For Generation Ace

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CONSIDER IMPOSING LOCKDOWN TO CURB 2ND WAVE OF COVID: SC TO CENTRE, STATES

THE SITUATION CAN'T BROOK ANY DELAY

The Supreme Court's order noted that getting admission in hospital with a bed is one of the biggest challenges being faced by thousands of people across the country since the beginning of the second wave of the Covid pandemic. The top court observed that citizens have been suffering immeasurable hardship. Different states and local authorities follow their own protocols. Differing standards for admission in different hospitals across the nation leads to chaos and uncertainty.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In the wake of the second wave of Covid-19, the Supreme Court on Monday directed the central and state governments to consider enforcing a ban on mass gatherings and super spreader events as well as consider imposing a lockdown. The SC also has asked the Central and state governments to put on record their efforts taken so far to curb the spread of the deadly virus which has so far infected 1,99,25,604 with 34,13,642 active cases and a total of 2,18,959 deaths. The top court further asked the Centre and the states to inform it about the measures that they have planned to deal with the global disease in the near future.

Considering Covid-19 crisis, the court then directed that "no patient shall be denied hospitalisation or essential drugs in any state or Union Territory for lack of local residential or identity proof". A bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud issued the directive that the central government should formulate a national policy on admissions to hospitals within two weeks. The judge said that the policy should also be followed by all state governments and that no patients till then will be denied admission or essential drugs in absence of local residential or identity proof.

"We would seriously urge the central and state governments to consider imposing a ban on mass gatherings and super spreader events. They may also consider imposing a lockdown to curb the virus in the second wave in the interest of public welfare. Thus, in case the measure of a lockdown is imposed, arrangements must be made beforehand to cater to the needs of these communities."

24 die due to lack of oxygen in Karnataka hospital

Bengaluru: The Karnataka government has ordered a probe into the tragic death of 23 Covid patients due to interruption in the supply of medical oxygen at the Chamarajanagar Institute of Medical Sciences (CIMS) in Chamarajanagar district on Monday. According to the notification issued by N. Manjunath Prasad, Principal Secretary in the Revenue Deparrtment, senior IAS officer Shivayogi Kalasad, who is also Managing Director of Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), has been appointed as the inquiry officer to probe the incident. CIMS Director D.M. Sanjeev told reporters that due to a shortage of oxygen, 23 patients who were on ventilator support and needed high flow of oxygen have died.

3,733 new Covid cases, 51 deaths in J&K

Srinagar: The Covid situation slipped from bad to worse on Monday in J&K after 3,733 new cases and 51 deaths were reported during the last 24 hours. Officials said that the new fatalities comprised 35 from the Jammu division and 16 from the Kashmir division, taking the number of people killed by coronavirus to 2,421. Of the new cases, 1,294 were from the Jammu division and 2,439 from the Kashmir division while 1,546 patients were discharged from different hospitals after recovery. So far, 187,219 people have been infected with coronavirus in J&K out of which 150,231 have recovered.

INDIA REPORTS 3.68L NEW COVID CASES, 3,417 DEATHS

New Delhi: India continued to report a dip in the number of Covid cases with 3,68,147 fresh cases and 3,417 fatalities recorded in last 24 hours, Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said here on Monday. It is the 12th straight day when India recorded more than 3 lakh cases while over 3,000 casualties have been reported for the past six days. India's total tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 1,99,25,604 with 34,13,642 active cases and a total of 2,18,959 deaths so far. According to MoHFW, 3,00,732 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours after getting cured.

BIHAR GOVERNMENT HEADING TOWARD 'TOTAL FAILURE' ON COVID: PATNA HC

Patna: Citing the rising Covid spread in Bihar, the Patna High Court on Monday made some strong remarks about the functioning of the state's Nitish Kumar government. "The state government has completely failed on tackling the pandemic. Why is the state government not taking a decision to lock down. The state government should avoid forcing us to pass an order pertaining to imposing a lockdown in Bihar," the bench told the Advocate General. The state government should inform the court about whether a complete lockdown will be imposed in Bihar or not, it said, directing the government to submit a report by Tuesday.

WITH 15 DEATHS, SOME GURUGRAM HOSPITALS STOP OPS

Gurugram: Nearly 15 critical Covid-19 patients have lost their lives due to acute shortage of oxygen in smaller hospitals of Gurugram during the last week. These hospitals regularly demand from the district administration through Twitter or other social media platforms to provide liquid oxygen to them. According to the hospital management, several of them have discharged all patients and shut down operations, claiming the administration and the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) have not paid attention to their repeated requests for liquid oxygen.

Key decisions to boost HR for Covid, NEET-PG postponed

- IT WAS ALSO DECIDED TO ALLOW DEPLOYMENT OF MEDICAL INTERNS IN COVID MANAGEMENT DUTIES UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF THEIR FACULTY, AS PART OF THE INTERNSHIP ROTATION.
- THE SERVICES OF FINAL YEAR POST GRADUATE STUDENTS (BROAD AS WELL AS SUPER-SPECIALITIES) AS RESIDENTS MAY CONTINUE TO BE UTILISED UNTIL FRESH BATCHES OF PG STUDENTS HAVE JOINED, THE STATEMENT SAID.
- B.SC. OR GNM QUALIFIED NURSES MAY BE UTILISED IN FULL-TIME COVID NURSING DUTIES UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF SENIOR DOCTORS AND NURSES, IT SAID.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union government on Monday reviewed the growing need of adequate human resources for responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and took several important decisions to boost availability of medical personnel in Covid duty. A decision was also taken to postpone NEET-PG for at least four months and the exam will not be held before August 31 this year. Students will also be given at least one month time after announcement of exam before it is conducted.

The services of final year MBBS students can be utilised for providing services like tele-consultation and monitoring of mild Covid cases after due orientation by and under supervision of faculty, it said. This will reduce the workload on existing doctors engaged in Covid duty and provide boost to efforts of triaging, it added.

The individuals providing services in Covid management will be given priority in forthcoming regular government recruitments after they complete minimum of 100 days of Covid duty, the statement said, adding that the medical students or professionals sought to be engaged in Covid-related work will be suitably vaccinated and all health professionals thus engaged will be covered under the insurance scheme of government for health workers engaged in fighting Covid-19.

3.19L candidates elected unopposed in UP panchayat polls

Lucknow: A total of 3.19 lakh candidates have been declared elected unopposed in the Uttar Pradesh panchayat elections, the State Election Commission (SEC) said in a statement. "As many as 3,19,317 candidates have been elected unopposed in the panchayat elections. This includes seven members of zila panchayat, 2,005 members of kshetra panchayat and over 3.17 lakh members who have been elected unopposed in this panchayat election. As many as 178 candidates for the post of pradhan of gram panchayats were also elected unopposed," the SEC said. Counting of votes for the panchayat polls in Uttar Pradesh began on Sunday morning.

Indian govt, Poonawalla refute reports about no vaccine orders

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Debunking news reports that India has not placed fresh orders for Covid vaccines with the Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat BioTech since March, the Union government on Monday said such reports are completely incorrect and are not based on facts. The media reports suggested that the last order placed with the two vaccine makers (100 million doses with SII and 20 million doses with Bharat Biotech) was in March.

Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla also issues a statement, saying that his company has received orders for 26 crore doses. Earlier, the Financial Times reported Poonawalla as saying that vaccine shortage could continue in India till July. "First of all, vaccine manufacturing is a specialised process, it is therefore not possible to ramp up production overnight. We also need to understand that the population of India is huge and to produce enough doses for all adults is not an easy task. Even the most advanced countries and companies are struggling in relatively smaller populations," he explained.

"It is clarified that 100 per cent advance of Rs 1,732.50 crore was released to Serum Institute of India (SII) on April 28 for 11 crore doses of Covishield vaccine during May, June and July, and was received by them on April 28. As on date, against the last order of 10 crore doses for supplies of Covishield vaccine, 8.744 crore doses have been delivered till May 3. Additionally, 100 per cent advance of Rs 787.50 crore was released on April 28 to Bharat Biotech India Ltd (BBIL) for 5 crore Covaxin doses during May, June and July, and was received by them on the same day, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said in a statement.

CLOUDBURST IN UTTRAKHAND, NO CAUSALITY REPORTED

Dehradun: At least three incidents of cloudburst were reported in Uttrakhand on Monday. However, no loss life has been reported so far as the local administation is carrying out relief and rescue operations. Cloudburst was reported in Kumarada village in Chiniyalisaur block, Uttarkashi and the Saini Tok area in Narkota village in Rudraprayag. The Rudrayag police said that two places near Narkota have reported cloudburst, but no report of any loss of life has been received so far. The SDRF, DDRF and fire service have been pressed into service to manage the situation. The police and officials of the administration have reached the spots to assess the situation. Damages to some houses and roads have been reported, sources said.

Himachal constructing forest ponds to conserve rainwater

The scheme aims to enhance the water level by retaining water for the maximum period. Efforts are also being made to improve the green cover by planting fruit-bearing plants. Special emphasis has also been laid on preventing fires in the forests.

- The department spent Rs 2.76 crore in 2020-21 for the construction of 110 big and small ponds, 600 check dams and 12,000 contour trenches along with plantation to store water and recharge the aquifers.
- Himachal Pradesh has 33 wildlife sanctuaries and two national parks. According to official records, 27 per cent -- 15,433 sq km of the total 55,643 sq km -- of the Himalayan state is under forest cover.
- The lush green valleys and snow-capped mountains of the state are home to 36 per cent of the country's species of birds. Of the 1,228 species that have been reported in India, 447 are in this state alone.

Shimla | Agencies

Forest ponds are being constructed in Himachal Pradesh to check the depletion of groundwater and to harvest rainwater, officials said on Sunday. Under the Parvat Dhara scheme, the government has initiated rejuvenation of water sources and recharging aquifers through the forest department with an outlay of Rs 20 crore. The work was started in 10 forest divisions that include Bilaspur, Hamirpur, Jogindernagar, Nachan, Parvati, Nurpur, Rajgarh, Nalagarh, Theog and Dalhousie. Under the scheme, the cleaning and maintenance of existing ponds has been done. Also the construction of new ponds, contour trenches, dams, check dams and retaining wall to control the soil erosion has been done, a forest official told reporter. According to the official, the scheme would be implemented in other forest divisions with emphasis on soil and water conservation through plantation.

AVOID CT SCANS IN MILD COVID CASES: AIIMS CHIEF

New Delhi: AIIMS Director Randeep Guleria on Monday advised avoiding unnecessary computerised tomography scan (CT scan) in cases of mild symptoms of Covid-19 and warned against use of steroids in the early infections of the deadly disease. Addressing a press conference, Guleria said one CT scan is equivalent to 300-400 chest X-rays and this increases the risk of having cancer in later life, especially in youth, as one is exposed to harmful radiation. The CT scan will show few patches which will end without any treatment, he noted. The CT scan machine takes cross-sectional images of the body using computers and rotating X-ray machines. They are being used to detect Covid infections by detecting signs of pneumonia or white patches in lungs. More people are relying on the expensive scan than last year as reports suggest the mutant variants of the virus can go undetected in the gold standard RT-PCR test. The AIIMS chief suggested to go for a chest X-ray first, if necessary. "The doctor will give proper advice whether a CT scan is needed or not." He said asymptomatic patients with normal oxygen saturation should not go for CT scans.

TRS MAKES CLEAN SWEEP OF URBAN LOCAL BODY POLLS

Hyderabad | Agencies

A day after retaining the Nagarjuna Sagar Assembly constituency in the bypolls, Telangana's ruling party Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) swept the municipal elections, capturing all seven urban local bodies that went to polls last week.

The TRS won a clear majority in the Greater Warangal and Khammam Municipal Corporations and five municipalities -- Siddipet, Kothur, Nakrekal, Atchampet and Jadcherla -- where elections were held on April 30. In the 66-member Warangal Municipal Corporation, the TRS won 48 seats. The BJP finished second with 10 seats while Congress candidates were elected in four wards. Independents and others were elected in four places.

The TRS also retained power in 60-member Khammam Municipal Corporation. The TRS-CPI alliance bagged 46 seats while Congress-CPI-M alliance won 10 seats. The BJP could win a single seat while others secured two seats.

In Siddipet, the TRS has bagged 32 seats while results have been declared for 34 out of 43 wards. The BJP and others won a seat each. In the 27-member Jadcherla municipality, the TRS won 23 seats. The BJP and the Congress bagged two seats each.

In the 20-member Atchampet body, the TRS won 13 seats. The Congress finished second with six seats while the BJP secured a single seat. In Nakrekal, the TRS won 11 of the 20 seats. The Congress won two seats while independents were elected from seven wards. In the 12-member Kothur municipality, the TRS won seven seats while the Congress bagged five seats. About 70 per cent voters cast their votes in the seven urban local bodies on Friday.

Polling was also held for the by-elections to four wards in four municipalities and one ward in Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC). A total of 11,59,112 voters including 5,84,963 women were eligible to cast their votes in these elections.

As many as 1,307 candidates including 480 independents were in the fray in two corporations and five municipalities. Fourteen candidates tested their political fortunes in four wards while five candidates were in fray in Lingojiguda ward in GHMC.

The Congress dealt a blow to the BJP by winning the Lingojiguda ward. The seat fell vacant after BJP corporator A. Ramesh Goud died before taking oath. The TRS had not fielded its candidate on the request of the BJP which had fielded Goud's son. With this victory, the Congress' strength in the 150-member GHMC rose to three.

Central Vista essential service, what about vaccines, asks Congress

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Reacting to reports of the Central Vista as essential service, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera has attacked the Union government and raised questions about the vaccines.

Addressing a press conference on Monday Khera said, "Central Vista is an essential service, amid this pandemic in the capital where thousands are dying every day, lakhs are suffering and struggling for hospital beds, for oxygen, for medicines, in the same capital city, the Central Vista is an essential service, but the vaccine will come in July, is that a joke?"

He said over the last 15 days, the tragedies in the hospitals that we have all witnessed in Delhi, which is the capital city, a few kilometres from the Central Vista, hospitals are pleading through social media, through media, they are pleading, begging for oxygen.

"Is the vaccine available? We have been told by the manufacturers that it wouldn't be available before July. I don't want to remind Hon'ble Prime Minister what he said in January at the World Economic Forum that by August, 300 million people would be vaccinated," he said.

The Congress demanded auditing and distribution of foreign aid like injections, oxygen and other drugs. "We request and demand from the Government, every day, please make public, share it with every Indian, where has this aid come from, where is it going -- which state, which hospital, which agency," he said.

Partial relief to parents in Raj as SC allows 15% fees rebate

Jaipur | Agencies

In partial relief for parents amid the ongoing pandemic, the Supreme Court on Monday asked private schools of Rajasthan to charge 15 per cent less annual fees from students in academic session 2020-21 and bar no one from attending actual or virtual classes, or withhold their results over non-payment.

The court had earlier this year stayed the Rajasthan High Court ruling which said that private schools should charge 70 per cent of the tuition fees from parents in wake of pandemic. The private schools had subsequently approached the Supreme Court soon after the decision and sought permission to collect the full fees. A Supreme Court bench of Justice A.M. Khanwilkar and Justice Krishna Murari meanwhile upheld the High Court's judgment in rejecting the challenge to the validity of the Rajasthan Schools (Regulation of Fee) Act, 2016 and the Rules framed under the law governing fixation of school fees by the government-mandated procedures.

The Rajasthan government had said it was awaiting final orders from the Supreme Court and then shall decide how much fee parents should pay.Education Minister Govind Singh Dotasara said: "We want that court's regard should be maintained and there should not be any injustice to parents as well."

The Rajasthan High Court, on December 18, 2020, had announced the verdict saying the schools running online classes should collect 70 per cent fees. On February 8, the apex court, in its interim order, said that parents will have to pay the complete fee for 2020-21, but, allowed them to pay fees in six instalments.

MHA seeks report from Bengal govt on post-poll violence

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Union Home Ministry on Monday sought a report from the West Bengal government on the post election violence in the state targeting opposition political workers.

The Home Ministry in a letter to the West Bengal Chief Secretary has asked him to submit a detailed report on the violence that broke out in parts of the state on Sunday evening even as trends and results from the Assembly election were pouring in.

The houses and vehicles of some Bharatiya Janata Party candidates were allegedly attacked and a party office at Arambagh was set on fire. The vehicle of Suvendu Adhikari, who defeated Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram, was also reportedly attacked.

"MHA has asked West Bengal Government for a report on the post election violence targeting opposition political workers in the state," the Home Ministry Spokesperson tweeted. After the violence, Trinamool Congress leaders, however, said they had nothing to do with any such incidents in West Bengal and urged people to maintain peace and follow Covid-19 protocols.

At Natabari, the car of BJP candidate Mihir Goswami was learnt to be damaged after the Election Commission announced his victory from Natabari in north Bengal defeating Rabindranath Ghosh, minister and senior TMC leader.

A BJP party office at Arambagh was set ablaze where the party's candidate Madhusudan Bag defeated TMC's Sujata Mondal by around 7,100 votes.

At Siuri, a BJP office was ransacked and the local party leader's tractor was set ablaze. A similar incident was reported from Kolkata's Beleghata constituency where a BJP candidate's garage was set on fire.

MAMATA TO MEET GOVERNOR, STAKE CLAIM TO FORM GOVT

Kolkata | Agencies

A day after her partys landslide victory in the Assembly elections, Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee on Monday appealed to the people of West Bengal to maintain peace and harmony and stand beside the people during the ongoing Covid crisis.

Banerjee also said that she would meet Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Monday evening to stake claim to form the government in the state.

"I am going to the party legislature meeting now where the decisions regarding oath taking, date of the first Assembly and the decisions regarding the formation of the ministry will be taken. I wanted to meet the Governor at 7 pm and he has consented. I shall go to the Raj Bhavan and fulfil the required formalities," Banerjee told the media at her residence in Kalighat on Monday.

Clad in her trademark white saree and chappal, the Chief Minister said, "I want to appeal to all the people of Bengal to stay in a peaceful manner. Bengal is a place of harmony, peace and culture and we should not forget that. I know that the BJP and the central forces have tortured us a lot, but this is the time when we should stand beside the people and help them out of the grim Covid situation."At a time when the Trinamool Congress is showing possibilities of becoming a key player in national politics, Banerjee, however, decided to skip the question on the possibility of her joining national politics.

Mentioning that all the national leaders, including Uddhav Thackeray, Arvind Kejriwal, Bhupinder Singh Hooda , Naveen Patnaik, Akhilesh Yadav and Amarinder Singh, called her to congratulate her on the electoral success, Banerjee said, "There is a lot of time to think on this. This is a time when we should fight Covid and I am only focused on that. The Prime Minister didn't call me. That doesn't matter though. He might be busy, but he had called me before."

