg, the Mumbai-Pune Highway and other major national and state thoroughfares.

Work on what is the country's longest creek road-bridge started in 2018, but missed several deadlines, including during the Covid pandemic.

Now, scan QR codes to know about trees in gardens of Thane



Team Absolute | Mumbai

In first of its kind initiative, the Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) has installed QR codes which will provide information about the city's rich biodiversity and trees in Thane district of Maharashtra.

Under its initiative 'Innovative Concepts in Gardens', QR codes have been installed on around 2,000 trees. These are installed on a pilot basis in as many as 21 municipal gardens across Thane, the civic body said on Thursday.

"QR codes have been placed on the trees so that the citizens can easily get the information about the trees in the parks. After scanning these codes on the mobile phone, information about the tree will be available to the citizens in two languages, Marathi and English," the civic body said. Mitali Sancheti, deputy commissioner, gardens and tree authority, said that residents with smartphones will be able to scan these QR codes and get information like tree name, botanical name, tree characteristics, place of origin etc.

"Keeping in mind the response, suggestions and feedback received from the citizens, we

have installed QR codes in the municipal gardens," Sancheti added.

She further said that as per the directives of Thane Municipal Commissioner Abhijit Bangar, the gardens and tree authority department is trying to make municipal parks more citizen friendly.

"Nature libraries have been started in some parks under the 'Chala Vachuya' campaign. They are getting enthusiastic response from citizens. And now the initiative of putting QR codes on trees has been taken up," Sancheti further said.

Shedding light on process of installing QR codes, she said that the officials inspected these gardens, identified the trees, gathered information about them and then installed QR codes. "In this way the information of about 2,000 trees was collected," Sancheti said.

The deputy commissioner also said that none of these QR codes were not nailed to the trees, but instead tied. "The QR codes were tied around the trunks of the trees with the help of nylon ropes. Care has been taken to ensure that no harm is done to the trees," Sancheti said.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Green corridors to be created on roads leading to Ayodhya on Jan 22

Specially cleared routes, known as green corridors, will be created on the roads leading to Ayodhya from different directions for the convenience of the guests invited for the consecration ceremony of Ram Lalla at the Ram temple on January 22. Ayodhya Divisional Commissioner Gaurav Dayal said, "Green corridors will be created on the routes leading to Ayodhya from Lucknow, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Prayagraj and Azamgarh districts to ensure a hassle-free journey for the invitees. The guests travelling through these green corridors must carry invitations, the bar code created by the Ram Temple Trust and photo identity cards," he added. Almost 48 hours before the consecration ceremony, Ayodhya and the adjoining places will be under a vast security blanket. Also, restrictions will be imposed on all movements. All the incoming traffic would be diverted from the borders of the district. Only the permanent residents of Ayodhya will be allowed entry. The commissioner said all traffic would be diverted from all entry points. However, outstation pilgrims who are having bookings at hotels may be allowed to enter. The Ayodhya administration has already acquired hotel rooms in large numbers to accommodate security personnel and government functionaries. The commissioner said the arrangements for the stay of guests have been done by the Temple Trust in hotels and tent cities. "Some guests have arranged their own accommodations," he added.

Knowing what lies ahead

DC Pathak

As the world rolls over to a new year, the global security scenario is likely to continue with the trends that had shown up earlier. The rise of 'proxy wars' as a combat in which terrorism was used as the weapon, expansion of security to embrace new national and global dimensions, viability of bilateral and multilateral relations in a multi-polar order, drift of the world towards a new Cold War on the horizon due to the steady rise of China as a potential superpower rivaling the US and the appearance of India as a world power serving the cause of global peace and economic development while facing a hostile Sino-Pak axis, are the more significant of these trends.

India's strategy of achieving self-dependence in the spheres of both defence and economic growth and handling international relations with the freedom to determine who our friends and adversaries are at a given point in time is working out well and sustaining the image of this country for its voice of sanity on the ongoing geopolitical developments and the challenges of human-centric economic growth.

India has the ongoing need for an extremely watchful security set-up, effective diplomacy and constant capacity building, to deal with what was an uncertain world situation marred by military conflicts in Eastern Europe and West Asia.

Fortunately, the far-sighted Prime Minister Narendra Modi aided by an extremely competent National Security Advisor, had ensured all of that.

In an era where open warfare had yielded to 'covert' offensives, the forces of Defence and Security have to combine to produce integral and effective responses like what has been achieved in J&K in the context of the ongoing cross-border terrorism desperately pushed there by Pakistan on the strength of elements recruited through indoctrination in the name of Jihad.

Collaboration of China with Pakistan on matters relating to Kashmir had become intense following the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution by the Parliament in 2019 and the validation of that act by the Supreme Court can be expected to lead to stepping up of covert operations by these two hostile neighbours against India.

India, however, is well prepared to deal with them on LAC and LoC, on the marine front as well as on international forums.

Punjab is another border state where the adversaries would attempt to revive militancy in some form or the other -- possibly through the narcotic route. The use of Chinese drones for dropping arms and drugs in the border districts of Punjab is an indicator of this trend.

China has been helped by Pakistan in reaching a 'give and take' arrangement with the Taliban in Afghanistan. As a result, China has extended its Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) to Afghanistan having been assured of non-interference by the Taliban on matters relating to Muslim minorities of China.

The advent of Information Technology has made social media an instrument of combat to be used for 'radicalisation', the creation of sleeper cells of terrorists including 'lone wolves' and building narratives to play 'politics by proxy'.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has multiplied the prospects of information warfare and cyber attacks as an extension of proxy war.

India has taken the lead in examining the promise and perils of AI and after putting it on the agenda of the G20 Summit hosted by it, and has already held the Global Partnership on Artificial



Intelligence (GPAI) Summit at Delhi on December 12-14.

GPAI has approximately 28 members besides the European Union. India is a founding member of this forum that guides the proper development and utilisation of AI.

In the Indian context, anti-India lobbies abroad in collusion with some civil society groups and NGOs have been building and spreading narratives designed to influence opinion against the regime by using 'misinformation' and even 'deepfake' tactics.

There is little doubt that the legitimate growth of AI can put healthcare, education, business productivity, human resource development, innovation and research on an entirely different pedestal. 'Machine learning', 'Deep learning' and 'Natural Language Process' can even provide 'predictability' -- though limited -- on the basis of human conduct studied through analysis of data.

India has brought in NITI Ayog to pursue the progress of AI and engaged in efforts to put AI applications for the larger good of humanity on one hand and prevent any destructive fallout of the same, on the other.

National security can be impacted by new socio-political developments of global importance.

The post-Cold War era was marked by the shift from open warfare to covert combat or 'asymmetric' war and this transformed the security scene. It was realised that "national security was inseparable from economic security" which meant that the enemy would be tempted to take recourse to causing economic damage to the opponent in order to weaken the latter.

This kind of damage can be inflicted through sabotage, blocking of the supply chains or recourse to cyber attacks to destroy the economic lifelines of the country.

Secondly, the destruction of national assets, large casualties and even loss of cattle wealth caused by natural or man-made disasters, weaken the country economically thus affecting national

security in the wider sense.

