

HOMETHEATRE

Gripping tale of terror from young eyes

UTOYA: JULY 22 Norwegian with English subtitles &Prive!D *Ing: Andrea Berntzen, Aleksander Holmen, Solveig Kollen Birkeland Rated: 6/10

There will always be a debate on whether it is appropriate to put out movies of terror attacks and the impact it has on the victims. Some argue it is glorifying the terrorist in some way. Others want documentation. Over and above this debate, Utoya is a Norwegian movie which looks at the terror killing on an otherwise peaceful island of Utoya in Norway's 2611 with many left dead quite without premise. "It is the safest island on Earth, mom" one of the main protagonists says in the opening sequence of this film. The environs she is walking through are green, serene and enchanting which, by the way, is a complete contrast to what the film otherwise centres on with dogged starkness throwing up the real impact of a terror attack and its aftermath on any population in any part of the world.

Here, the movie pans out through the eyes of youngsters and the terrorist is given a grand go-by, being allowed to view the screen only in pitiful scenes with almost an abstract presence to give the audience some shape of the orchestrator. An English version of this film is all set to premiere on Netflix and that promises to take over in starkness, blood and gore from Utoya. For now, however, Utoya is a powerful story told candidly



UTOYA, JULY 22



A BLACK CAPTAIN AMERICA?

FALCON AND THE WINTER SOLDIER Episode 5 Disney+Hotstar

*Ing: Sebastian Stan, Anthony Mackie, Wyatt Russell, Erin Kellyman, Danny Ramirez, Emily VanCamp Rated: 6/10

Those who have been following the miniseries would know how episode 4 ended — the Shield — all bloodied. The fallout is felt by the Falcon and Winter Soldier. The Shield, for now is back with Sam just how Steve Rogers had wanted. So are we looking at yet another Captain America? A Black Captain America? Like Isaiah Bradley played by Carl Lumbly says — no self-respecting Black will take up the job. With John Walker stripped of all his duties and the title of Captain America, there is a new person who

makes an entry — Contessa Valentina Allegra de Fontaine. Who is she and what is the agenda? Well, maybe we will get to see more of Walker in episode 6. Meanwhile, Flag Smashers have upped their ante and are preparing for the final count down. Will they succeed? Will the Falcon and Winter Soldier be able to prevent Karil from going full guns ahead? Given that death hangs over Falcon's head, things will come full circle next time. The only thing missing here is the awe-inspiring action. In almost all the episodes, till now, they have been far between. The series has Falcon, Winter Soldier and the now redundant Captain America and yet the action is way below on the makers list. That boggles the mind and wonders if it has all been saved for episode 6 for the wow factor. Definitely something that Avengers fans will be looking forward to. —Shalini Sakseena

Plan Your Day

Cold Brew Day is on April 20. SUNDAY PIONEER brings you recipes that will surely give you chills without costing too heavy on your pocket

COLDBREW POPCICLES WITH FRESH MINT

Ingredients: 1/2 cups coffee beans 2-4 tablespoons brown sugar Mint leaves Directions: Grind the coffee beans. Place the grounds in a large pitcher or carafe. Add three cups of cold water and stir to combine. Cover and let steep for 12-24 hours. Strain the coffee and add 2-4 tablespoons brown sugar. Stir to combine. Place a few torn mint leaves into each popsicle mold and top with a few tablespoons of half and half. Freeze for 15-20 minutes, until slightly firm. Insert popsicle sticks into each mold and freeze for another 20 minutes until set. Remove the pops from the freezer and top with sweetened coffee. Freeze until firm, 30-40 minutes. Enjoy! Half and half: It's that simple. Half whole milk, half heavy cream. The texture is thicker and more luscious than milk, but less decadent and rich than cream.

CARAMEL SURPRISE COLD BREW

Ingredients: 1-2 cups Coldbrew Handful of ice 1-2 tablespoons coconut milk 1-2 teaspoons caramel syrup Pinch of sweetener of choice (if desired) Directions: You can prepare coldbrew at home using French press or in a mason jar using muslin cloth, important is perfect coffee blend for your coldbrew. Keep prepared cold brew coffee in a pitcher or carafe in the refrigerator. Four one cup (eight-ounces) of coffee into a mug, cup or glass jar filled with ice. Stir in coconut milk and caramel syrup. Add sweetener, if desired. Serve immediately. Courtesy: Gursh Chandra, Beverage Training Manager, Lavazza India

TELLY TALE

IT'S TIME FOR MAHASANGAM



COLORS' Mahasangam episodes have always raised the bar of entertainment with its complete package of drama and musical performances. One such blast of entertainment is the upcoming Mahasangam episode where the cast of Choti Sardarni and Udayaani will share a screen during Basaihi celebrations. Tejo (played by Priyanka Chaudhary) and Jasmine (played by Isha Malviya) will invite Jass even after knowing that there is stress going on in Virk family due to Fateh's decision of going to Canada. The celebration will be sparked with singer B Praak's presence as he will sing some of his hit song Teri Mitti from Kesari and also his recently launched soulful track, Baarish Ki Jaaye.

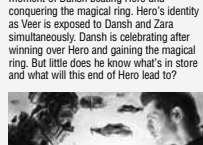
In the special episode, Fateh (played by Ankit Gupta) will have his share of dramatic moments as he will get to know that the woman he saved and admitted to the hospital is awake and turns out to be Meher! (played by Nimrit Kaur Ahluwalia). In a dramatic turn of events, Fateh will also come face to face with Sarabhi (played by Animesh Rekhi). Will he be able to bring together Meher and Sarab?

Singer B Praak, who was a part of the dramatic Mahasangam episode said: "I am excited to shoot here in Punjab with the cast of two most relevant show. Choti Sardarni is my family's favorite and Udayaani's concept strongly resonates with each one of us. The episode is going to be full of drama, entertainment and of course our beautiful new music track, Baarish Ki Jaaye. I had a lot of fun shooting with the cast of the show. They are fun, energetic, and extremely talented."

