

absolute india

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India witnesses worst Covid toll as 4,329 die in a day

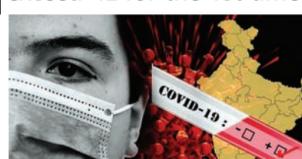
FATALITIES CONTINUE

- On May 12, India recorded 4,205 Covid deaths, while on May 7, the country had recorded its highest ever cases of 4,14,188.
- India's overall tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,52,28,996 with 33,53,765 active cases and 2,78,719 deaths so far.



According to the Health Ministry, a total of 4,22,436 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours, with 2,15,96,512 being cured from Covid till date. The Health Ministry said that a total of 18,44,53,149 people have been vaccinated so far in the country, including 15,10,418 who were administered vaccines in the last 24 hours.

India's daily recoveries exceed 4L for the 1st time



New Delhi: In a big achievement, India has recorded daily recoveries of more than four lakh Covid patients in a single day for the first time. Giving credit to the dedicated and tireless efforts of all the healthcare and frontline workers, the Union Health Ministry on Tuesday said 4,22,436 recoveries were registered in the last 24 hours. An average daily recovery of more than 3,55,944 cases has been recorded in the last 14 days. With the fresh recoveries, India's cumulative recoveries reached 2,15,96,512 on Tuesday and the National Recovery Rate has grown further to touch 85.60 per cent.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 31,82,92,881 samples have been tested up to May 17 for Covid-19. Of these 18,69,223 samples were tested on Monday.

NEW RT-PCR KIT TO DETECT VARIOUS MUTANT STRAINS

New Delhi: An Institute of National Importance under the Ministry of Science and Technology has developed a new RT-PCR kit with novel gene which targets facilitating detection of Covid-19 across various mutant strains. In a statement, the Ministry of Science and Technology said, "A newly developed multiplex RT-PCR kit has a higher accuracy of detecting Covid 19 across the various mutant strains of the virus responsible for the global pandemic. As the pandemic is going through a second wave with multiple variants, the selection of target genes in multiplex RT-PCR assay is becoming critical for accurate detection of the virus."

COVAXIN TRIALS FOR 2-18 YEAR GROUP IN 10 DAYS

New Delhi: Clinical trials to test Covaxin vaccine's efficacy in children between two to 18 years of age will begin in 10-12 days, top officials said on Tuesday. Addressing the Union Health Ministry press conference, NITI Aayog's Member Health, Dr V.K. Paul said: "Covaxin has been approved by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) for Phase 2 and 2 clinical trials in the age group of two to 18 years. I have been told that trials will begin in the next 10-12 days."

Bodies burnt with tyres & petrol in UP, Video goes viral

In-Human Police



BALLIA | Agencies

Five policemen have been sent to the lines after a video went viral in which bodies were being cremated with tyres and petrol in the presence of the police personnel. The incident apparently took place on Madhehat in Phephna in Ballia district on Monday. After the video went viral, SP Ballia Vipin Tada sent five policemen, who had been entrusted the task of getting the bodies cremated, to the lines. He has also ordered an inquiry into the incident. The inquiry will be conducted by an additional SP rank officer. In the video clip, the policemen are seen standing while a man pours petrol into a heap of burning tyres where the bodies were placed. Sources said that the bodies were in an advanced stage of decomposition and firewood was not available nearby.

MEDICAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN UP VILLAGES AT GOD'S MERCY: ALLAHABAD HC

Prayagraj: The Allahabad High Court has said that the medical infrastructure in villages and small towns in Uttar Pradesh is 'Ram Bharose' (at the mercy of God). "If this is the state of affairs of a medical college in a city like Meerut, then the healthcare system of the state, particularly in towns and villages can be likened to the famous Hindi saying - 'Ram Bharose'," the court observed on Monday, adding it was a case of "high degree carelessness". The court was referring to the disposal of the body of a patient, Santosh Kumar, as unidentified in Meerut district hospital. "A patient is admitted to the hospital in absolute care of doctors and paramedical staff and if they adopt a casual approach, then it is a case of serious misconduct. They are playing with the lives of innocent people. In these few months, we have realised that the state's medical infrastructure as it stands today, is very delicate, fragile and debilitated," the court observed.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With 4,329 deaths in last 24 hours, India on Tuesday recorded highest fatalities from Covid infection, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said. However, there was a bright side as well, as 2,63,533 new cases reported in the same duration -- were the lowest in 26 days. On Monday, the number of Covid cases has come down below the three-lakh mark for the first time since April 21.

While Maharashtra continues at the top with the highest deaths so far, the western state has been surpassed by Karnataka for largest number of cases being reported last week.

Govt officials are unaware of ground realities of Covid: Delhi HC

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court observed on Tuesday that the Central government officials are living in 'ivory towers' and are not aware of the Covid-19 pandemic situation. A bench pulled up the Centre for not being aware of the ground realities related to the ongoing pandemic, which has claimed scores of lives. The court emphasised that the government could get millions of vaccines and this is a window for that opportunity. Stressing on the utility of vaccines to fight the pandemic, the court noted that every day the Centre is castigated by the courts, yet it is not awake. The bench said: "God bless this country. In such matters, instructions are to be taken from the highest authorities, and that too within 30 minutes."



Indian Navy, Coast Guard rescue 314 from barges in Arabian Sea

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In one of the biggest search and rescue operations in the Arabian Sea, the Indian Navy (IN) and Indian Coast Guard (ICG) rescued 314 people stranded and struggling for survival on two barges that were engulfed by Cyclone Tauktae, officials said here on Tuesday.

All the 137 people marooned on the Barge GAL Constructor have been successfully rescued by the IN and ICG teams after daring helicopter and ship operations braving extreme weather conditions, battling tall waves, heavy rains and strong winds of over 100 km/hr, near the Colaba Point.

Similarly, another 177 persons out of 273 on board Barge Papaa-305 were picked



up with the help of INS Kochi, INS Kolkata, OSV Ahilya, OSV Ocean Energy and Sea King helicopters, even as the vessel sank in the sea this morning.

According to IN and ICG, these incidents involved a total of 707 persons of which 314 have been rescued and further operations are con-

tinuing since the past 24 hours. Meanwhile, At least three people have died following the devastation caused by the severe cyclone Tauktae in Gujarat. Chief Minister Vijay Rupani said that the administration is fully functional in carrying out the search and rescue operations.

Never exported vaccines at the cost of people in India: Adar Poonawalla

New Delhi: Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla has said that the SII never exported vaccines at the cost of the people in India.

Defending the move to export vaccines earlier this year by the government and vaccine manufacturers which has been the subject of a heated debate, he said: "Another important factor that people do not tend to realise is that we are amongst the two most populous countries in the world, a vaccination drive for such a large population cannot be completed within 2-3 months, as there are several factors and challenges involved. That said, it would take 2-3 years for the entire world population to get fully vaccinated."

Poonawalla said in the past few days, there has been intense discussion on the decision of the government and Indian vaccine manufacturers including SII to export vaccines. "The cooperation between countries also forms the basis for us getting access to technology and aid for healthcare. Today, it is this reciprocity, where India has helped other countries with the supply of HCQ and vaccine exports, that has in turn led to support from other countries," he added.



Mamata Banerjee wants change of governor, writes to PM, President

Anwesha Bhaumik | Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has written to President and Prime Minister demanding a change of Governor in the interest of "good governance" in the state.

The letter comes immediately after the CBI arrested four Trinamool leaders, including two ministers, a former minister and a former Mayor in the Narada scam, on Monday.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar has been on an unusual offensive against the Mamata government after the ruling Trinamool Congress won a landslide in this summer's assembly polls.

Banerjee's letters despatched on Tuesday alleges that Governor Dhankhar has been raking up an 'exaggerated version' of violence in West Bengal since the election.

It said the whole exercise is to project a 'highly inflated version' of the law and order situation in West Bengal, overlooking the fact



that the incidents happened when the control of administration was "not in our hands." The situation is now under full control and the administration is busy fighting Covid, it said.

It said the Governor is trying to 'destabilise the functioning of the government' at the time when the need of the hour was focussed efforts to control the Covid pandemic.

SUPER CYCLONE 'YASH' MIGHT HIT SUNDARBANS BETWEEN MAY 23 AND MAY 25

Kolkata: The Regional Meteorological Department has predicted that Super Cyclone 'Yash' is likely to make landfall in Sundarban areas between May 23 and May 25 and possibly move towards Bangladesh. The met department warned that the ferocity of the cyclonic storm named by Oman might equal that of 'Amphan' that devastated Kolkata and adjoining areas on May 19 last year during the lockdown. Though the meteorological department is not sure about the direction and the speed of the wind but they said that a low depression has been formed in the East Central Bay and its adjoining areas and as it is increasing in strength every day it might take the shape of a 'Super Cyclone' before making landfall by the end of the week.

- In particular, rural core has now jumped to 6.4 per cent in April 2021 and would rise further in May 2021. Increasing health expenditure because of the pandemic is having a meaningful impact in rural areas. Item-wise inflation of Health CPI shows persistent month-on-month increase in inflation of non-institutional medicine, and X-ray, ECG, pathological tests.
- Even hospital and nursing home charges have increased in April 2021. In the current pandemic, headline inflation may not be incorrect to look at, said the report. For failing to do enough to check terror financing and warned of blacklisting the country if it did not comply with the requirements before October.

Health expenditure of Indians to surge, impact consumption spending

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Health expenditure of Indians is likely to surge from the current levels and impact the expenditure on items of discretionary consumption, according to an SBI Ecowrap report.

It noted that although CPI inflation slowed to 4.29 per cent in April 2021 from 5.52 per cent in March 2021, primarily due to easing food prices, as the pandemic rages through India, it is worthwhile to look beyond the headline inflation.

It noted that overall CPI declined in April 2021 because of significant decline in food CPI, but when the relative prices of food items is compared to overall CPI, the deceleration was not sharp as it was seen in actual food CPI. Similarly, for certain items like fuel and health, the increase in relative prices is maximum. The core CPI, which was



showing a decline of 57 bps, increased in relative terms by 18 points.

"Health expenditure, currently at 5 per cent of overall PFCE (private final consumption expenditure), could increase by at least 11 per cent from the current level. This is likely to also result in squeeze in expenditure on other items of discretionary consumption, a recipe for a cutback in consumption spending."

BJP SLAMS CONGRESS OVER 'TOOLKIT'; GRAND OLD PARTY HITS BACK

New Delhi: The entire controversy erupted after BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra took to twitter on Tuesday and shared a page, saying, "Friends look at the Congress 'ToolKit' in extending help to the needy during the Pandemic. More of a PR exercise with the help of 'Friendly Journalists' and 'Influencers' than a soulful endeavour. Read for yourselves the agenda of the Congress: congressToolKitExposed." Hitting back at Sambit Patra, Congress Leader Rajeev Gowda said, "BJP is propagating a fake toolkit on Covid-19 mismanagement and attributing it to AICC Research Department. We are filing an FIR for forgery against (BJP Chief) J.P. Nadda and Sambit Patra. When our country is devastated by Covid, instead of providing relief, BJP shamelessly concocts



DAY AFTER PM'S RS 2K DOLE, FARMERS STUNNED BY HIKE IN FERTILISER PRICE

Day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi released Rs 2,000 each to 9.50 crore farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sanman Nidhi Scheme on May 14, the peasantry was hit by an unexpected bolt from the blue.

Quaid Najmi & Anand Singh | Mumbai/New Delhi

Barely 24 hours after the PM's nationally-televised event, and the ensuing interactions and laudatory messages from the BJP leaders, all major companies in the country effected a steep hike in prices of different categories of fertilisers - a key farming ingredient - on May 15. Many companies, wholesalers and retailers by the weekend had implemented the new prices of fertilisers, just as the farming community was preparing for the upcoming monsoon sowing three-four weeks hence. As the impact of the price hikes - ranging from 20-60 per cent for certain varieties or brands -

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(रुपये)			
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१२:३२:१६	११९०	१८००
२०:२०:०	१७५	१३५०
डीएपी	११८५	११००
आयपीएफ	१२००	११००
डीएपी	१२००	११००
२०:२०:०	१७५	१३५०
पोटा	८५०	१०००
महाधन	११७५	११२५
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२०:२०:०	१७५	१३५०
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१०:२६:२६	११७५	११७५
१२:३२:१६	११९०	१८००
२०:२०:०	१७५	१३५०
डीएपी	११८५	११००
सपर फॉस्फेट	३७०	४७०



Chemicals & Fertilisers, D.V. Sadananda Gowda, flaying the price hike as an "unfortunate decision" and demanding its immediate roll-back.NCP President and former Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said on Tuesday that it (price hike) would hamper the pre-sowing

farming activities and rub salt on the wounds of the farmers. Backing Pawar, Shiv Sena's farmer face and Vasant Naik Sheti Swavalamban Mission (VNSSM) President Kishore Tiwari - who has been accorded MoS status - said the price hikes by the fertiliser companies "appears to be pre-planned and done hand-in-glove with government support". "What was the need to do it just one day after the PM's highly-publicised but meager handout to the farmers? Why is the PM and the minister (Gowda) silent on this, knowing the current grave crisis afflicting the country on all fronts," Tiwari asked. "The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has badly impacted our people, devastating their every means of livelihood," Pawar told Gowda, adding that the farming community is reeling under one of the worst-ever crises and its issues need to be addressed on priority. Maharashtra Congress President Nana F. Patole said that the Modi government has acted on expected lines "for the benefit of a handful of crony industrialists" at the cost of the tillers.

Raj Political Saga: MLA from Pilot camp steps down

In a new twist to the political saga in Rajasthan, senior Congress MLA Hemaram Choudhary, who belonged to the camp of former Deputy CM Sachin Pilot, sent his resignation to Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi on Tuesday, creating ripples in the state's political circles.



JAIPUR | Agencies

In July last year, the Pilot camp had rebelled against the leadership of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. However, the 19 rebel MLAs were reintroduced into the party after senior Congress leaders stepped in to sort out the matter, including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and the late Ahmed Patel. Choudhary stood with Pilot all through the rebellion.

Even after the return of the rebel leaders into the party fold, they were not allotted any portfolio, nor were their grievances addressed. Choudhary has been raising his voice over the issues being left unaddressed. A few MLAs from the Pilot camp had even raised their concern over the functioning of the state government on the floor of the Assembly. Meanwhile, Choudhary has requested Speaker Joshi

to accept his resignation. Rajasthan minister and Congress leader Pratap Khachariyawas said that this is an internal matter of the party which will be resolved soon. BJP state president Satish Poonia said, "The party (Congress) is divided ever since the formation of the Congress government. It is their internal matter. In this time of crisis, we are busy saving the lives of the people amid the second wave of the Covid pandemic."

Delhi HC pulls up Centre for no response in toolkit case

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday pulled up the Centre for not filing its reply on a plea by climate activist Disha Ravi seeking to restrain police from leaking media any investigation material in connection with FIR against her in the toolkit case. The court made some strong remarks after it was told the Centre has not filed a response to Ravi's plea so far.



Justice Rekha Palli told Centre's counsel: "For Union of India, is there no last and final opportunity? This is very bad." The court emphasised if the reply were not filed on time, then what is the meaning of the court saying it is the last opportunity. "I cannot understand that. What is the sanctity of last and final opportunity,"

added Justice Palli. On March 17, the court had granted a final opportunity to the Centre to file its reply on the petition. Central government standing counsel Ajay Diggpaal informed the court that due to Covid-19, not many officials were coming

to the office, due to which the response in the matter could not be filed. After Diggpaal's submissions, the court said it will not impose any cost on the Centre and gave six more weeks to file its response. The High Court has posted the matter for further hearing in August.

K'TAKA TO REHABILITATE CHILDREN ORPHANED BY PANDEMIC: MINISTER

Bengaluru | Agencies

Karnataka on Tuesday resolved to rehabilitate children up to the age of 18 years who have been orphaned by the pandemic, besides setting up special paediatric Covid care centres in 30 districts of the state as part of its rolling out strategy to contain a possible third wave of Covid-19. The move came after the Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) had urged the state government to ramp up child-care infrastructure ahead of a possible third wave, during which children are predicted to be most vulnerable, as per experts. After the meeting with the concerned officials, the state's Woman and Child Welfare Minister Shashikala Jolle told reporters that the state government is ready to rehabilitate children who have been orphaned by the second wave of the pandemic, which hit the state since April this year. "We have decided to set up separate quarantine facilities as well as hostels for

those up to 18 years who have lost their both parents," Jolle said at a press conference, adding that such children need not be afraid as the government would come to their rescue. The minister said that the state government has set up a helpline number - 1098 -- and senior IAS officer Mohan Raj has been appointed as the nodal officer to ensure that such children are taken care of. She said the woman and child welfare department has identified five circumstances where children are deprived of parental care and require the department's intervention. "These are, if both the father and the mother die of Covid, if both parents are hospitalised, if any one of them dies of Covid or if one is dead and the other lives in a different area. In any possible scenario, the state government would surely intervene and protect the children below 18 years of age," she explained. According to her, many schemes have been introduced for children who are orphaned by the pandemic, such as special quarantine facilities for different age groups, among others.

UP OPPOSES ANTICIPATORY BAIL CITING COVID, SC TO HEAR CASE NEXT WEEK

Citing the top court's direction to decongest jails amid the pandemic, the High Court had said: "The observations and directions of the apex court show concern about the overcrowding of jails, and in case this court, ignoring the same, passes an order which will result in overcrowding of jails again, it would be quite paradoxical."



