

# absolute india

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## REASONABLE APPROACH!

**Increasing gap between Covishield doses unlikely to impact efficacy: doctors**

The Covid Working Group chaired by Dr N.K. Arora, on Thursday, recommended extension of the gap between two doses of Covishield vaccine to 12-16 weeks. The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has also accepted this recommendation.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Extending the gap between the first and second doses of Covishield vaccines to 12-16 weeks from the earlier 6-8 weeks, is a reasonable approach and is unlikely to have a negative impact on the efficacy of the jabs, say doctors on Friday.

The Serum Institute of India-manufactured vaccine, developed by Astra-Zeneca and the University of Oxford, was initially to be administered 4-6 weeks apart.

However, in April this year, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, working on the recommendations of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation and the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid revised the interval to 6-8 weeks.

"In the current scenario in which India is facing severe vaccine shortage, a single dose could generate

It's unlikely to have a negative impact on the vaccine efficacy. As the second dose is just a booster dose, in the body it will augment the pre-existing antibody response that happened as a consequence to the first dose of the vaccine. Hence the antibody against Covid will go up."

**Dr. Dipu T S, Associate Professor, Department of Internal Medicine, Amrita Hospital, Kochi**

immunity for the masses. Considering that protection in the larger public has a bigger impact, the current strategy of increasing the gap between the two doses of the Covishield vaccine, hence, appears to be a reasonable approach," Dipu said.

**Mixing Covid vax doses safe, can raise side effects: Lancet**

When given at a four-week interval, both of the 'mixed' schedules (Pfizer-BioNTech followed by Oxford-AstraZeneca, and Oxford-AstraZeneca followed by Pfizer-BioNTech) induced more frequent reactions following the 2nd, 'boost' dose than the standard, 'non-mixed' schedules. However, the adverse reactions were short lived and there were no other safety concerns, the researchers said.

The results suggest that mixed dose schedules could result in an increase in work absences the day after immunisation, and this is important to consider when planning immunisation of healthcare workers. "Importantly, there are no safety concerns or signals, and this does not tell us if the immune response will be affected.

LONDON | Agencies

Mixing Covid-19 vaccine doses -- second dose from a different brand than the first -- is safe, but may present more frequent mild side-effects such as a headache, chills or a fever, showed results of a preliminary study published in the Lancet. The study led by University of Oxford researchers, earlier this year, began to investigate the effect of alternate doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine and the Pfizer vaccine. The team examined more than 800 adults aged 50 and over who had received mixed vaccine doses at a four-week interval. The data on the vaccines' efficacy, when administered in this way, is expected to be published in June. The ongoing study will also assess whether early and regular use of paracetamol reduces the frequency of these reactions. They also noted that as the study data was recorded in participants aged 50 and above, there is a possibility such reactions may be more prevalent in younger age groups.

**Matthew Snape, Associate Professor in Paediatrics and Vaccinology at the varsity.**

"Government of India's vaccine policy is compounding the problem. Vaccine purchase should be centralised and distribution decentralised. India cannot afford this."

**Rahul Gandhi, Congress Leader**



## O2 shortage claims 13 more lives in Goa; 75 dead in 4 days



Team Absolute | Panaji

Thirteen Covid patients died at Goa's apex government hospital, the Goa Medical College, in the early hours of Friday owing to oxygen mismanagement, even as the death toll of patients who died between 2 am and 6 am at the premier facility in the last four days reached 75.

Amid the spate of deaths, Goa Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari on Friday conducted a review of the Covid-19 situation in a virtual conference with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and Health Minister Vishwajit Rane. In all, 61 Covid patients died in Goa's hospitals on Friday, taking the total death toll due to Covid-related complications to 1,998. Goa currently has 32,387 active cases, which amounts to more than 2 per cent of the state's entire population of approximately 15 lakh.

Videos of chaos at the numerous wards of the Medical College have gone viral, with patients and relatives pleading for assistance as well as uploading emotive snapshots of helplessness and lack of hygiene in the health facility.

## 2 COVID PATIENTS DIE AS TELANGANA POLICE TURN BACK ANDHRA AMBULANCES

Hyderabad: In a tragic turn of events, two patients from Andhra Pradesh died in the ambulance vehicles they were traveling in, as Telangana Police did not permit vehicles without valid online permits to cross the interstate border at Kurnool. The development took place at the Panchalingala checkpost on National Highway 44, on Friday. The two persons who died on Friday, were identified as natives of Nandyal and Kurnool respectively. At least 40 ambulances from Andhra Pradesh were forced to return back from the Pullur toll plaza since Thursday when they tried to cross the state border on the way to Hyderabad. A similar situation played out at the Ramapuram cross border post near Suryapet.



While Telangana police officials said that ambulances not carrying the required online permits, were barred from entering, kin of some of the patients said that even those with permits issued by the Andhra Pradesh police were forcibly turned back.

## Centre to supply 192L vax doses to states

New Delhi: The Centre on Friday announced to supply nearly 192 lakh Covid-19 vaccines free of cost to the states and the Union Territories (UTs) in the next fortnight from May 16 to 31. During this fortnight, 191.99 lakh doses of Covishield and Covaxin will be supplied to the states and the UTs free of cost, the Union Health Ministry said, adding that this will include 162.5 lakh doses of Covishield and 29.49 lakh Covaxin shots. The announcement came when India's cumulative figures of vaccine doses administered till Thursday touched nearly 18 crore (17.93 crore). The allocation of the Central government supplies to the states and the UTs will be decided on the consumption pattern and beneficiary load for the second dose during the upcoming fortnight.



## NO RESPITE IN LOCKDOWN IN MP

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the infection rate has decreased in the state. Corona infection rate had reached 24% in the state, which has now increased to 11.8%. The weekly positivity rate has also increased to 14.8%. There have been 8087 new cases of Corona in the state, but there is no laxity at all, yet to fight the war against Corona with full rigor. With the cooperation of all of you, we will liberate Madhya Pradesh soon. Chouhan said that the corona epidemic can go on for a long time, in such a situation every person will have to be aware of corona. We have to change our lifestyle. Even further, wearing masks, social & physical distancing, avoiding mass gathering, etc. Precautions have to be taken.

## INDIA RECORDS 3.43L COVID CASES & 4K DEATHS IN 24 HRS



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Witnessing a decline, India on Friday reported 3,43,144 new Covid cases and 4,000 fatalities, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said. In the past 22 days India's daily Covid tally has plateaued over the three-lakh-mark and over 3,000 casualties for a fortnight. On Wednesday, India

recorded 4,205 fresh Covid deaths, while on May 7, the country had recorded its highest ever cases of 4,14,188. India's total tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,40,46,809 with 37,04,893 active cases and 2,62,317 deaths so far. According to the Health Ministry, a total of 3,44,776 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours, with 2,00,79,599 being cured from Covid till date.

## Three undertrials killed in gang war inside Chitrakoot jail

Chitrakoot | Agencies

Three undertrials were killed in a gang war inside the high-security Chitrakoot jail on Friday.

According to reports, an undertrial Anshul Dixit opened fire at another gangster Mukeem Kala who died on the spot. In the shootout, another criminal, Mirajuddin, also received gunshot injuries and died.

Mirajuddin is said to be a close confidant of mafia don and Bahujan Samaj Party MLA Mukhtar Ansari. The police asked Dixit to surrender but he fired at the police



who, then opened fire in which Dixit was killed. Several rounds were fired inside the jail during the incident. Dixit used a country-made weapon to kill Mukeem Kala. Chitrakoot SP Ankit Mittal said that an inquiry would be set up to probe how the weapon reached

inside the jail. He said all barracks were being searched. This is the second time that a gangster has killed another gangster inside the jail.

Earlier, in July 2018, gangster Munna Bajrangji was shot dead inside the Baghatpat jail by another inmate Sunil Rathi.

## NSUI files missing person report against Modi, BJP top brass

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The National Students Union of India (NSUI) has filed a 'missing person' report with the Delhi Police against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several of his Cabinet ministers, accusing them of running away amid the Covid-19 crisis. The move by the student wing of the Congress came just two days after a similar complaint was filed against Union minister Amit Shah over the 'disappearance of the country's Home Minister at the time of the pandemic'.

The latest missing person report was filed by NSUI General Secretary Nagesh Kariyappa against Modi, Union ministers Nirmala



Alleged that all these BJP leaders were last seen during the Assembly elections in West Bengal

Sitharaman, Piyush Goyal, Smriti Irani, S. Jaishankar, Ravi Shankar Prasad, Dharmendra Pradhan, Narendra Singh Tomar, Prakash Javadekar, Harsh Vardhan and Gajendra Singh Shekhawat at the Parliament Street police station here. The NSUI leader said that as politicians, they have to be accountable to the whole country, but even in the darkest time of the pandemic, the Prime Minister and his ministers are running away from the crisis situation.

## CYCLONE 'TAUKTAE' TO HIT GUJ, MAHA, KERALA COASTS IN 96 HRS

Mumbai: With a low pressure area rapidly developing over the Lakshadweep Islands and the Arabian Sea, a powerful cyclonic storm is expected to manifest by Sunday and likely to hit the coasts of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Kerala in the next four days, the IMD said on Friday.

The IMD has already put Mumbai and Thane under a Yellow Alert, signifying isolated heavy rains accompanied by strong winds, while an Orange Alert and Red Alert has been issued for several districts of Gujarat and Kerala. Cyclone Tauktae, currently developing over Lakshadweep Islands and the Arabian Sea, will intensify into a full-fledged cyclonic storm on Sunday, causing heavy rains, accompanied by gusty winds, in southern and western coastal parts of the country.



## INDIA'S COVID-19 CRISIS IS DEVASTATING ITS MOST DESPERATE PEOPLE: THE ECONOMIST

### 'Let them eat dark chocolate'

Mostly, however, the government is notable by its absence. Harsh Vardhan, the health minister, who has promoted herbal Covid "cures", last week advised Indians to eat extra-dark chocolate with "more than 70 per cent cocoa" in order to beat Covid-related stress. Perhaps he should read a recent World Bank report, which shows that 86 per cent of Indian families cannot afford a basic balanced diet, let alone fancy chocolate, The Economist said.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's covid-19 crisis is devastating its most desperate people, The Economist said in a report. The poor are losing jobs, going hungry and falling victim to scams, it added. After the first Covid-19 wave swept India last year, numerous reports tried to tally



the cost to the poor. Pew, a research institute, estimates that whereas just 4.3 per cent of Indians were earning less than \$2 a day in January 2020, a year later, this had risen to 9.7 per cent, or 134m people. An in-depth study by Azim Premji University in

Bangalore suggests that in the wake of last year's nationwide lockdown, some 230m Indians slipped below a poverty threshold tied to the national minimum wage (around \$45 a month). Its researchers found that, during the lockdown, 90 per cent of the poor consumed less food. Six months later, their diets had not returned to normal. Over the course of the year the earnings of Indian workers, including the lucky 10 per cent who hold salaried jobs, declined by a third, The Economist said.

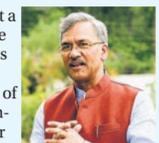
Shocked by the pain it caused last year, the central government has left state and local governments to impose their own lockdowns during this wave. "And in an ordinary year, one in every 20 families is pushed into poverty by medical expenses. The past two months have been anything but ordinary. Millions of desperate Indian families have been forced to sell gold, to pawn possessions or to borrow at usurious rates, all too often in order to pay for unnecessary treatments prescribed by harried doctors, or to provide basic items lacking in government hospitals, from oxygen tanks to syringes," the report added.

## CORONAVIRUS DESERVES TO LIVE: FORMER U'KHAND CM

New Delhi: At a time when the whole world is seeking solution to get rid of the Covid pandemic, former Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said the virus is a "living organism and it deserves to live".

Rawat's unusual video statement went viral on social media. His remarks triggered stinging barbs from Opposition leaders who had described his statement as not just "insensitive", but also "foolish".

"If we talk from a philosophical angle, coronavirus is also a living organism like us. We (human being) consider ourselves most intelligent, but that organism also wants to live. And it also deserves to live," Rawat said.





# MODI RELEASES 8TH INSTALMENT OF RS 19,000 CR FOR PM-KISAN SCHEME

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday released the eighth instalment of financial benefits worth Rs 19,000 crore under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme to benefit more than 9.5 crore farmers that includes first-time beneficiaries in West Bengal.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Prime Minister released the instalment through video conferencing, saying "farmers in West Bengal for the first time benefitted with the Central scheme and that more farmers will get the support as soon as the Centre receives it".

The instalment will enable the transfer of more than Rs 19,000 crore to over 9.5 crore beneficiary farmer families. Modi also interacted with farmer beneficiaries during the event and said that around Rs 1.35 lakh crore has been transferred to the bank accounts of farmers under the PM-KISAN and Rs 60,000 crore during the



Covid-19 pandemic.

So far this year, the Prime Minister said that "about 10 per cent more wheat has been purchased at Minimum Support Price (MSP) as compared to last year". "So far, about 58,000 crore of wheat procurement has reached the farmers' account directly". Under the PM-KISAN scheme, a finan-

cial benefit of Rs 6,000 per year is provided to the eligible beneficiary farmer families, payable in three equal 4-monthly instalments of Rs 2,000 each. The fund is transferred directly to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries. In this scheme, Samman Rashi of over Rs 1.15 lakh crore has been transferred to farmers' families so far.

# HC asks Centre to explain when Kerala will get vaccines

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM | Agencies

Taking a strong position in the manner in which the slow process of vaccination is taking place in the state, the Kerala High Court on Friday asked the Centre to explain when will the state get the required quantity of vaccines.

The case has now been posted for next Friday, when the Centre will have to explain.

The court informed the counsel of the Centre that the situation in the state is very grave and if it's at the present pace in which the vaccination is taking place, it will take two years for all in the state to get vaccinated.

According to the statistics of vaccination taken in Kerala, so far 19,51,126 have had both the doses, while 62,72,095 people have had one dose.

So far in the state while



over 16 lakh people have so far been cured of Covid, the present number of active cases stands at 4,38,913, after 39,955 turned positive on Thursday and the test positivity rate continues to hover in the range of over 27 per

cent. Starting Thursday private sector companies like Synthite and V-Guard have sourced their vaccine requirements for their staff and families.

# K'taka Home Minister turns constituency home into Covid care centre

Bengaluru | Agencies

Karnataka's Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai handed over his house in his assembly constituency for use as a Covid Care Centre (CCC).

The house, located at Shiggaon in Haveri district, can accommodate 50 Covid patients, and is being equipped with oxygen supply.

Along with the necessary medical equipment, the beds have been placed on the verandah. 50 oxygen concentrators are to be installed at each bedside to supply oxygen to the patients.

The son of former Chief Minister S.R. Bommai, Basavaraj Bommai represents Shiggaon constituency. His family lives in Hubballi, and he stays at the house on his constituency visits.

Bommai, who oversaw the transformation of his house into a CCC, said that the centre would be manned by government and private medical professionals. Doctors at the local



government hospital said that the move will relieve the pressure on the hospital which is grappling with shortage of beds.

# FIVE CHILDREN, RESCUER DROWN IN PUNJAB POND

Chandigarh: Five children drowned in a pond in a village in Punjab's Ludhiana on Friday, as well as a migrant who trying to save them, police said.

The incident happened in Mangarh village, where the five children, aged between seven and 10 years, accidentally drowned to death. The 22-year-old migrant who jumped into the pond in a futile attempt to rescue them also lost his life. Expressing deep shock over the tragic incident, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh announced ex-gratia of Rs 50,000 to the families of each of the victims. Deputy Commissioner Varinder Kumar Sharma said that four bodies had so far been recovered and search for the remaining two was in progress.



# Two killed, two injured in Assam grenade attack

Guwahati | Agencies

At least two persons were killed and two others injured in a grenade attack at a market in Digboi town in Assam's Tinsukia district on Friday, police said.

Police officials said that two motorcycle-borne men threw the grenade in front of a hardware shop at Tingrai market in Digboi. One person died on the spot while another succumbed to his injuries in hospital as three injured youths were taken to the Assam Medical College and Hospital in Dibrugarh.

Security forces led by senior officials rushed to the market and sealed the area. Police and other security forces have jointly launched a search operation to nab the culprits.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who also holds the home portfolio, condemned the attack and asked Director General of Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta to



apprehend those behind it.

"This act of violence is a sign of desperation and cowardice. State government will never tolerate such highhandedness leading to the loss of precious human lives," he said, as per an official statement.

Sarma asked the DGP to direct the Range Deputy Inspector General to rush to the site, inquire into the incident and nab those involved.

Sarma also condoled the deaths and wished speedy recovery of those who sustained splinter injuries.

# Tibetan diaspora contributes Rs 5 crore to PM CARES Fund

Bengaluru | Agencies

The Tibetan diaspora in exile has contributed Rs 5 crore to the government of India's emergency fund -- the PM CARES Fund, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) said on Friday.

These contributions made by Tibetans from all over the world were collected through respective settlement offices based in India and Offices of Tibet in 13 countries in just two weeks.

Lauding the generous contributions of the diaspora community, CTA President Lobsang Sangay said the amount has been raised across North America, Europe, Australasia, Taiwan, India, Nepal and Bhutan.

The contribution, he said, is a token of the Tibetan people's deep gratitude to the government and people of India who have provided a safe haven for Tibetan refugees for over six decades



and most importantly hosted Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama and the exile Tibetan administration.

Sangay in his virtual address to the Tibetan community across the world on May 12 expressed his appreciation for the hard work of the frontline workers led by healthcare workers and settlement CTA staff at the forefront of the pandemic fight.

Sharing his highest regard for essential workers, especially healthcare workers and teachers, he commended their relentless service amidst the unprecedented challenges and urged them to continue to dedicate their efforts.

Extending support to their efforts, he announced Rs 5,000 honorarium for healthcare workers from his Cabinet's budget. He also announced that the average pay of CTA staff in line with the five-year pay raise has been raised by 15.2 per cent.

# 6 PERSONS DETECTED WITH BLACK FUNGUS IN PATNA

Patna: While corona wreaks havoc in Bihar, cases of Black Fungus have also been detected in Patna. On Thursday, six patients infected with black fungus were detected in a private hospital and government hospitals in Patna. They were Covid survivors. The doctors of a private hospital conducted surgery of one of the patients to save his life. The doctor claims that if he would delay by 24 hours, he would not have survived. Black Fungus or mucormycosis is a fungal disease, appearing in corona survivor due to side effects of steroids. During the phase of pandemic, many patients are excessively using steroid like Dexona to come out of corona infection. Besides private hospital, two patient of Black Fungus detected in AIIMS Patna and IGIMS on Wednesday as well. The condition of all six patients are stable and under close observation of doctors. According to a doctor in Patna, AIIMS, persons having low immunity could become victim of black fungus. Swelling and pain in eyes, dryness in nose, low eyesight are some of the common symptoms of Mucormycosis.

