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NATION > 02

India not limping, but sprinting ahead powered by strength...



HOLLYWOOD > 06

Nicki Minaj defends Michael B. Jordan over name...



SPORTS > 07

Jadeja pips Holder to become world No. 1 all-rounder...



40 cases of Delta Plus variant found in India

LETHAL AND UNKNOWN

A total of 21 cases of the new strain have been found in Maharashtra, six in Madhya Pradesh, three each in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, two in Karnataka and one each in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Jammu, said sources. The genome sequenced samples received from Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh as well as other states confirmed the presence of Delta Plus variant, a mutation of the Delta strain or B.1.617.2 variant first detected in India.

- The Delta Plus, much like the Delta strain that has spread to 80 countries, is highly infectious and fast spreading.
- The Delta Plus shows "increased transmissibility, stronger binding to receptors of lung cells and potentially reduced monoclonal antibody response".
- It may also show resistance to existing treatment protocol for Covid, experts worry. There are concerns over whether current vaccines will be effective against the Delta Plus.
- The government said while the two vaccines being used in India, Covishield and Covaxin, are effective against the Delta variant, data on how they work on the Delta Plus would be shared later.



Madhya Pradesh's Bhopal and Shivpur. Soon after findings, the Ministry alerted the three states to take precautionary measures and shared that Delta Plus has characteristics like increased transmissibility, stronger binding to receptors of lung cells, potential reduction in monoclonal antibody response. The Chief Secretaries of Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh has been advised to take up immediate containment measures in different districts and clusters, including preventing crowds, widespread testing, prompt tracing and vaccine coverage.

ized by a mutation in the spike protein, which helps the virus gain entry into human cells. Very little is known about this strain, which is now in nine countries -- the US, the UK, Portugal, Switzerland, Japan, Poland, Russia and China besides India.

ASTRAZENECA 92% EFFECTIVE AGAINST DELTA VARIANT

AstraZeneca said it offers high levels of protection against the Delta variant (B.1.617.2; formerly the 'Indian variant'). AstraZeneca vaccine is used in India as Covishield. Real world data from PHE, demonstrated two doses of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca are 92% effective against hospitalisation due to the Delta variant and showed no deaths among those vaccinated. The vaccine also showed a high level of effectiveness against the Alpha variant (B.1.1.7; formerly the 'Kent' variant) with an 86% reduction of hospitalisations and no deaths reported.



MORE DEADLY MUTATION IN GAMMA COVID VARIANT

New York: A mutation in the Gamma variant (P1) of coronavirus disease is linked to increased mortality, a Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and MIT researchers said on Wednesday. The mutation also carries greater transmissibility, higher infection rates, and increased pathogenicity, showed the study detailed in the journal Genetic Epidemiology. The findings were based on genome-wide association studies (GWAS) methodology which analysed whole-genome sequencing data of SARS-CoV-2 mutations and Covid-19 mortality data. In September 2020, the team looked for links between each mutation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus's single-stranded RNA and mortality in 7,548 Covid-19 patients in Brazil.



"Currently the number of such Delta plus variants in India are only few but the distribution or detection in various states during past two months indicate that it is already present in some states and states may need to enhance their public health response by focusing on surveillance, enhanced testing, quick contact-tracing and priority vaccination."

New Zealand lift World Test Championship

SOUTHAMPTON | Agencies

New Zealand coasted to an unlikely eight-wicket win on the sixth -- and reserve -- day of the World Test Championship final against India at the Hampshire Bowl on Wednesday.



This is an apt redemption for New Zealand, who had lost the final of the last two 50-over World Cups, in 2015 and 2019. The match, in which two days were lost to rain, saw a strong performance from Kiwis on the reserve day as their bowlers ran through the Indian batting line-up and dismissed them for just 170 runs. And then they scaled the 139-run target through a 96-run third-wicket partnership between Kane Williamson (52 not out) and Ross Taylor (47 not out).

innings top scorer with 41 runs, was the last hope for India but he fell to a rash shot as the seventh wicket with the score on 156. Pace bowler Tim Southee picked four wickets for 48 runs to end as the most successful New Zealand bowler. Indian seamers, in response, failed to make an impact on a pitch where New Zealand bowlers looked unplayable. Barring a brief spell during which Ashwin unsettled the Kiwis by removing Devon Conway (19) and Tom Latham (9), the entire bowling unit looked innocuous. This is New Zealand's sixth successive win over India in ICC tournaments, dating back to World T20 in 2007.

Brief scores

India 217 all out in 92.1 overs and 170 all out in 73 overs (R Sharma 30, R Pant 41, T Southee 4/48, T Boult 3/39, K Jamieson 2/30); New Zealand 249 all out in 99.2 overs and 140/2 wkts in 45.5 overs (K Williamson 52 not out, R Taylor 47 not out)

Rs 9,371 cr seized assets of Mallya-Choksi- Modi transferred to banks: ED

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday said it has handed over assets worth Rs 9,371 crore belonging to fugitive businessmen Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi to state-run banks to realise the losses on account of the fraud committed against them.



three on the basis of the FIR filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

The financial probe agency said that the ED has taken swift action by unearthing myriad web of domestic and international transactions and stashing of assets abroad. It further said that the ED has attached or seized assets worth Rs 18,170.02 crore which included assets worth of Rs 969 crore located in foreign countries.

attached and seized assets represents 80.45 per cent of total bank loss of Rs 22,585.83 crore," it said, adding that the investigation by the ED has proved that substantial part of these assets were held in the names of dummy entities, trusts, third persons, relatives of these accused and these entities were proxy of these accused to hold these assets.

The ED has filed charge sheets against all the three accused after completion of PMLA investigation.

WOULD STATEHOOD DEMAND BE BUILDING BLOCK IN ALL-PARTY MEETING ON J&K?

Srinagar: It is a 'Delhi Chalo' moment for all the mainstream political leaders of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday as they meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his Lok Kalyan Marg residence in Delhi on Thursday afternoon. This is the first time that the leaders of NC, PDP, PC, CPI M and some others will meet Modi after August 5, 2019 when articles 370 and 35A were abrogated and the state downgraded into two union territories of J&K and Ladakh. It is also the first time these leaders will meet the Prime Minister after their detention in the wake of August 5, 2019 developments. A lot of backroom work has been done to create the atmosphere for the meeting. All the local leaders going to meet the Prime Minister have expressed faith and confidence in Modi asserting that "We are happy that he will listen to us and we will be able to express our views freely," Mehbooba Mufti told reporters while announcing her willingness to attend the meeting.



PRASHANT KISHOR MEETS SHARAD PAWAR FOR 3RD TIME IN FORTNIGHT

New Delhi: Poll strategist Prashant Kishor on Wednesday met Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) supremo Sharad Pawar at his residence, for the third time in a fortnight, and a day after members of eight political parties met there. According to sources, the meeting of Pawar and Kishor lasted for over an hour. The frequent Kishor-Pawar meetings have been fuelling speculations on the creation of a third front to combat the BJP. Earlier Kishor, whose latest success has been the victory of the Trinamool Congress in the recently-concluded West Bengal Assembly polls, had met Pawar at his Mumbai residence on June 11 and once again on Monday in Delhi at the NCP leader's residence.

'PR EVENT': CONGRESS SLAMS DIP IN VACCINATIONS

New Delhi: The Congress on Wednesday attacked the government over the dip in vaccination numbers after a record high earlier this week with former party chief Rahul Gandhi saying the country is not safe unless vaccination is done on a large scale but sadly the government is "unable to move beyond a PR event". Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also lashed out at the Centre over the dip in the number of vaccinations after India achieved a "historic milestone" of administering 88.09 lakh coronavirus vaccine doses in a single day on June 21. The numbers dipped to over 53.4 lakh on Tuesday.

WhatsApp privacy policy Delhi HC refuses stay on notice by CCI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court has refused to stay a notice issued by the Competition Commission of India (CCI), asking WhatsApp to furnish certain information in connection with the probe, ordered in March, on the instant messaging app's new updated privacy policy.



A vacation bench of Justices Anup J. Bhambhani and Jasmeet Singh said, "We do not consider it appropriate to stay the operation of impugned notice dated June 4, 2021 at this stage." The bench noted that Additional Solicitor General Aman Lekhi has "fairly" stated June 4, notice was perfectly in line with the procedure contemplated under the statute for taking forward an on-going investigation.

The bench said: "The notice has not been stayed by the division bench, and it would take substantial time for preparation of a report pursuant to the receipt of the information called-for by way of the impugned notice; which

report would thereafter be forwarded to the Competition Commission of India (CCI)". In January, the CCI had on its own decided to look into WhatsApp's new privacy policy on the basis of news reports. Facebook and WhatsApp challenged an order passed by single judge in April dismissing their pleas against the probe. In their fresh applications on Monday, the companies had urged the High Court to stay CCI's June 4 notice asking them to furnish certain information during the probe ordered by it into the instant messaging app's new privacy policy.

MP AGAIN CROSSES 10 LAKH-MARK IN DAILY VACCINATION

Bhopal: After recording around 17 lakh vaccine doses on Monday, Madhya Pradesh again surpassed the 10 lakh doses mark on Wednesday. However, the senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh slammed the MP government claiming that it fudging the vaccination data.

On Wednesday, the country administered around 60 lakh doses by 6 pm, around 20%, i.e. 10 lakh were administered in Madhya Pradesh while States like UP and Maharashtra were way behind in this. At the time of going for print, MP had clocked over 10.50 lakh vaccine doses.

Adani group to operate new Navi Mumbai Int'l Airport

The Maharashtra government on Wednesday approved Adani Airport Holdings Ltd (AAHL) to operate the upcoming Navi Mumbai International Airport in the adjoining Thane-Raigad region, an official said here.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The state cabinet presided over by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray gave its green signal to AAHL as the new concessionaire to the prestigious greenfield airport coming up as a public-private partnership (PPP) project.

Earlier, the airport was to be developed by GVK, which was running the Mumbai International Airport Ltd (MIAL). But last year it was taken over by AAHL, and the same was approved by the Directorate of Civil Aviation, Airports Authority of India, SEBI, CCI and finally the CIDCO, which is overseeing the mega-project.

With this, the AAHL, headed by industrial magnate Gautam Adani, becomes the biggest private airport operator running several major airports like Mumbai, Navi Mumbai (upcoming), Ahmedabad



and Lucknow, besides three more likely in the near future.

Nishad Party in UP eyes DyCM post, RS seat

Even though the BJP has been bending backwards to woo the Nishad Party, its leaders now seem to be demanding their pound of flesh. Nishad Party president Sanjay Nishad has said that the main priority for forging any alliance would be an assurance for giving reservation to the Nishad community and its sub-castes under the Scheduled Caste category.