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to hear a plea by the Uttar Pradesh government next week against a Allahabad High Court order, granting anticipatory bail to an accused in a cheating case, after holding that the accused's fear of contracting Covid-19 in custody

is a valid ground for granting the relief. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the state government, submitted before a bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and B.R. Gawai that the High Court had passed the order granting the bail till January 2022 citing Covid-19 on May 10. Noting that the accused has been accused in over 100 cases of fraud, Mehta sought urgent listing of the matter before the vacation bench. The bench said: "We will hear it next week."

HYDERABAD COP'S ACT OF KINDNESS WINS HEARTS



Hyderabad | Agencies

An act of kindness displayed by a police constable in Hyderabad during the lockdown is winning hearts on social media. S. Mahesh Kumar, a traffic police constable, while on patrolling duty at Somajiguda area in the heart of the city, found two hungry children begging for food. Moved by their plight, he took out his lunch box and

served the food to them. The Telangana State Police posted the video of the policeman's gesture on Twitter. The young constable, attached to Panjagutta Traffic Police Station, is seen placing two paper plates in front of the children who were simply overjoyed. Their hunger was clearly reflected in their reaction. The constable then takes out a bag from his motorbike and opens the lunch box. He personally serves rice, dal and chicken curry to the kids. "Kha lo beta, chicken kha lo," the constable tells the children in a heartwarming gesture. The video is winning the hearts of people on social media. It went viral and garnered 1.21 lakh views since posted on Twitter late Monday. Netizens were all praise for the humane gesture of the police constable.

PINARAYI VIJAYAN GOVERNMENT 2.0 MIX OF YOUTH AND EXPERIENCE

Thiruvananthapuram | Agencies

Returning to an unprecedented second term in power, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday unveiled his new team, which jettisons all sitting ministers from his CPI-M, and consists of a mix of youth and experience, besides giving adequate representation to women, caste, communities and religion. The team consists of three women - all first time ministers. They include two from the CPI-M - journalist-turned-two-time legislator Veena George, who is the wife of present CPI-M Secretary A. Vijayaraghavan, college professor R. Bindu and J. Chinchurani, the first woman from the CPI, after the Communist Party split in 1964. The entire team will be sworn in on Thursday here at the Central Stadium by Governor Arif Mohammed Khan at 3.30 pm. The biggest surprise in the 21-member team was Vijayan showing that he is the ultimate boss, by leaving out even acclaimed Health Minister K.K. Shailaja as he inducted all new faces from his Communist Party of India-Marxist.



Assam CM welcome ULFA-I's ceasefire declaration

Guwahati | Agencies

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday welcomed the unilateral ceasefire announced by outlawed ULFA-I, terming it a positive development and a renewed boost to peace and tranquillity in the state. He said that the government's doors are always open if the United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I) desires to join the peace process. "Nevertheless, there is hope in the unilateral ceasefire announced by ULFA-I and this must be considered in good stead," Sarma told media after meeting the parents and wife of abducted ONGC engineer Ritul Saikia at Titabor in Jorhat district and assuring them all efforts are on to ensure his safe release. Urging ULFA-I command-



er-in-chief Paresh Baruah to shun violence and join the path of peace, the Chief Minister, who also holds charge of the Home Department, said that people of Assam do not want incidents like grenade blast at

Tingrai or abduction of Saikia, but they want peace. "ULFA-I did not call the ceasefire in consultation with the government and if discussion is to be carried forward, there is a need to frame certain ground rules," he

added. Sarma told the reporters that as per state government sources, Saikia is at India-Myanmar border and in good health. "State government is leaving no stone unturned to ensure his safe return."

Court denies anticipatory bail to Olympic medallist Sushil



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi court on Tuesday declined to grant anticipatory bail to Sushil Kumar, India's double Olympic medallist in wrestling, in connection with a brawl at Chhatrasal Stadium, which led to the death of a wrestler. Additional sessions judge Jagdish Kumar declined to grant the relief to Kumar who has been booked for murder, abduction and criminal conspiracy. Kumar in his plea seeking anticipatory bail filed

by advocate Kumar Vaibhav has said: "unfounded, baseless, scurrilous and preposterous allegations have been made against the applicant maliciously with the only motive to humiliate and injure the reputation of the applicant." The police said Kumar is the main accused who has played a key role in the commission of offence. The police have also announced a cash award of Rs.50,000 for anyone who provides information on Sushil's associate Ajay Kumar, who is a

co-accused in the murder of Sagar Dhankar, a former international wrestler. On May 4, two groups of wrestlers clashed at Chhatrasal Stadium, resulting in the death of 23-year-old Dhankar. Kumar, in the plea, argued that statement of the victims has been recorded and alleged recoveries have also been made, therefore no custodial interrogation was required. Kumar also claimed that he has no connection with the alleged firing, which took place during the brawl.

BJP, RJD exchange potshots over vaccines in Bihar

Patna | Agencies

Biharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Rajya Sabha MP Sushil Modi alleged that due to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Congress party, the vaccination programme in the rural areas is progressing slowly. "The RJD and the Congress party are responsible for slow vaccination in rural areas in Bihar. RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav who is questioning the government should clarify why RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav and former CM Rabri Devi had not taken vaccines till now? How many RJD leaders have taken vac-

While the second wave of coronavirus has devastated lives across the country, the verbal sparring between the BJP and the RJD in Bihar is also intensifying over vaccines.

cines in Bihar?" Modi asked. "The RJD is also forcing poor people to avoid vaccines in the rural areas. This act of the RJD is putting their lives in danger" Modi said. "A section of people are saying that it is a vaccine of the BJP while some people are saying that PM Narendra Modi should take the vaccine first. I want to say that PM Narendra Modi and many other top personalities of the country have taken vaccines in a bid

to develop faith among the common people of the country," Modi said. Responding, Shyam Rajak, a senior leader of the RJD said: "Neither the Centre nor the Bihar government have adequate vaccines to vaccinate everybody in the country. Hence, these two senior leaders have not taken vaccines. Apart from that there are improper facilities of testing provided by the NDA government."



CYCLONE TAUTKAE BRINGS RECORD MAY RAINS, MAYHEM IN MUMBAI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The fury of Cyclone Tauktae on Monday brought in record highest rains and caused unprecedented levels of destructions besides one death, two missing and 10 injured, the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation said in a post-cyclone 'autopsy report,' on Tuesday.

The country's commercial capital also experienced its closest brush with a mega-cyclonic storm in the past 73 years, and the third most severe cyclone impact in the past 3 three years in a row after Cyclone Nisarga hit Maharashtra coast in 2020 and Cyclone Vayu had moved away parallel to the west coast in 2019.

Living up to the IMD's prediction of 110kms/hr windspeeds in Mumbai, the city notched 114 km/hr winds lashing Colaba, Brittanica Pumping Station Reay Road recorded 177 km/hr and Malvani in Malad west saw windspeeds of 101 km/hr.

The IMD recorded a staggering average 230.3 mm rainfall in the sub-



urbs and average 207.6 mm rains in the city side, both a record during the peak summer month of May in the past century. he city's annual average rainfall is around 2,500 mm, implying the cyclone brought nearly 9 percent of this year's likely total rains.

The highest rainfall figures were recorded in Kandivali (320 mm),

Borivali (315 mm), Dahisar (292 mm), Goregaon and Malad (281 mm each), G-South Ward of south-central Mumbai and surroundings (266 mm), and Worli (254 mm).

As many as 56 low-lying spots in the city witnessed flooding and waterlogging for several hours, disrupting traffic and pedestrian move-

ment, with reports of water seeping in some slums or ground floor flats in buildings.

The city saw 43 incidents of minor or major house or wall crash incidents which left 9 injured, and 39 complaints of electrical short-circuits due to water seepage in electric boxes or junctions.

At least 2,364 trees or major branches were ripped off during the cyclone across the city, leading to one death and one injury.

Fishing boats moored to the shores in Malvani and Mahim shores were uprooted from their anchors in which two persons are still missing, while 8 managed to swim ashore safely, said the BMC report. Hours after the Cyclone Tauktae whirled over to Gujarat coast and made a landfall late on Monday, Mumbai and the rest of the coastal Konkan witnessed stray rains since midnight today, though strong winds and showers continued in isolated areas as life limped back to normalcy.

SC judge Gavai recuses from hearing former Mumbai top cop's plea

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A new bench of the Supreme Court will hear a fresh plea filed by former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh seeking transfer of all inquiries ordered against him outside Maharashtra.

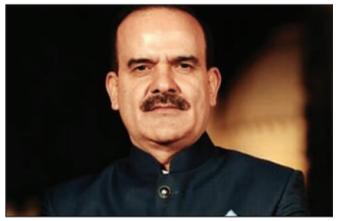
On Tuesday, as Singh's plea was taken up by a bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and B.R Gavai, Justice Saran told senior advocate Puneet Bali, representing Singh, "Brother (Justice Gavai) has some difficulty in taking up this matter. We will just say place it before another bench."

Justice Gavai added: "I can't hear this matter."

The bench, without going into the merits of the case, said: "List before another bench in which one of us is not a party." Justice Gavai did not cite any reason for not hearing the matter.

In his brief arguments, Bali had contended that inquiries against his client is a witch-hunt and also in complete transgression of the orders passed by the top court as well as the Bombay High Court. Singh had accused then Home Minister Anil Deshmukh of adopting corrupt practices in posting or transfers in police in addition with extortion of Rs 100 crore per month from various establishments.

In a writ petition, Singh alleged that the inquiry officer of the state government is threatening him with false cases unless he



withdraws the complaint against Deshmukh. Singh has asked the top court to transfer all investigations already initiated or contemplated against him to the CBI which is presently probing the charges against Deshmukh. He claims to have submitted to the CBI transcripts linked with alleged phone call conversations from the inquiry officer threatening him. "Issue a writ of mandamus or any other appropriate writ order or direction directing the Respondent no 1, its officers and agencies to: (i) transfer all the enquiries already ordered for considering departmental actions to any other state (ii) transfer all the investigations already contemplated or initiated against the petitioner for any punitive prosecution to independent agency like the respondent no 2 Central Bureau of Investigation, which is already probing the connected case or any other investigation agency outside the state of Maharashtra," said Singh's plea.

Maha Covid cases fall, deaths shoot up, toll crosses 83K

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra's Covid-19 new infections remained below the 30,000 level and in Mumbai, fell below in the 1,000 mark, but fatalities increased taking the state death toll across the 83,000 mark, health officials said on Tuesday.

Compared with 516 deaths on Monday, the state fatalities shot up to 679, taking the toll to 83,777. The number of fresh cases remained below the 30,000 level but increased from 26,616 on Monday to 28,438 now, taking the tally to 54,33,506 now. The Mumbai situation improved with new cases falling below four digits for the first time in over two months, from 1,232 on Monday to 961, while the city's tally increased to 690,023. Deaths dropped from 48 on Monday to 44, taking total fatalities in the country's commercial capital to 14,316. After five days, the state death rate again worsened from 1.53 per cent to 1.54 per cent now, while the number of active cases fell to 419,727 now. A total of 52,898 fully cured patients -- again higher than the number of fresh infections -- returned home, taking the total to 49,27,480, while the recovery rate further improved from 90.19 per cent to 90.69 per cent.



The Mumbai circle - comprising Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and Raigad districts - recorded a corresponding fall in new cases to 2,559, taking the case load to 14,90,389 and with 129 more deaths, the toll rose to 26,225 now. Of the day's total fatalities, Kolhapur led the state with 130 deaths, while there were 61 in Palghar, 44 in Mumbai, 39 in Nashik, 35 in Sangli, 34 in Satara, 28 in Nagpur, 27 in Beed, 26 in Solapur, 24 in Pune, 23 in Chandrapur, 19 in Ratnagiri, 17 each in Akola and Amravati, 16 in Ahmednagar, 15 in Nandurbar, 14 each in Thane, Jalgaon and Latur, 12 each in Nanded and Yavatmal, 10 each in Raigad, Sindhudurg, and Osmanabad, nine in Wardha, seven in Washim, four each in Jalna and Bhandara, two in Parbhani, and one each in Dhule, and Aurangabad.

PM Cares Fund ventilators faulty, says Maha hospital report

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Barely 3 days after the Centre ordered an audit of all ventilators given by the Centre, a report by the Government Medical College & Hospital (GMCH) Aurangabad, has contended that many ventilators provided under the PM Cares Fund are faulty, a senior Congress leader said here on Tuesday.

Giving details, Congress state Spokesperson Sachin Sawant said that the 3-page report by GMCH, among other things, said that it was given 150 ventilators under the PM Cares Fund (PMCF) for Covid-19 patients of which 100 Dhaman III models were supplied by Jyoti CNC on April 12. ter installation and testing of some ventilators, they were found to be unfit for treatment of extremely critical Covid patients, said the report submitted by the Dean to the Aurangabad Collector. The company's representatives, Sahdev Guchkund and Kalpesh came after six days and installed 25 ventilators, but all proved to be defective the very next day, April 20. Sawant said that the report stated how the ventilators were not supplying oxygen to the desired lev-



els making it difficult for the Covid patients to breathe, and consequently their oxygen levels were dropping, posing risks to their lives. The company officials were informed but they left without giving any service report, a team of engineers came after three days, repaired two ventilators which again broke down and were removed from the ICU, even as the Congress cried foul and demanded an inquiry-cum-audit into the matter. Despite repeated reminders, the service engi-

neers failed to come after which the hospital prepared a report and on May 13-14, Jyoti CNC's officials, Rajesh Roy and Ashutosh Gadgil came and two ventilators were repaired, but crashed soon after. "By giving sub-standard ventilators, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not only wasted public money but played with the lives of the people. Hence our demand of a joint-audit and probe by the Maharashtra government was correct," Sawant pointed out. Sawant said that some Bharatiya Janata Party leaders were now trying to shift the blame on the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, but the GMCH report has exposed them as they tried to protect the Jyoti CNC which is close to some BJP leaders. After Sawant raised the issue last month, on May 15, Modi ordered an audit of the installation and operations of ventilators provided under the PMCF.

Of the 150 ventilators supplied by Jyoti CNC, 58 were installed and all are lying unused despite repairs, the company has not even started installing another 37 ventilators, and the balance 55 were distributed to hospitals in Parbhani, Beed, Osmanabad and Hingoli, as per the GMCH report.

Cyclone Tauktae Hits Power For Over 18 Lakh In 2 Maharashtra Districts

Massive power outages were reported in Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts of Maharashtra. Authorities said, they are trying their best to restore power



of the area. Maharashtra Energy Minister, Nitin Raut said 13,172 personnel are working tirelessly to restore complete supply in the area. A total of 13,389 people from Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Raigad, Thane and Palghar districts were shifted to safer places, the note said.

In Raigad district, 8,383 people were evacuated to safer places, according to the Maharashtra dis-

aster management department. In Ratnagiri and Palghar districts 4,563 and 200 people were shifted. In Sindhudurg and Thane, 190 and 53 people were moved to higher grounds. The landfall of the eye of severe cyclonic storm Tauktae ended around midnight, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said. The cyclone hit Mumbai and other districts in the Konkan region on Monday.

SENIOR RESIDENT DOCTORS AT MAHARASHTRA GOVT COLLEGES DEMAND PAY HIKE

Pune: Dr Prashant Munde, advisor to MARD, said that senior resident doctors share major workload in government medical colleges and hospitals adding that senior resident doctors have neither received a pay hike nor the hazard fund despite working so hard during the Covid pandemic.

The Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors (MARD) has demanded a pay hike for senior resident doctors across government hospitals. A petition to this effect was submitted before Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Monday. Dr Prashant Munde, advisor to MARD, said that senior resident doctors share major workload in government medical colleges and hospitals. While there has been an increase in the pay of junior resident doctors and lecturers at government medical colleges, senior resident doctors have been getting minimal stipend. They have urged that the pay should be hiked from current Rs 66,000 to Rs 1 lakh. Senior resident doctors have neither received a pay hike nor the hazard fund despite working so hard during the Covid pandemic, Dr Munde said. They have urged authorities to consider their demand, failing which they have threatened to go on a strike.

Big B donates equipment, infrastructure to Covid facility

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amitabh Bachchan is donating resources to help set up a 25-bed oxygen facility in Juhu.

The veteran actor has teamed up with producer Anand Pandit for the same. Pandit, who had already set up a similar facility in Dadar, says: "A 25-bed oxygen facility has been set up at the RitambharaVishva Vidyaapeeth in Juhu. After a trial run, the centre was up and running by 10 am on Tuesday, May 18. Mr Bachchan has donated the equipment and infrastructure for the facility and all necessary permissions have been granted by the BMC."

"When Amit ji heard that I was scouting for places in Juhu, he called me and said he wanted to help in every way possible. He has always supported my social initiatives wholeheartedly and also contributed his time and resources. I hope this centre will help bring much needed relief and healing to those in need. We will continue to find ways to make a difference somehow during this tough time," he adds. Pandit had recently teamed up with



actor-filmmaker Ajay Devgn, too, to establish a 20-bed Covid-19 ICU at Shivaji Park and is working and scouting locations to set up another one in Borivali. He says: "It is imperative for the industry to come together at this time to help as many people as possible. We are facing an economic, humanitarian and social crisis at a scale that would have been unimaginable even last year. And those who can, must do everything to change the bleak narrative around the pandemic to one that gives hope."

Amitabh Bachchan stars in Pandit's production "Chehre". The theatrical release of the film has been postponed for now owing to the Covid outbreak.

Mental illness patients without IDs can get the jab

Last week, the state began vaccinating patients who have identification proofs in Thane and Ratnagiri mental hospitals.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Wednesday onwards, Maharashtra will start the process of vaccinating patients with mental illnesses, irrespective of whether they have identification proof, officials said on Monday.