# Bharat Biotech to start producing vaccines in Pune too

Pune | Agencies

The Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech International Ltd will soon start manufacturing Covid-19 vaccines in Pune, through subsidiary Biovet Pvt Ltd, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar announced on Friday.

"It will take around three months for the company to start production of vaccines from this facility," Pawar told media persons.

The state would also request the BBIL to give priority to supply vaccines to Maharashtra after fulfilling its commitments to the Centre, he added.

The development comes a couple of days after Pune Divisional Commissioner Saurabh Raot and Collector Rajesh Deshmukh toured the 11-acre plus site in Manjari Khurd where the manufacturing facility will start. This came in wake of a ruling of the Bombay High Court bench comprising Justice K. K. Tated and Justice Nitin Borkar in a plea filed by the Karnataka-based Biovet Pvt Ltd seeking that Maharashtra government should hand over the Pune facility to it.

The Manjari Khurd facility had come up on land granted by the state government to a private company in 1973 to manufacture vaccines for the food and mouth diseases.

Later, however, that company had quit its



operations here and tied up with Biovet Pvt Ltd for the transfer of the land and the plant, which was objected to by the Maharashtra Forest Department.

With the legal hassles behind, the plant officials are optimistic of making the Manjari Khurd facility fully functional by August-end to start rolling out the much-needed Covid-19 doses. Currently, the government-owned BBIL is one of the two Indian companies, along with the private Serum Institute of India Ltd (SII), manufacturing the Covaxin and Covishield vaccines, respectively.

# BSF seizes arms dropped by Pak drone in J&K's Samba

Team Absolute | New Delhi | Jammu

In another attempted aerial drop of arms in India from across the border, a drone was observed dropping its consignment in the Samba sector of the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir on Friday morning, security officials said.

Border Security Force (BSF) personnel on patrolling duty recovered the arms, while the drone flew back into Pakistani territory before it could be targeted.

"Alert troops of Border Security Force on Friday recovered the cache of arms and ammunition dropped by a Pakistani drone in Samba area early this morning. The consignment was wrapped in polyethylene packet," the BSF said.

An AK 47 rifle, a 9mm pistol, a pistol magazine, 15 rounds of pistol ammunition, and wooden frame used to support payload in drone was seized by the BSF, which is deployed to guard the 3,323 km-long



India-Pakistan border.

Using drones to drop arms, ammunition, drugs and money into India has been used by Pakistan-based elements for quite some now. Security forces on September 22 last year also recovered a cache of arms and ammunition dropped by a Pakistani drone across the LoC in the Akhnoor sector of Jammu division. The BSF then shot down the drone.

On September 19 last year, a Pakistani drone had dropped arms and ammunition in Jammu's Rajouri district for three Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militants. The LeT militants had come from Pulwama in the Kashmir valley via the Mughal road and had picked up the consignment before security forces arrested them. J&K Director General of Police, Dilbag Singh, has said though detecting weapons being dropped via drones in hilly areas was a challenging task, security forces were taking counter measures to thwart the nefarious designs of Pakistan-based subversive elements.

# Swapna Suresh now arrested in 'sexual harassment' case against AI official

Thiruvananthapuram | Agencies

In relief for a 'whistle blower' Air India employee, Swapna Suresh, the prime accused in the Kerala gold smuggling case, was on Friday arrested by the Crime Branch in the fabricated sexual harassment case against the official.

The complaint of Air India official L.S. Sibin in the fabricated sex harassment case against him was lying in cold storage allegedly on account of her connections with the high and mighty, and started to move after her arrest in the gold smuggling case.

Swapna, presently cooling her heels in a jail here, was on Friday produced virtually before the Chief Judicial Magistrate by the Crime Branch police probing the case in which she allegedly to have a role, and the court



sent her to the agency's custody till May 22.

Sibin, a union leader and working in the Ground Services Department at the Trivandrum airport, had, in 2014, alleged financial irregularities at the airport and sought to bring them to the attention of the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Central Vigilance Commission and the Prime Minister.



# DELHI'S VACCINE STOCK FOR 45+ TO LAST FOR 2-3 DAYS: AAP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The national capitals Covaxin stock for the 45-plus age group and healthcare and frontline workers will last for two days, while the Covishield stock for the same beneficiaries would last for three more days, the Aam Aadmi Party said on Friday.

Delhi has already run out of Covaxin vaccines for the 18-44 age group, while its Covishield stock for the same segment will last for one week.

Presenting the details of vaccination in Delhi, AAP MLA Atishi told the press that due to lack of Covaxin for the 18-44 age group, around 140 vaccination centers set up at different government schools remained shut on Friday.

She said that Delhi administered 1,23,188 doses of vaccines on



Thursday, of which 82,725 were first time beneficiaries, 1,188 doses were given to healthcare workers, 3,268 doses were administered to frontline workers, 27,178 beneficiaries were above 45 years of age, while 51,091 doses were given to those in the 18-44

age group. Meanwhile, the Delhi administration said that vaccination centers have been increased in the city and at present 470 centers are operating for healthcare/frontline workers and the 45-plus age group, while 353 centers are operational

across the city for the 18-44 age group. Meanwhile, Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said on Friday that vaccination centers set up at government-run schools are clean, spacious and airy and can effectively enforce social distancing measures as well. "We received huge response for the vaccination drive for the 18-44 age group and hence decided to expand it for the inoculation of 45+ as well," Jain said.

Talking about global tendering for procurement of vaccines, Jain said, "Three vaccines have been approved for inoculation in India -- Covishield, Covaxin and Sputnik V. I would like to reiterate that India is one nation, and one tender policy should be implemented, rather than statewide tenders, which will only create more confusion and heat between the states which are going to procure the vaccines."

# Oppn should not indulge in needless politics: Gambhir on police questioning

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As the Congress attacked the Government over questioning by the Delhi Police of its Youth Wing President for arranging essentials for Covid patients, the BJP urged the main opposition party not to indulge in needless politics.

Lok Sabha member from East Delhi Gautam Gambhir tweeted, "Opposition should not indulge in needless politicisation of due process. Delhi Police has asked for a reply from us and we've provided all details. I will keep serving Delhi and its people to the best of my abilities always." Earlier in the day, Delhi Police officers arrived at the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) office at Raisina Road here to enquire how its National President Srinivas B.V. has been managing to provide essential medicines and oxygen cylinders to Covid patients. Gambhir told IANS that three days ago, Delhi Police also came to his office in Jagriti Enclave and enquired about how medicines and other essentials were arranged. "I have provided all the details in writing to the Delhi Police like from where stocks of medicines or oxygen cylinders or concentrators were purchased. We also shared details about the distribution process we adopted like cross checking prescriptions with our own medical experts," Gambhir said. The cricketer-turned-politician



appealed to the Congress and other opposition parties to cooperate with the police in the legal process and not politicise the issue at the time of the pandemic. Delhi BJP spokesperson Harish Khurana, who was also questioned by Delhi Police, said, "Someone has filed a petition in the High Court against 10 people including me, Gambhir, AAP MLA Dilip Pandey, Congress leader Mukesh Sharma and others alleging hoarding of medicines and other life saving equipment. On May 11, a team of Delhi Police Crime Branch also questioned me and I gave my statement," Khurana said. Khurana added: "Only Congress and AAP politicising a court instructed enquiry by bringing Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah into it."

# 340 home isolated patients receive O2 supply online

GURUGRAM | Agencies

As many as 340 Covid patients placed in home isolation have received liquid oxygen cylinders at their doorstep by applying on an online portal, said Gurugram district administration officials. The administration has launched a door-to-door delivery service of oxygen cylinders.

This initiative has brought huge relief to coronavirus patients.

Gurugram Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg said in order to avail the service of refilling oxygen cylinders, the Covid-19 patient or their families will have to apply online on the portal -- <http://oxygenhry.in>.

"On acceptance of the application, information will be sent to the patient's mobile number through an SMS. The applicant will also have to upload the photo of the oximeter for oxygen level or the doctor's prescription and the Aadhaar number while applying. In addition, it will be mandatory to write the age and address of the patient. An application can be made only once a day from a mobile number," Garg said. The Gurugram District Magistrate has already fixed the rate of oxygen



cylinders. Now a small cylinder (B-type) would cost Rs 80 and big cylinder (D-type) Rs 250. The delivery charge will be Rs 100.

An individual ordering the B-type small cylinder will have to pay Rs 180 (including the delivery charge) and anyone who gets the D-type big cylinder shipped will have to pay Rs 350.

# AAP Government failed to build oxygen storage capacity in Delhi: BJP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A day after the AAP Government claimed the demand for oxygen in the national capital had reduced, the BJP said that people had lost lives due to the inability of the Delhi government to build storage capacity.

Addressing a virtual press conference on Friday, BJP National Spokesperson, Dr Sambit Patra, said, "Due to AAP government's inability to build storage, 20 and 13 lives were lost at Jaipur Golden Hospital and Batra Hospital respectively. Both hospitals had tried to contact the government, but the AAP government did nothing. This is criminal liability."

Patra claimed that the Arvind Kejriwal government has asked neighbouring states around Delhi to store oxygen because it does not have enough storage facilities.

"When the Delhi government was demanding additional oxygen,



Kejriwal could not create any additional storage facility or arrangements in Delhi. It shows the inefficiency of Arvind Kejriwal's government," he said. He further claimed that on May 9, Linde plant in Faridabad was expected to supply 120 MT Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) to Delhi but the AAP Government took 120 MT LMO and then returned 74 MT back to the plant due to non-availability of storage space or less demand in Delhi. Citing the Petroleum And Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO) report, Dr Patra said, "According to the PESO report, a week ago there was an excess supply of oxygen in Delhi. But Delhi was unable to store it. Due to this, the turnaround time of the tanker was increased, and other nearby states also had to face problems. The BJP National Spokesperson said, "Kejriwal's way of working is very unique, first make noises that there is a shortage but do nothing to create infrastructure. He raised demand for the oxygen and blamed other states for stalling Delhi's supply. But when oxygen was supplied, raised his hands saying it did not have a place to store it."

# Aid to kids who lost parents, families who lost earning members: Kejriwal

"We will provide financial assistance to such families, but such children and old people need love at this point in time. They need empathy. It is my request to all the neighbours and the relatives of such families to take care of them. These families are facing great challenges," he said.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi government announced on Friday that it will bear the cost of raising and educating children who have lost their parents, and also provide financial help to families and senior citizens who have lost their earning members during the second wave of the Covid pandemic.

Addressing a digital press conference, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said in the last few weeks,



many children have lost their parents and several senior citizen have lost their children. "We will provide financial assistance to such

families, but such children and old people need love at this point in time. They need empathy. It is my request to all the neighbours and the relatives of such families to take care of them. These families are facing great challenges," he said.

The Chief Minister also said that the number of people admitted to the hospitals has also reduced by more than 3,000 in the past 10 days but warned the situation was still serious.

"Now there is no problem being faced to get beds in hospitals, yet one thing to be observed is that the ICU beds are still full. This means the number of serious patients has not declined much. Even now, the ICU beds in the hospitals of Delhi are almost full. "If we do not take precautions, then the cases will increase again. There is no guarantee that they will remain low. Delhi may face problems again. And therefore by no means, can we let loose. The lockdown has to be adhered to strictly and should employ all the ways to ensure protection from coronavirus," he said.

# Vax drive for 18+ in Gurugram hit due to shortage

GURUGRAM | Agencies

Owing to acute shortage of the Covid-19 vaccine the vaccination drive for people in the 18 plus age category was suspended on Friday as the district health department ran out of doses, officials said.

The health officials informed that vaccination campaign of the second dose for those above 45 will continue, but it is also likely to get affected if the district does not receive fresh stock from the state government by Friday night.

The 18-44 vaccinations started in Gurugram on May 1. Till May 12, over 43,992 people in the age group have received their first shots. In this category, the targeted population for immunisation is more than 10 lakh.

"Both Covishield and Covaxin stocks for 18 plus age group are over in Gurugram. Therefore, no sessions have been planned for Friday. Only Covishield shots will be given to those aged 45 and above, waiting

for their second shot.

"If the doses are not allocated soon, vaccination for 45 above will also be hampered," said Virender Yadav, chief medical Officer (CMO) Gurugram. Most session sites in the city are at government facilities with only two private hospitals -- Max and Fortis -- administering vaccines at present. On Friday, these hospitals will be the ones that give vaccines to people in the 18-44 category.

"We have already demanded the state health department to provide the stock but cannot say how much and when we'll get this consignment," said Dr MP Singh, district immunisation officer. According to Singh, there are about 8,000 doses left for the population above 45 years.

Haryana Health Minister Anil Vji on Thursday said that the state government will float a global tender for the Covid-19 vaccines to ensure free vaccination for those aged between 18 and 44 years.

# O2 CONCENTRATORS CASE:

# Delhi HC denies interim protection from arrest to Navneet Kalra till May 18

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday refused to grant interim protection from arrest to Navneet Kalra in connection with alleged black marketing of oxygen concentrators. Kalra has approached the High Court seeking anticipatory bail after a sessions court on Thursday dismissed Kalra's anticipatory bail plea.

A single bench of Justice Subramoniam Prasad said: "I am persuaded by the reasons given by the trial court which is a valid ground for me not to grant any interim protection now." The court has listed the matter for further hearing on May 18. The sessions court had noted that allegations against Kalra are serious and his custodial interrogation was needed to unearth the entire conspiracy.

Senior advocates Abhishek M Singhvi and Vikas Pahwa, representing Kalra, contended before the High Court that it should grant some interim protection to their client, if the matter is being adjourned till May 18. Singhvi had argued that police were searching for

Kalra and visiting his relatives and close friends' homes in the matter. The counsel added that this should not happen in the backdrop of High Court hearing Kalra's anticipatory bail plea.

At the beginning of the hearing today, Additional Solicitor General (ASG) S V Raju submitted that the matter should be adjourned to May 18. Raju contended that he had information in connection with shell companies, which he required to place before the court and would need some time. Raju said heavens will not fall, if the matter is taken up on May 18. He insisted that there was no urgency to conduct hearing on Kalra's plea on a holiday.

Singhvi contested the submissions saying it was an attempt to embarrass the court and added that his client's arrest was not needed, as one of the charges were that he overcharged for the oxygen concentrators. Singhvi argued that under Drug Price Control Order (DPCO) 2013, there is a provision for adjusting the overcharged amount or refunding it. However, the court pointed out that many concentrators were seized from Kalra's properties and price stick-

ers, including blank ones, were found at the site. The court told Kalra's counsel would it be a violation of the DPCO 2013, is the main question.

Kalra's counsel contended that Essential Commodities Act is not applicable in the present case, as no price was fixed for imported oxygen concentrators. The High Court cited that as per the trial court, Kalra was selling poor quality concentrators at an exorbitant price. Kalra's counsel he will get data in connection with the sale of the concentrators on the next date.

Kalra had moved the High Court on late evening on Thursday after sessions declined to give him any relief and the hearing before the court went till 10.00 pm. The matter was listed for further hearing on Friday. The High Court had queried Kalra's counsel how could he sell concentrators, when he did not have a valid licence to manufacture, store or import. During a raid, 524 oxygen concentrators were recovered from three restaurants owned by Kalra -- Khan Chacha, Nega Ju and Town Hall. Police suspected that he had left Delhi along with his family.

# Recoveries outnumber daily Covid cases 3rd time in 4 days

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Recoveries from Covid-19 registered at 3,44,776 in the last 24 hours, on Friday outnumbered India's daily new Covid cases for the third time in the last four days.

India's cumulative recoveries surpassed two crore (2,00,79,599) on Friday pushing the national recovery rate to 83.5 per cent. The active caseload at 37,04,893 shows a net decline of 5,632 cases in the last 24 hours that comprises 15.41 per cent of the country's total positive cases.

Meanwhile, 3,43,144 fresh Covid-19 cases and 4,000 deaths were reported in the country in the past 24 hours. India's total tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,40,46,809 including active cases and 2,62,317 deaths.

The Union Health Ministry said 10 states account for 71.16 per cent of the new recoveries with Maharashtra on top with 54,535 cases followed by Karnataka (34,057), Kerala (33,733), Uttar Pradesh (19,425), Tamil Nadu (19,287), West Bengal (19,181), Andhra



Pradesh (18, 638), Haryana (16,041), Gujarat (15,269) and Delhi (15,189).

The Ministry also mentioned that 12 states cumulatively account for 79.7 per cent of India's total active cases with Karnataka (5,93,098), Maharashtra (5,35,704), Kerala (4,39,268) on top followed by Rajasthan (2,11,889), Uttar Pradesh (2,04, 658), Andhra Pradesh (2,01,042), Tamil Nadu (1,83,772), West Bengal (1,30,213), Gujarat (1,22,847), Chhattisgarh (1,19,450), Madhya Pradesh (1,08,116) and Haryana (1,03,140).

# Delhi reports below 10K cases 1st time since April 10

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi reported 8,500 new Covid infections in the last 24 hours, the first time in over a month when daily cases came below 10,000 as the positivity rate came down to 12 per cent, on Friday.

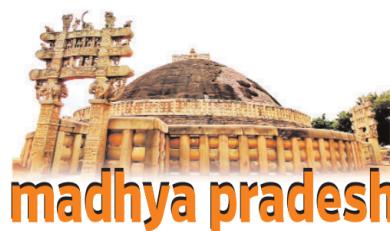
On April 10, the city had reported 7,897 cases in a day. While the positivity rate -- the proportion of samples tested that return positive for Covid-19 continued its sharp decline to 12 per cent, on Friday, the lowest in the single day since April 13.

Though daily positive cases in Delhi have decreased in the last few days, there are still many critical patients in hospitals. "Delhi has around 3,000 beds vacant for Covid patients, however, ICU beds are still packed in most hospitals. A total of 1,200 new ICU beds will be ready by one or two days," said Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday. While addressing a digital press conference, Kejriwal said Delhi has seen some respite from Covid



spread in the last few weeks due to determination of the citizens of the national capital. "You (people) have followed Covid lockdown rules strictly and have shown that Delhi can still fight against the spread of Covid-19. It is the need of the hour to fight against this pandemic. We still need to be more prepared to face more challenges to come," he said.

The Chief Minister said in the last few days many families have lost even more than one or two members, many children have lost their parents and many senior citizens too have lost their earning family members (son/daughter) due to this Covid pandemic. He said, "Delhi government will take care of children who lost their parents and will provide financial support to all senior citizens who lost their loan (son/daughter) earner for livelihood in the national capital."