A doctor can't shirk Covid duty: Himachal HC

Shimla | Agencies

The Himachal Pradesh High Court on Monday reminded a government doctor, who had challenged the order of his deputation to a makeshift Covid-19 hospital, that in the garb of self-unwillingness to serve, he cannot be permitted to shirk his responsibilities.

"This tendency has to be dealt and curbed with an iron fist," ruled a division bench comprising Justices Tarlok Singh Chauhan and Chander Bhusan Barowalia, while dismissing a petition filed by Vishal Koundal, who was shifted to a makeshift Covid hospital in Una from Kangra.In the plea, Koundal had said that he suffered accidental injuries in 2018 and was unable to serve at the place of deputation."The petitioner has failed to realise the health workers in overcrowded hospitals, the policemen and other front-line workers who are already beset with overwhelming load of Covid-19 patients and these workers are exhausted from almost an year of restless fighting against the pandemic," the bench observed.

Man kills in-laws to avenge betrayal by second wife

Lucknow | Agencies

Upset over alleged betrayal by his second wife, a man murdered her parents in a fit of rage.

The Kaiserbagh police on Sunday arrested the accused, Ram Milan Neelu, from Basti district.

His accomplice Durgesh, is still absconding.

The incident came to light after Suraj Thapa, Ram Milan's brother-in-law, lodged a missing complaint of his parents, Buddhi Bahadur and Beena, on April 25.Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (ADCP) west zone, Rajesh Srivastava said, "Police looked for the couple and found the body of Beena on Faizabad road in Ayodhya, while Buddhi Bahadur's body was recovered in Maharajganj Tanda road under Gosaiganj police station of Ayodhya,"

He said both the bodies were identified by Suraj on the basis of their clothes.

Ram Milan was put under surveillance and was arrested from Basti. An SUV was recovered from his possession. He informed cops that he had first married Mamta Devi in 2012 in Gonda.

He started organising dance parties in villages and was making huge profits after he met one Tamanna from Nepal. The duo developed likeness for each other and got married.

However, after some time Tamanna came in contact with Pappu Yadav of Bihar and eloped with him.

Ram Milan began suffering huge losses in his venture and started looking for Tammana. He got to know that her parents had shifted to Lucknow.

On April 24, he drove down to Lucknow in his SUV with his aide Durgesh and reached the home of Tamanna's parents in Ghasiyari Mandi.

Pramod Kumar Mishra, SHO, Kaiserbagh said that he took the couple to the outskirts of the state capital and murdered them.

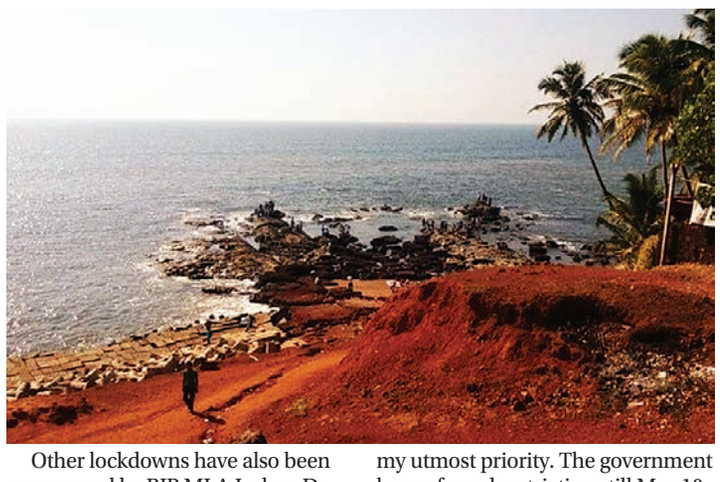
As curbs ends, Goa MLAs, panchayats impose their own 'lockdowns'

Panaji | Agencies

In developments which could raise questions about Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's grip over administration, ruling and opposition MLAs as well as individual village panchayats over the last 24 hours have announced a series of sporadic lockdowns in their respective areas, even as the government-enforced four-day lockdown wound to a close on Monday.

The sporadic 'voluntary' lockdowns, which involve closure of businesses and commercial establishments, are in defiance of Sawant's recent public appeals, in which the Chief Minister has repeatedly insisted that a lockdown was not an ideal option to tackle the menacing spread of Covid-19, as it severely impacts the state economy.

On Monday, hours after the government-enforced lockdown ended, at least three village panchayats have resolved to impose a lockdown in their own jurisdictions.



Other lockdowns have also been announced by BJP MLA Joshua De Souza, who has appealed for a closure of the popular Mapusa market and Leader of Opposition Digambar Kamat who has appealed for the municipal market in Margao, in South Goa, to go under lockdown for at least a week. "I have a responsibility towards the people of Mapusa and their best interests are my utmost priority. The government has enforced restrictions till May 10 and we should now do our bit towards a voluntary lockdown in light of the rising covid cases," De Souza said, adding that the lockdown would help break the chain of Covid-19 infections which have reached a record high in the coastal state.The Mapusa Merchants Association has supported De Souza's call for the lockdown till May 10. "My responsibility as MLA of Margao constituency is to ensure safety of Madgaonkars. I had urged for extension of lockdown in Goa but the government refused. My humble request to Madgaonkars is to go for voluntary lockdown for a week from tomorrow to help in our fight against #Covid," Kamat said, adding that he had spoken to the merchants association in Margao town, who have agreed to co-operate with him. Michael Lobo, the Ports Minister in the Sawant cabinet, has already enforced a lockdown in three villages in his jurisdiction, which includes the popular beach villages of Candolim and Calangute, which serve as the engines of Goa's mass-based tourism economy.

The four-day lockdown, which ended on Monday morning, was imposed by Sawant in wake of a steep spike in Covid-19 cases in the state. There are currently 24,607 active cases reported in Goa.

DON'T WORRY: MAHA ASSURES FULL SECURITY TO ADAR POONAWALLA

A perturbed Maharashtra government on Monday has assured "full security and safety" to Serum Institute of India Ltd (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla who has claimed threats of dire consequences in the past couple of days.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Taking a serious note, Shiv Sena's Minister of State for Home Shambhuraj Desai, while promising complete security to the Pune-based vaccine king also asked him to lodge a police complaint in writing and the state government would take strict action in the matter. Nationalist Congress Party's Housing Minister Dr. Jitendra Awhad demanded that the country and all citizens would like to know the truth behind Poonawalla's interview to a London newspaper.

"He says that if he speaks the truth, he will be killed. Let the country know the truth," Awhad urged.

Asking SII CEO "not to worry" about the threats, Congress state President Nana F. Patole said that the Congress would ensure no harm befalls him. "He must concentrate only on vaccine manufacturing. We will take care of his security. The country needs his services," Patole said.

Sena's veteran labour leader Dr. Raghunath Kuchik -- accorded status of a Minister of State -- said the pressures SII faces are obvious in view of the huge demands for vaccines from all over the world.

"He may have sounded out the concerned persons and has already been provided with Y-Category security. The Poonawallas are good people and take excellent care of all their employees also," Dr.Kuchik, who is advisor to the SII Employees Union, told IANS.

In a related development, Industry Minister Subhas Desai categorically dismissed certain television news channel reports alleging "Shiv Sena goons" had threatened Poonawalla for vaccines.

Desai termed as 'political bias' the TV channel's move to attach another party president's video to the Shiv Sena and "deliberately defame" the party, which is a part of the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government.

Poonawalla, 40, created a flutter a couple of days ago after he told a London-based newspaper that he was getting constant threats from some chief ministers and corporate leaders back home.

The head of the world's biggest vaccines producer, he added that the callers usually began politely but later became threatening after he made it clear that he couldn't oblige them to jump the queues for vaccines even as social media poured support for him.

Covid: BMC appeals to Mumbaikars to test more

In the past few days, the testing figures have fallen dramatically - from over 50,000 to barely 28,000 on Sunday (May 2) and is likely to fall further during the weekends.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Concerned at the sharp drop in the number of Covid-19 tests being conducted in the country's commercial capital, the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Monday appealed to Mumbaikars to undergo tests and help flush out the coronavirus from the city's environment.

Municipal Commissioner IS Chahal said that the city's highest single-day testing from March 2020 till February 10 this year when the second wave hit Mumbai was 24,500. Soon afterwards, the testing shot up by more than double and touched the maximum 56,000 tests on a single day on April 21, and the previous month (April) averaged at 44,000 tests conducted daily.

However, in the past few days, the testing figures have fallen dramatically - from over 50,000 to barely 28,000 on Sunday (May 2) and is likely to fall further during the weekends."Our aggressive testing policy has resulted in reduction of positivity rate. This might have reduced the natural demand for home collection of swabs by our citizens in the last few days. We need to increase the testing to 40,000 per day, at least, if not more," said Chahal.

He appealed to all Mumbaikars to step forward and get themselves tested to increase Covid-testing to the maximum levels to combat the coronavirus scourge.

Till Sunday, Mumbai has recorded the highest death toll of 13,294 and the case tally stood at 655,997 till date, though the daily infections have been on a downswing since a week now, spelling relief to the BMC.

Maharashtra reports 48,621 new Covid-19 cases, 2,624 fresh infections in Mumbai

Maharashtra, which is the worst affected state due to the second wave of Covid-19, has been consistently reporting a spike in numbers since the month of February.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra reported 48,621 new coronavirus disease (Covid-19) cases and 567 deaths on Monday which took the total tally in the state to 4,771,022, while the death toll reached 70,851. A total of 211,668 people were tested in the state in 24 hours, the bulletin showed and the total number of recoveries in the state stood at 4,041,158 as 59,500 were discharged in the preceding 24 hours.

On Sunday, Maharashtra had reported 56,647 new Covid-19 cases and 669 deaths which were slightly less than Saturday when the state had reported 63,282 new Covid-19 cases and 802 deaths. Mumbai reported 2,624 cases on Monday and 78 deaths which took the total number of cases in the city to 658,621 and the death toll to 13,372. On Sunday, the city had reported 3,629 cases and 79 deaths which were slightly lesser than Saturday when the city had reported 3,897 Covid-19 cases and 90 deaths.

Maharashtra has been consistently reporting the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the country and is the worst affected state due to the second wave of pandemic. Owing to this, the state is currently in lockdown-like restrictions till May 15 which have been put in place to stem the spread of the viral infection. The curbs on movement of people and other activities were first imposed early this month and were to initially continue till May 1 but were further tightened on April 14 and then extended last week till May 15.

Phone-tapping case FIR: IPS Shukla seeks protection from Bombay HC

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a fresh development in the sensational phone-tapping case, senior IPS officer Rashmi Shukla on Monday moved the Bombay High Court seeking quashing of an FIR lodged against her by the Mumbai Police, staying any coercive action or alternatively transferring the case to the CBI.

A former Commissioner of State Intelligence Department (SID), Shukla is presently the Additional Director-General of CRPF (South Zone), based in Hyderabad.

Her lawyer Sameer Nangre sought an urgent hearing on the matter on Tuesday (May 4), contending that the 1988 batch IPS officer is apprehending arrest, and sought directions to the Mumbai Police to refrain from taking any coercive action against Shukla.

Terming the police case as 'bogus' and 'frivolous', Shukla's plea said that the state is trying to arm-twist the petitioner.

On March 26, following a complaint by the SID, the Mumbai Police had lodged an FIR at the BKC Cyber Police Station against unknown persons for alleged illegal phone tapping and invoked sections under the Official Secrets Act, Information Technology Act and Indian Telegraph Act.

The alleged phone-tapping incidents had taken place during Shukla's tenure as the SID chief last year and the matter came out after BJP Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis revealed a letter written by Shukla to the then Director-General of Police in August 2020, about alleged corrupt practices in police transfers and promotions.

Following a political uproar, several leaders of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra accused Shukla of tapping phones unauthorisedly, and subsequently Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunte submitted a report on the matter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on March 25.Among other things, Kunte's detailed report accused Shukla of misusing her official position and overstepping her brief. When confronted, she admitted her mistake and even apologised, citing personal and family issues, after which the state government took a sympathetic view and did not take any action.

After the FIR was registered, the Mumbai Police served two summons to Shukla on April 26 and April 28, seeking her presence to record her statement, but she failed to appearbefore the police.

In her plea to the court on Monday, Shukla said she had exposed the alleged nexus between ministers and politicians in the matter of gross corruption pertaining to the police department, but instead of appreciating her work, the government authorities were trying to frame her in a false criminal case.

MAHA SEES NEW COVID INFECTIONS FALL, BUT DEATH TOLL CROSSES 70K

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra's Covid-19 deaths and infections witnessed a sharp fall on Sunday, although the state toll shot above the 70,000 mark while the case tally went above 47 lakh, health officials said here.

As against 802 deaths on Saturday, the state recorded 669 fatalities, taking up its toll to 70,284.After over a week, the number of new infections dropped below the 60,000 mark, from 63,282 on Saturday to 56,647 now, as the state tally rose to 47,22,401 now.

The Mumbai infections remained below the 5,000 level, at 3,629, while the tally rose to 655,997.

Mumbai's daily deaths also came down from 90 on Saturday to 79 now, and the total fatalities in the country's commercial capital shot up to 13,294.

For the second day, the state death rate remained stable at 1.49 per cent, while the number of active cases increased from 663,758 to 668,353.

On the brighter side, 51,356 fully cured patients returned home, taking the total to 39,81,658 now, with the recovery rate improving from 84.24 per cent on Saturday to 84.31 per cent now. The Mumbai Circle - comprising Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and Raigad districts - recorded a drop below the 10,000 level in new cases at 9,700, taking its tally to 13,91,160, while with 156 more deaths, the toll rose to 23,622.

Of the day's fatalities, Mumbai led with 79 deaths, while there were 65 in Pune, 62 in Thane, 49 in Solapur, 35 in Nashik, 34 in Ahmednagar, 30 in Nagpur, 28 in Yavatmal, 27 in Latur, 26 in Sangli, 23 in Nanded, 22 in Osmanabad, 21 each in Jalgaon and Amravati, 16 in Beed, 15 each in Satara and Chandrapur, 13 in Parbhani, 11 each in Raigad and Hingoli, 10 each in Sindhudurg, Jalna, and Washim, nine in Bhandara, six in Wardha, five in Gondia, four each in Palghar, Kolhapur, and Akola, and two each in Nandurbar and Aurangabad. Out of the state's 36 districts, only Gadchiroli, Buldhana, Ratnagiri, and Dhule recorded zero fatalities. Meanwhile, the number of people sent to home isolation decreased to 39,96,946 now, while those shunted to institutional quarantine went up to 27,735.

Pediatric Wards, Creche Network for Parents in Covid Care: Maharashtra Govt Braces for Third Wave

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As Maharashtra emerges from the ongoing disastrous wave of Covid-19, the state government is preparing to tackle the third wave. Earlier, the Maharashtra government had said the third wave could likely hit the state in July. Keeping in mind the changing behaviour of the virus which is also affecting children, Maharashtra minister Aditya Thackeray has suggested to set up a pediatric covid care ward, "As we prepare for 3rd wave capacity building in Maharashtra, I met AMC @SJaiswal_IAS ji to discuss the measures we've undertaken in Mumbai. I have suggested to him that we create a paediatric covid care ward anticipating the next wave and the demographic it may target," Thackeray wrote. He also suggested to create a network of creches to care for children whose parents are in covid care centres and may not be able to look after them. "Along with paediatric covid care centre, another aspect we are now focussed on is to create a network of crèches for those parents who may have to be in covid care centres and may not have support to look after their children, that aren't infected by covid," he wrote.A recent data by the Maharashtra health department indicated that more children are getting infected with the covid-19 in the second wave. This was not the case in earlier surges in covid-19 cases. According to the data, there has been a surge of 51%in infection among children within a period of a month in Maharashtra.

As many as 1,34,470 children as young as 10 years have been infected against 88,827 on April 3, The New Indian Express reported. More than 75,387 children were infected within 25 days in the state, which is almost a 51 per cent rise in positive cases among children.

Earlier, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said the state is prepared to deal with a third wave of the coronavirus with enough oxygen in stock. He said Maharashtra would have seen nine to 10 lakh active coronavirus cases if the state government had not imposed new lockdown-like restrictions, Thackeray said.

Mumbai's oxygen quota being diverted to Thane, Navi Mumbai: BMC

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The diversion of Mumbai's quota of liquid medical oxygen, currently in high demand for COVID-19 patients, to neighbouring Navi Mumbai and Thane has led to its "short supply" in some hospitals here, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has claimed.

BMC's Additional Commissioner P Velrasu has demanded that local administration officials be deployed at the refilling facilities of two companies in Navi Mumbai to monitor and ensure smooth supply of the life-saving gas in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

He wrote a letter last week to Konkan divisional commissioner AnnasahebMisal, claiming that the diversion of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) had led to multiple distress calls of its "short supply" in some hospitals and on one occasion, patients were shifted to other medical facilities.

The Maharashtra government has fixed a quota of the liquid medical oxygen for Mumbai, Thane, Navi Mumbai and other areas in the MMR, considering the huge increase in its demand due to a surge in COVID-19 cases, the letter said.

"It has been observed that the supply of LMO received for Mumbai quota has been diverted to Navi Mumbal and Thane region from common suppliers," the BMC said in the letter, which was also marked to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) commissioner.In spite of the allocation of LMO quota, its availability at re-fillers is decreased for the BMC by more than 50 per cent of the available quota, it said.

The BMC said the the supply of LMO should be as per the quota fixed for a particular region.

It also requested to deploy adeputy collector and a tehsildar (revenue officer) at the refilling facilities of two companies in Navi Mumbai area, to monitor the supply and ensure smooth delivery of LMO, as per the allocated quota.

Maharashtra DGP writes to Uddhav Thackeray seeking removal from Param Bir Singh probe

Maharashtra DGP has written to CM Uddhav Thackeray, asking to be removed from the investigation into the alleged nexus of Param Bir Singh with the underworld. This comes after Param Bir Singh alleged that the DGP offered him a settlement and asked him to withdraw his allegations against Anil Deshmukh.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra DGP Sanjay Pandey has written to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and has asked to be removed from the investigation into allegations against former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh in his alleged nexus with the underworld. DGP Pandey has asked the case to be reassigned to someone else.

his development comes a few days after Param Bir Singh alleged that Maharashtra DGP Sanjay Pandey offered him a settlement, advising him to withdraw his allegations against Anil Deshmukh. In return, inquiries against him ordered by the state government would be closed.

