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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, BHOPAL AND NEW DELHI

NATION > 02
Delhi court allows AAP MP Sanjay Singh to sign forms...



HOLYWOOD > 06
Ryan Gosling can 'make a hell of a pie'...



SPORTS > 07
Brisbane International: Sabalenka wins 14th in a row in...



JN.1 REPRESENTS 'VERY SERIOUS EVOLUTION' OF COVID VIRUS: GLOBAL EXPERTS



Team Absolute | New Delhi

JN.1, the latest Covid-19 variant from the lineage of Omicron making a fresh surge around the globe, represents 'very serious evolution' of Covid virus, according to global experts.

JN.1, classified as a variant of interest (VOI) by the World Health Organization (WHO) due to its rapid spread, is currently present in about 41 countries.

It was first detected in Luxembourg in August. The WHO expects JN.1 to increase the burden of respiratory infections in many countries. The WHO has "just called JN.1 a VOI (variant of interest), and that just doesn't cut it, with the growth advantage this variant has demonstrated. It is just extraordinary", Dr. Eric Topol, founder and director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute in California, US, was quoted as saying to

Fortune. JN.1 is a descendent lineage of BA.2.86, with the earliest sample collected on August 25, 2023. In comparison with BA.2.86, JN.1 has the additional L455S mutation in the spike protein, making it more transmissible. "JN.1 represents 'a very serious evolution of the virus'. And it isn't over," Dr. Michael Osterholm, Director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP), was quoted as saying. "JN.1 is an all new variant with numerous changes that had never been seen in any commonly circulating lineage before. This is unlike other recent variants, which were merely a few mutations from their predecessor," Dr Rajeev Jayadevan, co-chairman of the National Indian Medical Association Covid Task Force, told reporter. "Therefore, the disease patterns from an immune evasiveness and spread capability of this variant needs careful

attention," Dr Jayadevan added. He explained immune invasiveness of a variant as the ability of the virus to overcome the existing immune response within an individual.

After the major variants of Covid like Alpha, Delta and Omicron, JN.1 very likely represents a new chapter in pandemic evolution, claimed the experts. According to Ryan Gregory, a biology professor at the University of Guelph in Canada, JN.1 has ushered in "a new era". The highly transmissible variant is "on track to become the lineage from which most variants are descended for the foreseeable future", Gregory was quoted as saying to Fortune. Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's Covid-19 technical lead said that the next sub-lineages of the Covid virus can "come from JN.1". "But we could also see something quite different. We could see something like an Omicron again," she said.

INDIA REPORTS 761 NEW COVID CASES, 12 DEATHS

New Delhi: India on Friday recorded 761 new Covid-19 cases and 12 deaths in the past 24 hours, the Union Health Ministry said.

A dozen new fatalities -- five from Kerala, four from Karnataka, two from Maharashtra, and one from UP -- were reported in the span of 24 hours, according to the ministry's data. On Thursday, two deaths were reported, one each from Kerala and Karnataka. Meanwhile, the total number of active cases further fell to 4,334 from Thursday's 4,423.

As of now, the total number of coronavirus cases in India, since the outbreak in January 2020, has reached 4,50,16,604, while the death toll related to Covid cases has risen to 5,33,385.

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 619 cases of the subvariant by Thursday, 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. Kerala has the highest number of active cases at 1,249 in India, followed by Karnataka at 1,240, and Maharashtra at 914. Tamil Nadu's active cases stand at 190, and Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh at 128 each. 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.

Cargo Ship hijacked, Indian Navy responds to SOS, rescue crew



Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a swift operation, the Indian Navy's Marine Commandos have rescued all the 15 Indian crew aboard a Liberian-flagged cargo ship, barely within 20 hours after it reported a hijack off the northeastern coast of Africa, officials said on Friday. The ship 'MV Lila Norfolk' was taken over early on Friday by around 5-6 pirates when it was on a voyage from Port Du Aco in Brazil to Khalifa Bin Salman Port in Bahrain, as it was around 550 km off the Somalia coast. Responding swiftly to the distress call, warship INS Chennai was diverted from her anti-piracy patrol to the spot and it intercepted the hijacked ship around 3.15 p.m. in the Arabian Sea. The elite Marine Commandos have boarded the MV Lila Norfolk and initiated the sanitisation operations. Prior to

the operation, the Liberian-flag vessel was kept under continuous surveillance using Maritime Patrol Aircraft, helicopters and Predator MQ9B. Early on Friday, the hijacked ship had sent an SOS to the UK Maritime Trade Operations portal indicating 5-6 armed persons had boarded it late on Thursday. This was the third incident of its kind in the high seas on the country's west coast in the past one month or with the Indian Navy rising to the occasion with a rescue and relief operation. On December 23, 2023, another Liberian-flagged oil tanker 'MV Chem Pluto' with 21 Indian crew was targeted in a drone attack, followed by a similar attack on a Gabon-flagged crude oil carrier, 'MV Saibaba' on Dec. 24 with 25 Indians on board, but there were no casualties in both the incidents.

GOVT UPS GDP GROWTH FORECAST TO 7.3% FOR 2023-24



Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to grow by 7.3 per cent in 2023-24, up from 7.2 per cent in

2022-23, according to the advance estimate released by the Ministry of Statistics on Friday.

The ministry's estimate is higher than the RBI's recently revised forecast of 7

per cent, after the surprise 7.6 per cent growth seen in the July-September quarter on the back of a strong growth in the manufacturing sector.

The Finance Ministry, too, has said it expects GDP growth to "comfortably" exceed its forecast of 6.5 per cent.

"These are early projections for 2023-24," the National Statistical Office (NSO) said in a statement, noting that improved data coverage, actual tax receipts and spending on state subsidies would have a bearing on subsequent revisions.

Manufacturing, which contributes about 17 per cent of the GDP, is estimated to expand 6.5 per cent year-on-year in 2023-24, compared to 1.3 per cent a year ago, while construction output is seen growing by 10.7 per cent, up from 10 per cent seen in the previous year, according to the latest data.

However, the growth in farm output, which accounts for 15 per cent of the GDP, is seen slowing down to a mere 1.8 per cent in the current fiscal year, from 4 per cent the previous year as erratic monsoon hit crops.

Woman shares video of Air India flight with non-functional reading lights & broken seats



New Delhi: A content creator Shreyti Garg has shared on Instagram her disappointing experience on an Air India flight during her journey from Delhi to Toronto, underlining the allegedly sub-par in-flight facilities despite the hefty price she paid for the tickets. Travelling with her two children, aged 2.5 years and seven months, Garg documented the concerning scenario in a video, where she revealed that the in-flight entertainment and lights for three seats were non-functional, leaving her and her family in the dark, both figuratively and literally. "We were on an Air India Flight from Delhi to Toronto, travelling with our 2 kids (2.5-year-old and 7-month-old).

AYODHYA TO LIGHT UP WITH SOLAR TREES

Ayodhya | Agencies

About 42 parks in Ayodhya would be illuminated through solar power in the coming days.

Uttar Pradesh new and renewable energy development agency (UPNEDA) is going to install solar trees in the parks, taking forward the vision to deploy renewable energy sources as far as possible in the temple town.

While eight parks would be powered by 2.5 kilowatt solar trees, the remaining 34 parks would be lit up with the help of 1 kilowatt trees. The decorative trees have been designed in a way that the lights illuminate



the central area of the parks where benches would be put up. Moreover, a solar power

city being set up in the city, would supply power to the important locations which would be frequented by the tourists. Project manager UPNEDA, Praveen Nath Pandey said that overall, at 52 locations, solar trees are going to be installed and work is underway to cover all the locations. Some of the important locations where trees would be installed are Suryakund, Circuit house, State Bank of India colony, Kaushalpur phase 1, Rohini colony, Shiv Mandir park, Bahadurganj, among others. The trees have been designed in a way to blend in with the overall theme of the city.

'Divides Mizo people'

Aizawl | Agencies

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma, who met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several other Union Ministers in Delhi, has reportedly opposed the Centre's plan to erect fencing along porous Myanmar borders.

A highly-placed official on Friday said that the Chief Minister, during his meeting with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, said that if the Centre constructs border fencing along the

Mizoram-Myanmar border, it would amount to acceptance of the blunder committed by the British colonial government which divided the Mizo people living in both India and Myanmar.

"The Mizo people always oppose the proposal to fence the border," he said.

A former Indian Police Service officer, Lalduhoma, who was a security officer of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was batchmate (1977) of Jaishankar, who was in the Indian Foreign Service.

आचार्य बाळशास्त्री जांभेकर (१८९२-१८४६)

संस्मरण दर्पणकारांचे

अधिस्विकृतीधारक पत्रकारांना शासनामार्फत देण्यात येणाऱ्या सुविधा :

महाराष्ट्र राज्य मार्ग परिवहन महामंडळाच्या प्रवास शुल्कामध्ये (शिवशाहीसह) १००% सवलत
शंकरराव चव्हाण सुवर्ण महोत्सवी पत्रकार कल्याण निधीमधून अधिस्विकृतीधारक पत्रकार व त्यांच्या कुटुंबियांना वैद्यकीय उपचारार्थ आर्थिक मदत
म्हाडा सदनिका वितरणात पत्रकार संवर्गाला २.५% तर सिडकोमध्ये ५% आरक्षण
मंत्रालय येथे तळमजल्यावर अद्यावत सुविधांसह पत्रकार कक्षाची स्थापना
आचार्य बाळशास्त्री जांभेकर पत्रकार सन्मान योजनेतील लाभार्थ्यांना दरमहा रु.११,००० सन्मान निधी

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DELHI COURT SENDS HIZBUL TERRORIST INVOLVED IN 11 TERROR ATTACKS TO 7-DAY POLICE CUSTODY

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi court on Friday sent a Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist, Javed Ahmed Mattoo, an accused in 11 terror attack cases in Jammu and Kashmir, to seven-day police custody.

The Special Cell of Delhi Police in coordination with other agencies on Thursday arrested the 'A++ category' terrorist, who carried a reward of Rs 10 lakh for his involvement in a series of terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir.

On an application moved by the Delhi Police, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Nabeela Wali of Patiala House Courts sent Mattoo (32) to police custody for a week. Mattoo a.k.a. Irsad Ahmed Malla alias Ehsan, who hails from Sopore in Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla district.

He was allegedly involved in five grenade attacks in the Kashmir Valley.

Wanted in connection with 11 terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, Mattoo has been evading arrest for the last 13 years.

According to sources, the police are



currently in search of the handler responsible for providing arms and ammunition to Mattoo in Delhi.

Mattoo was apprehended by the Special Cell of Delhi Police in the Nizamuddin area, where he had arrived to collect weapons and ammunition from his associates, acting upon

the instructions of Pakistan's intelligence agency, Inter Services Intelligence.

This arrest is considered a significant breakthrough as it happened just 22 days before Republic Day.

Questioning was underway to learn about Mattoo's intended use of the

acquired ammunition.

Sources said that a handler based in Pakistan was orchestrating the delivery of arms and ammunition, directing Mattoo to carry out terrorist activities in J&K and other locations.

Investigators believe in the critical importance of arresting the arms supplier, as Mattoo's capture likely alerted his superiors in Pakistan, potentially prompting a change in their planned actions.

Mattoo, the sole surviving A++-category J&K-based terrorist, had gone underground a decade ago after sustaining injuries in a clash with security forces. He fled to Nepal as per ISI's instructions to evade the J&K police.

It was also revealed by sources that Mattoo possesses expertise in handling rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), under barrel grenade launchers (UBGL), and AK-47s. An official privy to the probe said that more details will be disclosed once Mattoo's questioning concludes, speculating that he may have entered India through Nepal.

Rajasthan: CM Bhajan Lal keeps Home, Finance goes to Diya Kumari, Bairwa gets Transport



Jaipur | Agencies

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma on Friday allotted portfolios to the state ministers.

Chief Minister Sharma has kept the Home department with himself, while Deputy CM Diya Kumari has been allotted six portfolios, including

Finance.

