

# absolute india

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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM NEW DELHI, MUMBAI AND BHOPAL

**NATION** > 02  
Plea in SC seeks President's rule in Bengal...



**HOLLYWOOD** > 07  
Ben Rekhi: Cinema is meant to be a shared...



**SPORTS** > 10  
Mourinho to replace Fonseca as Roma...



## Highly Unpredictable, 15 times more fatal strain found in Andhra

None is spared, as observed that it is affecting the younger population in a big way, including those who are fitness freaks and have high immunity levels. It is also observed that cytokine storm is occurring faster, and some are responding to treatment and some are not.

Hyderabad | Agencies

The new variant has shorter incubation period and the progress of the disease is much rapid. While it is too early to state whether the new coronavirus variant discovered by CCMB (Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology) N440K or AP variant is at least 15 times more deadly than the earlier ones, and may be even stronger than the Indian variants of B.1.617 and B.1.618. Scientist at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, Divya Tej Sowpati, closely working on genome sequencing of coron-

"We have observed that the new variant has shorter incubation period and the progress of the disease is much rapid. In the earlier cases, a patient affected with the virus would take at least a week to reach the hypoxia or dyspnea stage. But in the present context, patients are reaching the serious condition stage within three or four days."

P.V. Sudhakar, Principal, Andhra Medical College

avirus said that "The defining mutation is N440K, a mutation that was known since last year and widely prevalent in Andhra Pradesh. When tested in cell culture studies, they appeared to spread quite quickly but that's not how it always plays out in the real world. Vinod Scaria, scientist at the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, New Delhi, "N440K is slowly dying out and was fast being replaced by two other variants - B.1.1.7 and B.1.617 in almost all southern states including Kerala. Experts also point out that unlike during the first wave, a shorter exposure is enough to acquire the virus, which enables an infected person to infect four to five persons, within a shorter contact span. According to the experts the bottomline is - this variant is highly unpredictable.



## YOU CAN BURY YOUR HEAD LIKE OSTRICH, BUT WE WON'T: DELHI HC TO CENTRE

# ON ITS FAILURE

A division bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli asked the government to explain why a contempt case should not be initiated against it. It directed the Centre to show cause why no action should be taken against it for failure to comply with the Supreme Court and High Court orders to supply required oxygen to the Delhi government.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday told the Centre that it intends to see the compliance of its order in connection with the oxygen supply to the national capital. The Centre's failure to implement the order also irked the court and brought the government close to a contempt case. The court noted that it sees grim reality everyday of people, who are not able to secure oxygen or ICU beds in hospitals, which have reduced beds due to shortage of oxygen. The high court also sought appearance of two Central government officers to be present before it on Wednesday to respond to the notice. It also rejected the Centre's submission that Delhi was not entitled to 700 metric tonnes of medical oxygen against the backdrop of existing medical infrastructure.



"Are you living in an ivory tower? Where are you living? Because the Delhi government didn't raise the demand, people should be allowed to die. Is this what it's come to? You want to quibble while people are losing lives? You can put your head in sand like ostrich, we will not."

## EIGHT ASIATIC LIONS AT HYDERABAD ZOO TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID



Hyderabad: Eight Asiatic lions at the Nehru Zoological Park (NZP) in Hyderabad have tested Covid-19 positive, in what is believed to be the first case of human to animal transmission in India. The Zoo reported the lions with mild respiratory distress. Based on the guidelines of the Central Zoo Authority, their nasal and oral discharge samples were collected and sent for tests to the Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species at CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (LaCONES-CCMB). The samples were tested using RT-PCR, and found positive for coronavirus, the CCMB said on Tuesday. The NZP, one of the major zoos in Asia, has 12 lions in the 40 acre safari. The authorities were taking various measures to contain the spread of virus among other animals.

## Couldn't predict exact nature of Covid 2nd wave: Supermodel Committee

Hyderabad: National Covid-19 Supermodel Committee has said that it could not predict the exact nature of the second wave of the pandemic in India. The committee comprising three scientists working on the SUTRA model for charting the trajectory of Covid-19, denied reports in a section of media that it cautioned the government in March about the second wave but attention was not paid to it. "A meeting was called on 2nd April to seek our inputs by one of the very senior officers of the government coordinating the national pandemic response. We indicated that the SUTRA model predicted the second wave to peak by the third week of April and to stay most likely around 1 lakh daily cases," they said. The panel admitted that the model predictions in this instance were incorrect as the nature of the virus has been changing very rapidly. "We have been working on a mathematical model to predict the spread of the virus. It is important to note that a mathematical model can only predict future with some certainty so long as virus dynamics and its transmissibility don't change substantially over time. Mathematical models can also provide a mechanism to predicting alternate scenarios corresponding to various policy decisions such as non-pharmaceutical interventions," it said. "In the case of Covid-19, it is clear that the nature of the virus has been changing very rapidly. In such a context, any prediction for Covid-19 must be continually readjusted, sometimes almost daily," it added. The panel was formed by the central government last year to make projections about the spread of the pandemic to help it make short term and medium term plans and decisions.

## FULL LOCKDOWN IS ONLY OPTION: RAGA

"Government of India doesn't get it. The only way to stop the spread of Corona now is a full lockdown - with the protection of NYAY for the vulnerable sections. Government of India's inaction is killing many innocent people."

## DIP IN NEW COVID CASES CONTINUES AS INDIA CROSSES 2 CR-MARK

New Delhi: India continued to report a dip in Covid numbers with 3,57,229 fresh cases and 3,449 fatalities recorded in last 24 hours taking the total caseload to 2,02,82,833, Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said here on Tuesday. It is the 13th straight day when India recorded more than three lakh cases while over 3,000 casualties have been reported for the past seven days. India's total tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,02,82,833 with 34,47,133 active cases and a total of 2,22,408 deaths so far. According to MoHFW, a total of 3,20,289 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours after getting cured.

## Twitter suspends Kangana Ranaut's account

# PERMANENTLY

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Kangana Ranaut's handle @KanganaTeam has been suspended on Twitter, after the actress posted a series of tweets perceived to be controversial. Kangana had shared a video, where she commented on the reported violence that took place in West Bengal after the assembly election results were declared. The actress had captioned the



video: "Distressed beyond words, death of democracy, important message for our government #BengalBurning #BengalViolence" She added: "Fortunately, I have many platforms I can use to raise my voice including my own art in the form of cinema but my heart goes out to the people of this nation who have been tortured, enslaved and censored for thousands of years and still there is no end to the suffering."

## DoT permits telcos to go ahead with 5G trials

The Communications Ministry statement said that the objectives of conducting 5G trials include testing 5G spectrum propagation characteristics, especially in the Indian context, model tuning and evaluation of chosen equipment and vendors, testing of indigenous technology, testing of applications and to test 5G phones and devices.

- The TSPs will also be permitted to use their existing spectrum (800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz and 2500 MHz) for conduct of 5G trials.
- The duration of the trials is for a period of 6 months. This includes a time period of 2 months for procurement and setting up of the equipment.
- 5G technology is expected to deliver improved user experience in terms of data download rates (expected to be 10 times that of 4G), up to three times greater spectrum efficiency, and ultra-low latency to enable Industry 4.0, it said.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has permitted telecom service providers (TSPs), including Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio Infocomm, Vodafone Idea and MTNL, to conduct 5G trials. These TSPs have tied up with original equipment manufacturers and technology providers -- Ericsson,

Nokia, Samsung and C-DOT. The permissions have been given by the DoT as per the priorities and technology partners identified by TSPs themselves. The permission letters specify that each TSP will have to conduct trials in rural and semi-urban settings also in addition to urban settings so that the benefit of 5G technology proliferates across the country and is not confined only to urban areas.

## Bill and Melinda Gates to divorce after 27 yrs

Washington: The mega-billionaire couple Bill and Melinda Gates, who have emerged as a philanthropy powerhouse with a foundation named after themselves, are divorcing because their 27-year marriage has "irretrievably broken". According to TMZ, a media outlet that is up on celebrity affairs, Melinda Gates filed for the divorce asserting that their marriage was "irretrievably broken".



## SII to invest 240M pounds in UK to expand vaccine business

New Delhi/London: The Serum Institute of India (SII) will invest 240 million pounds in the UK to expand its vaccine business and create multiple jobs in the country. The investment is part of the 1 billion-pound India-UK Enhanced Trade Partnership that will create nearly 6,500 jobs in Britain. The investment by the Adar Poonawalla-run SII will also see opening of a new sales office in the UK. The SII has also begun phase 1 trials in the UK of a nasal vaccine against coronavirus, in partnership with Codagenix INC. "Serum's investment will support clinical trials, research and

development and possibly manufacturing of vaccines. This will help the UK and the world to defeat the coronavirus pandemic and other deadly diseases. Serum has already started phase one trials in the UK of a one-dose nasal vaccine for coronavirus, in partnership with Codagenix INC," the statement added. The SII investment came after news reports claimed that India has not placed fresh orders for Covid vaccines with the Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat BioTech since March. The Indian government and the SII refuted the reports.

## TWO TERRORISTS KILLED IN SOPORE ENCOUNTER

Srinagar: The two terrorists killed in an encounter in Sopore in north Kashmir on Tuesday evening were given an opportunity to surrender, but they refused to do that and instead fired at the security forces that triggered the encounter, the police said. The police said that based on a specific input provided by the Kupwara police regarding the presence of terrorists in the Nathipora area in Sopore, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by the police, the army and the CRPF. During the search operation, as the presence of the terrorists got ascertained, they were given an opportunity to surrender.

## BCCI postponed IPL 2021 with immediate effect

The Board confirmed that all players will return to their families after it emerged that SunRisers Hyderabad's (SRH) Wriddhiman Saha in Delhi and Delhi Capitals' (DC) Amit Mishra in Ahmedabad tested positive on Tuesday.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian Premier League's (IPL) 2021 season has been postponed, said the Indian cricket board (BCCI) on Tuesday. The decision was made after more Covid-19 positive cases emerged in the IPL bio-bubble following those on Monday. On Monday, Chennai Super Kings (CSK) bowling coach Lauxmipathy Balaji and Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) bowlers Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep Warrier, had tested positive along with the ground staff at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. That forced three teams - KKR, CSK and DC to go into isolation. However, more positive cases on Tuesday made it impossible for the league to continue. "The BCCI will do everything in its powers to arrange for the secure and safe passage of all the participants in IPL 2021," it added.

"The Indian Premier League Governing Council (IPL GC) and Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) in an emergency meeting has unanimously decided to postpone IPL 2021 season, with immediate effect. The BCCI does not want to compromise on the safety of the players, support staff and the other participants involved in organising the IPL. This decision was taken keeping the safety, health and wellbeing of all the stakeholders in mind."





# PLEA IN SC SEEKS PRESIDENT'S RULE IN BENGAL AMID POST-POLL VIOLENCE

A petition has been moved in the Supreme Court alleging that the constitutional machinery in West Bengal has broken down after the Assembly elections, besides seeking the imposition of President's rule in the state, deployment of central forces and a probe by a retired apex court judge into the "targeted pogrom" in Bengal post the declaration of Assembly election results on May 2.

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The plea has been filed by Tamil Nadu-based Indic Collective Trust through lawyer Suvividutt M.S. The petitioner sought urgent relief



In view of the 'widespread violence' and 'disruption of law and order' that has erupted in the aftermath of the assembly elections in West Bengal, and the 'failure' of the state machinery in protecting the life and liberty

of its citizens. "Declare that the Constitutional machinery has broken down in the state of West Bengal within the meaning of Article 356 of the Constitution in order for the President to take appropriate action under the said Article," the plea submitted. The petition added that election related violence in the state began after the declaration of election results on May 2. The members and supporters of the opposing political parties have been brutally murdered, with their houses and personal property being destroyed, it alleged. "There have been instances of heinous crimes including bombing of localities, murders, violations against the modesty of women, riotous looting, kidnapping, arson and destruction of public property," added the plea. The plea argued that the current state of affairs in West Bengal is so dangerous and wrought with internal disturbance that urgent intervention by the top court and deployment of central forces is the need of the hour.

# MP vaccination rollout for 18-plus from May 5

Team Absolute | Bhopal

People above 18 years of age in Madhya Pradesh will be vaccinated free-of-cost from May 5. The state government has completed preparations for the third phase of the vaccination drive. The people of this age group were supposed to take the vaccine jab from May 1 but it had to be put off due to lack of availability of vaccines. During a video-conference with the Covid core group on prevention of Covid-19, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the process of providing free vaccination to the age group of 18 to 45 years would begin from May 5. Purchase orders have been placed with both vaccine manufacturers, Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute of India (SII), for a potential requirement of 5 crore 29 lakh vaccine doses. The possibility of vaccine import is also being considered. The vaccination process of persons above 45 years will continue uninterrupted. Chouhan said that effective monitoring of home isolation arrangements must be ensured in rural areas. Panchayat Rural Development, Forest and Health department staff as well as local public representatives must strengthen the system by working in unison. In the absence of necessary arrangements for home quarantine, the Covid-infected person would be transferred to a Covid care centre. A vehicle could be



arranged for the infected person, if required. He said a health check-up should be done at prescribed rates which must be implemented strictly and action taken in case of overcharging. Taking a dig at the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government, former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath said, "Shivraj Singh Chouhan ji, you are saying that vaccination at a faster pace is very important to control the Covid-19 pandemic and you are yourself admitting that a total of five crore 29 lakh doses are required for vaccination of people from 18 to 44 years." Kamal Nath asked Chouhan, "You are talking about starting a vaccination programme for people in the age group of 18-44 years in the state from May 5, which was earlier announced to start from May 1, but this announcement also proved to be 'election rhetoric'."

# India-UK adopt 'Roadmap 2030' in key sectors like trade, defence

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India and the UK on Tuesday adopted an ambitious 'Roadmap 2030' to elevate bilateral ties to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" between the two countries in major sectors covering trade, defence and climate security. The roadmap will pave the way for a deeper and stronger engagement over the next ten years in the key areas of people-to-people contacts, trade and economy, defence and security, climate action and health, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in a statement. The decisions were taken in a virtual summit attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his British counterpart Boris Johnson -- a move ahead as both the countries already enjoy long standing friendly ties and share a Strategic Partnership underpinned by mutual commitment to democracy, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, strong complementarities and growing convergences.



The two leaders also discussed the Covid-19 situation and ongoing cooperation in the fight against the pandemic, including the successful partnership on vaccines. PM Modi thanked PM Johnson for the prompt medical assistance provided by the UK in the wake of the severe second wave of Covid-19 in India. Johnson appreciated India's role in extending assistance to the UK and other countries over the last year, including by way of supply of pharmaceuticals and vaccines. The two Prime Ministers launched an 'Enhanced Trade



Partnership' (ETP) to unleash the trade potential between the 5th and 6th largest economies of the world and by setting an ambitious target of more than doubling bilateral trade by 2030. The UK is India's second largest partner in research and innovation collaborations. A new India-UK 'Global Innovation Partnership' was announced at the Virtual Summit that aims to support the transfer of inclusive Indian innovations to select developing countries, starting with Africa.

# 7 more Gujarat cities under night curfew from Wednesday

The Gujarat government on Tuesday extended the night curfew to control spread of coronavirus to seven other cities, apart from the 29 major cities where the curbs are in effect from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m.

GANDHINAGAR | Agencies

The curfew, imposed in five north Gujarat and two south Gujarat cities, will come into force from Wednesday and will last till May 12. The state has been seeing an unprecedented scenario unfolding, with rising cases and deaths in April. But even though the number of new cases has been coming down since last four days, the daily spike of positive cases is still around 13,000 and the total caseload has climbed over six lakh, following which the night curfew was extended to Deesa, Ankleshwar, Vapi, Modasa, Radhanpur, Kadi, and Visnagar. The government had already banned political or social gatherings till May 5 and reduced the number of



gests who could attend a marriage ceremony to 50 from 100, following the Gujarat High Court order. Other gatherings have also been limited to a maximum of 50. Chief Minister Vijay Rupani chaired a high-powered core committee meeting late on Tuesday evening at his residence where the latest decision was taken. The night curfew had been imposed in Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Bhavnagar, Junagadh, Gandhinagar, Anand, Nadiad, Mehasana, Morbi, Dahod, Patan, Godhra, Bhuj, Gandhidham, Bharuch, Surendranagar, Amreli, Himmatnagar, Palanpur, Navsari, Valsad, Porbandar, Botad, Viramgam, Chotta Udepur, Gir-Somnath, and Veraval.

# NO RECOUNTING IN NANDIGRAM, GO TO COURT: EC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Following Trinamool Congress' demand for recounting of votes in the Nandigram Assembly constituency in West Bengal where Trinamool Congress supreme Mamata Banerjee suffered a close defeat against her one-time aide Suwendu Adhikari of the BJP, the Election Commission on Tuesday clarified that the "only legal remedy is to file an EP (Execution Petition) before the High Court". After the declaration of Assembly election results on Sunday, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had approached state Chief Electoral Officer Aariz Afab demanding recounting of votes in Nandigram, following



the Returning Officer's decision to not allow the same. The EC on Tuesday made it clear that the Returning Officer (RO) of an Assembly constituency performs statutory functions under the RP Act, 1951 in "quasi-judicial" capacity independently.

The commission said that the RO takes a decision which can only be challenged through an election petition under Section 80 of the RP Act, 1951. The poll panel said that after the counting in Nandigram, the polling agent of a particular candidate

(Mamata Banerjee) had requested for recounting, which was rejected by the RO. "...in such a case, the only legal remedy is to file an EP before the High Court," the EC said. The poll panel said that in this regard, the Chief Electoral Officer in West Bengal has made available a copy of the order of the RO and other relevant materials related to counting, while the General Observer for the Assembly constituency has also furnished a report in the matter. The EC further said that the election related officials on the ground perform in extremely competitive political environment with full transparency and fairness, and therefore attribution of any motive in such cases is not desirable.

