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Facebook has potential to polarise public debate, says Supreme Court

FIST, NOT HAND

Facebook today has influence over a third population of this planet. In India, Facebook claims to be the most popular social media with 270 million registered users.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday said Facebook has the "power of not simply a hand but a fist, gloved as it may be", as these platforms employ business models having potential to polarise public debates. These platforms have become power centres themselves, having the ability to influence vast sections of opinions, it added.

The bench observed that developments around the world reflect rising concerns across borders, it said in its 188-page judgment. The bench held that for intermediaries to say that they can sidestep this criticism is a fallacy, as they are right in the cen-



tre of these debates.

In this modern technological age, it would be too simplistic an intermediary like Facebook to contend that they are merely a platform for exchange of ideas without per-

forming any significant role themselves - especially given their manner of functioning and business model, it stressed.

The bench observed that governments have expressed concern for necessity of

greater accountability by these intermediaries which have become big business corporations with influence across borders and over millions of people.

NOTICE ON PTI'S PLEA CHALLENGING NEW IT RULES

New Delhi: India's largest news agency, Press Trust of India (PTI), has moved the Delhi High Court, against the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. A bench issued notice on PTI's plea to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting. The news agency contended the Central government was attempting to regulate digital news media by imposing "sweeping" government oversight, and a vaguely worded 'Code of Ethics'. The plea argued the rules usher-in an era of surveillance and fear, thereby resulting in self-censorship, which results in abridgment/violation of fundamental rights, enshrined under Part III of the Constitution. These rules virtually allow the government to dictate content to digital news portals, which completely violate media freedom. The news agency submitted that the rules went beyond the object and scope of the IT Act.

Everyone has to follow law of land: New IT Min

New Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Thursday did not waste any time to make it crystal clear how he wants things to pan out in the ongoing Twitter-Centre face off as he assumed office. "Everyone has to follow law of the country," Vaishnaw said after being made cabinet minister.

CONTRADICTION STANDS CAN'T BE PERMITTED

The bench said the business model of intermediaries like Facebook, being one across countries, they cannot be permitted to take contradictory stands in different jurisdictions. For example, in the US, Facebook projected itself in the category of a publisher, giving it protection under the First Amendment of its control over the material disseminated on its platform. This identity allowed it to justify moderation and removal of content. "Conspicuously in India, however, it has chosen to identify itself purely as a social media platform, despite its similar functions and services in the two countries," noted the bench.

"These platforms are by no means altruistic in character but rather employ business models that can be highly privacy intrusive and have the potential to polarise public debates. Facebook has the power of not simply a hand but a fist, gloved as it may be."

No interim protection for Twitter, Centre free to act

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Thursday said that there is no interim protection for Twitter and the Centre is free to take any action if the micro-blogging site breaches the new IT rules.

A bench of Justice Rekha Palli said: "It is made clear that since this court has not passed any interim order, this court has granted time to Respondent No 2 (Twitter Inc) to file affidavit, no protection is granted."

The court also granted two weeks' time to Twitter for filing a notarised affidavit of a competent official of Twitter Inc. The court was informed by Twitter's counsel that an interim chief compliance officer (CCO) has been appointed, which will be followed by an interim resident grievance officer (RGO) by July and interim nodal contact officer will be appointed within two weeks. Twitter said, though it is striving to comply with the 2021 Rules, but it "reserves its right to challenge the legality, validity, and vires of the Rules, and Twitter's submissions regarding compliance are filed without prejudice to its right to challenge the rules".

DELHI ASSEMBLY CAN SEEK INFO FROM FB

"We cannot accept the plea that an Assembly must confine itself to the core function of legislation. This would be unreasonably restricting the role of an elected body. The committee cannot go into issue of law and order and act as some kind of prosecuting agency. The "inquisitorial and recommendatory powers" of the committee can be utilised under the principle of better governance. Facebook's representative would have a right to refuse to answer and this would not invite privilege proceedings."

Learn from those who are not part of Cabinet: PM to ministers

"The Prime Minister told the minister to carefully choose their words and avoid making unnecessary comments in the media," sources said. It also learnt that the Prime Minister asked the ministers to focus on their ministerial assignments and work with utmost sincerity.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday advised the newly-inducted ministers to learn from those who are not part of the Union Cabinet.

The Prime Minister virtually chaired the first meeting of the Council of Ministers after the Cabinet reshuffle. It is learnt that the Prime Minister said that ministers



must learn from the experience of those who are no longer part of the Council of Ministers. "The Prime Minister told the new ministers that they should learn from former ministers, who are currently not part of the Council of Ministers, and benefit from their experience," sources said.

Sources said that Modi also advised ministers to avoid making unnecessary comments. Expressing concern over people violating Covid-appropriate protocols, the Prime Minister told the Council of Ministers that pictures and videos of crowded places and people roaming about without masks or social distancing is not a pleasant sight and it should instil a sense of fear in us.

2 soldiers, 2 terrorists killed as infiltration bid foiled in J&K

JAMMU | Agencies

Two Pakistani terrorists were killed and two soldiers martyred after an infiltration bid was foiled by the Indian Army in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district, army officials said on Thursday.

"Based on information regarding infiltration and movement of terrorists in the area of Dadal, Sundarbari Sector, district Rajouri, the army had launched extensive search



operations with effect from June 29. "Subsequently, the information was corroborated on July 8 and a search and destroy patrol seeking

pro-active engagement with the terrorists, spotted the terrorists in Dadal forest area, and challenged them. The terrorists opened fire

and lobbed hand grenades leading to a fierce encounter in which two foreign terrorists from Pakistan have been killed," an army statement said.

Two AK-47 rifles and ammunition in heavy quantity has been recovered from the killed terrorists, it said.

"In the operation, Naib Subedar Sreejith M. and Sepoy Maruprolu Jaswanth Reddy received fatal injuries. A detailed search of the area continues," the army statement said.

APMCS WON'T BE DONE AWAY WITH BUT STRENGTHENED; GOVERNMENT IS READY FOR DISCUSSIONS

New Delhi: The new Union Cabinet, in its first meeting on Thursday, held a comprehensive discussion on the welfare of farmers and made it clear that the Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) will be strengthened as farmer groups fear that they will be done away with after the new farm bills. Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar declared that the new farm laws "do not have any provisions to end markets controlled by the APMCs." The Minister said the APMCs will be strengthened, and will be supported by the Centre's infrastructure fund for their development. "Efforts will be made to provide more resources to the APMCs. Rs 1 lakh crores allocated under Atmanirbhar Bharat to Farmers Infrastructure Fund can be used by APMCs," the Minister said. The Minister also appealed to the protesting farmers unions to end their protest and to hold talks, saying "the government is ready for discussions".

Cabinet announces Rs 23K cr package to fight Covid



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Union Cabinet on Thursday announced a Rs 23,000 crore second emergency Covid package to improve the facilities in the health sector across the country, which will be used by both the Central and state governments to deal with the issues facing the country with regard to the second wave of the pandemic.

Addressing a press conference here, newly-appointed Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said: "Rs 23,000 crore package to

be given to deal with the problems that occurred in the second wave of Covid-19. The package will be used jointly by the Central and state governments."

He said the Centre will share Rs 15,000 crore while the state governments will share Rs 8,000 crore of the said package.

The Health Minister said that the package includes works like what should be done to ensure supply of critical medicines, oxygen supply and to stop the spread of Covid among children in the future.

He was the nine-time legislator and five-time MP.



6-time Himachal CM Virbhadra Singh passes away

Shimla: Congress veteran and six-time Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh passed away on early Thursday at the Indira Gandhi Medical College and Hospital (IGMCH) here after a three-month long battle with post-Covid complications, doctors said. He was 87. IGMCH Senior Medical Superintendent Janak Raj said that Virbhadra Singh died at 3.40 a.m., was the sitting legislator from Arki in Solan district, once the pocket borough of the BJP. Political observers say his death will be a big vacuum for the Congress leadership. He was the nine-time legislator and five-time MP.

Ganga is Covid-free: Scientists

RNA (RiboNucleic acid) extraction is the purification of RNA from biological samples. This procedure is complicated by the ubiquitous presence of ribonuclease enzymes in cells and tissues, which can rapidly degrade RNA.



University (BHU), Varanasi and Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP), Lucknow, it has been found that the Ganga river has no trace of the pandemic causing coronavirus.

Prof Gyaneshwar Chaubey of the department of zoology, BHU, said that to investigate possible traces of the virus in the Ganga, the team collected two samples every week for seven weeks from Varanasi

city, beginning May 15 to July 3. The sample collecting point as well as the process to test the sample was the same every time.

The finding is also important as it has been conducted amid apprehension that water of river Ganga may have been contaminated after several bodies were found floating in rivers Ganga and Yamuna. A large number of bodies were also buried on their banks during the pandemic.

"Our team extracted RNA and performed an RT-PCR test for all the samples with a true positive and negative sample. Surprisingly, none of the samples collected from the Ganga showed any trace of the viral RNA. However, samples collected from river Gomti did show the presence of viral RNA." Niraj Rai, Scientist, BSIP

KERALA'S ACTIVE COVID CASES JUMPED BY 12,000 IN 10 DAYS

Thiruvananthapuram: Just when the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in the country seemed to be receding, Kerala's active caseload increased by almost 12,000 cases in the last 10 days, data from state health department showed.

The active caseload in Kerala was 96,012 on June 28, which shot up to nearly 1.08 lakh on July 7. Further, since July 5, the active caseload has increased by nearly 7,300 cases. As per the data analysed by CNN-News18, the daily cases reported in Kerala have nearly doubled since June 28.



'IMPORTANT POINT': SC SEEKS CENTRE'S STAND ON PLEA AGAINST CONJUGAL RIGHTS RESTITUTION

■ According to Section 9 of the Hindu Marriage Act, when either the husband or the wife has, without reasonable excuse, withdrawn from the society of the other, the aggrieved party may apply, by petition to the district court, for restitution of conjugal rights and the court, on being satisfied of the truth of the statements made in such petition and that there is no legal ground why the application should not be granted, may decree restitution of conjugal rights accordingly.

Pathak challenging the Section 9 of the Hindu Marriage Act, Section 22 of the Special Marriage Act and Rules 32 and 33 of Order XXI of the Code of Civil Procedure. Bhati acknowledged it is an important issue and sought the court's permission to submit a response along with some documents to assist the court. At this, the bench said: "Okay then, counter affidavit to be fully filed in 2 weeks. List after 10 days". Senior advo-

with the main matter. After arguments, the bench posted the matter for further hearing on July 22. The plea argued that the remedy of restitution of conjugal rights was not recognised by any of the personal law systems of India and contended that court-mandated restitution of conjugal rights amounted to a 'coercive act' on the part of the state, which violates one's sexual and decisional autonomy, right to privacy, and dignity. The plea added this fall under the



cate Indra Jaising submitted this is purely question of law, namely what is the constitutional validity of Section 9 of the Hindu Marriage Act, and urged the court to hear the matter after one week, instead of two weeks. The bench also informed advocate Shoeb Alam that it will take up his intervention application

purview of right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution. "The same has its origins in feudal English law, which at that time considered a wife to be the chattel of the husband. The United Kingdom itself has abolished the remedy of restitution of conjugal rights in 1970," said the plea.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday granted two weeks' time to Centre to file a counter-affidavit on a plea challenging the provisions dealing with restitution of conjugal rights. A bench comprising Justices R.F. Nariman, Justice K.M. Joseph, and Justice B.R. Gavai adjourned the matter for two weeks following submissions of Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, representing the Centre, seeking time to file the counter-affidavit. Justice Nariman said: "This is a very important point on Section 9 (of Hindu Marriage Act)." The top court was hearing a PIL filed by Ojaswa

TN to replace 'Central' govt with 'Union' govt in school books

Chennai | Agencies

The Tamil Nadu Text Book and Educational Services Corporation on Thursday said that the term "Central Government" would be replaced by the word "Union Government" in the school text books printed by it from the next academic year onwards.