Keep an eye on the black marketing and hoarding of the drug of Black Fungus

## POST COVID CARE SHOULD ALSO BE ARRANGED IN COVID CARE CENTRES: CM

Discussion on the situation of Corona after the Cabinet meeting

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the corona patients who need post-covid care after being cured, should be cared at the Covid Care Centres. Necessary treatment will be provided to such persons at these centres according to the doctor's advice. Chouhan said that necessary arrangements are being made in view of the increasing cases of black fungus. The district administration stay alert to prevent black marketing and hoarding of useful medicines for this disease. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan was discussing the situation of Corona after the meeting of the Cabinet. The virtual meeting of the Cabinet began with the recitation of VandeMaratam. Chief Minister attended the meeting from his residence. Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains was also present. Additional Chief Secretary Health



Mohammad Suleman made a presentation on the situation of Corona. Cabinet members and officials attended the meeting through video conferencing. Chouhan said that prompt redressal of complaints received under Mukhyamantri Covid Upchar Yojana should be ensured. Services of Corona Volunteers should be obtained to



communicate with Corona patients and create a positive environment. The 'Yoga se Nirog' programme is effective in post-Covid care. Therefore, a system should be put in place for its timely implementation and continuous monitoring. Chouhan said that there should be constant monitoring of the patients living in the home isola-

tion; arrangements should be made to provide advice etc. to them for the necessary treatment. In the presentation made before the Cabinet, it was told that 95.3% of the people living in home isolation are in constant contact. So far, medical kits have been distributed to 2 lakh 49 thousand 607 people in urban areas and 73 thousand 744 people in rural areas.

Chouhan said that the Kill Corona campaign should be conducted with utmost seriousness to control the corona in rural areas. In the state, 25 thousand 433 Covid patients are being treated free of cost. Of these, 19 thousand 901 in government hospitals, 2602 in contracted private hospitals and 2930 patients are receiving free treatment under the Mukhyamantri Covid Upchar Yojana. During the discussion on Corona, suggestions were also made by the members of the Council of Ministers.

## Big relief to media persons and their family members

Chief Minister Chouhan announced free corona treatment, 'Many media persons have been infected while performing duties'

Chouhan has said that all the preferential or non-preferential media persons of the print, electronic and digital media of the state and employees of the editorial department and their family members will be treated free of cost if they are affected by the corona.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that all the preferential or non-preferential media persons of the print, electronic and digital media of the state and employees of the editorial department and their family members will be treated free of cost if they are affected by the corona. Chouhan said that all media colleagues are performing their duty of public awakening during the Corona epidemic. The government will also worry about the corona treatment of the family of media associates. Chief Minister said this in the video recording released at his residence. Chouhan said that in

this alarming crisis of Corona infection, our media colleagues are discharging their duties day and night with full dedication and loyalty. Many media workers have been infected while performing their duty and giving information to the public, some have sad demise. In such a situation, it is necessary that the corona infected should be properly treated. If a media worker or a member of his family is corona infected, they will not be left behind. Chief Minister said that under this scheme, all journalists working in the editorial department of print, electronic and digital media, journalists at the desk, fellow companions, cameramen, photographers will all be covered.

## CM expresses gratitude to PM

Rs 19 Thousand crore transferred from PM Kisan Samman Nidhi to 9.50 crore farmers' accounts

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on behalf of the farmers of the state. Under Prime Minister Kisan Samman Nidhi, an amount of 19 thousand crores was directly transferred by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to the bank accounts of 9 crores 50 lakh farmers of the country with a single click. Prime Minister Shri Modi also addressed the program. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan participated in the event organized by video conferencing from the residence. Panchayat Raj and Rural Development and Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Shri Narendra Singh Tomar said that Prime Minister Shri



Narendra Modi's focus on the village, poor, and farmers is praiseworthy. Changes in the standard of living of the poor and ongoing efforts to double the income of farmers are effective and practical. A short film on PM Kisan Yojana was also pre-

sented on the occasion. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also interacted with farmers of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu - Kashmir, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, and Andaman & Nicobar.

## MAN ALLEGEDLY KILLS WIFE OVER DOWRY, BIRTH OF 4 GIRLS

Shivpur: Savitri Baghel was strangled to death allegedly by her husband Ratan Singh, his father Kilold Singh and mother Benoo Bai at their home in village Dindoli, some 80km from the district headquarters, on Thursday, Police Inspector Ramraja Tiwari said. A 28-year-old woman was killed allegedly by her husband and in-laws for giving birth to four girls, last of which was born just three months ago, and also over dowry in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpur district, police said on Friday. Savitri Baghel was strangled to death allegedly by her husband Ratan Singh, his father Kilold Singh and mother Benoo Bai at their home in village Dindoli, some 80km from the district headquarters, on Thursday, Police Inspector Ramraja Tiwari said. He said according to the deceased's brother Krishna Baghel, Ratan Singh and his parents used to harass his sister for giving birth to four daughters and not bearing a male child. Krishna Baghel told the police his sister had given birth to the fourth daughter just three months ago, he added. The family would also harass the woman for dowry, Inspector Tiwari said. The accused have been booked under IPC sections 302 (murder) and 304B (dowry death), but no arrest has been made so far, the police officer said.

## Covid victim dies 24 hours after rape in Bhopal hospital

A 43-year-old Covid victim was raped by a ward boy at Bhopal Memorial Hospital and Research Centre last month, following which she died the next day.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

However, soon after the incident the accused was arrested. Sources said that even after a month, the family members of the victim were not informed about the incident that has brought the police under the lens. The woman was admitted to the facility after she had tested Covid positive. She was raped by the ward boy on April 6 following which her health deteriorated and she died the next day.

Sources said that accused Santosh entered into the woman's ward at 4 am on April 6 and asked her to undergo a medical check up. He first molested the Covid vic-

tim, took her to the bathroom in the name of the check up and raped her. After that her health worsened and she was then put on a ventilator but she died the next day. The matter came light when the organisations fighting for the rights of Bhopal gas tragedy victims, flagged the "pathetic condition of Covid wards" in the hospital. They had written to Justice (Retd) V.K. Agarwal, Chairman of a committee for medical rehabilitation of Bhopal gas tragedy victims, about the incident.

The Bhopal Group for Information and Action, an NGO working with the survivors of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, had also written to the officials on Wednesday about this shameful

incident, and sought an investigation. They further said that this matter should also be brought to the notice of the High Court. Former Chief Minister Kamal Nath tweeted, "Rape and molestation of the Covid victim who was hospitalised in Bhopal, is extremely shameful! It is very disgraceful that the victim had died and instead of taking action, the hospital management and the police kept the whole matter discreet."

The Bhopal police are in touch with the victims' kin and the case will now be presented in the court for justice.

"No attempt has been made by the Bhopal police to suppress and hide the case," a senior police official added.

## CM EXTENDS BEST WISHES TO THE PEOPLE OF STATE ON AKSHAYA TRITIYA

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, while wishing the people of the state on Akshaya Tritiya, said that it is considered auspicious to marry on this holy day. But in view of the corona infection, I had requested my nephews-nieces not to perform the Panigraha ritual at this time. Thanks to everyone for accepting this request. Chouhan expressed these sentiments by tweeting. Chief Minister has apologised to the nephews and nieces who could not take advantage of this auspicious day due to the circumstances of Corona, saying that if there is life then there is the world. With this spirit of cooperation and collaboration, we will achieve the goal of building a healthy Madhya Pradesh.

## CM GREETES PEOPLE OF THE STATE ON PARSHURAM JAYANTI

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has wished the people of the state on Lord Parshuram Jayanti. Chouhan said that this is a prayer to Lord Parshuram to bless the state, country and the world with freedom from the transition of Covid-19, so that all of us can again enjoy a normal, simple and easy life. Chouhan said in his tweet that Lord Parshuram was associated with the Janapav of the state. Every year on the birth anniversary of Lord Parshuram, I reached his birthplace Janapav and bowed at his feet. This year it was not possible due to Corona guidelines. I bow to his feet with all my heart.

## OVER 100 FARMERS FALL VICTIM TO FRAUD IN MP: EX-MIN

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh's former Agriculture Minister Sachin Yadav has written to Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan seeking action against those allegedly involved in deceiving over 100 farmers in Dhar district. He also urged compensation for the farmers to tide over the losses. In his letter, Yadav said that a businessman of Dhamnod Mandi in Dhar district had met a farmers' delegation and defrauded them of Rs 1 crore. The farmers said that maize had been purchased from 105 of them but later the traders fled without making any payment. Yadav also underlined that cases of fraud against farmers are increasing in the state and the government should take strict action against such people.

## State government issued instructions over new guidelines on excise system approved by the Cabinet

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The new excise system has been approved by the Council of Ministers for the remaining period of the financial year 2021-22 from June 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022. The state government has issued instructions to implement the approved excise system in the state. The Commercial Taxes Department has issued a directive to the Excise Commissioner asking them to compulsorily complete the renewal proceedings by 5 pm on 18 May 2021 under the new system.

Deputy Secretary, Commercial Taxes RP Under the order issued by Srivastava, provisions have been made in the new

system. Currently, the licensees of liquor shops in the state will be given the option of renewal of contracts for the period from June 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022, keeping all the provisions and conditions in force for the year 2020-21. For calculating the 10 month value of the year 2020-21 for renewal, the accepted value of the live contract on 31 March 2021 will be made 365 days on prorata basis, out of which the actual value of the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 May 2020 (first Giving 30% weightage to the quarter) will be reduced. The price of renewal will be fixed for the period from June 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022, if there is a 10% increase in the price received for this 10 months.

It has been said in the instructions issued that country liquor should be supplied in the capacity of 90 ml. Initially at least 10 percent of the production should be filled in 90 ml bottle, which can be reduced later as per the demand. Its MRP should be kept at half of the price of 180 ml bottle. The country liquor supply system was earlier approved by the Council of Ministers till May 31, 2021. Which should be extended to 31 July 2021 keeping the other conditions unchanged with the said provision.

The places where shops are built and made available for liquor shop by the local body, such shops will be hired by the licensee to operate liquor shop at the rates fixed by the collector.

## GAIL should establish an oxygen plant in Guna: Scindia

Former Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and MP KPYadav in their separate letters to Pradhan have written that this oxygen plant will benefit the people of Ashoknagar and Rajgarh districts along with Guna.

Team Absolute | Guna

Gas authority of India limited (GAIL) should establish an oxygen plant in Guna district hospital. This request was done to

Union Petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan by member of parliament Rajya Sabha Jyotiraditya Scindia and Lok Sabha Member of Parliament KP Yadav. Former Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and MP KPYadav in their separate letters to Pradhan have written that this oxygen plant will benefit the people of Ashoknagar and Rajgarh districts along with Guna.

Scindia's ex MP nominee Yogendra Lumba said, It is worth mentioning that state Panchayat Minister Mahendra Sisodia is continuously active in this matter.

## CABINET DECISIONS

### Ratification of allocation of 104 crores to collectors for prevention of corona epidemic

A virtual meeting of the State cabinet presided by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan was held on Tuesday.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In view of the intensity of Covid-19 infection in the virtual meeting of the cabinet presided by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan was held on Tuesday, for the proper arrangement and management of epidemic prevention at the field level, each district collector will be given an undisclosed amount of Rs 2 crore. It was endorsed to give an allocation of Rs. 104 crores. It includes arrangements for rehabilitation camps including food and clothing, operation of medical camps (quarantine camps), supervision of camps, security of staff deployed in essential works, sanitation expenditure etc. for prevention of Covid-19 in the financial year 2021-22. Various tasks to be taken and purchase of necessary equipment are included.

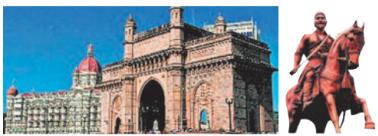
The cabinet has cancelled the lease of the new Najul Land Reclamation Directive 2020 (which is presently) by cancelling the lease of the government land which was allotted on lease



under the Pradhan Mantri Awas (Urban) Scheme at 103 places of 37 urban bodies in 31 districts of Madhya Pradesh. As per the provision made in, the land owners are entitled to zero allotment and according to the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code (Determination and Resetting of Land Revenue) Rules, 2018, to allocate annual land revenue and allocate land. It has been decided to execute the deed for giving the owner's title as per the prescribed form in Madhya Pradesh Nazul Land Dismissal Instructions, 2020.

The cabinet approved the excise system of Madhya Pradesh for the period from June 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022. Under this,

the licensees of the existing liquor shops of the state have been given the option to renew the liquor shops with a price increase of 10 percent. It was decided to extend the country liquor supply system up to 31 July 2021 as approved by the Council of Ministers till 31 May 2021. The cabinet transferred the land under question transferred to NVDA of Municipal Council Chhanera of Ward affected families of Indira Sagar Project and NVDA of ward number 15 to the Revenue Department. It has been decided to allot residential land blocks, given by NVDA, to the landowners, except those who have received the landowner's right to the land plot. Except the residential plots, the remaining plots will be kept on lease as before. Pattadhriti will be the pattadhriti of the state government. It was decided to authorize the District Collector to give land-owning rights over the residential plots. After submission of 100% of the tender price by the H-1 tenderer for the release of the property on lease G 63, Plan No. 7, Traffic Nagar, District Rewa, from the Rewa Municipal Corporation of the State Handloom Weavers Association. Decision was taken by Joint Director, Handloom Directorate, Bhopal, weavers union, to edit the sale registered contract for lease asset by July 13, 2021 and to rename the property register by Rewa Municipal Corporation in favor of H-1 tenderer.



# BLACK FUNGUS HAS CLAIMED 52 LIVES IN MAHARASHTRA SO FAR: OFFICIAL

Rising Mucormycosis cases, whose treatment requires a multidisciplinary approach, is expected to put a further burden on the state's healthcare infrastructure which is already under a strain.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As many as 52 people have died due to Mucormycosis, a rare but dangerous fungal infection, in Maharashtra since the Covid-19 outbreak last year, a senior health department official said on Friday. Mucormycosis, also known as black fungus, became a much talked about subject after some recovering and recovered coronavirus patients were found infected with the disease, whose symptoms include headache, fever, pain under the eyes, nasal or sinus congestion and partial loss of vision. As many as 52 people in Maharashtra have died due to the Mucormycosis disease since the COVID-19 outbreak last year. All of them were Covid-19 survivors, but succumbed to the black fungus infection, the official told PTI. For the first time, the state health department has compiled a list of deaths caused by black fungus," said the official who spoke



On condition of anonymity. On Wednesday, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope had said there were 1,500 cases of black fungus in the state, which is in the throes of a severe second wave of Covid-19. Rising Mucormycosis cases, whose treatment requires a multidisciplinary approach, is expected to put a further burden on the state's healthcare infrastructure which is already under a strain. The state will float a tender to procure one lakh Amphotericin-B anti-fungal injections to treat Mucormycosis patients, Tope had said a couple of days back. Mucormycosis has a very high fatality rate and this has increased the woes of the health

department which has deployed all its resources to combat Covid-19.

Mucormycosis was not a notified disease like malaria and hence its cases were not mapped and a database was not prepared, the official said. With the rise in Covid-19 cases and preliminary reports of growing infection of black fungus, the state started creating a database. This exercise revealed that so far 52 people have died due to the black fungus infection, the official said.

All the 52 patients died after the coronavirus infection spread in the country. However, very few deaths took place in 2020 in Maharashtra. A sizeable number of deaths have taken place in the current calendar year, he said. As per health experts, Mucormycosis is mostly found among Covid-19 patients who have diabetes, fluctuation in sugar level or increased iron level in the blood.

Tope has said patients with suppressed immune system and co-morbidities are vulnerable to contract the disease. As part of a contingency plan to treat Mucormycosis patients, the state government has decided to set up separate wards for them at hospitals attached to 18 medical colleges.

The treatment requires multidisciplinary expertise because the fungal infection spreads through the nose, eyes and can reach the brain, Tope has said. The Maharashtra government has already admitted that at least eight patients in the state have lost vision in one eye due to Mucormycosis.

# MAHARASHTRA EXTENDS EX-GRATIA PERIOD FOR STAFFERS WHO DIED DUE TO COVID-19

A government resolution said it has extended the period of ex-gratia assistance from January 1 to June 30 this year due to the present COVID-19 situation



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government on Friday extended the time period for ex-gratia assistance of ₹50 lakh to its staffers succumbing to COVID-19.

A government resolution said it has extended the period of ex-gratia assistance from January 1 to June 30 this year due to the present COVID-19 situation. The order on providing ex-gratia assistance was

first issued on May 29 last year, and was effective till September 30, 2020 before being extended till December 31.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra reported 42,582 new COVID-19 cases on Thursday, a drop of nearly 4,200 infections from a day ago, while 850 more patients succumbed to the disease, the state health department said.

With the addition of 42,582 COVID-19 cases,

down from 46,781 on Wednesday, the state's caseload increased to 52,69,292, while the death toll reached 78,857, it said.

On Tuesday, Maharashtra had reported 40,956 COVID-19 cases, 793 deaths and 71,966 recoveries. Of the 850 fatalities, 409 had occurred in the past 48 hours, 160 last week and the rest 281 before the last week but were added to the toll on Thursday, the department said.

# Petrol, Diesel Prices At Record Highs; Petrol Above 98 In Mumbai

In Delhi, petrol prices were hiked by 29 paise to ₹92.34 per litre and diesel was increased by 34 paise to ₹82.95 per litre, according to Indian Oil Corporation



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Petrol and diesel prices have been hiked again across the metros on Friday i.e. May 14 after a gap of a day. The fuel prices have been hiked eight times since May 4, when the state-owned oil companies ended an 18-day hiatus in rate revision observed during assembly elections in states such as West Bengal. In Delhi, petrol prices were hiked by 29 paise from ₹92.05 per litre to ₹92.34 per litre and diesel was increased by 34 paise from ₹82.61 per litre to ₹82.95 per litre, according to Indian Oil Corporation. Currently, petrol and diesel prices are highest in the financial capital of the country. Petrol in Mumbai was retailed at ₹98.65 per litre and diesel was sold at ₹90.11 per litre. The petrol rates had already crossed the ₹100-mark in several places in

Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The state-run oil marketing companies including Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum align the rates of domestic fuel with the global crude oil prices by taking into account changes in the foreign exchange rates. The new changes in fuel prices are implemented with effect from 6 am every day. Meanwhile, oil prices fell on Friday after dropping about 3 per cent a day earlier as coronavirus cases remained high in major oil consumer India and as a key fuel pipeline in the United States resumed operations after being shut due to a cyber attack. Brent crude oil futures were down 35 cents, or 0.5 per cent, at \$66.70 a barrel and West Texas Intermediate (WTI) was down 28 cents, or 0.4 per cent, at \$63.54 a barrel.

