

# absolute india

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## Diamantaire group defaults on IDBI Bank's mega loans of Rs 6,710 cr

# ONE MORE SCAM!

In another stunner, a prominent diamantaire has allegedly defaulted repaying loans worth over a staggering Rs 6,710-crore to the government-backed private sector IDBI Bank Ltd, Mumbai, official sources said. The outstanding amount also comprises a significant foreign currency component of more than \$161,000, or roughly Rs 1.20 crore.

▶ **THE BANKING EXPERT DEMANDED A THOROUGH PROBE BY THE CBI/ED OR OTHER AGENCIES AND ALSO TO ISSUE ALERTS TO ENSURE THEY DON'T SNEAK OUT OF THE COUNTRY LIKE THE 'MAMA-BHANJA' DUO OF MODI-CHOKSI.**

▶ **OFFICIAL SOURCES CONFIRMED THAT THE IDBI BANK LTD HAD SERVED NOTICES A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO TO ALL CONCERNED BUT THERE HAS BEEN NO RESPONSE.**



Quaid Najmi | Mumbai

Banking circles describe it as the "second biggest" default of its kind notched by a diamond industry entity after the infamous Punjab National Bank scam of around Rs 14,000 crore involving Mehul Choksi and Nirav Modi - erupted in early 2018, shaking the country's banking industry.

The IDBI Bank Ltd - owned by the Life Insurance Corporation of India, which is preparing for its much-anticipated IPO in early 2022 - has initiated measures to recover the outstanding monies from the defaulters.

The diamond company is Sanghavi Exports International Pvt Ltd, with headquarters in Bandra Kurla Complex, besides its 4 associate companies and 13 persons who are directors/promoters/guarantors, etc.

Indications that all is not well with the Sanghavi clan came way back in October 2018

when a consortium of lenders led by Bank Of India had seized the company's properties in the Bharat Diamond Bourse, Bandra Kurla Complex, for allegedly failing to repay loans worth Rs 468 crore. In a sharp reaction, banking authority and All India Bank Officers' Association leader Vishwas Utagi said the new revelations are "truly astounding" and won-

dered why it remained under wraps till now especially since it had a poor past track record.

The IDBI Bank Ltd is owned jointly by the Centre and LIC almost to the tune of 97 per cent, yet it was accorded the status of a 'private bank' by the Reserve Bank of India in 2019, he pointed out.

### THE MUMBAI-BASED COMPANIES ARE:

Sanghavi Diamonds Manufacturing Pvt Ltd, Sanghavi Jewelry Manufacturing Pvt Ltd, Sanghavi Star Retail Pvt Ltd, and Royal Estate Holding (India) Pvt Ltd, two factories in Surat and an office in Mumbai. The directors named are the trio of brothers - Kirtilal R. Sanghavi, Chandrakant R. Sanghavi and Rameshchandra R. Sanghavi - all based in the diamond industry hub of Surat. Besides there are other family members, men and women, from Surat and Mumbai, listed directors/promoters/guarantors - Kalpesh V. Sanghavi, Jayesh V. Sanghavi, Ketankumar V. Sanghavi, Virendrakumar K. Sanghavi, Aagam C. Sanghavi, Bharati V. Sanghavi, Nikita V. Sanghavi, Premila K. Sanghavi, Kalpana R. Sanghavi, Devika C. Sanghavi.

Diamond industry sources claim the Sanghavi clan has not left the country and are "very much present" in Gujarat and Mumbai, and even regularly seen in public.

Recently, the IDBI Bank Ltd followed up with public notices calling upon all the aforementioned entities and individuals to cough up the long-pending dues. It has further warned the public to refrain from any kind of deals with them since the bank has to recover the huge amounts due from them. Efforts by correspondent to get a version from the IDBI Bank Ltd's team did not materialize.

“With such mega scams lurking in 'the private bank owned by the government', who will now be held responsible for the losses - the Centre, the LIC, or the IDBI Bank officials - particularly since the LIC IPO is coming up soon.”

Vishwas Utagi, All India Bank Officers' Association leader

## Even triple vaccination cannot limit Omicron spread: BioNTech CEO



PARIS | Agencies

Three doses of a Covid vaccine may not be able to curb the rapid spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant of Covid, warned Ugur Sahin, CEO of Germany-based BioNTech.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the variant, known to escape vaccine immunity, has spread to about 90 countries. "We must be aware that even triple-vaccinated are likely to transmit the disease. It is obvious we are far from 95 per cent effectiveness that we obtained against the initial virus," Euronews quoted Sahin as saying to the French daily Le Monde on Monday. BioNTech partnered with US drugmaker Pfizer to develop the two-dose revolutionary Covid

job, based on mRNA technology. Despite this, Sahin noted that early data from the UK and South Africa is providing us with "reassuring information".

The latest research from South Africa, where Omicron was first reported, suggested that two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine offered 70 per cent effectiveness in reducing the risk of hospitalisation. Israeli researchers have also found that the booster doses of the vaccine works against Omicron.

Sahin said testing for Covid-19 is important, especially for the elderly and during winter, as are other protective measures such as mask-wearing, adding, "otherwise we will not be able to control the rapid expansion of this new variant".

### Moderna says its booster shot effective against Omicron

Moderna, which has also produced an mRNA vaccine, on Monday said that a booster dose of its vaccine appeared to be protective against Omicron. Moderna said that its research so far showed that a 50 microgram dose of its vaccine, which is the current amount for a booster job, increased the level of antibodies 37-fold, compared with two doses. It also said a full dose of 100 micrograms boosted antibody levels 83-fold, it said.

## Panama Papers case ED QUIZZES AISHWARYA RAI FOR OVER 5 HOURS

▶ In 2016, the Panama Papers leak case came to the light in which Aishwarya and Bachchan family members were named. The names of Amitabh Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan also cropped up in the case.

▶ In May 2005, a company was reportedly incorporated at British Virgin Island in which Aishwarya and other members of the Bachchan family were directors. In June 2005, her post was changed and she became a shareholder in the company.



**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai was on Monday quizzed for more than five hours by the officials of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) at its Jam Nagar office here in connection with the Panama Papers expose for allegedly violating FEMA (Foreign Exchange Management Act).

The expose showed that several prominent personalities in India had floated companies

in tax havens. A team of six officials, including a lady official, recorded her statement. A source said that Aishwarya was asked as many as 50 questions regarding a firm reportedly incorporated by her father-in-law and Bollywood icon Amitabh Bachchan. The firm was incorporated in British Virgin Island. She was first the director of the firm and then became a shareholder. The ED had lodged a case under FEMA after the Panama Papers leak showed how companies were set up in offshore islands to avoid taxes. Aishwarya and others have been named in the case.

## 3 kids die after taking 'cough syrup' at Delhi's mohalla clinic, 13 hospitalised

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

by Mohalla Clinics of the

Three children are reported to have died after allegedly consuming a 'cough syrup' which was administered by a mohalla clinic run by the state government in the national capital, the Directorate of Health Services (DGHS) has mentioned in its enquiry report.

A total 16 children were admitted to the Kalawati Saran Children hospital of which three died.

"16 cases of Dextromethorphan poisoning were reported in Kalawati Saran Children hospital, New Delhi, out of which three children have expired in the hospital. These children were prescribed the Dextromethorphan drug



Delhi government and the drug is strictly not recommended for paediatric age children. The drug was manufactured by Omega Pharmaceuticals ...." said the enquiry report. Delhi government on Monday terminated the services of three Mohalla Clinic doctors over the death of three children in connection with the Dextromethorphan poisoning case. The government has also ordered an enquiry into the matter.

## OMICRON CONCERNS: SENSEX FALLS OVER 1,600 PTS; FINANCIAL STOCKS PLUNGE



**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Continuous FIIs' selling along with caution over the rising Omicron variant cases triggered a massive slide in key domestic equity indices on Monday's post-noon trade session.

Notably, India VIX (volatility index) spiked to its nine days high levels and signified the dominance of the bears in the market. Besides, all sectors traded in the negative territory out of which Realty,

Banking and Financial counters witnessed the most weakness and selling pressure.

Consequently, at 12.45 p.m., the S&P BSE Sensex declined by 1,601.35 points or 2.81 per cent to 55,410.39 points. Similarly, NSE Fifty50 fell by 527.25 points or 3.10 per cent to 16,457.95 points. The Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have pulled out Rs 17,696 crore from the Indian markets in December so far.

## At least 17 die, 60 missing as boat sinks off Madagascar coast

**Johannesburg:** At least 17 people died and around 60 were missing after a boat sank off the northeast coast of Madagascar early Monday, maritime authorities said.

Port authority chief Jean Edmond Randrianantenaina said 45 of the 130 passengers aboard the vessel were rescued and searches were continuing for the others with the help of local volunteers.

He said the vessel was a cargo ship that had taken on passengers illegally.

Another port authority official, Adrien Fabrice Ratsimbazafy, said that after a "technical problem" affecting the engine, the boat found itself at the "mercy of the waves and foundered on a reef".

A team of gendarmes was headed to the site and an investigation was opened in the island nation off the southeastern coast of Africa.

## 77 kg of heroin worth Rs 400 cr seized from Pakistani boat off Gujarat coast



GANDHINAGAR | Agencies

In a joint operation, the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) in a joint Ops with ATS (Gujarat) has apprehended one Pak Fishing Boat 'Al Huseini' with 06 crew in Indian waters carrying 77 kgs #heroin worth approx 400 crs. Boat brought to Jakhau for further investigation.

In a similar joint operation in April, a boat was apprehended with eight Pakistani nationals carrying 30 kg of heroin worth about Rs 150 crore, from the Indian waters near the Jakhau coast in Kutch.

## Onus on government to run Parliament: Rahul Gandhi

New Delhi: Congress MP Rahul Gandhi

on Monday blamed the government for the stalemate in Parliament and said that the onus of running the House is on the government.

Countering the government's charge accusing the opposition of not allowing the House to function, Rahul Gandhi said: "We are not being allowed to raise issues in the House. We want the government to remove Union Minister Ajay Mishra Teni and discuss the Lakhimpur Kheri case in the House but the government did not allow us to do so." He added, "We wanted to raise the issue of Ladakh, but the government did not allow. Similarly, the government did not allow discussion on the issues of farmers, suspension of Rajya Sabha MPs and then accuses us that we are not allowing the House to function." He said that it is the government's responsibility to run the House and conduct business in a proper way.



## Severe cold wave alert issued in MP

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

▶ **THE MP CAPITAL SHIVERED WITH A MINIMUM TEMPERATURE OF 3.4 DEGREES CELSIUS, 8 DEGREES LESS THAN NORMAL. THE MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE OF BHOPAL WAS 24.1 DEGREES CELSIUS, 2 DEGREES BELOW NORMAL. PACHMARHI, A FAMOUS HILL STATION, SAW THE MINIMUM TEMPERATURE OF MINUS 0.5 DEGREES CELSIUS.**



wind from north India.

One of the three orange alerts issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warns of the ground frost accumulation.

The first alert predicted a likely severe cold wave at isolated places and a cold wave at many places in the ten divisions of MP- Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Rewa, Shahdol, Hoshangabad and Sagar, in the next two days.

In the second alert, IMD said that 17 districts, includ-

ing Indore, Jabalpur, Rewa, Satna and Mandla, are likely to witness either a "severe cold day" or a "cold day" in the next two days.

The Met department has also warned of the accumulation of ground frost in 16 districts including Bhopal, Gwalior, Raipur, Bhand, Shivpuri and Datia in the next 24 hours. The lowest minimum temperature of one degree Celsius in MP was recorded at Umaria and Nowgong in the Chhatarpur district. Chill in MP is likely to abate after two days.

## Lok Sabha passes Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 amid din

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The Lok Sabha on Monday passed the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 amid the Opposition's strong demand for more consultation on it.

This Bill seeks to link electoral rolls to the Aadhaar number, allowing electoral registration officers to ask for Aadhaar numbers of applicants wanting to register as voters to establish their identity. Replying to the debate, Law and Justice Minister Kiren Rijiju said that this Bill will bring important electoral reforms in the country. We wanted the entire House to participate in the debate but they have been protesting and sloganeering in the House.



He added that this Bill was brought after wide consultations with the Election Commission and also with the state governments and it will purify the electoral process in the country.