In a statement, the Corporation's Chairman Dindigul I. Leoni said on Thursday that several people in the state are now using the term "Union Government" and when textbooks are printed from the next academic year onwards, it will replace the term "Central Government". The textbook of students of Class 1 to 12 in the state board are being printed by the Text Book Corporation in both English and Tamil. Addressing the Assembly, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin had said that his DMK would use the term "Union Government" as it had used it in the past also.



Meanwhile the appointment of Leoni as Corporation Chairman has drawn flak from opposition with PMK leader and former Union Minister, Anbumani Ramadoss saying, in a tweet, that: "Appointing Dindigul I. Leoni as the Chairman of Tamil Nadu Text Book and Educational Service

Corporation is an insult to the position. Leoni is someone who has constantly made distasteful remarks about women." Leoni was widely criticised for his purported sexist remarks about women while campaigning for DMK leader Sivasenapathy in Coimbatore during the 2021 Assembly elections.

17 UP doctors resign in protest against DM's behaviour

Gonda | Agencies

Seventeen government doctors, including Additional Chief Medical Officer (ACMO) Dr Ajay Pratap Singh, have resigned in Uttar Pradesh's Gonda district, accusing District Magistrate Markandey Shahi of using abusive language.

Those who have resigned include 16 community health centre superintendents. The doctors have made serious allegations against Shahi.

In their resignations sent to the Chief Medical Officer and the UP Health Minister, the superintendents have accused the District Magistrate of using inappropriate language in the review meetings. The doctors have said that during the meetings, Shahi used offensive words to address them, and that they were deeply hurt by

the behaviour of the District Magistrate.

"We have been going through this agony for a long time. The District Magistrate uses unparliamentary and inappropriate language for us in review meetings. But in view of the Covid pandemic and vaccination, we were providing services to patients uninterrupted," the doctors said. The doctors have said in their resignations that during the review meeting held on July 6, the ACMO had asked for details of medical kits and medicines, but the District Magistrate scolded them and silenced them, saying: "Who are you to ask for accounts." "Instead of being respected as Corona warriors, we are being insulted."

All efforts to contact the District Magistrate proved futile and there was no reaction from the government either.

A day after mega-cabinet rejig, MVA slams Centre, BJP

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi carried out what is considered his biggest-ever Cabinet reshuffle, the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi allies in Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena, the Nationalist Congress Party and the Congress, slammed the Centre and the BJP for the exercise, here on Thursday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena farmer leader Kishore Tiwari, who has been accorded MoS status, said the new Cabinet constitution makes it clear that the BJP's ideological mentor, the Nagpur-headquartered RSS, is slowly being "nudged out of proximity to power".

"A majority of the ministers in Team Modi now are without RSS roots, many have been imported from different parties, while others with strong RSS links have either been sidelined, cut to size or ejected outright." The RSS was not consulted before the reshuffle. The message is out loud and clear that the BJP no longer needs any bosses in Nagpur," Tiwari stated. State Congress President Nana Patole, who launched a state-wide 10-day long 'bicycle agitation' protesting against the rising fuel prices, termed the Cabinet rejig as "a mere eyewash intended to hide the failures of the government in the past seven years". "Not only the ministers, even the

Prime Minister needs to be changed now," said Patole, who kicked off the bicycle agitation in Nagpur amid pouring rain while the party's working president Naseem Khan led the protests simultaneously in Mumbai.

Taking a potshot at the BJP, Sena chief Spokesperson and MP Sanjay Raut said that the BJP should thank Sena-NCP for giving it "human resources" to fill up the central berths in the PM's Cabinet.

He said that of the four new ministers inducted in the Cabinet on Wednesday, two Ministers of State are ex-NCP (Kapil Patil and Bharti Pawar), while Cabinet minister Narayan Rane was earlier with the Shiv Sena which made him the Chief Minister before he went to the Congress and then left to float his own party and later joined the BJP in mid-2019.

NCP state President Jayant Patil expressed hopes that Union Minister Amit Shah, who has now been handed the charge of the Cooperation Ministry, would work to give justice to the cooperative and banking sector.

3 SISTERS GO MISSING FROM UP'S BADAUN



Badaun: Three sisters, including two minors aged 14 and 17, who were working as labourers at a cold storage in Uttar Pradesh's Badaun have been reported missing.

The girls had gone to work on Tuesday but have not returned home. The father searched for them and later lodged a complaint against one Arif, a local.

On Wednesday, an FIR under sections 363 (abduction) and 366 (abducting a woman to compel her marriage) of IPC was registered against one Arif.

Arif was allegedly having an alleged affair with the eldest sister, aged 19 years. However, the girls was not found at his home during a police search. In the complaint, the girls' father alleged that Arif's mother had called his daughters to her home and since then they were missing and their phones were switched off. Since the accused belong to another faith, Bisauli Station House Officer (SHO) Rajeev Sharma has posted additional security in the village to ensure peace in the area. The SHO said that surveillance teams have been trying to trace the location of the missing girls based on their mobile phones.

IYC STAGES PROTEST AGAINST HIKE IN FUEL PRICES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Hundreds of Indian Youth Congress (IYC) activists staged a protest here on Thursday against the rise in the prices of petrol, diesel and LPG gas cylinders by riding bicycles and with effigies of gas cylinders.

Several IYC activists under the leadership of its national President, Srinivas B.V., joined the protest and raised slogans against the Central government.

Speaking to the media, Srinivas said, "In the last seven years, the Narendra Modi government has earned more than Rs 22 lakh crore by increasing the prices of petrol and diesel, but nothing has come in the hands of the common man except helplessness."

He said that despite the fall in crude prices in the international market, the prices of petrol and diesel in India are increasing almost every day.

"Only the Modi government can give an answer as to why this is happening," he said.



The protest came after fuel prices were increased for the second straight day on Thursday after already breaching the Rs 100-mark in all the metro cities.

In the sixth hike this month, petrol got costlier by 35 paise in the national capital, while diesel rose by 9 paise, according to price notification by the oil retailers.

Targeting the government, the IYC leader said that the 'loot' policy of the BJP government has given inflation as a gift to the people of the country.

"Modi government is robbing the public by increasing the prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas," he said.

He also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of not being concerned about the people of the country, and instead bothering for elections only.

"The people of the country have understood the chronology of the BJP's electoral gimmicks," he said. "If you cannot reduce inflation, leave the chair," he said.

MINOR GANG-RAPED IN UP, GIVEN ABORTION PILLS

Kanpur | Agencies

A minor girl was allegedly gang-raped, filmed and was later given abortion pills by two brothers in a village in Kanpur's Ghatampur, said police on Thursday. The incident came to light when the condition of the girl, who was given abortion pills, began to deteriorate on Wednesday. She is presently undergoing treatment at a medical facility.

In her statement to the police, she alleged that Roop Singh and Gulbadan Singh had gang-raped her on sever-



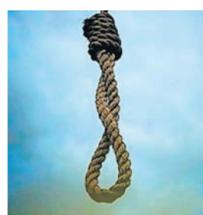
al occasions. And then forced her to have some pills. Both the accused are now absconding.

The police spokesperson said that the accused had

sedated the girl when they raped her for the first time and then made a video of the act. The girl was blackmailed on the basis of the same video and gang-raped again.

T'GANA WOMAN HANGS SELF AFTER KILLING TWO DAUGHTERS

Hyderabad: In a shocking incident, a woman allegedly hanged her two daughters to death before killing herself in Telangana's Yadadri Bhongir district, police said on Thursday. Turpunuri Umarani (32) hanged all her three daughters -- Harshini (13), Lucky (11) and Shainy (8) at her residence in Ramnagar before killing herself by hanging. However, her youngest daughter escaped death. Umarani's husband Venkatesh, who was sleeping outside the house, woke up Thursday morning to the cries of their youngest daughter. As the door was locked from inside, he broke it to find his wife and two daughters hanging from an iron beam.



Shainy escaped the death as the cloth with which Umarani hanged her to the beam apparently ripped off.

Police suspect that the woman killed her daughters and herself early Thursday. Deputy Commissioner of Police K. Narayana Reddy said no suicide note was found. She is believed to have taken the extreme step due to financial problems. The police officer, however, said they were probing if there was any issue between the couple.

Democracy has been ripped off in UP: Priyanka Gandhi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

After violence was reported from various parts of Uttar Pradesh during the filing of nomination papers for the block pramukh elections on Thursday, with allegations of opposition candidates being stopped by the administration, Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra trained her guns at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath over the issue.

"PM Saheb and CM Saheb should congratulate their workers in UP for firing, bombing, stone pelting, looting nomination papers and thrashing journalists and women. Law and order is blind-folded while democracy has been ripped off in UP," she said in a tweet in Hindi.

Widespread violence was reported on Thursday from various districts, including Siddharthnagar, Sitapur, Gorakhpur and Sambhal during the filing of nomination papers for the block pramukh elections.

Majority of the incidents took place after the opposition candidates were prevented from filing their nomination papers.

In Siddharthnagar, former Uttar Pradesh Assembly Speaker, Mata Prasad Pandey, was assaulted.



In Sitapur, three people received bullet injuries when Independent candidate Munni Devi arrived to file her nomination in Kamlapur.

She was prevented from going in even as unidentified persons opened fire in the presence of the police. Her supporters created a ruckus as some people even lobbed crude bombs.

Munni Devi's supporters blocked the highway in protest. In Ambedkar Nagar, some miscreants snatched the nomination papers from the hands of former BSP minister Lalji Varma, leading to violent clashes.

"It was BJP leader Tejaswi Jaiswal who snatched the papers, leading to tension and clashes," said Varma. In Kannauj, the supporters of Samajwadi Party and BJP clashed, with SP leaders alleging that they were being prevented from filing nomination papers.

A journalist with a news channel was beaten up while he was filming the incident.

Similar incidents were reported from Fatehpur where some people brandished firearms in the presence of the police and tore up the nomination papers of some candidates. Journalists were also roughed up.



NEWLY APPOINTED GOVERNOR OF STATE TAKES CHARGE

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The newly appointed Governor of State Mangubhai Chhaganbhai Patel took charge as the Governor of Madhya Pradesh at Raj Bhawan on Thursday. Chief Justice of the High Court of the state, Mohammad Rafiq administered the oath of office to him.

He is the 30th Governor of Madhya Pradesh, Raj Bhawan sources said.

At the swearing-in ceremony, the outgoing Governor and presently Governor of Uttar Pradesh Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, former Chief Minister and Leader of Opposition Kamal Nath, Home Minister Narottam Mishra, Sports and Youth Welfare Minister Yashodhara Raje Scindia, Finance and Commercial Taxes Minister Jagdish Deora, Forest Minister Vijay Shah, Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang, Higher Education Minister Mohan Yadav, Mineral Resources and Labour Minister Brijendra Pratap Singh, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Minister Om Prakash Saklecha, Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains, Director General of



Police Vivek Johri, Principal Secretary to Governor DP Ahuja and others were present.

