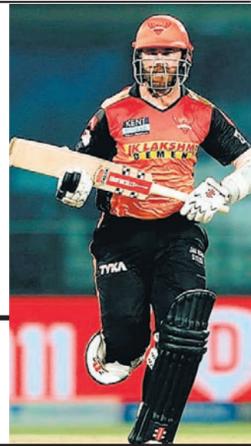


absolute india

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Make arrangements in view of cyclone 'Yaas': Centre to states

Cyclone Yaas is likely to make a landfall along the Bengal-Odisha coast between May 24 and May 26

The state governments have been asked to ensure water, electricity and fuel for the health facilities in the affected areas.

KOLKATA | Agencies

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has written a letter to the Chief Secretaries of the all the states that are likely to be

affected by the intensified cyclonic storm 'Yaas', urging the state governments to make adequate arrangements for Covid preparedness, because there is a fear that the storm might compound the public health threat posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the letter, the MoHFW said, "The public health challenges already posed by the Covid-19 pandemic may be compounded due to the direct impact of the cyclone in terms of waterborne, vector-borne and airborne diseases that may arise in the community or in the displaced pop-

ulation in camps and temporary shelter settings. Activate health sector DM plan and the hospital disaster management plan of all the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh, Andaman Islands, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal."

Urging the states to keep adequate stocks of ORS, Chlorine tablets, bleaching powder and specific drugs, the letter said, "There should be adequate power back-up arrangements for all the hospitals, labs, vaccine cold-chains, oxygen generation units and other supportive

medical facilities. Senior citizens and those suffering from diabetes, hypertension, liver/kidney/respiratory disease, and immuno-compromised diseases need to be specifically monitored with Covid perspective as they constitute people under high risk."

Assuring all kinds of assistance to the states, the ministry asked for evacuation of the hospitals in the path of the cyclone in the concerned districts of Odisha and West Bengal.

Ensure robust 'black fungus' prevention, control in Covid hospitals: Centre

CAUSE OF CONCERN

In a letter to Chief Secretaries and Administrators of all states and UTs, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan has urged them to undertake activities and practices to ensure that there are robust infection prevention and control practices in Covid hospitals and other healthcare facilities.

"Ventilation with focus on fresh air and natural ventilation wherever control systems with requisite air changes are not available. Cleaning, disinfection and sanitation of the hospital environment and frequently touched surfaces with recommended disinfectants like one per cent sodium hypochlorite or 70 per cent alcohol."



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Taking a note of the secondary and opportunistic fungal infections which are getting amplified due to the present surge in Covid cases and mucormycosis, or 'black fungus', the Union Health Ministry has advised all states and Union Territories to review their preparedness for infection prevention and control, as well as hygiene and sanitation in hospitals.

Ministry advised establishment or activation of the Hospital Infection Control Committee with the head of the institution or an administrator as the chairperson, and designating an infection prevention and control nodal officer - preferably a microbiologist or sen-

ior infection control nurse.

The Centre emphasised on strengthening procedures and practices for IPC in the context of Covid-19, and standard precautions to be applied all across the hospital/health facilities.

Transmission-based precautions need heightened focus on droplet, airborne and contact precautions from the perspective of protecting healthcare workers and ensuring patient safety, it said.

Infection in any country so far. It surpassed 4,468 deaths in the US on January 12, and earlier 4,211 in Brazil on April 6. These three are the worst-hit by the pandemic. India's overall tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,60,31,991 with 30,27,925 active cases and 2,91,331 deaths so far.

Black Fungus claims 13 lives in UP

Lucknow: The deadly black fungus -- Mucormycosis -- has claimed six more lives in the Uttar Pradesh capital in the past 24 hours while 34 more patients were admitted to hospitals. So far, the number of deaths due to Black Fungus stands at 13 while black fungus cases tally has reached 127. All the patients had earlier contracted Covid-19. The Uttar Pradesh government, on Friday, declared the deadly infection, black fungus, as an epidemic. The state has so far registered 169 cases of mucormycosis and thirteen deaths due to it.

India records 4,209 deaths in 24 hrs

Only 24 hours after recording less than 4,000 deaths, India on Friday once again breached the grim milestone as daily fatalities due to Covid-19 rose to 4,209, according to the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry, even as new cases dropped to its lowest at 2,59,551 in exactly a month. India registered record deaths due to Covid on Wednesday with 4,529 deaths -- the highest number of fatalities from Covid

No steroids for mild Covid patients

Director AIIMS, Dr. Randeep Guleria, explained that, there is a higher chance of occurrence of mucormycosis in patients whose immune system is not functioning well, and since Covid-19 treatment tends to suppress the working of the immune system, it places such patients at a higher risk of contracting the black fungus infection. He advised that Covid patients with a mild form of the infection should strictly avoid taking steroids as taking steroids increases the risk of secondary infections such as mucormycosis. If a Covid-infected person's oxygen saturation level is normal, and he/she is categorised as clinically mild, steroids should be completely avoided.

7 women among 13 Maoists killed in Maha forest encounter



Gadchiroli (Maharashtra): Registering a major victory in the ongoing war against rebels, the Maharashtra Police on Friday gunned down most-wanted 13 Maoists, including 7 women, in a fierce gun-battle in the deep forests near Etapally, officials said here. An official spokesperson for the Anti Naxal Operations (ANO) unit said that early Friday, following a tip-off that a group of Maoists were planning to come to the local villages for its regular extortion purposes, a team of C-60 commandos was deployed to carry out combing operation in the forests. At that time, a gang of around 60-70 heavily armed Maoists began firing indiscriminately in the direction of the police teams.

After an encounter lasting for about 90 minutes, the Maoists made good their escape in the thick forests, ending the dawn firing in which the police extracted a heavy toll on the rebels' side.

A subsequent search of the vicinity revealed the bodies of 13 Maoists, including 7 women and six men, carrying a collective reward of Rs.60-lakhs on their heads, and they belonged to the dreaded groups active locally.

DRDO develops Covid-19 antibody detection kit

The kit can detect both spike as well as nucleocapsid (S&N) proteins of SARS-CoV-2 virus with a high sensitivity of 97 per cent and specificity of 99 per cent. The kit has been developed indigenously by the scientists, followed by extensive validation on more than 1,000 patient samples at various Covid designated hospitals in Delhi.

Rs 75 per test in the market from June first week onwards. The kit has been developed by the Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences (DIPAS) of DRDO. Dicipovan is intended for the qualitative detection of IgG antibodies in human serum or plasma, targeting SARS-CoV-2 related antigens. It offers a significantly faster turn-around-time as it requires just 75 minutes to conduct the test without any cross reactivity with other diseases. The kit has a shelf life of 18 months. Industry partner Vanguard Diagnostics will commercially launch the product in the first week of June.

The kit will be useful for understanding the Covid-19 epidemiology and assessing an individual's previous SARS-CoV-2 exposure.

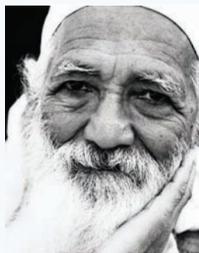
Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed an antibody detection kit known as Dicipovan, which is expected to be available at

CHIPKO MOVEMENT LEADER SUNDERLAL BAHUGUNA PASSES ON

New Delhi: Noted environmentalist Sunderlal Bahuguna, synonymous with the Chipko movement, on Friday passed away due to Covid-19 at the age of 94. He was under treatment at AIIMS Rishikesh and was admitted to the hospital on May 8 after testing positive for Covid-19.

Bahuguna had been critical since last night and with his oxygen levels dropping, was shifted to the ICU. He breathed his last at 12:05 pm on Friday, informed AIIMS director Ravikant. Bahuguna was a dedicated environmentalist best remembered for spear-heading the Chipko movement. He had been fighting for the preservation of forests in the Himalayas, first as a leader of the Chipko movement and later led the anti-Tehri Dam movement a decade later.

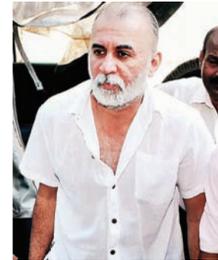


Tejpal acquitted in rape case; Goa govt to appeal against verdict

PANAJI | Agencies

Former editor-in-chief of Tehelka Tarun Tejpal was on Friday acquitted of rape charges, filed by a junior colleague who had alleged that the senior journalist had sexually assaulted her in a five-star resort in Goa in 2013.

According to the special public prosecutor Francisco Tavora, the verdict was a "serious setback" and the state government will be preparing to file an appeal against the order in the High



Court. Tejpal has been booked under sections under sections 376 (rape), 341 (wrongful restraint), 342

(wrongful confinement) 354A (sexual harassment) and 354B (criminal assault), of the Indian Penal Code.

According to the complaint filed against Tejpal by the junior colleague, the rape allegedly occurred on November 7, during a conference organised by the Tehelka media group in 2013. Tejpal subsequently stepped down as editor of Tehelka on November 20, three days before the Goa Police filed a First Information Report against him accusing him of rape.

Air India's passenger info compromised in global data breach

Team Absolute | New Delhi

National carrier Air India on Friday reported that some information of its passengers has been compromised in a massive cyber data breach with its vendor SITA PSS.

According to industry sources, the data breach has impacted other global airlines as well.

Recently, systems of SITA PSS came under a cyber-security attack leading to personal data leak of certain passengers.

The vendor is responsible for storing and processing of personal information of the passengers.

In a statement on Friday, Air India said the incident has affected around



4,500,000 data subjects in the world. "The breach involved personal data registered between 26th August 2011 and 3rd February 2021, with details that included name, date of birth, contact information, passport information, ticket information, 'Star Alliance' and 'Air India' frequent flyer data (but no passwords data were affected) as well as credit cards data. However, in respect of this last type of data, CVV or CVC numbers are not held by our data processor."

The airline said it is investigating the data security incident, securing the compromised servers, engaging external specialists of data security incidents, and notifying and liaising with the credit card issuers.

Covid claimed over 3 mn lives more than reported in 2020: WHO

Of the 23.1 million cases reported in the South-East Asia Region to date, over 86 per cent are attributed to India. Almost half (48 per cent) of all reported Covid-19-associated deaths have occurred in the Region of the Americas, and one third (34 per cent) in the European Region.

"At the time of writing, more than 160 million confirmed Covid-19 cases and 3.3 million deaths had been reported to WHO. Yet these numbers are only a partial picture, as many countries have not been able to accurately measure and report on deaths that are either directly or indirectly attributable to Covid-19."

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General, WHO

Geneva: The coronavirus pandemic claimed more than 3 million excess deaths, or 1.2 million more than officially reported, in the year 2020, according to a new report by the World Health Organisation on Friday.

While the WHO's official death toll due to Covid-19 is around 3.4 million so far, the actual number could be at least 6-8 million, showed the global health body's annual World Health Statistics report 2021.

The current estimate can be explained by under-reporting by countries on the number of infections and deaths tolls, the WHO report said. It also found that despite the extensive spread of the virus, Covid-19 cases to date are concentrated predominantly in high-income countries (HICs).



'Don't pass orders impossible to implement': SC stays Allahabad HC directions

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the directions issued by the Allahabad High Court in connection with Covid-19 management in Uttar Pradesh, stressing that the high courts should not pass orders "that are impossible to implement". While passing its directions, the Allahabad High Court had observed the entire medical system of the state, especially in smaller cities and villages, can only be taken to be like the famous Hindi phrase "Ram bharose" (at the mercy of god). An apex court bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and B.R. Gavai observed said the High Courts must ponder over the practicality of implementation of their orders. Noting that governments became active after orders were passed by various High Courts, it said that the courts should also look into the submissions made by the government. The top court also asked the High Courts to not pass orders having national and international ramifications, and leave these matters for the top court to examine.



"Courts should also have some judicial restraint and not pass orders which are difficult to be implemented," said the bench during the hearing of a plea filed by the Uttar Pradesh government challenging the High Court order. During the hearing of a PIL on the Covid-19 situation in UP, the Allahabad High Court had passed a slew of directions on May 17 in con-

nection with providing ambulances with ICU facilities in all villages, making oxygen beds available in all nursing homes, upgradation of medical college hospitals in the state etc, on an urgent basis. But the top court said the High Court should consider the possibility of directions being implemented and avoid passing the orders which are impossible.

13 acquitted in Senari massacre case that killed 34 in Bihar

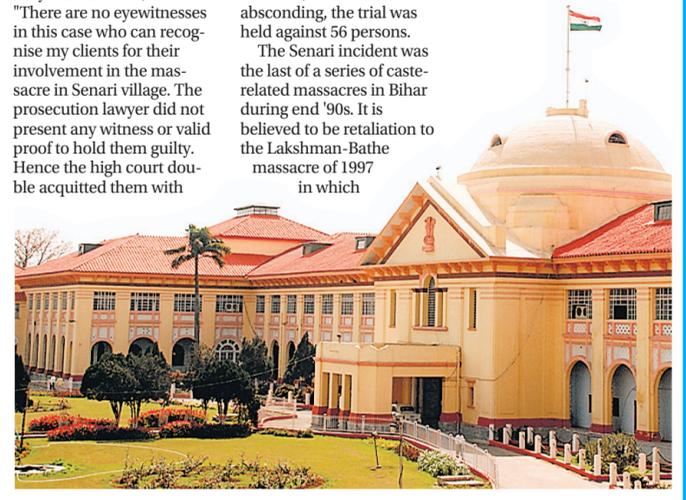
Patna | Agencies

The Patna High Court on Friday acquitted 13 persons who were accused in the infamous Senari massacre case, in which an erstwhile Maoist group had killed 34 upper caste men in 1999 at the Senari village in Bihar's Jehanabad district. On March 18, 1999, the cadres of Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) killed 34 people belonging to a particular upper caste. The cadres forced the victims out of their houses and lined them up near a temple, before killing them with blunt objects and firearms. A high court bench comprising Justices Ashwani Kumar Singh and Arvind Srivastava acquitted the 13 accused persons in the absence of evidence. All the 13 accused were serving life terms after a

lower court in Jehanabad district had sentenced them to life imprisonment. Anshul Raj, the defence lawyer in this case, said: "There are no eyewitnesses in this case who can recognise my clients for their involvement in the massacre in Senari village. The prosecution lawyer did not present any witness or valid proof to hold them guilty. Hence the high court double acquitted them with

immediate effect." The first chargesheet in this case was filed in 2002 against 74 persons. However, with 18 of them absconding, the trial was held against 56 persons. The Senari incident was the last of a series of caste-related massacres in Bihar during end '90s. It is believed to be retaliation to the Lakshman-Bathe massacre of 1997 in which

57 Dalits were allegedly killed by the members of Ranvir Sena, an upper caste private force.



RECOVERIES OUTNUMBERING NEW CASES FOR 8 DAYS: HARSH VARDHAN

New Delhi: Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Friday reviewed the public health response to Covid-19 and the progress made in the vaccination drive with nine states and Union Territories (UTs). The minister interacted with the health ministers of Chhattisgarh, Goa, Himachal Pradesh and Puducherry, and the Lieutenant Governors/Administrators of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Ladakh and Lakshadweep, in the presence of Union Minister of State for Health, Ashwini Kumar Choubey. Briefing about the Covid situation in the country, Harsh Vardhan outlined that at present there are 30,27,925 active cases in the country, while 3,57,295 persons recovered from the disease in the last 24 hours, with a recovery rate of 87.25 per cent. He expressed satisfaction that daily recoveries are outnumbering fresh cases for the last eight days. Stating that India has been reporting less than three lakh new cases a day for the last five days, the minister said that in the last 24 hours, India conducted the highest ever 20,61,683 tests, with the cumulative tests going up to more than 3,30,00,000. Underscoring the critical importance of the vaccination drive, the minister said that India has administered a total of 19,18,89,503 vaccine doses to its citizens so far.



Wife died due to lack of ventilator support, claims JDU MLA

Patna | Agencies

Achmit Rishidev, the JDU MLA from Raniganj in Araria district, revealed his ordeal after Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, after learning of the incident, consoled him over the phone on Friday. "My wife could have been saved if she had got a ventilator facility in time," Rishidev reportedly told the CM. Rishidev's wife Manjula Devi was having symptoms of Corona but her test report came negative. She was suffering from high fever for 10 days and died on Wednesday evening. "Manjula was admitted to Sadar Hospital in Araria district. That hospital has 6 beds with ventilator facilities but all of them were not operational. When her oxygen level declined, the doctors of the hospital suggested that she be taken to another hospital with a ventilator facility. We took her to the Covid care centre in Forbesganj in the adjoining Madhubani district. The doctors at the centre gave her oxygen support but her oxygen levels did not improve. The doctors said she required

A legislator of the ruling Janata Dal United said that his wife lost her life since ventilators were not functional at the Sadar Hospital in Bihar's Araria district and at the Covid care centre in adjoining Forbesganj.



immediate ventilator support," Rishidev said. "We searched for ventilators in several hospitals in Araria and adjoining districts and one ventilator was available in a private hospital located at Murliganj sub-town. We decided to shift her to that hospital, but Manjula lost her life on the way," Rishidev said. M.P. Gupta, the civil surgeon of Araria, said: "She was admitted in Sadar Hospital but her

KANGNA'S BODYGUARD BOOKED IN A RAPE CASE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The DN Nagar police have filed a rape case against Kangna Ranaut's bodyguard Kumar Hegde. The FIR was filed against a make-up artist who was promised marriage by Hegde alleged she was raped and cheated by him.



The victim in her complaint said, Hegde promised her marriage and wanted a live-in relationship with her which she had refused. She has alleged that Hegde forcibly established a physical relationship with her. In April this year, he told the victim that his mother was not keeping well and had to leave for his village after he borrowed Rs 50,000 from her. The accused switched off his phone for some time but later when the victim managed to connect with him, the accused mother threatened her and denied and said her son had not promised marriage to her. An FIR against the accused under IPC sections 376 (rape), 377 (unnatural sex), and 420 (cheating) has been lodged by police.