Lucknow | Agencies

Talking to reporters here on Wednesday, he said that his party had supported the BJP in 2019 but no initiative has been taken for granting

reservation and the community is rather upset over this. "The BJP should promise us a seat in the Rajya Sabha and also the post of deputy chief minister in the state," he said. He further warned that if the ruling BJP did not fulfil their demands, the community would be forced to take to the streets.



INDIA NOT LIMPING, BUT SPRINTING AHEAD POWERED BY STRENGTH OF CITIZENS: NADDA TO CHIDAMBARAM

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Hitting out at former Union Minister P Chidambaram over his comment on the pace of vaccination, BJP Chief J P Nadda on Wednesday said that India is not limping but sprinting ahead powered by the strength of its citizens.

Quoting the former Union Minister's tweet, Nadda said, "India is not limping, but sprinting ahead powered by the strength of our citizens. After the record Monday, India has crossed 50 lakh vaccinations on Tuesday and Wednesday, much to the dislike of the Congress Party."

In another tweet, calling Chidambaram a 'Recounting Minister' Nadda said, "It is the Congress' culture to attack Indians whenever India accomplishes a record. Also, it is ironical to hear about sanctity of numbers from a 'Recounting Minister' whose only claim to fame is dressing up numbers in the budget."

After record vaccinations on Monday, in a tweet Chidambaram had said, "Hoard on Sunday, vaccinate on Monday, and go back to limping on Tuesday."

"That is the secret behind the world 'record' of vaccinations on a 'single day'. I am sure the 'feat' will find a place in the Guinness book of records." Before Nadda, Union Ministers and senior BJP leaders attacked Chidambaram for his comment. Quoting the former Union Minister's tweet, Union Minister Prakash Javadekar said,



"Congress strategy for vaccination, Invent of Indian Vaccines - Discredit Scientists. Vaccination started - Questioned its efficacy. Vaccination picks pace - derailed, sabotage by Congress ruled states. Meanwhile, Vaccine Express moves on (nearly 30 crore Indians vaccinated)."

Questioning Chidambaram, Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri tweeted, "1.4 crore doses in two days. More than 48 lakhs and counting at

1600 Hours on Day 3. Mr P Chidambaram is this a limp? Or a fast paced medium/long distance run?."

In a series of tweets, BJP Yuva Morcha National President Tejasvi Surya said, "Five million crossed on Day 2 as well! The only ones limping here are the Congress-led state governments. You should worry why Chhattisgarh and Punjab managed less than a lakh jabs per day, even as MP touched 16 lakh, and Karnataka hit 10.5 lakh."

"BJP ruled states MP, Karnataka, UP, Haryana, Tripura, Gujarat & others are breaking records & will continue to. BJP governments top the list on number of daily jabs, but Congress-led states top the list on vaccine wastage! For once, at least try to compete with us, can you?," Surya said. BJP National General Secretary CT Ravi asked, "Ayya P Chidambaram, How does vaccinating 58 lakh people amount to 'limping'? It would have been more if only Opposition ruled States had focused on World's Largest Vaccine Drive instead of pointing fingers at PM Modi. Please ask your CMs to talk less and work more."

Quoting the senior Congress leader's tweet, BJP co-in-charge for West Bengal Amit Malviya said, "India closed Tuesday at 54.22 lakh vaccinations after a record Monday. It is the Congress ruled States that are limping, and dragging India down. So keep the scorn and derision for your colleagues and allies in Punjab, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, spare us."

Jairam Ramesh rejects reports of raising PM-CARES in standing committee meet

Team Absolute | New Delhi

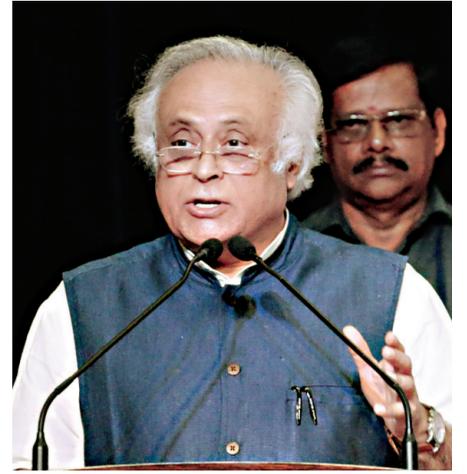
Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has rejected reports that he raised issues related to the PM-CARES fund in the Standing Committee meeting on Wednesday.

Chairman of the committee Ramesh said in a tweet, "This is completely, totally, absolutely FALSE. PM-CARES was not mentioned even once in 150 minutes of today's Standing Committee meeting. Report news. Don't peddle LIES."

His statement came after reports that he raised the issue of PM-CARES fund in the meeting.

But sources say that during standing committee meeting of Parliament, BJP members opposed any discussion on the vaccine policy and even briefly left the meeting when the issue of different pricing was raised by some members.

BJP members of the science and technology com-



mittee objected to the circulated agenda, which was on the vaccine policy. Sources said the panel was to discuss "the development of vaccines and the genome sequencing of Covid variants".

The BJP MPs left the room but they returned as chairman of the committee and Congress leader Ramesh assured that the meeting would stick to its agenda, sources said.

CBI books SBI official for causing Rs 7.07 cr loss to bank

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said on Wednesday that it has booked an official of the State Bank of India in Andhra Pradesh for causing the bank loss to the tune of Rs 7 crore, besides carrying out searches at three different locations.

A CBI spokesperson said that the agency has booked Rapaka Venkata Ramana Murthy, an award staff and cash in-charge of the SBI's Sakshinetipalli branch in Andhra Pradesh's East Godavari district. The official said that Murthy was booked over allegations that he used to create gold loans accounts in CBS without having pledged the required gold ornaments. In the complaint, the bank also alleged that



during the period between December 30, 2016 and January 1, 2021, he credited loan amounts to 319 savings accounts of 246 members, involving an amount of Rs 6.69 crore, where gold loan bags were not traceable.

It further said that in 37 cases, the gold loans sanctioned were more than the value of the gold ornaments, amounting to Rs 38 lakh.

It said that the accused had fraudulently created gold loan accounts in the name of several persons and caused the bank a loss of Rs 7.07 crore. The spokesperson said that the agency sleuths carried out searches at the office and residential premises of Murthy and others at three locations in Andhra Pradesh, which led to the recovery of incriminating documents.

Ramdev moves SC against multiple FIRs over allopathy comments

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Yoga guru Baba Ramdev has moved the Supreme Court seeking a stay on proceedings in multiple FIRs lodged against him over his remarks against the use of allopathic medicine in treatment of Covid patients during the ongoing pandemic.

In the plea, Ramdev sought transfer of FIRs lodged against by the Indian Medical Association (IMA) in Patna and Raipur to Delhi. He has been booked under Sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 269 (negligent act likely to cause infection of disease dangerous to the public), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace) of the IPC and other provisions of Disaster



Management Act, 2005.

The voluntary body of doctors accused him of spreading false information in connection with allopathic treatment for Covid patients. On May 23, Ramdev had withdrawn his statements on allopathic medicine after receiving a strong-worded letter from Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, who termed his remarks as "inappropriate".

According to the IMA complaint, Ramdev has allegedly been propagating false information on social media platforms against medicines being used by the medical fraternity, the Indian government, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), and other frontline organisations involved in the treatment of Covid patients.

Hizbul terrorist killed in Kashmir encounter refused to surrender

Srinagar | Agencies

The terrorist killed in south Kashmir's Shopian district in an encounter between militants and security forces on Wednesday had refused to surrender, officials said.

Based on a specific input regarding the presence of terrorists in the orchards of the Shirmal area in Shopian, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by the police, the army and the CRPF, the police said.

"During the operation, the terrorists were given an opportunity to surrender, but they fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party, which was retaliated leading to an encounter," the police said. The police said that in the ensuing



encounter, one terrorist was killed and his body was retrieved from the site of encounter.

The slain terrorist has been identified as Sajad Ahmad Bhat, son of Ghulam Qadir Bhat, a resident of Badgam Aishmuqam Anantnag. He was linked to the proscribed terror outfit Hizbul Mujahideen. The police said that as per their records, the slain terrorist was active since 2020 and was involved in several terror crime cases.

Arms and ammunition, including one pistol with magazine, one grenade and other incriminating materials were recovered from the encounter site.

"All the recovered materials have been taken into case records for further investigation and to probe Bhat's complicity in other terror crimes. During the search operation, one terrorist hideout was also destroyed," the police said.

HARYANA TO PROVIDE JOBS TO INTERNATIONAL MEDAL HOLDERS

Chandigarh: Haryana

chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Wednesday said the players who will secure medals in international events would be given government jobs.

He was interacting with Olympic medalists on International Olympic Day here. Haryana Minister of State for Sports Sandeep Singh was also present. The chief minister said besides getting government jobs in the sports department, international medal winners would be appointed on deputation in the education department and other departments. Expressing his willingness to promote sports, Khattar said that if sportspersons excelling in their field are appointed as coaches or trainers, the young sportspersons could be greatly benefited. The state has formulated a policy to promote sports. Under it, along with three per cent reservation, government services are being provided according to the medals won by the sportspersons.

64% vaccination in rural India on June 21: VK Paul

Team Absolute | New Mumbai

Rural India administered 63.68 per cent of the total vaccinations carried out on Monday (June 21), the first day when the revised vaccination guidelines came into force.

Out of the total vaccine doses administered on the day, 56.09 lakh vaccines were given from rural vaccination centres, while the urban areas recorded vaccination of 31.9 lakh people.

V.K. Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog, in a statement released on Wednesday, informed that particular emphasis has been given on rural coverage of vaccination. "The rural coverage is intense and in a good proportion. The vaccination numbers from Monday (June 21, 2021) were almost in proportion to

the rural-urban population division in the country. It proves that it is possible to take the vaccination drive to the rural and remote areas."

Paul further informed that 71 per cent of the vaccination centres are in rural areas. He also said no glitches were seen in the CoWIN platform while administering such a huge number of vaccine doses (88.09 lakh) on Monday.

"A total of 92 per cent vaccine doses were administered from government centres on June 21, 2021," he said. Paul noted that 46 per cent of those who received vaccine were women, while around 53 per cent were men. "We need to rectify this gender-imbalance in all places where it exists. We need to bring more women forward for getting vaccinated."

Amid infighting, Punjab Cong leaders meet Rahul Gandhi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Punjab Congress president Sunil Jharkar, finance minister Manpreet Singh Badal and Rajya Sabha MP Pratap Singh Bajwa met Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday to apprise him of the situation after infighting escalated in the state.

Sunil Jharkar said after the meet, "Hope that the current situation will be resolved and some wrong people are advising the chief minister over the decision on jobs to kin of MLAs."

He said the issue of Navjot Singh Sidhu is under discussion by the party leadership. While another bete noire of Punjab CM, Pratap Singh Bajwa also met Rahul Gandhi and said that he discussed the ground reality and current political situation in the state.

