

absolute india

VOL. 4, ISSUE 160, NEW DELHI | SATURDAY, MAY 01, 2021 | ₹5 | PAGE 12

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'COERCIVE ACTION ON SOCIAL POST ON COVID WILL BE TREATED AS CONTEMPT' SC SHOWS SUPREMACY

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday continued its hearing on the Covid situation and said any clampdown on information will be treated as contempt. The apex court flagged the issue of threat of coercive action against people putting help calls on social media. Justice Chandrachud has also asked if a mechanism can be developed to show real time updates regarding the allocation of oxygen. It also expressed concern over the drug shortage and asked why should the court not issue directions under Section 100 and Section 92 of the Patents Act to enable generics to manufacture drugs without the fear of legal action. The court expressed its reservation on the price disparity of the vaccine. Justice S Ravindra Bhat told the Solicitor General about the differential pricing for Covid vaccines.

SC to continue hearing suo motu case on Covid management
The bench had asked the central government to explain the basis and rationale behind the pricing of anti-Covid vaccines and other necessary items.

The top court had fixed the matter for hearing on their responses and said that the Supreme Court is here to complement the High Courts.



We want to make it very clear that if citizens communicate their grievance on social media and Internet then it cannot be said its wrong information. We don't want any clampdown of information. We will treat it as a contempt of court if such grievances are considered for action. Let a strong message go to all the states and DGPs of states.

HCS SHOULD RESTRAIN FROM OFF-THE-CUFF REMARKS

New Delhi: The Supreme Court said on Friday that the high courts should exercise restraint in making 'off-the-cuff' remarks. The observation was made by the top court at the fag end of the nearly four-hour long hearing on Covid related issues, after the Solicitor General of India, Tushar Mehta, flagged the issue of certain remarks made by the high courts while hearing cases related to the pandemic. Earlier the top court asked the Delhi government to cooperate with the Centre.

BIHAR CHIEF SECY DIES OF COVID

Patna: Bihar Chief Secretary Arun Kumar Singh on Friday died of Covid-19, health officials said. Singh was admitted to a private hospital here on Thursday after he had tested positive for coronavirus. The doctors said that he had developed complications in breathing a few days back. Besides him, Piyush Srivastava, Additional Session Judge of Sasaram district court also died of Covid. Another, Jagdish Acharya Goswami, the in-charge of primary health centre in Saran district also died due to Covid on Friday.

MADRAS HC REJECTS EC'S REQUEST TO RESTRAIN MEDIA

Chennai: The Madras High Court on Friday refused to restrain the media from publishing oral observations made by the court against the Election Commission for the surge in Covid-19 cases. The court had, on April 26 during the hearing of a suo moto PIL it had initiated, orally observed that the EC "is the institution responsible for the situation prevalent today" and asked why it should not face murder charges. Poll panel's counsel Rakesh Dwivedi had on Friday pleaded that these oral observations had caused "grave prejudice" to the Commission. He also cited that police complaints were being filed against the poll panel. However the court refused to accept the contentions.



No lockdown

MHA ASKS STATES TO GO FOR CONTAINMENT MEASURES

There would be no lockdown across the states as the Union Ministry of Home Affairs has advised them to go in for "containment" in districts and areas where the second wave surged.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The ministry directed states and Union Territories to consider containment measures such as restrictions on gatherings, operations of markets, offices, schools and universities, and intensified testing and tracking for immediate implementation based on their assessment of the situation until May 31. It has suggested intensive, local and focused containment measures in districts and areas with test positivity of 10 per cent and more in the last one week and where more than 60 per cent of oxygen-supported or ICU beds are occupied. The advisory asks states to encourage work from home. All District Magistrates are required to strictly enforce state-level directives on containment measures as well as the national guidelines. Apart



The Union Health Ministry had called for measures like night curfew, prohibiting public gatherings for political, social, religious, sports or entertainment purposes, capping attendance at marriages to 50 and at funerals to 20, closing of shopping complexes, cinema halls, gyms, spas, restaurants, stadia, operating public transport at 50 per cent, and a cap of 50 per cent attendance in government and private offices.

from suggesting 100 per cent vaccination of eligible age groups, the Health Ministry had also said that details of hospital beds and vacancy status be made available online on a daily basis. It also said details on availability of oxygen, drugs, vaccines and vaccination centres, includ-

ing the guidelines related to use of drugs like Remdesivir and Tocilizumab, should be widely publicised to generate public confidence. The guidelines will be applicable till May 31. The previous guidelines issued on March 23 are effective till April 30.

India to receive Sputnik V vaccine consignments from today

Amid the raging second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in India, the country will start receiving consignments of Russian Sputnik V vaccine doses from May 1 onwards. India is expected to receive 5 million doses of the vaccine by June. According to media reports, around 150,000 to 200,000 doses of the vaccine will be delivered by early May and another 3 million doses by May end. After Covishield and Covaxin, Sputnik V, developed by Gamaleya National Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology in Moscow, is the third Covid-19 vaccine to get emergency use approval in India.



India records 3.86 lakh fresh cases

India witnessed highest spike of 3,86,452 fresh cases of Covid-19 and 3,498 fatalities due to virus infection in the last 24 hours, according to Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. It was the ninth day in a row when India recorded more than 3 lakh cases while over 3,000 casualties have been reported for the past three days. On Thursday India witnessed 3,645 deaths, highest fatalities in a day. India's tally of total Covid-19 cases now stands at 1,87,62,976, the highest since the pandemic started in 2019, with 31,70,228 active cases and the total death toll stands at 2,08,330, according to the health ministry data. The ministry said that 2,97,540 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours taking the total recoveries to 1,53,84,418.



Mega scare as 90 suffer Remdesivir side-effects Brand suspended in Maharashtra

The shocking incident came to light when some patients developed chills, drop in blood pressure, fall in SPU count, varying degrees of fever or other health issues in various hospitals.

Team Absolute | Raigad/Mumbai

Sparking a mega health scare, at least 90 Covid-19 patients in Maharashtra's Raigad district, who were administered Remdesivir doses of a particular brand, developed severe side-effects following which the state government has imposed a temporary suspension on its use here, FDA Minister Rajendra Shingane said. "The incident took place on Thursday in around three hospitals in the district. The patients who were administered Remdesivir manufactured by the compa-



ny Hetero Drugs had complained of side-effects," Shingane told correspondent. Releasing a video-statement, Raigad Collector Nidhi Choudhari said that following

complaints from patients in different hospitals, the district health authorities acted on them immediately. However, Against 771 deaths on Thursday, the state now recorded 828 fatalities, taking up the toll to 68,813. The number of new infections remained above the 60,000 mark, but went down from 66,159 on Thursday to 62,919 on Friday, taking up the state tally to 46,02,472. The Mumbai infections remained below the 5,000 level, dropping from 4,174 to 3,888, and the city's tally rose to 684,471. However, Mumbai's daily deaths rose from 82 on Thursday to 89 now, and the total fatalities in the country's commercial capital stood at 13,125 now.

UP GOVT TO FLOAT GLOBAL TENDER FOR COVID VACCINE

Lucknow: The Uttar Pradesh government in has decided to float a global tender for four crore vaccine doses. UP has a massive target of vaccinating about nine crore people in the 18-44 age group, according to initial assessments undertaken by the state health department. According to the government spokesman, "A decision in this regard has been taken by the state task force on Covid-19 vaccination programme implementation. We need vaccines to be able to cater to this large chunk of people." The tender will be in addition to orders of 50 lakh Covid-19 doses, each placed by the state government to Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India. Officials pointed out that while registrations for the vaccination have begun, the global tender was urgently needed in wake of the huge demand. They also said that the UP Medical Supplies Corporation will place the tender in a day or two.



International flights suspension extended till May 31

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India on Friday extended the suspension on international commercial flight operations till May 31, 2021. However, international passenger flights under air travel bubble arrangements will continue. "In partial modification of circular dated 26-06-2020, the competent authority has further extended the validity of cir-

cular issued on the above subject... regarding scheduled international commercial passenger services to/from India till 2359 hrs IST of 31st May, 2021," the circular issued by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said. The circular said that the restriction shall not apply to international all-cargo operations and flights specifically approved by DGCA.

LALU PRASAD TO STAY AT DAUGHTER'S HOME IN DELHI

Patna: After the release order submitted by Superintendent of Hotwar jail at Ranchi, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) Supremo Lalu Prasad will be released any time from New Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and will stay at the official residence of Rajya Sabha MP and his daughter Misa Bharti in the national capital. Lalu's family has taken the decision in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. RJD Spokesperson Chitranshu



Gagan, said to be close to Lalu's family, told reporter that the doctors at AIIMS Delhi have allowed Lalu to stay at home. The Special CBI Court in Ranchi has already granted him bail in two cases registered in Chaibasa and one in Deoghar.

China's massive Tibet infra push cause of worry for India

China is planning to develop a massive defence logistics infrastructure in Tibet that will turn the once independent kingdom into a military hub to dominate the Himalayas. The plans were approved during the plenary session of China's National People's Congress (NPC) in March this year and also by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

- To make up for aerial defence weakness, China will construct at least 20 new border airports by 2025 in Tibet, in places like Tashkurgan and Longzi.
- Tashkurgan, the last stop before the Karakoram Pass, is under the jurisdiction of the South Xinjiang Military District and the PLA could easily threaten the Daulat Beg Oldi and the Depsang Plains from there.
- The airport at Longzi in Tibet's Shannan County will also boost the capabilities of the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) in the middle sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Subir Bhaumik | Kolkata

The Tibet infrastructure development projects have been included in the 14th Five Year Plan (2021-2025). The Long Range Objectives-2035 additionally identifies a number of strategic military projects for completion by 2025 and 2035. The G318 Sichuan-Tibet Highway and the G219 and G331 national highways will be upgraded and extended to run along China's southwestern border. The new 1,800-km Chengdu-Lhasa high-speed railway network will be the second strategic railway connecting from Tibet to the Mainland, reducing travel time from Chengdu to Lhasa to just 10 hours. Chengdu is now the headquarters of

the integrated Tibet-Sichuan military command that makes it possible for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to move strategic reserves swiftly from the borders with other Southeast Asian nations to beef up both offensives and strategic defence on the India front. Analysts like Jayadeva Ranade, former Cabinet Secretariat's Chiba expert, say that "in just over a decade, China will have a much-improved strategic border defence infrastructure." The document clarifies China's national strategic intent and identifies the core areas of national security and development. It has a definite focus on strategic science and technology programmes in the frontier areas. The document details the projects that have

direct implications for India," said Ranade. He said that India's worst concern is over the Chinese plan to construct a massive dam on the Great Bend on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra). A massive dam three times the size of the Three Gorges Dam in Sichuan province will be constructed on the Great Bend on the Tsangpo. He said the planned infrastructure projects in Tibet and the anticipated huge influx of labour and engineers will raise the temperature on the Tibetan Plateau and accelerate the retreat of Tibet's glaciers. These glaciers are the source of the Indus and a number of rivers that feed into the Ganges. This will seriously reduce the flow of water even leading to the rivers drying up.





PM HOLDS MEETING WITH EMPOWERED GROUPS ON COVID RELATED ISSUES

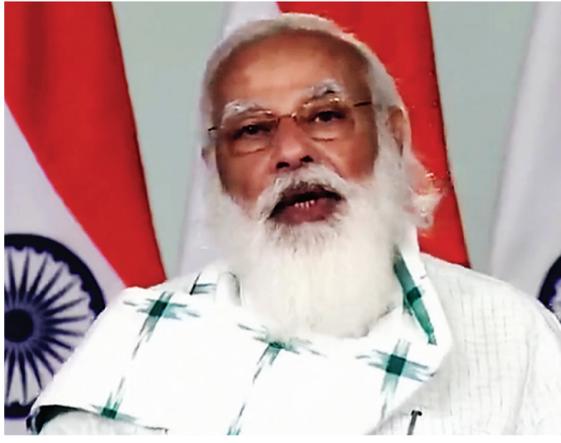
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday held a virtual meeting to review the functioning of different Empowered Groups with regard to the issues related to the prevailing Covid situation in the country.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The empowered group on economic and welfare measures made a presentation to the Prime Minister on the steps taken by it such as the extension of the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana.

It was discussed that the portability enabled due to the 'One Nation, One Ration Card' initiative has helped more people, while the insurance scheme for frontline health workers has been extended for another six months.

The Prime Minister directed that



The Central government should work in close coordination with the states to ensure that the poor people get the benefit of free foodgrain without any hassle.

The Prime Minister also said that

steps should be taken to expedite the settlement of the pending insurance claims so that the dependents of the deceased are able to avail the benefits in time. The empowered group on issues related to facilitating sup-

ply chain and logistics management gave a presentation on the various advisories related to the measures to be taken to contain the pandemic.

The Prime Minister instructed the officials to plan holistically to ensure seamless movement of goods so that supply chain disruptions are avoided.

The empowered group on coordinating with the private sector, NGOs and international organisations briefed the Prime Minister on how the government is working in active partnership with these bodies.

Modi asked the officials to explore how volunteers from civil society can be utilised to lessen the pressure on the healthcare sector by including them in non-specialised tasks. It was discussed that the NGOs could help establish and maintain lines of communication between the patients, their dependents and healthcare personnel. Ex-servicemen could be encouraged to handle call centres for communicating with the people under home quarantine.

Congress trounces BJP in 10 local body polls in Karnataka



Bengaluru | Agencies

The opposition Congress in Karnataka has trounced the ruling BJP by winning 120 out of the 263 wards in 10 local bodies across eight districts that went to the polls on April 27.

Surprisingly, even the Janata Dal (S) performed better than the BJP by winning 66 seats as against the saffron

party's 57 seats. While the BJP has been able to retain the Madikeri City Council, the Congress retained the Ballari City Corporation, besides winning the Bidar City Council.

Last time in Bidar, the Congress in coalition with the JD(S) had retained the Ramangari City Council, besides trouncing BJP in the Bhadravati City Council and

the Teerthahalli Town Council in Shivamogga district.

After a long gap, the Congress has now trounced JD(S) in the Beluru City Council in Hassan, which is considered to be a stronghold of JD(S) supreme H.D. Deve Gowda's family.

The Congress also won the Gudibande Town Panchayat, where the BJP drew a blank.

Reconsider decision to hold Class 10, 12 board exams: Andhra HC

Amaravati | Agencies

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Friday asked the state government to reconsider its decision to conduct board examinations for Class 10 and 12 students.

With several petitions seeking cancellation of the board exams on account of spiralling Covid cases being filed, the court heard the matter on Friday, and directed the state government to submit an affidavit by May 3, the date fixed for the next hearing.

The intermediate or Class 12 board exams are scheduled to commence from May 5, while the Class 10 board examinations are to begin on June 14.

The Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy government had Wednesday declared its intent to conduct the board exams. However, several quarters, including the opposition Telugu Desam Party, have been seeking their cancellation due to the risk involved for students, their parents, and teachers, in the prevailing situation.



Noting that 30 lakh students and teaching staff are stakeholders in the exercise, the court demanded to know how the state government intends to organise exams for Covid-affected students. With several states, the CBSE, and the ICSE having cancelled or postponed examinations, it directed the state government to reconsider its decision.

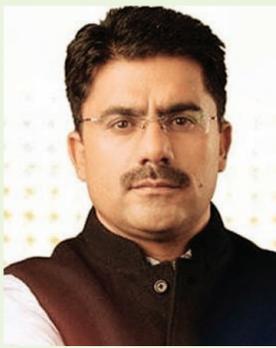
On its part, the state government argued that the board exams are being held keeping in mind students' interests and future in mind.

SENIOR JOURNALIST ROHIT SARDANA PASSES AWAY

New Delhi: Rohit Sardana, senior journalist and one of the top anchors of Hindi news channel Aaj Tak passed away on Friday, according to people close to him.

Rajdeep Sardesai took to twitter and wrote, "More terrible news friends. Well known TV news anchor Rohit Sardana has passed away. Had a heart attack this morning. Deep condolences to his family. RIP."

Sardana had joined Aaj Tak in 2017 after he left Zee News. He hosted the debate show "Dangal" on Aaj Tak. Sardana was a recipient of the 2018 Ganesh Vidyarthi Puraskar Award. He was among the most popular faces of TV news journalism in India. After the news of death of Sardana, condolences started pouring in.



Bengal announces partial lockdown amid Covid surge

Kolkata | Agencies

Considering the uncontrolled rise in the number of Covid cases in the state, the West Bengal government on Friday decided to impose indefinite prohibition on a number of things, including shopping malls, markets, restaurants and bars, gyms and swimming pools, with immediate effect. An order issued under the powers conferred in Section 22 of the Disaster Management Act by Chief Secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay said that all shopping complexes, malls, cinemas halls, beauty parlours, restaurants and bars, gyms, swimming pools, spas and sports complexes will remain closed till further notice. However, home delivery and online services which would meet the demand of the people would be allowed.

In the order, the government also mentioned that any kind of gathering, including social, cultural, academic and entertainment, will remain prohibited throughout the state.



The order said that markets will remain open from 7 am to 10 am in the morning and 3 pm to 5 pm in the evening. However, medicine shops, medical equipment stores, milk vending outlets, grocery shops and some other essential outlets will be exempted from the prohibition. The government has also made it clear that everybody will have to follow the instructions and the Covid guidelines laid down by the commission during and after the announcement of the Assembly election results on Sunday.

