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SC RULES OUT GAG ON REAL TIME COURT PROCEEDINGS, DISMISSES EC'S PLEA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday said it may be retrograde for it to promote the rule of law and access to justice on one hand, and shield the daily operations of the High Courts and this court from the media in all its forms by gagging the reporting of proceedings, on the other, as it emphasised that there can be no gag on real time court proceedings, which is an extension of freedom of press and principles of an open court. A bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah said: "This court stands as a staunch proponent of the freedom of the media to report court proceedings." The top court dismissed a petition by the Election Commission against the Madras High Court's oral remarks on April 26, which blamed the poll panel for the Covid-19 surge, but was not part of the official judicial record.

The top court observed that reporting on court proceedings is integral to the freedom of speech and expression of those who speak, of those who wish to hear and to be heard and above all, in holding the judiciary accountable. It, however, emphasised: "Language, both on the bench and in judgments, must comport with judicial propriety. Language is an important instrument of a judicial process which is sensitive to constitutional values. Judicial language is a window to a conscience sensitive to constitutional ethos. Bereft of its understated balance, language risks losing its symbolism as a protector of human dignity." The bench noted that with the advent of technology, it is seeing reporting proliferate through social media forums which provide real-time updates to a much wider audience. "This constitutes a virtual extension of the open court. This phenomenon is not a cause of apprehension, but a celebration of our constitutional ethos which bolsters the integrity of the judiciary by focusing attention on its functions." The bench added that several courts across the world, including the US Supreme Court, the UK Supreme Court, and the Court of Appeal, and the International Criminal Court enable public viewership of proceedings through livestreaming or other suitable open access methodology.

However, the top court remarked that the remarks of the High Court were harsh and inappropriate. "The High Court - if indeed it did make the oral observations which have been alluded to - did not seek to attribute culpability for the Covid-19 pandemic in the country to the EC. What instead it would have intended to do was to urge the EC to ensure stricter compliance of Covid-19 related protocols during elections," it noted. The poll panel said the reporting by media of the oral observations dented its reputation. The top court, however, maintained that the citizens have a right to know about what transpires in the course of judicial proceedings. The dialogue in a court indicates the manner in which a judicial proceeding is structured, and oral arguments are postulated on an open exchange of ideas, it said. The top court also appreciated the role played by High Courts during Covid-19 pandemic, however, it emphasised that judges need to "exercise caution in off-the-cuff remarks which may be susceptible to misinterpretation".

New high of 4.12L cases, 3,980 deaths in India

Not only has it been 15 straight day with India recording more than three lakh cases but also the second time after May 1 records saw it breaching the four-lakh margin in a day. Casualties are now closer to the 4,000 mark after nine days straight of over 3,000 deaths everyday.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With 4,12,262 fresh cases and 3,980 deaths in last 24 hours, India on Thursday recorded maximum fresh cases and fatalities in a day, another grim record, taking the total caseload in the country to 2,10,77,410, Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said.

Not only has it been 15 straight day with India recording more than three lakh cases but also the second time after May 1 records saw it breaching the four-lakh margin in a day. Casualties are now closer to the 4,000 mark after nine days straight of over 3,000 deaths everyday. On Wednesday India recorded 3,780 fatalities due to Covid infection. On May 1, India has recorded 4,01,993 cases of Covid in 24 hours.

India now has 35,66,398 active cases and reported 2,30,168 deaths so far.

According to MoHFW, a total of 3,29,113 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours after getting cured.

The health ministry said that a total of 16,25,13,339 people have been vaccinated so far in the country, including 19,55,733, who were administered vaccines in the last 24 hours.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 29,67,75,209 samples have been tested up to Wednesday (May 5) for Covid-19, of these 19,23,131 samples were tested on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, reeling under the second wave of Covid, Karnataka saw new cases breach the 50,000 mark, including 23,106 in Bengaluru.

Similarly, Kerala recorded 41,953 cases in last 24 hours.

Need to prepare for third Covid wave, revamp oxygen formula: SC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Centre to spell out its plan to deal with a possible third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, even as it held that the Centre's formula to distribute oxygen to state governments, particularly the national capital, was "a gross underestimate". A bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah said: "The third surge which is around the corner, according to experts, will affect children. What is the problem in enhancing the supply? It will save from oxygen panic and create a buffer." The top court told the Centre, which claimed though it supplied 730 MT oxygen on Wednesday, that this much oxygen was not required in Delhi. However, it also emphasised need for a speedy vaccination process, and suggested forming a committee of experts for oxygen audit as sought by the Union government.

Earlier, during the hearing, the top court observed that Centre's oxygen formula requires complete revamp. If preparations are made right away, we may be able to tackle the third wave for which scientific planning to vaccinate persons would be needed, it said. Elaborating on the third wave, the top court observed that when a child goes to hospital, the mother and father will also have to go. "That is why vaccination will have to be over for this group of people. We need to plan for this in a scientific way and thus make arrangement," it said. The Centre informed the top court that oxygen supplies may dip to 560 MT in the next two days. But the top court said that supplying 700 MT daily will help Delhi build buffer stock and panic will not be there among people.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, submitted that the government must have a solution thereby, to have a minimum fault-prone formula. "We are not saying that formula is cast in stone. We will revisit the formula," he added. Justice Chandrachud told Mehta that important points were missed by the Centre's committee, which they, as judges, came across. "We need to deal with it. I'm not saying it's the Centre's fault. I am saying that we need to deal with the third surge in a scientifically planned manner," he noted.

The bench added that if we prepare today, we may be able to handle it, and it also urged the government to explore the possibility of utilising services of doctors who have completed MBBS and waiting to enrol for PG courses. Under these pressing times, their services could prove crucial for the third wave, it said. "Today we have 1.5 lakh doctors who have finished medical course but waiting for NEET exam. How do you tap them? 1.5 lakh doctors and 2.5 lakh nurses are sitting at home." The observations were made by the top court during the hearing of an appeal filed by the Centre challenging the show cause notice for contempt issued against its officers by the Delhi High Court for failing to provide 700 MT of oxygen to Delhi as per top court order. Yesterday, the top court had stayed the High Court order of contempt, noting that contempt will not help salvage the oxygen situation.

The top court had asked the Centre to submit a tabulated plan to meet the 700 MT oxygen target by 10.30 am on Thursday. The Centre submitted the plan to the top court. During the hearing, the top court noted that Centre's formula needs to re-examined, as it only takes into account ICU beds and hospital admissions, but not those who need oxygen at home or requirements for ambulance etc.

PM briefed about 12 states having over One lakh active cases

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday chaired a comprehensive review meeting of the Covid-19 situation in the country, during which he was informed about the 12 states which have more than one lakh active cases. The Prime Minister was given a detailed picture of the Covid situation in various states and districts and was informed about the 12 states which have more than one lakh active cases at present. He was also apprised about the districts with high caseloads. Modi was also briefed about the ramping up of healthcare infrastructure by the states. He directed that the states should be provided help and guidance about the leading indicators to augment the healthcare infrastructure. The need to ensure quick and holistic containment measures were also discussed in the meeting. The Prime Minister noted that an advisory has been sent to the states to identify the districts of concern where the test positivity rate is 10 per cent or more and the bed occupancy in the hospitals is over 60 per cent for oxygenated/ICU beds.

The Prime Minister also reviewed the availability of essential medicines. He was briefed about the rapid augmentation in the production of vtal drugs, including Remdesivir. Modi also reviewed the progress made on the vaccination front and the roadmap for scaling up the production of vaccines in the next few months. He was informed that around 17.7 crore vaccines have been supplied to the states. The Prime Minister also reviewed the state-wise trends on vaccine wastage. He was briefed that around 31 per cent of the eligible population over the age of 45 years has been administered at least one dose of the vaccine.

Modi spoke about the need to sensitise the states that the speed of the vaccination drive shouldn't slow down. The citizens should be facilitated for vaccination despite the lockdowns, and the healthcare workers involved in the drive must not be diverted for other duties. Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nirmala Sitharaman, Harsh Vardhan, Piyush Goyal, Mansukh Mandaviya and other ministers and top officials were present at the meeting.

HC directs Bihar govt to submit detailed reports on Covid facilities

Patna: The Patna High Court has directed the Bihar government to submit detailed reports on the available Covid-related facilities in hospitals and quarantine centres. A two-judge bench of Chief Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice S. Kumar issued the direction to the Bihar government following a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by one Shiwani Kaushik. The court has asked the Bihar government to submit reports about the oxygen tankers operational in the state. It has also asked the municipal corporations and the Bihar state pollution control board to submit reports on the disposal of PPE kits and medical waste to prevent the spread of the coronavirus infection. Besides, detailed reports on the availability of beds in hospitals and life saving drugs were also asked to be submitted before the court. The Patna High Court is closely monitoring the coronavirus crisis on a day-to-day basis. Earlier, cases related to corona were heard before the two-judge bench of Justice Chakradhari Sharan Singh and Justice Mohit Kumar Shah.

EX-UNION MINISTER AJIT SINGH PASSES AWAY DUE TO COVID

New Delhi: Former Union Minister and Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) Chief Ajit Singh died of Covid on Thursday morning. He was 82. Singh was undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Gurugram after he tested positive for coronavirus. Ajit Singh was the son of former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh. He served as union minister in several governments. Prime Minister Naendra Modi, former Congress Chief Rahul Gandhi and BJP chief J.P. Nadda expressed condolences on the death of former Union Minister. At 9.10 a.m., his son Jayant Chaudhary tweeted in Hindi, "Chaudhary Sahib nahirahe (Chaudhary Sahib is no more). In a statement the family said, "Chaudhary Ajitsingh ji was diagnosed as Covid positive on the 20th April. He battled his condition till the very end and breathed his last today morning, the 6th of May, 2021". "Throughout his life journey, Chaudhary Sahib was loved and respected by many. He, in turn, cherished this bond with all of you and gave his best consideration and efforts for your welfare," the statement from the family said. Singh's family appealed to people to pay respect from home following Covid protocols.

No need for tests after 10 days of home isolation in mild cases: New guidelines

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Union Health Ministry has issued revised guidelines for home isolation for patients with mild or asymptomatic symptoms. The new revised guidelines said, "Patient under home isolation will stand discharged and end isolation after at least 10 days have passed from onset of symptoms (or from date of sampling for asymptomatic cases) and no fever for 3 days. There is no need for testing after the home isolation period is over." As per the revised guidelines, the patient should be clinically assigned a mild/asymptomatic case by the treating Medical Officer."The asymptomatic cases are laboratory confirmed cases not experiencing any symptoms and having oxygen saturation at room air of more than 94 per cent. Clinically assigned mild cases are patients with upper respiratory tract symptoms (and/or fever) without shortness of breath and having oxygen saturation at room air of more than 94 per cent are recommended for home isolation," the revised guidelines said. It said that a caregiver should be available to provide care on a 24x7 basis and a communication link between the caregiver and hospital is a prerequisite for the entire duration of home isolation.Elderly patients aged more than 60 years and those with co-morbid conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, chronic lung/liver/ kidney disease, cerebro-vascular disease shall only be allowed home isolation after proper evaluation by the treating medical officer. Talking about treatment protocols, the revised guideline said, "Patients must be in communication with a treating physician and promptly report in case of any deterioration. If fever is not controlled with a maximum dose of Tab. Paracetamol 650mg four times a day, consult the treating doctor who may consider advising other drugs like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) (ex: Tab. Naproxen 250 mg twice a day)." It further stated that consider Tab Ivermectin (200 mcg/kg once a day, to be taken empty stomach) for 3 to 5 days. Inhalational Budesonide (given via inhalers with spacer at a dose of 800 mcg twice daily for 5 to 7 days) to be given if symptoms (fever and/or cough) are persistent beyond 5 days of disease onset. "The decision to administer Remdesivir or any other investigational therapy must be taken by a medical professional and administered only in a hospital setting. Do not attempt to procure or administer Remdesivir at home," it said.

As per the guidelines,a patient under home isolation seeks immediate medical attention if serious signs or symptoms develop which could include difficulty in breathing, dip in oxygen saturation, persistent pain pressure in the chest and mental confusion or inability to arouse.

NOW, TOTAL LOCKDOWN IN KERALA FROM SATURDAY TILL MAY 16

Thiruvananthapuram: On expected lines with the Covid positive cases continuing its surge like never before, the office of the Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday announced a total lockdown from Saturday till May 16. Minister for Transport A.K. Saseendran confirmed that the state had no other option but to go for total lockdown given the surge. "This is the only way out and it will only benefit all of us. So all have to abide by it and stay home," said Saseendran. President of the Kerala Government Medical Officers Association, Vijayakrishnan said there is no way out other than for strict lockdown. The IMA State wing also had wanted tough protocols, but an all party meeting held last week however decided to wait and was against declaring a total lockdown. "This lockdown is different from the one which we had the last year as then the number of cases was very less, but the situation now is grave as the numbers are going high by the day. This lockdown will certainly help us bring down the new cases," said Vijayakrishnan. Vijayan on Wednesday expressed grave concern over the spike in cases and said 41,953 people turned Covid positive after 1,63,321 samples were tested in the past 24 hours. The TPR on Wednesday stood at 25.68 per cent and the total number of active positive cases in the state stood at 3,75,658, while 23,106 people were cured taking the total cured to 13,62,363. Since the end of last month as a first step, Saturdays and Sundays were like a partial lockdown and from Tuesday onwards such a condition was extended, when on Thursday the new decision came for a total lockdown.

3 TERRORISTS KILLED, ONE SURRENDERS IN SHOPIAN ENCOUNTER

Army said multiple appeals for surrender were made by the police and family members of the trapped terrorists. "Restraint was exercised to avoid any collateral damage," army said.

SRINAGAR | Agencies

Three terrorists were killed and another surrendered on Thursday morning after an encounter in South Kashmir's Shopian district, officials said.

A group of four new recruits of Al-Badr terror outfit were trapped in Kulgam area amid a cordon and search operation. Acting on a specific input about the militant presence, police and army had started a joint operation on Wednesday night.Police said turning down the surrender offer, the trapped terrorists fired and lobbed grenade on the joint search party."One newly recruited terrorist namely Tausif Ahmad surrendered," police said. "Three terrorists were killed. Search is going on."Army said multiple appeals for surrender were made by the police and family members of the trapped terrorists. "Restraint was exercised to avoid any collateral damage," army said.

Four pistols were recovered from the slain terrorists. The joint operation is over.

You will have to give 700 MT oxygen to Delhi, SC tells Centre

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday told the Centre that the national capital must get at least 700 tonnes of oxygen every day, which has been requested by the Delhi government to meet the demands of the Covid patients.

A bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah told the Centre: "You will have to give 700 MT oxygen to Delhi." It added that if nothing is to be hidden, let it come before the nation how allocation and distribution is done transparently by the Centre.

Defending its stand, the Centre's counsel submitted that the Delhi government is using the institution of the Supreme Court to speak against it. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, submitted before the top court that there has to be an audit because there is systemic failure, but it is not against political leadership or officers.

"The Centre was given mandate twice by the people of this country, and we are very much concerned. We cannot be Delhi-centric," he submitted.

Senior advocate Rahul Mehra, representing the Delhi government, said it was submitted by Mehta that there is no dearth of oxygen in the country. "Just to emphasise on April 28, there was a 113 percent increase in Delhi demand of oxygen from 490 to 700 MT. Now an attempt is being again made to give less than 560 MT which was given after intervention of this court," he submitted.

The SG submitted that there needs to be an audit, which is to see Rs 100 is sent to state and to see how it was spent. "I have been saying there has been a systematic failure. Centre has been given mandate this twice and you need not tell us people are dying," Mehta told Mehra. He added that it is a disaster and disaster is being managed.

"We have to see that there is equitable distribution of resources. I cannot start nit-picking and score debating points. I just don't want to see more people suffering," he said.

e argued that the medical oxygen problem in Delhi is the city's own making. "The problem in Delhi is not because of less supply but serious systemic failure in distribution," he said. Earlier, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said his administration "won't let anyone die" of oxygen shortage if it got the earmarked 700 tonnes of oxygen supply every day from the Centre.

MHA's 4-member team to look into Bengal post-poll violence

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has sent a four-member team led by an additional secretary-level officer to West Bengal to look into incidents of violence after the declaration of Assembly election results.

The MHA has also asked the West Bengal Governor to send a report on the law and order situation in the state.

According to the ministry, the team will review the situation in West Bengal and submit a report on the ground situation.

"The MHA team will submit its report on violence within 48 hours," an official said.

Earlier, advising the state government to take necessary actions to stop the violent incidents without any loss of time, the Ministry had sought a detailed report on the violence.The ministry also issued a reminder to the government in this

regard on Wednesday.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alleged that the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) cadre attacked its workers and set its offices on fire.

On May 4, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also called West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar over the violent post-poll incidents in the state. Modi had expressed serious anguish and concern over the worrisome law and order situation in West Bengal.

"PM called and expressed his serious anguish and concern at alarmingly worrisome law and order situation @MamataOfficial . I share grave concerns @PMOIndia given that violence vandalism, arson, loot and killings continue unabated. Concerned must act in overdrive to restore order," Dhankhar had tweeted after the Prime Minister's call.

mid reports of attack on the party workers, BJP president JP Nadda went to West Bengal and met the workers there who were attacked by the TMC supporters. Mamata Banerjee-led TMC, which regained power in West Bengal for the third consecutive time, has come under severe criticism from the opposition BJP, Left and Congress for the post-poll violence.

The BJP alleged that around one dozen of its workers were killed by the TMC cadre. The BJP has claimed that the incidents of post poll violence are state sponsored.

PM Modi to attend European Council meet on Sat

The India-EU Leaders' Meeting is being hosted by the Prime Minister of Portugal, Antonio Costa. Portugal currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the

Team Absolute | New Delhi

On the invitation of the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will participate in a meeting of the Council on Saturday as a special invitee.

The India-EU Leaders' Meeting is being hosted by the Prime Minister of Portugal, Antonio Costa. Portugal currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

An official statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs said that Prime Minister Modi will participate in the virtual meeting along with the heads of all the 27 EU Member States. The EU+27 have met in this format only once before, with US President Joe Biden in March this year.