Five-member bench formed to hear Narada sting case

Team Absolute | Kolkata

The acting Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court on Friday constituted a five-member bench to hear the interim bail plea of four Trinamool Congress heavyweights in West Bengal, who were arrested on Monday by the CBI in the Narada sting operation case. The case will come up for hearing on May 24. The state has been witnessing high drama since Monday morning after CBI sleuths arrested two Trinamool Congress ministers -- Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee - along with present MLA Madan Mitra and former Kolkata Corporation Mayor Sovon Chattopadhyay in connection with the Narada sting tapes cases, in which several politicians and a high-ranked police officer were allegedly found accepting cash for providing unofficial favours to a fictitious company. While a lower court



granted interim bail to all the four Trinamool leaders on Monday evening, the Calcutta High Court put a stay on the order late on the same night. In an order issued by the court on Friday, it

has been said that a five-member bench has been constituted that includes acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal, and justices I.P. Mukerji, Harish Tandon, Soumen Sen and Arijit Banerjee.

VACCINATE, DON'T PROCRASTINATE: RAHUL TO MODI



New Delhi: Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi on Friday again launched a direct attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the Covid vaccination drive in the country, saying 'vaccinate and don't delay it'. "Mr Modi, Vaccinate! Don't Procrastinate," he said in a tweet, attaching a news report which claimed that 70 per cent of the districts in the country have received less than 20 doses per 100 population. Several state governments have red-flagged the government over the shortage of Covid vaccines.

All Class 10 students in Telangana declared passed

Hyderabad | Agencies

As no public examinations could be conducted for Class 10 in Telangana this year due to Covid-19 pandemic, the state education authorities have declared all students qualified. Education Minister P. Sabitha Indra Reddy on Friday announced the results, declaring all students who paid their fee for Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams passed. She said students were allotted grades considering their internal assessment marks. The results could be viewed on the websites www.bse.telangana.gov.in and http://results.bsetelangana.org. All 5,21,073 students who had applied and paid fee declared qualified. They included 5,16,578 regular and 4,495 candidates who had failed earlier. Of the total regular students who passed, 2,62,917 were boys



and 2,53,661 were girls. As many as 2,10,647 students secured a perfect 10/10 Grade Point Average (GPA) in the examinations. All students in as many as 535 schools secured 10/10 GPA. The minister said as the SSC exams could not be conducted due to the pandemic situation and all the students were declared qualified. Officials said students can get their marks memos from their respective headmasters and any discrepancies in the mark-sheets should be brought to the notice of the SSC Board by the headmasters concerned.

PATNA COLLEGE STUDENTS MAKE SAFETY BRACELET FOR WOMEN

Patna: Five students of Patna Women's College prepared a safety bracelet to help women in crisis situations. Sonali Mishra, Anamika Singh, Khusboo Kumari, Anjali Rai, and Noor Fatima developed the bracelet over a period of 7 months. The bracelet will help women to protect themselves from eve-teasing, molestation, and sexual assault. "We have given the name 'safelet' having features to start an inbuilt alarm with one touch and its sound can be heard within a one km radius. Moreover, it will also send alert messages to mobile numbers registered with it," said Sonali Mishra, one of the team members. "After pressing the alarm, local police can track the victim through GPS and Google map to save their lives," she said. The cost of the project was Rs 4,000. The students were the finalists in a national innovation contest organized every year by the education and innovation cell of All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE). Theirs was the only team from Bihar. Now, Innovation cell will grant Rs 10 lakh to these students for further projects.



CLERIC HELD IN UP FOR PRO-PALESTINE APPEAL

Azamgarh: Police in Uttar Pradesh have arrested a Muslim cleric who allegedly appealed to his community to put up the flag of Palestine on their houses and vehicles after the Friday namaaz, in order to show solidarity with Palestinians in the wake of the violence in the Gaza Strip.



The cleric, Maulana Yasir Akhtar, was arrested on Thursday after he was booked under Section 505 (2) (statements conducing to public mischief) of the IPC. Azamgarh SP Sudhir Kumar Singh said: "It came to our notice that Yasir, a resident of North Churihar Kasha in Saraimir area, made an appeal on his Facebook page, Azamgarh Express, displaying the Palestinian flag and asking the community members to the such flags atop their houses and vehicles after Friday namaaz.

10-year-old found selling liquor in UP, 'rescued' by police

Lakhimpur Kheri | Agencies

A 10-year-old boy, who was found selling illicit liquor in Nighasan, has been rescued by the police. The boy, who quit school because of the pandemic, was allegedly being forced to sell liquor by his father and uncle. Action was taken after a policeman came across a video in which the minor can be seen selling liquor to the customers. During investigation, the police learnt that the boy had stopped going to school and was beaten by his father when he refused to sell liquor. The accused father and uncle have been arrested and



FIR registered against them under sections of the JJ Act and the Excise Act. SHO Nighasan police station, D.K. Singh, told reporters, "We just had a viral video and after conducting a

brief investigation, we managed to find that a family in Kripakund village sells illicit liquor in their grocery store. When we raided the village, the boy's parents were sitting at the shop while the boy was serving liquor in a small 'bar', just behind their shop. The uncle was preparing illicit liquor inside their house. The boy's father and the uncle were arrested along with 115 litres of illicit liquor." Senior Superintendent of Police, Kheri, Vijay Dhull said that the family had been running this business for the past two years. "The boy is the youngest among two brothers and a sister. He was handed over to the Child Welfare Committee as per rules. His father and uncle have been booked under sections 60/2 and 272 of the Excise Act and Section 78 of Juvenile Justice Act," said Dhull.



DELHI'S COVID POSITIVITY RATE BELOW 5%, 3009 NEW CASES, LOWEST SINCE APRIL 1

Delhi HC quashes IGST on import of oxygen concentrators for personal use, terms it 'unconstitutional'

The national capital also continued to witness reduction in the daily test positivity rate which slid below 5 per cent (4.76 per cent) on Friday, according to the Delhi government's health bulletin. This is the first time since April 4 that the national capital's Covid positivity rate has fallen below 5 per cent.



The national capital also continued to witness reduction in the daily test positivity rate which slid below 5 per cent (4.76 per cent) on Friday, according to the Delhi government's health bulletin. This is the first time since April 4 that the national capital's Covid positivity rate has fallen below 5 per cent.

(WHO) has declared Covid positivity rate below 5 per cent to be within the safe zone. The number of active cases has now reduced to 35,683, the lowest since April 11. The recovery rate in the city is at 95.85 per cent.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday held the imposition of Integrated Goods and Service Tax (IGST) on import of oxygen concentrators for personal use as "unconstitutional". A division bench comprising Justices Rajiv Shukdhakar and Talwant Singh said the imposition of IGST on oxygen concentrators imported by individuals or received by them as gifts, for personal use is unconstitutional. The High Court quashed the May 1 notification levying 12 per cent IGST on imported oxygen concentrators. The court noted that importers of oxygen concentrators would have to furnish a letter of undertaking to the concerned authority, declaring that device is for personal use, and not for commercial use. The order was passed on the plea of a Covid-19 patient, whose nephew had sent an oxygen generator as gift from the United States of America. Senior advocate Sudhir Nandrajog, representing the petitioner, had argued that the imposition of IGST by the central government on devices meant for personal use violated the Article 14 and also abridged the right to have oxygen, which was part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. The petitioner had challenged the May 1, notification issued by the Ministry of Finance and contended



that it was forceful payment of IGST of 12 per cent on the oxygen concentrator. It was also cited before the High Court that certain imports had already been exempted from IGST till July 31. The government counsel had argued that imposition of taxes could not be subject to judicial review, and IGST was imposed in the present matter to maintain parity

with a commercial user and to avoid black marketing and profiteering. During the hearing, the High Court had suggested that the central government should consider granting exemption to levying IGST on oxygen concentrators imported for individual use by way of gift, in the backdrop of ongoing Covid-19 health crisis.

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Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi has reported 3,009 new Covid cases in the last 24 hours, the lowest since April 1, when 2,790 new Covid infections were registered in a day. The

On Friday Delhi reported as many 252 Covid related deaths, taking the total deaths so far 22,831. A total of 7,288 people have recovered, talking the total recovery in the city so far - 13,54, 445. The World Health Organisation

The capital has witnessed the worst of the second Covid wave that has swept the country since February this year. However, it has seen some respite over the last few weeks.

Truck in Delhi falls into caved-in road after heavy rainfall, minister orders probe

The cave-in near the under-construction Dhansa Stand Metro Station in west Delhi was so huge that a truck fell into it



Team Absolute | New Delhi

A large portion of a road along with the footpath near a Delhi Metro station construction site caved in due to heavy rains a day before, prompting the city transport minister to order a probe into the incident, officials said on Thursday. The cave-in on Wednesday near the under-construction Dhansa Stand Metro Station in west Delhi was so huge that a truck fell into it. "Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot on Thursday visited the DMRC site at Dhansa Stand Metro Station and Khaira Crossing where a large portion of road caved-in, damaging the nearby buildings during heavy rains last night," the transport department said in a statement. Police officials said they received

information about the cave-in due to incessant rainfall on Wednesday night. The road caved-in and the rainwater entered many shops and buildings near the spot, they said. "A truck fell into the caved-in portion of the road. But no injury or loss of life was reported," a senior

police officer said. The truck was taken out by the authorities and the State Disaster Response Force was also informed about the incident, he said. People residing in three buildings near the spot were evacuated safely, he added.

ED SEARCHES SEVERAL LOCATIONS TIED TO NAVNEET KALRA

New Delhi: Two days after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) booked businessman Navneet Kalra in the alleged black marketing of oxygen concentrator case, the financial probe agency on Friday carried out searches at several locations, sources said.

An informed ED source told IANS: "The ED is carrying out searches at several locations, including Kalra's properties, the premises of Matrix Cellular Services staff and officials arrested by the Delhi Police, as well as a farm house in South Delhi from where several oxygen concentrators were seized." On Tuesday, the ED booked Kalra and several others under the sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) for the black marketing of oxygen concentrators his restaurants Khan Chacha and Town Hall in Khan Market, and Nege and Ju located in Lodhi Colony.

Delhi getting less supply of Amphotericin B against demand: Satyendar Jain

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With the rising number of cases of 'black fungus' in the capital complaints regarding shortage of Amphotericin B, a drug used to treat black fungus, have started coming in. Also, private hospitals are struggling to procure the suddenly in-demand drug.

The private healthcare in Delhi have voiced concern that the rare 'fungal' infection is only going to increase in the days to come. As per the reports, several private hospitals have pointed out that a committee setup under the Delhi Government to provide medicines is causing delay in providing Amphotericin B due to a lot of paperwork having to be done for the purpose. Doctors said that in normal situations, they use drugs immediately but now they would have to undertake paperwork and get the drug use cleared by the government. They say the paperwork has certainly added to the hospitals' troubles. It's time consuming to fill in patient details on the government portal. The government could consider daily delivery of the drug to a hospital since it would be easier this way to check the usage as well. Replying to a query in the matter, Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said on Friday that the supply of Amphotericin B and other required medicines



are controlled by the Centre and the states are receiving supply of medicines as per the allotted quota. "Shortage of Amphotericin B is not only in Delhi but across the nation. Delhi government will provide it to the hospitals as soon as the medicine is received from the Centre," Jain added. "The Centre will provide around 2000 injections of Amphotericin B and the state administration will supply it to the hospitals as soon as it is received," Jain added. An advisory issued by the Delhi Government stated that a committee has been formed to prevent the indiscriminate use of this injection and to establish a transparent, efficient and time-bound system of distribution of this drug to the needy Covid-19 patients on clinically approved grounds.

Plea in Delhi HC seeks regulation of HRCT test price

The petition further said HRCT not only detects the presence of a virus in the lungs but also shows the severity of the infection.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday adjourned a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) till May 31 seeking direction to regulate/cap the rate of High-Resolution Computerised Tomography (HRCT) test/scan in the national capital for patients with COVID-19 symptoms. The matter was adjourned as the Division Bench of Justice DN Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh did not assemble today. Earlier, Delhi High Court had sought the response of the Delhi government and Department of Health and Family Welfare in this matter. The petitioner, Shivleen Pasricha, through advocate Amresh Anand stated that currently the price of HRCT is unregulated in the state of NCT of Delhi and it costs between Rs 5,000 to 6,500, which may be beyond the paying capacity of a common man. The price

of HRCT/CT scan/ test has already been regulated by the state governments of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, and Madhya Pradesh at a very low price as compared to what the Delhi hospitals are charging. "In the present Covid-19 wave, there are many cases where RT-PCR test reports are coming negative; however, many patients are being diagnosed with Covid-19 after conducting of an HRCT. Hence, HRCT in the present scenario has become very relevant and important for the diagnosis, management, and treatment of Covid-19 patients," the plea stated. The petitioner further said HRCT not only detects the presence of a virus in the lungs but also shows the severity of the infection. The HRCT report primarily gives two findings - a Co-RADS Score (Level of suspicion of Covid-19 infection) and a cycle threshold (CT) value score, which determines the severity and specificity of the disease/infection. To mitigate the financial burden of people during these tough times, the petitioner is filing the present writ petition seeking issuance of appropriate direction(s) to the respondents to take appropriate steps to cap the price of HRCT in the state of NCT of Delhi.

BODYBUILDER BEATEN TO DEATH BY FIVE MEN IN GURUGRAM

Gurugram: A 29-year-old bodybuilder was allegedly beaten to death with sticks during a fight while playing cards in Bandhwadi village of Gurugram, the police said. The deceased has been identified as Sandeep. The police have arrested five of his acquaintances in connection with the incident. Those arrested have been identified as Dhanesh alias Major, Jagbir, Praveen, Sunni and Sukka. The father of the deceased in his police complaint said last Monday Dhanesh alias Major had asked his son to come out of his house but Sandeep did not do so. Thereafter, another man Jagbir came from Bandhwadi village on Wednesday night and took Sandeep to a plot owner Surajmal's room located in the Aravali area on the pretext of gambling. "When Sandeep did not return home overnight, the family started looking for him. On getting some information from the neighbours, they reached Surajmal's room in the Aravali area on Thursday morning. A man named Praveen was found at the spot there. When he was asked about Sandeep, he ran away," the complainant told the police. The family found Sandeep's body lying in a pool of blood on the floor of the room with injury marks. Preliminary investigation suggested that all the accused, including the victim, were playing cards during which an altercation took place between them which led to the murder, the police said.

Nigerian national arrested for cheating people on pretext of supplying Remdesivir

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A 41-year-old Nigerian national was arrested from South Delhi's Khanpur area for allegedly cheating people on the pretext of supplying them Remdesivir injections meant for treatment of Covid-19 patients at a higher rate, police said on Friday. Accused Chieuiem Daniel PE was arrested from his rented house on the complaint of a victim who alleged that he did not deliver the ordered injections despite making an advance payment, they said. According to the complainant, he was in urgent need of three Remdesivir injections as his acquaintance was suffering from Covid-19 and doctor had advised him to arrange the injections. After he failed to get it, he contacted a number received through social media. The accused agreed to provide the injection for Rs



25,000 each and also asked for Rs 10,000 in advance, which he paid but did not receive the delivery. A case was registered under section 420 (cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property) of the Indian Penal Code at Mohan Garden police station on Wednesday, police said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Santosh Kumar Meena said call detail records of the accused was analysed and based on a secret information received, the accused was arrested on Wednesday from south Delhi. "During interrogation, the accused disclosed that he is from

Nigeria, and came to India three-four years ago on a medical visa. His visa has expired but he along with his other associates indulged in cheating people on the pretext of custom clearance. They made friends on Facebook and offered them costly gifts. After that, they requested them to deposit money in their account number in the name of customs clearance of those gifts," he said. They used many mobile phones, forged SIM cards and bank accounts for this purpose. During the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, they also started allegedly cheating people on the pretext of providing medicines and injections required for treatment of Covid-19 patients, the DCP said. The police have recovered two laptops, eight android phones, 25 keypad mobile phones, 18 mobile SIM cards, seven ATM cards, two pen drives and Rs 50,500 cash from his possession.

Youth Congress gives financial assistance to orphaned children

IYC organised ration kits distribution and blood donation camp to the needy people across the nation on the death anniversary of Rajiv Gandhi, today we are also providing financial assistance to the children orphaned due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

On the 30th death anniversary of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) on Friday arranged a blood donation camp, distributed food packets and rations to the people in need and provided financial assistance to children orphaned due to Covid-19 pandemic. The National Students Union of India also distributed PPE kits, sanitizers, face shields and face masks to the frontline workers in the national capital. Paying tributes to Rajiv Gandhi, IYC National President Srinivas BV said that the former Prime Minister was the architect of modern India, who worked towards making India strong and self-reliant. He said that the IYC has organised ration kits distribution and blood donation camp to the needy people across the nation on the death anniversary of Rajiv Gandhi, today we



are also providing financial assistance to the children orphaned due to Covid-19 pandemic. Srinivas said that poor and helpless people are very much disturbed due to lockdown across India, Covid-19 pandemic has affected all sections of society ruthlessly, therefore as per the instructions of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and keeping in mind the ideals of Rajiv Gandhi and his service to

mankind, the IYC is organising such programs across the country. Since the nation-wide lockdown imposed last year, the IYC till date has been working day and night to provide food, oxygen cylinders, ICU beds, and other necessary things to the people in Delhi and elsewhere. The IYC state units are also working day and night to help

the people as much as possible, it is the ideals of the Congress and its great leaders that its members are working smoothly at the grassroots and will continue to do so. Recalling the works of Rajiv Gandhi, the IYC leader said, "The country is still taking advantage of the foresight of the former Prime Minister. The design of the vaccination process in the country is based on previous vaccination processes. It is said that it is Rajiv Gandhi's foresight that has placed India in the category of strong, modern nations." Under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi, India touched the dimension of development. He worked to strengthen every section of the country by paying attention to its upliftment. Rajiv Gandhi paved the way for development in the country through the establishment of peace. We pay our respects to him on his death anniversary," he added. IYC National Media Incharge Rahul Rao said that today IYC organised various programs at the state, district and block levels across the country on the death anniversary of former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Rajiv Gandhi and provided ration to the needy people, organised blood donation camps, distributed various essential relief materials including food distribution and paid tributes to him. NSUI national president Neeraj Kundan in a tweet said, "Ongoing preparations at NSUI headquarters to distribute PPE kits, sanitizers, face shields and masks for Covid front line warriors including doctors, medical staff, ambulance drivers and sanitation workers. We reiterate our pledge #LadengeAurJeetenge with #RememberingRajivGandhi."



