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WILL JN.1 DRIVE A SEVERE COVID WAVE IN INDIA?

JN.1 is also becoming the dominant variant globally, causing spikes in infections, hospitalisations as well as deaths in some countries. As per the WHO, the global number of new Covid-19 cases has increased by 52 per cent during the last one month. The UN health body also reported an increase in hospital, ICU admissions as well as deaths globally. This includes India, currently seeing a surge in Covid cases.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid mounting cases of Covid-19 infections daily in India, majorly driven by the JN.1 sub variant, health experts on Friday said there is no reason to worry.

India on Friday reported 4,091 active Covid cases and five deaths, revealed data from the Union Health Ministry.

The country has also reportedly detected about 145 cases of JN.1 variant from eight states.

JN.1 has been classified as a variant of interest (VOI) by the World Health Organization (WHO) due to its rapid spread. "Till JN.1 becomes Variant of Concern (VoC), it should not bother the common man -- in fact they do not come into the picture at all," said Dr Ishwar Gilada, Consultant in Infectious Diseases Unison Medicare and Research Centre, Mumbai.

"Till it is only a Voi, it is only of inter-



est (or if at all concern) for the scientific community and nodal ministry in governments at state and Centre," he added.

But then, what is causing the Covid-related deaths, including the death of DMDK chief Vijaykanth, in the country? "Individuals with certain comor-

bidities face an elevated risk of severe outcomes and increased mortality from Covid," Dr. Vikas Chopra, Sr. Consultant Interventional Cardiologist, Primus Super Speciality Hospital, told reporter.

"Common comorbidities associated with higher death risk include cardiovascular diseases like hypertension and coronary artery disease, chronic respiratory conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes, obesity, and compromised immune systems," Dr. Chopra said. Adding advanced age also to the list of risk factors, he said these comorbidities contribute to a higher likelihood of complications, respiratory distress, and organ failure in Covid patients. "Recognising and managing these underlying health conditions is crucial in mitigating the impact of the virus and enhancing overall public health resilience," the doctor said.

Dr. Gilada also stressed the importance of pandemic preparedness, and not mere Covid preparedness.

"Genome sequencing should go on. Preparatory drills can go on. No reservation of beds required, in fact that may cause collateral damage and affect other health conditions adversely, as was during the thick of pandemic times," said Gilada, Secretary General, Organised Medicine Academic Guild-OMAG. Though identified in August 2023 in Luxembourg and currently present in more than 40 countries, JN.1 has neither caused larger morbidity or any remarkable mortality. Deaths are only in co-morbid people globally, he said.

He also lauded the country for having managed the Covid-19 pandemic "much better than many powerful countries". "We are much better prepared now than ever before," the doctor said.

JN.1 VARIANT DOMINATES US WITH 50% OF COVID CASES

New York: The new highly transmissible JN.1 variant, from the lineage of Omicron variant of Covid, is now the dominant variant in the US, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has said.

The variant, classified as a variant of interest (VOI) by the World Health Organization (WHO) due to its rapid spread, is currently present in about 41 countries. It was first detected in Luxembourg in August. The proportion of JN.1

viruses over the past 2 weeks was up sharply, rising from 15-29 per cent to 39-50 per cent, the CDC said in its latest estimates, putting it far above the next most common variant, HV.1. The CDC said it is also seeing an increasing share of infections caused by JN.1 in travellers, wastewater, and most world regions. JN.1 is similar to its parent BA.2.86, but has an additional mutation (L455S) in the spike protein, which has immune-evasion properties.

Terrorist hideout busted in J&K's Poonch, arms recovered

Jammu | Agencies

The army and police, in a joint operation, busted a terrorist hideout at Mendhar in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Friday and recovered a quantity of arms and ammunition, including three pistols, officials said.

"In continuation of relentless operations against terror in Jammu region, an intelligence based joint operation by Indian Army and JK Police has led to the recovery of three pistols with foreign markings, six magazines, 64 rounds of 9mm ammunition and four grenades from a hideout in Mendhar sector," an army official said.



"This has dealt a huge blow to a terror plot planning to carry out targeted killings."

Mendhar sector in the past has been a major infiltration route for terrorists due to its proximity with PoK.

GOVT HIKES INTEREST ON TWO SMALL SAVINGS SCHEMES

New Delhi: The government has increased interest rates on two small savings schemes for January-March 2024 by 10-20 basis points, making it the sixth consecutive quarterly hike since October-December 2022.

The Finance Ministry notified on Friday that the rate of interest on the three-year time deposit has been increased by 10 basis points to 7.1 per cent while the rate of interest on the Sukanya Samriddhi Account Scheme has been hiked by 20 basis points to 8.2 percent for January-March 2024.

All other small savings schemes will continue to offer the same rate of interest as the previous quarter.

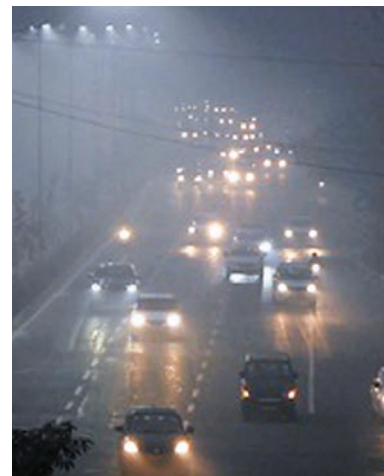
Dense to very dense fog likely to continue for next two days: IMD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Friday said that dense to very dense fog is likely to continue at many parts over Northwest India during next two days and gradually decrease thereafter while light isolated rainfall is likely over Northwest and Central India during Saturday and January 2.

The weather forecast agency further said that the minimum temperatures are in the range of 7-11 degree Celsius over most parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and in range of 12-14 degree Celsius over Bihar, Chhattisgarh, interior Odisha and Jharkhand.

"These are 2-4 degree Celsius above normal over many parts of Punjab,



Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, interior Odisha and Jharkhand," said the IMD, in its daily bulletin.

According to IMD, dense fog to very dense fog was observed at 8:30 a.m. in most places over isolated pockets of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, and at many places over Uttar Pradesh, west places over Rajasthan and Uttarakhand. The IMD said that similar weather conditions were observed at isolated parts over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit, Baltistan, Muzaffarabad and Himachal Pradesh. The IMD further said that cold day to severe cold day conditions are observed at many places over Punjab in some pockets of Haryana and in isolated pockets of Uttar Pradesh.

The IMD said that dense to very dense fog conditions are very likely to continue in most places over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi from Friday to Sunday morning and in some pockets for subsequent three days.

Govt likely to cut petrol, diesel prices ahead of LS polls



the oil PSUs -- Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum.

The final decision on the price cut will be taken at the level of the Prime Minister, sources said.

The last time the price of petrol and diesel were reduced was in May last year when the Finance Ministry had cut the excise duty on petrol by Rs 8 per litre and that on diesel by Rs 6 a litre.

Crude oil prices have also been falling in the global market. The price of benchmark Brent crude was hovering at around \$77 a barrel in the international market on Friday. This is down from the \$85 to 90 range in earlier months which makes it easier to go for a price cut in fuel prices.

Meanwhile, the shares of Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum crashed by 4 per cent in Friday's trade amid reports of a likely cut in petrol and diesel prices.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The government is likely to reduce the petrol and diesel prices ahead of the Lok Sabha polls as crude oil prices have also come down in the international market which will enable the oil marketing companies to bear the burden.

As per sources, the Ministry for Petroleum and Natural Gas has worked out various combinations and permutations on the price cuts ranging from Rs 4 to Rs 10 per litre in the two fuels and the impact it will have on the oil companies.

The government is also looking at reduction in the excise duty on petrol and diesel so that the entire burden of the price cut is not borne by

Ham radio operators reunite friends across the international border after half a century



Kolkata | Agencies

Loneliness can be dispiriting -- particularly the elderly -- over the brink. So, when 75-year-old Gautam Ray sent out an appeal over social media for information about his college mate Saifuddin Ahmed Choudhary, amateur radio operators of the West Bengal Radio Club (WBRC) got into the act. Ray is a retired banker who lives in Kolkata.

He lost his wife a few years ago and his only daughter is now settled in the US.

"I don't know how he got our number but he sent a WhatsApp message and then called up. He said that at the end of his life, he wants to get in touch with Choudhary. According to him, Choudhary completed his bachelor's degree with English Honours from the Scottish Church College in Kolkata before doing his master's from the

University of Calcutta. Ray and Choudhary were batchmates between 1964 and 1969. Choudhary used to live in Andul, Howrah, and left for Bangladesh in 1971 after the country was liberated. In Bangladesh, he joined a college or university as a teacher, Ray told me," says Ambarish Nag Biswas, secretary, WBRC.

The elderly gentleman also provided some old photographs from their college days and said how Choudhary had

refused to migrate to East Pakistan before the Independence of Bangladesh. The Ham operators of WBRC immediately got in touch with Shamsul Huda, secretary of the Amateur Radio Society of Bangladesh. Choudhary was traced within a few hours.

After leaving India, Choudhary started teaching at the Jahangirnagar University in Dhaka. A bachelor, he has also been associated with theatre. For over two decades, he has been a member of the steering committee of the UNESCO supported Forum of Theatre Training and Education. The two friends broke down after getting reunited after more than 50 years. "This is a new sunrise for the both of us. I had never thought that this would be possible. I have been trying to get in touch with Gautam for so long. We will also get in touch with another friend Deepak," Choudhary said.

ULFA, Centre & Assam sign accord



Team Absolute | New Delhi

In an effort to put an end to the decades-long insurgency in Assam, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), the Centre, and the Assam government signed the much-anticipated historic tripartite peace accord here on Friday.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma were present during the peace pact signing.

A delegation of 16 pro-talk members of the ULFA, headed by its chairperson Arabinda Rajkhowa, represented the faction. The historic agreement is

expected to go beyond previous agreements, highlighting an unmatched economic stimulus and strong safeguarding for indigenous populations, an official said.

The demand for a "sovereign Assam" led to the formation of the ULFA in 1979. Its subsequent subversive actions resulted in the Central government designating it as a prohibited group in 1990.

However, prominent leaders of ULFA were either arrested or surrendered around 2009. But the faction led by Paresh Baruah (known as ULFA-I) is still involved in insurgency activities and has not agreed to come to the table for talks.



DENSE FOG PROMPTS DELHI POLICE TRAFFIC ADVISORY, COMMUTERS URGED TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid dense fog and reduced visibility, the Delhi Traffic Police issued an advisory on Friday, urging commuters to observe and take the following precautions to reach their destination safely and prevent untoward incidents due to the fog.

"Delhi experienced a severe winter in the last few days. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) with the forecast for the coming week has predicted dense to very dense fog at most places in the morning. Delhi has already been given a 'Red Alert' as the city can be wrapped in dense fog and the visibility range may vary from 199 m to 50 m or can even be less than 50 metres," the advisory read.

"Due to dense fog in coming days, it becomes imperative on the part of all road users to follow certain precautions to avoid crashes and fatalities. All road users are advised to observe and take following precautions to reach their destination safely and prevent any untoward incident due to fog" it said. The advisory suggested commuters



make sure everything is in working order, especially lights, brakes, tyres, windscreen wipers, radiator, battery and car heating system.

"Keep your windows and mirrors clean. Use your defroster and wipers to maximise your vision. Make your vehicle visible to others both ahead of you

and behind you by using low-beam headlights as high beams get reflected back in the fog and impair visibility. If visibility is reduced, turn on fog lights, reduce speed and slow down, watch speedometer, don't drive beyond headlights," it said.

The traffic cops also advised commuters to not attempt to overtake other vehicles in foggy conditions.

"In extremely dense fog where visibility is near zero, the best course of action is to first turn on your hazard lights, then simply pull into a safe location such as a parking lot of a local business and stop. If there is no parking lot or driveway to pull into, pull your vehicle off to the side of the road as far as possible. Once you come to a stop, turn off all lights except your hazard flashing lights, set the emergency brake, and take your foot off the brake pedal to be sure the tail lights are not illuminated so that other drivers don't mistakenly run into you," it said.

