

absolute india

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8 DEAD IN KARNATAKA, 121 VILLAGES AFFECTED, HEAVY DESTRUCTION AROUND COASTAL AREAS

TAUKTAE HITS HARD

Cyclone Tauktae turned "Extremely severe cyclonic storm" while making landfall in Gujarat, gusty winds from 180 to 215 Kilometers per hour and heavy showers lashed Mumbai and its neighbouring areas as the force of storm has uprooted trees and disrupted local train services in the metropolis.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Over 200,000 people were evacuated from their homes in Gujarat to safe places as severe cyclonic storm Tauktae began landfall in the state. The landfall process took more than three hours to complete, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). As a precautionary measure, authorities closed ports and a main airport ahead of the cyclone's landfall on Monday which has killed at least 12 people till the time going for print. Among the affected states, coastal states of Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra have witnessed destruction and deaths due to severe storm which has uprooted trees and disrupted power supply. In Maharashtra's Konkan region, six people were killed in Raigad, Sindhudurg, and Thane districts. Three sailors went missing after two boats sank in the sea. In Kerala, the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on Monday said it rescued 12 fishermen stranded around 35 nautical miles off the Kochi coast.

NINE STRANDED CREW RESCUED

Bengaluru: All the nine crew members of tugboat 'Coromandel', who were stranded in the Arabian Sea, were rescued after Cyclone Tauktae crossed over the Karnataka coast earlier in the day, an official said on Monday. The tugboat, belonging to the state-run Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL), had drifted outside the port and ran aground Mulki rocks due to heavy rains and gusty winds triggered by the severe cyclonic storm. The state government has ordered an inquiry to ascertain why the ship did not return to the shore in time, as alerts were issued by the weather office about the cyclone approaching the west coast.

FOUR KILLED WHILE COLLECTING MANGOES IN RAJ

Jaipur: Cyclone Tauktae had its impact in Rajasthan as four people, including three kids in the age group of 10-12 years and a 46-year-old man lost their lives on Sunday night after lightning struck them when they were plucking mangoes from the mango trees, officials said on Monday. A severe storm had left the town devastated on Sunday night with trees uprooted and power lines snapped due to Cyclone Tauktae.

MUMBAI AIRPORT SHUT FOR 11 HRS, 7 FLIGHTS DIVERTED

Mumbai: Faced with threats from the raging Cyclone Tauktae, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) in Mumbai shut all its operations for 11 hours -- from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. -- on Monday. This resulted in the diversion of at least seven in-bound flights to less turbulent locations, including an IndiGo flight returning to Lucknow, a SpiceJet service diverted to Surat, while another IndiGo service was diverted to Hyderabad.

ROUGH WINDS, RAINS DAMAGE GOA'S COVID FACILITIES

Panaji: Rough winds and battering rain took a toll on the Goa government's Covid facilities, even as a newly inaugurated super speciality block housing Covid patients got flooded. Some amount of damage was also caused to the Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee indoor stadium, which is being utilised as a Covid care centre and houses Covid patients with mild symptoms. A day after Cyclone Tauktae wreaked havoc in the state, claiming two lives, large parts of Goa on Monday continued to be without electricity and water supply.

AFTER DAY-LONG DRAMA, 4 TRINAMOOL LEADERS GRANTED BAIL IN NARADA STING CASE

Centre vs Mamata

Aggrieved with the CBI move, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee held a sit-in protest at the CBI office for four hours even as agitated Trinamool supporters pelted stones at the central forces besides burning tyres in protest against the arrests.



Team Absolute | Kolkata

The state witnessed high drama since Monday morning after CBI sleuths arrested two Trinamool Congress ministers -- Firdah Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee -- along with present MLA Madan Mitra and former Kolkata Municipal Corporation Mayor Sovon Chattopadhyay in connection with the 2016 Narada sting tapes case, in which several politicians and a high-ranked police officer were allegedly found accepting cash for providing unofficial favours to the company. Speaking to the media after the leaders were granted bail, Trinamool Congress MP and lawyer Kalyan Banerjee said, "The CBI had asked for 14-day judicial custody, but the court rejected the prayer and granted bail to all the four persons who were illegally arrested by the agency. I have been constantly saying that the Governor (Jagdeep Dhankhar) has no jurisdiction to sanction prosecution without the advice of the council of ministers led by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. The CBI asked for his permission in January and he waited till May before giving the sanction. He didn't even communicate it to the state government."

After a day-long drama, four top Trinamool Congress leaders, who were arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the Narada sting operation case on Monday morning, were granted interim bail by a special CBI court here. Meanwhile, in late evening, Calcutta HC stays CBI court order granting bail to 4 Trinamool leaders, to hear case on Wednesday.

WHATSAPP TO DELHI HC: NO DEFERMENT OF PRIVACY POLICY

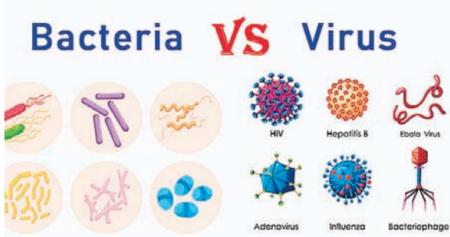
New Delhi: Mobile messaging service WhatsApp on Monday told the Delhi High Court that it has not deferred the May 15 deadline for users to accept its new privacy policy. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing WhatsApp, submitted before a bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh that it is trying to get users on board, but if they do not agree to the privacy policy, then the company will slowly delete these user accounts. The High Court has adjourned the matter till June 3. The ASG submitted the court should record the WhatsApp's counsel statement that the company will conform with the Indian law. He added that the company should maintain status quo where neither the account nor the data is deleted if users revoke their consent for the new privacy policy. WhatsApp's counsel objected to the stay and submitted that they would not make any such statement.

IISc finds new blood-based biomarker to discern between bacterial, viral infections

Scientists from the Indian Institute of Science and clinicians from M.S. Ramaiah Medical College teamed up to identify a set of molecular biomarkers that can be used in differential diagnosis of acute bacterial and viral infections. This new study is published in EBioMedicine, a journal that publishes research works of translational biomedical research world over.

N. B. Hombal | Bengaluru

According to this journal, the researchers have developed a test using patient blood transcriptomes and sophisticated computational modelling. A transcriptome is a full set of mRNA molecules expressed by a biological cell, and measured using Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS) technologies. During an infection, specific genes get turned on and these, in turn, lead to higher amounts of specific mRNAs and ultimately, higher amounts of the corresponding proteins.



To make it useful in the clinic, the researchers devised a standalone score called VB10, which could be used for diagnosis, monitoring the stage of recovery after infection, and estimating the severity of the infection. VB10 accurately indicated whether a given blood sample had a bacterial or viral infection, across different bacteria and viruses and across different age groups.

It also stated that the current Covid-19 pandemic is a grim testimony to the damage an infectious disease can cause to human health and welfare. The researchers elucidated that the human body responds to bacterial and viral infections differently and it produces different types of molecules -- such as proteins and RNA -- in the blood, depending on the type of infection. "While antibiotics can treat bacterial infections, they are ineffective against viral infections. However, indiscriminate use of antibiotics to treat any kind of infection has given rise to bacterial strains that are now resistant to our entire arsenal of antibiotics. Antibiotics are given even for viral infections in some cases because of misdiagnosis. With current methods, it can take a lot of time to test for bacterial or viral infections," said study author Sathyabaarathi Ravichandran, a Research Associate with Nagasuma Chandra, Professor at the Department of Biochemistry. The research team added that a quick method to detect acute viral and bacterial infections and distinguish between them can be immensely useful in the clinic, as accurate diagnosis will win half the battle and guide the clinician towards the optimal treatment path. The authors suggest that the test could be useful for differentiating Covid-19 infection from bacterial infections as well.

These biomarkers are different messenger RNA (mRNA) molecules found in the blood; differences in their levels can detect and predict with high probability if an infection is viral or bacterial, the study revealed.

NEW COVID CASES DROP BELOW 3L FIRST TIME AFTER APRIL 21

New Delhi: Covid numbers brought a heave of relief as the daily figures dropped below the 3-lakh mark for the first time in nearly a month. In the last 24 hours, 2,81,386 new corona cases were reported -- lowest in 25 days, and 4,106 fatalities, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said. On May 12, India recorded 4,205 fresh Covid deaths, the highest ever, while on May 7, the country had recorded its highest ever cases of 4,14,188. India's total tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,49,65,463 with 35,16,997 active cases and 2,74,390 deaths so far. According to the Health Ministry, a total of 3,78,741 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours, with 2,11,74,076 being cured from Covid till date.

GOVERNOR ASKS MAMATA TO FOLLOW RULE OF LAW

Concerned about the alarming situation. Call upon @MamataOfficial to follow constitutional norms & rule of law. Police @WBPOLICE @KolkataPolice @HomeBengal must take all steps to maintain law & order. Sad -- situation is being allowed to drift with no tangible action by authorities."



Drink cow urine to be safe from corona: Bhopal MP

Bhopal: Bharatiya Janata Party MP from Madhya Pradesh's capital Bhopal, Pragya Thakur has claimed that she was not infected with the coronavirus because she regularly drinks cow urine. She said she will continue to be safe as long as she consumes 'gomutra'. The Congress has taken a dig at the MP's statement. Participating in an event in Bhopal, Pragya Thakur said that the urine of a desi cow prevents the lungs from being infected with the virus. The MP's statement has sparked a huge controversy and has become a talking point in the city. This is not the first time Pragya Thakur has claimed that cow urine will cure serious illnesses. She had earlier claimed that cow urine has cured her cancer.



I am in great pain. But I also consume cow urine every day. That is why I am safe from coronavirus. I don't have to take any other medicine as long as I drink cow urine. I am not affected by this virus and God forbid will never be because I am taking this medicine (cow urine) regularly."

DRDO's anti-Covid drug 2-DG launched

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The first batch of DRDO-developed anti-Covid drug 2-DG (2-deoxy-D-glucose) was launched on Monday to treat patients suffering from the deadly disease. The medicine comes in powder form and can be taken with water. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Health Minister Harsh Vardhan released the first batch of the 2-DG, an anti-Covid-19 therapeutic application of the drug developed by the Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), a lab of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in collaboration with Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL). The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) granted emergency use nod for the drug last week. The drug could be a game-changer in the bat-



tle against pandemic as it helps in faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces oxygen dependence. Clinical trial results have shown that the drug helps in faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces supplemental oxygen dependence. Higher proportion of patients treated with 2-DG showed RT-PCR negative conversion in Covid patients.

Centre opposes PIL to stall Central Vista project, Delhi HC reserves verdict

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Monday reserved its verdict on a plea seeking to halt the construction of Central Vista redevelopment project against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. Senior advocate Sidharth Luthra, representing the petitioners, submitted they were only interested in the safety of the workers at the site and compared the project to "Auschwitz", a concentration camp of Nazi Germany. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, alleged that the plea was a "facade" to stall the work. After a three-hour long hearing, a



bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh reserved its judgment in the matter. The petitioners had questioned

termining the construction activities as essential services at a time when a curfew was in force in Delhi due to Covid-19. Luthra contended the Centre's submissions in connection with availability of medical facilities, testing centre, etc on site were all falsehoods. He termed the ongoing Central Vista project work as "central fortress of death" and compared it to "Auschwitz" and cited empty tents have been erected with no beds for workers. Mehta objected to the project being referred to as Auschwitz, saying that the criticism is fine, but one should not be venomous about the project, and such terms should not be used in court.



BLEEDING, CLOTTING EVENTS AFTER VACCINATION MINUSCULE IN INDIA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Incidents of bleeding or clotting following Covid-19 vaccination in India are minuscule and in line with the expected number of diagnoses of these conditions in the country, according to a report submitted by the National AEFI (Adverse Event Following Immunization) Committee to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).

Alerts were raised in some countries on post-vaccination "embolic and thrombotic events" on March 11 this year, particularly with the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine (Covishield in India), said the report. A decision was taken to conduct an urgent in-depth analysis of the adverse events (AE) in India in the light of the global concerns.

The National AEFI Committee noted that as of April 3 this year, 75,435,381 vaccine doses had been



administered (Covishield-68,650,819; Covaxin-6,784,562). Of these, 65,944,106 were first doses

and 9,491,275 second doses. Since the Covid-19 vaccination drive was initiated, more than 23,000

adverse events were reported through the CoWIN platform from 684 of the 753 districts of the country. Of these, the AEFI Committee said, only 700 cases (9.3 cases per million doses administered) were reported to be serious and of severe nature. The AEFI Committee has completed an in-depth case review of 498 serious and severe events, of which 26 cases have been reported to be potential thromboembolic (formation of a clot in a blood vessel that might also break loose and get carried by the blood stream to plug another vessel) events -- following the administration of Covishield vaccine -- with a reporting rate of 0.61 cases per million doses.

"There were no potential thromboembolic events reported following the administration of Covaxin vaccine," the report said.

AEFI data in India showed that there is "very minuscule but definitive risk of thromboembolic events".

Goa 02 deaths: Congress files complaint against CM, Health Minister

PANAJI | Agencies

The Congress on Monday filed a police complaint against Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and Health Minister Viswajit Rane, claiming that their "sheer incompetence, mismanagement and criminal negligence" led to the "deaths of hundreds of Covid patients due to oxygen shortage".

"This complaint reflects the pain and the anguish of all Goans, who have been completely failed and let down by the present state government on account of their sheer incompetence; criminal negligence; mismanagement and complete disregard to the lives of the peoples in handling the Covid-19 pandemic situation," the complaint filed by state Congress chief Girish Chodankar at the Agacaim police station said.

"Since the onslaught of the second wave of Covid-19



pandemic i.e. somewhere since April 2021, hundreds of people have died at Goa Medical College (GMC) due to shortage and or failure of the Government to maintain uninterrupted supply of medical oxygen," it said.

Health Minister Rane on May 11 said that 26 Covid patients admitted to the hospital had died on the day due to lack of oxygen. Days after

the admission, Goa Medical College Dean, Dr Shivanand Bandekar claimed that it was not possible to link the deaths to oxygen shortage.

In all, 75 patients have died at the hospital over four days beginning May 11, due to oxygen shortage, forcing even the Bombay High Court's Panaji bench to step in and attempt to streamline the oxygen supply procedure.

Highest single-day spike in Covid-related deaths in J&K

Srinagar | Agencies

With 73 deaths reported during the last 24 hours, J&K on Monday recorded the highest single day death toll since the beginning of the ongoing pandemic.

Officials said 73 deaths were reported in J&K today as the total number of people killed by coronavirus rose to 3,222 in J&K.

Monday's death toll of 73 is the highest single-day toll reported since the beginning of the pandemic in J&K.

Of these, 54 died in Jammu while 19 died in Kashmir division. 3,344 people tested positive on Monday, 1,418 from Jammu division and 1,926 from Kashmir division. 4042



patients were discharged from hospitals after recovery on Monday.

So far, 247,952 people have been infected with coronavirus in J&K out of which

193,878 have recovered. The number of active cases is 50,852 out of which 20,716 are from Jammu division and 30,136 are from Kashmir division.

Param Bir moves SC alleging witch-hunt

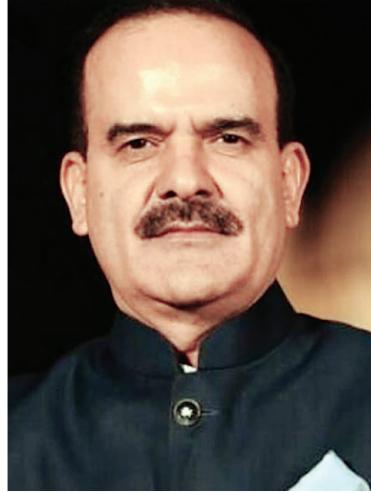
Ex-Mumbai CP cites threats to withdraw complaint against Anil Deshmukh

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh has moved the Supreme Court for transfer of all inquiries ordered against him outside the state of Maharashtra. Singh has alleged a witch-hunt after he accused then home minister Anil Deshmukh of adopting corrupt practices in posting or transfers in police in addition with extortion of Rs 100 crore per month from various establishments.

In a writ petition, Singh alleged that the inquiry officer of the state government is threatening him with false cases unless he withdraws the complaint against Deshmukh. Singh has asked the top court to transfer all investigations already initiated or contemplated against him to the CBI which is presently probing the charges against Deshmukh. He claims to have submitted to the CBI transcripts linked with alleged phone call conversations from the inquiry officer threatening him.

"Issue a writ of mandamus or any other appropriate writ order or direction directing the Respondent no. 1, its officers and agencies to: (i)



transfer all the enquiries already ordered for considering departmental actions the petition to any other state. (ii) transfer all the investigations already contemplated or initiated against the petitioner for any punitive prosecution to independent agency like the respondent no. 2 Central Bureau of Investigation, which is already the connected case or any other investigation agency outside the state of Maharashtra", said the Singh's plea.

On April 21, the CBI had lodged an FIR in the matter after the top court declined to interfere the Bombay High Court's order for preliminary investigation against Deshmukh. "Restrain from initiating or taking steps for commencing any further inquiries / investigations against the petitioner or taking any coercive steps against him in any of the pending investigations, without first taking leave of this court", the plea urged before the top court. Within days of his transfer to home-guards department on March 17, Singh had accused Deshmukh of setting a collection target of Rs 100 crore for Sachin Vaze of Crime Intelligence Unit, Mumbai, arrested in the Antilia bomb scare case.

4-year-old abducted, raped in UP: accused held

Banda | Agencies

A four-year-old girl was allegedly abducted and then raped at a wedding in Banda district.

