

absolute india

VOL. 6, ISSUE 180, BHOPAL | THURSDAY, MAY 20, 2021 ₹5 | PAGE 12

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INDIA'S VACCINATION DRIVE STUMBLING WHEN IT IS MOST CRUCIAL: REPORT

SOBBING LIVES AMIDST BLATANT STATEMENTS

The report said as India confronts a devastating Covid outbreak where thousands are dying each day, the country desperately needs to vaccinate its population as soon as possible. Yet the vaccine drive is stumbling just when it is most crucial, it said. Over the past six weeks, the number of vaccinations per day has fallen by about half, from a high of 4.2 million per day on April 2 to 2 million last Thursday.



The result has been acute shortages and supply breakdowns that have led several states to suspend altogether the vaccination drive for people younger than 45.

"didn't take us seriously when we said you cannot expand overnight", the report quoted the executive as saying. Instead of placing large advance orders, the government is "buying vaccines like monthly groceries," wrote Partha Mukhopadhyay, a senior fellow at the Center for Policy Research in Delhi, last week, as per the Washington Post report.

COVID VAX TO BE DEFERRED BY THREE MONTHS AFTER RECOVERY

The Union Health Ministry on Wednesday announced that Covid vaccination should be deferred by three months after recovery from the illness and if infected after the first dose, the second dose should be deferred by three months after clinical recovery from illness. Vaccination of Covid patients who have been given anti-SARS-2 monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma by three months from the date of discharge from the hospital, individuals who have received at least the first dose and got Covid-19 infection before completion of the dosing schedule, the second dose should be deferred by three months after clinical recovery from Covid-19 illness. Persons with any other serious general illness requiring hospitalisation or ICU care should also wait for four to eight weeks before getting the vaccine. An individual can donate blood after 14 days of either receipt of Covid vaccine or testing RT-PCR negative, if suffering from Covid-19 disease.

WITH 4,529 COVID DEATHS INDIA SETS ANOTHER GRIM RECORD

India broke its own previous record of Covid deaths in 24 hours after the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on Wednesday said the nation recorded 4,529 deaths -- the highest number of fatalities from Covid infection. There were 2,67,533 new cases reported in the same duration. On Tuesday, India recorded 2.63 lakh fresh cases, lowest since April 21. On May 7, the country had recorded its highest ever cases of 4,14,188.

- The inability to accelerate the vaccination drive in the short term means that immunisations will do little to blunt the ferocity of the current wave of infections, it said.
- Vaccinating India's more than 1.3 billion people was always going to be a monumental task. But experts say that India's present predicament is the product of miscalculations and optimistic predictions by policymakers and manufacturers, the report said.
- Meanwhile, the Indian government displayed little urgency about buying large amounts of vaccines in advance, unlike governments in the US and Europe, the report said.

DELHI HC DECLINES TO STAY COVAXIN CLINICAL TRIAL ON CHILDREN

A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh refused to pass any interim order staying the permission granted as it issued notice to the DCGI, the Ministry of Women and Child Development and others. In the petition, the petitioner has raised apprehensions that the children who would be part of the trial might suffer adverse health or mental effects due to the use of vaccine on them. The petitioner has sought criminal prosecution of the people involved in such trials or those who conduct the trial, in the event of death or "loss of peaceful and pleasant enjoyment of life" of any of the toddlers or minors who participates in the trial. The court has posted the matter for further hearing on July 15.



4.87-CR VAX DOSES TO BE AVAILABLE BY JUNE-END FOR STATES, UTS

A total of 4,87,55,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccines will be available for direct procurement by states and Union Territories (UTs) by June end. The Union Health Ministry shared the information based on inputs received from vaccine manufacturers. (That makes [1741250] Seventeen lacs, forty one thousand, two hundred and fifty doses for each state. No union territory is included in these figures.)

26 die, 49 missing in Tauktae Cyclone fury in Arabian Sea



In a gruesome tragedy, at least 26 persons on board the drifting Barge Pappaa-305 met a watery end in the stormy Arabian Sea in the aftermath of the Cyclone Tauktae, officials said here on Wednesday.

RELIEF PACKAGE OF RS 1,000 CR FOR GUJARAT

Gandhinagar: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday announced an immediate relief package of Rs 1,000 crore to Gujarat after cyclonic storm Tauktae badly hit the state on Tuesday. Following the enormous devastation caused by Tauktae on Tuesday, Prime Minister Modi arrived in his home state on Wednesday and both he and Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani took the aerial route to visit the affected districts of Bhavnagar, Amreli, Gir-Somnath and the union territory of Diu.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Their bodies have been brought to Mumbai by Indian Navy ships which had gone on rescue missions since the past 48 hours. The Western Naval Command confirmed the deaths of the 26 persons even as efforts are underway to trace another 49-odd missing in the still choppy seas near the Bombay High Fields, around 175 kms off Mumbai. INS Kochi has brought the bodies to the Mumbai harbour, along with many of the others rescued. As Cyclone Tauktae ravaged the Maharashtra coastal areas and whirled towards Gujarat, the ill-fated barge in the offshore development area of Bombay High Field had sunk late on Monday night. A total of 261 persons were on board Pappaa-305, an accommodation barge. The Indian Navy has so far saved 188 persons from that Barge, besides many more from other stranded or drifting vessels in one of the biggest search and rescue operations mounted under extreme weather conditions. Rescue operations are still continuing in the Arabian Sea as the weather conditions improved since this morning.

India tells WhatsApp to roll back privacy policy, firm defends it

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With the Indian government once again directing WhatsApp to withdraw its controversial user privacy policy that came into effect from May 15, the Facebook-owned platform with over 400 million users in the country on Wednesday defended its position, saying that it continues to engage with the government to resolve the issue. According to official sources, in its fresh notice to the company, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has said that there are various options available for the messaging platform under Indian law. The government told WhatsApp to respond to its concerns by May 25. Noting that many Indian users depend on WhatsApp for communicating on a daily basis, the ministry said that it is irresponsible for WhatsApp to leverage its position in the Indian market to impose unfair terms and conditions.

As per the ministry, the changes to WhatsApp privacy policy and the manner of introducing the changes undermines the



sacrosanct values of informational privacy, data security and user choice and harms the rights and interests of Indian citizens. Reacting to the MeitY notice, a WhatsApp spokesperson said that the company reaffirms what "we said before that this update does not impact the privacy of personal messages for anyone. Our goal is to provide information about new options we are building that people will have, to message a business on WhatsApp, in the future. No accounts were deleted on May 15 because of this update and no one in India lost functionality of WhatsApp either. We will follow up with reminders to people over the next several weeks," the company added.

DAP FERTILISER SUBSIDY HIKED BY 140%

New Delhi: In a decision made in the farmers' interests, the Narendra Modi-led Central government on Wednesday announced an increase in the subsidy for Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) fertiliser by 140 per cent, from Rs 500 per bag to Rs 1,200 per bag. Last year, the actual price of DAP was Rs 1,700 per bag for which the Central government was giving a subsidy of Rs 500 per bag. So the companies were selling the fertiliser to farmers for Rs 1,200 per bag. Recently, the international prices of phosphoric acid and ammonia used in DAP have gone up by 60 to 70 per cent. So the actual price of a DAP bag is now Rs 2,400, which could be sold by fertiliser companies at Rs 1,900 after considering the subsidy of Rs 500. With Wednesday's decision, farmers will continue to get a DAP bag for Rs 1,200.

Narada case:

No relief for TMC heavyweights

Team Absolute | Kolkata

The high-profile Narada sting case, in which four heavyweights of the ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal were arrested by the CBI on Monday, spilled over to Thursday as the hearing of the CBI plea to transfer the case to any other state remained inconclusive in the Calcutta High Court on Wednesday. The two-member HC division bench will also hear a review petition filed by the four arrested Trinamool leaders to recall the high court stay order on the bail granted to them by a special CBI court on Monday. The cases will come up for hearing at 2



p.m. on Thursday. The state witnessed high drama on Monday morning after CBI sleuths arrested two Trinamool Congress ministers -- Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee -- along with present MLA Madan Mitra and former Kolkata Municipal Corporation Mayor Sovon Chattopadhyay in connection with the 2016 Narada sting tapes case, in which several politicians and a high-ranked police officer were allegedly found accepting cash for providing unofficial favours to the company. The lower court granted interim bail to all the four Trinamool leaders on Monday evening, the Calcutta High Court put a stay on the order late on the same night.

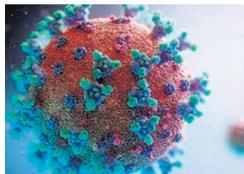
ANOTHER CONG MLA TURNS VOCAL AGAINST RAJ GOVT

Jaipur: A day after a senior MLA belonging to the Sachin Pilot camp in Rajasthan tendered his resignation, another Congress lawmaker, Ved Prakash Solanki, from the same camp turned vocal against the party-led state government, demanding that power should be decentralised and the party workers should be given more opportunities. Solanki belongs to the group of MLAs who under the leadership of Pilot had rebelled against the leadership of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot in July last year. Though Choudhary had sent his resignation letter to the Assembly Speaker on Tuesday, it is yet to be accepted. The exact reason behind his resignation is yet to be known.

New antiviral with 99.9% efficacy against Covid-19 developed

- When tested in SARS-Cov-2 infected mice the treatment with the therapy improved survival and loss of disease. Remarkably, in treated survivors, no virus could be detected in the lungs, the findings published in the journal Molecular Therapy, showed.
- Further, the researchers also showed that the nanoparticles are stable at 4 degrees Celsius for 12 months and at room temperature for greater than one month, meaning this agent could be used in low-resource settings to treat infected patients.

Traditional antivirals, which include Tamiflu, zanamivir and remdesivir, reduce symptoms and help people recover earlier.



Sydney | Agencies

An international team of scientists, from Australia and the US, has developed an experimental direct-acting antiviral therapy that can reduce viral load by 99.9 per cent and may be a new treatment against Covid-19. The new antiviral approach used gene-silencing RNA technology called siRNA (small-interfering RNA) to attack

the virus' genome directly, which stops the virus from replicating, as well as lipid nanoparticles designed at Griffith University and City of Hope to deliver the siRNA to the lungs, the critical site of infection. "Treatment with virus-specific siRNA reduces viral load by 99.9 per cent. These stealth nanoparticles can be delivered to a wide range of lung cells and silence viral genes," said co-lead

researcher Nigel McMillan, Professor at Menzies Health Institute Queensland (MHIQ) at Griffith. "This treatment is designed to work on all betacoronaviruses such as the original SARS virus (SARS-CoV-1) as well as SARS-CoV-2 and any new variants that may arise in the future because it targets ultra-conserved regions in the virus' genome," added Kevin Morris, Professor and

associate director of the Center for Gene Therapy at City of Hope. The results suggest that siRNA-nanoparticle formulations can be developed as a therapy to treat Covid-19 patients, as well as used for future coronavirus infections by targeting the virus' genome directly. "These nanoparticles are scalable and relatively cost-effective to produce in bulk," Morris said.



GOVT HAS REDUCED ITS REPUTATION BESIDES FARMERS' INCOME: RAHUL

Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday took a swipe at the Narendra Modi government over the hike in the prices of diesel and fertilizers saying it has "reduced" its reputation besides reducing the income of farmers.

Team Absolute | New Delh

In a tweet in Hindi, Rahul Gandhi said, "What did Modi government increase? GST and petrol diesel fertilizer prices, income of his friends and atrocity on the farmers during the pandemic. What it reduced -- agricultural subsidy, farmer's income and the reputation of the central government." He attached a news report citing the increase in the prices of diesel and fertilizers.

Earlier in the day, Congress spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala slammed the government saying the DNA of the BJP government is anti-farmer and the price rise



will lead to an additional burden of Rs 20,000 crore on the farmers.

Addressing a press conference here virtually Surjewala said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP government have decided to ruin the farming sector of the country. In reality, the BJP government has proved to be the enemy of the farmers." He said that it seems that the Modi government wants to enslave the 62 crore farmers of the country.

On Tuesday, NCP chief Sharad Pawar had also written to Union Minister DV Sadanand Gowda over the increase in the price of fertilizers and demanded that the government immediately review its decision.

Corona infected woman allegedly gang raped in Patna hospital, dies

Patna | Agencies

A 45-year-old Covid infected woman, who was allegedly gang raped by three employees of a private hospital in Patna, died on Wednesday.

The deceased woman's daughter claimed that her mother was admitted to the Paras HMRI Hospital in Patna on May 15. "My mother was sexually assaulted by three persons inside the hospital ICU on May 16. She had informed me about the incident. Since then her health condition deteriorated. I spoke to my relatives and the women's wing of the Jan Adhikar Party (JAP) about the incident," the deceased woman's daughter said. "In the meanwhile, the hospital administration put her on ventilator support and took my signature on a form. The doctors said that her health had deteriorated and



if she was not shifted to a ventilator, it would be life-threatening for her," she said.

M.L. Khan, the Duty Magistrate of Patna, said: "We have received a complaint from the deceased's person's daughter against the hospital administration. The names of the accused are not mentioned in her complaint. We have sent the body for post-mortem to ascertain if there was sexual assault. The hospital administration has cited corona infection as the cause of her death. Further investigation is on." Meanwhile, P.D. Gupta from the hospital

management team released a detailed written statement later on Wednesday, which refuted the rape charge.

According to the statement, "The patient was admitted to the Covid ICU of our hospital on May 15, with symptoms of Covid. On May 16 evening, the patient had become restless and was not maintaining proper saturation on high flow oxygen. The patient after being put on ventilation did not show signs of recovery and her vitals and other parameters kept deteriorating.

Plea moved in SC seeking direction to impose President's Rule in WB

Team Absolute | New Delh

A plea has been moved in the Supreme Court urging it to issue directions to the Union government to impose President's rule in West Bengal.

In his plea, advocate Ghanshyam Upadhyay pleaded for setting up a Special Investigation Team to probe killings of the BJP supporters after May 2. "The Petitioner also prays for direction to the Respondent No.4 to invoke Article 355 of the Constitution of India for the State of West Bengal and advise the President to issue a Proclamation under Article 356(1) of the Constitution of India for the State of West Bengal", said the plea, seeking imposition of President's rule in West Bengal.

The plea argued that there was abdication of responsibility by the state government in protecting the lives and



properties of the people, and more particularly those who have voted for the rival party in the 2021 elections. The plea contended that there is

growing tendency by certain political parties to impose party dictatorship after coming to power that needs to be nipped in the bud.

CACHE OF WEAPONS RECOVERED IN J&K

Jammu: The police and the army in a joint operation recovered a cache of weapons, including two pistols, from a forested area in the Bafliaz region in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said on Wednesday.

The army said the operation was carried out based on a specific input. "In a well coord Jt Ops with specific inputs, #RashtriyaRifles Bn @Whiteknight_IA @NorthernComd_IA & @JmukmrPolice recovered cache of arms incl 02 Pistols & amn in Sauni forest, #Bafliaz #Poonch. This foiled planning of targetting SF on NH 144A," a tweet by the army stated.

Undertrial prisoner flees from police custody in Bihar

Patna | Agencies

An undertrial prisoner escaped from police custody in Bihar's Araria district on Wednesday by jumping into a tunnel drain.

The incident occurred in the town police station area in Araria district, and the local police are using an earth mover machine (JCB) in search of the accused. The undertrial prisoner has been identified as Arshad Khan, son of Shahanshah Khan, a native of Kharaiya Basti village in Araria district. He was in custody on charges of bike theft.

Sources said that Khan knew the geography of the entire area well, which might have helped him escape from police custody.

According to an official of the town police station, the undertrial prisoners are taken to the district court for their hearings in a jail van. The accused probably seized the opportunity and jumped out of the jail van when it neared a speed-breaker. The police personnel



present in the van chased Khan before he jumped into a drain.

The drain is very deep and stretches for almost 3 km from the Ma Kali temple to the Babaji Kutiya. The police believe that the prisoner may be still hiding in

the drain, while local residents said that some people had fallen into it before and managed to come out unhurt.

"We have used an earth mover machine in search of the accused," said Pushkar Kumar, SDPO, Araria.

Muslim driver allegedly tortured, told to go to Pak by cops in Hyd



Hyderabad | Agencies

A Muslim driver was allegedly tortured by traffic police personnel at a police station in Shamshabad near the Hyderabad Airport on the outskirts of the city.

Mohammed Subhan, a DCM driver, alleged on Wednesday that he was physically tortured at the police station in Shamshabad where was kept under custody for three days.

Showing the injury marks all over his body, Subhan

said a traffic police officer used abusive language and also asked him to go to Pakistan.

Subhan, who was let off by the police at the intervention of Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi, said a traffic policeman had clicked a picture of his vehicle when he was driving through the vegetable market in Shamshabad. He got down from his vehicle and requested the policeman to delete the picture and not slap a fine on him in view of the lockdown.

The driver alleged that the policeman then abused and slapped him. "I then held him by his collar. Meanwhile, another traffic policeman came there, and they dragged me to the police station," he said. Subhan said he was kept in the traffic police section on the first floor of the police station where he was tortured.

3 KILLED, 2 INJURED AS TRUCK HITS JEEP IN UP



Pratapgarh : Three people were killed and two others injured when a truck collided with a jeep near Lilapur Bazar on the Lucknow-Varanasi highway.

The deceased, identified as Chandrika Prasad Yadav, 68, Kapil Dev Yadav, 33, and Suresh Chandra Yadav, 38, died on the spot in the accident that took place late on Tuesday night. Superintendent of Police (SP) Aakash Tomar said Jai Prakash Yadav, 22, and Anugraha Narayan Yadav, 32, were seriously injured and have been admitted to a hospital in Prayagraj. All the victims belong to Sarai Mamrej police station area in Prayagraj. The SP said that the truck driver fled leaving the vehicle behind. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem, he added.

NSUI files FIR against Raman Singh, Sambit Patra over alleged toolkit in Chhattisgarh

RAIPUR | Agencies

A day after the Congress approached the Delhi Police to file a case against BJP national President J.P. Nadda, Smriti Irani and several others over the alleged fake 'toolkit', the National Students Union of India (NSUI) on Wednesday lodged an FIR against former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh and party spokesperson Sambit Patra here.

NSUI National President Neeraj Kundan in a tweet said, "An FIR has been lodged by NSUI Chhattisgarh against the false propaganda of Sambit Patra and Raman Singh." He said, "Even in this time of pandemic, the BJP is catering to its only aim: 'Save (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's image by spreading lies, but the BJP is ok if the nation dies. They are only



bothered about their 'fake image'." He also shared the copy of the FIR registered at the Civil Line police station at Raipur. The FIR has been lodged under the sections of 404, 505 (1) (b), 505 (1) (C), 469 and 188 of the Indian Penal Code.