Former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh has alleged that Anil Deshmukh had asked suspended Mumbai Police officer Sachin Vaze to collect Rs 100 crore for him every month. In his letter to CM UddhavThackeray, Param Bir Singh alleged that Anil Deshmukh called Sachin Vaze to his official residence "several times" over the past few months and "repeatedly instructed" him to "assist in collection of funds" for him.

DGP Sanjay Pandey was asked to investigate the nexus of Parambir Singh with the underworld. However, on April 29, Param Bir Singh had approached the Bombay High Court and had claimed that DGP Sanjay Pandey confided in Singh that he had himself fought the system his entire life but to no avail. Pandey had then allegedly advised Param Bir Singh to not fight the system and asked him to take back the case against former Maharashta Home Minister Anil Deshmukh.

Param Bir Singh had also submitted transcript of conversation with DGP Pandey in the court.

A Mumbai police officer in his letter to the government had alleged a nexus between Param Bir Singh and the underworld. The officer had also submitted some proofs of his allegations. Following this, the Maharashtra government had asked Maharashtra DGP Sanjay Pandey to investigate the matter. DGP Pandey was also asked to investigate another FIR filed by a cop against Param Bir Singh in Akola. Police inspector Bhimrao Ghadge in his complaint had made a series of allegations of corruption against Singh and other officers, in the period when the former Mumbai CP was posted with the Thane police.According to the sources, DGP Sanjay Pandey and Chief MinsiterUddhav Thackeray are going to have a meeting after which a decision will be made in the matter.

DELHI GOVT WRITES TO CENTRE SEEKING ARMY HELP IN COVID CRISIS

Delhi government has sought help from the Centre to depute Armed Forces in the national capital to set up and operationalise the Covid-19 facilities.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia made the appeal through a letter written on Sunday to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh for lending services of the Armed Forces to set up Covid facilities here in the city with about 10,000 oxygenated non-ICU beds and 1,000 ICU beds.

Mentioning that Delhi is in the midst of unprecedented Covid surge which has stretched the health infrastructure to the maximum level, Sisodia said: "I shall be grateful if your Ministry could lend the services of our Armed Forces to set-up, operationalise and run some Covid health facilities with about 10,000 oxygenated Non-ICU beds and 1,000 ICU beds."

"Since the entire health infrastructure machinery is overwhelmed with the management of the existing hospitals and the upcoming Covid hospitals or care centres, it will be timely help to the people of Delhi if the Ministry of Defence, with the considerable resources at its commands, is tasked with the responsibility to provide and man the additional Covid health facilities as per the current projections."

The Deputy CM also requested the Ministry of Defence to make arrangements for supply of medical oxygen for the Covid health facility to be set up.

Sisodia sought the help noting "Indian Army has always stood at the forefront during every time of crisis, helped and protected the citizens of his great nation".

Considering the enormous number of cases, Sisodia said, the additional health infrastructure, being set up by the Delhi government is likely to be filled up as soon as it is ready and we need at least 10,000 oxygenated non-ICU beds and 1,000 ICU beds at the earliest to overcome this crisis.

The Deputy CM also informed that Delhi at present has 16,272 non-ICU oxygen beds and 4,866 ICU beds, and that the Delhi government is creating an additional 15,000 oxygenated non-ICU beds and 1,200 ICU beds which are likely to be operationalised over the next ten days.

In the letter, Sisodia further said: "The other requirement at the moment of crisis is the regular supply of medical oxygen."

The government of India allocates medical oxygen to the various states and Delhi is grateful to the efforts of the Centre in augmenting the supply of medical oxygen, said Sisodia, adding "from the initial allocation of 378 MT per day, government of India has increased the allocation to 490 MT on April 24 and thereafter to 590 MT"."The additional allocation to Delhi has been made from the plants located more than 1,500 km from Delhi like Durgapur, Rourkela and Kalinga Nagar. Delhi government with necessary help from the government of India and other state governments, is augmenting the transport infrastructure by sourcing cryogenic tankers even from abroad," Sisodia said.

"It would be an extraordinary help from our Armed Forces if the Ministry of Defence can provide cryogenic tankers for transport of Liquid Medical Oxygen".

Sisodia also informed that the Delhi government has deployed all available medical professionals in manning the Covid hospitals and Covid care centres, and it is also in process of recruiting retired doctors and para medical teams.

Still, the Aam Aadmi Party leader said, the availability is extremely limited considering the huge demand. "The Ministry of Defence may also kindly provide medical and para medical teams to supplement the medical manpower of Delhi."At the end of the letter, Sisodia mentioned that the requirements may be considered on humanitarian grounds in this hour of unprecedented health crisis, noting "the operational details can be mutually worked out after receipt of in principle approval from the Defence Ministry".

On an average, there have been 25,000 new Covid cases in Delhi every day and about 10 per cent of them require some form of hospitalisation including oxygen support.

Sisodia urges FM to waive GST on oxygen concentrators

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Monday requested Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to waive off GST on oxygen concentrators.

Welcoming reduction of IGST to 12 per cent on imports of oxygen concentrators through e-commerce platforms, Sisodia, in a letter to Sitharaman, said: "It would be appropriate if the government of India and GST Council consider exempting GST on Oxygen concentrators for the period of six months."

Sisodia had also requested the Defence Ministry to help make arrangements for supply of medical oxygen for the Covid health facility to be set up.Considering the enormous number of cases, he said that the additional health infrastructure, being set up by the Delhi government, is likely to be filled up as soon as it is ready and "we need at least 10,000 oxygenated non-ICU beds and 1,000 ICU beds at the earliest to overcome this crisis".Delhi at present has 16,272 non-ICU oxygen beds and 4,866 ICU beds, and the Delhi government is creating an additional 15,000 oxygenated non-ICU beds and 1,200 ICU beds which are likely to be operationalised over the next 10 days, he said.

In the letter to Rajnath Singh, Sisodia further sought the armed forces help in Delhi getting its oxygen supply. "It would be an extraordinary help from our Armed Forces if the Ministry of Defence can provide cryogenic tankers for transport of Liquid Medical Oxygen," he had said.

NIRVACHAN SADAN NEW CREMATORIUM IN DELHI: TMC'S MAHUA

New Delhi: In a sharp attack on Election Commission of India, Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Mahua Moitra on Monday dubbed Nirvachan Sadan, the headquarter of the poll panel, as "new crematorium" in the national capital. The Lok Sabha MP also took a dig at the commission, saying "constitutional body burnt here".

Moitra's remarks came a day after the Assembly poll results of four states and one Union Territory were declared on Sunday. "Nirvachan Sadan is new crematorium in Delhi.

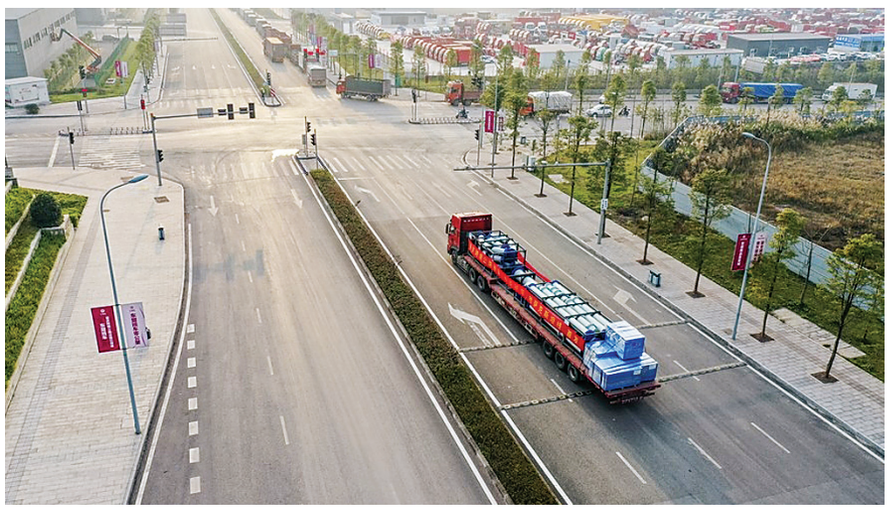
Pickrr to subsidise delivery costs for NGOs supplying Covid essentials

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid the Covid-19 crisis, logistics and shipping software solution provider for e-commerce businesses, Pickrr, has announced a 100 per cent subsidy on delivery charges for all non-profit organisations supplying Covid-19 essentials around the country.

The company has extended its support to all the NGOs and NPOs and has urged them to join forces with India in taking on the pandemic with full strength.

Rhitiman Majumder, Co-Founder at Pickrr, said: "The second wave of the virus has created massive chaos in our country, forcing many state governments to impose strict restrictions to stop the health crisis from becoming worse. During



these unprecedented times, Covid-19 essentials should reach every destination on priority." "We at Pickrr ensure to deliver all the essential health and grocery products without compromising the safety of your associates. NGOs supplying Covid-19 essentials can use our services without paying a single delivery charge and get the goods delivered at the right place and time."

Pickrr is an all-in-one solution for e-commerce businesses to manage their supply chains. The company works with the leading courier partners in the country, including Blue Dart, FedEx and more, to offer the best service to its customers.

Delhi Airport sets up dedicated facility for imported relief material

The Delhi airport on Monday said it has set up a dedicated logistic facility - Jeevoday - to ensure swift distribution of imported relief materials.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The airport has set up a 3,500 square metre dedicated logistic facility for interim storage and distribution of Covid-19 relief materials.

"The facility was commissioned in less than a day on April 28," Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL), a GMR Group-led consortium which manages and operates the Delhi Airport, said in a statement.

"All the Covid-19 relief material are brought to 'JEEVODAY' warehouse after customs clearance, where they are sorted and further distributed to

other parts of the country by GOI Agency M/s. HLL as per distribution plan. Distribution is done immediately after it is brought to the warehouse."As per the statement, in a span of just five days - April 28 to May 2, the Delhi airport has handled around 25 Covid relief flights totaling around 300 tonnes cargo, originating from various countries like the US, the UK, the UAE, Uzbekistan, Thailand, Germany, Qatar, Hong Kong, China amongst others.

"Most of the relief flights were supported by Air Force aircraft which included IL76s, C-130s, C-5s, C-17s. These flights brought in over 5,500 oxygen concentrators, approx 3,200 oxygen cylinders, over 9,28,000 masks, 1,36,000 Remdesivir injections, which are required in view of huge surge in Covid-19 cases in the country." "The handling and distribution of the medical aid is continuing in an efficient manner with the support from all stakeholders."

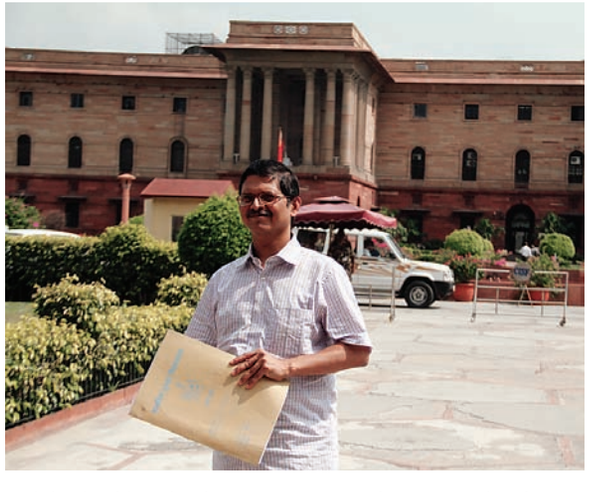
MHA denies info on compulsory retirement of Amitabh Thakur

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has denied sharing information to controversial IPS Officer Amitabh Thakur regarding his compulsory retirement, saying "it cannot be provided". The MHA has denied the information under section 8(1)(i) of the RTI Act, 2005.

Disagreeing with the decision, Amitabh Thakur has preferred first appeal saying that decision has already been made in this case and hence denial under section 8(1)(i) is not correct, said Nutan Thakur, wife of the former IPS officer.

"Amitabh also called denial of information related



with his livelihood as being against the basic spirit of the RTI Act," Nutan told reporter on phone.Thakur got the reply in Hindi from the MHA on April 26 against his three questions sought from the Ministry through RTI. The former IPS had also submitted the RTI query in Hindi.

Call meet of socio-religious leaders on Covid, Jamaat to PM Narendra Modi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH) on Monday said it has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to call a meeting of social and religious organisations and volunteer groups to discuss the health crisis confronting the nation in wake of the Covid surge.

Addressing a press conference, JIH President Syed Sadatullah Husaini said: "We have written a letter to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. We have stated three things in our letter. One is concern over the various administrative lapses during the second wave that have resulted in shortage of beds, oxygen, medicines and vaccines.

"Secondly, we pointed out the spiritual and moral dimension of the pandemic and how it is a divine warning to prepare us for greater calamities in this world and the hereafter. Thirdly, we have requested the PM to convene a meeting with all religious organisations and volunteer groups to discuss the grave situation prevailing in the country and explore the various means and avenues to collaborate with the government for alleviating the suffering of our people."

Earlier, JIH Vice President Mohammad Salim Engineer, who briefed the media on the results of the assembly elections, also expressed concerns over the second Covid wave.

"The results of the just concluded assembly elections have shown that the people of India have largely rejected the politics of hate and religious polarisation. This is a positive development for democracy and communal amity and Jamaat-e-Islami Hind hopes this trend will continue in the future. The elections of West Bengal were particularly critical as all efforts were made to polarise the electorate along with the misuse of our autonomous institutions. The JIH said that it hopes that the secular parties will form a pre-poll alliance to defeat the communal forces in future electoral battles and "save the country from hate and injustice".About the second wave, Engineer said: "Our health infrastructure is falling woefully short of standing up to the massive spike in corona cases. There is acute shortage of beds, ventilators and critical medicines for those affected by the virus. The surge in cases is not only alarming for us but also a threat to the global fight against the pandemic.

SBI ALLOCATES RS 71 CR TO COMBAT 2ND WAVE OF COVID-19

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Country's largest bank, the State Bank of India (SBI) has allocated Rs 71 crore, to undertake various support initiatives to help the country combat the second wave of Covid-19.

The Bank has dedicated Rs 30 crore to set up 1,000 bed makeshift hospitals, 250 bed ICU facilities and 1,000 bed isolation facilities across some of the worst-hit states. These facilities would be set up in collaboration with government hospitals and Municipal Corporations of the respective cities.

The bank is also in talks with various designated authorities to explore partnerships for setting up makeshift hospitals. SBI will also contribute Rs 10 crore for genome-sequencing equipment/lab and vaccine research equipment/lab to the government.

Additionally, SBI has allocated Rs 21 crore to all its 17 Local Head Offices to address the urgent medical needs of the citizens including procuring life-saving healthcare equipment and enhancing the oxygen supply to hospitals. Bank will continue to provide PPE kits, masks, rations and cooked meals. The Bank will also spend Rs 10 crore in partnering with NGOs to undertake community-based testing, strengthening vaccination drives, creating helpline for Covid-19 related matters, providing oxygen supply and other critical activities.

MADHYA PRADESH'S COVID-19 CASELOAD CROSSES 6 LAKH MARK

THEOFFICIAL SAID 13,408 PEOPLE WERE DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITALS DURING THE LAST 24 HOURS, TAKING THE RECOVERY COUNT IN THE STATE TO 5,08,775, LEAVING IT WITH 85,750 ACTIVE CASES.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh's Covid-19 tally on Monday passed the six lakh mark after 12,062 people were detected with the infection, an official said.

The case-hold in MP now stands at 6,00,430, including 5,905 deaths, 93 of which took place during the day, he added.

The official said 13,408 people were discharged from hospitals during the last 24 hours,taking the recovery count in the state to 5,08,775, leaving it with 85,750 active cases.

"With 1,787 new cases, Indore's caseload went up to 1,16,280 while that of Bhopal rose to 94,803 with the addition of 1,669 cases. Indore's toll rose by eight to touch 1,163, and 12 deaths took the toll in Bhopal to 758. The active cases in Indore and Bhopal stands at 10,819 and 11,488 respectively, he informed.

With 59,448 samples being examined in the last 24 hours, the number of tests in MP crossed 79.28 lakh.

Coronavirus figures in MP are as follows: Total cases 6,00,430, new cases 12,062, death toll 5,905, recovered 5,08,775, active cases 85,750, number of tests so far 79,28,482.

DAMOH BY-POLLS:

CONGRESS' AJAY TANDON BEAT BJP'S RAHUL LODHI BY 17,097 VOTES, THE BYPOLL HAVING BEEN NECESSITATED AFTER THE LATTER LEFT THE CONGRESS AND JOINED THE BJP LATE LAST YEAR.

BJP candidate blames internal sabotage for defeat

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The BJP's Rahul Lodhi on Monday blamed "massive internal sabotage" for his defeat at the hands of Congressman Ajay Tandon in the Damohbypoll in Madhya Pradesh, the result of which was announced a day earlier.

Tandon beat Lodhi by 17,097 votes, the bypoll having been necessitated after the latter left the Congress and joined the BJP late last year.

Speaking to reporters in the early hours of the day, Lodhi said, "The reason for my defeat is absolutely clear. It was due to massive internal sabotage. We lost heavily from the urban areas. People who said the BJP was like their mother have committed dishonesty."

Queried about who he was referring to, Lodhi said, "It is senior BJP leader and former MP minister Jayant Malaiya (74) and his family. They are solely responsible for my defeat. We lost in their ward. We lost heavily in city areas where Malaiya's son Siddharth was supposed to drum up support for us."

He said the "Malaiya family gameplan" had succeeded while the BJP had lost, and demanded that they be expelled from the party.

During the day, Union Minister and senior MP BJP leader Prahlad Patel too had blamed "conspiracies" on the part of insiders for the party's defeat in the Damohbypoll.

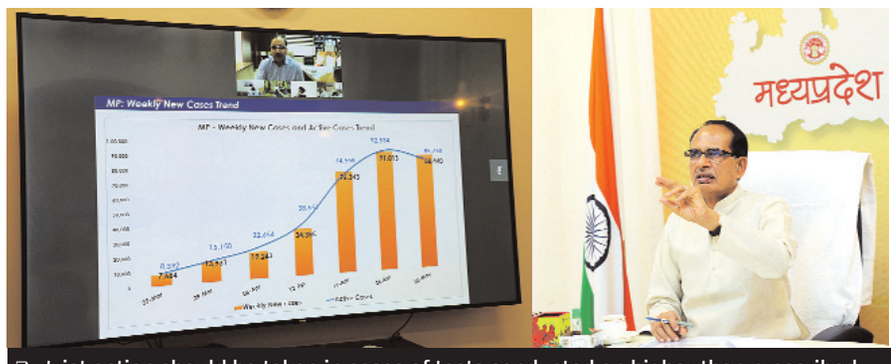
The Damohbypoll result gives clear indications of future challenges, conspiracies and improvements in the system and workers will find solutions through diligence and without being malicious, Patel, the local Lok Sabha MP, had said in a tweet.

