

absolute india

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Launch free mass vaccinations, appeal 13 opposition leaders



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Thirteen top opposition leaders on Sunday jointly called on the Narendra Modi government to launch free mass vaccinations to tackle the coronavirus pandemic, as well as ensure oxygen supplies to hospitals across the country. We call upon the Central government to focus all attention in

“ In times of the uncontrollable surge of the pandemic across our country, we call upon the Central government to immediately launch a free mass vaccination programme across the country. **”**

ensuring the uninterrupted flow of oxygen supplies to all hospitals and health centres across the country, said Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, former Prime Minister and Janata Dal-Secular supreme H.D. Deve Gowda, Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar,

Maharashtra Chief Minister and Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray, West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, Jharkhand Chief Minister and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leader Hemant Soren, DMK chief M.K. Stalin, Bahujan Samaj

Party chief Mayawati, National Conference chief Farooq Abdullah, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav, Communist Party of India-Marxist chief Sitaram Yechury and Communist Party of India's D. Raja, in the joint statement. "The budgetary allocation of Rs 35,000 crore for the vaccination programme must be utilised for this," they added.

INDIA RECORDS HIGHEST COVID DEATHS OF 3,689 IN 24 HRS, 3.92L CASES

A day after recording over four lakh cases of corona infections, India on Sunday recorded 3,92,488 new Covid-19 cases and 3,689 fatalities, highest daily death toll due to infections, Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said. It is the 11th day in a row when India recorded more than 3 lakh cases while over 3,000 casualties have been reported for the past five days. India's total tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 1,95,57,457, the highest since the pandemic started in 2020, with 33,49,644 active cases and 2,15,542 deaths so far.

'West Bengal results show people rejected BJP's politics of polarization'

KHELA HOYE GECHHE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The West Bengal Assembly poll results show that people of the state have rejected the Bharatiya Janata Party's attempt to polarize the elections. The BJP, which had left no stone unturned to dislodge the Mamata Banerjee government in the state is unlikely to touch the three figure mark in the 294-member assembly. Listing the reasons for the below expectation performance of the party, a BJP leader said their strategy failed to deliver the desired

results. The initial analysis by the saffron party found that all the attempts to polarize the polls on communal lines failed. The saffron camp believes that the central leadership's failure to understand the culture of the state was the key reason for its failure to uproot the TMC government. They believe that several actions of central leaders had hurt Bengali sentiments. The saffron camp also believes that four phases of the West Bengal polls amid the Covid surge worked against the BJP.

'Commander' Stalin set to rule Tamil Nadu finally

Chennai: For the 68-year-old M.K. Stalin, affectionately called "Thalapathi" (Commander) by members of his DMK, the wait to lead Tamil Nadu as its head is almost over. The DMK, led by Stalin, a former Deputy Chief Minister, is all set to come to power after a 10-year hiatus, and has even gained a majority on its own. With the successive poll victories - the first one was the 2019 Lok Sabha polls - and now the Assembly polls, Stalin has established himself as an undisputed leader within and outside the party. Stalin has to wait for some more days for his coronation as Chief Minister. His earlier coronation as the DMK's second President in 2018 was a smooth affair. Till date, Stalin has won six Assembly polls - four times from Thousand Lights and twice from Kolathur constituency. His seventh victory comes in 2021. With the 2021 Assembly election victory and heading the state government, Stalin has very many challenges facing him. First and the foremost will be arresting the spread of coronavirus. As an opposition leader, he had fired several salvos against Chief Minister K. Palaniswami. And now Stalin has to take control. After years of maintaining an anti-BJP stance, Stalin has to navigate carefully the centre-state relations as a Chief Minister.



CPI-M falls 3 short of making to power on own in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram: While Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has written himself into record books by becoming the first to retain power in the state, his CPI-M fell three short of forming a government on its own, winning 68 seats out of the 99 seats that the party-led Left Democratic Front won in the 140-member Assembly. At the end of the day, the LDF's final tally was the Communist Party of India-Marxist 68, the Communist Party of India 17, the Kerala Congress-Mani five, the Janata Dal-Secular and the Nationalist Congress Party two each and the Loktantrik Janta Dal, the Indian National League, Congress-Secular, the Revolutionary Socialist Party-L and Kerala Congress-B one each. The Congress-led United Democratic Front tally reads Congress 22, the Indian Union Muslim League 14, the Kerala Congress two and the Nationalist Congress Kerala, the Kerala Congress-Jacob and the Revolutionary Marxist Party one each. The big loser was the BJP that had one seat in the outgoing Assembly, but failed to open its account now. In the 2016 Assembly, the LDF held 91 seats, the UDF 47, the BJP one and there was one Independent candidate.



MAMATA DEDICATES VICTORY TO PEOPLE, DEFEATED IN NANDIGRAM

Kolkata: With the Trinamool Congress poised to cruise to a landslide victory in the Assembly elections to return to power for third time in a row, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday dedicated the win to the people of West Bengal, besides taking a dig at both the Election Commission and the BJP. However, there seemed to be a setback for the Trinamool supremo in Nandigram, where after several twist-and-turns, her one-time aide Suvendu Adhikari of the BJP reportedly defeated her by a narrow margin.



Mamata approaches EC demanding recounting in Nandigram

Kolkata | Agencies

In a major development, the Trinamool Congress on Sunday approached state Chief Electoral Officer Ariz Aftab demanding recounting of votes in Nandigram after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee lost from there against her one-time aide and BJP candidate Suvendu Adhikari in the 'battle of prestige in East Midnapore district. In the let-

ter, the ruling party alleged that certain 'preposterous' and 'illegal' things have happened during the counting of votes in Nandigram for which it is demanding immediate recounting. "The candidate, Mamata Banerjee, has sought recounting of votes before the Returning Officer, Nandigram, but such recounting has been refused for reasons unknown. Such refusal is bad in law and colour," the letter said.

Modi congratulates Mamata, Vijayan, Stalin; extends Centre's support

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday congratulated West Bengal and Kerala Chief Ministers Mamata Banerjee and Pinarayi Vijayan. Modi also congratulated Dravidia Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) Chief M.K. Stalin. In a series of tweets, Modi thanked the voters for supporting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "Congratulations to Mamata Didi for Trinamool Congress's win in West Bengal. I would like to congratulate Pinarayi Vijayan and the Left Democratic Front (LDF) for winning the



Kerala Assembly elections. Congratulations to M K Stalin and the DMK for the victory in the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. We will work together for enhancing national progress, fulfilling regional aspirations and defeating the Covid-19 pandemic."

Covid patients make beeline for Peepal tree in UP district



Shahjahanpur | Agencies

This is a clear case of superstition and faith riding over science as people in the Bahadurganj area in Shahjahanpur are making a beeline for a Peepal tree after being declared Covid positive. About half a dozen members from two families who have tested positive are now lying under the Peepal tree for a dose of oxygen. Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Roshanlal Varma reached the area and met the people. Expressing anger over the state of affairs in health care, he even called up district officials on Saturday and asked them to shift the patients to hospitals. Urmila, however, said that since she was feeling better under the Peepal tree, she did not want to be shifted to the hospital. Her family member said, "We were told that Peepal

“ I was having a problem in breathing and there was no hospital or oxygen support. Someone told me that the Peepal tree gives out oxygen and my family brought me here. I am now feeling better and can breathe better. **”**

Urmila, Woman lying under the tree gives out maximum oxygen. Since there was no option left, we brought my aunt here and she has recovered to a large extent. What matters is that she is improving and does not need oxygen support. We do not care what people say." Medical experts in Lucknow, meanwhile, claim that the impact is more psychological than physical. "It is probably fresh air that is helping people breathe easy," said a King George's Medical University (KGMU) doctor.

BJP-led NDA set to form govt in Assam again, Counting

Guwahati: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) or "Mitrajot" (Alliance of Friends) is set to form the government in Assam for the second consecutive time, as the ruling alliance according to the latest trends is likely to win 75 seats in the 126-member Assembly. The Congress-led "Mahajot" (Grand Alliance) is expected to win 45 seats. The BJP has won 47 seats till the time of going for print. All important candidates of the BJP, including Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, who is seeking re-election from Majuli Assembly constituency in eastern Assam, state Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma from Jalukbari Assembly constituency and state BJP President Ranjeet Kumar Dass from Patacharkuchi Assembly constituency, are leading on their respective seats. Many top Congress leaders, including state Congress President Ripun Bora and Legislature Party leader Debabrata Saikia are trailing in the Gohpur and Nazira Assembly seats, respectively. Of the 126 seats, the BJP is leading in 56 seats while its ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) is leading in eleven seats and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) in eight seats. Though the opposition Congress-led Grand Alliance performed poorly in most parts of Assam, it performed a little better in the Bengali dominated southern Assam.

NDA set to form government in Puducherry

Chennai: The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will be forming a government in Puducherry, a senior BJP leader said on Sunday. According to party national General Secretary C.T. Ravi, the BJP has been successful in retaining power in Assam, and further, "is on its way to form a NDA Government in Puducherry. This is no mean feat by our party. I congratulate our Karyakartas and leaders for these victories," he said. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Puducherry consists of the All India N.R. Congress, which contested in 16 of the Union Territory's 30 seats, the BJP nine and the AIADMK five. According to Election Commission, the All India N.R. Congress has won 10 seats, followed by the BJP winning four and leading in two.

WE HUMBLY ACCEPT THE PEOPLE'S MANDATE: RAHUL GANDHI

We humbly accept the people's mandate. Sincere gratitude to our party workers and the millions of people who supported us on the ground. We will continue to fight for our values and ideals. Jai Hind."



Congress won MP Assembly by-poll

Damoh: The counting of votes for the by-election to the Damoh Assembly constituency of Madhya Pradesh ended with Congress candidate Ajay Tandon winning over the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) nominee Rahul Lodhi. Voting was held on April 17 for the by-election to the Damoh Assembly constituency and counting held at Polytechnic College. Congress candidate Ajay Tandon won by 17089 votes. The voting percentage reported on April 17 was nearly 60 per cent which was 15 per cent less than in the previous poll for the seat. Congratulating to Congress candidate Union Tourism Minister and MP from Damoh, Prahalad Patel tweeted that "we will learn from it."

EC asks political parties to stop poll victory celebrations

New Delhi: Considering inputs of victory celebrations at some locations during counting of votes for 822 Assembly seats in four states and one Union Territory, the Election Commission on Sunday directed heads of political parties to prohibit these celebrations. The poll panel's order came after it found out about such celebrations by the followers of some political parties in some states despite the commission's two orders issued last month and one on Sunday to ban such activities to avoid Covid spread. The commission directed that "urgent action by heads of political parties" should be taken to prohibit victory celebrations during or after counting of votes which began at 8 a.m. on Sunday in Assam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala and Puducherry.



BKU LEADER TIKAIT, 12 OTHERS BOOKED IN HARYANA

Chandigarh: Haryana Police have registered a case against Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait and 12 others for violating prohibitory orders, officials said on Sunday. Tikait and other leaders addressed the 'mahapan-chayat' in a village near Ambala Cantonment on Saturday. The other BJP leaders who have been booked included Ratan Maan Singh, Baldev Singh and Jasmer Saini. To contain the pandemic, the district magistrate had imposed Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which bars a gathering of four or more persons.



CONGRESS' ALLIANCE WITH AIUDF, ISF COST PARTY DEAR

Senior Congress leaders, including Anand Sharma, had objected to the party's alliance with the Indian Secular Front (ISF) in West Bengal, but they were snubbed by Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Now after the dismal performance of the Congress-Left-ISF alliance in Bengal Assembly polls as well as in the Assam Assembly elections, many party leaders are saying that Congress lost poorly due to its tie up with the AIUDF in Assam and the ISF in West Bengal.



However, the party maintained in a statement that its morale is not down and it will work towards course correction, with Randeep Singh

Surjewala saying, "The Congress will deliberate on the issues, including the issue of alliance, but the ex-Assam Chief Minister late Tarun Gogoi too was keen to join hands with the AIUDF."

A Congress leader said on condition of anonymity that due to its alliance with the AIUDF, the BJP was able to polarise votes in its favour in Assam, and had there been a tacit understanding, things could have been better perhaps.

Of the 126 seats in Assam, the BJP is leading on 60 seats while its ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) on 11 seats and the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) on seven seats.

The main opposition Congress is leading on 26 seats while its partners All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) is leading on 11 seats, the Bodoland People's Front on three seats and CPI-M on one seat.

Mamata emerges as contender on national political stage

Team Absolute | New Delhi

After winning a bitterly-fought battle with the BJP to record her third successive victory in the West Bengal Assembly elections, Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee seems to have emerged as a formidable challenge to the Centre's ruling party.

With leaders of different regional parties, including NCP chief Sharad Pawar, sending her congratulatory messages, the message from the Assembly election is clear that Banerjee is capable of taking the challenge of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, and combating it successfully. However, the Congress, which was expected to win at least two states but could not do, failing to wrest Assam from the BJP and Kerala from the Left, still insists that it is the only option to BJP. Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said: "Congress is the sole national party which is alternative to the BJP as it is fighting BJP in all the states." But the messages from the leaders of regional parties indicate that Banerjee, whose Trinamool which was once part of the UPA, has shown her mettle by single-handedly defeating the BJP and in a convincing manner. The poll results show that people of West Bengal have rejected the Bharatiya Janata Party's attempt to polarise the elections. The BJP, which had left



no stone unturned to dislodge the Banerjee government, could not cross three-digit figure despite its claims of getting 200-plus seats out of the state's 294. The reason behind Banerjee's masterful performance was admitted by a BJP leader, who said that their leadership "failed to understand the pulse of Bengal and its culture". "And that is the reason despite leading in 121 Assembly constituencies in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, we are facing difficulties in winning over 100 seats in less than a two-year period." "People rejected politics of polarisation or communal politics. Muslim votes polarised in favour of the Trinamool while the Bengali Hindu also rejected communal politics and voted for the Trinamool," the BJP leader said.

Rajasthan bypolls: Congress retains 2 seats, BJP one

Jaipur | Agencies

Cashing in on the emotional card, Rajasthan's ruling Congress won the bypolls to the Sujangarh and Sahada Assembly seats while the BJP retained Rajsamand.

Congress has fielded late MLA Kailash Trivedi's wife Gayatri Trivedi from Sahada, while MLA Bhanwarlal Meghwal's son Manoj Meghwal contested from Sujangarh. The BJP, on the other hand, fielded its late MLA Kiran Maheshwari's daughter from Rajsamand.

The bypolls were necessitated by the sitting Congress and BJP lawmakers succumbing to illness, with



Trivedi and Maheshwari losing their battle to coronavirus. In Sujangarh, Manoj Meghwal got 79,253 votes against Khemaram's 43,642 votes. The Congress nominee had tested Covid positive on Sunday itself and hence

could not visit the counting centre. In Rajsamand, Dipti Maheswari won against Congress' Tansukh Bohara by 5,310 votes but in Sahada, Gayatri Devi won by a whopping 42,200 votes over BJP's Ratanlal Jat.

KAMAL HAASAN LOSES IN COIMBATORE SOUTH TO BJP'S SRINIVASAN

Chennai: Superstar and Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) founder, Kamal Haasan lost the Coimbatore South seat by a margin of 1,500 votes against BJP women's wing national President, Vanathi Srinivasan.

Congress candidate Mayura Jayakumar was relegated to the third position.

With the defeat of Kamal Haasan in his electoral debut, his MNM failed to open the account in the Tamil Nadu Assembly polls.

In the 2016 polls, Amman K. Arjunan of the AIADMK had won the seat, while it had gone to the party's Challenger Dorai in 2011. In this election, there was some friction after the AIADMK's NDA ally, the BJP, was allotted the seat but the matter was resolved.

Lotus fails to bloom in Kerala, Sreedharan misses train too

Thiruvananthapuram | Agencies

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's statement that the Bharatiya Janata Party, which had won one seat in Kerala in the 2016 Assembly polls, would see its account getting closed this time, has come true with the Centre's ruling party failing to secure any victory despite fighting hard in three constituencies.

In the 2016 Assembly polls, veteran BJP leader and former Union Minister O. Rajagopal had won the Nemom Assembly constituency in the Thiruvananthapuram district, getting the BJP its first-ever seat in the state.