HERO TASTES DEFEAT

Sony SAB's Hero — Gayab Mode On will take a shocking turn with Dansh (Manish Wadhwa) defeating Hero (Abhishek Nigam) and stands triumphant. The upcoming episodes will send shock-waves to the viewers, with Hero assumed to be dead. At the beginning of the War of Worlds, our beloved Hero is vanquished by Dansh. The intense battle between the two is set to take

the viewers on a roller coaster ride and keep them on the edge of their seats. With Rocky (Keshav Sadhana) uniting with Dansh to defeat Hero, the forces of the aliens get more robust, and it becomes difficult for Hero to fight them single-handedly. Dansh threatening to destroy the planet and cause harm to human beings, leads to the battle of the War of Worlds. Dansh launches his attack with the help of Rocky and with each passing moment, it gets trickier for Hero to fight Dansh and protect his ring simultaneously. The battle gets fiercer, leading to the heart-breaking moment of Dansh beating Hero and conquering the magical ring. Hero's identity as Veer is exposed to Dansh and Zara simultaneously. Dansh is celebrating after winning over Hero and gaining the magical ring. But little does he know what's in store and what will this end of Hero lead to?



As Kunkum Bhagya completes seven glorious years, Shabri Ahluwalia who plays the role of Abhi got nostalgic and said: "It is not just a show, but a feeling for me. I've been associated with it for seven years now, but it doesn't feel like it's been so long. I must say that all these years have been a breeze and the entire unit including the technicians and actors are like a family for me. Generally, you hear people saying this when the show is coming to an end, but our case is different. When you're around the same people for seven years, you know them even better, as you have seen them at their best and their worst. I have to add that the writers and the creative team are fantastic, and they've held all of us together. I've been associated with the producers, Bajaji Telefilms for nearly two decades and they are like a family to me. As we complete seven years, I would like to say Thank You Ekta for believing in me, Shobha aunty for being there always and Jettu uncle, you're a rockstar and always guide us for the best. I also want to thank Zee TV for giving us such a great platform to showcase Kunkum Bhagya. Last but not the most important, Kunkum Bhagya is what it is today because of all our fans, so thank you so much to all."

Is Veer Nanda aka Hero dead? What will happen next? Manish Wadhwa, essaying the role of Dansh, said: "Dansh is very strong and an intense character. He never gives up and attacks back with force. The experience of shooting for this fight sequence has been amazing and it's fun to work with Abhishek. He is very hardworking and we both share great timing. Dansh is happy and very delighted with getting hold of the ring, unaware of what will happen next. So, stay tuned to witness exciting twists and turns on the show and join us on this thrilling journey!"

Abhishek Nigam, essaying the role of Hero, said: "This is the most intense fight sequence we have shot on the show so far and I was so much into the character that I could feel the same energy. Hero was putting in all the efforts to save the world and protect his ring, but he chooses his loss so that he can save the world. It was a learning experience while shooting for this sequence with Manish Sir. This sequence has come out really well and it will take the viewers on a thrilling never seen before. So, stay tuned and don't miss the fun!"

KUNKUM BHAGYA TURNS SEVEN Zee TV's popular fiction show, Kunkum Bhagya has been an audience favourite ever since it was launched in 2014. Its intriguing

plot and the authentic portrayal of relatable characters like Abhi (Shabir Ahluwalia), Preeta (Sriti Jha), Rhea (Pooja Banerjee), Ranbir (Krishna Kaul) and Prachi (Mugdha Chapekar) have kept the audience entertained throughout these past seven years and has helped the show gain countless fans across the globe. Produced by Television's czarina Ekta Kapoor, Kunkum Bhagya has witnessed roaring success on the viewership charts every year and has won more than 50 awards till date. But it looks like there is no stopping the show even as the show completed seven years on April 15.

The family drama that explores and brings a range of emotions as well as the deepest intricacies of human relationships has kept the viewers hooked all this while through several interesting twists and turns in its storyline. In fact, the show has also managed to successfully reinstate the belief that soapies do attract by showcasing how despite having contrasting personalities, its lead protagonists are inseparable.

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'I don't regret my choices'

KUNAL JAISINGH, who plays Veer in SET's Kyun Utthe Dil Chhod Aaye, tells MUSBA HASHMI the attraction of playing the role, how it has become his priority and his story of giving endless auditions

■ What is your role in Kyun Utthe Dil Chhod Aaye? I play Veer, a self-destructive and brooding person who is addicted to alcohol. I am paired opposite Gracy, who plays Amrit in the show. I will be donning a different look. I am extremely excited to be a part of this show and to work with such a lovely production house.

■ What made you take up the role? The show offers beautiful love stories, many action scenes and gives a bit of knowledge to all the viewers about how people's suffering during the partition. Earlier the show managed to depict the pain and sorrow of 1947 perfectly. Now with a leap of four years, the makers are showing the story of the 1951 era and have planned many new things for the viewers. The concept of the show is unique and the overall plot is not only interesting, but intense and heart-wrenching for me. Other than that, I wanted to be a part of the show which stands out from all the other shows I have done in the past.

■ Did you have any apprehensions? No, not at all. I knew I was going to be a part of this story post leap. I was actually excited for it. With a lot of twists and turns ahead in the show, this will be a good start for me.

■ From Mann Kee Awaaz Pratigya to Kyun Utthe Dil... how has the journey been for you? It has been a great one. I have been able to grow and learn so much in every role I have played. Every character I essayed holds a special place in my heart because with each character my audience and my fans started loving me more. Not only that, I learnt something from every character I played. Those were not only roles, but life lessons. My only goal during all these years has been to make sure that the audience understands the actions and emotions of the characters I play.

■ Omkara Singh Oberoi was a much loved character... Each show has his trials and a story to tell. Ishqbaaz was focused on the story of three brothers, and India's first spin-off was Dil Boley Oberoi. When it comes to Omkara

I was always passionate about my career, but getting into this space has been difficult, given the fact that the City of Dreams has a lot to offer but the hard way

What is there in the pipeline?

My pipeline is full with the current show that I am doing. It is my only priority. I am focused and would like to be loyal to it. I believe to make one's work stand out one should focus on a single thing at a time. That is the reason I prefer not to juggle projects.



he was an artist who was the one balancing factor between the brothers and the family. Omkara has been a special character for me. It earned me a lot of love and support from my fans. I am grateful for all that. The character will always be valuable to me. I feel blessed and lucky and I never thought it would be so popular. The team, of course, was great. We are still like a family. We all have encouraged each other to perform at our best and that was visible in the show.

