

absolute india

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THE NEW DEADLINE

In its notice to the platforms, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting said that a total of around 60 publishers and their associations have informed the ministry that they have already initiated the process of formation of self-regulatory bodies under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Codes) Rules, 2021.

"There is no requirement for prior registration of digital media publishers with the ministry. The publishers may furnish the information to the ministry in the applicable format within 15 days of the issuance of this notice."



publishers will now have to notify the government of their operations, set up self-regulatory bodies and apply a complaint redressal mechanism, besides following the codes which were only applicable to print and television news thus far.

Europe issues new norms for social media

London: The European Commission on Wednesday published new guidelines to hold Facebook, Google, Twitter and other social media platforms accountable for disinformation shared on their respective platforms. The Code of Practice on Disinformation is the first of its kind worldwide and should be strengthened to become a more effective tool for countering disinformation, the commission said in a statement. The commission said that based on a robust monitoring framework and clear performance indicators, signatories should reduce financial incentives to disinformation, empower users to take an active role in preventing its spread, better cooperate with fact-checkers across EU Member States and languages, and provide a framework for access to data for researchers.

Twitter asks for 3-month extension on new rules

"We, alongside many in civil society in India and around the world, have concerns with regards to the use of intimidation tactics by the police in response to enforcement of our global Terms of Service, as well as with core elements of the new IT Rules. We urge the Ministry of Electronics and IT to publish these Standard Operating Protocols on procedural aspects of compliance for public consultation. We would request the Ministry to consider a minimum of 3 months extension in order for Twitter to implement the Rules".



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre has written to the OTT and digital media platforms to furnish all their details and compliance status as per the new IT rules within 15 days. One of the new rules provides for furnishing certain information by the publishers of news and current

affairs content, and publishers of online curated content, to the ministry.

Apart from the details on the websites, mobile apps and social media accounts, the ministry has also sought information on the grievance redressal mechanism.

The Centre came up with the new rules in February this year, creating a new framework for governing intermediary liability and digital media regulation.

As per the norms, digital news

Don't undermine India's legal system: IT Ministry

The Centre on Thursday hit back hard at Twitter's latest statement raising concerns over the 'potential threat' to freedom of speech, saying that the US-based microblogging platform is trying to dictate its terms in India, and also wants to undermine the country's legal system. Maintaining that India has a glorious tradition of free speech and democratic practices dating back centuries, the Ministry of Electronics and IT said in a statement that protecting free speech in India is not the prerogative of a private, for-profit and foreign entity like Twitter, but it is the commitment of the world's largest democracy.

Study on cocktail's efficacy against double mutant variant

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

AIIG Hospitals in Hyderabad on Thursday said that it is doing a study on the efficacy of monoclonal antibodies cocktail against double mutant variant of coron-



avirus. AIG Chairman Dr D. Nageshwar Reddy told reporters on Thursday that monoclonal antibodies-based treatment has the potential to increase mutant variants.

"Mutation in the virus can impact the effectiveness of this monoclonal antibodies' treatment. Although the effectiveness against some of the variants have been proven, we are not sure about how it will go against the double mutant B.1.617, the so-called Indian variant. We are doing a major study where we are looking at its efficacy against the double mutant variant of the virus. This treatment has the potential to increase mutant variants and that is why irrational

use of these antibodies' cocktails should be absolutely discouraged," he added.

The first Covid-19 patient in India who was treated with a monoclonal antibodies cocktail was discharged from a hospital in Haryana on Wednesday. The patient, an 82-year-old man with multiple comorbidities, was administered the jab on Tuesday at Medanta Hospital.

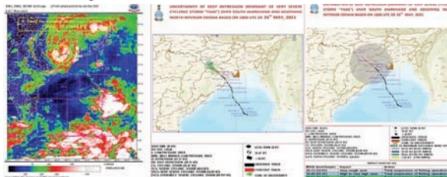
VAX TRIALS ON CHILDREN IN INDIA TO BEGIN SOON

New Delhi: The Central government on Thursday announced that Covid-19 vaccine trials on children in the country would begin soon. Member (Health) in NITI Aayog and the chair of National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC), Dr Vinod K. Paul, made the announcement on behalf of the government. Paul, however, said that there have been studies about safety of vaccines in children, which have been encouraging.

Sputnik V manufacturing to start soon in India

New Delhi: The manufacturing of Russia's Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine will start soon in India as the country has accomplished technology-transfer to Indian companies, said Dr Vinod K. Paul, chair of the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC) on Thursday. He said these vaccines will not need to undergo prior bridging trials as the provision has now been further amended to waive off the trial requirement altogether for the well-established vaccines manufactured in other countries. The declaration comes after the developers of Russia's Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine and Panacea Biotec on Monday announced that full-scale production of the doses in India will start this summer.

Yaas weakens into deep depression, likely to move north-westwards



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The cyclonic storm 'Yaas' in Bay of Bengal has weakened into a 'deep depression' and is very likely to move further north-westwards and weaken gradually during the next 12 hours. The cyclone is very likely to move further north-westwards and weaken gradually into a depression during next 12 hours. The storm had commenced the landfall process around 9 a.m. on Wednesday.

As per the IMD's 2.30 a.m. report, the last hourly bulletin regarding 'Yaas', the cyclone then intensified near the centre with windspeeds of about 55-65 kmph gusting to 75 kmph. The cyclone moved north-northwestwards with a speed of about 13 kmph during past six hours. As per the IMD forecast, the wind speed of the storm will decrease gradually becoming 40-50 kmph gusting to 60 kmph during three hours over south Jharkhand and adjoining north Odisha.

Karnataka government a 'three-party coalition', claims minister

Bengaluru: Karnataka Tourism Minister C.P. Yogeshwara, the one-time blue-eyed boy of Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa, is the latest in the party to rebel against him, saying the present dispensation in the state cannot be termed as the BJP's government but "a coalition setup governed by all three parties". Addressing reporters on the sidelines of a state cabinet meeting here, Yogeshwara said that he had gone to New Delhi to reveal everything about him facing humiliation at every possible level in the government. Asked to elaborate, Yogeshwara said that he certainly was not talking about 17 MLAs who have come from JD-S and the Congress, "but in the present set up, it (the government) is adjusting politics to reign supreme at the cost of BJP and its workers and leaders". "In my own case (Channapattana Assembly seat), the BJP has adjustments with my arch rivals (JD-S leader, H.D. Kumarswamy and Congress' state President D.K. Shivakumar). If this continues any further, would it not affect electoral prospects in 2023? Should I not bring this to our party top brass in Delhi?" he asked.



Indian-origin man among 9 victims of mass shooting in California

Arul Louis | New York

An Indian-origin man, who saved at least one person in a California mass shooting, was among the nine people killed by a railway worker who killed himself in San Jose, according to officials. Taptejdeep Singh, 36, was shot on Wednesday at a railway yard in the city in California's Silicon Valley, by a fellow worker, according to the local Sheriff's Office. Singh was a train operator for the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, a local light rail system.



San Jose Mercury News quoted Singh's brother, Bagga Singh, as saying that his brother "put a lady in a control room to hide. He saved her and rushed down the stairway." He

said that although his brother may be considered a hero, "he should have saved his life, too. We lost a good person." The home of the shooter, maintenance worker Samuel James Cassidy, 57, went up in flames around the time the shooting began. Mourning the deaths and the impact on families of the trade "union brothers and sisters," President Joe Biden renewed his call for stricter gun laws in a country which sees frequent mass shootings.

US to boost efforts to find Covid-19 origin

While making it clear that the agencies had not reached consensus on how the virus originated, Biden on Wednesday directed the agencies to "redouble their efforts" and report back in 90 days, the New York Times reported on Thursday.

WASHINGTON | Agencies

US President Biden has ordered US intelligence agencies to investigate the origins of the Coronavirus pandemic in China as a way to prevent future pandemics, the media reported.

In a statement, Biden said he had received the intelligence officials' report on the virus's origins, before asking for "additional follow-up". The



intelligence community had "coalesced around two likely scenarios," he said, but they had not definitively answered the question, the NYT said. Biden's statement indicates that his administration takes seriously the possibility that it was accidentally leaked from a lab, as well as the prevailing theory that it was transmitted to humans by an animal.

MAHA GOVT REVOKES PROHIBITION IN CHANDRAPUR DISTRICT



Mumbai: In a politically sensitive decision, the Maharashtra government on Thursday revoked the 6-year old prohibition imposed in Chandrapur district of the Vidarbha region, an official said here.

The decision to lift the liquor ban in the district - enforced since April 2015 - was taken at a Cabinet meeting presided over by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

This reversed the move by the then Bharatiya Janata Party-led regime of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, who has criticised the Maha Vikas Aghadi government's move, terming it as "regrettable", besides evoking mixed reactions from different sections of society.

Paytm to break even in 12-18 months: Bernstein

Paytm has crossed the proof of concept stage on consumer credit tech and merchant credit tech. Early disbursement numbers have been strong, rising month-on-month with strong bank and NBFC funding partners. Broking business with Paytm Money has also got off to a strong start, the report said.

- According to reports, Paytm is aiming to raise about \$3 billion in an initial public offering (IPO) late this year, which could be the country's largest debut ever.
- The startup, backed by investors including Berkshire Hathway, Softbank and Ant Group, plans to list in India in November around Diwali.
- Paytm, formally called One 97 Communications, is targeting a valuation of around \$25 billion to \$30 billion, as per reports.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Paytm is on track to break even in 12-18 months with increased financial discipline and targeted strategic investments, investment research firm Bernstein said in a



pre-IPO primer.

"Paytm has come a long way from a simple digital wallet business to an integrated payments ecosystem. We believe the next stage of growth will be led by financial services, particularly delivering seamless credit tech products to consumers and merchants. With increased financial discipline (rare in the hyper-competitive payments space), Paytm is on track to break even in 12-18 months. We expect Paytm to continue being the largest payments and fintech ecosystem in India," Bernstein said in

its report. Paytm has realigned its payments strategy around merchant payments leadership. Paytm's beneficiary UPI market share (a proxy for merchant receipts) is rising month-on-month and was 16 per cent in April, the report said. "Combine that with its digital wallet, merchant acquiring and online merchant payments, Paytm has a total throughput of \$2 billion in FY21, up 33 per cent year on year," it added. Paytm's credit tech vertical is likely to lead the next wave of revenue growth.

R&AW chief, IB director get one-year extension

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre on Thursday extended the tenures of Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) Chief, Samant Kumar Goel, and Intelligence Bureau Director, Arvind Kumar, by one year.

Both Goel and Kumar are 1984-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officers, who were to retire on June 30 this year. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the extension in service of both Goel and Kumar for a period of one year beyond their present tenure ending June 30.

An order issued by the Ministry of Personnel on Thursday mentioned that



both the IPS officers, holding two key posts, have been given extension in service "in relaxation of FR 56 (d) and Rule 16(1A) of All India Services (Death-cum-Retirement Benefits) Rule, 1958". As per the order, Goel's service was extended for one year as Secretary, Research and Analysis Wing. The order also mentioned that Kumar's service has been extended by one year as Director, Intelligence Bureau.



CHECK CASE OF THOSE WHO COULD NOT AVAIL HEALTH INSURANCE: DELHI HC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Thursday noted that with non-availability of hospital beds amid the second wave of Covid-19, a large of insured people could not avail benefits of their health insurance policies and asked the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) to see if such people can be covered. A bench, comprising Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh, said a large number of people could not receive benefits under their policies as they could not get a hospital bed. This cannot be termed as their fault, as the situation arose due to the dearth of medical infrastructure, it said, asking the sector regulator to discuss with insurance companies, the terms and conditions under which such people could be covered.

"About three to four weeks when the current wave of the pandemic was at its peak, there was acute shortage of hospital beds not only in Delhi but in the entire country. Covid-19 patients, who required hospitalisation, could not get hospital beds, as a result, several people had to take treatment at home with oxygen supply and other equipment," the bench said.

Observing the insurance policies issued by various companies do not cover claims unless the insured is hospitalised, it directed IRDA to examine various aspects through which people can receive benefits of health insurance and place a



status report before it. It has posted the matter for further hearing on July 14. Also after learning that Covid specific policies are meant for people between 18-65 age group, the bench said people above 60 years are more vulnerable to Covid-19 and excluding them will not help. It asked IRDA to examine possibility of a Covid specific insurance policy for citizens above the age of 65 years.

Noting that the IRDA has taken steps to mitigate the sufferings of people on account of Covid-19, it however, said that there are a couple of issues that it should consider. Counsel representing IRDA

submitted that against the backdrop of the pandemic, it has notified two policies: Corona Kavach Policy and Corona Rakshak Policy and apart from them, various companies are offering other policies on individual and group basis.

The counsel added till April 30, 26.37 lakh corona kavach policies were issued and 4.73 lakh corona rakshak policies were issued. However, the bench responded that insurance companies are not doing any charity, if one were to look at the premium collected in comparison with the amount disbursed.

B'LURU POLICE ARREST 4 WITHIN HOURS OF ASSAM POLICE TWEETING SEXUAL ASSAULT VIDEO



Bengaluru: Within hours of Assam police posting a video showing a young girl being sexually tortured and assaulted by five men that went viral, the Bengaluru police on Thursday nabbed four persons in connection with the case, claiming that all of them were Bangaladeshis.

The police at Ramamurthy Nagar said in a statement that the video was shot around 10 days ago, and the five men, believed to be Bangaladeshis, were involved in an international human trafficking racket.

While the police have not revealed their names yet, an officer said that all the four accused had brutally assaulted the 21-year-old woman after raping her.

Seven terrorist associates arrested in J&K's Pulwama



Bengaluru | Agencies

Seven men linked with proscribed terrorist outfit Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) have been arrested from Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district, officials said on Thursday. They have been identified as Sajad Ahmad Sheikh, resident of Pingsh Tral, Adil Hussain Sheikh, Mohammad Iqbal Baba, both residents of Tral-e-Bala, Yasir Amin Dar, resident of Noorabad Tral-e-Bala, Showkat Ahmad Sheikh, Ubaid Ahmad Mir, both residents of Batagund Tral and Adil Rashid Bhat, resident of Kranzbal Tral. Police said that the arrested terrorist associates were motivating youth to join the terrorist ranks. Besides, they were also involved in providing logistics, shelter and other kind of support to terrorists of JeM and helping them in transporting arms/ammunition in Tral and Awantipora areas. "The arrested terror associates were also in touch with Pakistan-based self style terror commanders through different social media platforms. Incriminating material has also been recovered from them," police said.

National level wrestler arrested for robbery, bootlegging

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Manjeet, a former national level gold medalist in wrestling, and member of the dreaded Kaushal gang, has been arrested for robbery and illegal supply of liquor, Delhi Police said on Thursday.

DCP, Dwarka, Santosh Kumar Meena said that a dedicated team of the Special Staff, Dwarka, arrested Manjeet, an active member of the gang, on May 24 from the Najafgarh area and a home-made pistol, a live cartridge and a robbed mobile phone was recovered from his possession.

A case was also registered against him under several sections of the



Arms Act. The DCP said that "Manjeet, along with his associates, robbed a car in 2012 from Haryana and was arrested for the first time in 2013. After that, he was again arrested in 2019 as he had done three car-jackings from the area of Gurugram and Delhi's Kapashera," he said. Meena also said that

in the Bhondsi jail, Manjeet came in the contact with the Kaushal Gang and become its member.

Coming out from jail in February 2021, Manjeet started supplying illegal liquor from Haryana to Delhi with his associate, namely Bhupender aka Khali.

HUNGRY PREGNANT WOMAN RAPED IN JAIPUR ON PROMISE OF FOOD

Jaipur: The rape of a 22-year-old pregnant woman in Jaipur, allegedly by two ambulance drivers who promised to give



her food, has evoked protests from the opposition while the National Commission for Women on Thursday took cognisance of the matter and asked the Rajasthan DGP for a fair and time-bound investigation. As per police officials, the woman, who lived with her husband on the footpath in front of SMS Hospital, went out begging for food on May 24. She was lured by an ambulance driver and also brought his friend. Promising to provide her a complete meal if she stays silent, both of them took turns to rape her in the vehicle and later dropped her near the SMS Hospital. Although police on Wednesday night arrested the two accused, but BJP state President Satish Poonia still questioned Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on the "deteriorating" law and order in state. "What kind of security is provided in the state when a hungry pregnant woman, begging for food, is raped in the centre of the city?" he asked, terming Gehlot's claims that he is providing food and shelter to poor a "failure".

Centre tried to defame farmers with motivated chargesheet, alleges Akali Dal

Team Absolute | Chandigarh

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Thursday condemned the Central government for trying to defame the farmers' agitation as well as suppress it by allegedly filing a politically motivated chargesheet accusing the farmers of conspiring to turn the Red Fort into a protest site on January 26 this year.

In a statement here, former minister Daljit Singh Cheema said it was shocking that Delhi Police had filed a chargesheet accusing the farmers of trying to capture the Red Fort on January 26 with the aim of turning it into a protest site.



He said this was furthest from the truth. "It is a matter of record that the entire established leadership of the Kisan Andolan as well as thousands of protesters took a predetermined route as finalised after talks with Delhi Police. Only a small section of

people reached the Red Fort." Cheema said it was apparent that Delhi Police had not done a professional investigation into the entire case.

"The factual position on the ground has not been taken into consideration while framing the chargesheet. In fact,

it seems to be motivated by politics." The SAD leader asked the Central government to take stock of the situation immediately and take corrective measures to ensure no farmer was victimised due to the partisan chargesheet filed by the police.

New school academic year will be online this time too in Kerala

Team Absolute | Thiruvananthapuram

Kerala Education Minister V. Sivankutty on Thursday said that with the Covid pandemic continuing its surge, the new academic school year will start in the online mode from June 1, this time as well. Sivankutty said that at the moment there is no way one can think of returning to classrooms and hence like the previous academic year, this time also it would be in the digital mode.

"The classes will be aired through KITE-Victers (an edutainment channel). Certain changes have been



made to make the classes more interesting and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will inaugurate it on June 1. The

state level inauguration would be held at the Cotton Hill Girls School here," said Sivankutty.

As the first step, during the first week, there would be bridging classes to connect with what happened in the

last academic year to ensure seamless continuity in the digital mode.

"This time, we are planning to hold interactive classes with the teachers coming live from their classroom and we are working out to have sessions which would give the students a real classroom feel," said KITE CEO, K. Anvar Sadath.