'Over 1 cr Covid vaccine doses available with states, UTs'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Day before the start of third phase of Covid vaccination in the country, the Union Ministry Health and Family Welfare on Friday said that more than one crore doses are still available with the states and Union Territories (UTs) while nearly 20 lakh additional doses will reach them in the next three days.

The ministry said that so far nearly 16.33 crore vaccine doses (16,33,85,030) have been provided to the states and UTs free of cost till Friday morning and of this the total consumption including wastages is 15,33,56,503 doses. "The states and UTs already have 1,00,28,527 Covid vaccine doses available for administration while additional 19,81,110 vaccine



doses will reach them in next three days," the statement said. As per the government data, Uttar Pradesh (13,36,677) has highest number of doses available followed by Bihar (7,22,237),

Jharkhand (6,15,715), Assam (5,83,778), Gujarat (5,57,764), Delhi (4,82,798), Chhattisgarh (4,68,326), Maharashtra (4,56,323), Karnataka (4,34,332) and Tamil Nadu (4,16,876).

SEATED IN OFFICE, ANDHRA GOVT EMPLOYEE SUCCUMBS TO COVID

Kakinada : The severity of the Covid-19 pandemic in Andhra Pradesh was underscored on Friday when a government employee died even as he was seated at his table in the office in East Godavari district. The deceased person has been identified as Jayasankar Narayana, who worked as a village secretary in Mallepally in Gandepally mandal in the district. According to local officials, over the past four days, Jayasankar was suffering from fever. However, he continued to attend his duty before breathing his last while he was seated on his chair on Friday.

Suspecting that he may have succumbed to Covid, the other office staff members hesitated to go near him.

Scientific Advisor's home care tips to manage Covid

Amid the surge in Covid cases, the office of the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India, K. Vijay Raghavan, has curated information and brought a simple visual reference to manage mild symptoms of COVID-19 at home -- "Home care tips for managing Covid-19".

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The reference advises people not to panic if they experience any COVID-19 symptoms, as the majority of people can manage their infections at home by following self-care measures," it said.



It lists the common symptoms of the disease and recommends that at the first sign of the symptoms, people

should isolate at home and begin following self-care measures. It asks people not to worry or become anxious, as these interfere with the body's immune response to fighting the infection.

It is important to isolate, rest and keep hydrated, and regularly monitor the patient's blood oxygen levels and temperature and consult a doctor if the fever persists or if oxygen levels fall below SpO2 92%. It also illustrates the positions that should be followed to help improve lung oxygenation if the SpO2 levels fall below 94%. The guide also highlights the importance of keeping the patient's doors and windows open to keep the room well ventilated. The guide outlines the importance of getting vaccinated to reduce the spread of the virus. It also reminds people that even after being vaccinated, it is essential to continue to follow Covid appropriate behaviour.

BJP lawmakers turn restive as Covid situation worsens in UP

Lucknow | Agencies

As the Covid cases continue to surge and the clock is also ticking away for the next Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, the state's lawmakers are getting increasingly restive.

Legislators, particularly those belonging to the ruling BJP, are now shedding inhibitions and talking openly about Covid mismanagement in the state.

Law Minister Brijesh Pathak was the first to blow the lid off the state of affairs in the state when he wrote a letter to senior health officials, expressing his anguish on the stressed-out health facilities amid Covid surge.

He also said that he tried desperately to save the life of noted historian and writer Yogesh Praveen but his efforts proved futile.

In the one-page letter, Pathak, who is MLA from Lucknow, lamented that he had received a frantic call from the residence of Yogesh Praveen, informing him that his condition was critical and needed an ambulance. However, the ambulance did not reach and the historian died.

BJP MP Kaushal Kishore, who recently lost his elder brother to Covid, has written to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, demanding action against Balarampur hospital and King George's Medical University doctors who have been "ignor-



ing" patients. He claimed in his letter that ventilators were not in working condition in these hospitals.

Earlier, the BJP MP had sought deferment of panchayat polls in the larger public interest. In another instance, BJP MP from Meerut, Rajendra Agarwal has written to Adityanath, complaining about inadequate arrangements, especially a lack of medical oxygen in the city. Agarwal stated in his letter that hospitals are unable to accept patients due to a shortage of oxygen, and demanded that the UP CM

provide Meerut with the requisite medical oxygen.

Chairman of the Uttar Pradesh Labour Welfare Council, and state minister Sunil Bharala, on the other hand, had protested about the lack of beds, oxygen, and life-saving drugs in Meerut and asked the Chief Minister to directly intervene on behalf of Covid-19 patients. BJP MLA from Badaun, Dharmendra Shukla, has also written a letter to the Chief Minister, levelling serious allegations against the Badaun Medical College and seeking a probe into the matter.

The MLA alleged that an extortion racket was being run by the staff of the medical facility and patients were being fleeced. Another BJP MLA, Dinanath Bhaskar from Bhadohi, has sent a letter to the Chief Minister seeking an inquiry into the circumstances that led to the death of local BJP leader Lal Bahadur Maurya.

The MLA said that Maurya was admitted to the Maharaja Balwant Singh hospital on April 22 after he tested positive for Covid. Maurya was not given the Remdesivir injection and neither was he given a bed in the ICU, despite his deteriorating health. Bhaskar further said that the doctors were abusive and told the patient to get "Yogi Adityanath to treat you."

4 held for black marketing of Remdesivir, Fabiflu

Moradabad | Agencies

The Moradabad police busted a gang which was allegedly involved in black marketing of Remdesivir injections and Fabiflu tablets here and arrested four persons working in three prominent private hospitals, while efforts are on to arrest one more member of the gang. Both the medicines are crucial in the treatment of Covid patients.

According to the police, a complaint was registered by the family of a Covid-positive patient with the Moradabad SSP following which raids were conducted and the four were caught red-handed.

The accused have been identified as Piyush Kumar (22), Kamran (24), Saddam (26), and Jeevan (25) while Rikki Thakur (28) is absconding.

Moradabad SSP Prabhakar Chaudhary, said, "Acting on the complaint, a special operations group (SOG) and the Majhola police launched a joint operation to crack



down on the black-marketing racket and raids were conducted on prominent private hospitals in the city.

The accused were apprehended and two empty and two full vials of Remdesivir injection, one syringe, 12 Fabiflu tablets and Rs 62,000 cash were recovered from their possession."

During interrogation, the four suspects said they stole Remdesivir and other medicines for treating Covid patients from hospital supplies and sold them at a premium. Each Remdesivir vial was sold for Rs 20,000 - Rs 25,000.



CITIZENS' LIVES ARE AT STAKE, COOPERATE WITH CENTRE: SC TO DELHI GOVT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday continued its hearing on the Covid situation and asked the Delhi government to cooperate with the Centre.

"Politics is for the time of elections, but now the citizens' lives are at stake," a Supreme Court bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, Nageswara Rao and S. Ravindra Bhat observed during the hearing.

The top court also praised the work done by the officials to mitigate the effects of the unfolding crisis.

"We want to send a message to the Delhi government that it must take the approach of cooperation. Please send a message to the highest level that at extreme times, there should not be any political bickering. Politics is for the time of elections. Now the citizens' lives are at stake. We want cooperation," the SC bench told Rahul Mehra representing the Delhi



government. It also gave suggestions to Solicitor General Tushar Mehta. Earlier, the bench had told the Union government that it has a "special responsibility towards Delhi"

since the national capital "represents the micro problems of the country". At the onset of the hearing, the apex court flagged the issue of threat of coercive action against people

posting help calls on social media. "We want to make it very clear that if citizens communicate their grievance on social media and Internet, it cannot be said its wrong information," the court said. "We don't want any clampdown on information. We will treat it as a contempt of court if such grievances are considered for action. Let a strong message go to all the states and DGPs of states," the SC bench said.

Justice Chandrachud also asked if a mechanism can be developed to show real time updates regarding the allocation of oxygen. The top court also expressed concern over the drug shortage and asked why should the court not issue directions under Section 100 and Section 92 of the Patents Act to enable generics to manufacture drugs without the fear of legal action. The apex court also expressed its reservation on the price disparity of vaccines.

Armed forces get more emergency financial powers to fight Covid surge

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday granted emergency financial powers to top officers of all the three armed forces to fight the Covid-19 surge.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

These are in addition to the emergency powers delegated to the medical officers of the armed forces last week, a Defence Ministry statement said. Invoking special provisions, Rajnath Singh granted the emergency powers to empower the armed forces and speed up their efforts in tide over the current Covid-19 situation in the country. "These powers will help formation commanders to

establish and operate quarantine facilities/hospitals and undertake procurement/repair of equipment/items/material/stores, besides provisioning of various services and works required to support the ongoing effort against the pandemic," the statement said. Vice chiefs of the three armed forces, including the Chief Of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman Chiefs

Of Staff Committee (CISC) and General Officer Commanding-in-Chiefs (GOC-in-Cs) and equivalents in all three services have been given full powers. "The Corps Commanders/Area Commanders have been delegated powers up to Rs 50 lakh per case and Division Commanders/Sub Area Commanders and equivalents have been delegated powers up to Rs 20 lakh per case," the ministry said.

PUBG MOBILE TEASER FOR INDIAN MARKET

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid rumours around PUBG Mobile's comeback in India, a short teaser video of PUBG Mobile India showed up on the Indian YouTube channel but it has now been taken down.

This teaser did not reveal any release date or an approximate time frame, GSMArena reported on Friday.

"However, the fact that the video showed up is a strong indication of its own that the game will soon be released in the country again," the report said.

PUBG's developer, recently, announced the pre-registration for a new battle royale game, called New State, on the Google Play store. However, it excluded India as the company is working on re-launching PUBG Mobile in the country. Recently, the company



had also posted few job listings for the India subsidiary, including an Investment and Strategy Analyst.

However, there is no official statement from the company about its relaunching plans in the country.

The Indian government had on September 2 banned 118 apps on national security

concerns, including the immensely popular PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG) Mobile, under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act. PUBG, which has more than 600 million downloads and 50 million active players globally, had nearly 33 million users in India.

FORMER NSG CHIEF'S LAST RITES HELD, WITH DELHI POLICE'S HELP



New Delhi: The Delhi Police again presented its human face after it organised the cremation of the National Security Guard's former Director General, K.L. Watts, who had passed away at his home on Friday.

According to DCP South Delhi Atul Bhatia, the police received a request from the family members of Watts to arrange for his cremation as his family was in deep distress and other family members were also in hospital. Following the request, a police team provided assistance in cremation of the former IPS officer.

Airlines intensify cargo ops to bring in essential supplies

Team Absolute | New Delhi

To ease the availability of key medical equipment and medicines, domestic airlines have increased their cargo hauling operations to ferry essential items.

SpiceXpress, the air cargo arm of SpiceJet, airlifted 1,100 oxygen concentrators from Singapore to Bengaluru in multiple consignments.

The medical device is used to provide oxygen to ease difficulty in breathing as it extracts concentrated quantities of oxygen from ambient air.

SpiceXpress had on April 24 airlifted 800 oxygen concentrators followed by another consignment of 1,000 oxygen concentrators on April 28 from Hong Kong to Delhi. These oxygen concentrators had been ordered by SpiceHealth for emergency use and distribution across India. SpiceXpress had used its A340 wide-body cargo plane to airlift the 600 oxygen concentrators from the US while its B737 freighter aircraft is airlifting the concentrators from Singapore. Besides, IndiGo's cargo team on Friday flew in oxygen concentrators from Hong Kong to Delhi via Kolkata, to help ease the current situation in the city. On Thursday, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri had said



that first consignment of oxygen concentrators have arrived from Germany on an Air India flight. "Every stakeholder of India's civil aviation sector is making a meaningful contribution in our unrelenting fight against COVID," he tweeted. India is reporting new record daily increases in coronavirus infections, prompting new lockdowns and restrictive measures to curb the spread of the pandemic. The exponential rise has lifted the demand for these medical equipments which are used to provide oxygen to Covid-19 patients especially as the country faces a supply crunch in the availability of medical oxygen.

Doctor among five arrested for making fake Covid reports in Delhi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Cracking its whip on the people involved in preparing false Covid reports, the Delhi police on Friday said it had arrested five people, including a doctor, from Malviya Nagar area for preparing Covid reports using forged means.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South Delhi, Atul Bhatia said that police have arrested Praganand aka Nihal, Himanshu Sharma, Dr Manish Kumar Singh, Satender and Nikhil in connection with the case.

The DCP said that the police had received a PCR call on Thursday wherein it was mentioned that Genestrings lab in Malviya Nagar were involved in preparing fake Covid reports.

He said that on reaching the spot caller Vipul Saini stated that in April this year he along with his 45 relatives had given their samples for Covid testing to Himanshu and Praganand Sharma.

On April 25, their known Rishab Shukla gave his sample to them and on April 26 he tested positive for Covid, but he did not show any symptom of Covid, he claimed. The officer said that on April 28 Shukla again gave his sample to SPICE Health Laboratory where he tested negative. The officer claimed that on April 29, Saini along with Himanshu Sharma and Praganand went to the Genestrings Lab and cross checked from above lab and found that the Covid report of Shukla was not in the records of this lab.

At 395, Delhi records highest single-day Covid death toll

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid a deteriorating Covid-19 situation, the national capital on Thursday recorded its highest ever single-day toll from the disease in 24 hours as 395 deaths were reported.

The situation in Delhi has been quite alarming, with many patients not getting bed in hospitals, along with a widespread shortage of medical oxygen.

The city has recorded its highest single-day Covid toll even as Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said there was "no more panic on availability of oxygen". On Thursday, while 395



patients died, 24,235 new cases were reported. During the last 24 hours, 73,851 tests were done. Out of them, 32.82 per cent were

found to be corona positive. Besides, since Wednesday, 25,615 corona patients in Delhi have also recovered. So far, a total of 15,772 peo-

ple have died due to corona virus in Delhi. There are currently 97,977 active corona patients.

Former Attorney General Soli Sorabjee succumbs to Covid

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former Attorney General Soli Sorabjee died of Covid in a private hospital here on Friday.

One of the top most lawyers of the country, Sorabjee (91) was tested positive of Covid a few days ago and was being treated in a private hospital in the national capital. He is survived by his wife, a daughter and two sons.

In his around seven decades of legal profession, Sorabjee served twice as the Attorney General for India. First from 1989-90 and second from 1998 to 2004.

Born in 1930, Sorabjee started his practice in 1953 and was designated as 'Senior Advocate' in 1971 by



the Supreme Court. He was conferred Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award, in 2002 for his exemplary services.

Tendulkar donates Rs 1 crore to 'Mission Oxygen'

Batting great Sachin Tendulkar has contributed Rs 1 crore to 'Mission Oxygen', an initiative on the medical fundraising website Ketto aiming to help procure oxygen cylinders for hospitals in India for Covid-19 patients.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The second wave of Covid has put our health-care system under immense pressure. Providing oxygen for the large number of serious Covid patients is the need of the hour," Tendulkar said in a statement he released on his social media handles on Thursday.

"It is heartening to see how people are rising to the occasion. A group of 250+ young entrepreneurs have launched Mission Oxygen to raise funds for importing oxygen concentrators and donating them to hospitals across the country. I've helped by contributing to the cause and hope that their effort soon reaches out to many more hospitals across India. Today, we have to stand together behind everyone that is



working hard to fight this pandemic," he further said. Tendulkar's name appears at the top of the list of donors on the initiative's page on the website. It shows that it has

thus far raised over Rs 17 crore as on Friday with a target of Rs 35 crore. It said on Thursday that it has already placed "an order for 3,900 concentrators".

Facebook to help users with information about Covid symptoms, vaccines

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Social media giant Facebook on Friday announced plans to help its users in India with access to authoritative information about Covid-19 symptoms and vaccines.

This is in addition to the recent announcement by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg to donate \$10 million to emergency response efforts in India.

"As India grapples with the current wave of Covid-19, we are committed to doing our bit to support local communities in the country with medical supplies and other life saving equipment," the tech giant shared in post on Facebook.

The social media platform will partner with the Centre to roll out a Vaccine Finder tool on its mobile app in India, this week. The tool, available in 17 languages, will help people identify places nearby to get the vaccine.

"In this tool, vaccine centre locations and their hours of operation have been provided by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. The tool will also show walk-in options (for 46 years and above) and a link to register on the CoWin website and schedule your vaccination appointment," Facebook said.

Users can access the tool from the Covid-19 Information Centre on the app. The tech giant will support NGOs and UN agencies in India with ad

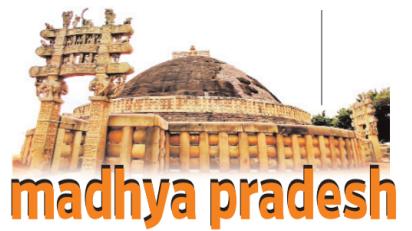


credits and insights to reach the majority of people on Facebook with Covid-19 vaccine and preventive health information, the post said.

Facebook will also provide health resources from UNICEF India about when to seek emergency care and how to manage mild Covid-19 symptoms at home. "The information is accessible and prominent on Facebook's Covid-19 Information Center and in Feed. On Instagram,

we are promoting this information via Guides in Explore," the social media giant said.

"I'm thinking of everyone in India and hoping we get this virus under control soon. Facebook is working with UNICEF to help people understand when they should go to the hospital and giving \$10 million to emergency response efforts," Zuckerberg had said in a post on the social media platform.



