

# absolute india

VOL. 8, ISSUE 179, MUMBAI | THURSDAY, MAY 13, 2021 ₹5 | PAGE 12

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, BHOPAL AND NEW DELHI

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## Edible oil, LPG prices go through roof in 2 years

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The common man is hurting due to the sharp rise in prices of essential commodities like edible oil and LPG in the last three years.

In Kolkata for instance, edible oil prices have more than doubled in the last three years. Mustard oil which was Rs 90 a litre in May 2019 is now selling at

Rs 190 a litre while rice bran oil which was Rs 80 a litre is now at Rs 150 per litre.

Similarly, groundnut oil is touching Rs 200 a litre in May this year compared to Rs 156 in 2019. Soybean oil is at Rs 140 compared to Rs 95 a litre in 2019.

Sunflower oil is being sold in Kolkata at Rs 180 a litre as against Rs 102 a litre in 2019.

It is not only edible oil which is on fire. The cooking fuel, LPG is also flaring up as 14.2 kg cylinder in Kolkata is now at a whopping Rs 835 compared to Rs 496 in February of 2019.

LPG cylinder prices have been going up in the last two years. They touched Rs 499 in May 2019, Rs 620 in August 2020, Rs 720 in January 2021 and Rs 835 in May 2021.



## CENTER COULD HAVE SAVED MANY LIVES WITH DOOR-TO-DOOR VACCINATION: BOMBAY HC

"Speaking off the cuff, if we had a door-to-door vaccination programme sometime back, then so many of our senior citizens, including prominent members of society from various walks of life, who have lost their lives to Covid-19, could have been saved."

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday said to the Union government that if it had started door-to-door vaccination programme for senior citizens a few months back, then lives of many of them, including prominent persons, could have been saved.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G S Kulkarni asked the Union government why not proactively start this programme when the lives of senior citizens, who are unable to go to vaccination centres to get inoculated, are concerned. The court reiterated its earlier order of April 22 in which it asked the Union government to

"India is the biggest manufacturer of vaccines. BJP celebrated vaccine day on April 12 but did not make arrangements for vaccines and within 30 days vaccination rate was down by 82 per cent. (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi went to vaccine industries and got his picture clicked. Why did his government order the vaccines in January 2021? US and other countries ordered for vaccines with Indian government much earlier. Who will take responsibility of the same? It is impossible to fight Covid-19 without delivering the vaccines door to door."

Priyanka Gandhi, Congress Leader

relook at its decision to not initiate a door-to-door vaccination programme. "It has been three weeks and the government (Union) is yet to

inform us of its decision. The government should have taken a decision one way or the other," the court said. It directed the Union government to

**JUSTICE CHANDRACHUD TESTS COVID POSITIVE**  
New Delhi: Supreme Court judge, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud has tested positive for Covid-19, apex court sources said on Wednesday. Justice Chandrachud is heading the bench in the suo moto case titled distribution of essential supplies and services during pandemic. According to sources, Justice Chandrachud has low-grade fever. Besides the suo moto case, several other petitions connected with Covid-19, including on vaccines, were also listed for hearing

file an affidavit by May 19, when it would hear the matter further.

## INDIA REPORTS RECORD COVID DEATHS IN A DAY

**New Delhi:** India on Wednesday recorded 4,205 deaths due to Covid, highest till date with 3,48,421 fresh cases, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said. On May 8, India has recorded 4,187 deaths in 24 hours, while on May 7, India recorded its highest ever fresh cases 4,14,188. In the past 20 days India's daily Covid tally has plateaued over the three-lakh-mark and over 3,000 casualties for a fortnight. India's total tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,33,40,938 with 37,04,099 active cases and 2,54,197 deaths so far. According to the Health Ministry, a total of 3,55,338 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours, with 1,93,82,642 being cured from Covid till date.

In a scathing comment on the Election Commission and the government, the Allahabad High Court has said that they "failed to fathom the disastrous consequences" of permitting elections in a few states and the panchayat election in Uttar Pradesh.

Team Absolute | Lucknow

A single-judge bench of Justice Siddharth Verma made these observations on Monday while granting protection

## EC, govts failed to stop covid surge: Allahabad HC

account of reasons like the present pandemic of novel coronavirus can certainly be held to be a ground for grant of anticipatory bail to an accused".

In detailed observations, part of the 18-page anticipatory bail order, the court highlighted how Covid has now reached villages in Uttar Pradesh, with the recent panchayat election in the state, contributing to the surge.

"The state government is having a tough time in controlling the spread of novel Coronavirus in urban areas, and it would be very difficult to conduct the test, detect and treat the village population found suffering from the disease. The state lacks preparation and resources for the same at present," the Allahabad High Court said

## House arrest can be ordered on basis of accused's age, health, antecedents: SC



The top court said that whatever be the nature of the custody, as long as it falls within four walls of Section 167, if the requisite number of days are spent in police/judicial custody/police and judicial custody is that suffices. It also held that number of days spent by a person under house arrest can be counted as period of custody for the purpose of filing charge sheet, as required under the law.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday said legislatures can ponder over utility of house arrest in post-conviction cases as a measure for problem of overcrowding in prisons.

The bench held that a period of transit remand, wherein an accused is produced before a jurisdictional court, has to be taken into account for computing the period of custody for the purpose of filing the charge sheet.

The bench added as regards post-conviction cases, it would leave it open to the legislature to ponder over its employment. "We have indicated the problems of overcrowding in prisons and the cost to the state in maintaining-

ing prisons," it said. The bench noted that house arrests have been resorted to in India, in the context of law relating to preventive detention. "What is however relevant is that preventive detention is also a form of forced detention. House arrest is also custody and forced detention," it said.

**"We observe that under Section 167 (of the CrPC) in appropriate cases, it will be open to courts to order house arrest. As to its employment, without being exhaustive, we may indicate criteria like age, health condition and the antecedents of the accused, the nature of the crime, the need for other forms of custody and the ability to enforce the terms of the house arrest."**

## 2 Bengal BJP MPs resign as MLAs after party directive



KOLKATA | Agencies

The BJP's MLA count in West Bengal came down to 75 from 77 on Wednesday after two of its MPs, who won the Assembly polls and became MLAs, decided to continue as parliamentarians and resigned from the legislative Assembly. Cooch Behar MP Nisith Pramanik, who won

## Govt is trying to bury one's head in the sand: Rahul

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday slammed the government over its mega push for positivity to fend off criticism nationally and internationally as "burying one's head in the sand" and a betrayal of citizens.

In a tweet in Hindi, Gandhi said, "The false assurance of 'positive thinking' is a joke on those families and health workers who have lost their loved ones and are suffering a crisis of oxygen, hospitals and medicines. Burying one's head in the sand is not positive - it is a betrayal of our citizens." He also attached a news report in Hindi with the tweet.

On the same day, poll strategist Prashant Kishor also slammed the government, describing as "disgusting attempts to push 'propaganda'" in the name of



spreading positivity. "In the face of a grieving nation and tragedies unfolding all around us, the continued attempt to push falsehood and propaganda in the name of spreading positivity is disgusting! For being positive we don't have to become blind propagandist of the government," Kishor said in a tweet.

## Opposition writes to PM Stop Central Vista project, use money for vaccines

**"We have repeatedly in the past drawn your attention, independently and jointly, to the various measures that are absolutely imperative for the Central government to undertake and implement. Unfortunately, your government has either ignored or refused all these suggestions. This only compounded the situation to reach such an apocalyptic human tragedy."**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

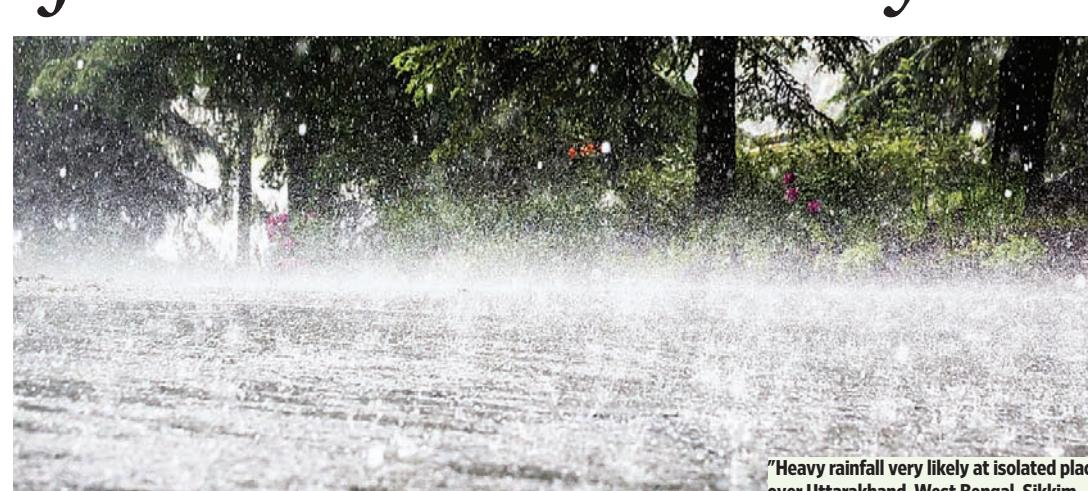
Twelve major opposition parties including four chief ministers have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding that the government should stop the Central Vista project and instead use the money to procure oxygen and vac-

## GOA BLP MLA DEMANDS HEALTH MINISTER'S RESIGNATION

Panaji: Amid the ongoing tussle in Goa between Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and Health Minister Vishwajit Rane over the death of 26 patients due to shortage of oxygen at a top government hospital, a ruling BJP MLA has demanded the latter's resignation and urged Sawant to take over the key portfolio.

Atanasio Monserrate also said that Rane had behaved "irresponsibly" as Health Minister and his request to the Bombay High Court on Wednesday to probe the death of the hospital patients between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. on Tuesday morning was tantamount to shirking of responsibility. "CM distributes the portfolio. What stops the CM from keeping that (health) portfolio with him until the crisis gets over."

## Rain, thunderstorm likely in several parts of India in next 3-4 days



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Several parts of India may witness rain and thunderstorm in next 3-4 days, the ministry of earth sciences has predicted and temperature could drop in the national capital by few notches.

Thunderstorm with lightning, hail and squall is likely at isolated places over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan and Muzaffarabad, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Telangana, said the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

Heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely at a few places over Coastal & South Interior Karnataka, isolated places in North Interior Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala, Mahe and Lakshadweep, on May 15.

Kerala, Mahe, Lakshadweep and Heavy Rainfall at isolated places over Konkan, Goa and Telangana on May 16.

**"Heavy rainfall very likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Coastal & South Interior Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Kerala, Mahe and Lakshadweep on May 13."**

The official statement



# RESIST FROM DICTATING STATE OFFICIALS, MAMATA WRITES TO GOVERNOR

Team Absolute | Kolkata

In a controversial development, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday asked Governor Jagdeep Dhankar to resist himself from 'communicating and 'dictating' the state officials surpassing the CM and her Council of Ministers.

The Chief Minister also asked the Governor to proceed 'unilaterally' to the violence affected places by 'violating the long-standing norms as evolved over several decades'.

In a strong letter to the Governor, Banerjee said, "Kindly refer to my No.91-CM/2020 dated September 26, 2020 wherein, inter alia, I had requested and specifically advised you 'to refrain from surpassing the Chief Minister and her Council of Ministers and communicating with and dictating the state officials', in excess of your power under the Constitution and directing them to attend before you."

"I find that you are steadily ignoring this advice, solemnly rendered by me to you, and have been communicating with and dictating the state officials. You have also been seeking reports from them directly. I urge you



and again request and advise you to refrain from this. I am asking my Chief Secretary to go by this norm," the Chief Minister added.

Banerjee's letter came after the Governor summoned Chief Secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay and DG Virendra to the Raj Bhawan and sought a report on the post-poll violence in the state.

He even expressed displeasure over the Home Secretary failing to apprise him on the law-and-order situation with regard to the post-poll violence. Dhankar tweeted that the Home Secretary did not forward the

reports of the state's DGP and Commissioner of Kolkata Police to him in this regard.

"Chief Secretary @MamataOfficial has been called upon to see me today before 7 PM as ACS Home @HomeBengal failed to impart a status report on law and order regarding post-poll violence," the Governor said in his tweet. Banerjee also asked the Governor not to take abrupt and unilateral decisions regarding his visit to any violence-hit place.

"The programme for the Governor's visits to places in the districts is finalised by the Secretary to

the Governor after obtaining before recommending a request to the Governor for acceptance, whether it is from a private party or a government institution. The Secretary to the Governor consults the government and the commissioner of the division and the district officer who are in charge of the proper execution of the overall programme," she wrote.

"I find from social media that you are unilaterally proceeding to the district of Cooch Behar on May 13 and, sadly, I find that to be violative of the long-standing norms as evolved over several decades. I, therefore, would expect that you will kindly follow the well-established norms of protocol, as stated above, and desist from abrupt decisions with regard to field visits," she added. However, on the same day, Dhankar wrote that he would be visiting Assam to meet the Bengali refugees stationed in the camps of Ranipgali and Srirampur.

"Governor WB Shri Jagdeep Dhankar will be visiting Ranipgali and Srirampur camps in Assam where due to post poll retrospective violence @MamataOfficial some people of WB had taken refuge for safety. Governor Dhankar will be reaching Ranipgali Assam at 9.45 am by BSF Helicopter," Dhankar tweeted.

## Unemployed doctors come forward to fight Covid in Mizoram

In a generous gesture, over 400 unemployed doctors, nursing students, laboratory technicians and pharmacists in Mizoram have voluntarily agreed to assist the government in Covid management, health officials said on Wednesday.



Aizawl | Agencies

A health official said that responding to the state government's appeal, 412 unemployed doctors, nursing students and laboratory technicians willingly engaged themselves in Covid-19 related works including sample collections, screening of patients, contact tracing, and providing care to the patients in Zoram Medical College (ZMC)

and other Covid care centres.

"The state government has been facing huge shortages of skilled medical manpower. The voluntary engagement of 412 unemployed doctors, nursing students and laboratory technicians would be a great help for the authorities in dealing with Covid management," the official said.

Of the 412, 37 are doctors and 144 are nurses, while the rest are labora-

tory technicians and pharmacists.

According to the official, around 900 doctors, nursing and para-medical students had voluntarily helped the Mizoram Health Department last year to deal with the pandemic.

A total of 8,032 positive cases have detected in the mountainous border state and on Wednesday, the active cases stood at 1,889 with 23 people succumbing to the disease.

## Vaccination big weapon in fight against Covid: Harsh Vardhan

Team Absolute | New Delhi



Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Wednesday that vaccination is a big weapon in the fight against Covid-19. Harsh Vardhan on Wednesday interacted with the health ministers and principal secretaries/additional chief secretaries of eight states/UT in the presence of Union Minister of State for Health, Ashwini Kumar Choubey.

The eight states/UT included Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Punjab, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Telangana, all depicting a rise in the number of daily cases with growing positivity rate.

At the meeting, Harsh Vardhan highlighted the trajectory of Covid in these states/UT and brought to their attention the consequent

stress on the medical infrastructure.

He stressed on the continued need to follow Covid appropriate behaviour along with renewed and stringent focus on containment measures for addressing the present surge. He also noted that stringent adherence to implementation of micro-containment zones has helped. Underlining the critical importance of the vaccination drive, Vardhan said, "Vaccination is our big weapon in the fight against Covid-19. India is the fastest country globally to reach the landmark of administering 17 crore doses in 114 days."

He pointed out that of these, 13.66 crore people have been administered the first dose, while the second dose has been given to 3.86 crore persons.

## BMC floats global bid to acquire 1 cr Covid vaccines

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a major decision, the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Wednesday issued a global tender to acquire 1 crore vaccines, an official said.

The bids were issued after Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray cleared a proposal, said BMC Commissioner I.S. Chahal.

"The BMC has issued global bid to acquire 1 crore Covid-19 vaccines to inoculate the citizens of Mumbai at the earliest possible on a massive scale in its decisive fight against the virus," he said.

Chahal added that the BMC is resolved to make all possible efforts in future also to acquire sufficient quantity of Covid-19 vaccines to vaccinate all eligible citizens of Mumbai on war footing in the next 60-90 days. Earlier on Wednesday, the Maharashtra government decided to put on hold vaccination for people in the 18-44 age group till sufficient stocks were built up.

On Tuesday, Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray met Chahal and Additional Commissioner Suresh Kakani to discuss procurement of vaccines.



## PM reviews availability and supply of oxygen, medicines

Team Absolute | New Delhi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday chaired a high-level meeting to review availability and supply of oxygen and medicines to tackle Covid. He was informed that the government is in regular touch with the manufacturers to enhance production of medicines and extend all help needed. The Prime Minister was told that the government is actively monitoring the supply of drugs being used in the management of Covid as well as mucormycosis. He was also informed about the current production and stock of APIs for each such drug and that states are being

provided medicines in good quantities.

The Prime Minister was also apprised that the production of all drugs including Remdesivir have been ramped up significantly in the last few weeks. "India has a very vibrant pharma sector and

the government's continued close coordination with them will ensure proper availability of all medicines," the Prime Minister said. He also took stock of the situation on oxygen availability and supply in the country.

ies seen floating on the river.

Officials in Buxar, Bihar, on Monday, claimed that the bodies floating in river Ganga were coming from UP. During inspection, seven bodies were spotted in river Karmnasha before its confluence in Ganga on Ghazipur-Buxar border.

## Iaf's Covid relief efforts increased three-fold in one week

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian Air Force has flown 732 sorties with a flying time of over 1,419 hours within the country and across the globe transporting Covid relief materials in the last one month.

In the past one week, IAF's flying time for Covid relief operations increased three-fold, from 500 hours to 1,419 hours, the force said.

On Wednesday morning, an IAF C-17 aircraft airlifted two cryogenic oxygen tankers from Agra to Jamnagar and two tankers from Indore to Jamnagar.

"The aircraft took off from Agra early in the morning at 1:30 am on May 12 and landed back at Agra after completing all the tasks at around 8:15 am," said the Indian Air Force.

