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SC affirms Centre's 2016 decision to demonetise currency notes of Rs 1000, Rs 500

VALID BY 4:1 MAJORITY

A five-judge constitution bench headed by Justice S.A. Nazeer and comprising Justices B.R. Gavai, A.S. Bopanna, V. Ramasubramanian, and B.V. Nagarathna pronounced the judgment on a clutch of petitions challenging the Centre's 2016 decision to demonetise currency notes of Rs 1,000 and Rs 500 denominations. Justice Nagarathna differed from the majority judgment on the point of powers of the Central government under Section 26(2) RBI Act.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday upheld the validity of Centre's November 2016 decision to demonetise Rs 500 and Rs 1000 currency notes, saying that from the record, it appears that there was consultation between the RBI and the Central government for a period of six months.

Justice Gavai, pronouncing the majority judgment, said the court has scrutinised the records and after examining the records, found that the decision-making process cannot be flawed merely because the procedure has emanated from the central government.

During the demonetisation period Urjit R. Patel was the RBI's governor and before him it was Raghuram Rajan, whose tenure lasted from September 4, 2013 to September 4, 2016.

Citing the apex court judgments, Justice Gavai said it has been held that there has to be great deal of restraint, while interfering with the matters pertaining to economic policy is concerned and the court cannot substitute its judgment for that of the legislature or the executive.



Justice Gavai said the notification dated November 8, 2016 was valid and satisfies the test of proportionality and this notification cannot be struck down on the ground of decision

making process.

During the hearing, the Centre had told the Supreme Court that the November 2016 decision to withdraw legal tender of Rs 500 and 1,000 currency notes was one of the critical steps in the series of transformational economic policy steps and this decision was taken after extensive consultation with the RBI and advance preparations.

The Ministry of Finance, in an affidavit, said: "The withdrawal of legal tender character of a significant portion of total currency value was a well-considered decision. It was taken after extensive consultation with the RBI and advance preparations." It further added that demonetisation was also a part of a larger strategy for combating the menace of fake money, terror financing, black money and tax evasion.

TO SAY DEMONETISATION WAS UPHELD IS MISLEADING, WRONG: CONG

New Delhi: The Congress on Monday while reacting to the Supreme Court judgement on demonetisation said the court only pronounced its verdict on whether Section 26(2) of the RBI Act, 1934 was correctly applied or not before the announcement was made on November 8, 2016 by the Centre, and to say that it has been upheld by the court was "totally misleading and wrong". Nothing more, nothing less. One Hon'ble Judge in her dissenting opinion has said that Parliament should not have been bypassed," Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said.

WILL RAHUL GANDHI NOW SAY SORRY: BJP

"It is a historic decision and is in national interest. The Supreme Court has held a decision taken in national interest valid. Will Rahul Gandhi now say sorry for his campaign against demonetisation. He spoke against it even abroad." *Ravi Shankar Prasad, BJP leader*

Third of global economy will be in recession this year: IMF



Washington | Agencies

International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief Kristalina Georgieva has warned that a third of the global economy will be in recession this year and 2023 will be "tougher" than 2022 as the US, EU and China will see their economies slow. "We expect one third of the world economy to be in recession," the BBC quoted Georgieva as saying to CBS News on Sunday.

"Even countries that are not in recession, it would feel like recession for hundreds of millions of people," she added. The IMF chief further warned that China, the world's second largest economy, will face a difficult start to 2023. "China has slowed down dramatically in 2022 because of this tight zero-Covid policy. For the first

time in 40 years China's growth in 2022 is likely to be at or below global growth. That has never happened before. For the next couple of months, it would be tough for China, and the impact on Chinese growth would be negative, the impact on the region will be negative, the impact on global growth will be negative," she said.

The warning comes as the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, rising prices, higher interest rates and the new wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in China weigh on the global economy. In October 2022, the IMF had cut its global economic growth outlook for 2023 due to the war in Ukraine as well as higher interest rates as central banks around the world attempt to rein in rising prices, the BBC reported.

MLAs poaching case: Telangana HC upholds lower court order

Hyderabad: The Telangana High Court on Monday dismissed an appeal by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) challenging order of a special ACB court which had aside a memo to array BJP national General Secretary B.L. Santhosh and three others as accused in the MLAs' poaching case. The ACB special court had last month rejected the memo and the SIT had challenged this in the High Court. The ACB special court had observed neither police nor SIT is competent to investigate the offences relating to the Prevention of Corruption Act and only the Special Police Establishment/Anti-Corruption Bureau is the competent authority to do so.

Malegaon Blast Case

Key accused's request for discharge rejected

Causing bomb blast not an official duty, says Bombay HC on accused's plea

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Monday rejected an appeal filed by Lieutenant Colonel Prasad Shrikant Purohit seeking discharge in the 2008 Malegaon blast case.

Purohit and six others, including BJP MP Pragya Singh Thakur, are facing trial in the case of the blast that killed six people and left more than 100 injured in September 2008. All the accused are currently out on bail.

Among other grounds for seeking discharge, Purohit had claimed lack of sanction under relevant provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc) to prosecute him. However, a bench of Justices A S Gadgarkar and Prakash Naik rejected his plea, saying the sanction was not needed as "he was not on official duty".

On September 29, 2008, six people were killed and more than 100 injured when an



explosive device strapped to a motorcycle went off near a mosque in Malegaon, a communally sensitive town in Maharashtra's Nashik district. According to the Maharashtra Police that conducted an initial probe into the case, the motorbike to which the explosive was strapped was registered in Pragma Thakur's name, which led to her arrest.

Never forced Tunisha to embrace Islam, her mother neglected her: Sheezan's family

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Arrested actor Sheezan Khan's family and legal team on Monday hit back at the allegations made by late actress Tunisha's mom Vanita Sharma, saying that they "never compelled her to embrace Islam" while revealing details about the alleged rocky relations of the mother-daughter.

Khan's family - sisters Falaq and Shafaz, mother Parveen, and lawyer Shailendra Mishra - rubbished Vanita Sharma's claims made on December 30, that they were pressuring her to convert to Islam, and that she had started sporting a 'hijab' against her wishes.

They also denied ever taking her to a 'dargah' or making her wear a hijab, as claimed by Vanita Sharma and her uncle Pawan Sharma.

The Khans pointed out that the viral photo of Tunisha sporting a 'hijab' was actually from the shoots of her show, "Ali Baba: Dastaan-E-Kabul", currently being shot in Vasai, where she (Tunisha) was found dead on December 24.

Addressing the media, the Khan family said that on the contrary, Vanita Sharma was forcing Tunisha to work though she was suffering depression.

"Tunisha was suffering from depression due to a



childhood trauma.. She was made to sign up for two music videos though she was not interested... If her mother had not forced her to work and given her professional mental treatment on time, she would have been alive today," said Shafaz Khan.

They further claimed that Tunisha's relations with her mom were strained and Vanita Sharma had allegedly once tried to strangle her daughter and even smashed her mobile phone.

"Tunisha never wanted to act. She wanted to study and travel, see the world, but her family never allowed her out. First time she went to a beach with us, that poor girl," said Falaq.

On the alleged break-up, the Khans said that it was their mutual decision as they both decided to first concentrate on their acting careers and take a call later, "and Vanita was the happiest at this break-up".

CONG INVITES MAJOR PARTIES AS BHARAT JODO YATRA SET TO RESUME

New Delhi: With the Bharat Jodo Yatra set to resume from Tuesday, the Congress has invited several major non-BJP parties to participate in it.

Sources said that many - but not all - non-BJP parties have been invited, as the party has extended invitation to parties as against leaders and MPs earlier. The Congress has got response from BSP leader Mayawati and SP leader Akhilesh Yadav who have sent their good wishes.

The Yatra will resume from Delhi on January 3, and go to Uttar Pradesh the same day and stay there till January 5, be in Haryana from January 6 to 10, Punjab from January 11 to 2, while spending a day in Himachal Pradesh on the January 19.

The Yatra will enter Jammu and Kashmir on the evening of January 20 and end with flag hoisting on Srinagar on the January 30.



CENTRE REVISES GUIDELINES FOR AIR PASSENGERS FROM IDENTIFIED HIGH RISK COUNTRIES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India on Monday issued revised guidelines for international air passengers arriving from identified high-risk countries including China, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Japan, mandating an RT-PCR test.

"As per the revised guidelines, a mandatory requirement for pre-departure RT-PCR testing (to be conducted within 72 hours prior to undertaking the journey) has been introduced for passengers in all international flights from these countries," the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said in a statement. This will also apply to transiting passengers through the countries irrespective of their originating countries before coming to any



Indian airport, it said.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Civil Aviation's Air Suvidha portal has to be made operational for passengers on all international flights from these countries to submit negative RT-PCR test reports as well as to submit self-declaration form, the Health Ministry said in a communication. The existing practice of post

arrival random testing of 2 per cent travellers (irrespective of port of departure) shall continue, it said.

The Ministry said that the guidelines has been revised in the context of the evolving trajectory of Covid-19 cases in some countries, especially China and Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Japan.

DELHI HORROR: WOMAN DRAGGED 10-12 KM UNDER CAR

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The woman, who was killed in the horrific accident on Delhi's outskirts on late Saturday, was dragged 10 to 12 km from Sultanpuri to Kanjhawala under the vehicle, police said on Monday.

Addressing a press conference here, Special Commissioner of Police, Law and Order, Sagar Preet Hooda, said that a medical board has been constituted to conduct the post-mortem. "The accused will be taken to the crime scene for recreation. Detailed interrogation would take place and timelines would be drawn on the basis of CCTV footage and digital evidence. The story of the accused will be verified," he said.

"The victim's family is being updated about the



investigation, on the basis of CCTV footage and digital evidence," Hooda said, assuring that the police will gather all necessary evidence to ensure that the accused get the strictest punishment.

The five men identified as Deepak Khanna, Amit Khanna, Krishan, Mitthu, and Manoj Mittal were arrested on Sunday.

The incident took place in the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday in the Kanjhawala area after the

victim's scooter was hit by the car and her clothes had gotten entangled in the car and she was dragged along under it.

Meanwhile, Delhi Lt Governor V.K. Saxena took stock of the developments in a meeting with Police Commissioner and reiterated his direction that every angle and aspect of the case be looked into and the strictest possible sections of the IPC be invoked against the accused.

MARKETS WELCOME 2023 ON A POSITIVE NOTE

Chennai | Agencies

Indian bourses welcomed the New Year 2023 on a high note, said Motilal Oswal Financial Services on Monday.

The absence of global cues, strong macros and expectations of healthy corporate earnings provided the support to domestic equities, said Siddhartha Khemka, its Head - Retail Research.

Nifty opened higher and remained in positive territory throughout the day to close with gains of 92 points at 18,197 levels. Majority sectors ended in green.

"Going forward, we expect market to remain steady with a positive bias ahead of the December quarterly results and run up to the crucial Union Budget in February," Khemka said.

"This should drive sector specific action in the market. Metals are likely to continue its northward movement as it benefits from the exports duty hike in China along with fall in the US dollar index - which is down to 7 months' low at



103," he said.

Some stock specific action would be also seen in auto sector stocks after it reported decent December sales numbers. Oil producing companies would be focus as Brent crude prices surged to one month high, Khemka said.

"The uncertainty of the impact of recession in 2023 lingers. Some are relying on central banks pivoting to interest rate cuts, and the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict while others are on the lookout for risks that may throw markets back into turmoil," said Mitul Shah - Head of Research, Reliance Securities.

Central banks across the globe are warning about a prolonged inflation fight while Russia-Ukraine war and Covid cases in China threatening to keep energy and raw material prices high.

Profitability expected to improve in 3QFY23 after earnings in 2QFY23 witnessed margin pressure. The markets are likely to remain volatile for the next couple of weeks, Shah added.

Delhi gets 50 high-tech e-buses as a New Year gift

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi witnessed the launching of 50 new low-floor electric buses on Monday.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal flagged off the new low-floor electric buses from Rajghat DTC Depot, marking another milestone in Delhi's e-bus revolution aimed at significantly curbing pollution in the state.