Last week, the state began vaccinating patients who have identification proofs in Thane and Ratnagiri mental hospitals.

"Immunisation drive for those without identification proof will start from Wednesday," said Dr Sadhana Tayade, Director, Directorate of Health Services.

The drive will gradually cover other groups such as residents of old age homes and rehabilitation centres as well as the destitute, nomads, beggars and other people who don't necessarily have an identification proof.

Until now, only 41 patients out of the 2,453 admitted in the four mental hospitals in the state have been vaccinated. The beneficiaries include 30 men and 11 women. The mental hospitals, situated in Thane, Ratnagiri, Pune and Nagpur, house 1,386 male and 1,067 female patients.

Officials said shortage of vaccine has slowed the vaccination process to some extent.

Till date 7,253 patients have been tested for Covid-19 in



these hospitals and 763 have tested positive. These include both OPD patients as well as those who were admitted in the facilities. Of them, 78 required hospitalisation for treatment. Four patients have succumbed to the infection, and 141 cases are still active, according to the data. Hospital officials said ensuring physical distancing and mask

adherence is difficult in case of patients with mental illnesses.

Dr Duryodhan Chauhan, incharge of Maharashtra mental health cell, said for those aged above 45 years, stock will come from the Centre, and for 18-44 years group, the state government will provide vaccines. Chauhan said the

health department will coordinate with Women and Child Development (WCD) and Social Justice departments to draw a list of beneficiaries. District task forces have been authorised to identify such population groups and a key facilitator will be picked from each institution to register them and monitor the vaccination process. Officials said the plan is to first vaccinate inmates under institutional care and then register the destitute.

Shyam Tagade, Secretary, Social Justice department, said the department has data of about 60 old age homes in Maharashtra ready.

"Coordination with the health department is yet to begin. We issued instructions to all old age homes to give priority to testing and treatment among the inmates," Tagade said.

Beggars' home and women shelter homes fall under the jurisdiction of the WCD department. Advocate Gaurav Bansal, who filed a petition in Delhi High Court a few weeks back about the need to vaccinate the mentally ill and the destitute, said, "It is still possible to immunise those in institutional care, but what about the destitute? How will they be registered, given first shot, and be located for second shot if they wander on the roads? There is no clarity."





NO VAX STOCK IN DELHI FOR 18-44 AGE GROUP FROM NEXT WEEK: ATISHI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Vaccine stocks for the 18-44 age group in the national capital will be exhausted in three days. The Delhi administration has warned that the vaccination drive for the youth may be disrupted after this week, in case new consignments do not arrive within three days. AAP leader and MLA from Kalkaji assembly constituency Atishi on Tuesday said the Covaxin stock for the 18-44 age group has already finished last week and the Covishield stock is likely to last just three days. "We have not received Covaxin supply for 18-44 age groups from the Centre and Covishield stock is left only for three days. Vaccination drive for the youth (18-44 years) may get disrupted next week, if the next consignment of vaccines is not supplied to Delhi within the next three



days," Atishi said.

For 45 and above age groups, Delhi has received over 60 k (60,240) doses of Covaxin and the Covishield stock will last another four days.

In another major development regarding vaccination in the city, the government has started walk-in vaccination at schools for 45 and above age groups on Monday and a few more

centres will be set up soon. "Walk-in vaccination for 45 and above age groups has been kicked off at Delhi government-run schools across the city and more centres will be added soon. There are many people who are unable to book an online slot for vaccination due to many reasons and therefore the Delhi government has started walk-in vaccinations," Atishi added.

'Has become fashion in Delhi': HC refuses to hear plea on priority vaccination

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday refused to entertain a plea seeking waiver of clinical trials of foreign vaccines for Covid-19.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A bench comprising Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said the relief sought in the plea was a policy decision and it is not in the domain of courts. The High Court emphasised that courts could only consider the possibility of policy decision



only in exceptional cases.

As the plea sought priority in vaccination to those who have already taken the first dose, the court said authorities may treat the plea as a representation. It observed that if everyone is given priority, then the question would be who will come next in line. "Government has its own priorities," said the bench.

The court also stressed that that relief sought in the plea by advocate Nazia Parveen cannot be given just for the asking.

"It has become a fashion in Delhi that every now and then people are rushing to the courts with PILs for priority in vaccination," it said.

The plea has sought framing of a policy in connection with vaccine

distribution and waiver of clinical trials of foreign vaccines. The bench said the policy decisions are supposed to be taken by experts in the field and that it is a complex phenomenon, and courts cannot draft policy. "We are not going to exercise our power to draft a policy," it said.

The plea also raised the issue of bottling of vaccines but the court replied that it was a technical matter, which should be dealt by experts. It also noted that few prayers in the plea were already pending before the apex court, and it would not examine them.

However, the High Court said the authorities concerned may treat the petition as a representation and decide it in accordance with the law, rules, regulations and government policy applicable.

It also told the petitioner's counsel that Right to Information Act can be used seek information in connection with the status of vaccine doses ordered for the vaccination drive starting from May 1.

DELHI'S COVID TALLY REMAINS BELOW 5,000 FOR 2ND DAY RUNNING

New Delhi: New Covid cases in Delhi remained below the 5,000 level for the second consecutive day on Tuesday, with 4,482 reported in the last 24 hours. This was also the lowest since April 4, when 4,033 cases were reported.

The capital city also continued to witness reduction in the daily test positivity rate which slid below 7 per cent, to 6.89 per cent. However, there were 265 deaths, taking the toll to 22,111. According to the Delhi government's health bulletin, a total of 9,403 Covid patients have recovered in the last 24 hours, while the city has 50,863 active cases at present. The number of Covid patients in home isolation has reduced to 31,197. A total of 65,004 tests -- 43,915 RT-PCR and 21,089 rapid antigen, were conducted.

For the last two weeks, Delhi, which is under lockdown, has seen sharp reduction in daily positive cases and positivity rate. During the peak of the second wave of the Covid pandemic, on April 20, Delhi's daily positive cases were reported at 28,395, while the highest daily positivity rate was 36 per cent on April 22.

Delhi reported 4,524 new cases on Monday, 6,456 on Sunday, 6,430 on Saturday, 8,506 on Friday, 10,489 on Thursday, 13,287 on Wednesday and 12,481 on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, a total of 1,13,310 doses were administered, which included 93,718 people receiving their first dose and 19,592 their second dose, totaling to 47,15,785.

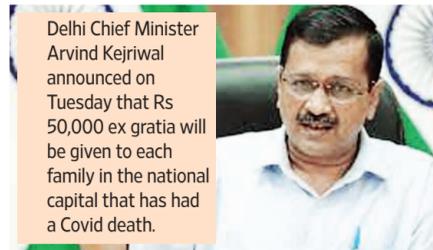
Kejriwal announces Rs 50K for families with Covid death in Delhi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Stating that many families have lost their loved ones during the second wave of the pandemic, Kejriwal said, "We cannot fill that void, but we will provide financial help of Rs 50,000 to each family that has lost at least one of its members to the pandemic." The Aam Aadmi Party-led government will also provide Rs 2,500 a month to the families whose sole breadwinner fell prey to Covid-19.

"There are many such families wherein the main earning members have died due to Covid. Delhi government will provide Rs 2,500 per month to each such family," Kejriwal said.

Also, children whose par-



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Tuesday that Rs 50,000 ex gratia will be given to each family in the national capital that has had a Covid death.

ents have succumbed to the virus will be given Rs 2,500 per month, while Delhi government will bear all expenses for their education. Apart from these, the Delhi government will also provide free ration to all the poor families which are struggling during the Covid-induced lockdown. "Each such family in Delhi will be given 10 kg free

ration (5 kg from the Centre and 5 kg from the Delhi government). There will be no need of producing income certificates to avail this ration. It would be given even to those who do not have a valid ration card," Kejriwal said. The Chief Minister said that all these decisions will be approved by the Cabinet and implemented soon.

BJP demands audit of money spent on Delhi's 'Mohalla Clinics'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Questioning the claims of the AAP Government about 'Mohalla Clinics' during the pandemic, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday demanded an audit of the money spent into setting up of these clinics. Former Delhi BJP Chief and MLA Vijender Gupta claimed that as Delhi was hit by the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the hollowness of the Arvind Kejriwal government's claims about its healthcare model stood completely exposed.

Referring to the Delhi High Court's observation that 'Mohalla Clinics' were a waste if not used during the pandemic, Gupta raising questions about the effectiveness of these clinics in the fight against Covid, said, "The Arvind Kejriwal government opened 450 Mohalla Clinics but not even one such clinic has been of use during the pandemic."

According to Gupta, crores of taxpayers' money were spent on advertising these clinics and countless claims made on how the world is appreciating Delhi's healthcare model but

today the condition of these clinics is pathetic as many of them are overrun by piles of garbage or lie abandoned like a haunted house. "Not a single mohalla clinic could support Covid patients in this hour of need. They could not even be turned into isolation centres or be equipped with life saving oxygen or drugs. Meanwhile, people of Delhi were dying because of lack of hospital beds and oxygen shortage, which proved to be an AAP-made disaster only," he said.

Gupta asked the government where are those doctors and nurses working in the 450 clinics when they were needed the most and demanded an audit of the money that went into the setting up of these clinics. "Money spent on the non-functional clinics could have gone into building more hospitals, or buying ventilators or other life-saving equipment. But due to the callousness of the Kejriwal government, Delhiites were left to fend for themselves as black marketing soared and Delhi's health infrastructure was found wanting during the second wave of the Covid," he said.

Covid strain in Singapore: Kejriwal urges Centre to suspend flights

Kejriwal has flagged a new Covid strain which he said has been detected in Singapore and is proving dangerous for children. Arguing that it can come as a third wave in India, Kejriwal said the Centre should take immediate measures, including suspension of flights to and from Singapore.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In view of a new Covid-19 strain that is reportedly affecting children in Singapore, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday urged the Centre to suspend all air operations with the Southeast Asian country. Kejriwal has flagged a new Covid strain which he said has been detected in Singapore and is proving dangerous for children. Arguing that it can come as a third wave in India, Kejriwal said the Centre should take immediate measures, including suspension of flights to and from Singapore.

Kejriwal said that the new virus is extremely dangerous for children,

and asked the Narendra Modi-led government to immediately suspend air services with Singapore and prioritise vaccination drive for children.

"The new form of Coronavirus in Singapore is said to be very dangerous for children. It could reach Delhi as a third wave. My appeal to the Central government: 1. Cancel all air services with Singapore with immediate effect; 2. Work on vaccine alternatives for children on a priority basis," Kejriwal tweeted. As per media reports, Singapore will shut schools from Wednesday as the authorities concerned have warned that new coronavirus strains, such as the one first detected in India, were affecting more children.

Taxi driver, two others held for murdering Kenyan national near IGI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Three people, including a taxi driver, have been arrested in connection with the murder of a Kenyan national who had come to India two weeks ago to get medical treatment, police said on Tuesday. Deputy Commissioner of Police, IGI Airport Rajeev Ranjan, said: "Police has arrested three people in connection with the murder of Kenyan national Jama Said Farah."

The arrested accused have been identified as Virender Singh aka Monu, Gopal Singh, and Dilbagh alias Billu, all residents of Rangpuri village. The DCP said Ranjan said that on Monday, a PCR call was received at the IGI police sta-

tion regarding a person lying dead near Centaur Hotel, and a police team reached the spot.

"From the incident scene, the police recovered a mobile phone of BMP Gold which was on and the last dialled number from the mobile was called which belonged to Manoj Sahu, a travel agent," he said. Ranjan said that Sahu, on being questioned, identified the deceased as Kenyan national Farah, who had booked a ticket through him for May 15 from Delhi to Somalia, and sent a copy of his passport. Sahu also informed Farah's daughter and she called up the Delhi Police to inform that her father came to India two weeks ago for the treatment of some heart disease, but



due to the pandemic, his treatment was postponed by the hospital and hence he was returning home, via Somalia, on May 17. The DCP said that Farah was denied immigration clearance at IGI Airport, due to non availability of a Somalian visa, and off loaded by airlines. "His daughter said that on being off-loaded, Farah came outside the airport and

took a taxi bearing registration number HR 55 AF 5435 for a hotel in Mahipalpur and since then she has no contact with her father," he said.

Then, Farah was found dead and his luggage was missing. A case was registered and seeing the gravity of the case, a dedicated team comprising a senior officer was constituted. "During the course of the investigation,

the police swung into action and ownership of the taxi number provided was obtained. The taxi was found registered in the name of Virender Singh. Thereafter, a raid was conducted at the above address and Virender Singh was arrested from his house," Ranjan said. During questioning, Virender Singh revealed that he, along with his two friends, namely Gopal and Dilbagh, were available in their taxi at the airport, and Farah took their taxi. "They had an altercation with Farah over the fare on the way, beat him up, threw him out near Centaur Hotel and fled," the DCP said, adding that to hide the identity of the victim, they took away the luggage and other valuable items of Farah.

Woman seeking 6 doses of Remdesivir, cheated off Rs 49K

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Black marketing of Remdesivir continues in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) with one more person here being cheated off over Rs 49,000 while trying to procure the drug for her ailing mother. Amrita Mallick, resident of Greater Kailash-1, stated that her mother was admitted in a hospital in critical condition, and six doses of Remdesivir injection was prescribed by the doctor. The Remdesivir vial was out of stock, so Mallick was searching for it everywhere that is when she was taken advantage of. She transferred the amount to a person who assured her on phone to provide six doses



of the medicine prescribed by doctor -- but received nothing return.

Mallick had come across a mobile number on WhatsApp promising help. She called on the number and transferred Rs 49,200 in the bank account of the person -- after that the phone was switched off. The victim then lodged a First Information Report at



Greater Kailash police station on May 6. Analysing details, one suspicious person of west Delhi's Najafgarh was zeroed in on. A police team under overall supervision of Assistant Commissioner of Police C.R. Park Lakshay Pandey was constituted comprising Sub Inspector Laxman, Assistant Sub-Inspector Atar Singh, Head

Constable Lekhraj, Constables Abhay and Sandeep led by Inspector Ritesh Kumar from Greater Kailash police station started the probe.

The team raided the Najafgarh address and found a clue regarding the culprit, said the police.

Raid was conducted at Chajupuram village in Haryana's Mahendergarh and one Sachin Yadav was arrested after interrogation.

Yadav, a resident of Chajupuram, had two mobile phones, which he used to swindle the woman among others. Rs 59,855 was recovered from him, said the police. During interrogation, Yadav disclosed that he circulated messages in various social media platforms wherein

availability of Remdesivir injection was displayed and his mobile numbers were also sent. "After disseminating the mobile number, Sachin Yadav started getting calls regarding remdesivir vials. He got money transferred into his account on the pretext of providing remdesivir vials. He has cheated several persons who approached him for Remdesivir injection," said the police. During investigation it was revealed that he had duped nine people among which another case at C.R. Park police station was registered.

"Further investigation is being done to ascertain the details of other victims. The accused was sent to judicial custody on Tuesday."

LET LAW TAKE ITS OWN COURSE: HC ON KALRA'S PLEA FOR SPEEDY BAIL HEARING

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday declined to direct expeditious decision on the bail plea of businessman Navneet Kalra, who has been arrested for allegedly black marketing oxygen concentrators amid a brutal second wave of the Covid pandemic. A single bench of Justice Subramonium Prasad said: "Let the law take its own course." The High Court also refrained from making any interference with the observations of a session's court, which dismissed Kalra's anticipatory bail plea.

Kalra was represented by senior advocate Vikas Pahwa. Refusing to grant relief to Kalra, the court said he had moved an anticipatory bail plea which has become infructuous after his arrest and therefore, nothing remains in the matter.

Kalra's counsel urged the high court to direct the trial court to decide his bail expe-

ditiously. He also urged the court to expunge the observations made on his client by the sessions court, as after his arrest he cannot challenge the order denying him anticipatory bail. A Delhi court on Monday sent Kalra, who was arrested late on Sunday night, to three days' police custody in connection with oxygen concentrator hoarding case. Metropolitan Magistrate Archana Beniwal at the Saket district court also passed the order after hearing the arguments of Delhi Police and Kalra's lawyers. The Delhi Police had sought a five-day custody of Kalra for interrogation in connection with the alleged black-marketing and hoarding of oxygen concentrators.

Delhi Police arrested Kalra, who was absconding since May 7, from his brother-in-law's farmhouse in Gurugram late Sunday night and handed him over to the Crime Branch, which is probing the matter.

Kalra was on the run since the seizure of 524 oxygen concentrators from three restaurants -- Khan Chacha, Town Hall, and Nege & Ju -- owned by him.

The High Court on May 14 declined to grant him any interim protection from arrest while his plea for anticipatory bail was pending before it.

Four employees of Matrix Cellular company, including its CEO and vice president, who were also arrested, were granted bail in the case. Kalra bought oxygen concentrators from Matrix Cellular which imported them.

On May 5, a case was registered against Kalra under Section 420 (cheating), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 120-B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code. The case was also registered under Essential Commodities Act and Epidemic Diseases Act.



CM Chouhan expresses gratitude to PM Modi

PM NARENDRA MODI APPRECIATES MP'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MODEL IN CORONA MANAGEMENT

Information given on Covid control strategy of Indore

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appreciated the public participation model adopted by Madhya Pradesh in Corona management. Modi has said that Crisis Management Committees have been formed at the district, block and panchayat levels. People of all political parties of both ruling and opposition have been added in this. This is the best way to connect with the public. By connecting public representatives, we can use their energy in the fight against Corona. Corona infection is spreading in villages where manpower and public support is must to face it. Public representatives have an important role to play at the village, ward and district level. Modi said that if other states also work like Madhya Pradesh in the direction of connecting political parties in the fight against Corona it will prove to be more effective.