OVER ONE LAKH COVID-19 DEATHS IN MP IN TWO MONTHS: KAMAL NATH; GOVT TERMS IT FALSE

Addressing a virtual press conference, Nath said, "We have collected figures from cremation ground and graveyards in March and April this year, and came to the conclusion that 1,27,503 bodies arrived there for the last rites and 80 per cent (1,02,002) of these deaths were caused due to COVID-19."



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Congress President and Leader of Opposition in the state assembly Kamal Nath on Friday claimed that over one lakh people have died in the state due to COVID-19 in March-April this year as per the figures provided by the cremation grounds and graveyards, and accused the Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led BJP government of hiding the real fatality count.

However, the state government, however, termed his claim as "false and misleading". Addressing a virtual press conference, Nath said, "We have collected figures from cremation ground and graveyards in March and April this year, and came to the conclusion that 1,27,503 bodies arrived there for the last rites and 80 per cent (1,02,002) of these deaths were caused due to COVID-19."

The government is misleading people on the issue. It asks people to bring certificates from competent authorities to prove that they died of COVID-19, he said. The senior Congress leader also alleged that Remdesivir injections (key anti-viral drug) were being

given by BJP leaders "to their own people", instead of members of the general public suffering from COVID-19. Kamal Nath also slammed the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government for the alleged slow pace of vaccination in the state. Claiming that people are under stress owing to the lack of enough vaccination centres, he lamented that no one knows when the vaccines ordered by the state government would be supplied. Responding to his claim, Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narottam Mishra asserted that what Nath said was "false and misleading", and challenged him to give evidence about it.

Mishra said if Nath fails to give evidence then he should resign from his party post, and added that he would step down from his position as a minister if the allegations turn out to be true. The minister also urged the Madhya Pradesh Governor to act against Nath for "spreading falsehood and indulging in anti-national activities by defaming the country at the international level on the issue."

Aggressive testing strategy should be adopted to get rid off Corona: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the remaining corona cases in the state will have to be eliminated soon by creating aggressive testing strategy, contact tracing and micro-contention zone. Area specific strategy should be implemented where necessary. To make the state corona free by May 31, all the members of the Crisis Management Group and the government staff should work in this direction with full vigilance and awareness. All necessary measures should be taken to break the chain of infection and the house-to-house survey work continued in the Kill Corona campaign to identify the corona potential. Immediate medicine should be given to the affected persons and their condition should be monitored. Chouhan said that if there is a need to apply oxygen to the corona affected person, So it should be installed under the supervision of a doctor in the hospital. The use of uncontrolled oxygen is causing damage to the lungs of patients. District collectors were instructed to keep an eye on it.

Chouhan gave these instructions in the review meeting of Covid-19 of Bhopal division. In this meeting organized by video conferencing from Bhopal Collectorate, Chouhan also addressed the development level management councils of Bhopal division.

Bhopal, Sehore, Raisen, Vidisha and Rajgarh collectors in the meeting arranged beds in government and private hospitals, arrangement of



sampling test, positivity rate, infected patients and containment area management, management of oxygen, vaccination campaign, patients benefited in Ayushman Bharat Yojana A presentation was made regarding the number of cases and arrangements for the treatment of black fungus in medical colleges.

Chouhan said that it is necessary to take constant precautions after 31 May. After May, life will be normal in order. People have to be motivated to adopt the necessary behaviors to prevent corona. For this, a massive public awareness campaign will be launched. Vaccination is necessary to remove public awareness and confusion

regarding vaccines. District collectors should ensure that not a single vaccine is wasted.

Chouhan said that arrangements will be made to increase the number of beds in hospitals and to set up wards for children for the purpose of preparing for the third wave of Corona. Oxygen beds and ICU beds will be increased in hospitals. Arrangements are being made in medical colleges for black fungus treatment. It will also be arranged in Vidisha Medical College.

Chouhan said that activities will have to be started in every district for self-reliance in oxygen in the state. Oxygen plants and other arrangements are necessary in large hospitals. For this, subsidy on electricity and government grant will be arranged. Chouhan said that all the districts of Bhopal division should take the resolution of 'My district, Corona-free district' and everyone should make efforts in this direction. This achievement is possible only with the support and team spirit of the people. In the review meeting, Bhopal Collector informed that 28 mobile investigation teams are active for testing in Bhopal region. To help and guide the patients, the Niramaya Bhopal App has been developed, on which Yoga, psychiatrists, physiotherapists and therapists can be contacted. Help desks have been set up in hospitals. Where food and other arrangements are being made available for the assistance of patients and their families with the cooperation of Public Campaign Council and voluntary organizations. Cooperation of voluntary organizations is also being taken in the Kill Corona campaign

40 MP districts record less than 10% corona positivity rate

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Covid-19 situation in Madhya Pradesh is improving gradually. While the number of new cases has fallen to less than 5,000 in a day, the positivity rate has declined to 10 per cent across 40 districts of the state. There are nine districts where the positivity rate has come down to less than five per cent.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is constantly monitoring the Covid-19 situation. He says that in those districts where the new cases have not declined for the last few days, it is necessary to break the chain of the infection by strictly following the 'Kill Corona' campaign and enforcing the 'Corona curfew'.

Chouhan said, "We have to make every effort to stop the Covid-19 infections in all districts of the state by the end of this month so as to normalise life from the coming month. Under the direction of the ministers in-charge, all the officials in-charge should make an area-specific strategy in their districts and strictly implement it."



"While reviewing the Covid-19 situation in Bhopal district it revealed that between 650 and 700 infected cases have been coming up for the last few days. This suggests that the Covid-19 chain is not broken in some regions. For this an area-specific

strategy will be worked out and the chain of infection will be broken."

Several cases of black marketing of medicines have also come to light. Criminal cases have been registered against 72 people for allegedly selling fake Remdesivir injections and

indulging in black marketing of medicines. Action has been taken against many hospitals for overcharging from Covid patients. Taking strict action in 265 such cases, an amount of Rs one crore nine lakh has been returned to the families of the Covid-19 patients.

Gang Waves Gun At Birthday 'Party', Mocks Lockdown

A video of a large group of people gathered for a birthday party in a village in Bhind, is viral. The incident took place in Gomri in Bhind. From the same district, another video had emerged yesterday, in which a group of wedding guests were made to do frog jumps by the police who raided the wedding venue to check if lockdown rules were being followed.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

A gang of young men in Bhind district turned a birthday party into a show of strength, waving guns and mocking the coronavirus lockdown.

A video of the 'party' shows several men holding up guns proudly, as they stand on a platform on the terrace of building, smiling for photographs being taken by their friends.

Slogans were raised to glorify a dacoit, Rambabu Gadaria, who was killed by police in 2007 by the police. In clear violation of Covid restrictions, nearly 400 people gathered outside the house and joined the sloganeering. A case has been registered for violation of lockdown, police officer Kamlesh Kumar said. "They gathered during lockdown. We have

filed a complaint and are investigating. Action to be taken accordingly," he said.

A case has been registered against the organiser of the birthday party and a special guest who arrived from Gwalior.

The incident took place in Gomri in Bhind. From the same district, another video had emerged yesterday, in which a group of wedding guests were made to do frog jumps by the police who raided the wedding venue to check if lockdown rules were being followed.

The Madhya Pradesh government has announced 'Corona Curfew' in the state till May 31. The state added 4,952 coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, taking its infection tally to over 7.52 lakh. 7,315 people have died due to the virus in Madhya Pradesh.

CM announces Rs one lakh ex-gratia for kin of COVID-19 victims during second wave

Since March this year, when the second wave of the pandemic hit MP, the state has officially lost around 3500 lives due to coronavirus.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Every family in Madhya Pradesh, which lost its member due to COVID-19 in the pandemic's second wave, will get Rs one Lakh as ex-gratia sum, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced on Thursday. Holding a virtual meeting with BJP legislators

during his visit to Indore, the CM announced that kin of all COVID victims in pandemic's second wave in the state will be rendered AnugrahaRashi (ex-gratia) sum of Rs one lakh.

"We tried our best to save the loved ones of every family, but many families lost their members, despite all our efforts. Words of sympathy aren't enough for such families, as they've suffered irreparable loss. So every family which lost its member due to the deadly viral infection during the pandemic's second wave will be granted Rs one lakh ex-gratia sum," Chouhan announced.

Since March this year, when the second wave of the pandemic hit MP, the state has offi-

cially lost around 3500 lives due to the killer viral infection.

This announcement by Chouhan makes MP second only to Delhi to announce ex-gratia to families who lost their loved ones to the current wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two days back, the Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal had announced that every family that has had a death due to COVID-19 second wave will get Rs 50,000 as ex-gratia.

On May 14, he had announced Rs 5,000 monthly sum for all COVID-19 orphaned kids, besides announcing free ration and free education and interest free loan to their kin for bringing their life back on track.

Three days later, Chouhan

had announced twin schemes for families of government employees killed by COVID pandemic's second wave. He had announced government jobs for one family member of each government employee who died due to COVID and also announced Rs 5 lakh ex-gratia sum to be payable to every such deceased government employee.

Meanwhile, the state officially reported 4952 fresh COVID cases (lowest single day spike in last 41 days), 88 deaths and 9746 recoveries during the last 24 hours. The day's positivity rate too declined on Thursday to 6.3%, which was the lowest single day positivity rate in the last 65 days.

4 DIE OF BLACK FUNGUS, INJECTION SHORTAGE REPORTED

Chief Medical Officers of Damoh and Balaghat admitted that the districts did not have Amphotericin-B injections used to treat Black Fungus patients.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Four people from Damoh and Balaghat districts in Madhya Pradesh have died of Mucormycosis, a fungal infection seen in some Covid patients and those who had recovered, even as the state grapples with a shortage of injections for its treatment, officials said on Friday. Deepak Soni (39) and Nitin Jain (30),



both from Damoh, died of the infection, also called Black Fungus, on Thursday, after recovering from Covid, officials said. heshram Kuchalahi (38) and Chinu Lalwani (42), the other two dead, were from Balaghat, the officials said. "Soni died in a hospital in Nagpur, Jain died in Damoh. Four other patients of Mucormycosis have been sent to Bhopal for treatment,"

Damoh ENT specialist Vishal Shukla said. Seshram died in Balaghat district hospital on Thursday, said Lanji Block Medical Officer Dr Pradeep Gadam.

Lalwani died in a facility in Nagpur on Wednesday after 10 days of treatment, said Balaghat Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr Manoj Pandey.

Damoh Chief Medical and Health Officer Sangeeta Trivedi and Dr Pandey admitted that their districts did not have Amphotericin-B injections used to treat Black Fungus patients. Earlier, speaking to Covid crisis management groups from Indore on Thursday, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had said "Black Fungus treatment was expensive and adequate stocks of anti-fungal injections were not available in the country and are being imported".

Harassment at the cost of enforcing Covid norms in MP?

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Amid the strict attitude by the state administration in enforcing Covid norms among people, many incidents have come to light in several districts of Madhya Pradesh where people are being harassed and excesses committed by the administration under the guise of enforcing Covid appropriate behaviour. This entails wearing face masks, maintaining social distancing and frequently washing hands to prevent people from contracting the infection.

Neemuch is one such district where people were allegedly harassed. The administration closed down industrial units amid the 'Janata curfew' in the district. Due to the massive uproar against this decision, the administration was forced to withdraw this order.

The administration has ordered complete closure of grocery, vegetable and fruit shops during the 'Janata curfew'. Even the home delivery of grocery items is non-operational. The question then arises that how will people be able to spend the next 10 days without vegetables, fruits, ration or grocery items? Local journalist Jinendra Surana continues to raise his voice on closing down everyday essentials during 'Janata curfew'. He has also apprised the Chief Minister's

Office about this. He says, "The district administration is acting in an arbitrary manner and harassing the local people. If people are unable to buy vegetables, fruits and essential goods, what will be their condition can be imagined? During Covid times it is recommended to take nutritious food along with green vegetables and fruits for boosting one's immunity, but in Neemuch district people are deprived of this necessity. The administration is unaware of what will happen to sick patients." Neemuch MLA Dilip Singh Parihar has written to state Minister Om Prakash Sakshlecha regarding the attitude



officials have come up with a new punishment. Any individual seen on the road driving their own vehicle, the tyres are deflated without seeking any explanation. The administration ignored the plight of those people whose vehicles tyres

of the administration. The letter said that permission must be granted to open fruits and vegetables, grocery, shops etc for two days a week so that people do not face any difficulty.

Another incident of excesses has come up in Sagar district where a woman had gone out for work with her daughter and the police officials misbehaved with them. A video which has gone viral on social media shows that the woman and her daughter were ill-treated by policemen.

In Datia district of Madhya Pradesh, the administration stepped out of their house. Local leader Sunil Tiwari says that the administration and police personnel are acting in an unfair manner with the common man. Strictness is necessary during Covid-19 but it is also necessary to understand the helplessness of the people. Those people found wandering needlessly on the roads, their vehicles must be confiscated and they should be fined.

In Chaki gram panchayat of Sagar district, five trees have to be planted by Covid violators for not wearing face masks while Lord Ram has to be written in Kelagwan in Satna district for violating the Covid norms. People are being sent to prison at various places.

The corona pandemic has disrupted normal life in Madhya Pradesh as elsewhere too. The state government is taking several precautionary measures to prevent the infection from spreading, including 'Janata curfew'.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has given instructions to strictly follow the 'Janata curfew' and appealed to the people to cooperate with the government. But senior officials in many districts are taking advantage of the government's directives and acting in a high handed manner in the name of strictness.



PETROL PRICE INCHES CLOSER TO CENTURY MARK IN MUMBAI

The price of petrol increased by 17-19 paise per litre while the diesel price increased by 28-30 paise per litre across metro cities of the country. With this increase retail price of petrol has now reached Rs 99.32 per litre in Mumbai, just few days off from reaching Rs 100 per litre mark of price rise momentum is maintained by OMCs.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The repeated rise in fuel prices in May is all set to take the retail price of petrol to historic high levels of Rs 100 per litre in Mumbai. Continuing with fuel price hike momentum maintained this month, the Oil marketing companies (OMCs) raised the pump prices of petrol and



diesel again on Friday across the country. The price of petrol increased by 17-19 paise per litre while the diesel price increased by 28-30 paise per litre across metro cities of the country. With this increase retail price of petrol has now reached Rs 99.32 per litre in Mumbai, just few days off from reaching Rs 100 per litre mark of price rise momentum is maintained by OMCs.

Petrol prices are already over Rs 100 per litre in several cities in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Premium petrol has been hovering above that level for some time now. In the month of May, fuel prices have already increased over 11 days so far. This has taken up the price of petrol by Rs 2.49 a litre Delhi. Similarly, diesel price rose by Rs 3.07 per litre in the capital this month.

Before Friday, OMC were revising fuel prices on every alternate day for last one week rather than undertaking changes on a daily basis as has been practiced. Under daily price revision, OMCs revise petrol and diesel prices every morning benchmarking retail fuel prices to a 15-day rolling average of global refined products' prices and dollar exchange rate. However, in a market where fuel prices need to be increased successively, alternate day price revision seems to be the flavour. IANS had written earlier that OMCs may begin increasing the retail price of petrol and diesel post state elections as they were incurring losses to the tune of Rs 2-3 per litre by holding the price line despite higher global crude and product prices. With global crude prices at around \$ 66 a barrel mark (lower than \$ 70 it touched last week), OMCs may keep a watch and spare consumers from any further increase in fuel prices for some time now.

Will Lockdown In Maharashtra Extend After June 1? Know What CM Thackeray Said

When asked if the lockdown would extend, he said, "The situation is under control now and we will make a decision later, but no one should be careless (about the COVID norms)."

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has made an important statement concerning the lockdown in Maharashtra after 1st June. "Corona cases are declining but it is not wise to talk about it. The last time we had control over Corona even then we cannot forget what happens when we do not take the COVID 19 safety rules seriously, the COVID cases quadrupled because of the same. The current Coronavirus variant is very dangerous and is spreading at an alarming rate. It is high time that we learn from past experiences and understands that the current situation is worse than it ever was. We have to follow the rules of safety even after the lockdown is over" said Thackeray while talking about the COVID circumstances in Maharashtra. He spoke to media persons in Ratnagiri. When asked if the lockdown would extend, he said, "The situation is under control now and we will make a decision later, but no one should be careless (about the COVID norms)."



Earlier, in an interview with CNBC; state environment minister Aditya Thackeray said, "We are trying to increase the number of tests and are also taking the initiative to get everyone tested. Whether the lockdown is lifted or extended will depend on the number of corona patients. Health and safety will be our priority." Adding further on the lockdown situation, he said, "Despite the lockdown, important offices, manufacturing industry, import and export are functional in the state but to get out of the house for something unnecessary depends entirely on the number of patients."

Arabian Sea tragedy: Culpable homicide charge against barge Master, others

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Yellowgate Police Station has lodged a first information report invoking charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder against the Master of the Barge Papaa-305 and others in connection with the tragedy in the Arabian Sea which left at least 49 dead and many more missing, officials said here on Friday. The police have acted on a complaint filed by the Barge chief engineer Rahman H. Shaikh who was among the survivors picked up by the Indian Navy rescue ships earlier this week. The development came two days after the police launched its probe to ascertain why the barge allegedly failed to adhere to safety norms despite warnings of the impending Cyclone Tauktae which wreaked havoc on the country's west coast last Sunday onwards. Besides culpable homicide not amounting to murder, the barge Master Rakesh Ballav and others are also charged with common intentions, negligent acts causing hurt to others, etc. It may be recalled that of the 342-plus offshore installations of the Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. including 243 fixed and the



rest floating, five of the latter including the Barge Papaa-305 were caught in the turbulence of the cyclone and it sank late on Monday. ONGC and maritime sources said that during the Cyclone Tauktae fury, there were an estimated around 10,000 people in and around the vicinity of the Bombay High Fields, around 175 kms off Mumbai. These included over 7,600 people of the ONGC, 1,290 of Acons Infrastructure Ltd, and the others on smaller barges or supply vessels providing various types of services on the high seas at the BHF. Of the total human presence in the BHF region, around 6,900 were on different types of 94 floating vessels, and the rest on the ONGCs fixed installations like oil rigs, drills or platforms, which did not suffer any casualties.