The swearing-in ceremony began and ended with the national anthem. After this, the Governor Mangubhai Chhaganbhai Patel was given a salute by the Guard of Honour. Governor Mangubhai Chhaganbhai Patel was born on June 1, 1944 in Navsari, Gujarat.

He was MLA from Navsari in Gujarat five times and from Ganadevi once. He has served as MLA for 27 years. He was Minister of Tribal Welfare (Independent Charge) from 1997 to 2002 and Minister of Tribal Welfare, Forest and Environment from 2002 to 2012. Notably, After the announcement, Patel had told reporters at his residence at

Navsari in Gujarat that he will try his best to fulfil his new responsibility. "The BJP is a party which believes in taking along all communities. I thank President Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and other leaders for giving me this new responsibility," Patel had said.

Mandsaur will set an example in following Covid appropriate behaviour: CM Chouhan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the experience of the world shows that wearing a mask reduces the risk of corona by up to 95 percent. We quickly forget the pain of lockdown. The lockdown has affected the employment and business of many people. The infection can be controlled by wearing a mask and following the precautions of maintaining distance. With this we can continue the economic activities of employment and business. Now is the opportunity to set an example in following Covid friendly behaviour. Surely "Amazing-Unique Mandsaur" will take initiative in this direction. Chouhan was virtually inaugurating the newly constructed RT-PCR lab at Mandsaur from his residence. Chouhan said that Mandsaur is the first district where RT-PCR labs have been established besides medical college. This lab has been set up at a cost of Rs. 50 lakh with Rs. 35 lakh contributed by MLA Yashpal Singh Sisodia from MLA fund and Rs. 15 lakh by social worker and industrialist Pradeep Ganediwal. This lab proves the phrase "where there is a will there is a way" as



correct. The district hospital has been rejuvenated by setting up of central oxygen line at more than 250 beds, 400 oxygen concentrators, ICU beds along with lab establishment, which shows the resilience and cooperative spirit of Mandsaur. Chouhan said that setting up of RT-PCR lab will help in increasing the number of tests. Tests should be conducted in every nook and corner of the district. Contact tracing, isolation of positive people, treatment and kill corona campaign should continue uninterrupted. Lab establishment and expansion of facilities in hospitals are being done to face the third wave of Corona. Our corona appropriate behaviour should be such that the third wave would not affect the state at all. Chouhan said that all possible activities would be conducted in Mandsaur for processing, quality improvement and better marketing of garlic in national and interna-

tional markets under one district-one product. Chief Minister also appreciated the initiative and cooperation of other social workers of the district along with Nirmila Devi Kaloria during the Corona period. Chouhan released the film "Garlic Mandsaur" produced for the branding of garlic grown in Mandsaur on the basis of "One District-One Product" under Atma-nirbhar Madhya Pradesh. Chief Minister also released short films Mandsaur Geet and Mandsaur Darshan produced for the promotion of archaeological and tourist places in the district. Chief Minister has benefited 25 persons under Mukhyamantri Covid 19 Anukampa Nyukti Yojana and 33 children under Mukhyamantri Covid-19 Bal Seva Yojana. With public cooperation and public participation, the disbursement of Rs. 2 thousand per month to 125 children was also started.

MP Board Special Exams For Class 10, 12 Students In September

The special exams for the Class 10 and Class 12 students will be held between September 1 and September 25 in designated exam centres allocated for the purpose.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh School Education Department has announced that the board will conduct special exams for those students unsatisfied with the Class 10 and Class 12 results. The special exams for the Class 10 and Class 12 students will be held between

September 1 and September 25 in designated exam centres allocated for the purpose. The board while announcing the special exam date, also said that the application window for applying for the special exams will open on August 1 and close on August 10. The application process will be online. The board has already announced the evaluation criteria for the cancelled Class 10 and Class 12 board exams. However, the board has not yet declared the MP Class 10th, 12th result date. Since, the application for the special exams is scheduled to start from August 1, students can expect the results to be out by July 31. As per the assessment criteria released by the board, Class 10 students will be evaluated on the basis of their mid-term exams or pre-boards, unit

tests, and internal assessment. Students will be assessed out of 100 marks for each subject. While the pre-boards will get 50 per cent weightage, unit tests will get 30 per cent and internal assessment 20 per cent weightage. The past three years' performance of schools in board results will also be considered. The Class 12th results for the cancelled board exams will be declared on the basis of their performances in the best five subjects of Class 10. "Class 12 marks will be determined on the basis of best of five marks obtained in various subjects of Class 10, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said, according to the department. All students, who had earlier registered for their board exams, will be promoted using this method, an official statement said.

Use of AYUSH medicines increased during the Corona Period

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The use of AYUSH medicines has increased during the Corona Period. The market of Ayurveda medicines has seen two to three fold growth in the year 2020 as compared to the previous year. AYUSH medicines have proved to be helpful in boosting the immunity of people. Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha, Secretary, Department of AYUSH, Government of India, said this while expressing his views in the lecture series "Effective Change-Sustainable Results" at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Good Governance and Policy Analysis on the topic "Opportunities in AYUSH Sector Emerged out of Covid-19 Pandemic." Kotecha said that the process of approval, renewal of license has been expedited with the aim of

speeding up the manufacturing of AYUSH products. The scheme of planting medicinal plants on a large scale is being implemented; this will fulfill the demand of drug manufacturers. Kotecha said that AYUSH-64 medicine has proved beneficial in mild and moderate corona. Along with this, Ayush decoction, Ashwagandha and Gudchi-Peepli have been useful in preventing corona. Helpline no. 14443 has been

issued by Ministry of AYUSH. Through this, the patients were counselled by the experts. Ayush kits were distributed. Trikatu churna was distributed free of cost in Madhya Pradesh. Kotecha said that research on Covid-19 was done in collaboration with CSIR, ICMR, Madhya Pradesh government and other institutions. Based on this, protocols were also issued. Gave feedback of people

through Ayush Sanjeevani App. Approximately lakh person given the feedback. In Madhya Pradesh wide publicity regarding benefits of AYUSH medicines has been carried out. People adopted them too. "Vaidya Aapke Dwar" campaign is being run in Madhya Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh ranks third in the country in terms of availability of Ayurveda practitioners. More than 13 thousand medical camps were organised this year. The Vice President of the Institute Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi said that better work is being done in the field of AYUSH. He said that useful materials are available in sufficient quantity for the manufacture of medicines in Madhya Pradesh. There is a need for their systematic use. For this a policy needs to be made.

DISCUSSION WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF AYUSH PHARMA COMPANIES

Bhopal: Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha, Secretary AYUSH, Government of India, discussed with the representatives of various AYUSH pharma companies at the Institute of Good Governance. The representatives informed about the expansion of AYUSH companies in Madhya Pradesh, problems faced in the promotion of AYUSH products and other issues. Kotecha assured to solve the problems and increase the capacity of the pharma companies.

Vyapam scam accused constable robs businessmen, says did it to fight case

Satendra Gurjar and two other constables posted at cyber cell, Gwalior, Abhishek Tiwari and Vivek Pathak, were arrested by Gwalior police a few days ago, said Amit Sanghi, superintendent of police, Gwalior. The SP said, "Sanjay Agrawal, Sanjay Gupta, and another businessman, are wholesalers of gold bullion in Jhansi. They purchased it from Delhi to supply it to jewellers in Jhansi. They were going to Delhi on June 17 on Jabalpur-Nizamuddin Express when the three police personnel and a Railway Protection Force (RPF) constable, Yogendra, asked them to show their bags at Dabra Railway station near Gwalior. The personnel introduced themselves as Crime Branch officers of Rajasthan Police. Threatening them to falsely implicate them in hawala racket, the police personnel confiscated their bag with Rs 60 lakh and got off the

Team Absolute | Gwalior

crime. Satendra Gurjar and two other constables posted at cyber cell, Gwalior, Abhishek Tiwari and Vivek Pathak, were arrested by Gwalior police a few days ago, said Amit Sanghi, superintendent of police, Gwalior.

train. "Once the businessmen lodged a complaint with GRP Gwalior, the personnel were identified through CCTV footage. During interrogation, they admitted that Gurjar was the mastermind," the SP said. During interrogation, Gurjar confessed to the crime and said he was suspended in 2015 after CBI filed a charge-sheet against him for using illegal means to clear the constable recruitment exam under the Vyapam scam. He was facing a financial crisis due to the court case. He had to return the money borrowed from private money lenders," said an investigating officer, who is not authorised to talk to media. Police are interrogating them to find out if they were involved in any other crime. They are also trying to find how the accused knew all the details about the businessmen they robbed. The SP said, "We have written to RPF to take action against the fourth accused."

HUSBAND MURDERED WHILE SLEEPING, POLICE SUSPECT WIFE'S ROLE

Bhopal: A newly married woman in Vidisha district was shocked to see her husband's defaced dead body after waking up while both of them were sleeping together. The couple got married just 15 days ago. The woman had come to her in-laws' home a day before the murder of her husband. According to sources, the rest of the family members had gone to Narmada in Hoshangabad for a holy bath. The incident has been reported from Malia Khedi village, 70 km from Vidisha town. During interrogation of the wife, it was revealed that when Sonu's (the dead husband) 22-year-old wife woke up in the morning, she saw the horribly mutilated body of her husband. She further said that she immediately alerted the neighbours about the ghastly incident. Both husband and wife were in the house at the time of the incident. The couple got married on June 20. After the wedding, the woman left for her maternal home. According to reports, she had returned to her in-laws' house a day earlier. The next morning, Mohar Prajapati, the father of the deceased, left along with his family to take a bath in Narmada.

Man Slits His Throat, Sends Picture To Wife On Whatsapp In Betul

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a bizarre incident, a man in Betul town slit his throat and then sent the graphic picture to his wife over Whatsapp. The man, who was on a visit to his in-laws' house during the incident, was rushed to hospital by his wife and her family. After visiting several hospitals, the man was finally referred to Nagpur. The man is said to be out of danger now. According to information, Sandeep hails from Nagpur and got married to a woman from Taroda village under Bordehi police limits. He had come to his in-laws' house recently and on Wednesday night he ventured a little far from the home. He then

allegedly slit his throat and sent a selfie to his wife on her Whatsapp number. His wife was shocked when she opened her husband's chat window. Sandeep was then brought to hospital by his wife, her brother and parents. Sandeep's in-laws first rushed him to the community health centre in Multai where he got stitches around the injured area and then sent to the district hospital. The district hospital, too, advised the family that Sandeep needs specialised medical care and referred him to Nagpur after his condition stabilised. Meanwhile, Multai sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) Namrata Soundhiya

said that a police team was sent to Betul after getting information that a man had slit his throat. However, Sandeep had left for Nagpur by the time police arrived to start the investigation. Soundhiya said that a police team will leave for Nagpur to record Sandeep's statement, and find out why he slit his throat. In another horrific incident from Vidisha district, a newly married woman said she woke up to find that her husband, who was sleeping next to her, was killed and his face disfigured. The couple had married just 15 days ago. Police are suspecting the wife's role in the incident which took place in Maliya Khedi village, 70 km from Vidisha.