As counting started on Sunday, the BJP was leading in three seats - Nemom, Palakkad and Thrissur. At Nemom, former BJP state President Kummanam



Rajasekheran was maintaining a lead till the last few rounds when former CPI-M legislator V. Sivankutty, who lost to Rajagopal the last time, breezed past him. In the process, Congress MP from Badagara K. Muraleedharan, who was asked to take on the responsibility to prevent the BJP repeating its victory, came a poor third. Sivankutty won with a margin of over

5,000 votes. But the major upset was the loss of 'Metroman' E. Sreedharan in Palakkad. Leading right from the time counting started, he, however, lost steam in the last few rounds and eventually his Congress rival and Youth Congress President Shafi Parambil completed a hat trick of wins by a margin of 3,840 votes. Malayalam superstar Suresh Gopi, presently a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha, also fought hard at Thrissur and at a few times, was leading, but at the end he had to settle in the third place after giving both the traditional rivals a few frights. Now, all eyes are on the vote share of the BJP and certainly heads are expected to roll as its state President K. Surendran had to bite the dust in two constituencies where he contested - he came second at Manjeswaram and third in Konni.

Sushil Modi's younger brother dies of coronavirus

Former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi on Sunday said that his younger brother succumbed to coronavirus in Patna on Sunday.

Patna | Agencies

Ashok Kumar Modi, 65, had tested corona positive a week ago and was admitted to a private hospital here.

"My younger brother Ashok Kumar Modi (65) died due to Corona at 2.45 pm in Patna. Doctors have made all efforts but they could not save him," Modi, a BJP Rajya Sabha member, said on his official Twitter handle.

Following his death, the RJD expressed its condolences. Party spokesperson Chitrnanjan Gagan said: "The deadly coronavirus is taking lives of people of all sections. It is not differentiating between poor and rich people. If influential persons are becoming helpless before the lethality of coronavirus, suppose what would happen to common people who



are struggling for beds, oxygen and treatment in Bihar."

Railways delivered 1,094 MT of medical oxygen through Oxygen Express

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Even as several hospitals complained of Oxygen shortage, the Indian Railways on Sunday said that it has delivered about 1,094 MT of liquid oxygen, since it ran first loaded Oxygen Express.

A railway ministry spokesperson said that the national transporter continued its journey of bringing relief to people by delivering Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) to various states across the country.

The official said, "Indian Railways has now delivered 1,094 MT of LMO in 74 tankers to various states across the country. And 19 Oxygen Express trains have already completed their journey and two more loaded Oxygen Express are on the run carrying 61.46 MT of LMO in four tankers." The official said that Delhi received its second Oxygen Express on Sunday afternoon carrying 120 MT of LMO, and third Oxygen



Express has already begun its journey from Angul to Delhi carrying 30.86 MT LMO. The official said that Telangana received its first Oxygen Express from Angul carrying 63.6 MT LMO earlier in

the day. He said that more Oxygen Express to Haryana and Delhi carrying 61.46 MT LMO are on their way. The official said that so far, Indian Railways has delivered more than 1094

metric tonnes LMO to Maharashtra (174 MT), Uttar Pradesh (430.51 MT), Madhya Pradesh (156.96 MT), Delhi (190 MT), Haryana (79 MT) & Telangana (63.6 MT).

Women emerge as independent 'vote bank' with stress on governance

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Assembly polls results of four key states and a Union Territory that came out on Sunday shows that women are emerging as an independent "vote bank" in the country and now play a decisive role in deciding electoral fortune of political parties, say analysts.

In the last 10 years, women's voting percentage has increased and crossed male voter turnout in recent elections. CVoter founder Yashwant Deshmukh told IANS that earlier women voter turnout used to be at least 10 per cent less than the male voter turnout but in the last 10 years, it has increased.

"In last ten years, women voter turnout is at par with male voter turnout or in many polls, their turnout is more," he said.

Deshmukh contended that governance is the most important poll issue for the women voters and they are least bothered by other political agenda of any political parties.

"Polarisation on the name of religion or caste does not affect the decision of women voters. They only vote for governance and



development and it is visible in recent polls in the last few years," he said.

Women voters not only outnumber male voters in exercising their franchise but also have independent preference. Their prefer-

ence has ensured the return of the Narendra Modi government at the Centre in 2019, and Nitish Kumar's return in Bihar in 2020.

Only due to their independent choice, did not only Mamta Banerjee return to power in

West Bengal for her third term but also ensured return of the BJP and the LDF for a second term in Assam and Kerala, respectively. In Tamil Nadu, women also played a crucial role in return of the DMK to power as they drifted away from the AIADMK after demise of its supreme and Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha, he said.

"Prime Minister Modi's women specific welfare schemes like Ujjwala Yojana, which gave free gas cylinders, financial help to build toilets in every home and other welfare schemes ensured women's vote to BJP in the last Lok Sabha polls. Women voters also ensured return of Nitish Kumar government in Bihar... as they are voting independently on issues concerning them," Deshmukh said.

He emphasised that IANS-CVoter polls for the last many years shows women voters in West Bengal played a key role in success of Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress. Pointing toward the voting pattern of women voters, Deshmukh said: "Women voters have arrived and they will make and break the electoral fortune of any leader of a political party."

3 killed as high tension wire snaps in UP district

Three farmers, including a teenager, were killed in Uttar Pradesh's Kasganj district on Sunday after a 11,000-volt high tension wire broke and fell down.

Kasganj | Agencies

The deceased included two brothers who were working in the field when the accident took place.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has taken cognizance of the accident. Expressing his condolences, he has instructed the District Magistrate and other officials to reach the spot immediately.

He has also directed the electricity department to pay a compensation of Rs five



lakh to the kin of the deceased.

According to reports, brothers Manvendra and Krishna died on the spot while Pawan was rushed to a hospital for treatment but died on the way.

The police have sent the bodies for post-mortem. A similar incident had taken place in the village six months ago where a girl Sapna had lost her life.



CORONA CURFEW EXTENDED IN BHOPAL TILL MAY 10, IN JABALPUR TILL MAY 17

"ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND EMERGENCY TRAVEL ARE EXEMPTED FROM THE CURBS," THE OFFICIAL INFORMED. THE CURFEW, IN FORCE SINCE APRIL 12 WITH EXTENSIONS ON APRIL 19 AND 26, WAS TO END AT 6AM ON MONDAY, HE ADDED.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government on Sunday extended 'corona curfew' in capital Bhopal till May 10, an official said. The curfew, in force since April 12 with extensions on April 19 and 26, was to end at 6am on Monday, he added.

agency travel are exempted from the curbs," the official informed. As on Saturday, Bhopal has a COVID-19 caseload of 91,456, including 742 deaths. While, the Corona curfew in Jabalpur has been extended till May 17. Corona curfew has been extended till May 17 in Jabalpur district as the infection continues to spread. Sources said that the increase in cases of infection has also laid bare the tall claims of appropriate medical

arrangements in the city. However, Indore will remain under Janata curfew till May 7. The urban areas of the district, the worst hit in the state, have been under Janata curfew since April 20. The order in this regard was issued under section 144 of CrPC by Collector Manish Singh. As per the order, movement of people will be allowed for essential and emergency purposes, while milk, grocery, fruits and vegetable outlets will remain open for a fixed period of time in the day.

RECOVERY IMPROVES TO 84.19 PERCENT AS COMPARED TO POSITIVE CASES: CM



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that there is a steady improvement in the recovery rate as compared to corona positive cases in the state. The recovery rate was 80.41 percent on April 23, which has increased to 84.19 percent on May 2 today. The recovery rate reached 82.28 percent on April 29, 82.88 percent on April 30 and 83.63 percent on May 1. According to the number of active cases, Madhya Pradesh was at number 7 in the country, which has now come in a better position at number 14. The percentage of recovery has been higher than the new positive cases in 26 districts of the state.

In the state, 83.4 percent of the patients recovered in one day were home isolation patients and 3.9 percent of the patients were treated in covid care centres. In this way, 87.3 percent of the patients got healthier in home isolation and covid care centers without going to the hospital. The remaining 12.7 percent have recovered in hospitals and gone back to their homes. A total of 68 thousand 156 patients are in home isolation in the state. Of these, 97 percent of the patients have been contacted at least once. Home delivery of medical kits and health brochures is being done to 99 percent of the patients of home isolation.

251 covid care centers have been started in 52 districts of the state, in which patients with mild symptoms are being kept. At present, a total of 16 thousand 636 beds have been arranged. Of these, 1180 oxygen beds have been installed. The number of beds in the centres is continuously increasing.

So far, a total of 22 thousand 10 institutional quarantine centres have been set up in rural areas. 2 lakh 63 thousand 715 beds have been put up in them. Medical kits and health brochures are being provided to the patients residing in all the centers established in urban and rural areas.

A total of 845 Covid hospitals are operated in the state. Till April 1, a total of 20 thousand 159 beds were available, which have been increased to more than 60 thousand. More than a thousand beds are being added daily.



More than 40 thousand beds have been added in a month. The work of laying the pipeline to convert the beds of government hospitals in the state to oxygen beds is going on a war footing. So far out of 2 thousand 302 beds of district hospitals, oxygen pipelines have been laid for 1476 beds. Out of 4643 beds of community health centres in the state, the work of laying oxygen pipeline for 557 beds has been completed so far.

The state has received 649 metric tonnes of oxygen from the Central government from April 24 to date. A total of 474.8 metric tonnes of oxygen is expected to be received from outside sources. Apart from this, 455.2 metric tonnes of oxygen has been supplied from outside sources. For quick transport of oxygen, oxygen tankers are being airlifted from Jharkhand and Gujarat and brought to Indore, Bhopal and Gwalior. Efforts are being made with the Central government for a flight from Jamnagar to Bhopal-Indore, including a tactical flight of the Air Force between Bokaro and Bhopal. Apart from this, Ministry of Railways was requested to provide 2 railway rakes with the facility of transporting 6 tankers per rake from Rourkela to Jabalpur via Railways.

A request has also been made by the state government to the Government of India to increase the allocation of oxygen from oxygen producing companies Air Liquid, Panipat from 6 metric tonnes per day to 20 metric tonnes per day and from Inox, Bokaro to 133 metric tonnes per day from 100 metric tonnes. 2000 oxygen concentrators have been installed by the state government for the supply of oxygen. Apart from this, 5000 concentrator centres with a capacity of 10 liters per minute have been requested to be supplied.

The state government is setting up new oxygen plants prepared with PSA technology in district hospitals from its own budget for 37 districts of the state. In the first phase, plants will be started in 13 districts by May 16. It is targeted to start oxygen plants by May 23 in 9 districts in the second phase and by July 20 in the remaining 15 districts in the third phase. Oxygen plants have been approved in 8 districts in collaboration with the Government of India, out of which 7 plants have started functioning.

Special financial assistance will be provided for production of medical oxygen

Shukla said that basic investment incentive assistance at the fixed rate of 50 percent on capital investment made on equipment, plants and buildings (excluding land and residential areas) will be payable to eligible units in the state whose production capacity of oxygen production would be minimum 10 cubic meters per hour.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The state government has decided to provide special financial assistance to units to promote capacity addition of medical oxygen in the state. In this connection, Principal Secretary of Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion Sanjay Kumar Shukla has notified the Secretary, Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Managing Director of Madhya Pradesh Industrial Development Corporation and all the collectors.

Shukla said that basic investment incentive assistance at the fixed rate of 50 percent on capital investment made on equipment, plants and buildings (excluding land and residential areas) will be payable to eligible units in the state whose production capacity of oxygen production would be minimum 10 cubic meters per hour. The maximum limit of the said assistance will be Rs 75 crores. The eligible units will be given a rebate of Re one per unit on the prevailing power tariff. This will be reimbursed to eligible units by MSME or MPIDC. The benefit of this facility will be available for a period of 3 years from the date of commercial production.

Shukla has told all the collectors to motivate oxygen producing units, oxygen equipment manufacturing units, large private hospitals and interested entrepreneurs to set up medical oxygen producing units in their district to increase the productivity of medical oxygen in the state.

POLICE BOOK BHOPAL AUTO-AMBULANCE DRIVER JAVED FOR VIOLATING COVID RULE, WITHDRAW CASE AFTER OUTRAGE

Police have withdrawn the case against auto-ambulance driver Javed after public outrage. Javed transports Covid patients to hospitals in his auto-ambulance.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Police have withdrawn the case against Covid warrior Javed who turned his auto into an ambulance equipped with oxygen cylinder to transport Covid patients to hospitals. On Saturday a case was filed against him for breaking protocol. However, the case was withdrawn following public outrage.

Madhya Pradesh has imposed curfew in the state because of the rise in Covid cases and several corridors have been made on the roads for the smooth movement of Covid patients and ambulances and others involved in emergency services.

On Saturday, when Javed was pulled up by the police for violation of section 144, he was out on the road. When police found out he did not have an emergency service pass, he was charged with section 188.

This happened ever after Javed told the police that he



used his auto as an ambulance to transport Covid patients to hospitals.

However, soon after the news broke, massive outrage erupted on social media. Following this, the case was withdrawn.

A special pass is now being issued for Javed so that he does not face similar issues in the future.

Javed, an auto driver in Bhopal, has converted his auto into an ambulance and is taking patients to hospitals during the Covid-19 crisis. He is providing all these services for free.

Javed said that he was

motivated to help people after he saw many Covid-positive patients and their families feeling helpless due to a shortage of ambulances across the country. He said, "I saw on social media and news channels how people were being carried to hospitals due to the shortage of ambulances. So, I thought of doing this." Javed further said that he sold his wife's jewellery to convert his auto into an ambulance. He has arranged for a sanitiser, an oxygen cylinder, a PPE (personal protective equipment) suit, and some medicines in his auto.

NCHRO challenges Religious Freedom Act 2020

She said that Article 25 of the Constitution gives every citizen the right to adopt any religion as per his wish, to follow it and to propagate it. But the Religious Freedom Act 2020 violates this right of citizens as provided by the Constitution. Therefore, this law is against the values and provisions of the Indian Constitution.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Human rights organization National Confederation of Human Rights Organizations (NCHRO) Madhya Pradesh unit has challenged the Madhya Pradesh Religious Freedom Act, 2020, popularity known as 'Love Jihad Law' in Jabalpur High Court.

The organization's State Secretary Advocate Shilpi Rangari issued a press statement stating that in the petition filed in the name of State President Aradhana Bhargava, the petition has been appealed to the High Court to declare the Religious Freedom Act



2020 as unconstitutional, stating the said law is against constitutional values. She stated that the clauses of the said law are against the provisions of Chapter III of the Constitution. She said that Article 25 of the Constitution gives every citizen the right to adopt any religion as per his wish, to follow it and to propagate it. But the Religious Freedom Act 2020 violates this right of

citizens as provided by the Constitution. Therefore, this law is against the values and provisions of the Indian Constitution. It should be noted that since the ordinance passed by the Governor of Madhya Pradesh earlier in the above context, there has been a spurt in religious conversion cases in which a large number of person belonging hailing from minority community have been targeted. Keeping this in view, the said writ petition has been duly selected, seeking to reject the Religious Freedom Act 2020 and to declare it as ultravires to the constitution.

Covid deaths: Madhya Pradesh government says 104, crematoriums say 2,557

"The last rites of 1,386 persons were performed at our crematorium last month. As many as 727 of them had died due to the coronavirus," Subhash Nagar Vishram Ghat manager Sobhraj Sukhwani said.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Crematoriums here claim that the last rites of as many as 2557 coronavirus victims from Bhopal district were performed in April, sharply contradicting the BJP-led state government's data which puts the COVID-19 deaths in the district last month at 104.

The mammoth mismatch has given credence to claims of massive under-reporting of COVID-19 fatalities in the city. Managers of two crematoriums and a cemetery in Bhopal told PTI that the last rites of 3811 people, including 2557 coronavirus patients from Bhopal district, were performed in the city last month. Home Minister Narottam Mishra recently rubbished allegations about the Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led government underreporting COVID-19 deaths in the state. "Altogether 2052 people were cremated at our facility last month. As many as 1654 of them had died of coronavirus," Bhadbhada Vishram Ghat crematorium



secretary Mamtesh Sharma said. Those 1654 bodies had reached the crematorium from COVID-19 designated centres in air-tight plastic bags as per coronavirus protocol to prevent the spread of the disease, Sharma said, adding they were consigned to flames. The Bhadbhada crematorium and the Zada cemetery in Bhopal were initially authorised to perform the last rites of COVID-19 patients in the district, an official said. However, due to the rise in fatalities, another crematorium, the Subhash Nagar Vishram Ghat, was also allowed to conduct the last rites, he said. "The last rites of 1,386 persons were per-

formed at our crematorium last month. As many as 727 of them had died due to the coronavirus," Subhash Nagar Vishram Ghat manager Sobhraj Sukhwani said.