Another Deputy CM, Prem Chand Bairwa, has been entrusted with the responsibility of four departments, including Transport. Cabinet minister Kirodi Lal Meena has been allotted the portfolios of Agriculture and Rural Development, Disaster Management and Public

Deprivation Prosecution.

Madan Dilawar has been given the responsibility of Education department, while Babulal Kharadi has been allotted the Tribal Regional Development portfolio. Hiralal Nagar has been entrusted with Energy portfolio. A total of 22 ministers had taken oath on December 30.

Delhi shivers on second consecutive Cold Day, air quality in 'very poor' levels

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The national capital, for the second consecutive day, on Friday witnessed a severe cold day amid shallow fog during the day with maximum temperature reaching at 14.6 degree Celsius, five notches below the normal, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The AQI continued to remain in a "very poor" category at several monitoring stations. According to IMD, the city is likely to witness a cold day on Saturday with maximum temperature hovering around 15 degree Celsius.

Meanwhile, the air quality at Anand Vihar plummeted to the "very poor" category with PM 2.5 at 393 and PM 10 at 335, while the CO reached 103, in the "moderate" category while NO2 was at 78 or "satisfactory", as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The AQI at ITO also remained in "very poor" category with PM 2.5 reaching at 311 and PM 10 at 181 or "moderate" and the CO was recorded at 74 or "satisfactory". The PM 2.5 at Punjabi Bagh also reached 384, in a "very poor" category, while PM 10 was at 292, in the "poor" category. The air quality at Jahangirpuri monitoring station entered into



"severe" category with PM 2.5 at 415 and PM 10 412. The CO was also reached at 106 or "moderate". The PM 2.5 at Okhla Phase-II was recorded at 381 and PM 10 at 372, both in the "very poor" category. The CO was at 96, in the "satisfactory" levels. The AQI at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport station plummeted with PM 10 at 344, in the "very poor" category while PM 2.5 was at 220, in the "poor" levels. The CO was recorded at 71, or "satisfactory".

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".

RAILWAYS TO USE AI FOR CROWD CONTROL IN MAGH MELA

Prayagraj (UP) | Agencies

The railway will ensure crowd control management at stations in Prayagraj through AI (Artificial Intelligence) during the upcoming Magh Mela.

This will also will act as a rehearsal for Maha Kumbh 2025.

At a coordination meeting between railway official and the district administration, it has been decided that with the increase in crowd, the devotees would be stopped in 14 holding area including seven at Prayagraj Junction, four at Prayag station and three at Rambagh along with circulating areas. Additional bogies and Mela special trains will also be operated to meet out heavy rush. Shuttle buses and e-rickshaws will operate from the station to the mela area too.

Preparations to deal with emergency situations were also discussed.

Moreover, to keep a close watch on the movement of devotees, a control tower has been built on top of the sta-



tion building, which will work for crowd management. Divisional level officers will manage the nine stations from control room, which will have arrangements for CCTV, hot line, wireless, display area board and the same will be connected to Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC)

of the mela area.

During the mela, direction-wise entry will be done in a controlled manner through passenger shelters from the city side only.

Same planning is being done at Prayagraj Junction, Prayagraj Cheoki, Naini, Rambagh, Prayag, Phaphamau

and Jhansi stations.

Maha Kumbh Mela Adhikari, Vijay Kiran Anand also directed the medical department to prepare a detailed SOP for station-wise medical arrangements and share it with the railways for quick communication. During Magh Mela, tickets will be available through the new system. This time, the work of issuing tickets under the new system will be done on Leader Road outside the passenger shelter, for which special arrangements are being made. Coloured stickers will be placed on the issued tickets as per the colour code of the holding area.

Airport-like facilities be available for passengers at Prayagraj Junction, while smaller stations will also be upgraded. Retiring rooms and dormitories are now ready for the convenience of passengers at Prayagraj Sangam railway station. Likewise, entry into Prayagraj Junction (from the city side) will be closed once the passenger shelters are full. It will be controlled in a temporary hold up area like Khusrobagh.

JD-U WILL CONTEST 16 LS SEATS IN BIHAR: MINISTER

Patna | Agencies

Rural Development Minister Sanjay Kumar Jha on Friday said that JD-U will contest on at least 16 seats across Bihar during the upcoming general elections.

"We have 16 Lok Sabha MPs and we will contest on all these seats. However, the final seat sharing arrangement is yet to be finalised. There is no question of contesting less than 16 seats. When we will have a meeting with RJD, we will put our concerns before them," Jha said.

He said that JD-U will talk with the RJD as far as Bihar is concerned but will not hold any parleys with Congress or left parties.

"The Congress and left parties should hold discussion with RJD. After the seat shar-



ing arrangement is finalised between them, we will then discuss about seat arrange-

ment with RJD," Jha said.

He said that Nitish Kumar was a pivot in bringing all the

opposition parties of the country on a common platform and the Patna media fraternity knows it.

"From beginning, Nitish has been insisting on a possible seat sharing arrangement. He had also said that the seat sharing formula should be finalised by October 2023 so that the INDIA bloc could start the election campaigning at the earliest but it did not happen," he said.

Jha said that the Bihar Chief Minister -- during the December 19 meeting of INDIA bloc in Delhi -- also insisted that the seat sharing formula must be finalised by January so that a joint campaign can be launched.

"Our leader (Nitish Kumar) time and again has said that he has no wish to become convener of the INDIA bloc," he said.

GST AUTHORITIES TELL NTPC TO COUGH UP RS 100 CR

Mumbai: NTPC has received demand orders from GST authorities in seven states to pay up tax, interest, and penalty adding up to a total of Rs 100.80 crore. The states from which the tax demand has come include Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

NTPC said that it will file an appeal against the said orders within the prescribed timelines.

The government-owned power giant also stated that the GST demand orders will not have a material impact on the financials, operations, or other activities of the company. Shares of NTPC were trading at Rs 315.70 apiece at 12 a.m. on Friday.

Delhi court allows AAP MP Sanjay Singh to sign forms, documents for RS renomination

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi court has allowed AAP MP Sanjay Singh, arrested in a money laundering case in connection with the alleged excise policy scam, to sign forms and documents for his Rajya Sabha renomination.

Singh filed an application submitting that his current term as a Rajya Sabha member is expiring on January 27.

The application says that the Returning Officer has issued a notice on January 2 for conduct of the election and nominations for the Rajya Sabha are to be submitted by January 9.

On Singh seeking direction to the Tihar Jail Superintendent to allow him to sign the documents, Special Judge M.K. Nagpal of the Rouse Avenue Court passed the order, saying that the Jail Superintendent must ensure that Singh's signatures are permitted to be taken on the said documents and he is also permitted to meet his Counsel for half-an-hour to discuss the modalities in connection with filing of the Rajya Sabha nomination. "It is being directed that if the documents are presented by the counsel for



accused before jail authorities on January 6, 2024, the Jail Superintendent must ensure that the signatures of the accused are permitted ...," the judge said.

On Thursday, the AAP MP moved the Delhi High Court, seeking bail in the money laundering case in connection with the alleged excise policy scam. The move comes after Special Judge M.K. Nagpal of Rouse Avenue Courts, on December 22, dismissed Singh's bail plea.

Kerala Orthodox Church priest removed from all posts after joining BJP



Thiruvananthapuram | Agencies

Days after senior Kerala Orthodox Church priest Fr Shyju Kurian took membership of the BJP from Union Minister of State for External Affairs, on Friday was removed from all posts that he held by the Church authorities.

Kurian was the secretary of the Nilakkal Dioceses of the Syrian Orthodox Church and

held a top post in the Sunday School. He has now been removed from both.

Kurian, however, claimed that he has "taken leave and once on leave, it's natural to move out of the posts".

Meanwhile, the Church higher ups have now constituted a commission to probe into the allegations of misconduct against him and submit its report in two months' time.

Unable to conceive, woman steals newborn girl from Delhi hospital

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A 23-year-old woman has been arrested for allegedly stealing away a newborn girl from a government hospital here, police said on Friday, adding that the accused, who was unable to conceive, seized the opportunity to fulfill her desire for motherhood through unlawful means.

The incident came to light when a 19-year-old woman from Samaypur Badli approached the police on Wednesday, reporting that her newborn daughter had been abducted by an unknown woman from the Labour Ward of Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital. Deputy Commissioner of Police, Rohini, Guriqbal Singh Sidhu said that the new mother had given birth at the hospital, and the alleged kidnapping occurred shortly after.

During the probe, the police team analysed the CCTV footage of the cameras installed in and outside of the



hospital. "In one of the CCTV footage, a woman was seen leaving the corridor of the labour ward of BSA Hospital with a newborn baby," he said.

Police also studied over 500 CCTV footage of possible routes in the vicinity.

"In one of the CCTV footage at Rohini West Metro Station, the woman concerned was seen boarding a red e-rick-

shaw with the kidnapped baby," said Sidhu.

The driver of the e-rickshaw was traced and questioned and told the police at at about 7 a.m. on Wednesday, he had dropped the woman, who was carrying a baby, near the main gate of ESI Hospital, Sector 15, Rohini. "It was learnt that she had interacted with two persons in front of DTC Depot,

Rohini. The police team traced both the persons and came to know that she had used their mobile phone for making a call." Finally, on the basis of technical surveillance, alleged Mamta (name changed), a resident of Badli was apprehended in the case and the kidnapped baby girl was recovered from her possession safely," the DCP added.

Pralhad Joshi behind arrest of Kar Sevak: Jagadish Shettar

Bengaluru | Agencies

Former Karnataka chief minister Jagadish Shettar on Friday alleged that Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Coal and Mines Pralhad Joshi is behind the arrest of Kar Sevak, Srikanth Poojari.

"LoP R. Ashoka was the Home Minister for 5 years while BJP was in power for 7 to 8 years in Karnataka. Why did they not take back the cases against Kar Sevak? All this controversy about Kar Sevak is being done for Lok Sabha election. There is a role of Union Minister Pralhad Joshi in this case. He is behind the arrest of Poojari," Shettar told media persons in Hubballi.

He asked why is BJP protesting now and made no efforts to take back these cases when they were in power. "I was the state's chief minister for ten months. My attempts to help Kar Sevak are in records," he said.

He said that BJP is doing all this only to get Hindu votes. "Why former chief ministers B. S. Yediyurappa, D. V.



Sadananda Gowda and Basavaraj Bommai kept quiet all these days? BJP got reminded of Kar Sevak only after the arrest of Srikanth Poojari. BJP leaders are being hypocrite over the arrest of Kar Sevak. They don't have any concern and sympathy towards Ram Bhakts," Shettar said.

He said that Kar Sevak was not arrested as per the direction of the government.

"It is BJP's objective to divide Hindus and Muslims. BJP gave ticket to Manikant Rathod during the assembly election, who had more than 10 criminal cases against him. Despite stirring emotions, BJP will not get any benefits," he said.



Pune goon Sharad Mohol shot by unknown assailants, dies in hospital

Team Absolute | Pune

In a shocking development, an unidentified gunman shot at least three bullets at the notorious gangster Sharad Mohol in the Kothrud area here on Friday afternoon. Mohol was rushed to the Sahyadri Hospital, where he succumbed during treatment, officials said.

According to preliminary information, the shooting took place near his residence in the busy Sutardara, Kothrud, around 1.15 pm when the shooter, along with another, came there on a motorcycle and started firing indiscriminately at Mohol.

They accused quickly sped off from the vicinity, sending shockwaves in the state's cultural, academic and IT capital.

Mohol, 40, who sustained at least one bullet injury, was seen bleeding profusely by locals and was rushed to the nearby private Sahyadri Hospital for treatment.

According to official sources, the bullet hit him in the upper right part of his torso and he was immediately operated upon but he later succumbed to the injuries.

The exact motive behind the attack is not known yet, but prima facie, police suspect it to be a busi-



ness dispute arising out of intra-gang rivalry. Later, Mohol's body was shifted to the Sassoon Hospital for an autopsy where a large number of his

supporters gathered and created a ruckus even as the police tightened security in and around the hospital.