■ How did acting happen? I was always passionate about my career, but getting into this space has been difficult, given the fact that the City of Dreams has a lot to offer but the hard way. I have been a part of endless auditions ever since I have come here. I have even stood in an audition line for more than 10 hours. This industry has offered me a platform to project my skills and I am truly humbled by the fact that today I am getting to do that. My experience in the industry has been a roller coaster ride with a lot of ups and downs, but I have learnt that at the end of it, it's all worth it.

■ Do you have any regrets? Till date, I don't regret anything I have done in life. If I talk about my journey in the industry, it has been beautiful. None of the characters that I have played overlaps each other. We should not regret anything. After all, we do choose the opportunities that we think is right at that time. How things will unfold is not in anyone's hands. Regrets just make you sad and I don't want to feel sad for the choices that I have made. I have surely mellowed with time. I might not do the roles now which I did earlier, but when back then, I was proud of what I was doing and will always be.

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Four killed in hospital fire in Raipur

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Four patients were killed when a fire engulfed a private hospital in the Chhattisgarh capital Raipur, said the government press release on Saturday. While Ramesh Sahu succumbed to burn injuries, three others -- Ishwar Rao, Vandana Gajjala and Devika Sonkar -- died due to suffocation, it said.

The reason why the fire erupted was not immediately known. Further details of the

tragedy were not available. Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel called the disaster 'very unfortunate' and expressed profound grief towards the families of the bereaved, said an official statement.

He announced a financial aid of Rs 4 lakh each to the families of the four who died, it added. Raipur Collector Dr. S. Bharathi Dasan and Raipur Senior Superintendent of Police Ajay Yadav reached the spot and oversaw the rescue efforts. It further said.



Singh Deo concerned over Remdesivir, oxygen supply

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Expressing concern over the Covid-19 crisis, Chhattisgarh Health Minister T.S. Singh Deo on Saturday raised the issue of shortage of Remdesivir injection and about establishment of oxygen plants in the state.

In a virtual review meeting, Singh briefed Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan about the grim situation in the state. Dr Harsh Vardhan was reviewing the situation in 11 states.

He said there was 100 per cent occupancy of ICU beds.



"We are expending two lakh active cases in the second wave and so we need 40,000 oxygenated beds," he said.

Self-isolation prevents Bastar tribals from viral infection



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The tribal habitats of Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district are still safe from the virulent Covid-19 virus, thanks primarily to the insular life the tribals largely lead. But Narayanpur's urban areas have registered a few corona cases.

Situated in the tribal dominated sprawling Bastar region, Narayanpur district seems all set to contain the virus. District Collector Dharmesh Sahu told

The Pioneer that no case has been detected in the interiors of the district due to the self-isolation of the tribals. Areas in the district headquarters -- in contrast to major towns and cities in Chhattisgarh -- have registered only a few cases. The official admitted that if the virus grips the interiors of the district, the situation will be alarming.

"Keeping that in view, active surveillance is planned to be done in the public places and offices in the district headquar-

ters," Sahu said. A lockdown has been imposed in the region from Saturday, he added. Narayanpur has around 1.5 lakh population and the administration has set a target of 350 tests each day from now on to contain the spread of Covid. Till Friday and since the outbreak of the infection, Narayanpur district had 2,137 Covid patients, of which 2,022 have recovered. Only two fatalities were registered -- these also due to comorbidity.

Lockdown extended in Raipur, Durg till April 26



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

With the Covid-19 situation still deemed serious, authorities on Saturday extended till April 26 the lockdown in Raipur and Durg districts -- the two worst affected districts in Chhattisgarh.

The original 10-day lockdown in both places was to end on April 19 morning.

Raipur Collector Dr S. Bharathi Dasan said the lockdown has been extended by seven days. A similar order was issued in Durg.

Dr Dasan said the surge in

coronavirus cases and fatalities despite a strict lockdown in Raipur district was a matter of concern and it was necessary to extend the lockdown to save human lives.

He appealed to the people to cooperate with the authorities in checking the spread of Covid.

The borders of the lockdown will remain sealed. All other conditions imposed when the lockdown was announced will prevail.

On Friday, 3,813 fresh Covid cases were detected and 61 people died due to Covid in Raipur district.

Now lockdown in Narayanpur from April 19

STAFF REPORTER ■ NARAYANPUR

Amid a sharp rise in corona cases and fatalities, a lockdown was declared on Saturday in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district. It will begin at 6 am on April 19 and end at the midnight of April 26.

The district's boundary will be sealed and only essential services will be allowed during the lockdown, Collector Dharmesh Sahu said in an order.

Medical shops and petrol pumps will function with conditional restrictions and only movement of medical emergencies will be allowed.

Petrol pumps will only cater to ambulances, ATM vans, medical vehicles, media personnel and press related vehicles besides vehicles from other states.

Milk parlours and bakeries will open between 6 to 9 am and 5 to 7 pm. Newspapers can be delivered during this time. Also, 24x7 home delivery of milk will be allowed, the order said.

Vegetable vends and fruit shops can open from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm.

All liquor shops, commercial and departmental zones, temples and tourism sites will be shut.

All Central, state government, semi government and private offices as well as banks will be closed. Telecom, sanitation, water supply, maintenance and health departments will work.

Only 20 people will be allowed in marriages and social gatherings. Narayanpur is among 23 districts where lockdown has been imposed amid a surge in Covid-19 cases and fatalities in Chhattisgarh.



An oxygen production unit started at the Medical College Hospital in Jagdalpur, the divisional headquarters of Bastar region. The unit will help combat the Covid-19 pandemic in Chhattisgarh. Pioneer Photo

No order issued to postpone Class XII exam

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh Board of Secondary Education (CGBSE) on Saturday described as "completely wrong" that it has postponed the Class XII Board examination in the state amid the Covid-19 crisis.

CGBSE Secretary V.K. Goyal clarified that no such order has been issued. A reported order which went viral on social media is "totally fake", he said in a press release.

On April 9, the CGBSE announced it was postponing the Class X examination that was scheduled to be held from April 15 to May 1 due to a spike in coronavirus cases in the state.



Also, the government last month decided to close all schools, central and private schools and to promote the students of all classes except X and XII without examining them.

Chhattisgarh enhances health infrastructure

In the last two years, the number of medical college hospitals (MCHs) has risen from six to nine, the number of district hospitals from 26 to 28 and the number of civil hospitals has gone up from 1,359 to 1,818, an official communication said on Saturday.