In the previous academic year, when the pandemic began, KITE had developed more than 8,300 digital classes and was aired through KITE Victers channel as part of the First Bell programme.

All the classes from Pre-primary to 12th Standards was held in the digital mode last year and the same would happen this time too.

Deporting Choksi to India directly may not be easy

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne has said that fugitive diamondaire Mehul Choksi, who was captured in Dominica after going missing for three days "needs to return to India" where he can face the criminal charges levelled against him. While Choksi's lawyer Vijay Agarwal says that the moment the businessman, who is also the chairman of the Gitanjali group, acquired the citizenship of Antigua he ceased to be a citizen of India and hence legally as per Immigration and Passport Act Section 17 and 23, he can only be deported to Antigua. Antigua News Room, a media outlet, quoted Browne as telling journalists in Antigua and Barbuda: "We asked them not to repatriate him to Antigua. He needs to return to India where he can face the criminal charges levelled against him." The Antigua Observer also said that Browne has reportedly told the media in India that he has asked Dominican government to detain



Choksi for entering their country illegally. "Browne has asked that officials in Dominica make Choksi persona non grata and have him deported directly to India," the Antigua Observer reported. Choksi, who is wanted by the CBI and the ED in connection with the over Rs 13,500 crore Punjab National Bank (PNB) loan fraud case, has reportedly been taken into custody in Dominica on

Wednesday. Choksi was reported missing on Sunday from Antigua and Barbuda, where he had taken citizenship, sparking a manhunt for the fugitive businessman. The Antigua Observer also reported that Choksi is in the custody of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Dominica. Choksi is fighting two cases in Antigua, according to the CBI, related to his citizenship and his extradition to India. He had fled India after taking citizenship in 2017 in Antigua, where wealthy foreigners can become citizens in exchange for investing there.

RAJ BJP CHIEF ACCUSES STATE GOVT OF DISTORTING COVID DEATH NUMBERS

Jaipur: The BJP's Rajasthan unit chief Satish Poonia on Thursday accused the state government of distorting the Covid death numbers in Jodhpur, the home constituency of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, besides lamenting the "pathetic" healthcare facilities in the state. Poonia also wondered if this is the same 'Rajasthan model' that was praised by interim Congress President Sonia Gandhi and her daughter Priyanka Gandhi. Accusing the Ashok Gehlot government of hiding the real death figures in Jodhpur, Poonia said the claims made by the government have been proven false looking at the large crowds thronging the places from where death certificates are issued. While the government said that only 618 people died of Covid in Jodhpur, the real figures are around 2,912 in 433 villages of the district, which reveal a huge discrepancy, Poonia claimed. The BJP leader also said that the CM is deceiving the people in the name of distributing free medicines, when the reality is that people are facing acute shortage of drugs and besides being denied admission to hospitals under the Chiranjivi Yojana, an insurance scheme launched by state government for the residents of Rajasthan. "Since the beginning, we have been demanding that CHCs and PHCs should be fully-equipped with medical resources to improve the health system in the state, but no attention has been paid to our requests. There is still time and the rural medical infrastructure can be improved by streamlining resources," Poonia said. He also said that regular medicine supply should be ensured in the rural belt and private hospitals should be directed to treat the beneficiaries of Chiranjivi Yojana.

Amend victim references in Tejpal judgement in 3 days: HC to Goa court

The Bombay High Court bench in Goa on Thursday directed the Additional District and Sessions Court in North Goa to rewrite references which revealed the identity of sexual assault victim.

Team Absolute | Panaji

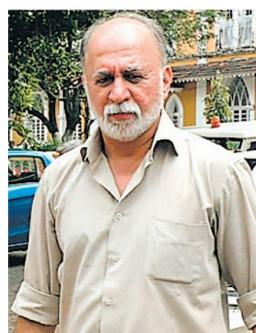
In its 527 page order the sessions court on May 21 acquitted former Tehelka editor-in-chief Tarun Tejpal from charges of rape levelled against him by a jun-

ior colleague in 2013.

The High Court's single bench of Justice SC Gupte said that the alterations to the judgement should be made in three days, before the order is uploaded to the court's online portal for public viewing.

Justice Gupte's order came after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta pointed out that the order by the Additional District and Sessions judge Kshama Joshi contained references to the victim's husband, her email and her mother's name in paragraphs 55, 177 and 182 of the judgement.

"In the interest of protecting the identity of the victim of an offence, such as the one with which we are concerned in the present case, it is appropriate to have the above references to be found in paragraphs



55, 177 and 182 of the impugned judgement redacted," the Court said in its order. "The trial Court is accordingly directed to redact the above refer-

ences, as also other similar references, wherever found in the order, whilst uploading the impugned judgment," the Court also said.

Speaking to reporters Assistant Solicitor General Pravin Faldessai said that the "judgement is not proper" and had "glaring irregularities".

"There is no question of why the state has filed the appeal. We find that the judgement of the Additional Sessions Court is wrong. The acquittal is not made on the proper prospects of law. So the state is right in filing an appeal..." Faldessai said.

The Court is now expected to hear the state government's appeal against the acquittal granted to Tejpal on June 2. Inexplicable normalcy of the

victim, post twin alleged sexual assaults, shoddy police investigation and an 'outright lie' in her deposition were some the reasons which may have led to the acquittal of Tejpal courtesy "benefit of doubt", according to the judgement by the Goa Court.

Judge Joshi in her judgement had also underlined "glaring contradictions" in the statements of the victim, her mother and brother, as well as in the statement made by the victim in context of the CCTV footage of the hotel where the alleged crime occurred in November 2013.

Tejpal was charged against under sections 376 (rape), 341 (wrongful restraint), 342 (wrongful confinement) 354A (sexual harassment) and 354B (criminal assault), of the Indian Penal Code.



CHIEF MINISTER'S WARNING AS STATE PREPS FOR UNLOCK

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the recovery rate in the state is constantly increasing but "we should not become relaxed." "The crisis still exists," he said.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday said that restrictions will continue to remain in force despite the gradual unlocking of economic activities in the state from June 1. Public events, including political rallies, won't be allowed, he said, adding, marriages will be allowed but with a cap of ten people and those who participate should be tested for COVID-19.

The Chief Minister said the recovery rate in the state is constantly increasing but "we should not become relaxed." "The crisis still exists," he said.

The ongoing ban on the assembly of five or more persons at one place will remain in place, Chouhan said.

He also warned of the possibility of a third wave and said that a roadmap



has been prepared to deal with such a scenario. Activities will begin but gradually, political rallies, meetings, and religious events will remain completely banned, he said.

Madhya Pradesh on Thursday reported 2,182 COVID-19 cases - with a 3.1 per cent positivity rate - 72 deaths and 7,479 recoveries in the last 24 hours. Total active cases have declined to 43,265 now. 17 districts now have a positivity rate below 10 per cent, but Indore and Bhopal continue to report 500 plus cases daily.

Ratlam, Anuppur and Sidhi districts too are a cause of concern, the Chief Minister said.

The Chief Minister said the 45 districts with low positivity rate will start getting relaxations gradually, however, seven districts, including Bhopal and Indore, may not get any relaxations. Ratlam, Rewa, Sidhi, Anuppur and Sagar are among these seven districts. There is a need for caution in these districts as well as the entire state. The rate of infection has come down as a result of implementation of

the Corona curfew and the model 'of the people, for the people and by the people' has become a separate identity of the state in controlling the infection, Chouhan said.

"We created the Crisis Management Group to deal with the crisis. Crisis Management Groups were formed at village, ward, block, city and district level. This has been our innovative experiment," he said.

Madhya Pradesh had imposed a Corona Curfew in several districts of the state, including Bhopal and Indore, which will remain in force till May 31.

"Behaviour of shopkeepers and customers will have to be determined if the markets open. Use of masks, drawing circles in front of shops and following these measures in a disciplined manner is must to avoid spread of infection. Tests will also continue along with this. Around 75 thousand tests will be conducted daily," the Chief Minister said.

The Corona curfew will be opened gradually, Chouhan said. The Crisis Management Committees at the village, ward, block, city and district level will decide when activities will start, which activities will remain open and which will remain closed, he said.

MP receives fresh consignment of amphotericin amid shortage

The black fungus disease is spreading in Madhya Pradesh along with the surge in Covid cases. A large number of patients who beat coronavirus are prone to the black fungus disease and are suffering from lack of amphotericin injections that are helpful in its treatment.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

A consignment of 1,910 vials of amphotericin injections for the treatment of black fungus patients reached Bhopal on Thursday. The consignment will be sent to other districts in Madhya Pradesh from Bhopal. The fresh consignment arrived after the state ran out of the injections amid rising cases of black fungus.

The black fungus disease is spreading in Madhya Pradesh along with the surge in Covid cases. A large number of patients who beat coronavirus are prone to the black fun-

gus disease and are suffering from lack of amphotericin injections that are helpful in its treatment.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has tweeted that the Madhya Pradesh government is making every effort to treat the patients of black fungus. "Today, the state has received 1,910 units of amphotericin injection. These injections are being sent by air to Jabalpur, Gwalior and Sagar districts," he informed.

He had earlier said that black fungus patients will be treated free of cost in government hospitals.

There should be no problem of drinking water during summer: CM

CHIEF MINISTER SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN REVIEWS THE STATUS OF DRINKING WATER IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that there should be no problem of drinking water in any urban body and panchayat area during summer.

Mark the places where hand pumps are not functioning due to the water level going down and boring should be done there immediately. Necessary alternative arrangements should be made in urban bodies where there is a

problem of drinking water. Chouhan was addressing a review meeting of the status of drinking water in urban and rural areas in the Mantralaya.

Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhopendra Singh, Minister of State for Public Health and Engineering Brajendra Singh Yadav attended the meeting online. Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains, along with officials of Public Health Engineering, Urban and Housing and Panchayat and Rural Development were present in the meeting held in the Mantralaya.

Chouhan instructed that projects should be implemented on priority basis under the Jal Jeevan Mission in the urban bodies where water is being supplied at intervals of one or more days. Chief Minister inquired about the status of the approved projects in Burhanpur and Niwari under the Jal Jeevan Mission

and directed to complete all the projects sanctioned in the mission, including these schemes.

It was informed in the meeting that more than 95 percent hand pumps are operational out of 5 lakh 54 thousand 25 hand pumps installed in the state. There is a problem in 20 thousand 580 hand pumps because the water level has gone down. Out of 16 thousand 561 tap water schemes set up in rural areas, 15 thousand 630 schemes are operational. Alternative arrangements have been made for drinking water at other places. Out of 407 urban bodies in the state, water is being supplied daily in 351 of them and on alternate days in 56. Grievance Redressal Cells have been set up for hand pump repair in all districts. Work on long-term plans is underway along with providing immediate relief for water supply in problematic urban areas.

Marriages Held Secretly, Flouting Covid Lockdown, to be Declared Illegal

On Wednesday, the district collector of Ujjain, Ashish Singh, told media that weddings were held secretly in the absence of any provision of punishment.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

To curb cases of weddings being conducted discretely, flouting Covid-19 lockdown regulations, few district administrations in Madhya Pradesh have decided to declare these marriages null and void. The couples will also not be issued marriage certificates. The Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led state government had banned weddings in May in the wake of rapid spread of Covid-19 cases, but marriages continued to take place. In less than a month,

at least 30 people were booked, a home department official said.

The marriage registrar offices have been ordered by the District Magistrates to not issue any certificate for these couples who tied the knot during the period when weddings were banned, or face action. Officials will be booked under section 188 for "disobedience to order duly promulgated by a public servant under the Indian Penal Code (IPC)", the DMs' orders say. At least 130 marriage ceremonies were reportedly conducted 'secretly', violating the lockdown norms set by the government. On Wednesday, the district collector of Ujjain, Ashish Singh, told media that weddings were held secretly in the absence of any provision of punishment. "In the absence of any provision of punishment, people are conducting marriages secretly. Now, all the marriages, which were conducted secretly, will be declared illegal. Action will be taken against the couple, family

members and even priests," Singh said. Meanwhile, Gwalior collector KV Singh said, "The decision was taken after 20% of villagers in Dabra were infected in a marriage. The motive was not to create trouble for people but to contain the spread," he added.

The Madhya Pradesh government has begun unlocking restrictions in various districts as Covid-19 infections are showing a consistent fall. After consultations with district administrations, the zilla crisis committee decided to ease Covid-19 rules in five districts: Jabhua, Alirajpur, Burhanpur, Bhand and Khandwa. Based on the feedback from these places, a decision will be taken for other districts in the state after June 1, sources told this newspaper. The Shivraj Singh Chouhan government had on May 18 extended the 'corona curfew' in all 52 districts of the state for different durations. In the industrial hub of Indore, it is in force till May 29 night.

PAYTM EMPOWERS USERS IN MP TO PAY THEIR ELECTRICITY BILL 24X7

Team Absolute | Bhopal

India's leading digital financial services platform Paytm has today announced that users in Madhya Pradesh can now pay their electricity bill 24x7 on the platform. The company has also announced an assured reward of up to Rs. 1000 on every bill payment. Users paying the electricity bill for the first time on the platform will get a guaranteed cashback of up to Rs. 50. Paytm has partnered with MPCZ, MPWZ, MPPKVCL and MPEB to enable millions of users to pay their electricity bills digitally.

To bring more convenience to its users Paytm has recently enhanced its UI for electricity bill payments that takes less than a minute to complete a transaction. Users need to simply choose their state & service provider, enter their bill number or customer account number and then make that payment. Paytm spokesperson said, "Electricity bill is one of the most important recurring expenses for people in our country, and we are committed to make it a convenient and hassle-free experience for all users. With superior technology and a user-friendly interface, we aim to enable every consumer in India to pay their electricity bills 24x7 and receive instant confirmations. We will continue to partner with more electricity boards across the country to reach new users and increase repeat transactions from our existing users." Paytm is a pioneer in electricity bill payments and has partnered with over 70 electricity boards across India, including locations like Manipur, Lakshadweep (please add some more names) to serve millions of users in this segment. Paytm users can also do mobile recharges, pay their credit card bills, book cylinders and do many other regular payments from the comfort of their home. All of this comes with a fast, safe, secure, and rewarding experience built by India's top technology minds to serve the whole of India.

Covid-19: 'Will relax curfew from June 1 but continue to take precautions:' CM

"WE WILL RELAX THE CURFEW FROM 1 JUNE. BUT WE DON'T HAVE TO LEAVE THE HOUSE SUDDENLY OR ORGANISE BIG EVENTS. THIS COULD MAKE THE SITUATION WORSE. WE HAVE SUFFERED A LOT. MANY PEOPLE HAVE LOST THEIR LIVES. WE DON'T WANT SUCH A SITUATION TO RETURN," CHOUHAN SAID.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday evening posted a message on Facebook for the people of the state saying that the government will relax Covid-19 restrictions in the state beginning from June 1. However, Chouhan also prescribed restraint to avoid yet another flare-up in the number of cases in the state.

"We will relax the curfew from 1 June. But we don't have to leave the house suddenly or organise big events. This could make the situation worse. We have suffered a lot. Many people have lost their lives. We don't want such a situation to return," Chouhan said in a post written in Hindi.

"Lockdown will be opened up in a scientific way. We have prepared a roadmap for this. Large events like marriages, religious events and political rallies will not be permitted. We do not have to stop being careful now," the

chief minister further said.

Warning about the third wave of Covid-19, he wrote that the cases will flare up suddenly if people do not remain cautious. "We should not let the third wave arrive. Now we have to get used to living with Covid-19. If we go out of the house, we will go with a face-mask. If someone is found without a mask, we will question them too. By keeping yourself safe, you keep your family safe," Chouhan said. In his appeal, the chief minister also asked people to make the fight against coronavirus a social movement and show a new way in controlling the disease.

Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday recorded 2,182 new Covid-19 cases and 72 fatalities. So far, 771,878 people have tested positive and 7,758 patients have lost their lives in the state. Active case-load currently stands at 43,265 and 720,855 people have recovered from their infections so far, a medical bulletin from the state health department, on Wednesday, showed.

Development works should be done without harming forests and wildlife: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that in the permissions given for development works in forest areas in the state, care should be taken to ensure that there is no harm to the forests and wildlife of the state. Immediate action should be taken against those who commit crimes against wild animals, but they should also be ensured punishment.

Chouhan said that efforts should be made to ensure that the animals are not harmed by wild animals. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan was presiding over the meeting of Madhya Pradesh State Wildlife Board in the ministry today. Forest Minister Kunwar Vijay Shah, Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains, Principal Secretary Forest Ashok Varnwal etc. were present in the meeting.

Forest Minister Kunwar Vijay Shah told that Cheetah will come from Africa in the month of November. The number of crocodiles in the Chambal Sanctuary has increased to 2176 and the number of dolphins to 82. The number of vultures has also increased. Satpura Tiger Reserve and Bhedaghat have been included in the possible list of World Heritage. Census of tigers will start in the year 2022.

In the meeting, approval was given to the 4-lane widening work of National Highway-69 in Ratapani Sanctuary. Permission was granted to put underground pipeline in Damoh-Patera Water Group Supply Scheme in Ratapani Sanctuary, Nimari-Prithipur Water Group Supply Scheme in Orchha Sanctuary and Jabera-Tendukheda Group Water Supply Schemes in VeeranganaDurgavati Sanctuary. Laying of optical fibers in various areas was also permitted.

In the meeting, permission was granted to the Katni-Singrauli rail line doubling and electrification work in Sanjay Tiger Reserve with conditions. It will be sent to the Government of India with conditions. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that Singrauli is a remote area. The rail line should be doubled here.

Chouhan said that survey of Ghatigaon Sanctuary should be conducted in connection with Sonchiraiya bird. It has been denotified by the Government of India for the year 1994 when Sonchiraiya is not seen in Karera Sanctuary. Sonchiraiya (Great Indian Bustard) in Madhya Pradesh is on the verge of extinction.

Chouhan said that efforts should be made to ensure that the villagers are not harmed by the wild elephants in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve area. For this, a group of experts should be formed, which should study and report on the rescue measures of the country and the world.

EFFORTS WILL BE MADE TO CONNECT VOLUNTEERS WITH HEALTHCARE

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The state government has constituted a group of ministers for the purpose of planned management of government and private sector hospitals and to provide necessary suggestions for the purpose and future strategy to ensure the availability of all necessary facilities and resources. The first virtual meeting of this group took place in the ministry today.