The bodies were cremated while following COVID-19 protocol, Sukhwani said. Rehan Golden, president of the Zada cemetery committee in the Jahangirabad area said 373 burials, including those of 176 coronavirus victims, took place in the Muslim burial ground last month.

The official coronavirus death toll in Bhopal district last month, collated using the daily bulletins issued by the Madhya Pradesh government in April, comes to 104. As per the government records, coronavirus has so far claimed 742 lives in Bhopal since the first case was reported last year. Madhya Pradesh Saturday reported 12,379 new COVID-19 cases and 102 fatalities, taking the tally of infections to 5,75,706 and the death toll to 5,718 in the state, a health department official said.

CM to transfer Rs 379 crore to the accounts of 17 thousand workers

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will transfer Rs 379 crore through single click to the accounts of about 17 thousand unorganized labourer families under Jan Kalyan Sambal Yojana on May 4. Labour Minister Brijendra Pratap Singh will also be specially present in this virtual programme of disbursement of assistance fund.

Sambal Yojana is a scheme that provides financial support to families of labourers of the state along with a foundation to the families. In case of accidental death of a labourer, the dependents are provided with an amount of Rs 4 lakh

by the Labour Department under the scheme. Similarly, ex-gratia amount of Rs. 2 lakhs is given to the labourer families under Mukhya Mantri Jan-Kalyan Sambal Yojana in case of natural death and permanent disability.

Under the scheme, Rs one lakh will be provided on partial permanent disability and Rs 5 thousand as funeral assistance.

Mukhyamantri Jan-Kalyan Sambal Yojana is working to provide support to poor labourer families of the unorganized sector. Since the inception of the scheme, an amount of more than Rs 1907 crore has been distributed to 2 lakh 28 thousand beneficiaries of

the state. In the last financial year, even under critical conditions like Corona pandemic, benefits of Rs 582 crore were transferred to the bank accounts of more than 72 thousand beneficiaries.

Mukhya Mantri Jan-Kalyan Sambal Yojana was launched in 2018.

In this, help is provided to the needy families of workers in the unorganized sector throughout his life right from the period before the birth of the child.

Under this, help is provided to running hand carts, junk collectors, domestic workers and those working in stone crushers. Sambal Yojana has been made for lakhs of such poor families of the state.



DELHI'S AAKASH HEALTHCARE WITH 250 PATIENTS CRIES FOR OXYGEN

Delhi-based Aakash Healthcare Super Speciality Hospital on Sunday sought the government's help to provide it with oxygen to save the lives of 250 patients, as the life-saving gas available with it would not last for "more than 60 minutes".

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The hospital sounded the alert through an SOS message on its Twitter handle, seeking help from the Delhi government as well as the Centre. "CRY FOR HELP: Received only 5 oxygen cylinders after running around the entire day, not more than 60 mins left to save lives of more than 250 patients. Crying out to Govt authorities to shift out our patients ASAP so that they can be saved," Akash Healthcare tweeted. Aakash Healthcare Super Speciality Hospital is a tertiary care facility in Delhi's Dwarka area. Earlier in the day, Delhi's



Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital had sounded an alert over oxygen shortage on a regular basis despite claiming to be the city's only hospital in the southern region which is admitting pregnant women infected with Covid-19. The 130-bed hospital sent an SOS message through its Twitter handle after oxygen availability at the facility for the day was estimated to last till 12 noon. Based in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar area, the hospital currently has 80-90 Covid patients, including pregnant women and children. Shortage of medical oxygen for over an hour had claimed 12 Covid patients' lives, including that of a doctor, on Saturday afternoon at Delhi's Batra Hospital.

BLK-Max Hospital to install in-house oxygen generator

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a bid to fight the current crisis of Coronavirus-induced oxygen shortage, BLK-Max Super Speciality Hospital on Sunday announced that it will install an oxygen generator and a high-pressure cylinder filling system that was donated by the France government.

The Oxygen Generator -- manufactured by NOVAIR Medical -- and cylinder filling system -- manufactured by Oxyplus Technologies -- has a total capacity of generating 22 cubic metre of oxygen every hour. It will be installed and commissioned at the hospitals over the next 72 hours.

The initiative will help provide approximately 15 per cent additional back-up to the existing medical oxygen demand at the hospital in the form of a continuous feed. "We are thankful to the



Government of France for providing us critical support at a time when India is facing the worst of the pandemic. This generous donation stands testimony of the Indo-France cooperation during this time of crisis," said Dr Abhay Soi, Chairman and MD, Max Healthcare in a

statement. The installation of the systems will help BLK-Max hospital manage its oxygen requirements better, particularly in this time of severe oxygen shortages. The system will also be used as back-up support to its normal oxygen supplies.

Delhi doctors getting oxygen cylinders refilled from Haridwar

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid the surge in Covid cases in the national capital, the Delhi government is taking all necessary measures to contain the virus and provide treatment to the patients. Doctors across the city are also putting in all their efforts in treating the patients and overcoming the shortage of oxygen.



The doctors with the help of family members of the patients are getting the oxygen cylinders refilled from a refilling facility in Haridwar in order to ensure continuous oxygen supply for the patients. The relatives of the patients are travelling from Delhi to Haridwar in their own vehicles to get the cylinders. Recently, the Delhi government converted the Shehnai Banquet Hall near LNJP hospital into a Covid care centre. Patients with mild to moderate symptoms

have been kept here. Rajat Jain, President of the 'Doctor for You' organisation, which is responsible for this Covid care centre, told IANS that "there is acute shortage of oxygen while the patients who are being admitted now are in need of it. The LNJP hospital is providing oxygen to us but they are also grappling with the shortage. We are getting the cylinders refilled from Haridwar with the help of family members of the patients. As of now, we have got 40 cylinders

refilled." "We have concentrators and with the help of a few NGOs we are trying to make arrangements at our level. Around 60 patients are admitted in the Banquet Hall. We are requesting the family members to get the cylinders refilled from Haridwar," he added.

The centre is equipped with oxygen support and doctors as well as nurses are here to take care of the patients with mild or moderate symptoms or who need oxygen support.

MAN COMMITS SUICIDE AFTER FAILING TO GET OXYGEN CYLINDER

Gurugram: A 25-year-old man in Haryana has allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree in a public park opposite an oxygen gas plant in Manesar on Saturday, after he failed to get oxygen cylinder for one of his relatives. According to sources, his relative has been admitted to a Gurugram's hospital, and the man was in queue since Saturday morning to procure an oxygen cylinder.

The deceased has been identified as Dharmender, a resident of Kannauj in Uttar Pradesh. According to the police, they have recovered a suicide note in which the man held responsible a woman behind this extreme step. "We have received a suicide note from the victim's pocket in which he mentioned a woman's name and it could be possible that she was responsible behind this suicide.

Day after 12 deaths, Batra Hospital gets 2.5-tonne liquid oxygen

A day after 12 patients, including a doctor, died due to oxygen shortage at Delhi's Batra Hospital, the facility in south Delhi on Sunday received 2.5-tonne liquid medical oxygen.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

S.C.L. Gupta, the medical director of Batra Hospital, confirmed that an oxygen tanker carrying the life-saving gas arrived at its Mehrauli-based facility where 12 people lost their lives on Saturday afternoon due to lack of medical oxygen for over an hour. "An oxygen tanker from INOX carrying 2.5-tonne liquid oxygen had reached Batra at around 12 noon. Supply to sustain till 11 p.m.," Gupta said.

The oxygen supply was provided to the hospital a day after the tragedy occurred on its campus, killing the hospital's gastroenteritis head R.K.



Himthani (62) and 11 others. Six of the 12 deceased persons were admitted to the hospital's intensive care unit (ICU). "Death toll at Batra Hospital increases from 8 to 12. Oxygen shortage at the facility led to these deaths. These were patients whose oxygen level sunk when the supply dropped," Sudhanshu Bankata, the Executive Director of Batra Hospital, had said on Saturday.

As on Saturday, a total of 220 patients were on oxygen support at the hospital. The hospital had sent an SOS message before the tragedy on Saturday, "Oxygen will last for another 10 minutes." "While oxygen was later supplied to the hospital, it said that by that time, eight patients had already died. Another four patients died later. This was the second time in a week that the hospital ran out of medical oxygen. On April 24, the hospital had received a last-minute supply which arrived minutes after its oxygen reserves ran out. Earlier this month, 20 people admitted to the critical care unit of Jaipur Golden hospital in Rohini had died when their oxygen levels dropped. The hospital had blamed the Delhi government for the delay in oxygen supply before the Delhi High Court.

Gurugram allows RWAs, NGOs to set up small Covid care centres

Team Absolute | Gurugram

Amid spike in Covid-19 cases in Gurugram, the district administration has allowed upscale condominiums, gated housing societies and NGOs to set up small Covid care centres while using their own resources.

Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg, said in his order: "Requests have been received from gated housing societies to set up small Covid-19 care facilities run by the Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), housing societies and NGOs using their own resources."

"This will help reduce the burden on existing facilities for managing pre-symptomatic, asymptomatic and very mild cases of Covid living in that particular society, and that



such an order would be extremely crucial to check the exponential increase in Covid cases," Garg said.

However, Covid care centres is "not meant for critically ill elderly patients, children less than 10 years

of age, pregnant or lactating women, and patients with co-morbidities, said the order. The order also directed that the Covid centres follow "strict infection prevention and control practices" by keeping

confirmed and suspected cases in separate partitioned areas with "no intermixing" and "separate toilets". The order further said that the facility will also need to be linked to the surveillance team (IDSP) and an ambulance provider, and telephone numbers of the RWAs, NGOs, doctors should be displayed prominently.

The order added that a doctor residing in the gated complex or provided by the NGO "facilitate daily medical examination" of the patients, and a caregiver also be identified to look after patients and keep records.

Both the doctor and caregiver, will undergo training organised by the Chief Medical Officer on Covid management and infection, prevention and control practices.

Delhi's Rainbow Children's Hospital sounds alert over oxygen shortage

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi's Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital on Sunday sounded alert over oxygen shortage on a regular basis despite it claimed to be the city's southern region's only hospital that have been admitting pregnant women infected with Covid-19.

The 130-bedded hospital sent an SOS message through its Twitter handle after it again faced similar issue on Sunday when the oxygen availability at the facility for the day was estimated till 12 noon.

Based in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar area, the hospital currently admitted 80-90 Covid patients that included pregnant women and children -- some in ICU

and NICU. Soon after the SOS message was posted by the hospital, AAP MLA Raghav Chadha said, "We have arranged five D Type oxygen cylinders for Rainbow Children's Hospital, from our Rajghat Response Point. The gov't oxygen reserves are extremely limited due to reduced oxygen supply to Delhi, but we are doing everything possible to avert any untoward incident."

In a tweet, Rainbow Children Hospital alerted, "We have liquid oxygen supply till 12 noon on Sunday at Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital."

A hospital staff Ankit, who sounded the alert, said that the hospital has been facing oxygen crisis on "daily basis." "It is a daily task. Its

daily hue and cry the fire-fighting mode that we have to come forward too. Being a children hospital, it's very difficult for us to come to a firefighting mode every day. "If we have ample amount of oxygen, we will be able to take more children also. Some of the time we have to limit ourselves to admit patients because of the oxygen scarcity."

Ankita said that Rainbow is the "only hospital in the south Delhi which is actively taking Covid positive pregnant women and secondly we have several children". Due to the medical oxygen shortage for over an hour, twelve Covid-19 patients, including a doctor, lost their lives on Saturday afternoon in Delhi's Batra Hospital.

RSS leader's son, friend die in accident in Gurugram

GURUGRAM | Agencies

Son of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader Pawan Jindal and his friend were killed in a road accident after their BMW rammed into a pillar of an underpass of DLF Phase-2 Rapid Metro Station on Golf Course Road at around 2.30 a.m. on Sunday.

According to the police the deceased have been identified as Gaurav Jindal (35) the son of RSS leader and his friend Sawan Khanna (37). Both were residents of Sector-15 in Gurugram.

"At the time of the accident the duo were returning from their friend's house in DLF-1. When they reached at the underpass of DLF Phase-2 Rapid Metro Station on Golf Course Road the BMW reportedly being driven by Gaurav at a very high



speed lost balance and hit the nearby metro pillar and overturned," Assistant Sub-Inspector Praveen of DLF Phase-2 police station told reporter. The investigation officer Praveen said, "Soon after we received the information, a team reached the spot and somehow managed to take out the bodies from the vehicle. Gaurav's body was cut into two parts while his friend was rushed to a

private hospital where doctors declared him brought dead." Preliminary investigation revealed that the accident happened because of overspeeding.

However, the deceased were drunk or not will be revealed after detailed investigation. The bodies have been kept in the mortuary for an autopsy while further investigation is on, said police.

3 held for selling Remdesivir injections illegally

Two male nursing staff, working in a leading private hospital in Gurugram including a woman, have been arrested from Sector-52 in Gurugram for allegedly stealing Remdesivir injections from the hospital and selling them illegally at high price.

GURUGRAM | Agencies

Teams of the Chief Minister flying squad and drug controller department nabbed the culprits with five infections.

"We have nabbed Chetan Kapoor, who has been working as staff nurse in Max Hospital in Gurugram, his associate Nitin Jose who used to work in Narayana hospital in Gurugram as a nursing staff and his wife Lima Oomen was also involved in the injections black market," Amandeep Chauhan, drug controller officer said.

He said they received information on Sunday that a gang was selling Remdesivir injections in Sector-52 area. "Our team verified the details and came to know about Chetan. A



trap was laid after sending decoy customers and the trio were arrested. Five Remdesivir injections were recovered from the possession of the culprits," he said. During interrogation, Nitin said he was stealing injections from the hospital to earn quick money. "He roped in Chetan and asked him to sell the injections in the market. They were currently selling it for Rs 45,000," an officer said.

An FIR has been lodged against them under the Drugs and Cosmetic Act, Epidemic Diseases Act and under relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code at Sector-53 police station in Gurugram. The accused will be produced before a local court for further legal proceedings, police said.



INCREASE ALLOCATION OF REMDESIVIR TO MAHA: BOMBAY HIGH COURT TELLS CENTRE

The bench said the high court came to know about the reduction in the allocation of Remdesivir to Maharashtra from May 1 to May 9

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court here on Sunday asked the Central government to increase the supply of Remdesivir injections to Maharashtra observing the current reduction in the allocation of the crucial drug is not consistent with the number of active COVID-19 cases as of May 1. In a special hearing, the bench of Justices SB Shukre and Avinash Gharote heard a bunch of petitions on the shortage of medical oxygen and Remdesivir, which is in high demand for treating COVID-19 patients.

The bench said the high court came to know about the reduction in the allocation of Remdesivir to Maharashtra from May 1 to May 9. "For the earlier period of ten days, the allocation was 4,30,000 vials, and the same for the next 10 days is 3,74,500. This means a reduction of 60,500 vials of Remdesivir for Maharashtra," the judges said. The bench observed that such a reduction in the allocation of Remdesivir vials to Maharashtra is not consistent with the number of active cases in the state. "On April 30, the number of active



cases in Maharashtra was 6,72,000 while the same is 6,64,000 as of May 1, which means active cases reduced hardly by about 1.2 per cent, whereas the reduction in the allocation of vials to Maharashtra for the aforesaid period is by 14.5 per cent. "This mismatch needs to be reconsidered and removed by the Central government," the bench said. The high court also said that the Additional Solicitor General of India Ullhas Aurangabadkar would take instructions from

the Union government on this issue and apprise the bench. In the same vein, the bench asked the Centre to reconsider its decision regarding the state-wise allocation of Remdesivir for the aforesaid period of ten days (from May 1 to 9) and increase the quota for Maharashtra to make it consistent with the reduced number of active cases. Maharashtra FDA Commissioner Parimal Singh submitted in the HC that they will issue new orders ensur-

ing that the districts affected by Remdesivir shortage will get the supply and the backlog is cleared. Singh told the HC the FDA will meet representatives of pharma companies and ensure they follow the directions at the district level. The bench directed that no pharmaceutical company, which is duty-bound to supply Remdesivir vials as per the Centre's orders dated April 24 and May 1 to different states and Maharashtra, shall supply the drug to private purchasers unless the daily quota of the supply allocated to each of these companies is fulfilled. "Only after that and in case of any remaining balance of Remdesivir vials, the pharma company concerned shall supply the vials to private purchasers till the fulfilment of orders received by them," the bench said. The bench directed the health secretary of Maharashtra and state FDA commissioner to ensure that these directions are followed by pharmaceutical companies concerned. The HC also directed the pharma firms to send their daily production figures to the state FDA commissioner and also upload them on respective websites. The bench warned of strict legal action for violation of its orders.