MP Pragya Thakur Marries off Two Girls from Poor Families, Shakes a Leg with Guests



The MP from Bhopal arranged the weddings of two girls whose families were unable to manage wedding expenses due to poor income during lockdown.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Often in the news for wrong reasons, Bhopal Member of Parliament Pragya Singh Thakur has hit the headlines with a positive incident. The BJP lawmaker on Wednesday married off two girls from poor families at her residence in Bhopal, taking part in all the traditional customs and rituals. The marriage processions, which started from Ujjain, had reached the MP's residence late evening on Wednesday and all the rituals were performed there as the two couples tied the knot in the presence of the

MP. Playing the guardian of the girls, the MP was present at the doors to receive the marriage processions that had reached her residence. During the rituals, the MP also was seen dancing with others and also seen with moist eyes when the her 'daughters' left after the marriages were solemnised. "I carry different forms of myself including a mother, a father, a guru and a sanyasin as well," said the MP. Extending blessings to the newly wed couples, Thakur said she was happy for them and promised that she will continue to discharge duty as a parent

afterwards as well. "My doors are always open for these couples," she said. Narmada Prasad Mishra, the father of these girls, Chanchal and Sandhya, had earlier approached Thakur and pleaded for help for their daughters' wedding. Mishra had told the MP that his business was destroyed in lockdown and he had no sources to arrange the wedding. The MP immediately pledged to marry off the girls in a grand style. She had promised Mishra that marriages will take place at her bungalow and she will bear all the expenses incurred during the function.

Calling Thakur 'Pragya Didi', the girls thanked the MP saying she acted like an elder sister and performed their marriages, saving their parents from hassles. Congress party again took a dig at the BJP MP as spokesperson Narendra Saluja said that it always heartening to see 'Bahan Pragya Thakur' playing basketball, walking without help or like this. To add, recently Thakur was seen playing basketball in a Bhopal stadium. For months in the past, the MP was wheelchair bound, attributing her injuries to Congress rule custodial tortures.



Govt focuses on districts of concern

COVID-19 CASES RISE IN MUMBAI AND MAHARASHTRA

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray convened a meeting of senior officials of various districts and asked them to take steps to ensure strict COVID protocols are adhered to mitigate COVID crisis.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

With the spectre of possible COVID-19 third wave starting at us, both Maharashtra and the state capital Mumbai have witnessed an increase in daily COVID cases on Wednesday. This comes even as the state government has decided to focus on eight districts where COVID-19 positivity rates is high.

On Wednesday, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray chaired two separate meetings via video conferencing with District Collectors, Divisional Commissioner, and



Covid Task Force on COVID-19 management. The meeting was regarding the preparedness for the possible third wave and the possible steps that can be taken to tackle COVID cases in eight districts - Kolhapur, Pune rural, Sangli, Satara, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Raigad and Palghar. The Maharashtra chief

minister said that the state had taken a strategic risk in opening up businesses despite the fact that the second wave has not completely subsided. Thackeray added that district authorities should ensure that COVID protocols are strictly enforced to mitigate surge in cases, according to a report in Times of

India. According to Dr Shashank Joshi, member of the Covid task force, better contact tracing, strict restrictions, and containment policies are required in the eight districts. "Although these areas have special vaccination drives, cases are not dropping," he added.

As for Mumbai, where the fresh COVID cases rose to 662 after two days of being under 500, Joshi said the "thick tail" is a worry and the second wave continues actively in the state, including Mumbai. "Failure to adhere to Covid-appropriate norms could see a spike in cases in the second wave itself," the report quoted Dr Joshi as saying.

Maharashtra on Wednesday recorded 9,558 fresh COVID-19 cases taking the total caseload to 61.2 lakh. The state reported 147 deaths which take the toll to 1,23,857. In Mumbai, nine deaths were reported on Wednesday which was the lowest in 16 days. The death toll in Mumbai now stands at 15,573 and the caseload at 7,26,278.

Schools In Covid-Free Zones To Resume Offline Classes From Next Week

Maharashtra government has decided to reopen schools in areas where no active COVID-19 case has been reported in the last month.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra government has decided to reopen schools in areas where no active COVID-19 case has been reported in last one month. The schools have been allowed to resume offline classes for students of Classes 8 to 12 from July 15, minister of school education department Varsha Gaikwad said. Get latest update on Maharashtra schools reopening through SMS/Email - Subscribe Here

"It has become a need of the hour to have a co-educational approach to reach out to the children of the last strata of the state," she added. Gaikwad shared the government order on Twitter which states that all teachers and staff members need to be vaccinated before the school reopening.

"Prior to the commencement of school, corona vaccination of all teachers and non-teaching staff in the respective schools should be done as a matter of priority," Mr Gaikwad said adding that "It is mandatory for all to strictly abide by the Corona prevention rules laid down by the state government before starting school. Considering the possibility of a possible third wave, any kind of negligence



will not be tolerated." "In Jaya village, no corona patient has been found for the last one month and in future, the gram panchayat may unanimously decide to keep the village corona-free. Classes 8 to 12 will be sanctioned to start from July 15," the minister said. An eight-member committee will be formed to take a call on Covid-free zones. The committee will comprise collectors, school principals and health officials. In rural areas, the committee will be headed by the head of the gram panchayat.

"The committee under the chairmanship of the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat will be responsible for strict adherence to the Corona Prevention Rules at the village level," Gaikwad said. "Let's all come together in this challenging time, let's secure our future! Continuing our children's education; their health and safety will always be a priority in our decision making process," she added.

NCP's Eknath Khadse goes to ED, alleges 'political vendetta'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Appearing before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for the second time on Thursday, senior Nationalist Congress Party leader Eknath Khadse claimed he and his family members are being "politically targeted" in the alleged corruption cases against him.

"The case against me is politically motivated. My and family members and I are being targeted politically to defame us. However, I am cooperating fully with the probe agencies," he said, while going to the ED office in Mumbai for the probe into the Pune land deal case.

The ED summoned Khadse, 68, a day after arresting his son-in-law Girish Chaudhary in connection with the alleged money-laundering and other irregularities in the purchase of a plot of land in 2016.

Khadse added that entire Maharashtra is witnessing what is going on, as the case has already been probed five times, the Anti-Corruption Bureau had given him a clean chit, yet it is being investigated again.

The ED has contended that Khadse and Chaudhary had bought the government-owned plot at Bhosari near Pune for Rs 3.75 crore against the prevailing market rate of over Rs 31 crore.

The agency also suspects that Khadse, as then Revenue Minister in the BJP-led government, had reportedly misused his official position to force the officials concerned into the transaction for his family, and contended that the source of funds for the deal was not genuine as the money had been routed through shell companies. A former senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader, Khadse was shunted to the political wilderness for almost five years following political differences with the then Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, and he joined the NCP in October 2020. "I left the BJP and joined the NCP, that's why I am being harassed like this. It's a political conspiracy," Khadse hit out, speaking briefly to the media outside the ED offices. Meanwhile, after interrogation on Wednesday, Chaudhary was produced before a Special Court which has sent him to ED custody.

MAHARASHTRA CYBER WARNS PEOPLE AGAINST FAKE WEBSITES OFFERING LOANS

Mumbai: During the pandemic and lockdown period, the department had found that anti-social elements were creating fake websites, luring people with the promise of loans and later duping them, a Maharashtra Cyber official said.

Maharashtra Cyber on Thursday warned citizens not to fall prey to fraudsters who are duping people using fake websites of well-known financial institutions and banks, and offering them loans.

During the pandemic and lockdown period, the department had found that anti-social elements were creating fake websites, luring people with the promise of loans and later duping them, a Maharashtra Cyber official said. One such gang had asked people to fill up forms or contact them, and after gaining their confidence, fraudsters asked victims to deposit some processing fees to clear loans, and later duped them, the official said.

Since many such cases came to light, the department has issued advisory asking people to verify logos and other details of financial institutions if they are applying for loans online, he said.

People have also been asked to visit the nearest branches of banks before applying for loans to get proper information for their safety, and contact the local police immediately if they fall victim to cyber frauds, the official added.

Maharashtra first state to administer over 3.5 crore vaccine doses

The state has the capacity to vaccinate 10 lakh people a day. Its daily average in the first week of July is 4.29 lakh. In seven days of July, Maharashtra has managed to administer 30 lakh vaccine doses against Covid-19. In the last week of June, the daily average was 4.49 lakh with 31.46 lakh people vaccinated between June 23-30.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra has become the first state to cross the 3.5 crore



COVID-19 vaccine doses milestone. On Wednesday the state vaccinated 6.35 lakh people. Following Maharashtra closely is Uttar Pradesh with 3.52 crore jabs. The highest single-day immunisation by Maharashtra was noted on July 3 with 8.11 lakh people vaccinated. The state has the capacity to vaccinate 10 lakh people a day. Its daily average in the first week of July is 4.29 lakh. In seven days of July, Maharashtra has managed to administer 30 lakh vaccine doses against Covid-19. In the

last week of June, the daily average was 4.49 lakh with 31.46 lakh people vaccinated between June 23-30. State officials said that they plan to speed up coverage of people aged over 45 years with both doses ahead of the third wave. Of 3.8 crore people in this pool, both doses have been administered to only 13.7 percent population (52.40 lakh). For the remaining 3.3 crore people aged above 45 years, if the current pace of vaccination continues, Maharashtra will take another 77 days to cover them.

281 DOCTORS WRITE A LETTER TO CM ASKING PERMISSION TO COMMIT SUICIDE

Mumbai: 281 Ayurvedic doctors have shot a letter to CM Uddhav Thackeray asking his permission to end life over negligent behaviour meted out to them by the state government.

More than 280 doctors have written a letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray asking him permission to commit suicide, reports TV9 Marathi.



According to the reports, 281 Ayurvedic doctors have shot a letter to Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray asking his permission to end their lives over non-fulfilment of promises and disrespectful behaviour meted out to them by the Maharashtra government.

In the letter, the doctors have lamented about the ill-treatment of Ayurvedic doctors by the state government, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Expressing disappointment over prolonged posting in backward tribal areas, the BAMS doctors said that they have been serving in 18 tribal districts for the last two decades, often visiting remotely located villages that do not even have basic facilities. According to BAMS doctors, they treat locals in these backward areas for various ailments, including minor illnesses, snake-scorpion bites, treating malnourished children, etc. The letter written by Ayurvedic doctors comes days after an Ayurvedic doctor Swarnil Lonkar ended his life after he was denied a posting even though he had cleared the MPSC (Maharashtra Public Service Commission) exam.

Dr Sheshrao Suryavanshi, one of the signatories to the permission letter to end their lives, said that the state government gives special incentive allowances to police and government officials serving in these Naxal-affected areas, however, the same benefits are denied to doctors, who are being paid just Rs.24,000 as salary.

Last year, after a meeting between the doctors and Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, Health Minister Rajesh Tope, and the Tribal ministry it was decided that these 281 Ayurvedic doctors working in tribal areas would be given Rs.40,000 rupees instead of the present Rs.24,000 rupees. However, this decision is yet to be implemented.

Expressing his disappointment with the MVA government, Dr Suryavanshi said that the Uddhav Thackeray-led government has not shown any humanity towards them even after extracting hard work under unfavourable conditions in the remotest corners in the state, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pune Dedicates Hospital For Transgender People

As a step forward, a hospital has been set up in Pune dedicated to Transgenders. The facility aims to provide basic healthcare & counselling services to them

Team Absolute | Pune

As a step forward, a hospital dedicated to the Transgender community is being set up in Pune, to provide basic health care facilities to them. The clinic is named 'Accelerate' and will be providing free healthcare and basic facilities to the Trans community. The hospital will also provide counselling sessions and work towards improving their Mental Health.

