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# absolute india

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## INDIA FACES NEW CHALLENGE AMID DEADLY COVID - 19 PANDEMIC

# BLACK FUNGUS FEAR

***This infection is largely affecting those with uncontrolled diabetes who are on immunosuppressed drugs and using steroids. Health Ministry asks states and Union Territories to declare Mucormycosis (Black Fungus) an epidemic***

- TELANGANA AND RAJASTHAN HAVE ALREADY DECLARED MUCORMYCOSIS AS AN EPIDEMIC.
- CASES OF BLACK FUNGUS HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE COUNTRY INCLUDING KARNATAKA, UTTARAKHAND, TELANGANA, MADHYA PRADESH, ANDHRA PRADESH, HARYANA AND BIHAR.
- MUCORMYCOSIS CAN ALSO DEVELOP ON THE SKIN AFTER THE FUNGUS ENTERS THE SKIN THROUGH A CUT, SCRAPE, BURN, OR OTHER TYPES OF SKIN TRAUMA.
- THE DISEASE IS BEING DETECTED AMONG PATIENTS WHO ARE RECOVERING OR HAVE RECOVERED FROM COVID-19.

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The Union Health Ministry has appealed to all the states and Union Territories (UTs) to declare mucormycosis or black fungus as a notifiable disease under the Epidemic Disease Act 1897. The Ministry has also advised that all government and private health facilities, as well as medical colleges should follow guidelines issued by it and the ICMR on screening, diagnosis and management of mucormycosis.The Ministry said mucormycosis or black fungus is a complication caused by a fungal infection. People catch mucormycosis by coming in contact with the fungal spores in the environment. Mucormycosis, which is primarily affecting people recovering from Covid-19, as per sources, has also infected several people in the national capital as it is caused by the steroid administered in the treatment of coronavirus. On May 18, the Haryana government also framed regulations called, "The Haryana Epidemic Diseases (Mucormycosis) Regulations, 2021".

### 90 KILLED IN MAHARASHTRA

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday urged the Union government to swiftly allocate to the state Amphotericin B injections, used to treat mucormycosis - now increasingly common in recovered Covid-19 patients. The minister told mediapersons that the state has placed an order for 1.9 lakh Amphotericin B injections but is yet to receive delivery from the manufacturers. On Thursday, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray is slated to discuss the drug's shortage with Prime Minister in a video conference. Maharashtra has at least 1,500 Covid-19 patients suffering from the black fungus, a term commonly used to refer to mucormycosis. Among them, 850 are in hospital.

### TASK FORCE TO BE FORMED FOR BLACK FUNGUS TREATMENT IN MP

**Bhopal:** A dedicated task force will be set up in Madhya Pradesh to oversee arrangements for the treatment of black fungus or 'mucormycosis'. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has issued instructions in this regard. houhan in a video conference with state health officials said black fungus should be identified in the early stages and every patient must be treated in time. This should be made a mass movement and there should be a system under which tests must be conducted for detection of black fungus in every district.

### DELHI TO GET DEDICATED CENTRES FOR TREATMENT

**New Delhi:** In wake of growing cases of mucormycosis or 'black fungus', the Delhi government has decided to open dedicated centres at three city hospitals for the treatment of the disease in Covid-19 recovered patients. These centres will be opened at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash (LNJP), Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB), and Rajiv Gandhi hospitals. The Delhi government will also prepare a detailed plan and issue special SOPs on how to raise awareness amongst Covid-recovered people for the prevention of the disease.

### TN REPORTS NINE CASES IN GOVT HOSPITALS

**Chennai:** Tamil Nadu on Thursday declared mucormycosis or 'black fungus' a "notifiable disease", as per directions of the Union Health Ministry. The state reported nine cases of mucormycosis at government hospitals. However, the total number of black fungus cases in the state is not clear as the private hospitals have not given reports. The state Health Department has formed a mucormycosis committee headed by Director of Medical Education, and this has prepared protocols for diagnosis, treatment, and the usage of antifungal drugs.

### NORTHEAST REPORTS FIRST DEATH

**Guwahati:** The northeast recorded its first death due to mucormycosis, commonly known as 'black fungus' when a 27-year-old man died at a private hospital here after his recovery from Covid, health officials said on Thursday.

### NOW 'WHITE FUNGUS' ERUPTS

**Amid the on-going second wave of the deadly COVID-19 disease, the country recently reported a spike in rare fungal infection called black fungus (Mucormycosis) cases. And now, adding to the trouble, the capital of Bihar, Patna recently reported four cases of white fungus. All four patients showed all the symptoms of the COVID-19 virus, but tested negative in every test. The doctor said that during a detailed investigation, it turned out that they were infected with white fungus.**

- AS PER THE HEALTH EXPERTS, WHITE FUNGUS INFECTION IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN BLACK FUNGUS INFECTION AS IT NOT ONLY AFFECTS THE LUNGS BUT OTHER PARTS OF THE BODY SUCH AS NAILS, SKIN, STOMACH, KIDNEY, BRAIN, PRIVATE PARTS AND MOUTH.
- THE SYMPTOMS OF THIS RARE FUNGAL DISEASE ARE SIMILAR TO CORONAVIRUS INFECTION. AS THIS ATTACKS THE LUNGS, THE DISEASE CAN BE DETECTED BY PERFORMING HRCT TEST ON AN INFECTED PATIENT.
- AS WITH THE BLACK FUNGUS INFECTION THOSE WITH LOW IMMUNITY ARE AT A GREATER RISK.
- PEOPLE WITH PRE-EXISTING MEDICAL ISSUES LIKE DIABETES OR THOSE ON STEROIDS FOR A LONG TIME ARE MOST LIKELY TO GET INFECTED WITH WHITE FUNGUS.

### 'GET THE DRUG FROM WHEREVER IN THE WORLD': DELHI HC TO CENTRE

**New Delhi:** The Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the Centre to take measures to address the shortfall in the medicines, like Amphotericin B, used for treating black fungus, which is affecting Covid-19 recovered people. A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said: "You have to get the medicine from wherever in the world. You have to take steps right now.Wherever it is available in the world get it," it emphasised.

# Now, get a Covid test at home in 15 minutes for Rs 250!

***CoviSelf will provide the results in just 15 minutes, and each pack has a unique QR code which must be entered along with the test outcome to get a report on the App.***

**Team Absolute** | Pune

The ICMR has granted approval to a Pune-based company for its new self-use rapid home-test kit for Covid-19 with results available in just 15 minutes. Named 'CoviSelf', the country's first Covid-19 home-test kit, priced at Rs 250, has been developed by Mylab Discovery Solutions, Pune, and will hit the markets within a few days. The company had also given India its first RT-PCR Test kit last year which is now commonly used for Covid-19 tests. The self-use test kit can be used by any symptomatic persons, or their immediate contacts of confirmed cases as per ICMR guidelines, and they can test themselves, go into isolation and get treatment quickly. Each kit would comprise the requisite testing materials, instructions for use leaflet and a biohazard bag to safely dispose it off after testing. The test is done using nasal swab as compared to the deep nasopharyngeal swab to reduce the user's discomfort.

### MAMATA HITS OUT AT PM AFTER MEETING ON COVID SITUATION

**Kolkata** | Agencies

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who attended a meeting of the district magistrates with the Prime Minister where some chief ministers were also present regarding the Covid situation, alleged that the chief ministers were not allowed to speak and they were reduced to puppets. She said the meeting was a 'super flop'. Addressing the media after PM Narendra Modi's meeting, Mamata Banerjee said, "It was so unfortunate that after inviting the CMs, he did not talk to us. We were not allowed to speak. Only some BJP chief ministers and the PM made small speeches and ended the meeting after this. It was a casual meeting."

She said the Prime Minister neither asked how West Bengal is handling the Covid situation nor did he enquire about the stock of vaccines or oxygen.

# Aerosol can travel to 10 mtrs from infected person: Govt advisory

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The government on Thursday said that the aerosol can travel up to ten metres from the infected person, and that aerosol through the infected person can fall within two meters but can be carried to ten teters through the air.

"Aerosol and droplets are key mode of transmission of the virus," it said.

The advisory said, to prevent it people should continue wearing mask, wear double masks or a N95 mask.

The advisory issued by the principal scientific advisors office said, "Ventilation is a community defense that protects all of us at home or at work. Introducing outdoor air in offices, homes and larger public spaces is advised. Measures to improve ventilation in these spaces must be taken up on urgent priority in urban and rural areas alike, recommendations for hutments, homes, offices and large centralised buildings are given. Simple strategic placement of fans, open windows and doors, even slightly open windows can introduce outdoor air and improve the air quality inside.

Introduction of cross ventilation and exhaust fans will be beneficial in curtailing the spread of the disease.

# *DELAY IN VAX EXPORT BY INDIA TO DEAL BLOW TO POORER COUNTRIES*

**The delays raise the prospect of billions of people around the world waiting until 2022 or even 2023 for vaccination, which may allow new and potentially more harmful variants of the virus to emerge, the report said. Nearly one in three recorded deaths from Covid worldwide are occurring in poor and lower-middle income countries, statistics from earlier this month revealed, up from 9.3 per cent of global deaths earlier this year.**

- *India is battling a wave of infections that has killed more than 283,000 people, according to official figures that many experts believe are substantial underestimates, the report said.*
- *The World Health Organization (WHO), a co-leader of Covax, has called on vaccine makers outside India to advance supplies to the programme to make up the shortfall.*
- *Covax has a deal with SII to deliver 1.1bn doses of either the AstraZeneca vaccine or the newer Novavax shot, which has still to obtain regulatory approval.*
- *Covax aims to provide vaccines to the developing world in 2021, a target that was always optimistic and now looks impossible to achieve, as per The Guardian.*

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Covid-19 vaccination programmes across Africa and much of the developing world will suffer big delays after India, the worlds biggest vaccine producer, said that it would not be exporting the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine until the end of the year, The Guardian reported. The decision is likely to leave the Covax global vaccine-sharing facility, which helps the poor countries, facing a shortfall of hundreds of millions of doses, the report said. SII had paused deliveries of the AstraZeneca vaccine in March, diverting for domestic use doses that were to be distributed across the developing world. It had been widely hoped that supplies of the AstraZeneca shot, which is suitable for use in countries with weak infrastructure and many poorer countries, would begin again in June or October, the report said.

The delays will hit India's neighbours hard. Nepal and Bangladesh are making frantic diplomatic efforts to secure vaccines to prop up their faltering inoculation drives as their stocks run out. Bangladesh said it urgently needed 1.6 million shots of the AstraZeneca vaccine to provide second doses. Nepal, which started its vaccination drive in January with 2.35 million AstraZeneca doses provided by India and Covax, also said it had no stocks and more than 1.55 million people were awaiting second doses.

The WHO said last month that Africa had given fewer than 2 per cent of vaccines administered globally and was being left behind. There have been 4.7 million infections and 1.26 lakh deaths from Covid in Africa, according to official figures, though experts believe these do not reflect the true total, The Guardian reported.

### TAX COMPLIANCE TIMELINES EXTENDED TILL SEPT 30

**New Delhi:** In view of the hardship being faced by taxpayers on account of the severe Covid-19 pandemic and on consideration of representations received from various stakeholders, the government has decided to provide further relief to taxpayers by extending various time limits of compliances. Accordingly, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has now extended the due date for furnishing of Return of Income for the Assessment Year 2021-22, which is 31 July, 2021 by couple of months to 30 September, 2021.

Similarly, the board has also extended the due date of furnishing of Report of Audit under any provision of the Income Tax Act for the Previous Year 2020-21, to October 31, 2021 from the earlier deadline of 30 September, 2021.

# Covaxin production to be ramped up by 200 million doses

*Bharat Biotech on Thursday announced the quick ramp up of additional manufacturing capacities for Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin by an additional 200 million.*

**Hyderabad** | Agencies

Hyderabad: The manufacturing capacities for India's first indigenous Covid vaccine have been ramped up at Chiron Behring Vaccines, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Bharat Biotech at Ankleshwar, Gujarat.

The company plans to produce 200 million doses of Covaxin per annum in the GMP facilities that are already operational for the production of vaccines based on Inactivated Vero Cell Platform Technology, under stringent levels of GMP and biosafety, Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech said in a statement.

The product availability at Ankleshwar is expected to commence from fourth quarter of 2021.

Bharat Biotech had already deployed multiple production lines at its Hyderabad and Bengaluru campuses, adding Chiron Behring to this line-up of high-containment BSL rated GMP facilities that are required to manufacture Covaxin.

This effectively takes the volumes up to about one billion doses per annum, with its own established campuses specialised for manufacturing inactivated viral vaccines under the highest levels of biosafety, the vaccine maker added.

# INDIA'S LARGEST COVID CENTRE GETS 150 GPS-BASED VENTILATOR BEDS

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

India's largest Covid care facility, the Sardar Patel Covid Care Centre (SPCCC), Radha Soami Beas, in Delhi's Chhatarpur area was on Thursday equipped with 150 GPS-based ventilator beds.

These beds have been provided by the PM-CARES Trust Fund to serve the patients who need oxygen support.

"Proved to be one of the best camp hospitals in the national capital, the confidence in the centre has further added to the faith of the government and today 150 GPS-based ventilator beds were provided from the PM-CARES Trust Fund which have been made functional," said ITBP spokesperson Vivek Pandey.

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) is the nodal agency operating the centre.

The new beds will be in addition to the 500 oxygen beds which are already functional at the centre, Pandey told reporter. "The ventilators will be used for providing critical care to Covid patients," he added.

The centre is serving as an important centre with the support of ITBP and Delhi government and is providing much-needed medical care to patients who need oxygen support.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had mandated the ITBP to provide doctors and paramedical staff for the SPCCC.

After starting operations on April 26 this year, the centre till May 19 admitted a total of 1,223 patients, out of which 935 have been discharged. "At present, 200 beds are occupied at the centre," the spokesperson said. "Walk-in admissions are open here for any Covid patient needing oxygen support. Adequate oxygen supply and medicines are being provided by the Delhi District Administration to the centre for the admitted patients," he said.

# Over 130-year-old road bridge in Patna collapses amid rain

**PATNA** | Agencies

A 136-year-old road bridge in Patna collapsed on Thursday, following a heavy spell of rain.

The bridge, located in Fatuha sub-town, 25 km away from Patna, had been built in 1884, and local residents claim that it was not being properly maintained. It connected the market with the office of the municipal council.The incident occurred at 12.30 p.m. as a truck laden with construction materials was crossing it. The driver and helper were injured and were admitted to the sub-divisional hospital.

While the Bridges and Roads Construction Department had declared it dangerous and barred heavy

vehicles from it some 25 years ago, local residents claim that the warning board was removed by anti-social elements a few months ago."On Thursday, we witnessed heavy rain of five hours in Patna which may have weakened the base of the bridge. Besides there was no warning board for heavy vehicles... the truck driver took the vehicle onto it, causing it to collapse under the weight," said Raman Sharma, a local resident.

"Due to the bridge collapse, local residents are using a four-km longer route to go from one place to another. It has become a huge challenge for those travelling with dead bodies to the cremation ground," said another resident Sagar Kumar.

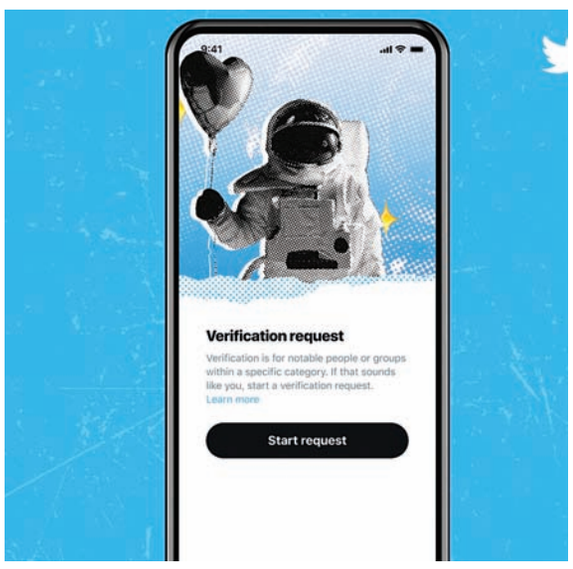
# Twitter restarts blue badge verification with 6 categories

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Twitter on Thursday announced to relaunch its new verification application process, beginning with six categories, and review public applications globally to help users earn the blue badge on the micro-blogging platform.

The six categories are -- government; companies, brands and organisations; news organisations and journalists; entertainment; sports and gaming; and activists, organisers and other influential individuals.

Twitter said that it will introduce more categories later this year, such as those for scientists, academics and religious leaders.




Over the next few weeks, everyone on Twitter will start to see the new verification application directly in the Account Settings tab.

Once the application is submitted, the applicants can expect an emailed response within a few days, but this could take up to a few weeks depending on how many open applications are in the queue.

"If your application is approved, you'll see the blue badge automatically on your profile. If you think we made a mistake, reapply 30 days after receiving our decision on your application," Twitter said.Over the past several months, Twitter worked to bring clarity to the verification eligibility criteria and launched a new policy shaped by public feedback.

# VIJAYAN TOOK OATH AS CM FOR SECOND STRAIGHT TERM

**Thiruvananthapuram:** It was a day that members and supporters of the Left Democratic Front were eagerly awaiting since the results for the April 6 Assembly elections came out on May 2, as Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday took oath as Kerala Chief Minister for a second consecutive term, breaking an over four-decade pattern of alternating governments.The LDF comfortably retained power, winning a record 99 seats in the 140-member Assembly and leaving the Congress-led united Democratic Front, which was hopeful of returning to power, with only 41. Governor Arif Mohammed Khan administered the oath of office to Vijayan and 20 of his cabinet colleagues at a function at the Central Stadium here.

# Health for those without wealth has been my motto: Harsh Vardhan

New Delhi: Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Thursday said that his motto has always been 'Health for those without wealth.

He was speaking at the opening session of the 33rd meeting of Health Ministers of Commonwealth countries themed "Commonwealth Response to COVID-19: Ensuring Equitable Access to Vaccines and Building Resilience for Health Systems and Emergencies".