In its complaint, the NSUI accused the BJP of trying to create communal disharmony and civil unrest in the country by sharing the fake 'toolkit' of the Congress.

On Tuesday, a war of words erupted between the Congress and the BJP after Patra shared an alleged toolkit of the Congress accusing it of trying to defame the image of the Prime Minister.

The Congress then hit back and approached the Delhi Police with a complaint to register an FIR against Nadda, Irani, B.L. Santosh and Patra and others for allegedly sharing the fake 'toolkit'.

Global record, India conducts 20L Covid tests in one day

Team Absolute | New Delh

India has set another landmark by conducting highest ever -- 20 lakh tests in a single day -- a global record, Union Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

The achievement was registered at a time when the daily Covid recoveries outnumbered daily new cases for the sixth consecutive day.

"More than 20 lakh tests were conducted in the last 24 hours (the highest ever conducted in a single day in India), while the daily positivity rate has declined to 13.31 per cent," the Ministry said.

"20.08 lakh tests conducted in the last 24 hours in the country is also a global record."

Over 32 crore tests have been conducted so far across the country since the pandemic began.

Meanwhile, India's daily recoveries outnumbered daily new cases for the sixth consecutive day with 3,89,851 recoveries registered in the last 24 hours.

India's cumulative recoveries have reached



2,19,86,363 on Wednesday, and the National Recovery Rate has grown further to touch 86.23 per cent. Ten states account for 74.94 per cent of the new recoveries with Karnataka on top with

58,395 cases followed by Maharashtra (52,898), Kerala (45,926), Rajasthan (25,160), Tamil Nadu (21,362), Andhra Pradesh (21,274), Uttar Pradesh (21,108), West Bengal (19,050), Haryana (14,897) and Chandigarh (12,098). Continuing the positive trend, India records less than 3 lakh new cases for three consecutive days, and 2,67,334 new cases were registered in the last 24 hours.

Ten states reported 74.46 per cent of the new cases in the last 24 hours. Tamil Nadu has reported the highest daily new cases at 33,059, followed by Kerala with 31,337 new cases.

On the other front, India's total Active Caseload has decreased to 32,26,719 on Wednesday. A net decline of 1,27,046 is witnessed in the last 24 hours. It now comprises 12.66 per cent of the country's total positive cases. Eight states -- Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal -- cumulatively account for 69.02 per cent of India's total active cases.

139 inmates in Gopalganj jail infected with Covid-19

Gopalganj (Bihar) | Agencies

There may be a slight decline in Covid-19 cases reported in Bihar but as many as 139 prisoners have tested positive for the infection at Gopalganj jail.

Gopalganj jail Superintendent Amit Kumar said 86 prisoners were confirmed to have tested positive for Covid-19 on Monday while on Tuesday, another 53 inmates were reported to be infected. He said all Covid-positive prisoners have been shifted to isolation wards in the jail premises and their treatment is underway. At present, 932 prisoners are lodged in Gopalganj jail.

The jail superintendent informed that if there is a need to send a prisoner to



the hospital he will be sent to the Covid centre located in the district education training centre in Thawe block. He said vaccination has also been started to protect the

prisoners from the infection. The first vaccine dose has been given to 480 prisoners which include 452 male and 28 females.



NO RELAXATION IN CORONA CURFEW TILL MAY 31, REOPENING ONLY AFTER JUNE 1: CM

There wouldn't be any relaxation in the 'janata curfew' till month-end, nor will there be extensions in restrictions, the chief minister said citing constraints in agriculture and other sectors.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A day after covid-19 cases slumped below 6,000 in Madhya Pradesh after nearly five weeks, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday said the 'Corona Curfew' restrictions would not be relaxed till May 31, adding that unlock will be possible only after June 1.

Addressing a covid-19 review meeting in Ujjain, Chouhan set targets for block and gram panchayat crisis management committees to ensure that the states are covid-19 free by May 31. "We can handle one odd case, but broadly we should try to contain the virus spread by May 31," he said.

There wouldn't be any relaxation in the 'janata curfew' till month-end, nor will there be extensions in restrictions, the chief minister said citing constraints in agriculture and other sectors. "Activities can't be stalled indefinitely as we have to carry on with life, he added.

Over 52 districts are under covid-19 curfew for different durations between May 24 and May 31.

The state government's 15-day 'Kill Corona' campaign, which focuses on prevention, testing and treatment facilities, will continue in full rigour, especially in rural areas even in June. The chief minister warned of the virus spread in rural areas. After failing to identify the symptoms, villagers are availing treatment from local untrained or semi-trained physicians leading them to land up in city hospitals in critical or worsened conditions, he said.

He also said the state would not halt covid testing despite the decrease in infection cases. "We have reached 73,000 daily tests in the state, which is ten times more than the daily positive cases and we will continue to do so. If required, mobile vans will be sent to take random samples in public places," he instructed officers.

Marriages and other functions could be allowed in June, Chouhan hinted while urging citizen to delay the events until then.

However, he requested citizens not to take the situation lightly and follow advice and regulations post the June relaxations.

Madhya Pradesh has seen a drop in covid cases,



with the state reporting 5,412 on Tuesday and 70 deaths, taking its tally to 7,42,718 and toll to 7,139. The state has 6,52,612 recovered cases and 82,967 active cases.

Madhya Pradesh has reported 573 black fungus infection cases, said Chief Minister Chouhan adding that the state will receive the anti-fungal injections allocated by the Centre by tomorrow. The injections, which the CM said will be rationally distributed among the districts, comes as the state reels under the growing number of fungal infections cases in the last week.

MP gets one hundred more oxygen concentrators

Sarang said that the government is continuously making efforts for the treatment of Mucormycosis (Black Fungus). Free treatment has been arranged in five medical colleges. A task force has also been formed for the treatment of black fungus. A campaign is being carried out to identify the primary symptoms of Mucormycosis and provide treatment over the next 15 days.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang was present at the drug store located at Malviya Bhawan, Tulsī Nagar on Wednesday at

the time of receipt of 100 oxygen concentrators. These concentrators obtained in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) will be distributed in different districts of the state.

Sarang informed that 4000 oxygen concentrators have been received through WHO by different states. These concentrators will prove to be useful for the treatment of patients. He said that the government is constantly trying to prevent corona. The result of the same is that there has been a decrease in the positivity rate and increase in the recovery rate in the state. Due to the self-discipline of the people, the place of the state has come down as regards the figures of Corona. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also praised the efforts of social organisations and volunteer workers.

Sarang said that the government is continuously making efforts for the treatment of Mucormycosis (Black Fungus). Free treatment has



been arranged in five medical colleges. A task force has also been formed for the treatment of black fungus. A campaign is being carried out to identify the primary symptoms of Mucormycosis and provide treatment over the next 15 days. Talks are in progress with the ENT Association and private sector to identify the nasal endoscopy free of cost. A detailed framework is being prepared for its treatment with all deans and ENT surgeons. Along with this, proper arrangements of medicines are also being made for its treatment.

Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr. Prabhakar Tiwari, WHO State Team Leader Dr. Abhishek Jain and Dr. Jatin Thakkar were present on the occasion.

Woman Thrashed By Cops Over Mask

The woman and her daughter were going out to buy groceries amid the Covid restrictions when the incident that was shot on mobile video happened. In visuals shared on social media, the woman is seen being thrashed by two policemen while she tries to free herself. She falls on the road several times and is seen struggling to get up.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A woman was kicked, punched and dragged on a road by a group of police personnel in Madhya Pradesh's Sagar district for not wearing a mask amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The woman and her daughter were going out to buy groceries amid the Covid restric-

tions when the incident that was shot on mobile video happened.

In visuals shared on social media, the woman is seen being thrashed by two policemen while she tries to free herself. She falls on the road several times and is seen struggling to get up.

A woman police officer is also seen trying to take her away in an official vehicle, but she refuses to get inside, while her daughter tries to pull her back. Unable to take the woman away, the police officer drags her by her hair while she screams on the road.

This is not the first time visuals of police personnel thrashing people while enforcing Covid safety rules have been reported.

An incident of appalling cruelty in Madhya Pradesh had also taken place on April 6, when a man in Indore was severely beaten up by two policemen, allegedly for not wearing his mask properly.

Over the last month, there have been several reports of policemen in parts of the country handing out corporal punishment on the roads when people were found without a mask.

Rats Nibble Away Parts Of Baby's Foot In Indore Hospital Nursery

At 3 am on Monday, my wife went to feed the child and got to know of the rats nibbling the child's toe and heel. My baby didn't have his toe," Daima said. The hospital has placed a nurse under suspension and terminated the services of two employees of a cleaning and security firm over the incident.

Team Absolute | Indore

The parents of a newborn in Indore were in for a shock earlier this week when they found blood oozing from their baby's foot



and realised that its toe and heel had been gnawed away by rats.

The 19-day-old, born premature to Priyanka and Kishan Daima, was under care in the city's government-run Maharaja Yeshwantrao Hospital's nursery ward.

"At 3 am on Monday, my wife went

to feed the child and got to know of the rats nibbling the child's toe and heel. My baby didn't have his toe," Daima said.

"Priyanka herself informed the hospital staff and only then my baby got the dressing. Where were they at the time of incident?"

After avoiding the matter initially,

the hospital authorities admitted that a nurse had been placed under suspension and services of two employees of a cleaning and security firm terminated on Tuesday following the incident. The firm has also been fined ₹ 1 lakh.

Dr PS Thakur, Superintendent of the hospital, said a three-member panel had been constituted to investigate the matter. They will submit the report in three days. "After administering first aid, the baby is now being treated by specialist doctors. The baby's condition is stable now."

Earlier in the day, taking cognisance of media reports about the incident, the Madhya Pradesh Human Rights Commission chairman, Justice Narendra Kumar Jain, directed Indore's divisional commissioner and the joint director of the health department to submit a report within the next 15 days.

MADHYA PRADESH MODEL APPRECIATED AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Bhopal: MP sets a unique example by breaking the chain of corona infection with public participation

Madhya Pradesh has once again emerged as a model in the entire country with the results of campaigns and innovations conducted with public participation by the state government to break the Corona transition chain. The strategy adopted in Madhya Pradesh to fight an invisible enemy like Corona has been appreciated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other provinces have also been asked to follow it. In today's situation, the situation of corona infection has been controlled to a great extent by the Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the innovations being made in Madhya Pradesh for the control and arrangements of Corona and coordinated efforts with public support in the state. The corona positivity rate of Madhya Pradesh, which was 20.3 percent on May 1, has come down to 6.96 percent on May 19. According to the number of active cases, Madhya Pradesh was at number 7 in the country on 21 April. With better improvement in the situation today, the state has come at number 15.

Chouhan said that the participation of all classes has been in the fight that was fought against a deadly disease like corona. This work could not be done at the governance level alone. Keeping this in mind, many such programs and innovations were done in which every section of the society played an active role. As a result of this, we have been successful in breaking the chain of transition in the state. Social service organizations also came forward to cooperate with self-motivation in the treatment arrangements continuously increased by the state government. In many districts, with the help of social institutions, all the facilities were established as well-equipped Covid Care Centers. Along with this, life-giving equipment like oxygen concentrators were also made available in many districts.

It is a matter of happiness for Madhya Pradesh that under the able leadership of Chouhan, the people of the state are collectively working shoulder to shoulder with the state government during the terrible calamity like Corona. The 'Main Bhi Corona Volunteers' campaign took the form of a mass movement in the state. Over a million Corona Volunteers came forward to work with self-motivation. The responsibility with which he has performed in the rural areas as well as in the rural areas is commendable. Important works such as giving a message of prevention of corona infection in the village, informing and motivating the villagers about the importance of vaccine, providing food to the needy, cooperating in the treatment of patients and following the corona guide line in collaboration with the district administration were done which are still in progress. Most of the gram panchayats of the state took a decision on self-motivation and imposed public curfew in all the villages. Due to this important determination taken by the villagers, there are many villages in which Corona could not enter.

MP sees 5,065 fresh Covid-19 cases, 10,337 recoveries; 88 die

Madhya Pradesh reported 5,065 new coronavirus positive cases and 88 fatalities, taking the tally to 7,47,783 and the toll to 7,227, the state health department said.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday reported 5,065 new coronavirus positive cases and 88 fatalities, taking the tally to 7,47,783 and the toll to 7,227, the state health department said.

A total of 10,337 patients were discharged from hospitals in the last 24 hours, taking the count of recoveries in Madhya Pradesh so far to 6,62,949, the department said.

The state is now left with 77,607 active cases. With 1,153 new cases, Indore's



caseload went up to 1,41,600 while that of Bhopal rose by 653 to 1,15,179.

With nine deaths in the day, Bhopal's count of fatalities went up to 870. Indore saw seven fatalities, taking the cumulative toll to 1,281. Indore is now left with 12,426 active cases and Bhopal 11,763.

With 72,756 new tests, the total number of samples tested for coronavirus so

far in Madhya Pradesh has crossed 89.92 lakh, the department said.

Madhya Pradesh recorded 1,84,456 cases and 1,611 fatalities so far this month. Coronavirus figures in MP are as follows: Total cases 7,47,783, new cases 5,065, death toll 7,227, recovered 6,62,949, active cases 77,607, number of tests so far 89,92,742.

Farmers block Tomar's convoy over new farm laws

Tomar spoke to the farmers while being seated in his car, after which the group was removed by the police and the convoy moved ahead, he said. One of the protesters, Anil Singh, claimed they had demanded time from the administration to meet Tomar but permission was denied.

Team Absolute | Sheopur

A group of farmers blocked the convoy of Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar in Sheopur in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday demanding that the Centre scrap three new agri marketing laws. Tomar was on his way to the district hospital when a dozen farmers blocked his vehicle, an official said. Tomar spoke to the farmers while being seated in his car, after which the group was removed by the police

and the convoy moved ahead, he said. One of the protesters, Anil Singh, claimed they had demanded time from the administration to meet Tomar but permission was denied. Talking to reporters later, Tomar said 11 rounds of talks had been conducted with farm groups over the three new laws but some of those opposing them "don't want to accept the interests of farmers, and we do not have a solution for this attitude". Some sections have been opposing the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020, claiming these are aimed at giving the corporates and private firms a stranglehold on the sector.

FIGHT AGAINST CORONA IN A DECISIVE PHASE AND WE WILL WIN- CM CHOUHAN

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that we have reached the decisive phase of winning the battle against Corona in Madhya Pradesh. Positivity rate is steadily declining in the state. The recovery rate is on the rise. There is adequate arrangement of oxygen beds, ICU beds and Remdesivir injections. Black fungus disease will also be treated free of charge. Chouhan said that the fight against black fungus will be given the form of a mass movement. We all have to fight it unitedly.

Chouhan was addressing members of all the districts of Ujjain division and tehsil level Crisis Management Groups through webcasting from Ujjain district on Wednesday. The Chief Minister said that post-Covid Care Centers will be set up in every district. At present, many cases of black fungus and blood clots have occurred after Corona infection. Now we have to tackle this new crisis as well. The Chief Minister asked the Collectors and Crisis Management Group members of all the districts to make and send a list of orphaned children who had lost their parents to Corona infection, so that such children can be given an amount of Rs five thousand every month.

The Chief Minister said that the government will make provision of free ration and free education for these children. On this occasion, the Chief Minister announced to open a



medical college in Ujjain district soon. He said that recently funds have been transferred to the accounts of rural street vendors. Soon, funds will also be transferred to the accounts of construction workers and self-help groups. The Chief Minister told the collectors of all the districts and members of the Crisis Management Group that the time to come will prove to be decisive in the battle against Corona, so strict adherence to public curfew must continue for the next 10 to 12 days. No relaxation should be made in Janata curfew till May 31. Chouhan said that the state government stands firmly with its employees who are battling against Corona while working in the field. Whether it is a contract worker or a regular employee, ASHA or Anganwadi worker, outsourced employee or Kotwar, if any of them dies, his family will be given a compassionate appointment on priority

basis. Praising the innovation by Mandsaur district, the Chief Minister directed the collectors of all the districts to visit the homes of children orphaned by Corona. It may be noted that in Mandsaur district, the administrative officials are visiting the homes of orphans personally to enquire about their well being. The Chief Minister asked all the group members to make every effort at their level to make Panchayats Corona-free. After Corona free Panchayat, there should be Corona free Wards, Corona free Blocks and Tehsils also. The number of Corona cases in the next 11 days should become zero. Make a special action plan and prevent infection under all circumstances. The Chief Minister said that we should not rest in peace and assume that the Corona has come to an end. Corona is a deadly virus that can strike anyone at any time. Experts have expressed the possibility that a third wave of Corona is inevitable. The Chief Minister said that all collectors and group members should make special preparations to deal with the third wave of Corona. Special wards should be made for children, fully equipped with ICU beds, oxygen beds, medicines and other resources. Praising the Kill Corona campaign launched in all the districts, the Chief Minister said that through this campaign, patients of cold, cough and fever are being identified in every house and infection is being prevented to a great extent by providing medical kits. The Kill Corona campaign should continue the entire population should be covered in it.



NO REPLY ON VAX SUPPLY FOR 18-44, 350 CENTRES TO SHUT: DELHI GOVT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Around 350 centres set up for administration of anti-Covid vaccines will be temporarily shut down after two days as the Delhi government was yet to receive assurances regarding further supply of vaccines, either from the Centre or the manufacturers, AAP leader Atishi said on Wednesday.

Giving daily vaccination details, she told the media that with Covaxin already out of stock for the 18-44 age group, Covishield stocks will only last another three days.

She added that for those above 45 and healthcare/frontline workers, there is one day stock of Covaxin, and three days of Covishield.

"Delhi government will have to temporarily shut down nearly 350 centres which are administering Covishield after two days from now." There has been no intimation from the Central government of any new supply for the 18-44 age group as of yet, neither from SII nor Bharat Biotech," Atishi, who is the MLA from Kalkaji, added. She also said administration of second doses to people has reduced because of the increased gap of 12-16 weeks between the first and second dose of Covishield. "After a few weeks, the administration of second doses might pick up pace. Hence, the total doses administered has increased to more than 48,00,705 doses. Out of these, nearly 10,94,619 people have received both their shots and are fully vaccinated," Atishi said.