He appealed to the members to pass the Bill unanimously as it was in the interest of the voters and the country. Earlier, debating the Bill, the Congress Party floor leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury asked why the government was in a hurry to bring this Bill as many MPs have requested the government to forward it to a Parliamentary Committee.



# CCI APPROVES ACQUISITION OF AIR INDIA STAKE BY TATA SONS' TALACE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

**F**air market regulator Competition Commission of India on Monday approved the acquisition of Air India, Air India Express, and Air India SATS Airport Services by Talace, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Tata Sons. The acquisition envisaged 100 per cent equity share capital of Air India and Air India Express, and 50 per cent for that of Air India SATS Airport Services by Talace. At present, Air India is wholly owned by the government. The airline, along with AIXL, is primarily engaged in the business of providing domestic scheduled air passenger transport service, international scheduled air passenger transport service, and air cargo transport services. Air India SATS Airport Services is engaged in the business of providing ground handling services at the Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad,



Mangaluru, and Thiruvananthapuram airports, and cargo handling services at Bengaluru airport.

In October, conglomerate Tata Group had entered into a share purchase agreement with the Central

government for buying out the latter's stake in national carrier Air India, Air India Express, and AISATS.

Earlier, a Letter of Intent (LoI) was issued to the Tata Group. After the SPA, Tata Group had to fulfil the

conditions precedent in the agreement before taking over the airline. The rest of the transaction is expected to be completed by December with final formalities to finish by January.

Tata Sons' subsidiary Talace had emerged as the highest bidder for the national carrier under the divestment process. It had quoted an enterprise value of Rs 18,000 crore for 100 per cent equity shareholding of the Centre in Air India along with that of Air India Express and AISATS.

It was announced that out of Rs 18,000 crore, Talace will retain Rs 15,300 crore, while the rest will be paid to the Centre as the cash component. The bid was higher than the consortium, led by industrialist Ajay Singh, which had quoted an EV of Rs 15,100 crore.

On its part, the Centre had stipulated a reserve price of Rs 12,906 crore. There were only two bidders in the final stage of divestment.

# India extends 'free' import policy for different palm oils

Team Absolute | New Delhi

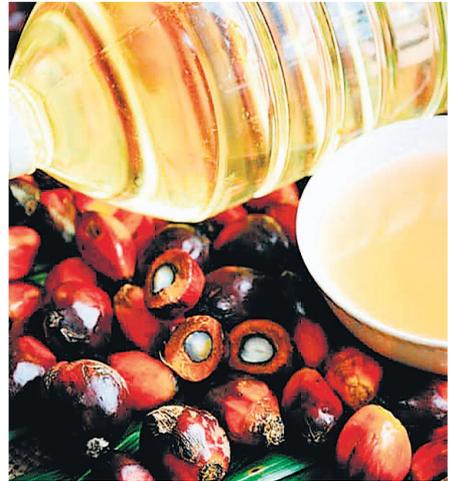
**I**ndia on Monday extended the "free" import policy for different kinds of palm oils till the end of 2022.

These palm oils include "refined bleached deodorised palm oil", "refined bleached deodorised palmolein", and another variant (palm oil and its fractions, whether or not refined, but not chemically modified).

As per a Ministry of Commerce and Industry notification, the import is free for a period up to December 31, 2022.

In June, the Centre removed import restrictions till December 31, 2021. However, imports are not permitted through any port in Kerala.

"Free" import policy of items under HS code 15119010, 15119020 and



15119090 is extended for a period up to December 31, 2022," the notification said. The move comes after

international prices of crude palm, and RBD palmolein-based edible oils have risen substantially.

## Government monitoring Omicron situation daily with experts: Mandaviya

Team Absolute | New Delhi

**T**he government is monitoring the Omicron situation everyday and constantly assessing this new Covid variant with experts, the Parliament was told on Monday.

"I have spoken with the states on this Covid variant and also an SOP has been issued for travellers landing from abroad for preventing the infection," Health Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya told the Rajya Sabha. He said that a total 161 cases of Omicron have been detected so far across the nation.

"We have made a transparent system for the ventilators in hospitals. Now the



state-run hospitals provide us a certificate that the ventilator has been installed and is running smoothly. State governments have provided 48,000 such ventilator reports so far. We will strengthen our fight against Covid on the basis of what we have learnt from the last wave," he said. About the ongoing vaccination drive,

Mandaviya informed the house that with the health workers' diligent efforts, total 88 per cent of the first Covid vaccine dose and 58 per cent of the second have been administered in India as of now, and the majority of the population in India is vaccinated. On India's vaccine capacity, he informed the house that the vaccine manufacturing capacity has been enhanced. Today, India has capacity to manufacture 31 crore doses of vaccines per month which will rise to 45 crore doses in the next two months, he said. All states and UTs have adequate quantities of vaccines, including approximately 17 crore unutilised doses, Mandaviya added.

## BJP LEADER ANNOUNCES RS 11L REWARD FOR CUTTING OFF JEETAN MANJHI'S TONGUE

Patna | Agencies

**F**ollowing his 'abusive' remark against Brahmins, a BJP leader on Monday announced a reward of Rs 11 lakh for anyone cutting off the tongue of former Bihar Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi, the founder of Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM). Gajendra Jha, the general secretary of International Hindu Maha Sabha and executive member of Bihar BJP, said that if a son of a Brahmin cuts off the tongue of Jitan Ram Manjhi and brings it before him, he will be awarded Rs 11 lakh. He also claimed to bear the expenses for his entire life. "We initially believed that Jitan Ram Manjhi is a mentally ill person. He has lost his consciousness. But he is repeatedly making derogatory and abusive statements against Brahmins, which cannot be tolerated," Jha said. "He neither has the dignity, nor does he believe in Hinduism. In a bid to save



the Hindu religion, I am ready to die," Jha said. Meanwhile, BJP Rajya Sabha MP Vivek Thakur suggested that the Bihar government should give him (Manjhi) admission in a short-term course on Indian traditions and Hindu religion. On Sunday, Manjhi had targeted

the Brahmin community by saying that they came to the houses of 'Mahadali' people (Mushahar) but did not eat food. Instead, they demanded money from them. He also said that Hinduism is the worst religion because of which B.R. Ambedkar had changed his religion to Buddhism.

**Will not do last rituals, 'Pind Daan' for Manjhi: Gaya's Pandas**  
Patna: HAM leader and Bihar's former Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi's "abusive remarks" on the Brahmin community have led to a row and now after the FIRs against him, the Pandas (priests) of his home district Gaya announced they will not perform rituals and "Pind-Daan" (offering to ancestors) after his death. "Jitan Ram Manjhi is a native of Gaya district and the entire Brahmin community has given good support to him. Still, he has not only abused the Brahmin community but also the entire Sanatan Dharma.

## Severe cold wave to continue in northwest India

Team Absolute | New Delhi

**C**old to severe cold wave conditions are very likely to continue in some parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh during next 24 hours, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Monday. Cold wave conditions at isolated pockets would likely continue for subsequent 24 hours and very likely to abate thereafter in the areas mentioned above.

During next 48 hours, cold wave conditions at isolated pockets are very likely over Uttarakhand, east Uttar Pradesh, Vidarbha, Bihar, Jharkhand, and during next 72 hours over Jammu, Kashmir-Ladakh-Gilgit-Baltistan-Muzaffarabad, Himachal Pradesh, and Gangetic West Bengal.

Mercury will dip during the day time and cold to severe cold day conditions are very likely at some places



over Madhya Pradesh and cold day conditions are likely in isolated pockets over west Uttar Pradesh during next 24 hours but will abate thereafter. Dense fog in the morning hours in isolated pockets is very likely over Punjab and Haryana during December 23 to 25 and over west Rajasthan on December 24 and 25. Meanwhile, under the influence of two 'Western Disturbances' in quick succession - the first from December 22 and second

from December 24, light to moderate isolated/scattered rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Western Himalayan Region between December 22 and 25. Light isolated rainfall is also likely over Punjab on December 24. Light to moderate isolated/scattered rainfall with thunderstorm and lightning is very likely over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura during December 21 to 24.

## 3 KILLED IN BIHAR ROAD ACCIDENT

Patna: At

least three people were killed and another was critically injured in a massive road accident in Bihar's Aurangabad district on Monday. The injured person has been identified as Satyendra Narayan Singh, President of the Primary Agricultural Credit Society (PACS) in Aurangabad. Singh's brother-in-law and two government school teachers, who were travelling with him in a Hyundai Creta SUV, have died.

The four people were returning from Arwal to Aurangabad, when an overspeeding truck coming from the opposite direction rammed into their vehicle. The impact of the collision was such that the car was mangled after the accident.

An officer of Obra police station said rescue operation is currently underway.

"We have been using a gas cutter to rescue one of the injured persons, Satyendra Narayan Singh. The three other bodies are still inside," he said. Following the accident, the truck driver fled from the spot.



## AFSPA to continue in Assam, be withdrawn if peace continues: CM

Guwahati | Agencies

**G**uwahati: When most parties of the northeast, including BJP's allies, are strongly demanding the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) be repealed from the entire region, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said the law would continue to be enforced in his state.

A decision on withdrawing the AFSPA would be taken only if the present peace prevails for a longer term, he said, expressing doubts whether militant outfits would reciprocate the same manner if the AFSPA is lifted from Assam.

"No state government wants to continue with AFSPA if the law and order situation is peaceful and favourable. AFSPA withdrawal is linked with the peace and stability of the state. Recently the Arunachal Pradesh government in consultation with the Centre has withdrawn the AFSPA from certain parts of the state," Sarma told the media.

The AFSPA, which allows the Army and Central paramilitary forces to conduct raids, operations, arrest anyone anywhere without prior notice or arrest warrant, is in force in Nagaland, Assam, Manipur barring the Imphal municipal council area, and certain districts of Arunachal Pradesh. All major political parties including the Congress, the CPI-M, the CPI, the Trinamool Congress, the Naga People's Front (NPF), the National



People's Party (NPP), the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) and almost all other local and regional parties have been demanding the repeal of the AFSPA.

The NPP, the NPE, the IPFT, and the NDPP are the allies of the BJP in the Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Manipur governments, respectively.

Though the BJP leaders in Nagaland are strongly demanding lifting of the AFSPA from the region, the Central leaders of the party have yet to disclose their stand.

## 'Delimitation Commission giving more seats To Jammu unacceptable'

Srinagar | Agencies

**K**ashmir based political parties are aggrieved over first draft recommendations of the Delimitation Commission. According to reports on Monday, six new seats will go to Jammu, one to Kashmir. Nine seats have been proposed for STs and seven for SCs in Jammu and Kashmir. Terming the draft report unacceptable -- the National Conference, PDP, Apni Party and the People's Conference said the new seats have not been allocated on the basis of 2011 census. "The draft recommendation of the J&K delimitation commission is unacceptable. The distribution of newly created assembly constituencies with 6 going to Jammu & only 1 to Kashmir is not justified by the data of the 2011 census," former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah tweeted. "It is deeply disappointing that the commis-



sion appears to have allowed the political agenda of the BJP to dictate its recommendations rather than the data which should have been its only consideration. Contrary to the promised "scientific approach" it's a political approach." Former Chief Minister and PDP President Mehbooba Mufti said the report ignores population census and pitches people against each other. "My apprehensions about the Delimitation Commission weren't misplaced. They want to pitch people against each other by ignoring the population census & proposing 6 seats for one region & only one for Kashmir," Mehbooba Mufti tweeted.

## SP TO FIELD MAXIMUM BRAHMIN CANDIDATES IN UP

Lucknow | Agencies

**T**he Samajwadi Party (SP) will field a maximum number of Brahmin candidates in the upcoming Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh.

Senior Samajwadi leader and former Speaker, Mata Prasad Pandey, said that SP president Akhilesh Yadav would field maximum Brahmin candidates, particularly in eastern UP, to ensure return to power.

Pandey was speaking at a Brahmin summit organised by the party in Katheri constituency in Ambedkar Nagar on Sunday. "Brahmins have been persecuted by the current BJP government and the anger in the community is palpable. Brahmins, who constitute 13 per cent of the population, will get a lion's share of tickets this time and we will tap this simmering angst to notch up a poll victory," he told reporters.

He said that Brahmins are self-reliant and do not seek benefits from the government. All they want is respect and dignity, he added.