# 5 DIE AS TRACTOR FALLS INTO POND IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Panaji | Agencies

Nellore: Five agriculture workers lost their lives in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday when the driver of their tractor lost control of the vehicle and it fell into a roadside pond. The mishap took place in Sajjapuram village in Nellore mandal. According to police, the victims were on their way to harvest watermelons. The victims include three women and two men, who were aged between 19 and 60 years. The bodies of the victims were taken to the local government hospital. Police have registered a case and are investigating the matter.

# GOA OPPN DEMAND COVID LOCKDOWN

Panaji | Agencies

Opposition MLAs in Goa have demanded a 15-day lockdown in the state and a closure of borders to combat the rising tide of Covid-19 infections, while also slamming the "lackadaisical approach" of the BJP-led state government in tackling the pandemic. Opposition MLAs who met here to discuss the grim Covid-19 situation in the coastal state, have demanded a white paper on Covid management efforts, while urging the state government to set up an experts' panel to make suggestions for handling of the crisis. "The government must immediately announce a 15-day lockdown in Goa with closure of all the borders. Entry to vehicles carrying



essential commodities, medical aid and equipment and vehicles on government duty may be permitted during the lockdown period," Leader of Opposition Digambar Kamat after the meeting. "Opposition MLAs expressed complete displeasure over the attitude and approach of the government in handling the Covid situation. The MLAs strongly felt

that the government must constitute a task force comprising of experts from civil society and army to handle and manage the Covid pandemic in the state of Goa," Kamat also said, while demanding a white paper from the government on handling of Covid management with details of availability of oxygen, ventilators, vaccines and beds in the state.

# SIKH CHARITY TO SET UP 100-BED COVID HOSPITAL IN CHANDIGARH



Chandigarh: Sikh charity Sri Guru Granth Sahib Society will urgently set up a 100-bed Covid Care Centre with an oxygen facility at the PGI Hospital's Infosys Sarai, Chandigarh Adviser Manoj Parida said on Tuesday. The decision was made in view of excellent work done by the society in Bal Bhawan, he added. Earlier, the society has set up a 40-bed Covid care facility with oxygen supply at Bal Bhawan in Sector 23. Meanwhile, the administration decided that vaccination will be free for all beneficiaries, including those between the age of 18 and 45, in the city.

# Cong leaders all out in praise of Mamata, ignoring party defeat

Team Absolute | New Delhi

After Mamata Banerjee decimated the BJP in West Bengal it was Congress which was overwhelmed to congratulate the TMC for spectacular performance, while many Congress leaders wondered till when the Congress is happy in BJP's loss. Former Union Minister Manish Tewari even termed Mamata as Rani of Jhansi (queen who fought the Britishers). Some are happy but cautioned the party. Salman Khurshid said, "Mamata didi's victory is relief and comfort despite the sacrifice we as Congress must endure. But for both as indeed many others there is need to return to drawing board for sustainable challenge to BJP." The reason for happiness is the defeat of the BJP but some said that the TMC leader was with the youth Congress and have worked with many party leaders during her political career and also the party saw hope in her defeat that BJP could be defeated if one works hard. But some wondered like Ragini Nayak, "till when the party leaders will be happy in BJP's defeat." The Congress was the



largest opposition party in outgoing assembly and in 2016 it had 44 seats. But the Congress State President Adheer Ranjan Chowdhury was more direct and said that Congress should come out from Twitter and FB and hit the roads, perhaps this is the opportunity. The Congress scored zero in the West

Bengal election and even lost its strongholds, while the party has said that it is committed to course correction. After losing in the state polls the Congress said that the party will "study" the results, correct mistakes and do a course correction. Congress Chief Spokesperson Randeep Surjewala addressing a press conference on Sunday read out a statement and said, "The Congress Party will definitely study the results and all the reasons diligently and we are committed to correct our mistakes and do appropriate course correction." Surjewala said the people's mandate is the final word in a democracy. People of West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have given their democratic mandate for the next five years. We accept the verdict with humility and a sense of responsibility. The statement said the party had lost the elections in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry and West Bengal but we have neither lost our morale nor our resolve or determination to continuously become the people's voice in these times of unprecedented calamity. Kamat also said that the MLAs have demanded closure of the state's border, only allowing entry to tourists with Covid negative certificates.



# DELHI SETS UP 24X7 HELPLINE FOR OXYGEN SUPPLY, 3 IAS OFFICERS PUT ON JOB

The Delhi government on Tuesday set up a round-the-clock emergency helpline involving three IAS officers and over 20 call centre executives to ensure smooth oxygen supply in the national capital in the wake of the raging second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The move came at a time when Delhi government expects oxygen supply to touch 500 MT by Wednesday or Thursday.

To facilitate the citizens in these testing times, setting up of a 24x7 helpline may strengthen the supply chain management of oxygen in the city. The announcement was made after senior health officials of the Delhi government on Tuesday briefed the media about the matters



related to oxygen supply and health-care management over a zoom meeting. "The demand for oxygen in Delhi is expected to be approximately 976 MT by May 11. The Central government has allocated 590 MT to the

government of Delhi," read a Delhi government statement.

To ensure that there is no shortage of oxygen, it said, the Delhi government is working to make sure that the supply chain is robust and efficient,

the movement of oxygen is regular, with the suppliers supplying oxygen to Delhi as per the prescribed roster.

Oxygen is to be supplied to Delhi from the nearby districts such as Roorkee, Panipat and Ghaziabad to make the supply chain more robust and time-efficient. At present, oxygen supply is coming from far-off places, mostly from the eastern part of the country, resulting in higher turn-around time. The Delhi government said that it is closely coordinating with the officials from the government of India to meet the desired demand for oxygen in the city. "Senior officials from the Railway Ministry, IOCL and Concorde have been designated to ensure undisturbed supply of oxygen to Delhi. The government of India provided Delhi with additional ISO containers," it said.

The Delhi government has also deputed a team of officials to each of the oxygen plant locations to make sure that there are no glitches or administrative obstacles in the supply of oxygen to Delhi.

# Gurugram admin warns shopkeepers charging exorbitant prices

GURUGRAM | Agencies

The Gurugram district administration has warned shopkeepers selling essential products at a price higher than the Maximum Retail Price under the guise of lockdown.

Action is being taken against shopkeepers who charge more than the MRP. The district administration team issued a challan to a food chain store under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, on Tuesday. According to the district administration spokesperson, Inspector Rakesh of the District Food and Supplies Controller's department received information that goods were being sold at a price higher than the MRP in 'More Hyper Mart' located in Gurugram's Sector-48. The complainant Pramod Kumar told the Inspector that he had purchased peanut oil from a food chain store at an MRP of Rs 220 but it was being sold by Mart for Rs 253.



Following the complaint, the team of the District Food and Supplies Controller Department went to the spot to investigate and found the complaint to be true. Acting on the complaint, the food chain store was challaned under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. "The lockdown is imposed to prevent infection due to Covid-19, the general public will not be inconvenienced over essential commodities in any way. A team of the District Food and Supplies Controller department has been appointed for complete monitoring of black marketing in

Gurugram. Essential items such as packed company items cannot be sold at rates higher than the MRP," said Yash Garg, Gurugram Deputy Commissioner.

"The district administration will deal strictly with those involved in black marketing. Buyers should also take care and alert about the rates charged above the MRP on the helpline number -- 9999097004 of the District Food and Supplies Controller department," said Garg, adding, "that to stop such kind of black marketing, the cooperation of the general public is needed."

# Delhi got only 44% of required oxygen from Centre on Mon: AAP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi government on Tuesday cornered the Central government over the allocation of medical oxygen to the national capital on Monday, saying it received only 433 metric tonne (MT) oxygen on Monday against its requirement of 976 MT - which comes to 44 per cent of the requisite amount to mitigate the crisis.

Sharing the details in a video conference, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Raghav Chadha said that 41 hospitals in the national capital sent SOS calls for oxygen on Monday through various mediums, including social media, phone calls and helplines.

In these 41 hospitals, Chadha said, the total number of people on oxygen support was 7,142 where the Delhi government supplied 21.3 MT oxygen.

"We addressed all the 41 SOS calls and ensured that oxygen was supplied to the people by hook or crook. The gap of 56 per cent between demand and supply in oxygen supply still exists, and the faster we overcome the gap, the faster such SOS calls will come down," Chadha said.

"The Delhi government needs 976 MT of oxygen, while what we received on May 3 from the Centre was only 433 MT. This is only 44 per cent of what we need and what we had



demand from them," Chadha said.

The AAP leader also said that Delhi received an average of 393 MT of oxygen a day last week against a requirement of 976 MT, which was just 40 per cent of the total demand. The AAP MLA said, "The team of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is working round-the-clock to overcome the shortage of oxygen through better management."

The AAP leader said that all Delhi government officials, employees and ministers are working day and night, tracking the hospitals.

# Railways delivers 1,585 MT LMO, 6 more Oxygen Expresses on way

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian Railways on Tuesday said that 27 Oxygen Express trains have completed their journey, delivering more than 1,585 metric tonnes of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) in 103 tankers to various states.

A Railway Ministry official said that overcoming all hurdles and finding new solutions, the railways is continuing its journey of bringing relief by delivering LMO. "So far, railways has delivered 1,585 MT of LMO in 103 tankers to various states across the country," he said, adding that 27 Oxygen Express trains have already completed their journey and six more loaded Oxygen Express trains are on the way, carrying 463 MT of LMO in 33 tankers. Two more Oxygen Express to Delhi carrying more than 244 MT LMO are on its way from Hapa and Mundra and are expected to reach Delhi on Tuesday itself, the official



said. With this, Delhi would see nearly 450 MT of LMO provided in 24 hours beginning early hours on May 4.

According to the official, of the total 382 MT of LMO being delivered by Railways on Tuesday, nearly 244 MT was meant for Delhi, which is nearly

64 per cent of total load.

The official also said that Telangana also received its second Oxygen Express from Odisha's Angul carrying 60.23 MT LMO.

"Lucknow will receive 79 tonnes from Oxygen Express from Bokaro,"

he said. The official highlighted that the Railways has delivered more than 1,585 metric tonnes LMO to six states - Maharashtra (174 MT), Uttar Pradesh (492 MT), Madhya Pradesh (179 MT), Delhi (464 MT), Haryana (150 MT), and Telangana (127 MT).

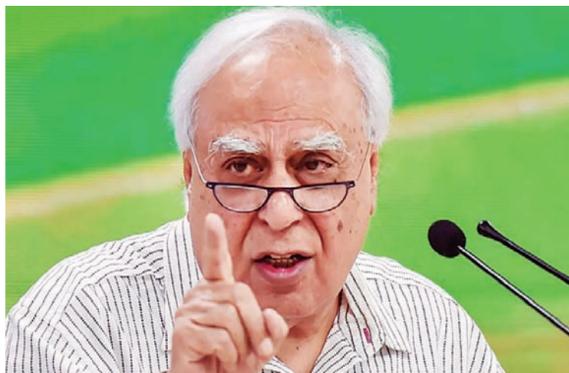
# Country facing health emergency, not a time to discuss poll outcomes: Kapil Sibal

Team Absolute | New Delhi

After the dismal performance of the Congress in recent Assembly elections in five states/UT, party leader Kapil Sibal said on Tuesday that this is not the right time to discuss such issues when the nation is in the grip of pandemic.

"Everyone is concerned about the electoral outcomes now. But the country is facing a health emergency, and the issue of the party can be discussed afterwards as priority should be given to containing the pandemic now," Sibal told reporter.

Barring in Tamil Nadu, where the Congress is the junior partner in the alliance with the DMK, which has returned to power in the state after a gap of 10 years, the party failed to



make an impression in West Bengal, Puducherry, Kerala and Assam.

After the declaration of results on May 2, the Congress said that the

party will 'study' the results, correct its mistakes and do a course correction. Similar reaction came from senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, who also said that containing the pandemic should be the first priority now. Meanwhile, another party leader Sandeep Dikshit on Tuesday blamed the Union government and praised Rahul Gandhi, saying "when Rahul Gandhi knew about the Tsunami (of Covid cases), how come the Prime Minister did not know about it with all the resources at his disposal?" Sibal also attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and held the Union government responsible for the present health crisis in the country. "The Prime Minister was more interested in campaigning while people were dying in the hospitals without oxygen and beds," Sibal said.

# BJP MP Parvesh Verma warns TMC leaders of attacks in Delhi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid the post poll violence against the BJP workers in West Bengal, the saffron party's Lok Sabha member Parvesh Verma warned the Trinamool Congress (TMC) leaders saying they may face similar violence in the national capital.

After the declaration of the West Bengal Assembly poll results on May 2, the BJP alleged that houses, shops and vehicles of its workers were attacked by TMC cadres. It is also alleged that the vehicle of Suwendu Adhikari, who defeated Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram, was also attacked.

Verma told reporter that defeat and victory are part of the election process and murder or attacks on political rivals have no place in a democracy. "TMC goons started attacking our workers and leaders after winning the elections. They set houses and shops of BJP workers on fire. They vandalized the vehicles of



our workers. The TMC must remember that its MPs, Chief Minister, MLAs also have to come to Delhi and they may be treated in the same way as they are attacking BJP workers in West Bengal. It is a warning to TMC leaders," Verma said.

# 86 institutions allocated foreign donated Covid materials

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A total of 24 different categories of items numbering nearly 40 lakhs have been distributed to 86 institutions in 31 States and Union Territories, said Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHF) on Tuesday.

Major categories of equipment include BiPAP Machines, Oxygen (Oxygen Concentrators, Oxygen Cylinders, PSA Oxygen Plants, Pulse Oximeters), Drugs (Flaviparivir and Remdesivir), PPE (Coveralls, N-95 masks and gowns).

The medical items started coming in as donations from different countries after the sudden rise in Covid cases across the different parts of the country, via Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

The materials are being given by countries due to the



immediate and urgent requirements in different parts of the country.

MoHF said the help is "over and above what government of India is already providing, and is thus an

additionality for the states and UTs".

As the different tranches are coming in, the Ministry said, the rest of the states and UTs will also be covered in the coming days.

# Delhi-NCR logs 5% growth in office space absorption in Jan-Mar: JLL

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi-NCR witnessed an increase of 5 per cent in net absorption of office space during the first quarter of 2021 on a quarter-on-quarter basis with 1.07 million sq. ft, according to a JLL report.

As per the JLL Office Market Update - Q1 2021, Noida contributed 55 per cent of the net absorption, backed by strong pre-commitment in the new completions followed by Gurugram with a contribution of 38 per cent.

Select big-ticket transactions in Gurugram and Noida contributed substantially to the leasing activity. There were few relocations by occupiers in a bid to reduce real estate cost and obtain fresh office spaces on attractive lease terms.

IT and IT-enabled services, BFSI, healthcare, legal and consulting



firms dominated leasing during the quarter.

"Delhi NCR continues to be a vibrant location for the office market with well-established submarkets and corridors. While Gurgaon and Noida have taken the lead in terms of development and infrastructure,

the city itself continues to remain a highly preferred location. In total, eight projects totaling 4 million square feet were added to the stock which stood at 129 million square feet at the end of the quarter," Manish Aggarwal, MD, Delhi NCR, JLL India.

"NCR office market remains one of the healthy commercial office space take-up and strong demand from IT/ITES, BFSI and law firms has fueled the growth momentum thereby showing strong commercial growth in the capital city," he added. The vacancy rate stood at 29.3 per cent at the end of quarter, increasing by 140 bps over the previous quarter. Vacancy levels rose in select prominent prime business districts where occupiers either downsized current occupancies or shifted to locations with relatively lower rents. Rents remained stable with developers offering increased rent-free periods on a case-by-case basis.

It is expected that rents will continue to remain range-bound in the short-term as leasing momentum in the next few quarters will mainly hinge on the containment of the second wave of Covid.



## CHIEF MINISTER SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN TRANSFERS RS 379 CRORE INTO ACCOUNTS OF SAMBAL BENEFICIARIES, 16 THOUSAND 844 BENEFICIARIES BENEFITTED

# BENEFITTING THE POOR IS GOVERNMENT'S FIRST PRIORITY: CM CHOUHAN

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that it is the priority of the state government to benefit the poor. The Sambal scheme has been formulated to support the poor working class in times of crisis. Today, 379 crore rupees have been transferred into the accounts of 16 thousand 844 beneficiaries of the state under the scheme. In the crisis of Corona period, this assistance amount will prove to be very useful for the poor families. On Tuesday, Chouhan was virtually addressing the poor labour families of the unorganised sector under the Mukhyamantri Jan-Kalyan Sambal Yojana. Labour Minister Brijendra Pratap Singh also participated in the programme virtually.

Chouhan, while interacting with the beneficiaries, said that in the difficult times of crisis, 16 thousand 844 beneficiaries of Sambal Yojana are also being given three months of free ration along with financial assistance. He said that every effort is being made to prevent corona infection. In the battle against Corona, the cooperation of the people is also necessary. He called upon the beneficiaries to take precautions against the corona and to protect others along with themselves.

Chouhan said that Sambal Yojana is the strength of the poor. Under the Mukhyamantri Jan-Kalyan Sambal Yojana in



the state, financial assistance is provided to the members of poor labour families of the unorganised sector in the event of death, disability, partial disability. From the beginning of the scheme till now, an amount of 2 thousand 286 crore has been transferred into the accounts of 2 lakh 44 thousand 844 benefi-

ciaries or their families in the last three years.

