

absolute india

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Congress and BJP spar words over vaccination, Covid - 19 management and curb

TIME FOR PM TO BECOME A 'LEADER': RAHUL GANDHI

"It's time that the Prime Minister should tell the country that I will arrange vaccines and become a leader and should not worry about his image. I had warned the government on number times non stop over the Covid since February last year. And the government made fun of us. Even the Prime Minister announced victory over Covid."



DON'T TRY TO STOKE FEARS: PRAKASH JAVADEKAR

"India ranks second in the world in the scale of vaccination by administering over 20 crore doses, and it is set to see a big jump from August. The government has been saying and working on from the beginning and cited the production of two vaccines in India. Gandhi should rather be concerned about the Congress-ruled states as they have not been able lift their quota from vaccine producers."



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addressing a virtual press conference on Friday blamed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the second wave of Covid-19 and said that it is time for the Prime Minister to become a leader and stop the blame game. He said the buck stops at the Prime Minister's door as it was he who exported the vaccine and not the states.

The Prime Minister's image has been dented and he should stop blaming the states as this time the Union and state governments should be in sync. It is the duty of the Prime Minister to ensure everybody is on the same page.

Rahul accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of being responsible for the second wave of the Covid pandemic in the country.

Attacking the government over the vaccination shortage he said that India is fighting a war with Covid and vaccination is the only way to stop the pandemic is to vaccinate people. He also accused the government of hiding the real figures of deaths due to Covid.

He said that problem is that the government and the Prime Minister were unable to understand the Covid. He said that last year he told the government to not give space to Covid and close the doors. "Vaccine is the permanent solution. And if you don't take the vaccine then the virus will keep on mutating itself and there will be second, third, fourth and many other waves of Covid," he said.

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Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Information and Broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar on Friday slammed Rahul Gandhi for his attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the pandemic's spread and said the language he used and the way he tried to stoke "fears" confirm that the Congress was behind the "toolkit".

He said that the COVID-19 vaccination will be complete in India by December this year. Speaking to reporters, senior BJP leader Javadekar noted that the health ministry had recently given a roadmap about producing 216 crore doses by December and how 108 crore people will be vaccinated, as he

rebutted Gandhi's claim that it may take three years to finish the exercise, considered critical to curb the disease. Attacking the Congress leader, the I&B minister alleged that his choice of words like "nautanki" for the prime minister when Modi is working to curb Covid is part of the toolkit's script, referring to a controversial document about targeting the government.

The BJP has claimed that the Congress is behind it, a charge the opposition party has rejected. It has instead blamed the BJP and sought police probe into the matter. "It has been confirmed, and there is no need for any evidence. It is clear that the toolkit was produced by you. The kind of language you used and the way you tried to stoke confusion and fear among people is part of that politics," Javadekar said.

CALCUTTA HC JUDGE QUESTIONS HANDLING OF NARADA CASE

'Reduced to mockery'

Team Absolute | Kolkata

A day when the five-member bench of the Calcutta High Court granted bail to heavyweight Trinamool Congress leaders accused in Narada bribery case, a letter surfaced from a judge who strongly objected to manner in which the transfer plea filed by the CBI in the case was listed before a division bench as a writ petition. Justice Arindam Sinha, a sitting judge of the High Court who has been part of the Narada hearing right from the beginning, wrote a letter to Acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal, criticising the manner in which the court entertained the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) plea for staying the lower court's ruling that granted bail to the arrested politicians.



"Our conduct is unbecoming of the majesty the high court commands. We have been reduced to a mockery," Justice Sinha wrote in his two-page letter, a copy of which is available with IANS, Justice Sinha wrote that the

Appellate Side Rules of the High Court, which govern the procedure of listing such matters, require that a motion seeking transfer either on the civil or the criminal side, has to be heard by a single judge.

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'WE ARE ALL LIVING THIS HELL': DELHI HC

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Friday, during the hearing of pleas in connection with shortage of medicine for black fungus, observed that the situation is similar to "living hell", and though court is willing to help patients facing issues with procurement of medicine, but is "helpless".

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said: "We are living this hell. Everyone is living this hell. It's a situation where we want to help but we are helpless."

As it was informed that steps are being taken by the Central government to procure 2.30 lakh vials of Liposomal Amphotericin-B from six countries, the bench queried what made the government fix this number, and emphasised the requirement of the medicine is much more, against the backdrop of several cases reported in the country.

The bench said: "We are only expressing our anxiety because of the proportions this thing is assuming... the effort here is to save lives and every hour matters."

Mehul Choksi to be charged for entering Dominica 'illegally'



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Fugitive businessman Mehul Choksi, who was captured from Dominica on Wednesday, has been charged for entering the island nation "illegally", the local media reported on Friday.

Choksi, who is wanted in India by the CBI and the ED for the Rs 13,500 crore Punjab National Bank (PNB) loan fraud

case, went missing from Antigua and Barbuda on Sunday, sparking a massive manhunt. He was captured in Dominica on Wednesday.

On Thursday night, Agarwal had said that Choksi was forced to get into a vessel from Antigua and was taken to Dominica. He also claimed that there were marks on Choksi's body, implying the use of force.

However, Antigua Police Commissioner Adee Rodney has rubbished the claims of Choksi's counsel and said that they have no information on him being forcefully removed.

On Wednesday, Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne had said that the fugitive diamondaire "needs to return to India" where he can face the criminal charges levelled against him.

"Upon filing of habeas corpus petition titled Mehul Choksi versus Attorney general of Commonwealth of Dominica and chief of police, Dominica court has ordered a restraint on removing Choksi from the land of Dominica until further order."

Vijay Agarwal, Choksi's lawyer

IMPORTED COVID RELATED ITEMS EXEMPTED FROM IGST TILL AUG



New Delhi: The much-anticipated GST Council meeting on Friday came up with some respite for items related to Covid relief, exempting integrated GST (IGST) from such imports till August 31, 2021. In another major decision, the council decided to exempt IGST on Amphotericin B, a medicine required to treat black fungus (Mucormycosis) infection. The discussions on relief for products required in Covid relief are not over yet. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while addressing the media post the meeting, said that a group of ministers (GoM) will be formed by Saturday (May 29), which will examine the need for further reductions and decide on any new rates in exemptions. The GoM will submit a report on the matter by June 8, 2021. In a relaxation to small taxpayers, the council on Friday recommended to come up with an amnesty scheme for reducing late fee. As per the Finance Minister, it will benefit around 89 per cent of GST taxpayers, as they would be able file pending returns, and avail benefits of scheme with reduced late fees.

'India is badnam, not mahan': Kamal Nath stirs controversy

Congress leader Kamal Nath on Friday claimed that Modi government's alleged mismanagement of the Covid-19 pandemic had rendered India 'badnam, not mahan.'

"Today, India is not great, rather it is infamous. The whole world is watching the Covid-19 situation unfold in India. Today, people in the United States are scared to sit in taxis being driven by Indian drivers."



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Senior Congress leader and former Chief Minister Kamal Nath stirred a fresh controversy on Friday as he termed India 'badnam, not mahan' (infamous, not great). Addressing the media during a religious visit to Maihar in MP, Kamal Nath claimed that India's Covid situation was being monitored by

of the Covid-19 virus, which was first discovered in India, as the "Indian variant." Defending his remark before the media on Friday, Kamal Nath said that the term 'Indian variant' was not just used by him but also by the government.

BJP hits back

Attacking Kamal Nath over his statement, BJP leader VD Sharma claimed that the Congress leader was defaming the country because he had lost his mental balance. "After losing power in Madhya Pradesh, Kamal Nath ji's mental balance has deteriorated otherwise a healthy mindset cannot do such things amid this worldwide crisis. You have insulted India by making such remarks. You have betrayed the country. You should be ashamed," VD Sharma said in a video tweeted from his handle.

MAMATA SKIPS PM'S 'YAAS' REVIEW MEETING

Kolkata: In a surprise development, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday skipped a review meeting conducted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Kalaikunda Air Force Station near Kharagpur to assess the damages caused by severe cyclonic storm Yaas that hit the state on Wednesday.



The review meeting snowballed into a political controversy after Banerjee personally met the Prime Minister before the meeting and submitted a copy of the damages caused by the cyclone to him. She even left the Air Force Station before the meeting commenced. Officials accompanying the PM said that the Prime Minister, Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar and other Union ministers patiently waited for half-an-hour. "Suddenly, Mamata Banerjee rushed in and handed over a bunch of papers on the cyclone impact to the PM and said that she was leaving as she had other visits lined up," the official said. Banerjee's objection was reportedly about the presence of state leader of opposition, Suwendu Adhikari, in the review meeting.

SC agrees to hear plea seeking Class XII board exam cancellation



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear a plea on May 31, a petition seeking cancellation of Class XII CBSE and Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) exams amid the ongoing second wave of the Covid pandemic in the country.

A bench comprising Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari said: "Please be optimistic. There may be some resolution by Monday." The bench fixed the matter for fur-

ther hearing Monday while asking the petitioner to serve copies of the plea on the two boards as well as the central government. The bench said that it will wait to see if any decision is taken by the Centre in the meantime. The bench noted that the CBSE would announce the schedule for the board exams on June 1. The petition filed by advocate Mamta Sharma urged the top court to issue directions to the boards to cancel the Class XII examinations, instead devise an objective methodology to declare the result within a specific time-frame.

Criminal charges against pvt hospitals found over-charging patients

Team Absolute | Amaravati

The Andhra Pradesh government has decided to crack the whip on private hospitals that are over-charging Covid patients. While notices and warnings were being issued to them till now, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has now directed officials to henceforth file criminal charges against such hospitals.

As per the orders issued by Principal Secretary, Health, Anil Kumar Singhal, hospitals caught billing patients exorbitantly, above the notified charges, will be levied a penalty ten times greater than the sum. Repeat offenders will be charged with criminal offences, and under the provisions of the Clinical Establishments Act.

"Any hospital or clinical establishment found to be repeating the same... such hospitals shall be prosecuted as per the provisions of IPC, besides action as per the Clinical Establishment Act," the order read.



COVID NEGATIVE MOM GIVES BIRTH TO COVID+ BABY

Varanasi: A Covid negative mother has given birth to a baby who tested positive immediately after being born.

The 26-year-old mother had tested negative for coronavirus before the delivery when she was admitted to SSL Hospital in Banaras Hindu University on May 24. On May 25, the woman gave birth to a baby girl who was tested for coronavirus just after her birth. The newborn's test report came positive despite her mother testing negative for the virus. The family and doctors are shocked over the newborn being Covid positive. The BHU hospital has said they will test the two again in a few days for Covid.

SSL hospital medical superintendent K.K. Gupta said that this was not a rare or abnormal incident. Both, the mother and her newborn, are doing fine.





GUARD AGAINST 'JUDICIAL LARGESSE' TO ACCUSED, SC TELLS COURTS

17 of a village die of Covid-19: Bihar panchayat Head

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A bench of Chief Justice N.V. Ramana and Justices Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose said the court's discretionary powers to grant anticipatory bail "cannot be exercised in an untrammelled manner".

The top court made it clear that if protection is granted while denying anticipatory bail then, such an order must necessarily be "narrowly tailored" to protect the interests of the applicant, while taking into consideration the concerns of the investigating authority. Cautioning the lower courts on this aspect, the top court said such directions, where protection from arrested is granted while denying pre-arrest bail, exceeds judicial discretion and amounts to "judicial largesse", which the courts do not possess. The top court set aside two orders passed by the Allahabad High Court, dismissing the plea of pre-arrest bail by the accused but granting protection from arrest for 90 days. "The resultant effect of the High Court's orders is that neither are the respondents found entitled to pre-arrest bail, nor can they be arrested for a long duration.. We are thus of the view that the High Court committed a grave error in passing such protection to the respondents accused," it said.

It stressed that if protection is granted to the accused, then such an order "must necessarily be narrowly-tailored to protect the interests of the applicant while taking into consideration the con-

The Supreme Court on Friday said protection from arrest should not be granted to accused, while dismissing their plea for anticipatory bail at the same time, as they would roam freely without being apprehensive of coercive action.

cerns of the society at large, and the investigating authority". "Such an order must be a reasoned one," it noted. The bench added that the High Court, giving the relief of 90 days, had not considered the concerns of the investigating agency, the complainant



or the proviso under Section 438(1), Cr.P.C., which necessitates that court pass such an exceptional discretionary protection order for the shortest duration that is reasonably required.

However, it observed the High Court can give protection to accused in certain extraordinary circumstances, even though the investigating agency has made out a case for arrest.

Patna | Agencies

As many as 17 persons from a village in Raghopur Assembly constituency in Bihar's Vaishali district died of Covid-19 infection in a single month, according to Juhi Parveen, the head of Chak Sikandar village panchayat.

Juhi Parveen released a list of the victims on Friday and said neither the district health department nor RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav took cognisance of severe Covid-19 infection in Mansukhpur village which falls under the Chak Sikandar village panchayat.

The deaths occurred between April 12 to May 12 due to severe Covid-19 infection in the village.

"It was like a community spread in the village comprising a population of 500 people. The situation was such that all family members in some houses were infected with Covid-19 infection. We have gone to



the graveyard for burial of dead bodies almost every day," said Mozahid Anwar, the husband of Juhi Parveen.

"Due to severe Covid-19 infection, many villagers migrated from Mansukhpur to other places. The situation is such that retailers avoid giving daily required domestic items to the villagers of Mansukhpur," he added.

The deceased have been identified as Saizid Akhtar,

Juhi Khatun, Gulnaz Parveen, Nazre Ali Khan, Mustaq Ahmed, Nasra Khatun, Badron Nisha, Jaha Alam, Nakibul Nisha, MD Gulab, Nazida Khatun, Jalal Khan, Mumtaz Khan, Zahida Khatun, Ekramul Haq, MD Bavik and Mawata Khan.

Juhi said many family members of the deceased have been infected with Covid-19 and are battling for their lives in the village.

'It's going to be hard,' tweets Twitter India MD as firm faces scrutiny

Team Absolute | New Delhi

After being snubbed by the Delhi Police, Twitter India Managing Director Manish Maheshwari on Friday tweeted a slogan poster, apparently admitting that there is a tough path ahead but things will be better soon. In a lengthy statement, the Delhi Police had said Maheshwari took "a path of evasiveness instead of cooperation".

Maheshwari's tweet showed a slogan poster that read: "It's going to be hard, but hard does not mean impossible (sic)," saying that "That's the tweet".

The Delhi Police statement had said: "Twitter India's subsidiary TC IPL's Managing Director chose to adopt a path of evasiveness instead of cooperation". Delhi Police said that initially, TC IPL's Managing Director had stated in his response that he was merely a sales head, and had no role whatsoever in any operations relating to content



and thereby refused to join the inquiry.

"It is to be noted that TC IPL's stance that its Managing Director is a mere sales head runs contrary to his very own previous press interviews, wherein he elaborately discussed Twitter's plans to devise methods to identify abusive or manipulative content. The above interview makes it clear that Twitter India's convoluted stance is similar to a deer caught in the headlights," the police

claimed. "Fourth, and last, the contrived fear mongering by Twitter is unfounded and misplaced. The Managing Director of TC IPL was merely served a notice, not as an accused but to participate in the inquiry as Twitter claims to have been acquainted with certain facts," the police said.

The Delhi Police had served a notice to Maheshwari on May 21, asking him to appear before the police with all the documents in the alleged Congress toolkit case.

On Monday, Delhi Police visited Twitter India's local offices in south Delhi's Lado Sarai and Gurugram to serve a notice after the social media platform had marked one of the tweets of BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra as "manipulated media".

Patra had shared the alleged toolkit of the Congress over Covid, accusing it of defaming the Prime Minister and the government.

Kerala HC cancels order dividing minority scholarships 80:20

Team Absolute | Kochi

The Kerala High Court on Friday decided to cancel a 2015 state government order under which 80 per cent of the merit-cum-means scholarships went to the Muslim community and 20 per cent to the Christian community (Latin Catholic and converted Christians).

A division bench, headed by Chief Justice S. Manikumar gave the order on a public interest litigation, directing that the scholarships should be distributed on the basis of the population of the communities. Incidentally Mizoram Governor and former state BJP President P.S.Sreedharan Pillai has gone on record to say that Cardinal George Alencherry, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, had shared his concerns that 80 per cent of the funds for the minority community are going to 'one' particular community and the Christian community is getting just 20 per cent.



In Kerala of the 3.34 crore population, the Muslim community accounts for 88.73 lakh, while the Christian population stands at 61.41 lakh. If the apportionment is going to cover all the Christians, then the new ratio will see the Muslims getting 60 per cent

and Christians 40 per cent. But if it is going to be applicable in the present form to only the Latin and converted Christians, then the present 80:20 ratio will continue. The respective communities are awaiting for the full order to come before they can comment on it.

LOWEST DAILY NEW CASES IN 44 DAYS, RECOVERY RATE 90%: HEALTH MINISTRY

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on Friday said that India's active caseload shows a declining trend as cases further dipped to 23,43,152 and active cases decreased by 76,755 in the last 24 hours. At 1.86 lakh cases, the daily new cases are the lowest in the last 44 days with less than 3 lakh daily new cases for 12 consecutive days. Recoveries continued to outnumber the daily new cases for the 15th consecutive day with the recovery rate increasing to 90.34%. The daily positivity rate at 9.00% is less than 10% for 4 consecutive days. India's active caseload has now reduced to 23,43,152. Active cases have decreased since the last peak on May



10, 2021. A net decline of 76,755 was witnessed in the last 24 hours and active cases are now only 8.50% of the country's total positive cases. As part of the continued decline in the daily new cases, the country has recorded less than 3 lakh daily new cases for twelve consecutive days now. 1,86,364 new cases were registered in the last 24 hours. India's daily recover-

ies continued to outnumber the daily new cases for the 15th consecutive day. 2,59,459 recoveries were registered in the last 24 hours with 73,095 more recoveries during the last 24 hours as compared to the daily new cases. A total of 20,57,20,660 vaccine doses have been administered through 29,38,367 sessions, as per the provisional report till 7 a.m. on Friday.

