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60% feel cancellation of Class XII exams can adversely affect student's career

FEAR OF UNCERTAINTY

While the CBSE and CISCE Class XII board exams may have cancelled, more than 60 per cent of the respondents in the IANS-CVoter CBSE Snap Poll feel that cancelling Class XII exams can have adverse impact on the career of the students and to avoid such a situation, the government should opt for alternate mechanisms like digital mediums to conduct various exams.

- A majority of the respondents - 49.1 per cent -- are of the view that instead of cancelling the Class XII board exams, the government should have postponed them.
- Of this, the opinion is stronger among the younger set of respondents. In the 18-25 age group, 50.8 per cent echoed this sentiment while only 46.2 per cent in the 56-plus age group said that the exams should have been postponed.
- The large number of respondents said that while career is important for the students, health risks should be avoided keeping in view of the spread of the deadly virus in the country, saying that conducting offline exams can prove fatal.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The IANS-CVoter CBSE Snap Poll was conducted in the aftermath of the Union government's decision to cancel the Class XII board exams taken on June 1. The all-India sample size for the snap poll was 5,422 and the field-work was conducted on June 2. Notably, while several states like Rajasthan, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttarakhand have cancelled Class XII board exams, Chhattisgarh is holding offline exams. Others, including Karnataka and Odisha, are yet to announce a final decision on the matter. A whopping majority of the respondents -- 76.4 per cent -- said the government should think of using digital mediums to conduct various competitive exams like IIT/JEE, NEET and for admissions to



universities and colleges in a fair manner to prevent loss of a career year of the students. However, 60 per cent of the respondents expressed concern about the digital divide in the country, saying that those not having access to digital platforms, especially in the rural areas, will be in disadvantageous position. A large number of respondents said the government should work on improving the digital infrastructure in the rural areas of the country to face such challenges in the future.

56.4% HAPPY WITH GOVT'S DECISION



New Delhi: The IANS-CVoter CBSE Snap Poll conducted in the aftermath of the Union government's decision to cancel Class XII board exams in view of the Covid-19 pandemic has found that as many as 56.4 per cent of respondents are happy with the government decision. Similarly, 56.6 per cent of those interviewed said that state board exams for Class XII should also be cancelled because of the prevailing Covid situation in the country.

ADMISSIONS IN UNIVERSITIES WILL BE DELAYED

New Delhi: The cancellation of class 12th board examination will also affect the admissions in universities. Delhi University has already made it clear that due to the cancellation of the examination this year, the common entrance test for admission to central universities will not be conducted. Along with this, now the university has also clarified that this year also the admission process may be delayed. Delhi University's acting vice-chancellor PC Joshi has said that the admission process will start after the declaration of CBSE Board Class XII results. However, this admission process in colleges may start late as compared to last year.

SC SEEKS ASSESSMENT CRITERIA IN 2 WEEKS

"We are happy with the Centre's decision to cancel the board exam (CBSE and ICSE boards). But what is the objective standard principle you will apply? The criteria have not been given in the letter. If you want you can do overnight, but we are giving you two weeks. All interactions are happening online, do it in two weeks. You should act overnight."



2nd Made-in-India vax coming, deal signed for 30 cr doses

Biological-E's vaccine is currently in Phase-3 clinical trials after showing promising results in Phase 1 and 2, and it is likely to be available in the market in next few months, said a Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) statement. The Ministry is learnt to have made an advance payment of Rs 1,500 crore to the firm - the second made-in-India vaccine manufacturer after Bharat Biotech's Covaxin.

vaccine, which is still in final phase of clinical trials. Biological-E's shot, the Ministry said, was given Rs 100 crore in financial assistance by the Department of Biotechnology, which also partnered with the company to conduct various studies. This is part of the government's mission to support five or six new COVID-19 vaccine candidates, said the statement. Biological-E also has a separate deal to produce about 600 million doses of Johnson and Johnson's Covid-19 shot annually. Besides Covaxin and Serum Institute of India's Covishield, Russia's Sputnik V will soon be used to vaccinate people as the government races towards a target of one crore vaccinations a day by August.

NOW SII SEEKS INDEMNITY FROM LIABILITY

New Delhi: Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII), which manufactures Covishield, has also sought indemnity from liability, expressing the hope that rules would be the same for everyone, said sources. This comes as the Centre is favourably considering granting indemnity against legal proceedings to foreign vaccine makers Pfizer and Moderna prior to their rollout in India. It is learnt that Serum is hoping that rules should be the same for everyone.

India to receive Covid vaccines from US stockpile

New York: As US President Joe Biden announced on Thursday that India will receive Covid-19 vaccines directly from its stockpile, Vice President Kamala Harris spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the distribution, according to the White House. Biden said he was releasing the first set of 25 million doses of which six million will be distributed between India, South Korea, Mexico and Canada. The six million "will be shared directly with countries experiencing surges, those in crisis, and other partners and neighbours", he said without a breakdown of how many will go to India.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In another landmark move in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic, the Central government has booked 30 crore doses of another Made-in-India vaccine to be manufactured by Hyderabad-based Biological-E's Covid

MEHUL CHOKSI CASE: DOMINICAN COURT ADJOURNS HEARING



New Delhi: Dominican High Court Judge Bernie Stephenson on Thursday adjourned the habeas corpus hearing of Indian fugitive businessman Mehul Choksi, who is wanted in India in Rs 13,500 crore Punjab National Bank (PNB) fraud case, local media reported. According to Antigua News Room, a news outlet based in the Caribbean island, it was adjourned to allow lawyers for Choksi and the Dominican government to agree on the language to be used with respect to the injunction filed to prevent his removal from Dominica. It said that both parties are expected to meet to discuss the matter and to inform the judge, who will set a new court date.

Is allopathic profession so fragile: Delhi HC; issues summons to Ramdev

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Thursday asked the Delhi Medical Association (DMA) if allopathy was so fragile to be dented by the opinion held by yoga guru Ramdev, his statements against allopathic medicines and also his claims that Patanjali's Coronil kit is a cure for Covid-19. However, the court issued summons to Ramdev on the DMA's plea, but declined to restrain him at this stage. Justice C. Hari Shankar said: "If I feel some science is fake... Tomorrow I will feel homeopathy is fake. Do you mean they will file a suit against me? I put in on Twitter. You will say take down the Twitter account." The court emphasised that it is public opinion and has to be tested on the touchstone of free speech. "I do not think your



allopathic profession is so fragile," the court told the DMA's counsel Rajiv Dutta. Orally asking the yoga guru not to make any provocative statement, the court issued summons to Ramdev on the suit filed by the DMA and sought response in three weeks. It has listed the matter for further hearing on July 13. The DMA, on behalf of its doctor members, argued that Ramdev's statement affects them as Coronil does not cure coronavirus and it is misleading. The court told DMA counsel that the association's members should be spending time to find cure for the pandemic instead of wasting the court's time.

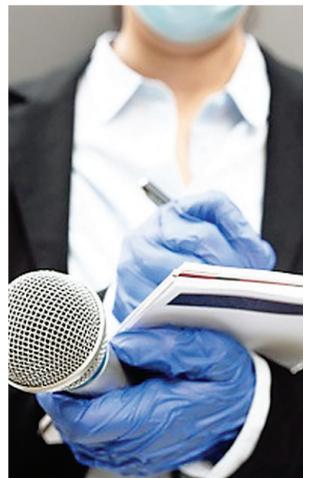
SC for protecting journalists against sedition unless reports incite violence

Journalists can criticize govts: SC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Holding that every journalist will be entitled to protection in terms of Kedar Nath Singh case, the bench observed that a citizen has a right to say or write whatever he likes about the government, or its measures, by way of criticism or comment, so long as he does not incite people to violence against the government established by law or with the intention of creating public disorder.

The Supreme Court on Friday said every journalist should be granted protection against prosecution under penal provisions of sedition, barring when his/her news report either incited violence or disturbed public peace. A bench of Justices U.U. Lalit and Vineet Saran relied upon decision in Kedar Nath Singh versus State of Bihar (1962), which upheld validity of sedition provision but with riders, to quash an FIR against senior journalist Vinod Dua registered on May 6, last year by Shimla police. Citing the contents of the FIR lodged by a local BJP leader, the bench said statements that the Prime Minister had used deaths and terror attacks to garner votes were not made by Dua in the talk show. Also, on the content of Dua's show on lockdown 2020, the bench noted: "The situation was definitely alarming around March 30, 2020, and as a journalist, if the petitioner showed some concern, could it be said that he committed offences as alleged?" The



bench noted that Dua's comments were certainly not made with the intent to incite people.

Southwest monsoon sets in over Kerala: IMD

Team Absolute | Thiruvananthapuram

The Southwest monsoon has set in over Kerala on Thursday said the India Meteorological Department (IMD), as against the normal date of June 1. It was conveyed in the IMD release issued here at 1.30 p.m., which also said that more than 60 per cent of the 14 rainfall monitoring stations reported rainfall of 2.5 mm or more in the past two days consecutively and the spatial distribution of rainfall over Kerala remained to be fairly widespread during the past two days. It also pointed out that the Southwest monsoon is likely to advance into remaining parts of south Arabian sea, rest of Kerala and Lakshadweep south interior Karnataka, Rayalseema and central Bay of Bengal in the next two days. Kerala has received a good amount of rain during the month of May, much above the normal summer showers. Weather in the state capital city here, however, was bright and sunny.



HEAVY RAINS LASH MANY PARTS OF TELANGANA

Hyderabad: With the onset of Southwest monsoon on the Kerala coast, heavy rains lashed several parts of Telangana since early hours of Thursday, met officials said. Many districts received rains with lightening and gusty winds, inundating low-lying areas and damaging paddy kept in paddy procurement centres at several places. Hyderabad Meteorological Centre has forecast light to moderate thunderstorm/rain with lightening and gusty winds with speed 30 km per hour or more in several districts.

Will maintain stand on policy till India gets PDP law: WhatsApp

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Facebook-owned WhatsApp on Thursday reiterated that privacy of users remains its highest priority and it will maintain its stand till the Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill becomes a law in India, after the Centre told the Delhi High Court that WhatsApp was obtaining "trick consent" from its users for its updated 2021 privacy policy ahead of the pending PDP Bill. The company said that it will maintain this approach "until at least the forthcoming PDP law comes into effect". The reaction came after the Centre claimed that WhatsApp is indulging in anti-users' practices by obtaining "trick consent" from its users for its updated privacy policy, under a game plan to transfer the existing users committed to its policy. "We reiterate that we have already responded to the Government of India and assured them that the privacy of users remains our highest priority. As a



reminder, the recent update does not change the privacy of people's personal messages," a WhatsApp spokesperson said in a statement. "We will not limit the functionality of how WhatsApp works in the coming weeks. Instead, we will continue to remind users from time to time about the update as well as when people choose to use relevant optional features, like communicating with a business that is receiving support from Facebook," the spokesperson said.



ONUS OF SUSTAINING CEASEFIRE ALONG LOC ON PAK: ARMY CHIEF

Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General M.M. Naravane, said on Thursday that the ceasefire is holding along the Line of Control, and the onus to sustain it lies with Pakistan.

Team Absolute | Srinagar

On the second day of his two-day visit to Kashmir to review the security situation along the LoC and in the hinterlands, General Naravane told mediapersons, "We entered this (ceasefire) understanding with Pakistan at the end of February. The ceasefire is holding as of now. The responsibility and the onus of making the ceasefire hold are squarely on Pakistan. We are willing to observe the ceasefire as long as long as they do."



General Naravane also said the terror infrastructure across the LoC is intact and forces cannot lower their guard. "While the ceasefire is on, the other activities they are indulging in are continuing, i.e., the terror infrastructure which is there on the other side

of the LoC, the terrorist camps etc. Therefore, there can be no slackening as far as we are concerned in our levels of preparedness," the army chief said. The ceasefire agreement along the LoC between India and Pakistan militaries was revived in February this

year. Earlier, the COAS, accompanied by Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Y.K. Joshi and Chinar Corps Commander Lt Gen D.P. Pandey, visited different formations and units, where the local commanders briefed General Naravane on the existing security situation and the measures taken to foil infiltration by terrorists from Pakistan occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK). The COAS interacted with the troops and complimented them for their high morale and the state of operational preparedness. While appreciating the current state of peace prevailing along the Line of Control, General Naravane cautioned all the commanders and troops to not let their guards down and to remain prepared to meet any emerging security challenges effectively, the army said. The army chief also complimented all the government agencies for their close coordination in maintaining peace in the region and for reaching out to the people wholeheartedly to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

ICMR gives nod to two RAT home-testing kits

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Accordingly, the ICMR has approved CoviSelf, manufactured by Mylab Discovery Solutions Ltd, Pune, and the PanBio COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test Device, developed by Chicago-based Abbott Rapid Diagnostics. The latter's provisional approval has been accorded till July 5, 2021. "Indiscriminate testing is not advised. Home testing should be conducted as per the procedure described by the manufacturer in the user manual. Home testing by RAT is advised only in symptomatic individuals and immediate contacts of laboratory confirmed positive cases," the ICMR said. All positive individuals are advised to follow home isolation and care as per the ICMR and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW) protocols. The symptomatic individuals who test negative



The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has approved two home-based Rapid Antigen Test kits, to be used only in symptomatic individuals and immediate contacts of laboratory confirmed positive cases.

are likely to miss few positive cases presenting with a low viral load. All RAT negative symptomatic individuals may be treated as suspect COVID-19 cases and are advised to follow the ICMR/MoH&FW home isolation protocol while awaiting the RTPCR test result, it said. All results may be interpreted as per the protocols laid down by the manufacturer in the user manual. Manufacturer's instructions must be strictly followed for disposal of the test kit, swab and other materials.

by RAT should get themselves immediately tested by RTPCR. This is especially important as the RATs

ALAPAN BANDYOPADHYAY REPLIES TO CENTRE'S SHOW-CAUSE LETTER

Team Absolute | Kolkata

In a late evening development on Thursday, former West Bengal Chief Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay replied to the show-cause letter sent to him on the ground that he refused to comply with the lawful directions of the Central government, violating Section 51 (b) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. The letter was sent to Bandyopadhyay, presently the Chief Advisor to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, on May 31, the last day before his retirement. Though the full content of Bandyopadhyay's letter is not known yet, sources close to him said that the former Chief Secretary has defended his action of leaving the review meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi early along with Banerjee on May 28. Bandyopadhyay in his letter has men-



tioned that as the Chief Minister of the state was his immediate authority, he left the place under her instruction, sources said. Being the Chief Secretary of the state, it was his duty to follow the instructions of the Chief Minister, he said.

Amateur investigators claim to break Wuhan lab secrets

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As the entire world scramble to find answers to the origin of the lethal Covid virus, a group of amateur sleuths called 'DRASTIC', with few resources, has claimed to reveal the dark secrets of the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), the media reported on Wednesday. DRASTIC stands for "decentralised radical autonomous search team investigating Covid-19" and it has set itself the mission of exploring the origins of SARS-CoV-2. "Thanks to DRASTIC, we now know that the WIV had an extensive collection of coronaviruses gathered over many years of foraging in the bat caves and that many of them -- including the closest-known relative to the pandemic virus, SARS-CoV-2 -- came from a mineshaft where three men died from a suspected SARS-like disease in 2012," Newsweek reported. "We know that the WIV was actively working with these viruses, using inadequate safety protocols, in ways that could have triggered the pandemic and that the lab and Chinese authorities have gone to great lengths to conceal these activities," the report added.



According to the report, the first cases appeared weeks before the outbreak at the Huanan wet market that was once thought to be ground zero. None of this proves that the pandemic started in the Wuhan lab. But the evidence assembled by DRASTIC amounts to what prosecutors call probable cause -- a strong, evidence-based case for a full investigation. It is not clear that the best efforts of the US and

other nations to investigate the lab-leak hypothesis will ever turn up unequivocal evidence one way or another, at least without the full cooperation of China, which is unlikely, the report said. Meanwhile, the former head of the US Food and Drug Administration recently said that there is less evidence now to show that the novel coronavirus developed naturally -- jumping from an animal to humans, strengthening the argument for Covid-19 originating in a lab. "The side of the ledger that suggests that this could have come out of a lab has continued to expand, and the side of the ledger that suggests this has come from a zoonotic source, come out of nature, really hasn't budged, and if anything, you can argue that that side of the ledger has contracted," the New York Post quoted Scott Gottlieb as saying on CBS' "Face the Nation". Last year, then US President Donald Trump had hit out at China for not stopping the Covid-19 pandemic and used the term "China virus" and urged his supporters not to call it coronavirus, saying the name sounds like a "beautiful place" in Italy. However, the comment attracted a lot of criticism against Trump.

BARS, RESTAURANTS, MALLS ALLOWED TO FUNCTION WITH LIMITATIONS IN BENGAL

Team Absolute | Kolkata

With the number of Covid cases shrinking steadily for the last one week, the West Bengal government has decided to give further relaxations, allowing bars, restaurants and malls to function with limited facilities. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced the relaxations in her meeting with different chambers at the state secretariat on Thursday. Accepting the request of the chambers, Banerjee said, "Covid-19 contagion is declining in West Bengal following the imposition of restrictions. Restaurants can be open for three hours in the evening from 5 pm to 8 pm provided the people working there are vaccinated." Though the Chief Minister didn't specify the date of the opening, senior officials indicated that it will be in effect soon and everything will be clear after the state government issues notification on this.