India has made remarkable advances in preventing and mitigating the effects of disasters -- the establishment of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) serves the mission of national security as well.

Finally, there is a new understanding of the protection of the environment as an essential mandate for the larger cause of the security of humanity. Prime Minister Modi with his deep understanding of the issue, placed before the G20 Summit his idea of 'Lifestyle For Environment' (LiFE) that underlined the importance of everyone's contribution to the protection of the environment.

These three dimensions of national security add up to the overriding requirement of 'mainstreaming' of security that has to be met in today's unsafe world. India has rapidly moved to achieve that by taking a holistic view of national security.

The basic task of national security set-up is to safeguard the assets of the nation -- physical resources, human power and 'protected' information -- against the 'covert' attacks of the enemy. An open attack will be taken care of by our Defence forces.

Intelligence is the anchor of security since by definition it is the reliable information about the secret plans of the adversary. Well-trained special agencies have been established for furnishing ongoing Intelligence. A new dimension of Intelligence is that the latter now has to help the process of framing policy of an integral response -- cutting across the spheres of military, law and order management and diplomacy -- instead of remaining content only with 'reporting' on threats.

Intelligence agencies have to have the closest liaison with local police set-up and other executive arms of the government at the ground level because threats relating to 'proxy wars' translate closer to the ground where people live.

'Intelligence from below' is the new requirement for safeguarding national security particularly when the gap between 'information' and 'action' was getting reduced.

Management of Intelligence agencies itself is somewhat of a challenge because national security does not admit of a wall of division between internal and external Intelligence or between human and technical Intelligence and calls for a convergence of objectives set forth for them on the basic mission of safeguarding national security, integrity and sovereignty.

National interests will be best served by a policy of exchange of officers among the agencies and such a practice should be further developed.

As the 'eyes and ears' of the State, Intelligence agencies have newer responsibilities of keeping the nation safe and economically progressive. It is a matter of great satisfaction that inter-agency cooperation has vastly improved under the present National Security Advisor (NSA) who is from the Intelligence background himself.

India today is better prepared to safeguard national security than it was at any time in the past because of a competent oversight of the Intelligence set-up, emphasis on an integral response to any threat and the political will displayed by the Modi regime in taking strong action on issues of security.

(The writer is a former Director of the Intelligence Bureau. Views are personal)

international

Hezbollah chief vows to wage war against Israel if it expands attacks on Lebanon

Beirut | Agencies

Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has warned to attack Israel "without restraint" if it expands attacks against Lebanon.

Nasrallah made the remarks on Wednesday night in a televised speech to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the assassination of top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in a US drone attack on January 3, 2020, Xinhua news agency reported. Meanwhile, Nasrallah said that the assassination of Saleh al-Aroui, Hamas' deputy chief, and other Hamas officials in Beirut a day earlier was "a dangerous crime."

He said the current con-



frontation on Lebanon's southern border has been limited, considering the priority of protecting Lebanon's stability and security.

However, "if Israel expands its attacks ... all our power will be used to attack Israel; we do not fear the war, and we are not hesitant about it; otherwise, we would have stopped fighting on the southern front," he said.

The Lebanon-Israel border witnessed increased tension since Oct. 8 after the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets toward Israel in support of the Hamas attacks on Israel the previous day, prompting Israel to respond by firing heavy artillery toward southeastern Lebanon.

Ukraine, Russia carry out largest prisoner swap

Kiev | Agencies

Ukraine and Russia carried out their largest prisoner swap since February 2022, the Coordinating Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War has said.

Under the exchange on Wednesday, 230 Ukrainian captives, including six civilians, had been returned from Russian custody, the agency was quoted as saying by Xinhua



news agency reported.

Among those freed are service people from the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the National Guard, the State Border Guard Service and the National Police. The exchange marked the first prisoner swap between the parties since August. More than 2,800 Ukrainians taken captive in the Russia-Ukraine conflict have been released so far as a result of prisoner exchanges.

Japan earthquake toll increases to 82, with 51 persons missing

Tokyo | Agencies

The death toll from the series of powerful earthquakes that struck the central Japanese prefecture of Ishikawa earlier this week, increased to 82 on Thursday, with 51 persons still reportedly missing amid ongoing rescue efforts nearly three days after the disaster.

With many running out of food and water supplies in affected areas, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism announced on Thursday that a transport ship carrying food and essential supplies was set to arrive at either the Wajima port or Nanao port in Ishikawa prefecture by Friday evening, reports Xinhua news agency.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida urged officials to mobilise all available resources to maximise life-saving efforts and lifeline supply within the first 72 hours of the disaster at a meeting of the emergency disaster response headquarters on Thursday.

The first 72 hours after earthquakes are especially critical for rescues because the prospects for survival greatly diminish after that, according to experts.

"By this evening, marking the passage of 72 hours since the disaster, I urge everyone on the ground to work with full dedication to save as many lives as possible," he said.

With time running out to find survivors before the 72-hour window closes, many were still believed to be trapped under rubble in the hard-hit coastal city of Wajima, where 48 deaths were confirmed so far, the national news agency Kyodo reported.

A Self-Defense Forces transport ship is set to unload heavy machinery on the coast of Wajima for disaster cleanup work, said the report.

In a series of aftershocks, nearly 95,000 households, as of Thursday morning, suffered water outages in several parts of Ishikawa due to water pipe damage.

Rubble and severed roads added to challenges in search and



rescue operations, three days after a series of strong quakes on Monday rocked Ishikawa and nearby areas, setting off tsunami warnings.

The Land ministry said that areas of at least 100 hectares in Ishikawa were flooded by tsunami waves following the earthquakes, and the true extent of the flooding will likely be larger.

A series of strong earthquakes, with a major one of 7.6 magnitude, on Monday struck at a shallow depth in the Noto region of Ishikawa.

The Japan Meteorological Agency has officially named it the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake.

Centered around 30 km east-northeast of Wajima, the devastating quake registered a maximum intensity of 7, which would make it impossible for people to stand.

Germany struggles with floods amid heavy rainfall

Berlin | Agencies

Germany is struggling with widespread flooding caused by heavy rainfall and swelling rivers, with disaster control reaching its limits in some areas due to a lack of sandbags and overflowing dykes.

Weeks of persistent rainfall have caused problems in large parts of Germany, and led to the deaths of at least two people, reports Xinhua news agency.

The German Weather Service (DWD) is expecting "heavy rain with only brief interruptions", as well as storms and gale-force winds into Thursday.

Within 30 to 60 hours, there will be up to 50 liters of rain per square meter in many places, and up to 100 liters per square meter in the mountains.



The northern German state of Lower Saxony, which has been hit particularly hard, is now dependent on outside help.

Neighbouring federal states have supplied 1.5 million sandbags, while relief workers have also been sent from France, bringing a 1.2-km-long mobile dyke system. Although the financial losses incurred in Germany cannot yet be quantified, politicians are calling for a national emergency situation to be declared in order to

be able to take on new debt in 2024.

"The floods are causing immense damage, especially in Lower Saxony," Andreas Schwarz, member of the Bundestag for Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democratic Party (SPD), told Spiegel magazine.