In the last two years, 15 MCH Hospitals with 50 beds and six MCH Hospitals with 100 beds have been set up. During this period, six sub-health centers and a community health center have also been established.

As a result of these efforts, the number of medical staff including specialists, doctors and medical officers has shot up from 18,458 to 20,405.

Specialist doctors now number 319, up from 175. The number of medical officers has increased from 1,359 to 1,818 and the number of staff nurses has ballooned from 2,580 to 4,091. Under process now is the recruitment of 300 medical officers, 92 staff nurses, 50 medical lab technologists and 146 rural health coordinators (women),

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Effective efforts made by the Chhattisgarh government to make health facilities people oriented are proving more than useful as the state wages a grim battle against a resurgent Covid-19.

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from six to nine, the number of district hospitals from 26 to 28 and the number of civil hospitals has gone up from 1,359 to 1,818, an official communication said on Saturday.

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the communication said.

To provide free health facilities, along with Ayushman Yojana, the Chief Minister Health Insurance Scheme, Sanjeevani Sahayata Kosh, Chief Minister Bal Hriday Suraksha Yojana, Chief Minister Bal Shrawan Yojana and Chirayu Yojana are being operated.

All the above schemes have been included in the Dr. Khubchand Baghel Health Scheme, Ayushman Yojana and Chief Minister Special Health Scheme operated by the Chhattisgarh government.

The number of Ayushman card holders as of December 2018 was 223,793. This now totals 13,57,441. With this, the benefit of free health facility is being made available to people in the state easily in government and recognized hospitals.

The number of government and recognized hospitals has gone up from 1,088 to 1,359 in the last two years.

COVID doesn't affect brain but still inflicts damage

IANAS ■

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid 19, likely does not directly infect the brain but can still inflict significant neurological damage, a new study suggests.

The findings, published in the journal Brain, suggest that the neurological changes often seen in these patients may result from inflammation triggered by the virus in other parts of the body or the brain's blood vessels.

"We've looked at more brains than other studies and we have used more techniques to search for the virus. The bottom line is that we find no evidence of viral RNA or protein in brain cells," said researcher James E. Goldman from Columbia University.

For the study, the research team examined the brains of 41 patients with Covid-19 who succumbed to the disease during their hospitalization. The patients ranged in age from 38 to 97,



about half had been intubated and all had lung damage caused by the virus.

All of the patients had extensive clinical and laboratory investigations, and some had brain MRI and CT scans.

To detect any virus in the neurons and glia cells of the brain, the researchers used multiple methods including

RNA in situ hybridization, which can detect viral RNA within intact cells; antibodies that can detect viral proteins within cells; and RT-PCR, a sensitive technique for detecting viral RNA.

Despite their intensive search, the researchers found no evidence of the virus in the patients' brain cells.

Though they did detect very low levels of viral RNA by RT-PCR, this was likely due to virus in blood vessels or leptomeninges covering the brain. The tests were conducted on more than two dozen brain regions, including the olfactory bulb, which was searched because some reports have speculated that

the coronavirus can travel from the nasal cavity into the brain via the olfactory nerve.

"Even there, we didn't find any viral protein or RNA. Though we found viral RNA and protein in the patients' nasal mucosa and in the olfactory mucosa high in the nasal cavity," Goldman said.

COVID SCARE IN THE REGION

Haryana records highest single-day spike of 7,717 infections

32 MORE DEAD

PNB ■ CHANDIGARH

There was no let-up in the Covid-19 surge in Haryana on Saturday as the State reported a record 7717 new cases of the disease which took its cumulative infection tally to 3,49,794. Thirty two more fatalities due to the viral disease were reported in the State in a span of 24 hours, pushing its overall death toll to 3,386, according to a health department bulletin. Of the fresh cases, Gurugram, the worst-hit district in the state, accounted for 2549, its highest single-day spike so far. Among other districts that reported a big spike are Faridabad (987), Karnal (477), Sonapat (646), Panchkula (349), Hissar (507), Ambala (173), Kurukshetra (201) and Sirsa (231), the bulletin said. On Friday and Wednesday, the State had recorded 6277 and 5858 coronavirus cases respectively. Among the latest deaths, five each were from Faridabad and Panipat, three were from Hissar, Karnal, Rohtak and two each from Gurugram, Ambala, Panchkula, Patiala and Jind. One each from Fatehabad, Yamunanagar, Kurukshetra districts. The number of active Covid-19 cases in Haryana stands at 38558. So far, 3,07,850 people have recovered from the disease, and the state has a recovery rate of 88.01 per cent, the bulletin said. Amid rising COVID-19 cases in the State, the Haryana government has decided to allow officials equal to the rank of under secretary or below to work from home and restrict their physical attendance in offices to 50 per cent. A letter in this regard has been issued by the Chief Secretary's office. Officers of the level of deputy secretary, equivalent and above are to attend offices on a regular basis, it said. According to the order, roters for employees' attendance are to be prepared by divisional and wing heads and frequented, they can call for more than 50 per cent physical attendance on administrative grounds. Officials who do not attend office on a particular day will make themselves available on phone and other electronic means of communication at all times from their residence and work from home, it said. PUNJAB REPORTS HIGHEST SINGLE-DAY SPIKE OF 4498 CASES, 64 MORE DIE Punjab's daily Covid-19 cases



highest number of fresh cases at 835, followed by 790 in SAS Nagar, 449 in Jalandhar, 372 in Patiala and 352 in Amritsar. Of the latest fatalities, 10 were reported from SAS Nagar, seven from Patiala, six each were reported from Amritsar, Ludhiana and Gurudaspur; four each from Tarn Taran and Bathinda. A total of 2615 coronavirus patients were discharged after they recovered from the infection, taking the total number of cured persons to 2,54,805. So far, 65,61, 928 samples have been collected for testing in the state, it added. 431 CASES, 2 DEATHS IN CHANDIGARH Chandigarh on Saturday reported two deaths and 431 cases of coronavirus, taking the infection count to 33,309 in the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana. It had on Friday recorded 481 Covid-19 cases, the highest single-day since global pandemic struck. Last year, on September 13, Chandigarh logged 449 cases. With two deaths, so far, 410 people have died from the infection in the union territory, according to a medical bulletin. The number of active cases stood at 3414. A total of 438 patients were discharged after they recovered from the infection, taking the number of cured persons to 29,485. A total of 3,58,865 samples have been taken for testing so far. 12 DEATHS, 1,392 NEW CASES IN HIMACHAL The COVID-19 death toll in Himachal Pradesh rose to 11,67 on Saturday with 12 more fatalities, while 1,392 new cases took the infection count to 75,587, an official said. The active cases in the state climbed to 8,444, the official said. Special Health Secretary Nipun Jindal said three people each died in Shimla and Kangra, two in Solan and one each in Sirmour, Mandi, Kullu and Lahaul-Spiti districts. Meanwhile, 647 people recovered from the disease in the past 24 hours, he added.