"It is a matter of great happiness that 50 new electric buses are being inducted into Delhi's bus fleet today. With this, Delhi now boasts of 300 electric buses that have been procured within a very short span of time. I congratulate all the officers behind this mission and the people of Delhi upon getting such good facilities to commute.

"With the induction of 50 new electric buses today, Delhi now has 7,379 buses under its city bus transportation fleet. This includes 4,060 buses being operated under Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and 3,319 buses being operated under DIMTS (Delhi Integrated Multimodal Transit Systems). This is the highest ever number of buses in Delhi's fleet," he said.

Kejriwal said the Delhi government has recently started the process of taking over the operations of 100 Electric Feeder Buses of the



Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and plan to operate a total of 480 feeder buses in the city in 2023. "This means we already have 400 e-buses in Delhi, with 100 plying on metro feeder routes. Mumbai has 406 e-buses, the highest in the country. We have 6 buses behind them but we'll be far ahead of them very soon. "Besides being equipped with CCTVs, Panic Buttons and all other modern tech, these buses are very eco-friendly. Pollution is amongst the biggest woes of Delhi and these buses are going to radically aid the cause of curbing pollution. Delhiites have been making succinct efforts against pollution and just this morning it was reported that 2022 was the least polluted year in the last 7 years," he added.

Mob attacks church in Chhattisgarh over conversions, SP injured

Raipur | Agencies

A mob attacked and vandalised a church in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district due to conflicts over religious conversions. The Superintendent of Police, who reached the spot, suffered injuries in the attack.

According to sources, two tribal groups, the Sarv Adivasi Samaj and the converted villagers, had been at loggerheads over religious conversion. The converted people accused the others of troubling them.

The opposing group took out a rally on Monday and alleged that the conversions were forced and done by



allurement.

The crowd participating in the rally became unruly and vandalised the church at Bangalpara. Despite the presence of police, SP Sadanand Kumar was also attacked.

Kumar said that the people were told to protest peacefully,

when some of them charged towards the church. Kumar added that he, along with the police, pacified the agitators when someone attacked him from behind, causing head injury.

The SP apprised that the situation

BSF CAUGHT 22 PAKISTANI FISHERMEN, SEIZED HEROIN IN GUJ IN 2022

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Border Security Force's (BSF) Gujarat Frontier achieved great success in thwarting infiltration and drug smuggling in 2022, arresting 22 Pakistani fishermen on the international border in the state and seizing heroin, valued at Rs 320 crore, in different operations.

The BSF's Gujarat Frontier is responsible for guarding the 826 km India-Pakistan border, from Rajasthan's Barmer to the Rann of Kutch, and the coastal areas including creeks.

The BSF apprised that it caught 22 Pakistani fishermen, who had infiltrated the Indian border and seized 79 fishing boats in the difficult, marshy terrain of the Harami Nala located in Bhuj sector and Sir Creek.

According to the information, troopers recovered 50 packets of



heroin valued at Rs 250 crore from the coastal and creek areas.

Apart from this, 61 packets of hashish valued at Rs 2.49 crore have been seized.

On the other hand, in a joint operation with ATS Jodhpur in Barmer, the force recovered 14 packets of heroin valued at Rs 70 crore.

The BSF confiscated Rs 12.05 lakh cash from the smugglers. In addition, 22 Indians, 4 Pakistanis, 2 Bangladeshis, 2 Canadians and a Rohingya were arrested for their involvement in illegal cross-border activities.

A BSF official said that more than 350 women personnel effectively guard the borders despite the vagaries of nature.

At the same time, BSF Gujarat is strengthening its hold in inaccessible areas like Sir Creek and Harami Nala by making permanent bases.

Himachal CM donates salary for students' education

Shimla | Agencies

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Monday announced he would contribute his first salary to the Chief Minister Sukhashray Sahayata Kosh as a part of his social responsibility.

It is a step towards humanity and serving those who are deprived of getting higher education. It would also give them a way to lead a respectable and a life of dignity, he said.

This relief fund was constituted on the first day of New Year by the state government, with an aim to help needy students and destitute women to get their higher education.



The amount received under this fund would be spent in providing quality higher education to the destitute women and students.

The Chief Minister said a specific amount would be given to these students and women which would help them in acquiring desired higher education.

300 unnamed advocates booked for blocking traffic for 9 hrs in Lucknow

Lucknow: | Agencies

Nearly 300 unidentified advocates have been booked for blocking the highway and attempting to lay siege to the police station for over nine hours.

The Mohanlalganj police said on Monday that the lawyers were protesting the incident in which two sub inspectors had detained an advocate and allegedly misbehaved with him.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) South, Rahul Raj, said that unidentified advocates have been booked under the charges of rioting, punishment for wrongful restraint, breach of peace and other relevant charges.

"I have removed the two sub-



inspectors from the Mohanlalganj police station to Gomti Nagar who were accused of detaining the advocate," said the DCP.

Commuters along with ambulances remained stuck on the road for several hours. Senior officials reached the scene and counselled the agitated group of advocates who were demanding immediate suspension of the sub inspector and action against the ACP.

The protest took place after a bike collided with the car of an advocate when he was returning home. One of the bike riders suffered injuries and the villagers surrounded the car. They informed the police. A team reached the scene and the advocate was taken to the police station.

Soon the lawyers assembled and started the protest in the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday which led to massive traffic jams on the highway.

NITISH SHOULD REVIEW LIQUOR BAN, RISING CRIME INSTEAD OF GOING ON YATRA: BJP

Patna | Agencies

Leader of Opposition in Bihar Assembly Vijay Kumar Sinha on Monday urged Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to review the liquor prohibition act, and rising crime and corruption of the state rather than going for another Yatra.

"Nitish Kumar did 13 yatras in the past and he did the 'terahwi' (13th day mourning ceremonies after death) of Bihar. The people of Bihar know when the terahwi happens. After the terahwi, he has planned to do another Yatra. People of Bihar know it's all over.

"A leader of his alliance already said that his previous 13 Yatras have had no result. If they would have been effective,



another Yatra would not be required for him. Hence, don't go for a picnic in the name of a Yatra," Sinha said.

Nitish Kumar is going for the Yatra in Bihar from January 5 to make people aware about the benefits of liquor ban, its social benefits and health. He will also concentrate on benefit schemes and policies of the state governments. Sinha, however, said that the Chief Minister should instead review the current situation, especially how liquor mafias are flourishing in Bihar with the help of local police.

ZOMATO CO-FOUNDER GUNJAN PATIDAR QUILTS IN ANOTHER HIGH-PROFILE EXIT

New Delhi | Agencies

Online food delivery platform Zomato's Co-founder and CTO Gunjan Patidar quit after more than 10 years, the company announced on Monday.

This is the second high-profile exit at the company. In November last year, Zomato co-founder Mohit Gupta had moved on after about five years at the food aggregator.

In a regulatory filing, Zomato said that Patidar was one of the first few employees of Zomato and built the core tech systems for the company.

"Over the last 10 plus years, he also nurtured a stellar tech leadership team that is capable of taking on the mantle of leading the tech function going forward. His contribution to building Zomato has been invaluable," said the company.

Zomato shares closed at Rs 60.26 apiece on Monday, up 1.52 per cent.

The company said that Patidar was not designated as key managerial personnel under the Companies Act, 2013 and the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations,



2015.

In December, the food delivery platform had announced that Rahul Ganjoo ended his 5-year tenure as Head of New Initiatives. Earlier in the month, Zomato's Vice President for global growth Siddharth Jhavar announced his departure as well.

Zomato in November announced to lay off nearly 3 per cent of its workforce on account of cost-cutting efforts and to turn profitable.

Controversial MP Cong MLA brandishes revolver in New Year party

Congress MLA from Madhya Pradesh, Sunil Saraf, has come under fire for firing in the air from his revolver during a New Year party organised at his residence in Anuppur district on Saturday night.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The MLA had thrown a party for his supporters with a view to give push the campaign for the Assembly elections scheduled later this year. However, he courted trouble by brandishing a revolver.

A video of the New Year celebrations went viral on social media, wherein Saraf could be seen brandishing firing in the air while dancing to a Bollywood number. The video triggered a political controversy, with the administration being asked to investigate the matter.

When the song 'Main Hoon Don' was played, Saraf could be seen dancing to the popular number while flashing his gun. When questioned about his act later, the Congress MLA claimed that he was holding a 'toy gun'.

On Monday, state Home Minister Narottam Mishra told mediapersons that the Anuppur district SP has been directed to conduct an inquiry into the matter and take action if the MLA is found to have broken the law. Following the Home Minister's order, a case was registered at the Kotma police station.

Anuppur SP Jitendra Singh Pawar said that the matter is being probed and an FIR has been registered against the MLA.

"After examining the viral video, we investigated the matter. We found that the MLA misused his licenced gun. The matter is under probe," Pawar added.

Few months back, Saraf, a first-time MLA, was accused of harassing a woman co-passenger while travelling on a train



from Rewa to Bhopal.

Saraf was then accompanied by another Congress MLA, Siddharth Kushwaha. The woman, who was travelling in the first AC compartment of Rewanchal Express, had accused that the Congress MLAs misbehaved with her in a 'heavily drunk' state.

Woman arrested in Ahmedabad for killing infant



Ahmedabad | Agencies

Police in Ahmedabad have arrested a woman who killed her three-month-old baby girl by throwing the infant from the third floor of a hospital.

According to the complaint lodged by Asifmiya Shaikh, his wife Farzanabanu gave birth on October 5, 2022, at a hospital in Uttarsanda of Anand district.

On Sunday morning, Farzanabanu informed her husband that the baby had gone missing.

Shaikh along with staff of the hospital searched for the baby and even informed the police.

While checking the CCTV footage of the hospital corridors, at around 4 a.m. Farzanabanu can be seen coming out of the ward with

the baby in her arms, she stands near a pillar for a while, later she returns to the ward empty handed, Asifmiya said in the complaint. During police interrogation, the accused said that she was fed up of the infant's illness and pain which led her to take the drastic step.

When the hospital security staff checked, they found the body of the baby.

Post birth, the baby was admitted to Vadodara government hospital for 15 days, then on December 14, the family noticed intestine enlargement when it surfaced on the stomach and on Nadiad doctor's recommendation, the infant was admitted at the government hospital in Ahmedabad.

Police Inspector K.D. Jadeja said the complainant is also being questioned.



Thackeray "backstabbed BJP": Nadda

Team Absolute | Chandrapur

Bharatiya Janata Party president JP Nadda on Monday alleged that Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray "backstabbed" the BJP and compromised with his ideology for the sake of power, but got a befitting reply as a new government is now in place in Maharashtra.

Nadda was addressing a 'Vijay Sankalp' rally in Maharashtra's Chandrapur district. The rally is part of the BJP's plan to win 18 "difficult" seats from Maharashtra in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, according to a party leader.

Thackeray's party had snapped ties with long-term ally BJP after the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly polls.

Thackeray later tied-up with the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Congress to form the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the state.

In June last year, senior Sena leader Eknath Shinde led a revolt against the party leadership following which the Thackeray government collapsed. Shinde later became the chief minister with BJP's Devendra Fadnis as his deputy. Nadda said during the polls it was clearly mentioned that "Delhi mein Narendra...Maharashtra mein Devendra" and the Shiv Sena gave consent to it at that



time. But, when the election results came out, they (Sena and Thackeray) "backstabbed us" for becoming the chief minister, the BJP president said.

One should understand that in politics, power goes only towards the truth, he said, adding that the "unnatural alliance" (MVA) did not last long.

"Thackeray for the greed of power backstabbed the BJP

and supported those against whom former RSS Sarsanghchalak Balasaheb Deoras fought all his life," Nadda claimed. He asked the BJP workers whether such people should be forgiven.

Thackeray compromised with his ideology for the sake of power and his government stopped the Ganesh Utsav and Dahi Handi programmes, he claimed.

Nadda further said Thackeray hurt the cultural sentiments of Maharashtra and stood with people who refused to understand the importance of the Indian culture in politics. But, they have got a "befitting reply" for everyone to see and a new government has been formed under the leadership of Eknath Shinde and Devendra Fadnis, he said.

Further targeting the MVA, he claimed "three shops of corruption" had opened in Maharashtra.