Modi was interacting with state and district officials from all over the country through video conferencing regarding his experiences during the Corona pandemic. These included districts with more Corona cases and infection. In the virtual dialogue, information was shared about the strategy, innovation adopted by the district authorities and the best practices adopted by the districts and the states. Modi also addressed the programme.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan joined the programme through video conference from his residence. Information was given about the strategy adopted by Indore Collector Manish Singh in Indore, efforts made for public participation, preparation of health facilities and work done in the supply chain in this national level pro-



gramme. Officers from Gautam Buddha Nagar, Chandigarh, Patna, Dehradun, Chennai also shared experiences in the programme.

Giving information about the programme, Home Minister Amit Shah said that the strategies adopted by the districts and the states according to the local conditions can be replicated as per the regional requirement. A presentation was made by the Union Health Secretary, Shri Rajesh Bhushan on the status of Covid in the country and the best practices adopted by the states and districts. The public participation model of Madhya Pradesh is the only state level public participation model in the presentation of best practices held before Prime Minister Shri Modi whereas all other best practices were district level. The Union

Health Secretary said that the implementation of Janata curfew in Madhya Pradesh was very effective as a result of ensuring public participation by the formation of Crisis Management Committees at the district, block, panchayat level. Along with this, public participation was also received in the management and vaccination of Covid. Chief Minister Chouhan thanked the Prime Minister Shri Modi for giving guidance in the management of Covid in the future.

Collector Indore Manish Singh said that as per the instructions of Chief Minister Chouhan, support of people is being sought at every level in the battle against Corona in the state. Crisis management committees exist at the district, block, panchayat level. These include public representatives of all levels of all political parties. It is only with

their initiative and cooperation that the Janata curfew is being implemented, which helped break the chain of infection. Public support was also found in tracing and testing. Collector also gave information about the precautions to be taken by the villagers for protection against Corona in various activities through self-motivation.

Giving information about the micro containment area, market arrangement, limited operation of industrial units in urban areas and the ongoing Kill Corona Campaign in rural areas, Covid Care Center, Step-down Center and vaccination arrangements, he told that public participation has helped improve better management of arrangements and identification of patients and timely treatment.

This is a great opportunity to serve the suffering humanity: CM

Chief Minister Chouhan virtually addressed over one thousand newly appointed nurses urges them to fulfil the religion of a sister and infuse new life into patients with their services



address nurses as 'sisters'. Sister is a symbol of affection, love and closeness. She has a wonderful affection for the family. Serve the patients with the same love, affection and closeness. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan also appreciated the service done by Sister Saroj Yadav during corona treatment. Chouhan said that the Corona period is like a war period. We have been fighting a war against Corona for the last nearly one and a half years. After the second wave, we now have to be ready for the third wave as well. In this case, 'sister' should perform her sacred duty with patience and restraint. told through a story that there can be three types of attitude towards work. The first is to consider the work as a compulsion or burden, the second is to consider it only as a livelihood and the third is to consider the work as an opportunity of service and thank God for that. We should consider the work as service and work with a positive attitude.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that this is a great opportunity to serve the suffering humanity during the time of global epidemic like Corona. You have to fulfil the religion of sister. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan was addressing newly appointed nurses in various districts of the state through video conferencing from his residence today. 1015 nurses have been appointed in the state. Health Commissioner Shri Akash Tripathi and all concerned were present in the VC. Nurses joined from NIC centres in districts.

Chouhan said that there is no attendant with the patient at the time of corona. In such a situation, the responsibility of the nurse increases. In addition to continuously checking the patient's health parameters, it is necessary to take continuous care of him and also to boost his morale. Start your new work and infuse new life into patients with your service. My heartiest congratulations to all of you. Chouhan said that we

Chouhan said that many sisters will be deployed for vaccination task. The vaccine is like nectar for us. All the sisters should keep in mind that not a single dose of the vaccine should be wasted.

Employee organisations express gratitude to CM Chouhan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Various employee organisations have expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Chouhan for implementation of Mukhya Mantri Covid -19 Anukampa Niyukti Yojana and the Mukhya Mantri Covid-19 Vishesh Anugraha Yojana by Chief Minister Chouhan. Representatives of employees' organisations met Chouhan at his residence on Tuesday.

Chouhan said that employees discharge their duties with full devotion and dedication whether it is the difficult time of Corona or the normal time. The concern of their families is the responsibility of the state government. Chouhan has appealed to the representatives of the employee organisation to continuously motivate the employees to follow all precautions for protection against Covid at all



times. Mantralaya Karmchhari Sangh President Sudhir Nayak, Executive President Rajkumar Patel, Madhya Pradesh Clerical Class Government Employees Union Executive President Mehmood Khan, New Multipurpose Health Workers Union Convener OPS Rajput, Gazetted Officers Union's State President DK Yadav, Madhya Pradesh Corporation Board Employees Federation's

President Ajay Shrivastava Neelu, State Vice-President of Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh State Vice President Neelam Dhanna and Representative Varuna Goyal, State General Secretary of Madhya Pradesh State Employees Union Hemant Shrivastava and Treasurer Anil Edwin and State President of Contract Health Employees Union S Jeetendra Bhadoria and State Vice President Ajay Awasthi called on Chief Minister today.

THREE BOOKED UNDER NSA FOR BLACK MARKETING OF REMDESIVIR

Bhopal: Three persons were charged under the stringent National Security Act (NSA) for alleged black marketing of Remdesivir injections in Bhopal. The Madhya Pradesh government will ensure strict punishment for those indulging in black marketing of Remdesivir injections and other essential medicines for the treatment of Covid-19 infections. Bhopal Collector Avinash Lavania has taken action against the three accused -- Aakarsh Saxena, Dilpreet Saluja and Ankit Saluja -- under the NSA in the Kolar police station area for alleged fraud in Remdesivir injections at JK Hospital, Bhopal, and selling them outside the hospital for exorbitant prices.

As per the report received from the police, the Collector has directed that all accused be booked under the NSA and be sent on remand to Bhopal Central Jail.

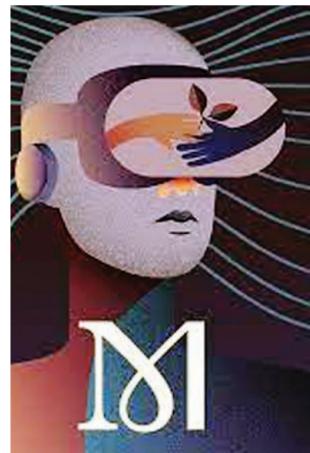
International Museum day

IGRMS organises lecture on "REIMAGINE the Future of Indian Museums: Education and Social Responsibilities"

Team Absolute | Bhopal

IGRMS on the occasion of International Museum day organized a lecture of Ambika Bipin Patel, Professor and Head, Department of Museology, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda on "REIMAGINE the Future of Indian Museums: Education and Social Responsibilities."

Speaking on the topic, she talked about the significance of Education to make the museum more vibrant. She discussed about how through educational activities museums can engage various segments of the society where, by the social responsibility of the museum to extend its service to the wellbeing of the society could be achieved. Dimensions of women empowerment, skill development, giving opportunities of learning to especially abled and physically challenges etc were discussed. Also, the responsibility towards communities by making them feel part of the museum and by making co-curative activities to enable them to stay con-



nected with museums will enable the sustainability of the community and their culture. Museums have to be connected in a traditional way to make people understand about museum objects.

This will be a fundamental change, and the Manav Sangrahalaya is a striking example of working between communities and connecting them.

The lecture was chaired by Director IGRMS Praveen Kumar Mishra, introducing Professor Ambika Vipin Patel he said that she is a distinguished eminence in the field of museum science. she has completed his PhD research work on the subject of archeology and ancient history. Since the year 2017, she has been working as Professor in the Department of Museology, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. At the same time, she also look after the work of the secretary of ICOM India. she has also received significant International Travel Grant awards in his career. Besides she also has various research works to her name.

On this occasion, the Director said in his message that the purpose of the establishment of International Museum Day is to spread awareness among the general public about museums and make them aware about their history and culture by visiting museums.

BJP SLAMS CONG AS WOMAN COMMITS SUICIDE AT MLA'S BUNGALOW

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Madhya Pradesh launched a blistering attack on the Congress after the alleged suicide by a woman at the bungalow of Umang Singhar, a Congress MLA and former Minister in the Kamal Nath government, in Bhopal. It is being alleged that Singhar was about to marry this woman but the reason behind her death is being investigated by the police.

The 39-year-old Sonia Bhardwaj, hailing from Ambala in Haryana, befriended the Congress MLA and frequently visited his house. She was residing at his bungalow for the last few days but committed suicide on Sunday by hanging herself with a dupatta. The woman was already married and lived with her son. The police have also recovered a suicide note from the spot holding blaming no one for her death. However, the name of Singhar has been cited many times in the note.



Police sources say that Singhar was friendly with Sonia for nearly two years and had met her through a matrimonial website. Sonia's mother reached Bhopal after receiving information about her death. The ruling BJP tweeted, "A female friend of the former

Congress minister committed suicide at his private bungalow and blamed him in the suicide note for her death. This incident is a minor issue for the Congress, is the former Congress minister responsible for inciting the woman to suicide?"

Union Minister's MLA Brother Says He Was Given Fake Remdesivir

BJP MLA Jalam Singh Patel, brother of Union Minister Prahlad Singh Patel, claimed his lung condition had worsened after being given fake injections.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The MLA brother of a Union minister has claimed he was given fake Remdesivir injections in a hospital in Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh and demanded a high-level probe into what he said was a racket in the district.

In a letter to Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Narsinghpur BJP MLA Jalam Singh Patel, who is the younger brother of Union Culture and Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel, said a fake Remdesivir business was thriving in Jabalpur amid the COVID-19 outbreak and he was a victim when he contracted the infection dur-

ing the Damoh Assembly bypoll campaign last month. "I am a sufferer, an eyewitness and a victim of fake Remdesivir," Patel said in the letter, pointing out that his lung infection worsened despite taking a total of 12 "phony" Remdesivir injections in a hospital on April 17 and then later when he was readmitted. He said people of 15 districts come to Jabalpur to get good medical treatment and some unscrupulous people had played with the lives of people by supplying fake Remdesivir injections to facilities here.

He claimed a relative had died of coronavirus, adding that the fake Remdesivir issue had created distrust among people. "I will fight this issue to the finish, I will go to court and raise the matter in MP Assembly to ensure victims (of this racket) are compensated. A central team should carry out a probe and the culprits should be severely punished," Patel said.

The MLA said he had written to the Jabalpur Inspector General of Police and Divisional Commissioner in this connection earlier.

CM announces welfare schemes for kin of state govt employees who succumbed to Covid-19

Mukhya Mantri Covid-19 Niyukti Yojana and Mukhya Mantru Covid-19 Vishesh Anugraha Yojana will be launched to take care of the families of those government employees who died of the deadly virus.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Monday announced twin welfare schemes for the families of the state government employees who succumbed to Covid-19.

Mukhya Mantri Covid-19 Niyukti Yojana and Mukhya Mantru Covid-19 Vishesh Anugraha Yojana will be launched to take care of the families of those govern-

ment employees who died of the deadly virus in the line of duty, the CM announced.

"The Mukhya Mantri Covid-19 Anukampa Niyukti Yojana which will render compassionate appointment in government jobs to dependants of all such employees who died due to COVID-19 infection, has been implemented for all regular permanent workers, workers on workload and contingency fund, daily wage earners, ad hoc, contractual, collector rate, government servants working as outsourced employees," Chouhan said.

"In the event of death of these employees from Covid infection, an eligible member of their family will be given compassionate appointment in the same type of employment under the scheme." Chouhan said that the state government has also decided that in the event of sudden death of any working, regular, permanent workers, daily wage earners, ad hoc, contractual, outsourced, other government servants / employees of the state due to Covid 19, their families will

be eligible for an ex-gratia amount of Rs 5 lakh as immediate financial assistance. In the event of a crisis, this ex-gratia amount will provide support to their families. Anganwadi workers, assistants, ASHA workers, village Kotwars, etc. workers will also be included in this scheme. In the scheme of compassionate appointment, separate plans are also being made for ASHA workers so that the dependants of these families can also get relief and livelihood. He added that he Covid-19 Compassionate Appointment Scheme will be implemented with effect from March 1, 2021 to June 30, 2021.

Similarly, the Covid-19 Special Grace Scheme will remain in force from March 30, 2021 to July 31, 2021. The CM said that our employees have discharged their duties with full dedication and commitment during Covid crisis. "While we are urging people to stay indoors to stop the chain of infection, these employees are working in the field and carrying out their responsibilities day and night by risking their lives.



HOW TO TAKE YOGA OFF THE MAT AND INTO YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Yoga is a powerful practice that works on both the body and mind; that is why it helps in transforming the whole personality and not just the physical body. However, there's a common misconception that yoga is all about complicated postures. That by doing a complicated backbend, or after achieving the full splits, we somehow become 'better than we were before'. It limits the concept of yoga to something that you only do on the mat. It assumes that if you can't do extreme postures, you can't ever be good at or practice yoga.

Namita Piparaiya, Yoga and Ayurveda Lifestyle Specialist, Founder, Yoganama shares few ways you can extend your yoga practice into your daily life.

Moderation

As we learned from Goldilocks, moderation is the approach of 'neither too much nor too little'. Moderation can be followed in all aspects of life, such as diet, speech, exercise, possessions, and everything else. Moderation keeps you away from extremes and therefore is a very sustainable strategy as it takes up very little energy.

When you hold postures for a more extended period. If you push yourself too much, you'll come out of the pose before the time is up due to pain or extreme discomfort. Equally, if you are lazy while practicing, you won't benefit from the time you're spending on the mat. Apply the right amount of effort, and you have a rewarding yoga practice that leaves you feeling recharged and refreshed.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness refers to present moment awareness. It is a very powerful and well-researched practice that can change the very structure of our brain. Mindfulness meditation makes us more rational, less impulsive, and even increases our grey matter.

Yoga is a great mindfulness practice because all postures are done with breath awareness. Even in Sun Salutations, you follow a specific breathing pattern. Each movement or transition is accompanied by an instruction to either inhale, exhale or hold the breath.

Equanimity

Try doing a single leg balance when very angry or emotional, and you'll likely have some trouble. In extreme circumstances, our inner emotional balance gets disturbed, reflecting in our physical state. In yoga, you learn to bring your balance back by taking some deep breaths or doing some gentle kriyas to re-center the body and mind.

With Yoga, you've trained yourself in resetting your nervous system by using your breath. And that's a skill that you can employ multiple times during the day to be stronger and more patient to deal with the stresses of modern life. In fact, without this skill, you cannot sit in meditation because the mind would be highly distracted. That is why in yoga, you practice pranayama before meditation as the breath helps your thoughts settle down.

DIVYANKA TRIPATHI CALLS HERSELF A 'SEASONAL FLOWER'



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Television star Divyanka Tripathi on Monday shared a stunning photograph from picturesque Cape Town, calling herself a "seasonal flower". In the picture, Divyanka is dressed in a red dress and she strikes a pose alongside a wall of red flowers. "A seasonal flower I am! I disappear with a promise to return like a fresh soulful bloom," she wrote as the caption. Divyanka is in Cape Town for the 11th season of "KhatronKeKhiladi". Others who will be seen in the reality show this year include Arjun Bijlani, Shweta Tiwari, Abhinav Shukla, Nikki Tamboli, Anushka Sen, and Rahul Vaidya and others will be seen competing with each other.

SHWETA TRIPATHI: IMPORTANT FOR ACTORS TO HAVE FITNESS-ORIENTED APPROACH WHILE WORKING

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Shweta Tripathi, who tested Covid positive a few months back, is back to work. The actress is shooting for the show "Escapade Live", and says the virus has left her weak. However, she focuses on a health and fitness regime very strictly, and be fit enough to face all hurdles. "While I understand how every career choice has its own sets of hurdles and difficulties to overcome, I think that having a fitness-oriented approach while working in the film industry can help an actor a long way," she says. She adds: "In instances such as the climax shoot of 'Mirzapur' when the whole cast was so vested in the scene, we ditched our lunch break without a second thought even while shooting in heat because of the intense zone we were all in. Such situations always require your body to be there and support you to portray the kind of emotions that we do, which is what fitness promotes the most for us." The actress recently shot in the scorching heat of 40 degrees Celsius in Benaras and then went on to shoot in the cold climes of Malani, at five degrees Celsius.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

During the pandemic, people's relationship with clothes has shifted significantly, as people prioritise comfort and convenience over appearance. Furthermore, the lockdown has left most of us with little or no desire to prepare a new look daily. For working women, it has actually become an even greater burden and source of anxiety.

Amid the pandemic, Qua launched 'Embrace', a new collection designed for WFH- Workleisure! The collection has become a huge success given that it adapted perfectly to the growing need for more comfortable yet presentable clothing for Zoom meetings.

Rupanshi, founder of Qua says, "Dressing up can motivate you and increase your

Dressing up is important when working from home

productivity as well. The flared and relaxed fits of the shirts, co-ords and dresses make dressing up easier, without compromising on comfort. On days when you are feeling uninspired, you can wear the co-ord or dress as it is and still look dressed up. These outfits can be elevated further

by layering them with shirts and blazers, on days when you want to feel like a true professional."