Doctor couple shot dead in broad daylight in Bharatpur

Jaipur | Agencies

A day after Bharatpur MP Ranjeeta Koli's car was attacked in Dharsoni village of the district by unidentified miscreants, a doctor couple was shot dead in broad daylight on Friday by unknown bikers in Bharatpur, prompting the opposition to question the law and order situation in Rajasthan.

The victims have been identified as Sudeep Gupta and his wife Seema Gupta, both medical doctors by profession.

The doctor couple was in the car when two bike-borne miscreants started firing on them indiscriminately, leaving both dead on the spot. The bodies have been kept at the RBM Hospital in Bharatpur. The police have a



launched a probe to identify and nab the assailants.

Attacked the ruling Congress government in the state, Rajasthan BJP chief Satish Poonia said, "Yesterday night there was an attack on an MP and today a doctor couple was shot dead in broad daylight. The Chief Minister should strengthen law and order in the state or else people will take to the streets to protest against the pathetic law and order situation in Rajasthan."

Free distribution of AYUSH-64 starts in Goa

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Minister of State for Defence Shripad Naik and Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Friday inaugurated free distribution of 'AYUSH-64' for asymptomatic, mild and moderate Covid-19 patients in Goa. The Union Ministry of AYUSH is constantly working on effective medicines for Covid-19 patients, said Shripad Naik. 'AYUSH-64' was recently launched by the AYUSH Ministry in all states and is being distributed free to asymptomatic, mild and moderate Covid-19 patients. Naik urged Goans to avail the benefit of this medicine.

The Goa Chief Minister said 'AYUSH-64' will be distributed with home isolation kits. 'AYUSH-64' is available with all the Primary Health



Centres (PHCs) in the state. To avoid post-Covid complications, the recovered patients should take care with good hygiene and proper diet.

'AYUSH-64' can be availed by the kin of the patient by producing a RT-PCR positive report within 7 days of the test and Aadhaar number. 'AYUSH-64' is an Ayurvedic

formulation which was developed by the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS), the apex body for research in Ayurveda under the Ministry of AYUSH, for the management of malaria. This drug was repurposed as the ingredients showed notable antiviral, immune-modulator and antipyretic properties.

Production batches of Covaxin initiated in March to be ready only in June

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Bharat Biotech said on Friday that the timeline for manufacturing, testing, and release for a batch of Covaxin is approximately 120 days.

In a statement, the company said that manufacturing, testing, release and distribution of vaccines is a complex and multifactorial process with hundreds of steps, requiring a diverse pool of human resources.

For vaccines to result in actual vaccination of people, highly coordinated efforts are required from international supply chain, manufacturers, regulators, and state and Central government agencies,



it added.

The company said production scale-up of vaccines is a step-by-step process, involving several regulatory SOPs of GMP (Standard Operating

Procedures of Good Manufacturing Practices). There is a four-month lag time for Covaxin to translate into actual vaccination. "The timeline for manufac-

turing, testing and release for a batch of Covaxin is approximately 120 days, depending on the technology framework and regulatory guidelines to be met. Thus, production batches of Covaxin that were initiated during March this year will be ready for supply only during the month of June," the company clarified.

Based on Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) guidelines, all vaccines supplied in India are mandated by law to be submitted for testing and release to the Central Drugs Laboratory, of the Centre. All batches of vaccines supplied to state and Central governments are based on the allocation framework received from

the Centre. "The timeline for vaccine supplies to reach the depots of the state and Central Governments from Bharat Biotech's facilities is around two days. The vaccines received at these depots have to be further distributed by the state governments to various districts within their respective states. This requires additional number of days," the company added.

It said pandemic vaccines are distributed by respective governments equitably across all sections of the population. Vaccines once available at the vaccination centres are then administered to recipients over a period of time, based on demand.

'Yaas' impact: One dead, 6 injured in Bihar



Team Absolute | Patna

Cyclone Yaas impacted several districts of Bihar on Friday as one person died and six were reportedly injured in Bihar's Begusarai district after an old house collapsed. The incident occurred at Nonpur village under Teghra police station. The deceased has been identified as Geeta Paswan. The house collapsed due to heavy rainfall for the last 36 hours. The injured persons, including two children, were admitted at Begusarai's Sadar Hospital. They said that the roof of the house collapsed due to heavy rain and they were trapped

under its debris. The local villagers rescued all of them. Districts like Patna, Vaishali, Saran, Gaya, Nawada, Begusarai, Madhubani and Sitamarhi have registered continuous rainfall since Thursday morning. Water-logging has been reported at several places in these districts. An approach road connecting Jai Prabha bridge along the Ganga river between Saran district in Bihar and Ballia district in Uttar Pradesh partially collapsed at the starting point of the bridge.

This led to a traffic cut-off between Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Jai Prabha bridge is part of Ghazipur (Uttar Pradesh) to Hajipur (Bihar) road. It is one of the key routes to connect Bihar's capital Patna to eastern Uttar Pradesh's districts such as Ghazipur, Ballia, Varanasi, Mau and Jaunpur. The Saran district administration has halted traffic on the road. The vehicles are taking longer routes through Arrah and Buxar to move toward Ghazipur. Several trees also toppled inside the premises of the Bihar Legislative Assembly.



DELHI GOVT TO LIFT LOCKDOWN WEEK-WISE, TRADERS PUSH FOR REOPENING MARKETS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Lifting the lockdown restrictions for construction work and also for manufacturing and production units in the national capital, which will come into effect from Monday, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Friday that the administration will take a decision on allowing activities in the city phase-wise.

Delhi's Covid management body, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), which is being chaired by Delhi Lt. Governor Anil Bajjal, on Friday decided that lifting of the lockdown will proceed like it was imposed -- week-wise.

After DDMA's meeting was over, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal through a digital press conference said, "The Government has to take care of the lowest strata first, which includes daily wagers, labourers, and migrant workers who come to Delhi from far off areas for livelihood. This category of personnel are usually found in the construction field and in factories." He added, "In the meeting, it was decided that to avoid losing the advantage gained in the past month, everyone is of the opinion that we must open phase-wise. There has to be some balance. Every week, based on suggestions from citizens and expert opinion, we will keep opening up progressively. If the rate of infec-



tion increases again, we will put the unlocking on hold. So everyone must maintain caution."

Beginning Monday, production units will be allowed to function in industrial areas within confines or manufacturing premises. In specified compounds, workers will also be allowed to carry out construction activities. The restrictions will remain the same and no other activity will be allowed till the DDMA takes a further decision on it. Meanwhile, the government's decision to allow

only construction and production units did not go down well with the market associations and they have expressed unhappiness.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said that curbing the spread of coronavirus is the priority of not only the government but also of the traders and citizens, but when the positivity rate is about 1.5 per cent, the markets in Delhi should also have been allowed to open, may be in a phased manner. Construction activities and factories provide livelihood to migrant workers, which is half baked only. More than 15 lakh small and big traders of Delhi are providing employment to more than 35 lakh employees who are largely migrant people and as such for their livelihood, the shops are also eligible to open," said Praveen Khandelwal, general secretary of CAIT.

Though the complete lockdown in Delhi was announced on April 19, the administration had put a ban on all social, political, religious, cultural, festival related gatherings by the end of March. During the period of complete lockdown, Delhi had reported the highest Covid cases in a day on April 20 -- 28,395, while highest daily positivity rate was over 36 per cent on April 22. And after one month of lockdown, Delhi on Friday reported 1,141 new cases and the daily positivity rate stands below 2 per cent from the last one week.

Gurugram caps rates of Covishield at Rs 900, Covaxin at Rs 1,200 per dose

"All private hospitals have been informed for fixing covid vaccine rates. As per the instructions issued by the government if the private hospitals set up vaccination camp out of their premises, then they can charge an additional Rs 250 for administering the vaccine dose," Singh said.



GURUGRAM | Agencies

Acting on the direction of the Haryana government, the Gurugram district administration on Friday ordered all the private hospitals to cap the Covid vaccine price of each dose.

Deputy Civil Surgeon M.P. Singh has directed all the private facilities to fix the rate of Covishield at Rs 900 and Covaxin at Rs 1,200, per shot.

"All private hospitals have been informed for fixing covid vaccine rates. As per the instructions issued by the government if the private hospitals set up vaccination camp out of their premises, then they can charge an additional Rs 250 for administering the vaccine dose," Singh told IANS.

That means that if the hospital set up a camp anywhere outside its premises, then it can charge Rs 1,150 for Covishield and Rs 1,450 for Covaxin. But inside their premises they can charge Rs 900 and Rs 1,200 for Covishield and Covaxin, respectively.

Besides, the Gurugram district administration has also issued helpline number for the orphan children. "There are some families where the children have become orphaned after their parents died due to this virus. For such children, the District Administration has released helpline numbers 0124-2328288, 9717846669 and 8700454307," Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg said.

Garg informed that the District Child Welfare Officer has been appointed as a nodal officer for this helpline service.

Medical college nurse ends life; kin allege harassment

According to the police, Preeti was undergoing treatment after she had allegedly consumed the toxic substance on April 26. After a month she succumbed on Wednesday.



GURUGRAM | Agencies

A 24-year-old nurse working at SGT medical college here died a month after allegedly consuming poison at her home, police said on Friday.

The deceased was identified as Preeti, a resident of Jhajjar district in Haryana.

According to the police, Preeti was undergoing treatment after she had allegedly consumed the toxic substance on April 26. After a month she succumbed on Wednesday. The deceased's family, however, alleged that she took the extreme step after being continuously harassed by her male colleague in the medical college.

Preeti's father Satveer told police that she was a staff nurse at the STG medical college, where a man named Manish also worked with his daughter. "Manish was pressuring Preeti to marry him but she had refused his proposal following which he started harassing her that compelled her to take such a step," Satveer said.

NSUI intensifies demand for cancelling Class XII board exams

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Intensifying its protest demanding the cancellation of Class XII board examinations, the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the student wing of Congress, staged a demonstration outside the Union Ministry of Education here on Friday.

The protest led by NSUI president Neeraj Kundan was joined by several activists wearing PPE kits and following the Covid protocols, raising slogans like 'Pahle Suraksha, Phir Pariksha' (safety first, then exams).

Kundan said, "Since the Central government announced its plan to conduct the Class XII board exams, NSUI has been demanding to find an alternative to physical examination."

He said that a few days back he wrote a letter to the Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, reminding him that the government has not yet come up with any guidelines to ensure the safety of those below the age of 18 years, and majority of the students fall in this category.

"We specifically warned the gov-



ernment that this (holding exams) could be life-threatening for the students. The government has already failed to procure adequate vaccines and there seems to be no definite plan for that.

"Now this lack of planning for the

board exams will harm the academic year of these students. The only solution to save their academic year is to promote them on the basis of internal assessments, rather than wasting more time on discussing the examinations," the NSUI leader said.

Lokesh Chugh, national secretary of the NSUI, said that they will also launch a Twitter campaign from Friday demanding the government to cancel the board exams, and find out some alternative ways to physical examination with the hashtag of #CancelExamsSaveLives.

Kundan said that NSUI has made its stand clear that nothing could be more important than the lives of the students, and the government must find an alternative solution rather than conducting the examinations.

"The students' body is against conducting the examinations in any form because while physical examination will risk the students' lives, every student does not have access to internet in case the exams are held online," Kundan said.

"The government must look at an alternative formula to grade the students as soon as possible. It can grade the students on the basis of their past performances, assignments or classroom assessments etc., but risking their lives is an insensitive decision," he added.

HC seeks Centre, Delhi's response on 12-year-old's Covid vax plea

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday sought response from Centre and Delhi government on a plea moved by a 12-year-old seeking for immediate vaccination of children between the ages of 12-17 in the city.

The plea, filed by Tia Gupta through advocate Bihu Sharma also demanded vaccination be prioritised for parents having children up to 17 years of age.

The plea contended that data from across the country, including Delhi, has revealed that between April-May, the number of reported cases of children infected and suffering from Covid-19 "has risen tremendously".

The plea said children have a fundamental right to be a beneficiary of the Covid-19 vaccines which are being promoted as "an easy, low-cost way to avoid the infection which may cause them serious harm or death".

A bench comprising Chief Justice D.N. Patel and justice Jyoti Singh issued notice to the Centre and Delhi government on the petition. The plea contended that it is pertinent that the vaccine policy against Covid-19 has failed to factor-in children



or parents of children, who are a vulnerable section of society, for vaccination against the deadly virus. The plea added that the evidence that unvaccinated children are more likely to develop a new, more powerful Covid-19 strain, is reflected in the prevalent 'second wave', which has infected many more children than the 'first wave' last year. "The Respondents have failed to prepare a National Plan for children in adherence to the guidelines given under the National Disaster Management Plan 2019, formulated under the Disaster Management Act 2005 ('DM Act'), which clearly recognize children and their vulnerability during a 'bio-

logical health emergency', such as the present COVID pandemic," said the plea. The plea said there is enough empirical evidence to show that Covid-19 virus brings long term health complications such as organ damage, long Covid, or multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C) and death -- to at least some proportion of children. "The State is obligated to recognize the vulnerability of children during this pandemic and accordingly take all suitable vaccination measures for them, along with other preventive medical infrastructure measures to ensure mitigation of the 'disaster'," added the plea.

FOUR PSA OXYGEN PLANTS INSTALLED IN GURUGRAM HOSPITALS

Gurugram: Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Friday virtually inaugurated four Pressure Swing Absorption (PSA) oxygen plants here.

These plants have been built under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme in collaboration with Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL). According to the administration spokesperson, two plants have been set up at General Hospital in sector-10 while one plant each has been set up in ESIC hospital sector-9 and ESIC Hospital at Sector-3 in Manesar. The capacity of the medical oxygen plants in sector-10 is 1 and 0.5 tonne per day, while the capacity of the oxygen plants in sector-9 ESIC hospital and ESIC hospital sector-3 in Manesar is one tonne each per day. "The health facilities in the district have also been increased after the installation of these four plants.

Gurugram Covid recovery rate 98.14%: Official

GURUGRAM | Agencies

The recovery rate of Covid-19 cases in Gurugram has shown marked improvement with 98.14 per cent recovery rate as compared to 91.89 per cent a week back, according to the district administration.

The health officials said the action plan prepared by the district administration focusing on testing, tracing and treatment appears to have paid off.

They said so far, 14,96,670 covid tests have been conducted in Gurugram, of which 13,11,750 have come negative. In the last 24 hours around 5,493 tests were conducted in the district.

Also, a total of 6,54,970 people have been administered with Covid jabs including 5,299 on Thursday.

On Thursday, 573 people recovered as against 171 new cases reported in Gurugram.



According to the daily health bulletin, 1,76,089 people have recovered so far in Gurugram. According to the figures, the number of total active case in Gurugram district is 2,554 out of which 2,145 patients are in home isolation. For the past one week, covid numbers in Gurugram has remained below 500, according to daily health bulletin. The health official said that due to increased awareness among the residents and several awareness campaigns

organized by the district administration and health department, the recovery rate of corona infected patients is constantly improving.

"Though the recovery rate is good in the district, but still we would like to advise the residents to be vigilant while the cases of Covid-19 are decreasing, we have to continue to take precautions to end the pandemic from the district," said Virender Yadav, civil surgeon Gurugram.

Two held for cheating 50 Covid patients on pretext of O2 cylinders

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Two people have been arrested from Greater Noida for cheating over 50 Covid patients and their family members on pretext of providing home delivery of oxygen cylinders, Delhi Police said on Thursday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police, Shahdara, R. Sathiyasundaram said that Vivek Vihar police station personnel arrested the two fraudsters -- Ritik Kumar Singh, of Bihar's Ara district and Sandeep Pandey, a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur -- who used to make promises to provide oxygen cylinder at doorsteps, received money through digital transactions, and then, disappeared.

He said that police received a complaint on May 2 regarding online fraud on the pretext of providing an oxygen cylinder.

"Complainant Sanchet Aggarwal stated that his mother was ill and he was in need of an oxygen cylinder. Accordingly, he contacted numbers available on Instagram of those promising to provide oxygen cylinders at home on payment.

"He and his father paid Rs 14,000 through Paytm for two cylinders but no oxygen cylinders were provided to him. These numbers were found switched off later," the DCP said. A case was registered and a team was formed to nab the accused.

The DCP said during the course of the investigation, bank statements and Paytm details of the complainant were obtained.



"On the scrutiny of bank and Paytm statement, it was revealed that fraudulent transaction was credited into a Paytm wallet which was registered on the name of Sandeep Tea and was found linked with above Paytm account. All the fraudulent amount of Rs 14,000 was further transferred into an account of Union Bank of India branch in UP's Ghazipur, which was registered in the name of one Pandey," he said.

He further said that during probe, it was also found that a mobile number is also issued in the name of Pandey. "What was interesting interesting the fraudulent amount

was further transferred into another bank account of Central Bank of India's Chowk Bazar Branch, Arrah which belonged to Singh and another account of Axis Bank in the name of Pandey," the DCP said, adding that on the basis of mobile phone location, local intelligence and hard work put forth by the investigating team, both accused were apprehended.

The DCP said that during questioning, Singh, who is the main accused, along with Pandey induced those whose family members were Covid patients to pay for oxygen cylinders, promising speedy home delivery.

"They got their mobile number go viral on social media -- Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp -- for the supply of oxygen. They received many phone calls for getting the oxygen cylinder and received fraudulent amounts in their bank account by cheating with the same modus operandi and led a lavish lifestyle," he said. A total fraudulently acquitted amount of Rs 2.43 lakh was found credited in the account of Pandey and Rs 4.23 lakh in the account of Singh in the above Paytm and bank accounts. The DCP further said that Singh claims to be national President of "India Youth Icon Team", headquartered in Greater Noida and having 18 lakh youths in eight states as active members/followers. Singh also said that he runs a consultancy for college admission through a company in which he is one of the partners, while the other partner is the Vice President of the above organisation, the DCP said.

Meanwhile, Pandey is working as a property dealer in Greater Noida, and also claims to be running a wheat flour mill business in Greater Noida along with his friends.