Under Sambal Yojana, an amount of Rs 4 lakh is given to their dependents on accidental death of workers. Similarly, in the event of normal death or permanent disability, an ex-gratia amount of Rs. 2 lakhs is given under the Chief Minister Jan-

Kalyan Sambal Yojana. In the event of partial permanent disability of the labourer, there is also a provision of giving Rs. 1 lakh as financial assistance and Rs. 5 thousand as funeral assistance. Chouhan transferred Rs 3 thousand 782 lakh in the accounts of 1645 beneficiaries in Bhopal division, Rs 1422 lakh to 658 beneficiaries in Chambal division, 2404 lakh to 1058 beneficiaries in Gwalior division and 5716 lakh to 2 thousand 587 beneficiaries in Indore division by a single click. In Jabalpur division, maximum Rs. 7526 lakh were transferred to 3 thousand 398 beneficiaries, Rs. 2062 lakh to 893 beneficiaries in Hoshangabad, Rs. 3020 lakh to 1316 beneficiaries in Rewa, Rs. 5240 lakh to 2326 beneficiaries in Sagar, Rs. 1490 lakh to 672 beneficiaries in Shahdol and Rs. 5172 lakh were transferred in accounts of 2291 beneficiaries in Ujjain today.

Chouhan said that three months' ration is being provided to poor families in lump sum. Those who have paid the ration for the month of April, they will be given free ration for the month of July. He said that the fight against Corona can be won only by staying at home. So do not leave the house unnecessarily. Chouhan said that there is a need to stay alert and vigilant and do not be afraid of Corona. If someone has early symptoms of corona, do not hide them. Seek medical advice on time and start treatment. Free medical kits are also being distributed to potential patients in the Kill Corona campaign.

### FREE SWASTHA AAHAR YOJANA FOR PATIENTS LAUNCHED

## Family of Corona patients will not face hardship anymore: Sarang

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang on Tuesday launched the Free Swastha Aahar Yojana (Healthy Food Scheme) for the corona patients of Bhopal. With the introduction of this scheme, the relatives of the corona patient will no longer have to face any hardship. The patient will get nutritious food on time free of cost in the hospital where he admitted. Minister Sarang said that as a pilot project, this scheme has been started in 110 hospitals in Bhopal. On its success, this scheme will be started in other cities of the state as well. Bhopal Collector Avinash Lavania was also present at the inauguration of the scheme.

Sarang said that during the review meeting of District Disaster Management Committee and Corona



Curfew, it was revealed that due to Corona Curfew, there is a problem in delivering food to the patients in hospitals. At the same time, when the corona patient's family members come to the hospital with food for him, then there is always a possibility of infection. Therefore, the government has started providing free food to the patients in hospitals with the help of voluntary organisations and public support. Sarang said that now the relatives of the corona patients will not face

any trouble and there will be no risk of their getting infected. Also, the patient will also get nutritious food on time in the hospital. Anyway, during this time, a healthy diet is needed for the patient to recover quickly.

Sarang informed that a helpline number for free healthy food service scheme is also being started soon. On those number the family of the patient will be able to tell the hospital where the patient is admitted for the delivery of food to him.

## CONGRESS ANNOUNCES REWARD TO TRACE 'MISSING' HEALTH MINISTER

- Addressing a press conference via video-conference, MP Congress working president Jitu Patwari said nobody knows where is the state's health minister.
- someone can trace him, the Congress will give a reward of ₹ 11,000. What is his contribution to the state's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic?

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh Congress on Tuesday claimed state Health Minister Dr Prabhuram Choudhary is "missing" at a time when people are facing various problems due to the spike in COVID-19 cases, and offered a reward of ₹ 11,000 to trace him. Addressing a press conference via video-conference, MP Congress working president Jitu Patwari said nobody knows where is the state's health minister.

"If someone can trace him, the Congress will give a reward of ₹ 11,000. What is

his contribution to the state's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic? Zero," the MLA claimed.

However, BJP state secretary and spokesman Rajneesh Agrawal termed it as a "political gimmick" of the Congress.

"The minister and the entire health department are working in this time of crisis. If Patwari want to meet the minister, he can directly call him," Agrawal said while talking to media persons.

Choudhary was recently seen campaigning for the Damoh Assembly by-poll in Madhya Pradesh.

## RIFT WITHIN MADHYA PRADESH UNIT OF BJP OVER COVID CRISIS

- Resentment is growing within the ranks of the ruling BJP in Madhya Pradesh over the government's handling of the COVID-19 situation in the state.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Resentment is growing within the ranks of the ruling BJP in Madhya Pradesh over the government's handling of the Covid-19 situation in the state. Two BJP lawmakers, a former minister, and two young leaders of the party have publicly expressed their disappointment over the handling of the Covid-19 situation in the state in recent days. Narayan Tripathi, the BJP MLA from the Maihar seat of the Satna district recently wrote a letter to Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, stating that the 'tamasha' of virtual meetings



won't address the grave situation, but a month-long total lock-down is urgently needed in the state. He also urged the government to conduct door-to-door testing and expand the vaccination programme.

Just a few days prior to it, another MLA of the ruling party, ex-minister and Bhopur legislator Surendra Patwa wrote to health minister Dr Prabhuram Choudhary complaining about the state of hospitals in the state. Both, Patwa and Choudhary are BJP legislators from the same Raisen district.

Another senior BJP leader

and ex-minister Anup Mishra (nephew of Atal Bihari Vajpayee) too had recently attacked the government over the rampant black marketing of oxygen and Remdesivir.

"Oxygen and Remdesivir injections are being black-marketed. They are available either with middlemen or influential politicians, but not with the commoners, who need them," Mishra had tweeted recently.

Further, Monu Patel, the nephew of Union Minister Prahlad Patel, alleging that the entire system had collapsed and the authorities were hiding the real picture.

## MASS PUNISHMENT FOR MASK DEFAULTERS BACKFIRES ON OFFICIAL

Team Absolute | Indore

Efforts by an administration official in Indore, to impart a lesson about mask usage have gone completely astray. Cellphone videos from the spot showed the officer had made an occasion of it not only gathering 20 or more wrongdoers, but also drummers, a policeman and sundry locals. They were told to proceed down a market road in a typical crouching gait used as a punishment for boys in village schools a long time ago.

As the drummers struck up a tune and the procession progressed, it became clear that the need to maintain social distancing has not occurred to anyone including the officer. The young men crouched close to each other as they moved. One who refused to crouch, jiggling to the tune instead, was administered a kick by the officer. No one pointed out the need to avoid corporal punishment bystanders appeared to enjoy themselves.

One even chased after the strange procession to record it on his cellphone. No one also pointed out the need to wear an N-95 mask or even a double surgical mask as doctors have advised in view of the mutant strains of coronavirus.

Most of the men used cloth masks, a few had causally wrapped a folded handkerchief around their faces. District authorities have admonished the official, reported news agency Press Trust of India. Indore district collector Manish Singh said the action was "totally wrong... I have scolded him".

He, however, said citizens who neglect norms in place under the Epidemic Diseases Act due to the pandemic, are inviting punishment. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the only way to break the chain of transmission is to stop Covid where it is. "My village-Corona-free village", "My locality-Corona-free locality" and "My city-Corona-free city" programmes should be made successful.

## Innovative initiative of Dream Bhopal Green Bhopal

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Plasma therapy also aids in the treatment being given to individuals infected with the corona. Placing the plasma of a corona patient with corona helps a person recover from a corona infection. An innovative initiative has been taken by Dream Bhopal Green Bhopal Society along with Bhopal District Administration Crisis Management Team to get plasma donated from people recovering from Corona and to provide plasma to infected patients. Representative of the institution, Sparsh Dwivedi said that the use of plasma therapy in the avail-

able medicine and treatment therapy for corona infection is also effective.

The institution contacts individuals who have recovered from corona infection for plasma therapy. They prepare individuals infected with the corona to donate their plasma. With the inspiration and cooperation of Principal Secretary Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, the organization has started work in association with District Administration Bhopal.

The institution is being motivated to give plasma by calling patients discharged from the hospitals of the district. More than 300 people who were healthy so far were called. Of these, 72 expressed

a desire to deliver plasma. 16 persons have come forward and donated their plasma in this sacred work. ADM Sandeep Kerkatta from Bhopal District Administration is coordinating this work. In this work, continuous virtual contact is being made to donate plasma from the patients recovered from the corona. Those who donate the plasma will be given a citation and an e-badge from the district administration.

The questions and questions that people ask regarding plasma donate are given to them by the team members. They are told that plasma donation is safe. They can donate life to others.

## IISER BHOPAL STUDIES ROLE OF CORONAVIRUS' N PROTEIN IN SPREADING INFECTION

- A group of researchers from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Bhopal have established that proteins from the COVID-19 virus other than the well-known 'spike protein' can play a critical role in the infectivity of the virus.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A group of researchers from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Bhopal have established that proteins from the COVID-19 virus other than the well-known 'spike protein' can play a critical role in the infectivity of the virus.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus has an RNA genome, surrounded by a sphere-shaped structure. This structure comprises various types of proteins, with one of them being the 'spike protein' that gives the virus its characteristic spiked look or 'crown'. It suggests that it is not enough to study spike protein alone to develop therapeutic drugs, antibodies, and entry inhibitors, since actual infectivity levels may vary significantly based on the presence of other viral proteins like the nucleocapsid (N) protein. Since the virus is highly infectious, most studies do not use the live virus, but use a similar protein capsule made up of spike that has been filled with another viral core, in a process called 'pseudotyping'. The infectivity of each of the pseudovirus containing one of the twenty-four proteins was studied. With this, the researchers found that pseudovirus produced with the nucleocapsid (N) protein had higher infectivity than those containing other proteins. The researchers also found that a synthetic microbody that neutralizes spike-pseudotyped viruses was less effective against the N protein-containing pseudotype. They observed similar patterns during experiments with a spike mutant that is found in the UK variant of COVID-19. The study was led by Dr. Ajit Chande, Assistant Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, IISER Bhopal. The results of this work have recently been published in the peer-reviewed journal Frontiers in Cellular and Infection Microbiology co-authored by Tarun Mishra, Sreepadmanabh M, Pavitra Ramdas, Amit Kumar Sahu, Dr Atul Kumar, and Dr Ajit Chande. Elaborating on his research, Dr. Ajit Chande said, "Current methods of retrovirus pseudotyping are focused on the spike protein of the virus. Our study picks off from this point."

## Attack the corona by making a strategy: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan has said that the time for the final strike on the corona has come. For conducting the Kill Corona campaign, the government team as well as the team of villagers should be prepared at the village level, who should support the government staff in the survey work. Also, after the survey, this team will cooperate in following the corona guide line if needed in future while staying in the village. The mobile numbers of the team members should also be displayed on the portal, so that there is constant contact with them. Chouhan was discussing about the Kill Corona campaign by video conference from the Chief Minister's residence today.

Chouhan said that this is the right time to

completely prevent and capture the infection through Kill Corona campaign. This is to ensure that not a single infected person remains hidden. The state of infection is constantly improving in the state, with the reduction in the number of positive cases, the number of healthy people is also increasing continuously. He said that efforts would have to be made by strategizing to completely prevent corona infection. Work will have to be carried out for the survey of each village and house under the Kill Corona campaign. Along with the government staff, a team of local people of each village should be formed. It should include willing workers, panchayat officials, members of Jan Abhiyan Parishad and social workers of all village parties. In collaboration with the government staff, these teams should cooperate in identifying patients with symp-

oms of corona, giving them medical kit and getting them checked.

Fever clinics will be built in big villages Chouhan said that in addition to sub-health centers in large villages, fever clinics should also be set up. He said that the village level team should be prepared for continuous monitoring of infection, so that even after the survey, if any person gets signs of infection, then they should be examined, given medical kit, home isolation as per requirement, covid care center and hospital Cooperate in transport arrangements. Similarly, ward wise committees can be formed in municipal municipal areas.

Chouhan stated the need for extensive public awareness in connection with Kill Corona campaign. He has said that with the use of various mediums of mass communica-

tion, arrangements for mobile announcements should be made in the municipality, municipal areas. Corona Help Centers should be set up. Public awareness should be made in connection with the campaign of beating Dandi in rural areas.

Chouhan said that the protocol of home isolation should be followed effectively. In the absence of proper arrangements at home, the infected person should be taken to quarantine centers or covid care center with the consent of the villagers. Arrangements for food etc. should be made at the centers. Funds should also be arranged for this. He said that in the same way, at the district and district level, a team should be formed under the leadership of the Chief Executive Officer, which includes social workers including MPs, MLAs, public representatives.



Lockdown-like curbs in Maharashtra:

KOLHAPUR IMPOSES 10-DAY LOCKDOWN TO CURB COVID SPREAD

KOLHAPUR | Agencies

The Kolhapur administration in Maharashtra on Tuesday decided to impose a strict lockdown from Wednesday for 10 days to curtail the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The decision was taken in a meeting today, which was attended by the Rural Development Minister, Guardian Minister, Minister of State for Health.

According to reports, only milk and medicine supply will continue every day and the rest of the essential shops will remain closed.

Besides Kolhapur, Sangli guardian minister Jayant Patil has also announced a complete lockdown in the district for eight days.

The lockdown will come in force from midnight of 5 May.

Meanwhile, the Maharashtra government has demanded the Centre enhance the present allocation of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) to the state by at least

200 metric tonnes (MT) which will help in better management of the demand for the life-saving gas.

Maharashtra chief secretary Sitaram Kunte said 16 districts - Palghar, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur, Solapur, Nandurbar, Beed, Parbhani, Hingoli, Amravati, Buldhana, Wardha, Gadchiroli and Chandrapur are showing continuous growth in Covid-19 positive cases and the oxygen requirement is on the rise.

Daily Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra dropped below 50,000 to 48,621 on Monday for the first time in the last 30 days, taking the tally to 47,71,022.

With 567 more patients succumbing to the viral infection, the overall toll mounted to 70,851, the state health department said.

On April 3, Maharashtra had reported 49,447 infections. On April 1 and 2, 43,183 and 47,827 cases were added, respectively.

The state had reported an average of 60,000 cases in

most of April. Of the 567 fatalities, 283 had occurred in the last 48 hours. Given the alarming surge in the cases, the state government had imposed lockdown-like curbs in the state on 5 April coupled with prohibitory orders and restrictions on the movement of people. The curbs were later extended till 15 May.

Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope has said that the positivity rate in state has dropped from 27% to 22%.

"We're testing 2.80 lakh persons daily and there's been no shortage in testing. From 63,000, tally for Covid patients have come down to 61,000," he added.

At 84.07%, our recovery rate is the highest in the country, Tope said.

On Monday, 2,11,668 tests were conducted, taking the overall number of samples tested so far to 2,78,64,426, the department said.

A total of 59,500 patients were discharged during the day, taking the count of recoveries in Maharashtra to 40,41,148, it said.

Preparing for a third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic which is expected to hit kids, the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and Maharashtra government are gearing up by setting up Pediatric Covid Care Wards in the city and elsewhere, officials said here on Tuesday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Taking an early initiative, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray last week directed all district collectors and municipal commissioners in the state to be ready for the Covid third onslaught which may also hit children in a big way.

Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray who is Guardian Minister of Mumbai Suburban District has held discussions with BMC Mayor Kishori Pednekar, Additional Municipal Commissioner



Sanjeev Jaiswal and other top officials in this regard. Among other things, he suggested to the BMC to create separate Pediatric Covid Care Wards anticipating the next wave and the demographics it may target.

"Since last year, our jumbo covid care centres also have units of Covid +ve dialysis and maternity care as well. As the virus mutates and targets different age groups, our response to it must actively mutate as well," said Aditya Thackeray.

two-thirds of the state's infections reported now are in age groups below 50, with the highest new cases reported in the 31-40 age (22.09 percent), 41-50 years (18.15 percent), 21-30 age (17.51 percent). Children in the 0-10 years account for 3.04 percent, and older children and teens in the 10-20 years are more than double at 6.80 percent, of the state's new cases, giving rise to huge concerns as the situation is vastly different from the 2020 first Covid-19 hit. The Pediatric Covid Care Ward is slated to come up at the NESCO Jumbo Covid

Care Centre in Goregaon east suburb of Mumbai - and 700 beds are expected to be added. This would include 300 for a dedicated Pediatric Covid Care Ward comprising Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) with a capacity of 25 beds each to cater to the infants who maybe hit. Apart from that, the BMC is planning to build four oxygen plants and maintain adequate stock of medicines like Remdesivir and Tocilizumab injections, masks, PPE kits, etc. "In the 2020 first wave mostly the adult and senior citizens were affected. In the current second wave (from February 2021) young men/women and children are also getting affected. We have to be alert for the third wave. Also we have to account for the fact that the vaccination drive has not yet been opened for the under-18 age groups," a senior BMC official expressed his concerns, requesting anonymity.

Besides wide-ranging consultations shall be held with the Covid-19 Task Force, medical experts and other stakeholders, on the strategies that need to be adopted for the third wave, likely to slam the state around July, as warned by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar recently.

Now, GPS keeps an eye on oxygen tankers in Maha

From Monday, 250 oxygen tankers fitted with the GPS devices have enabled the Transport Department to keep 24x7 tabs on the vehicles on a single dashboard set up in the Transport Commissioner's office.



Transport Commissioner's office. The development came after FADA State Chairperson Amar Jatin Sheth met Transport Commissioner Avinash Dhakane and discussed the issues recently.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra Transport Department in collaboration with the Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (FADA) state unit has fitted GPS devices to monitor the movement of oxygen tankers in the state, an official said here on Tuesday.

From Monday, 250 oxygen tankers fitted with the GPS devices have enabled the Transport Department to keep 24x7 tabs on the vehicles on a single dashboard set up in the

Following Dhakane's recommendation, the FADA decided to arrange the GPS devices, roped in MOBO which has the technical knowhow and expertise and spent Rs 10 lakh for the venture.

FADA president Vinkesh Gulati said the move would strengthen the hands of the state government at the height of the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic.

It will also help save precious lives of patients by providing them with the lifesaving oxygen on time, and help the efficient management of tankers' movements, said Sheth.