Union health Minister pointed that the poor and vulnerable are often left reeling under severe financial distress due to

any illness.Pointing that this pandemic has thus foregrounded the need to intensify efforts towards achieving the ultimate goal of universal health coverage, he said, "My motto has always been 'Health for those without wealth'."

# COVID WREAKS HAVOC IN UP VILLAGE, OVER 100 DEAD IN A MONTH

**Mohammad Suaib Khan** | Ghaziabad

The second Covid wave is wreaking havoc in rural areas of Uttar Pradesh. Just 30 minutes drive from Delhi, a village in Ghaziabad has lost up to 100 people due to Covid like symptoms in just over a month.

Residents of Nahal village in Ghaziabad say that after the panchayat elections, the situation started deteriorating. After April 15, people in the village suddenly started falling ill, complaining of mild fever and cough.

Long queues began forming outside doctors' clinics, however, many people recovered after taking the medicine. Those whose condition deteriorated were taken to the big hospitals by their family members. The local hospital is about 5 kilometres from the village.

According to the people of Nahal village, from April 15 till May 10 as many as 10 people died in a single day. On other days 3-4 people died daily. The villagers claim that the situation worsened so much that more than 100 people have died in about 30 days in the village.

Munnawar, the former head of Nahal village, said, "People got fever and their throats were choked. About 112 people lost their lives. The oxygen cylinders were not available. People started dying after developing pneumonia like symptoms." "Those who could not visit big hospitals, got the treatment in the village itself as they had no other option. No one came to check on behalf of the government. One person died yesterday also," he added.

# J&K POLICE ARRESTS 2 TERRORIST ASSOCIATES, RECOVERS 6 GRENADES

**SRINAGAR** | Agencies

Jammu and Kashmir Police have arrested two terrorist associates in Kupwara district and recovered six live grenades from their possession, officials said on Thursday. Police said acting on specific information regarding movement of terrorists, a special checkpoint was set-up at the main market in the district.During checking, two suspicious persons, who on seeing the search party, tried to escape from the spot but were tactfully chased and apprehende.They have been identified as Jahangir Ahmad Hajam and

Abdul Hameed Hajam, both residents of Khawarpara Tangdhar."During search, incriminating materials including six live grenades have been recovered from their possession," the police said. An FIR has been registered and further investigation has been initiated in this regard.

# UP bars schools from hiking fees for 2021-2022 session

**Lucknow** | Agencies

The state government in Uttar Pradesh has barred all schools form increasing fees in the new academic session 2021-2022.

Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma, who holds the secondary education portfolio, told reporters that the decision has been taken in view of the ongoing pandemic.

"Several families have been financially hit by the pandemic. Keeping the situation in mind, the state government has decided the parents should not be given any extra financial burden. Teachers and employees in schools will be given salaries as usual," he said.

The minister further said that since sports, libraries and computer classes were not being held, schools would not be allowed to charge for these and other extracurricular activities. He said that the decision would be applicable to all school boards.

# Devise Covid strategy in rural, urban specific way: PM to DMs

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

In order to ensure a Covid-free rural India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asked a group of District Magistrates (DMs) to devise their strategies in rural and urban specific manner.

Noting that coronavirus has made their job more demanding and challenging, the Prime Minister urged everyone to ensure full commitment to fight the pandemic.

The Prime Minister expressed his views while interacting with the state and district officials on the Covid-19 situation through a video conference. In the virtual meeting, Modi interacted with the DMs of 54 districts across 10 states -- the second such interaction involving the Prime Minister on the Covid situation.The Prime Minister held a similar interaction with the DMs of 46 districts with high Covid burden on Tuesday.

Speaking on the occasion, Modi said: "In the midst of these new challenges, new strategies and solutions are needed."Mentioning that over the past few days, active cases have started to reduce in the country, the Prime Minister warned that the challenge remains as long as this infection is present, even on a minor scale.Modi stressed on the need to use local experiences and work together as a country, saying that there is a need to spread messages on keeping villages corona-free and following all Covid-appropriate behaviour, even when cases are declining.Stating that every epidemic has taught us the importance of continuous innovation, the Prime Minister emphasised that the methods and strategies to deal with the pandemic should be dynamic as the virus is expert in mutation and changing form.Modi also said that the virus mutation is concerning the youth and children, as he stressed on the need to boost the vaccination drive.

The Prime Minister added that the vaccination strategy is also being pushed forward by incorporating suggestions from the states and various stakeholders at all levels.

On vaccine wastage, Modi said that wastage of a single vaccine means not being able to provide necessary security to an individual. Therefore, one should make a conscious effort to stop vaccine wastage, he said.

# 15 booked, 5 held for raising pro-Pak slogans in UP

**KANNAUJ** | Agencies

The police have arrested five persons and booked 15 others for allegedly raising pro-Pakistan slogans, the video of which had gone viral on social media.The arrested persons include a local Muslim cleric.

According to the Kannauj police, taking cognizance of the viral video, they conducted an inquiry and identified the people seen in it. The video was of May 15 at the Jalalabad crossing, police added.The four arrested persons have been identified as Maulana Mohammad Afzal, an Imam of a local mosque who hails from Kanpur Dehat, Salman, Shahid, and Meraj- all residents of the area.They have been booked under IPC section 153-B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration) and 505 (2) (statements creating or promoting enmity between classes) among others.Circle Officer, (Kannauj City) Shiv Pratap Singh said that while five of the accused are named in the FIR and 10 unnamed, efforts are on to identify all the others in the video and arrest them.

Station House Officer, Gurusahaiganj, Raja Dinesh Singh said police are also trying to ascertain why the video was shot and circulated on social media.

## DAP SACK OF RS 2400 WILL NOW BE AVAILABLE FOR RS 1200

# CM CHOUHAN THANKS PM MODI FOR INCREASING SUBSIDY ON DAP FERTILIZER

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that I congratulate farmer friendly Prime Minister Narendra Modi for providing relief to farmers on DAP fertilizer. Taking a historic decision in the interest of farmers, PM Modi has given relief to the farmers in the event of 140 percent increase in the prices of DAP fertilizer. Due to increase in prices, if DAP was given to the farmers at the original price, it would have cost them Rs 2400 per bag. The central government was already giving subsidy at the rate of Rs 500 per bag. Due to increased prices, this subsidy has been increased to Rs 1200 per bag. The subsidy has been increased by Rs 700 per bag for the farmer. As a result, the DAP bag of Rs 2400 will now be available to the farmer at Rs 1200.

Farmers would have had to pay a higher price for fertilizer, due to the increasing prices of DAP in the international market, which would have increased the cost of the crop. PM Modi's resolve is to double the income of farmers and reduce costs. The subsidy that the Prime Minister has increased to reduce the cost, will cost more than about Rs 14 thousand 500 crore. CM Chouhan thanked PM Modi on behalf of the farmers of Madhya Pradesh.

### CM apprises PM on situation of Black Fungus

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, in a telephonic discussion with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, apprised him with the current situation of Black fungus disease in the state. Chief Minister Chouhan informed the Prime Minister Modi about the arrangements being made for the prevention and treatment of the disease in the state.

# Public support stopping pace of Corona infection : CM

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that an important role has been ensured for public participation in prevention of Corona infection in the state. This has resulted in increased public awareness. People have been inspired to follow the Corona Protocol. People not only adopted measures to prevent Corona, but also inspired others to follow suit. Cooperation from social organizations, voluntary organizations, public representatives, social workers, doctors, paramedical staff and citizens of different areas of the community has helped to accelerate the pace of elimination of Corona infection. Public participation has also helped in the proper treatment of Corona victims. Chouhan says that the state government is making continuous efforts to put an end to Corona infection and black fungus with public support.

With the help of social organizations, awareness was generated and proactive identification was done to identify people suffering from Corona infection at the initial level under the Kill Corona campaign. Testing capacity was increased in the state. Also, the time taken for testing results was reduced. The District Command and Control Center constantly monitored home isolation. Institutional Isolation was done by establishing Covid Care Centers. Health infrastructure was strengthened. Hospital facilities were enhanced. Beds, easy supply of oxygen, equipment and medicines useful in treatment were arranged on a war footing. Vaccination has been enhanced on the basis of the availability of vaccine. For early vaccination, orders have also been given by the government to purchase vaccine doses in sufficient quantity.

Chouhan said that the contribution of Corona-Volunteers in prevention and rescue of Covid-19 has been commendable. It was informed that the number of Corona Volunteers across the state has now increased to more than one lakh 16 thousand 98, out of which more than 50 thousand volunteers have been more active. About 7899 volunteers are helping out at the vaccination centers. Similarly, people above the age of 18 years have been motivated for vaccination by 12 thousand 298 vaccination motivators and 7 thousand 242 vaccination helpers. Apart from this, 7 thousand 496 Corona Volunteers have given assistance in spreading information about medical facilities and 3096 volunteers in transportation for medical facilities. Moreover, 11 thousand 159 volunteers were active in the distribution of masks.

So far, 93 thousand 779 home isolated Covid patients have benefitted from the Yog se Nirog programme.

# New experiment in the state: Covid testing camp

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

For corona control, testing has been started in the municipal corporation zone of the city through the mobile units for people having corona symptoms. Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang had given instructions in this regard on Tuesday. Sarang himself reached various places on Thursday to inspect the testing being done by these mobile units started on the initiative of Sarang. He visited the Covid Testing Camp set up by the mobile unit at Siddharth Bauddha Vihar and Government School, Barwai at Shiv Nagar. During this, he discussed with the team and patients present there. Sarang gave instructions to provide information in the area and make people aware. He said that people with early symptoms should be made aware to be tested. Initially no positives were found at both the centres till noon. 15 and 11 investigations, respectively, were conducted up to the time of inspection. Sarang informed that a new experiment has been done in Bhopal to prepare the mobile testing unit. It will visit about 80 places and check people with primary symptoms. Centres have been made in every zone. He informed that work is being done to make people aware through loudspeakers. Medical kits are also being made available at these centres by conducting checkups. Through the unit, the team is going to every area and checking people. For many people who do not want to go to the fever clinic, it is proving to be effective. This will also reduce pressure on fever clinics.Covid testing camps are being organised with the cooperation of District Administration and Municipal Corporation.

Sarang also inspected the vaccination centre at Maa Vaishno Higher Secondary School located at New Jail Road Barwai. Out of the vaccines available for 200 people at the vaccination centre, 108 vaccines had been administered till noon. Sarang obtained appropriate information from the team present. Along with this, he encouraged the citizens coming to get the vaccination done.

# HCCB donates oxygen concentrators

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

HCCB, one of Indias top FMCG companies, handed over a batch of EverFlo oxygen concentrators, imported from Germany to aid the fight against COVID-19. The oxygen concentrators were handed over to Civil Hospital, Narsinghgarh in the presence of Aman Vaishnav, Sub Divisional Magistrate and Dr. Gaurav Tripathi, Block Medical Officer.

The gesture is a part of HCCB's (Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages) nation-wide CoVID Care plan, which includes setting up Oxygen plants, distributing free food kits and beverages to the needy, donating ICU and other medical emergency equipment to Government and charitable hospitals and facilitating vaccination camps and support programs.

Vaishnav appreciated the contributions of HCCB and expressed the hope to continue to receive the support from the company in future. He thanked the HCCB team for standing with its community in such difficult times.

Reaffirming the company's commitment to continue to contribute to the cause of the community, Kamlesh Sharma, Chief Public Affairs and Communication Officer, HCCB said "We consider it our privilege in being able to serve the community at a time when the country combats a crisis of enormous proportions.

We are thankful to the Indian Consulate at Munich for having helped us procure these oxygen concentrators from Germany. Slowly but surely, the state is making good progress towards containing the spread and therefore our focus must also be on getting the maximum number of people vaccinated. So, on one hand we seek support of the district administration in getting our factory employees and sales staff vaccinated, on the other, we are willing to offer all the help to the administration to efficiently but effectively conduct large vaccination drives."

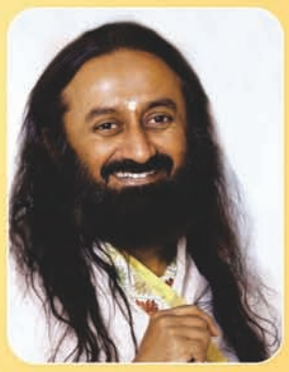
In addition to the above outlined plans, HCCB is also donating ventilators, ICU beds, ICU equipment, BiPAP machines and several other medical emergency amenities to several hospitals in Madhya Pradesh. Besides, HCCB has started distributing dry ration kits to the poor and underprivileged.


# योग से निरोग

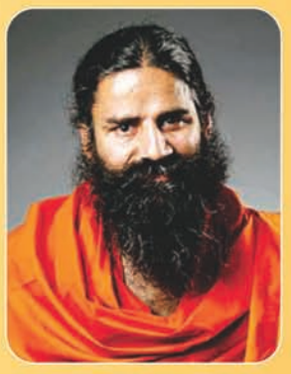
कार्यक्रम के अन्तर्गत
कोविड-19 के होम आइसोलेटेड,
कोविड केयर सेंटर पर भर्ती और
स्वस्थ हुए मरीजों तथा योग प्रशिक्षकों से

श्री नरेन्द्र मोदी, प्रधानमंत्री — श्री शिवराज सिंह चौहान, मुख्यमंत्री

गुरुदेव श्रीश्री रविशंकर जी और योग गुरु स्वामी रामदेव जी
एवं
श्री शिवराज सिंह चौहान
मुख्यमंत्री, मध्यप्रदेश
करेंगे
संवाद



गुरुदेव श्रीश्री रविशंकर जी



योगगुरु स्वामी रामदेव जी

ऑनलाइन संवाद
21 मई, 2021
दोपहर 12.00 बजे

इंडियन योग एसोसिएशन का विशेष सहयोग

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आयुष विभाग, स्कूल शिक्षा विभाग
मध्यप्रदेश शासन

सहयोगी संस्थायें : THE ART OF LIVING, भारत योग, heartfulness, isha FOUNDATION, KAIVALYADHAMA, PARMARTH NIKETAN, PATANJALI

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आकल्पन : म.प्र. माध्यम/2021

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मध्यप्रदेश जनसम्पर्क द्वारा जारी

# FIRE ERUPTS IN DELHI'S ESI HOSPITAL,NONE INJURED

A massive fire broke out at the Employees State Insurance (ESI) Hospital in Delhi's Punjabi Bagh area on Wednesday afternoon. According to media reports, the blaze started on the third floor of the hospital. No injuries have been reported so far.

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

A massive fire broke out at the Employees State Insurance (ESI) Hospital in Delhi's Punjabi Bagh area on Thursday, following which seven fire tenders were rushed to the spot, officials said, adding that no injuries have been reported so far. An official said that a call reporting fire in the UPS room on the second floor of the ESI hospital in Punjabi Bagh area was received at 1.16 pm. He said that after receiving the call, five fire tenders were rushed to the hospital to douse the flames. Around 20-25 OT staff were safely evacuated from the second floor after the fire erupted in the UPS room due to suspected short-circuit, he said. The official said that the fire was doused by 2.25 p.m.

# Covid positivity rate dips to 5.5 per cent, will Kejriwal end Delhi lockdown?

With Covid cases coming down, it is being expected that the lockdown in Delhi will be eased gradually. A decision in this regard may be taken later this week.

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

After skyrocketing for weeks, Delhi's Covid graph is now showing a downward trend for the past several days. The national capital recorded 3,231 fresh cases and 233 fatalities on Thursday. The health department said that the city's positivity rate has dipped to 5.5 per cent which had touched a high of 35 per cent in April.

With Covid cases coming down, it is being expected that the lockdown in Delhi will be eased gradually. A decision in this regard may be taken later this week. The ongoing Covid curbs in Delhi will end on May 24.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said he would discuss the matter with Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal in the meeting scheduled to be held over the weekend.

"I will talk to LG sir over the weekend. We will let you know whatever decision will be taken," Kerjriwal said on Thursday. However, the CM has repeatedly alerted people over not letting their guard down.

"We can't afford to be complacent or let our guard down. The battle has not been won yet," Kejriwal had said last week.According to the latest health bulletin, the new fatalities pushed the death toll from the novel coronavirus infection in the city to 22,579. Delhi recorded 3,231 COVID-19 cases on Thursday, the daily count dipping to below 4,000-mark for the second consecutive day, it said.

Medical experts have attributed the lockdown as the main factor behind the dip amid the second wave of the pandemic. The savage second Covid wave witnessed Delhi's medical infrastructure crumbling under pressure with hospitals running out of beds, oxygen, medicine. Even crematoriums overflowed with dead bodies.

## RAINWATER INUNDATES COVID FACILITY IN GURUGRAM

**Gurugram:**Heavy rain inundated the 100-bed Covid care centre at the Tau Devi Lal stadium in sector-38 here, which was inaugurated by Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday. However, the Covid facility is yet to be made operational as it's completion work was in the last phase.The rain also disrupted the centre's power supply on Wednesday. The Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) installed water pumps to flush out the water from inside and the adjacent Covid centre.

Videos and pictures that went viral on social media revealed that a few centres in the area were virtually floating in water.According to officials, the 100-bed Covid facility is on lower ground and is prone to flooding.

# Delhi reports 3,231 new Covid cases, lowest since April 2

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Delhi on Thursday reported 3,231 new Covid-19 cases, the lowest single-day spike since April 2, when the city had registered 3,594 new infections, said the daily health bulletin issued by the Delhi government. The national capital's cumulative case count now stands at 14,09,950, while 233 fatalities in the last 24 hours mounted its overall death toll to 22,579, the bulletin said.

About 58,744 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours, 7,829 less than Wednesday's figures of 66,573. The positivity rate dropped further to 5.50 per cent on Thursday from 5.78 per cent a day earlier.

