

absolute india

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HIGHEST COVID DEATHS OF 3,780 IN INDIA, 3.82L CASES IN 24 HRS



Team Absolute | New Delhi

India on Wednesday recorded 3,780 deaths, maximum in a day and 3,82,315 fresh cases of Covid-19 infections in the last 24 hours, taking the total caseload in the country to 2,06,65,148, Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said. It is the 14th straight day when India recorded more than three lakh cases while over 3,000 casualties have been reported for the past eight days. India's total tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,06,65,148 with 34,87,229 active

cases and a total of 2,26,188 deaths so far. According to MoHFW, a total of 3,38,439 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours after getting cured. The health ministry said that a total of 16,04,94,188 people have been vaccinated so far in the country, including 14,84,989, who were administered vaccines in the last 24 hours. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 29,48,52,078 samples have been tested up to Tuesday (May 4) for Covid-19, of these 15,41,299 samples were tested on Tuesday.

Mamata Banerjee takes oath as Bengal CM for 3rd time

Kolkata | Agencies

Mamata Banerjee after taking her oath as West Bengal CM for the third consecutive time in an unembellished function at the 'Throne Room' in Raj Bhawan in Kolkata on Wednesday morning announced that handling the Covid situation in the state and tackling post poll violence and the overall law and order situation in the state will be her priority. The chief minister's convoy left her residence at Harish Chatterjee Street popularly known as Kalighat at 10.10 a.m. and reached Raj Bhawan at 10.20 a.m. Like any other day she sat by the side of the driver but the usual scene of people standing by the side of the road to have a glimpse of the chief minister was missing because she had requested everybody



to stay indoors. Though the curious eyes were absent but the entire road was decorated with blue-white -- the colour combination branded by Trinamool Congress and large footballs -- highlighting the party's theme song -- 'Khela Hobe' (We will play). Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who was escorted by her nephew Abhishek Banerjee

and poll strategist Prashant Kishore reached Raj Bhawan and exchanged pleasantries with the guest that included Trinamool hierarchy Arup Biswas, Subrata Mukherjee, Partha Chatterjee, Subrata Bakshi and Firdah Hakim. Though opposition leaders and personalities like BJP state President Dilip Ghosh, Congress state President Adhir

Ranjan Cowdhury, veteran leader Abdul Mannan, Left Front Chairman Biman Basu, former chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and BCCI President Sourav Ganguly were invited but they were not present. The oath taking ceremony started after Governor Jagdeep Dhankar entered the hall at 10.44 a.m. and his entry was followed by the national anthem. The ceremony started at 10.45 a.m. and lasted for seven minutes where Mamata Banerjee took her oath in Bengali. Speaking to the media after that the chief minister said, "I shall start my work from today only. I shall go to Nanbanna and do a high-level meeting on the Covid situation in the state. We need to review the situation and several measures will be announced in the evening. We hope we will be able to

control the situation as we did before". "I would also like to take this opportunity to appeal to all people and workers of all political parties to maintain peace and harmony. Bengal has a culture and we should not forget that. There are some sporadic incidents. I have got information but the administration was not in my hand for the last three months. I assure everybody to take necessary action and handle the situation strongly but before that I would like to appeal to everybody to stay in a peaceful manner," she added. Ghosh had told the media that he decided to quit the oath taking ceremony because a lot of the BJP workers are being killed all over the state in post poll violence. State Congress President Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said that he didn't receive any invitation letter from the government.

Can imagine what citizens are going through: SC on O2 crisis

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday observed that the judges of the top court are also based in Delhi, and they can imagine what the citizens of the capital are going through due to shortage of medical oxygen. A bench headed by Justice DY Chandrachud said, "We are also in Delhi. We are helpless and have been on phone." The bench further added, "We can imagine what citizens are going through." During the hearing, the top court also observed that putting officers in jail would not bring oxygen to Delhi, while it asked the Centre about the supply it has made to the capital since May 3. The sharp observations were made by the top court while hearing Centre's plea against the Delhi High Court order. The top court also suggested that Centre should take a cue from Mumbai municipal authority in managing oxygen supplies. The top court noted that this is a pan-India pandemic, and it is important to find ways to ensure



oxygen supply, as we are not answerable to people of Delhi. The Centre submitted before the court that it has provided 550 MT oxygen to Delhi, but the top court reiterated that it must provide 700 MT even if it takes the point of Centre that it is way beyond the requirement of oxygen for the number of patients. The top court emphasized that the pandemic in Delhi is at very critical stage and asked the Centre to inform by evening how 700 MT oxygen supply is maintained daily for next four days. The bench emphasized

that it would review its direction to supply 700 MT of oxygen to Delhi on Monday. It further added that for the next 4 days Centre must ensure that daily supply of 700 MT oxygen is met. The hearing began in the afternoon on Wednesday after Centre moved the top court challenging the High Court threat to pursue contempt charges against officials for non-compliance of its earlier order. Chief Justice NV Ramana placed the matter before a bench of Justices Chandrachud and MR Shah.

Modi sarkar has failed to save people: Rahul Gandhi

Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi had on Tuesday said, the only way to stop the apocalyptic march of the pandemic was an immediate complete lockdown with the protection of NYAY scheme for the vulnerable sections.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said that the Modi government has failed to provide relief to the public. "No vaccine, no employment, public is suffering from corona, and Modi sarkar has absolutely failed," he tweeted in Hindi. Rahul Gandhi has been attacking the government and on Tuesday had said lockdown is the only option which was endorsed by Anand Sharma. "Endorse the call given by @RahulGandhi that a lockdown is the only option available, given the constant denial and false claims of the govt on the number of infections, deaths and shameful claims of no oxygen shortages when hundreds of Indians, including doctors, have died," Sharma had said. Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi had on Tuesday said, the only way to stop the apocalyptic march of the pandemic was an immediate complete lockdown with the protection of NYAY scheme for the vulnerable sections.



Third wave of Covid inevitable, warns govt's Scientific Advisor

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The third wave of Covid is inevitable given the amount of virus circulating in India, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government, K. VijayRaghavan warned on Wednesday. Addressing the Union Health Ministry press conference, he said: "Third phase is inevitable given the amount of virus circulating. But it is difficult to predict the timeline. We should prepare for the new (third) wave. He also said that regular monitoring of the Covid-19 vaccines is needed for upgradation to deal with the new strains. The Scientific Advisor also pointed out that variants are transmitted the same as the original strain. "It doesn't have properties of new kinds of transmission. It infects humans in a manner that makes it more transmissible as it gains entry, makes more copies and goes on, same as



original," he said. VijayRaghavan also emphasized that vaccines currently available are effective against existing variants. He said that scientists in India and across the globe are working to anticipate new variants and act against them rapidly by early warning and developing modified tools. The Union Health Ministry, meanwhile, said that around 2.4 per cent day on day growth in Covid cases has been noticed in the country. Joint Secretary, Health, Luv Aggarwal said: "12 states have

more than one lakh active cases, seven states have 50,000 to one lakh active cases and 17 states have less than 50,000 active cases. Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have more than 1.5 lakh active cases." Aggarwal stated that 24 states and UTs have reported more than 15 per cent Covid positivity rate while 10 states have more than 25 per cent positivity rate. Maharashtra has a reported positivity rate of 24 per cent. Niti Aayog's Member, Health, Dr V.K. Paul urged physicians to come forward and provide teleconsultations to people and families at home who are infected with Covid. Referring to the new strain, he said: "The response to the changing virus remains the same... we need to follow the covid appropriate behaviour such as mask, distancing, hygiene, no unnecessary meetings and staying at home."

CABINET APPROVES FREE FOODGRAIN UNDER PMGKAY FOR 2 MONTHS

New Delhi: To give Relief to around 80 crore beneficiaries during Covid crisis, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved allocation of additional foodgrain to NFSA Beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (Phase III) for a period of two months -- May and June, 2021. The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has given its ex-post facto approval for allocation of additional foodgrains under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana Phase III- for another period of 2 months, May to June, 2021 at 5 kg per person per month free of cost for about 79.88 Crore beneficiaries covered under NFSA (AAY & PPH) including those covered under DBT. The State/UT-wise allocation in terms of wheat/rice shall be decided by the Department of Food & Public Distribution on the basis of existing allocation ratio under NFSA. Also, the Department of Food and Public Distribution may decide on the extension of the lifting/distribution period under PMGKAY as per operational requirements keeping in view partial and local lockdown situations, and also arising out of adverse weather conditions like monsoon, cyclones, supply chain and Covid-induced constraints etc. The total outgo in terms of foodgrains may be approximately 80 lakh metric tonne.

'CORONA CURFEW' IN UP EXTENDED TILL MAY 10 MORNING

Lucknow: The ongoing 'closure' in Uttar Pradesh has been extended till May 10, according to UP additional chief secretary Navneet Sehgal. As a result, all the restrictions under 'corona curfew' will now continue till 7 a.m. on May 10. Officials, for unexplained reasons, refuse to term this as a lockdown. All shops and establishments will remain closed during this period. The UP government had earlier extended the closure till 7 a.m. on Thursday and made it mandatory for people to carry an e-pass if they needed to step out for essential services during the period. People can apply for the e-pass by

visiting the official website. The Gautam Buddha Nagar Police has already extended restrictions under Section 144 of the CrPc till May 12 to ensure a peaceful law and order situation and proper distancing amid a surge in Covid cases. The e-pass will be required for movement within the district and within Uttar Pradesh during the lockdown period and also for travelling outside the state. Identification documents with a picture like Aadhar or PAN card and GST-related papers (for commercial units) will be required for the online application for an e-pass, officials said.

Govt lying on oxygen shortage: Chidambaram

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram has accused the government of lying on the oxygen shortage in the country. Chidambaram said on Wednesday, "Government is maintaining the lie that there is no shortage of oxygen. Everyday, there are true life stories of hundreds of people desperately trying to find oxygen cylinders for their near and dear ones." "I have a story, my friends have many stories. Indian Youth Congress had a great

true life story on May 1. An intolerant Minister S. Jaishankar was quick to resort to abuse, but records and Facebook posts called his bluff. Why do otherwise intelligent ministers become bhakts?" he said. The ex Minister was referring to the incident of New Zealand High



Commission. The Delhi government on Tuesday cornered the Central government over the allocation of medical oxygen to the national capital, saying it received only 433 metric tonne (MT) oxygen on Monday against its requirement of 976 MT -- which comes to 44 per cent of the requisite amount to mitigate the crisis. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Raghav Chadha said that 41 hospitals in the national capital sent SOS calls for oxygen on Monday through various mediums, including social media, phone calls and helplines.

Fake drug rackets reaching rural areas: Beware of cheap antibiotics sold as Remdesivir

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Beware of fake life saving drugs. Instead of Remdesivir, which is required for critically ill Covid patients, similar looking vials of Monocef or Zetri, a low cost antibiotic injection, are being sold in the black market. Criminal gangs and swindlers active in Delhi-NCR and Western Uttar Pradesh are reportedly buying Monocef vials in bulk, each piece costing around Rs 52, and selling them to desperate customers for over Rs 5,500 to Rs 10,000 apiece. Taking note of such rackets gradually reaching the smaller towns and rural areas, the Uttar Pradesh Police have alerted all the districts, particularly in western and central parts of the state, to keep a strict vigil on the stockists, distributors and wholesalers of medicines. "We have raided over 68,000 places to seize genuine or fake drugs being sold in the black markets in the past few days. In a bid to punish such



accused persons harshly, cases are being registered under the National Security Act," Prashant Kumar, Additional Director General of Police (ADG), Law and Order, UP. Acting on specific inputs, the Delhi Police on Tuesday unearthed a gang involved in selling fake vials of Remdesivir for Rs 5,500 each. The gang, which was active in the Nand Nagri area of the national capital, had purchased low cost Monocef injections in bulk. "They got labels of Remdesivir print-

ed from a local press fixed them on the Monocef vials. One Dhanesh Kumar from Ashok Nagar and Amit from Meet Nagar were involved in the racket. Both have been arrested. We are questioning them to ascertain how widespread the racket was," said an officer of the Delhi Police. And it's not only in Delhi-NCR and its neighbouring states where such rackets are thriving. Fake Remdesivir injections are being sold in far off places like Gujarat and Odisha. In a major

crackdown on such rackets, the Detection and Crime Branch of Ahmedabad Police arrested seven persons last week who were selling antibiotics as Remdesivir. Fake labels of Hetero and Jubilant, two major pharma companies manufacturing Remdesivir, were also seized from the accused persons. Even in Maharashtra where cases are multiplying in smaller towns, the merchants of death are reportedly selling fake drugs to the needy attendants of Covid patients. When asked how cheaper injections like Monocef are being sold in bulk to criminal gangs, the General Secretary of All India Organisation of Chemist and Druggist (AIOCD), Rajiv Singhal, said that instructions have been given to all chemists to keep a tab on the customers who demand injections in bulk. "It is unfortunate if some criminals are selling antibiotics in the name of Remdesivir. We will take all measures to put a check

on this crime, though as a practice we ensure that bulk drugs are sold only to the bonafide customers," said Singhal, a key functionary of AIOCD, which represents over 9.50 lakh chemists across India. To prevent any misuse of such fake drugs resulting in possible fatality of critical patients admitted to ICUs, leading Delhi radiologist Sandeep Sharma suggested that attendants should note the batch number of the vials for future reference. "In some cases, attendants who are not allowed to enter Covid hospitals are provided videos of injections being administered to ensure that the right dose is being given to the patients," Sharma said, adding: "Yet I would say that our nursing staff are very reliable and they take every possible care of the patients. A few exceptions relating to use of fake injections on patients which were reported from some hospitals should not worry the people."



BENGAL GUV URGES CM TO HANDLE LAW AND ORDER

New Delhi | Agencies

Kolkata: West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankar sounded the war bugle on the day Mamata Banerjee took oath for a third term as chief minister and asked her to rise above partisan attitude and work for the people of the state.

He also wanted the chief minister to work hand-in-hand with the Centre with a new approach of 'cooperative federalism'.

Dhankar who has always been accused by the chief minister and Trinamool congress leaders of being a spokesperson of BJP said after the oath taking ceremony, "I congratulate Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for her third term."

"I express hope and expectation that her government will according to the constitution and rule of law. India is a great democracy where power emanates from the process of law". Dhankar who in his recent tweets expressed serious concern over the law-and-order situation in the state and even spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue said, "We are at the moment in a very difficult crisis."

"I am getting reports from within and outside the country that people are worried. I had words with the chief minister and she has taken steps. Our first priority is we should bring an end to this senseless violence that has affected society at large."

"Post poll violence if it is retributive is antithetical to democracy / I hope that the chief minister on



Such nosediving of constitutional values cannot be countenanced. Call upon @MamataOfficial to restore order". Mamata Banerjee reacted sharply. "The law-and-order situation was in the hands of the election commission for the last three months. The election commission had set up a new set and it was not in my hands. I have just taken the oath. There is a lot of inefficiency and that shall be rectified. I have information that some political parties are resorting to violence and torture. I shall accept this and will take strong action. No one should have an avenging attitude," she said. Dhankar also spoke about "cooperative federalism" and better relation with the Centre because Banerjee has always accused the BJP-led Centre of destroying the federal structure of the country and contested the central schemes with state launched projects. "I would also expect from the chief minister a new government. A new commitment, a new approach of cooperative federalism. It is a country where we only survive by adhering to constitutional prescriptions. I have every hope that the chief minister will rise to the occasion," he said. Addressing her as his 'younger sister', the governor said, "It is not usual for a person to get a third term in a row and I am sure she would do it. There are occasions when the state faces a crisis. We have to rise above the partisan interest. We have to reach a level where the governance reaches the expectations as per our preamble."

Lalu Prasad to hold virtual meeting with party MLAs, MPs on Covid

Patna | Agencies

After being released on bail, Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad has come into action mode on the present coronavirus crisis in Bihar.

According to a top official of the state unit, Lalu Prasad, who has been out of active politics for last three and half years due to his conviction and imprisonment in the fodder scam, will soon take a virtual meeting of all MLAs, MLCs and MP on the present crisis situation arising due to pandemic.

The former Chief Minister and Union Minister is currently staying in his Delhi residence and monitoring the situation of the pandemic in Bihar.

He will individually interact with MLAs, MLCs and MPs of his party including Tejashwi Yadav, Tej Pratap Yadav and RJD state President Jagadanand Singh.

"As per the directives issued from RJD chief, every public representative has been asked to stay at their respective constituen-



cies and help common people during pandemic. They have been asked to visit every health centre in their respective jurisdiction and analyse the health facilities and provide every possible help," a party leader said. Sources have said that the virtual meeting will be held within one week and the actual date is yet to be finalised.

2 OXYGEN PLANTS FUNDED BY PM-CARES SET UP AT AIIMS, RML

New Delhi: In a significant development, two medical oxygen plants funded by PM-CARES have been set up at AIIMS and RML Hospital in the national capital within a week. Union Health Minister said, "Carried out on a war footing, the two plants were swiftly airlifted from Coimbatore and installed yesterday. Both the plants will start supplying oxygen by today evening." Union Minister of States for Health, Ashwini Kumar Choubey tweeted, "Installation of two high flow medical oxygen plants funded by PM-CARES at AIIMS, New Delhi and RML Hospital completed. Oxygen Supply to Covid patients to begin from today."

Kerala needs 1K tonnes liquid oxygen, 75 lakh vax doses: Vijayan to PM

Thiruvananthapuram | Agencies

With the second wave of the Covid pandemic surging, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for allocation of 1,000 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen and 75 lakh doses of vaccines.

On Tuesday, 37,190 people turned positive after 1,42,588 samples were tested in the past 24 hours while there were 3,56,872 active cases in the state.

Moreover, the test positivity rate in the state has been in the range of 25 per cent in the past many days, forcing Vijayan to seek immediate help from the Centre.

In his letter to Modi, Vijayan said with the import of oxygen now taking place, Kerala needs the first instalment of 500 tonnes, and then it should be given another 500 tonnes in the second round. "Taking into concern the spike in



Covid cases in Kerala, we should be allocated oxygen tankers, oxygen concentrates and ventilators on an urgent basis," he said. He also sought fresh sup-

plies of vaccines which includes 50 lakh doses of Covishield and 25 lakhs of Covaxin.