The leaders will exchange views on the Covid-19 pandemic and healthcare cooperation; fostering sustainable and inclusive growth; strengthening the India-EU economic partnership as well as regional and global issues of mutual interest.

The India-EU Leaders' Meeting is an unprecedented opportunity for discussion with all the leaders of the EU Member States. It is a significant political milestone and will further build on the momentum witnessed in the relationship since the 15th India-EU Summit in July 2020.

After Swamy, Shiv Sena also wants Gadkari as NDMA chief

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A senior Shiv Sena leader on Thursday demanded that the Centre should take immediate steps to appoint Union Minister Nitin Gadkari as the head of the National Disaster Management Authority as the Covid-19 situation could worsen in the coming weeks.

Sena leader Kishore Tiwari - who is accorded a MoS status - made the plea soon after BJP leader Subramaniam Swamy also raised a similar suggestion.

Among other things, Swamy on Wednesday asked Gadkari to be made in-charge of the Covid-19 management amid the second wave, and the possibility of a third wave looming ahead that could target children, for which strict precautions are needed now.

Tiwari said that given the current trends of the Covid-19 spread in the country - with more cases coming up from north India as compared with the first wave in 2020, besides affecting the younger population nationwide - the country could see as many as 40 lakh new infections daily in the coming weeks.

This is largely due to increased awareness, higher testing and greater levels of precautions taken by the Centre and the states to determine the extent of the spread that is being witnessed in the ongoing second wave of the pandemic since February, he said.

"There is a need for a full-time person empowered to deal with the emerging situation as there will be huge demand for medicines, medical facilities, beds, oxygen, ventilators, etc. as the number of 'active cases' requiring hospitalisation goes up simultaneously," Tiwari contended.

Put pressure on Centre to assist on Covid, Punjab CM asks MPs

Chandigarh | Agencies

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Thursday urged Congress MPs from the state to put pressure the Centre to augment supplies of oxygen, tankers, vaccines and vital medicines to help the state government effectively fight the deadly second wave of the pandemic.

Exhorting the MPs to push the Centre to enhance the state's quota of oxygen and dispatch additional tankers on priority to enable lifting of the full allocated quota of 195 metric tonnes (MT) on a daily basis, he said Punjab was being meted out step-motherly treatment by the Centre in the matter of supplies needed urgently to battle Covid.

The Chief Minister said that BJP-ruled neigbouring Haryana had got a bigger oxygen quota and more tankers than Punjab. Expressing concern over the issue, the MPs, from both Houses of Parliament, promised to utilise their MPLAD funds to set up oxygen generation plants in government hospitals, to complement the state government's

efforts in tackling the exponential rise in patient load in Punjab, where a large number of patients are also coming from neighbouring states for treatment.

Besides shortage of oxygen, tankers vaccines and medicines, the state was facing issues even on the ventilators front, since there was no BEL engineer to install 108 of the 809 ventilators received from the Centre, said the Chief Minister.Amarinder Singh told the MPs that despite the state's repeated pleas and his personal letters to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister for increase in oxygen quota for the state by 50 MT, the state was still struggling with insufficient oxygen supply.

The 195 MT quota allocated was inadequate for the state to meet its present needs, and even that could not be completely lifted due to shortage of tankers, he noted, adding that the state was currently facing a backlog of 120 MT from nearby sources (Dehradun, Panipat, Roorkee). The situation, he said, was grim as the state was currently managing on a 12-hour supply cycle.On the vaccination front, the MPs expressed concern over the low supplies and repeated delays from the Centre.

The Chief Minister said the state government was continuously engaging with both, the Central government and the Serum Institute of India, to expedite availability."The Centre's apathy towards Punjab was also reflected in the fact that many other states had been given more vials of Tocilizumab, whose import and distribution was controlled by it," he said. The state had sought 650 vials but was given only 200 in the initial stages, which were distributed to government and private hospitals, he added.

'In shambles': Delhi's medical infrastructure exposed in pandemic: HC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Thursday said the existing medical infrastructure in the national capital was in shambles, and exposed when put to the test during the pandemic, as it directed the state government to provide facility for medical treatment required by all city residents suffering from Covid-19.

The sharp observations were made by a division bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli while dealing with a plea seeking an ICU bed with ventilator facility for a 52-year-old suffering from Covid. On the aspect of black marketing of oxygen cylinders and concentrators and medicines, the bench remarked that the moral fabric of people has been "dismembered" to a great extent as instead of coming together to fight the pandemic, they are engaging in hoarding and black-marketing. It noted that coronavirus has mutated and is proving to be lethal, and the viral infection is causing inflammation in lungs and onset of pneumonia in lungs. The bench said in most cases, the patient requires supervision in ICU and even a ventilator, adding that it is the obligation of the state to provide sufficient infrastructure to save the lives of people. However, it noted that the existing medical infrastructure in the state had been "completely exposed."

The High Court noted the Article 21 of the Constitution guaranteed the right to life and liberty to all, therefore the petitioner could not be turned away on account of lack of medical infrastructure."We are sworn to protect the fundamental rights of the people. Therefore, we are bound to issue a writ to provide the infrastructure to enable the petitioner to undergo the treatment required to save his life .....,During the hearing, the High Court noted that information on Tocilizumab medicine should be made available on the portal with transparency.

Maharashtra sees Covid deaths cross 73K, cases near 5 mn mark

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra's Covid-19 fatalities dropped on Thursday but remained above the 800 level while the toll crossed the 73,000 mark and the state case tally hovered below the 5 million mark, although the Mumbai situation remained tolerable, health officials said

As against 920 deaths on Wednesday, the state saw fatalities at 853, taking the toll to 73,515. The number of new infections against surpassed the 60,000 level, at 62,194, and the state tally rose to 49,42,736.

The Mumbai position offered hope with the infections remaining below the 5,000 level, at 3,028, as the city's tally increased to 668,085. There were 69 deaths, and the total fatalities in the country's commercial capital shot up to 13,680. For the fifth day, the state death rate remained stable at 1.49 per cent, while the number of active cases stood at 639,075. On the brighter side, 63,842 fully cured patients returned home - higher than the number of fresh infections on Thursday - taking the total to 42,27,940 now, and the recovery rate improved from 85.32 per cent on Wednesday to 85.54 per cent now. The Mumbai circle - comprising Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and Raigad districts - recorded a drop in new cases, at 8,525 now, taking its tally to 14,24,093, and with 124 more deaths, the toll rose to 24,296. Of the fresh fatalities, Nashik led with 117 deaths, while there were 79 in Pune, 69 in Mumbai, 58 in Solapur, 43 in Beed, 41 in Nagpur, 39 in Nanded, 31 in Thane, 26 in Sangli, 25 in Latur, 24 in Osmanabad, 23 in Chandrapur, 22 in Amravati, 21 in Wardha, 20 in Raigad, 19 each in Ahmednagar and Kolhapur, 17 in Satara, 14 each in Hingoli and Washim, 12 each in Dhule and Yavatmal, 11 each in Jalgaon, Jalna, and Akola, 10 each in Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, and Aurangabad, eight each in Nandurbar, Parbhani, and Gondia, six each in Bhandara and Gadchiroli, five in Buldhana, and four in Palghar. Meanwhile, the number of people sent to home isolation decreased stood at 38,26,089, while those shunted to institutional quarantine went down to 29,406.

Mamata accuses BJP of instigating violence in Bengal

Banerjee said, "One minister is trying to provoke people. Some sporadic incidents happen after elections and that is natural, but the BJP-led Central government is trying to exaggerate the whole thing. They are instigating violence."

Kolkata | Agencies

Hours after Union minister and senior BJP leader V. Muraleedharan alleged that his convoy was attacked by Trinamool Congress supporters in West Midnapore district, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday accused the saffron party of instigating violence in Bengal to put undue pressure on the state government on the issue of law and order.

Speaking at a press conference at state secretariat Nabanna, Banerjee said, "One minister is trying to provoke people. Some sporadic incidents happen after elections and that is natural, but the BJP-led Central government is trying to exaggerate the whole thing. They are instigating violence."Banerjee also said that the BJP leadership should control itself and accept the mandate of the people.Announcing a compensation of Rs 2 lakh each for the people who died in post-poll violence in the state, the Chief Minister said, "Altogether 16 people have died. Half of them are from the BJP, one from the ISF and rest from our party. So people from all the parties have died and I am really sorry for them. But what the BJP is doing is not acceptable." Accusing the Centre of putting pressure on the state government, Banerjee said, "I took oath at 11 am on Wednesday and in the evening, they sent a strong letter and the next day they sent a Central team. Why are they in such a hurry? I don't see this kind of prompt reaction when it comes to supply of oxygen, vaccines, emergency medicines or saline. They don't send their teams then. They can't accept their defeat."The Chief Minister also made it clear that controlling the Covid situation is her priority and she would work to keep the people of the state safe. "I don't have the time to fight with the BJP now. The elections are over. I want to make one thing clear that whoever comes to the state needs to get an RT PCR test done. I shall not allow anyone into the state without that," Banerjee said. "Even a Central minister or a businessman coming by a chartered flight will have to come with a fit medical certificate and I shall not allow anybody without that. If the person tests positive, he or she will have to stay in quarantine for 14 days at his own cost. I shall do everything for the poor people but not for those who have money," she added. When asked about people fleeing from Bengal and taking shelter in Assam, the Chief Minister said, "They are teaching the chief ministers to speak against me.

absoluteindia
BHOPAL, FRIDAY, MAY 7, 2021
madhya pradesh 03

"HAVE TO SHUT EVERYTHING TILL MAY 15: CM," MADHYA PRADESH DECLARES LOCKDOWN

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government has announced a complete lockdown in the state till May 15 to bring under control the coronavirus surge that has overwhelmed health infrastructures across the country.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the state can't remain open with an 18 per cent case positivity rate.

"To break the chain of transmission of the coronavirus in the state, we have to completely shut everything till May 15 strict 'Janata Curfew'," he said.

"We can't shut things for too long, but with more than 18% positivity, we can't remain open," he added.

Chouhan has called upon the people of the state and said that Corona is a big threat to humanity. The only way to control the corona is to break the chain of infection. This work is not possible without the cooperation of all. We cannot keep things closed for long; public life also has to be normalised. So, stop everything till the 15th of May. Strictly follow public curfew and break the chain of infection. The marriages and weddings should be postponed. Stop the work of MNREGA in the villages where there is a single corona patient, Chief Minister Shri Chouhan has appealed for everyone's cooperation in this work.

Chouhan said that the government will provide free treatment for corona immediately to the poor, common people and middle-class people as well. For this, the government is starting the scheme from tomorrow itself. The package is being announced under the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. The government will contract with private hospitals. CT scan, tests etc. will also be free of charge. Chouhan said that like districts, Crisis Management Groups should be set up in district panchayats that must include MLAs, SDMs, CEO janpads, social workers etc. Legislators should lead this task. Chouhan said that the government is providing free ration to every poor. Every poor is being given 10 kg of free ration. There is no need to give eligibility slip, thumb impression, Aadhaar number etc. for this. An amount of one thousand rupees is being given to rural and urban street vendors.

On Thursday, Madhya Pradesh reported 12,421 coronavirus cases and 86 fatalities in 24 hours.

A total of 12,965 patients were discharged from hospitals in 24 hours, taking the count of recoveries to 5,42,632, according to official data. The number of active cases in the state is 88,614. Several states, including Delhi, Bihar and Maharashtra, have imposed lockdowns or lockdown-like restrictions to bring down active caseloads brought on by the rapid second wave of infections. Many of these states had been reluctant to impose severe restrictions as they could severely harm their economies. However, acute shortages of hospital beds and life-saving medical supplies because of the rapidly growing caseloads forced them to make the tough choice between lives and livelihoods. India has been constantly reporting more than three lakh daily cases and thousands of deaths every day.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had last month urged states to use complete lockdowns as the last resort. However, with the surge causing mayhem in several parts of the country, many politicians are now demanding a nationwide shutdown.

NEW SCHEME WILL BE IMPLEMENTED FOR FREE TREATMENT OF CORONA: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that a new scheme is being implemented for free treatment of corona patients in the state . Under this, the poor and common people of the state will be able to get free treatment of corona even in the contracted private hospitals.

Chouhan said that a special package will be given by the state government to private hospitals on Ayushman Bharat Yojana for the implementation of the scheme. The government will contract private hospitals for covid treatment. Chouhan was taking a meeting of Corona Control Core Group through video conferencing from his residence today. The meeting was attended by concerned ministers and officials through video conferencing.

Chouhan said that under the scheme, CT scan etc. tests will also be free and medicines, Remedisvir injection, Oxygen etc. will also be available free of cost.

So far, 2 crore 42 lakh cards have been made under the Ayushman Bharat scheme in the state, due to which 88 percent of the population is being covered. All of them will be able to get free treatment of corona in government-contracted hospitals. There are currently 328 private hospitals affiliated to the state under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, out of which 23 thousand 946 beds are available. On May 5, 68 private hospitals of the state have been associated under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme for the next 3 months.

CM TO TRANSFER RS. 1500 CRORES INTO THE ACCOUNTS OF 75 LAKH FARMERS

- Chouhan has started the "Mukhyamantri Kisan Kalyan Yojana" for the farmers of the state and has started giving Rs. 4 thousand per year in two equal instalments to the farmers on behalf of Madhya Pradesh government.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will transfer Rs 1500 crore into the accounts of 75 lakh farmers of the state on Friday May 7 under "Mukhyamantri Kisan Kalyan Yojana." This virtual programme, to be held at 3 pm in the afternoon, will be telecast live through various means of communication. The programme will include members of the Cabinet, public representatives, collectors, commissioners and farmer beneficiaries of the "Mukhyamantri Kisan Kalyan Yojana." Chouhan has started the "Mukhyamantri Kisan Kalyan Yojana" for the farmers of the state and has started giving Rs. 4 thousand per year in two equal instalments to the farmers on behalf of Madhya Pradesh government.

STATE NODAL OFFICER APPOINTED FOR COORDINATION WITH CENTRAL AGENCIES AND FOREIGN IMPORTED MATERIAL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Managing Director, State Industrial Development Corporation, Shri John Kingsley, has been appointed as the Nodal Officer by the State Government for all goods imported from abroad and activities related to prevention and treatment of Covid-19. The State Nodal Officer will coordinate with the concerned departments and agencies of the Central Government to make medicines, equipment and other materials imported from abroad related to Covid-19 available in the state. This decision has been taken by the state government in the recent sequence of the exemption given by the central government in the import rules in respect of Covid-19 relief material. New provisions have been introduced relaxing the import rules for medicines, equipment and other materials coming from abroad required for the prevention and treatment of Covid-19.

The Central Government has also given necessary powers to the State Nodal Officer appointed by the State Government in the import rules for Covid-19 material. The State Nodal Officer will coordinate with the concerned departments, agencies of the Central Government and ensure that the material coming from abroad is received by the state without any delay.

DELHI'S DAILY COVID POSITIVITY RATE REPORTED BELOW 25%

Delhi had reported the highest daily positivity rate - 36.2 per cent - on April 22. This is the fifth consecutive day that the positivity rate has remained below 30 per cent in the national capital.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid the spike in Covid cases in many parts of the country, the national capital got some respite as the daily positivity rate was reported below 25 per cent.

The capital reported 19,133 new Covid cases and 335 deaths in the last 24 hours, according to the Delhi Government's health bulletin on Thursday.

The daily positivity rate was reported at 24.29 per cent, the lowest since April 15. Delhi had reported 20,960 new cases on May 5 with a positivity rate of 26.37 per cent.

Delhi had reported the highest daily positivity rate - 36.2 per cent - on April 22. This is the fifth consecutive day that the positivity rate has remained below 30 per cent in the national capital.

On May 4, the capital had registered a positivity rate of 26.73 per cent, on May 3, the positivity rate was reported at 29.56 per cent, on May 2 it was reported at 28.33 per cent while on May 1, it was 31.6 per cent.

Over 20K people infected with Covid-19 recovered in the last 24 hours, taking the total recoveries so far to 11,64,008.

With another 335 deaths, the death toll in Delhi due to Covid reached 18,398 on Thursday.

A total of 78,780 Covid samples were tested, of which 64,529 were RT-PCR and 14,251 were Rapid Antigen test.Active cases in Delhi rose to 90,629, of which 50,562 are in home isolation.

Delhi receives 730 MT of oxygen, Arvind Kejriwal thanks Modi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to express his gratitude for the supply of medical Oxygen amid rising cases of coronavirus.

"I express my gratitude on behalf of the people of Delhi for the supply of 730 MT of oxygen yesterday (May 5). I request you to supply the same amount of oxygen daily to Delhi," Kejriwal said in a statement.

In his letter, Kejriwal also urged the PM Modi for a daily supply of 700 MT oxygen to the national capital as demand of oxygen in Delhi has been rising for the last 15 days.

"Delhi has a requirement of 700 MT daily. We were continuously requesting the Centre to provide us oxygen. On Wednesday, Delhi received 730 MT oxygen for the first time. I express my gratitude on behalf of the people of Delhi for the supply of 730 MT oxygen. I request you to supply the same amount of oxygen daily to Delhi," he said in the letter.

Earlier in the day, the Centre told the Supreme Court that it has complied with its order and instead of 700 MT oxygen, it ensured a supply of 730 MT to Delhi for treating Covid-19 patients.

The top Court, while staying contempt proceedings initiated by Delhi High Court against central government officials for non-compliance of direction to supply 700 MT of oxygen to Delhi, had sought an answer from the Centre on Thursday morning. The second wave of the Covid-19 in Delhi has put huge pressure on the public health system, with hospitals in several states reeling under a shortage of medical oxygen, beds, medicines and equipment.

Gurugram admin fixes ambulance rates for Covid patients

The deputy commissioner of Gurugram, Yash Garg said that strict action will be taken against those who charge more than the fixed rates from the Covid patients.

GURUGRAM | Agencies

The district administration of Gurugram on Thursday issued an order to regulate the maximum amount of fare that can be charged by ambulances and other vehicles carrying patients/bodies in Gurugram.