# Hospital audit shows leaks in oxygen duct or valve of cylinders

In the backdrop of accidents in hospitals in Nashik and Virar last month, Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunte had last month instructed district collectors to conduct fire and oxygen audits of all hospitals.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Oxygen audits at all government and private hospitals in Maharashtra have reported that in majority of these medical units, there are leakages in oxygen duct or in the valve of cylinders. It has also found that fire safety audits have not been carried out in most hospitals. In the backdrop of accidents in hospitals in Nashik and Virar last month, Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunte had last month instructed district collectors to conduct fire and oxygen audits of all hospitals. The government, while instructing that audit teams - comprising district collectors and principals of government-run engineering and polytechnic colleges

and industrial training institutes - be set up in all districts, had appointed Dr Abhay Wagh, Director (Directorate of Technical Education), as the nodal officer. In all, 1,814 hospitals, including 335 government and 1,479 private units, were inspected till May 9 by the teams. Reports on 1,719 hospitals have been submitted to the district collectors recently, said an official. The official added the teams

focused mainly on storage of oxygen cylinders and their safety, maintenance of ventilators, emergency measures and skilled manpower. "In most hospitals, leakage was found in the oxygen duct or near the cylinder valve. It was also found that fire safety audits have not been carried out..." The official further said that the reports spoke of other issues like materials obstructing oxygen cylinder

storage spaces, inadequate fire prevention system at storage places and keeping oxygen cylinders in a technically wrong manner. "It was also observed that there was lack of tools for repair as well as skilled manpower." Another official said that the teams submitted their opinions on the findings or "oxygen audit paras" to the respective district collectors. "After getting the oxygen audit paras, the district collectors immediately issued notices to the respective hospitals, asking them to take appropriate measures to fix the issues. Following this, corrective measures have been taken by the respective hospitals. So, it has helped save a lot of oxygen by fixing leakages." At present, Maharashtra needs 1,800 MT oxygen, of which 1,295 MT are being produced in the state. About 500 MT are being made available from other states. "The oxygen audit is not only helping in saving it but will also help in the state's 'Mission Oxygen' campaign to become self-reliant," an official said.

# Mumbai's vaccine centres set up arbitrarily, corporators say BMC ignored population size

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Even as it awaits adequate stocks of vaccines for Mumbai, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has been setting up vaccination centres across the city. But a look at the city's map shows uneven distribution, with some of the most populous areas having just two and the least four such centres. While the BMC has said it will set up one vaccination centre in each of the 227 wards in the coming days, corporators - the elected representatives of each ward - have pointed out to the disparity in allotment of the currently functioning 135 centres in 24 wards as on May 12. L ward, comprising Kurla, Chandivali and Asalpa, with a population of 9.33 lakh, has just two centres. Similar is the case of M West ward, comprising Chembur and Tilak Nagar, where 4.36 lakh residents have to make do with one centre. At the other end is C ward in south Mumbai, which includes Bhuleshwar and Kalbadevi. Here, its 1.71 lakh residents can choose from

But a look at the city's map shows uneven distribution, with some of the most populous areas having just two and the least four such centres.

four vaccination centres. Similarly, F South - comprising Parel and Sewri - has seven vaccination centres to cater to 3.73 lakh people. This area has major hospitals like KEM and Wadia. The disparity is immediately evident at the centres where people are forced to crowd as they wait for the job, unless they decide to hunt for a slot in other less crowded wards with more centres.

"L ward has a huge population and only two centres. I have requested the ward officer and the MOH (medical officer of health) to start vaccination centres in my ward. Also, they should ensure enough stock of vaccines at these centres. As public representatives, it is we who face the wrath of the people," BJP corporator Harish Bhandirge said. In Tilak Nagar, local BJP corporator Susham Sawant said that he receives daily complaints regarding

crowd and mismanagement at Maa Hospital since that is the only vaccination centre in the locality. "There are a lot of complaints about the huge rush at Maa Hospital. No proper planning has been made to cater to the population. People fight at the hospital as there is no clarity on how many doses are available," he added.

While the BMC has promised to open a vaccination centre in each ward, officials in private acknowledge that corporators who are influential and proactive have been able to wangle more centres for their wards.

Samajwadi Party Corporator Rais Shaikh said that BMC did not consider location and population while setting up the centres. "It is a very loose administration. The centres were opened arbitrarily. Those who can make calls to BMC officials have

managed to get maximum centres in their wards, irrespective of geography and population."

Social activist Anil Galgi said that ideally, BMC should have set up one vaccination centre to cater to 50,000 to 60,000 people. "To ensure that social distancing and Covid-19 appropriate behaviour are followed at vaccination centres, BMC should set up one centre for every 50,000 people."

Additional Municipal Commissioner Suresh Kakani said that the centres have been set up depending on the local situation and inspection reports of ward offices. "We are targeting one centre per electoral ward. The remaining centres are being finalised... We are trying to operationalise 90 per cent of these by Sunday. The decision to start more vaccination centres was taken to control the rush at big centres and decrease travel time for the people." However, corporators and officials acknowledged that until adequate stocks are available, having so many centres may give rise to other challenges.

# 'Make the unbreakable vow': Mumbai Police uses Harry Potter to create awareness about wearing two masks



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai Police is known for their social media brilliance with funny and witty advisory posts. The latest one, inspired by Harry Potter, is winning hearts on social media. Taking to Twitter, Mumbai Police shared the Harry Potter post in a bid to

remind people to wear two masks and be safe.

The post features Professor Albus Dumbledore asking Professor Severus Snape, "Double mask". To which Snape replies, "Always".

"Do you solemnly swear to be all good? Make the 'unbreakable vow' to double mask and keep safe 'always,'" read the caption

of the Twitter post.

Many who came across the post lauded the creativity of the police department.

Since being shared on Twitter, the post has almost 300 likes. The same post, which was shared on the department's Instagram page managed to garner over 14,000 likes.

# Travelling to Maharashtra? Here's what you need to keep in mind

Team Absolute | Mumbai

With the Maharashtra government extending the restrictions that it had imposed earlier until June 1, the government has also tightened the rules for travel to Maharashtra from all other states. Until now, those travelling to Maharashtra from specific states, identified as 'Sensitive Areas', required to hold an RT-PCR negative test. From Friday, a negative RT-PCR test result obtained within 48 hours before the time of the entry into the state, has been made mandatory for all entrants to the state. However, considering the delay being experienced in getting RT-PCR test results, rail and air travellers are being allowed to disembark at their destinations in Maharashtra and tested using RT-PCR or antigen methods upon arrival. There is a lack of clarity for those

travelling by road as the state does not grant one-way e-Passes for those travelling from other states to Maharashtra. Such individuals will have to apply with local authorities in respective states for interstate travel permission to Maharashtra and comply with the ePass rules in the home state.

As per the order issued by State Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunte, any person entering the state of Maharashtra by any mode of transport will have to carry a negative RT-PCR report. The test report will have to be issued within 48 hours before the time of entry into Maharashtra.

The restrictions imposed on people arriving from 'sensitive origins' have now been extended to everyone arriving in Maharashtra from other parts of India. In case of cargo carriers, only two persons will be allowed in the vehicle. If

the carriers are originating from outside Maharashtra, they will be allowed with a negative RT-PCR test report issued within 48 hours before the time of entry into the state and will be valid for seven days, the order said. Practically, however, passengers who are arriving in Maharashtra by air, rail or road without an RT-PCR test have to go through varying processes.

## By Air

Airlines may allow passengers to board for an airport in Maharashtra even if they do not have an RT-PCR test if they agree to get tested upon arrival. For such passengers, airport authorities have arranged for swab collection centres where they can submit their throat-nasal swabs after payment.

For example, at Pune Airport, those passengers who do not have a negative

RT-PCR test are ferried to a sample collection booth set up at the arrival area and a sample is collected. "Contact details and address of the passenger is collected at this time. Once the test results arrive, names and contact details of the passengers who have tested positive are shared with municipal authorities who then proceed with the established protocol," said an Airports Authority of India (AAI) official at Pune.

## By Rail

Officials of Indian Railways said that they deal with incoming passengers in accordance with the advisories issued by the state government pertaining to the passengers coming from 'Sensitive Locations'.

As per the advisory, passengers coming to Maharashtra must carry a nega-

tive RT-PCR test result. However, if they fail to carry it, they will be checked at the arrival station.

"As, despite all efforts by Railways, some passengers may not carry negative RT-PCR tests, to the extent possible, DMA and railway authorities may set up Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) facility at the station, either using railways, state government or private labs. If it is not feasible or before it becomes operational, local DMA, in consultation with the railway officials should decide elaborate checking for the passengers without negative RT-PCR test. However, such passengers should be let go only after reasonable confirmation of them being non-infected," said the government advisory issued last month about long-distance trains.

## By Road

The police manning the entry points to Maharashtra only check for the ePass to allow a vehicle entry into the state. At present, Maharashtra ePass issuance website only issues emergency passes for those staying in Maharashtra if they need to travel to another state (and come back). It does not provide passes to individuals who are presently located outside the state and want to travel to Maharashtra. An official with Nanded Police - who man checkpoints at the Maharashtra-Telangana border - said that they only check if the vehicle has a valid ePass to enter the state.

"The authorities in the neighbouring state must ensure that the requisite medical documents such as Covid test results and death certificates are attached by the applicant while seeking the ePass," said the police officer.



## Somy Ali: Covid made us realise we've no control on our present or future



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Somy Ali says that the one essential life lesson that this pandemic taught us is the importance of staying close to our families. The actor-turned-humanitarian on the occasion of International Day of Families shares her experience of dealing with problems many are coping up with and how the results been satisfying.

Somy runs an NGO No More Tears (NMT) that assists and empowers survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence.

"We are all products of our childhood and having said that, family for me solely means No More Tears. Every child, woman and man we rescue is my family. I believe

the devastating Covid has made us realise that we have absolutely no control over our present or our future, thus definitely has cemented the significance of family life and friendship.

It's also been a huge ego kicker for many who believe that they are larger than life. I believe it has taught us as individuals that in the bigger scheme of things, we are just a drop in the ocean. None of us is specifically perfect or special," says Somy.

Talking about her experience of helping those in need and interacting with victim families, she adds that NMT had encountered a few special cases recently. Every time it has been tough but there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

*RakulPreet Singh: It boils down to when people start appreciating your work*

Team Absolute | Mumbai

RakulPreet Singh is a self-made star. In over just seven years since her Bollywood debut, in the 2014 film "Yaariyan", she has negotiated well the uphill task of dealing with the outsider tag, and is today one of the busiest actresses in the Hindi film industry.

The actress attributes her success to her ability to not be cowed down, or be scared of losing stardom.

"Ultimately it boils down to when people start appreciating your work. That is all what you work for. That one smile that you bring on someone's face or when they come and say 'we loved that film of yours'. That just makes you so happy," said Rakul.

"I am not the kind of person who lives in fear. I came with nothing and I always see the brighter side that I got the opportunity where so many people want to do films. I got the opportunity and I'm living my dream!" she adds.

Ask her what is important -- script or the character -- Rakul replies she operates in the theory of "permutation and combination".

"For me, what is important is -- it is a permutation and combination. Sometimes you choose a film because you love the story and you want to be a part of the message of the film or the entire setup of the film itself. Sometimes you go by your character and director," Rakul says.

She adds: "It is always the permutation and combination. It is subjective to each film." Talking about why she did "SardarKa Grandson", Rakul said it was the emotion of the film that decided it for her.

"It was the emotion of the film. It is such a sweet film. It talks about the grandson going to any extent to fulfil the grandmother's wish," she sums up the gist of her upcoming film, slated to release on Netflix on May 18.



## Choose the right amount of SPF in your sunscreen

Team Absolute | New Delhi

SPF known as Sun Protection Factor is an indicator of how effectively it can protect the skin from harmful of the sun rays. We need to buy a good sunscreen with a good amount of SPF. But we also need to keep in mind certain factors while choosing the right SPF.

AssemSood, Managing director Proveda India shares how one has to be careful while choosing a right SPF for their skin.

- \* Go for broad-spectrum: Knowing the importance of SPF, better choose the cream which has broad-spectrum as it will create a shield around your skin from UVA rays as well, besides UVB rays. UVA rays cause premature ageing and skin cancer, on the other hand, exposure to UVB rays may lead to sunburn and skin cancer.
- \* Know the SPF level: There are various SPF levels but SPF 15, 30 and 50 are mostly talked about. Most of the time SPF 15 is recommended but we would suggest going for a higher one like SPF 30. Using this higher version ensures higher protection and for a longer time. Please note, even the dermatologist suggests to use SPF 15 OR 30. Make sure it is applied properly and at stated intervals.
- \* Sweat/Water-resistant: Before buying make sure the SPF cream is sweat or water-resistant, especially for those who are going to take a dip in a pool or a beach. Cream with water-resistant are sticky therefore you need to reapply it after every 2-3 hours.
- \* Check the ingredients: If you are allergic to certain ingredients then you must check the ingredient section for it. One of the most unsafe ingredients is oxybenzone, which upsets the hormonal balance and can cause an allergic reaction too. Try to pick up a sunscreen that contains natural or herbal components rather than loads of chemicals.
- \* Go with cream-based SPF: There are many kinds of SPF sunscreens available in the market, but we recommend the ones with a creamy base. Do not use sprays as they contain nanoparticles that are likely to enter the bloodstream and may lead to various health issues.
- \* Expiry Date: Last but not the least, always check the expiry date. The expired products not only lose their efficiency, but they also tend to damage the skin.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Too much balcony time, exposure to the sun and gadgets may increase skin-related problems.

With the temperatures soaring high, sunscreens find their way out of boxes. Follow the advice of a good dermatologist to protect your skin against UV and infrared damage while you stay indoors and continue to apply sunscreen at home.

When it comes to protecting the skin, the choice of the right sunscreen is extremely important. Besides the sun,

**Protect yourself against the summer sun**

infrared rays can also come from less obvious places like the computer screens, mobiles, hair dryers etc. which then travel deep into the skin releasing free radicals that damage the skin.

Here are three reasons listed by Cetaphil India on why the use of sunscreen is imperative at all times. The newly-launched Cetaphil Bright Healthy Radiance Range also offers a range of daily essentials, curated and formulated to offer complete day and night protec-

tion. Prolonged use of gadgets can be damaging

Regardless of the extended 'stay at home' and limited outdoor gatherings, the radiation from the lights, TVs, cell phone screens, and even lights from different indoor lighting(s) might add to skin problems. Moreover glass windows, do not filter the harmful rays from reaching you. Daily use of sunscreen will shield your skin from the harm brought by exposure to any kind of harmful UV and infrared rays.

Offering proven protection against harmful UV and infrared rays Your sunscreen must contain broad spectrum filters to help protect from the sun's harmful radiation on your skin. A lightweight sunscreen that is easily absorbed, is hydrating

and nourishing, water and sweat resistant, and non-greasy - like the Cetaphil Sun SPF50+ / SPF 30+ Light Gel. It is a dermatologically tested, fragrance free sunscreen that can be used even in sensitive skin.

Results in skin aging and skin worries The harmful UV and infrared rays not only cause skin tanning but also penetrates the skin causing premature skin aging, pigmentation or dark spots and other skin related problems. Hence choosing a sunscreen which offers proven protection against UV and infrared radiation is important.

## Sanjana Sanghi helps Covid-impacted underprivileged children, families

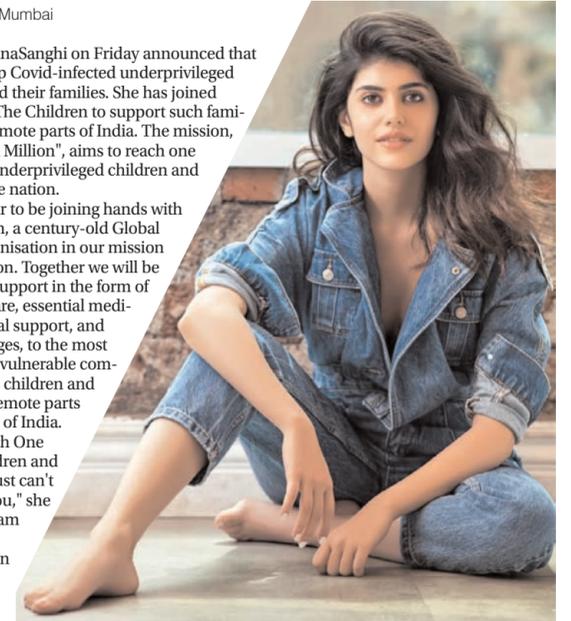
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress SanjanaSanghi on Friday announced that she will help Covid-infected underprivileged children and their families. She has joined hands with Save The Children to support such families, residing in remote parts of India. The mission, named "Protect A Million", aims to reach one million affected underprivileged children and families across the nation.

"It is my honour to be joining hands with Save The Children, a century-old Global Child Rights Organisation in our mission to #ProtectAMillion. Together we will be providing Covid support in the form of oxygen, critical care, essential medicine, psycho-social support, and nutritional packages, to the most underserved and vulnerable communities which is children and their families in remote parts across 57 districts of India. Our aim is to reach One Million such children and families and we just can't do this without you," she said in an Instagram video.

She added: "Join me and save the children as we fight to protect the future and fight for hope. Every single penny, I promise you will better the life or save the lives of those for whom the basics like a thermometer, oximeter, a mask or medicine, are a huge, huge privilege. Let's open our hearts up, like we already have, and Help each other and fight for the children of our country."

She captioned the post as: "#ProtectAMillion | Save The Children We need all your help in helping us be able to provide critical relief to the most disadvantaged COVID-impacted children & families in the most remote parts of India. @savethechildren\_india and I are on a mission #ToProtectAMillion such children & families and fight for them, as they fight for their lives. Your contribution, big or small will go the longest way in allowing us to make this uphill task a reality by allowing us to make the following reach them: -Oxygen -Critical Care -Essential Medicines -Testing Support -Nutritional Packages -Psychosocial support."



## PARESHRAWAL HAS A WITTY REACTION TO NEWS OF HIS DEATH

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Veteran Bollywood actor

PareshRawal on Friday reacted to a social media page claiming that he has passed away. The actor shared screenshot of a Twitter page that has his photo

with a condolence message in Hindi, announcing that "PareshRawalji, a member of the film industry has passed away at 7am on 14th May, 2021".

Reacting to the hoax with humour, the 65-year-old actor tweeted: "Sorry for the misunderstanding as I slept past 7am...!"