Police said the accused Umesh Nishad, who was arrested on Sunday, has been booked under relevant sections, including section 376 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). He was also charged under the stringent Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

According to reports, Umesh took the girl away



when her family members were busy in the wedding ceremony to a desolate spot

in nearby jungles. He raped her and later tried to strangle her, police said.

"The girl who had gone to attend a wedding function in a locality under Jaspura police station area of the district on Saturday night. She was found missing during the wee hours of Sunday," said Circle Officer (City) Satya Prakash Sharma.

After a search was conducted by the family members, she was found unconscious in nearby jungles.

The victim has been admitted to a nearby hospital while the accused arrested after some guests at the wedding confirmed that they had seen him with the girl.

SIX CASES OF 'BLACK FUNGUS' DETECTED IN GOA: OFFICIAL

Panaji: For the first time, six cases of mucormycosis or black fungus were detected in Covid patients in Goa on Monday, a senior health official said.

"Six cases of mucormycosis were detected in Covid patients. Such cases may be expected in patients with high diabetes," Dr Shivanand Bandekar, Dean of the state's biggest Covid facility, the Goa Medical College, told reporters here. Meanwhile, 1,562 new Covid cases were detected in Goa on Monday, taking the total count to 25,753.

Bengal cabinet approves setting up of state Legislative Council

Kolkata | Agencies

The West Bengal cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, on Monday approved formation of the upper house of the state legislature, in its second meeting on Monday.

The setting up of the Legislative Council, to again make West Bengal one of the few states with a bicameral legislature, was one of the main manifesto points of the Trinamool Congress in the recent Assembly elections.

Chief Minister Banerjee, who spent most of her time at the Nizam Palace with her party leaders who were arrested



ed by the CBI in the Narada case, attended the cabinet meeting where the proposal for the formation of the Council was approved. The Trinamool government had resolved to form the Council within the first 100 days of her

government, as was reported earlier. Sources in the cabinet said that the Legislative Council is likely to comprise eminent persons, who will play an active role in shaping the state's functions.

Patna HC seeks fresh affidavit on bodies found in river Ganga



PATNA | Agencies

Flagging discrepancy in the government's death toll, the Patna High Court on Monday directed the Chief Secretary and the Divisional Commissioner of Buxar to file a fresh affidavit on the bodies that were found in river Ganga last week.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Sanjay Karol found inconsistency in the government's statistics of deaths during the hearing on Monday.

Karol had earlier asked both the Chief Secretary and the Divisional Commissioner

to file affidavits on Saturday. The Chief Justice has also asked the Bihar government to submit separate data on the deaths caused by Covid-19 as well as other diseases in the state amid the pandemic.

The Buxar administration had detected 71 decomposed bodies on the banks of Ganga in Chausa last week. The Bihar government, however, alleged that the bodies had flown in from Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur, Varanasi and Allahabad districts.

Besides Buxar, over two-dozen bodies were found in river Ganga near the Patna Gulabi Ghat in the Mahendru locality as well.

Remdesivir production scaled up to 1.19 crore vials per month

Team Absolute | New Delhi

All seven domestic licensed manufacturers of Remdesivir have scaled up production from 38 lakh vials per month to nearly 119 lakh vials per month, following government directives, an official statement said.

With accelerated approval of 38 additional manufacturing sites, the number of approved manufacturing sites of Remdesivir in the country has increased from 22 to 60. With the help of the Ministry of External Affairs, the manufacturers are being facilitated for getting supplies of requisite raw materials and equipment from foreign countries.

Meanwhile, Department of Pharmaceuticals intensified monitoring of availability, production and supply of drugs used for Covid-19 treatment in early April, as number of cases of Covid-19 started increasing steeply.

Remdesivir is a patented



drug, manufactured in India under voluntary licenses granted by patent holder Gilead Life Sciences US to seven Indian pharmaceutical companies -- Cipla, Dr Reddy's Lab, Hetero, Jubilant Pharma, Mylan, Syngene and Zyodus Cadila.

According to the statement, all efforts are being made to enhance the availability of the drug, both through imports as well as augmented domestic production. Exports of Remdesivir has been prohibited since April 11, while customs duty has been exempted on Remdesivir

injection, Remdesivir API and Beta Cyclodextrin (SBEBGD) used in its manufacture with effect from April 20.

After the demand surged, the Central government has been making allocations to states and UTs since third week of April. Interim allocation of 11 lakh vials was made for 19 states and UTs with high demand on April 21 for period up to April 30. This allocation was increased to 16 lakh vials on April 24 as more supplies became available. In a series of allocations issued subsequently, with latest on May 16, 76 lakh vials in

total have been allocated among states for period up to May 23.

The state governments and UT administrations have been asked to monitor proper distribution within their jurisdiction, covering both government as well as private hospitals, and in line with judicious use as advised in the "National Clinical Guidance for Management of Adult Covid-19 patients", issued jointly by the AIIMS/ICMR Covid-19 National Task Force and Joint Monitoring Group of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

All the seven Indian manufacturers have been making supplies to states as per the allocation both against government purchase orders and also through their private distribution channels in states. A total of 54.15 lakh vials of Remdesivir have been supplied across the country by the drug companies during April 21-May 15, the statement said.

Bihar BJP leaders write to CM against pilot water channel from UP

PATNA | Agencies

The leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Bihar have written to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, urging him to stop the ongoing construction work of a pilot channel in Uttar Pradesh that is currently underway in some districts of eastern UP to divert the flow of rivers towards the West Champaran district in Bihar.

Some construction work is also underway in the West Champaran district with the permission of the Bihar government. The local leaders and residents are claiming that over 70,000 people of Yogapatti, Barria and Nautan blocks will get affected by the proposed water channel, which is supposed to end at the Gandak river.

The state BJP leaders feel that as 21 districts of north Bihar are already affected by floods, the additional water from Uttar Pradesh will cause more devastation in the state.

State Tourism Minister Narayan Prasad and ex-minister Vinay Bihari are spearheading the protest.

"We have written to Chief



Minister Nitish Kumar, Deputy CM Renu Devi, Water Resource Minister Sanjay Jha and the Principal Secretary in Water Resource Ministry, urging them to stop the construction work in West Champaran and also apply pressure on Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath to stop construction work in his state," Prasad said.

Following pressure from the local residents, the construction work in West Champaran is being carried out during the night.



COVID-19 PACE SLOWING DOWN IN MP: CM CHOUHAN TO PM MODI

Official sources said that Chouhan had a telephonic conversation with the PM during which he informed him about the COVID-19 situation in the state, said.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The pace of coronavirus infection is slowing down in Madhya Pradesh as its positivity rate has dropped to 9 per cent while the recovery rate is now 87 per cent, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan informed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday.

Official sources said that Chouhan had a telephonic conversation with the PM during which he informed him about the COVID-19 situation in the state.

"The chief minister informed Modi that the situation in the state is under control. On Monday, 5,921 cases were found positive for coronavirus in the state while 11,513 patients were discharged from hospitals. The COVID-19 recovery rate is 87 per cent, while the positivity rate is now 9 per cent," the sources said quoting the CM. Chouhan thanked Modi for the adequate supply of anti-viral Remdesivir injections and oxygen for hospitals.



He also informed the prime minister about the ongoing vaccination drive, 'Kill Corona' campaign and post-COVID care centres being opened in the state, as well as about the arrangements being made for dealing with the viral infection in rural areas.

The sources said that the prime minister assured Chouhan that the Centre will extend all possible help to Madhya Pradesh to tackle COVID-19. Referring to cases of 'black fungus' detected in Madhya Pradesh, Chouhan informed that special wards were set up in five medical colleges of the state to provide its treatment free of cost.

Modi also assured Chouhan to provide all necessary help to the state for the treatment of patients suffering from the black fungus infection, the sources said. Mucormycosis, also known as the black fungus, is a rare but serious infection being found in a number of COVID-19 patients in some states.

Cyclone Tauktae Effect: Orange, Yellow Rain Alerts for 13 Districts in MP

The IMD also issued a yellow alert for thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds at speeds of 40-50 kilometres per hour in isolated places of nine divisions till Tuesday morning.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Monday issued an orange or "be prepared" alert for heavy rains in 13 districts in Madhya Pradesh even as the state received intermittent showers during the day due to cyclone Tauktae, an official said. The IMD also issued a yellow alert for thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds at speeds of 40-50 kilometres per hour in isolated places of nine divisions till Tuesday morning. The orange alert is for 13 districts, including Narsinghpur, Alirajpur and



and Mandsaur, while the yellow alert has been issued for Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Gwalior and Jabalpur divisions among others. "Large parts of MP received rainfall, accompanied by gusty winds in some places, in the last 24 hours. An upper air cyclonic circulation was lying over north-east MP and the neighbourhood. Tauktae has brought moisture to Madhya Pradesh, which is causing rains along with winds," said P K Saha, senior meteorologist with IMD's Bhopal office.

With rise in black fungus cases, its cure drugs vanish from market

MP has reported 281 cases of mucormycosis in the past week, though special hospital units have been created in Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, Ujjain and Jabalpur for mucormycosis patients but non-availability of the anti-fungal drug is making their treatment tough.

Zafar Alam Khan | Bhopal
www.absoluteindianews.com

Amid rise in the black fungus cases in the state, there is mad rush for the anti-fungal drug that is needed to treat the dreaded disease.

Notably, as cases of black fungus or mucormycosis rose in the state, there is a mad scramble for anti-fun-

gal drug Amphotericin B that is used to treat the disease. Around 280 cases of the fungal disease, which results from post-Covid complications in people with diabetes who have been administered steroids for Covid treatment, have been reported in Madhya Pradesh alone. The rare infection is caused by a fungus named mucor, which is found on wet surfaces. General symptoms of the black fungus infection include headache, fever, pain under the eyes, nasal or sinus congestion, and partial loss of vision.

In Madhya Pradesh, 281 cases of mucormycosis and 27 related deaths have been reported in the past week, officials said. Special hospital units have been created in Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, Ujjain and Jabalpur for mucormycosis patients but non-availability of the anti-fungal drug is making their treatment tough. "We are performing surgeries of eyes

and jaws daily to save lives but how we will control the spread without the drug?" said a doctor treating black fungus patients in Bhopal.

A patient in Jabalpur, Arpit Rai, said, "I was admitted 26 days ago for Covid-19 treatment but now I am suffering from mucormycosis. One of my eyes has been infected badly and I need Amphotericin B but it is not available here." The injection is not easily available even in the capital city of Bhopal. AIIMS, Bhopal, director Sarman Singh said, "We have not received any guidelines and instructions regarding the treatment of black fungus from the Central government so we are not providing medicines to patients. They are arranging [it] themselves." MP health minister Prabhuram Chaudhary said, "We are trying to get the anti-fungal medicine from pharma companies in Gujarat. Soon, we should have 2,000 injections."

Caring for families of deceased employees in Covid-19 is our responsibility: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that our employees have discharged their duties with full dedication and commitment during Covid crisis. While we are urging people to stay indoors to stop the chain of infection, these employees are working in the field and carrying out their responsibilities day and night by risking their lives. Due to their efforts, arrangements are running smoothly.

Chouhan said that several unfortunate incidents have also occurred. Many of our employees passed away while on duty during Covid-19. It is our responsibility to look after and care for their families. Chouhan said that the state government has decided that two schemes will be launched for the welfare of employees. These are the Mukhya Mantri Covid-19 Anukampa Niyukti Yojana and the Mukhya Mantri Covid-19



Vishesh Anugrah Yojana.

The Mukhya Mantri Covid-19 Anukampa Niyukti Yojana has been implemented for all regular permanent workers, workers on workload and contingency fund, daily wage earners, ad hoc, contractual, collector rate, government servants working as outsourced employees. In the event of death of these employees from Covid infection,

an eligible member of their family will be given compassionate appointment in the same type of employment under the scheme. Chouhan said that the state government has decided that in the event of sudden death of any working, regular, permanent workers, daily wage earners, ad hoc, contractual, outsourced, other government servants / employees of the state due to Covid 19, their families will be eligible for an ex-gratia amount of Rs 5 lakh as immediate financial assistance.

Chouhan said that in the event of crisis, this ex-gratia amount will provide support to their families. Anganwadi workers, assistants, ASHA workers, village Kotwars, etc. workers will also be included in this scheme. In the scheme of compassionate appointment, separate plans are also being made for ASHA workers so that the dependents of these families can also get relief and livelihood.

WEES supplied poor patients oxygen and food packets.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Women's Education Empowerment Society (WEES) distributed ration packets and food packets to the needy during the Corona period. Team Weiss has been doing ration distribution work since last year due to Corona epidemic. In particular, ration packets were distributed among the Daily Wagers whose work has come to a standstill due to the lockdown. Khanugaon, Jogipura, Barkhedhi, Gandhinagar, Idgah slum, Polytechnic slum, Arifnagar etc. Food packets, especially family



members of Covid patients who are sitting outside hospital and have no provision for food, are distributed among

them. Food packets were distributed among the hospital staff as well. Food packets were given in Hamidia

Hospital, ABN Hospital, Jawaharlal Nehru Cancer Hospital etc. WEES has also supplied oxygen to many hospitals and organizations that have emergency beds so that the patient can get initial treatment till they get beds in the hospital. In addition, the consultant doctors have also been requested to provide free medical help to the poor covid patients aided by WEES. Much gratitude to Dr. Abrez Sohalat, Dr. Ahmed Anwar, Dr. Rashi Jain, Dr. Tariq Hussain and Dr. Mushfiq Hussain who helped us in this difficult time.

3 arrested in Indore for black-marketing Remdesivir vials

The police seized one Remdesivir vial each from the possession of Kaithwas and Patidar. When asked about the source of the anti-viral drug, they were unable to give a satisfactory reply, he said.

Team Absolute | Indore

Police have arrested three persons here in Madhya Pradesh for allegedly black-marketing

Remdesivir injections, which are currently in high demand for the treatment of COVID-19, an official said on Monday.

Acting on a tip-off, the police laid a trap and nabbed Abhishek Kaithwas (21), Gaurav Patidar (21) and Ravi Vaishnav (24) on Sunday night. Additional Superintendent of Police Guruprasad Parashar said. The police seized one Remdesivir vial each from the possession of Kaithwas and Patidar. When asked about the source of the anti-viral drug, they were unable to give a satisfactory reply, he said.

"The accused had procured the drug illegally and were trying to sell it to the relatives of COVID-19 patients at a higher price than its MRP," the official said.

Woman Commits Suicide At Congress MLA's Bungalow, He Says "Heartbreaking"

Singhar has said the woman was a good friend and that he was unaware that she was under treatment for mental health issues.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A 38-year-old woman allegedly died by suicide at Congress MLA and former Madhya Pradesh minister Umang Singhar's bungalow in Bhopal yesterday.

Police said a note allegedly written by the woman was found at the spot. It names Singhar and says she wanted to "find a place" in his life, but that did not happen. The note added that she was killing herself as she could not take it anymore. Singhar, who represents Gandhwani constituency in the

Assembly, has said the woman was a good friend and that he was unaware that she was under treatment for mental health issues.

Police said the woman was from Ambala and had been coming to Mr Singhar's residence in Bhopal's Shahpura area for about a year. She had been staying there for the past 25-30 days, said police.

The former minister was out of Bhopal for the past two days. Additional SP Rajesh Singh Bhadoria said, "A servant and his wife stay at the bungalow. On Sunday morning, the ser-

vant's wife knocked on the door. When there was no response, the servant Ganesh informed Mr Singhar and he sent a relative to the bungalow. The woman was found hanging from the ceiling." In a message to media persons, Singhar said, "She was a very good friend, it's a heart-breaking incident. Police told me that they found prescriptions of psychiatric treatment at Ambala and Bhopal hospitals. Had I known about it, I would have ensured she got timely treatment. I was away at my Assembly constituency for the past three days."

Cop finds new way to punish curb violators: Write Ram's name

He said that so far, no one was forced to undergo this 'punishment' and that they ensured that the measure is not in conflict with their religious belief.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A sub-inspector in Satna district is "punishing" lockdown violators by making them write the name for Lord Ram for 30-45 minutes and counselling them to stay at home and take care of their families. Sub-inspector Santosh Singh, deployed at the Sindhi Camp Baba Dyaldas chowk in Bhopal one of the 20 check points created to stringently

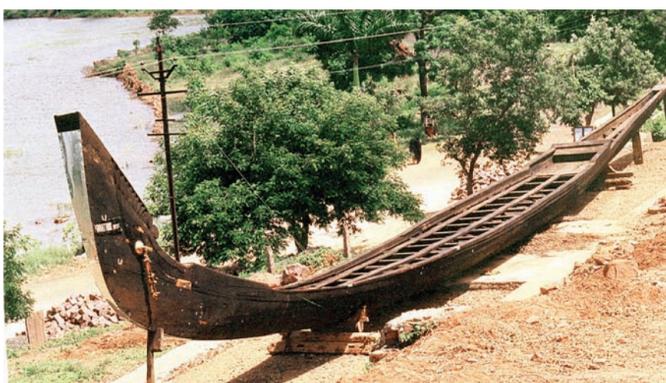
enforce Corona curfew in the district said the new way of punishing lockdown violators came to him after a nearby community donated several booklets to them. "We would earlier make them do sit-ups or make them sit for 45 minutes to an hour before allowing them to go, so, I just thought that they can instead write the name of Lord Ram for as long as they are comfortable as punishment before letting them go. We also cautioned them to sit at home and care for their parents instead of roaming out," said Singh. He said that so far, no one was forced to undergo this 'punishment' and that they ensured that the measure is not in conflict with their religious belief. "People were made to do it with their willingness. We have been doing it for 3 days and around 25 odd people have been punished so far, we have not received any complaints about it," said Singh.