Delhi reports 3,846 new Covid cases, lowest since April 5

With the city under lockdown since April 19, Delhi's overall Covid situation has improved considerably in the last few weeks. This is the first time since April 5 that the daily tally of new cases in the national capital dropped below the 4,000-mark.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi on Wednesday reported 3,846 new Covid-19 cases, the lowest single-day spike since April 5, when the city had logged 3,548 new infections. The latest additions took the city's overall Covid tally to 1,40,6719, according to the health bulletin issued by the Delhi government.

The national capital's daily positivity rate also dropped below the 6 per cent-mark to 5.78 per cent on Wednesday.

With the city under lockdown since April 19, Delhi's overall Covid situation has improved considerably in the last few weeks. This is the first time since April 5 that the daily tally of new cases in the national capital dropped below the 4,000-mark.

The tally of active cases has also come

down below the 50,000-mark to 45,047, while the number of patients under home isolation has reduced to 27,112. Meanwhile, with 9,427 people recovering from the disease on Wednesday, the overall recoveries in the national capital mounted to 13,39,326.

The city had reported 4,482 new coronavirus cases on Tuesday, 4,524 on Monday, 6,456 on Sunday, 6,430 on Saturday, 8,506 on Friday and 10,489 on Thursday.

The daily deaths due to Covid-19 also witnessed a significant drop in the last two days with the city reporting 235 fatalities on Wednesday, taking its overall death toll to 22,346. Delhi had reported 265 deaths on Tuesday, 340 on Monday, 262 on Sunday, 337 on Saturday, 289 on Friday and 308 fatalities on Thursday.

'Tell us about your stock, supply': Delhi HC asks Centre, Delhi govt on medicine for black fungus

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday queried the Centre and the Delhi government on the shortage of medicine required in the treatment of black fungus, affecting people recovering from Covid-19.

A bench comprising Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said: "Tomorrow you tell us about your stock, your supply and how you are distributing it and what is the rationale behind it."

Advocate Rakesh Malhotra raised the issue of shortage of medicine Amphotericin B, for treating mucormycosis (black fungus). He cited a recent order passed by the Delhi government concerning requisitioning of the drug for the ailment. According to the government mucormycosis or black fungus is a complication caused by a fungal infection.

The High Court asked the government to bring on record issues associated with the supply of medicine, especially when they are manufactured locally. The court added the virus has raised its "ugly head" once again and the health crisis is unprecedented. Senior advocate Rahul Mehra, appearing for Delhi government, cited the shortage of the medicine and added that it is worse than issues associated with the availability of Remdesivir. He added that the state government has req-



uisioned the drug from the Centre.

Malhotra submitted there is no stock, they can't give buffer stock, and also added that all other states are facing this shortage of medicine. He argued the Centre supplies this medicine to the states by rationing them.

The court asked both Centre and Delhi government to take instructions on the issue and inform it on Thursday. The court noted, "You will have to elaborate what is the bottleneck. We must address this. This should not be the case of artificial shortage as it was being manufactured earlier."

Mehra submitted that the demand for medicine has increased suddenly.

The High Court, on its own, revived a disposed of petition filed by Malhotra in connection with the testing for Covid-19 and infrastructure. The court also noted that it is evident the health care infrastructure is at the stage of imminent collapse in the backdrop of ongoing second wave of the pandemic.

Politicians, bureaucrats find it difficult to accept their failure, says Delhi HC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday observed that it is "very difficult for politicians and bureaucrats to accept their failure" as it expressed concern over the condition of subordinate judiciary's judicial officers who, due to their nature of duties, are at risk amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The court insisted that prima facie judicial officers should be considered equivalent to frontline workers and asked the government to consider this aspect.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh noted that three judicial officers have already died due to the viral infection. "The judicial officers' exposure is different and you should take steps for good reasons. You examine it and then decide," it told the government.

The bench also expressed dissatisfaction with Delhi government's submission that it had earlier passed an order by which the District Judges



were supposed to coordinate with District Magistrates to address judicial officers' and their families' concerns. The government added that nodal officers were appointed in each district. The Delhi Judicial Services Association has filed an application, raising certain issues including that facilities on ground are "an eyewash". The counsel added that it may submit a representation to the Delhi Chief Secretary, who could convene a virtual meeting with

the members of the association.

The bench observed: "They (judicial officers) are here because it didn't bring about any satisfactory results. It is very difficult for bureaucracy and political leaders to accept their failure or inability. This is not in their veins."

"You don't expect a judge to discharge his duty when his son, daughter, wife or any other family member is seriously ill," it told the government's counsel, insisting that the

government should act on its own and should not wait for orders.

Senior advocate Rahul Mehra, representing the Delhi government, submitted the government would consider whether judicial officers can be declared as "frontline workers".

Senior advocate Dayan Krishnan, representing the association, submitted the district nodal officers' facility is not working in case of emergency and suggested a centralised nodal officer of the Delhi government. He added that so far 852 judicial officers and staff have been infected with the virus.

Posting the matter for further hearing on May 27, the court said: "Let the Delhi government address these issues and a status report be filed."

The application by the association was filed in a pending petition by a group of lawyers seeking a coordination mechanism for judicial officers, in connection with their medical treatment, against the backdrop of the pandemic.

Delhi govt to set up task force to save children from third wave

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi government has decided to set up a special task force to protect children from a possible third wave of Covid-19. A meeting chaired by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in this regard was held at the Delhi Secretariat on Wednesday.

According to an estimate, during the third wave, about 40,000 hospital beds and 10,000 ICU beds may be needed. The meeting deliberated on the maximum number of cases likely in the third wave. The task force will include senior IAS officers, apart from experts from different fields.

This task force will look at other aspects as well including the impact of Covid on children, how to mitigate that effect and how to protect children from this, and take appropriate decisions accordingly.

The management of oxygen and medicines also came up for discussion



in great detail in the meeting. It was decided that oxygen and medicines would have to be arranged in advance. This will be done on a priority basis.

It was emphasized that under no circumstances should there be black mar-

keting of oxygen or any other drugs required for the treatment of Covid-19. A committee comprising senior officers will be set up to monitor this.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said that if the number of hospital beds is increased, then oxygen should also be arranged in the same capacity. "We have to be ready for this. If the demand for oxygen increases suddenly, it has to be met," he said. The meeting decided that the Delhi government will purchase oxygen tankers and cylinders in advance to avoid the problem of transporting them to different hospitals.

The CM also directed that the oxygen plants being set up in various hospitals should be completed on time and an oxygen storage system should be ensured so that if the need arises the situation can be brought under control quickly. According to the medical experts, a third wave of Covid is expected, which can also have an effect on children.

4 BOOTLEGGERS HELD IN DELHI, INCLUDING ONE WITH PRESS ID

New Delhi: The Delhi Police said on Wednesday that they have arrested four bootleggers, including one carrying a fake ID card of a prominent media house, with several bottles of liquor and beer. Atul Kumar Thakur, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South Delhi, said that on the intervening night of Tuesday-Wednesday, the police got a tip-off that few bootleggers were selling liquor at very high rates. Due to the ongoing lockdown, all liquor shops are closed in the national capital. According to the police, the accused persons used to supply liquor in their own vehicles, and would come near the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) from the South Extension side.

Gurugram deploys teams for door-to-door Covid screening in rural areas

GURUGRAM | Agencies

To identify Covid-19 patients in the rural areas of Gurugram, the district administration has set up around 164 teams to conduct door-to-door screening in each gram panchayat to identify corona patients and make people aware of the prevention measures.

Health officials said that more than 36,000 people in the rural areas will be covered by these teams which have been deployed by the district health department. Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg said, "Awareness campaigns have been increased in the rural areas of the district and the villagers are coming forward to test themselves and their acquaintances with symptoms related to Covid-19."

"The members of the field survey team at the village level include Asha workers, Anganwadi workers, school teachers, village secretary and volunteers for collecting samples. This team is going from door to door and collecting information about the family members," Garg added. He said if a person is found positive, necessary arrangements are made



for home isolation or for shifting the infected person to the isolation centre in the village.

The Deputy Commissioner said that in the second wave of the pandemic, cases are being reported from both the urban and the rural areas. "For the convenience of the villagers, isolation centers have been set up in the villages itself, where people are provided with all the necessary health facilities. For this, buildings in 164 gram panchayats of the district have been converted into isolation centers," Garg added.

Gurugram reports 1st death due to suspected black fungus; hospital issues clarification

GURUGRAM | Agencies

Max hospital, Gurugram, has issued a clarification regarding the first case of suspected death due to black fungus in Gurugram. A 28-year-old man allegedly died due to black fungus infection on May 16 at a private hospital here. The youth was identified as Vikas Sharma (28). He was admitted to Max Hospital on May 15 after recovering from Covid-19.

However, the hospital management has mentioned the cause of death as cardiac arrest and said he was also diagnosed with black fungus, according to the death summary.

In a statement given to IANS, a Max Health Care (MHC) spokesperson claimed that the victim was already in an extremely poor condition when he was brought to the hospital.

"The 29-year-old patient arrived at the emergency in a critical condition on the morning of May 15. He was bleeding from the nose, complained of nausea, headache, was disoriented and had a severely damaged right eye with loss of vision. He had been ill with Covid since April 23 and was undergoing treatment from outside." The patient was on multiple medicines including steroids which were prescribed by his treating doctor since May 5. He was thoroughly investigated which confirmed that he was infected with extensive mucormycosis (black fungus), which had extended extensively including the brain," the spokesperson told IANS.

"The family was explained the poor prognosis and informed that there was chance of 50 per cent in his condition/case, despite high end medication and multiple surgeries. The family agreed and consented for this treatment. An estimate of Rs 10 lakh was shared at the time of admission, involving heavy/high-end drugs and multiple critical surgeries." The patient underwent two surgeries the same evening and was shifted to a post-operative ICU at night and was under



heavy sedation. However, despite a multidisciplinary team effort, he succumbed to cardiac arrest," he claimed.

The patient's family members had alleged that the hospital had demanded Rs 7.21 lakh as treatment charges just for 24 hours and later the bill was settled at Rs 3.50 lakh. "The INR 7.21 lakh bill that the family received was a system generated interim bill, which included additional planned surgeries. The final bill was prepared after the unfortunate death of the patient, which was of INR 3.95L and was presented to the patient's attendants for final settlement," he said. "We strongly deny any allegations by the family/relatives that there was any excessive billing. As a

common practice, system-generated interim bills are shared with patient's attendants on a daily basis, which are always revised at the time the final bill is prepared," the hospital statement said further. Earlier, The deceased's family members said that Vikas had developed Covid symptoms on April 25 and he was admitted to a Rewari based private hospital and after three days of treatment he was discharged from the hospital and was in home isolation and later he was cured of Covid-19. The family said eventually on May 14 Vikas' health started deteriorating and he lost his voice and vision and even black spots were visible on his face. Thereafter, the family rushed him to a private hospital where several tests were conducted and all reports were normal but later on May 15, Vikas developed breathing problems and he was again taken to a private hospital where he was referred to the Artimis hospital and due to non availability of beds he was admitted to Max hospital. There at the hospital the management had demanded Rs 15 lakh as treatment charges but finally the hospital agreed to diagnose the patient for Rs 10.40 lakh and handed over the estimate to us. We had even submitted Rs 2.50 lakh as advance and Rs 1 lakh was paid via credit card," a family member said. The family alleged that they suspected that Vikas had died on Saturday (May 15) night but neither doctors nor hospital staff informed them. On Sunday (May 16) morning the doctors declared him dead. "Just for 24 hours of treatment the hospital handed over a bill of Rs 7.21 lakh and claimed that they had performed nose and throat surgery of the patient. Later when we protested for several hours against such huge amount the hospital authorities refused to hand over the body," he alleged. The aggrieved family said they will soon file a complaint before the district administration. "We have no information related with the matter. Also, if someone died in a hospital due to black fungus symptoms that particular hospital will have to inform the state government. The local health department has no such role on this issue," Virender Yadav, chief medical officer (CMO) Gurugram told IANS.



"MAHARASHTRA NOT AT ALL SERIOUS ABOUT PROTECTING ITS DOCTORS": HIGH COURT

The Bombay High Court had directed the Maharashtra government to inform of the number of FIRs registered in cases of assault on doctors and hospital staff and the steps taken to protect them.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra government doesn't seem "serious" about protecting its doctors against attacks by family members of patients, the Bombay High Court said on Wednesday. A bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice GS Kulkarni was referring to an affidavit filed by the deputy secretary of the state Health department following the orders passed by the high court on May 13. In its order, the bench had directed the state government to inform the High Court of the number of



FIRs registered in cases of assault on doctors and hospital staff and the steps taken to protect them among other things. The affidavit submitted before the High Court, however, merely made generic submissions and annexed the provisions of the Maharashtra Medicare Service, Persons and Medicare Institutions (Prevention of violence and damage

or loss of property) Act, 2010. It submitted that a total of 436 cases had been registered across the state but failed to give timelines or details of such cases. The bench said the affidavit did not address any of the queries put forth by the high court in its earlier order. "This is so shocking, the one-page affidavit that has been filed. From the next time, we are not

going to accept affidavits unless vetted by the government pleader." The only word we can use is pathetic. This is absolutely callous. The state is not at all serious about protecting its doctors. Yet, the public expects doctors to give their all," the bench said. The bench directed the deputy secretary, the state health department, to file an additional affidavit by the next week. It said that such affidavit must also include the state's response to the various suggestions submitted by the petitioners last week on curbing such incidents and protecting doctors and medical staff. The HC was hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by one Dr Rajeev Joshi seeking judicial intervention to curb violence against healthcare professionals. As per the PIL, Maharashtra witnesses the maximum number of such incidents of violence. Dr Joshi also claimed in his plea that the Maharashtra government had failed to implement the existing legal provisions, including the 2010 Act, to curb attacks on doctors. The high court will hear the matter further on May 27.

Mumbai Gets Bids To Import 1 Crore Sputnik Shots At Rs 700 Crore

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai's municipality has received bids to import 10 million Sputnik vaccines and expects more proposals as authorities attempt an ambitious plan to vaccinate every resident of the world's second-most densely packed city within two months. India's financial capital estimates to spend about 7 billion rupees (\$96 million) to buy the shots, Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal told Bloomberg TV in an interview on Wednesday. Faster vaccinations could help avert a third wave of the coronavirus, which could cost the city above 8 billion rupees just to run its temporary hospitals created to tackle a surge in patients.

Mumbai has been the epicenter of India's virus outbreak in both previous waves, though it has received praise for flattening the curve relatively quickly. Last week it became the first city in the country to independently seek to import vaccines as local manufacturers struggle to keep up with demand. "Once we get 15 million vaccine shots, I plan to vaccinate the entire city in next 60 days and by doing so I am very sure we will be able to stop the third wave from coming," Mr Chahal said.

The three bids received include a proposal from London-based Taliesin International Ltd. and two other companies from Hyderabad which claim authorized distributorship from Sputnik marketer The Russian



Direct Investment Fund, Mr Chahal said by phone. The city needs 10 million shots for vaccinating people aged 18-45 years and another 5 million for older residents.

The import tender, which was due to close May 18, will be extended until May 25 when a final decision will be taken, Mr Chahal said. All large global manufacturers are invited including Pfizer Inc., Moderna Inc., Johnson & Johnson, Serum Institute of India Ltd. and Bharat Biotech Ltd. About 5% of tests conducted in Mumbai are currently throwing up positive results, down from 31% a month ago. The so-called positivity rate will drop to 2% by the end of May, Mr Chahal said.

India is still reporting an overall positivity rate of about 20%, far higher than the less-than-5% the World Health Organization considers as an indicator that the spread is under control.

Search on for 89 missing from barge during Cyclone Tauktae

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Indian Navy (IN) and Indian Coast Guard (ICG) continued their search for missing 89 personnel from a barge with 273 people which went adrift and later sank near the Bombay High Fields unable to withstand the fury of Cyclone Tauktae, officials said here on Wednesday.



By late Tuesday, the IN-ICG teams managed to rescue 184 from the sunken Barge Papaa-305, with the help of Seaking helicopters, two naval ships and two offshore supply vessels. Besides, IN and ICG also saved the lives of all 137 who were marooned on the Barge GAL Constructor with helicopter and ship operations near the Colaba Point.

In another cheerful news, 196 people on board a Barge Support Station-3 and 101 on an Oil drilling rig, which had gone drifting near the Pipavav Port, are now safe after giving alarming moments to the authorities the past couple of days.

OSVs hired by the Oil & Natural Gas Commission and Shipping Corporation of

India are towing them to safe location even as INS Talwar reached the area where the two vessels had drifted late on Monday.

The ONGC said this morning that the two barges and an oilrig - barring Barge Papaa-305 which has sunk - are taken in control and their crew are safe, with the IN and ONGC engaged in the rescue operations for the crew of Papaa-305. With these, a total of 618 people, plus two from a life-raft, have been rescued in different challenging operations in the Arabian Sea, braving extreme weather conditions, massive waves upto 8 mtrs tall, strong winds reaching over 150 kmp/h.

As Covid curve dips, one in five exposed to virus or vaccinated

Maharashtra's population is estimated to be 12 crore, of which 2 crore have been administered the first vaccine dose and 54 lakh have contracted the infection, providing 20 per cent of the population some level of immunity.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Every fifth person in Maharashtra has either been exposed to coronavirus or received vaccination, data from the health department shows. Maharashtra's population is estimated to be 12 crore, of which 2 crore have been administered the first vaccine dose and 54 lakh have contracted the infection, providing 20 per cent of the population some level of immunity.

On Tuesday the state recorded 28,438 new Covid-19 cases, and its death toll touched 83,777 with 679 more deaths reported.

As Maharashtra's Covid curve slides down, data shows the peak of the second wave has plateaued longer than the first wave. In the first wave, last September the plateau lasted a week, in the second wave this year it lasted for over three weeks.

During the first peak, Maharashtra crossed 20,000 cases on September 5, touched the peak by



September 11 at 24,886 cases, and by September 24, cases had quickly dipped below 20,000.

During the second wave, the state crossed 60,000 cases on April 11, reached the peak by April 18 with 68,631 cases and continued to hover over 60,000 cases till May 6, stretching the plateau for 26 days.

"The infection load was higher this time, the mutated virus was more transmissible. These factors took the state longer to come out of the second wave," said Dr Archana Patil, director of family welfare in the Directorate of Health Services.

"We need to further investigate why the second wave persisted longer, and what role the mutated variant (B.1.617) and vaccination played.

Vaccination began in January and by March, when cases started rising across the state, at least a small population had received its first dose. How vaccination impacted new infections is yet to be seen," said state epidemiologist Dr Pradeep Awate.