Most Brahmin leaders from 20 UP districts who participated in the conclave endorsed the former Speaker's views and held up the battle axe of Lord Parshuram



to announce a "dharma yudh" against the anti-people policies of the BJP government.

SP vice president Jai Shankar Pandey while avoiding a query on whether the Samajwadi Party was trying to replicate Mayawati's social engineering formula,

said, "Each district will have one or two Brahmins in the fray on a Samajwadi Party ticket."

The Brahmin meet at Katheri, coincided with 'Jan Vishwas Yatra' flagged off by BJP national president J.P. Nadda in Akbarpur, headquarter of Ambedkar Nagar district.

Brahmin icon Parshuram's battle axe motif along with conch shells were distributed to all.

Ashish Pandey Dipu, organiser of Brahmin conclave, said, "We distributed battle axes and conch shells, which symbolise Brahmin pride.



# MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT WRITES TO SEC TO DEFER LOCAL POLLS BY THREE MONTHS, SEC TO REPLY THIS WEEK

The Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi cabinet had passed a resolution on Wednesday requesting the SEC to defer the polls.

Mumbai | Agencies

Just days after the state cabinet passed a resolution favouring deferment of forthcoming local body polls in Maharashtra, the state government has written to the state election commission (SEC) asking the poll body to postpone elections to local bodies by at least three months in order to allow it to collect data pertaining to the share of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the population.

The Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi cabinet had passed a resolution on Wednesday requesting the SEC to defer the polls. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) minister Chhagan Bhujbal had then said that the chief secretary will write to the SEC on the issue.

Sources in the SEC said that the commission is examining the matter. "We received the letter on Friday, and will reply to the government this week," State Election Commissioner UPS Madan said.



Notably, the resolution has been passed with regard to forthcoming local body polls and it will not have any bearing on polls to the 105 nagar panchayats, two zilla parishads and some by-elections that are slated for Tuesday (December 21).

The polls to the 15 municipal corporations and 25 zilla parishads, which are called "mini assembly" in local political parl-

ance, are likely to be held next year. The cabinet resolution was passed last week after the Supreme Court rejected the state government's plea requesting census data from the Centre. The apex court also directed the SEC to convert OBC seats into general seats. After the Supreme Court on December 6 put a stay on the state government's ordinance providing 27 per cent OBC reservation in local polls, the SEC stayed elections to the seats reserved for the OBCs.

The Supreme Court, in its order on March 4, had asked the state government to fulfill the 'triple test' before notifying seats reserved for the OBC category. The triple test includes setting up a dedicated commission for collecting empirical data on OBC population, specifying the proportion of reservation and ensuring that the cumulative share of reserved seats don't breach 50 per cent of total seats.

# Due to our friendship, even Rahul Gandhi is talking of Hindutva: Raut

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Hitting out at the BJP, senior Shiv Sena leader and Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Raut on Monday said that despite all its efforts, it could not topple the three-party coalition Uddhav Thackeray government in Maharashtra which will complete its full term. In an exclusive interview with IANS, Raut also said that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi after tying up with the Shiv Sena has started talking the language of Hindu and Hindutva.

Q. Amit Shah has alleged that you (Shiv Sena) relinquished Hindutva for power?

A. It does not suit the Home Minister of the country to use such language. Pune is the land of Shivaji Maharaj. It was from here that Lokmanya Tilak started the freedom movement. We consider Pune a holy land.



People go there and try to tell the truth, but those who are unable to do so, resort to lies. But we have neither betrayed nor deceived anyone, it is known to all. Now we (BJP and Shiv Sena) are on two separate paths in politics. You do your politics, we are doing our own. You (BJP) are repeatedly trying to topple the Maharashtra government and have failed miserably. Our government will complete its full term, and this is a 25-year arrangement.

Q. Leave aside BJP, you have been accused of com-

promising Hindutva for the sake of power. A.

(Laughing) The answer is in the question itself. If we were Hindutvavadi, then why did they (BJP) leave us in 2014? In 2014, you first left us for power. Q. You have been accused of making an alliance with the Congress, and the NCP for power. A. So what if we went with the Congress? Now Rahul Gandhi has also started talking about Hindu and Hindutva. This is the result of our friendship. Q. Amit Shah has also said that the Maharashtra government is running on three wheels which are punctured. A. We are happy that our government is running on a three-wheeler auto-rickshaw. This is a vehicle of the poor. The Central government has increased the prices of daily commodities so much that people have no option but to travel in auto-rickshaws, don't they?

# At 7.8 degrees, Nagpur records season's lowest temperature



Team Absolute | Nagpur

The second capital of Maharashtra, Nagpur on Monday recorded a minimum of 7.8 degrees Celsius, the lowest of the season so far and other parts of Vidarbha region also experienced the chill.

According to the Regional Meteorological Office, Amravati in Western Vidarbha with 8 degrees Celsius and adjoining Wardha district with 9 degrees Celsius also experienced

cold wave conditions.

Gondia with 8.2 degrees Celsius was also experiencing similar cold weather conditions. Akola 11.3, Chandrapur 11.4, Gadchiroli 11.6 and Yavatmal 12.5 were slightly better than Nagpur, Amravati and Gondia.

Though there was no fog in the city, the temperature, which was 13.4 degrees Celsius earlier, suddenly dropped in the morning.

# 'Real enemies of Muslims are so-called secular parties': AIMIM Maharashtra president

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Intiaz Jaleel, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) Maharashtra president and Aurangabad Parliamentarian, speaks to The Indian Express about the status of Muslims in Maharashtra's polity and why he feels that the Congress-NCP pose a bigger threat to Muslim empowerment than the BJP.

Your party held a rally in Mumbai last week seeking reservation for Muslims. What is your next course of action on this issue?

Our emphasis is on creating awareness about the need for reservation for the Muslim community. The rally was part of this awareness drive that the AIMIM's state chapter has been conducting over the past three months across Maharashtra. There is strong empirical data to show that Muslims are justified in seeking reservations. The AIMIM is also keen on exposing the duplicity of the so-called secular parties who were crying hoarse on how the community needed reservation when (ex-CM) Devendra Fadnis was in power but have now gone silent on the issue after coming to power themselves.

The AIMIM is being accused of raking up this issue to polarise ahead of the upcoming corporation elections in the state...

If people are claiming that we are politicising this issue, then let me tell you that they are 200 per cent correct.



We are politicising this because we want the community to question these politicians when they land up at their doorsteps seeking votes. We want people to question them as to why they have gone mum on Muslim reservation. The AIMIM has now become used to being referred to as "vote cutters" by these so-called secular parties. I have a counter offer to make to them: If the Maharashtra government brings in a Bill for Muslim reservation in the upcoming winter session of the Assembly, I promise that the AIMIM will not contest a single seat in the upcoming corporation or council elections.

The Mahmood-Ur-Rahman committee that was set up by the Maharashtra government had recom-

mended 8 per cent reservations to Muslims both in jobs and education. The HC, however, upheld only 5 per cent reservation for the community, that too in education. Is the AIMIM comfortable with this?

In India, most of the reservation demand - be it of the Maratha community or that of Other Backward Classes - are stuck in courts. The reservation of Muslims is the only proposal that has cleared the judicial process. With the kind of disempowerment that the Muslim community faces, 5 per cent reservation, that too only in education sector, is not enough. But, it is a beginning. I also think that the Maharashtra government failed to put its point effectively before the Bombay HC...

You have also raised the issue of Waqf land in your rally. What is it that you are seeking from the state government on this issue?

Our demands are very specific. There are hundreds of government offices which are built on Waqf lands. When the state government builds or takes properties on leases or rents for its offices, it pays money to the original owners. The state should pay rent as per the present ready reckoner rate to the Waqf board too.

The AIMIM talks about marginalisation of Muslims in Indian polity. However, Maharashtra, at this point of time, has a record number of Muslim ministers in the cabinet.

The AIMIM speaks for the general uplift of the larger Muslim community. Maharashtra may have five Muslim ministers but tell me even a single decision that they have taken for the larger well being of the Muslim community. Not one... has spoken about reservations for the community. Whom do you blame for the situation of Muslims in Maharashtra today: the BJP or the MVA? The real enemies of Muslims are these so-called secular parties. Muslims face a unique predicament as they are forced to square off against an openly hostile foe, which is the BJP, and also guard themselves against these so-called secular parties who will not flinch in stabbing them in the back if that serves their political purpose.

# Minister apologises for comparing roads with Hema Malini's cheeks

Team Absolute | Pune

Water Supply and Sanitation Minister Gulabrao Patil made the comment while addressing an election rally at Bodwad Nagar panchayat in Jalgaon district and it triggered widespread condemnation from the BJP and the NCP and drew the state women's commission's ire.

Maharashtra Water Supply and Sanitation Minister Gulabrao Patil has apologised for his comments comparing roads in his constituency with Hema Malini's cheeks after it triggered widespread condemnation from political parties like the BJP and the NCP and drew the state women's commission's ire.

"My intention was to highlight the good roads in my constituency. However, my statement was misun-



derstood. If my statement has hurt anyone, I would like to apologise..." the Shiv Sena minister said in a video message on Monday.

Addressing an election rally for Bodwad Nagar panchayat in Jalgaon district on Sunday, Patil, taunting his political adversary NCP leader Eknath Khadse, had said: "Those who have served as MLA for 30 years should visit my Dharangaon constituency. They should see first hand the development that I have carried



out in my constituency. If you don't find the roads in Dharangaon like the cheeks of Hema Malini, then I will resign..." The state BJP said it will file a police complaint against the minister for making "insulting and undignified" remarks. BJP leader Pravin Darekar, who is the opposition leader in the state Legislative Council, said that an offence should be registered against Patil for denigrating womenfolk. The Maharashtra state women's

commission said Patil should apologise or face legal action. The women's commission chairperson, Rupali Chakankar, who is also the state NCP women's wing chief, said: "As a people's representative, Patil's statement is highly deplorable and demeaning of the womenfolk...If he does not apologise, we will have to take legal action against him."

BJP's women's wing general secretary Uma Khapre told reporter that Patil had no reason to drag Hema Malini's name into the discussion. Khadse, meanwhile, responded to Patil's comments saying if people had elected him for 30 years, it meant he had worked for them. While the NCP said with the minister's apology, the chapter is closed for them, the BJP said it is still contemplating a legal action against Patil.

# Inflationary inflected: Centre suspends futures trade in 7 agri commodities

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Mumbai

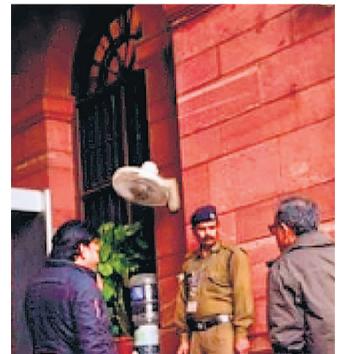
To check inflationary pressure, India on Monday suspended trade in futures contracts of some agricultural commodities for one year.

As per a Ministry of Finance notification, these agri commodities include wheat, paddy (non-basmati) chana, mustard seeds and its derivatives, soya bean and its derivatives, crude palm oil and moong.

"Futures trading is to be suspended with immediate effect for one year in respect of the following commodities paddy (non-basmati), wheat, chana, mustard seeds and its derivatives, soya bean and its derivatives, crude palm oil and moong," the Ministry said in a notification.

Industry insiders opined that the move is in consonance with the Centre's goal to drive down inflation while maintaining a growth oriented liquidity stand.

Macro-data, released earlier this month, showed that higher prices of commodities, food items and fuels lifted India's November



consumer and wholesale inflation gauges. According to data, CPI inflation jumped to three-months high of 4.9 per cent which was led by higher core inflation.

Similarly, the annual rate of inflation, based on wholesale prices, rose to a new record high of 14.23 per cent last month from 12.54 per cent in October.

# BAIL PLEA OF ARMAAN KOHLI IN DRUGS CASE REJECTED

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Monday refused bail to actor Armaan Kohli, arrested by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) for alleged possession and consumption of drugs.

A single bench of Justice N W Sambre rejected Kohli's application seeking bail. The court will pass a detailed order giving its reasons later. Kohli was arrested in August this year for possession of 1.2 grams of cocaine, a quantity falling under 'small category' meant for consumption. Later, the NCB arrested the drug peddler from whom commercial quantity was recovered.

Kohli approached High Court after a special court



rejected his bail plea.