He asserted, "the party high-command will take decision over the chief ministerial candidate for next assembly elections." Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi has stepped in to defuse the tension in the state unit as he met several leaders including Pargat Singh. Some MLAs who met Rahul Gandhi said that they have raised issues regarding the state. Pargat Singh, who is among those MLAs, critical of the chief minister, said, "If CM is ready to address the issues raised by me, then the matter is resolved." Meanwhile, Amarinder Singh expressed his displeasure during the meeting on Tuesday with the party panel for being targeted and said that undue pressure is being created by a few individuals, sources said.



However, senior party leader Mallikarjun Kharge, who heads the three-member panel, which has got a larger mandate for poll preparation apart from resolving factionalism in the state party unit, said, "Everybody has said that they will fight the polls together and the party is united under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi." political situation in the state and also

issues related to Navjot Singh Sidhu and a possible way out to resolve the issue.

While Sidhu is not relenting in his attack on the chief minister, he has insisted on an early resolution of issues. State in-charge Harish Rawat has said that the matter is with Sonia Gandhi and refused to comment on statements made by Sidhu.

10 of 52 UP hospitals wasted oxygen: IIT report

Kanpur | Agencies

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur has submitted a report to the state government on the oxygen wastage in hospitals across Uttar Pradesh during the month of May.

The report claims that of the 52 hospitals from various districts, 10 were found to be wasting oxygen or using more than the required amount per patient.

According to the team, the list of hospitals was provided by the government with most of them being state-run hospitals. Those from the NCR districts included in the study were Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) in Greater Noida, NCR Institute of Medical Sciences and LLRM in Meerut, Santosh Medical College in Ghaziabad and Rama Medical College in Hapur. However, none of these were found to be using excessive oxygen.

The team collected information on the different



kinds of instruments the hospitals used for supply of oxygen, amount of oxygen used and the number of patients using the oxygen.

This was compared to the standard usage to find where the consumption was excessive. Professor Manindra Agrawal, deputy director of IIT Kanpur who was heading the study, said, "There are different kinds of equipment for oxygen supply - various kinds of masks and ventilators. All of these have standard consumption rates. We compared these standards with the average daily con-

sumption in these hospitals and found that 10 hospitals had been using excessive amounts. We have submitted the findings to the state to take further corrective steps." He added that maximum wastage was found while using the High Flow Nasal Cannula (HFNC).

"The study did not mention reasons for the wastage and it needs to be investigated further. However, the wastage could be because of leakage if the mask is not adjusted properly and has been left unmonitored," said Agrawal.



MP ENTERS IN THE WORLD BOOK OF RECORDS

The President of World Book of Records, India, Santosh Shukla, in a confirmation letter sent to Chief Minister Chouhan, said that the institution is happy to include the records made by Madhya Pradesh in the record book.



India, Santosh Shukla, in a confirmation letter sent to Chief Minister Chouhan, said that the institution is happy to include the records made by Madhya Pradesh in the record book.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The World Book of Records has included in the world record for administering the vaccine dose to 16 lakh 91 thousand 967 people in a day in the mega campaign of vaccination of Covid-19 in Madhya Pradesh.

In the letter, while appreciating the steps taken by Chief Minister Chouhan regarding vaccination of Covid-19, he has also congratulated him.

Congress question State's vaccination record, minister says opposition is not aware about facts

State vaccination officer Dr Santosh Shukla said anti-corona vaccination was not carried out on Tuesday and Friday. "There is clear instruction from the government that on Tuesdays and on Fridays, pregnant women and children will only be vaccinated," he remarked.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Congress leaders on Wednesday raised doubts over Madhya Pradesh's record breaking vaccination drive on June 21, that was the first day of Vaccination Maha-abhiyan in the state.

The Congress leaders shared three days' data of vaccination drive in state and accused BJP-led government of "engineering" a record.

Former union minister and Rajya Sabha MP Jairam Ramesh tweeted three days of vaccination data in Madhya Pradesh. "Madhya Pradesh vaccination trend last 3 days: 20th June- 692, 21st June- 16.93 lakh and 22nd June - 4842. Who are we trying to fool?" tweeted Jairam Ramesh.

Retweeting it, former chief minister and senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh wrote, "Simple, we are fooling ourselves!" Former chief minister and Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee president Kamal Nath said that there were irregularities in vaccination drive in Madhya Pradesh.

people are vaccinated in a single day and pre and post of that particular day, very few hundred people are vaccinated. The government must clear its stand as it is a matter of lives of crores of citizens of the state," Nath tweeted. Condemning Congress leaders, state medical education minister Vishvas Sarang said Congress leaders are circulating fake data. "We have started a mega vaccination campaign on June 21. There is an obvious reason that the figure would be high on that particular day. They are claiming that only 4,000 vaccination doses were administered on Tuesday. This figure is of vaccination done at private hospitals and at a few centres of government. They must visit the department and find out actual figures before circulating fake data. They should also obtain information about vaccination programme," Sarang told media persons.



Vaccination is not only a campaign of the government but also of the people: CM

Vaccination-day for 4 days a week as per vaccination programme in Madhya Pradesh. Credit for success of vaccination campaign goes to the people of Madhya Pradesh.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that vaccination is not only a campaign of the government but also of the people. Not just political parties, but the entire public was involved in this campaign. Social workers, voluntary organizations and experts were all involved in this campaign. Together everyone has made it a success.

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang has said that the vaccination campaign of Madhya Pradesh government has started from June 21. Covid vaccination are administered on 4 days a week that is on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Sunday is a holiday across the state. There was no vaccination days in

Madhya Pradesh on Sunday June 20 and Tuesday June 22. Sarang said that the vaccination programme was released on January 16. Ever since, vaccination is being done on 4 days a week, in which health workers, frontline workers, citizens above 45 and then those in the 18 to 45 age group were included in a sequential manner.

Sarang said that the vaccination programme was prepared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a scientific way and the Madhya Pradesh government had announced the Covid vaccination programme in January according to which the vaccination drive was started. Madhya Pradesh government has no vaccination programme on Sunday, June 20. Similarly, on June 22 also vaccination was not done in government institutions. Vaccinations of people have been done on this day as per convenience by the private sector institutions. In the vaccination campaign, 16 lakh 95 thousand 562 people were vaccinated on June 21, which is a record. Today on June 23, 10 lakh 38 thousand people got vaccinated till 5:30 pm on Vaccination Day. Madhya Pradesh ranks 1st today and ranked first on June 21 also. The credit of the Grand Vaccination Campaign goes to the people of Madhya Pradesh.

MP's activism in implementing reforms is good: PM Modis Tweet

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that under the Aatma-nirbhar Bharat package, states were allowed an additional 2 percent GSDP for the year 2020-21, a condition of economic reforms was added at one percent.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appreciated Madhya Pradesh's activism in implementing reforms through his tweet. The Prime Minister said that while the implementation of reforms in Madhya Pradesh would help the people a lot, the state would also develop rapidly. Responding to the tweet of Prime Minister Modi, Chief Minister Chouhan said in his tweet that PM Modi is a visionary leader. Chouhan said that Modi has the urge to serve the people and he efficiently takes public-friendly decisions for the new construction of the nation.

Chouhan said that under the Aatma-nirbhar Bharat package, states were allowed an



सुधारों को लागू करने में मध्य प्रदेश की सक्रियता देखकर अच्छा लगा। इससे जहां लोगों को बहुत मदद मिलेगी, वहीं राज्य का भी तेजी से विकास होगा।

additional 2 percent GSDP for the year 2020-21, a condition of economic reforms was added at one percent. This decision of the Prime Minister helped the states to do public welfare work with additional credit facility and they could contribute more in the strengthening of the country's economy.

Chouhan said that the visionary initiative of Modi has brought unprecedented positive change in the 'ease of living' of the citizens. Out of the reforms mentioned by Modi, Madhya Pradesh has completely implemented three reforms. Implemented one component of the fourth component, in which Madhya Pradesh got the benefit of additional loan for one percent to 0.09 percent.

CM PAYS TRIBUTE TO SYAMA PRASAD MUKHERJEE



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan garlanded the portrait of Bharatiya Jana Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mukherjee on his martyrdom day at his residence on Wednesday. Chouhan remembered Mukherjee tweeted that following the path shown by Mukherjee, contributing to the progress and development of the nation will be the true humble tribute to him. He paid his humble homage at the feet of revered Syama Prasad Mukherjee, the founder of Jana Sangh, the son of Mother Bharati, who laid down his life to achieve the goal of 'Ek Desh Mein Do Nishan, Do Pradhan, Do Vidhan Nahi Chalenge'. Mukherjee was an educationist, thinker and founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Mukherjee was born on July 6, 1901 in Kolkata. Mukherjee was a worshipper of humanity and idealist in the true sense. He always opposed the policy of appeasement. He travelled to Jammu on May 8, 1953 with Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Vaidya Gurudutt, Burman and Tekchand etc. After entering the border, he was arrested by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir. Mukherjee remained in jail for 40 days and died in jail on 23 June 1953.

There is no greater virtue than helping in difficult situations: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that there is no greater virtue than helping people in difficult situations. In our culture also, the highest place has been given to benevolence. The work done by Dharmendra Latoria of Suraj Heera Foundation, Mehsana, Gujarat, in the difficult circumstances of Covid to help the people of his motherland and birthplace of Naugaon, Chhatarpur, is an example of sensitivity. The people of Bundelkhand have got a lot of relief from the health, education and poor welfare works done by the initiative of journalist Rakesh Agnihotri. Chouhan was addressing the virtual launch programme of Covid Care Centre set up by Suraj Heera Foundation at Naugaon from Mantralaya, Bhopal. Khajuraho MP VD Sharma also participated virtually in



the programme. Chouhan said that while living in Gujarat, taking care of his native land and its people and working for them shows the auspicious resolve of Suraj Heera Foundation. The cooperation of such organisations has helped the government a lot in dealing with Covid. The strategy of the state has been to meet the challenges by making the public a participant. The Foundation has expressed its

desire to start a Multi Specialty Hospital at Naugaon. The state government will give maximum cooperation in this. ICU Covid Care Centre has been developed at Naugaon of Chhatarpur district by Suraj Heera Foundation, active in health, education and social service. The foundation has also provided 20 oxygen concentrators and other necessary medical equipment and materials.

Hindustan Power sets up a 50-bed Facility, donates essential medical equipments

50-bed facility set up in Village Jaithari, district Anuppur for General Public. Hospital has facilities for oxygen support, ambulances, modern equipment and medicines. Ambulances, 5 Oxygen Concentrators & 25 Oxygen Cylinders provided to Anuppur district Medical Hospital. 25-bed Facility Created for Employees & Contractors.

Team Absolute | Anuppur

In a bid to support the local communities in their fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, Hindustan Power, a leading player in the power sector, has set up a 50-bed facility in Jaithari, Anuppur for the general public. The facility is fully equipped with Ambulances, Oxygen Concentrators, Oxygen Cylinders, Medication, PPE Kits, Pulse Oximeters and other essential medical requirements. The Company has also donated two Ambulances, Five Oxygen concentrators and 25 Oxygen cylinders to Anuppur Medical Hospital.