Cooperate in breaking the chain of infection: CM appeals to street vendors

RS 61 CRORE DEPOSITED IN THE ACCOUNTS OF 6 LAKH 10 THOUSAND STREET VENDORS OF THE STATE

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the fight against Corona can be fought only by staying inside the house. He appealed to urban street vendors to cooperate in breaking the chain of Corona infection. Giving information about depositing an amount of Rs one thousand in the accounts of urban street vendors, he urged them to take special care not to throng the banks to withdraw the amount. Chouhan was addressing urban unorganized workers after transferring Rs 61 crore into the accounts of more than 6 lakh 10 thousand such workers in the state through Direct Benefit Transfer from the CM's residence.

Chouhan said that breaking the chain of Corona transition is the successful way to control it. With the cooperation of the public through Janata Curfew, the results of control over the state of infection in the state have started showing. The state ranking in number of active cases in the country has reduced to 13th from 7th, the growth rate of positive cases which had crossed 25 percent has come down to 21 percent. The number of positive cases is decreasing and the number of recoveries is increasing. Compared to a total of 12 thousand 400 new positive cases, 13 thousand 584 people have recovered. He informed that the government is continuously working for the



availability of beds, medicines, equipments, injections etc. in hospitals. Efforts are being made at a war footing to produce oxygen at the local level, along with arrangements being made for supply of oxygen by airplanes and trains. To make the treatment system more effective, it is necessary to break the chain of infection. This is possible only with everyone's cooperation. Therefore, the public should strictly follow curfew. People should cooperate in breaking the Corona transition chain by staying indoors. He said that Corona is an enemy of humanity. To stop it, we will have to stop meeting people, organizing ceremonies, weddings and crowding.

Chouhan said that if the spread of infection continues to spread rapidly, then all arrangements may crash. Therefore it is important to strictly follow the infection control guide line. The government is fully supporting the curfew to remove the difficulties faced by the poor. He told the street vendors that along with Rs one thousand being deposited in their accounts, free food grain is also being distributed. Each person will get 5 kg foodgrain from the state government and 5 kg from the central government in the months of May and June. He assured the street vendors that just they were being assisted during curfew, the government would continue to extend support in running their enterprises after infection control. Chouhan said that everyone should remain healthy, everyone's families should remain healthy. For this, everyone has to be committed and work unitedly. He said that the infection rapidly penetrates into the lungs. Hence, immediate treatment is essential. The sooner the infection is reported it becomes easier to treat it fast. Therefore, it is important to get tests as soon one notices symptoms of cold, cough and fever and starts taking medicines immediately. He said that hiding the infection can be fatal. Therefore, anyone showing signs of infection in villages, wards, localities and settlements, should be immediately examined. In the early stages, one can be easily treated at home or under the care of a doctor in a Covid Care Center.

Number of active cases at 90 thousand 796

STATE STANDS AT 14TH PLACE AS REGARDS CORONA INFECTION. RECOVERY IS STEADILY INCREASING COMPARED TO NEW CASES



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the rate of corona infection in the state is continuously decreasing. The state stands at 14th place in the country in terms of corona infection. The number of active cases of corona in the state has come down to 90 thousand 796. Recovery is steadily increasing compared to new cases.

Chouhan was taking a core group meeting through video conferencing from his residence on Friday. Ministers and officials of core groups from various districts participated in the meeting through video conferencing.

The recovery rate of corona patients in the state is continuously improving. In the last 24 hours, 13 thousand 584 corona patients became healthy, while 12400 new patients have been found. The state's recovery rate has been 83 percent. There is also a decline in the positive rate of corona in the state. The average positivity rate of the state has declined to 21.1%

and the average positivity rate of 7 days is 22.4%. The country's seven-day average positivity rate is 21%. District-wise review found that the maximum 1811 new Corona cases were reported from Indore district. There have been 1713 new corona cases in Bhopal, 980 in Gwalior, 771 in Jabalpur, 345 in Rewa, 322 in Ujjain, 280 in Ratlam, 257 in Sagar, 256 in Shahdol and 249 in Dhar. Chief Minister said that the state is now getting adequate amount of oxygen. On 29 April, the state received 556.2 MT of oxygen, while the state consumed 467 MT of oxygen. Chouhan said that patients, who do not have a space for home isolation at their home, should go to Covid Care Centre. Covid care centres are operated in all the districts of the state, with a total of 3889 beds and 650 oxygen beds. There are a total of 57741 beds in government and private hospitals for the treatment of Corona in the state, out of which 40 thousand beds are filled at present. 71% of total patients are in home isolation and 29% are in hospitals. Chouhan informed that the government will provide subsidy and assistance for setting up new oxygen units in the private sector. Hence, investors should set up oxygen units in Madhya Pradesh.

MP GOVT MULLS SEALING INTER-STATE BORDERS TO CURB COVID SURGE

Home Minister Narottam Mishra said during a review meeting on the Covid-19 situation under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, that in accordance with efforts being made to control the infection across 16 districts in the state, the emphasis was being laid on breaking the Covid chain.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government is considering sealing the inter-state borders to curb the spread of the coronavirus infection. Home Minister Narottam Mishra said during a review meeting on the Covid-19 situation under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, that in accordance with efforts being made to control the infection across 16 districts in the state, the emphasis was being laid on breaking the Covid chain.

He said with the stoppage of bus services along the borders of Uttar Pradesh, measures are being taken to prevent the infection spreading from people travelling along the borders of other states. The process of breaking the chain of infection due to traffic on the borders is paying dividends, hence the plan to seal the inter-state borders.

Mishra said the Chief Minister has assured that the general public will not be inconvenienced.



Tata Group to help MP govt in setting up new oxygen plant

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Tata Group is willing to help Madhya Pradesh government deal with the shortage of oxygen during the second wave of Covid-19. The company has offered help to the state in the form of an oxygen concentrator.

The state Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan confirmed the news on Twitter on Friday.

Chouhan, in a tweet said, "Had a conversation with the chairman of Tata Group N Chandrasekaran over the phone. During the conversation, I was informed that Tata Group will provide an oxygen concentrator and other help to fight COVID."

He further added, "I welcome the initiative by Tata Group. Together we will win over the pandemic."

The Chief Minister's office further informed that the company will also help in setting up an oxygen plant in the state.

"Chief Minister @ChouhanShivraj had a con-



versation with N Chandrasekaran, chief of Tata Sons, over the phone. Tata will provide an oxygen concentrator and a CT scan machine to Madhya Pradesh. The group will also cooperate in setting up an oxygen plant in the state," the CMO Madhya Pradesh tweeted.

Madhya Pradesh reported 12,762 fresh COVID-19 cases and 95 deaths on Thursday, the state health department informed. The COVID tally in the state has reached 5,50,927, out of which 4,53,331 people have recovered from the disease. According to the health department, as many as

59,388 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours and the positivity rate in the state is at 21.4 per cent.

There are 4,92,276 active COVID-19 cases in the state. The death toll due to COVID-19 has mounted to 5,519.

Out of 8,998 fresh COVID-19 cases in Madhya Pradesh, 1,789 new cases were reported in Indore, while 1,811 new cases were reported in Bhopal. Meanwhile, India once again recorded the highest single-day surge of COVID-19 infections, registering 3,79,257 new cases along with 3,645 deaths and 2,69,507 recoveries in the last 24 hours.

Covid scare grips Gyaraspur as 22 Kumbh returnees go missing

Bhopal: People of Gyaraspur, a small town in Madhya Pradesh's Vidisha district, are panic-stricken after the administration announced that 22 of the 83 people who returned after attending the Kumbh Mela went missing from the area. Of the remaining 61 who have been traced, 60 have tested positive for Covid-19. According to the district administration, the 83 pilgrims had left for Haridwar between April 11 and 15 in three different buses. The pilgrims, according to health officials, returned to Gyaraspur on April 25. "All those who had gone for the Kumbh are being traced and tested. We found 83 had gone but so far we have only been able to trace 60 of them. 22 have so far not been traced, and we are trying to do everything possible to trace them," block medical officer Gyaraspur JD Abbas said. The 60 who have tested positive have been asked to stay in home isolation with a directive to report complications if any, immediately. Five pilgrims who have reported complications have been shifted to a covid-care centre that has been set up at a hostel in Gyaraspur. The government has directed to trace and test all Kumbh returnees as it is being feared that they could spread the virus if not isolated on time, a health official said.

Madhya Pradesh loses 42 cops to COVID-19 in April 2021

Bhopal: Of the 44 Madhya Pradesh police personnel who lost their lives to COVID-19 this year, 42 died in April alone. The month has seen a dramatic rise in the number of COVID cases in the state. About 30 of the 42 who died this month had received at least one dose of a vaccine.

Most of the deaths have occurred in the 50-60 age-group. Some of those who died are between 40 and 49 years of age. An assistant sub-inspector aged 38 was the youngest among the 42 cops who died this month.

Compared to the last year, the current year has seen a steep rise in COVID-19 deaths among police personnel. If 35 cops died of the infection between March and December 2020, 44 have died so far this year. In fact, more cops have died of COVID this month than all of last year. This is despite the fact that about 90 per cent of the state's police force has been vaccinated against the deadly infection.

According to Madhya Pradesh DGP Vivek Johri, who spoke to The New Indian Express, most of the cops who have died had either obtained the first dose or both the doses of the COVID vaccines. "Most of those who died had co-morbidities like blood pressure, heart ailments and diabetes," the DGP said.

2 killed in road accident in Jabalpur

Jabalpur: Two persons, including a minor boy, were killed and 11 others injured on Friday morning when the tractor trolley they were travelling in overturned here in Madhya Pradesh, police said. The accident took place near village Ghughara, some 50 km from Jabalpur district headquarters, Kundam police station inspector PK Markam said. Two occupants of the vehicle, Sanju Maravi (13) and Aam Singh Dhurve (26), were killed, he said, adding 11 others were injured. Over 25 persons had boarded the tractor trolley and were returning to their native place in Kundam town after attending a pre-wedding ceremony in village Panagar tehsil on Thursday when the incident occurred, he said. Initial investigations suggest the driver lost control over the tractor, causing it to topple, the police officer said.

AUTO-DRIVER TURNS 3-WHEELER INTO AMBULANCE, OFFERS FREE SERVICE

Khan's auto is equipped with necessary things like an oxygen cylinder, a PPE kit, sanitizer and an oximeter.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

With many facing shortages of beds, oxygen and ambulances amid the devastating second wave of COVID-19 pandemic, Javed Khan -- an auto driver in Bhopal -- has turned his three-wheeler into an ambulance-like vehicle and is providing the service free of cost.



Khan's auto is equipped with necessary things like an oxygen cylinder, a PPE kit, sanitizer and an oximeter.

"I saw a lot on social media, WhatsApp and news channels that several people are forced to carry their relatives on the shoulder or pull them on carts due to unavailability of ambulances. That is when I thought I could do something for humanity," Khan told media persons. "I sold my wife's gold necklace for ₹ 5,000 and bought an

oxygen cylinder to turn this auto into an ambulance. I refuel the auto with my money," he further said.

Talking about how he manages to procure oxygen when the whole country is facing an oxygen crisis, he said, "There is a factory in Govindpura. We get oxygen refilled from there. It is a tedious task as we have to stand in the line for 4-5 hours. The cost of refilling the oxygen cylinders ranges from ₹ 450-550." Khan has been providing this service for the last 15-20 days in Bhopal.

"It is completely free. I have shared my mobile number on social media platforms - 7999909494. Whoever is in trouble and is not able to get an ambulance, can call me. I am ready to help people 24 hours," Khan said.

NO CHANGE IN REGISTRY GUIDELINES TILL JUNE 30: CM

Chief Minister said in his message issued to the public that no increase has been made in the registration rate of the property in view of the convenience of common citizens. According to the guideline, exemption of 2 percent in the registration fee in the name of women will also continue.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that a new guideline is issued for the purchase and sale of property in the state from April 1 every year. But in view of the corona transition, it has been kept undone till June 30, without any change in the guideline for the financial year 2021-22. Chief Minister said in his message issued to the public that no increase has been made in the registration rate of the property in view of the convenience of common citizens. According to the guideline, exemption of 2 percent in the registration fee in the name of women will also continue. The normal registration rate is 3 percent while for women applicants this rate is kept at 1 percent. Chouhan said that it is our endeavor that the office of Deputy Registrar should be opened in a phased manner, so that the general public can also register and the economy is not affected.

We have controlled the pace of Corona, but the fight is still long: Chief Minister

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that in the state we have controlled the speed of corona, more patients are recovering than the new corona patients in the state for the last few days. The active cases that went over 94 thousand have now reached 90 thousand 796. But the fight is still long. It is necessary to break the chain of infection. All districts should take effective action to break it.

Chouhan said that in the districts where the positivity rate is high, strictly implement the Corona curfew. Check the patient in case of cold, cough, cold, do not wait for the report of the test, isolate them and immediately start the medicine by giving a medical kit.

Chouhan was interacting with members of the Crisis Management groups of 18 districts of the state through video conferencing from his residence on Friday. Ministers in charge, officers in charge and Crisis Management Group from Jabalpur, Rewa, Narsinghpur, Singrauli, Sidhi, Panna, Satna, Sagar,

Shahdol, Katni, Chhatrapur, Seoni, Shahdol, Katni, Chhatrapur, Seoni, Mandla, Balaghat, Umaria, Dindori, Chhindwara and Damoh districts Members joined.

Chouhan directed that Covid-19 centers in all districts be ensured better. All those patients who do not have a place for home isolation in their homes should be kept in Covid Care Centers. All arrangements of medical kit, breakfast, food etc. are available here. Seoni district suggested that Covid care centers should be built near the health center.

Chouhan said that Corona infection should be strictly prevented in villages. Public curfew should be strictly enforced. Gram panchayats should work actively in this direction.

Chouhan said that all patients living in home isolation should be provided with medical kit. Talk to them daily and monitoring should be done. A review of Sidhi district found a positivity rate of 31.87% there. Expressing concern over this, Chief Minister Chouhan directed to implement the Corona Curfew strictly. The officer in charge immediately go there and see the arrangements. A review of Panna district found that there is good work

in relation to corona control. Previously the positivity rate of the district had reached 50%, which has now come down to 22%. Panna collectors are working day and night despite the family being infected. Chouhan appreciated the work. Chouhan informed that Madhya Pradesh has received a quota of 92 thousand Remdesivir injections by the Government of India for the period up to April 30. Further, these injections will continue to be available as required. Chouhan said that the transition of corona from matrimonial events spreads rapidly. People should be advised to pursue weddings to prevent corona infection.

Chouhan directed that door-to-door health survey should be done in rural areas and medical kits should be distributed to them. Medicines should also be given to them for common diseases. Chouhan congratulated the entire team for effective control of Covid in Chhindwara district. The positivity rate here is 5%. The recovery rate is 91%. There is oxygen surplus, 27 ICU beds and 197 oxygen beds are empty. There are 1463 Micro Containment Zones in the district. CCCs have also been created at the block level.



MUMBAI'S COVID POSITIVITY RATE BELOW 10%; 85% CASES ASYMPTOMATIC: OFFICIAL

Mumbai's positivity rate was 9.94 per cent on April 29, when 4,328 people tested positive for COVID-19 out of 43,525 those samples were examined, the official said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In an encouraging sign, the COVID-19 test positivity rate in Mumbai has dropped below 10 per cent, municipal commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal said on Friday. According to Mr Chahal, Mumbai's positivity rate was 9.94 per cent on April 29, when 4,328 people tested positive for COVID-19 out of 43,525 those samples were examined. The test positivity rate (TPR) is defined as proportion of samples that return positive among the total tested.

"Our positivity rate is in single digit now with nearly 44,000 tests. Perhaps, Mumbai is the only city in India with a single digit positivity rate with high testing," Chahal claimed.



Highlighting that 85 per cent of the new cases are asymptomatic, the IAS officer said the number of vacant beds available in city hospitals increased to 5,725 on Friday after-

noon, indicating a drop in fresh admissions. According to the data provided by Mr Chahal, who took charge of the BMC during the pandemic last year, Mumbai had a TPR of

20.85 per cent in the beginning of April.

The highest positivity rate during the month was 27.94 per cent, reported on April 4, when 11,573 people had tested positive after 51,313 samples were examined.

The data suggested that test positivity rate started slipping below 20 per cent from April 19.

Earlier this week, Dr Shashank Joshi, a member of the Maharashtra government's COVID-19 task force, had said Mumbai may have turned the corner in its fight against the pandemic. He had said the turnaround was due to the metropolis tackling the surge in cases during the second wave of the infection with the "ATM strategy", which is "Assess, Triage and Transfer, and Management."

No vaccination of 18-44 age group in Maharashtra from May 1 due to Centre: Congress

Sawant added that even Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan has said the vaccination process for this age group will not start on May 1 in his state due to lack of vaccines



ment two days back said that the exercise cannot be launched on this date as vaccine doses were not available in sufficient quantity. Taking to Twitter, state Congress spokesperson Sachin Sawant said, "From May 1, Modi govt had announced vaccination of country's young workforce in age group of 18-44 years. Unfortunately that this nationwide program will not be able to take off as Modi govt has not supplied vaccines." "At a time when vaccination is being carried out in a war footing in the world and deaths due to Covid-19

are rampant in India, this reckless approach of Modi government is criminal," he said in another tweet.