The Kothrud Police is lodging a murder case and a team along with senior officials rushed to the spot to investigate the crime.

The police are scanning CCTV footage of the vicinity, cordoned off the crime spot, are questioning eyewitnesses and launching a massive hunt for the shooters.

Incidentally, Mohol's wife, Swati had joined the ruling ally Bharatiya Janata Party in April, 2023 in the presence of Minister Chandrakant Patil, and the Mohol couple was regularly seen in various public events in the city.

A history-sheeter, Mohol had more than a dozen serious criminal offences in different police stations in the city, spent nine years in jail, secured bail in some cases and was externed from Pune district at one point.

Sharad Mohol was the younger brother of the notorious mafiosi Sandeep Mohol, who was also shot dead on a Pune road in October, 2006.

Earlier working as the driver of his older sibling, after his death, Sharad entered the underworld and virtually lorded over the city till his own killing today.

Probe agency raids company owned by Sharad Pawar's grand-nephew

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday raided the premises of a firm owned by Sharad Pawar's grand-nephew and MLA Rohit Pawar as part of its investigation into the alleged Rs 25,000-crore Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank scam. Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar and his nephew, Ajit Pawar, who is now part of the ruling coalition in the state, had also been named in the scam earlier.

The raids - which are part of the agency's money-laundering investigation - were conducted on at least six premises of Baramati Agro and linked entities in Baramati, Pune, Pimpri and Aurangabad. Baramati Agro is owned by Rohit Pawar, who is also the CEO of the firm.

Sources said the Enforcement Directorate's allegation is that Baramati Agro had taken high-value loans from the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank Scam, which either remained unpaid or the



funds were diverted. The agency has also claimed that people close to Sharad Pawar were on the bank's board of directors and they had given loans, without following proper procedure, to Baramati Agro and several other companies. These loans were allegedly not paid back.

In 2019, the Mumbai Police had registered an FIR against Ajit Pawar, Sharad Pawar and 70 others in the cooperative bank scam, but had filed a clo-

sure report later that year, citing lack of evidence. The Enforcement Directorate has opposed the closure report. In July 2021, it had also seized assets of the Jarandeshwar Sugar Mills, in which Ajit Pawar was once a director, in connection with the scam.

Ajit Pawar had rebelled against his uncle Sharad Pawar last year and engineered a split in the Nationalist Congress Party with the support of senior leaders like Chhagan Bhujbal and Praful Patel. He took oath as deputy chief minister in the Eknath Shinde-led Maharashtra government in July. The Enforcement Directorate's latest raids come at a time when it has summoned Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav in various cases. All three, and their parties, are members of the opposition-led INDIA bloc, which has been alleging that the BJP is misusing central agencies ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, which are around three months away.

Talks on seat sharing with Congress, NCP almost done: Sanjay Raut

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amid intensifying preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Shiv Sena (UBT faction) leader Sanjay Raut said that his party's talks on seat sharing with Congress, NCP, Shiv Sena, and Prakash Ambedkar (Vanchit Bahujan Aaghadi chief) are almost done.

"I discussed with the senior leaders of the party who are a part of the high-level committee. In a few days, we'll sit with the committee formed by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and our primary discussions will come to an end... Our talks on seat sharing with Congress, NCP, Shiv Sena, and Prakash Ambedkar (Vanchit Bahujan Aaghadi chief) are almost done. It has been a very positive discussion. We can't see any clashes in the four parties... We are in talks with Congress and Prakash Ambedkar," said Shiv Sena (UBT faction) leader Sanjay Raut.

Earlier, Congress top leadership, including party



president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi on Thursday conducted meetings with the members of the party's Alliance Committee and Manifesto Committee here in the national capital.

The grand old party went into a huddle two times, first holding a meeting of Congress Alliance Committee at the party chief Kharge's residence and later a meeting of Congress Manifesto Committee at the AICC headquarters which is

headed by party Rajya Sabha MP P Chidambaram.

Briefing about the Alliance Committee meeting, committee convener Mukul Wasnik said that in the meeting, a discussion regarding seat-sharing of Congress within the INDIA bloc was held.

"The Congress Alliance Committee held deliberations with leaders from various states within the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA bloc) in the last several days. Today, their details were given to party president Kharge, former president Rahul Gandhi and Organization General Secretary KC Venugopal. Now, soon Congress will hold state-wise discussions with other allies of INDIA bloc," Mukul Wasnik said.

Meanwhile, P Chidambaram, while informing about the Manifesto Committee meeting, said, "This was the first meeting of the Manifesto Committee. There will be a meeting again next week regarding the manifesto of Congress for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Preliminary views were exchanged in today's meeting."

Won't be surprising if he is arrested: Sharad Pawar on Arvind Kejriwal



Team Absolute | Shirdi

Backing Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal over Enforcement Directorate summoning him, Nationalist Congress Party president Sharad Pawar on Thursday said the Centre was misusing power to discourage those who do not have similar political views.

Addressing party workers, Pawar said summons have been sent by the central probe agency to Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren as well and feared he too could be arrested.

Pawar said in the last 10 years, people have voted Kejriwal to power, adding that Aam Aadmi Party ministers have been jailed and steps were being taken to arrest him as well.

"He has been issued notices to appear before the Enforcement Directorate. The chief



minister of the country's capital. Everyone in Delhi knows he is a simple man with a clean image. It will not be surprising if he is arrested," Pawar claimed.

"This means efforts are being made to discourage those who do not have similar political views by misusing power," Pawar alleged.

Kejriwal, who is also the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener, had skipped the Enforcement Directorate summons on Wednesday. He has so far skipped three summons by Enforcement Directorate for questioning in connection with a money laundering case linked to the alleged liquor scam. The alleged liquor scam is related to the excise policy 2021-22 that was scrapped by Kejriwal's government last year after Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena recommended a CBI probe into "lapses and irregularities" in its implementation.

Mumbai court denies bail on medical grounds to ex-chief of Pune-based coop bank



Team Absolute | Mumbai

A special Prevention of Money Laundering Act court in Mumbai Friday denied bail on medical grounds to Amar Mulchandani, former chairman of a Pune-based cooperative bank, in a money laundering case linked to alleged fraud and misappropriation of funds worth Rs 429 crore.

MG Deshpande, the special judge for cases under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), on January 2 denied bail to Mulchandani after observing that any liberty under the guise of medical treatment at Pune will certainly accelerate the criminal activities relating to the scheduled offence, a newswire reported.

The Enforcement Directorate is making further investigation as per the provision of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act and there is a possibility of the applicant (accused) dealing with POC (proceeds of crime) and ultimately paralysing further investigation of the ED, the court said in the order made available on Friday, in the money laundering case.

It further said once the applicant is admitted in hospital in Pune, no one is sure when he will be discharged, and in that situation "this court would be functus-officio (of no further official authority or legal effect)".

Top artistes to regale at 32nd Mumbai Sanskriti Festival on 'Universal Peace'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Top music stalwarts will enthral audiences at the Mumbai Sanskriti Festival with the theme of 'Universal Peace' organised by the Indian Heritage Society (IHS) at the iconic Asiatic Society of Mumbai's Town Hall on January 13-14, officials said here on Friday.

The stellar line-up comprises Pt. Rakesh Chaurasia, Vidushi Ashwini Bhide-Deshpande, Pt. Sanjeev Abhyankar and their teams of musicians at the 2-day musical treat.

The festival will open on January 13 with flautist Chaurasia's 'Confluence - Music for Peace & Harmony' with Indian Classical Music, and then weaving in elements of fusion and folk, to the accompaniment of Sridar Parthasarathy (Mridangam), Ojas Adhiya (Tabla), Shikhar Naad Qureshi (Percussion), Sanjoy Das (Guitar) and Ritik Chaurasia (Flute).

"This festival platform provides an ideal stage to spotlight Indian Classical Music, an integral part of our cultural heritage. I commend IHS for this impactful



initiative, poised to resonate with a diverse audience and extend the cultural richness of our heritage to as many as possible," said Pt. Rakesh Chaurasia.

On January 14 (Sunday), will see 'Bhakti Sangam' performances by Vidushi Ashwini Bhide-Deshpande, an acclaimed exponent of Hindustani Classical Music belonging to the Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana), and Pt. Sanjeev Abhyankar, Hindustani Classical Music singer of the Mewati Gharana.

This 'Bhakti Sangam' promises to be a true confluence of the devotion embedded in both the artists' unique styles, gharanas, and of various musical genres like khayal, bhajans, stotras and stutis.

They will be accompanied by Ajinkya Joshi (Tabla), Abhinay Ravande

(Harmonium), Amar Oak (Flute), Omkar Dalvi (Pakhawaj), Uddhav Kumbhar (Side Rhythm), and Avanti Patel as the compere. 'Mumbai Sanskriti Festival' traces its roots way back to 1992 when it was launched as the 'Banganga Festival', after a 1991 sign-petition by IHS Chairperson Anita Garware, to save the now historic precinct - the Banganga Tank.

"While all Mumbai citizens were aware of the Banganga Tank, very few were acquainted with its location, history, and importance, and we felt live music was the best way to raise awareness," said Anita Garware. What began as the IHS Banganga Festival has evolved into the widely recognised Mumbai Sanskriti Festival, weaving together architectural and cultural heritage.

85 IIT-Bombay students get job offers of over Rs 1cr per annum

Team Absolute | Mumbai

At least 85 students of Indian Institute of Bombay (IIT-B) reaped a rich harvest of job offers with more than Rs 1 crore per annum CTC, an official said here on Thursday.

As many as 388 Indian and international companies and organisations from around the world made the offers in various sectors for the placement season 2023-2024 in the Phase 1.

Among them were companies making replacement offers (PPOs) as well as PSUs, and firms interacted with the students in person or through virtual meeting platforms with all the students appearing for interviews from the venue.

Till December 20, 2023, around 1,340 offers were with 1,188 students getting placed including 7 in PSUs and 297 PPOs via internships of which 258 were accepted.

The IIT-B slotted companies in a way to ensure that firms are maximally spread out to reduce stress on students and also minimise cross offers, said the official spokesperson. The sectors with highest number of offers were engineering and technology (average salaries Rs 21.88 lakh/per annum), information technology/software (Rs 26.35 lakh/per annum), finance/banking/fintech (Rs 32.38 lakh/per annum), management consulting (Rs 18.68 lakh/per annum), data science and analytics, research and development (Rs 36.94



lakh/per annum), and design; with the overall average salaries pegged at Rs 24.02 lakh/per annum.

Among the placements were 63 students who received international offers with locations in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, The Netherlands, Singapore and Hong Kong.

The top recruiters who visited the campus this season included: Accenture, Airbus, Air India, Apple, Arthur D. Little, Bajaj, Barclays, Cohesity, Da Vinci, DHL, Fullerton, Future First, GE-ITC, Global Energy and Environ, Google, Honda R&D, ICICI-Lombard, ideaForge, IMC Trading, Intel, Jaguar Land Rover, JP Morgan Chase, JSW, Kotak Securities, Marsh McLennan, Mahindra Group, Micron, Microsoft, Morgan Stanley, Mercedes-Benz, L&T, NK Securities, OLA, P&G, Qualcomm, Reliance group, Samsung, Schlumberger, Strand Life Sciences, Tata group, Texas Instruments, TSMC, TVS Group and Wells Fargo among many more, according to IIT-B.

Lawyer buys Dawood plot for Rs 2 crore, to set up Sanatan School there



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The auction of four properties owned by Dawood Ibrahim concluded today, with two of the land parcels getting no bids and one, which had a reserve price of just Rs 15,000, being sold for an eye-popping Rs 2 crore. Dawood is India's most wanted terrorist and is believed to be hiding in Karachi.

The buyer of the plot said he paid so much for it because the survey number and the amount add up to a figure in numerology that works in his favour. He intends to set up a Sanatan school there.

The four tracts of agricultural land are located in Mumbai village in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district, and their combined reserve price was just Rs 19.22 lakh.