Let Sushil Kumar come: Delhi HC refuses to hear plea against media

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea seeking to restrain the media from sensationalising Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar's trial in connection with the murder of a 23-year-old wrestler.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said Kumar is a "vigilant person" and the court cannot entertain a PIL on his behalf.

Disposing of the plea filed by a law student, the bench said: "Let that man come... We see no reason to entertain litigation on behalf of a vigilant person. The plea claimed that Kumar's career and reputation was tarnished by the media reporting against him in connection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a wrestler. According to the plea, the excessive publicity of the suspect in the media before the

trial in a court of law, either incriminates a fair trial or results in characterizing the suspect as the one who has certainly committed the crime. The plea added that this amounts to undue interference with the "administration of justice", and sought proceedings against the media for contempt of court. A Delhi court on May 23, sent the Olympic medalist to six days police custody.

According to the police, Kumar and his associates allegedly assaulted fellow wrestler Sagar Dhankar and his two friends Sonu and Amit Kumar at the stadium on May 4 night. Dhankar succumbed to his injuries later. The Delhi Police have filed an FIR under Sections 302 (murder), 308 (culpable homicide), 365 (kidnapping), 325 (causing grievous hurt), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 341 (wrongful restraint) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code.



WORK WITH FULL CAPACITY TO ELIMINATE CORONA INFECTION: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the status of Corona infection is under total control in the state. This has been made possible through the coordinated efforts of public representatives, government servants and common citizens. The positivity rate in the state is constantly on the decline. Even a slight negligence in the constantly declining Corona infection can adversely affect all efforts, so caution and vigilance are necessary. Shri Chouhan said that the state government will provide every possible help to each victim's family. Chouhan was reviewing the status and arrangements of Covid the District Panchayat auditorium in Sehore district.

Chouhan said that unlock will begin from June 1 in a phased manner. For this, members of the Crisis Management Committee at the district, Janpad, village and ward levels will decide what to open and to what extent the exemption should be granted. He said that the Corona curfew should be strictly followed in the entire district. Crowded events like



wedding ceremonies etc. should be avoided. Chouhan expressed satisfaction over the efforts made by the administration to control Covid infection. Chouhan said that all necessary preparations should be made to face the third wave of Corona infection. Corona protocol should be followed so strictly that the third wave does not come. Oxygen beds and ICU beds should be increased. Adequate oxygen supply must be ensured. Chief Minister said that the state government will give subsidy in grant and electricity charges on setting up oxygen plant. Chouhan said that proper arrangements are also being made by the government to treat black fungus. Necessary medicines are also being arranged for the treatment of black fungus. Chouhan directed to make

arrangements for test of black fungus.

Chouhan said that the Kill-Corona campaign should be continued. Every person affected by cold, cough, etc should be identified and provided with a medical kit immediately. Treatment should be arranged as needed. There should be no delay in identifying the symptoms of Corona and starting treatment. Corona patients admitted to hospitals should be treated better. Every effort should be made to save the patient's life. Not a single dose of vaccine should go waste. Chouhan said that the first priority at this time is to save the lives of the people. He said that Corona breaks the body besides destroying you financially. Free Covid treatment should be ensured to all poor and middle class families under the Chief

Minister Covid Upchar Yojana.

Chouhan said that the state government is making every effort to help poor families under the circumstances arising out of Corona. Two months ration has been provided by Prime Minister Modi and three months by the state government. Free ration is being distributed to all eligible beneficiaries. It should be ensured that no one goes hungry in the city. Necessary precautions should be taken to avoid Corona even during plucking of tendupatta. Funds are being released to the accounts of construction labourers and self-help groups. Chouhan said that decision has been taken to provide assistance of Rs one lakh to families where people have died of Covid.

Chouhan said that a plan has been made in which the government will bear the responsibility for the upbringing of the children whose parents and guardians have died due to Covid. Government will provide Rs 5000 per month to eligible children and pay for their education. He said that the children of government servants who died in Covid will be given compassionate appointments.

BJP-Ruled MP, Too, Refutes Centre's Data On Vaccine Wastage

■ Madhya Pradesh, which the centre said has a vaccine wastage rate of 10.7 per cent, has indicated there could be issues with the data or a communication gap with the Health Ministry

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh has joined other states in disputing the centre's data on COVID-19 vaccine wastage. Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, where the BJP is not in power, have already rejected the centre's data that shows high vaccine wastage in these two states.

Madhya Pradesh, which the centre said has a vaccine wastage rate of 10.7 per cent, has indicated there could be issues with the data or a communication gap with the Health Ministry. Madhya Pradesh Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang told reporters he has asked officials in the state to contact their central counterparts

and revisit the data for fixing discrepancies.

"According to our calculation, the vaccine wastage is 1.3 per cent. The centre's figure for Madhya Pradesh is quite high. It is possible the actual figures from our end couldn't be communicated properly to the centre. I have asked our officials to get in touch with officials at the Health Ministry and get the figures corrected," Sarang told reporters.

Madhya Pradesh is the first BJP-ruled state that disagreed with the centre's data on vaccine wastage.

The Health Ministry data released yesterday showed that Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh have reported 37.3 per cent and 30.2 per

cent vaccine wastage, respectively. These are high figures amid the shortage of vaccines across the country.

Chhattisgarh Health Minister TS Singh Deo and his Jharkhand counterpart Banna Gupta have criticised the Health Ministry for what they claimed was showing wrong data. Both have denied their states are the biggest vaccine wasters in the country, as the centre's data indicate. The centre's "intention is not right," Deo said. "They are calling it vaccine wastage without getting proper data. If centre does not believe us, it can send its own team for a probe. Their intention is not right and these statements are politically motivated," Deo said.

Remdesivir scam: first-year psychology student arrested



■ Over 11 persons lost over 2 Lakh rupees to her fake antiviral drug but the police tracked her down and have recovered all the stolen items.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

First-year Psychology Student arrested from a remote area in Madhya Pradesh duped several citizens in Delhi under the guise of providing Remdesivir injections.

She collected Mobile phones, passbook, chequebook and more valuable items from her customer to whom she would sell fake Remdesivir vials.

Over 11 persons lost over 2 Lakh rupees to her fake antiviral drug but the police tracked her down and have recovered all the stolen items.

On May 1, FIR No 87 /21, U/S - 420 IPC was registered in PS Defence Colony on the complaint of one Mr Ankit Kumar S/o Mr Rajiv Kumar R/o C-474 Defence Colony, New Delhi, with the allegations that he was in urgent need of Remdesivir injection for his relative.

He contacted her and said

the person on the phone promised to give 5 injections of Remdesivir for Rs 32,400. The demanded amount was transferred by the complainant via UPI transaction.

After transfer of money the alleged person did not respond. After these directions a dedicated team of SI Sachin, D-6294, SI Priti, Ct Sachin, Ct Nitin under the supervision of SHO Defence Colony and overall supervision of Sh. Kulbir Singh, ACP Defence Colony was constituted and investigation was taken up after registration of the case.

During the course of investigation, Alleged Axis Bank Account details were collected. Technical details were obtained. Address was found. On May 24, a dedicated team consisting of SI Sachin, W/SI Preeti and Ct Sachin were sent to Old BJP Office, Barapathar, Dist Seoni, Madhya Pradesh. The team was briefed about the ramification of the case, how the person had cheated citizens under the stress of the Pandemic and directed to work in tandem on different aspects of the case.

The team after travelling approx. 1000 KM distance reached Seoni City, Madhya Pradesh and searched for the accused person.

Even after facing difficulty

in finding the place they had to go, as there was no House No. or Street No., the team rigorously searched the address. All out efforts were made to nab the criminal.

The relentless efforts of the team yielded results and the location of the accused was traced with the help of technical surveillance. Immediately, on May 26, the team raided the house of accused Vartika Rai and successfully arrested her.

During sustained interrogation, the accused - Vartika Rai confessed guilty.

She told that she is a permanent resident of Near Jathar Hospital, Barapathar, Akbar Ward, Seoni, MP-480661. She is a student of Psychology 1st year from IGNOU University.

Along with studying she likes to promote pages on Instagram and earn money from that. His father also has his own medical store and *Uncle (Phuppa) suffered from COVID.

Thereafter, she saw an opportunity during this emergency situation of COVID-19 and got interested in this kind of use of social media to earn more money* by cheating the innocent people who were in urgent need of the COVID-19 Medicines.

Further investigation of case is in progress.

Private school conducts exams amidst Covid-19, action to be taken

A private school in Guna has carried out examinations in the school amidst Covid-19 restriction. Now, action would be taken against the school.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Private school in Madhya Pradesh's Guna district has carried out annual examinations in the offline mode amidst Covid-19 restrictions. Now, action is expected to be taken against the school. "Exams were being conducted here. We found approx 30-40 students at school. The school has violated section 144 and the administration's order. Will take action against the school," said Naib Tehsildar Ramashankar Singh, according to ANI.

Madhya Pradesh had announced summer vacation for students of Classes 1 to 8 from April 15 to June 13 for the government and state-aided schools. Notably, The MP Class 10 board exams were planned from April 30 to May 19 and the MP Class 12 board exams were planned from May 1 to May 21. The exams were supposed to be held offline, in pen and paper mode.

On May 15, the Class 10 board exams were cancelled while the Class 12 board exams were postponed in the state.

On May 24, the government said offline exams would be conducted for Class 12 when the situation was more favourable. "At present, no change is proposed in the examination system," an official statement had said.

Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal is expected to announce the mode and dates for the Class 12 CBSE board exam 2021. The states should follow soon with announcements of their own since most state boards tend to model their decisions on the basis of CBSE during the pandemic.

DO NOT GIVE GOODS TO A PERSON WITHOUT MASK, TAKE ALL PRECAUTIONS: CM

You have to run a shop and prevent infection too, get the vaccine installed. Chief Minister Chouhan transferred an amount of Rs. One thousand to 6 lakh 10 thousand rural road vendors

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has asked the street vendors, shopkeepers not to give the goods to any customer who has not put on a mask. Apply the mask on your own, store soap and sanitizer at the store. Customers should also take the goods while keeping a distance. Shopkeepers make shells in front of the shop.

Chouhan said that business will start gradually from June 1. We now have to run a shop and also prevent the spread of corona infection. If you take full precautions, then the corona will not spread and will end.

Chouhan said that a campaign of vaccination is being carried out in the state. Every person must get vaccinated. All take a pledge that they will protect themselves

and their families from the corona. Chouhan today transferred a total amount of Rs 61 crore from the Ministry through single click to 6 lakh 10 thousand rural street vendors at the rate of one thousand rupees per beneficiary.

Through video conferencing, Chief Minister interacted with beneficiaries. Everyone told that they have got easy interest loan of Rs 10-10 thousand under the scheme. With this he did his business. Rajat Sen runs a tea snack shop, Purushottam Mali vegetable shop, Bhawani Bai tea shop and Neha Karmale grocery store. Everyone thanked Chief Minister for the loan of Rs 10 thousand and Rs 1000 each for his work.

Chouhan said that at present 4 lakh 10 thousand cases of rural street vendors are in banks. Everyone will get an interest-free loan of Rs 10-10 thousand soon.

Farmers Spend Night In Queue As Bank Reopens After Days

■ Many farmers were seen sleeping on the road with pieces of clothes laid out, as they waited for their turn. They had also placed stones on the ground to mark their spots in the long queue.

Team Absolute | Vidisha

Farmers in Madhya Pradesh's Vidisha queued up outside a bank through Wednesday night in order to withdraw money. The District Cooperative Bank had been closed for two weeks after a few staff members tested positive for coronavirus recently. Farmers have been thronging the premises for cash withdrawal even before the bank reopened on Tuesday.

However, the bank decided to release only 150 tokens daily to customers to avoid crowding, thus, promoting farmers to queue up to get tokens. Many of them were seen sleeping on the road with pieces of clothes laid out, as they waited for their turn. They had also placed stones on the ground to mark their spots in the long queue. "They've been waiting since night for tokens to withdraw money; 150 tokens were distributed & rest of them will get them tomorrow," said the Tehsildar of Shamshabad area. Many of those who spent the night on the road did not have money to

buy diesel, seeds and pesticide. A few others were there to withdraw money for the wedding of their daughters. Vinod Ahirwar, manager of the bank, said people are coming to withdraw money for hospitalization and other emergencies, and that they are being given money even without tokens.

On Monday, hundreds of farmers gathered in certain rural areas in Madhya Pradesh Ujjain without maintaining social distancing and other Covid protocols. Many were without masks outside the rural branches of District Central Co-operative Banks to get the money under a government scheme called Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana. Bank manager Mahendra Kumar Jatav admitted that hundreds of farmers came to get funds despite being told to maintain social distance. Funds were made available to them through a token system.

Madhya Pradesh added 1,977 coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, taking its infection tally to over 7.73 lakh. 7,828 people have died due to the virus in the state.

Tigers' roar gets louder in Bandhavgarh as 41 cubs caught on camera traps amid pandemic gloom

FORESTERS HAVE COLLECTED THE INFORMATION FROM CAMERA TRAPS AND BASED ON ACTUAL SIGHTINGS OF CUBS IN THE RESERVE, WHICH IS A DENSELY POPULATED HAVEN FOR BIG CATS IN THE STATE, THE OFFICIAL SAID.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Amid the pandemic gloom, a boom in tiger numbers in Madhya Pradesh's Bandhavgarh has brought some cheer to forest officials and animal lovers. In the last few months, as many as 41 tiger cubs have been caught on camera traps set up by forest officials in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve and National Park to count those aged 12 months or below.

"The forest staff after analysing the data has found over 41 tiger cubs, from newborns to one year olds, at BTR," principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife) Alok Kumar said.

Though a rapid growth in tiger population is a reason to cheer, the forest officials have expressed concerns saying the tiger reserve already has big cats beyond its carrying capacity.

An official said that the population growth would only lead to territorial fights among tigers. Old tigers are leaving the reserve in search of new homes, a report in Times of India quoted the forest official as saying.

With a large tiger population, the reserve is one of the most popular parks in India. Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve was declared a national park in 1968. The reserve attracts a large number of tourists from across India. A rise in the birth of cubs in the reserve is the result of the focus on the increasing tiger population.



"The only option is to expand the reserve as it has exceeded its carrying capacity causing infighting. Many old tigers have moved out from the reserve and this can't be reversed," said an official.

Officials further said that at least 25 tigers have left the reserve and fell

prey to the electric traps laid by villagers and poachers. And in most cases, the tigers have been electrocuted by electric traps.

As per the data, four eight to 10-month-old cubs were spotted in Kallavah beat, while 12 in the same age group were seen in Pator.

Similarly, five cubs of a tigress identified as T-17 were seen in Tala beat, four six-month-old cubs were spotted in Dhamakhor, while Panpatha core and buffer areas have two three-month-old big cats each, it was stated.

Apart from these, Bhanpur has two newborns, five cubs aged 10 to 12 months old were seen in Maghdi beat and four in the age group of eight to 12 months old in Khatouli, the official said, adding that two cubs were spotted in a cave in Badkheda beat.

The BTR is also known as a nursery of tigers in the state and once they grow, adult big cats are shifted to places in and out of the state, where their density is low, Kumar said.

Bandhavgarh was declared a national park in 1968 and later as a tiger reserve in 1993. Spread across 716 sq km, the reserve is known for the highest density of tiger population.

According to All India Tiger Estimation Report 2018 released on International Tiger Day in July 2019, Madhya Pradesh recorded the highest tiger count in India and once again gained the status of "Tiger State". The state pipped Karnataka by just two tigers 526-524.



LOCKDOWN EXPECTED TILL JUNE 15

Team Absolute | Mumbai

We have almost finalised the lockdown extension for 15 days. Things are being fine-tuned as to what relaxations can be given in districts where cases have dropped. The lockdown order is expected in two days", he said.

Speaking about the vaccination drive, Tope informed, "As per formula of the central government, vaccine manufacturers have reserved 50 per cent vaccine for the centre, 25 per cent for states and 25 per cent for private hospitals. We have already declared our stand that we are ready to buy vaccines for all people of the state in one go but due to central government rule we are not able to buy the vaccine in bulk. Hence, the vaccination process has slowed." Earlier on Thursday, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to Chief Secretaries of all states and union territories to extend the lockdown till June 30, 2021.

The letter states, "The strict implementation of containment and other measures has led to a declining trend



Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope told reporters in Pune on Friday that lockdown in the state might be extended for 15 days. "Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray will take a final decision after discussing the situation with the task force and health department officials."

in the number of new and active cases, across States & UTs, barring some areas in the Southern and North-Eastern regions. I would like to highlight that in spite of the declining trend, the number of active cases presently is still very high. It is, therefore, important that containment

measures may continue to be implemented strictly. Any relaxation by States/UTs, may be considered at an appropriate time, in a graded manner, after assessing the local situation, requirements and resources. I would, therefore, urge you to continue compliance to the containment meas-

ures, as has been advised by the Ministry of Health of Family Welfare (MoHFW) in their letter dated 25.04.2021, so as to fully overcome the pandemic. In this regard, necessary directions may be issued to district authorities in your State/UT, for taking all necessary measures."

Maharashtra SSC Result To Be Based On Class 9, 10 Internal Marks: Varsha Gaikwad

Maharashtra Board will release Class 10th SSC results by June-end. The Class 10th board exam results will be announced on the basis of internal marks obtained in Class 9 and Class 10.

absence of physical board exams. Exams for Class 10 students in Maharashtra were earlier cancelled looking at the prevailing situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and also taking into account the safety and well-being of the students and staff members. Gaikwad has also informed that the state will try to announce the Maharashtra SSC result 2021 by June-end. "We will try to declare the [SSC] result by the end of June," Gaikwad said. Students who aren't satisfied with their results can write the exam later, Gaikwad added.

The Maharashtra government told the Bombay High Court earlier this week that the Board will make a decision on the evaluation criteria

for SSC or Class 10 students soon. A "fair and accurate" assessment criterion will be formulated after meetings with stakeholders, Gaikwad had earlier said. The minister had said marks will be awarded to students based on 'internal assessment' or 'objective criterion'.