"All motorists are advised to follow these precautions for their own safety as well as the safety of other road users," it added.

JDU President Lalan Singh resigns, BJP now predicts break in party

Patna | Agencies

A meeting of the National Executive of Janata Dal United i.e. JDU was held in Delhi... in which Lalan Singh has resigned from the post of JDU President... and the party has also accepted the resignation of Lalan Singh.

Lalan Singh claimed that he would be busy in the election campaign in his home constituency and hence offered his resignation as party's national president. He took the decision in the presence of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar during the two-day meeting held in New Delhi. While addressing the meeting, Lalan Singh said: "As I am busy in the Lok Sabha election in my own constituency, I am giving the resignation from the post of national president of the party. I also proposed the name of CM Nitish Kumar as a national president of the party." Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, the finance minister



of Bihar government and JD-U leader said: "Lalan Singh has given the resignation and it was accepted by the party."

During the meeting, it was also proposed that Nitish Kumar will have all the authority to take decisions on alliance, seat-sharing formula in the alliance, selection of candidates, etc. All the power of JD-U was also given in the hand of Nitish Kumar as well.

Lalan Singh ultimately had to leave the post of President of Janata Dal United. This was first predicted by BJP leader and former Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi. Now Modi

has claimed the breakup of JDU.

The former Deputy Chief Minister said that our prediction of removal of Lalan Singh from the post of National President, who was trying to break JDU by meeting Lalu Prasad, came true within a week, but this is the beginning of the game, not the end. He said that the disintegration of the party is certain.

He claimed that two factions have formed within JDU. One camp is Lalu's supporters, of which Lalan Singh had made more than 12 MLAs stand behind him. The second group maintains goodwill towards BJP. Modi said that if Lalan Singh had not been removed in time, he would have agreed to merge JDU with RJD while working as Lalu Prasad's agent. He said that Lalan Singh is not going to keep quiet, so he will make some more noises. JDU now needs to be more careful with them.

Aircraft gets stuck under flyover in Bihar's East Champaran, causes traffic jams

Patna | Agencies

A decommissioned aircraft got stuck under a flyover in Bihar's Motihari on Friday afternoon, leading to massive traffic snarl on both sides of NH 28.

The aircraft was purchased in an auction by a scrap dealer from Mumbai and was being carried to Assam on a big lorry.

When it reached Gopalganj on NH 28, it headed towards Pipara Kothi in East Champaran district to go towards Muzaffarpur and further Darbhanga to go towards Purnea, then Silliguri, on way to Assam.

"Every vehicle which comes from NH 28 via Gopalganj has to cross the underpass at Pipara Kothi flyover to go towards Muzaffarpur. When the lorry driver took the turn under the flyover, the upper part of the



aircraft touched the flyover and got stuck. The driver made every possible effort to free it but failed," Pipara Kothi police station SHO Manoj Kumar Singh said.

"This has led to huge traffic snarls on both sides of the road. We reached the spot and looked into the technical aspects so it cross the flyover.

After brief discussion, we have decided to remove the air of all the tyres of the lorry to reduce the height and then pull it from under the flyover," Singh said.

As news spread about an aircraft being struck under the flyover, a large number of people assembled there to see the sight and take selfies.

Rajasthan Cabinet expansion on Dec 30; Guv to administer oath to new ministers

Jaipur | Agencies

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma on Saturday will expand his Cabinet with Governor Kalraj Mishra administering the oath to the new ministers.

CM Sharma took the oath of office and secrecy on December 15.

The cabinet expansion is scheduled to happen 15 days after he was sworn in as chief minister.

According to sources and speculation making the rounds, the first-term as well as second-time MLAs stand a good chance of being inducted into the Bhajan Lal Sharma-led Cabinet.

Besides, senior leaders are also likely to get a place. Some senior MLAs who are among probable candidates include Kirori Lal Meena, one of the most prominent leaders of the eastern region of Rajasthan. Hindutva face and Tijara MLA Baba Balaknath is also



expected to be a part of the Cabinet. Among the women leaders, all eyes were on Anita Bhadel, Deepthi Maheshwari and first-time MLA Nauksham Chaudhary. Jitendra Gothwal and senior MLA

Madan Dilawar from the Dalit community could also be made ministers.

Senior MLAs of the Rajput community like Pushpendra Singh Ranaut and Siddhi Kumari are hopeful of becoming ministers. Meanwhile, the Brahmin

community leaders are also hopeful of getting a seat or two in the Cabinet. According to sources, names of MLAs like Sanjay Sharma, Sandeep Sharma, Jethanand Vyas among others are making the rounds. An analyst said that in the new Cabinet, most of the attention is likely to be given to representation to the Jat community.

CM Sharma took the oath of office and secrecy on December 15.

Along with him, Diya Kumari and Prem Chand Bairwa were sworn in as Deputy CMs.

The swearing-in ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, BJP President JP Nadda and chief ministers of many BJP-ruled states.

After taking the oath, CM Bhajan Lal Sharma had said: "We will leave no stone unturned to make Rajasthan the best, prosperous and self-reliant state."

Haryana doctors strike: Additional doctors deployed to run hospitals, says govt

Chandigarh | Agencies

Health services in Haryana were badly impacted in government hospitals on Friday after at least 2,500 doctors went on an indefinite strike in response to the call given by the Haryana Civil Medical Services Association (HCMSA).

However, the government has said that over 3,000 additional doctors have been deployed across the state.

The doctors have been demanding the formation of a specialist cadre, no direct recruitment of senior medical officers, reduction in bond amount for postgraduate courses and an assured career progression scheme on a par with their Central government counterparts. Meanwhile, the Health and Family Welfare Minister Anil Vij has reassured the public that all patients visiting government health centres or hospitals in the state will receive ade-



quate healthcare services, despite the ongoing strike called by government doctors. He said that the Health Department has revoked all types of leaves for doctors, mobilising around

3,000 doctors to ensure continuous services. The minister told the media the mobilised doctors included consultants, senior consultants, NHM doctors, medical officers from medical col-

leges, and community health officers.

Earlier, Health Services Department Director General Randeep Poonia along with J.S. Punia and Manish Bansal convened a meeting with representatives of the HCMSA.

The attendees included state President Rajesh Kumar, media coordinator Amarjeet and district president Mandeep and state general secretary Anil Yadav. The meeting addressed various demands of the association, such as the establishment of a specialist cadre, amendments to the postgraduate policy, pay revisions, and halting direct recruitment of Senior Medical Officers (SMOs), an official statement said. At the meeting, the association office-bearers were informed the specialist cadre has been approved.

Currently, direct recruitment of SMOs is not underway, and plans are in place to promote 100 medical officers to SMO positions.

Dhankhar declines request to appoint Raghav Chadda as interim party leader in RS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar has declined the request of AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal seeking the appointment of Raghav Chadda as the interim party leader in the Rajya Sabha.

The Chairman has said that Sanjay Singh will continue to be the leader of AAP in Rajya Sabha. "This aspect is subject to 'The Leaders and Chief Whips of Recognised Parties and Groups in Parliament (Facilities) Act, 1998' and the Rules made there under. The request, not being in conformity to applicable legal regime, is not being acceded to," the Chairman said, as per the sources. Kejriwal, in his previous communication, had written: "I would like to propose the name of Raghav Chadda as



the interim party leader in the Rajya Sabha until further changes are deemed necessary. We request that this change be allowed as per the rules and procedures of the Rajya Sabha." The officials said

that Kejriwal's request had come in the backdrop of the current Rajya Sabha AAP leader Sanjay Singh being under judicial custody and unable to attend the parliamentary session.

Vedanti asks Yogi to bring Advani to Ayodhya for Jan 22 event

Ayodhya | Agencies

Former BJP MP Ram Vilas Vedanti, who was an accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case in 1992, has urged BJP veteran and former Deputy Prime Minister L. K. Advani to attend the consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22.

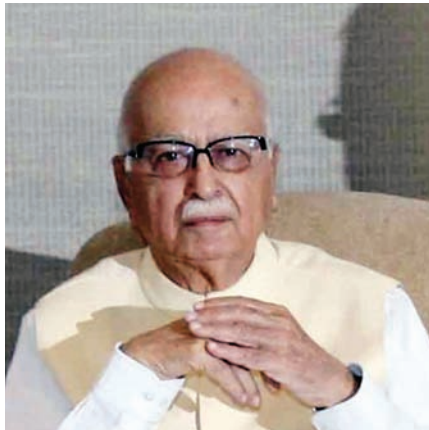
Vedanti said the Yogi government must make arrangements for Advani's visit, so that he could witness the grand temple and idol of Shri Ram at the sanctum sanctorum.

The Temple Trust has already sent an invite to Advani, however, there were doubts over him attending the event because of his ill health.

Advani became one of the torchbearers of the final phase of the temple movement when he started his Rath Yatra from Somnath to mobilise support for Ram Temple in September 1990.

"Advani had made a huge contribution to awakening Hindutva in the Ram Mandir movement through his Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya. Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has invited him for the consecration ceremony. We welcome it. I want that the UP government, especially Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, should make arrangements to bring Advani to the sanctum sanctorum at the time when Ram Lalla is being seated there," Vedanti said.

"Atal, Advani and Joshi have contributed a lot for BJP to reach where it is now. Advani's contribution to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement is huge. He should witness Ram Lalla enthroned in his temple. This is not just the desire of the country but of Hindus across the



globe," he said. Vedanti was one of the 32 accused in Babri Masjid demolition, including Advani, Murlu Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharti and Kalyan Singh and was acquitted by the CBI court in September 2020.

He won from Machhlishahr parliamentary seat in 1996 and Pratapgarh in 1998.

Vedanti was the working president of Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas which the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had set up for the construction of Ram Temple during the temple movement.

After the SC verdict in 2019, the Centre set up Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust to oversee the construction work, with Nriyaya Gopal Das as its chairman and Champat Rai its secretary.

Proposed tableau from Bengal for Republic Day Parade rejected

Kolkata | Agencies

The Central government has rejected the proposed tableau from the state government for the Republic Day Parade on January 26 next year at New Delhi.

The theme of the tableau proposed by the West Bengal government this time was "Kanyashree Prakalpa" project, a financial assistance scheme to discourage girls from being school dropouts while encouraging them to go for higher studies, a pet project of the Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

The ruling party leaders feel that the proposed tableau has been rejected deliberately by the Union government to ensure that the success stories of this "unique girl-child development project" by the state government do not get wider publicity. "Had this tableau not been rejected, the scientific approach of the West Bengal government under the dynamic leadership of the Chief Minister in women-development would have come in the limelight and in that process the failures of the Union government in the same field would have surfaced. It is unfortunate that the "Kanyashree Prakalpa", which had received international accolades



including that from the UN, had not been acknowledged by the Union government," said the State Women & Child Development and Social Welfare Minister Sashi Panja. As per Trinamool Congress leaders, giving permission to the project would

have meant an indirect acknowledgment that the Union government project of "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" project was actually inspired by the West Bengal government's "Kanyashree Prakalpa" project.

The sources said that this is not the

first time that the proposed tableau from West Bengal for the Republic Day parade has been rejected.

Earlier, there had been instances of rejections of proposed tableaux from the West Bengal government in 2020 and 2022 as well.



MP: A MONTH AFTER POLL RESULTS, PORTFOLIO OF MINISTERS STILL AWAITED

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Almost a month after assembly election results were announced on December 3, the wait for the portfolio of the cabinet ministers of Madhya Pradesh is still awaited.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 163 out of 230 assembly seats, and elevated three-time MLA Mohan Yadav as Chief Minister on December 11. He along with his deputies took oath on December 13.

Two weeks later, 28 MLAs were sworn in as ministers in Mohan Yadav's cabinet, which consists of 18 council of ministers and 10 state ministers on December 25.