DROUGHT LIKE SITUATION IN HP

HP CS directs agriculture, horticulture depts to prepare action plan

PNB ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Chief Secretary Anil Khachi on Saturday reviewed the preparedness of the officials to deal with drought like situation in the state and instructed the agriculture, horticulture and the allied department to prepare district level action plans to ready mitigate with such situation. In a video conference with the Deputy Commissioners, he said crop weather watch groups must also be constituted besides the agriculture department should prepare a sound database on weather, crop conditions to assist the state disaster management authority (SDMA). He said that presently drinking water supply was normal across the State however as per the information supplied by the districts agriculture sector had been affected due to scanty rainfall during this year. It was disclosed in the meeting that out of total 413,134 hectare cropped area, 146,508 hectares of area had been affected due to less rainfall in State as of now with an estimated loss to the tune of ₹ 10820.57 lakh. As per the preliminary data received, the highest loss had been reported in district Bilaspur where 20280 hectares of land out of total cropped area of 28020 hectares had been affected resulting in loss of ₹3259.37 lakh. In district Chamba, 3571 hectares of land had been reported to be affected causing loss of ₹815.58 lakh. Similarly, all other districts had also been affected due to scanty rainfall. Anil Khachi said that various schemes of food Shakti Vibhag had also been affected due to short rainfall. Out of total 9526 schemes of the department, 401 schemes had been affected up to 25 per cent.

ALL-PARTY MEETING

J'Khand Govt aims to normalise situation soon in State: CM

CM seeks everyone's help to curb infection in State

PNB ■ RANCHI

Holding an all-party meeting on virtual mode here on Saturday Chief Minister Hemant Soren appreciated all the political parties for making suggestions in the meeting. "With the cooperation of all, we will be able to prevent the infection of Corona once again. Strict steps will be taken to break the corona chain," he said. At the same time, various political parties told the CM that in this time of crisis, they are with the government. Whatever decision will be taken by the government, they will cooperate. There will be no politics of any kind in this. The CM discussed in detail with representatives of various political parties for effective control over Covid-19. During this time, several important suggestions were made by political parties in relation to prevention and control of Corona. The CM said that the important suggestions that have come up during the deliberations in the all-party meeting



Chief Minister Hemant Soren during a virtual all party meeting about the rising infection of coronavirus, in Ranchi on Saturday

is very important. This will help the government to formulate further strategies to deal with Corona. The CM said that he is constantly keeping an eye on preventing the second wave of Corona and providing better treatment facilities to the infected persons. Addressing the representatives of political parties, the CM said, "We are all aware of the present situation in Corona. Every day the number of infected is increasing rapidly and the number of dead is also increasing significantly. In such a situation, the government is

now it is taking all appropriate steps to stop the second wave as well." The CM said that for the treatment of Covid-19, complaints of shortage and black marketing of some life-saving drugs are constantly being received. In such a situation, the government has started negotiations to buy such medicines directly from its producing companies. He also said that the corona vaccination campaign is constantly being expedited, as vaccine consignments are being received, people are being put in place. On the issue of reducing the age limit for taking vaccine by some political parties, he said that it is a matter of the central

government and the center will be requested in this regard. Several important suggestions were given by political party representatives in the meeting, which include helpline numbers in all districts, production of oxygen by local industrialists, availability of life saving drugs, curb on black marketing of medicines, increase in infrastructure and beds in hospitals of State, taking help from Central hospitals, nursing students and doctors, screening of migrant workers

returning to State, taking help from political and social organisations, setting up hospitals in indoor stadiums etc. Different political parties gave different opinions on the issue of lockdown. While the Left parties said that lockdown

is not a solution to the problem, some parties suggested week-long and some suggested full lockdown. At the same time, all parties agreed to strictly follow the government guidelines regarding Corona.

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CM for providing medical kits to people under home isolation

Asks officials to appoint para medical staff

PNB ■ RANCHI

Chief Minister Hemant Soren today directed officials to provide medical kit to the corona infected patients living in home isolation. The departmental officers were instructed to provide all the necessary medicines, oximeters and masks etc in the medical kit. The CM said that pulse oximeter should be ensured in all Angarwad centers in the State. He directed the Health Secretary to appoint trained youths of the State who have done para-medical courses on contractual basis to overcome the shortage of medical staff in hospitals as per requirements. The CM was holding a high-level meeting held at his residence on Friday. Soren said that to overcome the shortage of medical staff in dedicated hospitals, Covid care centers, etc in the dis-

tricts make an action plan and appoint more staff. He said that every possible effort should be made to increase oxygen rich beds in hospitals and maintain ICU beds etc in hospitals. He directed that the hospital management should work by preparing a better action plan for the treatment of corona infected patients. The CM said that the hospitals should ensure the provision of Oxygen Plant and Air Separation Unit. He said that constantly

strive for the availability of Redmesivir. The CM said that the number of corona infected patients is increasing daily. So patients should be closely monitored and special vigilance should be taken in the areas where more cases of corona are coming. The CM said that in order to ensure that the infected patients do not face problems, medicines should be fully prepared. In the meeting, the Health Secretary apprised the Chief Minister about the latest status of Corona infected patients and preparations related to the system of treatment. The meeting was attended by the Chief Secretary of the State Sukhdev Singh, Development Commissioner Anur Kumari Singh, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Rajeev Arun Ekka, Health Secretary KK Soan, Disaster Management Secretary Anil Kumar, Urban Development Secretary Vinay Choubey, Campaign Director of NRRHM Ravi Shankar Shukla and other senior officials.