The IAF stated that in the 98 sorties abroad flying 480 hours, it airlifted 95 oxygen containers that have a capacity of 793 MT and other relief materials like oxygen generators, oxygen concentrators etc. from foreign countries.

The aircraft flew to the UAE, Thailand, Singapore, Germany, Australia, Indonesia, Israel and the UK, among other countries.



Within Indian, the IAF aircraft have done 634 sorties with 939 hours of flying time carrying 403 empty oxygen containers with a capacity of 6856.2 MT and other equipment.

The force said that IAF was pressed into action to ensure quick airlifting of bulky oxygen containers and oxygen generation plants to augment the supply of liquid medical oxygen in the country. The acute shortage of medical oxygen had created a big crisis, leading to deaths of several Covid patients.

This prompted the IAF to start a war-like mission to airlift oxygen containers, the force said.

increased from 500 hours on May 4 to 1,400 hours as of May 12.

The IAF's C17 and IL76 transport aircraft, which are crucial for heavy lift capabilities, have been pressed into action to ensure quick airlifting of bulky oxygen containers and oxygen generation plants to augment the supply of liquid medical oxygen in the country. The acute shortage of medical oxygen had created a big crisis, leading to deaths of several Covid patients.

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## FLOATING BODIES CREMATED IN UP DISTRICTS

Ghazipur /Ballia: All the bodies recovered from the Ganga river in Ghazipur and Ballia districts were cremated and investigations have been initiated to find out where the bodies had been immersed in the river.

Ballia district Magistrate Aditi Singh said that Sub-divisional Magistrate Sadar and

Circle Officer Sadar spearheaded a search operation on reports of decayed bodies piling under Ballia-Buxar bridge in the Ganga under Narahi police station area.

The official, however, did not reveal the exact number of bodies found. The bodies were found floating on the river on Monday evening and

officials found decayed dead bodies in large numbers near Ujjayi and Bharaul under Narahi police station of Ballia.

Joint search drives were conducted by officials of Ballia and Ghazipur districts in the Ganga and its tributaries, including Karmnasha before its confluence in Ganga on Ghazipur-Buxar border.

## Arrest Pappu Yadav to divert attention from govt's failures: RJD

Team Absolute | Patna



A day after Jan Adhikar Party chief Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav was put behind bars, allegedly in a three-decade-old case, the Rashtra Janata Dal (RJD) claimed that the BJP-JDU combined government had arrested him to divert attention from its failure in handling the Coronavirus pandemic.

"The warrant of Pappu Yadav was issued one and half years ago. As per the RTI filed by a RJD leader, the Bihar government mentioned that he is a fugitive.

RJD submitted the details before the Madhepura administration. Now, we want to know why the Nitish Kumar government allowed him to travel in helicopters during the Bihar assembly election 2020. The BJP-JDU allowed him to roam freely so that he could cut the votes of Mahagathbandhan, Chandrashekher, the RJD MLA of Madhepura, alleged on Wednesday.

## Nagaland goes for total lockdown, more curbs in other NE states

Team Absolute | Guwahati/ Kohima/ Agartala

The Nagaland government has clamped total lockdown across the state for eight days while Assam and the other six northeastern states extended the timings of curfew and imposed other restrictions to curb the alarming spread of Covid, officials said on Wednesday.

Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh have shown continued increasing trend in daily new Covid cases.

In Kohima, health officials said that the High-Powered Committee on Covid-19 decided to impose a state-wide total lockdown starting from 6 p.m. on Friday till May 21.



Officials in Guwahati said that in the past one week (May 5-May 11), 5,215 new Covid cases were reported against 3,466 cases in the previous week (April 28-May 4) while 2,333 fresh cases reported in the earlier week (April 21-April 27).

The Assam government on Wednesday issued new standard

operating procedures (SOPs) with effect from Thursday. According to the SOPs, the curfew timings across Assam have been advanced to 2 p.m. from the earlier 6 p.m.

The fresh SOPs, issued by Chief Secretary Jishnu Barua, said that all shops and commercial establishments would be shut down at 1 p.m. on all days instead of 2 p.m., weekly markets would not be allowed for 15 days, all educational institutions including schools, colleges and Universities must provide quality virtual options, and no physical classes would be allowed for 15 days, and all government and non-government offices would be closed for 15 days with effect from Thursday.

After imposing night curfew and other restrictions, the Tripura govern-

ment has declared three containment zones within the Agartala Municipal Corporation area.

The Manipur government has imposed total curfew in seven of the 16 districts till May 17. The seven include Imphal West and Imphal East districts. In the remaining districts, night curfew would be in effect from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m.

The Meghalaya government extended the lockdown in East Khasi Hills district, where Shillong is located.

The Mizoram government announced complete lockdown till 4 a.m. of May 17 while Sikkim imposed lockdown-like restrictions till May 16. Arunachal Pradesh has imposed night curfew -- from 6.30 pm to 5 am - till May 31.



# PROBE ORDERED IN 'MEGA-CORRUPTION' IN REMDESIVIR SUPPLIES: CVC

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Nearly a month after a Maharashtra activist alleged a massive scam in the supplies and availability of key anti-viral drug Remdesivir injections, the Chief Vigilance Commissioner has finally ordered a probe.

Taking cognizance of a petition by Barrister Vinod Tiwari, the CVC has ordered the Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO) of Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilisers to investigate the issue in detail.

In a communication to Tiwari dated May 11, the CVC has said that "the complaint has been duly examined by the Commission and having regards to the nature of the issues raised therein", it has been sent to the CVO of the ministry for a probe.

The development comes nearly a month after Tiwari's plea to the Centre on April 13 alleging a rampant corruption scam involving many people and the pharmaceutical sector to sell Remdesivir at exorbitant prices by creating an "artificial scarcity" in the past few months, as first highlighted by IANS (April 16-17). In his petition to the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), a statutory authority under the Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO), Tiwari had demanded a high-level probe into the "artificial" scarcity, hoarding, blackmarketing and misuse of the drug which could run into a racket of over Rs 25,000 crore under the nose of the



NPPA, in the past ten months since the drug was launched after the pandemic was declared.

Lakhs of Covid-19 patients had been systematically fleeced as the Centre failed to bring Remdesivir under the DPCO - the motives for which are not clear - and subsequent data indicates the scam could be over Rs 1 lakh crore - bigger than the 2G, Coalgate or other similar scandals - and all those who exploited the people in this pandemic

must be booked criminally," Tiwari contended.

Incidentally, rattled by the plea, the Centre post-haste brought the drug under the DPCO and slashed the MRP of Remdesivir by around 60 per cent on April 17, though Tiwari feels it can be reduced even further since the pharma companies and other officials "have already profited massively from the tragedy of the Covid patients and their families".

Incidentally, Maharashtra was the first

state to make efforts to bring Remdesivir under the ambit of the DPCO, but its efforts were allegedly stonewalled by the Centre and others. Tiwari has questioned why the NPPA shirked its statutory responsibility to bring Remdesivir under the DPCO regime, since, as per the DPCO Act, 1995, issued under the Essential Commodities Act, the Centre is empowered to include any item of medical importance, like Remdesivir currently, within the DPCO list to control its manufacture, stocking, distribution, sale, etc and make it easily available at a reasonable price to the patients.

"The Covid pandemic is the biggest affliction mankind since 2020. Why did NPPA wait for so long? Who's responsible and what were the ulterior motives behind the delays?" demanded Tiwari and said that the CVO probe would unravel the truth and the conspiracy.

The petition was sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Union Ministers DV Sadananda Gowda, Harsh Vardhan, and Mansukh Mandaviya, the Central Vigilance Commission and departments concerned, seeking a hearing.

The CVC was the first to take note of the plea by seeking more details, even as the country reeled under a shortage of Remdesivir with the "medical mafia" playing havoc with patients who need six doses (injections) for Covid-19 treatment.

## Bhima Koregaon case: SC dismisses activist Gautam Navlakha's bail plea

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed a plea by activist Gautam Navlakha, who sought bail in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist link case of Maharashtra's Bhima Koregaon.

Navlakha had challenged the Bombay High Court's February 8 order, which declined to grant him bail, holding that the alleged illegal detention period cannot be considered to compute maximum 90 days' time, which is mandatory to file charge sheet, or the accused could get statutory bail.

A bench comprising Justices U.U. Lalit and K.M. Joseph dismissed Navlakha's appeal. The top court on March 26 had reserved its verdict on Navlakha's plea. Pronouncing the verdict, Justice Joseph said it is dismissing the appeal filed by Navlakha against the High Court order. On March 3, the top court had sought reply from the NIA on Navlakha's plea where he argued that the charge sheet was not filed within the stipulated time period and hence, he was entitled for default bail. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal,

representing Navlakha, had contended before the top court that his client should be released on default bail, as the charge sheet was filed after 93 days of his custody. Sibal had also submitted before the top court that two days period of transit from Delhi to Mumbai should also be counted in 90 days period.

The top court had on March 16 last year declined anticipatory bail to Navlakha and asked him to surrender within three weeks before the NIA. On April 8, last year, the top court gave Navlakha one more week to surrender in the case. The FIR against him was re-registered in January 2020, and he surrendered before the NIA on April 14 last year. Navlakha had spent 11 days in the NIA's custody till April 25, and since then, he is in judicial custody. The High Court on February 8 had dismissed Navlakha's plea saying, "it sees no reason to interfere with a special court's order", which earlier rejected his bail plea. Navlakha had moved the high court last year, against the special NIA court's order of July 12, 2020, which rejected his plea for statutory bail.

## Maha's Covid deaths, cases rise again, state toll crosses 77K

After a breather of two days, Maharashtra again saw Covid-19 cases and fatalities rise even as the Mumbai situation continued to ease, health officials said on Tuesday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Compared with 549 deaths on Monday, the state fatalities went up to 793, taking the toll to 77,191, while the number of new infections, though remaining below the 50,000 level, increased from 37,236 on Monday to 40,956, taking the tally to 51,79,929.

The Mumbai position continued to be encouraging, with the infections remaining below the 3,000 level, falling from 1,782 to 1,717, taking the tally to 679,129, while daily deaths went down from 74 to 51, taking total fatalities in the country's commercial capital to 13,906 now.

For the tenth day straight, the state death rate remained stable at 1.49 per cent, while the number of active cases dropped sharply from 590,818 to 558,996.

A total of 71,966 fully cured patients -- again higher than



the number of new infections -- returned home, taking the total up to 45,41,391 now, and the recovery rate improved from 86.97 per cent to 87.67 per cent now.

The Mumbai circle - comprising Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and Raigad districts - recorded a hike in new cases, at 5,024, taking its tally to 14,56,811, while with 118 more deaths, the toll rose to 24,981. Of the day's total fatalities, Nashik led with 93 deaths, while 65 succumbed in Nagpur, 61 in Beed, 51 in Mumbai, 43 in Pune, 41 in Nanded, 38 in Latur, 37 in Thane, 30 in Solapur, 26 in Jalna, 25 in Raigad, 24 in

Ahmednagar, 23 in Amravati, 20 each in Satara and Chandrapur, 18 in Ratnagiri, 17 in Kolhapur, 16 in Sangli, 15 each in Parbhani and Osmanabad, 14 each in Akola and Bhandara, 12 each in Sindhudurg and Yavatmal, 11 each in Dhule and Nandurbar, nine in Gadchiroli and Washim, eight in Wardha, six in Gondia, five in Palghar, and two each in Jalgaon and Aurangabad.

Meanwhile, the number of people sent to home isolation stood at 35,91,783 now, while those shunted to institutional quarantine totalled 29,955.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As the second wave of Covid-19 cripples the Indian healthcare system with hospitals running out of beds and oxygen supply, a report by Housing.com shows that when it comes to health infrastructure, Pune is the most equipped city in India, although, with just 3.5 hospital beds per 1,000 people.

This is much higher when compared to India's national average 1.4 available beds per 1,000 people, including both public and private sector hospitals, showed the report by the Elara Technologies-owned online realty firm.

Titled 'State of Healthcare in India - Indian cities through the lens of healthcare', the report ranks health infrastructure in the country's most urbanised eight cities -- Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai (MMR) and Pune through its Housing.com's 'City Health Card'. The top-ranked city Pune also scored significantly high on parameters such as ease of living, water quality and also performance and sustainable initiatives taken by its local government, it said.

These rankings are benchmarked against parameters such as number of hospital beds, air quality, water quality, sanitation, liveability index, among others.

Mani Rangarajan, Group COO of Housing.com said: "India, which is the third-largest economy in Asia, needs to significantly increase its spending on healthcare. This has been made eminently clear as the country is currently struggling to keep

its people safe from the ongoing second wave of the coronavirus pandemic."

"As the second most populous country in the world with over 1.3 billion people, India also has to focus on building quality healthcare infrastructure and economically develop itself in such a way that its overall infrastructure is preventive against health risks. Here, one is also forced to acknowledge how crucial quality housing is, in reducing health risks."

With nearly 3.2 hospital beds per 1,000 people, Ahmedabad is ranked second in the list while India's Silicon Valley, Bengaluru is ranked third, despite a high number of hospital

beds per 1,000 people and its top ranking in the ease of living index, as parameters such as air quality, water quality and availability, and municipal performance index pull down the city's rank.

The Delhi-National Capital Region, which covers the national capital, Gurugram, Faridabad, Noida, Greater Noida and Ghaziabad, was ranked the lowest in the list, primarily because of the region's poor scores on air and water quality, sanitation and performance of municipal bodies.

"The density of hospitals is lower in Ghaziabad and Greater Noida regions compared to Gurugram, Noida and

Faridabad which also have higher levels of service sectors, warehousing and manufacturing activity," said the report.

India's financial capital Mumbai and its metropolitan region --- also the largest residential real estate market in the country with a transactional value of \$2.5 billion in the first quarter of 2021 ---- were ranked fourth on the Housing.com City Health Card, with parameters such as the number of beds, air quality, and liveability pulling its overall score down.

Hyderabad, Chennai and Kolkata held the fifth, sixth and seventh positions, respectively.

## Mucormycosis threat in Maharashtra: Two COVID patients die of fungal infection in Thane, six hospitalised

A 38-year-old patient from Mharal in Thane rural and another one from Dombivli town died of the fungal infection while undergoing treatment at different COVID-19 care centres.

Team Absolute | Mumbai



COVID-19 patients and there should not be an excessive use of steroids for their treatment, the official said.

According to health experts, the symptoms of mucormycosis include headache, fever, pain under the eyes, nasal or sinus congestion and partial loss of vision.

On Tuesday, Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said there could be over 2,000 mucormycosis patients in the state as of now and with more and more COVID-19 cases coming up, "their number would increase for sure".

Symptoms of Mucormycosis, also known as black fungus, include headache, fever, pain under the eyes, nasal or sinus congestion and partial loss of vision. He said, There could be over 2,000 Mucormycosis patients in the state as of now and with more and more COVID-19 cases coming up, their number would increase for sure."

The state government has decided to select hospitals attached to medical colleges for treatment of Mucormycosis patients as it demands a multidisciplinary approach, Tope said.

He said black fungus has a 50 per cent mortality rate and is found in COVID-19 patients with suppressed immunity or co-morbidities.

"A Mucormycosis patient needs to be seen by various experts such as ENT, ophthalmologists and neurologists among others. We are trying to cover most of the treatment under the Mahatma Phule Jan Arogya Yojana (the state's flagship health scheme)," the minister said.

Commenting over the costly treatment, he said, I will be writing to the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority to bring down the MRP of medicines needed for Mucormycosis treatment."

### MAHARASHTRA GOVT CONTROLLED OXYGEN SHORTAGE WELL: SANJAY RAUT

**Mumbai:** Stating that there is a shortage of oxygen across the country for the treatment of Covid-19 patients, Maharashtra minister Sanjay Raut asserted on Wednesday that his state handled the crisis well.

He also spoke about 12-member National Task Force (NTF) set up by the Supreme Court and said the force has to work hard to streamline oxygen supply.

"There is a shortage of oxygen in the country. That is why Supreme Court has created National Task Force (NTF). People are dying due to the shortage of oxygen.

Maharashtra also faced a shortage of oxygen but our government controlled it well. NTF has to work hard," said Raut. An SC bench, headed by Justice DY Chandrachud had last week constituted a National Task Force (NTF) to assess, recommend the need and distribution of oxygen for the entire country.

## Bank staff can't take local trains, metro; curbs to continue: Maharashtra to HC

The state added that only frontline health workers and state government staff are allowed to use suburban local trains to avoid crowding as per 'break the chain' restrictions.

A division bench led by Chief Justice Dipankar Datta is likely to hear on Wednesday the PILs filed by lawyers' associations seeking directions to the state to consider practising advocates as essential service providers and permit them to travel by local trains for professional purpose.

Meanwhile, the administrative judges of the Bombay HC led by CJ Datta, along with associations of lawyers, representatives of state and central government and BMC Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal held a meeting on Tuesday to discuss a special Covid-19 vaccination drive for lawyers practising before HC.

Over 1,100 people including staff members of the HC and their family members were vaccinated last week. As per sources, Chahal said that nearly 1000 vaccines can be made available for lawyers, but demands of all lawyers cannot be catered to due to limited stock. The lawyers' associations have initiated a drive to ascertain how many lawyers from Mumbai will be required to be administered vaccines.

# NO COVAXIN LEFT, RECEIVED 2.67 LAKH DOSES OF COVISHIELD: DELHI GOVT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

There will be no Covaxin doses available at any vaccination centre in the national capital from Wednesday onwards as the stock has finished, prompting the state government to shut around 100 centres. The Delhi government, which raised an alarm regarding Covaxin shortage on Tuesday evening, on Wednesday said the last available stock of Covaxin was administered earlier in the day. "We had just 16,900 doses of Covaxin stock for today (Wednesday) which was administered and we have no Covaxin stock left for any centre. Now, Covaxin will not be administered at any vaccination centre from tomorrow until vaccine supply is received," said AAP MLA Atish, while giving details of the Delhi government's vaccination scheme to the press on Wednesday.

Delhi on Wednesday received 2,67,790 doses of Covishield vaccine



for people in the 18 to 44 years age group.