However, wait for the portfolio of new council of ministers is getting longer in Madhya Pradesh. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav is visiting Delhi frequently to meet the BJP top leadership.

Yadav visited Delhi again on Thursday evening - the fourth time in last one week. Yadav's frequent visit to Delhi is being judged or speculated differently as many claimed some heavyweights racing to top ministries.

BJP leaders here in Madhya Pradesh were of the view that the decision of allocating portfolio to the



council ministers likely to be made by end of this month and from January 1, the state government would be fully operational.

Until then, Yadav is making all efforts to get everything streamlined for the smooth running of the administration. Some top bureaucrats have been reshuffled and Yadav has met every senior politician of his party, even those who lost the election. Well-aware of the fact that his governance would be compared with that of his predecessor Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who headed the state for

over 16 years, Yadav is trying to win the confidence of his party colleagues.

However, not much is happening in state politics right now and all key decisions are being made by the BJP's central leadership. The bustle in Madhya Pradesh's politics is likely to begin after the portfolio allocation.

The race for acquiring top ministries like home and urban development has already begun among the heavyweight leaders in the state.

Madhya Pradesh's new cabinet is a combination of young and senior

leaders. Of them 17 are first-timers, including stalwarts like the BJP's National General Secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, ex-Union Minister Prahlad Singh Patel and former state President Rakesh Singh.

Significantly, out of 31, only nine Ministers from former CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan's Cabinet have been retained, including the Chief Minister and his two deputies Shukla and Devda.

Apart from the combination of new and old leaders, the BJP has tried to balance castes and regions in its cabinet selection.

Notably, to make it easier for Yadav to gain control, the BJP's top leadership has clipped Chouhan's wings and very few of his loyalists have been included into the cabinet.

Some former Ministers who had strong influence in the state's politics, like Gopal Bhargava, Bhupendra Singh, Jayant Malaiya and some others, have been dropped.

The new CM, whose political journey began with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has the backing of Modi and Shah. However, it remains to be seen if he can dominate his cabinet colleagues, especially the senior-most and influential leaders and how governance takes place in the future.

Question mark over the future of MPs who lost assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Bharatiya Janata Party in Madhya Pradesh has started preparations for the Lok Sabha elections to be held next year. Besides, she is also studying those assembly seats where she had to face defeat.

Those MPs who lost the assembly elections are in the most trouble. In the elections held on 230 assembly seats in the state, BJP won on 163 seats, while BJP did not get success on 67 seats. BJP's main focus is now on these seats. Yesterday, the organization summoned these defeated candidates to the party office and asked them the reason for their defeat. While all the candidates explained the reasons for their defeat, the organization has instructed

them to remain active in their respective assembly constituencies. The party is taking out Vikas Bharat Sankalp Yatra. Assembly bar ambassadors are also being appointed for this yatra and the party has decided to make those who lost the elections also as ambassadors. Party sources say that the party is conducting a survey for the selection of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. It is also collecting details of current MPs. BJP has control over 28 out of 29 seats in the state. BJP had fielded seven MPs, including three Union Ministers, in the assembly elections, out of which five won, but two had to face defeat. Those who lost the election are Satma MP Ganesh Singh and Mandla MP and Union Minister Fagga Singh Kulaste. Whether these

two MPs will get a chance next time or not is a big question. The people of the party itself argue that when these two MPs have lost the elections from the assembly constituencies of their parliamentary constituency, then what is the guarantee that they will win the Lok Sabha elections.

Political analysts believe that it is not very easy for BJP to select candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections as seven MPs contested the assembly elections and two of them lost the elections. It will not send a good message if the party fields MPs who have lost the assembly elections. With this, a perception will already be formed as to how those who do not win the Lok Sabha elections will win the Lok Sabha elections.

Two girl students returning from coaching in Indore were hit by a trial train, died



Team Absolute | Indore

Late Thursday evening, two girl students returning from coaching in Madhya Pradesh's commercial city Indore were hit by a trial train and died.

This accident happened in Kailod Hala of Indore-Dewas railway track. According to the information received, three girl students were

returning after studying from the coaching center of Satellite Junction Colony. Before she could cross the track, the trial train arrived and two of the girl students got hit by it and jumped and fell a long distance away. Both the girls died as soon as they fell on the ground.

The girl students who became victims of the accident have been identified as

Radhika Bhaskar and Babli Masrak of Kailod Kankar, while their third friend had a narrow escape.

Local people say that the work of doubling the railway line is going on and during this time, a trial train passed by there whose speed was very high and these girls got hit by it. No one was even aware of the passing of this trial train.

368 POLICE OFFICERS/EMPLOYEES PROMOTED

Bhopal: During the meeting held at the Police Headquarters by Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, instructions were given to the officers/employees of the Police Department for immediate promotion. As per the instructions of the Chief Minister, Director General of Police Sudhir Saxena ordered all the branches of the police department to take immediate action. In the same sequence, Special Armed Forces (SAF) constituted departmental promotion committees of various cadres and took promotion action in which in various cadres (GD, Arms, Cavalry, Band) 67 were promoted from Sub Inspector to Inspector, 118 were promoted from Assistant Sub Inspector to Sub Inspector and by releasing the suitability list of 167 officers/employees from head constable to assistant sub-inspector, 368 officers/employees were promoted.

BJP collected details from candidates who lost assembly elections

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Bharatiya Janata Party may have won power in Madhya Pradesh, but it has started a review of the places where it lost. Prominent leaders of the party have also sought details of the reason for defeat from the MLAs who lost the elections.

On Thursday, BJP held a meeting at the party office with the candidates who lost the assembly elections. All of them were also asked the reasons why there was defeat. Besides, it was also brainstormed to ensure that there are no mistakes in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. State BJP President Vishnu



Dutt Sharma has said that BJP has got a big victory in the state, but there are some people who were left behind in the elections, a meeting was held with such people. All the workers should maintain morale, as Atal ji used to say that 'Neither in defeat nor in victory, I am not afraid in the slightest', hence in view of the preparation for the Lok Sabha elections, what are the things in the assembly elections due to which we lagged behind? we learned from all the workers. There are 10 workers in this election who lost by a very small margin. All those workers discussed the Lok Sabha elections along with the upcoming plans in this meeting.

THE TURMOIL IN CONGRESS INTENSIFIED, PATWARI EXPRESSED HIS DISPLEASURE

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The turmoil is intensifying after the change in power in Madhya Pradesh Congress. State President Jitu Patwari has been holding introductory meetings continuously, but in some meetings the old officials are also seen venting their anger.

Recently, the President had taken a meeting of Congress cells. Cell in-charge JP Dhanopia was also present in the meeting. The president of one cell had to go out for party work. He authorized two of his colleagues to attend the meeting. As soon as he reached the meeting, Dhanopia got angry and said that the Chairman had been called, not him. Both were insulted and thrown out. But Chairman Patwari took it seriously. He told Dhanopia in the meeting itself that he himself had become an ex. Presidents of other cells present in the meeting also opposed in-charge Dhanopia. Patwari said that any representative can come to the meeting. They have to review the cells and get information about the activities. After



this incident, officials of many cells have opened a front against the in-charge. Here, party sources say that along with the State Congress Executive, most of the departments and cells are to be changed, hence at present the officials have maintained

silence. It is noteworthy here that Dhanopia was earlier a supporter of late Arjun Singh, and when Kamal Nath became the PCC president, he joined him. His presence remained mostly in PCC. Never been a field

leader. Only factionalism and PCC politics have been hesitant. Taking advantage of being close to Kamal Nath, he took the post of cell in-charge. He is in charge of fifty cells, yet Congress lost in his area by one lakh votes.

Swarna Prashan program organized in AIIMS Bhopal

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Under the guidance of Prof. (Dr.) Ajai Singh, the Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal, Swarna Prashan has been systematically organized over the past year, specifically on the day of Pushya Nakshatra each month. According to Ayurveda principles, Swarna Prashan is administered to enhance children's immunity and contribute to their physical and mental development.

The final Swarna Prashan for the year 2023 took place today, December 29, 2023, at the Department of AYUSH, AIIMS Bhopal, O.P.D. Ayurveda. A total of 79 children actively participated in this program, including 46 returning participants and 33 new registrations. Dr. Ranjana



Pandey, an Ayurveda Medical Officer, administered Swarna Prashan to children ranging from 1 to 16 years old, extending warm wishes for their health and a promising

future in the upcoming New Year. The event also served as an opportunity to educate participants about the importance of cleanliness and maintaining good health.

CM requests Amit Shah to inaugurate cyber tehsil system on January 1

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav has met Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah and requested him to launch the cyber tehsil system in the state on January 1, 2024.

The Chief Minister met Shah at his residence on Friday during his visit to Delhi. The Union Minister has accepted this invitation.

Yadav said that the state government is determined to fulfill the guarantees of Resolution 23 given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the people of the state. In this sequence, the state government has decided to implement the concept of cyber tehsil in the entire state from January 1. With the use of modern technology in the Cyber Tehsil system, the name transfer can be done in favor of the buyer in a transparent manner within the time limit of 15 days from the registry and the Khasra-Naksha can also be improved immediately.

In the first phase, this process is being implemented only in such undisputed cases where the sale is of entire meales. Later it will be implemented in all types of undisputed transfers and divisions. With online, paperless and faceless process of name transfer through



Cyber Tehsil, the state government will move in the direction of 'Good Governance to Suraj'.

Shabnam Sheikh moving towards Ayodhya with saffron flag

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Pran Pratishtha ceremony is going to be held on January 22 in the Ram temple in Ayodhya and everyone is not only eager to see this sight but everyone aspires to have the darshan of Ram. It is a matter of faith, and now it has gone beyond religion.

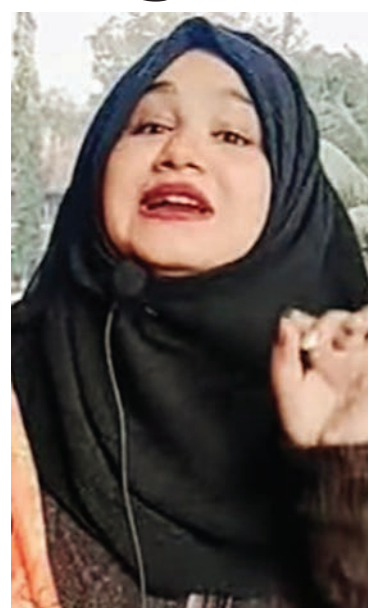
This is the reason why Shabnam Sheikh of Mumbai has set out with a resolve to visit Ram Lalla and is moving towards Ayodhya on foot. 20 year old Shabnam Sheikh is a first year B.Com student but she has immense faith in Ram. She calls herself a Sanatani Muslim. He came to know about people from all over the country and the world going to Ayodhya and he also decided to go to Ayodhya on foot. Shabnam is passing through

Barwani district of Madhya Pradesh while en route. She has traveled 350 kilometers so far. He believes that one does not need to be a Hindu to worship Ram, for this it is enough to be a human being. Shabnam is walking 25 to 30 kilometers every day and at this speed it is impossible for her to reach Ayodhya to consecrate the temple.

Shabnam has a saffron flag in her hand on which Hanuman ji's picture is engraved. There is also a pitthu bag on which there is mention of the temple of Ayodhya. He says that he heard the talk of youth going to Ayodhya on bicycle and on foot and the thought came to his mind why not travel to Ayodhya on foot. I also had this thought in my mind that I am a woman of India and I am superior to every-

one. In this, her two friends Ramraj and Vineet Pandey suggested to go to Ayodhya by bicycle, on which Shabnam said that it would not be right to ride a bicycle on the highway. Therefore, he decided to go to Ayodhya on foot and his companions agreed to do so. Shabnam tells that when she told her father about her plan to go to Ayodhya, he agreed. Mother definitely felt a little sad. After that we made preparations and started towards Ayodhya.