While the two bigger land parcels did not receive any bids, a plot with an area of 1,730 sq m and a reserve price of Rs 1.56 lakh was sold for Rs 3.28 lakh.

The smallest land parcel, which has an area of 170.98 sq m and had a reserve price of Rs 15,440, has been sold for Rs 2.01 crore.

This plot was bought by lawyer Ajay Srivastava, who had earlier purchased three of the underworld don's

properties, including his childhood home in the same village. When he was asked why he had paid so much for the agricultural plot, Srivastava, who is a former Shiv Sena leader, said, "I am a Sanatani Hindu and we follow our panditji. The survey number (of the plot) and the amount have a figure that goes in my favour according to numerology. I will start a Sanatan school on this plot after getting it converted."

"I had bid for Dawood Ibrahim's Bungalow in 2020. A Sanatan Dharm Pathshala Trust has been set up and, after getting it registered, I will start a Sanatan school there as well," he said.



EDITOR'S SPECS

RJD, JD(U) likely to contest 16 seats each in LS polls

Two major alliance partners of the Mahagathbandhan -- RJD and JD(U) -- have almost reached a final formula on seat sharing for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Bihar has 40 seats and these two parties are likely to contest 16 each, while six are left for Congress and two for the Left parties. For RJD and JD(U), one seat plus or minus can be possible. Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav met Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday evening in Patna. Although there is no information about what the two discussed, sources said that Tejashwi conveyed his father Lalu Prasad Yadav's message on seat sharing formula to contest equal number of seats. The sources added that Lalu Prasad Yadav brought the formula of 2015 Assembly election where the RJD and JD(U) contested on 100 seats each in 243 seats of Vidhan Sabha and remaining 43 seats were given to Congress. The sources further said that another point was also discussed about the JD(U) contesting on 17 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. At that time, the party was part of the NDA. Hence, JD-U may not lose one seat and go for 17 seats in Bihar. Nitish Kumar is said to be a hard bargainer on seat sharing and he did that in 2015 Assembly election, 2019 Lok Sabha polls and 2020 Assembly election. Keeping in view of his track record, he may be asked to contest on 17 seats. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, JD(U) was part of NDA and contested on 17 seats and won 16 of them, while BJP contested on 17 and won 17 while LJP contested on 6 seats and won all six.

Learning is earning for women entrepreneurs from the Northeast

Sayantani Deb

Amid the vast stretches of tea gardens and the striking mountain views of Soreni in Sikkim lies the modest dairy farm of Tika Khanal (41). As we enter, she can be seen operating a pressure washer to keep her cowshed spic and span. Khanal initially tried her luck cultivating desi vegetables and pahleno makkoi (a local maize variety). In 2015, she decided to start livestock rearing by acquiring two local goats and cattle each. However, she faced hurdles along the way. "The animals were yielding low milk even during their peak lactation period. Lack of quality fodder and livestock diseases made it extremely challenging," she shares candidly. She learnt about the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) at that time when she was looking for solutions to her problems. In 2017, she joined the KVK in East Sikkim, seeking knowledge and training. She never had to look back since then as she was provided with the expertise needed to rear enhanced breeds and implement scientific livestock management practices. "I never missed a training session or field demonstration," she states. Milk production has witnessed a remarkable increase after scientific training, with her annual income growing by over 200 per cent. "I could make Rs 50,000 per month from my four cows earlier. But after putting KVK training to use, I was able to purchase another cow and increase the earnings to Rs 1.25 lakh per month," she says. Khanal at present owns seven cows and her income has since then risen to Rs 1.50 lakh per month. In recognition of her outstanding contributions to the dairy sector, ICAR-Research Complex for North-Eastern Hills Region, Umiam, Meghalaya, conferred the Best Innovative Farmer Award on Khanal in January 2023. A homemaker, Junuma Mali Deka (35) stumbled upon a training session in marigold production offered at KVK Morigaon, Assam, when she was looking for employment after her marriage to a native of Dandua in the district. Following the training, she initiated her own nursery in 2018. Her nursery boasts of a diverse array of nearly 60 flower varieties, including rose, hibiscus, marigold, orchid and gerbera. "The flowers I grow are of superior quality because I use vermicompost only," she says, adding that gerberas are a popular choice among her customers as they are widely used in bouquets and floral decorations. She sells most of them locally and sometimes in Guwahati. This is not the only venture that Deka nurtures. Her dairy farm also took root in 2018, initially starting with one cow that yielded around five litres of milk per day. She says professional guidance helped her learn how to maintain the cow, what and how much to feed, and how to keep it healthy and disease-free. Deka now manages a livestock portfolio consisting of 22 goats and 13 cows, producing and selling 70 to 90 litres of milk daily. This dairy enterprise contributes significantly to her monthly profit of Rs 50,000.

New beginnings
Though Hema Taki (47) was interested in agriculture since her childhood, she took it up only after marriage when her mother-in-law encouraged her. After trying her hand at agriculture and animal husbandry in the remote Runne village in East Siang district, Arunachal Pradesh, she turned to backyard poultry farming in 2011 by purchasing one-day-old Vanaraja chicks, a breed developed by Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-Directorate of Poultry Research, Hyderabad, from the Pashigat local market. Her life took a remarkable turn when she met the



officials of KVK East Siang in 2013, a time she embarked on a journey of learning and innovation under their expert guidance. She began employing an indigenous brooder made from bamboo and carton material, equipped with electrical bulbs to provide essential artificial heat to the chicks during their initial three weeks. She received comprehensive training on crucial aspects, including proper food concentration, and regular deworming and vaccination protocols against Infectious Bursal Disease and Newcastle Disease. Taki currently breeds nearly 200 Vanaraja birds, from which she obtains 13,000 eggs in every batch. Expressing her gratitude for KVK's transformative role, Taki states, "I have acquired knowledge about scientific animal rearing, wherein animals are grown in a way that ensures income, employment and food security. The insights from specialist scientists have been instrumental in expanding my business." Thanks to her relentless dedication, Taki's annual income has soared from Rs 32,000 to an impressive Rs 1.65 lakh. In addition to her poultry and animal husbandry ventures, she cultivates advanced varieties of vegetables and rice.

F Gupa Biswakarma (45) had the opportunity to serve as a panchayat councillor of Joyrampur village in Bordoloni block of Assam's Dhemajai upon her election around 15 years ago. The role offered her a unique perspective on Assam's untapped agricultural/livestock potential, which had been hampered by a lack of local interest. The realisation prompted Biswakarma to venture into dairy farming by acquiring her first cow with her family's support. "My family enjoys milk and milk products, so I started Laxmi Dairy in 2013 to provide them with fresh milk and dairy products," says Biswakarma, who now owns 45 cows.

In 2022, she underwent a scientific training on milk management at KVK Dhemajai to enhance the quality of her dairy products. "I learned how to extract pure milk, and gained valuable insights into maintaining the health and productivity of cows," she shares. Biswakarma has diversified her business by selling homemade paneer and generating substantial profits. She generates a monthly earning of around Rs 1 lakh these days. To help the community, she also provides employment to several villagers. Lipi Deb Bhowmick (43) starts her day before sunrise. The mother of a toddler, she completes her household chores early and reports at the block panchayat office by 10 am. In her role as the krishi sakhi of West Sonatala village in Khowai district of Tripura, she single-handedly provides emotional, financial and technical support to around 700 women farmers. "Being a krishi sakhi, I act as a bridge to disseminate information on government announcements to the farmers. I also represent farmers before the government bodies," Bhowmick informs. She is a strong advocate for organic farming practices and passionately encourages women to adopt the use of vermicompost over conventional fertilisers. Under her able guid-

ance, all the women farmers she deals with have been diligently adopting sustainable and eco-friendly agriculture. Bhowmick regularly receives incentives from the Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission, however it depends on the number of women who benefit from the government scheme or how many she has supported. "The more the merrier. My monthly earning is between Rs 10,000 and 15,000 now. Two years ago, before becoming a krishi sakhi, it was nil," she says. She also successfully cultivates 25 cauliflowerers each of purple and yellow colours.

A helping hand
First established in Sonitpur district of Assam in 1981, 126 KVKs function across the Northeast at present. Besides providing hands-on training on latest technologies, it supports farmers with necessary requirements of seeds and equipment. It bridges the gap between the technology developed at research institutions and its adoption at the field level by farmers through training and demonstrations. "With our technical help, women have now acquainted themselves with paddy transplanters and paddy drum seeder [for sowing germinated seed]. They get very involved in the value addition process as well. Earlier, women's interest in such activities were minimal. Moreover, many rural women were not allowed to do such work. By conducting one-to-one discussion and holding awareness meetings, we exhorted them to come out," Dr Rijusmita Sarma Deka, a senior scientist and head of KVK Morigaon, tells 101Reporters. ICAR-Agricultural Technology Application Research Institute (ATARI) oversees and supports the activities of KVKs, providing financial and infrastructural assistance for their effective functioning. Currently, 47 KVKs are affiliated to it, with 17 functioning in Arunachal Pradesh, 26 in Assam and four in Sikkim.

According to an ICAR research in nine states, women are responsible for a significant portion of agricultural activities, contributing to major crop production (75 per cent), horticultural endeavours (79 per cent), post-harvest work (51 per cent) and animal husbandry and fisheries (95 per cent).

Dr Kadirvel G, Director, ATARI Zone VI, notes, "Northeastern women farmers are performing exceptionally well. They adapt to changes and new trends efficiently."

Dr Eloni Vida, Subject Matter Expert (Home Science), KVK East Siang, attests to women's adaptability to new changes. In her 15 years of experience working with farmers, she has noticed their enthusiasm for experimenting with new technologies related to fruits, seeds and breeds. "It is heartening to see that over 80 per cent of the participants in our training sessions are women. Many even bring their infant children along," she states. According to KVK Khowai Head Dr Manoj Singh Sachan, women possess a better understanding of nutritional values as compared with men because they are primarily responsible for providing food for their families. Dr Janak Kumar Singh, Head, KVK East Sikkim, says that with support of KVK, ICAR and state governments, women in the Northeast are turning to entrepreneurship. "They are no longer just farmers; they are becoming entrepreneurs, creating a brighter future for themselves, their families and communities."

(Sayantani Deb is an Assam-based freelance journalist and a member of 101Reporters, a pan-India network of grassroots reporters.)

international

3 Hindu temples in California targeted in quick succession

San Francisco | Agencies
Three Hindu temples have been targeted by unknown miscreants in quick succession in the US state of California's Bay Area region, leaving members of the community in shock. The Vijay's Sherawali Temple in Hayward was vandalised with anti-India and pro-Khalistan graffiti, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) said in a post on X on Friday. A few weeks earlier, the outer walls of walls of Shree Swaminarayan Mandir in Newark were defaced with similar graffiti, and a theft was reported at the Shiv Durga temple in the same area, the Hindu advocacy group said. "Another Bay Area Hindu temple attacked with pro-Khalistan graffiti," the Hindu American Foundation said in the post on X. "The Vijay's Sherawali Temple in Hayward, CA sustained a copycat defacement just two weeks after the Swaminarayan Mandir attack and one week after a theft at the Shiv Durga temple in the same area." Located at 20789 Garden Avenue, the graffiti spray painted with black ink targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi and eulogised Khalistan.



The group said that is in touch with temple leaders, Alameda Police Department and the Civil Rights Divist of the Department of Justice to address the matter. In view of the rising threat from pro-Khalistan elements, HAF urged temple leaders across the US to download its safety guide. "The guide specifically discusses that temple graffiti qualifies as a hate crime and also the importance of installing working security cameras and alarm systems in view of the rising threat from #Khalistan proponents as well as the omnipresent risk from anti-Hindu actors," HAF wrote and posted the safety guide on X. Meanwhile, US authorities are investigating the attack on Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Hindu Temple, as a potential hate

crime. "We condemn the vandalism of Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Hindu Temple in California. We welcome efforts by the Newark Police Department to ensure that those responsible are held accountable," the State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs had said in a post on social media platform X. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar condemned the defacing of the temple, and said that separatists should not get space. "As you know that we are worried that... outside India the extremism and separatists should not be given space. Our Consulate there complained to the government and the police and I think an inquiry is underway." Mihir Meghani, co-founder of HAF, had told CBS News that the Indian-American community in the Bay Area is growing, and these political issues are now becoming a part of the division here. These attacks on Hindu temples, occurring between December 2023 and the first week of the New Year, follow US indictment against an Indian national for his alleged involvement in a foiled plot to kill New York-based Khalistan leader Gurbhagat Singh Pannun.