The Company has also set up a 25-bed fully oxygenated facility for employees, contractors and their families in the district. In-house doctors and nurses will pro-

vide treatment to all those affected. Lalit Jain, President Thermal, Hindustan Power said: "We believe in creating strong partnerships with the local communities. Fighting the pandemic have to be a collective effort to succeed. These initiatives are for well-being of our employees, local partners and the general public. We will continue to work for the benefit of the people in these trying times. We urge the people to take all precautions and stay safe." Last year, Hindustan Power had also donated the ventilators to the district Hospital in Anuppur for the treatment of Covid 19 patients. Hindustan Power is committed to standing alongside the administration and health authorities to ramp up medical facilities and infrastructure.

Man arrested for raping daughter for over 3 years

The accused had threatened to throw the victim's mother and younger brother out of the house if she dared to reveal her ordeal to anyone.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A 45-year-old man was arrested in the Aishbagh area of Bhopal on Monday for raping his 19-year-old daughter for over three years.

The survivor was a minor when she was first raped by her father about three years back, police said. The accused sexually assaulted his daughter again on Monday while threatening to throw her mother and younger brother out of the

house if she dared to reveal her ordeal to anyone. Fed up with her harassment, the victim, however, spoke with her mother and the two later went to the Aishbagh police station and lodged a rape complaint. In her complaint, the survivor told the police that she was first raped about three years back when no one was at their one-room house. At that time, the accused had threatened to kill her minor brother if she spoke about what happened to her,

police said. The accused has been booked under POCSO and relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and sent to judicial custody. In another case of rape reported in the city, a post graduate medical student approached the Kolar police station on Monday alleging a male friend sexually assaulted her at a mutual friend's house in March 2019. The victim also alleged that the accused had established a physical relationship with her on

several occasions after the incident of rape, with the promise of marrying her. The two were classmates in an undergraduate medical course in Indore. The accused went on to take a job in Bhopal, while the victim was pursuing a post-graduate degree. The rape complaint was lodged after the accused refused to marry the victim and left the city without disclosing his whereabouts. Police have registered a rape case and the accused is at large.

CHOUHAN SLAMS DIGGY OVER 'TALIBAN MEET' REMARK

While speaking to media persons after planting a sapling on the occasion of the death anniversary of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Chouhan said, "His (Digvijaya Singh) mentality is Talibani."

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh on Wednesday demanded a statement from the Centre quoting a media report that 'Indian officials discreetly met Taliban leaders', Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that mentality of Singh is Talibani.

While speaking to media persons after planting a sapling on the occasion of the death anniversary of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Chouhan said, "His (Digvijaya

Singh) mentality is Talibani". Earlier, sharing a news channel's report which claimed that Indian officials had "quietly" met Taliban representatives in Doha, senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh on Wednesday demanded an immediate statement from the Union government. "The Government of India should make an immediate statement on this subject. Will BJP IT cell take cognizance of this in the sedition category?" tweeted former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister sharing the report of the news channel.

Earlier in the day Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Ashoka sapling in Smart City Park on Wednesday in fulfilment of his resolve to plant saplings every day. Ashoka trees not only purify the environment, but are also capable of making our body healthy. Ashoka tree is also important in enhancing the beauty of the gardens.



IGRMS will open for general public from 24 June 21

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Due to increasing of Corona virus Disease (COVID)-19 effect, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) Bhopal was closed From 15 April 2021, The museum is being opened to the general public from Thursday, 24 June 2021. During this time, all employees will also be prepared with complete security as per the guidelines of Covid 19.

The director of the museum Praveen Kumar Mishra said that we are ready to open the museum once again. Complete security has been prepared for the people visiting the museum. As time goes, the museum is being sanitized. During the entry into the museum, gate the security personnel, will be screened with the help of

mask / face shield, thermal scanning machine, sanitizer, globs at the gate, thermal screenings of the visitors and complete information about the vaccination and the visitors will be entered in the register with ID proof. Admission will not be granted if the current pulse rate and oxygen saturation level (SpO2) is below 95% or the temperature is above 37 °C / 98.6 F. The number of visitors to the museum is limited and it is mandatory for everyone to wear a mask. The ticket will be given only on payment from online, QR code, Bharat Pay, Bhim, UPI. All Open air and Indoor exhibitions of the museum will be open from 11.00 am to 6.30 pm from 24 June 2021 to 31 August 2021. The Sangrahalaya would remain closed on Sunday and all National Holidays.



CLOSELY MONITORING DELTA PLUS VARIANT CASES: RAJESH TOPE

"I have directed officials that the Delta Plus variant cases should be monitored closely. Information about these cases should be collected and recorded for study. We are taking 100 samples from every district," State Health Minister Rajesh Tope said on Wednesday



samples from every district," State Health Minister Rajesh Tope on June 23 informed media persons. Tope said the state has reported 21

cases of Delta Plus variant of Covid-19. Twenty-one tested positive out of 7,500 samples sent for testing. Out of the 21 patients infected with

Delta Plus variant, nine are from Ratnagiri, seven from Jalgaon, two from Mumbai and one each from Palghar, Sindhudurg, Thane. The samples were being collected since May 15.

While talking about these cases, Tope said that the state has taken a decision regarding genome sequencing and started the process of taking 100 samples from each district and CSIR and IIGB have been involved in this important process. He added that NCDC is also cooperating.

Further action is being taken in these cases so that complete information of these index cases can be noted.

The state authorities are now talking to their close contacts to get information about their journey as in whether they were vaccinated, whether they were re-infected with Covid. Authorities are collecting detailed information about the mutations that have occurred in Delta and Delta Plus.

Maharashtra Announces Pay Hike, Covid Allowance For State ASHA Workers

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) are contractual workers hired to implement a slew of government schemes, chiefly of the health department.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Wednesday announced that ASHA workers will get an increment of ₹ 1,000 in their wages and ₹ 500 as Covid allowance per month from July besides a smartphone.

After the announcement, which will benefit more than 68,000 such community health activists, ASHA workers withdrew their week-long protest which they had launched in over various demands, including a wage hike.

The family members of ASHA workers who have died due to COVID-19 will get a compensation of ₹ 50 lakh, the minister said.

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) are contractual workers hired to implement a slew of government schemes, chiefly of the health department. Speaking to reporters, Tope said, "Maharashtra's ASHA workers will get an expensive smartphone for their work along with an increment of ₹ 1,000 per month. They will also get ₹ 500 per month as COVID-

19 allowance in addition to the increment." This means, ASHA workers will get ₹ 1,500 more every month starting July, the minister said. ASHA group monitors will get an increment of ₹ 1,200 and ₹ 500 as COVID-19 allowance, he said.

There are 71,137 sanctioned posts of ASHA workers in the state, of which 68,297 seats are filled, Tope said. Group heads of ASHA workers, who monitor their daily functioning, will get a permanent increment of ₹ 1,200 per month apart from a COVID-19 allowance of ₹ 500, he said. ASHA workers will get another increment of ₹ 500 from July 2022, he added.

Maharashtra will spend ₹ 202 crore annually to absorb the hike in increment and allowance, said the minister. ASHA workers helping at vaccination centres to manage crowds will get an additional ₹ 200 allowance, he said. "The family members of ASHA workers who have died due to COVID-19 will get a compensation of ₹ 50 lakh. The data compilation work is going on and the government is trying to settle such claims at the earliest," Tope said. Their family members will also get free COVID-19 treatment at state-run hospitals, he added. ASHA workers who assist pregnant women in getting admitted to district COVID-19 hospitals will get ₹ 200 as a special allowance and shelter will be provided to them at such hospitals, said the minister.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra government has directed officials to closely monitor the Delta Plus variant cases of COVID in the state. "I have directed officials that the Delta Plus variant cases should be monitored closely. Information about these cases should be collected and recorded for study. We are taking 100

Nurses of state-run hospitals on strike in Maharashtra

The nurses of Maharashtra's state-run hospitals did two hours protest on Monday and Tuesday. The nurses claim that when the govt didn't listen to them, they went to this 48 hours strike.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Before Maharashtra government could heave sigh of relief after resolving Asha workers issues the nurses of state-run hospitals have now gone on a 48 hours strike. More than 5,000 nurses of Maharashtra's state-run hos-

pitals are on an indefinite strike from Wednesday onwards. The nurses protested for a couple of hours for the last two days but didn't hear anything from the govt. So from today, they are on an indefinite strike. They have demands related to their allowance and workload.

As per these nurses, despite vacancies, new recruitments are not happening in the state so the existing nurses are left to bear all the workload. The nurses are not getting leaves because of Covid. They don't get permission for higher studies. Most importantly, they are not getting their nursing allowance.

The nurses claim that central govt deputed nurses and nurses at other states are getting the nursing allowance which was announced in the

6th pay commission. But Maharashtra govt nurses are not getting this allowance. As per these nurses they are eligible for a monthly allowance of Rs 7,200, which they are not getting. The nurses claim that before the strike, they wrote to the govt several times but no one paid any heed to their issues.

In Mumbai, the impact of this strike is going to be on JJ hospital, St George hospital, and GT hospital.

Around 65,000 Asha workers of the state are on indefinite strike since 15th June. And despite having meetings with Maharashtra's health minister Rajesh Tope, their demands are not that met.

Now this nurses' strike will impact the day-to-day medical functioning in the state even more.

Furore as rat nibbles patient's cheek in Mumbai civic hospital

On Tuesday patient Shrinivas Yellappa's sister saw a bandage below his left eye and created ruckus when informed that a rat was suspected to have nibbled the patient on the cheek.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a shocking incident, a patient undergoing treatment in the ICU of a BMC hospital was reportedly bit by a rat on his cheek, sparking off protests, here on Wednesday.

The patient, Shrinivas Yellappa, 24, was admitted for liver complications three days ago and was on ventilator in the ICU of the Rajawadi Hospital,



Ghatkopar. Yesterday, (Tuesday), his sister saw a bandage below his left eye and created ruckus when informed that a rat was suspected to have nib-

bled the patient on the cheek. Later, doctors and civic authorities claimed that the rat-bite was not serious and would heal soon, but the patient's

family was not convinced. Mayor Kishori Pednekar suspected that since the ICU is on the ground floor, the rat may have sneaked in unnoticed when the door was opened by one of the staffers.

The Mumbai Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has slammed the BMC for failing to protect patients from such happenings and demanded a thorough probe into the matter.

Criticising the Mayor for her statement, AAP Mumbai chief Ruben Mascarenhas asked whether this is the 'Mumbai Model' as hospitals are under attack by rats.

Hoping to drive home the point, the AAP has organised an 'Undir Protest' (Rat Protest) in which its activists will dress up like rats and present mouse-traps to the BMC, this afternoon.