Kohli's advocate Aabad Ponda had argued the offences against the actor were bailable considering he had been allegedly found with a small quantity of drugs. He also contended that except for statements and panchnamas, there was nothing to justify why sections 27A (illicit trafficking) and 29 (conspiracy) of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act were invoked. Mr Ponda argued that mere collection of bank statement

and WhatsApp chats was not sufficient to invoke the stringent provisions of NDPS Act. Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, appearing for NCB, pointed out to the court that Kohli has been accused of supplying contraband to third parties, for which he had received money. ASG Singh said several links had been found between Kohli and foreign nationals during investigation indicating illicit procurement of drugs. The ASG also showed court WhatsApp chats and financial transactions from Kohli's bank accounts to point out that the latter had committed a serious and grave offence. The bench, however, granted bail to Kareem Dhanani and Imran Ansari, two other accused in the case.

# No plan to restrict Christmas or New Year's parties: Mumbai Mayor

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai mayor Kishori Pednekar on Monday said that there is no plan to put restrictions on parties during the upcoming Christmas festival and New Year.

She also urged people to adhere to the guidelines issued by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and the Mumbai Police.

"We have already issued SOPs for Christmas and New Year's celebrations. There is no plan to put restrictions on the Christmas and New Year's parties. We appeal to people to follow the SOPs issued by BMC and Mumbai Police," Pednekar told an agency.

Meanwhile, BMC Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal appealed to citizens to avoid gatherings and parties during the upcoming Christmas festival and New Year, and warned of stringent



action against those who flout rules.

So far, Maharashtra has reported 54 cases of the Omicron variant. Out of these, 22 are from Mumbai, as per official data. "Avoid any kind of crowding, wear masks and follow COVID-19 guidelines. All citizens must also get fully vaccinated," Chahal said in a press release issued on Sunday.

# VARAVARA RAO GETS EXTENSION TO SURRENDER

Mumbai: The Bombay High Court on December 20 extended the time for 82-year-old Varavara Rao to surrender till January 7.

A division bench of justices Nitin Jamdar and S.V. Kotwal was hearing a plea filed by Rao, an accused in the Bhima Koregaon caste violence. He is currently out on medical bail and is residing in Mumbai with his wife. He urged the court to allow him to go back home to Telangana. He was granted interim medical bail for six months on February 22 and has filed for an extension of the same in court.



EDITOR'S SPECS

OMICRON SPREADING FAST

The hyper mutated Omicron variant of Covid-19 has now spread to about 89 countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) said. Omicron is a highly divergent variant with a high number of mutations, including 26-32 in the spike protein, some of which are concerning and may be associated with immune escape potential and higher transmissibility. "As of December 16, 2021, the Omicron variant has been identified in 89 countries across all six WHO regions," the WHO said in its latest update. It added that there is "consistent evidence" Omicron will soon outpace Delta where community transmission occurs. It is because Omicron is spreading significantly faster than the Delta variant in countries with documented community transmission, with a doubling time between 1.5-3 days. The WHO also noted it is uncertain whether the observed rapid growth rate can be attributed to immune evasion, intrinsic increased transmissibility or a combination of both. Moreover, on severity of Omicron, the UN health body stated that the data is "still limited". However, hospitalisations in the UK and South Africa due to the variant continue to rise, and given rapidly increasing case counts, it is possible that many healthcare systems may become quickly overwhelmed. Preliminary data suggest that there is a reduction in neutralising titres against Omicron in those who have received a primary vaccination series or in those who have had prior SARS-CoV-2 infection, which may suggest a level of immune evasion. There is still limited available data, and no peer-reviewed evidence, on vaccine efficacy or effectiveness to date for Omicron.

THE CONTROVERSIAL UK NATIONALITY BILL

Asad Mirza

The controversial Nationality and Borders Bill was introduced by the ruling Conservative Party in the House of Commons on July 6, 2021. The Bill has now progressed to the House of Lords, and if passed it would impact the current UK immigration system as it relates to asylum seekers and refugees; and does this primarily by introducing a two-tier system for asylum-seekers arriving in the country, based on method of arrival. In addition, as per other measures recommended if voted to a Law, the bill would put at risk the future of six million minorities living in Britain. Majority of British citizens who possess dual passports, fear that they would become more vulnerable and victims of discrimination in a legal manner. The government earlier had the power to withdraw nationality but after notifying the affected person. The Bill also includes clauses to allow the UK to be able to send asylum seekers, particularly the boat refugees from various Muslim countries to a "safe third country" and to submit claims at a "designated place" determined by the Secretary of State. The Indian-origin British Home Secretary Priti Patel said the Bill would tackle illegal immigration and the "underlying pull factors into the UK's asylum system". The government in its defence asserts that the bill looks to alter the current system for asylum claims and appeals, as well as looking to stop the flow of people-smuggling and modern slavery. Why the controversy? The bill has been criticised by the opposition Labour Party and also some members of the Conservative party. Former Conservative minister David Davis described the plans to strip people of British citizenship as "uncivilised" and "legally disputable". Under existing law, deprivation of citizenship can be executed for those people who are considered to pose a threat to the UK - based on terrorism or war crimes records - or if they obtained their citizenship fraudulently. However, as reported by different newspapers in November, Patel surreptitiously introduced a provision that would allow the government to strip people of their British citizenship without notice. And this move has set the alarm bells ringing. The British Nationality Act 1981 requires the secretary of state to give a person written notice of a decision to deprive them of their



British citizenship before a deprivation order can be made. But Clause 9 of the new Bill exempts the government from giving notice if it is not "reasonably practicable" to do so, or in the interests of national security, diplomatic relations or is otherwise in the public interest. Why the criticism? Critics say this will give the government enormous power over British citizens who have another nationality or who may have been born elsewhere. Effectively, naturalised citizens can be made stateless without notice. The government, however, claims that it will not make anyone stateless and will not affect their right to appeal. Citizenship stripping can take place for public interest reasons, mostly connected to national security and counter-terrorism. These decisions come into effect even before appeals can be processed, so it is crucial for the affected person to be notified. The UK has had a recent, significant rise in citizenship deprivations. Most have taken place when the British citizen is already overseas, so they would be unlikely to know about cancellation orders and would find it diffi-

cult to appeal. Davis also said his amendment to clause nine of the bill would have still enable the Home Secretary to deprive a person of British citizenship but it would remove the right to do it without notification. The British Law Society giving its take on the Bill says: "We believe this bill contains a number of measures which are, or are likely to be incompatible with international law, damage access to justice, and impact on the role of lawyers in immigration cases. "We're concerned that allowing differential treatment of refugees depending on how they arrive in the UK would penalise those arriving via irregular means; this is incompatible with the UK's obligations under the Refugee Convention 1951." In its recommendations to the government, the Society says: "We believe the government should remove provisions that are likely to be incompatible with international law; this includes provisions that relate to the differential treatment of refugees based on their mode of arrival, increase the standard of proof for establishing

whether someone is a refugee, and re-define what is considered a particularly serious crime, remove provisions that would harm access to justice; including those that reduce safeguards in relation to appeals, and unfairly penalise late submission of evidence, remove the power for the Immigration Tribunal to impose additional fines on lawyers." Devyani Prabhat, Professor in Law at University of Bristol, says that currently, no other country can make its own citizens stateless by depriving them of citizenship. In the an article on Conversation.com, Prabhat further says that the UK's citizenship deprivation practice affects minorities and those of migrant heritage much more than it does white British nationals born in Britain. Taking away notification requirements will make appeals even harder. Even without this change, deprivation laws risk alienating minority communities, but with it, potential challenges in courts will be eliminated at source. Human rights organisation Amnesty International says, if passed, the Bill "will create significant obstacles and harms to people seeking asylum in the UK's asylum system" and that the legislation undermines the Refugee Convention and the UK's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on Reduction of Statelessness. In October, a team of leading immigration lawyers also concluded that the controversial bill breaches international and domestic law in at least 10 different ways and accused the government of "riding roughshod" over its obligations. Leading the team, human rights Raza Husain said, if passed, the legislation would lead to challenges under international human rights and refugee treaties. It seems as if the Conservative government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson is keen to move away from the liberal policy that Britain had adopted since the 1940s, and particularly during the last 40 years or so, motivating the talented to join its work force. This had slowly resulted in making UK a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious society. Though racial prejudice still persisted but it was possible to protest in the name of the British law and jurisprudence. But now it may not be possible in future.

(Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi)

international

PHILIPPINES TYPHOON DEATH TOLL REACHES 208, 52 MISSING

The death toll from the powerful typhoon Rai that lashed the Philippines last week has increased to 208, a top police official confirmed on Monday, adding that 52 people were still unaccounted for. However, Philippine National Police spokesperson Colonel Roderick Alba only provided details of the reported 29 deaths caused by typhoon Rai, the 15th and the most destructive typhoon to hit the Southeast Asian country this year, reports Xinhua news agency. The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported only 58 deaths on Monday. Only four of the 58 are confirmed. The agency also reported that 18 people were missing. Bohol in the central Philippines is one of the hardest-hit by Rai. Bohol



Governor Arthur Yap said on Monday that 94 people died in his province alone, while at least 18 more are missing. The NDRRMC said close to 1 million people have been affected by the typhoon, including 442,424 displaced residents. It added that the initial estimate of damage to agriculture is 118.28 million pesos and 225.17 million pesos worth of infrastructure. On December 16, the typhoon first slammed into Siargao Island, off the eastern coast on Mindanao island. Rai lashed the Philippines for three days, causing flooding and landslides and leaving a

trail of destruction in the central and southern region, including some areas in the main Luzon island. "We are still assessing the damage, but it is huge. The typhoon leveled the entire community to the ground, no electricity, water, and food," said Defence Secretary and NDRRMC Chairman Delfin Lorenzana. He said the government is now addressing the food, water, and medical care of those injured. "I have directed the armed forces to deploy all available assets such as ships, boats, aircraft, and trucks to bring relief goods to the stricken areas and the deployment of troops if necessary," Lorenzana said. Meanwhile, NDRRMC spokesperson Mark Timbal said 29 foreign nationals have been evacuated from Siargao Island, famous for surfing. "The tourists have been identified, and they are in good condition," he added.

S.KOREAN PRESIDENT'S APPROVAL RATING FALLS TO 40.2%

Seoul: South Korean President Moon Jae-in's approval rating inched down 0.2 percentage points to 40.2 per cent last week, a new poll showed on Monday. The negative assessment on Moon's conduct of state affairs added 0.7 percentage points to 56.8 per cent, according to the Realmeater survey. Support for Moon's ruling Democratic Party fell 1.1 percentage points to 33.1 per cent last week, reports Xinhua news agency citing the survey. The main conservative opposition People Power Party won 39.2 per cent of support last week, down 0.1 percentage point from the previous week. The minor centre-right People's Party gained 7.2 per cent of approval score, followed by the minor centre-left Open Democratic Party with 5.6 per cent and the minor progressive Justice Party with 4.1 per cent. As for the approval rating of presidential candidates, support for the Democratic Party's Lee Jae-myung retreated 1.7 percentage points over the week to 38.0 per cent last week. Support for the People Power Party's Yoon Suk-yeol declined 0.8 percentage points to 44.4 per cent last week. The country's presidential election is scheduled for March 9, 2022.