The actor's fans, however, are not amused by the death hoax. While some expressed anger, others prayed for his long life. Some fans also shared memes featuring the actor, for tackling the fake news with humour.

"Action should be taken against this page. I can't tolerate such kinds of joke. You are my fav sir. I pray god this day will never come," commented a fan.

"Yes, this is bad in taste," suggested another fan. "Some respect must be shown to all the living legends. They can't have more likes n share (asTRP) by announcing someone's death. Not acceptable in civilised Society," tweeted another fan.

On the work front, Rawal will next be seen in "Hungama 2", sequel to the 2003 film "Hungama". The film also stars Shilpa Shetty, MeezaanJaaferi and PranithaSubhas.



## Why diets don't work in the long term, lifestyle changes do?

Team Absolute | New Delhi

For decades, diet conversions globally have ranged from the simple and straightforward to elaborate and convoluted, the latter sometimes even bordering on crazy. In today's digital age, before you can say cheese, a new diet would have garnered a global following, with everyone from a lay person to experts swearing by its efficacy.

However, just a few weeks or months later, the same experts have moved on to another 'miraculous' weight-loss or diet program. That is what you get when you don't follow science, just fads. Health though, is not a fad. It is a lifestyle habit.

Amid all these fads, one cannot help but wonder if each of these programs are a sure-shot way to maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle, why don't they survive the test of time?

According to a study published in the BMJ, most diets help with weight loss and lower blood pressure in the first few months, but the



desired effects don't last. So, people keep returning to new fads. But fad diets can be damaging. They often lack essential nutrients and teach you nothing about healthy eating. Excessively restrictive diets also take pleasure out of eating and may lead to eating disorders, slow down your metabolism, causing more harm than good in the long run. One of the reasons for crash diets to fail is because the body views dieting as a form of starvation. When you eat much below your desired energy intake for a long time, your metabolism slows down and tries to fight back. The

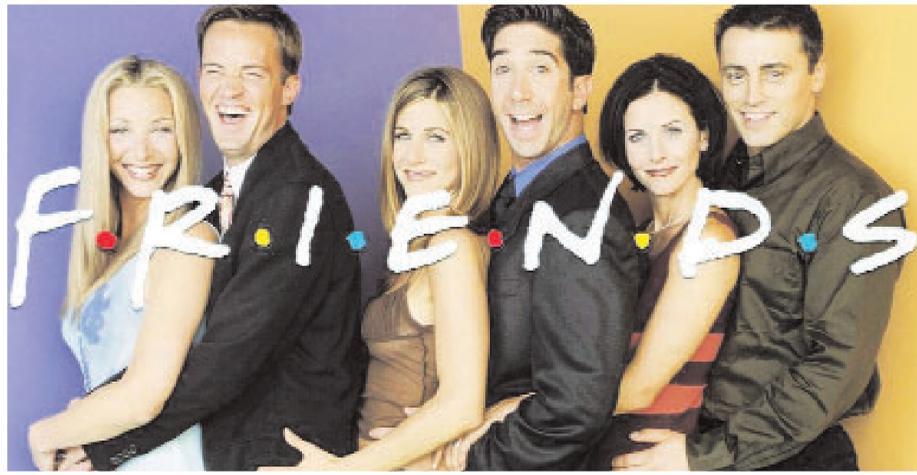
hormones that regulate our hunger and satisfaction waver making it harder to sustain the diet and hence weight loss. Further, the idea of taking extreme steps such as quitting certain foods can often lead to one feeling low and disappointed. Sooner or later you bounce back to prior 'unhealthy' eating habits. And a few months later, you are trying another new weight loss diet.

No wonder that the diet and weight loss industry around the world is growing leaps and bounds from \$192.2 billion in 2019, expected to be over \$295 billion by

2027. However, more and more studies show that if you are truly interested in losing weight and maintaining a healthy lifestyle you need a more sustainable plan than a fad diet. We must also understand the difference between weight loss and fat loss. Not all weight loss might be healthy, you might just be losing muscle or water weight due to crash dieting and doing copious amounts of cardio.

To lose fat, a few components are proven to work: these are eating slightly less than your energy requirements, having adequate protein intake to preserve muscle mass, and strength or resistance training. Doing this regularly, will slowly help manage your weight in a healthy manner, and also boost your metabolism and tone your body.

Consider making these small, incremental changes to your lifestyle to embrace a healthy relationship with food and, indeed, life. Suggested by Habbitt CEO and Co-founder DhruvBhushan.



# 'FRIENDS: THE REUNION' TO PREMIERE ON MAY 27

Los Angeles | Agencies

The much-awaited Friends reunion special will be premiering on May 27. "Friends: The Reunion" will debut on the one year anniversary of the launch of the network HBO Max and exactly one year after it was originally supposed to air. The special was delayed multiple times due to the production shutdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, reports variety.com. It was originally set to film in February 2020 but the unit was only able to begin filming in April. The special stars the original cast of

Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry, and David Schwimmer. Aniston shared the trailer on Instagram on Thursday night, India time and wrote: "It's official! The #FriendsReunion premieres May 27th on @HBOMav -- could we BE any more excited?!" The reunion special will also feature guest stars including David Beckham, Justin Bieber, BTS, James Corden, Cindy Crawford, Cara Delevingne, Lady Gaga, Elliott Gould, Kit Harington, Larry Hankin, Mindy Kaling, Thomas Lennon, Christina Pickles, Tom Selleck, James Michael

Tyler, Maggie Wheeler, Reese Witherspoon and Malala Yousafzai. Ben Winston directs the special and executive produces along with "Friends" executive producers Kevin Bright, Marta Kauffman, and David Crane. The special comes from Warner Bros. Unscripted Television in association with Warner Horizon, Fulwell 73 Productions and Bright/ Kauffman/ Crane Productions. Aniston, Cox, Kudrow, LeBlanc, Perry, and Schwimmer also executive produce, with Emma Conway, James Longman and Stacey Thomas-Muir co-executive producing. "Friends: The Reunion" will debut on HBO Max.



## JLO: 'THIS IS ME... THEN' IS MY FAVOURITE ALBUM I'VE EVER DONE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Latina pop superstar Jennifer Lopez on Friday shared that her 2002 album "This is me... Then" is her favourite among all the albums she has ever done so far. Lopez posted a clip on Instagram featuring all the music videos from the album including the hit number "Jenny from the block". "All of my albums are very special to me, but This Is Me... Then is my favorite album I've ever done - so far! I know a lot of you have heard me say that before, so in honor of my #JLovers helping it re-enter the album charts AGAIN after 19 years - here is a lil #TBT #ThisIsMeThen," she wrote as caption with her post. "This Is Me... Then" was her third studio album, released in November 2002. Her relationship with Hollywood star Ben Affleck reportedly served as her primary inspiration for the album. Lopez recently broke off her engagement with former baseball player Alex Rodriguez after about two years. Shortly after the split, she was spotted with Affleck in Montana.



## DRAKE LAUDS 'GOD'S PLAN' SCHOLARSHIP RECEIVER FOR MASTER'S DEGREE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Drake was overjoyed to know a fan he had awarded a 2018 college scholarship has since graduated with a master's degree. Drake surprised Destiny James with a cheque for \$50,000 while he was shooting his "God's plan" video in Miami where she had been studying public health at the University of Miami, reports aceshowbiz.com. The money helped her obtain her bachelor's degree in 2019, and she went on to pursue her master's degree. She will soon officially graduate from the public health program. James shared a photo of her academic achievement on Instagram, and captioned it: "Mama, I mastered it. Daddy, I did it... 4 days until I am officially UNC Alum." Among followers applauding the news was Drake. He proudly commented: "LETS GOOOOOOOOOOOOOO DES" She replied: "THANK YOUUUUU!!" James had also made an appearance in the "God's Plan" promo. She previously shared how important Drake's scholarship had been for her, after fearing she wouldn't be able to complete her studies following the loss of her father to cancer in her first year of college.

## TOM JONES REACTS TO BECOMING OLDEST SINGER TO TOP UK CHARTS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Sir Tom Jones says he didn't expect to be alive at 80, and is so happy to be making music even at this age. The iconic singer was recently named the oldest man to have a UK number one album. The veteran scaled the top spot with his new studio album "Surrounded By Time". Jones broke the record set by Bob Dylan who, in June 2020, had become the oldest singer to reach number one in the UK charts at the age of 79 for "Rough And Rowdy Ways". "I didn't think about being alive at this age. 80 years old. Who knows? You think, if I get there maybe, and here I am and here we are. I've always wanted to keep recording as long as possible. I want to sing as long as I possibly can. I've never really known life without it. I've always been singing since I was a kid ... They told me that it's number one. I couldn't believe it. I was thrilled to bits. After all this time," he said, according to a report in femalefirst.co.uk. In an interview on ITV's The Jonathan Ross Show, he said that he has no plans of retiring anytime soon. "People have always been positive and said don't retire. I've said I'm not going to, I won't. Hopefully at the end of the day the people are going to like it (my music) and thank god, they do," he said.



## Andrew Garfield too 'sensitive' for social media

Los Angeles | Agencies

"The Amazing Spider-Man" star Andrew Garfield says he wants to stay away from social media because he is too sensitive and it wouldn't benefit his mental health. "I don't think it would be beneficial to my mental health. I think I'm too sensitive, and I want to stay that way. What these platforms promise is some form of negative or positive feedback, and either one can be addictive for someone who equates attention with love," Garfield said, according to a femalefirst.co.uk

report. He added: "It's not great if you want to have a deep experience of being alive." Garfield will next be seen in "The Eyes Of Tammy Faye", Michael Showalter's feature film based on a documentary of the same name and starring Jessica Chastain in the title role. The film is scheduled to be released on September 24. He also has the Lin-Manuel Miranda-directed musical "Tick, Tick... Boom!" coming up. Co-starring Alexandra Shipp, Vanessa Hudgens and Bradley Whitford, the film is set for an OTT release later this year.



## Idris Elba: 'Gimme five for peace'

London | Agencies

British star Idris Elba makes a beautiful appeal for peace in his new Instagram post on Friday. In a picture he posted we only see Elba's right hand, in closeup and reaching out to the sky. Alongside the image, he wrote: "Gimme five for Peace." Elba's caption seems to be an appeal to the heavens to restore peace in the world, at a time when the Covid pandemic has paralysed life globally, and fresh violence has erupted between Israel and Palestine. Elba will soon be seen in the superhero film "The Suicide Squad", besides the epic fantasy romance "Three Thousand Years Of Longing" and the western drama "The Harder They Fall". The 48-year-old actor, writer, producer, rapper, singer, songwriter and DJ, is known for roles including in the series "The Wire", "Luther", and Nelson Mandela in the biographical film Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom.



## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Kimberley Garner





EDITOR'S SPECS

## The Blame Game

Indians blamed foreigners, minority groups and doctors for the rapid spread of Covid-19 across the country during the first wave due to misinformation, rumour and long-held discriminatory beliefs, a study claimed on Thursday. Researchers from the Monash University, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, and the University of Southampton surveyed 2,138 people across 40 localities in Uttar Pradesh on their views about the spread of Covid-19. Ninety-three per cent of the respondents blamed foreigners for the spread of Covid-19, while 66 per cent also blamed the Muslim population. Surprisingly, 34 per cent and 29 per cent of people blamed the healthcare workers and the police, respectively, for failing to contain the virus spread. The social and physical consequences of stigmatisation were found to be severe, as those with symptoms refused to step forward and get tested for fear of public humiliation, the researchers said. Other examples included the refusal of non-Hindu doctors and patients to have a dignified burial; attacks on Muslims during and after religious events; healthcare workers being assaulted and asked to vacate their residences due to fear of virus spread; and incidents of Covid-19 patients leaving self-isolation early. The findings were published in the journal *Social Science & Medicine*. As India comes to grips with a devastating second wave, with an average of 350,000 new cases and 4,000 deaths daily, researchers say these incidents during the first wave are happening again. "We believe the results are as relevant today, as widespread stigmatisation is visible even during this wave," said Asad Islam, Director of the Centre for Development Economics and Sustainability at the Monash Business School. "Cases of stigmatisation during the second wave have resulted in doctors being verbally abused and prevented from taking a lift in their own residential building, old parents being abandoned, several patients fleeing medical facilities across the country, and dead bodies being dumped in rivers. Most importantly, we found that stigmatisation of Covid-19 can have negative public health implications as it may lead people to avoid getting tested and respecting prevention measures. This is essential if India is to get on top of this second wave," he added. However, when presented with accurate and reliable information about the virus spread, the Indian people backedpedalled on those negative sentiments and were more likely to get tested and seek medical help, highlighting the importance of health advice from credible sources, the researchers said.

## Kerala hit hard by drop in remittances as 1.2mn workers return: World Bank

Kerala has been hit hard by the drop in remittances from the Gulf countries from where about 1.2 million workers returned to the state due to the Covid-driven layoffs, according to the World Bank.

Arul Louis

Overall, though, the total remittances from Indian workers abroad was \$8.3 billion in 2020, a drop of only 0.2 per cent from the previous year, the Bank's Migration and Development Brief released on Wednesday revealed. India's remittances from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) recorded a steep decline of 17 per cent, but it was offset by resilient flows from the US and other host countries, it said. India remains the world's top recipient of remittances in total value, a status it reached in 2008, according to the brief. However, remittances to India are nowhere near the top when it comes to their share of the gross domestic product (GDP). Remittances make up a far more important share of the GDP for smaller countries like Tonga and Lebanon. The exodus of foreign workers from the seven member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) last



year hit Kerala hard, according to the brief. The Bank said that in "Kerala, an estimated 1.2 million migrant workers, out of more than 4 million who worked in the GCC countries and contributed 30 per cent of the state's income, returned in 2020 after the global pandemic left them jobless. Low-skilled workers were the hardest hit". In that state the monthly remittances to families receiving them fell on average by \$267, the brief said. The brief listed the US as the largest source of remittances, followed by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. For the South Asian region, remittances rose by about 5 per cent because of increased flows to Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, according to the brief. Like India, Nepal also experienced a small drop in remittances, it added.

For next year, the bank projected the remittances to the region to dip slightly to 3.5 per cent "due to a moderation of growth in high-income economies and a further expected drop in migration to the GCC countries". The main factor in the level of remittances holding up was family loyalties and the stimulus payments in some countries where the workers were located. The author of the report, Dilip Ratha said: "The willingness to help family members was enabled by fiscal measures in almost all host countries that resulted in better-than-expected economic performance. A second enabling factor was that businesses in many host countries were better prepared for remote work and remote provision of services which also supported employment."

## 2 more leaders quit Kamal's party, more exits expected soon

Venkatachari Jagannathan

The exit of top leaders of actor Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) has begun and expected to continue, say party insiders. On Thursday, MNM General Secretary and retired IAS officer Santhosh Babu announced his resignation from his post and the party's primary membership. "Dear friends, Good afternoon! It's with a heavy heart that I am informing you that I am resigning my post and membership from Makkal Needhi Maiam. My decision is due to personal reasons. I thank Kamal Sir and our team for their affection and friendship," Babu said in a tweet. Similarly, Padma Priya, MNM's State Secretary (Environment Wing) tweeted her resignation from the party post and the primary membership for personal reasons. "Some more are expected to quit next week. After the defeat of the party and his own in the Coimbatore (South) seat, Kamal was not ready to fix the problem but bent on fixing persons," an MNM insider, speaking on condition of anonymity, correspondent. The quitting of the two has raised the question whether the MNM is suffering from Thursday jinx? On May 6, a Thursday, the

party's Vice President R. Mahendran announced his decision to quit his post and the party, saying that from June 2020 onwards, the multi-faceted MNM was being converted into a fan club. The MNM had attracted many people who had made their name and fame in different sectors. "We joined the MNM as it seemed different from other parties. As a new party, it offered lateral entry for many, unlike other established parties like the DMK and the AIADMK," the official said. "Till February 2021, Kamal was fine but after March, he was a different person. All were shocked to see that Kamal was more focussed on his own victory from Coimbatore (South) constituency than that of the party as a whole," the official said. The MNM suffered a rout in the recently-concluded Tamil Nadu Assembly elections with Kamal Haasan himself losing the poll in Coimbatore (South). According to party insiders, Kamal Haasan was not ready to accept the reality and many are not seeing any future in the party. The one common view was that the party was not to be seen after the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and did not contest in the local body elections. Parachuting into Fort St George



and occupying the Chief Minister's seat may only happen in movies and not in real life, was the common view. One of the common complaints voiced against Kamal Haasan was that he was not willing to discuss issues with the party officials while expecting them to execute his orders. "A political party is not a proprietary firm. In a party, everyone is a stakeholder and issues have to be deliberated," the official added. In his resignation letter, Mahendran recalled how the suggestion made to Kamal Haasan to contest in Chennai or in two seats - Coimbatore (South) and in Chennai was ignored. According to him, there is a decline in Kamal Haasan's tenacity of purpose "which is buried under a style of operation that reeks of non-democratic manner

of running a political party". Mahendran said after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the party engaged political strategist Prashant Kishor's IPAC but later, Kamal Haasan had brought in Sankhya Solutions to manage the party's assembly poll campaign. Sankhya Solutions and Kamal Haasan's advisor did not know or understand how to enhance "Brand Kamal", he claimed. "Kamal Haasan was a big brand but the party and its political strategists botched up that brand. From being a Chief Ministerial candidate, Kamal Haasan was reduced to a star campaigner in his Coimbatore (South) constituency," a political strategist said. Political analysts were of the unanimous view that Kamal Haasan, by aligning with small

parties like the AISMK floated by movie hero R. Sarathkumar and the IJK blundered his chance to position himself as the third alternative to the AIADMK and the DMK. "The problem with Kamal Haasan's MNM ideology of 'Centrism' is very confusing and nobody understands that," political analyst Kolahala Srenivas had told correspondent. "Kamal Haasan failed in the three Ps formula for a third alternative - Purpose, Position and Performance. He didn't have a clue as to how to position himself as an alternative. His ideology or Purpose was not clear and Performance was also bad. His party was not at all visible. It will be difficult for him from now as the novelty factor has vanished," said an analyst.