With the spurt in positive cases in the past three weeks, and despite Vijayan time and again stating that complete lockdown will not happen, the government has now decided that things have reached dangerous levels and announced a near lockdown till Sunday and with every chance of extending it for another week. One reason why the near lockdown like status is prevailing is because close to 30,000 cases being reported, it would be practically impossible to hold the swearing-in ceremony of his for a second term, after he led the Left to a record breaking win with 99 seats in the 140-member Kerala Assembly.

As things stand, the swearing-in might take place in the third week of May.

Discord between doctors, Goa CM and health min affects Covid fight



Panaji | Agencies

While Rane has claimed that no deaths have occurred in the state due to oxygen shortage, the Goa Association of Resident Doctors has claimed the contrary. Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has now blamed health officials, including Rane and the dean of the state's top government medical facility Dr ShivanandBandeekar for not informing him about oxygen shortage in health facilities.

The controversy first erupted after the Association, in a letter to the dean

Differences at the top of Goa's Covid management pyramid appear to be affecting the state's battle against Covid-19, with the medical fraternity, Health Minister Vishwajit Rane and Chief Minister Pramod Sawant not appearing to be on the same page vis a vis deaths at Covid facilities due to oxygen shortage.

last week, said that patients were dying at the Covid hospitals due to lack of oxygen.

"In the middle of the night when oxygen gets over, and patients worsen and sometimes die, it's the junior doctor on duty who has to face angry relatives," the letter had said.

Following the revelation, the Congress party in Goa had demanded booking the Chief Minister for culpable homicide. Health Minister Rane has however ruled out any deaths in the state linked to oxygen shortage.

"(There is) no death due to lack of oxygen. They (doctors) have met me.

All the doctors' apprehensions have been addressed. It is a challenge for the government," Rane said.

The Health Minister said that Sawant had assumed responsibility for oxygen supply and the buck stopped with the CM with regard to the critical issue. Sawant has however maintained that he was not even aware of the oxygen shortage in the state, until he saw the letter written by the resident doctors' association to the dean after it was published in the media on Monday.

"I came to know about this issue only after reading their (resident doc-

tor's association) statement in newspapers," Sawant said, adding that neither Rane nor the dean had informed him about the issue. When asked about Rane's statement that on oxygen supply the buck stops with the CM, Sawant said: "One person cannot take such control. It is teamwork, and we have an entire disaster management committee working towards it".

Goa has witnessed more than 200 deaths over the last four days. The state currently has 26,731 active Covid cases, while in all 1,00,902 persons have tested positive in Goa so far since the pandemic outbreak.

Thousands throng Gujarat temple, Covid norms go for a toss

GANDHINAGAR | Agencies

Thousands of devotees from Navapura and Nidhrada villages in Sanand Tehsil of Ahmedabad gathered to shower water on the Baliyadev temple to fulfil their vow to the temple deity, thereby violating the current Covid guidelines of physical distancing and masks. The Sanand police has filed charges in the matter and arrested around two dozen people for violation of the protocols. Even as the entire country is grappling with the crisis of the second wave of the coronas pandemic, and the government as well as the public taking utmost precautions against the virus spread, Gujarat's Sanand city on Tuesday saw thousands of women gathering to offer water at the Baliyadev Temple.

Thousands of people were mobilized for a mass gathering upon the Baliyadev Temple priest's call to fulfil the 'Badha' (vow) to shower the temple. Along with the vow, a myth was also linked that by fulfilling the vow the temple deity would get rid of the corona outbreak in the country. Women in their thousands from Navapura in Changodar and Nidhrada village in Sanand Taluka thronged the road leading to the temple, carrying water filled pots on their heads. Apart from the mass gathering, music was also being played by a DJ. Visuals of the mass gathering show the women marching as the music is being played. Apart from physical distancing going for a toss, the place was also seen with most of the people flouting mask guidelines. As soon as the video of the incident

went viral, the local police sprung into action. The Chandogar police went to Navapura village to investigate the matter. The police found out that the women had gathered in huge numbers near the Baliyadev Temple. The police arrested 23 people in Navapura village, including the village Sarpanch as well as the organizer of the mass religious gathering.

"As soon as we came to know about the incident, the police rushed to the place and we have filed charges at both the Navapura village and Nidhrada villages. We have arrested the Navapura Sarpanch, the DJ and the organizer in Navapura. We appeal to the people to please follow the Covid protocols and cooperate with the administration in fighting the virus," said KT Kamaria, DySP, Ahmedabad Rural.

Punjab yet to get 30 lakh doses of vaccine from SII

Chandigarh | Agencies

With government hospitals in the state failing to kickstart the process of vaccinating people in the 18-44 age group due to non-availability of vaccine doses, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Wednesday directed the Health Department to explore all options for the supply of vaccination.

Though the state had made payment of Rs 10.37 crore to the Serum Institute of India (SII) for procurement of around 30 lakh doses of Covishield on April 26, no schedule for supply had so far been received from them, Health Secretary Hussan Lal

informed the Cabinet during a virtual meeting chaired by the Chief Minister.

Only some private hospitals, which had placed direct orders for the vaccines, had commenced the process of vaccinating the 18-44 population, the meeting was informed. For the state government, the SII has only indicated that the availability of Covishield will be known in about four weeks' time, he added. The meeting was informed that in the circumstances, vaccination in the 18-44 age group could not be launched in government hospitals, nor was there any clarity on when the process could begin. Meanwhile, the Cabinet approved one-time

relaxation in Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Rules, 1964 for transfer of five acres of panchayat land in Mohali to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for establishment of the National Institute of Virology. The Institute has been sanctioned by the Central government on a proposal by the Punjab government. The cabinet authorized the Deputy Commissioner of Mohali to complete all necessary formalities for transfer of the land in Mullanpur Garibdas village in Kharar block in the district. Chief Secretary Vini Mahajan said construction for the institute would start by the end of this year.

Punjab grants 'thrust sector' status to oxygen units

Chandigarh | Agencies

Amid the oxygen crisis triggered by the spiralling Covid-19 cases, the Punjab government on Wednesday announced thrust sector status for all oxygen production units, while appointing a nodal officer to coordinate with the Customs Department for quick clearance of foreign aid.

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said with the way things were going currently, the situation was likely to worsen in the coming days, with nobody knowing how many more waves of Covid would hit the country and the state.

The status, approved at a virtual cabinet meeting chaired by the Chief Minister, will apply to oxygen production units with minimum capacity of 700 cylinders per day equivalent to five metric tonnes (MT), oxygen cylinder manufacturers or fabricators and oxygen concentrator manufacturing units.

Oxygen refilling units will not be covered by the special status.

With this decision, the units, both old and new, will become eligible for 100 per cent exemption



from change of land use (CLU), external development charges, property tax, electricity duty, stamp duty and investment subsidy by way of reimbursement of GST up to 125 per cent of the fixed capital investment made in the land and machinery. The status of thrust sector to oxygen production units has been conferred under clause 10.6 of Chapter 10 of the Industrial and Business Development Policy of 2017 and subsequently as per clause 2.22 of Detailed Schemes and Operational Guidelines of 2018.

The Cabinet took the decision to help the state cope with the emergent situation arising out of

acute shortage of oxygen in view of the increased case load due to the unprecedented pandemic in the state. For the week ending May 4, the state had average positivity rate of 11.6 per cent, with case fatality rate (CFR) of 2.1 per cent, from a sample size of 74 lakh.

Currently, the daily oxygen allocation to Punjab stands at 195 MT from outside the state: Inox plant at Himachal Pradesh's Baddi (60 MT), Air Liquide plant at Haryana's Panipat (20 MT), Air Liquide plant at Uttarakhand's Roorkee (15 MT), Linde plant at Dehradun (10 MT), and Inox plant at Jharkhand's Bokaro (90 MT).

However, only 140 MT is actually being supplied from these plants on a daily basis, with shortage of tankers hampering lifting of oxygen, especially from Bokaro.

Health Secretary Hussan Lal informed the Cabinet that 14 districts had positivity over 10 per cent and six over 11 per cent, with Mohali the highest at 25 per cent.

Orders had been placed for essential drugs, including 50 lakh Remdesivir 100 mg injections, and the supplies were expected in the next few days, Lal added.



DELHI'S DAILY POSITIVITY RATE REMAINS BELOW 30% FOR 4TH DAY

The national capital reported 20,960 new Covid cases and 311 deaths in the last 24 hours. A total of 19,209 persons recovered from the disease during this period, taking the total number of recoveries in the national capital to 11,43,980 till now.



recovered from the disease during this period, taking the total number of recoveries in the national capital to 11,43,980 till now. As per the bulletin, in the last 10

days, Delhi's daily test positivity rate has come down by around 9 per cent. On April 26, the positivity rate was reported at 35 per cent, which came down to around 26 per cent on May

4."On April 26, Delhi conducted 57,690 tests, of which around 20,201 returned positive. On May 4, Delhi conducted 74,654 tests, out of which 19,953 people tested positive for Covid-19. These numbers show that in these nine days, there has been a marked drop in the positivity rate in the national capital," the Delhi government said in a statement.

On April 27, Delhi's positivity rate stood at 32.7 per cent, followed by 31.8 per cent on April 28, 32.8 per cent on April 29, 32.7 per cent on April 30, 31.6 per cent on May 1, 28.3 per cent on May 2, and 29.6 per cent on May 3. "From this drop in the positivity rate, it can be concluded that in Delhi, during the last 10 days, the positivity rate has dropped by approximately 1 per cent each day," the statement said.

As per the bulletin, out of the total 21,528 Covid beds in the national capital, 20,010 are occupied while 1,518 are vacant. As many as 50,077 persons are under home isolation.

Delhi received 555 MT Oxygen, 48 SOS calls on Tuesday

A day after Delhi High Court came down heavily on the Centre for oxygen supply to Delhi, it received 555 metric tonnes (MT) of Liquid Medical Oxygen as against the requirement of 976 MT, which is the highest till now



Wednesday said that the city's hospitals struggled with a shortage in the supply of the life-saving gas amid a spurt in coronavirus cases.

receive it from our regular sources but Centre arranged it from other states and gave Delhi the oxygen that was being sent elsewhere."

"A day after Delhi High Court came down heavily on the Centre for oxygen supply to Delhi, it received 555 metric tonnes (MT) of Liquid Medical Oxygen as against the requirement of 976 MT, which is the highest till now," Chadha said. He said, "However, this oxygen was not made available from regular sources but from an ad hoc arrangement. We did not

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid shortage of Oxygen for the Covid infected patients admitted in the hospitals, the national capital received 555 metric tonnes of Oxygen on Tuesday. AAP MLA Raghav Chadha addressing a digital press conference on

Delhi to face water shortage from May 6 to 8: DJB

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid the surge in Covid-19 cases and severe shortage of oxygen, many parts of the national capital are also likely to witness water shortage from May 6 to May 8 due to an alarming dip in raw water supply through the Yamuna.



According to a Delhi Jal Board (DJB) notice issued on Wednesday, the water level at Wazirabad, which is fed by the Yamuna river, had fallen to 667.20 feet against the standard level of 674.5 feet.

Due to depletion of levels at Wazirabad Pond and reduction in the release of raw water by Haryana into Yamuna, water production has been curtailed from the water treatment plants at Wazirabad, Chandrawal and Okhla. The water supply shall be affected on May 6 to May 8 and so on, till the pond

level improves to normal," the DJB said. As per the DJB, the areas likely to be affected are Civil Lines, Hindu Rao Hospital and adjoining areas, Kamla Nagar, Shakti Nagar and adjoining areas, Karol Bagh, Paharganj and NDMC areas, Old and New Rajinder Nagar, East Patel Nagar and West Patel Nagar, Baljeet Nagar, Prem Nagar, Indrapuri, among others. South Delhi areas likely to be impacted include Greater

Kailash, South Extension, Kalkaji, Govindpuri, Amar Colony, Tughlaqabad, Sangam Vihar, Ambedkar Nagar, Prahladpur and adjoining areas.

In other parts of Delhi, the areas likely to be impacted include Ramlila Ground, Delhi Gate, Subhash Park, Model Town, Gulabi Bagh, Punjabi Bagh, Jahangirpuri, Moolchand, Burari and adjoining areas, and parts of Cantonment areas.

Delhi Govt sets up Oxygen cylinder pool at DTC bus depots

As many as 11 DTC bus depots (one in each district) have been earmarked for life saving oxygen cylinders storage. Each depot has been allocated as many as 20 filled cylinders which will be issued (exchanged) in lieu of empty cylinders after approval from the concerned district magistrate.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid increased demand of oxygen supply due to surge in Covid-19 cases in the national capital, the Delhi government has decided to set up oxygen cylinders storage at Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) depots.

As many as 11 DTC bus depots (one in each district) have been earmarked for life saving oxygen cylinders storage. Each depot has been allocated as many as 20 filled cylinders which will be issued (exchanged) in lieu of empty cylinders after approval from the concerned district magistrate. A notification issued by

the health department of the state government said the capacity (number of oxygen cylinders) will be increased in phase wise as per the demands. All DTC bus depots will be used as hubs where oxygen cylinders will be stored and supplied to Covid-19 patients in home isolation and in case of emergency at hospitals in their

vicinity. The government has directed district magistrates (DM) to ensure that empty oxygen cylinders are refilled. "The district magistrate may also utilize the flexibility quota of 10 per cent to fill up buffer stock cylinders and utilize the same judiciously to cater any SOS calls received, till the cylinder pool is made large enough to cater to all individuals," Delhi government's notification said. To deal with the capital's oxygen crisis, the Delhi government had on Tuesday set up a 24x7 emergency helpline for hospitals and other healthcare institutions.

Meanwhile, two oxygen plants have come up, one at - Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital and another at Covid care centre at Commonwealth Games Complex in east Delhi.

Delhi has recorded 338 Covid-19 deaths and 19,953 cases in the last 24 hours with a positivity rate of 26.73 per cent, according to the health bulletin issued by the Delhi health department on Wednesday morning.

DU teachers' union warns against termination of 12 ad hoc teachers

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Twelve ad hoc teachers' services have been terminated in Delhi University's Vivekanand College, according to a teachers' organisation. This action has been condemned by the Delhi University Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe/Other Backward Class Teachers' Forum.

According to the DU SC/ST/OBC Teachers' Forum, of the 12 ad hoc teachers, five have tested positive for Covid-19. The overall condition of teachers suffering from the infection is quite bad. Their families have been struggling with a financial crisis while they have been terminated.

For the last five days, these teachers have pleaded with the Principal and Chairman of Vivekanand College to restore their services but to no avail. These teachers have also written a letter to the Delhi Teachers' Association (DTA) in-charge, apprising him of the situation.



Teachers' Forum President, Kailash Prakash Singh, has said two Commerce, one Economics, three English, two Computer Science, one Sanskrit, one Food Technology, one Mathematics and one Environment Sciences ad hoc teachers have been teaching in Vivekanand College for a long time. Of these, three ad hoc teachers belong to the SC cate-

gory, four to OBC category and five to the General category. He said even in January 2021, the college principal had taken an arbitrary step to not reinstate these ad hoc teachers but after the intervention of Hansraj Suman, Delhi Teachers' Association in-charge, and Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA), the chairman of the college's governing body halted the interviews for these posts and got all 12 teachers reinstated. He said that if any teacher was terminated during the Covid-19 pandemic they would be forced to take to the streets against the college principal.

Hansraj Suman has said the tenure of these 12 ad hoc teachers was in force till April 29, 2021. On April 30, they were intended to be given the rejoining letter again, but the principal of Vivekanand College terminated the services of these teachers on April 29. The Vivekanand College principal has given instructions that their salaries would be given only if they take clearance from the college.

Delhi's O2: SC stays contempt against Centre's officers, seeks 700 MT supply plan

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the contempt notice issued by the Delhi High Court against Central government officers for failing to comply with the direction to ensure 700 MT supply of oxygen to Delhi hospitals.

A bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah said: "We direct that by 10.30 a.m. tomorrow (Thursday), the Centre shall place a comprehensive plan in the form of a chart, indicating the manner in which the direction for allocation of 700 metric tonnes shall be complied with."

The bench added that it does not want contempt proceedings, but rather wants action on ground. It reiterated that "putting officers in jail is not going to bring oxygen to the city, instead let us ensure lives are saved".

The observation came during the hearing urgent plea by the Centre against Tuesday's order by the High Court. The top court also asked the Centre's and Delhi's officers to

study and try to adopt the model followed by the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation to deal with the similar oxygen crisis over there.

It also declined to stop the Delhi High Court from monitoring the oxygen situation in the national capital. "No one can dispute that some have died to oxygen shortage and it is a national emergency. What is the plan?" the bench said, emphasising that it is answerable to citizens, as it referred to several deaths.

The court also asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to inform it by Thursday, on the steps taken to achieve quantity of 700 MT, though the Centre claimed to have supplied up to 550 MT. The top court on April 30, had fixed 700 MT as requirement for Delhi and directed the Centre to ensure the supply by May 3 midnight. "When the country is facing humanitarian crisis, the court must aim at problem solving," it said, adding that there must be some scientific basis to ascertain the requirement of oxygen by states on a real-time basis. The top court said it will continue to hear the matter on Thursday.