No foul play in 18 wild elephants' death in Assam, says probe panel

Guwahati | Agencies

Dispelling all speculations, an Assam government probe report, released on Thursday, said that the 18 wild elephants, found dead in Nagaon district on May 12, were killed after being struck by a "massive lightning bolt". Releasing the 10-member probe committee report, state Environment and Forest Minister Parimal Suklabaidya said that 18 elephants' death due to lightning has been established with clinching evidence. "The exhaustive report incorporating post mortem and reports from concerned agencies have proved beyond doubt that lightning caused the death of a herd of elephants," he told the media. The expert group report said: "The autopsy report suggests that as per



in situ spot evidence, the death of the elephants in the herd may not be attributed to any infectious pathological agent or any toxin or poison." Incorporating reports of various organisations including the North Eastern Regional Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, meteorological data obtained from the North East Satellite Application Centre at Meghalaya's Umiam and other evidences gathered

and statement of the fringe communities recorded during the investigation, a detailed report on the elephant deaths was submitted on Thursday to Chief Wildlife Warden M.K. Yadava. "The investigation report suggests that there does not appear to be any foul play such as conscious attempt of electrocution, revenge killing, poisoning, anthrax outbreak etc. Hence it can be deduced from the evidence available, which point to the cause of death of the 18 elephants by accidental electrocution due to lightning," the report said. The probe committee was constituted by Assam's Wildlife Department to ascertain the actual cause of the death of 18 wild elephants including calves on May 12 night in the mountainous Kandali Proposed Reserve Forest (PRF) in Nagaon district.

MCC COMMISSIONER 'RESIGNS' ACCUSING MYSURU DC OF HUMILIATING HER

Mysuru: Accusing Mysuru Deputy Commissioner Rohini Sindhuri of humiliating her at every step, the Commissioner of Mysuru City



Corporation (MCC), Shilpa Nag, announced to step down on Thursday, saying that she would soon meet the Chief Secretary, P. Ravi Kumar, on the matter. Reading out her 10-page handwritten resignation letter at a press conference here, Nag alleged that she faced humiliation at every meeting. "The Covid situation in Mysuru has been brought under control after taking several measures, including setting up of Covid call centres at each and every ward (65 in total) and forming Covid task forces comprising social activists and political leaders at the ward level. But still Sindhuri continued to humiliate each and every officer involved in this process. During the meetings every day, she tried to highlight one mistake or the other," Nag alleged. She added that if her resignation can give in some respite to Mysuru, so be it.

Google apologises for hurting Kannada sentiments on Search after uproar

Facing a controversy after a Google Search with the keywords "ugliest language in India" showed "Kannada" in the results, Google India said on Thursday that it is not the reflection of the company, as it apologised for misunderstanding and hurting any sentiments.



Team Absolute | Bengaluru

The Search result sparked an outrage among the netizens earlier in the day, with the Karnataka government threatening to issue a legal notice to the company. "Search isn't always perfect. Sometimes, the way content is described on the Internet can yield surprising results to specific queries," a Google India spokesperson told reporter in a

statement. "We know this is not ideal, but we take swift corrective action when we are made aware of an issue and are continually working to improve our algorithms. Naturally, these are not reflective of the opinions of Google, and we apologise for the misunderstanding and hurting any sentiments," the company spokesperson added. The Search algorithm issue has been rectified now. Minister for Kannada, Culture

and Forest in Karnataka, Aravind Limbavali, took to Twitter earlier on Thursday and highlighted the controversy, demanding an apology from Google. "Kannada language has a history of its own, having come into existence as many as 2,500 years ago! It has been the pride of Kannadigas all through these two-and-a-half millennia. If Kannada is now called ugliest language in India, it is merely an attempt by Google to insult this pride of Kannadigas," he

said in the tweet. Bengaluru Central MP, C.A. Mohan, also shared a screenshot of the Google Search engine showing Karnataka as 'ugliest language in India'. Mohan said Karnataka is home to the great Vijayanagara empire and the Kannada language has a rich heritage, a glorious legacy and a unique culture. "One of the world's oldest languages, Kannada had great scholars who wrote epics much before Geoffrey Chaucer was born in the 14th century. Apologise @GoogleIndia," he tweeted. After Mohan's screenshot went viral on Twitter, social media platforms were filled with outrage, demanding an unconditional apology from the tech giant as well as removal of any such offensive content associated with any language, including Kannada. Janata Dal (S) strongman H.D. Kumaraswamy also lashed out at Google and sought to know why Google "behaves in an irresponsible manner" when it comes to the language.

Raj announces perks for pvt hospitals to set up oxygen plants

Jaipur | Agencies

Rajasthan, which became the first state to announce a capital subsidy package for medical oxygen manufacturing units, has now started encouraging private hospitals to set up oxygen plants in the state. The private facilities in the state can now avail the benefits of the government's special package, wherein the minimum investment criteria has been relaxed. Industries Minister Parsadi Lal Meena said, "As there were requests from the medical fraternity for inclusion of hospitals establishing oxygen plants for incentives under the package, and lowering the investment bar for them, we have now extended the benefits to private



hospitals also, understanding the need of the hour. This step of the government will help equip us better for the future." The Industries Department has held quick rounds of discussions with the representatives of the state's major private hospitals and has understood their requirements in setting up the oxygen plants. Following this, the state government has decided to cover private hospitals under the special package that is being offered to the enterprises.



Delhi Reports Less Than 500 New Covid Cases, 45 Deaths In 24 Hours

Centre not providing required amount of Covid vaccines: Delhi

The positivity rate, the number of positive cases identified per 100, stood at 0.61 per cent in the city.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi recorded 487 fresh cases of coronavirus today, lowest since March 16.

The positivity rate, number of positive cases identified per 100, stood at 0.61 per cent. 45 patients died due to the disease in the last 24 hours in the capital. While the recovery rate stands at 97.67 per cent, the death rate was at 1.71 per cent. There were 80,046 tests conducted over the last 24 hours.

As the deadlier second wave of the infections spread across the country, Delhi began witnessing a rise in the number of daily cases and deaths from April 19. It reported the highest single-day spike of 448 deaths on May 3. However, there is a declining trend in the number of cases and deaths over the last several days. On Wednesday, the city reported 576 Covid cases, lowest since March 17, and a positivity rate of 0.78 per cent. 103 patients died

yesterday. Delhi reported 623 fresh COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, the lowest in two-and-a-half months, and 62 deaths as the positivity rate remained below one per cent.

The city reported 648 fresh COVID-19 cases and 86 more fatalities on Monday, while the positivity rate was 0.99 per cent.

Last week Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal made it clear that despite low number of cases, "unlocking" Delhi will be a gradual process. The lockdown was extended till June 7. However, relaxations were allowed for construction and manufacturing units.

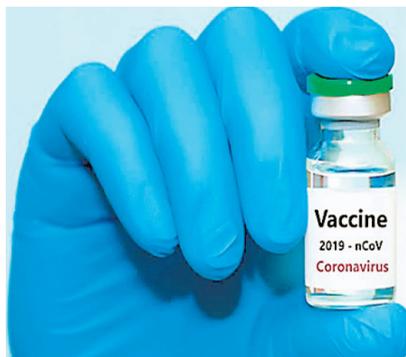
Earlier this week, amending the excise rules, the city-state government allowed the home delivery of liquor through mobile apps or websites.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain called on Central government to rethink its current vaccination policy because when a state is ready to vaccinate and to buy vaccines, then it should get the required number of vaccines.

"Delhi government is fully prepared and has the best facility to vaccinate the entire population, but we are not getting the required number of vaccines from the Central government," he said.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader said that the Delhi government wants to vaccinate more and more people because it wants to save the lives of the citizens. "I understand that many people who have taken the first jab of Covaxin are not getting the scheduled second jab in Delhi. The situation has become like this because of the mismanagement on the behalf of the Central government. They have changed the schedule of vaccination. If the Central government had given us the required number of vaccines, then there should have been no problem. But they are not providing vac-



The Delhi government on Thursday blamed the Centre for not providing it the required amount of Covid-19 vaccines despite its preparedness and facilities to inoculate people.

Jain said, adding "the cost of the vaccines in the private hospitals is also monitored by the Central government". About black fungus, he said 1,044 such cases were there in Delhi till Wednesday. "Out of these 1,044 cases, 92 patients have recovered fully and 89 people have lost their lives due to black fungus."

The Minister said for the past three days, Delhi has been reporting a positivity rate below one per cent which is a good sign, but still appealed to every citizen to follow Covid protocols. "Delhi reported 576 positive Covid-19 cases and the positivity rate was 0.78 per cent." In this phase of the Covid pandemic, Delhi even witnessed over 28,000 cases in 24 hours but now the number of Covid cases is coming down which is a good sign, he said. "Before this second phase of the pandemic in Delhi, day to day cases used to stay within 200. My appeal to every citizen is that please maintain social distancing, wear a mask all the time and wash your hand from time to time."

cines. We are hopeful that people who are waiting for the Covaxin second dose will get it as early as possible," he said. Noting that the Central government earlier told them to vaccinate more and more people, Jain noted that according to the Central government, 50 per cent of the vaccines will go to it, 25 per cent will be given to the states and 25 per cent will be given to the private partners. "I think it is high time to rethink this policy and rework it. When a state is ready to vaccinate its citizens,

then that state must get the required number of vaccines.

"The Delhi government is fully prepared to vaccinate the entire population, but we are not getting it (vaccines). We are buying these vaccines and giving them for free to the citizens but due to the policy of the Central government, we are not getting the required number of vaccines," he contended.

The whole control over the vaccines and the price of the vaccines are with the Central government,

Delhi govt hiding actual Covid death figures: BJP



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The BJP on Thursday attacked the Arvind Kejriwal government for hiding the actual death count due to Covid in the national capital. Addressing a press conference party National Spokesperson Sambit Patra said, "During peak of second wave in two months of April and May, the three Municipal Corporations of Delhi issued 34,750 death certificates while Delhi Government's death toll is only 9,916 due to Covid." Patra asked who is responsible for hundreds of deaths and hiding the actual number of people who died due to Covid. "What picture the Delhi Government is portraying in front of us," he asked. Talking about the case fatality rate, Patra said, "Delhi

has the highest case fatality rate in the country followed by Punjab at second place. The case fatality rate is 2.9 percent in Delhi, more than double the national rate of 1.3 percent. What is the reason for so many deaths in Delhi." Patra asked if it is true that when the second wave Covid was at its peak you (Kejriwal) deliberately reduced the number of tests to save the credibility of your government in Delhi.

Questioning the health infrastructure in Delhi, Patra said, "Why was not a single new hospital opened in the national capital between 2015 and 2019? After 2013, there were 16 under construction hospitals in Delhi which were supposed to be inaugurated, but what was the reason that none of these 16 hospitals were made operational."

Taking a dig at the change in the liquor policy of the Kejriwal government allowing home delivery, Patra said, "Kejriwal had promised home delivery of oxygen in Delhi. But today Kejriwal is ensuring home delivery of liquor. Kejriwal has failed to deliver medicines, oxygen at home."

Patra slammed the Delhi Government for not conducting an oxygen audit, lack of a proper plan for vaccination and its minister Gopal Rai commenting that 33 lakh trees will be planted to end the scarcity of oxygen.

Gambhir's foundation illegally stocked-distributed Covid drugs: HC told

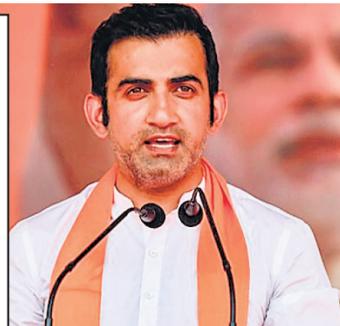
Team Absolute | New Delhi

The drug controller informed the Delhi High Court that action will be taken against Gambhir's foundation, drug dealers, as well as other such cases which were brought to its notice. The drug controller also informed the court that MLA Praveen Kumar has also been found guilty of similar offences under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

The court asked the drug controller to submit a status report on progress made in these cases within six weeks. The court has posted the matter for further hearing on July 29. On May 31, the Delhi High Court had said it cannot be taken for a ride, as it pulled up the drug controller, for not properly probing the issues involved with procurement of huge quantity of Fabiflu, used in the treatment of Covid-19 patients, by BJP MP Gautam Gambhir.

A bench comprising Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh had said: "You can't take us for a ride. If you think we are so naive, we are

The Delhi government drug controller on Thursday informed the high court that Gautam Gambhir's foundation has been found guilty of non-authorized stocking, procuring and distributing Fabiflu medicine used for Covid-19 patients.



curement of the medicine by cricketer-turned-politician Gambhir.

The court noted it was well-known that the essential Covid drug was in short supply. However, Gambhir purchased several strips of the medicine; and others, who needed it, could not get it, the bench added. "You (drug controller) are wrong to say it was not in short supply. You want us to shut our eyes. You think you would get away with this," said the bench. The high

court did not mince words in criticizing recent statement by Gambhir stating that he will continue to do such work. The bench said: "We have already said it is a malpractice. This tendency of people trying to take advantage and then trying to appear as a saviour when they themselves created the problem, has to be denounced." The court also examined the report in connection with the allegations against AAP MLAs Priti Tomar and Praveen Kumar for hoarding of medical oxygen. The report in connection with allegations against Tomar was accepted by the court, however, it trashed the reports in connection with Gambhir and Kumar. The court gave three days to the drug controller of the Delhi government to file better reports.

The court was hearing a PIL seeking registration of a case on the allegations that politicians are able to procure in huge quantities and distribute Covid-19 medicines even as patients were running from pillar to post to get them amid a brutal second wave of the pandemic.

Gurugram hospital saves kid with severe heart injury

Gurugram | Agencies

A 10-year-old boy, Vinay (name changed), who belongs to an economically weaker section, suffered a major penetrating injury in the chest while playing with his friends.

A sharp object penetrated the front of his chest and within minutes he lost consciousness and was unable to breathe. His family rushed him to a nearby hospital where he was given first aid. As the child's condition was deteriorating rapidly, he was referred to the Artemis Hospital in Gurugram and upon reaching an Emergency room, it was found that he was not breathing, and his heart had also stopped working.

Immediately, the Pediatrics and Emergency team initiated Resuscitation (CPR) to revive the child. There was severe blood loss already which was not stopping and made it certain that there is a major injury to the heart. His heartbeat and breathing had

stopped because of the massive blood loss from the injury. Immediately a tube was inserted (ICD placement) on the left side of the chest to relieve pressure on the heart and lungs. Around 500 ml of frank blood came out with a gush.

Realizing the critical situation of the child, Dr Aseem R Srivastava (Head of Pediatric Cardiac Surgery), Artemis hospital was called in and the child was rushed to the Paediatric Cardiac Surgery Operation Theatre with ongoing CPR.

Thereafter, Dr Aseem along with his team opened the breast bone (bone in the front of the chest) to realize that there was a 2 cm penetrating hole in the heart that was spurting blood all over and the chest was full of blood.

He performed the surgery and the injury was repaired with sutures and the cardiac massage was continued until the lost blood was replaced. After this surgery the blood pressure picked up gradually and his heart rate and heartbeat stabilized.

Dr Aseem said, "There was a penetrating wound in the right ventricle of heart which was repaired. With such massive cardiac injury, survival is rare and unheard of. Most people die before reaching the hospital because of massive blood loss. This child survived because the team identified immediately that the heart has been punctured. Post surgery, the patient stayed on ventilator support, in the Pediatric Cardiac ICU, for about 2 days and started breathing on his own on the third day of surgery. He later walked out of the hospital with absolutely normal situation".

Dr Devlina Chakravarty, Managing Director, Artemis Hospitals said, "We are more than happy to see the child back with his family that too perfectly recovered".

"We are grateful to the doctors and entire team of the Hospital who gave our child second life. We don't have enough words to thank them," Vinay's parents said.



Gurugram | Agencies

The Covid-19 positivity rate in Gurugram district has come down to 1.63 per cent from 34.9 per cent within 32 days.

Similarly, the recovery rate has also increased to 98.79 per cent, a district administration official has said. A district administration

spokesperson said that in order to break the chain of coronavirus infection, the state government initially decided to impose a weekend lockdown in 9 districts of Haryana state including Gurugram. On April 30, the government had imposed a weekend lockdown for 2 days. The positivity rate of Gurugram was 34.9 per cent

Covid positivity rate drops to 1.63% in Gurugram

on that day and there were 4,435 active cases in 24 hours. The doubling time was 23.35 days and the growth rate of corona infection was 3.60 percent. At that time the recovery rate of the district was 69.76%. To reduce the rate of this infection, an action plan was prepared as per the guidelines of the state government," he said on Wednesday. "The recovery rate of the district's corona patients is increasing rapidly. Presently, the recovery rate of the district has been 98.79 per cent, which is commendable," Deputy Commissioner Gurugram, Yash Garg said.

Apart from this, District Surveillance Officer Dr. Jai Prakash informed that around 45 patients suffering from Mucormycosis black fungus in Gurugram district have recovered and 184 patients are under treatment in various hospitals. Meanwhile, on Wednesday, around 337 people recovered while 83 new cases were reported on Gurugram. Also, the number of total active case in Gurugram district is 1,073 out of which 926 patients are in home isolation. A total of 7,08,768 people have been administered with covid jabs including 7,544 on Wednesday.