Special Covid Care Centre for children in Pune village

Talking about their decision to start the centre, Ganjale said it was taken after they realised how children need to be treated in a different manner than adults.

Team Absolute | Pune

In anticipation of the supposed effect on children from the third wave of COVID 19, a few good samaritans of Manchar, in Ambegaon taluka of Pune have come forward to start a dedicated Covid Care Centre (CCC) for children. Former sarpanch Datta Ganjale, said they have pulled in resources to start the center after noticing an increasing number of children getting affected by the virus.

Located around 60 km away from



Pune, Manchar has seen an uptick of infections during the second wave of COVID.

Ganjale's 15-year-old daughter was afflicted by the virus, so he says he has seen how painful it can be for both the

child and the parents to handle the isolation that comes with the disease.

Talking about their decision to start the centre, Ganjale said it was taken after they realised how children need to be treated in a different manner than adults. "A normal hospital would scare the children. The rooms have to be decorated in a different way and we have to ensure the child is not frightened in isolation," he said. Thus, the 50 bedded center has bright colours and toys to keep the children engaged. Five beds have oxygen facilities in case the children require them. For very young children who would not be able to live apart from their parents, the center also has the facility to house the parents.

Doctors in Manchar have agreed to man the facility free of cost.

The facility which is named after the late Shiv Sena Supremo Balasaheb Thackeray is slated to be inaugurated later today by MP Sanjay Raut.

NCB DETAINS DAWOOD BROTHER IN DRUGS CASE

Mumbai: The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has detained Iqbal Ibrahim Kaskar the Mumbai based sibling of absconding mafia don Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar in connection with a drugs-related case. "He has been taken under a production remand," NCB Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede told IANS, but declined to comment further. Currently, Iqbal, who is lodged in Thane Jail for extortion cases, is being interrogated at the NCB Mumbai office, after his name allegedly cropped up during investigations into various drugs cases being probed by the central agency in the past one year.

Dates announced for by-polls to seats in local bodies post quashing of OBC quota by SC

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra State Election Commission has decided to hold elections to five Zilla parishads and bypolls to the seats in 33 Panchayat Samitis that were rendered vacant and converted into general category following the Supreme Court's verdict of quashing OBC reservation in local bodies on July 19.

Maharashtra State Election Commissioner UPS Madan issued a statement stating that Dhule, Nandurbar, Akola, Washim and Nagpur Zilla Parishads will vote on July 19. The counting of votes will be taken up on July 20.

By-elections to the seats rendered vacant in the 33 Panchayat Samitis falling under the jurisdiction of these five Zilla Parishads will also be held on the same day (July 19), it said.

Polling for the Palghar Zilla Parishad and by-elections for the vacant seats in the panchayat samiti will be held after the improvement in the pandemic situation.

Recently, Maharashtra Rural Development Minister Hasan Mushrif had said elections will not be held for local bodies unless 70 per cent of the population is vaccinated against COVID-19.

Madan said elections to Dhule, Nandurbar, Akola,

Washim, Nagpur and Palghar ZPs and 44 Panchayat Samitis under their jurisdiction were held in January 2020.

However, the top court in its order dated March 4, 2021 stated that the quota in favour of OBCs in local bodies shouldn't result in breaching the overall 50 per cent ceiling on the reservation.

The Supreme Court also directed the Maharashtra government to set up a commission to gather empirical data for fixing the reservation percentage. The top court had observed that the reservation if fixed, shall not exceed the aggregate of 50 per cent of the total seats reserved for SC, ST and OBCs.

For travel operators, second wave clogs rebound route, revenues to touch only 40% of pre-pandemic levels in FY22

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The tours and travel industry, which was beginning to recover before the second wave of Covid-19 infections began, will now see revenue this fiscal reaching only 35%-40% of the pre-pandemic levels, ratings agency Crisil said on Wednesday.

While companies have raised capital last fiscal and will continue with cost-control measures to cut cash losses, a significant decline in travel, and continued uncertainty about the pandemic will weigh negatively on their credit profiles.

This is as per Crisil's study of three sector majors that account for over half of the domestic tours and travel industry, with a reported revenue of Rs 11,300 crore in fiscal 2020.

Tours and travel operators provide services such as air/bus ticketing, hotels/packages for both leisure and corporate travel within India and overseas. These companies saw their revenues plunge to Rs 2,300 crore last fiscal, which was only 20% of fiscal 2020 levels, after the nationwide lockdown and other restrictions led to a sharp reduction in travel.

The industry was brought to a standstill in the first quarter of last fiscal -- the peak travel season because of summer holidays -- which eroded revenue 95% on-year. However, fortunes started to mend gradually thereafter, with improving air traffic and demand for short domestic holidays lifting revenue to 55% of the pre-pandemic level by the fourth quarter.

Then the second wave set in. Under its impact, the first quarter of this fiscal is expected to be almost a washout once again, this time because of state-level lockdowns.

Says Manish Gupta, Senior Director, CRISIL Ratings,



"With states beginning to ease restrictions and vaccination rates expected to improve, we see domestic travel picking up slowly from the second quarter. However, segments such as international holidays and inbound travel may see recovery only in the second half, and that too only if travel restrictions are eased in foreign countries." "Also, with meetings and events shifting to the online mode, corporate travel is expected to remain under pressure. Overall, therefore, rev-

enue this fiscal may reach only a little over a third of the pre-pandemic level."

To be sure, the industry was in the red even pre-pandemic, on account of high marketing and promotion expenses. Under additional pressure because of the pandemic, players cut their sales promotion expenses and other fixed costs by 45%-50%, which limited their cash burn last fiscal to around Rs 700 crore.

This fiscal, too, Crisil said that the industry is expected to post operating cash losses of around Rs 150-Rs 200 crore, though significantly lower than last year, with improved bookings and continued control of costs.

That said, travel operators have limited dependence on debt as their working capital cycle is typically negative because of high customer advances and creditors compared to low receivables. Further, companies raised capital last fiscal amid near-term uncertainties, which boosted their cash balance to over Rs 4,300 crore, against modest debt repayments of Rs 85 crore due this year.

Says Naveen Vaidyanathan, Associate Director, CRISIL Ratings, "The silver lining for the industry is people's fundamental urge to travel may not have diminished. Multiple European countries, including France, Italy and Spain, began opening up their borders over the last two months to bring back tourists. The United States is expected to soon follow suit. However, uncertainties continue in the Indian context, including an improvement in vaccination rates, opening up of international borders for Indian travellers, and how corporate travel actually shapes up in the post-pandemic world. These uncertainties, along with continued losses, drive our negative outlook on the sector - and are also key monitorables."

Man held for bomb threat hoax at Maharashtra secretariat

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A 53-year-old man has been arrested for sending an e-mail to the Maharashtra government threatening that he was going to place a bomb in the state secretariat as he was angry over the suffering of children due to the 'apathy' of the education department, police said on Tuesday.

The threat was found to be a hoax. Shailesh Shinde, the accused, was arrested from Pune and produced before a court here which sent him in police custody till June 25, an official said. He allegedly sent the e-mail around 6.15 on Monday evening, sending security agencies into a tizzy.

He was going to place a bomb in the Mantralaya, the state government's headquarters in south Mumbai, as the school education department was shirking its responsibility towards children, he said in the message, according to the police official.

Four teams of the Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad were rushed but no bomb was found, the official added. Shinde was subsequently arrested from his residence in Ghorpadi area of Pune, he said.

Earlier the police had said that Shinde was upset over his child not getting admission in a school and had sent e-mails complaining about the school to the Chief Minister's Office.

As he did not get any response, he sent the bomb threat e-mail to the state Home Department, they had said. But a later official release did not mention any specific school admission issue being the reason for his act.

A case was filed against Shinde at Marine Drive police station under IPC sections 506 (criminal intimidation), 505 (1)(B) (publishing any rumour with intention to cause alarm or fear) and 182 (giving false information to public servant), the official said, adding that further probe was on.



EDITOR'S SPECS

2nd wave is less effective on economy!

Monday's Investors Service estimates that the overall hit to India's economy to be softer than during the first wave last year. However, the pace of recovery will be determined by (1) access to and delivery of vaccines, and (2) the strength of the recovery in private consumption...

Sachin Pilot opens poster war as 'turncoats' call meeting



Archana Sharma

Amid the ongoing tussle between the camps of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and former deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot, a new poster war has been triggered by the latter in the desert state. The Pilot camp has been pasting posters that seek to highlight his struggle and hard work as the state Congress chief before the 2018 Assembly election to help form the Congress government.

state government a year ago. The Pilot camp in turn questioned their credibility for jumping their party loyalties and termed them outsiders. Also, BSP state chief Bhagwan Singh termed these six BSP MLAs as traitors who betrayed their own party to join the ruling party.

Indian Everester gives clarion call for renewable energy

Siddhi Jain

When one finds Covid-19 has spread to the Earth's highest mountain, the need to look at sustainable living and promoting the use of clean, renewable sources of energy, becomes crucial. This is what 24-year-old, mountaineer and adventure seeker Harshvardhan Joshi, who successfully scaled Mt. Everest in his very first attempt this year, would like to focus on.



awestruck. They even invited me for one of their Everest expeditions back then in 2011, but I found it very expensive (Rs 70K) and more importantly, I was busy enjoying my teenage entrepreneur life along with my college friends. During the summer of 2015 I got to know about Youth Hostels Association of India (YHAI). It seemed super-affordable and very exhilarating to go on such adventurous trips.

international

UN ENVOY SEES DIRE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

United Nations:

The UN Secretary-General's special representative for Afghanistan warned on Tuesday that the situation on the ground in the country is dire. "I cannot overstate to the council my concern regarding the present situation in Afghanistan. All of the major trends -- politics, security, the peace process, the economy, the humanitarian emergency, and Covid -- all of these trends are negative or stagnant."



their incredible resilience is being severely tested and the possible slide toward dire scenarios is undeniable," she said. What happens in Afghanistan remains of global consequence and the Security Council needs to be fully informed of the gravity of the present situation, she added.

months sent a seismic tremor through the Afghan political system and society at large. The withdrawal decision was expected. But its speed -- with the majority of troops now already withdrawn -- was not. All actors have had to adjust to this new, reality that is unfolding, she said.

BLAST NEAR HAFIZ SAEED'S HOUSE IN LAHORE CLAIMS 2 LIVES, INJURES OVER 15

Lahore | Agencies

At least two people have died while over 15 persons have been critically injured in a massive bomb blast located near the Allah Hu Boulevard in Jher town area in Lahore on Wednesday. As per police sources, an explosive laden vehicle exploded near a police check-post located near the Allah Hu Boulevard in Jher town. The intensity of the blast was so severe that several nearby buildings developed cracks, while the windowpanes of many houses and vehicles parked in the area were shattered.

investigation," said Inam Ghani, Inspector General of Punjab Police. As per eyewitnesses, the intensity of the blast was huge. However, some of the eyewitnesses claimed that the explosive was planted on a motorcycle. It is pertinent to mention here that the target of the vehicle carrying the explosives may have been the residence of Mumbai terror attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed, whose house is located in the same area.