The distance from Mumbai to Ayodhya is about 1,400 kilometers and she is traveling 25 to 30 kilometers every day, till now she has been able to cover only 350 kilometers. In this context, it is difficult for her to reach Ayodhya by 22nd January but she says that she has gone to see Ram. Lalla.





EDITOR'S SPECS

RSS, Ram Mandir and 2024 polls

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in Karnataka has outlined a plan to reach out to over 29,000 villages in Karnataka ahead of the inauguration of Ram Mandir at Ayodhya on January 22, 2024. Tippeswamy, RSS Kshetra Karyanirvahak, on Thursday said that the organisation has planned to carry out a Sampark Abhiyaan between January 1 and January 15. During this 15-day duration, a plan has been chalked out to reach out to all 29,500 villages in the state. Mantrakshate (sacred raw rice used for worship), a photograph of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, and hand-bills brought from Ayodhya would be given to the people. The main objective of this campaign is to make people aware of the history of Lord Ram and his struggles. On January 22, the main temples in every village will organise 'satsang', special worship, and 'Ram Jap' programmes, he said. LED screens would be erected, and live telecasts of the inauguration of the Ram temple would be arranged. Every home will light five diyas in the direction of Ayodhya in the evening, he said. It has been estimated that 1.5 lakh volunteers will take part in the Sampark Abhiyan. The Ram Pratishthan event will take place between 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The rituals will begin three days prior to the inauguration, Tippeswamy said. Guests at the consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya will have the opportunity for 'Ayodhya Darshan' through the renowned Gita Press literature that will be gifted to them.

INDIA LOOKS AT SURPASSING BEST-EVER TOKYO TALLY OF 7 MEDALS IN PARIS 2024

B. Shrikant

Excellence in non-cricket sports in India has always been measured in terms of medals won at the Olympic Games.

The quadrennial Games have been the pinnacle of success that only a few Indians have achieved, because in over a century of participation in the Olympic Games since making their debut at Stockholm in 1912, India have won only 35 medals -- 10 gold, nine silver and 16 bronze.

Of these, field hockey has contributed 12 medals -- eight gold, one silver and three bronze.

After being also-rans for decades, except in hockey for more than 10 editions, Indian athletes nowadays go to the Olympics as medal contenders, especially in shooting, badminton, wrestling, boxing, weightlifting and athletics.

It is with this newfound success, confidence and skills that the Indian sportspeople will be going to the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, to be held from July 26 to August 10, as title contenders in many events.

As India will be competing in Paris after achieving their best medal tally in the Olympics at the Tokyo Games and post crossing the 100-medal mark in the Asian Games for the first time in Hangzhou this year (107 -- 28 gold, 38 silver and 31 bronze), there are huge expectations that the country will achieve another high in Paris, bagging a record medal haul in the French capital.

In three consecutive Olympics starting with the 1984 edition in Los Angeles, India had failed to win a single medal in the quadrennial Games, returning empty-handed from the 1984, 1988 and 1992 editions.

It was at the 1976 Games in Montreal that the world's second most populous country had, for the first time since 1928 when it won its first gold medal in hockey, failed to win a single medal at the Olympic Games.

Till that time, India had won seven gold, one silver and three bronze medals in hockey. In Montreal, they failed to win a medal in hockey, as artificial turf replaced natural grass at the mega event.

India did win their eighth gold in hockey at the boycott-marred Moscow Olympics in 1980, but what followed was a medal drought for 12 years.

India's fortunes changed from the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, United States, with Leander Paes winning the bronze in men's singles tennis. Since then, India has returned from every edition of the Olympic Games with at least



one medal. It was at the Beijing Games that India won multiple medals since the 1952 Games in Helsinki when K.D. Jadhav had won a bronze medal in wrestling.

In Tokyo in 2021, the Games postponed by one year from 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, India surpassed its best-ever medal haul so far and returned with seven medals, including a gold won by the country's biggest superstar -- Neeraj Chopra -- in javelin throw.

India won one gold, two silver and four bronze medals in Tokyo.

So, going by the record so far, India will, in all probability, win medals in Paris. But the question that the fans would like to be answered is whether India will be able to surpass its seven-medal haul achieved in Tokyo in 2021.

Crores of people and most experts believe that India will return from Paris with many medals -- if not bag full, at least take the tally into double figures for the first time in the history of the Games.

Though many of India's stars are yet to qualify for the Games as the qualifying period is still continuing, a clearer picture will emerge when the full strength of the squad is revealed.

In Tokyo, Neeraj Chopra became the first Indian to win a gold medal in athletics. It was also a historic occasion as India won an Olympic medal for the first time in men's hockey in four decades -- a bronze coming for the first time since the gold in the 1980 edition.

Also in Tokyo, P.V. Sindhu became the first woman sports person to win multiple medals for India at the Olympics -- adding a bronze in women's singles badminton to the silver she won in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

In Paris, Neeraj Chopra will get the opportunity to add another medal to his tally. He is the best medal prospect for India to win a medal considering that since winning the gold in Tokyo, Neeraj has won gold at the Diamond League Finals, the World

Championships, Hangzhou Asian Games and has surpassed his personal best, going from strength to strength.

Reigning World Champion boxer Nikhat Zareen, Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist pugilist Lovlina Borgohain, U20 World Champion wrestler Antim Panghal, besides shooters like Rudranksh Patil, Anish Bhanwala, Manu Bhaker, Sift Kaur Samra and top weightlifter Mirabai Chanu will be among the medal contenders in Paris.

The list is expected to grow further with many more qualification berths available across disciplines.

If all goes as per plan, India can take their medal count to double-digits for the first time, thus helping the country achieve its best and most successful medal haul in Paris.

international

L'OREAL HEIRESS IS FIRST WOMAN TO AMASS A FORTUNE OF \$100BN

London | Agencies

The L'Oreal heiress and businesswoman, Francoise Bettencourt Meyers, has become the first woman to amass a fortune of \$100bn, media reports said.

Bettencourt Meyers, who is French, broke through the barrier on Thursday thanks to a rise in the share price of the cosmetics empire she inherited from her mother, who also held the title of the world's richest woman until her death in 2017.

L'Oreal was founded in 1909 by Eugene Schueller, Bettencourt Meyers's grandfather, to manufacture and market a hair dye he had invented, The Guardian reported.

Based in the north-western Parisian suburb of Clichy, in the region of Hauts-de-Seine, it has grown into a globe-straddling colossus valued at \$241bn (£209bn) on the Paris stock exchange.



The famously reclusive Bettencourt Meyers, 70, and her family, remain the largest shareholders with a stake of nearly 35 per cent, the

value of which has helped her wealth balloon by \$28.6bn this year to reach \$100bn, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Bettencourt Meyers was far from alone in growing richer during a year in which the fortunes of billionaires generally increased significantly, even as the cost of living crisis affected countries across the world.

Of the world's 50 richest people, 12 lost money in 2023 while the remainder watched their piles grow, albeit without adjusting for inflation.

In a list dominated by men, mostly from the US, Bettencourt Meyers remains 12th in a ranking topped by Elon Musk, the Tesla and SpaceX founder.

Bettencourt Meyers was not the highest-placed French person. Bernard Arnault, the luxury goods tycoon, has a \$179bn fortune that has grown by \$16.9bn in 2023, thanks to the performance of his LVMH (Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton) group.

Israel launches fresh missile attack on targets near Syrian capital

Damascus | Agencies

A fresh Israeli missile attack targeted the outskirts of the Syrian capital of Damascus, triggering a response from the Syrian air defence system, the media reported.

The Syrian army said on Thursday in a statement that the "Israeli enemy" carried out an aerial attack from the direction of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, targeting some points in the southern region, without elaborating on the targeted sites.

It added that the Syrian air defence forces intercepted most of them, with losses limited to material damages.

Previous Israeli strikes in Syria had reportedly targeted military sites suspected of harbouring Iranian-backed militias, arms convoys, and alleged weapons storage facilities, according to the opposition watchdog group -- the Syrian



Observatory for Human Rights. Israel has recently upped its attacks on Syrian targets in tandem with its military campaign in the Gaza Strip, Xinhua news agency reported.

Syria has been engulfed in over 12-year war, with the government forces of President Bashar al-Assad, backed by Russia and Iran, fighting against various opposition groups.

Israel, on the other hand, has a long-standing policy of preventing Iran from establishing

a military presence in Syria by repeatedly conducting airstrikes to destroy alleged Iranian weapons supplies.

The previous Israeli attack in Syria on Monday evening killed Seyyed Razi Mousavi, who was also one of the longest-serving advisors of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Syria and a close associate of the late Iranian top commander Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by a US drone attack in Iraq in 2020.

Russia reinforcing defense, reconnaissance capabilities: report



Team Absolute | New Delhi

After the Ukraine developed new drone strike strategy, the Russians have responded by reinforcing their defense and reconnaissance capabilities, media reports said.

As per the reports the DPR military is working on the Avdeevka Front, a major influx ("in abundance") of FPV attack drones to the UAF in Avdeevka has resulted in new and dangerous tactic being employed by UAF/NATO drone operators against DPR/RF soldiers.

"The high volume of attack drones delivered to the remaining UAF Special Forces and

Western mercenaries in Avdeevka now allow them to launch hunter/killer drones in pairs, a new tactic, which makes them more dangerous and effective," media reports said. Reports said that the Russian drones, and the operators, work in close proximity, which allows real time communication between the operators, and much more effective detection and destruction of identified targets by two attack drones instead of one. "If you have plenty of attack drones, the previous tactic of one recon/observation drone working with one attack drone becomes obsolete, which now appears to be the case," the media reports said.

SHOTS FIRED AT HOUSE OF TEMPLE HEAD'S SON IN CANADA

Toronto | Agencies

Canadian police said it is investigating an incident in which shots were fired at the residence of a Hindu temple's head's son in British Columbia in the early hours of Wednesday.

Police said no one was injured during the incident at the 14900 block of 80 Avenue in Surrey -- the residence of the son of Satish Kumar, president of Lakshmi Narayan Mandir.

"Officers are still working to determine the motive of this incident," said Constable Parmbir Kahlon, Media Relations Officer for Surrey RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police).

Kahlon added that the residence involved sustained damage consistent with bullet holes.

According to the Indo-Canadian voice website, as many as 14 shots were fired at the Hindu businessman's



house. Police remained in the area, examining the scene, speaking with witnesses and canvassing the neighbourhood for CCTV footage. The Surrey RCMP General Investigation Unit is conducting the probe, and has

appealed to anyone with more information, including dash cam footage of the incident, to get in touch with them.

Canada has witnessed a rise in incidents of vandalism and attacks against Hindu temples and installations in the country

with pro-Khalistan elements getting active beginning this year.

The situation worsened after Khalistani leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar was shot dead outside a Sikh temple in Surrey on June 18 this year.

The same Lakshmi Narayan Mandir of Surrey was targeted in August this year after anti-India and pro-Khalistan posters were found pasted on its front and rear walls.

Last month, Indian-origin Canadian MP Chandra Arya shared a purported video of pro-Khalistan supporters in Surrey, claiming they want to create trouble at the Lakshmi Narayan Mandir.

In September, Shri Mata Bhameshwari Durga temple in Surrey was defaced with anti-India and pro-Khalistan graffiti on its outer walls.

Incidents of vandalism have also occurred at temples in Brampton and the Greater Toronto area.

Shot down drone, anti-ship missile fired by Houthi in Red Sea: US

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The US on Friday said that it has shot down a drone and an anti-ship ballistic missile fired by Houthi, media reports said.

The reports said that the Houthi allegedly repeatedly targeted vessels in the Red Sea shipping lane with strikes -- the U.S. -- said to be in support of Palestinians in Gaza, where Israel is battling militant group Hamas.

"The USS Mason (DDG 87) shot down one drone and one anti-ship ballistic missile in the Southern Red Sea that were fired by the Houthis," media reports quoting the US Central Command (CENTCOM) as having said.