Dhakane appreciated the contribution of FADA and said the GPS fitted tankers would be able to do a quick turnaround and help save more people's lives. Maharashtra currently is the worst-hit by the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of infections and deaths, though the situation is gradually improving, and there is a huge demand for oxygen among the patients.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Tuesday launched Maharashtra's first 'drive-in' vaccination centre at the multi-storey Kohinoor Parking Lot near the Shivaji Park in Dadar.

The drive-in facility is for senior citizens, specially-abled, expectant mothers and other citizens who are not able to wait in queues at vaccination centres, said a civic official. The facility has a capacity to give the jobs to around 5,000 people per day in seven booths, of which two have been kept aside for the drive-ins, and has proved to be an instant hit.

More than 200 people drove down to the drive-in vaccination centre on Tuesday, got their jabs, and waited the mandatory 30 minutes in their vehicles before driving out. "Drive In facility for 45+ specially-abled. BMC G-North Ward has started a new vaccination centre at Kohinoor Parking Lot for citizens coming for their 2nd dose of Covid vaccine," the BMC said in a statement.

Two local BMC Corporators Vishakha Raut and Preeti Patankar, both of the ruling Shiv



Sena, had demanded such a facility for the people in both their wards - Shivaji Park and Dadar - after the BMC decided to start vaccination centres in each corporators' ward for public convenience. For the ongoing vaccination, those using it would pay the regular parking charges of Rs 60/hour but avail a hassle-free job in the safety and comfort of their own vehicles as per the Covid-19 protocols, said the official.

Interestingly, last year, the Kohinoor Parking Lot was utilised for conducting mass RT-PCR tests and proved immensely popular as it afforded physical distancing, adequate ventilation and accommodate a large number of people simultaneously.

New age start-up 'The Fuel Delivery' starts operations in Mumbai

Team Absolute | Mumbai

App-based door-to-door fuel delivery service provider, 'The Fuel Delivery' on Tuesday announced the launch of its Mumbai operations.

With this service launch, the start-up aims to cater to sectors like real estate (both under construction and occupied projects), hospitals, corporate office parks, schools and institutions, banks, shopping malls, warehouses, and the agricultural sector. Given the Covid-19 pandemic running through the second wave, it will be a win-win offer for the consumers as they can maintain social distancing norms through contact-less delivery by avoiding long queues at fuel filling stations. The company also recently announced the signing of an 'All India Business Agreement' with state-owned



oil major, Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL). The service level agreement allows The Fuel Delivery to offer doorstep delivery of diesel anywhere in India. As far as industry standards are concerned, the door-to-door delivery of fuel service is closed to 60,000 - 70,000 litres a month per bowser. State-owned Indian retailers' petrol and diesel sales in April, 2021 fell by 61 per cent and 57 per cent year-on-year.

This decline can be attributed to a low level of industrial and transportation activ-

ity due to Covid-19 restrictions, however, it started to gain momentum by late April as activities resumed. Oil marketing companies anticipate the door-to-door fuel market to be worth more than Rs 2,000 crores in the near term of the next 12 to 18 months. The Fuel Delivery has recently announced its entry into the Delhi market and now has expansion plans in a phased manner to enter other key markets like Chandigarh, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and Kolkata in the next 12 to 18 months.

Maha sees Covid deaths, cases shoot up again, but Mumbai improves

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra's Covid-19 fatalities and new cases recorded a sharp hike though the Mumbai situation improved while the state death toll shot past the 71,000 mark on Tuesday, health officials said.

Against 567 deaths on Monday, the state saw 891 deaths of Tuesday, taking the total fatalities to 71,742 now.

The number of new infections crossed the 50,000 level again, at 51,880, taking the state tally to above the 48 lakh mark, to 48,22,902.

The Mumbai position was a relief with the infections falling further to 2,554, taking the tally to 661,175. Daily deaths came down, from 78 on Monday to 62 now, and the total fatalities in the country's commercial capital stood at 13,434.

For the third day, the state death rate remained stable at 1.49 per cent, while the number of active cases decreased to 641,910.

As many as 65,934 fully cured patients returned home - higher than the number of fresh infections on Tuesday - taking the total to



41,07,092 now, and the recovery rate improved from 84.07 per cent on Monday to 85.16 per cent now.

The Mumbai circle - comprising Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and Raigad districts - recorded 7,436 new cases, taking its tally to 14,05,276, and with 165 more deaths, the toll shot to 23,982.

Of the day's fatalities, Nagpur led with 107 deaths, while there were 72

in Thane, 62 in Mumbai, 53 in Pune, 52 in Nashik, 42 each in Ahmednagar, Solapur, and Chandrapur, 38 each in Jalgaon and Kolhapur, 36 in Nanded, 30 in Sangli, 29 in Raigad, 23 in Nandurbar, 22 in Jalna, 20 each in Amravati and Wardha, 16 in Gadchiroli, 15 each in Ratnagiri and Latur, 14 each in Satara and Osmanabad, 13 in Yavatmal, 11 in Bhandara, 10 in

Aurangabad, nine in Parbhani, eight each in Sindhudurg, Beed, and Akola, seven each in Washim and Gondia, six in Hingoli, and two in Palghar.

Dhule and Buldhana recorded zero fatalities. Meanwhile, the number of people sent to home isolation increased to 39,36,323 now, while those shunted to institutional quarantine went up to 30,356.

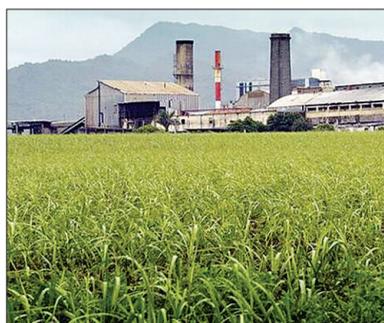
About 70 Maharashtra sugar mills gear up for oxygen manufacturing

This is a timely step taken by mills in Maharashtra. About 25 mills are already in the process to set up oxygen plants and we are focusing on about 60-70 sugar mills that have financially performed very well. Majority of these mills are in rural areas and the demand for oxygen here could be met by sugar mills

the demand for oxygen here could be met by sugar mills," said Prakash Naiknavare, MD, National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories (NFCFSF).

He added, "Mills will need to modify distilleries for oxygen manufacturing. Also, mills will have to take care that the commitments of ethanol supply are met. With oxygen manufacturing, mills are shouldering social responsibility. Also, this could be a business model for the mills."

Naiknavare added that NFCFSF is going to discuss oxygen manufacturing with sugar mills in other States. BB Thombare, President of West Indian Sugar Mill Association (WISMA), told BusinessLine that 15 mills including private and coopera-



tive mills have placed orders for skid-mounted oxygen manufacturing units. "We have approached manufacturers in China, Taiwan as local manufacturers said they would require 8-10 months to fulfil the orders. Each plant has the capacity to refill

90-100 oxygen cylinders daily which will be provided to government and private hospitals at a nominal price," said Thombare.

He added that mills have placed orders for 600 oxygen concentrators. WISMA has appealed to sugar mills across the country to set up one plant each and procure 25 oxygen concentrators to meet the oxygen requirement in their localities. Recently, Nationalist Congress Party

(NCP) Chief Sharad Pawar had held a meeting of millers to discuss oxygen manufacturing in mills. Of the 190 sugar mills that started crushing this season in Maharashtra, 167 mills have closed their crushing operations and 23 sugar mills are still operating.

Last year, as Covid-19 cases multiplied, many sugar mills started sanitiser manufacturing. According to industry players, mills benefited from sanitiser manufacturing despite selling the product at minimal rates. According to some of the key players in the industry, sugar mills have no system to manufacture oxygen and need molecular sieve modification in ethanol plant for filtering oxygen. "What happens to the investment when there will be no demand for medicinal oxygen?," one of the senior industry players reiterated speaking to BusinessLine.

Vasantdada Sugar Institute (VSI) headed by Sharad Pawar, NFCFSF and WISMA are together working on a long-term plan on oxygen manufacturing so that mills continue to be in the business even after the demand for medical oxygen recedes.

Aditya Chopra requests Maha CM to let YRF vaccinate 30K cine workers

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Filmmaker Aditya Chopra has come forward to vaccinate daily workers of the Hindi film industry, and has requested Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to allow his production house Yash Raj Films (YRF) to purchase 60,000 Covid-19 vaccines.

YRF has sent a letter to the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) stating: "With the film industry going through an unprecedented time, there is an urgent need to restart at the earliest so that thousands of workers can start earning their livelihood again and protect their families. Yash Raj Films, through The Yash Chopra Foundation, would like to offer its support in this

regard." The statement further reads: "We have sent a request to the Honourable Chief Minister of Maharashtra to allocate and allow us to purchase Covid-19 vaccines for 30,000 registered workers, who are members of the film industry's federation in Mumbai at the earliest." The letter also mentioned that The Yash Chopra Foundation would bear all other costs associated with vaccinating the workers including raising awareness, transportation of workers and setting up of all the required infrastructure for the immunisation programme. "We hope our kind request is approved which will enable our members to be safe and also get them back to work at the earliest," the statement concluded.



**Neha Dhupia urges fans to 'stay strong', 'stay safe'**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Neha Dhupia on Monday tweeted urging fans to stay strong as India battles the deadly second wave of Covid-19. The actress requested all to stay at home and be safe, but also encouraged them to be "positive".

"Stay strong, stay positive, stay home, stay safe," she wrote.

Talking about the situation today, the actress also posted: "Somewhere between hope and despair..."

Neha has always been very vocal about the issues that she believes in. She also took to social media recently to talk about how we should "normalise" breastfeeding and not "sexualise" it. She spoke about how breastfeeding mothers are looked at in a sexual manner. Neha and her husband actor Angad Bedi were blessed with a baby after six months after their wedding. The couple had a baby girl, Mehr, in 2018.



**Karishma Tanna is a 'Black and White person' in 'a colourful world'**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Karishma Tanna has tagged herself as a "Black and White person in a colourful world".

Karishma on Monday posted a picture on Instagram, where she is seen posing in a black and white pants with sunglasses. The picture is from her vacation in Goa, going by the hashtags she has used.

"I am a very Black and White person living in a colourful world," Karishma posted alongside the image.

She used hashtags #mood #goa #love #p0td to describe the picture.

Karishma was last seen in "Lahore Confidential", Kunal Kohli's spy drama that dropped digitally earlier this year. Her special dance number "Basanti" in last year's comedy release "Suraj Pe Mangal Bhari" became quite popular.

## Why age matters when it comes to your fertility



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Mostly women are aware of reproductive facts and something called a biological clock ticking away. This comes into prominence especially when couples plan their pregnancy. One should keep in mind that fertility is age-related for both men and women and this understanding is pivotal because it helps in conceiving, the baby's health depends on it and one can make informed choices during pregnancy.

**How age affects a woman's fertility as compared to men?**

Fertility with age has a different effect on men and women. A woman is born with certain number of eggs that only get depleted over a period of time, and after some time she can't produce any more eggs. But in the case of a man, he can produce sperms his entire life. Therefore, it signifies the women's pregnancy health window is short as compared to a man's, who can even father a child in their 60s and 70s. So, let's have a look at the fertility across different age groups:

**Fertility in their 20s:**

According to the experts, this is the perfect age group for a woman to have a healthy pregnancy. This is the age when women are most fertile. The difference in fertility in their early 20s and late 20s is almost negligible.

**Fertility in 20s:**

As your eggs have lesser odds of carrying genetic abnormalities, the chances of your child having any genetic disorders such as Down Syndrome, Thalassaemia, etc. is minimal. The risk of miscarriage lays only 10 per cent. Less likely that you will have premature baby or baby with low birth weight. Even the mother has lower risk of any health complications like gestational diabetes or hypertension.

**The disadvantages of this phase are:**

In first pregnancy, the risk of pre-eclampsia, a pregnancy complication, becomes higher. If you have PCOD or uterine fibroids or any underlying medical condition, achieving a pregnancy is complicated. When it comes to male fertility, they don't have to worry at all. If at all infertility has been diagnosed in a man, then it's all because of his lifestyle choices that lead to obesity, hypertension, contraction of any sexually transmitted infection and

diabetes. This can be reversed in the case of men by altering lifestyle choices. Sexually Transmitted Infections in men affect the motility and concentration of sperms.

**Fertility in 30s:**

If a woman wants to conceive in this phase of her life, then the chances of expecting are between 15 and 20 per cent each month provided they don't have any underlying health conditions. A study has confirmed that women in 30s have 30 per cent chances of conceiving in their first try. But, fertility tends to decline when a woman reaches 35 because of the decreased quality and quantity of the eggs. Even the chances of conceiving naturally after 35 are also minimal. The increased level of the follicle-stimulating hormone in a female body makes her more prone to having twins or triplets.

The risks of conceiving in 30s are Higher C-section rates, higher chances of genetic issues in the newborn, increased rates of miscarriages and stillbirths, elevated risks of ectopic pregnancy

**Fertility in 40s and beyond:**

In case of a woman, it's not impossible to conceive in this age but one should take notice of the fact that during each ovulatory cycle, pregnancy rate dips to 5 per cent between 40 and 44, whereas beyond 45 it gets reduced to 1 per cent. According to Center for Disease Control, half of women across the globe undergo fertility issues in 40s. The risk factors of conceiving remains the same as it is in their 30s. Since there are risk factors involved, there is no guarantee that a female can conceive for sure. Even a man's fertility also declines in this age group as the sperm count and semen volume also decreases. But, one should not give up hope and consult a fertility expert at the right time.

Ultimately, the perfect time to get pregnant is when you feel it's the right time for you. It's completely fine if you want to feel more confident in your career and finances to start building your family. If you do choose to wait, do consult with your doctor or a fertility specialist to make sure no health issues will come as surprise once you're ready. The fertility expert will not only help you know your ovarian reserve but can also suggest ways and means to preserve your fertility till you are ready to become a mother.

## ALLU ARJUN'S 'DOING WELL WITH VERY MILD SYMPTOMS'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Telugu superstar Allu Arjun, who tested Covid positive last week, posted a health update on Monday, assuring fans that he is recovering well. "Hello everyone! I am doing well with very mild symptoms. Recovering well and nothing to worry. I am still in quarantine. Thank you so much for all the love you have been showing and the prayers you have been sending my way. Gratitude," the 38-year-old actor wrote on his verified Instagram account.

Arjun had announced testing positive in a social media post on April 28. "Hello everyone, I have tested positive for Covid. I have isolated myself at home and have been following all the protocols. I request those who have come in contact with me to get tested. Stay home, stay safe and get vaccinated when you get the chance. I request all my well-wishers and fans not to worry about me as I am doing fine," he had tweeted.



**Daler Mehndi urges people to 'be human' in these trying times**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Punjabi pop icon Daler Mehndi says that only if we were to acknowledge ourselves and teach our kids how 'durlabh' (rare) our human body, life and the mind is -- only then, we will be able to take care of it and only then we will make well-informed choices and thus be better people, then a better society, a nation and a world.

To spread a positive outlook towards life in the middle of the pandemic, the 'Bolo Ta Ra Ra' singer has encouraged all to pray for those who are suffering and their families. Marking the 400th Prakash Purb recently, Mehndi has started daily live streaming sessions 'Ruh Se Rab Tak' from May 1-15 in the mornings and evenings for all.

These live prayers will be an hourly session on his YouTube and Facebook page and will continue every day with morning and evening sessions where various artists will participate in praying for healing.

Mehndi urges everyone to celebrate by meditating, lighting up diyas, connecting with

our soul, aligning with the Divinity, praying hard in these trying times, asking for peace for the souls that have left us.

"It is the most horrific times India, especially Delhi now is facing, it is painful and distressing. I have lost many relatives and friends. I am sure no one had ever dreamt of such horrible times. Just praying safety and good health for all. Request everyone to get vaccinated, don't hoard medicines, stop publishing and promoting hurtful images, pray for all. Mask up, follow all the Covid-19 guidelines strictly and be human," he told IANSLife, when asked about the second wave of Covid-19 hitting Indian people.

"Instead of losing hope let us shift our minds from fear to fearlessness. Together we can do it. We should empathise, pray for all, trust and surrender, be more mindful, pause and process your thoughts and feelings, check if they are in alignment with the divine, if not, start over, we should pay our gratitude to the supreme power."

## 2020 lockdown revealed India's creative and altruistic side: Research

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Over half of all Indians surveyed in a recent poll say that they have become conscious of the environment -- including growing plants, become more prudent on purchases, and conserving energy -- as a direct result of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown.

'The Little Things We Do', the latest research from Godrej Group, analysed the daily routines, habits and gestures adopted by citizens during the 10 months of lockdown last year to make their life more tolerable.

When the country is reeling under the mutated virus and lockdown in many states, the research is a reminder of the duties of responsible citizens and organisations to support the country, even though the second-wave lockdown doesn't seem as exciting to many. It revealed 44 per cent have participated in community activities such as volunteering and helping the less privileged, during the same period.

According to the data, confinement and other restrictions have also liberated India's creative side: more than one-in-five Indians (22.9 per cent) are now more likely to cook, paint, sketch, or pursue other creative hobbies to keep themselves happy. Nearly a quarter (23.2 per cent) found solace reading or listening to music during periods of lockdown. These findings correspond to another research, by SEMrush that



highlighted between February and March in 2020 searches such as "how to bake a cake", first by a staggering 238.5 per cent. In April, the percentage increase in the number of times these keywords were searched grew by 81 per cent and a further 190 per cent the following month.

**Other insights revealed through the research include:**

More than half donated 'little things' such as sanitisers, food packets, old clothes, blankets, medical devices, etc. to those in need; 40 per cent made financial donations to the underprivileged.

Men and women seemed to have different priorities when it came to making decision on 'little things', as almost 31 per cent of male respondents preferred to spend time with

their family to keep themselves content during the lockdown as compared to almost 19 per cent female respondents. At the same time, 32.8 per cent women saw cooking as a source of comfort and happiness compared to just 12 per cent of men. More men switched on the TV for comfort.