Russia develops Covid antibody test system for animals

Moscow | Agencies

Russia has developed a test system for identifying Covid-19 virus' antibodies in animal blood serum, according to the country's Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Control, media reports said on Wednesday. "Only specific antibodies generated in the animal body against SARS-CoV-2 virus are trapped in the course of blood serum testing," the regulator was quoted as saying by TASS news agency.



foxes, and minks). The test system is intended to analyse blood serum for all these animal species, the report said. Last month, Russia also started vaccinating animals against coronavirus -- with the Carnivac-Cov vaccine, Russia's veterinary watchdog Roselkhoz nadzor told local media. A Carnivac-Cov jab provides immunity for an estimated six months. The vaccine was earlier tested on dogs, cats, mink, foxes, and other animals and was

US seizes websites used by Iranian news outlets

Washington | Agencies

The US on Tuesday seized dozens of websites used by the Iranian news outlets for "violation of sanctions." "Today, pursuant to court orders, the United States seized 33 websites used by the Iranian Islamic Radio and Television Union (IRTVU) and three websites operated by Kata'ib Hizbullah (KH), in violation of US sanctions," said the Justice Department in a statement.

agency reported. The websites of the Iranian state-owned news channel Press TV and Al-Alam were among those being blocked, while both are running again later in the day by using Iranian domains. The move came one day after Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raisi urged the US to lift "all unjust sanctions" against Iran and ruled out a meeting with President Joe Biden.

'US FED WILL NOT RAISE RATES PREEMPTIVELY ON INFLATION FEARS'



Washington | Agencies

US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on Tuesday that the central bank will not raise interest rates preemptively based on inflation fears, reiterating recent inflation surge is transitory. "We will not raise interest rates preemptively because we think employment is too high, because we fear the possible onset of inflation. Instead, we will wait for actual evidence of actual inflation or other imbalances," Powell told lawmakers at a hearing before the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Xinhua news agency reported.

Core personal consumption expenditures price index, the Fed's preferred inflation measure, is expected to rise to 3 per cent by end of 2021, and then decelerate to 2.1 per cent over the next two years, according to the Fed's latest economic projections released last week. "Of course we are prepared to use our tools as appropriate if that turns out not to be the case, you know, to guide inflation to 2 percent," Powell said. The Fed chief also reiterated that the central bank intends to encourage a "broad and inclusive" recovery of the job market. "We will not just look at the headline numbers for unemployment, we'll look at all kinds of measures of unemployment, including employment for various groups, ethnic groups, gender groups, and things like that," Powell said. "There's a growing realization, really across the political spectrum, that we need to achieve more inclusive prosperity. Real incomes at the lower end of the spectrum have stagnated relative to those of the top," he added. The Fed last week kept its benchmark interest rates unchanged at the record-low level of near zero. About 13 of 18 Fed officials see the first rate hike occurring by the end of 2023, compared with seven in March, according to the Fed's latest economic projections.



NICKI MINAJ DEFENDS MICHAEL B. JORDAN OVER NAME OF HIS NEW RUM BRAND

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Michael B. Jordan has been accused of cultural appropriation over the name of his new rum brand, and rapper Nicki Minaj has come out in defense of the actor. Jordan has named his new product J'Ouvert Rum. J'Ouvert is a large street party held annually as part of Carnival in many Caribbean islands (primarily in the Lesser Antilles) and in areas where Caribbean peoples have immigrated.

Reposting users' comment taking issue with the rum brand's name on her Instagram account, Minaj believes that Jordan didn't intentionally mean to offend Caribbean people.

"I'm sure MJB didn't intentionally do anything he thought Caribbean ppl would find offensive," she captioned her post, reports aceshowbiz.com. Minaj still suggested that Jordan changes the name of his rum brand. She added: "but now that you are aware, change the name and continue to flourish & prosper."

The original comment shared by her slammed the decision to name Jordan's rum brand, which the user explained is "a broken down version of the French J'Ouvert, the morning time referred to as day open".



Emmy Awards announce gender-neutral option for nominees and winners

Los Angeles | Agencies

The Television Academy's Board of Governors shared the news that they have approved the gender-neutral option for nominees and winners.

They confirmed nominees in the Best Actress or Best Actor honours can choose to be called a "performer" rather than an actor or an actress when the 73rd Primetime Emmy Awards take place in September this year, reports aceshowbiz.com.

They said in a statement on their website: "No performer category titled 'Actor' or 'Actress' has ever had a gender requirement for submissions. Now, nominees and (or) winners in any performer category titled 'Actor' or 'Actress' may request that their nomination certificate and Emmy statuette carry the term 'Performer' in place of Actor or Actress."

The decision comes into effect after a years-long debate over how to accommodate gender-neutral performers at awards ceremonies.

Actor Asia Kate Dillon, who is non-binary, in 2017 had asked the TV Academy to clarify its gender distinctions.



'PEOPLE FIND UNCOMFORTABLE TO TALK ABOUT IT'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Cara Delevingne has revealed she's 'taken pride' in her enjoyment of sex and wants to 'take away the stigma' around orgasms.

Speaking on a Pride episode of podcast Make It Reign with Josh Smith, the model, 28, explained she believes people still find the topic of sex 'unbelievably uncomfortable' and she wants to 'open up

Cara Delevingne admits she's 'taken pride' in her enjoyment of sex and vows to 'take away the stigma' around orgasms

the conversation' around self-pleasure, reports daily-mail.co.uk. Cara, who admitted her own sexuality changes like a 'pendulum swinging,' added that it's 'important' to discuss the taboo subject of women taking pleasure from sex, as it's something she unknowingly ignored for many years.

She said: 'It's not trying to alienate men and women or how you identify, it's about opening the conversation of self-pleasure and what it means to you. 'It's so interesting when you start talking about sex and how many people find it unbelievably uncomfortable. Setting up Lora DiCarlo has made me take pride in my sexuality, 100 per cent.'

'It's really taking pride in my sexual identity, my sexuality and taking pride in my sexual needs as well, to take ownership of my orgasm.'



'FINISHED WITH "THE WITCH"'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Anya Taylor-Joy, who made her feature film debut with "The Witch" six years ago, says she thought her career was over with the role, despite getting praised for her performance as Thomasin in the horror film. "Rob showed us the film, maybe, two hours before the audience screening and I was devastated," Taylor-Joy told The Hollywood Reporter, reports femalefirst.co.uk. She added: "I thought I'd never work again. I still get shivers thinking about it. It was just the worst feeling of, 'I have let down the people I love most in the world. I didn't do it right.'"

Anya Taylor-Joy thought she'd never work again after debut film

"And I'm quite verbose, I like to talk, I like to communicate. I did not talk, I just cried. I couldn't handle seeing my face that large." The film helped the actress take the lead in projects like "Morgan", "Split" and "Glass". She was also seen in "Peaky Blinders" and "The Dark Crystal: Age Of Resistance". Despite her success, it was at this point that she considered taking a step back from acting after putting "all of (her) energy" into her career. "What it was about is it took me a second to realise that the people around me weren't working the way that I was working. I thought everybody finished a job, got on a plane, and started the next job. I am incredibly grateful that that's the way that I learned how to work," she said.

I AM THE BEST: STONE

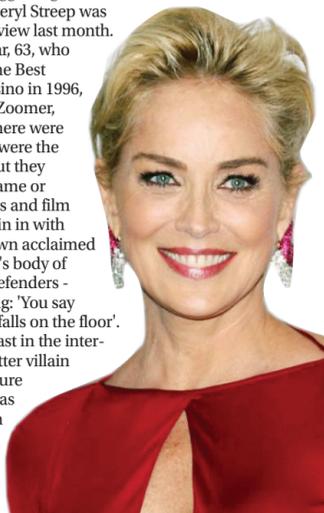
'For f**s sake, you say Meryl and everyone falls on the floor': Sharon Stone goes viral with swipe at Streep and insists she is 'a better villain' than the three-time Oscar winner**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Sharon Stone was the talk of Twitter on Tuesday after she went viral for suggesting three-time Oscar winner Meryl Streep was overrated in an interview last month.

The Basic Instinct star, 63, who was nominated for the Best Actress Oscar for Casino in 1996, spoke to Everything Zoomer, where she claimed there were many actresses who were the equal of Meryl, 72, but they never achieved her fame or acclaim. Twitter users and film fans were quick to join in with praise for Sharon's own acclaimed career, though Meryl's body of work had plenty of defenders - despite Sharon stating: 'You say Meryl and everyone falls on the floor'.

She went on to boast in the interview: 'I'm a much better villain than Meryl and I'm sure she'd say so. Meryl was not gonna be good in Basic Instinct or in Casino. I would be better. And I know it. And she knows it.'



Vin Diesel talks about reported feud with Dwayne Johnson

Los Angeles | Agencies

Vin Diesel has spoken out about the reported feud between him and Dwayne Johnson. The subject came to light in the July/August 2021 issue of Men's Health magazine, where Diesel opened up about Johnson's involvement in the "Fast & Furious" franchise, reports aceshowbiz.com.

He said: "It was a tough character to embody, the Hobbs character (the role played by Johnson). My approach at the time was a lot of tough love to assist in getting that performance where it needed to be." The actor added that it took "a lot of work" to bring out the unexpected character of Hobbs, as the audience came in with expectations and assumptions about Johnson.

"As a producer to say, 'OK, we're going to take Dwayne Johnson, who's associated with wrestling, and we're going to force this cinematic world, audience members, to regard his character as someone that they don't know' -- Hobbs hits you like a ton of bricks," Diesel said.

He added: "That took a lot of work. We had to get there and sometimes, at that time, I could give a lot of tough love."

Of his conversations with Johnson, he shared: "Not Felliniesque, but I would do anything I'd have to do in order to get performances in anything I'm producing."

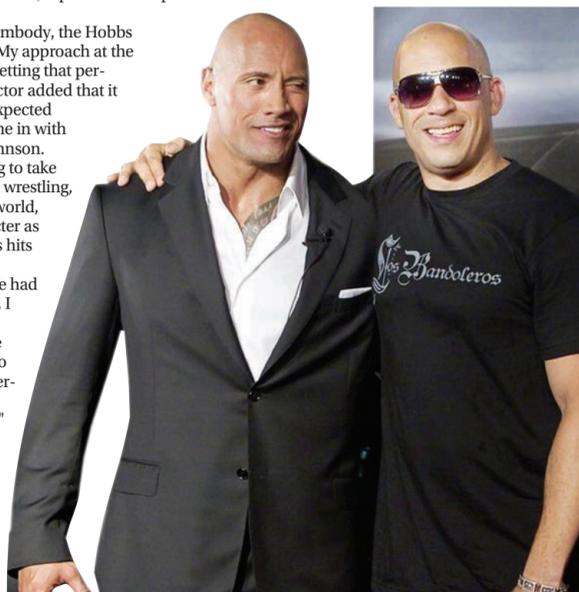
He went on to claim that he is "proud" of the aesthetic they created for Hobbs.