Rupees 500 per km will be charged for a distance of up to 3 km and after that it will be Rs 25 per km.

Similarly, Rs 750 would be charged for a distance of 3 km to 7 km and after this Rs 25 per km. For more than 7 km Rs 1,000 would be charged and after this Rs 25 per km.

The deputy commissioner of Gurugram, Yash Garg said that strict action will be taken against those who charge more than the fixed rates from the Covid patients.

The district administration order stated that, it has come to its notice that private ambulance drivers/service providers are charging exorbitantly from the citizens for transporting the patients within/outside the state. Due to this, additional financial burden is being borne by citizens during the crisis of Covid-19, which is a matter of serious concern.

"In compliance of the directions received from the Mission Director, National Health Mission (NHM), Haryana, it is necessary to fix the rate of hiring charges of Ambulance to be used by citizens for transporting the patients in district Gurugram," the order said.

According to the administration officials, the fare charges have been fixed to ease the problems faced by the Covid patients and their families due to unreasonable rates charged by ambulance drivers/owners during these precarious times.

Covid patients in home isolation can book oxygen online: Delhi Govt

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Covid infected patients living in home isolation in Delhi would now find life saving oxygen cylinders through online booking. Amid surge in demand of oxygen cylinders across the national capital, the Delhi Government said on Thursday that it has set up a new system to ensure the smooth availability of cylinders.

In a notification issued by health department of the Delhi government on Thursday, district authorities have been directed to look after the issue of oxygen supply to the people in home isolation.

As per the Delhi Government's notification, those needing oxygen for themselves or looking out for their relatives, must register on the portal - https://delhi.gov.in. One would have to submit these required documents to book oxygen cylinders through online - copies of their Aadhaar, Covid test report, and CT-Scan report if any.

"Each district has been assigned refiller for accessing its lump-sum allocation and the respective district magistrates have been directed to supervise the management of distribution of cylinders," notification said.

The government's move has come after witnessing residents struggling in long queues at various refill centres and depots across the city.

All district magistrates have been told to set aside enough number of officials to sort out the applications and ensure that those eligible receive their e-pass on priority.Those whose applications are approved will receive the e-pass from the district magistrate stating when, where, at what time, and at which depot they would get the oxygen cylinders, the release said. This will, however, depend on the availability of stocks.

The district magistrates have also been asked to appoint only such depots and dealers where availability is hassle-free so that the patients or their relatives are not put into any further trouble for the sake of oxygen.

MAN SHOT DEAD INSIDE PG, POLICE SUSPECT OLD RIVALRY

Gurugram:A 35-year-old man was allegedly shot dead by two armed assailants over an old enmity inside a paying guest (PG) accommodation located in Islampur village in Gurugram on Tuesday night, the police said on Wednesday. The accused duo fired several bullets, four of which hit the man's body and he died on the spot, they said. The two are absconding after leaving their pistols on the crime spot, the same was recovered by the police team.Police investigation has revealed that the victim Sandeep of Sampla village in Rohtak was residing in the PG for the last two months whereas the culprits Manish and Jonti were also residing in the same PG for the last one month.

3 held in Delhi for selling Remdesivir injections in black

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Tightening its noose around black marketeers, the Delhi Police on Thursday arrested two persons, including a nursing staff of Fortis Hospital, for selling Remdesivir injections at higher prices.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Outer North Delhi Rajiv Ranjan Singh said that acting on a tip off, a team of Narcotics Cell, Outer North District arrested two persons, identified as Avichal Arora and Pradeep Bhardwaj, along with 8 injections of Remdesivir.

Arora was apprehended from Shahbad Dairy area and was found to be in possession of two injections without any receipt or prescription.

Singh said that during interrogation, Arora disclosed that he procured the injections from Bhardwaj for Rs 30,000 per injection through one Payal Choudhary for further sale at Rs 40,000.

"At the instance of Arora, Bhardwaj was nabbed from Shalimar Bagh area. A search of Bharadwaj revealed six more injections of the same brand," the DCP said. Singh said that during interrogation, Bhardwaj disclosed that the recovered injections were procured by him from one Amit Pahalwan of Kharkhoda in Haryana.During interrogation, it was also revealed that Bhardwaj and Payal Choudhary (who facilitated the deal) were working in the Covid Ward of Fortis Hospital at Shalimar Bagh in Delhi as nurses. He said that a case has been registered and a notice has been issued to Choudhary for joining the investigation. The official added that efforts are continuing to apprehend Pahalwan, the ultimate source of the recovered injections of Maxvir brand reported to be illegally imported from Ukraine.

Meanwhile, in another incident the police arrested one more person for selling Remdesivir injections at a high price.

Singh said that secret information was developed by Constable Vikas of the Special Staff of Outer North Delhi.

He said that following a tip off, the team of Special Staff arrested Kapil Dev Tiwari for indulging in black-marketing of Remdesivir medicine. Singh said that in this regard, information was received from an informer that a person namely Tiwari was selling Remdesivir injections in the black and he may be contacted through his Whatsapp number provided by the informer."Constable Vikas acted as a decoy customer and asked the accused for a supply of Remdesivir injections, who responded and agreed to provide two Remdesivir injections for Rs 50,000 each. "

Fire breaks out in Super Mart building, no casualties reported

Due to the spread of the flames, some ACs installed in the building were also damaged. The exact cost of damage is yet to be ascertained, officials said. The cause of the fire is not known yet.

GURUGRAM | Agencies

A fire broke out in the Super Mart building's sixth floor at DLF Phase-4 in Gurugram at around 4 p.m. on Thursday. No casualties have been reported in the incident, said a fire officer.

The fire was brought under control within an hour, officials said.A call was received by the fire department at around 4.05 p.m. following which dozens of fire tenders were rushed to the spot to douse the flames at the 10-storeyed building.

Fire tenders from Sector-29, Udyog Vihar, Bhim Nagar, Manesar and DLF were pressed into service after the incident was reported.

A fire department official said that no employees were present inside the office when the fire broke out because of the ongoing lockdown in Gurugram.

Furnitures, computers and other electronic equipment were gutted inside the offices of property dealers in the fire.

Due to the spread of the flames, some ACs installed in the building were also damaged. The exact cost of damage is yet to be ascertained, officials said.The cause of the fire is not known yet.

"The reason for the fire is yet to be ascertained. Luckily, no one was injured in the incident. We suspect that short-circuit could be the cause of the incident but it will be clear after a detailed investigation is conducted," Pankaj Parashar, a senior fire officer, told IANS.

Over 67K vaccinated in Delhi in a day: Govt

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Over 67,000 people received vaccination against Covid-19 in the national capital on Wednesday, the Delhi government said here on Thursday. As per the data shared by the Delhi Government, 47,086 people in the age group of 18-44 got vaccinated till 9.30 p.m. on Wednesday.

A total of 5,230 people in the 45-59 age group were vaccinated, while 1,629 people, aged above 60, received the first dose of vaccine.

As many as 1,571 frontline workers and 591 healthcare workers were also given the first jab on Wednesday.

Over 11,200 people received the second dose of the vaccine during the same period, the data showed.

During an inspection visit to Radha Soami Satsang Beas in Rajendra Nagar (a newly set up mass vaccination centre) on Wednesday, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal stated that the state government wants to vaccinate every person in Delhi within three months if the Centre provides adequate vaccines to it.

"The Delhi government is also working on increasing the number of oxygen beds across Delhi. We are arranging more and more oxygen concentrators and oxygen cylinders to hospital beds. I am very hopeful that in the coming days we will be able to increase the number of beds in Delhi significantly," Kejriwal said.

Three held in Gurugram for smuggling oxygen cylinder

GURUGRAM | Agencies

A joint team of the district drug controller department and the Gurugram police has arrested three men from Gurugram's Aklimpur village for allegedly smuggling oxygen cylinders to sell them in black market at higher rates in Gurugram, the police said on Wednesday.

260 oxygen cylinders, (250 small cylinders and 10 big cylinders) and a canter used for smuggling have been recovered from the trio. The arrested men have been identified as Vikas Kumar (32), a resident of Karnal at present residing in Gurugram's Unitech Sector-70, Shiv Kumar (33) from Karnal and Prabhat Kumar (31) from Thane, West Maharashtra.Subhash Boken, spokesperson of the Gurugram police said on Tuesday that they received a tip-off about the consignment that the culprits would come Gurugram to sell oxygen cylinders at a high rate. "On this, a trap was laid near the Aklimpur village in Gurugram and a suspicious canter bearing Maharashtra number was intercepted on searching the canter, we recovered 260 oxygen cylinders," Boken said.

The accused disclosed that the bigger oxygen cylinders were being sold at Rs 50,000 while the smaller ones for Rs 35,000 to those in need.

Further interrogation revealed that the trio had purchased these cylinders from a Maharashtra-based vendor.

"The culprits used to sell these cylinders whenever their demand increased. The accused were produced before a local court on Tuesday which sent them to a three days police remand," the officer said.

All the three were booked for cheating and under relevant sections of The Essential Commodities Act and Epidemic Diseases Act at the Badshahpur police station in Gurugram.

Tokens to be issued in Gurugram for oxygen distribution

Under this initiative, three dedicated counters have been set up at the MCG's offices located in Sector 34, Sector 42 and old Municipal corporation office, near the Civil Hospital, Gurugram.

GURUGRAM | Agencies

To streamline the liquid medical oxygen distribution and curb black marketing, the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) and the district administration have started the token system for Covid patients.

Under this initiative, three dedicated counters have been set up at the MCG's offices located in Sector 34, Sector 42 and old Municipal corporation office, near the Civil Hospital, Gurugram.

"Tokens will be given for Liquid Medical Oxygen from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on these counters. A total of 30 tokens will be released every day from each counter, 90 tokens will be issued daily from all three dedicated counters. The validity of a token will be 2 days and after receiving the token, the attendant can receive liquid medical oxygen from the Star Gas, located at plot number 324, Sector 7, Manesar," MCG spokesperson Satbir Rohilla said.Besides, it has been made mandatory to collect the patient's RT-PCR report, Aadhar card, address proof and doctor's report to avail this facility.

"With this initiative, people will not face any problem and they will get oxygen for patients without any hassle. This facility has been started by the MCG and the district administration under an instruction issued by Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar," Rohilla said.

MAHARASHTRA HAS 82K-PLUS SERIOUS COVID-19 PATIENTS

Only five districts out of 36 in the state including Pune, Nagpur, Mumbai, Nashik and Thane account for 50 per cent of the total 656,870 'active cases', as per the periodical data compiled till May 3.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra currently has around 82,098 Covid-19 patients who are serious and under treatment in various hospitals across the state, according to official data released here on Thursday.

Of these 82,098, the maximum, 25,265 are in intensive care units, including 17,077 on oxygen and 8,288 on ventilators.

Another 56,733 Covid patients are also taking treatment on oxygen, but outside ICUs across the state.

The serious patients (82,098) comprise 12.50 per cent of the 656,870 'active cases' currently in the state with a case doubling rate of 54.22 days.

Among these 'active cases', 230,955 (35.02 per cent) are in hospitals comprising 148,857 who are either asymptomatic or those with mild symptoms.

Only five districts out of 36 in the state -- Pune, Nagpur, Mumbai, Nashik and Thane -- account for 50 per cent of the total 656,870 'active cases', as per the periodical data compiled till May 3.The state's current fatality rate is 1.49 per cent, while the recovery rate stands at 85.32 per cent of the 48,80,542 total cases notched till date, besides a death toll of 72,662.

Mumbai ATS nabs 2, seizes Uranium worth over Rs 21cr

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a sensational developing during lockdown, the Mumbai Anti Terrorist Squad (Nagpada Unit) has seized 7.10 kgs of radioactive Natural Uranium and arrested two persons, an official said here on Thursday.

The seized material was sent to the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre which has said in its report that it was 'Natural Uranium' which is highly radioactive and very dangerous to human life.

Following the seizure of the Natural Uranium, estimated to be worth around Rs. 21.30 crore, the ATS has registered an offence against the accused duo under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and other laws, and further investigations are underway.

According to the ATS, on February 14, Police Inspector Santosh Bhalekar received a tip-off that one person of Thane, 27-year old Jigar Jayesh Pandya was reportedly planning to make a sale deal of some pieces of illegally acquired Uranium.

After verifying the tip, Bhalekar and other ATS sleuths laid a trap and succeeded in apprehending Pandya.

Following his interrogation, Pandya revealed that the Uranium pieces were given to him by one Abu Tahir Afzal Choudhary, 31.

Choudhary hails from the Mankhurd suburb in north-east Mumbai, barely 3 km away from the BARC's Anushakti Nagar in Trombay.

Immediately, the ATS team comprising Bhalerao, API Prashant Sawant and others rushed to Mankhurd from where they apprehended Choudhary, and the radioactive material was seized under a panchnama.

After receiving the BARC analysis report, and a complaint lodged by the Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research, Nagpur, the Mumbai ATS Nagpada Unit on May 5 filed a first information report invoking the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and other laws.

The accused Pandya and Choudhary were produced before a Magistrate Court and remanded to ATS custody till May 12.

The ATS is attempting to verify how and from where Choudhary managed o lay his hands on such a large quantity of the dangerous and radioactive substance like Natural Uranium, to whom Pandya was planning to sell it, their other associates in the conspiracy and related aspects.

Heavy security deployment as protests spread across Maharashtra

While no major law and order problems were reported, agitations were held at several places, with people being detained and let off after being issued notices.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Anticipating law and order disturbances in Maharashtra over the Supreme Court quashing Maratha reservation, police presence was stepped up on Wednesday, with an additional 1,500 State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) personnel being deployed at sensitive points. While no major law and order problems were reported, agitations were held at several places, with people being detained and let off after being issued notices. At least two FIRs - once each at Solapur and Pune - were registered, said the police."One FIR was against a group of agitators who burnt a tyre on the main road, which falls under the Pune rural police's jurisdiction. The protestors set ablaze a tyre that they brought with them. A police team reached the spot and detained the protesters," said a senior officer. The second FIR was registered by the Solapur rural police after a group of protesters gathered to tonsure their heads. "They had assembled in large numbers without following lockdown guidelines, and a case was registered," said an IPS officer. A senior officer said that major protests were reported from Pandharpur, Aurangabad city and rural areas, Jalna, Tuljapur, Beed, Solapur and Pune.

"A top-level meeting was held on Tuesday between senior police officers and home department officials where a plan was charted out for security preparations ahead of the big day in SC," a senior officer said.

Maharashtra preparing for third wave of Covid-19: Uddhav Thackeray

Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray said his government has decided to increase oxygen production of the state by 3,000 metric tonnes from 1,200 metric tonnes at the moment under the 'Mission Oxygen' initiative.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Having witnessed the brunt of the second wave of coronavirus disease (Covid-19) Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday said that the third wave is imminent and urged the people to be careful. The chief minister said that the state government has started 'Mission Oxygen' to avoid any scarcity.

"We have started the preparations for the third wave. We have directed to increase oxygen production by 3,000 metric tonnes from the current 1,200 metric tonnes," Thackeray told media persons.

The chief minister also noted that the Covid-19 cases in some districts have started declining while in some other districts they are still witnessing a rise. On the preparations by the state to combat the inevitable third wave Thackeray said the task force members have started speaking with family doctors to tell them what to do if a Covid-19 positive patient comes and what line of treatment to follow etc.

The health ministry also warned about the predestined third wave of Covid-19, considering the high level of virus circulation. While the time when the third phase of the deadly virus has not been determined, the government urged everyone to be prepared. "Phase 3 is inevitable, given the high level of circulating virus. Though not clear on what time scale Phase 3 will occur. We should be prepared for new waves; previous infections/vaccines will cause pressure on the virus for changes to escape; need scientific solutions, "principal advisor to the government K Vijay Raghavan said during a press briefing on Wednesday.

India is currently reeling under the weight of the second wave of Covid-19 that has overwhelmed the underprepared healthcare infrastructure of the country.Maharashtra is the major contributor to the number of new infections as well as to the active caseload of the country. The state reported over 57,000 new Covid-19 infections and 920 deaths in the last 24 hours, data updated by the state health department on Wednesday showed.

Maharashtra breaches 900-death mark for second time

- The toll from the pandemic has now reached 72,662 in the state. Mumbai has recorded the most fatalities (13,511) followed by Pune (9,863)

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra on Wednesday breached the 900-death mark for the second time since the Covid-19 outbreak as it recorded 57,640 cases and 920 fatalities. The highest fatalities (985) were reported on April 28. The toll from the pandemic has now reached 72,662 in the state. Mumbai has recorded the most fatalities (13,511) followed by Pune (9,863).

The state has 6,41,596 active cases with the highest in Pune (1,14,254), followed by Nagpur (58,944).

Tatyarao Lahane, director, directorate of medical education and research, said the deaths will stabilise in the coming days. "Most of these patients have been ill for over two weeks and the treatment was delayed. In addition, many of them had already been suffering from medical complications and the virus made it worse," said Lahane. "...the death rate will come down in the coming days as the new cases are coming down."Jeevan Jain, a physician, said the current strain of Covid-19 is highly infective and lethal. "In the second wave, we are seeing the new variant of Covid-19 directly affecting the lungs, which was not the case last year. This is proving to be fatal. Last year, the fever hardly exceeded 100-degree Fahrenheit but this time it is not coming down for a long time. The range of fever now goes up to 103-104-degree Fahrenheit," said Jain.

Maharashtra emerged as the leader in the COVID-19 vaccination drive

Not the only highest number of total COVID-19 doses administered but also the highest number of fully protected persons in the country, those vaccinated with second doses, 28.66 lakhs," said Dr Pradeep Vyas, Principal Secretary of Public Health Department.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra on Thursday emerged as the leader in the COVID-19 vaccination drive and also became the first state to cross 1.67 crore inoculation mark.