46% OF BUSINESSES IN INDIA SAW RISE IN FRAUD AMID PANDEMIC: REPORT

Mumbai: More than 45 per cent of businesses in India have seen an increase in fraud amid the pandemic, said a report on Friday. According to data analytics company Experian, despite the growing risk of fraud, 40 per cent of Indian businesses indicate that they are placing more emphasis on revenue generation rather than fraud detection, which can lead to an increase in losses and a decline in customer confidence, considering that 56 per cent of consumers in India cite online privacy as a significant concern, businesses must take robust actions to safeguard themselves and their customers against potential digital risks, it said. "India has now become one of the largest and fastest-growing technology markets in this world," Steve Griffiths, Managing Director, Decision Analytics, Experian Asia Pacific, said in a statement.

Centre, states should coordinate for vax procurement: Report

The members of the Joint Negotiation Team - representing seven member states - are appointed by a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee discusses and reviews all aspects of the Advanced Purchase Agreement (APA) contracts before signature. All EU Member States are represented in this Committee.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As the country battles with the second wave of Covid-19 and lack of vaccines at its disposal, an SBI report has recommended that the Centre in coordination with states, should enter into deals with these companies so that we vaccinate a sizeable population. India should follow the



European Union's model of vaccine procurement, said the SBI Ecowrap. "India should ideally follow the EU template in global vaccine procurement. Globally, the EU Commission jointly with a Joint Negotiation Team carries out the negotiations with vaccine suppliers," it said. The members of the Joint Negotiation Team - representing seven member states - are appointed by a

Steering Committee. The Steering Committee discusses and reviews all aspects of the Advanced Purchase Agreement (APA) contracts before signature. All EU Member States are represented in this Committee. All member states have endorsed this approach, which is at the heart of the EU vaccines strategy, it said. It further suggested that government should focus on vaccinating people of the worst affected districts first so that the spread can be controlled. As per UNICEF data, globally, the reported production capacity (per dose) stands at 22.2 billion in 2021. Out of the reported production capacity of 22.2 billion, 13.74 billion doses' agreements is already formalized and out of this, 9.34 billion doses are secured and India has secured 0.28 billion as per the dashboard data in UNICEF. India is also exploring other options and the Government has committed at a 2.14 billion pipeline between August and December, it added.

Maharashtra SSC Result: Evaluation Criteria Expected In Two Weeks

The Maharashtra government is likely to make a decision on the evaluation criteria for SSC or Class 10 students soon.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government is likely to make a decision on the evaluation criteria for SSC or Class 10 students soon. Exams for Class 10 students in Maharashtra were earlier cancelled. A "fair and accurate" assessment criterion will be formulated after meetings with stakeholders, School Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad had earlier said. The minister had said marks will be awarded to students based on 'internal assessment' or 'objective criterion'. Recommended: Choose the right stream (Arts/ Science/ Commerce) after Class 10th. A decision for Class 10 students can be expected in two weeks, the Maharashtra Government told the Bombay High Court on Thursday. The court was hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by Dhananjay Kulkarni, challenging the government's decision in April to cancel SSC exams due to a surge in COVID-19 cases. Representing the government, PB Kakade said the government is yet to devise a formula to evaluate students (in the



absence of the exam), and a decision will be taken in two weeks. The Bombay High Court came down heavily on the state government over the cancellation of SSC exams. "You are making a mockery of the education system," Justice Kathawalla said. "Are you thinking of promoting the students without exams? If yes, then God save the education system of this state. This is the last year of schooling. Tenth standard is an important year and hence the exam is also important," the court said. The bench of Justices SJ Kathawalla and SP Tavade sought a reply as to why the decision to cancel the state board exam should not be set aside. The HC said the gov-

ernment cannot spoil students' career and future in the name of pandemic. "This is not acceptable at all. You are destroying the system," Justice Kathawalla said. The high court also asked why the government decided to cancel the Class 10 (SSC) exams but not that for Class 12 (SSC). Why this discrimination? It seems things are being done at the whims and fancies of so-called policymakers," the court said. The plea also challenges decisions taken by central boards like ICSE and CBSE. Mr Kulkarni's advocate, Uday Warunjikar, had earlier said that each board will use different marking systems, which will affect the Class 11 admission process. "The Central government will have to intervene and come out with a uniform policy," Adv Warunjikar had previously said. Maharashtra's decision to cancel SSC exams came soon after CBSE's decision to cancel their board exams. Ms Gaikwad had previously said the government will also come up with criteria for First Year Junior College (FYJC) or Class 11 admission, as the Class 10 exams have been cancelled.

Covid negative RT-PCR report must for passengers arriving in Maharashtra

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Covid negative RT-PCR report is now mandatory for all Indian Railways passengers arriving in the state of Maharashtra. Piyush Goyal chaired Railway Ministry has advised all train passengers to follow COVID-19 appropriate behaviour while boarding, travelling and de-boarding at the destination. According to the national transporter, any person entering the state of Maharashtra by any mode of transport will have to carry a negative RT-PCR covid test report. The coronavirus RT-PCR test report should have been issued from up to a maximum of 48 hours before the time of the passenger's entry into Maharashtra, Indian Railways has stated. All the restrictions that have been made applicable to persons arriving from the states of Goa, Kerala, Rajasthan, Gujarat, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR), as per orders dated 18 April 2021 and 1 May 2021, will now be applicable to anyone arriving from any part of the country to the state. The latest covid advisory for various states is available on the website https://contents.irct.co.in/en/stateWiseAdvisory.html. Indian Railways has advised



passengers travelling in long distance trains are requested to check the covid advisory from the official IRCTC website and follow COVID-19 protocols for their own safety and the safety of others. Meanwhile, the Railway Ministry has suspended several passenger special train services. Since last year, several special train services have been plying over the Indian Railways network as all passenger train services were put on halt by the government due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the national transporter, because of the surge in covid cases, some of the special train services were running with low occupancy. Thus, due to low occupancy as well as other operational reasons, Indian Railways has decided to discontinue some of the special train services till further advice.

"Should Be Faster Than Virus": Mumbai Preps For 3rd Wave, Focus On Kids

Mumbai is building four mammoth centres with units for children infected with COVID-19 and it is working closely with a special task force that includes some of the country's top paediatricians, the city's civic chief said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai won plaudits this year for tackling the second wave of the pandemic better than any other metropolis in the country - and it is gearing up to get ahead of a potential third wave that experts fear could affect children. Mumbai is building four mammoth centres across the city with units for children infected with COVID-19 and it is working closely with a special task force that includes some of the country's top paediatricians, the city's civic chief said. "If a 2-year-old child becomes highly symptomatic, how can you deposit the child in hospital without the mother?" Mumbai's Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal told Reuters. "We have already started preparing for that. ... One should be faster than the virus." With more than 25 million infections, India has the world's second-largest caseload after the United States and

many of its states have been grappling with a lack of hospital beds and inadequate oxygen and medical supplies. Mumbai, in the country's richest state, Maharashtra, struggled initially with one of the highest caseloads in the country but reined in the virus with strict lockdowns, widespread testing and a decentralised COVID management system. Chahal, widely credited for successfully managing the surge there, said the four COVID care centres with paediatric units, as good as hospitals, will



The city is spending tens of millions of dollars to build the paediatric units and is already procuring ventilators,

be able to house more than a thousand children along with a parent. The facilities, which will also have intensive-care units (ICUs), will be ready by next month, well before experts predict the third wave will hit, said Chahal, adding that there is ample funding from the state, companies and even Bollywood celebrities.

monitors and other medical equipment, Chahal said. Apart from these units, the government is also in talks with hospitals to increase the number of paediatric beds and ICUs. The paediatric task force, led by Dr Suhas Prabhu, plans to train about 660 paediatricians on how to handle children affected by COVID-19, and then broaden the training to more staff. The third wave might not end up affecting children greatly, but cities like Mumbai cannot afford to be caught off guard, Prabhu said. Chahal was handpicked by Maharashtra's Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray in May last year to lead the city's response when the virus hit. Chahal, the son of an army officer, set up local COVID "war rooms" in 24 zones in the city to decentralise the pressure and hasten the response. Even as other cities in Maharashtra continue to report high numbers, Mumbai's cases have plunged, says Prince Surana, a doctor who runs three hospitals in the city. But Chahal says Mumbai is not out of the woods. He city, like the rest of India, is still grappling with an acute shortage of vaccines. The city has floated a global tender to acquire 10 million doses from private companies, Chahal said. "If we get the vaccines, in 60 days we can fully vaccinate Mumbai and negate the threat of a third wave," he said. "That's my biggest challenge and we are on it now."

JUHI PARMAR SHARES DO'S AND DON'TS WHILE DEALING WITH COVID PATIENTS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Television actress Juhi Parmar, whose mother had tested Covid positive recently, has shared a few do's and don'ts to be kept in mind while dealing with those who contract the virus. "Covid-19 has scared us and this time around the second wave in India is really deadly, and has hit us either close to home or right at home. In my case, unfortunately my mom tested positive and then started the 15-day journey of isolation. But with the isolation and medication there are many dos and don'ts for the recovery of a Covid patient," she said. Talking about do's and don'ts, Juhi shared: "First of all, it is important to understand that even if you only are at home, it doesn't mean you can't get infected. My mother was at home most of the time but she was the one who tested positive, so we should take care of our immunity." "I would also advise everyone to keep an oximeter handy, so that you can keep a track of the patient's oxygen level and if it drops, then you should immediately consult your doctor and follow their recommendations," she added. "An important thing to do is to keep the patient hydrated, you should see to it that they have at least eight to 10 glasses of warm or normal water along with a glass or two of fresh fruit juice -- either orange or lemon juice, which are rich in Vitamin C. Coconut water and buttermilk can be given too. Do not give them oily food or canned

items. Fresh, homecooked meals are the best and it should be simple so that it is easy for digestion," she further suggested.

"We must also understand that they are trapped inside their room alone, going through a lot, they're feeling unwell, so we need to keep a regular check on their mental health too. Make them feel loved, cared for and spread a positive vibe, so that they feel secure. Speak about positive things, it will only inspire them to get better soon," Juhi said.

"I really hope these measures are of your help and you or your near and dear ones, whoever is suffering from COVID-19 gets well soon.

Please take care, stay safe and let's hope that this pandemic ends soon," concluded the actress.

On the work front, Juhi Parmar features in the Zee TV show "Hamariwali Good News" where she plays the role of Meera.



Taapsee Pannu: Just hanging there, staying afloat

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Taapsee Pannu took to social media on Thursday to express her state of mind amid lockdown with a throwback picture that triggers melancholic moods.

Taapsee shared a throwback photo on

Instagram where she is posing in a swimming pool, staying afloat. Alongside the photo, Taapsee wrote: "Just hanging there 1/2. Staying afloat 1/2. One day at a time 1/2. Waiting 1/2... Throwback pictures don't always make u smile."

Taapsee recently took to social media to mourn the demise of Shooter Chandro Tomar, fondly known as

Shooter Dadi, whose life inspired her 2019 film "Saand Ki Aankh". While the role of Chandro was played by actress Bhumi Pednekar in the film, Taapsee essayed the avatar of Shooter Prakash Tomar.

The actress has several films lined up, including "Loop Lapeta", "Rashmi Rocket", "Haseen Dill Ruba", "Shabaash Mithu".



Amitt K. Singh opens up on body transformation

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Television actor Amitt K. Singh has revealed how and why he transformed his body for his role in the daily soap "Ranju Ki Betiyaan".

While Amitt had gained 15 kilos for his role in a film towards the end of last year, his transformation to get into his avatar of Rajveer in the show has surprised viewers.

Talking his transformation, Amitt shared: "I gained 15 kgs for a film in November last year. The real challenge started when I had to lose extra inches for Ranjuki Betiyaan's introduction scene. When I came to know that my character's (Rajveer) introduction

scene starts from a pool, and I have to be ultra-fit with abs and a chiseled body, I found this very difficult yet exciting."

"Rajveer is an outrageous boy. My trainer and I discussed how my character's body structure should be, and we came to the conclusion that he should have lean swimmer's body and not a very muscular bulky frame. When we started training, it seemed difficult to achieve what we wanted, but with hours of intense workout sessions, proper rest and a strict diet, we could achieve what we desired," the 29-year-old actor added.

The drama series "Ranju Ki Betiyaan" airs on Dangal TV.



KASHIKA KAPOOR: NO ONE CAN TEACH YOU TO ACT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Kashika Kapoor feels no one can teach an artiste how to act, adding that acting workshops and classes can just make the craft fun for an artiste. "Nobody can make you an actor or teach the art of acting to you. Acting workshops have only made it fun and consistent for me to practise acting, not learn acting. I'd rather put in my own skills than trying to adapt to someone else's. That's the best part about acting. I'm a born actor and I know it. I don't need to learn acting. I'm bound to practise it," she declared. She added that she comes from a background that has nothing to do with showbiz.

"I belong to a simple family where we didn't have any association with the entertainment industry, but it was my passion for this art that made me pursue acting. Growing up, I used to watch a lot of movies and listen to Bollywood music. Soon I developed an interest in acting. With the support of my family, I started learning singing, Kathak and martial arts at the age of five," she says.

However, she adds that she has always tried to get to know more about the craft.

"When I was in the 10th grade, I went to one of the studios in Mumbai to practise acting for six months. I also practised acting for two years at the renowned Film Academy in New York. I believe that having knowledge in the various creative arts will help me achieve my dream of becoming an actress," she added. Kashika has been part of television shows like "Pyar Tune Kya Kiya" and "Adaalar".

Team Absolute | New Delhi

While it may sound weird to tell people with depression to go outside and garden, there is a considerable amount of clinical evidence which suggests that spending time with plants improves our mental health, particularly depression. Even spending time with indoor plants works wonders to alleviate both mental and physical stress in people of all ages.

Vinayak Garg, Founder, Lazy Gardener says: "Many researchers have found that gardening or green care stimulates our bodies' natural development of happy chemicals, which may help keep depression and anxiety at bay, with unexpectedly amazing results. Even during this pandemic, each nation is battling a war where the enemy is not visible nor are the weapons. In these times, along with other safety measures, why not turn to the potential benefits of gardening as a way to help in the mental and physical war against coronavirus."

Here are some interesting and the creative way to fight depression and anxiety, suggested by Garg.



Getting your hands dirty!

Getting your hands dirty in the garden boosts your serotonin levels, according to studies. Serotonin is a happy chemical that also serves as a natural antidepressant and immune system booster, lack of which is responsible for depression. When you come in contact with soil, a particular soil bacterium, Mycobacterium vaccae, causes serotonin to be released in our brain, making us feel better and happier from within. At the very least, now we understand why people prefer to garden without gloves and always enjoy the sensation of getting their hands into the dirt and compost heap.

De-stress therapy at your doorstep

Gardening is an awesome diversion from our increasingly technologically driven lives. Spending time gardening and enjoying nature can help us mentally de-stress by keeping us involved. When you directly contribute to the nurturing of the buds and witness the plants grow gradually, believe me, your happiness and contentment will know no boundaries and you'll keep coming back to it. This is a small yet a very powerful exercise to even boost your self-esteem, leaving no space for stress at all.

Can gardening be an effective way to fight depression?

Building your Creativity

How about simply finding out how to keep those garden pests away and improving soil quality to keep the garden healthy? How about deciding what kind and colour of a pot will suit your favourite plant the best? Get yourself into it once and this green care will take care of your positivity, creativity, mood upliftment, skill building, and ultimately help you fight depression naturally and gradually.

Building your strength

Working in the garden improves dexterity and strength. Digging, raking, and mowing are especially calorie-dense activities and the aerobic exercise involved will easily burn the same amount of calories as a gym workout. During gardening, physical exercise is combined with social contact.

You get exposed to nature and sunlight. Sunlight works two way on your body: reduces blood pressure while also increasing vitamin D levels, and the fruits and vegetables grown have a positive effect on the diet. Sounds healthier right?

Understanding the importance of salt, oil, spices and sugar

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Ayurveda teaches that salt is essential for growth, maintaining water electrolyte balance, and proper digestion, absorption and elimination of wastes. It creates flexibility in the joints, stimulates the appetite and helps digest natural toxins, clearing the subtle channels of the body. It has a calming effect on the nerves and emotions, replenishing and energizing the entire body. Salt balances Vata and can imbalance Pitta and Kapha when used excessively, causing premature wrinkles, thirst, skin problems and weakness.

Throughout time, salt (sodium chloride) has played a vital role in human societies. However, excessive salt consumption could result in serious health problems as it directly impacts the energy levels in one body. Salt is typically made up of the fire and water elements and a small amount regulates moisture level in the body which promotes better absorption of nutrients from food, regulates blood pressure and are vital to the functioning of the brain and nervous system.