Diesel said: "That's something that I'm proud of, that aesthetic."

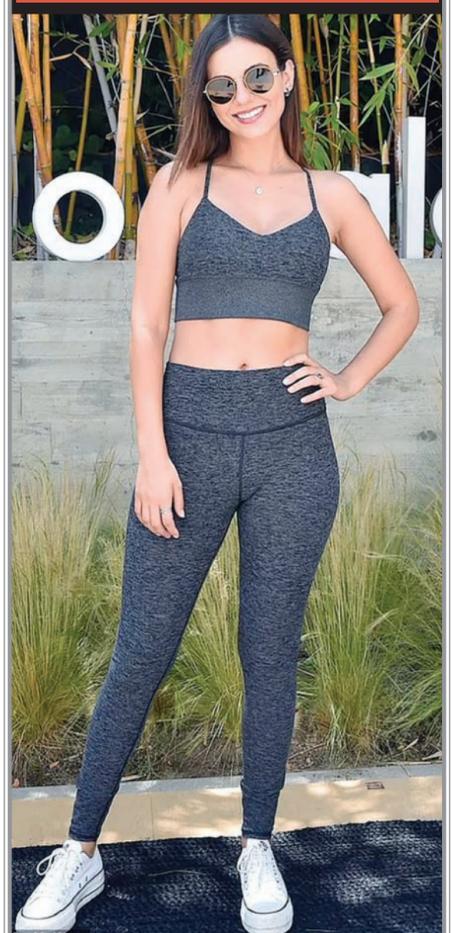
Reports of the pair's feud first emerged in 2016 when they filmed the eighth movie of the franchise, "The Fate Of The Furious". During the last week of filming, Johnson wrote in a deleted Instagram post that some people on set

"conduct themselves as stand-up men and true professionals, while others don't."

"The ones that don't are too chicken s**t to do anything about it anyway. Candy a**es. When you watch this movie next April and it seems like I'm not acting in some of these scenes and my blood is legit boiling -- you're right," his post read.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Joy Corrigan



WTC TRIUMPH MAKES UP FOR 2019 WORLD CUP FINAL LOSS: TAYLOR

Southampton | Agencies

New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor, who hit the winning runs in the inaugural World Test Championship (WTC) final, called the title win after the eight-wicket victory over India as the "highlight" of his career.

"This would have to be the highlight of my career. At the start of my career, I felt we probably did not have the side to do this," said Taylor, who had postponed his retirement two years ago.

The right-handed batsman had earlier said he would have retired had New Zealand lifted the 50-over World Cup in 2019. They lost to England in the final.

"It is still sinking in but it has been a couple of years coming. Lot of rain but the way the team fought from day one, to be out there in a crucial situation for a little bit, it's something I'll never forget," said the 37-year-old who



INDIAN TAIL'S WOES CONTINUE, ADD JUST 28 IN 2ND INNINGS

India's last four wickets added only 28 runs on Wednesday, thereby continuing the tail's abysmal performance against New Zealand in Test cricket in the last year-and-a-half, during which they have failed to aggregate 50 runs in all the six outings.

When all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja fell as the sixth wicket on Wednesday, which is the sixth, reserve day, India had 142 on the scoreboard. They could reach only 170 as the tail end batsmen once again failed to show technique and spine. During last year's away series too, the Indian tail had disappointed in the two Test matches.

has played 107 Tests for New Zealand.

JAMIESON REVIVES KOHLI'S HORROR

Southampton: India skipper Virat Kohli fell to New Zealand pace bowler Kyle Jamieson for the second time in the World Test Championship (WTC) final on Wednesday and the third time in six innings of the last three Test matches between the two teams.

On Wednesday, the reserve day of the WTC final, a cautious Kohli, who resumed the day on eight, looked to be in control as he got in line of deliveries. However, soon after adding five to the total, Kohli nicked a delivery from Jamieson, which bounced a bit more, to wicket-keeper BJ Watling and was caught behind.

Skeet shooters Bajwa, Khan to skip World Cup

Osijek | Agencies

Olympic bound skeet shooters Angadvir Singh Bajwa and Mairaj Ahmad Khan will skip the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Cup starting here on Thursday, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) said on Wednesday.

"India will not compete in the shotgun event as two skeet shooters Angadvir Singh Bajwa and Mairaj Ahmad Khan are training in Italy and have opted out of the World Cup on the advice of their respective coaches," the NRAI said in a statement.

On the opening day, four finals, including 10 meters air rifle and pistol events, are scheduled to be held.

India's Abhishek Verma and Saurabh Chaudhary will be in action in the men's 10m air pistol event.

In the men's 10m air rifle,



Deepak Kumar and Divyansh Singh Panwar will be one s to watch out for. Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar will be the third Indian shooter in this event.

Elavenil Valarivan, Apurvi Chandela and Anjum Moudgil will compete in the women's 10m air rifle event.

Rahi Sarnobat, Manu

Bhaker and Yashaswini Deswal will feature in the women's 10m air pistol event. More than 500 shooters from 47 countries, including Russia, Germany, France, Italy and host Croatia, will be looking to fine-tune their skills before heading for next month's Tokyo Olympic Games.

Jadeja pips Holder to become world No. 1 all-rounder, Ashwin fourth

Dubai | Agencies

India's Ravindra Jadeja is the world No. 1 all-rounder in Test cricket, according to the latest International Cricket Council (ICC) rankings. The southpaw displaced West Indian Jason Holder from the top, and is two rating points ahead of the Barbadian with 386.

England's Ben Stokes retained his third place with 377 points, while R Ashwin is fourth in the list with 353 points. The 32-year-old Jadeja, who missed the four-match Test series against England at home, is playing the ongoing World Test Championship final in Southampton against New Zealand. He made 15 in the first innings and took a wicket too.

Jadeja had last played a Test in January in Sydney against Australia during which he got injured.

Holder's unimpressive performance as all-rounder in the two-match Test series against South Africa has seemingly seen him slip in the rankings. Holder aggregated 34 in four



innings at an average of 8.25 and picked only six wickets.

Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan (338), New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson (276), Australians Mitchell Starc (275) and Pat Cummins (249), New Zealand's Colin de Grandhomme (243) and England's Chris Woakes (229) wind up the top 10 in the list of top all-rounders.

England through to last 16 Euro 2020

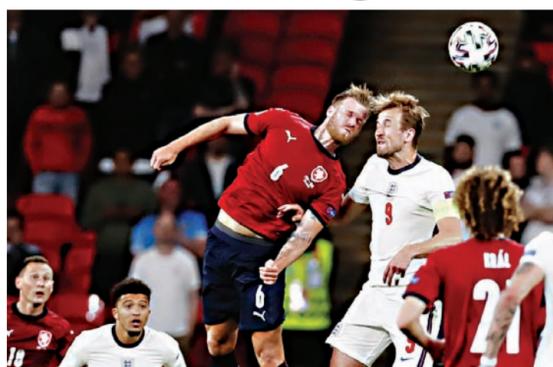
London | Agencies

England advanced to the last 16 at Euro 2020 as Group D winners after beating the Czech Republic 1-0.

Both teams had qualified for the knock-out stage ahead of Tuesday's clash, but England needed a victory over the Czech Republic to go through as Group D winners, reports Xinhua.

Aston Villa playmaker Jack Grealish and Arsenal teenager Bukayo Saka started for England and Manchester United defender Harry Maguire was back in the starting line-up after recovering from an injury.

England dominated the pitch from the start with Raheem Sterling hitting the woodwork within two minutes. Ten minutes later, Grealish shot a



fine cross into the box with Sterling jumping behind Saka to head home from close range. Sterling also scored

the only goal in England's 1-0 win over Croatia in the first match on June 13.

CROATIA BEAT SCOTLAND 3-1

Glasgow: Croatia qualified for the last 16 of the European Championships with a 3-1 win against Scotland in Hampden Park.

Goals from Nikola Vlastic, Luka Modric and Ivan Perisic gave Croatia a win they deserved for their control of the ball to dash Scotland's hopes of reaching the knockout stage of the tournament for the first time in their history, reports Xinhua. Scotland were without Billy Gilmore with Stuart Armstrong coming in for the midfielder, who has tested positive for Covid-19 in Steve Clarke's only change to the side that drew with England on June 18.

The Hundred

Conway, de Kock signings give Southern Brave respite

London | Agencies

South Africa's wicketkeeper-batsman Quinton de Kock and New Zealand opener Devon Conway gave the maiden edition of The Hundred tournament some respite after they signed up for Southern Brave as replacements for Australians David Warner and Marcus Stoinis, who had pulled out due to bio-bubble life.

"While we are disappointed that David Warner and Marcus Stoinis will not be available for our men's team, we are delighted to welcome both Devon and Quinton to the side. They are both quality cricketers who will add power and excitement up the top of the order for us," said Giles White, general manager of Southern Brave franchise.

The Hundred, a 100-ball-an-innings tournament, is England and Wales Cricket Board's (ECB) invention. The board hopes to derive a lot of money from the tournament that starts on July 21 and ends on August 21.

However, due to Covid-19 and the bio-bubble life as a result of it, some top



players have pulled out.

Apart from Warner -- bought for 100,000 pounds -- and Stoinis - for 80,000 pounds -- South Africa pace bowler Kagiso Rabada is also expected to pull out of the event.

New Zealand woman cricketer Sophie

Devine, too, has also pulled out of the tournament. While there are no Indians in the men's tournament, four Indian women -- Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana, Jemimah Rodrigues, and Deepti Sharma -- have signed for the tournament.

NEVER THOUGHT OF CANCELLING THE GAMES: TOKYO 2020 SPOKESMAN

Tokyo: With 30 days to go and the Covid-19 pandemic far from being contained in Japan and the world, the Tokyo 2020 organisers believe the Games will take place on the night of July 23. "Our preparation is in the very final stretch," Tokyo spokesman Masa Takaya told Xinhua.

"Tokyo 2020 is absolutely focused on delivering the Games this summer starting on July 23."

"All parties are fully focused on delivering the games," he emphasised when asked if he was "100 per cent" sure about the Games. What makes him confident is the publication of the playbooks, which have outlined all the rules and regulations that have to be followed by the athletes, officials and media personnel. "We are now asking all the participants to follow these rules and regulations so that we should be able to deliver a safe and secure Games."

Takaya, who became the spokesperson of Tokyo 2020 four years ago, described the past year after the Games had been postponed as a "long journey," but the idea of "cancellation" never crossed his mind despite all the rumours and reports from home and overseas.