## RISE IN BJP'S VOTE SHARE IN BENGAL AND OTHER NUMBER GAMES

Saibal Gupta

Though the BJP lost the West Bengal Assembly elections, it increased its tally from three seats in 2016 to 77 seats now, making it the main opposition party in the state legislative body. Though apparently it seems that the BJP made a dent in the Left-Congress alliance that suffered a huge loss in vote share this time compared to the last Assembly polls, it also cannot be ignored that a different kind of voting pattern is also responsible for the rise in vote share for the saffron brigade. In 2016, the BJP had a vote share of 10.1 per cent, allowing it to win three Assembly seats, but in the last Lok Sabha elections in 2019, the party's vote share rose to a staggering 40.7 per cent -- the highest for the saffron camp in the state so far, which enabled it to win 18 seats. It was also ahead of the other parties in 121 Assembly segments, but in the recent Assembly polls, the BJP saw a dip of 2.6 per cent in vote share to 38.1 per cent, giving it victory in 77 seats. On the other hand, the Trinamool Congress had a vote share of 44.9 per cent in the 2016 Assembly elections and got 211 seats, but in the recent polls, the ruling party increased its share to 47.9 per cent -- an increase of 3 per cent -- to win 213 Assembly seats. The vote share of the ruling party came down to 43.3 per cent in the last Lok Sabha elections, when the party managed to keep lead only in 164 Assembly segments. So, both the BJP and the Trinamool increased their vote share substantially in this election, which had a direct effect on the traditional vote bank of the Left-Congress combine, which reduced from 36.3 per cent in 2016 to only 8.5 per cent now, witnessing an erosion of 27.8 per cent. Apparently, it seems that this 27.1 per cent erosion in the Left-Congress combine directly contributed to the growth of the BJP in the state, but experts believe that the poll mathematics in Bengal is not that simple, rather it follows a more complex mechanism in its distribution among the political parties. "The Left and the Congress had a traditional secular vote bank which had a presence in all sections of the society. It is true that the voters discarded the alliance, but all of them didn't create a direct allegiance to the saffron party. The 27 per cent Muslim votes that had a significant role in the state went to the Trinamool camp while the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shared their loyalty with the BJP and the Trinamool equally. The BJP, on the other hand, had been successful in gathering the support of the upper caste Hindu votes. So though they didn't get the full support of the lower caste Hindus, they were successful in retaining nearly the same vote share as in the last Lok Sabha polls," poll analyst Biswanath Chakraborty said. When asked whether the Left-Congress vote went to the BJP, Chakraborty said, "It is true that the erosion in the Left-Congress alliance had an indirect effect on the growth of the BJP in the state. A portion of the votes went to the saffron party definitely, but not fully. The BJP has managed to get the votes of the upper caste Hindus, a portion of which had their loyalty with the alliance, but the Muslim votes largely went to the Trinamool, allowing the ruling party to increase its vote share from 44 per cent to 47 per cent."

## JUNE - AN AUSPICIOUS START OF SUMMER IN ENGLAND FOR INDIAN CRICKET

Yajurvindra Singh

The famous quote by Jean Hersey, "June is the gateway to summer" is perfect as regards Indian cricket teams that tour England. India's first ever Test match was played at Lord's, London, on June 25, 1932. On that very date 51 years later, India won the World Cup at the same venue. These two landmark moments are etched in the history of Indian cricket, both achieved in England at the start of the summer in June. The inaugural edition of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) final is to be held at the Rose Bowl Stadium in Southampton in England from June 18. India should look at it as a lucky omen, as June 2021 could just be the crowning glory for Indian cricket, if they lift the trophy and become the official Test cricket champions. It would be a glorious moment for Indian cricket after 89 years of playing the longest format. The concept of a Test championship is a terrific initiative of the ICC. The pure and conventional form of the game needed a boost. Although arranging matches in an already approved cricket calendar was a major issue, both India and New Zealand, the finalists at present look to be the two best Test teams in the world. The issue that one is concerned about is the weather. In June, rain could be a spoilsport. The ICC has earmarked an extra day for the WTC

final for that purpose. They could have quite easily decided to increase it further to ensure five days of cricket. A draw would result in both teams sharing the trophy, an outcome that is considered "fuddy duddy" in the modern world that believes in a result and a winner. The ideal way would have been for the team that qualified with the maximum points to be adjudged the winner if the result is a draw. This would then require the team with less number of points to go for a win. Alternatively, a three-match series would have been the perfect setting. If drawn then the team with the better aggregate of points in the league stage should be the winner. New Zealand, having beaten India comprehensively in the 2 match Test series in New Zealand in 2019, must fancy their chances. The June weather conditions in England may be very similar and so New Zealand will feel they have that psychological edge over India as well. Another additional advantage that the Kiwis have is that they will be playing a 2 Test match series versus England before the Test Championship. This would give their players an opportunity to get acclimatized and also the team management to zero in on their playing eleven. On the other hand, the abrupt end to the IPL has given Indian selected players that extra time for them to recover and recoup from the treach-

erous bio-secured bubble and the fatigue of the workload of cricket that they have been subjected to in the last six months. However, the escalating spread of the dreaded virus and the lockdowns in India may result in many of the players being cocooned indoors. To get into top physical and mental fitness may become a challenge for many of them. Keeping in the groove is very important in a sportsman's life and three weeks of idleness could put one back quite a bit. Indian players do plan to assemble in the first week of June and in England play a few practice matches amongst themselves. This may look acceptable in relation to the long England tour that India will undertake immediately after the WTC, but for the prize fight it may be inadequate. India has faltered in the first Test matches that they played overseas in the recent years and even in the last series at home against England. This shows that the Indian players need time to acclimatise and adjust to the conditions. The Indian batting does look superior to New Zealand on paper. However, the Kiwis would have an upper hand after having played the two-Test matches before they take on India. The pace bowling of both the sides stand tall and the deciding factor will be the fielding, especially in the slip cordon. India, have a very peculiar problem and that is to select the playing XI.

The batting with Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane and Rishabh Pant make up the top six. And after adding three pacers in Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, and Ishant Sharma, India are left with two slots to fill. The challenge would be as to who from the two spinners, Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel, who championed the side to victory in the last Test series against England or from the all-round performances displayed by Shardul Thakur and Washington Sundar, would make the cut. Adding to their selection 'problem' is India's leading all-rounder at present, Ravindra Jadeja, back from an injury. One can also not overlook Mohammed Siraj who spearheaded India's pace attack in the last Test match in Australia. The plethora of choice is what the rest of the cricketing world is in awe of as regards Indian cricket. The onus of selecting the final XI on the tour will be on the head of the Indian tour management and their think tank of the coach, captain and vice-captain with inputs from the support staff. It's a task that will only be appreciated when Virat Kohli lifts the inaugural WTC trophy. After all in this case, one swallow will make the summer for Indian cricket! (Yajurvindra Singh is a former Test cricketer. Views expressed are personal)

## ARM TWISTING TACTICS OF KERALA CONG (M) WON'T WORK WITH LEFT

Sanu V. George

One are the days when Kerala Congress (M) as the third biggest ally in the Congress-led UDF, could be a bother with their arm twisting tactics for in the present ruling CPI-M led Left such designs will not work. For a long time, K.M. Mani used to take things up with the UDF -- the way he wished, on account of his stature and for being one of the founders of the UDF in the eighties. Following his death in 2019 and the party splitting with the faction led by his son Jose K. Mani last year crossing over to the ruling LDF, many thought, when they were given 13 seats to contest the April 6 assembly polls, they will get key position as well. However, with the shock defeat of Jose K. Mani from Pala in Kottayam, his father's citadel from 1967 till he died, despite five of KC (M) winning the elections, their first demand of two cabinet minister's was shot down by the all prevailing Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. At the end of talks with them, Vijayan has more or less agreed to give them the Chief Whip post, which comes with cabinet status. Jose though is now trying to bargain for a prime portfolio and wished to get the 'revenue' portfolio which was held by his father. This appears unlikely as with the Left in power, it's normally handled by the CPI -- the second biggest ally of the Left. The CPI is already upset with the arrival of Jose into the Left fold, as they had to forego

two seats in Kottayam district. When Jose's demand surfaced, Kanam Rajendran, the secretary of the CPI was said under no circumstances they let go of 'revenue' portfolio. The CPI-M is now planning to give the Power portfolio and along with it there are talks of giving the Public Works Department too. Incidentally both these portfolios were handled by two different CPI-M ministers in the outgoing Vijayan cabinet. A media critic on condition of anonymity said by now Jose would have realised that the Left is not like the UDF, especially with Vijayan at the helm of affairs. "Looking back, Mani was a master of taking away more than what he actually deserved. Whenever he was able to flex his muscles, he did it and he got Raja Sabha seats, when his party actually never deserved it. In 2001 when the UDF won with 99 seats, the Congress did not give the finance portfolio, but in 2011, the UDF had a margin of just two seats in the 140 assembly and then he extracted his pound of flesh and got the finance portfolio. So it would be really doubtful, if Jose will get all what he desires," said the critic. Jose won the 2009 and 2014 Lok Sabha polls from Kottayam and in 2018 he quit the Lok Sabha after his party was offered a Raja Sabha seat as part of a patch up with K.M. Mani to return to the Congress-led UDF in 2018. Now all eyes are on Jose if he would settle for one minister, but would try to get back the Raja Sabha seat, he quit after leaving the Congress-led UDF, as after 2009, this is the first time that he has no post.



# SCIENTISTS CALL FOR INVESTIGATION INTO ORIGINS OF COVID-19

The Coronavirus disease, which was first documented on December 1, 2019 from Wuhan City in China, has since spread like wildfire throughout the globe. The overall global Covid-19 caseload has topped 160.8 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 3.34 million, so far.

New York | Agencies

More investigation is needed to determine the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic, say a team of 18 scientists from Universities in the US, Canada, the UK and Switzerland.

"Theories of accidental release from a lab and zoonotic spillover both remain viable," they wrote in a letter published on Thursday in the journal Science.

"Knowing how Covid-19 emerged is critical for informing global strategies to mitigate the risk of future outbreaks," said the researchers led by Jesse Bloom, an evolutionary virologist at the University of Washington, US.

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China, has since spread like wildfire throughout the globe. The overall global Covid-19 caseload has topped 160.8 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 3.34 million, so far.

The team of researchers lauded the efforts of scientists in understanding SARS-CoV-2 -- its transmission, pathogenesis, and mitigation by vaccines,

therapeutics, and non-pharmaceutical interventions. Yet, even after 17 months, how the coronavirus pandemic exactly began still remains a mystery. The researchers highlighted a joint China-World Health Organization (WHO) report into the origins of SARS-CoV-2, some results of which were released in November 2020.

"WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus commented that the report's consideration of evidence supporting a laboratory accident was insufficient," they noted.

"As scientists with relevant expertise, we agree with the WHO director-general, the United States and 13 other countries, and the European Union that greater clarity about the origins of this pandemic is necessary and feasible to achieve," they said. They call for an investigation that is "transparent, objective, data-driven, inclusive of broad expertise, subject to independent oversight, and responsibly managed."

"In this time of unfortunate anti-Asian sentiment in some countries, we note that at the beginning of the pandemic, it was Chinese doctors, scientists, journalists, and citizens who shared with the world crucial information about the spread of the virus -- often at great personal cost. We should show the same determination in promoting a dispassionate science-based discourse on this difficult but important issue," they said.

# Nuclear process at Chernobyl plant under control: Experts

Kiev | Agencies

The fission reactions in uranium fuel masses of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) reported earlier pose no danger and the possibility of a disaster is minimal, according to Ukrainian experts.

The experts from the State Scientific and Technical Centre for Nuclear and Radiation Safety said that a New Safe Confinement (NSC) recently built atop the unit four reactor hall is equipped with a modern system of continuous monitoring, with the limits of safe operation set for each sensor, Xinhua news agency reported on Friday.

An increase in the activity of neutron fluxes in a separate area was recorded under the NSC, meanwhile this process is very slow and under control, according to the experts.

"The NSC is a complex object, it is a series of physical processes, so the situation



should be assessed comprehensively, taking into account all available aspects," they said.

"First of all, it should be understood that all processes under the NSC take place in a subcritical, safe manner."

The Chernobyl NPP, some 110 km north of Kiev, witnessed one of the worst nuclear accidents in human history on April 26, 1986.

After the disaster, a large tract of land around the plant was designated as a forbidden zone and ordinary people were completely prohibited from entering it for decades. As radiation levels decreased, the 30-square-km area around the plant was officially opened to tourists in 2010, though some areas still highly polluted with radiation.

# Iranian reformist announces bid to run for Prez

Team Absolute | Tehran

Renowned Iranian reformist Mostafa Tajzadeh on Friday announced his candidacy for the upcoming presidential election, the first time a regime critic has registered for the post in the Islamic Republic.

"I was a political prisoner myself for seven years and am, therefore, first and foremost against banning critics from speaking up," dpa news agency quoted Tajzadeh said as saying.

The former Deputy Interior Minister, under President Mohammad Khatami, belongs to the radical wing of the reformist camp. After protesting against the allegedly rigged election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009, Tajzadeh was arrested and spent several years in prison.

Since then, the 64-year-old has been frequently in the headlines with his tweets criticising the regime. During the registration of his candidacy, Tajzadeh said he was against forcing women to wear a headscarf.

He said he wanted to promote more liberties and seek peaceful solutions to foreign policy issues. Like all other candidates, Tajzadeh still has to be vetted and approved by the Guardian Council.



His approval is seen as highly unlikely, however. Registration for the presidency is open until Saturday. Aside from former leader Ahmadinejad, several former generals of the revolutionary guard have announced their bid. Justice chief Ebrahim Raisi is seen as the most promising candidate. Incumbent President Hassan Rouhani cannot stand for re-election after two terms in office. The election is to take place on June 18.

# Israel reports tunnel system destruction amid violence

Tel Aviv | Agencies

The Israeli Army said on Friday that it sent 160 aircraft into the violence-hit Gaza Strip to destroy a network of tunnels operated by Hamas, the Islamist party that controls enclave, as confusion and chaos continued between the two sides.

Army spokesperson Jonathan Conricus said about 40 tanks participated in the 40-minute mission, reports dpa news agency.

Conricus said the tunnel system, named Metro, operated as a sort of "city under the city".

The extent of the damage to the system was unclear. The tunnel network is vital in the Gaza Strip for shifting goods and people in and out.

Israel often targets the tunnels, which it says are used by Hamas to allow militants to access Israeli territory for attacks. The two sides have entered another phase of aggression after growing tensions about access to holy sites in Jerusalem and efforts that possibly forced some Palestinian residents from their homes in East Jerusalem.

Militants in the Gaza Strip have attacked Israel



predominantly with rockets. About 1,800 have been fired at Israeli territory since Monday, and some 430 of them went down inside the strip.

Israel relies on its Iron Dome missile defence system to deal with those that pose a threat.

It claims that it has been about 90 per cent effective in stopping the missiles this week.

So far, Israel has reported eight deaths due to the rockets out of Gaza. The Health Ministry in the Gaza

Strip says the Israeli response has resulted in 119 deaths and 830 injuries. Israel withdrew all troops from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and has responded to attacks from within the strip since then with airstrikes and artillery. Thus, overnight reports that troops had re-entered the strip caused a stir.

But Conricus emphasized on Friday that, while tanks supported the airstrikes from Israeli territory during the mission against the tunnel network, no Israeli troops set foot inside Gaza. The Army has since apologised for the miscommunication. The rocket attacks from Gaza continued over into Friday. Police said a house in Ashkelon was struck by a rocket. Israeli and Hamas' forces have engaged in three wars since 2008. The last clash, in 2014, claimed the lives of 70 Israelis and 2,100 Palestinians. The violence has also spilled over into clashes between Jewish and Arab residents of Israel. Police reported detentions and attacks in the cities of Beersheba, Lod, Netanya, Qalansawe and Tel Aviv. In Qalansawe, there were reports of a police station being set on fire. Police have reported arresting 750 people in Israel amid this current wave of violence.

# 6.7-MAGNITUDE QUAKE STRIKES OFF INDONESIA

Jakarta: An earthquake measuring 6.7 on the Richter scaled rocked Indonesia's North Sumatra province on Friday, but did not have the potential to trigger a tsunami, the meteorology and geophysics agency said here. Earlier the agency said the quake had a magnitude of 7.2 before revising it. Ali Imran, an official in charge at the agency, told Xinhua news agency. The quake occurred at 1:33 p.m., with the epicentre at 141 km southwest of Nias Barat district and 19 km under sea bed, he said. "For this quake, no tsunami alert was issued as it was not potential for a tsunami," said Imran. The intensity of the quake was felt at III to IV MMI (Modified Mercalli Intensity) at Gunungsitoli town, Nias district, Nias Barat district and Nias Selatan district, the official said. The tremors were also felt at a nearby province of Aceh at III MMI, he added.

# 9 KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN ON 1ST DAY OF EID CEASEFIRE

Kabul: At least nine people were killed and 17 others injured during explosions in Afghanistan's Kandahar and Kunduz provinces on the first day of an Eid ceasefire declared by the Taliban and the Kabul government, according to authorities. The three-day ceasefire began on Thursday as the country marked Eid-ul-Fitr, reports TOLONews. In Kandahar, two landmines exploded in Panjwai and Maiwand districts, claiming the lives of seven civilians and injuring three others. Hours after the Eid prayers, a remote-controlled landmine blast in Kunduz's Sardawra town killed two people, including a child, and injured 14 others. Officials in the Kunduz Provincial Hospital said the injured patients were in a critical state. Before the ceasefire, more than a dozen provinces witnessed heavy clashes between the two sides, TOLONews reported. Kabul, Kandahar, Helmand, Herat, and Balkh reported the most violence.

# 4 KILLED IN KABUL MOSQUE BLAST DURING PRAYERS

Kabul: At least four people were killed and 20 others injured in an explosion inside a mosque in Kabul while Friday prayers were underway, Afghan police said in a statement. The blast took place at Haji Bakhshi Mosque in Qala-e-Murad Bek area, Shakardara district, TOLONews quoted the police as saying. A security official said that the Imam of the mosque was among the injured persons. The official said the bomb was placed inside the mosque. No group so far has claimed responsibility for the explosion. His comes a day after at least nine people were killed in two blasts in Kunduz and Kandahar provinces on the first day of an Eid ceasefire declared by the Taliban and the Kabul government.

# S. KOREAN PRESIDENT APPOINTS NEW PM

Seoul: South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Friday appointed a new Prime Minister and four other ministers after a cabinet reshuffle last month for the final year of his five-year term. Moon conferred the certificate of appointment on Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum, a former four-term lawmaker who served as the Interior Minister in the first cabinet of the Moon government, according to the presidential Blue House.

# SKorea mulls talks with Japan over nuke water release

Seoul | Agencies

South Korea is considering ways to have consultations with Japan over its plan to dump radioactive wastewater from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean, local media reported on Friday citing the Foreign Ministry.