Social media also revealed itself as a source of happiness during lockdown period, as many remained connected with friends and family through social media; watched funny memes and videos, and attended Instagram Live concerts; explored their creative side by making content for social media; and learnt new skills such as cooking, painting, etc. through DIY videos created by influencers.

Confinement also made happen other benefits to Indian households. Thirty six per cent of respondents claimed to now spend more time with their families because of the absence of long commutes, while almost 3 in 10 now take regular breaks throughout the day to de-stress and maintain work-life balance. Nineteen per cent claim that they are more efficient at work -- completing tasks within allotted working hours -- because of the absence of distractions. Also, 16 per cent believe that working from home has helped to improve their time management skills.

Tanya Dubash, Executive Director and Chief Brand Officer, Godrej Group, described the research as a unique insight into resilience, altruism and capacity of our citizens to adapt to, in many instances, extremely challenging circumstances. "Our research reveals the little things and daily routines that can make a huge difference to people's well-being. The situation of the pandemic has really highlighted the often overlooked role which rituals play in our overall health and well-being," she said.

She added, "It also reveals the positive side of such trying circumstances, with long-standing routines being reassessed: 36.2 per cent of respondents claim to have quit unhealthy habits, while a staggering 58.2 per cent are now engaged in activities which support their mental and physical fitness such as yoga, walking or meditation."



# Zack Snyder was scared of being sued for his version of 'Justice League'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Filmmaker Zack Snyder, who released his version of "Justice League" a while back, was scared he would be embroiled in a legal suit with the film's producers Warner Bros. due to the public campaign that led to it.

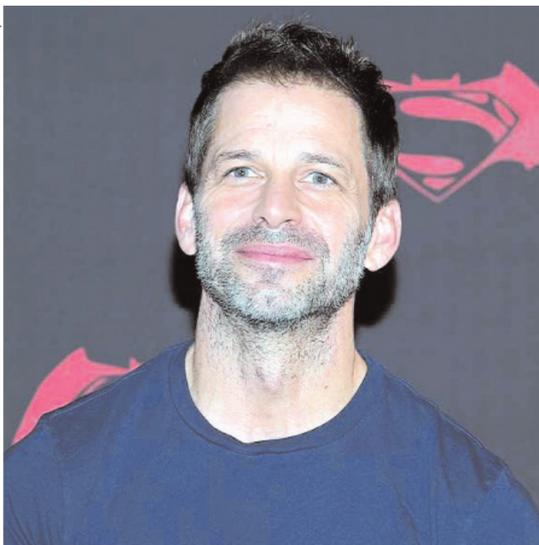
Snyder had to back out of superhero film in May 2017 due to his daughter Autumn committing suicide at the age of 20. He was replaced by Joss Whedon, who changed the film, which did not go down well with fans.

A huge public uproar resulted in the #ReleaseTheSnyderCut campaign.

The filmmaker says that while he was all for the idea, he did not expect it would happen because he was scared of a lawsuit from Warner Bros.

"I was more worried the studio would sue me. Do something to silence me," he said, according to contactmusic.com.

Snyder released his version of the film subsequently, and he says his fans did a lot for him at that time. "Here's the reality. That fandom raised \$750,000 for suicide prevention and mental health awareness. They've saved lives. That's a fact. But on the other hand, was it fun to provoke them? For a clickable thing? Yes. And they were an easy target. But they continue to raise money," he said.



## Little Mix's Leigh-Anne Pinnock is PREGNANT!

Los Angeles | Agencies

The singer, 29, revealed she's expecting her first child with her footballer fiancé Andre Gray, after the couple announced their engagement back in May.

She shared a trio of images on Instagram on Tuesday and wrote alongside: 'We've dreamed about this moment for so long and we can't believe the dream is finally coming true... we can't wait to meet you.'

Leigh-Anne looked breathtaking in the images as she posed in a bra with billowing green sleeves and a skirt with luxurious lengths of matching silk material, while shirtless Andre posed alongside her in one of the shots.

Making sure the shoot turned out perfectly, she was flanked by a fantastic glam squad, she tagged the team, including hairstylist Dionne Smith, her make-up artist Hila and Little Mix's stylists Zack Tate and Jamie Mcfarland.

Dionne shared a breathtaking behind-the-scenes video from the shoot and added a caption reading: 'Congratulations to you both I am looking forward to seeing your bundle of joy when he/she arrives...'

'It was great to be apart of this special day and I enjoyed giving @leighannepinnock a little something different? I mean come on guys how gorgeous does she look and what do you think about her hair?'

Her Little Mix bandmates Jade Thirlwall, 28, and Perrie Edwards, 27, alongside a host of other stars were quick to congratulate the star.

Clearly delighted for their pal, Jade penned: 'love you so much look at this family', while Perrie added: 'I can't stop staring at these pictures. You're a vision. Ily both so much! CONGRATULATIONS my beautiful sister!'



## LOVE ISLAND'S MAURA HIGGINS AND CHRIS TAYLOR SPLIT

Los Angeles | Agencies

Love Island stars Maura Higgins and Chris Taylor have split.

The duo, who went public with their romance in November after months of secrecy, took to Instagram on Tuesday to reveal the news.

The Irish beauty, 30, penned: 'It breaks my heart to even type this but I wanted to let everyone know that myself and Chris have made the joint decision to end our relationship...'

'There is no wrongdoing on either side... we still love, care and respect each other deeply. From the minute we met each other we've been very close friends and that will never change. There is no regret, life is about taking chances.'

'We wanted to make this work but we have realised we work better being friends. Whilst I appreciate people may speculate or create false stories this is the truth.'

'I wish Chris nothing but the best and I will always be one of his biggest supporters. Thank you for all the love and support.'

Meanwhile, the statement released by Chris, also 30, read: 'Hey guys, after some very heartfelt conversations over the past few days, myself & Maura are very sad to announce that we have decided to part ways.'

# Dwayne Johnson was often mistaken to be a girl as a kid

Los Angeles | Agencies



Dwayne Johnson recalls how, as a child, other children would ask him if he was a girl because he had "soft features" and "really soft Afro hair" when he was young. Dwayne made his mark as in the professional wrestling as The Rock before hitting Hollywood superstardom, and his father Rocky Johnson was also a professional wrestler back in the day. Owing to his father's calling, the family had to travel a lot, which left Dwayne changing schools constantly and trying to make new friends. "I sit down next to a kid, and within 60 seconds, he goes, 'Can I ask you something?' I said, 'Yeah.' He goes, 'Are you a boy or a girl?' I would say between the ages of seven and 11, people thought that I was a little girl because I had really soft features and I had really soft Afro hair," recalled Dwayne while talking to Sunday Today, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The actor shared his thoughts about his presidential ambitions and said he would be interested in running for the position if people "want to see it happen". "I have a goal and an ambition and an interest to unite our country. If this is what the people want, then I will do that. If the time comes where there is a good amount of people who want to see that happen, then I'm going to consider it," he said.

## BEN AFFLECK'S MESSAGE TO TIKTOK STAR NIVINE JAY GOES VIRAL AFTER SHE UNMATCHED WITH HIM ON DATING APP



Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Ben Affleck went viral on TikTok yesterday after an influencer revealed he sent her a video asking why she unmatched him on celebrity dating app Raya.

Nivine Jay, who is the author of Cry Baby, believed the Oscar-winner's profile on the elite dating app was "fake" so promptly turned down his advances.

However, it turns out Ben's account was real as she shared his video message in a hilarious TikTok that has been viewed over a million times.

"Thinking of the time I matched with Ben Affleck on raya and thought it was fake

so I unmatched him and he sent me a video on Instagram," she wrote, along with four skull emojis.

After striking a series of poses, Nivine then inserted the video Ben, 48, allegedly sent her which saw him in a red T-shirt attempting to confirm his identity.

The Justice League actor asked her: "Nivine, why did you unmatched me? It's me!" before he ended the video with a smirk.

Nivine captioned the clip "Sorry Ben" alongside a number of hashtags which included the actor's name and the app Raya. Raya is an uber-exclusive dating app for the rich and famous with a waiting list of more than 100,000.

# Ben Rekhi: Cinema is meant to be a shared experience

Los Angeles | Agencies

Indian origin filmmaker Ben Rekhi feels film festivals hold a lot of significance at any stage in one's career. Rekhi, whose documentary "The Reunited States" has been shown at multiple film festivals, adds that cinema is an experience that needs to be enjoyed with others.

"I think at any point in a career, film festivals are of tremendous value for both the filmmaker and the audience to interact with each other. Cinema is meant to be a shared experience, which is suffering now owing to the closure of movie theatres over the past year. Film festivals are places where we are able to meet each other in person," said Rekhi.

The film has been screened at Cinequest Film and Creativity Festival, Nashville Film Festival, United Nations Association Film Festival, and Virginia Film Festival among others. Rekhi says film festivals as these are a great experience because they allow makers to interact with the audience and get feedback. "There's nothing more powerful than being in a dark room together and sharing a story, and film festivals allow you to generate a lot of press, connect with your audience, experience real-time feedback, connect with other filmmakers, and build connections and resources. We're grateful to continue making the types of movies that film festivals want to screen. They (festivals) are not right for every film but for many



films they are," he says.

Talking about his documentary, he says he is happy to be able to depict what is happening in the world through his films.

"The Reunited States" came to me after the 2016 elections. I had typically done fictional films up until that point but the landscape of US politics had changed and I became fascinated with

how my work could inform this new reality that we found ourselves in. So, the idea of non-fiction and turning the camera around on reality to try and understand it and help us manoeuvre became an obsession for me," he says.

Rekhi's film "The Reunited States" is a documentary that aims at urging all Americans to realise everyone has a role to play in reuniting the country.

## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Georgia Harrison



## EDITOR'S SPECS

## Difference between South &amp; North

**A**t a time when the Kerala unit of the BJP decided to sit down to discuss the rather poor performance in the just held assembly polls when it not only saw the one seat that they had in 2016 disappear, but also saw a dip in the total votes, a top BJP state leader made no bones of the dismal performance who said that strategies adopted in North India won't work in Kerala. What has

**IF THERE IS ANY SOLACE FOR THEM IS THEY MANAGED TO COME SECOND IN NINE CONSTITUENCIES.**

**hurt the party and has come as a shocker is their vote percentage which saw a fall from 15.01 per cent in the 2016 Assembly polls**

to a 12.47 per cent after votes were counted on Sunday for the 140-member Kerala Assembly. If there is any solace for them is they managed to come second in nine constituencies. This setback has come after an array of its biggest leaders which include Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath who came to the state more than once and others who came once included Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Smriti Irani, to name a few. Former State BJP president C.K. Padmanabhan who was the party candidate against Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at Dharamadam constituency in Kannur came a distant third with over 14,000 votes. He spoke to the media on Tuesday and said this is a victory for the work of Vijayan. "If anyone thinks that the strategy adopted in North India will work in Kerala, then it will not work out and all should first understand that," said Padmanabhan. He was also critical in the manner in which the present State BJP president K. Surendran who contested in two constituencies and opined that it was not needed. The state leadership which had a first round meeting to find out what had happened, after raising huge hopes that the BJP will form the new state government and it required only 35 seats in the 140 member Kerala assembly and it even had declared Metroman as the Chief Minister. At its meeting the only decision that was taken was to constitute a committee which will look into the reasons for this debacle. On Monday, Vijayan rubbed further salt into the wounds of the 'wounded' BJP leadership here when he alleged that in 90 of the 140 constituencies the BJP has lost its vote as compared to the 2016 assembly polls and added that in 10 seats this was the reason for the Congress led Opposition getting to the present tally of theirs to 41 seats.

## INDIA HEADED FOR STRICTER LOCKDOWNS TO COMBAT COVID WAVE

SPS Pannu

**I**ndia appears to be headed for more stringent lockdowns to rein in the massive surge in deadly coronavirus infections as both medical experts and apex industry chambers are giving fresh feedbacks to the Centre.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi while urging the states to avoid blanket lockdowns that would cripple the economy and hit livelihoods has also maintained all along that the government would go by the advice of medical experts in formulating its policy to tackle the devastating pandemic.

AIIMS chief Dr Randeep Guleria has now stated that the country's health infrastructure is "stretched to the limit" and "aggressive lockdowns," like the one imposed in March last year are required in areas with positivity rates of over 10 per cent to contain the second COVID-19 wave.

Dr Guleria said the ferocity with which the virus was spreading is unprecedented, and night curfews and weekend lockdowns, such as those enforced by Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Haryana and other states, were proving to be ineffectual.

"We have to work aggressively to bring this number down. No healthcare system in the world can manage this kind of load. The issue



of aggressive containment or lockdown holds the key," Dr Guleria said on television.

Similarly, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) president Uday Kotak, has said authorities should curtail economic activity to snap the transmission chain of coronavirus infections. "At this critical juncture when toll of lives is rising, CII urges the strongest national steps including curtailing economic activity to reduce suffering," Uday Kotak, who is also

chief executive of Kotak Mahindra Bank, said in a tweet.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had imposed one of the most stringent lockdowns in the world during the first Covid-19 wave, but has increasingly left it to the states to act more locally this year amid concerns of large scale disruptions of livelihoods. He has already provided for free foodgrains to the poor and this would be stepped up in the

days ahead with stricter lockdowns, a senior official said. The Supreme Court of India on Sunday had also advised the central and state governments to consider a lockdown to break the chain of Covid-19 transmission.

"In light of the continuing surge of infections in the second wave of the pandemic, we direct the Central Government and State Governments to put on record the efforts taken to curb the spread of the virus and the measures that they plan on taking in the near future," the Supreme Court observed.

"At the same time, we would seriously urge the Central and State Governments to consider imposing a ban on mass gatherings and super spreader events. They may also consider imposing a lockdown to curb the virus in the second wave in the interest of public welfare," the apex court stated.

India reported a staggering 392,488 new cases of COVID-19 on Sunday with the number of deaths shooting up by a record 3,689.

This relentless surge in the coronavirus infections has come as a major setback for the global war against the pandemic as India had emerged as the pharmacy to the world, exporting vaccines and medical supplies to as many as 80 nations. The country is now running short of supplies itself due to the massive second wave.

## RSS' 'mixed feelings' over BJP's Bengal poll debacle

Anwasha Bhaumik

**T**he RSS wants the BJP leadership to do a 'thorough introspection' over the landslide victory secured by the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and specially focus on the merit of inducting many Trinamool deserters.

A quick review by RSS leaders in West Bengal and its top leadership revealed that induction of Trinamool deserters have not worked for the BJP.

With the exception of giant killer Suvendu Adhikari, the idea of taking TMC deserters into the BJP fold has backfired, justifying TMC strategist Prashant Kishor's repeated assertion that they joined BJP when faced with denial of TMC ticket in view of doubts over their winnability.

Suvendu justified the 'Adhikari factor' by his slender victory over Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram, but the TMC won 33 of the 47 seats in the Midnapore area because the battle Royale sucked in the Adhikari clan and left yawning gaps elsewhere in the region.

The RSS leadership feels the large scale induction of Trinamool deserters and nominating them as BJP candidates created rifts between the RSS-trained BJP leaders and the 'new BJP' inductees from Trinamool.

"There was an inevitable clash of political culture between two distinct outlooks. That did not help the party (BJP) ultimately," said a senior RSS leader, on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to brief the media.

He said the BJP, by inducting Trinamool defectors, failed to exploit the local level public anger against the ruling party because the very cause of anger was inducted by the BJP.

Kolkata's Salt Lake-New Town leader Sabyasachi Dutta is a classic example.

Accused of running syndicates forcing real estate barons to purchase inferior quality building materials at inflated prices in the New Town region, Dutta suffered a humiliating defeat unbecoming of his stature as the former Salt Lake-New Town municipal boss.

"If you induct Sabyasachi Dutta and then attack syndicate culture, you risk falling between two stools. Modi, Amit Shah, Nadda all did that but the stink did not stick for obvious reasons," said the senior RSS leader privy to the 'chintan' session immediately after the polls.

Barasat's TMC MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, Dutta's bitter rival within the party, told IANS that Mamata Banerjee's foresight in easing out the defectors came as a blessing for the party.



"The fat and flab was cut out at the right time. The muscle provided by hardcore credible loyalists remained to fight the saffron steamroller. This was a real blessing in disguise," she told correspondent.

The RSS leadership also identifies two other factors for the BJP defeat. One, despite the success in making Hindutva and Illegal migration a real poll issue, the BJP failed to break "the faith reposed in communal amity by the Bengali bhadralok".

"The BJP leaders got carried away by the apparent response generated by allegations of TMC's minority appeasement. But Bengali Hindus resent the high-handedness of Urdu speaking Muslims in and around Calcutta and that most big Muslim leaders of TMC come from this community. But their bonding with Bengali Muslims remain very strong and they only partially responded to the BJP rhetoric," the RSS leader said.

Analyst Sukhoranjan Dasgupta agrees with this observation. "The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 undid the communal divide of Partition and Bengalis on both sides of the border realised their gain from communal harmony and social peace. The BJP's effort to disturb that social fabric had an unsettling effect on the Bengali psyche. I love my friend Mr Sharma from UP but it cannot be at the cost of my Muslim sister Shahnaz Parvin Dolly from my ancestral district of Barisal," Dasgupta told correspondent.

He said the NRC exercise in Assam not only created a scare

among Bengali Muslims but also among East Bengali Hindus, who suffered more. "Mamata successfully projected that as an anti Bengali and not just an anti Muslim exercise."

Second, the absence of a tall Bengali leader in BJP against a formidable Mamata Banerjee cost the saffron brigade, said the RSS leader. "Bengali have hated the High Command culture from the days of CR Das and Subhas Bose. Mamata is a product of that anti-Delhi angst and one needed to pitch a big local leader rather than stick to the old formula of picking one from the crowd after fighting the polls with Modi and Shah as face," he said. "Bengalis are strong Indian nationalists but they like to see their own leader, Subhas Bose or Shyamaprasad Mukherjee," the RSS leader said.