"Not the only highest number of total COVID-19 doses administered but also the highest number of fully protected persons in the country, those vaccinated with second doses, 28.66 lakhs," said Dr Pradeep Vyas, Principal Secretary of Public Health Department. According to data released by the government, the cumulative COVID-19 vaccination in Maharashtra as of 7 am on May 6 is 1,67,81,719.The state has administered the second dose of vaccine to 28,66,631 people, thereby reaching the cumulative vaccination figure of 1,67,81,719.

Maharashtra tops the states with a total of 1,67,81,719 inoculations followed by Rajasthan at 1,35,97,367 crore and Uttar Pradesh at 1,31,75,325 crore.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra reported 920 deaths due to COVID-19, taking the toll to 72,662, while 57,640 new cases pushed the overall infection count to 48,80,542 on Wednesday.

As many as 57,006 patients were discharged from hospitals in the last 24 hours, raising the number of recovered cases to 41,64,098. The state now has 6,41,569 active cases. Maharashtra's COVID-19 recovery rate currently stood at 85.32 per cent, while the fatality rate was 1.49 per cent.

RT-PCR swab testing kits packed without safety protocols in Ulhasnagar slum, case filed

Women and children in the slum of Ulhasnagar in Maharashtra's Thane district were found packing sticks used for swab tests or RT-PCR tests without following Covid-19 protocols.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Women and children in the slum of Ulhasnagar in Maharashtra's Thane district were found packing sticks used for swab tests or RT-PCR tests without following Covid-19 protocols.
According to reports, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Ulhasnagar Municipal Corporation (UMC) officials along with local police raided several houses in the Khemani slum.

The officials discovered that women and children involved in the exercise were not wearing face masks and hand gloves. The kits were being packed in an unhygienic environment, thus putting the lives of many at risk. The video of the incident has now gone viral in no time."We get Rs 20 for packing 1000 sticks. We pack roughly 5,000 such sticks and receive Rs 100 per day," a woman can be heard as saying in the video when asked how much money they make daily. According to the UMC, several families in the slum of Ulhasnagar are making these kits since May last year. The UMC said that the packed kits having 'Bio-Swab' written on them were not used in corporation hospitals. The corporation has directed the private hospitals, chemists not to procure such kits.

Meanwhile, an FIR has been filed against contractor Mahesh Keswani.

BMC-hospital is Covid-hit moms' cradle for safe delivery

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Marking a significant achievement, the civic-run BYL Nair Charitable Hospital has just completed its 1025th safe delivery for a woman infected by Covid-19 - and may walk into record books, excited officials said.

The first such delivery of an infant by a Covid-19 positive mother took place on April 14, 2020 at the height of the pandemic at the hospital run by BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

"Of around 1,025 safe deliveries so far, there was one set of triplets, 19 twins and the remaining 984 were single bundles of joy whose first cries brought cheers to the lives of their anxious parents," the hospital Dean & Director Dr Ramesh Bharmal told IANS.

The achievement comes hand-in-hand with the Supreme Court's observations this week patting the BMC's handling of the Covid-19 situation and asking other states like Delhi to follow the 'Mumbai model'.

The BMC attributes the success of Nair Hospital to the sheer dedication of the medical, para-medical and support teams at the hospital under the guidance of BMC Commissioner I.S. Chahal, Additional Municipal Commissioner Suresh Kakani, Dr Ramesh Bharmal, and other top officers."They slogged 6 hours consecutively without even drinking water as they wore PPE kits, did all their duties tirelessly practically 24X7, spending days in hospital without going home, and dedicated themselves without complaints to the care of the Covid-19 positive pregnant women and their special needs," said Dr Bharmal.

"Covid infection is not congenital. Even if the mother is infected, the unborn baby is not infected but can become positive after coming in contact with the mom after birth," explained Dr Sushma Malik, head of the departments of neonatal and pediatrics care.

As per protocols, all newborns of Covid-infected women are also tested and though some infants born here during the year were found positive, they were asymptomatic and later discharged after they tested negative, she added.

Dr Bharmal said that while a majority, or over 60 per cent of the deliveries were 'normal', the rest were through the Cesarian Section, and there was not a single fatality among the mothers or the infants in the first Covid-wave.

"However, this time, the second wave of Covid is affecting pregnant women, babies and children So far in the past nearly 3 months, we have recorded around a dozen unfortunate deaths" he added.

The hospital had to take special care to ensure hygiene in the two main departments - the obstetrics and the neonatal intensive care units to ensure they were sparkling clean with regular efforts by the ward-boys and other conservancy staffers.Another problem that confronted the doctors was breastfeeding the newborn infants to ensure their proper nutrition but without getting infected from the mom.

Maharashtra DGP seeks cooperation of citizens to enforce COVID-19 curbs

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra in-charge DGP Sanjay Pandey on Wednesday sought cooperation from citizens to strictly implement lockdown-like curbs enforced to contain the spread of the COVID-19 infection in the state.

Pandey interacted with citizens through his official Twitter account @DGPMaharashtra with hashtag #AskDGPMaharashtra and replied to their questions.

Speaking about people who don't follow rules during the pandemic, the top cop of the state said, "Police across the state is trying to implement the lockdown guidelines and also creating awareness amongst citizens regularly. However, none of the efforts are complete without cooperation of citizens. We request everyone to cooperate in interest of everyone." Asked by one user about how he gets motivation to stick to 'morality' and choose unbiased investigation in a situation in which he may have to face political pressure for solving a particular case, ' the DGP replied, "The only side I prefer to take is the right side of law." The senior IPS officer was asked by the state government to inquire into the corruption charges levelled by a police inspector against former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh. Pandey then wrote a letter to the government and expressed his inability to conduct the probe Another user asked his about the frauds related to Remdesivir and Tocilizumab injections, used in treatment of COVID-19, which people are struggling to get. To this, Pandey said, "We request citizens to be extremely careful on such transactions. Never share anything sensitive or confidential without verifying facts". Replying to a question about rampant black marketing of Remdesivir, Pandey said action is being taken against those engaged in illegal sale of the anti-COVID-19 drug. An user requested the DGP to cancel the e-pass system for travelling during the pandemic, to which he said, "Not following necessary precautions will only add to the existing problem.

Kumud Mishra:

'Itwaar' is about beating hardships with a positive mind

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Kumud Mishra says his new short film "Itwaar" is apt for today's times. The actor says the film is about how to overcome hardships and stay positive.

"The core message of Itwaar is that a positive frame of mind can enable you to beat the hardships of life. It is very relevant today. I was very sure that the film would receive a lot of love from the audience," says Mishra, who had tested positive for Covid a while back.

The actor adds that he is satisfied if the film has lightened the mood of even one person and helped them feel better.

"Given the pandemic, if our film could make people smile, it would achieve its objective. The idea behind Itwaar is that a positive mind can conquer any hurdle. Let's hope to keep the same positivity and beat this deadly virus soon," he says.

The film, hich released digitally, also features a song by singer Udit Narayan titled "Man bhalatoh sab bhala".

"Itwaar" received international acclaim at the River To River 18th Florence Indian Film Festival in Italy. The film also received the Special Jury Award at 16th Kalpanirjhar International Short Fiction Film Festival 2018 and Filmingo International Short Film Festival 2018. It was also an official selection at DadasahebPhalke International Film Festival 2019 and 9th Jagran Film Festival 2018.

Written and directed by Rahul Srivastava, "Itwaar" also stars HarshitSidhwani and Lubna Salim in key roles. The film is currently streaming on Disney+ Hotstar.

SONU NIGAM: THERE'S GOING TO BE SEVERE BLOOD CRISIS IN INDIA, SO DONATE BLOOD

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Singer Sonu Nigam urged every non-vaccinated person in India to step forward and donate blood because he says there is will be a severe blood crisis amid the second wave of Covid-19.

"There is going to be a severe crisis in blood-banks. People who haven't been vaccinated till now needs to step forward and donate blood. The situation, which could turn serious in the coming time, can easily be controlled with blood donation," said Sonu.

The singer, who donated blood and oxygen canisters at a blood donation camp in Juhu, urged all not to wait till the time the crisis is on us.

"Rather than waiting for the crisis to arrive and then start looking for a solution, it is a lot easier to foresee the problems and start looking for solutions right away. That's what I am doing here, trying to make arrangements for the crisis," added Sonu.

Sonu inaugurated the blood donation camp and also donated 250 oxygen canisters for BMC and ambulances. He added, "There are 250 oxygen canisters here, of different capacities. Patients who are being transported in ambulances, from home to hospital, it's for them. We're making these canisters available for BMC and ambulances."

Sonu had tested Covid positive earlier and he has not taken the vaccine yet.

RECIPES FOR A SUMPTUOUS IFTAR EVENING

Team Absolute | New Delhi

While many spend the holy month Ramadan fasting, part of the rituals include breaking the daily fast with an evening meal. The Park Hotels share traditional recipes you can try your hand at for a mouth watering Iftar.

Shish Taouk, Middle Eastern Chicken Kebab by Chef AshutoshNerlekar, Executive Chef, THE Park Chennai

Ingredients: Chicken leg, Garlic, Hung curd, Olive oil, Green chilli, Lemon, Cumin powder, Homemade ras el hanout, Capsicum - yellow and red, Onion, Garlic aioli, Pita bread dough, Sumac powder.

Ras el Hanout spice powder

Ingredients: Cumin whole, Coriander, Clove, Cinnamon, Black pepper, Chilli powder, Paprika powder, Turmeric powder, Salt To Taste

Garlic aioli

Ingredients: Egg whites, Oil, Crushed garlic cloves, Vinegar, White pepper 10 Gms, Salt To Taste

Method: Cut the chicken leg in dices. Reserve it aside.

Prepare the marinade with hung curd, olive oil, lemon juice, chopped green chilli, lemon, cumin powder, homemade ras el hanout spice. Mix the marinade with the chicken.

Skewer the chicken onto the bamboo skewers with 02 pieces of chicken and coloured peppers and onion. Repeat the step to make 3 skewers.

Sear the chicken skewers on a pan and transfer them to a plate for them to be cooked in the oven. Finish with olive oil drizzle and dash of sumac powder.

For the garlic aioli - emulsify the oil into egg white using an electric beater, just like while making mayonnaise. This needs to be done slowly or the mixture could curdle. Add chopped garlic, vinegar, white pepper and salt. Serve hot with pita bread and garlic aioli.

SUNNY LEONE ASKS FANS WHAT THEY LIKE TO EAT!

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Sunny Leone took to Instagram on Thursday to treat her fans to a dance video. In the video, the actress is seen dancing to the song "Temperature" by Sean Paul.

The video starts with the text: "When mom makes paneer and not tinde."

Dressed in a yellow crop top and jeans, Sunny let her hair open in the clip. She also asked her fans what their favourite food was.

"When life gives you Paneer instead of Tinde!! What's your favorite food?" she wrote with the video that has 1.6 lakh likes in less than an hour.

Sunny has also been encouraging her fans to follow Covid protocols and to get themselves vaccinated, through her posts on social media.

She recently teamed up with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to feed 10,000 migrant workers in Delhi.

Jay Bhanushali matches steps with daughter Tara in new video

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Jay Bhanushali posted a fun video with his daughter Tara on social media on Wednesday. The two can be seen dancing in the video, which ends with Tara kissing Jay on the cheek.

While Jay is dressed casually in a T-shirt and shorts, Tara wore an off-shoulder dress with a matching hairband.

"Lots of love and positivity from our family #reelsinstagram #reelkarofeelkaro #reels #reelitfeelit #reel #reelsindia #reelsvideo #babyofinstagram," Jay wrote.

His wife, actress MahhiVij, was quick to comment. She wrote: "Mine" with a heart emoji". Jay also replied with a heart emoji.

His peers from the industry also reacted to the video. Actress Yuvika Chaudhary wrote: "So cute" with a heart emoji, while actress Jaswir Kaur posted: "Aaaawwww."

Both Jay and Mahhi often post videos and pictures with Tara for their fans on ocial media. A video of Tara saying goodbye to her mom at the airport went iral a while back.

Mahhi and Jay tied the knot in 2010 and Tara was born on August 21, 2019. hey had also adopted their caretaker's kids, Khushi and Rajveer, in 2017.

Sunny Leone, PETA India to donate 10,000 meals to Delhi migrant workers

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Sunny Leone has joined hands with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to feed 10,000 migrant workers in the city. We are facing a crisis, but together with compassion and solidarity we will come out ahead. I'm delighted to join hands with PETA India again -- this time to get protein-packed vegan meals to thousands in need," Sunny said.

The meals consist of daal and rice or 'khichdi' and often fruit.

Sunny was named PETA India's Person of the Year in 2016 and previously starred in the organisation's campaigns in support of vegan fashion, vegetarian eating, and dog and cat adoption and sterilisation. PETA and Sunny will donate food through Uday Foundation.

Keep your kids summer-safe

Team Absolute | New Delhi

It's the beginning of May, and temperatures are already soaring close to 40 degrees Celsius. The sun is scorching and humidity is hitting us in the face like a sauna.

Schools are off and while in addition to lockdowns, many children are home because of summer vacations and online classes, but parents still need to ensure protection of little ones from ill effects of the season. Follow these simple tips by Manoj Jain, Director, Scram.in to navigate through these sticky weeks like a pro and keep your children safe and comfortable this summer.

Stick to shade for the tiny tots

Keep newborns, especially those under six months, out of direct and indirect sunlight. Young infants have not developed sweat glands, meaning they have no natural way off cooling off. Add in the fact children's body temperatures can rise up to five times faster than adults, and babies have no way to tell you they're uncomfortable! The perfect way to prevent heatstroke is by keeping them in the shade - under a tree or an umbrella - even when outdoors.

Make hats mandatory

A lightweight wide brimmed hat is perfect to keep your little ones cooler when they're playing outdoors. It not only blocks out the brightness, they protect otherwise exposed hair, eyes, face, ears and neck from sun damage and harmful UV rays.

Cover up in comfort clothing

Stick to natural cotton outfits for your precocious tots this season. They'll likely be sweating buckets while running around causing mayhem, and loose, light clothing not only allows their skin to breathe, but also absorbs moisture from the skin, preventing pesky itchy heat rashes.

Hydrate! Hydrate! Hydrate!

Keep their water bottles filled and handy at all times. Not only does drinking water often replenish lost fluids due to excessive sweating, taking a few gulps every now and then makes them feel instantly cooler even from the inside.

Slather on the SPF

Probably the most important summer tip -- more so for Indians baking under the tropical sun. Apply sunscreen early, and often, especially if the children spend time outdoors. Sunscreen protects your little ones' delicate skin from the harmful (and sometimes cancer-causing) ultra-violet rays of the sun. Go for a brand that offers a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 30, contains zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, has broad spectrum coverage (against UVA and UVB rays), and is water-resistant. Make sure to lotion them up at least 30 minutes before sun exposure, and don't forget to top it up every few hours, as a sunscreen's SPF is only fully effective for up to two hours after you put it on.

Keep a close eye

Lastly, remember to always look out for signs of heat illness. No matter our best efforts, sometimes life and kids can get the better of us. So pay attention to these tell-tale warnings that can signal an oncoming problem. Signs of heat exhaustion in children may include: elevated body temperature; cool, clammy skin; goose bumps; fainting, dizziness or weakness; headache; increased sweating; increased thirst; irritability; muscle cramps; and nausea and/or vomiting.

If your notice any of the above, it's best to immediately bring your child into the shade, cool them off with wet towels or sponges, and encourage them to drink fluids with electrolytes. Don't hesitate to call your doctor when in doubt!

ELLIE GOULDING AND HUSBAND CASPAR NAMED THEIR SON 'ARTHUR'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Ellie Goulding and Caspar Jopling have named their son Arthur Ever Winter Jopling.

The announcement - under the 34-year-old singer's real name, Elena - was made in The Times' Births, Deaths and Marriages section on Thursday, and also confirmed their newborn was born on 29 April, exactly a week prior to the reveal.

The paper's announcement section opens with a bible quote, which Caspar, 29, quoted in an Instagram post penning: 'It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. Ecclesiastes 7.5'.

He added on the end: '[[ps hi A.E.W.J.]]', in a nod to their son's initials. The announcement is the first time the couple have revealed Arthur's gender.

Over the weekend, Caspar announced that Ellie had given birth just weeks after surprising fans with the news that she was eight months pregnant in Vogue.

The new dad gleefully confirmed Ellie had welcomed their son on his Instagram story as he shared a picture of a bunch of flowers and wrote: 'Mum and baby both healthy and happy :) Extremely grateful'.

Ellie and Caspar married in August 2019 at York Minster, and first learned they were expecting while celebrating their one-year anniversary last year.

The artist revealed late last month that she was embracing her pregnancy figure.

Jacqueline Jossa is launching first beauty range

Los Angeles | Agencies

Jacqueline Jossa is launching her first beauty range, which looks set to include hair oils, body scrubs and bathing lotions.

The business savvy 28-year-old has trademarked the name NIXIE for her latest venture and is set to get working on the range, after her application was approved last month.

She will be able to sell up to 17 different hair, facial and body products under the brand, which is part of her company Ella Oil Ventures Limited.

Jacqueline set up Ella Oil last year, which is reported on Companies House as 'retail sale via mail order houses or via internet'.

She also has her performing arts business EMJ Entertainments.

The mum-of-two rose to fame playing Lauren Branning in EastEnders before being crowned Jungle Queen in I'm A Celebrity 2019.

Since then she has worked on a number of different projects and made some serious money.

She has a very lucrative clothing range with In The Style and works as an influencer, being paid for posts online.

She was reportedly paid around £500,000 for her range and is thought tohave raked in even more after it was the company's biggest launch ever.

Jacqueline and her husband Dan Osborne recently moved into a £1.2 million six-bed home, which they are renovating.

Thomas Mann to star with Emma Roberts in 'About Fate'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Thomas Mann has joined the cast of the romantic comedy "About Fate", co-starring Emma Roberts. The two stars were earlier seen in the 2010 comedy drama, "It's Kind Of A Funny Story".

"About Fate" is about two people falling in love but are unable to understand the true meaning of love. However, as fate would have it, they are put in each other's lives on a stormy New Year's Eve. The film has been directed by Marius Weisberg and has been penned by Tiffany Paulsen.