N.Korea provided ballistic missiles to Russia to be used in Ukraine: WH official

Washington | Agencies
White House official has said that North Korea recently provided Russia with several ballistic missiles and launchers which were used in the repeated waves of aerial attacks against Ukraine. Addressing a press briefing on Thursday, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said that as Moscow continues to "launch these brutal attacks", the US has "new information to share about the support that Russia is receiving from third countries". "Due in part to our sanctions and export controls, Russia has become increasingly isolated on the world stage and they've been forced to look to likeminded states for military equipment. As we've been warning publicly, one of those states is North Korea," Kirby said. The spokesperson said that on December 30, 2023, Russian forces launched at least one of these North Korean ballistic missiles into Ukraine. The missile appeared to have landed in an open field in the Zaporizhzhia region, he claimed. Kirby further said on January 2, Russia launched multiple North Korean ballistic missiles into Ukraine, including as part of its overnight aerial attack. "We're still assessing the impacts of these additional missiles." The North Korean ballistic missiles are capable of ranges of approximately 900 km. The White House official also warned the US anticipates that "Russia will use additional North Korean missiles to target Ukraine's civilian infrastructure and to kill innocent Ukrainian civilians".



24 injured after two NYC subway trains collide

New York | Agencies
At least 24 people were injured when a subway train reportedly derailed after a collision with another train on the Upper West Side of New York City. "There is a major disruption to 1/2/3

service while emergency teams assist passengers and conduct an investigation after a train derailed near 96 St. There is no 1/2/3 service in most of Manhattan," the Metropolitan Transportation Authority said in a post on X on

Thursday. A commuter train rear-ended a work train near the 96th Street Station around 3 p.m., and eight people were taken to hospitals with injuries. Xinhua news agency reported, citing local media reports.

Extreme cold hits Nordic nations, floods cause chaos in Western Europe

Brussels | Agencies
While extreme cold and heavy snowfall have led to power cuts and emergency rescues in the Nordic nations in the first week of 2024, floods in several Western European countries have also caused immense damage. On Wednesday, the Swedish city of Kvikkjokk recorded minus 43.6 Celsius degrees -- the country's coldest January temperatures in 25 years, reports Xinhua news agency. According to Swedish Television (SVT), the lingering freeze grounded flights at Lulea airport in the North as it was too cold to de-ice the planes. Bus routes in the region were also canceled, and thousands of households have been temporarily left without electricity. Meanwhile, train lines that had been shut down earlier in the week due to the cold remained closed, to avoid the risk of passengers becoming trapped on trains in plummeting temperatures in the case of power outages. In Denmark, on Thursday morning the town of Hald in the West recorded snow depth of half a meter, the deepest since January 2011. It is the first time in 13 years that Denmark has seen such extensive snow coverage, the Danish Meteorological Institute (DMI) reported. Denmark has also broke a 138-year-old rainfall record. The town of Svendborg, some 163 km West of the Danish capi-



tal Copenhagen, on Wednesday received 59 millimeters of rain. This surpassed the previous record of 50 millimeters, set in January 1886. The weather conditions have also led to significant traffic disruptions, with over 5,000 motorists seeking roadside assistance on Wednesday, making it one of the busiest days for emergency services. Finland on Thursday recorded its lowest winter temperature, at minus 42.1 degrees, causing disruptions to public transit. State railroads canceled 10 per cent of long-haul trains.

IDF intensifies fighting in southern Gaza's Khan Younis

Tel Aviv | Agencies
The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have intensified operations in southern Gaza's Khan Younis area, with reports of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade of the Fatah joining the Hamas's military wing Al-Qassam Brigades in the raging war. Sources in the Israeli Defence Ministry told IANS that the IDF has made major advancements in southern Gaza and added that many terror operatives were neutralised. The entry of the other Palestinian militant groups have increased the fire power of Hamas. They are using anti-tank missiles, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars in the intense fighting in Khan Younis, the sources said. US-based think tanks -- the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and the



Critical Threats Project (CTP) -- have also said that the presence of new groups in the war have increased ammunition strength in the region. It is being said that top Hamas leaders Mohammed Deif and Yahya Sinwar are believed to be in hiding in the tunnel network of Khan Younis.



COUNTRY'S FIRST PRASADAM TO BE INAUGURATED ON JANUARY 7 AT SHRI MAHAKAL MAHALOK COMPLEX UJJAIN

CM Dr. Mohan Yadav, Union Health Minister Mandaviya to inaugurate, lay foundation of 187 health institutions. A grand inaugural ceremony to be held at Ujjain. Deputy CM Shukla and Minister of State Patel to be present

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The country's first Prasadam is going to be inaugurated on January 7 in the Neelkanth forest complex of Mahakal Mahalok of the world famous pilgrimage site Ujjain. This is a remarkable achievement for Madhya Pradesh.

This Prasadam has been developed by Ujjain Smart City Limited under the 'Clean Street Food Hub' program of the Food and Safety Standards Authority of India at a cost of Rs 1 crore 75 lakh, between the Neelkanth forest complex of Mahakal Mahalok and Avantika Haat. In this, a clean street food hub has been created by constructing 17 shops. Parking and other public facilities will be available for the visiting devotees.

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav and Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Mansukh Mandaviya will inaugurate it. He will perform bhumi puja and inaugurate health institutions worth Rs 218 crore 76 lakh.



For the convenience of devotees visiting Mahakal Lok Complex, Chief Minister Sanjeevani Clinic will be operated at Mahakal Lok Complex, Neelkanth Gate, keeping in mind the health care of more than 1 lakh devotees on an average every day, in which emergency health services will also be available.

Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla, Minister of State for Public Health and Family Welfare Shri Narendra Shivaji Patel will be present on this occasion.

Foundation laying ceremony for 36 health institutions, 151 to be inaugurated

On this occasion, Bhoomi Pujan for 36 health institutions costing Rs 118 crore and 151 health institutions

costing Rs 100 crore 69 lakh will be inaugurated. For this, Rs 189 crore 89 lakh has been made available by the Central Government while Rs 28 crore 87 lakh has been provided by the State Government.

54 Sanjeevani Clinics, 66 Ayushman Health Temples to be inaugurated

With an aim of strengthening the urban health facilities for the citizens, urban health institutions were approved under the 15th Finance Commission. Under this, 54 Chief Minister Sanjeevani Clinics will be inaugurated. In these, 12 types of primary health facilities, 67 types of testing facilities and 208 types of medicines will be provided free of cost. Besides, 2 Block Public Health Units (CHC Hatod and CHC Saver, District Indore) will be inaugurated, which will provide testing services. Through these centres, information related to epidemics and health will reach the institutions at the district, state and national level.

Congress will protest if promises are not fulfilled by January in Madhya Pradesh: Jitu Patwari

Team Absolute | Bhopal

BJP has registered a big victory in the assembly elections held in Madhya Pradesh, during which many promises were made by the BJP to the people of the state. Congress alleges that the BJP government does not seem to be fulfilling the promises made, if the promises are not fulfilled by the end of January then the Congress will protest on the streets.

Congress State President Jitu Patwari, who reached Jabalpur, while discussing with the reporters, said that before the elections, BJP had promised the public that under the Laadli Brahmin Yojana, Rs 3000 per month will be given to the sisters, Rs 3100 per quintal of paddy will be given to the farmers and Rs 2,700 per quintal will be given to the farmers. Wheat will be purchased at the rate of Rs 450, apart from this, LPG cylinder will be given for Rs 450. He said that one month and two days have passed since the assembly election results came, but till now the government has not fulfilled any promise. In the assembly session, the Chief Minister had taken the BJP's promissory note in his hand and said that this is our Ramayana and Geeta, so I want to know whether in the cabinet meeting held in Jabalpur two-three days ago, not a single promise of this Ramayana and Geeta was fulfilled. Why was the decision not taken?

Jitu Patwari has challenged Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and said that this January is completely yours, but the opposition is ready to play its role from February. Now only the



workers will lead the party. In response to a question regarding former Congress President Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra', Patwari said that this Nyaya Yatra is being organized to provide justice to the people. 90 percent people are struggling with inflation, why are they struggling? Why has economic inequality arisen? To remove social inequality, economic inequality, educational inequality, political inequality, Rahul Gandhi is taking out 'Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra'.

Jitu Patwari said that Rahul Gandhi's journey will pass through 9 districts of the state in the coming days, which will also include 30 assembly and 5 Lok Sabha constituencies. In response to a question regarding the construction of Shri Ram temple in Ayodhya, Patwari said that the Congress party has always been in favor of building the temple of Lord Ram. The Congress party always said that it will respect the decision taken by the court and every citizen of the country welcomed it. We are also included in that.

TANTRIK TOOK WOMAN'S LIFE IN DESIRE OF CHILD

Team Absolute | Jhabua

In Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, a woman was handed over to a Tantrik in order to have a child for her family. The Tantrik tied the woman with iron chains and beat her so much that she lost her life. The police is investigating the case.

The matter is of Naganwat village of Meghnagar, where Ranjita was married to Prakash about one and a half decade ago. She did not have a child, in this situation both her in-laws and her maternal family wanted a child. Due to this, they took the woman to a Tantrik in Ranapur.

The Tantrik said that the woman was possessed by a demon, hence she would have to be treated. For this the Tantrik tortured the woman in different ways for three days. Ultimately his health deteriorated on the third day and the Tantrik advised him to take him to the hospital. He died before he could be taken to the hospital. Family members say that they took the woman to a Tantrik, where he was calling her continuously for three days.



The Tantrik said that an evil spirit had entered the woman's body, which would have to come out. On the third day, the Tantrik beat the woman with iron chains, she became unconscious and did not regain consciousness. Police officials say that the statements of the victim's family members will be recorded and only from the viscera report it will be clear how the woman died.

Mohan Yadav government's emphasis on regional strength

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After the change in the Chief Minister of Bharatiya Janata Party in Madhya Pradesh, a change is also visible in the strategy of the government and the organization. Now the aim of both is regional strengthening and a campaign has also been launched for that.

BJP got an overwhelming majority in the state assembly elections and the newly elected MLAs along with the party chose Mohan Yadav as their leader. Yadav has been continuously active since taking oath as the Chief Minister and forming the cabinet and his efforts to tighten the administrative system and work out the political mathematics are continuing. In this sequence, the Chief Minister's emphasis is also on regional gathering. After becoming the Chief Minister, while Mohan Yadav handed over the responsibility of administrative tightening to the senior officers of the Indian Administrative Service at the divisional level, the senior police



officer has been asked to keep an eye on the divisional level to improve the law and order situation.

On one hand, in view of the administrative tightness, senior officials have been instructed to remain active by keeping an eye on the division and district levels, while on the other hand, Chief Minister Yadav himself is touring the area. If we look at the activities of the last few days, we will come to know that the Chief Minister went to Neemuch in Nimar-Malwa, then reached Jabalpur in Mahakaushal, then he reached Gwalior in Gwalior-Chambal and reviewed the functioning of the government machinery along with development works and now Vindhya. Political analysts believe that after taking charge of the state, Chief Minister Yadav wants to tighten the grassroots level in the state. They are also trying to bring changes in the systems. This is the reason why on one hand they are taking action against officers whose working style is under question, on the other hand they have started taking action at the divisional level. While the general public will benefit from this, the image of the government will be improved and the organization will also benefit.

Professor removed within 24 hours due to Joda's protest in Bhopal

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Mohan Yadav led government is in action in Madhya Pradesh. When the junior doctor protested against Dr. Aruna Kumar, who was posted in the Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics at Gandhi Medical College in the capital Bhopal, the government decided to remove her within 24 hours.