One of the future task for the Hindutva Brigade is to find a big Bengali leader here in West Bengal, preferably a woman because the two Ms vote (Mohila and Muslim) seems to have upset the saffron applectart.

"But the BJP-RSS male patriarchy is uneasy with strong woman leaders, which is why Sushma Swaraj could not make it to the very top despite enormous ability," says gender specialist Pallavi Guha, author of a brilliant recent book on India's "Me Too movement."

Guha says Hasina at the helm in Bangladesh and Mamata at the top here is no accident and proves gender power is no empty cliché in Bengali society.

"The RSS' Adarsh Bharatiya Nari is an ideal gharwali (homemaker), they should understand Bengalis worship Durga or Kali more fervently than Ram. And for us, Ram Mohan Roy rather than Ram is more important because he is the anchor of our social modernisation," Guha told correspondent.

"In West Bengal or Bangladesh, nobody aborts the foetus to avoid a girl child. She is welcomed as Ma Laxmi," she said. "Even our Muslims describe girls Lokki Meye".

"The BJP paid a price for over estimating Mamata," says BJP Lok Sabha candidate Chandra Bose, a scion of the Netaji family. Social engineering works only to an extent. You cannot change societal values overnight however powerful and well funded your campaign," says IPAC analyst Sayantika Bhowal. "BJP should fit into Bengal rather than try making it an UP or Gujarat."

"Don't be angry with Bengal for what has happened. Try understand us," was her advice to the saffron brigade.

IPAC was Trinamool's campaign manager and its chief Prashant Kishor has been proved dead correct over his repeated assertion that BJP won't cross double digit. But Bhowal, who left IPAC to 'try something else' warns Trinamool against "wishing BJP away".

## Why BJP is winning Assembly elections in Assam?

Aarti Tikoo Singh

**T**he massive development work initiated under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's various central schemes combined with the politics of Hindu nationalism seem to have clinched victory for the BJP-led alliance in Assam.

On Sunday, the BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) was leading in 79 seats while the Congress-AIUDF alliance was ahead only in 46 of the 126-seat legislative Assembly. Given these trends, it is clear that the BJP headed by chief minister Sarbanand Sonowal faced neither anti-incumbency nor rejection over the Citizenship Amendment Act (Act) from the electorate.

The reason for that is that the Modi government and the Sonowal administration in the last five years addressed the lack of development which Assam along with the northeast had faced under their predecessors for decades. The Centre made huge investments in infrastructure projects - roads, bridges, educational institutions, hospitals - as well as Prime Minister Modi's welfare schemes including cash transfers to the poor.

Along with constructing



4000 km national highways including 21 two-lane roads, the Centre expedited and completed several bridges. Of them, the most significant is the Bogibeel bridge, India's longest rail-cum-road bridge which connects the Brahmaputra river to Silapathar bordering Arunachal Pradesh.

The establishment of medical colleges, judicial academy and national law school earned the BJP lot of votes among youth in Assam. Just before the elections, the government distributed free Scooties to young women, earning their votes as well.

As a result, the opposition, the Congress party which ruled the state for most part of its history in independent India, could not persuade voters on the development front. On the other hand, the Congress seems to have harmed its base in the Upper Assam, because of its alliance with a Muslim communal party, All Indian United Democratic Front (AIUDF) headed by Badruddin Ajmal.

## Dismissal of 'anti-national' govt employees begins in J&amp;K

Ahmed Ali Fayyaz

**N**ine months after making some amendments to the laws and rules governing the government employment, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinhas administration has begun the process of terminating the services of the government employees, allegedly indulging in anti-national activities in Jammu and Kashmir.

On 30 July 2020, Government of Jammu and Kashmir had amended the service rules and dispensed with the requirement of an enquiry for dismissal of the employees emerging as a threat to the security of the State. For the first time, the government had devised a mechanism to terminate the 'anti-national employees' without facing judicial scrutiny.

Principal Secretary Home and Additional Director General of Police Criminal Investigation Department were given sweeping powers to decide the fate of the employees reported to the government as a threat to the security of the State.

The General Administration Department with approval of the LG on Friday issued Government Order No: 400-JK (GAD) of 2021 Dated 30-04-2021, terminating the service of Idrees Jan, teacher at Government Middle School Kralpora in Kupwara district.

"Whereas the Lieutenant is satisfied after considering the facts and circumstances of the case and on the basis of the information available that the activities of Mr. Idrees Jan, Teacher Government Middle School, Kralpora, Kupwara are such as to warrant his dismissal from service;

"And whereas, the Lieutenant Governor is

satisfied under sub-clause (c) of the proviso to clause (2) of Article 311 of the Constitution of India that in the interest of the security of the State, it is not expedient to hold an enquiry in the case of Mr. Idrees Jan, Teacher, Government Middle School, Kralpora, Kupwara.

"Accordingly, the Lieutenant Governor hereby dismisses Mr. Idrees Jan, Teacher, Government Middle School, Kralpora, Kupwara from service, with immediate effect", reads the order issued on Friday.

On 21 April 2021, the Government had constituted a high level committee vide Order No: 355-JK (GAD) of 2021 for the purpose of scrutinising and processing the cases of the employees reported by the intelligence agency. ADG CID was appointed as its Chairman and Inspector General of Police Kashmir/Jammu and Additional Secretaries of the Law Department and the concerned department of the employee as members. The Committee was given the responsibility to scrutinise cases of employees suspected of activities requiring action under Article 311(2) of the Constitution of India, to compile record of such employees, wherever necessary and to refer it to the Committee constituted vide Government Order No: 738-JK(GAD) of 2020 Dated 30-07-2020 and to engage with other members



of the Terror Monitoring Group (TMG) for identifying such other employees, as necessary.

"This is the first dismissal of an employee indulging in anti-national activities by the LG's government. More of

such terminations will follow as the cases of 500 to 1000 government employees have been reported by the security and intelligence agencies", said a highly placed bureaucratic source. He said that previous political regimes had dismissed some of such 'anti-national employees' but the process had been left legally deficient and almost all of them had been reinstated under court orders. "It is incredibly strange that even the Government employees' association had joined and operated for over 20 years as a constituent of the secessionist Hurriyat Conference. This cannot be tolerated by any responsible State", said a senior bureaucrat now working in the Jammu and Kashmir Government. From the outbreak of militancy in 1989-90 to the street turmoil of 2016, the J&K government employees and their associations participated openly in the demonstrations and conferences organised by separatist and militant organisations. However, the senior ranks stood away from such activities after 1998. In the very beginning of the militancy, the government employees sympathetic to the separatist

cause managed signatures of almost all the top ranking bureaucrats on a resolution demanding Plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir under the UN Security Council resolutions of 1948 and 1949.

Later in 1990, they proceeded on a 72-day shutdown of government offices and services when Governor Jagmohan terminated five senior officers for supporting the separatists and militants. However, they were all reinstated by Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar's government on persuasion of the two J&K politicians namely Farooq Abdullah and Saifuddin Soz. Bureaucrat-turned-politician Naem Akhtar, who later resigned, joined Mufti Sayeed's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and functioned as a Member of Legislative Council and a Cabinet Minister in the PDP-BJP government, was among the five officers. Family members and relatives of the separatist leaders in the State government service were particularly promoted and placed on prize positions in some regimes from 2002 to 2019. Some of their close relatives were taken into the government services through the backdoor. LG's government is reportedly in possession of reports about hundreds of the employees, including senior officers in Police and civil administration, who for years were publicly supporters of the separatists, militants and Pakistan. They seldom attended their offices or duties for over 25 years of the militancy. Besides, a number of the government employees picked up the gun and got guerrilla training and weapons from Pakistan. Simultaneously they continued to draw salaries from the State exchequer.



# BIDEN RAISES REFUGEE ADMISSIONS CAP TO 62,500 AFTER BACKLASH

US President Joe Biden has raised the cap for refugee admissions into the country to 62,500, in a U-turn that more than quadruples the limit set by his predecessor Donald Trump.

Washington | Agencies

The number announced on Monday was still short of the 125,000 Biden promised during his presidential campaign, though he said he intended to set that as the goal for next year, reports dpa news agency.

Biden had previously set this year's refugee admissions level at 15,000, maintaining the cap set by Trump, but after receiving criticism in April he walked it back.

"Today, I am revising the US' annual refugee admissions cap to 62,500 for this fiscal year," Biden said in a Monday statement.

"This erases the historically low number set by the previous administration of 15,000, which did not reflect America's values as a nation that welcomes and supports refugees.

"The sad truth is that we will not

achieve 62,500 admissions" to be reached this fiscal year, which ends September 30, the President said.

"We are working quickly to undo the damage of the last four years. It will take some time, but that work is already underway." The Trump administration's 15,000 cap was the lowest since the introduction of the US refugee programme in 1980. The previous limit for the last fiscal year was 18,000.

In 2016, then-president Barack Obama's last full year in office, about 85,000 refugees were allowed into the US. Trump lowered the limit in 2017, his first in office, and about 53,000 refugees were let in, according to a report issued last year by the Department of Homeland Security. Monday's announcement came as the White House, which faced an exacerbating influx of migrants on the southern border, backtracked in mid-April after an



emergency determination signed at the time by Biden to keep the cap as it was drew immediate criticism from refugee groups and Democratic lawmakers.

They deplored the administration's sudden and significant reversal from its own commitment made in February to lift the annual maximum to 62,500.

The number of refugees admitted into the US this fiscal year stood at only 2,050 as of March 31, according to the State Department's Refugee Processing Center. More than 100 days into his presidency, Biden scored one of his lowest marks in polls for his handling of the immigration issue.

His remarks last month admitting the situation on the southern border was a "crisis" forced the White House to downplay his use of words, saying the labelling did not indicate a change in the administration's official position.

# 2 KILLED, 18 INJURED IN MOSCOW HOTEL FIRE

Moscow: Two people were killed and 18 others injured after a fire broke out at a five-storey hotel building in Moscow, local media reported on Tuesday.

"Two adults died in the hospital. It was not possible to save them," the TASS news agency reported, citing a source from the local department of the Russian Emergency Ministry.

According to the source, the fire, which started at 3.27 a.m. at the Vechny Zov Hotel and was extinguished by 4.30 a.m., covered an area of about 100 square metres, reports Xinhua news agency.

At the time of the fire, 305 people were inside the building, said the report.

An investigation was underway to determine the cause of the fire, which might be a short circuit, TASS said.

# 23 dead in Mexico City underground rail bridge collapse

Several carriages of a line 12 metro train plunged several metres and collided into each other, videos circulating on social media showed, reports dpa news agency.



a subway train was passing, reports Xinhua news agency.

"The corresponding investigations will be carried out to publicise the causes of the accident. We are very sorry for what happened," she said.

Several carriages of a line 12 metro train plunged several metres and collided into each other, videos circulating on social media showed, reports dpa news agency.

Initial findings showed the accident occurred when part of the bridge gave way, Sheinbaum said.

Traffic had been flowing under the collapsed section

of the bridge at Olivos station on the south-eastern edge of the Mexican capital at the time of the accident.

Footage showed rescuers using a ladder to pull passengers out of train carriages as they were hanging from the bridge.

Because of the train's unstable position, rescue efforts had to be suspended, Sheinbaum said.

Residents had reportedly complained about damage to pillars along the route of metro line 12 years ago.

There had also been allegations of corruption in the construction of the line.

Mexico City | Agencies

At least 23 people were killed and 70 others injured after a bridge on an elevated section of the Mexico City underground system partially collapsed as a train was passing over it, according to authorities.

In an interview with local TV station on Tuesday, Mexico City mayor Claudia Sheinbaum said that the accident occurred on Monday night when a concrete beam collapsed just as

# Lebanon-Israel maritime border talks resume: UN source

US Ambassador to Algeria John Desrocher, who arrived in Beirut on Monday, has been acting as a mediator at the talks, the source told dpa news agency. Four previous rounds have been held since October 14, 2020.



UN headquarters in Naqoura, a source of the world body confirmed. The highly sensitive talks came amid a row between Lebanon and Israel stemming from differing methods of demarcation of 856 square kilometres of shared waters. US Ambassador to Algeria John Desrocher, who arrived in Beirut on Monday, has been acting as a mediator at the talks, the source told dpa news agency. Four previous rounds have been held since

Beirut | Agencies

Lebanon and Israel resumed their US-mediated indirect talks on Tuesday over a long-standing dispute on sea borders at the

October 14, 2020. Talks stepped as Lebanon seeks to expand the disputed area with Israel to reach some 2,290 instead of 860 square kilometres. The meeting is being held at the Naqoura headquarters of the UN Interim Forces in Southern Lebanon (UNIFIL).

The dispute between Lebanon and Israel has escalated after natural gas discoveries in the Mediterranean Sea, as both countries claim gas deposits there for themselves. Lebanon signed its first offshore drilling agreement with an international consortium in 2018, though exploration of the area called Block 9 has not yet begun due to the controversy over its ownership.

# Indian-American bodies mobilise resources for Covid relief in India

Washington | Agencies

Several Indian-American organisations have mobilised resources and raised millions for Covid-19 relief in India, which is currently battling a deadly second wave of the pandemic, according to a media report.

On Monday, Indiaspora, a non-profit community of global Indian diaspora leaders, announced the launch of the 'ChaloGive for India' campaign which began with an initial \$1 million raised through their private donor network of members, reports American Bazaar.

In a tweet on Monday, the community said: "Thank you for the outpouring of support toward Covid-19 relief efforts in India. We are launching ChaloGive to continue the momentum." "No matter where you are in the world, you can give and make an impact." "Another leading community organization, the American India Foundation (AIF)



announced on Monday that it has partnered with digital payments leader Paytm "to provide oxygen concentrators in India". "AIF join hands with Paytm to provide oxygen concentrators in India. To further advance their contribution, Paytm has committed to matching AIF up to \$2 million, for a total of \$4 million to purchase and deliver oxygen concentrators," it said in a tweet. On May 1, the Foundation had

announced that it received a donation of \$8.9 million from Mastercard "to install 2,000 portable beds in India." "AIF as the implementation partner to work with government and local partners, to quickly construct these portable hospital units, comprising 20-100 beds each." Meanwhile, the Houston-based Sewa International has ramped up their fundraising goal to \$10 million to fight the deadly resurgence in India. Gitesh Desai, President, Houston Chapter of Sewa International, told ABC 13 News-Houston that 400 oxygen-concentrators have been already shipped to India, and 2,184 more would be shipped shortly. Sewa which has started 'Help India Defeat Covid-19' campaign to ship oxygen concentrators to Indian hospitals, is also providing food and medicines to about 10,000 families and more than 1,000 orphanages, and senior citizen centers across the country. The American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (APIO), is also rushing 200 oxygen concentrators to Indian hospitals.

# 12 KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN FLOODS

Kabul: At least 12 people were killed as heavy rains and flash floods hit parts of Afghanistan's Herat province, the local government said in a statement on Tuesday. "Flash floods engulfed vast areas in Adraskan district and neighbouring areas on Monday," Xinhua news agency quoted the statement as saying. Among the dead were one woman and four children, according to a local government source. The floods also destroyed tens of residential houses and orchards in the districts and caused closure of several roads, the statement said. The rescue personnel have arrived in the affected areas, and scores of local households have so far been evacuated to safe areas, according to the statement. Heavy rains hit many areas in the country in recent weeks.

# 2 DRUG-TRAFFICKING GANGS IN ITALY'S SICILY BUSTED

Rome: Italian police have busted two drug-trafficking gangs in major raids in the area surrounding the Sicilian city of Messina, local media reported on Tuesday. More than 25 suspects were arrested and taken to jail, while numerous others were placed under house arrest, dpa quoted the Adnkronos news agency as saying in a report. Authorities had been monitoring the gangs for some time. Their members used violence to control the region's narcotics market, and their wives and mothers-in-law also played an active role in the networks, according to the Ansa news agency. Suspects are also accused of extortion, kidnapping and assault. Investigators had targeted drug-trafficking gangs with Mafia ties in the same area in April with at least two major operations.

# HUMAN RIGHTS, THREATS TO DEMOCRACY IN FOCUS ON DAY 2 OF G7 MEET

London: Foreign ministers from G7 countries will on Tuesday discuss human rights and threats to democracy on the second day of a special meeting in London, according to the UK Foreign Office.

The face-to-face meeting is taking place ahead of a G7 summit planned for June 11-13 in the English county of Cornwall, reports dpa news agency.

On Tuesday, representatives from the US, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the European Union are due to meet British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab.

Following talks through the day, the Foreign Ministers will hold a dinner discussion with guest nations India, Australia, South Africa, South Korea and this year's Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) chair Brunei. The discussions in the morning will cover the coup in Myanmar. The Ministers will watch a video from the National Unity Government which will update them on the situation on the ground. In a statement, the Foreign Office said Raab will then urge the G7 nations to take stronger action against the military junta, including by expanding targeted sanctions against individuals and entities connected to the army, supporting arms embargoes and increasing humanitarian assistance. Discussions will then move to Libya and the ongoing war in Syria. Later in the afternoon, the politicians will discuss the situation in Ethiopia, as well as Somalia, the Sahel Region, and Western Balkans. The Foreign Ministers will also speak about Russia's ongoing malign activity including through the build-up of troops on the border with Ukraine, its imprisonment of opposition figure Alexei Navalny and the situation in Belarus.

# New Australian taskforce targeting offshore fugitives

Canberra | Agencies

Australia's national law enforcement agency announced on Tuesday that it has established a taskforce to pursue offshore fugitives.

Reece Kershaw, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) Commissioner, said that the Fugitive Apprehension Strike Team (FAST) has a list of 43 accused murderers, fraudsters, drug traffickers and money launderers who fled the country while wanted for their alleged crimes.