Snake boat of Kerala is third Exhibit of the Week of the month of May

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Under the Latest and popular online series of Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) entitled 'Exhibit of the Week' the "NAKTA" A Wooden mask collected from 1990. The Community of Muria of Chhattisgarh. This is the 52 exhibition under the Exhibit of the Week displayed in the audience as The Third Exhibit of the month of May, 2021 through official website, Facebook, Instagram and twitter page of the IGRMS.

In this regard Praveen Kumar Mishra, Director, IGRMS said that Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (National Museum of Mankind). Initially this series will focus on the masterpieces from its collection which are considered as unique for their contribution to the cultural history of a particular ethnic group or area. Chundan Vallam is a long snake boat made out of Anjali wood. The boat resembles a



snake with its hood raised. This particular boat participated in the annual Vallam Kali festival (boat festival) for nearly 10 decades

ago in Kerala. It is considered to be a prized object of IGRMS display because of its large size. This boat won several races, and was

said to be blessed by the then Prime-Minister of India Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru during one of the annual boat festival in Aranmula, where he was the chief guest for the occasion, in 1960s.

One of the significant aspect attached with the snake boat is underlying in its transportation from its native place to IGRMS, Bhopal. The snake boat is brought from Patnamthitta district of Kerala without dismantling. It is a belief among the local community that being a form of Devi Laxmi they never allow to dismantle it. A combination of three truck trailer around 120ft long was used for its transportation. The local Malayali community of Bhopal performed their traditional rituals for welcoming of snake boat at the time of its installation in IGRMS. The boat was earlier maintained as a community property, as a symbol of high esteem, by the villagers of Poovathoor in Pathanamthitta district as the first Prime Minister of India ferried in it for a while.

CM took employee-friendly decisions: employees' organizations expressed gratitude

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Compassionate family dependent on death of Covid infection of government employees working as daily regular, ad hoc, contractual, collector rate and outsourced by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan Employee organizations of the state have expressed their gratitude to the Chief Minister for the Chief Minister Covid-19 Compassionate Appointment Scheme and Chief Minister Covid-19 Special Grace Scheme.

Representatives of employee organizations said that Chief Minister is a sensitive Chief Minister. This is his commendable and employee friendly decision. Madhya Pradesh is the

first state in the country, where these schemes have been implemented in the interest of employees. Employee-friendly image of Chouhan has been reappeared by worrying about employee families even in the worst phase of Corona epidemic. These schemes will prove to be a boon for the dependent families of the employees and will provide them strong financial support.

Employee organizations said that the special thing in these schemes is that in the scheme, dependent families of all types of employees like regular, daily salaried, permanent workers, contract workers and collector rate etc. will get compassionate appointment and ex-gratia amount.



WALK-IN VACCINATION FOR 45+ IN DELHI, STOCK TO LAST 3 DAYS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi will receive 3.83 lakh doses of vaccines in May but as on Monday, it has vaccines for the 45 and above age group categories for the next three days and for the 18 to 44 age group for only two days.

Vaccination centres for the 45 and above age groups in hospitals and other healthcare centres are now being shifted to government schools. At the schools vaccination centres, people aged 45 and above will be vaccinated even if they have not registered online for vaccination.

"Walk-in vaccination process has been started at schools for those in the 45 and above age group. Vaccination centres operating at government hospitals and other healthcare centres now are being shifted to the government schools. The process of shifting has started and in the next few days many other centres will be shifted to schools," said Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Monday. The Minister told the press that the Centre has informed that



Delhi would receive 3.83 lakh doses of vaccines in May. No vaccines will be supplied for the age group 18-44 years. "We have requested the Centre to provide vaccines for the 18-44 age group at least the same amount

being given for 45 and above age group so that both categories of people can be administered vaccines at the same time. If vaccines are not received in the next three days, all vaccination centres for the 18 to 44

age group will be shut," Sisodia said.

Sisodia, who is also Nodal Minister for Covid management in the national capital, said he has written to the Centre and has demanded that Delhi inform in advance how much vaccines will be provided in June and July so that the Delhi government can prepare the vaccination programmes in advance.

Sisodia also pointed out that like the Centre has fixed oxygen quotas for all States and Union Territories, similarly the Centre should maintain transparency in allocating vaccines to the States and UTs.

"The allocation of vaccines is being done under the supervision of the Centre and we have requested the Centre to make the system transparent. All States must be aware of how many vaccines they would be getting and how many vaccines other States would be receiving at the same time. The Centre should also direct vaccine manufacturing agencies to maintain transparency in allocating vaccines for the government (States and the Centre) and to the private agencies," Sisodia added.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi court on Monday sent businessman Navneet Kalra, who was arrested late on Sunday night, to three days' police custody in connection with oxygen concentrator hoarding case.

Metropolitan Magistrate Archana Beniwal at the Saket district court passed the order after hearing the arguments of Delhi Police and Kalra's lawyers.

The Delhi Police had sought a five-day custody of Kalra for interrogation in connection with alleged black-marketing and hoarding of oxygen concentrators.

Advocate Vineet Malhotra, representing Kalra, had argued that Kalra's custody was not required, as the police have already had his phone and bills of sale of the oxygen concentrators.

Additional Public Prosecutor Atul Shrivastava, however, submitted that Additional Sessions Judge at the Saket Court had earlier held custodial interrogation of Kalra was required, and also the Delhi High Court did

not entertain his plea seeking anticipatory bail. He also submitted that the whole society is looking at the investigating agency and the judiciary in this case.

A Delhi High Court bench of Justice Subramonium Prasad had turned down Kalra's plea for anticipatory bail, remarking: "I'm persuaded by the trial court's order. Interim protection cannot be given at this stage."

During the hearing before the magistrate, the Delhi Police said the details in connection with the system of procurement of the oxygen concentrators were yet to be unearthed. The police insisted that for this purpose, it requires Kalra's custody.

The magistrate noted that the court was of the view that Kalra's custodial interrogation was required for recovery of electronic devices used for the purpose of commission of alleged offences, to recover remaining oxygen concentrators, and to identify victims exploited by him.

The court added that his interrogation is required for detailed investigation

"regarding his involvement and connection with Matrix and Classic Metals, the manner of procurement of OCs, for detailed investigation of financial transactions from his firm as well as to identify the other co-accused/ associates involved in the present case". The court said the accused should be medically examined before production as per rule and be produced on May 20, before the duty metropolitan magistrate concerned.

The south Delhi police arrested Kalra, who was absconding since May 7, from his brother-in-law's farmhouse in Gurugram late Sunday night and handed over him to the Crime Branch, which is probing the matter. On May 5, a case was registered against Kalra under sections 420 (cheating), 188 (disobedience to order promulgated by public servant), 120B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code as also under the provisions of the Essential Commodities Act and the Epidemic Diseases Act.

Covid vax drive organised for scribes in Gurugram

Media personnel have been vaccinated on a priority basis as per the announcement of the Chief Minister. He hoped that during this crisis, after getting vaccinated, media personnel will be safe and keep people aware in this way," Garg said.

Team Absolute | Gurugram

Covid vaccination campaign for media persons was organised at the John Hall premises in the Civil Lines area here on Monday.



As many as 70 mediapersons were administered the Covishield doses during the drive. Gurugram Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg said that Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar had announced a few days ago that the media persons also fall under the category of frontline workers, so they should be given the jabs on a priority basis. "Media person-

nel have been vaccinated on a priority basis as per the announcement of the Chief Minister. He hoped that during this crisis, after getting vaccinated, media personnel will be safe and keep people aware in this way," Garg said. Joint Director of Information Public Relations and Language Department (NCR) and District Information and Public Relations Officer R.S. Sangwan thanked Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg and Civil Surgeon Virender Yadav for organising the camp for journalists.

He also thanked all the members of the team of Health Department for carrying out the vaccination.

4524 new Covid cases in Delhi as high casualties cause for concern

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi reported 4,524 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, the lowest since April 4, when the city had reported 4,033 positive cases in day. The Capital also continued to witness reduction in daily positive cases which slid below 9 per cent (8.42%) on Monday.

It has witnessed a sharp decline in daily positive case and positivity rate for around the last two weeks. During the peak of the second wave of the Covid pandemic, on April 20, Delhi's daily positive cases were reported at 28,395, while the highest daily positivity rate was 36 per cent on April 22.

Even if the new infections continued to dip in Delhi, the daily deaths figure remained on the higher side. According to a health bulletin, Delhi reported 340 deaths on Monday, tak-



ing the overall toll to 21,846.

The Capital reported 262 deaths on Sunday, 337 on Saturday, 289 on Friday, 308 on Thursday, 300 on Wednesday and 347 on Tuesday.

Delhi reported 6,456 new Coronavirus cases on Sunday and

before that 6,430 on Saturday, 8,506 on Friday, 10,489 on Thursday, 13,287 on Wednesday and 12,481 on Tuesday.

The number of new cases reported came out of the 53,756 tests conducted on the previous day. As many as

41,849 RT-PCR and 11,907 rapid antigen tests were conducted in the last 24 hours.

A total of 10,918 patients recovered from the deadly disease, taking the total recovery figure to 13,20,496 in the national capital. The recovery rate was 94.42 per cent. The active cases declined to 56,049 from 62,783 on the previous day.

As far as the vaccination drive is concerned, a total of 91,105 people received vaccines in the last 24 hours. A total of 79,585 people received the first dose of the vaccine whereas 11,520 people received their second dose. So far, 46,02,475 persons have received vaccines in the national capital. Out of the total 24,104 beds in hospitals dedicated to Coronavirus, 8,562 are vacant. The tally of people in home isolation declined to 35,141 from 39,211 on Sunday.

WHO gives 100 oxygen concentrators to Haryana

Team Absolute | Gurugram

The World Health Organization (WHO) in first phase provided 100 oxygen concentrators to Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal through one of its top representatives -- National Profession Officer, Regional Team Leader, North India, Dr. Vishesh, here on Monday.

Khattar thanked the WHO for the assistance and said Haryana is following its guidelines to combat the pandemic.

He hoped that the WHO would keep on helping Haryana in terms of providing medical equipments and also continue guiding for tackling the pandemic in more effective ways.

While assuring the Haryana CM of all help, Dr. Vishesh said that WHO stands in solidarity with the



people of India in this crisis and our sympathies are with the families that have lost their loved ones.

He said: "We will continue to work with the Union government and state governments to end the pandemic."

He added that WHO is supporting India to fill critical gaps in the availability of oxygen, testing kits, and hospital beds and it procured 1.2 million respirator masks (KN95), 4,000 oxygen concentrators, 424 medical beds, 128 tents for auxiliary health facilities, 1.2 million reagents and 400,000 test and swab kits to support testing capacity across states and union territories.

Transparency should be maintained on vax supply: Manish Sisodia

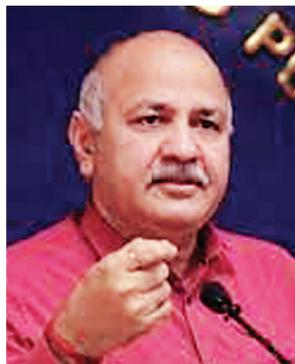
Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid the shortage of anti-Covid vaccines, the AAP-led Delhi government on Monday wrote to the Centre and demanded full transparency in the vaccine allocation system.

In the letter, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) mentioned that similar to medical oxygen allocation, wherein the Centre has fixed a quota for each state and Union Territories (UTs), the same should be done for vaccine allocation.

Addressing a virtual press conference, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia who is also the Nodal minister for Covid management, said Delhi is ready to purchase vaccines but the Centre said Delhi will not be given more vaccines in May.

"The Centre has in a letter to Delhi government today has informed that Delhi will be supplied 3.83 lakh doses (3,83,000) of vaccines in May and no vaccines to be supplied for the age group 18-44 years. If vaccines are not



received in the next three days, all vaccination centres for the 18-44 age group will be shut," Sisodia said.

Sisodia told the press that the Delhi government has requested the Centre to provide vaccines for 18-44 age groups at least equal in number to the doses pro-

vided for the 45 and above age groups.

"We want to vaccinate both sections (18 to 44 and 45 and above) at the same time so that all age groups of people in Delhi can be administered vaccines before the third wave of Covid pandemic starts," he added.

"The allocation of vaccines is being done under the supervision of the Centre and we have requested the Centre to make the system transparent. All states must be aware of how many vaccines they would be getting and how many vaccines other states would be receiving at the same time. The Centre should also direct vaccine manufacturing agencies to maintain transparency in allocating vaccines for the government (states and the Centre) and to the private agencies," Sisodia added.

The Delhi government has also requested the Centre to inform it about the number of vaccines to be supplied in the months of June and July so that the state administration can prepare for the vaccination drive.

Haryana CM unveils 100-bed Covid centre in Gurugram

Team Absolute | Gurugram

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Monday inaugurated a 100-bed Covid care centre here in sector-14.

With this facility, the Chief Minister has launched 500 beds of Covid care centres in Gurugram within two days. With this, 500 additional beds have been added to the total bed capacity available in various government and private hospitals for covid patients in Gurugram. Khattar on Sunday inaugurated 2 temporary Covid care centers at Tau Devi Lal Stadium in sector-38 with 100-bed facility and sector 67 with 300 beds for in Gurugram. At the Government College covid centre launched on Monday, 100 oxygen beds have been installed for the corona patients. Here, the district administration

will fulfill the requirement of oxygen while, the Hero Group has also made arrangements for 100 oxygen concentrators.

The Hero Group will also provide medicine and doctors in collaboration with an NGO called "Doctors for You". The Civil Surgeon Office will be supervised here. "Cleanliness and disposal of biomedical waste at these covid care centers will be handled by the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) and the security arrangements will be looked after by the district police. The Volunteers of Gurujal Society and Civil Defence will also cooperate in the operation of these centers and if any patient becomes serious, then there will be a system to shift them from these centers to hospitals," according to an official statement of the district administration.

Jaish operative tasked to kill Hindu priest held from Delhi hotel

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Jammu and Kashmir resident who was allegedly tasked to kill priest Swami Yati Narsinghanand from Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), has been arrested from a hotel here, the Delhi Police's Special Cell said on Monday.

According to a Special Cell source, John aka Jaan Mohammad Dar, a resident of J&K's Pulwama, was held from his room at the Shiva Hotel in Paharganj area on Sunday evening.

A .30 bore pistol, two magazines, 15 live rounds, an orange-coloured kurta, a piece of 'kalawa' and several other religious items were recovered from him.

A Special Cell officer said that Dar was arrested in connection with a

case registered on April 28 this year. During questioning, he revealed that he has studied up to Class 12 and currently works as a carpenter. It was also found that he was booked by the Jammu and Kashmir Police for stone pelting in 2016 at the time of death of terrorist Burhan Wani.

The officer said that Dar stated that he had met JeM terrorist named Aabid while roaming in his field in December 2020.

"Aabid informed him that he is from Pakistan-occupied Kashmirie and that he is a 'Mujahid' of JeM. Over the period, Aabid and Dar grew a strong bonding as both wanted to fight against the Indian government," the officer said. Though they again met in April this year, they were frequently in touch with each other on WhatsApp, he said. The officer said that in

February this year, Dar had come to Delhi for treatment of his nephew who has some heart ailment, and on returning home, told Aabid about it.

"Upon hearing about Dar's visit to Delhi, Aabid assigned him with the task to assassinate Swami Narsinghanand as he committed 'Gustakh-e-Rasool' (insult of the Prophet). Aabid also gave weapon handling training to Dar for the purpose of target killing and Rs 6,500," he said, adding that Aabid promised him that he would be paid substantial amount for carrying out the action and also told him that a person, code named Umar would receive him in Delhi.

Revealing the plot, the officer said that Aabid had called Dar to meet in Sangam area of Anantnag in the second week of April and informed that

he would have to go to Delhi to kill Yati Narsinghanand whose video were shown to him by Aabid.

"Dar left Jammu and Kashmir on April 23 and after arriving in Delhi, he was in touch with Umar through Telegram." A sum of Rs 35,000 was received in his account in J&K Bank on the day he left.

The officer said that Umar was to arrange his recce and stay in Delhi and also to provide access to Narsinghanand to carry out his killing. "Dar met Umar in the Jama Masjid area as directed by Aabid. Umar took Dar to one of his hideouts for three days and later shifted him to Shiva Hotel in Paharganj," he said.

The officer further said that Umar also brought the puja items and the orange-coloured clothes as a cover to gain entry in temple.

Team Absolute | Gurugram

A data of the Gurugram health department revealed that between April 1 to May 10, 77 per cent of the patients who succumbed to the lethal virus in the district were over 50 years of age while, only 23 per cent patients who died due to the dreaded virus were below 50 years of age.

In Gurugram, so far, a total of 673 people have lost their lives amid a high number of Covid-19 infections.

According to a daily health bulletin, between April 1 and May 10, 235 patients have died due to Covid in the district, of which 181 were over 50 years of age.

Among them, 62 patients are in the age group 61-70 and only 1 patient in the age group of 91-100 died due to the coronavirus infection.

Besides, only 1 patient in the age group of 11-20 died due to the novel coronavirus.

77% patients aged above 50 die of Covid

The figure also showed that the virus has claimed lives of more men than women. Of the 235 patients who died of the coronavirus between April 1 and May 10, around 82 were women and 153 men.

Meanwhile, the Covid recovery rate in Gurugram has reached 79.64 per cent.

The officials said that to prevent Covid infections, an action plan has been prepared by the district administration which focusing on testing, tracing and treatment.

"To curb Covid infections, around 138 teams of the health department are working in a planned manner in different areas of the district. Also, a dedicated team of the health department is monitoring the conditions of home isolation patients," Chief Medical Officer Gurugram, Virender Yadav said.