The national capital's active caseload also dropped to 40,214 on Thursday from 45,047 on Wednesday, while the number of patients under home isolation reduced to 23,851 now from 27,112 a day before.Meanwhile, about 7,831 patients recovered from the disease in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of recoveries in Delhi to 13,47,157. With the city under lockdown since April 19, Delhi's overall Covid situation has improved considerably in the last few weeks. This is the second consecutive day since April 5 that the daily tally of new cases in the national capital dropped below the 4,000-mark. The city had reported 3,846 new Covid cases on Wednesday, 4,482 on Tuesday, 4,524 on Monday, and 6,456 on Sunday.The national capital had reported 235 deaths on Wednesday, 265 on Tuesday, 340 on Monday, and 262 on Sunday.A total of 68,703 people were vaccinated in the national capital in the last 24 hours, including 61,576 who received their first dose and 7,127 who got their second shot. In total, 48,90,028 people have been vaccinated in the city so far, which includes 37,87,895 who received their first shot, and 11,02,133 who have got their second dose.

# 'We will chase you': Delhi HC tells govts to set up oxygen buffer stock

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Warning that the drop in Covid-19 cases in Delhi should not be taken as a signal to relax vigilance, the Delhi High Court on Thursday said the authorities concerned should take steps to create a buffer stock of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) in the city.

A bench comprising of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh emphasised that it is the duty of the Centre and the Delhi government to ensure that all the preparations are made against the backdrop of scientists predicting the virus may raise its ugly head again, hitting the people badly.

Insisting that it means business and stressing that authorities should take its warning seriously, the bench said: "If you have not taken steps, we will come and chase you again. We are telling you; we mean business."

The Delhi government counsel informed the High Court that it has a buffer stock of 419 metric tonnes (MT) of LMO at different locations in the capital, and also arrangements are in progress to further augment the stock in next 10 days.The bench added that both Centre and Delhi government share the responsibility to set up the buffer stock of medical oxygen. It further observed that as per top court's April 30 order, primarily the responsibility is on the Centre and also on Delhi government.

The bench also noted that the Central government is yet to disclose in the status report as to what steps it has taken to fulfil in accordance with the Supreme Court order. The Centre's counsel submitted before the court that it is not taking the situation casually and steps are being taken to create the buffer stock of LMO.Reiterating that complacency cannot come due to drop in number of cases, the bench said: "This is a temporary phase. We know it is going to come back and hit us badly."

On May 4, the High Court, besides the top court, had also directed the Centre and Delhi government to create buffer stock of 100 MT of LMO. The High Court asked the Centre to file a report in connection with the steps taken to create buffer stock by May 24.

# BEDS OPEN UP AS CASES GO DOWN IN DELHI

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The national capital has seen a rise in the number of vacant beds for Covid-19 patients as a result of a steady decline in daily cases. This has brought a bit of relief for coronavirus patients and their kin who were finding it hard to acquire beds in hospitals and care centres at the peak of the second wave.

According to the Delhi Corona app, till about 9 pm on Wednesday, there were 14,485 beds available for Covid patients out of the total 27,992 beds across the care facilities, government or private-run. As per the app, over 12,000 beds with oxygen supply were vacant and 1,346 ICU beds were available at about 9 am on Wednesday.

A few weeks ago, in the middle of the worst phase of the second wave of the pandemic, there was a massive shortage of beds with oxygen supply, ICU beds and ICU beds with ventilators, with cases spiralling up to as high as over 28,000 on April 20. The national capital also saw a high number of fatalities during this period.

The visuals of patients waiting outside hospitals for beds and the reports of people dying due to lack of oxygen supply to the facilities were among the worst images of the pandemic.

On April 14, COVID-19 ICU beds with ventilators had become fully occupied at the majority of 94 hospitals with such facilities, as per official data shared on an official app on that day. On the same says, Covid-19 beds without ventilators were being fully used by patients at 75 of the 110 hospitals, according to the app. While the Covid-19 situation seems to have improved in the last few days, with daily cases on the decline, fatalities are still being recorded in large numbers. The severity of cases is still the same as it was a few weeks ago, say doctors.Amid a steady fall in daily cases of Covid-19 in the national capital, the number of vacant beds has again started to go up at hospitals, offering some relief to patients and their families.

## 886 HOME ISOLATION PATIENTS RECEIVE OXYGEN VIA ONLINE ROUTE

**Gurugram:** As many as 886 Covid patients in home isolation have received liquid oxygen cylinders at their doorstep via the online route, said Gurugram district administration officials.The administration had launched a door-to-door delivery service of oxygen cylinders through an online portal "oxygenhry" nearly two weeks ago. With this initiative Covid patients in the city have been freed from stress and the black marketing of cylinders has also been stopped."In order to avail the service of oxygen cylinder refill, the patient or their families will have to apply online on the portal."On acceptance of the application, information will be sent to the patient's registered mobile number through an SMS," Yash Garg, Deputy Commissioner Gurugram, said.The applicant will also have to upload the photo of the oximeter for oxygen level or the doctor's prescription and Aadhaar number while applying online. In addition, it will be mandatory to write the age and address of the patient."An application can be made only once a day from a mobile number," a district administration official said.The district administration has already fixed the rate of cylinders. A small cylinder (B type) will cost Rs 80, big cylinder (D type) will cost Rs 250, while the delivery charge will be Rs 100.An individual ordering the B-type small cylinder will have to pay Rs 180 (including the delivery charge) and anyone who gets a D-type big cylinder shipped will have to pay Rs 350.

# Kejriwal provides Rs 1 cr assistance to late Covid warrior's family

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday provided financial assistance of Rs 1 crore to the family of corona warrior late Sheoji Mishra, a Trained Graduate Teacher (TGT) in English at a Rajkiya Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya (RSBV) which facilitated the screening, movement, providing food, and temporary stay to migrant labourers during the Covid pandemic. Kejriwal said that Mishra "continued to serve the people till his last breath."

"No life can be valued with money, but this financial assistance will provide some ease to the family of the Corona warrior and the Delhi government will also provide his elder son with a job and will stand beside his family for any help they might need in the future," Kejriwal announced.

The CM said that late Sheoji Mishra was a very hardworking and dedicated teacher in our Delhi government school and passed away after getting infected while being on Covid duty last year. "I can understand the pain and grief of his family. While we cannot bring him back, I, on behalf of the Delhi government, have provided monetary support of Rs 1 crore."

Mishra is survived by his wife Saroj, elder son Piyush and younger son Ayush. His wife is a homemaker, while the elder son is preparing for a job and the younger son is a student of Class 12. Kejriwal said that Mishra's elder son is preparing for a job, and the Delhi government will provide him a job. "We will also stand beside them in any assistance that they shall need in the future." Mishra was posted as a TGT English at RSBV, Kalyanwas. The school functioned under Covid-19 duty to facilitate screening, movements, providing food, and temporary stay (night shelter) to the migrant labourers in the school.

# Delhi records highest-ever 24-hour rainfall in May

The rainfall in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, northern Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand on Wednesday was a result of interaction between the remnant of cyclonic storm Tauktae and a western disturbance, the IMD said.

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

A record 119.3 mm of rainfall pounded Delhi under the impact of cyclonic storm Tauktae and a western disturbance in 24 hours ending 8:30 am on Thursday, breaking all the previous records for May, the IMD said on Thursday.

The city had also recorded a maximum temperature of 23.8 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, 16 notches below normal and the lowest in the month of May since 1951, it said.

"A record 119.3 mm rain fell in Delhi between 8:30 am on Wednesday and 8:30 am on Thursday, which is a new record for May. The capital had recorded 60 mm rainfall in a 24-hour period on May 24 in 1976," an Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of India Meteorological Department's regional forecasting Centre said.

The rainfall in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, northern Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand on Wednesday was a result of interaction between the remnant of cyclonic storm Tauktae and a western disturbance, the IMD said. Rainfall recorded below 15 mm is considered light, between 15 and 64.5 mm is moderate, between 64.5 mm and 115.5 mm is heavy, between 115.6 and 204.4 is very heavy. Anything above 204.4 mm is considered extremely heavy rainfall.

R K Jenamani, senior scientist, national weather forecasting centre, said, "May remains generally dry. Normally, Delhi gets maximum of 30 mm or 40 mm (24-hour rainfall) in this month. The rain lasts only an hour or less. But this is completely different system coming from Arabian Sea and meeting with a western disturbance. Because the feature is rarest, so this much rain is not a surprise." The IMD said "rainfall activity is very likely to decrease" on Thursday and "scattered to fairly widespread" rainfall is forecast in the capital.The incessant rains brought the maximum temperature down to 23.8 degrees Celsius at Safdarjung on Wednesday. The minimum temperature on Thursday settled at 19.3 degrees Celsius, seven notches below normal. "Safdarjung recorded a maximum temperature of 23.8 degrees Celsius on Wednesday. This is the lowest maximum temperature since 1951," Srivastava said.In between, a low of 24.8 degrees Celsius was recorded on May 13 1982, he said.

According to the IMD, Delhi's maximum temperature on Wednesday was less than that of Srinagar (25.8 degrees Celsius) and Dharamshala (27.2 degrees Celsius) up in the north.

# 'Learn from bitter experience': Delhi HC asks hospitals to set up O2 plants

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Emphasising on learning from "bitter experience" of the second wave of Covid-19, the Delhi High Court on Thursday asked all big hospitals with 100 or more beds in the capital to install Pressure Swing Absorption (PSA) oxygen plants.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said lessons have to be learnt from the crisis, which was caused due to shortage of medical oxygen for the treatment of Covid-19 patients."The bitter experience with huge shortage of medical oxygen has certainly left a lesson to be learnt particularly for hospitals," it said.The court said the big hospitals in the capital with 100-bedded facilities or more should install PSA oxygen plants and ensure that their capacity is more than normal requirement to minimise dependence on other sources. "Larger hospitals with 100-bedded facilities or more should have their own PSA plants having capacity of at least two times their normal requirement," said the bench. The bench added that smaller hospitals and nursing homes with 50-100 beds should also have PSA plants with a capacity to meet the normal requirement, which may prove helpful in mitigating, if there were a similar crisis in future.The court observed that for installation of these plants, municipal corporations and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) may consider exploring some relaxations in building by-laws. The authorities could see that if the PSA plants can be installed in open parking spaces of the hospitals, added the bench.

# ONGC BARGE TRAGEDY: MVA SEEKS DHARMENDRA PRADHAN'S RESIGNATION

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

As the toll in the Arabian Sea barge tragedy rose to 37, Maharashtra's ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) allies on Thursday demanded that Union Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan must be held accountable and should quit over the loss of precious human lives.

Hitting out at the Centre, Shiv Sena MP and senior leader Arvind Sawant said that if there had been a similar tragedy in Maharashtra, the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party leaders would have sought resignations of the people in the government.

"The ONGC is under the Petroleum Ministry headed by Dharmendra Pradhan. Why don't the BJP leaders seek his resignation? Who will be held accountable for the huge loss of lives in this tragedy, give compensation and other relief... Merely pointing fingers won't do?" Sawant said.

Terming it as a 'man-made tragedy', Congress State Spokesperson Sachin Sawant said that 37 innocent people on the Barge

Papaa-305 died when it sank, while another 38-plus are missing.

"The warnings of the imminent Cyclone Tauktae had been given in advance. Action must be taken against all those responsible for endangering lives of the workers. Dharmendra Pradhan should resign taking moral responsibility," Sawant demanded.

Seeking action and charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder against all responsible for the barge disaster, Minorities Affairs Minister Nawab Malik said that "Pradhan must be held answerable" for the incident which left 37 people dead and many more missing.

"Everyone was aware of the cyclone and warnings were issued for all to take necessary precautions. While fisherfolk were moved to safety and prevented from going to the sea, why did the ONGC not heed these warnings and follow safety protocols?" Malik asked.

He said that all the workers should have been evacuated from the barges or oil rigs and brought ashore before the monster cyclone hit as is the norm worldwide, which was not done.

"Due to the ONGC's failure, more than 600 lives were endangered and 37 have already been killed besides many more missing. Strict action must be taken against those in-charge at ONGC and they should be booked under charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder," Malik demanded.The MVA leaders' responses came after the Barge Papaa-305 with 261 people on board went adrift. It sank late on Monday and later 37 bodies were recovered while the rest were saved in commendable operations by the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard.

Besides Papaa-305, two other barges and an oil-drilling rig were also hit badly by Cyclone Tauktae which virtually went overhead the Bombay High Fields of the ONGC on Monday before making landfall in Gujarat.

# Cyclone Tauktae: Arabian Sea barge tragedy toll rises to 37

The Union Ministry for Petroleum & Natural Gas late on Wednesday ordered setting up of a high-level committee to probe the sequence of events leading to the stranding of ONGC vessels in the Cyclone Tauktae, etc in and around the Bombay High Fields, around 175 kms off Mumbai.

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

The death toll in the barge tragedy near Bombay High Fields increased to 37 with 11 more bodies recovered and brought to shore, officials said here on Thursday.

On Wednesday, at least 26 persons on board the drifting Barge Papaa-305 were found dead in the stormy Arabian Sea in the aftermath of the Cyclone Tauktae.

Another 40-plus persons are still missing for whom searches continue, as the Centre ordered a probe into the tragedy.

The 37 bodies have been brought to Mumbai by Indian Navy ships which had gone on dare-devil rescue missions since the past 72 hours.The Union Ministry for Petroleum & Natural Gas late on Wednesday ordered setting up of a high-level committee to probe the sequence of events leading to the stranding of ONGC vessels in the Cyclone Tauktae, etc in and around the Bombay High Fields, around 175 kms off Mumbai. A total of 261 persons were on board Pappa-305, an accommodation barge which sank late on Monday.

The Afcons Infrastructure Ltd (AIL), which had contracted the sunken barge, expressed regrets over the fatalities in the high seas and said its immediate focus is to locate and rescue the remaining missing personnel on priority. "The safety and wellbeing of our people are our topmost priority, and we're doing everything possible to address this unprecedented crisis. We know nothing can ever compensate for the loss of a loved one, but we will extend our fullest support including financial assistance to the bereaved families in this hour of their need," the AIL added.

# Over 10K people in Cyclone Tauktae path in Maha, 49 bodies recovered

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

As the death toll in the barge tragedy in the Bombay High Fields rose to 49 on Thursday, it has now emerged that there could have been over 10,000 people in the path of the devastating Cyclone Tauktae as it whirled over to Gujarat on Monday.

In the tragedy that befell one of the adrift barges in the BHF earlier this week, 49 persons have died so far and another 26 are reported missing, though the figures of those not traced remain unclear. The Centre late on Wednesday ordered an all-encompassing high-level probe into the lapses that led to the tragedy that left over four dozen people dead on the high seas and many more missing.

Authoritative sources in the Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Ltd, which runs the BHF, said that there were "more than 7,600 people" on its 342-plus, big and small, 243 fixed and 99 floating, offshore installations there. Of the total human presence, around 6,900 were on different types of 94 vessels.Of all its assets in the Arabian Sea, five vessels were stranded, including one of

oil drill ship Sagar Bhushan with 101 people on board, but all were rescued safely.

Simultaneously, construction giant Afcons Infrastructure Ltd (AIL) revealed that it had a total of 1,290 people on 6 of its barges there, including 50 of its own (AIL) staffers.

Out of these 1,290, there were 261 on the Barge Papaa-305 which sank late on Monday and from which the Indian Navy managed to rescue 186 persons while 49 bodies were recovered, and the rest are "still missing" for whom search operations continue, as per an AIL statement.

# MAHA'S COVID DEATH TOLL CROSSES 85K MARK, OVER 5 MN CURED

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

With deaths rising up again on Thursday, Maharashtra's Covid-19 death toll crossed the 85,000 mark, while as new infections declined, the state achieved a record five million plus getting cured of the scourge, health officials said.

Against 594 deaths on Wednesday, fatalities rose to 738 on Thursday, taking the toll to 85,355.

The number of fresh cases again dropped below the 30,000 level, decreasing from 34,031 on Wednesday to 29,911 today, while the state tally rose to 54,97,448 now.

In Mumbai after a brief lull, the new cases increased from 1,329 on Wednesday to 1,433, taking the total to 692,785, while there were 59 deaths, raising total fatalities in the country's commercial capital to 14,410. The number of active cases fell to 383,253, as another 47,371 fully cured patients, again higher than the number of fresh infections, returned home, taking the total of cured to 50,26308, while the recovery rate further improved from 91.06 per cent to

91.43 per cent.The Mumbai circle - comprising Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and Raigad districts - recorded 3,767 cases, taking its case-load to 14,97,602 and with 168 more deaths, the toll rose to 26,411 now.

Of the day's fatalities, Pune led with 91 deaths, followed by 59 in Mumbai, 52 in Kolhapur, 50 in Raigad, 47 in Beed, 36 in Nagpur, 32 in Sangli, 31 in Palghar, 29 in Ratnagiri, 28 each in Thane and Solapur, 23 in Osmanabad, 22 in Amravati, 20 in Nashik, 19 in Aurangabad, 18 in Latur, 16 each in Ahmednagar, Parbhani, Wardha, and Gadchiroli, 15 each in Satara and Akola, 14 in Jalgaon, 10 in Chandrapur, eight in Bhandara, seven each in Sindhudurg and Gondia, six in Yavatmal, three in Washim, two in Jalna, and one each in Hingoli and Nanded.

Meanwhile, the number of people sent to home isolation stood at 29,35,409 now, while those shunted to institutional quarantine was at 21,648.

# *Mucormycosis kills 90 in Maharashtra, govt seeks injection stock from Centre*

On Thursday, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray is slated to discuss the drug's shortage with Prime Minister in a video conference.

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday urged the Union government to swiftly allocate to the state Amphotericin B injections, used to treat mucormycosis - now increasingly common in recovered Covid-19 patients.

The minister told mediapersons that the state has placed an order for 1.9 lakh Amphotericin B injections but is yet to receive delivery from the manufacturers. On Thursday, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray is slated to discuss the drug's shortage with Prime Minister in a video conference.