"We could suspend the debt brake to cover these costs."

The debt brake is Germany's instrument for preventing new borrowing.

Over the last four years, the government has already suspended the regulation twice, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the energy crisis. During a visit to the flooded area in Lower Saxony on Sunday, Scholz assured the affected states and local authorities that the government would support them "to the best of its ability".

Yemen's Houthi militia warned against attacking commercial shipping in Red Sea

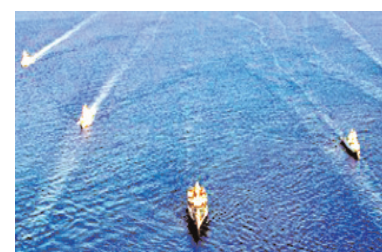
London | Agencies

A group of Western nations have jointly warned the Iran-backed Houthi militia in Yemen from carrying out any new attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

Since November 2023, the militia have carried out attacks on commercial shipping in the region more than 20 times after it declared support for Hamas in the militant group's ongoing war with Israel, the BBC reported.

The Houthis have used missiles, drones, fast boats and helicopters to carry out the attacks and have often claimed that the targeted ships were linked to Israel.

In a joint statement issued on Wednesday, the group of 12 nations -- Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan,



Netherlands, New Zealand, the UK and the US -- issued the formal warning to the Houthis and called the attack in the Red Sea "illegal, unacceptable, and profoundly destabilising".

They said there was "no lawful justification for intentionally targeting civilian shipping and naval vessels", adding if the attacks continued then the Houthis would "bear the consequences", reports the BBC.

The nations also called for an "immediate end" to the attacks which, they said, posed a "direct threat to freedom of navigation" in the critical waterway through which almost 15 per cent of global trade passes.

According to the International Chamber of Shipping, 20 per cent of the world's container ships are currently avoiding the Red Sea and steaming around southern Africa as a result of the attacks.

This development comes as the Houthis claimed a new attack on a cargo ship in the Red Sea.

On Wednesday, the group's military spokesman Yahya Sarea in a live broadcast aired by the Houthi-run al-Masirah TV said that the militia carried out an operation targeting the ship CMA CGM TAGE, Xinhua news agency reported.



IISER BHOPAL DEVELOPS MATERIAL TO BREAK DOWN CHEMICAL WARFARE AGENTS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A team of researchers at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Bhopal has developed an effective photocatalyst -- a substance that absorbs a wide range of solar energy and light -- to quicken chemical processes in laboratories and industries.

This new, sustainable development contributes to harnessing a renewable energy source for detoxifying harmful substances such as chemical warfare agents.

Chemical warfare agents include mustard gas simulants like '2-chloroethyl ethyl sulfide' (CEES) and nerve agents, which are highly poisonous chemicals that affect a person's nervous system.

This research represents a significant advancement in the field of photocatalysis -- a process where a substance (a photocatalyst) is used to



change the rate of a chemical reaction when exposed to light.

While many different types of photocatalysts are used in various industries for effective light harvesting, they all suffer from a drawback in that they only absorb UV or high-energy parts of light.

But the novel photocatalyst called 'UC-POP-Au' displays remarkable strength and catalytic efficiency as it absorbs the entire spectrum of light, making it a more potent catalyst during chemical processes.

"The current investigation unveils a novel direction in the development of

advanced light-harvesting porous organic polymer nanocomposite materials, showing potential applications in designing smart protective coatings against chemical warfare agents under natural sunlight conditions," said Prof. Abhijit Patra, Department of Chemistry, IISER Bhopal.

This composite material has integrated near-infrared absorbing upconversion nanoparticles and visible light absorbing gold nanoparticles with UV rays absorbing conjugated porous organic polymer (POP).

The use of upconversion and gold nanoparticles enhances the chemical reaction so drastically.

"We have developed an innovative design approach that involves the integration of plasmonic and upconversion nanoparticles with a conjugated porous organic polymer, which opens up new vistas towards artificial light harvesting," Patra said.

The findings are published in the peer-reviewed journal *Angewandte Chemie*. To test the applicability of this photocatalyst, the team coated a small piece of cotton cloth with the UC-POP-Au under direct sunlight to detoxify mustard gas simulant, a popular chemical warfare agent. Displaying excellent performance compared to a regular polymer-based photocatalyst, the UC-POP-Au significantly expedited photocatalysis.

The photocatalyst is also reusable and can be used five times over. No significant change in the catalytic activity was observed during multiple uses, unlike some other catalysts, which can not be collected and reused. The team suggests that UC-POP-Au can also be used for creating personal protective equipment and has high application potential as promising materials for various other industries beyond the detoxification of chemical warfare agents.

DUE TO NEGLIGENCE IN PADDY PROCUREMENT CENTER, JABALPUR COLLECTOR SENT TO SECRETARIAT

Bhopal: Administrative surgery of Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav is going on. Due to negligence, Jabalpur Collector Saurav Kumar Suman was removed on Thursday. Saurav Suman was negligent in determining the procurement center and warehouse for paddy. CM was angry with this. In his place, Director Deepak Saxena has been given the responsibility in the Consumer Protection Department.

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav had held a review meeting with the collectors and SP of Jabalpur division on Wednesday. In this, information about development works and law and order situation was taken. After the meeting, a case of widespread irregularities in determining procurement centers and warehouses had come to the notice of the Chief Minister in the month of December. In this, the negligence of Collector Saurav Suman came to light. The information sent to the Principal Secretary was also supplemented. Due to this, farmers faced problems in purchasing paddy. In this case, seven officers including the officers posted in Warehousing Jabalpur, District Manager of Marketing Association, Food Controller in-charge have been suspended.

Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' to cover 700 km in MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's second edition of yatra, which has been renamed as 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' on Thursday, will cover around 700 kilometres across nine districts in Madhya Pradesh in one week.

As per the details shared by MP Congress office, the yatra is scheduled to kick-start on January 14 from Manipur and will conclude in Maharashtra on March 20.

'Bharat Jodo Yatra' that started from Kanyakumari and concluded in Kashmir last year, had covered more than 1300 kilometres in Madhya Pradesh.

The Congress state unit had organised 17 sub-yatras from different parts of the state.

'Bharat Jodo Yatra' passed through Madhya Pradesh few months before the assembly elections in the state. However, it failed to make an impact as the Congress, which was thinking of coming back to power, could win only 66 seats in the elections held in December, 2023.

Earlier in the day, Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said that the march will now be called 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra'.

"In the meeting of all general secretaries,



in-charges, PCC chiefs and CLP leaders, it was felt that the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' has become a brand that is embedded in minds of people. We should not lose it," Ramesh said, referring to the padyatra carried out by Rahul in September, 2022 from Kanyakumari to Srinagar in January 2023," he added.

Rekindling Nostalgia: All Saints School 1996 Batch Celebrates Unforgettable Reunion

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a heartwarming reunion that spanned across the tapestry of time, the All Saints School 1996 Batch came together from every corner of India and the globe to create enduring memories and revive cherished connections. The event, attended by a multitude of students, was a testament to the enduring bonds forged within the classrooms of the school.