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang, Public Health and Family Welfare Minister Prabhuram Chaudhary, Minister of State for Horticulture and Food Processing (Independent Charge), Bharat Singh Kushwaha, Minister of State for School Education (Independent Charge) Inder Singh Parmar at the meeting. AYUSH (Independent Charge) Minister of State RamkishoreKavre, Minister of State for Public Health and Engineering Brijendra Singh Yadav and Minister of State for Urban Development and Housing OPS Bhadoria joined. Sarang said that micro planning is needed for the planned management of hos-



pitals. Institutional planning should be done for this. Both government and private health structures have to be added. Along with the increase of hospitals, it is necessary to pay attention to facilities and other arrangements

in them. For this, district-wise, institution-wise planning should be done.

Sarang said that training of health workers is necessary for the treatment of children in view of third wave. For the treatment of chil-

dren, their parents will also need to be trained. He said that if the children became ill, the mother or the foster would have to be kept with them. For this, their vaccination will also have to be taken care of. Planning for home isolation patients will also have to be done.

Sarang said that innovation has been done to connect people engaged in service work in Bhopal with health service. In the coming time, preparations will be made to train about 250 people. They will be made aware of the treatment protocol. Sarang said that ambulance should be ensured to bring the patients to the district hospital or medical college.

Also, pay attention to medical college research and development. Suggestions received in the meeting include the cooperation of local doctors, other arrangements at community and primary health centers, the need for private hospitals to set up their own oxygen plants, the need for women doctors and pediatricians. Along with this, suggestions were also received from the government to release the list of contracted private hospitals and contact numbers, so that private hospitals could not be misled by the citizens.



DELHI RECORDS 1,072 NEW COVID-19 CASES, LOWEST SINGLE-DAY SPIKE SINCE MARCH 30

Delhi recorded 1,072 new Covid-19 cases and 117 deaths on Thursday. Delhi has so far reported 14,22,529 cases of Covid-19 till date. However, the infection count on Thursday was the lowest since March 30 when 992 cases were reported.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi reported 1072 new confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours, pushing the tally of active cases to 16,378.

Delhi has so far reported 14,22,529 cases of Covid-19 till date. However, the infection count on Thursday was the lowest since March 30 when 992 cases were reported.

The city also recorded 117 coronavirus-related deaths in the last 24 hours, the lowest since April 15 when the city recorded 112 deaths.

The novel coronavirus has claimed 23,812 lives in Delhi to date. While the case fatality rate (CFR) among patients in the city now stands at 1.67 per cent,



the infection rate reduced to 1.53 per cent. The lowest infection rate was last reported on March 24 at 1.52 per cent.

As many as 70,068 samples for coronavirus, using 49,348 Rapid Antigen and 20,720 RT-PCR tests, between Wednesday and Thursday were conducted in Delhi. A total of 1,90,09,274 samples have been tested for Covid-19 to date. A total of 3725 patients were discharged from hospitals in Delhi after recovering from Covid-19 in the last 24

hours. At the same time, the recovery rate of Covid-19 patients in Delhi has increased to 97.17 per cent, highest since March 30 when the rate was recorded at 97.2 per cent. While the percentage of active cases among confirmed cases of infection decreased to 1.15 per cent, a total of 8247 Covid-19 patients are in home isolation across the city. More than 34,000 containment zones have been notified in Delhi in a bid to break the chain of transmission.

Man Arrested For Supplying Liquor In Milk Containers: Police

New Delhi: A 28-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly supplying liquor in milk containers in west Delhi's Mangolpuri area, police said on Thursday.

While checking vehicles at a picket around 9.45 am on Wednesday, police stopped a motorcycle rider carrying four plastic milk containers.

The two-wheeler was without a number plate and the rider, Manoj, could not give any satisfactory reason for the lapse, a senior police officer said. Upon checking the vehicle, 40 bottles of liquor, made for sale in Haryana only, were found from inside the plastic containers, the officer said.

The accused, a resident of Rohtak, has been arrested while the liquor bottles, milk containers and the motorcycle have been seized, police said.

13 Gurugram villages remain free from coronavirus

Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg said that 13 villages with zero Covid cases is a major relief to the district at a time when other areas are reporting maximum number of infections.



GURUGRAM | Agencies

Door-to-door screening being conducted by the Gurugram health department in the rural areas has found that 13 villages remain unaffected by the coronavirus.

Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg said that 13 villages with zero Covid cases is a major relief to the district at a time when other areas are reporting maximum number

of infections. District Development and Panchayat Officer (DDPO) Narendra Sarwan said that the health department groups, which comprise Anganwadi workers and Asha workers, have been screening people in every village of the district since May 15. This work is being done simultaneously in all the 166 villages of the district. "As of now, according to the survey data, of all the 166 villages in Gurugram, 13 have not reported a single Covid case so far," Sarwan added.

He said that out of 73 villages of Pataudi block, seven were found to be Covid-free. Similarly, in 48 villages of Farrukhnagar block, four villages were found to be free from the infection. So far, two villages were also found to be Covid-free out of 35 in Sohna block. Besides, the survey also said that out of 65 villages, only one person was found to be Covid positive. "During the survey, around 252 persons have been found Covid positive in rural areas. The district administration has provided appropriate help including kits to those who were infected," the official said.

Judges equal to frontline officers, HC asks Delhi govt consider job, ex-gratia for next of kin

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Citing empathy, the Delhi High Court on Thursday asked the Delhi government to consider ex-gratia and compassionate appointment to family members of judicial officers who succumbed to Covid-19.

The court said that currently there isn't a category where judicial officers are recognised as frontline workers for Covid-19 vaccination. The Delhi government informed the court the category is created primarily for vaccination only and in future, it would take into account, extending it to judicial officers. The bench noted it expects the state government to consider the matter with adequate empathy and sensitivity. The observation was made while hearing a petition by a group of lawyers

seeking a coordination mechanism for judicial officers, as they were unable to get Covid-19 medical treatment and beds in hospitals.

The Delhi Judicial Services Association informed the court the Delhi government is yet to recognise judicial officers as frontline workers and asked the court that if there are any other benefits available to other frontline workers, they should also be considered for the same. The application by association was filed in the pending petition citing issues with medical facilities for judicial officers in the national capital.

Stating that issues have been adequately addressed, the court disposed of the matter seeking certain reliefs for court staff.

The court was informed that Delhi government was considering granting ex-gratia

and compassionate appointment to family members of judicial officers, who succumbed to the viral infection. The association's counsel had submitted that the principal secretary (law) has been appointed as nodal officer for interacting with all the district judges in the connection with medical assistances to judicial officers who are Covid-19 patients.

Earlier the court had 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.

Citing the death of three judicial officers, the court had insisted that prima facie judicial officers should be considered equivalent to frontline workers and asked the government to consider this aspect.

Gurugram first district in Haryana to administer over 6L jobs

According to officials, so far over 5,72,000 people in the district have been administered with the first dose of the vaccine, and over 1,42,000 have been given their second shot.

GURUGRAM | Agencies

Gurugram became the first district in Haryana to administer the anti-Covid vaccine to over 6.49 lakh people, health officials said on Thursday.

According to officials, so far over 5,72,000 people in the district have been administered with the first dose of the vaccine, and over 1,42,000 have been given their second shot.

"In order to run the vaccination



smoothly, a drive was being conducted in the government and private health facilities across the district. Under the immunisation campaign, 59,191 healthcare workers have so far received the first dose of Covid vaccine and 37,161 workers the second

dose," Yash Garg, Deputy Commissioner of Gurugram, said.

Similarly, around 51,213 frontline workers have received the first dose of their Covid vaccine and 36,001 people were administered their second dose. Besides, around 88,080

people in the 18-44 age group have received their jobs. Over 2,37,000 in the 45-59 age group have also been administered with first and second dose of the vaccine.

Over 1,52,000 people above 60 years have received their first dose and over 60,000 the second dose.

On Wednesday 578 people were discharged after recovery, while 187 new cases were reported in Gurugram. Health officials said testing is being done to curtail the Covid infections in Gurugram. In the last 24 hours the health department has conducted 6,757 Covid tests.

According to the figures, the number of total active cases in Gurugram district is 2,961 out of which 2,513 patients are in home isolation.

"We appeal to the people not to step outside unnecessarily. They should stay indoors and follow Covid norms," Garg added.

Pvt hospitals procured more vaccines than AAP govt in Delhi: BJP

Patra further said that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal does daily press conferences for his "politics" and engages in a battle of "one-upmanship."

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Stepping up its attack on the AAP government in Delhi over Covid management, the BJP on Thursday asked it to come clean on the arrangements it made to procure vaccines and set up oxygen plants, and alleged that private hospitals in Delhi have procured more Covid vaccines than the government.

Rejecting the Delhi government's claims on its inoculation programme and on ramping up oxygen production in the city, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said the AAP government has directly procured over 8.17 lakh doses while private hospitals have bought over 9.04 lakh doses.

Patra also accused the government of "politicising" the issue of vaccine procurement by the Centre in order to deflect attention from its own failures in procuring vaccines.

"Nearly 46 lakh free vaccines were supplied by



the Centre to Delhi. Private hospitals, for their part, procured about 9 lakh doses of vaccine while the Delhi government could manage just a little over 8 lakh... Only 13 per cent of the people who are vaccinated in the capital have got their vaccine from the state government," Patra said. He sought details

of the order for Sputnik vaccine from Russia by the Delhi government. The BJP and the AAP have been involved in a public spat over the handling of the second wave of the pandemic. While the state government has alleged that the Centre's oxygen supply was inadequate, the Centre has sought an audit of the oxygen supplied to the state.

Patra said that while Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal does daily press conferences for his "politics" and engages in a battle of "one-upmanship", the fact is that his government has on its own provided for only 13 per cent of the total vaccination done in the national capital so far.

The BJP leader also accused Kejriwal of spreading misinformation over his demand that the Centre should procure vaccines for children as soon as possible after pharma giant Pfizer claimed that its jab has been proved suitable for everyone over 12 years of age.

Patra said that as of now, nowhere in the world are children being vaccinated.

"We cannot use children as guinea pigs. Until the time proper vaccine trials are properly conducted, we will not allow children to be made scapegoats... Kejriwal should not drag them into his politics," the BJP spokesperson said.

Delhi Police bust gambling racket, arrest 15 accused

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi Police on Thursday said that it had busted a gambling racket and arrested 15 people along with Rs 4.73 lakh in cash.

Shahdara Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) R. Sathiyasundaram said 15 persons who were allegedly involved in gambling have been arrested and Rs 4.73 lakh and other gambling accessories recovered from them.

Sathiyasundaram said that a team of the Seemapuri police station got the information that gambling is going on in DDA flats in the New Seemapuri area.

He said that after taking all the due permissions, the team reached the spot and apprehended 15 persons red-handed.

The arrested accused have been identified Shahrulkh, Arun, Milan Kumar, Raj Kumar, Suraj Singh, Mallik Mojjam, Suresh Ahirwal, Mujahir, Mohammad Waris, Saleem, Sameed, Nishu, Mohammad Irshad, Sanjay and Suresh Kumar. He said that besides Rs 4.73 lakh in cash, the police also recovered some receipts of gambling and 12 sets of playing cards.

He said that a case has been registered under several sections of the IPC, Disaster



Management Act and Epidemic Disaster Act.

The DCP said that Shahrulkh has previously been involved in five cases of robbery, theft, Arms Act in various police stations of the Trans-Yamuna area. He said that interrogation of Shahrulkh and others further revealed that one Neeraj aka Ninju of New Seemapuri is the kingly of these gambling activities and he had ran away from the scene of the crime.

"Further interrogation also revealed the premises where gambling was going on belonged to AKDubey, who claimed to be an advocate of Delhi High Court and had rented this place to one Ekta Sharma in 2019. The claim is being verified," he added.

Republic Day violence was conspiracy to make Red Fort new farmer protest site: Delhi Police

The Delhi Police in its chargesheet said the Republic Day violence by farmers was a conspiracy to make Red Fort the new site for the protest.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi Police in its chargesheet on the Republic Day violence this year revealed that there was a conspiracy to capture the Red Fort and make it the new site of farmer protest against the three new farm laws.

In an unprecedented turn of events, protesting farmers broke through police barricades on their tractors to hoist their own flag Nishan

Sahib at Red Fort on January 26 this year. Across Delhi, police resorted to lathicharge and teargassing as farmers tried to break away from the designated rally routes and pelted stones at security personnel. Several people were arrested in connection with the violence on Republic Day in the national capital and now the police chargesheet has revealed that this was all a part of a well-planned conspiracy to make Red Fort the new site for farmer protest against the Centre's recently passed farm laws. Many elderly farmers were also mobilised to bring the plan to fruition. The police chargesheet also said Republic Day was chosen as the day of protest to embarrass the government.

The police also said a huge sum of money was

promised to those who would hoist their flag at the Red Fort. A call made by a daughter of one of the accused was a part of the chargesheet where she was heard saying that her father would get Rs 50,00,000.

According to the chargesheet the conspiracy was hatched in November and December 2020 during which tractors were bought in large numbers in Punjab and Haryana.

The chargesheet also said the purchase of tractors saw a huge growth in Punjab ahead of the protest.

According to Delhi Police, the purchase of tractors increased by 43 per cent in November 2020, and by 94 per cent in December. In Haryana too, the purchase of tractors increased after the introduction of the bills.

In June, Delhi may get only 400,000 free shots for 18+

The Centre also said it will send 415,810 doses in the first fortnight of the month under its vaccine supply programme, which is meant to be distributed among people aged 45 above.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Capital will get a little over 400,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccines directly from vaccine makers in June, according to estimates shared by the Union government to the Delhi health department, which translates to roughly 40,000 additional shots that can be given to adults above the age of 18 compared to May.

The Centre also said it will send 415,810 doses in the first fortnight of the month under its vaccine supply programme, which is meant to be distributed among people aged 45 above. Compared to the first 14 days of May, this number is a drop of around 81,120 doses for this category.



ry.

These estimates suggest the city is unlikely to receive any significant boost in its supplies and could run out of the free doses meant for the 18-45 age group, which the state government administers after directly procuring it from manufacturers. In the month of May, it was allotted 360,530 doses -- according to an affidavit submitted by Centre in the Supreme Court this month. The city ran out of doses for this age group on May 22.

"States were informed that more stocks will be available in June, and a plan has been shared with them. The Centre has to ensure equitable distribution [of vaccine doses], and efforts are being towards that, so

that there is no disparity among states," said a central government official aware of the matter. The Union government caps the amount of doses states can buy directly from vaccine makers in ratios that account for a state's population, and distributes its share of doses using a mechanism that is based on the severity of the outbreak in a region. It announces the doses it will distribute on a fortnightly basis, while the cap for the direct procurement is announced for the full month's duration in advance.

In a letter written to Delhi's principal secretary (health), Vikram Dev Dutt on May 17, Manohar Agnani, additional secretary of the Union health ministry, said, "...the Phase 3 of Covid-19 vaccination is ongoing since 1st May, 2021... In this regard for your State/UT the availability of Covishield from M/s Serum Institute of India, under free supply from government of India for the first fortnight of June '21 is 319,510 doses."

The state can procure 309,220 allocated Covishield doses on its own for the entire period of June.

In a separate letter, the Centre said it will provide 96,300 doses of Covaxin during the first two weeks of June, while the state can on its own procure a maximum of 91,960 doses. Private hospitals procure doses separately.

The Serum Institute of India (SII), which manufactures Covishield, and Bharat Biotech, which makes Covaxin, can together make around 70-75 million vaccine doses a month, government officials have said in recent days, and this capacity is expected to rise to around 120 million by July -- with some enhancements possible before that.

"By next month [June], there will be more doses available, as companies are making all efforts to ramp up production capacity. The vaccine basket will also expand and there will be more choice," the official added.

Experts have said that the weeks ahead will be crucial to ramp up the vaccination drive as cases go down, since inoculations alone can blunt any future wave of infections without the need for more lockdowns.



Districts With Less Cases May Get Relaxations:

RESTRICTIONS TO CONTINUE IN MAHARASHTRA, GUIDELINES IN FEW DAYS: HEALTH MINISTER

State health minister Rajesh Tope had hinted that the government could consider easing the restrictions in a phased manner after June 1.



Government could consider easing the restrictions in a phased manner after June 1. It has been decided that all Covid-19 restrictions will not be lifted as 21 districts have more than 10 percent positivity rate.

be issued in a few days," Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said. This came as the positivity rate in Maharashtra reached 12 percent and authorities believe that they have adequate supplies and medicines.

easing the Covid-induced restrictions in a phased manner. The government will assess the situation in the last week of May. If the positivity rate falls below 10 percent and the number of active cases comes down, the state may consider easing some restrictions.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Covid-19 restrictions in Maharashtra will continue while certain districts, where cases are declining, could have some relaxation in curbs. Fresh guidelines will be issued in a few days, the state health minister informed on Thursday.

In Maharashtra, 2,290 Children Have Lost One Or Both Parents To COVID-19



In Maharashtra, a 10-member panel has been set up in 36 districts to identify children who have lost one or both parents to COVID-19

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As many as 2,290 children in Maharashtra have lost either one or both parents to COVID-19 infection so far, sources said on Thursday. While 2,183 children have lost one parent, 107 lost both the parents during the pandemic, the sources in the state Women and Child Development Department said.

the district task forces headed by the collectors.

The government had set up a 10-member task force in each of the 36 districts in the state to identify the children, who were orphaned due to the pandemic. The task force will also oversee the arrangements of their shelter and supervise their adoption to ensure that there is no trafficking and exploitation.

The government has also set up a helpline number to seek information about such children after getting inputs that several people were encouraging illegal adoption of such children for human trafficking.

"The government has got custody of 10 out of the 107 children as there is nobody to look after them," they said. The data about the orphaned children has been compiled based on the inputs given by

3,200 CASES OF BLACK FUNGUS RECORDED IN MAHARASHTRA: STATE GOVT TO BOMBAY HC



Mumbai: As against Maharashtra's requirement of 14,000 vials per day, the state was receiving only 4,000 to 5,000 doses each day, the state's counsel, Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni, told the court.

The Maharashtra government on Thursday informed the Bombay High Court that the state has so far recorded 3,200 cases of mucormycosis, also known as black fungus, a serious infection being found in COVID-19 patients.

As against Maharashtra's requirement of 14,000 vials per day, the state was receiving only 4,000 to 5,000 doses each day, the state's counsel, Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni, told the court.

He said there were "very few" manufacturers of anti-mucormycosis drugs and injections, hence there was a shortage across the country.