Maharashtra has at least 1,500 Covid-19 patients suffering from the black fungus, a term commonly used to refer to mucormycosis. Among them, 850 are in hospital."The state had last purchased 16,000 injections and has issued a global tender to procure

the drug. But since the drug is centrally controlled by government, we have urged the Centre to allocate more stock to Maharashtra at the earliest," Tope said. He added that they expect delivery of more Amphotericin B injections after May 31. "The next 10 days are crucial. We may face a shortage. The Centre must direct companies to supply the drug to us." So far, at least 90 people have died due to mucormycosis in the state. Maharashtra has placed an order of 1.9 lakh Amphotericin B injections, of which 60,000 are to be supplied by AIG Life Science. Maharashtra is also in the process of boosting local manufacture. "Locally, 20,000 more injections are being manufactured," Tope said.The state, meanwhile, has asked all hospitals enrolled under Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Arogya Yojana to treat mucormycosis patients for free, even if the cost crosses the insurance scheme's ceiling price of Rs 1.5 lakh.

Mucormycosis patients require specialist treatment, including ENT, neurosurgeon, plastic surgeon, ophthalmologist and a doctor of internal medicine.The state has issued a nine-page guidance document for doctors to treat the fungal infection. They include strict infection control measures, replacement of humidifiers and regular testing of masks, tubes, humidifiers and common touchpoint in hospitals for the fungus. Doctors have also been advised to keep an eye for symptoms and start treatment early.Discharge from nose, headache, cough, blocked nose, redness in eyes, blood vomiting and facial pain are the symptoms of the infection. Each patient requires about 100 injections of Amphotericin B. Doctors have been advised to reduce indiscriminate use of steroids while treating Covid-19 patients, reportedly behind many mucormycosis cases.Meanwhile, Tope said the state has issued a global tender for five crore vaccine doses, but is yet to receive response from a manufacturer to seal the deal.

# Pune tops list of 10 districts in Maharashtra with highest number of active Covid-19 cases

A state health department analysis shows that till May 18, Pune had 72,089 patients with Covid-19 followed by Mumbai with 39,790 patients. Thane had an active caseload of 28,257 patients.

**Team Absolute** | Pune

With cases still high in rural areas, Pune district tops the list of 10 districts in Maharashtra which have the highest number of active Covid-19 cases.

A state health department analysis shows that till May 18, Pune had 72,089 patients with Covid-19 followed by Mumbai with 39,790 patients. Thane had an active caseload of 28,257 patients and among the others were Nagpur, Solapur, Ahmednagar, Nashik, Satara, Kolhapur and Sangli. verall there are 4.19 lakh active Covid patients in these ten districts. Strict restrictions have helped bring down the rate of infection. The weekly positivity rate should dip below 10 per cent, state health officials have said, and only few have achieved this as per the state analysis. These include Mumbai, whose weekly positivity rate is 10.5 per cent, Aurangabad, Solapur, Jalgaon, Nandurbar and Bhandara. Till May 18, the weekly positivity rate in Satara was 32.78 per cent, while it was 27.6 per cent in Parbhani. The Covid positivity rate in Pune and Thane were at 20.23 per cent and 19.47 per cent, respectively. Other districts like Osmanabad, Hingoli, Beed, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Sangi and Amravati continue to range between 20 and 25 per cent.The state analysis has also raised concern over the high case fatality rates in at least five districts of Nanded, Nandurbar, Bhandara, Hingoli and Chandrapur. At Nanded, the CFR has shot up from 3.8 per cent (April 21-27) to 9.2 per cent (May 12-18). The state has also seen a near doubling of the weekly CFR from 1.1 per cent between April 21 to 27 to 2.2 per cent in the week May 12-18.Meanwhile, till May 18, there were 1.48 lakh Covid patients admitted across various hospitals in the state. At least 68,552 were critical and 23,620 were admitted to intensive care units, of which 8,097 were on ventilator support.

# Isolation of 119 in village in Maha's Nanded breaks Covid chain

The village of 6,000 people in the Bhokar taluka of Nanded showed the way of fighting the Covid-19 pandemic by simply adopting the path of isolating the infected. All residents of the village cooperated in the endeavour and managed to defeat the Covid onslaught in next 20 days of adopting the method that grabbed attention of the Central government as well.

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Bhosi, a village in Maharashtra's Nanded district, has set an example of how to break the chain of Covid-19 pandemic in rural areas and save villagers from the impact of the deadly disease.

The village of 6,000 people in the Bhokar taluka of Nanded showed the way of fighting the Covid-19 pandemic by simply adopting the path of isolating the infected.

All residents of the village cooperated in the endeavour and managed to defeat the Covid onslaught in next 20 days of adopting the method that grabbed attention of the Central government as well.Two months ago, after a wedding ceremony, a girl of the village was found infected with coronavirus. Subsequently, five more were found Covid-19 positive the following week, leading to a commotion in the whole village. At this time, Zilla Parishad member Prakash Deshmukh Bhosikar took the initiative to organise a health camp in the village in coordination with the Gram Panchayat and the Health Department to conduct Covid tests.

Rapid Antigen Test and RT-PCR tests revealed that 119 people were Covid-19 positive. Then, it was decided to isolate these patients to break the chain of Covid-19 spreading to others. Accordingly, all the infected people were persuaded to go and live on their fields for a period of 15-17 days, as mandated by the guidelines of Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for people with mild infections. Among them, farm labourers and others who did not own their farm land, were accommodated in a makeshift shed on Bhosikar's own farm land. Asha, the village health worker and Anganwadi sevika, would visit the fields every day and interact with patients. Food and medicines were also provided.

"After 15 to 20 days of isolation, the villagers returned home as corona-free persons only after a health check-up," said Union Health Ministry, which circulated a message to other villagers follow such methods to avoid spread of Covid.

Bhosikar said that a month and a half has passed since then and no new patient has been found in the village.

"Covid can be fought effectively by adopting the age-old path of isolation - as was being done during the days of plague - even in villages without adequate health facilities," he said. LakshmibaiAkkemwad, who spent a fortnight in quarantine on the fields, said "separation is the only way to save the villagers from getting infected".

Nanded Zilla Parishad CEO Varsha Thakur Ghuge said that the Bhosi pattern is a good example of joint coordination between the villagers, people's representatives and the administration, worthy of implementation in other villages of the district and elsewhere. As fresh challenges are being posed with the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic spreading to rural areas, the method adopted by residents of Bhosi village is really a laudable effort at a time when 2,57,72,440 people (including 31,29,878 active cases) have so far been infected and 2,87,122 have succumbed.Prime Minister Narendra Modi has warned about this and said, "creating awareness about Covid-19 among rural people and cooperation of Panchayat Raj institutions are equally important". Preventing the spread of Covid-19 in rural is a relatively complicated process due to the lack of testing facilities and health infrastructure, as compared to urban areas.

# RONIT ROY ON TAUKTAE IMPACT: I'VE NEVER SEEN GOA SO DESERTED

**Team Absolute** | Panaji

Actor Ronit Roy took to social media on Thursday to talk about the effect of the cyclone Tauktae over Goa. Ronit, who is a regular in Goa over the last 25 to 30 years, said he has never seen the place in such a deserted condition.

Ronit shared a video on Instagram where he says: "Goa GoaGoa... I've been coming here for the past maybe 25-30 years or so. I've never seen Goa so deserted. It's like off season kabhi off season hogaya. After the cyclone, trees and poles have fell, there is no electricity or water supply since the last five days..."

Along with his video, the actor wrote: "It's untrue that Nature has harmed mankind! Mankind and nature have borne the brunt alike. It's just one of those things. We shall keep loving! We shall learn a lesson or two and move on!"

Ronit recently shared videos on Instagram to offer glimpses of how his garden has been damaged by the cyclone and raw mangoes fell from his tree, which he collected in a basket.

Meanwhile, the remnant of Tauktae has weakened further into a well-marked low-pressure over east Rajasthan and adjoining west Madhya Pradesh, and is likely to move further northeast-wards into Uttar Pradesh over the next 24 hours.

# SAMIKSSHA BATNAGAR: HAVING PLAN B IS A GOOD IDEA

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Actress SamiksshaBatnagar feels it is important for actors have a back-up career option as the industry is very uncertain. She adds that she is looking at an alternative, too.

"Having a plan B or an alternate business model is definitely a good proposition if one is planning to be an artiste. Something that doesn't take your complete attention, is easy to set up and yields good financial returns. I'm yet to set up one but I am thinking on similar lines," said Samikssha.

However, she adds that all actors must be prepared to struggle once they are part of the profession.

"I can only say we must choose our options wisely. If you want to become an actor, you will have to go through a lot of hardship and you should be prepared for a rollercoaster ride. You need to be steadfast in your beliefs," she says.

Samikssha was recently seen in the web film "Black Rose".

# Smita Singh recalls how she coped with Covid

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

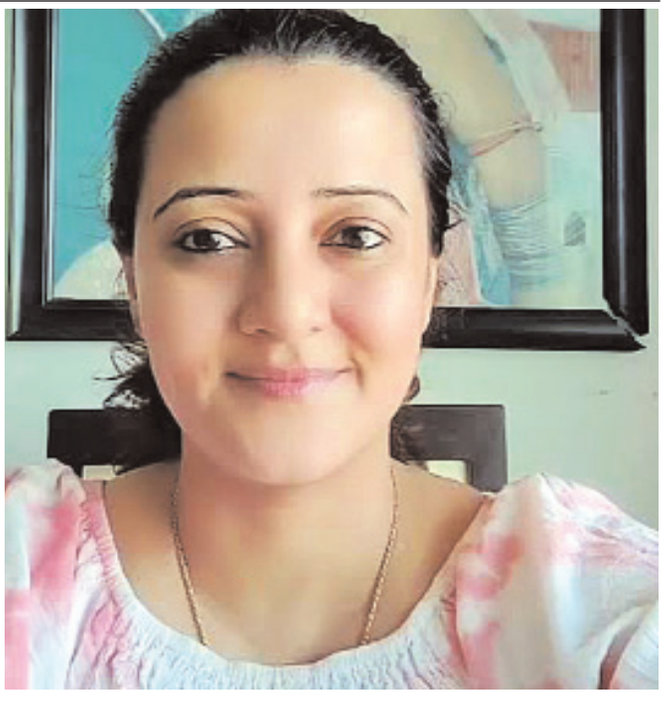
Actress Smita Singh and her parents recovered from Covid-19 recently. She recalls how the family coped with the virus together.

"I was at my hometown Lucknow, to be with my parents, as my mother was to go for eye surgery. But in between our visits to hospitals, my parents and I tested positive to Covid-19. We were quarantined at home. My parents were stressed because of all that was happening around us. We even lost a few family members to virus," said Smita.

While Smita and her parents, Dr Pratap Singh and Veena Singh, have recovered now, the actress recalled how, during the infection, she cut off all contact from social media and phone calls, and turn the home environment entertaining and positive.

"Apart from healthy diets to all the medical care required to recover Covid. I decided to trust god and believed that 'all Is well'. Apart from our doctors I wasn't not in touch with anyone or was active on social media. I made sure we all take complete rest and no stress. Finally, we tested negative," she added.

Smita is known for her work in in television series like "Bhagyavidhaata", "Hitler Didi" and "ThapkiPyar Ki".



FROM WEIGHT LOSS TO STRONG BONES

# Health benefits of Millets

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

When you ask people about the most common food in India, they usually respond with wheat, rice and pulses. Food grains are ingrained in our culture, but there are better alternatives. Did you know, humans require more than 20 mineral elements for the body to function properly?

Calcium (Ca), one of the essential macro minerals, is needed in relatively large quantities in the diet to maintain good overall health. There is one ingredient which is not only simple to prepare, but also entails many health benefits -- Millets. PrabhuGandhikumar Co-Founder TABP Snacks and Beverages shares simple ways prepare and use millets :

**Boosts Immunity Level :** Millets are high source of antioxidants and therefore are considered as an immunity booster to flush out harmful radicals from the body. It aids your body's detoxification by supplying antioxidants such as quercetin, curcumin, ellagic acid, and other useful catechins, which aid in the elimination of toxins and the neutralization of enzymes in your organs. Thus, preventing variety of health issues.

**Aids and manages weight loss in humans :** Millets help you lose weight since they are low in calories and gluten-free. They're high in complex carbohydrates and can help health-conscious people reach their fitness goals easily. Millets also help to lower your cholesterol levels and keep your weight in check.

**Helps in Digestion :** Millets have a high fiber content, which helps with digestion and prevents constipation, bloating, and acidity. Good digestion avoids digestive complaints which humans generally makes, like gastrointestinal cancer and kidney/liver complaints.

**Reduces Cardiovascular Risks :** Millets are high in essential fats, which provide our bodies with their own natural fats. It prevents us from storing excess fat in our bodies, lowering our risk of high cholesterol, paralysis, and other heart problems. Millets contain potassium, which helps to control blood pressure and increase circulation. When embarking on a journey of healthy living or attempting to lose weight, you do not deprive yourself by refusing to eat; rather, you substitute those foods that do not help in weight loss with healthier foods that promote good health. Millets will keep you fit and strong for the rest of your life. It provides a significant amount of nutrients for our human diet. Millets should be a part of your diet for solid, healthy bones!

# What Manav Kaul does when he is #boredinthehouse

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Actor ManavKaul has found a way to beat boredom when he is hanging about at home doing nothing.

He takes a selfie or two, and posts it on Instagram! Manav has posted a couple of selfies on Instagram, looking at the camera with an enigmatic smile.

Manav, who is also a poet, chose to caption his post using only hashtags to describe the pictures.

He wrote: "#selfshot", "#Random", "#boredinthehouse", "#mightdeletelater", "#randomlife", "#selfie", "#actor", "#actorslife", "#jobless".

The actor was last seen in the digitally-released anthology film "Ajeeb Daastaans".

He is all set to feature alongside Madhuri Dixit Nene in the upcoming thriller series "Finding Anamika". The show also features Sanjay Kapoor.

# RAVI DUBEY TESTS COVID-19 NEGATIVE, SHARES PHOTO

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Television actor and producer Ravi Dubey has tested negative for Covid-19. Ravi took to social media to share the news with fans and followers on Thursday.

Ravi tweeted a photograph flashing the victory sign and wrote: "hogayeji -ve."

Earlier this month, Ravi had issued a statement on social media informing that he had contracted the virus.

"Hi guys just got my report it's positive. Would advise anyone who has come in close contact with me in the past few days to take care of themselves and monitor their symptoms if any. I have isolated myself and I am in care of my near and dear ones. Stay safe, stay positive (as in stay optimistic). God bless us all," he had written.

On the work front, Ravi and his wife, actress Sargun Mehta, turned producers with the daily soap "Udaariyaan", which started airing earlier this year.

The show is inspired from the Punjabi film "SurkhiBindi" and features IshaMalviya, Priyanka Choudhary and Ankit Gupta in the lead.

# *Wear your professionalism when Work From Home*

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

With the second wave of coronavirus, work from home has made a comeback! Here are a few tips by ShivamSoni, CEO and Founder, Beyoung Folks Private Limited to help you get ready for all your virtual meetings and conference calls.

## Pick Your Comfort Zone

The first and foremost benefit people enjoy is that they can pick their comfort level without the pencil skirts or high heels. The pleasure of shorts and shirts together with flip flops while you are "working from home" is unbeatable. Men have been teaming their boxers with shirts, which is a delightful twist to work wear.

## Balance Home And Work

One has to assure your work decorum stays in place when WFH. So, never forget be at the top of your game even at home. Well it doesn't mean you need a tie, but you can simply be ready for a virtual meeting with crisply ironed shirts. Wear your professionalism.

## Do Not Forget It's Work

One has to also look in the mirror before being on the camera. Comb your hair so that you do not look you're right out of bed. Women should continue to wear their makeup as sometimes your face in the video speaks louder than your words.

## A Pattern Which Is Noticeable

Wear some patterns like stripes and checks. Even colours do the trick. For instance, try your hands on bold coloured styles like mustard yellow, black, red or blue. All these colours make for a memorable look. If you haven't bothered thus far it's time to maybe shop online on a number of retailers who are delivering. Also pick accessories to make an impact.

# JEREMY IRVINE IN TALKS TO PLAY GAY HERO ALAN SCOTT IN 'GREEN LANTERN'

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

English actor Jeremy Irvine is in talks to play Alan Scott in the series "Green Lantern". Scott is one of the higher-profile gay characters of the DC Universe. The fictional superhero, created in 1940, was the first character to bear the name Green Lantern.

When Green Lantern was re-developed in the sixties, the hero, Hal Jordan, made his entry as a test pilot and Scott was re-introduced as a Lantern from a parallel Earth. In the multiverse, he was reimagined as gay. The upcoming series stars Finn Wittrock as Guy Gardner, one of the many Green Lanterns expected to appear in the big-budget series from executive producer Greg Berlanti and Warner Bros. TV, reports hollywoodreporter.com.

Berlanti, along with Seth Grahame-Smith and Marc Guggenheim, is writing the HBO Max series, with Grahame-Smith as showrunner. Jeremy Irvine made his film debut in Steven Spielberg's 2011 release, "War Horse". The actor played a young Pierce Brosnan in "Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again" and was recently seen in the Jason Bourne-inspired spy series "Treadstone".

# Mischa Barton was bullied on The O.C. set

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Actress Mischa Barton claims she faced bullying on the set of the popular show "The O.C".

"It's a bit complicated. It started pretty early on because it had a lot to do with them adding Rachel (Bilson) in last minute as, after the first season, a series regular and evening out everybody's pay -- and sort of general bullying from some of the men on set," Barton said, according to a report in femalefirst.co.uk.

She added: "But, you know, I also loved the show and had to build up my own walls and ways of getting around dealing with that and the fame that was thrust specifically at me. Just dealing with like the amount of invasion I was having in my personal life, I just felt very unprotected, I guess is the best way to put it."

Barton felt "ashamed" before now about talking about what happened.

"I've always felt ashamed in a way to really talk about what went on behind the scenes because I've always been a very private person and very aware of people's feelings," she said.

The actress added while speaking to E! News: "Now that we're living in this era where we do speak out about our experiences and women do come clean about what was really going on behind the scenes and how they were treated, it's a slightly different thing."