Nadda said the BJP is bringing "digital cleanliness" in politics with 'JAM' (Jandhan-Aadhaar-Mobile), and said the MVA is another 'JAM' which implies 'jointly acquiring money'. Nadda said he will do his best to strengthen the BJP, right from Kashmir to Kanyakumari (north to south) and from Kutch to Cuttack (west to east), but it will start from Chandrapur district. He also offered prayers at the Mahakali temple in Chandrapur.

BJP PROTEST AGAINST AJIT PAWAR FOR REMARK ON CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJI MAHARAJ

Team Absolute | Nashik

Workers of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) staged an agitation here today against

Maharashtra Leader of Opposition Ajit Pawar over his alleged remark about Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj.

A demonstration was held at Ravivar Karanja Chowk, where BJP workers shouted slogans against Pawar and burnt his effigy.

Speaking in the state Assembly last week, Pawar had allegedly said that Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj was not 'Dharmveer' (protector of religion). The BJP has claimed that the NCP leader's remark was an "insult" to Sambhaji Maharaj. "The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) always stands against Hindus. Pawar has consistently made controversial statements. He has now made statements against Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and insulted him. He should tender an apology or resign as the leader of opposition," BJP MLA Devyani Pharande said during the agitation.

During a similar agitation in Ojhar town, a procession was taken out with Pawar's effigy on a donkey. Office-bearers and activists of Balasahebanchi Shiv Sena also joined the BJP's agitation.

Activists of the Shinde faction staged a 'jode maro' agitation at the party office and shouted slogans hailing Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Sambhaji Maharaj and Shiv Sena supremo Balasaheb Thackeray. Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the eldest son of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, was captured and tortured to death on orders of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1689.



Over 7,000 resident doctors in Govt colleges go on strike

Team Absolute | Maharashtra

More than 7,000 resident doctors at government colleges in Maharashtra went on strike on Monday over a range of issues, including the quality of hostels and filling of vacant posts of assistant and associate professors. Talking to reporters, state Medical Education Minister Girish Mahajan said he has asked resident doctors to engage in a dialogue and urged them not to stretch the matter further. The Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors (MARD), which has called the strike, has claimed that students at government colleges were facing problems due to poor quality of



hostels. The resident doctors have also pressed for the recruitment of 1,432 senior resident doctors and demanded filling vacant posts of associate and assistant professors. The minister said half of the demands of the striking doctors were being approved immediately, and Rs 12 crore has been given to the public works department (PWD) for repair works. "We are positive about

everything. They (doctors) should have spoken to us before going on strike," Mahajan said.

Talking to reporters, MARD president Avinash Dahiphale said the association has not received any proposal from the state government for talks. Resident doctors are a crucial cog in the government and civic body run hospitals, which see heavy footfall of patients.

WANTED FOR MURDER IN BIHAR, MAN ARRESTED AFTER 1 YEAR FROM THANE: COPS

Team Absolute | Thane

A 38-year-old man accused in a murder case in Bihar and missing since December 2021 has been arrested by police in Maharashtra's Thane district, an official said on Monday. An FIR was registered at Nathnagar police station in Bihar's Bhagalpur district after the accused, Jibrai Jak Pathan, allegedly shot dead a 27-year-old man, Imran, on December 14, 2021 and fled with the latter's motorcycle and cash worth Rs 10,000, he said.

He came to Bhiwandi town in Thane where he stayed by concealing his identity and worked in a unit, Nizampura police station's senior inspector Naresh Pawar said.

The Bihar Police got a tip-off about the accused and sought the help of their Bhiwandi counterparts who traced the man and arrested him on Saturday, the official said. The accused was subsequently handed over to the Bihar Police, he added.



Proud to be governor of the state that boasts the best police force: Bhagat Singh Koshyari

Team Absolute | Maharashtra

Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari on Monday said he feels proud to be the governor of the state that boasts of the best police force in the country and asked the security personnel to use modern technological tools to tackle challenges coming from the coastal border and issues like cyber security, drug menace and Naxalism. He was speaking at an event to mark the Maharashtra Police Raising Day where he inspected the ceremonial parade and received a salute by marching columns of the state police.

The day is celebrated to commemorate the presentation of the state police flag on January 2, 1961 by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The function was organised by Maharashtra Police at the State Reserve Police Force ground at Goregaon in Mumbai.

On the occasion, Koshyari said, "I feel proud to



be the governor of a state that boasts of the best police force in the country."

He called upon the state police to harness Artificial Intelligence and other modern technological tools to tackle emerging challenges like cyber security, drug menace, Naxalism and the challenges coming from the coastal border. The governor praised the state police personnel for being the frontline COVID-19 warriors alongside doctors and nurses during the pandemic.

Maharashtra Director General of Police Rajnish Seth, Mumbai Commissioner of Police of Vivek Phansalkar, other senior serving and retired police officers, jawans and their family members were present. This year, the police band presented a musical ensemble while a team of 46 commandos presented the Silent Arm Drill. The dog squad also presented an impressive show on the occasion.

Sanjay Raut says Uddhav-led group is 'real Shiv Sena'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Monday asserted the group led by Uddhav Thackeray is the "real Shiv Sena" and rejected a suggestion from a leader of the Eknath Shinde-headed camp for introspection by Thackeray for the unification of the two rival party factions. Talking to reporters, Rajya Sabha member Raut said there is no need for introspection and such a suggestion shows the frustration of the rival group.

Shinde led a revolt against the Sena leadership in June last year following which the party split and the Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi government collapsed. Shinde later became the chief minister with the



Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) support. Deepak Kesarkar, spokesperson of the Shinde-led Balasahebanchi Shiv Sena, on Sunday said Thackeray should introspect which could lead to the unification of two groups. Raut, a

key associate of Thackeray, on Monday said, "His (Kesarkar's) suggestion stems from frustration. The people of the state have decided that traitors should not be sent to the Vidhan Sabha or the Lok Sabha."

"The Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray is the real Shiv Sena. If traitors are asking us to introspect, then it is difficult. There is no need for introspect. The Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray is growing like it was growing before," he said. Raut claimed there were groups within the Shinde camp that were at odds with each other.

"This (Shinde-led) government will not last. Half of the MLAs will join the BJP and that's their aim because the Shiv Sena will not accept them and they don't have another option," he claimed.

Raut further claimed that 16 MLAs (of the Shinde faction), whose disqualification plea is before the Supreme Court, will be disqualified because the Thackeray faction's case is legally strong.

Go ahead for Kalasa-Bhanduri project gimmick by BJP: K'taka Congress

Team Absolute | Hubballi

The Karnataka Congress on Monday came down heavily on the ruling BJP in connection with the consent given by the Union government for the Kalasa-Banduri project and dubbed it as an "election gimmick" of the saffron party.

Calling the BJP an 'university of lies', state Congress President D.K. Shivakumar said, "The BJP is coming out with one lie after the other in connection with the issue of Mahadayi river," he said.

In a major boost to the BJP government in Karnataka, the Centre on December 29 approved the detailed project report (DPR) of the Kalasa-Banduri project.

The Kalasa-Banduri Nala is a project undertaken by the Karnataka government to improve drinking water supply to Belagavi, Bagalkot, Dharwad and Gadag districts. It involves building a dam across Kalasa and Banduri, two



tributaries of Mahadayi river, to divert water to Malaprabha river, a tributary of Krishna river.

The project is being opposed by both Goa and Maharashtra. The total catchment area of the Mahadayi basin is 2,032 sq km, of which the catchment of the river in Goa is about 1,580 sq km (78 per cent). About 375 sq km (18 per cent) of the catchment area falls in Karnataka, while for Maharashtra it is 77 sq km (4 per cent).

Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai had termed the decision as a commitment of the Centre led by Prime Minister

Narendra Modi towards the development of Karnataka.

The people in north Karnataka region have been demanding to implement the project for more than three decades. The project would end the water crisis in the major districts in the north Karnataka region.

The decision would also prove to be a shot in the arm for the BJP in the state, which is going to the polls in less than four months' time.

The Kalasa-Banduri project, which became an inter-state dispute between Karnataka and Goa, was prepared in 1978. It was then called the 'Mahadayi project'.

"There are 26 BJP MPs in Karnataka. Did they discuss anything about the Mahadayi project before," Shivakumar asked, adding: "They could have discussed and resolved the matter between Karnataka and other states." Since the elections are nearing, BJP leaders are enacting drama after drama, Shivakumar alleged.

Police nabs man who threatened to blow up Mount Mary Church



Team Absolute | Bandra

The Mumbai Police nabbed a person who allegedly threatened to blow up Mount Mary Church in Bandra area, police said on Monday. According to the police the accused was arrested from Kolkata

after he sent a mail threatening to blow up the Mount Mary Church. The police traced the accused's location by tracking the IP address and arrested him.

Mumbai Police further informed that the motive of the accused in sending those mails is yet to be ascer-

tained and will be known only after the enquiry.

On December 30, the Mount Mary church in Bandra received a threatening email warning of an attack by the terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba, informed police officials.

Police registered a case u/s 505(3)

of IPC against unknown persons. The police officials later in the day informed that another email was received following the first one where the sender claimed to be the mother of the child who allegedly sent the first threat email.

"In it, the mother apologized saying that her child is mentally ill so he sent such a message," informed police officials.

In a separate incident on the same day, the Mumbai Police control room received an anonymous call on Friday night saying that there will be explosions in Mumbai on New Year's Eve. The caller identified himself as Azhar Hussain from Uttar Pradesh and said that he has weapons and RDX. Acting on the call, a team from the Azad Maidan Police station immediately started the investigation and arrested the caller. The police later found out that the call was a hoax, and arrested the caller.

The police revealed that the accused caller was identified as Narendra Kavle and he had made this call in an inebriated condition. Further investigations are underway in both cases, the police have said.

Bandra Terminus-Jodhpur Suryanagari Express derailment



SOME WESTER RAILWAY TRAINS CANCELLED, DIVERTED

Team Absolute | Bandra

The North Western Railway (NWR) on Monday said that as many as eleven coaches of the Bandra Terminus-Jodhpur Suryanagari Express were impacted after a derailment incident that took place near Pali in Rajasthan. Due to the derailment of train number 12480 between Rajkiawas - Bomadra section in Jodhpur Division, some long distance trains of Western Railway (WR) are affected and has been cancelled and diverted, the WR said in a statement on Monday. The WR also released the list of cancelled and diverted trains.

The details of the Cancelled Trains are as under:

- Train No. 14894 Palanpur - Jodhpur Express of 03/01/2023
- Train No. 14821 Jodhpur - Sabarmati Express of 02/01/2023
- Train No. 14822 Sabarmati - Jodhpur Express of 02/01/2023
- Train No. 14819 Jodhpur - Sabarmati Express of 02/01/2023
- Train No. 14804 Sabarmati - Jaisalmer Express of 02/01/2023
- Train No. 14893 Jodhpur - Palanpur Express of 02/01/2023


EDITOR'S SPECS

OPPN UNITY REMAINS A PIPE DREAM IN UP

Just two days into the New Year, it has become amply clear that opposition unity in Uttar Pradesh will remain a pipe dream ahead of the general elections 2024. Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's remark that the Samajwadi Party (SP) does not have a national perspective has sparked of a fresh round of the blame game between opposition parties, leaving the BJP smiling. SP president Akhilesh Yadav retorted by saying that his party's outlook is national and it has been making strong political interventions in the national interest. The SP fully believed in the Indian Constitution and was committed to democracy, socialism and secularism, the party chief said in a press release. Akhilesh also rubbished reports of him supporting Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY) in Uttar Pradesh. The Rashtriya Lok Dal, an ally of SP, has already turned down the question of joining the BJY. Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati, meanwhile chose to welcome the New Year by blaming the Congress for the plight of OBCs and Dalits in the country. She alleged the SP of playing a key role in giving OBCs and Dalits a raw deal on the issue of reservation. The SP promptly returned the attack and senior party leader Shivpal Singh Yadav said that people know whom Mayawati is supporting and no one will listen to her. The opposition has given the BJP a reason to smile in 2023. All the talk of opposition unity has already crumbled and a fragmented opposition will ensure BJP's return to power. These leaders put their egos before their political goals. As the main opposition force in Uttar Pradesh, it is the responsibility of Akhilesh Yadav to bring everyone together but he apparently believes that he alone can defeat the BJP. He has not learnt his lesson from the 2022 Assembly polls.