"There are 3,200 cases of mucormycosis as of now in the state. Mucormycosis has been declared a notified disease, so when the health-care establishment receives a patient, they have to inform public health officials, so at the state-level we can have complete data of patients," he told the HC. As the data available on May 26, Mumbai has recorded 335 cases of mucormycosis so far, the state informed a bench of Justices Amjad Sayyad and GS Kulkarni.

The bench was hearing a bunch of public interest litigations (PILs), seeking proper management of issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Kumbhakoni and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) advocate, senior counsel Anil Sakhere, informed the court that they were keeping records and maintaining data of such cases.

The state also said it had developed an online portal to maintain records of mucormycosis cases and medicines available for the infection. Kumbhakoni said there were "very few" manufacturers of anti-mucormycosis drugs and injections, hence there was a shortage across the country.

The Centre has identified only three manufacturers to produce anti-mucormycosis injections, he said, adding a patient on an average requires four to five vials per day. As against Maharashtra's requirement of 14,000 vials per day, the state was receiving only 4,000 to 5,000 doses each day, Kumbhakoni said.

The state had tied-up with the Haffkine Pharma to manufacture the drug in the state to meet the demand, he said.

"Maharashtra has started in-house manufacturing of anti-mucormycosis injections. It takes 20 days to have the finished product. We completed the procurement of raw material on Wednesday," Kumbhakoni said.

By June 6, the state should have a comfortable demand-supply position, he said.

The Union government's counsel, Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, told the HC that the Centre had issued a detailed advisory on prevention, and dos and don'ts for mucormycosis. "An expert task force is working on this. The states most affected by the black fungus are Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat. The supply of injections to these states will be increased by mid-June," Singh said. Several factors, such as co-morbidities, low immunity and indiscriminate use of steroids were resulting in the rise in cases of mucormycosis, he said.

The HC then suggested that the Centre issue a protocol on prescription and use of steroids for treating COVID-19. "We want a protocol as there is an indiscriminate use of steroids," the bench said.

The court also directed the state government and BMC to use technology to improve the condition of crematoriums and to construct more electric and gas crematoriums. "What about facilities, technology, electric crematoriums, handling the bodies in a scientific manner?" the HC asked. The court directed the state to inform it about the steps being taken in the matter on the next date of hearing. "Fortunately, we do not have incidents like other states where bodies are floating in the Ganga (river)," Kumbhakoni said. "Not a single person has been denied a decent burial or cremation in the state on account of lack of space," he said. The high court will continue the hearing on June 2.

Maharashtra Congress accuses BJP of betraying Maratha community on quota

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra Congress on Thursday accused the BJP of betraying the Maratha community, and claimed that the BJP-RSS connection of an organisation that opposed the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) quota has come out in the open now.

The BJP, however, said it supports the quota for the community and would continue to do so in future. It alleged that the Congress was spreading rumours on the issue. Addressing a press conference, state Congress spokesperson Sachin Sawant claimed that the BJP-RSS connection of the office-bearers of 'Save Merit Save Nation' organisation, which opposed the Maratha quota in the Supreme Court, is now out in the open.

"Isn't this betrayal of the Maratha community when the BJP helps the organisations that opposes the quota. This can't be a mere coincidence. Did the BJP prevent the party office-bearers from being associated with this organisation? We seek a clarification from the BJP," Sawant said.

He lashed out at the BJP on its plan to hold a protest on June 5 over the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government's handling of the Maratha quota. "If the COVID-19 numbers go up,

superspreader BJP will be responsible for it. The MVA did not make any changes in the legal team or the draft of the act passed by the legislature during the BJP rule. How is the MVA responsible?" he asked.

Sawant accused the BJP of indulging in political opportunism. Meanwhile, reacting to Sawant's allegations, BJP spokesman Keshav Upadhye said the Congress was spreading rumours since it was scared of the agitation. "In fact, some Congress and NCP leaders supported the anti-quota petitions in the court. The BJP was in support of reservation and will continue to remain so," he said. Earlier this month, the Supreme Court had struck down the Maharashtra law granting quota to Marathas in admissions and government jobs, terming it as "unconstitutional", and held that there were no exceptional circumstances to breach the 50% reservation cap set by the 1992 Mandal verdict.

The Maharashtra State Reservation (of seats for admission in educational institutions in the State and for appointments in the public services and posts under the State) for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act 2018 was enacted to grant reservation to people of the Maratha community in the state in jobs and admissions.

High cost in private sector, unavailability at govt centres keeps domestic workers away from vaccine

While most domestic workers have resumed their work, their access to vaccination is still a challenge.

Team Absolute | Pune

For over two lakh domestic workers in and around Pune, the Covid-19 vaccine is an elusive commodity due to high cost in the private sector and unavailability at most government vaccination centres. Due to this, only a low percentage have been able to get the job.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, domestic workers have faced multiple challenges in terms of employment as well as healthcare. In the first lockdown last year, many were barred from entering housing societies and many others lost their jobs. During the second lockdown that started in April, the sector was assured that it will be financially supported besides more being given more ration under the public distribution system.

While most domestic workers have resumed their work, their access to vaccination is still a challenge. Kiran Moghe of Janwadi Mahila Sanghatana said the high cost of vaccines in private sectors and the difficulty in getting the job under the government had made it difficult for domestic workers to get vaccinated. "Over the past few years, the age profile of the domestic worker has changed. Unlike in the past, when it was the middle-aged 45 and above group that were into domestic work, this time around it is younger women, aged 18 and above, who are taking up domestic work," she said, adding that this was mainly due to the absence of other kinds of work available for women.

With a majority of women in the age group of 18 to 45 years, getting the job has become as tough as others in this



age group. While slots for this age group fill up in no time on CoWIN, vaccination for this category is yet to open at government centres, where it is available for free. The issue is also compounded by the fact that one dose costs Rs 900.

Moghe, whose union has been working with domestic workers for many years, said after lockdown, many domestic workers saw their earnings dip. "Unlike in the past, when a woman

worked at, say eight to 10 houses, now it's only one to two households. Thus, it will not be feasible to appeal to their employers to finance their shots," she said. Moghe also said she and other unions conducted extensive outreach campaigns among domestic workers to remove vaccine hesitancy and, now, when most workers were ready to take their shot, the vaccine was unavailable for most.

Maha railwayman launches 'Oxygen Bank' for tribals, poor

Team Absolute | Nagpur

Though freely available in nature, oxygen is now apparently a scarce commodity with states and the Central government gasping and puffing to get liquid medical oxygen (LMO) stocks for treating serious Covid-19 patients in the second wave of the pandemic.

In this crisis, a Central Railway (CR) Commercial Department OS in Nagpur Khushroo Poacha has come up with a unique solution - an "Oxygen Bank" - especially targeting the tribals in forests and urban poor or slum-dwellers in the Vidarbha towns.

"I witnessed the critical shortage of oxygen, particularly in small hospitals in mofussil areas with patients just dying anywhere. I tried to help out those who cannot afford oxygen concentrators or cylinders, and there are even few who can afford it but there's no oxygen available in the remote areas," Poacha told IANS.

Accordingly, the compassionate railwayman issued a global SOS for oxygen through his social media and charitable organisations last month.

The first to respond were a 17-year-old boy and 3 engineering students who immediately donated 1 oxygen concentrator each, but the pleasant surprise came from ordinary Zoroastrians (Parsis) in Abu Dhabi who crowd-funded 40 top-class Turkish oxygen concentrators and airlifted them to the anxious Poacha. "This was like a divine gift; I gave 6 oxygen concentrators to Dr Ashish Satav's Mahaan Hospital for exclusive use of the tribals of the remote Melghat area of Amravati. Another 6 are given for the jungle folk of Yavatmal through farmer leader Kishore Tiwari, and the rest are distributed as an 'oxygen loan' to poorest people or slum-dwellers in Nagpur and other cities," Poacha smiled



with pride.

The oxygen concentrators, each costing around Rs 75,000, are easy-to-use, tough workhorses and have functioned without glitches and are helping save many people breathe easily, absolutely free of cost. "Many government and private hospitals insist after cure, the patient must remain on oxygen for at least a month. But, how can the poor patients or tribals afford this and they are kept in hospitals, depriving other needy patients of treatment," Poacha explained. The Oxygen Bank, billed as first of its kind in the country, and instead of merely giving away, the oxygen concentrators are rotated among various tribals and poor patients as and when required, for maximum reach at minimum costs. "With the growing demand and appeals from tribal belts in Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Gondia and Wardha, we now seek another 60 oxygen concentrators of similar quality for the recovered poor tribals or slum-dwellers," Poacha said.

A tribal patient from Nagpur, Tulsiram Bhaire was virtually kept 'hostage' in a government hospital after he tested negative and could not be discharged as he could ill-afford an oxygen concentrator at his small dwelling.

"I appealed through the NGO Seva Kitchen and the very same day we got one delivered; My dad was discharged, he is now using it at home and recovering well," said his grateful daughter Priyanka Bhaire. At a function in Yavatmal, Tiwari distributed 6 oxygen concentrators to a small 10-bed hospital in a tribal village and all were deployed for use immediately for the relieved patients. "This is indeed a unique concept and ensures that the oxygen concentrators can be put to use for multiple patients and avoid wastage of resources in the remote areas of Vidarbha," Tiwari remarked.

At the height of the first lockdown, through his 'Seva Kitchen' initiative, Poacha and his team of 1000 volunteers collected and donated food or aid worth nearly Rs 50 lakh via online appeals only, first reported by IANS (April 6, 2020).

Impressed by the feat, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray called up Poacha the next morning, while Railway Minister Piyush Goyal proudly tweeted his 'railway family' member's eye-catching achievements the following day.

"Till date we have given over two million foodkits in Nagpur, Wardha, Yavatmal, slum-dwellers in Mumbai and even Amreli in Gujarat, with support from NGOs like Sant Nirankari Seval Dal, Vasant Rao Naik Sheti Swavalamban Mission, besides many silent or anonymous philanthropists preferring to remain in the shadows," acknowledged the grateful Poacha.

NAGPUR REPORTS 476 FRESH COVID CASES, 16 DEATHS, RECOVERY RATE AT 96.21%

Nagpur: The district reported 476 fresh novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases and 16 fatalities in last 24-hours. In the day, total 1,151 people successfully recovered from the virus borne disease, taking the numbers of cumulative recovered to 4,55,246. As per the official report, out of the total 476 positive cases, 208 were from rural areas and 264 cases from Nagpur city alone while four cases were reported from out of the district. While out of total deaths, eight were reported from Nagpur city, four deaths were registered from outside the district, while four casualties were reported from Nagpur rural.

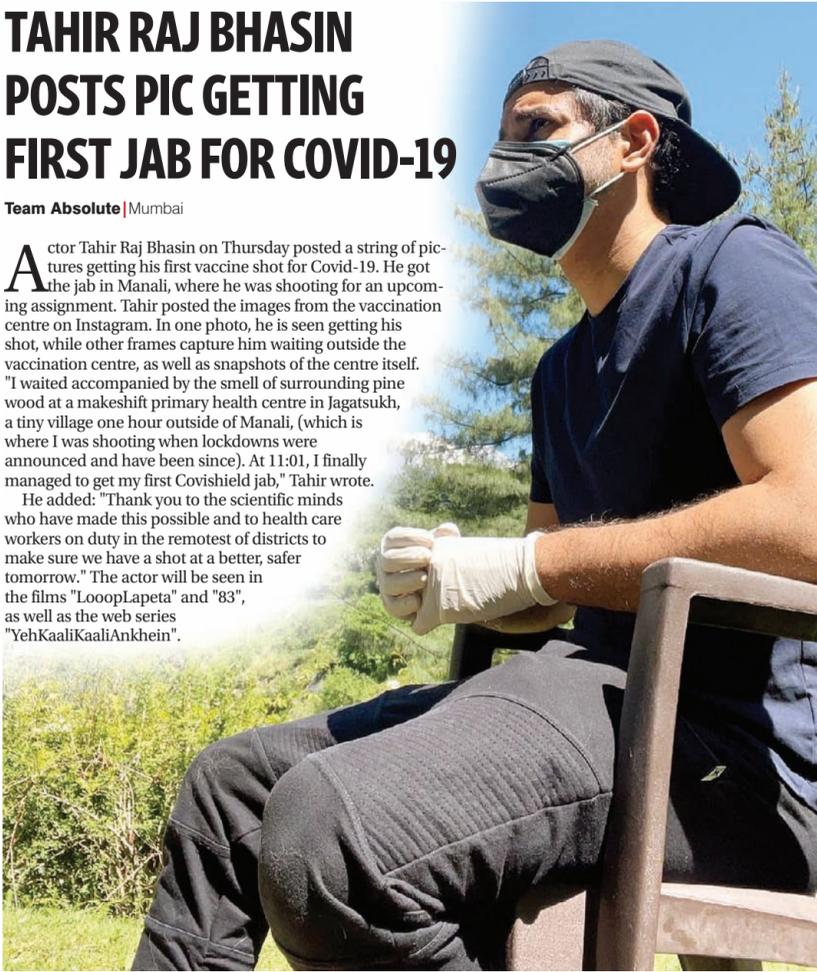
With the latest update, the total number of cases has surged to 4,73,172 while the number of deaths rose to 8,854. In the day 1,154 patients were successfully recovered from the virus borne disease taking the numbers of total recovered patients at 4,55,246. Following which recovery rate has improved to 96.21%. After the fresh updates, the total active cases in the city now stand at 9,072 including asymptomatic cases advised for home isolation.

TAHIR RAJ BHASIN POSTS PIC GETTING FIRST JAB FOR COVID-19

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Tahir Raj Bhasin on Thursday posted a string of pictures getting his first vaccine shot for Covid-19. He got the jab in Manali, where he was shooting for an upcoming assignment. Tahir posted the images from the vaccination centre on Instagram. In one photo, he is seen getting his shot, while other frames capture him waiting outside the vaccination centre, as well as snapshots of the centre itself. "I waited accompanied by the smell of surrounding pine wood at a makeshift primary health centre in Jagatsukh, a tiny village one hour outside of Manali, (which is where I was shooting when lockdowns were announced and have been since). At 11:01, I finally managed to get my first Covishield jab," Tahir wrote.

He added: "Thank you to the scientific minds who have made this possible and to health care workers on duty in the remotest of districts to make sure we have a shot at a better, safer tomorrow." The actor will be seen in the films "LoopLapeta" and "83", as well as the web series "YehKaaliKaaliAnkhein".



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Elnaaz Norouzi says she is not one to stress over performing well on screen or choosing the right project.

The actress, who has been seen in the web series "Sacred Games" as well as the OTT-released film "Hello Charlie", feels if she takes on pressure, she won't be able to perform well.

"I believe that nobody functions well under pressure, especially me. So, I never put myself in a place where I feel the pressure of performance. That's detrimental, especially in a creative field like ours," said Elnaaz.

Talking about how she comes on board with a script, she says that it all depends on

if she likes it and how different it is from what she has done before. "I read the script and if I like it, and if I feel that it has potential, then I go for it. I never go for what I've done before or what people expect of me. It's my career, and the first priority is always what I love to do, and something that can be challenging for me as an actor. Hopefully, that's the right script to choose," she says.

ELNAAZ NOROUZI: NOBODY FUNCTIONS WELL UNDER PRESSURE



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Shruti Haasan posted a picture of her lush cascading hair, saying that she has got "the whole glam things right".

In the Instagram images, Shruti is seen struggling with her hair while she is all dolled up.

"Clearly I'm getting the whole glam thing right #epicfail #toomuch-hairdontcare," she wrote

SHRUTI HAASAN IS GETTING WHOLE 'GLAM' THING RIGHT

as the caption. 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.

Salon style hair at home!

Team Absolute | New Delhi

There's now a platform which allows salons to offer potential and existing consumers the opportunity to discover, consider and consult with an expert and finally make a hair care purchase -- all online using a social media platform.

The #KerastaseAtHome platform is successful and very well received by the brand's salon partners. The Social Commerce model gives consumers the convenience of an online experience, without eliminating the personalisation and human element of the salon/hair expert conversation. Globally, this is a rapidly growing avenue for brands to reach their end-consumers and Kerastase was the first to bring it to the Luxe Salon industry in India at this scale.

The luxury professional hair care brand has been offering its consumers in India a personalised yet indulgent hair care experience for more than 10 years by partnering with only the most luxurious salons across the country. The brand offers hair care rituals and home care products in more than 350 salons across 30 cities, including Mumbai, NCR, Bangalore, Kolkata, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Pune, Hyderabad, Chandigarh, Lucknow to name a few.

"Being where the consumer is, is critical for any brand and all the more important in today's scenario! For our partner salons to stay ahead of the curve and better service the needs of their consumers offering a platform for online purchase was key. We launched a Social Commerce platform in 2020 to enable our salon partners to grow their consumer base via digital activation and hyper local media advertising. This year we continue to strengthen Social Commerce with improved features and simplified back-end management systems for our salons to be able to accelerate their business," says Rachit Mathur, GM, Kerastase India.

In light of the challenging situation brought about by the global pandemic in 2020, Kerastase created an opportunity for its salon partners by launching a pioneering SoComm platform in order to reach out to new and existing consumers and give them the convenience of having their luxury hair care delivered to their doorstep. This year it continues to push the SoComm platform while also driving "sampling" by offering two complimentary Kerastase sample sachets on every order placed. This way one gets to experience more of Kerastase's range offering.



Suhana posts throwback video with birthday boy AbRam

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shah Rukh Khan's son AbRam Khan turns eight on Thursday. To mark his special day, elder sister Suhana Khan has shared a picture post for him on social media. Suhana posted a video clip on Instagram Story where the brother-sister duo are in the pool. Little AbRam crawls up to Suhana to pose with his sister. As the two smile at the camera, she asks him to kiss her. AbRam gives her a peck on the cheek.

"Birthday Boy," Suhana captioned the video that posted on Thursday night. AbRam, son of Shah Rukh and Gauri Khan, was born through surrogacy in May, 2013. His elder siblings Suhana and Aryan are currently studying in the US.



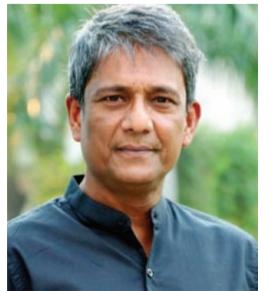
ADIL HUSSAIN ON WHY ACTORS NEED TO BE EMPATHETIC IN LIFE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Adil Hussain says an actor will only be able to depict compassion on screen only if he is empathetic in life. The actor features in the film "Raahgir: The Wayfarers" and says the artistes in the film have done a great job depicting these emotions. He shares screen space with Neeraj Kabi and Tilotama Shome in the film directed by the veteran Goutam Ghose.