While former state minister Jayant Malaiya, who was BJP MLA for several terms from the area earlier, stayed away from the bypoll campaign, sources said there were several local leaders in the party who were upset with Lodhi joining it.

Lodhi, incidentally, had defeated Malaiya in the 2018 Assembly polls, though the former at the time was in the Congress. MP Home minister Narottam Mishra on Monday said "we lost Damoh due to out own Jaichands".

It is a common reference for an insider who betrays, the term coming from the role played by Jaichand who backstabbed Prithviraj Chauhan in the latter's fight against invader Muhammad Ghori in the 12th century.

VACCINATION OF THOSE ABOVE 18 YEARS OF AGE IN THE STATE FROM MAY 5



❑ trict action should be taken in cases of tests conducted on higher than prescribed rates, CM Chouhan reviews prevention and arrangements of Covid-19

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that free vaccination for people between 18 and 45 years of age will start from May 5. Purchase orders have been issued to both the vaccine manufacturers keeping in view the potential requirement of 5 crore 29 lakh doses for vaccination.
Possibilities for import are also being examined for the earliest supply of dosages for vaccination. He said that the vaccination of those above 45 year will continue as before.
Chouhan was addressing a meeting of Covid Core Group today in connection with the prevention and arrangements of Covid-19 from his residence through video conferencing.

Chouhan has said that effective monitoring of home isolation system should be ensured in rural areas. Panchayat Rural Development, Forest, Health Department staff and local public representatives should coordinate and ensure best arrangements. In the absence of proper arrangements for isolation at home, the infected person should be transferred to the Covid Care Center. Vehicles can also be arranged if required.

He stressed the need to ensure implementation of health related tests at prescribed rates. He said that strict action should be taken in cases of tests being conducted at higher than prescribed rates.

Chouhan was told in the meeting that 12 thousand 72 new positive cases have come up in the state. The number of people who have recovered is 13 thousand 408. Those who have recovered include 1506 from different hospitals, 706 from Covid Care Centers and 11 thousand 197 in home isolation. As many as 14 thousand 88 oxygen beds are available in government hospitals in the state. Of these, 11 thousand 891 are occupied. Out of 10 thousand 837 oxygen beds in the private sector, 9 thousand 390 beds are full.

About 14 thousand 472 isolation beds and one thousand 375 oxygen beds are available in Government Covid Care Centers and 621 isolation and 68 oxygen beds are available in private sector Covid Centers. Nearly 28 percent isolation beds and 61 percent oxygen beds in Government Covid Care Center are full. In the Covid Care Centers of the private sector, 22 percent isolation beds and 85 percent oxygen beds are full. The work of laying new oxygen pipeline in 42 district hospitals in the state is in progress at a rapid pace. Out of a total of 2,302 oxygen points, 1,558 have been completed. Construction work of the remaining is going on at a fast pace. Similarly, the work of laying oxygen pipeline in 51 community health centers of the state is also being done at a rapid pace.

Madhya Pradesh declares journalists as 'frontline workers'

- ChiefMinister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said journalists were risking their lives while doing their duty during this "dangerous period of COVID-19 pandemic."
- Around 4,000 journalists are currently accredited with the state government, according to a public relations department official

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Madhya Pradesh on Monday declared media professionals accredited with the state government as 'frontline workers'.

While making the announcement, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said journalists were risking their lives while doing their duty during this "dangerous period of COVID-19 pandemic."

"Therefore, we have decided to declare all accredited journalists as frontline workers in Madhya Pradesh. They will be taken care of," Chouhan said in a video statement posted on the Twitter handle of the Chief Minister's Office.

The accriditated journalists of the State have been included in the category of Front Line Workers.
Chouhan said that journalists who have brought reality to the masses in the corona transition are also actual Corona Warriors. The Chief Minister, Chouhan said that now accriditated journalists will also be given the benefit of all facilities provided to front line workers.

Around 4,000 journalists are currently accredited with the state government, according to a public relations department official.

The official said the state government was yet to decide on other modalities regarding this announcement.

Madhya Pradesh reported 12,662 new COVID-19 cases on Sunday, which took its infection tally to 5,88,368, while 94 deaths pushed the fatality count to 5,812, as per official data.

POSITIVITY RATE DECLINING CONTINUOUSLY

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Due to the efforts being made to curb corona infection in the state, the positivity rate of corona is continuously decreasing. The state's positivity rate was 21.12% on April 30, which has come down to 20.9% on May 2. Today, on May 3, the positivity rate has come down to 20.2%. The state is getting more recoveries than positive cases every day. More than 50 thousand tests are being done every day. On Sunday May 2, 59 thousand 448 tests were conducted. Mobile teams are also being sent to collect samples in all the districts.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the number of people becoming healthy and infection-free is increasing every day due to better management and increase in medical facilities in the state. On April 30, 13 thousand 584 patients, on May 1, 14 thousand 562 and on May 2, 13 thousand 890 corona patients have reached their home safely after recovering and getting infection free. The state's recovery rate was 82.88% on April 30, 83.63% on May 1, and it increased to 84.19% on May 2. Today, the recovery rate of the state has gone up to 84.73%.

Chouhan said that out of the total number of people who have become healthy in a single day in the state, 84.3% are patients who were in home isolation and 4% are patients who were in Covid Care Centres. Thus, 88.3% of the patients are recovering in home isolation and covid care centres without going to hospital. The remaining 11.7% have recovered and returned home from hospitals.

More than 64 thousand 218 patients are currently in home isolation in the state. 97% of these patients have been contacted at least once over the telephone. Home delivery of medical kits and health brochures are being made to 100% of patients living in home isolation in urban and rural areas.

255 covid care centres have been started in 52 districts of the state, in which patients with mild symptoms are residing. At present, there are a total of 16 thousand 516 beds in these centres. Out of these, 1267 oxygen beds have been set up. Similarly, a total of 22 thousand 10 institutional quarantine centres have been set up in rural areas of the state, in which more than 2 lakh 63 thousand 715 beds have been set up. Medical kits and health brochures are being provided to 100 per cent of the patients residing in all Covid Care Centres / Institutional Quarantine Centres in urban and rural areas.

A total of 845 Covid hospitals are presently operational in the state. Of these, 315 are being operated in the government sector and 530 in the private sector. On April 1, the number of beds available in the state was 20 thousand 159, which has now increased to 60 thousand 550. More than a thousand beds are being added every day. More than 40 thousand beds have been added in the last one month.

Aap ka sambal- Aap ki sarkar

CHIEF MINISTER TO DISTRIBUTE EX-GRATIA ASSISTANCE TO LABORERS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will transfer Rs 379 crore through single click to the accounts of about 17 thousand unorganized labour families under Jan Kalyan Sambal Yojana on May 4. Labour Minister Brijendra Pratap Singh will also be specially present in this virtual programme of disbursement of assistance fund. Sambal Yojana is a scheme that provides financial support to families of labourers of the state along with a foundation to the families. In case of accidental death of a labourer, the dependents are provided with an amount of Rs 4 lakh by the Labour Department under the scheme. Similarly, exgratia amount of Rs. 2 lakhs is given to the labourer families under Mukhya Mantri Jan-Kalyan Sambal Yojana in cas of natural death and permanent disability. Under the scheme, Rs one lakh will be provided on partial permanent disability and Rs 5 thousand as funeral assistance. Mukhyamantri Jan-Kalyan Sambal Yojana is working to provide support to poor labourer families of the unorganized sector. Since the inception of the scheme, an amount of more than Rs 1907 crore has been distributed to 2 lakh 28 thousand beneficiaries of the state. In the last financial year, even under critical conditions like Corona pandemic, benefits of Rs 582 crore were trasnferred to the bank accounts of more than 72 thousand beneficiaries.

DO HOUSE-TO-HOUSE SURVEY TO CHECK CORONA AND PUT AN END TO IT: CM

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that we have to do house to house survey and put an end to Corona wherever it is. Corona infection should not be allowed to spread at all. During the survey, patients who are found to be suffering from cold, cough, and fever should be given a medical kit immediately after their examination, medical advice and their treatment should be started. Chouhan was taking a meeting related to the Kill Corona campaign through video conferencing from his residence today.
Chouhan directed that a team should be formed in every village, locality to conduct the campaign, in which social workers, public representatives, etc. should be added. Chouhan instructed that under the campaign, a medical kit should be given to every patient compulsorily. To ensure that there is no shortage of medicines.

BAKSA, An wooden box is First Exhibit of the Week of the month of May

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Under the Latest and popular online series of Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya entitled 'Exhibit of the Week' the "BAKSA" A Wooden box collected from 1979 is on display. The Community of Folk of Himachal Pradesh . This is the 50th exhibition under the Exhibit of the Week displayed in the audience as The First Exhibit of the month of May , 2021 through official website, Facebook, Instagram and twitter page of the IGRMS.

In this regard Praveen Kumar Mishra, Director, IGRMS said that Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (National Museum of Mankind), Initially this series will focus on the masterpieces from its collection which are considered as unique

for their contribution to the cultural history of a particular ethnic group or area. Baksa is a rectangular wooden box made of local seasoned wood and its outer surface is covered with Deer skin. This object was collected from Himachal Pradesh - a northern state of India. The beautifully designed metal plate fittings at the corner makes the Baksa more appealing. It was used to store clothes and other precious belongings. The decoration of household objects among the folk communities is purely personal taste. In past decades skins of animals, including the wild animals, were used to fulfil multiple necessities like clothing, shoes, furniture, household decorations etc. Now a days, the use of wild animals skins are limited to a great extent due to ban on the poaching of wild animals. Therefore, such objects are now rare and unique and can mostly be seen as a part of museum collection.

Visitors can see this object from home through the Official site (https://igrms.com/wordpress/?page_id=3432) and Facebook site (https://www.facebook.com/NationalMuseumMankind), Instagram and twitter page of the IGRMS.

BJP betting on turncoat leader proves costly in Damoh Assembly by-poll

- After the announcement of the election results, Rahul Lodhi had openly accused former minister Jayant Malaiya and other party leaders and said the elections were lost due to their treachery. His potshots were directly aimed at Jayant Malaiya.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Bharatiya Janata Party's defeat in Madhya Pradesh's Damoh Assembly by-election has created quite a political stir. The party is not only introspecting the reasons but the party's own leaders are under the scanner for the defeat.

The Congress had won from Damoh in the Assembly elections held in 2018 and Rahul Lodhi was elected. He had defeated BJP candidate Jayant Malaiya, who had won from there for six consecutive terms.

After quitting the Congress, Rahul Lodhi recently joined the BJP and during the 2021 Damoh by-poll, he contested the election on the saffron party's ticket against Congress candidate Ajay Tandon who defeated him by over 17,000 votes.

The party organisation and the BJP government had put in huge efforts despite which Lodhi lost.

Former minister Jayant Malaiya was a major contender for the BJP ticket from Damoh Assembly constituency. Malaiya initially expressed displeasure over Rahul Lodhi being nominated as the BJP candidate but the party managed to placate him and he was actively involved in the poll campaign.

Union Minister Prahlad Patel's statement in which he allegedly referred to the Ramayana did not go down well with a particular community.

The party's state organisation was fully aware that there was a lot of resentment against Rahul Lodhi in the Damoh assembly constituency. This was the reason that the party's state unit President, Vishnu Datt Sharma, and several officials of the organisation camped in Damoh. For a fortnight Sharma and other leaders held separate meetings with various people. The public openly expressed their anger against Rahul Lodhi.

People said that they are not angry with the BJP but want to teach a lesson to Lodhi. Despite this Vishnu Datt Sharma tried to convince the people to support the party due to which some people agreed to lend their support but a large number of people refused to support the BJP.

After the announcement of the election results, Rahul Lodhi had openly accused former minister Jayant Malaiya and other party leaders and said the elections were lost due to their treachery. His potshots were directly aimed at Jayant Malaiya.

State Home Minister Narottam Mishra also blamed party leaders for the poll defeat and said, "We have not lost Damoh Assembly seat but instead we have been deceived by deceitful people. This time we have lost the polls due to 'Jaichands' (traitors) in our party. The Congress should not be too happy over the Damoh victory. (Former CM) Kamal Nath should introspect upon how the Congress has been eliminated from the entire country."

Speaking on the defeat in Damoh, Vishnu Datt Sharma said, "We accept people's verdict in the Damoh by-election. Congratulations to Congress candidate Ajay Tandon. Our party workers worked tirelessly at the booth level during the Damoh by-election. I thank them for their contribution. We must not get discouraged with the poll results but move forward with a resolve to further strengthen the organisation. Also we will sit down with the local party workers of Damoh and review the reasons for the failure in depth." Asked about the Congress' win in Damoh, former Chief Minister Kamal Nath said the victory was ultimately of truth. The public has taught the BJP a lesson with this poll result, Nath added.

Political analysts believe that the rejection of the BJP's candidate in Damoh is a lesson for parties that they cannot win elections by making anyone they want the candidate.

Several controversial statements and 'treachery' by many BJP leaders also paved the way for the saffron party's defeat. In Damoh, it is not the BJP but Rahul Lodhi who has been defeated while Congress candidate Ajay Tandon has won and not the grand old party, said analysts.

KARAN SINGH GROVER'S 'FEAR' THEORY: FACE EVERYTHING AND RISE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Karan Singh Grover posted a fitness video on Instagram on Monday, motivating fans to gather strength to face everything around amid the pandemic.

In the video, Karan is practicing his karate moves with nanchakus he made at home.

"F ace E verything A nd R ise," he wrote with the video, underlining what 'fear' actually stands for.

The motivating video seemed to have worked with his fans. One fan wrote: "We will rise once again.. thank you Karan for always spreading positivity and hope," while another posted: "thank you for inspiring us always."

Karan was recently seen in the web series "Qubool Hai 2.0", a spin-off to the popular TV show "Qubool Hai". The series also features actress SurbhiJyoti.

Karan is known for his performances in shows such as "KasautiiZindagii Kay", "Teri Meri Love Stories" and "Dill Mill Gayye".

'SHOOTING FOR UNREALISTIC BODY TYPES IS HARMFUL'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

According to National Eating Disorders Association, the International No Diet Day on May 6 encourages the rejection of diet culture. This movement, started by Mary Evans Jones in 1992, celebrates the importance of body acceptance, diversity, and respect for all body shapes and sizes.The day is dedicated to promoting a healthy lifestyle with a focus on health at any size. It aims to eucate people about the right way to diet and not feeling guilty about indulging once in a while; create an acceptance of how your body looks and its uniqueness; and to end weight discrimination.Nutritionist, sports consultant, psychologist Shwetha Bhatia, who is among the few dieticians recognized by the Indian Dietetic Association, Mumbai, shares her thoughts on the day's importance that may make you rethink your approach to dieting culture. "We must respect people of all sizes and their unique battles with body shaming and weight loss. However positive body image in no way should be an excuse for quitting and remaining unhealthy. As humans we do have a psychological association with food. This can reach unhealthy proportions in the form of emotional eating," saidBhatia.

She emphasizes, "Shooting for unrealistic body types is harmful.""The focus should be health and fitness rather than a certain size or number on the scale. Shape is largely determined by your genes. So is the tendency to store fat and build muscle in certain areas..Even when you begin to lose fat, it leaves areas that were never meant to store it first," she says.With major celebs in her list of clients, Bhatia, 43, is a well-known name in the fitness and nutrition field.She says, "A fit body always looks good. Aesthetics is the by-product when you have more muscle and less fat. Spot reduction does not work: When you exercise, it is working the muscle rather than burning the fat sitting above it. Fat burning is targeted trough the diet."A diet is a combination of nutrients your body needs on a daily basis to survive, repair and adapt. Being on a diet therefore means doing the right things most of the time in line with your heath and fitness goals. Going off the diet then means letting go once in a while such that does not throw you off the wagon."

Finally, she advise, "Stop obsessing over calories and consumed and burnt: Exercise is for improving fitness, not trying to cancel out cheat meals. Calorie burning is the bonus and not the goal of the exercise program. The caloric value of foods is measured in a controlled environment in a lab. But in your body, your hormones and enzymes decide how these calories are released and used. All calories are not equal. Foods with similar calories take different pathways once digested and their fate depends on our hormones. Calorie counting without paying attention to quality and quantity of nutrients does not make sense, even within a calorie deficit plan. You may lose weight but healthy weight loss means less fat mass while gaining or maintaining muscle."

Shweta Tripathi: I'm an advocate of sustainable fashion

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Shweta Tripathi encourages sustainable fashion for the sake of the environment. "I am a big advocate of sustainable fashion and I think if one is conscious of the environment, they'd always choose ethical clothing over anything else. Right from thrift stores to second-hand shopping, I'd like to encourage people to indulge in these practices and make a difference," Shweta said.

The actress treats her clothes with a lot of love and care to ensure they are not torn or damaged.

"The problem is that everyone thinks someone else will save the world. It's time to be that someone. If we all do our little bit, the world will be in a better place. I'd also like to tell people that even when it comes to sourcing for shoots, we try our best to cut down on new things," she added.

In the upcoming web-series, the thriller "Escaype Live", Shweta wears her own footwear.

"For my character in Escaype Live, I'm wearing my own footwear as opposed to buying new ones because if there's something that already fits, I think it's really unnecessary to purchase new ones," she said.

How dance can lift spirits during tough times

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Passion is something that is performed not only with our body but with our spirit, with our highest possible state of being. When we dance we feel that our spirits have been lifted. We enjoy every Moment and the reason behind this is because dance is not only about your body moving rather about the spirit feeling free and lifted. In these tough times, if we can devote our time to anything that we do with passion, not only dance, it can be music for someone, painting for another but any activity that helps you release your negative emotions, it can fill you with a lot of joy that will come from your own spirit and your high life condition. Just remember that this too shall pass, and by that time, we can keep our passion alive and dance our hearts out to face these tough times. Right now what we have been facing is an unprecedented situation, a crisis that humanity has never faced before. The time in itself is teaching us to live in a moment and dance is all about that. That is what we artists and dancers have been doing through our training in dance. With everybody sitting at their home, it is okay to feel anxious at times, but it is not okay to let our mental health suffer. Dance can be an important source of feeling better, whether physically, emotionally, or mentally. As dancers, we have been trained to live in the moments, and maybe that is why dance lets us be a little more equipped where we can be present at the moment. Rather than focusing on the past or future, it is always about the moment which is important, which has to be cherished, celebrated, and lived.