Eating too much salt can have a range of effects. In the short term, it may cause bloating, severe thirst, and a temporary rise in blood pressure. In severe cases, it may also lead to hypernatremia, which, if left untreated, can be fatal. In ayurveda, it is established that over indulgence or at least of any ingredient can cause various imbalances in the human body. From a holistic perspective anything overused, misused or used in a high amount leads to an imbalance and causes destruction. Similarly, ayurveda teaches that the Sweet taste nourishes and invigorates the mind, relieves hunger and thirst, increases tissues and improves the immune system. Importantly, it is associated with the positive emotions of happiness, contentment, calmness, cheerfulness, love and satisfaction when eaten in appropriate amounts. But again, in moderation. From an Ayurvedic perspective, we need to consider long-term moderation combined with well-timed and precise restraint. Brown sugar, jaggery and natural fruits are used as an alternative to refined sugar. Natural sources of sugar are digested slower and help you feel full for longer. It also helps keep your metabolism stable. 'Atisevanam' as per Ayurveda might lead to high blood pressure or hypertension involves a disruption of balance in the blood (doshas) one of which is due to excessive salt intake. Whereas high amount of fat intake can cause cholesterol to build up in your arteries (blood vessels), on the other hand too many spices may give acute gastritis, while if consumed in moderation it helps us in combating heart diseases, fight inflammation and keeping the body warm especially in winters. Hence the key is to keep consuming everything in moderation and to avoid 'Atikriya' (overdoing) of everything. Whether it's a food or any activity. Hence the key is to keep consuming everything in moderation and avoid Atikriya (overdoing) of everything, be it food, lifestyle, indulgence or any activity. As recommended by professionals at Vana, an individual should also practice some of the disciplined lifestyle for a content and mindful living.

BABIL KHAN TALKS OF SELF-DOUBT, INSECURITIES IN NEW POST

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Babil Khan, son of late actor Irrfan Khan, has shared a throwback picture of his 'baba' and talked about being insecure and frightened by the prospect of a godless world. Babil posted a picture of Irrfan on Instagram on Friday morning. The image seems to be from a play the actor featured in. He wears an all-white ensemble and holds a shoe in one hand. "Hey man, I am so lost. I can't figure out who to trust. I doubt my self, you know? I'm insecure, I'm frightened by the prospect of a godless world. My mind is in war with my gut, I am hopelessly falling in love with attention, I am hopelessly heartbroken that it's all for nothing," Babil captioned the image. Irrfan had been diagnosed with neuroendocrine cancer in 2018. He passed away in Mumbai's Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital on April 29, 2020. Babil is all set to make his acting debut with "Qala", produced by Anushka Sharma. He has wrapped up his first shooting schedule. The film also stars "Bulbul" actress Triptii Dimri.





BTS' NEW SINGLE 'BUTTER' SETS RECORD OF 10MN YOUTUBE VIEWS IN JUST 13 MINUTES!

Seoul | Agencies

K-Pop super band BTS' latest song "Butter" set a new record with 10 million views on YouTube in just 13 minutes, upon release on Friday. The band's new music video also drew around 3.89 million concurrent viewers during its midnight (EST) premiere. "Butter" is also the second BTS song after "Dynamite" to be performed entirely in English, which vastly improves its prospects at radio, according to forbes.com. In its first five hours of release, the track had over 47,034,131 views on YouTube and 4.8 million likes. "Butter" is a dance pop track with the band's distinctive baseline and crisp synth sounds. The choreography is a combination of group and unit dances, with highlight gestures such as stroking of hair, blowing kisses and walking on tiptoes.

The band will perform "Butter" for the first time at the upcoming Billboard Music Awards on May 23. They are nominated in four categories at this year's award -- Top Duo/Group, Top Song Sales Artist, Top Social Artist and Top Selling Song. The band also kicks off Good Morning America's Summer Concert Series on May 28.



Why Salma Hayek was shocked when offered 'Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard'?

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Salma Hayek says she was "shocked" when asked to reprise her starring role of Sonia Kincaid in the upcoming action comedy "Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard", sequel to the 2017 hit "The Hit Man's Bodyguard".

The 54-year-old plays is cast alongside Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L. Jackson, Antonio Banderas and Morgan Freeman in the sequel. "Quite frankly, I was shocked. I've been in so many movies where we get the call: 'Oh my God, you're one of the most liked characters in the film.' So many times," she said, according to contactmusic.com. She is happy that director Patrick Hughes listened to what the audience wanted. "For the first time, there was a director that said, 'I'm gonna listen to the audience'. But I didn't trust him. At the beginning, I said, 'oh, he's just exaggerating. He's just being nice,'" she said. She added: "But then when we started talking about it, he told me the storyline and then I realised, 'oh, my God, this guy is not for real, but he also wants me involved in the process.'"



THE WILD HAS TAUGHT ME IMPORTANCE OF RESILIENCE

London | Agencies

BEAR GRYLLS:

British adventurer and survivalist Bear Grylls says the wild has taught him the importance of resilience and helped him imbibe a never-give-up spirit. "Life has truly been challenging for so many people around the world this last year, but if the wild has taught me anything, it is the importance of resilience and a never give up spirit," Grylls said. Grylls will next be seen on "Sunday Thrills

With Bear Grylls, a two-hour special adventure stack starting May 23 that will present four thrilling, action-packed shows featuring Grylls. This India special will include shows such as Running Wild with Bear Grylls, Get Out Alive with Bear Grylls, Mission Survive With Bear Grylls, and Britain's Greatest Adventurers With Bear Grylls. "With this special adventure programming across all these Sundays ahead, the goal is to take viewers with me on many journeys and expeditions, and to help them experience how the wild places can transform us and inspire us to be stronger, more determined and to view the storms of life as times of opportunity. Together we can beat this and come through this challenging time," he said. "Bear Grylls has become the embodiment of adventure and outdoor survival and we are excited to work with him and collaborate on a Sunday special that has been curated especially for our Indian viewers," said Kevin Vaz, President and Head, Infotainment, Kids and Regional Entertainment Channels, Star and Disney India. "Sunday Thrills With Bear Grylls" will air on National Geographic.



LADY GAGA RECALLS TRAUMA OF BEING RAPED

Los Angeles | Agencies

Grammy and Oscar-winning singer Lady Gaga has opened up about her trauma of being raped, while speaking on Oprah Winfrey and Prince Harry's series "The Me You Cant See". Appearing in the first episode of the five-part series, Gaga remembers being 19 when a producer threatened to burn her music if she didn't take her clothes off. "They didn't stop asking me, and then I just froze, and I just -- I don't even remember," the 35-year-old singer recalls, according to a report in usatoday.com. She says she isn't comfortable naming her assailant, adding: "I do not ever want to face that person again."

Gaga first spoke about her sexual assault in a 2014 radio interview with Howard Stern. She opened up about her PTSD diagnosis in 2016.

On "The Me You Can't See", she says her pain manifested in a physical way. "And then I was sick for weeks and weeks after and I realised that it was the same pain that I felt when the person who raped me dropped me off pregnant on a corner, at my parent's house, 'cause I was vomiting and sick, 'cause I had been being abused. I was locked away in a studio for months," Gaga recalls. "I had a total psychotic break, and for a couple years I was not the same girl," she says in the series. "Even if I have six brilliant months, all it takes is getting triggered once to feel bad. And when I say feel bad, I mean want to cut, think about dying, wondering if I'm ever gonna do it." Gaga points out, adding: "You get frustrated with yourself, 'Why am I not getting better? What's wrong with me?' And you know what, there's nothing wrong with you, but there is something that's not firing right." Gaga says she shares her story not to garner sympathy but to trigger empathy in others, reports usatoday.com. "Open your heart up for somebody else, because I'm telling you, I've been through it and people need help. That's part of my healing, is being able to talk to you," she sums up.



MUSE TO CELEBRATE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF 'ORIGIN OF SYMMETRY' WITH REMIX LP



London | Agencies

The English rock band Muse will celebrate the 20th anniversary of "Origin Of Symmetry" with a remix LP of the album. The band, which comprises of Matt Bellamy, Chris Wolstenholme and Dominic Howard, will bring out a collection that includes a new version of the album's hit number, "Citizen Erased". The LP is expected to release on June 18, around a month before the anniversary of the album, which originally released on July 17, 2001. Bellamy said that he would have ideally done a special show for the occasion. "If the live scene exists next year, we could do a special show to celebrate it in some way. I wouldn't be against that. As soon as concerts open up again, Muse will be keen to do something," he said in an earlier interview with NME, reports contactmusic.com.



SARAH JESSICA PARKER, BETTE MIDLER, KATHY NAJIMY TO REUNITE IN 'HOCUS POCUS 2'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood stars Sarah Jessica Parker, Bette Midler and Kathy Najimy are all set to reprise their roles in "Hocus Pocus 2", a sequel to the 1993 Disney classic "Hocus Pocus". Disney initially revealed plans for a follow-up film in 2019, hoping that the trio of actors would return, but Midler, Parker and Najimy hadn't formally confirmed their participation back then, reports variety.com. Production is expected to begin this fall and the sequel is set to debut on Disney Plus sometime in 2022. Midler had tweeted: "Sistaaaahs! It's been 300 years... But we're BACK!"

Filmmaker Adam Shankman, who was scheduled to direct, will no longer do so due to reported scheduling conflicts. However, he will be associated as an executive producer even as he shifts attention to directing "Disenchanted", a sequel to the 2007 fairytale comedy "Enchanted" with Amy Adams, for the studio.

Anne Fletcher, whose credits include "The Proposal" and "27 Dresses", will take over as director. "As heartbroken as I am that I won't be able to direct my friends Bette, Sarah Jessica and Kathy in what is sure to be nothing short of a major event for Disney Plus due to scheduling conflicts, I couldn't be more pleased to be

handing over the reins to Anne, who has brought so much laughter and joy into people's lives with her previous work," Shankman said.

"I am still grateful and proud to help shepherd this ingenious project as executive producer alongside producer Lynn Harris, whom I have loved and admired as a colleague and friend since she helped get me the job choreographing 'Boogie Nights'," Shankman added. "Now more than ever, people need to laugh. We should be laughing every day, and there is so much fun to be had with these three unbelievable women playing delicious characters from such a beloved film," director Fletcher said.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Zara McDermott



EDITOR'S SPECS

Dengue linked with Covid-19

People who have had dengue in the past are twice as likely to develop symptoms of Covid-19 if they are infected by coronavirus, finds a new study. "Our results show that the populations most exposed to dengue, possibly owing to socio-demographic factors, are precisely those that most risk falling very sick if they're

THE STUDY, LED BY UNIVERSITY OF SAO PAULO IN BRAZIL, DETECTED THE PRESENCE OF ANTIBODIES AGAINST DENGUE VIRUS AND SARS-COV-2 IN BLOOD SAMPLES FROM 1,285 INHABITANTS OF MANCIO LIMA, A SMALL TOWN IN THE STATE OF ACRE, PART OF BRAZIL'S AMAZON REGION.

infected by SARS-CoV-2. This is an example of what has been called a syndemic (synergic interaction between two epidemic diseases so that one exacerbates the effects of the other)," principal investigator Marcelo Urbano Ferreira, Professor at the varsity's Biomedical Sciences Institute (ICB-USP) told the Sao Paulo

Research Foundation. "On one hand, Covid-19 has hindered efforts to control dengue. On the other hand, the latter appears to increase the risk for those who contract the former," Ferreira added. There may be a biological basis for the phenomenon, in the sense that antibodies against dengue virus somehow exacerbate Covid-19, or it may simply be due to socio-demographic factors that make certain population groups more vulnerable to both diseases for various reasons, the researcher reported in the journal Clinical Infectious Diseases. "The results evidence the importance of reinforcing both the social distancing measures introduced to contain the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and efforts to control the dengue vector, as the two epidemics are occurring at the same time and affecting the same vulnerable population. This should be getting more attention from the federal government," Ferreira said. The blood samples analysed for the study had been collected in November 2019 and November 2020. They were submitted to tests capable of detecting antibodies against all four dengue serotypes and against SARS-CoV-2. The results showed that 37 per cent of the people had contracted dengue before November 2019 and 35 per cent had been infected by coronavirus before November 2020. Clinical data (symptoms and outcomes) of the volunteers diagnosed with Covid-19 were also analysed.

How is Israel-Hamas ceasefire different this time?

Major General S.B. Asthana

The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas after 11 days of deadly hostilities is a welcome step for the innocent people suffering casualties in the crossfire, provided all sides observe this ceasefire judiciously. The Israel-Palestine struggle is one of the oldest struggles in the world with Israeli occupation of West Bank and Gaza Strip 53 years back, interspersed with wars and conflicts at varying scale intermittently, with no signs of permanent peaceful solution so far.

This truce after the latest round of fighting, like previous wars, has ended inconclusively, with Israel claiming heavy damage to Hamas, but unable to stop their rockets (killing 12 Israelis and over 200 injured). Hamas also claims victory, despite heavy casualties (230 Palestinians killed, over 1900 injured), facing challenges of rebuilding Gaza, poor confidence with troubled population (58000 Palestinians fled their homes) already suffering poverty due to coronavirus pandemic.

Gaza is controlled by Hamas (post Israeli disengagement in 2005), which also operates militant wing and West bank with 167 enclaves of Palestinians are governed by Fatah (claiming to represent erstwhile Palestinians Liberation Organisation) amidst 230 Israeli settlements governed by Israel. Both factions (Hamas and Fatah) have different ideologies and differences, but form a Palestinian Unity Government under President Mahmoud Abbas since 2014, negotiating peace through Quartet (US, Russia, EU and UN). The competing claims to Jerusalem, which is crucial to Christians, Jews and Palestinians is the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and have repeatedly triggered incidences of violence in the past, like the present one.

Trigger for Current Crisis

The renewed violence started on 6 May, when Palestinian protests

began over an anticipated decision of the Supreme Court of Israel (Yet to be announced), on the eviction of six Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah, a neighborhood of occupied East Jerusalem, resulting increasing skirmishes between Israelis and Palestinians in the Old City of Jerusalem. On May 8, Palestinian Muslims streamed to the Haram al-Sharif for Ramadan prayers, in large numbers to mark the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad, considered not only the most sacred night of Ramadan, but of the whole Islamic calendar. Simultaneously, some Israeli Jews were gathering ahead of Jerusalem Day (May 10) marking Jewish control over the Old City of Jerusalem secured during the 1967 war.

The focal point of those celebrations is the Western Wall of the Temple Mount (the holiest site in Judaism), the same elevated platform that Muslims call the Haram al-Sharif. Israeli police stormed the compound of the al-Aqsa Mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam and the confrontations occurred resulting more than 300 people injured, mostly Palestinians.

Closure of Damascus gate was another irritant. This resulted in a barrage of rockets fired by Hamas on Israel, responded by repeated air attacks by Israel on Gaza, along with other arsenal, causing heavy destruction and casualties, which continued for last 11 days.

Internal Dynamics

This confrontation has happened at a time when there is political crises in Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel recently failed to put together a ruling coalition even after the fourth round of elections in just two years; hence lacks popular mandate.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, whose term expired 12 years ago, also lacks popular mandate. He recently cancelled legislative elections, after his party was trailing badly in the polls. With leaders on both sides lacking legitimacy any peace talks regarding such complex situation may have little chances of



success, with a risk of reckless action by either.

Moreover the Arab population in Israel was also on streets and incidences of lynching may have potential to ignite if pending Supreme Court decision is one sided. The Hezbollah also came out in support of Hamas further adding complexity to the problem. The truce therefore is quite fragile.

International Reaction

During UNSC resolutions USA found itself isolated in backing Israel. It was therefore in tight spot to broker peace amidst growing pressure against Israel seen to be using excessive force. It also needs to be noted that after erstwhile President Trump recognised Jerusalem as capital of Israel, he shifted US embassy there and offered an unviable peace solution, which was rejected by PA, but Prime Minister Netanyahu seems to have assumed that entire Jerusalem belongs to Israel and others need to slowly vacate it. This is disastrous because from historic and religious point of view Jerusalem is non-negotiable to Christians, Jews and Palestinians, who coexist there since ages.

International community although recognises Israel's right to defend itself, but not at the cost of

pulverising civil areas of Gaza, causing heavy civil casualties, even if it accuses Hamas of basing itself amidst population (a tactics adopted by most terrorist groups in the world). As per UN, the truce seemed to be brokered by Egypt and Qatar (normally accused of supporting Shia based Hamas, along with Iran). What is grossly different this time was over-reaction by Erdogan, trying to pose himself as new leader of Islamic world and Pakistan with loud voices against Israel.

This confrontation happened when Israel was improving relations with some countries of Arab world, which may suffer a temporary setback due to their objection to Israeli actions on the Haram al-Sharif. Most Arab states otherwise are hostile to Hamas, and differentiate well between the Palestinian people and the Hamas fighters.

Future Peace Prospects

Fed up of insecurities, In 2007, according to a number of polls, the majority of Israelis and Palestinians, prefer the two-state solution over any other solution, as a means of resolving the conflict, which was initiated in Oslo Accords in 1993-95. With complexities of entanglement of 167 Palestinian enclaves embedded in 203 Israeli settlements and related governance issues, it's

not really practical that it may be possible for Israel to agree to vacate West Bank. I don't visualise any Israeli leadership ever agreeing to such a proposal. Same is the case with Jerusalem. Any attempt to push out any one religious community from its religious site is bound to have serious backlash. Peaceful coexistence may not be preferred option but seems to be the only practical option. There is also a possibility of outside peace spoilers like Erdogan igniting religious disharmony, which must be curbed by both the parties and Quartet.

There have been some voices from Palestinians expecting Indian mediation as India has good relations with Israel as well as Palestine, but the issue is so complex and sensitive that current Indian policy of maintaining independent relations with both with no interference in internal affairs of either, may be the best policy for India. Considering all the factors, the current truce is a welcome step, but its longevity is questionable in light of political uncertainties both sides and mistrust between communities.

(Major General S.B. Asthana is a strategic and security analyst, a veteran Infantry General. He is the Chief Instructor, United Service Institution of India. The views expressed are personal)

Retail participation adds liquidity risks to Indian markets

Sanjeev Sharma

Retail and non-institutional participation in Indian markets has increased meaningfully, adding liquidity risks in the event of a correction. "We think the increased retail participation adds beta/liquidity risks to the Indian markets. A change in sentiment/decline in the headline index can lead to a quick withdrawal of non-institutional volumes," JP Morgan said in a report. MSCI India has been remarkably resilient through the second Covid-19 wave (barely underperforming EM), yet underlying market dynamics have been deteriorating for some time, it said.