Japanese household assets mark record high on less spending

Tokyo | Agencies Assets held by Japanese households reached a record at 1,999.8 trillion yen (\$17 trillion) at the end of September, the highest since comparable data became available in 2005, official data revealed on Monday. According to the data by Bank of Japan (BOJ), accounting for 53.6 per cent of the overall balance, the holding of cash and deposits increased 3.7 per cent to 1,072 trillion yen, as people were refrained from spending due to the Covid-19 pandemic, reports Xinhua news agency. Many areas of Japan including Tokyo and Osaka were under a months-long Covid-19 state of emergency until the end of September, which required people to avoid nonessential outings and restaurants and bars to close earlier. Assets held in equities surged 28.6 per cent



to 218 trillion yen due to increasing stock prices on economic recovery hopes. Cash and deposits held by non-financial firms increased 4.4 per cent to 321 trillion yen, accounting for 25.6 per cent of the total assets, worth 1,250 trillion yen, up 8.3 per cent. Loans extended by financial institutions to non-financial firms were down 0.1 per cent to 351 trillion yen. The BOJ's holding of Japanese government bonds fell 0.7 per cent to 538 trillion yen, account-

UN backed investigator into Yemen war crimes targeted by NSO spyware

New York | Agencies The mobile phone of a UN-backed investigator who was examining possible war crimes in Yemen was targeted with spyware made by Israel's NSO Group, the Guardian reported citing a new forensic analysis of the device. Kamel Jendoubi, a Tunisian who served as the chairman of the now defunct Group of Eminent Experts in Yemen (GEE) - a panel mandated by the UN to investigate possible war crimes, was targeted in August 2019, according to an analysis of his mobile phone by experts at Amnesty International and the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto, the report said. The targeting is claimed to have occurred just weeks before Jendoubi and his panel of experts released a damning which concluded that the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen war had committed



"serious violations of international humanitarian law" that could lead to "criminal responsibility for war crimes". Jendoubi's mobile number also appears on a leaked database at the heart of the Pegasus Project, an investigation into NSO by the Guardian and other media outlets, which was coordinated by Forbidden Stories, the French non-profit media group. The leaked list contained numbers of individuals who were believed to have been selected as potential surveillance targets by NSO's government clients, the report added.

Sudanese protesters reach presidential palace, demand civilian rule

Khartoum | Agencies Thousands of Sudanese protesters managed to break a security cordon and reach the presidential palace in capital Khartoum, demanding a civilian rule on the third anniversary of the December revolution, which toppled the regime of former President Omar al-Bashir. The huge crowd on Sunday have managed to cross three bridges linking cities of Khartoum, Bahri and Omdurman despite the intensive security presence, Xinhua news agency reported. The protesters voiced rejection to the political agreement signed between Chairman of Sudan's Transitional Sovereign Council Abdel Fattah el-Burhan and the transitional Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok on November 21, the report said. Protesters



from Gezira and North Kordofan states, who arrived in Khartoum on foot on Saturday evening, also took part in the demonstrations. The security forces fired tear gas, forcing the majority of the demonstrators to retreat. Meanwhile, the Forces of Freedom and Change Alliance, the civilian coalition leading the protests, called for continuing the resistance until "power is handed to the people". The Sudanese Doctors' Committee said in a primary report that one protester was killed and about 80 others injured during the demon-

S.KOREAN SPY AGENCY WARNS OF POSSIBLE TERROR ATTACKS DURING HOLIDAY SEASON

Seoul: South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) on Monday warned of possible terrorist attacks during the upcoming year-end holiday season, stressing that terrorism is increasingly becoming an "actually existing threat" in the country. The NIS said anti-vaccine protests in Europe and other countries could turn violent or become a target for a terrorist attack, and South Korea is no longer free from such threats, reports Yonhap News Agency. A total of 489 materials instigating or propagandising terrorism have been blocked since an anti-terrorism act took effect in the country in 2016, and the number has been on the rise recently, according to the agency. In South Korea, multiple suspects were detected after funneling money to overseas terrorist groups or instigating terrorism activities since the 2010s, an official said. "Terrorism is increasingly becoming a clearly and actually existing threat," the official said, vowing to beef up efforts to protect citizens and public security.





# MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT WRITES TO SEC TO DEFER LOCAL POLLS BY THREE MONTHS, SEC TO REPLY THIS WEEK

The Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi cabinet had passed a resolution on Wednesday requesting the SEC to defer the polls.

Mumbai | Agencies

Just days after the state cabinet passed a resolution favouring deferment of forthcoming local body polls in Maharashtra, the state government has written to the state election commission (SEC) asking the poll body to postpone elections to local bodies by at least three months in order to allow it to collect data pertaining to the share of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the population.

The Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi cabinet had passed a resolution on Wednesday requesting the SEC to defer the polls. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) minister Chhagan Bhujbal had then said that the chief secretary will write to the SEC on the issue.

Sources in the SEC said that the commission is examining the matter. "We received the letter on Friday, and will reply to the government this week," State Election Commissioner UPS Madan said.



Notably, the resolution has been passed with regard to forthcoming local body polls and it will not have any bearing on polls to the 105 nagar panchayats, two zilla parishads and some by-elections that are slated for Tuesday (December 21).

The polls to the 15 municipal corporations and 25 zilla parishads, which are called "mini assembly" in local political parl-

ance, are likely to be held next year. The cabinet resolution was passed last week after the Supreme Court rejected the state government's plea requesting census data from the Centre. The apex court also directed the SEC to convert OBC seats into general seats. After the Supreme Court on December 6 put a stay on the state government's ordinance providing 27 per cent OBC reservation in local polls, the SEC stayed elections to the seats reserved for the OBCs.

The Supreme Court, in its order on March 4, had asked the state government to fulfill the 'triple test' before notifying seats reserved for the OBC category. The triple test includes setting up a dedicated commission for collecting empirical data on OBC population, specifying the proportion of reservation and ensuring that the cumulative share of reserved seats don't breach 50 per cent of total seats.

# Due to our friendship, even Rahul Gandhi is talking of Hindutva: Raut

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Hitting out at the BJP, senior Shiv Sena leader and Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Raut on Monday said that despite all its efforts, it could not topple the three-party coalition Uddhav Thackeray government in Maharashtra which will complete its full term. In an exclusive interview with IANS, Raut also said that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi after tying up with the Shiv Sena has started talking the language of Hindu and Hindutva.

Q. Amit Shah has alleged that you (Shiv Sena) relinquished Hindutva for power?

A. It does not suit the Home Minister of the country to use such language. Pune is the land of Shivaji Maharaj. It was from here that Lokmanya Tilak started the freedom movement. We consider Pune a holy land.



People go there and try to tell the truth, but those who are unable to do so, resort to lies. But we have neither betrayed nor deceived anyone, it is known to all. Now we (BJP and Shiv Sena) are on two separate paths in politics. You do your politics, we are doing our own. You (BJP) are repeatedly trying to topple the Maharashtra government and have failed miserably. Our government will complete its full term, and this is a 25-year arrangement.

Q. Leave aside BJP, you have been accused of com-

promising Hindutva for the sake of power. A.

(Laughing) The answer is in the question itself. If we were Hindutvavadi, then why did they (BJP) leave us in 2014? In 2014, you first left us for power. Q. You have been accused of making an alliance with the Congress, and the NCP for power. A. So what if we went with the Congress? Now Rahul Gandhi has also started talking about Hindu and Hindutva. This is the result of our friendship. Q. Amit Shah has also said that the Maharashtra government is running on three wheels which are punctured. A. We are happy that our government is running on a three-wheeler auto-rickshaw. This is a vehicle of the poor. The Central government has increased the prices of daily commodities so much that people have no option but to travel in auto-rickshaws, don't they?

# At 7.8 degrees, Nagpur records season's lowest temperature



Team Absolute | Nagpur

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# 'Real enemies of Muslims are so-called secular parties': AIMIM Maharashtra president

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Intiaz Jaleel, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) Maharashtra president and Aurangabad Parliamentarian, speaks to The Indian Express about the status of Muslims in Maharashtra's polity and why he feels that the Congress-NCP pose a bigger threat to Muslim empowerment than the BJP.

Your party held a rally in Mumbai last week seeking reservation for Muslims. What is your next course of action on this issue?

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The Mahmood-Ur-Rahman committee that was set up by the Maharashtra government had recom-

mended 8 per cent reservations to Muslims both in jobs and education. The HC, however, upheld only 5 per cent reservation for the community, that too in education. Is the AIMIM comfortable with this?

In India, most of the reservation demand - be it of the Maratha community or that of Other Backward Classes - are stuck in courts. The reservation of Muslims is the only proposal that has cleared the judicial process. With the kind of disempowerment that the Muslim community faces, 5 per cent reservation, that too only in education sector, is not enough. But, it is a beginning. I also think that the Maharashtra government failed to put its point effectively before the Bombay HC...

You have also raised the issue of Waqf land in your rally. What is it that you are seeking from the state government on this issue?

Our demands are very specific. There are hundreds of government offices which are built on Waqf lands. When the state government builds or takes properties on leases or rents for its offices, it pays money to the original owners. The state should pay rent as per the present ready reckoner rate to the Waqf board too.

The AIMIM talks about marginalisation of Muslims in Indian polity. However, Maharashtra, at this point of time, has a record number of Muslim ministers in the cabinet.

The AIMIM speaks for the general uplift of the larger Muslim community. Maharashtra may have five Muslim ministers but tell me even a single decision that they have taken for the larger well being of the Muslim community. Not one... has spoken about reservations for the community. Whom do you blame for the situation of Muslims in Maharashtra today: the BJP or the MVA? The real enemies of Muslims are these so-called secular parties. Muslims face a unique predicament as they are forced to square off against an openly hostile foe, which is the BJP, and also guard themselves against these so-called secular parties who will not flinch in stabbing them in the back if that serves their political purpose.

# Minister apologises for comparing roads with Hema Malini's cheeks

Team Absolute | Pune

Water Supply and Sanitation Minister Gulabrao Patil made the comment while addressing an election rally at Bodwad Nagar panchayat in Jalgaon district and it triggered widespread condemnation from the BJP and the NCP and drew the state women's commission's ire.

Maharashtra Water Supply and Sanitation Minister Gulabrao Patil has apologised for his comments comparing roads in his constituency with Hema Malini's cheeks after it triggered widespread condemnation from political parties like the BJP and the NCP and drew the state women's commission's ire.

"My intention was to highlight the good roads in my constituency. However, my statement was misun-



derstood. If my statement has hurt anyone, I would like to apologise..." the Shiv Sena minister said in a video message on Monday.

Addressing an election rally for Bodwad Nagar panchayat in Jalgaon district on Sunday, Patil, taunting his political adversary NCP leader Eknath Khadse, had said: "Those who have served as MLA for 30 years should visit my Dharangaon constituency. They should see first hand the development that I have carried



out in my constituency. If you don't find the roads in Dharangaon like the cheeks of Hema Malini, then I will resign..." The state BJP said it will file a police complaint against the minister for making "insulting and undignified" remarks. BJP leader Pravin Darekar, who is the opposition leader in the state Legislative Council, said that an offence should be registered against Patil for denigrating womenfolk. The Maharashtra state women's

commission said Patil should apologise or face legal action. The women's commission chairperson, Rupali Chakankar, who is also the state NCP women's wing chief, said: "As a people's representative, Patil's statement is highly deplorable and demeaning of the womenfolk...If he does not apologise, we will have to take legal action against him."

BJP's women's wing general secretary Uma Khapre told reporter that Patil had no reason to drag Hema Malini's name into the discussion. Khadse, meanwhile, responded to Patil's comments saying if people had elected him for 30 years, it meant he had worked for them. While the NCP said with the minister's apology, the chapter is closed for them, the BJP said it is still contemplating a legal action against Patil.

# Inflationary inflected: Centre suspends futures trade in 7 agri commodities

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Mumbai

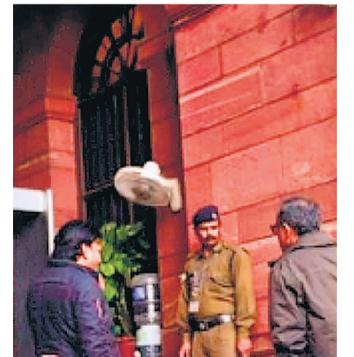
To check inflationary pressure, India on Monday suspended trade in futures contracts of some agricultural commodities for one year.

As per a Ministry of Finance notification, these agri commodities include wheat, paddy (non-basmati) chana, mustard seeds and its derivatives, soya bean and its derivatives, crude palm oil and moong.

"Futures trading is to be suspended with immediate effect for one year in respect of the following commodities paddy (non-basmati), wheat, chana, mustard seeds and its derivatives, soya bean and its derivatives, crude palm oil and moong," the Ministry said in a notification.

Industry insiders opined that the move is in consonance with the Centre's goal to drive down inflation while maintaining a growth oriented liquidity stand.

Macro-data, released earlier this month, showed that higher prices of commodities, food items and fuels lifted India's November



consumer and wholesale inflation gauges. According to data, CPI inflation jumped to three-months high of 4.9 per cent which was led by higher core inflation.

Similarly, the annual rate of inflation, based on wholesale prices, rose to a new record high of 14.23 per cent last month from 12.54 per cent in October.