Sawant added that even Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan has said the vaccination process for this age group will not start on May 1 in his state due to lack of vaccines. He alleged that while the Modi government was solely responsible for failure of this exercise, BJP leaders were shifting the blame on the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government and spreading misinformation.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Congress on Friday alleged that the vaccination of people from 18 to 44 age group is not taking off in Maharashtra from May 1 due to the "reckless approach" of the Centre.

Earlier this month, the Union government announced opening up vaccination for the entire adult population starting from May 1. However, the state govern-

Maharashtra govt to take back COVID-19 vaccines from private hospitals

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government on Friday announced that it would take back COVID-19 vaccines from private hospitals and administer these doses to people through state-run health centres only.

State Health Minister Rajesh Tope said the government has decided to do so in as per the Centre's orders.

"The Maharashtra government is going to take back the vaccines given to private hospitals for the inoculation drive as per the Centre's orders. These vaccine doses will then be administered to beneficiaries through state-run hospitals and centres only," he said. Talking about the vaccination drive for the

18-44 age group that is supposed to start from May 1 as per the central government's instructions, Tope said, "We need to reduce the number of vaccination centres so that it can offer the doses smoothly on daily basis."

"We have been told by the vaccine makers that up to 18 lakh vials could be supplied to Maharashtra in the month of May. In such situation, the state is planning to set up one centre per district to inoculate people against COVID-19," he said. Tope insisted that people should visit the vaccination centre with prior appointment. It will avoid crowding and every one will get the dose, he added. "Unless we get adequate supply of vaccines, we cannot increase the coverage of population."

Maharashtra May See Third Wave Of Covid In July-August: Health Minister

The grim prediction by Rajesh Tope came on a day when Maharashtra, the state worst-hit by the pandemic in the country, recorded 66,159 fresh coronavirus cases and 771 fatalities.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Still reeling under a deadly second wave of COVID-19, Maharashtra may witness a third wave of the infection in July-August, said health minister Rajesh Tope on Thursday.

The grim prediction by Mr Tope came on a day when Maharashtra, the state worst-hit by the pandemic in the country, recorded 66,159 fresh coronavirus cases and 771 fatalities.

Speaking to reporters in Mumbai, he said, As per epidemiologists, Maharashtra could witness a third wave of COVID-19 in July or August. "Maharashtra is trying to be self-sufficient in terms of availability of medical oxygen by then.

It has been said the state could reach to the plateau level of COVID-19 cases by the end of May. If it is hit by a third wave in July or August, it would increase the challenges before the state administration, he said. He was speaking after taking part in a review meeting with Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray where various aspects of COVID-19 management and vaccination were discussed. District collectors and divisional commissioners also took part in the virtual meeting. During the discussion, the chief minister stressed on setting up 125 PSA (pressure swing adsorption) plants (for generating medical oxygen) at the earli-

est for treating patients with mild to moderate COVID-19 infection," Mr Tope said.

District collectors were told the government will not tolerate any complain about non-availability of oxygen when the state is hit by a third wave, said the health minister.

Maintaining that the current requirement of oxygen is being met through local generation as well as supplies from the Centre, he said Maharashtra is facing a shortage of 10,000 to 15,000 vials of Remdesivir, used to treat critical COVID-19 patients.

Though there is a shortage, we have asked doctors to use it judiciously. Extra doses could lead to grave side effects, he said.

Mr Tope said the chief minister informed the meeting that he has told business houses and corporates that if they spend on setting up COVID-19-related facilities, that money will be considered as CSR expendi-

ture. "They can avail all benefits related to CSR spendings and this will also ease financial burden on the state," the health minister said.

"We will try to set up oxygen generator plants, arrange oxygen concentrators as well as provide medical equipment such as CT scan and MRI machines to districts where these facilities are not available," he said.

Districts such as Hingoli, Jalna, Parbhani, Osmanabad, Ratnagiri, Sindhadurg, Washim and Gadchiroli will get tele-medicine services where COVID-19 patients with other health issues can seek consultancy from doctors based in major cities, Mr Tope said. Maharashtra, which has so far reported 45,39,553 coronavirus cases and 67,985 fatalities, is under lockdown-like restrictions till May 15.

MAHARASHTRA ENERGY DEPARTMENT BEGINS INSPECTION AT HOSPITALS

Mumbai: The main focus of the inspection and safety audit would be ICUs, AC system and lifts and the department has directed electrical inspectors to submit an audit report within 10 days. In the wake of a spate of recent fire incidents in Covid-19 hospitals in the state, the Maharashtra energy department has started safety inspections and audit of electrical installations in government as well as private hospitals treating patients for the infection. The main focus of the inspection and safety audit would be ICUs, AC system and lifts and the department has directed electrical inspectors to submit an audit report within 10 days. Following an order by Energy Minister Nitin Raut, the energy department issued a circular on April 26, asking the Chief Electrical Inspector, Dinesh Khonde, to carry out an electrical safety audit in hospitals across the state. "Due to the pandemic, the hospitals are overburdened which has created pressure on electric equipments. The continuous load on the equipment may lead to mishaps due to short-circuit. If due precautions are taken, these could be prevented," said Raut. "The purpose of the inspection is not to harass anyone or to target any hospital, but to ensure the safety of the patients. Considering the pandemic, some of the hospitals have increased their admission capacity which is likely to increase power consumption and subsequently cause extra load on the system. The task is now to bring to the notice the lacunae, if any, to the hospital authorities in time to prevent mishaps," said Khonde. According to the instructions given by Khonde to his team, it is mandatory for all Covid hospitals or centres to have a standby DG (diesel generator) set, which would supply electricity in case of a power break down.

Maharashtra 10th Board Exam za2021

Teachers urges government to return examination fees

Maharashtra 10th Board Exam 2021 has been cancelled. So, teachers association have started urging the government to return the examination fees to the students.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra 10th Board Exam 2021 has been cancelled by the state government. As the class 10 board exam has been cancelled, teachers have started urging the government to return the exami-

nation fees to the students. An examination fee of Rs. 415 has been paid by each of the students registered for Maharashtra 10th Board Exam 2021. Teachers association have demanded and said that a way must be found out to return the fees of Maharashtra 10th Board Exam 2021. Each year approximately 17 lakh students appear for the Maharashtra board exams.

The Vice President of Teachers Democratic front, Mr Rajesh Pandya, told TOI, "The board collects about Rs. 80 crore as examination fees. It will not be spending on stationery and other logistics required for an offline exami-

nation. The government must find a way to return the money to the students now that the exam is cancelled". However, a board official said, "Question papers were printed, and other preparations were underway."

Earlier, it has been announced that an alternative assessment method will be followed to declare the results for Maharashtra 10th Board Exam 2021. As of now, there are no official updates on the examination fees. Students and peers are hereby advised to keep checking for the official announcements from time to time on Maharashtra 10th Board Exam 2021.

Covid disruption unlikely to impact April GST collections: SBI Ecowrap



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Even with the new wave of Covid-19 resulting in 'lockdowns' in 15 parts of the country and impacting business all across, the country's GST collections, the barometer of economic activity in India, is likely to cross the Rs 1 lakh crore mark for the sixth time in as many months in April, a SBI Ecowrap report said on Friday. According to the internal simulation model adopted by SBI Ecowrap, the April GST collection is expected to be in the range of Rs 1.15-1.20 lakh crore. This is mar-

ginally short of the record high GST collection in March of Rs 1.24 lakh crore.

The optimism about possible GST collection in April, the report says, is from a healthy growth in E-way bill generation.

"This will be quite impressive given the fact that during April, most of the states imposed partial lockdowns. Also, it is heartening to note that despite the curbs due to the second wave, the All India GST E-way bills till 25 April have reached 4.89 crore and we estimate it to cross 5.5 crore comfortably, given the past trends," the report

said. "We believe that any disruption in GST collections will be transient and the states will have comfortable SGST collections."

The present optimism is also on account of trend shown last year, given the SGST collection, allocation of IGST to states and Cess amount, it is around 89 per cent of the budgeted numbers of Rs 6.5 lakh crore. There is a substantial portion of IGST which is unallocated.

"If the 50:50 distribution takes place, then states will be only short by around Rs 6,000 crore, which is quite impressive given the fact that we were amidst a pandemic and stricter lockdown measures were imposed last year," it said. Meanwhile, the demand for work by households under MGNREGA increased by 92 per cent to 2.57 crore households in April '21 (highest in any April since compilation of the data started in 2013) so far, against 1.34 crore in April '20. "This indicates the extent of reverse migration from the lockdown states to their native states," the report said.

Government of Maharashtra

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Hon'ble Dy. Chief Minister

Shri Balasaheb Thorat
Hon'ble Minister, Revenue

ROC-2021-22/No.-5/C 314
Directorate General of Information and Public Relations, Government of Maharashtra



BHUMIKA GURUNG: I FIND IT EXCITING TO WORK UNDER PRESSURE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Bhumika Gurung, who plays the role of Meera in "Mann Ki Awaaz Pratigya 2", is not one to crumble under pressure. The actress says while acting, she never really is stressed by who she is sharing the screen with or how her character will be received by the audience.

"I'm not thinking about anything but the show when I am acting. I'm a confident person, I find it exciting to work under pressure. Honestly, it's a task to make each character convincing but that's my job. I'm adding my touches to Meera's role but mostly I am going by the script because the character has been written very well

on paper," said Bhumika.

Bhumika says she is happy to get roles that are close to how she is in real life.

"I feel lucky to be offered characters that share similarities to who I am in real life. Meera is someone who believes in doing good for others. This is one trait that I also have," she says.

On the current scenario in the country, the actress says she is trying to do as much as she can to help others.

"It has impacted everybody's life. I'm grateful to be in a better position than many who are suffering out there. I'm doing my best to help those in need and praying for everyone's safety. I take this as a phase that hopefully would pass soon," she says.

JACQUELINE FERNANDEZ'S INSTA FOLLOWING HITS 50 MILLION-MARK

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Jacqueline Fernandez's Instagram following reached the 50-million mark on Thursday. "I am immensely grateful to my family of 50 million for their constant love and support. Everything I am is because of them. I pray for their safety and well-being in these trying times. I hope they all, their families, friends and in fact everyone in the world comes out of this soon," Jacqueline said.

The Bollywood star has her kitty full with films over the next few months. She co-stars with Akshay Kumar in "Ram Setu" and "Bachchan Pandey", and returns with Salman Khan in "Kick 2". "Cirkus" casts her with Ranveer Singh while Jacqueline also features in the horror comedy "Bhoot Police", with Saif Ali Khan, Arjun Kapoor, and Yami Gautam.



We are in a hurry, and often skip emotions: Filmmaker Ram Kamal



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Writer and director - he says the amalgamation of two makes him a narrator. For him, the driving force is always to tell a tale whether it is writing a book or making a film. "I don't think I will be able to make what is fashionably called stylised cinema. What people in this country crave for is a story. Sadly, we have forgotten to pause and take a nice closeup shot. We are in a hurry, and often skip emotions," says writer and filmmaker Ram Kamal, who recently completed his fourth film 'Broken Frame', starring Ritabhari Chakraborty and Rohit Bose.

The director, who has to his credit shorts like 'Cakewalk', starring Esha Deol, 'Season's Greetings' with Celina Jaitley and 'Rickshawala' with Avinash Dwivedi, says that it is important for him not to repeat his narratives. "You will never find me revisiting my own stories or characters. I like to tell stories that I feel would fascinate others. There is this constant need to expand my canvas, I try to grow as a storyteller with every film," he says. Although he wanted to produce all eight stories from his book eLong Island Iced Tea' with eight different directors and create an anthology, despite getting some good directors onboard, he somehow could not manage the required funds. "A year later, when I made eCakewalk' and eSeason's Greetings', people wanted to see more shorts from me. That is when I decided to make the first story eBroken Frame' from my book. Since it was written as a short story, I had no option but to make it as a short."

Talk to him about his special connection with Kolkata, and Kumar who was born and brought up in that city says that he never really planned to shoot all his films in that city. "It just happened."

Crediting actor Esha Deol for pushing him into direction, he remembers, "I always wanted to tell stories. From words to celluloid. It was during eCakewalk', which I initially wanted to just produce that Deol literally pushed me to become a director. She felt that I have it "in me" and she could sense it. So that's how the journey started." Kumar, whose eRickshawala' won awards at the Cardiff International Film Festival and Melbourne International Film Festival congratulates film festival organisers for managing to hold online festivals even as the pandemic just refuses to go away.

All set to start his full-length feature in Bengali immediately after the lockdown is suspended, the filmmaker, who has produced two Hindi and one Bengali Short, which will release this year, adds, "I will also be completing my next eShubho Bijoya', a Hindi love story with Gurmeet Choudhury and Debina Bonnerjee."



KAREENA EXPLAINS IMPORTANCE OF COVID VAX TO SON WITH A 'TOM & JERRY' CLIP

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Kareena Kapoor Khan on Thursday posted a clip from the "Tom & Jerry" cartoon series in a bid to explain to her son Taimur why it is essential for adults to get vaccinated for Covid-19. Kareena wrote a note with the video post, too, about how she has been trying to explain the concept of vaccination to Taimur. "We don't realise that our kids are also absorbing what's going on and they are scared too. We were talking to Tim to try and explain why all the adults need to be vaccinated and I think this sums it up pretty well. It's really that simple. But like we explain to our kids, we too need to be patient and help everyone who is trying to help us - medics, pharma, authorities and the millions of volunteers - please register and wait for your turn. #BreakTheChain," she wrote.

The actress has been posting messages on social media, urging people to follow Covid protocols seriously. She posted a message talking about the importance of wearing masks correctly recently.



SO MANGOLICIOUS!

Team Absolute | New Delhi

What better time than now to indulge in mango based dessert. Summer is the ideal time to indulge in some healthy and cool refreshments. With the abundance of different varieties of mangoes we explore some interesting recipes out of India's favourite summer fruit!

Loaded with nutrition and taste, this ripened pulpy fruit is all-in-all a dessert in itself. Grow with Kimaye, INI Farms shares drinks and dessert you can make out of mangoes at home! o All in for Aamras - This one goes without saying and is by far the easiest dessert you can make! Nothing beats this sweet and smooth flavour on a summer noon. It's not just a sweet escape but is full of nutritional elements. They're mostly made with sweet Alphonso mangoes for the natural sweet essence, so pick the right Mangoes before you blend them!

o Fuse the Fizz - If you are looking for something fresh and light, Mango Fizz is the ultimate solution. While lemon soda may be the summer drink, you can always add some mango pulp to twist the taste! This perfect blend of soda, lemon, mint leaves and mango will leave you refreshed and all energised.

o Make space for Cheesecake! - A mango cheesecake makes it a perfect summer dessert for those short get-togethers. The process of making a no-bake mango cheesecake is simple, easy, and delicious to devour! All you need are some rich flavoured mangoes, so make sure you pick good quality ones. A rich dessert requires rich fruits!

o Blend it in a Milkshake - Summers are incomplete without these, aren't they? If you love milkshakes, mangoes are your go-to fruit! Out of the very few fruits that blend well with milk, Mango happens to be one. So, make the most of this healthy choice! You can also blend in a few chocolate pieces and make it a Mango-chocolate shake.

o Mango Kesari or Halwa - The season calls for something special, and if one can blend fruits into delicious recipes, then why not? The simple recipe of halwa with mango mixture can add up to the sweet flavour. It's an easy recipe to try at home when you're craving something sweet and fruity! o Time for Lassi - Last but not least, Mango lassi not just makes a tasty drink but also has major health benefits. The mixture of mango and yoghurt is healthy for your gut, helps in digestion and keeps your stomach cool. With minimal efforts, mango lassi is a must-have summer drink! Fruit is a great way to get your dose of nutrients and vitamins. You can also add other fresh fruits like banana, grapes and pomegranates to make these recipes a little more fruit-full!



How to maintain positive well-being at home

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With the lockdown, restrictions and changes at work, people have been grappling to find some normalcy in their lives. As the crisis deepens, there are mixed emotions, feelings of despair, fears, insecurity, stress, and for women, in particular, there have been extra care-giving responsibilities while working from home and working at home. It's important to remain upbeat while staying at home, managing self-care and well-being.

Vasant Mundra, Consultant Psychiatrist, PD Hinduja Hospital and MRC; and Chandni Tugnait, MD (A.M) Psychotherapist and Founder-Director, Gateway of Healing, share some tips for women to take care of themselves:

Be physically fit : If one is fit, one is likely to have a slightly better mood than one would have had if one was not so. So be active. Morning sunlight is essential for the upbeat of an individual. Get up and get some sunlight. Whether it is within the house, from a terrace, from a corridor, or possibly in a compound somewhere, get morning sunlight.

Follow a routine : A routine always helps us cope with change. Make sure you focus on a routine with healthy eating habits, exercise, good sleep and meditation or mindfulness exercises. This improves focus and productivity and also leads to lower stress levels.

Mind is money : The next thing is to stop wasting neurotransmitters of our brain on things that do not matter. Whether we have anxiety about coronavirus, concerns about the administration, or frustration about our favourite cricket team, we are spending neurotransmitters. Let's use our neurotransmitters for something more substantial. The simplest way is to focus on one's brain is like how we would treat our wallet. We are always careful when handing out or wasting money. Let's just be as careful with wasting our brain chemicals like our money. Fear, anger, envy, anxiety are all waste neurotransmitters. Often it is not so much the situation

that causes it but our interpretation of the situation.