Mischa insists leaving the show after the third season was the "best thing" for her and her health.

She said: "I was getting offers from big films at the time and having to turn them down. I had always been supporting in The Sixth Sense and any of those things."

Barton said that her dream was to be offered those lead roles, so that's what happened.

"It just felt like it was the best thing for me and my health and just in terms of not really feeling protected by my cast and crew at that point," she added.

# Rita Ora and beauTaikaWaititi spotted on romantic dinner date

**Sydney** | Agencies

Rita Ora and boyfriend TaikaWaititi were spotted on a dinner date together in Sydney after confirming their romance. The A-list pair were at the upmarket Chiswick restaurant, which specialises in modern Aussie cuisine.

Share

Hollywood director Taika wore a backwards baseball cap and bold knitted jumper, while Rita was more sophisticated in a smart black jacket, crop top and trousers.

Once inside, Rita removed her black shades and jacket, while Taika placed his cap on the seat beside him as they relaxed into the setting.

Rita had been secretly dating Thor director Taika for over a month after growing close Down Under.

The 30-year-old had sparked rumours she was dating the Oscar-winner, 45, after they were pictured embracing on a night out.

Last week they were pictured together for the first time since the relationship was revealed, holding hands while out and about in the city.

A source previously told us: "They've been a couple since early March but kept things low key. However, all their friends know about the relationship - they're really into each other."

Rita, who has been in Australia filming The Voice, was recently pictured with Taika, Chris Hemsworth, his wife Elsa and Matt Damon exiting a private jet in Sydney after a trip to the Gold Coast.

# Kaia Gerber thanks mom Cindy Crawford for letting her make fashion mistakes

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Model Kaia Gerber, who is the daughter of Cindy Crawford, said she is grateful to her mother for letting her make fashion mistakes.

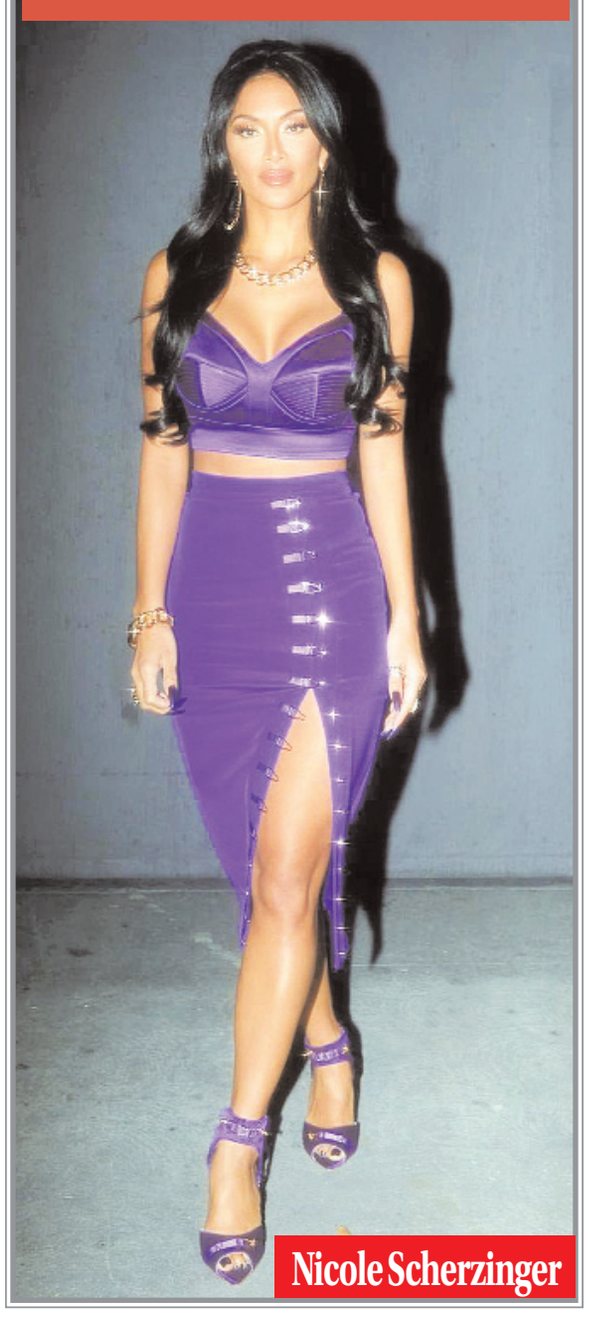
"The best style advice my mom has given me is less is more. She also let me make fashion mistakes, which I appreciate a lot. I think the biggest mistake that I made was trying to dress up a lot. When I was off duty, when I first started modelling, I was wearing heels all the time and full looks that lasted one season," Gerber said in a clip for Vogue's "7 Days, 7 Looks" series, according to a report in contactmusic.com.

She said her fashion style is similar to her mother's.

"My mom always referenced very classic looks. So, I get that from her. She always gave me very staple pieces to have, to travel with that you can interchange.

Sometimes, I will see a picture of my mom and I think it's me. This happened the other day. I posted a picture in this Marc Jacobs plaid dress, and she texted me and she's like, 'Kaia, I swear to God, I had that dress in the nineties', and she sent me a picture, and it was the exact same dress," said Gerber.

## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Nicole Scherzinger

# CHER ANNOUNCES BIOPIC ON BIRTHDAY

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Singer Cher, who turned 75 on Thursday, tweeted to announce that her official biopic is in the works. "Ok Universal is doing biopic with my friends Judy Craymer, Gary Goetzman producing. Theyy produced both Mamma Mia's and my dear dear friend 4 yrs, & Oscar winner.. Eric Roth is going 2 write it," Cher wrote on Twitter. The yet-untitled film is set at Universal Pictures, with "Mamma Mia!" producers Judy Craymer and Gary Goetzman on board to produce and Eric Roth penning the script, reports variety.com. Cher will serve as a producer on the film, too. As Cher mentions in her tweet, Roth wrote the screenplay for "Forrest Gump", which won him an Oscar in 1995, as well as 2018's "A Star Is Born" starring Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper. Roth and Cher previously collaborated on the 1987 release, "Suspect". Cher is a Tony Award away from achieving EGOT status, having won an Emmy in 2003, a Grammy in 2000 and an Oscar (as Best Actress) in 1988.

# *Mel Gibson joins Elisha Cuthbert, Josh Duhamel in 'Bandit' cast*

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Hollywood veteran Mel Gibson has joined the cast of the action thriller "Bandit", starring Josh Elisha Cuthbert and Josh Duhamel.

The Allan Ungar directorial, scripted by Kraig Wenman, is based on Gilbert Galvan Jr, who went by the name of Robert Whiteman and was dubbed the infamous Flying Bandit for pulling off 63 bank and jewellery heists. The book draws reference from Robert Knuckle's best-seller "The Flying Bandit" as well as journalist Ed Arnold's interviews with Galvan Jr, reports variety.com.

Duhamel is cast in the starring role of Galvan Jr, and the film traces how he escapes from a US prison and makes his way to Canada, and acquires his new identity. He gets married and settles down, claiming to be a travelling security consultant, but continues with his crime spree, the website adds.

EDITOR'S SPECS

# Deaths from Covid

***The US with 458,000 deaths topped the list, followed by the UK (94,400), Italy (89,100), Spain (84,100), and Poland (60,100). Overall, an estimated 979,000 total excess deaths occurred in 2020 in the 29 countries analysed. Except for Norway, Denmark and New Zealand, all other countries examined had more deaths than expected in 2020, particularly in men. The study by a team of international researchers, led by Nazrul Islam from the Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford, set out to estimate the direct and indirect effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on mortality in 2020 in 29 high income countries. Using a mathematical model, they calculated weekly excess deaths in 2020 for each country, accounting for age and sex differences between countries, and also for seasonal and yearly trends in mortality over the five preceding years. The total number of excess deaths was largely concentrated among people aged 75 or older, followed by people aged 65-74, while deaths in children under 15 were similar to expected levels in most countries and lower than expected in some countries. In most countries, age-specific excess death rates were higher in men than in women, and the absolute difference in rates between the sexes tended to increase with age. However, in the US, the excess death rate was higher among women than men in those aged 85 years or older. The study "adds important insights on the direct and indirect effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on total mortality", the researchers said. "Reliable and timely monitoring of excess deaths would help to inform public health policy in investigating the sources of excess mortality in populations and would help to detect important social inequalities in the impact of the pandemic to inform more targeted interventions," they added. India's overall tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,57,72,440 with 31,29,878 active cases and 2,87,122 deaths so far. According to the Health Ministry, a total of 3,69,077 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours, with 2,23,55,440 being cured from Covid till date. The Health Ministry said that a total of 18,70,09,792 people have been vaccinated so far in the country, including 11,66,090 who were administered vaccines in the last 24 hours. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 32,23,56,187 samples have been tested up to May 19 for Covid-19. Of these 20,55,010 samples were tested on Wednesday, which is the highest so far.***

NEARLY 1 MILLION EXTRA DEATHS RELATING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC OCCURRED IN 29 HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES IN 2020, FINDS A STUDY PUBLISHED BY THE BMJ ON THURSDAY.

# CAN COVID-19 VACCINES GET ADULTERATED?

**Rachel V Thomas**

India is known as the pharmacy of the world, but the country has also been battling the challenge of counterfeit drugs for long. While the list includes many life-saving drugs and currently fake Remdesivir and oxygen concentrators, a fake Covid-19 vaccine can dampen the efforts of governments and add to the already overwhelming healthcare system in India, says an expert.

The second wave of Coronavirus in India has had a greater impact on the country's healthcare system. People have been running helter-skelter to get medicines, oxygen cylinders, concentrators, masks, PPE kits and other essential life-saving things. The sudden surge in demand unfortunately boosted the trade of fake medicines and other essentials for Covid treatment.

Early this month, four people were arrested in Pune for selling fake vials of Remdesivir for Rs 35,000 -- a price far above the official Rs 2,000 price cap for the original medicine. Police said the men had sold at least seven vials filled with liquid paracetamol to a relative of a coronavirus patient. In Mysuru, a nurse at a private hospital was arrested for selling Remdesivir vials that had been refilled with antibiotics and saline solution. There are many such cases.

**❑ But what if the Covid vaccine gets adulterated?**

"We have strong immunisation networks, however, we need to be extra vigilant in this case, as any adverse situation will have a long impact. The Covid vaccine can save a life, but a falsified vaccine will kill human beings as well erode public confidence in healthcare systems, healthcare professionals, and government agencies," Nakul Pasricha, Chief Executive of Pharma Secure, a company that offers drug verification technology to pharmaceutical companies in India, told correspondent.

"Greater risk of harm to consumers will result in greater liability for healthcare providers. Circulation of falsified or fake vaccines will add to the already overwhelming crisis that the country is facing thus hampering the efforts of our governments, healthcare organisations, and our frontline warriors," he added.

**❑ What causes these rampant counterfeits?**

"Scarcity breeds falsification and counterfeiting, that is a fact. Adding to that, the absence of anti-tampering, anti-counterfeiting and traceability measures is making their task

quite easy," Pasricha noted, adding "counterfeiters are becoming smarter, and we need to stay one step ahead of them".

Similar to global companies, measures must be taken at brand level to ensure the product supply chain integrity, safety, and security, he said.

While physical solutions, such as tamper-evident packaging, eradicate product tampering, digital solutions such as QR codes or barcodes ensure supply chain integrity along with data intelligence. At the regulator level, most of the countries in the world have anti-counterfeiting regulations for pharma and healthcare, Pasricha said.

"Protecting Covid-19 vaccines and other essential products from falsification and diversion require cutting-edge authentication and traceability solutions, public-private collaboration, and national-level support," he said.

To secure the vaccine supply chain, Pasricha recommends three steps: (a) Implementation of serialisation-and-traceability authentication on product packaging; (b) Training staff at healthcare centres to differentiate genuine vaccines from falsified ones; (c) Contingency plan to alert stakeholders in case falsified products are discovered in the supply chain.

"It is high time that we must implement these regulations within India the way we have been doing while exporting vaccines and drugs for almost a decade. Fighting counterfeiting is a long-term battle and we need to start somewhere. We have to start now, and we have the ways and means to do it," emphasised Pasricha, who is also the President, Authentication Solution Providers' Association (ASPA), a non-profit organisation.

Counterfeiting is also not just confined to India, but is a global problem, causing a tremendous impact on public and economic health.The World Health Organisation, in March, issued a warning about counterfeit and stolen Covid-19 vaccines being sold on the dark web.

Doses of AstraZeneca, Sputnik, Sinopharm and Johnson & Johnson vaccines are being offered for prices between $500 and $750 on the dark web, according to media reports. From about 20 dark web vendors in November 2020, the number grew to 600 in January and more than 1,200 by March this year, showed a report from the cybersecurity firm Check Point. Besides the Covid-19 jabs, vaccine passports and faked negative test papers are also being sold.

While Covid-19 is a current pandemic, counterfeiting is an ongoing menace and every stakeholder's role is important in combating it.

# 233 inmates in 16 Assam jails are Covid positive: IG (Prisons)

**According to Inspector General of Prisons, Barnali Sharma, in the first wave of the Covid pandemic around 3,000 prisoners were infected by the contagious virus and all of them had recovered from the dreaded disease.**

**Sujit Chakraborty**

In all 233 inmates of 16 of the total 31 jails in Assam are currently under treatment after they tested Covid-19 positive, a top prison official said.

"Compared to the first wave of the pandemic, the situation in the jails in the second wave is completely under control," the IG (Prisons) claimed. She said that of the 233 Covid positive prisoners, 54, the highest number, are in Dibrugarh Central Jail.

Among the 54 Covid patients, a top leader of the banned United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I) Jiban Moran, a close aide of the outfit's Commander-in-Chief Paresh Baruah, also tested positive for the virus a few days back.

"The Dibrugarh Central Jail currently has 530 inmates. Over the past two days, 54 have been found to be infected by Covid-19. The inmates who have tested positive have been kept in isolation in the jail complex," Sharma told correspondent over phone.

She said that due to many steps taken including the release of many prisoners during the second wave of the disease, lesser number of inmates were infected by the coronavirus.

The steps included conducting Rapid Antigen Tests in all the 31 jails in the state, setting up of isolation facilities and strengthening the medical treatment facilities in the prisons.

"Following the directives of the Supreme Court, Gauhati High Court, Union Home Ministry and state government we have released many prisoners on parole, PR Bond (personal recognizance bond) and interim bail," said Sharma.

The official said that the state level committee headed by a Gauhati High Court judge would meet on Thursday to discuss the prevailing situation in the 31 jails, including six 6 central jails, across Assam.

In pursuance to the Supreme Court's order, different state governments of the northeastern region have taken several steps including interim release of thousands of undertrials, to prevent the spread of coronavirus in jails. Assam has reported 5,835 new Covid cases and 73 deaths over the past 24 hours.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the impact of the second wave has been "extremely severe" in Assam and the state's medical infrastructure including production of oxygen is being further strengthened.

The number of active cases in Assam rose to over 46,393 late on Tuesday night against 25,027 active cases on May 1. Assam has so far reported 3,40,858 Covid cases, while 2,344 persons have succumbed to the disease.

Of the 34 districts in Assam, the situation in five districts is very serious -- Kamrup Metro, where the active case tally stood at 921 on Tuesday night, followed by Nagaon (451), Dibrugarh (445), Kamrup Rural (410) and Cachar (355). Assam's Guwahati, also the northeastern region's main commercial hub, falls in the Kamrup Metro district.

# FAKE COVID VACCINE, TEST CERTIFICATE MARKET GROWING: RESEARCH

Israel-based researchers have found an online market of fake vaccine and test certificates with over 1,200 vendors in the UK and worldwide on dark web and on instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram and Jabber. The vendors on these platforms sell false documents for 25 pound, the media reported.

Researchers from the cybersecurity firm Check Point found evidence of forgeries of vaccine cards issued by the UK National Health Service and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fake test certificates and products claimed to be Covid vaccines, the Guardian reported on Sunday.

From about 20 dark web vendors in November last year, the number grew to 600 in January and more than 1,200 by March, the researchers found.

The majority of people caught in the UK with fake negative Covid test certificates were from poorer nations, including African, South American and Asian countries, a Border Force official was quoted as saying to the Guardian.

Besides, anti-vaxxers -- individuals who refuse to take the vaccine on the grounds of baseless conspiracy theories and spread dangerous disinformation - also buy the forged certificates, Liad Mizrachi, senior researcher at Check Point, said.

The researchers noted that in the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, darknet produced the masks, the protective equipment, and later drugs were also on sale. Initially the Chinese-made Sinovac and Russian-produced Sputnik jabs were offered, later Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were also offered in the darknet.

"As at March, vendors were supplying from all the countries in Europe -- Spain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden a (plus) Mexico, Australia," said Oded Vanunu, head of product vulnerability research at Check Point.

"After vaccinations, the next step was the certificates and negative tests," he added.

The researchers said individuals who proudly post images of themselves holding the cards on social media unwittingly provide the source for forgeries. Without an official global database recording individuals' vaccination status, the system will be open to fakes and forgery, Vanunu said.

# *Second Covid wave dents auto sector's recovery momentum: ICRA*

**"Not only have many auto OEMs and auto ancillaries resorted to plant shutdowns as a restrictive measure, but also automotive dealerships across regions have not been operational in light of regional restrictions imposed by various states and local authorities in order to curb the pandemic," the ratings agency said.**

The second wave of Covid-19 has dented the recovery momentum of automobile sector's Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and auto-ancillaries, said ratings agency ICRA.

As per an ICRA note, while these trends would cause near-term supply disruptions in the sector, the larger and prolonged impact will be on various demand drivers.

Consequently, the ratings agency revised the growth estimates for most of the different automotive segments downwards.

According to Shamsher Dewan, Vice President & Group Head, ICRA Ratings:

"The second wave of the pandemic, the intensity of which has taken the entire country by surprise, is expected to impact near-term automobile purchases, across segments. Unlike the first wave, where infections were largely localised to urban clusters, the second wave has seen deeper and wider penetration, including into rural hinterlands."