AFTER BHARAT JODO, CONG ALL SET FOR MASSIVE OUTREACH DOWN TO BLOCK LEVEL

Saiyed Moziz Imam Zaidi



"I have opened the shop of love in the marketplace of hatred." This line has been echoing throughout the Congress outreach programme, which commenced from Kanyakumari and ends at Srinagar on January 23. But the Congress is not planning to sit back after the Yatra comes officially to an end. On January 26, the party will start the 'Haath Se Haath Jodo Abhiyan', which will continue for the next two months. To make it a success, the party has not left any stone unturned, appointing senior leaders to oversee the programme in each state. Buoyed with the success of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, the Congress is also planning to reach every voter through booth level convention. Senior functionaries of the party will be attending the programmes, and the party has deputed Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to lead the all-women march and there is work in progress on this. The party's 'haath jodo' programme will start from January 26 and the Congress programme will be telecast live on giant screens and will be shown at important places across each state.

Priyanka will lead an all-women march in each state capital and read out a 'women's manifesto' as the Congress gears up to take the Bharat Jodo Yatra to booth level. The party has started its preparatory meetings for this at the state level and then district and block level. The party has reached out to like-minded leaders to join the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Some have already joined and some have agreed to join like Mehbooba Mufti and Farooq Abdullah. The party activists will distribute letters written by Rahul Gandhi and a charge sheet against the BJP government to every person. After the yatra, a block level convention will be held in each district to be attended by the state president and senior state Congress leaders. Congress General Secretary K.C. Venugopal said: "The Bharat Jodo Yatra has become a movement, you people know about that. Lakhs of people are participating in this yatra every day. Starting from Kanyakumari, till today, crores of people have participated." Venugopal added: "Apart from Congress leaders, general people enthusiastically participated in the yatra... their involvement is huge in this yatra, which will resume from January 3." The party general secretary also said as this yatra emerged as a greatest movement in this country, a proper follow-up is needed, and that is why, the Congress Steering Committee decided for a 'Haath Se Haath Jodo Abhiyan' from January 26 onwards. This, he said, will be a two-month massive campaign at the grassroots level. Two months of continuous padyatra will be there at the block level under the leadership of senior leaders, while state units will assign two leaders for each block to conduct the yatra. The yatra will be undertaken by the leadership of the Block Congress Committee, but two leaders deputed by the state unit will be there to lead the yatra. Along with this yatra, there will be village-level sabhas, and interaction with influential people in the villages and massive district level workers' convention. Then, the culmination of this yatra will happen with a massive rally in the state capital, in which Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge or Rahul Gandhi will participate, he said. The party is saying that the critics now accept that the yatra is successful. The BJP's alliance partner in Haryana, Dushyant Chautala, too has been heard praising the kind of effort Rahul Gandhi is putting in the Yatra. Ramdev also praised the Gandhi scion for taking up 3,570-km yatra.

The former Congress President Rahul Gandhi seems to enjoy the show as donning a T shirt in chilly Delhi winter he attacked the BJP and said that they are fanning hatred and divisiveness but the Congress will not allow it.

Rahul Gandhi in Alwar also recited a poem by Makhdoom Mohiuddin -- "Hayat leke chalo kainat le ke chalo, chalo to sare zamane ko saath le ke chalo" -- and said that this is how he is taking everyone along.

PILOT, RAJE KEEP SUSPENSE QUOTIENT UP IN RAJASTHAN'S POLITICAL SOAP

Archana Sharma



The great political story of Rajasthan has become quite interesting with continued suspense and speculations rife over the next role of former deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot and former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje. Will they be back or not? This has been a million dollar question over the last many months as political whispers remain abuzz on the next role of these leaders who are simply holding the MLA posts currently.

While Pilot was made the deputy Chief Minister in 2018 following the Assembly polls, his portfolios were snatched after he and 18 other MLAs staged a rebellion against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot.

He was however, brought back to the party's fold later with a promise to be given a decent portfolio.

Since then, the Congress as an organisation has been giving subsequent dates, but nothing has been materialised. Pilot's next portfolio has been delayed in the wake of the Covid pandemic, Assembly polls in other states, budget in the state and so on.

In fact, when the Congress high command had called a meeting at CMR and invited all CLP members on September 25 to discuss this matter, Gehlot camp leaders called a parallel meeting at another venue where around 91 MLAs threatened the party with their resignations which were submitted to Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi.

Amid all this drama, the question yet remains if Pilot will be given a chance to lead the state and this speculation will stay on in the coming months too as the Pilot camp has been bringing their demand to the fore time and again. This is just not the case with Congress as the opposition BJP is also facing a similar challenge with Raje being sidelined.

Raje's supporters have also been pitching her as the next Chief Minister while the party high command has refused to announce any chief ministerial face for the 2023 Assembly polls.

Earlier, her posters were also removed from the party office as well as during the bypolls. Party officials however, said that Central leadership had directed that only pictures of state president, national president and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be accommodated on posters.

Raje was also seen missing from campaigning for the bypolls and many meetings. The BJP's Janakrosh Yatra became a platform for the comeback of Raje's pictures in posters.

Again, there are discussions if she will be back or if she will be kept isolated as she was in Gujarat polls. Raje was no where in the list of star campaigners in Gujarat which once again became an issue of discussion. So it won't be wrong to say Raje and Pilot were the discussing points in the year which passed off peacefully but for the state's political sphere. There was a lot of drama, action, surprise, suspense, attack and counteractions. Meanwhile, there were other discussion points as well. The slang words like 'Gaddar', 'Nikkama', 'Nakara' used by Gehlot against Pilot and Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat became political jargons in Rajasthan as pundits were seen trying to decode their meanings. These words were initially used by Gehlot against Pilot during the political rebellion in 2020. In fact even recently, Gehlot openly targeted Pilot terming him as 'Gaddar' before the start of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra. Whenever the Chief Minister used these words against Pilot, the political pundits had to scratch their heads to find the meaning and intension of Gehlot as such attacks with these words always gave a meaning. Recently, when Gehlot used the 'gaddar' word before Bharat Jodo Yatra saying -- "A 'gaddar' cannot be the Chief Minister" -- political experts said that this was the direct message to high command that he will never want Pilot to take the top role. In fact questions are being raised as to why the 'Gandhian' Chief Minister known for his suave language ever used these harsh words against his deputy. "Usage of these words are like political jargons. The Chief Minister has used the Nikkama for Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat too in ERCP matter and that matter has now become a national issue in forthcoming polls," said senior Congress leader.

"So, when such words are used, take them as jargons and try to find its meaning. They have a long shelf life and deep meaning," he added.

Meanwhile, it won't be wrong to say that Rajasthan's politics since last many months has been in for discussion and the millions dollar question being raised across political circles is who will lead from the front, will Gehlot continue as Chief Minister or will former deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot get the chance to lead the state.

Will there be more words like 'gaddar', 'nikkama' and 'nakara' rocking the state or will it pass peacefully to enter the 2023 assembly polls -- these are a few questions which are presently being discussed in political circles with major question been 'Kaun Banega Mukhya Mantri'?

RUSSIA SUFFERS DEADLIEST DAY OF WAR AFTER UKRAINE STRIKE DURING PUTIN'S SPEECH

London | Agencies



Russia has suffered its deadliest day of the war so far after Ukraine launched a massive strike during Putin's New Year's Eve speech, media reported.

Hundreds of mobilised troops reportedly died in the Ukrainian strike on a barracks in the Donbas region just before the clock struck midnight.

The deadly strike was 115 miles from where Putin "pre-recorded" his New Year's message with dozens of troops in Russia's Rostov region, The Sun UK reported.

During his speech, he claimed the West was "cynically using Ukraine and its people to weaken and divide Russia".

Russia attempted to hide the toll of soldiers lost in the strike - but Ukraine's military puts the number of Russian deaths at 400, with 300 others wounded.

Moscow did confirm a "significant loss of life", signalling a grievous blow to the already exhausted Russian troops.

According to reports on the Telegram channel of General SVR, Putin has lost more than 1,000 FSB secret service officers in the war in Ukraine - bringing Russia's death toll to 145,000 in 10 months, The Sun UK reported.

Thought to be a Kremlin insider, the report suggests the losses in Putin's regular army alone to 104,186, with another 33,902 in private military companies - like Wagner Group - which are fighting for the Kremlin in the war.

Losses in the Russian National Guard amount to 5,941, it is claimed.

A viral video showed a family watching Putin's speech before eating a traditional New Year's meal in their home.

A woman on the balcony began screaming in the video as the attack began on the Russian barracks, The Sun UK reported.

Another video showed a Ukrainian soldier in a holiday hat as a missile launches behind him - at the same time as the strike on Makiivka.

Russian pro-war sources say two HIMARS missile strikes hit the barracks in Makiivka, killing Russian commanders alongside their soldiers.

14 KILLED IN MEXICO PRISON ATTACK

Mexico City | Agencies

Ten guards and four inmates died after an attack on a prison in the Mexican city of Ciudad Juarez, authorities said.

On Sunday morning, gunmen in armoured vehicles opened fire against the security personnel of the prison. Xinhua news agency quoted the Chihuahua state prosecutor's office as saying.

Mexican soldiers and state police regained control of the prison late Sunday, it said, adding 13 people were injured and 24 inmates fled during the incident.

Local police killed two gunmen in a vehicle, according to the statement.

INDIAN-AMERICAN TAKES OATH AS TEXAS COUNTY JUDGE

Team Absolute | New Delhi



Indian-American Democrat Juli A. Mathew took oath as a judge in Fort Bend County, Texas, for a second consecutive term.

Mathew, a native of Thiruvalla in Kerala, was sworn-in via videoconferencing from Bheemanady in Kasaragod, and will continue to serve as presiding judge for Number 3 of the Fort Bend County Court for a period of four years. She ran for re-election and won with 123,116 votes, beating Republican Andrew Dornburg. "I'm grateful for every supporter, prayer warrior, and voter during this journey," Mathew said in a Facebook post after winning the election.

Mathew won her 2018 electoral bid for the bench against Republican Tricia Krenek by an impressive 8.24 per cent margin, making history as the first Indian-American woman elected to the bench in the US.

A practicing attorney for 15 years with experience in mass tort, civil litigation, probate, and criminal matters, Mathew also heads the first Juvenile Intervention and Mental Health Court.

Judge Mathew grew up in Philadelphia and attended Penn State University before attending Delaware Law School for her Juris Doctorate. A few of her academic achievements include - in January 2021, she founded the Juvenile Intervention and Mental Health Court to assist young people with mental health issues. Fort Bend has a large population of Indians, including Malayalis.

Eighteen unidentified bodies found in Libya

Tripoli | Agencies



The Libyan authorities have said that 18 unidentified bodies were discovered in the northern coastal city of Sirte.

The 18 bodies were found in the Sabaa area of Sirte last week and transferred to a hospital in the city, the General Authority for Research and Identification of Missing Persons said in a statement on Sunday.

Samples were collected from the bodies and taken to laboratories for analysis, the statement added.

In October 2022, the Libyan authorities announced the discovery of 42 unidentified bodies in mass graves inside a school yard in Sirte, Xinhua news agency reported. Sirte, located nearly 450 km east of the capital Tripoli, used to be controlled by Islamic State militants before they were defeated and expelled from the city in 2016 by the former UN-backed Government of National Accord. Libya has been suffering violence and insecurity since the fall of the late leader Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011.

EU CHIEF VISITS CROATIA TO MARK ENTRY INTO EUROZONE, SCHENGEN

Zagreb | Agencies



Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, visited Croatia on New Year's day to mark the country's entry into the eurozone and the border-free Schengen area.

Various activities were held at border crossings with Slovenia and Hungary on early Sunday morning to celebrate the historic moment.

"This is a day to celebrate. It is time for new beginnings. I believe that there is no other place in Europe where a new beginning and a new chapter can be better marked than the border of Slovenia and Croatia," said von der Leyen, along with Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and Slovenian President Nataša Musar, at the Bregana border crossing between Croatia and Slovenia.