The Pink Lotus Academia is an online and offline tutorial platform, a creative organisation playing on the benefits of Indian classical arts and culture so that they help in boosting artistic faculties beyond the realm of performance to health and well-being. The idea is to incorporate their benefits and wholesomeness into any activity of our personal and social lives. Our lessons happen through video tutorials, personal coaching, group classes, skill development, advice, mentoring, workshops and concerts.

Urvashi Dholakia can't get over her love for selfies

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Urvashi Dholakia opened up about her love for selfies on Monday. "No matter how many photos I may have gotten clicked, but I looovee taking a selfie #happy #Monday #selflove #selfie #time #pink #gold #lovingit #urvashidholakia #indian #ethnic #look #happiness #believe #alwaysandforever," she wrote on Instagram. She posted the note with a selfie that captures her donning a magenta and gold ensemble teamed up with big earrings and a magenta bindi.

The actress often posts funny videos to keep her fans engaged. She also recently posted information on Covid safety protocols and urged her fans to follow the same.

Known for her popular role of Komolika in "KasautiiZindagii Kay", Urvashi has been seen in shows such as "Chandrakanta: EkMayaviPremGaatha", "BayttaabDilKeeTamanna Hai" as well as KabhiiSautanKabhiiSahelii".

Pooja Hegde is keeping a positive frame of mind during her quarantine

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Pooja Hegde had announced that she had tested positive for Covid-19 a few days ago and had isolated herself immediately. The actress is keeping herself busy with activities to keep a positive frame of mind.

A source close to the actress shares, "Pooja is completely isolated due to Covid and that can get really stressful for a person so Pooja is doing motivational activities daily to keep a positive frame of mind. She has been doing yoga and meditation and is also reading more of positive books to stay calm and energised during this time."

Pooja Hegde had also done a live session with a yoga coach some days back on breathing exercises and pranayama to help build lung capacity urging all her fans to share the same with their friends and family as it is very helpful during the current situation.

The actress has been keeping everyone updated on her health through her social media regularly where she first announced that she had tested positive and later told her fans there was nothing to worry as she had mild symptoms and was recuperating well.

The Pan-India actress has been having a super busy year working on her huge lineup of films across industries including Rohit Shetty's Cirkus with Ranveer Singh, her next with Salman Khan, Pan-India film RadheShyam with Prabhas, Acharyaa with Chiranjeevi and Ram Charan, Most Eligible Bachelor as well as Thalapathy 65 with Thalapathy Vijay.

Guru Randhawa's has a new style of pronouncing Urvashi Rautela's surname!

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Urvashi Rautela On Monday posted an Instagram video clip of popular singer Guru Randhawa saying her surname in an unusual manner.rvashi worked in Guru's new music video "Doobgaye" and the clip is to be from the set of the song. In the clip, Guru is seen pointing at Urvashi and pronouncing the word "Rautela" with what appears to be a touch of comic swag.

"Is that a new style of pronouncing my surname Guru," she wrote as caption with emojis of question marks and a lopsided grin. "Doobgaye" has garnered over 40 million views on YouTube since it dropped on April 29. The song, composed by noted singer B Praak and written by Jaani, is directed by Remo D'Souza.

FEELS RIGHT TO WRITE SONGS ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON: DEXTER HOLLAND

Los Angeles | Agencies

American rock band The Offsprings talks of everything that is happening in the United States right now in their 10th LP, "Let The Bad Times Roll".

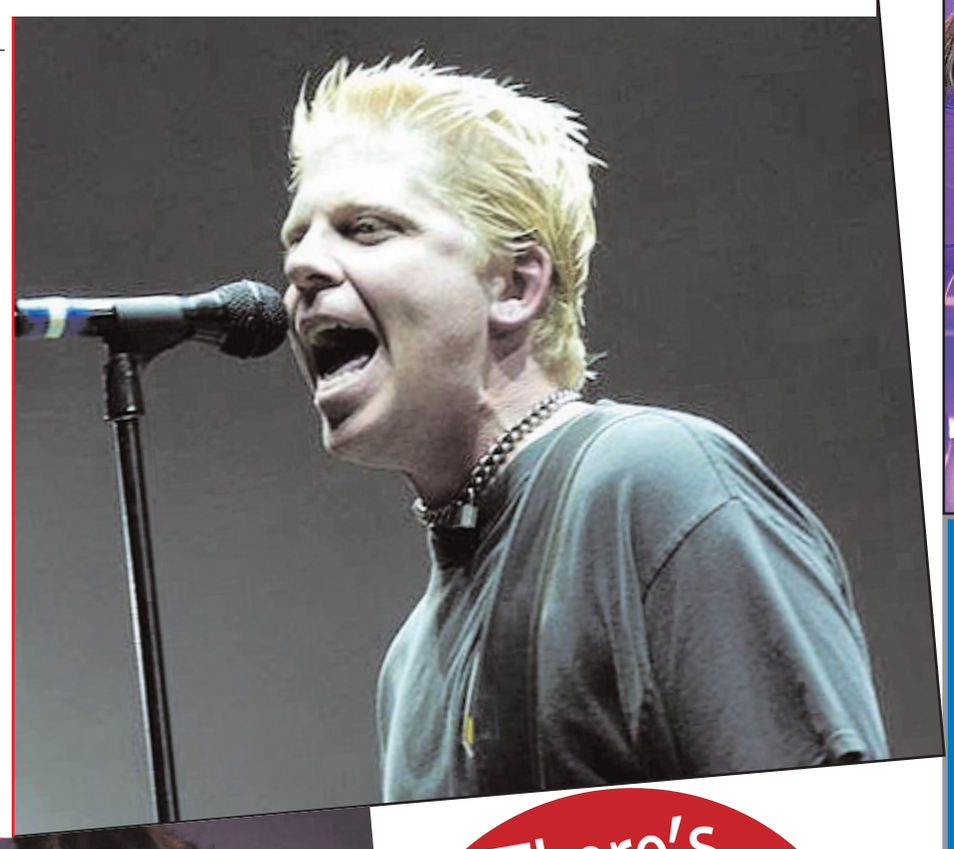
Frontman Dexter Holland says there has been a lot of "crazy politics" going on in the US, which is why this is the right time for the album to come out.

"It felt right to be writing these songs that talk about what's going on right now. The time was right for this record. The social upheaval of the past year has been incredible. There's a lot of crazy politics going on," Holland said, in an interview with contactmusic.com.

He added, "There's definitely been things going on in the US that feel very America-centric to us. But we see it going on around the world too - in Hong Kong, for example, and Myanmar."

The band, which had been together for eight years, got their big break with their 1994 album "Smash".

Recalling those days, Holland said, "Talk about a complete change of life. Within three months, we'd gone from what we were to being a full-time punk rock group, or rock-'n'roll band. It was a rollercoaster... (by then) we'd been doing the band for a long time, and that was an advantage for us."



Jennifer Lopez sizzles in a thong bodysuit at charity gig

Los Angeles | Agencies

Jennifer Lopez was sure to show her former fiancé Alex Rodriguez what he was missing as she stormed the stage at the Global Citizen VAX LIVE: The Concert To Reunite The World concert on Sunday. The singer, 51, turned the heat up in a trio of sizzling ensembles including a yellow wrap-around garment which she tore off to reveal an incredibly racy neon thong bodysuit underneath.

She took to the stage at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles for the first public event to be held at the NFL stadium, performing three times and rocking three bold looks for each performance which came in the wake of claims that her ex is fighting to win her back, according to sources speaking to In Touch. While she was no doubt wowing her most recent lost love while taking the stage, closer to home was her ex Ben Affleck, who also took the stage for a sketch with Jimmy Kimmel, just days after they were spotted hanging out.

Jennifer looked breathtaking as she stormed the stage just weeks after revealing that she had split from Alex.

On the possibility of a reunion a source told in Touch: '[Alex] is holding out hope and that's why he wanted to meet up with Jennifer. She agreed to see him because they do have a lot of history and they also have some business dealings together. Alex really thinks they could make it work, but in Jen's mind, romantically it's over.'

During her performance on Sunday, Jennifer first took to the stage to sing the iconic Neil Diamond song Sweet Caroline, joined by her mother Guadalupe, with Lopez revealing her mother used to sing that song to her.

'There's a lot to say but not now': Lily James

Los Angeles | Agencies

Lily James has admitted there is 'a lot to say' about her Dominic West scandal, but insisted now is not the time to divulge.

In October, co-stars Lily and married Dominic, 51, were caught enjoying what appeared to be a racy weekend in Rome, leading to his wife Catherine FitzGerald assuring the public they were fine - but banning him from working with Lily.

The Downton Abbey alum, 32, is now blazing the promo (rail for their new series The Pursuit Of Love alone and in an interview with The Guardian, she declined to discuss the media storm - but admitted there is in fact much to discuss.

In her interview with the paper, The Guardian asked Lily, 'You found yourself at the centre of a media storm last autumn (due to rumours of an affair with Pursuit of Love castmate Dominic West). What was that like?'

"It was then she came over bashful and declined to discuss, saying: 'Ach, I'm not really willing to talk about that. There is a lot to say, but not now, I'm afraid," she replied.

Eddie Murphy: I am grounded and spiritual

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Eddie Murphy says he is very grounded and spiritual, adding these traits reveal his connection with god.

"I am very grounded and spiritual and that's just my connection with God. Being a young person in this business is like you have to navigate through a minefield. There are so many ways you could destroy yourself. A lot of people I have seen destroy themselves," said Murphy, on "The Drew Barrymore Show".

The actor's assertion came when Barrymore asked him if he had "avoided some of the pitfalls in life because of spirituality".

Murphy said his contemporaries such as Michael Jackson, Prince and Whitney Houstan had a self destructive thing.

"The people who came on the scene the same age as I am, they had a self-destructive thing going on. That's my biggest blessing that I got started real early and I knew what I wanted to do and I was really young and I learnt to love myself and never hated myself or beat up myself.

I have always been my biggest fan," Murphy said on the show that airs on Zee Cafe in India.

'You can't end every series with a big shoot-out': Nigel Boyle

Los Angeles | Agencies

Fans across the nation were left underwhelmed and disappointed on Sunday night as the nail-biting series finale drew to a close - and the mysterious antagonist 'H' was finally unmasked as DSI Ian Buckells, played by Boyle.

And during an appearance on BBC Breakfast on Monday, Boyle insisted that fans of the hit show would grow to appreciate the ending over time, as he also revealed he'd only told his wife Lainy that he was the Fourth Man ahead of the finale.

He said, "The fans have been brilliant. So many people have invested so much in this series, and some of the fans' theories themselves have been outstanding."

"So I think there's always gonna be some element of disappointment, but you can't have every series with a big shoot-out, urgent exit required," he added.

"I think with this season more so than the other seasons, people have been watching it not just once, but two or three times and really analysing what's going on."

"And I think when you watch this again, I think you'll reaffirm some assumptions and you'll see things that you might not have seen," he concluded.

WILL SMITH: I'M IN THE WORST SHAPE OF MY LIFE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Will Smith has done a reality check on his fitness, confessing he is in the worst shape ever. In an Instagram image posted on Monday according to India time, Smith appears in a more regular frame than his usual muscular self.

"I'm gonna be real wit yall - I'm in the worst shape of my life," he wrote as caption.

Actor Joel Kinnaman laughed and wrote: "Hahahahaha".

Filmmaker Ava DuVernay said: "I see no "worst" here."

"Hahahhahahaha that face is fits the caption so well," wrote DJ Steve Aoki.

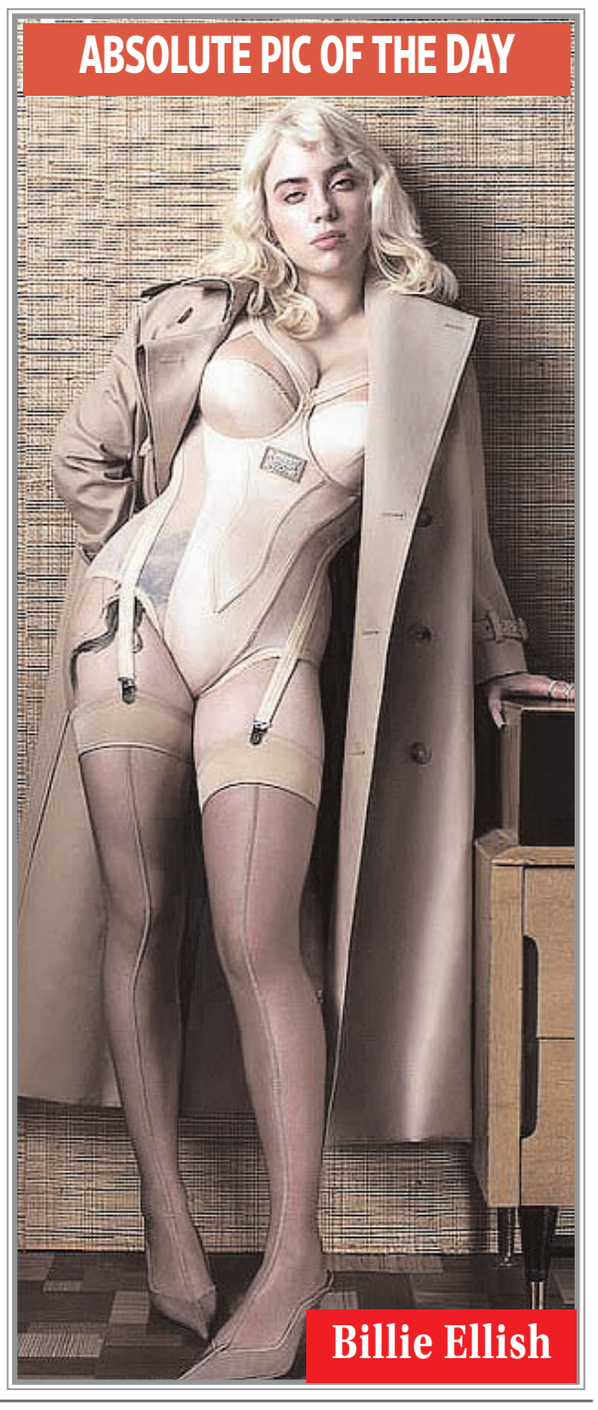
Rapper and actor Ludacris could not control his laughter looking at his picture and dropped laughing emojis on the commenting section.

American singer-songwriter Harry Hudson called Smith a "genius".

Singer Sonna said: "You're Will Smith!! You can be in whatever shape you want."

Grammy-nominated American rapper, DJ Lana Michele Moorer, better known by her stage name MC Lyte brushed it off and said: "Lies".

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Billie Ellish

EDITOR'S SPECS

Arrogance Defeated

Didi O Didi...these were the arrogant comments of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for Mamata Banerjee, which enforced the BJP to bite dust in West Bengal. She superseded all the heavy weight top brasses of the world's largest party. Bengalies are known for their peace loving as well as intellectuality. Neither they abuse nor they like abusive language. This may be the reason that they refused BJP and its Hanky Panky measures adopted by BJP during the election campaigning. Bengalies have proved that their state is famous for worship of Goddess and they won't tolerate the insult of the supreme lady of Bengal. The language, BJP used for Mamata Banerjee during election campaign was not party's culture. It was known as a 'Party with Difference'. But today, it is a different party from that 'Difference'. Currently, it is led by the people, who are indulged in a practice to get the power by hook or crook, right from the beginning of their career. Proceed by laws, be in discipline, non-individualism, nation interest and ideology, this was the quality of BJP has been vanished. BJP is in its peak. This is not an achievement. BJP's achievement will be to maintain this level of height. To maintain the level of achievement, two qualities are mandatory. Service and Humility. Without these mandatory qualities, things start collapsing. Mandate of Bengal is a strong message of it. Big defeat in Bengal, unable to open an account in Kerela, Set back in Tamil Nadu, rise of opposition in Assam are not good sign. Situation is still in control, be careful for future, otherwise it may be repeated in Uttar Pradesh as well in next year. If that happens, there won't be even a margin of damage control. Time has changed and now it requires something different other than communalism. Today's young India need opportunity to grow to shape their future in better way. Providing these facilities may save you. In the mid of pandemic, when only horrific visuals are emerging from every corner of the country, the Prime Minister needs to evolve a mechanism by which his name will be printed by golden ink rather to be known as a Prime Minister, who was busy in fighting with a lady just to in power in a particular state and citizens were dying in anticipation.

THIS MAY BE THE REASON THAT THEY REFUSED BJP AND ITS HANKY PANKY MEASURES ADOPTED BY BJP DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGNING.

CONGRESS PAID THE PRICE OF PACT WITH AIUDF IN ASSAM : EXPERTS

Sujit Chakraborty

The alliance with the AIUDF shattered Congress dream to capture power in Assam, though the grand old party performed better this time as compared to 2016, when it was defeated by the BJP after 15 years, experts and political commentators feel.

Political analysts categorically said that the Congress paid the price for the coalition with the Muslim-based body, All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), in Assam.

Social activist and political commentator Ajoy Kumar Dutta said that the Congress tried to win the hearts of the people in Assam using the sentiments against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, but the Assamese and the indigenous people of the state could not accept the alliance with the AIUDF, led by perfume baron and Lok Sabha member Badruddin Ajmal.

Dutta, a Padma Shri awardee, told IANS: "Every action has an equal reaction. Once three-time Assam Chief Minister late Tarun Gogoi had said 'who is Ajmal', but after his death, his party allied with it. People feared that if the Congress came to power in Assam, it would be controlled by Ajmal's AIUDF."

The BJP and few other non-BJP parties had accused the AIUDF and its leadership of patronising "illegal immigrants" and most Assamese people had accepted the logic.

The BJP fought the 2016 Assembly polls with the slogan of "'jati, mati, bheti' (identity, land and homestead) and succeeded. This time, the saffron party campaigned for the protection of Assamese civilisation and traditional culture and again it achieved its goal.

Except Bengali dominated southern Assam, the Congress-led 'Mahajot' (Grand Alliance) performed poorly in most parts of the state, especially in eastern Assam, known as the Assamese heartland. Of the 15 seats in southern Assam's Barak Valley comprising three districts -- Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi -- the Mahajot either won or is leading in 11 seats with the BJP and its ally ahead in four seats. In the 2016 Assembly elections in Barak Valley, the BJP had won eight seats while the Congress had bagged seven seats.

Political commentator Sushanta Talukdar said that considering the AIUDF's track record and role, the people of Assam could not accept the Congress' alliance with the party, which is soft towards the "infiltrators and illegal migrants". "Most Assamese and indigenous people thought that the AIUDF is more dangerous than the CAA. So despite not support the new citizenship act, they could not accept the Congress' stand to ally with Ajmal's party," Talukdar told correspondent.