"Additionally, the significant medical spends have eroded the purchasing power of individuals and families to a greater extent, which would impact large ticket discretionary purchases like vehicles, at least over the near term."

Besides, the agency cited that within the industry, two-wheeler segment is expected to be the most impacted, with the target consumer group's affordability and demand sentiment sharply hit by the second wave.

Accordingly, domestic two-wheeler volumes in FY2022 are expected to grow by 10-12 per cent now as against 16-18 per cent earlier.

Furthermore, the domestic passenger vehicle (PV) segment would also see a softening of demand due to the spread of pandemic to hinterlands, hit on disposable income and rising vehicle costs and will see a lower growth of 17-20 per cent now as against 22-25 per cent expected earlier.

In terms of commercial vehicle (CV) segment, ICRA said the Medium and Heavy Commercial Vehicles (M&HCVs) would see relatively lower impact from the second wave of the pandemic, as construction and mining activities continue largely unimpacted so far.

However, it pointed out that Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs) are likely to face some demand moderation on account of the rural impact of the pandemic, likelihood of financing challenges for the segment, and some slackening of e-commerce demand due to the increased restrictions and wariness.

Additionally, the bus segment, ICRA said, would continue to be severely impacted due to wipeout of the seasonal demand from schools, increased prevalence of work-from-home practices, weak tourism prospects and a general aversion to public transportation.

Overall, the CV segment is expected to grow by 21-24 per cent in FY2022 now, as compared to 27-30 per cent that was expected earlier.

Similarly, tractor segment, which had reported record sales in FY2022 despite the pandemic impact, are likely to witness largely flattish volumes this year, especially due to the high base of the previous year.

Moreover, the rural spread of the pandemic would also act as a dampener.While growth prospects primarily hinge on how the monsoon would pan out, stable crop prices, healthy crop harvest and procurement, along with government support offers some comfort regarding stability of farm cash flows, ICRA said.

The agency expects the segment to close the year with 1-4 per cent growth, a slight moderation from the 4-6 per cent growth expected earlier.

"While most of the segments would continue to report growth on a Y-o-Y basis, given the favourable base, the growth estimates stand revised downwards given the sharper and longer-than-expected impact of the second wave," Dewan said."While pick-up in the vaccination drive is expected to support flattening of the curve going forward, an elongated recovery cycle or possibility of a third wave offers further downside risks to these estimates."

# RUSSIA, US SEEK COOPERATION AMID TENSION, WITH 'SERIOUS DIFFERENCES'

**Reykjavik** | Agencies

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met here for the first time, expressing willingness to cooperate but also admitted "serious differences" amid tense relations between the two countries.

Meeting with his counterpart on the sidelines of an Arctic Council meeting in the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik, Lavrov on Wednesday said Moscow and Washington have to decide on their further cooperation despite the "serious differences" on a series of issues between the two sides, reports Xinhua news agency.

"We have serious differences in the assessment of the international situation, we have serious differences in the approaches to the tasks which have to be solved for its normalisation," Lavrov said."Our position is very simple," the Russian diplomat said."We are ready to discuss all the issues without exception, but under the perception that the discussion will be honest, with the facts on the table, and of course on the basis of mutual respect."

For his part, Blinken said the administration of President Joe Biden seeks "a predictable, stable relationship" with Russia, noting that Washington wants to work with Moscow on some areas of mutual interests, including the anti-pandemic fight, climate change, as well as the nuclear issues related to Iran and the Korean Peninsula.

But at the beginning of his speech, Blinken said that it was "no secret that we have our differences" and that Washington would respond "if Russia acts aggressively".In a tweet later, the Secretary of State said that he "also reiterated our resolve in response to Russian actions" against Ukraine and opposition figure Alexei Navalny, who is currently jailed.

Wednesday's meeting will be the first between a member of US President Joe Biden's administration and a high-ranking Russian official.

Last week, the State Department had said that the focus of the talks between Blinken and Lavrov will be whether an agreement will emerge on Biden's proposed summit with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.Biden had suggested the two meet in a third country at a summit, but it is unclear whether Putin will accept the invitation.US-Russia ties have nose-dived over Washington's allegations of election interference and cyberattacks, the treatment of Navalny and the conflict in eastern Ukraine.The two sides have imposed a wave of sanctions and counter-sanctions.

# Israel determined to continue Gaza operation: Netanyahu

- Netanyahu later in the day issued a video statement on Twitter, saying: "I am determined to continue this operation until its objective is achieved: to restore quiet and security to you, citizens of Israel."

**Tel Aviv** | Agencies

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the country was determined to continue its fight against the Palestinian Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip after US President Joe Biden called for "a significant de-escalation".

The White House said in a statement that Biden told Netanyahu on Wednesday "that he expected a significant de-escalation today on the path to a ceasefire" in the deadly violence, reports Xinhua news agency.

Netanyahu later in the day issued a video statement on Twitter, saying: "I am determined to continue this operation until its objective is achieved: to restore quiet and security to you, citizens of Israel."The two leaders have held three previous talks over the phone since Israel launched its "Guardian of the Walls" offensive in Gaza on May 10. According to the latest data by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 219 Palestinians, including 63 children, were killed in Gaza.

In the West Bank, 25 Palestinian deaths were tallied, including four children.

Israeli sources reported 12 people killed, including two children and a soldier.

Thousands of people are injured, mainly in the West Bank and in Gaza

Militant groups fired barrages of rockets from the Gaza Strip at Israel, while Israeli fighter jets kept carrying out intensive airstrikes on buildings and infrastructure in the besieged enclave.

# Canada to research on efficacy, safety of Covid vax in pregnancy

**Toronto** | Agencies

The Government of Canada will invest approximately Canadian $1.3 million for two studies on vaccine safety and effectiveness in pregnant women.

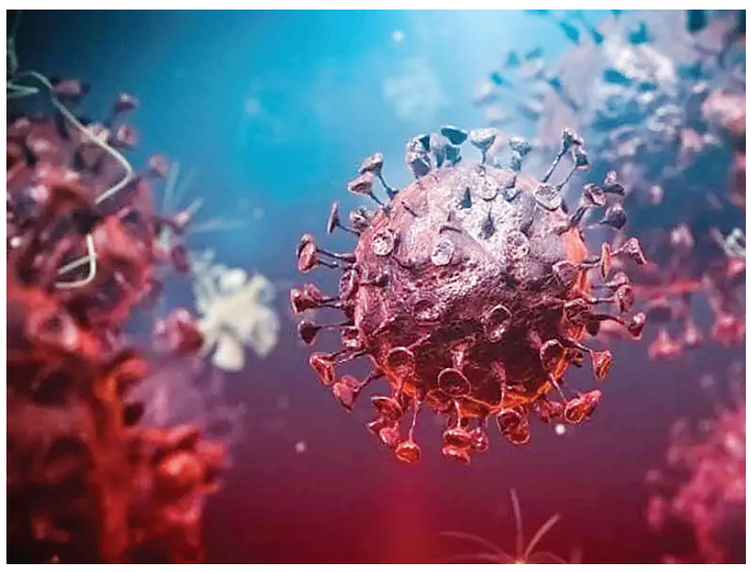
While pregnant or breastfeeding individuals were excluded from the initial mRNA and viral vector Covid-19 clinical trials, recent real-world evidence is showing that mRNA Covid-19 vaccines are safe during pregnancy. Additional research and surveillance of Covid-19 vaccination among pregnant and lactating populations is needed. The results will be communicated regularly to public health officials to help inform decision making for the ongoing Covid-19 vaccine administration rogramme.esearchers from the University of British Columbia, leading the first study called COVERED, are launching a Covid-19 vaccine registry for pregnant and breastfeeding people across Canada. "We are asking pregnant and breastfeeding individuals in all 10 provinces and three territories to sign-up for the registry, after which they will be invited to fill out a survey," said study lead researcher Deborah Money, Professor at the varsity's Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

"Through this registry and survey, we will monitor the safety of the various vaccines for those who are pregnant and breastfeeding.

We will also study whether the vaccines are more effective -- or less so -- in this group. It is important that these data become available to pregnant and breastfeeding individuals so that they are able to make an informed choice about getting a Covid-19 vaccine," she added.The second study will link information collected from the Better Outcomes Registry and Network (BORN) Ontario Registry, which collects data from every baby born in Ontario, with the province's vaccination registry from the Ontario Ministry of Health (COVaxON). Researchers will monitor the health outcomes and effect of vaccines on mothers and their babies, comparing individuals who received a Covid-19 vaccine during pregnancy, or just before, with those who did not. The findings from this study will help to fully inform pregnant people, their care providers, and public health policymakers.

# Strong links between our hormones and Covid-19 confirmed

**London** | Agencies



The human body's endocrine system that makes hormones is strongly involved in the SARS-Cov-2 infection -- the virus behind Covid-19 -- so much so that evidence of an "endocrine phenotype" of Coronavirus has emerged, according to a statement by the European Society of Endocrinology.

A team of scientists from the UniversitatAutonoma de Barcelona in Spain looked at the available evidence with respect to Covid-19 across a number of endocrine conditions and related factors: diabetes, obesity, nutrition, hypocalcemia, vitamin D insufficiency, vertebral fractures, adrenal insufficiency, as well as pituitary/thyroid issues and sex hormones.

The effect on hormones cannot be ignored in the context of Covid-19," said lead author Manel Puig from the varsity, adding "the evidence is clear".

"We need to be aware of the endocrine consequences of Covid-19 for patients with a known endocrine condition such as diabetes, obesity or adrenal insufficiency, but also for people without a known condition. Vitamin D insufficiency for example is very common, and the knowledge that this condition has emerged frequently in the hospitalised Covid-19 population and may negatively impact outcomes should not be taken lightly," Puig added, in the statement published in the journal Endocrine.

Diabetes has emerged as one of the most frequent comorbidities associated with severity and mortality of Covid-19, according to a rapidly increasing amount of published data on the incidence of Covid-19 in patients over the last year.

Mortality in Type-1 or Type-2 diabetes has consistently increased during the year of pandemic,A and evidence is emerging that a bidirectional relationship between diabetes and Covid-19 may exist, both in terms of worsening existing conditions and new onset of diabetes.

Similar trends were identified for people with obesity. Obesity increases susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 and the risk for Covid-19 adverse outcomes.The researchers posit that nutritional management is important both for patients with obesity or undernourishment in order to limit their increased susceptibility and severity of infection. Vitamin D, calcium and bone are other areas showing a growing body of evidence that better monitoring and solutions for patients are needed in the context of Covid-19.

# ISRAEL PUMMELS HAMAS TUNNEL SYSTEM

**Tel Aviv** | Agencies

The Israeli Army on Thursday said it "neutralised" an extensive tunnel system dug by the Palestinian Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip, keeping up its military offensive in the enclave as diplomats continued to search for a ceasefire deal.

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) said that its aerial assault and artillery bombardment continued overnight, hitting targets including the house of a Hamas commander in Khan Younis, an arms factory and rocket launchers, dpa news agency reported.

The IDF said that the tunnels were built over five years and allowed Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, to move ammunition, fighters and food within the coastal strip. There was pressure on both sides to declare a ceasefire, with diplomats trying to spur a breakthrough after 10 days of fighting that has left more than 220 Palestinians and 12 people in Israel dead.Tens of thousands of Gaza residents have fled their homes.

US President Joe Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday that he "expected a significant de-escalation" to start.But Netanyahu said he was determined to continue its fight against the Palestinian Hamas militants "until its objective is achieved: to restore quiet and security to you, citizens of Israel".

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas began a visit to Israel and the Palestinian Territories on Thursday to promote the international community's ceasefire efforts.Maas is to hold talks with Netanyahu, Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, Defence Minister Benny Gantz and President Reuven Rivlin.He will also meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Senior Hamas official Moussa Abu Marzouk told Lebanon's al-Mayadeen television that he expected "a ceasefire to be reached within a day or two".

"I think that the ongoing efforts regarding the ceasefire will succeed," he said, adding that he assumed any deal would only apply to hostilities in Gaza and not encompass issues related to unrest in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

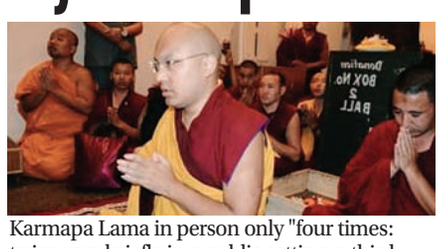
"The talk is now on stopping fire only, and not on stopping any other form of resistance." More rockets were fired by Palestinians at Israeli towns after midnight on Thursday. According to the IDF, some 4,070 rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip in Israel's direction over the past week and a half.

## EU LAWMAKERS DIFFER ON COVID VAX PATENT WAIVER

**Brussels:**No consensus was reached among the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) regarding a proposal for a temporary waiver of patent rights for Covid-19 jabs in a bid to speed up the global vaccine rollout. A statement issued by the European Parliament following the debate on Wednesday said that several MEPs had asked the European Commission to support a waiver of the intellectual property rights for coronavirus vaccines as a core element in speeding up the rollout processes in low and middle income countries, reports Xinhua news agency.

# Ex-nun alleges she became pregnant after sexual assault by Karmapa Lama

**Vancouver** | Agencies



Claiming that she was in a 'marriage-like" relationship with the Karmapa Lama and became pregnant when he sexually assaulted her in 2017, a Canadian woman is suing the second highest-ranking Buddhist monk for spousal support.

The British Columbian Supreme Court in Vancouver on Tuesday admitted a petition by Vikki Hui Xin Han, a former Tibetan Buddhist nun, of Richmond city against the Karmapa Lama. The Karmapa Lama, whose real name is OgyenTrinley Dorje and who fled to India from Tibet in 1999, ranks second in spiritual hierarchy among Tibetan Buddhists. The monk has denied romantic links with the woman, but acknowledged having provided her "emotional and financial support for the benefit of the child the claimant told him was his daughter", according to court documents.The woman says she met the Karmapa Lama in person only "four times: twice very briefly in a public setting; a third time in private, when she alleges the respondent sexually assaulted her; and a fourth and final occasion, when she informed the respondent she was pregnant with his child".The two first met at a large puja in 2014. The experience of the puja convinced the woman to become a Buddhist nun and she met the Karmapa Lama after the ceremony to seek his approval, the court documents said.Before the birth of her daughter on June 19, 2018, the Karmapa Lama allegedly sent her $420,000 and C$350,000 to buy a home, wedding ring, etc.

# *Pro-Palestine group attacks Jew diners in LA*

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

A group of Jewish diners were attacked by some a group who were waving pro-Palestinian flags at a restaurant in Los Angeles, prompting the city's police department to launch a probe into the case as an incident possible hate crime.

The incident occurred shortly at around 10 p.m. Tuesday in Los Angeles downtown, Xinhua news agency quoted the CBSLA news channel as saying in a report on Wednesday.

A group of men wearing all black got out of a car and started to attack the diners who were meeting at the restaurant to plan a wedding, yelling racial slurs, CBSLA said.

One of the diners, who is not Jewish, was quoted as saying that the attackers waving pro-Palestinian flags approached and began throwing bottles at him and the others he was dining with.

The man said he was physically attacked when he tried to defend the group, adding he was pepper-sprayed during the attack and had to go to a hospital.

Los Angeles Daily News reported on Wednesday that police said the restaurant apparently was not damaged, and only one minor injury was reported and no one was arrested. The incident occurred amid the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which triggered two pro-Palestine rallies in Los Angeles in the last four days.

On Tuesday afternoon, a large crowd of pro-Palestinian demonstrators gathered outside the Israeli consulate.

Last weekend, thousands of pro-Palestinian demonstrators rallied calling for an end to the violence.

Los Angeles Councilmember Paul Koretz said the restaurant incident was one of two attacks directed at Jewish victims over the course of 24 hours."Last night, members of a caravan of pro-Palestinian protesters targeted innocent Jewish diners in a vicious attack while they were sitting outside a sushi restaurant, and a separate attempt was made by two drivers to run over a Jewish man who had to flee for his life. Both incidents were captured on video. These were anti-Semitic hate crimes that are unconscionable," Koretz said in a statement released Wednesday morning."We are not going to allow the violence in the Middle East to spill out onto the streets of Los Angeles. Everyone is entitled to express their opinion but never through violence."

# Renewed fighting in Yemen's Hodeidah kills 8

**Sanaa** | Agencies

Eight people were killed in renewed armed confrontations between Yemen's warring factions in the Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, a military official said. "Two groups of the the Houthi rebels carried out an attack in an attempt to to advance towards key areas located in the southeastern parts of Hodeidah," the official told Xinhua news agency on Wednesday He said that the Houthis' attack sparked intense armed confrontations with the joint pro-government forces stationed in the area.The clashes that lasted for hours resulted in the killing of eight people from the two-warring sides and injuring several others.

Last week, five people were killed and 11 others wounded during armed confrontations in Hodeidah's eastern parts. The port city of Hodeidah, a vital lifeline for the war-torn country, has witnessed a shaky ceasefire between the government and the Houthi rebels since they reached a UN-sponsored truce in Stockholm in December 2018. The truce was seen as the first phase toward a nationwide ceasefire to end Yemen's more than six years of civil war.Hodeidah is under the control of the Houthis, while the government forces have advanced to the southern and eastern districts.

Both sides have been blaming each other for truce breaches and sporadic military escalation.Yemen has been mired in civil war since late 2014, when the Houthi militia seized control of several northern provinces and forced the internationally-recognised government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi out of the capital Sanaa.

# WACA TO HOST HISTORIC WOMEN'S TEST BETWEEN INDIA AND AUSTRALIA

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

India women's team will play their first ever pink-ball Test against Australia at the WACA Ground in Perth. It will be the first Test match between the two teams in 15 years.

It will also mark the first time a Test match will be played at the WACA since the men's Ashes Test in December 2017.