"There was no damage to any of the 18 ships in the area or reported injuries," CENTCOM said, adding that it was the 22nd attempted attack on



international shipping by the Houthis since mid-October.

However, the Houthis said they are targeting Israel and Israeli-linked vessels to push for a stop to the offensive in the Gaza Strip.

The Israel-Hamas conflict began after Hamas carried out an attack on October 7.



QUOTAS STIR: 3-CRORE MARATHAS TO BESIEGE MUMBAI FROM JAN 20, WARNS JARANGE-PATIL

Team Absolute | Jalna, (Maharashtra):

The Shivba Sanghatana leader Manoj Jarange-Patil warned that at least three crore (30-million) Marathas will lay siege to Mumbai from January 20 onwards to press for the reservation to the community, here on Friday.

"From January 20, people will leave their towns and villages all over Maharashtra... They will come on foot, in buses, big and small vehicles or tractors. It will be a peaceful march, nobody will carry stones or resort to violence," said Jarange-Patil, talking to the media.

He called upon his supporters to reach the country's commercial capital with any suitable mode of transport without any fear for the cause, and "don't worry, your vehicles will not be seized".

Jarange-Patil will also start on foot from his village Antarvali-Sarati in Jalna to Mumbai, a distance of around 400 kms, with lakhs expected to join him en route, accorded a massive welcome at the Azad Maidan in south Mumbai, where he will sit on an indefinite hunger strike.

To a query, he said if the marchers



or their vehicles are stopped anywhere, "then thousands of Marathas will go and surround the Deputy Chief Minister and home minister Devendra Fadnavis' homes in Mumbai and Nagpur". On which ground he would address the gathering in Mumbai, Jarange-Patil shot back saying that "we will need to occupy all the grounds and maidans" as three-crore Marathas are expected

to troop here from across Maharashtra. With a population of around 1.50 crore, Mumbai has barely half-a-dozen huge open grounds including Azad Maidan, Oval Maidan, Cross Maidan, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Park, the BKC grounds, some other venues like Chowpatty and Juhu beaches, and a few more small grounds that are used for such public events.

"The aim is reservations, the direction is Mumbai... We are going to Mumbai means we are going there... There's no stopping now. And we will come back with the quotas," said Jarange-Patil in his typical soft speaking style.

He called upon all his supporters and Marathas "to bury all differences and start from our homes" all over the state to show the community's strength and unity to the government.

Jarange-Patil, who has been agitating since August, said that they had given sufficient time to the state government to declare the quotas, and "now, we will not give even one hour extra", urging the government to take a decision soon.

He was referring to Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's statement in the Legislative Assembly last week that the government would convene a special session of the Legislature in February 2024 and announce the reservation, but the Marathas have spurned the proposal.

Jarange-Patil repeated his demand that the eligible Marathas should be given Kumbi Caste (OBC) certificates to entitle them to OBC quotas, and vowed to fight till his last breath to get the reservation for the community.

Angry mob sets vehicle on fire as Nagpur siblings mowed down by Truck



Team Absolute | Nagpur

A 20-year-old woman and her 15-year-old brother were killed when their two-wheeler was hit by a garbage carrying tipper truck in Nagpur on Friday, after which an agitated crowd set the offending vehicle ablaze, a police official said. The incident took place at

Bidgaon square in the afternoon, the Wathoda police station official said.

"Anjali Nanelal Saini (20) and Sumit Nanelal Saini (15) died on the spot. A crowd that gathered set the tipper truck ablaze. The enraged mob also vandalised a firefighting vehicle of the Nagpur Municipal Corporation that had gone to douse the blaze," he said. "Local police personnel and

those from the State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) had to be deployed in the area. The situation was brought under control after a lathi-charge. The bodies of the siblings have been sent for post mortem examination," the official said.

Bidgaon area sees constant movement of such trucks carrying garbage since the Bhandewadi dumping yard is nearby, the official added.

Congress puts bar codes behind chairs for crowd funding at Nagpur rally

Team Absolute | Nagpur

The Congress put bar codes behind the chairs for crowdfunding during a rally in Maharashtra's Nagpur on Thursday.

As a part of the Congress Crowdfunding Campaign 'Donate for Dosh', which was launched earlier this month, a barcode was pasted behind all the chairs on the ground and attendees of the 'Hain Taiyyar Hum' rally were urged to donate.

The pamphlet behind the chairs featured Rahul Gandhi's image along with a bar code.

The pamphlet read, "In this struggle of 138 years for the formation of a better India, Congress needs you. India needs you. Scan now to donate." The pamphlet further mentioned that among all the donors, five "lucky donors" will be awarded a donation appreciation certificate by Rahul Gandhi.



Rahul Gandhi in his address at the 'Hain Taiyyar Hum' rally exuded confidence that the grand old party will win elections in Maharashtra and across the country. "This is a fight of ideologies. Together we are going to win elections in Maharashtra and the country," Gandhi said. The Congress leader, during his

address, also mentioned that there is an ongoing conflict between two opposing ideologies in the country. The Congress kickstarted its campaign for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections with the 'Hain Taiyyar Hum' rally in Nagpur on Thursday. The Grand Old Party also celebrated their 139th Foundation Day on December 28.

MTHL STILL NOT READY, COST SHOT UP AS 2 DEADLINES MISSED: RTI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A fortnight before its planned inauguration by the Prime Minister, the prestigious Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL) is not yet fully ready, with the work reported to be 98.41 per cent complete, as per an RTI reply released here on Friday.

Additionally, the cost of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)-funded MTHL project has shot up considerably - by Rs 2,192-crore - while the contractors missed two deadlines for project completion.

Mumbai activist Anil Galgali had sought details of the project status from the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA). The MTHL is likely to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the second week of January.

The RTI reply to Galgali said that the physical progress was 98.92 per cent for the Packages 1, 2 and 3, and 82 per cent for Package 4, with the average total implementation being 98.41 per cent complete.

Similarly, the project cost has also



gone up for each of the packages executed by various private companies, as per the RTI reply to Galgali.

Under Package 1 of Larsen & Toubro Ltd and IHI Infrastructure Systems Co Ltd, the contract price of the consortium was Rs 7,637.30 crore, which has now increased by Rs. 999.67 crore. Under Package 2 of Daewoo Engineering and Construction Company Ltd and Tata Projects Ltd, the contract price of the

JV was Rs 5,612.61 crore, which has now increased by Rs 936.45 crore.

Under Package 3 of Larsen & Toubro Ltd, the contract price was Rs 1,013.79 crore, which has increased by Rs 232.37 crore.

Under Package 4 of Strogob Infrastructure and Safety Solutions GmbH, the contract price of the JV was Rs 449 crore, which has increased by Rs 23.24 crore.

"The original expenditure for the

MTHL was Rs 14,712.70 crore, but now it has increased by Rs 2,192.73 crore. Now the new construction cost is Rs 16,904.43 crore, yet the work remains incomplete," said Galgali.

Moreover, the contractors also missed two deadline extensions on the project slated for completion on September 22, 2022 - the first deadline was extended by 12 months to September 22, 2023, and the second extension lapsed on December 15, 2023.

"The project missed two deadlines, and the work is still incomplete due to the fault of the contractors, which has led to cost escalation. Instead of paying the contractors the increased amounts for their fault, the MMRDA should order a probe into the huge 15-month delay, impose a fine on the contractors and also recover the escalated costs from them," Galgali demanded.

The much-anticipated showpiece project, MTHL is expected to reduce traffic congestion in Mumbai and on the mainland and provide convenient links on the highways/expressways to Nagpur, Pune, Konkan, Nashik and other directions.

PM Modi to virtually flag off Mumbai-Jalna Vande Bharat train from Ayodhya on Dec 30

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to virtually inaugurate the Mumbai-Jalna Vande Bharat Express on December 30. According to a Central Railway statement cited in the report revealed that PM Modi will launch the eight-coach train from Ayodhya through video link.

The report stated that apart from the Mumbai-Jalna train, PM Modi will also inaugurate five other Vande Bharat services from Ayodhya Dham railway station in Uttar Pradesh and initiate two Amrit Bharat services.

According to the a report, the maiden run of the 02705 Mumbai-Jalna Vande Bharat train is scheduled to depart from Jalna at approximately 11 am and reach Mumbai by 6:45 pm. Along



the route, it will halt at key stations including Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (formerly Aurangabad), Manmad Junction, Nasik Road, Kalyan Junction, Thane, and Dadar, before reaching Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus.

The occasion will witness the enthusiastic participation of Members of Parliament, MLAs, guardian ministers, schoolchildren, and the general public at these stations, as per the CR release, the report added.

The Mumbai-Jalna Vande Bharat service is Maharashtra's seventh Vande Bharat venture, with six other Vande Bharat services already functioning on the CR network. It would be the fifth Vande Bharat service to depart from Mumbai, underlining the state's connectivity and convenience improvements.

Mumbai Police to deploy thousands of officials for New Year's Eve security

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai Police on Friday said that it has planned elaborate security measures for New Year's Eve 2024 on Sunday, December 31. The police said that it will be deploying as many as 11,500 police officials apart from senior police officials as part of their security arrangements in Mumbai and have asked the citizens to dial 100 in case of an emergency.

The police said, On December 31st, to welcome the New Year, many hotels, shopping malls, grounds and parks, and public places will be seeing huge gatherings. In Mumbai, as part of the security of the citizens, Mumbai Police have planned elaborate security arrangements in the city. According to the police, as part of the security



arrangements, the police will deploy as many as 22 Deputy Police Commissioner (DCP) level officials, 45 Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) level officials, 2,051 Police Inspectors and 11,500 police officials across the city to maintain the law and order and safe New Year celebrations in Mumbai.

The police said, apart from the deployment of police officials, the Mumbai Police have also planned to deploy SRPF companies, QRT teams, RCPs, and Police Homeguards at sensitive places and spots where huge crowds are expected to reach to celebrate New Year's Eve in the city.

MAN DETAINED IN CHEATING CASE ATTEMPTS SUICIDE AT POLICE STATION IN THANE

Mumbai: A 36-year-old man detained in connection with a cheating case allegedly attempted suicide at a police station in Maharashtra's Thane district, police said on Friday.

The incident took place at Narpoli police station in Bhiwandi on Thursday when the man identified as Anil Muralilal Gupta was detained for his involvement in a cheating case, inspector Pramod Kumbhar said. The Bandra police nabbed Gupta, a resident of Narpoli, and took him to the local police station to complete formalities, he said.

Gupta went to the washroom and consumed a poisonous substance. He was immediately administered first aid, the official said. The accused feared arrest in connection with the offences of cheating registered against him with the Bandra and Dindoshi police stations, he said, adding that a case under section 309 (attempted suicide) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered.

"HAVE TO START SEAT-SHARING TALKS WITH CONGRESS FROM ZERO": SANJAY RAUT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut asserted on Friday that his party would contest in 23 of the 48 Lok Sabha constituencies in Maharashtra next year and said their talks with the Congress on seat-sharing have to start from zero as it has "not won any seat" in the state.

Speaking to reporters, Raut said discussions on the seats won by the Shiv Sena, the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party will be held later.

In the 2019 general elections, the undivided Shiv Sena under Uddhav Thackeray had contested 23 seats and won 18. However, it split last year after Eknath Shinde rebelled against Thackeray. Later, the Election Commission allowed the Shinde faction to keep the 'Shiv Sena' name.

While the NCP under Sharad Pawar won four seats in the last Lok Sabha polls, the Congress had bagged just one seat. Its lone MP from Chandrapur, Balu Dhanorkar, died earlier this year.

Mr Raut said the Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders, including Thackeray, have been holding talks with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, and AICC general secretary K C Venugopal.