The team of specialist investigators and intelligence analysts, which was established in February, is also targeting suspected offenders who have fled to Australia



from other countries, reports Xinhua news agency. "A number of serious criminals have fled Australia and believe they are no longer within the reach of the AFP," Kershaw

said. "However, they are mistaken." He said that AFP personnel were posted in 33 countries.

"We will be working closely with our international,

Commonwealth and state and territory partners - leveraging the specialist capabilities, intelligence and operations of the AFP and our partners - to hunt down these serious criminals who are hiding here in Australia and those suspected Australian criminals who have fled offshore."

Kershaw added that the taskforce would make it easier for Australia's law enforcement and intelligence agencies to work together to find high-value targets who pose an ongoing risk.

"My message to offenders who have fled Australia, or are offshore and targeting Australians, is clear: You are within our reach and the AFP will be relentless in bringing you to justice."

# German man arrested over extremist hate mail sent to public figures

Berlin | Agencies

German police arrested a 53-year-old man in Berlin accused of writing right-wing extremist mail to public figures in a case that has baffled investigators for about three years.

The mail was marked with the sender "NSU 2.0", a reference to the National Socialist Underground, a far-right German terrorist group that was discovered 10 years ago, dpa news agency reported on Tuesday. The case was particularly sensitive because the perpetrator or perpetrators were apparently able to access police information.

The man is strongly suspected of having "sent a series of letters with inciting, insulting and threatening content nationwide" under the pseudonym NSU 2.0 since August 2018, the public prosecutors said following



the Monday night arrest.

The German citizen, whose name has not been released under the country's strict protection laws, was arrested following a search of a Berlin apartment. He is currently unemployed.

The recipients of the mail were mainly public figures, especially from the media world and politics, including state and federal parliamentary members.

# Right-wing populist party eyes Madrid regional govt role

Madrid | Agencies

A new regional parliament will be elected in the Spanish capital, Madrid, on Tuesday, with the right-wing populist Vox party hoping to form part of the government.

The vote is therefore being seen as having nationwide significance beyond the economically strong region, dpa news agency reported.

According to opinion polls, the conservative People's Party with the incumbent regional President Isabel Diaz Ayuso could double its share of the vote compared to the last election to about 40 per cent.

To form a government, however, Ayuso may have to rely on Vox, a prospect she has described as unproblematic.



The possible coalition has united the otherwise divided left, which has called for a massive turnout during a bitter election campaign.

Spain's Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has warned that a People's Party pact with Vox could endanger the democratic system of the whole of Spain.

The left-wing Unidas Podemos, which is in coalition with Sanchez at the national level, even issued the slogan, "Fascism or democracy".

# Colombian FM steps down after violent protests

Bogota | Agencies

Colombian Finance Minister Alberto Carrasquilla resigned following violent protests against a controversial tax reform.

"I have accepted the resignation of Alberto Carrasquilla," President Ivan Duque tweeted on Monday. Duque expressed his "gratitude and respect" for Carrasquilla's contribution at the head of his economic team, reports dpa news agency.

The President praised the economic team's achievements, including what he called an "unprecedented" social programme to face



the coronavirus pandemic. Duque named Trade and Tourism Minister Jose Manuel Restrepo as new Finance Minister.

The government withdrew the planned tax reform legislation on Sunday after days of protests which saw demonstrators set buses on fire

and loot stores in several cities. Several injuries as well as deaths have been reported.

The Colombian government deployed soldiers to cities across the country to help support police. More protests are expected in the coming days. In a statement on Monday, Colombia's

Office of the Ombudsman said so far a total of 19 people had died in the violence.

It urged authorities to launch an investigation.

As a public agency, the role of the ombudsman's office in Colombia is to oversee the protection of citizens' human and civil rights. In its now withdrawn tax reform draft, the government wanted among other things to reduce tax allowances, increase income tax for certain groups and abolish value-added-tax (VAT) exemptions for a number of goods and services. This was to offset the deficits in the state budget caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.



# UNCERTAINTY LOOMS OVER T20 WORLD CUP IN INDIA

IF THE T20 WORLD CUP DOESN'T HAPPEN IN INDIA, IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME INDIA WILL BE HOSTING AN INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENT OR A SERIES OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY.

The World Cup is scheduled to be held in October-November in India. Although the tournament is still five months away and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) feels there is still time, the forced suspension of the tournament is unlikely to go down well with the International Cricket Council (ICC) and the other national cricket boards.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Uncertainty looms over India hosting the T20 World Cup this year after the Indian Premier League (IPL) was postponed on Tuesday following rising Covid-19 posi-

itive cases in four out of the eight competing teams, and all over India. The IPL bio-bubble was supposed to be tight and impenetrable despite the rising number of Covid-19 cases across the country. However, the emergence of positive cases in half of the IPL

teams has put question marks over the Indian cricket board's ability to put up a safe bio-secure environment.

An ICC rescue team that was supposed to visit India during the IPL cancelled/postponed its programme due to the pandemic.

A top BCCI official last week confirmed that the UAE has already been kept as a standby venue for the T20 World Cup.

India is witnessing a surge in Covid-19 cases with daily fresh cases in the range of 3.5 to 4 lakh. Apart from that, India is also reporting around 3,500 deaths a day.

On Monday, two players of the Kolkata Knight Riders team - Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep Warrier - and the bowling coach of Chennai Super Kings, Laxmipathy Balaji tested positive while on Tuesday, a player each from SunRisers Hyderabad (Wriddhiman Saha) and Delhi Capitals (believed to be Amit Mishra) tested positive. Besides, two members of support staff of the CSK also tested positive.

## Indian team to feature in AFC Women's Club Championship



Team Absolute | New Delhi

An Indian side is set to feature in the inaugural AFC Women's Club Championship, a pilot tournament the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) will kick off this year. With the country set to host two major international events -- the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2022 and the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup 2022 - an Indian club competing in the eight-team tournament will give a "huge boost" to women's football in the country.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) said in a statement on Tuesday that, "The tournament will feature eight teams from eight different nations and will be played between October 30 to November 14, 2021.

"Group A (East) will consist of representative clubs from Chinese Taipei, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, while Group B (West)

is set to feature a club each from India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan and Uzbekistan, wherein India are to be represented by the Hero Indian Women's League champions," the AIFF said.

"An Indian club playing in the AFC Women's Club Championship is a great opportunity to boost the growth of women's football in India. We already have two International events -- the AFC Women's Asian Cup, and the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup lined up in 2022. As a prelude to that, Indian representation in the Club Championship will further redefine women's football in India to a large extent," AIFF general secretary Kushal Das said.

The AFC will also have a soft implementation of the AFC Women's Club Licensing System in order to prepare clubs and member associations ahead of the planned AFC Women's Champions League in 2023.

## STRANDED AUSSIE PLAYERS MAY STAY IN INDIA OR GO THIRD COUNTRY

Sydney | Agencies

Australian players stranded at the postponed Indian Premier League (IPL) will either stay back in India or move to a third country as Cricket Australia (CA) and Australian Cricketers' Association (ACA) on Tuesday made it clear that they would not seek exemptions to their national government's norms.

The Australian government has suspended all flights from India till May 15, leaving around 9,000 Aussies, including cricketers and former cricketers in IPL, stranded in the country that is reeling under the pandemic with fresh Covid-19 cases between 3.5-4 lakh being reported daily. "CA and the ACA

respect the decision of the Australian Government to pause travel from India until at least May 15 and will not seek exemptions," said their joint statement on Tuesday.



While three of the Aussie players in IPL - Adam Zampa, Kane Richardson (Royal Challengers Bangalore) and Andrew Tye (Rajasthan Royals) - left for Australia before the government imposed flight ban, the remaining cricketers stayed back. Umpire Paul Reiffel decided to return but could not as his flight via Qatar too were cancelled. Commentator Michael Slater had to escape to Maldives and lashed out at the government that was not allowing entry to its citizens from India.

## MADRID OPEN: BARTY THROUGH TO FINAL AFTER BEATING SWIATEK

Madrid | Agencies

World No.1 Ashleigh Barty won the battle when the last two champions of the French Open clashed and she beat Poland's Iga Swiatek 7-5, 6-4 in the third round of the Madrid Open.

Barty won in Paris in 2019 and Swiatek in 2020 and both players went into the clash with long unbeaten runs on clay, with Barty not losing her last 19 matches, while Swiatek 18. Swiatek started out better of the two and raced into a 3-0 lead, but she failed to beat the Australian's serve and although Barty's first serve wasn't at her best, she still won almost 80 per cent of her service points, Xinhua news agency reports.



The No.1 seed will now meet Petra Kvitova in the quarterfinals after the No.9 seed reached the quarterfinals in Madrid for the sixth time in her career with the three-time winner taking a 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 win over Veronika Kudermetova, while No.8

seed Belinda Bencic moved into the last eight after injury forced her rival, Ons Jabeur to retire trailing 7-6(2), 4-3.

On the first day of the men's competition, Russia's Aslan Karatsev opened his debut Mutua Madrid Open campaign on Monday by hit-

ting 24 winners on his way to a 7-5, 6-4 victory against Ugo Humbert, which set up a second-round tie against No.7 seed Diego Schwartzman.

British number one Daniel Evans beat Jeremy Chardy in a marathon 7-6(6), 6-7(7), 6-2 match, which lasted two hours and 46 minutes.

Lloyd Harris continued his excellent form against Top-20 ranked opponents with a tense, 6-3, 3-6, 7-6(5) win over Bulgaria's No.13 seed Grigor Dimitrov.

Harris wasted three match points while 5-2 up in the third set, but then fought back from 2-3 down in the decisive tie-break.

Meanwhile, big-serving John Isner hit 28 aces on his way to a 6-4, 7-6(6) win over Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic.

## SA IPL PLAYERS TO RETURN HOME, UNDERGO QUARANTINE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

South African players who were playing in the Indian Premier League (IPL) will have to undergo quarantine in their own homes, once they return to their country, Cricket South Africa (CSA) said on Tuesday.

The 2021 IPL was postponed indefinitely on Tuesday after a spate of positive Covid-19 tests came up within the tournament's bio-bubble in Ahmedabad and Delhi.

"CSA supports the decision to put the health and safety interests of all involved in the tournament first and foremost and has made contact with all of the relevant franchises to ensure the expedited travel of all South African players and support staff back to our shores," said the CSA. "Those travelling back to South Africa will undergo home quarantine in line with the current World Health Organization recommendations. CSA and the South African Cricketers Association (SACA) are in contact with all players and are assured of their safety and comfort in their respective locations," it said.



## India's Pro League hockey games vs Spain, Germany postponed



Lausanne | Agencies

The Indian men's hockey team's preparations for the Tokyo Olympic Games suffered a major blow on Tuesday as its upcoming FIH Pro League away matches against Spain and Germany were postponed due to

"international travel restrictions affecting India because of the Covid-19 pandemic".

While India were supposed to play Spain on May 15 and 16, their matches against Germany were scheduled on May 22 and 23.

"FIH, Hockey India as well as the

Hockey National Associations of Germany, Spain and Great Britain -- since the matches initially planned in London on May 8-9 were also postponed -- are currently looking at all potential options to rearrange these matches at a later date," an FIH statement said.

The FIH expressed sympathy to the Indian hockey community, as well as their families and friends in times of Covid. "At this very hard time for India, a country so much linked to the history as well as the current development of hockey, our thoughts are with all Indian people," it said.

The Manpreet Singh-led India team had recently returned from a successful tour of Argentina, where they had defeated the reigning Olympic champions in both the Pro League games and also won two of the four practice games in Buenos Aires.

## Mourinho to replace Fonseca as Roma coach

Berlin | Agencies



Jose Mourinho has been appointed Italian football club AS Roma coach on a three-year contract from next season onwards. He will succeed Paulo Fonseca, the Serie A club said on Tuesday.

Mourinho, 58, has won 25 major titles in his coaching career, highlighted by the 2004 Champions League success with Porto and the 2010 treble with Inter Milan, the other Italian club he has coached.

The Portuguese was replaced two weeks ago at Tottenham Hotspur and will be hoping to turn the fortunes of Roma from 2021-22 onwards.

"We are thrilled and delighted to welcome Jose Mourinho into the AS Roma family," Roma president Dan Friedkin said in a statement. "A great champion who has

won trophies at every level, Jose will provide tremendous leadership and experience to our ambitious project. The appointment of Jose is a huge step in building a long-term and consistent winning culture throughout the club."

Mourinho, who has also coached Real Madrid, Manchester United and Chelsea, said, "After meetings with the ownership and (general manager) Tiago Pinto, I immediately understood the full extent of their ambitions for AS Roma. It is the same ambition and drive that has always motivated me and together we want to build a winning project over the upcoming year."

Roma's last Serie A title was in 2001 and the last Italian Cup title came in 2008.

They have had modest results recently, losing 6-2 in the Europa League semi-final first leg at Manchester United last week.

## Will work with BCCI to ensure everyone gets safe passage home: RCB



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) said that it will work in close consultation with the Indian cricket board to ensure those in the franchise reach home safely following the postponement of the 2021 Indian Premier League (IPL).

The tournament was postponed indefinitely on Tuesday after a spate of Covid-19 infections came up within its bio-bubble in Ahmedabad and New Delhi.

"The safety and security of everyone in VIVO IPL 2021 is of paramount importance and we support the decision of BCCI to postpone the tournament. Royal Challengers Bangalore will work

in consultation with the BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) to ensure that everyone has a safe passage back home," said RCB in a statement.

Monday's match between RCB and Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) at New Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium was postponed after two KKR players tested positive. The BCCI announced the postponement of the tournament shortly after news broke out that SunRisers Hyderabad's (SRH) Wriddhiman Saha in Delhi and Delhi Capitals' (DC) Amit Mishra in Ahmedabad tested positive on Tuesday.

"The Indian Premier League Governing Council (IPL GC) and Board of Control for Cricket in

India (BCCI) in an emergency meeting has unanimously decided to postpone IPL 2021 season, with immediate effect," said a statement from the BCCI.

"The BCCI does not want to compromise on the safety of the players, support staff and the other participants involved in organising the IPL. This decision was taken keeping the safety, health and wellbeing of all the stakeholders in mind," the statement added.

The Board confirmed that all players will return to their families. On Monday, Chennai Super Kings (CSK) bowling coach Laxmipathy Balaji and Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) bowlers Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep

Warrier, had tested positive along with the ground staff at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. That forced three teams - KKR, CSK and DC to go into isolation. However, more positive cases on Tuesday made it impossible for the league to continue.

"These are difficult times, especially in India and while we have tried to bring in some positivity and cheer, however, it is imperative that the tournament is now suspended and everyone goes back to their families and loved ones in these trying times," the statement said further.

"The BCCI will do everything in its powers to arrange for the secure and safe passage of all the participants in IPL 2021," it added.

# FM DOES QUICK FOLLOW UP OF IGST EXEMPTION ON COVID RELIEF MATERIAL

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In an attempt to speed up clearances of goods received free of cost for distribution for Covid relief, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday undertook a quick follow up action by briefing the chief secretaries of the states on the order on IGST exemption.

The Centre on Monday exempted from IGST or integrated GST the import of goods received free of cost for distribution for Covid relief. The exemption is ad hoc and applicable on all specified imports made till June 30, 2021.

The exemption will also cover goods already imported but lying uncleared on the date of issuance of exemption which starts from Monday.

In a tweet, Sitharaman said: "Quick follow-up action in briefing Chief Secretaries of states on today's order of IGST exemption on specified COVID-19 relief materials (Customs duty waiver given earlier). Will speed up clearance for charitable organisations and others."

The government had earlier issued a notification exempting from basic customs duty and/or health cess imports of a number of Covid related relief materials for a limited period. These included Remdesivir injection/ API and Beta Cyclodextrin (SBEBCD), inflammatory diagnostic (markers) kits,



imports of which has been exempted from Customs duty till October 31, 2021.

Also, imports of medical grade oxygen, oxygen therapy related equipment such as oxygen concentrators, cryogenic transport tanks etc., and Covid-19 vaccines have been exempted till July 31, 2021.

The Central government had received a number

of representations from charitable organisations, corporate entities and other associations/entities seeking IGST exemption on the import of Covid-19 relief material (already exempted from Customs duty), donated/received free of cost from outside the country for free distribution. The IGST exemption, however, will be conditional. The Centre had decided that the state governments shall appoint a nodal authority in the states for the purpose of this exemption. Such authority will then authorise any entity, relief agency or statutory body for free distribution of such Covid-relief material.

The Finance Ministry statement said that goods can be imported free of cost by a state government or any entity/relief agency/statutory body authorized in this regard for free distribution anywhere in India.

The importer shall produce a certificate from the said nodal authorities stating that the goods are meant for free distribution for Covid relief.

Also, after imports, the importer shall produce to the deputy or assistant commissioner of Customs at the port within a period of six months from the date of importation or within such extended period not exceeding nine months, a simple statement containing details of goods imported and distributed free of cost. This statement shall be certified by the said nodal authority of the state government.

# State elections over, auto fuel prices start rising again

On the expected lines, oil companies did not wait long post declaration of state election results to raise the price of auto fuels -- petrol and diesel across the country. Accordingly, the petrol and diesel prices increased by 15 paise and 18 paise per litre to Rs 90.55 and Rs 80.91 per litre respectively on Tuesday in Delhi.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prior to the increase, petrol and diesel were being retailed at Rs 90.40 and 80.73 per litre respectively in the national Capital. The two auto fuel prices were static for 18 days

prior to this increase. Across the country as well the petrol and diesel prices increased on Tuesday but its quantum varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states.

IANS had written earlier that OMCs may increase 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. The oil companies had already increased the ATF prices by 6.7 per cent effective this month.

OMCs benchmark retail fuel prices to a 15-day rolling average of global refined products' prices and dollar exchange rate. In the last fortnight global oil prices have hovered in \$66-67 a barrel range higher than the levels when petrol and diesel prices were last revised.