Pandharpur-Mangalvedha Assembly By-poll Results 2021: BJP Snatches Seat from NCP in Maharashtra

BJP candidate Samadhan Autade defeated Bhagirath Bhalke, son of late NCP MLA Bharat Bhalke, who was fielded by the MVA. Autade defeated his nearest NCP rival by a margin of over 3,700 votes

Bhalke, son of late NCP MLA Bharat Bhalke, who was fielded by the MVA. NCP shares power with Shiv Sena and Congress in the Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA government. The NCP and opposition BJP were in a direct fight in this bypoll, which was necessitated following the death of Bharat Bhalke due to post-COVID-19 complications in November last year.

As per the district election officials, Autade defeated Bhalke by a margin of 3,733 votes. While Autade polled 1,09,450 votes, Bhalke bagged 1,05,717. A total of 2,27,421 votes, including postal ballots, were counted, they said.

After the poll results were declared, BJP workers were seen celebrating the victory in the temple town of Pandharpur, despite a ban on gatherings in view of the COVID-19.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a setback to the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra, BJP candidate Samadhan Autade on Sunday won the by-election to Pandharpur-Mangalvedha Assembly seat in Solapur district by defeating his nearest NCP rival by a margin of over 3,700 votes, officials said. Autade defeated Bhagirath

MUMBAI REPORTS 3,672 CASES, 79 DEATHS ON MAY 2

Mumbai: With the addition of 3,672 new COVID-19 cases during the day, the city's infection tally rose to 6,56,204. Mumbai reported 79 deaths due to coronavirus on Sunday (May 2) which pushed its fatality count to 13,330, the data released by the civic body said. With the addition of 3,672 new COVID-19 cases during the day, the city's infection tally rose to 6,56,204. This is for the fifth time this month, the city has reported less than 4,000 cases in a day. On May 1, it had recorded 3,908 cases.

But the number of deaths has been on the rise in the city over the last few days and Saturday's toll is the highest since June 30 last year, when it had recorded 93 fatalities.

1 dead in major fire at ink factory in Navi Mumbai

One person died after a major fire broke out at an ink manufacturing unit at Turbhe in Navi Mumbai on Sunday, an official said.



"It is a ground plus one floor structure. The Navi Mumbai fire department received an alert call around 8.15 am. Around 12 fire tenders and 10 to 12 water tankers were rushed to the spot. It took around eight hours to bring the blaze under control," the official said. During the cooling operation, the fire brigade staff found the body of a man, who is yet to be identified, he said, adding that the preliminary probe suggests that the deceased was a worker of the company, he said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

One person died after a major fire broke out at an ink manufacturing unit at Turbhe in Navi Mumbai on Sunday, an official said. The incident occurred in Ambedkar Nagar locality in the morning, the fire brigade official said.

Balaji Polycoat, the factory where the blaze erupted, manufactures printing inks, coatings for metals and plastic packaging, he said.

More kids below 10 years get infected with COVID-19 in Maharashtra

The Maharashtra government's health department data has revealed that more and more children are getting infected with the Covid virus in the second wave.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government's health department data has revealed that more and more children are getting infected with the COVID virus in the second wave. There is a 51 per cent rise in infection among children within a period of a month in the state.

As many as 1,34,470 children as

young as 10 years have been infected against 88,827 on April 3. More than 75,387 children were infected within 25 days in the state, which is almost a 51 per cent rise in positive cases among children. According to the health department data, 3.04 per cent of children up to 10 years old

were infected while the percentage was 6.80 among those between the 11-20 age group. The percentage of infection among the 21-30 age category was 17.51. The highest infection was in the age group of 31-40 years - 22.09 per cent. In the senior citizen group between 61 and above,

the positivity percentage was found at 17.15 per cent. The data also reveals that after children, the young population between the 21-60 age group are more infected - around 72.6 per cent in Maharashtra. More men are getting the virus than women with percentages at 60 and 40 respectively. The total number of deaths in Maharashtra is 67,214 against 2.048 lakh in India. Maharashtra's mortality rate is 1.50 per cent against the country's 1.11 per cent. Across the country, Maharashtra stands fourth in mortality among COVID positive patients. The Punjab mortality rate is the highest i.e. 2.45 per cent, followed by 1.89 per cent in Sikkim, and 1.51 per cent in Himachal Pradesh.

On World Laughter Day, Mumbai Police Shares Funniest Excuses They've Heard On Duty

World Laughter Day 2021: "All the characters and events depicted are real," wrote Mumbai Police.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

World Laughter Day celebrated every year on the first Sunday of May to spread awareness about the many healing benefits of laughter. "Everybody knows that laughing feels good, but few realize how valuable these simple tools can be in improving our every day wellness and wellbeing," states the official website of World Laughter Day. To make sure their followers enjoy a good chuckle on World Laughter Day, Mumbai Police took a trip down memory lane to remember some of the funniest excuses

their officers have heard while on duty. This morning, Mumbai Police took to Twitter and Instagram to share some examples of hilarious excuses they have heard from people flouting Covid guidelines. The list include gems like a "medical emergency" to get a band-aid and a person who only stepped out to grab a vada pav only because they were feeling "very hungry".

Alongside the excuses, Mumbai Police shared a hilarious disclaimer. "All the characters and events depicted are real," the police department wrote. "Any resemblance to a person living or dead is purely intentional". They also added

hashtags like #ExcuseNotOKPlease #HeardOnDuty and #WorldLaughterDay.

Mumbai Police's World Laughter Day post was well-received on social media. While many social media users laughed at the excuses, others praised the police department for their witty caption and post. Mumbai Police is well-known for sharing interactive and funny posts to get important PSAs across to the public. This is not the first time they have gotten creative while urging Mumbaiers to stay inside during the pandemic. Last month, their social distancing message came with a musical twist.

2,869 NEW COVID-19 CASES IN THANE, 53 MORE DEATHS

Mumbai: There has reported 2,869 new cases of coronavirus, raising the infection count in the Maharashtra district to 4,70,050, an official said on Sunday.

Besides these new cases recorded on Saturday, the virus also claimed the lives of 53 more people, pushing the death toll in the district to 7,643, he said. The COVID-19 mortality rate in Thane stood at 1.62 per cent, he added. Details of recovered patients and active cases were not provided by the district administration. In neighbouring Palghar district, the COVID-19 case count has gone up to 87,132, while the death toll has reached 1,578, another official said.

Dubai returnees escape mandatory quarantine in Mumbai; FIR lodged

The passenger who returned from Dubai was sent to a quarantine facility at Andheri east. He tested positive for the virus on the seventh day.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

An FIR has been registered by the Powai police against a 60-year-old passenger from Dubai and his daughter. The elderly man escaped the mandatory quarantine despite testing positive for the virus and his daughter is allegedly said to have abused

a civic staff. As per Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) quarantine guidelines, international passengers travelling from Europe, Middle East, Brazil have to stay in institutional quarantine for seven days.

The passenger who returned from Dubai was sent to a quarantine facility at Andheri east. Dr NR Tiwari, BMC's east ward medical officer said, "We conducted the Covid test on the seventh day of his quarantine and he was found positive. Accordingly, following the protocol, we arranged for an ambulance to send the patient to GT hospital in South Mumbai," as quoted by Times of India.

However, his daughter did not want him to get admitted citing he had no symptoms. She insisted that they should allow him to isolate himself at home. The civic staff added that they had asked her to speak to the hospital facility for admitting her father. Tiwari added that his daughter came to the quarantine centre and instead of taking him to the hospital, she took him away.

She did not budge from her decision despite authorities warned her that taking COVID-19 positive patients is prohibited and would invite legal actions. He alleged that she also sent them abusive text messages and termed the entire process a scam.

FARM LABOURER KILLED BY ROOMMATE WITH AXE AFTER QUARREL OVER FOOD



Akola: The duo had an altercation over food and the farm labourer was killed by his roommate with an axe who later fled from the spot. A farm labourer was killed in the early hours of Sunday after being attacked with an axe by his roommate in Akola in Maharashtra, police said.

The duo had an altercation over food and the farm labourer was killed by his roommate with an axe who later fled from the spot.

Chabulal Bhuham and Prabhu Dikhar, who stayed together in Pimpri Khurd village, had an altercation over food and the latter killed Bhuham with an axe and fled from the spot, said Akot Rural police station in charge Dnyanoba Phad.

"We arrested Dikhar from a nearby forest," he added.

One-fifth of deaths, one-third of new infections makes April worst month for Pune

The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) registered 1,50,175 patients in the month of April this year which is 35.80 per cent, more than one-third, of the total infected so far. Fortunately, most of those infected did not require hospitalisation and were cured in home isolation.

PUNE | Agencies

Even though the Covid-19 situation in the city has been showing signs of stabilising in the last 10 days after reaching its peak on April 18, over one third of infections and one fifth of the deaths due to Covid till now have been recorded in April, a year after the outbreak.

The city registered its first Covid-19 case in March last year and authorities have been taking containment measures since then to check the spread. However, the worst has come one year later, in April.

The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) registered 1,50,175 patients in the month of April this year which is 35.80 per cent, more than one-third, of the total infected so far.



Fortunately, most of those infected did not require hospitalisation and were cured in home isolation. A total of 1,39,294 patients were cured, which is about 37.70 per cent of the total recoveries recorded in the city till date. The civic administration registered the largest number of casualties in April with 1,495 succumbing to the viral infection, which is about 22 per cent, or over one-fifth, of the total 6,797 deaths in the city till now.

The city has been witnessing a decline in the overall case fatality rate, with lowest of 1.62 per cent being reported by the end of

April 30 this year, but it registered a mortality rate of one percent in the previous month which is higher than 0.67 percent in March this year. The positivity rate of above 20 per cent throughout the month added concern for the authorities as it struggled to provide beds for treatment of critical patients due to the high number of patients in need of it.

Thus, the authorities had to sweat it out to increase the number of beds for hospitalisation of patients and managed to double the bed capacity from 5,564 on April 1 to 11,873 on April 30. As of now, it has 2,128 beds with-

out oxygen, 7,036 beds with Oxygen, 622 ICU beds and 770 ventilator beds for treatment of patients and is further making efforts to increase the capacity by setting up one more dedicated covid hospital of over 100 Oxygen beds in Baner and setting up Covid Care Centers with Oxygen bed facility.

The limitation in availability of medical Oxygen has put breaks in further increase in the number of Oxygen beds but with the help of the district administration, PMC is making all efforts to handle the shortage of Oxygen in the city. "The state government is making all possible efforts to overcome the shortage of medical Oxygen for the treatment of Covid patients and make it available as per requirement," said deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar during the weekly review meeting of Covid situation in the city.

The five week low positivity rate of 20.38 per cent in the last week has brought some relief to the administration in managing the situation. Pawar directed the administration to create health infrastructure considering the requirement during the third wave. "Oxygen generation plants should be set up while the number of beds for treatment of critical patients should be increased. The stock of necessary medicine for treatment of patients should be procured in advance," he said.

TOXIC GAS LEAKS AT BHIWANDI, NO CASUALTY



Mumbai: A toxic gas leaked from some cylinders kept at open ground and spread in nearby areas in Maharashtra's Thane district, a civic official said on Sunday.

The incident took place around 10 pm on Saturday in Bhiwandi township, but there was no report of any casualty, Thane Municipal Corporation's regional disaster management cell chief Santosh Kadam said.

Sixteen cylinders containing sulphur dioxide were kept on the ground in the Chiknipada area of Khuni village in Bhiwandi. The gas leaked from two cylinders and spread in the area, he said. Local firemen and police rushed to the spot and plugged the leakage after about two hours, the official said. "No casualty has been reported so far," he said.



KIM KARDASHIAN IN THE MOOD FOR GOLF

Los Angeles | Agencies

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian was in the mood for golf on Sunday, and she shared the vibes with fans, too.

Kim posted a couple of pictures in Instagram of her latest golfing encounter. In one image, she is poised to tee off while the second is a shot of a bagful of golf clubs.

"And just like that I'm a golfer! Well one lesson in is a start! My mom surprised the whole fam w golf clubs for Easter. Thanks mom!" she wrote as caption.

Kim recently shared pictures from the poolside along with her friend Lala Anthony, where the duo is seen twinning in bikinis. Currently, Kim is going through a divorce procedure with rapper Kanye West. She filed for divorce on February 19 after seven years of marriage. They have four children -- North, 7, Saint, 5, Chicago, 3, and Psalm, 23 months. Two months after Kim Kardashian filed for divorce, Kanye has asked for joint custody of the kids.



Keira Knightley to embrace husband's last name

Los Angeles | Agencies

Keira Knightley will adopt her husband and musician James Rightons surname. The two have been married for eight years. The actress has submitted documents to the UK's Companies House registering the name change.

This comes six years after Keira first shared that she was considering the move but was too scared to go through with it.

"I went to do the passport thing, I was thinking, 'Shall I do it? It will be helpful'. But you actually have to see it written down, and I found I couldn't do it. I couldn't go there," said Kiera, according to Daily Mail. The actress has two children with the former Klaxons singer. She kept her family life private, but she often shared her views on motherhood and parenting in interviews.

Kat Dennings posts a love-up pic with Andrew WK

Los Angeles | Agencies

"2 Broke Girls" star Kat Dennings shared a portrait of PDA along with beau and musician Andrew WK. In the selfie Dennings posted on Instagram on Sunday morning according to India time, Andrew kisses the actress on her forehead while Dennings pouts at the camera.

"Oh haaaaaaayyyyyyy," she wrote as the caption. Last month, Dennings revealed on "The Drew Barrymore Show" that she faced a lot of criticism over her body.

The actress rose to popularity with her character of Max Black in the sitcom "2 Broke Girls". She was later seen in the 2011 superhero film "Thor" and then in "Thor: The Dark World" in 2013. Earlier this year, Dennings was seen in the miniseries "WandaVision".



CAMILA CABELLO URGES ALL TO DONATE FOR INDIA AMID COVID-19 SECOND WAVE

Los Angeles | Agencies

International pop star Camila Cabello has urged everyone to help India by making donations to help the country amid the devastating second wave of Covid-19. Cabello posted a video message on Instagram early on Sunday morning according to India time.

In the video she says: "Hey guys! India is facing a devastating

second wave of Covid. There have been 18 million cases reported and the healthcare system simply does not have enough resources to care for everybody. They need protective equipment, oxygen and medicine to save lives."

For caption, Cabello wrote: "India is facing a devastating second wave of COVID infections and needs resources and support to help save lives. If you can, please help @jayshetty and @radhikavlukia raise \$1M for @give_india and their generous sponsor

@indiaspora will match it! Every dollar will be doubled so we can try our best to make a difference!"

India on Sunday recorded 3,92,488 new Covid-19 cases and 3,689 fatalities, highest daily death toll due to infections, Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said.

India's total tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 1,95,57,457, the highest since the pandemic started in 2020, with 33,49,644 active cases and 2,15,542 deaths so far.

Being a mum is the most rewarding job': Sheridan Smith

Los Angeles | Agencies

Sheridan Smith celebrated her son Billy's first birthday on Sunday with an elaborate jungle-themed celebration at home with close family.

Taking to Instagram to share the special day with her followers, the actress, 39, wrote: 'My precious Billy's 1st Birthday...Becoming a mother has been the most rewarding job in the world.'

She continued: 'In between a busy filming



schedule, we managed to celebrate my son's special day with some family and what a day it was!

Sheridan had transformed her lounge into a safari oasis complete with giraffes, lions, monkeys and a green balloon arch for the wild party with her loved ones.

And she and Jamie beamed from ear to ear as they posed with the birthday boy amongst the decorations with their family.

The BAFTA and Olivier award-winning entertainer took to her Instagram stories to tell her fans what an 'amazing day' she'd had despite her busy schedule.

MAYA JAMA 'SECRETLY DATING KENDALL JENNER'S BASKET BALLER EX BEN SIMMONS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Maya, 26, is said to have been 'spending lots of time with' Australian athlete Ben, 24, as he continues to like the presenter's social media posts.

A source told The Mirror: 'Things are hotting up for Maya and Ben. They are really into each other and the fact she flew to Philadelphia to be with him says a lot. They had a fun two weeks together. It's nice to see her so happy.'

Maya was forced to delete



a March Instagram post of herself wearing a fluorescent tracksuit after it prompted speculation that she and Ben were an item.

The raven-haired beauty was snapped later in the day wearing the same outfit while out shopping with Ben.