"We have said that we have been contesting 23 seats in Maharashtra and (we will also contest) Dadra Nagar Haveli (as Sena has a sitting MP from

there)," he said, stressing that "Shiv Sena is the biggest party" in Maharashtra. Congress is a national party, he said. "We have decided that seats won

by us will be discussed later. The Congress does not figure in it as it has not won any seat in Maharashtra. So talks with the Congress have to start from zero in the state," Raut said.

Taking a swipe at state Congress leaders for their remarks that the Shiv Sena has now split, Raut said though the Congress did not break, it lost elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.

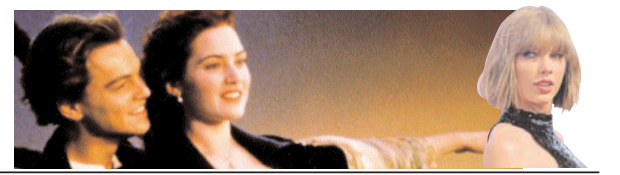
"A party's (strength) is (tested) on the ground. Our party workers are with us. Even if our party split, we won the Andheri assembly bypoll and you (the Congress) won the Kasba Peth assembly bypoll (in Pune) with our support," Raut said.

Former Maharashtra Congress chief Sanjay Nirupam hit back at Raut, saying the Shiv Sena (UBT) cannot win any seat on its own. It needs the Congress and vice versa, Nirupam said.

Nirupam said that out of the 18 seats won by the undivided Shiv Sena last time, more than a dozen MPs have "deserted" the Uddhav Thackeray camp.

"They don't even have the guarantee whether the remaining MPs will stay with them or not," he said.

Mr Raut said Congress remains an important part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi and the three parties - Sena (UBT), Congress and NCP faction under Sharad Pawar - will contest together.



Harry Styles enjoys dip with new girlfriend

Taylor Russell in London

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Harry Styles took a dip in the River Thames. The former One Direction singer, 29, showed off his tattooed torso as he braved the cold water in just a pair of tiny trunks and a bobble hat covering up his new buzz cut, with his girlfriend Taylor Russell joining him on his festive swim in the London river.

In the snap shared by a fan on Instagram, Harry was all smiles as he emerged from the water after his dip in the water, reports Mirror.co.uk.

Actress Taylor also beamed as she rocked a black unitard and matching woolly hat as she walked down the jetty with the pop icon.

As per Mirror.co.uk, Harry and Taylor have been romantically linked since the summer, following the 'As It Was' singer splitting from director Olivia Wilde in November last year and then enjoying a brief rebound smooch with model Emily Ratajkowski.

Hot new couple Harry and Taylor were first seen together in June and have been looking loved-up ever since.

The couple have been seen on various outings since first sparking romance rumours, including a sightseeing trip near the Plague Column in Vienna, according to 'The Sun' on Sunday.

"Harry and Taylor have been spending a lot of time together. She is a huge fan of his music," an insider revealed.



Will Smith was 'most terrified' on his 'one and only date' with Pepa of Salt-N-Pepa

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Will Smith invited the iconic hip-hop duo Salt-N-Pepa on his Class of 1988 podcast for a chat about their ascension towards rap superstardom in the 1980s, and to reflect on how he was rather smitten with Sandra "Pepa" Denton, 57, at the time. On the episode, Smith and the rap star reminisced about the "one and only date" they went on together, and how "terrified" the Fresh Prince himself was throughout the experience, reports People magazine.

Smith said that they went on a date "sometime in early 1988" after he had been crushing on the performer for quite some time.

"I always had a thing for Sandy, but she was always dating somebody else," the Grammy winner shared. "Now, she was single. We were both going to be in Los Angeles at the same time, so I'ma shoot my shot."

Since he only had one chance, the superstar explained that he felt he had to do it right. "This girl was special and I wanted to impress her, so I rented a white Mercedes convertible just because I needed to floss a little bit," he said, quotes by People. "My plan was then to take her around Hollywood Hills, drive up Mulholland and all that, watch the sunset."

As per People, Denton made it clear on the podcast that she remembered their outing together, too, but one of the Oscar winner's moves was by far the most memorable. "I know exactly what happened," she interjected. "We were out and we saw a homeless person and you gave the homeless person \$100". The 'Push It' rapper continued: "I was like OK and it was so nice. And then we went to the Hollywood sign."

While Smith had the musician impressed, he revealed that his mind was somewhere else at the time. "My concern was that I was going to get killed," the 'King Richard' star admitted. "That was my concern when I was trying to spit my game, but I ain't really have nothing."

"I was always faked like I had a game. I didn't really have a game (sic)", he added. "I was always in this full-on, trying to give the wildest flavour of having a game, but that might have been the most terrified I had ever been trying to shoot my shot with Pepa. And I didn't believe I had a real shot."



For Natalie Portman, Psychology and acting are very similar

Los Angeles | Agencies

'Black Swan' actress Natalie Portman believes that acting and Psychology are "very similar". The actress took a break from her career to pursue a degree in Psychology from Harvard University.

She thinks it helped her work because doing both successfully involves being "observant", reports Female First UK.

Asked if her degree has been useful in her work, she told Radio Times magazine: "I think it's very similar - in acting you're trying to imagine why people do the things they do and what forms them. Psychology is very much the same practice. The first thing they teach is observing - it's watching people, noticing patterns, behaviour."

As per Female First UK, in 'May December', Natalie plays Elizabeth, an actress preparing to play a real-life figure and she admitted playing someone based on a real person can feel "vampiric", even when she is trying to be empathetic. She said: "That's a classic trope of literature and theatre. You read Chekhov, and he's questioning whether storytelling is stealing from people's lives. I think every artist with a heart and soul questions themselves."

She added, "Am I stealing from real people to feed my art - like a vampire? It can be vampiric, but I think you can approach it in a way that's more generous, more about empathy and trying to imagine someone's life, as opposed to trying to steal someone's life".

The 42-year-old actress made her movie debut in 'Leon' when she was 12 and had her first Broadway role four years later in 'The Diary of Anne Frank' and she enjoys working on stage and screen in different ways. She said: "They're both different in their own ways - it's pottery and painting. I had an amazing experience on 'The Diary of Anne Frank'. It really changed my whole life and changed me as a person. But film is also satisfying to work in. You reach wider audiences."



Dame Helen Mirren has 'enormous' self-doubt

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Dame Helen Mirren has shared that she still struggles "enormously" with self-doubt. The award-winning actress believes it is part of human nature to keep questioning yourself.

However, the 78-year-old star has grown to learn to push herself into things that seem "dangerous", reports Female First UK. Asked if she experiences self-doubt, she told Britain's HELLO! magazine: "Enormously - and I still do. I don't know why human beings struggle through life questioning ourselves all the time. We all do. In my whole career, the thing that has scared me the most is the thing that I feel I should do. The thing that looks like the most dangerous, the thing that I'm most likely to fail at, is the thing that I should jump into and attempt. If I fail or not, it doesn't really matter. It's the journey rather than the arrival, as they say."

As per Female First UK, Helen admitted one of the reasons why she enjoys getting older is the "liberating" realisation that not everything is focused on herself. She added: "I don't know if the fear gets less, we learn how to handle our fear, I guess that's what it is. And you learn that it becomes less about you, which is one of the great advantages of getting older - you're not so self-concerned all the time."

She added: "It's not all about you, it becomes about the wider world and it's so much more interesting. You look outward much more than you look inward. It is completely liberating."

Selena Gomez cuddles up to boyfriend Benny Blanco on romantic date night

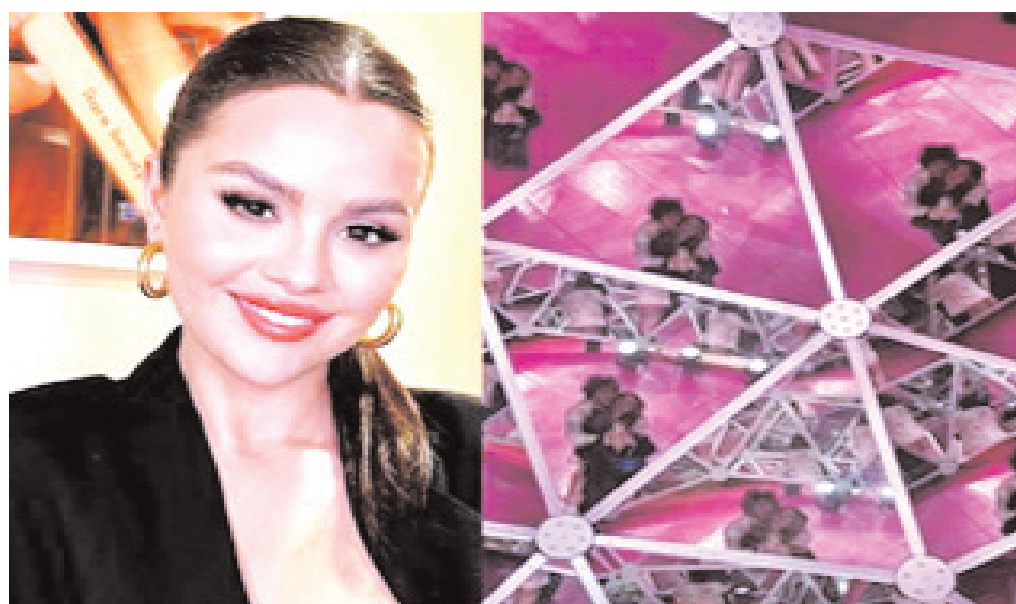
Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress-singer Selena Gomez has been showing off her new boyfriend, Benny Blanco, and their adventures. The 'Only Murders in the Building' actress shared photos of the couple at an art exhibit with kaleidoscope mirrors on her Instagram story on Thursday, reports Mirror.co.uk.

Selena documented their adventure at the Luna Luna: Forgotten Fantasy fair in Los Angeles on her Instagram Story.

As per Mirror.co.uk, Selena is all smiles in one of the photos while holding her phone to capture the moment, as Benny is holding her from behind. She also posted an off-guard photo of her new beau, who was looking at his reflection.

The singer confirmed her relationship with the music producer earlier this month. Selena has already been forced to defend her relationship against the haters since she first shared snaps with Benny. When the 31-year-old actress first shared snaps with Benny, some of her fans bashed the couple, claiming that it was a "marketing plan". Underneath a post on Instagram sharing the news of Selena's new boyfriend, Selena assured that she was happier than ever in her new relationship. Under the post, Selena defended her relationship, writing: "He has treated me better than any human being on this planet." And in another added: "He's still better than anyone I've ever been with. Facts."



Anitta



AVESH KHAN ADDED TO INDIA'S SQUAD FOR 2ND TEST VS SA; VISITORS DOCKED 2 WTC POINTS FOR SLOW-OVER RATE



Centurion | Agencies

ahead of the New Year's Test at Cape Town, with the visitors' now 1-0 behind in the two-game series.

Avesh, who plays for Madhya Pradesh in domestic cricket, is currently turning out for India 'A' in the four-day match against South Africa 'A' at the Willowmoore Park in Benoni, where he picked 5/54 in 23.3 overs, including five maidens, at an economy rate of 2.3.

In 38 first-class matches, Avesh has taken 149 wickets at an average of 22.65 and economy rate of 3.12, including seven five-wicket hauls. Avesh has been capped for India in white-ball cricket - having played 19 T20Is and eight ODIs.

In the opening ODI against South Africa at Johannesburg, Avesh, the right-arm fast-bowler, picked career-best figures of 4-27. Meanwhile, India have been fined

10 per cent of their match fee and docked two ICC World Test Championship points for maintaining a slow over-rate against South Africa in the first Test at SuperSport Park in Centurion, where they lost by an innings and 32 runs.

Match Referee Chris Broad imposed the sanction after India were ruled to be two overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration. In accordance with Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined five per cent of their match fee for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time.

In addition, as per Article 16.11.2 of the ICC World Test Championship playing conditions,

a side is penalised one point for each over short. Consequently, two World Test Championship points have been deducted from India's points total.