The initiative was aimed at providing free healthcare services to Transgender people, as they often face discrimination at hospitals. In the healthcare centre, the facilities are being added to conduct lab tests to detect minor ailments, technicians, nurses, doctors, counsellors are being appointed. The hospital is the first one in the state of Maharashtra.

Deepak Nikam, District Coordinator of Accelerate, said, "Services will include counselling sessions to improve the mental health of individuals. Also, lab tests can be carried out to diagnose minor ailments. We hope to start this centre



soon." Advocating the initiative, Nikam said, "After carrying out community research, our team found out that we should start a separate healthcare centre for the trans-people. With this initiative, we hope we can provide much-needed healthcare support to them."

Sonali Dalvi, a transgender activist told ANI, "Usually, we face a lot of discrimination from local people if we are being treated in a normal hospital ward. Many women do not feel comfortable with our presence. Hence, we hope that via this clinic, we trans-people can take care of our healthcare." A ray of hope now emerges for these people who wish to avail quality healthcare in the Pune region.

Earlier, On September 16, 2020, as per an official release, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment enacted, "The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights), Act, 2019". As per Chapter VII of the Act in the National Council for Transgender Persons, along with other members, five representatives of the transgender community from the State/UTs by rotation and five experts to represent Non-Governmental Organizations or associations working for the welfare of transgender persons are to be nominated by the Central Government. The Council will assess the impact of various policies and they are free to decide on the modalities.

Maharashtra government set to double storage capacity of medical oxygen

On Wednesday, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray held a review meeting to discuss existing storage capacity and how hospitals are faring.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Anticipating a third wave of Covid-19, Maharashtra plans to scale up storage capacity of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) by 2,000 to 2,500 MT. The public health department has estimated its requirement will touch 4,000 MT per day in a worst case scenario in the third wave.

On Wednesday, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray held a review meeting to discuss existing storage capacity and how hospitals are faring.

The state currently can store 2,000 MT of LMO, including in medical colleges and hospitals under the public health department. On June 28, Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Dr Pradeep Vyasa had written to all collectors to



increase storage capacity for medical oxygen in districts. The collectors have said that apart from the existing ones, they will need to set up storage tanks for 2,000 MT. Maharashtra currently produces 1,300 MT of LMO for industrial and medical use. There are 533 pressure swing adsorption plants in pipeline or already ready, which will produce 400 to 500 MT per day. In addition, the state expects to receive 5,500 oxygen concentrators from the Union government and another 4,000 to 5,000 concentrators through Corporate Social Responsibility funds. In all, 20,000 concentrators will be available, officials said. The concentrators will produce an additional 150 MT of oxygen on a daily basis. While

Maharashtra estimates to touch 2,000 MT of oxygen production on a daily basis, officials said they cannot accurately predict how much oxygen will be required during the third wave.

In the second wave, the state required a maximum of 1,850 MT per day. "If the third wave is less severe, then our existing capacity will be sufficient. But based on the Union government's formula, we have calculated our oxygen requirement estimating a worst case scenario. Then oxygen needs will shoot up to 4,000 MT per day," a senior health official said.

States have been asked to calculate their requirement based on the formula of intensive care unit patients needing 30 litre of oxygen per minute and non-ICU patients requiring 10 litre.

Earlier, Maharashtra had directed hospitals to use 20 litre for ICU and 7 litre per minute for non-ICU patients. With the rise in oxygen usage, the requirement will also increase. Officials said they may still need to rely on the Union government to allocate more oxygen if Maharashtra falls short.

Maharashtra govt to urge Centre to cancel vaccine certificates of fake jab scam victims

An official said the Maharashtra health department will write a letter to the Centre, demanding the cancellation of CoWin certificates issued to victims of fake vaccination drive.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra health department will write a letter to the central government on Thursday, demanding the cancellation of certificates issued to victims of the Mumbai vaccination scam, an official said.

In its letter, the Maharashtra government's health department will ask the Centre to cancel CoWin certificates of all people who received jabs during the fake vaccination drive that took

place in Mumbai, Thane and Navi Mumbai.

Once data is deleted from the CoWin site, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) will then get all the victims vaccinated, said the Maharashtra government health department official. "Once their data is deleted from the CoWin, all [the victims] will be vaccinated by the BMC immediately," the official said. The officials said over 5,000 people are expected to be vaccinated by the accused in the fake vaccination scam. The scam came to light in Mumbai when residents of Hiranandani Heritage Club in Kandivali (West) complained that they were allegedly given fake Covid-19 jabs on May 30.

Following this, Aditya College from Borivali also came forward and filed a complaint against a group for carrying out a fake vaccination drive on their campus.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Now, HIV vaccine !

Scientists at the University of Oxford have started vaccinations of a novel HIV vaccine candidate as part of a Phase I clinical trial in the UK. The goal of the trial is to evaluate the safety, tolerability and immunogenicity of the HIVconsuX vaccine -- a mosaic vaccine targeting a broad range of HIV-1 variants, making it potentially applicable for HIV strains in any geographical region. Thirteen healthy, HIV-negative adults, aged 18-65 and who are considered not to be at high risk of infection, will initially receive one dose of the vaccine followed by a further booster dose at four weeks. "An effective HIV vaccine has been elusive for 40 years. This trial is the first in a series of evaluations of this novel vaccine strategy in both HIV-negative individuals for prevention and in people living with HIV for cure," said lead researcher Tomas Hanke, Professor of Vaccine Immunology at the Jenner Institute at Oxford, in a statement. While most HIV vaccine candidates work by inducing antibodies generated by B-cells, HIVconsuX induces the immune system's potent, pathogen obliterating T cells, targeting them to highly conserved and therefore vulnerable regions of HIV -- an "Achilles heel" common to most HIV variants. "Achieving protection against HIV is extremely challenging and it is important that we harness the protective potential of both the antibody and T cell arms of the immune system," said Paola Cicconi, Senior Clinical Research Fellow at the Jenner Institute. At present, prevention of HIV largely focuses on behavioural and biomedical interventions such as voluntary medical male circumcision, condom use, and anti-retroviral drugs used prior to exposure. The researchers aim to report results of the trial by April 2022. Similar trials are also planned in Europe, Africa and the US.

The confused US withdrawal from Afghanistan

The recent attacks by Taliban in Baghlan, Farah, Kunduz, Herat, Takhar, Helmand, Ghazni and Badakhshan provinces and the capture of Dahla dam which supplies water to Kandahar town should be a curtain raiser for those who ardently watch the story unfold in Afghanistan.

Maj Gen Mandip Singh

As on May 1, 139 pro-government and 44 civilians had lost their lives in just a week alone. On April 14, 2021, President Joe Biden promised to end the "Forever war" by announcing a full US pull out on September 11, 2021, largely out of symbolism to commemorate the 20th year of Global War on Terror (GWOT). But soon after the announcement, it is becoming apparent that the US has not thought through the larger implications of this decision.

It is quite apparent that even the US army is surprised by the sudden turn of events. The confusion in the US army is compounded by the contradictory statements emerging from the US military leadership.

"It's not a foregone conclusion, in my professional military estimate, that the Taliban automatically win and Kabul falls," said General Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, while speaking at the Pentagon on 6 May 2021 even as Afghan Army casualties began to mount in Taliban attacks within the week. He even came out in support of the ANDSF and their capabilities announcing that "I'm a personal witness -- that the Afghan security forces can fight," Milley, who had previously served in Afghanistan, added.

"We've been supporting them, for sure, but they've been leading the fight."

That is not how a former US commander who crafted US strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan, Gen. David Petraeus assess the situation. In an interview he said, "I do fear that two to three years from now we are going to look back and regret the decision to withdraw the remaining 3,500 US troops," enthusing no confidence in the abilities of the ANDSF to stabilise Afghanistan post the withdrawal.

In fact he even predicted the return of ISIS and believed, "This is not going to end the endless war in Afghanistan; it is going to end the US and the coalition involvement in that war militarily" and warned of resurgence of Daesh. For instance, the recent Taliban attacks have seen desperate calls for the Afghan Air Force to assist the ground troops in fighting the Taliban. The Afghan Air Force is almost entirely dependent on the US for its force sustenance and would be ineffective unless this support is assured. The US has



indicated that it would be capable of supporting operations from its air bases in close proximity of Afghanistan like the Middle East and has been actively courting Uzbekistan as a possible destination. But that does in no way mitigate the problems of keeping Afghan Air Force in the air. Gen Mark Milley accepts that "[M]aintaining logistic support to the Afghan Air Force is a key test that we have to sort out", and even hinted that some contractors could return to Afghanistan after the withdrawal is complete. In fact the SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction) report released on April 30, 2021 stated that the Afghan Air Force could be grounded "within months without the current level of contractor support". (italics mine). The SIGAR report is more candid as it quotes US military leadership expressing their reservations and concerns at the capabilities of the ANDSF to defend Afghanistan. Consider these statements in the run up to Biden's speech of April 14, 2021.

On February 20, 2021, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin linked the US withdrawal to a reduction in Taliban attacks. "The violence must decrease now."

The same day, on February 20, 2021, General Kenneth F. McKenzie, in a meeting with Pakistani officials, warned that an early US pullout could risk the collapse of the Afghan government.

On March 13, 2021, the commander of US and allied forces in Afghanistan, General

Austin Scott Miller, expressed concerns at the capabilities of the Afghan air force saying that "When you start talking about removing our presence... certain things like air, air support, and maintenance of that air support become more and more problematic".

On March 25, 2021, General Richard Clarke, Commander, US Special Operations Command accepted the Taliban have not upheld their end of the Doha accord and said: "It's clear the Taliban have not upheld what they said they would do and reduce the violence. It is clear they took a deliberate approach and increased their violence since the peace accords were signed."

On April 20, 2021, the Commander of US Central Command, General Kenneth McKenzie, while testifying at a House Armed Services Committee stated that, "Everyone will leave. All US defence contractors will leave as part of the withdrawal."

The contradictions are visible. Violence has climbed by 37 per cent in the first quarter as compared to last year. With reference to Gen Kenneth McKenzie's statement, it is now clear that as many as 17,000 contractors, approximately 6000 of whom are US citizens are in Afghanistan will be permitted to renegotiate their contracts. The Economic Times comments that the Pentagon was toying with the option of turning over some contracts, particularly maintenance contracts presently effected by US contractors to Afghan

control. Even the CIA Director William Burns acceded during a hearing that "[W]hen the time comes for the US military to withdraw, the US government's ability to collect and act on threats will diminish... That is simply a fact."

Even the Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, released as recent as April 9, 2021 and tabled before Biden's announcement, assessed that the possibility of the success of an intra-Afghan deal between the Afghan government and the Taliban "will remain low during the next year," and that "the Taliban is likely to make gains on the battlefield, and the Afghan Government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if the Coalition withdraws support." The Report expressed serious reservations about the capabilities of the ANDSF and concludes that the ANDSF "continues to face setbacks on the battlefield, and the Taliban is confident it can achieve military victory."

Almost as if on cue, and in complete synchronisation with the US, NATO too ordered its drawdown from Afghanistan, clearly aligning their interests with the US and showing how bereft EU is of an independent Afghan policy as well as the limitations of its military reach and capabilities. Almost immediately after Biden's announcement, on the same day, at a joint press conference NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that NATO ministers "decided that we will start the withdrawal of NATO Resolute Support forces by May 1... We plan to complete the drawdown of all our troops within a few months." Clearly, the military leadership did not approve of or never sensed the impending announcement by the President. In any case, if indeed they made a pitch to the President, he obviously has overruled their advice. The US withdrawal, as it unfolds at the present, is confusing and portends ill for the future of Afghanistan.