The shoot will begin in Boston next month, according to contactmusic.com.

Thomas has been part of films such as "Project X" and "Kong: Skull Island". He will be seen next in "The Chariot" as well as horror film "Halloween: Kills".

Emma will be seen in the film "Robot", directed by Anthony Hines.

CHANNING TATUM: WOULDN'T LOOK LIKE THIS UNLESS I HAD TO BE NAKED IN MY MOVIES

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Channing Tatum shared he has a good physique thanks to his job profile, as acting often requires him to take his clothes off.

"As someone who works out for a job, I promise you I would not look like this unless I had to be naked in most of my movies mostly. At some point I have to get better at acting so I don't have to be naked in all of them," Tatum said on the "The Kelly Clarkson Show", reports femalefirst.co.uk.

He also expressed his admiration for the people who find the time to work out as well as having full-time jobs and families to raise, because for him hitting the gym counts as work.

He said: "I literally get to work out as a job and it's still hard. I can't imagine people who have a 9-5 job, who have kids at home, and where do they get the energy and the time to actually focus on themselves?"

LIL NAS X FEELS PEOPLE USE HIM AS STEPPING STONE IN RELATIONSHIPS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Lil Nas X is worried that people use him as a stepping stone in relationships, to move ahead in their lives. However, he added that he doesn't let this fear stop him from meeting new people.

"I've honestly gotten to this point where I'm just like,

okay, I hope this person actually likes me for me (and) isn't trying to use me as a stepping stone. I've just got to a point where it's like well, even if they are (using me), then that's a lesson learned. I can't just stop meeting people because of this fear," he said, according to femalefirst.co.uk.

Meanwhile, the singer, who came out as gay two years back, said that he was initially unsure about how his straight fans would react to his music.

"At first I was really afraid of alienating any of my straight fans. But then it was kind of like, if they feel offended, they were never really here for me. They were here for whatever version of myself they made up in their head," he said in an interview with Entertainment Weekly.

Adele looks happier than ever as she shares unseen snaps on 33rd birthday

Los Angeles | Agencies

Looks happier than ever as she shares unseen photos for her 33rd birthday.

The Rolling In The Deep singer captioned the carefree snaps "Thirty Free".

In the first picture Adele goes makeup-free with her hair looking damp and natural.

Her tattoo of Saturn is clearly visible in the snap as well as the word 'paradise' inked on her left hand.

In the second photo Adele cavorts in the sea wearing a pair of sunglasses and a bright patterned top.

The third snap shows the singer twirling in a pretty tie-dyed dress.

Another partygoer shared a video on Instagram of Adele standing near the bar with a drink in her hand.

The video was captioned: "Adele said social distancing."

The singer showed off her amazing figure as she stunned in a lime-green coat with feather trim sleeves.

Adele, who has been keeping a low profile lately, was seen laughing and dancing with pals and fellow A-listers including Drake at the bash thought to have been thrown at a private house.

Another partygoer shared a video on Instagram of Adele standing near the bar with a drink in her hand.

In March it was announced the mother of one had finalised her $194million divorce with ex-husband Simon.

Adele and Simon married in a secret ceremony in 2017.

The agreement came two years after the singer announced they had decided to split.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Hailee Steinfeld

EDITOR'S SPECS

Poverty in India amid pandemic

As the pandemic and the eventual lockdowns wreaked havoc on the economy and livelihoods, around 23 crore Indians have been pushed into poverty during the past one year, showed a report by Azim Premji University.It said that the rural poverty rate increased by 15 percentage points and the urban poverty rate was up nearly 20 points."The number of individuals who lie below the national minimum wage threshold (Rs 375 per day as recommended by the Anoop Satpathy committee) increased by 230 million during the pandemic," said the report titled 'State of Working India 2021: One Year of Covid-19'.It noted that though incomes fell across the board, the pandemic has taken a far heavier toll on poorer households. In April and May, the poorest 20 per cent of households lost their entire incomes.In contrast, the richer households suffered losses of less than a quarter of their pre-pandemic incomes. Over the entire eight-month period (March to October), an average household in the bottom 10 per cent lost Rs 15,700, or just over two months' income.Further, as per the report about 1.5 crore workers remained out of work by the end of 2020. About 10 crore people lost jobs during the nationwide April-May 2020 lockdown.Incomes also remained depressed. Average monthly household income per capita in October 2020 (Rs 4,979) was still below its level in January 2020 (Rs 5,989).Job losses were higher for states with a higher average Covid case load. Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi, contributed disproportionately to job losses.During the lockdown and in the months after, 61 per cent of working men remained employed and 7 per cent lost employment and did not return to work. For women, only 19 per cent remained employed and 47 per cent suffered a permanent job loss during the lockdown, not returning to work even by the end of 2020.The report showed that younger workers were much more impacted, experiencing higher job losses, of a more permanent nature. Around 33 per cent of workers in the 15-24 years age group failed to recover employment even by December 2020. This number was only 6 per cent in the 25-44 years group.The report shows that the pandemic has further increased informality and led to a severe decline in earnings for the majority of workers resulting in a sudden increase in poverty. Households have coped by reducing food intake, borrowing, and selling assets. Government relief has helped avoid the most severe forms of distress, but the reach of support measures is incomplete.

IN APRIL AND MAY, THE POOREST 20 PER CENT OF HOUSEHOLDS LOST THEIR ENTIRE INCOMES.IN CONTRAST, THE RICHER HOUSEHOLDS SUFFERED LOSSES OF LESS THAN A QUARTER OF THEIR PRE-PANDEMIC INCOMES. OVER THE ENTIRE EIGHT-MONTH PERIOD (MARCH TO OCTOBER), AN AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD IN THE BOTTOM 10 PER CENT LOST RS 15,700, OR JUST OVER TWO MONTHS' INCOME.FURTHER, AS PER THE REPORT ABOUT 1.5 CRORE WORKERS REMAINED OUT OF WORK BY THE END OF 2020.

HISTORY OF PANDEMICS

OJJUS CHAWLA

As we all know, a pandemic is an epidemic of an infectious disease that has spread across the world and created havoc. For instance, you might have heard this term when COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the WHO. Although the history of pandemics is quite long and extensive, from the 1918 Spanish Flu to COVID-19 now, pandemics have always impacted life as we know it. It all started with the earliest recorded pandemic which happened during the Peloponnesian War. After it affected Libya, Ethiopia and Egypt, it not only crossed the Athenian walls but also lay siege to the Spartans -- as many as two-thirds of the population died of it. Even though this was the first ever pandemic, it was not as deadly in comparison to other subsequent pandemics.

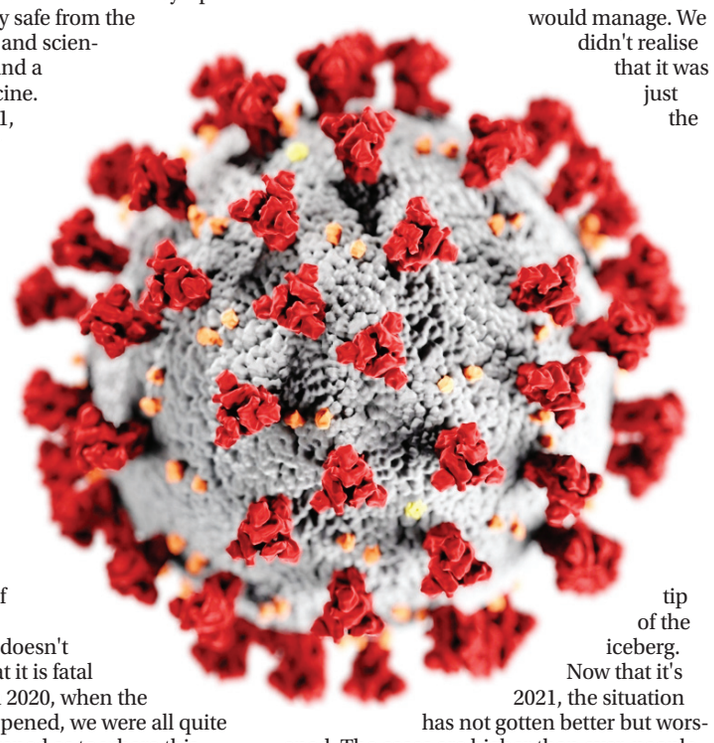
One of the worst pandemics was "The Plague of Justinian". The number of deaths is unknown. It was the beginning of the first Old World pandemic of plague, the contagious disease caused by the bacterium Yersinia pestis. It started in 541 AD and ended around 750 AD. Scientists believe that the Plague of Justinian spread through fleas. Studies indicate the plague may have originated in China or India and was then transported to the fertile valleys of Egypt through trade routes since technology and medicines were quite old and some had not yet been discovered. Surprisingly, the plague doctors had to guess as to what might end this pandemic. They attempted treatments such as vinegar and water or told the patients to carry flowers around all day, but they all failed.

Now, let's come to one of the major pandemics, the 'Spanish Flu'. The Spanish Flu, which is also known as the 1918 Influenza virus, was an unusually deadly influenza pandemic caused by the H1N1 influenza virus. Lasting from February 1918 to April 1920, it infected 500 million people -- about a third of the world's population at the time -- in four successive waves. By the summer of 1919 the flu pandemic came to an end, as those that were infected either died or developed immunity.

History tells us that the worst pandemic recorded to date is 'Black Death', which killed roughly over 75-200 million people. Black Death was essentially a bubonic plague pandemic occurring in Afro-Eurasia from 1346 to 1353. It was present mainly in Eurasia and North Africa. This plague was also caused by the Yersinia pestis. It was spread around through fleas. These bugs picked up the germs when they bit infected animals, then passed them to the next animal or person they bit. This pandemic eventually ended through the implementation of quarantines, that's right, the same quarantine that we are currently stuck in. The uninfected would typically remain in their homes and only leave when it was necessary, while those who could afford to do so would leave the more densely populated areas and live in isolation. I believe that if this same faith and patronage are to be followed now, the current COVID-19 cases will drop and we can return to normalcy.

Coming to the West African Ebola virus epidemic, which started on Dec 26, 2013 and ended by Jun 9, 2016, it killed over 11,323 people. It was deadly and dangerous and people again had no clue about the symptoms or how to stay safe from the virus. Researchers and scientists eventually found a solution i.e., a vaccine.

On December 31, 2020, the first-ever coronavirus case was recorded. As we all know, 'CO' stands for corona, 'VI' stands for virus and 'D' for disease. The coronavirus originated in Wuhan, China and from there it travelled and spread across the globe. The cause of the coronavirus is unknown but that doesn't change the fact that it is fatal and destructive. In 2020, when the first lockdown happened, we were all quite alarmed and frightened as to where this would lead and how we would manage. We didn't realise that it was just the tip of the iceberg. Now that it's 2021, the situation has not gotten better but worsened. The cases are higher than ever, people are dying and in need of oxygen or plasma. In India, things are not looking good but we can also curb this situation and help out each other in these difficult times by donating plasma or money or even basic supplies, volunteering virtually. There is always something you can do to help others.



Although this article doesn't even come close to capturing all the deadly and disastrous pandemics, what we do know is that these pandemics have brought untimely deaths of our near and dear ones and a lot of pain and suffering to mankind. Not only this, but pandemics are also known to create havoc in human civilizations and disrupt life as we know it. But what I have learnt is that in the midst of a pandemic, there is always a greater sense of unity amongst the people also bringing out the goodness and kindness in people. As history is witness, we always end up adapting to such situations and find a solution to make it out of these pandemics. So, with this we must realise that a crisis can bring misery, difficulty and death, but it also brings forth hope, the strength of human spirit, the goodness of the human heart, and formidable will to say: "The show must go on."

(Ojjus Chawla is a student of Class 10, Modern School, Barakhamba Road)

5G is our only chance to grow

Pradeep Baijal

Everyone talks of China overtaking the USA in GDP and 5G (in a digital world with multiplying 5G usages). Indians have always been ahead in the digital and mobile technologies, till of course, regulations and crony capitalism blocked growth. What is so special about 5G? Is it just a communication technology? 5G is the new global wireless standard after 1G to 4G networks, much faster and having lower latency, packing density etc. 5G enables a new kind of network that is designed to connect virtually everyone and everything together including machines, objects, and devices, both static and moving, and like everything in new technologies, evolving and changing fast. 4G Broadband earlier delivered deep web functionality to our latest technology Smartphones. 5G also requires new kind of regulation internalizing content and pricing regulation.

The US and other liberal democracies are falling behind China in the global 5G race. "I estimate that China is about 10 times ahead of us in the 5G space. This is a national emergency. The US needs to get the necessary bandwidth and funding to the telcos to get that built out, we may have already lost that one, that's how dire the situation is," Schmidt told CNN recently. "If these technologies are built in China, for example, they are not necessarily going to follow our privacy rules or our ethics We have to be careful to win this battle," Schmidt said, pointing to the Chinese government's plan to lead the global market for AI by 2030. Indians have proved that they can move ahead very fast as they did both for liberalised 2G and 4G networks.China's 5G networks are among the most advanced in the world, unless India is enabled to challenge them like the US did that to China, post 1980. According to CCS Insights, China will account for more than half of all 5G users by 2022. China is also expected to dominate through 2025, at which time it might represent 40 percent of global 5G connections, according to the GSMA. Mainland China is already the world's largest Smartphone market, and it also boasts the largest 4G market, with 843.7 million 4G subscribers. Based on a 5G study published by the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, China's aggressive investments in 5G infrastructures will be key to the country's status as the world's largest 5G market soon, unless India challenges like it did for 2G and 4G. We must also remember that seven Presidents after Nixon, helped China for political reasons. They might now help India and Japan in the peculiar political/geographical environment in Asia, where China can never collaborate with India or Japan.

China earlier grew with the help of stolen technologies from the US and the rest of the world. The US collaborated. It can no longer do so and hence China has invested hugely in R&D, and commercial use of new technologies- "David G. Goldman".

The US, India and some other countries flourished when they started operating on far better and fully digital 2G to 4G standards/technology and regulation (converged network and regulation). But there was a problem in some countries like India, where we could not migrate to a converged network/regulation due to the opposition of incumbent telecom operators, and tried to inefficiently operate on Unified Access License in 2004, and later moving to case to case regulations for 4G networks.

The US and other liberal democracies are falling behind China in the global 5G race. "I estimate that China is about 10 times ahead of us in the 5G space. This is a national emergency. The US needs to get the necessary bandwidth and funding to the telcos to get that built out, we may have already lost that one, that's how dire the situation is," Schmidt told CNN recently. "If these technologies are built in China, for example, they are not necessarily going to follow our privacy rules or our ethics We have to be careful to win this battle," Schmidt said, pointing to the Chinese government's plan to lead the global market for AI by 2030.

China's 5G networks are among the most advanced in the world. According to CCS Insights, China will account for more than half of all 5G users by 2022. China is also expected to dominate through 2025, at which time it might represent 40 percent of global 5G connections, according to the GSMA.Late, late 5G in India: GOI is looking at issues around high prices of spectrum and its limited availability/usage. We faced similar problems for 2G/3G in 2004, but were carefully dealt with in new unified access regulations, license fee and connectivity charges.In its report titled 'Making India 5G Ready' in August, 2018 Inter-Ministerial High Level Forum for 5G (Paulraj Committee)', India anticipated the start of 5G in 2020. Based on the Report, the Government is creating an enabling framework for development of 5G services in India. Progress is slow as many new developments have taken place and the 5G services are expected to be introduced gradually and advance to a full range of services as ecosystem and demand for services grows. Indian IT technologists are far ahead of those in the world. 5G can unleash new economic opportunities and societal benefits giving it the potential for being a transformational force for Indian society. It can help the country leapfrog the traditional barriers to development as well as advance the Digital India Mission. The cumulative economic impact of 5G on India can reach $1 trillion by 2035. But the progress in development in new services/usages is slow in India, and does not match with the high anticipated fee. There are thus apprehensions that India is set to miss the 5G bus due to lack of preparedness, spectrum issues, inadequate use-case development, uncertainty around sale of radio waves for 5G, etc. Inadequate availability of spectrum, high spectrum prices, poor development of use cases, low status of fiberization, non-uniform RoW issues, deficient backhaul capacity, etc. are some of the factors coming in the way of rolling out of 5G services in India, missing the target dates in the Report.Globally 118 operators in 59 countries have deployed 5G network, though only China and S. Korea has progressed to significant commercial operation. China has already developed more than 5 lakh 5G base stations covering around 7-8 per cent of their population. Regarding status of deployment of 5G in India, 5G High Level Forum has given its report titled 'Making India 5G Ready' to the Government in August, 2018. 5G Hackathon had been organized and the Department have shortlisted 100 use cases for further development. Thirty out of 100 use cases will be demonstrated along with TSPs to learn 5G use cases and roll out challenges. The current reserve price of spectrum is one of the highest in the world, which needs to be rationalized taking into account per capita income, extremely low usage, and reserve price benchmarks of other countries, 5G trial applications have been submitted by the TSPs in the month of January, 2020, however, till date the guidelines for trials have not been made clear and there is no set date for commencement of these trials. Specrum allocation is also posing to be a big problem.

We have four times more people and four times less spectrum which means that spectrum available to one person is 1/16th of the global average. Availability of 175 MHz only in 3300 MHz to 3600 MHz band will mean that approximately 50 MHz or so spectrum per operator could be allocated, which is far below the global average.

TRAI had recommended Rs.492 crore per MHz as reserved price for spectrum in 3300 MHz to 3600 MHz for 5G which is far higher than the auctioned spectrum price in other countries. Comparison of unit pricing of 5G spectrum with other countries indicates that it is 07 times costlier than UK, 14 times costlier than Australia, 35 times costlier than Spain and 70 times costlier than Austria. Price recommended by TRAI is exorbitantly high and ranges from 3-70 times of the market determined price of the spectrum in other countries in absolute terms and is 16 times of the price in relative terms. They are of the view that there is a need to strike a balance between the Government's expectation to generate revenue from the auction and growth of the sector and the overarching impact of 5G across the sectors.