90% of Covid patients in Himachal in home isolation: CM Jai Ram

PNB ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Saturday said over 90 per cent of the Covid patients are under home isolation in the state. Presiding over a virtual review meeting of Covid-19 sit-

uation in Sirmour district from Nalagarh, he said special thrust must be laid on increasing the number of tests to detect covid-19 patients besides strengthening the mechanism of home isolation in the State. He said that doctors must ensure proper treatment and regular monitoring of the

patients under home isolation, adding that the health department must regularly monitor health parameters of the patients under home isolation. He said that elected representatives of the panchayat raj institutions must also be involved to keep a watch on the health conditions of those

under home isolation. Thakur said that the industrialists of Kala Amb and Poanta Sahib areas must be asked to ensure that the workers in their units strictly follow the SOPs and guidelines issued by the State Government. He said that focus should be

laid on contact tracing of the covid-19 positive patients. He said that this would go a long way in timely detection of covid-19 cases in the State. He said that every possible effort should be made to increase the capacity in the district should also be increased. He said that the shopkeepers must also ensure to strictly follow "No

Mask, No Service" policy to check the spread of coronavirus. The Chief Minister said that the district administration must also ensure the social functions such as marriages etc must strictly follow the maximum limit prescribed for such events. He said that action, if

required, could be taken against the violators. He said that district administration must also ensure that adequate arrangements be made to meet out the demand in case of any major surge in the cases. He said that people must be motivated to use face masks and hand sanitizers and also

avoid overcrowding in public places and that effective regulation of devotees must also be ensured in temples and other religious places to avoid overcrowding. Secretary Health Amitabh Awasthi said that the pace of vaccination must be increased as this was an effective tool.

Weekend curfew halts life in Capital

SHEKHAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Life in the national Capital came to a halt after weekend curfew was imposed by the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, amid rise in Covid-19 cases. The CM also appealed to people to adhere to the restrictions. Roads, markets and buses across Delhi were closed from Saturday morning, as the weekend curfew began in the city. Apart from essential service providers working in pharmacies, grocery shops, hospitals, some restaurants, police stations, and banks, a majority of the National Capital's residents appeared to have stayed at home. The weekend curfew aimed at breaking the chain of spiralling coronavirus infections were clamped at 10 pm on Friday and will continue till 5 am on Monday. Deputy Police Commissioner, S N Shrivastava also remained in the field and visited several places across the city. Police pickets could be seen around the city with police personnel and officials were deployed, checking people having valid movement passes and issuing challoan to those not following the guidelines. Since Saturday morning, all the major markets including Sarojini Nagar, Connaught



Delhi police personnel checks passing during weekend curfew in Delhi on Saturday

Place, Lajpat Nagar, South Extension, Chandni Chowk were closed. Only a few shops providing essential services remain open. These include pharmacies, grocery stores, some food outlets and banks. However, the Municipal services including collection of garbage, watering of plants, and sweeping of the roads continue on Saturday. Food delivery service agents were also seen on roads as restaurants were given permission for continuing the service of home delivery. At some areas across the city some vegetable vendors were also present, as some people flocked to them for the

essential supplies. Few numbers of public transport including Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and cluster buses were also seen on roads while Delhi metro ran at reduced capacity and frequency for those involved in essential services and activities. However, small a little crowd was seen at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and Sardarjung hospitals where people had come for treatment or get them coronavirus tested. Several, daily-waggers including rickshaw pullers and auto-rickshaw drivers were also seen on roads

that were waiting to get passengers. "There is a curfew but my only source of income is through rickshaw. Our daily needs are fulfilled through it," said a 40-year-old rickshaw puller near Green Park in South Delhi. During the day, Delhi Police Commissioner, Shrivastava also visited several places across the city to take stock of the execution of weekend curfew orders. The areas toured include, inter alia, Samastipur, Pickett, Akshardham, Ghaziपुर Crossing, Maharajpur Check Post, NH 24 Anand Vihar,

Jagatpuri, Krishna Nagar, New Usmanpur, Signature Bridge, Majnu Ka Tilla, ISBT Kashmiri Gate, Rajghat and Tilak Marg. Police personnel were found wearing face masks. A vigorous awareness by using public announcement systems and flexi informative boards for the general public at various places were also seen on ground. "All the district deputy commissioners of police are on the ground. The movement of essential goods and services is being facilitated. Police have also placed banners on pickets and outside the gates of residential colonies to inform people about the curfew and asked them not to come outside their houses unnecessarily," said Chinnoy Biswal, the Public Relation Officer (PRO) of Delhi Police.

The police teams are also monitoring the COVID helpline and assisting people facing difficulty in getting movement passes," said Biswal. The Delhi government and the police have issued a pass-to-be exempted category people who need to go out during the curfew for necessary services and activities like vaccination, going to railway stations, airports, buying grocery, fruits and vegetables.

Modi sending vaccines to Pakistan, Canada when Indians dying here: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Following the surge in Covid cases across the country, the senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Saturday lashed out at Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister (CM) Yogi Adityanath, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah with regards to the dire state the country is in due to coronavirus. "There are dead bodies across the country, at crematoriums, at burial grounds; there is a shortage of vaccines here and people are anxious to get vaccinated. However, before vaccinating the population in India, Narendra Modi is busy sending vaccines to countries like Pakistan and Canada," said Singh. He said both PM and Home Minister appear to care more for elections than for the lives of citizens. "Uttar Pradesh is particularly in bad shape, with no beds available. Family members are running from pillar to post trying their best



to arrange for oxygen, a hospital bed and basic medicines. People are dying in hospitals, but the Yogi Adityanath government, instead of attempting to improve or address the situation, is busy putting up screens in front of crematorium grounds," said Singh. "Yogi Adityanath government has colossal failure in addressing the coronavirus situation in Uttar Pradesh and it's time that the Centre made an immediate intervention. People had to wait for hours to cremate their loved ones. The Yaranis where ModiJai said 'I've been called by Ganga Ma'iyaj saw 125 corpses being cremated at the Harishchandra Ghat on Friday," said Singh. Singh also raised the issue of being unable to get a COVID test in some districts in Uttar Pradesh, referring to a case in

Ambedkarnagar where the patient could not get a ventilator in the medical college despite his lungs having failed. The senior AAP leader also spoke about reports of unavailability of beds, oxygen and ventilators in hospitals of all districts. "The Centre should keep an eye on Uttar Pradesh and make special announcements about the situation in the state," he said. "The Delhi Government has written to the Centre on various issues related to Covid-19, and that the Centre should give an entire account of the PM-Cares Fund to the people of India. The ventilators purchased in Rajasthan from this fund are 90 to 95 per cent defective, which may well lead to large scale corruption," Singh claimed.