Raising red flags for the market, JP Morgan said institutional participation (foreign plus domestic) is close to 14-year lows even as aggregate daily volumes are up 3x since 2014 at \$10 billion a day now, implying that retail/corporate/other participation has increased dramatically, up 5x.

The report said delivery volumes remain well below pre-pandemic levels - volumes of non-delivery/intraday/speculative trading have doubled in three years. The percentage of daily volumes traded in stocks



with market caps of less than \$2 billion has doubled in a year (and is meaningfully higher than pre-pandemic levels).

The proportion of BSE 500 stocks delivering weekly moves of +/- 10 per cent or more doubled through 2020, and India VIX remains above 2019 levels.

Higher participation in smaller stocks seems to show up in sell-side forecasts. Consensus implies 85 per cent EPS growth for the NIFTY mid-cap index between FY20 and FY23, compared to a 47 per cent growth forecast for NIFTY. The mid-cap index has delivered earnings growth less than large-caps' historically, the report said.

With the market willing to look through the sharp Covid-19 wave, a noticeable global equity correction remains a concern.

For the second consecutive year on Friday, Chhattisgarh transferred Rs 1500 crore to 22 lakh farmers of the state as the first instalment of the agricultural input subsidy under the Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana for kharif season 2020-2021. Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel also transferred Rs 7 crore 17 lakh directly to the accounts of villagers and cattle rearers as payment for the dung procured from March 15 to May 15, under the multi-pronged Godhan Nyay Yojana of the

Chhattisgarh government. Besides, he also transferred Rs 3.6 crore to the gauthan samitis and women self-help groups. Under the Godhan Nyaya Yojana, which was launched on July 20, 2020 on the occasion of Hareli Parva, a total of 88 crore 15 lakh rupees have been paid so far to the state's cattlemen and villagers. Congress interim President Sonia Gandhi and MP Rahul Gandhi sent congratulatory messages on the occasion on the death anniversary of former Prime Minister Rajiv



22 lakh farmers in Chhattisgarh get Rs 1500 crore input subsidy

Gandhi. Sonia Gandhi said that the amount received by the farmers in the second wave of corona will act as a "booster". Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi said that the Government of Chhattisgarh has been successful in realizing the vision of Rajiv Gandhi. The way the vision of justice has been embodied in the agriculture sector through the Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyaya Yojana, it has strengthened the rural economy. The Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana was launched by the Chhattisgarh government on Rajiv Gandhi's death anniversary on May 21, 2020 with the aim to encourage crop productivity

in the state. Under this scheme, the state government transferred Rs 5628 crore to the bank accounts of about 19 lakh farmers (registered in Kharif season 2019-20) in four instalments as agricultural input subsidy. The chief minister also took several important decisions in the interest of farmers at a meeting held on May 19. As per the decision, the input subsidy on the paddy procured from farmers in Kharif year 2020-21 will be given at the rate of Rs 9,000 per acre. The government has also decided to provide input subsidy of Rs 10,000 per acre instead of Rs 9000 per acre to the farmers, who have sold paddy at the

support price in the year 2020-21, if they are cultivating kodo kutki, sugarcane, pigeonpea, maize, soybean, pulses, oilseeds, aromatic paddy, fortified paddy crop or plant trees. Farmers utilizing their paddy fields for plantation will be provided this grant for 3 years. The state government has also decided to provide input subsidy at the rate of Rs 9000 per acre per year to the producers of all major kharif crops such as maize, soybean, sugarcane, kodo kutki and arhar, along with paddy, from Kharif year 2021-22. The government has fixed the minimum support price of kodo-kutki at Rs 3,000 per quintal.

Lab escape from Wuhan can explain coronavirus more easily

Proponents of lab escape can explain all the available facts about SARS2 considerably more easily than can those who favour natural emergence, said Nicholas Wade, a science writer.

Writing in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, Wade said, "For the lab escape scenario, a Wuhan origin for the virus is a no-brainer. Wuhan is home to China's leading center of coronavirus research where, as noted above, researchers were genetically engineering bat coronaviruses to attack human cells. They were doing so under the minimal safety conditions of a BSL2 lab. If a virus with the unexpected infectiousness of SARS2 had been generated there, its escape would be no surprise."

"It is clear that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was systematically constructing novel chimeric coronaviruses and was assessing their ability to infect human cells and human-ACE2-expressing mice," says Richard H. Ebright, a molecular biologist at Rutgers University and leading expert on



biosafety.

Researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, led by China's leading expert on bat viruses, Shi Zheng-li or "Bat Lady," mounted frequent expeditions to the bat-infested caves of Yunnan in southern China and collected around a hundred different bat coronaviruses, Wade said.

Shi then teamed up with Ralph S. Baric, an eminent coronavirus researcher at the University of North Carolina. Their work focused on enhancing the ability of bat viruses to attack humans so as to "examine the emergence potential (that is, the potential to infect humans) of circulating bat CoVs

[coronaviruses]."

Wade said in pursuit of this aim, in November 2015 they created a novel virus by taking the backbone of the SARS1 virus and replacing its spike protein with one from a bat virus (known as SHC014-CoV). This manufactured virus was able to infect the cells of the human airway, at least when tested against a lab culture of such cells.

Wade said natural emergence was the media's preferred theory until around February 2021 and the visit by a World Health Organization (WHO) commission to China.

The commission's composition and access were heavily controlled

by the Chinese authorities. Its members, kept asserting before, during, and after their visit that lab escape was extremely unlikely. But this was not quite the propaganda victory the Chinese authorities may have been hoping for. What became clear was that the Chinese had no evidence to offer the commission in support of the natural emergence theory, Wade said.

This was surprising because both the SARS1 and MERS viruses had left copious traces in the environment. The intermediary host species of SARS1 was identified within four months of the epidemic's outbreak, and the host of MERS within nine months.

"Yet some 15 months after the SARS2 pandemic began, and after a presumably intensive search, Chinese researchers had failed to find either the original bat population, or the intermediate species to which SARS2 might have jumped, or any serological evidence that any Chinese population, including that of Wuhan, had ever been exposed to the virus prior to December 2019. Natural emergence remained a conjecture which, however plausible to begin with, had gained not a shred of supporting evidence in over a year," Wade said.

"And as long as that remains the case, it's logical to pay serious attention to the alternative conjecture, that SARS2 escaped from a lab," Wade said.



EGYPT-BROKERED CEASEFIRE BETWEEN ISRAEL-HAMAS COMES INTO EFFECT

After mediation by Egypt, Israel's Cabinet approved the unilateral ceasefire late on Thursday, with a Hamas representative confirming the Islamist organisation's agreement shortly afterwards.

Gaza | Agencies

An Egypt-brokered ceasefire came into effect on Friday between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas movement, ending an 11-day bloodshed in the Gaza Strip.

The ceasefire came into force at 2 a.m., reports Xinhua news agency.

According to Egypt's official MENA news agency, Cairo will send two security delegations to Israel and Palestine to ensure the implementation of the truce.

The heaviest fighting between Israel and the Gaza militants since 2014 has so far killed 232 Palestinians, including 65 children, and 12 Israelis.



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Taher al-Nunoo said the Palestinian "armed resistance" would honour the ceasefire as long as it is upheld by the Israel side. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country's political leadership has stressed

that the reality on the ground will determine whether fighting continues. If the Palestinians continue with rocket attacks, the ceasefire will be lifted immediately, he added.

US President Joe Biden welcomed the ceasefire, expressing "sincere gratitude" to Egypt for its role in brokering the deal.

"I extend my sincere gratitude to President al-Sisi and the senior Egyptian officials who played such a

critical role in this diplomacy," Biden said at the White House.

He said the US, the UN and other partners stand ready to help the Palestinian Authority with humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres welcomed the ceasefire and called on all sides to observe it.

Israeli forces and Gaza Strip militants have fired thousands of missiles back and forth since May 10, in response to the rockets fired by Palestinian militants in Gaza to retaliate for Israel's violation of the sacred Islamic holy site of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. According to the Israeli Defence Forces, the Palestinian side fired some 4,070 rockets towards the Jewish state. But over 90 per cent of the rockets heading toward populated areas were intercepted by the Israel's Iron Dome. About a third fell inside the Gaza Strip.

In response, Israeli fighter jets kept carrying out intensive airstrikes on buildings and infrastructure in the besieged enclave.

EU, US working to settle aircraft dispute by July 11

In 2004, the US accused France, Spain and Germany of providing illegal subsidies and grants to support the production of a range of Airbus products. In October 2019, the World Trade Organization (WTO) allowed Washington to take countermeasures against European exports worth up to \$7.5 billion.

Brussels | Agencies

The European Union (EU) and the US are working to reach an agreement on their long-standing dispute on aircraft subsidies by the July 11 deadline, European Commission



Executive Vice-President and trade chief Valdis Dombrovskis said.

Dombrovskis said at a press conference on Thursday that the deadline was "realistic" and that he was confident that an agreement will be reached, reports Xinhua news agency.

"We had intensive and broad discussions on this topic with US Trade Representative Katherine Tai last week and also during today's video conference she confirmed this timeline so we are working to reach this agreement by July 11," Dombrovskis said.

In 2004, the US accused

France, Spain and Germany of providing illegal subsidies and grants to support the production of a range of Airbus products. In October 2019, the World Trade Organization (WTO) allowed Washington to take countermeasures against European exports worth up to \$7.5 billion. Both sides agreed in March to suspend tariffs imposed on billions of imports in their 16-year-old dispute at the WTO over subsidies for plane makers Airbus and Boeing.

The suspension runs until July 10, with tariffs re-applying on July 11 if there is no solution.

1,000 employees urge Apple to support Palestinian people

San Francisco | Agencies

Nearly 1,000 employees at Apple have written a letter to CEO Tim Cook, calling for the company to support the Palestinian people, as a ceasefire agreement was reached between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas, following 11 days of escalating tension between the two sides on the Gaza Strip.

The employees, part of the Apple Muslim Association (AMA) which is an official employee group, asked the company to recognise that "millions of Palestinian people currently suffer under an illegal occupation," reports The Verge. "We are frustrated and disappointed because once more, many of those in positions of power and influence... either choose to

remain silent or release ineffectually neutral 'both sides' statements with regards to the Palestinian situation," they wrote in the letter.

Apple was yet to respond to the letter, according to the report. "We are Muslims at Apple have enjoyed even more privilege -- to work for a great company that has led the way not only on products, but on human rights issues. We in the AMA have expressed our solidarity and will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our Black and Brown communities in their fight for justice and equity. We reached out to support and will continue to support our Asian communities in the face of anti-Asian hate and attacks. And we supported teammates from multiple nations as they dealt with the anxiety of the travel ban," the letter read.

AFGHAN DISTRICT FALLS TO TALIBAN

Kabul: Jalrez district in Afghanistan's Maidan Wardak province have fallen to the Taliban after heavy attacks by the militant group for three straight days, an official confirmed on Friday. Mahdi Rasikh, an MP from the province, said the district Governor's compound and the police headquarters were captured by the Taliban, TOLO News reported. He added that at least seven security force members were killed during the attacks on the district, adding that some soldiers were missing, while others captured. Rasikh reiterated that "no action was taken by the central government to help the district" during the heavy fighting. Taliban has claimed that they have captured Jalrez district located in the west of Maidan Wardak province. It lies 62 km southwest of Kabul.

Indian-Americans recorded highest rate of voting in 2020 polls

Washington | Agencies

In the November 2020 US presidential elections, Indian-Americans reported the highest rate of voting at 71 per cent among adult citizens, according to the publisher of demographic data and policy research on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI).

Japanese Americans came second with 66 per cent, an AAPI Data blog reveals. For Indian-Americans, this was a 9 percentage point increase compared to the 2016 election, while for Japanese Americans, the increase was a modest 4 per cent, it said.

The blog further said that the election on November 3, 2020, witnessed a major increase in voter engagement among AAPI community, "building on record gains in



voting in the 2018 midterm elections, where midterm voter registration and turnout jumped

across every segment, including by nativity, age, gender and geography".

Karthick Ramakrishnan, the Director of AAPI Data, told NPR there was a stark increase in voting among second-generation immigrants, who were born in the US to immigrant parents, The American Bazaar reported.

"This second generation is coming of political age and especially during this moment of Covid and the increase in anti-Asian racism and hate incidents, you are seeing a kind of political consciousness that's forming that will likely last a generation.

"Given the success of Kamala Harris as the highest-ranking Asian American elected official, as well as senators and members of Congress that have done very well over the last decade, we will likely see many more Asian Americans running for office in the future inspired by those examples," he was quoted as saying.

Myanmar junta accused of ignoring regional peace plan

Bangkok | Agencies

Myanmar's military rulers have ignored a tentative peace plan agreed a month ago by the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), according to lawmakers from across the region.

The ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) group on Friday urged the bloc's nine other member-states to push for "immediate and effective implementation of the Five-Point Consensus," as the blueprint is called, "and to hold the military accountable for its blatant disregard" of the deal, dpa news agency reported. Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing signed up to the consensus, which includes calls for an end to violence and the visit to Myanmar of a regional envoy, during an ASEAN summit one month ago.

The army seized power in Myanmar on February 1, arresting civilian government leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi, the 1991 Nobel peace laureate. Nationwide protests against the coup have been met with fierce army reprisals that activists say have killed



over 800 people.

The April ASEAN deal came about after some neighbouring governments voiced concerns about spill-over as refugees fled border-region fighting between the army and ethnic militias. Nothing has changed," said Malaysian opposition lawmaker Charles Santiago, the APHR chair, who on Friday accused Min Aung Hlaing of "blatantly ignoring" the deal. Kasit Piromya, a former Thai foreign minister, said ASEAN governments run the risk of being seen as acting "to protect them (the junta) against global condemnation, not to end the violence".

Meeting with Putin would help end Ukraine conflict: Zelensky

Kiev | Agencies

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky believes that a meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin would help to put an end to the seven-year conflict in the country's eastern Donbas region.

At a press conference to mark his two years in office, Zelensky on Thursday expressed his expectation of a meeting with Putin, reports Xinhua news agency.

"I believe that in addition to the Normandy format (Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany), there will be a direct conversation with the President of the Russian Federation.

"I also see a format for involving the US in this discussion," said Zelensky, noting that Ukraine has no other chance but to stop the war

now.

The President stressed that ending hostilities and a de-occupation of Ukrainian territories remain priorities for him and that the situation in Donbas, that comprises the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, may become the subject of an all-Ukrainian referendum. Parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions along the Russian border have been controlled by rebels supported by Moscow for nearly seven years.

According to UN estimates, more than 13,000 people have been killed in fighting since 2014, while as many as 40,000 others have been wounded. Despite the imposition of the latest ceasefire in 2015, around 50 people have been killed since the beginning of this year alone. Kiev has repeatedly blamed Moscow for inciting the conflict.

Israel says Blinken to visit 'soon' as ceasefire holds

Tel Aviv | Agencies

Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken would visit the region in the coming days, as an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire to halt 11 days of bloody fighting between the Jewish state and Hamas was enforced on Friday.

Ashkenazi tweeted that Blinken said in a phone call he "intends to visit the region soon", reports dpa news agency.

"I welcomed his decision and told him that we would welcome him warmly and that I look forward to continuing our discussions on advancing regional strategic issues for maintaining Israel's security and regional stability," Ashkenazi wrote. The fighting in the Gaza Strip since May 10 killed 232 people in Gaza and 12 people in Israel.

According to the Israeli army, the majority of those killed in the Gaza Strip were Palestinian militants. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, around a quarter



of the fatalities were minors. Among those killed on the Israeli side were a soldier, two workers from Thailand, an Indian nurse and Arab Israelis. The ceasefire came into effect at 2 a.m.

Israeli forces and Gaza Strip militants have fired thousands of missiles back and forth since May 10, in response to the rockets fired by Palestinian militants in Gaza to retaliate for Israel's violation of the sacred Islamic holy site of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

Inquiry finds BBC 'fell below standards' over Princess Diana interview

The inquiry revealed on Thursday that former BBC reporter Martin Bashir had acted in a "deceitful" way and faked documents to obtain the interview while the broadcaster's own internal probe in 1996 into what happened was "woefully ineffective", Xinhua news agency.

London | Agencies

An independent inquiry has revealed that the BBC "fell below its high standards of integrity and transparency" over the 1995 interview with the late Princess Diana.

The inquiry revealed on Thursday that former BBC reporter Martin Bashir had acted in a "deceitful" way and faked documents to obtain the interview while the broadcaster's own internal probe in 1996 into what happened was "woefully ineffective", Xinhua news agency.

The independent inquiry, by retired judge Lord Dyson, was commissioned by the broadcaster last year, after Diana's brother, Earl Spencer went public with allegations about how the interview was obtained.

It found Bashir mocked up fake bank statements that falsely suggested individuals were being paid for keeping the Princess, who died in a car crash in France 1997, under surveillance.



He later showed the fake documents to Spencer, to gain his trust in order to gain access to the Princess of Wales and persuade her to agree to give the interview.

The BBC carried out its own investigation into the issue in 1996, but it "fell short of the high standards of integrity and transparency", according to the inquiry.

In response to the findings, the British broadcaster sent written apologies to Princes William and Harry, as well as the Prince of Wales Charles and Spencer.

The BBC's incumbent Director-General, Tim Davie, said: "Although the report states that Diana, Princess of Wales, was keen on the idea of an interview with the BBC, it is clear that the process for securing the interview fell far short of what audiences have a right to expect.

"We are very sorry for this. Lord Dyson has identified clear failings. He added that the BBC should have "made greater effort to get to the bottom of what happened at the time and been more transparent about what it knew". In a letter sent by Davie to Prince Charles, the Director-General apologised for Bashir's "lurid and untrue claims" and accepts that the veteran journalist made the claims "intending to play on the Princess's fears, in order to arouse her interest in him, and without concern for the impact on those he maligned". According to the the BBC, this was the first time a serving British Royal had spoken openly about her life, including her "unhappy marriage" to Prince Charles, their affairs and her bulimia. Responding to the inquiry findings, Prince William said he was "most saddened" that his mother never learned she had been deceived, adding that she was failed "not just by a rogue reporter" but also by "BBC bosses".