The results of the elections to the 126-member Assam assembly clearly indicate that the BJP has caused a permanent dent in the erstwhile traditional Congress stronghold among the tribals, lakhs of tea garden workers and the indigenous people.

It is also understandable that the saffron party's inroad into this Congress bastion in 2016 was not a temporary phenomenon.

During the campaign, the BJP highlighted the "perfect NRC (National Register of Citizens)" while the Congress gave top priority to the CAA, even as both the national parties had common issues of empowerment of women, jobs to the youth and protecting the Assamese traditional culture.

The Congress had promised 'Five Guarantees' to the voters in its manifesto, including restarting the process of NRC; repealing the CAA; Rs 365 daily wage to 10 lakh tea garden workers; 5 lakh jobs in five years; Rs 2,000 per month to housewives and 200-unit free electricity per household.

The BJP's 'Sankalp Patra' also promises to control floods in Assam, empower the women under the state's flagship scheme 'Orunodoi', and increase the monthly payment of Rs 830 to Rs 3,000 covering 30 lakh deserving families. The AIUDF, which won 13 seats in the 2016 Assembly polls, has won five seats this time besides leading in 10 seats, while the Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF), which had bagged 12 seats five years ago, has won one seat this time and is leading in two seats in the Bodoland areas of western Assam.

According to the latest tally of the Election Commission, of the total of 126 seats, the BJP has so far won 27 and is leading on 32 seats, while its ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) won six seats and is leading on four seats. The United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) has won four seats and is leading on two seats.

The Congress has won eight seats and is leading on 23 seats, while its ally CPI-M is leading on one seat.

Raijor Dal (RD) President and jailed leader Akhil Gogoi, who is contesting from the Sibasagar constituency as an Independent candidate, is also leading.

The BJP had won 60 seats in the previous Assembly elections in 2016 while its ally AGP had managed 14 seats. The Congress had secured 26 seats while one seat went to an Independent candidate.

All eyes on Cong after its defeat in Kerala

Sanu George

With Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan scripting a new political history in Kerala by becoming the first sitting government to retain power, all eyes are on the badly hit Congress, which leads the United Democratic Front, as never before has such a thing happened in the state.

In the 2016 Assembly polls the UDF had won 47 and the Congress 22 seats, but in the results that came out on Sunday the UDF tally sunk to 41 and the Congress to 21.

State Congress president Mullapally Ramachandran when asked if he would resign after taking the moral responsibility of the defeat, said, "I will definitely come back to you after going through what actually happened."

Today with the scenario looking bleak for the Congress, as already five years have passed without power and now will have to wait another five years on the sidelines, it could well be a period of test for the party right from its top leaders and grassroots workers.A media critic said that it is doubtful if the fireworks in the Congress will continue this time also, which has always washed its dirty linen in the public. "The party high command saw through that they need not bank on just one leader as the star campaigner and it was their move to draft in Oommen Chandy, the last of the Congress leaders who has a pan Kerala acceptance as the one to oversee the elections to be assisted by Ramachandran and also the Leader of Opposition Ramesh Chennithala. The campaign and the candidate selection was jointly seen by the trio," said the critic.

With all the three having a collective responsibility, it's unlikely that any one of them will be held responsible and all that remains to be seen is with Chandy holding no post, will Ramachandran and Chennithala go on their own.If that happens, then one can expect fireworks as it could well be a generation change that will happen in the Congress party, as there are a few contenders from the second line leaders eyeing posts, to take forward the party and it includes former State Minister Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan, veteran party legislators V.D. Sateeshan and P.T.Thomas.

Then it remains to be seen if they will go for young turks like P.C. Vishnunath and even Shafi Parambil, who was given a fright till the last moment by Metroman E. Sreedharan.

"If the Congress party needs to get back to its position, the need of the hour is to stop thrusting leaders from the top to all party posts, which has been happening for the past over three decades. The party should immediately go in for electing leaders through the ballot, if not then there is not going to be any hope for the party," added the critic.

So at the moment, all eyes are on the upcoming meeting of the Congress and also the UDF and it remains to be seen if there will be a demand for a generation change and if it happens then it would be curtains for veterans like Chandy, Ramachandran and Chennithala.

But the silver lining for these veterans are the allies of the Congress, especially the second biggest ally -- the Indian Union Muslim League. The IUML's seasoned veterans like P.K. Kunhalikutty, M.K. Muneer may not be keen to play second fiddle to young turks in the Congress, so Chennithala might get a second life.

BJP SHOULD NOT HAVE UNDERESTIMATED MAMATA: CHANDRA BOSE

Anand Singh

- The BJP should not have "underestimated" its opponent and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee, and the party should have read the heritage, history and culture of West Bengal properly as people of the state are more inclusive, said Chandra Kumar Bose, the grand nephew of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and grandson of Sarat Chandra Bose, the elder brother of Netaji.

He also said that the BJP should have announced a chief ministerial candidate in West Bengal, besides not imposing its ideology on the people. While the counting of votes is still on, the Trinamool is poised to return to power for the third time in a row in Bengal with leads in over 200 seats, well above the magic figure of 148.

Bose, who had joined the BJP in January 2016, told IANS that the 2021 Assembly election results are good for the party as it is leading on over 80 out of the 292 seats that went to the polls. He said, "I think it is a good performance. In 2016, we had won three Assembly seats while this time we have been leading on more than 80 seats. In fact, it is a fairly good performance. And yes, we fell short of the magic figure of 148 to form the government." Bose further said that he had in fact given suggestion to the party leadership that it needs to get the 6 per cent critical vote bank. "We had in fact got 41 per cent votes in 2019 (general elections) but we fell short of the critical vote bank of Bengal and we fell short by 4 to 5 per cent. This has happened this time also as the people of Bengal are very inclusive in nature," Bose said.

He also noted that the appeasement politics of Trinamool Congress cannot be countered by appeasement of the Hindu community. "You need to have inclusive politics of reaching out to all religions in equal manner and cannot give weightage to one and less weightage to another. And there we failed to win the critical vote bank," the BJP leader said.

Bose noted that while polarisation happened in North Bengal, it did not happen in all the 292 seats. He said, "If you consider 292 seats, polarisation happened only on certain seats." Bose added that if BJP could have done inclusive politics, then it could have reached out to the 10 crore voters of Bengal. "What happened by doing vote bank politics and appeasement politics... we could not reach out to 100 per cent voters in the state," Bose said.

Citing an example, the BJP leader said that if you sit in an exam, you need to prepare for 100 per cent of the questions, but "we had prepared for 60 per cent questions and by answering 60 per cent questions one cannot top in exams".

"That is what I feel. My strategy was to reaching out to all communities like Hindu, Msulim, Sikh and others, then we would have combated the strategy of Mamata Banerjee," he said. "But we underestimated our opponent as Banerjee is a leader of the masses and of repute. We should have taken our opponent seriously," Bose said. He also said that the party leaders claiming to reach the halfway mark during few phases of polls did not work. "These comments had an adverse effect on Bengal voters because Bengali people are very sentimental and intellectual. They took offence to that," Bose said. He noted that "you cannot in the halfway stage claim that Mamata Banerjee would not be forming the government, and this was when the elections didn't even reach the halfway mark". "I think those things we should have avoided and we should have also learnt the history, heritage and culture of Bengal. It was a bad reading," the BJP leader said. Bose also said that the party should have focused more on local leaders. "We know that BJP is a national party but more focus should have been given on local leaders backed by national leaders. We have a lot of local leaders like Mukul Roy, Dilip Ghosh, Suvendu Adhikari and others. And of course local leaders should have got support from the national leadership," he said. He also said that a chief ministerial face should have been projected in West Bengal.

Backing his claims, Bose said, "Bengal is not Madhya Pradesh or Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP has a strong support base. Trinamool Congress has a strong face in the form of Mamata Banerjee."

Citing examples of strong CM faces, Bose said that against Congress Chief Minister Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the Left parties had brought Jyoti Basu.

First Basu and then Buddhadeb Bhattacharya ruled till 2011 for 34 years and then Mamata Banerjee emerged as the strong face, he said. "I had suggested this to the central leadership. But the party decided to follow its own ideology. Look, you need to do what Bengal wants. You cannot impose yourself on Bengal and ask people to vote for you," Bose said, adding that these are the things that went wrong. He also said that now the BJP is the major opposition party in the state and it will play the role of a responsible opposition. "We have several issues like the Covid menace and development of the state and we will work as a responsible opposition," the BJP leader said.

Commenting on the performance of Left parties and the Congress in the state, Bose said that both have been decimated in Bengal. He felt that Left parties have the support base at the grassroot and booth level but they were unable to reach out to the voters.

Trinamool Congress successful in consolidating Muslim votes

The Trinamool Congress which scored a landslide victory in the assembly elections was successful in consolidating the Muslim votes and that had a direct impact on the results of the election. Of the 63 Muslim dominated assembly constituencies elections were held in 61 constituencies and the Trinamool Congress won 58 of them leaving two for the BJP and one for the Sanjukata Morcha.

The bulk of the Muslim dominated seats are mostly in four districts -- Murshidabad, Malda, North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas. While Murshidabad has 16 Muslim dominated seats among the total 22 Assembly seats the rest of the three districts have 9 assembly seats each. However, elections were held in 61 of these total 63 seats because elections in two districts - Samserganj and Jangipur - were deferred because of the death of candidates. Among the rest of the 61 seats the Trinamool Congress managed to get 58 seats.Interestingly, among these 58 seats the Trinamool Congress managed to win 30 seats with a margin of 40,000 or more votes. Candidates like SK Jiyauddin at Sujapur in Malda district, Monirul Islam in Farakka, Idris Ali in Bhagabangola - both in Murshidabad - managed to win with a margin of more than 50,000 votes having a vote shore above 50 percent of the total votes. The BJP managed to get only one seat in North Dinajpur and another in Murshidabad district while the Indian Secular Front -- an alliance partner of the Sanjukata Morcha -- managed the single seat in Bhangar in South 24 Parganas district.With the Hindu votes expected to polarise in favour of the BJP, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee feared that if Muslim votes don't come to the Trinamool it might lead to her defeat. That was evident in her speeches where she appealed to the electorate not to allow the person who is visiting Bengal from Hyderabad, as he received money from the BJP, to contest the Assembly elections.

G7 MINISTERS TO MEET FOR 1ST TIME IN 2 YRS

- Ministers from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US are due to meet British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, reports dpa news agency.

London | Agencies

Ministers from the G7 countries will meet in person for the first time in two years on Monday in London, where they will discuss the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, a post-Brexit trade deal, Iran's nuclear programme and China.

Ministers from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US are due to meet British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, reports dpa news agency.

Members of the European Union will also attend, and representatives from Australia, India, South Korea, South Africa and the chairman of the Association of South-East Asian Nations have been invited as guests.

Raab is expected to meet one-on-one with Japanese Foreign Minister ToshimitsuMotegi at lunchtime, and with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken later on in the afternoon.

Ahead of the meetings, the UK Foreign Office said the ministers will also discuss plans to boost girls' education and women's employment in recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

IRAN DENIES TALKS ABOUT RELEASING PRISONERS

Tehran | Agencies

The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Monday dismissed a report that Tehran is preparing to free five prisoners in exchange for access to bank accounts that have long been frozen due to diplomatic disputes with the UK and the US.

"As a rule, we don't confirm reports and statements by so-called informed sources," dpa news agency quoted Ministry spokesperson SaeidKhatibzadeh as saying.

The comments were prompted by a report by Lebanese broadcaster Al-Mayadeen, which reported on Sunday that Iran is poised to free five people, all with dual citizenship in either the UK or the US, for access to funds that have long been frozen because of ongoing diplomatic disputes about Iran's nuclear and missile programmes.The report, which the authors said was based on information from informed sources, was cited in Iranian media several times at the weekend. Although Al-Mayadeen did not name the prisoners, it is believed that the four Americans refer to three business executives and one environmental activist incarcerated in Iran.

According to the report, their freedom would give access to 7 billion dollars currently frozen.

The fifth person is allegedly Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who also has British citizenship and was recently released after five years in detention.

But she was quickly sentenced again to another year in jail for participating in a demonstration 12 years ago.

According to the report, the UK was prepared to free up 400 million pounds out of frozen accounts in exchange for Zaghari-Ratcliffe's freedom.

Khatibzadeh said there was no link between the frozen funds and any talks about releasing prisoners.

However, he did say there are routine conversations with the US about the status of the prisoners. London and Washington have already denied the report. The two countries have routinely accused Iran of using the prisoners as leverage in an effort to regain access to the frozen funds, a charge Iran regularly denies.

US denies reports of prisoner swap with Iran

Washington | Agencies

The US State Department has rejected reports of a prisoner swap deal between Washington and Tehran.In a statement issued on Sunday, Department spokesman Ned Price said: "Reports that a prisoner swap deal has been reached are not true. As we have said, we always raise the cases of Americans detained or missing in Iran.

"We will not stop until we are able to reunite them with their families."

Also rejecting the reports, White House chief of staff Ron Klain told CBS News on Sunday that "there is no agreement to release these four Americans", The Hill news website reported.

"We are working very hard to get them released. We raise this with Iran and our interlocutors all the time. But so far there's no agreement to bring these four Americans home," Klain added.

The last prisoner swap between the two countries took place in December 2019. Xiyue Wang, a US scholar who had been in Iranian custody since August 2016, and Iranian scholar Massoud Soleimani held by the US for more than one year, were released.

Wang was sentenced in 2017 to 10 years in prison after being found guilty of being "an infiltrating American agent".

Soleimani was reportedly arrested in Chicago last year and was charged with violating US trade sanctions against Iran. Iran and the US have had an increasingly strained relationship in recent years and share no diplomatic links.

Diplomatic missions to Myanmar underscore need for press freedom

- More than 80 journalists have been detained since a February 1 coup by the military, more than half of whom remain in custody, reports dpa news agency.

Nay Pyi Taw | Agencies

Diplomatic missions in Myanmar used the occasion of World Press Freedom Day on Monday to call attention to the country's continued detainment of journalists and restrictions on local media.

"Today, no major independent printed media is operating in Myanmar, and internet shutdowns continue to be used to control news coverage, communications and access to information," said the missions.

More than 80 journalists have been detained since a February 1 coup by the military, more than half of whom remain in custody, reports dpa news agency.

Media companies have also been targeted through raids and having their licences revoked. In the joint statement, signed by countries including Germany, the US, Australia and the Czech Republic, the military leaders of Myanmar were called on to release media workers, roll back internet restrictions and establish the freedom to access information.

"It is unacceptable that the journalists who work for access to information have to be arrested and detained in prison," HmueEainZaw, a journalist from Myanmar, told dpa.

CHINA ACTING MORE AGGRESSIVELY, SAYS BLINKEN

An increasingly confident China is acting "more aggressively abroad", US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a televised interview. "What we've witnessed over the last several years is China acting more repressively at home and more aggressively abroad. That is a fact," dpa news agency quoted Blinken as saying in a CBS News interview broadcasted on Sunday.Asked what he considered Beijing's long-term goal, Blinken said: "I think that over time China believes that it can be and should be and will be the dominant country in the world."When queried about a potential military confrontation with China, the Secretary of State replied: "I think it's profoundly against the interests of both China and the US to get to that point or even to head in that direction."The top US diplomat stressed "Our purpose is not to contain China, to hold it back, to keep it down"."It is to uphold this rules-based order that China is posing a challenge to. Anyone who poses a challenge to that order, we're going to stand up and defend it," Blinken continued. Concern has been growing over China's increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region, its growing tensions with Taiwan and human rights issues regarding the Muslim minority Uighurs in the western region of Xinjiang.

Oversight Board to decide on Facebook's Trump ban on May 5

- The board, constituted by Facebook with 20 members from across the world last year, last month said it is reviewing more than 9,000 responses before it delivers the verdict on Trump's ban on the social media giant.

Washington | Agencies

The independent Oversight Board on Monday said it will announce its decision on May 5 on the case concerning former US President Trump, who was banned on Facebook following the Capitol attack on January 6.

On January 21, the Oversight Board accepted a case referral from Facebook to examine its decision to indefinitely suspend Trump's access to post content on Facebook and Instagram, as well as provide policy recommendations on suspensions when the user is a political leader. The board, constituted by Facebook with 20 members from across the world last year, last month said it is reviewing more than 9,000 responses before it delivers the verdict on Trump's ban on the social media giant. "We extended the public comments deadline for this case, receiving 9,000+ responses. The Board's commitment to carefully reviewing all comments has extended the case timeline, in line with the

Board's bylaws," the Board had said in a tweet. Facebook banned Trump from its platforms after the Capitol Hill attack on January 6.

Company CEO Mark Zuckerberg said that "the risks of allowing President Trump to continue to use our service during this period are simply too great".Trump is still banned from using Facebook and its other platforms.So far, the Board has received over 300,000 user appeals and thousands of public comments.

NZ-China differences becoming harder to reconcile: PM

Washington | Agencies

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Monday that as Chinas role in the world grows, the differences between Beijing and Wellington are becoming "harder to reconcile".

In a keynote speech to the China Business Summit in Auckland, Ardern said New Zealand's relationship with China was one of the country's most significant, reports dpa news agency.However, given the two countries' different histories, world views and political and legal systems, they were going to "take different perspectives on some important issues", Ardern said."We need to acknowledge that there are some things on which China and New Zealand do not, cannot, and will not agree," she said."This need not derail our relationship, it is simply a reality."In the past year, issues had been raised with China both in private and in public, Ardern said. At other times, New Zealand had chosen to partner with other countries that shared its views and values and "sometimes we spoke out alone," Ardern added.

"We will continue to promote the things that we believe in, and support the rules-based system that underpins our collective well-being."Maintaining contact and promoting understanding remained a "crucial foundation of our relationship" she said.

"The pandemic continues around the world, but we have seen that this does not stop us from working, trading, and talking together."

China is New Zealand's largest trading partner, with two-way trade exceeding NZ$33 billion.

IRANIAN FM SORRY FOR CRITICAL COMMENTS ON LEAKED AUDIO

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has apologised for critical remarks he was heard saying about the country's political system in a leaked audio recording.

Tehran | Agencies

I would like to apologise to everyone," dpanws agency quoted Zarif, one of Iran's most high-profile figures and who has been Foreign Minister since 2013, as saying in a social media post on Sunday.

Zarif said he regretted comments he made in which he complained about the interference of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a branch of the armed forces, in diplomatic affairs.The remarks came in an interview conducted by one of President Hassan Rouhani's advisers.