India captain Rohit Sharma pleaded guilty to the offence and accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing. On-field umpires Paul Reiffel and Langton Rusere, third umpire Ahsan Raza and fourth umpire Stephen Harris leveled the charge. India's squad for 2nd Test: Rohit Sharma (C), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah (VC), Prasidh Krishna, KS Bharat (wk), Abhimanyu Easwaran, Avesh Khan

RAVINDRA JADEJA LIKELY TO BE AVAILABLE FOR CAPE TOWN TEST AGAINST SA

New Delhi: All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja is likely to be available for the second Test against South Africa, starting on January 3 at Cape Town. After South Africa thrashed a listless India by an innings and 32 runs inside three days in the first Test at SuperSport Park on Thursday, hope flickered on the horizon with the news of Jadeja's potential return for the crucial second Test. Jadeja's absence in the opening Test, plagued by an upper-back spasm, left a void in the Indian lineup. The left-arm all-rounder sent down a few deliveries during the innings break on the third day at SuperSport Park, his movements betraying no lingering discomfort. It was a silent proclamation - he was on the mend.

The prospect of Jadeja's return injected a renewed sense of vigour into the Indian camp, for they recognised the importance of the upcoming battle in Cape Town. The defeat in Centurion presents a daunting challenge for the team, and Jadeja's potential availability for selection breathed life into their aspirations to square the two-match series.

IND v SA: Injured Bavuma ruled out; Elgar to captain SA in Cape Town Test

Centurion | Agencies

Captain Temba Bavuma has been ruled out of the second Test against India due to a left hamstring strain, Cricket South Africa (CSA) confirmed after the conclusion of the first Test on Thursday.

In Bavuma's absence, Dean Elgar will captain the side in the final match of his international career, having announced his decision to retire before the series.

Meanwhile, Zubayr Hamza has been added to the squad as Bavuma's replacement.

Bavuma sustained the injury while fielding on day one of the first Test at SuperSport Park on Tuesday and scans revealed a hamstring strain which kept him out of South Africa's first innings.

He will undergo further medical assessments prior to the start of the SA20 to determine his availability for the Sunrisers Eastern Cape. After Bavuma went off the field during the first Test, Elgar assumed the role of the captain in South Africa's win by an innings



and 32 runs at Centurion.

Elgar is no stranger to captaincy, having led the Proteas in the past, including the last time India visited South Africa for a Test series. After going 1-0 down in 2022-23, the opener led by example to complete a comeback 2-1 victory.

Pat Cummins bags 10-wicket haul as Australia clinch series with 79-run win over Pakistan

Melbourne | Agencies

Captain Pat Cummins took his second five-wicket haul of the Boxing Day Test, taking his match tally to ten scalps, and leading Australia to a series win with a 79-run victory over a much-improved Pakistan on day four's play at the MCG here on Friday.

After being handed a heavy 360-run defeat in the first Test in Perth, Pakistan put up a much better showing in Melbourne, with Agha Salman and Mohammad Rizwan threatening to pull off an improbable chase through their 57-run partnership.

But Cummins returned to take out Rizwan on review for his 250th Test wicket, which showed the ball had touched his wristband while trying to evade the delivery.

He then took out Aamer Jamal and



Shaheen Shah Afridi to bag his ten in Tests, becoming the second Australia captain after Allan Border to do so. Mitchell Starc claimed scalps of Salman and Mir Hamza on successive deliveries, as Australia secured a hard-fought win. Australia are now up in third place in the WTC points table, while Pakistan have slipped to fifth place.

With the New Year Test at Sydney starting on January 3, Australia will be tempted to add more points with another win over Pakistan.

In the morning, Australia began from an overnight score of 187/6, with a lead of 241 runs. Alex Carey scored a fighting 53 and added 75 runs for Australia with the tail's help. Shaheen (4-76) and Hamza (4-32) were the standout performers for Pakistan as Australia made 262 in the second innings.

After setting a daunting target of 317, Australia struck early as Abdullah Shafique fell to Starc for four, while Imam-ul-Haq was dismissed for 12 by Cummins. However, Shan Masood and Babar Azam joined forces to help Pakistan make progress. But the 61-run stand came to an end when Cummins struck and removed Masood. Babar held on for

some time but eventually fell to a beauty from Josh Hazlewood. Rizwan and Salman then got together and helped Pakistan cross 200. However, Cummins struck thrice to leave Pakistan tottering at 237/8.

Mitchell Starc eventually finished the game at that very score by picking back-to-back wickets. Cummins was the Player of the Match for just his second ten-for in Test cricket. He finished with 10/97 in the game.

Brief scores

Australia 318 and 262 (Mitchell Marsh 96, Alex Carey 53, Mir Hamza 4-32, Shaheen Shah Afridi 4-76) beat Pakistan 264 and 237 (Shan Masood 60, Agha Salman 50, Pat Cummins 5-49, Mitchell Starc 4-55) by 79 runs

Michael Vaughan calls India as most 'underachieving' team, says 'they don't win anything'

Melbourne | Agencies

Former England captain Michael Vaughan has called India as the most 'underachieving' team in the cricketing world, saying that despite all the talent and resources at their disposal, 'they don't win anything'.

Vaughan's remarks come after India suffered a heavy defeat by an innings and 32 runs to South Africa within three days of the Boxing Day Test at SuperSport Park in Centurion.

The year 2023 has been one in which India lost the ODI World Cup final after winning 10 matches in a row, as well as losing the World Test Championship final.

The first Test loss to South Africa also means that India's search for a maiden Test series win in the country will continue.

In the Fox Sports broadcast during the Australia-Pakistan Test at the



MCG, Vaughan began by questioning Mark Waugh, "Do you think, in terms of cricket, India are one of the most underachieving sports teams in the world?"

Waugh deflected the question back to Vaughan for answers, to which he replied, "They haven't won much in recent times. I think they are (an underachieving side). They don't win

anything. When was the last time they won something? With all the talent they have, all the skill set."

"They've won in Australia twice (Border-Gavaskar Trophy series wins in 2018/19 and 2020/21). Magnificent, but the last few World Cups, been nowhere, in the last few T20 World Cups, been nowhere."

"You go to South Africa, who are, you know, useful in Test match cricket and to produce a performance like that...I mean, with all the talent they have, and the resources they have, I don't think they win anything."

"They're a good team, they have got plenty of talent but with all the talent they have and the resources they have, I just don't think they win (a lot)."

With India now 1-0 behind in the two-match series, they will be aiming to square the scoreline against South Africa in the New Year's Test at Cape Town starting on January 3.

United Cup: Fokina-Sorribes pair guide Spain to dramatic 2-1 win over Brazil

Perth | Agencies

Spain earned victory in its Opening Group A tie of United Cup on Friday when Alejandro Davidovich Fokina and Sara Sorribes Tormo prevailed in the decisive mixed doubles rubber against Brazil.

With the tie locked at 1-1 after the two singles matches, Davidovich Fokina and Sorribes Tormo rallied past Beatriz Haddad Maia and Marcelo Melo 6-4, 7-5 to move Spain to 1-0 in Group A play. Earlier, Haddad Maia prevailed in her first WTA Tour match of the new season, defeating Sara Sorribes Tormo of Spain 7-6(1), 6-2 in their Group A clash, levelling



the showdown with Spain at 1-1 and sending it into a decisive mixed doubles match. In the first match of the tie, Fokina kick-started

his season with a comfortable win, where he dispatched Thiago Seyboth Wild 6-4, 6-0 to give Spain a 1-0 lead.

Zadran to lead Afghanistan in UAE T20Is; Rashid misses out

Kabul | Agencies

The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) selection committee has unveiled an 18-member squad for the upcoming T20Is against the UAE with Ibrahim Zadran leading the side in a three-match series.

Regular T20I captain, Rashid Khan, missed out on the main squad as he recovers from the recent back surgery. Fast bowlers Fazal Haq Farooqi and Naveen Ul Haq, two of the three players, who recently faced sanctions for their intention to opt out of the annual central contracts, have also been added to the squad.

The three-match T20I series is scheduled to be played from December 29, 2023, to January 2, 2024 at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium.

Afghanistan are coming off their best display at the ICC

AFGHANISTAN SQUAD FOR T20I SERIES VS UAE

- 01 IBRAHIM ZADRAN (C)
- 02 RAHMANULLAH GURBAZ (WK)
- 03 MOHAMMAD ISHAQ (WK)
- 04 HAZRATULLAH ZAZAI
- 05 SEIDIQUILLAH ATAL
- 06 RAHMAT SHAH
- 07 DARWISH RASOOLI
- 08 MOHAMMAD NABI
- 09 NAJIBULLAH ZADRAN
- 10 KARIM JANAT
- 11 AZMATULLAH OMARZAI
- 12 SHARAFUDDIN ASHRAF
- 13 FAZAL HAQ FAROOQI
- 14 FARID AHMAD MALIK
- 15 NAVEEN UL HAQ
- 16 MOHAMMAD SALEEM
- 17 NOOR AHMAD
- 18 QAIS AHMAD

RESERVES:

- RASHID KHAN
- IKRAM ALIKHIL
- GULBADIN NAIB
- IJAZ AHMADZAI

#AFGHANATALAN | UAEVAFG2023-24

Men's Cricket World Cup, securing four impressive wins, including notable victo-

ries against teams such as Pakistan and the 2019 champions, England.

Individual plans are more important than techniques: Rohit Sharma

Centurion | Agencies

After losing the first Test to South Africa by an innings and 32 runs, India captain Rohit Sharma said the batters need to devise their own individual plans, which he feels are more important than the techniques they possess, adding that it holds huge importance while going on tough overseas assignments. After conceding a 163-run lead to South Africa, India had a horror second innings which lasted 34.1 overs, as eight batters, including Rohit, fell for single-digit scores to be 131 all out. Virat Kohli tried to avoid the ignominy of an innings defeat, scoring a fighting 76 off 82 balls, but ran out of support from the other end.

"When you come in such conditions, it's important for you to have confidence in yourself even more than the technique. Mentally, if you trust yourself and your game on what you need to do. It's important to have individual plans in such venues and



such a country. "Everyone has a different kind of technique, so you can't tell everyone how to play. It's impor-

tant to come here with individual plans. If you want to score runs and do well, individual plans are more

important than techniques, to study their bowlers, their strengths," said Rohit after the match ended.



Kusha Kapila: I have mostly essayed extremely urban characters

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Kusha Kapila, who plays Chhaya in the coming-of-age drama series 'Dehati Ladke', shared how she has mostly essayed extremely urban characters, and in this show, she has played a professor unlike her previous roles.

The social media personality and YouTuber, Kusha is known for her roles in 'Selfiee', 'Plan A Plan B', 'Thank You for Coming', 'Case Toh Banta Hai', and others.

Speaking about her role in 'Dehati Ladke', she shared: "Chhaya is a liberal and progressive woman, who is an Assistant Professor at Rajat's university. She finds love in Rajat's mentor, Prashant. Chhaya has a mind of her own; she is a strong-headed yet amicable person, and people find it easy to open up to her. Besides being progressive, she is also unafraid to make mistakes in life."

Talking about taking up a role unlike any other she has played in the past, Kusha said: "Interestingly, my character in 'Dehati Ladke' is unlike any other roles that I have done in the past. I have mostly essayed extremely urban characters. I've never really played a professor, especially somebody who quotes poets and imparts wisdom at the drop of a hat. So, that was very interesting."

Based on a best-selling Hindi novel, the narrative not only evokes a sense



of nostalgia for college days, but also imparts valuable life lessons about embracing life to the fullest.

The series follows the journey of Rajat, a simple boy from a small village, who embarks on a quest to

chase his dreams in the glare of Lucknow city.

This young adult series features Shine Pandey, Raghav Sharma, Tanish Neeraj, Saamya Jainn, Aasif Khan, and Kusha.

Zahrah Khan aspires to follow mother Salma Agha's successful footsteps

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress and singer Zahrah Khan has reflected back on her journey this year, calling it 'grateful and incredible', and shared how she wants to be successful like her mother Salma Agha.