The collection includes already built ensembles that require little to no styling, light-weight and

breath-

able fabrics, seamless finish combined with comfy-style garments. The key garments of the collection namely smart co-ords, casual

Maniesh Paul's witty reminder that people should stay indoors

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actor Maniesh Paul on Tuesday resorted to an old Bollywood song to wittily drive home the point that people in areas affected by cyclone Tauktee should stay indoors.

In a collage of two images on Instagram, Maniesh defines two different appearances vis-a-vis the cyclone. The actor borrowed the opening line of Udit Narayan's melodious number "Ghar se nikalte hi" from the 1996 film "Papa Kehte Hain" to drive home his point.

"Ghar se nikalte hi," he wrote with the first picture, where he sports neatly combed and gelled hair.



"Kuch door chalte hi," he wrote with the second frame, where he has

dishevelled hair -- implying that's how his appearance would be if he hazarded going out amidst the cyclone.

He captioned the post as: "Hahahahahahaha Guys stay home....stay safe... Lets see what comments you have for my hair... #mp #fun #hair #fun #mess #blessed #life #themanieshpaulpodcast".

On the work front, Maniesh Paul recently launched his podcast "The Maniesh Paul Podcast", engaging in a conversation with a renowned Covid specialist doctor from Bombay Hospital, in order to throw light on basic concepts around the virus.

DISHA PARMAR'S STRESS BUSTER: PUT ON SOME LIPSTICK, FEEL GOOD



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actress Disha Parmar took to Instagram on Monday to share her mantra for feeling good in these gloomy times, along with a couple of pictures.

In the images, the actress looks stunning in a yellow kurta. She keeps her hair open and wears colourful earrings. "Put on some, feel good, click a picture maybe... And then back to bed. #currentnormal," she wrote, adding a lipstick emoji.

Disha will soon tie the knot with singer Rahul Vaidya, who is currently shooting for the stunt-based reality show "KhatronKeKhiladi" in Cape Town. The couple was clicked together as they bid adieu at the airport recently.

She recently featured in the music video "Madhanya" alongside Rahul. Disha is known for her roles in shows such as "PyaarKa Dard Hai MeethaMeethaPyaaraPyaara" and "WohApna Sa".





MARVEL STUDIOS RELEASES EXCLUSIVE NEW FOOTAGE FROM BLACK WIDOW!

Los Angeles | Agencies

Marvel Studios reveals a brand new exciting clip from their upcoming big-ticket entertainer Black Widow packed with high octane action!

The special clip debuted during the 2021 MTV "Movie & TV Awards," airing live from the Palladium. During the telecast, Tony and BAFTA-winning and Academy Award-nominated actress Scarlett Johansson received the Generation Award-an honor that celebrates beloved actors for their contributions to film and television.

In Marvel Studios' "Black Widow," Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow confronts the darker parts of her ledger when a dangerous conspiracy with



ties to her past arises. Pursued by a force that will stop at nothing

ing to bring her down, Natasha must deal with her history as a spy and the broken relationships left in her wake long before she became an Avenger.

Scarlett Johansson reprises her role as Natasha/Black Widow, Florence Pugh stars as Yelena, David Harbour portrays Alexei/The Red Guardian, and Rachel Weisz as Melina. Directed by Cate Shortland and produced by Kevin Feige, "Black Widow"-the first film in Phase Four of the Marvel Cinematic Universe-the action-packed spy thriller launches in Indian theaters on July 9, 2021, in English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada.

Noel Gallagher doesn't correct people when they think he is Liam

Los Angeles | Agencies



British musician Noel Gallagher says he is often mistaken for his estranged brother Liam. However, he doesn't get annoyed anymore and, asked for a selfie by fans who think he is Liam, he doesn't correct them.

"I humour most people. I get f***** people going: 'Can I get a picture Liam?' I go 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, no problem, oh mad for it. I don't stamp my feet and go: 'Stop calling me that,'" he said on an interview on Matt Morgan's "Funny How?" podcast, reports contactmusic.com.

Although the two are not on the best of terms, they are the executive producers on the upcoming documentary about their Knebworth shows. The film is being directed by Jake Scott. Talking about the project, Jake said: "It's a story driven entirely by the music, a rock and roll experience, told in the moment, like a visual stream of consciousness that is built around the extensive archive footage from the event.

No on-camera interviews or unnecessary celebrity recollections."



ARIANA GRANDE MARRIES REAL ESTATE AGENT BEAU IN 'TINY' CEREMONY

Los Angeles | Agencies

American pop star Ariana Grande got married to real estate agent Dalton Gomez in an intimate ceremony that took place at the couples home in Montecito, California. "They got married," confirmed a representative of the singer to People, adding: "It was tiny and intimate, less than 20 people. The room was so happy and full of love. The couple and both families couldn't be happier."

About the choice of venue, the source further told People: "Both Ari and Dalton love Montecito. They spend a lot of time there. It seems only natural that they would get married at Ari's beautiful and historic house." Grande, 27, had announced her engagement to Gomez, 25, in December with a picture of her ring, and a caption saying: "Forever n then some."

They have been dating since January last year and were together through Covid lockdown at her Los Angeles home. The couple have regularly been posting pictures on Instagram over the past year.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor James Corden lends his voice to the titular character of the new live action-CGI animated film "Peter Rabbit 2", and he says an advantage of doing a voiceover role



JAMES CORDEN ON VOICE ACTING: CAN TURN UP IN PYJAMAS AND NOT WORRY ABOUT BEING IN SHAPE

is one doesn't have to worry about being in shape.

"It feels very freeing and also you don't have to worry about that curry you ate at the weekend where you might have put on four pounds and it's showing on your face, it doesn't matter. You can turn up in your pyjamas and it's fine," he said, according to a report in contactmusic.com.

"You've got countless times to do it and try it.

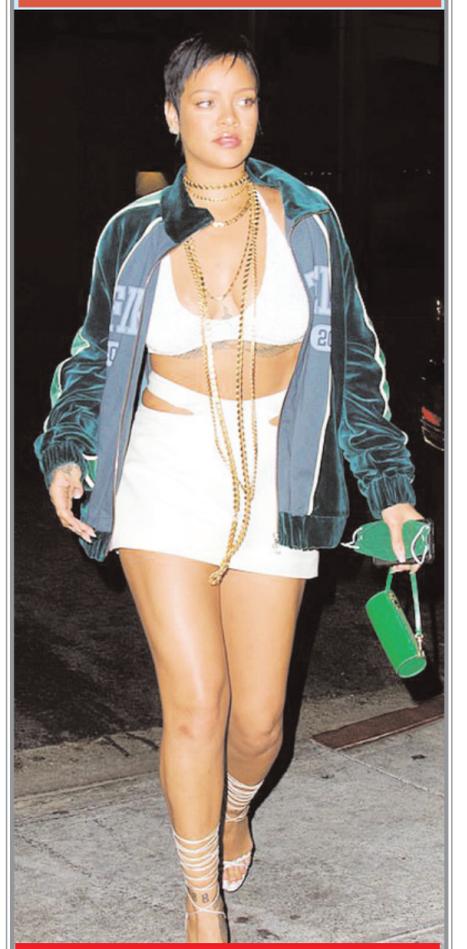
The hardest thing when you're filming anything, even us doing this now, is time. Time is the greatest pressure. I think I've recorded "Peter Rabbit 2" from start to finish, the whole movie, maybe eight to 10 times and in moments of that, doing 10 reads of individual lines. Then it's up to (director) Will (Gluck) to pick how he wants the character to sound and feel," Corden added.

Los Angeles | Agencies

BILLIE PIPER SOUGHT THERAPY TO DEAL WITH ADULT SITUATIONS AS TEEN CELEB

I wouldn't subject my own kids to (at the age of) 16. I was going through everything a teenager goes through, but very publicly. Therapy has been crucial to my getting better," she wrote in the Big Issue magazine's Letter To My Younger Self. The actress, now 38, has three kids today -- Winston (12), Eugene (nine), and Tallulah (two). "If you can get your kids any sort of mental health support, get it," Piper added. Her work ethic as a teenager led to mental health issues and eating disorder, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Rihanna



Amazon may acquire film giant MGM for \$9B: Report

San Francisco | Agencies

Amazon is reportedly in talks to acquire movie giant MGM for \$9 billion, at a time when the world's largest telecommunication company AT&T has announced to merge WarnerMedia with Discovery to create a new media giant that will compete with leading streaming players like Netflix.

While The Information reported Amazon is in discussions to acquire MGM Holdings between \$7 billion to \$10 billion, Variety said in its report on Monday that \$9 billion is the amount MGM was hoping to zero in.

MGM owns a major film library, with interests in the long running James Bond franchise as well as other well-known titles such as Rocky and Pink Panther.

"It also owns the Epix cable channel and makes TV shows, including The Handmaid's Tale and Fargo and reality shows such as Shark Tank and Survivor," the report mentioned.

The Guardian earlier reported that MGM has a library of 4,000 films and 17,000 hours of TV.

MGM has been up for sale since December 2020.

The news came as AT&T and Discovery on Monday announced a definitive agreement to combine WarnerMedias premium entertainment, sports and news assets with Discovery's leading non-fiction and international entertainment and sports businesses to create a premier, standalone global entertainment company. Under the terms of the agreement, AT&T would receive \$43 billion (subject to adjustment) in a combination of cash, debt securities, and WarnerMedia's retention of certain debt.





EDITOR'S SPECS

Israeli-Palestinian hostilities

At least 208 people have been killed and some 1,500 others injured in a week of the ongoing airstrikes and rocket shellings between Israeli troops and Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The Gaza Ministry of Health reported on Monday that 198 people died, including 58 children, and 1,300 injured in seven days of bombardments by Israel. Meanwhile, Israel reported 10 fatalities and hundreds more injured by Palestinian rocket attacks launched from Gaza. Concentrating its report on the toll to Palestinians, the OCHA said more than 42,000 displaced people are seeking protection in 50 schools across Gaza operated by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees known as UNRWA. Citing the Gaza Ministry of Public Works and Housing, OCHA reported 94 buildings destroyed and 285 housing units severely damaged and rendered uninhabitable. The humanitarian partner Shelter Cluster reported more than 2,500 people homeless. Damaged structures include 41 education facilities, schools, kindergartens, a UNRWA vocational training centre, the Ministry of Education directorate and a higher education facility, the world organisation said. Additionally, four Ministry of Health hospitals, two non-governmental hospitals, two clinics, a health centre and a Palestine Red Crescent Society also were damaged. Electricity across Gaza is down to six to eight hours a day, on average, with some feeder lines not functioning, disrupting the provision of health care and other essential services, including water, hygiene and sanitation, OCHA said. Food and cash support needs are increasing. The UN and humanitarian partners provide food and non-food items to displaced families in Gaza and immediate cash assistance to more than 52,000 people. They also provide remote psychosocial counselling sessions for the traumatized, increase awareness about the heightened risk of explosive remnants of war and assess property damage. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said that some recent Israeli airstrikes, particularly on high-rise buildings, are raising concerns of indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks under international humanitarian law. Likewise, the launching of rockets and mortars from highly populated civilian neighbourhoods in Gaza into civilian population centers in Israel also may be unlawful. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, widespread demonstrations and clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces broke out in multiple locations in commemoration of Nakba Day on May 15, OCHA said. Two Palestinians were shot and killed by Israeli forces. Another boy died after having been shot four days previously in Hebron by Israeli forces.

Lancet editorial on India's fight against Covid biased and misguided

Pankaj Chaturvedi

I read the editorial in The Lancet titled 'Indias Covid-19 emergency published on May 8, 2021. Let me quote from the article, "India will see a staggering 1 million deaths from COVID-19 by Aug 1. If that outcome were to happen, Modi's Government would be responsible for presiding over a self-inflicted national catastrophe."

It is reminiscent of news reports in the British colonial era in India. To justify their forceful occupation of India, there was an orchestrated attempt of the western media and their political leadership to portray India as the country of fakirs and snake charmers that didn't deserve independence.

When India's Independence Bill was being debated in the British Parliament in 1947, Winston Churchill had angrily remarked, "Power will go into the hands of rascals, rogues, and freebooters."

While the Covid crisis is indeed alarming in India, the article is suitable for a politically motivated tabloid rather than a reputed academic journal. As an Indian, I felt indignant with the vitriolic rant leading to poor portrayal of my country.

Being in the frontline for last one year in Mumbai, I have been witness to death, disability, disaster and despair. I have lost several of my own near and dear ones. However, the issue is much larger than what the editorial conveys. The solutions are much more complex than one can imagine. It is time for an end game and not the blame game.

Mark Twain had once described three grades of lies - "Lies, damned lies, and statistics!"

Let me present the Indian statistics in a different manner. The USA with a population of 0.3 billion has lost 0.6 million citizens, Brazil with its 0.2 billion population has lost 1.5 million lives, the UK with its population of 0.06 billion lost 127,000 citizens and France with a population of 0.06 billion lost 106,493 of its citizens. India, with its 1.3 billion population, has lost 262,000 Indians and I accept that the numbers are likely to rise further. One may argue about under reporting in India due to low Covid testing in many parts of the country. Therefore, let's look at the case fatality ratio (CFR) - the number of deaths divided by the number of confirmed cases.

India's CFR of 1.1 per cent is less than that of the US, France, Italy and Germany. India's Covid-19 recovery rate is among the highest in the world. However, this cannot be a reason for any complacency.

The US started vaccination on December 14, 2020 and vaccinated 256 million people to date. The UK started its vaccination drive on December 21 and vaccinated 53 million till now. Australia started on February 22 and vaccinated 2 million till today.

India started its vaccination drive on January 16, 2021 and has vaccinated 180 million citizens as of today, which is nearly 9 per cent of its entire population.

There are more reasons to appreciate the Indian government. It lifted the ban on export of HCQ and exported HCQ and Paracetamol during the height of the epidemic.

In order to create a sensation, the editorial mentions statistics of mortality and morbidity to suit the purpose.

Despite shortage of vaccines in India, our government had the magnanimity to export 66 million doses abroad on humanitarian grounds.

The editorial makes several contradictory remarks and one of them says that the "local governments have begun taking disease-containment measures, but the federal government has an essential role in explaining to the public covid appropriate behavior."

The fact is that the government has launched a massive multi-pronged Covid awareness campaign and developed a dedicated portal to share all the statistics - <https://www.mygov.in/covid-19>.

I am also surprised that the author is unaware of the several viral genome sequencing data published by the Indian labs. Needless to say, this virus keeps mutating very frequently just like any other influenza virus. Contrary to the claims in the editorial, the central and state governments regularly conduct press conferences to share the emerging data and newer information.

In India's federal structure, as per the Constitution, health care is a state subject. I do agree that dramatic reduction in the Covid case load during the winter led to a false belief that the pandemic was getting over. I also agree that many states were not prepared for the second wave that turned out to be a Tsunami. Even if they had planned, it would be impossible to create an efficient system in less than six months. States like Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Delhi that have better healthcare systems suffered the most. If we take example of the worldwide mortality, the countries with the best health care infrastructure (the US, France, Italy etc.) seemed to have the highest mortality. In short, biology trumped technology and pharmacology.

With virtually no effective medical treatment currently available, state and central governments have resorted to lockdown multiple times in this entire pandemic. The arm chair critics may not realize that lockdowns are politically challenging decisions. Let us not forget that these measures have profound socio-economic impact that may turn out to be more hazardous than Covid itself especially among the impoverished groups.

I am appalled by the editor's statement that "government's attempts to stifle criticism and open discussion during the crisis are inexcusable".

I am confident that the editor has never watched the Indian television debates where such criticisms are made. In fact, the vehement criticism of the Indian vaccines by some political parties made some gullible



citizens believe that the vaccines were useless, leading to lukewarm response in the beginning.

Now let's discuss about the large political rallies and failure of the Election Commission of India in deferring the polls. The editor blamed the Indian government for failing to heed the warning of the second wave of the pandemic. If that is the case, predictions are being made of a much larger third wave in India. Will the editor please let us know when India could have conducted the elections safely? Is the author aware of the consequences of indefinite postponement of elections in the politically sensitive states of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala?

I agree that the Kumbh Mela shouldn't have been held this year and it could have been the super spreader event. Kumbh Mela is one of the largest voluntary religious congregations of human beings on earth that happens every 12 years in the months of January to April. Let me share some more information to put things in perspective.

The entire Kumbh area was spread over 150 sq km and over 9 million people voluntarily visited it between January and April 2021. The maximum number of people visiting the Kumbh area on a single day was 3.5 million. On that day of peak foot fall, the population density in the Kumbh area was estimated as nearly 23,000 people per sq km.

With nearly 17 and 13 million population, respectively, Delhi and Mumbai are India's two largest cities. The population density of Mumbai is approximately 30,000 per sq km, of which nearly 40 per cent live in the slums. That means Mumbai and many metropolitan cities lives with Kumbh like situation every day. Dharavi, a locality in Mumbai, is Asia's largest slum that has a population density of nearly 277,136 per sq km. Compare it to London that has a population density of 6000 people per sq km.

Mumbai's local trains, the line life of the city, carry 7.5 million people (population of Hong Kong) every day with nearly 6,000 passengers packed into a 12-car rake during the peak hour. When the lockdowns were lifted during the pandemic (February and March, 2021), nearly 4 million passengers travelled every day in the Mumbai local trains.

While the developed world may look down upon these as

uncivilised conditions, it probably gave this population a distinct advantage. In August 2020, a seroprevalence study reported presence of antibody among 54 percent of the slum population and 16 percent of the non-slum population.

The study concluded that asymptomatic spread of the infection led to significantly lower infection fatality rate among slums compared to non-slums. The reasons why slum dogs fared better than the millionaires were because of the population density, poor hygiene and non-adherence to Covid appropriate behaviour.