# BAIL PLEA OF ARMAAN KOHLI IN DRUGS CASE REJECTED

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Monday refused bail to actor Armaan Kohli, arrested by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) for alleged possession and consumption of drugs.

A single bench of Justice N W Sambre rejected Kohli's application seeking bail. The court will pass a detailed order giving its reasons later. Kohli was arrested in August this year for possession of 1.2 grams of cocaine, a quantity falling under 'small category' meant for consumption. Later, the NCB arrested the drug peddler from whom commercial quantity was recovered.

Kohli approached High Court after a special court



rejected his bail plea.

Kohli's advocate Aabad Ponda had argued the offences against the actor were bailable considering he had been allegedly found with a small quantity of drugs. He also contended that except for statements and panchnamas, there was nothing to justify why sections 27A (illicit trafficking) and 29 (conspiracy) of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act were invoked. Mr Ponda argued that mere collection of bank statement

and WhatsApp chats was not sufficient to invoke the stringent provisions of NDPS Act. Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, appearing for NCB, pointed out to the court that Kohli has been accused of supplying contraband to third parties, for which he had received money. ASG Singh said several links had been found between Kohli and foreign nationals during investigation indicating illicit procurement of drugs. The ASG also showed court WhatsApp chats and financial transactions from Kohli's bank accounts to point out that the latter had committed a serious and grave offence. The bench, however, granted bail to Kareem Dhanani and Imran Ansari, two other accused in the case.

# No plan to restrict Christmas or New Year's parties: Mumbai Mayor

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai mayor Kishori Pednekar on Monday said that there is no plan to put restrictions on parties during the upcoming Christmas festival and New Year.

She also urged people to adhere to the guidelines issued by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and the Mumbai Police.

"We have already issued SOPs for Christmas and New Year's celebrations. There is no plan to put restrictions on the Christmas and New Year's parties. We appeal to people to follow the SOPs issued by BMC and Mumbai Police," Pednekar told an agency.

Meanwhile, BMC Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal appealed to citizens to avoid gatherings and parties during the upcoming Christmas festival and New Year, and warned of stringent



action against those who flout rules.

So far, Maharashtra has reported 54 cases of the Omicron variant. Out of these, 22 are from Mumbai, as per official data. "Avoid any kind of crowding, wear masks and follow COVID-19 guidelines. All citizens must also get fully vaccinated," Chahal said in a press release issued on Sunday.

# VARAVARA RAO GETS EXTENSION TO SURRENDER

Mumbai: The Bombay High Court on December 20 extended the time for 82-year-old Varavara Rao to surrender till January 7.

A division bench of justices Nitin Jamdar and S.V. Kotwal was hearing a plea filed by Rao, an accused in the Bhima Koregaon caste violence. He is currently out on medical bail and is residing in Mumbai with his wife. He urged the court to allow him to go back home to Telangana. He was granted interim medical bail for six months on February 22 and has filed for an extension of the same in court.



# Marisa Tomei: 'Spider-Man' co-stars are like family

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Marisa Tomei says that she loves the "camaraderie" on set in the 'Spider-Man' films and hopes to work with director Jon Watts again. Tomei told the I newspaper: "You do feel part of a family, which is very hard to find in Hollywood. I love Jon so much and to see Tom and Zendaya grow as artistes is very exciting."

Tomei also shared that she and Jon had an extensive conversation about spiders when she first took on the part, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She said: "And the power of spider medicine, and how the spider in native American culture is the female, as she weaves the web of life. She cares about the community."

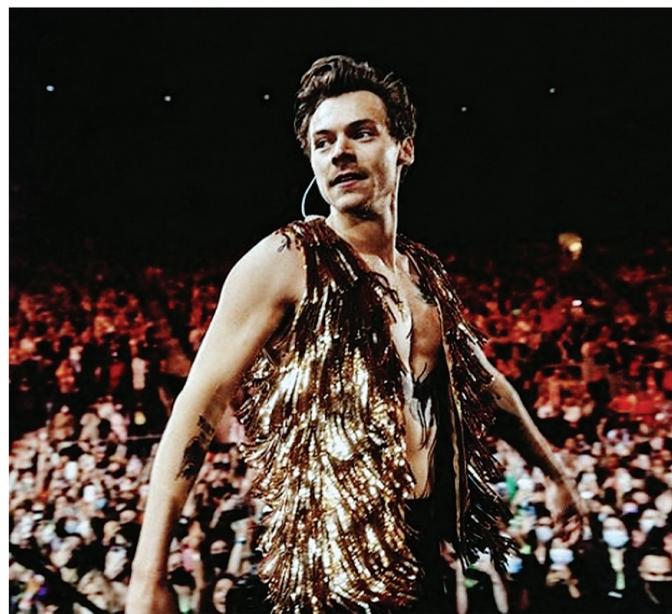
Tomei shot to stardom after she played Mona Lisa

Vito in the 1992 film 'My Cousin Vinny' - which earned her an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress - but she confessed that she was "ill-prepared" for the attention that came her way afterwards.

She explained: "I've felt differently about it at different times of my life... The further I get away from it, the more pleasurable it is. It was pleasurable at the time as well, but then I was ill-prepared for the attention afterwards. But in the actual moment, and the doors it opened, it was wonderful."

The 'In The Bedroom' actress has fought against sexism within the movie industry and is delighted to see that things seem to be changing.

Tomei said: "There are laws being changed now. Then there is the consciousness that has been raised... I cannot tell you what it has meant. I never thought I would see something like this in my life - never!"



## HARRY STYLES HOOKED UP WITH ANDY COHEN?

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rumours are circulating about the relationship between former One Direction singer Harry Styles and TV personality Andy Cohen on social media.

This was after 'The Real Housewives of New York City' member Sonja Morgan commented on it during a question and answer session with fans at an event recently. Asked by an audience member about the One Direction member, Morgan quickly responded that she wasn't interested in the singer, reports aceshowbiz.com. She said she didn't even know who Styles was until he was intimate with 'Real Housewives' producer Cohen. Cohen has always been open about his sexuality.

In a 2019 interview with Oprah Winfrey's magazine, he revealed he realised he was gay in the men's locker room at his father's tennis club when he was "around 12 or 13. I was devastated," he said. "It was the early '80s and there were no gay people on TV, no gay role models. I wasn't hopeful about my future," he recalled.

"My friends were all constantly saying 'fag', and they said it on TV all the time - it was in the vernacular, and it was not shocking. I would kind of shut down when I'd hear it; I just didn't think my friends and family would accept me."

Cohen has since become one of the most prominent producers and hosts in Hollywood. He welcomed son Benjamin via surrogate in 2019.

## Priyanka missed Nick at 'The Matrix Resurrections' premiere

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas shared that she missed her American pop star husband Nick Jonas at 'The Matrix Resurrections' premiere. Priyanka posted a string of photographs, where she posed alongside 'Papa' Kevin Jonas, 'Mama'



Denise Jonas and her mother Madhu Chopra in a private plane. Her pet pup Diana was also seen along with her. She tagged the location as San Francisco, where she attended the premiere of 'The Matrix Resurrections'. Crew!! I'm so thankful for my family. Thank you all for being a part of this amazing moment with me. My team without who I would

never be able to do any of it. Grateful. Missed u @nickjonas Happy birthday @divya\_jyoti," she wrote as the caption. 'The Matrix Resurrections', which also stars Keanu Reeves, Carrie-Anne Moss, Jada Pinkett Smith, Neil Patrick Harris, Daniel Bernhardt, Jonathan Groff and Jessica Henwick, is slated to release on December 22.



## JACK WHITEHALL FEARS BEING CANCELLED IN HOLLYWOOD

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Jack Whitehall has forged a successful movie career with roles in films including 'Jungle Cruise' and 'Clifford the Big Red Dog', but he shared his fears that his old stand-up jokes could come back to haunt him.

Speaking on the 'Irishman Abroad' podcast, Whitehall said: "I feel like I've definitely said jokes in the past that would be worthy of cancellation. I guess it's how you weather that storm if it does ever come up."

"I've had it, sort of, occur a few

times and I think, maybe, people are a little better now.

"We've had a few of these ridiculous cancellations of people because of historic jokes that, especially with a comedian because it was told in jest and the context of it was only ever intended as a joke, that you do tend to get away with it a little bit more."

"More so than you might with a tweet or a comment in an interview."

Whitehall has been concentrating on his movie career over the past few years, he hopes to make a return to stand-up, reports femalefirst.co.uk.



## BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH ENJOYED PLAYING DARKER ROLE IN 'THE POWER OF THE DOG'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Benedict Cumberbatch relished not having to play a "people-pleaser" as rancher Phil Burbank in 'The Power of the Dog'.

Cumberbatch told The Guardian newspaper: "As somebody who's a bit of a people-pleaser and apologetic at the best of times, who worries too much about what people think of me, I loved the freedom of being somebody who wasn't in that space."

"Of course, there's this deep kernel of truth he never lets get exposed. And that ties into the breadth of fear and fury that we know he has."

"But he can also stand behind his back and survey all these scenes with a sort of calm acceptance and knowing. And not be taken in with the hoopla of worrying about what the ranchhands think of him. He's very self-assured. I admired that." Cumberbatch had to learn how to play the banjo for his role in the movie, which has been nominated for seven Golden Globes, and said he will continue using the instrument for personal pleasure, reports femalefirst.co.uk.



Jessica Henwick

## Meryl Streep: We've become accustomed to loving horrible people

Veteran Hollywood star Meryl Streep will be seen playing President Orlean, who knows how to navigate her way around the system, in the upcoming satirical science fiction comedy 'Don't Look Up'.

Los Angeles | Agencies

She says the anti-heroine is much less common and that people have become accustomed to loving horrible individuals.

Talking about her role and how there's been a rise in powerful female lead characters, Meryl said, "We've become accustomed to loving horrible people. The anti-heroine is much less common."

She added: "Take 'The Devil Wears Prada'. Miranda Priestly is one of those people who's disagreeable, but I understood her more because she had such a bur-



den on her. But President Orlean wears the burden of leading the country very lightly."

"She hardly gives a second thought to it. It's really about self-aggrandizement."

Netflix's upcoming satirical science fiction black comedy 'Don't Look Up' tells the story of two low-level astronomers, who must go on a giant media tour to warn mankind of an approaching comet that will destroy earth.

The film features a stellar cast of Jennifer Lawrence, Leonardo DiCaprio, Meryl Streep, Jonah Hill and Timothee Chalamet. It will start streaming on Netflix on December 24.



## Yash Dhull to lead India in ICC U19 Cricket World Cup 2022

Mumbai | Agencies

Delhi lad Yash Dhull will lead the 17-member Indian squad in the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup 2022 to be played in the West Indies from January 14 to February 5 across four host countries. SK Rasheed of Andhra Cricket Association will be Dhull's deputy, the BCCI said in a statement on Sunday.

"The All-India Junior Selection Committee has picked India's squad for the upcoming ICC Under 19 Men's Cricket World Cup to be played in the West Indies from January 14 to February 5, 2022 across four host countries. The 14th edition of the tournament will see 16 teams competing for the trophy in 48 matches," the statement read. India are the most successful team having won four titles in 2000, 2008, 2012 and 2018. India have also been runner-up in 2016 and in the previous edition of the tournament held in 2020 in New Zealand.

The format will see the top two teams from each of the four groups advance to the Super League while the remaining teams feature in



the Plate across 23 days of competition. India U19 are placed in Group B.

India U19 squad: Yash Dhull (Captain), Harnoor Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, SK Rasheed, Nishant Sindhu, Siddarth Yadav, Aneeshwar Gautam, Dinesh Bana (WK), Aaradhya Yadav (WK), Raj Angad Bawa, Manav Parakh, Kaushal Tambe, RS Hangargekar, Vasu Vats, Vicky Ostwal, Ravikumar, Garv Sangwan

Standby players: Rishit Reddy, Uday Saharan, Ansh Gosai, Amrit Raj Upadhyay, PM Singh Rathore. India's fixtures at ICC U19 World Cup 2022: India vs South Africa - January 15, Providence Stadium, Guyana (19:30), India vs Ireland - January 19, Brian Lara Cricket Academy, Trinidad and Tobago (19:30), India vs Uganda - January 22, Brian Lara Cricket Academy, Trinidad and Tobago (19:30).