3 HELD FROM BIHAR'S NALANDA FOR DUPING PEOPLE FOR O2 CYLINDERS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Police has arrested three cyber criminals and a juvenile from Bihar's Nalanda and Sheikhpura districts, for cheating people in the pretext of providing oxygen cylinders amid the second wave of the Covid pandemic. The arrested accused have been identified as Balender Chaudhary, Gopal, Kameshwar Prasad and a juvenile.

This is the second such arrest from Bihar's Nalanda in recent days. Earlier, the Crime Branch of Delhi Police had arrested several members of Chotte Chaudhary gang.

The arrests were made by the cyber cell police of South District of Delhi Police. Police recovered 15 mobile phones, 13 fake SIM cards, three ATM cards, four fake Aadhaar cards, two fake PAN cards, five bank passbooks and one post office saving passbook. The arrest was made on the complaint of Harleen Kaur, who had approached the police stating that her father tested positive for Covid and she needed an oxygen cylinder. In her complaint, Kaur alleged that she got a mobile number via social media. She



called the number and one person who disclosed his name as Pankaj promised that he can provide the oxygen gas cylinder on advance payment of Rs 7,500 for each cylinder and also provided a bank account number for transferring the payment.

Following that she transferred Rs 15,000 as advance payment in the bank account for two oxygen cylinders but she did not receive any and the accused stopped receiving the phone calls of the complainant thereafter.

A case was registered at Greater Kailash police station and several similar complaints were also received. The official said that a joint team of Greater Kailash police station and Cyber cell of Chitranjan park was constituted to identify and nab the culprits.

The police official said that the team conducted technical investigation and details of alleged cheats were obtained and analyzed. "Location of calling mobile number was found in Nalanda, Bihar and the account of accused was also from Nalanda," the official said. "The joint team rushed to Nalanda. The information was further developed and shared with local sources following which

four suspects were identified. Accordingly, with the help of technical support and local police stations, raids were conducted and four accused persons were arrested.

Explaining the modus operandi of the cheaters, the police official said that all the accused persons are members of an organised syndicate, who cheat those who are in need of oxygen cylinders.

He said that each person plays his role in this syndicate.

DCP South Atul Kumar Thakur said that the juvenile used to arrange the bank ATM cards of poor persons, who require the money and sold it to accused Gopal for Rs 10,000. Kameshwar sold his bank account and ATM card to Rahul for Rs 2,000. While Balender used to call the persons who required oxygen cylinders, Thakur said.

Thakur also said that Gopal used to arrange the fake SIM cards for calling and withdrawal of the money by the ATM card.

With the arrest of three accused and a juvenile, the police has worked out three cases registered in South district district Delhi.

PROCLAIMED OFFENDER ARRESTED WITH ILLEGAL WEAPONS IN GURUGRAM

Gurugram: The Gurugram police have arrested a notorious proclaimed offender and also recovered two illegal weapons from his possession, officials said on Thursday.

The accused was identified as Bishambar alias Pahalwan (43) of Balyawas village in Gurugram.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (Crime) Preet Pal Sangwan said the accused was arrested by a team of crime branch Sector-10 led by Sub-Inspector Dalpat Singh after a tip-off from near Ghata village on Wednesday. During the search, cops recovered two country-made pistols from him.

Sangwan said the accused was involved in two dozens cases of murder, attempt to murder, kidnapping, loot and dacoity.

"The accused had purchased the recovered weapons in Rs 10,000 with the help of his accomplice from Meerut in Uttar Pradesh. He used to carry weapons to commit crime," the ACP said.

It was also disclosed that Bishambar was the key aide in MG Road shootout case which took place in July 2015. He was the man who had smuggled arms for the shootout.

A case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) including Arms Act has been registered against the culprit at Sector-56 police station.



NOW NO DISTRICT OF THE STATE IN RED ZONE: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that now no district of the state is in the Red Zone from the point of view of Covid infection. The positivity of any district is not more than 5%. The state is rapidly coming out of the corona infection. Every effort should be made to make the state completely corona infection free soon.

Chouhan said that all the in-charge ministers and officers in-charge of Covid should keep a close watch on the unlock process in their respective districts and ensure COVID-compliant behaviour. Chouhan said that the work of 'Covid Safety Team' under the direction of the Minister-in-Charge is a good example of micro-monitoring to ensure corona-compliant behavior in Bhopal. Other districts should also follow this.

Chouhan said that vaccination acts as a protection wheel against corona, its speed should be increased. In vaccination, priority should be given to parents of children below 12 years of age, students going abroad, handcarters, shopkeepers etc. Chouhan was reviewing the situation and arrangements of Corona in the state through video conferencing at Mantralaya on Thursday.



The weekly average positivity of corona in 30 districts of the state is less than 1% and in 22 districts the weekly average positivity ranges from 1% to 5%. The weekly average positivity of all 52 districts is less than 5%.

No new case of corona has been reported in 3 districts of the state Alirajpur, Jhabua and Katni. One new case each has come up in four districts of Bhand, Mandla, Singrauli and Tikamgarh.

More than 20 new cases of corona have come in 3 districts of the state, Indore, Bhopal and Jabalpur. 287 new cases have come in Indore, 183 in Bhopal, 71 in Jabalpur, 17 in Gwalior and 16 in Ratlam. The weekly positivity of Indore is 4.9%, Bhopal 3.8%, Jabalpur 1.8%, Gwalior 1.4% and Ratlam 2.1%. Today 846 new cases of corona have

come in the state, 3746 patients have become healthy and there are 14 thousand 186 active cases. The weekly average positivity of the state is 1.7 percent and today's positivity is 1.1%. Today 78 thousand tests were done in the state.

Chouhan said that the Kill Corona campaign has played a major role in controlling corona infection in the state. This campaign continued continuously in rural and urban areas and it was continuously monitored.

Minister Vishwas Sarang, in the presentation of the work being done by 'Covid Safety Team' in Bhopal, informed that 9159 shops have been opened in Bhopal district, out of which 8632 shops are following Covid behaviour, 319 shops are not being treated as Covid. It was closed and a fine of Rs 65 thousand 500 was imposed against 208 shops. The Covid safety team is urging people to follow the corona protocol, and action is being taken against the violators. These teams are working on making shells outside shops, tying ropes, thermal screening in offices, checking social distancing, urging people to use masks, sanitizers and maintain a distance of 2 yards, etc. Along with this, it is also being ensured that only those shops which are allowed to open and close at the stipulated time.

12th internal assessment should be done by scientific method: CM

The students who want to take the examinations later will be able to take the examinations of higher education and technical education, according to last year

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that there will be no 12th board examinations in the state, but students who want will be able to take the exams later. The work of internal evaluation will be done on a scientific basis and the Group of Ministers will discuss with the subject experts and decide regarding its process.

Chouhan said that the examinations of Higher Education Department and Technical Education Department will be held as per the previous year. Higher

Education Minister Mohan Yadav, Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains, Principal Secretary Higher Education Anupam Rajan, Principal Secretary Technical Education Yashodhara Rajesh Chindia and Minister of State (Independent Charge) for School Education Inder Singh Parmar attended the meeting through video conferencing. Higher education examinations will be conducted according to last year's open book method. On the prescribed date and time, the student will receive the online question paper, the answer of which will be written in the answer book and submitted to the nearest collection center while sitting at home. Students who do not have internet facility at home will be given the facility to take the examination in the nearest educational institution. Undergraduate

third year and postgraduate fourth semester examinations will be held in June 2021 and the result will be out in July 2021. Similarly, the graduation first and second year and postgraduate second semester examinations will be held in July 2021 and the result will come by August 2021. There are total 14 lakh 88 thousand 958 in undergraduate classes and 3 lakh 8 thousand 117 candidates in postgraduate classes in 8 universities of the state. All examinations of Technical Education Department will be online and will be based on open book method. Candidates will write the answer online only. Time will be 2 hours. A surcharge of 50% CGPA earned in previous semesters will be considered in the assessment. The examinations will be held in June and July and the results will be out in 10 days. There are a total of 1 lakh 87 thousand 811 candidates in technical education colleges in the state.

CM PLANTS SAPTAPARNI SAPLING



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a Saptaparni sapling in Smart Park. Chouhan plants a sapling every day in compliance with his resolve. Saptaparni is an evergreen medicinal tree, which has great importance in Ayurveda. It is useful in healing wounds, jaundice, malaria and eliminating debility.

BJP now gears up for next by-poll battle in MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After the emphatic win of the Congress in the Damoh assembly bypoll, the Madhya Pradesh unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is now brainstorming for the upcoming by-elections for three assembly constituencies and one Lok Sabha seat, the dates for which are yet to be announced. For this, the BJP has initiated the process of taking feedback from the ground.

The BJP's national leadership has become more alert after the defeat in the West Bengal Assembly elections and it is keeping a close eye on the states where elections are to be held in future. Steps are also being taken for the by-elections for three assembly constituencies, namely Prithvipur in Bundelkhand, Raigaon in Vindhya region and Jobat in Nimar-Malwa. Besides, the Khandwa Lok Sabha constituency will also see a by-election. Two of the three assembly seats have been held by the Congress -- Jobat and Prithvipur, while Raigaon assembly and Khandwa Lok Sabha seat were occupied by the BJP. The results of these



elections will send out a big message for the next assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh to be held in 2023.

The seriousness of the BJP can be gauged from the fact that the party's national co-organization general secretary Shiv Prakash has been camping in the state, keeping an eye on the state's politics, gauging the public mood and ramping up organizational strength. He held meetings with senior BJP leaders during his stay in Bhopal, and inquired about the work done by the government during the Covid pandemic. He also discussed the reasons for the party's defeat in the Damoh by-poll. Prakash also held

meetings with RSS cadres during his stay. Political analyst Saji Thomas says, "Though BJP lost the elections in 2018 but it came back to power due to the rebellion in the Congress rank. Then in the by-elections of 28 assembly constituencies, BJP won 19 seats. After this, the party had to face defeat in the Damoh assembly bypoll. Overall, the bypoll result sent a warning signal to the BJP. This is the reason why the organization has become so alert."

Political experts believe that the national leadership handed over the responsibility of organization of the state to young MP Vishnu Dutt Sharma about one and a half years ago. He, after taking over, sidelined several veterans and brought in young turks entrusting them with huge responsibilities. This led to apprehension in the minds of the senior leaders about their prospects and future in the party. Several veterans, some openly, some clandestinely, aired resentment and sided with the opposition Congress in leading attacks on the party and the government. This is the reason the party this time is extremely cautious about any by-poll as they don't want to take chances.

Recovery of each sold unit should be ensured : MD

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Managing Director of Madhya Kshetra Vidyut Vitran Company, Ganesh Shankar Mishra has said that the value of each sold unit of electricity should be recovered within the time limit. Every effort should be made to increase the units sold. The company will provide a citation to the divisions that increase the cash revenue collection per unit. The acreage of moong and paddy has increased in the Kharif crop, so keeping in view the inputs in the agriculture sector, the number of temporary connections should be increased continuously as compared to last year. Action should be ensured to disconnect the electricity connections of the outstanding consumers for the revenue recovery process. Managing Director Shri Ganesh Shankar Mishra said this to the field officials in the review meeting organized through video conferencing of Bhopal and Gwalior

regions at the company headquarters. The Managing Director said that power theft should be effectively curbed. He said that Armed Guards (Ex-Servicemen) should be effectively utilized by increasing night patrolling in Gwalior-Chambal division. Revenue collection should be increased by sending Armed Guards along with Vigilance staff. The faulty and burnt meters of the consumers should be replaced immediately. Electricity theft cases should be filed in special courts. He made it clear to the field officers of the company's workplace that their performance should be in such a way that its results should be reflected in revenue growth. Efforts should be intensified for recovery from the permanently disconnected (PDC) defaulters as per rules and attachment proceedings should be taken in this regard under the Land Revenue Code. Mishra said that the system of spot billing should be strengthened so that the consumers can get the right bills at the

right time. He said there is a need for massive work to bring down the "gross technical and commercial losses". There is a need to increase the activities of Vigilance Checking and Business Intelligence Cell. Vigilance checking for reduction of losses, connected connections according to load, checking in theft prone area. Every high pressure consumer needs to carry out activities like early connection and campaign for new connection and energy audit etc. Energy audit of feeders should be a part of continuous process. It is necessary to launch a campaign to convert temporary connections into permanent connections. The faulty metering system in the premises of high pressure consumers should be replaced at the earliest and new connections to all categories of consumers should be accepted easily and immediately. All these functions will allow the calculation of each unit of electricity usage.

CM CONDOLES DEATH OF ACHARYA RISHABH CHANDRA JI MAHARAJ

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has condoled the demise of revered Saint Acharya Rishabh Chandra Sureshwar Ji Maharaj of Mohankheda. Chouhan in his message said that the thoughts and guidance of Rishabh Chandra Sureshwar Ji Maharaj, the messiah of human service and kind hearted person, will always inspire to humanity. Rishabh Chandra Sureshwar Ji Maharaj was a personification of religious service and beings' welfare. His benevolent thoughts will continue to inspire us to serve humanity and religion.

Superstition draws crowd in village to seek protection against Covid-19

Police registered a case against the woman and three other persons under the IPC and the Disaster Management Act, Khujner police station in-charge Umesh Yadav said.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Defying COVID-19 norms, a large number of people gathered at a village here in Madhya Pradesh under the belief that a woman, supposedly blessed by a Goddess, can

protect them from the viral infection, police said on Thursday.

Following the gathering of over 150 people on Tuesday at Chatukheda village in Raigarh, police registered a case against the woman and three other persons under the IPC and the Disaster Management Act, Khujner police station in-charge Umesh Yadav said.

A video of the incident went viral on social media in which a temple priest was

purportedly heard saying the woman was under the spell of "Pari Mata", a local deity, and the water offered by her would help them keep the coronavirus at bay, the official said. In the video, a large

number of people, mostly women, were seen standing at a place in the village and most of them were neither wearing masks nor following the social distancing norms, he said. The district administration has banned all social and religious gatherings in the wake of COVID-19, he said. However, over 150 people gathered at the event on Tuesday, in violation of the collector's orders, the police official said.

Khujner tehsildar Shambhu Singh Meena said on getting information about the gathering, he went to the village and persuaded people to return to their homes following which the crowd dispersed.

CM RECEIVES 5 CRORE FOR VACCINATION



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was presented a check of Rs 5 crore by Procter and Gamble Home Procter Private Limited at the Chief Minister's residence on Thursday for vaccination in the state. Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang was present on the occasion. Plant Manager Mahim Agarwal and Senior Manager Sanjay Singh presented a check to Chief Minister Chouhan on behalf of Procter & Gamble.

Corona volunteers will be honoured on 15th August and 26th January: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the state's public-participation model has set an example in front of the country in controlling corona. Corona has been controlled in the state only as a result of coming together with the public in villages, wards, districts, cities and districts and the Crisis Management Committees taking responsibility and cooperating in the Janata curfew. 'Main Corona Volunteer Campaign' has also been a strong part of this entire campaign. To control the corona and prevent the third wave, the people of the state will have to join this campaign on a large scale. Chouhan appealed to NCC, NSS cadets, youth and teenagers to become Corona volunteers.

Chouhan was addressing the volunteers registered under the 'Main Corona Volunteer' campaign and the workers of Madhya Pradesh Jan Abhiyan Parishad virtually from Mantralaya on Thursday.

Chouhan also interacted virtually with Corona volunteers of Singrauli, Indore, Ujjain, Jabalpur, Shahdol, Satna, Gwalior and Bhopal. So far more than 1 lakh 19 thousand 730 people have been associat-



ed with the 'I Corona Volunteer' campaign. Out of these, more than 61 thousand volunteers contributed by being active daily under the Vaccination Coordinator, Medical Facility Coordinator, Mask Awareness Coordinator, Mohalla Toli Organization Coordinator and charity category.

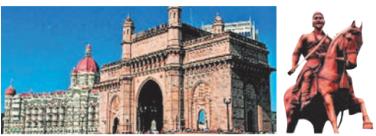
Addressing the district coordinators of Corona Volunteers and Jan Abhiyan Parishad, Chief Minister said that in all religions, the help of the victim is consid-

ered as the biggest virtue. The disaster of Corona is a terrible crisis in centuries. In such a situation, I am overwhelmed to see the dedication and hard work of the volunteers who have come forward risking their lives to serve the suffering humanity. Corona volunteers will be honoured with certificates on August 15 and January 26. Chouhan said that Corona is under control but the challenge is not over yet. It is a big responsibility to make people aware to follow Corona

friendly behavior and to ensure its compliance. This would not be possible without Corona Volunteers. Volunteers have to take the responsibility of their village, ward. Testing, contact tracing, kill corona campaigns will continue. It is only through these activities that we will be able to stop the third wave. Chief Minister inspired the Corona Volunteers to remain active with the lines of 'Sagar's own capacity but when human also gets tired.'

PRIORITY IN VACCINATION TO PARENTS OF CHILDREN BELOW 12 YEARS AND STUDENTS GOING ABROAD: CM

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that we have brought the second wave of Corona under control. Apprehension is being expressed about a third wave. Preparations have been started to counter the third wave. It is feared that its effect will be more on the children. In view of this apprehension, it has been decided to strengthen the health services. It has been decided to make special wards for children at different levels. Chouhan said this in a message issued to the media in Mantralaya. Chouhan said that it has also been decided that priority will be given to the parents whose children are below 12 years of age. Their vaccination is very important. Because if a child has an infection, it will be necessary for the mother or father to stay with the child. Once the parents are vaccinated, they will continue to take care of the children. Chouhan said that this fact has also come to my notice that many sons and daughters of Madhya Pradesh want to go abroad for education. Therefore, it has also been decided that the children who have to go abroad for education will be vaccinated on priority basis so that they can go abroad safely and get education.