Amid the nationwide second wave of the Covid pandemic, the

Delhi government has been struggling to provide beds, oxygen, medicines for Covid patients in the hospitals and at homes. For the last few

days, the capital is also struggling for vaccines.

The Delhi government has relentlessly flagged the dwindling stock of vaccines in the capital, saying the manufacturers were not supplying enough doses to meet the target of inoculating the city's adult population in the next three months.

This has come a week after the state administration set a target of three months to complete the vaccination of all the citizens in Delhi. Mass vaccination was kicked off for the 18-44 years age group on May 3.

Earlier in the day, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said that Covaxin maker Bharat Biotech has refused to supply doses to Delhi under instructions from the central government.

Sisodia accused the Centre of controlling the supply of Covid shots and of vaccine mismanagement. He said the Delhi government has ordered 67 lakh doses of both vaccines - Covaxin and Covishield each.

# Delhi court grants bail to Matrix Cellular CEO, VP in black marketing of oxygen concentrators

A Delhi Court on Wednesday granted bail to Matrix Cellular CEO Gaurav Khanna, vice president Gaurav Suri and two others in connection with the alleged black marketing of oxygen concentrators.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The order was passed by Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Saket court, Arun Kumar Garg and bail was subjected to a personal bond of Rs 50,000 and surety of like amount. The court granted bail in case registered after a stock of oxygen concentrators was seized by the Delhi Police from locations in Lodhi Colony and Mehrauli

last week. All five accused were arrested by the Delhi Police last week soon after the raids. According to the prosecution, the accused had allegedly hatched a conspiracy to wrongfully make money by selling imported oxygen concentrators at an "exorbitant rate" amid the ongoing second wave of COVID-19 pandemic. The counsel for the accused had argued before the court that there was no black marketing of oxygen concentrators.

The counsel, seeking bail for the accused, contended that in the absence of any government order, which capped the price, the sale price was fixed after considering the various costs incurred by Matrix Cellular, which included importing and selling the equipment.

The court noted that the government had itself not reg-

## Four in child care centre found Covid infected

As per the government, one boy and three girls at the Sanskar Ashram, where 42 girls and 25 boys are staying, had contracted the virus and were sent to the Covid Care facility and are recovering.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Four children in Delhi government-run child care homes were found Covid-infected and have been sent to healthcare centres for treatment, the state government said on Wednesday.

As per the government, one boy and three girls at the Sanskar Ashram, where 42 girls and 25 boys are staying, had contracted the virus and were sent to the Covid Care facility and are recovering. Delhi Social Welfare Minister Rajendra Pal Gautam, who inspected the



Ashram, said that children are being provided better facilities. "I am happy to know that children are being provided good quality food, healthy balanced diet, quality education and television facilities are available... and in view of the danger of coronavirus, medical facilities are being provided to them," he added. Both these homes located in the Sanskar Ashram campus are under the Department of Women and Child Development. Orphans, homeless and needy children are sent here on the basis of the recommendations of the Child Welfare Committee.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Mid the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic assuming dangerous proportions, an additional 500 Intensive Care Unit (ICU)-bed facility is being set up at Ramlila Maidan in the national Capital in front of the Lok Nayak Jaya Prakash Narayan (LNJP) Hospital which will be operational from Thursday onwards.

Due to shortage of oxygen, Covid medicines, plasma etc. in the national Capital, the patients are facing severe difficulties.

Earlier, a 500-ICU bed facility had been started at Ramlila Ground near Guru Tegh Bahadur hospital in Delhi. The health care infrastructure in Delhi is crumbling due to the large number of Covid patients admitted to hospitals. Suresh Kumar, Medical Director of LNJP Hospital, speaking



to IANS said, "As many as 500 ICU beds are going to be set up here. This Covid care centre will be equipped with all requisite facilities in accordance with Covid-19 guidelines."

This Covid centre will comprise

100 doctors and 150 nurses. They are being imparted the necessary training.

The good news about this centre is that two tanks are being equipped with oxygen. Yesterday, an oxygen tank was also refilled. Now oxygen

will be provided through central pipes to all beds.

Kumar said Covid patients will first come to the LNJP hospital after which the doctors will decide whether they will need ICU beds or not based on their health condition. If a patient requires an ICU bed urgently, we will admit him to the ICU bed facility of Ramlila Maidan. According to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, after the commissioning of additional oxygen beds, people will not feel the shortage of ICU and oxygen beds anymore.

Kejriwal said given the possibility of a third pandemic wave, the government will have to ramp up the basic health infrastructure system. "We are preparing health infrastructure on a large scale." "If there are even 30,000 Covid positive cases during the third wave of the pandemic we are ready to deal with it," he added.

## Police arrest four people, work out six cases of Covid fraud

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi Police have worked out six cases of inter-state cyber fraud relating to families of Covid-19 patients and arrested four people.

In a statement, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Central Delhi said that with the arrest of Ritik Singh, a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Farukhabad, three more persons -- Yogesh Singh, Mohammad Arzoo and the alleged mastermind Ravish -- all residents of Haryana's Gurugram, were arrested.

He said that Karol Bagh police station has made a significant breakthrough in busting an organised Covid loot syndicate.

The DCP said that on May 3, a complaint was received from Kshitij Mehra, a resident of Karol Bagh. In his complaint, Mehra stated that he called on a mobile number asking for oxygen cylinders for his



friend. "The accused introduced himself as Ritik and demanded a payment for the same. The complainant paid a total of Rs. 47,500 to Ritik through various online modes," he said, adding that on the basis of that a case was registered. He said that the police investigated the trail of money, fake accounts and sims used zeroed in on Ritik. The DCP said that Ritik

was arrested from Farrukhabad on May 7. Following Ritik's disclosure, the police arrested Yogesh Singh, Arzoo and the alleged mastermind namely Ravish on May 10.

He said that during the investigation, Ravish stated that he had undergone a training for cyber fraud in Jharkhand's Jamtara where he learnt all the ways to dupe people. Further,

they used to target innocent people and lure them to open different bank accounts in different banks by offering them a fixed salary per month.

"The mobile phone used to cheat innocent people and the credit and debit cards used to withdraw the amount from said account were recovered from their possession. Fourteen SIM cards have been recovered and seized and the ATM cards used have been recovered," he said.

The police said that with the arrest of four accused, they have solved six cases registered at Karol Bagh, Uttam Nagar, KottlaMubarakpur, Najafgarh, Kalkaji and Hauz Khas.

He said that police also recovered 4 smart mobile phones having two SIM cards used in cheating and 14 suspected SIMs, two normal phones (T9 Dictionary), one laptop, one Activia Scooter, one Royal Enfield and one Yamaha R15 Motorcycle and multiple ATM cards and credit cards, along with 13 Aadhar and eight Pan cards.

## 679 recovered Covid-19 patients donate plasma in Gurugram

GURUGRAM | Agencies

The Covid-19 recovery rate in Gurugram has reached 77.18 per cent and 679 people out of 1,27,181 recovered patients have donated plasma in the district. Nearly 1,292 units of plasma from these people have been received by the Rotary Blood Bank here. According to health officials, nearly 1,234 people in Gurugram have come forward to donate plasma to save the lives of other Covid-19 patients after having recovered from the virus. Of these, 679 recovered patients were found to be fit for plasma donation.

Gurugram Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg said people are more aware about plasma donation now than before and they are coming forward to donate plasma more than once.

He said that 679 people in the district were found healthy enough to donate their plasma. From these 679 persons, nearly 1,292 units of plasma have been received. This



plasma has been given by the blood bank for the treatment of coronavirus patients.

"Earlier people had various types of misconceptions regarding plasma donation but now people are clearing their doubts about it and coming forward to donate plasma after recovering from Covid-19 infection," Garg added. Giving information about plasma donation, medical and nodal official Mahima, from the Rotary Club, said it is mandatory for a person between 18 and 60 years to donate plasma.

## "Learn from bitter experience": HC pulls up Delhi govt for not fully operationalising Indira Gandhi Hospital

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday expressed its displeasure with the Delhi government for not fully operationalising the 1,241 bedded Indira Gandhi Hospital, which currently has only 80 beds for non-serious COVID patients. A bench comprising of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said the state government should learn from the bitter experience of the people amid the ongoing second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Senior advocate Rahul Mehra, representing the Delhi government, submitted before the bench that completion of the hospital was not a pressing issue and cited that around 4,500 beds were currently available in the national capital. The bench pointed out that if the Delhi government were to take up hospital completion as a pressing issue, then the facility would have been completely functional now. The

court was also informed that there was no piped oxygen, ICU beds or ventilators available at the hospital.

"If a third wave comes, as many experts are warning it might, and your facility is not up and running (to full capacity)", said the bench, adding "again we would be back to this situation." The court noted that due to the lethargy of the state the health care project has not been completed. Mehra argued that in the backdrop of availability of such a large number of beds, there exists no "grave urgency" to completely operationalise the hospital. The bench took note of the Delhi government contention that situation in connection with the availability of beds may have improved. However, the court said it cannot overlook the grim situation which existed just couple of days ago when serious COVID-19 patients were desperately searching for medical oxy-

## Nurses are the backbone in the fight against Covid

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The outbreak of Covid-19 has affected all sections of society throughout the globe. But there is one group who emerged real heroes in this ongoing war against Covid-19 everywhere: Nurses

Every year International Nurses Day, which commemorates the birthday of Florence Nightingale, the first "professional nurse" is observed on May 12. The theme for this year is "Nursing the World to Health".

Nurses account for more than half of all the world's health workers, yet there is an urgent shortage of nurses worldwide with 5.9 million more nurses still needed, especially in low- and middle-income countries, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

"Today is #InternationalNursesDay. Nurses have been at the core of the #Covid19 response providing life-saving care and, in so many heart-breaking cases, they are there in the last moments of a person's life. To nurses everywhere, thank you for your tireless commitment," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the WHO,



shared in a tweet on Wednesday.

While the general public have the luxury to call it a day off due to 'pandemic fatigue', nurses often have to go beyond the call of duty with dedication, empathy, compassion, and purpose. Nurses have been a backbone in this fight against Covid. While many people find it hard to wear masks, nurses spend long hours wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) kits and face masks. Nurses and other healthcare workers have been working tirelessly through many challenges and adversities such as a surge in patients. They need to be available round the clock, wearing PPE kits and face

masks in a high-pressure environment, all with a smile. Capt( Dr ) Usha Banerjee, Group Director Nursing, Apollo Hospitals Group, told IANS. "It is not at all comfortable, especially for the female staff. Wearing a PPE suit for just an hour makes us suffocate and it is even worse for those with phobias when they have to go to the MRI. Wearing it throughout a 6 hour shift makes them sweat a lot and they end up feeling dehydrated," added Sister LathaNonis, Chief Nursing Officer, Fortis Hospitals, Bengaluru. The Covid-19 pandemic is a stark reminder of the vital role nurses play and how impossible it is without nurses and other health workers, to put up a fight against outbreaks. Many have neglected their families and not been on leave since the beginning of the pandemic, last year. While nurses have proven themselves as true warriors on the frontline, their mental well-being is of utmost importance. "Most times we have to speak to each nurse before sending them to the Covid ward. At times we have had to speak to the nurses' families to explain the gravity of the situation. We have to make them understand, give them some time, and then only we can take the nurses," Nonis said.



MUMBAI, THURSDAY, MAY 13, 2021

05

## TWO BODIES FOUND IN RUNJ RIVER OF PANNA, OFFICIAL NEGATES COVID

A senior administration official of the area said the bodies were of locals, one of whom died of cancer and another of old age.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The human tragedy amid the second wave of Covid - that of bodies being dumped in rivers instead of being given a funeral -- has now reached Madhya Pradesh. Two bodies were seen on the banks of Runj river in Panna district of the state on Tuesday. A senior administration official of the area, however, said the bodies were of locals, one of whom died of cancer and another of old age.

The residents alleged that four to five bodies have been found in the Runj river, which acts as drinking water source for cattle in the village.

"We fear an epidemic might break in our village due to these bodies which have been floating in the river since the last five to six days," a resident said. The Panna district collector Sanjay Kumar Mishra, however, said just two bodies, and not four to five bodies, were there. "One body was of a 95-year-old villager. Another was of a cancer patient. Both are from Nandapur village. The village sarpanch has told us that both bodies were immersed and not cremated in the river as part of a long-standing tradition. Both bodies were retrieved on Tuesday and were buried safely."

Over the last two days, scores of



bodies had washed up on the banks of river Ganga in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. It is suspected that the bodies are that of Covid patients.

In Buxar district of Bihar, 71 bodies have been fished out of the river. More bodies have been found in Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh, around 55 km upriver from Buxar.

In addition, videos of a bridge near Bihar border in Saran district, have been doing the rounds on social

media. In the videos, bodies are apparently seen thrown into the river from ambulances stopping at the spot. Locals claimed that the ambulances come both UP and Bihar.

Across the border in Uttar Pradesh is Ballia district. The two states have been disputing over the corpses since the first ones were found on the riverbank in Buxar. Bihar minister Sanjay Kumar Jha has said the bodies have floated down into Bihar from Uttar

Pradesh. "Nitish Kumar is pained at both the tragedy as well as harm to the river Ganges. A net has been placed in Ganges in Ranighat, bordering UP and Bihar," the minister has said. The District Magistrate of Buxar, Aman Samir, said a "narrative was being made" that due to the lack of logs for cremation or financial issues, families were immersing their dead in the Ganga. "That is not true," he said.

Bhopal has reported at least seven cases, six in state-run Hamidia hospital, while one patient was admitted to a private hospital.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Two people have reportedly died in Madhya Pradesh due to black fungal infection that affected their brain. According to doctors, 13 patients have been detected with this infection in Madhya Pradesh so far. Bhopal has reported at least seven cases, six in state-run Hamidia hospital, while one patient was admitted to a private hospital.

One of the patients admitted to Hamidia hospital had undergone an operation on Monday and physicians removed his nine teeth and jaw to end infection, while another patient lost an eye in the surgery.

Two people have died due to black fungal infection as their brain was affected. Total 13 patients have been detected with this infection here so far," Dr Shweta Walia, Designated Professor, Eye Department, Maharaja Yeshwantrao Hospital, Indore

was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.

Black fungus or mucormycosis is a fungal infection reported among patients who have recovered from coronavirus. Maharashtra, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha have logged such cases over the past week amid spiralling cases of coronavirus.

According to experts, the black fungus is already present in air and land; and infects a person with weakened immunity. Consumption of steroids during coronavirus to strengthen lung function has been cited as one reason for this infection. "The fungus first enters the body through the nose and then reaches the brain with blood from the lungs. The higher the infection, the more severe the symptoms." Dr Suryakant, head of the respiratory department of King George Medical University,



Lucknow, explains. The government has released an evidence-based advisory for screening, diagnosis and management of the disease.

Stating that it may turn fatal if not cared for, the government said mucormycosis is a fungal infection that mainly affects people who are medication that reduces their ability to fight environmental pathogens. Sinuses or lungs of such individuals get affected after fungal spores are inhaled from air. The guideline was prepared by the Union Health Ministry and ICMR that have been in the frontline of the government's war against the coronavirus pandemic. This can lead to serious disease with warning sign and symptoms like pain and redness around eyes and/or nose, fever, headache, coughing, shortness of breath, blood with vomiting, altered mental status.

## Hats off to your spirit and courage, There is no greater religion than this: Chief Minister

Team Absolute | Bhopal



Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that in a terrible epidemic like Covid, you are serving patients day and night with dedication and dedication, regardless of your life. There is no greater religion than this. I salute your service spirit and courage on behalf of the 8 crore people of the state. You are our greatest support in this time of crisis. Along with serving others, take care of yourself.

Chouhan was addressing the nursing staff of the state through video conferencing and webcasting on International Nursing Day today. VC Health Commissioner Akash

## PM CARES VENTILATORS LIE UNUSED IN STATE HOSPITALS

**Bhopal:** Ventilators purchased under the PM Cares fund -- life-saving medical equipment desperately needed amid the skyrocketing Covid cases -- have been found defective, a few hospitals in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have complained. In others, the equipment is lying unused for want of people to operate them.

Among the first category is Bhopal's biggest government-run hospital -- the Hamidia Hospital, which even lost a Covid patient last week. While the hospital had initially denied the patient's family's claim that the breakdown of the ventilator had led to the death, media reports claim that its officials have written to the hospital administration regarding the ventilators.

We are also in possession of the doctors' letter to the superintendent, which says ventilators purchased under PM Cares are not working properly.

The doctors said the machines are not generating the required pressure and sometimes they turn off suddenly, which is very dangerous for the patients. It is difficult to manage critical patients and save their lives with these machines and so they need to be replaced, the letter said.

The state government, however, contended that there is nothing wrong with the machines.

Medical Education minister Vishwas Sarang said, "There is no such information that the ventilators from PM Relief Fund are bad. Thanks to our Prime Minister, we have worked to upgrade health services continuously in the country. The Centre has given such a large number of ventilators to save lives".

But ventilators in other parts of the state -- supplied to the government hospitals under the PM Cares fund -- are also throwing up glitches. In other hospitals, they are lying unused as there are no expert medical personnel to operate them.

In Sagar's Budelkhand Medical College, there are 72 ventilators but only five are being used in the Intensive Care Unit for Covid. The rest are lying unused. The Dean, Dr RA Verma, said, "We don't have expert doctors to operate them". Shahdol Medical College received 24 ventilators from the government, but the hospital is not able to use them. "They are advanced machines. There are some operational issues in the ventilator, we have informed the company," said Dr Milind Shiralkar, the Dean of the hospital.

Tribal-dominated Alirajpur district hospital got four ventilators, two of them from the PM Cares funds, but has been unable to use any of them. Medical Officer Dr KC Gupta said, "We are unable to use them as we don't have trained people." Dr Pradeep Mudia, CMHO, Katni, said they: "Two ventilators have come from PM Cares fund, but they are yet to be installed by the company. We have written a letter to them".

praised her work by mentioning nurse Saroj Yadav of Bhopal, Sunita Tiwari of Vidisha, Archana Rai of Agar-Malwa, Prafull Peter, nurse from Tikamgarh, Razia Mansoori of Hamidia Bhopal, Dr Jyoti Sharma, Nursing In-charge of Indore. . Also mentioned 15 nurses from Morena, who canceled their vacations. One even extended his marriage further. The nurses of Indore are encouraging the patients by singing a song. Chouhan said that the work of vaccination is being done on a war footing in the state. 5 crore 29 lakh doses of vaccine have been ordered for the state. Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang said on Wednesday.