Similar high prevalence of protective antibodies was reported in the other parts of India as well - Delhi (56 per cent), Mumbai (up to 75 per cent), Hyderabad (54 per cent) and Bengaluru (57.9 per cent).

In contrast, the highest level of antibody achieved in New York, London and Paris was 20 per cent, 13 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively. Is Indian's high level of herd immunity responsible for the low case fatality rate?

Herd immunity (also called population immunity) is due to the presence of antibodies that occurs when a population acquires it through either the infection (asymptomatic or symptomatic) or vaccination. While I admit that allowing infection to ravage the population is not the best way to achieve Herd immunity, it is also true that long term safety and efficacy of the vaccine is presently unknown.

Murmurs are already happening in the scientific community that the concept of natural herd immunity is being actively suppressed to promote vaccine companies. Having said that, with vaccine as the only hope to combat the spread, it is time to make it more affordable and accessible.

Ironically, while thousands are dying every day, World Trade Organization has failed to prevail upon member countries to waive patents and intellectual property rights linked to vaccines and technologies. The waiver is being fiercely opposed by many developed countries such as the UK and the European Union. Even an international association of pharmaceutical manufacturers warned WTO that waiving the patents and copyrights will be counterproductive and dangerous.

Politicians have become the

favourite punching bags for the journalists who are desperate to hit the headlines. Bad journalists always scour through the speeches of politician and pick up the most sensational sentence to create a narrative that suits them.

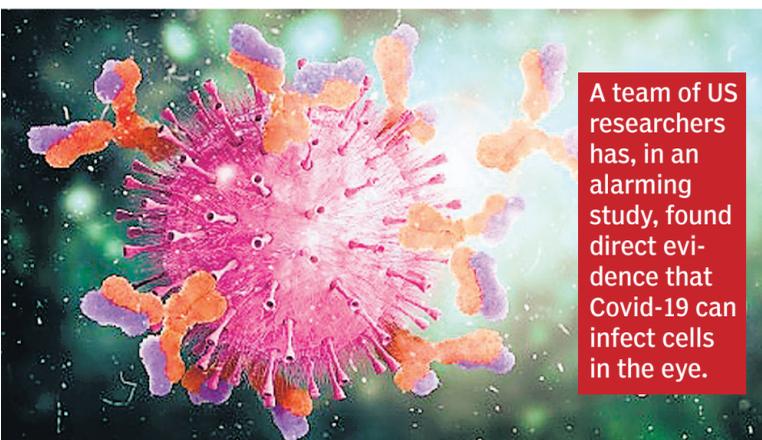
With hopelessness all around, society tends to hold the political leadership as the ultimate cause of their miseries. I agree that political leaders are accountable and they cannot shift the blame for this failure. However, there are many stakeholders in this pandemic whose accountability needs to be questioned. How about those researchers whose misleading recommendations were later proven to be ineffective or even harmful? What about those journals who shortened the publication pipeline to improve citation index only to end up with substandard articles? We can't forget the retraction of an article from a reputed journal claiming effectiveness of HCQ.

We still remember the allegations of pharma industry - journal nexus in publishing pharma funded studies of questionable benefits. What about the pharma companies who failed to communicate about lack of efficacy or appropriate usage while selling lopinavir, ritonavir, oseltamivir, remdesivir, interferons, tocilizumab, hydroxychloroquine, azithromycin etc? Will the scientists, institutions and the rich nations apologize to the world for holding on to the patents/copyrights of the lifesaving drugs and equipment while thousands die every day?

The Lancet editorial made a ludicrous statement that the "government has seemed more intent on removing criticism on Twitter than trying to control the pandemic". It is obvious from my narration above that India has done the best it could do. The Lancet editorial seemed to be solely for the media attention and trending on twitter while maligning India globally. In the word of German Scholar, Max Mueller, "If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions, I should point to India." Wait till India recovers, it will lead the world soon.

(Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi is a professor at the Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai. The views expressed are personal)

Covid-19 can infect cells in eye: Study



A team of US researchers has, in an alarming study, found direct evidence that Covid-19 can infect cells in the eye.

SARS-CoV-2, which causes Covid-19, is thought to transmit and begin infection in the upper respiratory tract. For this reason, the use of face masks has been recommended for the general public. However, the new study by the Mount Sinai Hospital researchers found that cells in the eye can be directly infected by SARS-CoV-2. While aerosol transmission is thought to be the

primary route of spread, viral particles have been detected in ocular fluid suggesting the eye may be a vulnerable point of viral entry.

The findings showed that SARS-CoV-2 can infect surface cells of the eye. The exposed cells revealed the presence of infection-associated proteins including ACE2 -- the virus receptor -- and TMPRSS2 -- an enzyme which allows viral entry.

IFN-beta -- a protein that has antiviral and antibacterial properties -- was also found to be suppressed from the exposure to the virus.

In addition, the researchers found that ocular surface cells, particularly the limbus, were susceptible to infection, while the central cornea was less vulnerable.

"We hope this new data results in additional measures to protect the eyes. We also intend to use these models to test approaches to prevent ocular infections," said Timothy Blenkinsop, Assistant Professor, at Mount Sinai.

The study, published in the journal Cell Stem Cell, has an immediate impact on preventive measures to help mitigate the spread of Covid-19 and support new guidance for eye protection that can be instituted worldwide. It also highlights the importance of washing hands, as rubbing one's eyes should now be viewed as an entry point for infection, the researchers said.

For the study, the team examined adult human eyes in an in vitro stem cell model. The donor cells were infected with SARS-CoV-2 and then analysed through RNA sequencing. The sequences were then mapped to the human genome and compared to non-infected control cells from adult tissues.

The expression of the exposed cell was then evaluated. The study also evaluated whether SARS-CoV-2 could infect both tissues and primary cells in the eye.

I always have a story to complete: Ruskin Bond

Sukant Deepak

Ruskin Bond will be celebrating his 87th birthday tomorrow -- writing a new story sitting on his old desk in a picturesque house in Landour which has become a landmark and a must see for tourists visiting that part of Garhwal. It has been a long writing voyage that started with his first story being published at the age of 16.

The ritual of starting a new story or a book will carry on this time too, "I make it a point to start a new story or book every time on my birthday. This year will be no different. Of course, that would not stop me from biting into cake and a hot butter bun," he told reporter. Even as Puffin, an imprint of Penguin Random House brings out his eAll Time Favourites' for children tomorrow, a keepsake edition with 25 stories, a mixed bag of his most cherished stories like eRusty's adventures; eGrandfather's stories; spooky tales along with a diverse set of new stories like eGoldfish Don't Bark, eFriends from the Forest, the writer shares the credit with the editor. "Sohini Mitra did all the hard work. I added a few stories to the collection." Talking about the heavily illustrated book, Bond says that they are vital for a children's story book. "I have always been fortunate to have excellent illustrators." The illustrations in the latest one are by Kashmiria



Sarode. This Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan recipient, on whose works several films like 'Junoon', 'The Blue Umbrella' and '7 Khoon Maaf' have been made had recently told this reporter, "I really don't run out of ideas or subjects." Talk to him about his recently released eIt's a Wonderful Life', a book on essays that also takes into account the ongoing pandemic and consequent lockdowns, and he says, "Well, like most writers, I work from home. Although the writing has not stopped, however I am getting a bit restless now. I am definitely missing the sun on my back." While his name has been synonymous with short stories, novels and children's books, Bond says that he has always enjoyed writing essays. "They emerge from my journals. But publishers prefer fiction, especially in the field of children's books." Smiling that he is yet to figure out his eprocess, the writer says perhaps it is the omnipresent feeling that he always has a story to complete. As the conversation veers towards mountains and his never ending fascination for them, Bond says they are always there -- giving a sense of permanence. "The newness is within ourselves, like new leaves and grass. And we must keep it alive in order to stay alive," concludes the author who is currently working on new short stories and a book of reflections titles, eThe Bedside Bond'.



JOE BIDEN ADMIN APPROVES \$735MN ARMS SALE TO ISRAEL

Citing sources familiar with the matter, The Washington Post said on Tuesday that Congress was officially notified of the proposed sale on May 5, nearly a week before the conflict escalated between the Israeli forces and Palestinian militants in Gaza, reports Xinhua news agency.



The proposed sale includes the joint direct attack munitions (JDAM) and GBU-39 small diameter bombs, according to The Washington Post.

In a separate report, The Hill news website said that the window for Congress to block the sale is all but closed. "The notification earlier this month set off a 15-day clock for Congress to act. There are four days left in that window, and it takes 10 days once a resolution of disapproval has been introduced before someone can force a vote to bring it to the floor." Some Democrats raised concerns about the sales as shelling and airstrikes continued in Gaza, causing more than 200 civilian casualties on both sides.

"While I have supported security assistance to Israel, including by funding the Iron Dome defense system, I have

serious concerns about the timing of this weapons sale," House Democrat Joaquin Castro said in a statement.

"The message it will send to Israel and the world about the urgency of a ceasefire, and the open questions about the legality of Israel's military strikes that have killed civilians in Gaza," he added. Biden on Monday voiced support for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in a call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The call came as the Biden's administration faced mounting pressure from a group of Democratic senators urging an immediate ceasefire to prevent loss of civilian life. The ongoing conflict, the worst violence between Israel and the besieged Palestinian enclave since 2014, has killed 204 Palestinians, including 59 children, and 10 Israelis.

US to share more Covid vaccines with other nations

Washington | Agencies

The US will share 20 million more doses of its Covid-19 vaccines with the rest of the world by the end of June, said President Joe Biden.

Monday's announcement came under mounting international pressure that Western wealthy nations which have stockpiled vaccines far more than they need should share more doses with countries struggling with the pandemic, reports Xinhua news agency.

"We have the vaccine. We've secured enough supply to vaccinate all adults and children above the age of 12," Biden said during a White House address.

"We know America will never be fully safe until the pandemic that's raging globally is under control."

The vaccines Washington is to ship overseas will consist of leftover doses from either Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech or Johnson & Johnson, which are authorized by the US Food and Drug Administration to use in the country.

Earlier, the Biden administration has made commitment to send 60 million AstraZeneca vaccine doses overseas. The AstraZeneca jab has not been cleared by FDA yet.

Biden said on Monday that the 80



million doses will represent 30 per cent of the vaccines produced by the US by the end of June.

So far, the US has administered more than 272 million COVID-19 vaccine doses and distributed more than 344 million, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The Biden administration has set a goal of getting 70 per cent of the country's adult population to receive at least one dose of a Covid vaccine by July 4. The FDA expanded its emergency use authorization for Pfizer's vaccine to include people 12

to 15 years old last week.

Biden's announcement came after World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Monday repeated his calls for manufacturers and high-income countries to share their doses with COVAX. "There's a growing disconnect. Some countries with high vaccination rates appear to be in the mindset that the pandemic is over, while others are experiencing huge waves of infection. The pandemic is a long way from over, & it won't be over anywhere until it's over everywhere," he said

in a tweet.

The US has bought enough vaccines to fully immunise 750 million people, three times the number of its adult population, reported Washington Post in March.

High-and upper-middle income countries, with 53 percent of the world's population, have received 83 per cent of the world's vaccines, while low- and lower-middle income countries, with 47 per cent of the world's population, have received just 17 per cent of the world's vaccines, according to WHO data.

Majority of Germans want new political beginning: Survey

Berlin | Agencies

A majority, around 62 per cent, of German citizens said it would be good if there was a change in government after September's federal elections, while only 13 per cent preferred things to remain as they were, according to a new survey.

Even more than 67 per cent of Germans were seeking for a change in policies across many areas, Xinhua news agency quoted the survey conducted by the opinion and market research institute Allensbach Institute (IfD Allensbach) and published by the Bertelsmann Foundation on Monday, as saying. Most people in Germany desired a new environmental and climate protection policy, closely followed by a new refugee and integration policy, as well as pension and education policies, according to the survey.

"Most people in Germany currently want a political change and a new beginning," said Robert Vehrkamp,



senior advisor to the Bertelsmann Foundation, in a statement.

Regarding the desire for change, this is the highest measured value since the question was first surveyed in the early 1990s," he added. The German federal election will take place on September

26. According to the latest Politbarometer survey, Germany's governing conservative CDU/CSU union is looking to confirm its position as the largest party, with 31 per cent support, the elections.

The Greens Party are in second place, on around 21 per cent.

The party has named Co-chair Annalena Baerbock as its first-ever candidate for Chancellor.

She is also the only female Chancellor candidate in the upcoming polls.

Meanwhile, Social Democratic Party (SPD) has already nominated Minister of Finance and Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz, while the CDU/CSU has yet to choose between the leaders of the CDU and the CSU, Armin Laschet and Markus Soeder, respectively.

According to a recent INSA survey, 37 per cent of German voters favoured Soeder against Laschet's 14 per cent.

Incumbent Chancellor Angela Merkel will retire after the election.

ISRAEL TO TEMPORARILY REOPEN GAZA CROSSING

Tel Aviv | Agencies

Israel will temporarily reopen Gaza's main cargo crossing Kerem Shalom on Tuesday to allow the transfer of the humanitarian aid of gas, food and medicine to the besieged Palestinian enclave where intense fighting continued for an eight straight day. The crossing will be reopened for a few hours to transfer the humanitarian aid to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Gaza Strip, an Israeli government spokesperson told Xinhua news agency. The announcement came amid a deadly escalation between Israelis and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. At least 208 people have been killed and some 1,500 others injured in the escalation since it erupted on May 10.

EU vows to develop sustainable maritime economy

By blue economy, the Commission refers to all sectors working with or in close proximity to seas and oceans, including fisheries, aquaculture, coastal tourism, maritime transport, port activities and shipbuilding.

Brussels | Agencies

The European Commission has pledged to develop a sustainable maritime economy in a bid to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

"We add the blue dimension to the European Green Deal," said European Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius, who is in charge of Environment, Oceans and Fisheries at the Commission, said on Monday. The Green Deal is the EU's lead program to achieve carbon neutrality in 2050, reports Xinhua news agency.

By blue economy, the Commission refers to all sectors working with or in close proximity to seas and oceans, including fisheries, aquaculture, coastal tourism, maritime transport, port activities and shipbuilding.



It provides employment to 4.5 million people in the EU, with a turnover of more than 650 billion euros (\$789 billion).

"Pollution, overfishing and habitat destruction, coupled with the effects of the climate crisis, all threaten the rich marine biodiversity that the blue economy depends on," said Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-president of the European Commission for the Green Deal. The goals are to reach climate neutrality, to switch to a circular economy, to preserve biodiversity, to ensure sustainable food production and to improve the management of maritime space, according to a press release from the EU Commission.

AFGHAN AIR RAIDS KILL 12 TALIBAN MILITANTS

Kabul: At least 12 Taliban militants were killed as Afghan fighter planes struck a hideout of the militant group in Logar province, the military said in a statement on Tuesday. Acting on a tip off, the planes targeted the hideout in Kozachatrakai area of the restive Azra district late Monday night, killing 12 armed militants on the spot and injuring three others, Xinhua news agency quoted the statement as saying. Seven motorbikes and a number of arms and ammunition were also destroyed during the airstrikes, the statement added. Taliban militants have intensified activities since the formal start of the U-led forces pull out from Afghanistan on May 1 and are active in parts of Logar province.

PAK FM HEADS TO NY TO ATTEND UNGA MEETING ON GAZA VIOLENCE

Islamabad: Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has left for New York City to attend an emergency UN General Assembly (UNGA) session on the ongoing violence in the Gaza Strip. The Express Tribune quoted sources as saying that Qureshi will travel to the US via Ankara and on way to New York, he will be accompanied by his counterparts from Turkey, Sudan and Palestine. He left Islamabad on Monday night. The UNGA session will take place on Thursday. Besides attending the session, Qureshi, will hold important meetings with various dignitaries at the UN, the sources said. The ongoing conflict, the worst violence between Israel and Palestinian militants in the besieged enclave since 2014, has so far killed 204 Palestinians, including 59 children, and 10 Israelis.

ISRAEL FIRES ARTILLERY INTO SOUTHERN LEBANON

Tel Aviv: Israel fired artillery into southern Lebanon after six rockets were fired toward the Jewish state but fell short within Beirut's territory, the army here said. The fire on Monday night triggered sirens in the community of Kibbutz Misgav Am in northern Israel, reports Xinhua news agency. "Six failed launches were identified from Lebanon that did not cross into Israeli territory," a military spokesperson said in a statement. There were no immediate reports of casualties on both sides. The Israeli military's Homefront Command ordered opening of shelter in communities within four km from the Lebanese border. The incident came amid a deadly escalation between Israelis and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. At least 208 people have been killed and some 1,500 others injured in the escalation since it erupted on May 10.

Situation in Ethiopia's Tigray region horrific: WHO

Geneva | Agencies

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), has called for a peaceful solution to the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray and said that humanitarian workers should be granted unfettered access as the "overwhelming" majority of the region's inhabitants need immediate assistance.

The situation in Tigray is "horrific, very horrific", Xinhua news agency quoted Tedros as saying said in a press conference on Monday.

Ninety-one per cent of the Tigray locals need food aid and many of them are dying of hunger, he said, adding that incidents of rape have also been reported.

Fighting that erupted in November last year in Tigray between the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which used



to rule the region, and the Ethiopian National Defense Forces has left thousands of people killed and caused immense losses.

On May 12, Stephane Dujarric, the spokesperson for UN Secretary-

General Antonio Guterres, said that military forces were blocking humanitarian access to the local population, further increasing food and health insecurity.