Yadav said that due to awareness among the district residents, administration and health department, the rate of recovery of Covid is constantly improving.



410 STRANDED ON BARGES, INDIAN NAVY SHIPS TO THE RESCUE

The ships are expected to reach the venue by late afternoon, and other ships and aircraft also being prepared to go there for a search and rescue operation in the region clobbered by the passing Cyclone Tauktae.



Oilfield at Bombay High Fields of Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), around 175 kms from Mumbai.

Following an SOS from the Barge P305 which is adrift near the oilfields with the crew and ONGC personnel on board, the Indian Navy has dispatched two ships INS Kochi and INS Talwar to render assistance. The ships are expected to reach the venue by late afternoon, and other ships and aircraft also being prepared to go there for a search and rescue operation in the region clobbered by the passing Cyclone Tauktae. The critical assets of ONGC's Bombay High Fields are falling in the direct path of the

raging Cyclone Tauktae, now swirling towards the south Gujarat coast, after wreaking huge havoc in Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra. In the second instance, another stranded barge GAL Constructor, with 137 people onboard sent an SOS from its location around 15 kms in the Arabian Sea off Mumbai. Responding promptly, the IN has deployed INS Kolkata to render assistance to the crew and passengers on the second barge. Several other ships have been readied for HADR tasking in the wake of Cyclone Tauktae that has wreaked havoc along the West coast of India," an IN official said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Triggering huge concerns, the Indian Navy has deployed 3 ships to rescue at least 410 persons stranded on two barges off Mumbai coast which has been lashed by Cyclone Tauktae since midnight, officials said here on Monday. In the first instance, 273 persons are struggling on a drifting barge near the Heera

Rain Forces Mumbai Airport, Sea Link To Close, PM Calls Uddhav Thackeray

Cyclone Tauktae forced over 12,000 citizens to be relocated to safer places from Maharashtra's coastal areas.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today spoke to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to take stock of the situation in the state in the backdrop of Cyclone Tauktae sweeping the coastal regions of the state. The gale has by now intensified into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm", according to the weather department, and is likely to reach the Gujarat coast today evening.

The Prime Minister also called up Chief Ministers of Gujarat and Goa, besides the Lieutenant Governor of Daman & Diu, to discuss the preparation and response to the storm, according to agency reports.

At around 2.30 pm, the cyclone lay about 165 kilometres west-northwest of Mumbai and 130 kilometres south-southeast of Diu. It was expected to cross the Gujarat coast between Porbandar and Mahuva, east of Diu tonight between 10 pm and 11 pm, India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said.

On Monday, Mumbaiers woke up witnessing gusty winds and heavy showers due to the cyclone.



Many Mumbaiers are enjoying the change in weather amid the coronavirus pandemic. The city continued to be battered by heavy rains through the day. The airport was shut through the day and the Bandra-Worli sea link closed, as was the city monorail service. Temporary shelters have been set up across the city.

State Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik said 193 COVID-19 patients admitted in a makeshift centre in Mumbai's Bandra-Kurla Complex had been shifted to other BMC-run hospitals due to the heavy rains that lashed the city.

The police have been asked to maintain close coordination with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation officials ward-wise to implement mitigation measures, an official said.

"All police stations and posts have been asked to check communication equipment like wireless sets and public address systems to ensure they are working optimally. The same instructions have been given for vehicles and life-saving and rescue items like life jackets, first-aid kits, ropes, hammers, emergency lighting, stretchers etc," the official informed.

Over 12,000 citizens were relocated to safer places from Maharashtra's coastal areas. Those relocated include 8,380 people in Raigad, 3,896 in Ratnagiri, and 144 in Sindhudurg districts.

"Farmers in some parts of Konkan have suffered losses due to the situation. Spot inspections have begun," Mr Malik said in a statement.

The Indian Coast Guard said it had rescued 12 fishermen stranded around 35 nautical miles off the Kochi coast amid rough seas due to the cyclone on the night of May 16.

Cyclone Tauktae storms over Mumbai, razes trees, damages homes

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Cyclone Tauktae hit Mumbai with full fury bringing heavy rains, strong gales of over 60-75 km/hr, which wreaked havoc by uprooting scores of trees, damaged some homes, and disrupted road traffic, though there are no human casualties, officials said.

Categorised now as 'Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm', its effects were felt shortly after midnight of Sunday-Monday with many areas lashed by heavy rains, accompanied by lightning and thunder in some places, aggravated by powerful winds, as it whirled northwards from Sindhudurg-Ratnagiri towards Raigad-Mumbai en route to the Gujarat coast.

As a major precautionary measure, the state authorities have already shifted out 7,866 people from vulnerable spots along the coast, besides another around 4,000 in Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri and Thane, an official said.



Till Monday morning, the city had recorded 8.37 mm rains, 6.53 in eastern suburbs and 3.92 in western suburbs, substantially cooling the weather at the height of mid-summer when

Mumbai swelters with the mercury remaining in the upper-30s-to-mid-40s. Several roads were littered as at least 30 big and small trees got uprooted in different parts of

Mumbai and Thane, during the night, besides minor damage to several homes. The cyclone was hovering around 160 kms away from the Mumbai coast and is likely to reach Gujarat by midnight tonight, said the IMD's latest warning bulletin.

It is accompanied by strong winds of 180-190 kmph, gusting to 210 kmph, which is expected to drop gradually over the next 48 hours into a depression with 40-60 kmph winds by Wednesday morning.

The IMD has warned of winds of upto 75-100 kmph in Mumbai, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Thane and Palghar during the day and people have been asked not to venture outdoors. He combined effect of these have resulted in 'Phenomenal' waves in the frothy Arabian Sea with tidal waves to reach heights of upto 3 metres and the authorities have completely banned all fishing and other maritime activities for the next few days.

Shiv Sena miffed with acting Maharashtra DGP Sanjay Pandey: Report

Acting Maharashtra Director General of Police Sanjay Pandey will be returning to the state from Chandigarh tonight.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A report on Monday claimed that Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena is upset with Sanjay Pandey, who was given additional charge of the Maharashtra Director General of Police (DGP) in April.

As per media reports, the ruling party is miffed as Pandey is absent at a crucial time when the state is battling with the COVID-19 pandemic and the cyclonic storm Tauktae.

The 1986-batch Indian Police Service officer is currently in his hometown Chandigarh.

After the report surfaced, Pandey clarified that he came to Chandigarh for a few hours and will be returning to Maharashtra tonight. "I am monitoring the situation from here and connected with all the officers and government as well. I had asked for a leave for a day which was accepted," claimed Pandey. Earlier this month, the acting DGP had written a letter to the Maharashtra government, recusing himself from the task of carrying out two inquiries against former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh related to corruption. Pandey recused himself after Singh claimed that the acting DGP offered to mediate between him and the Maharashtra government. In a letter to the Central Bureau of



Investigation on April 19, Param Bir Singh had claimed a "malicious attempt" and "conspiracy to thwart the preliminary enquiry of CBI and attempt to tamper witness" by Sanjay Pandey. The former Mumbai police commissioner had also attached transcripts of the telephone conversation between him and Pandey on WhatsApp recorded without the latter's knowledge. Param Bir Singh, in March, wrote a letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and accused the then Home Minister Anil Deshmukh of asking the Mumbai Police officers to 'extort' Rs 100 crore per month for him. Anil Deshmukh had resigned from his post in April.

Maha sees Covid cases drop, deaths rise marginally, toll crosses 80K

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maha sees Covid-19 new infections drop but the state's deaths kept increasing to cross 81,000, though there was also an increase in the recovery rate, health officials said.

Against 960 deaths on Saturday, the state fatalities were at 974, taking the toll to 81,486 now. Remaining below the 50,000-level, the cases dropped from 34,848 to 34,389, to take the tally to 3,78,452 now. The Mumbai situation continued to improve, with the infections remaining below the 3K-level, but increasing to 1,535, taking the city tally to 687,830, while with 60 more deaths, the total fatalities in

the country's commercial capital went up to 14,224. After three days, the state death rate worsened slightly from 1.51 per cent to 1.52 per cent now, though the number of active cases fell from 494,032 to 468,109.

Meanwhile 59,318 fully cured patients, again higher than the number of fresh infections, returned home, taking the total to 48,26,371, while the recovery rate further improved from 89.02 per cent to 89.74 per cent now.

The Mumbai circle - comprising Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and Raigad districts - recorded a fall in new cases, taking its case-load to 14,83,823, while with 152 more deaths, the toll rose to 25,788 now. Of the day's fatalities, Nagpur again led

with 104 deaths, while there were 98 in Kolhapur, 85 in Solapur, 62 in Pune, 60 in Mumbai, 55 in Chandrapur, 45 in Aurangabad, 44 in Nashik, 43 in Nanded, 38 in Amravati, 36 in Beed, 35 in Thane, 34 in Sangli, 31 in Jalgaon, 30 in Raigad, 27 in Palghar, 21 in Ahmednagar, 20 in Parbhani, 17 each in Latur and Yavatmal, 13 in Jalna, 12 in Washim, 10 in Sindhudurg, nine in Nandurbar, eight in Satara, six each in Wardha and Gadchiroli, four in Osmanabad, and one each in Hingoli, Akola, Buldhana, and Gondia. Meanwhile, the number of people sent to home isolation stood at 34,91,981 now, while those in institutional quarantine were 28,398.

NO BIDDERS YET FOR BMC VACCINE TENDER

Mumbai: The BMC has received no bids for its global expression of interest (EOI) floated last week for procurement of 1 crore vaccine doses. Sunday was the last day for accepting queries from interested bidders. The tender will close on May 18. On May 12, BMC became the first municipal corporation in the country to float a global tender for purchase of vaccines. The civic body gave bidders six days to respond. As per the tender condition, bidders were supposed to send their queries related to the tender by May 16. Officials from the BMC have hinted that the civic body may extend the deadline.

"No bids were received till Sunday. We will wait till the last day of the EOI and then decide on extending the deadline for the tender," said P Velrasu, Additional Municipal Corporation (Projects), who is handling the vaccine procurement.

Congress MP Rajeev Satav's last rites performed at native place in Maharashtra

Satav was undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Pune after testing coronavirus positive last month and was on ventilator support.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The mortal remains of Congress MP Rajeev Satav, who died after recovering from Covid-19, were consigned to flames with state honours at his native place Kalamnuri in Maharashtra's Hingoli district on Monday. Several key Congress leaders, including AICC in-charge of Maharashtra H K Patil, party's Maharashtra unit chief Nana Patole and state ministers Ashok Chavan, Balasaheb Thorat, Vijay Wadettiwar,



Aslam Shaikh, Nitin Raut, Varsha Gaikwad, Satej Patil, Vishwajeet Kadam and other party workers were present at the funeral.

Satav (46), considered as a close associate of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, died at a hospital in Pune on Sunday, days after recovering from

the coronavirus infection. The late Rajya Sabha member's family members bid him an emotional farewell as his mortal remains were consigned to flames at his native place on Monday.

Paying tributes to the late leader, Shaikh said, "...he would always talk about the issues concerning the people of Maharashtra...the farmers have lost their leader. He is not among us. I am speechless." Kadam described Satav as his "big brother and mentor".

Satav was undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Pune after testing coronavirus positive last month and was on ventilator support.

A media release by the Jehangir Hospital in Pune had said Satav succumbed to "secondary pneumonia with multi-organ dysfunction syndrome". He had become "RT-PCR swab negative" on May 9, it said.

Indian art community to raise funds for Covid relief via auction

According to a statement from the auction house, Art Rises for India features over 120 works of modern and contemporary South Asian art, all of which have been generously donated by artists, gallerists, collectors, and patrons to support the cause.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amid the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country, the Indian art community has united to raise funds to assist with the ongoing relief efforts through 'Art Rises for India', a 24-hour online

fundraiser auction hosted by Saffronart from May 19-20.

According to a statement from the auction house, Art Rises for India features over 120 works of modern and contemporary South Asian art, all of which have been generously donated by artists, gallerists, collectors, and patrons to support the cause. All the proceeds from the auction, including the reduced buyer's premium, will be donated to grassroots non-profit organisations such as Goonj, Hemkunt Foundation, YUVA, Dastkar, FICA, Khoj, Street Survivors, Aangan and Charaka, which are working on the ground to provide medical support and daily subsistence to those in need.

The highlights of the fundraiser auction include an untitled work by Amrita Sher-Gil, and a watercolour on paper by Ganesh Haloi, both esti-

mated at Rs 8-10 lakh each; a 2015 oil on canvas by A. Ramachandran, estimated at Rs 7-9 lakh; Gieve Patel's bronze and wood sculpture Eklavya estimated at Rs 6-8 lakh; as well as significant works by Ram Kumar, Krishen Khanna, K.G. Subramanyan, Thota Vaikuntam and Sudhir Patwardhan, among other artists. The contemporary section includes a 2017 work on paper by Imran Qureshi titled 'When I Thought of You', estimated at Rs 7-9 lakh; N.S. Harsha's 'Beginning' (2019), estimated at Rs 5-7 lakh; a set of two works by Rana Begum, estimated at Rs 3-5 lakh, as well as works by Vivan Sundaram, Alyssa Pheobus Mumtaz, Rathin Barman, Natessa Amin and Gigi Scaria, among others, said the auction house. Saffronart CEO and Co-founder Dinesh Vazirani said, "We are living in unprecedented

times. The harsh reality of the deadly second wave of the COVID-19 virus has compromised the lives of millions across India. All of us have been touched by this tragedy in some way.

"We, the Indian art community, have decided to join forces in raising funds to assist the NGOs doing critical work at the grassroots level, which includes providing medical support, basic amenities and sustenance to daily labourers, migrant workers, street survivors, artists, artisans, craftspeople, and anyone in need." This online fundraiser auction has come together thanks to the generous donations of several artists, gallerists, and collectors. As we did with our COVID-19 Relief Fundraiser Auction last year, we hope to raise a significant corpus of funds and do our small part in helping those in need.

Pune admin supplies low dosage tocilizumab vials to hospitals over shortage

Apart from regulated supply of tocilizumab vials to hospitals, the district administration has also brought down the dose among the 980 vials distributed to hospitals on Monday

PUNE | Agencies

Apart from regulated supply of tocilizumab vials to hospitals, the district administration has also brought down the dose among the 980 vials distributed to hospitals on Monday. The dosages were supplied to 107 hospitals across Pune, Pimpri-Chinchwad and Pune rural. Instead of the regular 400

mg dose in each vial of the immunosuppressive drug used in the treatment of Covid-19, the administration on Monday supplied 80 mg vials. According to doctors, a severe Covid-19 patient needs 400 mg of each dose which could be two doses if the health situation does not improve. With the present supply, hospitals will have to give five vials to such Covid cases. The district administration has asked hospitals and doctors to exercise caution while administering the drugs. On Monday, in a letter to district hospitals that had requested tocilizumab 400 mg vials, the admin supplied 40mg vials. Just like remdesivir, the distribution of tocilizumab is also restricted by the Pune district administration. Hospitals are unable to procure the drug directly.

The letter signed by Pune district collector Rajesh Deshmukh states: "the demand for tocilizumab has risen steadily and the drug is not made in India but imported and distributed by Cipla across the country. The earlier stock distributed on May 4 was tocilizumab 400 mg. However, the stock provided on May 17 is 80 mg. So, it is advised that the prescription must be in accordance with the Covid patient's severity." As per an annexure by the central government, tocilizumab 400 mg must be administered slowly over NS IV over 60 minutes and the patient can be given an additional dose if the condition worsens. As a patient may need up to 800 mg of the drug, now 10 injections of the current dose have to be administered.



Jacqueline Fernandez's recently launched foundation YOLO is working endlessly to help people in need. The actress is currently working in Mumbai in one of Ghatkopar's Covid care centre. She opened up on what her foundation is looking to work on in near future.

WE ALSO PLAN TO BRING IN OVER 500 OXYGEN CONCENTRATORS: JACQUELINE FERNANDEZ

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In an interview with a leading entertainment website, Jacqueline explained what YOLO plans to do in near future, she shares, "It's going to be an uphill battle but we are working on getting 100 hospital beds. We also plan to bring in over 500 oxygen concentrators. Currently we've added two ambulances and are trying to look more what more we can bring in to help the people in need."

She continues, "I heard that people are not able to afford ambulances

because of the rate they charge. People have been losing lives because of this and it's truly disheartening and so we have started to provide free ambulance services. The ambulances are loaded with necessary medicine and equipments.

The good work does not stop here, the actress also is making efforts to get a toll-free number registered for people to call when they are in need of help. Jacqueline along with her foundation is doing everything she can to help the people, she feels it is her way to give back to the people.

YOLO was originally supposed to be a foundation that would focus on other issues however, the need of the hour was to help for Covid relief as the country is going through such unprecedented crisis. In the future Jacqueline and YOLO will join hands to fight against other causes as well.

The actress has also collaborated with Roti Bank Foundation for a drive to feed the needy amid the pandemic. She plans on distributing 1 lakh free meals, feed the strays and donate mask, sanitizer and raincoats to Mumbai police in these testing times.

Pallavi Joshi and Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri to help Covid-19-hit children and families for adoption

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Who thought who will take care of the kids if both parents go into hospital with COVID and don't return? High incidents of deaths in young Indians has implored state agencies and NGOs to step in even as adoption pleas online for COVID orphans stoke fear of child trafficking.

Actress Pallavi Joshi and director Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri have joined hands with an NGO to adopt children and families who have been impacted by Covid-19 pandemic. As India is going through one of its worst phases in history, with the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic squeezing the country's health infrastructure and its economy, a good samaritan has come out to lend a helping hand.