The film is based on a short story by Prafulla Roy and centres around the story of three daily wage labourers in dire need, and how they showcase humanity despite their problems.

"The film is about three human beings Nathuni, Lakhpati and Chopatla, whose empathy and compassion come out when they opt for humanity over survival. They have nothing to fall back on and Goutam da has beautifully captured that in this film. If an actor is not really empathetic in real life, it will show on screen," he says. "One has seen many people with or without resources going out to help others during this pandemic. That is what humanity is all about. Raahgir is the story of such people in dire circumstances. Goutam Ghose's Raahgir epitomises the humanity that one is seeing so often in the pandemic," says producer Amit Agarwal.



Terrace gardening for healthy living aiding immunity booster

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Work from home may also have some adverse impacts like mental fatigue and anxiety. An effective way to overcome this is engaging oneself in some creative activity, 'gardening' being an option. With most people living in apartments, terraces and balconies can be a perfect place for it.

Rajesh, Horticulturist, IFFCO Kisan My Urban Greens, suggests some ideas/tips to help you set up that perfect terrace garden.

The Layout

The layout is the first yet most important step while setting up a terrace garden. One can either cover the entire surface with soil or use planters to grow plants. Earthen or cement pots can be used to set up a mini garden; however, if you plan to grow your own



veggies on your terrace, use of grow bags or installing grow stations would be a better option.

Terrace area should ideally receive proper sunlight, but in order to protect the plants from direct heat during summers, a shed is recommended.

Choose the plants:

Depending upon the space, we can grow all kinds of plant, from organic fruits and vegetables to herbs to shrubs and flowers in the terrace garden.

As the pandemic has re-emphasised the importance of health and wellness, one can also consider growing immunity booster plants like Aloe Vera, Giloy and Tulsi. In addition, growing natural air purifiers like Sansevieri -- Green and Variegated; Money Plant, Areca Palm, Spider Plant, Jamia and White Pathos is also a popular choice of home gardeners.

Soil Preparation:

In general, the soil should be fertile, containing the correct levels of moisture and minerals. Fresh soil from any farm with the right amount of organic manure and vermicompost is good for planters. Organic manure or aged manures are the best ways

to prepare the soil for gardening as they supply almost every nutrient to the plant. To avoid infestation of pests some amount of organic pesticides can be mixed in the soil.

For home gardening, soil mixes are available online or in nurseries. COCO peat is also a very popular choice for home gardeners as it helps in water retention, aeration for roots and protects the plant from soil fungus. Mix it with soil or apply 1 inch of

coco peat layer over in the potter/planter to retain moisture.

Watering:

Some plants require more water, while others need less. Hence, it is important to monitor the requirement of water frequently. It also depends upon the season. Generally, one needs to water the plants 1-2 times a day in summers and perhaps every alternate day during winters.

Depending upon the frequency of rains, the watering interval may go up and down during the rainy season. Check the topsoil if it has dried; it is time to rewater. It is essential to understand the requirement for different plants as over watering may lead to root decay.

Other requirements:

Weeds disrupt the growth of plants. Removal of weeds on a timely basis is a healthy practice. This may be done once a week or fortnight. Also, for the healthy growth of plants, we can use compost or any other organic manure from time to time.





Brad Pitt wins joint custody of kids with ex-wife Angelina Jolie

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Brad Pitt has been granted joint custody of his children with his former wife, actress Angelina Jolie, following a long court battle.

The 57-year-old actor and the 45-year-old actress are parents to Pax, 17, Zahara, 16, Shiloh, 14 and 12-year-old twins Vivienne and Knox. Maddox, 19, is not subject to the custody decision.

Jolie filed for divorce in 2016 and the pair have since been engaged in custody battle. A private judge named John Ouderkirk was hired to oversee the case and ruled in Pitt's favour, reports [bbc.com](#).

The ruling was a "tentative decision" and Jolie is continuing her legal fight, a source told [pagesix.com](#).

Jolie had not objected to joint custody but there were "other issues of concern", it reported. The trial lasted for several months and there were a large number of witnesses, experts and therapists, another source said. The actress has criticised the judge's decision not to allow their children to testify in custody hearings. She had cited "irreconcilable differences" when she



filed to end the marriage, and the pair became embroiled in a child custody battle in the months following the announcement. Earlier, Pitt was investigated for possible child abuse after losing his temper in front of some of the children, but was later cleared of the allegations. Popularly known as "Brangelina" by fans in their heydays together, the two actors had met on the sets of "Mr And Mrs Smith In 2005". It was Pitt's second marriage as he was previously married to "Friends" star Jennifer Aniston. It was Jolie's third after marriages with actors Billy Bob Thornton and Jonny Lee Miller.

Priyanka misses hubby Nick, posts pic with a kiss

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Priyanka Chopra gets mushy in a new post, featuring husband Nick Jonas and a kiss. She reveals she is missing hubby.

Priyanka posted a picture of Nick on Instagram. On getting a closer look, a kiss shaped lipstick mark can be seen on the American pop singer's image.

"My lipstick on his fade...miss u already," Priyanka wrote as caption.

The couple are in different places owing to work. However, no details were shared by the actress.

Priyanka and Nick were recently seen together at the Billboard Music Awards in Los Angeles. While Nick served as host of the show, the actress was seen presenting an award.

Priyanka is currently busy with "Citadel". Helmed by "Avengers" makers Joe and Anthony Russo, "Citadel" is a spy thriller series co-starring Richard Madden, and is billed as a global event for OTT.



Lady Gaga flaunts mermaid oomph in bikini photo-op

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Lady Gaga lives her mermaid fantasies in a tiny gorgeous blue bikini, in her new post on Instagram.

The Grammy and Oscar-winning singer posted two pictures in a blue tie-dye bikini. She is seen lying down by the pool with her back towards the camera.

For caption, Gaga dropped the mermaid emoji, and the image currently has over 2.2 million likes.

Gaga is currently seen essaying a quirky cameo in the much-hyped "Friends: The Reunion", which drops globally on May 27.



ARIANA GRANDE DAZZLES IN SILKY WHITE GOWN IN SECRET WEDDING TO DALTON GOMEZ

Los Angeles | Agencies

Grande has confirmed her wedding to Dalton Gomez by sharing stunning photos on Instagram from her secret ceremony.

The international pop sensation tied the knot on May 15 in an "intimate" ceremony at her Montecito, California home.

Ariana, 27, looked sensational in her wedding photos, which she has now shared with Instagram and Vogue to commemorate the day. The singer looked phenomenal in her custom Vera Wang silky white gown complete with a low swooping back and leg slit.

The charmeuse empire waist dress featured a sculpted neckline and was paired with patent platforms and a fluffy white mini bag. Ariana's short veil held an Audrey Hepburn-esque bow placed at the crown of her signature pony tail, and her old Hollywood makeup glam complimented the look.



Los Angeles | Agencies

Instagram, sharing a picture in which she called herself a "single"

Rebel Wilson is ready to date again

"Lots on my mind...aghhhhh...single-girl-head-ing-to-Super-Bowl!" she wrote as the caption.

Wilson and Busch were last photographed together during the Christmas holidays when they were on a vacation together, which came three months after they had confirmed their romance by attending Prince Albert's Planetary Health Gala together in Monaco last September.

MICHAEL DOUGLAS WANTS JOHN KRASINSKI TO PLAY HIM ON SCREEN

Los Angeles | Agencies

Veteran actor Michael Douglas would like actor John Krasinski to play him in a biopic. Krasinski is known for his film "A Quiet Place" as well as the series "Jack Ryan" and "The Office". "Because of his compassion, his humour," Douglas explained as reasons he wants to see Krasinski as himself on screen, while speaking to Deadline. "Compassion and humour can take you a long way. I sense in him that he makes a conscientious effort where the material is good to try different types of roles," he added in the interview, reports [contactmusic.com](#). Meanwhile, Douglas said earlier that Covid had affected his health greatly. "During this Covid-19 period, doing much more couch potato-ing. I have been shocked by the reduction of my stamina. And my long-term memory is fine, but my short-term memory is not. I used to blame it on pot. But I've got some friends who've been smoking as long as I have and have fabulous memories, so I don't think that's the issue. I'm researching it," he said.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Camila Coelho



EDITOR'S SPECS

Low testosterone is not good

Men with low testosterone levels may be more prone to severe Covid-19 infection, say researchers, including one of Indian origin. "If a man had low testosterone when he first came to the hospital, his risk of

THE STUDY DID NOT FIND A DIRECT CORRELATION HOWEVER, THOSE WITH THE LOWEST LEVELS OF TESTOSTERONE IN THE BLOOD WERE AT THE HIGHEST RISK OF GOING ON A VENTILATOR, NEEDING INTENSIVE CARE OR DYING.

having severe Covid-19 -- meaning his risk of requiring intensive care or dying -- was much higher compared with men who had more circulating testosterone," said researcher Abhinav Diwan from Washington University School of Medicine.

"And if testosterone levels dropped further during hospitalisation, the risk increased," Diwan added. For the study, published in the journal JAMA Network Open, the researchers measured several hormones in blood samples from 90 men and 62 women with symptoms of Covid-19 and who had confirmed cases of the illness. For the 143 patients who were admitted to the hospital, the researchers measured hormone levels again at days 3, 7, 14 and 28, as long as the patients remained hospitalized over these time frames. In addition to testosterone, the team measured levels of estradiol, a form of estrogen produced by the body, and IGF-1, an important growth hormone that is similar to insulin and plays a role in maintaining muscle mass. Among women, the researchers found no correlation between levels of any hormone and disease severity. Among men, only testosterone levels were linked to Covid-19 severity. A blood testosterone level of 250 nanograms per deciliter or less is considered low testosterone in adult men. At hospital admission, men with severe Covid-19 had average testosterone levels of 53 nanograms per deciliter; men with less severe disease had average levels of 151 nanograms per deciliter. By day three, the average testosterone level of the most severely ill men was only 19 nanograms per deciliter. In addition, the team found that lower testosterone levels in men also correlated with higher levels of inflammation and an increase in the activation of genes that allow the body to carry out the functions of circulating sex hormones inside the cells.

China's expanding influence in UN

China's ascendancy in the UN seems almost unquestioned. A study by Gateway House has traced China's expanding influence in the world body, its related bodies, and influential non-UN multilateral bodies.

The research was conducted over four months in 2020-21, studying the most important multilateral agencies in the world including UN agencies, funds and programmes, as well as non-UN security, finance, and scientific agencies. The findings revealed that China is in a dominant position in several critical multilateral bodies, in both personnel and funding.

The most prominent are the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The links are obvious. ITU sets global telecommunications standards, where China's Huawei is a major player. UNIDO was formed to encourage industrialisation in the developing world but its importance has waned as countries found it unhelpful, leaving China in charge. China immediately connected UNIDO to its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which UNIDO now endorses.

China's positioning at ICAO, which sets air navigation and safety standards, ensured that during the pandemic, Taiwan was excluded from all discussions, just as it was with the World Health Organization (WHO), over which China has a disproportionate influence.

In October 2020, with the world writing under the pain of Covid-19, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) held triennial elections to select 15 new members.

Despite its abysmal human rights record, and the human and economic devastation inflicted by Covid globally, China was elected as

a member with the lowest number of votes. Now here it stands, with a sheen of credibility provided by the UN, the study said. Then on May 4, China was further embedded into the UN system. China's Vice Minister in the Ministry of Commerce, Xiangchen Zhang, was appointed as one of four new Deputy Directors-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) along with the US, France, and Costa Rica.

India's candidate lost

While the world was preoccupied with opening the Chinese internal market, China spent years preparing to dominate and leave its mark on the external global system. In fact, it has been part of China's global agenda since 1992, the study said. By 1997, China was a member of 20 per cent of multilateral organisations, up from 12 per cent in 1989, and by 2002, started to create new ones, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Over the last two decades, ever since it entered the WTO in 2001, China has set out to influence the global multilateral system.

The participation has grown more sophisticated over the years. China has carefully chosen clusters of agencies to lead, whose work can be interwoven with and are inter-linked to its own domestic agendas like Made in China 2025, and the rise of Chinese companies. The multilateral agenda includes creating new global standards for technology, which can be led by China and its national corporate champions. These in turn, are linked to China's foreign policy strategy led by the Belt and Road Initiative, which has its own expansion plans like the Digital Silk Road, Space Silk Road, and the Health Silk Road. The



expanding influence is enabled by China's increased monetary contribution to the UN, both mandatory as a UN member, and increasingly, voluntary donations. According to this study, these have risen by 1096 per cent and 346 per cent respectively from 2010 to 2019.

The study found that China is present either as the head or a deputy position in almost all the critical international agencies.

China directly heads four of the 15 principal agencies of the UN: FAO, UNIDO, ITU, ICAO.

Chinese deputies are present in nine of the 15 agencies: World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Monetary Fund (IMF), IMO, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), WHO and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

The study said China influences UN agencies through its proxies. The current Director-General of the WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was elected with China's support in 2017. He is the former health and foreign minister of Ethiopia, which is one of the largest recipients of Chinese investments in Africa. The WHO was previously headed for 10 years by Margaret Chan, from Hong Kong. The WHO's delayed warnings and travel restrictions regarding the pandemic in China, is a globally devastating outcome borne of

China's influence.

The study said China also has a network of its nationals, who are career professionals or diplomats, at the lower rungs of the UN system. These officers, who have entered the UN system laterally, or through the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programme, are supposed to be impartial but may not be.

Some agencies are still firmly in the grip of the Western powers. For instance, the World Bank is with the US, the IMF is with the EU, the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is with the UK, and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is with France. China has been rising here too: it has its people in senior positions at financial institutions, eg: Shaolin Yang at the World Bank and Tao Zhang at the IMF.

In institutions where China occupies no position, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), Universal Postal Union (UPU), UN Development Programme (UNDP), and UN Habitat, it has signed Memorandums of Understanding between those UN agencies and its Belt and Road Initiative through relevant domestic ministries, often leveraging its capacity for voluntary funding. Thus in effect, China's foreign policy agenda gets endorsed and co-promoted by the UN.

In mandatory contributions, at 12 per cent of the total, China is the second largest donor. Its voluntary donations have also been increas-

ing, from \$51 million in 2010 to \$172 million in 2019, a 346 per cent rise in nine years. Combined, China becomes the fifth largest donor to the UN. This has implications. The study shows that where China is not leading an organisation, it almost certainly makes voluntary contributions. The voluntary contributions enable the UN's funds and programmes agencies to run their special projects, as only administrative, daily expenses are covered by the UN's core budget, the study said.

So, when China makes a \$7.5 million contribution to the UNDP, it can influence the way development projects are implemented. China is increasingly involved with the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPO) through a recent \$1 billion pledge to the UN Peace and Development Fund as the largest donor. This is viewed by some as a way for China to keep an eye on its investments in Africa.

Finally, even if Chinese nationals, its government or its ministries are not prominent in the UN, its state-owned companies are. The International Seabed Authority, which is "mandated under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to organise, regulate and control all mineral-related activities in the international seabed area for the benefit of mankind as a whole" has awarded five contracts to Chinese companies for deep sea mining of polymetallic nodules, sulphides, and cobalt rich ferromanganese crusts, the study said.

Despite cyclone Yaas, Odisha maintains liquid oxygen supply to nation

Anand Singh

Despite being hit by Cyclone Yaas, the Odisha government has ensured the uninterrupted supply of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) which is required by several states where the cases of Covid-19 are still high. State government officials said that the uninterrupted supply of LMO was due to proper planning by the government.

Speaking to IANS, Y. K. Jethwa, ADG Law and Order of Odisha police said, "Advanced planning was done and standard operating procedure was prepared for ensuring unhindered Oxygen movement, while ensuring the safety of oxygen production centres, tankers, drivers and other staff." Jethwa said that each tanker was moved under close supervision and escort of Odisha Police. Another senior official of the Odisha government said that even amidst cyclone Yaas, the transportation of LMO continued. He said that four Oxygen tankers are on their way from Angul to Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam, while two LMO tankers are going from Jajpur to Berhampur and Bhubaneswar under close supervision and escort of the Odisha Police. Earlier in the day, the IMD said that the landfall process of "very severe" cyclonic storm Yaas in the Bay of Bengal has been completed and it has weakened into a "severe cyclonic" storm. Yaas, which is crossing between Dhamra and Balasore in Odisha, weakened into a severe



cyclonic storm and lay centred at 12.30 p.m. on Wednesday over north coastal Odisha near latitude 21.45 and longitude 86.80e, about 15 km west-southwest of Balasore, said the National Weather Forecasting Centre of the India Meteorological Department (IMD). It is likely to move north-northwestwards and weaken gradually into a cyclonic storm during the next six hours. The cyclone had commenced the landfall process around 9 a.m. Several people have been evacuated to shelter houses in several districts of Odisha. Till date, the Oxygen centres situated in Odisha's Rourkela, Dhenkanal, Jajpur and Angul have supplied 22,542 MT of LMO to several states since April 22 to May 25. Odisha has supplied LMO to Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab, Bihar, Rajasthan and Chandigarh.

Even the railways said that in a scale up of operations which continued till late on Tuesday night, 12 Oxygen Expresses with 969 MT of LMO started their journeys from cyclone hit Odisha. They include three trains for Tamil Nadu, four trains for Andhra Pradesh and one each for Delhi region, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Kerala.

13 years on, coastal B'desh still awaits stone dams to escape tidal surge

Sumi Khan

Even after 13 years, people of Bangladesh's coastal region are still awaiting construction of stone dams to escape the tidal surge following a cyclonic storm. As many as three million people from Chormontaj, in the coastal area, have alleged that despite several appeals to the authorities, the Water Development Board (WDB) had always turned a deaf ear to their pleas.

As Cyclone Yaas is likely to intensify further into a 'very severe cyclonic storm', experts opined that it may exacerbate the situation due to the full moon and lunar eclipse on Wednesday. On Tuesday, the cyclone and super moon caused 5 to 6 feet high tidal waves on the Pataukhali coast of Bangladesh. It flooded the stretch from Barisal to Chittagong. A warning has been issued as more than 5 million people across 14 districts are still trapped in the deluge. Hatia, another island of Chittagong, was also inundated. Natural calamities have been devastating the lives of nearly three million people in the coastal areas of Chormontaj, Khaleq Sikder, 60, a farmer, Rafiq Mollah, 50, a fisherman and Mohammad Bashir, 32, another farmer told correspondent.