(The writer -- Maj Gen Mandip Singh, SM, VSM retired recently from Northern Command. He has been a Senior Fellow at MP- IDSA & Dean of the Army War College at Mhow. He is a keen China watcher and writes regularly on foreign & military affairs)

international

POLICE GUN DOWN 4 AFTER HAITI PRESIDENT ASSASSINATED

Port-au-Prince | Agencies

Four persons suspected of assassinating Haiti's President Jovenel Moise have been killed in a shootout with the security forces, police said.

Two others have been detained, while officers are still in combat with some remaining suspects in Haiti capital Port-au-Prince, the BBC reported citing officials.

"They will be killed or captured," police chief Leon Charles said.

Moise, 53, was fatally shot and his wife was injured when attackers stormed their home early on Wednesday. The unidentified gunmen entered the private residence in Port-au-Prince at 1 a.m. local time (05:00 GMT). Moise was killed, but First Lady Martine Moise survived and has been flown to Florida where she is receiving treatment.

She is reported to be in a stable but critical condition.

"Four mercenaries were killed (and) two were intercepted under our control," Charles said in a televised statement late on Wednesday. "Three policemen who had been taken hostage have been recovered." "We blocked (the suspects) en route as they left the scene of the crime," he added.



"Since then, we have been battling with them." Speaking after the killing, interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph called for calm and declared a nationwide state of emergency.

The state of emergency, or "state of siege", allows for the banning of gatherings and use of the military for police roles, along with other extensions of executive powers.

US President Joe Biden offered condolences to the people of Haiti for the "horrific assassination". UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, meanwhile, called it "an abhorrent act" and also appealed for calm. Moise became president of Haiti in 2017, but in recent times faced widespread protests demanding his resignation.

Coups, political instability, widespread gang violence and natural disasters have plagued the country for decades and rendered it the poorest nation in the Americas.

Joseph said the attackers were "foreigners who spoke English and Spanish". Haiti's official languages are Creole and French.

Some reports spoke of men dressed in black who carried high-powered weapons who may have pretended to be part of a US drug enforcement operation, although no official details have been given.

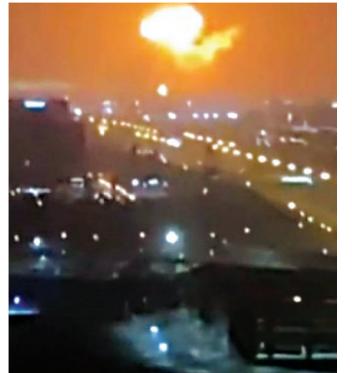
Haiti's ambassador to the US, Bocchit Edmond, said there was "no way" US drugs agents carried out the attack. He believed it was the work of "professional mercenaries".

Massive blast at Dubai port, no casualties reported

Dubai | Agencies

A huge explosion has rocked Dubai's Jebel Ali Port just before the midnight on Wednesday, resulting in a large cloud of flame and causing a shock wave that rattled windows of buildings several kilometres away.

According to initial reports, there was, however, no loss of lives. The explosion took place on a small ship at Jebel Ali Port. Commander-in-Chief of Dubai Police, Lieutenant General Abdullah Khalifa Al Marri said: "The fire in Jebel Ali Port broke out on board a small-sized container ship. No casualties were reported." Director General of Dubai Civil Defense, Major General Rashid Thani Al Matrooshi told Dubai Media Office that the fire was brought fully under control some two and a half hours after the incident and the cooling process had started. An official told a local TV channel that the crew had managed to evacuate in time before the fire caused one of the containers to explode. The nature of the material in the container is not known at the moment. Indian expat Vishal Bathija, who lives relatively closer to Jebel Ali Port, was watching the England-Denmark match when the blast took place. "My TV room faces



towards the port. The sound was very loud and it caused our windows to rattle," said the 49-year-old from Mumbai. Another Indian expat, Madhuri Bhandari, said she could hear the blast nearly 35 km away inside Dubai Mall, despite a fairly crowded environment in the mall. Jebel Ali is one of the biggest ports in the world on the northern end of the city.

EX-S AFRICAN PRESIDENT ZUMA HANDS HIMSELF OVER TO POLICE

Cape Town | Agencies

South Africa's former President Jacob Zuma has handed himself in to police to begin serving a 15-month jail sentence for contempt of court.

He was admitted to Estcourt Correctional Centre in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal on Wednesday, the BBC reported. Police had warned that they were prepared to arrest him if he did not hand himself in by midnight.

Zuma, 79, was handed the jail term last week after he failed to attend a corruption inquiry.

The sentencing sparked an unprecedented legal drama in South Africa, which has never seen a former president jailed before. Zuma had initially refused to hand himself in, but in a short statement on Wednesday, the Jacob Zuma Foundation said he had "decided to comply".

His daughter, Dudu Zuma-Sambudla, later wrote on Twitter that her father was "en route (to the jail) and he is still in high spirits". Zuma was sentenced on June 29 for defying an instruction to give evidence at an inquiry into corruption during his nine years in power. He has testified only once at the inquiry into what has become known as "state capture" - meaning the siphoning off of state assets.



Trump sues social media firms with 'little legal substance'

Washington | Agencies

Frustrated at the social media ban, former US President Donald

Trump has sued Twitter, Facebook and Google-owned YouTube, saying they violated his First Amendment rights by restricting him from their respective platforms. Media reports, however, said on Thursday that the lawsuits are all sound and fury with "little legal substance to back them up".

Trump has filed proposed class-action lawsuits against the companies as well as Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey and Google and Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai.

The lawsuits come six months after Trump was permanently or temporarily suspended from the three platforms. At a press conference



on Wednesday, Trump referred to the cases as "a very important game-changer for our country." Trump's lawsuits have also asked courts to declare Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act "unconstitutional". The social media platforms are protected by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act in the US.

The suits alleged that Twitter, Facebook and YouTube violated Trump's First Amendment rights.

"But the First Amendment is intended to protect citizens

from censorship by the government -- not private industry. The irony that Trump himself was the uppermost figure in the federal government at the time probably won't be lost on whoever's lap this case lands in," reports TechCrunch.

The lawsuits claimed that the tech companies colluded with "Democrat lawmakers," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Dr Anthony Fauci, director of National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases director.

In the press conference, Trump cited an email thread between Zuckerberg and Fauci from March 2020, which was during Trump's own presidency, reports The Verge. "We're not looking for a settlement. We don't expect a settlement," Trump said in response to a question.

Global Covid deaths surpass 4 million

New York | Agencies

The global Covid-19 death toll has surpassed the 4 million mark, according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University.

Argentina registered 457 more deaths from Covid-19 in the last 24 hours, raising the total death toll from the pandemic to 97,439, the Health Ministry said on Wednesday. In the same period, tests detected 19,423 new cases of infection, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 4,593,763, Xinhua reported citing the ministry. Southwest China's Yunnan Province reported two locally transmitted Covid-19 confirmed cases, both in the city of Ruili, on Wednesday, the provincial health commission said on Thursday. The two confirmed cases were previously found and categorized



as asymptomatic infections in the all-inclusive nucleic acid testing in Ruili, the commission said.

Meanwhile, Brazil registered 1,648 more deaths from Covid-19 in the past 24 hours, bringing the national death toll to 528,540, the health ministry said on Wednesday. A total of 54,022 new infections were detected, raising the total caseload to 18,909,037, the ministry said. Chile reported less than 2,000 Covid-19 cases for the second consecutive day, continuing a gradual decline in infections prior to a lifting of a lockdown, the Ministry of Health said on Wednesday.

ISAAC HERZOG SWORN IN AS ISRAEL'S PRESIDENT

Jerusalem: Former Labor party leader Isaac Herzog has been sworn in as Israel's new president. Herzog, 60, took his oath on Wednesday before the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, and became Israel's 11th president. Xinhua reported. In his first speech as president, Herzog vowed to serve the entire citizens of Israel. He said there is a need for a more moderate tone in Israeli politics and to stop the incitement that divides and polarizes Israeli society. "The shared values are more brittle than ever," he said, adding that hate and incitement lead to "heavy prices" such as "harming our national resilience." He called for a greater integration of Arabs in society and to stop street violence and killings in Arab towns.



Why **Cardi B** is sad for her daughter?

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rap star Cardi B is hoping her daughter Kulture fully recovers in time to celebrate her third birthday. Kulture had a bad reaction to a mosquito bite, causing her eyes to swell and hindering her vision, reports femalefirst.co.uk. Cardi explained in a voice note: "Guys, I'm so sad. I'm just going to tell you a little bit about my day. I am so sad because my daughter got bit by a mosquito again."

She added: "I don't know if y'all remember last year, I think I showed you a bit how my daughter's eyes were so swollen because a mosquito bit her? Now, this year, a mosquito bit her and it swelled both her eyes - she could barely open one of them."

The rapper says she gets sad looking at Kulture's face. Cardi B said: "I'm just so sad. Just looking at her face literally had me tearing, and her daddy almost cry as well." Cardi, who recently announced she's set to have a second child with her rapper husband Offset, hopes that Kulture's allergic reaction will pass before her upcoming third birthday.



ADELE SCREAMS WILDLY AS SHE CELEBRATES HARRY KANE'S WINNING GOAL

London | Agencies

Singer Adele shrieked with joy as Harry Kane smashed home England's winning goal against Denmark in the Euros last night.

The singer, like the nation, held her breath as captain Kane stepped up for a penalty in the second half.

There was a split second of despair as Danish keeper Kasper Schmeichel saved it before the ball fell kindly to Kane who scored the rebound.

Filming the penalty on the screen inside her home, Adele jumped up and around and screamed "oh my God" in celebration.

She shared the video on Instagram and wrote: "IT'S BLOODY COMING HOME" England will now face Italy in Sunday's final at Wembley for the chance to win their first major tournament since the 1966 World Cup.



Ed Sheeran gets tattoo of Orca on arm in honour of daughter **Lyra**

London | Agencies

Ed Sheeran is having a whale of a time as a new dad - so much so that he has had an orca tattooed on his arm as a tribute to his daughter.

The singer has revealed he got the black and white inking to honour ten-month-old Lyra Antarctica, as the killer whale is native to the continent which is now her middle name.

His wife Cherry conceived their daughter while they were on a trip there, sparking the quirky moniker.

Ed, who dressed up as a vampire in the video for his new single Bad Habits, which became his tenth No1 on Friday, said of his recent tattoos: "I got some vampire teeth on my shoulder for the video and an orca for Antarctica."

But even the singer admits it is not particularly poignant that he got the body art for his daughter.

After all, some of his other inkings include a bottle of ketchup, a teddy bear and the character Pingu.

He confessed: "I am completely covered in the weirdest, most colourful tattoos and that is the thing no one can get their head around, apart from my wife. Everyone says I look like a melted crayon."

"But I love them. I love that any time something random happens, I put it on my body."

'FAST AND FURIOUS 9' TO HIT INDIAN BIG SCREENS ON AUGUST 5

Los Angeles | Agencies

The ninth installment of the high-octane actioner "Fast & Furious" starring Vin Diesel, John Cena and Cardi B among others is all set to release theatrically in India on August 5, it was announced on Thursday. The Justin Lin directorial also stars Michelle Rodriguez, Tyrese Gibson, Jordana Brewster, Chris Bridges (Ludacris), Nathalie Emmanuel, Helen Mirren, Ozuna and Charlize Theron. Universal Pictures have announced the release date of the franchise on Thursday. It will be released in English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada languages. The ninth instalment has already been released in the US, Canada, China, Russia, Korea, Hong Kong, and the Middle East. However, the release of the film was pushed in India due to the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.