Zahrah is the daughter of Pakistani singer and actress Salma Agha, who had worked in both Pakistani and Indian film industry in the 80s and 90s.

Zahrah's father is a squash player Rahmat Khan. Salma is known for her work in movies like 'Nikaah', 'Oonche Log', 'Jungle Ki Beti', 'Paanch Fauladi' and others. Zahrah is known for her melodious hits like 'Kusu Kusu', and 'Dance Meri Rani'.

The diva has opened up on reflecting upon the new year, plans for forthcoming year and more.

Talking about how she is grateful for every bit of it and the excitement of the future, Zahrah revealed: "I am immensely grateful for the growth I've experienced every year since entering the industry as a professional playback singer in March 2021. There has been no looking back since then; each year has been progressively more significant and fulfilling professionally. I am thankful to God for continuously blessing me with more work."

Zahrah shared that everything that she had manifested seemed to effortlessly materialise, and she is excited to see what unfolds in 2024.

"I'm set to finish shooting my film 'Vrushabha' by March, with its release slated for the end of 2024. My goal is to work on scripts that showcase a new side of me with each film. My musical journey aligns hand in hand with this pursuit. I hope to achieve what my mother did as both an actor and a singer," she shared.



Worst flight of my life: Jasmine Bhasin slams airlines

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Jasmine Bhasin, who was travelling from Mumbai for a vacation to Jammu, shared about her 'worst flight' experience, and has slammed the airlines for their 'horrible and disastrous' management.

Taking to Instagram, Jasmine shared her selfies, wherein she can be seen sitting inside the flight, with her hand on her head. She is wearing a blue knitted top, and round framed sunglasses. The photo was captioned as: "Jammu ki jagah delhi pahuch gaye Thank you @indigo.6e".

She recounted the flight experience, and shared how she had spent 10 hours in the aircraft, and landed back in Mumbai itself. The 'Naagin 4' actress wrote: "Just had the worst flight of my life, was in aircraft for more than 10 hours, boarded from Mumbai and landed in Mumbai so I didn't reach anywhere. Cabin crew was helpful and did their best but horrible and the most disastrous senior management and administration @indigo.6eShame @indigo.6e". Slamming the airlines, and their staff for the mismanagement, Jasmine added: "And the way your manager at Mumbai airport is speaking with people, it's shameful indigo.6e That too he came after so many calls were made to him by your assisting staffs as they did Not know how To deal with passengers."



Amitabh Bachchan gets nostalgic as 'KBC 15' contestant shares the same college hostel room

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amitabh Bachchan, the iconic figure of the Indian cinema, experienced a wave of nostalgia during 'Kaun Banega Crorepati 15' when a contestant revealed staying in the same college hostel room in which he did.

This delightful connection sparked memories of Amitabh's Kirori Mal College days, taking him on a trip down memory lane.

Big B, who is the host of the quiz-based reality show, welcomed Avinash Bharti to the hot seat. He hails from Haiderganj, Uttar Pradesh.

During the game, the megastar shared that the makers of the show have shot a video of Avinash.

In the video, the contestant says: "I hail from Haiderganj in Uttar Pradesh. I currently live in Delhi on rent and am preparing for UPSC exams. My family underwent many hardships for me. I want to do something for them."

"When I miss my parents, I talk to them on a video call. I miss my mother's food and my father's scolding. I am currently preparing for the Civil Services. During struggles, a person walks alone. The day I become successful, my parents will be with me. My friends and the universe will be with me," said Avinash in the video.

Amitabh was impressed by the contestant's determination, and congratulated him. "You're determined about your goal in life. And the emotions with which you express it is very rare to see. I'd like to congratulate you," said the 'Sholay' actor.

The video featured the Kirori Mal College, from where Big B graduated with a BSc degree.

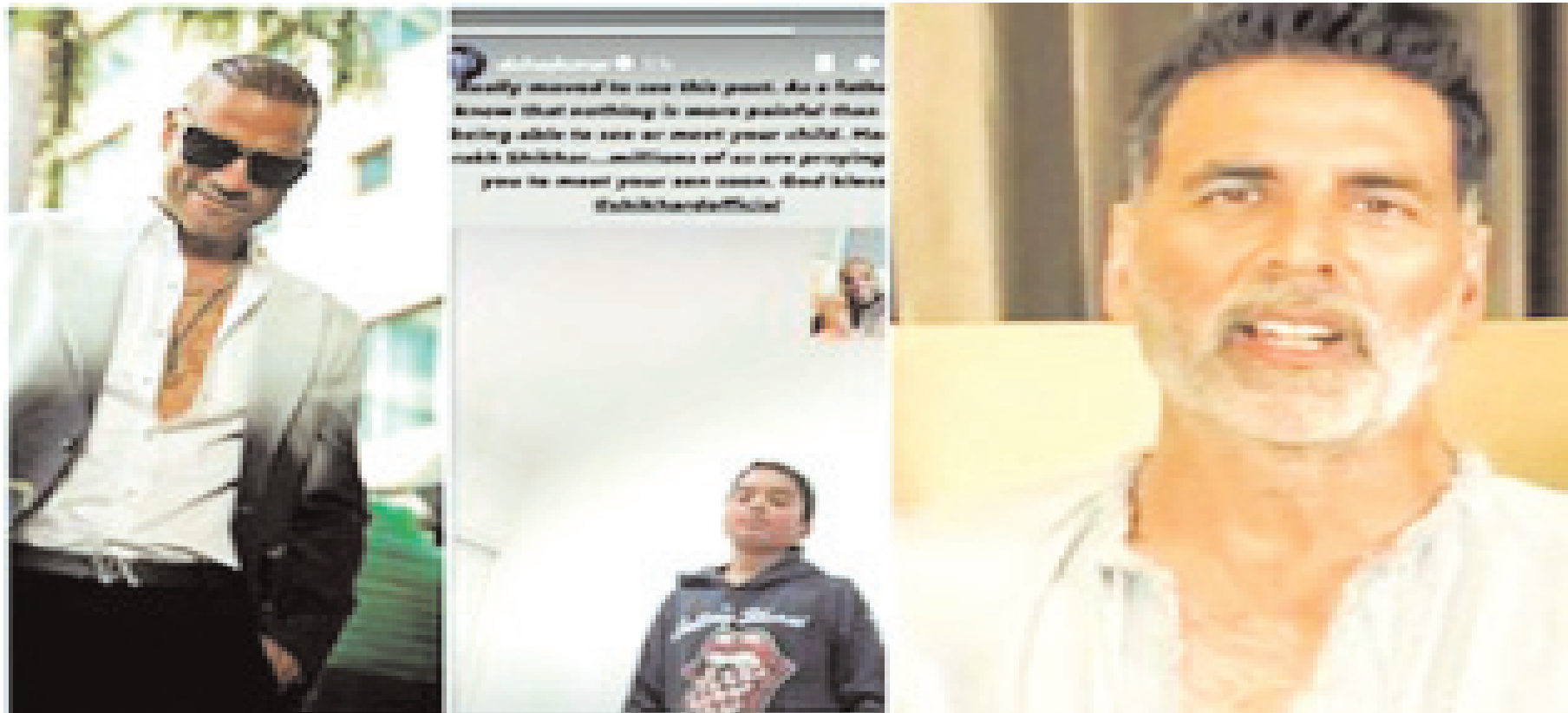
Reminiscing about the same, the 'Brahmastra' actor said: "There were many good things in the video. One of them was that I studied in the same college."



The contestant said: "Sir, I'm a junior in your college. Kirori Mal College, Delhi University. I've studied there too. You spent three years in room no. 27. Sir, I've been living in the same room for the last three years."

Big B continued: "I'd like to know something. That hostel room, you were saying that it was my room. How is it now? Is it the same? It's lovely, right? It's in a corner. You can see the wall from that room. We used to cross that wall to watch movies."

AKSHAY KUMAR LENDS SUPPORT TO SHIKHAR DHAWAN IN TOUCHING SOCIAL MEDIA POST



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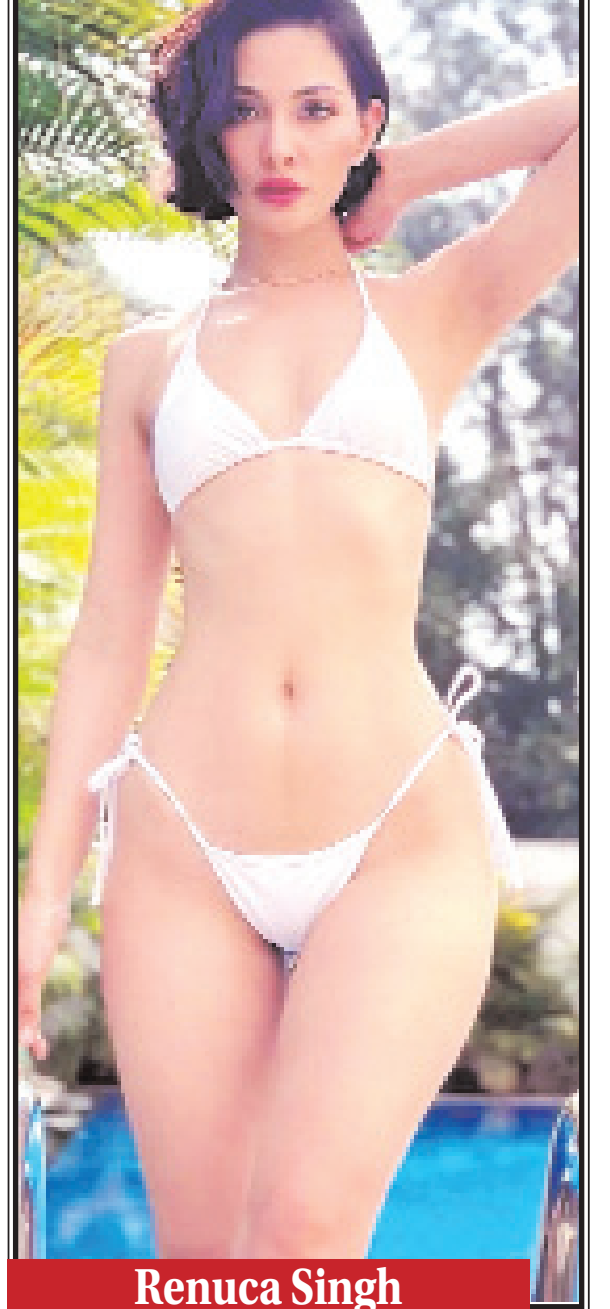
Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar, who was recently seen in the theatrical film 'Mission Raniganj', has extended his support for Indian cricketer Shikhar Dhawan as he sympathised with the latter as a father. Shikhar recently shared an emotional birthday message for his son, Zoravar, whom he hasn't been able to meet for a year due to divorce proceedings with his estranged wife Aesha Dhawan. In October this year, a Delhi court granted divorce to Shikhar Dhawan on grounds of 'cruelty' inflicted on the famous Indian cricketer by his estranged wife. Earlier, Shikhar Dhawan shared a note revealing that it's been one year since he saw his son. He wrote: "It's been a year since I saw you in person, and now, for almost three

months, I've been blocked from everywhere so posting the same picture to wish you, my boy, a very Happy Birthday. Even if I can't connect with you directly, I connect with you through telepathy. I am so proud of you, and I know you're doing great and growing up nicely".

He further mentioned: "Papa always misses you and loves you. He's always positive, waiting with a smile for the time when we will meet again by the Grace of God. Be naughty but not destructive, be a giver, be humble, compassionate, patient, and strong. Despite not seeing you, I write you messages almost every day, asking about your well-being and daily life, sharing what I'm doing and what's new in my life. Love you loads Zora (heart emoji), Papa."

Akshay Kumar connected with Shikhar's situation as he lent out his support in a social media post.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Renuca Singh