Actress Pallavi Joshi and her filmmaker husband Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri to offer counselling sessions, headed by experts, for children orphaned due to Covid-19. The couple runs I Am Buddha Foundation, through which it has been helping individuals from the film fraternity affected by the pandemic. "These counselling sessions are aimed at children and young adults who are bearing the emo-

tional brunt of having lost one or both parents in the pandemic," says Joshi.

For this, the couple has tied up with the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), an Indian statutory body that works under the aegis of the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Agnihotri says they have roped in a panel of psychologists to offer their expertise. The sessions are conducted under supervision. "We are also looking at children whose families are in quarantine. Sometimes, extended families are at a loss of how to deal with a child who is going through emotional upheaval. There is the tendency to experience rage and anxiety because they are being looked after in foster care," he adds.

Even small initiatives during a pandemic can help save a thousand lives and this couple is doing their bit. Pallavi and Vivek along with NGO will focus on helping the children and families suffering because of the prevailing situation.



Ananya Panday wishes her Bestie

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Ananya Panday is quite popular with the youth. Her acting may have won over the people but her young age and bubbly nature is much relatable with for the youth. Like any other teenager Ananya too loves her Bestie and she took to social media to wish her Bestie Happy Birthday.

In the boomerang a grown up Ananya is again looking at her lovely dadi as the dadi looks towards the camera. Ananya is wearing a white top again and

this time the dadi is wearing a brown flower patterned suit. On the first photo she has written, "Happy Birthday Bestie! Love you so much dadi" and on the second one she wrote a simple yet meaningful "Forever". Ananya shares a very strong bond with her dadi and she has showcased it time and again on social media to her fans. Ananya is currently spending time with her family but on the work front she has Pan-India film Liger starring Vijay Deverakonda and Shakun Batra's untitled next with Deepika Padukone and Siddhant Chaturvedi on the cards.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

In the image, she poses in a mustard-hued boat neck blouse paired with denims, and strikes a smiling pose for the camera. "Things are tough, but this too shall pass, it's been a while so just some #monday-motivation," she wrote as caption.

On the work front, Bhumi will next be seen alongside Rajkumar Rao in "Badhaai Do". The film is the second instalment in the "Badhaai Ho" franchise. While the first film starred

Bhumi Pednekar has shared some Monday motivation along with an Instagram picture she has shared for fans.

'MONDAY MOTIVATION'

Ayushmann Khurrana and Sanya Malhotra, the new film will see Bhumi team with Rajkumar.

The film is directed by Harshvardhan Kulkarni, who helmed the Gulshan Devaiah-starrer comedy "Hunterrr" (2015), and is written by Suman Adhikary and Akshat Ghildial, who earlier wrote "Badhaai Ho".

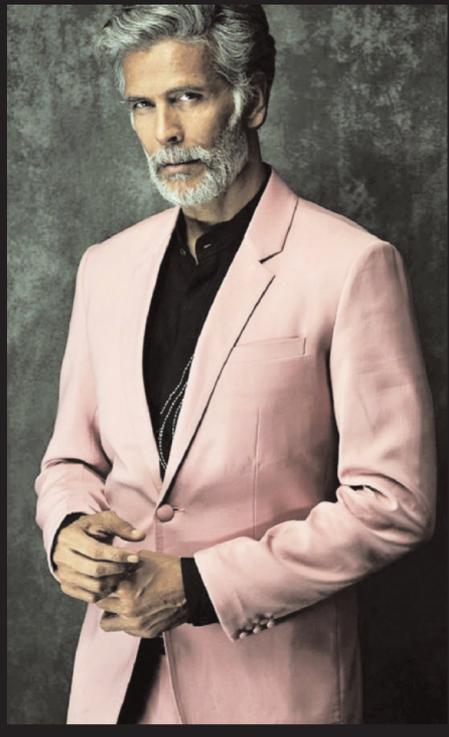
MILIND SOMAN EXPLAINS WHY HE IS UNABLE TO DONATE PLASMA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Model and actor Milind Soman explained on Monday why he is unable to donate plasma despite recovering from Covid-19. "Back to the jungle! Went to Mumbai to donate plasma but didn't have enough antibodies for donation. Even though plasma therapy is not proven effective 100%, there are opinions that it might help, so I guess we must do whatever we can," Milind wrote on Instagram along with a selfie. "Low antibody count generally means I had mild symptoms and that I have enough to fight another infection but not enough that I can help other people. Felt a bit sad. #postcovid," he further explained.

In a recent Instagram post, the 55-year-old, known for his fitness, shared a few tips with netizens to improve their strength and flexibility.

"Six finger pullups -- third set of 8 repetitions. Every part of your body and mind, organs and systems, muscles, focus, concentration, stamina, digestion, are getting weaker as you grow older, and by older I mean after mid-twenties, slowly at first, but then faster and faster. UNLESS you make the effort to keep every part of your body and mind strong. It's upto us to understand our mental and physical weaknesses and make lifestyle and attitude choices to ensure we do not suffer due to them," he wrote recently.



'BE HEALTHY'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shilpa Shetty Kundra took to social media on Monday to remind netizens that they need to be gentle towards themselves at a time when the nation is battling the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"When you feel everything around you is overwhelming; straighten your back, release your tongue hitting the roof of your mouth, and loosen your shoulders. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. You can ensure everyone around you is okay only when you are okay. #MondayMotivation," she further wrote. The actress is gear-

ing up to return to the screen after over a decade. She will be seen in the films "Nikamma" and "Hungama 2" soon. Her last release in Bollywood was "Apne", in June 2007.

To be able to stay united and help each other, we need to be gentle with ourselves. Prioritise what needs and deserves your attention before everything else. Please don't neglect your health, your food, your sleep, or even your water intake.



Eric Clapton feared not being able to play again after Covid vaccine jab

VACCINE FEAR

Los Angeles | Agencies

Legendary rocker and guitarist Eric Clapton admits fearing he would never play again after he got the first jab of the Covid vaccine, adding he could not do anything for two weeks.

The 76-year-old suffers from peripheral neuropathy, a disease that affects the nerves beyond the brain and spinal cord.

Telegram shared a letter by Clapton to architect and film producer Robin Monotti Graziadei, in which he wrote: "I took the first jab of AZ and straight away had severe reactions which lasted ten days. I recovered eventually and was told it would be twelve weeks before the second one." "About six weeks later I was offered and took the second AZ shot, but with a little more knowledge of the

dangers. Needless to say, the reactions were disastrous, my hands and feet were either frozen, numb or burning, and pretty much useless for two weeks, I feared I would never play again (I suffer with peripheral neuropathy and should never have gone near the needle). But the propaganda said the vaccine was safe for everyone," he wrote in the letter, according to contactmusic.com.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Model-actress Kelly Brook has been with her beau Jeremy Parisi for years, but is not desperate to have children or tie the knot.

"I've got a bucket list and I have to say a wedding is not on it!" Brook said, adding that motherhood "isn't on her radar" at the moment.

"I feel like marriage and children are not things I've wanted. I like travelling and being with my partner, I like animals working and being independent and I like my freedom. I like being spontaneous," Brook told Notebook

Kelly Brook: I don't have the instinct for marriage or kids



Katy Perry sends temperatures soaring on American Idol as she works a skintight red leather dress with thigh-high PVC boots

HOT 'N' STUNNING

Los Angeles | Agencies

She is one of the hottest singers in Hollywood. And Katy Perry sent temperatures soaring as she worked a skintight leather red dress for Instagram followers on Sunday. According to dailymail.co.uk, The I Kissed A Girl songstress, 36, shared snaps of herself posing in between American Idol takes, where she looked ravishing in the crimson frock with thigh-high PVC boots. The plunging number clung to Katy's waist and flashed a hint of leg as she posed for the camera with her hands upon her svelte torso. The Roar singer looked fierce with her blonde hair styled into a sleek 'do that framed her exquisitely done makeup. Long full lashes brought out her blue eyes while a tint of lipstick added to the red hot vibe. In the final pose of the slideshow, she squatted towards the floor with one hand resting upon her knee.



NICK JONAS BACK HOME FROM HOSPITAL AFTER BEING INJURED ON SET

Los Angeles | Agencies

American pop star Nick Jonas was injured while shooting for a new show. While details about the accident or the injury are awaited, Jonas had to be taken to a hospital close by in an ambulance. He has returned home since then.



Priyanka Chopra's husband Jonas was shooting late on Saturday night when the incident happened, sources told TMZ.

"Nick was on set when something happened," said sources, adding that Jonas was back home on Sunday night. He is scheduled to appear on "The Voice" on Monday night.

Earlier, the 28-year-old singer had suffered a hand injury during a post-show workout in Mexico in 2018.

Sophie Hermann gives rare insight into her 'failed' fashion label as she puts entire collection up for sale... vowing to burn it if it doesn't sell

JEFFREY BOWYER-CHAPMAN: FACED HOMOPHOBIA, RACISM GROWING UP IN ADOPTED WHITE HOUSEHOLD

Ottawa | Agencies

Canadian actor Jeffrey Bowyer-Chapman recalls being the only identifiably queer person and the only person of colour in his town while growing up, adding that he experienced an abundance of homophobia, emotional abuse, physical violence and racism. Coming from an adopted white household and raised in a small town that was mostly an all-white, racist, and homophobic community, the actor says that his life was a nightmare and a horror story in itself, due to which he didn't want to see films that could terrorise him further.

"I was raised by an entirely white family; I grew up in white spaces; I was the only identifiably queer person and the only person of colour in my family, in my school, in my town. I experienced an abundance of homophobia, emotional abuse, physical violence, racism," Bowyer-Chapman said.

"So, I left at a really young age -- I left when I was like 16 years old and started modelling, and I only did that because I knew that it was going to be an out, an escape from that world for me. Throughout my twenties and my early thirties, I did a lot of therapy, and I got to work through a lot of that stuff," said Bowyer-Chapman, whose 2019 horror release "Spiral" premieres on Amazon Prime Video.



'MY DREAM WAS SHATTERED!'

London | Agencies

Sophie Hermann has opened up about her attempts at launching a fashion label in her early 20s - and how she learnt invaluable lessons from its failure. On a quest to contribute to a sustainable and mindful approach in consuming fashion, the Made In Chelsea favourite, 34, is selling the entire collection - designed for the 2012-2014 seasons - vowing to 'do a Vivienne Westwood' and burn it if it doesn't sell. 'If you have a dream, you try to make it come true,' Sophie told MailOnline. 'But my dream was shattered. It all ended very dramatically and terribly with me liquidating the company.'

'Basically, don't start a business in your early 20s with your boyfriend - especially if said boyfriend is younger than you. The whole thing made me end a toxic relationship and rethink life.' Sophie launched Sophie Hermann London around the time she joined Made In Chelsea - but admits she got the wrong end of the stick with her expectations.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Addison Rae



EDITOR'S SPECS

Mysterious snow leopard

All the research efforts, spanning over a century, have only managed to cover 23 per cent of snow leopard habitat and the rest remains unexplored, according to a WWF report. Most of the vast range -- possibly over 1.7 million sqkm of rugged mountain terrain -- has never been researched from a snow leopard context, said the report titled "Over 100 Years of Snow Leopard Research - A Spatially explicit review of the state of knowledge in the snow leopard range" which examines the current state of knowledge across their habitat. The report is based on an analysis of peer reviewed published papers on the species and its habitat. It points at some glaring gaps in our knowledge of this elusive and threatened big cat species and highlights that lack of basic data could be hampering its conservation. Globally, there could be as few as 4,000 snow leopards left in Asia's high mountains and this remaining population faces continued and emerging threats. Increased habitat loss and degradation, poaching and conflict with communities have contributed to a decline in their numbers and left the species hanging by a thread in many places, the WWF report mentions. The report also highlights that although conservationists are addressing several of the threats, a robust analysis of how effective the interventions are in achieving their objectives remains deficient. The WWF report points out that despite a major research focus on snow leopard population assessments, less than 3 per cent of the big cat's range has robust data on abundance. Though snow leopard research in the past few decades has been growing exponentially, there are only four research hotspots where multi-year research is being carried out. A large majority of snow leopard habitat, spanning over 12 countries, remains under-researched, and critical knowledge gaps must be plugged for informed conservation, according to a WWF report. As part of its conservation strategy, WWF supports vital research, including the use of camera traps and satellite collaring, to collect more data on the elusive big cat. In recent years, there has been a growing global focus on national-level population assessments and several countries, and NGOs, have come up with nationwide snow leopard numbers. According to the WWF, The snow leopard's powerful build allows it to scale great steep slopes with ease. Its hind legs give it the ability to leap six times the length of its body. A long tail provides balance and agility and also wraps around the resting snow leopard as protection from the cold. The mountains ranges rich with their prey such as blue sheep, Argali wild sheep, ibex, marmots, pikas and hares found in 12 countries -- including China, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, and Mongolia -- are their habitat.

S.Ravi

With the surge in the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic overwhelming the health facilities in the urban areas, the Government is seized of its spread and affect in the rural areas. Two pointers recently put the spotlight on the importance of dealing with Coronavirus in the rural areas of India, where the vast majority of the country lives. Panchayati Raj Ministry's advisory to states. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj wrote to all the State Governments to take preventive measures to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in rural India. It suggested the States to sensitize and facilitate the Panchayats/Rural Local Bodies towards meeting the challenge and provide leadership. The advisory also asked States to undertake an intensive communication campaign for the awareness of rural communities on the nature of the infection and preventive and mitigation measures. This was necessary to dispel the prevailing false notions and beliefs. Besides, they were asked to involve frontline volunteers from the local community for the campaign including elected panchayat representatives, teachers, ASHA workers etc. while ensuring necessary protective systems for them like finger oxy-meters, N-95 masks, infrared thermal scanning instruments, sanitizers etc. Medical facilities like ambulances, advanced testing and treatment and multi-speciality

care too

were to be established for handling emergency situations. Leveraging of IT infrastructure to provide real-time information on availability of testing/vaccination centres, doctors, hospital beds etc. too has been advised. Besides home quarantine locations, specific isolations centres for the needy and migrant labourers and vaccination drives were to be arranged. In order to provide relief and rehabilitation, like rations, drinking water, sanitation, MGNREGS employment, Central and State Government schemes were to be leveraged. NCDC cautions against spread of Covid-19 To rural areas. Meanwhile, the National Centre for Disease Control asked the Centre to prioritize testing and vaccination in rural areas as the Covid-19 spread is now moving to semi and peri-urban and rural areas. The Director of NCDC Dr Sujeet K. Singh as reported in Mint while presenting the epidemiological findings and a granular analysis of the Covid-19 trajectory in the States during a review meeting, cautioned against the spread of the infection to the rural areas, as the health infrastructure in the rural regions of the country is not adequately equipped to deal with the rising number of cases. Way forward to counter these challenges. As grim as the situation may seem, local governance is the only way out. According to a comprehensive study titled "The local governance of Covid-19: Disease prevention and social security in rural India" by Anvesha Dutta and Harry W. Fischer "local governance is likely

to be especially important in bridging the gap between policy measures and local realities for the coordination of responses to Covid-19." According to the study local government perform better for a variety of grassroots State functions and thus likely to play an essential role in Covid-19 response. They are more closely connected to public and are better able to navigate context-specific local conditions. Being far more knowledgeable about local needs they are able to mobilize key local actors, monitor activities at the grassroots, and anticipate and resolve site-specific challenges that arise. Being embedded within the societies they serve makes them likely to be more responsive to the public's urgent needs. It makes them more accessible, more accountable due to formal sanctions like elections and threat of loss of personal reputation.

Moreover, local government are often perceived as more legitimate as they are directly selected by the public and thus tend to reflect citizens' values and aspirations and often their sense of identity. The study referred above was based on the lockdown in 2020.

In order to urgently control the pandemic and ensuring basic welfare and food security panchayats can work together with frontline health workers like the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM), women SHGs, local community members like teachers, and others. A committee for this purpose was formed and these designated

variously as control rooms, rapid response teams or Panchayat Jagruta Sammittee.

ASHA and ANM workers are the frontline functionaries for disease control. Appointed by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and selected by the Gram Panchayat, their function is to work with the village health and sanitation committee to develop a comprehensive village health plan. Providing information and creating awareness in the community about nutrition, basic sanitation and hygienic practices, health services they also facilitate access to health care institutions, acting as a bridge between marginalized communities and health care systems. Implementation of social security measures during the Covid-19 pandemic surge can be done efficiently by panchayats. They can undertake household surveys to identify households and individuals in need of social and economic support not registered in existing government schemes. This can help in direct cash transfers to banks and/or door to door cash disbursement by panchayats through ASHA and youth workers. Role of panchayats in Covid-19

Spread public awareness through loudspeakers, distribution of posters and pamphlets, village meetings, creation of WhatsApp groups.

Set up and run village level quarantine centres. Register incoming migrant workers from cities and facilitate compulsory quarantine.

Disinfection and sanitization of villages and areas around quarantine centres.

Ensure maintenance of physical (social) distancing rules in the village.

Distribution of masks and hand sanitizer (if and when available). Monitor symptoms at household level as well as in quarantine centres. Monitoring of health in villages.

Referral to district administration of those showing symptoms. Food support through the Public Distribution System (PDS) and income support under India's Labour Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Run community kitchens and make homemade masks through mobilization of women Self Help Groups (SHGs).

Ensure market linkages for procurement and sale of farm produce.

Assure continuance of agricultural and allied services through agricultural inputs, seed and fertilizer distribution.

Mobilize volunteers for preparation and distribution of food to quarantine centres.

The frontline workers' role in containing Covid-19 pandemic

Prevent, Control and monitor the spread of infection in the community.

Ensure early detection and referrals through Panchayat level committee.