Delhi reports 20,960 new Covid-19 cases, 311 deaths in 24 hours

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In the national capital, out of the total 21,528 beds, 20,010 are occupied while 1,518 are vacant. As many as 50,077 people are under home isolation



National capital Delhi on Wednesday reported 20,960 positive cases, 19,209 recoveries, and 311 deaths in 24 hours, according to data by the state's health department. The positivity rate of the last 24 hours stands at 26.37 per cent. This is the fourth day on the trot that the positivity rate has remained below 30 per cent. The cumulative positive cases have surged to 12,53,902 and the positive rate stands at 7.16 per cent. Whereas the number of deaths has climbed to 18,063. And, the active cases in the national capital stands at 91,859. "Within just 10 days, Delhi's Covid-19 positivity rate has reduced by 9 per

cent. On April 26, Delhi reported a positivity rate of 35 per cent and on May 5, it came down to around 26 per cent," the health department said. Delhi had reported 19,953 cases on Tuesday, 18,043 cases on Monday, the lowest since April 15; 20,394 cases on Sunday, 25,219 on Saturday, 27,047 on Friday, 24,235 on Thursday, 25,986 on Wednesday, 24,149 on last Tuesday, 20,201 on last Monday and 22,933 on last Sunday. In the national capital, out of the total 21,528 beds, 20,010 are occupied

while 1,518 are vacant. As many as 50,077 people are under home isolation. The city conducted a 62,767 Covid-19 test in 24 hours. In addition to this, 16,274 Rapid antigen tests were conducted in the same duration. A total of 90,365 people have been vaccinated in the last 24 hours. Out of the total 90,365 beneficiaries, 64,983 were given the first dose of vaccine, and 25,382 were given the second dose. So far, a total of 34,83,832 people have been vaccinated in the national capital Delhi.

No congregational prayers on Ramzan's last Friday, Eid: Jamaat

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Jamaat-e-Islami Hind's Shariah Council has issued guidelines for Muslims related to the last days of the holy month of Ramazan and the Eid prayers amid the partial/total lockdowns across the country in the wake of the second wave of coronavirus.

"The last Friday of Ramazan (Jumatu'lWida) is like any other Friday. It has no special virtue. In the current situation, the government regulations regarding the performance of prayers in mosques should be adhered to. Wherever there is permission by the local authorities to offer congregational prayers, one should pray as usual using masks and maintaining social distance. Where there is no permission, if

there are four people in the house, they can offer Friday or Zohar (midday) prayers in congregation. If less than that, offer Zohar prayers individually," the Sharia Council's Secretary Maulana Raziul Islam Nadvi said.

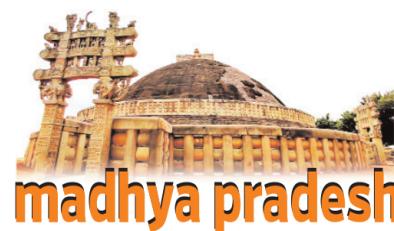
Muslims were also advised to avoid crowding the bazaars for shopping in the last days of Ramazan. "On the day of Eid, new or old clean clothes, whatever is available, should be adorned and one should express gratefulness to Allah," the Council said.

As per the Shariah Council's guidelines, the Eid-ul-Fitr prayers should be offered in Eidgahs, Jama Masjid and the local masjids, depending on how many numbers of people are permitted under the present circumstances. "During this time, masks should be used as a precautionary measure and

social distancing should be maintained," it said. Shaking hands and hugging after Eid prayers is not mandatory. "If there are four people in a house, then they can offer two Rakat of Eid-ul-Fitr prayers at home with extra 'Takbeerat'. The 'Khutbah' (sermon) may be given after the prayer, but it is not compulsory," the Council said. It asserted that one of the most important acts of Ramazan is the payment of Sadqah-al-Fitr (charity to poor before Eid prayer). It is obligatory on every Muslim to pay it in the last days of Ramazan on behalf of himself/herself and all the members of the household.

Its quantum can be calculated in terms of dates, raisins, paneer and barley and is 3.5 kg per person. If it is calculated in terms of wheat, then it is 1.75 kg. Its value in terms of money can also be cal-

culated and in terms of wheat, it comes to about Rs 50 per person. The amount can be increased based on a person's financial status, it said. The Shariah Council also instructed the Muslims to avoid going around to meet and greet people on the day of Eid. "Please remember the poor, the needy on the day of Eid along with Muslim prisoners and their relatives. In the joys of Eid, care should be taken of the poor and needy, especially Muslim prisoners in jails and their distressed families." "We must ensure that in all our acts of worship and Islamic rituals, our actions do not endanger the lives of human beings. Protection of life is one of the objectives of the Islamic law. Therefore, it is necessary to take precautionary measures during the pandemic," it said.



CHOUHAN REVIEWS FREE FOOD DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

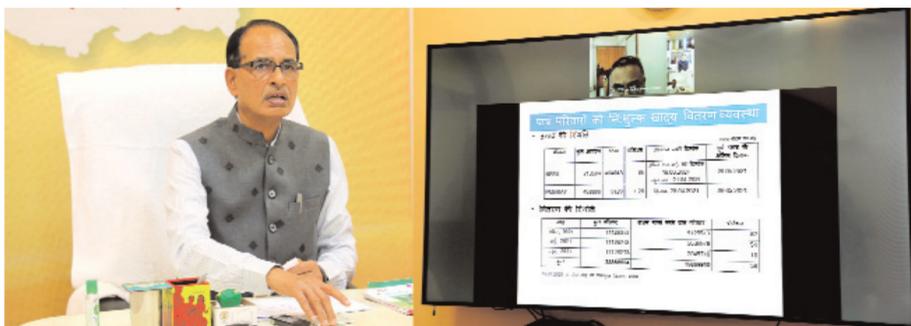
NO POOR WILL BE DEPRIVED OF RATION: CM

Public distribution system arrangements should be perfect

Directed the officers of the Cooperatives and Food Departments to relax the rules and make arrangements in this regard. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan was reviewing free food grains distribution system from the eligible families under the public distribution system from the Chief Minister's residence on Wednesday.

Chouhan said that the poor person should not have any problem in getting food grains. Food grains should be distributed to them even if they don't have eligibility slip, Aadhar Card and other documents. He asked the ministers of the Food and Cooperation Departments to make effective arrangements in this regard.

Chouhan said that fair price shops should not be crowded at the time of distribution of ration. Corona guideline should be effectively followed. Along with its effective system, it should also be monitored. A competent government officer or employ-



ee should be posted at the time of distribution of ration. Chouhan said that the beneficiaries should be informed about the distribution of free food grains through SMS. He said

that lifting, transportation and distribution of free ration is a challenging task during the Covid crisis. The transportation and distribution of food grains should be closely monitored.

There should not be any kind of laxity and communication gap in this. The Co-operatives and Food Departments should work in tandem with mutual co-ordination.

Chouhan said that along with free food grains distribution, an acknowledgment should be provided to the beneficiary from the P.O.S. machine. He said that irregularity in distribution work will not be tolerated.

Chouhan said that poor families, who have received food grains for April and May by paying the amount, should also be provided free food grains during the next month. He was told that free grains will be distributed to such beneficiaries in the months of July and August.

Chouhan was told in the meeting that after May 15 the remaining families who did not receive food grains will be given entire food grains for 5 months. Out of a total of One crore 11 lakh 29 thousand 273 families in the state, 91 lakh 25 thousand 513 have received ration for the month of April. The number of families receiving ration for the month of May is 56 lakh 38 thousand 678 and the number of families receiving ration for the month of June is 20 lakh 45 thousand 719.

Centre, MP government failed to stop Covid-19 deaths: Kamal Nath

Should we blame the public for the deaths due to Covid-19? Both the Centre and the state governments led by the BJP are responsible for the fatalities. They are playing politics over dead bodies. They have no concern for the common people," Senior Congress leader Kamal Nath told reporters.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Senior Congress leader Kamal Nath on Wednesday held the Centre and the Madhya Pradesh governments responsible for the Covid-19 fatalities which he attributed to the failure to take timely measures to deal with the "second wave" of the pandemic.

"Should we blame the public for the deaths due to Covid-19? Both the Centre and the state governments led by the BJP are responsible for the fatalities.

They are playing politics over dead bodies. They have no concern for the common people," Nath told reporters here.

He said the national and international media had been alerting about the second wave of coronavirus for the last three months, but no preparations were made in advance. "Rather India was exporting medical oxygen and Remdesivir injections that time," the Madhya Pradesh Congress chief said.

Targeting the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government, Nath said the administration was indulged in politics and distributed Remdesivir injections to leaders of the ruling BJP. "The injections are being sold in the black market," he alleged.

Attacking the Union government over the vaccination program, Nath said. "The government has no adequate stock of vaccines but still it announced the launch of the inoculation drive for the people in the age group of 18 to 44 years." Nath reiterated his allegation that the announcement to launch the drive for the younger lot was made in a bid to attract voters to the BJP during the recently-held Assembly elections.

"Today the people are dependent on God and not on the government. I have prayed at the famous temple of Lord Hanuman in Chhindwara (Nath's constituency)," he said. As of Tuesday, Madhya Pradesh's Covid-19 tally stood at 6,12,666 with 6,003 fatalities, the state health department had said.

Saving lives is our biggest priority: CM Chouhan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that Corona infection has been controlled in the state. We have to break the chain of infection completely by adopting stern measures for a few more days. Saving people's lives is our biggest priority. We have to ensure best treatment of Corona in all districts. The number of ICU beds should be increased. Wedding ceremonies should be postponed. Funerals must be attended by limited number of persons. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that the provision of free ration to every poor should be ensured during Corona in all districts.

Chouhan was reviewing the situation and arrangements of Corona in the state through video conferencing from his

residence today. Ministers in-charge of all districts, officers in-charge of Corona, Collectors, Superintendents of Police, etc. were present in the video conference. Chouhan said that adequate oxygen, Remdesivir injection, etc. are available in all the districts of the state. Number of beds should be increased wherever necessary.

Chouhan said that the complaints of black marketing of drugs, injections etc. being received from some places, is barbaric. Strict action must be taken against those engaged in such irregularities. It should be ensured that private hospitals do not charge more from patients.

Chouhan said that ambulance charges have been fixed for urban and rural areas. It should be ensured that ambulances are available to the patients at the prescribed rates.

There has been a significant decline in the weekly new cases of Corona in the state. As of April 28, the weekly new cases of Corona were 91 thousand 354 in the state, while on May 5, the cases have reduced to 86 thousand 820. The state's weekly positivity rate is 20.3 percent.

There are 89 thousand 144 active cases of Corona in the state. In the last 24 hours, 12 thousand 319 new cases have come up, while 9,643 have recovered. The state's recovery rate is 84.7 percent and death rate is 1 percent.

More than 200 new cases of Corona have been reported in 12 districts of the state. As many as 1817 new cases were reported in Indore, 1579 in Bhopal, 1174 in Gwalior, 826 in Jabalpur, 355 in Ujjain, 341 in Rewa, 328 in Shivpur, 308 in Ratlam, 252 in Dhar, 236 in Sagar, 232 in Singrauli and 231 in Satna.

EXPAND MEDICAL TREATMENT FACILITIES: CM AT CORONA CORE GROUP MEETING

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the continuation of works to strengthen the hospital's medical facilities should be continued. The level of medical facilities should be such that no person is denied treatment facilities. The Chief Minister Shri Chouhan was reviewing efforts to prevent corona infection in the state today through video conferencing with the Corona Core Group.

Chouhan said that it is a matter of relief that the availability of oxygen beds has improved in the state. Along with the continuation of infection control efforts, ICU in hospitals. Efforts to increase the availability of beds and ventilators continue vigorously. It was informed that 30 new ventilators have been made available in Bhopal.

Chouhan said that the pace of the work of recruitment of technicians holding diplomas, certificates and certificates related to medical works in the state should be speeded up. He appointed a nodal officer for this task and asked him to take action. It was told that 189 certificate-holding anesthetic technicians in the state, 3,081 O.T. Technician and 206 diploma holder anesthetic technicians have been

identified. A list of these has been attached and sent to all the districts on the basis of availability on contract of Rs 25 thousand per month for 3 months as per requirement.

Chouhan said that each patient who has been shifted to hospital, positive patients under home isolation, should be studied. Under which reasons and circumstances there was a need to send to the hospital. After reviewing this, efforts should be made to make the home isolation system effective.

Chouhan said that adequate number of isolation and oxygen beds are available in Covid Care Centers in the state. They should be handled in ideal form. It should be monitored. Also, on receipt of demand for Covid Care Center in remote areas, concrete arrangements should be made to start the center immediately.

Chouhan said that oxygen supply in the state has been better than consumption. With the efforts of supply, the pace of installation of new oxygen plant should not slow down. This work should be reviewed continuously.

Chouhan was informed that work is being done to install new oxygen plants on the war footing. 94 new oxygen plants are being installed in all the districts of the state. Along with this,

oxygen plants are being installed at the tehsil level as well. These plants range from 200 to 600 tons.

Chouhan said that efforts should be made to connect various doctors in the country and abroad in providing online medical guidance to the positive person under home isolation. He also directed necessary action in this regard.

Chouhan said that exploitation of forced people in trouble during Covid infection by private hospitals will not be tolerated.

He said that the government is fully supporting the expansion of treatment facilities to private hospitals and will be done further. But they will not be allowed to recover an arbitrary amount for treatment. In such cases, drastic action will be taken.

It was informed in the meeting that the number of people discharged from hospitals has increased. On May 4, 1815 persons were discharged, while on May 3, 1781 patients were discharged.

It was informed that 25 thousand 865 oxygen beds are available in government and private sector hospitals in the state. Out of these, 81 percent beds are filled in 12 thousand 65 government hospitals and 87 percent in 9,447 private hospitals.

Safety shield of vaccination will protect against corona: CM Chouhan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the people of the state and the country are being provided with a safety shield of vaccination to prevent corona infection. In the same sequence, he was having virtual discussions with youths in the age group of 18 years and up to 45 years regarding their experiences before and after vaccination from Wednesday onwards. He informed that about 5 crore 16 lakh vaccine doses will be required in the state. He informed that 45 thousand remdesivir injections have also been received on Tuesday. They are being distributed as per requirements.

Chouhan said that I do not say, the scientists say, the facts show that after the vaccination is done, corona will not occur and if it occurs it will not cause harm. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan while addressing the vaccinated youths above the age of 18 years of Sagar, Jabalpur, Ujjain and Gwalior said that vaccination has been done in one session in each district. He said that 9 lakh people will be vaccinated this month. About 82 lakh people have been vaccinated so far. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that apart from orders for vaccination supplies to two companies of the country, efforts are being made to obtain supplies from foreign companies through the Government of India.

While talking to the Chouhan in a virtual discussion, Sheetal and Raj of Sagar said that there was no problem in getting the vaccine. Registration was done easily on the portal and slots and information were received on time. After this, Chief Minister Shri Chouhan asked Shubham and Shubhangi of Jabalpur whether there were any side effects after vaccination. They said there were no side effects. Apoorna Deora and Shilpi of Ujjain, on being asked by Chief Minister Shri Chouhan, told that after vaccination, they were kept under observation for 30 minutes. He took information about vaccination site from Satyas and Aayushi Tomar of Gwalior. Asked about social distancing and said that the selection of the vaccination site away from the hospitals has been done in view of security. Supporting the proposal of the Gwalior's Aayushi, Chief Minister Shri Chouhan has appealed to the old corona patients to donate their plasma to help others. Plasma can save the lives of other patients. He told the general public that vaccination would be done 4 days a week. People can donate their blood before vaccination. This will help others when needed.

QUACK TURNS FARM INTO 'HOSPITAL'; IV DRIPS HUNG FROM TREES



Team Absolute | Bhopal

A quack in Agar Malwa district of Madhya Pradesh was found running a 'hospital' in an orange farm where patients prone on mats and cardboard sheets spread on ground were being administered intravenous fluid (IV drips) hung from tree branches. The 'hospital' was operative in the farm just 200 metres from a main road from Susner in Agar Malwa to Pidawa in neighbouring Rajasthan, close to village Dhaniakhedi.

Though the people undergoing 'treatment' here refused to talk on record, some of them revealed that they were seeking medical help in the 'hospital' to avoid going to the government health centres as they fear that they might be admitted in the COVID-19 wards, sources told THE WEEK.

After people came to know about the 'hospital', the chief medical and health officer (CMHO) Dr. Samandar Singh Malviya sent a team to the spot. "We did not find any patients or the quack at the spot, but we did find empty bottles of medicines/injectables that suggested that something was afoot there. Also, there are videos available on the farm where this was happening belonged to the quack," Dr. Malviya told THE WEEK. He added that earlier too, four FIRs have been lodged against quacks duping patients.

Talking to local media, the CMHO had said steps were being taken to create awareness among people about COVID-19 pandemic, protocols and treatment and to

encourage them to seek medical help when required. Such measures will continue, he said.

Though the CMHO could not confirm the name of the quack, local sources said that he was called Devi Lal. People from at least 10 surrounding villages came to the 'hospital' to get treated and no COVID-19 protocols like use of mask or social distancing were followed.

The available video of the 'hospital' shows several persons, mostly women prone on the ground quite close to each other with some of them being administered drips hung from tree branches. Also other persons, apparently attendants of the patients, were seen sitting on traditional cots put close at some distance to the patients and some others squatting or roaming about, none of them with masks on.

IMPAR Issues COVID-19 Prevention Guidelines for Eid Namaaz at Masjids

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In wake of the COVID 19 threat, IMPAR has released a set of guidelines for the Eid 2020. As Eid ul fitr is less than ten days away, the 11 point guidelines seek to ensure that social distancing and austerity measures should be adhered to. IMPAR has advised people to offer Eid prayers at home, no to shopping, avoiding extravagant Eid meals and donate the money saved to the suffering people, irrespective of caste and creed.

IMPAR has advised its members to look out for poor and needy and those stranded and need food, medicine or any other help. The first priority of Zakat spending must be these people, and not Madarsa etc., the usual recipients of Zakat,

which is paid during Ramazan month @ 2.5% of the assets and is mandated for all Muslims.

These guidelines cover almost all spheres of social life around Eid. In addition, placing value to things like paying some ones' school fees on Eid, paying somebody's rent, feeding a family, helping someone re-start the business etc. The other points raised in the guidelines is the paying zakat by before the Eid Namaz. For this IMPAR has started an online system to facilitate collection and delivery of a zakat funds to be delivered to the beneficiaries, who are unable to reach the donors in the COVID 19 situation.