Slow and steady may win the race. India won the race in 2G growth after 2010 (Comparison with Chinese growth ever.) Whereas the United States is pursuing a gradual, economical deployment of 5G, the problems with China's rushed 5G deployments are already starting to show. One of Huawei's own executives went so far as to call China's 5G "fake, dumb and poor," mostly due to poor integration with the 4G network. Another former official warned in a recent speech that China's 5G push could become a failed investment. While China is no doubt investing substantially in the expansion of its 5G network, including by pressuring its state-owned carriers to invest faster than the market demands, Chinese figures must be properly scrutinized when using them to make U.S./other country policy decisions.

National Strategy of 5G

5G, will be a key driver of our Nation's prosperity and security in the new age economy towards which we are progressing fast. It will provide consumers, businesses, and governments with remarkably fast network connections that will enable tens of billions of new devices to harness the power of the Internet, transforming the way we live, work, learn, and communicate. Whole of government and industry led approach should be launched for faster rollout with demonstrable use cases. Spectrum cost should be rationalized to remove the artificial cost barrier.Indigenous and demonstrable use cases are the backbone of 5G because that will create the new economy.Indian government has to finalise the list of industries where it needs to achieve indigenous technological innovations, and handhold them for a profitable start.

(Pradip Baijal is former Chairman, TRAI, and has authored many books on Indian reforms)

24 DEAD, 46 INJURED DURING VIOLENT PROTESTS IN COLOMBIA

- In its now withdrawn tax reform draft, the government had wanted to reduce tax allowances, increase income tax for certain groups and abolish value-added-tax exemptions for a number of goods and services, to offset the deficits in the state budget caused by the pandemic.

Bogota | Agencies

At least 46 people were injured in further violent clashes in Bogota and other cities in Colombia after a seventh night of protest.

"We had a brutal escalation of violence. Thirty civilians and 16 police were injured," Bogota's Mayor Claudia Lopez tweeted on Wednesday.

The destruction meant fewer buses were running, she said.There were renewed clashes between protesters and a special police unit, dpa news agency quoted the El Espectador newspaper as saying in a report.Some 25 police stations were attacked and some were set on fire, according to the report.There was further violence and destruction in other major cities including Medellin and Cali.

So far, 24 people have died in the protests, according to El Tiempo newspaper, citing the national ombudsman's office.The protests began on May 5 when thousands of Colombians took to the streets to oppose a controversial tax reform that has since been withdrawn.

President Ivan Duque condemned the violence, and expressed his condolences to all those who had died during the protests, in a video shared on Twitter on Wednesday.

The UN and European Union expressed concern at reports of excessive police violence, but Duque did not address this.n its now withdrawn tax reform draft, the government had wanted to reduce tax allowances, increase income tax for certain groups and abolish value-added-tax exemptions for a number of goods and services, to offset the deficits in the state budget caused by the pandemic.

SL BANS ALL INDIAN TRAVELLERS UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

Colombo: In a statement, CAASL Additional Director General P. A. Jayakantha said the restrictions were applied until further notice following the guidelines received by the Health Ministry until the next evaluation, reports the Daily Mirror newspaper. The Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka (CAASL) on Thursday announced its decision to suspend all Indian travellers from entering the country with immediate effect in an effort to curb the spread of the Indian Covid-19 variant.In a statement, CAASL Additional Director General P. A. Jayakantha said the restrictions were applied until further notice following the guidelines received by the Health Ministry until the next evaluation, reports the Daily Mirror newspaper.

He said the CAASL have directed all airlines to preventing disembarking Indian passengers.

China suspends economic dialogue with Australia

- Recently, some Australian Commonwealth Government officials launched a series of measures to disrupt the normal exchanges and cooperation between China and Australia out of Cold War mindset and ideological discrimination

Beijing | Agencies

China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) said on Thursday that it would suspend all activities under the China-Australia Strategic Economic Dialogue framework set up in 2014, while accusing Canberra of a "Cold War mindset".The move comes shortly after the Australian government scrapped two Belt and Road Initiative agreements with China, reports dpa news agency.

In a statement, the NDRC said its decision was based on the "current attitude" of the Australian government.

"Recently, some Australian Commonwealth Government officials launched a series of measures to disrupt the normal exchanges and cooperation between China and Australia out of Cold War mindset and ideological discrimination," the statement said.China is Australia's largest trading partner.

The two countries have been locked in a trade dispute that escalated last year and saw China hit Australian wine, beef, barley and coal with trade tariffs and customs delays.However, it is unclear whether the most recent move will have any practical effect.Beijing was already refusing high-level meetings, according to Australian newswire AAP.

The last time both sides met under the economic dialogue was in September 2017.Analyst Jeffrey Wilson from the Perth USAsia Centre told Australian broadcaster ABC the suspension would have "zero substantive effect" because Beijing has already placed sanctions so widely on Australian exporters over the last year.

"By going thermonuclear in 2020, China now has no substantive forms of leverage over Australia, and has to resort to largely meaningless acts of symbolism," Wilson said.

Ready to promote Israeli-Palestinian dialogue: Russian FM

- We will do this both through bilateral efforts and as a member of the international quartet of Middle East mediators," Lavrov said at a press conference here on Wednesday following a meeting with his Palestinian counterpart Riyad al-Maliki.

Moscow | Agencies

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Moscow is ready to facilitate direct dialogue between Israel and Palestine.

"We will do this both through bilateral efforts and as a member of the international quartet of Middle East mediators," Lavrov said at a press conference here on Wednesday following a meeting with his Palestinian counterpart Riyad al-Maliki.

The international quartet is composed of the UN, Russia, the European Union and the U. Direct dialogue would be aimed at resolving all permanent status issues, Lavrov said, stressing the urgent need for de-escalation that would be in the interests of both sides.

The Palestinian minister expressed hope that the role of the Middle East Quartet would be strengthened with the administration of US President Joe Biden."The situation has now changed. A new administration has come to power, which is aware of its role and responsibility in the Middle East Quartet," al-Maliki said.

"We expect that this will help restore confidence and foster cooperation between members of the quartet and ultimately lead to a ministerial meeting of the mediators that will accelerate the resumption of negotiations," he said.

CHINA SHARPLY REJECTS CRITICISM BY G7 FMS

Beijing: The group of economically powerful democracies had issued a statement on Wednesday at the conclusion of their Foreign Ministers' meeting in London criticizing the persecution of the Uighur Muslim minority in Xinjiang and Beijing's tough stance on Hong Kong.China on Thursday sharply rejected criticism by the G7 Foreign Ministers as "groundless accusations"."The G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting made groundless accusations against China, grossly interfered in China's internal affairs," dpa news agency quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin as saying to reporters here."Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang ... are all China's internal affairs."The group of economically powerful democracies had issued a statement on Wednesday at the conclusion of their Foreign Ministers' meeting in London criticizing the persecution of the Uighur Muslim minority in Xinjiang and Beijing's tough stance on Hong Kong. Wang said the G7 group should pay more attention to the recovery of the global economy and help developing countries instead of fomenting conflict in the international community.

The spokesman also took exception to comments from within the group, including from German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, that the G7 group should counter China's vaccine diplomacy.

Wang pointed out that some G7 countries have suffered the most severely from the pandemic, even though they have widely developed medical technology.The G7 should focus on international cooperation in the fight against the pandemic and equitable distribution of vaccines, rather than hoarding vaccines and making "vague and irrelevant remarks" about other countries' behaviour, the spokesman said."We urge relevant countries to face up to their own domestic problems, to correct their selfish behaviours in anti-epidemic efforts and stop over-stretching the concept of national security," Wang said.

French FM in Beirut for talks on govt deadlock

Beirut | Agencies

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian started talks with officials in Beirut on Thursday aimed at breaking the deadlock in forming a Lebanese government to grapple with the country's economic woes.

The French official, who arrived in Beirut at midnight, met Lebanese President Michel Aoun on Thursday, Lebanon's state news agency NNA reported, without giving details.

Le Drian is also scheduled to confer with House Speaker Nabih Berri, dpa news agency reported citing NNA as saying.The French embassy in Beirut has not issued an itinerary for Le Drian's visit.

According to a government official, Le Drian's exact mission is still unclear, but it mainly aims to break the political impasse in Lebanon.The official said the French Minister "will be very firm with politicians accused of putting obstacles towards forming a new government".Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri was tasked with forming a new Lebanese government in October.But, he has failed so far, and due to political divisions among rival factions also to form a Cabinet made of experts to tackle the country's worsening economy.

Lebanon, a former French colony, is experiencing its worst economic crisis since its civil war ended in 1990.The country has been under pressure from international financing institutions to introduce economic reforms and act against corruption.

France has been pushing for the formation of a new government since caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned following a devastating August 4, 2020, Beirut port explosion, which killed at least 190 people, injured 6,000 and displaced 300,000 others.

France and other countries have said that they would help Lebanon if a "government with a mission" is put in place to introduce much needed reforms in the country.

SCAROLINA TO ADD FIRING SQUAD TO EXECUTION METHODS

Washington: The south-eastern US state's lower house on Wednesday voted 66 to 43 to approve the bill, which will require inmates on the death row to choose to die by firing squad or electric chair if injection drugs aren't available South Carolina was one step closer to introducing firing squads to the US state's execution methods amid a lack of lethal-injection drugs.

The south-eastern US state's lower house on Wednesday voted 66 to 43 to approve the bill, which will require inmates on the death row to choose to die by firing squad or electric chair if injection drugs aren't available, reports dpa news agency.

Republican Governor Henry McMaster pledged to sign it "as soon as it gets to my desk."

"We are one step closer to providing victims' families and loved ones with the justice and closure they are owed by law," the Governor said following the lower house's vote.

As the lower house tweaked the bill, it will need approval by the Senate, which had voted 32 to 11 to approve it in February. South Carolina has not executed any inmates in a decade, having had to postpone three executions due to a nationwide shortage of lethal injection drugs, according to local newspaper the State.In February, Virginia became the first state in the US south to stop executions.

The death penalty is on the decline in the US, in part due to changing public opinion, as well as the increasing difficulties in obtaining the necessary substances for lethal injections.

The imposition of the death penalty also usually leads to protracted and costly litigation.

Yemen's warring sides fail to reach deal: UN envoy

The recently-concluded negotiation, which took place in Saudi Arabia and Oman, aimed to install a ceasefire across Yemen, including in the central province of Marib, where the Houthi rebels have been launching massive offensives on the governmental forces since February, reports Xinhua news agency.

Sanaa | Agencies

UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths said that a recent UN-brokered negotiation between the country's warring sides and other relevant parties has failed to produce any agreement.

The recently-concluded negotiation, which took place in Saudi Arabia and Oman, aimed to install a ceasefire across Yemen, including in the central province of Marib, where the Houthi rebels have been launching massive offensives on the governmental forces since February, reports Xinhua news agency."We have been discussing these issues for over a year now... Unfortunately, we are not where we would like to be in reaching a deal," Griffiths said in a statement on Wednesday."I will keep engaging the parties to the conflict and all involved and concerned actors and stakeholders to offer them opportunities to find common grounds to help advance the peace efforts," he added.

In February, the Houthis began a major offensive against the Saudi-backed Yemeni government army to capture the oil-rich province of Marib, which hosts over 2 million internally displaced people. The UN aid agencies have warned the Houthis that the assault on Marib could lead to a major humanitarian catastrophe.

Yemen has been mired in a civil war since late 2014 when the Houthi militia seized control of several northern provinces and forced the internationally recognized government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi out of the capital Sanaa.

Palestine to set new poll date if Israel approves voting in E.Jerusalem

Ramallah | Agencies

Palestine will set a new date for holding the general elections if Israel approves voting in East Jerusalem, according to Prime Minister Mohammed Ishtaye.

"Once Israel allows holding the general elections in East Jerusalem, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas will immediately issue a decree to set a new date for the general elections in the Palestinian territories," Ishtaye said during a meeting on Wednesday with Lynn Hastings, the UN deputy special coordinator for the Middle East peace process. "Holding the general elections is a Palestinian strategic decision and holding them in East Jerusalem is substantial," he told the UN official.

"Ignoring East Jerusalem means that we accept the rejected US Deal of the Century," the Prime Minister said.Last week, Abbas announced the general elections will be postponed until further notice, Xinhua news agency. "We have decided to postpone the general elections until the participation of our people in East Jerusalem is guaranteed," the President said.He stressed that the Palestinian people in East Jerusalem have the right to vote and run as candidates in the upcoming elections. The Palestinian leadership insists on holding the general elections in East Jerusalem, as they want to elect a new parliament and a new president covering all Palestinian territories.

Big Tech must pay 'political price': Trump on FB ban

Washington | Agencies

After the independent Oversight Board upheld Facebook's decision to ban Donald Trump, the former US President slammed the move as a "total disgrace," saying the Big Tech companies "must pay a political price."

Trump slammed Facebook, Google and Twitter and called them "corrupt", saying these social media companies "must pay a political price, and must never again be allowed to destroy and decimate our Electoral Process."

"What Facebook, Twitter, and Google have done is a total disgrace and an embarrassment to our Country," Trump said in a statement posted to his new communications platform on his website"Free Speech has been taken away from the President of the United States because the Radical Left Lunatics are afraid of the truth, but the truth will come out anyway, bigger and stronger than ever before."

The Board found that Trump's posts severely violated Facebook's rules, and his words of support for those involved in the attack on the US Capitol building legitimised violence in a situation where there was an immediate risk to people's lives.

"President Trump's actions on social media encouraged and legitimised violence and were a severe violation of Facebook's rules," said Thomas Hughes, Director of the Oversight Board Administration.

"By maintaining an unfounded narrative of electoral fraud and persistent calls to action, Mr Trump created an environment where a serious risk of violence was possible. Facebook's decision to suspend the President on January 7 was the right one," Hughes added.While the Board concluded that Trump should have been suspended from Facebook and Instagram, it also found that Facebook failed to impose a proper penalty.

Egyptian Ministers, US envoy hold talks on Nile dam

- In a statement, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry said the meeting on Wednesday was held "in order to discuss the developments of the GERD file and the Egyptian position in this regard", Xinhua news agency reported.

Cairo | Agencies

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation Mohamed Abdel Aty held talks with US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman on the disputed Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) built on the Nile River.

In a statement, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry said the meeting on Wednesday was held "in order to discuss the developments of the GERD file and the Egyptian position in this regard", Xinhua news agency reported.It did not provide further details.

Recent tripartite negotiations between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia have failed to reach a legally binding agreement on the rules of filling and operating the GERD. Ethiopia, which started building the GERD in 2011, expects to produce more than 6,000 megawatts of electricity from the dam project.But Egypt and Sudan, downstream Nile Basin countries that rely on the river for its freshwater, are concerned that the dam might affect their share of the resources.Sudan proposed a mediation quartet of the UN, the European Union, the US and the AU regarding the GERD issue.

Ethiopia, however, has announced its rejection to this formula.

'40 HOUSEKEEPING STAFF ALLOWED FOR IPL TIES, DDCA LET IN 42'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) had let in two extra persons, beyond the 40 that were registered for housekeeping, during an Indian Premier League (IPL) match on May 2, it has been learnt. Incidentally, Delhi police have arrested two persons for indulging in 'betting' during the said match.

"There were 40 persons who had the permission to get into the ArunJaitley Stadium for housekeeping during IPL matches at Delhi's AunJaitley Stadium. However, these two individuals, who were arrested by Delhi Police, managed to get into the stadium," said a DDCA, official in the know of things.

"So there were 42 eventually who managed to get in. The contracted worker - a cleaner - who led to the arrest of these two was however, part of the 40 that were registered," said the official.

Earlier on May 3, Delhi Police nabbed two supposedly IPL "accredited" individuals for illegally entering ArunJaitley Stadium during the Rajasthan Royals-SunRisers Hyderabad match.

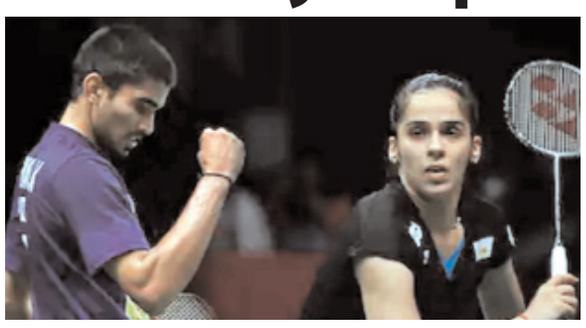
A Delhi Police sub-inspector spotted Krishan Garg and Manish Kansal, and after not getting satisfactory answers to their questions, lodged an FIR against the two.

"The police are investigating the matter. It could lead to someone within the association. The responsibility lies with the DDCA Administrator (HR) Neeraj Sharma since all the passes and accreditation go through him," said the official.

While Sharma had said on Wednesday that the DDCA will investigate the matter, on Thursday he said he can't speak on the matter, but would do so later. Shabbir Hussain Khandwawala, chief of the Board of Control for Cricket in India's Anti-Corruption Unit, told IANS in an interview on Thursday that he believed DDCA was responsible for providing accreditation to the two individuals who had entered the stadium for the "purpose of betting".

Blow for Saina, Srikanth as India withdraw from Malaysia Open

Team Absolute | New Delhi



KidambiSrikanth and SainaNehwal's chances of making it to this year's Tokyo Olympics are all but over after the Indian contingent withdrew from the Malaysian Open on Thursday. Malaysia has imposed a ban on travellers from India, which is witnessing a massive surge in Covid-19 cases during the second wave.

"The Indian badminton team will have to withdraw from the Malaysian Open, scheduled from May 25 to 30, owing to a temporary travel restriction imposed by the Malaysian Government on travellers from India," said the Sports Authority of India (SAI) on Thursday.

Malaysia Open was the second last event that provided points for Olympic qualification, with the final qualifier tournament being the Singapore Open Super 500 tournament scheduled to be held from June 1 to 6.

"The tournament is one of the last events that contribute to Olympic qualification which ends on June 15. All top Indian singles and doubles players like PV Sindhu, SainaNehwal, KidambiSrikanth, Sai Praneeth, SatwiksairajRankireddy, Chirag Shetty, AshwiniPonnappa and Sikki Reddy were due to participate," said SAI.