"We need to scale up and coordination and leadership, and we need access" to Tigray, said Michael Ryan, executive director of the WHO's Health Emergencies Program.

The conflict has seriously increased the risk of cholera and measles as well as the number of Covid-19 cases, according to Ryan.

However, Tedros commented that for the region's population, "Covid is the least of their concerns." "For most of the part, we're not even in a position to discuss Covid, to be honest," he said.

He called for the de-escalation of violence and a solution through peaceful means, stressing that "when there is a will there is a way".

EU suspends increasing counter measures against US metal tariffs

Brussels | Agencies

The European Union (EU) has decided to temporarily suspend the increase of its counter measures against the additional tariffs the US has imposed on the imports of steel and aluminium products, European Commission Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis said.

Dombrovskis said on Monday that the move, which was taken in an effort to "reboot transatlantic relations", would offer "space to find joint solutions to this dispute and tackle global excess capacity", Xinhua news agency reported.

Dombrovskis, along with US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, announced the start of discussions to address global steel

and aluminium excess capacity, according to a joint statement issued on Monday. The statement said they had acknowledged, during a virtual meeting last week, "the need for effective solutions that preserve our critical industries, and agreed to chart a path that ends the WTO disputes following the US application of tariffs on imports from the EU under section 232." The three said they were committed to engaging in discussions expeditiously to find solutions before the end of the year. Citing national security concerns, the former US President Donald Trump administration unilaterally imposed a 25 per cent tariff on steel imports and 10 per cent tariff on aluminium imports globally in 2018, drawing strong opposition domestically and abroad.

Kids are key to ending Covid pandemic in US: Survey

"Children are key to ending the pandemic," said David Celentano, chair of epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University and one of the 723 epidemiologists who participated in the survey this

Washington | Agencies

A new survey has revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic in the US will not come to an end until children are vaccinated against the disease.

The New York Times on Monday quoted epidemiologists as saying in the survey that the true end of the pandemic, when it becomes safer to return to most activities without precautions, will arrive once at least 70 per cent of Americans of all ages are vaccinated, reports Xinhua news agency. Adolescents in the US just began receiving vaccines this week, and those for children younger than 12 are not yet approved, according to the newspaper.

"Children are key to ending the pandemic," said David Celentano, chair of epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University and one of the 723 epidemiologists who participated in the survey this month. The experts also believe that

Covid-19 will circulate at a lower rate in five years, but no longer be a public health crisis necessitating lockdowns. "It feels like there is a light at the end of the tunnel," said Gretchen Bandoli, an assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Diego. "We have the tools we need to get there, and it feels within reach." In the survey, about 85 per cent of respondents said it was likely that Americans would be able to safely gather for Fourth of July barbecues this year. A slightly higher share said it was likely that schools would be able to be fully open in the fall, and that families would be able to safely gather indoors for the winter holidays.



INDIA MEN & WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAMS MAY TRAVEL TOGETHER TO ENGLAND

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In what could possibly be the first instance of its kind, the India men and women's cricket teams are likely to travel together to England on a charter flight on June 2 for their respective series.

The two teams are likely to assemble in Mumbai on May 19 for a two-week quarantine although there were talks and speculation on Monday that cyclone on the west coast may delay their arrival.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) had been mulling May 19 and May 24 as dates for assembling cricketers in Mumbai before departure.



While the Indian men's team will play six Test matches -- the World Test

Championship final against New Zealand from June 18 and five Tests against

England from August 4 --, the women's team will play a one-off Test in mid-June,

three ODIs and three T20Is.

According to a report in ESPNcricinfo.com, 'the 20 players in the men's Test squad, excluding those residing in Mumbai, will start their quarantine at the team hotel from Wednesday'.

It added that the 'rest of the squad and members of team management residing in Mumbai, including captain Virat Kohli, his deputy Ajinkya Rahane, Rohit Sharma and head coach Ravi Shastri, will enter the bio-secure bubble at the Mumbai team hotel from May 24'. The teams will undergo a 10-day quarantine upon arrival in England.

AB de Villiers's no to comeback as SA names squads for WI, Ireland

Johannesburg | Agencies

Former South Africa captain AB de Villiers will not come out of his international retirement, said Cricket South Africa (CSA) on Monday while announcing squads for the upcoming tours of the West Indies and Ireland.

CSA said it held discussions with de Villiers, but his retirement decision remains final.

"Discussions with AB de Villiers have concluded, with the batsman deciding once and for all that his retirement will remain final," said CSA in a statement.

de Villiers, who retired from all forms of international cricket in 2018, had said during the 2021 Indian Premier League (IPL) that he would have a discussion with CSA about returning for this year's T20 World Cup.

CSA announced a 19-man squad, to that be led by Dean Elgar, for two Test matches in the West Indies that will be



played from June 10 to 22. A 20-man squad led by Temba Bavuma has also been named for the five-match T20I series against the West Indies, following the Tests, and a limited overs tour of Ireland in July.

The T20I series against West Indies will be played from June 26 to July 3. After that the Proteas will play a three-match ODI series in Ireland from July 11 to 16, and a three-match T20I series from July 20 to 25.

INDIA WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM TO TOUR AUSTRALIA IN SEPTEMBER

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The India women's cricket team is set to tour Australia for the first time in 15 years for a one-off Test and a white-ball series in September.

Though the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and Cricket Australia (CA) are yet to make an announcement, Australian pace bowler Megan Schutt recently revealed on 'No Balls: The Cricket Podcast' that her country will play a home series against India in September, with a preparatory camp in Darwin, ESPNcricinfo.com reported.

The India women's team last toured Australia in 2006 under captain Mithali Raj and lost the one-off Test in Adelaide by an innings and four runs. That team comprised Anjum Chopra, Jhulan Goswami and Neetu David



among others. In all, the two teams have played nine Tests, with Australia leading 4-0. Five matches have ended as draw. India women are currently gearing up for a month-long tour of England in June-July. They will play a

one-off Test against England from June 16-19 at Bristol, which will be followed by three ODIs and an equal number of T20Is. This is the first time since 2014 that the Mithali Raj-led India will play two Tests in a calendar year.

India's white ball series needed to lift SL out of mess: BCCI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's limited-overs tour of Sri Lanka is necessary to ensure that Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) makes up for the loss of revenue caused by last year's cancelled tour of the Island nation, the Indian cricket board treasurer Arun Dhumal has said.

India's tour of Sri Lanka in June last year was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which sent the entire Future Tours Programme (FTP) of the top cricketing countries haywire.

India's tour to Sri Lanka is coinciding with the national team's Test tour of England, comprising the World Test Championship final against New Zealand and a Test series against the host.

"We had to miss Sri Lanka tour last year also. So, we need to work out on that. Since our team that is going to England is primarily for Tests, we could have made up (sic) a team for these white-ball matches. So, that is why we thought we should do our bit to make sure

Sri Lankan board and we can play white-ball cricket in time," Dhumal was quoted as saying by Sportskeeda.



These days every country wants to host the Indian team, comprising stars like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, for matches as they fetch handsome revenue through TV rights, sponsorships, and series branding etc.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) treasurer said that it is important for the teams to follow such a policy in future.

"See, as you know the cricket world is under tremendous pressure for the last one-and-a-half year given this Covid pandemic. A lot of FTP has been cancelled (sic), which has put a lot of strain on these associations all over the world. Until and unless you do these tours, we can't make up, and it would be very difficult for all these boards to come out of their financial struggle that they are going through," said Dhumal.

The selection committee is likely to pick the squad for the white ball series in Sri Lanka soon after the England-bound Test squad assembles in Mumbai.

DON'T HOLD OLYMPICS, SAYS TOP TOKYO DOCTORS' BODY

Tokyo | Agencies

A Tokyo doctors' body has recommended cancelling this year's Olympics saying that hospitals in Japan are already overwhelmed due to spike in Covid-19 cases in the country.

The Games, which were postponed last year due to the pandemic, are scheduled to be held from July 23 to August 8.

"We strongly request that the authorities convince the IOC (International Olympic Committee) that holding the Olympics is difficult and obtain its decision to cancel the Games," said the Tokyo Medical Practitioners Association in an open letter to Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

The association posted the letter on its website on Monday and is dated May 14. "The medical institutions dealing with COVID-19 have their hands full and have almost no spare capacity," the medical association said in its letter.

The government has extended its state of emergency in Tokyo and several other prefectures until May 31 due to a severe shortage of beds and hospital staff.



India seamers can perform anywhere in the world: Wagner

Southampton | Agencies

New Zealand pace bowler Neil Wagner has said that the World Test Championship (WTC) final will be a battle between bowling attacks as he acknowledged the depth in Indian attack. India and New Zealand lock horns in the WTC final from June 18.

While India are carrying six pace bowlers in their main squad of 20 for the tour of England which includes WTC final, there are three other pacers travelling as standby.

Besides potent pace bowlers like Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami among others, India also have an experienced spin attack led by R Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja.

New Zealand, on the other hand, have a potent seam attack with Trent Boult, Tim Southee, Kyle Jamieson and Wagner. They have Mitchell Santner as their lead spinner.

"There are a lot of quality bowlers



up on show. India has a number of quality fast bowlers in their side, who

can perform anywhere around the world. They can make it (the ball)

swing around under overcast conditions," said the left-armer speaking in a video posted by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on its Twitter handle.

Wagner said that the challenge for teams would be to adjust to the conditions in England where the weather and conditions can change within a session. "When the sun comes out, it (wicket) is flat and nothing happens again."

"Conditions can change quickly throughout the day. They can start from being flat, nothing happening to suddenly starting to swing and nipping around within a session," added Wagner who earned rave reviews for trapping Steve Smith with short deliveries during New Zealand's tour of Australia in the 2019-20 season.

The 35-year-old South Africa born bowler said he is not thinking too much of the WTC final. "I am not getting carried away too much, trying to control the controllable," added Wagner.

We didn't tamper with ball, end rumour-mongering: Aussie bowlers

Sydney | Agencies

Australia bowlers Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon and Josh Hazlewood said they were not aware of ball being tampered during the infamous third Test

against South Africa in Cape Town in 2018. Cummins, Starc, Lyon and Hazlewood were the bowlers in that Test and the four released a joint statement

on Tuesday amid rising speculation over their awareness of the tactic which eventually led to bans on Cameron Bancroft, Steve Smith and David Warner. "We did not know a foreign substance was taken onto the field to alter the condition of the ball until we saw images on the big screen at Newlands," said the players in the statement.

"And to those who, despite the evidence, insist that 'we must have known' about the

use of the foreign substance simply because we are bowlers, we say this: The umpires during that Test match, Nigel Long and Richard Illingworth, both very respected and experienced umpires, inspected the ball after images surfaced on the TV coverage and did

not change it because there was no sign of damage," they further said. In a recent interview with The Guardian, Bancroft indicated that the bowlers knew about tampering. This was followed by former Australia captain Michael Clarke saying that bowlers had to know

about what was happening to the ball. "We respectfully request an end to the rumour-mongering and innuendo. It has gone for too long and it is time to move on," the four bowlers further said in their statement. "We pride ourselves on our honesty. So it's been disappointing to see that our integrity has been questioned by some journalists and past players in recent days in regard to the Cape Town Test of 2018," they said.



LOVE THE SHOT OF DHONI'S 2011 WC WINNING SIX: BUTTLER

Team Absolute | New Delhi

England wicketkeeper-batsman Jos Buttler said he is fascinated by MS Dhoni's calmness and brilliance. Buttler

said he loves the famous shot of Dhoni twirling his bat around after hitting the winning six in the final of the 2011 World Cup and that there was hardly any other celebration from him despite the enormity of the occasion. "I love the shot of him hitting that six to win the World Cup and then he twirls his bat around. That was all he gave you, it is probably the biggest moment in Indian cricket history and he still just pulls it off with such composure. I love watching him play," Buttler said on Cricbuzz. "I like that about him, made me intrigued about him. It is quite amazing trying to think what he is thinking about, why is he not riding the emotions of the game. He always kept people guessing like that. I like the way he does things because they make sense to him. It doesn't look like he worries too much about what it looks like," said Buttler. Buttler also noted Dhoni's quickness behind the stumps despite the unconventional positions he gets himself into.



Good coordination key to India's success: Gurinder

Team Absolute | Bengaluru

While skills are important, good coordination helps you win matches, and that's what India did right during the successful tour of Argentina recently, said India men's hockey team defender Gurinder Singh on Tuesday.

India defeated the Olympic champions in the two FIH Pro League matches besides winning two of the four practice games in Buenos Aires in April. India also remained unbeaten on their tour of

Europe where they played Germany and Belgium in March.

"One of the things that we have always focused on is good coordination on the field. Skill is important, but if there is no coordination between players then the skill of players will not be utilised properly," said Gurinder, who has played 58 international matches.

"We coordinated very well during our tours of Europe and Argentina. We didn't hesitate while passing the ball as the players were moving well on the pitch. This is a very good sign for us and the

coordination we had helped us achieve results in our matches this year," said the 26-year-old.

Gurinder added that India's defence was more solid now, with the likes of experienced the Harmanpreet Singh and Surender Kumar manning the backline.

"We have a fantastic balance between youth and experience in our side. I feel very fortunate to have senior players such as Harmanpreet Singh and Surender Kumar in our team. They have played over 100 matches for India," added Gurinder.



Declining Covid trend pushes equities higher; Sensex above 50K

The S&P BSE Sensex traded at 50,266.92, higher by 686.19 points, or 1.38 per cent, from its previous close. Similarly, the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange traded at 15,110.95, up 187.80 points, or 1.26 per cent, from its previous close.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

A steady decline in new Covid cases along with accelerated vaccination drive powered the rise of India's benchmark stock indices during the mid-afternoon trade session on Tuesday. Accordingly, both key indices started on a positive note with a gap up opening and maintained their gains with the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange breaching the over 15,100 points-mark and the S&P BSE Sensex reclaiming the 50,000-points threshold. Globally, robust trends were witnessed across Asian stock markets.

Sector-wise, except marginal losses in the FMCG space all other sectors traded in the positive territory. Around 2.00 p.m., the S&P BSE Sensex traded at 50,266.92, higher by 686.19 points, or 1.38 per cent, from its previous close. Similarly, the Nifty50 of the National

Stock Exchange traded at 15,110.95, up 187.80 points, or 1.26 per cent, from its previous close. "Indian market started on a strong note and opened gap up above 15,050 marks and touched 15,134 zones. It has been moving in the positive territory but some consolidation can be seen at current junctures," said Jay Purohit, Technical & Derivatives Analyst, MOFSL. "India VIX traded below 19 zones which provides support to the bulls. Market breadth continues to strongly be in favour of the advancing counters." According to Gaurav Garg, Head of Research at CapitalVia: "Another day of lower daily Covid-19 cases boosted investor confidence. The US market ended lower after the signs of increasing inflation in the economy kept the investors worried about the tightening monetary policy."

"Asian markets also carried the momentum in the market and were mostly trading in green."

Petrol, diesel prices increase after a day's pause

Under the new found preference for revising fuel prices every alternate day, the Oil and marketing companies (OMCs) raised the pump prices of petrol and diesel yet again on Tuesday. Accordingly, the price of petrol increased by 27 paise per litre to Rs 92.85 a litre in Delhi while diesel price increased a tad higher by 29 paise to Rs 83.51 a litre on Tuesday.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Across the country as well the petrol and diesel prices increased between 25-30 paise per litre on Tuesday but its actual retail prices varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states. The OMCs are following the practice of changing petrol and fuel rates every alternate day rather than undertaking changes on a daily basis for past few days. Accordingly, the Tuesday's price hike came after there was no change on Monday.

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

raised on Friday, it remained unchanged on the previous day. "It seems oil companies are giving a sense of relief to consumers as fuel prices are not being raised on a daily basis. But still prices are not actually falling but being raised on every alternate day too this month," said a oil sector expert not willing to be named. He said that the practice of daily price revision, started after deregulation of petrol and diesel prices few years ago but had been done away with by OMCs for past several months giving clear indication that administrative price regime is still working for the sector.

Under daily price revision, OMCs revised petrol and diesel prices every morning benchmarking retail fuel prices to a 15-day rolling average of global refined products' prices and dollar exchange rate. However, in a market where fuel prices need to be increased successively, alternate day price revision seems to be the flavour. It is worth noting that with 10 price increase in May, the retail price of regular petrol has already reached over Rs 99 a litre in Mumbai. Petrol prices are already over Rs 100 per litre in several cities in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Premium petrol has been hovering

above that level for some time now. Petrol prices have increased by Rs 2.30 a litre in Delhi in May in the 10 increases so far. Similarly, diesel prices have risen by Rs 2.78 per litre in capital this month. IANS had written earlier that OMCs may begin increasing the retail price of petrol and diesel post state elections as they were incurring losses to the tune of Rs 2-3 per litre by holding the price line despite higher global crude and product prices. With global crude prices at around \$69 a barrel mark, OMCs may have to revise fuel prices upwards again if there is any further firming up.