## ASHES, 2ND TEST: AUSTRALIA IN FIRM CONTROL, NEED SIX WICKETS TO TAKE 2-0 LEAD IN SERIES

Adelaide | Agencies

Australia maintained their firm control on the second Ashes Test, taking out four England wickets before the fourth day of the second Test ended at the Adelaide Oval. After half-centuries from Travis Head and Marnus Labuschagne enabled the hosts to declare with a lead of 467 runs, Australia then took out England's top four, including captain Joe Root on the final ball of the day, to leave the visitors at 82/4 in 43.2 overs. With only the fifth day left, Australia now need six wickets to go 2-0 up in the five-match series while England need to bat three sessions to save the match. After setting a target of 468 for England, Australia took only 12 balls to take out the first wicket. Haseeb Hameed fell for a duck, gloving a ball behind to keeper Alex Carey that bounced off a length from Jhye Richardson. Rory Burns and Dawid Malan survived till tea break and 40 minutes after the interval, Nathan Lyon got one to turn away and take the outer edge of Malan's bat, to be put down by Steve Smith at first slip. But in the next over, Malan couldn't make the most of the dropped chance, trapped lbw on the front pad by Michael Neser, and burnt a review as well, ending the 44-run stand for the second wicket.

Burns, looking comfortable for the first time in the series, was given out caught behind against Cameron Green but got to change the decision



### Brief scores

Australia 473/9 dec in 150.4 overs and 230/9 dec in 61 overs (Travis Head 51, Marnus Labuschagne 51, Joe Root 2/27, Dawid Malan 2/33) against England 236 all out in 84.1 overs and 20/1 in eight overs (Rory Burns 34, Joe Root 24, Jhye Richardson 2/17), England need 386 runs to win the match.

as the ball flicked his back leg on the way to keeper Alex Carey. But Richardson, who troubled the opener with cross-seam deliveries, came back to take out Burns for a fighting 34, nicking to Smith for a low catch at second slip. Joe Root and Ben Stokes fought hard to survive till stumps but a blow to the abdomen, where he was hit during the practice session before the start of the day, caused Root a lot of discomfort. After the blow, Root wasn't moving well and nicked behind to Carey off Starc at the stroke of stumps. Earlier, Head and Labuschagne notched up half-centuries to help Australia recover from 55/4 to reach 230/9 and swelling the

lead beyond 450 in the process. The start of the day wasn't rosy for the hosts. In an action-packed first session, England bossed the first half while Australia took charge in the second hour. Resuming from an overnight score of 54/1, nightwatchman Neser was nearly run out on the first ball of the day. In the next over, Neser was bowled through the gate by James Anderson getting one to jag back in. England got their second wicket in just three balls as Stuart Broad extracted a thick outside edge from Marcus Harris' bat and keeper Jos Buttler took a flying one-handed screamer of a catch to his left. Broad almost had Smith dismissed for a

golden duck if not for Buttler dropping the catch to his right. On the very next ball, Broad rapped Smith on the pads, which was adjudged not out. England took the DRS but Smith survived as replays showed impact as umpire's call. But the Australia captain couldn't make the most of the twin lives as he glved behind to a diving Buttler off Robinson. Head and Labuschagne stitched a counter-attacking partnership for the fifth wicket to ensure Australia didn't lose any other wicket in a see-saw session. Head was the more aggressive of the two, striking boundaries while Labuschagne took his time to get going. Post dinner, Head began by smashing past Chris Woakes for four and then pulled for two through mid-wicket to bring up a half-century at his home ground. But in the next over, Head went for a pull against Robinson, only for a brilliant diving effort from Stokes at deep mid-wicket to send the left-hander back to the pavilion. Labuschagne continued to march and reached his half-century with a single through square-leg off Robinson for the second time in the match. Labuschagne fell as he slog-swept straight to deep mid-wicket off Malan. An arm ball from Root saw Carey chop onto his stumps. Richardson and Starc slammed a six each but when the duo got out in successive overs, Australia declared their innings for the second time in the match, ending England's agony on the field, only to pile more pain by the time stumps were called.

## India ease past Japan, maintain unbeaten run in Men's Asian Champions Trophy 2021

Dhaka | Agencies

The Indian Men's Hockey Team is on a roll as they continued their unbeaten run at the 2021 Asian Champions Trophy, with a brilliant 6-0 win over Japan in the round-robin stage, here on Sunday.

Harmanpreet Singh (10', 53'), Dilpreet Singh (23'), Jarnmanpreet Singh (34'), Sumit (46'), and Shamsher Singh (54') scored the goals as Team India picked up a big win. India are in contention for their third consecutive title at the Asian Champions Trophy, having won the prestigious tournament in 2016 and joint winners in 2018. Team India's dynamic frontline started troubling the Japanese defence as soon as the hooter blew, as they received a flurry of penalty corners early on in the first quarter. Defender Harmanpreet Singh made the most of the opportunity in the 10th minute, as he converted it into the 1st goal for India. India camped inside Japan's circle in



the final few minutes of the first quarter. Young forward Shilanand Lakra and experienced striker Lalit Kumar Upadhyay managed to get shots on target but were denied by Japan goalkeeper Takashi Yoshikawa. As soon as the second quarter started, Japan started working hard to find the equaliser. In the 21st minute, Japan received a penalty corner, but once again, the Indian defence was up to the task and denied Japan the equaliser. Dilpreet Singh continued his goal-scoring form, as he put the

ball back into the net in the 23rd minute to score the second goal for India. Japan bagged another penalty corner in the dying minutes of the second quarter but were yet again unable to breach India's defence. After half-time, Japan started showing attacking intent to cover up the deficit quickly and immediately attempted to make circle penetrations. But India continued to defend well, leaving no gaps for Japan forwards to get a shot away. Jarnmanpreet Singh scored from a reverse hit in the

34th minute to extend India's lead to 3-0. India goalkeeper Suraj Karkera made two important saves in the third quarter with Kenta Tanaka making threatening penetrations inside India's circle, and India maintained their clean sheet going into the final 15 minutes of play. Early on in the fourth and final quarter, Sumit scored the fourth goal in the 46th minute after India surprised Japan's defence with quick penetrations and passes. Japan's defence faltered, awarding India a late penalty corner, and Harmanpreet Singh converted it into a goal with ease, adding in the 5th goal for India in the 53rd minute. A minute later, Shilanand Lakra combined with Shamsher Singh as the latter scored the 6th goal for India in the 54th minute. Japan made penetrating runs in the final few minutes, but Team India maintained their calm and came away with another clean sheet, winning the match 6-0.

India will play in the semi-final on Tuesday.

Washington | Agencies

American tennis player Jennifer Brady has pulled out of next month's Australian Open due to a left foot injury, the tournament organisers said on Sunday.

The 26-year-old Brady reached her maiden grand slam final at last year's event at Melbourne Park, losing in straight sets to Naomi Osaka. "Our 2021 finalist @jennifurbrady95 has withdrawn from #AusOpen 2022 due to a left foot injury. Wishing you a speedy recovery Jen," the Aus Open said in a tweet. The world number 25 has not played since retiring from her second-round match against Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko at the Western & Southern Open in Cincinnati in August. She has now joined the list of



players - Karolina Pliskova, Serena Williams, Bianca Andreescu and Roger

Federer in missing the tournament, which is set to be played from January 17.

## India vs South Africa: Our fast bowlers are our strength, says Cheteshwar Pujara

Johannesburg | Agencies

Test specialist Cheteshwar Pujara has said that the Indian bowlers have always made the difference in overseas Tests, and now expects the best from them in the upcoming three-match series against South Africa.

India and South Africa will clash in the three-match Test series before the two sides meet in the limited-overs format. The Test series begins on December 26. The team has reached Johannesburg on Friday and have already started preparing for the Boxing Day Test.

"Our fast bowlers have been the difference between the two sides whenever we have played abroad. If you look at the Australia series, even if you look at the



England series, we have done exceptionally well as a bowling unit and I am sure that will be the case even in South Africa," Pujara was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo. "Our fast bowlers are our strength and I hope that they will be able to utilise these conditions and give us 20

wickets in every Test match," he added. Last month, India defeated New Zealand in the Test series 1-0 and the right-handed batsman feels this is the best opportunity for the squad to clinch the series in South Africa.

"The good thing is we played a couple of Test matches in India. So most of the guys are in touch, and when it comes to preparation, the support staff has been excellent. They have been supporting us well and we have five or six days more before we head into the first Test," said Pujara.

"I am sure there is enough time for us to prepare and guys are looking forward to this series. This is the best opportunity for us to win our first series in South Africa. So all of us are looking forward to it," he added.

## GURMAIL KAUR SHINES AS RAJA KARAN ACADEMY HOLD SAI B TO A 2-2 DRAW

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Gurmail Kaur wrested the attention with two goals that saw her claim a share of the leading scorers and help Raja Karan Hockey Academy, Karnal, pinch a 2-2 draw with Sports Authority of India (SAI) B in the Khelo India U21 Women's Hockey League here on Sunday. Gurmail Kaur's ball sense and opportunism stood her in good stead as she scored twice in the final quarter to deny SAI B full points. Her twin strikes saw her rise to the top of the goal scorers list with 10 goals. India Juniors' ace Deepika scored twice in her team's 12-0 win against Khalsa Hockey Academy to join Gurmail at the top. Looking for their fourth win, SAI B did well to score once in each of the first two quarters to go into the half-time break with the lead. But as the only Group A sides playing their fifth matches in a row, both SAI B and Raja Karan HA were getting weary in the second half at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium. Gurmail Kaur found the



energy and the openings to slot home twice, the second coming moments from time. India Juniors maintained their winning vein by recording their fourth straight victory, a 12-0 verdict over Khalsa Hockey Academy, Amritsar. Mumtaz Khan, who opened the scoring, finished with four goals to take her personal tally to nine. India

Juniors will meet Odisha Naval Tata HHPAC and Mumbai Schools Sports Association in the remaining matches. Har Hockey Academy fought long and hard to post a solitary goal win against Sports Authority of India A. It defender Saavi's third-minute goal till the very end to secure its fourth win in as many matches and top Group B with

12 points, ahead of Madhya Pradesh Hockey Academy, Bhopal, which has 10 points from four games. The two top teams will clash on Tuesday.

### RESULTS

Group A: India Juniors 12 (Mumtaz Khan 4th minute, 21, 33, 48, Deepika 15, 47, Priyanka 19, Sangita Kumari 25, Annu 28 and 24, Ishika Chaudhary 39, Rujuta Pisai 55) beat Khalsa Hockey Academy 0. Half-time: 6-0. Sports Authority of India B 2 (Mary Lotla 15, Vinamrata Yadav 30) drew with Raja Karan Hockey Academy 2 (Gurmail Kaur 48, 60). Half-time: 2-0. Him Hockey Academy 9 (Navjot Kaur 5, 13, 28 and 45, Taranpreet Kaur 11 and 56, Sarabdeep Kaur 24, Shivani Sahu 32, Raveen Rani 42) beat Mumbai School Sports Association 0. Half-time: 5-0. Group B: Har Hockey Academy 1 (Saavi 15) beat Sports Authority of India A. Half-time: 1-0.

## ROOT OVERTAKES COOK, BECOMES HIGHEST RUN-SCORER AS ENGLAND TEST CAPTAIN

Adelaide | Agencies

During his stay of 24 in the second innings of second Ashes Test at the Adelaide Oval, Joe Root overtook former skipper Sir Alastair Cook for the record of most runs by an England captain in Test cricket.

Root has surpassed Cook's tally of 4844 runs as the Test captain of the team in his 58th match as the skipper - completing the feat in one match and five innings quicker than his captaincy predecessor, to be at 4859 runs at an average of 47.63.

Root, currently ranked number one Test batter in the world, is enjoying a sublime run-making spree with the bat. He is the leading run-scorer in

Test cricket in 2021, amassing 1630 runs in 14 Tests and though his stay at the crease was cut short on Sunday, Root will get a chance to add more to his tally in the Boxing Day Test at Melbourne.

"Another one gone to Joe Root - I haven't got many left. He's slowly but surely edging his way into England's greatest batsman and he is pretty much there," said Cook on BT Sport.