A highlight of the reunion was the gracious presence of veteran teachers, who were not only invited but also accorded the respect they rightly deserve. Their wisdom and guidance were pivotal in shaping the lives of the students present, and the event served as a heartfelt acknowledgment of their enduring impact.

The evening unfolded with a delightful get-together party at the scenic Samardha Jungle Resort, where laughter echoed, and stories of shared history were recounted. It was a jubili-



lant celebration, fostering an atmosphere of companionship and joy. An emotional journey down memory lane ensued as the students revisited the school premises, retracing the steps of their formative years. The walls echoed with laughter and anecdotes, and every corner whispered tales of friendships that stood the test of time. Mr. Siddhartha Malik and Hina Malik, a member of the 1996 Batch, also shared their views.

Expressing gratitude to their Alma mater, many students conveyed heartfelt thanks for the foundation of knowledge and values instilled in them. The reunion was not merely an event; it was a poignant reflection of the impact a school can have on shaping lives and fostering lifelong connections. As the night unfolded, filled with laughter, shared memories, and heartfelt conversations, the All Saints School 1996 Batch reunion concluded as a testament to the enduring spirit of friendship and the indelible mark left by their alma mater.

BJP and government keeping an eye on tribal vote bank in Madhya Pradesh

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After the formation of government in Madhya Pradesh, Dr. Mohan Yadav led government, the special focus of the BJP organization is on the tribal vote bank. This has become clear from the first meeting of the Council of Ministers held in Jabalpur.

The tribal class, which has 22 per cent votes, has special importance in the politics of the state. This is the reason whether the ruling BJP or the opposition Congress, both leave no stone unturned to woo this class.

After the huge success in the assembly elections, BJP has started trying to strengthen its penetration among this class in view of the Lok Sabha elections. The BJP government has given the message through the first Council of Ministers meeting after its formation that its emphasis is going to be on the tribal vote bank.



In the meeting held in Jabalpur, two big decisions were taken regarding the tribal community. One, the rate per standard bag of tendu leaf collection was increased from Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,000, while an amount of Rs 10 per kg will be provided on the production of millet. Both these decisions have been taken with the aim of benefiting the

tribal community.

The meeting held in Jabalpur has significance because there are a large number of tribals in Mahakaushal area and this class plays a big role in the politics of Vindhya area adjacent to it. Therefore, BJP has laid the chess-board to win over this class.

On one hand, the government is

busy in fulfilling the promises made during the elections, while on the other hand, the attitude of Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav is strict. Not only the ruling party but also the opposition parties are satisfied and happy with the steps he has taken in the past or the decisions taken to rein in the bureaucracy. Leader of Opposition Umang Singh said that it is a good thing to remove Shajapur Collector Kishore Kanyal from his post for showing the status of a driver brother. In a democracy, bureaucrats do not have the right to ask the public about their status. The public was supreme, is supreme and will always remain so. It is not wrong to dispose of the unruly collectors of Shivraj regime one by one. While the Guna Collector was punished for the bus accident, the Shajapur Collector was punished for showing his strength in the meeting. There must be a cleanliness campaign against filth.

Man stabbed to death during Lord Hanuman's procession in Indore

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A 25-year-old man, who along with his friend went to attend a procession of Lord Hanuman in Indore, was stabbed to death by a group of men during a scuffle on Thursday.

As per information, Shubham Raghuvanshi was attacked by knives by a group of youth during the 'prabhat pheri' (procession) around 07.30 a.m. in Indore's Mhow.

When Shubham, along with his friend Krishna Prajapati (29), was participating in the procession, they entered into an argument with another group, after which Shubham was stabbed in stomach multiple times.

The accused persons also hit Krishna when he tried to save his friend. As Shubham collapsed on the ground, he



was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he died during treatment. The police are investigating the matter. It is also being investigated whether this is a case of mutual enmity. Thousands of devotees took part in Ranjeet Hanuman Prabhat Pheri amid fog and cold winds.

After the incident, a group of right wing Bajrang Dal members staged a protest at Mhow police station and demanded investigation into the matter. The right wing members raised questions as to how the youths entered into the procession with knives.

Loot worth Rs 1 crore in Bhopal, robbers caught

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Three miscreants entered the house at knife point in Arera Colony, a posh residential colony of Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, and looted cash and jewelry worth more than Rs 1 crore. Due to the alertness of the woman and the cooperation of the neighbor, one of the accused was caught on the spot.

According to the information received from the police, when his wife Kirti was alone late on Wednesday evening at the house of billion businessman Sushil Dhanwani living in Arera Colony, three youths came posing as painters. Taking the opportunity, these three accused showed a knife to Sunil's wife Kirti, removed the jewellery, and ran away with the cash and jewelry kept in the cupboard.

Police Commissioner

Harinarayanchari Mishra admitted that one suspect has been caught by the police and said that the police is searching for the remaining accused.

According to Sunil Wadhvani, he was roaming in the colony at that time. He received a call from his wife and when his wife started shouting after the incident, the security personnel posted in the neighboring house came forward to help and caught one of the three accused, while two ran away.

The police analyzed the CCTV footage and according to the information received from the arrested accused, two others were also arrested.

According to Sunil Dhanwani, the police has informed him that all three accused have been caught and goods have also been recovered from them, but they still cannot say clearly the total amount of loot.

Advisory issued to protect public from cold wave outbreak



Team Absolute | Bhopal

According to the seasonal forecast released by the Indian Meteorological Department, there is a possibility of normal to minimum temperatures in most parts of the

state during the winter season. Therefore, all the district authorities and all the concerned departments should take seriously the possible outbreak of cold wave (cold wave) in the state and take all necessary steps at the departmental and district level to

reduce the damage caused by it. Detailed guidelines have been issued by the Home Department in this regard.

What to do before cold wave

Keep sufficient quantity of winter clothes. Wearing several layers of clothing is also

beneficial. Have all the necessary emergency supplies ready.

What to do during cold wave

Stay indoors as much as possible. Travel as little as possible to avoid cold winds. Keep your body dry. If clothes get wet, change them immediately. This will maintain body heat. Listen to the radio, watch TV, read newspapers for the latest weather information. Drink hot drinks regularly. Take special care of the elderly and children. Be alert for symptoms of frostbite such as numbness, whitening or yellowing of fingers, toes, earlobes and the tip of the nose. Do not massage the area affected by frostbite. This may cause more damage. Immerse the body parts affected by frostbite in lukewarm water.

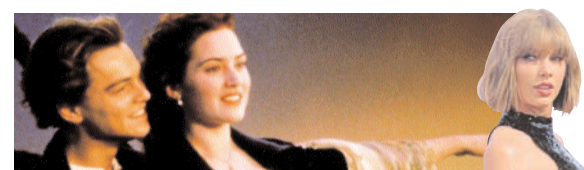
Nescafe kiosk inaugurated at AIIMS Bhopal



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Nescafe kiosk was inaugurated in the hospital premises for the convenience of doctors and patients at AIIMS Bhopal. While inaugurating the Nescafe kiosk, Professor (Dr) Ajai Singh, Executive Director, AIIMS Bhopal, said that with this, the doctors working here, patients and their relatives will get the facility of snacks, tea, coffee etc. and they will not have to

go out of the hospital premises. On this occasion, Col. (Dr) Ajit Kumar, Deputy Director (Administration), Dr Shashank Purwar, Medical Superintendent and others were also present. During this, Professor (Dr) Singh also inspected the cleanliness and asked the kiosk operator to maintain the quality of food and beverages. AIIMS Bhopal always strives to provide better facilities to doctors, patients and their families.