Indian IT Services market grew 6% in 2020 amid pandemic

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian IT and Business Services market was valued at \$13.41 billion in 2020 and recorded a 5.41 per cent year-over-year (YoY) growth as compared to 8.43 per cent in 2019, an International Data Corporation (IDC) report showed on Tuesday. Of the IT and Business Services market, the IT Services market contributed 77.06 per cent and grew by 5.97 per cent in 2020 compared to the 8.91 per cent growth in 2019. The reduced growth rate was due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on businesses in the country. The IT and Business Services market is projected to grow at a CAGR of 7.18 per cent between 2020-2025 and reach \$18.97 billion by the end of 2025, the IDC said. "During the second half of 2020, apart

from cloud adoption and IT security, enterprises also started to increasingly invest in technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, and analytics for solutions like conversational AI and Chatbots, fraud prevention, demand forecasting, etc., which would help streamline their business operations," said Harish Krishnakumar, Senior Market Analyst, IT Services, IDC India. Even sectors like manufacturing, which was adversely affected during the initial stages of the pandemic, started investing in cloud-based applications and automation projects. 2021 will pave the way for business resiliency plans to kick-in and accelerated investments in technologies to support an enterprise's digital goals. "Some of the areas where IDC envisions clear opportunities for service



providers include cloud enablement and augmentation services, network management, optimisation and automation, managed security services, and AI-based services, among others," said Shweta Baidya, Senior Research Manager, Enterprise Software and ICT Services, IDC India. With a large part of the workforce being out of action during the second wave of the pandemic, enterprises will look up to their service partners to enable digital transformation initiatives and prepare them to be a future-ready enterprise, she noted.

Second Covid wave unlikely to severely impact textile sector: Ind-Ra

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The second covid wave might slightly impact the textile sector's supply and demand dynamics primarily in Q1FY22, said ratings agency India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra). However, a sustained export demand, learnings from the first wave, stronger balance sheet and liquidity compared to 4QFY20 will enable the sector credit profile to remain stable in FY22, the agency said. "The supply chain has been impacted by the local lockdowns imposed at key textile hubs such as Tirupur, Ludhiana, Surat and Bhilwara," the agency said. "The restricted movement

of goods means non-availability of inputs such as yarns and fabric is likely to have a short-term impact on the finished output." Besides, it pointed out that labour availability has also been impacted but moderately and at much lesser severity than that during the first wave. "Shop floor are likely to remain functional at a few plant sites but a restricted occupancy level. However, 1QFY22 may not be a lost quarter, thanks to strong export markets." "Moreover, most cotton textile players will have adequate inventory given the second wave has hit us in April-May and because the fresh inventory is available during November to March."

Nevertheless, this supply chain disruption may lead to a 20-30 per cent YoY of reduction in topline in Q1FY22. "Again, the recovery expectation varies depending on the sub-sector. Export-focused garments and home textiles are likely to remain resilient compared to the spinning and fabric segment." "The export order book was reported to be yoY higher at end-March 2021 with garment players. However, the 1QFY21 shipments are likely to get deferred to 2QFY22. Challenges on the availability of containers and high shipping costs however have been impacting profitability since 3QFY21 and are likely

to remain in so in the near term." As such beyond 1QFY22, Ind-Ra assumes a demand recovery across the sub-segments, driven by the unleashing of pent-up demand in 2HFY22 with the start of retail, offices, educational institutions, social functions among other things, moderately countered by weak household balance sheets. "The growth rates will also benefit from the low base effect. Ind-Ra expects the export demand to remain favourable with geo-political tensions and China, Plus One story continuing to play." "Demand recovery continues in export markets, which is at least 30% of the India's total textile produce."

Govt to keep impetus on road segments for tendering in near term: Ind-Ra

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Central government is expected to keep impetus on roads, irrigation and water works segments for tendering in near term, said India Ratings and Research. "Ind-Ra believes that the incremental order inflows in roads, railways, irrigation, housing development projects and distribution segments would drive the demand forecast for the sector in FY22. "The schemes such as Bharatmala, commissioning of 'Dedicated Freight Corridors', 'Swachh Bharat' mission and 'Jal Jeevan' mission and 'Affordable Housing Schemes' coupled with the 'National Infrastructure Pipeline' would drive the sector order inflows in the medium term," it said. However, continued competitiveness in these segments is likely to result in a moderation of operating margins of EPC players. "Ind-Ra, in its FY22 construction outlook, has revised the sector outlook to improving from negative, based on the rich budgetary allocations which would result in huge order inflows coupled with better execution rates." In FY21, the tenders floated had seen incremental growth, majorly contributed by Uttar Pradesh. "The tenders announced from



UP contributed 15 per cent to the overall tenders floated across the country in FY21. "The orders floated are majorly from 'Bharatmala Expressway' projects and 'Swachh Bharat Mission' schemes. UP was followed by Telangana and Andhra Pradesh; both put together contributed around 16 per cent to the overall tenders floated in FY21." In addition, it said that orders awarded grew 72 per cent YoY in FY21 to Rs 3,183 billion, with the road segment contributing to the major chunk of the orders awarded at 27 per cent. "This was followed by mining at 23 per cent and railways (including metros) at 21 per cent." "Out of the overall order awards in FY21, 70 per cent of the orders were contributed by roadways, mining and railways."

Indian data centre sector needs \$3.7 bn investment by 2023 to meet demand

Team Absolute | Mumbai

India's data centre sector will require investment of \$3.7 billion over the next three years in order to fulfill the 6 million square feet greenfield development opportunity for the industry, a JLL report said. Titled '2020 India Data Center Market Update', the report said that as the data centre landscape continues to evolve, the industry is expected to grow exponentially to reach 1,007 MW by 2023 from its existing capacity of 447 MW. With growing reliance on digital connectivity, demand is likely to rise further due to the imminent rollout of 5G, IoT-linked devices, data localisation and cloud adoption. "India's colocation data center industry witnessed

unprecedented absorption of 102 MW during 2020, notching higher absorption than most key markets of Europe and America. Fueled by longer-term trends of rising cloud adoption, increasing digitalisation and progressive legislation, we anticipate increased demand for colocation space nationwide," said Rachit Mohan, Head, Data Center Advisory (India), JLL. Rising demand led data center operators and developers to pursue ambitious expansion plans, while some adopted the acquisition route to enter Indian markets, which is expected to continue. Colocation capacity grew by around 28 per cent to reach 447 MW in 2020 from 350 MW in 2019 per cent, he added. Mumbai and Chennai are

expected to drive 73 per cent of the sector's total capacity addition during 2021-23, while other cities like Hyderabad and Delhi-NCR emerging as new hotspots. Robust expansion by global cloud players in the established markets of Mumbai and Pune continues owing to prevailing infrastructure, while new markets like Hyderabad are gaining momentum in this space. "India's data centre industry is expected to add 560 MW during 2021-23 leading to a real estate requirement of 6 mnsq ft. The supply addition will be complemented by densification of racks and servers, sustainable energy sourcing and use of indigenous resources," said Samantak Das, Chief Economist and Head of Research & REIS (India), JLL.

Rising demand is leading operators to pursue ambitious expansion plans, while some are adopting the acquisition route to enter Indian markets. Various policies and reforms brought in by the government with an aim to turn India into a 'Global Data Hub' has provided necessary measures to achieve this goal," Das said. The increasing usage of e-commerce, EdTech and digital transactions placed the existing IT infrastructure of enterprises under pressure. Overall data usage increased by 36 per cent in 2020 due to increased usage of smartphones and fixed wireless access as per Nokia Mobile Broadband India Traffic Index 2021. Enterprises have been upgrading their IT infrastructure by adopting hybrid

models, given their budget constraints. Technology trends like 5G rollout, IoT-linked devices and AI will also result in stronger growth in demand. According to JLL, the rapid growth of the data center industry has led to increasing energy consumption and environmental impact. Increasingly, global cloud players setting up bases in India aim to reduce their carbon footprint and are looking at data centers that provide sustainable energy alternatives and are entering renewable energy power contracts. India's renewable energy capacity at 90 gigawatts accounts for 25 per cent share of the installed power capacity and provides tremendous scope for development of green data centers.

COVID BREAK RURAL IMPACT TO LIMIT TRACTOR SALES GROWTH, SAYS REPORT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Growth in domestic tractor sales volume might get limited to 3-5 per cent this fiscal on the back of strong second wave of Covid-19 infections and rising cases in hinterland, apart from high-base effect of last fiscal, said Crisil Ratings on Tuesday. Accordingly, the agency said that trend is expected to take place despite the forecast of a normal monsoon auguring well for farm incomes and therefore tractor demand. Besides, it pointed out that operating margins of tractor makers will shrink on an average by 200 basis points (bps) due to firming up of steel prices, which is the primary raw material and accounts for bulk of the cost. However, the credit profiles of

tractor makers will, continue to remain stable, supported by strong and almost debt free balance sheets, as well as robust liquidity. "The already high base of last fiscal and severity of the second wave preclude significant tractor volume growth this fiscal," said Gautam Shahi, Director, Crisil Ratings. "Several states have imposed lockdowns recently, and crucially, rural India has been less insulated this time around. Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, which account for over 50 per cent of tractor volumes, have seen a surge in infections." Last fiscal, domestic tractor volumes logged a whopping 27 per cent on-year growth to a record 9 lakh units. The growth, that time, was driven by strong government



spend on rural schemes and an increase in farm incomes, supported by good monsoons. Moreover, rural India was less impacted by the pandemic last fiscal and farmers redirected savings from spending on marriages, etc, towards tractor purchases, the agency said. "Part of the good augury is expected to continue with forecast of a well-distributed and normal monsoon this

year, too. This should benefit farm incomes and help sustain demand for tractors. An all-time high rabi sowing and expected good kharif season, driven by healthy reservoir levels, will be supportive, too," the report said. "Additionally, increased government spending in rural India and prospects of higher minimum support prices for 2021-22, should

buoy rural incomes. Also, non-agricultural tractor demand (20-25% of demand), which moderated last fiscal, is expected to recover, supported by recovery in rural infrastructure and mining activities compared with last fiscal." Furthermore, even as tractor volumes growth remains in positive territory, players in the sector have seen their cost of operations rise sharply as the price of the primary raw material, steel has appreciated sharply. "Primary steel prices increased by over 60 per cent in the six months through April 2021, and are expected to remain strong in the near term, before easing in the second half." "Although tractor players generally enjoy good pricing power, they are expected to absorb a part of the cost inflation given the sudden surge in steel prices."

Second COVID-19 surge will delay earnings recovery for Indian companies: Moody's

Singapore: India's sharp rise in infections will disrupt earnings recovery of companies recorded over the past six months, a research report by Moody's Investors Service has said. A prolonged and wider lockdown will have a more severe effect on earnings recovery. India's largely regional and less stringent lockdowns amid the second wave of coronavirus cases so far have had a limited impact on economic activity. If infections fail to decline to more manageable levels, however, lockdowns may be prolonged and widen, which will have a more severe effect on companies' earnings recovery, according to the new report. "Movement restrictions and weaker consumer sentiment amid the second virus wave will hit housing and automobile sales as well as transportation-fuel demand temporarily. Still, rising consumer preference for remote working and personal mobility solutions will drive long-term demand for bigger homes and entry-level cars," said Sweta Patodia, a Moody's Analyst. "Demand for IT and telecommunication services will remain strong despite our expectation of a slowdown in economic activity over the next few months." "Strong global demand could boost exports from Indian steel-makers given relatively weaker demand from automotive and white-goods manufacturing in the current quarter. Exports are therefore an attractive opportunity because domestic steel prices are lower than international prices," said Kaustubh Chaubal, a Moody's Vice President



'THE FAMILY MAN' SEASON 2 EXPECTED IN JUNE, TRAILER OUT TODAY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Manoj Bajpayee took to Instagram on Tuesday to inform fans that the trailer of the second season of the popular series "The Family Man", will be released on Wednesday. According to reports, the series is expected to stream in June. Sharing the poster of the series, Bajpayee wrote: "Our excitement level is 11/10 Yours? #TheFamilyManOnPrime Summer is here, and so is #TheFamilyManOnPrime Trailer out tomorrow."

The series has been directed and produced by Raj Nidimoru and Krishna D.K, who took to their twitter account to share the update.

"Finally! #TheFamilyManSeason2 trailer drop. Tomorrow 19 May. 9 AM," the tweet read.

The second season will mark the digital debut of South actress Samantha Akkineni. She will be playing the role of Raji in the series.

Along with Bajpayee, the show also features Priyamani Raj, Sharib Hashmi, Seema Biswas, Darshan Kumar, Sharad Kelkar, Sunny Hinduja, Shreya Dhanwanthary,

Shahab Ali, Vedant Sinha and Mahek Thakur, besides south actors Mime Gopi, Ravindra Vijay, Devadarshini Chetan, Anandsami and N. Alagamparumal.

The series revolves around a middle-class man, Srikant Tiwari, who works for a special cell of the National Investigation Agency. It showcases his struggle to strike a balance between his secretive, low paying, high-pressure, high-stake job and being a husband and a father.

The series streams on Amazon Prime Video.



Arjun Kapoor: An actor alone is not deciding hits and misses

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Arjun Kapoor agrees that an actor's career in Bollywood is defined by hits and misses, as it helps in assessing the saleability of the star through the business of their films. However, he points out an actor alone is not the deciding factor for the highs and lows.

"When you are looking at the saleability of an actor you have to assess how the business of his/her film has done. At the same time, I feel if you are a good actor, you are more defined by the performance," said Arjun. He added: "Sometimes you can be a very good actor and have made wrong choices. You could be the correct actor that attracts people but they are disappointed by the work that you are doing at the moment because an actor alone is not deciding the hits and

misses."

Arjun says there are various elements that may or may not work in an actor's favour.

"Actors are sometimes let down by their director, sometimes by the fact that the script eventually did not pan out the way it was imagined and an actor sometimes let a film down by not doing a good job with the material provided to them," he said.

"The definition of an actor for the outsider is of course hits and misses, but within the community I would say there are a lot of other circumstances that come forward," he said.

Arjun's next is "Sardar Ka Grandson", which is set to release on Netflix on May 18.

"Sardar Ka Grandson" is the story of Amreek played by Arjun, who wants to fulfil a wish of his grandmother, essayed by Neena Gupta.



Tamannaah reveals the two things she was looking for in her upcoming series

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Tamannaah Bhatia plays an ethical hacker in the upcoming series "November Story". The actress says the two things she was looking for on the digital platform were relatable scripts and a strong character.

"The two things that I was looking for in a web series were a relatable script and a strong character that would pique audience interest," Tamannaah said.

Speaking about her experience of working with debutant director Ram Subramanian, the actor added: "When Ram Subramanian approached me with the script of November Story, not only did it align with these two parameters, but the holistic vision he embodied for a series as complex as this, was extremely admirable. His well-rounded vision along with his impressive storytelling skills got me to sign November Story." A seven-episode whodunit, "November Story" also includes Pasupathy, GM Kumar, Aruldass and Vivek Prasanna among others. The show releases on May 20 in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu on Disney+ Hotstar VIP.

JACKIE SHROFF: IF ALMIGHTY GOT ME FROM CHAWL TO STARDOM, HE HAS A PLAN

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Jackie Shroff has been in Bollywood for almost four decades and is universally loved as a star and a human being. The actor says he does not have the fear of losing stardom because he feels that god surely seems to have a plan for him.

Jackie Shroff was touted as Bollywood's new big thing when he made a blockbuster debut as lead actor in Subhash Ghai's 1983 film "Hero". Through the decades, his notable films have included "Ram Lakhan", "Yudh", "Karma", "Parinda", "Tridev", "Kala Bazaar", "Vardi", "Doodh Ka Karz", "100 Days", "Angaar", "Khalnayak", "Rangeela", "Agnisakshi", "Bandhan", and the recent "Radhe".

It has been a journey where Jackie, 64, has taken the rough with the smooth. Has the thought of losing stardom ever scared him? "Nothing. No fear. If god has got you here he has made a position and will take you somewhere. If the almighty has got you from a chawl to stardom with so much affection, then he has a plan. So, just relax and float," reveals Jackie. "Grow, open up, love more. Get the energy and take the energy and give affection. Keep yourself right. Don't pay attention to what others say or do. If someone needs help, give them that. Don't mean harm to anyone and life is sorted," says Jackie, who does a comic turn as hero Salman Khan's senior cop and heroine Disha Patani's elder brother in his new release "Radhe", which is directed by Prabhudeva.



Shama Sikander is 'trying to help as many lives as possible' through virtual fundraiser

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Shama Sikander has joined a virtual fundraiser initiative to raise money for Covid patients, and she says she is trying to reach as many people as she can to provide help.

"It's the most difficult time we have seen in our lives. We are trying to reach as many people as we can. I am taking

part in this virtual fundraiser to raise money, which can directly go to the aid of the suffering people through verified institutions. We have to follow all the SOPs asked of us. We are trying to save as many lives as possible. I pray and hope that we all get through this sooner than later," said Shama, who is on board with Mission Oxygen to raise funds, and is also trying to get beds and oxygen for those in need. The actress said that she, too, has experienced loss due to the pandemic. "My heart cringes to see our country in this state last few days have been really heavy, I have my own family members going through lack of oxygen, one of my very dear friend's sisters lost her life to Covid due to lack of oxygen. It's been too much on us as a family and as a nation," shares the actress.

FILM FRATERNITY LAUNCHES COVID RELIEF SEVA- 'MISSION ZINDAGI'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The film fraternity has come forward to support a nationwide Covid-relief initiative, Mission Zindagi. This initiative promises to provide beds, oxygen cylinders, ambulance help, immunity kit, doctors and mental health guidance.

Art of Living's volunteers from across the country are helping people find hospital beds, oxygen cylinders, ambulances, immunity kits, on-call doctors, and other critical medical resources via this initiative. One can reach out for help on website www.artofliving.org/mission-zindagi or WhatsApp on +919343090734.

Rajkumar Hirani, Karan Johar, Mahaveer Jain, Bhumi Pednekar, Kartik Aaryan, Sonakshi Sinha, Taapsee Pannu, Kapil Sharma, Badshah, Warda Nadiadwala, Varun Sharma, and many other celebrities have come together to support this pan-India initiative by the Art of Living foundation.



Laxmi Rai