Limit information intake : It's important to be aware and cautious, however, an overdose of news and information from all corners can be very distracting and emotionally draining. Make sure you limit your intake of the pandemic-related news if it unnerves you.

Take frequent breaks : It can be quite unnerving to manage the office work, house work, online school classes for kids, and so much more. Amid it all, it's important to take frequent breaks (even if for five to ten minutes each time) and relax. A breather, every now and then, not only increases our productivity but also helps keep stress at bay.

Surround yourself with positive people : Be part of communities that uplift you. Connect with people who inspire you, who are fun to be with and who allow you the space to be the way you like. It's especially important to not engage with people who are constantly in a negative loop and are not willing to step out of it. Also stay away from people and things that are emotionally or energetically draining.

Practice gratitude : Research has proven how a simple practice of gratitude daily can shift so much in a person's life. It improves the physical and psychological health and adds bliss to life, thereby improving the relationships with self and others. The key factor here is to 'feel' gratitude and not just 'think' gratitude.

Revive a hobby : Once a week (if not everyday), indulge in your hobby and see how much it adds to your life. Whether it is dancing, painting, creating music or reading, take that time out for yourself. You matter! And only when you are able to feel physically, mentally and emotionally balanced can you contribute to the others around you. It isn't selfish to indulge in some 'me time'. On the contrary, it is absolutely essential.

Some more tips for a positive well-being are: do not overreact when feeling angry; try not to get easily insulted; try and value the other person's opinion; exercise regularly; enjoy food keeping an eye on the portions; watch positive content; enjoy conversations; and stay connected with friends.





'Fast & Furious' franchise set to drop podcast series on April 30



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The makers of the "Fast & Furious" franchise are set to drop their first podcast series on April 30, ahead of release of the ninth film in the series. The podcast will have nine parts and the first episode features the film's hero Vin Diesel, who plays the iconic Dominic

Toretto. The upcoming sixth season of the popular Binge Podcast series will focus on the "Fast & Furious" franchise, which has raked in over \$5 billion worldwide so far, Entertainment Weekly announced. The upcoming season will take fans through all of the previous films of the franchise and also focus on

the upcoming "Fast & Furious 9", in a nine-week series featuring conversations with the stars who brought those films to life. A new episode will be aired every Friday. Each episode will have key cast and crew members in exclusive interviews, sharing insights and talking about their journey with the fran-

chise. Hosted by Entertainment Weekly Social Media Director Chanelle Johnson and Associate Editor Derek Lawrence, the series gives fans an in-depth look at the making of the franchise through exclusive interviews with director Justin Lin as well as franchise stars Sung Kang and Michelle Rodriguez among others.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Jessica Simpson got rid of the weighing machine at home and has no idea about how much she weighs.

"I threw it out. I have no idea how much I weigh. Like, I just want to feel good and be able to zip my pants up. If I don't, I have another size. I have every size. I've really tried my hardest to not let that define me," Simpson said on "The Today Show", reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She had earlier said she is "open" about her insecurities and flaws. "I am always open. I'm open about my insecurities and my flaws, and if I can help inspire anybody to feel better about themselves, that's why I'm here. I'm always out to empower women, empower people to feel better about themselves," Simpson said.

She adds that she has been quiet over the past decade: "It was time to really understand my entire life. The way people have been

Jessica Simpson has no idea how much she weighs

reacting to it is exactly how I would want my best friends to read it. It's very liberating to be open. With my openness comes confidence."



Elliot Page recalls collapsing at 'Inception' afterparty

Los Angeles | Agencies

"Juno" star Elliot Page, who came out as a transgender man last year, says he collapsed at the premiere afterparty of the 2010 film "Inception" because wearing a dress and heels to every single event was hampering his mental health.



"It was like a cinematic moment. That night, after the premiere at the afterparty, I collapsed. That's something that's happened frequently in my life, usually corresponding with a panic attack," Elliot said, according to a report in femalefirst.co.uk.

He added, "Ultimately, it's every experience you've had since you were a toddler, people saying, 'The way you're sitting is not ladylike, you're walking like a boy...,' every aspect of who you are being looked at and put in a box in a very binary system. That's what it leads to."

The actor also shared he can't look back at photos of the 2008 Oscars, when he was nominated for Best Actress for the film "Juno", as Ellen Page.

Speaking to Oprah Winfrey on her Apple TV+ series 'The Oprah Conversation', he recalled: "That was a pretty intense time. I remember it felt so impossible to communicate with people how unwell I was, because obviously there is so much excitement. The film unexpectedly became a big hit, I became quite known, all these things and I felt I couldn't express the degree of pain I was in."

"I could not look at a photo from that red carpet. People might watch this and say, 'Oh my gosh, this person is crying about the night they went to the Oscars.' That prevents the ability to allow yourself to not just feel the pain but reflect on the pain, to begin to sit down and bring it all up and finally confront all of that," he says.



Michelle Heaton in rehab for alcohol abuse

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Michelle Heaton is currently in rehabilitation, receiving treatment for alcohol abuse that worsened during lockdown.

Heaton had experienced symptoms of menopause after a hysterectomy in 2012 and a double mastectomy in 2015, a report in daily-mail.co.uk said. Her spokesperson told Mail Online that her family was supporting her during this phase.

"She realised she needed to get help when she'd increasingly turned to alcohol as a crutch as she couldn't cope with the effects of her operations," The Sun quoted a source as saying.

"Michelle was left feeling like she had lost so much of what made her a woman and when she went into early menopause that brought with it a whole other collection of problems," the source added.

The lockdown made it worse, added the source. "She was just about coping when lockdown hit last year, but the effect of being at home and being unable to distract herself, saw her hit rock bottom."



Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor George Clooney turns 60 on May 6 but the idea does not make him very happy.

"As far as turning 60, listen, I'm not thrilled with it but it's better than dead. So I'll take it. I got two options," Clooney said.

Clooney and his wife Amal have three-year-old twins - Ella and Alexander - and the couple are already teaching the little ones to be charitable.

"Well, you try (to instill charitable values). They're not quite four yet so they don't (understand). My kids will always say, they'll pick up a toy and they'll go, 'This is for the poor people!'"

George Clooney on turning 60: I'm not thrilled

said Clooney, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

"I go, 'Good. OK, so let's put it in the basket and we'll take it to the poor people.' And then there's this shock on their face when reality hits," the actor added while speaking to Entertainment Tonight.

Clooney said, "But I hope so. My parents always taught me that the best things you could do (is) challenge people in power and look out for people who aren't in power and those kinds of things."

He is a director of the Motion Picture and Television Fund, which was founded in 1921 and offers care and assistance to those of the industry and their families financial assistance, case management and even residential living at the Wasserman Campus in Los Angeles. Clooney loves taking his wife to visit the facility.

Willow Smith explains decision to be polyamorous

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Willow Smith reveals she is polyamorous. She shared this while sitting with her mother Jada Pinkett Smith and grandmother Adrienne Norris-Banfield, during their Facebook show "Red Table Talk".

"With polyamory, I feel like the main foundation is the freedom to be able to create a relationship style that works for you. And not just stepping into monogamy because that's what everyone around you says is 'the right thing to do'," Willow, 20, said, according to a report in reports.aceshowbiz.com.

Willow, daughter of Hollywood star Will Smith, added: "Let's say you haven't always been the person wanting sex all the time, but your partner is. Are you going to be the person to say, 'Just because I don't have these needs, you can't have them either?'"

"That's one of the reasons why I was interested in poly because I was introduced to it through kind of a nonsexual lens." She then admitted that she is the "only polyamorous person" among her friend group and has "the least sex out of all of (her) friends," she said.

The singer also made it clear that she needs a reason greater than "I think you're cute" to walk down the aisle.

Willow has her mother's full support on her choice.

Her mother said, "I was like, 'I totally get it.' Wanting to set up your life in a way that you can have what it is that you want, I think that anything goes as long as the intentions are clear to everyone, more to yourself than anything."



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Jesse J





EDITOR'S SPECS

Poor Congress

Sonia Gandhi-led Congress performance in all the four states – West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam – where Assembly polls took place remained bad, according to exit polls. In West Bengal, the C-Voter survey predicted 14 to 15 seats to Congress and Left combined

where as Chanakya gave them eight seats. The Axis survey gave two seats to them and CNX gave between 11 to 21 seats. In 2016 Assembly elections in the state, Left + Congress had cornered 76 seats. In Assam, C-Voter predicted 53-66 seats to Congress

THE AXIS SURVEY GAVE TWO SEATS TO THEM AND CNX GAVE BETWEEN 11 TO 21 SEATS. IN 2016 ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN THE STATE, LEFT + CONGRESS HAD CORNERED 76 SEATS.

led UPA, Chanakya has between 47 to 65 seats. Axis and CNX in its survey gave 40 to 50 seats. In Tamil Nadu, DMK and Congress alliance is forming government however Congress was only allocated 25 a total of 234 Assembly constituencies. The C-Voter survey shows that DMK-led alliance is projected to secure 160 to 172 seats in the state. The incumbent AIADMK-led alliance is expected to be restricted to 58 to 70 seats in the state. While the Axis exit poll shows that DMK+ should get 175-195 seats and the AIDMK+ to contend with 38 to 54 seats. Chanakya predicted 164 to 186 seats of DMK and Congress and 46-48 seats to AIDMK. The CNX predicted 160-170 seats to DMK and Congress and 58 to 68 seats AIDMK. In Kerala, it's a straight forward electoral battle between the incumbent Pinarayi Vijayan led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Congress Aled United Democratic Front (UDF). According to the exit polls, the ruling LDF expected to retain the southern state of Kerala and thus buck the trend of defeating the incumbent every electoral cycle. Kerala went to the polls on April 6 to elect 140 legislators. According to the C-Voter survey 71-77 seats to the LDF and the UDF to secure 62-68 seats. While the Axis survey shows 104-120 to LDF and 20-36 to UDF. The CNX predicted 72-80 seats to LDF and 58-64 seats UDF. Chanakya survey shows 93-111 seats to LDF and 26-44 seats to UDF. If the exit polls are to hold on the result day it will be a relief for the BJP with party doing exceptionally well in West Bengal, retaining power in Assam and winning Puducherry. While the Congress will have a lot to worry about as they could not win Assam and in Kerala, now the home state of Rahul Gandhi who is a Lok Sabha MP from the state, his party could not make a comeback.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AS SCHOOLS OF REVOLUTION RELEVANT TODAY?

Brij Khandelwal

As the Covid-19 pandemic sweeps the globe, denting economies and devastating medical infrastructures, the role of the trade union movement in India and its widely accepted irrelevance in the changed circumstances, merits a deeper analysis.

What is the role of trade unions in a new globalised, privatised and liberal socio-economic order that seems to have found popular acceptance in most emerging societies?

Looking at the long queues of litigants at the labour courts, it would appear that trade unions have lost the will to fight it out in the field with strikes or direct action. They now prefer to get engaged in protracted disputes settled by litigation committees or tribunals.

"The reality is that in the new so-called liberal economic order, the workers are totally at the mercy of the employers who can fire anyone at will. Job security is an outdated concept. With most government departments these days outsourcing services, the bargaining power of unions has been drastically reduced," says Abhinay Prasad, president of the Self-employed Workers and Vendors Association, of Agra.

In a country populated by farmers and an unorganized workforce, the relevance of celebrating May Day remains highly questionable, if not amusing, adds former trade union activist Shrawan Kumar Singh.

"Who is fighting whom? Trade unions as 'schools of revolution' is a dated concept. The leftists these days feel left out from all spheres of public discourse. They hardly have any contribution to make in a system where roles are not clearly defined and the economic classes not clearly segregated, as Marx would have wanted," Singh added. As the number of self-help employers is going up steadily, it becomes difficult to decide who is exploiting and who is being exploited.



"But our fight is chiefly against the government agencies and the police who harass and often turn to exploiting vendors or petty shopkeepers," says an ageing trade union leader.

"Trade unions everywhere are losing their revolutionary character and are being degenerating into litigation committees, striking deals and bargains with management. Their preoccupation is no longer waging a class struggle or sharpening the political consciousness of their members but winning small mercies from the establishment," opines a former left-leaning commentator Paras Nath Choudhary.

Strikes are no longer in fashion. This is because trade union leaders are now members of the management boards, with a responsibility to keep the wheels of industry running in their collective self-interest, adds Ram Kishore, president of the Socialist Foundation.

"These days we do not see any effort by the working class to wage a relentless struggle for

restructuring society according to Marxist thinking. Karl Marx visualised that the working class would eventually become the vanguard of the socialist revolution, with trade unions acting as the organising centres for uniting the forces of workers competing with one another and to give them elementary class training. But experience has shown that these institutions have emerged neither as independent centres of power nor as schools of socialism and solidarity.

Of late we have seen a tendency of most unions to appear "apolitical". Many have refused to make political statements that could lead to a change of governance. Union leaders do not realise that the genuine interests of workers lie not so much in the percentage of dearness allowance or gain in salary structures but in the real purchasing power of money which depends on the political and economic policies of a government.

In practical terms, the main function of union leaders is to "keep the fellows in order"

to help keep the industrial wheel running at any cost. It is not surprising therefore that in the industrialised West, trade unions are considered an extremely vital part of the establishment and involved in the decision-making process. Today's grim reality is that as institutions of labour activism, they cannot challenge the system or even question the existence of a society based on a division of classes. The history of the trade union movement in India proves that the unions can never be a vehicle of advance towards socialism. They are tied to capitalism and therefore cannot transform or rebel against the given system.

The isolated case of a big union's involvement with the changing of the system was the 18-day long railway strike in 1974 by George Fernandes that hastened or created conditions for the imposition of emergency.

Clearly, the trade union movement is at a crossroads. It has to redefine its agenda and its ideological parameters. Organising rallies to promote sectarian interests is one thing, but getting involved with a larger struggle to usher in socialism and leading the working class to dismantle the feudal-capitalism complex is quite another.

Trade Union leaders no longer want to play a political role. The old model of a trade union always being in conflict with the establishment has changed. Now there is close coordination and co-existence. This has put the ordinary worker in a permanent state of tension and uncertainty.

The labour class can not afford to fight as alternatives are no longer available, due to the shrinkage of the job market and the economy not really looking up. Clearly, the trade union movement is at a crossroads. It has to redefine its agenda and its ideological parameters. Organising rallies to promote sectarian interests is one thing, but getting involved with a larger struggle to usher in socialism and leading the working class to dismantle the feudal-capitalist complex is quite another.

Myanmar drug surge worry for neighbours including India

Subir Bhaumik

A spike in illegal narcotics from the 'Golden Triangle' to South and Southeast Asian countries as a result of pandemic-related supply gluts and a likely increase in production is worrying Myanmar's neighbours, including India.

The 'Golden Triangle', located in northeastern Myanmar bordering Laos, Thailand and China, is one of the two biggest global sources of narcotic drugs.

Anti-narcotics authorities in neighboring Thailand have seized more than 80 million methamphetamine pills, or yaba, in the past six months, a record haul that they blame partly on a supply glut caused by the Covid-19.

The Assam Rifles that guards India's borders with Myanmar has also reported a significant rise in drug seizures in northeastern states like Manipur and Mizoram but many feel the 'seizures are mere tips of the iceberg'.

Assam Rifles DG Lt Gen Sukhdeep Sangwan told IANS during a recent seminar that his traditional counter-insurgency force is 'fully geared to meet the drug threat from Myanmar.'

"We started by focusing on couriers who cross the border carrying headlines but now we are focusing on the organized cartels operating on the long Frontier. Our pro-active intelligence driven operations are helping bust the drug smuggling rackets," Sangwan said. Some big seizures in Mizoram and Manipur by Assam Rifles may have turned the heat on the drug cartels operating on India-Myanmar border, but the boom in production in Myanmar remains a cause for worry.

2020 was boom year for Myanmar's drug trafficking syndicates, with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reporting a sharp drop in the price of methamphet-



amines in East and Southeast Asia to its lowest level in 10 years. That was because the market was overwhelmed with supply. This boost owes to cartels in 'Golden Triangle', like the United Wa State Army (UWSA), developing the ability to produce the ingredients to manufacture various synthetic drugs, including amphetamine-type stimulants like crystal meth and yaba, as well as synthetic opioids.

This innovation has enabled drug traffickers to avoid restrictions on the import of precursors such as pseudoephedrine and ephedrine, particularly from China.

"This development has allowed transnational criminal networks to flourish and expand their operations despite the economic recession prompted by COVID-19," said an UNODC report. The steady increase in meth production has been reflected in the region's seizures: Asian anti-drug authorities confiscated a record 139 tons of meth in 2019, up

from 127 tons in 2018 and 82.5 tons in 2017, according to UNODC data. Data for 2020 was not available but UNODC says they will be close to 150 tons. The UNODC has warned that the region should brace for a larger flow of illegal drugs as the crisis in Myanmar deepens, and the formal economy all but collapses amid strikes, protests, and increasingly violent crackdowns by the security forces. Organized drug cartels and their militias in eastern Myanmar will consolidate their control, thriving on the chaos unleashed by the February 1 military takeover, Jeremy Douglas, who heads the UNODC office in Bangkok, told correspondent. "If past actions are an indicator of what's coming, then we're likely to see another increase in synthetic drug production," Douglas said. "The best way to make big money fast is the drug trade, and the pieces are in place to scale up."