U-TURN: LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS CONTINUE IN STATE

“The lockdown has not been lifted (from Friday). The proposal is still under consideration. In view of the deadly and changing form of the coronavirus, it is important to decide whether or not to life the ongoing curbs. The restrictions have not yet been lifted in the state.”

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In an abrupt U-turn, the Maharashtra government on Thursday said that lockdown restrictions have not been lifted in half the state from Friday, hours after Relief and Rehabilitation Minister Vijay Wadettiwar earlier in the day announced partial relaxations.

The state is still not completely free of the Covid-19 infection, with cases still on the rise in many rural areas and the proposals would be considered and implemented after a detailed review of the departments concerned in all districts, it said.

It pointed out that under its 'Break The Chain' orders, the government has started giving some relaxations on a regular basis and the Disaster Management Department is considering a five-phased unlockdown based on the



weekly Covid-19 positivity rate and the availability of oxygen beds.

Accordingly, the detailed guidelines in this regard, on tightening or easing of restrictions, shall be notified by the government soon, it said.

The state government's clarification came hours after Wadettiwar

held a press conference and unveiled the details of the unlockdown in half of Maharashtra - or 18 of the 36 districts - from June 4.

Apparently going on the backfoot, Wadettiwar defended his statements, claiming that the unlockdown proposals have been tentatively approved and the final decision would be taken by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

Meanwhile, Bharatiya Janata Party leader Sudhir Mungantiwar and others slammed the Maha Vikas Aghadi government for lack of coordination among the Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress which resulted in the hugely embarrassing developments.

Maharashtra also cancels HSC Board exams for 2021



Team Absolute | Mumbai

On expected lines, the Maharashtra government on Thursday too decided to cancel the HSC (Class 12) board exams for 2021 in view of the Covid-19 pandemic second wave, Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad announced. The move came a day

after a cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, in which all ministers of the ruling Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress unanimously spoke in favour of cancelling the exams. Gaikwad said in a statement that the decision has been taken to safeguard students' physical wellbeing

and mental health in view of the pandemic. The latest development came nearly two months after the Maha Vikas Aghadi government had cancelled the SSC (Class 10) board examinations on April 20, conducted by the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary & Higher Secondary Education, on similar grounds.

Pune continues to be among districts with high Covid-19 positivity

Officials urge citizens to avoid weekend picnics, celebrations in large groups to ensure the declining trend continues and economic activities are further opened up.

Team Absolute | Pune:

Although there has been a steady decline in coronavirus infections in the last few weeks, Pune district continues to be among the 10 districts whose weekly Covid positivity rate at 14.23 per cent is higher than the state average of 8.47 per cent. The data from a new report of the state health department also shows the state has recorded a decline in the weekly case growth, and rate of recovery is high across Maharashtra.

State surveillance officer Dr Pradeep Awate informed that it is likely that by the end of June there would be a gradual easing of restrictions. He said the epidemic curve of each district is dif-



ferent, and, therefore, some had cases earlier in the year like Amravati and Akola, while others in western Maharashtra reported a surge later. The data shows the cumulative active Covid cases in the state (2.3 lakh on June 1) have registered a drop of 24 per cent from the three lakh infections in September last year. According to a state health department report till June 1, the weekly Covid positivity rate in Maharashtra was 8.47 per cent. In the

week May 5-11, the weekly Covid positivity rate in the state was 22.57 per cent, which has now come down to 8.47 per cent in the week May 26 to June 1. There are 13 districts whose weekly Covid positivity rate is higher than the state average. These include Raigad (18.59 per cent), Ratnagiri (17.32 per cent), Satara (16.73 per cent), Sangli (16.10 per cent), Kolhapur (16.04 per cent), Pune (14.23 per cent), Buldhana (13.96 per cent), Sindhudurg (13.19 per cent), and Beed (9.06 per cent).

There are 13 districts whose weekly Covid positivity rate is higher than the state average. These include Raigad (18.59 per cent), Ratnagiri (17.32 per cent), Satara (16.73 per cent), Sangli (16.10 per cent), Kolhapur (16.04 per cent), Pune (14.23 per cent), Buldhana (13.96 per cent), Sindhudurg (13.19 per cent), and Beed (9.06 per cent).

According to the state report, till June 1, there were a total of 30,092 active patients with Covid in Pune followed by 20,777 in Satara, 20,147 in Mumbai, 18,590 in Kolhapur and 18,339 in Thane. Of the total of 2.30 lakh persons infected with the disease in the state, at present, 44,036 are critical of which 15,854 are in intensive care units.

In a positive development, there are nine districts whose weekly Covid positivity rate is less than five per cent and these include Nagpur, Yavatmal, Nandurbar, Chandrapur, Gondia, Dhule, Jalna, Nanded and Jalgaon.

BMC builds bridge over Mithi River in record 5 months

The swanking new bridge is 34 metres long, 24 metres wide and 7 metres high, and despite hurdles like many staff and workers getting infected by Covid-19, the construction was completed before monsoon as per plans, Velarasu added.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a feat, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) constructed an east-west connecting road bridge over the Mithi River in a record period

of five months and has thrown it open for traffic, an official said on Thursday.

The old and badly-dilapidated bridge, built in 1940, was declared dangerous and demolished in December 2020, BMC Additional Municipal Commissioner P. Velarasu said. Thereafter, taking advantage of the lockdown, the Bridges Department rebuilt the new bridge at the same location using the latest technology and construction techniques in just five months. The swanking new bridge is 34 metres long, 24 metres wide and 7 metres high, and despite hurdles like many staff and workers getting infected by Covid-19, the construction was completed before monsoon as per plans, Velarasu added. Compared with this,

the original bridge was much smaller, measuring 20 metres long, 7 metres wide and 6 metres high on that particular stretch of Mithi River - Mumbai's only freshwater river originating from the Sanjay Gandhi National Park - as it passes near Powai to south and finally merges with the Bandra Creek. The bridge connected the Filterpada area of the eastern suburbs with Aarey Colony in the western suburbs, making it a critical east-west link for the road traffic in both directions.

The new bridge incorporates a 1.20 metre wide footpath on both sides, 2 metres kept aside for waterlines or other utilities and a protective wall on two sides to escape the fury of the Mithi River which regularly floods during monsoon.

Won't allow 'experiments' with glitched ventilators: Bombay HC

AURANGABAD | Agencies

In a significant ruling the Bombay High Court has said that it will be the responsibility of the Centre in case any faulty ventilators supplied by a Gujarat-based company through the PM Cares Fund, cause deaths of Covid-19 patients.

In its verdict on Wednesday, a Division Bench comprising Justice Ravindra Ghuge and Justice B.U. Debadwar said that they would "not permit experimentation of ventilators which have undergone major repairs in treating the patients, since this would be causing a risk/health hazard to the patients, and unfortunately, the use of such ventilators may cause loss of life, which must be averted". After a submission by the Additional Solicitor-General of India Anil Singh,

that a team expert doctors from New Delhi - one each from Ram Manohar Lohiya Hospital and Safdarjung Hospital - would visit the Government Medical College & Hospital, Aurangabad (GMCH) today to inspect the defective ventilators, the court has posted the matter for further hearing on June 7.

The matter pertains to 150 ventilators provided to the GMCH in April under the PM Care Fund which were supplied by Rajkot-based Jyoti CNC, of which around 133 were found to be defective or malfunctioning. (IANS - May 18). A GMCH committee had submitted a report on the ventilators which suffered continuous breakdowns even after repairs, and hence the machines were not being used as a precautionary measure with the Maharashtra

Congress Spokesperson Sachin Sawant raising the issue in a big way. In their suo moto criminal PIL filed at the Aurangabad Bench, the judges said: "If the ventilators are found to be dysfunctional even after inspection/repairs, the manufacturer would be held liable and the Union of India shall press for replacement of such defective ventilators keeping in view that there exists a one-year manufacturer's warranty in relation to each of such ventilator." To this, Singh hastily added that no casualty would occur since these ventilators will not be made operational in the treatment of the patients until the team of the doctors visiting GMCH Aurangabad (today) and representatives of the manufacturer ensure that the ventilators are upto desirable operational standards.

Maharashtra agriculture department to farmers Avoid early sowing to avoid seed wastage

The advisory has warned of early sowing as it might lead to seeds failing to germinate due to insufficient soil moisture

Team Absolute | Pune

The Maharashtra agriculture department has advised farmers against early sowing even though many parts of the state have received a few pre-monsoon showers.

Farmers have been asked to undertake sowing only after their areas have received 80-100 mm of rainfall to avoid chances of seed wastage. Kharif activities have gathered momentum with farmers undertaking the preparation of soil



ahead of the sowing.

Over the last few days, many parts of the state have reported heavy to medium rainfall. Parts of Konkan Marathwada, Kolhapur, Pune, Sangli, Satara, and some parts of north Maharashtra and Vidharbha have seen sporadic showers. The dams

and reservoirs in the state have a decent amount of water. The monsoon arrived at the Kerala coast on Tuesday and it is expected the rains would reach Maharashtra in the next few days. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted a normal rainfall this season.

In its advisory, the agriculture department has advised farmers not to take up sowing for crops like soybean, cotton, maize etc. Rice growers in Vidharbha have been advised to keep nursery preparation ready but avoid transplantation. The advisory has warned of early sowing as it might lead to seeds failing to germinate due to insufficient soil moisture. The extension arm of the department has undertaken a massive drive using all mediums to discourage farmers from an early sowing. Maharashtra is expected to over 40 lakh hectares sowing of both cotton and soybean. Pulses like tur, urad and moong is expected to over a combined acreage of 20 lakh hectares. Sugarcane another important cash crop is expected to be over around 10 lakh hectares of area.

One out of five mucormycosis cases from Maharashtra: Centre to Bombay HC

According to state data, more than 5,000 mucormycosis cases have been reported in Maharashtra till date, of which 412 have succumbed to the disease while 1,024 have recovered.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra accounts for over 20 per cent of active mucormycosis cases in the country, according to an affidavit filed in the Bombay High Court on Saturday.

In an affidavit filed by Deputy Drugs Controller Rubina Bose of Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) on behalf of the central government in the High Court on Wednesday, the Union government said there were a total of 19,727 active cases of mucormycosis across the country, 3,931 of them in Maharashtra.

According to state data, more than 5,000 mucormycosis cases have been reported in Maharashtra till date, of which 412 have succumbed to the disease while 1,024 have recovered.

The affidavit stated that mucormycosis is not contagious and cases are likely to decline in proportion to the overall trend of decline in the number of active cases of Covid-19 in the country. "It is not possible to exactly predict the exact number of mucormycosis cases in the coming months," said the Union government. As per tentative estimates by the Joint Monitoring Group under the Directorate General of Health Sciences, 20 percent of the total active Covid-19 cases are moderate to severe and may require hospitalisation, and from these 20 per cent cases, 1 in 500 or 1,000 cases may develop mucormycosis. Due to the



surge in cases, the Centre has been assessing the availability of drugs, mainly Liposomal Amphotericin B, which is the primary choice and conventional medicine for treatment of patients, through domestic manufacturers and imports. The Centre told the court that it has been allotting the available quantity of Amphotericin B to states in accordance with the reported caseload and it has allotted 68,360 vials to Maharashtra till May 31 from the total 2,70,060 vials of the drug distributed so far. The Union government, through the Ministry of External Affairs is taking several steps to augment domestic production and imports. The Health Ministry has asked the MEA to take steps to procure 2,30,000 vials of Liposomal Amphotericin B from Australia, Russia, Germany, Argentina, Belgium and China.

CDSCO has also granted import licences to Ahmedabad-based Zydus Healthcare Ltd and Karnataka-based Stelis Biopharma Pvt Ltd to import Amphotericin B Liposomal injection from Taiwan-based companies. After an appeal to industries to scale up the production of the drug in the country, the Union government said the production of Amphotericin B Liposomal injection has been increased to 1.4 lakh in May from 62,000 in April, and it is expected to touch 3,57,600 injections in June. The central government has recently issued manufacturing and marketing permission of the drug to Emxure, Gufic, Alembic, Lyka, Natco and Intas Pharma.

Further, state governments have been asked to identify companies that are interested and capable of manufacturing the drug so that production is further increased.

Meanwhile, the Union government has discontinued the central allocation of Remdesivir injection to states in view of availability of sufficient doses. Remdesivir production in the country has been ramped up from 33,000 vials per day to 3,50,000 vials per day, stated the affidavit.



Actress Kirti Kulhari unveiled her character in the upcoming film "Shaadisthan" with an Instagram post on Thursday.

KIRTI KULHARI: HOT 'N' COOL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Kirti posted a picture of her protagonist Sasha, describing her as "coolest" and "most sorted". She sports a short bob paired with a red shirt and chunky sunglasses in the image. "Meet #SASHA. The coolest and the most sorted person I have

ever met in my life, on-screen and off-screen ... She is cool as a cucumber and hot as fire .. She is an ARTIST all the way... and a HUMAN all the way," Kirti wrote as caption.

"Shaadisthan" is set for a digital release on June 11. The actress will also be seen in the medical thriller web series "Human".

Alaya F. finds dieting hard around 'vada pav, jalebis'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Alaya F. had a revelation for fans on Thursday. She admitted she finds it difficult to diet around vada pav and jalebis. The svelte actress posted a throwback video clip on Instagram where she is seen asking her crew not to give her jalebis and vada pavs being served on set. Moments later, she is caught sneakily tucking in on the delicacies. "What can I say? It's hard dieting around vada pav and jalebis #throwback to some fun behind the scenes moments on set," she wrote as caption. Alaya made her Bollywood debut with "Jawaani Jaaneman" last year. She was recently seen in the music video "Aaj sajeya", directed by Punit Malhotra.



Big B posts wedding pics with Jaya on 48th anniversary

Team Absolute | Mumbai

On the occasion of his 48th marriage anniversary on Thursday, Amitabh Bachchan shared pictures from his wedding with actress-politician Jaya Bachchan on social media.

Big B posted a picture on Instagram from the day of his wedding. As caption, he wrote: "June 3, 1973... Thank you all for your greetings on our Anniversary."

The thespian took to his blog and thanked his fans, whom he fondly refers to as his EF or extended family.

"Thank you all with immense gratitude for the wishes for Jaya and me on our Wedding Anniversary. June 3, 1973... now 48 years!! Your wishes

and your gracious words have been most moving and filled with love for us.. and we truly appreciate them... For today and now.." he wrote on his blog.

The couple's romance began on the sets of "Guddi". The two have worked together in several successful films such as "Zanjeer", "Abhimaan", "Silila", "Chupke Chupke", "Mili", "Sholay" and "Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham."

VIVEK OBEROI DONATES RS 25 LAKH TOWARDS OXYGEN RELIEF

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Vivek Anand Oberoi has donated Rs 25 lakh to a fundraiser for the aid of people suffering from Covid-19. The actor has contributed to the I Am Oxygen Man initiative that he started recently.

"We all are seeing what the world is going through now, in this second Covid wave. With the I Am Oxygen Man initiative, we are trying to reach out to as many people as possible. We are already operating and maintaining a 200-bed free Covid hospital in Delhi, which has saved more than a thousand lives in the past few weeks alone. Our goal as a nation should be to make India ready for the third wave of Covid," the actor declared.

He added: "Whatever little I was able to contribute from my end for this noble cause, I gave it. Dr Vivek Bindra and his team are making miracles happen with the donations. Many of my friends from the industry also came forward and pledged support. If we all stand together and help each other, then we will definitely come out of this as a much stronger nation."

Besides the I Am Oxygen Man initiative, Vivek has sponsored free heart surgeries for underprivileged children. The actor has also been working with Cancer Patients Aid Association to feed 3000 underprivileged children who are fighting cancer.



POOJA BANERJEE HAPPY TO RESUME YOGA AFTER ACCIDENT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

"Kumkum Bhagya" actress Pooja Banerjee has revealed how she has finally resumed yoga after recovering from a major accident in 2019.

"I had met with an accident on the set of a reality show a few years ago and suffered from multiple fractures in both my arms due to the incident. In fact, I had to undergo a surgery for the same and they put two rods and eight screws into my hand," Pooja recalled.

Opening up on life after the surgery, she added: "After the surgery, I was in so much pain that I thought I'd never be able to get back to normalcy and use my hands properly. It was a task to pick up things or hold on to things. I couldn't work-out or do a lot of things that I loved. Some days were tough, some days were fine, but I kept motivating myself and got back to work slowly and steadily."

Pooja has finally resumed yoga and she says the activity it has been a source of peace and energy.



WOMEN ARE INCLINED TO SHOP THINKING OF SUSTAINABILITY

Puja Gupta | New Delhi

Nearly 62 percent of the visitors on Myntra For Earth's store are women, with metro cities contributing about 40 percent of the overall visits to the store, online shopping platform Myntra finds. People of all age groups are seemingly conscious about their fashion choices and their impact on the environment in varying degrees. However, those in the age group of 21 to 35 are contributing the highest to the growth of the store, it said. About 70 fashion and lifestyle brands partnered with Myntra over the last six months to offer over 5,500 styles to customers on its sustainable store for sustainability-inclined conscious shoppers.