Facing shortage of oxygen, Remdesivir, ventilator: States



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Grappling with the surge in Covid-19 cases, various States in a meeting with the Centre on Saturday highlighted the shortage of oxygen cylinders, Remdesivir in hospitals, ventilator stocks and poor supply of vaccine doses.

Eleven States and Union Territories, including Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, account for 79.32 per cent of the new coronavirus cases in the country were present at the meeting.

The high-level meeting was chaired by Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan with the Health Ministers of 11 States and Union Territories to review measures taken by them for prevention, containment and management of the recent surge in Covid-19 cases.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to meet top officials of several ministries later in the evening to review the overall covid situation and vaccination drive.

Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, West Bengal, Delhi, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh have been reporting an unprecedented surge in new infections.

In a statement, the Ministry said "Many of the States" raised the issue of diverting the medical oxygen supply lines and capping of

US must lift export ban on raw materials for production of vaccines, says CPM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CPI(M) polit bureau on Saturday said that the United States must lift their export ban on raw materials for the production of vaccines.

In a statement, the Left party pointed out that the export ban by the US is a double-axe, citing US President Joe Biden's assurances in the recently convened Quad Summit.

"The ban on exports of materials used in vaccine production goes completely against the US Government's aim. The Modi government, which sets

prices of essential drugs like Remdesivir which has been sold in the black market at exorbitant prices.

"Double mutant strain in Maharashtra was a key point of concern. The Delhi Government requested for additional beds in Central Government hospitals as was done in 2020 to help tide over the emergent health crisis," the Ministry said.

The notification of the Home Ministry granting permission to states to utilize up to 50 per cent of their annual allocation of State Disaster

Response Fund, and that of the Union Health Ministry, allowing utilisation of unspent pending balance under National Health Mission as on April 1, 2021 for COVID management purposes, were reiterated, it said.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan informed the states on the steps taken to provide medical grade oxygen and augmenting Remdesivir stocks in the country.

The states were also informed about the issuance of the calendar of medical oxygen supply from different oxygen

manufacturers in the country. The steps taken for unhindered movement of oxygen cylinders from their manufacturing units across states were also detailed, the Ministry said.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan informed the states on the steps taken to provide medical grade oxygen and augmenting Remdesivir stocks in the country.

much store on the Quad alliance, must ensure that the Biden administration keeps to its committed word and immediately ensures supply of essential vaccine material to India. This is the least that must be done when India is facing vaccine shortage in the face of an unprecedented surge of Covid infections," says CPI(M).

The CPI(M) also pointed out the concerns raised by Serum Institute of India head Adar Poonawala on hampering of production in India due to the US Government's ban on export of raw materials of vaccine.

"The scaling up of vaccine production in India is being hampered by the shortage of the intermediate material required for vaccine production. Much of this material such as filters, solutions and plastic bags come from the United States. But the U.S. Administration has banned the export of vaccine materials under its Defence Production Act. Despite requests by the Indian authorities, no relaxation or exemption has been given for export of these items," the CPI(M) said in a statement.

The Congress came out with a 14-point attack on Government over grave errors in Covid-19 management.

India should gradually lift or lower the age bar for beneficiaries to widen the vaccination ambit. "We should gradually lift or lower the age bar so that more and more people get into the pool of people who can be vaccinated. That will happen in the coming few weeks."

"We will have more and more vaccines that will come into the common pool which will allow us to open up the vaccination to a larger population," he said.

Cong's 14-point attack on Govt over Covid 'mismanagement'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Maintaining that India has been caught off guard in its fight against the deadly coronavirus once again despite having a year to prepare, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Saturday urged the Government to ramp up its strategy to tackle the menace as she pointed out to the overwhelmed medical infrastructure and shortage of vaccines and drugs.

Sonia was speaking during the meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting, which was attended by former party chief Rahul Gandhi, general secretaries and State in-charges of the party.

She reiterated her insistence on lowering the immunisation age to 25 years and above "as also all younger persons with at-risk health disorders like asthma, ailments, diabetes, kidney & liver diseases and other similar ailments."

The Congress came out with a 14-point attack on Government over grave errors in Covid-19 management.

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Narendra Modi after his meeting with chief ministers of Congress-ruled states to take a jibe at the Centre.

Both Sonia and Rahul earlier have written to Modi asking him to expand the country's vaccination drive against Covid-19.

"I have written to the Prime Minister after meeting with them. Our Chief Ministers have spoken to the Prime Minister and written to the concerned minister from time to time pleading for relief. Some of them were left with only a few days of vaccine, no oxygen or ventilators. But there has been thundering silence on the part of the Government. On the contrary some other states have received preferential treatment/relief," she said.

"Instead of listening to the constructive suggestions of the opposition, Union Ministers are pressed into service to attack leaders of opposition for giving those sugges-

tions. This convoluted "me versus you" debate is childish and totally unnecessary," she added.

Sonia said Goods and Services Tax (GST) on all equipment, instruments, medicines and support required to prevent and treat Covid-19 should be made free. "It is a matter of grave concern that life saving drugs like Remdesivir etc. and medical oxygen as also other basic supplements are subjected to GST @ 12%. Even basic equipment like Oxymeters and life saving critical equipment like ventilators are subjected to 20% GST. In the current state of affairs, this is inhuman and untenable," she added.

The Government must provide financial support for the poor in the form of monthly income support and transfer ₹6,000 in the account of every eligible citizen, who have been hit by the partial curbs, especially the closure and lockdowns put in place by authorities, she said in her CWC meeting statement.

"Similarly, with reverse migration of labour which has started, it will be critical to immediately address

cases with the onset of early symptoms so that prompt and effective treatment checks the deterioration of health in the deceased, the statement said.

Large containment zones for achieving community as a strategy were also suggested as an option. During the meeting, Vardhan assured fresh supply

of the lifesaving machines, saying 1,121 ventilators are to be given to Maharashtra, 1,700 to Uttar Pradesh, 1,500 to Jharkhand, 1,600 to Gujarat, 152 to Madhya Pradesh and 230 to Chhattisgarh.