Pay special attention to pregnant women and the elderly. Spread information on symptoms of Covid-19 and its spread, and explain physical distancing rules.

(This content is being carried under an arrangement with indianarrative.com)

Palestinian issue: Is a solution possible?

Asad Mirza

Jerusalem has witnessed worst unrest in years with Arab communities inside Israel holding continuous demonstrations against the atrocities during the Holy month of Ramadan.

Events leading to the current crisis Tension had been brewing in the Old City of Jerusalem since the end of the last month, in addition to a series of events converging at once, reaching a crescendo last Monday (10 May). On one hand Palestinians are frustrated by a decision of Mahmoud Abbas, the 85-year-old leader of the unpopular semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority, to postpone planned elections, PA's last parliamentary ballot was held in 2006. On the other hand, results of an election held in March earlier has further emboldened Israel's far right, bringing a party of Jewish ultra-nationalists allied with the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, to power.

In addition, since the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Palestinians have complained of what they term as unnecessarily severe restrictions by Israeli police, who prevented them from gathering on steps outside the Old City - an unofficial tradition after evening prayers.

Amid rising tensions, there was an increase in communal violence, with videos shared online of street harassment and several attacks between Jews and Palestinians. Events came to a head in late April when hundreds of far-right Israelis marched down city streets chanting "death to Arabs" and confronted Palestinians.

Added to this was the anger building over an Israeli court ruling, due on 10 May, on whether Israeli authorities would evict dozens of Palestinians from the majority-Arab East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and give their homes to Jewish settlers.

On 10 May, thousands of flag-waving Israeli nationalists were due to march through Muslim neighbourhoods in the Old City in a provocative parade that celebrated Israel's capture of the city in 1967. Though, the court date was

rescheduled and the march was rerouted, it has added to increased passions across both the parties.

Historical context Jewish families claim they lost land in Sheikh Jarrah during a war in 1948, when Israel was created, a conflict in which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were also displaced.

Israel recaptured East Jerusalem from Jordanian forces in the 1967 war and later annexed it. Under Israeli law, Jews who can prove pre-1948 title can claim back their Jerusalem properties. But no similar law exists for Palestinians who lost homes in West Jerusalem.

Why is Jerusalem a flashpoint? Jerusalem has always been at the centre of the Israeli-Palestinian tensions, as several holy sites revered both by Jews and Muslims are situated in the city.

Israel considers all of Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish state. The Palestinians want the eastern sector of the divided city to be recognised as the capital of their future state. The Al-Aqsa mosque compound situated at the southeast corner of the Old City of Jerusalem occupies a 35-acre rectangular esplanade. The area was seized by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War, along with the rest of east Jerusalem, which was later, annexed in a move, which has never been internationally recognised.

Muslims revere this area as Al-Haram al-Sharif, and the compound houses the famous golden Dome of the Rock shrine, a seventh-century structure, believed to be where Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ascended to heaven and the Al-Aqsa mosque, which used to be the mosque towards which Muslims used to turn while praying, before the Grand Mosque at Makkah was declared as the Kabbah, after it was cleared of the idols by the Holy Prophet. It is the third-holiest site in Islam after the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, both in Saudi Arabia.

The site is also revered as the holiest site in Judaism because it housed both the First and Second Temples. In Hebrew, it is referred to as Har Ha Bayit -- the Temple Mount.



During the last week hundreds of Palestinian protesters have been wounded in clashes with Israeli police and more than 197 are dead in Gaza and 10 in Israel, 42 were killed in the early hours of 17 May only, after the Israeli rocket attacks and bombing by Israeli planes on Palestinian settlements in the west Bank.

Jews are allowed to visit the compound, but are forbidden from praying there for fear of sparking tensions with Muslim worshippers.

Israel has several times tried to change the status quo and annex the whole of Jerusalem. In 1996, an Israeli decision to open a new entrance to the west of the plaza sparked clashes that left more than 80 people dead in three days. And a controversial visit to the plaza in September 2000 by the then right-wing opposition leader Ariel Sharon was one of the main triggers for the second Palestinian Intifada, which lasted from 2000 to 2005.

In July 2017, the compound was temporarily closed after three Arab Israelis opened fire at Israeli police near the site, killing two of them, before fleeing into the sacred compound, where they were shot dead by security forces.

In 2020, access to the compound was closed to the public during the month of Ramadan due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the reopening was subject to strict sanitary conditions with a limit on the number of worshippers. Arab countries' response

The reaction and response by different Arab countries and organisations over the recent flare-up has been the same as always. They issued hollow statements and discussed the situation telephonically with each other. The UN also just expressed its desperation; the UN Secretary General has warned that the latest Israeli-Palestinian conflict is heading for "an uncontainable security and humanitarian crisis".

The response as expected has been muted and is more subdued because of the recent wave of establishing ties with Israel by different Arab countries, which are more guarded now due to the regional geo-politics or just political pressures. Though the Arab leadership has been found wanting the response of the public at large has been that of continued support to their Palestinian brethren.

Why the Indian Muslims support Palestine?

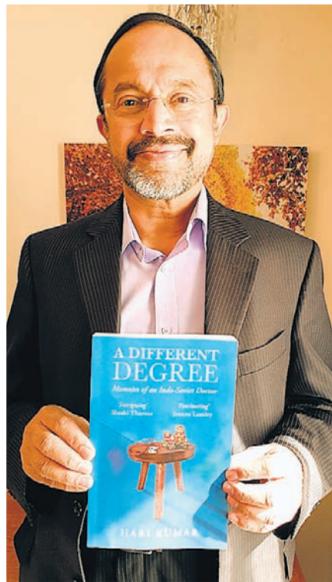
The Indian Muslims and to a certain extent the Indian polity also, during the last 70 years has been supportive of the Palestinian cause. One reason for this was that they were experiencing the same troubles and repercussions, though not

up to that level, after the partition of India at the hands of the British, who were also responsible for creating the state of Israel.

Thus, the colonialists are responsible for creating two permanent sores in the Middle East and Indian subcontinent, to safeguard their interests and submerge the populace in a continuous state of flux. In addition India being one of the leading promoters of the Non-Aligned Movement, its leaders always had good rapport with the Palestinian leaders and supported their cause to the maximum, a fact that was endorsed even by late Atal Bihari Vajpayee when he led the coalition Janata Party government.

In the given circumstances it seems too wishful to hope that this conflagration would die, as Israel to camouflage its military aggression, tries to give it religious colours to win its populace for support. And we know, once religion creeps into any political issue it becomes too difficult to solve it.

(Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi. He writes on Muslims, educational, international affairs, interfaith and current affairs.)



Kerala doctor re-lives his days in Russia behind the 'iron curtain'

Kerala doctor Hari Kumar who studied medicine in the erstwhile USSR, after decades re-lives his life and times, like experimenting with vodka, surviving the bitter winter and falling in love with Russian culture.

Incidentally it's through his book, 'A different degree', released recently that he traces his life and times, which he in one sentence describes, 'a unique perspective of life as an international student in 1970s Soviet Moscow. It is made all the more vibrant by the loving, sincere and honest people he met and the permanent impressions they made on his life'.

Kumar, now an orthopaedic surgeon lives with his family in London.

Looking back at his life, he told that it was in the early 1970s, a seventeen year old Indian boy left his village from Kerala to study medicine in the USSR.

"I, then had never travelled outside my village on my own before and knew nothing of Soviet culture, or one word of the Russian language," said Kumar.

But after nine years and becoming a doctor in 1980, Hari learned fluent Russian and returned to India, married and then made another move to the UK - where he lives to this day with his family.

Incidentally 35 years later, he went back to Moscow briefly for a reunion of his medical school batch and he says, Moscow was a completely different city, as it had become the capital of a capitalist country.

Upon reuniting with old friends and recounting their experiences, they kept returning to the same underlying question; "Was life better for the common man under Communism or in today's capitalist Russia?"

"It is by no means a simple question, but

is one which inspired me to unpick within my book, 'A Different Degree'," said Kumar. Although the book is about the life of a medical student behind the iron curtain, it is written with clarity and simplicity for everyone to understand and enjoy.

He describes the fun of living in an international community of students and narrates his interesting trips to cities within the USSR and to London and Paris. While feeling homesick, he remembers his joyous childhood and exciting times in boarding schools back in India.

Hari recounts intimate observations of the lives and habits of the Soviet people, their joys, frustrations and hopes. They lived good lives without having to worry about food and shelter or even crime, despite the controls and queues.

Soviet citizens, remarkably, kept their humour and this book is sprinkled with moments of merriment and characteristically understated Russian jokes.

Hari introduces readers to the richness of Russian song and poetry with some sublime English translations.

"There is something about Moscow that tends to attract you back like a magnet. It must be the warmth and genuineness of the people," reflects Hari.

Panchayats, village frontline workers to play a key role in curbing Covid-19 in rural India



UNSC URGES CESSATION OF ISRAEL-PALESTINE VIOLENCE

3,150 rockets fired from Gaza: Israel Army

United Nations | Agencies

As tensions between Israeli troops and Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip were continuing unabated, the UN Security Council (UNSC) has called for an immediate end to the bloodshed. In his opening remarks during Sunday's open debate of the Council, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described the conflict as "utterly appalling", calling for an immediate end to it, reports Xinhua news agency.

"Fighting must stop. It must stop immediately. Rockets and mortars on one side and aerial and artillery bombardments on the other must stop. I appeal to all parties to heed this call," he said.

Warning that the fighting has the potential to unleash an uncontrollable security and humanitarian crisis and to further foster extremism, the UN chief said this senseless cycle of bloodshed, terror and destruction must stop immediately.

"The only way forward is to return to negotiations with the goal of a two-state solution, with two states living side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states, based on relevant UN resolutions, international law and prior agreements," Guterres added.

During the meeting, China put forward a four-point proposal regarding



the escalating conflict.

According to Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the four points are: ceasefire and cessation of violence is the top priority; humanitarian assistance is an urgent need; international support is an obligation; and a "two-state solution" is the fundamental way out.

US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said "the human toll of this past week has been devastating. Hundreds have been killed and injured by rockets and airstrikes, including children".

"The United States calls on all parties to ensure the protection of civilians and to respect international humanitarian law. We also urge all parties to protect medical and other humanitarian facilities, as well as journalists and media organizations," said Thomas-Greenfield.

The armed confrontation must end, said Russian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Vershinin, who condemned the use of force and violence against civilians in Israel and Palestine. Stressing that the priority is to cease fire and bloodshed, he denounced attempts to change the demographic character of East Jerusalem. Parties must comply with international humanitarian law and protect civilians as well as infrastructure used by journalists and the media, he added. During the open debate, senior officials from Palestine and Israel traded accusations against each other. "Israel is killing Palestinians in Gaza, one family at a time," Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki said, adding there are no words to describe the horrors his people are enduring. "We are not two

neighbours living side by side in peace," said Malki, calling Israel an armed thief who has "entered our house and is terrorizing our family".

In response, Israel's Permanent Representative Gilad Erdan accused Hamas militants of being responsible for the escalation, saying: "What would you do if thousands of terrorist rockets were being fired at your country?" Describing Hamas' attacks as a "double war crime" he emphasized that Israel has always sought peace and continues to do so.

During the meeting, other countries, including France and the UK, also called for an immediate end to the rising tension, sounding alarm bells over the imminent potential for the violence to spill into the wider region. Confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City have been intensified following a court ruling that tried to evict several Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. After hundreds of Palestinians were injured in clashes with Israeli police in East Jerusalem last week, Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, launched rocket attacks against Israel, which responded with intense airstrikes against targets in Gaza. The fiercest fighting between the two sides since 2014 has killed nearly 200 Palestinians and about 10 Israelis.

Confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City intensified this month following a court ruling that tried to evict several Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem.



Tel Aviv | Agencies

A week after the shelling began, 3,150 rockets from the Gaza Strip toward Israel, the Israeli Army said on Monday.

About 460 of the rockets never made it across the border and went down in Gaza territory, dpa news agency quoted the military as saying. The Iron Dome missile defence system had an interception rate of about 90 per cent, it said. In comparison, a total of 4,481 rockets were fired at Israel during the entire 51-day Gaza war in 2014. There were initially no current figures on the number of attacks by Israel in the Gaza Strip this morning.

Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip began firing rockets at Israel a week ago on May 10. Since the escalation, around 42,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have fled their homes, according to the UN Palestinian Relief

and Works Agency based in the coastal enclave.

They have sought shelter in 50 schools run by the Agency, a spokesperson for the organization said on Monday.

More than 2,500 people have been left homeless after their homes were destroyed.

Confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City intensified this month following a court ruling that tried to evict several Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. After hundreds of Palestinians were injured in clashes with Israeli police in East Jerusalem last week, Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, launched the rocket attacks against Israel, which responded with intense airstrikes against targets in Gaza.

The fiercest fighting between the two sides since 2014 has killed nearly 200 Palestinians and about 10 Israelis.

Czech Prez accuses Russia of 'stupidity' over 'unfriendly' label

The Russian side is committing stupidity because it is a mistake to turn former friends into enemies," dpa news agency quoted the President as saying to the radio station Frekvence 1 on Sunday.



President as saying to the radio station Frekvence 1 on Sunday. He pleaded that if friendship was not possible, "at least correct relations" should be restored.

Under Moscow's decision, the Czech Republic may only employ 19 Russian citizens in its embassy in Russia.

This has very concrete consequences: From June on, hotel and restaurant operations in the Czech Cultural Centre in Moscow will be discontinued.

The large building com-

plex in the middle of the city centre was built in 1986 and serves as a base for businessmen and exporters as well as an advertisement for the country. The Czech Republic had blamed Russian intelligence services for explosions at an ammunition depot in the east of the country in 2014. Moscow denied all accusations. Both sides expelled diplomats as a result. Only the Czech Republic and the US are on the new list of "unfriendly foreign states".

COLOMBIAN PROTEST LEADERS PRESENT DEMANDS TO GOVT

Bogota: Among the demands presented on Sunday are an end to military deployments to protests and the use of firearms by police as well as measures to end sexual violence against women by security forces, reports Xinhua news agency.

After more than two weeks of violent protests in Colombia, national strike leaders have presented a list of demands to the country's government.

Among the demands presented on Sunday are an end to military deployments to protests and the use of firearms by police as well as measures to end sexual violence against women by security forces, reports Xinhua news agency.

They are also demanding the inclusion of UN and church representatives in talks with the government. The two sides plan to meet again on Monday. Since the strike was called at the end of April, there have been numerous protests in cities across the country, some of which turned into riots.



SAUDI ARABIA TO LIFT TRAVEL BAN FROM MONDAY

Riyadh | Agencies

Saudi Arabia will lift the travel ban which was imposed last year in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic from Monday, with authorities saying that they were ready to operate international flights at full capacity.

In an announcement on Sunday, the Interior Ministry announced that May 17 will mark the full opening of all borders -- air, land and sea, reports Xinhua news agency.

The Kingdom will allow people who received Covid-19 vaccines to travel along with those who recovered from infection in less than six months, it said.

Citizens below 18 can travel if they have health insurance policy that covers coronavirus-related risks. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia will impose institutional quarantine on arriving passengers starting from May 20, the Ministry announced.

The decision was based on the recommendations by the competent health authorities. Some cate-



gories of passengers will be excluded from the quarantine, including Saudi citizens, their spouses and children. long with passengers who received Covid-19 vaccines, official delegations, as well as diplomats and their families residing with them will also be excluded from the institutional quarantine. But the excluded categories, except for the vaccinated individuals, will be required to undergo home quarantine, with an emphasis on the need to obtain a valid health insurance policy to cover the risks of the coronavirus. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabian Airlines said in a statement that it has completed preparations to oper-

ate flights to 71 destinations from 95 airports, including 28 domestic and 43 international destinations, reports Arab News. The General Authority of Civil Aviation said that around 385 flights are expected to operate throughout the Kingdom's airports on Monday. The Interior Ministry however, added that said travel to a number of Covid-affected countries, directly or via another nation, is still banned without prior permission. The countries are India, Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iran, Turkey, Armenia, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Venezuela and Belarus.

'New US CDC guidance don't permit widespread removal of masks'

Washington | Agencies

The new mask guidance for vaccinated individuals does not grant permission for widespread removal of masks, the US Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky said.

"If they're vaccinated, they are safe. If they are not vaccinated, they are not safe. They should still be wearing a mask or better yet, get vaccinated," Xinhua news agency quoted Walensky as saying on ABC News on Sunday. The CDC Director and other health officials have stressed that their guidance is up to individuals to follow and if vaccinated people wish to continue wearing their masks they can. "We wanted to deliver the science of the individual level, but we also understand that these decisions have to be made at the community's level," she said. Since the new mask guidance was announced on May 13, many



states, local governments and businesses have updated their ordinances based on the CDC's recommendation that vaccinated individuals can be without face coverings indoors, outdoors or in large crowds. The guidelines still call for masks to be worn on public transportation and in homeless shelters, hospitals and prisons. Some states, including California, Hawaii, Massachusetts and New York, are keeping

their universal mask mandates intact. Meanwhile, schools should continue to require face masks "at all times, by all people in school facilities" for the rest of the academic year, according to updated CDC guidance issued on Saturday. Strict rules requiring mask use and physical distancing should remain in schools nationwide "regardless of the level of community transmission" of coronavirus, the CDC insisted.

That's because "students will not be fully vaccinated by the end of the 2020-2021 school year", and school systems will need time to make "systems and policy adjustments" relating to their mask rules, t added. "The challenge here is that not everybody is eligible for vaccination," Walensky told ABC on Sunday. We still have children under the age of 11 and they should obviously still be wearing masks. So, if you're unvaccinated, we are saying, wear a mask, continue distance if you're unvaccinated and practice all of those mitigation strategies."