The store focuses on handloom and handcrafted, organic, natural-dyed, recyclable and eco-friendly, vegan, and cruelty-free products. They also use recycled paper for packaging of the products. The brands associated includes H&M, Mango, Unnati Silks, Bharatsthal, Pothys, Metro Kids Company, Kama Ayurveda, Forest Essentials, Fab India, etc.





LANA PARRILLA OPENS 'WHY WOMEN KILL 2'

New York | Agencies

Actress Lana Parrilla has opened up about her role in the second season of "Why Women Kill".

"I play Rita in Why Women Kill season two. She is a sardonic wife, married to this elderly man, and she has waited long enough for her husband to die so she can live her best life," Parrilla said.

"She's the president of a gardening club that she rules with an iron fist and she spends most of her time perfecting her beauty and having this torrid affair with a handsome young buck!" she added.

The first season of the dark crime comedy show takes place in three different eras. The second season is around a main storyline, and takes place in 1949.

Parrilla added: "When I watched the first season, I actually binge watched it twice, I really wanted to

understand the show and the storytelling and also just the whole look of the show. This is very different because what we are doing on this show is the classic film noir style from the 1940s. So, it's going to have a different feel from the first season."

"From the sets coming back to real life, it is a weird transition, like when you go from a set in 1949 and you look up at your crew and everyone is wearing a mask. That's a bit disorienting. It just kind of snaps you back into reality," she said.

Parrilla said it is fun stepping into a time machine and going back to 1949 and experiencing the fashion and the language of the time, which is prevalent on the show.

"Marc Cherry did an excellent job bringing in that kind of dialogue, like 'Aw Geez!' and things that they would say back then. The most upsetting thing was coming back home and looking at my own closet and looking at the clothes and seeing how drab everything looks! I'm so over my own fashion," said the actress, who is known for her roles in films like "Frozen Stars" and "The Tax Collector" among others.

"Why Women Kill" season two streams on Voot Select starting June 3.



Kourtney Kardashian 'splashes out \$10m on swanky Palm Springs mansion' ahead of living it up at the new home for Memorial Day weekend

Los Angeles | Agencies

Kourtney Kardashian reportedly bought a new home in Palm Springs in May. The reality star, 42, decided to spend more than \$10million (£7million) on a six-bedroom property in the Californian desert, according to Us Weekly.

She gave her social media followers a brief behind-the-scenes look at the property over Memorial Day weekend, when she was seen spending time with her boyfriend Travis Barker and her kids three kids.

Kourtney, who shares Mason, 11, Penelope, eight, and Reign, six, whom she has with Scott Disick, posted a series of at-home snaps and videos including one which revealed her view of the mountains from the pool in her backyard.

Kourtney captioned the photos: 'happy weekend (sic)' and seemed to have soothed into life in her new home with ease.



Indiana Jones 5 'will start filming next week'

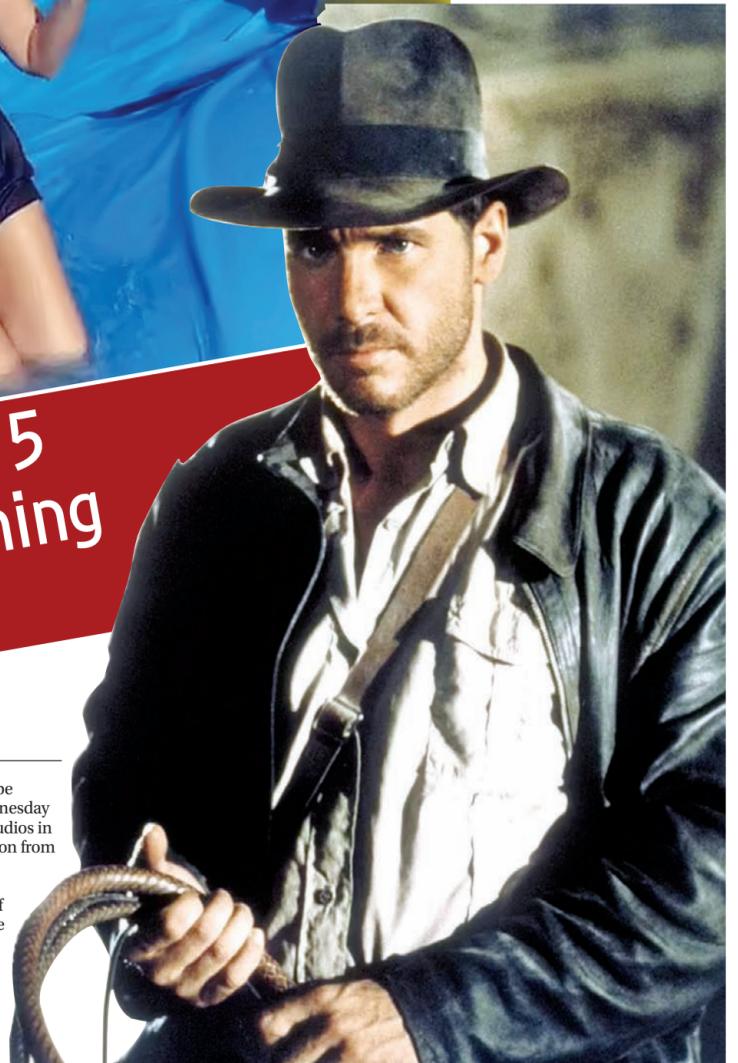
Los Angeles | Agencies

The long-awaited fifth installment of Indiana Jones will be underway soon after delays due to COVID-19. On Wednesday Deadline claimed filming would begin at Pinewood Studios in England next week. The site said they received the information from sources 'close to the production.'

The Sun added that shooting will also take place at the 'haunted' Bamburgh castle situated on the northeast coast of England by the village of Bamburgh in Northumberland. The crew is reportedly 'spooked' by the famed Pink Lady.

The movie stars Harrison Ford in the title role of the swashbuckling archeologist with supporting parts going to Mads Mikkelsen and Phoebe Waller-Bridge.

According to the publication, crew is worried about the castle as it is haunted by the Pink Lady from the Middle Ages who roams the halls.



Angelina Jolie 'will never forgive' Brad Pitt after he was awarded joint custody of their children and she 'feels the legal battle is far from over'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Angelina Jolie reportedly will 'never forgive' Brad Pitt after he was awarded joint custody of their children last week.

According to reports from

US Weekly on Tuesday, the actress, 45, was left 'bitterly disappointed' by the result and feels their legal battle is 'far from over'.

Angelina and Brad share children Maddox, 19, Pax, 17, Zahara, 16, Shiloh, 15,

and twins Knox and Vivienne, 12.

A source told the publication: 'She will never forgive him... She maintains it's far from over and still believes that justice will prevail.'

It was also claimed that the Maleficent star will give 'everything she's got' to appeal the decision in court.

The court ruled that Brad and Angelina will have shared custody of all their children with the exception of Maddox, who is no longer a minor.

MailOnline has contacted Angelina and Brad's representatives for further comment. On Thursday, sources close to the actress and humanitarian shared that she felt let down by the courts that did not allow her

children to testify at the custody hearings.

One person close to her claimed she did not object to the custody decision, but to a lack of 'care for her family,' according to Page Six. It was added the star did not feel the court 'took into account the full set of issues that affect her family.'

'The custody schedule was always determined by the court,' the source explained. 'It's sad that Brad's people are gloating about a potential win when beating a system that exists to protect families and children from issues that harm their well-being is not something to brag about.'

They stressed that Jolie wasn't simply trying to deprive Pitt of time with his children.



Lottie Moss pouts for the camera as she tries on a wavy bubblegum pink wig teamed with glowing make-up and a busty tie-dye top



Pouts for the camera

Los Angeles | Agencies

Lottie Moss tried out different looks on Wednesday, as she took to Instagram to showcase a variety of wigs. In a pouting video, the model, 23, posed with bubblegum pink locks, which she wore in light waves around her features, reports dailymail.uk.co. She accentuated the look with bright pink lipstick, giving herself a peachy glow with foundation and adding a light brushing of mascara to her lashes. She wore a tie-dye top, in neon pink and blue, posing for her camera to show off her angles.

She put on the busty display for her followers, before slipping out of the ensemble and posing topless - this time in a jet black wig. Lottie set pulses racing on Tuesday night too. The younger sister of supermodel Kate Moss could barely contain her ample assets in a racy strapless corset.

Lottie teamed the item of clothing with a tartan mini skirt with buckle fastenings on the side of it.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



AnnaLynne McCord



EDITOR'S SPECS

Beneficial lockdown

The study led by scientists from the Central University of Jharkhand and University of Southampton in the UK found that the significant environmental improvement was due to an abrupt reduction in industrial activities and a major decrease in the use of land and air transport. The team used data from a range of Earth Observation sensors, including those from the European Space Agency's Sentinel-5p and NASA's MODIS sensors, to measure changes in surface temperature and atmospheric pollutants and aerosols. They compared data from the 2020 March to May lockdown with pre-pandemic years in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad, say researchers.

THE FIRST COVID-19 LOCKDOWN IN INDIA LED TO AN IMPROVEMENT IN AIR QUALITY AND A REDUCTION IN LAND SURFACE TEMPERATURE IN DELHI, MUMBAI, KOLKATA, CHENNAI, BANGALORE, AND HYDERABAD, SAY RESEARCHERS.

from the 2020 March to May lockdown with pre-pandemic years in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad. Their findings, published in the journal Environmental Research, revealed a significant reduction in Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂), a greenhouse gas emitted from the combustion of fossil fuels, which equated to an average decrease of 12 per cent throughout India and 31.5 per cent over the six cities. There was a 40 per cent reduction over the national capital. The study also found Land Surface Temperature over major cities in India substantially declined in contrast with the previous five-year average (2015-2019) with day temperatures being up to 1 degree Celsius cooler and those at night up to 2 degree Celsius cooler. "The lockdown provided a natural experiment to understand the coupling between urbanisation and local microclimate. We clearly observed that reduction in anthropogenic activity during lockdown resulted in a decrease in local day and night-time temperature. This is an important finding to feed into the planning for sustainable urban development," said Professor Jadu Dash, from University of Southampton. Further, the atmospheric fluxes at the surface and top of the atmosphere also saw a significant decline over major parts of India. The reduction of greenhouse gas concentration, higher atmospheric water vapour content and meteorological conditions played a complex role in the land and near-surface temperature reduction. "The aerosol type sources, such as organic carbon (OC), black carbon (BC), mineral dust, and sea salt also reduced significantly," said Bikash Parida, from Central University of Jharkhand.

Shahroz Afridi

Chandravati Gaund, who lives in Phular said, "We had to borrow atta (wheat flour) from the neighbours to feed guests who would come by rarely." Else, the non-descript village with 92 houses and 975 people - home to the Gond tribe - survived on kodokutki (a raw variety of rice) and barley. Things changed drastically after 2006 when the people's movement, Ekta Parishad, made inroads into the hamlet. They helped the residents understand their claim to the land. Parishad's founding member and a proponent of Gandhian ideals, PV Rajagopal, started the stir to pressure the Union government to implement the Forest Rights Act (FRA). It was passed in 2006 to "recognise the forest rights and occupation in the forest land of the Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers". A march to remember a year after FRA's birth, Rajagopal helmed the Janadesh Yatra to better inform the people about the rights granted by the FRA. About 25,000 people participated in the Yatra, marching from Gwalior to Delhi to make a statement. This included 325 people from Phular and its neighbouring village, Jabera, whose residents had also long lived in fear. "Government officials asked us to vacate the lands on many occasions. We were helpless until members of the Ekta Parishad intervened. They told us that this land was ours," said Ghanashyam Prasad, convener of Manav Jeevan Vikas Samiti and a resident of Jabera. Prasad, along with Ekta Parishad, passed on this information to other villagers. The aware-

CREDIT CONSCIOUSNESS: A FIXED INCOME BEHAVIOUR ASSESSMENT

Suyash Choudhary

The credit market had approached the first wave of the pandemic last year with a certain amount of caution. The economic fallout was hard to predict given the unique nature of the shock. This, alongside recent specific events in the market, was justifiably weighing on risk perceptions even as spreads on offer were fairly lucrative. As it turned out the right analytical construct for assessing the Covid shock was that of the 'K' shaped recovery. Thus for the larger / better to do companies and individuals this was largely a stoppage in time without much impact to survivability. In fact many companies actually succeeded in meaningfully deleveraging themselves and creating cash on balance sheet.

Financial institutions, as lenders to such companies, also benefitted in their risk profiles even as many proactively raised additional capital to further buffer their balance sheets. Many individuals also emerged financially stronger from the first wave since there was an element of forced saving owing to curtailment of activity. For the bottom half of the K, however, things became worse as economic survivability was called into question. Both firms and individuals here have much less financial flexibility and are prone to suffering the brunt of economic shocks given very thin safety buffers. While this constitutes a major welfare issue, there is little immediately obvious impact from this in the kind of data that generally gets viewed from the cold prism of financial markets.

■ The Price of Caution and the Rewards for 'Keeping the Faith'

As a result of the above dynamics, the risk perception of the market improved dramatically in the months following the first wave. Supply of paper from issuers dwindled following the deleveraging efforts by many companies. The economy bounced back strongly as well thereby further cementing risk perceptions. These have resulted in dramatic compression in credit spreads for the most part (some segments have still struggled with nar-

rative perceptions or business model vulnerabilities but these increasingly have been fewer and farther between).

An important contributing factor has been the extended period of very low overnight rates, which has further contributed to the ongoing chase for carry. To be clear this isn't a criticism of RBI policy since the accommodation provided is more than justified given the economic shock, but merely an observation on what extended periods of loose financial conditions invariably bring.

Investors who had kept the faith' last year have been rewarded handsomely as credit conservatism got heavily penalized owing to the above developments. Now a more damaging second wave has hit the economy, but recent experience has been very reassuring for the market and hence there has been no pressure at all on credit spreads so far.

The market has RBI's proactive assurance that the central bank is battle-ready and is thus expecting loose financial conditions to continue for the foreseeable future. Embedded in recent memory also is the fact that there was a substantial price to pay last year for conservatism given the financial impact of the first wave as described above.

The financial system looks largely robust, a point that we have noted since end of last year as one of the tailwinds now for the Indian economy. Additionally, the global construct is very different now. Large parts of the global economy (especially the developed world) have been fueled by extra-ordinary fiscal stimuli and have progressed well on vaccination. As a result they are coming back strongly thereby lifting prospects of our own exports at least for a while. Also basis this global optimism, commodity prices have risen sharply to multi-year highs thereby creating strong tailwinds for many business models in the credit space.

■ The Euphoria Safeguards

There are certain standard aspects of euphoria that need to be taken note of: 1> The investment narrative sounds very compulsive and hence risk perceptions are there for that much weaker.

2> Risks even if assessed seem too theoretical and far-fetched especially when seen in the light of concurrent experiences 3> Lower levels of risk compensation sustain owing to pressures of the day to day' and because longer term narratives seem supportive of lower risk perceptions (market knows best).

If some of what is happening today meets the above definition, then it may purely be coincidental. Almost by definition, naysayers are often early and mostly wrong (at least for all practical purposes) in times like these. The objective here is certainly not to stand in the way of the flow or the narrative, for fear of the great risk of injury that often comes with such a course of action. Instead the idea is to merely flesh out the nuance and put some pointers on the table which will hopefully help with navigating this phase of fixed income markets.

■ Consciousness versus Conservatism

Consciousness pertains to a level of awareness whereas conservatism describes one's general philosophy. This distinction, and the nuance associated, is very important in the current discussion. In the context of fixed income, there is reason now to raise one's level of consciousness even as the general philosophy is a matter more of personal choice. The starting point of this adaptation is a recognition grounded in basic humility that one can't see all risks especially when the pro-cyclical narrative is as strong as it is today (this is notwithstanding a robust credit assessment process which is a given). One then overlays two additional points: 1> The economic damage from the second wave seems both intense and widespread and may weigh on certain pockets of issuer risk perception with a lag.

2> The spreads on offer versus the additional risk taken are now quite modest for the most part (one has to allow for exceptions that would represent the '½pockets' of opportunities). Put another way, the costs associated with preferring quality have diminished substantially. This is especially true as term



spreads continue to be quite wide. This is relevant since in order to enhance yield an investor can always choose to increase average maturity of investments by a couple of years and remain in the highest quality rather than dilute quality by taking on more credit risk.

■ Conclusion

Apart from everything else that they have been, the past 14 months have been an analytical whirlwind. The sheer magnitude of the initial shock justifiably triggered the need for safety in investments for many. As it turned out, however, the nature of the shock and the subsequent behaviour of lenders and companies ended up substantially rewarding the risk taker during that phase.

The current phase is marked by a meaningful compression in spreads reflecting these developments, continuation of highly accommodative financial conditions, as well as a global narrative that is overwhelming pro-cyclical. In the midst of these, India's second wave has (at least basis anecdotal evidence) wreaked havoc to purchasing power and financial security across a large swathe of economic agents. Even given the hangover from last year's implications for conservatism, spreads on offer now are generally very low thereby tilting the scales towards preference for quality.

At the very least, this backdrop calls for greater credit consciousness and a heightened awareness of how much reward one is getting versus risk taken. These also need to be measured in context of significantly elevated term spreads.