As with Covid-19, chaos for Myanmar is opportunity for the region's drug trafficking syndicates. Over the past two decades, meth production has jumped up in Myanmar, displacing the opium and heroin production in the 'Golden Triangle'.

Much of this is concentrated in Shan State, especially in regions controlled by dozens of micro-militias linked to the Myanmar military, as well as in regions under the sway of non-state armed groups like the United Wa State Army.

The International Crisis Group puts the total value of the Golden Triangle drug trade at around \$40 billion per year.

The worry for India and Bangladesh emerges from a dynamic shift in the Burmese illicit drug industry. Smaller cartels like the Wei Brothers, Zhang Ming group and Lo Hsin Nian group have moved their production facilities to Western Myanmar on borders with India and Bangladesh.

ASIAN-PACIFIC AREA LAWMAKERS SEEK 'WHOLE OF SOCIETY' APPROACH AGAINST COVID

Policymakers from 50 Asian and Pacific countries on Thursday called for a "whole-of-society" response to Covid-19. Indian diplomats, attending the annual session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) told IANS that the policymakers encouraged coordinated action across the region to mitigate the economic and social devastation brought on by the pandemic. That augurs well for India, they said, because it needs external support at the moment to tide over the crisis of the second Covid surge that has led to more than three million infections.



Endorsing a resolution on the final day of ESCAP's annual session, the delegates also reaffirmed its commitment to multilateralism in response to global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. They further underlined the importance of ensuring universal and equitable access to vaccines, and investing in social protection systems that promote access to essential services and decent jobs.

They particularly stressed on meeting the health and social care needs of the most vulnerable populations, and promoting the continued flow of essential goods and services. "We are committed to supporting governments to building back better from the Covid-19 pandemic through inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery strategies," United Nations Under Secretary General and ESCAP Executive Secretary Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, said in her closing remarks to the Commission's 77th session. "It is my utmost hope that the resolution on regional cooperation to build back better from crises in Asia and the Pacific will further mainstream our response to Covid-19." Noting that the ESCAP will celebrate its 75th anniversary in 2022, she remarked that "regional cooperation is as needed today as it was 75 years ago".

DOMESTIC TRAVEL BANS CAN SPIKE COVID-19 CASES: RESEARCHERS

A new study using data from India and five other countries finds that using domestic travel bans to control Covid-19 infections may be inadvisable.

Depending on their duration, these restrictions can lead to more rather than fewer infections overall, especially when there is a large urban-rural migrant population, it indicated.

As India battles a severe second wave of Covid-19, state governments are once again faced with the question: Should they use travel bans to control disease transmission?

In the first wave of Covid-19, most states chose this option. The hardships faced by migrant workers prevented from returning home to their villages were seen as a necessary sacrifice to reduce the spread of disease into rural India.

In the second wave, the Delhi government has urged migrants not to leave. Other cities may follow suit.

A new research paper by academics at the University of Chicago suggests that imposing travel bans can counter-intuitively increase the total spread of the disease, creating a lose-lose situation.

This outcome occurs when a country has a large migrant population that is prevented from leaving an urban hotspot and returning to rural areas. The researchers show that if the net effect of a travel ban is to delay the movement of these people, rather than prevent it entirely, the policy can lead to more cases overall.

The paper uses detailed data on rural-urban migration, travel ban policies, and Covid-19 cases to show that this lose-lose outcome occurred in India during the first wave, due to travel bans imposed on migrants wishing to leave Mumbai.



Elaborating on the findings, Anant Sudarshan, South Asia Director of The Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago and one of the study authors, said: "The national lockdown in the first wave trapped millions of migrants inside big cities like Mumbai that were fast-growing coronavirus hotspots.

"Eventually people were able to leave, but variations in government policy meant that the length of time they were detained depended on where they wanted to go. In the case of rural districts where people could return quicker -- using the Shramik Special Trains for example -- cases rose modestly at the destination.

"But for those areas where bans were in effect longer, there was a much more inten-

sive increase in coronavirus, likely because the returning population was now more likely to be infected, having been trapped in the hotspot longer."

Apart from Mumbai, the paper further analyses data from five other countries where migration is prevalent -- China, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa, and Kenya.

Together these countries comprise roughly 40 per cent of the global population and all of them had initial outbreaks in a few hotspot locations.

The researchers used epidemiological data, migration data, and information on travel bans from all these countries to show that although exceptionally long bans may work to reduce total cases, moderate dura-

tions are associated with significant increases in disease spread.

Fiona Burling, Assistant Professor at the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago, one of the co-authors of the study, adds: "The evidence indicates that if the duration of a travel ban is not long enough, we may end up imposing hardship on people while adversely seeing more spread of infection.

"Getting the duration wrong is easy because it is not possible to predict in advance what the optimal length should be, and in a democracy, such restrictions cannot be easily sustained. There may be merit in letting people go home early, and indeed encouraging them to do so, rather than forcing them to stay."



US TO DEPLOY ADDITIONAL FORCES TO AFGHANISTAN AS WITHDRAWAL UNDERWAY

White House Deputy Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters aboard Air Force One that "a draw-down is underway," saying that the US military would deploy additional military assets to Afghanistan and the region to cover the withdrawal, Xinhua reported.



from Afghanistan. Citing defense officials, CNN reported that fewer than 100 troops and military equipment had been pulled out of the country largely by aircraft to implement the withdrawal order announced by President Joe Biden earlier this month. The US State Department on Tuesday ordered non-essential staff to leave the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. US Charge d'Affaires to Afghanistan Ross Wilson tweeted that the departure was approved "in light of increasing violence & threat reports in Kabul."

Washington | Agencies

The White House has said the US military will send additional forces to Afghanistan to protect US and coalition forces during the withdrawal. White House Deputy Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters aboard Air Force One that "a drawdown is underway," saying that the US military would deploy

additional military assets to Afghanistan and the region to cover the withdrawal, Xinhua reported. "Elements of an Army Ranger Task Force will temporarily deploy to Afghanistan to assist with the force protection of forces on the ground as we initiate withdrawal operations," she noted. Jean-Pierre also said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had directed that a carrier strike group would provide sustained additional

force protection capabilities in the region throughout the withdrawal. "While these actions will initially result in increased forces levels, we remain committed to having all US military personnel out of Afghanistan by September 11, 2021," she added. The Pentagon last week said that B-52 bombers and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier will deploy to the region to protect U.S. and coalition forces as they withdraw

44 killed in stampede at Jewish festival in Israel

The tragedy happened in Mount Meron in northern Israel, during the festival celebrated every year on the eve of the Jewish holiday Lag BaOmer, the Xinhua news agency reported.



BaOmer, the Xinhua news agency reported.

"In great concern I follow the reports from Meron and pray for the healing of the wounded. May God heal them."

Jerusalem | Agencies

At least 44 people were killed and 103 injured in a stampede after midnight Thursday at an Israeli festival attended by tens of thousands of people, local media reported.

The tragedy happened in Mount Meron in northern Israel, during the festival celebrated every year on the eve of the Jewish holiday Lag

According to estimates by the Israeli media, about 100,000 people, most of them ultra-Orthodox Jews, participated in the festival this time.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wrote on Twitter, "A heavy disaster on Mount Meron. We are all praying for the healing of the injured. I want to strengthen the rescue crews operating there." Israeli President Reuven Rivlin also tweeted,

It was first speculated that the tragedy was caused by the collapse of a stand, but Israeli ambulance service Magen David Adom (MDA) later said that it was caused by crowding. The MDA added that the wounded were evacuated, some of them by helicopters, to four hospitals in northern Israel and Jerusalem.

Scientists find 27K suspected barrels of toxic DDT on ocean floor near LA

Los Angeles | Agencies

Scientists found 27,000 barrel-like objects on the seafloor about 12 miles (19.3 kilometers) offshore Los Angeles, local CBS news channel reported, saying it confirmed the existence of a DDT dump site in the waters off the coast of Southern California.

The report said that a team from University of California San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography used two deep-sea robots to map more than 36,000 acres (145.7 square kilometers) of seafloor between Catalina Island and the Los Angeles County coast over two weeks in March. Among more than 100,000 objects on the seafloor imaged by sonar as deep as about 1,000 meters below, 27,000 were classified as barrel-like, and it could contain DDT inside, the report said, adding even

though samples would be taken to see what was inside the barrels, the area had already been found to contain high levels of DDT in sediments and the ecosystem, the Xinhua news agency reported on Friday.

"Unfortunately, the basin offshore Los Angeles has been a dumping ground for industrial waste for several decades, beginning in the 1930s. We found an extensive debris field in the wide area survey," Eric Terrill, chief scientist of the expedition and director of the Marine Physical Laboratory at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, said in a statement to CBS news. According to a report from local ABC 7 early this month, researchers from the University of California, Santa Barbara and Scripps Institution of Oceanography conducted the survey focusing on gathering

information not vacuuming up the toxic material. Researchers had been exploring this site and learning more about the extent of the pollution for at least a decade using underwater cameras and robotic vehicles, the report said, noting this latest expedition hoped to get a more detailed picture of the extent of the contamination. The report named the Montrose Chemical Corp. as the owner of the toxic DDT, which was described as the largest global supplier of DDT for decades. The company's plant in Torrance, 30 kilometers south of Los Angeles downtown, produced more than 800,000 tons of the chemical from 1947 to 1982. While DDT was banned in the US in 1972, the company continued to manufacture it in Southern California for export to other nations.

UN launches intelligence tool for natural capital accounting

New York | Agencies

An innovative artificial intelligence (AI) tool that will make it easier for countries to measure the contributions of nature to their economic prosperity and well-being was launched by the United Nations and the Basque Centre for Climate Change (BC3).

Developed by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and BC3, the new tool, launched on Thursday, can vastly accelerate implementation of the new ground-breaking standard for valuing the contributions of nature that was adopted by the UN Statistical Commission last month.

The tool makes use of AI technology using the Artificial Intelligence for Environment and Sustainability (ARIES) platform to support countries as they apply the new international standard for natural capital accounting, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Ecosystem Accounting. The new open-source and user-friendly digital tool, called the ARIES for SEEA Explorer, enables, for the first time, rapid and standardized yet customisable ecosystem accounting anywhere on the earth.

"The ARIES for SEEA Explorer is a game changer for governments that want to implement the recent-

ly adopted SEEA Ecosystem Accounting standard," stressed Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the Statistics Division. "This application allows countries to jumpstart accounts compilation from global data sources, which they can refine with national data or model parameters."

The ecosystem accounts produced by countries will track the extent, condition and services provided by nature's ecosystems -- such as forests and wetlands -- in the form of physical and monetary accounts and indicators. The adoption of the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting has been heralded as a historic step forward for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to move beyond GDP in tracking global progress. Bert Kroese, Deputy Director for Statistics Netherlands and Chair of the UN Committee of Environmental-Economic Accounting, said, "The ARIES for SEEA Explorer will give countries a much-needed tool to make progress with the SDGs and the monitoring framework of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Its low barrier to entry will ensure that no country is left behind when it comes to ecosystem accounting." Risenga Maluleke, Statistician-General of Statistics South Africa and Chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics, said, "The launch of the ARIES for SEEA Explorer on the UN Global Platform is an important step to mainstream the

measurement of ecosystems and their contribution to the economy and wellbeing into global, regional and domestic statistics that will feed into policy and decision making. Better measures of nature will contribute to better policies to save our planet."

Building economic systems that value nature as a central source of human wellbeing, environmental health and economic prosperity in the post-COVID-19 world is essential, according to Susan Gardner, Director of UNEP's Ecosystems Division.

"Having technology that incorporates and integrates the latest data, models and understanding of nature's contributions through natural capital accounting will facilitate well-informed nature positive decision-making from businesses and governments -- driving tangible action on biodiversity loss and climate change and a sustainable future for all," she said. The ARIES for SEEA Explorer is available on the UN Global Platform: a cloud-service environment supporting international collaboration among all countries in the world by sharing scientific knowledge, data, methods and technology. A number of countries have already started using the ARIES for SEEA Explorer. The explorer will continue to be expanded in the near future, by adding the functionality to derive indicators that allow to assess progress towards SDGs and the emerging post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

UNGA PRESIDENT CALLS FOR ACTION ON ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE



United Nations: UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir on Thursday called on member states to take action on antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

"I encourage member states to develop and implement national action plans on AMR, strengthen regulation of antimicrobials, improve knowledge and awareness, and promote best practices, as well as foster innovative approaches, using alternatives to antimicrobials and new technologies, for diagnosis and vaccines," he told a high-level interactive dialogue on antimicrobial resistance, Xinhua reported. Effective communication, education and training are critical to raise awareness and encourage expert-driven behavioral change. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are key. The private sector, doctors, medical workers, farmers, the food industry, and regulators, as well as consumers, are critical partners in this battle, he said.

As with so many crises, it is the vulnerable who stand to be most affected by antimicrobial resistance. Stronger systems are needed to monitor drug-resistant infections and the volume of antimicrobials used in humans, animals, and crops, said Bozkir.

The world is already running out of effective treatments for several common infections. Currently, an estimated 700,000 people die each year due to drug-resistant diseases. And with few replacement products in the pipeline, the world is moving toward a post-antibiotic era in which common infectious diseases will once again cause mortality. None of the 43 antibiotics currently in development are enough to combat the increasing emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance, he said.

If current trends continue, sophisticated interventions like organ transplantation, joint replacements, cancer chemotherapy and care of pre-term infants, which all require antimicrobials, will become too dangerous and will no longer be possible. If no action is taken, drug-resistant diseases could cause 10 million deaths each year by 2050 and damage to the economy will be as catastrophic as the 2008 global financial crisis. By 2030, antimicrobial resistance could force up to 24 million people into extreme poverty, he warned. Lack of regulation, the use of antibiotics as growth promoters in animals, over-the-counter and internet sales have sparked a boom in counterfeit or poor-quality antimicrobials, he said. "Let me leave you with one thought. Next time you consider using antimicrobials, or are offered a meal treated by antimicrobials, consider the impact your decision will have on your grandchildren's access to these life-saving drugs. We can no longer take them for granted. We have to act now to safeguard the progress we have already achieved," said Bozkir.

EU lawmakers want 'Covid-19 certificate' to guarantee free movement

Brussels | Agencies

European lawmakers said on Thursday that the European Union's (EU) planned "COVID-19 certificates" -- and not "Digital Green Certificates" as proposed by the European Commission -- aimed at facilitating travel across the bloc should be enough to enable free movement this summer. On Thursday, members of the European Parliament (MEPs) adopted their negotiating position on the Commission's proposal, according to which EU member state governments should not impose quarantines, tests or self-isolation measures on certificate holders, Xinhua reported.

In its proposal presented in March, the Commission said the temporary system will be suspended once the World Health Organization (WHO) declares the end of the Covid-19 international health emergency.

MEPs insisted on Thursday that the new "EU COVID-19 certificate" should be in place for a maximum of 12 months. Following Wednesday's vote, the results of which were announced on Thursday, negotiations between the European Parliament and the EU



Council can start with the goal of having a deal approved in June, ahead of the summer season. The Commission proposed last month that the certificates should be given to EU residents who can prove they have been vaccinated as well as to those who have a recent negative test result or can prove they have recovered from the infection. The MEPs stressed that the certificate

should neither serve as a travel document nor become a precondition to exercise the right to free movement. Those who are not vaccinated or cannot afford tests should be offered accessible, timely and free-of-charge tests, they added. According to the Commission's predictions, about 70 percent of the EU's adult population is likely to be vaccinated by July.

Iran welcomes signs of reconciliation from Saudi Arabia

Tehran | Agencies

Iran's Foreign Ministry said on Thursday that it welcomed signs of reconciliation coming from Saudi Arabia and hoped to put a quick end to their political differences.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are both important states in the Islamic world whose cooperation can lead to peace and stability in the region, the spokesman said, according to the ISNA news agency, DPA reported. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman struck conciliatory tones this week regarding Iran. "In the end, Iran is a neighbouring country. All we hope for is to have a good and special relationship with Iran," he said on state television. "We want it to prosper



and grow as we have Saudi interests in Iran, and they have Iranian interests in Saudi Arabia." Sunni Saudi Arabia considers Shiite Iran an arch-enemy. The two now settle their decades-old political and economic rivalry primarily through proxy wars in Yemen, Syria and other states. Recently, however, there have been signs of detente. The crown prince's softer tone comes after reports earlier this month that Saudi and Iranian officials held talks in Baghdad.

Vaccinated Europeans outnumber confirmed Covid cases: WHO's Kluge

Copenhagen | Agencies

More Europeans have been vaccinated against Covid-19 than have been confirmed to be infected, Hans Kluge, the World Health Organization's (WHO) regional director for Europe, said on Thursday.

"Based on numbers of confirmed cases, 5.5 per cent of the entire European population has now had Covid-19, while 7 per cent has completed a full vaccination series," Kluge said in a press release, Xinhua reported.

To date, some 215 million vaccine doses have been administered in Europe, he said. Approximately 16 per cent of the WHO European Region's population has received the first vaccine dose.