"Taking forward our commitment towards women's cricket, I am extremely pleased to announce that Team India @BCCIwomen will play in their first-ever pink ball day-night Test later this year in Australia," Jay Shah, the secretary of Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), wrote on his Twitter handle.

Cricket Australia confirmed it through a statement, "The WACA Ground will host just the second ever women's day-night Test match when

Australia take on India in a multi-format series to kick off the 2021-22 international summer of cricket."

The decision to play in Australia comes after severe criticism from various quarters that the current BCCI dispensation has ignored women's cricket. The Indian women's team didn't play any cricket for almost a year before the home series against South Africa.

Even the women players' contracts were announced only on Wednesday night, well over a month after contracts for men's team were announced.

That aside, the women's squad for the tour of England was announced much after the men's squad was announced even though both the teams are to depart for England on June 2 in the same charter flight.

In all, the Aussies and Indians have played nine Tests, with Australia leading 4-0. Five matches have ended as draw.

# Boards will be reluctant to send players to India for T20 WC: Hussey

**Sydney** | Agencies

Even though Indian cricket board (BCCI) is confident it will be able to host the T20 World Cup in October-November, doubts remain on whether teams will be prepared to travel to India for the tournament.

Former Australia batsman Michael Hussey, also the batting coach of Chennai Super Kings (CSK), said on arrival from India that it will be difficult to host the tournament in India as cricket boards will be reluctant to send their teams to the country reeling under the pandemic.

"I think it's going to be very difficult in my view to play that tournament in India," Hussey, who is serving quarantine, was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.com.

Hussey was one of those who got infected by Covid-19 and had to get treated in Chennai before departing to Australia.

While CSK saw Hussey and bowling coach Lakshmipathy Balaji get infected, Kolkata Knight Riders, Delhi Capitals and SunRisers Hyderabad were the other teams affected by the virus. It eventually led to the postponement of the tournament.

"We're talking about eight teams in the IPL. I think there are probably similar number, maybe more teams coming in from overseas [for the T20 World Cup], there would be more venues. As I said earlier, if they're playing in different cities, that is when the risk goes up.

## WTC FINAL BETWEEN INDIA AND NZ LIKELY TO BE ATTENDED BY CROWD

**Southampton** | Agencies

Encouraged by presence of crowd in the ongoing match against Leicestershire at Rose Bowl, host county Hampshire looks set to welcome crowd during the World Test Championship (WTC) final between India and New Zealand which is scheduled to take place here on June 18-22. Cricket in England last witnessed crowd in September, 2019 and the last season was played in front of empty stands. West Indies, Pakistan and Australia had toured England last year. Rod Bransgrove, head of the Hampshire County Club, was quoted as saying by Cricbuzz that England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) is allowing 4000 fans for the WTC final. "It is a high interest game and there is a good demand for it," he said.

## SHAKIB RETURNS TO BANGLADESH ODI SQUAD

**Dhaka** | Agencies

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has been included in Bangladesh's 15-member ODI squad for the first two of their three-match series against Sri Lanka. Shakib had missed Bangladesh's previous series against New Zealand due to a thigh injury. Bangladesh host Sri Lanka for three ODIs, all of which will be played in Dhaka. The matches will be played on May 23, 25 and 28. Shakib and fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman were in quarantine after returning from the postponed 2021 Indian Premier League. The pair started training on May 18.

## 'FLYING SIKH' MILKHA SINGH TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

**Team Absolute** | Chandigarh

Legendary athlete and 'Flying Sikh' Milkha Singh, 91, was diagnosed coronavirus positive on Thursday after one of his staff members tested positive. He isolated himself at his residence here, doctors said. "His condition is stable, but has been down with fever since last (Wednesday) night," said a doctor. His wife Nirmal Milkha Singh said a cook, who has been with the family for 50 years, was earlier diagnosed Covid-19 positive. Since the pandemic broke last year, Milkha Singh has been appealing to the people to exercise daily during the lockdown while staying at home.

# Juventus win record extending 14th Coppa Italia title

**Rome** | Agencies

Federico Chiesa scored the decisive goal as Juventus sealed a record-extending 14th Coppa Italia title with a 2-1 win over Atalanta.

It has been a disappointing first season in charge for coach Andrea Pirlo, with the Bianconeri knocked out of the Champions League at the last-16 stage by Porto and their hopes of qualifying for next season's competition hanging by a thread ahead of the final round of Serie A fixtures this weekend. And they looked set for more despair when Ruslan Malinovskiy cancelled out Dejan Kulusevski's fine strike before half-time, DPA reports.

Juve stormed back in the second half, though, and sealed victory in their 20th Coppa Italia final thanks to Chiesa's composed finish with 17 minutes remaining.

Gian Piero Gasperini's side deservedly pulled level four minutes before the interval when Malinovskiy collected Hans Hateboer's pass and lashed a powerful strike past Buffon from just inside the area.

Chiesa was not to be denied in the 73rd minute, collecting Kulusevski's pass and then sliding home his 13th goal in all competitions this season. Atalanta battled in the closing stages, but they never really came close to finding a goal that would have forced extra time, with Juve holding on to consign last season's final defeat to Napoli to history.

# Bach, Japan PM promise safe Olympics

**Tokyo** | Agencies

International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga both reiterated their commitment that the postponed Olympic Games will be held as scheduled in a safe way. "Together with our Japanese partners and friends, I can only re-emphasise this full commitment of the IOC to organise safe Olympic and Paralympic Games for everybody," Bach said before a three-day virtual meeting attended by IOC officials and Tokyo Olympic organisers, Xinhua reports. "To accomplish this, we are now fully focused on the delivery of the Olympic Games." Bach said that the IOC will send additional medical personnel to help the organisers ease the shortage of medical staff. He also revealed that at least 75 percent of the athletes and participants to stay in the Olympic village will be vaccinated.

"At this moment, as many as 75 percent of the residents of the Olympic Village are already vaccinated or have secured vaccination in time before the Olympic Games," Bach said, adding that there are good reasons to believe that this figure will be well "above 80 percent" by the time the Games kicks off.

"The most important principle is very clear, the Olympic Village is a safe place and the Olympic and Paralympic Games of Tokyo 2020 will be organized in a safe way," he said.

Suga said at an Upper House plenary session that his government will push ahead with preparations to host the Games safely.

He added that by having athletes and people involved in the Games take full anti-virus measures, they will be able to take part in the events with peace of mind.

He said officials will consider strict measures, such as making sure locals don't meet with Games participants.

# Cheptegei fails to add world 3000m record to his kitty

**Ostrava (Czech Republic)** | Agencies

Joshua Cheptegei, the world champion in 10,000 metres, failed to break long-standing men's 3000m world record in the Continental Tour Gold meeting here on Wednesday night.

The 24-year-old talented runner clocked 7 minutes 33.24 seconds, a personal best and a world leading time for the 3000m race, but was nearly 13 seconds short of Kenyan Daniel Komen's time of 7 minutes 20. 67 seconds set in 1996.

After an outstanding 2020 season, during which he broke world 5,000m and 10,000m records, Cheptegei was aiming to add 3000m record to his kitty this season.

He was on a world record pace in the first half of the race covering the first 1600m in 3 minutes 55 seconds but slowed down as the race progressed. In August 2020, Cheptengei clocked 12 minutes 35.26 seconds to erase the previous world record of 12 minutes 37.35 seconds in 5,000m, and later in October, he clocked 26 minutes 11.00 seconds to improve the previous 10,000m world record by six seconds.

Last month, Cheptengei clocked an impressive 3 minutes 37.36 seconds for the 1,500m race in Kampala's high altitude.

# *Adapting to Tokyo time zone key to success: Savita*

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

India women's hockey team goalkeeper Savita Punia said their preparation for Tokyo Olympics includes adapting to the local time zone and weather conditions.

"With just two months to go for the Tokyo Olympic Games, the focus is on high intensity sessions to maintain good fitness. We are also adapting to different time zones to perform well in Japan. The local weather conditions in Tokyo are going to be quite challenging and we are preparing for that as well," the 30-year-old said on Thursday.

Savita said the players are not letting the pandemic hamper their spirit.

"We are staying optimistic and have our eyes firmly on our goal which is to succeed in Japan," she added.

Savita said the women's hockey team has established itself at the continental level, but now is the time to move ahead to make an impression at world level.

"We are one of the leading hockey playing nations in Asia, having won silver at the 2018 Asian Champions Trophy and Jakarta Asian Games. The Indian team also won the 2017 Asia Cup. Now, the aim is [to do well at] the Olympics," she said.

Savita is also of the opinion that the national women's team has developed right temperament required to face top teams of the World.

"We got good exposure during the Tokyo Olympic cycle. It has strengthened our mind-set to play tough matches," she added.

# *Former pacer Tsotsobe accuses Graeme Smith of racism*

**Johannesburg** | Agencies

Former South Africa fast bowler Lonwabo Tsotsobe said former captain Graeme Smith had threatened to retire if Thami Tsolekile was selected as wicketkeeper in the national squad. Tsotsobe said that Tsolekile's selection was blocked by Smith so as to stop a black player coming into the fold and AB de Villiers was then made wicketkeeper.

"Tsolekile was destined to replace Boucher, but suddenly AB de Villiers was made the keeper. Wicketkeeper is a specialist position that needed a specialist, which de Villiers is not," said Tsotsobe in a seven-page document he submitted to Cricket South Africa (CSA) in which he described his experiences with racism within the country's cricket structure, according to South Africa's Sunday Times.

"The idea of assigning keeping duties to de Villiers was to block the selection of a black player in the fold of Tsolekile. This was confirmed by Smith who categorically stated that if Tsolekile was selected he would retire with immediate effect," alleges Tsotsobe, who played nine Tests, 94 ODIs and 18 T20Is between 2009 and 2014. Smith, who is currently CSA's director of cricket, captained South Africa for 11 years between 2003 and 2014.

# INDIA'S TOUR OF SL ON SCHEDULE, DRAVID MAY COACH TEAM

**Colombo** | Agencies

India's limited overs tour of Sri Lanka is on schedule as of now despite Covid-19 worries, and will likely give Rahul Dravid first taste of coaching the India senior team.

The details of the series in July are still being worked out and there has been no official intimation on it from the cricket boards of the two countries.

Following the announcement by Sri Lanka Cricket on Wednesday that Asia Cup T20 tournament won't happen due to Covid-19 pandemic, there was speculation that India's white ball series could also be shelved.

The visiting Indian team is expected to play a three-match ODI series and a five-match ODI series.

However, an official in the know of things confirmed that the series is on schedule as of now but the boards are keeping an eye on the situation.

"There has been no change in plan since the announcement of the series by the BCCI president Sourav Ganguly. However, both boards may have to keep an eye on the situation," said the official.

It has also been learnt that Rahul Dravid is likely to coach the team which will comprise of white ball specialists and could be led by Shikhar Dhawan.

The India coaching staff, including head coach Ravi Shastri, bowling coach Bharat Arun and batting coach Vikram Rathour, will be on tour in England for five Test matches and the World Test Championship final during the time India's white ball specialists play in Sri Lanka.

Since the main coaching staff will be on tour in England, Dravid is expected to step in ahead of others because of his experience of coaching the A and under-19 sides, it has been learnt.

Dravid has earned rave reviews for unearthing and grooming talent during his stint as the India A and India under-19 sides.

Many of the India youngsters, including those who could be touring Sri Lanka, have played under Dravid as coach.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India is yet to confirm Dravid's appointment as coach.

# Global cues, slowdown fears subdue equities, metal stocks fall

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

**The S&P BSE Sensex traded at 49,841.92, lower by 60.72 points, or 0.12 per cent, from its previous close. Similarly, the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange traded at 14,988.55, down by 41.60 points, or 0.28 per cent, from its previous close. Besides, both the key indices started on a positive note with a gap up opening, however, ceding their initial gains soon afterwards.**

Fears over an economic slowdown as well as negative global cues subdued India's benchmark stock indices during the afternoon trade session on Thursday.

At 1.20 p.m., the S&P BSE Sensex traded at 49,841.92, lower by 60.72 points, or 0.12 per cent, from its previous close.Similarly, the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange traded at 14,988.55, down by 41.60 points, or 0.28 per cent, from its previous close.Besides, both the key indices started on a positive note with a gap up opening, however, ceding their initial gains soon afterwards.

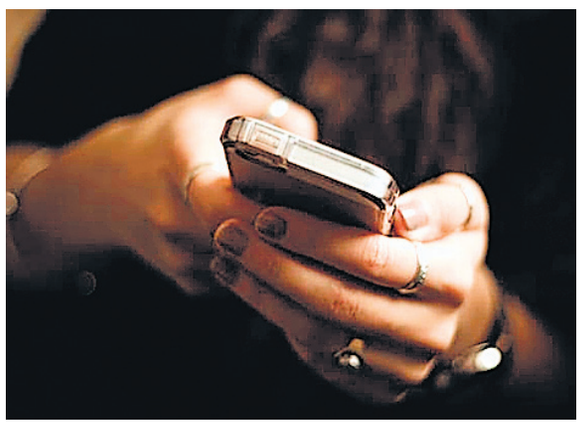
Globally, most of the Asian stock markets traded in the red.Sector-wise, losses were witnessed in the Metals, FMCG, IT, Auto and Banking space whereas Realty, Media, Financial Services continue to trade in the positive territory.

On the domestic front, Nifty opened flat to negative and has been moving downwards since its opening levels."Despite the corrective move, market breadth continues to strongly be in favour of the advancing counters. Currently, Nifty is retesting the breakout line of the 'Falling Channel' on daily chart and holding above the same," said Jay Purohit, Technical & Derivatives Analyst, MOFSL.

"The ongoing correction of last two sessions shall be used as a buying opportunity as this is mere a corrective move within an uptrend. Going forward, resistance can be seen around 15300 whereas support is placed at 14900 and then 14700 levels."

According to Gaurav Garg, Head of Reserach at CapitalVia Global Research: "In morning trades, Indian equity indices continued their lackluster performance ahead of the weekly expiration of index futures and option contracts."

"US market decline further Federal Reserve participants agreed that the US economy remained far from the Central bank's target. Asian markets were mostly trading in red following the global peers."



## 'Interoperability of digital wallets would increase penetration of digital payments'

"The RBI has made four key changes that will create a much greater level playing field between bank and non-bank PPI issuers.

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

With RBI making mobile wallet interoperability mandatory from FY23, the non-bank (prepaid payment instruments) PPI issuers or the digital wallets has been brought at par with traditional bank accounts in terms of services offered with the move enabling much wider usage and penetration of digital payments in the country, experts have opined.

Yesterday the RBI issued guidelines mandating inter-operability for full KYC wallets (aligned with the framework outlined in its policy statement last month) and increasing the limit from one lakh to two lakhs for these instruments. The RBI has allowed a cash withdrawal facility for all non-bank issued full KYC PPIs and had earlier permitted non-banks to access centralised payment systems such as NEFT and RTGS. These quasi bank payment features will enable much wider usage and penetration of PPIs pushing the growth of digital payments," said Shilpa Mankar Ahluwalia, Partner-FinTech, ShardulAmarchandMangaldas& Co.

Interoperability, in simple terms, means that customers who have completed full KYC will be able to transfer funds to beneficiaries of other PPIs or banks. So from wallet service provider like Paytm you can transfer money to day PhonePay and vice-versa.

Moreover, cash withdrawals are also permitted now from non-bank wallets within limits set by the apex bank. RBI has set maximum limit of Rs 2,000 per transaction with an overall limit of Rs 10,000 per month per PPI.

What this means is that cash withdrawal points would substantially increase from the limited option available now in the form of bank ATMs and point of sale (PoS) terminals, said another expert with a leading company consultancy firm.

Currently cash withdrawal is limited to full-KYC bank issued PPIs but the new development has extended the benefit of withdrawal from all PPIs.

During the April 2021 Monetary Policy Committee meeting, RBI had announced that PPIs (prepaid payments instruments) such as digital wallets have to be made interoperable. After the RBI released its Master Directions in October 2017, digital wallets were expected to become interoperable within six months. But the plans were put on hold. Now, it has been mandated for fully know-your-customer (KYC) compliant PPIs.

"It shall be mandatory for PPI issuers to give the holders of full-KYC PPIs (KYC-compliant PPIs) interoperability through authorised card networks (for PPIs in the form of cards) and UPI (for PPIs in the form of electronic wallets). Interoperability shall be mandatory on the acceptance side as well," the RBI has said in its May 19 notification.The maximum amount outstanding in respect of full-KYC PPIs (KYC-compliant PPIs) has been increased from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 2 lakh, the notification added.

## 'Indian hospitality industry declined 39% in RevPAR during Q1 2021'

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The Indian hospitality industry witnessed a decline of 38.7 per cent in Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) during the first quarter of 2021 as compared to 2020, said a report on Thursday.According to JLL's Hotel Momentum India (HMI) Q1 2021, a quarterly hospitality sector monitor, RevPAR in the top six Indian cities has decreased by 48 per cent in Q1 2021 as compared to Q1 2020.Total number of signings in Q1 2021 stood at 28 hotels comprising 2,064 keys, recording a decline of 53 per cent as compared to the same period last year.

International operators dominated signings over domestic operators with the ratio of 54:46 in terms of inventory volume.

Goa grew to be the RevPAR leader in absolute terms, despite the single digit decline of RevPAR by 1.1 per cent in Q1 2021 compared to Q1 2020. This was due to a 6.4 per cent increase in occupancy levels.

Demand for domestic leisure travel amidst international travel restrictions continues to make Goa the fastest recovering market in absolute term.

Bengaluru saw the sharpest decline in RevPAR in Q1 2021, with a 60.6 per cent decline compared to the same period of the previous year.

Demand and supply of operational inventory in six major cities declined by 6.7 per cent and 4.2 per cent, respectively in the first quarter of 2021.

Jaideep Dang, Managing Director, Hotels and Hospitality Group, South Asia, JLL said: "In Q1 2021, hospitality industry witnessed a revival, with most leisure markets performing exceptionally well. The pace of recovery started picking up due to increase in corporate travel, but it was short lived as the onset of second wave brought back travel restrictions and derailed the recovery.