IMPAR has compiled guidelines as per SOP on preventive measures to contain spread of COVID-19 in religious places/ places of worship which are shared for Namazis to follow

during Eid Namaaz, these include to abide rules or norms applicable for gathering at religious places, to be followed at Masjids/Eidgah. Namaz may preferably be performed in open area, if there is sufficient open space. Prayers on roads, pavements, footpaths must not be performed. Only asymptomatic persons should be allowed in the Masjids / Eidgah. Person above 65 years of age, persons with co morbidities, and children below the age of 10 years are advised to stay at home. Standing or sitting arrangement during Namaz to be made in such a way that adequate social distancing is maintained, while Namazis' should keep their faces covered with face masks. Masjids should have sanitizer dispenser and thermal screening provisions at the entrance. Wherever possible, staggering of visitors and separate entry and exits should be organized.

Namazis should perform wuzu at home and bring their own prayer mats for namaz. Before leaving for masjid and after reaching home, they should wash hand and feet with soap. Specific markings may be made with sufficient distant to manage the queue and ensure social distancing in the premises as well as in the parking and circulating area. Avoid physical contact while greeting each other. Also avoid touching of anything, like caps, glasses, water cooler etc. at the Masjid premises. Proper disposal of face covers / masks / gloves left after namaz should be ensured. Posters on preventive measures about COVID-19 to be displayed prominently and that Wuzu Area and toilets to be thoroughly sanitized, disinfected and kept in good hygienic condition.



SC QUASHES MAHA LAW GRANTING RESERVATION TO MARATHA COMMUNITY

A five-judge Constitution Bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan allowed no breach of 50 per cent ceiling to give more reservation, as it refused to consider reviewing Indra Sawhney verdict of 1992.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday quashed the Maharashtra law granting reservation in jobs and admissions to Maratha community. The top court said it did not find any exceptional circumstance to justify exceeding the 50 per cent cap set by Indra Sawhney judgment. A five-judge Constitution Bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan allowed no breach of 50 per cent ceiling to give more reservation, as it refused to consider reviewing Indra Sawhney verdict of 1992.



"Exceeding ceiling limit of 50 percent laid down by Indra Sawhney is violative of Articles 14 and 15," said the top court. The

top court said the people from Maratha community cannot be declared as educationally and socially backward. The unanimous judgment was delivered by a bench also comprising Justices L. Nageswara Rao, S Abdul Nazeer, Hemant Gupta and S. Ravindra Bhat. The top court made it clear that there were no extraordinary circumstances to grant reservation to Maratha community over and above 50 per cent ceiling. The top court struck down the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018 which extends reservation to the Maratha community in public education and employment. The top court emphasized that exceeding the 50 per cent limit without exceptional circumstances violates Article 14, and it held that 2018 act as amended in 2019 exceeds the limit without any exceptional circumstances. The top court held that SEBC Act, which extends reservation to the Maratha community in public education and employment is unconstitutional.

Will meet Adar Poonawalla on Covid vaccines once he returns from London: Tope

The state government had no communication with Poonawalla after his interview to British media, Maharashtra health minister said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government has had no communication with Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla on vaccine procurement after Adar's interview to a British media house where he claimed he was under immense pressure from some of the most powerful people in the country for vaccines. "When he returns (from London), we will have a meeting with him," Rajesh Tope told media persons. Earlier, Tope said as Poonawalla hails from Pune and as his operation is based out of Pune, he should think about Maharashtra and give priority to his home state in allocating Covishield. As India started the third phase of the vaccination drive from May 1, which also includes people between the



age group of 18 and 44 years, demand for vaccines doubled. The Centre provided Y category security to Poonawalla after his company wrote to the home ministry complaining of threats to Poonawalla. "I'm staying here (London) for an extended time because I don't want to go back to that situation. Everything falls on my shoulders but I can't do it alone...I don't want to be in a situation where you are just trying to do your job, and just because you can't supply the needs of X, Y or Z you really don't want to guess what they are going to do," Poonawalla told the British newspaper. Assuring that the work is going on in full swing at Serum, Poonawalla said he would soon come back to the country. According to PTI reports, The world's largest vaccine maker is looking to invest 240 million pounds in the UK to expand its vaccine business as part of the 1-billion pound India-UK Enhanced Trade Partnership. Serum is also conducting phase one trials of a nasal vaccine against coronavirus in the UK. Reacting to his complaints, the Maharashtra government and the state Congress earlier said Adar Poonawalla must complain to the state police regarding the threats he said he received.

Maharashtra govt and BMC write to Centre on daily oxygen needs

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government and the BMC wrote two separate letters to the Centre highlighting their daily oxygen requirement, with state Chief Secretary Sitarum Kunte requesting for enhanced allocation of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) to the state by at least 200 MT. The letters, officials said, were also written to ensure that allocation for Maharashtra and Mumbai is not reduced on the ground of increasing allocation for Delhi, which has been witnessing an acute shortage of oxygen. BMC Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal wrote to the office of Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce and Industry, giving details of daily oxygen consumption in Mumbai, which currently stands at 220 MT. The city's active case load is 57,342. "I had a word with the minister and he wanted daily break up of

Mumbai's oxygen requirement in light of Delhi's demand for 700 MT. This letter gives details of daily cases and oxygen consumption in Mumbai. There is no shortage," Chahal said. Chahal said they have created protocol for oxygen use to limit consumption after BMC was forced to shift 168 patients from six hospitals due to oxygen shortage on April 18. A letter was written to the Centre even then to ensure steady supply. With Maharashtra's current oxygen requirement ranging between 1,750 MT 1,850 MT daily, Health Minister Rajesh Tope said that the state has asked the Centre to increase oxygen allocation by 200 MT. "We have also received response from a few countries for the global tender that has been floated. After careful scrutiny, orders will be placed," Tope said. Maharashtra has issued tender for 25,000 MT oxygen, 40,000 concentrators, 132 pressure swing adsorption plants and 27 tankers.

Vaccines falling short, Maharashtra Health Minister's Jalna district got extra doses

Home to Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope, Jalna district received 60,000 vaccine doses more than its allotment of 17,000 when fresh supplies of 26.77 lakh doses were received by the state from the Centre on March 31 and distributed to all districts.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

From April 7 to 9, when several districts in Maharashtra had to shut down their vaccination centres on account of shortage of vaccines, Jalna stood out, with a surplus that would last at least 10 more days. Home to Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope, Jalna district received 60,000 vaccine doses more than its allotment of 17,000 when fresh supplies of 26.77 lakh doses were received by the state from the Centre on March 31 - and distributed to all districts. Sources said Tope called Health Department officials and asked them to increase the allocation to his district to 77,000 doses. Tope told The Indian Express "no particular district was preferred" and that if Jalna got more stocks, this was done "to encourage more vaccination". "We distributed doses to primary health centres and sub centres to increase vaccination," the minister said, noting that against the state average of 27% of the target population receiving vaccinations, Jalna had accomplished just 18.1% at the time

But this went against both the criteria on which the Maharashtra public health department distributes doses: a district's daily performance of vaccination and active cases. On March 31, Jalna had 773 active cases, lower than 30 districts. In terms of daily vaccinations, its figure of 600-1,000 till March end put it among the 10 lowest-performing districts. State immunisation officer Dr DN Patil diverted 60,000 doses from Aurangabad to Jalna on April 1. Aurangabad, also one of the six divisional storage centre for vaccines in the state, had received 1.95 lakh doses, based on its 7,000-8,000 daily vaccinations. At that point Jalna was conducting just 600-1000 vaccinations a day. At this rate, it had enough vaccine doses to last 15-18 days when other districts had stocks only for five-10 days. Following the extra doses, Jalna increased daily vaccinations to 3,000-5,000 in the first week of April. Meanwhile, between April 8 and 9, officials across Maharashtra districts made frantic calls for more supplies to the state health department. Finally, Tope allowed transfer of

15,000 doses from Jalna to nearby districts. Immunisation officer Dr Patil did not respond to calls or text messages. Jalna's neighbouring districts received lower doses despite performing better than it on daily vaccination numbers and having more Covid cases. Beed, that in the last week of March was vaccinating 3000-5,000 people per day and had 4,296 active cases, received 30,800 doses on April 1; Latur with 3,000-5,000 daily vaccinations and 5,931 active cases got 53,800 doses; and Parbhani with 2,000-3,000 vaccinations and 4,944 cases got 21,500 doses. Only nine districts with vaccination numbers higher than Jalna (between 8,000-40,000) received more stocks than it on April 1. Sources said Tope "insisted" on allotting Jalna more stock on March 31 because Maharashtra had received a huge supply from the Centre. Before that as well as later, the state received limited stocks ranging between 5-14 lakh doses. Among the districts and corporations that shut down several vaccination centres between April 7 and 9

due to zero stocks were Satara, Navi Mumbai, Mumbai and Sangli. On April 7, Jalna had over 50,000 doses. Mumbai had to shut 25 private centres on April 8 and 50 centres on April 9. District health officials said they requested the state government, including Tope, to urgently send more stocks. "We reasoned with the minister that stocks in Jalna would sit for days as other districts suffered. He eventually agreed to divert stocks from Jalna," an official said. On April 8, Jalna transferred 15,000 doses, to Washim, Yavatmal and Parbhani. "A few centres could not function for a day-and-a-half," said Dr Avinash Aaher, Washim's district health officer. Dr Vivek Khatgaonkar, district health officer in Jalna, said doses were moved to other districts when shortage was reported. In Yavatmal, district health officer Dr Hari Pawar said their supply is always limited. Incidentally, on April 7 and 8, Tope red-flagged the acute vaccine shortage in Maharashtra, receiving in turn a trenchant response from Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan that the state had enough stocks.

NO DECREASE IN NUMBER OF TESTS: MAHARASHTRA MINISTER ON DECLINE IN COVID-19 CASES IN 15 DISTRICTS

Mumbai: The number of daily Covid-19 infections in Maharashtra has significantly come down in the last few days as from around 70,000 daily cases, the state is recording around 50,000 new cases. Dismissing fewer tests as the reason behind the sudden dip in the number of cases, health minister Rajesh Tope said 15 districts, including Mumbai, Dhule, Nanded, Bhandara, Thane, Nashik, Latur, Nandurbar, Nagpur, Aurangabad, Amravati, Raigad, Osmabanaad, Chandrapur and Gondia, are seeing a decline in the number of daily cases. In and around 20 districts including Sangli, Satara, Buldhana and Kolhapur, the cases are still on the rise. The positivity rate has dropped by 5 per cent and has settled around 22 per cent from 27 per cent. Asserting that there has been no reduction in the number of testing, the minister said, "The number of daily tests ranges between 2.5 lakh and 2.8 lakh of which RT-PCR (lab technique) accounts for 65 per cent and RAT (rapid antigen test) 35 per cent." Maharashtra's recovery rate of 84.07 per cent is the highest in the country, the minister said. In the last two days, more people have recovered from Covid-19 than the number of people who have contracted the infection, which is a signal of the situation gradually improving. On Tuesday, around 65,934 people recovered as against 51,880 new infections. On Monday, 59,500 people recovered while 48,621 new cases were registered.

Maha school principal's fancy 'avatars' create vax buzz

Team Absolute | Nandurbar

Scores of children in the small village of Biladi in Nandurbar district stare with disbelief at an unusual sight unfolding daily in their neighbourhood. Around 9 am onwards, the Biladi Zilla Parishad Primary School Principal Sachin Patki sheds his tough demeanour and 'school-headmaster' attitude to walk up and mingle freely with the villagers, comprising mostly farmers or daily labourers, to create awareness about the Covid-19 vaccination. For this, Principal Patki slips into a new fancy attire daily in different areas, goes around singing, dancing, reciting folk-tales, hymns, poems and attempts to remove misconceptions about the Covid-19 pandemic and the life-saver vaccination jabs that have reached the village of 1,750. "I don our schoolteachers' uniform, or self-stitched costumes of Lord Shiva with a damru and a club, a Policeman, a Doctor, Lord Vasudeo (Sage Naradmmuni, with a pair of 'kharitals'), etc., to lure the people and make them feel more comfortable among familiar Hindu gods and the frontline workers," smiles Patki. The 42-year academician devotes around 30-45 minutes in each area, speaks about the Covid protocols like physical distancing, sporting face-masks, washing hands often, hygiene, and the need to get inoculated, etc. to the wide-eyed parents and villagefolk who gather, of course, at a safe range. "I am accompanied by my two teachers - Shantaram Wadile and Smita Budhe" While I convey the messages in an entertaining style, they distribute around 40-50 masks, soaps or handwashes to the crowds to drive home the importance of following Covid-appropriate behavior," Patki said. The idea dawned on Patki a couple of weeks ago after hearing how medical or social workers and anganwadi staff were hounded out by the villagers when they went to conduct Covid-19 tests or register them for vaccination.



"Most villagers slammed doors shut, those in the fields would scoot from the volunteers, others would surround and abuse them, at times there were minor fisticuffs after which the perplexed workers retreated," he recalled. The ZP school, now a temporary quarantine-cum-inoculation centre, is manned by two other teachers -

Sarla Patil and Sachin Bagal -- who killed hours of boredom on the designated 'Vaccination Thursdays' with barely a handful of villagers turning up for the jab. Last month, only 35 sceptics turned up for the dose, but after Patki's public awareness drive, it shot up to 100 the next week and last Thursday notched a record 140

people queuing up for their jabs. "My small campaign has apparently clicked... The simple folks have lot of misconceptions... They apprehend illnesses, some short-term or permanent handicap or even death...! I gently try to erase all their doubts and convince them to go for the life-saver jab..." said Patki, sounding relieved. In Biladi, he touches around 25 families daily in his two-hour long 1/2 road-shows' and buoyed by the response, took it even to the adjoining Bankheda village (1,500 pop.) too. On an average, Patki -- who also works as a part-time Hindu priest and revered as 'Brahmin Sir' -- spends around Rs 5,000 each month from his pocket toward the 'extra-curricular social activities' for his 110-school kids who hail from economically weaker sections... But he desires to do even more for them. "We need a good library, a book bank, a computer lab with at least 25 computers, etc. for the children to keep pace with modern technological advancements, but resources are a big constraint," he rued. Undeterred, last year, Patki embarked on a unique venture -- taking the classroom to the students' doorstep, at the height of the lockdown, when all schools were shut down, vide his "Shikshan Rath". "I installed a 42-inch TV set on my personal car, put up educational banners and posters and drove down to one locality daily... The children would step out of their home, attend my doorstep classes with videos of different subjects, and return. Their academic sessions were undisturbed, and they enjoyed classes without the anxiety of online classes, erratic Internet connectivity or fat phone bills," Patki explained. Though his family comprising mother Mangala, wife Harshada and 9-year old twins Nidhi and Navanya frown at his magnanimity, Patki has earned accolades from the village authorities, the Collector Dr. Rajendra Bharud, and state-level officialdom, but he shrugs it off: "I am merely doing my duty!"

Madhuri Dixit: Hold your loved ones closer than ever

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actress Madhuri Dixit Nene reiterated the need to hold on to loved ones in the time of crisis, in a new post she shared on Tuesday evening.

"Hold your loved ones closer than ever," she wrote alongside an image that sees her strike a smiling pose with husband Sriram Nene.

In the image, which seems to be clicked abroad, Madhuri sports sporting a denim dungaree with a black full-sleeved top. She lets her hair open and completes the casual look with spectacles and sneakers. Hubby Nene wears a dark blue pullover, with white shirt and shorts, with socks and sneakers. Madhuri tagged the post with #MayThe4thBeWithYou.

Among the earliest to post a reaction was Arjun Bijlani, who described



the couple as "cute". Madhuri will next be

seen in the web series "Finding Anamika". She plays a superstar who

goes missing. Manav Kaul and Mohit Raina also star in the show.



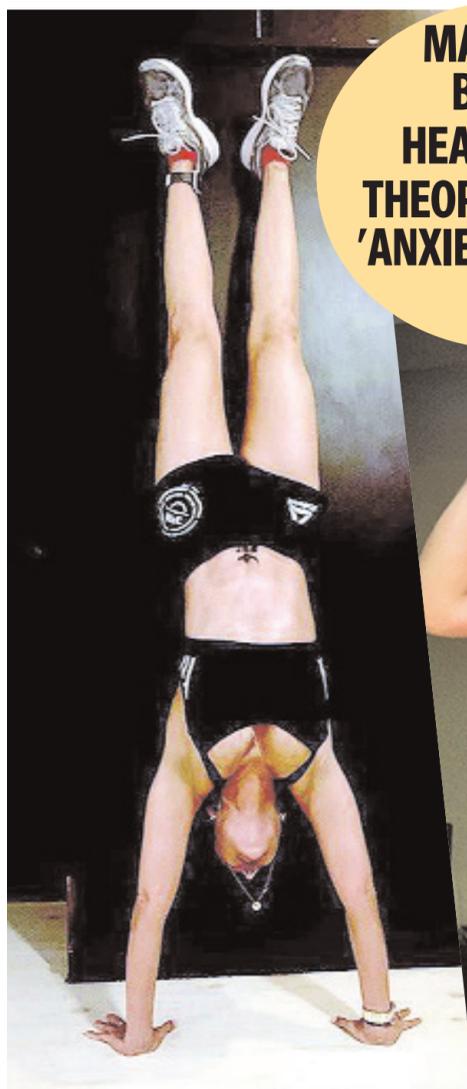
Vaishnavi Dhanraj: Pandemic has taken a toll but we are fighting back

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Vaishnavi Dhanraj, who plays the role of Namrata in the show "Aapki Nazaron Ne Samjha", says the television industry may have suffered during the pandemic but everyone involved is determined to fight back. "I feel the best thing about this industry is there's work for everybody. This is a very good phase to be a part of showbiz. I know the pandemic has taken a toll on us but

we're fighting back. Things will soon be better," said Vaishnavi. Meanwhile, the actress says her show is gaining in popularity because they are making sure to come up with new content.

"People wouldn't want to watch anything they have seen before or don't like. So, it's always a challenge to bring something new and exciting which the audience can relate to at the same time. The team of writers and creatives on this show are doing a great job," she says.



MANDIRA BEDI'S HEADSTAND THEORY TO KEEP 'ANXIETY AT BAY'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Mandira Bedi took to Instagram on Wednesday to post a picture that captures her doing a headstand.

The actress wrote about how such an exercise helps her beat anxiety and added that she has been able to achieve this after regular practice.