Ward numbers 7,8 and 9 of Chormontaj



island of Rangabali upazila of Pataukhali district of Bangladesh, the coastal area surrounded by the Bay of Bengal, was severely affected by Yaas. Experts had earlier warned that around 20 per cent-30 per cent people would be injured in Bangladesh, within a year after the devastation by cyclone Amphan.

An investigation by IANS revealed that there was no official on the spot to lend support to those affected by cyclone Yaas and the subsequent tidal surge. Besides, the cyclone centres were also closed. Md Mohsin, Secretary in the Ministry of Disaster

Management and Relief, refuted the IANS claim and said that at least two thousand volunteers are busy in protecting the people of Chormontaj. Earlier, Enamur Rahman, Minister of Disaster Management and Relief, had claimed that 150 cyclone centres are being prepared for the cyclone-hit people.

About 3 million people in this area are being severely affected by almost all kinds of natural disasters, but there are no volunteers, government and private officials to help them. Borboishdia, Andarchor and two other islands were also inundated but there was no warning message or alert from the authorities. People in Chormontaj have been pleading, after Cyclone Sidr hit the coastal area in 2007, for building stone dams as protection from the tidal surges during the cyclones. The mud dams scarred by previous storms are too weak to survive another tidal surge. However, after 2007 no one from WDB or the government officials visited Chormontaj to protect the vulnerable people.

All the paddy lands are flooded by the sea water, the vulnerable people of Chormontaj are waiting from Tuesday morning for shelter. Earlier on Tuesday Deputy Commissioner Matul told IANS that he came to know from Mashfaqur Rahman, the Upajila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Chormontaj, that they're using a speedboat to monitor the situation.

Following that Rahman, the UNO told this news agency that 100 people are already in the cyclone centre of ward 8 of Chormontaj.

Later, one Delwar Hossain, claiming to be the former Chairman and local President of the Awami league, asked for the identity and whereabouts of the IANS correspondent, asking not to publish any "wrong information".

When questioned about the number of volunteers, he replied, "I don't know the number, but volunteers are in each ward."

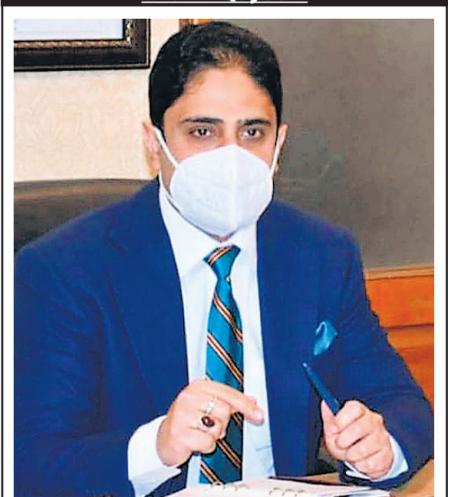
Several wards of Chormontaj Union were inundated and have been washed away, due to the breaking of the embankment due to rising sea level and rising air pressure, leaving hundreds of families homeless. Cropland has been submerged. High winds and floods also caused damage to housing, roads and other infrastructure. Electricity and communications were knocked out, and roads and waterways became impassable. Drinking water was contaminated by debris and many sources were inundated with saline water from tidal surges, the sanitation infrastructure of 3 wards of Chormontaj has been destroyed.

But the district authorities denied the real scenario, claiming to send relief, if needed.

Monsoon floods had previously caused extensive agricultural production losses and destruction of physical assets of Bangladesh, totalling nearly 1.1 billion dollars.

KRAMER VS KRAMER IN SRINAGAR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

Sheikh Qayoom



In a typical Kramer VS Kramer situation in Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), the mayor, Junaid Azim Mattu is battling it out with his joint commissioner planning, Ghulam Hassan Mir.

Mattu sat on protest on Thursday inside SMC premises against his own official at the corporation headed by himself. The Mayor and his supporters want to oust Mir from SMC. The Mayor has sought removal of Joint Commissioner Planning and his repatriation to Housing and Urban Development Department of the UT.

Commissioner SMC, Athar Amin Khan, last week formed a Task Force of seven officials of the SMC headed by Mir to look into illegal constructions, deviations and conversion of residential buildings into commercial in Srinagar city.

Khan also ordered demolition these structures and recovery of the money lost by such constructions from delinquent SMC officials.

Mir said he demolished several illegal structures that were coming up during lockdown allegedly with the active connivance of some Municipal officials and Corporators. The drive that was started on May 21 will continue till June 6. Continuing the protest against Mir, Corporators who support Mayor staged a sit-in and raised slogans against 'Afsar Shahi'.

In a letter to Commissioner SMC, Mayor has enclosed a representation signed by 61 Corporators of SMC- has sought enacting of Section 46 (2) and 50 (b) of J&K Municipal Corporation Act 2000, which deal with appointment of Joint Commissioners and functions of the Commissioner respectively.

"The approval of the Corporation for the appointment of Ghulam Hassan Mir, Joint Commissioner (Planning) is hereby rejected by the Corporation under Section 46 (2) of the J&K Municipal Corporation Act 2000," reads the letter.

Mayor has sought appointment of a new JCP and requested Commissioner SMC to immediately relieve Mir of his charge as the Joint Commissioner Planning.



US, CHINA TRADE NEGOTIATORS HOLD TALKS



Beijing/Washington: US and Chinese trade negotiators on Thursday held talks over the two countries' ongoing trade dispute for the first time since American President Joe Biden took office in January.

The new US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai and China's Vice Premier Liu He spoke on Thursday, both sides have confirmed in separate statements.

"The two sides had frank, pragmatic and constructive exchanges," dpa news agency quoted China's Trade Ministry as saying in a statement. The US gave a similar evaluation, noting a "candid exchange" between the two. It added that during an "introductory virtual meeting", Ambassador Tai discussed "the guiding principles of the Biden-Harris administration's worker-centred trade policy and her ongoing review of the US-China trade relationship, while also raising issues of concern". The USTR also noted that she looks forward to future discussions with Vice Premier Liu, according to the US statement. Both sides emphasised the importance of their trading relationship. But the new administration sees China as its biggest competitor and has indicated that it will also pursue a tough course against Beijing, albeit in coordination with international allies.

German development agency to stay in Afghanistan after troop pullout

Kabul | Agencies

German development agency intends to continue working in Afghanistan even after international troops are withdrawn, a spokesperson for the firm said on Thursday.

The German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) can work in Afghanistan "even under difficult conditions" dpa news agency quoted the spokesperson as saying.

About 1,000 people from Afghanistan work for the GIZ, which implements development projects on behalf of the German government. The spokesperson said that the agency was not active in regions controlled by the Taliban and underlined that security was top priority, with a risk management system in place for years.

The German Ministry responsible for economic cooperation and development said that it has not been able to identify a significant increase in notifications of danger from local staff.

Local staff have the ability to apply for admission to Germany if their work puts them at risk. According to the ministry, 42 staff members of German development organisations and their immediate



family members have received visas to enter Germany since 2013.

Afghanistan is in a state of uncertainty after US President Joe Biden announced that American troops will pull out from the country by September 11, 2021 after almost 20 years. NATO agreed to follow suit. According to a US non-governmental organization, 300 local staff for the US or their family were killed in Afghanistan in recent years. They are targeted by the Taliban for cooperating with the West. Beijing and Washington have been embroiled in a trade war for three years. The last contact between

negotiators was in August 2020 during the administration of former US President Donald Trump. The US and China reached a partial agreement last January with a so-called phase-one trade deal that served as a ceasefire in the trade war, with compliance to be reviewed every six months.

China pledged to significantly increase its imports from the US as part of the agreement. Beijing is also demanding the US withdraw punitive tariffs imposed by Trump on almost all imports from China, more than Beijing could respond to with counter-tariffs.

PALESTINIAN PREZ CALLS FOR INT'L PEACE TRACK TO END ISRAELI OCCUPATION



Ramallah: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has called for launching an international peace track in the Middle East aimed at ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Abbas' remark was made in a meeting held in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Wednesday with UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, reports Xinhua news agency. The Palestinian leader added that the Palestinians want to establish their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with the international resolutions. Briefing the British diplomat on the latest developments in Palestine, Abbas called on the UK to help end Israel's assaults on the Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. He noted that the ongoing Egypt-brokered ceasefire must be observed not only in Gaza but in all Palestinian territories, saying the international community should help Palestinians in the Hamas-held enclave to rebuild what had been destroyed during the conflict.

Raab reiterated the UK's position of supporting the two-state solution and the efforts to achieve peace between Israel and Palestine. He UK Foreign Secretary arrived in Ramallah days after Israel and Hamas agreed to the ceasefire that ended the 11-day bloodshed, the worst since 2014, between the two sides. At least 243 Palestinians and 12 Israelis were killed between May 10 and May 20.

Macron in Rwanda in bid to normalise ties

After meeting with President Paul Kagame, he will visit a memorial for victims of the genocide, which saw representatives of the Hutu majority kill members of the Tutsi minority and moderate Hutus.



minority and moderate Hutus.

A commission of historians recently concluded that France bore a heavy responsibility for the genocide; one of the conclusions was that Paris had remained blind to preparations for the killings. However, there was no evidence of France's complicity in the deaths.

Macron is scheduled to depart for South Africa on Friday.

8 FOREIGN IS SUSPECTS DETAINED IN ISTANBUL

Istanbul: Turkish police on Thursday detained eight foreigners in the country's biggest city of Istanbul for their suspected links to the Islamic State (IS) terror group. Simultaneous operations were launched at 12 locations to capture those allegedly seeking to carry out terror attacks, Xinhua news agency as saying in a report. The suspects, whose nationalities were not immediately clear, were reportedly involved in conducting activities in the city on behalf of the group. Many organisational documents and digital materials were also seized during the operations, the agency added. The IS has conducted a spate of deadly attacks in Turkey since 2015. Turkey's counter-terrorism units in response have been conducting operations against the group's members in the country.

DRC city partially evacuated over volcano eruption threat

Kinshasa | Agencies

Authorities ordered a partial evacuation of Goma, a large city in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), on Thursday over concerns of another eruption of the nearby Mount Nyiragongo volcano.

Lieutenant General Kongba Constant, military governor of the North Kivu region, announced on the official TV broadcaster RTNC that 10 districts would be evacuated, reports dpa news agency.

Authorities would organise transport, he said, and residents should take along only the bare necessities.

Residents had fled their homes in panic, some even to neighbouring Rwanda, after the Nyiragongo volcano erupted on May 22. At least 119 earthquakes were recorded in Goma on Monday. Some of the lava had flowed toward Goma, but stopped 300 metres from the airport. While 32 people have been confirmed dead, 40 others are still missing, according to UN figures, while



some 20,000 have been left homeless.

Humanitarian relief efforts have been hampered by airport closures in Goma and the neighbouring city of Bukavu.

Three villages and a Goma suburb were destroyed by lava from the volcano

in Virunga National Park, about 20 km north of the city, near the Rwanda border. Nyiragongo last erupted in 2002, with lava destroying large parts of Goma at the time, leaving 250 people dead and displacing 120,000.

Sri Lanka fears oil spill from burning container ship

Colombo | Agencies

Sri Lankan authorities fear a possible oil spill from a Singaporean container ship on fire off the country's western coast as the upper deck of the vessel was completely destroyed, officials said on Thursday.

The fire, which broke out on May 20 on the MV X-Press Pearl, was beyond control and spreading inside the vessel anchored 10 nautical miles off the main Colombo port, reports dpa news agency.

Firefighters are trying to control the fire around the engine room and prevent an oil spill, as the vessel has nearly 300 tonnes of fuel in its tank, navy spokesman Indika Silva said.

But Sri Lankan authorities, including the Marine Environmental Protection Authority (MEPA), were preparing to mitigate damage in the event of an oil spill. "There is a possibility of an explosion occurring in the ship as the fire continues. We have put in place oil spill management plans to control damage



from an oil spill," MEPA general manager Turney Pradeep Kumara said.

Debris and chemicals have already fallen into the sea and washed ashore in areas up to 20 nautical miles away from the container ship. Residents have been strictly warned not to collect items washed ashore, but many of them ignored the warnings and were seen collecting the items. The vessel, registered

under the Singaporean flag, was en route from the Indian port of Hazira to Singapore, via Colombo, with 1,486 containers, most of them carrying chemicals, including 25 tonnes of nitric acid.

On Tuesday, the Sri Lanka Navy said it had rescued 25 crew members from the cargo ship. Two injured Indians among the rescued had been hospitalised for treatment, according to the Navy.

53 ABDUCTED VICTIMS RESCUED IN NIGERIA

Lagos: May 27 (IANS)

Gunmen in Nigeria released 53 people after several days in captivity, said a local official. Zamfara state commissioner of security and home affairs Abubakar Dauran on Wednesday told reporters in the state capital Gusau that the victims were released unhurt through the state government's ongoing peace process, reports Xinhua news agency. The victims were kidnapped from the Bungudu local government area of the state last week. "A total of 53 persons who were kidnapped last week were released Monday through the efforts of the repentant bandits and support of the state police command," Dauran told reporters, adding that all of them were in good health and had already reunited with their families. He called on all sides in the state to continue to comply with the ongoing peace process aimed at achieving lasting stability in the region.

Biden urges ceasefire in Ethiopia's Tigray region

Washington | Agencies

US President Joe Biden has called for a ceasefire in Ethiopia's conflict-ridden Tigray region in view of the escalating violence there.

"Political wounds cannot be healed through force of arms," dpa news agency quoted Biden as saying on Wednesday evening. He said belligerents in the Tigray region should declare and adhere to a ceasefire, and Eritrean and Amhara forces should withdraw.

"I am deeply concerned by the escalating violence and the hardening of regional and ethnic divisions in multiple parts of Ethiopia. The large-scale human rights abuses taking place in Tigray, including widespread sexual violence, are unacceptable and must end.

"Families of every background and ethnic heritage deserve to live in peace and security in their country," the President said.

The US government's special envoy to the Horn of Africa, Jeff Feltman, will travel to the region again next week to seek a peaceful settlement of the conflicts, Biden said.

The Ethiopian government launched a military offensive in November 2020 against the



the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in northern Ethiopia, which until then had power in the Tigray region.

The hostilities in northern Ethiopia soon escalated into a complex conflict involving neighbouring Eritrea. Ethiopia had long denied that Eritrean troops were present in the conflict-ridden region, but then announced in early April that they would be withdrawn. Ethiopia's military offensive followed years of tension between the TPLF and the central government, in a conflict which has driven hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes and caused widespread destruction.

Belarusian Prez defends forced landing of Ryanair flight

Minsk | Agencies

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has defended a decision to force the landing of a Ryanair passenger plane with a dissident journalist on board.

The forced landing on Sunday has been sharply condemned by members of NATO as well as the UN Security Council, reports dpa news agency.

"I acted lawfully by protecting people, according to all international rules," Lukashenko told Parliament in Minsk on Wednesday. Authorities used Sunday's landing to have dissident Belarusian journalist Roman Protasevich arrested at the airport in Minsk. Protasevich is a "terrorist", added Lukashenko, who said the 26-year-old blogger was planning a "bloody uprising" in Belarus. "There was a terrorist on board the plane," he said, claiming that it was his country's sovereign right to detain its own citizens.

Lukashenko initially said, without elaborating, that Belarus had received information that there was an explosive device on the plane. Therefore, he said, the plane, which was on its way to Lithuania from Greece, was diverted to Minsk with the assistance of a fighter jet.

"That the plane was forced to land by a MiG-29 fighter jet

is an absolute lie," said Lukashenko.

Belarus acted for safety reasons, he said, because the plane flew over the country's nuclear power plant.

The European Union has imposed new sanctions on the power apparatus in Belarus in the wake of the action, including a landing ban for the country's airlines and sanctions on the leadership. NATO condemned the action on Wednesday.

The body's North Atlantic Council said the "unacceptable act seriously violated the norms governing civil aviation and endangered the lives of the passengers and crew".

Protasevich and his partner, Sofia Sapega, should be released and there should be an "urgent independent investigation", it added. Many current and former members of the UN Security Council have also condemned the forced landing of a passenger flight. Belarusian authorities' campaign of repression against its own people," said a statement from the



UN representation of Estonia, supported by France, Ireland, Belgium, Germany, Norway, Britain and the US.

Together they demanded an investigation into the incident and Protasevich's release.

A joint statement by all 15 members of the Security Council failed, among other reasons due to Russia's opposition. Belarus threatened to react to the latest sanctions with ones of its own, though Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko said the decision would not be made hastily.

"We suggest soberly thinking again before you go down the slippery slope of an economic war in which there will be no winners," he said, adding that the measures would be painful but leaving open whether they would apply to goods or oil and gas transport to Europe. More than 100 people were on board the Ryanair flight that was forced to land, including

Protasevich and his partner.

Both were arrested and their fate remain uncertain. Poland has decided to close its airspace for planes operated by Belarusian carriers, government spokesperson Piotr Mueller said on Wednesday. The website Flightradar showed an aircraft of the Belarusian airline Belavia flying several loops on the route from Minsk to Barcelona before entering Polish airspace and finally turning back towards Minsk.

According to the airline, France had revoked a previously issued overflight permit. Attempts to take alternative routes had been unsuccessful, the airline said in Minsk. Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte of neighbouring Lithuania has expressed concerns, saying: "This is an unpredictable regime from which you can expect anything, and you have to be prepared for anything." Lukashenko made other claims about Protasevich's past, including that he had fought on the side of government forces in eastern Ukraine and had "a lot of experience as a mercenary". Protasevich had reported from Ukraine in 2014, when the war between pro-Russian forces and the central government in Kiev was breaking out.

However, it has never been proved that he engaged in combat.



COVID-19

US EXPERTS FLAG CONCERNS FOR OLYMPICS 2021, CALL FOR WHO HELP

New York | Agencies

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has not taken adequate steps to protect athletes, coaches, and support staff from more than 200 nations in late July. One month later, the Paralympics will play host to 5,000 athletes, plus their support staff.