Dr. Aruna Kumar, who was posted in the Gynecology and Obstetrics Department of Gandhi Medical College, has been in controversy in the past also. Dr. Bala Saraswati, a junior doctor, had committed suicide and had allegedly accused Dr Aruna of torture. As a result he was removed. She was posted in the



Health Directorate. Yesterday, as soon as the order for his posting in the medical college was issued, the junior doctors came out in protest.

Regarding the posting of Dr. Aruna, Joda started his protest by tying a black band and was even planning to go on strike.

Meanwhile, the government has canceled the order of posting of Aruna Kumar. State Health Minister Rajendra Shukla said on Twitter that by canceling the order issued yesterday with immediate effect, till the departmental investigation continues, the attachment of Dr. Aruna Kumar, Professor Gynecology and Obstetrics Department, Gandhi Medical College, Bhopal, in the Directorate of Medical Education remains as it is.

69.13 PERCENT VOTING TOOK PLACE IN URBAN BODIES AND 63 PERCENT VOTING IN PANCHAYATS

Bhopal: Peaceful voting for the by-elections of urban bodies and panchayats has been completed today. According to the information received till 7 pm, 69.13 percent voting took place in urban bodies and 63 percent voting took place in Panchayats. In urban bodies, 69.86 percent male and 68.37 percent female voters exercised their franchise. In Panchayats, 64.46 percent male and 61.47 percent female voters exercised their franchise.

It is noteworthy that the counting of votes and announcement of election results of urban bodies will start from 9 am on January 9. The counting of votes for the Panchayat post in the Panchayat by-election has been done in the polling station immediately after the voting. The counting of votes in EVMs of Sarpanch, District Panchayat member and District Panchayat member will be done on January 9 at the respective development block headquarters from 8 am. The election results for the post of Sarpanch and District Panchayat member will be announced on January 9 and the election results for District Panchayat member will be announced on January 11.

It is noteworthy that by-elections are being held for 9 thousand 220 Panch, 56 Sarpanch, 15 District Panchayat members and one District Panchayat member and for 20 councillor posts in various urban bodies.

New collector Singh takes charge as Bhopal collector



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Newly appointed Collector Kaushalendra Vikram Singh took charge as Bhopal Collector today. After assuming charge, he got introduced to the officials in the Collectorate meeting room. New Collector Kaushalendra Vikram Singh

met Bhopal Divisional Commissioner Pawan Sharma courtesy.

Naturally, even before the then Collector Ashish Singh, orders for his posting were made in Bhopal itself, but for some reason, within 24 hours before he took charge, orders for his second posting were made to the Tourism Corporation.

'I am not his spokesperson...' Uma Bharti on Shivraj's 'spilling pain'

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Former Chief Minister Uma Bharti reached Sehore on Thursday. He offered prayers in the ancient Ganesh temple of the city. During this, while discussing with the media, BJP's fire brand leader Uma Bharti bluntly said regarding the statements of former CM Shivraj Singh Chauhan that I am not his spokesperson. Only he will answer this.

Shivraj had given a statement on Tuesday in his constituency Budhni regarding not being able to become the Chief Minister of the state for the fifth time. The former CM said, "Many times one goes into exile before the coronation. This happens only to fulfill some purpose or the other. There must be some bigger purpose. Shivraj also added that my life is for my sisters, daughters and public. I will not let tears remain in my eyes, I will work day and night."

At the same time, BJP's fire brand leader



congratulated Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on the removal of Shajapur Collector Kishore Kanyal. Uma Bharti said, administrative officers are servants of the public and the government. A servant should talk like a servant. A government servant has no right to insult anyone.

Uma Bharti, one of the prominent faces of the Ram Mandir movement, said about going to Ayodhya, I have been called 6 days ago. Ram Lala's life is consecrated on 22nd January. I will reach on 18th. Regarding Lord Ram, he said that he is an example of an ideal life for dignity Indian culture and identity of India.

During this, in response to a question, the BJP leader said that she will not talk about contesting the Lok Sabha elections. Right now I am engrossed in Ayodhya. Before this, the former Chief Minister visited the ancient Ganesh temple of Sehore and offered prayers and wished for the prosperity and well-being of the state.



Ryan Gosling can 'make a hell of a pie'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actor Ryan Gosling, who has two daughters with partner Eva Mendes, has said that he can bake a terrific pie.

The actor credits his mother for passing on his baking skills to him and insisted he doesn't make a half-hearted attempt when he's rustling up a culinary treat, reports Female First UK.

Talking about his secret skill, he told W magazine: "I make a hell of a pie. I go with raspberries. My mom used to bake as a side hustle, and I've been lucky enough to get the pie gene. I flute my crust too, so don't let anyone tell you that I don't."

As per Female First UK, his 'Barbie' co-star

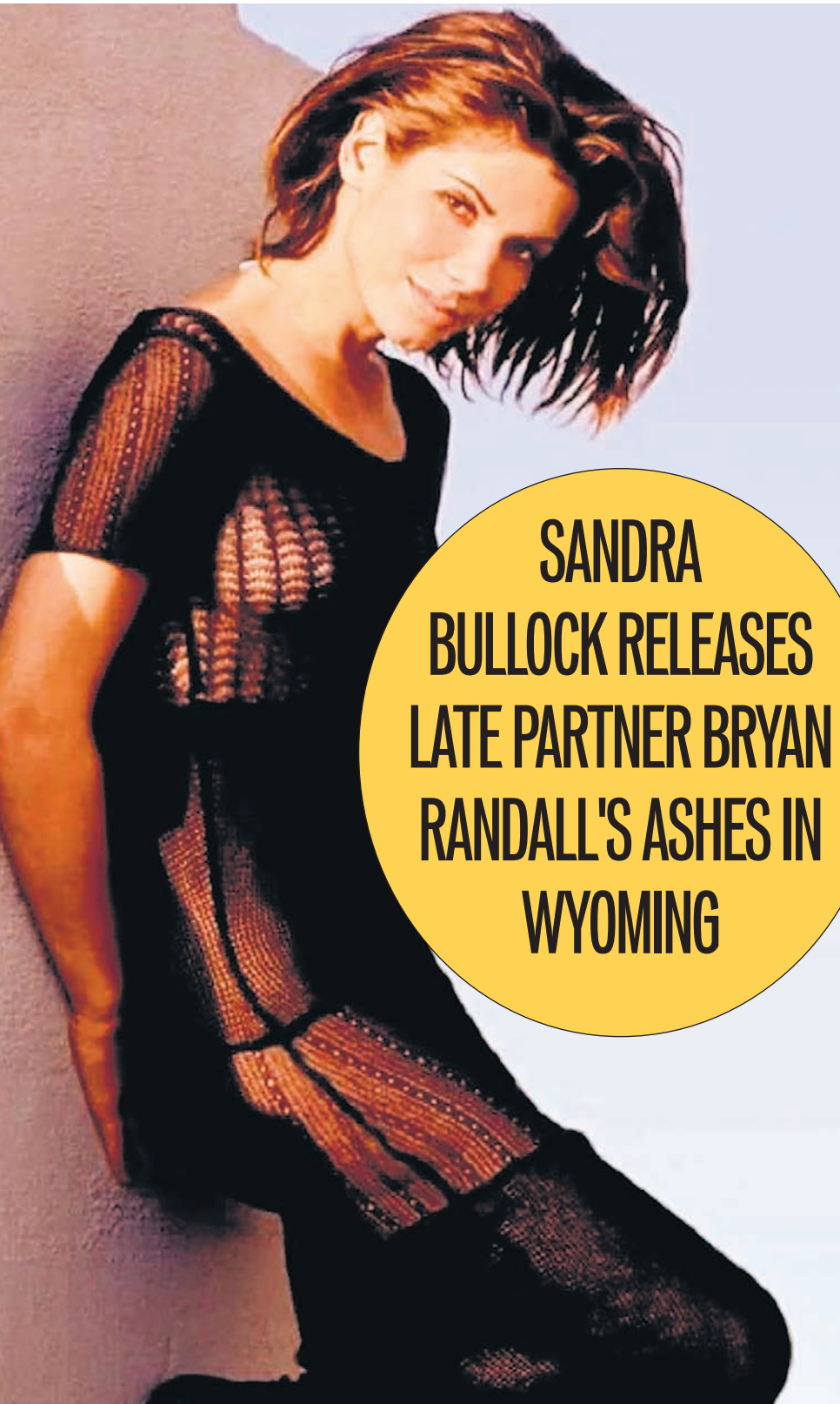


Margot Robbie joked she was "hurt" he hadn't shared his talent with her. She quipped: "I feel hurt that you've never made me one."

Ryan's song from 'Barbie', 'I'm Just Ken' is expected to be nominated for an Oscar when the Academy Awards shortlist is announced next month but he revealed he hasn't yet been asked to perform sing at the ceremony in March, as is customary for the tracks in the running for the Best Original Song gong - but the possibility is now going to be on his mind constantly.

Asked if he'll be singing at the Oscars, he said: "Well, I haven't been invited. And I wasn't thinking about it until now, and now it's all I'm going to think about."

Do you get paid to sing at the Oscars? Do you have to drive yourself? What kind of scratch is involved? They pick you up at least, right?"



SANDRA BULLOCK RELEASES LATE PARTNER BRYAN RANDALL'S ASHES IN WYOMING

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Sandra Bullock has honoured one of the final wishes of her partner Bryan Randall.

In an Instagram post, chef Gesine Bullock-Prado revealed that her actress sister had released her late partner's ashes on Snake River in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

"Happy birthday, Bry. Sandy brought you to the river, just as she promised," Bullock-Prado captioned a serene video of the scene, reports People magazine.

Bullock's longtime partner died on August 5

from ALS, a diagnosis he kept private for three years, his family said in a statement at the time.

A model-turned-photographer, Randall met the Oscar winner, 59, in 2015, when he photographed her son Louis' birthday at the time.

As per People, they took their relationship more public that year, including an appearance at Jennifer Aniston and Justin Theroux's wedding.

Bullock and Randall are parents to three children between them: Bullock's son Louis, 13, and daughter Laila, 11, plus Randall's older daughter from a previous relationship.



Hailey Bieber shares cheeky pictures from her beach vacation

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hailey Bieber posted a series of photos on her Instagram showing off her tropical Barbados vacation where she rang in the new year.

In several of the snaps, which she shared on Thursday, Bieber is enjoying the sun on a boat, reports People magazine.

"2024... I'm along for the ride," she captioned it. The first photo shows the Rhode skincare founder wearing a long white dress with her

hair in a bun as she stands on the sand as the sun is setting.

The next is much more casual, with Bieber's hair wrapped in a towel - highlighting her makeup-free face - and a pair of shorts hanging out of her bag as she exits the ocean.

As per People, the following several images put her figure on display, as she poses wearing a skimpy green bikini and a straw bucket hat. In one picture, Bieber is turned around, showing a cheeky display of her tan figure.

Bieber's close friend and fellow model Kendall Jenner also posted images taken on the beach, where they vacationed together. In her

post, Jenner, 28, posed next to Bieber in a long sheer Helsa gown - leaving little up to the imagination - as the pair stood oceanside.

"Years pass, and they seem faster and faster. Presence and time is all I can ask for," the caption began, reflecting on 2023. "So grateful for what has passed, so optimistic for what's to come. Go love the people you hold close to your heart, and don't waste a second."

"2024, shower me with love and laughter, gratitude and growth, patience and presence," she concluded.

Sources said that the 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' alum's ex, Bad Bunny, and Bieber's husband Justin Bieber were also on the trip.



AMBER HEARD HUMBLER BY AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO HER 'AQUAMAN 2' ROLE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actress Amber Heard, who reprised her role of Mera in 'Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom', is pleased with the response to her work from the audience.

The actress took to social media to acknowledge all the support she's been receiving from fans who watched the DC Studios film, reports Deadline.

"After all this time, 'Aquaman 2' made its splash (sorry, it's too easy)", Amber posted on Instagram along with a series of photos from the set of the movie.