Patil said they expect to see an impact of vaccination when over 70 per cent of the population is immunised. "And that too both doses. That will take time," she said. On Tuesday the state received 2 lakh vaccine doses for its immunisation drive.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has reported reinfection rate at 4.5 per cent. In Maharashtra, state officials said the reinfection rate hovers between 3 per cent to 4 per cent.

"Mutation appears to be the driving force in the second wave, but it seems that once infected, most people are protected from second infection," Awate said. Maharashtra has five laboratories and five tertiary care hospitals authorised to collect samples for genome sequencing. Each centre is drawing 15 samples every fortnight, and in a month Maharashtra is collecting at least 300 samples for genome sequencing.

Awate said they are collecting and sending samples of patients from clusters, those with long Covid symptoms, those with reinfection and those reporting breakthrough infections after vaccination.

Man flees with wife's body from Covid hospital after request to perform last rites denied

The body of the woman was brought back to the Civil hospital in Beed after the police warned the man.

Team Absolute | Aurangabad

In a shocking development reported from the Beed district of Maharashtra, a man ran away with the body of his wife, who died of novel coronavirus, from Covid ward of the civil hospital. However, the body was brought back to the hospital after police warned the man. Beed police have now booked the man and three of his relatives for illegally taking the body of the woman.

The woman, a resident of Gevrai taluka, died on Monday at 5 am after her condition deteriorated in the last few days. She was admitted to the hospital on April 23, according to a report in Times of India. According to Additional Civil Surgeon, Sukhdev Rathod, the woman's husband had demanded her body to perform her last rites. However, his request was denied keeping in view Covid protocols.

"The man argued that his wife's report came negative in the antigen test conducted on Sunday and wanted to take the body to the home town. When his



request was turned denied, he quietly sneaked out of the hospital with the body as hospital staff got busy with other duties," the report quoted Rathod as saying. The matter came to light after the Class Class IV employees went to the ward to wrap up the body and take it to the morgue. The hospital authorities immediately contacted the police who in turn asked the man to hand over the body to the hospital.

Meanwhile, a hospital nurse has filed a complaint in this regard. The accused and three others have been booked under various sections of IPC and Epidemic Diseases Act.

Centre has increased supply of Remdesivir to state: Maharashtra govt

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As Maharashtra continues the battle against the second wave of COVID-19, the state government on Wednesday said the Central government has increased the supply of Remdesivir to the state.

While sharing information about Remdesivir injections, the state government said it is produced by May Cipla, Hetero, Zydus, Mylan, Sun Pharma, Dr Reddy's and Jubilant.

The statement government further said that according to a letter dated May 1, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Central Government had sanctioned a total stock of 8,09,500 Remdesivir for Maharashtra from 21/04/2021 to



23/05/2021. Meanwhile, as per the letter dated 07.05.2021, the Union Health Ministry has increased the supply of Remdesivir by 347500 and a total of 1157000 stocks have been sanctioned for Maharashtra for the period of 21.04.2021 to 16.05.2021.

The state government informed that from 21/04/2021 to 17/05/2021, 11,37,073 vials of Remdesivir have been distrib-

uted to private and government hospitals. However, the statement remains silent on whether the Centre has met the state government's demand of 70,000 vials of Remdesivir a day.

According to the statement, 1696.33 tons of medical oxygen was supplied to different districts of the state on May 17.

In an official statement, the Maharashtra government said the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prepares a statement of supply to the Liquid Medical Oxygen Producers in the state by stating the amount of oxygen they need to supply in each district on a daily basis.

On May 19, 2021, the state government asked producers to supply 1718.5 ton of medical oxygen, it said. "On May 17,

2021, 1696.33 ton of oxygen was supplied to different districts of the state," it added. This includes 194.38 ton of oxygen received from other states of the country. 117.36 tons of liquid medical oxygen was received from Gujarat and 77 ton from Chhattisgarh's Bhilai.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday had said that Maharashtra cannot afford to rely on others for medical oxygen in the present COVID-19 situation and priority must be given to produce 3,000 metric tons of the vital gas per day in the state itself. The second wave was a strong one and patients needed oxygen on a large-scale due to which the state government was encouraging the setting up of oxygen generation plants, he added.

Amravati sees another surge, over 80% Covid cases in rural areas

In Amravati, rural areas account for 83 per cent of fresh cases as the transmission pattern moves from urban to rural parts. Officials said they are also noting a percentage rise in deaths in younger age groups in Amravati.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amravati district has shown a worrying rise in Covid-19 cases for a second time this year even as the rest of Maharashtra is showing a downward trend. Amravati was one of the first districts in Maharashtra to report a second wave in February this year. Following a 10-day lockdown in March, it noted a dip in cases. But state data shows it has again seen a rise in average daily cases by 148 per cent from April 9-15, when 426 new cases were recorded daily, to May 8-14 when 1,060 daily new cases were reported.

In the same period, Maharashtra has noted a fall in daily new cases from over 65,000 to 40,900.

On April 16 the state implemented a lockdown. "There are 19 districts that have shown a rise in active cases since. But our concern is Amravati, Buldhana, Yavatmal in Vidarbha region. They have shown significant surge despite a lockdown. Nagpur has shown a decline," said state epidemiologist Dr Pradeep Awate.

Awate said that laxity in control measures could cause erratic rise in cases but the health department is studying data of contact tracing and sending more samples for genome sequencing to understand the pattern. Yavatmal and Buldhana too have recorded a rise towards April end and May beginning, although both districts have shown a declining trend since the last one week. The state held a video conference with districts on Monday to assess why some districts have noted a surge and why some are showing a sudden drop. Nanded reported 81 and Mumbai 77 per cent drop in daily cases between pre-lockdown and now. In Amravati, rural areas account for 83 per



cent of fresh cases as the transmission pattern moves from urban to rural parts. Officials said they are also noting a percentage rise in deaths in younger age groups in Amravati. Of 1270 deaths reported till date due to Covid-19, 168 belonged to 41-50 years and 95 to 31-40 years in the district. District data shows a death audit of 697 deaths has been undertaken.

On Monday the Amravati collector held a meeting with district officials and decided to form village-level committees. Their task will be to ensure everyone complies with isolation norms and lockdown rules. Civil sur-

geon Dr Shyamsunder Nikam said, "Ideally in rural areas, infection can be easily controlled due to the sparse population. But that is not happening here. We still don't understand the pattern. The Indian variant is abundant here."

Amravati is sending 180 samples regularly for genome sequencing. It has noted double variant B.1.617 in most samples.

Amravati has noted a weekly positivity rate of 27 per cent, while Buldhana's positivity rate is 37 per cent for last week. Amravati had 4874 active cases before the state-wide lockdown was announced on April 16, its active burden now stands at 10,205. Buldhana has 5873 active cases, up from 2,737 cases. Yavatmal's positivity rate is 14 percent, its active cases are 5244, up from 4305. Dr Balkrishna Kamble, district health officer in Buldhana, said they noted a second surge in cases in April end and early May this year, but since a week fresh cases have dipped from over 1000 to 600-800.

Yavatmal is reporting 600-700 cases, down from 1300. Apart from these three districts, Sindhadurg and Ratnagiri are noting a steady rise in active cases since a month.

Bombay HC asks Centre, Maharashtra govt to give details of protocol to treat black fungus

Mumbai: The Nagpur bench of Bombay High Court has directed the Central government as well as the Maharashtra government to give details of a set protocol for treatment of 'Mucormycosis', commonly known as 'black fungus disease'.

The high court issued these directions while hearing petitions on issues pertaining to Covid-19 management in Vidarbha. Advocate M. Anil Kumar appearing for an intervenor had filed an application seeking directions to be issued for making the drug Amphotericin available, which is presently being used for treating the patients infected with the fungal disease. Anil Kumar's application stated that presently there is a shortage of Amphotericin drug.

While hearing the plea, the bench of Justice Sunil B Shukre and Justice Avinash G Gharote said that it was not aware of which drugs are used to treat this particular fungal disease. The court said, "This Court is not aware of any protocol having been devised by the Central Government and/or State Government for combating the Black Fungus disease. It is also not known as to which drugs are expected to be part of standard treatment to be given to the patients having black fungus disease." "We shall be benefited if the State Government apprises this Court on this issue. The parties are also at liberty to enlighten this Court on this aspect," it added.

Several states like Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka have been reporting a shortage of this drug. It has been reported that as many as 52 people have died due to mucormycosis in Maharashtra since the Covid-19 outbreak last year. Maharashtra government is likely to float a tender to procure one lakh Amphotericin-B injections to treat this fungal disease.

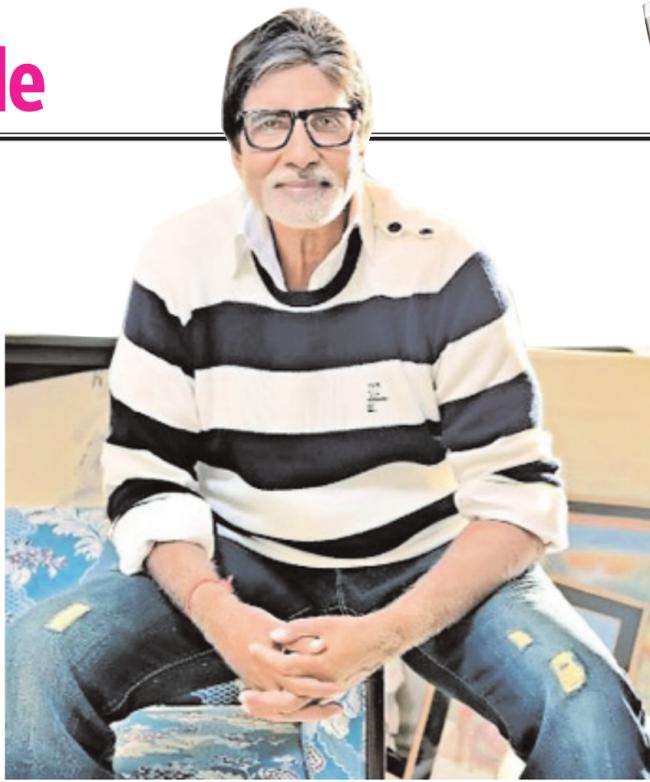
BIG B PRAYS FOR 'STABILITY' AMIDST COVID, TAUKTAE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amitabh Bachchan took to Instagram on Wednesday and shared a prayer that the country survives the second wave of Covid as well as cyclone Tauktae. "Stability .. a situation in which something is not likely to move or change .. Please dear Lord 'something not likely to move' .. do not 'move' the winds and rains for the fury of its presence .. the destruction of your environ .. the helplessness of the destitute," he wrote. "... something not likely to change' .. dear Lord do not stop the 'change' of the graphs

of improvement, in the repair that is apparently seen in some areas of the virus just 'move' the stability that is reportedly seen in both the environs -- the storms of Tauktae and the mild improvements in the Virus over the land where it disturbs the most we pray in the sincerity of our beings .. we have and are doing what humanity believes in its supreme pontiffs .. in the bended knee or the supine servile submission before the unseen Force that we all have our faith and belief in ..prayers .." he concluded.

The actor recently informed his fans on Monday that his office was flooded with water due to the cyclone.



RUBINA DILAİK

TALKS OF FIVE THINGS TO DO WHILE RECOVERING FROM COVID

Krystle D'souza posts a pic from the beach

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Krystle D'souza took to Instagram on Tuesday to share a stunning picture from the beach.

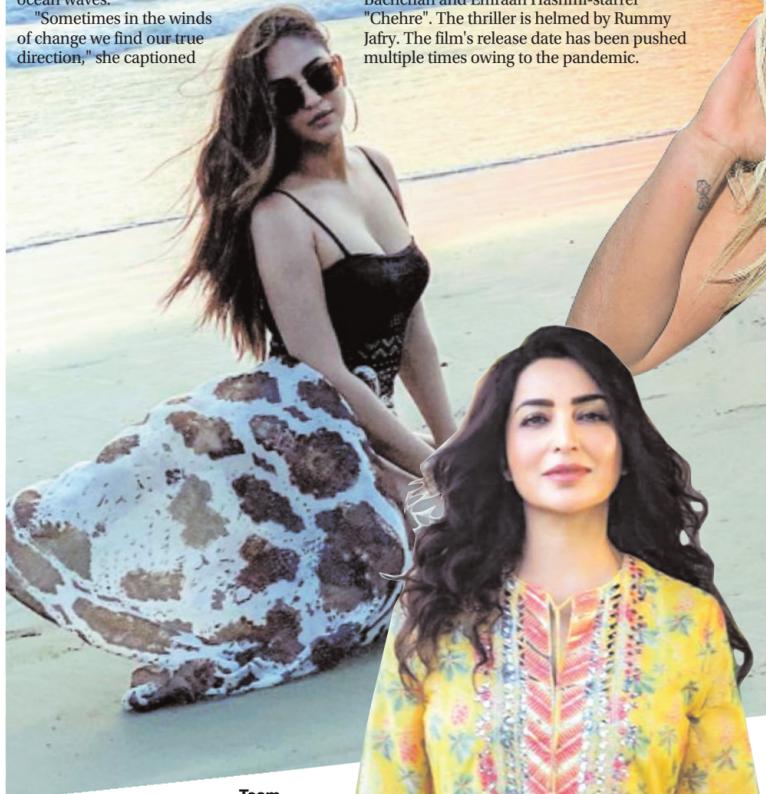
In the image she looks gorgeous in black net beachwear worn with a sarong. She completes the look with stylish shades and open hair. The sun can be seen setting behind her, against the backdrop of serene ocean waves.

"Sometimes in the winds of change we find our true direction," she captioned

the image, on a philosophical note, with an orange heart emoji.

The actress recently featured in the recreated version of the song "Ekbewafaa" by Bharat Goel. She shares the screen with Siddharthh Gupta and AkshayKharodia in the song. The original song is from Akshay Kumar-Kareena Kapoor Khan's film "Bewafaa", which released in 2005.

Krystle is also part of the Amitabh Bachchan and Emraan Hashmi-starrer "Chehre". The thriller is helmed by Rummy Jafry. The film's release date has been pushed multiple times owing to the pandemic.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress RubinaDilaik took to Instagram on Wednesday, to speak about things she did to ensure proper recovery from Covid. The actress posted a video in which she talks about the five things to do

while battling Covid. She says she ate healthy, stayed hydrated, practised yoga, took medications on time and listened to music.

She captioned the post as: "I quarantined for more than 19days. But these are 5 things I did to help me speed up my recovery. Most important is to listen

to your favourite music and be happy. #staysafe #covi?d19 #covidrecovery #meditate #hydrate #behappy."

Rubina had tested positive for Covid a few weeks back. She was in Shimla and had quarantined herself there. The actress has been keeping her fans updated about her health.

BRITNEY SPEARS LIKES EXPERIMENTING WITH HER HAIR

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Britney Spears loves to experiment with her hair, and changes her hairstyle and colour regularly. The pop star's hairstylist Dimitris Giannetos had a few interesting revelations to make on the subject recently. "I've been working with Britney for almost five years now, she likes to play with her hair colour and her hair length. I'm very honoured she trusts me for all her hair changes," Giannetos said in an interview with Page Six Style. Meanwhile, Britney was in the news recently for describing all documentaries made on life and conservatorship battle as "hypocritical". The BBC documentary "The Battle For Britney: Fans, Cash And A Conservatorship", aired earlier this month. Britney has been under a conservatorship imposed by her father since her breakdown 12 years ago. After the breakdown, she was hospitalised and went to rehab subsequently. Her father gave up his duties in 2019 due to personal reasons, and now Britney does not want him to return.

AMYRA DASTUR: IF A FILM DOESN'T DO WELL I GET READY FOR THE NEXT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress AmyraDastur says she has reached a point in her career where she is unaffected by a film not doing well. "I think I have had enough films not do well and do well, and realise that it is part and parcel of the job. One film works and one doesn't. I just laugh and get ready for the next film. As long as I get work, I am happy. The day I don't, that's the day I will be worried," said the actress.

The actress adds that there is a lot more she has to achieve. "At the end of the day, I feel I still haven't reached that position where I wanted to be at," she says. "I am proud of how far I have come without knowing anyone. It is about hard work and I believe you create your own luck. I am happy to see where my career is

going. Hopefully, I will have a long career with different roles," she adds.

While she has worked in projects in different languages and platforms, Bollywood will always be special.

"Bollywood would always be my number one. It's home. Hindi cinema tohmerikhoonmeinai (Hindi cinema runs in my blood), but I love working in Tamil and the other industries. But at the end of the day, home is home," she says.

Bollywood apart, Amyra has worked with martial arts superstar Jackie Chan in the film "Kung Fu Yoga".



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Tisca Chopra has been one of the very few from Bollywood who've come forward to help people during this ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. She has been helping out people by donating and distributing food for frontline workers. She has gone all out to help out people in whatever way she can. Now, it's not just her, but even her parents, who're old, who've come out taking full protection to offer their help to people suffering due to Covid-19.

Tisca Chopra has collaborated with India Gate Rice and Vikas Khanna's charity organization to donate rice packets to people in need. The actress' parents also came out to help her in this noble deed. She took to her social media pages to share a picture of the same.

Tisca Chopra captioned the post as, "At the Sector 15

Gurudwara with the parents .. so proud that at their age, they lifted bags and bags of rice without hesitation to help provide food to #Covid staff at Hospitals .. Doing our little bit in association with @indiagatefoods @vikaskhannagroup & @atticastable #alittlebitgoesalongway #Seva #doin-gourbit #covid2021 (sic)."

Tisca Chopra's parents helping out people in these pandemic conditions, despite being old, is what re-instills our faith in humanity.

Tisca Chopra, parents distribute rice packets to people amidst Covid

USE GRAM FLOUR FOR SKIN AND HAIR PROBLEMS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Besan or gram flour has long been used in India for its many benefits for skin and hair care. In fact, it is a traditional home remedy used right from the time when one is a baby. Besan in the form of uptans or epilation formula for baby hair, during adulthood in a myriad number of packs and scrubs to take care of beauty issues right from acne to tanning, cleansing and exfoliating. Not surprisingly, the world is now waking up to this must-have beauty essential that is gram flour.

Dr.Geeta Grewal, Cosmetic Surgeon and Wellness Expert, 9Muses Wellness Clinic, Gurugram takes you through the various ways to use gram flour and also gives you recipes for packs and treatments you can make and apply at home.