"All inverted poses help keep my anxiety at bay. Be it the headstand (which I needed today after a long time) or the 10 wall assisted handstands I practice every day. Karam karo.. phal ki chinta mat karo. Bas chinta door hi rakho #stayhome #staysafe #stayactive," she wrote.

On the work front, Mandira will soon be seen playing a cop in an upcoming murder mystery web series. It will also star Sid Makkar, Dipannita Sharma and Nauheed Cyrusi. The details of the series are under wraps, including the title.



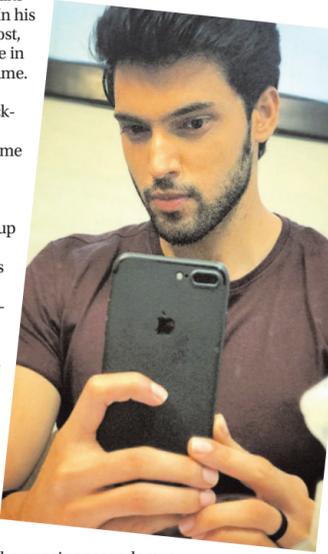
Parth Samthaan shows how to click a natural selfie

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Television star Parth Samthaan took out time on Tuesday to demonstrate for fans how to take a 100 per cent natural selfie sans make-up or use of filter. In his latest Instagram post, Parth strikes a pose in a tight-cropped frame. He is obviously at home owing to lockdown, and in the mood to try out some new angles for his cellphone camera lens.

"No filter/makeup selfie but yes my phone cover needs some make up," wrote Parth, alongside a photo that shows him trying to capture the perfect selfie in a black vest and flaunting a trimmed designer stubble. He tagged the image with #stayhome and #stayhealthy, as an appeal amidst the ongoing second wave of Covid-19.

Parth is known for his roles of Manik Malhotra in "Kaisi Yeh Yaariaan" and Anurag Basu in "Kasautii Zindagii Kay". His recent release is the action thriller web series "Mai Hero Boll Raha Hu".



Randeep Hooda pitches in to provide oxygen concentrators

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actor Randeep Hooda on Tuesday posted an Instagram video announcing that he has teamed up with an NGO to arrange oxygen concentrators. Randeep and the NGO, Khalsa Aid, aim to arrange at least 700 concentrators for the Covid-afflicted, at a time when oxygen is in short supply all over the country.

In the video post, Randeep stands displaying various placards that read slogans like "India needs Oxygen", "Every 4 minutes a person dies by Covid-19", "Crematoriums and burials are running out of space", and "You can save precious lives". He asked people to donate for the cause, and reiterated his appeal in the caption alongside the video.

"It's your chance to save lives! With India facing the worst of the pandemic, people are dying due to lack of oxygen. Let's come together to help the country fight #COVID and save precious lives. @khalsaaid_india is providing oxygen concentrators and we urge you to come forward and do your bit to help India breathe," Randeep wrote in the caption. On the work front, Randeep Hooda plays antagonist in the Eid release "Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai", starring Salman Khan and Disha Patani. The Prabhu Deva directorial is slated for a pay-per-view release digitally on May 13.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Pulkit Samrat has received his first dose of Covid-19 vaccine. On Wednesday afternoon, the actor posted a picture on Instagram that shows him getting the vaccine jab.

"#Jab We Met... This is our best form of defence. Be safe #Getvaccinated," Pulkit wrote, along with a vaccine emoji.

In the photo, actor is dressed in a black T-shirt and grey pants. For precautions, he is seen wearing a shield and face mask.

Pulkit has lately been working to get fit for his role in the upcoming film "Fukrey 3". He also features in the jungle adventure drama "Haathi Mere Saathi" alongside Rana Daggubati.



PULKIT SAMRAT GETS VACCINATED FOR COVID-19

How to choose the best sunscreen for your skin type

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Sunscreen is your best friend, whether you're stepping out shopping or going about your work and chores, it protects your skin from harmful UVA/UVB rays and pollution that cause damage in any and every season. Not only outdoors, sunscreens play a crucial role in protecting your skin while you are indoors from UVA rays which enter through standard glass windows and can penetrate deeper into the skin than UVB rays, becoming a contributing factor to photo-aging - which are changes seen as dark spots, wrinkles, and leathery textured skin. Broadly there are four types of skin and to choose the best sunscreen it's very important to know your skin type. This can be done by washing your face with the help of gentle cleanser. This will wash away the makeup, pollutants and other dirt. Wait for an hour and make sure that you do not touch your face. Your skin should return to its natural state which will help to determine the type of your skin. Take a tissue paper and dab your face. The area con-



sisting of your forehead and nose must be the place where you concentrate.

the perfect SPF Sunscreen for yourself. If you have dry skin, look for a sunscreen with a moisturiser or sunscreens that contain hydrating ingredients (ceramides or hyaluronic acid).

If you have oily skin type, creamy sunscreens can usually feel sticky and heavy. Opt in for water-based or a light-weight formula sunscreen which is considered ideal for oily skin type. If you're blessed with normal, uncomplicated skin, your choice is easy. Any high-quality sunscreen will work for you, whether spray, cream or stick. Along with the SPF factor it is equally important to look at the PA factor. SPF is a grade used to rate the level of UVB protection. The higher the number, the higher the UVB protection. PA is a grade used to rate the level of UVA protection. The more "+" symbols, the higher the UVA protection. Typical sunscreens offer protection from mostly UVB Rays. UVB Rays burn your skin while UVA rays cause skin aging and age spots when your skin is over-exposed. A broad spectrum sunscreen or a full spectrum sunscreen protects you from both.

lots of flakes and dead skin, then your skin is dry. You need to consider moisturizing your skin.

Now that you know your skin type, it's easy to choose

Normal Skin: If your skin shows no oil or no flaking and it feels smooth and supple, you have a normal skin type.

Oily Skin: If there is lots of grease on the tissue paper, then you have an oily skin type. It is common that you might have a shine and large pores.

Dry Skin: If the tissue paper is accompanied by

Now that you know your skin type, it's easy to choose





Britney Spears will 'not ask for her conservatorship to end'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Britney Spears will not ask for her conservatorship to end when she speaks in court next month. It was revealed last month that the Gimme More singer will address Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Brenda Penny on June 23, but insiders have stressed the 39-year-old star does not feel trapped in the agreement.

However, she wants to explain why she wants her father, Jamie Spears, removed from being in charge of her business affairs. 'She has 99% of the freedom she'd have if she weren't in a conservatorship, and the only thing she's prevented from doing are crazy things, like buying three



cars at a time [something she tried to do back in the day], a source told TMZ.

The insider pointed out that not only is Britney free to travel and lives her day-to-day life without any real restrictions but she is also aware of how out of control things were before the

arrangement was put in place in 2008 and is grateful for the structure the conservatorship gives her.

The source said: 'She's taken care of and she knows it.' Britney is happy with Jodi Montgomery being in charge of her personal affairs but doesn't want her dad in charge of her business arrangements as the pair no longer speak.



'It's never too late for dreams to come true': Leggy Martine

Los Angeles | Agencies

Martine McCutcheon revealed she has been signed by a modeling agency at the age of 44, after dreaming of the career since she was a child. The actress took to Instagram on Saturday to share the news that she had been signed by Elite Modeling Agency World, stating: 'It just goes to show how it's never too late for dreams to come true.'

She posted a series of beautiful snaps which saw her beaming from ear to ear and showcasing her enviable slender legs as she posed in a flowing burnt orange dress. The Love Actually star showed her versatility as a model, pictured wearing a range of different styles, including a loose-fitting camel-coloured suit and more casual jean looks.

During the shoot she showed off her large mesmerising smile which she has become synonymous with during her career but also pulled some more sultry poses.

Sharing the news, Martine said: 'I'm SO excited to announce that I've been signed to @elitemodworld. It's a dream come true! My 14 year old self would've died knowing this! I'm 45 next month and it just goes to show how it's never too late for dreams to come true and also that the world of fashion and modelling is evolving in the greatest of ways and embracing so many different women.'



'I'D HAVE ENDED UP WHERE I WAS AND IT'S SCARY': JESY NELSON

Los Angeles | Agencies

Jesy Nelson has discussed her departure from Little Mix in a candid new interview and voiced fears her mental health could have deteriorated to a fatal point. Gracing the cover of Cosmopolitan's June issue, the musician, 29, admitted she would have 'ended up back where I was five years ago' - following her suicide attempt - if she didn't leave the band and 'freed herself' last December.

The singer - who also confirmed she's making new music - reflected on feeling 'sad' during her 10-year stint with Leigh-Anne, Jade Thirlwall and Perrie Edwards, and revealed featuring in the video for Sweet Melody marked her 'breaking point'.

In 2019, Jesy bravely shared that she once tried to take her own life after years of relentless trolling, and went on to produce her award-winning BBC documentary, Jesy Nelson: Odd One Out, which detailed her struggles in the spotlight.

When asked about words which represent her during her time in the group and how she feels now, the songstress told the publication: 'In Little Mix: honest, hard-working, sad. [Now] Honest, content, free.'



Tiffany Haddish wants to adopt a child who is at least five

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Tiffany Haddish, who is in a relationship with rapper Common, is taking parenting classes to prepare her for adopting a child. She wants to be mother to a child who is at least five years old. 'I'm taking parenting classes now so I can adopt. I'm looking at (ages) five and up, really like seven. I want them to be able to use the restroom on their own and talk. I want them to know that I put in the work and I wanted them,' Haddish said on E!'s 'Daily Pop', reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The actress admitted it would be a miracle if she gets pregnant and has a biological child because she has "taken the precautions" to ensure that doesn't happen.

"Let me tell you, if I get pregnant that is all God tearing down all walls, all barriers. I have definitely taken the precautions to protect me. If that s*** happens, I'm going to hire some help, and I'm definitely going to cry a lot," she said.

She is also not interested in having a surrogate mother to carry her baby because she "gave up a bunch of eggs" for money when she was younger.



'2 Broke Girls' star Beth Behrs makes yoga her 40-day goal

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Beth Behrs, popular as Caroline Channing in the sitcom "2 Broke Girls", has been spending time practicing yoga going by her new Instagram boomerang clip on Wednesday, India time. She shared a clip featuring a burning candle and some incense sticks and wrote: "Day #2 #40daysof yoga". Beth had also shared a video performing a complicated yoga pose on Tuesday night, according to India time. She said: "Inspired by my dear friend @drtarasvart's advice to come to the #yoga mat every day -- even if it's 5 mins of lying down breathing. Making it a 40 day goal, so it'll become a habit! Who's with me?" Beth made her acting debut in 2009 with "American Pie Presents: The Book Of Love". She was then seen in projects such as "Chasing Eagle Rock" and "Hello, My Name Is Doris" among many others.

Oscar winner Asif Kapadia-backed Indian web series 'The Last Hour' to drop on May 14



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Oscar-winning filmmaker Asif Kapadia is an executive producer on the supernatural web series "The Last Hour" featuring Sanjay Kapoor, Raima Sen, and ShahanaGoswami. The series is written and produced by Amit Kumar and AnupamaMinz, and is all set to release on May 14. Set in a Himalayan town, the series explores the story of a shaman (healer), who joins a newly transferred cop to track down a mysterious killer.

"Amit and I share an interest in the supernatural, and he is particularly fascinated by the concept of playing with time. We wanted to create a series that was original, authentic and riveting. I am so excited to launch 'The Last Hour' to audiences across the world," said Kapadia, who bagged the Academy Award for the Best Documentary (Feature) in 2016, for his film "Amy".

Added Amit Kumar, who has also creative-produced the film with Kapadia: "Asif Kapadia and I have worked together since our film school days, and when the chance to collaborate on this idea came up, we grabbed it. Together with AnupamaMinz, my co-creator and co-writer, we have created a unique supernatural show."

The series also features Karma Takapa, Shaylee Krishen, Robin Tamang and MandakiniGoswami. "The Last Hour" releases on Amazon Prime Video.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Kendall Jenner





EDITOR'S SPECS

Why Government was careless?

The scientific community has stated that they had hinted to the Central government about the new variants of Covid-19 virus and also an increase in the cases in May this year. The community, however, did not make any prediction

THE COMMUNITY, HOWEVER, DID NOT MAKE ANY PREDICTION DUE TO LACK OF DATA ANALYSIS.

due to lack of data analysis. Dr. M. Vidyasagar, who is a professor at IIT (Hyderabad), stated that by

March 13 this year Covid cases were showing an upward trend but as they did not have requisite data available so they did not make any prediction. Vidyasagar further stated that after they hinted, the government said the authorities made long- and medium-term plans to short-term plans. Based on the events of the past few weeks, however, those plans seem to have been inadequate, said Vidyasagar citing the current crisis of oxygen supply across the country. The IIT Kanpur study in April also stated that the daily cases in the second wave will increase by May 8. The Kanpur study also predicted a peak of 38 to 44 lakh active cases between May 14 and May 18. The scientists also stated in March that they had alerted the government about the new and more contagious variant of the coronavirus -- SARS-CoV-2 Genetics Consortium, or INSACOG. The institution was set up by the government in December last year, specifically to detect genomic variants of the coronavirus. The institution examined 10 national laboratories across the country studying virus variants. The institution first detected B.1.617 as early as February. Ajay Parida, director of the state-run Institute of Life Sciences and a member of INSACOG, reportedly stated that they first detected B.1.617 in February and alerted the government. The Union Health Ministry's National Centre for Disease Control received the finding in March. The finding reportedly stated that the mutations, called E484Q and L452R, were of high concern. It stated E484Q mutant viruses escaping highly neutralising antibodies in cultures, and L452R mutation was responsible for both increased transmissibility and immune escape. The mutated versions of the virus could more easily enter a human cell and counter a person's immune response to it, according to the findings. The ministry put the findings in public domain in March stating that 'more problematic variants required following measures already underway'.

Clean energy demand for critical minerals set to soar: IEA

Supplies of critical minerals essential for key clean energy technologies like electric vehicles need to pick up sharply over the coming decades to meet the world's climate goals, creating potential energy security hazards that governments must act now to address, a new report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Wednesday. The special report, The Role of Critical Minerals in Clean Energy Transitions, is the most comprehensive global study to date on the central importance of minerals such as copper, lithium, nickel, cobalt and rare earth elements in a secure and rapid transformation of the global energy sector. Building on the IEA's longstanding leadership role in energy security, the report recommends six key areas of action for policy makers to ensure that critical minerals enable an accelerated transition to clean energy rather than becoming a bottleneck. "Today, the data shows a looming mismatch between the world's strengthened climate ambitions and the availability of critical minerals that are essential to realising those ambitions," said IEA Executive Director Fatih

Birol. "The challenges are not insurmountable, but governments must give clear signals about how they plan to turn their climate pledges into action. By acting now and acting together, they can significantly reduce the risks of price volatility and supply disruptions." "Left unaddressed, these potential vulnerabilities could make global progress towards a clean energy future slower and more costly -- and therefore hamper international efforts to tackle climate change," Birol said. "This is what energy security looks like in the 21st century, and the IEA is fully committed to helping governments ensure that these hazards don't derail the global drive to accelerate energy transitions." The special report, part of the IEA's flagship World Energy Outlook series, underscores that the mineral requirements of an energy system powered by clean energy technologies differ profoundly from one that runs on fossil fuels. A typical electric car requires six times the mineral inputs of a conventional car, and an onshore wind plant requires nine times more mineral resources than a similarly sized gas-fired power plant.

COVID EMERGENCY: WE SHOULD GO BACK TO THE DISTRICTS

D.C. PATHAK

India is in great distress because of the 'killer' second wave of Covid and people are shaken up with the fear of the unknown amidst a crumbling medical infrastructure -- witnessing deaths in large numbers for lack of oxygen and hospital beds. While the elected political executive governing the Centre and the states is under scrutiny for not taking certain policy measures in time to cope up with the pandemic, there has to be some questioning directed also at the administrative machinery of the states in the matter of implementing the guidelines of the Centre on the health emergency.

Leadership of the Civil Services advises the policy makers and also coordinates implementation of the Government's decisions. The matter of whether inputs provided by it to the political masters were duly considered, cannot be easily fathomed but it can be rationally believed that 'wise counsels' would be rarely disregarded. In the context of the corona pandemic, it is logical that the health experts would receive prime attention but this would not be considered as something happening outside of the system led by the top bureaucracy.

In the final analysis, therefore, the fact that there were major roadblocks in the implementation of the policy decisions taken in regard to the production, transportation and distribution on the ground of all resources vital for the handling of the crisis, calls for a quick examination for corrective actions -- both punitive as well as those meant for augmentation. This national level challenge is of long range and it is never too late to make up for the shortcomings and shortages revealed so far -- a lasting plan of action it is hoped will be framed expeditiously.

Traditionally it is the Cabinet Secretary, the topmost bureaucrat of the Government of India dealing with state governments, who provides the administrative umbrella under which all lines of flow of vital data from the states -- these would cut across the ministries handling different subjects -- and channels of directions going down to authorities on the ground, would operate. Both Cabinet Secretary and Home Secretary, who administered the National Disaster Management Act, are the top leaders of the IAS, the famed Civil Service of India and they realised that the district administration headed by the DM-SP duo



was best placed to implement a national plan in its jurisdiction since these officials on the ground were also in seamless communication with the Centre and the State headquarters on all matters of national importance.

The young IAS and IPS officers manning the district are the natural nodal points for both sending up information of the district and executing a directive in their area. The DM has senior officers looking after health, education and public distribution in the district and it would be possible for him or her to send up in quick time a map of the district showing the number of hospitals big or small with bed capacity, quantity of oxygen cylinders in the district with production potential if any and the location of vaccination centres there. Logistics of despatch of emergency supplies would be smoothened by this first step since even airlifts could be considered for rushing the supplies to state or divisional headquarters for onward movement by road to the needy districts. There is no establishment big or small, in public or private sector, which would not give correct information to the DM in public interest. The SP would step in to prevent smuggling or black marketing of essential supplies and keep the crime situation under control -- the corona pandemic has enlarged the incidence of local crime because of 'restrictions' and the 'desperation' of the people in economic distress. As a policy of governance, India needs to go back to the districts -- there is no politics involved in this.