The WHO European Region has so far registered 51,506,373 confirmed Covid-19 cases and 1,076,173 deaths. Despite the recent decline in new



cases, hospitalizations and deaths, Kluge reiterated his dire warning to citizens in the region to be vigilant and remain "conscious of the fact that vaccines alone will not end the pandemic." "Without informing and engaging

communities, they remain exposed to the virus. Without surveillance, we can't identify new variants. And without contact tracing, governments may need to reimpose restrictive measures," Kluge said. He used the current European Immunization Week (April 24-May 2) to illustrate the importance of vaccines as a guarantee against life-threatening diseases, referencing the 100,000 measles cases that occurred in 2019 as a result of faltering immunization rates in previous years.

"Hard-earned success can slip away fast. That is why I urge you to press hard to maintain high immunization coverage with routine vaccines in the region. We must not loosen our grip on vaccine-preventable diseases," he said.

Kluge also urged the region's health systems to provide essential primary health care, including routine vaccinations, while controlling the pandemic.

Pak recalls ambassador in Saudi Arabia over corruption charges

Islamabad | Agencies

The Pakistan government has recalled its Ambassador in Saudi Arabia, along with other officials at the Pakistan embassy, to make them part of a high-level inquiry into complaints of demanding bribes from the Pakistani expatriates.

The announcement came during a weekly press briefing at the Pakistan foreign office, where the spokesperson Zahid Chaudhri confirmed that officials in the Pakistan embassy in Saudi Arabia, had been called back.

"Our Ambassador of Pakistan to Saudi Arabia has already returned and orders have been issued for the recall of six more officers of the diplomatic, community welfare and consular wings of the embassy," confirmed Chaudhri. "Prime Minister Imran Khan had directed for an inquiry. The Prime Minister's directions were being fully implemented," he

added. Chaudhri went on to say that the welfare of the overseas Pakistanis couldn't be ignored. "The Government of Pakistan attaches high importance to the welfare of overseas Pakistanis. The overseas Pakistanis are our greatest asset. Their role in national development is indispensable," said Chaudhri. The high-level inquiry was initiated as per orders of Prime Minister Imran Khan, after complaints of alleged involvement in taking bribes from the labourers.

The Prime Minister's Office stated that Imran took "serious view of the situation and expressed displeasure over the attitude and behaviour of the officers posted at the embassy or consulates in Saudi Arabia." Khan said that he has ordered a "full-scale inquiry of Pakistan's ambassador in Saudi Arabia on multiple complaints of maltreatment with Pakistani nationals."



BRAR, RAHUL STAR IN PBKS'S BIG WIN OVER RCB

Ahmedabad | Agencies

Left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar had a dream first match in this season's Indian Premier League (IPL) as he picked up the wickets of Virat Kohli, Glenn Maxwell and AB de Villiers to help Punjab Kings (PBKS) romp to a 34-run win against Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Friday night.

After putting up a challenging total of 179/5, PBKS managed to restrict RCB to 145/8 in their 20 overs. Brar, who had played only three IPL matches before Friday, scalped 3/19 in his four overs to run through the power-packed RCB middle-order. Before that, Australian pacer Riley Meredith had dealt the first blow to RCB by sending opener Devdutt Padikkal's off-stump flying.

Kohli (35) and Rajat Patidar (31) then took their time and added 43 for the second wicket to set the platform for Maxwell and de Villiers. However, Brar spoiled all the plans.

He first removed Kohli, who looked to charge down the wicket but missed the line as the ball kept low. Then the tweaker from Moga spun one to beat Maxwell and hit the top of his off-stump.



In the next over, he had de Villiers caught at cover. RCB were suddenly reduced to 69/4, needing 111 runs off 47 balls, which proved too much for the lower order batsmen. Earlier, skipper K.L. Rahul's unbeaten 91 (57 balls, 7x4, 5x6) powered PBKS to 179/5.

WE CONCEDED 25 RUNS TOO MANY TO PUNJAB: KOHLI



"In the end we gave away 25 runs too many. Should have been chasing 160 when they were 116/5. But we gave away 25-odd runs in the end. One wicket there and we could have squeezed them. We couldn't execute our plans. We focussed too much on what the batters were doing. We got away from our plans. We gave too many bad balls for boundaries."

KOHLI'S WICKET GAVE ME CONFIDENCE: BRAR



"I wasn't overwhelmed when Kohli hit me because a bowler always gets a second chance to come back. My first IPL wicket was Kohli paaji's wicket and that was very special. It came out in a flow after that, your body opens up, you get confident and things fall in place."

Brief scores

Punjab Kings 179/5 in 20 overs (KL Rahul 91 not out, C Gayle 46, K Jamieson 2/32, D Sams 1/24) vs Royal Challengers Bangalore 145/8 in 20 overs (V Kohli 35, H Patel 31, R Patidar 31, H Brar 3/19, R Bishnoi 2/17).

Aussie IPL stars may have to pay heavy penalty on return home



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Australian cricketers may face trouble getting back home and could be left stranded somewhere after their media reported that Australian government was mulling hefty fine and jail term for those returning from India, which is reeling under unprecedented surge in Covid-19 cases.

"The federal government is considering fining and jailing anyone who tries to enter Australia from India amid that country's Covid-19 crisis," said a report in the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH).

As many as 14 Australian cricketers are currently playing the Indian Premier League (IPL) in India. They include top draws like David Warner, Steve Smith and Pat Cummins.

Australians are also part of various IPL franchises' coaching/support staff and TV commentary team. They

include Ricky Ponting, David Hussey, Brett Lee and Matthew Hayden among others.

"Nine News reported on Friday night that the government was considering a further step by making it a crime, punishable by a maximum \$66,000 fine or five years' jail, if they travel home from India," said the SMH report.

"Nine reported that federal Health Minister Greg Hunt would invoke powers under the Biosecurity Act -- the same legislation used to close the borders -- as soon as Saturday." While there are 36,000 Australians stuck abroad there are 9,000 Aussies in India including the cricketers.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison had earlier said that since the players are privately visiting India for the IPL they would have to ensure their return.

"They have travelled there privately," Morrison was quoted as saying by The Guardian. "This wasn't part

of an Australian tour. They're under their own resources and they'll be using those resources too, I'm sure, to see them return to Australia in accordance with their own arrangements," the report said.

"If imposed, it would be the first time it has been made a crime for an Australian to enter their own country," the SMH report on Friday further said.

Three of the Australian cricketers in IPL -- Adam Zampa, Kane Richardson and Andrew Tye -- have already returned home via Qatar. However, since their arrival home, the Australian borders have been completely sealed.

Umpire Paul Reiffel, who also wanted to return via Qatar after the three cricketers, couldn't do so as the flights to Australia were by then cancelled. He was just 10 minutes away from leaving the IPL bio-bubble before he learnt about the cancellation of the flights.

Dhawan takes back Orange Cap, Shaw rises to third

Team Absolute | Ahmedabad

Shikhar Dhawan returned to the top of the Orange Cap table after scoring 46 in Delhi Capitals' (DC) seven-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in the Indian Premier League (IPL). Dhawan took 47 balls to score his 46 but played the perfect foil to his opening partner Prithvi Shaw, who scored 82 off 41 balls. The pair shared an opening

partnership of 132 runs in 14 overs, putting DC in cruise control in their chase of a target of 155. Dhawan's tally for the season stands at 311 while second-placed Faf du Plessis of Chennai Super Kings is on 270. Shaw, meanwhile, entered the top three of the Orange Cap standings, with his



total run tally of 270 putting him one run ahead of Punjab Kings captain KL Rahul. Rajasthan Royals' Chris Morris entered the top five of the Purple Cap standings as his two wickets against Mumbai Indians took his tally for the season to 11.

Morris is ranked fourth while Kolkata Knight Riders fast bowler Pat Cummins reached sixth thanks to his three wickets against Delhi Capitals. It took his tally for the season to nine.

Royal Challengers Bangalore's Harshal Patel remains firmly in the top spot of the Purple Cap rankings with 17 wickets and could extend his lead on Friday in their match against Punjab Kings. He leads DC's Avesh Khan by four wickets.

IPL table: DC move up to second spot, MI remain 4th



Team Absolute | Ahmedabad

Delhi Capitals (DC) moved up to second spot on the Indian Premier League (IPL) table after their seven-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) at the Narendra Modi Stadium.

The victory took DC to 10 points, level with third-placed Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) and table toppers Chennai Super Kings (CSK). DC's net run rate (NRR) of +0.466 is higher than RCB's +0.089 but lesser than

CSK's +1.475. RCB, however, have a game in hand on DC and could take back the second position if they beat Punjab Kings on April 30.

Meanwhile, defending champions Mumbai Indians (MI) remain fourth with six points, trailing the top three by six points after their seven-wicket win over Rajasthan Royals (RR) on Thursday.

RR are placed seventh, leading bottom-placed SunRisers Hyderabad by two points and level with Punjab Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders above them.

MADRID OPEN Osaka wins maiden clay match in two years

Madrid | Agencies

Playing her first match on clay in nearly two years, world No. 2 Naomi Osaka recovered from a slow start to defeat qualifier Misaki Doi 7-5, 6-2 in the first round of the Madrid Open on Friday.

The reigning US Open and Australian Open champion had withdrawn from last year's autumn clay swing due to a hamstring injury and had not competed on clay since her third-round loss to Katerina



Siniakova at Roland Garros 2019.

But Osaka has stated that mastering the natural surfaces, where she is yet to reach a WTA final, is a goal for 2021.

Against Japanese compatriot Doi, she kept her focus to edge a tight first set before asserting her authority in the second, eventually tal-

Muguruza pulls out

Madrid: Spanish No. 1 women's tennis player, Garbine Muguruza, said she will not be able to compete in the Madrid Open tennis tournament due to an injury to her left leg.

The injury had previously forced Muguruza, who is currently 13th in the WTA rankings, to withdraw from the third round in Charleston earlier this month. "This is the worst news and the most painful decision any player can make," said Muguruza on Thursday, Xinhua reports.

lying 26 winners to 15 unforced errors, according to wtatennis.com.

Doi got off to a superb start, swatting away drive volleys and dictating off the ground with her left-handed forehand. But the World No.79's high-risk game also leaked errors, and after missing three points for a 3-0 lead, Osaka took control.

BARCELONA MISS CHANCE TO GO TOP, LOSE 1-2 TO GRANADA

Barcelona | Agencies

FC Barcelona missed the chance to go top of La Liga with just five games left when they were stunned 2-1 by Granada at Camp Nou.

Although Barca controlled most of the ball and had the majority of the chances, two defensive lapses allowed Darwin Machis and Jorge Molina to overturn Leo Messi's opener for the home side, who remain third in the table, two



points behind Atletico Madrid, Xinhua reported.

With a difficult visit to Valencia on Sunday, Barcelona coach Ronald

Lenglet, Pedri, and Sergino Dest. As expected, Barca controlled the ball, but they could not test Aaron in the Granada goal until the 20th minute. The home side looked to be in complete control as they stroked the ball around, but they were caught flat-footed in the 63rd minute when Oscar Mingueza failed to cut out a through ball allowing Darwin Machis to race forward and beat Marc Andre Ter Stegen and level the scores.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: AL WAHDA BEAT FC GOA 2-0



Fatorda (Goa): FC Goa were beaten 0-2 by Al Wahda in their final AFC Champions League match at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Thursday night.

Owing to the Covid-19 situation, FC Goa were without the services of all their foreign players as well as head coach Juan Ferrando.

The result means that the Gaurs finished third in Group E in their maiden appearance in the tournament thanks to three points from three draws. They avoided the wooden spoon which went to Al Rayyan.

FC Goa's foreign contingent was forced to leave for native Spain abruptly. The departure of foreign players meant all eleven players that took the pitch were Indians.

Al Wahda, coming into the game on the back of three successive wins, were full of confidence. They bombarded the Goan penalty area with bodies in the first half, leading to a host of decent chances.

Lucas Pimenta fashioned the first really big opportunity just short of the 15-minute mark following a corner, but his tame effort was easy for Dheeraj Singh to deal with in the Goa goal. Omar Khribin was growing into the game, and he managed two good chances back to back.

INDIAN ATHLETES SAD AT MISSING WORLD RELAYS: SPRINT COACH



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The disappointment of missing next month's World Relays due to new travel restrictions imposed on Indians due to surging Covid-19 cases in the country is palpable among the Indian athletes who would have competed, said sprint coach N Ramesh on Friday. "It's a bad experience. We had a good chance

to win a berth for the Tokyo Olympic Games as well as qualify for the 2022 World Athletics Championships in Oregon, USA," Ramesh told IANS from Patiala.

Since there was no direct flight from India to Poland, the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) had to cancel the tour as there was no alternate route to reach the Polish city of Chorzow, the venue of the World Relays.

IPL 2021 PREVIEW: MATCH 27

Feeling at home in Delhi, MI take on CSK



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Resurgent Mumbai Indians (MI) will take on Chennai Super Kings (CSK) in an Indian Premier League (IPL) match here at the Arun Jaitley Stadium on Saturday night.

MI, who seem to have rediscovered their mojo on a batting-friendly surface in Delhi after the Chennai leg saw them lose three of their five matches, will be tough competitors for CSK who are on top of the table at the moment.

The Chennai franchise has won five out of its six matches and looks a very strong unit. MI have won three and lost three matches.

However, the biggest concern for MI will be the opening pair of Faf du Plessis and Ruturaj

Gaikwad. The India-South Africa duo has given CSK solid starts in the recent matches, providing a solid platform.

MI would hope their strong bowling attack led by pacers Trent Boult and Jasprit Bumrah would be able to provide early breakthrough and expose the CSK middle-order that hasn't looked solid. For CSK, handling MI's strong batting line-up would be a tough task.

With matches shifting to Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium, where the pitch is batting-friendly, the MI middle and lower order will find stroke-play easy with the ball coming onto the bat. Skipper Rohit Sharma had said after the last match that the pitch is conducive to their style of play.

GOVT TO PROVIDE RS 15K CR TO STATES FOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Finance Ministry has decided to provide an additional amount of up to Rs 15,000 crore to states as interest free 50-year loan for spending on capital projects.

The Department of Expenditure has issued fresh guidelines in this regard on the "Scheme of Financial Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure" for the financial year 2021-22.

The Finance Minister in her budget speech had announced that the Centre would take measures to nudge states to spend more on infrastructure and to incentivise disinvestment of their public sector enterprises.

Capital expenditure creates employment, especially for the poor and unskilled, has a high multiplier effect, enhances the future productive capacity of the economy, and results in a higher rate of economic growth. Therefore, despite the adverse financial position of the Central government, it was decided



last year to launch a "Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure".

Under the scheme, financial assistance is provided to the state governments in the form of 50-year interest free loan. An amount not exceeding Rs 12,000 crore was earmarked for the scheme for the financial year 2020-21, and a sum of Rs 11,830.29 crore was released to the states. This helped to sustain state level capital

expenditure in the pandemic year. In view of the positive response to the scheme and considering the requests of the state governments, the Centre has decided to continue the scheme in the year 2021-22, a finance ministry statement said. The scheme this year has three parts. First part of the scheme is for the North-East and Hill states and an amount of Rs 2,600 crore has been earmarked for this part. The second

part is for all other states not included in Part-I. An amount of Rs 7,400 crore is earmarked for this part. The third part of the scheme is for providing incentives to states for monetisation/recycling of infrastructure assets and disinvestment of the State Public Sector Enterprises (SPSEs). An amount of Rs 5,000 crore is allocated for this part of the scheme. Under this part, states will receive interest free 50-year loan ranging from 33 per cent to 100 per cent of the amount realised by them, through assets monetization, listing and disinvestment. Monetisation of assets unlocks their value, eliminates their holding cost and enables scarce public funds to be deployed to new projects, thus speeding up the implementation of the National Infrastructure Pipeline.

Funds provided to the states under the scheme by the Centre shall be used for new and ongoing capital projects, for long term benefit to the state. The funds may also be used for settling pending bills in ongoing capital projects.

Sensex down 983 points as banking stocks plunge

■ Heavyselling was witnessed in banking and finance stocks. The decline came amid surging Covid-19 cases in the country and weakness in the Asian markets.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Indian stock market witnessed a freefall on Friday with the BSE Sensex closing nearly 1,000 points lower.

Heavyselling was witnessed in banking and finance stocks. The decline came amid surging Covid-19 cases in the country and weakness in the Asian markets. Sensex closed at 48,782.36, lower by 983.58 points, or 1.98 per cent, from its previous close of 49,765.94. It had opened at

49,360.89 and touched an intra-day high of 49,569.42 and a low of 48,698.08 points.

The Nifty50 on the National Stock Exchange closed at 14,631.10, lower by 263.80 points, or 1.77 per cent, from its previous close.

The top losers on the Sensex were HDFC, HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank, while the only gainers were ONGC, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, Dr Reddy's Laboratories and Bajaj Auto.

Notably, Around 2.35 p.m., Sensex was trading at 49,015.62, lower by 750.32

points or 1.51 per cent from its previous close of 49,765.94. It opened at 49,360.89 and has touched an intra-day high of 49,569.42 and a low of 48,921.44 points.

The Nifty50 on the National Stock Exchange was trading at 14,701.35, lower by 193.55 points or 1.3 per cent from its previous close.

The top losers on the Sensex were HDFC, HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank, while the major gainers were ONGC, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries and Dr Reddy's Laboratories.