Government doctors in Madhya Pradesh will hold consultations with their counterparts in the US on how to deal with cases of mucormycosis fungal infection among COVID-19 patients, state Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang said on Wednesday. In some cases of mucormycosis, also known as black fungus, a rare but serious infection, the affected part

In some cases of mucormycosis, also known as black fungus, a rare but serious infection, the affected part has to be surgically removed.

Team Absolute | Bhopal



has to be surgically removed, Sarang told media persons. According to health experts, the symptoms of mucormycosis include headache, fever, pain under the eyes, nasal or sinus congestion and partial loss of vision.

A number of cases of the fungal infection among COVID-19 patients have also been reported in neighbouring Maharashtra and Gujarat.

"A team of doctors from the government-run Hamidia Hospital in Bhopal will interact with their counterparts in the US via video confer-

ence to discuss steps to check the spread of the fungal infection," Sarang said. The minister held a meeting with officials of various government and private medical colleges on Tuesday evening and it was suggested that a protocol be laid down for the treatment of the fungal infection.

They also discussed ways to deal with the possible third wave of coronavirus. Sarang said US-based infectious diseases expert Dr Manoj Jain, who hails from Madhya Pradesh, also took part in the meeting and gave suggestions on how to check the spread of COVID-19, its treatment protocol and focus areas during the third wave. Health experts recently warned of a third wave of the coronavirus infection in the country, which could also affect children. Sarang said during the meeting, they discussed arrangements to be made to check

the viral infection among children and to ensure availability of necessary medicines and resources to deal with the problem.

They also discussed steps to raise the number of beds in the Intensive Care Units (ICUs) and High Dependency Units (HDUs) for COVID-19 patients and ways to develop an effective IT solution to monitor patients under home isolation, he said. Discussions were also held on preparing a training module for final year students of medical, dental and nursing streams to rope them for treating COVID-19 patients, he said. It was also suggested to train patients who have recovered from COVID-19, NCC personnel and NGO members and deploy them for dealing with the coronavirus situation during the third wave, the minister said.

CM will transfer pension amount into the accounts of beneficiaries of various pension schemes

Team Absolute | Bhopal

crore 87 lakh 19 thousand to 13 lakh 14 thousand 532 beneficiaries of Mukhyamantri Kalyani pension, Rs. 2 crore 8 lakh 5 thousand to 34 thousand 675 beneficiaries of Social Security Parikarta Pension, Rs. 19 crore 49 lakh 22 thousand to 3 lakh 24 thousand 870 beneficiaries of Social Security Divyang Pension, Rs. 3 crore 44 lakh 92 thousand to 57 thousand 486 beneficiaries of Social Security Shiksha Protshan, Rs. 12 lakh 84 thousand to 2 thousand 140 beneficiaries of Mukhyamantri Avivahita Pension and Rs 1 lakh 48 thousand pension amount will be transferred into the accounts of 246 elderly people residing in old age homes through a single click.

## Culture Minister bats for 'yagya' to get rid of COVID-19

Team Absolute | Indore

Culture Minister Usha Thakur has said 'yagya' is an ancient method of purifying the environment and claimed such a practice is being followed since ages to get rid of pandemics.

Amid the ongoing second wave of COVID-19, Ms. Thakur on Tuesday appealed to people to perform "havan" (a fire ritual) at one time.

"We appeal to all to perform yagya and offer aahuti (oblation) and purify the environment because performing this sacred ritual to eliminate pandemics has been a tradition since ages," she told reporters. She claimed 'yagya' is a practice to purify the environment and



it is "not bigotry or ritualism".

"So, let us all offer two aahutis each and purify the environment. The third wave of COVID-19 will not be able to

touch our country," she said.

Thakur also said the State government was aware of the threat of a third wave of the viral infection. It is being said that this wave will affect children.

The State is making full preparations to curb it, she added. "I am confident that we will be able to handle third wave of the pandemic properly because no problem can stay if we make joint efforts with good intentions. We pray to God that this wave may not cause hardships to people," she said.

Earlier, on March 7, Thakur had stressed on the need for adopting a Vedic lifestyle for protection against coronavirus, and claimed that "havan" of a cow dung cake can keep a house sanitised for 12 hours.

Fuel prices up 25p;

## Bhopal, Indore join cities with Rs 100/litre petrol

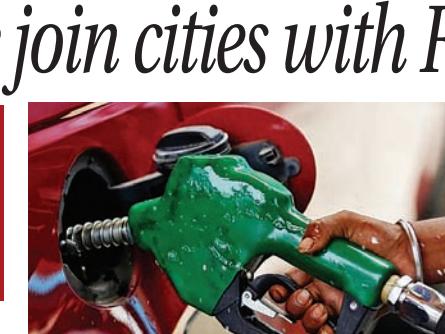
Petrol and diesel prices were hiked by 25 paise per litre each, the third increase this week, propelling petrol price to cross Rs 100 per litre mark in more cities including Bhopal and Indore

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Petrol and diesel prices on Wednesday were hiked by 25 paise per litre each, the third increase this week, propelling petrol price to cross Rs 100 per litre mark in more cities including Bhopal and Indore.

Petrol and diesel prices are now at record high across the country, price notification of state-owned fuel retailers showed. In Delhi, petrol now comes for Rs 92.05 per litre and diesel is priced at Rs 82.61.

This was the third increase in prices this week and seventh hike since May 4 when the state-owned oil firms ended an 18-hiatus in rate revision they observed during assembly elec-



tions in states like West Bengal.

The price increase led to petrol rates crossing the Rs 100 mark in more places in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Fuel prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes such as value-added tax (VAT) and freight charges. Rajasthan levies the highest VAT on petrol in the country, followed by Madhya Pradesh. Bhopal on Wednesday earned the distinction of being the first state capital in the country to see petrol cross Rs 100 mark. Petrol in the city now costs Rs 100.08 a litre. Indore had petrol priced at Rs 100.16 per

litre.

Sri Ganganagar district of Rajasthan had the costliest petrol and diesel in the country at Rs 102.96 per litre and Rs 95.33 a litre, respectively. In seven increases, petrol price has risen by Rs 1.66 per litre and diesel by Rs 1.88. Since March last year, when the government raised excise duty on fuel to an all-time high, petrol price has increased by a record Rs 22.46 per litre (after accounting for a handful of occasions when rates fell) and diesel by Rs 20.32.

Oil companies, that in recent months resorted to unexplained freeze in rate revision, had hit a pause button after cutting prices marginally on April 15. This coincided with electioneering hitting peak to elect new governments in five states including West Bengal.

No sooner had voting ended, oil companies indicated an impending increase in retail prices in view of firming trend in international oil markets. They said prices have been on a continuous up trend since April 27. Central and state taxes make up for 60 per cent of the retail selling price of petrol and over 54 per cent of diesel.

## 6 ARRESTED FOR BLACK MARKETING OF REMDESIVIR

**Bhopal:** Amid rising cases of Covid-19, several cases of black marketing of Remdesivir were reported from Madhya Pradesh's Indore, Bhindwara and Shahdol on Tuesday. Three persons, including a nurse, were arrested on Tuesday for black marketing of Remdesivir in Chhindwara and five injections were seized from them, said the police. "We have arrested three including a nurse. We have seized five Remdesivir injections from their possession. Investigation on," said Police Inspector Manish Bhadoria. In another case, three people were arrested the same day in Shahdol including a nurse and two lab technicians of a medical college for black marketing of Remdesivir. Shahdol Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Mukesh Vaishya informed, "We also arrested a pharmacy store owner. Six injections, mobile phones and over 76 lakhs cash recovered from their possession." The third case was reported from Indore on Tuesday where 21 people were booked for selling fake Remdesivir injections under National Security Act on charges of culpable homicide, informed Hari Narayan Chari Mishra, IG Indore Range.



## Asha Negi takes a jibe at celebs posing while getting the jab

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**T**V star Asha Negi on Tuesday took a potshot at celebrities who make a big deal about posing for videos and pictures while getting vaccinated.

"To all the actors who are uploading their vaccination videos... yaar awareness keliyethikai but please itni overacting mat kiyakaro, bohot annoying hojaatahai (buddy),

spreading awareness is a good thing but please cut down on the overacting, it gets annoying!"

Asha said in a note she posted on Instagram.

She had a further witty dig while captioning the note.

"Please yaar! Aurhaan log pooch rahein videographer khud jaheho ya hospital is providing (people wonder if you took the videographer along or if the hospital provided one)?" went the caption.

Friends in the industry as well as fans loved her post.

"Someone said it!!" wrote Rahul Sharma said.

"Abhi to pataniyakayadekhnapade-gaaurukiskisko. (who knows what else one will have to see next) @ashanegi," Nia Sharma wrote, in response to Asha's post.

Meiyang Chang wrote: "Tuhameshasachboldehaiya anemann (you always state facts)."

Other TV celebs including Anita Hasnandani, Ravi Dubey, Sanjeeda Shaikh and HeliDaruwala responded with laughter emojis.

## AnupamKher's 'Project Heal India' to conduct relief work for Covid-19

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**nupamKher Foundation in collaboration with Dr AshutoshTewari (Global Cancer Foundation, USA) and Baba Kalyani (Bharat Forge, India) has recently started

an initiative called 'Project Heal India' to conduct relief work in this pandemic.

Through the project, the organizations will provide critical equipment and other life supporting devices to

needy institutions and hospitals across India. The first consignment of CrossVent Ventilators (ICU Critical Care), Medtronic Ventilators, ResMed non-invasive ventilation devices and oxygen concentrators are expected to arrive in India within the week.

About the project AnupamKher, said, "At the time of an ongoing world cri-



sis, we human beings have always collectively come together to respond and provide help in any way possible. As India is reeling under a huge crisis, it is our moral responsibility to pick up the mantle and do our bit. It is people and humanitarians like Mr Baba

Kalyani and Dr AshutoshTewari that help make the world a better place and restore our faith time and again in humanity. I am honoured and pleased to be joining hands with them." In response to the overwhelming need, Project Heal India will do its best to address the needs created by the pandemic. The contributors believe that to control this virus, it is extremely important to work together and ensure the health and safety of citizens and do our part in this ever-changing situation.

## The seven-day summer food calendar

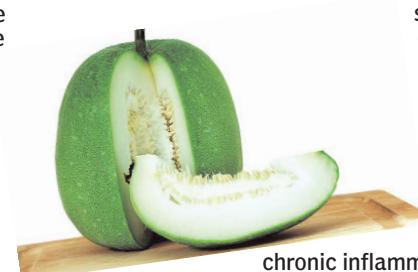
Team Absolute | New Delhi

### Ashgourd Juice

When you spend considerable time in the scorching heat, it can cause detrimental effects on your health. As the body temperature increases, it leads to profuse sweating, signs of dehydration, sticky skin, tiredness, headache, dizziness, nausea, cramps, and a quick, weak pulse. With majority of us currently staying at home during this summer amid the COVID-19 pandemic, staying on top of our health is a priority more so than usual. In order to survive the summer and its adverse effect on our health, we need to keep ourselves cool and healthy with a cooling and nourishing diet. An adequate intake of water and avoiding food that is dry, salty and fried is essential.

### Watermelon, Muskmelon

Watermelon has high water content along with a good amount of lycopene, vitamin C, vitamin A, potassium, amino acid, antioxidants and is low in sodium and calories. It helps to lower inflammation and reduce oxidative stress. Remember, as watermelon is slightly acidic in nature, eating it on an empty stomach and late-night should be avoided. Serving size for an adult is two cups a day. Muskmelon contains potassium which makes it perfect for your blood pressure numbers. High fibre and water content of muskmelon also contributes to cooling down body systems and to manage blood pressure.



Cucumber is inexpensive, packed with water and helps to detoxify your body overall body. It is an excellent coolant. This cool and crisp energizing green will stave off problems of constipation; enhance your immunity and tame inflammation while also calming sunburn. Along with cleansing your body, the presence of silicon and sulphur in cucumber is excellent to support hair growth and volume. The best way to consume cucumber is adding it in salads or drinking cucumber juice.

### Cucumber

Loaded with the goodness of healthy bacteria like Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium, yogurt and other fermented food helps in brain development and is great for anxiety. It also offers gut-friendly microorganisms that aid in the process of digestion during summers. Eating yoghurt helps in reducing chronic inflammation which is responsible for anxiety, stress, and raita. Drinking buttermilk helps to cool down your body and improve metabolism. It is also loaded with vitamins, and minerals which help to restore your body's natural energy if you are feeling drained by the heat.

### Yogurt and buttermilk

Coconut water benefits by maintaining electrolyte stability in your body. It's an exceptional summer drink to combat hot weather by keeping you hydrated, and also facilitates in boosting your digestive ability. Additionally, it helps to foster cell growth, regulates blood pressure and above all performs the function of a natural diuretic.



**Neetha Shetty:**  
*Working during this situation is quite stressful*

Team Absolute | Mumbai

### NARGIS FAKHRI'S DINNER DATE: 'WHEN HE LOVES TO COOK AND YOU LOVE TO EAT!'

New York | Agencies

**N**argisFakhri is currently whiling away time in the Big Apple with boyfriend and American chef Justin Santos, and on Tuesday she uploaded a video where he prepares a sumptuous dinner for her.

In the Instagram clip, Justin prepares the meal even as the table is set, and Nargis flashes a grin in anticipation. The couple had a movie night in, obviously, for we see a quick snapshot of the television screen with the Sean Penn-starrer "Mystic River" all set to play.

"When he loves to cook and you love to eat," wrote Nargis, as caption with the video clip, along with a bunch of emojis including laughter icons, folded hands, heart and chef icons.



She tagged the post with #cookforme, #food, #cooking, #chef, #justinthekitchen, #yummy, #imhungry, #feedme, #couplegoals, #mymancooks, and #goodfood. Nargis' post had garnered over 1,81,270 views by the evening.

### MADHURI DIXIT IS 'BACK ON SET', DAYS AFTER SECOND DOSE OF COVIDVAX

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctress Madhuri Dixit Nene on Tuesday took to Instagram to inform fans that she was "back on set". The 53-year-old veteran had taken her second dose of the Covid vaccine a while back, and on



open and goes for matching heels in the photo-op of three images.

"Back on set," she wrote as caption with the images, along with a film projector emoji.

While the actress did not share details

about what the shoot, it seems like she faced the camera for a special shoot. Currently, Madhuri is readying to enter the OTT space with the thriller series "Finding Anamika". She plays a superstar actress who goes missing one day. The show also features ManavKaul and Sanjay Kapoor.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

**P**olyzystic ovarian syndrome or disease (PCOS/PCOD) is a common condition in women in their reproductive age caused due to hormonal imbalance. This hormonal breakdown results in irregular or prolonged menstrual periods, excessive body hair, acne, and hair loss. Because of this, Polycystic ovaries may fail to develop follicles and regularly release eggs, causing difficulty in conceiving. Ayurveda Diaries, on Tata Sky Fitness explains ayurvedic ways to treat these problems:

### Ayurveda & Infertility

Both men and women face issues of infertility. However, one of the reasons for infertility is the irregular metabolic fire that results in PCOS and ovarian disorder that is results in PCOD. This disorder can be treated by various ayurvedic products.

Men can consume products like Ashokarishta, Ashwagandha, Shatavari, and Guggul that helps them to build and strengthen vigour, increase vitality and metabolism. Also, products such as Kaunch, Musli, and Shilajit help men in healing infertility. Women with infertility issues need to make a drastic shift in their lifestyle and eat-

Ayurvedic ways to treat PCOS or PCOD



ing habits. One can start with giving up dairy products, meats, seafood, and eggs from their diet. It has proven beneficial for women dealing with various menstrual disorders.

### Ayurveda & PCOD / PCOS

Nowadays, 4 out of 7 women complain of PCOS or PCOD, infertility or menstrual disorders. Therefore, women must adapt plant-based diet. One must include Carrot, Beetroot and Spinach in their diet. They can make a soup and drink it every night for a 28-day cycle. It helps to purify the blood and rectifies the damage done to the uterus. Spices like Fenugreek, Carom seed in your dals, or soups can work wonders for these women.

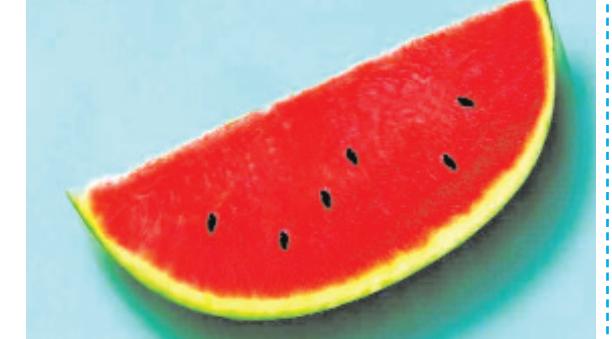
Seeds like chia seeds, flax seeds, pumpkin seeds, Sunflower seeds, and Sesame seeds are excellent source of protein for women following plant-based diet. Cumin Seeds and Fennel seeds help women prevent UTI. Coriander seed and Cardamom seeds have proven to be best remedies for period cramps.

Fruit like Pomegranate and Black grapes also help in purifying the blood that carries fresh oxygen to the uterus, thus helping to repair damaged tissues, muscles, and nerves.

One can also consume saptashayamkasaram or Sukhumarakasaram for 3 - 4 month. It has proven to show good results for all gynaecological health issues.

This should be practiced with yoga and exercise to strengthen the core muscles around the uterus and pelvic.

Asanas like the Camel Pose, Boat Pose, and Butterfly also help to build strength around the core.



### Herbal teas

Herbs and spices are great to manage excess body heat. This includes Hibiscus tea, Chamomile teas, Mint juices, Amla juices; Orange juice, lime juice etc are very healthy during this season.