Heidi Klum removes bikini top during beach outing with husband Tom Kaulitz

Los Angeles | Agencies

Heidi Klum went topless in the sea on a lavish break with her husband. The former supermodel hit the beach in the luxury destination of St Bart as she and Tom Kaulitz, 34, made the most of their break in the celebrity holiday hotspot.

Heidi, 50, flaunted her toned figure in just a pair of leopard print bikini bottoms for the trip as she strutted her stuff around the golden sand, reports Mirror.co.uk.

Heidi was seen wearing a large pair of black and gold sunglasses as she oozed sex appeal on the beach, later adding a white bikini top and a baseball cap as she walked beside her far younger spouse.

As per Mirror.co.uk, the pair were also seen kissing and cuddling in the water as she snapped selfies of them on her phone with the duo looking blissfully happy as they enjoyed their day.

Tom meanwhile opted for a pair of blue and white polka dot swim shorts as they shared a special day on the expensive getaway. Heidi first met Tom in February 2018 when they both attended a birthday party.



Open to date a woman

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Kyle Richards has said that she is open to love in all forms.

In a sneak peek of what's to come on 'The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills', the Bravo mainstay, 54, asks her fellow housewives if they would consider "dating a woman" during a particularly rowdy lunch.

While Dorit Kemsley nearly spits out her wine, Crystal Kung Minkoff turns the question back onto Kyle, who answers her query with a simple "yeah" and a little nod, reports People magazine.

Elsewhere in the teaser, Kyle is seen struggling with a looming decision. With her gaze fixed with a problem on her phone, she admits to pal Morgan Wade, "I'm so anxious," as she bites her lip pensively. "I really don't know if I can do it," she continues before the country singer assures her, "You got it."

As per People, Kyle's declaration comes as rumours of a romance with Morgan have been swirling amid her separation from husband Mauricio Umansky. The two first became friends after connecting on social media and since then, they've spent a lot of time together from joint workouts to vacations with other Housewives stars.

In this season of 'RHOBH', fans even saw Kyle tattooing her initials onto Morgan's arm -- a gesture that had her co-stars raising their eyebrows.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Iggy Azalea has shared a lengthy post on X explaining that she wouldn't be finishing her 4th album, and would be pursuing different creative endeavours.

"I've always been someone who finds my joy in being creative & seeing my ideas come to life. For a long time I used music to deliver my big crazy ideas to the world," Azalea wrote, reports People magazine.

She continued: "I know a lot of people have this idea that I was 'bullied away from music' and that's something I've always laughed at because I'd never be bullied out of anything! In fact, I'm too stubborn. I think I've even resisted changes within myself at times, purely because I don't like being viewed as someone who quits."

As per People, Azalea then revealed that she would be moving away from music and into something else. "In truth what I've known for a long time is that I feel more passionately about design and creative direction than I do about songwriting", she explained. "To many of you that's no shock to read. It shows in my work. Haha! Jokes aside, I do spend a lot more time on that part of things... because I'm most confident at that."

She added: "That's why I want to let you know that I'm not going to finish my album. It's been paused for a few months while I was giving direction for a different project & in truth I just haven't felt the urge to go back to it. The rapper said she feels "really happy & passionate when she's "focused on that."

"I want to stick to what's undeniably best for me," she said of her decision, adding: "Can't wait to start sharing some of the things I've been involved in creating and hoping you'll see my quirk and humour in anything I touch."

Rapper Iggy Azalea won't be finishing her 4th album

Jacob Elordi's bath water is now a candle

Los Angeles: Rapper Iggy Azalea has shared a lengthy post on X explaining that she wouldn't be finishing her 4th album, and would be pursuing different creative endeavours.

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LEONARDO DICAPRIO, CAMERON DIAZ, BRUCE WILLIS, KEVIN SPACEY NAMED IN EXPLOSIVE JEFFREY EPSTEIN LIST

Los Angeles | Agencies

The entertainment world has been rocked with the revelations from the sealed court documents related to prolific sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The document includes a bunch of names from Hollywood. Michael Jackson and Leonardo DiCaprio are some of the big names in the document along with politicians Bill Clinton and Donald Trump, reports Mirror.co.uk.

Stars such as Cate Blanchett, Cameron Diaz, Bruce Willis and Kevin Spacey have also been name-dropped. However, simply their mention doesn't not imply that they have been party to any wrongdoing. The claims and association of the names to the crimes are yet to be proven in the court of law.

As per Mirror.co.uk, the judge said a handful of names should remain blacked out in the documents because they would identify people who were sexually abused. Before the unsealing, the names were listed in court papers as variants of J Doe. Many of the names on the list are people who

had been publicly identified as Epstein associates prior to this unsealing through years of coverage of the case. Dozens of previously sealed court documents related to Epstein were made public late Wednesday after US Judge Loretta Preska ruled last month that documents naming more than 170 people who were either associates, friends or victims of Epstein should be made public.

The documents are part of a 2015 US defamation case by Virginia Giuffre against Ghislaine Maxwell, the disgraced British socialite who supplied Epstein with underage girls. Giuffre claimed the now deceased and heavily disabled physicist Stephen Hawking participated in an "underage orgy".

In 2015, photographs showed Hawking was hosted on Epstein's private Caribbean island before the billionaire was first charged in 2006, while it is alleged magician Copperfield had dinner with Epstein and asked a "victim" if she knew girls were getting paid to find other girls. Prince Andrew has also been named in the tranche of names, despite Buckingham Palace previously saying the allegations are "categorically untrue."

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Kendall Jenner



India vs South Africa, 2nd Cricket Test Match

INDIA STORM TO SEVEN-WICKET WIN OVER SOUTH AFRICA IN TWO DAYS, END THE SERIES 1-1

Cape Town | Agencies

Fast-bowling spearhead Jasprit Bumrah bagged a six-wicket haul and set the base for India beating South Africa by seven wickets inside two days at Newlands Cricket Ground here to end the two-match series 1-1.

South Africa began Day Two with them still trailing India, who scored 153 in their first innings, by 36 runs, and they managed to enter the lead, thanks to Aiden Markram's stunning 106 off 103 balls coming under pressure, especially when none of his teammates reached 20. But Bumrah continued to strike and picked 6-61 to bowl out South Africa for 176 at the stroke of lunch.

Chasing 79, India took only 12 overs to chase the target, with Yashasvi Jaiswal leading the charge by striking six boundaries in his aggressive 23-ball 28. Though India lost him, Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli, captain Rohit Sharma and Shreyas Iyer, who was troubled by short balls, hung around to hit boundaries and make India the first Asian team to win a Test match in Cape Town.