Natural Hair Remover

In India, gram flour has been used to remove fine facial hair. In fact, a gram flour scrub is used to remove hair from all over the body for babies. If you are tired of threading and waxing your face, you could try gram flour hair removal as well. Just keep a few things in mind before you start. For starters, steam your face so that the pores open and the hair is easier to remove from the roots; Don't rub too harshly as that might cause your skin to become inflamed and irritated. Don't forget to do a patch test first to check if you are allergic to any of the ingredients in the home remedy and don't be impatient because you will have to repeat the treatment a number of times before you get the results you want.



Brings glow to the skin

Gram flour packs work wonders in absorbing the excess oil and cleansing your skin as well. Gram flour has alkalizing properties that keeps the pH levels of your skin balanced. It is also very absorbent and soaks up all the extra oil. Gram flour has been used for brightening one's skin tone for centuries and its super cleansing properties leave your face looking its best.

Removes dark patch from the elbow

Tanning and darkening of elbows is one of the most difficult and stubborn areas to remove black spots. But there are certain home remedies to help you to get rid of dark and black elbows. Gram flour

cleanses the area and also provides mild exfoliation. Lemon juice acts as a natural bleach that will help to reduce the darkness from your elbows.

Cures Dry Skin

Are you wondering how we can make such contradictory statements, especially when we have just talked about how gram flour can help deal with oily skin? Well, that is the wonder of gram flour that helps control oiliness and also tackles dry, scaly skin. When besan is mixed with milk cream (malai), it acts as a wonderful moisturiser. You could also add some olive oil or almond oil and get the same results.

Best for exfoliation

Exfoliating should be an essential part of your beauty routine because if you do not scrub away all the dead skin cells, the debris starts to pile up leaving your skin looking dull and lifeless. While there are hundreds of scrubs available in the market, there's nothing like a good, home-made gram flour scrub to get the glow back on your face. And its environment-friendly as well.

Tan lightener

If you want to go back to your natural colouring, ditch the harsh chemical tan lighteners and try gram flour instead for tan removal. With its multipurpose benefits, there is nothing quite like gram flour and the best part is that it is almost always available in your kitchen. Gram flour has been used for de-tanning and brightening one skin tone for centuries and its super cleansing properties leave your face looking its best ever. Try this kitchen remedy today.



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY HARRY AND MEGHAN!

Los Angeles | Agencies

Fans of the Sussexes share tribute to the couple as they celebrate three years of marriage.

Fans of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle have taken to social media to share support for the couple on their third anniversary.

Supporters of The Duke and Duchess of Sussex posted sweet tributes as they looked back at the royal wedding at St George's Chapel in Windsor three years ago, with many wishing the pair well following a tumultuous year for The Firm.

Posting pictures of the elaborate day, one royal fan wrote:

'Happy 3rd Wedding Anniversary, Harry and Meghan! Gosh, it all seems like a lifetime ago, so much has happened! Hope you spend a wonderful day today, celebrating your love and happiness!'

It's the second year official royal accounts have stayed silent on Harry and Meghan's big day, with the official royal family account announcing the pregnancy of Harry's cousin Princess Beatrice instead.

Harry and Meghan themselves have not spoken on their celebrations, but it is likely they will be celebrating at home in Montecito, California.

Yesterday, the Duke and Duchess announced their supporters had helped to raise \$3 million to pay for Covid-19 vaccinations in disadvantaged countries in a campaign drive organised to mark their son Archie's birthday.



The Friends cast seen together ahead of their reunion special

Los Angeles | Agencies

The Friends cast is seen together again ahead of their reunion special as Jennifer Aniston reveals she thought they would 'cry our faces off' during taping.

All six Friends cast members have been seen together again.

The stars posed for the cover of the latest issue of People magazine ahead of the show's reunion special that will air on HBO Max this month.

Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, David Schwimmer and Matthew Perry - who shot to fame on the iconic sitcom which ran from 1994 to 2004 - were clustered together against a green back-

drop as they wore muted shades.

And Jennifer, 52, shared the way all of them felt ahead of the taping: 'Oh God, how are we going to get through this alive, without just crying our faces off?' Courteney also revealed that during the process of making the reunion: 'I was flooded with 10 years of irreplaceable memories.'

Matt admitted that the reunion had been a bit 'melancholy', while Lisa acknowledged it was an 'emotional' time for them. During the 10-season run of the NBC sitcom the six stars formed a famously close bond with one another personally and professionally. They even banded together to negotiate an equal salary hike for all of them, resulting in a \$1 million payday apiece per episode.



BEBEREXHA WAS ALMOST 'MARRIED OFF' WHEN SHE WAS A TEENAGER

Los Angeles | Agencies

Beberexha has revealed she was almost 'married off' when she was a teenager. The singer, 31, revealed she had men asking to 'take my hand in marriage' as she explained how in Albanian culture women tend to get married 'super young'. Bebe, whose mother Bukurije tied the knot at 17, described how her mum 'fought' against traditions to help her pursue her career in the music industry. Bebe told The Daily Star: 'It's completely changed now, it's so much more modern and women have more rights and stuff like that, but when I was younger there were literally guys trying to take my hand in marriage. It was part of the culture. Bebe added it wasn't until she was 23 that she had her first kiss, which she described as 'very bad'. The songstress is now loved-up with beau KeyanSafaryi, 37.

DEMI LOVATO COMES OUT AS NON-BINARY

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Demi Lovato has shared the news with their fans in a video posted to Twitter on Wednesday, adding that they will be changing pronouns to they/them.

Demi, who identifies as pansexual, said that they don't want to be seen as an 'expert or spokesperson,' and has 'opened up another level of vulnerability' by sharing the news with their fans.

Demi shared the clip revealing their new identification with fans alongside a lengthy Twitter thread, to mark the launch of their podcast series 4D with Demi Lovato.

In the video they said: 'I want to take this moment to share something very personal with you.'

'Over the past year-and-a-half I've been doing some healing and self-reflective work, and through this work I've had the revelation that I identify as non-binary.'

'With that said, I'll be officially changing my pronouns to they/them. I feel that this best represents the fluidity I feel in my gender expression and allows me to feel most authentic and true to the person I both know I am and still am discovering.'



ANGELA BASSETT: 'BLACK PANTHER' SEQUEL WILL CARRY ON CHADWICK BOSEMAN LEGACY

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Angela Bassett feels "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" will do justice in honouring the memory of late actor Chadwick Boseman. Bassett, however, adds it will be a challenge matching the first "Black Panther" film of 2018 that starred Boseman as the titular superhero.

"It's going to be interesting to surpass the cultural phenomenon that it was. It's going to be really interesting to see how we do that again," said Bassett, who plays Ramonda, Queen Mother of Wakanda and mother of Boseman's character T'Challa.

"It's going to be phenomenal and it's going to pay tribute, and it's going to carry on that legacy," she adds, according to a report in contactmusic.com.

Talking about her bond with Chadwick, the actress said they met much before they started shooting for the film.

"He could do anything he put his mind to. He could rap, he could dance like James Brown. He could hold the centre of a movie (as) the cinema's first black superhero. He could do it all and he can inspire us to live our best," she said.

JENNIFER LOPEZ EXCITED ABOUT HOW THINGS ARE GOING' WITH BEN AFFLECK

Los Angeles | Agencies

Jennifer Lopez is said to 'still be very excited about how things are going' with Ben Affleck as their 'flirty phone calls' brought their 'old magic' and 'connection' back.

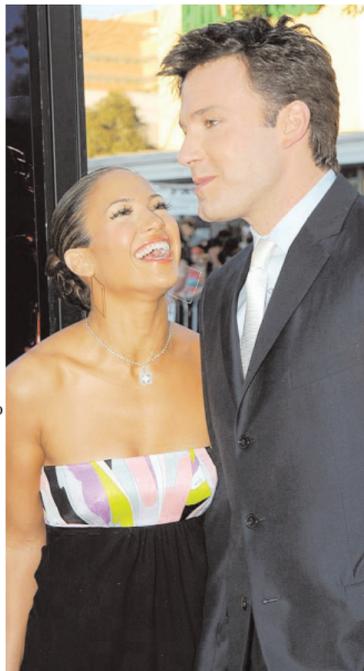
A source close to the 51-year-old Hustlers actress told People on Wednesday that she and the 48-year-old Good Will Hunting star have 'kept in touch every day' since their getaway in Montana earlier this month.

The dynamic duo were together from 2002 to 2004 and even got engaged before their romance fell apart 17 years ago.

Though the two have a bi-coastal relationship with JLo being in Miami and Affleck living in Los Angeles an insider for the weekly says 'they are making plans to see each other.'

The source adds 'Jennifer is still very excited about how things are going.'

Apparently it is starting to feel like old times as a different source for UsWeekly said on Wednesday: 'As soon as [Jennifer] and Ben started talking again, it became very clear to both of them that the old magic and special connection was still there. 'Then when they met up again all bets were off.'



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Madison Bailey



EDITOR'S SPECS

Covid remedy in your hand

The team, led by researchers of the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (RUB), analysed how long the variants remain infectious on surfaces made of steel, silver, copper and on face masks and how they can be rendered harmless by means of soap, heat or alcohol. It turned out that both variants, as well as the wild type virus, could be inactivated when treated with at least 30 per cent alcohol for at least 30 seconds. "Common disinfectants are therefore effective against all these variants," said Stephanie Pfander from the RUB. Hand washing with soap could also lower the risk of infection. Heat also works against the virus: after 30 minutes at 56 degrees Celsius, all variants were rendered harmless, Pfander added. To find out whether the stability of the different mutant variants on surfaces differs from each other, the team analysed the amount of infectious virus particles on surfaces made of steel, copper, silver and on surgical and FFP2 masks over 48 hours. "The surface stability did not differ between the virus variants," said Eike Steinmann from the Department for Molecular and Medical Virology at RUB. "As described several times before, copper in particular has a very strong anti-viral effect". The results, published in the Journal of Infectious Diseases, did not detect any differences between the different mutants in terms of their sensitivity to different hygiene measures. The fact that viruses change genetically over time is well known. Variants of concern are those that give the virus an advantage, for example by allowing it to replicate faster, become more infectious or enable it to evade the immune response. The British and South African variants have accumulated several mutations which result in an increased transmission and, in some cases, lead to more severe courses of disease. Meanwhile, Scientists and medical experts from the Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, working on Covid-19, have written to Union government of India suggesting some specific measures to tackle the projected third wave of the pandemic. The experts have also requested the government to set up a virus surveillance centre in BHU. The experts have recommended monthly sero-surveillance in hotspot regions like Mumbai, Delhi, Lucknow, Varanasi, saying it reveals the vulnerability of population towards infection. The experts further said their pilot study on patients who recovered from Covid showed that one dose of vaccine is enough to produce adequate number of antibodies, whereas those who were never infected need two doses.

COVID-19 VARIANTS HAVE A SIMILAR SURFACE STABILITY AS THE WILD TYPE VIRUS UNDER LABORATORY CONDITIONS, BUT CAN BE EFFECTIVELY ELIMINATED BY DISINFECTION AND THOROUGH HAND WASHING, HEAT OR ALCOHOL TREATMENT, GERMAN RESEARCHERS HAVE FOUND.

rendered harmless, Pfander added. To find out whether the stability of the different mutant variants on surfaces differs from each other, the team analysed the amount of infectious virus particles on surfaces made of steel, copper, silver and on surgical and FFP2 masks over 48 hours. "The surface stability did not differ between the virus variants," said Eike Steinmann from the Department for Molecular and Medical Virology at RUB. "As described several times before, copper in particular has a very strong anti-viral effect". The results, published in the Journal of Infectious Diseases, did not detect any differences between the different mutants in terms of their sensitivity to different hygiene measures. The fact that viruses change genetically over time is well known. Variants of concern are those that give the virus an advantage, for example by allowing it to replicate faster, become more infectious or enable it to evade the immune response. The British and South African variants have accumulated several mutations which result in an increased transmission and, in some cases, lead to more severe courses of disease. Meanwhile, Scientists and medical experts from the Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, working on Covid-19, have written to Union government of India suggesting some specific measures to tackle the projected third wave of the pandemic. The experts have also requested the government to set up a virus surveillance centre in BHU. The experts have recommended monthly sero-surveillance in hotspot regions like Mumbai, Delhi, Lucknow, Varanasi, saying it reveals the vulnerability of population towards infection. The experts further said their pilot study on patients who recovered from Covid showed that one dose of vaccine is enough to produce adequate number of antibodies, whereas those who were never infected need two doses.

'KASHMIR SHAIVISM THE FRUIT OF INDIAN CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHICAL DEBATES'

"If we look at any Indian classical philosophical system, typically it discusses four important areas such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. Kashmir Shaivism is remarkable in the sense that it assimilates the major philosophical debates such as Santana vs Buddhist, Dualist vs Non-Dualist, Impact of Grammarians on epistemology, and multiple Bhakti traditions all into one coherent system.

Vishnu Makhijani

Indian intellectual systems have been greatly influenced by the ancient Kashmiri centres for theological discourse and out of these debates emerged the "remarkable" Kashmir Shaivism that assimilates the concepts of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics into a single entity, says techie-film historian-author Prachand Praveer, whose seminal book on world cinema has been essentially influenced by 10th century Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta.

"If we look at any Indian classical philosophical system, typically it discusses four important areas such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. Kashmir Shaivism is remarkable in the sense that it assimilates the major philosophical debates such as Santana vs Buddhist, Dualist vs Non-Dualist, Impact of Grammarians on epistemology, and multiple Bhakti traditions all into one coherent system.

"Unfortunately, Tantric systems are out of current mainstream intellectual and philosophical discourses, whereas Abhinava Gupta assimilates all walks of life including drama and music in his assimilation and formulation of various thoughts of Kashmir Shaivism. It is important to note that Kashmir Shaivism is considered as the fruit of Indian classical philosophical

debates," Praveer told IANS in an interview.

How else did Kashmir contribute to the development of Indian classical philosophy?

"Indian intellectual systems have been greatly influenced by the Kashmiri mathikas (centres for discourses) and its numerous intellectual traditions. Great grammarians such as Panini (author of the 'Astadhyayi') and Patañjali (author of 'Mahabhasya'), an ancient treatise on Sanskrit grammar and linguistics, and the compiler of the 'Yoga sutras', a text on Yoga theory and practice, were Kashmiris," Praveer explained.

He also pointed to a "long list of major contributors with a definite presence in Kashmir" such as Bhamaha (7th century), the author of "Kavyalankara"; Shrivijaya (8th century), the author of "Isvara-pratyabhijñā-karika" (on Tantric metaphysics); and Abhinavagupta (950-1016), the author of "Tantraloka" and "Abhinavabharati".

Post-Abhinavagupta, there were Kemendra (990-1070), and Mammata Bhatta (around 11th century). "I believe even today any Indian literary criticism cannot be possible without describing or citing or subscribing to the views of one of these literary techniques such as 'Alamkara' or poetic decoration (attributed to Bhamaha),

"Dhavni" or aesthetics suggestion (attributed to Anandavardhan), "Vakrokti" or theory of oblique expression (attributed to Kuntaka), "Auchitya" or propriety (attributed to Kshemendra) or Mammata's propounded theory of poetic creations," Praveer said.

He noted that an "important name" that every Indian student of music would know is Sargadeva (1175-1247) who authored "Sangita Ratnakara". He was born in a Brahmin family of Kashmir and was not living in Kashmir, but we do see the impact of Abhinavagupta and other Kashmiri traditions on his famous treatise of music. Needless to point out that his authoritative treatise on Indian classical music is revered by both the Hindustani music and the Carnatic music traditions," Praveer said.

Any other examples of how Kashmiri intellectuals have preserved Indian thoughts?

"Well, India in its intellectual curiosity and discipline has preserved her heritage in many strange ways. Abhinavagupta's commentary on Natyashastra, the 'Abhinavabharati', was discovered in Kerala in the early 20th century. Without his commentary, our understanding of Natyashastra would have been very shallow.

"Indian classical traditions always include the additions in shlokas as 'prakshipta' (projected addition) if found not matching with the current version. If you

happen to read the Valmiki Ramayana or Mahabharata in any authentic preserved version, you will encounter such additions with commentary that it has been added by some sources which is not approved but yet present for the sake of completeness.

The Bhagavad Gita occupies a unique place in the annals of Indian thought and culture through the ages and in this sphere too, Kashmir claims its share of originality.

"The existence of Kashmir recension of Gita was first drawn by (German philologist) Dr (Friedrich) Schrader as back as 1930. The Kashmir recension of Gita contains 745 verses as against 700 verses of the popular recension adopted by Adi Shankaracharya. Abhinavagupta's commentary, under the title 'Itaarthasangraha', explains the fight between Kauravas and Piṅḍavas is symbolic of a war that is constantly raging between the lower and upper impulses of our personality," Praveer explained. Once upon a time, Buddhism was a major philosophical movement in India. Was there any Buddhist connection to Kashmiri intellectual traditions?

"Yes. Kashmir, from early times, has been a meeting ground of a variety of faiths and divergent thought currents. Kashmir's attachment to Buddhism dates back to the time of Ashoka (273-232 BC). Niḥīgasena (150 BC), the



author of 'Milind-Panho', is said to be a Kashmiri. Kanishka (78-102) convened the 2nd Buddhist Council in Kashmir and brought Ashvaghosha to act as its Vice President.

"It has been noted that Kashmiri monks were active in medieval China from the early fourth century up to the 11th century. Kashmirians' contribution, at large, includes translations into Chinese of Buddhist canons and ritualistic texts," Praveer said.

His book, "Cinema Through Rasa - A Tryst with Masterpieces in the Light of Rasa Siddhanta", released earlier this year, unravels the nuances of world cinema by harkening back to Abhinavagupta as it pays tribute to his commentary on the "Natyashastra" and the concepts of "Rasa Siddhanta" (theory of aesthetic experience) and "purushartha" (cultural value system of life-pursuits).



India's second Covid wave is a humanitarian rather than an economic crisis, according to Japanese brokerage, Nomura. A more virulent virus strain and stretched hospital capacity have resulted in a sharp rise in fatalities," the report said.

It is not an economic crisis. The report says the hit to mobility due to the rolling state-wide lockdowns has been steep, and the economic impact is likely to be most severe in May. However, we expect the overall hit to sequential growth in Q2 (April-June) to be much less severe than last year and less than what the drop in mobility suggests, as lockdowns are more nuanced this time and consumers and businesses have adapted, a view supported by international evidence.