(Suyash Choudhary is Head of Fixed Income, IDFC AMC. The views expressed are personal)

Shashi Bhushan

Standing in solidarity of workers facing violent attack from ruling TMC, the BJP has started explaining its workers across the country about attacks its cadre is facing in West Bengal. The BJP teams from the rest of the country will likely visit West Bengal to tell cadres in the eastern state that the whole party is with

them. A senior BJP leader said that the entire exercise has been started to keep its cadres intact in West Bengal after reports that some of turncoats who joined the party before the State Assembly polls and cadres on ground were trying to leave the saffron fold to join back Trinamool. Senior leaders had interacted with party workers in Uttarakhand and Assam.

On Wednesday a similar interaction was planned with the Delhi

poll violence in West Bengal by Trinamool goons. He answered

Amid 'ghar wapsi' in Bengal, BJP makes last bid to hold on to TMC turncoats



unit which was to be addressed by National Joint General Secretary (Organisation) Shiv Prakash, who oversees the BJP's poll management in West Bengal.

On Tuesday, BJP National General Secretary and in-charge of West Bengal, Kailash Vijayvargiya held a virtual meeting with the party workers from Uttarakhand.

Uttarakhand BJP chief Madan Kaushik told correspondent that Vijayvargiya held the virtual interaction with workers of the hill state and explained the violence and atrocities done to party cadres by Trinamool Congress in West Bengal. "Vijayvargiya explained how many BJP workers and leaders were attacked and killed in post

queries of our workers related to the ground situation in West Bengal." He said that despite adverse conditions, BJP workers are holding their grounds in West Bengal," Kaushik said.

Kaushik further said that a team of Uttarakhand BJP leaders and workers will visit West Bengal to extend their solidarity to cadres there. Rajya Sabha member and BJP National General Secretary, Bhupendra Yadav also held a similar interaction with workers in Assam, where the saffron party had claimed that it's workers took shelter following the brutal attacks by the Trinamool workers.

"Spoke at a video conference organised by Assam BJP on

'Harassment of BJP karyakartas in West Bengal'. Victims of Bengal violence are taking refuge in Assam. The human rights violations under the Mamata Banerjee regime must stop." Yadav tweeted on Tuesday evening. A senior party functionary said that the whole exercise is being done to motivate demoralised cadres who felt that they were left alone to defend themselves against TMC workers in post-poll violence.

"Standing in solidarity with West Bengal workers is need of hours as they feel that senior central leaders left them after declaration of Assembly polls results. There are reports that some of our cadres are in touch with TMC to change side.

"It is an effort to convey to them that the whole party is with workers of West Bengal and they are not alone in their fight against the undemocratic Mamata Banerjee government," he said.

Delhi BJP General Secretary, Harsh Malhotra said, "Today evening, Shiv Prakashji will brief us about the difficult situation our workers in West Bengal are working in. All of Delhi BJP is with them as they are part of our family."

How a tribal village in Damoh fought for its land and rejuvenated it



Even a decade ago, the villagers of Phular in Damoh district of Madhya Pradesh had no claim on the lands that they had lived in for generations. They lived under the constant fear of government officials destroying their crops or asking them to vacate these lands. The aridity and limited prospects of agriculture further compounded their poverty.

ness sessions boosted their confidence, which was further bolstered by the Union government's promise to implement the FRA with immediate effect.

The process of reclaiming land under FRA started in 2009 with 90 families submitting the required forms. Of these, 45 claims were rejected. The beginning of the reclamation process was marred with such incidents of rejection and general confusion over the paperwork. Most villagers did not know where to get the forms, which ones to fill and where to submit them, besides the other formalities they needed to go through to claim their land.

Prasad and his team stepped in to assist the people. They relentlessly trudged through the bureaucratic quagmire till 2017 and helped 128 families (out of the 162) claim their rights. As a result, 221.118 hectares of land have been claimed. And, the contrast to the situation from a decade ago is stark. "Before 2007, only 30-40 families owned agricultural fields," said Gopal Kurmi, Panchayat Sachiv, a ground-level state employee responsible for implementing all the government schemes under the Panchayat and Rural Development Department.

Turning barren land fertile The successful fight to reclaim their land raised the morale of villagers. There was an urge to do more with this land, utilise it more efficiently. The native landowners were only too aware of how Damoh's acute water shortage was limiting their traditional means of agriculture. Thus, it was imperative to find solutions to improve these circumstances.

The residents of Phular had networked with water experts during the Janadesh Yatra of 2009 who had recounted the many benefits of creat-

ing small water structures and practising rain-water harvesting. Upon returning to their hamlet, the villagers levelled the fields, created small ponds, and constructed boundaries to catch rainwater.

Vimla Bahin, who has been the unsung guardian of Phular -- for she had constantly resisted the government efforts to usurp their lands before FRA came into force -- took the lead among the women in charting and creating these water bodies.

"A member from each family would donate labour to develop small ponds in the low lying

places," said Amar Singh Gound who played a crucial role in identifying sites for making ponds and gathering the village folk for shramdaan. This slowly changed the

face of Phular. By 2011, there were dozens of such structures, and farmers realised that their agricultural produce had increased, along with their groundwater table.

Amar Singh Gound added that earlier, one farmer had an average production of 30-40 quintals of grains. It is now at least 70 quintals per farmer.

"At present, every farmer has a reserve of 8-10 quintal of grains at his home," said Sone Singh Gound, a farmer. He has seen veritable growth on his land. His crop inventory now includes onion, brinjal (eggplant) and tomatoes. The kharif crops include wheat, channa (chickpeas), and masoor (lentils) and rabi crops include rice, makka (corn), jowar (sorghum), bajra (pearl millets), moong (pulses), arhar (yellow split pigeon peas) or urad (black gram). The water catchment has created the scope for farming all year round. It has helped many of the villagers stay home, rather than go to places like Delhi, Punjab, Guna and Ashoknagar in search of labour opportunities.

"This is a dry area. Agriculture was completely dependent on natural rains," said Kurmi, the Panchayat Sachiv. The villagers, he added, used to migrate to bigger cities in September-October and return in June when the skies promised rains. But now, they stay and plant crops throughout the year.

Apart from the bustling agriculture at Phular, many people continue their traditional activities of collecting forest produce and maintaining livestock.

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



NEW ISRAELI COALITION GOVT PUSHES FOR EARLY SWEARING-IN

Tel Aviv | Agencies

Israel's new coalition government is pushing to be sworn in by Parliament as early as June 7, according to media reports on Thursday.

The reports said the factions around the leader of the Yesh Atid (Future) party, Yair Lapid, are also trying to replace parliamentary speaker Yariv Levin, dpa news agency.

According to the reports, the reason behind the move are efforts by long-time Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's camp to prevent the planned coalition of eight parties.

A spokesperson for Lapid did not initially comment on the matter.

On Wednesday evening, the former opposition leader Lapid informed President Reuven Rivlin that he formed a coalition with eight parties from all political camps.

The coalition has a slim majority of 61 out of 120 seats in the Knesset. Initially, it was said that the necessary vote and swearing-in ceremony



in Parliament would probably take place on June 14.

Among others, the ultra-right Yamina (Rightwards) party of former Defence Minister Naftali Bennett is part of the coalition. The new coalition also includes Ra'am, an Islamist party headed by Mansour Abbas,

marking the first time for an Arab party to be part of a coalition in Israel. According to a rotation agreement, Bennett will initially become premier and be replaced by Lapid two years later. This would be the first time in 12 years that a government has been formed without the

right-wing conservative head of government Netanyahu.

For the unusual coalition to begin its work, a simple majority of the 120 legislators must vote in favour of it.

It is expected that Netanyahu's supporters will try to derail the shaky alliance of Lapid and Bennett before the swearing-in ceremony.

Even after the signing of the coalition agreement, there are reports of at least one possible defection in the ranks of the Yamina party.

Early Thursday morning, Lapid wrote on Twitter that the new government "will work in the service of all Israeli citizens, those who voted for it and those who did not".

"It will respect its opponents and do everything in its power to unite and connect all parts of Israeli society." "The move comes amid a series of inconclusive elections and a lingering political deadlock.

The deal paves the way to the end of the rule of Netanyahu, who has been facing a criminal trial over corruption charges in three separate cases.

Iran dampens hopes for early agreement in nuke dispute

Tehran | Agencies

Iran has dampened hopes of an early agreement in its dispute with the US over the 2015 nuclear deal. "We have come closer, but we are still far from an agreement," Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Thursday.

He did not want to confirm speculation that the nuclear negotiations in Vienna would enter the final round next week, reports dpa news agency. Before that, Araghchi said, the US and other parties would have to make "some difficult decisions". Iran's final decision would also definitely not be made in Vienna, but in Tehran, the Deputy Minister and head of Iran's delegation in Vienna said.

A new problem in the Vienna negotiations is the imminent change of political power in Iran. The top favourite in the presidential election is the arch-conservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi, who had always sharply criticised the 2015 Vienna nuclear agreement.

Whether he will continue President Hassan Rouhani's moderate course is questionable, according to observers.

It is also unclear at present who will soon be appointed as chief nuclear negotiator and lead the negotiations on behalf of Iran.

According to European diplomats, the negotiations to save the nuclear agreement with Iran are heading for the most delicate phase. Representatives from Germany, France



and Britain have been trying since early April, together with Russia and China, to mediate between Iran and the US. At stake are the difficult questions which of the many Iran sanctions Washington is willing to lift and how to permanently prevent Iranian nuclear facilities from being used for military purposes.

Under the leadership of the previous president Donald Trump, Washington had unilaterally left the nuclear pact in 2018 and again imposed economically painful sanctions on Tehran. The Islamic Republic then gradually expanded its nuclear activities in contravention of the agreements and restricted international nuclear inspections. Most recently, Iran began producing uranium that is just below the purity level suitable for nuclear weapons.

Czech PM to face vote of no confidence

Prague | Agencies

The government of embattled Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis will face a vote of no confidence on Thursday after representatives of five opposition conservative and liberal parties announced earlier in the week that they planned to bring the motion.

Babis is accused of having a conflict of interest as a politician and founder of a business conglomerate, and he has been threatened with prosecution for fraud relating to EU subsidies, reports dpa news agency. He is also accused of failure in the fight against the coronavirus.

A simple majority of all 200 members of parliament is required for a successful vote of no confidence. The five parties together have 68 MPs, and additional votes are



expected from right-wing MPs.

There has only been one successful no-confidence vote in Czech history.

Regardless of the outcome of the vote, President Milos Zeman has announced that the Cabinet would remain in office until parliamentary elections in October.

According to a recent poll by the Median agency, Babis' ANO party would only come second in an election, with 23 per cent of the vote.

The strongest grouping would be the electoral alliance of the Pirate Party and the Mayors and Independents party with 24 per cent.

PAKISTAN MOST AT RISK DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE: PM

Islamabad: Pakistan is among the countries most at risk due to climate change, Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Thursday. "We are more vulnerable than Bangladesh due to the melting of our glaciers. It is not our fault. There are giants that contribute to carbon emissions but countries like us face the consequences," Dawn news quoted Khan as saying at an event here.

"For the first time in the US, President Joe Biden's administration is focusing on climate change. The previous administration was not thinking about environmental degradation," he added. Khan reiterated that it was imperative to take steps to protect the environment, which include making national parks, planting trees and carrying out urban forestry.

"We need to utilise all available resources to increase the number of trees in the country."

Nigerian govt accuses Twitter of double standards

Abuja | Agencies

The Nigerian government has expressed doubts about Twitter's mission in the country, accusing the micro-blogging platform of double standards and supporting the secessionists in the west African nation.

Information and Culture Minister Lai Mohammed took a swipe at Twitter after it deleted a tweet by President Muhammadu Buhari who issued a warning to troublemakers in Nigeria, Xinhua news agency reported. "We have a country to rule, and we will do so to the best of our ability. Twitter's mission in Nigeria is very suspect, they have an agenda. The mission of Twitter in Nigeria is very suspicious," Mohammed said on Wednesday. In the deleted



tweet, Buhari had made a reference to the country's 30-month civil war in 1967-1970, warning "those who wanted the government to fail" to desist from fomenting trouble. "Many of those misbehaving today are too young to be aware of the

destruction and loss of lives that occurred during the Nigeria civil war. Those of us in the fields for 30 months, who went through the war, will treat them in the language they understand," the President tweeted on Tuesday night.

Twitter deleted the President's post on Wednesday, following criticisms from some netizens. However, Mohammed questioned the rule of Twitter. "Twitter may have its own rules, it's not the universal rule. If Mr. President, anywhere in the world feels very bad and concerned about a situation, he is free to express such views," he said. The social networking service, he said, had overlooked the tweets of leading secessionists in Nigeria. "When people were burning police stations and killing policemen in Nigeria during End SARS, a decentralised social movement, for Twitter, it was about the right to protest. But when a similar thing happened in the United States, it became insurrection," Mohammed said.

US chopper makes emergency off-base landing in Japan

Tokyo | Agencies

A US military helicopter made an emergency off-base landing on a small island in Japan's southernmost prefecture of Okinawa, authorities said on Thursday.

The incident, which occurred at around 11 p.m. on Wednesday, involved a UH-1 helicopter with five crew members aboard landing in a field on Tsuken Island due to engine trouble, the US military told the Okinawa prefectural police.

No hazardous material was being carried by the chopper and none of the crew were injured in the incident, Xinhua news agency reported.

The emergency landing did not damage the helicopter, which was made just 120 metre away from a house on the island.

The island is home to just 380 people and located off the main island of



Okinawa.

The five crew members belonged to the US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, local police official confirmed.

Following the incident, the Japanese government set up a task force team on Thursday involving officials from the Foreign Ministry, the Defence Ministry and the Cabinet Secretariat to investigate the matter. Residents and officials in Okinawa have long been perturbed by numerous incidents of US military air-

craft accidents and mishaps.

Okinawa hosts the bulk of US military facilities in Japan, yet the tiny sub-tropical island accounts for just a small fraction of Japan's total landmass.

Along with a steady flow of accidents and mishaps involving US military aircraft, Okinawa residents have also suffered from environmental and noise pollution.

There have also been numerous cases of local citizens being victims of US base-linked workers' criminal activities.

In addition, the planned relocation of the US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from the densely populated city of Ginowan to a coastal region also in Okinawa, has deeply upset and angered locals and officials.

They have long-called for their US base-hosting burdens to be lifted and for the Futenma base to be relocated out of Okinawa or Japan altogether.

TOP GERMAN, US OFFICIALS DISCUSS NORD STREAM 2 PIPELINE

Washington: High-ranking government representatives of the US and the Germany held discussions over the disputed German-Russian gas pipeline, Nord Stream 2. US President Joe Biden's National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met German Chancellor Angela Merkel's foreign policy advisor Jan Hecker on Wednesday, the National Security Council in Washington announced.

Their talks also focused on US concerns about the impact of the pipeline on Ukraine and European energy security, dpa news agency reported. Other topics included the upcoming summits of the G7 and NATO countries, the fight against the coronavirus pandemic and cybersecurity. The German Chancellor's Office did not want to comment on possible results of the meeting when asked on Thursday. A spokesperson merely referred to the statement made the day before by deputy government spokesperson Martina Fietz, according to which such meetings were part of the normality of US-German cooperation. In May, the US government had deliberately refrained from imposing sanctions on the company operating the pipeline.

In a report from the State Department to the US Congress, it was stated that not imposing sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG in Zug, Switzerland, its German managing director Matthias Warnig and four other employees was in the "national interest."

Myanmar military court sentences journo to jail

Nay Pyi Taw | Agencies

A court of the military junta in Myanmar has sentenced two journalists to two years in jail each after reporting on the anti-military protests.

The court in the southern city of Myeik found both reporters guilty of sedition based on a criminal law dating back to colonial times, dpa news agency reported on Thursday.

Aung Kyaw, a reported for broadcaster Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), and Zaw Zaw, a freelance reporter for online portal Mizzima News, had been reporting on the protests against the military coup until they were arrested a few weeks ago, the media outlets and human rights organisations said late on Wednesday. he US Committee to

Protect Journalists (CPJ), which fights for freedom of the press worldwide, called for the immediate release of the journalists. "Reporting the news is not a crime. Myanmar's junta must stop jailing and sentencing journalists on fabricated charges, and should allow the press to work freely," said Shawn Crispin, CPJ South-East Asia representative. On May 12, journalist Min Nyo of the Democratic Voice of Burma was sentenced for the first time under article 505a in Myanmar to three years in jail.

On May 25, authorities in Myanmar detained Danny Fenster, an American journalist working at a local English-language publication, at the Yangon airport shortly before boarding a flight back home. The charges against Fenster are however, unknown.

UN calls on nations to meet commitments to restore 1 bn hectares of land

Nairobi | Agencies

Facing the triple threat of climate change, loss of nature and pollution, the world must deliver on its commitment to restore at least one billion degraded hectares of land in the next decade -- an area about the size of China.

Countries also need to add similar commitments for oceans, said a new report on Thursday prepared by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), launched as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 gets underway.

he report, "Becoming #GenerationRestoration: Ecosystem restoration for People, Nature and Climate", highlights that humanity is using about 1.6 times the amount of services that nature can provide sustainably.