Plenkovic said that Croatia would help strengthen both the eurozone and the Schengen area, Xinhua news agency reported.

In the early hours of January 1, Croatian Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic and Slovenian Interior Minister Sanja Ajanovic Hovnik pressed a button to lift a barrier at the Bregana border crossing, while Croatian Foreign Minister Gordian Grlic Radman and Hungarian parliamentarian Peter Cseresny, former Mayor of the Hungarian border town of Nagykanizsa, lifted the barrier at the border crossing, signaling the free passage between Croatia, Slovenia and Hungary.

This was the first time that a European country joined both the eurozone and Schengen area on the same day, an important milestone for Croatia, an EU member since 2013.

IRAN BLACKLISTS 60 US OFFICIALS FOR TOP COMMANDER'S ASSASSINATION

Tehran | Agencies



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has said that nearly 60 US officials have been blacklisted by Tehran for their involvement in the assassination of top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani, semi-official Mehr news agency reported. In a televised interview ahead of the third anniversary of the assassination of Soleimani, the former commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, Amir-Abdollahian on Sunday said Iran is investigating the US assassination of the commander. He stressed that the Americans and Westerners, however, were throwing a wrench into Iran's efforts to pursue the case legally, although Tehran had taken necessary measures, Xinhua news agency reported. During a recent round of the Vienna talks on the revival of a 2015 nuclear deal, the Americans demanded the removal of their former officials from Iran's blacklist, according to the Iranian Foreign Minister. On January 3, 2020, the US military, at the order of the then President Donald Trump, assassinated Soleimani and the Deputy Commander of Iraq's paramilitary Hashd Shaabi forces Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a drone strike near Baghdad International Airport. The assassination was condemned by Iran as "state terrorism". On January 8, 2020, Iran responded to the assassination by launching missiles at the US Ain al-Asad base in the Iraqi province of Anbar.



DENSE FOG IN BHOPAL, 2ND IN COUNTRY

1 flight divert, 1 cancelled; Chances of rain and hail on 5 and 6 January

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Even though December in Madhya Pradesh was the hottest in 10 years, the New Year brought severe cold. Bhopal had the second highest fog in the country on Sunday morning. Here the visibility remained up to 50 meters. In the capital, the temperature dropped by 3 degrees on Sunday night and recorded 7.2 degrees. Apart from Bhopal, visibility was 50-50 meters in Chandigarh, Ambala, Bhiwani, Karnal, Bhagpur and Mandi in the country. The densest fog remained in Hisar and Purnia. Here the visibility was 25-25 meters.

Air India's Delhi and Mumbai flights coming to Bhopal had to be diverted to Nagpur due to bad weather. Indigo's Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad flights were delayed. Indigo's Bangalore flight had to be canceled yesterday.

The temperature in Pachmarhi's was the coldest; here it was recorded at 4.5 degree Celsius. The night tem-



perature was 8.2 in Gwalior, 9.4 degrees in Indore. The temperature has dropped by 2 degrees in Indore. The temperature remained above 10 in Khandwa, Khargone Narmadapuram, Khajuraho, Satna, Rewa, Sidhi and Seoni. Rest of the districts recorded less than 10.

Apart from Bhopal, maximum fog remained in Raisen, Guna, Umaria, Damoh, Khajuraho, Jabalpur and

Sagar across the state. Visibility ranged from 50 meters to less than 500 metres. More than 18 passengers were injured when the bus overturned due to fog in Sagar. The bus was going from Rewa to Indore.

According to the Meteorological Department, Mavatha may also fall on January 5-6. Its entry will be from Jabalpur. It can remain active till near Bhopal. The night temperature in

Gwalior-Chambal is below 5 degrees, while in Indore and Bhopal it can come up to 9 degrees. Meteorologist SN Sahu told that water may fall in East MP. If a strong system is formed, there will be a rapid drop in temperature.

It may rain for two days in Jabalpur, Narmadapuram, Betul and surrounding districts. In most areas, the temperature can fall below 10 degrees. The mercury can go below 7 in Gwalior, Chambal, Bundelkhand, Baghelkhand and Mahakaulash. In Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain and Narmadapuram, the temperature may fall below 9 degrees.

Yellow alert of dense fog in for next 24 Hours:

Rewa, Sagar, Chambal, Gwalior, Bhind, Neemuch, Mandasaur, Ujjain, Betul, Bhopal, Raisen, Sehore, Vidisha, Dindori and Datia. The Meteorological Department has issued a yellow alert for these districts.

Addiction causes downfall of society and family: Governor Patel

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that for social upliftment and prosperity, we have to create an addiction-free society. Addiction leads to social distortions, addiction becomes the reason for the downfall of society and family. Governor Patel was inaugurating the "Mera Madhya Pradesh Vysan Mukh Madhya Pradesh" campaign organised by Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwavidyalaya today.

Governor Patel said that "My India Healthy India" national campaign is being run by the organisation for the past several years in the direction of building an advanced and developed India. The launch of "Mera Madhya Pradesh Vysan Mukh Madhya Pradesh" campaign by the organisation at the state level is commendable. He said that the organisation of programs in the campaign at different levels to make the entire society free from addictions is commendable. At the district/tehsil/development block/panchayat level, efforts should be made to connect



the people of the society trapped in addictions and vices to the mainstream of the society by making them to quit addiction. The work done by the Ishwariya Vishwavidyalaya in this direction is commendable.

Governor Patel said that just as a small ray of light dispels the darkness, in the same way, the work of de-addiction is no less than a ray of hope for the people suffering from addiction. He exhorted the young generation to keep themselves away from addiction vices like paan, gutkha, alcohol, addictions lead to social disorders.

Governor Patel said that if the society improves, then the country and the state will improve, then it will be called Vishwa Guru. He said that the university should cooperate fully in fulfilling the resolve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to eradicate TB by the year 2025.

Governor Patel said that people from every section of the society should connect with and take inspiration from such programs for de-addiction. All of us must take personal interest and benefit from the training being imparted by various divisions of the institute.

CM will launch Khelo India Youth Games mascot, torch and anthem on January 7

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Union Sports and Youth Affairs Minister Anurag Thakur will unveil the mascot, torch and anthem of the 5th edition of Khelo India Youth Games on January 7.

Sports and Youth Welfare Minister Yashodhara Raje Scindia informed that the mascot will be launched in the presence of various school and college students, sports experts, sportspersons, social media influencers etc. at Shaurya Smarak Complex in Bhopal at 6 pm. He said that it is a matter of pride for Madhya Pradesh that the



state has got the opportunity to host Khelo India. No stone will be left unturned to make this event successful and memorable. Minister Smt. Scindia today reviewed the preparations for the Khelo India Youth Games at TT Nagar Stadium.

The fifth edition of Khelo India Youth Games will be

held from January 30 to February 11 in eight cities of the state including Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Mandla, Balaghat and Khargone (Maheshwar). One game (cycling) will be held in Delhi. For the first time water sports namely Kayaking Canoeing, Canoe Slalom and Fencing will be part of this edition of Khelo India Games. For 13 days, 27 games will be played in 23 game venues in 9 cities. Around 6 thousand players, 303 international and 1089 national officials will be part of these games. About 2 thousand volunteers will be deployed in different game venues for Khelo India.

6 BOYS CHASE BIKE, STAB MAN ON BUSY ROAD

Team Absolute | Indore

Six minor boys in Madhya Pradesh's Indore stabbed a 22-year-old college student on the evening of December 31, 2022, over an argument on crowding the main road. The victim died during treatment, and all the minors were caught. Two of them are class nine students.

The shocking incident, caught on security camera, happened at the Bhanwarkuan area of the city where the victim, Ayush, honked and asked the group of boys to clear the way and let their vehicle pass. Ayush was riding pillion on a motorcycle with two friends. This led to a heated argument, after which one of the minors ran after the two-wheeler and stabbed Ayush, who was sitting last.

The CCTV footage shows a group of boys running after a motorcycle, when at least one of them stabs the person sitting at the rear, and all of them then run away from the spot. Ayush was immediately rushed to a hospital, where he died during treatment. All six minors have been arrested, and charged with murder.



GOVT STILL WORKING ON FIRE SAFETY, TENANCY BILL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The state government is still working on fire safety bill and tenancy bill though their drafts were prepared long back. Earlier, the bills were to be tabled before assembly's winter session but nothing moved. The state government has decided to come up with Fire Safety Act. Urban Administration Department Minister Bhupendra Singh had asked officers to prepare the bill by studying Fire Safety Acts of other states, especially Maharashtra and New Delhi. Officers have visited other states and studied their fire safety acts. After this, they prepared



the draft by including best practices and provisions of other states. An Urban Administration Department official told Free Press that new Principal Secretary was going through the bills and some amendments were likely in the draft. The proposed fire safety bill is likely to be tabled in the next assembly session, sources said. The draft of tenancy bill was prepared by studying the Model Tenancy Act of the central government, which provides rights to both owner and the tenants under the agreement. Madhya Pradesh government wants to come up with its own tenancy law to safeguard interest of owners and tenants.

World Ramayana Conference to be held in Jabalpur from 6th January

Team Absolute | Jabalpur

World Ramayana Conference will be organised for the third time in Jabalpur to make the detailed explanation of Ramayana to the young generation. The Ramayana conference will be held at Manas Bhawan Jabalpur from January 6 to January 8. The World Ramayana Conference will be staged on different aspects of Ramayana.

Researchers from America, Bangladesh, Thailand, Switzerland, Canada will be involved. The attendees will be Sri Lankan Cultural Minister Vidura Wikramanayaka, Mauritius Cultural Minister Avinash Teeluck, and Swiss MPs.

Scholars from abroad are doing research on Ramayana and are visiting Sanskardhani



Jabalpur. Along with this, representatives of 15 countries will give lectures on their research on Ramayana in the conference. On one evening of Shabari event Nandigram and Ramdhan will be presented by Vanvasi Ram Dhun Mandali. About 13 thousand Sunderkand lessons will be recited. The organisers have especially appealed to the youth to get to know each and every aspect of Ramayana closely by participating in the World Ramayana Conference.

PATWARI, ASSOCIATE SENTENCED FOR 4 YEARS IN CORRUPTION CASE

Mandasaur: Court of Special Judge Anti-Corruption, Mandasaur, on Saturday sentenced a patwari and his associate to four-year imprisonment under Prevention of Corruption Act and also slapped a fine of Rs 20k each who were caught red-handed by Ujjain Lokayukta team while accepting bribe. Prosecution media in-charge Deepak Jamra said that Heeralal Mali approached Patwari Ravi Acharya for obtaining revenue extract of the land mutated in his favour and sisters after the death of his uncle. The concerned Patwari and his associate demanded Rs 3.5 lakh as bribe for issuing revenue extract. During the course of investigation, a trap team was constituted, and a successful trap was laid and the accused along with the associate were arrested while demanding and accepting bribe for issuance of revenue extract on February 2, 2015, and booked them under sections 7, 13(1)(D), 13(2) of Prevention of Corruption Act and Section 120-B of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The court of special judge, anti-corruption, convicted the then Patwari Acharya and his associate named as Jayprakash Rathore and awarded them four years of imprisonment and a fine Rs 20k each to the accused on December 31, 2022.

'Naya Sal, Nayi Sarkar', MP Cong begins poster campaign for polls

Team Absolute | Bhopal

On the eve of New Year, the Congress workers put up a huge poster outside the state party headquarters in Bhopal mentioning the slogan - 'Naya Sal, Nayi Sarkar' (New Year, New Government) and declaring party's state chief Kamal Nath as the 'future Chief Minister' of Madhya Pradesh.

The poster was put up at a bus stop at Vyapam Chowk (in front of Indira Gandhi Bhavan) by some party workers on December 31. By the next day similar posters were visible in other places in Bhopal. And, now the campaign is being taken across the state.

With addition, new posters with slogans - 'Naya Sal, Nayi Sarkar' and 'Congress ka hath, Kamal Nath' have emerged and gone viral on social media also.

Initially, it began after party's former president Rahul Gandhi claimed that the Congress will



sweep the state polls in the next elections and the BJP will be seen nowhere. "I can guarantee this, you can write this down and show it to me at that time (after poll results)," said Gandhi on the eve of New Year during his press conference in New Delhi as part of his Bharat Jodo Yatra.