The price of the two auto fuels had fallen by 16 paise

and 14 paise per litre respectively on April 15 after a 15-day break when OMCs kept its prices static. Thereafter revision of fuel prices have been halted. The OMCs went on price cut for the first time this year on two consecutive days -- March 24 and 25 after keeping oil prices steady for the past 24 days. It again reduced the price on March 30. Thereafter, fuel prices have remained unchanged for the past 15 days before falling again on April 15. In all petrol prices have fallen by 77 paise per litre while diesel by 74 paise per litre in 2021 so far.

Earlier, petrol and diesel prices increased 26 times in 2021 with the two auto fuels increasing by Rs 7.46 and Rs 7.60 per litre respectively so far this year.

With global crude prices at over \$ 67 a barrel mark, OMCs may revise fuel prices upwards again if there is any further firming up.

# Mondelez commits \$2 mn Covid-19 relief support to India

In the last one year, we have seen our country coming together to fight this unprecedented challenge. We are deeply concerned about the latest wave of Covid sweeping across the country and want to lend our support in this fight.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Mondelez International on Tuesday announced a contribution of \$2 million as part of the company's Covid-19 relief efforts in India.

According to the company, this contribution will aid in the purchase of medical supplies and other critical equipment in the fight against the pandemic. "In the last one year, we have seen our country coming together to fight this unprecedented challenge. We are deeply concerned about the latest wave of Covid sweeping across the country and want to lend our support in this fight," said Deepak Iyer, Managing



Director, Mondelez India Foods. "We hope our contribution will support with the access to medical supplies and infrastructure that is much needed to save lives."

In addition, the company said it will continue to distribute its products to impacted communities across India during this difficult time.

# Pharma sector facing shooting prices of raw materials:Assocham

Chandigarh | Agencies

The pharma sector is facing shooting prices and shortage of raw materials, known as active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), as 85 per cent of them come from China, Assocham said on Tuesday.

It sought government's intervention in clearing the bottleneck in the import.

"Such practices are not acceptable during these challenging times when the whole country is fighting a battle against the pandemic. We urge an immediate intervention from authorities to take necessary action against this practice," Assocham Chairman of Northern Region Development Council A.S. Mittal said in a statement. The drugs for which the raw material cost has gone up multi-fold include paracetamol (price from Rs 350 to Rs 790 per kg), propylene glycol (from Rs 140 to Rs 400 per kg) ivermectin (from Rs 18,000 to Rs 52,000 per kg) doxycycline (from Rs 6,000 to Rs 12,000 per kg) and azithromycin (from Rs 8,000 to Rs 12,000 per kg).

Jitender Sodhi, Assocham Chairman of Himachal Pradesh State Development Council, said, "The economic impact of the Covid-19 second wave has started taking a toll on pharma sector as well. Pharma grade raw materials should be sup-



plied to manufacturers uninterrupted through provision of special passes and green passes can help in curbing the problem of shortage of raw material. "Call on action for mandatory fixing of base prices on per km basis for transportation vehicles and ambulances indulged in the services of Covid-19 should be taken by the government, which can help in cost cutting of raw material, he added.

Asia's biggest pharmaceutical hub -- Baddi-Barotiwala-Nalagarh (BBN) in Himachal Pradesh, producing several primary life-saving, anti-infective, anti-viral, and Covid-19 drugs, is facing problem in procuring active pharmaceutical ingredients.

"This industrial belt is the backbone of India in the current Covid war. The unprecedented price hike and shortage of raw material due to various reasons has resulted in a huge demand and supply gap for these drugs. The government should intervene to streamline the availability and the transportation of raw material as most of the active pharmaceutical ingredients are imported from outside India," said Manik Batra, Assocham Chairman of J&K Development Council.

The Chinese state-owned Sichuan Airlines has also suspended its cargo services to India for 15 days following the second wave of Covid-19. This, many industrial units in the BBN, fear will add to the problems. "The entire country is facing a difficult time, when we cannot afford price hike in pharmaceuticals. The government should intervene and control the rising cost of raw materials of pharmaceuticals. Subsidies in raw material and transport can be a big help," added Vijay Sharma, Assocham Chairman of Haryana State Development Council.

# Microfinance industry to witness disruptions from Covid surge: ICRA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Covid resurgence is expected to further disrupt the microfinance industry, ratings agency ICRA said.

According to ICRA, risk perception for the microfinance industry remains high as Covid-19 pandemic is still not under control.

"Though some states have classified the microfinance industry as an essential activity, the cash flows of borrowers may be affected due to the restrictions or lockdowns, thereby affecting their repayment ability. Moreover, the risk of infections spreading faster in other regions and increased restrictions/lockdowns in more places per-

sists, which would impact collections. "While ICRA has noted the relatively stronger balance sheets of most entities in terms of maintaining higher liquidity and lower leverage, the risk of further disruptions in the operations and impact on collections cannot be ruled out," it said.

According to Sachin Sachdeva, Vice President and Sector Head, Financial Sector Ratings, ICRA, lockdowns are creating disruptions in the economic activities and impacting the field operations of micro finance institutions (MFIs).

Consequently, the industry is witnessing a reduction in collections and the recovery seen in Q4FY21 is being challenged again.

## RAYTHEON TECHNOLOGIES SENDING 1,000 OXYGEN CONCENTRATORS TO INDIA

New Delhi: Aerospace and defence major Raytheon Technologies Corp on Tuesday said it is sending 1,000 oxygen concentrators to India.

The company employs nearly 5,000 people in India, primarily through Pratt & Whitney and Collins Aerospace. According to the aerospace and defence major, some of these oxygen concentrators have already started to arrive in India, through the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum and organisations actively working with the government across the country.

"These life-saving devices will be distributed where the need is the greatest, including those communities where our employees work and live," the company said in a statement.

# International, Domestic air travel recovery delayed by 3 months: Ind-Ra

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Recovery in domestic and international travel has been delayed by three and six months, respectively, due to Covid resurgence, said India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra).

The first two months of 2021 witnessed a solid improvement in air travel, after a steep decline in EBITDAR losses in 3QFY21 as airline operations normalised, it said.

However, late March and April have seen a sharp rise in active Covid cases all across India which has significantly impacted air travel and dented confidence in aviation recovery. Besides, 2021 has brought three new challenges such as higher fuel expenses as crude prices recover amid a soaring global demand, rising competition intensity amid the possible re-start of operations by Jet Airways, and likely pressure on airline yields as the scramble for market share realignment to pre-Covid period begins. "Ind-Ra believes the domestic air travel recovery should resume in three months, if the



fresh Covid wave subsides. "However, a meaningful international travel recovery is around six months away and contingent on the achievement of vaccination coverage for a significant proportion of the

population," the ratings agency said.

Furthermore, Ind-Ra expects regulator DGCA to continue to keep price controls in place till demand normalises and reaches closer to pre-Covid levels.

"However, the overall yields for two leading carriers remain at a weak level and largely in line with median yield level witnessed in the last five years. "In addition, Ind-Ra's baseline expectations for a partial but meaningful recovery in international travel have been pushed ahead by up to six months post the fresh wave of restrictions and will continue to significantly depend on a huge decline in active cases, coupled with achievement of mass vaccination coverage.

"Even when international travel resumes in 2HFY22, significant tourism and corporate demand may not recover immediately, given restrictions requiring travellers to quarantine for up to 10 days. "International Air Transport Association in a recent update on the global aviation recovery has highlighted that 89 per cent of airline travel remains down with cargo being the only bright spot."

# Steel, oil cos become lifeline with ramped up oxygen supplies for Covid relief

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Steel and oil companies have emerged as the oxygen lifeline for the country gasping for breath in the ongoing second wave of Covid-19.

Companies such as IndianOil, BPCL, SAIL, Vedanta, JSPL, Tata Steel have all been diverting large portions of industrial oxygen they produce for manufacturing for Covid relief. In fact, a few companies have cut down their routine production to make available additional oxygen for medical use across the country.

The support of these two sectors is crucial for Covid relief measures as they account for more than 60 per cent of the country's 7,000 MT of oxygen production per day.

The role of two steel PSUs - SAIL and RINL in this direction has been significant. SAIL has already supplied 36,747 metric tonnes (MT) of Liquid Medical Oxygen since August last year. The company has also reduced the production of gaseous Oxygen, Nitrogen and Argon besides optimizing process parameters in its plants to boost production of LMO.

"During this hour of emergency need, SAIL firmly stands committed with the nation and will do everything to augment the production of Liquid Medical Oxygen from its plants. All its plants have been advised to maximise production of LMO and optimize dispatch logistics so as to reduce the turnaround time of oxygen tankers," the company reaffirmed.

With the help of Indian Railways and the Ministry of Steel, SAIL has also planned to load a rake from its Bokaro, Durgapur steel plants. This will help greatly in bulk evacuation of LMO and faster arrival of the same at the destination.

Another steel PSU RINL is also supplying around 140 tonnes of medical oxy-



gen per day. The first Oxygen Express had left RINL Vizag Steel Plant site on April 22, carrying 100 tonnes of oxygen to Maharashtra.

Sources said that Union minister for steel and petroleum Dharmendra Pradhan is monitoring oxygen production at PSUs on a regular basis and is attending to all emergency situations by augmenting supplies from companies under its administrative control.

Oil PSUs IndianOil, HPCL, BPCL have also ramped up oxygen production for

supplies to hospitals across the country. In fact, the companies are also in the process of setting up Pressure Swing Absorption (PSA) medical oxygen plants at over 90 locations across the country to facilitate captive oxygen generation facilities at hospitals. Official sources said that PSUs have been asked to increase production of medical grade oxygen even if it means cutting down their production for some time. Accordingly, a few companies have also reduced their stock of oxygen at plants that is kept for almost 4 days to just about half a day's stock. Companies said that they may dip into this stock as well if the need arises.

Sterlite Copper has also received approval from the Supreme Court to supply oxygen from its Tuticorin plant. Sterlite Copper's oxygen plants have a capacity to produce 1,000 tonnes of oxygen daily. Also, to respond to the national urgency, Linde India has joined hands with the Tata group and the Government of India (GoI) to undertake measures to augment the availability of LMO across the country. In one such measure to bolster the delivery infrastructure for medical oxygen, Linde India in partnership with the Tata group has secured 24 cryogenic containers for carriage of medical oxygen from international sources. These containers have arrived by air to the eastern part of India, from where Linde would be transporting them to their Liquid Oxygen manufacturing facility. At the Linde facility, these cryogenic ISO containers would be conditioned and certified for liquid medical oxygen usage. Each of these containers, which can carry up to 20 tons of Liquid O2, will be used by Linde to pick up oxygen from various manufacturing facilities and deliver it to hospitals where required. These ISO containers can also act as interim oxygen storages in remote areas which are facing oxygen scarcity.

JSPL has more than 500 tons of liquid oxygen stock readily available at its Angul plant and has asked users to send their tankers to pick it up. JSW Steel, meanwhile, has commenced supplies of 1,000 tons per day of Liquid Medical Oxygen.

## VINEET KUMAR SINGH: GREAT TO SEE HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IS BEING USED TO HELP OTHERS



Team Absolute | Mumbai

"Mukkabaaz" actor Vineet Kumar Singh, who is also an Ayurveda physician, has constantly been trying to help people with bed, oxygen, medicines through social media, during the ongoing Covid crisis. He says this is how a powerful platform as social media ought to be used. "I am so glad that in the last few

months requests of beds, oxygen and other things from the needy -- especially the family of Covid-19 patients -- are being shared as much as possible, and those needs are being fulfilled. On social media, people are putting up posts and there are good people standing by each other. Many of my friends and I are doing the same. This is how social media should be used during crisis like a global pandemic, for help and

support," said Vineet.

Being a doctor who also suffered from Covid earlier, he also emphasised on mental health and how stress and anxiety could possibly affect the body and breathing and, in turn, blood pressure and oxygen levels.

"We, as doctors are trained to handle crisis first. Remember, if you are a youngster, middle-aged with no other medical complications like heart disease or diabetes, and if you have good immunity, then your possibility of quick recovery from Covid would be higher with home care. Staying strong, not panicking, protein-heavy food, breathing exercise, taking steam, and consuming certain herbs are mentioned in Ayurveda, too. These help in recovery. The more anxious and stressed our body gets, (the more it) affects our heart and blood pressure and, naturally, oxygen level. I know it is tough to stay positive and strong amidst the crisis, but what else can we do?" shared the actor.

Vineet says he has a chain of volunteers in different cities including Mumbai, Pune and his native city Varanasi, besides many other cities in Uttar Pradesh, where he is constantly helping people.

"One of the problems is the numbers available online are not always working. Out of five phone numbers, maybe be one responds quickly. So, we are trying to generate that source to the needy, so that one does not have to hustle by calling too many sources to find out," he said.

"Verifying information is another matter, and when one is in need of injection or oxygen, we are only going by prescription. Always remember, if you have recovered from Covid-19, you are a warrior. Donate plasma, and help another person in need. Each one, can save one -- at least try once," Vineet signed off.

## ELNAAZ NOROUZI: SOCIAL MEDIA HAS KEPT LIFE MOVING AMID COVID

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Elnaaz Norouzi says social media has emerged as a great platform for people to help each other during these tough times. "As the world hit the pause button owing to Coronavirus, social media has kept life moving forward. In such trying times, the power of new media made it possible for everyone to come together and fight the deadly virus. From crowdfunding to making people aware of Covid to sharing the resource details, all these platforms have been contributing to a very large extent to bring lives back on track again," said Elnaaz. The actress adds that she, too, is trying her best to reach out and help as many people as possible. "At such a critical time, every post, every request, and every query is crucial. To pitch in my contribution in helping the nation get back on its feet, I am trying to amplify Covid related information through my social media handle. Only together we can fight this virus," she says. Elnaaz, who shot to fame with a role in the web series "Sacred Games", was recently seen in the OTT-released film "Hello Charlie".



## RAJNESH DUGGAL: I LOVE PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLERS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Rajnesh Duggal is all set to star in the upcoming psychological thriller web series "Flawed". He plays an alcoholic for the first time in the show. The series also stars Pooja Bisht, Sumit Manak, Ashok Pathak and Sammratt Kapoor. It is directed by Dheeraj Singh Padiyar.

"I love psychological thrillers. It's one of my favourite genres. The script of 'Flawed' is brilliant and Dheeraj and (writer) Monty's passion towards it was evident right from the word 'go'. I'd never played an alcoholic before. Plus, the slight under-layered situational comedy amongst friends was very quirky," Rajnesh said. He added: "We had a great time shooting in Kota, even though we were shooting till 7pm due to the night curfews. At the moment all I can say to my fans and readers is stay safe and follow all protocols." Pooja said: "We are all under lockdown and these are difficult times. We have to follow protocols. I am so looking forward to the release of 'Flawed' and it would be a blessing if we can entertain people during these tough times. I hope and pray for everyone. We should all get through this safely, get vaccinated and support each other." The series is in post-production stage and should be ready once lockdown opens. "I really hope that this pandemic comes to an end and people get back to leading a normal life. Please be safe and maintain social distancing to end this chain," added Padiyar. The series is produced by Abhishek Pareek and Sumit Manak. Work has already started on "Flawed 2".

## SHLOKKA PANDIT: WE'RE LITERALLY AT WAR WITH COVID-19 VIRUS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Shlokka Pandit has urged everyone to follow Covid-19 protocols, noting we are literally at war with the deadly virus. "These are dire times. We haven't seen days like this and we are literally at war with the virus. A war that we can't afford to lose. Everyone I know has lost a near and dear one," Shlokka said.

"The least that we could do is follow all the protocols that are set -- be it social distancing, using masks, sanitising and isolating. If we see symptoms or test positive, we have to follow everything religiously. People are losing lives in hours, so we have no reaction time.

"I pray and wish everyone gets through this safely," says Shlokka, who was recently seen in the film "Hello Charlie", co-starring Jackie Shroff, Elnaaz Norouzi and Aadar Jain.



## 'VIGNAHARTA GANESH' ACTOR KULDEEP SINGH PRACTICES YOGA FOR FITNESS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Kuldeep Singh, who is playing the role of Lord Vishnu in the show "Vignaharta Ganesh", says fitness is a major issue for him, and he has been practising yoga to make sure he stays in shape. "For a person like me, fitness has been addictive and I'm very passionate about it. I'm regularly practising yoga, mostly Surya Namaskar during sunrise and sunset," he says. "I make sure to keep my body engaged. I try and take up household chores and do other work at home," he adds. The actor insists one must stay at home and follow Covid protocols to ensure our safety.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has brought this fast-moving world to a standstill. The impact of this pandemic is massive, and the only strategy to curb the rapid spread of the disease is to follow social distancing. The imposed lockdown has resulted in the closure of fitness and activity centres, and overall social life, and has hampered many aspects of the lives of people including routine fitness activities of fitness enthusiasts," he says. The actor is known for featuring in shows such as "Vikram Betaal Ki Rahasya Gatha" and "Kaisi Yeh Yaariaan".

## VIDYA MALAVADE TO APPEAR IN 'LIGHT, EASY-BREEZY AND COMEDY SERIES'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Vidya Malavade is all set to star in a mini-series titled "Bamini And Boys". She plays an attractive woman who has three young boys as tenants who swoon over her and try to impress her all the time. "It's a hilarious ride. I love sitcoms and I laughed out really loud while I was going through the narration. It's done with a difference, and is not in the run-of-the-mill way. Each episode is just 10 to 12 mins, so it's a light, easy-breezy and quick comedy series," Vidya said.

She shared that these are extremely uncertain times that have gone totally out of control. "Staying home and safe is one of the things we are bound to do. In such times if we could laugh a bit, it spreads positive energy and things get easier. Let's all stay safe and I pray for the well-being of everyone," she said, adding: "I am blessed to be able to entertain my audience even during these times as we battle this deadly second wave of the pandemic."



## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Janhvi Kapoor