It's not the first time the



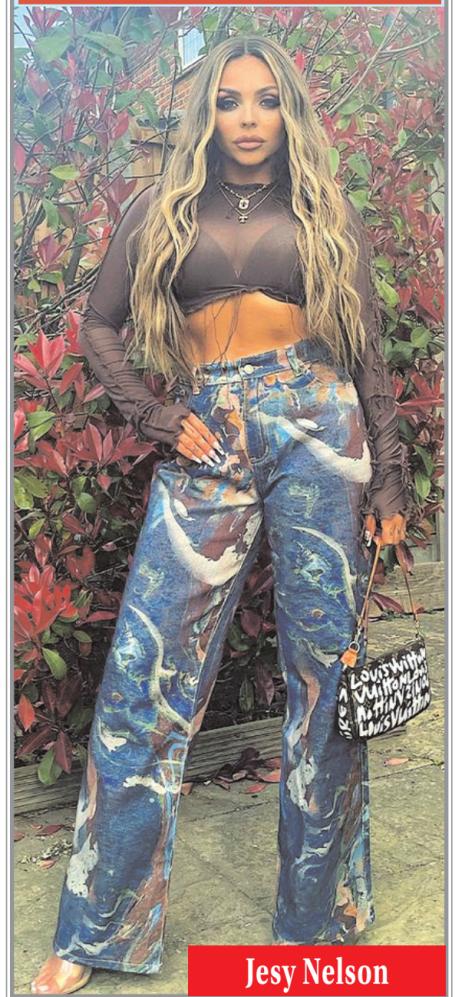
pair have been linked. In 2019, Maya caught Ben's eye after posting a sexy Halloween snap on Instagram, beneath which the athlete left two fire emojis. Ben was last linked to KUWTK star Kendall Jenner. The pair called it off in May 2019 after months of dating on-and-off.

The notoriously private

couple dated for four years but were said to have ended their relationship in order to focus on their careers.

Maya and Stormzy first went public with their romance in 2016 after initially keeping their relationship private. After their split, Maya revealed she is not on any dating apps or looking for a new flame.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Jesy Nelson



EDITOR'S SPECS

Covid's spike protein plays key

SARS-CoV-2's distinctive "spike" proteins have been known to infect its host by latching on to healthy cells, but scientists have, in a new study, showed that they also play a key role in the disease. The paper, published in the journal *Circulation Research*, showed conclusively that Covid-19 is a vascular disease, demonstrating exactly how the SARS-CoV-2 virus damages and attacks the

THE PAPER, PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL *CIRCULATION RESEARCH*, SHOWED CONCLUSIVELY THAT COVID-19 IS A VASCULAR DISEASE, DEMONSTRATING EXACTLY HOW THE SARS-COV-2 VIRUS DAMAGES AND ATTACKS THE VASCULAR SYSTEM ON A CELLULAR LEVEL.

vascular system on a cellular level. The findings help explain Covid-19's wide variety of seemingly unconnected complications, and could open the door for new research into more effective therapies. "A lot of people think of it as a respiratory disease, but it's really a vascular disease," said Uri

Manor, Assistant Research Professor at the Salk Institute in California. "That could explain why some people have strokes, and why some people have issues in other parts of the body. The commonality between them is that they all have vascular underpinnings," Manor added. The study, for the first time, revealed the mechanism through which the protein damages vascular cells. The mechanism was not understood before. Similarly, scientists studying other coronaviruses have long suspected that the spike protein contributed to damaging vascular endothelial cells, but this is the first time that the process has been documented. In the study, the team created a 'pseudovirus' that was surrounded by SARS-CoV-2 classic crown of spike proteins, but did not contain any actual virus. Exposure to this pseudovirus resulted in damage to the lungs and arteries of an animal model — proving that the spike protein alone was enough to cause disease. Tissue samples showed inflammation in endothelial cells lining the pulmonary artery walls. The team then replicated this process in the lab, exposing healthy endothelial cells (which line arteries) to the spike protein. They showed that the spike protein damaged the cells by binding ACE2. This binding disrupted ACE2's molecular signaling to mitochondria (organelles that generate energy for cells), causing the mitochondria to become damaged and fragmented. Previous studies have shown a similar effect when cells were exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, but this is the first study to show that the damage occurs when cells are exposed to the spike protein on its own.

Telling a tale with soil and iron

Sukant Deepak

When politician Yogendra Yadav called him this month to discuss a memorial at Shahjahanpur on the Delhi-Rajasthan border to honour the farmers who had lost their lives during the agitation, it did not take long for Ahmedabad-based artist Laloon, who had been following the protests closely, to jump into worn out car with his friend Shubham Singh and undertake a 14-hour journey to Delhi.

Meanwhile, farmers from across the country were reaching the protest site with soil carried in a 'kalash' from their native places.

Although he had conceived something already but owing to paucity of time, it was decided that the pots the farmers were carrying from their native places could be used as part of the installation which has been going viral on the Internet.

Reaching late at night and sleeping in the cold, waking up to see the protesters braving everything with a smile, the NID-pass out recalls remembering Pablo Neruda's lines... eYou can cut all the flowers, but you cannot stop the spring from arriving.' Using materials like terra-

cotta and iron --- the former being earthen and latter, known to be sturdy, signifying the agriculturist's close relationship with earth and undying spirit, he says, "If you look at the structure, it might look fragile, but it is actually quite well-built. It resonates with the protesting farmers. They might appear poor, weak and helpless, but we have seen the strength of their resolve," says the artist about the installation that was completed on April 14.

Considering it had to be wrapped up in less than three days, as many people were expected during the pre-scheduled date, the artist remembers that initially the farmers around could not fathom what he and his junior were doing. However, when they saw them working under the blazing sunlight, some offered them tea, others chaach. Many also started lending a hand. "Just when I was apprehensive about finishing the work on time, some ten farmers and labourers showed up. They helped us build the walls. And when we needed mud, one of them brought it on a tractor. And magically, the entire base was prepared in merely four hours."

READING UP ON THE FUTURE

D.C. PATHAK

Intelligence is all about deciphering what lies ahead -- analysis of what happened in the past and a capacity to determine what entails for the future in the goings-on of the present, certainly help but Einstein's famous dictum 'imagination is more important than knowledge' also speaks of the relevance of the versatility of the human mind that could see beyond what the 'facts' presented to the analyst meant and thus enrich the assessment. All of this seems to have guided the US National Intelligence Council's 20-year forecast of where the world would be, published recently.

It is a sobering thought that today strategic assessments have ceased to have a long life since the world could change faster than the calculated shifts and therefore the best that such an exercise could do is to project the trends and legitimately conclude where these, if unchecked, would end. Global readings are basically premised on the doings of human beings as a whole and the NIC has rightly identified five crucial areas in play where manmade changes would contribute to the shape of things to come -- international relations, global economy, technology, environment and domestic management of governance. Long range trends can be established and their cumulative effect read through a competent analysis in which legitimacy of 'imagination' as mentioned above would also play a part. But what about a crisis not directly created by man, like Covid? An infliction by nature that affected the entire humanity would set the clock back for the analysts in the sense that they would have to recalibrate their entire readings afresh.

'A more contested world' is the total summation that the NIC report makes and regardless of the details that might have gone into this assessment, there is no denying the fact that this is a brilliant prediction of the direction in which international relations are headed. In a very broad picturization it is prudent to consider the end of the Cold War as a reference point for examining what is shaping up the new global order ever since. Success of the anti-Soviet armed campaign in Afghanistan leading to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from there and a rapid dismemberment of the USSR, the mighty Communist superpower, that followed, brought down the curtains on the Cold War leaving the USA as the only superpower commanding all military and economic initiatives at the global level. The transformational event, however, was accompanied by three new developments that would further affect the world in the future. Still in play these, it is hoped, did get into NIC's calculus.

One is the impact that the Soviet collapse made on China, the second most powerful Communist power. President Deng Xiaoping did not fail to notice that the USSR had cracked under its own internal economic contradiction, had acquired military strength but not built its economy and had in fact moved towards an oligarchy. Deng was set on seeking the economic route to becoming a superpower, learning from the failed Soviet model and opening into the global economy



in a controlled fashion. China has built a huge balance of trade in its favour, reached out to Western centres of knowledge through investments in the universities there and harnessed technology in all fields.

The second transformative change that coincided with the end of the Cold War was the success of the IT Revolution that shifted the world from the Industrial Age to the Age of Information. The new age brought in the Knowledge Economy, created borderless markets and set new benchmarks of competitiveness wherein a rival could appear from anywhere on the globe making better use of information that came into the public domain as soon as it was produced. There were no obscure corners in the world any more as a global outreach accessed them all. The end of the Cold War interestingly produced a large number of border conflicts, insurgencies and cross border offensives as many national identities that had been suppressed during the Cold War asserted themselves. This phenomenon is still at play in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and is a significant factor affecting international relations. The third development -- and this posed a lasting threat to world security -- was the rise of the new global terror, a product of faith-based motivation from the same battleground in Afghanistan that had ousted the Soviet army from there. The anti-Soviet armed campaign was directed on the war cry of Jihad and led by the Pak-controlled Hizbul Mujahideen, the radical Taliban and the Lashkar-e-Toiba of Osama bin Laden with equal force. The success of the Afghan Jihad was followed by the installation of the Afghan Emirate at Kabul in 1996, on the initiative of Pakistan, that was headed by the Taliban's Mullah Omar working in close concert with Laden. That regime of Islamic radicals soon bared its fangs against the US-led West, the Shiites and the idol worshippers and compelled the US to oust it. This, in turn, laid the turf for the Al Qaeda's offensive of 9/11 and the subsequent launch of the 'war on terror'

by the US-led World Coalition against Islamic radicals, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq.

With Islamic radicals enjoying considerable support within the Muslim world spread across Asia and Africa and in particular receiving shelter in Pakistan, the 'war on terror' leaves behind a lasting conflict between the West and radical Islam, rightly described by the likes of Samuel P. Huntington and his mentor Prof. Bernard Lewis as a 'clash of civilisations'. The rise of China, advent of the cyber world and revival of radical Islam are thus the three paradigms that are shaping the world and pushing it in the direction of a new bipolar order. Even factors like economy, environment, technology and internal governance are in some way adding to this new post-Cold War cleavage created by international relations. The geopolitical contours of 'a more contested world' are getting crystallised, as viewed from India, along three courses. First is the significant development of the advent of Biden Presidency restoring the traditional US-NATO alliance which was weakened in the Trump regime. This is in line with the Biden administration looking at China and Russia as the antagonistic powers much like what the position was for the US in the Cold War. Biden apparently looks at Russia's Putin with great distrust -- Donald Trump gave the impression of being in a comfortable equation with the Russian President and perhaps regarded Russia as another white nation across Europe. The new level of energisation of QUAD achieved in Biden administration was basically directed against the aggressive designs of China in the Indo-Pacific but it has evoked a sharp reaction from Russia and created a sense of strategic unity between Russia and China. Japan is the anchor of QUAD in the region and this has evidently led to Putin cautioning India against becoming part of an 'Asian NATO', particularly after the appearance of France on the scene through its participation in the naval exercises with QUAD.

Another course of global alignments that

has a long-term implication is the divide between the democratic world and the autocratic regimes spawning across Asia in particular, which was of direct concern for India. The Chinese strategy of gaining influence in South and South-East Asia -- through the Sino-Pak alliance on the one hand and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) on the other -- demands an effective counter strategy from India. RCEP is a trading partnership of China with the ten ASEAN countries along with South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. The challenge for India is that its political appeal to ASEAN as a democratic power is pitted against the overbearing economic pressure of the Communist neighbour which is testing India's 'Act East' policy. India has to work for multi-polarity in Asia to counter China's dominance here. India has to be in the democratic camp in Asia, on the side of US and its allies in the region. Participation of Prime Minister Modi in the first QUAD summit was a sound decision in this context -- it serves the cause of the security of Indian Ocean as well.

It is the third geopolitical trendsetter however, that is perhaps the most important for India's national security and international relations -- the shifting alignments within the Muslim world that weighed in favour of Pakistan in spite of the falling image of that country as a principal harborer of Islamic extremism. This adds to India's concerns as Pakistan is encouraged to step up its terror offensive against India and also cause internal destabilisation here. These goings-on strangely do not bother the Biden Presidency so much -- even though, ironically, the 'war on terror' against Islamic radicals was all along by the US-led world coalition. The Sino-Pak alliance is working for Pakistan on the Afghan issue while a new grouping within the Islamic world -- of Pakistan, Turkey and Malaysia -- is becoming supportive of Islamic radicals and recalcitrant towards the supremacy of Saudi Arabia, a committed ally of the US in the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). If President Biden withdraws US troops from Afghanistan with a half-baked truce with the Taliban, Pakistan will retain its sway in that country and cause further problems for India. Meanwhile, pro-Pak lobbies are active in the US on the issue of Kashmir and there is a meeting of minds between Pakistan and China on countering India's hold in the Ladakh sector that was now directly administered by the Centre as a Union Territory. Also, there is revival of Islamic radicalism in many parts of Europe including France and Belgium because of the history of colonialism and even the legacy of the Crusades. The US-led West and India have a convergence of interest against the threat of 'radicalisation' but the NIC report does not seem to be impacted much by the latter. India does not have the comfort of distance that the US had on the threat from Islamic radicals -- it has therefore, to counter it largely on its own. Mobilisation of the democratic world against the faith-based global terror has to be kept up.

(The writer is a former Director, Intelligence Bureau)

Now drought leaves vegetable growers high and dry in Himachal

VISHAL GULATI

"Owing to scanty rainfall from January to end of March, crops have been severely hit in the entire area," Nasib Singh Thakur, a marginal vegetable grower in Kandaghat tehsil in Solan district, told correspondent. He said almost 60 per cent of the crops in Rabi season like peas, cabbage, capsicum, beans, cauliflower and cucumber are damaged due to long spells of drought from December onwards.

"In this season during last year we had left so much food on farms to just rot in the fields owing to the nationwide Covid-19 lockdown (March 25, 2020). This time hostile weather took a heavy toll on the crops," another vegetable grower C.D. Verma of Jubbarhatti village, on the outskirts of the state capital, told correspondent. "On normal occasions, we used to harvest peas in this season of Rs 60,000. This time we earned around Rs 20,000 from them," he added.

Vegetable production is generating revenue of Rs 3,500-4,000 crore annually and has emerged as an alternate economic activity in the agriculture sector. The returns of off-season vegetable cultivation are very high compared to traditional food crops.

As per government estimates, cultivating off-season vegetables gives a net return from Rs 60,000 to Rs 200,000 per hectare, whereas the traditional crops fetch Rs 8,000 to Rs 10,000 per hectare only.

Officials with the state Agriculture Department said 146,508 hectares of the 413,134 hectares cropped area have been hit due to less rainfall between January and mid of April with an estimated loss of Rs 10,820.57 lakh.

As per the preliminary survey, the highest loss has been reported in Bilaspur district where 20,280 hectares of the total cropped area of 28,020 hectares was affected resulting in loss of Rs 3,259.37 lakh.

The second worst affected district is Chamba where 3,571 hectares has been hit due to the scanty rainfall.

Chief Secretary Anil Khachi said water supply schemes of the Jal Shakti Vibhag, previously known as Irrigation and Public Health Department, had also been hit due to short rainfall.

Out of the total 9,526 schemes in the state,

Vegetable growers in Himachal Pradesh are sowing crops but reaping despair. Last year it was nationwide lockdown owing to the coronavirus pandemic. This time drought has left them high and dry.



401 have been hit up to 25 per cent, 197 between 25 to 50 per cent, 87 between 50 to 75 per cent and 28 schemes more than 75 per cent.

Amid the second wave of coronavirus pandemic the farmers are in despair again about their crop due to ongoing travel restrictions almost across the country.

Potato is one of the major cash crops grown in the lower and mid-hills of the state. Una district alone harvests potatoes in nearly 900 hectares, besides cultivating wheat on 29,000 hectares. Its harvesting has just begun in some pockets.

"The crop this time is less compared to the

previous year but the government should have to facilitate the farmers marketing of potatoes in neighbouring states of Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana and Delhi, where curfew-like situation is currently prevailing. Otherwise, most of the potatoes remain unsold," said Harpreet Gill, a grower on the outskirts of Una town.

Last year Una district saw the production of over 13,000 tonnes, a bumper for the second consecutive time.

About 81 per cent of the total cultivated area in Himachal Pradesh is rain-fed.

Manmohan Singh, Director of the regional meteorological department, told IANS the

deficiency of precipitation in the state between January and March was more than 60 per cent. However, in April was more than normal.