An unnamed Ministry official was quoted by multiple local media as saying the South Korean government is in a position that the bilateral consultations between Seoul and Tokyo will be necessary to deliver its stance and receive additional information, separately from the verification process via the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The official told reporters that Seoul is reviewing ways to hold the bilateral consultations over the issue, Xinhua news agency reported.

Seoul is reportedly mulling ways to form a consultative body with Tokyo to let



South Korean officials or experts visit the destroyed Fukushima nuclear plant and figure out situations around it. Japan announced a plan in April to discharge the tritium-laced contaminated water of over 1.25 million tonnes, stored in tanks near the Fukushima plant, into the ocean

in two years.

The radioactive wastewater, accumulated at the plant since the massive 2011 earthquake and tsunami that triggered a triple core meltdown, contains such materials as tritium, cesium and strontium far beyond the tolerable limits.

# Senate Republicans to make infrastructure counter-offer: Joe Biden

Washington | Agencies

US President Joe Biden said that Senate Republicans will give him a revised infrastructure offer next week as the two sides seek compromise on the issue.

"We had a very, very good meeting and I am very optimistic that we can reach a reasonable agreement," Biden said after a meeting with a group of six Republican senators at the White House on Thursday.

"I laid out what I thought we should be doing, how it should be paid for. And my colleagues in the Senate came back and said they'll come back to me with a counteroffer of what they are prepared to do and fund, and how to fund it, and then we'll talk again next week," he said.

Following the meeting, Shelley Moore Capito, Republican ranking member of the Senate Environment



and Public Works Committee, also said both sides voiced their desire to reach a bipartisan agreement, reports Xinhua news agency.

"We promised to come back with another offer that he will react to then and counter-offer. We did what we

intended to do, which was get next steps, be very cordial and ready to deal," Capito told Fox News.

"I think we all felt that he was an honest broker here in terms of wanting to actually do something together that we've traditionally gotten done

together, which is infrastructure," Capito said of the President.

The meeting came after Senate Republicans last month unveiled a \$568 billion infrastructure investment plan, while Biden had proposed a \$2.3 trillion proposal.

During the meeting, Biden also stressed that inaction was a red line for him and that he wanted to see real progress toward a potential bipartisan deal by Memorial Day, according to the White House.

"President Biden and the six Senators agreed to stay in touch and follow up on their conversation next week. The President will be in touch with Senator Capito about further talks," the White House said in a readout of the meeting.

The two sides remain far apart on the definition of infrastructure and how to pay for such a package, according to local media.

# Colombian Foreign Minister resigns amid protests

Bogota | Agencies

Colombian Foreign Minister Claudia Blum has stepped down amid the ongoing violent anti-government protests in the country.

Blum did not give a reason for her resignation in a Thursday video message, but media reports cited criticism of her crisis management, reports dpa news agency.

Deputy Minister Adriana Mejia will be her successor, according to the reports.

Colombia has witnessed violent protests for the past two weeks, including some that turned into riots. At least 42 people have died and 168 others are missing, according to the latest figures from the national ombudsman's office. The demonstrations were initially against a controversial tax reform that has since

been withdrawn. Economy Minister Alberto Carrasquilla has already resigned over the issue. Most of the protesters are now focusing on other issues, such as opposing a planned health reform and advocating for the fragile peace process. The UN and the European Union expressed alarm at reports of excessive police violence, which the Colombian Foreign Ministry strongly rejected. Colombia is the second most populous country in South America, after Brazil, and an important ally to the US in the region. A civil war raged in the country for more than 50 years, killing 220,000 people and displacing millions.

In 2016, the Colombian government made peace with the FARC guerilla movement, and the country experienced an economic upswing and a tourism boom.

# IRISH HEALTH SERVICES HIT BY 'SOPHISTICATED' CYBERATTACK

Dublin: The Irish government's Health Service Executive (HSE) has shut down its information technology systems after being hit with what it described as "a significant ransomware attack" on Friday. HSE Chief Executive Paul Reid told public broadcaster RTE that the computer shutdown was necessary to protect patient data, reports dpa news agency. "It's quite a very sophisticated attack," Reid said, and "is impacting all of our national and local systems." "We are at the very stages of fully understanding the threat," Reid said. While the HSE said coronavirus vaccinations scheduled for Friday would proceed and ambulance services "are operating as per normal", the National Maternity Hospital said "a major IT issue" would mean "significant disruption" to services.



## ICC CONSIDERING EXPANDING T20 WORLD CUP TO 20 TEAMS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is reportedly considering expanding the T20 World Cup to 20 teams from its current number of 16. While the 2021 tournament, which is currently scheduled to be held in India, will remain unchanged, the ICC is looking to add four more teams to the tournament from the 2024 edition, according to ESPNcricinfo. Additionally, there is also speculation over the possibility of the ICC expanding the number of teams participating in the 50-over World Cup. The World Cup had been reduced to 10 teams from 14 in 2019 with the argument that broadcasters would prefer the lesser participation so as to reduce one-sided matches. However, there is now talk of getting the number back to 14 teams. The T20 World Cup is scheduled to be held in October-November but there is uncertainty over India hosting the tournament due to the deadly second wave of Covid-19 ravaging the country. The pandemic had led to the indefinite postponement of the Indian Premier League (IPL) last week. The United Arab Emirates has been kept as a standby venue for the tournament.



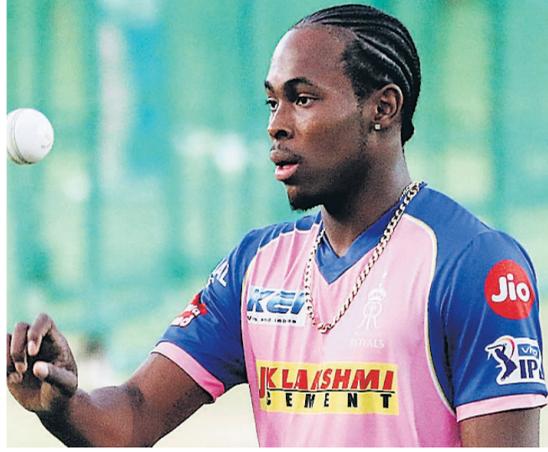
## Archer keen to play for RR if IPL rescheduled

London | Agencies

A fit-again tearaway England bowler Jofra Archer said on Friday that he would be more than willing to join his Indian Premier League (IPL) side Rajasthan Royals if the lucrative tournament is rescheduled.

Archer, who was forced to miss the first half of the IPL this year because of an elbow injury and a cut on his hand, returned to action recently for county side Sussex.

"It's terrible in India at the moment and to be honest if I did go to India, I probably would have been home early, anyway, but I think that's just how it's gone. I feel hopeful when it does reschedule for this year,



hopefully, I'll be able to go again but it was a hard decision to not go to India," said Archer.

Speaking about his fitness, the pace bowler said he wouldn't be able to comment on how many games he would have been able to play for RR, had he gone for the IPL, given the condition of his elbow.

"It was just really unpredictable. I don't know if I could have gone but I don't know how many games I would have played," said Archer.

Archer has worked closely with the Sussex and England men's medical teams to get fit and will be in contention for a place in the squad as England prepare to host New Zealand for two Tests and then play India in a series of five Tests.

## WEST INDIES TO HOST AUSTRALIA, SOUTH AFRICA, PAKISTAN IN JUNE-AUGUST

Kingston: West Indies are set for a busy home season between June and August with South Africa, Australia and Pakistan set to tour the islands for a combined four Test matches, 15 T20Is and three ODI matches.

The season starts with South Africa touring the islands for two Tests and five T20Is. The series was rescheduled from 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The tour starts with a two-Test series on June 10 after which T20I series will be played from June 26 to July 3.

West Indies then host Australia for a five-match T20I series and three ODIs. The T20Is will be played from July 9 to July 16 after which the ODI series will be played from July 20 to July 24.

The season concludes with Pakistan's tour of the islands. The two teams play a five-match T20I series from July 27 to August 3 after which they play two Test matches starting on August 12 and August 20.



## TOUGH COMPETITION FOR OLYMPIC SLOTS IN HOCKEY SQUAD: NEHA

New Delhi: India women's hockey player Neha Goyal said that she can't wait to play in the Tokyo Olympics and is doing whatever she can to make it to the team.

Neha has been a regular in the team and is part of the core group of probables training at the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Bengaluru centre.

"There is enough competition within the core group to make the final squad. I think, another contributing factor to our growing confidence is chief coach Sjoerd Marijne who constantly pushes us to excel. He inculcates that confidence in each player, and I believe this has also helped in the way we have played against some of the top teams in the recent past," Neha said.

Neha said that she has heard stories of what it is like to represent India at the Olympics from the seniors in the squad.

## Haaland, Sancho fire Dortmund to 5th German Cup title

Berlin | Agencies

Erling Haaland and Jadon Sancho scored a brace each as Borussia Dortmund beat RB Leipzig 4-1 in the German Cup final for their fifth title in the event. Sancho opened the scoring in the fifth and netted again on the stroke of half-time on Thursday, DPA reported. Haaland got the second and a late fourth in his return from injury on a wet night behind closed doors in Berlin's Olympic Stadium.

Dortmund's young and talented team of coach Edin Terzic claimed their first Cup title since 2017 in their 10th final to somewhat salvage a season that saw them fail to challenge Bayern Munich for the Bundesliga title but at least close to a top four finish for a place in the next Champions League after some strong



past weeks.

Leipzig and their Munich-bound coach Julian Nagelsmann failed to win a first title of any kind, with Leipzig having also lost the 2019 Cup final against Munich. Their 71st-minute goal from

Dani Olmo was not enough on the night. They continued their poor record against Dortmund who have not lost against the eastern Germans in eight games and beat them 3-2 in the Bundesliga on Saturday.

## SOMETHING THE BOYS HAVE EARNED: SHASTRI ON NO.1 TEST RANKING

New Delhi: India head coach Ravi Shastri hailed the team for retaining their position at the top of the International Cricket Council's (ICC) Test rankings for the fifth consecutive year. "This team has shown steely resolve & unwavering focus to be crowned No. 1. It is something the boys have earned fair & square. Rules changed midway but #TeamIndia overcame every hurdle along the way. My boys played tough cricket in tough times. Super proud of this bindass bunch," tweeted Shastri. India have been No.1 in the annual Test rankings since 2017. The Virat Kohli-led side are on 121 rating points while second-placed New Zealand are on 120. The two teams face each other in the final of the World Test Championship from June 18 to 22 at the Ageas Bowl.



England overtook Australia to take third place with 109 rating points. Australia currently have 108. The West Indies, who beat Bangladesh 2-0 and drew 0-0 with Sri Lanka in series played this year, have moved from eighth to sixth with 84 points, their best position since 2013.

## Liverpool renew top four push with 4-2 win over United

Manchester | Agencies

Jürgen Klopp tasted victory at Old Trafford for the first time as Liverpool breathed new life into their top-four push with a thrilling 4-2 win in the rearranged fixture against Manchester United.

After anti-Glazer protestors got into the ground and onto the pitch 11 days ago, further demonstrations could not stop Thursday's Premier League fixture going ahead in Old Trafford's final match behind closed doors, DPA reported. United missed this chance to all but end Liverpool's Champions League qualification hopes as their fourth match in eight days ended in a first



home loss to their bitter rivals since 2014.

Also on Thursday, Everton's European hopes

suffered a blow after a limp 0-0 draw at Aston Villa. They climbed to eighth, above Arsenal, to move two points

behind fifth-placed West Ham, but Everton's inconsistencies look like costing them a European spot.

## ZIDANE SAYS REAL WILL 'GO TO THE END' IN LA LIGA TITLE RACE

Berlin | Agencies

Real Madrid head coach Zinedine Zidane has said his side will go until the final minute in the La Liga title race after closing within two points of leaders Atletico Madrid. Madrid won 4-1 away to Granada to keep the pressure on the leaders with two games to go, while moving ahead of third-placed Barcelona who are a further two points back after their 3-3 draw at Levante earlier in the week. Atletico remain in the box seat to clinch their first La Liga title since 2013-14, but Zidane's side remain in the hunt should there be any slip-ups. "We'll keep going; there are two games left and we'll go to the end, until the final minute, we'll give it our all," Zidane said post-game, DPA reports. Atletico's final two league



games are at home to 11th-placed Osasuna and away to 18th-placed Valladolid, while Real go to ninth-placed Athletic Bilbao and host seventh-placed Villarreal on the final day. Los Blancos are unbeaten in their last 16 games in La Liga of which they have won 11, the best current unbeaten run in the competition. In addition, they have equalled their best unbeaten run in a single league campaign under Zidane, achieved in 2016-17.

## Paine clarifies on India comments after being slammed

Sydney: Australia Test captain Tim Paine was caught off-guard by the backlash on social media over his comments that the Indian cricket team is good at "creating these sideshows", which "distracted" his team and it went on to lose the final Test at the Gabba -- and with it the series 1-2. The wicketkeeper said he "certainly wasn't making any excuses" for the side's series defeat. "I was asked a number of things, and one of those was talking about the challenges of playing against India. One of them is the distraction they can create. There was a lot of talk that they weren't going to Brisbane. They're always changing gloves and bringing out physios and all that can get on your nerves. Just said that was one of the things that probably distracted me and took my eye of the ball at times," Paine said on the Gilly and Goss podcast, hosted by former Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist and Tim Gossage. The skipper added that his comments that India "simply outplayed us" didn't get reported and he ended up only being slammed.



## Hussey tests negative, may fly home next week



New Delhi: Chennai Super Kings' (CSK) batting coach Michael Hussey has tested negative and will leave for Australia hopefully over the next week, the franchise has said. "Hussey has tested negative. It is not yet decided how he will go. It may not be Maldives since we are hearing that it is closed. But he will leave in the coming week, hopefully," the CSK chief executive officer Kashi Viswanathan told reporter on Friday.

The other Australians, who were part of the postponed Indian Premier League (IPL), are in Maldives serving quarantine before their departure to Australia.

However, the Health Protection Agency of Maldives had earlier this week announced that tourist visas from South Asian countries will be halted from May 13 onwards. The decision comes in the wake of a huge second wave that India is reeling under and also rising numbers in cases in other South Asian nations. The Australian government has banned direct flights from India till May 15. CSK is likely to wait till Sunday when the flight ban will end or will be reviewed to take further decision.

## Portugal to host Champions League final



Lisbon | Agencies

The Dragao Stadium, in the Portuguese city of Porto, will host on May 29 the final of the Champions League, involving the English teams from Manchester City and Chelsea, European football's governing body UEFA announced.

"Porto was chosen to replace Istanbul, following the insurmountable travel difficulties of English fans, taking into account that Turkey is on the UK's 'red list,'" UEFA said on

Thursday, Xinhua reports.

In addition to the change of venue, UEFA also confirmed the presence of at least 12,000 spectators at Dragao Stadium in "cooperation with the Portuguese authorities and with the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF)." "Once again, we call on our partners in Portugal to help us, and I am, as always, very grateful to the Portuguese Football Federation and the Portuguese Government for having agreed to organize the game in such a short period of time," said the UEFA president, Aleksander Ceferin.

"Whenever there is an obstacle, they have been creative in the solutions they found, and the fact that they are organizing this year's final is clearly due to the hard work and perseverance they have shown," added Ceferin

in praise to the Portuguese.

The Portuguese government has announced that foreign fans traveling to Porto to watch the final of the football Champions League will be staying less than 24 hours in Portugal and will all be tested for COVID-19.

"People who come to the Champions League final will come and return on the same day, with a test done, in a 'bubble' situation, that is, on charter flights, with trips to a waiting area and from there to the stadium and then to the airport," said Portuguese Minister of State and Presidency, Mariana Vieira da Silva, in a press conference.

It is the second consecutive final to be held in Portugal, since just under a year ago, UEFA held the final games in Lisbon, at the stadiums of Luz and Jose Alvalade due to the conditions of control of the pandemic of COVID-19.

## COVID RESURGENCE SUBDUES EQUITIES, AUTO, METAL STOCKS FALL

■ The S&P BSE Sensex traded at 48,652.94, lower by 37.86 points from its previous close. Similarly, the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange traded at 14,662.75, down 33.75 points, or 0.23 per cent, from its previous close.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Economic impact of Covid resurgence dented investors' sentiments during Friday's afternoon trade session. Accordingly, both indices traded in the red. On the sectoral front, other than FMCG all other sectors traded in the red.



At around 1 p.m., the S&P BSE Sensex traded at 48,652.94, lower by 37.86 points from its previous close. Similarly, the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange traded at 14,662.75, down 33.75 points, or 0.23 per cent, from its previous close.

"Markets have traded on the negatively after facing the resistance at higher levels in the market. Traders have taken the cautious route in the market after a lot of agencies have revised their GDP

growth target after the second wave in India," said Gaurav Garg, Head of Research at CapitalVia Global Research. "With the lockdown in various parts of the country continuing to extend, Retailers Association of India (RAI) said it is becoming increasingly difficult for retailers to retain employees and keep their companies alive, and that capital is needed to inject into the industry. This has added to the negative sentiments in the domestic markets."

## Fuel prices rise sharply again after day's break

■ Petrol prices in some states including Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and in some places in Maharashtra have breached the Rs 100 per litre mark while premium petrol has been hovering above that level for some time now.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Maintaining its rising trend, fuel prices increased again on Friday just after a day of pause with state-owned fuel retailers hiking rates of petrol and diesel by 29 paise and 34 paise per litre respectively in the national capital. In Delhi, petrol now costs Rs 92.34 per litre and diesel is priced at Rs 82.95 per litre up from yesterday's level of Rs 92.05 and Rs 82.61 a litre respectively in the national capital. Across the country as well the



petrol and diesel prices increased on Friday but its quantum varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states.

In Mumbai, petrol now comes for around Rs 98.65 a litre and diesel for Rs 90.11 a litre according to a price notification from oil marketing companies. Petrol prices in some states including Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and in some places in Maharashtra have breached the Rs 100

per litre mark while premium petrol has been hovering above that level for some time now. Fuel prices have now increased on four of the last five days rising continuously from Monday to Wednesday, pausing on Thursday and again rising on Friday. Prior to holding back auto fuel prices on Saturday and Sunday, its pump rates had also increased sharply on previous four days as well. Petrol prices have increased by Rs

1.79 a litre Delhi in May in the eight increases so far. Similarly, diesel prices have risen by Rs 2.22 per litre in capital this month.

IANS had written earlier that OMCs may begin increasing the retail price of petrol and diesel post state elections as they were incurring losses to the tune of Rs 2-3 per litre by holding the price line despite higher global crude and product prices.

The oil companies had already increased the ATF prices by 6.7 per cent effective this month.