### Aam Panna

It is a vegan drink made from unripe green mangoes. Aam panna has a tangy, sweet taste, which can be flavoured with cardamom or mint etc. It is also rich in various acids, which help regulate the liver and fight diseases like jaundice. The black salt and jeera powder defines the digestive properties of aam panna, and mint helps in keeping the body cool, which makes it perfect for the summer season.



## Ludacris recalls his last-minute auditioning for '2 Fast 2 Furious'

Los Angeles | Agencies

**A**ctor and rapper Ludacris, who plays Tej Parker in the "Fast & Furious" franchise, shared a host of fascinating insights about his role and the films in the latest episode of the podcast, "F9: The Fast Saga".

Speaking about "2 Fast 2 Furious", the second film of the series that released in 2003, Ludacris recalled how his role and

audition happened at the last minute. "The studio was initially looking for Ja Run to bring back as Edwin, however he turned down the offer and Tej Parker came into existence," he said.

"In the last minute they had to hurry up and fill this role. I remember right before getting on stage, I was in my dressing room and someone told me, 'You have to try out for this part. They only have one day so you've got to put it

on tape now, and here's the sides and you've got to do it.' I was 15-20 minutes away from going on stage," Ludacris recalled. He added that they were so short on time that he didn't even get the time to be nervous about reading his lines! Ludacris says "never in a million years" did he imagine he would reprise Tej Parker again before 2011's "Fast Five". He has been a part of every film in the franchise since then.



Scarlett Johansson to receive Generation Award at MTV Movie & TV Awards

"WandaVision" leads the tally with five nominations, while "Emily in Paris" and "The Boys" have four. "Bridgerton", "The Mandalorian" and "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm" have three nominations. Sacha Baron Cohen will receive the Comedic Genius Award for his act in "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm".

MTV Movie & TV Awards 2021 will be hosted by comedian Leslie Jones on May 16.

"BTS TO PERFORM 'BUTTER' FOR FIRST TIME AT BILLBOARD MUSIC AWARDS

#BTS and #BBMAs.

The group has four nominations at this year's BBMAs. These are: Top Duo/Group, Top Song Sales Artist, Top Selling Song ('Dynamite') and Top Social Artist (Fan Voted). This year, the Billboard Music Awards will be held on May 23 and hosted by Nick Jonas. Canadian singer The Weeknd leads with 16 nominations. Rapper Drake will be felicitated with the Artist of the Decade Award this year.



Los Angeles | Agencies

**H**ollywood star Angelina Jolie quips she has been single "for a long time" because she is too picky about partners.

Jolie divorced Brad Pitt in 2019, and the former couple have six children -- Maddox, (19), Pax (17), Zahara (16), Shiloh (14), and the twins Knox and Vivienne (12).

Asked if she has a list of 'nos' when it comes to finding a new guy to date, she said: "I probably have a very long list (of 'nos'). I've been alone for a long time now."

Jolie can be a worrier, but she's thankful she doesn't need to fret about her "cool" children because they are all "very capable", reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She told E! News: "I have six very capable children. Of course, you wake

up and you just feel like, 'I've got to make sure they're OK. I've got to make sure they're mentally OK,' but honestly I think a few years ago it switched and they're thinking, 'I've got to make sure mom's OK.'

"We're such a team so I am very, very lucky. I'm always the one who worries but I don't worry about them. They're cool people."

She shared that playing PTSD-stricken fire fighter Hannah Faber in her new film "Those Who Wish Me Dead" had been a "very healing" experience for her.

"I am drawn to people who have been through something and are broken and then find their way forward and overcome it. As an artiste, it's very healing to play people like that. She's been very healing for me, because you just get so broken and then you stand back up," she said.

Los Angeles | Agencies

**T**he Grammy-nominated South Korean super band BTS is all set to perform their new song "Butter" at the upcoming Billboard Music Awards. The group made the announcement on their official Twitter handle on Tuesday.

"We can't hold it in any longer! Our debut performance of '#BTS\_Butter' will be at this year's @BBMAs! Watch on Sunday, May 23rd at 8pm ET/5pm PT on @nbc," they wrote on their official page, with the

## BRIT AWARDS 2021: JESY NELSON SHARES HER JOY OVER LITTLE MIX'S HISTORY-MAKING BRITISH GROUP WIN

London | Agencies

For the first time in history Girl group Little Mix won the Brit Award for British Group. On this occasion, the new trio, Leigh-Anne Pinnock, Jade Thirlwall and Perrie Edwards, accepted hot off their remix of "Confetti" with Saweetie.

And Jesy Nelson, who left Little Mix in December, revealed her joy over the impressive accolade as she shared a sweet snap of her ex-bandmates to Instagram.

The singer, 29, posted the lovely image of pregnant Leigh-Anne

Pinnock and Perrie Edwards alongside Jade Thirlwall, with a line of heart and clapping hand emojis.

Jesy didn't attend the ceremony at London's O2 Arena, instead spending the day in the studio working on her solo music and teasing fans with an 'exciting' new track.

Taking to Instagram Stories, Jesy gushed that she had almost got emotional while penning a new track with her collaborators.

She wrote: 'I nearly just cried at the song we've wrote today that's how excited I am for you guys to hear this [sic].'

And while she was working on her new material, Little Mix finally bagged the title of British Group after being nominated three times, becoming the first girlband to EVER win the award during the star-studded event.

They had also been the only female group in the category and were up against The 1975, Young T & Bugsey, Bicep and Biffy Clyro.

When accepting their well-earned award Leigh-Anne, Perrie and Jade ensured to give a shoutout to their former fourth member Jesy.



## J.Lo spotted with Ben Affleck; actor's buddy Matt Damon wishes they unite

Los Angeles | Agencies

**H**ollywood star Matt Damon thinks it would be "awesome" if his dear friend, actor-filmmaker Ben Affleck, gets back together with Latina pop superstar Jennifer Lopez.

Affleck and Lopez, known to fans as Benimier back in the day when they were a couple, have lately been spotted together, and photos of the two have been doing the rounds. Post JLo's split with baseball ace Alex Rodriguez, the buzz is rife that Benimier might be back together.

Damon, who is a close friend of Affleck, was drawn into discussion on Tuesday's "Today" show, when he was asked about new photos of a reunited Ben and Jen making the rounds.

"There's not enough liquor in the world for you to get me to say something about that," Damon first replied, according to a report in pagesix.com.

He went on to add: "I love them both. I hope it's true. That would be awesome."

The photos being referred to appeared in the Daily Mail. Page Six said the snapshots show Affleck, 48, and Lopez, 51, heading to the airport in Montana together and then arriving in Los Angeles. The website quoted sources as saying that two celebrities -- who broke off after getting engaged in 2004 -- attended a party together in Montana. Sources close to both Affleck and Lopez told the website they were just friends.



Los Angeles | Agencies

**H**ollywood superstar Scarlett Johansson will receive the Generation Award at MTV Movie & TV Awards this year. Recipients of the award in the past have included the likes of Robert Downey Jr., Tom Cruise, Will Smith, Dwayne Johnson, Jim Carrey, Adam Sandler, Reese Witherspoon, Sandra Bullock, Mark Wahlberg, Jamie Foxx, Ben Stiller, Chris Pratt, Mike Myers, Johnny Depp, and the "Fast & Furious" film franchise.

The award celebrates "beloved actors whose diverse contributions to both film and television have turned them into household names", according to MTV, said a report in variety.com.

Johansson has been nominated at the MTV Movie & TV Awards six times before, and she took home a Golden Popcorn in 2013 for the Best Fight in "The Avengers".

This year, the superhero series "WandaVision" leads the tally with five nominations, while "Emily in Paris" and "The Boys" have four. "Bridgerton", "The Mandalorian" and "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm" have three nominations. Sacha Baron Cohen will receive the Comedic Genius Award for his act in "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm".

MTV Movie & TV Awards 2021 will be hosted by comedian Leslie Jones on May 16.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Kimberley Garner



## EDITOR'S SPECS

## Video calls are soothing

**A**round 90 per cent of respondents feel that video calls have helped them to combat feelings of loneliness amid the pandemic, a report said on Tuesday. The survey conducted by video-conferencing platform Zoom in collaboration with Qualtrics Research also revealed that 50 per cent of respondents have used video calls for business purposes. And over half of them (52 per cent) appreciate having a choice between virtual and physical meetings as they feel "hybrid workplaces will save time and provide convenience". "India adjusted and adopted video call platforms rapidly. It wasn't just a shift in technology but in behavioural mindset as well," Sameer Raje, General Manager & Head of India, Zoom, said in a statement. "As we look forward to a hybrid world, Zoom is ready to empower organisations with solutions that ensure physical safety and virtual security of their hybrid workforce. We are excited to see the role of video unfolding in the future," Raje added. In India's sector-specific dive, the report finds that the most common use of video calls are seen in education (72 per cent), celebration/social gatherings (62 per cent), events (59 per cent), entertainment (58 per cent), business (50 per cent) and a sector that gained prominence during the pandemic -- telehealth (42 per cent). More than 90 per cent of respondents feel that virtual and remote activities have helped them stay connected with others during this period, while 75 per cent said that these activities helped to improve emotional health, the survey revealed. When it comes to business travel, 39 per cent expect to travel more post-pandemic, while 37 per cent expect less travel than in the pre-Covid era. The company said that it emerged as one of the top video calling apps in India, having high levels of awareness (85 per cent) and usage (72 per cent) and 61 per cent of respondents using it over seven days. The survey included 7,689 respondents from the US, the UK, Mexico, Brazil, France, Germany, Japan, India, Singapore and Australia from March 15 to March 26, 2021.

## 7 OF 15 ASSAM CMS EX-STUDENTS OF 120-YR-OLD COTTON UNIVERSITY

Sujit Chakraborty

The 120-year-old Cotton University, previously Cotton College, in Guwahati has given Assam seven of the states 15 Chief Ministers, including Himanta Biswa Sarma, who on Monday was sworn-in as the 15th CM of the northeastern state. As the Education Minister in the previous government led by Sarbananda Sonowal, Sarma, who studied in the varsity from 1985 to 1992, took active initiative to turn Cotton College into a university in 2017 by approving the Cotton University Bill, 2017 in the state Assembly. Before 2017, Cotton College was under the Gauhati University. Assam's first Chief Minister (1946-1950) and the architect of modern Assam, Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi, was a student of the then Cotton College. He was posthumously conferred with the Bharat Ratna in 1999.

The five other students of Cotton University who went on to become Chief Minister of Assam include Mahendra Mohan Chowdhury (1970-1972), Sarat Chandra Sinha (1972-1978), Jogendra Nath Hazarika (Sept 1979-Dec 1979), Hiteswar Saikia (1983-1985 and 1991-1996) and Bhumidhar Barman (April 1996-May 1996). Besides the seven Chief Ministers and many prominent political leaders of northeastern India, the first premier of Assam in the pre-Independence period (Assam became a constituent state of India in 1950), Maulavi Sayid Sir Muhammad Saadulla (1937-1938 and 1939-1946) was also a student of Cotton College. Sir Henry John Stedman Cotton, then chief commissioner of Assam, had set up the Cotton College in Guwahati in 1901. Before the Partition of India in 1947, Cotton College and Sylhet College were the two main higher educational institutions in the region. Hence most students from Assam and other northeastern states either went to Cotton College or Sylhet College for higher education. "Of the two colleges, since the beginning Cotton College was government-run and most students of the region preferred to study there," Cotton University Vice-Chancellor Bhabesh Chandra Goswami told correspondent over phone. "Himanta Biswa Sarma had enrolled as a higher secondary student in the college in 1985 after completing his schooling from the Kamrup Academy School. He completed his graduation in political science from the institute in 1990 and post-graduation in 1992," Goswami added. Sarma was the assistant general secretary of Cotton College Student's Union from 1987 before becoming the general secretary for a record three times -- in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1991-92. "Besides being a popular leader, he was a very generous man who respected the elderly, especially the teachers. Sarma's hard work, dedication and sincerity took him to the top post of Assam. I believe that as a Chief Minister, he would do more for the university," said Goswami, who was also present in Monday's swearing-in ceremony at the Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra in Guwahati. Goswami said that before the establishment of Jorhat College in 1960s, thousands of students, including many future top politicians of the eight northeastern states, studied in the Cotton College.

## absolute edit

## TN POLITICS TO REVOLVE AROUND IDEOLOGIES NOT JUST PERSONALITIES

Venkatachari Jagannathan

**P**olitics in Tamil Nadu is going to revolve around three different ideologies and not mainly around personalities that is what has become clear following the humiliating defeat of actors like Kamal Haasan, Vijayakanth and R. Sarathkumar floated parties, as well as that of politician T.I.V.Dhikanarakan's AMMK party, said political strategists and analysts. The other outcome is that the reemergence of three different ideologies -- Dravidianism by DMK (social justice, state autonomy, self respect, rationalism), Tamil Nationalism (Liberation of Language pride and Land) by Naam Tamil Katchi (NTK) and

Nationalism/Hindutva by the BJP -- around which the state politics will revolve, "Jhon Arokiasamy, political strategist said. "Stalin proclaiming himself 'Belongs to the Dravidian stock' on his Twitter handle shows that the ruling party will go full steam on Dravidianism against NTK's Tamil Nationalism," an analyst not wanting to be quoted told correspondent.

Political analysts said the AIADMK

has the word Dravida in its name but it does not profess it like that of DMK. For a long time Tamil Nadu politics was dominated by personali-

"The major outcome of 2021 Tamil Nadu assembly poll is the settlement of the leadership issue in the state with DMK under its President M.K.Stalin winning it.

ties like actor-turned-politician and AIADMK Founder M.G.Ramachandran (MGR) and successor J.Jayalalithaa and DMK's M.Karunanidhi. Now none of the three are alive. On the other hand, the existing leaders like Chief Minister and DMK President M.K. Stalin, former Chief Ministers of AIADMK K. Palaniswami and O.Panneerselvam are not towering personalities like that of MGR, Jayalalithaa or Karunanidhi. "Stalin has established himself as the leader winning the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and the recently concluded assembly polls. Leaders emerge winning polls which Stalin



has done twice," Arokiasamy reiterated. Analysts said the Tamil Nadu assembly poll results are not based on personalities but on issues or anti-incumbency factors against the AIADMK party that was in power for 10 years. Tamil actor Rajinikanth after announcing his entry into Tamil Nadu politics with his 'spiritual politics' ideology later backed out citing coronavirus spread. "The problem with Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) ideology 'Centrism' is very confusing and nobody understands that," political analyst Kolahala Srenivas told correspondent.

"Kamal Haasan failed in the three Ps formula for a third alternative - Purpose, Position and Performance. He didn't have a clue as to how to position himself as an alternative. His ideology or Purpose was not clear and Performance was also bad. His party was not at all visible. It will be difficult for him from now as the novelty factor has vanished," said an analyst. Kamal Haasan, touted as the Chief Ministerial candidate, was defeated by BJP candidate Vanathi Srinivasan in Coimbatore (South) constituency. The MNM party secured about two per cent vote share down from about four per cent

secured in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll. Similar was the case with DMDK floated by another actor-turned-politician Vijayakanth.

While Vijayakanth was not able to contest due to his health condition, his wife and party Treasurer Premalatha lost badly in Virudhachalam seat. The party got a mere 0.43 per cent vote share with all its candidates losing miserably. Riding solo during the past three elections NTK notched up about seven per cent vote share or about 30 lakh votes and became the third largest party after DMK and AIADMK with MNM, AMMK and DMDK trailing far behind.

Seeman, NTK's founder is the sole and star campaigner for the party. However, his party is known for espousing Tamil Nationalism ideology than him being a former movie director and an actor.

"Seeman can target the population segment that are not beneficiaries (mostly forward castes) of the government schemes," Raveendran Dhuraiswamy told correspondent.

Citing the four seats won by BJP in the assembly polls an analyst said Hindu vote consolidation has happened. "If in 2024 Lok Sabha polls BJP does not win then its nationalistic plank will not be able to overtake the Tamil Nationalism ideology of NTK," an analyst said.

## SPELLING LIFE IN KASHMIR VALLEY

Sukant Deepak

**E**ven as another book 'Life in the Clock Tower Valley' emerges from Kashmir, its author, Shakoor Rather says that while many past books have shone a light on the conflict in Kashmir, his debut novel takes a different approach by depicting the life that the people live amidst the conflict.

Stressing that though the book highlights the uncertainty in the lives of people there, he says, "I have memories engraved in my head about the events unfolding in the lanes and historical places of downtown Srinagar where the book is based. Matador rides, searching up history, and listening to people about mundane incidents and anecdotes formed the foundation for the book."

Adding that the Valley is a storyteller's abode, a place where he grew up listening to legends and stories from his early years, this Delhi-based journalist says that inspiration was always... just a block away. "As journalists, we are always reporting facts. There is no scope for putting your own opinions out there. Now, when you're from a place like Kashmir, there are so many stories to tell -- so I have always had many stories and observations in my head, throughout my life there. When I used to get some time off from my journalistic work, I would always pen down these stories and observations. Over time, these stories took the shape of a novel and I approached the publishers. Although he grew up in a rural setting, but the book, published by Speaking Tiger, is set in an urban one -- in downtown Srinagar. And in a way, the characters are also trying to



reconcile with each other. "One incident that spurred an important chapter in the book involved overhearing a dejected passenger in a dilapidated matador who lamented the loss of his cherished cow during a curfewed night in downtown Srinagar. I used it as a metaphor in the larger context of the situation in Kashmir." Adding that the late poet Agha Shahid Ali has played an instrumental role in inspiring a new generation of writers from Kashmir, someone whose poetry comprises a brilliant combination of aesthetic and political, he adds, "It generates a new paradigm in the tension between the personal and the historical which has resonated with the new generation here. In fact, many authors have used the phrases in his poetry as the title name of their books. The biggest challenge while writing a book is translating your thoughts into a non-native language. As Joseph Conrad said, 'a writer has to wrestle painfully with language which they feel they do not possess'. However, Kashmir writers have effectively used the language to tell their stories."