However, the last week of April saw damage to crops due to unseasonal snow, hailstorms and rain. Acting swiftly, the Chief Secretary directed the Horticulture and Agriculture Departments to prepare and submit a detailed analysis report of crop loss assessment and submit it to insurance companies.

The saving grace amidst the pandemic is that state's major harvesting of vegetables is the Kharif season that starts from August-mid and lasts till November-end.



US MAY BE WINNING WAR AGAINST COVID WITH VACCINATIONS

While some researchers argue it's still too soon to say, a growing number of epidemiologists, infectious disease researchers and public health experts think that the vaccination campaign may be helping the country win the race against the Coronavirus can be denied aid by international bodies.



still too soon to say, a growing number of epidemiologists, infectious disease researchers and public health experts think that the vaccination campaign may be helping the country win the race against the coronavirus, according to a report in NPR.org. "I think we've hit a tipping point. We've really turned a corner on this latest wave. And I think that

the worst days of the pandemic really are now behind us," Ashish Jha, the dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, was quoted as saying.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an estimated 34 per cent proportion of the US population already have some immunity to the virus

from having been exposed to the virus. Added to this is the vaccination campaign, the report said. More than 43 per cent of the population has now gotten at least one shot, and a third are fully vaccinated. That's getting very close to where other countries, such as Israel, started to turn the corner and experience a precipitous drop in infections, it added. The combination of natural immunity from people who were exposed and vaccination "means we may be closer to 60 per cent population immunity already," Jha said. "That's why I'm pretty confident we have turned the corner." After months of rising, the number of daily infections in the US has begun to fall again. It has on average dropped 27 per cent in the last two weeks. However, in places, such as Oregon, Washington state, and parts of Colorado and Arizona, the infections are spreading fast, leading experts to warn people of letting down their guard too soon.

Watchdog reports 40% increase in attacks on Pak journalists

The data showed that out of a total of 27 cases, 25 of them were related to detention or confinement, 15 were linked with violence and physical assaults, seven were of assentation attempts, six of murders, while five were related to abductions.



said that overall, there has been a 40 per cent increase in the attack on journalists and Islamabad had reported 51 of those cases. The breakdown showed that Sindh was in second place with 38 cases, Punjab in third with 39 cases, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in fourth with 13 cases, Azad Jammu and Kashmir in the fifth place with nine cases and Balochistan was in the last place with eight cases, Geo TV reported.

The network also reported that 148 different types of attacks on journalists were reported across Pakistan between May 3, 2020, till April 20, 2021.

The data showed that out of a total of 27 cases, 25 of them were related to detention or confinement, 15 were linked with violence and physical assaults, seven were of assentation attempts, six of murders, while five were related to abductions.

Washington | Agencies

With nearly 100 million Americans fully vaccinated and new coronavirus cases at their lowest level since last October, the US might have attained or will reach the crucial inflection point, the media reported.

Only one in hundred gets Covid shot in Pakistan: Data

Islamabad | Agencies

More than 1.08 billion vaccine doses have been administered worldwide, equal to 14 doses for every 100 people. There is already a stark gap between vaccination programmes in different countries, with some yet to report a single dose.

The data is compiled from government sources by the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford. A vaccinated person refers to someone who has received at least one dose of a vaccine, and a fully vaccinated person has received all required doses of a vaccine. For the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, a person who is "fully vaccinated" has received two doses, The News reported.

April 28 data of doses per hundred people shows Seychelles at top with 127 doses, Israel second with 116, while UAE is at third place with 107 doses per hundred persons. In regional countries Maldives has administered 73 doses per hundred people, China 17, India 11, Nepal 7.2, Bangladesh 5.2, Sri Lanka 4.2, Iran 1.1, Pakistan 1 and Afghanistan 0.6.

While vaccine doses remain relatively



scarce globally, most countries have focused their early vaccination efforts on priority groups like the clinically vulnerable; people in their 60s, 70s and older; and front-line workers, like doctors and nurses.

There is also a striking divide between continents. Africa has the slowest vaccination rate of any continent, with some countries yet to start mass vaccination campaigns. Less wealthy countries are relying on a vaccine-sharing arrangement called Covax, which aims to provide two billion doses by the end of the year. As many as 83 per cent of shots that have gone into arms worldwide have been administered in high- and upper-middle-income countries.

OVER 100 MN AMERICANS FULLY VACCINATED AGAINST COVID

Washington: More than 100 million adult Americans have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19 as of Saturday, according to data of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The fully vaccinated account for 30.5 per cent of the US population Xinhua reported

More than 144 million Americans received at least one Covid-19 shot, accounting for 43.6 per cent of the population, according to the CDC.

About 240 million Covid-19 vaccine shots have been administered across the country by Saturday, while more than 308 million Covid-19 vaccine doses have been distributed, CDC data show.

Top Hefazat leader Junaid Al Quasemi detained in B'desh

Dhaka | Agencies

The Criminal Investigation Department of Bangladesh Police arrested Hefazat-e-Islam leader Junaid Al Quasemi, one of the masterminds of the militant outfit, from Brahmanbaria on Saturday morning.

Junaid was behind the violence unleashed in the district by the radical outfit during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh in March this year, Jisanul Haque, Senior Assistant Superintendent (media wing) of CID, told IANS.

Junaid is the son of Allama Nur Hossain Quasemi, who was the secretary general of the recently dissolved committee of Hefazat.

Haque said the police are also probing if there is any case of sabo-

tage against Junaid, as has been reported recently.

Earlier on Friday night, the police had arrested six persons, including militant leader from Brahmanbaria, Niazul Karim, in connection with the three-day mayhem unleashed in the district in March.

The police have so far arrested 398 persons in connection with the case.

Raich Uddin, Additional Superintendent of Police (crime and administration), said that six persons were arrested in a special operation from different places on Friday. Among them, Niazul Karim had led a mob on March 26 to Radhika Bazar in SadarUpazila which set fire to tree trunks and tyres on the streets.

Niazul Karim is the Women and Family Welfare Secretary of the Brahmanbaria District Islamic Movement and the Madrasa

Secretary of the Central Committee of the National Teachers Forum.

He had led the attacks on the Central library, besides orchestrating arson in Brahmanbaria between March 26 and March 28.

Hefazat activists and supporters had wreaked havoc across the district in March, when large scale vandalism was witnessed at various government and private establishments in the district.

So far, 56 cases have been registered in connection with these incidents, in which more than 40,000 people have been accused.

During the violence on March 26-28, teachers and students of different madrasas vandalised and torched different government and non-government establishments and houses in the district.

EGYPT TO SEND MEDICAL SUPPLIES TO INDIA FOR FIGHTING PANDEMIC

Cairo: Egyptian Minister of Health Hala Zayed announced on Saturday that 30 tonnes of medical supplies will be sent to India to help contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. In a statement, the minister said a shipment of 300 oxygen cylinders, 20 ventilators, 100 medical beds, 20 electrocardiography machines, 30 defibrillators and 50 electric syringe pumps will be sent to India.

The supplies will be delivered to India in cooperation with the Egyptian armed forces, the Xinhua news agency reported.

India's Covid-19 infections tally reached 19,164,969 on Saturday, with a single-day spike of 401,993 cases, according to the Indian health ministry.

Powerful Indians making aggressive calls for vaccines: Poonawalla

London | Agencies

Admitting that he is facing immense pressure from "some of the most powerful people in India" demanding supplies of Covishield, Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla said on Saturday that the company is also planning to start vaccine production in the UK, the media reported.

In an interview with The Times, Poonawalla said that everything falls on his shoulders when it comes to delivering the Covid vaccine to millions in India. "I'm staying here (London) for an extended time because I don't want to go back to that situation. Everything falls on my shoulders, but I can't do it alone...I don't want to be in a situation where you are just trying to do your job, and just because you can't supply the



needs of X, Y or Z, you really don't want to guess what they are going to do," Poonawalla told The Times.

Referring to the phone calls from some of the most powerful people in India to get them vaccines first, he added: "The level of expectation and aggression is really unprecedented. It's overwhelming. Everyone feels they should get the vaccine. They can't understand why anyone else should get

it before them." India is facing an immense crunch of vaccines amid the lethal second Covid wave, and as the country started vaccination for people in the 18-44 age group in its third drive on Saturday, several states are unable to start the immunisation drive because of the demand-supply gap.

The CEO of the Pune-based pharmaceutical company said that the company will make an official announcement to produce vaccines in London in the coming days. "There's going to be an announcement in the next few days," he said. Recently, SII had borrowed money from banks instead of waiting for the government's aid to arrive to scale up the production of its Covishield vaccine. The company assumed that the funding from the government will reach them very soon, probably by this week.

Global Covid-19 caseload tops 151.7 mn

The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 32,389,652 and 576,719, respectively, according to the CSSE.

Washington | Agencies

The overall global Covid-19 caseload has topped 151.7 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 3.18 million, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Sunday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and death toll stood at 151,774,770 and 3,188,331, respectively.

The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 32,389,652 and 576,719, respec-



tively, according to the CSSE. In terms of infections, India follows in the second place with 19,164,969 cases. The other countries with more than two million confirmed coronavirus cases are Brazil (14,725,975), France (5,703,505), Turkey (4,849,408), Russia (4,759,902), the UK (4,434,157), Italy (4,035,617), Spain (3,524,077), Germany (3,410,821), Argentina (2,993,865), Colombia (2,877,746), Poland (2,798,617), Iran (2,516,157) and Mexico (2,344,755), the CSSE figures showed.

Uganda opts for vaccines elsewhere than India

Uganda has received 964,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine from the COVAX initiative and the Indian government, and is expected to import another 5 million doses



the AstraZeneca vaccine from the COVAX initiative and the Indian government, and is expected to import another 5 million doses, the Xinhua news agency reported.

About 330,077 people in Uganda have so far received the first AstraZeneca jab, according to the health ministry. "To be on the safe side let's immunise a minimum of five or seven million, then we can open up curfew," Museveni said, urging the public to continue adhering to the prevention measures.

As of Saturday, Uganda's national count of Covid-19 cases reached 41,905, with 41,422 recoveries and 342 deaths.

Kampala | Agencies

Uganda planned to import Covid-19 vaccines from elsewhere after India as a supplier is grappling with a surge in cases domestically, said Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni.

"We were getting the vaccine from India, but they are now struggling. We shall get the J and J (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine and also import another batch from Cuba. That's our strategy," said Museveni in a televised address on Saturday. Uganda has received 964,000 doses of

5 CHILDREN AMONG 45 DEATHS IN DEADLY STAMPEDE IN ISRAEL

Jerusalem: Five children, aged from nine to 14, are among the 45 victims who were killed in a stampede disaster at Mount Meron in northern Israel on Thursday night, the country's health ministry said. The ministry said in a statement on Saturday that 42 of the 45 people killed in the tragedy have been identified so far.

The process of identifying victims was resumed on Saturday evening after it was stopped on Friday afternoon for religious reasons, it added. Described as Israel's worst civil disaster ever, the stampede took place during a festival celebrated on the eve of the Jewish holiday Lag BaOmer and resulted in 45 deaths and at least 150 injuries, the Xinhua news agency reported. More than 100,000 people participated in the festival, most of them ultra-Orthodox Jews. Following the disaster, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared Sunday as a national day of mourning.

Demand for oxygen rising in Nepal as Covid cases surge

Kathmandu | Agencies

Demand for oxygen has been rising in Nepal as more and more hospitalised Covid-19 patients are in need of oxygen.

"The majority of the Covid-19 patients admitted at our hospital required the support of bottled oxygen," Somnath Bastola, senior manager (corporate communication and public relation department) of Norvic International Hospital said.

According to him, over 30 patients have been admitted at the Norvic and the hospital planned to increase beds for coronavirus patients amid surging numbers of such patients, the Xinhua news agency reported.

Nepal's former Queen Komal Shah is getting treatment at Kathmandu-based Norvic International Hospital at an intensive care unit (ICU) fighting the Covid-19 for the last few days. As treatment with plasma therapy could not bring the desired result, she was moved to ICU and she has been kept there on high flow oxygen support, Bastola told Xinhua on Sunday.

Former queen and her husband former King Gyanendra



Shah were tested positive following their return from a trip to India in late April. Their daughter Prerana is also receiving treatment in the same hospital for Covid-19. Former Nepali Prime Minister Jhulanath Khanal, who was admitted at

the Norvic hospital on Saturday, is also getting treatment along with the support of bottled oxygen, according to Bastola.

Many other hospitals in Kathmandu have also reported that they are running out of beds for the surging inflow of coronavirus patients, and the majority of the patients required oxygen support from outside. Kathmandu-based Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital has admitted 78 patients, exceeding its capacity of 60 as hospitals in Kathmandu are overwhelmed.

"The situation of almost all patients is serious and all of the Covid-19 patients admitted at our hospital have required extra oxygen from outside for their survival," said Sagar Kumar Rajbhandari, director of the hospital, on Saturday.

5 SOLDIERS, 8 MILITANTS KILLED IN AFGHAN CLASHES

Kabul: Five soldiers and eight militants were killed when fighting erupted in Afghanistan's northern Badakhshan province on Saturday night, a local source confirmed on Sunday. The clashes broke out when armed militants stormed an Afghan Regional Army's checkpoint in surrounding areas of restive Wardoj district at midnight, Abdul Raziq from the Afghan national army's 217 Pamir Corps told the Xinhua news agency. There were also 10 soldiers and eight militants wounded in the fighting, he said. The violence lingers in war-torn Afghanistan as the US and NATO troops have been leaving the country. About 3,500 US forces and 7,000 NATO troops will be withdrawn before September 11, the day which is the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks that drew the US into war in Afghanistan.

CHILE TO ACCELERATE MASS VACCINATION PROGRAM AGAINST COVID

Santiago: Chilean President Sebastian Pinera announced on Saturday that the country will accelerate its mass vaccination program against Covid-19 after already having 6.6 million people fully vaccinated. Pinera reported that starting next week, the vaccination program will expand to reach younger people "early," and in the next two weeks, the government plans to vaccinate people between 35 and 44 years of age, the Xinhua news agency reported. The President also stated that the vaccination of pregnant women, which began earlier this week, complies with "all the rules and protocols established by the health authority." He explained that the speeding up of mass vaccinations can be done thanks to the fact that the Chilean government has closed contracts that will give it access to a total of 40 million doses of vaccines this year. More than 7 million people are expected to be fully vaccinated by the time constituent elections will be held in the country on May 15 and 16, when citizens will choose representatives to draft the country's new constitution.



BUTTLER'S MAIDEN T20 TON LEADS RR TO 55-RUN WIN OVER SRH

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Jos Buttler's maiden T20 ton coupled with three-wicket hauls from Mustafizur Rahman and Chris Morris helped Rajasthan Royals (RR) cruise to a 55-run win over SunRisers Hyderabad (SRH) in an Indian Premier League (IPL) match at the Arun Jaitley Stadium on Sunday.

Chasing a mammoth target of 221, Rahman and Morris led the way as RR restricted SRH to 165 for eight wickets in 20 overs.

With David Warner replaced by Kane Williamson as SRH captain and dropped from the team, Manish Pandey (31) walked out with Jonny Bairstow (30) to open the innings. The pair put up 57 runs in the powerplay before Pandey fell to Rahman off the first ball of the seventh over.



Bairstow then fell to Rahul Tewatia in the next over after which Vijay Shankar (8) fell to Morris in

the 11th over, following which Williamson (20) became Kartik Tyagi's maiden IPL wicket.

Mohammad Nabi then gave SRH some respite by smashing 17 runs in five balls but succumbed to Rahman in the 15th over. SRH then fell well behind the required run rate after that point as they struggled to score runs. Earlier, Jos Buttler scored his maiden T20 century to help Rajasthan Royals (RR) score 220 for three wickets. RR got to the mammoth score, largely due to Buttler's

Brief scores

RR 220/3 in 20 overs (Jos Buttler 124, Sanju Samson 48; Rashid Khan 1/24) vs SRH 165/8 in 20 overs (Manish Pandey 31, Jonny Bairstow 30; Mustafizur Rahman 3/20, Chris Morris 3/29)

124 off 64 balls and his second-wicket partnership with captain Sanju Samson. The pair put on 150 runs off 88 balls with Samson scoring 48 off 33.