The experts including Annie Sparrow, Lisa M Brosseau, Robert J Harrison, and Michael T Osterholm, noted that when the IOC postponed the Tokyo Olympics in March 2020, Japan had 865 active Covid-19 cases. The country is now in a state of emergency, with 70,000 active cases, with less than 5 per cent of its population vaccinated against the coronavirus. "We believe the IOC's determination to proceed with the Olympic Games is not informed by the best scientific evidence," the experts write. They said that the IOC Covid playbooks assert that athletes participate at their own

risk but fail to delineate these risks and do not recognise the limitations of measures such as temperature screenings and face masks. Nor do they adequately address airborne transmission, asymptomatic spread, and the definition of close contacts.

The letter comes at a time of Covid crisis in Japan, with hospitals buckling under the strain of cases in Osaka, the country's second-largest city, and the US State Department recommending that US citizens not travel to the country.

Pfizer and BioNTech have offered to donate vaccines for all Olympic athletes, but this does not ensure that athletes -- especially those from countries without adequate vaccination efforts to begin with -- will be vaccinated in time.

The experts recommend that the IOC's playbooks classify sports as low, moderate, or high risk, based on what is known about Covid-19 spread, including airborne transmission. They also call for an immediate WHO response to assist the IOC.



"We recommend the WHO immediately convene an emergency committee that includes experts in occupational safety and health, building and ventilation engineering, and infectious-disease epidemiology as well as athlete representatives to consider these factors and advise on a risk-management approach for the Tokyo Olympics," they wrote.

A study conducted by two University of Tokyo professors showed that restricting movement of people during forthcoming Olympics and Paralympics to the same level as decrease in economic activity if the two events were to be called off could reduce spread of Covid-19. But the study noted that Games can go ahead provided restrictions are implemented.

England will not change its home schedule for IPL: Giles

England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) will not tweak its home schedule for any reason, England director Ashley Giles said on Thursday.



London | Agencies

Giles' comments come amid speculation that the Indian cricket board may request, or has informally requested, the ECB to make changes to the upcoming Test series between India and England so that a window could be made to complete the postponed Indian Premier League (IPL).

"I'm not aware of anything official, any requests to shift anything. As far as we're concerned and what we're pre-

pared for, the matches will be where they are," Giles is quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

"I'm not surprised there's all sorts of speculation. Everyone wants to get their cricket in. But we've not received anything official and we're cracking on," he said.

The five-Test series against India, which starts on August 4, sets off a busy calendar for England for the latter half of the year that includes the T20 World Cup in India and the Ashes.

"We have a full schedule. If we go from the end of the

fifth Test in September, we are set to leave for Bangladesh on September 19 or 20. We have a full schedule right through including Pakistan and wherever the T20 World Cup is," Giles said.

"We are going to have to give some of these guys a break at some point. But the intention of giving guys a break for, say, Bangladesh, wouldn't be for them to go and play cricket elsewhere. We have to manage our schedule now, so we get our guys arriving in the best shape possible for the T20 World Cup and the Ashes."



Paris | Agencies

India's top-ranked singles tennis player Ankita Raina's bid to qualify for the main draw of a Grand Slam ended in disappoint-

ment, as she bowed out in the French Open Qualifiers with a second-round loss on Wednesday. The 125th ranked Ankita lost to higher-ranked German Greet Minnen 2-6, 0-6 in one hour

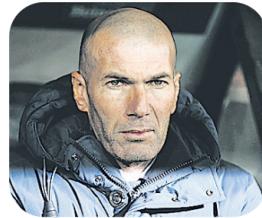
and 21 minutes. Ramkumar Ramanathan also crashed out, losing to Asian Games gold medalist, Uzbekistan's Denis Istomin, 1-6, 2-6 in the second round of the qualifiers.

ANKITA, RAMANATHAN CRASH OUT OF FRENCH OPEN

Zidane leaves Real Madrid after trophyless season

Madrid | Agencies

Zinedine Zidane has resigned as head coach of Real Madrid, the Spanish club said on Thursday. "It is now time to respect his decision and show our appreciation for his professionalism, dedication and passion throughout all these years, and for what he represents as his figure for Real Madrid," the club said in a statement, DPA reports. The World Cup-winning former France captain had a contract until June 2022 but had reportedly already told Real Madrid players earlier in May he would leave the club at the end of 2020-21 season. Zidane won Champions League three times and Spanish league



twice in two spells as Real Madrid coach. However, his stay had been a subject of speculation by the media for several weeks, and the resignation comes after a disappointing season which has seen the club finish without any title for first time in 11 years. They finished second to city rivals Atletico Madrid in La Liga, and lost to third tier Alcoyano in Copa del Rey and to Chelsea in the semi-final of Champions League. This is the second time Zidane has left Real Madrid before the end of his contract. He stepped down as coach in the summer of 2018, days after winning Champions League, only to make a surprise return in March 2019 after Santiago Solari was sacked.

DJOKOVIC REACHES BELGRADE OPEN SEMIFINALS



Belgrade: World No.1 Novak Djokovic eased past Argentina's 96th ranked Federico Coria in straight sets to reach semifinals of the Belgrade Open on Thursday.

Djokovic beat Coria 6-1, 6-0 in just 56 minutes to record his 952nd career win as a professional. This put him fifth on the all-time list for match wins in the Open Era, ahead of Argentine great Guillermo Vilas (951). Djokovic will now face either compatriot Dusan Lajovic or qualifier Andrej Martin. Djokovic improved to 18-3 in the season. He is seeking his third final of the year after winning the Australian Open and falling in the final of the ATP Masters 1000 event in Rome. Coria was appearing in only his third tour-level quarter-final and struggled to find any way past Djokovic. The only game the 29-year-old Argentine would win would end up an unexpected break of Djokovic's serve at 0-4.

Mary Kom, Sakshi march into final at 2021 ASBC Asian Boxing Championships

Panghal and four other men boxers to play semi-finals on Friday

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As India boxer Mary Kom made her way into the final after defeating Lutsaikhon Altantsetseg in the women's 51kg semi-final at the 2021 ASBC Asian Boxing Championships in Dubai on Thursday. The seasoned campaigner Mary Kom made a defensive start and took her time in the first round. The six-time world champion made the Mongolian opponent work hard and looked in good touch in the next round as she landed timely and powerful punches that put pressure on Altantsetseg. Mary Kom, kept her calm and used all her experience to take charge of the game and completed a 4-1 win. Having won six

medals already in the Asian Championships, including five gold, Mary Kom will be up against Kazakhstan's two-time world champion Nazym Kyzaibay entered the final beating Sri Lanka Nadeeka Pushpakumari with the referee stopping contest (RSC) after the first round. Extending the winning momentum, two-time youth world champion Sakshi pulled off a power-packed performance and upstaged the 2016 world champion Dina Zholaman of Kazakhstan 3-2 in the 54kg last-4 clash. With 15 medals confirmed in the on-going event, Indian contingent achieved their highest medal haul, bettering previous best of 13 from the 2019 edition in Bangkok where they finished



third with two gold, four silver and seven bronze medals. The on-going event has witnessed the presence of 150 boxers from 17 countries including strong boxing nations such as India, Uzbekistan, Philippines and Kazakhstan. Five men boxers, including defending champion Amit Panghal (52kg),

Shiva Thapa (64kg), Vikas Krishan (69kg), Varinder Singh (60kg) and Sanjeet (91kg) will be seen competing in the last-4 stage on Friday. Shiva Thapa, who has secured a record fifth successive medal at the Asian Championships, will take on top-seeded Bakhodur Usmonov of Tajikistan.

FOOTBALL WORLD RANKINGS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian men's football team retained its 105th position on the FIFA world rankings released on Thursday. In the women's category, the Indian team slipped four spots to be 57th in the rankings released last month. It has been a quiet period for international football, and this is mirrored in the latest FIFA world men's rankings. "With only one match played since the last edition was published -- a Ukraine-Bahrain friendly that ended all square (1-1) -- the top 50 remains unchanged, with Belgium leading the way from France and Brazil," FIFA said in a statement. France is placed second, followed by Brazil, England, and Portugal in the men's category. "Bahrain's one-place gain (98, +1) is the only movement among the 210 national teams that make up the Ranking. Ukraine remain 24th but, having dropped points, have enabled nearest pursuers Serbia to close the gap on them." However,

India men's team retains 105th position



things are expected to change in the coming weeks, when a host of international competitions take place around the globe. Among the matches are FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Asia, as well as qualifiers for the FIFA Arab Cup 2021, involving teams from Africa and Asia in mid-June. In the women's category, the USA leads the way, followed by Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Sweden.

Osaka to boycott media during French Open



Tokyo | Agencies

Japanese four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka has said she will not interact with press in her upcoming French Open campaign, citing mental health reasons. Naomi -- the reigning Australian Open champion -- announced the media boycott ahead of the Roland Garros event, which will get underway on Sunday, DPA reports. Under French Open rules, players are required to hold media conferences after each match. Naomi is the world's highest earning female athlete and will be fined by tournament officials should the world number two not take part in news conferences. She hopes the fines she will receive can be donated towards mental health charity. "I'm writing this to say that I'm not going to do any press during Roland Garros," Naomi wrote on Twitter.

ASHWIN ON CUSP OF ENDING AS TOP WICKET TAKER OF WTC

Team Absolute | New Delhi



Off-spinner R. Ashwin will most likely end as the top wicket taker in World Test Championship (WTC) cycle after India's final against New Zealand next month as the needs just four more wickets to surpass Australia speedster Pat Cummins who leads the tally of 70. The Aussie pace bowler has picked his wickets in 14 Test matches whereas the wily Indian spinner has 67 scalps in 13 matches. So, when the WTC final gets underway, all eyes will be on him, provided he is picked in the XI, considering the spin options available to him. The New Zealander closest to him is Tim Southee, who has 51 wickets in 10 matches and unless he takes 20 wickets in the final, which is highly improbable, and Ashwin takes less than four, he will stay behind the Indian. Ashwin has four four-wicket hauls in WTC so far, the same as fellow Australian off-spinner Nathan Lyon who has 56 scalps. Ashwin has played his WTC matches in India (9 Tests), Australia

has picked 52 wickets at home and 15 overseas -- 12 in Australia and three in New Zealand. As many as 32 of his 52 wickets in WTC have come in the four-Test series this year. This, along with 181 runs in four innings, won him Man-of-the-Series award against England. Bowling in England will, however, be a lot more difficult than in India. Since India will be playing the WTC final next month, the early part of England summer and with there being rain around, the conditions will most likely support the seam bowlers. On Wednesday, Cummins said conditions in England would be more favourable to New Zealand than India. Ashwin's average in the lone Test he played in New Zealand as part of

WTC cycle was an unimpressive 33. However, Indians can draw some inspiration from the fact that they played in Southampton, the venue of the WTC final, only three years ago during the Test series against England, and ran the home side close before succumbing to a 60-run loss in fourth Test of the series. Ashwin, who was part of that Test and bowled 51.4 overs for just three wickets, was completely overshadowed by Moeen Ali who took nine wickets to script an England win. Moeen's success though came towards the end of English summer in August-September when the wickets had become less seam-friendly. Ashwin has played just six Test matches in England and picked 14 wickets at an average of 32.92 which is a shade better than his average in New Zealand (33) and far better than Australia (42.15) and South Africa (46.14).

HEALTH CRISIS CAN BE MORE PERVERSIVE, DEBILITATING FOR ECONOMY: RBI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Compared to financial crises, a health crisis can be more pervasive, persistent and debilitating in its impact on the real economy, as per the RBI annual report for 2020-21. "Letting down the guard is perilous; it is best to prepare for future waves," the report said. It added that private investment is the missing piece in the story of the Indian economy in 2020-21; reviving it awaits an environment in which "animal spirits" are rekindled and entrepreneurial energies are released so that backward and forward linkages and multipliers prepare the ground for a durable investment-driven recovery. The report said 2020-21 will go down in history as the year of the Covid-19 pandemic break in the life and ethos of humanity.

"It altered economic activity, finance and, more generally, life and livelihoods in a drastic and deep way that may take several years to heal. The pandemic also exposed the fragility of health care infrastructure

and the inadequacy of health spending over the years. The year 2020 will also be notable for unprecedented policy responses which, although not coordinated globally, turned out to be synchronised globally," the report said. The report said the extent of misery and the loss of human lives has left indelible fissures and several lessons for the future: eternal vigilance in terms of pandemic preparedness - it is not going away for some time; priority for upscaling health spending and health infrastructure; faster rollout of vaccines and vaccination while building up stocks; investing in research and development as vaccine developers/producers are challenged by new variants of the virus; prudent and preemptive pandemic protocols, including local lockdowns, restrictions on mobility and other COVID-appropriate behaviour.

Besides the toll on life and living, the year 2020 was ravaged by output and employment losses unprecedented in history, globally and in India. The pandemic also turned out to be highly inequitable - it is estimated that around 95 million additional people around the world have been forced into extreme poverty during the year, with 80 million more undernourished, mostly in low-income countries. The report said just a year ago when the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 a pandemic and India imposed a strict lockdown in March,



and employment losses unprecedented in history, globally and in India. The pandemic also turned out to be highly inequitable - it is estimated that around 95 million additional people around the world have been forced into extreme poverty during the year, with 80 million more undernourished, mostly in low-income countries. The report said just a year ago when the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 a pandemic and India imposed a strict lockdown in March,

a deep despondency and risk psychosis became pervasive.

Since then, lives have been lost, surviving life has been disrupted and lifestyles have been fundamentally altered. In India, some areas of activity, especially contact intensive ones, have been deeply scarred while others such as agriculture and allied activities, information technology, highway infrastructure, tractor sales, railway freight, electricity demand and domestic trade have shown a rare resilience, it added.

Nifty ends at record closing level

The BSE Sensex closed at 51,115.22, higher by 97.70 points or 0.19 per cent from its previous close of 51,017.52 points. It had opened at 51,128.80 and touched an intra-day high of 51,282.90 and a low of 50,891.66 points.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Nifty50 on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) settled at its record closing level on Thursday.

It closed at 51,337.85, higher by 36.40 points or 0.24 per cent from its previous close of 51,301.45 points. Healthy buying was witnessed in banking and IT

stocks. The BSE Sensex closed at 51,115.22, higher by 97.70 points or 0.19 per cent from its previous close of 51,017.52 points. It had opened at 51,128.80 and touched an intra-day high of 51,282.90 and a low of 50,891.66 points. Shrikant Chouhan, Executive Vice President, Equity Technical Research at Kotak Securities said: "Due to the

rebalancing of the FTSE index, the market remained heavily volatile on the day of monthly expiry of the F&O contracts. The Nifty once again gave buyers the opportunity to buy on dips." The top gainers on the Sensex were State Bank of India, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Axis Bank, while the major losers were HDFC, Bajaj Finance and ONGC.

India wearables market sees highest 11.4M unit shipments in Q1

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The strong momentum in the watch and earwear categories led to the highest ever first-quarter shipments of wearables in India, an IDC report said on Thursday. The India wearables market grew 170.3 per cent (year-over-year) in Q1, shipping 11.4 million units, according to the data from IDC's 'Worldwide Quarterly Wearable Device Tracker'. Watches grew 463.8 per cent (YoY) in Q1 to become the fastest-growing category in wearables, replacing earwear which also maintains a triple-digit growth in the first quarter. The overall wristwear category, which includes wrist bands and watches, grew 74.8 per cent YoY in the quarter. "From style to health monitoring, the wearables have now become one of the most sophisticated devices in recent times. The category is witnessing a constant shift in the competitive landscape with new players entering the segment," said Jaipal Singh, Associate Research Manager, Client Devices, IDC India said. However, shipments for overall wearables fell by 24.9 per cent sequentially in Q1, owing primarily to a drop in earwear shipments. This decline can be



primarily attributed to the left-over inventory with channel partners as it restricted the fresh buying in this quarter. "The ongoing consumer enthusiasm for earwear devices demonstrates the category's healthy appetite.

Vendors are trying to capitalize on the ride with low and mid-priced devices. This is not only helping lower the category's ASP but also adding improved features to acquire new users," said Anisha Dumbre, Market Analyst, IDC India. In the wristbands category, Xiaomi maintained its lead with a 37.3 per cent category share. OnePlus, the new entrant in this category, finished second, replacing Realme with a 25.2 per cent share in Q1.

A total of 1.4 million watches were shipped in Q1. Noise continued to lead the category with a 26.7 per cent share, followed by BoAt with a 21.9 per cent. In the earwear category, BoAt, with its multiple devices in its portfolio, continued to lead with a 29.3 per cent. "The second wave of the pandemic has caused a sudden stir across vendors and channel partners, impacting the planned launches to postpone and delay in deliveries," Singh said.

COST OF EQUITY DECLINED IN INDIA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The India Cost of Capital Survey 2021 concludes that in line with the falling interest rates, the cost of equity in India has declined since EY's last cost of capital survey in 2017.

The EY-NSE report encapsulates views of around 200 respondents from the corporate India, spread across different sectors and company sizes. The survey concludes that in line with the falling interest rates, the average cost of equity in India has decreased since EY's last cost of capital survey in 2017.

While largely a measure of risk, the cost of equity is also a proxy for return expectation, and its decline with falling interest rates can be interpreted as signs of conservatism in return expectations from prospective investors.

The survey findings say that India's average cost of

equity is 14 per cent; declined by 100 basis points since EY's last cost of capital survey in 2017.

Real estate, healthcare (including pharmaceuticals

and life sciences) and renewables command the highest cost of equity, whereas chemicals, media and entertainment and FMCG, are at the lowest. The survey also found that start-ups or internet-age companies recorded higher cost of equity on an average. The Discounted Cash Flow (DCF) methodology is one of the key approaches for valuation analysis used and most companies typically consider a horizon of five years under this approach.

In the light of the pandemic, most of the respondents



indicated that they did not make any temporary adjustments to discount rate and the inherent uncertainty arising out of the situation was met by businesses by adjusting their projections or evaluating multiple scenarios instead. Most respondents acknowledged that an additional risk premium is justifiable when considering strategic investments in start-ups and provided their views on the quantum. The quantum of premium varied across industries, with most sectors capping it at 10 per cent.