Earlier, during his knock of 62 in the first innings at the Adelaide Oval, Root went past Indian legends Sachin Tendulkar (1562 runs in 2010), Sunil Gavaskar (1555 runs in 1979) and former Australia captain Michael Clarke (1595 runs in 2012) to be at fourth place for most Test runs in a year. He also became only the second



captain after Graeme Smith (1656 runs in 2008) to score 1600+ runs in a year in Test cricket. Root is just behind former Pakistan batter Mohammad Yousuf, who made a jaw-dropping 1788 in just 11 Tests in 2006 at an average of 99.33, followed by West Indies legend Viv Richards, who scored 1710 runs in 11 Tests at an average of 90.00 in 1976 and former South Africa skipper Graeme Smith, who amassed 1656 runs in 15 innings at an average of 72.

The 30-year-old Root is already the highest run-scoring England player in a single calendar year of Test cricket, having gone past former captain Michael Vaughan's 1871 runs in 2002 during the first Ashes Test in Brisbane.



# AKSHAY, BHUMI NAMED PETA'S MOST BEAUTIFUL VEGETARIAN CELEBRITIES 2021

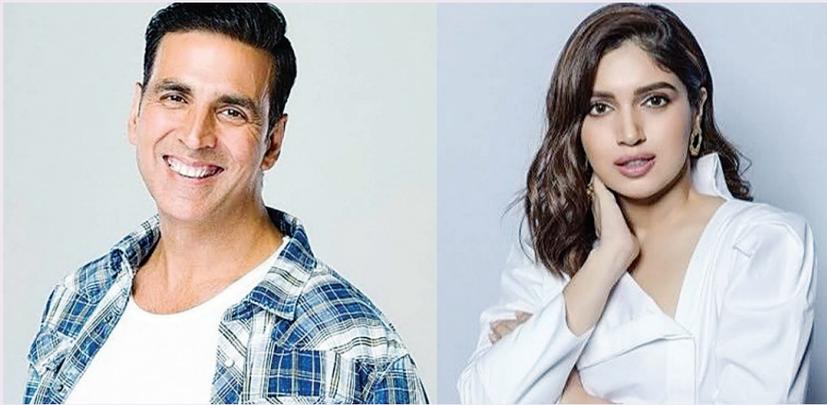
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Akshay Kumar and Bhumi Pednekar, who will soon share the screen in 'Raksha Bandhan', have been named the Most Beautiful Vegetarian Celebrities of 2021 by PETA India.

Bhumi, who also champions the cause of environmental conservation and the climate crisis through her campaign Climate Warrior, became vegetarian over a year ago as for her eating meat just "didn't feel good anymore".

For Akshay, "Health matters most" and the actor relies solely on a plant-based diet for protein requirements. The "true-blue animal lover" also makes a point to speak up for animals of all species, and raises awareness around animal cruelty on Twitter.

PETA India Director of Celebrity and Public Relations, Sachin Bangera said, "From being one of the fittest actors in Bollywood to leading a climate revolution from



her dinner table, Akshay Kumar and Bhumi Pednekar are showing everyone how easy it is to stay fit and eco-friendly while saving animals. PETA India is recognising them for being beautiful inside and out."

Earlier, prominent figures like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, actors Shradha Kapoor, Sonu Sood, Manushi Chhillar, Anushka Sharma, Kartik Aaryan, Vidhut Jammwal, Shahid Kapoor, Rekha,

Amitabh Bachchan and footballer Sunil Chhetri have been conferred with the title, which until 2020 was called the Hottest Vegetarian Celebrity Award.

# SUBHASH GHAI TO MAKE OTT DEBUT WITH '36 FARMHOUSE'

VETERAN BOLLYWOOD FILMMAKER SUBHASH GHAI IS ALL SET TO MAKE HIS DEBUT FORAY IN THE OTT SPACE AS A PRODUCER AND WRITER WITH THE FAMILY ENTERTAINER '36 FARMHOUSE'.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The film, which stars Flora Saini, Amol Parashar, Barkha Singh, Vijay Raaz, Ashwini Kalsekar and Sanjay Mishra, is inspired by Ghai's endeavour to offer viewers content that a family can enjoy together.

Talking about the project, Subhash Ghai says, "It's great if one can reach out to viewers across the world, who have exposure to great content. '36 Farmhouse' is sure to echo the sentiments of the Indian diaspora worldwide because it has family issues today at its core and it also explores the dichotomy of the rich and the poor through an interesting lens."

The film, produced by Subhash Ghai and Rahul Puri, directed by Ram Ramesh Sharma, with story written by Subhash Ghai and dialogues by Sharad Tripathi, will be released on ZEE5 as it turns a new leaf in the life of the veteran filmmaker.

Shedding light on the decision to venture in a new space with OTT, he says, "Change is the name of life - so is for the storytellers that have to re-learn to write for the new medium



with the best of all our experience of writing drama stories for big screen for four decades."

"So, I am really excited to create the new energy and quality update on the small screen too. I'm sure our new attempt with the film '36 farmhouse' on ZEE5 will be loved by the viewers as a family entertainer - especially a film from Subhash Ghai and his young team all over," he adds.

# Ranveer: Bowling like Kapil was the most difficult aspect of '83'



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Ranveer Singh, who will be seen playing legendary Indian cricket captain Kapil Dev in the upcoming sports drama '83', has talked about getting into the skin of the character. Ranveer revealed that bowling like the star cricketer was the most difficult

aspect of his character development.

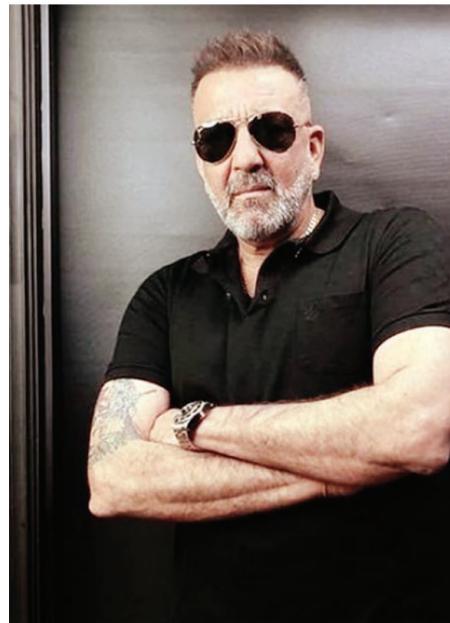
Ranveer said: "Bowling like Kapil Dev was the most difficult aspect of the character development. He has a very unique bowling action and his biomechanics are very unique to him. My body is very different from his so I had to transform my physicality drastically in order to achieve it.

He added: "It took a long time, in fact months to perfect the action. Initially, my body was too heavy because I was coming off the shoot of 'Simmba'."

The actor shared that Balwinder Singh Sandhu, the legend of the 1983 World Cup win who was also his coach noticed that his body was too heavy and he said "Jab tu run-up mein aata hai toh tu aisa lagta hai ki pehelwan bowling karte aa raha hai!"

Ranveer added: "And he sent me away for a month just to change my physicality to bring it closer to Kapil's athleticism and then once I did that, I started making some headway. I was playing cricket for 4 hours a day for 6 months and doing physical conditioning for 2 hours a day for those 6 months. Four months of prep and 2-3 months of shoot, I put in a lot of hours."

Ranveer's metamorphosis to become Kapil Dev pushed his body to its limit.



# Sanjay Dutt wants Rajkumar Hirani to make 'Munna Bhai 3'

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As his comedy film 'Munna Bhai M.B.B.S.' clocked 19 years in Hindi cinema on Monday, actor Sanjay Dutt made an emotional appeal to fans in Nagpur to press director Rajkumar Hirani to make 'Munna Bhai 3'.

The actor was at the 'Khasdar Sanskritik Mahotsav' at Ishwar Deshmukh College ground in Nagpur.

At the event, he said: "I am tired of requesting Raju Hirani many times. Since he hails from Nagpur, I appeal to Nagpurians to press him for making 'Munna Bhai 3' fran-

chise".

It evoked loud applause from the people.

The full cast of the second film 'Lage Raho Munna Bhai' included Boman Irani, Dilip Prabhavalkar, Jimmy Sheirgill, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Saurabh Shukla and Parikshat Sahni, among others.

The film won National Awards for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment, for Best Screenplay, for Best Supporting Actor and for Best Lyrics. On the work front, Sanjay has a long list of films waiting release such as 'Pritiviraj', 'Shamshera' and 'K.G.F: Chapter 2'.



# 'BAJRANGI BHAIIJAAN' SET FOR SEQUEL, SALMAN KHAN CONFIRMS AT 'RRR' EVENT

Mumbai: Salman Khan has announced that his 2015 hit 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan' will be returning with a sequel.

The actor made the revelation at the pre-release event of S.S. Rajamouli's multi-starrer period action film 'RRR'. Salman attended the event hosted by Karan Johar, to show support to the pan-India release of the film.

'Bajrangi Bhaijaan', which won the 63rd National Film Award for the Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment, was co-written by Rajamouli's father and veteran screenwriter Koduri Visva Vijayendra Prasad, who will pen the sequel as well.

Salman slipped in the announcement while talking about Rajamouli's father as to how the veteran writer gave him one of the biggest films of his career. When Karan probed him, "So can we say, this is the official announcement of the film?", Salman affirmed saying, "Yes, Karan".

# FOUR ACTRESSES WHO STOLE THE SHOW WITH THEIR PERFORMANCES IN 2021

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In every sense, 2021 was a brilliant year for all cine lovers. The year witnessed some of the most unconventional plotlines, daring filmmaking styles, and incredible performances. From taking up a challenging role to giving a new definition to a girl-next-door character, our actresses explored every avenue of acting and, dare we say, they excelled!

As we are all set to welcome a new year, we can not help but look back at these phenomenal actresses and their work. So, here's listing down four must-watch performances of the year 2021.

1) Yami Gautam



Touted as one of the most versatile stars on the block, Yami Gautam perfectly tackled one of the most challenging genres, horror-comedy, with her balanced performance in 'Bhoot Police'. The actress impressed every-



one with her command over the character in the film. Especially one of her last scenes earned roaring applause.

2) Konkona Sen Sharma

Well, Konkona Sen Sharma never fails to impress us with her craft. This year too, the

actress brought an unconventional story with a hard-hitting subject at its core, Geeli Pucchi from Ajeeb Dastaan, alive on screen. The powerhouse wowed the critics with her excellent performance.

3) Kriti Sanon

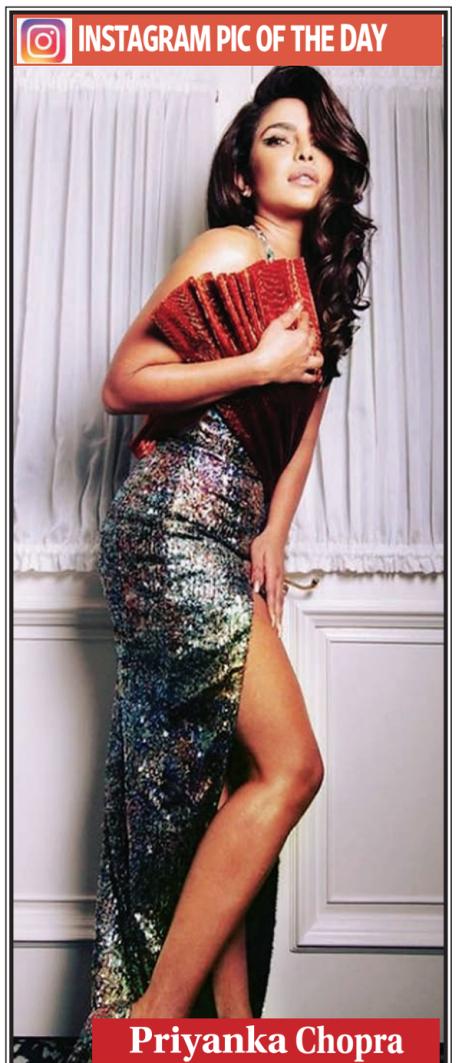


Kriti Sanon made the character of a surrogate mother in 'Mimi' her own. The actress earned acclaim for catching the beats of her role on point. Leaving critics mighty impressed, the star managed to ace the

character curve masterfully in the film.

4) Taapsee Pannu

Taapsee Pannu, known for essaying powerful female characters, gave another brilliant performance in 'Haseen Dillruba'. The whodunit drama featured the actress in a never-before-seen shade and left an indelible mark on the audience. She also received much love for 'Rashmi Rocket'.



Priyanka Chopra