The audio tape was allegedly stolen by "inner circles" and then published by Persian-language news outlets abroad.

Later on Sunday, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei criticized Zarif for his comments.

"We have heard statements in recent days that were very regrettable," Khamenei said in a televised speech.

He said the remarks resembled US criticism of the IRGC.

"If someone wants to run for the presidency, they must follow the Iranian Constitution and its Islamic principles, otherwise he is not suitable for the post," Khamenei said.

Zarif is considered a potential candidate in next month's presidential election.

The scandal has dominated the front pages of Iranian newspapers for days as it seemed to suggest a rift among the country's leadership ahead of the vote.

Rouhani, who cannot run for re-election, said the leak was a tactic by hardliners to help them win over voters as well as to hinder ongoing nuclear negotiations.

"Why are certain things happening just when we are on the verge of success in the nuclear negotiations in Vienna?" the President queried.Talks continue in Vienna to revive a deal aimed at softening Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The US left the framework under former US President Donald Trump but is working to rejoin and needs Iran to agree.

According to Rouhani, the hardliners want to sabotage the nuclear negotiations and thus preserve their chances before the presidential election.

For his part, Zarif said he had not given a "classic interview" but a "theoretical exchange of views" about strategy with a member of the presidential office.

Myanmar's Kachin rebels shoot down military helicopter

Kolkata | Agencies

The rebels of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) shot down a Myanmar military helicopter gunship when it was attacking their base on Monday. This is the first time a rebel group in the country has brought down a military helicopter after the Tatmadaw (military) started offensives against the country's multiple ethnic rebel armies in late April.

KIA's "foreign liaison unit" located somewhere near India's Arunachal Pradesh state informed IANS that the helicopter was brought down by rebel anti-aircraft fire at Momauk in Kachin state at 10.20 a.m. local Myanmar time on Monday.

The unit's 'chief liaison officer' Naw Bu said the direct hit on the helicopter scared away two Burmese air force jets which were strafing the KIA base in the vicinity.

He said that helicopter crashed near Konglaw village after getting hit by anti-aircraft fire in its tail rotor.Tatmadaw's Burmese troops and KIA rebel fighters have twice clashed near Momauk since April 11.

On April 29, the KIA launched an artillery attack on Bhamo airport which these military helicopters use for raiding rebel positions.

The fighting in Momauk is near the KIA's base at Alaw Bum on a hill overlooking Myanmar's border with China. The hill overlooks the strategic approach to the KIA base which the Tatmadaw is trying to capture. Naw Bu told IANS the KIA will 'fight like hell' to prevent the capture of the Alaw Bum base because its fall to the Tatmadaw would help it dominate a huge swathe of territory between Bhamo and Myitkyina, administrative capital of the Kachin state.

KIA seized this base from the Myanmar military Tatmadaw on March 25.

A total of 7000 ethnic Kachins have been displaced due to the ongoing fighting in the Momauk area.Clashes between the Tatmadaw and KIA started in mid-March after the KIA launched a sneak attack on a military camp near Sai Zin village in Mohnyin district of Kachin state.

Since then, every KIA raid on a Burmese military camp has provoked retaliatory air strikes by the Tatmadaw.

The Tatmadaw has used the helicopters in gunship role to strafe KIA camps and also land troops for retaliatory attacks. Two KIA camps were subjected to sudden attacks using heli-borne troops in northern Shan state's Kutkai township during the last one month. Tensions have been high between the army and the ethnic armed groups since the military seized power in a coup on February 1. Since the coup, the Myanmar army has also clashed with the Karen National Union and the Restoration Council of Shan State, both signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with Aung Saan Suu Kyi's NLD government that was unseated by the Feb 1 coup.

On February 20 this year, weeks after the military takeover, all 10 armed groups that have signed the NCA announced that they would be putting on hold political meetings for negotiations with the junta.

The announcement also said that the groups support the Civil Disobedience Movement and other forms of public resistance to the coup and would find ways to support them. Meanwhile, the ruling military council has withdrawn its designation of the Arakan Army as a terrorist organization after months of relative peace in Rakhine state.

Until the two sides entered into a temporary ceasefire last November, they were engaged in some of the worst fighting seen in the country in recent years.

The military junta is trying to placate some ethnic rebel groups even as they attack those sheltering and training ethnic Bamar rebels who have fled Myanmar's cities to raise armed groups after the brutal military suppression has led to nearly 800 deaths so far.

COVID HITS IPL IN DELHI, AHMEDABAD, GAMES IN DOUBT

- Delhi and Ahmedabad, among the IPL venues, are in tight grip of the raging pandemic, with hundreds of people dying of the virus and thousands struggling in and outside hospitals for oxygen and medical aid. But the BCCI has so far insisted that the IPL would go on.

Team Absolute | Ahmedabad

A serious doubt about continuation of the Indian Premier League (IPL) cropped up on Monday when two Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) tested positive for Covid-19, resulting in the postponement of the KKR-Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) match here while similar news emerged from the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) camp and Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium.

A couple of CSK franchise members and three members of the ground staff at the Arun Jaitley Stadium have tested positive.

Delhi is scheduled to host successive matches on May 4 (SunRisers Hyderabad-Mumbai Indians) and May 5 (Rajasthan Royals-CSK), but these two matches -- and indeed the rest of the IPL -- are now in grave doubt of carrying on.

Incidentally, the 60-match IPL reached its halfway mark on Monday, with the 30th match scheduled, between KKR and RCB, being postponed.

Although the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) confirmed the positive results of KKR's Varun Chakaravarthy and Sandeep Warrier, it did not specify when and where the rescheduled KKR-RCB would be played.

The KKR players, now in Delhi for their Tuesday's match, were locked up in their rooms and didn't go for practice on Monday, following the reports of positive tests from their camp. If their tests till Thursday (May 6) return negative results, they will be allowed to train on May 6 and 7. They will then be available for the May 8 match, provided that game takes place at all.

> At the Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium, everybody seemed on tenterhooks on Monday, the day the Delhi government sought Indian Army help to meet the Covid situation that is virtually got out of its hands. Three members of the ground staff in Delhi have tested positive. Also a couple of members of CSK, which is to play its matches at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, are said to have tested positive," a source said.

The BCCI said that the medical team is also "determining the close and casual contacts of the two positive cases during the 48 hours prior to collection of the sample that returned the positive test results".

While there was official confirmation on KKR players testing positive and postponement of Monday night's match, there was none on the Delhi cases. Earlier on Monday, the BCCI admitted that the KKR camp has reported positive tests.

Kiwis replace England as top-ranked ODI side; India third

Dubai | Agencies

New Zealand have replaced reigning world champions England as the No. 1- ranked side in the One-day International (ODI) rankings.

However, England consolidated their position at the top of the T20I table after the annual update carried out on Monday.

New Zealand, who defeated Bangladesh 3-0 in their only ODI series during the past year, have moved up two slots in the MRF Tyres ICC Men's ODI Team Rankings after gaining three rating points to reach an aggregate of 121. Australia are second with 118 points, while India and England are on 115, the former ahead on decimal points.

England's slide to fourth comes in the second annual update since they won the ICC World Cup at Lord's in 2019. In the past 12 months, they have suffered 2-1 series losses to Australia and India, as well as an ODI defeat to Ireland.

The latest update, that rates all matches played since May 2020 at 100 per cent and those of the previous two years at 50 per cent, sees Australia move up two places from fourth to second and India drop one place to third.

The West Indies have overtaken Sri Lanka to ninth position.

England remain the top-ranked side in the ICC Men's T20I Team Rankings, extending their lead over India to five points. During this period, they drew a three-match series against Pakistan 1-1, defeated Australia 2-1 and South Africa 3-0 before losing an away series to India 2-3. New Zealand have also gained in the annual T20I update, moving up from fifth to third after series wins over the West Indies, Pakistan, Australia and Bangladesh. Australia have moved the other way, down from third to fifth.

DHAWAN RETURNS TO TOP OF ORANGE CAP TABLE

Team Absolute | Ahmedabad

Shikhar Dhawan returned to the top of the Orange Cap table after his unbeaten knock of 69 in Delhi Capitals' (DC) seven-wicket win over Punjab Kings (PBKS) in the Indian Premier League (IPL). Dhawan anchored a chase of a target of 167, which DC managed to get with as many as 14 balls to spare, thus helping him overtake PBKS captain KL Rahul, who did not play Sunday's match. Rahul has been admitted to a hospital with acute appendicitis and will need surgery. While PBKS are yet to say how long it will take for their captain to return, it could mean he will be absent in matches in the immediate future, which means he could fall further in the race for the Orange Cap.

Mayank Agarwal, who stood in as PBKS captain in place of Rahul on Sunday, is now sixth on the table with 260 runs after his unbeaten 99. Rajasthan Royals' (RR) Jos Buttler, who scored his maiden T20 ton on Sunday, rose to seventh with 254 runs for the season. In the Purple Cap standings, SunRisers Hyderabad's Rashid Khan is fifth with 10 wickets after picking one wicket in Sunday's match against RR. Harshal Patel still holds the Purple Cap with 17 wickets and could increase his tally on Monday when Royal Challengers Bangalore face Kolkata Knight Riders.

PL table: DC rise to top spot after big win over PBKS

Team Absolute | Ahmedabad

Delhi Capitals (DC) rose to the top of the Indian Premier League (IPL) table after their comprehensive win over Punjab Kings (PBKS).

DC's reign may, however, turn out to be a short one for now if third-placed Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB), who are two points behind the Capitals, end up beating Kolkata Knight Riders by a big margin on Monday. Punjab Kings (PBKS), meanwhile, are sixth on six points as they fell further away from the top three. DC have a net run rate (NRR) of +0.547, which is higher than that of RCB's -0.171 but lower than second-placed Chennai Super Kings' +1.263. PBKS, meanwhile, have an NRR of -0.368 which is lower than that of fifth-placed Rajasthan Royals (-0.190), who are also on six points. PBKS could fall to seventh if Kolkata Knight Riders, who are on four points, beat RCB on Monday.

SRI LANKA CRUSH BANGLADESH, CLINCH TEST SERIES

Kandy | Agencies

Sri Lankan left-arm spin prodigy Praveen Jayawickrama again grabbed a five-wicket haul as he helped his team crush Bangladesh by 209 runs on the final day of the second Test on Monday. The first match of the two-Test series had ended in a draw.

Jayawickrama claimed 5 for 86 for a record debut match haul of 11 for 178, becoming the first bowler to take a 10-wicket haul on debut since Jason Krejza in 2008. The 22-year-old had taken six wickets for 92 runs in the first innings.

Chasing 437, Bangladesh were all out for 227, with Ramesh Mendis chipping in with 4 for 103 in a game where the hosts dominated from Day 1 with skipper Dimuth Karunaratne and Lahiru Thirimann scoring 118 and 140 runs, respectively.

It was all over in just over an hour's play on the final day when Jayawickrama trapped Abu Jayed leg- before wicket after having got rid of of Mehidy Hasan Miraz (38), who had kept the Lankans at bay for over an hour.

Jayawickrama proved virtually unplayable, having started the slide by trapping Liton Das leg-before for 17, his fifth LBW victim.

Ramesh Mendis proved to be the perfect spin partner for Jayawickrama, hastening Bangladesh's collapse by taking the wicket of Taskin Ahmed, caught by Karunaratne for 7 to add to his tally of 3 the previous day.

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 493 for 7 decl and 194 for 9 decl beat Bangladesh 251 and 227 in 71 overs (Mushfiqur Rahim 40; Jayawickrama 5/86, Mendis 4/103) by 209 runs.

INTER END JUVE DOMINANCE, WIN FIRST LEAGUE TITLE SINCE 2010

Rome | Agencies

Inter Milan claimed their 19th Italian Serie A title after a 1-1 draw between Atalanta and Sassuolo gifted the Nerazzurri the crown for the first time since 2010, and their first major title since winning the Coppa Italia in 2011. Inter had last claimed the Scudetto in the 2009-2010 season when coach Jose Mourinho guided the Italian giants to a historic treble. AC Milan then topped Serie A the following year, before Juventus established an era of dominance by winning nine consecutive titles.

The Nerazzurri temporarily went 13 points clear on the table after a 2-0 victory over already-relegated Crotone on Saturday. Antonio Conte's side was expected to end the title drought with four games remaining once Atalanta failed to beat Sassuolo, and the 1-1 draw was enough for Inter to secure the championship.

The newly-crowned champions also urged the fans to "celebrate responsibly". While the Scudetto has been secured, the top-four race is still wide open as Juventus fight for a Champions League spot.

Atalanta, Juventus and AC Milan rank second to fourth, all with 69 points, while fifth-placed Napoli with 67 points also have Champions League aspirations after a 1-1 draw with Cagliari on Sunday. In Sunday's other fixtures, Lazio edged Genoa 4-3, Sampdoria conquered Roma 2-0, and Bologna shared the spoils with Fiorentina 3-3.

Former Sri Lanka skipper Thisara Perera calls it a day

Colombo | Agencies

Former Sri Lanka ODI and T20 skipper Thisara Perera announced retirement from international cricket on Monday.

The 32-year-old all-rounder, in his letter addressed to Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC), said that he felt "the time is right" for him to step aside and pave the way for younger and more talented players to take over the reins.

Perera, who played 166 ODIs and 84 T20Is, besides competing in the Indian Premier League (IPL), said this is the right time for him to follow on his personal goals and family life.

In his letter, Perera also thanked the team captains he had served under during his international career, team-mates -- past and present -- the executive committee of Sri Lanka Cricket, management, and the SLC staff, "for the support they extended to me during my career".

"I take pride in the fact that I was able to represent Sri Lanka in seven cricket world cups and be a contributing member of the 2014 T20 World Cup win against India in Bangladesh. Easily the highlight of my life," Perera said in his letter.

Wishing the cricketer "the very best in his future commitments", SLC said, it "dearly values the immeasurable services rendered by him to the game".

IPL 2021 PREVIEW: MATCH 31

Desperate SRH seek a win against Mumbai Indians

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Time is running out for SunRisers Hyderabad (SRH), who have managed just one win in the first half of the Indian Premier League. They face Mumbai Indians (MI) here at the Arun Jaitley Stadium on Tuesday.

After seven matches, they have two points and are placed at the bottom of the points table.

While nothing seems to be going right for the Hyderabad franchise, MI seem to have overcome inconsistency in the initial phase of the tournament they played in Chennai and taken to the Ferozeshah Kotla pitch as duck to water.

Their batsmen, especially power-hitters like Kieron Pollard, are back among big runs. Their openers Quinton de Kock and skipper Rohit Sharma too are looking fluent. They start favourites against SRH who are facing problems on more than one front. SRH witnessed a change in captaincy ahead of the sixth game on Sunday. More surprisingly their regular skipper and opener David Warner wasn't just stripped of the leadership role but also dropped from the playing eleven.

Under Kane Williamson, their bowling came a cropper on a good batting surface against Jos Buttler, who hammered a big century.

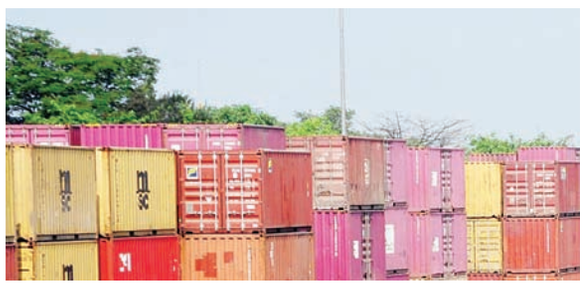
MI will present an even bigger challenge. They may decide to recall Jason Holder in place of Afghan spin bowling all-rounder Mohammed Nabi, considering that their pace bowling looks a bit shaky. Nabi was picked in place of Warner and although he managed a few lusty blows, he was expensive in the only over he bowled. MI's bowling too will be a challenge for the SRH batting that has plenty of holes in the middle-order.

CA PLEDGES $50,000 TOWARDS INDIA'S FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

Sydney: Cricket Australia (CA) on Monday said that it has pledged an "initial donation" of $50,000 towards India's fight against the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. CA also said that it is partnering with the Australian Cricketers' Association (ACA) UNICEF Australia to raise more funds. "Australian Cricket has been deeply saddened by the devastation caused by this second coronavirus wave to hit India, a country with which Australians share a strong friendship and connection," it said in a statement. "Cricket Australia will make an initial donation of $50,000 and encourage Australians everywhere to give generously at this critical time in India's Covid-19 response," it further said.

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

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



Team Absolute | New Delhi

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

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

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

Trade deficit in April 2021 was $15.24 billion, which increased by 120.34 per cent over trade deficit of $6.92 billion in April 2020.

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

The value of non-petroleum and non-gems and jewellery exports in April 2021 was $23.51 billion, registering a growth of 164.28 per cent over $8.90 billion in April 2020.

Oil imports in April were at $10.8 billion, a growth of 132.26 per cent compared to $4.65 billion in April 2020.

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

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

Govt gives ad hoc IGST exemption on imports of Covid relief material

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In view of the coronavirus pandemic, the Central Government has exempted IGST or integrated GST on import of such goods received free of cost for free distribution of Covid relief.

The exemption is ad hoc and applicable for all specified imports made till June 30, 2021.

The exemption will also cover goods already imported but lying uncleared on the date of its issuance of exemption which starts from Monday.

Government had earlier issued notification for exempting Basic Customs Duty and/or Health cess imports of a number of Covid-19 related relief materials, for a limited period. These included Remdesivir injection/ API and Beta Cyclodextrin (SBEBCD), Inflammatory diagnostic (markers) kits, imports of which have been exempted from customs till October 31, 2021. Also, imports of Medical grade Oxygen, oxygen therapy related equipment such as oxygen concentrators, cryogenic transport tanks, etc., and Covid-19 vaccines have been exempted till July 31, 2021.

This exemption (from IGST) shall thus enable import of the Covid relief supply imported free of cost for free distribution without payment of IGST (up to June 30, 2021). As customs duty is already exempt, these imports will not attract any customs duty or IGST, a finance ministry statement said.

The Central government had received a number of representations from charitable organisations, corporate entities, and other Associations/entities outside India seeking exemption from IGST on the import of Covid-19 relief material (already exempted from customs duty), donated/received free of cost from outside India for free distribution. The IGST exemption, however, is conditional. Centre had decided that the state governments shall appoint a nodal authority for the purpose of this exemption. Such authority will then authorise any entity, relief agency or statutory body, for free distribution of such Covid-relief material. The finance ministry statement said that goods can be imported free of cost by a state government or any entity/ relief agency/ statutory body, authorised in this regard for free distribution anywhere in India. The importer shall before clearance of goods from Customs produce a certificate from the said nodal authorities that goods are meant for free distribution for Covid relief.