OMCs benchmark retail fuel prices to a 15-day rolling average of global refined products' prices and dollar exchange rate. In the last fortnight global oil prices have hovered in \$66-67 a barrel range higher than the levels when petrol and diesel prices were last revised. Crude prices have jumped around \$ 69 a barrel now.

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

## FM hands over first batch of houses under special window project

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday handed over possession to homebuyers virtually as the Centre's Special Window for Affordable & Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) completed its first residential project.

The residential project -- Rivali Park in suburban Mumbai -- is the first housing project in India to have received funding under the SWAMIH Fund. The SWAMIH Fund was launched by Sitharaman in November 2019.

Rivali Park Wintergreens is the first investment by the fund and is also the first project to be completed.

It is a large project spread over seven acres consisting of 708 units of various configurations. It has been developed by CCI Projects Pvt Ltd (CCIPPL), an associate company of Cable Corporation of India Ltd.

Along with Sitharaman, the online event was also attended by MoS Finance Anurag Thakur; Durga Shankar Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs; Ajay Seth, Secretary, Department of



Economic Affairs; K. Rajaraman, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs; Dinesh Kumar Khara, Chairman, SBI, and other officials from SBICAP Ventures Limited.

Addressing the virtual event, Sitharaman said she is very pleased to see that SWAMIH Fund has completed its first residential project. More so,

it is an important achievement since the SWAMIH Fund has worked its way through the difficult period of the Covid-19 pandemic, she added.

The Finance Minister said that the government of India had stepped in to provide funding to the stressed affordable and mid-income housing projects, thereby giving relief to the

homebuyers who had invested their hard-earned savings. Sitharaman said the government believes that once these homes are constructed and completed, a large amount of capital locked up in these projects will be released. The Finance Minister also said that the scheme will provide employment to construction workers and will provide impetus to the allied industries such as steel and cement. Further, it will improve the portfolios of banks and NBFCs besides significantly improving the economic sentiments in the nation, she said. Sitharaman also complimented and congratulated the SBICAP Ventures team for converting a policy announcement into an on-the-ground funding institution that has achieved significant progress within a short span of time. The SWAMIH Investment Fund has so far given its final approval to 72 projects that will include 44,100 homes, while 132 projects have received preliminary approval, which will complete an additional 72,500 homes. The fund is targeting to complete an aggregate of 1,16,600 homes.

## Govt to provide liquidity to exporters by fast customs, duty drawback refunds

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In an attempt to ensure liquidity for exporters in the difficult period of Covid pandemic, the government has decided to credit all customs refunds and duty drawback claims, made by them upto May 14, by the end of the month. The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has launched a special refund and duty drawback between May 15 and May 31. Under this drive, efforts will be made by customs officials for priority disposal of all pending Customs refunds, IGST refunds and Customs duty drawback claims pending as on May 14 this year.

In an instructional circular issued to all Principal Chief Commissioners, Chief Commissioners and Commissioners of Customs

and Central taxes, the CBIC has instructed officials to closely monitor performance of the special refund and duty drawback drive on a daily basis and, wherever required, suitably guide the officers concerned to maximise the disposal.

"Further, it is important to coordinate this special drive with the major trade and industry associations (especially those that cater to exporters) for their assistance including submission of required documents from their members (if a claim is pending for want of a required document)," the CBIC has said in its instructional letter to officials.

To ensure that the latest drive is a success, the CBIC has instructed officials to widely publicise the exercise.

It has also told officials that though the decision to process pending refund

claims has been taken with a view to provide immediate relief to the taxpayers, due diligence is to be done before granting the refunds and drawback. All the relevant legal provisions, notifications, circulars and instructions must be followed while processing these claims, it has said. For facilitation of exporters, it has been decided that all communication will be done over email, wherever email id of the applicant is available.

It is urged that in these difficult times all officers concerned make special efforts to liquidate the pending refund, the CBIC letter mentions. The CBIC had launched special customs refund and duty drawback drive even last year between April 8 and 30 for priority disposal of pending Customs refund, IGST refund and Customs duty drawback claims.

## S Korea's logic chip capacity to further shrink as US expands

Seoul | Agencies

South Korea's capacity share in the advanced logic chip market is likely to decline further down the road, a report showed on Friday, as the US pushes to beef up its presence by attracting more global semiconductor firms to build factories on its turf.

South Korea was expected to represent 20 percent of global wafer capacity of 10-nanometer (nm) and below nodes this year to rank second in the sector, but its share was projected to decline to 19 percent in 2025 and 17 percent in 2027 to lose its runner-up spot, according to the latest report from market researcher Counterpoint Research.

The report estimates capacity of foundry firms and integrated device manufacturers based on their production locations.

he US, which is trying to bolster its supply chain under the Joe Biden administration, was predicted to see its share rise from 18 percent in 2021 to 21 percent in 2025 and to 24 percent in 2027 as major chipmakers like Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), Intel and Samsung are set to build their new facilities in the country.

"We believe that under the CHIPS for America Act, both local and foreign players will be pushed to follow production schedules to avail government support," Counterpoint



Research said. "Therefore, we forecast that the US' capacity share will get boosted to 21 percent (in 2025), surpassing South Korea's, with the majority of nodes in the US. On 5nm and in Intel on 7nm." The report showed that Taiwan, home to TSMC, was expected to maintain its No. 1 position in leading-edge logic chip capacity through 2027, despite a sharp decline in its market presence, reports Yonhap news agency. Taiwan was estimated to take a 55 percent share in 2021 before dropping to 44 percent in 2025 and 40 percent in 2027.

Counterpoint Research expected a 21 percent increase in the average annual wafer capacity of leading-edge logic chip nodes from 2021-2027 following chipmakers' aggressive build-up in capacity.

## GoAir files DRHP for Rs 3,600 cr IPO

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Budget carrier GoAir has filed a 'Draft Red Herring Prospectus' (DRHP) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to raise up to Rs 3,600 crore.

Accordingly, GoAir proposed an Initial Public Offer (IPO) of equity shares through the 100 per cent book building process in accordance with SEBI regulations.

"The company will offer fresh equity shares aggregating up to Rs 3,600 crore. ICICI Securities Limited, Citigroup Global Markets India Private Limited and Morgan Stanley India Company Private Limited have been appointed as the Global Coordinators and Book Running Lead Managers (GCBRLMs) to the IPO," the airline said in a statement issued on Friday.

"Khaitan & Co is the Legal Counsel to the Company as to Indian Law while AZB & Partners is the Legal Counsel to the GCBRLMs as to Indian Law. Clifford Chance Pte Ltd. is the International Legal Counsel to the GCBRLMs."

As per the statement, the IPO is



subject to receipt of requisite regulatory approvals, market conditions and other considerations.

"The Equity Shares of the Company are proposed to be listed on the BSE Limited and the National Stock Exchange of India Limited."

According to the statement, GoAir plans to use the net proceeds from the fresh issuance of capital for prepayment or scheduled repayment of all or a portion of certain outstanding borrowings and replacement of letter

of credits, which are issued to certain aircraft lessors towards securing lease rental payments and future maintenance of aircrafts, with cash

deposit. Besides, the proceeds will be utilised for repayment of dues to Indian Oil Corporation, in part or full, for fuel supplied to the company and for general corporate purposes.

Presently, GoAir has placed firm orders for delivery of 144 Airbus A320NEO aircraft as part of the growth plan.

Of these, the airline has already taken delivery of 46 Airbus A320NEO aircraft and is awaiting delivery of 98 Airbus A320NEO aircraft.

GoAir as an ultra-low-cost carrier (ULCC) is focused towards maintaining low unit costs and operational efficiency.

At present, it is one of the fastest growing airlines in India, with an increase in domestic market share from 8.8 per cent in fiscal 2018 to 10.8 per cent in the fiscal 2020.

## Economic normalcy in India by Aug-Sept, predicts CLSA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic is expected to peak in India by June, and economic normalisation is likely by August-September, as per foreign brokerage CLSA.

CLSA said the second wave will peak by June 2021 in India, though some states may take more time.

India may see a peak in the 7DMA of new cases by June. This peak in Maharashtra may have already happened, while Haryana, Delhi and Andhra Pradesh are next in line, CLSA said. Using the mid-date of the predicted range, 11 of these 16 states may see a peak of this wave by the end of June. These make up 47 per cent of India's population and 65 per cent of GDP.

Compared to cumulative testing equal to 22 per cent of national population, Madhya Pradesh (10 per cent), West Bengal (11 per cent), Rajasthan (12 per cent) and Uttar Pradesh (19 per cent) have tested much lower proportions of



their respective populations, the brokerage said.

"This may suggest a higher chance in under-reporting of cases in these states and may also impact the accuracy of predictions regarding the peak. West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar may be the last

to peak, i.e., after July," CLSA said.

Of these 16 states, 13 have imposed similar lockdown-like restrictions which restrict the free non-essential movement of people. Barring essential services, offices are either closed or allowed to open with clear restrictions.

A few states have also put a cap

on the daily timing of grocery stores for 4-6 hours. These states contribute nearly 75-77 per cent to India's GDP/population.

Mobility restrictions are a bit less strict, and more in the form of night curfews in the remaining three states of Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab, but even these have clear restrictions on offices, shops and social gatherings. Restaurants are closed in all these states while only takeaway and home delivery is allowed. India's mobility for May YTD to workplaces/recreation/groceries is at 52 per cent/ 39 per cent/ 77 per cent of pre-Covid-19 levels, respectively, which compares to the lows of 38 per cent/ 18 per cent/ 48 per cent seen during the strict nationwide lockdown in April 2020.

These saw a high of 85 per cent/ 77 per cent/ 116 per cent of pre-Covid-19 levels in February 2021. Data for four key cities show traffic at sub-20-25 per cent of the 2019 average. Delhi, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh appear to have the biggest impact

on mobility in May MTD. Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Telangana are states where mobility has had less of an impact in May so far.

Using these estimates, CLSA expects restrictions will begin to be rolled-back in Maharashtra in early-June. Possibly, states with over 75 per cent of India's GDP should roll-back these restrictions by July-August, i.e., 4-6 weeks after the peak in the respective states. This points to some kind of normalcy in economic activity from August-September 2021.

Therefore, these restrictions could have a notable impact on earnings in 1QFY22 as well as part of 2QFY22. However, with a possible peak in Covid-19 cases in the coming weeks, announcements on the rolling-back of restrictions and a further pick-up in vaccination should lend enough hope for the markets to look beyond this short-term impact and focus on a possible growth pick-up after the impact of the ongoing wave is over, the CLSA said.

## Techstars Bangalore picks 9 startups for 3rd cohort in India

Team Absolute | Bengaluru

Mentorship-driven Techstars Bangalore on Friday announced it has selected nine Indian startups for its third cohort in India.

The acceleration programme will run virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic and each selected startup will get an investment of \$120,000.

"It's heartening to see how Indian founders are increasingly focusing more on IP, and building for global markets, and not just India. These only go to create better outcomes, sustainable business models and more value creation for investors," said Dhritiman Hui, Managing Director, Techstars Bangalore. Among the nine chosen start-ups are AfterShoot that is creating the 'Grammaphone' in a world where taking pictures has become

zeitgeist for expressing oneself; Asanify, a Human Resources Platform for small businesses in emerging countries; Asvin Tech, which provides low-cost, high precision 3D scanning solutions to dentists; CogniSaaS, which aims to reduce churn in the enterprise SaaS industry; and CustomerGlu a low-code platform that helps companies solve the \$400 billion 'lost revenue' opportunity by creating interactive workflows that drive user stickiness. Dara network is creating the world's finest alumni engagement platform; EasyLokal is a translation solution enables businesses to localise mobile apps and websites easily and quickly using its cloud-based software tools; Generic Systems provides robotic solutions for the multi-billion-dollar global construction industry and Xook makes robotic food kiosks for office canteens, college, university campuses and apartment complexes.



**SUNNY LEONE: HOLD YOUR LOVED ONES CLOSE TO YOU**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Sunny Leone on Friday shared that her children Nisha, Asher, Noah, and husband Daniel Weber outdid themselves in making her feel special on her birthday, which was on May 13. "So thankful to all the love put into making me feel special on my birthday. We make due with the resources around us but Nisha, Asher, Noah and @dirty99 out did themselves. Beyond

touched. You can have all the things in the world but without family you are nothing," she wrote on Instagram. "I love you all so so much! God bless and stay safe everyone! Hold your loved ones close to you and protect each other at all costs!! It's our job as parents to protect our family and feed our family. Stay indoors and wear a mask!!" she concluded. On the work front, Sunny will next be seen in the film "The Battle Of Bheema Koregaon" and the web series "Anamika".



**POOJA BISHT OPENS UP ON HER ROLE IN 'FLAWED'**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Pooja Bisht has opened up about her role in the upcoming web-series "Flawed". "I play the character of Soumya. She is a strong, independent girl in everyone's eyes, but at the same time she bears the scar of her father's absence after he abandoned her, along with her younger sister and mother, for another woman, putting responsibilities on her shoulders," says Pooja. "Just the idea of love itself nauseated her and because of this she is unable to have a healthy relationship with anyone, and she doesn't want to open herself to anybody. Yet a little part of her wants a father figure in her life because she is tired of the responsibilities. An internal search for broken people like herself leads her from time to time towards the greater unknown," she added. The series also stars Rajnesh Duggal, Sumit Manak, Ashok Pathak and Sammratt Kapoor. It is directed by Dheeraj Singh Padiyar.

**ANUSHKA AND VIRAT'S COVID FUNDRAISER EFFORT SURPASSES TARGET, RAISES OVER 11 CRORE**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Anushka Sharma on Friday shared that the Covid fundraiser she started with her husband, cricketer Virat Kohli, has surpassed its target, raising Rs 11,39,11,820. Virat and Anushka



started the fundraiser campaign on May 7. The couple collaborated with crowd-funding platform Ketto for the campaign #InThisTogether and donated Rs 2 crore towards the initiative. They had aimed to raise Rs 7 crore for Covid relief in India. On Friday, Anushka shared a note on Instagram that reads: "Thanks to all we have surpassed our target! Funds raised for Covid Relief. Rs 11,39,11,820. #inthistgether."

"Truly amazed and humbled by the spirit of solidarity that you all have shown. We are proud to announce that we have raised more than our initial target and it will go a long way to save lives," she added. "Thank you for your overwhelming support in helping the people of India. This wouldn't be possible without you. Jai Hind. #InThisTogether #ActNow #OxygenForEveryone #TogetherWeCan #SocialForGood," Anushka further stated.



**'VARCHASVA- AN ABSOLUTE POWER' TEASER POSTER LAUNCHED**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Director Manish Singh is all set to begin his career from a roaring mafia story 'Varchasva'. The film based on the mafia power and factionalism in the coal mining business in the Dhanbad district of Jharkhand. The crime and domineering mafia stories in the backdrop of rural areas have always attracted a lot of film makers. Gangs of Wasseypur, Mirzapur, and Raktanchal have been appreciated by the audience.

The film 'Varchasv- An Absolute Power' is being produced under the banner of Kurji Production. The filmmakers have launched the teaser poster of the film. The poster reveals a protagonist with a shovel on his shoulder. The story of the film has been written by Rajesh M Sharma. The film is to be shot on the real locations of the coal mines in Dhanbad district of Jharkhand. The story of the film is inspired by the real characters and events in the 90s, which is why the filmmakers are not yet sharing much information about the main features of the film.

While talking about the film director Manish says, "The story of Varchasv is the story of domination of the coal mine in Dhanbad in the 90s. The leaders of the coal mafias make the battle of suzerainty, over these coal mines a battle for supremacy." The shooting of the film Varchasv will start as lockdown ends and it will be released in cinemas in the beginning of next year 2021.

**Mac Mohan's daughters' film 'Skater Girl' to premiere on June 11**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Late actor Mac Mohan's daughters Manjari and Vinati Makijani will be releasing their film "Skater Girl" on June 11. The sisters have written the film, with Vinati producing and Manjari directing it. Manjari has earlier directed short films and has also assisted on films such as "Dunkirk", "The Dark Knight Rises", "Wonder Woman" and "Mission Impossible 4". She has also assisted on Bollywood films such as "Saat Khoon Maaf", "Wake Up Sid" and "Gandhi Of The Month".



Talking about "Skater Girl", Manjari says: "Skater Girl' is about Prema, who fights through all obstacles -- both societal and her inner fears -- to embrace her true talent and chase her dreams. It's also a story about women across different strata of society and how they connect with each other and relate to each other's struggle. Across generations, these women have a story to tell," she says. The film's story is set in a remote village in Rajasthan and follows Prema, essayed by Rachel Saanchita Gupta, a teenager living a life bound by tradition and duty to her parents. Through the course of the story, she finds herself torn between conforming to society's expectations of her and living out her dream of competing in the National Skateboarding Championships. The film will stream on Netflix.

**INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY**



Shweta Tiwari

**Rapper Naezy pays homage to Mumbai in new song**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

'Kasa Kai', a new upbeat track by Rapper Naezy and producer Shikhar Yuvraj Manchanda, is an ode to the rapper's beloved city Aamchi Mumbai, in which the makers check in on their fans and spread a dash of positivity during these testing times. It was launched on Friday.

The song asks the people of Mumbai 'Kasa Kai' in a way they understand best and Naezy, gives an ode to his beloved Mumbai. The idea behind the track is to dispel negativity and through music, bring in some positive vibes in the lives of the listeners.

BGBNG, a new age music label that aims to bring pop culture back to independent music, is releasing the song. The label is dedicated to finding superstars in the non-film music space.

Talking about the track, Naezy says, "This song is close to my heart, it speaks about my emotions and the message is loaded with what I feel for this city and its hip-hop scene. I have expressed myself with an open heart. I connected the story of my life with the ups and downs this city has seen in the last



two years or so. The song teaches you to embrace positivity

and shun negativity. I have also questioned boundaries of religion, community and country. It's a layered song and that's the reason it's special for me."

Producer Manchanda known as Rakhis, shares: "This song is about Mumbai. I have lived in this city while taking baby steps into the music business. The ruckus and the craziness of this city have played a key role in my life and inspired my journey so far. Life has ups and downs but we must put our differences aside and try to help each other, especially through these difficult times. The lyrics of this song touch upon the way we can help each other and also change our attitude towards life. As for Naezy, he's a force to reckon with. It was an absolute pleasure collaborating with him. From seeing him perform back in 2015 to conceptualising and creating this song with him, it has been a wonderful ride."

Gaurav Wadhwa, Co-founder and CEO Big Bang Music, says, "We're proud of the track Naezy and Rakhis have created. This marks our first collaboration with InCInk and Songs like these help us solidify our mission of amplifying Artist expression. These are unprecedented times and with Kasa Kai we're just trying to remind people that we are in this together."