It further said that the Sports Ministry, through the Ministry of External Affairs, approached the Malaysian authorities requesting to permit the Indian team to participate. The latter, however, denied the request, thus leading to the pull-out. There was no official update on the Singapore Open.

The Badminton Association of India (BAI) had earlier said that it hopes to send players to Malaysia via Doha, Qatar.

"Currently as per the guidelines laid out, for any Indian to enter Singapore, they have to either be in quarantine in a foreign country other than India for 14 days before they will be allowed to enter Singapore. Alternatively, all players have to maintain a 21-day quarantine period in Singapore," BAI had said on April 29.

If they are allowed to participate in the Singapore Open, Saina and Srikanth will at least have to make it to the final while hoping that players placed above them don't finish ahead of them. Additionally, players currently ranked above the duo could earn further points based on their performances in the Malaysian Open.

AUSSIES IN IPL TRANSPORTED TO MALDIVES, HUSSEY STAYS BACK

Sydney | Agencies

Amid a raging debate over Australia's decision to ban travel from India, many players, coaches, match officials and commentators who were involved in the now postponed 2021 Indian Premier League (IPL) have been transported from India to Maldives.

The Cricket Australia (CA) and Australian Cricketers' Association (ACA) said in a joint statement on Thursday. The Australian government had faced criticism from every quarter calling the ban "racist". Chennai Super Kings (CSK) batting coach and former Australian batsman Mike Hussey remains in India having tested positive. "Mike is experiencing mild symptoms and is in the care of his IPL franchise, the Chennai Super Kings. CA and the ACA will work closely with the BCCI to ensure Mike's safe return to Australia when it is safe to do so," said the CA and ACA. The Australians will remain in the Maldives until the conclusion of the travel ban pertaining to flights from India to Australia.

India is crippled by a raging second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic which led to Australia banning flights from the country until May 15. It also resulted in the 2021 IPL being indefinitely postponed after multiple Covid-19 cases came up within the tournament bio-bubble, thus stranding the Australians who were involved in the tournament. "As previously stated, CA and the ACA are not seeking an exemption from the Australian Government," said the CA and ACA. Australian Prime Minister fended off accusations of racism and having blood on his hands Tuesday, as he retreated from a threat to jail Australians trying to escape Covid-wracked India. Morrison's government moved to ban travellers from India from entering Australia starting Monday, threatening rule-breakers - including Australian citizens - with prison time. The decision was denounced by rights groups and some of Morrison's most prominent allies who said it "stinks of racism".

Be prepared for Games without fans: Coe to athletes

Tokyo | Agencies

World Athletics (WA) president Sebastian Coe on Wednesday said that athletes should be prepared to compete at the Tokyo Olympics venues without spectators. Coe, who was in Sapporo for an Olympic test event, said at an online press conference: "Everybody, the athletes particularly, will hope for spectators. But they recognise if that is not possible, the games will still take place and the competition will still be extremely good. And athletes need to get used to competing in stadiums where there are not any crowds." Overseas spectators would not be allowed to enter Japan during the Games and the decision on local spectators, which was originally scheduled to be made at the end of April, will have to be made in June. "I am guessing the judgment needs to be made at some stage," he said. "I am sure we will be based on the Covid-19 conditions at the time. "My position has not changed. We will have to see the prevailing conditions over the next few weeks."

Due to the worsening Covid-19 situation, a 10km race open to the public was cancelled on Wednesday.

Coe, visiting Japan for the second time in six months, assured the Japanese public that the Games would be held safely. "We take that nervousness (of the Japanese public) very seriously. We have Covid-19 protocols.

They have been tried and tested. I have witnessed them this morning. We take very seriously the well-being and security of the local community." "But it is also important that when the world looks to come out of Covid-19 pandemic, the Games should be delivered successfully and safely."

DIFFICULT TO SAY HOW IPL 2021 BIO-BUBBLE WAS BREACHED: GANGULY

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Indian cricket board president SouravGanguly said that it is difficult to say how the Indian Premier League's (IPL) bio-bubble was breached and the report that the board got had shown that there was no breach.

The 2021 IPL was postponed this week after multiple Covid-19 cases emerged within the tournament's bio-bubbles in Ahmedabad and New Delhi.

"The report we got is that there's no breach of the bubble. How it happened is very difficult to say. How so many people are getting (infected) in the country is also very difficult to say," Ganguly told Indian Express.

Ganguly said that "it is too early to say" whether there is a window available to resume the season. He also said that while there was a discussion to host the tournament in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) decided to hold it in India as there were hardly any Covid-19 cases in the country. "It was discussed, but the (COVID-19 cases) in India in February was (virtually) nothing. It has just gone through the roof in the last three weeks. Before that it was nothing. We discussed about the UAE but then decided to do it in India," he said.

Playing against India best way to learn how to handle pressure: Junaid

Lahore | Agencies

The best way for a Pakistani player to learn how to handle pressure is by playing against India, said fast bowler Junaid Khan.

"If a player wants to learn how to handle pressure, he should play against India. There is a lot of pressure on both teams during India-Pakistan encounters," Junaid, 31, told Cricket Pakistan.

Junaid has faced India in six ODIs, three of which were played in India, and one T20I. His matches in India came in the three-match ODI series in 2012/13, which is also the last time the two teams faced each other in a bilateral series.

"I learned how to handle pressure during the 2012 series against India in India. Fans from both countries will enjoy these matches but the decision to play the series depends on the administrators," said Junaid.

Junaid last played for Pakistan in an ODI against England in May 2019. He has played 22 Tests, 76 ODIs and nine T20Is, picking 71, 110 and eight wickets respectively.

NZ TEST SQUAD'S IPL PLAYERS TO LEAVE INDIA ON MAY 11

Team Absolute | New Delhi

New Zealand's Test players who are part of the Indian Premier League (IPL) teams will leave India for the UK, where they face England in two Tests before the World Test Championship (WTC) final against India, on May 11, New Zealand Cricket (NZC) said on Thursday. "Kane Williamson, Kyle Jamieson and Mitchell Santner, as well as physio Tommy Simsek, will remain in a secure mini-bubble in New Delhi before departing for the UK, ahead of preparations for the Test series against England, and the ICC World Test Championship final against India," the NZC said in a statement.

Fast bowler Trent Boult, however, will return to New Zealand in a chartered flight that will leave New Delhi on Friday along with trainer Chris Donaldson. Both are returning home briefly to see their families.

"We're completely supportive of Chris and Trent taking the opportunity to see their families before heading to the UK. They've always been the consummate professionals and we're more than happy to accommodate these arrangements," said NZC CEO David White. Boult will depart for the UK in early June. He will spend a week with his family in May after finishing his quarantine period before training at Mount Maunganui. NZC expects him to be available for selection for the second Test against England.

2 of India's 1980 Olympic hockey gold medallists battling for lives

Team Absolute | New Delhi

MaharajKrishan Kaushik and Ravindra Pal Singh, stalwarts of India's 1980 Olympics gold-winning hockey team, are battling for their lives in hospitals after Covid-19 affected them. Kaushik is serious as the doctor has said the next 24 hours, ending Friday afternoon, are 'critical'.

While 66-year-old Kaushik is admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a private hospital in New Delhi, 62-year-old Singh has fortunately come out of the Covid's grip in Lucknow. But Singh needs constant supply of oxygen as he is feeling depressed and has anxiety. On Thursday evening, Singh was finally shifted to a non-Covid ward of the same hospital, Vivekananda Polyclinic.

"The doctor has said that the next 24 hours, ending around 2 pm on Friday, are very critical. He said that if my father doesn't react to the medicines, there are chances that his body may collapse. He now needs all the prayers in the world," said Eshan, son of Kaushik on Thursday.

Kaushik's wife, who was also affected by Covid, is also admitted in the same hospital and is recovering. "She is better now and would, hopefully, be discharged in a few days," said Eshan.

In Lucknow, Singh's niece Pragya said that the family and some people in the hockey fraternity have been searching for an oxygen bed.

"Mama [Singh] has recovered from Covid. But, as the doctor said, he has anxiety and is feeling depressed. So he needs a good and constant supply of oxygen after he is moved out of his Covid bed. He has now been shifted to a non-Covid ward in emergency, for the time being," said Pragya, whose family members have recovered from Covid.

"Generally speaking, the medical situation in Lucknow is very poor. Hardly any beds, oxygen and oxygen cylinders are available here. Some hockey players like [former India player] Rajneesh Mishra bhayya, have helped mama," she said. Mishra pointed out that a hockey connection worked for Singh.

"The PRO of Vivekananda Polyclinic, Vishal Singh, is the brother of former hockey international Praveen. He played a crucial role in getting Ravindrabhai a non-Covid in the hospital," he said. Pragya said that doctors have said that if her uncle makes a little extra effort, it would help in his recovery. "His lungs were infected, so breathing is crucial. Doctors are saying that he can recover faster if makes an effort," she pointed out.

Kaushik, an outside-right wearing jersey No.10, scored in India's 4-3 win over Spain in the final of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. Singh, who wore jersey No.7, was in the same XI that brought glory to India.

Chelsea beat Real, to face City in Champions League final

London | Agencies

Chelsea set up an all-England Champions League final against Manchester City as Timo Werner and Mason Mount settled their last four second leg tie against Real Madrid.

Werner headed in from almost on the goal-line after Germany team-mate Kai Havertz hit the bar and Chelsea spurned several chances before Mount secured a 2-0 victory, DPA reports.

Following last week's 1-1 draw in the first leg in Madrid, the win on Wednesday was enough for Chelsea to reach a first Champions League final since they lifted the trophy in nine years ago.

It also returns manager Thomas Tuchel to the final after he lost the showpiece last season with Paris Saint-Germain against Bayern Munich.

Tuchel has turned Chelsea's season around since his appointment in late January as replacement for Frank Lampard with a top four berth in the league looking likely.

And they will not fear domestic champions-elect City in Istanbul on May 29 having already defeated Pep Guardiola's otherwise all-conquering side in the FA Cup semis to set up a final with Leicester City two weeks before their big day in Turkey.

Chelsea and City also meet in a dress rehearsal in Manchester on Saturday where the hosts can confirm the Premier League title if they win the match.

"I can't put it into words at the moment," a delighted Mount told BT Sport. "It was a great performance. We should have had about five, but the most important thing is that we won.

"I haven't won anything yet, but we have two massive cup finals, and hopefully we can win. The final is going to be a stunning game."

Tuchel transforming Chelsea mid-season will spark memories of Roberto Di Matteo doing so after his appointment in March 2012, months before Chelsea stunned Bayern in Munich to lift their only title in the tournament.

"We deserved to win," Tuchel said. "We could have scored so much earlier, so much more to be safe, but now is no time for criticism.

"It is a fantastic achievement and big congratulations to the team.

"It is not done yet, we want to go all the way, we arrive in Istanbul to win."

N'GoloKante surged through the midfield to set up the 28th minute opener and though Havertz's delicate chip landed on the bar, Werner couldn't miss the rebound.

Karim Benzema, who scored for Real in the first leg, was twice denied by Edouard Mendy as the guests showed a rare bit of urgency. Other Zinedine Zidane's side limped to defeat and ended their coach's previous perfect record in Champions League semi-finals.

When Kante won the ball in midfield and released Christian Pulisic, the American crossed for Mount five minutes from time and Real were done.

"We can say that yes, they deserved the win," Zidane told Movistar. "We fought and tried but they deserved to win and go through.

"I'm proud of my boys: we tried, we have got this far - just one game from the final."

The second half had been a string of Chelsea chances as the Real defence, even with the influential Sergio Ramos back from a three-month absence due to a calf injury, frequently in tatters.

Havertz and Mason Mount both struck the bar while only one-on-one saves by Thibaut Courtois on Havertz and Kante kept Real's outside chance alive a little longer.

Chelsea were rarely troubled in reaching their third final with the first lost against the other Manchester side, United in 2008, in Moscow.

And Real, 13-time record champions of Europe, will now try to salvage their season by emerging on top of a four-way battle for the Spanish domestic title.

EQUITY MARKET ENDS IN GREEN; AUTO, METAL STOCKS SURGE

Mumbai: The BSE Sensex closed at 48,949.76, higher by 272.21 points or 0.56 per cent from its previous close of 48,677.55 while the Nifty50 on the National Stock Exchange closed at 14,724.80, higher by 106.95 points or 0.73 per cent from its previous close.

The key Indian equity indices closed higher on Thursday, with healthy buying in auto and metal stocks.

The BSE Sensex closed at 48,949.76, higher by 272.21 points or 0.56 per cent from its previous close of 48,677.55.

It had opened at 48,877.78 and touched an intra-day high of 49,011.31 and a low of 48,614.11 points.

The Nifty50 on the National Stock Exchange closed at 14,724.80, higher by 106.95 points or 0.73 per cent from its previous close. The top gainers on the Sensex were Tata Steel, Bajaj Auto and HDFC, while Power Grid, ONGC and Asian Paints lost the most. Shrikant Chouhan, Executive Vice President, Equity Technical Research at Kotak Securities said: "On the day of the weekly expiry of index options, Nifty/Sensex closed at the highest point of the day."He noted that due to the follow-up buying there was a recovery in the metal stocks from lower levels.

Non-residents will be taxed if transaction value exceeds Rs 2 cr

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Non-residents undertaking transactions with Indian parties will trigger taxability under the domestic law in India even if they do not have physical presence in the country and operate digitised businesses.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes has notified new rules for operation of business by non-residents under which any transaction over Rs 2 crore (apex $27,100) in respect of any goods, services or property carried out by them with any person in India including provision of download of data or software in India, will attract tax in India.

The provisions of Significant Economic Presence (SEP) that becomes the base for taxability of non-residents in India will also apply if the number of users with whom systematic and continuous business activities are solicited (or who are engaged in interactions) exceeds 3 lakhs.

The provisions of Significant Economic Presence (SEP) were introduced in the legislation in 2018 with an intent to tax non-residents operating digitised businesses which function without a physical presence. It meant that SEP of a non-resident in India shall constitute a 'business connection' in India. These provisions were further amended vide Finance Act, 2020 which defined SEP as transaction in respect of any goods, services or property carried out by a non-resident with any person in India including provision of download of data or software in India, if the aggregate of payments arising from such transaction or transactions during the year exceeds a threshold or systematic and continuous soliciting of business activities or engaging in interaction with a defined number of users in India.

The new provisions are applicable with effect from Financial Year 2021-22. It had become fully functional now with CBDT notifying the thresholds for triggering SEP and consequently tax liability in India.According to PwC, the Central government has now made it clear that economic presence in India by non-residents is not limited only to the physical presence in India but also includes a virtual establishment. But non-residents could offset the taxability under these provisions by exploring taking relief under Double Taxation

PAYTM LAUNCHES COVID-19 VACCINE FINDER TO HELP CITIZENS

New DelHI: Paytm announced the launch of COVID-19 Vaccine Finder on its Mini App store. The platform helps citizens to check the availability of vaccination slots for a specific date by individually entering different PIN codes or district details along with age group (18+ or 45+). In case the slots are saturated for the near future, users can select the option for real-time alerts from Paytm once any slot is free. The automated process reduces the hassle and ordeal of refreshing the platform for new slots repeatedly. The data is sourced on a real-time basis from the CoWIN API where a slot can be booked to take vaccination to protect oneself and loved ones The company aims to enable maximum numbers of citizens to benefit from the service, get vaccinated in a timely manner & avoid crowding at the centres.

Fuel prices rise again sharply for third straight day

New Delhi | Agencies

Petrol and diesel prices in the country rose again sharply by 25 paise and 30 paise per litre respectively on Thursday as Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) continued to cover for their losses on holding back price rise for the past 18 days due to state elections.

This is third increase in fuel prices in as many days as petrol and diesel prices rose by 15 paise and 18 paise per litre respectively on Tuesday and by 19 paise and 21 paise per litre respectively on Wednesday after 18 days break.

With Thursday's increase, petrol is now being retailed at Rs 90.99 a litre and diesel Rs 81.42 a litre in the national capital.

Across the country as well the petrol and diesel prices increased on Thursday but its quantum varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states.

Petrol prices in some states have breached the Rs 100 per litre mark while premium petrol has been hovering above that level for quite some time now.IANS had written earlier that OMCs may begin increasing the retail price of petrol and diesel post state elections as they were incurring losses to the tune of Rs 2-3 per litre by holding the price line despite higher global crude and product prices. The oil companies had already increased the ATF prices by 6.7 per cent effective this month.

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

The price of the two auto fuels had fallen by 16 paise and 14 paise per litre respectively on April 15 after a 15 day break when OMCs kept its prices static. Thereafter revision of fuel prices have been halted.

The OMCs went on price cut for the first time this year on two consecutive days - March 24 and 25 after keeping oil prices steady for 24 days. It again reduced the price on March 30. Thereafter, fuel prices remained unchanged for 15 days before falling again on April 15. In all petrol prices fell by 77 paise per litre while that of diesel by 74 paise per litre in 2021 so far.Earlier, petrol and diesel prices increased 26 times in 2021 with the two auto fuels increasing by Rs 7.46 and Rs 7.60 per litre respectively so far this year.

With global crude prices at over $69 a barrel mark, the OMCs may revise fuel prices upwards again if there is any further firming up.

NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE RISK MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURE OF INDUSTRY: EXPERTS

Hyderabad | Agencies

It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair" - the words of Charles Dickens during the French Revolution echoed in an inaugural address by N Rangachary, the founding Chairman of Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI).

While inaugurating the Hyderabad Chapter of PRMIA the veteran leader put the spotlight on the importance of risk management for the country to achieve its economic potential!