Dhawan leads clinical DC to 7-wkt win over PBKS

Ahmedabad | Agencies

Shikhar Dhawan's 47-ball 69 helped a clinical Delhi Capitals (DC) ease to a seven-wicket win over Punjab Kings (PBKS) at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Sunday in the Indian Premier League (IPL). DC chased down the target of 167 runs with 14 balls to spare, as Dhawan anchored the chase and put up partnerships with Prithvi Shaw, Steve Smith, captain Rishabh Pant, and Shimron Hetmyer.

Shaw (39) and Dhawan put up an opening stand of 63 runs that ended when the former fell to Harpreet Brar off the first ball of the seventh over. Smith (24) then played an almost chanceless innings and put up 48 for the second wicket with Dhawan, who then took the attack to the bowlers in a 36-run stand



Brief scores

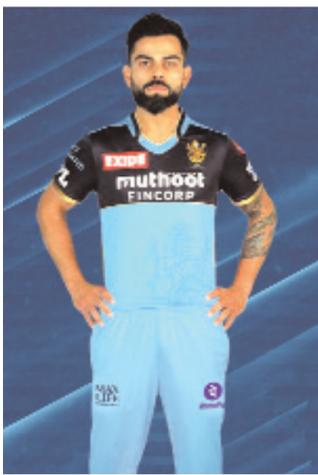
Punjab Kings: 166/6 wks in 20 overs (Mayank Agarwal 99 not out, Dawid Malan 26; Kagiso Rabada 3/36) lost to Delhi Capitals: 167/3 wks in 20 overs (Shikhar Dhawan 69 not out, Prithvi Shaw 39; Harpreet Brar 1/19) by seven wickets with 14 balls remaining

with Pant (14).

Pant fell to Chris Jordan in the 17th over, and the chase was completed in the 18th in which Hetmyer hit Riley Meredith for two sixes and a four. DC were left with two runs to win, and they got those after Meredith bowled

consecutive two wides.

Earlier, PBKS captain Mayank Agarwal's 99 not out propelled PBKS to 166/6 in 20 overs. Agarwal stepped in after captain KL Rahul was diagnosed with acute appendicitis and was admitted to a local hospital here.



RCB TO WEAR BLUE KIT TO SHOW SOLIDARITY WITH FRONTLINE WORKERS

Team Absolute | Bengaluru

Indian Premier League (IPL) side Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) have joined hands with Give India Foundation to provide 100 units of oxygen concentrators in Bangalore and other cities in the fight against Covid-19.

In a show of respect and solidarity with frontline workers, the Virat Kohli-led RCB will sport a special blue kit in one of the upcoming IPL matches. The jersey will carry messages on spreading awareness about fighting the disease.

RCB will then auction all the signed blue jerseys to raise money for the cause. RCB skipper Virat Kohli said on

Sunday that, "This is a tough time for our country; what's happening with the spread of the virus is deeply concerning. It is only because of the frontline heroes that we hope to save humanity.

"We salute them and would like to take the opportunity to spread as much awareness for people to follow all the safety protocols. We would do every part that helps fight this battle," Kohli added.

Since the start of the pandemic last year, RCB's parent company, Diageo India, has manufactured and distributed 3,00,000 litres of sanitisers and committed Rs 75 crore towards the programme to support the fight against the disease.

WE WERE ABOUT 10 RUNS SHORT: AGARWAL

Ahmedabad:

Punjab Kings (PBKS) were about 10 runs short and should have scored more in the middle overs against Delhi Capitals (DC), said stand-in captain Mayank Agarwal after their seven-wicket defeat in the Indian Premier League (IPL) on Sunday. Agarwal captained the team in place of KL Rahul, who is set to have a surgery for acute appendicitis.



KL Rahul hospitalised with acute appendicitis



Team Absolute | Ahmedabad

Punjab Kings (PBKS) captain KL Rahul has been diagnosed with acute appendicitis and admitted to a local hospital here, the team said on Sunday.

"KL Rahul complained of a severe abdomen pain last night and after not responding to medication, he was taken to the emergency room for further tests which revealed he was diagnosed with acute appendicitis. It will be resolved surgically

and, for safety measures, he has been transferred to a hospital," said PBKS in a statement released through their social media handles.

PBKS are slated to face Delhi Capitals (DC) at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Sunday evening. Rahul played an integral role in PBKS's win over Royal Challengers Bangalore in their previous match, smashing an unbeaten 91 off 57 balls. The innings helped him take the Orange Cap and he has scored 331 runs so far this season at an average of 66.20.

HAPPIER WITH MY TWO WICKETS THAN THE 87-RUN KNOCK: POLLARD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Mumbai Indians (MI) batsman Kieron Pollard said that the unbeaten 87 he scored against arch-rivals Chennai Super Kings (CSK) "has to be somewhere near the top" among the scores of match-winning knocks he has played in his more than decade-long stint in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

But, despite the stroke-filled knock that included eight sixes and six boundaries, the West Indian was "more impressed with his bowling" which fetched him two wickets for 12 runs in two overs.

The allrounder dismissed South African Faf du Plessis on 50 and then got rid of Suresh Raina for two, as CSK made 218 for 4 in the allotted 20 overs. But thanks to Pollard's pyrotechnics, MI reached the imposing target off the last ball of the innings.

"All I want to do is make my father and my family proud," said an emotional Pollard after the match on Saturday.

"The last couple of months have been very difficult for me losing a close person, a dear person to my heart who introduced me to cricket. He



was here a couple of years ago in the IPL as well. He got the opportunity to see us win in 2019 and he passed away. All I want to do is to continue to make him proud. Make my family proud," said Pollard.

Asked if he was counting the number of sixes he kept on scoring, the West Indian said, "No I didn't. Actually, I was just watching the scoreboard, knowing that I had to hit sixes in order to win the game."

Pollard, who struck the

fastest fifty in this edition of the IPL, taking just 17 balls, said that as a cricketer, they are used to playing such knocks. "As a cricketer you have to evolve and teams come up with different plans and you play around the world and you see different things they use. Playing international cricket as well has helped in terms of a confidence perspective," said the big hitter who had a strike rate of nearly 256 on Saturday.

MADRID OPEN WORLD NO.2 OSAKA SHOCKED

Madrid | Agencies

Karolina Muchova added yet another stunning win over a top player to her collection with a 6-4, 3-6, 6-1 upset of world No. 2 Naomi Osaka in the second round of the Madrid Open on Sunday.

The rising Czech captured her third win over a top-5 player this season, and her 10th top-5 win in her career overall, with her one-hour and 49-minute victory over reigning Australian Open champion Osaka. Fresh off her top-20 debut in the WTA singles rankings on Monday, Muchova continued to impress in her Madrid tournament debut, as she plays only her second event since her breakthrough semi-final run at the Australian Open earlier this year, according to wtatennis.com.



ATLETICO SURVIVE PENALTY, REAL STAY IN THE RACE

Barcelona | Agencies

Atletico Madrid earned a tight 1-0 win at Elche to maintain their two-point lead at the top of La Liga with four games remaining, with second-place Real Madrid beating Osasuna 2-0.

Diego Simeone's side survived a late penalty, missed by Fidel Chaves, as they battle for their first league title since 2014, reports DPA. Atletico striker Luis Suarez came close in the opening stages and then the Uruguayan had a goal ruled out for a narrow offside. Marcos Llorente fired the Rojiblancos ahead in the 23rd minute with his 12th league goal of the season from Yannick Carrasco's

cross.

Suarez had another ruled out for offside early in the second half as his team continued to dominate the game. In the 90th minute Llorente turned villain when he handled the ball inside his own area and handed Elche a penalty kick. However, Chaves fired it against the post to hand Llorente and Atletico reprieve, while Elche are 19th, in grave danger of relegation.



The Osasuna goalkeeper was in excellent form and produced two further stops from Madrid defender Eder Militao, who twice sent powerful headers towards goal. At the other end Thibaut Courtois

had to react quickly to tip over Manu Sanchez's cross which was creeping in.

Coach Zinedine Zidane, who started with Toni Kroos and Luka Modric on the bench with the Champions League semi-final second leg in mind, kept faith in his team to make the breakthrough and they eventually did.

Militao finally got his goal with a superb header from Isco's corner in the 76th minute and Casemiro netted a fortunate second when his attempted control on Karim Benzema's pass spun into the net. Third-place Barcelona visit Valencia later on Sunday, while Sevilla, fourth, host Athletic Bilbao on Monday.

IPL 2021 PREVIEW: MATCH 30

Cummins's battle with Maxwell, AB to dominate show



Team Absolute | Ahmedabad

The well-oiled and batting-heavy Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) will take on a struggling Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in an Indian Premier League (IPL) match here at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Monday night.

RCB, who sit pretty with 10 points from five wins in seven games, have however been struggling in recent games. They have lost two out of their last three matches, the latest against Punjab Kings by 34 runs on Friday night.

KKR, on the other hand, have won just two out of their seven matches and have odds stacked heavily against them.

The first match between the two sides this season was won convincingly by a margin of 38 runs by the Virat Kohli-led side.

The key battle to watch out for in the match will be between KKR's Australia pace

bowler Pat Cummins and the RCB batting geniuses AB de Villiers and Glenn Maxwell.

Both AB and Maxwell fell cheaply in their last match, to Punjab Kings left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar. It was a rare failure for the two, who have carried RCB ahead with their power-hitting.

The Kolkata franchise may look to save Cummins's overs for the back-end as Maxwell bats at No. 4 and AB comes in at No. 5.

KKR too have got some good quality spin bowlers who they can use upfront but it will be the Aussie pace bowler, ranked No. 1 in ICC Test cricket rankings, who they will depend on to get rid of RCB's talismanic batting duo.

The Eoin Morgan-led team is facing problems of their own in batting. The top-order has been inconsistent and hasn't done enough to provide platform to the lower-order power-hitters.

SL NEED 5 WKTS, BANGLADESH 260 RUNS TO WIN 2ND TEST

Kandy (Sri Lanka) : Sri Lanka ended the fourth day of the second Test against Bangladesh needing five wickets to win the match and the series. Bangladesh were 177/5 wickets at stumps, 260 runs away from their target.

Spinners Ramesh Mendis and Praveen Jayawickrama were the wicket takers for the hosts. Mendis ended the day with three wickets while Jayawickrama took two. The day ended early with the umpires calling the players off due to bad light.

Sri Lanka earlier declared at 194/9 wickets, with captain Dimuth Karunaratne following up his ton in the first

innings with a 78-ball 66. They thus set Bangladesh a target of 437 to chase. The first Test had ended in a draw. Brief scores: Sri Lanka 493/7 wickets declared & 194/9 wickets declared (Dimuth Karunaratne 66, Dhananjaya de Silva 41; Tajjul Islam 5/72); Bangladesh 251 & 177/4 wickets (Mushfiqur Rahim 40, Saif Hassan 34; Ramesh Mendis 3/86)



INDIA'S EXPORTS IN APRIL RISE TO \$30.2 BN, TRADE DEFICIT SURGES

India's merchandise imports in April 2021 were \$45.45 billion, with an increase of 165.99 per cent over \$17.09 billion in April 2020 and an increase of 7.22 per cent over \$42.39 billion in April 2019.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's merchandise exports in April 2021 was \$30.21 billion, higher by 197.03 per cent over \$10.17 billion in April 2020.

Exports last month also recorded a 16.03 per cent growth over \$26.04 billion in April 2019, said an official statement.

India's merchandise imports in April 2021 were \$45.45 billion, with an increase of 165.99 per cent over \$17.09 billion in April 2020 and an increase of 7.22 per cent over \$42.39 billion in April 2019.

Trade deficit in April 2021 was \$15.24 billion, which increased by 120.34 per cent over trade deficit of \$6.92 billion in



April 2020.

In April 2021, the value of non-petroleum exports was \$26.85 billion, registering a positive growth of 200.62 per cent over \$8.93 billion in April 2020 and a positive growth of 19.44 per cent over \$22.48 billion in April 2019. The value of non-petroleum and non-gems and jewellery exports in April 2021 was \$23.51 billion, registering a growth of 164.28 per cent over \$8.90 billion in April 2020.

Oil imports in April were at \$10.8 billion, a growth of 132.26 per cent com-

pared to \$4.65 billion in April 2020.

Non-oil imports in April were estimated at \$34.65 billion, showing an increase of 178.6 per cent compared to \$12.44 billion in April 2020 and an increase of 12.42 per cent compared to \$30.82 billion in April 2019.

Major commodity groups of export showing growth in April 2021 over April 2019 were iron ore, other cereals, oil meals, rice, cereal preparations, electronic goods, drugs and pharmaceuticals among others.

MARUTI SUZUKI REPORTS SALES OF 159,691 UNITS IN APRIL



New Delhi: Automobile major Maruti Suzuki India on Saturday reported a total sales of 159,691 units in April 2021. According to the company, total sales in the month include domestic sales of 137,151 units, sales to other OEMs at 5,303 units and exports of 17,237 units. The company had sold 632 vehicles during April 2020 and 143,245 units in 2019. "Since April 2020 had lockdown due to Covid-19 and almost zero sales, a comparison with April 2020 doesn't have any meaning," the company said in a statement.

Govt relaxes several compliance timelines under GST

As per the suggestions of GST Council, the government has decided that the timeline for compliance of certain actions which fall due during April 15 and May 30, would be extended till May 31.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As the Covid crisis and the resultant lockdowns impact business, the Centre has come up with several relaxations regarding timelines for GST compliance norms.

Among the relaxations, the government has extended the deadline for filing GST returns, and reduced the interest and late fee for delayed return filing for March and April. As per the suggestions of GST Council, the government has decided



that the timeline for compliance of certain actions which fall due during April 15 and May 30, would be extended till May 31. Further, businesses with up to Rs 5 crore sales will have no interest liability for late reporting of monthly summary of transactions for March and April for the first 15 days from the due date, said a notification. For the next 15 days, there will be a concessional nine per cent annual interest and 18 per cent, thereafter. The waiver of interest for first 15 days followed by nine per cent concessional rate for the next 15 days, has also been given to small businesses filing their

March 2021 quarterly returns. A notification from the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) also said that there is a late fee waiver for the monthly returns to be filed for March and April. Companies with sales up to Rs 5 crore get late fee waiver for a month from the due date while larger businesses would get a 15-day waiver. Further, small businesses filing quarterly returns would get a late fee waiver for 30 days from the due date for the March quarter returns. They have also been given extra time of one month till May-end to file their annual returns for FY21.

OMCs continue to hold petrol, diesel prices

Sources indicated that price revisions may begin anytime next week after results to state elections are declared. However, whether price of petrol and diesel would move up or down then would depend on actual average global price in the last fortnight of March.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Oil marketing companies (OMC) kept the retail prices of petrol and diesel unchanged for the 17th straight day across the four metro cities. In the



national capital, petrol was sold for Rs 90.40 per litre on Sunday. Similarly, the price of the fuel in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata was unchanged at Rs 96.83, Rs 92.43 and Rs 90.62 a litre, respectively.

In tandem with petrol prices, diesel was also sold at unchanged price levels. The price of diesel in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata was Rs 80.73, Rs 87.81, Rs 85.75 and Rs 83.61 per litre. Fuel prices in the

country remained unchanged as OMCs decided to wait and watch the prevalent situation in global oil markets before restarting daily revision of petrol and diesel prices. Sources indicated that price revisions may begin anytime next week after results to state elections are declared. However, whether price of petrol and diesel would move up or down then would depend on actual average global price in the last fortnight of March.

HOTELS' BODY SEEKS LIQUIDITY SUPPORT AMID 2ND WAVE OF COVID

Mumbai: As the severe Covid crisis and the resultant lockdowns have again brought the travel and hospitality industry to a halt, the Hotel Association of India (HAI) has written to the Central government seeking liquidity support in the form of lower interest rate and further customisation in the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS).

The industry body has also sought a complete or partial waiver of statutory expenses like property tax, lease rentals, license fee, and excise fee payable by hotels to various government authorities. HAI noted that the second wave of the pandemic has stopped the recovery of the hospitality and tourism sector. Hotels in India, which were shut for nearly 6-8 months reopened in a staggered manner and were recovering somewhat on the strength of domestic leisure tourism and weddings and family get-togethers, only to be impacted yet again on account of lockdowns in some states, night and weekend curfews, reduced limits on the number of guests allowed for functions and other restrictions, it said.

In its submissions to the Finance Ministry, the industry body said the ECLGS 3.0 should be further customised wherein the scheme factors in aspects such as high percentage of fixed costs of operations for hotels, and the possibility of long-drawn recovery of the industry. Inclusion of State Financial Corporations, Asset Reconstructions Companies (ARCs) and Debt Funds, extension of moratorium, capping of interest rate at 8 percent, increasing of the delinquency period are some of the suggested customisations, HAI said. In addition, the association has requested that hotels with no borrowings should also be eligible for ECLGS 3.0 as these too are facing a severe liquidity crunch. HAI has highlighted that while ECLGS 3.0 offers liquidity to pay interest obligations, it does not help businesses to survive.