BRITNEY SPEARS IS 'HOPEFUL CONSERVATORSHIP WILL BE TERMINATED'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Britney Spears is hopeful her conservatorship will be terminated. The 39-year-old's optimistic outlook comes as multiple members have resigned from her team. Britney's long-time manager Larry Rudolph resigned from his position earlier this week, while her lawyer Samuel D. Ingham III asked to no longer represent her. In light of the

team members quitting, Britney reportedly thinks the 13-year long conservatorship may be coming to an end. An insider told E! News: "She's finally feeling hopeful about the future." She thinks people are resigning because they know she is speaking the truth. She is relieved her attorney resigned and hopes that if she can pick her own lawyer, it means the judge is leaning towards terminating the conservatorship.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Shannon Singh

Robert Downey Jr.'s filmmaker father passes away

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor-filmmaker Robert Downey Sr., father of Hollywood star Robert Downey Jr., has passed away aged 85. Downey Sr. is best known for films such as "Putney Swope" and "Greaser's Palace". Robert Downey Sr. died on Tuesday night after battling Parkinson's disease, his son Robert Downey Jr. confirmed in a post late on Wednesday night according to India time. He wrote: "RIP Bob D. Sr.



1936-2021...Last night, dad passed peacefully in his sleep after years of enduring the ravages of Parkinson's...he was a true maverick filmmaker, and remained remarkably optimistic throughout. "The Iron Man" star also shared a picture of his late father on the photo-sharing website. He concluded: "According to my stepmoms calculations, they were happily married for just over 2000 years. Rosemary Rogers-Downey, you are a saint, and our thoughts and prayers are with you." Downey Sr. is survived

by son Downey Jr., daughter Allyson Downey and wife Rogers, reports usatoday.com. Born in New York City, Downey Sr. is best known for directing "Putney Swope" (1969), which follows an African-American activist taking charge at an advertising agency. His other behind-the-camera credits include "Balls Bluff," "Babo 73," "No More Excuses," "Pound," and "Greaser's Palace." He also went on to appear in films such as "Boogie Nights," "Magnolia" and "The Family Man."



HARMANPREET HOPES TO REGAIN FORM IN T20I SERIES VS ENGLAND

Northampton | Agencies

The Indian women's cricket team enters the T20 International series against England women from Friday buoyed by victory in the final ODI but also concerned by failure of their batters, especially captain Harmanpreet Kaur who has blamed lack of preparation due to Covid-19 and injuries for her poor run.

Test and ODI skipper Mithali Raj was the lone performer in the ODI series as she racked up three half-centuries in three matches, including a 75 not out in the last match that took the team to a face-saving win. India lost the series 1-2, having lost the first two ODIs.

However, Mithali is not part of the T20 International squad and the onus is on the others like openers Shafali Verma and Smriti Mandhana as well as Harmanpreet to put up a total for their bowlers who have struggled under pressure.

India have played 19 T20 Internationals against



England and have won only four of the matches. They have lost 15. In England, they have managed to win only one out of the five matches they have played against the host.

Harmanpreet blamed lack of preparation due to Covid-19 and injuries for her failures but said she is expecting to return to form in the T20I series.

She made four and eight in the one-off Test and one, 19 and 16 in the three One-day Internationals.

"I am someone who likes to work hard and train everyday. Because of Covid-19 and injuries, I didn't get much time to prepare but this is not an excuse, because I am someone who takes a lot of time on the ground to prepare," she said

"At international level, you can't just come and take things easily. After five innings I have understood where I have to improve and how. So you will see a different approach from my side," added Harmanpreet.

Euro 2020: Kane's extra-time strike takes England into final



London | Agencies

Harry Kane scored a 104th minute goal to give England a 2-1 win over Denmark in European Championship semi-finals on Wednesday night and end a 55-year wait for his country to qualify for the final of a major football tournament.

Kane slotted home the rebound after Denmark keeper Kasper Schmeichel had saved his spot-kick which England earned after Raheem Sterling went down following a slight contact in the Danish penalty area.

A low cross from Harry Kane evaded Raheem Sterling, who then cut inside only to shoot tamely at Schmeichel, before Kane hit

a powerful shot well over.

Denmark then began to work themselves into the game with Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg challenging Jordan Pickford from outside of the penalty area and the England goalkeeper conceding a corner after a poor clearance.

Denmark took control and Mikkel Damsgaard made no mistake in the 30th minute with a vicious free kick from 25 metres which flashed past Pickford to put Denmark ahead. It was the first goal England had conceded in the competition, but they levelled in the 39th minute.

Bukayo Sako collected a pass from Kane and his low cross for Sterling, who moments earlier had seen Schmeichel save from point blank range,

was turned into own net by Simon Kjær.

The second half was also played at a ferocious pace with both sides creating chances in the opening minutes.

The half ended with England controlling the ball in and around the Danish area, but they were unable to find a clear chance against the Danish defence and the game went into extra-time.

Schmeichel was the hero again with a low save from Kane in the 93rd minute and even stopped his 104th minute spot-kick after Sterling went down under a slight contact, but he could do nothing to stop the England captain slotting home the rebound to end a 55-year wait for his country.

Tokyo Olympics will be held without spectators at venues



Tokyo: The upcoming Olympic Games in Tokyo will be held without spectators. All the stakeholders involved in organising the Games on Thursday came to this conclusion after the Japan government announced an emergency in and around Tokyo until the end of the Games that will be held from July 23-August 8.

With the government of Japan virtually barring spectators' entry into the stadiums, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) supported the decision, thus sealing the fate of the Olympics as 'closed games'.

In June, the Japan government had announced possibility of allowing a limited number of local spectators into the stadia. A decision to not allow foreign spectators was taken a few months ago. On Thursday, Japan's Olympics Minister Tamayo Marukawa made the announcement following discussions with officials and organisers.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told reporters in Tokyo that the state of emergency would run from July 12 and remain in place until August 22, thus impacting the start of the Paralympic Games, which will start on August 24 and run till September 5. The big announcement by the Japan government got the five stakeholders into a huddle and they came out with a joint statement supporting the move. "The GoJ today decided to announce a state of emergency in Tokyo. The state of emergency in Tokyo is being implemented as a measure aimed at suppressing the flow of people in order to prevent the spread of infection now, because the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases remains high and the number of people infected with variant COVID-19 strains in Tokyo is increasing," the joint statement said. "In response to the state of emergency, stricter measures with regard to the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 have also been decided by the three Japanese parties. No spectators will be allowed into any venues in Tokyo during the Olympic Games. Under this policy, in areas where emergency measures are not in force, local government authorities will meet and decide specific measures in consultation with the local governors based on the situation in each area," the IOC statement said.

It was decided on Thursday that a call on allowing spectators at the Paralympic Games will be taken after the Olympic Games.

Wimbledon: Ashleigh Barty powers into final

London | Agencies

Ashleigh Barty became the first world No. 1 to reach Wimbledon Championships final in five years after she defeated 2018 champion Angelique Kerber 6-3, 7-6(3) in the first semi-final on Thursday.

Ashleigh, who will lead the Australian tennis contingent at the Tokyo Olympics this month, took an hour and 26 minutes to prevail over the German opponent. She came back from a break down at 5-3 in the second set to seal the win.



The Aussie committed more double faults - 4 against 3 - but it was her power-packed game and high percentage of wins on first service that carried her through.

She fired eight aces against none by Angelique and won 88 per cent of points on first serve.

Ashleigh also converted two of the five break-points.

This is Ashleigh's best finish at Wimbledon. She has won only one Grand Slam singles title before - the 2019 French Open.

India invited for new annual women's hockey tournament in Dec 2022

Lausanne | Agencies

The international hockey federation will start promotion and relegation for the FIH Women's Pro League for the next season and has invited India to compete in the upcoming eight-team competition called the Women's Nations Cup.

The Women's Nations Cup, a new yearly competition for the second-rung teams placed from 10th to 20th in the FIH rankings, will take place in Valencia, Spain, from December 10-17 next year, the FIH said in a release on Thursday.

Apart from India and host Spain, the other teams in the fray are Canada, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea and South Africa. "The aim of this new yearly event is to offer a top-level competition to the best-ranked teams not participating in the Hockey Pro League and give the winning team the option to be promoted to the Hockey Pro League the next season," the FIH release said.

Thus, the winning team of the Women's Nations Cup in 2022 will have "the chance to be promoted to the 2023-24 FIH Hockey Pro League (provided they meet the necessary requirements for it), the FIH said.

"On behalf of FIH, I'd like to thank



wholeheartedly the Royal Spanish Hockey Federation for hosting this inaugural edition of the FIH Hockey Women's Nations Cup, a new competition in our portfolio which will bring further excitement to our sport," FIH CEO

Thierry Weil said. "Nothing less than a place within the FIH Hockey Pro League is at stake. This promises to generate great and hard-fought matches between excellent teams. That is really good for the growth of our sport worldwide."

AUSSIES EYE INDIAN WOMEN CRICKETERS FOR BIG BASH LEAGUE

Sydney: The Women's Big Bash League (WBBL) of Australia is hoping to tap Indian viewership for its seventh edition as it looks up to Indian women stars to participate in the league scheduled to run from October 14 to November 27.

With uncertainty surrounding the availability of England women players as they will be busy in a series in Pakistan in early October and quarantine rules may force them to miss a part of WBBL, Cricket Australia is hoping that the touring Indian women players like Shafali Verma will fill in the overseas numbers. "Shafali Verma is on everyone's list, no doubt," Lisa Sthalekar, former Australia woman cricketer and Sydney Sixers franchise list manager, told Australian media on Thursday. Shafali is being linked to Sydney Sixers, who are leading the race to include the Indian batter in their squad. The 17-year-old from Rohtak is the world's top-ranked T20I batter and she hit 96 on her Test debut recently. She is being linked to Sydney Sixers along with left-arm spinner Radha Yadav. "She loves Australian conditions, we saw that in the T20 World Cup. Each club will have some vacancies and (there may be) an Indian player there that could fit that role ... I am sure that they are picking up the phone and making those calls," added Sthalekar.

"It helps that they are in the country and they have already done the two weeks' quarantine."

India will tour Australia in September and October to play a one-off Test and a T20 International series. The two series will be played in the first half of October.

Gambhir clarifies after archer Deepika's appeal against cricket ground

Team Absolute | New Delhi

BIP leader Gautam Gambhir has clarified that the Yamuna Sports Complex in East Delhi is not being converted into a cricket ground. His response came after Indian archer Deepika Kumari's request of not using the ground for cricket matches. The Member of Parliament from East Delhi, a former India cricketer, had tweeted a 20-second video of the ground on Wednesday night with a caption: "Ads can't substitute for intent & hard work. East Delhi ready for Pro Cricket! #DelhiNeedsHonest".

On Thursday afternoon, Deepika, who is set to participate in the Tokyo Olympics, tweeted her anger against the supposed move. "I became Deepika in this ground in 2010 Commonwealth Games. Please do not make this Archery Ground to a Cricket Ground. This is the one of the best Archery Ground in Asia. International Archery tournaments can happen here. @PMOIndia @KirenRijju @ianuragthakur @lokesharcher".