Admitting that as a writer, one cannot look away from the 'conflict' of a place and the haunting grimness on the faces of its people, but being too focused on the outward, one can also make one easily lose touch with the inward. "Due to this, we create for ourselves a metaphorical distortion. More people from Kashmir need to tell their own stories. People on the outside need to know the vast difference between the ground realities and what is being portrayed on the screen of their televisions."

Rather feels that the way people view Kashmir through the lens of the media must change. "The Kashmiri society is like a meta-text in which diverse territorial issues intricately inform the production as well as falsification of meanings. I think Kashmiris are finding their voice, not only because they believe their stories will be heard, but also by the fact that their stories have been muffled in other media. Although the book was in the writer's imagination since his university days in Kashmir, the actual writing happened during his time in Delhi. "Writing it helped me escape the monotony of everyday life. It took me over two years to write the first draft and then another year to fix the nuts and bolts of the manuscript. I had to draw it for another year or so. Then I pulled it out again and fiddled with it for a few more months until I was sure it was shaped in the way I wanted it to. "Now wanting to work with Valley's rural setting as he feels that remains untapped, Rather says, "Of course, it will take time to pen down those thoughts and channelise them into a concrete shape."

## The intriguing story of how Sikkim became India's 22nd state

**S**ikkim remains an enigma for most, with many misconceptions about its history and its merger with India in 1975. In "Sikkim - A History of Intrigue and Alliance" (HarperCollins), former diplomat Preet Mohan Singh Malik combines insights into the erstwhile kingdoms unique history with the intriguing story of how it became Indias 22nd state. He examines the often-fraught relationship between the Lepchas (Rongpas) -- its original inhabitants -- and the Bhutias -- people of Tibetan origin who established institutions of religion and governance, and founded the Namgyal dynasty that ruled the kingdom until it became a part of the Indian Union. India's historical relationships with Tibet and China form a part of this narrative covering, in particular, the many facets of British involvement in the Himalayan region during the colonial period, and strategic failures that were compounded by a flawed Tibet policy pursued by independent India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

For India today, Sikkim remains significant from a strategic point of view, given its proximity to Tibet and the crucial Siliguri Corridor that connects India's north-eastern states with the rest of the country. The author draws from extensive sources, including hitherto unknown archival material that he had access to while serving at India's political office to Sikkim and Bhutan in Gangtok in the late 1960s.

Preet Mohan Singh Malik served in the Indian Foreign Service for more than three decades from 1962. He was posted in Gangtok from October 1967 to April 1970 at the Political Office for India to Sikkim and Bhutan. He has also served as India's Ambassador to Bahrain, Cuba and Myanmar, and as High Commissioner to Tanzania (with concurrent accreditation to the Seychelles), and Malaysia, with concurrent accreditation to Brunei.

He has served at the Permanent Mission of India to the European office of the UN in Geneva where he was also a delegate to the Disarmament Conference and on the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization. He was a Deputy Permanent Representative at the UN Mission in New York. He specialized in economic diplomacy, covering both bilateral and multilateral areas. He was a member representing the Ministry of External Affairs, of both the Foreign Investment Promotion Board and the Steering Committee on Economic Reforms chaired by the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister (1992-95).

## Moody's cuts India growth forecast, warns of severe and prolonged stress

**M**oody's Investors Service on Tuesday revised its India GDP forecast down to 9.3 per cent from 13.7 per cent for fiscal 2021.

"As of now, we expect the negative impact on economic output to be limited to the April to June quarter, followed by a strong rebound in the second half of the year. As a result of the negative impact of the second wave, we have revised our real, inflation-adjusted GDP growth forecast down to 9.3 per cent from 13.7 per cent for fiscal 2021 and to 7.9 per cent from 6.2 per cent in fiscal 2022. Over the longer term, we expect growth of around 6.0 per cent thereafter," Moody's said.

It said that the credit profile of India is increasingly constrained by obstacles to economic growth, a high debt burden and weak financial system.

"Policymaking institutions have struggled to tackle and contain these risks, exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Mutually reinforcing risks from deeper stresses in the economy and financial system could lead to a more severe and prolonged erosion in financial strength, exerting further pressure on the credit profile," Moody's said.

India is experiencing a severe second wave of coronavirus infections which will slow the near-term economic recovery and could weigh on longer-term growth dynam-

ics. The second wave started in March in the state of Maharashtra, home to the major urban centre of Mumbai, and has since spread throughout the country. As of early May, India's active caseload count surpassed 3.5 million with daily new cases exceeding 400,000. The surge of the virus, which has been driven by a highly contagious variant, has put significant strain on India's healthcare system with hospitals overrun and medical supplies in short supply.

Moody's said lockdowns and tightened restrictions have focused on the most severely impacted states and districts as 10 states or Union Territories continue to account for around 75 per cent of active cases. The government's latest order on containment measures, which remain effective until the end of May, advises states and Union Territories to demarcate containment zones based on a test positivity or bed occupancy threshold; it recommends measures such as night curfews, prohibition of gatherings, closure of recreational facilities, and reductions in public transport operational capacity.

The reimposition of lockdown measures will curb economic activity and could dampen market and consumer sentiment.

"However, we do not expect the impact to be as severe as during the first wave. Unlike

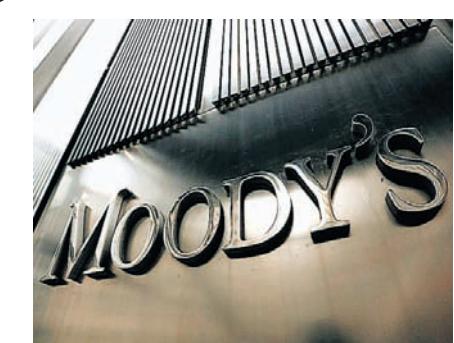
the first wave where lockdowns were applied nationwide for several months, the second wave 'micro-containment zone' measures are more localized, targeted and will likely be of shorter duration," it added.

Businesses and consumers have also grown more accustomed to operating under pandemic conditions.

On the fiscal front, Moody's expects the renewed surge in the virus to contribute to a marginal shortfall in revenue and a redirection of spending toward healthcare and virus response relative to what the government budgeted in February.

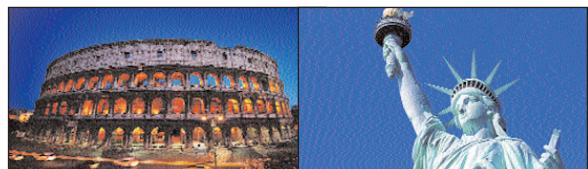
"As a result, we now expect a wider general government fiscal deficit of about 11.8 per cent of GDP in fiscal 2021, compared with our previous forecast of 10.8 per cent and an estimated 14 per cent in fiscal 2020. We expect the combined impact of slower growth and a wider deficit to drive the general government debt burden to 90 per cent of GDP in fiscal 2021, gradually rising to 92 per cent in fiscal 2023," it said.

India began the third phase of its vaccination campaign for those aged 18-44 on May 1, making the vaccination available to the entire adult population. However, as of early May only around 10 per cent of the country's population had received at least one dose of the vaccine. Meanwhile, a shortage of vaccines and logistical difficulties in reaching a



large rural population (about two-thirds of the population) complicates the vaccine rollout. The international community has recently contributed to India's vaccine efforts with increased medical and vaccine supplies to help address shortfalls. The spread of the virus and the rate of vaccinations will have a direct impact on economic outcomes, Moody's said.

On May 5, the Reserve Bank of India announced new liquidity measures to support the economy and financial system during the second wave. Measures focused on loan forbearance and liquidity access to households and businesses, including through a restructuring scheme with the extension of a loan moratorium for up to two years.



## TENSION BETWEEN ISRAEL, GAZA MILITANTS THREATENS TO FURTHER ESCALATE

Gaza | Agencies

The tit-for-tat trade of fire between militant groups in the Gaza Strip and Israel has been mounting on Tuesday, leaving 28 Palestinians and three Israelis killed and dozens of others wounded from both sides.

Palestinian militant groups, including the armed wing of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), fired hundreds of rockets from the besieged coastal enclave at Israeli towns and cities in southern and central Israel, the Xinhua news agency reported.

In response, Israeli fighter jets and drones bombed military posts and facilities belonging to Hamas and the Islamic Jihad militants. The fighter jets also destroyed apartments and high-rise buildings that belong to the two groups in the Gaza Strip.

The tension between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza started when the militants fired a barrage of rockets at Jerusalem in response to the clashes that broke out at al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem between Palestinian worshippers and Israeli police forces.

Since Monday, the buzz of the Israeli fighter jets and drones mixed with the sounds of the bombs were heard all over the Gaza Strip, as gray and black smoke



could be easily seen billowing into the sky as result of the Israeli bombings or the firing of rockets by Gaza militants.

The current wave of violence between Israel and Gaza militant groups is the first of its kind since the last large-scale air and ground offensive that Israel waged on the Palestinian enclave for 50 days in 2014. Hamas spokesman in Gaza Fawzi Barhoum said in a press statement that Hamas is determined not to pull back from the equation of escalation.

"If Israel strikes, the armed resistance strikes back," he vowed. On Tuesday, Israeli fighter jets struck

a 14-floor high-rise building in western Gaza city after the Israeli army asked its inhabitants to evacuate. However, Hamas warned Israel against targeting populated houses and buildings.

After destroying the building, the al-Qassam Brigades, the Hamas' armed wing, claimed responsibility for firing 130 rockets from the Gaza Strip at Tel Aviv and other cities in central Israel.

The group said in a short text message that firing the rockets was in response to Israel's targeting of the high-rise building and many other apartments in the Gaza Strip.

**5 KILLED, 16 WOUNDED IN CAR CRASH IN SOUTHERN EGYPT**



Cairo: At least five people were killed and 16 wounded on Wednesday in a crash involved a minibus and a private car at Sohag desert road in southern Egypt, state-run Ahram newspaper reported on its website. Initial investigations said the high speed of the bus driver caused the accident, the Xinhua news agency reported. Ambulances have transferred the wounded to Sohag Public Hospital, and teams were immediately sent to clear debris that halted the traffic. Daily road accidents are common in Egypt because of poorly maintained road infrastructure and loosely applied traffic regulations.

Over the past few years, Egypt has been upgrading its road network by establishing new roads and bridges to reduce traffic accidents.

## We stand with Gaza: Imran Khan reiterates support for Palestine

Islamabad | Agencies

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday took to Twitter to reiterate his support for the people of Palestine, denouncing atrocities being committed by Israel.

The death toll from the Israeli air strikes in Gaza strip has risen to 35. The tense atmosphere in Jerusalem over the past couple of days reached a crescendo on Tuesday when Israeli planes bombed Gaza following reports of rockets being fired into Israeli territory, Geo TV reported.

Israeli police have been attacking Palestinian worshippers with stun grenades and rubber bullets over the past days over the Sheikh Jarrah expulsion controversy.

The massacre invite rebuke from most Muslim countries, with Prime Minister Imran Khan tweeting his support for Palestine today as well.

"I am PM of Pakistan and #WeStandWithGaza #WeStandWithPalestine," he tweeted. The Prime Minister tweeted an excerpt from what seems to be an old article of Noam Chomsky on the Palestine-Israel situation.

"You take my water, burn my olive trees, destroy my house, take my job, steal my land, imprison my father, kill my mother, bombard my country, starve us all, humiliate us all, but I am to blame: I shot a rocket back," reads the statement.



This is, by far, the heaviest exchange between Israel and Hamas since a 2014 war in Gaza, and prompted international concern that the situation could spiral out of control.

UN Middle East peace envoy Tor Wennesland tweeted: "Stop the fire immediately. We're escalating towards a full-scale war. Leaders on all sides have to take the responsibility of de-escalation."

"The cost of war in Gaza is devastating & is being paid by ordinary people. UN is working w/ all sides to restore calm. Stop the violence now," he wrote. Into the early hours of Wednesday morning, Gazans reported their homes shaking and the sky lighting up with Israeli attacks, outgoing rockets and Israeli air defence missiles intercepting them

## About 70 migrants brought to Malta after rescue

Vallletta | Agencies

A group of around 70 migrants were brought to Malta after being rescued to the south of the island on Monday night following a distress call, a spokesperson from the Home Affairs Ministry said.

The spokesperson gave no further details, including the nationalities of the illegal migrants, the Xinhua news agency reported on Wednesday.

The migrants were swabbed for Covid-19 upon arrival on land and were escorted to a detention centre where they will be kept in isolation until the authorities investigate their provenance and whether they are entitled to asylum, the spokesperson said.

Migrant departures from



North African shores have increased significantly in recent days, possibly owing to the arrival of good weather. Alarmed Phone, an NGO that monitors rescue calls from migrant boats crossing the Mediterranean, said on Monday that there were over 400 migrants in five boats in Malta's search and rescue zone. Last September, Prime Minister Robert Abela

warned European Council President Charles Michel during a meeting here that Malta is at its full capacity and cannot take any more migrants. Malta insists that member states on Europe's southern border cannot be left alone to deal with the problem created by illegal migration. It contends that other EU countries have to share the burden.

## US top health officials urge vaccination at Senate hearing

Washington | Agencies

US top health officials on Tuesday testified before the US Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on efforts to combat Covid-19, urging people to get vaccinated.

"We are at a critical turning point with the coronavirus and it will depend on continued vaccination to get us back to some form of normality," said Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases under the National Institutes of Health, Xinhua reported. "We are in a race between the vaccine and the virus, if left to its own devices, (Covid-19 cases) will continue to surge based on experience thus far in this country and globally," said Fauci.

"I feel confident that if we continue to vaccinate people at the rate that we're doing, that we will very soon have a situation where we will have so few infections in this country, we will begin to return to normality that all of us desire so much," the top infectious disease expert noted.

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky echoed Fauci,



imploring everyone to get a Covid-19 vaccine as soon as possible as a way to "end this pandemic". She urged parents to get their children vaccinated now that the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech shots for children aged 12-15.

"I am so proud to report the administration of more than 261 million vaccine doses," Walensky said, adding that over 84 per cent of Americans aged 65 and older and over 58 percent of all adult Americans have received at least one vaccine dose.

But "globally, the pandemic is more severe than ever," she said. "Surge of cases (in India) is tragic and a reminder that the virus can rapidly outstrip our efforts to contain it. If we are not careful, we will not end this pandemic without working hand in hand with countries around the globe to fight Covid-19."

Along with continuing the effort to vaccinate every American, "we must also maintain public health measures," namely mask, hand hygiene, and physical distancing, Walensky said.

David Kessler, chief science officer for the federal administration's Covid-19 response, expressed concerns that vaccination efforts alone won't end the pandemic. "I am concerned that even after we finish vaccinating most of the people who want to be vaccinated, by this summer there will still be a significant number of cases and an unacceptable number of deaths," he said.

## UN CHIEF CONCERNED ABOUT PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI ESCALATIONS

United Nations: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday voiced grave concern over the serious escalations in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel, including the latest escalation in Gaza, which added to the heightened tensions and violence in occupied East Jerusalem, said his spokesman.

Guterres is deeply saddened to learn of increasingly large numbers of casualties, including children, from Israeli airstrikes in Gaza, and of Israeli fatalities from rockets launched from Gaza, said Stephane Dujarric, the spokesman, in a statement, Xinhua news agency reported.

The secretary-general's thoughts are with the families of the victims, said the statement.

Israeli security forces must exercise maximum restraint and calibrate their use of force. The indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars toward Israeli population centres is unacceptable. This spiralling escalation must cease immediately, it said. The United Nations is working with all relevant parties to de-escalate the situation urgently, said the statement.

## RUSSIA URGES RESTRAINT AS PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI TENSIONS FLARE UP

Moscow: The Russian Foreign Ministry on Tuesday called on Palestinians and Israelis to exercise restraint and refrain from steps that could further escalate the conflict in East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

"Moscow perceives this dangerous development of events with deep concern. We strongly condemn attacks on civilians, regardless of their nationality or religion," the ministry said in a statement, Xinhua news agency reported.

The ministry deems it important to observe the status quo in relation to the holy places in Jerusalem.

It said Russia, in cooperation with regional and international partners, will consistently seek a comprehensive and sustainable settlement with the coexistence of the two states, Palestine and Israel.

## ONE KILLED IN ROCKET ATTACK NEAR TEL AVIV; AIRPORT CLOSED

Tel Aviv: One person was killed on the outskirts of Tel Aviv on Tuesday evening after a rocket attack by Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip. According to media reports, a woman was killed in the town of Rishon Lezion when a rocket hit her directly; the Zaka aid organisation confirmed her death.

A bus in the city of Holon was also struck by a rocket and burned out, leaving at least six people injured in the attack, DPA news reported citing Times of Israel.

Initial reports about a woman being killed in the bus incident were later not confirmed. The greater Tel Aviv area was in the cross-hairs of Palestinian militants, who sent a barrage of rockets towards the coastal metropolis, marking the heaviest attack the city has faced so far.

The Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv was closed to landings and departures due to the attacks, and flights were diverted to Cyprus. The Islamist Hamas movement in charge of the coastal enclave had vowed a "harsh" rocket attack on Tel Aviv.

## UN report predicts stronger world economic growth

United Nations | Agencies

A UN report has revised up the world economic growth as a result of robust rebounds in China and the US but warned against fragilities in other economies in the context of Covid-19.

In its mid-year update of its World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021, which was released in January 2021, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) now predicts the world economy will grow 5.4 per cent in 2021 instead of the 4.7 per cent forecast in January 2021, Xinhua reported. Following a sharp contraction of 3.6 per cent in 2020, the world economy will return to positive territory as

the world's two largest economies -- China and the US -- will register impressive growth, according to the mid-year update, which was released on Tuesday. DESA revised its forecast for China from 7.2 per cent to 8.2 per cent; and for the US from 3.4 per cent to 6.2 per

cent for 2021.

While the global growth outlook has improved, surging Covid-19 infections and inadequate vaccination progress in many countries threaten a broad-based recovery of the world economy, warned the report.

The pandemic is far from

over for a majority of countries. Daily new infections were higher in April 2021 than the number of new infections reported daily during the peak of the pandemic in December 2020, the report noted.