"Thank you to all of my fans for the overwhelming support and love in Mera's AQ return. Thank you so much!"

As per Deadline, Amber first played the role of Mera in 2017's 'Justice League' before reprising her role in the 'Aquaman' film in 2018 directed by James Wan.

The Aquaman sequel directed by Wan from a screenplay by David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick was released on December 22, 2023.

'Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom' picks up several years after Arthur Curry (Jason Momoa) became king of Atlantis, married Mera, and had a son they named Arthur Jr.

The film's sequel was announced after the allegations Amber raised against Johnny Depp.

Warner Bros. removed Johnny from 'Fantastic Beasts 3' and an online petition to have Amber removed from the 'Aquaman' sequel garnered over 1.5 million signatures.

Earlier this year, Wan addressed rumours that Amber's involvement in the sequel was watered down.

David Tennant to host BAFTA Film Awards

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor David Tennant is set to host the BAFTA Film Awards for the first time. The actor, who is best known for playing Doctor Who, will oversee proceedings during the U.K.'s biggest night for film on February 18, at the Royal Festival Hall in London.

He said: "I am delighted to have been asked to host the EE BAFTA Film Awards and help celebrate the very best of this year's films and the many brilliant people who bring them to life," reports Variety.

Tennant's career across film, TV and stage also includes 'Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire', 'Good Omens' and 'Broadchurch'. He can currently be seen playing Macbeth at the Donmar Warehouse.

"We are over the moon that David Tennant will be our host for the 2024 EE BAFTA Film Awards," added BAFTA CEO Jane Millichip. "He is deservedly beloved by British and international audiences, alike. His warmth, charm and mischievous wit will make it a must-watch show next month for our guests at the Royal Festival Hall and the millions of people watching at home."

As per Variety, Tennant follows previous hosts Richard E. Grant and Rebel Wilson, who helmed the ceremony in 2023 and 2022, respectively, with the British Academy - which long relied on the services of Stephen Fry - now appear to go with new faces each year.

The news comes just ahead of the



revealing of the BAFTA longlists, covering all 24 categories, which will be announced on January 5. The final nominations will be unveiled on January 18 by former Rising Star award nominees Naomi Ackie and Kingsley Ben-Adir.

The BAFTA Film Awards will be broadcast on BBC One and iPlayer in the U.K., and on BritBox International in the U.S., Canada, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and South Africa.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Sara Sampaio



INDIA-PAKISTAN CLASH IN 2024 ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP TO HAPPEN IN NEW YORK ON JUNE 9

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India will face archrivals Pakistan in a highly anticipated clash of the 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup at Eisenhower Park in Nassau County, New York, on June 9. The tournament will take place from June 1-29, with the opening match to be played between co-hosts USA and Canada, as per the schedule released by broadcasters Star Sports. The 2024 event will be co-hosted by the West Indies and the United States.

India, the 2007 T20 World Cup winners, are slotted in Group A alongside Pakistan, USA, Canada and Ireland. They will be playing all of their group matches in the USA. India kick-off their campaign against Ireland on June 5 in New York, before facing Pakistan on June 9.

They will play their third game in New York against the USA on June 12, before facing off against Canada in Miami on June 15.

All of India's matches have a start time of 8:30 pm IST. The semifinals will be played on June 26 and 27 in Guyana and Trinidad respectively, before the final at Barbados on June 29. England are the defending champions, having beaten Pakistan in the 2022 T20 World Cup final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). The Jos Buttler-led side will open its title defence against their archrivals Australia on June 8 in Barbados. Canada, the USA and Uganda will be making their first-ever appearance at



a Men's T20 World Cup in 2024.

Overall, 55 matches will be played in the tournament, across six venues in the West Indies and three stadiums in the USA.

In the Caribbean, Kensington Oval in Barbados, Brian Lara Cricket Academy in Trinidad, Providence Stadium in Guyana, Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua, Darren Sammy Cricket Ground in St Lucia and Arnos Vale Stadium, St Vincent will be the hosts.

In the USA, Eisenhower Park in New York; Broward County in Lauderdalehill, Florida and Grand Prairie Stadium in Dallas, Texas, will be the

venues. The 20 teams will contest for the coveted silverware in the shortest format, which is an increase from 16 teams in the 2022 edition of the tournament in Australia.

The 20 teams will be divided into four groups of five each for the first round. The top two teams from each group will qualify for the Super Eight stage. In Super Eight, teams will be split into two groups of four each.

A1, B2, C1 and D2 finishers will be in one group, while A2, B1, C2 and D1 will be slotted in the other group. The top two sides from two groups of the Super Eight will advance to the semifinals.

2024 Men's T20 World Cup grouping

- Group A:** India, Pakistan, Ireland, Canada, USA
- Group B:** England, Australia, Namibia, Scotland, Oman
- Group C:** New Zealand, West Indies, Afghanistan, Uganda, Papua New Guinea
- Group D:** South Africa, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Netherlands, Nepal

PKL 10

U Mumba begin home leg in style, beat Bengaluru Bulls 40-35

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Young Bittu impressed with six tackle points on his debut as U Mumba got their home leg off to a rollicking start as they earned a commanding 40-35 win over Bengaluru Bulls in the Pro Kabaddi League Season 10 match at the DOME by NSCI here on Friday.

Buoyed by a boisterous home crowd, U Mumba went all guns blazing from the first raid and inflicted an All-Out as early as the 7th minute. Guman Singh and Amirmohammad Zafardanesh picked points at will and the U Mumba defence was rock-solid as Bittu's tackle on Aman put U Mumba ahead 11-3. Bengaluru Bulls were forced to play catch up thereon. Their first tackle point came only in the 11th minute and that summed up their defensive show as they struggled to contain U Mumba's three-pronged raiding unit. Bulls' ace raider Bharat was unable to find a rhythm and Vikash Kandola offered some hope but failed to capitalize on numerous chances to inflict the All-Out on U Mumba. The home team played with



3 men for nearly five minutes and held on to go into the break with a 19-10 lead.

U Mumba extended their lead early into the second half as Zafardanesh's multi-point raid reduced the Bulls to 2 men. Sushil came off the bench to the Bulls' rescue and scored 6 quickfire points and Aman claimed a Super Tackle, but it still wasn't enough to stop U Mumba from grabbing a second All-Out. With 12 minutes left, the hosts sat pretty at 28-18. The former PKL winner brought on a couple of players from the bench for the remainder of the match as they dominated the proceedings. Bittu, who replaced Rinku in the

U Mumba line-up, trapped Bharat in a fine tackle to claim a High 5. The Bulls' veteran defender Surjeet Singh produced a moment of magic towards the end of the game as he outwitted 3 defenders to execute the first Super Raid of the match. Incidentally, this was also the first Super Raid of Surjeet's PKL career.

Sachin Narwal followed it up with another sublime Super Raid and U Mumba had just two men left on the mat. The Bulls went on to bag an All-Out in the final raid of the match, but it wasn't enough to erase their deficit as U Mumba clinched their 5th win on the trot.

IWL 2023-24

Indumathi strikes to give Odisha FC third win in a row

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

Indumathi Kathiresan's goal from the penalty spot in the 66th minute secured the third consecutive victory for Odisha FC over Sethu FC in the Indian Women's League (IWL) 2023-24 at the Bhubaneswar Football Academy Stadium on Friday.

The victory not only fetched Odisha FC three points but also took them to the top of the IWL table with nine points from three matches with a perfect defensive record of zero goals conceded so far. It took 65 minutes and a foul inside the penalty box by Sonali Chemate for the Odisha attack to break the stout Sethu FC defensive wall. The hosts put on a stellar performance and dominated ball possession in the midfield throughout the match, but it was the lack of quality in the final third that kept the scores level in the first half.

Sethu FC opened the game with a high tempo in the first five minutes as they troubled the Odisha defence numerous times. But Odisha FC weathered this storm of attack and got back into the game as they started domi-



inating. Pyari Xaxa squandered an early opportunity to give the hosts the lead as her header from a brilliant cross just fizzled past the post. Sethu FC's defence breathed a sigh of relief as Indumathi hit the post from close range in the 27th minute. All the pressure finally paid off as Pyari Xaxa trickled past the Sethu FC defence with her quick feet and was fouled from behind by Sonali Chemate inside the box. The referee was quick to point to the spot and Indumathi made no mistake and comfortably put the ball in the bottom left corner to give Odisha the lead. Sethu FC seemed desperate for a goal in the final stages, but it was the lack of quality in the final third that led them down throughout the match. Sethu FC faced their first defeat of the season, which now puts them in third place with four points from three matches.

LATE PENALTY SAVES BARCA, VALVERDE CELEBRATES 500TH GAME IN LA LIGA

Los Angeles | Agencies

Ilkay Gundogan scored an injury-time penalty to give FC Barcelona a 2-1 win in Las Palmas on Thursday to keep their La Liga title hopes alive.

The game passed the 90-minute mark with the score at 1-1, which would have left Barca nine points behind Real Madrid and Girona, but the German international won the spot kick after he was pushed by Daley Sinkgraven as he looked to nod home a loose ball, reported Xinhua.

Two former Barcelona players, Sandro and Munir, had combined to give Las Palmas an 11th-minute lead, with Barca keeper Inaki Pena's hesitation allowing Munir to bundle home Sandro's cross.

Barca could have been further behind before the break when Sandro hit the post after Pena blocked Javi Munoz's shot.

Without a shot on target in the first half, Barca leveled on 55 minutes when Ferran Torres finished calmly after Las Palmas had failed to clear a ball in their area.

Joao Felix and Lamine Yamal came



on for Barcelona, and Victor Roque made his debut with 12 minutes left but missed an open goal which would have made it 3-1 after Gundogan's penalty.

Also on Thursday, Athletic Bilbao coach Ernesto Valverde celebrated his 500th game in a La Liga dugout by watching his team move into the top four with a 2-0 win away to Sevilla. Athletic completely controlled the

first half against their leaden rivals and the surprise was they only led 1-0 thanks to Mikel Vesga's 30th-minute header. Nico Williams hit the post for Athletic at the start of the second half, after which the home fans tried to get behind their team.

In the 74th minute, Aitor Paredes scored his first goal for Athletic as he latched onto a curling cross from Ander Herrera.

The defeat leaves Sevilla with 16 points from 19 matches, and Sergio Ramos had a verbal confrontation with a fan as he was giving his post-game interview.

Elsewhere, Ante Budimir's first-half goal gave Osasuna a 1-0 win at home to bottom side Almeria, which means the Pamplona outfit travel to Saudi Arabia for the Super Cup in mid-table, while Almeria complete half a season without a win and with just five points from 19 games, the second worst start to a season in their history.

On Wednesday, Real Madrid ensured they reach the halfway point of the season as league leaders with a 1-0 win at home to Mallorca, but Girona remain level with them on 48 points after a thrilling 4-3 win at home to Atletico Madrid.

Celta Vigo climbed out of the bottom three with a 2-1 win at home to Real Betis, and Granada claimed their second win of the campaign with a 2-0 victory over Cadiz.

On Tuesday, Rayo Vallecano won 2-0 away to Getafe, who had three players shown red cards, Valencia won 3-1 at home to Villarreal, and Real Sociedad and Alaves drew 1-1.

AUSTRALIA LEAPFROGS INDIA TO REGAIN NO.1 TEST RANKING

Dubai | Agencies

Australia has reclaimed its Test throne at the summit of the Men's Test Team Rankings as India's command at the top of the Men's Test Rankings comes to an end.

The ICC World Test Championship 2023 winners secured the No.1 spot after India's hard-fought 1-1 series draw against South Africa.

Australia's stellar performance on home soil against Pakistan proved pivotal in their ascent to the top, a position they briefly held following their WTC Final victory. The closely contested battle for supremacy saw India and Australia tied with 118 rating points each before this update.

Australia are 2-0 up in a three-match Test series against Pakistan with the third ongoing Test at Sydney



Cricket Ground. Under the leadership of Pat

Cummins, Australia's cricketing accolades in the past year have been nothing

short of spectacular. Alongside their ICC World Test Championship Final triumph, they also clinched the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023, showcasing their prowess across formats.