The court was hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by Dhyananjay Kulkarni, challenging the government's decision in April to cancel SSC exams due to a surge in COVID-19 cases. Representing the government, PB Kakade said the government is yet to devise a formula to evaluate students (in the absence of the exam), and a decision will be taken in two weeks.

SHOP TIMINGS TO BE RELAXED, BUT CURBS TO STAY

Mumbai: Despite a dip in Covid cases in the state, lockdown-like restrictions will be extended beyond June 1 with minor relaxations such as extended hours for shops selling essentials. However, sectors where social distancing is an issue like restaurants, beauty parlours and gyms are unlikely to be permitted to reopen immediately. A discussion on the handling of the pandemic and whether curbs should be relaxed took place in the state cabinet meeting on Thursday. A final decision will be taken by CM Uddhav Thackeray after consulting the Covid task force. Even though Covid infections in the state are on the decline there are still 15 districts reporting a surge. Apart from that, mucormycosis infections are on the rise and so we still have to be cautious. Rather than completely lifting the lockdown, it will be extended beyond June 1 and relaxations will be given in a staggered manner, the CM said in the meeting. Officials said though active cases have dipped, they are still at the level at which they were during the peak of the first wave, and hence it would be premature to open up for various activities. Officials said it is likely that restrictions will be extended till June 15 but shops selling essentials would be allowed to stay open longer along with some in the non-essential category, especially those selling items for the monsoon. Currently, only essential shops are allowed to remain open 7 to 11 am. Officials said sectors which involve contact in enclosed spaces like restaurants, salons, gyms and even malls will not be considered for reopening till a sizable chunk of the population has been vaccinated.

Sushant case:

Ex-flatmate Pithani sent to NCB custody till June 1

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai court on Friday sent Sushant Singh Rajput's former flatmate Siddharth Pithani, arrested in Hyderabad and brought here, to the custody of the Narcotics Control Bureau till June 1 in connection with a drug case linked with the death of the Bollywood actor last year.

Among the prime suspects in the case, Pithani was absconding since long, but was arrested by the NCB in a joint operation with its Hyderabad office on Wednesday, May 26.

After getting a transit warrant from a Hyderabad court, Pithani was brought to Mumbai and produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate at the Esplanade Court this afternoon, and it sent him to NCB remand for four days.

Seeking his remand, the NCB lawyer said that it wanted to probe his role and



nexus with others accused in illicit drug trafficking rackets and details of his links with contraband dealers to unearth the full truth and ensure justice is done.

The other co-accused in the same case, Samuel Miranda and Dipesh Sawant, had spilled the beans on Pithani in their statements, claiming he was in direct with not only Rajput, but also with actress Rhea Chakraborty and her brother Shovik Chakraborty, who were also arrested in the case

last year.

Pithani's arrest came nearly 3 months after the NCB filed a charge sheet in the Sushant case before a Mumbai special court on March 5, naming 33 persons including the Chakraborty siblings and many others.

A former flat-mate of Sushant, Pithani was among the earliest persons who had seen the actor's body found hanging in his Bandra apartment on June 14, 2020, as the death sparked off a nationwide political furore.

Woman kills self over harassment; in-laws get fake Covid-19 report to evade autopsy

Puja Ganesh Raikar, resident of Dhangar Javalka village of Patoda tehsil, allegedly consumed sanitiser on May 19 due to harassment by her husband and his family over dowry, the official said.

BEED | Agencies

A 21-year-old woman allegedly committed suicide due to harassment by in-laws, following which, the latter procured a fake Covid-19 positive to

evade autopsy in Beed district of Maharashtra, police said on Friday.

A case has been registered against four members of the family, two of whom have been arrested, an official said. Puja Ganesh Raikar, resident of Dhangar Javalka village of Patoda tehsil, allegedly consumed sanitiser on May 19 due to harassment by her husband and his family over dowry, the official said.

The victim was admitted to a private hospital in Ahmednagar and was later taken to a hospital in Pune, where she died on Wednesday (May 26), he said. The victim's in-laws knew that an autopsy would reveal that she had con-

sumed a poisonous substance and hence, decided to procure a fake Covid-19 positive report to cover up the cause of death, the official said.

When the victim's family refused to believe that she had died due to Covid-19, another test was done, the result of which came out negative, he said.

A case has been registered against the victim's husband Ganesh Raikar, father-in-law Shivaji, mother-in-law Vijubai and Namdev Sukde, a relative, who helped get the fake report, the official said. While two of the accused have been arrested and two are absconding, he added.

Bombay HC orders Maha to admit ailing Father Stan Swamy to pvt hospital Maharashtra to set up comprehensive dashboard for real-time Covid-19 data: Govt tells HC

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Friday ordered the Maharashtra government to immediately transfer ailing octogenarian priest and Koregaon-Bhima case accused Father Stan Swamy to a private hospital for 15 days, in view of his deteriorating health.

At a special urgent hearing, a division bench of Justice S.S. Shinde and Justice NR Borkar said that although Sir JJ Hospital - where Swamy is current admitted - is well-equipped and medically staffed, it may not be feasible to give proper attention to him, owing to the present Covid-19 pandemic influx of patients.

Accordingly, the court directed that Swamy should be shifted to the Holy Family Hospital in Andheri, preferably on Friday itself, and be admitted there for

15 days. As per an undertaking by the accused's counsel, senior advocate Mihir Desai, the court said that Swamy would bear all his medical treatment expenses.

The hospital authorities were also asked to provide an attendant in view of his advanced age, besides a policeman for his security. The bench's directions came on a plea for temporary medical bail filed by the priest, challenging two earlier orders by a special NIA court rejecting his bail application.

During the hearing last week, Swamy only requested release on interim bail and refused to get admitted to any hospital, after which his lawyer sought time to speak with him.

After discussing the matter with Senior Advocate Desai, Swamy agreed to get admitted to the Holy Family Hospital and

moved the high court for an urgent hearing.

Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, representing the NIA, argued that there was no need to admit the accused to the Holy Family Hospital since Sir JJ Hospital has all facilities to care for patient, and admitting an accused to a private hospital may set a wrong precedent.

Strongly opposing Desai's plea for allowing a friend of Swamy to remain with him as he had no other family, Singh said that the hospital staff was enough to take care of him.

After considering all submissions and arguments, the court ruled that Swamy can be admitted to a private hospital of his choice and also allowed a friend, Father Frazer Mascarenhas, to visit him in hospital as per the hospital protocols.

The proposed comprehensive dashboard to be operational by June 15 would include real-time data on testing, availability of beds, tracking and supply of not only oxygen but also various essential medicines.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra may become the first state in the country to have a comprehensive dashboard for providing real-time data on bed management and availability of medicines for Covid-19 as the government has proposed to set up a comprehensive dashboard by merging all the existing district and purpose-based dashboards.

"The preparation of a comprehensive board is in the final stage. The software to be used for operating the same is ready," informed the state government during the hearing of a PIL on Covid issue.

The state government said that there are about 3,000 plus hospitals in the state which are intended to be connected to the dashboard. "Presently there are more than 25 such dashboards which are in operation in the state. It is proposed that all these dashboards presently in operation are discontinued by merging them into one comprehensive dashboard to be operated at the state level itself," it said adding the exercise will require merging of data of all the presently operational dashboards because they are proposed to be discontinued.

The proposed comprehensive

dashboard to be operational by June 15 would include real-time data on testing, availability of beds, tracking and supply of not only oxygen but also various essential medicines.

Once the dashboard is ready, the state government would provide appropriate training to all those who will be connected to it, mainly 3,000 plus hospitals of the state. The state government said that it was taking longer than anticipated to make the comprehensive dashboard operational. "The state government will certainly be going to consider the directions and suggestions given by the high court and do its best to incorporate them in the actual functioning of the dashboard," according to the affidavit filed in the high court. The design and working of the dashboard will be finalised by taking inputs of all those concerned with Covid19, it

said.

The Bombay High Court had recently pulled up the local bodies for not updating the dashboards set up for Covid-19 citing the inconvenience to patients struggling to get treatment for the viral infection. Lawyers Rajesh Inamdar and Pankaj Kandhari, while filing an intervening application during the hearing, told the High Court that the management of beds in rural areas is still not streamlined. "The online dashboard is not updated on a real-time basis. Also, there is no information supply and availability of medicines for the treatment of Covid19 and black fungus as the medicine continues to be in scarcity. There should be an audit of essential supplies to the hospital as there is no proper tracking of the supplies of medicines. The hospitals still ask the patients to bring Remdesivir," they said.

Leopard Strays Into Mumbai Housing Society

Bimbisar Nagar, where the housing society is located, is near the Aarey Milk Colony, the suburb closest to Sanjay Gandhi National Park, where leopards live



Team Absolute | Mumbai

A frightening video of a big leopard roaming freely inside a Mumbai housing society in the early hours on Friday has emerged online. It shows the animal moving around the parking area in complete silence as a milkman, unaware of the presence of the predator, heads towards it. As soon as he sees the leopard, he quietly retreats. The whole incident was captured by a CCTV camera installed in the society. The man then alerted the security guard of

Green View Society in Bimbisar Nagar in Goregaon East. The security guard then informed the secretary of the society who alerted the residents to remain inside their homes. After some time, the leopard returned to the jungle.

Bimbisar Nagar is near the Aarey Milk Colony, the suburb closest to Sanjay Gandhi National Park, where leopards live. The Aarey forest area is spread over nearly 40 square miles and is home to hundreds of species,

including about 35 leopards. The area is one of the places in the metropolis from where leopards enter the city. Wildlife experts say most of the time leopards enter human habitats to get access to easy food. The incident, which happened around 5 am, has triggered panic among the residents of the colony. Had it not been for the milk delivery man, no one would have possibly noticed the presence of a leopard in a residential housing colony.

Also, an image captured by a mobile phone camera shows the adult leopard prowling in the housing society for its prey.

This is not the first time a leopard has been sighted in a Mumbai housing society. In August last year, a leopard was spotted in the Andheri area. A security guard said he first thought it was a large dog but realised it was a leopard when he saw the animal striding into the surrounding forest.

Two Nigerian nationals arrested in Pune for hacking ATM machines

As per a press release issued by the Pune city police, an offence was lodged at the Shivajinagar police station against two persons who were hacking ATM machines at certain spots in the city.

Team Absolute | Pune

The Pune city police has arrested two Nigerian nationals for allegedly hacking ATM machines and withdrawing money.

The police identified the accused as David Charles Alies Ugochukwu Charles Nwagchukwu (30) and Kehinde Sadiq Idris (29), both currently residing in

Undri and natives of Nigeria. As per a press release issued by the Pune city police, an offence was lodged at the Shivajinagar police station against two persons who were hacking ATM machines at certain spots in the city.

It was learnt that the accused persons were connecting some external device to the network cable of the ATM machine. Then, after the ATM machine was hacked, they inserted an ATM card and gave input for withdrawing Rs 1,000.

But as per the input, instead of Rs 1,000, as many as 40 currency notes of Rs 500 denomination came out of the ATM machines. On knowing about this, bank officials lodged a complaint with the Pune city police.

A cyber police station team led by senior police inspector D S Hake initiated investigation into the case.

Cops got clues from the videos captured by CCTV cameras. During the probe, cops identified one of the accused, David, on May 25. His interrogation revealed the involvement of his aide Idris.

A court remanded the two accused to police custody till May 30 for further investigation. "Both accused were found to be staying in Pune for the past few months. They do not have proper visa documents and are suspected to be overstaying in the city. Further investigation is on," said inspector Hake.

During searches, police seized seven cell phones, three laptops, one modem and two passports from David, while three cell phones and a laptop was recovered from Idris. The police has also seized a two wheeler from their possession.



ON MENSTRUAL HYGIENE DAY, CELEBRITIES SPREAD AWARENESS ON SAFE PERIODS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

On Menstrual Hygiene Day, marked on May 28 every year, did you know that 28 stands for the average length of a menstrual cycle, whereas 5 marks the average number of days of menstruation? We celebrate this day to mark the importance of menstrual hygiene, break the stigma around periods, raise awareness and change the negative mind-sets, which prevent girls and women from having a safe period.

Many times, a lack of education, age-old taboos and stigmas and limited or no access to hygienic menstrual products can lead to women practicing poor menstrual hygiene during their period. When girls and women apply poor menstrual hygiene, they are more conducive to infections such as that of the reproductive tract, urinary tract, Hepatitis B and more. Not only is this detrimental to the overall health and wellness of the gender, it also puts a dampener on the progress of society as we strive to bring about educational, health and overall status opportunities for girls and women across the country. It prevents millions of girls from achieving their full potential and chasing their dreams.

In order to undo the stigma and negative connotations around a period, Menstrual Hygiene Day brings about an acceptance, thus encouraging young girls and women to embrace their period hygienically. This year, on Menstrual Hygiene Day, several Bollywood celebrities have not just donated sanitary napkins to ensure a safe period, but are also coming together to support the cause and make menstrual hygiene an everyday thing.

Outspoken actor and a champion of health and fitness, Mandira Bedi says, "The pandemic brought our lives to a standstill, but our periods didn't stop. Young girls residing in the

remote areas of Pune lost access to sanitary napkins and had to resort to unhygienic practices such as using pieces of cloth and cotton balls -- something that no girl should resort to for a natural, biological phenomenon. To ensure girls and women have a safe period, Whisper and I got together to donate sanitary pads at an NGO in Pune.

Additionally, to further empower girls to unleash her full potential especially during these testing times, I am glad to know that people across the country have also come together to support Whisper's #KeepGirlsInSchool movement, to ensure that girls are well equipped to manage periods and don't miss out on school or their dreams. Lets come together and help women and girls most in need get through their period with safe and hygienic protection."

Bollywood star Neha Dhupia has also stressed upon the importance of a safe period by making sanitary napkins available to young girls and women. Neha states that as women lost access to safe and hygienic sanitary supplies, especially during the pandemic. She said, "Even today taboos and stigma around periods hold many young girls and women back from achieving their true potential. Being a mother, I feel that nothing should come in the way of young girls achieving their full potential. This Menstrual Hygiene Day, lets talk about periods openly and help women and girls most in need get through these trying times. As many of them lost access to hygienic sanitary solutions due to the pandemic, Whisper and I came together to donate sanitary napkins in remote Guwahati. I believe every woman and girl deserves a safe and healthy period."

SUNNY HINDUJA: SUCCESS AND FAME SHOULDN'T OVERWHELM US

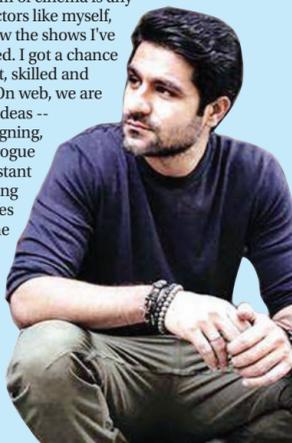
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Sunny Hinduja, seen as Sandeep bhैया in the show "Aspirants", feels along with achieving dreams and goals, one should know how to handle success. "We should never let success and fame overwhelm us so much that we lose touch with our root. When I say rooted, I mean staying connected with people you have grown up with, who stood by you when you were starting from zero because only they do not judge you by your success or failure," said Sunny.

"I know and see people around who became much-talked-about after the release of a show or two, but they are not the same persons anymore. We should dream big and work hard to achieve that, but we should also know how to handle success without being overwhelmed by it," he said.

The actor, who has appeared in shows like "Chacha Vidhayak Hain Humare", "Jamun", "Rasbhari" and "Bhaukaal" among others, will soon be seen in "The Family Man 2", scheduled to drop on June 4. He feels it is not just a great time for actors like him but every technician who gets the opportunity to work on OTT platforms.

"Not that the charm of cinema is any less, especially for actors like myself, but I can also see how the shows I've done so far have fared. I got a chance to work with brilliant, skilled and young technicians. On web, we are playing with quirky ideas -- whether it is set designing, camera angle or dialogue -- and there is a constant experiment happening because on web series you do not follow one formula. Rather, you try new things, in performance, storytelling -- everything. I am glad that talent is getting recognition because of OTT platforms," said the actor.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

In the last one year, especially during the pandemic, the demand to empower home chefs saw an upsurge with new and innovative players entering the space making an exceptional growth on virtual platforms. Some who were already prominent in this space saw extraordinary growth considering everybody wanted to hone their chef skills.

Check out these 5 platforms which can help refine your chef skills:

Your Food Lab

After being a Food Producer for MasterChef India, Mumbai-based Sanjot Keer started Your Food Lab in 2016 which has garnered millions of views on the internet. For chefs, creating content in social media has become a win-win situation as the platforms can be seen flooded with varieties. Today, no doubt Your Food Lab is the most loved food video channel with easy and interesting recipes.



Foodism

Foodism, a 2019 foodtech company that has brought together verticals like a Wholesome Food magazine, a website and an Instagram handle covering from great food to nutrition and more! They have a recipe sharing platform for members to come together and share their love and knowledge of food. It is also a one stop shop for food lovers and professionals and the only platform to incentivise content creators (recipes, lifestyle, health, wellness, blogs -- both video and posts). Foodism is also coming up with a mobile and web application that allows users to interact and network for business

DEEPIKA PADUKONE FEATURES IN 'SEVEN HAPPY WOMEN' LIST

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone has featured in the 'Seven Happy Women' list by Chopard under its 'Happy Diamond' campaign. The other names in the list include Aja Naomi King, Jung Ryeo-Won, Sadie Sink, Anne Nakamura, Dorra Zarrouk and Yang Zi. Chopard's Co-President and Artistic Director, Caroline Scheufele, has chosen the names with unparalleled influence to embody Happy Diamonds. "Seven Friends of the Maison who represent, each through in their own way, a strong, free, joyful way of living in the world and of owning the spirit of the era. Deepika Padukone, Aja Naomi King, Jung Ryeo-Won, Sadie Sink, Anne Nakamura, Dorra Zarrouk and Yang Zi have all grasped the codes of their time to blaze their trail in a manner that is both singular and generous." Theirs are powerful voices that resonate with that of Karin Scheufele -- Caroline Scheufele's mother -- who once exclaimed, faced with the first sketches of the future Happy Diamonds: "diamonds are happier when they are free". The brand quotes, "An indispensable voice, she (Deepika) speaks of the fragility and strength of the human mind, which she describes with great intelligence: 'To accept the highs and the lows. To embrace the various emotions that we are challenged with every single day. And to live a life that is fuelled by authenticity and purpose.' A strong mantra for a free spirit that bears witness to a deep humanity, making her a true global icon."