"There is no question ... the BJP will not be seen anywhere

there (MP). I had thought and said that we got very good response in Maharashtra, but there is total undercurrent in Madhya Pradesh, there is (Congress) storm out there," Gandhi said.

In response, the state BJP unit took a dig at Kamal Nath by saying that the elections are almost a year away and he has declared

himself as the Chief Minister. "This can happen in Congress only. One should ask Digvijaya Singh about the Congress' Chief Minister's face in Madhya Pradesh. His brother Laxman Singh has already questioned Congress MLAs' performances," said senior BJP leader and state Home Minister Narottam Mishra.

CONGRESS MEN ASSESSES CROP DAMAGE DUE TO ERRATIC WEATHER IN MALHARGARH



Team Absolute | Malhargarh

Farmers in Mandasaur region have been reporting damage to masoor or lentil (Rabi) crops due to bad weather conditions in terms of crop yield and nutrition quality. On Sunday, Congress leader Parshuram Sisodia, Malhargarh block Congress president Anil Sharma, district secretary Kanhaiyalal Patidar, youth president Vinod Patel, block general secretary Pawan Patidar, Mandala president Kanhaiyalal Gurjar along with sector president Prahlad Patidar and party workers undertook visit to rural areas

to assess crop damage due to erratic weather conditions. The farmers talked about their grievances to the Congressmen. Balram Nathulal Patidar, a farmer hailing from Malhargarh town said that he sowed masoor (lentils) in 6 bighas of agricultural land at a total cost of Rs 50k. But the crops have suffered severe damage and have been deemed unfit for procurement, while emphasising on the need to adopt climate-resilient agriculture. The Congressmen, after conducting inspection, demanded adequate compensation by getting an immediate survey conducted of the affected crop.



CAMILA MENDES IS ENJOYING HOLIDAYS AT MIAMI BEACH

Miami | Agencies

Camila Mendes flaunted her incredibly toned physique as she spent her New Year's Day holiday at Miami Beach while sharing affectionate moments with her new boyfriend, YouTuber Rudy Mancuso. The Riverdale star donned a patterned two-piece swimsuit as she jumped into the large waves as she enjoyed her new romance with the internet personality.

The talented actress, who recently opened up about her 'anxieties' of her hit CW show coming to an end, went Instagram official of the budding relationship with Mancuso earlier in November of last year.

The Do Revenge star confidently showed off her toned midriff while sporting a white drawstring bikini that contained colorful floral patterns on the fabric.

The beauty opted to accessorize her beach look with a pair of dainty, gold-hooped earrings and had a black rubber band wrapped around her right wrist in case she wanted to toss her locks into an up do later in the day.

Camila's brunette hair was parted in the middle, and effortlessly flowed down naturally past her shoulders.

When she wasn't spending time in the cool blue water, the star threw on a pair of stylish shades to protect her eyes from the bright Florida sun.

Camila was seen celebrating the New Year by occasionally sporting gold, Happy New Year headband along with a blue party hat.

Selena Gomez

and Nicola Peltz
get matching
'angel' tattoos



Los Angeles | Agencies

Selena Gomez and Nicola Peltz get matching 'angel' tattoos as their unexpected new friendship continues to blossom. The singer and the actress showed off their new ink on Instagram while on a sun-soaked New Year's trip in Los Cabos, Mexico. It comes after her shocking

fall out with former friend and kidney donor, Francia Raisa, last year in November. The duos were dressed in their glam party outfits when they snapped a picture of the matching tattoos which are located on their arms.

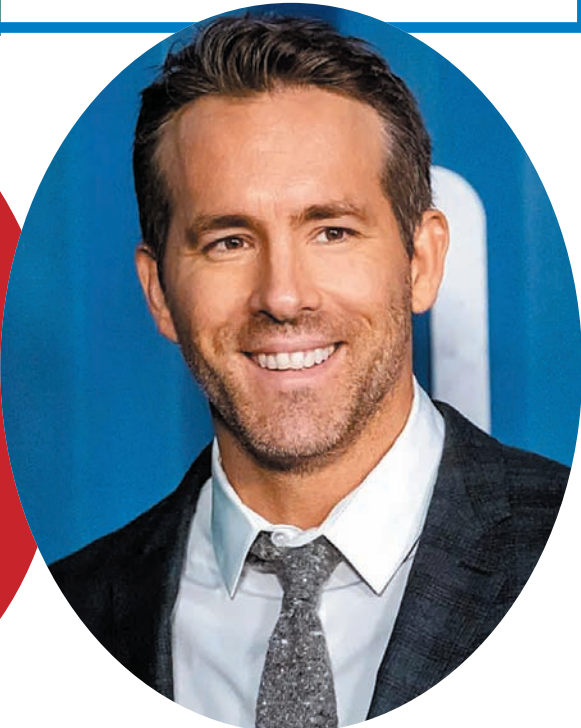
Selena insisted that she and married pair Brooklyn Beckham and Nicola be called 'a throuple' as she shared a snap of the threesome snuggling during their trip.

The My Mind & Me star cuddled up with the actress and former model in an Instagram snap posted Sunday. The talented singer was spotted earlier on Friday arriving to Los Cabos, Mexico, with Nicola and Brooklyn to ring in 2023. The

British-born star notably spent Christmas with his wife's family, rather than celebrating with his parents and siblings. The talented star shared a photo series which she captioned as, 'New Years dump part 1,' and uploaded an assortment of snaps from her trip to Los Cabos to say a final farewell to 2022. 'Fine calls us a throuple foreverplussone,' Selena humorously penned in an additional photo series from the New Year's holiday. Selena appeared to have had a blast as she celebrated jumping into 2023 while surrounded by close friends, two months after her notable fall out with former pal, Francia Raisa.



Blake
Lively is
tempted to get
thigh tattoo
of Ryan
Reynolds' face



Los Angeles | Agencies

After a fan of Hollywood star Ryan Reynolds shared a video of them getting a tattoo of the actor's face on their leg, his wife joked that she wouldn't be opposed to getting inked herself. The actress, who is expecting the couple's fourth child, reposted the December 30 clip on her Instagram Stories, with the playful caption: "I realise pregnancy is a strange time to get a thigh tatt but I'm nothing if not committed," reports eonline.com.

The fan's tattoo design featured the actor's face, blue tribal designs and the phrase "NO RAGRETS SWITCHING TO MINT MOBILE," in reference to the Free Guy star's telecommunication company.

Ryan had first shared the video on his own Instagram page earlier that day, shedding some light on where his fan's

ink inspiration may have come from.

"Every year at mintmobile we send a little Christmas gift to our customers," he captioned his post. "This year it was a temporary tattoo. But some people are more committed to saving money with Mint than others."

The next day, Ryan reposted Blake's Story, adding the text: "It's not a competition but I also have my face tattoo on my thigh."

Ryan - who has been married to Blake since 2012 and shares with her three daughters (James, Inez, and Betty) - recently proved his commitment to the actress when he accepted the People's Icon Award at the 2022 People's Choice Awards. "You're my heart. You're my hope. You're my happiness," he gushed in his speech at the December 6 ceremony. "I joke that my family exhausts me but, in reality, you give me more strength than any man could possibly deserve."

Jeremy Renner in 'critical but stable' condition after accident

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Jeremy Renner is in "critical but stable condition with injuries suffered after experiencing a weather related accident while ploughing snow earlier today," his spokesperson said. Renner, a two-time Oscar nominee, is the star of the returning Paramount+ series 'The Mayor of Kingstown' and Marvel's 'Hawkeye' series on Disney+ as well as the Avengers and Captain America films.

Deadline had heard word of an accident and that Renner had been airlifted earlier on Sunday to the hospital. His spokesperson said that his family is with him now and he is "receiving excellent care."

According to the Reno Gazette-Journal, Renner has a home in the area, near Mt. Rose-Ski Tahoe. The region saw a winter storm hit on New Year's Eve that resulted in 35,000 homes across Northern Nevada's Washoe, Carson, Douglas, Storey and Lyon counties to be without power as of this morning, according to the paper.

Renner scored a Best Actor Oscar nomination in 2010 for 'The Hurt Locker,' and landed a Supporting Actor Oscar nomination the next year for 'The Town'.

Mayor of Kingstown begins its second season January 15 on Paramount+. The series is created by Taylor Sheridan and Hugh Dillon and produced by 101 Studios, Bosque Ranch Productions, MTV Entertainment Studios and Paramount Network for Par+.



Lucien is being considered to lead the James Bond film franchise: Reports

London | Agencies

Actor Lucien Laviscount is reportedly being considered to lead the James Bond film franchise, amid speculation about who will replace Daniel Craig in the iconic role. The actor is said to have caught the eye of producer Barbara Broccoli who co-owns Eon Productions, which is the production company behind the franchise, reports mirror.co.uk.

It comes amid ongoing speculation over who will replace Daniel who has played the character - created by the late author Ian Fleming - in five films over the last 15 years.

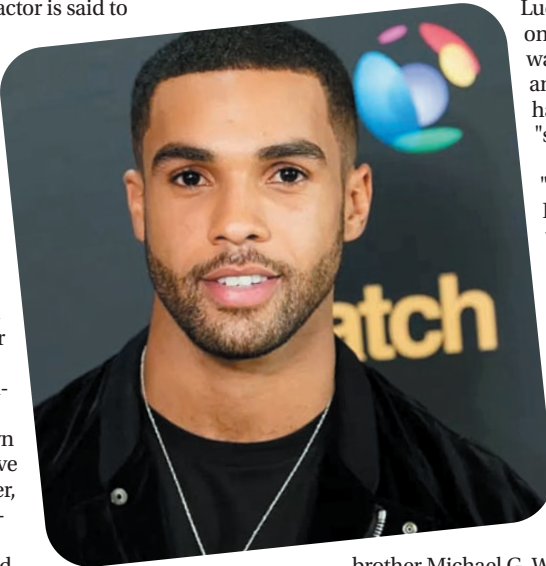
Producers are reportedly considering Lucien. He's most recently known for playing Alfie - the love interest of Emily Cooper, played by Lily Collins - in Emily in Paris.

It has been claimed that the British actor has caught the attention of those behind the 007 franchise.

A source has told the Daily Mail: "Lucien ticks all of the boxes."

They said that he is a "super talented" actor, "extremely handsome" and has attracted new fans over the last 18 months since joining the cast of the Netflix's rom-com series.

The source further told the outlet: "Bond bosses are already saying how you can see him in the 007 tuxedo, how dapper and fitting to the role he will look."



They, however, said that his stint on Celebrity Big Brother in 2011 could be a "sticking point."

The source said that he appeared on the show when his acting career wasn't as high-profile.

The source said that Lucien - who placed fifth on the reality TV show - was popular at the time and added that he now has a fan base which "stretches generations."

They continued: "That is a dream for Barbara who is very taken with him."

Lucien's acting career has included roles in Coronation Street and Waterloo Road. He's almost been among the cast of shows like Scream Queens, Snatch and Katy Keene.