QNET Launches All-in-One DSG

The innovative All-in-One Disinfectant Solution Generator transforms tap water into 100% natural Disinfectant and Sanitiser

Team Absolute | New Delhi

QNET has announced the launch of MyHomePlus Disinfectant Solution Generator (DSG). MyHomePlus DSG transforms tap water into eco-friendly disinfectant and sanitiser. This revolutionary DSG eliminates 99.9% of germs, bacteria, viruses and helps to keep fruits and vegetables clean from pesticides. Being a multipurpose disinfectant, this is effective on germs, mild on the skin, and its eco-friendly nature makes it a perfect choice for the current COVID situation in India. As India is hugely affected by COVID 2.0, appropriate hygiene measures and sanitising have become of utmost importance. DSG is 100% natural, non-flammable & non-alcoholic, it is mild and safe. One needs to just spray and wipe hands after 30 seconds, so it can be used as hand sanitiser too. The product is equipped with a USB chargeable feature that enables this revolutionary wireless product to be used 12-13 times with a charge of 3-4 hours. With the spread of Covid-19, the entire ecosystem has undergone a paradigm shift in the way we live. QNET will continue to strengthen better living and bring unique products and solutions for its customers. MyHomePlus DSG is tested by FICCI Research and Analysis Centre (NABL accredited laboratory) to be able to eliminate 99.9% deadly bacteria and fungi present on surfaces, vegetables and fruits.

NUMEROLOGIST LAUNCHES JC NUMMERRO APP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Noted Numerologist JC Chaudhry, Chairman, Chaudhry Nummero Private Limited has launched the 'JC Nummero App' combining 35 years of his experience in the field of Numerology. The app provides valuable insights and close-fitting predictions based on various numerology based parameters like psychic number, destiny number, name number, ruling number, etc.

The App is available for download from Google and Apple Playstore in Android and iPhone versions respectively. The JC Nummero App aids the users with benefits like daily prediction, monthly prediction, yearly prediction, a better understanding of oneself, the best year for investment and more.

While commenting on the launch of the app Chaudhry said, "Numerology is an ancient practice and provides very fast and accurate predictions about an individual. This application is a culmination of my 35 years of experience in the numerology field. Making use of technology, we would like to reach to a wider audience to help them solve their queries and provide essential remedies to rectify the uncertainties of one's future. We hope that this application will prove to be beneficial for the masses and will bring in peace and tranquility in their life."

EDUKEMY ANNOUNCES GS MAINS TEST SERIES FOR UPSC 2021 ASPIRANTS



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Edukemy, India's first EdTech Company in the non-STEM segment, today announced GS Mains Test Series 2021 to help students prepare for the upcoming UPSC examinations. Students enrolling in the GS Mains Test Series will undertake 16 comprehensive tests which will be evaluated by a team of experts and skilled faculty.

Additionally, students will get personalized feedback during the post-test discussion sessions with detailed comments which will aid in improving overall preparations. Sharing his views, Chandras Panigrahi, CEO and Co-Founder, Edukemy, said, "At Edukemy we aim to offer students an array of live and interactive courses to help them prepare and qualify for India's most prestigious exams. The GS

Mains Test Series is an addition to our existing offerings which will play a key role in acing the UPSC 2021 examination. Tests commence from May 31 and students can visit the website: <https://www.edukemy.com> to register. Additionally, downloadable study material and model answers will be provided so that students can revise important topics and prepare effectively.

Toll road projects likely to witness low teen revenue growth: ICRA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The sudden and severe onset of the second wave of the Covid pandemic, has adversely impacted the toll collections again, and the same are on the downward trajectory. As per an ICRA note, despite the lack of a nationwide stringent lockdown or toll suspensions, the regional restrictions imposed in several states, along with the increase in wariness, has negatively affected the people movement in the past few weeks. Road traffic had witnessed a marked improvement in H2 FY21 after subdued traffic witnessed in the initial months of the last fiscal, post resumption of tolling from April 20, 2020. Shedding more light on the impact on toll collections, Rajeshwar Burla, Co-Group Head & Vice President, Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said, "With continued rise in number of Covid cases in May 2021 and stringent lockdowns imposed by states to contain the infection, the de-growth in the toll collections has been much sharper in May 2021.

The toll collections reduced by around 10 per cent in April 2021 over March 2021 and estimated to decline by 25-30 per cent in May 2021 over April 2021. With fall in number of Covid cases from third week of May 2021, the States are expected to relax the lockdown restrictions in a gradual manner. "We expect the toll collections to ramp-up from June onwards. Despite hitting a speed breaker in the form of second wave of Covid; toll road projects are expected to witness low teen revenue growth in FY22 on the back of low base and inflation linked increase in toll rates." ICRA has done a study on toll collections data for 29 projects which are spread across 11 states over a period of 60-70 days (Mar 1, 2021 to May 10, 2021). As per the study, Maharashtra is the worst hit state in India, with the lockdown restrictions having started earlier than other states due to which de-growth has been higher in April 2021. For Rajasthan, most of the projects in sample have higher proportion of passenger vehicle as they cater to tourist destinations, therefore, the impact on toll collections has been much sharper due to the restrictions

imposed on people movement. For the states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the de-growth remained comparatively moderate as these stretches are largely used by commercial traffic. The month-on-month, de-growth has increased over the month of April and May 2021 with sharper dip on weekends as some of the states have started restrictions by imposing weekend lockdowns.

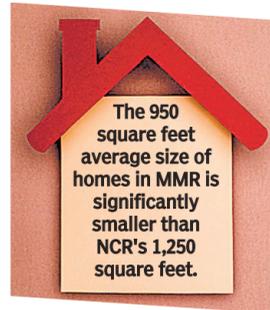
Although the de-growth in toll collections has been across vehicle categories, the impact has been severe on the passenger vehicles and bus categories due to strict restrictions imposed on people movement by various states. Unlike the earlier wave where there was a nationwide lockdown and toll suspension; this time the nature of lockdowns is more regional with relaxations to both manufacturing and construction activities and movement of goods. As a result, the impact on the overall toll collections is expected to be less severe when compared to last year.

"Unlike the first wave, no compensation against toll revenue loss is announced by the authorities so far

and is unlikely to be covered under concession agreement. However, the rebound in traffic now is expected to be much faster as compared to first wave which took almost 5-6 months to reach pre-covid levels. Majority of the road projects rated by ICRA in investment grade categories have 3 to 6 months of DSRA and are adequately placed to withstand the current impact," Burla added. As for the impact on the ratings for ICRA rated BOT (Toll) road portfolio, in FY2021, ICRA has upgraded one issuer which had achieved significant ramp up in toll collections post commercial operational date (COD). There were four rating downgrades; the rating action in two of these four issuers was because of breach of rating triggers due to expected deterioration in coverage metrics on account of reduced toll collections. In the case of third issuer, the rating action was on account of adverse regulatory developments viz. adverse arbitration outcome and in fourth, termination notice served by NHAI. In April 2021, there were no upgrades/downgrades.

REAL BOOM:

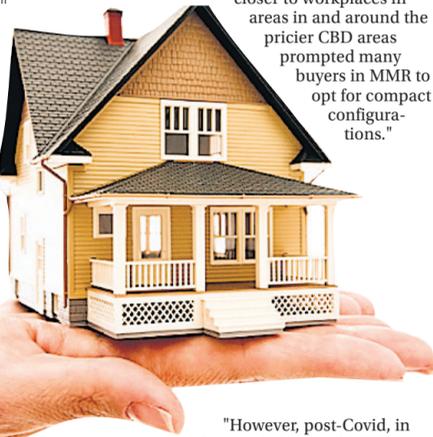
85% IN NCR BOUGHT 1ST HOME, 65% IN MMR UPGRADED POST COVID



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The pandemic has brought forth many contrasting trends in the country's two major real estate hotspots -- National Capital Region (NCR) and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

An Anarock report showed that out of the total housing sales in NCR (nearly 21,750 units) and MMR



(around

47,140 units) took place in the nine months between July 2020 and March 2021.

While 85 per cent of buyers in NCR purchased their very first homes; in MMR, a massive 65 per cent of buyers upgraded to bigger properties.

Just 15 per cent of end-users in NCR felt the need to upgrade to bigger homes, while 65 per cent of buyers in MMR upgraded, driven by the 'new normal' imperatives of WFH and e-schooling.

The 950 square feet average size of homes in MMR is significantly smaller

than NCR's 1,250 square feet. Bottomed-out prices, lower stamp duty charges, low interest rates and the growing preference to move to the peripheries amid WFH viability also prompted more MMR homebuyers to upgrade from 1BHKs to 2BHKs/3BHKs, said the Anarock report.

In NCR, all-time-best affordability attracted more first-time homebuyers to respond to the new pandemic-driven demand for homeownership.

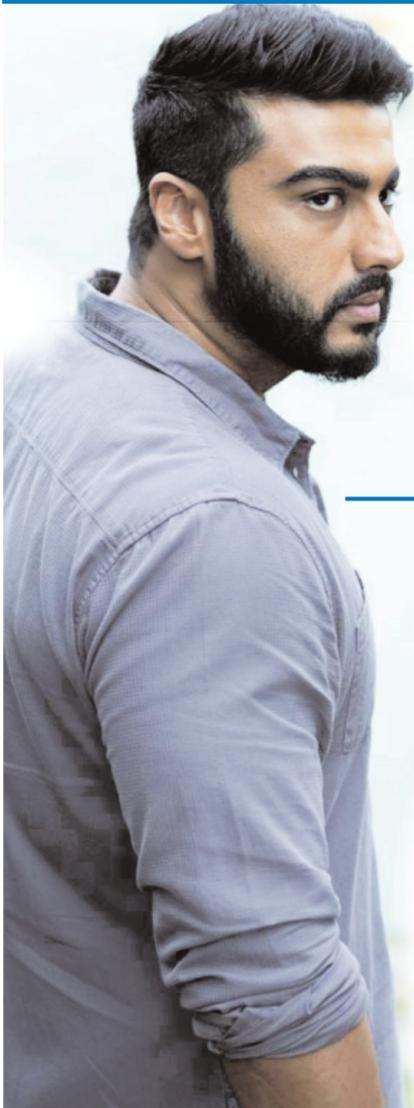
Anuj Puri, Chairman of Anarock Property Consultants said: "In the pre-Covid era in MMR, the need to live closer to workplaces in areas in and around the pricier CBD areas prompted many buyers in MMR to opt for compact configurations."

"However, post-Covid, in the new hybrid and WFH environment and with various infra upgrades, the peripheral areas have also become attractive," he said.

Many homebuyers upgraded to larger homes in non-central locations.

Reduced property rates, a limited-period stamp duty cut, and attractively low home loan interest rates were other reasons, Puri added.

"In contrast, NCR -- where average property sizes start from a much higher base -- saw more first-time homebuyers to leave the fence and enter the housing market. Moreover, it attracts first-time buyers from many neighbouring cities as well."



ARJUN KAPOOR: 'SANDEEP AUR PINKY FARAAR' HAS SCOPE FOR A DARK SEQUEL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Arjun Kapoor feels the climax of Dibakar Bannerjee's "Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar" sets up the prospect of a sequel that can be dark and gritty. "If you see the climax of the film that Dibakar has so masterfully designed, you will realise that there is a scope for a sequel that can be dark, gritty, raw, and thrilling," Arjun said. He added, "Now, it is up to the director

and his genius mind to tell us whether or not he sees this happening. I can assure you that whenever he gives the green signal, Pari (Parineeti Chopra) and I will be on to shoot."

Arjun is thankful to Dibakar for being convinced he could deliver as the corrupt Haryana cop, Pinky Dahiya, in the film. "It (the film) really took me to places that I didn't imagine going," he said, adding, "I'm overwhelmed because I know how much Dibakar told me to believe in myself and submit to his process."

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Mitaali Nag, who is currently seen playing Devyani in the show "Ghum Hai Kisikey Pyaar Mein", had to dress up in a traditional Maharashtrian avatar for a wedding sequence in the show recently. The actress says that she loved her look.

"I enjoy my onscreen character but I was very excited about shooting the wedding sequence. I am so happy that I got to dress up as Marathi 'mulgi'. The look was so radiant," she says. The actress adds that jewellery has always been her favourite. "I enjoy wearing jewellery. Women love getting jewellery as gifts. They always have and always will. There's something about gold and diamonds and precious gemstones that adds to the significance of the gift. Jewellery has always made women feel beautiful, confident," she says. "We women are romantic creatures. We like nothing better than to tell the story of how our lover surprised us with the earrings or the ring that we're wearing. That gift is the physical symbol of the declaration of love," she says.

Mitaali Nag: Happy I got to dress as Marathi bride on screen



Alia Bhatt backs series educating people about Covid vaccine

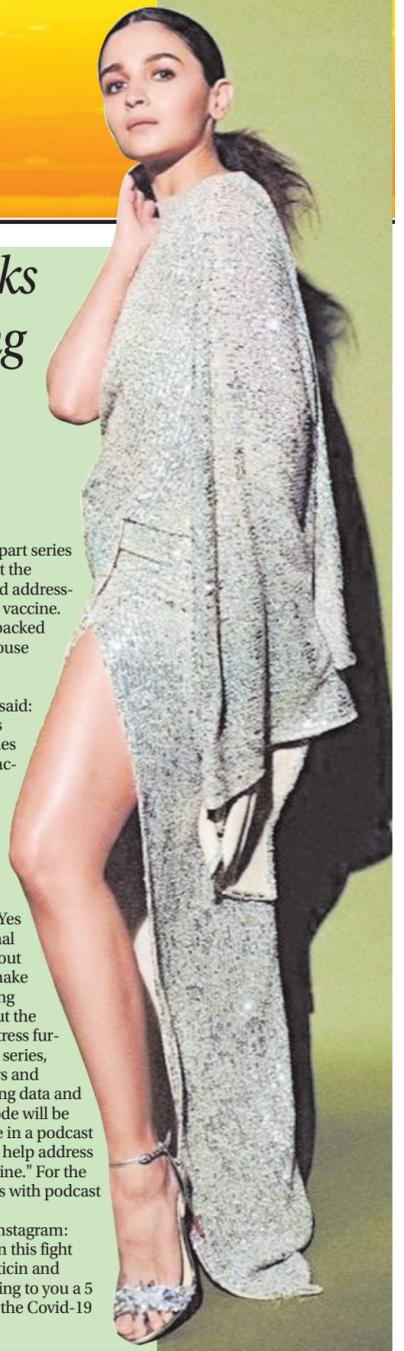
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Alia Bhatt is backing a five-part series that aims to educate people about the necessity of Covid vaccination and address rumours and myths surrounding the vaccine. The series starts from Thursday and is backed by Alia's newly-launched production house Eternal Sunshine Productions.

Taking to Instagram on Wednesday evening, Alia shared a video where she said: "In the fight against Covid-19, science is our greatest ally. Science gave us vaccines and vaccines give us hope. Thanks to vaccines we now have a way of ending this pandemic and rebuilding our lives. But even though the vaccine is here and waiting, some of us are still hesitant."

"A great deal of this hesitancy is linked to misinformation, myths and rumours that are exchanged on social media and other messaging platforms. Yes getting the Covid-19 vaccine is a personal choice... (but) together we can learn about the vaccine from reliable sources and make the most informed decision about getting vaccinated," she added. Informing about the content and format of the series, the actress further said, "Throughout this five-episode series, we will be speaking with reliable doctors and global health activists who will be sharing data and facts around the vaccine. The first episode will be released tomorrow and will be available in a podcast and video format. I hope this series will help address some of your concerns around the vaccine." For the series, the actress-producer collaborates with podcast makers Audiomatic.

Along with her video, Alia wrote on Instagram: "Shared knowledge is our greatest ally in this fight against Covid-19. Together, @Audiomaticin and @Eternalsunshineproduction are bringing to you a 5 part series that can help us understand the Covid-19 vaccines a little better."



Shilpa Shetty's son imagines her as Hela from 'Thor: Ragnarok'



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shilpa Shetty took to Instagram on Thursday to share a video made by her son Viaan, in which he envisioned the actress as Cate Blanchett's character Hela, goddess of death, in "Thor: Ragnarok". Viaan morphed his mother's face over Blanchett's in various scenes of the superhero film. In the clip, Viaan pitted Shilpa against the deadly virus Covid-19, represented by Chris Hemsworth's character Thor. Shilpa wrote: "Viaan put a smile on my face with this video he made, describing how mumma handled COVID-19. All NEGATIVE... Still being positive hoping for a better Covid-free future for all."

"Thor: Ragnarok" is directed by Taika Waititi and released in 2017. The film was about superhero Thor, who without his hammer Mjolnir, had to save his home Asgard from Hela.

Shilpa has two films lined up. She will be seen in "Hungama 2", the sequel to the 2003 hit "Hungama", and also "Nikamma", which stars Abhimanyu Dassani and Shirley Setia.

KRK sued not due to 'Radhe' review: Salman Khan's legal team

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan's legal team issued a statement on Thursday divulging the actual reason why the actor has filed a suit against actor-turned-film critic Kamaal R Khan.

The suit was filed because Kamaal R. Khan "has been publishing and endorsing defamatory allegations, including that Mr. Salman Khan is corrupt, that he and his brand 'Being Human' are involved in fraud, manipulation and money laundering



transactions, that he and Salman Khan Films are dacoits," DSK Legal, the legal

team representing Salman, said.

The statement comes a day

after KRK tweeted alleging that Salman Khan has filed a defamation case against him because the actor is getting affected by KRK's review of his latest film "Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai".

"I said so many times that I never review film of any producer, actor if he asks me to not review. Salman Khan filed defamation case on me for review of #Radhe means he is getting too much affected by my review. Hence, I won't review his films anymore. My last video releasing today," KRK had tweeted on Wednesday.

Huma Qureshi: Moving from Delhi to Mumbai changed my life

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Huma Qureshi says playing the protagonist Rani Bharti in the upcoming web series "Maharani" was exciting because it involved 'forgetting' a lot of what she knows, in order to become the character. She says moving from Delhi to Mumbai to be an actress was an experience that in some way helped her understand Rani.

Rani is an illiterate village woman, oblivious to most things in the world outside, and yet she finds herself in the centre of Bihar politics after a twist of fate, and ends up being chief minister of the state. Like Rani's ignorance about the world of politics, Huma says she had no idea what it meant to be a part of Bollywood when she was growing up.

"Rani Bharti has never stepped outside her village. To play her was a big challenge. She's absolutely opposite to how I am. That was the exciting part. If you know something how, do you forget about it? How do I show in Rani's eyes if she doesn't know something despite me knowing it? That was fun and challenging. The look and costume really helped," said Huma. "Moving from Delhi to Mumbai has been a turning point. It changed my life completely. I was living a different life in Delhi. I never thought that this was the world I belonged to."

I grew up in Delhi, my friends are also from there. I dared to be somebody I was told I can't be. For me and my family, me moving to a different city was a big change," she says.



Nargis Fakhri