DIA MIRZA: OUR HEARTS GO OUT TO PEOPLE WHO SUFFERED THE IMPACTS OF CYCLONE YAAS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Dia Mirza took on Thursday tweeted to express concern for people who have been affected by the Cyclone Yaas.

Dia reacted to a photo of a forest officer rescuing a deer in a flooded area of Sunderbans, West Bengal. Reacting to the photo on Twitter, the actress wrote: "Our hearts go out to thousands of people who have suffered the impacts of #CycloneYaas. So many lives and homes affected...this image is a reminder that empathy and kindness in a shared world is what will get us by #ClimateChange is REAL. #ClimateAction Necessary." Yaas, which made landfall between Dhamra and Balasore in Odisha on early Wednesday, lay centred at 11.30 p.m. on May 26 over south Jharkhand and adjoining north interior Odisha near latitude 22.4 degree north and longitude 85.8 degree east, about 60 km west-southwest of Jamshedpur and 110 km south-south-east of Ranchi in Jharkhand, said the National Weather Forecasting Centre of the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Ileana D'Cruz: You just want people to like watching you

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Ileana D'Cruz has had a great run down South and has also been doing her share of Bollywood films. She says everything comes down to people and, as an artiste, one just wants the audience to like watching you.

Popularity, she explains, is the one thing that balances the fact that the film industry can actually be a very cruel place to survive. "It (the film industry) is brutal, of course, but it comes down to people. If they (people) like you that is all you need. You just want people to like watching you," she told IANS.

Ileana feels the moment an actor is not appreciated they lose the mark. "It basically goes the same for me. I wouldn't want to watch a film with an actor I don't like watching. The minute you are not liked anymore you sort of lose the mark. The industry is brutal in a sense, but it has got so many perks as well," she says.

Acting is a profession that comes with its pros and cons, the actress notes, in this context. "You cannot have all the good things only, there is always a little bit of con. I think that makes it interesting. It makes you work harder. It makes you strive to keep doing better," she sums up.

Ileana will next be seen in "Unfair N Lovely", a comic take on India's obsession with fair skin. The film is set against the backdrop of Haryana and casts her opposite Randeep Hooda.



Twinkle Khanna gets 'punishment' makeover from daughter

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Twinkle Khanna on Friday posted a picture of a "makeover" she got from daughter Nitara, which she wittily described as "punishment". In the Instagram image, Twinkle's face is smeared with lipstick and kohl, and she poses smiling at the camera.

"Another day and another makeover! I am clearly a glutton for punishment. And the little one has no future as a make-up artist! #FunnyMakeovers," Twinkle wrote as caption.

Filmmaker-writer Tahira Kashyap had encouragement for Nitara's makeover sense. "The little one is a visionary! Giving Frieda vibes," Tahira wrote in the comment section.

Stylist Anaita Shroff Adajania said: "Very kahloesque of her!" Twinkle is married to actor Akshay Kumar. The two tied the knot in 2001. The couple have two children, Aarav and Nitara.

Hone your chef skills by logging into these 4 platforms

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In the last one year, especially during the pandemic, the demand to empower home chefs saw an upsurge with new and innovative players entering the space making an exceptional growth on virtual platforms. Some who were already prominent in this space saw extraordinary growth considering everybody wanted to hone their chef skills.

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Kabita's Kitchen

Kabita Singh's YouTube channel called Kabita's Kitchen has 10.4 million subscribers. Kabita gave up her banking job to look after her son and since she had time she decided to pursue her passion for cooking. Kabita's aim is to keep the recipes simple so that everyone can cook. She posted her first YouTube video on November 2, 2014, and her channel has grown rapidly over the years.

Roposo

Roposo 'TV by the People' is an Indian social media platform that allows users to express, connect, and interact with the world. With its channel Hungry TV, people can curate cooking videos, upload them and learn a variety of dishes from the uploaded videos. It has tools which create realistic videos with music, voice-over applications and GIF stickers.



Simon Cowell cannot imagine life without his son

Los Angeles | Agencies

Music mogul Simon Cowell says his son Eric is the most amazing thing to have happened to him. He shares seven-year-old Eric with girlfriend Lauren Silverman. "After I lost my parents, I genuinely felt I would never feel that kind of love for anyone ever again. I thought that was it, until I saw the scan of him for the first time. From that moment I saw the scan, I was like, 'That is it, I'm besotted'. Now I just cannot imagine my life without him. He's the most amazing thing that ever happened to me. I adore him," said Cowell on "The Kelly Clarkson Show", reports

femalefirst.co.uk. His comment came in response to Clarkson's observation: "You're like a different dude with a child. I think the vulnerable little side of you came out when you had a kid." Cowell fell off his electric bike last year. Talking about how his son supported him at that time, he said: "I was so embarrassed about coming home looking about 100 (years old) because I couldn't walk, and I have these metal rods in my back and these screws. I said, 'Lauren, I just don't know how to explain it to (Eric)'. She obviously said something to him because he came in ... and I was lying in bed and he said, 'Daddy, you're like Ironman,' and I thought that was the sweetest thing and it meant a lot."



SINGER RINA SAWAYAMA IN 'KEANU REEVES-STARRER 'JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 4'

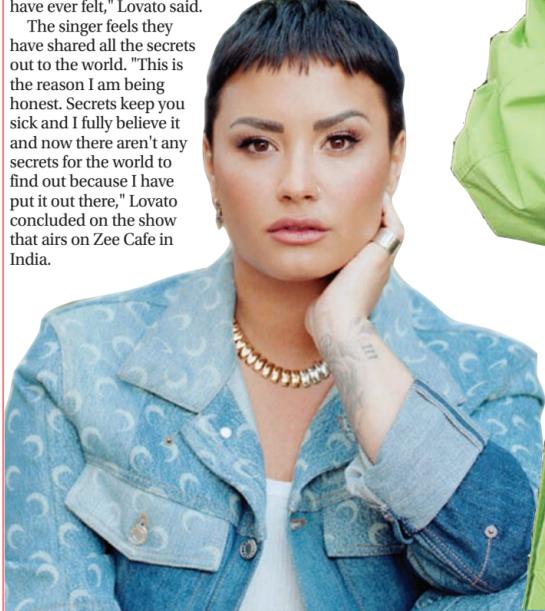
Los Angeles | Agencies

Japanese-British pop superstar Rina Sawayama is set to star alongside Keanu Reeves in the upcoming film "John Wick: Chapter 4". "I'm so glad to have Rina on board to make her feature film debut in John Wick: Chapter 4," Stahelski said. Details about her role are still under wraps. The film is being directed by Chad Stahelski, reports deadline.com. The script is by Shay Hatten and Michael Finch. Basil Iwanyk, Erica Lee, and Stahelski are producing, with Reeves and Louise Rosner as executive producers. The film begins production this summer, shooting on location in France, Germany and Japan. Sawayama, who was born in Japan and raised in North London studied politics, psychology and sociology in Cambridge University. She had a stint of modelling, which she used to fund some of her early music.

Demi Lovato: I cut my hair to be free of gender, sexuality norms

Los Angeles | Agencies

American singer Demi Lovato, who recently declared she should be identified as non-binary, has opened up on insecurities and fears, saying they cut their hair to be free from gender and sexuality norms. "I was trying something that didn't work for me. Now I am doing something that is working for me and, instead of feeling judged by everyone, I'm just going to say that people's opinion of me doesn't matter to me," said Lovato, on "The Drew Barrymore Show". "I'm doing what I need to do for myself and my wellness. I'm putting myself in front of my career and that is something I never did before because I was so preoccupied trying to be the sexy feminine popstar that I just ignored who I was," the singer added. Lovato has a feeling of liberation after the haircut. "I cut my hair to be free of all the gender and sexuality norms that were placed on me as a Christian in the south and when I cut my hair, I felt so liberated. I wasn't subscribing to an ideal or belief that was placed on me to be something that I am not and now that I am owning who I am, I feel the happiest I have ever felt," Lovato said. The singer feels they have shared all the secrets out to the world. "This is the reason I am being honest. Secrets keep you sick and I fully believe it and now there aren't any secrets for the world to find out because I have put it out there," Lovato concluded on the show that airs on Zee Cafe in India.



'I EXPERIENCE A LOT OF BODY SHAMING': TIKTOK STAR ADDISON RAE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Addison Rae has candidly revealed that she's experienced a lot of 'body shaming' from trolls online. The TikTok star, 20, discussed how she copes with cruel comments, explaining that she doesn't go online daily and has set up 'boundaries' to maintain her own space. While elsewhere in her interview with Rollacoaster Magazine, Addison gushed over her pal Kourtney Kardashian, 42, who has helped 'navigate' her through fame. Reflecting on the darker side of the internet, Addison said: 'I do experience a lot of

body shaming, and some say I don't deserve my success. 'So, I have to regularly remind myself to be myself, no matter what, and that I'm unique and healthiest by being me. 'Also, I remind myself to be graceful towards people and understand everyone's having their own battles, and we don't know what they're going through.' Addison then detailed how she doesn't go online daily and said has now 'set up boundaries' to maintain her own space, getting into meditating. The star added: 'I've learned to keep my own space, to set boundaries and keep them. I see a therapist now who gives me a safe place where I can be unfiltered without any walls up and process things.

Nick Jonas chose Kevin over Joe to break accident news to Priyanka

Los Angeles | Agencies

American pop star Nick Jonas has shared which brother he chose to break the news of his recent accident to his wife, actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas. Nick, who suffered a cracked rib after the bike accident, chose eldest brother Kevin over Joe to carry out the responsibility, he recalled during an appearance with his brothers on "The Late Late Show With James Corden". "It was a test of a lot of things. Trust, I think, is the biggest thing. So, it was a choice between Joe and Kevin. Who (do) you give your phone to call your wife in a time of crisis?" the 28-year-old singer recalled on the show, reports aceshowbiz.com. He added, "I gave it to Kevin. It's kind of telling." Sharing details, Nick said: "Basically I was there, and the medics were kind of attending to me. I was about to be put on the gurney to get into the ambulance, and obviously I had to call Priyanka, my wife, to say this has happened. But obviously I wasn't really in a spot where I could talk to her." On how he himself reacted to the accident, Kevin said: "I was really calm, collected, I think it has

something to do with being a father, seeing children fall all the time." Nick quipped: "I love how he's equated my rib breaking and the whole thing to just me falling." "Well, (children) fall on their bikes, it's a big deal in the moment, but if you get freaked out then they get more freaked out, so I try to stay extremely calm," Kevin tried to send his point across. Joe added, "You told Nick, 'Just walk it off, you'll be fine'." Nick then jokingly shared: "And I have the same emotional maturity as his five-year-old." On what caused the bike accident, Nick said: "Something just got caught, dirt on the bike, and (I) just tumbled. A little spill. A fractured rib and some other bumps and bruises, but I'm feeling really lucky. It probably could've been a little worse. All is good. I'm recovering nicely. I've got a lot of support around me and I appreciate everyone's well wishes. It means a lot." Nick cracked a rib on the set of "Olympic Dreams" Featuring Jonas Brothers" on May 15.



TRAILER OF DWAYNE JOHNSON-EMILY BLUNT STARRER 'JUNGLE CRUISE' OUT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The trailer of Dwayne Johnson and Emily Blunt's upcoming fantasy adventure "Jungle Cruise" was launched on Thursday. The cast also features Edgar Ramirez, Jack Whitehall, Jesse Plemons, and Paul Giamatti among others and, inspired by the popular Disneyland theme park ride of the same name, the film is directed by Jaume Collet-Serra, known as the helmer of films such as "House Of Wax", "Orphan", "The Shallows", "Unknown", and "Goal II: Living The Dream". The story is penned by John Norville, Josh Goldstein, Glenn Ficarra and John Requa. Michael Green, Glenn Ficarra and John Requa have worked on the screenplay. Besides starring, Johnson is also credited as a producer of the Disney film, which is slated for an international release on July 30. "Jungle Cruise" is also scheduled to release on big screen in India. Set in the early 20th century, the film tells the story of a riverboat captain named Frank Wolff (Johnson) who takes a scientist, Dr. Lily Houghton (Blunt), on a mission into a dangerous jungle to find the Tree of Life, which is said to have healing powers. During the trip, they must battle dangers of the wild and supernatural forces.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY
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EDITOR'S SPECS

Rural India, Covid and lockdown

Rural consumption slowed in financial year 2021, largely due to a rise in the number of Covid-19 cases in rural areas and consequent lockdowns, according to a report by Motilal Oswal Institutional Securities.

THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT HAS INTRODUCED VARIOUS INITIATIVES TO REVIVE RURAL DEMAND, SUCH AS SUBSIDISING ALL THE FERTILIZERS (NAMELY UREA, DAP, AND P&K).

Balram Singh Yadav, Managing Director, Godrej Agrovet, was quoted as saying that the surge in agri-commodity prices is expected to be corrected shortly - as prices are not sustainable at

this level (15-20 per cent decline may be expected) and reflect the change in global prices. Cereal prices are expected to remain elevated on increased demand from the Bio-Diesel segment. Yadav said rural consumption slowed in FY21, largely due to a rise in the number of COVID cases in rural areas and consequent lockdowns. The Central government has introduced various initiatives to revive rural demand, such as subsidising all the fertilizers (namely urea, DAP, and P&K).

Another Rs 190 billion has been allocated to 95 million farmers under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, of which 45 million farmers have received the funds. The drop in consumption is expected to be temporary, and demand is expected to bounce back faster than expected, he added. India's domestic sector saw a bumper rabi season, thereby paving the way for robust growth in FY22. Food grain production for the year is expected to be north of 307 mmt. Sameer Goel, Managing Director, Coromandel International was quoted as saying that as of April, the Food Price Index posted a rise for the 11th consecutive month and was at the highest levels since May 2014. Growth was largely driven by vegetable oils and cereals, lower output and decline in inventory levels, and stockpiling in China. The monsoon forecast for CY21 remains normal, and reservoirs in South and West India are at good levels; these factors bode well for acreages. As per the World Bank, prices in April increased 83 per cent YoY for maize, 64 per cent YoY for soybean, 76 per cent YoY for palm oil, 58 per cent YoY for sugar, and 43 per cent YoY for cotton.

India can play pivotal role in Afghanistan's stability after US withdrawal

As the United States prepares to pull out the entirety of its remaining 2,500 troops from Afghanistan (Liptak, 2021) - a move fast being followed by NATO allies in the war-tattered nation (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation [NATO], 2021a, 2021b) - the onus for security and stability will fall on the regions neighbours.

However, this is a window of opportunity in which India can lead the way. It will not be an easy or simple process. As the Taliban become increasingly assertive in the ongoing peace talks and potentially set to govern the country again someday, it is vital that New Delhi carves a channel for diplomatic dealings. So far there have been some evident efforts in that direction. Indian officials are taking an increasingly visible role in the various meetings concerning Afghanistan's future, of which Taliban members have been party. New Delhi will attend the ten-day Istanbul conference starting this week (Aljazeera, 2021; Did Press Agency, 2021).

Of course, India's history with the Taliban - for instance when it was

poised at the Kabul helm from 1996 to 2001 - has been a turbulent one. This is not surprising given the Taliban's protracted policy of direct- and indirectly supporting Pakistani terrorist groups, a policy which has resulted among other things in various skirmishes in Jammu and Kashmir.

Moreover, it is hard to forget the painful hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight in 1999 by five Taliban gunmen, resulting in one passenger being fatally stabbed and 17 being wounded (Joshi, 2020). Allegations of involvement by the Pakistani ISI inflamed the aftermath.

And certainly, the Taliban's perchance for violence and the ruthless targeting of both Afghan forces and civilians in recent years reminds all the sobering reality that their overarching tactical approach remains unchanged. Furthermore and of course, India's leaders cannot enthusiastically align with a political faction that ideologically limits the education and vocational opportunities for women and endorses extremist values that amount to violence and terrorism.

The diplomatic dance with the Taliban must therefore be delicate, but not dismissive. Uncomfortable facts are facts nonetheless, and India will need to work with the reality on the ground if - or when - the Taliban resume a potent palace position.

On the plus side, the Taliban's top brass has not - for some two decades - made explicit anti-New Delhi threats. They were swift to release, following quiet negotiations, the seven captured Indian engineers working in Afghanistan three years ago (The Economic

Times, 2019).

The organisation has also refrained from sabotaging or attacking India-backed development projects in Afghanistan - all of which should be perceived as positive tools for the communications arsenal. The success in this area may have stemmed in large part from New Delhi's non-militarized Afghan strategy.

Rather than bolstering Kabul's security endeavours with boots on the ground, India's lawmakers instead opted for a "soft power" approach - focusing its support spending on economic and infrastructure projects, as well as community-centric development and humanitarian aid. The war-splattered nation is the second-largest beneficiary of Indian assistance (Vivek, 2017), shoring up a positive perception of India among much of the Afghan citizenry - a critical puzzle piece for future influence in the embattled nation.

Indeed, India has built up a robust portfolio of strategic interests in Afghanistan - despite its conflicts and volatility. A good example is the \$100 million enlargement of the Chabahar port (Zee News, 2014) to serve as an import-export core between Central Asia and Afghanistan.

By opting to play a more pervasive part in Afghanistan, India also stands to secure even closer strategic ties to the United States. Washington has vowed to maintain its diplomatic and humanitarian endeavours in Afghanistan after the military exit, and President Biden has expressed a desire to see neighbouring nations play more prominent roles.