A second revelation in this crisis has been of the cumulative malady of lack of accountability of the heads of any public service establishments existing closer to the people. It is seen that the crisis in a hospital -- which happened to be part of a big chain -- was being explained by the chairman of that business enterprise and not by the superintendent or the CEO of

that individual centre. Decentralisation of accountability cannot go with centralisation of decision making -- what happened at the hospital front was rooted in the deadly combination of profiteering and internal corruption, reflected in the stories of ward boys arranging oxygen cylinders from the back door, and lack of fear of punishment. All through the ongoing national crisis not one wrongdoer at any level has been hauled up which itself is a commentary on governance. The nation must inculcate the psyche amongst the heads of establishments and enterprises that they were to govern them in an autonomous but transparent mode -- be it a university, a hospital, a public distribution centre, an employment bureau or a licensing authority. Oversight of the district administration is extremely important in ensuring that this happened.

Finally, a learning for the present as also for the future is that we must be aware of the new expectations the pandemic has created in the public mind about the performance of our law and order authorities. A health disaster is a national concern and it is testing the fundamental role of the police of helping the distressed and coming down hard on law breakers who were exploiting the situation for personal benefits. High-handed treatment of hospital staff towards an ordinary patient to favour somebody else -- all within the knowledge of the local police -- recovery of hoarded oxygen cylinders and vaccines without any arrests in the follow-up and harassment of vendors by the constabulary during the restrictions, could produce a multiplier effect in generating an anti-police environ. Pressing into use police resources for helping the desperate citizens would go a long way in correcting that situation. The police machinery may also have to remain prepared for anticipating any mass protests or resort to public

violence by some desperate people in the event of the present crisis getting prolonged beyond a point. The pandemic highlights the people's expectations of a constructive role of the police as a guardian of the society.

In a bid to mop up every resource for handling the unprecedented corona crisis, the Government of India has moved to tap the Army's known efficacy for taking up a challenge -- even in the civilian sector -- and given special financial powers to the Commanders to manage hospitals, oxygen manufacturing plants and logistic issues. This is being done as the civilian machinery is overwhelmed by the demands of the pandemic. The army is used to coming in aid of the civil administration in countering manmade threats like terrorism and it is not abnormal that it has been invited to step in for handling a natural disaster like the corona emergency.

The learning from this is that the nation must, while emphasising on the creation of infrastructure, get on with the business of building adequate medical infrastructure as well -- with private partnership wherever possible -- and generate jobs for medical and paramedical trainees. In this country there will always be a demand for hospitals and nursing homes and these will be financially self-sufficient, even though they might not generate 'business like' profits. The policy framework for India has to be a healthy mix of 'free market' and 'welfare' approach. The pandemic has witnessed the political will of the leadership to take major decisions without losing time but it has certainly exposed the limitations of the machinery of execution down the line in coping up with a national challenge of this magnitude. The pandemic has tested decision making, coordination and delivery and has brought lessons to the government and the people alike on their respective share of responsibility in producing an integral non-political response to a national crisis. And yes, let me commend as a man of science that everybody must drink enough water because water is hydrogenated oxygen that reaches the cell through osmosis, jacking up the oxygen level and take to deep breathing with emphasis on exhalation (to throw out carbon dioxide) that directly improves the access of oxygen to lungs. The moral of the story is that every citizen, not the government alone, has to contribute to the fight against the virus.

(The writer is a former Director Intelligence Bureau)

In a Kashmir lockdown, home doesn't translate into a safe place: Farah Bashir

Sukant Deepak

Author Farah Bashir, whose debut novel *½ Rumours of Spring - A Girlhood in Kashmir* (HarperCollins) hit the stands recently, which looks at her years between 1989 to 1994 spent in the valley, says, "The Kashmir conflict, as we know it, has always been reduced to binaries, so it became imperative to de-saturate home from all kinds of significance and see it as an ordinary home and the losses it suffered."

The first chapter of the book -- *½ The Day I Was Dead* documents the metamorphic hour in 1989 which changed the face of Kashmir as its residents knew it. "But even before that, I do recall endless periods of curfew during the rigging of elections in the late 80s."

A freelance consultant now, who spends time between the valley and where her work takes her, the author says that it was an intentional decision to look at everything through teenage years. "I borrowed a lot of courage and resilience from my teenage-self and it became important to examine the kind of circumstances from then."

Adding that it was important to revisit how women and children who survive wars grow up, and what kind of scars and joys inform their lives, she says that women, when threatened by external circumstances have very different coping strategies. "Looking back at those memories helped me understand and write about them. As our land and lives continue to be transformed fundamentally by a pitiless conflict, as the arc of the moral universe doesn't seem to bend toward justice, remembering and processing the 1990s, the crucial years of my adolescence became necessary."

For her, as a teenage girl, growing up in a conflict-stricken territory happened to be a dual struggle: To make sense of the militarisation of domestic spaces and to learn new social etiquette -- informed by war -- to navigate life. The first literary work on that period (early 1990s) to come out of Kashmir written by a woman, out of 36 chapters, nine are about the author's childhood while fourteen are about other women associated with her. "Be it a sixty-year-old aunt of mine whose home was

When she sent a picture of brooding girl, sitting atop a shikara, to Times square, one of her editors commented that it looked too grim to be sent where it would be flashed a few thousand times its original size. Working for an international news agency in Singapore, that was the moment she knew that it was important to do something that would represent her people. A year later, in 2008, she quit her job and began to write.



burnt down post an encounter and she developed a habit of saluting the paramilitary during their evening patrol or my six year old cousin and her coping mechanism during night patrols on the lake by the paramilitary *½* and how war impacted them."

Stressing that the book is not about it not only about documenting the conflict as it revolves around the transformation of a young girl into a young woman which coincides with the transformation of Kashmir as the war grinds on, the author says, "The memoir captures the juxtapositions of combat by an

ordinary Kashmiri girl and her ways to try and live a normal life, escaping war briefly in her mind by writing her first love letter, imagining an ordinary future during prolonged periods of curfew, and her listening and dancing to songs from banned radio stations."

Ask her if the lockdown post the abolition of Article 370 reminded her of the *½* curfewed days' in the 90's, and she asserts that the fundamental difference between a lockdown in Kashmir and elsewhere is that home does not necessarily and naturally translate into a safe space in Kashmir. "Everywhere else,

being at home means taking refuge from unimaginable horrors. As I write in the book, in Kashmir, stray bullets find their way into the homes, as it happened to a friend of mine whose asthmatic grandmother was killed while opening a window. Another friend's father was assassinated inside their home. Tear gas or PAVA (synthetic pepper spray) sprayed in the air enters homes choking you, making it painful to breathe. The two are incomparable," says Bashir who is currently working on a group portrait of women spanning across a decade.



UNGA PRESIDENT SAYS KASHMIR STATUS SHOULD NOT BE CHANGED; ACKNOWLEDGES SIMLA PACT

United Nations | Agencies

General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir has said that the status of Jammu and Kashmir should not be changed while acknowledging the 1972 Simla Agreement between India and Pakistan making it a bilateral issue.

"I call on all parties to refrain from taking steps that could affect the status of Jammu and Kashmir," he said at a news conference here on Tuesday.

"I support dialogue and diplomacy, and I encourage both Pakistan and India, neighbours, to resolve this dispute through peaceful means," he said.

While answering a reporter's question about Kashmir, he said that he would repeat the statement he made last August about it at a news conference when he visited Pakistan as the president-elect.

He recalled that he had said, "The position of the United Nations on Jammu and Kashmir is governed by the UN Charter and applicable Security Council resolutions. And I also recall India and Pakistan's Simla Agreement of 1972, which states that the final status of



Jammu and Kashmir is to be settled by peaceful means in accordance with the UN Charter.

"So there again, I mentioned that I call on all parties to refrain from taking steps that could affect the status of Jammu and Kashmir."

In the Simla agreement signed in the aftermath of the Bangladesh War by

Indira Gandhi, who was the prime minister of India, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who at that time held the post of president of Pakistan, they agreed that their countries would resolve disputes bilaterally, thus ruling out third party intervention.

The Security Council's Resolution 47 adopted in 1948 requires Pakistan to withdraw its personnel and nationals from Kashmir.

Bozkir did not mention either country but asked "all parties" to refrain from changing the status of Kashmir.

While India abrogated in 2019 the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution giving Kashmir a special status, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan announced last year that he would make the Gilgit-Baltistan area of Jammu and Kashmir under its occupation a province of Pakistan.

Bozkir said that he was postponing a visit to India that had been scheduled as part of his trip to South Asia because of the COVID-19 surge -- and would visit Pakistan and Bangladesh as planned.

"But I will absolutely make sure that I'll go to India as well," he said.

5 KILLED IN PRESCHOOL ATTACK IN BRAZIL

Rio de Janeiro: An 18-year-old man wielding a sharp object forced his way into a preschool in southern Brazil and killed three children and two caregivers.

Another child was injured in the attack on the Aquarela preschool in the town of Saudades, military police spokesperson Major Rafael Antonio da Silva told dpa from the state of Santa Catarina. It was initially thought that two children had died, but the Saudades Mayor Maciel Schneider, confirmed a third death in comments to Brazilian television. "This is the saddest day in our history," Schneider said. "We don't really know how to act now. This is my first term in office, I'm 35 years old, I have a small child." Local Education Secretary Gisela Hermann called it a "scene of horror," in comments to news site G1. A witness said caregivers hid the children in the changing room and locked the door. Police searched his home, including his computer.

Nepal's Oli government slips in minority

Kathmandu | Agencies

The KP Sharma Oli-led government in Nepal has slipped in the minority after the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) withdrew its support to the government. With this Maoist's decision, the Oli government has been reduced into a minority who is going to test the floor on May 10.

Maoist's decision comes days before Prime Minister Oli had decided to seek a vote of trust from Parliament on May 10.

Through the vote of confidence, Oli will try to prolong his stay while the Opposition will try to unseat him who are now struggling to get required magic numbers to remove him.

Opposition party leaders say the talks between primary opposition, Nepali Congress, Maoist Center and a faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party, the fourth largest party in the House, is going on at various levels to form a coalition government after unseating Oli. After Maoist withdrawal the support, Oli has to garner majority vote or continue as Prime Minister as the leader of the largest party until opposition parties unseat him. Oli is negotiating with a faction of Janata Samajbadi Party to continue in power that has 32 seats in the parliament. Opposition parties are also frequently meeting to



secure the number to unseat Oli but still they are struggling. A section of the leaders inside Oli's Nepal Communist Party (UML) is likely to support the opposition's bid but no decision has been made yet. Chief Whip of the party, Dev Gurung on Wednesday submitted a letter at parliament secretariat regarding the party's decision to withdraw support to the Oli government. A Standing Committee meeting of the Maoist Center on Tuesday decided to withdraw support to the Oli government extended in April, 2018. In the letter, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda accused Oli for violating constitutional norms, didn't reign from the post even after the Supreme Court invalidated his decision to dissolve the house and continuously tempering the system, democratic norms and values and prompted regression in the country.

Popular Party wins by landslide in Madrid regional polls

The centre-right Popular Party (PP) won the elections of the Autonomous Community of Madrid with 65 seats, more than doubling the seats it won in the 2019 elections.

Madrid | Agencies

Falling short of an absolute majority, the PP's candidate and Madrid's Regional President Isabel Diaz Ayuso will be able to form a government with the help of other parties, with the far-right VOX seen as a most likely partner, Xinhua reported.

The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party from the center left led by candidate Angel Gabilondo won 24 seats, a loss of 13 seats compared to 2019, while the leftist Mas Madrid with candidate Monica Garcia managed to add four more seats, moving from 20 to 24 seats. VOX, which added one more seat compared to the 2019 elections, obtained 13 seats, followed in fifth place by United We Can led by former Deputy Prime Minister Pablo Iglesias, who obtained 10 seats and 7.28 per cent of the votes. As indicated by polls, the



centre-right Ciudadanos, which had been running the Madrid region together with the PP, has disappeared from the Madrid Assembly, as its seats were slashed from 19.4 per cent of the votes in 2019 to only 3.52 per cent this year, falling short of the 5 percent threshold to enter the Assembly.

The turnout was a historic 80 percent, 16 points above the 2019 elections.

Isabel Diaz Ayuso, since 2019 president of the Autonomous Community of Madrid, dismissed on March 10 the six advisers of the Citizens party in her government, ordered the dissolution of the Madrid Assembly and called elections for May 4 with the objective of stopping the threat of being evicted from power.

TRUMP LAUNCHES HIS OWN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM AS WORDPRESS BLOG

San Francisco: Banned on Facebook and Twitter, former US President Donald Trump has launched a new so-called social media platform, which is actually just a WordPress blog on his own website. His followers can sign up for posts alerts on the platforms via their email and phone numbers. The new platform is designed like a generic version of Twitter but is hosted as a running blog. A Twitter spokesperson told The Verge on Tuesday that "Generally, sharing content from the website reference is permitted as long as the material does not otherwise the Twitter Rules".

Trump has posted content dating back to March 24 on the new 'platform'. The latest post is a video advertising his new platform, calling it "a place to speak freely and safely, straight from the desk of Donald J. Trump." The platform appears to have been built by Campaign Nucleus, a digital services company founded by Trump's former campaign manager Brad Parscale. The Trump's 'platform' went live just ahead of ruling by the independent Oversight Board on the ban concerning Trump, who was banned on Facebook following the Capitol attack on January 6. On January 21, the Oversight Board accepted a case referral from Facebook to examine its decision to indefinitely suspend Trump's access to post content on Facebook and Instagram, as well as provide policy recommendations on suspensions when the user is a political leader.



Biden hopes to meet Putin during Europe trip in June

Washington | Agencies

US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he expects to hold a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin during his trip to Europe in June.

"That is my hope and expectation. We are working on it," Biden told reporters when asked if he plans to meet Putin during his upcoming trip to Europe, the first overseas visit since he took office in January.

Biden will attend the Group of Seven (G7) Summit in Cornwall, Britain from June 11 to 13, and hold bilateral meetings with leaders of G7 members. He will then travel to Brussels, Belgium to participate in the NATO Summit on June 14, the



Xinhua news agency reported. Biden had proposed a summit with Putin in Europe this summer to address a range of bilateral issues. US media reported earlier that the White House is hammering out the details of the summit.

Relations between Washington and Moscow have been adversarial in recent years. The two were bitterly divided over Ukraine and cybersecurity issues, and they mutually accused the other of domestic political interference.

Indian in UAE to produce O2 cylinders instead of CNG to aid patients back home

Dubai | Agencies

An Indian expat at a UAE-based free zone firm has set aside producing Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) cylinders and shifted to manufacturing oxygen containers for India to help out the Covid patients in the country.

Speaking to Gulf News, Pushkar Khurana, Managing Director of the company EKC International FZE, said, "We are an Indian subsidiary and as soon as we came to know about the oxygen cylinder shortage in India, we had to rise to the call of our nation and serve the needs of our country."

Khurana said that since March, they have been exporting these cylinders in multiple containers to Port Mundra in India's Gujarat state.

"We make the cylinders which are then filled with medical oxygen by Gulf-based industrial gas companies such as Emirates Industrial Gases Company (EIGC) and Gulf Cryo, and these are shipped to Port Mundra. Each container that is shipped



contains about 350 cylinders of 50 litre capacity."

In March and April, the company shipped about 6,000 oxygen cylinders and in May the number is likely to go up to 7,000.

Khurana said, "The lives of people suffering from COVID-19 are important. We look at this as a critical or emergency duty and will continue to produce oxygen cylinders for as long as India needs them. The Adani Group from Gujarat reached out to us and we immediately adapted the production to manufacturing oxygen cylinders which have a slightly different specification than CNG cylinders."

K.N. Kutty, sales manager of the company, a subsidiary of Everest Kanto Cylinder Limited in India, said the UAE unit has been producing CNG cylinders for Natural Gas Vehicles (NGV) as well as industrial cylinders since 2002. "Over 99.9 per cent of the production is exported to Latin American countries, Mexico, USA, Egypt and some parts of South East Asia."

Global Covid-19 caseload tops 153.9 mn

Washington | Agencies

The overall global Covid-19 caseload has topped 153.9 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 3.22 million, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Wednesday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and death toll stood at 153,953,421 and 3,223,436, respectively.

The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 32,510,922 and 578,407, respectively, according to the CSSE.

In terms of infections, India follows in the second place with 20,282,833 cases. The other countries with

more than two million confirmed coronavirus cases are Brazil (14,856,888), France (5,741,537), Turkey (4,929,118), Russia (4,784,497), the UK (4,439,485), Italy (4,059,821), Spain (3,544,945), Germany (3,450,663), Argentina (3,047,417), Colombia (2,919,805), Poland (2,808,052), Iran (2,575,737), Mexico (2,352,964) and Ukraine (2,143,427), the CSSE figures showed. In terms of deaths, Brazil comes second with 411,588 fatalities. Nations with a death toll of over 50,000 are India (222,408), Mexico (217,740), the UK (127,803), Italy (121,738), Russia (109,670), France (105,548), Germany (83,711), Spain (78,399), Colombia (75,627), Iran (73,219), Poland (68,133), Argentina (65,202), Peru (62,674) and South Africa (54,511).

US 'doing a lot for India' to meet COVID crisis: Biden

India came to our assistance early on in our hour of need when we were having real struggles with COVID-19, providing millions and millions, for example, of protective masks. We remember that, and we're determined to do everything we can to help now

New York | Agencies

President Joe Biden has said that the US was "doing a lot for India" by sending it oxygen and materials to make anti-COVID-19 vaccines.

He said on Tuesday that he had spoken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and "what he needs most is, he needs the material and the parts to be able to have his machines that can make the vaccine work. We're sending them that." "We're sending them a lot of the precursors," he added, referring to the ingredients needed for making the vaccines.

He said the US was also sending oxygen, which is in short supply in the nation in the throes of a COVID-19 resurgence.

"We're helping India significantly," he said. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has acknowledged assistance last year from India when the US was facing its deep crisis while speaking of the aid the US is now sending it.

"India came to our assistance early on in our hour of need when we were having real struggles with COVID-19, providing millions and millions, for example, of protective masks. We remember that, and we're determined to do everything we can to help now," he told the Financial Express according to the interview transcript provided by the State Department.