Detailing the number of beneficiaries vaccinated in each targeted segment of the

population, Vardhan also addressed the issue of vaccine shortage.

"The total consumption of vaccines so far (wastage included) has been approximately 12.57 crore doses against the 14.15 crore doses provided by the Centre to the states," he said.

Vardhan said about 1.58 crore doses are still available with the states while another 1.16 crore doses are in pipeline, to be delivered by next week.

Emphasizing that there is no shortage of vaccines, he strongly pushed for further ramping up the vaccination exercise.

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Wearing 2 face masks more effective in beating Covid: Study



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Wearing two face coverings or masks can nearly double the effectiveness of filtering out SARS-CoV-2 sized particles, preventing them from reaching the wearer's nose and mouth and causing Covid-19, as per a recent study.

The findings published in JAMA Internal Medicine also states that the reason for enhanced filtration is not about adding too many layers of cloth but eliminating any gaps or poor-fitting areas of a mask.

The medical procedure masks are designed to have very good filtration potential based on their material, but the way they fit our faces isn't perfect," said Emily Chen, Bennett, PhD, associate professor of infectious diseases at the UNC School of Medicine and lead author of the study.

To test the fitted filtration efficiency (FFE) of a range of masks, UNC researchers worked with James Samet, PhD, and colleagues in the USEPA Human Studies Facility on the campus of UNC-Chapel Hill. There they filled a 10-foot by 10-foot stainless-steel exposure chamber with small salt particle aerosols and had researchers don combinations of masks to test how effective they were at keeping particles out of their breathing space.

A transmission electron microscope image that shows SARS-CoV-2 also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes Covid-19, isolated from a patient in the US, as the Virus particles are shown emerging from the surface of cells cultured in the lab- the spikes on the outer edge of the virus particles give coronaviruses their name, crown-like.

Each individual mask or layered mask combination was fitted with a metal sample port, which was attached to tubing in the exposure chamber that measured the concentration of particles entering the breathing space underneath the researcher's mask. A second tube measured the ambient concentration of particles in the chamber. By measuring particle concentration in the breathing space underneath the mask

Lack of Covid-suitable behaviour, virus mutation cause Covid spurt: AIIMS head



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lack of Covid-appropriate behaviour and mutation of the virus are the two main reasons behind the rapid spread of coronavirus infections in the country, AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria on Saturday said even as he expressed concern over the religious and political activities taking place in a few States, cautioning that they must be done in a restricted manner.

"The cause for the surge... is multifactorial. But two main causes are that people have stopped following Covid-appropriate behaviour during January-February when the vaccination started and cases went down. Also, at this time, the virus mutated and spread more rapidly," Dr Guleria said to a news agency.

"This is a time when a lot of religious activities happen in our country and polls are also underway. We must understand lives are also important. We can do this in a restricted manner so that religious sentiment is not hurt & Covid appropriate behaviour can be followed," said Dr Guleria. He also highlighted that India was witnessing a huge strain in the healthcare system and efforts need to be stepped up to keep increasing our hospital beds/resources for the increasing number of cases.

"We also have to urgently bring down the number of Covid-19 cases, he added.

"This is a time when a lot of religious activities happen in our country and polls are also underway. We must understand that lives are also important. We can do this in a restricted manner so that religious sentiment is not hurt & Covid appropriate behaviour can be followed," he said.

His remarks come in the backdrop of the ongoing Kumbh Mela in Uttarakhand, which has attracted people from different parts of the country in large numbers.

DRDO setting up hosp in Ahmedabad for Covid patients



RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has conveyed to the Gujarat Government that DRDO is establishing a 900-bedded hospital in Ahmedabad to cater to the "alarming surge" in Covid-19 cases there.

The Union Home Ministry has also directed the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) or the Central paramilitary forces to spare 25 doctors, 75 paramedics and ensure that they report by April 21 to man the hospital in Gujarat.

The hospital is being established at the Gujarat University Convention Centre, Ahmedabad to cater to the alarming surge of the Covid cases there," reads an order issued by Additional Director General (Medical) of CAPFs under the Union Home Ministry on Friday.

It has further been decided and conveyed that CAPFs are required to provide 25 medical officers and 75 paramedical nursing staff, reads the order.

It is, therefore, requested that the following number of doctors and paramedical nursing staff be detailed for the purpose please," it said.

The detailed staff should report to the nodal officer (Colonel B Chaubey, DRDO Hospital, Ahmedabad by April

Kumbh Mela: Plea in SC seeks direction to clear mass gathering from Haridwar



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking directions to the Centre and others to clear the "mass gathering" from Haridwar amid a surge in Covid-19 cases across the country and prescribe a safety protocol with respect to people returning from Kumbh Mela.

The plea, which referred to the recent spike in COVID-19 cases, has also sought directions to the Centre and the Uttarakhand government to immediately withdraw the advertisements inviting people to Haridwar for Kumbh Mela.

It said that the Election Commission should be asked to issue directions to the authorities in the states where elections are being held to strictly enforce COVID-19 guidelines during the poll process and take appropriate action against the violators.

The plea, filed by Noida-resident Sanjay Kumar Pathak, said that COVID-19 cases are increasing rapidly across the country and the health infrastructure is "crumbling" in many states.

It claimed that hospitals and crematoriums are running out of space and shortage of essential drugs has been reported from many cities.

The petition said that India is currently witnessing its highest surge in COVID-19

Private vehicle would not come within expression of public place: SC



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A private vehicle does not come within the expression of "public place" as per the explanation given under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, the Supreme Court has said.

A bench comprising justices U U Lalit and K M Joseph made the observation while deciding an appeal challenging an order passed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court affirming their conviction and sentence under the NDPS Act.

Two bags of poppy straw were recovered from the accused while they were sitting in a jeep at a public

place. The trial court, after considering the evidence on record, acquitted accused but convicted the convicted accused Bhoop Singh, Gurdeep Singh and Gurmohinder Singh, under the NDPS Act and sentenced them to rigorous imprisonment for two years.

The accused argued before the top court that the vehicle in question was a private one belonging to accused Gurmohinder Singh and was not a public conveyance, though it was parked on a public road.

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