Global tablet shipments reach 40M units in Q1, Apple leads

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Tablets had an outstanding first quarter of 2021 with 55.2 per cent growth (YoY) and shipments totalling 39.9 million units, according to preliminary data from the International Data Corporation (IDC).

Apple led the tablet segment with 31.7 per cent share, followed by Samsung at 20 per cent and Lenovo at 9.4 per cent share.

Chromebook shipments totalled 13 million units in 1Q21, up from 2.8 million in the first quarter of 2020. "While vaccine rollouts and businesses returning to offices may slow down the work-from-home trend, we are still far from returning to 'normal' working conditions and hence the demand for tablets, especially detachables, is expected to continue for a while," said Anuroopa Nataraj, research analyst with IDC's Mobility and Consumer Device Trackers. Growth of this magnitude has not been seen since the third quarter of 2013 when the tablet market grew by 56.9 per cent year over year, said the IDC.

"However, as buyers increasingly turn towards competing products, such as thin and light notebooks for work or entertainment and Chromebooks for education, the future of tablets will remain under constant competition, leaving the heavy lifting to large-



er brands such as Apple, Samsung, Amazon, and Microsoft," Nataraj added.

The rising popularity of Chromebooks is quickly leaving little room for tablets in markets such as the US, Western Europe, and more recently, Japan. "There's no doubt that Chromebooks have supplanted tablets in many education markets. However, price and the dependence on cloud services have prevented them from becoming mainstays in all regions," said Jitesh Ubrani, research manager with IDC's Mobility and Consumer Device Trackers.

"Besides, Chromebooks have yet to break into the consumer market in a meaningful way as competing notebooks as well as tablets, such as the iPad, Galaxy devices, and Fire tablets, maintain a strong presence."

AWS LEADS \$42B GLOBAL CLOUD SERVICES MARKET IN Q1

New Delhi: Amazon Web Services (AWS) was the leading cloud service provider with 32 per cent market share in Q1 2021, as cloud infrastructure services spending grew 35 per cent to \$41.8 billion in the first quarter, according to a new report. Microsoft Azure grew 50 per cent for the third consecutive quarter, taking 19 per cent market share in Q1 2021.

Google Cloud maintained its momentum, growing 56 per cent in the latest quarter to account for a 7 per cent market share, according to the report by market research firm Canalis. The trend of using cloud services for data analytics and machine learning, data center consolidation, application migration, cloud native development and service delivery continued at pace.

Overall, customer spending exceeded \$40 billion a quarter for the first time in Q1, with total expenditure nearly \$11 billion higher than in Q1 2020 and nearly \$2 billion more than in Q4 2020, according to Canalis data.

"Cloud emerged as a winner across all sectors over the last year, basically since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of lockdowns. Organizations depended on digital services and being online to maintain operations and adapt to the unfolding situation," said Canalis Research Analyst Blake Murray. "Migration and cloud spend will continue as customer confidence rises during 2021. Large projects that were postponed last year will resurface, while new use cases will expand the addressable market," Murray said in a statement. The acceleration of digital transformation over the last 12 months, with organizations adapting to new working practices, customer engagement, and business process and supply chain dynamics, has elevated demand for Cloud Investment at the edge, including 5G, is a key area, especially for the development of ultra-low latency applications and use cases, such as autonomous vehicles, industrial robotics and augmented or virtual reality, the report noted.

462 INFRA PROJECTS REPORT COST OVERRUN OF RS 4.36 LAKH CR

New Delhi: Out of the 1,737 projects, 13 projects are ahead of schedule, 229 are on schedule, 557 are delayed, 462 projects reported cost overrun and 136 projects reported both time and cost overrun with respect to their original project implementation schedules. As many as 462 infrastructure projects reported a cost overrun of over Rs 4.36 lakh crore as of April 1, 2021. The Flash Report on Central sector projects for March published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation showed that 557 projects are running behind schedule. "Out of the 1,737 projects, 13 projects are ahead of schedule, 229 are on schedule, 557 are delayed, 462 projects reported cost overrun and 136 projects reported both time and cost overrun with respect to their original project implementation schedules," the report said. It, however, said that the number of delayed projects decreases to 412 if delay is calculated on the basis of latest schedule of completion. Further, for 938 projects, neither the year of commissioning nor the tentative gestation period has been reported. "Total original cost of implementation of the 1,737 projects was Rs 22,33,409.53 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 26,69,649.35 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,36,239.82 crore (19.53 per cent of original cost)," it said.

Essar sets up 100-bed Covid centre in Gujarat's Dwarka

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Essar on Saturday said it has set up a 100-bed Covid care centre in Gujarat's Dwarka district. Accordingly, the centre is duly equipped with oxygen support and will be operated by the Khambaliya Civil Hospital.

"The centre is equipped with oxygen support which will have become critical during the second Covid wave across the country. It houses 40 rooms with double occupancy and 20 rooms of single occupancy to cater to the medical needs of the people," the company said in a statement.

"The centre will also take care of the housekeeping and healthy diet arrangements for the patients admitted to the facility. The centre is also equipped with



an administration hub for the hospital staff."

The centre has been jointly set up by Essar companies - Essar Ports and Essar Power and will be scaled up as required.

Last year, Essar had extended support to the people of the region through vari-

ous initiatives which acted as welcome relief amid the pandemic.

"Essar has a very close association with the people of Gujarat and has always been indebted to them for their undeterred support towards its growth, over past five decades," said Prashant Ruia, Director, Essar Capital.

"This centre is an effort from our side to provide timely medical care to the people of Gujarat and support the government's endeavours to fight this pandemic." In 2020, Essar had provided two million meals and 1.55 lakh medical supplies as part of Essar Foundation's Covid-19 initiatives across the country.

A massive rise in infections in the second wave of the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic has hospitals in several states reeling under a shortage of medical oxygen and beds.

FPIs turn net sellers in April

The net FPI investment in 2020 now stands at Rs 46,083 crore, including the net investments of Rs 19,473 crore, Rs 25,787 crore and Rs 10,482 crore in January, February and March, respectively.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPI) ended their buying spree in April as they pulled out net investments worth Rs 9,659 crore from Indian equities during the month.

The reversal in trend came at a time when the surging Covid cases and the resultant lockdowns spooked investor sentiments.

The FPIs turned net sellers after a gap of five months. In September, FPIs pulled out net investments worth Rs 7,783 crore.

Along with the second wave of Covid-19, weakness in the Indian rupee also led to the outflow of foreign funds last month, analysts said. The net FPI investment in 2020 now stands at Rs 46,083 crore, including the net investments of Rs 19,473 crore, Rs 25,787 crore and Rs 10,482 crore in January, February and March, respectively.

SpiceHealth enables walk-in RT-PCR testing at multiple locations

As the country reels under spike in Covid cases, labs struggle to keep up with the demand and home collection of samples becoming a huge challenge, SpiceHealth's walk-in RT-PCR testing facility at multiple locations across Delhi, Haryana and Maharashtra aims to address these issues

Team Absolute | New Delhi

SpiceHealth on Saturday said it has set up walk-in RT-PCR testing laboratories in Delhi, Haryana and Maharashtra.

According to the healthcare company launched by the promoters of SpiceJet, SpiceHealth's RT-PCR testing labs have been conducting the country's "fastest and cheapest" RT-PCR tests.

"As the country reels under spike in Covid cases, labs struggle to keep up with the demand and home collection of samples becoming a huge challenge, SpiceHealth's walk-in RT-PCR testing facility at multiple locations across Delhi, Haryana and Maharashtra aims to address these



issues," said Avani Singh, CEO, SpiceHealth. "Our mobile labs are located at landmark, easy to locate, accessible locations. The walk-in facility provides a hassle free and safe testing experience. The only way to

counter the spread of the pandemic is to test rampantly and at SpiceHealth we have been innovating constantly to offer medical care at the most affordable cost." SpiceHealth launched a new

mobile testing laboratory in Nagpur on Thursday and will soon be setting-up laboratories in Aurangabad and Nashik. More testing laboratories will soon be opened in Delhi and other states, the company said. Lately, the company has emerged as the fastest growing diagnostic lab in India having conducted more than 2.2 million RT-PCR tests since its launch in Delhi in November 2020. It is also working closely with multiple state governments and hospitals to beef up the supply of oxygen concentrators, ventilators, pulse oximeters, BiPAPs and other medical devices. In the last one week, SpiceHealth has imported more than 2,000 oxygen concentrators from Hong Kong to Delhi and many more will shortly be arriving in India.

INVESTORS OF FRANKLIN TEMPLETON'S SHUT SCHEMES TO GET RS 2,489 CR MORE



Mumbai: The unitholders of the six shut schemes of Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund will get Rs 2,488.75 crore in the week starting Monday, May 3. This will be the third tranche of disbursement for the investors after the distribution of Rs 9,122 crore across five schemes in February and Rs 2,962 crore last month. "We are pleased to now inform you that SBI Funds Management Pvt Ltd (SBI MF) would be distributing the next tranche of Rs 2,488.75 crore to unitholders across all six schemes. The payment to all investors whose accounts are KYC compliant with all details available will be made during the week of 3 May 2021," a company spokesperson said.

R. MADHAVAN: IN ALL THIS CHAOS, PLEASE SPARE A THOUGHT FOR KIDS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor R. Madhavan has urged all to spare a thought for young children at home, and ensure kids feel comforted. He says it is important for people to explain the ongoing pandemic situation to children.

"In all this chaos, uncertainty, and stress please spare a thought for the young kids at home. Their world has become frightening and they have been mostly neglected," he tweeted.

"Explain to them what is happening and make sure that they feel comforted and secure what we fight this battle," he added.

The actor makes his directorial debut with "Rocketary: The Nambi Effect", based on the life of scientist and aerospace engineer S. Nambi Narayanan. Madhavan also essays the protagonist in the film.

Besides starring in and directing the film, Madhavan has written and produced the project, which will be



released in Hindi, Telugu, Malayalam, Tamil, English and Kannada languages.



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NIKHITA GANDHI ON REMIXES: INDIAN AUDIENCE IS BIG ON RECALL FACTOR

The Indian audience is big on recall factor, which is a reason remixes are so much popular, feels Nikhita Gandhi. "I guess the Indian audience is really big on recall factor. When we do shows, we don't really perform originals or songs that the audience is yet to hear, because people in India like to listen to the songs that they know and can sing along. That's why remixes are so big right now," said Nikhita.

Asked if she is personally a fan of remixes, the singer replied: "I like some of them that are innovative are fun. It really depends on how it's made."

Among the few originals delivered by B-Town that have resonated with the Indian audience in the recent past is Nikhita's song "BurjKhalifa" from the 2020 horror-comedy film "Laxmi". "I feel blessed to be part of 'BurjKhalifa'. I'm thankful to Shashi (composer) for making me a part of the song, which became a sensational hit."

Nikhita recently collaborated with American R&B and soul singer-songwriter Pink Sweats for a remixed version of his popular song "At my worst", and the singer thanks her team for making this possible.

"The Pink Sweats collaboration is a big pat on the back to

both our teams for making this happen. His publishers had approached mine because they really liked this other collaboration, which I'd done with an American-Indian artiste on a song called 'Insecure'. It was a big deal when this brief came to me. I couldn't believe when my manager informed me about it. Of course, I knew the song and when the track released, I got a feedback from their team that they liked my version. I couldn't believe that I was on the same playlist with Pink Sweats and Kehlani."

Nikhita recently joined Zee TV's music reality show Indian Pro Music League (IPML). On her stint in the show, she said: "So far, the experience has been fun. It's something new because I've never done TV, so this is my first outing."

What I love about it is my teammates -- Bengal Tigers comprising Shaan da, AkritiKakar, Rituraj and Mismi. They are wonderful people and it's great to perform and ideate with them." She parts with this advice for budding singers: "It's a great time for all the budding singers out there. It's the age of the internet, where you can put your work out there and that's a great tool for this generation. So, don't underestimate yourself and make sure you put yourself out there," Nikhita suggested.

DEEPIKA SHARES MENTAL HEALTH HELPLINE CONTACTS TO DEAL WITH CRISIS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood star Deepika Padukone on Sunday shared a list of verified mental health helplines on Instagram, highlighting the significance of strong mental and emotional health in the time of surging Covid pandemic. "As millions of us (me and my family included) strive to stay afloat, let us not forget that our emotional well-being in this current crisis, is equally important! Remember, You Are Not Alone. We are in this together. And most importantly, there is HOPE! #YouAreNotAlone @tllfoundation," she wrote, along with 12 slides in varied shades of pink that contain the essential numbers.

Several Bollywood stars have been using their social media platforms to pitch in with assistance for the Covid-affected over the past few days. These include Alia Bhatt, John Abraham, Katrina Kaif, Vicky Kaushal, Taapsee Pannu and Bhumi Pednekar among others. Almost every B-Town celebrity has also been appealing on social media to encourage fans to help in whatever way possible, not to pay heed to rumours and stay safe.

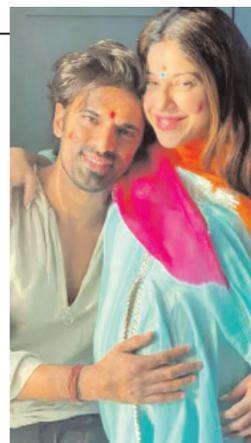
SUCHITRA PILLAI: I WANT TO EXPLORE THE COMEDY GENRE IN CINEMA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Suchitra Pillai has portrayed a strong woman in many films, TV shows and web series, and she says she would like to explore comedy, especially in films. "I want to do comedy roles in cinema because that one of the genres I did not tap into much. I used to do comedy on television and on stage. We used to do 'The Great Indian Comedy Show' with Suresh Menon, Ranvir Shorey, Vinay (Pathak), Rakesh Paul. I love doing comedy and that is why I want to explore the genre in cinema," said Suchitra. "In real life, I am quite a clown, though my on-screen image is different and that's because I mostly played those 'strong women' roles," added Suchitra, who is still recalled for her delightful role that she wished she had essayed, Suchitra replied: "I think the character that Neena Gupta played in 'Badhaai Ho' and Shradha Kapoor's character in 'Stree'. Even though 'Stree' was a horror film I was laughing all through it. I like such entertainer films in which the story has a dash of comedy." Suchitra is currently seen as a god-woman in the web series "Hello Mini 3", streaming on MX Player.



MOHIT MALIK ON BECOMING A DAD: MY WORLD HAS CHANGED



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Mohit Malik shared an Instagram picture of his newborn on Saturday. In the image, Mohit kisses the baby whose face is concealed.

"My world has changed! And you my little miracle have been the one behind this magic! Thank you to all of you who have sent your wishes and love! Ever so grateful for the positivity coming towards our little one #grateful @additemalik," he wrote.

Mohit and his wife actress Addite Shirwaikar Malik were blessed with a baby boy on Thursday. The couple announced the news on social media.

"Dear Universe, Thank you for this blessing! Thank you for these midnight cries and all that comes with it, because we truly feel lucky to welcome our little baby boy into our world of love! He's Here and He's Truly Magic From 2 to 3, Happily Ever After...Yours Truly, Parents of #BabyMalik Mohit&Addite," wrote the couple, who tied the knot in 2010 after dating for a while.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Bandagi Kalra

Salman Khan announces advance booking of 'Radhe' in UAE



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Bollywood superstar Salman Khan announced on Sunday that advance booking for his upcoming film "Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai" has started in the United Arab Emirates. The film is scheduled to release globally on the occasion of Eid, on May 13.

"#Radheki advance bookings hogayihainshuru for the UAE. Miltehai theatres mein (advance bookings for Radhe have started for the UAE. See you in theatres). Stay safe!" the actor wrote addressing his UAE fans on his verified Twitter account, @BeingSalmanKhan. Salman shared his note on the microblogging site along with a poster of the film featuring him with actress Disha Patani. Salman hits action hero mode in the photo, wearing cool shades and brandishing a gun. Although the Prabhu Deva-directed action drama will release on the big screen in many countries abroad, it is unlikely to keep its date with a theatrical release in India given the current Covid situation, which has forced closure of cinema halls. With less than a fortnight to go for the film's release, Salman fans in India will have to watch the film digitally. The film will simultaneously release on May 13 on the pay-per-view platform Zeeplex.