Compliance norms eased for companies, market participants amid Covid crisis

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As the country goes through a severe crisis amid the second wave of Covid-19 while lockdowns and restrictions are underway across several states, the securities market regulator SEBI has relaxed several compliance norms for listed companies and market participants.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has extended the deadline to file the financial results for the quarter and the financial ended March 31, 2021, to June 30. The original deadlines were May 15 and May 30 respectively.

In a circular, the regulator said: "SEBI is in receipt of representations from listed entities, professional bodies, industry associations, market participants etc. requesting extension of timelines for various filings and relaxation from certain compliance obligations under the LODR Regulations inter alia due to ongoing second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions imposed by various state governments."



It also said that listed entities are permitted to use digital signature certifications for authentication or certification of filings or submissions made to the stock exchanges under the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 for all filings until December 31, 2021.

Further, SEBI has relaxed the requirement of uploading KYC (know your customer) application form and supporting documents of the clients on system of KRA within 10 working days.

Petrol, diesel prices unchanged on Friday

■ Fuel prices in the country remained unchanged on Friday as oil marketing companies decided to wait for state elections to get over before restarting daily revision of petrol and diesel produced in line with price movement globally.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Sources indicated that price revisions may begin early next month after results to state elections are declared. However, whether price of petrol and diesel would move up or down then would depend on actuals average global price in the last fortnight of March. OMCs benchmark retail fuel prices to a 15-day rolling average of



global refined products' prices and dollar exchange rate.

With no price change on Friday, pump price of petrol and diesel remained at Rs 90.40 a litre and Rs 80.73 a litre respectively in Delhi. This is 16 consecutive day when fuel prices have not been 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.

Across the country as well the petrol and diesel prices remained unchanged on Friday but its retail levels varied depending on the level

of local levies on respective states. Premium petrol, however, continues to remain over Rs 100 a litre in Mumbai and several other cities across the country.

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 past 24 days. It again reduced the price on March 30. Thereafter, fuel prices have remained unchanged for 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 have revise fuel prices upwards again if there is any further firming up.

84pc Covid claims got settled; average payout per claim is Rs 96k

Chennai | Agencies

The non-life insurance industry has settled about 84 per cent of the Covid-19 claims lodged till date with the average payout per claim being about Rs 96,000.

A senior industry official preferring anonymity told IANS that the industry received a total about 11.05 lakh Covid-19 claims amounting to about Rs 15,570 crore since the pandemic broke out in India last year.

It is learnt the average amount per claim is about Rs 1,40,085, while the average payout per claim is Rs 95,777.

The total payout made by the non-life insurers towards Covid-19 claims is about Rs 8,900 crore. Citing the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India's (IRDAI) direction to insurers to authorise cashless treatment within an hour of receiving the request with neces-



sary papers from the hospital, the official said it is going to be a tall order to meet. Further the insurers/Third Party Administrators (TPA) are also working from homes managing handicaps like fast net connectivity, power cuts and many of them are also affected by Covid-19, the official said.

Firstly, the officials of Third Party Administrators (TPA) are also working from homes managing handicaps like fast net connectivity, power cuts and many of them are also affected by Covid-19, the official said.

On the issue of coming out with a package rates for treating Covid-19 patients, the official pointed out that the General Insurance Council last year published a schedule of rates for Covid-19 claims after discussions with medical professionals employed by member insurance companies.

The General Insurance Council had said insurers shall be guided by the treatment protocols prescribed by the Indian Council of Medical Research. The Council said the rates are broadly based on the schedule of rates suggested for Covid-19 treatment by a NitiAyog panel.

Further state governments also ordered a cap on treatment costs last year. Now the Covid-19 cases have increased manifold and there is an acute shortage of beds. So the priority will be on getting admitted at any cost and not haggling about treatment costs, the official said.

SBI GENERAL INSURANCE REPORTS 22% GROWTH IN GWP

Mumbai: SBI General Insurance, one of India's leading general insurance companies, today announced its financial results with a Net Profit of Rs. 544 crore and Gross Written Premium (GWP) of Rs. 8312 crore in FY 20-21. The company's GWP grew by 22% where the general insurance industry has shown a growth of 5.2%. In its 11 years of operations, the company has shown steady growth for the past 4 years, while maintaining positive track record of underwriting. PC Kandpal, MD and CEO, SBI General Insurance, said, "We all have gone through challenging times in the last financial year, however, I'm glad that SBIG has shown a decent growth in top line and bottom line with the support of our distribution partners and customers."

SOS Children's Villages opens doors to Children who have lost parental care due to COVID-19

Team Absolute | New Delhi

SOS Children's Villages India has announced that it is ready to provide short or long-term care to vulnerable children across the country whose safety, security, and well-being have been severely affected because of losing parental care due to the pandemic and have no caregivers left to provide for them.

Sumanta Kar, Secretary General, SOS Children's Villages said, "In these trying times we express solidarity with the people to fight COVID-19, which has devastated the socio-economic fabric of the country. We are trying our best to ensure that all the children under our care are safe and secure. We are willing to join hands with the government,

the corporates, and the civil society to extend care to children belonging to the underserved communities, whose families have been affected due to the pandemic in our 32 children's Villages across 22 states in providing short term and long-term care. Children whose parents are COVID positive and are undergoing treatment could be placed under short-term care till their parents recover and children who have lost parents can be placed under long-term care in our Family-Like Care Programme aka Children's Villages. If you come across any child nearer to our projects, please call our helpline number 18002083232 or email at sosv@sosvindia.org. We will be happy to reach out to the child and extend support in the best possible manner."

Apple captures 42% share, Samsung largest smartphone OEM globally

■ Riding on the success of its iPhone 12 series, Apple captured 42 per cent market share (by value) in the global smartphone market that posted a record \$113 billion in sales for the first time in the first quarter (January-March) this year, according to a new report.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Samsung regained its top spot as the world's biggest original equipment manufacturer or OEM (by volume) with shipments reaching 76.8 million units in Q1 2021, according to Counterpoint Research.

Global shipments grew 20 per cent (YoY), reaching 354 million units, led by OPPO, vivo, Xiaomi and Apple. "Apple captured a record first-quarter revenue share driven by

the strong performance of the iPhone 12 Series and demand spill-over from the previous quarter due to delayed launch. The popularity of its higher-end variant, the Pro Max, in countries like the US and Europe also boosted Apple's revenue growth," said Senior Analyst, Harmeet Singh Walia. Strong demand for the iPhone 12 series has helped Apple log March quarter record for iPhones at \$47.9 billion, growing 66 per cent year-over-year.

The iPhone performance was consistently strong across the world as Apple grew through double digits in each geographic segment and set March quarter records in most markets, according to the company. "Xiaomi, OPPO and vivo also clocked record shipments and revenues this quarter, helped by capturing Huawei's share globally and significant 5G uptake in China. Flagship series such as Mi 11, Find and X60 drove this uptick, respectively," Walia said in a statement late on Thursday. Samsung regained the



top spot with the successful launch of the Galaxy S21 series, with pent-up demand across Europe, US, Korea and other markets, according to Senior Analyst Varun Mishra.

Samsung's push into the mid-end segment with its successful A-Series devices was another major driver.

In the meantime, semiconductor shortages have affected the overall supply landscape and increased the lead times of chipset solutions for

major vendors. "However, we see these vendors looking to diversify their foundry strategy to alleviate chipset shortages in the second half of this year," said Tarun Pathak, Research Director at Counterpoint Research. "These shortages might push specific component prices up by 5-10 per cent and OEMs will look to absorb these cost increases by being creative with the Bill of Materials (BoM) and in some cases might even pass the added costs to the consumers," he added.

Xiaomi's record smartphone shipments of 48.5 million smartphones were driven by markets like China, India, Spain, Italy, Russia and Indonesia. OPPO had a record quarter both in terms of revenue and shipments. OPPO shipped 38 million units globally, growing at a staggering 70 per cent (YoY).

vivo's shipments grew by 64 per cent (YoY) to reach its highest ever, 35.5 million units, in Q1 2021 driven by growth in China, the report noted.

Amazon's profits soar as online shopping surges amid pandemic

San Francisco | Agencies

Riding on the continued surge in online shopping, Amazon has posted another record quarter, with sales soaring 44 per cent (on-year) to \$108.5 billion.

Net income increased to \$8.1 billion in the March quarter, compared with net income of \$2.5 billion in the first quarter of 2020, showing how millions of people now shop on the platform as pandemic continues to ravage the retail sector.

Amazon shares climbed more than 3 per cent in extended trading on Thursday.

Amazon said that in the second quarter (April-June), it expects to post revenue between \$110 billion and \$116 billion.

"Two of our kids are now 10 and 15 years old - and after years of being nurtured, they're growing up fast and coming into their own," said Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder and CEO.

"As Prime Video turns 10, over 175 million Prime members have streamed shows and movies in the past year, and streaming hours are up more than 70% year over year," the outgoing CEO said in a statement.

There are now more than 200 million paid Prime members worldwide.

"In just 15 years, AWS has become a \$54 billion annual sales run rate business competing against the world's largest technology



companies, and its growth is accelerating - up 32 per cent year over year," Bezos added.

Amazon's sales increased more internationally than in North America. International revenue surged 60 per cent year over year while North America revenue jumped 40 per cent. In India, Amazon announced that it has added nearly 300,000 new direct and indirect jobs since its last announcement in January 2020, putting the company on track to meet its pledge to create an additional one million new jobs in India by 2025.



B-TOWN PAYS TRIBUTE TO RISHI KAPOOR ON FIRST DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood colleagues and family took to social media to pay tributes to late actor Rishi Kapoor on his first death anniversary on Friday.

Niece Kareena Kapoor dropped a heart emoji on Rishi Kapoor's picture on Instagram story. Kareena's sister Karisma, too, shared a picture on Instagram story of Rishi Kapoor in his younger days with a heart emoji.

Randeep Hooda shared a picture of the late actor on Twitter and captioned it: "#RishiKapoor", while Arjun Kapoor

share a picture with Rishi Kapoor on Instagram and wrote: "My constant reaction when I was next to him...Mouth shut ears open. Miss you Chintoo uncle. Cheers to that twinkle in your eyes...Always & forever."

Actor-host Maniesh Paul posted an image with the late star shot during their New York meeting and wrote: "Miss you sir...love you sir..."

Divya Dutta recalled working with the actor. "Childhood was you. And your movies!! That handsome face!! Dancing n singing and acting like a dream !! Cherish each moment of working with

you, learning from you, knowing you!! You lived life beautifully!! All heart! That's what you are!! Miss you #RishiKapoor," she wrote.

Actress Payal Ghosh, who worked with Rishi Kapoor in the film "Patel Ki Punjabi Shaadi", shared a picture from their promotions of the film and tweeted: "Remembering #RishiKapoor Sir on his first death anniversary, he was really a gem of a person. You will always be missed Rishi uncle." Late veteran actor Rishi Kapoor passed away a year ago on May 30, after a two-year battle with leukaemia.

JOHN ABRAHAM HANDS OVER SOCIAL MEDIA TO NGOs

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor John Abraham announced on Friday that he has handed over his social media accounts to the NGOs he partners, so that they can help people with what they need as the country battles Covid.

Alia Bhatt, Sonu Sood and Bhumi Pednekar are other celebrities who have been trying to help out by putting out relevant information on their social media accounts. The actor posted a note talking about the terrible situation in the country, and informed fans that all the content on his social media account will be imed at helping people with whatever they need.

"As a country we are experiencing a very grim situation. With each passing minute, there are more and more people who are unable to procure oxygen, an ICU bed, a vaccine and sometimes even food. However, these trying times have also brought people together, to support, to make a difference and attend to needs. Starting today, I will be handing over my social media accounts to NGOs we have partnered with across the country and all content posted on my handles will be exclusively to help connect those affected with the resources they require. It is time to extend ourselves to humanity and take measures to overcome this crisis. Anything and everything to save lives and win this battle together," read John's note.

He captioned the note as, "Anything and everything to save lives and win this battle TOGETHER #covid19india #covidresources #covidindia #togetherwecan #togetherwearerstronger."



Urvashi Rautela donates oxygen concentrators in Uttarakhand

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Urvashi Rautela has donated 27 oxygen concentrators in Uttarakhand to help in the war against Covid. The actress made the contribution through Urvashi Rautela Foundation.

"I was born in Haridwar Uttarakhand. Several hospitals and health institutions across the nation's capital and other parts of the country are running out of oxygen supplies for patients suffering from Covid. I really wanted to do something to help out," said Urvashi.

"There are patients suffering and their hard-earned money is being used for their treatments. So, we are doing everything to help," she said.

The actress urges others to help, too. "I would request everyone to help India with the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. I have the forethought to do much more in the future. I will continue to explore other relevant ways to help in saving lives and am committed to supporting the nation in this time of upheaval," she says.



Sharad Malhotra opens up on his directorial debut

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Sharad Malhotra's debut directorial "Prem Gajra Aur Chilli Chicken" recently released digitally, and he says making the short film was challenging but an amazing experience.

"When you do something new, it is never a smooth ride. But your efforts and prayers never go unanswered. We are getting so much love for the film that also gives out a strong message to society. Making the film has been a challenging, blissful and full-filling experience. It's my labour of love. I'm happy how it turned out," he told IANS.

Sharad recalls he was shooting for the show "Kasam Tere Pyar Ki", when he started work on his film.

"We were on a tight schedule but I somehow managed my time to work on this project. The moment the show got over, I started building my team. First, we formed a production team, and then I approached my close friend Prateek Chakravorty of Pramod Films," shares the actor.

He actor, "Prateek liked the concept and thought I would act in it. He was taken by surprise when I told him I want to direct it. But he was more than happy to fund my dream. He always pushes me to do my best. We both have immense trust in each other that has not changed over the years. He was like 'you make the film, I'll take care of the rest'. He's always there for me." A team of around 30 to 40 members worked for 32 hours to complete this 20-minute short feature. He recalls the day it suddenly started raining during an outdoor shoot. "I got worried and secretly prayed for a miracle to happen. The rain stopped for about 15 minutes, allowing us time to get what we wanted. Then there was another time when I wanted to shoot on a particular bridge in Powai but was told it'd take time to get permission. Everyone wanted me to change the location but I didn't want to compromise or lose hope, and we did get the permission after two days," he says.

Raashii Khanna excited to shoot in sync-sound set-up for 'Thank You'

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Actress Raashii Khanna is currently shooting for her upcoming Telugu film "Thank You" in Milan. This is the first time the actress shoots using sync-sound technology and she is excited. A sync-sound set-up is one where the sound of the film recorded during a shot makes it to the final edit and doesn't have to be dubbed separately.

"This is the first time I am shooting for a Telugu film that will be shot with this technique. People will hear my real voice and not a dubbed voice. It's not easy to be shooting in such a set-up. I am nervous and excited because for the first time the audience will hear my voice over my face," said Raashii. "Thank You" co-stars Naga Chaitanya Akkineni and is director Vikram Kumar.

Raashii's upcoming projects include "Tughlaq Durbar", "Aranmanai 3", "Methavi" and "Bhramam". She also awaits the streaming of her digital debut directed by Raj and DK and starring Shahid Kapoor and Vijay Sethupathi.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Avneet Kaur

Bhumi, Taapsee mourn demise of 'Shooter Dadi' Chandro Tomar due to Covid

Team Absolute | Mumbai

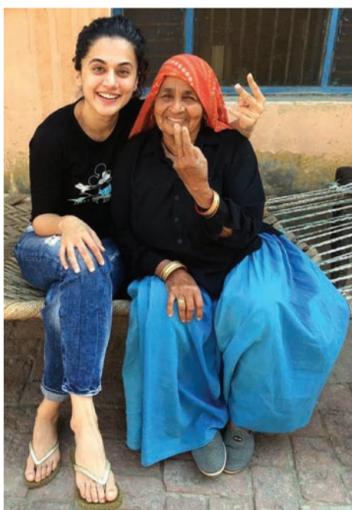
Shooter Chandro Tomar, fondly known as Shooter Dadi, died after battling Covid on Friday. She was admitted to a hospital in Meerut earlier this week.

Actress Bhumi Pednekar, who played Chandro in the 2019 film "Saand Ki Aankh", says Chandro Tomar's death comes as a "personal loss" to her.

"It is completely devastating to know that Chandro dadi is not with us anymore. It really feels like a very big personal loss. She was someone who lived a very fulfilling life. She made her own rules, paved her own path and she had a beautiful sisterhood and a beautiful partnership with Prakashi dadi and together they left an impact on so many lives," says Bhumi.

The actress adds, "I feel so fortunate to have played her character, got a chance to learn about life from her and she has left a very big part of herself with me."

The actress says that she will always remember her.



"My condolences to the family and everybody whose life she impacted because I know there will be many who will be grieving her passing away today. But she always said tann buddha hota hai, mann buddha nai hota. I know in spirit she will always be with us because her teachings are going to be with us. She will thoroughly be missed," she says.

Sharing a picture with her on Twitter, actress Taapsee Pannu, who played the role of Prakashi Tomar in the film, posted: "For the inspiration



you will always be... You will live on forever in all the girls you gave hope to live. My cutest rockstar May the and peace be with you."

She also wrote on her Instagram page: "But I learnt from you to never give up...Daadi will live on forever in the hearts of many girls like me who she was an inspiration to."

Actor Randeep Hooda also posted on social media about how he was to meet her for the inauguration of a shooting ring, which got delayed due to Covid.