Apart from levelling the series, India have secured 12 important World Test Championship points after losing the first Test at Centurion inside three days, which meant Dean Elgar signed off from international cricket in a losing cause.

With the match decided in four



and a half sessions, at 624 balls (107 overs), the Cape Town Test match between South Africa and India is now the shortest-ever completed game in the history of the longest format of the game.

Resuming from 62/3, the pitch offered excessive variable bounce and seam movement, Bumrah struck in the very first over of the day by having David Bedingham drive away from the body and nicked behind to wicket-keeper K.L. Rahul.

Despite South Africa finding runs via streaky boundaries, Bumrah had another scalp when Kyle Verreynne tried to pull a short-of-length ball but holed out to mid-on. But Markram had other ideas on a tough pitch,

playing a gorgeous drive off Mukesh Kumar to reach his fifty in 68 balls.

Bumrah, though, continued to pick scalps as he took a stunning return catch on Marco Jansen's chip and had Keshav Maharaj drive to gully for picking his five-wicket haul. With wickets falling from the other end, Markram went for the attack, pulling Mukesh and bringing out the on-drive against Bumrah for boundaries.

He lofted and cut off Mohammed Siraj for two boundaries and had a reprieve on 73 when Rahul dropped a simple catch. Markram took a liking to Prasidh Krishna, dispatching him for two fours and two sixes in an over yielding 20 runs.

Markram then hit back-to-back

fours off Bumrah to reach a scintillating century and dedicated the hundred to his captain Dean Elgar, who was jubilant in the dressing room. His brilliant knock was ended by Siraj when he mistimed the slog to long-off, where captain Rohit Sharma took the catch and threw the ball into the ground in frustration.

In the next over, Kagiso Rabada hit the ball straight to mid-off against Prasidh and Nandre Burger along with Lungi Ngidi added 14 runs for the final wicket, before Bumrah had the latter edging to the third slip to keep South Africa's lead to 78 and take his sixth scalp of the innings.

In the chase, Jaiswal went for the attack from the word go, throwing the kitchen sink at every ball to get runs aplenty. He and Rohit helped India reach 44/0 in just 33 balls, before Jaiswal holed out to mid-wicket, though he did his job. Gill was castled on low bounce by Rabada, while Kohli was strangled down leg off Jansen. Iyer's winning boundary over mid-on then settled a topsy-turvy match in India's favour.

Brief scores

South Africa 55 and 176 all out in 36.5 overs (Aiden Markram 106; Jasprit Bumrah 6-61) lost to India 153 and 80/3 in 12 overs (Yashasvi Jaiswal 28; Marco Jansen 1-15) by seven wickets

Kohli, Shami, Gill nominated for ICC Men's ODI Cricketer of the Year 2023 award



Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's trio of Talismanic batter Virat Kohli, senior fast-bowler Mohammed Shami and young batter Shubman Gill have been nominated for the ICC Men's ODI Cricketer of the Year 2023 award. New Zealand batter Daryl Mitchell is the fourth and lone non-Indian nominee for the award.

Kohli built on his stunning international cricket comeback in 2022 with a spectacular 2023, where he was adjudged Player of the Tournament in the Men's ODI World Cup on home soil. He smashed at least a half-century in nine of his 11 innings at the World Cup, finishing with a mind-blowing 765 runs.

Kohli's hundred against New Zealand in the semi-

final was also his 50th ODI hundred, making him the leading century-hitter in the format's history. He finished the year with 1377 runs at an average of 72.47, recording six centuries and eight half-centuries in 24 innings.

On the other hand, Shami got into the playing eleven due to Hardik Pandya's injury and finished the tournament as the highest wicket-taker with 24 scalps at a staggering average of 10.7.

Notably, Shami took three five-wicket hauls and a four-wicket haul in the seven matches he played in the tournament. The seamer also broke the record for India's leading wicket-taker at Men's ODI World Cups, taking his tally up to 55 wickets in just 18 games, with the notable performance

being a record haul of 7/57 against New Zealand in the semifinal.

Gill, meanwhile, produced performances in ODIs that would make 2023 his coming-of-age year in international cricket. He made 1584 runs at an average of 63.36 in the format in 2023, making it the fifth-highest tally of runs by an Indian men's batter in a year in ODIs, only surpassed by Sachin Tendulkar (1996, 1998), Rahul Dravid (1999) and Sourav Ganguly (1999).

With five hundreds and a strike-rate of over 100, Gill was a rock at the top of the order for India alongside skipper Rohit Sharma, and the duo put on several memorable opening stands in the year. He ended the Men's ODI World Cup 2023 with 354 runs at an average of 44.25.

Svitolina dispatches Raducanu in Auckland three-setter

Auckland | Agencies

Ukraine's Elina Svitolina halted Emma Raducanu's comeback in the second round of the ASB Classic, battling into the quarterfinals 6-7(5), 7-6(3), 6-1 in 2 hours and 49 minutes.

No.2 seed Svitolina fought back from a set down against Raducanu to set a quarterfinal with No.5 seed Czech player Marie Bouzkova, who dismissed Amanda Anisimova 6-0, 6-1 on Wednesday.

A narrowly-contested encounter saw Raducanu hold off a late Svitolina charge in the first set, edging the tiebreak despite losing a 5-1 double-break lead.

Raducanu, playing her first tournament following an eight-month injury layoff, seemed to be on the verge of



victory when she led 3-1 in the second-set tiebreak, only for Svitolina to rattle off 10 straight points to level the

match. But, the Ukrainian then motored through the decider as No.301-ranked Briton faded.

Real Madrid beat Mallorca to lead table, Girona edge Atletico in thriller

La Liga

Madrid | Agencies

Real Madrid reached the halfway point of the season as leaders of La Liga with 48 points after a hard-fought 1-0 win at home to Mallorca on Wednesday night.

Antonio Rudiger's header from Luka Modric's 78th minute corner gave Madrid the points as they struggled to break down a well-organized rival.

Mallorca hit the woodwork through Antonio Sanchez in the first half, and Samu Costa also hit the post for the visitors, before Brahim headed against the bar for Real Madrid.

Carlo Ancelotti's side pinned Mallorca further back as the game progressed and Rudiger's header finally brought relief to the fans in the Santiago Bernabeu.

Girona remain level on points after

an incredible 4-3 win at home to Atletico Madrid, who looked like taking a point thanks to a fine hat-trick from Alvaro Morata.

Girona got off to a flying start with Valery Fernandez's goal in the third minute. But Morata beat the offside trap to level for Atletico 10 minutes later. Girona took control of the ball and Savio's volley from outside of the area got them back ahead and Daley Blind followed in at the far post to make it 3-1 in the 38th minute.

Morata dragged Atletico into the game with an individual goal in the 43rd minute and then had a goal ruled out for offside before the break.

The Spain striker did finish his hat-trick in the 53rd minute, running onto a pass from Rodrigo de Paul and clipping the ball over Pablo Gazzaniga to make it 3-3, Xinhua reports.

Atletico looked the more likely to

sneak a win, but Ivan Martin won the game for Girona in injury time, collecting a pass from Portu, jinking past two defenders and firing past Jan Oblak in the Atletico goal to send the home fans wild and leave Atletico 10 points behind the top-two.