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price announced this month that Secretary Tony Blinken and his Indian counterpart S. Jaishankar would work together in advocating Afghanistan cohesion. This of course constitutes the outgrowth of a long and trusting affinity (The Week, 2021).

India can also coordinate its strategy and act as something of an interlocutor for all countries directly impacted by security affairs in Afghanistan - China, Russia, Pakistan, Turkey, Qatar and beyond.

Moreover, the likes of ISIS-K, the Da'esh outfit operating on Afghan terrain, appears relatively small at this stage; there are an estimated 19 other terrorist outfits thought to have a footprint inside the country (Arian, 2017). The Taliban may, in the end, turn out to be a necessary bastion against groups that pose threats both within and outside of Afghanistan's borders.

However, when assuming responsibilities, India must also be mindful of maintaining a healthy distance from Kabul's internal security affairs - ramping up developmental support with the goal of long-term stability while giving space for Afghanistan to grow and take shape on its own.

And even though it remains to be seen whether the Taliban takes an increased focus on the contentious Kashmir issue, Suhail Shaheen - a representative for the Taliban's political wing in Afghanistan - has previously taken to Twitter to espouse that in their policy it "is clear that it does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries." (Gupta, 2020)

For its part, another spokesper-

son for the Taliban's political wing - officially termed the Islamic Emirate - also pledged (Gupta 2021) this past week that its foreign policy would "seek positive relations with all its neighbours" on the basic principles of "respect and interaction" (Gupta, 2021).

"The Islamic Emirate does not allow anyone to use the soil of Afghanistan against another country, group or individual. It should also be made clear that the Islamic Emirate will never allow anyone to turn the soil of Afghanistan into an arena of proxy conflicts and disputes," spokesperson Muhammad Naeem Wardak told CNN News18's Manoj Gupta (Gupta, 2021), while also doubling down that they do not intend to interfere in any cross-border disputes, including those involving Pakistan.

"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan calls on all to assist the Afghan people in achieving independence and freedom, in the light of the values of the people, in the establishment of an independent Islamic system and the reconstruction of the country."

Thus, while India cannot control who takes power in Kabul, it is in India's best interests to keep the door open to whoever wins the stakes in the months and years to come. Keeping in mind the Taliban's tenacity over the past two decades of US occupation, and the fact that it is a force which is here to stay.

(The writer is a war crimes investigator and author of "Only Cry for the Living: Memos from Inside the ISIS Battlefield". The views expressed are personal)



BURIED IN TEJPAL JUDGEMENT IS A TALE OF TWO BOBS

Mayabhushan Nagvenkar

Two Bobs, iconic American Actor Robert De Niro and legendary Irish singer Robert Frederick Zenon Geldof appear to have made more than just cameo appearances in the bulky Tehelka rape case judgement.

The 527-page judgement by Additional District and Sessions Judge Kshama Joshi which acquitted former editor-in-chief Tarun Tejpal on May 21, is liberally peppered with references to the two global celebrities, both of whom were attendees at the highbrow Tehelka THINK fest in Goa. Geldof performed at the event's 2012 edition, while De Niro was the key attraction the subsequent year, when Tejpal was accused of alleged rape by a junior colleague.

Geldof has found mention 28 times in the trial court's order, while De Niro has been mentioned on 203 occasions.

The context of the references to the two Bobs, Geldof and De Niro, both decorated knights by the British and French authorities, however vary in the judgement.

In her complaint the victim had alleged that she was sexually assaulted twice by Tejpal, while they were taking an elevator to Robert De Niro's room in Block 7 of the

Grand Hyatt Resort in North Goa.

The judgement, which has since acquitted Tejpal giving him the "benefit of doubt", makes mention of Robert De Niro while painstakingly examining the various circumstances and statements by defence and prosecution witnesses about the brief journey of Tejpal and the victim to and from De Niro's room. De Niro was booked in a suite, along with his daughter Drena.

The judgement paraphrases the victim's comments in her deposition, saying that the first alleged sexual assault occurred in the resort's elevator when Tejpal wanted to "wake up Bob" after the event's opening gala concluded on November 7, 2013.

"PW1 (the victim) further states that as they were making their way out of the lobby the accused said to her 'let's go to wake up Bob' and that Mr. De Niro was referred to as Bob. PW1 further states that though she was confused and unsure about why the accused wanted to wake up Mr. De Niro since they had just wished him good night," the judgement states.

While the victim had alleged the first sexual assault occurred in the two minutes, which Tejpal and she spent in the elevator, and that she was in a state of shock and trauma and blinking back her tears, the judge observes: "The CCTV footage does not

support the statement that she was in shock or trauma and blinking in tears".

The judgement, paraphrasing the victim's statement, says the second alleged sexual assault also occurred in an elevator on November 8, when Tejpal asks her to accompany him to De Niro's room.

"and the accused gestured to her to stop and walked up to her and asked her to accompany him saying that 'we have to get something from Bob's room'. PW1 further states that at this point, she wanted to be as calm and professional as possible but she was still afraid of entering the elevator with the accused because she felt that he might try to assault her again," the judgement reads.

The judgement also documents a conversation laced with sexual overtones between the victim and her female friend, which refers to the two Bobs, De Niro and Geldof, as 'grandpas'. While De Niro is 77, Geldof is 69-years-old.

It is not the first time, that the reference to Geldof has been lassoed into the case. The first public reference was made by Tejpal in his letter of apology to the victim on November 2013, days before police intervention.

"The context (of) that ill-fated evening, of our conversation, as you will recall, was

heavily loaded. We were playfully and flirtatiously talking about desire, sex; you were telling me the Bob Geldof story in graphic detail, and about XXX (her male friend), and the near-impossibility of fidelity," Tejpal had said after the victim had complained in writing to Tehelka's managing editor Shoma Chaudhury.

The victim's alleged sexual encounter with Geldof in 2012 is recounted in the judgement, through the statement of Defence Witness (DW) 4 Nikhil Agarwal.

"The prosecutrix had gone up to Bob Geldof's suite and that Bob Geldof had asked her what do Indian women wear under their sarees, to which she'd replied why don't you see for yourself, and that she'd lifted her saree and Bob Geldof had picked her up and put her on the table" the judgement says paraphrasing Agarwal's deposition.

The judgement also observes that WhatsApp chats between the victim and her friends corroborates the alleged encounter with Geldof.

A shell-shocked Goa government has now gone in appeal against the acquittal of former Tehelka editor-in-chief Tarun Tejpal in the 2013 rape case. Which means that the proverbial dust is unlikely to settle on the contents of 527-page judgment just yet.

IN KASHMIR, PANDEMIC BRINGS MENSTRUAL HEALTH CAMPAIGNS TO HALT

Hirra Azmat

Today, the government health centre in Nandpora at Saidakadal locality here wears a deserted look. The only visitor, a stray dog that lies dozing in the compound, basking in the mild May sun. In the pre-pandemic times, however, the health centre was the hub of many a bustling activity.

Awareness campaigns around the importance of menstrual health would be held every fortnight, refuting myths and misperceptions around menstruation. The World Menstrual Hygiene Day, which falls on May 28, would have especially been a lively affair. But in these pandemic times, like every other non-Covid healthcare intervention, menstrual health has taken a backseat. With every resource being diverted to the crisis at hand, a crushing blow has been dealt to menstrual awareness efforts in the valley. Auqfeen Nisar (30), a resident doctor at Shri Maharaja Hari Singh (SMHS) Hospital, initiated a first-of-its-kind, crowd-funded campaign against menstrual taboo, 'Panin Fikr', when she was still a post-graduate student.

She has been championing the cause since 2019, leading a six-member team comprising two nurses and four ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers.

She conducted her campaign from the health centre in Nandpora where she was posted, catering to a community of around 4,000 women, of whom 200 are adolescent girls.

She notes that the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown has unleashed a sanitary napkin crisis in the valley. "After the pandemic began, the donations stopped pouring in. Our funds have completely dried up and we are unable to provide sanitary napkins free of cost to the registered population under the initiative. Moreover, door-to-door and mass awareness campaigns are not possible at this time, when social gatherings are disal-

practices, if they haven't done so already," Auqfeen said. She cites the example of a 35-year-old woman from Nandpora, who had attended several awareness programs, subsequently shifting from cloth to sanitary pads. However, when Auqfeen met her recently, she was saddened to hear that the woman had reverted back to using cloth. The pandemic had reduced her income,



lowed," Auqfeen rued. She said it took them a lot of time to bring about behavioural changes in women regarding menstrual hygiene. "The free napkins were a great source of motivation for them. However, all our efforts will go to waste if things continue like this. They will resort to their old, unhygienic

and so pads had become unaffordable. Similarly, entrepreneur Aqib Peerzada (28), popularly known as 'Padman of Kashmir' for launching organic sanitary napkins, concurs that the pandemic has exacerbated women's deprivation of menstrual hygiene products. "Before the crisis, we at Seha Health and Hygiene were engaged in distributing packs of sanitary napkins to teenage girls at

affordable prices as well as free of cost to many others across the valley. Our mission was to create awareness about menstruation in addition to manufacturing affordable and organic sanitary napkins," he said. However, the lockdown severely hampered their production and operations. Their manufacturing units were shut-down, and the lack of manpower ensured that the production of sanitary pads came to a screeching halt. Aqib himself came down with Covid-19 pneumonia and had to stay away from Seha during his month-long hospitalisation and recuperation. "Eventually stocks were exhausted in many places and women had to resort to unhealthy alternatives," he said.

However, despite the lockdown and threat of infection, Seha has managed to distribute many boxes of napkins, especially to women in quarantine. "I have faced many hurdles and difficulties during this time but still I personally delivered many boxes to needy girls during this crisis. I believe that it's our priority to not think about profits and targets but come forward and help people as much as we can," he said.

The crisis is aggravated by the fact that the mobility of women is severely restricted during the lockdown. Irfana Zargar (30), the founder of 'Eva's Safety Door' campaign, illustrates this.

As part of her campaign to raise awareness, she used to distribute sanitary napkin packs for free among the attendants of public toilets in Srinagar city so that the women coming there could use them. With the toilets now shut, the campaign has also gone for a toss.

"The lockdown has resulted in restricted access and mobility, making it even more difficult for girls to manage their monthly cycle in a dignified healthy way," she said.

Meanwhile, Irfana who also works at the Srinagar Municipal Corporation, is deputed these days at the round-the-clock district control room Srinagar that handles Covid-19 related complaints. "The work is so taxing that there is no time to devote to altering the campaign to meet the pandemic needs," Irfana said.

Nausheen Khan, a senior gynaecologist at Lal Ded, the lone maternity hospital in Srinagar, said after lockdown, the distribution of the sanitary pads has hit a dead end.

"The government must ensure that the sanitary pads are distributed to females in the community through Auxiliary Nurse-Midwives (ANMs) and ASHAs. Even if sanitary napkins are not available, they should educate them on how to make sanitary napkins at home.

The napkins can be made from cotton cloth and changed frequently. They should be washed properly before using it again," she said.

Khan pointed out that subsidised sanitary pads can also be made available for sale through the ration shops. "An inclusive and gender-sensitive response to COVID-19 must involve catering to the menstrual health and hygiene needs of women and girls especially from the most marginalised sections," she said.

(The author is a Srinagar-based freelance journalist and a member of 101Reporters.com, a pan-India network of grassroots reporters)



PAK LAWMAKER DEMANDS HINDUS TO BE CALLED NON-MUSLIMS, NOT MINORITY

Islamabad | Agencies

A Pakistani Member of the National Assembly (MNA) has submitted a bill and called on the House seeking to ensure that the country's religious minorities are referred to and identified as non-Muslims.



Amendment Act, 2021, urging for it to be adopted and come into force immediately. "It is against the spirit of the Constitution 1973, to discriminate against a large number of population by declaring them minority, when the sacrifices of that popula-

tion are remarkable in every sphere of life of the prosperity, growth and bright future of the country," he said in his arguments and reasoning of the bill. "The word 'minority' is used for four times (in the Constitution)

while the word 'non-Muslims' is used 15 times, which reflects the intent of the makers of the Constitution. Therefore, the anomaly shall be omitted by substituting the word 'minority' with the word 'non-Muslims'.

The bill is expected to be presented before the lower house in the coming session. Non-Muslim Pakistanis or minorities are in a large number in the country.

As per the sixth Population and Housing Census, the country's population of minorities constitutes about 3.53 per cent, while Muslims account for 96.47 per cent.

Lukashenko heads to Russia to meet Putin

Minsk | Agencies

Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko, who's under increasing pressure from the West and European Union (EU) sanctions, is heading to Russia on Friday to meet his counterpart Vladimir Putin.

The two leaders will discuss further developing their countries' ties when they get together in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, according to the Kremlin. Friday's meeting will be the third between the two leaders already this year, dpa news agency reported.

Before embarking on the trip, Lukashenko had said that he will also discuss the consequences of EU and US sanctions, which are currently hitting Belarus especially hard. Minsk already owes Moscow billions, but Putin has recently repeatedly



emphasized that the Kremlin would continue to support Lukashenko.

The meeting is taking place less than a week after Belarus forced a passenger plane to make an emergency landing in Minsk, saying there was a bomb threat aboard, which turned out to be an unfounded claim, and sending a fighter jet to accompany the Ryanair flight.

taken into custody after the landing, prompting a raft of measures by the EU, including restricted access to the bloc's airspace for Belarusian carriers. On Wednesday, the long-time Belarusian leader defended the decision to force land the aircraft, saying that "I acted lawfully by protecting people, according to all international rules."

Protasevich is a "terrorist", Lukashenko said, adding that the blogger was planning a "bloody uprising" in Belarus.

EU FAILS TO SETTLE \$330BN AGRICULTURE FIGHT

Brussels | Agencies

The 27-member European Union (EU) and the European Parliament have failed to settle their fight over the bloc's 270-billion-euro (\$330 billion) agriculture budget in their latest negotiation round this week, postponing talks on a policy that affects millions of farmers to a later day.

Since Tuesday, representatives for the parliament, European Commission and 27 EU countries have negotiated until late into the night to decide on rules for how the Common Agriculture Policy's funds can be used.

Oxford University to launch Pandemic Sciences Centre

London | Agencies

The University of Oxford on Friday announced the launch of a new centre for research collaboration -- the Pandemic Sciences Centre -- to create global, and equitable science-driven solutions to prepare for, identify, and counter future pandemic threats.

The Pandemic Sciences Centre, which will include a number of core institutes, will focus on generating actionable knowledge and data (from pathogens through to patients) in near 'real-time' and making this globally accessible; translating research into real-world solutions; and identifying ways to strengthen societal and political engagement, resilience, and responsiveness.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us that spectacular advances are possible through an alliance of science, the public sector and industry -- creating digital disease control tools, diagnostic tests, and life-saving treatments and vaccines at unprecedented speed. But it should not take a pandemic to make this happen," said Professor Peter Horby, inaugural

Director of the Pandemic Sciences Centre. "This level of innovation and multi-sectoral collaboration must be applied, day in and day out, to prevent another catastrophe like Covid-19," he added. The University hopes to raise



500 million pounds to invest in this centre -- with contributions from philanthropists, corporate partners and governments. Oxford scientists were pioneers in

developing the Covid-19 vaccine that is being manufactured by AstraZeneca. It was also the second to win authorisation for widespread use around the world.

CROWDFUND OFFERS FEE FOR JAILING BELARUSIAN PREZ

Minsk | Agencies

One of Belarus' most famous entrepreneurs is launching a crowdfunding venture to put long-time President Alexander Lukashenko behind bars, the media reported on Friday. Valeri Tsepikalo campaigned for the presidency in last year's elections, but fled Belarus before the polls after he grew concerned for his safety, the dpa news agency report said.

But Tsepikalo says he's optimistic the gambit will work, arguing that there are still upstanding people in power in Belarus who are not willing to cooperate any longer with "criminal number one", as he calls Lukashenko.

Tsepikalo is one of many who have accused Lukashenko of fixing the election last year, as well as charges of murder and kidnapping. Multiple sanctions have been slapped on the country since the widely panned elections, which the European Union and other democracies have failed to recognize. Tensions with Belarus have ratcheted up after a Ryanair flight heading from Greece to Lithuania was forced to land in Minsk at the weekend because of an alleged bomb on board.

No bomb was found, but Belarusian authorities took advantage of the situation to arrest dissident blogger Roman Protasevich. The 66-year-old Lukashenko has led Belarus, a former Soviet republic, for more than a quarter of a century.

German Prez ready to stand for 2nd term in office

Berlin | Agencies

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said on Friday that he has planned to stand for a second term for the largely ceremonial post.



Christian Democrats headed by Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Announcing his plans, Steinmeier said he hoped to accompany the country into its post-pandemic future. He said he wanted to ensure the pandemic does not leave German society divided and to try to build bridges between different groups. "These are turbulent times," Steinmeier said, adding that Germany is facing important elections and the risk of political upheaval.

Germany recognises colonial crimes in Namibia as genocide

Berlin | Agencies

Germany is recognising the atrocities committed by the country's colonial powers against the Herero and Nama ethnic groups in Namibia as genocide. Historians say some 65,000 of the 85,000 Herero and at least 10,000 of the 20,000 Nama were killed under the German empire in what it then called German South West Africa from 1884 to 1915.

As a gesture of recognition for the immeasurable suffering inflicted on the victims, we want to support Namibia and the descendants of the victims with a substantial programme of 1.1 billion euros for reconstruction and development," Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said on Friday.



Delegations from both countries had earlier agreed on a political declaration after almost six years of negotiations, with both governments now in agreement but the document yet to be signed.

Germany's government plans to classify the killings as genocide from today's perspective as part of the agreement.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will also officially ask for forgiveness at a ceremony at the Namibian Parliament. The 1.1 billion euros will primarily be used to support projects in the Herero and Nama settlement areas.

Germany's government is also emphasizing that its recognition of the genocide and the establishment of the aid fund will not result in any legal claims for compensation.

The negotiations were stalled for a long time over the question of financial compensation for colonial exploitation and oppression.