Presidential campaigns start in Syria

Damascus | Agencies

Syrian presidential campaigns have officially started as posters of President Bashar al-Assad and the two other candidates filled the squares and streets in the capital Damascus.

Under the theme "Hope is in Work", Assad launched his campaign on Sunday where his posters, most of which were presented by Syrian businessmen and celebrities, filled the main streets in the capital city and other provinces, reports



Xinhua news agency.

His two competitors, Mahmoud Muri and Abdullah Saloum Abdullah, have got fewer posters in comparison due to the popularity of the incumbent President. Muri, a lawyer and

a member of the Syria-based opposition, has started his campaign under the banner "Together", with a prominent slogan speaking about the need to "release all political detainees". For Abdullah, the third candidate who was also a member of the Syrian parliament and a former state minister, his campaign features slogans about investments. The election, scheduled to be held on May 26, comes seven years after the last polls took place in the war-torn country. Syrians abroad will vote on May 20.

Mindat falls to Myanmar Army, Resistance withdraws

Kolkata | Agencies

Myanmar's military has finally taken control of the small town of Mindat in the country's western Chin state, after three weeks of savage fighting.

The local militia Mindat Defense Force (MDF) says its fighters have retreated from the town in nearby hills after three weeks of brave resistance. MDF spokesman "John" told IANS that Myanmar military troops entered the town on Sunday evening using villagers as shields.

"How can we shoot at our own people? The Tatmadaw (military) had taken many villagers hostage from areas around Mindat and put them in front of their advancing columns. That is when our leaders decided to withdraw from the town," said John, who has refused to disclose his full name because his family was left behind at Mindat.

Nearly 300 to 350 local Chins had joined the MDF three weeks ago to stop the Tatmadaw from entering the town. The army was forced to use helicopters to bring in troop reinforcements, as at least three of its road convoys were ambushed. Later, it started pounding the town with artillery fire. Local residents in Mindat set up what they called a People's Administration Team, stating that they did not recognise the authority of the military government. Last week, the government declared martial law in the town. It has described those defying its authority there as terrorists, and says it will set up a military tribunal to put on trial those responsible for attacks on the security forces.

The defense at Mindat has become the symbol of resistance, initially peaceful but now armed as well to the February 1 military takeover. The crisis caused by the takeover has now snowballed into a full scale civil war with large ethnic rebel armies



like Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and Karen National Union (KNU) reneging on ceasefire they had maintained with Aung Saan Suu Kyi's NLD government. Both groups are sheltering, training and arming ethnic Burmese hardliners who have organised themselves into urban insurgent groups like the Federal Army and United Defense Force.

Some of these insurgents have entered Burmese cities and attacked police inform-

ers and Chinese business interests including an offtake station on the 800 km oil-gas pipeline connecting Kyaukphyu on Myanmar's Rakhine coast with China's Yunnan province. Last week, Burmese beauty queen Htar Htet Htet hit the social media, gun on shoulder and dressed in military fatigues, with an appeal to bring down the military junta. Htar claimed that she was now a member of one of the insurgent groups. MDF spokesman John said their fighters have braved massive artillery barrages and several infantry charges by the Tatmadaw troops. Six of their fighters have died in the fighting against more than 25 Tatmadaw troops who were killed in ambushes. The Chins are ethnic cousins of the Mizos in India and doughty hill fighters.

"Our fighters were armed with local hunting rifles. Our ammunition ran out and we decided to spare the town any more artillery bombardment," he told IANS.

Mindat is one of several towns where opponents of the military have armed themselves. This happened after nearly 800 people were killed in indiscriminate firing by troops and policemen during largely peaceful protests after the February coup which ousted the elected government of Suu Kyi.

"We will not stay any more in the town, but we will come back to attack soon," John told IANS. "We only have homemade guns. This was not enough. We retreated out of concern over damage to the town. We will get proper weapons to assault the Tatmadaw." With fighting taking place so close to the India-Myanmar border, it is being feared that a large-scale migration of refugees from the neighbouring country into India's Mizoram state might take place. Meanwhile, the US and the UK have condemned the violence. India has been silent. The military's use of weapons of war against civilians, including this week in Mindat, is a further demonstration of the depths the regime will sink to hold onto power," the US Embassy said in a statement. "Attacks on civilians are illegal and cannot be justified," the British embassy said.



ICC CLEARS INDIA'S TWO HOME TESTS OF 'SPOT-FIXING' INFLUENCE

Dubai | Agencies

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has cleared India's two home Tests -- against England in 2016 and against Australia in 2017 -- of any influence by spot-fixers, saying that a TV channel's allegations had 'fundamental weaknesses'. The match against England was played in Chennai while the game against Australia was held in Ranchi.

"The ICC has concluded its investigation into the documentary programme 'Cricket's Match Fixers' broadcast by Al Jazeera on 27 May 2018. No charges will be brought under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code against any of the five participants to the Code who featured in the programme due to insufficient credible and reliable evidence," an ICC statement said on Monday. The ICC said that it hired four betting and cricket specialists to study the passages of play. The four, the ICC added, couldn't find anything wrong. "To assess whether the passages of play highlighted in the programme were unusual in any way, the ICC engaged four independent betting and cricketing specialists to analyse the claims. All four concluded that the passages of play identified in the programme as being allegedly fixed were entirely predictable and, therefore, implausible as a fix," said the statement.



CRICKET MATCH-FIXING

The 2018 documentary had alleged that a group of English and Australian cricketers were involved in spot-fixing. "All five participants to the Code who featured in the programme have been interviewed by the ICC Integrity Unit and there is insufficient evidence based on the normal thresholds applied through the Code to lay any charges," the ICC said.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had earlier denied the allegations, saying the

evidence used in the reporting was poor.

However, Alex Marshall, the ICC General Manager (Integrity) said that the ICC is open to review the allegations if substantial evidence comes forward.

"Should any new substantial evidence come to light I will re-examine the case. But at present I am comfortable with the conclusion of the investigation and the thoroughness with which it was undertaken," he said.

ATP RANKINGS

Rome | Agencies

Despite the hard-fought three-set victory over arch-rival Novak Djokovic of Serbia in the Italian Open final on Sunday, Spaniard Rafael Nadal continues to be at third spot on the ATP rankings, released on Monday.

Djokovic is way ahead of the pack with 11,063 points. Russian Daniil Medvedev continues to be ranked No. 2 in the world with 9,793 points, just 163 points ahead of Nadal, who would be aiming for a record 21st Grand Slam title at the French Open starting on May 24.

While no movement was seen in the top 10, it was a historic last week for Nadal in Rome in several ways. The Spaniard not only won the Italian Open for a record 10th time,



he also tied Djokovic's record for most career Masters 1000 titles at

ATP or WTA rankings history, according to tennis.com

Nadal remains No.3, Djokovic No.1

A day after achieving so many historic feats, Nadal started off his 817th career week in the top 10, passing American legend Jimmy Connors for the second-most career weeks in the top 10 in ATP rankings history.

The Spaniard now trails Switzerland's Roger Federer, who is currently ranked eighth in the world.

While Federer has spent 948 weeks among the top 10, Nadal has 817. Djokovic is a distant fifth with 683 weeks.

Iga enters WTA top 10 after Italian Open tennis triumph

Rome | Agencies

Polish teenager Iga Swiatek, who won the Italian Open on Sunday to add to last year's French Open crown and the Adelaide Open this year, jumped six places on the WTA Tour rankings to enter the top 10 on Monday.

The 19-year-old player is now ninth, behind American legend Serena Williams, winner of 23 Grand Slams, on the list released on Monday.

Iga is the only new entrant in the Top-10 following her title triumph against the Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova in the Italian Open on Sunday. The top three slots continue to be retained by Australia's Ashleigh Barty,



Japan's Naomi Osaka and Romania's Simona Halep, respectively.

With her title run in Rome, Iga becomes the fifth teenager to make her top 10 debut since 2008, joining Canada's Bianca Andreescu, Switzerland's Belinda Bencic, Belarus' Victoria Azarenka, the Netherlands' Caroline

Wozniacki, and Poland's Agnieszka Radwanska. Prior to winning the French Open in October last year, Iga was ranked world No.54.

American teenager Coco Gauff also jumped five places -- from 35 to 30 -- to make her Top-30 debut after reaching the Italian Open semi-finals and position herself to earn a seeding at this year's French Open.

Former world No. 2, Russia's Vera Zvonareva, has returned to the Top-100 for the first time since August 2019. The 36-year-old, who advanced to the third round of the Italian Open and defeated No.10 Petra Kvitova, moved up 17 spots to No. 96 from 113.

Will aim to implement Dhoni sir's tips on England tour: Indrani

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Jharkhand wicketkeeper-batswoman Indrani Roy, picked for India's tour of England, says she would implement the tips former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni has given her to make an impression in the upcoming series. India will play a one-off Test from June 16-19, followed by a three-match ODI series and a three-match T20 series, culminating on July 15. "During a training session in Ranchi sometime last year, I had a long conversation with Mahi sir, about how to improve my game and he had told me that I should ensure that I improve my reflexes and movement in the five-metre radius," the 23-year-old player told Sportstar.

"For wicketkeepers, that's a key thing, and he advised me that I should try and get better. That actually helped me," said Indrani, who shifted base from Howrah district of West Bengal to Jharkhand a few years ago.

Indrani, who has had a prolific season,



scoring an unbeaten 103 against Chhattisgarh and 86 against Karnataka in the senior women's one-day trophy, said that getting advice from someone like Dhoni was a privilege. "Learning a thing or two from a legend like Mahi sir is a privilege and his advice actually helped me improve my game. Every time I hit the ground, I try to remember his tips," she said. Before signing with Jharkhand in 2014, Indrani represented the Bengal under-19 team for four years.

NZ cricketers reach London for WTC final vs India, Tests vs Eng

London | Agencies

A majority of cricketers comprising the New Zealand team that will play a Test series against host England and the World Test Championship (WTC) final against India next month have arrived here.

New Zealand Cricket (NZC) said that the other members of the team would arrive here on Monday.

"Tim Southee, BJ Watling, Ross Taylor and Neil Wagner will depart Auckland on Monday afternoon (New Zealand time) to join the squad in Southampton," said NZC on Monday. "The Maldives-based IPL contingent of captain Kane Williamson, Kyle Jamieson, Mitchell Santner, team physio Tommy Simsek and trainer Chris Donaldson will arrive on Monday (UK time)," read the statement.

Williamson and other players and staff were in India for the Indian Premier League (IPL), which was suspended mid-way due to raging Covid-19 pandemic in India. They then went to the Maldives before flying out to England.



Aussie cricketer charged with possessing child abuse material

Melbourne | Agencies

A former Australian state cricketer has been charged with 'possessing child abuse material' and 'grooming a minor'.

Aaron Summers, who represented Tasmania in state cricket, Hobart Hurricanes in Big Bash League and Deccan Gladiators in Abu Dhabi T10 league, was asked to appear before a court for the two charges.

"Aaron Summers, 25, appeared in front of the Darwin Local Court (Northern Territory), with police alleging that his mobile phone contained child abuse videos," said a report in The Age.



Summers, who is a fast bowler, was due to play NT Cricket 365 tournament, an event run by Cricket Australia and featuring many current

and former state and BBL players. "A matter was brought to the attention of NT Cricket and was immediately

actioned in accordance with our member protection policy. In line with the policy the matter was referred to the relevant authorities and is now being handled by police," Cricket Australia told The Age in a statement. NT (Northern Territory) Police issued a statement in relation to the matter.

"Detectives from the Joint Anti-Child Exploitation Team (JACET) arrested a 25-year-old man in Fannie Bay on Friday afternoon for child abuse material," the statement said.

"Police executed a section 3E Crimes Act 1914 (Cth) search warrant on the man and seized a mobile phone," it added.

DEALT WITH ANXIETY FOR 10-12 YEARS: TENDULKAR

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former India batsman and captain Sachin Tendulkar said he had to deal with anxiety before a match even after he had spent several years in international cricket. "Pressure, anxiety and all were always there. In my case, I realised all my

preparations were there in a physical sense. After all of that, the anxiety was always there," Tendulkar said in an interaction for Unacademy. Tendulkar said that he realised over a period of time how important it is to prepare yourself for matches and series mentally. "Even when I was playing for

India, there were sleepless nights. Over a period of time, I realised that besides preparing physically for a game, you have to prepare yourself mentally also. In my mind the match started long before I entered the ground. The anxiety levels were very high and I learned to accept to those things," he said.



CA should have probed ball-tampering scandal thoroughly: Gilchrist

Sydney: Former Australia wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist has blamed Cricket Australia (CA) for not investigating the 2018 ball-tampering scandal thoroughly due to which questions are still being raised over it. "I think Cricket Australia are responsible for why this will be continually asked. When they did their investigation at the time they had Patty Howard the high-performance general manager, Iain Roy was the integrity officer," said Gilchrist on SEN's Gilly and Goss show.

"They went there and did this very quick review of that isolated incident and perhaps no one in the team knew," added Gilchrist. On Monday, another former Aussie cricketer, Michael Clarke said he was not surprised by Cameron Bancroft, one of the players involved in the scandal, alleging that bowlers could also have been known about it besides him, Steve Smith and David Warner. Gilchrist blamed CA for not getting to the root of the scandal.

"Anyone would be naive to think people were not aware with what was going on about ball maintenance. I don't think Cricket Australia wanted to go there. They did not want to go any deeper than that superficial example of ball-tampering," said Gilchrist.



NZ refuses to visit India for Hockey Pro League games

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian men's hockey team lost an opportunity to test its competitive skill after its FIH Hockey Pro League home matches against New Zealand this month were postponed as the opponents refused to visit India due to the raging Corona pandemic.

The two matches were to be held on May 29 and 30 in Bhubaneswar.

"Due to the second coronavirus wave in India, the New Zealand men's hockey team has refused to travel to Odisha to play the Pro League matches against India," a source told reporter on Monday.

The matches would have also helped India prepare for the Olympic Games, scheduled to start on July 23 in Tokyo.



Earlier, the Indian men's team's Europe tour to play a series of Pro League matches were put off, again due to the pandemic.

The Great Britain leg of Pro League in London on May 8 and 9 was postponed as Indians were denied visas because coronavirus cases surged in India. The Spanish leg of the league in Valencia on May 15 and 16 was also postponed as the team couldn't travel to Spain.

Germany, too, restricted travellers from India and the hockey team couldn't play matches on May 22 and 23 in Hamburg.

Last month, India competed in the Argentina leg of Pro League. Since then the core group of 33 players have been training at Sports Authority of India training centre in Bengaluru.

INDIA'S WPI INFLATION RISES TO 10.49% IN APRIL

This is the highest rate of WPI inflation in the last 6-months. The monthly rate of inflation, based on month over month movement of WPI index, in April 2021 stood at 1.86 per cent as compared to March 2021.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's annual rate of inflation based on wholesale prices sequentially rose to 10.49 per cent in April from a rise of 7.39 per cent in March. Significantly, this is the highest rate of WPI inflation in the last 6-months. The monthly rate of inflation, based on month over month movement of WPI index, in April 2021 stood at 1.86 per cent as compared to March 2021. On a year-on-year basis, the inflation rate last month was higher. The WPI had come in about (-) 1.57 per cent in April of 2020. "In April, 2021 (over April, 2020), the annual rate of inflation (YoY), based on monthly WPI, stood at 10.49 per cent (Provisional)," the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in a statement on WPI.

"The annual rate of inflation in April 2021 is high primarily because of rise in prices of crude petroleum, mineral oils viz petrol, diesel etc, and manufactured products as compared to the corresponding month of the previous year."

On segment wise YoY basis, prices of primary articles, which constitute 22.62 per cent of the WPI's total weightage, inflated by 10.16 per cent last month from 6.40 per cent in March 2021. Besides, WPI food index rose to 7.58 per cent from 5.28 per cent reported for March. The prices of manufactured items remained at elevated levels with a rise of 9.01 per cent from 7.34 per cent. On the same note, the prices of fuel and power with a weightage of 13.15 per cent rose 20.94 per cent from 10.25 per cent.

Equities rise on lower Covid numbers, banking stocks shine

The S&P BSE Sensex traded at 49,570.05, higher by 837.5 points or 1.72 per cent from its previous close. Similarly, the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange traded at 14,916.15, up 238.35 points, or 1.62 per cent, from its previous close.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

India's key stock markets maintained their solid gains during the late-afternoon trade session on Monday on the back of healthy buying witnessed banking and financial sector. Both the key indices kicked the week on a positive note with a gap up opening. Among sectors, banking, financial services and auto space witnessed healthy buying, where as marginal losses were seen in pharma, metal and media



indices. At around 3 p.m., the S&P BSE Sensex traded at 49,570.05, higher by 837.5 points or 1.72 per cent from its previous close.

Similarly, the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange traded at 14,916.15, up 238.35 points, or 1.62 per cent, from its previous close. "Currently, Nifty is moving within the territory of a falling channel from last few weeks and is in verge of giving breakout from the same," said Jay Purohit, Technical and Derivatives Analyst, MOFSL. "A move above 14,970 will lead to a breakout and then we can see a buying momentum towards

the 15,300 zone. At current juncture, support for Nifty is inching higher at 14,725 and then the 14,600 zone."

According to Gaurav Garg, Head of Research at CapitalVia: "India's equity benchmarks extended their gains made in the morning session, with frontline gauges surpassing their critical levels." "Sentiments" got a boost as the number of corona virus cases are on the decline in the country. The US market ended higher even after the concerns over the inflation rate. Asian markets were mostly trading in green, following the recovery in the global market."