In a separate statement, his brother Harry said that the "ripple effect of a culture of exploitation and unethical practices" ultimately took his mother's life.

"Our mother lost her life because of this, and nothing has changed. By protecting her legacy, we protect everyone, and uphold the dignity with which she lived her life," the Duke of Sussex added. Bashir, who is one of the UK's best known journalists and had also made headlines for his 2003 interview with the late pop star Michael Jackson, has stepped down from his role as the BBC's religion editor, the corporation confirmed last week.

New date set for Ethiopian general elections

Addis Ababa | Agencies

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) announced that it has set June 21 as new date for the country's sixth general elections.

Addressing the media here on Thursday, NEBE spokeswoman Solyana Shimelis said the new electoral timetable was set taking into account the need to finish and transport printing ballots to electoral constituencies across the country, reports Xinhua news agency. Ethiopia had previously set June 5 as the tentative date to hold the polls. Shimeles said in addition to parliamentary and regional council elections, a referendum to create a possible 11th regional state will also be held on June 21.

She admitted some electoral constituencies might

not conduct polls on June 21, primarily due to security issues. However, the spokesman said the NEBE plans to conduct polls on delayed electoral constituencies and announce poll results before the formation of a new government. More than 31.7 million Ethiopians including more than 1.2 million prospective voters in Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa, have registered to cast their ballots.

Under Ethiopia's parliamentary government system, the Prime Minister who is the highest authority of the land is selected from the party that wins the most seats at federal parliament level and will be sworn in after parliamentary vote. These elections were initially scheduled for August 29, 2020, but were delayed, supposedly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



ORGANISERS URGED TO DECIDE OLYMPICS' FATE AFTER MULLING IMPACT

Tokyo | Agencies

Japan's top coronavirus adviser on Friday called on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and local organisers to decide whether to stage the Tokyo Olympics after studying how the Games could burden the country's medical systems. The IOC and the Tokyo Olympics organising committee "certainly have a responsibility" for making the decision, Shigeru Omi, who chairs the government's coronavirus advisory panel, told a low house committee meeting, DPA reports. "The decision cannot be made at the last minute," Omi stressed. Tokyo Olympics organising committee president Seiko Hashimoto has said they have already decided to hold the Games between July 23 and August 8. The IOC and local organisers are pressing ahead with the Games despite rock-solid opposition in Japan amid the pandemic. Japan on



Friday added the southern prefecture of Okinawa to the current coronavirus state of emergency, which brought the total number of regions under the measure to 10, including Tokyo. Japan reported 5,253 new cases, including

649 in Tokyo, on Friday, according to a tally by broadcaster NHK. Japan has so far confirmed more than 711,000 infections and about 12,100 Covid-19-related deaths, by far the worst in East Asia, NHK said.

WAS NOT EASY TO GET RUNS AGAINST KUMBLE: SANGAKKARA

New Delhi: Former Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara said that India spin great Anil Kumble gave him some "sleepless nights" as a batsman. Sangakkara said that Kumble's height made him quite unorthodox as a leg-spinner. "Kumble has given me a few sleepless nights as a batsman. He was not your orthodox leg-spinner. This big, tall gangly bowler running in and bowling with very high arm action," said Sangakkara in a video tweeted by the International Cricket Council (ICC). "Bowling fast, bowling straight and accurately. It was not at all easy to get him away for runs. A lot of bounce... he had great pace on the ball and if there was any rough on a length, the batsman had very little chance of getting away. Lovely guy, very intense cricketer but an absolute champion for India and world cricket," said Sangakkara. Kumble is India's all-time highest wicket taker in Tests and ODIs with 619 and 337 wickets, respectively.



Clearly there were some breaches in IPL bio-bubble: Williamson

London | Agencies

New Zealand cricket team skipper Kane Williamson has said that "clearly there were some breaches" in the Indian Premier League (IPL) bio-bubble and that the Indian cricket board took the "right decision" to indefinitely postpone the tournament. The 14th edition of the IPL was postponed on May 4 following a breach in the bio-bubble during the Delhi and Ahmedabad legs, after which a few cricketers and staff tested positive for Covid-19. "Things escalated really quickly over in India and the challenges that way in that part of the world are heart-breaking to see," Williamson said during a media interaction on Wednesday from the New Zealand team's quarantine base in Southampton. The New Zealand team is in England to play a two-Test series against the hosts starting at Lord's on June 2. The series concludes on June 14, following which the Black Caps will take on the Virat



Kohli-led India in the World Test Championship final at Ageas Rose Bowl in Southampton from June 18. "We were very well looked after in the bubble for the first half of the tournament when things were still intact but clearly, there were some breaches," the Kiwi skipper said, though he did not elaborate. "The tournament couldn't continue and the right decisions were made, I believe that's how things unfolded in the IPL," said the batsman.

NO OFFICIAL REQUEST FROM BCCI TO ADVANCE TEST SERIES: ECB

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on Friday said it has not received any request from the Indian cricket board to advance the Test series so as to create a window for the completion of the postponed Indian Premier League (IPL). A news report in ESPNcricinfo.com on Thursday said that the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) had approached ECB to advance the Test series by a week to provide September window for the IPL. However, an ECB spokesperson told reporter, "We talk to the BCCI on a regular basis about a wide range of issues especially as we address the challenges of Covid-19, but have had no official



PANT SHOULD BE INDIA'S FIRST-CHOICE WICKET KEEPER IN WTC FINAL: SAHA

New Delhi:

Wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha has said that Rishabh Pant should be India's first-choice wicketkeeper in their upcoming Test matches in England, including the World Test Championship (WTC) final against New Zealand. Saha was India's first-choice wicketkeeper since 2014 after MS Dhoni retired from Test cricket until the emergence of Rishabh Pant. Both players have been included in the squad that will travel to England for the WTC final and the subsequent five-match Test series. "Rishabh Pant played the last few matches of the World Test Championship, he's done well and he should be our first-choice keeper in England. I would just wait, and if any opportunity arises, I will give my best. I will keep practising for that one chance," Saha told Sportskeeda. "I try to be the same irrespective of the situation. Whether I am performing or not, I don't see any change in myself, no idea if others around me spot anything different. We can only try to perform --sometimes it clicks, sometimes it doesn't-- and the management takes the call based on all these parameters," he said.



request to change dates and are continuing to plan for the five Test series as is scheduled."

There are 31 matches remaining in this year's IPL and the BCCI is searching for a window to complete the tournament.

India begin their Test series on August 4 and end the series on September 14.

The opening Test is in Trent Bridge from August 4-8. It will be followed by Tests at Lord's (August 12-16), Headingley (August 25-29), The Oval (September 2-6) and Old Trafford (September 10-14).

India are set to depart for England on June 2 in a charter flight. They begin the England tour with the World Test Championship final against New Zealand from June 18-22.

COLOMBIA DROPPED AS 2021 COPA AMERICA CO-HOST

Asuncion | Agencies

The South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) said on Thursday that Colombia will no longer co-host this year's Copa America amid civil unrest and surging coronavirus cases. Colombia had been scheduled to host fixtures in four cities, and the final was earmarked for Barranquilla's Estadio Metropolitan on July 10.

"CONMEBOL guarantees the realization of the 2021 Copa America and in the coming days will inform where the games originally allocated to Colombia will be played," CONMEBOL said in a statement, Xinhua reports.

The announcement came just hours after Colombian sports minister Ernesto Lucena asked CONMEBOL to postpone the tournament until local coronavirus restrictions were eased to allow fans into stadia.

CONMEBOL said it was impossible to reschedule the competition because of the tight global football calendar.

Argentine President Alberto Fernandez this week offered to stage the entire Copa America



if Colombia could no longer be a co-host.

Colombia is currently grappling with a prolonged third wave of Covid-19 infections and many cities have strict nightly curfews while large public gatherings remain banned.

The health ministry has reported more than three mil-

lion confirmed cases of the virus and over 83,000 fatalities.

In addition to the pandemic, the Andean country is in the midst of violent anti-government protests that have claimed the lives of at least 42 people since April 28, according to the attorney general's office.

The public body has said it is

also investigating the disappearance of 134 people during the demonstrations, which continued on Thursday.

Copa Libertadores matches in Cali and Barranquilla last week were marred by images of players and officials visibly struggling with the effects of tear gas used by police to disperse protesters.

BENGALURU RULED OUT AS VENUE FOR INTER-STATE ATHLETICS MEET



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has ruled out Bengaluru as venue for next month's Indian Grand Prix 4 and Inter-State Athletics Championships, which is the last domestic competition to achieve the Tokyo Olympic qualification mark for Indian athletes.

"AFI is working to shift the venue of IGP 4 and inter-state championships from Bengaluru. Patiala is being considered as option," AFI said on its social media platform.

The eight-lane synthetic track at Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru is still under construction. "Due to lockdown in

Karnataka, the relaying of track got delayed. Since construction work is yet to be completed, it is not possible to conduct any competition," said an official of the Karnataka Athletics Association (KAA).

The AFI is hopeful of conducting both IGP 4 and Inter-State Athletics Championships in Patiala.

Kuldeep and I could play together until Pandya was around: Chahal

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Yuzvendra Chahal said that the reason for him and Kuldeep Yadav not featuring together in the Indian team in the last two years is because all-rounder Hardik Pandya is unable to bowl.

"When Kuldeep Yadav and I used to play, Hardik Pandya was also there and he would bowl. In 2018, Hardik Pandya got injured and Ravindra Jadeja made a comeback (in white-ball cricket) as an all-rounder, the one who could also bat at number 7. Unfortunately, he is a spinner. We could have played together if he was a medium pacer. It was the demand of the team," Chahal told Sports Tak in an interview.

Pandya had to be stretched off the field with a back injury in a match against Pakistan which was followed by a lengthy spell on the sidelines. He had only started bowling again after the 2020 Indian Premier League (IPL) last year and is yet to play a Test match since September 2018. Kuldeep and Chahal were developing as a lethal spin pair before the 2019 World Cup but they have hardly played a match together since the tournament, with the former's appearances for the Indian team going on a nosedive.



Playing Test against India at WACA will favour Aussies: Perry

Sydney | Agencies

Australia women's team all-rounder Ellyse Perry said playing the one-off Test against India women in Perth this year will give home side advantage since there will be extra pace and carry.

India will visit Australia in September-October for a full series comprising one Test, three One-day Internationals and three T20 Internationals. The Test at WACA Ground will take place between September 30 and October 3. The historic Test match will be the first between the Australian and Indian women's teams in 15 years, and India's first ever women's day-night Test. "Playing a Test match there before -- it's an absolutely wonderful venue for a women's Test," Perry was quoted as saying by cricket.com.au.

Perry was given Player of the Match award when Australia women last played a Test at Perth, against England in 2014. She took eight wickets and scored 71 runs. "The pitch provides that little bit of extra pace and bounce, the ball carries though really well, there's a little bit of sideways movement," she added.



FIFA under-17 women's WC to be held in India in October 2022

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The 2022 FIFA under-17 Women's World Cup will be held in India from October 11 to 30, 2022, football's global governing body said. India was set to host the 2021 u-17 Women's World Cup before it was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The World Cup was originally to be played between November 2 and 21, 2020, before being postponed to 2021. It was to be staged from February 17-March 7.

"The announcement of the dates for U-17 Women's World Cup India 2022 marks a fresh



beginning for the tournament. The LOC (Local Organising Committee) is carrying on the work that had already begun with the previous edition. As the Covid-19 situation improves, we look forward to restarting all the legacy activities that have been planned, and to the growth of women's football through this tournament," said All India Football Federation general secretary Kushal Das. This global event will be the second FIFA tournament to be hosted by India after the FIFA under-17 World Cup in 2017, which broke the record for being the most attended youth World Cup in FIFA's history.

Smith toughest, Kohli & Rohit easy pickings: Amir

Karachi: Former Pakistan fast bowler Mohammed Amir has picked Steve Smith over both Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, calling him the toughest batsman he has bowled to unlike the Indian duo who he feels are easy pickings. Amir, who retired from international cricket in December, 2020 after differences with the team management was one of Pakistan's star performers in the 2017 ICC Champions Trophy final, dismissing both Kohli and Sharma early. "I haven't found it tough bowling to either. In fact, I find it easy to bowl to him (Rohit Sharma). I feel that I can get him out both ways. He struggles against the in-swing from a left-arm and as well as against the ball that goes away early on. I may say that I find bowling to Virat slightly tougher because he revels in pressure situations, but otherwise I've never found it difficult bowling to either of the two," Amir said in an interview with Cricwick. The left-arm pace bowler, who served a five-year suspension for match-fixing early last decade, said that Australia's Smith is the most difficult batsman to bowl to because of his different technique.



RBI TO TRANSFER RS 99,122 CR AS SURPLUS TO CENTRE

Reserve Bank will transfer Rs 99,122 crore as surplus to Centre for nine months ended March 31, 2021. The decision was taken at the 589th meeting of the Central Board under the chairmanship of RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, through video conference.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

According to the RBI, the Board in its meeting reviewed the current economic situation, global and domestic challenges and recent policy measures taken by the Reserve Bank to mitigate the adverse impact of the second wave of Covid-19 on the economy. "With the change in the Reserve Bank's accounting year to April-March (earlier July-June), the Board discussed



the working of the Reserve Bank of India during the transition period of nine months (July 2020-March 2021) and approved the Annual Report and accounts of the Reserve Bank for the transition period," the RBI said in a statement.

"The Board also approved the transfer of Rs 99,122 crore as surplus to the Central Government for the accounting period of nine months

ended March 31, 2021 (July 2020-March 2021), while deciding to maintain the Contingency Risk Buffer at 5.50 per cent. "The RBI approved a Rs 1,76,000 crore (\$24.8 billion) dividend payment to the government, including Rs 1,48,000 crore for FY20.

It earns via interest income on account of open market operations (OMOs), foreign exchange (FX) gains, and writing back of excess risk

provisions.

RBI's liabilities include issuance of notes and deposits held (CRR and reverse repos).

The transfer of surplus is expected to help the government ease fiscal pressure caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and also aid it in giving the economy a boost. In the past, the demand on the RBI for higher dividends and to part with a greater share of its capital has been a hotly debated issue between the central bank and the government.

"The amount of surplus to be transferred by the RBI to the Government of India is considerably higher than the budgeted level. This will offer a buffer to absorb the losses in indirect tax revenues that are anticipated in May-June 2021, related to the impact of the now widespread state lockdowns on the level of consumption on discretionary items and contact-intensive services," said ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar. "Moreover, high commodity prices at a time when demand and pricing power are subdued, would dent the margins of corporates in many sectors, compressing the growth in direct tax collections."

Value buying lifts equities; banking stocks rise

The S&P BSE Sensex traded at 50,227.28, higher by 662.42 points, or 1.34 per cent, from its previous close. Similarly, the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange traded at 15,096.55, up 190.50 points, or 1.28 per cent, from its previous close. Both the indices opened on a positive note and have maintained their gains.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Value buying along with healthy buying in the banking stocks lifted the key domestic indices during Friday's late-afternoon trade session. At 1.50 p.m., the S&P BSE Sensex traded at 50,227.28, higher by 662.42 points, or 1.34 per cent, from its previous close. Similarly, the Nifty50 of the National Stock Exchange traded at 15,096.55, up 190.50 points, or 1.28 per cent, from its previous close. Both the indices opened on a positive note and have maintained their gains. Globally, the US market



on Thursday closed slightly higher after consecutive few days of correction in the market. Besides, Asian markets traded with mixed sentiments as the inflation worries remain intact. On the domestic front, all sectors traded in the green out of which Banks, Financial Services, Media and Realty showed most strength. "Currently, Nifty is showing good strength and sustaining at higher zones. Buying interest can be seen across the street," said Jay Purohit, Technical & Derivatives Analyst, MOFSL. "Going forward,

resistance can be seen around 15300 whereas support is placed at 14900 and then 14700 levels." According to Likhita Chepa, Senior Research Analyst at CapitalVia Global Research: "With news that the International Monetary Fund is willing to increase its discourse and expand its technical engagement with India, sentiments remained upbeat." After the sharp correction in the market yesterday in the second half, Nifty took support near the 14900 level and we saw buying in the major sectors."

US wants crypto transfers over \$10K to be reported to IRS

San Francisco | Agencies

Calling for stricter cryptocurrency rules, the US Treasury Department has said that any cryptocurrency transfer worth \$10,000 or more has to be reported to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). In a new report on tax compliance proposals, the Treasury Department's Office of Tax Analysis estimated that the move will help raise an additional \$700 billion in tax revenue over the next 10 years and could bring in as much as \$1.6 trillion in the following decade, reports The Verge. "Cryptocurrency already poses a significant detection problem by facilitating illegal activity broadly including tax evasion. This is why the President's (Joe Biden) proposal includes additional resources for the IRS to address the growth of cryptoassets," the department said in a statement on Thursday.

Businesses would also be required to report cryptocurrency transactions above \$10,000 under the new requirements.

Requiring large crypto transactions to be reported would help "to minimise the incen-



tives and opportunity to shift income out of the new information reporting regime," it added. The decision comes at a time when the price of bitcoin tumbled below \$40,000 for the first time in months and other cryptocurrencies were pressured earlier this week, after the People's Bank of China apparently warned against using digital coins as payment.

On Wednesday, nearly \$1 trillion was wiped off the market capitalisation of the entire crypto sector, before it got stabilised at around \$40,000 per coin. It was the second jolt to the fast-growing crypto market after Tesla last week applied brakes on Bitcoin as a payment mode to buy its electric vehicles, citing environmental harm.