Namibia's President Hage Geingob complained last year that the German government had agreed to an "unconditional apology" to Namibia's government, but did not want to use the term "reparations."

PAKISTAN REJECTS ALLEGATIONS OF CROSS-BORDER INFILTRATION BY INDIA

"Peace and security in the region are threatened on account of India's brutalization of Kashmiri people and refusal to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, and its own pledges to the international community and the Kashmiris.



Islamabad | Agencies

Pakistan has categorically rejected an allegation levelled by India, accusing Islamabad of cross-border infiltration, counter-accusing New Delhi for practicing what it called "brutalization" against the people of Kashmir.

Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri said that "it was New Delhi's brutalization of Kashmiri people, that threatened regional peace".

"Peace and security in the region are threatened on account of India's brutalization of Kashmiri people and refusal to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the

UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, and its own pledges to the international community and the Kashmiris.

"Kashmir that was the core outstanding issue between Pakistan and India since 1947, has awaited settlement as per international legitimacy. India's illegal and unilateral actions of August 5, 2019,

in Indian Illegal Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) were against international law and manifestly anti-peace," he added.

Chaudhri went on to say that the movement of freedom from "Indian occupation and state-sponsored terrorism in IIOJK is indigenous and is likely to continue till India decides to act in accordance with the UNSC resolutions, mandating a free and impartial plebiscite in the occupied territory".

The spokesman also advised India to refrain from levelling regurgitating insinuations against Pakistan and focus on "creating enabling environment for a meaningful and result-oriented engagement for resolutions of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute as well as any other issues".

Chaudhri's remarks came after Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar claimed that there was a firing incident along the Line of Control (LoC) due to infiltration attempts by Pakistan.

Jaishankar said this during an

address at the Stanford University's Hoover Institute.

"We have seen a lot of that mainly because there has been infiltration from their side. There had been an agreement between the director generals of military operations of the two countries to not fire at each other across the LoC, which had seen a lot of firing. "Ceasefire agreement is a good step but there were bigger issues that needed to be resolved between the two countries. Since 1947, part of the problem has been the use of cross-border terrorism by Pakistan," he added.

Jaishankar said that India's position on the issues with Pakistan is clear that terrorism cannot be accepted. "If there is thinking in Pakistan along the lines that there needs to be a better relationship with India, than it is important."

Talking about terrorism infiltration from Pakistan, the Minister said: "We cannot accept it as a legitimate, diplomacy or as any other aspect of statecraft."

JAPAN'S UNEMPLOYMENT RATE RISES TO 2.8% IN APRIL

Tokyo | Agencies

Japan's unemployment rate rose to 2.8 per cent in April from 2.6 per cent recorded in the previous month, the government said on Friday.



The number of unemployed people in April rose 10.6 per cent year-on-year to 2.09 million for the 15th straight month of rise, dpa news agency reported citing a report published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Though the unemployment rate remained relatively low despite the coronavirus pandemic, one of the most critical issues in Japan's labour situation has been underemployment, analysts argue. The proportion of temporary and part-time workers, many of whom are women and young people, stood at 36 per cent in April, the ministry said. These workers in these types of roles typically earn less. In 2019, their wages were nearly one-third of those of regular salaried employees. Such contingent workers also bore the brunt of the economic fallout of the pandemic. Japan's economy shrank at an annualised rate of 5.1 per cent in the January-to-March period, the first contraction in three quarters, as the country has been struggling with a slow vaccination roll-out and rising coronavirus infections.



WTC FINAL TO HAVE RESERVE DAY, JOINT WINNERS AFTER DRAW OR TIE: ICC

The playing conditions confirm that a draw or a tie will see both teams crowned as joint winners as well as the allocation of a Reserve Day to make up for any lost time during the regular days of the Final -- scheduled to be played from 18 to 22 June, with 23 June set aside as the Reserve Day. Both of these decisions were made in June 2018, prior to the commencement of the ICC World Test Championship,



International Cricket Council announced on Friday.

The ICC added that the reserve day has been kept only in the event of lost time and not to get a result.

"The Reserve Day has been scheduled to ensure five full days of play, and it will only be used if lost playing time cannot be recovered through the nor-

- **Short Runs** - The third umpire will automatically review any call of a 'short run' by the on-field umpire and communicate the decision to the on-field umpire before the next ball is bowled.
- **Player Reviews** - The fielding captain or the dismissed batsman may confirm with the umpire whether a genuine attempt has been made to play the ball prior to deciding whether to initiate a player review for LBW.
- **DRS Reviews** - For LBW reviews, the height margin of the 'wicket zone' has been lifted to the top of the stumps to ensure the same umpire's call margin around the stumps for both height and width.

mal provisions of making up lost time each day. There will be no additional day's play if a positive result is not achieved after five full days of play and the match will be declared a draw in such a scenario," the statement added. The WTC final will be played between June 18 and 22 in Southampton. In the event of time being lost during the match,

DON'T BE OVER-AGGRESSIVE: KAPIL DEV

Test cricket is about sessions. Each can be intriguing because of the weather factor. Within minutes, it changes from sunny to cloudy. So you have to be tactically good and technically sound when you play in England. I expect him (Kohli) to excel. Can you really shackle him? He is a natural when it comes to adapting but I would caution him to not be over-aggressive. He will have to measure it session by session. He'll be better off waiting for his moments of dominance. He will get his runs with a bit of patience.



The ICC match referee will regularly update the teams and media about the way in which the reserve day will be used. The final decision on whether the reserve day needs to be used will be announced at the scheduled start of the last hour on the fifth day, the ICC added. The match will be played using Grade 1 Dukes cricket balls. The final will also see the implementation of changes to international playing conditions that came into effect with the ongoing ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League series between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Saina, Srikanth miss out on Olympic qualification

Four Indians -- PV Sindhu, Sai Praneeth, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, and Chirag Shetty -- have qualified for the July-August Olympics in Tokyo. Olympic silver medallist Sindhu and 2019 World Championships bronze medallist Praneeth will represent India in women's and men's singles while Rankireddy and Shetty have qualified for the men's doubles event.

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) can confirm no further tournaments will be played inside the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games qualifying window. As such, while the qualification period officially closes 15 June 2021 as per the Revised Tokyo 2020 Qualification System, the current Race To Tokyo rankings list will not change.



The world body

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Olympic medallist Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth's hopes of making it to this year's Tokyo Olympic Games ended on Friday as badminton's global governing body said that no more qualifying tournaments would be played due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While Srikanth and Saina were the closest to qualifying among the Indians, Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy too had an outside of chance of making it to the Olympics in women's doubles.

Players had to be ranked inside the top 16 of the singles rankings in the Race to Tokyo standings and the top eight of the doubles rankings to achieve qualification. Saina is ranked 22nd while Srikanth is 20th. Ashwini and Sikki are ranked 26th. Sindhu, who won gold at the 2019 World Championships, is

ranked seventh while Praneeth is 13th. Both Saina, India's first Olympic medallist in badminton, and Srikanth, who became world No.1 in 2017, are ageing and might find it difficult to appear in the 2024 Olympics in Paris. Three years from now, the competition too could become tougher.

Saina is 31 while Srikanth is 28. Srikanth may still pose a challenge for a spot in the 2024 Olympics, by which time he would be 31. On the other hand, Tokyo might have been the last chance for Saina to challenge for a second Olympics medal as she would be 35 by 2024. Their chances of making it to the Olympics were significantly depleted by postponement of a number of tournaments that served as qualifiers, most notably the Indian Open, the Malaysian Open, and the Singapore Open, in March and April.

The three tournaments were the last in the qualification calendar and were all deferred amid a deadly second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in India.

Dubai | Agencies

India and New Zealand will end as joint winners in case of a draw or a tie in World Test Championship (WTC) final, which will also have a reserve day to make up for any lost time during regular days of the final, the

BELGRADE OPEN

Djokovic enters final after qualifier stretches him

Belgrade | Agencies

World No. 1 Novak Djokovic was stretched to three sets by Slovakian qualifier Andrej Martin in the semi-finals before the Serbian made it to the Belgrade Open final here on Friday.

The 6-1, 4-6, 6-0 win helped Djokovic secure his maiden entry into the ATP Tour final on home soil since 2011. Djokovic will face the winner of eighth seed Argentinian Federico Delbonis and qualifier Alex Molcan as he seeks his 83rd Tour-level title, and



his third in Belgrade. Djokovic was in full flight as he breezed through the opening set, but his opponent was by no means rolling over. Martin, who took down

third seed Nikoloz Basilashvili of Georgia and fifth seed Dusan Lajovic of Serbia en route to the semi-finals, did well to hang on with the world No. 1 from the first point.

2021 ASBC Asian Boxing Championships

Panghal cruises into final, clash against Rio Olympic champ for gold

Mary Kom, Lalbuatsahi, Pooja and Anupama progress into final. Finals to take place on Sunday and Monday

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The defending champion Amit Panghal punched his way into the men's 52kg final at the 2021 ASBC Asian Boxing Championships after outpunching Kazakhstan's Saken Bibosinov in the last-4 clash in Dubai on Friday. During an intense battle between World Championships silver medallist Panghal carried on

the momentum throughout the match and stamped his authority over Kazakh boxer to secure a commanding 5-0 win. Aiming to win second successive gold, the Indian boxer will take on Rio Olympic champion Zoirov Shakhobidin of Uzbekistan in the gold medal match on Monday. India is now assured of at least five silver medals with four women already making their way into



the finals earlier on Thursday at the prestigious event which is jointly hosted by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) and UAE Boxing Federation. With 15 medals

confirmed, Indian contingent also achieved their highest medal haul, surpassing the previous best of 13 (2 gold, 4 silver and 7 bronze) from the 2019 edition in Bangkok.

Meanwhile, in the 54kg as the two-time youth world champion Sakshi Chaudhary, who was initially adjudged as winner, lost her place in the final and had to settle with bronze medal after the opponent Dina Zholaman appealed to review the last round of bout. The jury upheld the claim and altered the result in favour of Kazakh boxer. Simranjit Kaur (60kg), Jaismine (57kg) Monika (48kg), Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), Saweety (81kg) are the other women boxers who secured bronze medals after enduring defeats in their respective last-4 clashes.

I'M CONFIDENT INDIA WILL QUALIFY FOR 2023 AFC ASIAN CUP: COACH STIMAC

New Delhi: With less than a week to go for India's first match in the World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup 2023 Qualifiers against Qatar, coach Igor Stimac on Friday advocated the importance of making up for lost time on the training ground.

Due to the prolonged lockdown in the country, India players have got little foreign exposure in one-and-a-half years, with the friendlies against Oman and the UAE in Dubai in March being the only international outings. The Sunil Chhetri-captained India now play Asian champions Qatar (June 3), Bangladesh (June 7) and Afghanistan (June 15) in the combined qualifying tournament in Doha.



England board agrees with Archer on skipping India Tests

London | Agencies

England cricket board has concurred with pace bowler Jofra Archer on his decision to put T20 World Cup and Ashes series later this year ahead of August-September's five-Test series against India in which the 26-year-old may not participate as he recovers from elbow surgery.

"I have talked a lot about our objectives in the T20 World Cup and the Ashes, and we need to make sure he is best prepared for that," Ashley Giles, the director of cricket at



England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), was quoted as saying by Daily Mail. Giles said that Archer's USP is his ability to bowl fast. "The thing that has held him back is that he's had two different injuries in that elbow, and it stops him doing what he does incredibly well, which is bowl quick. That must be frustrating for him," added Giles.

Archer had on Thursday written in the Daily Mail that he was willing to miss this English summer's long Test series against India so as to be fully fit for T20 World Cup and Ashes later this year.

PADDLER SURESH BOWS OUT OF WTT YOUTH STAR CONTENDER

Tunis (Tunisia) | Agencies

Promising Preyesh Raj Suresh went down fighting 1-3 against Russian Ilya Koniukhov in the under-15 boys single quarter-finals at the 2021 WTT Youth Star Contender Tunis here.

Chennai-based Suresh, current sub-junior national champion, showed great resistance against his opponent and made him work hard for each point. However, Suresh failed to gain the required momentum and lost 9-11, 8-11, 12-10, 4-11 after a hard fight.

On Saturday, India's Diya Chitale and Swastika Ghosh will begin their campaign in the under-19 girls' singles group stage.

The tournament, scheduled from May 26-30, is the first youth international tournament where Indian paddlers are competing in since the coronavirus outbreak.

BCCI TO MEET ON SATURDAY, MAY DECIDE ON IPL 2021'S FATE

It is understood that the BCCI would look into the period between September 15 -- a day after India's Test series in England ends -- and mid-October, around the time T20 World Cup is slated to begin, to stage the 31 remaining IPL matches. The tournament is most likely to be completed in the UAE.

The remaining IPL games are expected to be played in 20 or 22 days. There could be a large number of double-headers, so as to finish the tournament quickly. There is a likelihood that many international stars may give the tournament a miss.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian cricket board may decide the fate of the remainder of the 2021 Indian Premier League (IPL) along with rest of domestic season when it meets on Saturday through a virtual meeting. The IPL 2021 was suspended this month due to Covid-19 cases inside the tournament's bio-secure environment.

Jay Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), this month issued a note to state bodies, calling for a special general meeting for 'Discussion on the upcoming cricket season in view of the pandemic situation prevailing in India'. There would be a discussion on T20 World Cup that India is scheduled to host, but may now be held in the UAE.

England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has already said that its top star players won't compro-



mise with the national team's international calendar. Australia's limited overseas stars too will be busy with international commitments in July (West Indies) and August (Bangladesh)



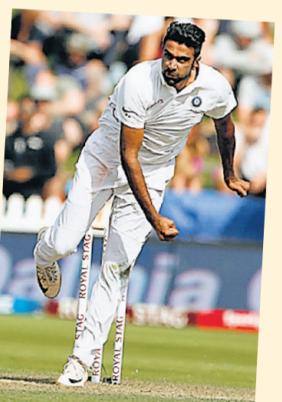
and they will have a short rest period ahead of the T20 World Cup, which begins in mid-October, as well as a busy season Down Under that includes the Ashes.

The rest of Indian domestic season that comprises long-format tournaments, the Ranji Trophy and Duleep Trophy is expected to be chalked out at the meeting.

ASHWIN CAN BREAK MURALI'S RECORD FOR MOST TEST WICKETS: HOGG

Sydney: India's ace off-spinner R Ashwin can break Muttiah Muralitharan's record for most Test wickets, former Australia spinner Brad Hogg has said. Ashwin, 34, who has 409 wickets from 78 matches, is 391 wickets behind the former Sri Lankan offie who has 800 Test scalps.

"Ashwin is 34 now. I think he will probably play till 42 in Tests. I think his batting might drop off but he'll be more lethal with the ball with the time passing by. I can see him pushing 600+ Test wickets at least. He might even break Muttiah Muralitharan's record [of 800 Test wickets] as well," said Hogg. Hogg called Ashwin a chess player on the field and admired the courage he showed on the last tour in Australia.



UNLOCK HOPES, COVID DECLINE PUSHES NIFTY TO RECORD HIGH

Team Absolute | Mumbai

India's key benchmark equity index NSE Nifty50 touched a new record high level as fresh Covid cases declined, thereby, igniting hopes for a quick unlock.

Accordingly, global cues and accelerated pace of economic recovery led both the indices - Nifty50 and S&P BSE Sensex - to open higher.

During the trade session, all sectors barring Pharma and Auto traded in the green out of which Media and Metal sectors are showing the most strength.

At 1.15 p.m., the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange ended the trade session at 15,431.80, up 93.95 points, or 0.61 per cent, from its previous close.

Earlier, the Nifty50 hit a record high of 15,455.55.

Similarly, the S&P BSE Sensex closed the day's trade at 51,414.45,



higher by 299.23 points, or 0.59 per cent, from its previous close.

"Currently, Nifty is showing good strength and market sentiments have welcomed the index to sustain

at higher zones. Buying can be seen on dips. Going forward, resistance can be seen around 15600 zone whereas support is placed at 15250 and then 15100 levels," said Jay

Purohit, Technical & Derivatives Analyst, MOFSL.

"Considering overall chart structure, traders are advised to trade with positive bias and use dips as buying opportunity. Traders can look for buying opportunity in counters like Hero Moto, Lalpath Labs and Trent." According to Likhita Chepa, CapitalVia Global Research: "Following favorable global cues, the market made a good start on Friday's opening session. We observed holistic participation of different sectors helping the market to maintain the early gain. The market's overall structure remains positive. As investors are optimistic about the economy's reopening in June, which will help restart commercial activity."

"Besides, investors are anticipating today's meeting of the goods and services tax council, in which the commission is likely to discuss the compensation shortfall."

CBDT gets three new members

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has approved the appointment of three members of the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).

In a circular issued on Thursday by the Department of Personnel and Training, Anu J. Singh, J.B. Mohapatra and Anuja Sarangi both IRS 1985 batch officers have been appointed CBDT Members. They are amongst the most senior officers in the income tax department.

The government stuck to script and chose to fill long-vacant slots in the direct taxes czarism without obsessing over seniority or even rules related to retirement.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), oversees of the dreaded income tax administration has a chairman and six members. Four of the member posts are vacant. Chairman, P.C. Mody, too is on extension, his third, and slated to demit office on May 31.

This may mean two things. First, that vigilance clearance sought for four officers ultimately whittled down to only three - the name of Rashmi Saxena Sahni (IRS 1984 Sl.No.45) seniormost among the shortlist of four sent for vigilance clearance, went missing from the list



announced today. econd, even among the three members announced today, Singh's name upended Mohapatra even though she is placed ahead of him in the 1985 batch. The field for chairman CBDT will be clearer when portfolios of the members are available. A big pointer will be the position of member investigation, held in dual charge by the past two chairmen directly.s per sources, 1984 batch IRS officer Rashmi Saxena Sahni was also in the fray for the post. Sahni is currently posted as Principal Director General, Administration, and Tax Payers Services in Delhi Mohapatra is currently working as Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Sarangi is currently working as Principal Director General Vigilance in Delhi. Singh is currently posted as Principal CCTT Delhi.