Just an hour after her tweet, Gambhir took to Twitter to clear Deepika's doubt. "To set the record straight, Yamuna Sports Ground has not been converted but only upgraded. Archery & other sports will continue like before. Being a sportsman myself, will never let anything hamper the growth of any sportsman!" said the former Indian cricketer's tweet. The Yamuna Sports Complex hosted the archery events during the

Commonwealth Games in 2010. Deepika, then a teenager, stepped into the limelight with gold medals in individual and team events.

She recently won three gold medals in individual, mixed and team events at the third stage of the 2021 Archery World Cup in Paris.

ICC CEO Manu Sawhney sacked, has 5 days to appeal

Qaiser Mohammad Ali | New Delhi

Exactly four months after suspending its CEO Manu Sawhney, the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Thursday sacked him, the world body said in a terse 36-word statement.

"The ICC today announced that Chief Executive Manu Sawhney will leave the organisation with immediate effect. Geoff Allardice will continue as acting CEO supported by the 'leadership team' working closely with the ICC Board," said the statement.

Sawhney, who was suspended on March 9, has five days to appeal to the same 16-member ICC Executive Board that on Thursday decided to sack him. It is gathered that Bangladesh skipped Thursday's meeting, but that did not make any

difference to the final outcome of the meeting. If Sawhney appeals, his plea could be taken up at the next ICC Board meeting on July 15, though it is highly improbable that the same directors would reverse their own decision. The ICC annual general meeting is on July 18.

Sawhney was appointed ICC CEO in January 2019, when India's Shashank Manohar was the ICC chairman. The CEO's tenure lasted a little over two years.

There were broadly four allegations against Sawhney, originally from India. He was accused of "targeted acts of bullying against certain [ICC] staff"; of "physical aggression, such as fist banging"; of having "impacted directly and indirectly on individuals' health and wellbeing through [his] behaviour"; and, that he did not "properly report to the [ICC] Board

and have implemented decisions or changes without proper consultation with the Board".

Sawhney has been sacked on the basis of a culture review of the ICC employees, conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and reportedly cost the ICC up to \$200,000. He alleged that he was not given the PwC report initially, and received it only after seven days of his suspension, when he asked for it.

Sawhney, in an apparent final attempt to get a favourable decision, sent a two-page letter to each member of the ICC Board on Wednesday and appealed to them to appoint an "independent ethics tribunal" to hear his case, and "uphold the basic principles of the ICC -- accountability, fairness, and integrity". On Thursday, however, the ICC Board rejected his appeal.

OLYMPIC COUNTDOWN: PANGHAL ADDS PUNCH TO INDIA'S HOPES IN BOXING

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amit Panghal burst onto the national scene in 2017, and in just four years, the young Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) from the Indian Army has made rapid strides to be counted as the top medal contender in his category at the Tokyo Olympics.

He was rated as the No 1 boxer in men's flyweight (53kg) category by the International Olympic Committee's Boxing Task Force (BTC) recently. The accolade

coming in just 27 days before the Tokyo Olympics is a huge morale-booster for the boxer from Haryana. It is also likely to get him a favourable draw in the 28-player competition. This is the second time he has been ranked No 1. The first time was soon after he won the Asian Games gold

in 2018. A gold-medallist at the Asian Games in 2018 in Indonesia, Panghal, the 25-year-old from Rohtak district in Haryana, is the first Indian male boxer to reach the final at the World Championships at Yekaterinburg, Russia. Though he eventually lost to Shakhobidin Zoirov of Uzbekistan in the 52 kg category final and

had to settle for silver, it was a big achievement for Panghal as no Indian had achieved this feat till then. It was a shock first-round defeat at the Inter-services meet in 2017 that changed his approach towards the sport and Panghal worked harder to develop his skills, especially his ability to reach the approach of his opponent. A regular at the Army Sports Institute in Pune, Panghal qualified for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics after he defeated Philippines' Carlo Paalam in the 52 kg quarter-final.



I really don't know, need to regroup: Federer on retirement

London | Agencies

Tennis ace Roger Federer, who crashed out of Wimbledon Championships on Wednesday night, is still undecided on retirement and insists on "time to regroup". The 39-year-old Swiss lost his men's singles quarter-final match in Wimbledon to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in straight sets 6-3, 7-6 (4), 6-0 and was given a standing ovation by the crowd on the Centre Court. It was also the first time, Federer lost a set to love at Wimbledon. Federer was asked on his retirement plans.

"It's a struggle for me. I knew it was going to be hard, to be honest, but now I need to talk to the team, take time -- not feel rushed by you guys or anybody -- take time and work out the decision to take. I hope not, the goal is to play on," said Federer in the post-match press conference.

When asked if the loss was his final match at the Centre Court, the eight-time Wimbledon champion remained non-committal. "I really don't know. I need to regroup. My goal was to play another Wimbledon. The initial goal was to play last year. I was able to play this year," he said. Federer didn't talk much on his future after Wimbledon. He is scheduled to take part at Tokyo Olympics and US Open this year.





'DELHI CRIME' CREATOR RICHIE MEHTA TO HELM BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY SERIES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

International Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Richie Mehta of "Delhi Crime" fame has been roped to write and direct a series based on the 1984 Bhopal Gas Tragedy.

"The authors have done such a precise and fascinating job of mapping out the human story that creates a thread all through this disaster and is told in an impartial manner, which is very important to me as a storyteller to step back and allow the viewer to fill in that judgment, and in the case of something like this very harsh judgment, of course," said Mehta.

The Indo-Canadian maker added, "I think the fact that it happened in the 1980s, it is starting to evaporate from the collective consciousness of young people. Many people don't even know about it or they hear rumours of it in India and certainly internationally." "And so I feel like it's really important to get it out there in an impartial and extremely well-researched manner, which the authors have done."

Produced by Ronnie Screwvala's RSVP and Ramesh Krishnamoorthy's Global One Studios, the series is based on Dominique Lapierre and Javier Moro's 1997 book "Five Past Midnight in Bhopal: The Epic Story of the World's Deadliest Industrial Disaster," detailing the disaster in 1984.

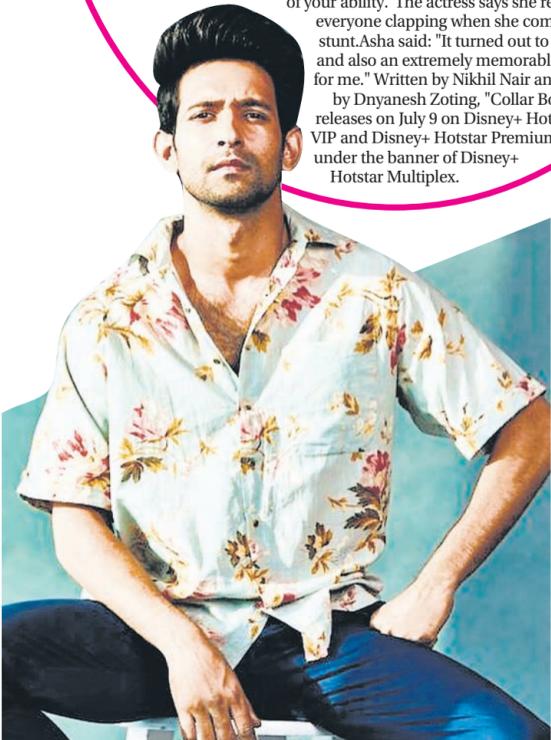
The series, which is likely to consist of six to eight one-hour episodes, is in development and will commence production in early 2022.



Asha Negi had 'a lot of fun' doing stunts in 'Collar Bomb'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Asha Negi, who will be seen essaying the role of ASI Sumitra Joshi in the crime thriller "Collar Bomb", says she hoped to portray a fierce and empowering character for a long time. Asha said: "For a long time, I had hoped to portray a fierce and empowering character, so when 'Collar Bomb' came my way, I did not think twice before auditioning for the role of ASI Sumitra Joshi. My character had a few action sequences in the movie and I was thrilled to perform stunts for the first time." She added: "Those were also my favourite moments from the shoot. There was one scene where I had to jump in fire and that really worried me. I was scared and had multiple thoughts about it. Eventually I convinced myself because at the end of the day you have to believe in yourself for the team and perform the scene to the best of your ability." The actress says she remembers everyone clapping when she completed that stunt. Asha said: "It turned out to be a lot of fun and also an extremely memorable experience for me." Written by Nikhil Nair and Directed by Dnyanesh Zoting, "Collar Bomb" releases on July 9 on Disney+ Hotstar VIP and Disney+ Hotstar Premium under the banner of Disney+ Hotstar Multiplex.



Vikrant Massey talks about fading star culture

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Vikrant Massey has opened up about the fading star culture in Hindi cinema. He agrees that OTT has played an important part in it but there are other factors, too. Talking about the web-space playing an integral part in the erosion of star culture, Vikrant said: "I don't think it's (just) because of OTT. I think it is because of society in general. The new generation we see today, they don't idol worship like probably people 20 years ago used to do. Cinema culture was a hit but people are so busy with their own lives. The newer generation has digitisation and tech-

nology at their disposal." He added: "My nieces are eight and nine. They don't watch Indian content. They are sitting and watching Korean content, so the world has shrunk because of digitisation. We are far more exposed to international content." "OTT has definitely played an important part but also I think there are far more important things that people are busy with, like the pandemic, and everybody has something in their lives, especially the newer generations," he explained. "They don't do idol worship as much. All these things are inter-linked," said the actor, whose latest film is "Haseen Dilluba", which was released on Netflix.

TARA SUTARIA IS BACK TO FILMING 'EK VILLAIN RETURNS'

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Actress Tara Sutaria has resumed work and is back to filming "Ek Villain Returns". Director Mohit Suri resumes shoot for Ek Villain Returns with Actor Arjun Kapoor and Tara Sutaria in lead roles.

Tara posted a picture on Instagram Story, where she shared a glimpse of a mic. On the image she wrote: "Days spent behind this are days well spent! Back to filming Villain 2 and the villainy has only just begun."

The shoot was halted due to pandemic, but now with the lockdown rules having been relaxed, the makers are back with the cast and crew. Both Arjun and Tara have resumed the shoot of Ek Villain Returns. The makers are maintaining a strict protocol on the sets owing to COVID-19 and have also created a bubble, for the safety of the cast and crew. The film, which is a sequel to the 2014 film "Ek Villain" is co-produced by Ekta Kapoor and Bhushan Kumar.

The sequel features John Abraham, Disha Patani, Tara Sutaria and Arjun Kapoor in pivotal roles. The film is slated to release on February 11 next year.



Yami Gautam 'to enchant all with her charm' as Maya in Bhoot Police

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Yami Gautam offered a glimpse into her character, Maya, in the upcoming horror comedy "Bhoot Police".

Yami shared a photo on Instagram where she can be

seen standing in a cave at night holding a torch. Fire from the burning torch lights up her face in the dark.

"To enchant all with her charm arrives MAYA, in #BhootPolice. Coming soon on @disneyplusandhotstarvip," the actress captioned the photo. Yami recently tied the knot with "Uri: The Surgical Strike" director Aditya Dhar. "Bhoot Police" will be her first release after wedding.

The Pavan Kirpalani directorial also features Saif Ali Khan, Jacqueline Fernandez and Arjun Kapoor in the lead. Produced by Ramesh Taurani, Akshai Puri and co-produced by Jaya Taurani, "Bhoot Police" is slated to release on Disney+ Hotstar.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Aashka Goradia