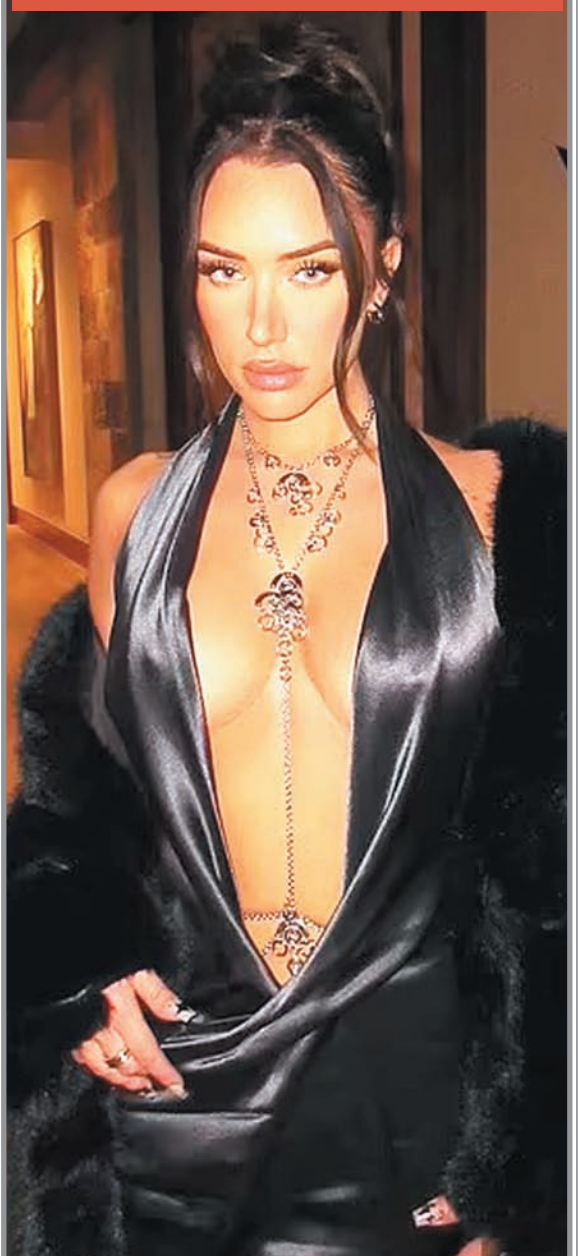
Barbara - who produces the 007 franchise alongside her brother Michael G. Wilson - has previously spoken about casting Daniel's replacement in the leading role.

Discussing casting, Barbara told the Girls on Film podcast in 2021: "We want the actor to be British. (That's) the key thing. And British, as we know, can be many, many things."

Barbara said that she is open to some diversity with the role, suggesting that the next actor may not be white and that the character could be non-binary in the future.

She suggested at the time that the character "will be a man". And her brother Michael has teased more recently that the role is likely to be given to someone in their thirties.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Anastasia Karanikolaou



IND v SL T20Is

HARDIK PANDYA,RAHUL DRAVID FACE TOUGH CALLS IN OPENER AGAINST SRI LANKA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The New Year heralds a hectic season in an ODI World Cup year for the Indian men's cricket team, which embarks on a whirlwind of matches in the first quarter of the year, oscillating between white-ball and red-ball cricket.

First off for the Men in Blue will be a three-match T20I series against neighbours Sri Lanka followed by three 50-over encounters with the same opponents.

India will kick-start the hectic first quarter of the year with a Hardik Pandya-led team taking on Sri Lanka in a three-match T20I series.

It will be a crucial match for both India and skipper Hardik Pandya, who will be standing in for Rohit Sharma for the second time this season and will have Suryakumar Yadav as his deputy.

The national selectors have rested senior players like Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and K.L. Rahul and the team management will be testing players for



key slots like opener -- someone to partner Rohit Sharma as K.L. Rahul's performance in recent times has come under the scanner -- a second wicket-keeper and also pace bowlers as seniors like Jasprit Bumrah is still not available as he is recuperating from an injury while Bhuvneshwar Kumar's performance has been up and down in recent times. Mohammad Siraj, who

played the T20I series against New Zealand, has not been included and India would be hoping to blood Shivam Mavi and Mukesh Kumar in one of these matches. It will be a big test for Hardik Pandya after he caught the eye by leading Gujarat Titans to the IPL 2022 title in a maiden attempt for both the team and the skipper. Thus the team management will have to

make some tough decisions for the first match itself. The first call that Pandya and chief coach Rahul Dravid will have to take about will be the two openers. Ishan Kishan, who struck a double hundred in the third ODI against Bangladesh, will be a toss-up between Shubman Gill and Ruturaj Gaikwad for the second spot.

The team management will also have to take a call on the bowling unit - especially the pace combination, picking up between Arshdeep Singh, who is likely to start after his impressive outing against Bangladesh, Harshal Patel, Umran Malik, Shivam Mavi and Mukesh Kumar. They will also have to pick between Washington Sundar, Yuzvendra Chahal, and Axar Patel for the spinners' slots. With Rishabh Pant rested, it will be either Ishan Kishan or Sanju Samson who will keep the wickets. India's opponents Sri Lanka too have to take some difficult calls as they have recalled senior batters like Avishka Fernando and Sadeera Samarawickrama.

VVS Laxman could be India's next coach after Rahul: Reports

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) may consider making V.V.S. Laxman the next head coach of the Indian men's team after the end of Rahul Dravid's contract, which currently runs till the 2023 ODI World Cup.

A report by News18 Cricketext has said it is reliably learnt that should Dravid not consider an extension as men's team head coach, then Laxman, who is currently the Head of Cricket at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru, could be the person to take the top job.

Laxman has filled in as the head coach of the Indian team in Dravid's absence. He was with the team for the bilateral series against Ireland in June 2022, as well as for the first T20I against England and the short tour of Zimbabwe.

He was also with the Indian team for the 2022 edition of the T20 Asia Cup in



the UAE when Dravid was down with Covid-19 and has also travelled to New Zealand as the head coach of the team for their white-ball tour immediately after the T20 World Cup ended in November 2022.

Apart from grooming the next generation of players at the NCA, Laxman had travelled with the India U-19 team for their successful 2022 World Cup too and played a very proactive role with the young bunch during their

campaign in the West Indies.

The report also said that for now, split coaching will not be happening. "Has that happened in Indian cricket before?" a senior BCCI official was quoted as saying in the report when asked about the possibility of split coaching coming into the set-up.

Ever since he took over from Ravi Shastri as the head coach in November 2021, Dravid has had an indifferent run at the helm of the Indian team.

Tata Open Maharashtra

15-year-old Manas impresses on ATP Tour debut in first-round loss

Pune | Agencies

Rising India star Manas Dhamne put up a gutsy show on his ATP Tour debut but slumped to a straight sets defeat against the World No. 113 Michael Mmoh 2-6, 4-6 in the singles opening round match of the Tata Open Maharashtra at the Balewadi Stadium.

The tennis prodigy began the match confidently and even bagged the opening game of the match aggressively by conceding just a point against the American. The Pune-born talented youngster was handed a wildcard at South Asia's only ATP 250 event for his impressive performances recently.

In other Round-of-32 singles matches, Roberto Carballes



Baena beat Bernabe Zapata Miralles 6-1, 7-5 whereas Benjamin Bonzi outperformed Chun-Hsin Tseng 6-0, 6-3 comfortably to enter the second round.

Playing in front of his home fans, the local boy Dhamne made the former World No. 96, Mmoh work hard for each point.

The American player pocketed the first set 6-2 and carried the momentum in the next by taking a strong 5-1 lead. But, the reigning Asian Junior

champion Dhamne refused to give up and fought back hard as he almost took the match to a decider by bagging three successive games to make it 5-4.

However, Mmoh, who has played all four Grand Slams, used his experience to tilt the game in his favour in the end.

"I had a chance; maybe the match could have been different. I am happy with the way I performed. It was a really good experience. I will try to improve when I play the next tournament," the talented youngster, who has also been selected for the Grand Slam Player Grant Programme 2023, concluded.

Another Indian player, Sumit Nagal will kickstart his campaign later on Day 1 of the main draw against Filip Krajinovic.

Premier League

ASTON VILLA STUNS TOTTENHAM 2-0 IN FIRST MATCH OF 2023

London | Agencies

Mid-table club Aston Villa started the New Year with a bang as they defeated higher-placed Tottenham Hotspur in a Premier League match.

Second-half goals from Emiliano Buendia and Douglas Luiz put Villa in control as Tottenham struggled to create much in the way of clear opportunities, having just two shots on target all game.

After a barren first half, Villa went ahead in the 50th minute when Ollie Watkins teed Emiliano Buendia up to open the scoring in north London with a close-range finish after 50 minutes. John McGinn then set up the second goal and picked out Douglas Luiz with a superb pass after 73 minutes, and the Brazilian coolly flicked the ball home to double the away side's lead.

A strong defensive effort ensured Aston Villa were never troubled at



the back as Unai Emery's side went home with a clean sheet, the first of the manager's tenure.

An early opportunity fell to Villa when Ollie Watkins dragged wide, but most of the first period was

played out in front of the two defences, predominantly in the Villa half as the Spurs probed for a way through their massed ranks.

Tottenham did finally carve out an opening five minutes before half-

time but Ivan Perisic clipped over a cross to the back post where Harry Kane headed goalwards but Ashley Young just managed to nod it off the line.

Villa had failed to test Hugo Lloris in the first half but that immediately changed at the start of the second as they swept forward and snatched the lead. The goalkeeper failed to hold Luiz's long-range shot, and the alert Watkins reacted quickest to tee up Buendia, who had an easy first-time finish. Spurs came close to levelling when Perisic prodded over the bar having collected Yves Bissouma's cross.

The visitors continued to look the more dangerous of the two sides and they stunned the stadium with a second goal after 73 minutes. Luiz played the ball into McGinn and burst into the box, collecting a superbly weighted return pass from the Villa captain and nonchalantly flicking the ball past Lloris.

Happens to be at the wrong time of the year: Hazlewood on his run with injuries

Sydney | Agencies

Ahead of the Sydney Test against South Africa starting from January 4, Australia's right-arm fast-bowler Josh Hazlewood put down his recent clash with injuries to them happening at the wrong time of the year.

Hazlewood suffered a side strain during the first Test against West Indies in Perth and hasn't been in action since then. He then ruled himself out from playing the Boxing Day Test against South Africa in Melbourne, and is now on the verge of a comeback in the longer format at Sydney.

"It's frustrating, definitely. I don't feel like I've been injured much...it just happens to be at the



wrong time of the year, after the first Test. The Test matches are so close together now. Apart from that, (for) the rest of the 24 months I've been fit and firing. So it's frustrating when you think about it like that," Hazlewood was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

"I still feel like it's in place. It's always good to have pressure and every time Scotty's played, he's done remarkably well. With the Ashes coming up as well, it's a big one that he's looking at and he's a similar bowler to me and Pat - we could potentially all play there together on a wicket that might seam and swing. It's great to have options and it keeps you on your toes."

United Cup

AUSTRALIA TAKES 1-0 LEAD AGAINST SPAIN

Sydney | Agencies

Rafael Nadal's woeful start to the season got a bit gloomier as the Spanish World No. 2 suffered his second defeat in the United Cup mixed team tennis tournament.

Nadal, who had earlier lost to Cameron Norrie in Spain's first preliminary round match here, went down to Australia's Alex de Minaur in three games as the hosts took a 1-0 lead in their Group D encounter.

De Minaur came up with a stunning performance here on Monday as he upset Nadal 3-6, 6-1, 7-5 as the 23-year-old rallied from a set-and-a-break down to earn the biggest win of his career by ATP Ranking after two hours and 44 minutes.

De Minaur, who also lost against Briton Cameron Norrie in his opening match of the season, has now earned eight Top 10 wins in his career. After a slow start at Ken Rosewall Arena, Nadal came to life. He rallied from a break down in the first set, consistently hitting his spots on serve while he pulled De Minaur around the court with his heavy forehand,



striking an array of winners to lead.

However, after Nadal gained an early break at the start of the second set, momentum quickly shifted as De Minaur started to time the ball cleanly to force the Spaniard back. The Australian began to find great depth on return, locking down from the baseline to enjoy success on Nadal's serve and level.

I was emotional, but I knew my time had come: Shivam Mavi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delighted with his maiden call-up for the Indian team, pacer Shivam Mavi said that he got "emotional" but he knew his "time had come" when picked for the T20I series against Sri Lanka.

"When we play domestic games, we normally hit the bed early to get proper rest. But that day, because I heard the team was about to be announced, I was sitting in Saurabh (left-arm spinner Saurabh Kumar) bhaiyya's room with Samarth (Singh).

"As soon as I learnt of my selection, for a split second, everything came to a standstill. It was an amazing feeling. I was emotional, but I knew my time had come,"

Mavi was quoted as saying to ESPNcricinfo.

Mavi also credited his parents for supporting him. "This wouldn't have been possible without their [his parents] sacrifices. They were naturally emotional too. Whatever the situation I found myself in, they always played the role of boosting my confidence and placing implicit trust in me," Mavi added.

In 2018, Mavi made a name for himself for his brilliant pace after India won the U19 World Cup in New Zealand under the leadership of Prithvi Shaw.