"We expect lockdowns to last for around six weeks and be followed by selective reopening in June, which should result in better sequential growth. We expect the pace of vaccinations to accelerate after June: Vaccinations are trailing currently, but our analysis of vaccine supplies suggests the pace will rise sharply after June. We expect half of the population to be fully vaccinated by end-2021 and India to reach its vaccine pivot point in Q3, which should boost domestic consumption," the report said.

As pandemic uncertainty ebbs and vaccinations rise, the full impact of easy financial conditions on growth should also become

visible. Overall, we expect the second wave impact to be localized in Q2 (April-June), with GDP contracting by -3.8% q-o-q, much less than during the first wave (-24.6% in Q2 2020), and overall GDP growth likely at 9.8% y-o-y in 2021 and 10.8% in FY22 (year-ending March 2022).

Inflationary pressures appear set to intensify. Nomura sees cost pressures intensifying from supply chain disruptions, high global commodity prices and rising rural wages, some of which will likely be passed on to consumers. We believe core inflation will remain elevated at 5.3% y-o-y in 2021, topping the already-elevated 5.1% in 2020.

Despite the second wave shock, India's business cycle remains on an upturn. The report says the second wave has exacted a large human cost, but we expect its economic impact to be localised in Q2 and muted overall.

Faster vaccinations after June, strong global growth and easy financial conditions are likely tailwinds to the ongoing business cycle recovery.

India's second wave likely peaked in early May. During this wave, a new 'double mutant' variant of the virus was discovered, which has been found to be more infectious than the variant that was responsible for the first wave; this likely resulted in the rapid transmission of the virus at a time when pan-

INDIA'S COVID2.0 'HUMANITARIAN RATHER THAN ECONOMIC' CRISIS, SAYS NOMURA

"India's second wave has likely peaked, but in its wake, it has unleashed a devastating human cost.

demical fatigue had set in and the economy was re-opening. However, in line with experts' expectations, the pandemic curve seems to be correcting, the report said.

The official daily death rate is tracking at around 4100 (7-day MA), which marks a slight moderation in the growth rate to 2.5% w-o-w from 6.9% last week.

The situation remains mixed: among the states with the top 6 case loads (15k-40k daily cases) currently, the pandemic curve for Maharashtra -- the epicentre of the second wave -- has clearly inflected, while Karnataka, and to a lesser extent Kerala, are starting to show incipient signs of flattening.

However, states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal are at risk given their high case loads and inability to flatten their curves yet.

For the next five states (around 9,500-15,000 daily cases), most states have inflected, most significantly Uttar Pradesh. Odisha remains the outlier with an increasing pace of cases. For the next five states, again we find encouraging signs of flattening among most states, except for Punjab, where the curve has yet to flatten materially.

The case fatality rate -- daily deaths as a share of new infection cases -- under the second wave (around 1.1%) is lower than during the first wave (around 5% at its peak), but the mortality rate has risen over the last month due to overcapacity issues at hospitals. Given the mortality rate lags new infection cases by a few weeks, daily deaths, which have risen to an average of 4100 per day from 300 at end-March, may remain high, the report said.

The current supply capacity is unable to keep pace with the rising demand for vaccines amid the second wave, resulting in the daily pace of inoculation rising from less than 0.5mn doses per day in early February to a peak of close to 3.5mn doses per day in mid-April, but since slowing to 1.6mn per day as of 18 May (7-day MA), the report said.

The priority is now given to those scheduled to receive their second dose, with the pace of first dose starting to fall. More recent concerns include whether these vaccines are effective against the double mutant strain. Research is still ongoing, but a recent study by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Virology suggest that Bharat Biotech's Covaxin is effective against the Brazilian, British, and the Indian mutants of the virus.

The vaccination pace varies across states. The states with the highest vaccination rates (20-32% of population) are Himachal Pradesh (HP), Goa, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Delhi and Rajasthan. Of these, HP and Goa appear relatively low risk (below 10k cases/day), Kerala is high risk, and others are in the medium-risk category.

The next cohort of vaccinated states (i.e., where 15-20% of the population has been inoculated), includes Maharashtra and Karnataka among the high-risk states, and Haryana and Odisha are among the medium-risk ones. Among the states with a lower proportion of population vaccinated, Tamil Nadu is concerning given its rising cases, as are states like West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh that have yet to materially stabilize their pandemic curves, the report said.

Did Shailaja dig her own grave?

Sanu V. George

The decision is now final that people's 'shero' outgoing Kerala Health Minister

K.K.Shailaja is not going to be there in the new Pinarayi Vijayan cabinet, which will be sworn in here on Thursday and even though none doubts her performance, the moot question is did she dig her own grave?

The decision by the party to leave out Shailaja has come under heavy criticism, especially on the social media, even demanding the party to change their decision.

This clearly shows she will go the way her illustrious predecessors K.R.Gowri who passed away last week and late Susheela Gopalan went after raising high hopes of even being considered for the post of Chief Minister.

In 1987 Gowri and in 1996 Gopalan that hogged centre stage -- even being considered as the first woman Chief Minister, but at the last minute on both occasions, Comrade E.K.Nayanar breasted the tape and the CPI-M said they never said anything like this and the party's decision was final.

Incidentally, Shailaja's status grew as a Minister after Nipah struck the northern district

of Kozhikode in 2018 and it came at a time, when murmurs made rounds in the party that her performance was not as desired, but since then her status changed.

Then came the mega floods that year and again in 2019 and her status in people's eye catapulted when Covid pandemic struck in 2020 January, when the first Covid case in the country was identified in Thrissur.

Since then Shailaja has been a constant on TV screens on a daily basis explaining the Covid situation and even the international media came calling on her and there were even talks she might be considered for a Nobel prize.

There were times, when the local media had to wait for days to get an interview with the Teacher and the answer that was given was "you are in the queue as even the international media is waiting".

Sensing the shift, Vijayan, who is known for his anti-media stand, broke the shackles and his daily Covid briefing soon became one of the most viewed TV programme. Ever since then Shailaja was seen only as an onlooker and day by day, her place in the public domain was restricted.

What's more surprising Shailaja was very

active when the state had a handful of cases and she disappeared into oblivion when the daily cases crossed 40,000 cases and then the talk of the town was -- did she dig her own grave and was she portraying herself above other party leaders and even the party.

Incidentally after her stunning victory by recording the highest ever margin of over 60,000 in the April 6th assembly polls, the media went to town that Vijayan will retain only Shailaja in his new team from his party and it remained intact till Tuesday when at the State Secretariat meeting of her party which she is also a member decided not to include her.

Though a weak defence came from a few, the decision not to include anyone from the previous cabinet was conveyed to the nearly 80 member state committee and here too it was cleared, paving the way for her exit.

The decision to drop her was taken at a Politburo meeting held here which included Vijayan, Kodyeri Balakrishnan, M.A. Baby and S.Ramachandran Pillai and it was this decision that was relayed in their other two committees.

On Wednesday morning CPI-M acting secretary A.Vijayaraghavan said the party is the final decision maker when it comes to organisational



issues and political decisions which are made.

"I have no clue of a campaign which is currently on to bring her back. I do not know. The party has made its decision and it's final," said Vijayaraghavan, who was also one of the biggest beneficiaries when Vijayan formed his new cabinet when his wife a college professor and a first time legislator -- R.Bindhu found a place in the cabinet, much to the surprise of many.

Another surprising defence that came about the omission of Shailaja was from former Health Minister in the V.S.Achuthanandan cabinet (2006-11) P.K.Sreemathi, who said she was also a health minister and after her tenure she went her way and nothing has happened to her.

"I even won an award from the President of India," defended Sreemathi, who after her tenure



as health minister got a term to the Lok Sabha and later lost the seat in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Presently she is a central committee member of the party.

Speaker elect M.B.Rajesh, an avid social media enthusiast, described the cries for Shailaja in the social media as nothing but a natural expression, "as in the social media it's more of an emotional outburst and hence it can be left like that".

However the national leadership also was taken aback and following the public sentiments it is going to take this issue up at its next meeting. But as things stand for all practical purposes, Shailaja has become history and anyone who knows the CPI-M, for it individuals do not matter, as the party is final and if at all there is any exception to that, it's only for Vijayan.



ANTI-ASIAN HATE CRIMES BILL SENT TO BIDEN FOR SIGNATURE

Washington | Agencies

The US House on Tuesday voted overwhelmingly to pass a bill aimed at combating the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes in the country, sending the legislation to President Joe Biden's desk for signature.

The COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act passed in a 364-62 vote in the House, with all no votes coming from Republicans. The Senate last month approved the bill on a 94-1 vote, with GOP Senator Josh Hawley of Missouri casting the lone no vote, Xinhua reported.

Biden is expected to sign the bill into law as soon as Thursday. "After a year of the Asian American community crying out for help, today Congress is taking historic action to pass long overdue hate crimes legislation and send the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act to President Biden's desk," Judy Chu, Democratic congresswoman from California and chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, told



reporters before the vote.

"The past year and a half has been one of pain and struggle marked by despicable and sickening acts of hate and violence against the Asian-American community," Democratic Congresswoman Grace Meng, who coauthored the legislation with Democratic Senator Mazie Hirono, said at a news conference on Tuesday. "Those of Asian descent have been blamed and scapegoated for the outbreak of Covid-19 and as a

result Asian Americans have been beaten, slashed, spat on and even set on fire and killed," Meng said.

The legislation would create a position at the Justice Department to expedite a review of COVID-19-related hate crimes; provide grants for states to create hotlines for reporting hate crimes and for law enforcement training aimed at preventing and identifying hate crimes; and direct federal agencies to work with community organizations to help raise

awareness about hate crimes during the pandemic. "The COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act will strengthen our defenses to prevent and combat anti-AAPI violence and will build on steps already taken by President Biden. Together these actions will make a significant difference in how we address hate crimes in America, not only during this pandemic, but for years to come," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Tuesday.

Reported hate crimes against Asian Americans in 16 of the nation's largest cities and counties have increased 164 percent since last year, showed a recent study by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University San Bernardino.

Separately, Stop AAPI Hate, a center tracking reports of racism and discrimination against Asian Americans, said it has received 6,603 firsthand complaints -- nearly two-thirds of them reported by women -- since last year, revealing the troubling spike in anti-Asian hatred during the pan-

5.8 magnitude earthquake hits Nepal, 3 injured

Kathmandu | Agencies

An earthquake of magnitude 5.8 on the Richter scale hit the Lamjung district in northern-central Nepal on Wednesday, leaving at least three people injured, a local official said.

With the epicentre in Bhulbuhle of the Marsyangdi Rural Municipality, the tremor that struck at 5:42 am (local time) was felt in different parts of the country including in the capital Kathmandu, according to the national earthquake centre.

People responded by fleeing their home following the jolts, according to officials. "People were panicked due to the strong tremor," Hom Prasad Luintel, the chief district officer at Lamjung, told Xinhua.

"Three persons injured after the collapse of the walls of their houses are receiving treatment, while there are reports of damage in several houses."



All the details of the loss are yet to be reported, said Luintel. A police team has been mobilized to collect the details of the loss and support the victims in need.

"The jolt was pretty strong. However, there haven't been reports of any human casual-

ty," Arjun Gurung, chairman of the rural municipality, told Xinhua over the phone from the epicenter. "We are still collecting the details about the loss."

At least 9,000 people were killed in a 2015 devastating quake in Nepal.

Hungary extends pandemic state of emergency

Budapest | Agencies

The Hungarian Parliament has again extended a state of emergency that allows the government to impose measures to stop the Covid spread.

The Parliament in Budapest voted on Tuesday to extend the state of emergency until the autumn. It creates a framework for the government to issue orders which would have to be approved by Parliament under normal circumstances, DPA reported.

The right-wing nationalist government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban justified the measure by saying that it would ensure that regulations that were already in force would not become invalid when the current state of emergency ends on May 22.

The opposition charged that the government is abusing the state of emergency created by the pandemic for regulations that have nothing to do with the fight against coronavirus.

A state of emergency was initially imposed for 15 days at the beginning of November. It has been extended twice



since. Critics say Orban has also abused emergency powers by letting corruption grow and abolishing university autonomy.

Infections are going down in Hungary. But its two-week incidence rate - the number of new infections per 100,000 inhabitants over the past 14 days - was recently the highest in the EU

at 193.66 cases. Some 5.7 million Hungarians out of a total population of just under ten million have been vaccinated so far, with 2.7 million of them having already had their second dose.

The Sputnik vaccine from Russia and China's Sinopharm vaccine, which are not approved by the EU, are also in use in Hungary.

Germany bans three organisations linked to Hezbollah

Berlin | Agencies

German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer has banned three organisations known to have collected money for projects of the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah in Germany.

The bans on German Lebanese Family, People for People and Give Peace had already been pronounced on April 15, a ministry spokesman said on Wednesday.

Raids were carried out and offices were searched in Bremen, Hesse, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, North Rhine Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein and Rhineland-Palatinate, DPA reported.

"Those who support terrorism will not be safe in Germany," Seehofer's spokesman quoted him as saying on Twitter.

"Regardless of the garb in which his supporters appear, they will not find a place of



retreat in our country," added the Minister, who is currently in quarantine at home after infected with Covid. The three banned groups are said to have collected donations and arranged sponsorships for Hezbollah "martyr families." The aim of the organizations was to promote Hezbollah's fight against Israel, which goes against the

idea of international understanding, the ministry said. The certainty that the bereaved would receive financial support in the event of their death increases the willingness of young Hezbollah supporters to take part in the fight against Israel. In March last year, Germany banned ban Hezbollah activity on its soil.

Germany's domestic intelligence agency estimates that there are about 1,050 Hezbollah members and supporters currently in the country. They do not comprise an official organization in Germany, but work unofficially, doing fundraising, among other activities, according to security officials.

Indian expats in UAE warned against vax rumours for parents on visit visa

Dubai | Agencies

The Indian Consulate in Dubai has warned Indian expatriates against a WhatsApp message that is being circulated saying that the mission is seeking applications from those who want to have their parents in UAE on visit visas vaccinated against Covid.

The mission's advisory came after Gulf News contacted it to verify the message that had gone viral. The message, which had a link to the consulate's online helpline service attached to it, read: "Ladies and gentlemen, this link is for the Consulate General of India Dubai. We spoke to them a couple of days ago about trying to arrange vaccine for our parents who are on visit visa. When we spoke to them

they said if we have enough number of people requesting us, then we can approach the government for arranging vaccination for seniors who are here on visit visa. So please send your messages in ... and type out the details and maybe our parents will have a shot or two! (sic)."

A spokesperson of the consulate dismissed the message as a rumour and urged expatriates not to believe in such communication. "We have no such information from local authorities here and currently, only UAE residents holding valid Emirates ID are eligible for vaccination. People should not believe in such information and avoid forwarding such stories to others," the official cautioned.

Dubai resident Rihanna J. said she got the message for-

warded in a WhatsApp group.

"I passed it on to my husband because we have been trying to get my father-in-law vaccinated. He had come over on a visit visa and we didn't send him back because of the surge in Covid cases back in India."

Some other residents, whose elderly parents are in the UAE on visit visas, also said that they had been desperately waiting to get their parents vaccinated.

Roshni Roy, whose parents have been in Dubai on visit visas, said: "I have not been able to sponsor a residence visa for them [her parents] due to the salary requirement of Dh20,000. I am eagerly waiting for the authorities to open vaccination for elderly visit visa holders."

EU TOP DIPLOMAT URGES IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE BETWEEN ISRAEL, PALESTINE

Brussels: Josep Borrell, the European Union's (EU) foreign policy chief, called on Tuesday for the "immediate cessation of all violence and implementation of a ceasefire" between Israel and Palestine. At a press briefing after the EU foreign ministers' video conference on the Middle East situation on Tuesday afternoon, Borrell cited a statement backed by 26 member states but blocked by Hungary's veto as Budapest supports Israel, Xinhua reported. The EU has thus been prevented from taking a common position on the escalating Middle East conflict. "The purpose (of the call for a ceasefire) is to protect civilians and to give full humanitarian access in Gaza," Borrell said. He added that the violence in the past few days has led to a high number of civilian casualties, including children and women. "We condemn the rocket attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups on the Israeli territory, and we fully support Israel's right to defense, but we have also considered and stated that this has to be done in a proportionate manner and respecting international humanitarian law," Borrell said. He said that the security of Israel and Palestine requires a true political solution because only that could bring peace. He called for reopening the political process, exploring reengagement between the conflicting parties, developing confidence-building measures and improving the living standard of the people in order to open a path towards a potential launching of the peace process, which has been in a stalemate for too long.

Global initiative to build more climate literate business leaders

Stockholm | Agencies

A new initiative aimed at building more climate literate business leaders is being piloted in early June by the Climate Reality Project and the social climate media organisation We Don't Have Time.

The initiative, which is initially aimed at board members in Europe and the US, could be a regional blueprint for a global effort if the training proves successful.

The decision to launch the scheme, which begins with a pilot course in Swedish and then in English for a total of up to 100 board members, follows recent, in-depth research by New York University's Stern Center for Sustainable Business. "It found only 0.2 per cent of

board members on Fortune 100 companies had 'climate expertise' despite climate change becoming a defining force in the future success or failure of business worldwide," said Ingmar Rentzhog, the CEO and founder of We Don't Have Time. "I witnessed this firsthand during a recent fund-raising drive with some financiers reasonably familiar with the challenges and opportunities of climate action, but still many, many others requiring a great deal more information and deeper understanding about one of the most defining issues of our generation," he added. Christina Carlmark, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Climate Reality Europe (Team Nordics), said: "The training will be based on a customised AI Gore presen-

tation, delivered by myself and Ingmar Rentzhog. Having presented this material to numerous management teams, I know it will be engaging, motivating and inspiring." Former US Vice-President Al Gore is the Climate Reality Project Founder, currently hosting climate training online to increase the transition to a low-carbon sustainable world. "Business has a crucial role to play helping governments deliver the Paris Climate Change Agreement and we want to provide board members with the knowledge, the urgency and direction needed to step up ambition and develop the businesses and solutions the world needs in the 21st Century," said Ingmar Rentzhog.

Kachin rebels hit junta's aviation fuel supplies

Kolkata | Agencies

Rebels of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) hit and set ablaze seven tanker trucks in northern Shan state with artillery to cut down aviation fuel supplies for Myanmar's military junta.

The trucks were attacked on the Union Highway and Kutkai-Hseni road, transporting fuel from China through Muse.

The fuel is used by Burmese Air Force to bomb and strafe rebel targets or for helicopter gunship raids on them.