CPL alters dates to accommodate Indian Premier League in UAE

St. John's (Antigua) | Agencies

Cricket West Indies (CWI) president Ricky Skerritt has confirmed that the dates of the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) had been tweaked in consultation with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to accommodate the remaining matches of the Indian Premier League (IPL), which was suspended on May 4 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

While earlier, the CPL was scheduled to commence on August 28 and end on September 19, it will now be played at St Kitts and Nevis between August 26 and September 15.

Several cricketers, who play in the Caribbean league, will now be able to fly to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to compete for their contracted teams



in the IPL, which has a playing window between September 19 and October 15.

A CWI statement said on Tuesday that, "President of Cricket West Indies, Ricky Skerritt, has confirmed that CWI, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) engaged in talks for a tweaked CPL schedule to accommodate the second phase of the Indian Premier League (IPL)." "The CPL which was originally scheduled to commence on August 28th will now be played in St Kitts and Nevis between August 26 and September 15."

Indian shooters take aim in World Cup with an eye on Olympics

Osijek (Croatia) | Agencies

The International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) World Cup here from Thursday will be the last chance for 15 Indian shooters to test their skills for the Jul 23-Aug 8 Olympic Games in Japan.

The Croatia World Cup will be organised in all three disciplines -- rifle, pistol and shotgun.

India have won five Olympic quota places in pistol events, eight in rifle and two in skeet during the 2019 Olympic qualification cycle.

The Indian shooters, who are on a short training-cum-competition stint in Europe to prepare for the Olympics, had last month also competed in the European Shooting Championships in Osijek in Minimum Qualification Score (MQS)



category.

India's high performance rifle coach Deepali Deshpande had expressed her satisfaction over the team's performance in Osijek. "It was a good performance overall considering the shooters had a break after the New Delhi World Cup in March," Deepali had said. While Deepak Kumar, Divyansh Singh Panwar, Sanjeev Rajput, Aishwary Pratap Tomar, Apurvi Chandela, Anjum Moudgil, Elavenil Valavi and Tejaswini Sawant have qualified for the Olympics in rifle shooting events, Abhishek Verma, Saurabh Chaudhary, Manu Bhaker, Rahi Sarnobat and Yashaswini Singh will compete in pistol events in Japan. Angadvir Singh Bajwa and Mairaj Ahmad Khan have qualified in the men's skeet event for Tokyo.

Javelin ace Chopra to compete in Kuortane Games on Friday

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Acce javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will be part of a highly competitive field at the Kuortane Games on Friday in Finland in a bid to further boost his confidence ahead of next month's Tokyo Olympic Games.

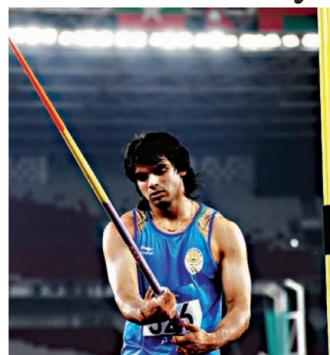
The Kuortane Games will be 23-year-old Chopra's third competition on the European circuit. He has won gold medals in Lisbon on June 10 and in Karlstad on June 22.

Chopra's performance in both Lisbon and Karlstad Grand Prix was moderate though.

The 2018 Jakarta Asian and Commonwealth Games champion's personal best and national record is 88.07m, recorded in March in Patiala.

In Lisbon, Chopra won gold with 83.18m while his best throw in Karlstad GP was 80.96m.

India's Olympic hopeful returned to international competition after nearly 18 months since qualifying for the Tokyo Olympic Games in January 2020 in South Africa due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Shivpal Singh is the other Indian javelin



thrower to have qualified for the Olympics. He, however, has opted to train in Patiala to prepare for the Olympics.

Singh had skipped the one-day Indian Grand Prix IV held on Monday in Patiala, but is expected to compete in the National Inter-State Athletics Championships scheduled from Friday in Patiala.



TAAPSEE PANNU SET TO RETURN FROM RUSSIA VACATION

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Taapsee Pannu shared with fans on Wednesday that she is all set to pack her bags and bid goodbye to her fun holiday in Russia.

The actress shared a picture on Instagram where she is seen in a pensive mood, sitting by a huge window overlooking the urban landscape of Russia. She is dressed in sports attire -- a white hoodie, shorts and a headband.

"Time to pack bags and come back. With this photographic view engraved in mind," she wrote as caption.

She mentioned the hashtags SaintPetersburg, Russia and TapcTravels in her post.

Taapsee has been actively sharing picturesque posts from her Russian holiday on social media. Recent pictures showing her on the streets of Saint Petersburg in a white saree and sneakers impressed netizens.

The actress is known to be an avid traveller and often travels with her sister Shagun, whenever she has a break from film shoots. Taapsee and her sister travelled to Maldives in 2020 and had shared the adventurous moments spent together on her social media.



'Sherni' was a difficult film to score music: Director

Team Absolute | Mumbai

"Sherni" director Amit Masurkar has opened up on the music of the film, saying he is glad to have collaborated with composers Naren Chandavarkar and Benedict Taylor for the project.

"Sherni" was a difficult film to score because of the complex intersections in the story. I felt safe with Naren and Benedict. I knew they would put the story and the theme first. They have the sensitivity and depth to understand a layered narrative and not judge characters or events. They are

open-minded, collaborative and have a genuine love for cinema," Amit tells reporter.

The music composers made their foray into the industry with Anurag Kashyap's "That Girl In Yellow Boots" and shot to fame with "Uda Punjab" and "Newton".

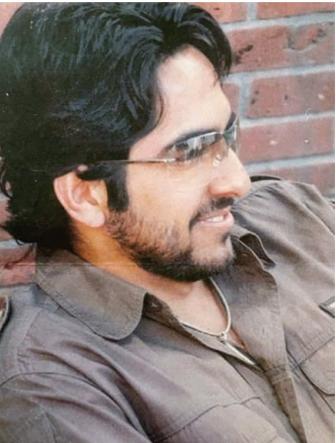
Talking about working with Amit again after "Newton", Benedict says: "With 'Newton', we got in on the project quite late but with 'Sherni' we

were part of it much earlier on. By then we had already developed a comfort level and understanding with Amit."

Naren adds: "He (Amit), along with writer Aastha Tiku and the editor Dipika Kalra, didn't discuss the brief in terms of music, but more the politics and ideas they wanted to come across. They trusted our vision and encouraged us to take it in a musical direction we felt appropriate. This coupled with the delicate moral balance they had outlined made it both a freeing and challenging process."

Ayushmann turns Insta poet

Team Absolute | Mumbai



Actor Ayushmann Khurrana on Wednesday donned the poet's hat on Instagram, and went down memory lane recalling his college days. Ayushmann posted a picture of his younger self from his student days and wrote in Hindi: "(Circa 2006) Baat hai Panjab University ke hut number fourteen ki. Muskaan hai befikr everyday routine ki. Mass comm dept ki purani building ke peeche. Samosa aur chai. University ka most famous guy, fir bhi quite shy (This is about hut number 14 of Panjab University. Life was all about carefree everyday routine and smiles. Behind the old building of the mass comm department. Samosas and tea. The most famous guy of the university, still shy) #throwback." Speaking about his upcoming slate of work, Ayushmann has his bag full. He currently has three films lined up. He will be seen in "Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui", "Anek" and "Doctor G".

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Under the banner of Rudransh Entertainment, Sitapur-the city of gangster is produced by Ravi Sudha Choudhary, and directed by Mobeen Warsi. The teaser of the film has been released.

Dev Singh Rana (Ravi Sudha Choudhary), the lead actor of the film Sitapur the city of gangster, happens to be the college president. In a mutual encounter in college itself, he gets into a fight with

Ravi Sudha Choudhary is making debut with 'Sitapur The city of Gangsters'

some bullies, which later takes the form of a fierce enmity. Since the bullies belongs to the political background, a series of murders starts. And this is where the story of Dev Singh Rana takes a turn. The series of murders and revenge on murders never stop.

The mix of romance, drama and action is well served in this story, which will prove to be successful to a great extent in keeping the audience engaged. The songs of this film have been shot at very idyllic locations, which make the songs quite appealing as well. Filled with all shades of politics, conspiracy, revenge, deceit and gang war, the film is found to be able to capture the love and attention of the audience. Preeti (Aparna Mallick), Lead Actress of this movie, has given an outstanding performance in this film. The film looks perfectly balanced and is all set to garner a lot of love from the audience.



Girl power on OTT

Unconventionally in the digital spotlight



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The world of OTT is reimagining female protagonists with a different perspective. As the spotlight shifts on woman power in the digital space, characteristics of the heroine that was hitherto untapped have come to fore. A recent instance is Vidya Balan's new release "Sherni", where she is

seen playing a forest officer caught in the quagmire of the sexism-laden 'sarkari' workplace, even as she fights to protect wildlife. Through the eyes of Vidya Vincent, her on-screen character, the film looks at rapid erosion of forest land, poaching, threat to wildlife in the name of development and chauvinistic "babu culture". For Vidya, "Sherni" refers to all women who derive their identities from the

work they do. She agrees the digital platforms get instant reactions.

"What happens is when a film releases you need to wait until Saturday morning to know how it is received. When it is a theatrical release the box office matters the most. Whereas with 'Shakuntala Devi', the film was released at midnight and when I woke up the next morning, I had a barrage of messages

from people who stayed up the night before to watch it at 12am. So, I think I wasn't expecting to receive feedback instantly. I think both are great," Vidya told reporter.

Samantha Akkineni made an impactful digital debut with the second season of "The Family Man 2", as the antagonist Raji, a Sri Lankan Tamil terrorist. The role is complex, and Samantha has very few lines to speak. Her character balances her vulnerability as a person who knows nothing beyond her movement and what she perceives is her idealism, and is at the same time she is a ruthless person who will go to any extent to get what she wants. Then there is actress Huma Qureshi in the web series "Maharani", which tells a story of an illiterate wife of an indisposed chief minister being pushed into the hot seat of Bihar politics. The series made it easy to understand the much talked-about fodder scam. "It's not often that you get to portray a character that lets you explore so many layers as a performer. Rani Bharti has been a delight to play. She starts off as someone whom we all know and relate to but what she goes onto become is someone few of us can aspire for," Huma said.

One of the most powerful and unusually imagined female roles on OTT has been Shefali Shah as the fierce cop DCP Vartika Chaturvedi in web series "Delhi Crime", which won the Best Drama Series award at the 48th International Emmy Awards.

Shefali in an interview to reporter recalled how, back in the day, Bollywood reduced its women characters to props, noting how the OTT space and new-age films have ushered change. "That has changed. OTT has opened the world to us as actors and heroes as well. We are going back to that stage," she had said.

Rasika Dugal has been one of the biggest success stories in the OTT era. She wowed the audience with her role in season one and two of the web series "Mirzapur" as Beena Tripathi.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Urf7