He said, "What I've seen really is an amazing mobilisation not just of the United States government, but of our private sector, and of Indian Americans as well. I was on a call a week ago with virtually every leading CEO -- it was a who's who -- all

wanting to help. And the government, our government, is coordinating those efforts. So we are doing everything we can."



Biden's Spokesperson Jen Psaki, who gave a rundown of the assistance to India, said that the US government was sending ingredients for making 20 million doses AstraZeneca (Covishield) vaccine from supplies that it had ordered. These were ingredients had been ordered on a priority basis by invoking the Defence Production Act to supply to companies under contract to make vaccines for it.

The US is unlikely to need the 300 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine that it had contracted because it has adequate supplies of the Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson vaccines. She said that the total value of the COVID-19 aid will exceed \$100 million.

Psaki said that six air shipments funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) with oxygen and oxygen supplies, N95 masks, rapid diagnostic tests, medicines and components requested by the Indian government have already been sent.

"At the request of the government of India, USAID provided these urgently needed supplies to the Indian Red Cross to ensure they reach those most in need as quickly as possible," she said. India is in dire need of oxygen and USAID sent about 1,500 oxygen cylinders that will remain in India and can repeatedly be refilled locally, 550 concentrators to obtain oxygen from ambient air and a large-scale unit to support up to 20 patients, she said.

She said that 2.5 million N95 masks have been sent and an additional 12.5 million are available if the Indian government asked for them, she said. One million rapid diagnostic tests and 20,000 treatment courses of the anti-viral drug Remdesivir have also been sent, she said.



NOCs GIVEN TO FOUR INDIAN WOMEN CRICKETERS FOR THE HUNDRED

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Four Indian women cricketers -- Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana, Jemimah Rodrigues, and Deepti Sharma -- have been granted No Objection Certificates (NOCs) by the Indian cricket board to participate in the inaugural Hundred, an eight-team tournament scheduled to start in England on July 21.

The four were part of the Indian contingent competing in the now-defunct Kia Super League (KSL), the England and Wales Cricket Board's (ECB) domestic T20 competition that made way for the Women's Hundred.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has sent the NOCs to the ECB and the official announcement regarding the four contracted players comprising the Indian contingent is likely to be made by the teams soon, according to espn.cricinfo.com.

The four cricketers, who are accompanying the India team on the tour of England to play a one-off Test, three ODIs and an equal number of T20Is, will extend their stay in the UK following the completion of their national duty on July 15 and then compete in the Hundred.

The Hundred organisers have made 20 of the 24 overseas signings, with Southern Brave, London Spirit, Manchester Originals and



Northern Superchargers still to fill one vacant slot apiece.

The Hundred, which was postponed last year due to Covid-19, will kick off with the contest between the Oval Invincibles and Manchester Originals in London, before their respective

men's sides meet the following day.

Some of the big overseas players in the tournament include Sophie Devine (Birmingham Phoenix), Deandra Dottin (London Spirit), Marizanne Kapp (Oval Invincibles), and Meg Lanning (Welsh Fire).

BCCI to move Aus players to SL, Maldives: CA



Sydney | Agencies

The Indian cricket board (BCCI) is looking to move Australian players involved in the postponed 2021 Indian Premier League (IPL) to Sri Lanka and Maldives before sending them home, Cricket Australia CEO Nick Hockley said on Wednesday.

"What the BCCI is working to do is to move the entire cohort out of India where they will wait until it's possible to return to Australia," Hockley told reporters in a press-conference Sydney. "The BCCI has been working on a range of options. That's now narrowed down

to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. The BCCI is committed not only to the first move but also to putting on a charter to bring them back to Australia," he further said.

Australia has placed a strict ban on travel from India, which is ravaged by the second wave of Covid-19, until May 15, stranding Australian players in India after the IPL was postponed on Tuesday.

The tournament, which was being held amid the healthcare crisis caused by the pandemic in India, was postponed after multiple positive cases came up within the bio-bubble in Ahmedabad and New Delhi.

SRI LANKA ALL SET FOR THREE-MATCH ODI SERIES IN BANGLADESH

Colombo | Agencies

Fresh from their 1-0 victory over Bangladesh in the two-match Test series, the Sri Lankan cricket team will play three One-day International (ODI) matches during their tour of Bangladesh starting May 16.

The team, which will arrive in Dhaka on May 16, will complete three days of hard quarantine, followed by its first training session to be held at the National Cricket Academy ground in Mirpur on May 19.

The visitors will then play an 'intra-squad' practice game at the Bangladesh Krira Shiksha Protishtan (BKSP) ground in Savar on May 21, before playing their inaugural ODI -- a day/night



contest -- at the Sher-e-Bangladesh National Cricket Stadium (SBNCS), Mirpur on May 23. The other two ODIs, on May 25 and 28, will also be played at SBNCS.

Sri Lanka will become only the second foreign team since the Covid-19 pandemic

ravaged the world to arrive in Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had hosted the West Indies team in January-February this year for a two-Test and three-match ODI series in Dhaka and Chattogram.

Madrid Open: Thiem eases past qualifier Giron

Madrid | Agencies

Austrian third seed Dominic Thiem needed less than an hour to brush past American qualifier Marcos Giron 6-1, 6-3, while Matteo Berrettini won against his fellow Italian Fabio Fognini 6-3, 6-4. Meanwhile, world number seven Andrey Rublev had to work hard on his Madrid Open debut on Tuesday before booking a place in the third round with a 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-4 win over Tommy Paul, Xinhua reports. Rublev had problems adapting to the speed on the ball on the Madrid clay, where conditions are made a bit harder by the altitude of the Spanish capital, but is on track to continue his record of reaching at least the quarterfinals of every tournament he has played in all season. In the first round, No. 9 Roberto Bautista Agut needed three sets before edging past Marco Cecchinato 6-2, 6-7(3), 7-5, and 11th seed Denis Shapovalov beat Dusan Lajovic 6-1, 6-3. Qualifier Federico Dabonico produced a sur-



prise by knocking out Spanish No. 10 seed, Pablo Carreno Busta, coming back from a set down to win 3-6, 6-4, 6-3. In the women's tournament, No. 3 seed and two-time winner Simone Halep lost 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 to Elise Mertens to crash out of Madrid before the quarterfinals for the first time since 2015. The Romanian struggled to find her game throughout the match, and ultimately 48 unforced errors were the difference in a close match. "She played really well, and she definitely deserved to win because she was stronger in the end. I cannot say I played bad, but I did some mistakes, important mistakes. Sometimes it's just a little bit and the match is going away," said Halep after the match. Mertens will play No. 5 seed Aryna Sabalenka in the last eight in a clash between two players who have been doubles partners in the past. Sabalenka needed only 52 minutes to power past Jessica Pegula 6-1, 6-2. No. 11 seed Jennifer Brady failed to make it through after losing a marathon match 7-5, 6-7 (8), 6-3.

JUST DON'T SEE GAP IN CALENDAR FOR IPL TO BE RESCHEDULED: ATHERTON

London: Former England captain Mike Atherton said that while a lot of people would want the Indian Premier League (IPL) to be held at some point considering the revenue it brings to global cricket, he can't see when it can be rescheduled to. "I just don't see where the gap (in the schedule) is. India come to England for five Test matches in the summer -- and that ends around mid-September. Then the T20 World Cup, which is supposed to be in India -- but who knows, they may have to move that tournament to the UAE -- takes place in mid-October," Atherton told Sky Sports.

"There is maybe a gap there, but all countries will already have their pre-T20 World Cup preparations baked in now -- England are due to go to Bangladesh and Pakistan, for example -- and you're also asking India's players, who have spent long, long periods inside these bubbles, and then asking them to spend more time in one, it seems hard to me," he said.

Atherton said that any argument for holding the IPL would have become unacceptable when Covid-19 cases started emerging within the bio-bubble. "It became inevitable once the Covid cases got inside the franchises' bubbles -- three or four franchises had to go into quarantine or isolation -- and, once that happened, the tournament became impossible really," he said. "Up until that point, they could make an argument that in a pretty horrendous time for India, the IPL was providing a bit of daily respite for people to watch in the evening. That argument held water, just about, but it didn't once the bubbles were breached," said Atherton.

Nepal's Bhurtel nominated for ICC Player of the Month award



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Nepal's Kushal Bhurtel will be competing with Pakistan stars Babar Azam and Fakhar Zaman for the International Cricket Council's (ICC) Player of the Month award for April. Bhurtel, 24, became the first player to score three consecutive half-centuries in

T20 Internationals.

He helped Nepal win their recent tri-series against Netherlands and Malaysia, finishing the series as the highest scorer with 278 runs at an average of 69.50.

He scored 62, 61 and 62 in the first three matches of the series, which were also his first three matches in T20Is. Zaman scored a total of 302 runs at

100.66, with a strike rate of 111.43 in the three ODIs against South Africa. In that series, he scored two centuries, including an inspired knock of 193 in the second ODI. His two centuries enabled him to jump to a career-best seventh position in the ICC ODI batsmen's rankings.

Pakistan captain Azam managed scores of 103 and 94 in three ODIs against South Africa, which won him two Player of the Match awards, as Pakistan won the series. His performances helped him move ahead of Virat Kohli as the No. 1-ranked ODI batsman, becoming the fourth Pakistani player to do so after Zaheer Abbas, Javed Miandad, and Mohammad Yousuf.

Azam also played seven T20Is in April, four against South Africa and three against Zimbabwe, scoring a total of 305 runs at 43.75 with a strike rate of 126.55 with two half-centuries and a 59-ball 122 at the centurion. Among the highlights was a 197-run partnership with Mohammad Rizwan, the highest partnership in a T20I run chase.

Despite injury, lifter Lalrinnunga aiming for Olympic berth

Aizawl | Agencies

Teenaged Indian weightlifter Jeremy Lalrinnunga will look to secure an Olympic Games berth in 67kg category when the 2021 junior World Championships, the last qualification event, is held in Tashkent from May 21 to 31.

Weightlifting qualification for the Tokyo Olympics is based on world rankings, and Lalrinnunga is placed 26th in his weight class. To qualify for the Olympics, he needs to do better than South Korea's Myeongmok Han, who is placed 20th. Even though doctors have advised the 18-year-old to not stress his injured knee too much, the young weightlifter is pushing hard to better his personal best of 306kgs (140kg in snatch and 166kg in clean and jerk).

The Mizoram lifter, who became India's first Youth Olympics gold medalist in 2018, needs to lift at least 310kgs at the Tashkent tournament to have any chance of usurping the South Korean lifter in the 'Gold Level' ranking event. Another major hurdle for the lifter is a knee injury he suffered during the Asian



Championships in Tashkent last month. Due to the injury, Lalrinnunga's performance suffered and he finished eighth. Lalrinnunga has undergone an MRI scan and doctors have advised him not to put pressure on his knees. But Lalrinnunga, who is training at National Institute of Sport (NIS), Patiala, is hopeful of full recovery.

"I am focusing more on strengthening right now. I have started doing light

training with the world event around the corner. I still have more than a fortnight to recover. I hope to compete in the Uzbekistan event and earn requisite ranking points," the Olympic channel quoted Lalrinnunga as saying. India's woman weightlifter Mirabai Chanu, who won bronze at the Asian Championships last month, has all but secured her Olympic spot in the 49kg category.

City reach maiden Champions League final with 4-1 win over PSG



Manchester | Agencies

Manchester City qualified for their first ever Champions League final after Riyad Mahrez's double ensured a 4-1 aggregate win over Paris Saint-Germain in the second leg of the semi-final.

Mahrez's goals either side of half-time secured a 2-0 victory after his free kick last week earned City a 2-1 win in Paris against last season's beaten finalists, DPA reports.

Angel Di Maria was later sent off for lashing out at birthday boy Fernando to end any slim chance PSG had of a comeback.

City could meet Premier League rivals Chelsea or 13-time record winners Real Madrid in the Istanbul final on May 29. The second semi-final concludes in London on Wednesday with the teams tied at 1-1.

The victory means City could complete a treble of Champions League, Premier League and League Cup titles this season but it was Chelsea who ended their quadruple dream in the FA Cup semi-final.

"We didn't have a very good first half, but we scored the goal," Mahrez told BT Sport. "In the second half we played very good and could have scored more. They lost their nerves and started kicking us. After the red card it was more comfortable for us."

"We have a game on Saturday we have to win to be [domestic] champions, and then we can concentrate on the final." It also ends a four-year semi-final losing streak in European elite competition for manager Pep Guardiola, who led Barcelona to Champions League titles in 2009 and 2011. PSG had Kylian Mbappe in their squad after he picked up an injury in the first leg but left him on the bench

to initially peer at torrential rain, sleet and hail from the stand. That he was not used even in desperation suggests he was not fully fit.

The guests, who had previously won first leg ties at Barcelona and holders Bayern Munich, were busy early on and had a handball penalty correctly overturned when the ball hit Aleksandr Zinchenko's shoulder.

Zinchenko was involved in the 11th minute when goalkeeper Ederson sent him clear on the left and he found Kevin De Bruyne, whose shot was deflected.

The ball could have gone anywhere but fell perfectly for Mahrez to finish. "Of course, Ederson's long pass was planned," said Mahrez. "We know he is capable of putting the ball in the other goal and we work it all the time and today it worked."

In the 63rd minute De Bruyne, whose equalizer turned the tide of

the tie last week, was again crucial as he fed Phil Foden to cross for Mahrez to ram home at the back post.

That settled matters with PSG needing three goals to secure an unlikely comeback.

"We fought to the end. We can look each other in the eyes, having tried everything," said PSG midfielder Marco Verratti. "That's two years in a row we've reached the last four. We had a good run. I don't know what to say: we wanted to reach the final and we couldn't do it." Their best chances came straight after the opener when captain Marquinhos, who scored in the first leg, headed onto the bar.

Di Maria then shot wide with Ederson out of position following a sudden change of possession, but PSG struggled to create opportunities against a resolute City defence, who congratulated each other for almost every block and tackle.



RBI RELIEF: LIQUIDITY SUPPORT UNLEASHED TO SUPPRESS COVID TURBULENCE

India's Reserve Bank has initiated several liquidity boosting measures to combat economic turbulence unleashed by the resurgence of Covid-19.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In virtual address, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das announced a number of liquidity enhancement and targeted measures to ease the build of economic strain seen recently. "As in the recent past, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will continue to monitor the emerging situation and deploy all resources and instruments at its command in the service of the nation, especially for our citizens, business entities and institutions beleaguered by the second wave," he said.

"The devastating speed with which the virus affects different regions of the country has to be matched by swift-footed and wide-ranging actions that are calibrated, sequenced and well-timed so as reach out to various sections of society and business, right down to the smallest and the most vulnerable."

Accordingly, RBI will conduct the second purchase of G-Secs worth Rs 35,000 crore on May 20. "Domestic financial conditions remain easy on abundant and surplus system liquidity. The average daily net liquidity

absorption under the liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) was at Rs 5.8 lakh crore in April 2021," Das said.

"G-SAP has engendered a softening bias in G-sec yields which has continued since then... With system liquidity assured, the RBI is now focusing on increasingly channelising its liquidity operations to support growth impulses, especially at the grassroots level." "The first auction under G-SAP 1.0 was conducted on April 15, 2021 for a notified amount of Rs 25,000 crore. Besides, RBI announced a targeted on-tap liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore to set up Covid-related healthcare infra till March 31, 2022.

"Under the scheme, banks can provide fresh lending support to a wide range of entities including vaccine manufacturers; importers or suppliers of vaccines and priority medical devices; hospitals or dispensaries; pathology labs; manufactures and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators; importers of vaccines and Covid related drugs; logistics firms and also patients for treatment."

"Banks are being incentivised for quick delivery of credit under the scheme through extension of priority

sector classification to such lending up to March 31, 2022. These loans will continue to be classified under priority sector till repayment or maturity, whichever is earlier."

According to Das, banks may deliver these loans to borrowers directly or through intermediary financial entities regulated by the RBI.

"Banks are expected to create a Covid loan book under the scheme. By way of an additional incentive, such banks will be eligible to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of the Covid loan book with the RBI under the reverse repo window at a rate which is 25 bps lower than the repo rate or, termed in a different way, 40 bps higher than the reverse repo rate." Furthermore, the Reserve Bank will allow restructuring for borrowers with exposure of Rs 25 crore, who have not been beneficiaries of RBI's previous loan restructuring schemes. Additionally, in order to further incentivise inclusion of unbanked MSMEs into the banking system, the current exemption available for exposures up to Rs 25 lakh and for credit disbursed up to the fortnight ending October 1, 2021 is being

extended till December 31, 2021. Recently, in February 2021 banks were allowed to deduct credit disbursed to new MSME borrowers from their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL) for calculation of the cash reserve ratio (CRR).

In addition, lending by Small Finance Banks (SFBs) to Micro-Finance Institutions (MFIs) for on-lending has been classified as priority sector lending (PSL). "In view of the fresh challenges brought on by the pandemic and to address the emergent liquidity position of smaller MFIs, SFBs are now being permitted to reckon fresh lending to smaller MFIs for on-lending to individual borrowers as priority sector lending. This facility will be available up to March 31, 2022." As of now, India suffers from a massive spike in Covid-19 infections. The latest spike has brought in record number of patients, thereby, impeding healthcare infrastructure's ability to deal with the surge.

Consequently, the situation has forced state governments to implement local lockdowns and travel restrictions which have started to slowdown economic activity.

RBI announces 2nd round of loan restructuring for MSMEs, individuals

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India has announced another round of loan restructuring for MSMEs, small businesses and individuals with aggregate exposure of up to Rs 25 crore, who have not been beneficiaries of restructuring frameworks.

BI Governor Shaktikanta Das noted that the resurgence of Covid-19 pandemic in India in recent weeks and the associated containment measures adopted at local/regional levels have created new uncertainties and impacted the nascent economic revival that was taking shape.

"In this environment the most vulnerable category of borrowers are individual borrowers, small businesses and MSMEs," he said.