Tamil Nadu minister assures support to MSMEs hit by Covid-19

Chennai | Agencies

Tamil Nadu Minister for Rural Industries T.M. Anbarasan said that the government would include schemes for the revival of MSMEs and will go for more job creation in the sector which has faced the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The minister was addressing a webinar "What Tamil Nadu Needs :SICCI Policy Recommendations for the New Government," organized by the South India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI). The minister in his speech said that the sector has been badly hit fol-

lowing the second wave of the pandemic. The minister said, "The MSMEs are badly hit by financial stress, workers returning back to their respective states and the hike in production costs". He said that the government is envisaging a scheme and a package for the revival of the MSMEs which includes job creation off setting the job losses as well as digitalizing the sector to face the modern challenges."

He said, "The state government has already announced a capital subsidy for MSMEs and waived off registration fees till December and several other steps will be taken to revive

the sector as it is affecting 1.52 crore jobs under 23.60 lakhs MSMEs." RM Arun, president, SICCI, pointed out that the MSMEs have been facing a lot of stress during the Covid-19 pandemic, and are finding it difficult to avail of working capital from the banks. He suggested measures including loan moratoriums for MSMEs. Anbarasan said that the government will consider the suggestions and pointed out that Tamil Nadu is the third biggest state in the country for MSMEs after Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The state has 23.60 lakh MSMEs employing 1.52 crore people.

'Govt should focus on converting 30 cr on-road vehicles to clean fuels'

In a statement, the industry body said that with mass adoption of electric vehicles still a distant future, an absence of a near term strategy to convert existing vehicles to cleaner alternatives is a crucial policy oversight.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The government should focus on converting around 30 crore vehicles currently running on petrol and diesel to clean fuels in a bid to

improve the air quality, said Indian Auto LPG Coalition, apex body of Auto LPG stakeholders. In a statement, the industry body said that with mass adoption of electric vehicles still a distant future, an absence of a near term strategy to convert existing vehicles to

cleaner alternatives is a crucial policy oversight. Indian Auto LPG Coalition has said that government's indifference towards immediately available clean alternative fuels is proving to be a major health bane for the country. "Electric Vehicles are still in very

early stages of adoption and even the most optimistic projections suggest that a mass adoption is not likely to begin at least till another decade. Meanwhile, around 300 million vehicles including two wheelers continue to produce toxic emissions," said Suyash Gupta, Director General, Indian Auto LPG Coalition.

The statement also noted that there remains a large untapped market for vehicle conversions in India with consumers actively looking to cleaner as well as cheaper alternatives to petrol and diesel. In this situation, a positive messaging from the government supported by regulatory easing and fiscal incentives can bring about a largescale clean switch.

Paytm to issue Visa physical debit cards

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's homegrown Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) has announced that after witnessing the popularity of Visa virtual debit cards among its customers, it will also start issuing physical debit cards by Visa. The bank has already issued over 4.5 million virtual cards and is now targeting to issue over 1 million physical debit cards by end of FY '21. PPBL is already one of the largest issuer of RuPay Debit Cards and has a debit cardholder in every district of the country.

Satish Kumar Gupta, CEO & Managing Director, PPBL said, "This is yet another step taken by us to democratize the digital financial ecosystem in the country. Physical

cards will help more people have another payment method to rely on whenever they are out buying services or shopping. This partnership will allow millions of our customers to avail the benefits of Visa debit cards along with the power to make international transactions."

Commenting on the launch, TR Ramachandran, Group Country Manager, India & South Asia for Visa said, "Globally, Debit cards offer customers a simple, convenient, ubiquitous way to pay as we move towards a less-cash economy. These physical debit cards will allow customers to use over 5 million Visa acceptance points as also allow them to tap and pay for contactless transactions."

Karnataka eases lockdown curbs on e-commerce firms

The revised order will enable e-tailers and delivery firms to scale their operations, as the state is among the top 5 markets for online shopping across the country.

Bengaluru | Agencies

With Covid cases declining by the day, Karnataka on Thursday eased extended lockdown restrictions on e-commerce and home-delivery firms.

"Delivery of all goods, including food, by e-commerce and home-delivery firms will be allowed from



Friday," said state Revenue Secretary N. Manjunath Prasad in a fresh order, withdrawing the May 9 order, restricting delivery of merchandise to curb movement of delivery personnel and vehicles.

The revised order will enable e-tailers and delivery

firms to scale their operations, as the state is among the top 5 markets for online shopping across the country.

"The new order also eases curbs on movement of citizens, especially lawyers, their assistants and support staff to their offices during court working days," said Prasad,

who is the member-secretary of the state disaster management executive committee.

The order, however, restricts the functioning of law firms with 50 per cent of their staff strength.

The state government extended the lockdown till June 7 from May 24 to contain the virus spread, as positive cases and deaths spiked, especially in Bengaluru, which accounts for over 50 per cent of the state's Covid tally as the epi-centre of the pandemic.

"The lockdown restrictions on all other activities will continue till 6 a.m. on June 7 as notified on May 22, with 4-hour relaxation from 6-10 a.m. daily for buying essential goods and daily needs like milk, fruits and vegetables," an official said.

CAPRI GLOBAL CAPITAL LTD PAT RISES 10% Y-O-Y TO RS 1.77 BN

Mumbai: Focused on MSME and Housing Finance, a Non-banking finance company (NBFC) Capri Global Capital Ltd (CGCL) has registered 20% growth in the total asset under management to Rs 48.48 bn driven by its focus on MSME and affordable housing finance segments. The initiatives taken by the company to modernize its tech stack has led to improvement in overall employees' productivity and in-turn reduction in operating expenses to income ratio to 35.3% in FY21 as against 40.9% in the previous financial year. This supported growth in profit by 10% Y-O-Y to Rs. 1.77 bn from Rs. 1.61 bn in the year-ago period.

Commenting on the outcome, Rajesh Sharma, Managing Director, Capri Global Capital Ltd., said, "Our profitability and strong loan book growth for the quarter demonstrated significant improvement in performance across key indicators despite severe headwinds of Covid-19. Our knowledge of micro-market and emphasis on the secured small ticket size loan in Tier II, III & IV cities led to a significant growth in the business. Compared to the scenario in the first two quarters of the year, the second half of the year saw us flex towards our visionary growth. Our financial prudence coupled with other measures including regulatory policies has helped us widen our credit reach for the financial inclusion while maintain a healthy

AU SMALL FINANCE BANK'S NEW PROGRAMME

Mumbai: Extending a timely helping hand up to the families of employees who succumbed to Covid, AU Small Finance Bank has added certain key benefits to its three-pronged Prevention-Cure-Security (PCS) programme, making it one of the most comprehensive employee welfare scheme among all the banks. This scheme aims to provide financial, medical and educational assistance to its employees and their families. The bank will provide monetary compensation equal to 50 per cent of the deceased employee's fixed salary to the family for two years with a maximum cap of Rs. 5,00,000. Another important step taken by the bank is allowing the vesting and exercise of unvested ESOPs of deceased employees which can be exercised by the heir. Both these measures aim to provide support to the families of employees who succumbed to Covid. "We stand in solidarity with the world for the global loss of lives and livelihoods that it suffered in the last year. We have introduced the Prevention-Cure-Security (PCS) programme for our employees to provide financial aid and assistance to them, as our key sustainability initiative, this year.

OMCs delay petrol price climb to Rs 100/litre in Mumbai

With no change in prices on Friday, the pump price of petrol in Mumbai continues to remain at Rs 99.94 a litre. Similarly, diesel prices in the city is also static at Rs 91.87 a litre, the highest among all four major metro cities in the country.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The wait for retail price of regular petrol in the city of Mumbai to cross Rs 100 a litre mark, its highest level ever, has got a bit longer with Oil marketing companies (OMCs) deciding to keep fuel prices unchanged on Friday.

But this wait has already ended for the city of Jaipur where with Thursday's fuel price hike, regular petrol is now being sold at Rs 100.17 per litre. Similar is the case with several towns and cities in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra including Thane where petrol price has crossed the Rs 100 per litre much before the Thursday's price rise.

With no change in prices on Friday,



the pump price of petrol in Mumbai continues to remain at Rs 99.94 a litre. Similarly, diesel prices in the city is also static at Rs 91.87 a litre, the highest among all four major metro cities in the country. In Delhi also, petrol and diesel are priced at previous days level of Rs 93.68 and Rs 84.61 a litre, respectively. Premium petrol prices has already crossed the Rs 100 per litre mark in the city and other parts of the country through increase in the retail rates in the month of January and February. Friday's pause in price revision came after OMCs raised fuel prices by 25-30 paise a litre kept on the previous day. The oil companies have been following this trend for past couple

of weeks when fuel prices are raised on few days and kept unchanged on others. Fuel prices have now increased and remained unchanged on 14 days each respectively so far in the month of May. The 14 increases in May has taken up petrol prices by Rs 3.28 per litre in Delhi. Similarly, diesel price has increased by Rs 3.88 per litre in national capital.

Under the daily price revision, the OMCs revise 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, oil companies this month have been holding back price rise on few days before starting the process all over again.

Earlier, IANS had reported 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 rising again to around \$70 a barrel mark, OMCs may have to keep revising prices upwards for some more time.

Kerala government committed to revival of tourism: Minister

Thiruvananthapuram | Agencies

Kerala's new Tourism Minister P. A. Mohamed Riyas on Thursday assured the stake holders that the government will unveil various projects focusing on the revival of the vital sector ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic, including special marketing campaigns.

Riyas, a first-time legislator and son-in-law of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, said that the government will closely work together with the industry with the aim of doubling tourists' arrival by 2025, and hoped that 2022 will be turn out to be a "Covid-19 Free Tourism Year."

"The government will implement all possible measures to ease the current problems being faced by the industry. Special marketing campaigns will be conducted once the second wave of Covid-19 recedes," he said, in his address at a virtual meeting of representatives of 18 stakeholders in the tourism sector.

The meeting was convened to elicit suggestions for revival of the industry that has been hit badly by the pandemic and to work out plans for an impressive comeback.

The participants explained to the Minister how the pandemic had resulted in a severe setback for the entrepreneurs and all others engaged in the sector. They noted that unlike any other state, the Kerala government had provided total support and encouragement to the industry during the crisis. "The roads to tourism centres will be developed and more tourism circuits will be formed by connecting destinations.



Through the socially-committed Responsible Tourism, the benefits of tourism sector will be made available to more people. The government's goal is to support the kind of tourism that brings benefits to entrepreneurs, tourists and local community alike," added the Minister.

AKSHAY KUMAR URGES ALL TO #BREAKTHETABOO ON MENSTRUAL HYGIENE DAY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar urged all to break taboos surrounding menstruation, on the occasion of World Menstrual Hygiene Day on Friday. Akshay cited his 2018 release "Pad Man" to highlight the issue. The R. Balki film was inspired by the life of Arunachalam Muruganatham, a smalltown entrepreneur from Tamil Nadu who invented low-cost sanitary napkins to gener-

ate awareness in rural areas. The film also stars Radhika Apte and Sonam Kapoor in key roles.

"Today is World Menstrual Hygiene day. Doing #Padman in 2018 opened my eyes to what women go through because of stigma and lack of basic sanitary facilities. Thankfully things are improving by the year. @mrsfunnybones and I will forever stay with the cause. #BreakTheTaboo," Akshay wrote on Twitter, tagging wife Twinkle Khanna who tweets as @mrsfunnybones and

who is one of the producers of the 2018 film. Commenting on Akshay Kumar's tweet, fans appreciated the actor for choosing a subject like menstruation and sanitary pads for his film.

"Thanks for bringing such sensitive issue in mainstream sir, you are forever our idol more power to you," commented a fan. "More than Boxoffice numbers, it earned love, respect and appreciation from everyone," wrote another fan.

Gauahar Khan urges all to help their staff get vaccinated

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Model-actress Gauahar Khan took to social media on Friday to inform that she has taken the Covid vaccine, and urged people to not only get the jab but also help their staff get administered with the vaccine.

Sharing a photo with husband Zaid Darbar on Instagram, Gauahar wrote: "A lot of people don't know that getting vaccinated is being responsible right now! Log on to cowin app n get an appointment, especially for the elderly in your family. Got my driver also an appointment n it was easy n much needed! Don't forget your staff n people who may not know the procedure.. help one another."

Thanking the hospital staff where she got vaccinated, she added: "@saifeehospital @juzer_kandyy @mustafas52 you guys r doing a great job at making the vaccine experience easily understood n carried out in safety measures."

Gauahar, who recently went on a vacation to Darjeeling, West Bengal, shared beautiful photographs of herself posing from her hotel window in an Instagram post on Friday. "Saamne waali khidki mein... ab main iske aage apni taareef kaise karoon hahhhha ...is there any other Bollywood khidki song u know??? I can't think of any. #BestVacations #hillstation #filmyLadki," she wrote.



Seerat Kapoor: May consider going bald if role demands

Team Absolute | Mumbai

South actress Seerat Kapoor, who is known for her big curls and is often showered with compliments for her hairstyle, says she doesn't mind going bald if a role requires.

The actress, who mainly works in Telugu films, will soon be seen in the Bollywood film "Maarich", with Naseeruddin Shah and Tusshar Kapoor. "If the character has depth, I will most likely consider it (going bald). My fans have always appreciated every hairstyle on me -- be it straight, wavy or curly.

Over the years I have come to realise that the bond we share goes beyond visual appeal. When they say we love her curls, it's not the hairstyle that they are attached to. It comes from the intent of loving who I am naturally. If I were ever to play such a role, I can only imagine how excited they'd be to watch how I'd carry it," she claimed. Seerat is known for her work in Telugu films such as "Raju Gari Gadhi 2", "Columbia", "Touch Chesi Chudu" and more recently "Maa Vintha Gatha Vinuma". Her debut Bollywood act was in a 2014 film titled "Zid", starring Mannara Chopra.

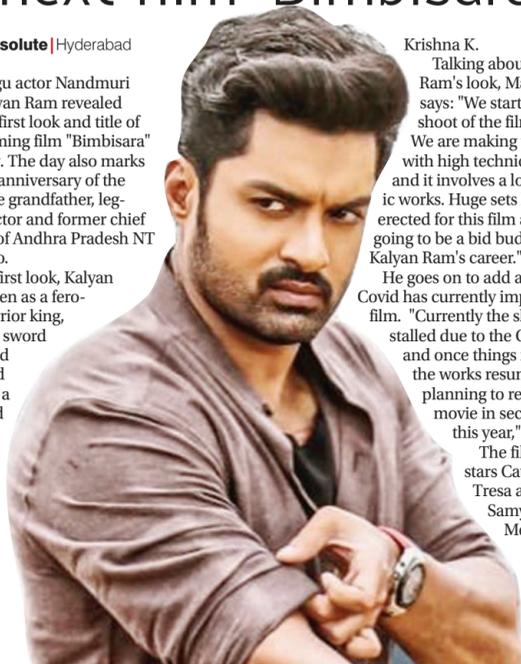
Nandamuri Kalyan Ram reveals first look of his next film 'Bimbisara'

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Telugu actor Nandamuri Kalyan Ram revealed the first look and title of his upcoming film "Bimbisara" on Friday. The day also marks the birth anniversary of the actors late grandfather, legendary actor and former chief minister of Andhra Pradesh NT Rama Rao.

In the first look, Kalyan Ram is seen as a ferocious warrior king, holding a sword with blood stains and posing in a battlefield strewn with corpses.

The film is directed by Mallidi Vashist and produced by Hari



Krishna K.

Talking about Kalyan Ram's look, Mallindi says: "We started the shoot of the film last year. We are making the film with high technical values and it involves a lot of graphic works. Huge sets have been erected for this film and it is going to be a big budget film in Kalyan Ram's career."

He goes on to add about how Covid has currently impacted the film. "Currently the shooting is stalled due to the Covid-19 and once things normalise, the works resume. We are planning to release the movie in second half of this year," he says.

The film also stars Catherine Tresa and Samyuktha Menon.

Sonakshi Sinha: Current situation makes us think hard about climate change

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sonakshi Sinha says that it is important to value the environment we live in. "We end up in the environment we create for ourselves, and we must make sure that it's beautiful. The current situation around us is making us think hard about climate change, and the kind of effect it has on our planet. As responsible individuals, if we make small sustainable changes to our daily routine then together, we can create a healthier environment to live in," she says. On the occasion of World Environment Day on June 5, Sonakshi, along with actress Tara Sharma, will be seen on the digital property "Earth Champions", which streams on the Sony BBC Earth Instagram page.

On screen, Sonakshi is all set to make her web series debut with "Fallen", where she plays a cop. She is also part of "Bulbul Tarang", which will have a digital release, and will be seen in the film "Bhuj: The Pride Of India" co-starring Ajay Devgn, Sanjay Dutt and Nora Fatehi.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Pooja Hegde is soon to be seen in the Pan-India film Radhe Shyam opposite Baahubali star, Prabhas. The film is a period romantic drama where Hegde will be seen in the role of Prerna. A source close to the film informed, "Prabhas, along with a few other members of the team, recently watched a copy of Radhe Shyam and he was so happy with Pooja's work. He just kept praising her, talking about how

Pooja Hegde's performance in Radhe Shyam leaves co-star Prabhas extremely impressed

spectacular her performance was and how well her scenes had turned out. Prabhas was really impressed and we are sure that the audience is going to love Pooja all the same in the film." According to reports, only a little bit of the shoot is pending for one song which will be done in Hyderabad once the lockdown eases. The team had earlier shot some parts of the film in Italy as well last year, post which Hegde had jumped straight into the shoot for Circus. The Indian actress is currently using her lockdown to experiment with food, read scripts, listen to her favourite vinyl records and do yoga as part of her post Covid care. Besides this Pan-India film, Pooja will also be seen in Rohit Shetty's Circus opposite Ranveer Singh, her upcoming next opposite Salman Khan, Acharya with Chiranjeevi and Ram Charan, Most Eligible Bachelor as well as Thalaphy 65 opposite Thalaphy Vijay.



Karishma Tanna