With the risks of a prolonged pandemic and insufficient fiscal space to stimulate demand, the world's most vulnerable countries are facing the prospect of a lost decade. The growth outlook in several countries in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, remains fragile and uncertain. For many developing countries, economic output is only projected to return to pre-pandemic levels in 2022 or 2023, according to the report.

## More nurses lead to fewer patient deaths, shorter hospital stays: Study

Sydney | Agencies

A minimum ratio of one nurse to four patients for day shifts can successfully improve patient care, with a 7 per cent drop in the chance of death and readmission, and 3 per cent reduction in length of stay for every one less patient a nurse has on their workload,

according to a study across 55 hospitals in Queensland, Australia. In 2016, 27 public hospitals in Queensland were required to instate a minimum of one dedicated nurse for every four patients during day shifts and one for every seven patients for night shifts on medical-surgical wards.

The study, published in

The Lancet, examined more than 400,000 patients and 17,000 nurses in 27 hospitals that implemented the policy and compared with 28 hospitals that did not. The comparison hospitals had no change in staffing, with six patients per nurse in 2016 and the same ratio (1:6) in the follow-up period in 2018.

The findings showed that the chance of death rose between 2016 and 2018 by 7 per cent in hospitals that did not implement the policy, and fell by 11 per cent in hospitals that did implement the policy. The chances of being re-admitted increased by 6 per cent in the comparison hospitals over time, but stayed the same in hospitals that implemented the policy.

## Israel-Gaza violence spirals as Netanyahu vows to intensify attacks

Tel Aviv | Agencies

Hundreds of rockets were fired upon Israel from Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip throughout Tuesday, as Israel pummelled the tiny coastal territory with airstrikes and the death toll mounted on both sides.

The cross-border violence, which erupted on Monday following weeks of rising tensions in the contested city of Jerusalem, is the worst the region has experienced in years.

More than two dozen Palestinians have been killed in the last day, including several children. Three Israelis died from Gaza rocket fire on Tuesday, DPA news agency reported.

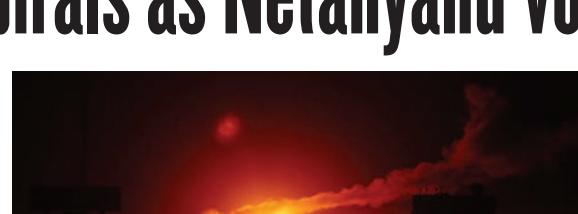
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the attacks on Gaza, which have targeted some 500 Hamas and Islamic Jihad positions since Monday, would intensify.

"This operation will take time, but we will bring security back to the citizens of Israel," he said late Tuesday. Hamas, which rules the coastal strip, would "receive blows it did not expect," Netanyahu had said hours earlier in remarks after a meeting with military officials.

An Israeli military spokesperson said that at least 20 members from the two groups have been killed so far in Gaza, including senior officials, and some 150 missile-launchers had been destroyed.

Many of the targets were located in places where civilians reside, spokesperson Jonathan Conricus said, so civilian casualties could not be ruled out, though the army was trying hard to avoid them.

Rocket warning sirens were a persistent sound across Israeli communities.



The greater Tel Aviv area was in the cross-hairs of Palestinian militants, who sent a barrage of rockets towards the coastal metropolis, marking the heaviest attack the city has faced so far. The rocket fire prompted flights to be halted at Israel's main international airport outside of the city. The Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv was closed to landings and departures due to the attacks; flights were diverted to Cyprus. One person was killed on the outskirts of Tel Aviv in rocket attack. According to media reports, a woman was killed in the town of Rishon Lezion when she was hit directly. The Zaka aid organization also confirmed her death.

The rockets were fired toward Tel Aviv after the Israeli army destroyed a building containing offices of members of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip.

Residents of the building were warned by Israeli forces before the attack and told to leave, witnesses said.

A Hamas spokesman had earlier threatened a "harsh" rocket attack on Tel Aviv if the Hanadi Tower building was destroyed.

In the southern city of Ashkelon, two women were killed when their homes were struck, according to the Zaka aid organization. Impacts were also reported on residential buildings in Ashkelon as well as a school where no lessons were being conducted.

In total, Gaza militants aimed around 480 rockets towards Israel over 24 hours. Of these, some 200 were intercepted and 150 failed to properly launch, the Israeli military said Tuesday evening. The Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, claimed responsibility for the attacks, which it said were in retaliation for a deadly Israeli strike on a high-rise residential building in the western part of the Gaza Strip. The apartment belonged to a member of Islamic Jihad, according to witness-ees.

In total, the Gaza Health Ministry put the death toll in the latest round of violence at 28, including 10 children. More than 100 people were injured, it said.

According to local media and witness reports, three children were killed by Israeli airstrikes and others by misdirected rockets fired by extremists.

Israel said it was targeting rocket production, storage and training facilities as well as military posts. The airstrikes and rocket attacks followed violent clashes in recent days at Jerusalem's holy site known as the Temple Mount to Jews and the Noble Sanctuary to Muslims.

Demonstrations continued on the ground in Israel on Tuesday between police and Israeli Arabs in numerous cities throughout Israel. Stones were thrown at police officers and several cars were set on fire.

## INDIA'S BIGGEST TEST IN ENGLAND

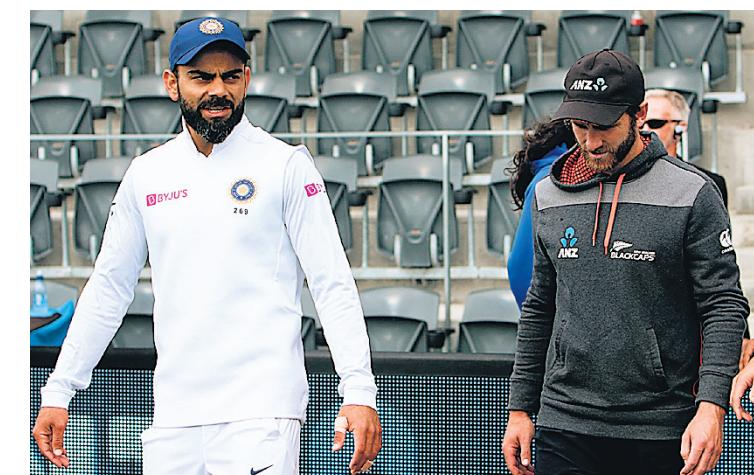
Team Absolute | New Delhi

**A**lthough Virat Kohli's team may get enough time to get acclimated for the five-Test series against England, starting August 4, following the WTC final against New Zealand from June 18-22, no matches have been scheduled for the visitors.

The Indian team will have to play only intra-squad matches to prepare, this was confirmed by an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) statement last month. The Indian team was supposed to play India A in warm-up fixtures as per initial plans. However, the ECB last month announced that the India A tour had been postponed.

"The India men's team will instead tour with a larger squad to prepare for, and use during the five-match Test series," the ECB statement had said. The Indian team will get to play two four-day intra-squad matches.

With just 24 players, including four reserves, available, the team will barely be able to make two teams for the two warm-up matches. Last time in 2018, the Indians played a three-day game prior to the Test series against



Essex. The number of warm-up matches ahead of overseas series has gone down in recent times due to a packed schedule, which doesn't allow long stays in any country. This has adversely affected batsmen touring England as they have been found wanting against extra ball movement in English conditions. However, this time India will be spending three and a half months in England due to the twin assignment. But due to Covid-19 pandemic there will be no games in this period when players could have polished their skill. India will also get very little time to prepare for the WTC final as they will straightaway enter the game with just about four days' practice, unlike opponents New Zealand who will have played two Test matches against England before the WTC final.

To India's advantage, Kane Williamson's Kiwis will be forced to take field thrice in Test matches in 17 days, leaving them exhausted. Williamson's team plays England on June 2 in the first Test. It will be followed by the second Test on June 10 before the WTC final gets underway on June 18. India are likely to leave on June 2. They then undergo 10 days of quarantine before they have 3-4 days of practice.

On its upcoming tour of England, the Indian cricket team's biggest challenge will be the one-and-a-half month, between World Test Championship (WTC) final and Test series against the host, when it will have no competitive cricket.

## UNCERTAINTY FOR SAINA, SRIKANTH AS OLY QUALIFIERS CANCELLED



Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a setback for Indians hoping to qualify for this year's Tokyo Olympics, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) announced on Wednesday the cancellation of the last Olympic qualification event, the Singapore Open, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The tournament was set to be held from June 1 to 6 and the qualifying window for the Olympics is currently scheduled to end on June 15. The BWF said that it will release a "further statement" on the qualification process later.

As things stands, India's badminton star PV Sindhu (women's singles), B Sai Praneeth (men's singles) and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty (men's doubles) have qualified for Tokyo.

However, Saina Nehwal, the 2012 London Olympics bronze medallist, and former men's singles world No.1, Kidambi Srikanth, will miss out on qualification.

## MANCHESTER CITY WIN 5TH PREMIER LEAGUE TITLE IN 10 YEARS

**M**anchester: Manchester City were confirmed as Premier League champions once again after Manchester United were beaten 2-1 at home by

Leicester City. City missed the opportunity to secure a third league title under Pep Guardiola on Saturday when a missed penalty from Sergio Aguero proved costly as Chelsea came from behind to win 2-1 at the Etihad Stadium. United beat Aston Villa on Sunday and needed another victory to delay the celebrations once again -- but a side showing 10 changes could not see off the Foxes, who took an early lead through a fine volley from teenager Luke Thomas which was cancelled out by Mason Greenwood's neat finish, DPA reports.

Caglar Soyuncu headed in a corner midway through the second half to secure all three points, which left City as champions with three games still to play.

Even if United, set for a rescheduled league match against Liverpool on Thursday as well as the Europa League final, could have produced the required performance, it would have only delayed City's seemingly inevitable march towards the title.



## India should play both Jadeja and Ashwin in WTC final: Ojha

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin should both be playing in the World Test Championship (WTC) final against New Zealand for their prowess with the bat as much as their ability to take wickets, said Pragyan Ojha.

Ojha said that with India having no fast-bowling all-rounder in the squad, Jadeja in particular gives them an extra option in the batting order.

"They should play, both of them. Because both can bat, both have the experience of bowling on any track. The biggest plus point is Jadeja can bat up the order. The way he is performing. Mind you if you look at his domestic record, he's got three triple hundreds."

I think he can bat long and Ashwin has got international hundreds also. I feel if there's a little

chance where you can play both the spinners, you should play. They have enough experience to win you games on any track," Ojha told Sports Today.

"Overall, it's a fantastic team. Even I was following Hamuma Vihari. Very thoughtful of him to go and play some county cricket. You know you get acclimated to the conditions. That's very important," he added.

Jadeja will be making his comeback to the Test team after being sidelined in the second Test against Australia due to a finger injury. The injury forced him to miss the four-Test series at home against England but he hit the ground running for Chennai Super Kings in the 2021 Indian Premier League.

Ashwin, on the other hand, has experienced a resurgence with the bat in recent matches, helping India to a draw in the third Test against Australia by fending off 128 balls and finishing unbeaten on 39. He then scored 106 against England in the second Test in Chennai in February.

## Creating more goal-scoring opportunities important: Lalremsiami

Bengaluru | Agencies

**I**ndia women's hockey team forward Lalremsiami will focus on creating more goal-scoring opportunities when the team competes at the Tokyo Olympics 70 days from now. "Creating more goal-scoring opportunities will be the key to our success (during the Olympics and other international competitions)," said the veteran of 64 matches, who is with the team training at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) centre at Bengaluru, on Wednesday. "The national side has improved in many aspects after its tour of Germany in February-March this year. We tried to create more goal-scoring opportunities during the tour and that



will be our main focus this year. If we can create more goal-scoring opportunities, it will hold us in good stead, especially in an Olympic year," said the 21-year-old.

Lalremsiami added that she is looking to make a bigger impact this year.

"I have been in the senior team for four years now and 2021 will be the most important year of my career. I am looking to make a bigger impact for the team this year, especially in the Olympics. I am confident about my abilities and am sure that I can make more contributions to the team's victories in the upcoming months," said the forward.

"Our Olympic preparations are on track and everything is going according to plan," she said.

## 13 AUSSIE CRICKETERS APPEAL TO HELP INDIA FIGHT COVID-19



Sydney | Agencies

**A**ustralian men and women cricketers have increased their efforts to help India in its fight against the Covid-19 crisis, urging every citizen of their country to come forward and donate liberally to UNICEF Australia.

In a one-minute video posted on UNICEF Australia's Twitter handle on Wednesday, some of the top Australian cricketers, including the legendary Allan Border, have said that the "situation in India is heart-breaking" and that in "times of crisis, we have to come together".

Among the cricketers, besides Border, who have helped deliver the powerful message are: Pat Cummins, Brett Lee, Alex Blackwell, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc, Mike Hussey, Steve Smith, Marnus Labuschagne, Ellyse Perry, Alyssa Healy, Meg Lanning, and Rachael Haynes. India is recording four new Covid cases every second. There's not enough oxygen to go round. These are the most deadly days of the pandemic so far. Coronavirus is devastating communities across the country. The situation is heart-breaking," said the 13 cricketers, in an effort to draw the global attention to the crisis.

"In times of crisis we come together. We're throwing our support behind UNICEF's India Crisis Appeal. Their [UNICEF] teams are on the ground right now delivering emergency supplies to the vulnerable."

The message added: "No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. Join us by clicking the link below because right now India needs us. Help send life-saving supplies to families in India, donate now to unicef.org.au."

## SOMETIMES MISS DHONI'S GUIDANCE: KULDEEP YADAV

Team Absolute | New Delhi

**S**pinner Kuldeep Yadav has admitted that he misses the guidance he used to get from MS Dhoni when the latter kept wickets. Kuldeep has seen his international appearances nose-dive since the end of 2019, which was also the year that Dhoni played his last match for India.

"Sometimes I miss that guidance because he (Mahi) has great experience. He used to guide us behind the wicket, kept screaming. We miss his experience. Rishabh is there now, the more he plays, the more input he will give in the future. I always felt every bowler needs a partner who can respond from the other end," Yadav told The Indian Express.

Yadav has played seven ODIs in 2020 and 2021, as compared to 23 in 2019 alone. Dhoni played his last game for India in their semi-final defeat to New Zealand in the 2019 World Cup on July 10 before eventually retiring from interna-



tional cricket on August 15, 2020. "When Mahi bhai was there, I and (Yuzvendra) Chahal were playing. Ever since Mahi bhai left, Chahal and I haven't played together. I played only a handful of games after Mahi bhai left. I must have played ten-odd games. I had even taken a hat-trick. If you look at the performance as a whole, it will look pretty decent but if one breaks it up then my performance sometimes can look not up to the mark. One has to also look at the opposition we are playing against," said Yadav.

# UN FORECASTS INDIA'S ECONOMY TO GROW 7.5% IN 2021, BUT WARNS SITUATION 'FRAGILE'

The UN forecasts India's economy to grow by 7.5 per cent this calendar year and rebound to 10.5 per cent next year with the caveat that the outlook is "highly fragile" because of the brutal Covid-19 second wave.

**United Nations | Agencies**

**T**he mid-year World Economic Situation and Prospects report released on Tuesday said that for a global recovery universal access to Covid-19 vaccine is critical but in India "access to vaccines is unequal and insufficient to meet the massive demand".

"Given the fluid situation, India's growth outlook in 2021 is highly fragile," it warned.

It noted that while "India has been particularly affected by a brutal second wave, which is overwhelming the public health system in large parts of the country", the country also "has expanded vaccine eligibility and is ramping up supply in every possible manner".

The mid-year forecasts are 0.2 per cent higher than that made in January for this year and it has been revised up by 4.2 per cent higher for next year.

The report forecast investment



growth to plunge by a negative 10.2 per cent this year.

This year China's economy is projected to grow by 8.2 per cent and the US by 6.2 per cent -- the highest it has seen since 1984.

Introducing the report, the Chief of the UN Development Research Branch, Hamid Rashid, said that universal access to vaccines was a critical factor for global economic recovery as it will create her immunity to enable the resumption of economic activities.

The report, however, painted a dim picture of the global vaccination situation.

It said, "As of 24 April 2021, 1.01 billion vaccine doses have been administered globally, with the United States, the United Kingdom and China collectively accounting

for nearly 50 per cent of all the doses administered worldwide. Only about 1 in 10 people worldwide have received a vaccine shot so far (figure 1). The vaccination rate is only 1 in 100 in Africa."

For South Asia, the report said, economic growth will return in 2021 at 6.9 per cent against a 5.6 per cent drop in 2020, but the recovery will be very uneven, and the scarring effects will run deep.

It added, "Indeed, South Asia's regional economic growth in 2021 will still be insufficient to undo last year's 6.7 per cent loss in GDP (gross domestic product) per capita. Many of the region's households that have fallen into extreme poverty will thus remain trapped in their precarious condition."

## INDIA'S FLEXIBLE SPACE SEGMENT TO GROW AT 10-15% ANNUALLY FOR NEXT 3 YEARS

**Team Absolute | New Delhi**

**T**he co-working or flexible space segment in India is likely to grow at the rate of 10-15 per cent annually for the next three years, according to a CBRE report.

Currently, the flexible space in the country accounts for 36 million square feet.

Titled 'The Future is Flex', the report said that the prospective growth can be attributed to the hybrid space demand, expansion across cities and sustained funding.

It highlights that as of Q1, 2021, Bengaluru holds a flex stock of 11.6 million square feet which is the maximum in the country, followed by Delhi-NCR at 6.6 million square feet and Hyderabad at 5.7 million square feet.

While these cities, along with Mumbai will continue to see further demand, flex demand in cities like Pune and Chennai are also expected to see growth in the coming years. In 2020 alone, over 75,000 seats were leased in flex spaces across India.

Additionally, with an expanded range of



flexible space options, and increased focus on hybrid working models by enterprise clients, tier 2 and 3 markets are also expected to witness an increase in flex demand. Tier 2 activity is expected to be dominated mostly by domestic operators during the next couple of years, it said.