PRMIA organized a webinar where a galaxy of experts from the financial sector highlighted the need to strengthen the risk management architecture of the industry, critical to navigate the uncertain future amidst Covid-19. The experts view the pandemic as an ideal Stress-Test for the Indian economy, business and markets. The Chief Guest of the event, N Rangachary, advocated setting up National Assets Depository Ledger (NADEL) to address business risks and data privacy in the Indian financial sector. This entity could be the repository of the citizens' data - transactional or static information, stored based on their consent.Rangachary said, "Risk, like God, is omnipresent. A lot of good work in academics, the business world, and policy-making bodies has been accomplished. The core question is how the unknowns in our financial sector trigger heavy regulatory fiat and bailouts at regular frequency despite such statistical sophistication, mathematical modeling and advancement in computing modelling. "

On this occasion, a panel discussion was conducted with a cross-section of experts comprising Vishesh Kumar Srivastava - Group Chief Risk Officer of Punjab National Bank, Piyush Kabra - Chief risk Officer from Mindtree and Siddhartha Sanyal - Chief Economist from Bandhan Bank. Srinivasa Rao, Professor from IIRM, brilliantly moderated the panel discussion.

Covid secured: IGIA deploys AI to curb pandemic spread

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Giving a boost to its biosafety credentials, national capital's IGI Airport has deployed an AI-based system which ensures all Covid related precautions are followed by passengers as well as the staff.

Accordingly, the system alerts terminal authorities on any breach of social distancing norms. It focuses on key areas of the airport such as entry gates, check-in counters, security check and hold zones. The new system and associated protocols assume significance amid massive surge in Covid-19 infections.

"The use of advanced technology and implementation of robust protocols has made the IGI Airport as one of the safest zones in Delhi," DIAL Chief Executive Videh Kumar Jaipuriar said.

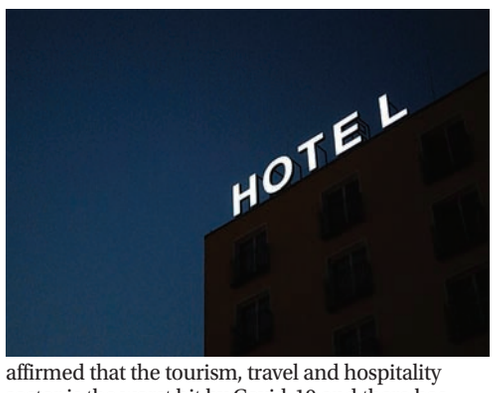
Besides, DIAL has formed 'Cross Function Teams' (CFTs), which include staff from DIAL Security, CISF and other stakeholders to ensure that Covid protocols are being followed by employees and passengers.

"These team carry out regular audits of the terminals to ensure COVID protocols are followed by all." "If they find any violations, they first ask the violators to comply with the procedures, but if he or she refuses they issue challan." Presently, over 15,000 employees, including of DIAL, airlines and others stakeholders, are working at Delhi Airport.

Furthermore, DIAL has installed a filtration system which ensures high air quality is maintained inside the terminal building. "To ensure this, fresh air is injected inside the terminal every 10 minutes after passing it through HEPA filters and UV-C lighting, which cleans air from any kind of pollutants."

Hospitality industry requests govt to ease special credit scheme rules

Team Absolute | New Delhi



The hospitality industry has requested the Union Finance Ministry, Reserve Bank of India and Tourism Ministry to ease some rules and regulations of Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) introduced on March 31 to help the 'dying' industry.

FAITH, the policy federation of all the national associations representing the tourism, travel and hospitality industry, stated, "This scheme proposes to extend support to tourism, travel and hospitality accounts which were classified as regular, special memorandum account-0 and special memorandum account-1 and whose past dues were not beyond 60 days as on February 29, 2020."

However, Clause 19 of the operational guidelines mentions that the scheme will not be applicable to accounts classified as non-performing assets 'as on' date of disbursement, it said.

"This clause is inherently contradictory to the proposed spirit of the scheme which is to help borrowers by assessing their accounts on a pre-pandemic status," FAITH stated The organisation said that all government data, whether that of GST or of income tax, has repeatedly highlighted and affirmed that the tourism, travel and hospitality sector is the worst hit by Covid-19 and there has been negligible business for the majority during the 13 months since the time pandemic struck India.

FAITH suggested to reissue the necessary instructions to have the Clause 19 issued in operational guidelines of the scheme to be immediately annulled as it is sending a contradictory message to all the member lending institutions.

The policy body also sought to consider eligible outstandings for tourism, travel and hospitality as an average of 11 months of FY 2020 -- April 1, 2019 to February 29, 2020 -- as just against the outstandings as of February 29, 2020. The rationale for the same is that October-February is traditionally the peak tourism season in India and thus credit outstanding levels are usually the lowest during February.Accordingly, an 11-month average of outstandings would enable a correct need assessment of the Indian tourism, travel and hospitality enterprises as it would balance out the off-season and the peak season accordingly, it stated. The think-tank also stated that there is no moratorium on interest on funds drawn under this scheme and it has to be paid as per Clause 10 of the guidelines and Clause 16 of the Frequently Asked Questions.

They also highlighted that due to the second wave of the pandemic, there is literally no domestic tourism business. This is on top of complete shutdown of all other segments of tourism - inbound, outbound, corporate and also group tourism business.

"Without any business, it is practically impossible for tourism, travel and hospitality entities to generate cash flows and to service interest," it stated. The organisation requested to allow moratorium on interest too to enable drawdown under the proposed scheme.

Power market beats pandemic, April trade up 90.2% YoY

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Continuing its exceptional performance during the last fiscal, the electricity market at the Indian Energy Exchange entered the new fiscal year 2022 with 7707 MU volume in April 2021, achieving a 90.2 per cent YoY growth.

According to the power demand data published by the National Load Dispatch Centre, the national peak power demand was at 183 GW while the peak demand and power consumption registered close to 40 per cent YoY growth on a weak base.

While the growing electricity consumption has been one of the key factors behind the consistent performance of the Exchange, its robust value proposition in terms of the most competitive prices, flexible, and efficient procurement positions it as the most preferred destination for power procurement for both the distribution utilities as well as the industrial consumers.

The day-ahead market traded 5,699 MU volume in April, achieving a significant 54 per cent YoY growth. The average monthly price at Rs 3.70 per unit witnessed 53 per cent increase over Rs 2.42 in the corresponding period in 2020.

The increase in price was primarily due to increase in demand and sharp slump in electricity prices in April 2020 due to a stringent nationwide lockdown. The day-ahead market saw ample availability of power with sell-bids at 1.48X of the cleared volume during the month.

The term-ahead market comprising intra-day, contingency, daily & weekly contracts traded 349 MU during the month.

The real-time market saw highest ever monthly volume of 1473 MU in April'21 achieving 4.2 per cent MoM growth. It also recorded the highest single day volume of 68.36 MU on April 3. With sell-side bids at 1.8X of cleared volume, the market continued to have ample availability of power. The growing volume in the real-time electricity market shows its acceptance by distribution utilities and industrial consumers as the go-to platform for addressing the real-time electricity demand-supply balance in the most competitive and efficient manner with the delivery of power at just 1-hour notice.

The green term-ahead market traded 186 MU volume during April'21 comprising 78 MU in the solar segment and 108 MU in the non-solar segment, achieving a significant 262 per cent MoM growth. A total of 34 participants participated during the month with distribution utilities from Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Telangana among others as the key participants. The market has been enabling distribution utilities, industrial consumers, and green generators to trade in renewable energy in the most competitive and viable way.

During the month, IEX commenced the Cross Border Electricity Trade (CBET) on its platform marking a significant milestone in its endeavour to build an integrated South Asian regional power market. As a first-of-its kind initiative, the new market segment allows the Exchange market to expand its reach beyond India to the South Asia region, thus supporting the growth of energy ecosystem in the region in an efficient and sustainable manner.

BABIL KHAN: YOUR INSTINCT IS AGELESS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Debutant actor Babil Khan, son of late actor Irrfan Khan, has rooted for instinct, saying the quality is ageless.

In an Instagram image he posted, Babil makes for a stylish photo-op covering half of his face with a shawl.

"Remember your mind is only as old as you are, your instinct is ageless. It presides in the past and the future; the infinite present," he wrote as caption alongside the photo he shared on Wednesday night.

Babil is all set to make his acting debut with "Qala", produced by Anushka Sharma. He has wrapped up his first shooting schedule. The film also stars "Bulbbul" actress Triptii Dimri.

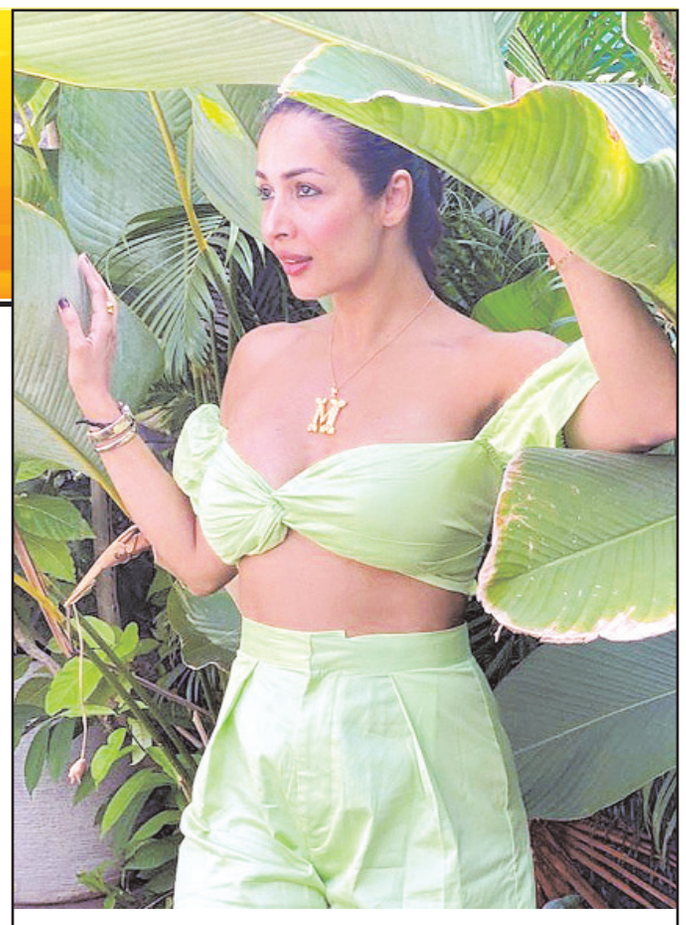
TAMANNAAH PLAYS ETHICAL HACKER IN 'NOVEMBER STORY', SAYS ROLE WAS 'GRATIFYING EXPERIENCE'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Tamannaah Bhatia stars as an ethical hacker in the upcoming web series "November Story". The seven-episode whodunit is directed by Ram Subramanian, and also includes Pasupathy, GM Kumar, Aruldass and Vivek Prasanna in the cast. Tamannaah plays ethical hacker Anuradha whose biggest concern is selling her father's house so she can pay for his Alzheimer's treatment.

"Anuradha is a young, independent, fearless and intelligent woman who takes it upon herself to save her father from being punished for a cold-blooded murder. Portraying such a strong female character who is the hero of the story was one of the most gratifying experiences in my career so far," says Tamannaah. She promises fans that the series has a "compelling storyline and unique narrative" that will keep the audience "hooked till the end as the mystery around the murder is uncovered".

Director Ram Subramanian said: "'November Story' is a classic murder mystery where the quest to find the truth behind the crime unveils a series of hidden truths. We wanted to bring the Tamil audience a crime thriller unlike any other they've seen before, in terms of both the storyline, and the way it's brought to life." "November Story" is set to release on May 20 in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu on Disney+ Hotstar VIP.



Malaika Arora: Started cooking because of my son

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Malaika Arora says she started cooking because of her son Arhaan Khan. Malaika will be seen on the fourth episode of "Star Vs Food". She cooks her all-time favourite comfort food, Malabar fish curry, for her close ones including sister Amrita Arora, and friends Preeta Sukhtankar and Sarvesh Shashi

On entering the kitchen, Chef Prateek Sadhu asks her how she planned to cook in the kitchen in stilettos.

Malaika replied: "If I had a choice, I would sleep in stilettos. I have already thought two steps ahead of you, I am a mom, so I am always well prepared. So, I have come with comfy shoes and I am fully prepared."

She added: "I really look forward to days like this because it has all my passion in it, which is spending time with my near and dear ones, my dear friends, cooking, learning something that I don't know, meeting new people, raiding a kitchen."

On how often she cooks, Malaika said: "Whenever I get the time. My son loves it actually, he likes. I actually started cooking because of him."

"He once came back from school and he told me, 'mumma, all the other parents cook such yummy stuff and you don't know to cook, actually that was one of my challenges that I took up when I said, you know what, I will show you and I can do this! So, I cook for him pretty often," she said on the show, which airs on Discovery+.

Arjun Kanungo 'was nervous about' first scene in 'Radhe'

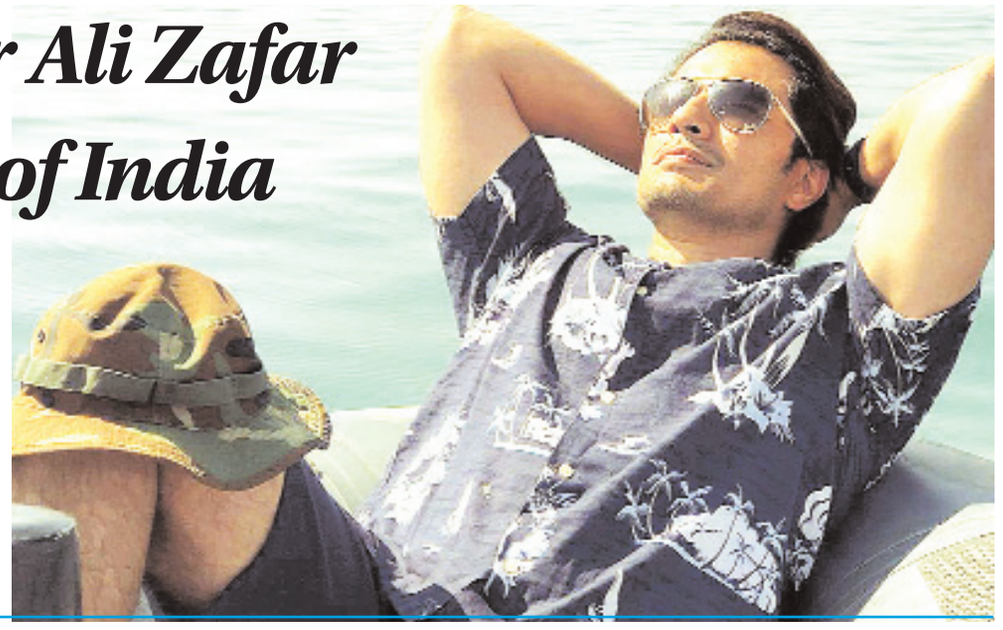
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Popular singer Arjun Kanungo faces the camera as an actor in the Salman Khan-starrer "Radhe", and he still sounds excited recalling his first scene with the Bollywood superstar that, incidentally, was his first scene in the shoot, too.

"My first scene in the shoot was with Salman Khan. I was nervous about it. Everything was great. Everyone was supportive. It was a fun experience," Kanungo told IANS.

Kanungo insists he was serious about exploring his skills as an actor in "Radhe", more than featuring as a singer in the film's soundtrack. "I came on to this project strictly for acting," he said.Known for belting out hits such as "Baaki baatein peene baad", "Gallan tipsiyan", "Fursat" and "La la la", the 30-year-old has, incidentally, attended acting school. "I would love to act more. I have studied acting in 2014 and then music kind of took over my life, so the last six to seven years have mostly been about music. But I always wanted to act. This was an opportunity I couldn't have passed up," he said. "I am not trying to change my profession but I would like to explore acting a little more," he summed up.

Pakistani actor-singer Ali Zafar prays for wellbeing of India



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Pakistani actor-singer Ali Zafar on Wednesday shared a video message for India, conveying his concern and prayers even as the country struggles to battle the raging second wave of Covid-19. Speaking in a mix of Hindi and Urdu, Zafar said: "People of India, you are facing tough times and pain one cannot imagine. In Pakistan, too, people are troubled. Maybe these tough times will make us understand what humanity is, and the fact that there is nothing bigger than humanity. In these difficult times, the people of Pakistan and I stand with you and pray for your wellbeing. We all are praying to God that our difficulties get resolved soon and there is happiness everywhere in India, Pakistan and everywhere else in the world. Let's all stand together and pray for each other during these difficult times." Ali Zafar found success as an actor in Bollywood. He was seen in several popular films including "Dear Zindagi", "Tere Bin Laden", "Mere Brother Ki Dulhan" and "Kill Dil".

AASTHA GILL ON 'KHATRON KE KHILADI': NEVER THOUGHT I'D BE PART OF A REALITY TV SHOW

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Singer Aastha Gill, says she never thought she would take part in a reality TV show as "Khatron Ke Khiladi". Aastha will soon be seen on season 11 of the stunt-based show. "I never thought that I would be a part of a reality TV show and then this happened. When I got the call to be part of this show, the first thought was how would I face my fears of insects and animals. But then that's what kicked me to be part of it and overcome those fears. Of course, it won't be easy, but I'm kicked to challenge myself once again," she says. The contestants will fly down to Cape Town on May 6 for the shoot, and Aastha says she is looking forward to the show. "I'm quite overwhelmed and excited as it will be a new journey for me and I have never experienced something like this ever. Trying something different always excites me and that's what made me take up the show and I am totally looking forward to winning," she says. Aastha is known for her songs such as "Dj waley babu", "Buzz" and "Proper Patola".

SHORT FILM 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY' BAGS NOMINATIONS AT NY FILM FEST

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The short film "Happy Birthday", featuring Aahana Kumra and Anupam Kher, has bagged multiple nominations at the New York City International Film Festival (NYCIFF).

While Anupam and Aahana are in contention for Best Actor and Best Actress awards respectively, the film has also secured nomination in the Best Short Film category. Prasad Kadam has bagged a nomination for the Best Director award.

"It always feels incredible to be appreciated because an artist puts so much effort into making the film. This project is very close to my heart. I am so grateful and thrilled to be nominated at such a prestigious Film Festival, and I hope the team wins big," Aahana said. The film recently made it to the final of the Paris Play Film Festival.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Shama Sikander

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