Sharing the secrets to wholesome living, on World Meditation Day

Hyderabad | Agencies

Kamlesh Patel (Daaji), Heartfulness Guide - Heartfulness Institute and Luke Coutinho, Holistic Lifestyle Coach - Integrative & Lifestyle Medicine conversed on the topic of 'Secrets of Wholesome Living' today, on the occasion of World Meditation Day. Daaji and Luke shared their insights derived from their experience of working with people from different walks of life. They shared their philosophies, enlivened with many anecdotes from each of their lives. Daaji also spoke about the Heartfulness meditation system and the role it has played in his personal journey. Luke and Daaji answered some of the most pertinent questions that beginners have before they commence meditation. The conversation deepened into ways in which one can enable their mind to meditate, devel-

op interest to meditate every day, achieve clarity of thought and reason, and above all tap into and learn to listen clearly to one's inner guidance.

Their intent through the length of the conversation was aimed at guiding the viewers with deep insights and more importantly practical tips and tools on maintaining one's mental, physical, and emotional well-being. This is especially important now due to the individual challenges posed by COVID-19. Lockdowns and many social restrictions, more keenly faced by India due to extended pandemic restrictions, have created a negative impact on people's mental and emotional psyches. Through the reasonings of science and philosophy and various personal observations and life examples, Luke and Daaji, deliberated on the practical solutions on bringing hope, confidence and positivity in the current scenario of extreme mental fatigue.

INDIAN CHAIRPERSON, CEO OR MD MUST FOR INSURANCE COS WITH FDI



Team Absolute | New Delhi

All insurance companies with foreign investment will have to appoint resident Indian citizens on at least one of the key managerial positions in the entity to get permission to operate in the country. Government has notified the Indian Insurance Companies (Foreign Investment) Amendment Rules, 2021 that makes appointment of resident Indian citizen mandatory, at least one amongst the chairperson, managing director or Chief Executive Officer.

The new rules, which will also apply to existing insurers with FDI, also said that foreign investors' direct and indirect investments will be counted as prescribed under regulations for the registration of insurance companies issued by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI). Moreover, the rules have also made specific provision for insurance companies with more than 49% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). In the concluded budget session

Parliament has raised FDI in insurance from present 49% to 74%.

To be able to enhance FDI to 74% level, companies would now be required to have minimum 50% independent directors on the board. An exception is given where the chairperson is an independent director. In such case, one-third of directors would be independent.

Moreover, such companies would be required to retain net profits for dividend declaration, where prescribed solvency margins are not met for a financial year.

Earlier this year, foreign investment in the insurance sector was liberalised vide amendments to the Insurance Act, 1938. Last month, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) had released draft foreign investment amendment rules for public consultation. It has now been notified.

Insurance sector experts said that now further amendments are expected in Foreign Exchange Management (Non-debt Instruments) Rules, 2019 and IRDAI guidelines on Indian ownership and control.

MORE PETROLEUM PRODUCTS PRODUCED IN APRIL DESPITE LOWER COVID-HIT DEMAND

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Indian refineries produced more petroleum products in April this year than what was achieved in the same period last year even as demand conditions remain tepid with slower sales of auto fuels in the country amid wave of fresh Covid-19 wave and lockdowns in various parts of the country. According to petroleum ministry data, production of petroleum products by Oil's

Refineries during April, 2021 was 20525.69 TMT (thousand million tonne) which is 0.97 per cent higher than the target for the month and 31.04 per cent higher than the production during April, 2020. Production of petroleum products by Refineries during April, 2021 was 365.89 TMT which is 5.08 per cent higher than the target for the month and 23.58 per cent higher than the production during April, 2020.

While product performance in April remains unaffected, crude oil production continued to remain flat with dwindling old reserves and lack of new prospective producing oil finds. Accordingly, crude oil during April, 2021 stood at 2493.26 TMT which though is 1.16 per cent higher than target for the month but is 2.07 per cent lower than the production during April, 2020.

The story on natural gas production in the country is

slightly better with development of new funds both by public and private sector entities. Gas production during April, 2021 stood at 2651.49 MMSCM which is 22.68 per cent higher than the production during April, 2020 but lower by 1.02 per cent than the monthly target. The main growth performer for natural gas in the country has been private are for entities and other joint venture companies. Natural gas production by

Pvt/JVs companies in the PSC & CBM regime during April, 2021 was 710.86 MMSCM which is 12.10 per cent higher than the target and 204.33 per cent higher than the production during April, 2020.

Crude Oil Processed during April, 2021 was 19884.70 TMT which is 1.82 per cent higher than the target for the month and 34.86 per cent higher vis-a-vis April, 2020. Capacity utilization during the April, 2021 was 96.82 per cent.

Covid2.0 to obstruct recovery in domestic consumption of petroleum products: Ind-Ra

In a report, the ratings agency cited that India's domestic consumption of petroleum products declined 1.8 per cent month on month to 4.4 million barrels per day (mb/d) in March 2021, after achieving FY21's peak level of 4.5 mb per day in February 2021.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The resurgence of Covid-19 is expected to obstruct the recovery in domestic consumption of petroleum products, said India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) on Friday. In a report, the ratings agency cited that India's domestic consumption of petroleum products declined 1.8 per cent month on month to 4.4 million barrels per day (mb/d) in March 2021, after achieving FY21's peak level of 4.5 mb per day in February 2021.

"The mom decline is likely to have been higher in the months of April and May due to the fresh restrictions imposed to curb the second covid wave," the agency said.

"However, Ind-Ra opines that the consumption levels to have remained higher on a yoy basis due to the lower base effect caused by the more stringent restrictions imposed during the same period last year."

As per the report on a cumulative

basis, production, domestic consumption and exports on a YoY basis declined by 11 per cent, 8.7 per cent and 13.3 per cent, respectively, during FY21. Similarly, domestic crude production fell 3.1 per cent YoY. "During March 2021, the production volumes of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, Oil India and fields under production-sharing contracts decreased 3.7 per cent yoy, 1.8 per cent yoy and 2.3 per cent yoy, respectively. "Domestic production declined 1.6 per cent mom during the month. "On a cumulative basis, a fall of 4.7 per cent YoY in domestic crude production was registered during FY21. Besides, the report pointed out that in March 2021, natural gas (NG) production increased 11.3 per cent YoY and NG production volumes from private or joint venture fields increased 118.4 per cent YoY while the production from Oil and Natural Gas Corp and Oil India fell by 3.9 per cent and 0.7 per cent respectively. "The increase in domestic con-

sumption was largely led by a 28.1 per cent yoy and 21 per cent yoy increase in consumption by the city gas distribution and power segments, respectively, in March 2021. "Furthermore, LNG import volumes increased 3.8 per cent YoY while it declined 4.3 per cent MoM in March 2021. "Ind-Ra expects continued subdued crack spreads in both gasoil and gasoline will impact the overall gross refining margins of Indian oil marketing companies (OMCs), though they have healthy complexity and low operating costs per barrel. "Gasoil and gasoline are the two key products of Indian refiners, accounting for around 65 per cent of their product slate. "In addition, Ind-Ra said refining and marketing segment would continue to dominate the overall profitability in the near term, while OMCs have been consistently increasing their pipeline capacity to reduce transportation costs and venturing into new business segments such as petrochemical and city gas distribution to diversify its revenue streams.

"With the expectations of a subdued recovery in the gross refining margins and continuance of healthy marketing margins, Ind-Ra believes that the marketing segment would be the principal contributor to OMCs' profitability in FY22 and witness a higher demand once the economy recovers."

"Further details are mentioned in Marketing Segment to Continue Driving OMCs' Profitability in FY22."

AESL launches National Level Print Campaign for Scholarship Program

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Aakash Educational Services Limited, the national leader in test preparatory services for aspiring doctors and engineers, has launched national level print campaigns for its flagship instant admission cum scholarship test, also known as the iACST. The campaign will run over a period of fifteen days across national and regional dailies. The campaign highlights the opportunity that iACST gives to students so that they can start their journey early

diately. Commenting on the campaign, Abhishek Maheshwari, CEO, Aakash Educational Services Limited (AESL) said, "We empathise with the parents and students predicament in these tough times and want to highlight the importance of early and timely preparation. Our Hybrid offering allows students to start their preparation online and seamlessly migrate to offline when the centers open and our scholarship exam enables them to avail up-to 90% scholarship."

The specially crafted test enables talented and deserving students from Class 7-11 gain upto 90% scholarship from the safety of their home, online as per their convenience. It allows students to take the exam online and provide them with details of the scholarship earned immediately.

SECOND WAVE FLATTENS FIZZ FOR SOFT-DRINK MAKERS: CRISIL

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's non-alcoholic beverages industry, led by cola giants Pepsi and Coca-Cola, is unlikely to reclaim pre-pandemic levels this fiscal, ratings agency Crisil said. "Indeed, despite some claw-back after an estimated decline by a fifth last fiscal, revenue will still be 10 per cent short of the fiscal 2020 mark," the ratings agency said. "Credit profiles of players, however, remains resilient because of their cost-control measures, strong balance sheets and ample liquidity." As

per an analysis of 13 Crisil-rated bottlers of Pepsi and Coca-Cola, which account for over 50 per cent of the market, indicates as much. As things stand, Crisil said Pepsi and Coca-Cola have a combined market share of over 80 per cent in India's non-alcoholic beverages industry. "The manufacturing operations are either owned by them or are done through third-party bottlers in different regions of the country." Last fiscal, a strict nationwide lockdown and subsequent restrictions over April-September severely affected peak season demand

as summer months alone account for two-thirds of annual cola sales. "A redux looms now." According to Nitesh Jain, Director, Crisil Ratings: "Beverages sales volumes will be adversely impacted in the peak season once again due to localised lockdowns and restrictions on movement to contain the second wave of the pandemic." "This will affect out-of-home consumption of beverages the most in the first quarter. Though these restrictions are staggered across regions and are less stringent this time around, full-year revenue may

still be 10 per cent below pre-pandemic levels." Besides, the agency cited that operating profits may be more resilient, driven by continuation of cost-control measures and improving product mix. "Demand for high-margin carbonated soft drinks (CSD), which forms two-thirds of the beverage portfolio of players, was impacted less during lockdowns compared with juices and bottled water. This is due to higher in-home consumption of CSD, driven by increasing access to refrigeration," the agency said.



ARMAAN MALIK, ERIC NAM AND KSHMR RELEASE 'ECHO'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Singer Armaan Malik has collaborated with Korean-American singer-songwriter Eric Nam and international music producer KSHMR for a single titled "Echo", which was released on Friday. The track highlights indecisiveness in a relationship that pushes partners off the edge. "Echo was inception when I met KSHMR in Los Angeles right before the onset of the global pandemic. He played some unreleased material including 'Echo'. It just stuck, and I recorded my demo at his studio itself. Around mid-2020, Eric and I had this little interaction on Twitter that sparked off an internet friendship and our teams got connected to discuss a potential collaboration. The track we all gravitated most towards was 'Echo', and we spent the next few months making it sound like it does right now. It feels amazing to create a magnificent song with such talented artists like KSHMR and Eric!" said Armaan.

The song has been released through Indian-American DJ and music producer Niles Hollowell-Dhar aka KSHMR's record label Dharma Worldwide. Talking about it, he expressed, "Echo was a demo I started years ago, unsure of how to finish it until I met Armaan. The voice and story he brought to the song was the perfect fit. Eric lent his awesome talent and it became a cross-country Asian collaboration, which I love. 'Echo' is a song about tough relationships that I think we can all relate to."

Eric Nam added: "(I am) Incredibly excited to be a part of this song with Armaan and KSHMR, especially as we release during this month that celebrates the AAPI Community. I'm so glad that we get to share this with the world and for us to be able to create this collaborative moment across continents and cultures. I hope our fans and listeners love it as much as we did putting it together!"

The release of "Echo" aims at honouring the artists' Asian backgrounds and celebrates May as the Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (AAPIHM).



NEHA KAKKAR TALKS ABOUT 'SABSESUNDAR' UTTARAKHAND

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Singer Neha Kakkar sent out a prayer on Friday hoping everything returned to normalcy again, in her birth state Uttarakhand as well as the rest of India. Neha, who was born in Rishikesh, also posted a series of throwback pictures on Instagram from her stay at Uttarakhand.

"Humara #Uttarakhand SabseSundar!!!! Hey BhagwanSabkoJald Vaccine lag jaayeurPhir Sab Aakar, Yahan Ki KhoobsurtiDekhein..YahanKabhiaur Poore Bharat

kabhiRozgarShuruHoJaayeWapis, Sab Phir se AchaHoJaayeJald se Jald (Our Uttarakhand is the most beautiful of places!!!! God, please let everyone be vaccinated soon, so they can visit the state and see its beauty.. Let avenues of income open up again all over India as well as here, let normalcy return soon enough)," she wrote in her post.

Neha's new song has also come out recently. Titled, "Khadtainu main dassa", the song also features her husband singer Rohanpreet Singh and talks about the life of a couple right after they get married.

Neha and Rohanpreet got married in October last year.

'Disco Dancer' musical planned for release around Diwali

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Mithun Chakraborty-starrer evergreen dance musical blockbuster "Disco Dancer" is being made as a musical, and plans are to release it around Diwali this year.

Work on the project, helmed by composer duo Salim-Sulaiman, started last year and initial plans were to launch the musical in May 2020. However, it had to be stalled in March due to lockdown, and a new date of release is now being planned around Diwali.

"We are restarting Disco Dancer. Some of us are vaccinated and some of them



need to. Things have changed a lot right now and we want to restart it when everyone has taken the first dose. We are almost ready to release it, but things are a bit

preliminary. We are hoping to release it near Diwali," said Salim Merchant.

Talking about why they decided on "Disco Dancer", he said: "It was Mithun

Chakraborty's biggest film. All the songs of this film are massive hits, whether it is 'Yaad aa rahahai', 'I am a disco dancer', 'Goronkinakalonki', 'Jimmy Jimmy', 'Auvauva' -- musically, it has a lot of amazing songs. In terms of the musical style, which is disco, it can never go out of fashion. It's still present right now and people still move to it, dance to it, enjoy it, listen to it. It has a classic touch."

"We have taken the rights for 'Disco Dancer' from B. Subhash. Our company Gravity Zero (Entertainment) is basically a company that makes musicals. We made 'UmraoJaan' before this," Salim added.

Sidharth Shukla: Both TV and OTT have their share of challenges

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Television actor Sidharth Shukla is set to step into the world of the web soon, with "Broken But Beautiful 3".

Sidharth agrees that OTT is the new thing now, but both small screen and the digital platform come with their share of challenges.

"I know the whole world is hooked to the web platforms, and I feel it is the new medium now. The OTT consumption, especially since the last year, has tremendously increased. People are consuming different things, and actors are willing to experiment more with content on the web space," Sidharth said.

"Both the mediums have their share of challenges. As actors, our job is to act in any medium. I strongly believe if the content is good, people will watch it, irrespective of the medium. I am truly excited about my digital

debut and am looking forward to the audience's response to Broken But Beautiful 3," he added.

"Broken But Beautiful 3" is the story of Agastya Rao and Rumi Desai, two people from very different worlds. Not only are their worlds poles apart, but they are also a complete contrast to each other. Directed by Priyanka Ghose, "Broken Beautiful 3" features Sidharth along with Sonia Rathee, and the cast also includes Ehan Bhat, JahanviDhanrajgir, Manvir Singh, Taniya Kalra and Saloni Khanna in prominent roles.

The ALTBalaji's show releases on May 29.



Arshi Khan: I enjoy being entertaining in real life, too

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Arshi Khan says that she makes sure to keep her life as entertaining as possible and tries to maintain a positive approach towards things.

The actress, who recently travelled to Bhopal to meet her parents, says they too look forward to her visiting because then the house comes alive.

"I have always learned to face any circumstances positively. I'm a happy soul and I live my life with lots of entertainment. People say even my anger is fun-filled. For my parents, I'm still a kid and they believe when I'm home, the house start talking," she says.

She says that her journey in showbiz has been successful only because of her entertaining nature.

"People say I know how to make them forget their problems and make them happy. I'm very entertaining. But this is not something I act or turn on when the cameras are shooting me. I enjoy being entertaining in my real life, too, and that has only help me make my showbiz journey successful," she says.

Arshi is known for starring in television series like "Savitri Devi College & Hospital", "Ishq Mein Marjawan" and "Vish".

SUPERSTAR MOHANLAL CELEBRATES 61ST B'DAY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Thiruvananthapuram: Versatile actor, Superstar Mohanlal, on Friday turned 61 as wishes poured in from all corners for Kerala's most popular son. Winner of five national awards, for those in the industry he is Lal, but those who consider him dear refer to him as 'Laletten' and for actress Neena Gupta he is Mohan.

As the Covid pandemic is in full swing, there will be no celebrations. The superstar is at the moment resting at his Chennai residence.

His glittering screen career began way back in 1978, when he did his first film 'Thiranoottam', which was canned, but he has had no reason to look back as he has had a wonderful career donning the grease paint for some 345 films. The biggest blockbuster of his, directed by Priyadarshan -- "Marakkur: ArabikadalinteSimham" is currently held up for release on account of the lockdown and its producer, who is also his closest aide - Antony Perumbavoor said they are planning to release the film in August.

Their last film 'Drishyam-2', a sequel, released on the OTT platform turned out to be a blockbuster hit and Perumbavoor on the superstar's birthday said they are working on a new film, directed by Jeethu Joseph who directed the sequels 'Drishyam'. Incidentally, on Thursday Mohanlal appeared on the video wall singing as part of a musical tribute that was shown just before Chief Minister PinarayiVijayan was sworn in for an unprecedented second term. As birthday wishes poured in, one was from a first year engineering college student from Malappuram-Vaishnav, who in a matter of 8 hours drew 100 pictures of the actor in various roles from his films on a canvas and is waiting to meet the actor to gift him. The li'l champs of ZEE Keralam's music reality show SaReGaMaPa KeralamLi'l Champs have come up with a birthday tribute to Mohanlal in the form of short videos compiling all-time hit songs of Lalettan's films. In 2009, he was inducted into the Territorial Army as a (Hon) Lt.Colonel. And now all eyes are on his debut directorial venture -- Barroz, that has already started rolling, but now wound up on account of Covid. It is a 3D film and is expected to go on the floors next year.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Alanna Panday