We expect that the hospitality sector in India will mostly remain under stress in 2021. However, the hotels are much nimbler and better prepared in terms of their SOPs and cost structures to navigate business interruptions this year. A few trades may emerge in the hotel investment space given the dynamic cash flow situations."

# New IT filing portal from June 7

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The Income Tax Department will launch a new income tax filing portal on June 7.Therefore, the existing portal will remain suspended for 6 days from June 1 to June 6," said a circular by the Income tax Department.

As per the circular, officers including AOs, CIT(A) etc access the information for taxpayers from the portal.

Likewise, taxpayers also use extensive use of the portal for filing their ITR, checking refund and raising grievance among others. Due to unavailability of the system for six days, officers have also been advised to not fix anything for compliance during these 6 days.

The Department has directed that any hearing or compliance is to be fixed only from June 10 such that taxpayers are given ample time to respond via the new system.

As per the official circular, the officers in the field including AOS, CIT (A), PCIT interact with taxpayers through E-proceedings over the E-filing portal directly or through the NeAC/NFAC for issuance of notices, sCNs and getting a response to various e-proceedings, conducting of video conference or adjournments, issuing questionnaires, summons, letters.In preparation for the transition to the new system, the existing E-filing portal will not be available to both taxpayers as well as Departmental Officers for a period of 6 days from 1" June to 6th June 2021.

"Hence, it is requested that all officers may be immediately informed about this so that they may not fix any compliance dates during this period. All Officers may be directed to fix any hearing or compliances only from June 10 onwards to give taxpayers time to respond on the new system. If they have already scheduled any hearing or compliance which requires submissions online during this period, they may prepone or adjourn the hearing and reschedule the work items after this period, etc", the circular said.

"They may also view/download any submissions in E-proceedings prior to June 1" and the PDF of any ITRS and non-ITR forms that may be needed by them in advance so that they can continue to work in the ITBA system including completion of assessment proceedings where no further interaction with the taxpayer is necessary. It is clarified that the ITBA system and the CPC systems will continue to function for assessment-related functions. All Orders, notices issued during this period, however, will be made visible to the taxpayer only after the new portal goes live on June 7th, 2021," the circular said.

It would also encourage all Officers to complete all their urgent tasks involving interactions with taxpayers prior to June 1 to avoid the blackout period or typical initial teething issues in the transition.

## EDUKEMY ANNOUNCES 100% COVID SUPPORT SCHOLARSHIP

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Edukemy, India's first EdTech Company in the non-STEM segment, today announced a COVID Support Scholarship Program to support students preparing for the upcoming UPSC examinations.
Students can avail a 100% scholarship on Previous Year Question (PYQ) sessions for GS and Optional subjects.

The course structure has been designed meticulously and comprises of Booster PYQ (Previous Year Questions) Sessions for answer writing in GS and Optional subjects of UPSC Mains 2021. Students will learn to sculpt effective answers using model handwritten answers and will learn the art of incorporating current affairs and factual information into answer-writing to improve the overall score. As the UPSC Prelim Exams have been postponed to 10th Oct 2021, students are seeking expert advice and Edukemy has come forward to support UPSC aspirants in these trying times. The expert faculty of Edukemy has devised a unique strategy in light of postponement of UPSC 2021 thus, enabling students to ace mains and prelims for UPSC 2021 at the comfort of their home.Sharing his views on the exclusive scholarship, ChandrahasPanigrahi, CEO and Co-Founder, Edukemy said, "As India is navigating through a challenging time with the current wave of COVID, we remain committed to supporting students in these tough times. This is a step forward in accelerating our mission of taking students closer to their goals."

## Consumers spared of hike; petrol, diesel prices unchanged on Thursday

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Consumers have been spared of another increase in auto fuel prices with oil marketing companies (OMCs) deciding to keep petrol and diesel rates unchanged on Thursday.This is second consecutive day of fuel price pause and follows slight softening in global oil market over demand concerns prime markets in Asia seeing rising cases of coronavirus.

With fuel prices spared of another increase, the price of petrol continues to remain at Wednesday's level of Rs 92.85 a litre and diesel Rs 83.51 per litre in Delhi.Across the country as well the petrol and diesel price remained static on Thursday but its actual retail prices varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states.

Before Thursday, OMC were revising fuel prices on every alternate day for last one week rather than undertaking changes on a daily basis as has been practise. Accordingly, the Wednesday's price hold came after there was an

increase in prices on Tuesday. These was no price increase on Monday as well.Also, on Sunday while petrol and diesel prices were raised by 24 and 27 paisa per litre respectively, there was no price revision on Saturday.
Similarly, while fuel prices were raised on Friday, it remained unchanged in the previous day.Under daily price revision, OMCs revise petrol and diesel prices every morning benchmarking retail fuel prices to a 15-day rolling average of global refined products' prices and dollar exchange rate.
However, in a market where fuel prices need to be increased successively, alternate day price revision seems to be the flavour.It is worth noting that with 10 price increase in May, the retail price of regular petrol has already reached over Rs 99 a litre in Mumbai. Petrol prices are already over Rs 100 per litre in several cities in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Premium petrol has been hovering above that level for some time now.

Petrol prices have increased by Rs 2.30 a litre Delhi in May in the 10 increases so far. Similarly, diesel prices have risen by Rs 2.78 per litre in capital this month.IANS had written earlier that OMCs may begin increasing the retail price of petrol and diesel post state elections as they were incurring losses to the tune of Rs 2-3 per litre by holding the price line despite higher global crude and product prices.

With global crude prices at around $ 67 a barrel mark (lower than $ 70 it touched last week), OMCs may keep a watch and freakin' from any further increase in fuel prices for some time now.

## CATERPILLAR AND THE CATERPILLAR FOUNDATION DONATE ADDITIONAL $3.4 MILLIONIN COVIDRELIEF

**New Delhi:** Caterpillar Inc. And the Caterpillar Foundation, the company's philanthropic arm, announced today a series of targeted relief efforts to support countries struggling with a significant rise of COVID-19 cases.As part of the Caterpillar Foundation's ongoing response to COVID-19 and commitment to building stronger, more resilient communities, it is collaborating with partners and relief organizations to provide essential medical supplies and improve equitable access to vaccines."Supporting communities in need around the world aligns with the Caterpillar Foundation's strategy and our company's values," said Caterpillar Chairman and CEO Jim Umpleby. "Through partnering with relief organizations, the generosity of our employees and the Foundation's platform, we are helping fight the spread of COVID-19 and give front-line workers resources to act quickly and save lives." Currently, India is experiencing the world's worst outbreak; the unprecedented surge of COVID-19 cases has resulted in an overwhelmed healthcare system and shortage of oxygen throughout the country.The Caterpillar Foundation is giving $1 million to help India's health system deliver care to families and communities by funding medical equipment, including oxygen concentrators and oxygen plant optimization, as well as critical medical supplies, across identified hot spot locations. In addition to the Foundation's efforts, Caterpillar India is providing an initial contribution of $1.4 million, enabling an additional supply of oxygen, donating beds with ventilator support to hospitals, supporting vaccination drives and setting up temporary relief shelters.

# BITCOIN CRASH: THINK LONG-TERM, SAY INDIAN CRYPTO LEADERS

**The price of bitcoin tumbled below $40,000 for the first time in months and other cryptocurrencies were also pressured on Wednesday, after the People's Bank of China apparently warned against using digital coins as payment.**

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

A day after the key cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum saw a bloodbath, industry players on Thursday requested people not to lose hope and take a long-term view of their investments.The price of bitcoin tumbled below $40,000 for the first time in months and other cryptocurrencies were also pressured on Wednesday, after the People's Bank of China apparently warned against using digital coins as payment.

It was the second jolt to the fast-growing crypto market after Tesla last week applied brakes on Bitcoin as a payment mode to buy its electric vehicles, citing environmental harm.

According to Avinash Shekhar, Co-CEO of ZebPay, a 40 per cent dip in the Bitcoin price from its all-time high looks dramatic but is normal in many volatile markets, including crypto, especially after such a large rally.

"Such corrections are mainly due to short-term traders taking profits. Investors should invest in education first. Research the underlying value of Bitcoin, Ethereum, and other crypto assets as you might look at a company's information before buying stocks," Shekhar said in a statement.

On Wednesday, nearly $1 trillion was wiped off the market capitalisation of the entire crypto sector, before it got stablised at around $40,000 per coin.

"Use strategies like rupee cost averaging and SIPs to more confidently manoeuvre through volatility and take a long-term view," Shekhar said.

The crypto crash came as the Indian government plans to come up with a Cryptocurrency Bill.Experts are of the view that India should formulate regulations in the lines of the developing countries which regulate these currencies including the US, UK, Japan and Australia, among others.

According to Nischal Shetty, Founder and CEO, WazirX, India's crypto policy should be geared towards fostering innovation, and customer safety.

"We should be able to prevent bad activities but keep the door to innovation open by allowing everything else to be built."

Currently, there is no single regulator in a position to regulate the entire crypto sector in the country.Industry body IAMAI has also appealed to the government not to ban cryptocurrency, while saying that a robust mechanism to regulate th ecosystem is needed.While the contents of the Bill are not yet known, the Centre in February had said that the Bill would seek to ban all private cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and ether.However, in the recent past, the government had hinted that it would take a 'calibrated approach' towards digital assets.

In March, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that all windows on cryptocurrencies will not be closed down, bringing relief to the stakeholders.

Earlier this month, Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das also said that the central bank has flagged major concerns over cryptocurrency to the government.

According to industry experts, crypto may become the most important asset class of the 21st century.

# JR NTR REVEALS HIS LOOK IN 'RRR'

**Team Absolute** | Hyderabad

Telugu superstar Jr NTR revealed the look of his character KomaramBheem in SS Rajamouli's upcoming film "RRR". The actor shared the look with fans on the occasion of his birthday on Thursday.

"He's a rebel full of heart. It's been a pleasure to play this intence role and I am happy to introduce to you all one of my biggest challenges so far. #KomaramBheem from #RRRmovie," he captioned the image.

In the picture, Jr NTR as KomaramBheem leaps above a stormy sea, spear in hand and ready to charge.

The film also stars Ram Charan, Alia Bhatt and Ajay Devgn in leading roles. The cast along with the director uploaded Jr NTR's look on their respective social media accounts.

The film is said to be based during India's freedom fight and traces the lives of two freedom fighters.

## Himanshi Khurana's grocery therapy is an instant hit on social media

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Punjabi star and "Bigg Boss 13" contestant HimanshiKhurana has revealed her therapy mantra in a new social media post, and the idea seems to be trending.

In a picture that has garnered over 3,29,984 likes, Himanshi is seen striking a casual pose at a grocery store. She turns out in in a printed peplum blouse and denims, with minimum make-up.

"My therapy is grocery shopping," Himanshi captioned the image.

Himanshi made her debut in the Punjabi Music industry with the song "Jodi: Big day party" in 2010. She gained greater fandom in Bigg Boss 13, where she also met model-rapper AsimRiaz. Her chemistry with Asim on and off the screen continues to make waves. Professionally, they have appeared in songs like "Kallasohnanai" and "Khyaalrakhyakar" among others.

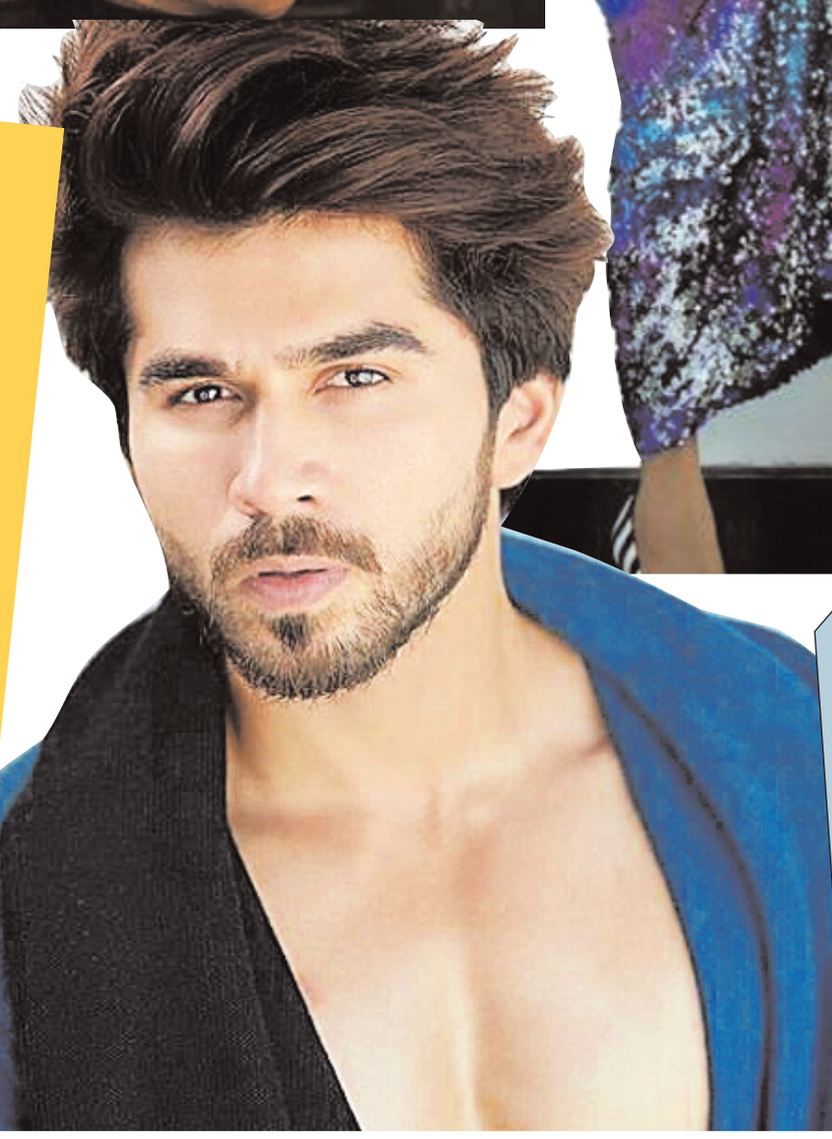
# SHRISHTI BEHL ARYA QUITS NETFLIX

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

SrishtiBehl Arya, Director-International Original Film, has decided to leave Netflix after more than three years and a slate of more than 35 original films including Guilty, AK vs AK, Bulbbul and Serious Men, and our first Tamil and Telugu films, with PaavaKadhaigal and Pitta Kathalu.

Srishti reported to VP of content for India, Monika Shergill. Her last day with Netflix will be this Friday, May 21, 2021. In an official statement, Shrishti said, "Leading the Netflix originals film team in India over the last three years has been the adventure of a lifetime. I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity and have learned so much along the way. I couldn't be more proud of the stories we've told, from first-time directors, female filmmakers, established voices and so many fresh faces. I wish this wonderful team all the very best and can't wait to see what's ahead."

Film remains a focus and priority investment for Netflix in India. The India Content team is led by Monika Shergill who will continue the momentum the network has built into 2022 and beyond.



## TV ACTOR KARAN KHANDELWAL PITCHES IN WITH SUPPORT FOR COVID VICTIMS

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Television actor Karan Khandelwal says he is trying to pitch in with aid for those who are badly affected by the pandemic. "I am tied up with two NGOs. One of them was started by his friend. They donate beds, oxygen, medicines to Covid patients. Along with that, they provide meals to 100 people every day. I have also joined an organisation on their sanitisation drive," he said. The actor is known for his work in shows like "Haiwaan", "Siddhi Vinayak" and "SaathNibhanaSaathiya". He currently plays Lucky in the show "Ranju Ki Betiyaan" that airs on Dangal TV.

# ASHISH VIDYARTHI: 'OTT IS A BRILLIANT MIX BETWEEN CINEMA AND TELEVISION'

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Actor Ashish Vidyarthi, who will be seen in the OTT show "Sunflower", says he loves the medium as it is a healthy mix of cinema and television.

The actor says he had ample freedom to add his nuances to his character in the show.

"OTT is a very new thing for me. I think it is a brilliant mix between cinema and television. My work experience with the cast and crew of Sunflower was very fulfilling, as an actor I got a lot of freedom from my director, which helped me learn a lot in many different ways," he says.

He also adds that there is no "hierarchy" among actors on an OTT show set, which makes shooting a fulfilling experience.

"The series has a great ensemble cast, and the casting is apt. I enjoyed working with each and every actor in the show. The thing I liked the most was each of us was having fun with each other and there was no hierarchy while playing our roles, because of which the experience of working with such an eclectic cast and director was extraordinary," he says.

The series has been directed by VikasBahl and co-directed by Rahul Sengupta. It stars Sunil Grover, RanvirShorey, Girish Kulkarni, ShonaliNagrani and SonalJha, and will stream on Zee5 from June 11.

## Chiranjeevi charitable trust to work for Covid relief

**Team Absolute** | Hyderabad

Chiranjeevi Charitable Trust debuted on Twitter to announce covid relief work today. The tweet says that the bank is going to be operational in a week. Mega star Chiranjeevi and his son Ram Charan are not only known for being stalwarts of cinema but also for their philanthropy. In 1998, when Chiranjeevi was reading a newspaper, he came across an article on a patient unfortunately passing away because they couldn't find blood on time. Moved by the article, he immediately launched a life saving landmark, the Chiranjeevi Blood Bank. It is no news that the bank has saved millions of people across the Telugu states and the entire country.

With the pandemic shaking the country to unimaginable bound, making people to run from pillar to post, many of them succumbing to oxygen deprivation, Chiranjeevi have risen up to the cause to start an Oxygen Bank to curb the oxygen crisis across Telangana and Andhra. The Oxygen Banks will be monitored by his son Ram Charan and are

Said to be handled by the Fans Association President of the respective districts.

Chiranjeevi and his son Ram Charan have been actively helping a lot of Covid patients both emotionally and financially. Fans collectively echo that words can't express the life saving help the father and son duo are doing to society.



## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Esshanya S Maheshwari

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