KIA information officer Colonel Naw Bu told IANS five tanker trucks were hit on the Union Highway, two in separate attacks on the Kutkai-Hseni road on Monday and Tuesday.

"People told us that the fuel is not for public use but for the military aviation, so we opened fire," said Col. Naw Bu.

There was no fighting with the military in northern Shan state, apart from these artillery attacks, he said. Myanmar's military used jet fighters to retake control of the strategic hill-top Alaw Bum base on the Chinese border in



Kachin State's Momauk Township, which was seized by the KIA in late March. The outpost allows the KIA to control the road between Kachin State's capital, Myitkyina, and Bhamo, also in Kachin State. The KIA has also attacked the Myitkyina airbase and Bhamo Airport with artillery, reportedly forcing

Myanmar's air force to fly from Shan State's Lashio, Mandalay and Meiktila in Mandalay Region to attack Momauk. The KIA had good reason to believe the tanker trucks were providing jet fuel to bomb Momauk, Col. Naw Bu said.

"They attacked with two jet fighters yester-

day in Momauk," he said.

The military regime has not commented on the attacks. The fate of the tanker drivers was not yet known.

The National Energy Puma Aviation Services Co Ltd, a joint venture between Singapore-based Puma Energy Co and the government-owned Myanmar Petrochemical Enterprise, is Myanmar's major supplier of aviation fuel.

However, Puma Energy suspended imports following the military coup in February, disrupting supplies.

The regime has since reportedly been importing Chinese aviation fuel.

The KIA was negotiating a ceasefire agreement with Myanmar's military before the February 1 coup but clashes broke out on March 11 after the security forces shot dead peaceful anti-regime protesters in Myitkyina.

The KIA has launched attacks on military and police outposts in Kachin State. They are also training and arming Burmese youths who seek to raise urban insurgent formations to hit the junta and business interests of their Chinese patrons.

SPAIN POSTS SOLDIERS AT BORDER AS 8K MIGRANTS ENTER ENCLAVE

Madrid | Agencies

Spain has deployed soldiers after scores of migrants entered its north African enclave of Ceuta from Morocco.

Some 8,000 people have reached Ceuta in two days, Spanish officials said.

They said the migrants - who include about 1,500 minors - either swam around the border fences that jut out into the sea or walked across at low tide, the BBC reported.

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has vowed to restore order. The country claimed that around half of the migrants have been sent back to Morocco.

By Tuesday evening, footage of the beach showed that nearly all migrants had been cleared. Sanchez travelled to Ceuta and Melilla to

deal with the crisis, which exacerbated diplomatic tensions with Morocco. Morocco withdrew its ambassador for consultations after Spain's Foreign Minister told the Envoy of her "disgust" at what had happened.

Most of the migrants are said to be from Morocco. The Spanish troops have been deployed to the beach to help border police at Ceuta's main entry point - Tarajal, on the enclave's south side.

Dramatic scenes were captured offshore as families waded through the water and officers from Spain's Guardia Civil went into the sea to rescue young children.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska said 200 troops, plus 200 extra police were going to assist Ceuta's normal 1100-strong border force.



IOC READY TO DISPATCH MEDICAL STAFF TO TOKYO FOR OLYMPICS: BACH

Lausanne | Agencies

International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach said on Wednesday that the organisation is ready to send medical staff to Tokyo for this year's Olympic Games to support coronavirus countermeasures.

The IOC and local organisers are pressing ahead with the Games despite opposition in Japan amid the pandemic, DPA reports.

Bach told a video conference on the first day of a three-day coordination commission meeting that the IOC plans to dispatch additional medical personnel "to support the medical operations and the strict implementation of Covid-19 countermeasures in the Olympic Village and Olympic venues".

The meeting is the last between the IOC commission and Japanese organisers before the opening of the



Games on July 23.

The IOC chief's words come at a time when doctors and nurses in Japan have expressed strong opposition to the Games with hospitals overwhelmed by rising numbers of coronavirus infections.

Governors of Ibaraki and Chiba prefectures neighbouring Tokyo also said they have no plan to provide hospital beds to Olympians infected with the coronavirus.

Japanese people complain about

the extremely slow pace of the vaccination in Japan. Only 1.6 per cent of the country's 125 million population has been fully vaccinated since the beginning of the vaccination effort in mid-February.

Tokyo has been under another Covid-19 state of emergency since late April as the Japanese capital has been struggling to curb a fourth wave of infections.

The measure has also been imposed on eight other prefectures

and it is scheduled to end on May 31.

Last week, Japan expanded the state of emergency to the nine prefectures, including Hiroshima, where Bach was scheduled to participate in a torch relay event on Monday. His trip to the region, however, was cancelled due to surging infections there.

Bach said more than 80 per cent of the residents in the Olympic Village will be vaccinated by the time of the Olympics.

"The most important principle is very clear: The Olympic Village is a safe place and Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 will be organised in a safe way," Bach said.

"We must concentrate on the delivery of these safe and secure Olympic Games because the opening ceremony is only 65 days away," he said.

First batch of England-bound India cricketers reaches Mumbai



Team Absolute | New Delhi

India cricketers Ravichandran Ashwin, Washington Sundar, Mayank Agarwal, Mohammed Siraj and women's team captain Mithali Raj have reached Mumbai en route to the United Kingdom (UK), the Indian cricket board tweeted on Wednesday.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) tweeted photos of the players

in flight. "First stop, Mumbai #TeamIndia," it said along with the images.

Some other cricketers like Wriddhiman Saha, who has just recovered from Covid-19, and the standby players will reach Mumbai on May 24. India skipper Virat Kohli and other players staying in Mumbai will also join the pre-departure bio-bubble on May 24.

The Indian men's and women's teams are expected to travel together to the UK.

The men's team plays the World Test Championship (WTC) final against New Zealand at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton between June 18 and 22. India men then face England in a five-Test series from August 4 to September 14.

The women cricketers, meanwhile, play England in a Test match, their first in seven years, from June 16 to 19 after which they play three ODIs and as many T20s from June 27 to July 15.

Mbappe dreaming of playing for France at Tokyo Olympics

Paris | Agencies

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) star Kylian Mbappe said he is dreaming of playing for France at the upcoming Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Mbappe and world champions France are preparing for the rescheduled Euro 2020, which gets underway next month.

As Didier Deschamps's Les Bleus eye European glory, Mbappe also wants to represent his country at the Tokyo Games, starting in July, DPA reports.

"For us, having recognition from the whole country is very important," the 22-year-old Mbappe told TF1.

"Everyone knows that my dream has always been to take part at the Olympic Games and I hope I will be able to realise one of my life-



long dreams."

France have been drawn alongside hosts Japan, Mexico and South Africa in Group A at the Olympics. Led

by Under-21 boss Sylvain Ripoll at the Olympics, France are scheduled to open their campaign against Mexico on July 22.

Immediate focus on England Tests but WTC final special: Williamson

London | Agencies

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson has said his team's immediate focus is on the two Test matches against England but there is a "lot of excitement" for the World Test Championship final against India which follows the series.

"The first challenge, which is the first Test against a very strong side (England), is what we need to be focussing on, and I know as a group that is what we will be talking about," said Williamson on Wednesday. "At the same time, we are playing three Tests quite close together so there is in the back of your mind an eye on that (WTC final), which is a really exciting opportunity," the Black Caps skipper said on icc-cricket.com. New Zealand will take on England in the opening Test at Lord's from

June 2, followed by the Test at Birmingham from June 10. The side then plays India in the inaugural WTC final at Southampton from June 18-22.



The Black Caps' squad is currently quarantining at the Hampshire Bowl, the location of the WTC final.

Williamson said that playing the WTC final "is pretty special" and that the team was "really excited just being able to play Test cricket".

"I know the guys are really excited. Just being over here to play Test cricket is always a fantastic opportunity, but to play that third one, which is the Test Championship final, is pretty special."

This will be New Zealand's first match since securing their spot in the WTC final, and Williamson is aware of the challenge facing his team in a country where they have not enjoyed a Test series win since 1999.

DOOR OPEN FOR BANCROFT IF HE PERFORMS, SAYS CA INTERIM CEO

Sydney | Agencies

Cricket Australia (CA) Chief Executive Officer, Nick Hockley said on Wednesday that the Cameron Bancroft episode was a 'closed chapter' and 'we've moved forward', indicating that the Test batsman might be up for selection in future if he performs.

Bancroft -- who was banned along with Steve Smith and David Warner following the 2018 ball-tampering scandal during the third Test at Newlands, Cape Town in 2018 -- had indicated recently that the Australian bowlers too were aware of the unfair tactics. Video footage had showed Bancroft rubbing sandpaper to roughen one side of the ball to make it swing during the Test against South Africa.

In an interview recently, Bancroft when asked about the involvement of the Aussie bowling attack that comprised Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood, had remarked: "I think it's pretty probably self-explanatory". On Wednesday, when asked if the door was open for Bancroft to return to the Test team after he had backtracked on the claims and cleared air with CA saying there was no new information, Hockley told Sydney Morning Herald that, "As far as we are concerned, the matter is closed and we move forward."



Impossible Aus bowlers didn't know of tampering: Fanie de Villiers

Johannesburg | Agencies

Former South Africa fast bowler Fanie de Villiers said that it is "absolutely impossible" that Australia's bowlers did not know about the ball tampering tactics employed in the third Test against South Africa in Cape Town in 2018.

De Villiers was part of the commentary team for the match and alerted the television crew which eventually led to Cameron Bancroft being caught by the cameras using a foreign object on the ball.

"It's absolutely impossible for bowlers not to know what's going on the ball, because you are the person that scrutinises it, you are the person that's looking at it, you are the person that's cleaning it, you are the person that knows exactly that one side looks this way because of looking after (the ball) and the other side doesn't look a



specific way because of the grass on the wicket. So it's absolutely nonsense," de Villiers, who played 18 Tests and 83 ODIs and took 180 international wickets, told The Indian Express. Bancroft was caught on the

third day of the Test, at the end of which he and captain Steve Smith admitted to tampering with the ball in a press conference. It led to Bancroft, Smith and vice-captain David Warner being slapped with

lengthy bans from all forms of cricket. The incident came back in the news recently after Bancroft indicated that the bowlers may have also been in on the tactics. Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon, who formed Australia's bowling lineup in that Test, said in a joint statement on Tuesday that they were not aware that the ball had been tampered. "I think from start it was obvious that they knew, and from start, the Australian system didn't handle it properly. They should have handled it differently, and they tried to cover everything by just making two (three actually) people the culprits. It was a combined effort... The coach knew; everybody knows in a system, because you don't hide these things in the team firstly, and secondly, it's impossible for a bowler not to know because he can see the difference," said de Villiers.

AB didn't want to come ahead of players in the system: Boucher

Johannesburg | Agencies

AB de Villiers refused to play for South Africa in this year's T20 World Cup since he didn't want to come ahead of players already part of the system, said national coach Mark Boucher.

"AB has his reasons, which I respect. Unfortunately he's no longer in the mix. I say unfortunately because I think we all agree that he's still one of the best -- if not the best -- T20 players in world cricket," Boucher was quoted as saying by The Citizen, a South African media outlet.

"But he alluded to being concerned about coming in ahead of other players who have been a part of the system. I don't think it sat well with him, which I understand.



Boucher said that he wanted to assemble his best players for the World Cup scheduled to be held in October-November in India. But he added that South Africa will have to respect de Villiers's

decision and move forward. Cricket South Africa had issued a statement on Tuesday confirming that de Villiers's decision to retire was final and he won't be making a comeback.

ASIA CUP T20 TOURNAMENT

POSTPONED INDEFINITELY DUE TO COVID

Colombo | Agencies

The Asia Cup T20 tournament which was scheduled to be held in June in Sri Lanka has been postponed indefinitely due to Covid-19 pandemic.

"Due to prevailing situation, it will not be possible to play the tournament in June this year," Ashley de Silva, the Sri Lanka Cricket chief executive, told media on Wednesday.

The tournament which was originally scheduled to be held in September, 2020 in Sri Lanka was moved to June, 2021 due to Covid-19.

However, the unrelenting pandemic has played spoilsport again. The tournament is likely to be moved to next year. A formal statement from the Asian Cricket Council is, however, yet to come. The 2020 edition has been shifted a number of times. Initially, Pakistan was supposed to host it. However, due to tensions between India and Pakistan, the tournament was moved to the island nation.

INDIA FOOTBALL SQUAD TO TRAVEL TO DOHA FOR 2022 WC QUALIFIERS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A 28-member Indian national squad will leave for Doha on Wednesday evening for India's three forthcoming matches in the qualifiers for the 2022 FIFA World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup. The matches are slated to be played from June 3 onwards.

As per the health parameters required to travel to Qatar, all the travelling players and staff have to carry with them negative test results from the RT-PCR tests conducted in the last 48 hours. All of them were also in isolation in the Capital under the bio-bubble at the team hotel from May 15 onwards.

India have struggled to train for the qualifiers amid the deadly second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country. Head coach Igor Stimac said that it is not the 'ideal



situation" ahead of the qualifiers but the team will be putting in "intense" sessions before their matches get underway. The Indian players are also lacking game time, with the two

friendlies they played last month against the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman in late March being the only matches they have played since the end of the Indian

Super League earlier that month. "It's not an ideal situation as we move ahead to the qualifiers in June. Due to the pandemic, our national camp which was slated to begin in

Kolkata at the beginning of May had to get cancelled. The pandemic also robbed us of a friendly match in Dubai," said Stimac. "However, we understand the magnitude of the situation, and it will be intense sessions in Doha to raise the tempo and try to get ready for the matches which starts with the one against the Asian champions Qatar in Doha," he said. India are scheduled to play Qatar on June 3, Bangladesh on June 7, and Afghanistan on June 15 with all three matches to be played at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Doha. Among the 28 named for the camp, Glan Martins remains the sole player to have made it to a national team camp for the first-time ever.

Meanwhile, captain Sunil Chhetri expressed his relief to get back into the national team set-up. Chhetri had missed the friendlies in March after testing positive for Covid-19.

ALTERNATE DAY FUEL PRICE REVISION ROLLS ON, PAUSE AFTER HIKE A DAY AGO

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Under the new found preference for revising fuel prices every alternate day, the Oil marketing companies (OMCs) kept the pump price of petrol and diesel unchanged on Wednesday.

Accordingly, the price of petrol continues to remain at Tuesday level of Rs 92.85 a litre and diesel Rs 83.51 per litre in Delhi.

Across the country as well the petrol and diesel prices remained static on Wednesday but its actual retail prices varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states.

The OMCs are following the practice of changing petrol and fuel rates every alternate day rather than undertaking changes on a daily basis for past few days. Accordingly, the Wednesday's price hold came after there was an increase in prices on Tuesday. There was no price increase on Monday as well.

Also, on Sunday while petrol and diesel prices were raised by 24 and 27 paise per litre respectively, there was no price revision on Saturday.



Similarly, while fuel prices were raised on Friday, it remained unchanged in the previous day.

"It seems oil companies are giving a sense of relief to consumers as fuel prices are not being raised on a daily basis. But still prices are not actually falling but being raised on every alternate day too this month," said a oil sector expert not willing to be named.

He said that the practice of daily price revision, started after deregulation of petrol and diesel prices few years back. This has now been done away by OMCs for past several months giving clear indication that administrative price regime is still working for the sector.

Under daily price revision, OMCs revised petrol and diesel prices every morning benchmarking retail fuel

prices to a 15-day rolling average of global refined products' prices and dollar exchange rate. However, in a market where fuel prices need to be increased successively, alternate day price revision seems to be the flavour.

It is worth noting that with 10 price increase in May, the retail price of regular petrol has already reached over Rs 99 a litre in Mumbai. Petrol prices are already over Rs 100 per litre in several cities in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Premium petrol has been hovering above that level for quite some time now. Petrol prices have increased by Rs 2.30 a litre in Delhi in May in the 10 increases so far. Similarly, diesel prices have risen by Rs 2.78 per litre in capital this month.

IANS had written earlier that OMCs may begin increasing the retail price of petrol and diesel post state elections as they were incurring losses to the tune of Rs 2-3 per litre by holding the price line despite higher global crude and product prices.

With global crude prices at around \$69 a barrel mark, OMCs may have to revise fuel prices upwards again if there is any further firming up.



NCLT ASKS DHFL LENDERS TO CONSIDER WADHAWAN'S SETTLEMENT OFFER

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a major turn of events in the resolution of DHFL, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has asked its lenders to consider the settlement offer of former promoter Kapil Wadhawan.

The tribunal has given the committee of creditors a period of 10 days to consider his offer and come back to the court with its decision by May 31, sources said.

Wadhawan had filed a petition at the NCLT and the order was reserved since January 15. Kapil Wadhawan's offer to repay 100 per cent principal amount to all the creditors. In his revised proposal of Rs 91,158 crore for the creditors, Wadhawan promised to make an upfront payment of Rs

9,000 crore.

He had offered to service Rs 31,000 crore debt in 7 years at 8.5 per cent per annum. Apart from that, he

has offered to repay Rs 12,000 crore within a period of 7 years at 11.5 per cent per annum, following a one-year moratorium. The plan also includes repayment of Rs 18,000 crore in 5 years at 11 per cent per annum, following a 5-year moratorium. While Rs 5,000 crore will be converted to equity, Rs 16,158 crore will be converted into zero coupon bonds as per the proposal. Wadhawan had also stressed on to pay 100 per cent to FD and NCD holders all the time. Wadhawan in his petition had raised concerns over the bids by Piramal Enterprises and the other bidders.

Piramal Group turned out to the successful bidder for the bankrupt Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has already approved the takeover.

Asian exports, pandemic demand fuel record global trade rebound

Dublin | Agencies

Global trade enjoyed a record rebound in the first quarter of 2021, according to UN estimates, growing 10 per cent year-on-year largely on the back of booming exports from East Asia.

Countries in the region thrived after "early success in pandemic mitigation," which "allowed them to rebound faster and to capitalize on booming global demand for Covid-19 related products," the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said in a report published on Wednesday. China, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam have been among the nations reporting relatively low virus-related death tolls and surging exports, DPA reported. Health care products, digital services and "home office" equipment were in high demand last year, UNCTAD said, though international travel and hospitality services lagged. "Consumer behaviour has substantially changed," UNCTAD



said, warning that "some of this may be enduring."

Pandemic tensions led to "substantial uncertainty" related to trade, prompting some manufacturers and governments to try "shift production closer to consumers."