That means conservation efforts alone are insufficient to prevent large-scale ecosystem collapse and biodiversity loss. Global terrestrial restoration costs -- not including costs of restoring marine ecosystems -- are estimated to be at least USD 200 billion per year by 2030.

The report outlines that every \$1 invested in restoration creates up to \$30 in economic benefits. Ecosystems requiring urgent restoration include farmlands, forests, grasslands and savannahs, mountains, peatlands, urban areas, freshwaters, and oceans.

Communities living across almost two billion of degraded

hectares of land include some of the world's poorest and marginalized.

"This report presents the case for why we must all throw our weight behind a global restoration effort. Drawing on the latest scientific evidence, it sets out the crucial role played by ecosystems, from forests and farmland to rivers and oceans, and it charts the losses that result from a poor stewardship of the planet," UNEP Executive Director, Inger Andersen, and FAO Director-General, QU Dongyu, wrote in the report's foreword.

"Degradation is already affecting the well-being of an estimated 3.2 billion people -- that is 40 per cent of the world's population. Every single year we lose ecosystem services worth more than 10 per cent of our global economic output," they added, stressing that "massive gains await us by reversing these trends.

Ecosystem restoration is the process of halting and overturning degradation, resulting in cleaner air and water, extreme weather mitigation, better human health, and recovered biodiversity, including improved pollination of plants.

Restoration encompasses a wide continuum of practices, from reforestation to re-wetting peatlands and coral rehabilitation. It contributes to the realization of multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including health, clean water, and peace and security, and to the objectives of the three Rio Conventions' on Climate, Biodiversity, and Desertification.

Actions that prevent, halt and reverse degradation are necessary to meet the Paris Agreement target of keeping global temperature rise well below two degrees Celsius.

Restoration, if combined with stopping further conversion of natural ecosystems, may help avoid 60 per cent of expected biodiversity extinctions.

It can be highly efficient in producing multiple economic, social and ecological benefits concurrently -- for example, agroforestry alone has the potential to increase food security for 1.3 billion people, while investments in agriculture, mangrove protection and water management will help adapt to climate change, with benefits around four times the original investment.

Reliable monitoring of restoration efforts is essential, both to track progress and to attract private and public investments. In support of this effort, FAO and UNEP also launched the Digital Hub for the UN Decade, which includes the Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring.

The Framework enables countries and communities to measure the progress of restoration projects across key ecosystems, helping to build ownership and trust in restoration efforts. It also incorporates the Drylands Restoration Initiatives Platform, which collects and analyses data, shares lessons and assists in the design of drylands restoration projects, and an interactive geospatial mapping tool to assess the best locations for forest restoration.

UN AIDS CHIEF CALLS FOR NEW MOMENTUM IN FIGHT AGAINST HIV

Geneva: The fight against the coronavirus pandemic must also spur global efforts to defeat HIV infection and AIDS, the head of the UN Programme to Fight AIDS, Winnie Byanyima, has said. The Covid pandemic has made political leaders aware of how vulnerable we all are, how it shuts down economies, we must renew the momentum to fight AIDS," Byanyima told dpa news agency. Byanyima is executive director of UNAIDS which plans to present a report on Thursday showing that more efforts are needed to also achieve its stated goal of defeating the HIV pandemic by 2030. "We have proven that science can bring solutions in short time, we proved that governments can bring together resources," Byanyima said.

She is therefore cautiously optimistic that the same can be done to end the HIV pandemic.

It has been 40 years since the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) first reported on the then mysterious immunodeficiency disease on June 5, 1981. Next week, the UN plans to launch a new appeal for donations at an AIDS summit in New York. In the past 40 years, nearly 35 million people have died from complications of AIDS. "Those lives matter, like the ones taken by Covid," Byanyima said.



The Hockey5s flagship event is a brand-new FIH competition. Sixteen teams per gender - three per continent plus Oman as hosts -- will take part in the maiden edition. Continental Hockey5s qualifiers for the World Cup will be organised next year.

HOCKEY5S WORLD CUP 2024

Lausanne | Agencies

Oman has beaten India, Pakistan and Singapore to win the bid to host the first edition of the FIH Hockey5s World Cups for men and women, to be played in January 2024. Matches will take place in Omani capital Muscat, the FIH announced on Thursday.

"We're convinced that Hockey5s will play a key role in the growth of hockey worldwide. This is why this World Cup has been created, as well as a Hockey5s World Tour, which we are currently working on and which fans and athletes will have a glimpse of soon with the FIH

OMAN BEATS INDIA TO BECOME FIRST HOST



Hockey5s Lausanne 2021 event," said FIH CEO Thierry Weil. Upon recommendation from the

task force events bidding -- comprising Executive Board members of all five continental federations), the

Executive Board of the FIH -- has appointed Oman as the host country for the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cups, said the FIH statement. "I am very pleased and delighted. We happily undertake this great responsibility to deliver the first ever FIH Hockey 5s World Cup at the highest possible standard. We will build state-of-the-art facilities and provide best conditions for the athletes," said Oman Hockey Association president Captain Talib Al Wahaibi.

"Winning the rights to host this innovative and attractive hockey tournament will open up great horizons and showcase the Sultanate of Oman around the world."

FRENCH OPEN

Medvedev beats Paul to enter third round



Paris | Agencies

Second seed Daniil Medvedev defeated American Tommy Paul 3-6, 6-1, 6-4, 6-3 to enter third round of French Open at Roland Garros late on Wednesday. The Russian, who had registered his first career win at Roland Garros in the first round earlier, beat Paul in a game that saw him

bounce back from one set down.

The 25-year-old, who is eyeing the world No. 1 spot in the tournament, had arrived in Paris with a 0-4 record here. But he has been impressive through this campaign, losing just one set in the first two matches. He will play American Reilly Opelka for a place in the fourth round.

Serena advances after tough round, Paula has it easy



World No. 8 Serena Williams was stretched by world No. 148 Mihaela Buzarnescu, before the winner of 23 Grand Slam singles titles overcame the Romanian's challenge 6-3, 5-7, 6-1 in a late evening second-round French Open match on Wednesday. Serena will take on American world No. 50 Danielle Collins for a place in the fourth round. Danielle, a French Open quarter-finalist last year, dropped just two games against Ukrainian qualifier Anhelina Kalinina, 6-0, 6-2, to halt the qualifier's 14-match winning run. Spain's world No. 35 Paula Badosa joined the American duo in the third round after beating Montenegro's Danka Kovinic, 6-2, 6-0 in just 52 minutes. Paula, a 2015 junior French Open champion, will bid for a second-straight appearance in the second week when she takes on Romanian Ana Bogdan in the third round. Ana moved into the third round by virtue of Japanese world No. 2 Naomi Osaka pulling out of the French Open due to mental health issues.

I WANT TO PLAY MANY TEST MATCHES: HARMANPREET

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India T20 captain Harmanpreet Kaur is excited over getting an opportunity to play Test match cricket after seven years.

"It is a great feeling. Playing a Test match is a dream. I want to play many Test matches in my life and I hope we will continue [doing] this. Playing in England with red ball is challenging and we all are very excited about this," Harmanpreet, who has represented India in two Tests, said in a video posted on bcci.tv

The right-handed batswoman has a point to prove in England during the one-off Test that begins in Bristol on June 16. Her aggregate in the two Tests of her career is just 26, including a highest of 17.

In the three Test innings she has played, she has scores of 9, 0, and 17 and has a poor average of 8.66.

Harmanpreet has represented India in 104 ODIs (2,532 runs, with three centuries) and 114 T20 Internationals (2,186 runs, with one century). It will be interesting to see if she can carry the confidence gained in white-ball cricket over the past few years to Test match cricket. She was in form during the recent home ODI series against South Africa, before pulling out of the T20 International series.



Six-nation T20 women's cricket in Rwanda from Sunday

Team Absolute | Pune

A six-nation T20 women's tournament between African nations in Rwanda capital Kigali, starting this week, will be streamed live on Women's CricZone's YouTube and Facebook channels.

Botswana, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Namibia, and Nigeria will compete in the tournament, to be played from June 6 to 12, at the Gahanga Cricket Ground in Kigali in a bio-secure bubble, said a statement from Women's CricZone website on Thursday.

"All 14 matches will be available to watch on Women's CricZone's YouTube and Facebook channels," it said.

This will be the first event



that Women's CricZone, a website dedicated to women's game globally, will host as part of its five-year broadcast deal with the Rwanda Cricket Association (RCA).

"Through our partnership with Women's CricZone, we hope to take Rwanda Cricket to the world, showcase our team's potential and create

more opportunities for cricket players," said RCA chairperson Stephen MUSAale in the statement.

"There is plenty of talent within Rwanda cricket and we believe this is a step in the right direction in terms of professionalising the sport in our country. We see this as a good foundation in doing this," he said.

Conway's 200 in NZ's 378 all out, England 25/2 (Tea)

London | Agencies

Ollie Robinson bagged four wickets and Mark Wood three as New Zealand were all out for 378, with debutant Devon Conway scoring 200, in their first innings of the first Test against England here on Thursday.

By the tea interval, England were reduced to 25 for two in 10 overs, with Tim Southee and Zak Crawley being dis-



missed for nought and two respectively.

Conway was, ironically, run out after playing for 578 minutes and facing 347 balls. He hit 22 boundaries and one six.

Earlier, resuming at first day's score of 246/3, the Kiwis lost four wickets in under nine overs and the addition of just six runs in the first session.

Brief scores (tea, Day 2):

New Zealand: 378 all out (D Conway 200, H Nicholls 61, O Robinson 4/75, M. Wood 3/81) England: 25/2

Conway breaks Ganguly's record

New Zealand opening batsman Devon Conway, who on Wednesday surpassed former India captain Sourav Ganguly's record for highest score on Test debut at Lord's, said he needs time to let the feat sink in. Conway's unbeaten 136 on first day of the first Test against England took him past Ganguly's 131 that the India left-hander had scored on the 1996 tour of England. Besides Conway and Ganguly, four others have scored a Test debut ton at Lord's.



INDIA CRICKET TEAMS REACH SOUTHAMPTON, CHECK INTO HOTEL

Southampton: The Indian men's and women's cricket teams reached Hampshire Bowl, venue of World Test Championship (WTC) final, and checked into Hilton at The Ageas Bowl hotel where they will undergo quarantine.

India team wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha posted a picture from the balcony of his hotel room. The room overlooks the Ageas Bowl stadium. Some of the other rooms in the 171-room hotel overlook the golf course.

"That's our view from the room balcony...Your thoughts? [emotion: thought balloon]," tweeted Saha on arrival. The men's team will play the WTC final against New Zealand at the Ageas Bowl from June 18-22. New Zealand are currently playing the first of two Test matches against England at Lord's. The Kiwis, who will return to Southampton on June 14, were in quarantine and training at the venue before the Test series in England. The women's team will move to Bristol where they will play a one-off Test against England. The International Cricket Council had on Saturday said that the Indian men's team would be allowed gradual increase in activity during its period of isolation in Southampton.

Won't be easy to secure podium finish at Olympics: Sindhu

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's star shuttler and Rio Olympic Games silver-medallist PV Sindhu said competition in Tokyo Olympics would be tough as top 10 players in women's singles event are of the same calibre with anyone capable of springing surprise. "I'm ready for the element of surprise during Tokyo Olympics. It wouldn't be easy to earn a podium finish as all the leading players in women's singles event are of the same ability," said the 25-year-old during an online media interaction on Thursday. Sindhu is the only Indian to have qualified for Olympics in women's singles event.

Sindhu said the free time following cancellation of tournaments due to pandemic has provided her with an opportunity to learn new skills and technique. "I'm focussed and all the hard work would enable me to tackle my opponents in Japan," said the 2019 World champion.



BIO-BUBBLE LIFE AFFECTING ME MENTALLY: ANDRE RUSSELL

Abu Dhabi: Kolkata Knight Riders' West Indian all-rounder Andre Russell has said life in bio-bubble is exhausting him. The right-arm pace bowler and right-handed batsman, who is in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for Pakistan Super League, said that quarantine life is taking a toll on him mentally.

"I think it's taking a toll on myself," Russell told Geo News from Abu Dhabi. "I cannot talk for any other player, or coaches or anyone that goes through this whole quarantine stuff. But it has definitely taken a toll on me mentally because from bubble to bubble, in a room locked in, you cannot go out for a walk, you cannot go certain places, you cannot socialise. It is different," he said.

Russell said he was keeping himself busy in the hotel room trying to keep himself fit by exercising, and was thankful that he was still playing cricket.



Indian shooters to start training from Monday in Zagreb

Zagreb (Croatia): India's Olympic Games bound shooters will start training here from Monday. They will also compete in this month's World Cup, to be staged here. Ronak Pandit, India's high-performance manager for pistol shooting, and foreign pistol expert Pavel Smirnov will monitor the training of the shooters after completing their quarantine. "Both Pandit and Smirnov reached Zagreb this week and it's mandatory to undergo seven days quarantine before joining the camp," an official told reporter.

Earlier, 13-member Indian shooting team reached Croatia for a training-cum-competition stint and will directly reach Japan from Croatia. Only pistol coach Ved Prakash had accompanied the squad while Pandit and Smirnov couldn't join due to different reasons. India has got five Olympic quota places in pistol events and eight in rifle. Two skeet shooters have also qualified for the July-August Olympics.



New kit for Olympic Games bound Indian athletes unveiled

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A newly designed playing and ceremonial kit for the Tokyo Olympic Games bound Indian contingent was unveiled in the presence of six prominent athletes here on Thursday, marking 50 days for the world's biggest sports extravaganza to begin in Tokyo.

Blue, white, orange, and green are the prominent colours on the T-shirts, shorts, and track suits. The tracksuit is predominantly blue, with the right sleeve of its upper having the three colours of the Indian national flag - saffron, white, and green - shoulder downwards. Each athlete would receive four sets of playing kit.

The Indian Olympic Association

(IOA) invited only for Olympics bound athletes -- Ravi Dahiya, Deepa Punia, Sumit Malik, Seema Bisla, Neeraj Chopra, Bajrang Punia. IOA secretary general Rajiv Mehta tried to justify the limited invitation to athletes, saying that it wasn't possible to have a bigger gathering due to a lockdown in Delhi. Indian athletes have qualified in more than 10 disciplines, including archery, athletics, boxing, shooting, and wrestling, for the Olympics scheduled to start on July 23.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a review meeting on Thursday regarding the preparation of the Indian athletes for the Tokyo Olympic Games, and said the nation should cheer up the athletes," sports minister Kiren Rijiju, who was present at the function, told the officials.



I like T20 format unlike my contemporaries: Gavaskar

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar says he is fond of T20 format unlike most other cricketers of his era since the shortest format involves more action than others.

"The T20 format game has attracted lot of criticism from some past cricketers who have blamed it for Test cricket losing relevance and players spoiling technique.

The demise of West Indies Test team due to players from the Caribbean

preferring T20 franchise leagues has especially led to criticism of the format.

"I know a lot of people who played around my time, they're not happy with the T20 format, but I actually love it. I love it for the simple reason that you know it's a three-hour game, and you get to see a result, and you get to see so much action," said Gavaskar on The Analyst Inside podcast.

Gavaskar, who was the first batsman to score 10,000 runs in Test matches, said that innovative strokes attracted him.



SENSEX, NIFTY SETTLE AT RECORD CLOSING HIGHS

Sensex closed 52,232.43, higher by 382.95 points or 0.74 per cent from its previous close of 51,849.48. It had opened at 52,121.58 and touched an intra-day high of 52,273.23 and a low of 51,942.20 points. The Nifty 50 which touched an all-time intra-day high of 15,705.10 points also settled at its record closing level. It closed at 15,690.35, higher by 114.15 points or 0.73 per cent from its previous close.



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Healthy buying was witnessed in consumer durable and oil and gas stocks.

The top gainers on the Sensex were Titan Company, ONGC and Larsen & Toubro, while the major losers were IndusInd Bank, Power Grid and Mahindra & Mahindra.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The key Indian equity indices surged to end at record closing highs on Thursday tracking a bullish trend in the global markets.

Decline in the daily cases of Covid-19 and strengthening of the Indian rupee supported the market sentiments.

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Covid resurgence triggers contraction in India's May services sector output: PMI

Consequently, at 46.4 (index value) in May, down from 54 in April, the seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index was in contraction territory for the first time in eight months.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Covid resurgence heavily dented India's service sector output which contracted last month. Moreover, the data indicated that India's service providers struggled in May, with the intensification of the Covid-19 crisis causing renewed declines in new business and output.

Consequently, at 46.4 (index value) in May, down from 54 in April, the seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index was in contraction territory for the first time in eight months.

The seasonally adjusted index reading remained above the critical 50-mark that separates growth from contraction.

"The latest reading pointed to a solid rate of reduction that was nevertheless slower than those seen in the aftermath of the Covid-19 outbreak,"



IHS Markit said in the PMI report.

According to panel members, the fall in output stemmed from the escalation of the pandemic and the reintroduction of restrictions.

"Growth of new work intakes ground to a halt in May, with companies noting the first decline in sales since September 2020. Survey participants

indicated that demand was dampened by the intensification of the Covid-19 crisis."

"International demand for Indian services also worsened, with new export business falling at the quickest rate in six months. The drop was attributed to international travel restrictions and business closures."