"Borrowers i.e. individuals and small businesses and MSMEs having aggregate exposure of upto Rs 25 crore

and who have not availed restructuring under any of the earlier restructuring frameworks, and who were classified as 'Standard' as on March 31, 2021 shall be eligible to be considered under Resolution Framework 2.0," Das said. Restructuring under the proposed framework may be invoked up to September 30, 2021 and shall have to be implemented within 90 days after invocation.

In respect of individual borrowers and small businesses who have availed restructuring of their loans under Resolution Framework 1.0, where the resolution plan permitted moratorium of less than two years, lending institutions are being permitted to use this window to modify such plans to the extent of increasing the period of moratorium or extending the residual tenor up to a total of 2 years.

Regarding small business-

es and MSMEs restructured earlier, lending institutions are also being permitted as a one-time measure, to review the working capital sanctioned limits, based on a reassessment of the working capital cycle, margins, among others. Further, with a view to incentivise credit flow to the micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) borrowers, in February 2021 Scheduled Commercial Banks were allowed to deduct credit disbursed to new MSME borrowers from their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL) for calculation of the cash reserve ratio (CRR).

In order to further incentivise inclusion of unbanked MSMEs into the banking system, this exemption currently available for exposures up to Rs 25 lakh and for credit disbursed up to the fortnight ending October 1, 2021, is being extended till December 31, 2021, RBI announced.

Banks allowed to tap floating provisions for NPA cover

In order to mitigate the pandemic related stress on banks and as a measure to enable capital conservation, the RBI has now allowed banks to utilise 100 per cent of floating provisions or countercyclical provisioning buffer held by them as on December 31, 2020 for making specific provisions for non-performing assets.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday provided big relief to banks that fear increased provisioning for non-performing assets

(NPA) amidst the pandemic would seriously dent their capital.

In order to mitigate the pandemic related stress on banks and as a measure to enable capital conservation, the RBI has now allowed banks to utilise 100 per cent of floating provisions or countercyclical provisioning buffer held by them as on December 31, 2020 for making specific provisions for non-performing assets. What this would mean is that banks may not have to dip into their capital for fresh provisioning on new NPAs but could provide cover for such bad assets through floating provisions already existing in the system.

To see that the measure is used only selectively, such action by banks will only be allowed with prior approval of their Boards. Also, such utilisation will be permitted with immediate effect and up to March 31, 2022.

RBI RELAXES OVERDRAFT (OD) FACILITY FOR STATES TO AID FIGHT COVID

Mumbai: To enable the State Governments to better manage their fiscal situation in terms of their cash-flows and market borrowings, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday permitted certain relaxations with regard to availment of Overdraft (OD) facilities.

Accordingly, the maximum number of days of OD in a quarter is being increased from 36 to 50 days and the number of consecutive days of OD from 14 to 21 days.

This facility will be available up to September 30, 2021. The Ways and Means Advance (WMA) limits of states have already been enhanced on April 23, 2021.

High frequency indicators showing mixed signals: RBI Guv

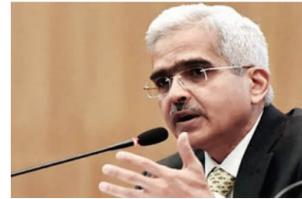
Team Absolute | Mumbai

As a country battles the Covid crisis and states go for lockdowns, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Shaktikanta Das has said that high frequency indicators are showing mixed signals for the Indian economy.

He said that aggregate demand conditions, particularly in contact-intensive services, are likely to see a temporary dip, depending on how the Covid situation unfolds.

With restrictions and containment measures being localised and targeted, businesses and households are learning to adapt, Das said, adding that, "consequently, the dent to aggregate demand is expected to be moderate in comparison to a year ago".

Citing reports, he said that disruption in manufacturing units so far is "minimal". Consumption demand is holding



up, with sales of consumer goods rising in double digits in January-March 2021, and average daily electricity generation up by 40.0 per cent year-on year in April. Rail freight has registered growth of over 76 per cent year-on-year in April.

However, toll collections in April suggest that mobility has declined but quite unlike the abrupt halt in mobility during April last year. Further noting that registration of automobiles in April 2021 has shown moderation compared to March and the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for manufacturing continued in

expansion mode in April, he said, "Overall, the high frequency indicators are emitting mixed signals."

He said that the central bank will closely and continuously monitor all incoming data to assess on a real time basis the impact of the second wave on macro-economic and financial conditions. The Governor was of the view that aggregate supply conditions are underpinned by the resilience of the agricultural sector. The record foodgrains production and buffer stocks in 2020-21 provide food security and support to other sectors of the economy in the form of rural demand, employment and agricultural inputs and supplies, including for exports, he said. The forecast of a normal monsoon by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) is expected to sustain rural demand and overall output in 2021-22, while also having a soothing impact on inflation pressures, Das added.

RBI eases KYC compliance; extends video KYC to new customers

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India did not stop at providing liquidity enhancement measures to tackle the current economic strain unleashed by the resurgence of a Covid-19 wave. It also rationalised certain compliance matters to provide ease of doing business for consumers.

Accordingly, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das, in his virtual address on Wednesday also announced rationalisation of compliance to KYC requirements. Taking forward the initiatives of the apex bank for enhancing customer convenience, it has now been decided to rationalise certain components of the extant KYC norms including extension of the scope of video KYC known as V-CIP (video-based customer



identification process) for new categories of customers such as proprietorship firms, authorised signatories and beneficial owners of Legal Entities and for periodic updation of KYC.

The easing of compliance measures also includes conversion of limited KYC accounts opened on the basis of Aadhaar e-KYC authentication in non face-to-face mode to fully KYC-compliant accounts. Also, the RBI has allowed the use of KYC Identifier of Centralised KYC

Registry (CKYCR) for V-CIP and submission of electronic documents (including identity documents issued through DigiLocker) as identify proof.

Banks have also been asked to introduce more customer-friendly options, including the use of digital channels for the purpose of periodic updation of KYC details of customers.

Further, keeping in view the COVID related restrictions in various parts of the country, Regulated Entities have been advised that for the customer accounts where periodic KYC updating is due/pending, no punitive restriction on operations of customer account(s) shall be imposed till December 31, 2021 unless warranted due to any other reason or under instructions of any regulator/enforcement agency/court of law, etc.

CBIC ASSIGNS NODAL OFFICERS IN EACH ZONE TO FACILITATE COVID RELATED IMPORTS

New Delhi: In order to facilitate quick clearance of imports of COVID-19 related equipment or medications, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has assigned nodal officers in each zone to handle such cases.

The officers will not only handle queries but would also ensure that items and raw material imported for Covid 19 mitigation does not get stuck up at customs ports and the onward movement of such critical equipment is delayed. A separate help desk to facilitate such movement has already been put in place by CBIC. To help importers, the CBIC dash board gives details of each officer along with their mobile numbers and email IDs. The details of nodal officer from CBIC Board office has also been provided. Government is taking all steps to prevent red tape from hampering Covid relief measures at a time when the pandemic is showing its most devastating face.



MoCA clarifies all investments in health infrastructure qualify as CSR spending

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As part of efforts to quickly channelise funds for the development of the health infrastructure required to fight the Covid pandemic, the government has allowed investments in such activities to qualify as eligible corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities.

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs on Wednesday clarified that spending of CSR funds directly or through pooling of resources for 'creating health infrastructure for COVID care are eligible CSR activities.

Resources for 'creating health infrastructure for COVID care', would include 'establishment of medical oxygen generation and storage plants' and 'manufacturing and supply of Oxygen concentrators, ventilators, cylinders and other medical equipment for countering COVID-19'. Any funds moving in these activities by companies would qualify being termed



as CSR spending for meeting annual compliance.

All companies, including government entities, with a net worth of Rs 500 crore or more, a turnover of Rs 1,000 crore or more, or net profit of Rs 5 crore or more, are required to spend 2 per cent of their average profits of the previous three years on CSR activities every year.

India ready for full-fledged local display FAB manufacturing

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As the Indian government renews its thrust on domestic electronics manufacturing with various incentive-linked schemes, the country has a great opportunity as well as required capabilities to establish a full-fledged semiconductor fabrication (FAB) electronics manufacturing ecosystem in the country, the India Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA) said on Wednesday.

India's share in the global electronics manufacturing has grown from 1.3 per cent in 2012 to 3.6 per cent in 2019.

Domestic electronics manufacturing has increased substantially from Rs 1.90 lakh crore in 2014-15 to Rs 5.34 lakh crore in 2019-20, growing at a compounded annual growth rate of 23 per cent.

However, there is still a lot to be done in this area. According to estimates of ELCINA, the electronic components manufacturing sector suffers from a disability of around 10 per cent due to the lack of adequate infrastructure, domestic supply chain and logistics constraints, high cost of finance, inadequate availability of quality power, limited design capabilities and focus on R&D by the industry apart from inadequacies in skill development. "We are looking at building a large electronics manufacturing ecosystem in India and it's certainly never late to start. Hence, FAB can be a steppingstone to make India the global electronics manufacturing hub of the world. It will also be in line for achieving



the NPE 2019 target of \$400 billions of domestic manufacturing and export of electronics," said Pankaj Mohindroo, Chairman, ICEA. Out of this, "a production of one billion mobile handsets is targeted by 2025, valued at \$190 billion, including 600 million mobile handsets valued at \$110 billion for export. Therefore, India has the opportunity and the capability to establish a full-fledged FAB electronics manufacturing ecosystem in the country," Mohindroo said in a statement. In April 2020, the government announced a Rs 41,000-crore Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for manufacture of electronics in India. More recently, the scheme was extended to IT hardware with an outlay of Rs 7,350 crore. In order to incentivise the electronics sector fur-

ther, the government had come out with an Expression of Interest (EOI) for setting up of semiconductor wafer or device fabrication facilities in India or acquisition of semiconductor FABs outside India. India's display panel market is estimated to be of around \$7 billion and is expected to grow to \$15 billion in just four years, by 2025. However, setting up a display FAB manufacture unit is an extremely capital-intensive project and requires an estimated investment of around Rs 70,000-75,000 crore or roughly \$10 billion over a period of 2-3 years. "FAB manufacturing facility is a capital-intensive business, and it is present in very few geographies of the world. Hence, we should build a competitive environment. We need to be very aggressive in terms of providing proper infrastructure facilities such as water, power, and logistics apart from capital support," Mohindroo emphasised. A beginning has already been made in domestic display FAB manufacturing as South Korean electronics giant Samsung has already made an investment of Rs 4,825 crore for assembling displays in India. According to Aruna Sharma, a practicing development economist and former secretary, ministry of electronics and IT (MeitY), it is natural to move from just assembly to that of display FAB manufactured indigenously in the country. "The intention to get into display FAB manufacture is seen by investments by Samsung and MeitY's call on EoI. A plant can be set up in 2-3 years, thus giving advantage of not just reducing imports of parts considerably but also enable India to become a hub for exports of displays," Sharma noted.

Paytm to set up Oxygen Plants for long-term sustainable supply across India

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's leading digital financial services platform Paytm announced that Paytm Foundation will be setting up oxygen plants in 12-13 cities as hospitals across pan-India face oxygen shortage amid the tumultuous second Covid-19 wave. These oxygen plants would be directly installed at hospitals, which would serve the oxygen needs for the entire hospital. Paytm Foundation has also sourced over 21,000 Oxygen Concentrators that would be sent to government hospitals, COVID care facilities, private hospitals, nursing homes as well as Resident Welfare Associations in the mid of May. Paytm is currently between dialogues with the State Governments and hospitals for affirmation and approval to set up these oxygen plants; once purchased,

the oxygen plants will be provided free of cost to Government hospitals by Paytm Foundation.

Paytm spokesperson said, "Before economic growth, we need to think about the sustainability of our human forces, the people. While Oxygen Concentrators are good for short term support, we figured out that oxygen plants could provide our healthcare system with larger support. Hence, we decided to direct our donations to build oxygen plants at government hospitals for free. We are overwhelmed at the collective effort and support citizens of the country have shown to help pacify the ordeal caused by the pandemic's 2nd wave. We are optimistic that with the right resources and empathy for our fellow countrymen, we will not only survive this crisis but also come out stronger."

Sonu Sood to those who couldn't save loved ones: You didn't fail, We did

Team Absolute | Mumbai

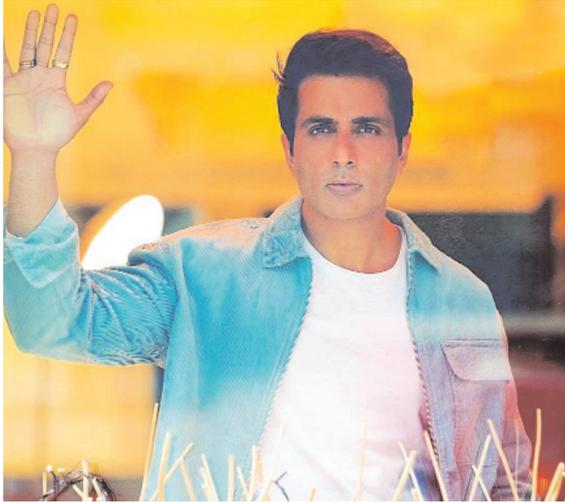
Actor and philanthropist Sonu Sood said anyone who has lost a loved one due to scarcity of oxygen or injection has not failed.

"Anyone who has lost a loved one due to scarcity of Oxygen or an injection, will never be able to live in peace all their life. They will always live with a feeling that they failed to save their family. I want to tell them, You didn't fail, We did," Sonu tweeted late on Tuesday night.

Since last year, Sonu has been working relentlessly to help people amid the Covid crisis. He and his team recently saved the lives of 22 patients at a Bengaluru hospital, and also arranged for a critically ill Covid patient to be airlifted from Jhansi to Hyderabad for necessary treatment.

On May 3, Sonu thanked Indian actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas for backing his appeal for free education to children of those who lost their lives to Covid.

"Thanks a ton Priyanka for your support. I promise we will make this happen," Sonu wrote to Priyanka, along with a folded hands emoji.



Elli AvrRam wins best actress at Stockholm City film fest for 'With You'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Elli AvrRam has won the Best Actress award for her role in the short film "With You" at the Stockholm City Film Festival. The 23-minute short film is based on the socially relevant subject of mental health awareness, sexual abuse and childhood trauma.

"I'm just so thrilled and grateful for this recognition. We all went in with our heart for this project, and to see it getting this response at such prestigious film festivals is truly heart-warming. I feel so happy for all of us, grateful to my director Peppe Segura, and especially for the fact that a story like this is being noticed and appreciated," she says.

Talking about the process of shooting the film, she adds: "I flew down from Mumbai to Stockholm to shoot the film because I wanted to be part of such films that raise awareness about important issues. Everyone who worked on the film felt it's important to bring in light, in the darkness, because that's what we all need to be able to find the strength and to change things. It was emotionally tough to step into my character, Lilly, but I believe that's what I also love, to get challenged, because it leads to growth as an actor."



WHY ARSLAN GONI IS OFTEN CALLED 'LALE DI JAAN' LATELY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Arslan Goni is currently seen playing the negative character Lala in the series "Mai Hero Boll Raha Hun", and is amused at how people sometimes refer to him by the name of his on-screen avatar, and also as "Lale di jaan".

"I feel good that people refer to me sometimes as Lala. That's also because of the excitement of the show, and I hope they like my character Lala," Arslan said.

"Also, whenever people meet me I have been getting a lot of 'Lale di jaan!' he added.

He hopes to give many more performances that stick to his identity in the future. "I will give better performances that will stick with me and I'll have more people addressing me relating to my characters," he said.

Arslan had recently shared that he wasn't confident about taking up such a negative character at first.

"Mai Hero Boll Raha Hun" tells the story of Nawab, who rises as a powerful underworld don in Bombay from being a smalltown boy, and falls in love with actress Laila, played by Patralekha.



SONIA BALANI: COULDN'T HAVE ASKED FOR A BETTER DIGITAL DEBUT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sonia Balani makes her digital debut in the upcoming "Bhopal To Vegas", and she says her character shows how to follow a dream and lead life on own terms.

The "Detective Didi" fame actress plays Rashmi in the series, a character she describes as "a fearless and vivacious young girl who wants to be successful while doing something she enjoys".

"She is smart and carefree, and takes risks unlike other girls her age. I admired her in many ways, and couldn't have asked for a better start to my digital innings. My character and the story are both relatable and funny, and also deliver a subtle message on following your dreams, being passionate about what you do, and falling in love the way you want," said Sonia.

Anushka Ranjan urges all to take Covid protocols seriously

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Anushka Ranjan, who was last seen in the film "Gulabi Lens", has urged all to take protocols seriously, given the surge in Covid-19 cases in the country.

"Let's all stay strong in this. We have a difficult situation at hand and we have to follow all protocols extremely seriously. If possible, let's double mask when we go out if we go out. We have to sanitise and maintain social distancing when we are out. Let's get vaccinated whenever the situation arises," Anushka said.

She added: "Do help the right foundations and be accountable that our donations are used for the right purposes. We have no choice but to defeat this virus. It can't get the better of us at any cost. My prayers and love to all. Let's stay safe and healthy."

Anushka made her debut in Bollywood with "Wedding Pullav" in 2015. She was later seen in the Shahid Kapoor-starrer "Batti Gul Meter Chalu". In 2020, she starred in the web show "Fitrat", which also stars Krystle D'Souza and Aditya Seal.



ADIVISESH INSTALLS WATER PLANT IN HYDERABAD HOSPITAL

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Telugu actor Adiviseesh had a water plant installed in King Koti District Hospital for the hygienic supply of water for patients, frontline workers and the staff.

The hospital has had no supply of clean water for the last eight months and was functioning on



packaged water.

"I guess we are all trying to do our bit. Our nation needed to be better prepared and now we need to respond to this crisis better. The response starts with humanity," he told IANS.

The medical staff had no access to clean water and was getting dehydrated due to the heat in their PPE kits. The water plant connects the Covid ward and non-Covid ward with an administrative block in between. Pipe is also being laid to get water to ICU patients. On the work front, the actor will be seen in "Major", the biography on 26/11 martyr Sandeep Unnikrishnan. He also has "Hit 2" and "Goodachari 2" in the pipeline.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Ashka Goradia