While German vaccine pioneers BioNTech this month it would build a factory in Singapore, recent months have seen producer countries accused of hoarding jobs, after earlier in the pandemic others were fingered for allegedly monopolizing medical and protective

equipment. While the world economy contracted by over 4 per cent in 2020 as the pandemic and restrictions hampered major economies, trade regained lost ground and by early 2021 was "higher than pre-crisis levels." UNCTAD expects goods trade to keep growing this year, but is less optimistic about services sectors such as tourism. Many borders have been closed since March last year, particularly earlier in the pandemic others were fingered for allegedly monopolizing medical and protective

The/Nudge Accelerator calls for applications from non-profit startups alleviating poverty

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The/Nudge Centre for Social Innovation has called for applications from non-profit startups ready to scale up their solutions for India's economically disadvantaged communities. This is third round for The/Nudge's 5-year Accelerator fund which has enabled 10 non-profits to touch over 10 million lives till date.

Selected non-profits will receive grants up to Rs 2 crore and mentoring by some of India's most admired change leaders, the entity said in a statement. The/Nudge CSI Partners such as K.R. Lakshminarayana, Chief Endowment Officer of Azim Premji Foundation, Sanjay Purohit, Chief Curator - Societal Platform, and Surendra Kumar Jain, Co-Founder and Former Managing Director of WestBridge Capital, will invest their time and expertise to provide hands-on support to the entrepreneurs throughout the 12-24 months of acceleration. In addition to the founders, CXOs will benefit from training and mentoring by renowned subject matter experts.

The accelerator portfolio currently includes some of India's fastest growing and deeply impactful startups such as IntelHealth - a telemedicine platform



Centre for Social Innovation

extending reach of quality healthcare to underserved geographies, Saarthi - an educational technology platform enabling parents from low-income families to participate in their children's' education and Transform - A remedial programme driving secondary school readiness and excellence in 4 states, to name a few.

AkshaySoni, Managing Director for The/Nudge Accelerator, said, "The pandemic has set India back in the progress we had made in alleviating poverty. It is important

more than ever before to invest in audacious non-profit founders and teams with the potential to solve problems at large scale."

The/Nudge Accelerator, supported by StateStreet Foundation, Skoll Foundation, Facebook CSR and Mphasis F1 Foundation will induct up to 6 startups in this round.

Startups working to improve employability and economic empowerment of women and youth will have an added advantage. Applications will remain open till May 26, 2021.

PayPoint takes COVID-19 health insurance policy to its customers

Team Absolute | Mumbai

PayPoint India, a last-mile distributor of Financial Services, rolls out Covid-19 health insurance policy for its customers in the under-served regions of India, including rural areas.

PayPoint, and Go Digit General Insurance have joined hands to deepen insurance penetration and enhance access to coronavirus protection cover for rural families. Customers will be guided about the policy features by PayPoint to ensure that they fully understand the product and its benefits.

Ketan Doshi, Managing Director of PayPoint India, said, "When the country is going through tough times, more than 80% of people in urban India and 85% in rural India do not have any health expenditure coverage. There are a lot of rejections or deductions in claims settlements for Covid-19, and medical inflation is making treatments unaffordable. This dedicated cover for coronavirus would secure our customers from financial impact due to hospitalization in such a scenario."



The insurance covers pre-hospitalization expenses for up to 30 days, post-hospitalisation expenses up to 60 days, road ambulance charges (1 percent of your chosen sum insured - up to Rs 5,000). Not only this, the cover which has a waiting period of only 15 days from the payment of premium does not have any cap on Room Rent or ICU charges, unlike other medical policies.

A policyholder can avail of cashless claims by displaying the e-health card at the network hospitals.

PRACTICALLY NAMED TIE50 AWARD WINNER AT TIECON 2021

New Delhi: Practically, India's first experiential learning app, designed to make learning immersive and increase retention in STEM learning among students of class 6 to 12, has been selected as an Award Winner in the prestigious TIE50 Awards Program. This ten-year-old awards competition is a program of TIEcon, the world's largest conference for tech entrepreneurs. Practically name was recognized for its cutting-edge & highly animated 3D videos, Simulations and AR/VR experiences.

"Practically is honoured to be selected as a TIE50 2021 winner for our focus on bringing learning alive with the help of new-age, immersive technologies and reshaping the way the world learns. We were chosen from hundreds of applicants in every technology sector globally which is further validation of our technology and market opportunity," said CharuNoheria, Co Founder and COO, Practically.

"Companies from diverse fields and in various stages made their applications to our prestigious TIE50, showcasing innovation and disruption. TIE50 continues to partner with Meet the Draper's, a ground-breaking reality show to give an opportunity to select companies to pitch on the show," said Kumar Sripadam, TIE50 Program Chair.

"TIE Silicon Valley is excited to announce TIE50 winners. TIE50 awards is our way of giving visibility to startups and connecting them with our sponsors, partners and investors in the TIE ecosystem" said AGK Karunakaran, President, TIE Silicon Valley.

India's business risk environment deteriorates in Jan-Mar: Report

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The business risk environment in India deteriorated in the fourth quarter of FY 2021, according to a Quarterly Risk Transition Report by Rubix Data Sciences.

It noted that the Rubix GST Compliance Score of 2,292 business entities (22 per cent of the total number being monitored) deteriorated between Q3 FY 2021 and Q4 FY 2021. In the prior quarter, only 8 per cent of the business entities had witnessed a drop in their Rubix GST Compliance Score.

"This indicates a deterioration in the risk environment in India in Q4 FY 2021 compared with the prior quarter," it said.

The report was prepared on the basis of 10,193 business entities from more than 35 sectors of the economy.

Further, the Rubix Provident Fund Compliance Score of 29 per cent of the business entities being monitored deteriorated between Q3 FY 2021 and Q4 FY 2021 compared with the prior quarter where only 13 per cent of the business entities witnessed a drop in their Rubix PF Compliance Score.

The deterioration in the Rubix PF Compliance Score of a significantly higher percentage of business entities in Q4 FY 2021



as compared with Q3 FY 2021, underscores the current challenges to the financial health of business entities in India.

The higher degree of non-compliance of business entities with PF filing requirements implies further hardship for employees in the short run, it said. Further, the external credit ratings of 7 per cent of the business entities deteriorated between Q3 FY 2021 and Q4 FY 2021, compared with only 2 per cent in the prior quarter. "This raises concerns about corporate risk levels in Q1 FY 22 (April - June 2021) when the impact of the second wave of Covid will play out in the broader economy," it said.

SECOND WAVE INDUCED SEQUENTIAL SLACKENING A CONCERN: ICRA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Sequential growth slackening driven by the second wave of Covid-19 in India has emerged as a concern, ratings agency ICRA said. ICRA also cautioned that bruised sentiment, high healthcare and fuel expenses will limit discretionary purchases in the immediate term. Furthermore, the agency expects a cut-back in spending on contact-intensive services.

"As expected, the shrunken base of the nationwide lockdown in April 2020 has boosted the pace of year-on-year (YoY) expansion of several high-frequency indicators in April 2021, resulting in a widespread improvement compared to the performance in March 2021," ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said.

"However, the optimism generated by this trend is limited, as eight

of the 13 non-financial indicators in April 2021 remained below their pre-Covid levels. "According to Nayar, indicators such as GST e-way bills, electricity generation, vehicle registrations, rail freight traffic, etc displayed a slowing sequential momentum in April 2021, reflecting the rise in Covid-19 cases and imposition of localised restrictions. "The early data available for May 2021 confirms that this trend is continuing, as the lockdowns have both been extended, and spread to other states, to curb the second wave of Covid-19."

As per ICRA, the YoY performance of 14 of the 15 high frequency indicators (except bank deposits) tracked by it recorded an improvement in April 2021, relative to March 2021. "As expected, the pace of this improvement was exceptionally high in several sectors such as

automobiles output, vehicle registrations, non-oil merchandise exports, GST e-way bills etc on account of the low base related to the nationwide lockdown that was in effect in April 2020."

Given the distorted base, ICRA compared the performance of the indicators in April 2021 to the pre-Covid levels (April 2019) to gauge the momentum of activity across sectors. "Discouragingly, eight of the 13 non-financial indicators recorded lower volumes in April 2021 relative to April 2019. This sub-set includes domestic airlines' passenger traffic, vehicle registrations, auto output, consumption of petrol and diesel, as well as the output of Coal India Limited," "In contrast, electricity generation, rail freight, port cargo traffic, generation of GST e-way bills and non-oil merchandise exports recorded higher volumes in

April 2021, relative to April 2019. "Accordingly, it cited that regardless of the high YoY expansion, many of the indicators such as GST e-way bills, fuel consumption, vehicle registrations, etc. displayed a slowing sequential momentum in April 2021, reflecting the rise in Covid-19 cases, and imposition of restrictions in various parts of the country. Moreover, ICRA said this trend has continued in May 2021 so far, with the restrictions spreading to other states. "In our view, the sharply higher daily infections in the second wave of Covid-19 in India will have a prolonged negative impact on consumer sentiment. In addition, the substantial healthcare expenses related to the Covid-19 treatment, along with high retail prices of fuels, are likely to squeeze disposable incomes in the urban as well as rural areas," Nayar

said. "Moreover, after the satiation of the pent-up demand seen during the festive season in 2020, demand for many varieties of consumer durables may be low. Overall, we expect discretionary spending on consumer durables and areas such as home improvements may be limited in the near term, in addition to the expected cut back in spending on contact-intensive services. "At present, ICRA tracks monthly indicators like production of PVs, motorcycles, scooters, vehicle registrations, output of CIL, electricity generation, non-oil merchandise exports, ports cargo traffic, rail freight traffic, generation of GST e-way bills, domestic airlines' passenger traffic, consumption of petrol and diesel, aggregate deposits and non-fossil credit of scheduled commercial banks.

HUL TO PROVIDE FREE O2 CONCENTRATORS IN DELHI, BENGALURU

New Delhi: FMCG major Hindustan Unilever (HUL) has rolled out 'Mission HO2PE' to provide oxygen concentrators free of cost to Covid patients in New Delhi and Bengaluru. According to the company, India is facing a severe shortage of oxygen (O2) concentrators as the health-care system continues to grapple with the deadly second wave of Covid-19. "Through Mission HO2PE, HUL has air-lifted over 5,000 oxygen concentrators into India. HUL's partnership with KVN Foundation and Portea will provide access to oxygen for Covid-19 patients directly in their homes, thereby reducing the pressure on our healthcare infrastructure which is already under duress. "In New Delhi and Bengaluru, patients and caregivers can request for an oxygen concentrator... Once the requirement is validated, the concentrator will be delivered to the patient's doorstep. A trained volunteer will also visit to help the patients and caregivers and assist them in managing the functions and operations of the oxygen concentrator," HUL said. The programme will operate under a 'borrow-return-use' model. "Post usage, the concentrators will be sanitised, serviced and provided to the next set of people who need them, thus ensuring the concentrators reach a maximum number of people and help save as many lives as possible," the company added.



WHY TAMANNAAH BHATIA IS EXCITED ABOUT 'NOVEMBER STORY'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Tamannaah Bhatia's can't stop gushing about her upcoming web series "November Story", a murder mystery that casts her as a young ethical hacker named Anuradha, who is trying to sell her father's house so she can pay for his Alzheimer's treatment.

"When I first heard the narration of 'November Story' from director Ram Subramanian, I could have never anticipated that the storyline was going to be so layered. I have never watched a crime thriller series that is so complex and intriguing at the same time, and one that engages audiences in every episode like an authentic whodunit," she says.

"What commences as a plain Jane murder spirals into the unleashing of a series of hair-raising events interlaced with a multitude of characters and narratives that come to the fore, raising more and more questions while building mystery around the killer and motive," she promises. The seven-episode whodunit also features Pasupathy, GM Kumar, Aruldass and Vivek Prasanna among others, and releases on May 20 in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu on Disney+ Hotstar VIP.



Jr NTR requests fans to not celebrate his birthday amidst pandemic on May 20

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Hyderabad: Telugu star Jr NTR took to Twitter on Wednesday to pen a note for fans, requesting them to not celebrate his birthday this year on May 20.

He titled the note as "A Humble Appeal" and spoke about how the country was at war with Covid-19. He urged them to follow all Covid protocols and stay at home.

"My dear fans, a big thank you to each and everyone of you. I have seen your messages, your videos, and your good wishes. Your prayers have kept me going and I am indebted to you all for this love. I am doing very good and I hope to test negative soon."



Every year, the affection shown by you on the occasion of my birthday is something I truly cherish. But in these challenging times, the biggest gift you can give me is to stay home and follow local lockdown rules," he wrote.

He added: "Our country is at war with Covid-19. Our medical community and frontline workers are waging a selfless and tireless war. Many people have lost their loved ones and livelihoods. This is not a time for celebrations. This is a time for showing our solidarity with those in need. Support each other and extend a helping hand to those in need. When all this is over and the war on Covid-19 is won, we shall celebrate together. Wear a mask. Stay at home. Jai Hind."

The actor tested positive for the virus a few days back. He took to Twitter to share this health update with his fans and added that he had quarantined himself. Jr NTR has SS Rajamouli's upcoming mega project "RRR" lined up. He will share the screen with Ram Charan as well as Alia Bhatt and Ajay Devgn in the film.

ATHAR SIDDIQUI: I DOUBT I WILL GET THE CHANCE TO PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Athar Siddiqui, who plays the antagonist in the television show "Mann Kee Awaaz Pratigya 2", says he enjoys his onscreen bad boy image.

However, he wants to "shock" the audience with a positive character. "I doubt I will get a chance to act in a positive role. Casting directors always call me for a negative one. But I am waiting for the opportunity to play a good boy and shock the audience," he says.

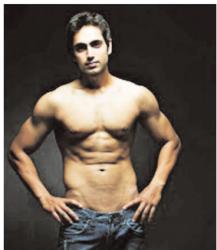
On his part, the actor says he always makes sure his roles



are integral to the story.

"After playing so many negative roles on TV, the audience assumes that I am playing a dark character and I enjoy my onscreen bad boy image. I choose to play strong characters rather than being just part of the show. I don't mind joining the drama for short tracks, but I just make sure till the time I'm part of the show, I rule the screen," he says.

Athar is known for featuring in shows like "Jag Janani Maa Vaishno Devi" and "Parvarrish: Kuchh Khattee Kuchh Meethi".



ANKIT GULATI: VILLAINS HAVE OVERSHADOWED THE HEROES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Ankit Gulati, who is currently seen in the television show "Mehndi Hai Rachne Waali", feels nowadays villains overshadow the heroes in films and shows. "Earlier, the villain was one of the hated characters in a show and most actors didn't prefer a negative role. Now, the times have changed and there are movies and shows where villains have overshadowed the heroes. At times they are loved more than the hero. I enjoy the hateful love of my audience for my grey-shade roles," he says. The actor says that playing negative characters has been a gamechanger for him. "For me, these have worked like sunshine. This has been the greatest and most fruitful decision I have taken in my life. As an actor, such characters challenge me a lot. You need to work hard to present yourself with expressions and style to impress your audience," he says. Ankit is known for featuring in series like "Radha Krishna" and "Vish: A Poisonous Story".

Team Absolute | Chennai

Actress Shruti Haasan believes being a public figure, she can easily be misunderstood. However, she hopes to continue to speak her mind with confidence irrespective of what people perceive of her.

"I think we live in a time where there is a certain amount of easy negativity or judgement. I've realised I want to share my truth and speak with ease no matter what. Those who want to take the good from it will, and those who twist things will always twist things," she told IANS.

The actress, known for her love of Goth, recently started the #McKenzieMakeupChallenge, in association with American singer and actress McKenzie Westmore. The topic of the challenge is Beautiful Gothic Make up. Shruti is judging the challenge, where she invites

Shruti Haasan:

entries from all over the country to showcase

I want to share my truth and speak with ease

their creative gothic looks.

"The Goth look is my all-time favourite. The McKenzie challenge is a really nice and innovative platform and I'm glad to be part of it," she says. Talking about the entries she has received so far, she says: "There's a lot of people who don't know much about the subculture, who are intrigued. Mostly it's been super fun and positive."

The gothic look is yet to be accepted as part of pop culture in the Indian glamour industry. However, Shruti feels that if a certain look is an extension of one's personality, then people eventually feel drawn towards it. "I think whatever a look is, if it's an authentic extension of your interests and personality, then people are drawn to it even if it's not a style they are used to," she says.

The actress will announce the winner of the challenge on Wednesday. Shruti will soon be seen in the Prabhas-starrer "Salaar", which is being shot in Kannada and Telugu languages, and will be dubbed in Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam.



Abhishek Banerjee: My dream role is Al Pacino's Tony Montana in 'Scarface'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Casting director-turned-actor Abhishek Banerjee would love to reprise Al Pacino's iconic character Tony Montana in Brian De Palma's 1983 classic "Scarface".

"I've been fascinated with Al Pacino all my life. Something like Tony Montana in Scarface -- that's the kind of dream role I have for me. If I ever get to play something like that, I'm sure I'm going to kill it. The energy, the gruesomeness of such a character is always very exciting. It is very liberating and helps you vent your inner anger," said Abhishek.

After working in theatre in Delhi, Abhishek arrived in Mumbai around 12 years ago with the dream of being an actor. He took up casting direction in order to support himself in the expensive city. Although he has been around for a while, life changed after he garnered critical appreciation for his performance in the 2018 horror comedy "Stree".

"Before Stree, I used to doubt myself as an actor. Filmmakers didn't know about me. No matter how talented you are, till the time people trusts you, I don't think you can showcase your talent. Stree gave me that opportunity -- that

recognition and trust. Whatever I am today is because of that film. Huge thanks to (director) Amar Kaushik and (producers) Maddock Films for that." The 36-year-old actor is not interested in confining himself to Hindi cinema. Rather, he wants pan-India recognition. Abhishek said: "As an actor I want to work in languages like Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Bengali among others. I have stayed in several parts of India because of my dad's Armed Forces background. He used to get transferred every four to five years. I want to become a pan-India actor." With films mostly releasing on OTT in the current pandemic situation, does he feel it makes a difference to him as an actor? "I don't know, maybe it makes a difference. As an actor, watching myself on the big screen is more exciting than watching myself on the small screen. Of course, I can't complain. OTT is also a medium where everybody can watch your work," he replied.

On the work front, Abhishek features in the latest Netflix anthology "Ajeeb Daastaans". The actor has his kitty full with upcoming projects like "Dostana 2", Akarsh Khurana's "Rashmi Rocket", Amar Kaushik's "Bhediya", Umesh Shukla's "Aankh Micholi" and Satram Ramani's "Helmet".



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Donal Bisht