Hyd Airport bags ACI-Asia Pacific Green Airports Gold Recognition

Hyderabad | Agencies

GMR led Hyderabad International Airport Ltd (GHIAL) has been awarded the Gold Recognition by the Airports Council International (ACI) Asia-Pacific Green Airports Recognition 2021 in the below 25 Million Passengers Per Annum (MPPA) category. The award was decided by a distinguished global panel that recognized GHIAL's sustainable airport operations for effective air quality management. This is the fourth time in a row that GHIAL has received this award. ACI's Green Airports Recognition programme promotes environmental best practices to minimize aviation industry's impact on the environment and recognizes ACI Asia-Pacific members for outstanding environmental initiatives and projects. Some of the initiatives at GHIAL

to improve the air quality at the Airport and the surroundings that won the accolades of ACI include Fixed Electrical Ground Power (FEGP) use resulting in prevention of Auxiliary Power Unit and saving of Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF), solar powered Baggage Freight Loader (BFL), step ladder, electric coaches, tugs, and vehicles resulting in the saving of diesel and associated air emissions, electric buses and cars in the city side of the airport resulting in the saving of diesel and single engine taxing of aircraft resulting in saving of ATF. "We, at GMR Hyderabad International Airport consider sustainable airport operations as an integral part of our business, and are committed to conduct the operations in an environment-friendly manner. As part of our environmental policy, we are committed to protecting the environment and have embraced



many eco-friendly measures. We continue to make progress on our environment and safety targets aimed at zero discharge and zero emissions in collaboration with all our stakeholders," said Pradeep Panicker, CEO - GHIAL.

GHIAL proactively engages with the employees, stakeholders, concessionaires and influences them to adopt environmentally sustainable practices. The airport also actively promotes environmental awareness to sensitize the airport community and the passengers by observing World Environment Day, World Forestry Day, Earth Day, etc. The sus-

tainable airport operations have resulted in significant reduction of fossil fuel consumption and consequent air emissions in and around the Airport.

The Green Airports Recognition programme was established in 2017 with the support from the ACI Asia-Pacific Regional Environment Committee. The programme highlights different environment themes each year. The submissions will be reviewed by a panel of judges. Since 2018, GHIAL has been continuously winning ACI Green Airports Recognition awards for various sustainable initiatives.

RAI seeks reopening of malls, shopping centres

Formal retail spaces such as malls and shopping centres play an extremely important role to play in the economy due to their contribution to the exchequer in the form of taxes and the people they employ, as per the retailers' body.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As several states begin to relax lockdown restrictions, the Retailers Association of India (RAI) has suggested state governments to reopen the formal retail sector including malls and shopping centres. In a statement, the industry body noted that the opening up of the formal retail sector across states would ensure revival of the economy. Speaking on relaxations announced by various state governments, Kumar Rajagopalan, CEO of RAI said: "We believe that formal retail spaces like malls have the ability to operate as controlled environment." "Appreciating the Haryana government's decision to open malls with restricted time, he said: "We hope other states will also



follow the same method when opening up and support the economy." Formal retail spaces such as malls and shopping centres play an extremely important role to play in the economy due to their contribution to the exchequer in the form of taxes and the people they employ, as per the retailers' body. RAI in its statement observed that economic revival is intertwined with the revival of retail businesses especially large formal retail spaces, which are the drivers of consumption. The only way of getting rid of the economic impact of pandemic and saving livelihoods is by everybody participating in sharing of the cost burden and acting to revive retail business activity, it said.

KARADI PATH RECEIVES INTERNATIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

The citation from London Book Fair says, "The judges enjoyed reading many excellent entries this year and all three on our chosen shortlist (for Educational Learning Resources) are outstanding."

Team Absolute | Chennai

The Karadi Path Education Company has been announced as the winner by the London Book Fair International Excellence Awards for the category - Educational Learning Resources. Karadi Path is the only firm from India to win the award this year presented by the London Book Fair in partnership with the UK's Publishers

Association. The shortlist for the different categories of the Awards featured 15 countries across five continents. The Karadi Path Education project is our chosen winner due to its innovative approach, versatile and creative content, and its reach which allows the resource to be used by disadvantaged communities who would not normally have access to high quality educational resources."

Learning innovator and Co-founder of Karadi Path, CP Viswanath said, "For Karadi Path's innovation and work in language learning to be recognised by one of the most prestigious institutions of the world, the London Book Fair IEA, is both a validation of the work we do and an inspiration to continue our journey in India and beyond. This award is even more special as they have come in the 25th year of the Karadi venture."

BLUE DART'S DIGITAL INITIATIVES INTRODUCES PAPERLESS TRANSACTIONS



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Blue Dart, announces paperless transactions on their new Digital Portal for all its Vendor Partners this World Environment Day on 5th June 2021. Under the Group's New Sustainability Roadmap, Blue Dart has made significant investments in developing future-ready technology that can protect the environment and at the same time deliver excellence in a sustainable way.

Balfour Manuel, Managing Director, Blue Dart said, "We are a purpose-driven organisation and have always kept sustainability and living responsibility at the centre of all our operations. This initiative is our endeavour to inculcate sustainable business practices and at the same time raise the bar on innovation."

Aneel Gambhir, CFO, Blue Dart said, "In the journey of being an ESG compliant organisation, we have identified sustainable ways to carry out business operations. We are committed to giving back to the community in which we operate and at the same time, we are doing all that it takes to restore and protect our environment. The pandemic era combined with climate change emphasises the urgent need for organisations to invest in the ecosystem, before it's too late."



HDFC BANK COMMITS TO BECOMING CARBON NEUTRAL BY 2031-32

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bank will continue to incorporate and scale up the use of renewable energy in its operations. As part of its ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) strategy, the Bank will also focus on offering loans for green products like electric vehicles at lower interest rates and incorporating ESG scores in its credit decisions.

The Bank is also working on a framework for issuing green bonds.

This announcement, which comes just ahead of World Environment Day on June 5, is a part of the bank's overall commitment to embed ESG principles in its business. The bank has a three-pronged strategy to achieve its objective to become carbon neutral: Reduce consumption, transition to renewable energy, and offset carbon footprint.

As a part of this strategy it is planning to decrease absolute emissions and energy consumed in line from current level of 315,583 MT CO2 emissions. The bank will also increase Rooftop Solar capacity in large offices and convert 50 per cent of its total sourced electricity to renewable energy. Other initiatives include; creation of single use plastic free corporate offices, plantation of 25 lakh trees and reduction in water consumption by 30 per cent.

"A shared future means that individuals, companies and countries all have to act together to mitigate the effects of climate change," said Ashima Bhat, Group Head - CSR, Business Finance and Strategy, Administration and Infrastructure, HDFC Bank. "Through this effort, we are supporting the country's commitment in this direction. The broad strategy is in place and going forward we will fine tune it and introduce new measures if necessary. As a responsible corporate citizen, HDFC Bank is fully committed to help India mitigate the effects of climate change as well as help the country meet its international commitments under the Paris agreement."

HDFC Bank on Thursday announced plans to become carbon neutral by 2031-32. As part of this initiative, the Bank is looking at reducing its emissions, energy, and water consumption.

Tapering Covid: Monetary policy to be retained against volatility

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Prevailing onslaught from Covid's second wave as well as persistently high prices will deter the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) from initiating any tapering exercise, experts told IANS.

Besides, economy watchers have ruled out any reduction in key lending rates during the first monetary policy review coming after one of worst phases of Covid-19 pandemic.

Accordingly, RBI's monetary policy committee (MPC) is expected to retain rates as well as the current accommodative stance due to growth concerns amidst resurgence of Covid-19. "We estimate the average CPI inflation to moderate to 5.2 per cent in FY2022 from 6.2 per cent in FY2021. Nevertheless, it will remain well above the mid-point of the MPC's renewed medium term target range of 2-6 per cent, ruling out the possibility of further rate cuts to support economic activity and sentiment," ICRA's Chief Economist Aditi Nayar told IANS.

"However, with the economic outlook remaining uncertain in light of the continuing pandemic, we expect the monetary policy stance to remain accommodative for a large part of 2021, until the vaccine coverage improves dramatically."

As of now, India suffers from a massive spike in Covid-19 infections.



The latest spike has brought in record number of patients, thereby, impeding healthcare infrastructure's ability to deal with the surge.

Consequently, the situation has forced state governments to implement local lockdowns and travel restrictions which have started to slow down economic activity.

"Amidst severe outbreak of second wave, both the growth-inflation dynamics have worsened, and inflationary risk has worsened more than the growth," India Ratings & Research's Associate Director Soumyajit Niyogi said.

"Wholesale inflation, which had been on the benign side for almost a decade, has now turned wobbly owing to durable factors

like global commodity prices. In the backdrop of this, no scope for changes in rate or normalisation of policy stance is largely expected in this policy, however an explicit communication in sync with the inflation targeting framework is warranted."

However, the country's CPI based inflation increased at a slower pace in April.

Nevertheless, the sharp downward correction in consumer price index was largely attributed to the favourable base effect owing to 2020's pandemic-related lockdown.

"We do not see any change in the repo rate next week even with elevated risk of input cost and output price inflation," said Madhavi Arora, Lead Economist, Emkay Global Financial Services.

"The policy guidance has become more open-ended and state-based amid new uncertainties and the evolving nature of the economy, with the MPC stating that the policy stance will remain accommodative 'as long as necessary' till growth recovers on a durable basis while ensuring that inflation remains within the flexible target."

The CPI-based inflation rose by 4.29 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) in April from 5.52 per cent in March.

Likewise, the Consumer Food Price Index increased on a lower rate to 2.02 per cent last month from a rise of 4.87 per cent in March. According to Dun & Bradstreet's

Global Chief Economist Arun Singh said the rise in inflation is largely related to the input prices and demand for inventory.

"The inability to fully pass the price increase to consumers amidst subdued demand conditions might dent the profit margins of businesses rather than the retail prices. Given that economy is not yet opened up fully, the rural areas are impacted and there is uncertainty around the pace of vaccination, the situation does not warrant a rate change at this juncture."

"Both the policy rate and stance are expected to remain status quo and accommodative till the end of the year."

In addition, Suman Chowdhury, Chief Analytical Officer, Acuite Ratings & Research, there is a need to pursue a similar monetary and fiscal policy framework over the next two-three quarters till the impact of the second Covid wave tapers-off.

"We expect the policy stance to remain unequivocally accommodative throughout the current financial year. While there is virtually no scope for a further cut in interest rates given the increased commodity prices... the status quo on rates is likely to continue for a longer time possibly till the end of FY22," Chowdhury said.

"Despite the risks of a build up of inflationary pressures in the near term, RBI is likely to give higher priority to the concerns around growth recovery."

"Season 2 drops at midnight. And one thing is overwhelmingly clear: The Family Man now belongs to you, the audience, and all its fans. We remain forever humbled by all the love we have received, said Manoj.

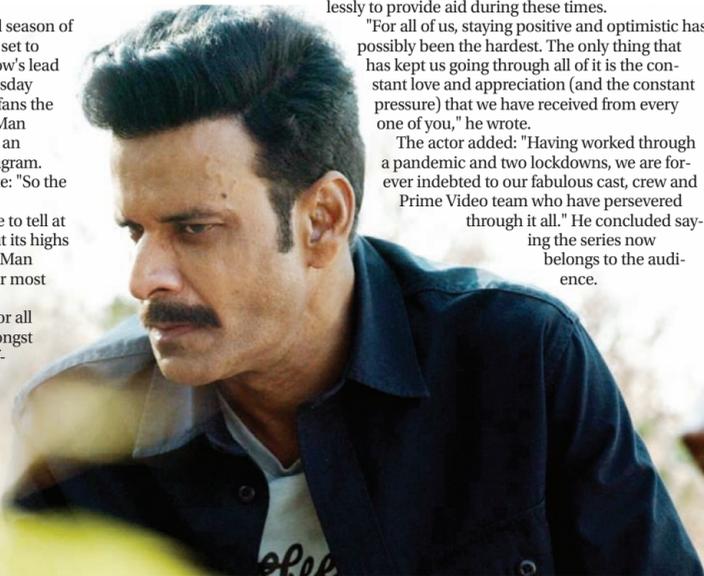
'THE FAMILY MAN 2' IS THE MOST CHALLENGING PROJECT: MANOJ BAJPAYEE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The much-hyped second season of "The Family Man" is all set to drop on June 4. The show's lead star Manoj Bajpayee on Thursday took to Instagram to remind fans the date of release. "The Family Man Season 2 ... June 4," declared an image Manoj posted on Instagram. Alongside the image, he wrote: "So the day is finally here..."

"Every filmmaker has a tale to tell at the end of every project about its highs and lows. For us, The Family Man Season 2 has proved to be our most challenging project yet.

"These are difficult times for all of us. There isn't anyone amongst us untouched by loss and suffering. While we mourn the tragic loss of lives, we are grateful for the heroic actions and



courage of the frontline workers and everyone working tirelessly to provide aid during these times.

"For all of us, staying positive and optimistic has possibly been the hardest. The only thing that has kept us going through all of it is the constant love and appreciation (and the constant pressure) that we have received from every one of you," he wrote.

The actor added: "Having worked through a pandemic and two lockdowns, we are forever indebted to our fabulous cast, crew and Prime Video team who have persevered through it all." He concluded saying the series now belongs to the audience.

Arjun Kapoor opens up relationship with his uncle Anil Kapoor

'WE PULL EACH OTHER'S LEG'



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood veteran Anil Kapoor worked with nephew Arjun Kapoor in Aneez Bazmee's 2017 comedy "Mubarakan". The outcome wasn't quite blockbuster success, but Arjun sure wants to work in a film with uncle Anil once more. He feels filmmakers should explore their camaraderie again.

"We are more like friends in real life and we are constantly pulling each other's leg," says Arjun, about his bond with Anil.

"We are a tag team of entertainment. Filmmakers, maybe, should explore our bonding and camaraderie again because we can truly make people smile. You just have to throw us in one room say action and see the madness unfold," says Arjun.



Disha's sultry splash in mellow sun

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Disha Patani's Thursday post on Instagram is about a sultry splash and the mellow sun. The throwback image captures Disha in a silhouette frame, rising out of the water in a bikini with her hair splaying droplets of water in a symmetric arch. The sun in the backdrop accentuates the beauty of the picture.

"#Throwback," Disha wrote with the photo, which currently has over 10 lakh likes on the photo-sharing website.

Disha's sister Khushboo left a comment. She wrote: "So Nice." The actress was recently seen in Salman Khan's Eid release of the year, "Radhe". She also has "Ek Villain Returns" along with John Abraham coming up, and will be seen in the Ekta Kapoor-produced heroine-centric drama "KTina".

A THRILLER HAS THE ABILITY TO LET YOU BINGE-WATCH: TAMANNAH BHATIA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

South star Tamannaah Bhatia feels choosing a role in a thriller can always be an advantage for an actor because the genre has a high binge quotient. This year, Tamannaah made her digital debut in April with the Telugu web series "11th Hour", a crime thriller that also features Adith Arun and Vamsi Krishna. In May, she returned to OTT space again with the Tamil whodunit drama "November Story" alongside Pasupathy, GM Kumar, Aruldass and Vivek Prasanna. "A thriller, if done well, has the ability to let you binge-watch. Now that is essentially what everybody who makes a show wants you to do. So, when you choose a genre like the thriller, if it is done well, it has a high potential of reaching that goal of being a binge-watchable show," she says. "11th Hour" streams on Aha while "November Story" is on Disney+ Hotstar VIP.

"If part two is made, usmein bhi main hi kaam karunga. (I would work in it). I dream of making part two as an action film. He was a principled man and won hearts. Not action in terms of beating people up, but as a thriller."

Anupam Kher dreams of making 'Saaransh 2' as an action thriller

Yashika Mathur | Mumbai

If "Saaransh", his debut film of 1984 had a sequel, veteran actor Anupam Kher would want it to be an action film high on thrills.

"Saaransh" is considered one of Kher's best works. The Mahesh Bhatt film cast the actor, then 28, as a 58-year-old man



who is heartbroken after the tragic loss of his young son. However, he doesn't let go of his morals when faced with an adverse situation. He is confident if a second part of the film is made, he would be cast in it.

The actor, now 66, has completed 37 years in Bollywood and has essayed over 500 roles.

"I always considered myself a star. It is the sign of an uneducated person to differentiate between a character as a hero, a villain and a star. An actor is an actor. Of course, there is a always small jealousy that someone has done such a powerful role and I also should do something brilliant. That is healthy competition, but 'Saaransh' never made me feel that way. I still say that no one could have done that role except me. I was watching the film and when I look at it now, I don't feel like it's me. That is the magic of that film," he says.

PAYAL GHOSH IS WATCHING J.LO'S POLE DANCING

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Payal Ghosh is watching a lot of Hollywood star Jennifer Lopez these days, especially her role of a pole dancer in the 2019 crime comedy "Hustlers". Payal says watching J.Lo's moves closely is part of her learning process to master pole dancing, for a song in her upcoming film "New York To Haridwar". Online sessions to polish her skills are on, too.

"The script for New York To Haridwar is absolutely enticing. I was then told there is a song that will require me to pole dance. They would be fine even if I did the front shots but I am taking to it fully as I want to ace," Payal said.

"I watched Jennifer Lopez in Hustlers and have

been

absolutely smashed by that performance. I would give my

best in this one for sure. online sessions are on. I would be meeting a coach and taking sessions as soon as the situation eases. Let's all stay strong and defeat the pandemic first and follow all the protocols," she added.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Alana Panday