The ongoing third Test between Australia and Pakistan, coupled with the upcoming five-match Test series between India and England, scheduled to start from January 25 in Hyderabad, promises further excitement and potential shifts in the Test Team Rankings.

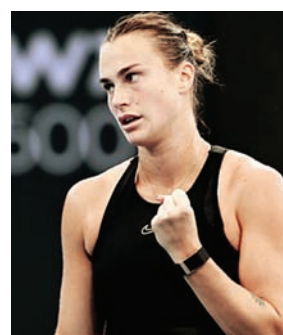
The battle for the top spot intensifies, with crucial ICC World Test Championship points up for grabs, adding another layer of significance to these upcoming clashes. As the cricketing world eagerly awaits the outcomes, the narrative of supremacy in the Test arena unfolds with each gripping match.

Brisbane International: Sabalenka wins 14th in a row in Australia; Rune, Dimitrov seal SF spots

Brisbane | Agencies

Aryna Sabalenka racked up a 14th straight win on Australian soil after dispatching Kasatkina 6-1, 6-4 to reach the final four of the Brisbane International. The defending Australian Open champion has dropped just nine games through three matches so far this week in her first appearance at the tournament.

She will next face No.8 seed Victoria Azarenka in what will be the pair's fifth career meeting; Sabalenka owns a 3-1 head-to-head lead so far, including wins in the 2020 Ostrava final and their most recent meeting in



the 2021 Montreal quarterfinals.

In the men's singles, top seed Holger Rune of Denmark rode a fast start to down James Duckworth 6-2, 7-6(6) and reached the semifinals. The 20-year-old Rune

reeled off five games in a row to seize the opening set inside Pat Rafter Arena before digging deep to clinch a second-set tie-break and seal a one-hour, 46-minute triumph in his maiden ATP Head-to-Head clash with home favourite Duckworth.

The Dane will look to continue his impressive start to the year in his semifinal against Roman Safiullin, who defeated Matteo Arnaldi 7-6(4), 6-2 earlier on Friday.

Meanwhile, second seed Grigor Dimitrov also booked his spot in the last four with a straight-sets win. The Bulgarian overcame Rinky Hijikata 6-1, 6-4 to reach his fifth Brisbane semifinal.

KOHLI, JADEJA, CUMMINS AND HEAD NOMINATED FOR ICC MEN'S CRICKETER OF THE YEAR 2023 AWARD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Talismanic India batter Kohli, left-arm spin all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, along with Australia captain Pat Cummins and left-handed batter Travis Head have been nominated for the ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year 2023 award.

Kohli, who is also nominated for the ICC Men's ODI Player of the Year 2023 award, is in contention to win his third Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy, given to the winner of this honour, after amassing 2048 runs in 35 matches in 2023. He had won this award previously in 2017 and 2018.

In Tests, Kohli began with an important 44 against Australia in the second Test of the 2023 Border-Gavaskar Series at his hometown New Delhi, which helped India post a solid total in the first innings of a game they went on to win.

In the final game of the same series, Kohli hit a majestic 186 at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, also his first Test century since 2019. It didn't take him much time to add to that number, hitting a 121 against the West Indies.



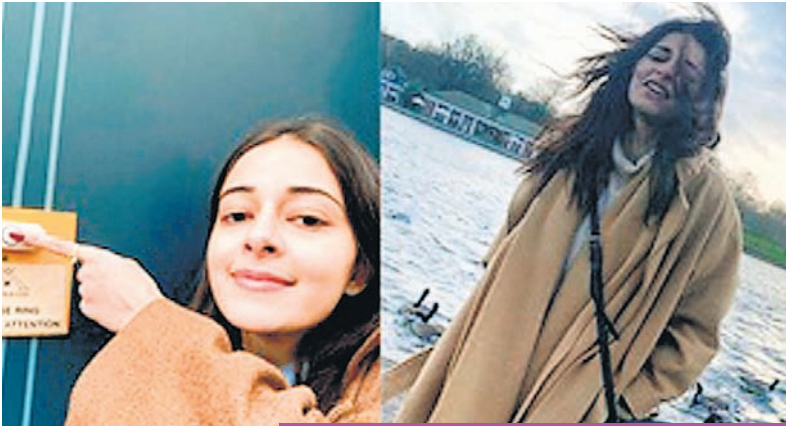
It was in the ODI format that Kohli shone the brightest, hitting six ODI hundreds, and finishing with 50 centuries in the

format. This helped him become the player with the most ODI hundreds, overtaking India legend Sachin Tendulkar in

the process, when he smashed 117 against New Zealand in the ODI World Cup semi-final. His stupendous run in the World Cup, helped India reach the final, where they finished runners-up. The batter hit 765 runs, the most by any player in any single edition of the World Cup, and was eventually awarded Player of the Tournament. If he wins, it would be Kohli's third Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy, the most by any men's player.

The 2023 was also the year Jadeja made a successful return to the field after a knee injury which needed surgery forcing him to miss the Asia Cup and 2022 Men's T20 World Cup. In 2023, Jadeja made 613 runs and 66 wickets in 35 matches across all formats.

Jadeja picked 22 wickets in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at home and played an important role in India winning the series. He also made a resilient 70 in the first Test against Australia at Nagpur that helped India to a massive lead and then ran through the batting order to take 7/42 in Australia's second innings at New Delhi, where his match haul was 10/110.



It was time for reboot,' says Ananya Panday as she unveils her holiday album



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Ananya Panday, who was in the UK for her New Year vacation, on Friday dropped her holiday album, and it is full of fun, candid pictures full of love, lights and celebrations.

Ananya went for the year-end vacation with her rumoured boyfriend Aditya Roy Kapur. A viral picture shows the actors enjoying ice skating in the UK.

However, Ananya in her holiday album did not share Aditya's photo. The album included pictures of the 'Liger' actress flaunting her natural beauty.

One picture features Ananya posing against picturesque backdrop of London with lakes and birds.

The other snap shows Ananya enjoying cuisines of London. There is also a glimpse of beautifully decorated

Christmas tree, heart-shaped chocolates.

One photograph also shows the 25-year-old actress enjoying ice-skating.

The post was given a geotag of London. It was captioned as: "Happy new year!!! I know I'm slightly late but like Ahana said at the end of 'Kho Gaye Hum Kahan' - it was time for a reboot and a couple of resolutions every year we try to change ourselves but this year I hope you can be completely yourself."

Ananya was referring to her character of Ahana in the recently released coming-of-age drama 'Kho Gaye Hum Kahan'. Directed by Arjun Varain Singh, the flick also stars Siddhant Chaturvedi and Adarsh Gourav.

The film revolves around three friends who navigate their goals and relationships against the pressures of social media.

Sanjay Dutt remembers mother Nargis: Wish I had spent more time with her

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt got nostalgic as he went down memory lane, remembering his late mother and legendary actress Nargis, and shared how she would ask him to spend more time with her.

Sanjay appeared in the weekend episode of the singing reality show 'Indian Idol Season 14'. The special episode is titled 'Celebrating Sanjay Dutt'.

The actor shares interesting trivia from his time in the entertainment industry, along with memories of his parents making for an intriguing episode.

But it was contestant Ananya Pal, from Kolkata, whose voice is termed as 'Misthi Dhoi', and she won everyone's heart yet again with her beautiful rendition of the songs, 'Tu Shayar Hai Main Teri Shayari' from the 1991 movie 'Saajan', 'Roz Roz Aankhon Tale' from 1986 movie 'Jeeva' and 'Aisa Sama Na Hota' from the 1984 movie 'Zameen Aasmaan'.

Impressed with her performance, Sanjay, who played an anonymous poet in the movie 'Saajan', complimented Ananya in a 'Shayari' style, saying, "Dil karta hai ki sunta hi jau, aisi pyaari aapki aawaz hai."

After her performance, judge Shreya Ghoshal requested Sanjay to elaborate on the equation he shared with his father, late Sunil Dutt. He said: "I can only say that sometimes we take our parents for granted, assuming that they will always be there for



us. But there was something that my mother had told me that comes to my mind now."

'Love & duas': Sushmita Sen on 'babush' Rohman Shawl's birthday

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sushmita Sen has penned a birthday wish for her ex-boyfriend Rohman Shawl, wishing him a "toast" of happiness and abundance of love.

Sushmita and Rohman were in a romantic relationship from 2018 to 2021. The former Miss Universe had announced their break up through an Instagram post on December 23, 2021.

Now, on the occasion of Rohman's birthday, the 'Aankhen' actress shared a mirror selfie, wherein both can be seen in winter outfits.

Sushmita is wearing a black jogger and a matching leather jacket, and paired it

with a grey beanie cap and grey boots.

On the other hand, Rohman is wearing a black joggers and matching jacket.

The birthday post reads: "Happyyyyy Birthday Babushhhhhh @rohmanshawl. A toast to your happiness always!!! Abundance of love & Duas!!! Mmuuuuaah!!!!"

Rohman commented on the picture, and wrote: "Thank you Babushh."

Sushmita's daughter Renee wrote: "I love this picture."

Sushmita has two adopted daughters Renee and Alisah.

Meanwhile, on the work front, Sushmita was last seen in season 3 of the crime thriller drama 'Aarya'. She also portrayed Gauri Sawant in the web series 'Taali'.



Sharad Kelkar: Animation gives us power to draw the audience in

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Sharad Kelkar, who is the voice of Ravan in the upcoming series 'The Legend of Hanuman 3', has shared how the series is enjoyed by people of all ages, and said that animation gives us the power to draw the audience in.

The show brings together viewers from different age groups, making it enjoyable for everyone.

Talking about the same, Sharad said: "I think we can take a lot of liberty with animation. We can create anything from our imagination. Technically also with animation, we can achieve a lot more by creating a very visually immersive world around the story, which is harder to bring alive in live action, especially when creating a show like this."

The 'Bhoomi' actor went on to say, "You can create a fantasy medium with



animation which is why it's very popular with kids. I learned this from my daughter. She literally feels that if she's watching some animation, she is in that world."

"But with this show we have drawn in all age groups and families as well. Animation gives us that power to draw the audience in. It's very inclusive," he added.

Sharad has earlier lent his voice to the characters like Malcolm for 'Dawn of the Planet of the Apes', Ronan the Accuser for 'Guardians of the Galaxy', and 'Captain Marvel', Deckard Shaw for 'Furious 7', Raghav for 'Adipurush', Amrendra Baahubali for the movie 'Baahubali', among many others.

'The Legend of Hanuman Season 3' is slated to release on January 12, showcasing the timeless tales of Ramayana as the saga of Hanuman unfolds.

It is produced by Graphic India and created by Sharad Devarajan, Jeevan J Kang and Charuvi Agrawal.

Janhvi Kapoor oozes elegance in saree, begins new year with spiritual bliss



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Janhvi Kapoor on Friday dropped glimpses of herself in a traditional attire, visiting a temple which seems to be in South India, and said "now it feels like 2024."

Janhvi is the daughter of late legendary actress Sridevi, and filmmaker Boney Kapoor. Sridevi was born in Tamil Nadu, and her elder daughter Janhvi is often seen sharing her admiration for southern India.

The diva, who has 23.3 million followers on Instagram, shared a series of photos, in which Janhvi is looking fresh and happy in the sun kissed pictures.

The 'Dhadak' actress is wearing a traditional South Indian saree, which is golden in

colour, and is basking in the winter sun.

For the accessories, she opted for a diamond necklace and matching earrings. Janhvi sported a minimal makeup look, with blushed cheeks, and nude pink lips. The look was completed with a purple bindi. The last photo shows stairs of a temple.

The 'Roohi' actress captioned the post: "And now it feels like 2024 has begun."

Though, she did not mention the location in the pictures.

Meanwhile, on the work front she next has 'Mr and Mrs Mahi', and 'Ulajh'.

Janhvi will also be seen in Telugu action drama 'Devara', directed by Koratala Siva. It stars NTR Jr, and Saif Ali Khan.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Saie Manjrekar