## 7,400 office leases of 90 mnsq ft up for renewal in top 6 cities

**Team Absolute | Mumbai**

**O**ver 7,400 office space leases spanning around 90 million square feet area will come up for renewal in 2021 across the top six cities -- Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Chennai, Gurugram and Noida, as per the Anarock data. Data further reveals that 2021 has the highest lease expiry pipeline when compared to the next two years, 2022 and 2023.

The next year will see nearly 7,000 leases for around 78 million square feet come up for renewal and around 4,200 leases for over 55 million square feet in 2023. Out of the around 7,400 leases expiring in 2021, Mumbai has the highest share at about 44 per cent,



followed by Pune with a 17 per cent share. These two cities have been among the worst-affected by the second wave. The impact on leasing activity there over the year bears watching.

The total number of leases coming up for renewal in 2021 account for 90 million square metres area. In terms of area, Bengaluru has the largest share at about 37 per

"To accommodate these employees in a future when we see a gradual return of employees and adoption of hybrid workplace practices by infotech giants, office space demand will grow."

"Office demand also is expected to gather momentum from 2022 in the wake of robust hiring by large corporates. These big corporates will definitely renew their leases, though some of the smaller companies may consider rationalising space," he added. "The leases coming up for renewal in 2021 were entered into at much lower rentals - rates that prevailed 3 to 5 years ago - since office leases are usually signed for the long-term. There is some room for rental escalation in many of these leases," he added.

## JIVA AYURVEDA DOCTORS NOW JUST A CALL AWAY WITH IMMUNITY HELPLINE NUMBER TO HELP IN FIGHT AGAINST THE PANDEMIC WAVE

**New Delhi:** Jiva Ayurveda has launched a new helpline number so that during this current medical crisis, people can easily speak to specialized Ayurveda doctors, who can guide them on ways to boost immunity. The immunity helpline number is 7042404040 and is operational from 8 am to 10 pm. The helpline shall address doubts relating to immunity and how Ayurveda can help them strengthen their immunity levels. The doctors shall give a proper treatment plan, along with diet and lifestyle changes and recommend immunity building products. Dr Partap Chauhan, Director, Jiva Ayurveda said, "Jiva Ayurveda has started this immunity helpline number after receiving several requests



seeking advice on ways and means to boost immunity. Common recommendation like kapha and kapha have noticed some people get adverse reaction, thereby, this helpline will ensure that each individual gets immunity advice suited to their own body type, condition, age and environment. Rebuilding immunity, overcoming weakness and strengthening the respiratory system has also been found as a key challenge with people recovering from Covid. In some cases, people struggle with after effects of the infection for weeks and months; the special advice from doctors will also help people in gaining their normal body function and strengthening the respiratory system."

## business

**absoluteindia**

11

# Fuel prices rise for third day, closing on Rs 100/litre in Mumbai



**Team Absolute | New Delhi**

**M**aintaining its rising trend, fuel prices increased for the third day in a row on Wednesday as state-owned fuel retailers hiked rates of petrol and diesel by 25 paise per litre each in the national capital.

In Delhi, petrol now costs Rs 92.05 per litre and diesel is priced at Rs 82.61 up from yesterday's level of Rs 91.80 and Rs 82.36 a litre respectively.

Across the country as well the petrol and diesel prices increased on Wednesday but its quantum varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states.

In Mumbai, petrol now comes for Rs 98.36 a litre and diesel for Rs 89.75, according to a price notifi-

cation from oil marketing companies.

Petrol prices in some states including Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and in some places in Maharashtra have breached the Rs 100 per litre mark while premium petrol has been hovering above that level for some time now.

Fuel prices have now increased on each of the day this week. Prior to holding back auto fuel prices on Saturday and Sunday, its pump rates had increased sharply on previous four days as well.

Petrol prices have risen by Rs 1.50 a litre in Delhi in May in seven hikes so far. Similarly, diesel prices have risen by Rs 1.88 per litre in capital this month.

IANS had written earlier that OMCs may begin increasing the retail price of

petrol and diesel post state elections as they were incurring losses to the tune of Rs 2-3 per litre by holding the price line despite higher global crude and product prices.

The oil companies had already increased the ATF prices by 6.7 per cent effective this month. OMCs benchmark retail fuel prices to a 15-day rolling average of global refined products' prices and dollar exchange rate. In the last fortnight global oil prices have hovered in \$66-67 a barrel range higher than the levels when petrol and diesel prices were last revised.

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

## Refiners cut output to prevent stock build up in a market with subdued demand

**Team Absolute | New Delhi**

**W**ith India's fuel demand slipping again after reimposition of lockdowns across parts of the country to combat a surge in Covid-19 cases, Indian oil refiners have started doing the balancing act to prevent buildup of excess stock of products with squeezing outlets to liquidate them.

Industry sources said, country's largest public sector refiner IndianOil has reduced cut output at its refineries to less than 90 per cent levels this month after clocking over 95 per cent refinery throughput last month to prevent build up of stocks as storage facilities are getting full with restricted date in the market.

Government officials contend that

the situation this year would not worsen to the levels it went last year as inter state movement of vehicles is still on and industrial activity largely is going on unhindered. Last year a few refineries had to reduce their output to as low as 65 per cent to prevent build up stock in absence of

viable sales options in the market.

An official of a public sector oil refiner said that though fuel consumption in May is expected to be lower by about 5 per cent over April numbers which itself was about 10 per cent lower than March numbers,

they would get away with limited cut on refinery output this month and maybe in June to balance operations.

The reduction in refinery throughput also had an impact on crude imports that fell in April and is likely to fall again in May. Sources said, HPCL has reduced crude imports to 1 million barrels in May and May further deepen these cuts to 2 million barrels in June. "This year is not as bad as 2020 for oil refiners. With various global economies opening up post Corona wave, fresh demand has been created for Indian refined petroleum products. This has eased stockpiles and these is ample space to store products now. This will put lesser pressure on refiners to cut production in absence of demand and stocking facilities," said an official of PSU refiner.

## ALUMINIUM INDUSTRY REITERATES URGENCY FOR 5% RODTEP RATE FOR ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

**Team Absolute | New Delhi**

**T**he Aluminium Association of India (AAI) has pushed for speedy implementation of the RoDTEP Scheme (Remission of Duties or Taxes on Export Products) for the Indian Aluminium industry on priority to survive these challenging times.

In a letter to senior officials of ministries of Commerce & Industry and Finance & Corporate Affairs, AAI expressed the urgent need for at least 5% remission rate for the Aluminum Sector under RoDTEP Scheme to ensure its global competitiveness. The AAI also requested a separate budget allocation for the aluminium industry, being a strategic sector, to realize the immense potential to double Aluminium exports over the next 2-3 years.

Highlighting the urgency of the matter, the AAI said, the Government needs to notify the actual remission rates as per actual sectoral data submitted to the RoDTEP Committee. The inordinate delay in notifying the sector-wise remission rates is creating a precarious situation and a high level of uncertainty for the Indian exporters. It is adversely impacting exports due to ambiguity w.r.t. pricing of exports goods and absence of any clarity on the mechanism of duty remission/ drawback rates for exports. The situation for exporters further aggravates with the withdrawal of MEIS, as to date the exporters are unable to avail the MEIS benefit for exports already made during FY- 20 and FY- 21 (Apr-Dec) due to the blocking of the online MEIS module for applying claims.

The Commerce Ministry / DGFT are yet to notify the rates due to Government's current situation pertaining to budgetary constraints. Union Budget 2021-22 has allocated only Rs 13,000 Cr for RoDTEP Scheme against Rs 50,000 Cr announced by Hon'ble Finance Minister in Sept, 2019. This allocation is just one-third of the Rs 39,097 Cr allocated in FY-20 for MEIS (Merchandise Exports from India Scheme).

Supporting the rates calculated by RoDTEP by an extensive exercise conducted through detailed discussions, due diligence and analysis done for various sectors, AAI said that implementation of its rates will give flexibility in increasing the rate in the future based on budget allocation to increase exports without any objection from WTO.

Throwing light upon the current dilemma of the Indian Aluminium industry, it further highlights the plight of the Indian Aluminium exports struggling to retain competitiveness in international markets as compared to the major exporting countries, specially China, which extends various



support measures for export competitiveness. In India, the high incidence of numerous unrebated Central & State taxes/ duties impedes the growth potential of Aluminium sector in India. The various taxes constitute ~15% of Aluminium production cost which is amongst highest in the world. This adversely impacts the sustainability & competitiveness of Aluminium industry and further renders Indian exporters vulnerable and uncompetitive vis-à-vis global players in international markets. These duties and taxes should not be exported as such and should be remitted back to the domestic producers to encourage domestic value addition and export of finished products.

Under MEIS, the Aluminium exports were eligible for a 2% reward rate which itself didn't provide ample cushion to remain competitive against the current bearish market condition. Government support is extremely crucial at this juncture to reduce the burden of high taxes/ levies with an adequate remission rate of at least 5% under RoDTEP to boost exports and survive this challenging phase.

Recognized as one of the 12 champion sectors, India has the 2nd largest Aluminium production capacity (4.1 million tons/ annum) and is the 3rd largest Aluminium producer. Huge investments of Rs 1.2 Lakh crore (\$20 billion) have been made to enhance domestic production capacity to cater to domestic demand as well as enhance exports of high quality finished Aluminium products. The industry has generated more than 8 lakh jobs and developed over 4000 SMEs in the downstream sector. Aluminium exports alone contributed \$5 billion to India's Forex earning in FY-21, i.e. ~2% of India's export basket and have massive potential to double the exports to the tune of \$10 billion Forex earning in future.

## RAKULPREET SINGH STARTS FUNDRAISER TO HELP COVID PATIENTS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctress Rakulpreet Singh has announced a fundraising campaign to help Covid patients in the country. She is urging people to contribute, so that they can aid the provision of oxygen supply through oxygen concentrators and cylinders and their refilling, besides live-saving equipment.

"It is devastating to see the current plight of our country. Every day we hear heartbreaking stories of people struggling and fighting their battles due to the scarcity of oxygen,

beds, medications and a lot more. Through this fundraiser with Give India, our aim is to provide support and relief at a ground level with the supplies of oxygen and life-saving equipment," said Rakulpreet.

Rakulpreet urged people to contribute and says that even small amounts will go a long way.

"All we are requesting is for Rs 100 and welcoming more if people can. But a contribution of Rs 100 will go a long way. So, in these trying times when we are feeling helpless, I request everyone to do their bit," she says.



## NIKHITA GANDHI: I'M EXCITED TO BE PART OF NEW WAVE OF INDIE RELEASES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**S**inger Nikhita Gandhi is making sure that she continues making music during the pandemic, and says the Indie genre excites her.

"I am excited to be part of this new wave of Indie releases. I have another single dropping soon, where you get to hear the female version of 'Mawaalidil'. All in all, a lot of self-written melodies," said Nikhita.

Nikhita added, "I'm excited because the spectrum is so global right now, and to be a part of this movement is a dream come true. I got to collaborate with the American RnB artiste Pink Sweats for the song 'At my worst' and be on playlists with Rihanna and Kehlani. I don't think if I went back to 13-year-old me and told her all this would happen, she would ever believe

me!"

Talking about her recent number "Karobaardilkha", she says that musician Kushal Mangal came to her with the idea.

"Kushal has been my bandmate and he's been playing the keys with me for the past couple of years. He's an extremely talented musician, and more importantly, a wonderful person. He started releasing his own compositions in 2020 and he came to me with "Karobaardilkha" saying that he really wanted me to sing the last stanza. I agreed even without hearing the song because I know how great he is. And when I did listen to it, I fell in love with the simple, yet resonating melody of the song. It's so mature and gorgeous and I really hope people listen to it," she says.



## Pratik Gandhi: It took almost 16 years to reach this place

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctor Pratik Gandhi, who became a pan-India sensation last year with his portrayal of Harshad Mehta in the popular series "Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story", says it took him over a decade to reach where he is today.

Post "Scam 1992", Pratik, who has made a mark on the Gujarati screen and stage, is set to appear as a solo hero in Hardik Gajjar's film

"Atithi Bhoot Bhava", co-starring Jackie Shroff and Sharmin Segal. He has other assignments lined up.

Recently though, Pratik faced the camera with a very different challenge than testing his histrionic skills. He was on the set of "Star Vs Food", where, under the guidance of Chef Vidit Aaren, he was seen trying his hand at whipping up cold-roasted globe artichokes and portobello mushrooms.

The actor says his wife

Bhamini is his biggest critic, and he believes he would win the challenge only if he satisfies her refined palate.

"During lockdown I had done enough disasters," he said, recalling his recent culinary experiences.

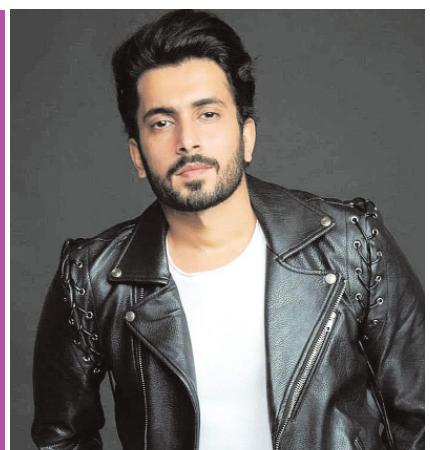
Bhamini added: "The couple of times he tried to make rotis, roti ekdumpapadjaisai-hojati hai (the roti would end up becoming like a papad)!"

Pratik, who graduated in industrial engineering from Pune university and had

worked for a while in Reliance Industries before acting beckoned, said: "I had heard this phrase where 'if you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen'. Now I understand where it comes from. I think more than actor, my engineer side will work in the kitchen."

"When I came to Bombay in 2004, I had an engineering degree in my hand and some sort of theatre experience from my hometown, and I thought I will be making it big soon, but it took almost 16 years to reach this place," the actor added. After going through rigid kitchen drills, Pratik reflects on his achievement during the taste test: "I think I have successfully completed this challenge and you can see how successful I was - the fact is these guys are not even ready to believe that I cooked this! That says a lot." He will be seen in the show on Discovery+ on May 13.

## SUNNY SINGH HAVE BEEN WORKING OUT 'TWICE A DAY' FOR ADIPURUSH



Team Absolute | Mumbai

**S**unny Singh is gearing up for his first Pan-India film, Adipurush. The actor is making the most of the lockdown by preparing for his character in the film in order to maintain his physique.

Talking about his prep to play Laxman in Adipurush, Sunny Singh shares, "I have been working out twice a day because they want me to be a little muscular and there is a requirement of size gain for the character. So with the help of my trainers, the current workout routine which I have been following is weight training with a combination of functional training."

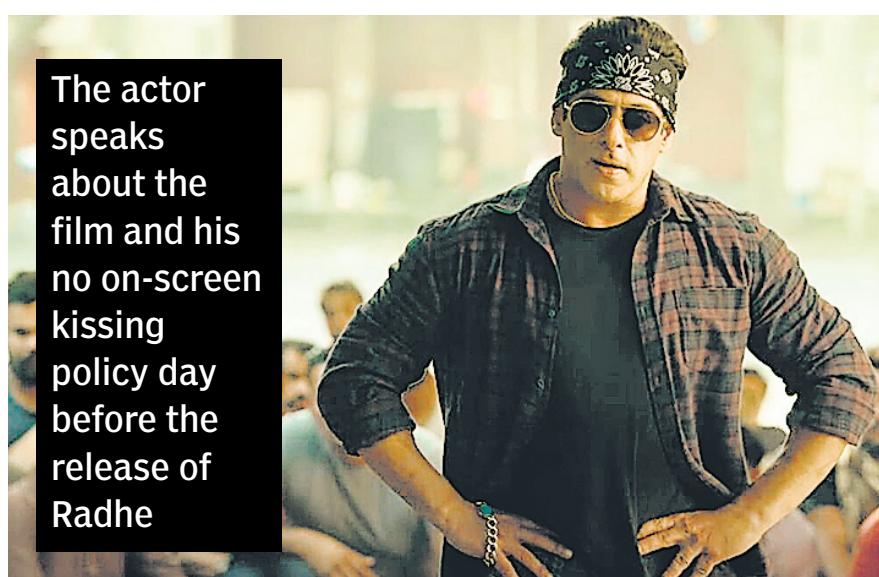
He adds, "Unfortunately, owing to the pandemic while we are not shooting I still have to follow the workout and fitness regime to maintain the physique for the character so that I am in the required shape when we resume the shoot."

The Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety star will be seen in his first ever Pan-India film in Adipurush, also marking his first foray into a mythological role.

Sunny Singh often keeps his fans entertained through his social media with his breath-taking monochrome pictures and tongue-in-cheek captions.

Sunny Singh will be seen as Laxman in the Om Raut directorial which also stars Prabhas, Kriti Sanon and Saif Ali Khan.

***It is for the first time I have kissed duct tape in a film: Salman Khan***



**The actor speaks about the film and his no on-screen kissing policy day before the release of Radhe**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**D**ay before the release of his film Radhe superstar Salman Khan talks about the subject of the film. The actor is a media interaction informs, "the plot is that Radhe makes a commitment to this child whose friend dies and goes and cleans the city out. This is what Radhe is about and in that we have comedy and we have three villains Sang Hae from Bhutan, Gautam Gulati who was in Bigg Boss, and then there is Randeep Hooda. They are fantastic in the film and they look something else only. They have actually made Radhe look much stronger and bigger. The opposition, they were so

lethal and they are actually dangerous and you can tell how hard these guys have worked. And then with all that, we have Jackie, comedy, romance. But did the actor break the no kiss policy in Radhe to which Salman replied, "it the first time I have ever kissed a duct tape in movies... I have done it in Radhe. I have never kissed a duct tape in movies ever at all. That duct-tape was on Disha's lips so I say no when people ask me- "You have never kissed on-screen?". So yes, this time I kissed on screen but not Disha's lips, it was duct tape that I kissed. Like in Maine Pyaar Kiya, I kissed the lipstick from the other side of the window of Bhagyashree. So yes, this time I have."



**TAMANNAAH: I ALWAYS FIND GREAT JOY WHEN FANS RESONATE WITH MY REEL CHARACTERS**



Ridhima Pandit