Elsewhere, Williot Swedberg scored a 96th minute goal to give Celta Vigo a 2-1 win at home to Betis, which lifts Rafael Benitez's side out of the bottom three.

Granada claimed their second win of the season with a 2-0 win at home to Cadiz thanks to goals from Myrto Uzuni and Bryan Zaragoza. The defeat drops Cadiz into the relegation zone and their day was made even worse by Ruben Soriano's 56th minute sending off.

On Tuesday, Real Sociedad drew 1-1 at home to Alaves, while Rayo Vallecano won 2-0 away to Getafe



and Valencia enjoyed a comfortable 3-1 victory at home to Villarreal.

The pitch played totally different to what everyone thought: Dean Elgar

Cape Town | Agencies

With the pitch for the second Test between South Africa and India offering exaggerated variable bounce and seam movement, a retiring Dean Elgar said the 22 yards for the match played completely different to what everyone had expected.

In the match, South Africa were skittled out for just 55 in their first innings, before bowling out India for 153. After the visitors' took a 98-run lead, the Proteas made 176, with Aiden Markram stroking a 103-ball 106.

At the mid-point of the second session on day two, India chased down 79 in 12 overs to get a seven-wicket win and level the series 1-1.



"It was a bit of a ripper. To the naked eye, it looked like it was going to be a nice one. It played totally different

from what everyone thought. Unfortunately, we were on the receiving end, a big learning curve for the

future. If you ask Rohit, he'd have batted first as well. They just out-skilled us in that first session," said Elgar after the match ended. The left-handed opener praised the bowlers and Markram for stepping up for South Africa in the series. "A tough one for us. Pretty positive coming into this game. The first innings with the bat killed us. India bowled fantastically and used the conditions to a T. Still a draw, still a lot of positives for the young players that we have within this side." "A 2-0 result would have been really nice, would have tasted a lot better today, still managed 1-1, proud of the boys. The way the bowlers bowled in this series and the way Aiden batted in the second innings is something out of the world."

Lee, Mbappe power Paris Saint-Germain to Champions Trophy win

Paris | Agencies

Paris Saint-Germain defeated Toulouse FC 2-0 at the Parc des Princes to lift the Champions Trophy (Trophée des Champions), a first piece of silverware for Luis Enrique with Paris.

The Parisians opened the scoring less than five minutes into the match on Wednesday night. Ousmane Dembele connected with Kang-in Lee to give PSG the early lead in the contest. Despite conceding the first goal, Les Violets did their best to respond. In the first half, Toulouse would make five total shots but they could not find the back of the net, and eventually, PSG made them pay. Kylian Mbappe



doubled the lead on 44 minutes to give the capital club some breathing room before halftime. Although scoring was absent in the second half, both teams had opportunities to secure a goal during the final 45 minutes. Toulouse, aiming to get back into the game, displayed aggression with 12 total shots, yet none led to a goal.

In contrast, PSG managed only two shots but maintained their lead, ultimately securing their Trophée des Champions. At the end of an entertaining match, PSG collected their first trophy of the new year by winning the Trophée des Champions for the 12th time in their history, an all-time record in this competition.

Brisbane International Azarenka makes quarterfinals, faces Ostapenko next

Brisbane | Agencies

Two-time former champion Victoria Azarenka advanced to the quarterfinals at the Brisbane International with a 7-5, 6-2 win over France's Clara Burel.

Eighth-seeded Azarenka, the World No.23, needed 1 hour and 33 minutes to end a firm challenge from 22-year-old Burel, a former junior World No.1 now ranked No.56, in their first-ever meeting, WTA reports. The 34-year-old is through to



the quarterfinals at the tournament for the fifth time in her career. Azarenka won titles in Brisbane in 2009 and 2016, and was also a finalist in 2014. Two-time Australian Open titlist Azarenka will now face another

Grand Slam champion, No.3 seed Jelena Ostapenko, in the quarterfinals. Ostapenko advanced by overcoming No.16 seed Karolina Pliskova 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 in 2 hours and 17 minutes on Thursday. Ostapenko snapped Pliskova's 10-match winning streak at the Brisbane International. Pliskova, who defeated former World No.1 Naomi Osaka in the second round, is a three-time Brisbane champion, including at the two most recent editions of the tournament in 2019 and 2020.

ATP Tour NADAL ROMPS TO ANOTHER IMPRESSIVE WIN IN BRISBANE, REACHES QUARTERS

Brisbane | Agencies

Spanish legend Rafael Nadal's comeback to the ATP Tour continued seamlessly with a stylish victory in the second round of the Brisbane International here on Thursday.

The former World No.1, who recently returned to action after a 12-month-long break due to injuries, dismantled Australia's Jason Kubler 6-1, 6-2 to reach the quarterfinals.

The 37-year-old Nadal, who started with a rock-solid opening victory against Austria's Dominic Thiem, picked up where he left off at the hard-court ATP 250 event by scoring an equally impressive victory on



Thursday. Nadal, who had not played a competitive match for nearly 12

months due to injury before this week in Brisbane, continued to move impressively around the court as he powered past Kubler in 83 minutes.

Nadal, the 92-time tour-level titlist, won 12 of the first 13 points in his maiden meeting with Kubler and barely looked back thereafter as he booked a last-eight meeting with another home favourite, Jordan Thompson, whose highlights against Kubler included a stunning backhand smash that simultaneously showcased high-class agility and timing, will step on the court against the World No. 55 Thompson having won 10 of his past 11 tour-level matches against Australian opponents.



Janhvi Kapoor recounts the moment she learnt about Sridevi's death

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Bollywood actress Janhvi Kapoor, who recently appeared on the streaming chat show 'Koffee With Karan' along with her sister Khushi Kapoor, shared the heart-breaking moment when she came to know that her mother, the legendary

actress Sridevi suddenly died.

The 'Bawaal' actress revealed that it was her younger sister, Khushi who comforted her and calmed her down in the face of the tragedy.

The actress recounted the moment to the show host Karan Johar: "When I got the call, I was in my room and I could hear wailing from Khushi's room. I think I barged into her room,

howling and crying but what I do remember is she looked at me and the minute she looked at me, she just stopped crying. She just sat next to me and started comforting me and I've never seen her cry about it since."

Khushi shared: "I felt like I had to hold it together for everyone because I feel like I've always been the strong one."

Sridevi passed away in February 2018 in Dubai. The family had gone to Dubai to attend the wedding of her husband, Boney Kapoor's nephew Mohit Marwah. Sridevi decided to spend a couple of days in Dubai to shop for her elderdaughter Janhvi's 21st birthday, after the wedding. The cause of her death was revealed to be accidental drowning.

Aamir's daughter Ira to take pheras with Nupur Shikhare on Jan 8 in Udaipur

Team Absolute | Jaipur

Ira Khan, the daughter of Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan, is set to take the traditional route with pheras in lake city Udaipur after signing the marriage registration document on Wednesday in Mumbai.

The couple, which is legally married now, will head to Udaipur for a round of traditional festivities lined up for family members.