BANK NEFT TRANSFERS WILL NOT BE OPERATIONAL COMING WEEKEND



Team Absolute | Mumbai

If you planning an online money transfer using the banking system between Saturday midnight and Sunday, you are well advised to either cancel or postpone such transfers.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said that due to NEFT system upgrade, this service will not be available from 00:01 hrs to 14:00 hours on Sunday, May 23, 2021.

This would mean that during this period any money transfer involving NEFT system would not be available for use by bank customers. But, the RTGS system will continue to be operational as usual during this period.

It may be mentioned that a similar technical upgrade for

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said that due to NEFT system upgrade, this service will not be available from 00:01 hrs to 14:00 hours on Sunday, May 23, 2021.

RTGS was completed on April 18, 2021.

"A technical upgrade of NEFT, targeted to enhance the performance and resilience, is scheduled after the close of business of May 22, 2021. Accordingly, NEFT service will not be available from 00:01 hrs to 14:00 hrs on Sunday, May 23, 2021," an RBI communication to banks said. The communication advised banks to inform their customers to plan their payment operations accordingly.

India's online higher education market to grow 10x in next 5 years

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Buoyed by the continuous remote learning amid the pandemic, the online higher education market in India will grow 10 times over the next five years to reach \$5 billion by the financial year 2025, a new report said on Monday. The market will grow driven by new reforms set forth, including the increase in public spending (targeted at 6 per cent of the nation's GDP), relaxation in regulations governing degrees, supply side capacity gaps, need realisation among students and professionals and transition to credit system, according to Bengaluru-based market research firm RedSeer.

Edtech was one of the main sectors which saw a huge boost after the pandemic. According to the report, India's online higher education and lifelong



user base will grow at a CAGR of 50 per cent till FY25.

"A key indicator of any industry remains the growth user base. In this case, the user base consists of the students and other categories including professionals with varying experiences, entrepreneurs among others," the report

mentioned. In India, it is expected to grow from 90 million individuals in FY20 to 133 million individuals by FY25. The paid users are expected to increase from 1.2 per cent to 8.1 per cent in the next five years.

After schools and colleges shut and lakhs of people lost jobs, many enrolled in online courses to upgrade their academics as well as learn new technologies to grow in their careers.

"The industry though has been seeing a gradual growth over the years, it received a major boost post pandemic. India has been showing strong growth in the edtech sector, a similar trend like China," the report said.

China has shown significant market potential in the edtech sector over the last years. The market stood at \$250 million in FY20 and is expected to grow upto \$295 million by FY25.



Kolkata | Agencies

The Indian livestock sector currently contributes 25.6% to the Agricultural GDP and 4.11% to the National GDP which is far below the potential it holds. The Poultry sector contributes INR 1.3 lakh crore to the GDP. The poultry industry had run into losses of over INR 26,000 crores in just three months in 2020, owing to misinformation about COVID 19 spreading from the consumption of chicken and a nationwide supply chain and logistics

The Indian Livestock Feed & Poultry Industry seeks intervention with the rising prices of soya meal

logjam. This impacted not only the poultry industry but other auxiliary industries, such as the livestock feed manufacturers. In addition, the prices of raw materials, primarily soya meal, has gone up in the past few months. With the second wave of COVID hitting the country, the sector is facing new hurdles that is implicating the poultry farmers and the livestock feed manufacturers, gravely.

Taking note of the situation, the Animal Husbandry and Fisheries department, issued an office memorandum to the undersecretary of the Department of Commerce, recommending duty-free import of 12 lakh metric tonnes of soya meal to



avoid further ramification of losses for the sector. This recommendation was in response to a request made by the industry, which had raised the issue early in April. The letter has also requested regulation of soyabean commodity trade on commodity exchanges, which would end speculation-driven surge in

soyabean prices. Commenting on the recommendation made, Amit Saraogi, Chairman, Managing Director, Anmol Feeds Pvt. Ltd. added, "The rising price of soya meal is impacting the price of the finished feed cost which has increased by 25% on overall for the past one year."

TVS Srichakra enters Europe Two-Wheeler Tyre market

Chennai | Agencies

TVS Srichakra Ltd., one of India's leading manufacturers of 2 & 3 wheeler and off-highway tyres, today announced its foray into the European market with its new range of Eurogrip two-wheeler tyres customized to meet the European rider's needs. The first product to be launched is "Eurogrip Bee Connect" scooter tyres which will be available in a basket of 40 different sizes in the coming months.

"We have developed a new and exciting range of tyres suited for the European roads and conditions, keeping in mind the needs of the European rider. I am confident that the technical expertise of our Product Design and Development team in Milan, Italy coupled with the experience of our team in India would result in the Eurogrip Bee Connect Scooter tyre range being a delight for scooter riders in Europe and rest of the world", said



Andrea Bianchi Milella, Marketing Manager, of TVS Srichakra's Italian Centre. Speaking about the announcement, PMadhavan, EVP - Sales & Marketing said, "Our entry into the prestigious European tyre market is a testimony to our three decades of experience and specialization in the two-wheeler tyre category and is a step towards building Eurogrip as a strong global brand. Our focus is to deliver quality tyres and develop a robust business infrastructure that can help us cater to the needs of our partners and customers in the European market. The new products introduced in Europe will also be launched in the India replacement market as well as all the countries where TVS Srichakra has established a distribution network."

Max Life launches new pension plan with guaranteed financial protection

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Max Life Insurance Company on Monday announced the launch of 'Max Life Saral Pension', a Non-Linked, Non-Participating Single Premium, Individual Immediate Annuity Plan.

The plan guarantees a regular stream of income in one's golden years, offering customers a chance to maintain their lifestyle pre and post retirement with the assurance of guaranteed income as long as the policyholder lives.

The product has been launched at a time when a large section of the society is showing an inclination towards securing their future financial stability. According to the findings of Max Life's



recent survey 'India Protection Quotient 3.0' in association with KANTAR, it was revealed that in the backdrop of Covid-19, around 52 per cent of urban India is saving for 'retirement/old age security.'

Commenting on the launch of the product, Prashant Tripathy, MD &

CEO Max Life Insurance said, "Our latest offering, 'Max Life Saral Pension' plan is in line with IRDAI's vision for insurers to introduce a simple, immediate annuity product that can offer apt and standardized features for an individual's post-retirement financial convenience. We hope that this much needed

and impactful product will help Indians achieve financial independence, and enjoy a comfortable lifestyle during their retirement years."

Available to customers in the entry age group of 40 to 80 years, there are two options available under the policy. i.e. single life and joint life annuity. 'Max Life Saral Pension' further offers customers the flexibility to choose from any of the four annuity payout modes available - monthly, quarterly, half yearly or yearly. The product also offers a 'Surrender Benefit' - an option to surrender on diagnosis of Critical Illness - if the annuitant or spouse or any of the children of the annuitant is diagnosed with any of the covered critical illnesses as specified (under the plan),

then the annuitant will have an option to withdraw 95% of the purchase price (Single Premium) as surrender benefit. Under single life annuity, a fixed income guaranteed at the policy inception will be paid to the annuitant throughout life; income payment will cease on the death of the annuitant and 100 per cent of the purchase price shall be paid to the nominee on death of the annuitant.

Under the joint life option, a fixed income guaranteed at the policy inception will be paid as long as at least one of the annuitants is alive. Income payment will cease on death of the last survivor and death benefit, 100 per cent of the purchase price shall be paid to the nominee on death of the last survivor (annuitants).

ARE OMCs SHIFTING TO ALTERNATE DAY FUEL PRICE REVISION MECHANISM?

In the last few days, pump prices of petrol and diesel have been revised every alternate day but the practice had not helped consumers as even under this system prices have only moved up making the fuel dearer.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Oil marketing companies seem to be moving towards a revised fuel price revision mechanism, shifting to the practice of changing petrol and fuel rates every alternate day rather than undertaking changes on a daily basis.

In the last few days, pump prices of petrol and diesel have been revised every alternate day but the practice had not helped consumers as even under this system prices have only moved up making the fuel dearer. On Monday, OMCs kept retail price of



petrol and diesel unchanged. So petrol still costs Rs 92.58 per litre and diesel Rs 83.22 per litre in Delhi, the same as previous day.

Across the country as well, the petrol and diesel price prices remained static on Monday but its actual retail prices varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states.

The price pump on Monday came after petrol and diesel prices were raised by 24 and 27 paise per litre, respectively, on

Sunday. Prior to Sunday, there was no price revision on Saturday. Similarly, while fuel prices were raised on Friday, it remained unchanged in the previous day.

"It seems oil companies are giving a sense of relief to consumers as fuel prices are not being raised on a daily basis. But still prices are not actually falling but being raised on very alternate day too this month," said an oil sector expert not willing to be named.

He said that the practice of daily price revision, started after deregulation of petrol and diesel prices few years had been done away by OMCs for past several months giving clear indication that administrative price regime is still working for the sector.

Under daily price revision, OMCs revised petrol and diesel prices every morning benchmarking retail fuel prices to a 15-day rolling average of global refined products' prices and dollar exchange rate. However, in a market where fuel prices need to be increased successively, alternate day price

revision seems to be the flavour.

It is worth noting that with 9 price increase in May, the retail price of regular petrol has already reached closer to Rs 99 a litre in Mumbai. Petrol prices are already over Rs 100 per litre in several cities in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Premium petrol has been hovering above that level for some time now.

Petrol prices have increased by Rs 2.03 a litre Delhi in May in the nine increases so far. Similarly, diesel prices have risen by Rs 2.49 per litre in capital this month. IANS had reported earlier that OMCs may begin increasing the retail price of petrol and diesel post state elections as they were incurring losses to the tune of Rs 2-3 per litre by holding the price line despite higher global crude and product prices.

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

RAYSUT CEMENT GETS CE, NF CERTIFICATIONS FOR CONFORMING TO EUROPEAN STANDARDS

Mumbai: Oman's largest cement manufacturer, Raysut Cement Company (RCC), which has plans to invest about US\$700 million in India, has received CE and NF certifications, two stringent global quality norms validating RCC's adherence to EU standards in cement production. "We consider CE and NF certifications as a testimony to our commitment to constantly improve product quality and processes in line with rigorous global safety, quality and environmental regulations," said Group CEO, Joey Ghose. RCC has also been certified by BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards), enabling it to stabilize its presence in the Indian market as a quality brand. It also has a certification from SABPS (South African All Brothers Products and Systems). The CE and NF certifications, apart from an endorsement that will help RCC export to European markets, will also ensure proven quality product supplies to Indian market. Salim bin Ahmed bin Alawi Al Ibrahim, Acting Deputy Group CEO of RCC said: "The cement now produced at RCC's Salalah plant has accomplished the strictest environmental criterion of Hexavalent Chromium (Cr6+) content of less than two parts per million. The NF certification also opens up new market opportunities and we are now introducing a superior quality cement brand to the French colonies in the Indian Ocean Reunion Islands."



'RADHE' SHOWS INDIA'S READY FOR THE PAY-PER-VIEW MODEL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Salman Khan-starrer 'Radhe', has offered a new ray of hope to the Indian film industry with the partial success of a multiple platform experiment at a time when Bollywood has suffered massive losses amid closure of cinema screens due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Zee Studios had decided to release 'Radhe' simultaneously across multiple platforms, including theatres (wherever they are open) and via pay-per-view on on Zee 5. 'Radhe' was available to rent

for ₹249 on ZEE5 as well as for DTH subscribers. Additionally, ZEE5 had also launched a combo offer for annual subscription at ₹499, giving 'Radhe' complimentary.

Zee Studios and Salman Khan Films' decision to open Radhe...online and offline simultaneously had resulted in massive pre-sales, with fans lining up to see the film on its opening day. The bold decision has given the audience to consume a high-on-entertainment, quintessential Salman Khan movie at a place and time of their choice. The makers of 'Radhe' has truly shown that with

unprecedented circumstances comes the responsibility to make innovative choices that will in turn pave the way for future business models.

This spells good news for an industry grappling with the temporary closure of the traditional exhibition sector. It takes a phenomenal star like Salman Khan to educate the audience to consume content in existing as well as new formats, even in times like these. It has also filled other production houses and studios with the hope that innovation is the key to reboot the industry's prospects in the near future.

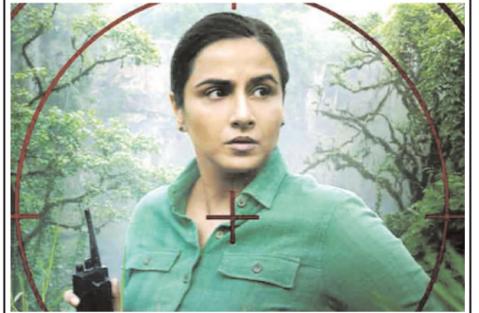


B'day girl Nushratt Bharuccha 'TRULY BLESSED WITH WISHES AND LOVE'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Nushratt Bharuccha, who celebrated her 36th birthday on Monday, took to social media to thank fans, followers and colleagues for their love and wishes. The actress added she wants to forward these wishes and love to the world, which is battling a pandemic and trying to heal itself. "Feeling truly blessed with all the wishes and love coming my way today, fills me with gratitude! I want to give all of these wishes and love out to the world instead, which is trying to heal itself back. Hope it reach the ones who need it the most! #PayingItForward," she tweeted. Meanwhile, fans, friends and industry colleagues shared adorable wishes for the birthday girl. Sharing a photo of the actress from her latest anthology film "Ajeeb Daastaans", where Nushratt plays a domestic help, director Raj Mehta wrote: "Yes not your most flattering pic, but that's the point. Everyone is posting those. At least it best represents how you are, always! How? Maintain that. Through everything. Sky is the limit for you bro. Wish you a very happy birthday. Big hug."

Vidya Balan-starrer 'Sherni' to release digitally in June



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Vidya Balan's new starrer "Sherni" will release on OTT in June. The final announcement date is yet to be officially confirmed.

The film casts Vidya as an upright forest officer who strives for balance in the world of man-animal conflict while she seeks her true calling in a hostile environment.

The film is directed by Amit Masurkar, who earlier made waved helming "Newton" in 2017. Along with Vidya, the cast includes Sharad Saxena, Mukul Chaddha, Vijay Raaz, Ila Arun, Brijendra Kala and Neeraj Kabi.

"I'm excited for the fans of Vidya Balan to see her in the unique avatar of a forest officer. I can't wait for the 'first day first stream' of 'Sherni'!" said Vikram Malhotra, producer and CEO, Abundantia Entertainment. Bhusan Kumar, producer, T-Series, claimed this was one of the most unconventional and engaging films he has produced.

"The film is an intriguing tale of triumph that will not only entertain audiences, but offer them an experience of adventure in the comfort of their homes," said Vijay Subramaniam, Director and Head, content, Amazon Prime Video India, the digital platform releasing the film.

Elnaaz Norouzi: More than ever, you have to be picky now

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Elnaaz Norouzi says with so many web series and films being made, it is very important to be sure of picking the right projects. "I have always been picky. That's always how I've worked. Right now, everything is on halt and when things settle down a bit there will be too many scripts and sto-

ries for everyone to tell. So, you have to be picky as there is a lot of content out there. Now, there are a lot more films and web series happening and, therefore, more than ever you've to be picky now," she told reporter. Talking about the kind of role she wants to play, the actress says: "I really always wanted to do an action film. I really want to do a strong boss lady sort of a character. Also, I always wanted to be a part of a thriller. The role I'm already playing in 'Sangeen' is something of that type. I would want to do an action film next," she says.

RAKUL PREET SINGH: I'M A WALKING TALKING TIME TABLE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Rakul Preet Singh is gearing up for the release of her new film "Sardar Ka Grandson". The actress relates to Radha, her character in the film, saying she is a walking talking time table.

Rakul's character in the film is a very organised and level-headed person. Is the actress in real life somewhat like her on-screen avatar? "When (director) Kaashvi (Nair) narrated it to me and after she got to know me, she said Radha is Rakul! I am a little punctual about time and I have to do things right. I am a walking talking time table and I could relate a lot with Radha. So, I do agree to that part," Rakul told reporter. "Sardar Ka Grandson" is the story of Amreek played by Arjun Kapoor, who wants to fulfil a wish of his grandmother, essayed by Neena Gupta. The film is all set to release on Netflix on May 18.

KUMAR SANU: HAVE MEMORY ASSOCIATED WITH EVERY SONG I SANG FOR NADEEM-SHRAVAN

Ahana Bhattacharya | Mumbai

Playback veteran Kumar Sanu is not against the current trend of remixing old songs, and he says he likes a remixed number even better if the original voice is retained. He also opened up with nostalgia on his association with composers Nadeem-Shravan.

Sanu became popular in the nineties, particularly singing romantic numbers that reigned that charts back then, and among his biggest hits were songs he recorded for Nadeem-Shravan, starting "Aashiqui" in 1990. Shravan Kumar Rathod of the Nadeem-Shravan duo passed away last month. Walking down memory lane, Sanu recalled how he has a special memory with literally every song he sang for them.

"Music composer duos like Nadeem-Shravan are rare and Shravan ji's demise is a great loss for our industry. I have so many memories with them. Shravan ji was a soft spoken and jovial person, and loved me a lot. They used to call me Tiger. I have a separate memory associated with every song I sang for them, the shows we did together, the tasty food I had at their place, the tips they shared to help me during song recording," Sanu recalled.

Any Nadeem-Shravan number close to his heart? "Every song I have sung for them is special to me. Their songs used to have melody and good lyrics, for which people remember me. One song, "Zindagi ki talash mein hum maut ke kitne paas aa gaye", from the film 'Saathi' -- it's a meaningful song and really close to my heart," revealed the singer.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Shobhita Rana