Thereafter, he bagged a lucrative deal with the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR). Recently, Gujarat Titans secured his services at a price of INR 6 crore.

Adelaide | Agencies

Serbian tennis great Novak Djokovic received a grand welcome back to Australia when he made a rare doubles appearance at the Adelaide International on Monday.

The Serb and his Canadian partner Vasek Pospisil suffered a 4-6, 6-3, 10-5 loss at the hands of Tomislav Brkic and Gonzalo Escobar, on his return to Australia for the first time since he won the 2021 Australian Open.

The 21-time Grand Slam champion received huge support from the crowd. He was greeted by loud cheers and chants of "Novak, Novak" when he walked out on to court.



Prior to the Australian Open 2022, Djokovic was deported because of his Covid-19 vaccination status and was handed a three-year ban from entering Australia.

However, Immigration Minister Andrew Giles overturned Djokovic's three-year visa ban in November, allowing him to enter the country.

Djokovic is the top seed in the singles draw in Adelaide and will face Frenchman Constant Letienne in the first round on Tuesday. The World No.5 is a nine-time champion in Melbourne and is just one Grand Slam title short of Rafael Nadal's record of 22 for male tennis players.

Adelaide International

DJOKOVIC RECEIVES GRAND WELCOME ON HIS RETURN TO AUSTRALIA

Noskova stuns Kasatkina

Adelaide | Czech teenager Linda Noskova has claimed her maiden top-10 victim, steadying the ship to secure a first-round upset of Daria Kasatkina at the Adelaide International on Monday.

The player, in just her fifth tour-level main draw, backed up two qualifying wins with a 6-3, 6-7(2), 6-3 defeat of the third seed, reports adelaideinternational.com.au. Having climbed as high as world No.87 as recently as August, Noskova was intent on building on a breakout 2022, in which she qualified for her first two grand slam main draws at Roland Garros and Flushing Meadows and notched a tour-level semifinal on home soil in Prague. In an opening set that featured five breaks in Adelaide it was the heavier-striking world No.102 who came through when it mattered. A hefty first serve drew the return error and the Czech, fist clenched, strode to the chair with the set in the bag after 46 minutes. Momentum proved more elusive in a tight second set as twice Kasatkina was forced to scrap her way back from the break down. While she failed to capitalise on two set points, last year's Roland Garros semifinalist was not ready to cast her sights east to Melbourne just yet. The world No.8, having collected hard-court trophies in San Jose and Granby last year, broke as Noskova served for the match and looked to have wrested control when she forced a decider.

It was not to be as a lower-back niggle required treatment and a red-hot opponent ended her stay after two hours and 31 minutes.





Tara Sutaria and Aadar Jain mutually decided to part ways: Reports

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As per a fresh report, Bollywood actresses Tara Sutaria and Aadar Jain have ended their romance. The actress has been seeing Ranbir Kapoor's cousin for some time, and the duo has been sighted together on a few Kapoor family occasions. There were even rumours of a wedding in the works. They've split up, according to an ETimes insider. According to the source, "Aadar and Tara have decided to amicably part



ways. They're both mature and they will remain friends and care for each other fondly." While they have said to parted ways, the reason behind their break up remains unclear.

Tara was missing from the Kapoor family's famed Christmas supper when the news of their breakup broke. She was spotted at the lunch party in 2021 and 2020. In 2020, the actress made her relationship with Aadar official. She posted beside a photo from a Diwali party: "Ever thine, ever mine, ever ours! Happy Birthday to my favourite person". Tara and Aadar were not a PDA couple, but they would occasionally share images of each other on their social media accounts. Tara was seen in August of last year posting a sweet snapshot of Aadar on his birthday. They were also seen together at gatherings.

Meanwhile, Tara Sutaria just completed the filming of 'Apurva'. The film is directed by Nikhil Nagesh Bhat and stars Abhishek Banerjee, Rajpal Yadav, and Dhairya Karwah in major parts. She was most recently seen in Mohit Suri's 'Ek Villain Returns', in which she co-starred alongside Arjun Kapoor, Disha Patani, and John Abraham. Tara made her big screen debut alongside Ananya Panday in Karan Johar's 'Student Of The Year 2'. Tiger Shroff also played a major part in the film.

SREEJITA DE AND ARCHANA GAUTAM HAVE YET ANOTHER VERBAL SPAT

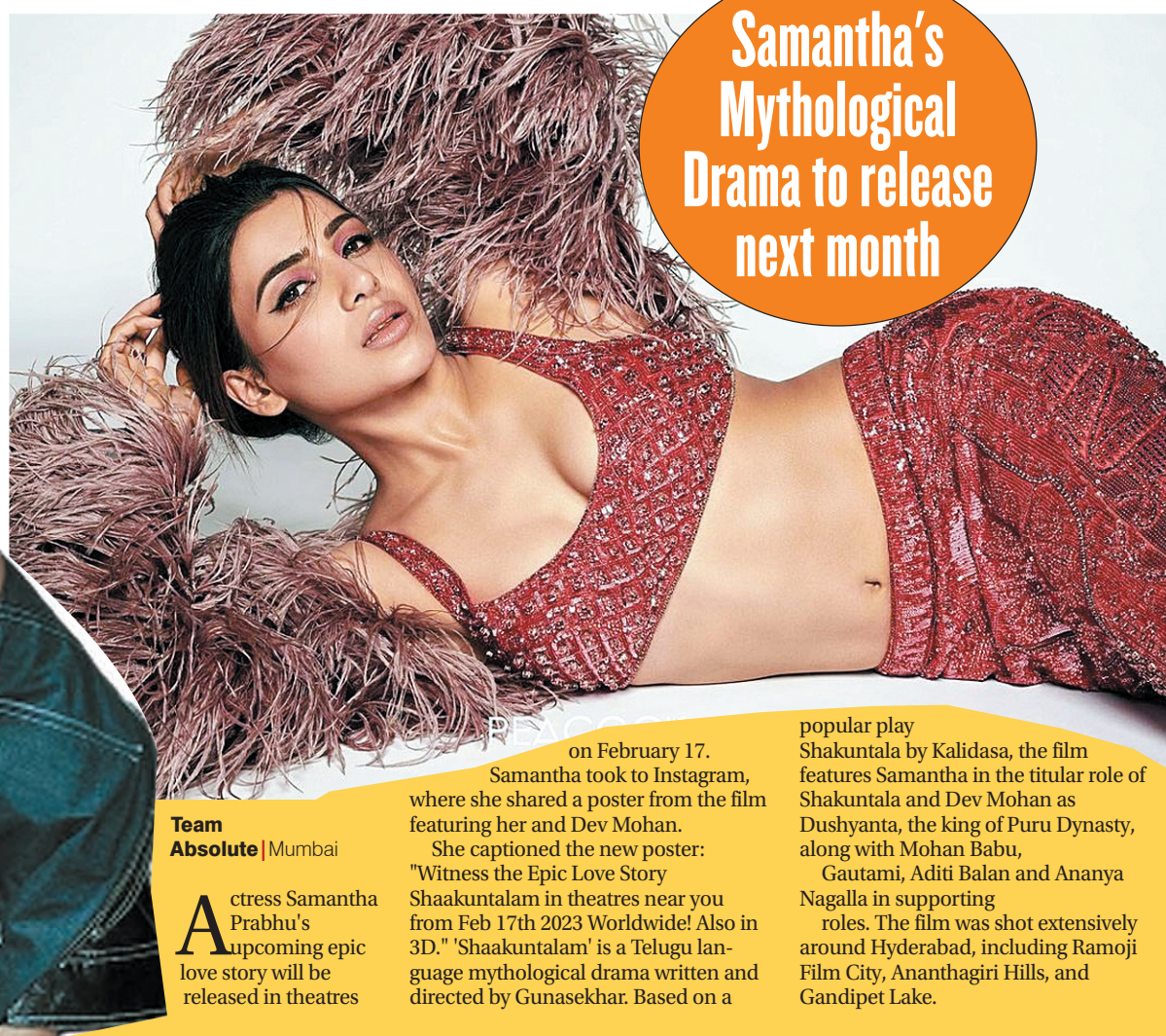
Team Absolute | Mumbai

In the upcoming episode of 'Bigg Boss 16', contestants Sreejita De and Archana Gautam have yet another a verbal spat. It all begins with Archana complaining to the cameras of the house that Sreejita doesn't do her duties properly. Sreejita returns the blow by declaring that Archana wants to instigate housemates on one hand and create a group of people who are in her favour on the other.

The tension in the house dissipated with a fun gossip session and its topic was the authenticity of Tina and Shalin's equation. The coveted house has been divided on whether their relationship is fake or for the cameras.

After this 'chugli' session, the tension comes back haunting the contestants with a unique nomination drill.

'Bigg Boss' assigns each contestant a makeshift hut that has a bulb sourced from a power station that is controlled by captain Shiv Thakare, who can protect a few housemates from nominations by supplying power to their huts. The task starts with Shiv immunising contestants of his choice and the four rounds of nominations begin. An element of kismet is involved with a spinning wheel that decides who gets to nominate whom and the hut of the nominated contestant witnesses a power cut.



Samantha's Mythological Drama to release next month

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Samantha Prabhu's upcoming epic love story will be released in theatres

on February 17. Samantha took to Instagram, where she shared a poster from the film featuring her and Dev Mohan.

She captioned the new poster: "Witness the Epic Love Story Shaakuntalam in theatres near you from Feb 17th 2023 Worldwide! Also in 3D." 'Shaakuntalam' is a Telugu language mythological drama written and directed by Gunasekhar. Based on a

popular play Shakuntala by Kalidasa, the film features Samantha in the titular role of Shakuntala and Dev Mohan as Dushyanta, the king of Puru Dynasty, along with Mohan Babu, Gautami, Aditi Balan and Ananya Nagalla in supporting roles. The film was shot extensively around Hyderabad, including Ramoji Film City, Ananthagiri Hills, and Gandipet Lake.

'I will chase my dreams, work even harder'

RUHANIKA DHAWAN BUYS HER OWN HOME AT 15

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Child actress Ruhaniqa Dhawan has purchased a house at the age of 15. She has posted several pictures and a long post expressing her gratitude towards her parents for their guidance and support. In one of the pictures, she is posing with the key of her new home and in the other one she is standing with her father inside her house. The 'Yeh Hai Mohabbatein' actress wrote in the caption: "With the blessings of Waheguru ji and my parents, sharing my happiness with you all. To new beginnings! My heart is full and I'm extremely grateful. I have check marked a very big dream- 'Buying a home on my own'. This is very huge for me and my folks. I couldn't wait to share this with you all. My parents and I are extremely thankful for all the platforms and opportunities I have gotten which have helped me achieve this dream." She added that this achievement was impossible without the help of her parents. "Of course, this wouldn't have been possible without the help and guidance of my parents and as I write this, I know how blessed I feel to have them. Special mention to my mother who



is some magician, she in all ways is Desi mother who saves every penny and doubles it. Only God and she know how she does it!" she added. At last, she concluded with the hope to achieve more in life: "There's no stopping for me!! This is just the beginning. I'm already dreaming bigger, I will chase my dreams, work even harder. So, if I can do it you too can!! So dream on, follow your dreams and it will definitely come true one day," she concluded.

I have a few targets to achieve for myself: Tina Philip

Team Absolute | Mumbai

TV actress Tina Philip, who is currently seen playing the role Rhea in the daily show 'Kumkum Bhagya', revealed her 2023 resolutions and says that she wants to focus more on her health. The actress, who is known for her shows such as 'Aye Mere Humsafar', 'Laal Ishq', and 'Ek Aastha Aisi Bhee', says: "I don't usually plan resolutions, I believe in just living my life and going with the flow. In fact, I like random plans, but this year, I have a few targets to achieve for myself." She adds that now she will be focusing more on health and will be doing yoga. Moreover, Tina says it is important to be positive and to learn to say 'no' to people whenever needed without any hesitation. She has planned to bring all these changes in herself. "I would like to travel more with my friends, concentrate on my health and be regular at doing Yoga. Most importantly, I want to focus on staying positive and need to learn how to say no to the people around me whenever I don't want something because saying no to people doesn't come easy to me," she adds.



Neha Malik