The traditional wedding ceremony will take place at Taj Aravali Resort located on Kodyat Road in Udaipur with festivities taking place from January 8 to 10. All 176 rooms of the hotel have been booked for around 250 guests including Bollywood stars and family members of the bride and groom.

The wedding festivities will be a family affair and will see relatives attending the functions. The couple will then head to Mumbai and host a reception at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre on January 13.

Nupur Shikhare proposed to Ira in 2022 and is the official fitness trainer of Ira and Aamir. The pre-wedding festivities started with a Haldi ceremony on Tuesday. The couple made it official on the night of Wednesday.

They signed the marriage registration document in the presence of friends and family at the Taj Lands End in the Bandra area of Mumbai.

On Thursday, Ira shared the first picture of her with her hubby after they became husband and wife.

The ceremony on Wednesday was thoroughly entertaining as Nupur ditched the traditional choice of a horse and jogged for to the wedding venue from Santacruz to the Bandra area in Mumbai



Arti Singh says 'silence is the mantra for 2024'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Arti Singh, who was in the Gulmarg, Kashmir for her New Year vacation, has shared her mantra for the year 2024, and it is 'silence'.

Known for her work in shows like 'Maayka', 'Uttaran', 'Devon Ke Dev Mahadev' among others, Arti took to her Instagram, and shared her holiday album, wherein she can be seen posing against the snow clad mountains of picturesque Kashmir.

Arti also shared a Reel video, in which she is donning a pink bathing suit, and is swimming in a pool.

The video has a dialogue which says, "ab is naye saal me ek kaam to karna hai mujhe, ki apne sukoon ke saath koi compromise nahi karna. Jo galtiyen ho



gayi unhe repeat nahi karna... apne par kaam karna hai.

(Now this year I have to do one thing, that is not to compromise with my peace. I won't repeat the mistakes I have made... I will work on myself)."

The video was captioned as: "Reel says it all new year new goals. Silence is the mantra #gulmarg #khyber".

Mean while, on the work front she is currently seen in the show 'Shravani'.

In 'Shravani', Arti portrays the antagonist, Chandra Taiji, who consistently creates trouble for Shravani. Even while playing the villain on-screen, Arti's off-camera fun and playful side is something her fans enjoy.

The show airs on Shemaroo Umang.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actress Kajal Aggarwal on Thursday shared her 'motto' of the year 2024, and it is 'sweat, sacrifice and success'.

The actress is known for her work in the movies like 'Chandamama', 'Om Shanti', 'Darling', 'Singham', 'Special 26' and many others. Kajal, who enjoys massive fanbase of 27 million followers on Instagram, shared a mirror selfie, wherein she can be seen posing in a gym, wearing a black T-shirt and

Kajal Aggarwal's 2024 'motto' is 'sweat, sacrifice & success'

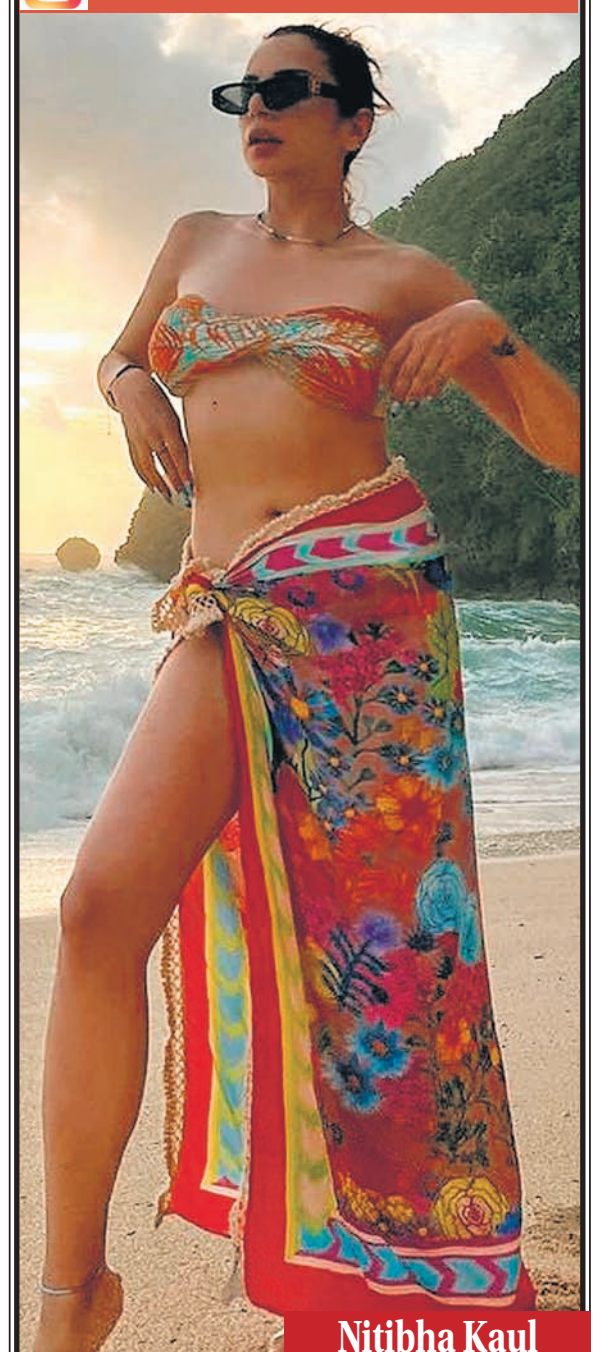
matching leggings. The backdrop shows a message written on the wall, which reads as: "Sweat, Sacrifice, Success".

The 'Hey Sinamika' actress captioned the photo as: "Motto".

On the personal front, Kajal had tied the knot with Gautam Kitchlu in October 2020. The couple have a baby boy Neel.

While, on the work front, she next has 'Indian 2', 'Uma', and 'Satyabhama' in the pipeline.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Nitibha Kaul

Naqiyah Haji draws inspiration from Nina Dobrev

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Naqiyah Haji, who plays the character of Nikki in the upcoming wedding fantasy thriller 'Shaitani Rasmlein', revealed that her character draws inspiration from Nina Dobrev's portrayal in the American series 'Vampire Diaries'.

Naqiyah shared insights into her preparation for the role.

Talking about the same, the actress expressed: "Our show's concept is very unusual, and it's the first time that the Indian audi-

ence will experience something of this nature. With fictional characters, supernatural powers, and a unique storyline, it bears a resemblance to the American show 'Vampire Diaries'."

"My character, Nikki, mirrors Nina Dobrev's character, where the line between good and bad becomes blurred. Similarly, Nikki enters a new world where the boundaries between good and bad are not so clear for her. Nina's character was adored by many, and I hope the viewers will shower the same love on

Nikki and the show," added the actress. For the unversed, Nina plays the character of Elena Gilbert in the supernatural drama 'The Vampire Diaries'.

The show marks the television debut of actress Shefali Jariwala, who will be essaying a pivotal role alongside Naqiyah and Vibhav Roy.

'Shaitani Rasmlein' promises a distinctive blend of suspense, fantasy, and romance, offering the audience a fresh and intriguing viewing experience.

The show will air from January 15 on Star Bharat.