Also, after imports, the importer shall produce, to the Deputy or Assistant Commissioner of Customs at the port within a period of six months from the date of importation or within such extended period not exceeding nine months, a simple statement containing details of goods imported and distributed free of cost. This statement shall be certified by the said nodal authority of the state government.

India's manufacturing output inches up as demand rises: PMI

- Consequently, the headline seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) inched up from 55.4 (index reading) in March to 55.5 in April.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Demand growth pushed India's manufacturing sector output higher in April, showed IHS Markit India Manufacturing PMI report on Monday.

Accordingly, the report said economic conditions in India's manufacturing sector remained favourable in April, as companies scaled up production in line with a further improvement in demand.Consequently, the headline seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) inched up from 55.4 (index reading) in March to 55.5 in April. The PMI ranges between 0 and 100, with a reading above 50 indicating an overall increase compared to the previous month.

Besides, the report said consumer goods sector was the strongest-performing category, followed by capital goods and then intermediate goods."While output and sales increased at the slowest rates since last August due to an intensification of the Covid-19 crisis, there was a faster upturn in international orders," the report said.

"Moreover, quantities of purchases expanded at one of the strongest rates seen for over nine years as firms sought to boost their inventories." Furthermore, survey participants signalled a steep increase in input costs, the quickest since July 2014, and upward revisions to selling prices.

Petrol, diesel prices revision maintain pause as OMCs weigh options

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Fuel prices in the country remained unchanged on Monday as oil marketing companies decided to wait and watch the situation prevailing in the global oil markets for some more time before restarting daily revision of petrol and diesel prices.

Sources indicated that price revisions may begin anytime now as oil companies have already increased ATF prices by 6.7 per cent beginning this month. However, whether prices of petrol and diesel would move up or down then would depend on actuals average global price in the last fortnight of March.

OMCs benchmark retail fuel prices to a 15-day rolling average of global refined products' prices and dollar exchange rate.

With no price change on Monday, pump prices of petrol and diesel remained at Rs 90.40 a litre and Rs 80.73 a litre respective in Delhi. This is 18 consecutive day when fuel prices have not been revised.

The price of the two auto fuels had fallen by 16 paisa and 14 paisa per litre respectively on April 15 after a 15 day break when OMCs kept its prices static. Thereafter revision of fuel prices have been halted.

Across the country as well the petrol and diesel price remained unchanged on Monday but its retail levels varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states.

Premium petrol, however, continues to remain over Rs 100 a litre in Mumbai and several other cities across the country.

The OMCs went on price cut for the first time this year on two consecutive days - March 24 and 25 after keeping oil prices steady for past 24 days. It again reduced the price on March 30. Thereafter, fuel prices have remained unchanged for past 15 days before falling again on April 15. In all petrol prices have fallen by 77 paisa per litre while diesel by 74 paisa per litre in 2021 so far.

Earlier, petrol and diesel prices increased 26 times in 2021 with the two auto fuels increasing by Rs 7.46 and Rs 7.60 per litre respectively so far this year.With global crude prices at over $ 66 a barrel mark, OMCs may have revise fuel prices upwards again if there is any further firming up.

Covid crisis, rollback of stamp duty cut impact Mumbai home sales

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The second wave of Covid-19 and the rollback of the stamp duty cut in Maharashtra impacted the housing sales in April, showed a report by Knight Frank India.

The report noted that Mumbai recorded upwards of 10,000 residential property registrations in April 2021. However, upon delving deeper into the property registrations data, it was found that, only 7 per cent of these registrations were from new residential sales concluded in the same month, while 93 per cent of the registrations were from properties transacted between December 2020 to March 2021 for which applicable stamp duties were paid during the lower rate window, it said.

The Maharashtra state government in December 2020 had given a leeway of four months to homebuyers to register a property after the payment of stamp duty in order to prevent crowding of registration offices. This ensured that homebuyers who had purchased residences and paid stamp duty on or before March 31, 2021, have maximum window of four months till July 31, 2021 from the respective date of payment of stamp duty for registering their

apartment.There had been a very sharp pick up in property registrations in Mumbai during September 2020-March 2021 during the seven months of concessional stamp duty window, hence, when the state government reverted to the previous stamp duty regime, sales momentum was expected to moderate post 31st March 2021. But the fall in momentum has been exacerbated by the second wave of COVID-19and the ensuing lockdown. The state government's collections from stamp duty registered a modest 12 per cent increase in April 2021 against that in April 2019, despite a rise of 71 per cent in units registered in the same comparable period. This was because 93 per cent of registrations in April 2021, were for apartments that were transacted in the preceding four months paying stamp duty rates of 2 per cent and 3 per cent only but registered now. The state government revenues from property registrations during the seven months of lower stamp duty window (September 2020 till March 2021) were 66 per cent higher than those collected during the preceding 8 months of 2020 (January 2020 till August 2020), indicating that reduction in stamp duty rates had been compensated by a sharp rise in sales velocity, thereby leading to higher revenue generation for the government. Shishir Baijal, Chairman & Managing Director, Knight Frank India, "The residential real estate sector had shown a healthy bounce back in the last few months backed by reduced stamp duty ,contributing greatly to the state's exchequers. The demand stimulus provided by the state helped the sector inch back providing employment and economic stability." This thereby proved that the stamp duty sop was a master stroke that kept the sector and indeed the state economy buoyant during the country's prolonged fight against the pandemic, he said.

WinZO gives complete exit to Hike through a $12MM share buyback

WinZO, has given a complete exit to its early investor Hike with four-fold returns on their investment in May 2019.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

This comes after the Series B funded gaming start-up raised additional $13 million capital from its existing investors- Stephan Pagliuca, Makers Fund, and Courtside Venture. It is noteworthy that these investors had led the $18 Million Series B fund raise for WinZO in September 2020, taking the total fund raise tally for the three-year-old startup to $38MM.

This exit transaction, which has received a nod from the Ministry of corporate affairs (MCA), saw WinZO buy back Hike's share for $12 million, making it one of the largest buy back transactions by an early-stage start-up in the Indian start-up ecosystem. Hike had earlier participated in the $5 Million Series-A funding in WinZO back in 2019 and has received 4X returns within a span of 18 months. Earlier

Paavan Nanda, the Co-Founder of WinZO said, "That's correct. Hike's been given a complete exit from WinZO. As Founders, we are super chuffed and humbled to have a Board that is extremely bullish, and completely aligned with the audacious goals we have set for ourselves. They had immensely supported the Company through the process."

WinZO which is a pioneer in the fast-growing social gaming industry in India saw unprecedented growth over the last one year during the ongoing COVID pandemic. It is widely regarded for its innovative models to empower its stakeholders through democratizing entrepreneurship among the game developers, content creators and content translators. It has also announced initiatives to groom the aspiring content creators through structured training programs.

Neuberg Diagnostics launches NCGM, its first Laboratory in the USA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Neuberg Diagnostics, a global laboratory testing group, announced the start of its clinical laboratory operations in North Carolina in the United States of America (USA). The laboratory in North Carolina, known as NCGM, Inc. (Neuberg Centre for Genomic Medicine), will focus on genomic and molecular testing based on new generation sequencing techniques. It also runs an extensive network of labs in India, South Africa, and the UAE as well.

NCGM has introduced COVID-19 molecular testing to detect active SARS CoV-2 virus infections that is of immediate public health priority in North America, along with genome scale testing, such as Exome Sequencing, which is applicable across a variety of Rare Genetic Disease Testing (Inherited Diseases) from Newborn Screening to Oncology to Pediatric Care Setting. Dr. GSK Velu, Chairman & Managing Director of Neuberg Diagnostics, said, "NCGM, USA will act as the laboratory and hub, aiding our operations in the North America. Through leveraging our collaborative efforts across our organization in India, South Africa, and UAE, and with our external partners, we aim to develop and provide the best-in-class affordable tests."

Dr Sandip Shah, Executive Director Neuberg Diagnostics, said "NCGM, USA Sequencing services will be supported by in-house bioinformatics team and cutting-edge technologies which has been developed inhouse, and along with reputed partners. It will also support genetic research by leveraging our own extensive infrastructure in India, South Africa, and UAE."Dr Andy Bhattacharjee, CEO, NCGM, USA, said, "The setup has comprehensive Genomic testing facility allowing large-scale clinical and research projects. With Currently we are offering Covid RT-PCR Testing Services at our NC Lab with home sample collection facilities in association with FexEx to help fight the pandemic in USA too."

CAPSI, ISIO join hands to enhance biological threat security

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Central Association of Private Security Industry (CAPSI) has signed an MoU with the UK-based International Security Industry Organisation (ISIO) to offer first-of-its-kind "Certified for Biological Threat Security" (CBTS) certification to master trainers of the private security industry to enhance biological threat security in view of Covid-19 pandemic.

During his discussions with ISIO Director General Juan Kirsten on the issue of biological threat security, CAPSI Chairman Kunwar Vikram Singh mooted the idea of equipping the private security industry with the expertise of dealing with ever emerging biological threats.

CAPSI and ISIO jointly formulated a module to train master trainers who can equip the security personnel who manage security protocols on the ground. "Any practitioner in security criminology, risk and investigation can apply to undertake the CBTS which is suitable for site managers, trainers and assessors for the COC19 Certificate of Compliance for Security Covid-19 Protocols. CBTS will ensure that manpower is equipped and layered by skill sets besides being knowledgeable on security Covid-19 protocols for their field of responsibility," said Singh. Singh also said the Covid-19 Security Compliance Certification Project is being submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs for making it mandatory for every government and private organisation to get its security teams acquire professional certification so that human assets of all establishments can be secured from any kind of biological threat. Stating that India is the first country to introduce such a programme globally, the CAPSI Chairman said: "The Covid-19 security protocols related to the biological threats are based on intensive research which fuelled the security and operational protocol guide for managing Covid-19 in March 2020. We have also released booklets for building and housing security protocols in consultation with some leading global security experts.

"These new protocols and certification will massively strengthen our preparedness in dealing with the rapidly changing Corona pandemic situation. We cannot always remain in lockdown or partial lockdown, so these new methodologies and training programmes will help in normalising our economic and business activities which have been severely hit by the pandemic." Singh said this initiative is important because it is impossible to inoculate the entire globe within weeks. In some countries, it could still take a good year to begin making an impact. "The point is that this is a mutating beast that can change shape. The security industry must have awareness of comprehending that this is an active biological threat that must be treated with the respect and addressed accordingly by using security Covid-19 protocols. This certification will help in dealing with emerging scenarios vis a vis the Corona pandemic," he added. CAPSI is a federal body which represents the interest of the entire private security industry of India, and operates through its state chapters.

'TOOFAAN' RELEASE POSTPONED DUE TO ONGOING COVID PANDEMIC

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The makers of the Farhan Akhtar-starrer "Toofan" announced on Monday via social media that the release date of the boxing drama has been postponed due to the second wave of Covid.

Farhan, who also produces the film along with partner Ritesh Sidhwani and the film's director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, posted the joint statement of the makers on his Twitter account.

"The situation in India is truly heart-breaking, and we at Excel Entertainment and ROMP Pictures send our thoughts and prayers to everyone affected by the pandemic. In light of the severity of the situation, our focus is completely on the pandemic and on supporting our employees, their families and in helping the wider community. Therefore, we have taken the decision to postpone the release of our film 'Toofaan' until the situation improves. We will issue an update regarding the new release date in due course of time," the statement read.

"Please continue to observe Covid Appropriate Behaviour. Also, please register and get vaccinated when it's your turn. On behalf of the entire team of Toofaan, we urge you to Stay Home, Stay Safe and Stay United. Jai Hind," the statement added.

The film is scheduled to premiere on Amazon Prime Video.

SOUNDARYA SHARMA: CHALLENGING TO PLAY DE-GLAM ROLE AT START OF CAREER

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Soundarya Sharma plays a girl next door on season two of the web series "Raktanchal", and says it is a challenge to essay such a de-glamorised role at the start of her career.

Based on true events, the story casts her as a simple homemaker who weaves her way into the world of politics because of the circumstances she had to face to protect her family.

"I play the character of Rolly Rai. This is a simple girl next door. It's set in the 1980s. Season one was an introduction and in season two, I take over. I play the female protagonist," she declares.

"This is about how this simple girl weaves her path into the world of politics to save her family and loved ones from getting completely destroyed. This is her journey and how she powers herself and her loved ones. She has to step into dirty politics to protect her family," Soundarya added.

About the show, she added: "It has an old charm and it takes a hard line. It's very challenging to play de-glamorous at the beginning of my career. I sat with the makers to design this look so that it looks very unconventional and not how we have seen this young 22-23 year old girl. It's inspired from true events so we can't play around too much with the character," she said.

"Since it's set in purvanchal so it has got that UP touch to it," she summed up.

SHILPA SHETTY'S NOTE TO ENCOURAGE FANS: BELIEVE IT WILL GET BETTER FROM HERE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Shilpa Shetty Kundra took to Instagram on Monday to share a motivating message for her fans.

She posted a picture that shows her meditating in the mountains, with the text: "Overthinking will destroy your happiness and your mood. It'll make everything worse than it actually is. Take a deep breath, exhale and have faith. What's meant to be, will be."

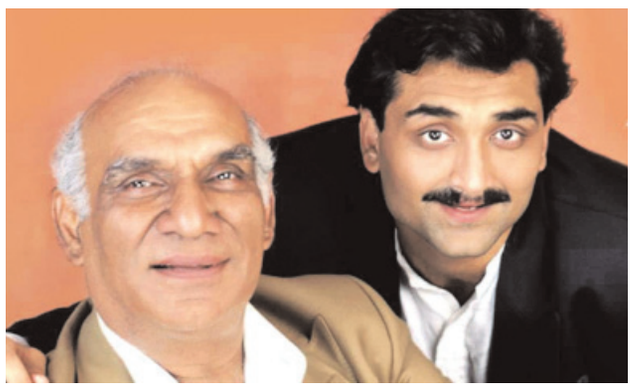
In the caption, she wrote about how we must try to help those who we can. She also spoke about the importance of believing that the situation will get better with time.

"We're all reading about the actual situation around us and it is absolutely devastating. This news plays on the mind all the time and leads the mind to very dark places. But then, there are posts and news about complete strangers helping people desperately in need of help. People who are cooking meals for COVID patients living alone, volunteers driving down to people needing medical assistance, and doctors providing information and guidance via online sessions. So reassuring! If we can do something for someone, we definitely must! But if not, don't panic excessively. Tune out for a little while, inhale deeply, and believe that it will get better from here. Live in the NOW. Together, we WILL overcome this. We will walk through this time towards a better tomorrow. Faith and hope are what we need right now," she wrote.

The actress will be seen in "Hungama 2", the sequel of 2003 film "Hungama". The film also stars Paresh Rawal, Meezaan Jaaferi and Pranitha Subhas. Shilpa will also be seen in the film "Nikamma", starring Abhimanyu Dassani and Shirley Setia.

Yash Chopra foundation comes forward to help cine workers get vaccinated

Team Absolute | Mumbai



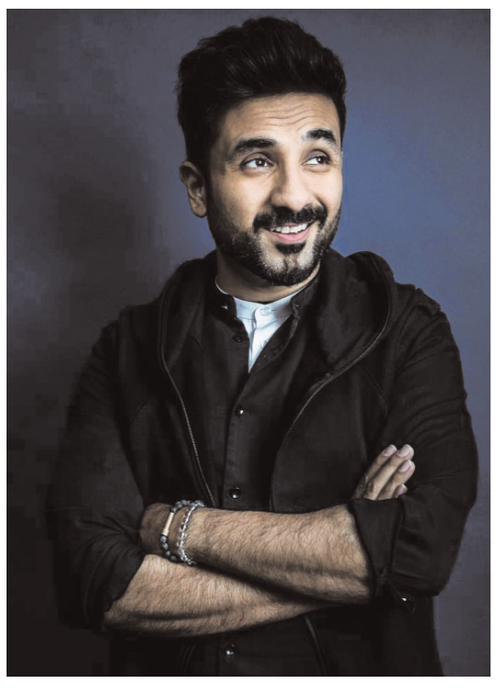
Producer Aditya Chopra comes forth to help people working in Bollywood get vaccinated. The producer write to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to vaccinate 30k cine workers.

Aditya wrote that Yash Chopra Foundation wants to take the responsibility of vaccinating members of the media and entertainment industry.

In the letter written to Thackeray, Chopra has mentioned that the foundation will bear the cost of vaccination of 30,000 cine workers with the request to process the request at the earliest. The foundation has also taken the responsibility of providing the infrastructure for the inoculation program.

Federation of Western India Cine Employees in its letter to CM has stated they will support the Yash Chopra foundation in the vaccination programme and once its members are inoculated they can go back to work without the fear of Covid 19.

VIR DAS RAISES ABOUT RS 7 LAKH FOR CHARITY



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Stand-up comic and actor Vir Das announced on Monday that he has raised about Rs 7 lakh for charity, apart from entertaining 200 doctors and nurses over the weekend. "Very happy to announce we raised about 7 lakhs for both our charities, and also made 200 doctors and nurses laugh this weekend. Thank you to everyone who bought tickets. We will make sure the money gets to those who need it. #VirDasAtHome," Vir tweeted. Last month, he had shared on the micro-blogging website that he was hosting a charity show for doctors and nurses.

Marathi film 'Photo Prem' to premiere digitally on May 7

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Marathi film "Photo Prem" will be released digitally on May 7. The trailer of the film was released on social media on Monday. The drama features Neena Kulkarni, Amita Khopkar and Sameer Dharamadhikari. The story revolves around the life of Maee, a housewife, who is worried about being forgotten by the future generations after she dies because she's doesn't look her best in old pictures of herself. It is about her journey to overcome the fear of being clicked. The film has been directed and co-written by Aditya Rathi and Gayatri Patil.

Talking about his film, Rathi says, "Photo Prem is an unusual story of a very usual scenario that everyone can relate to. It beautifully depicts the emotional and the most common human side of any person where they start thinking about how the world will remember them once they cease to exist." Neena adds, "Photo Prem has such a nuanced and thoughtful storyline and it has been nothing short of a privilege to play a lead in this film. The movie portrays one of the most innocent and purest emotions and I did everything in my capability to do justice with the character. The quintessential story of 'Maee' in Photo Prem is one which deserves to be showcased as widely as possible. It is a movie for everyone and I hope it will be showered with the same quantum of love with which we made it. Photo Prem will stream on Amazon Prime Video.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Sunny Leone

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