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Twitter, Facebook may not be able to operate in India from May 26

BAN ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

For some platforms, sources said, the standard reply has been that they will await instructions from their company headquarters in the US, who in turn on their own will have an "expert assessment" to take a view.

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) had asked the social media platform to abide by the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 by May 25, or face strict action.
- Except one Indian social media company, Koo, sources said that none of the top social media intermediaries have appointed a resident grievance officer, a chief compliance officer and a nodal contact person yet.
- Sources said the failure of social media companies to make these appointments in three months has not gone down well with the government.
- With arbitrary suspensions of accounts and inaction over abuses and bigotry on social media platforms, users in India have been persistently complaining against tech giants like Twitter, Facebook and others.



Aarti Tikoo Singh | New Delhi

The deadline to comply with the new legal rules meant for big social media platforms, which were issued by the government three months ago, is ended on Tuesday, threatening the operations of the likes of Twitter in India.

According to top official sources, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and others, which were required to abide by the rules notified in the gazette of India on

GOOGLE, YOUTUBE SAID YES TO INDIAN RULES

"We respect India's legislative process and have a long history of responding to government requests to remove content where the content violates the local law or our product policies. We have consistently invested in significant product changes, resources, and personnel to ensure that we're combating illegal content in an effective and fair way, and in order to comply with local laws in the jurisdictions that we operate in," a Google spokesperson said yesterday. Its statement covers all its platforms, including YouTube.

"If social media companies do not obey the rules, they may lose their status and protections as intermediaries and may become liable for criminal action as per the existing laws of India."

February 25 under Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code Rules, 2021, have failed to comply on many accounts. The government's rules will come into effect from today.

In the latest alleged Congress toolkit controversy, Delhi Police visited Twitter India's local offices in the National Capital Region on Monday after Twitter had marked one of the tweets of BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra as "manipulated media".

Twitter's presumptive judgement has trig-

gered widespread outrage among Indian users across the country. Twitter was yet to speak officially on the May 25 deadline.

Sources said the social media platforms which were required to furnish monthly reports as to how many grievances were filed and settled, have failed to do so. Some of the platforms, sources said, have sought more time of up to six months for furnishing compliance.

WORKING HARD TO MEET INDIAN IT RULES: FACEBOOK

Facebook on Monday said that the company aims to comply with the provisions of the new intermediary guidelines and is working towards it. A Facebook spokesperson said that the company is putting operational processes in place to meet the new IT rules. "We aim to comply with the provisions of the IT rules and continue to discuss a few of the issues which need more engagement with the government. Pursuant to the IT rules, we are working to implement operational processes and improve efficiencies. Facebook remains committed to people's ability to freely and safely express themselves on our platform."



Amid cyclone threat, West Bengal evacuates 9 lakh people

'Yaas', presently located 270 km away from Odisha's Paradip, and is likely to make a landfall somewhere between Paradip and Sagar Island on Wednesday morning and will move towards Jharkhand. Though most of West Bengal will not face direct effect of the storm, but two districts -- East Midnapore and South 24 Parganas -- will see its impact.



Team Absolute | Kolkata

In an effort to minimise casualties from severe cyclone 'Yaas', expected to make landfall on Wednesday, the West Bengal government on Tuesday said it has relocated more than 9 lakh people to different cyclone centres, schools, colleges, and other government places in the last 24 hours.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said that the state government has created a master plan with three lakh people working directly in relief and rescue work during and after the storm.

People particularly in the

areas of Digha, Sundarbans, Kakkdwip, Sagar island and other low-lying areas have been shifted to flood centres and different schools. More than 9 lakh people have been evacuated and the process of shifting is still on. Last year we evacuated 10 lakh people. "The force includes 74,000 government officials and employees, and 2 lakh police personnel. Apart from that, teams of the NDRF, SDRF, electricity, and telecom workers have been kept ready for any kind of emergency situation," the Chief Minister added. The Army has also been kept on stand-by.

Patanjali's dairy biz head dies of Covid

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As yoga guru Ramdev continues to stoke controversy with his comments about allopathic medicines and Covid, the head of



his Patanjali Ayurveda's dairy business has died due to Covid-related complications. Sunil Bansal, 57, contracted Covid and breathed his last on May 19 in Rajasthan.

Ramdev had sparked an uproar after purportedly calling allopathy a "stupid science". Following the controversy, Ramdev also wrote an open letter on social media on Monday asking the IMA if allopathy offered permanent relief for ailments such as hypertension and diabetes.

In the letter shared on his official Twitter handle, he posed 25 questions to the IMA, which had objected to his video clip running down allopathy treatment for Covid-19. The development comes a day after he was forced to withdraw his statement questioning the efficacy of allopathy medicines. On Bansal's death, Patanjali Ayurveda spokesperson S.K. Tijarawala told reporter: "On May 19, Patanjali Dairy CEO Bansal died due to Covid, which is a big loss to us."

Subodh Jaiswal appointed new CBI chief

Team Absolute | New Delhi

IPS officer Subodh Kumar Jaiswal was on Tuesday named the new Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

In an order, the Department of Personnel and Training said: "The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has, based on the panel recommended by the Committee, approved the appointment of Subodh Kumar Jaiswal, IPS, (Maharashtra 1985) as Director, CBI for a period of two years from the date of assumption of the charge of the office or until further orders whichever is earlier."

The appointment of Jaiswal comes a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi-header Committee comprising also of Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana and Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan



Chowdhury discussed the names of the new CBI chiefs.

Jaiswal, who is currently the Director General of the Central Industrial Security Force, was considered the front runner for the post.

He also has served as Maharashtra's Director General of Police and has a stint in India's external intelligence agency, R&AW.

The CBI had got an acting Director in the form of Praveen Sinha after the term of R.K. Shukla ended on February 3 this year.

BHARAT BIOTECH EXPECTS WHO APPROVAL FOR COVAXIN BY JULY-SEP

Hyderabad: Bharat Biotech has said on

Tuesday that it is expecting regulatory approvals from the World Health Organisation (WHO) for its Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin by July-September 2021. The Hyderabad-based company stated that application for Emergency Use Listing (EUL) has been submitted to WHO, Geneva and regulatory approvals are

expected by July-September 2021. It also said regulatory approvals for Covaxin are in process in more than 60 countries including the United States, Brazil and Hungary. "Emergency use authorisations have been obtained in 13 countries with more to follow," it said. Most countries recommend vaccinations against Covid-19. Unvaccinated travellers can travel with negative RT-PCR tests prior to travel, in the absence of any other country specific travel restrictions, it added. Bharat Biotech's statement came out amid reports that people who have taken Covaxin and plan to travel abroad were nervous as it is not in the list of WHO approved vaccines. With countries gearing up to resume travel and tourism, intending travellers from India who have taken Covaxin jabs will be anxiously waiting for Covaxin's approval by WHO.



Priyanka slams removal of shrouds on Ganga banks

Team Absolute | Lucknow

"They were not given treatment while they were alive, they did not get dignity in their death and did not find a place in the government data. Now shrouds are being ripped off their bodies. What kind of a cleanliness drive is this? This is showing disrespect to the dead, to the religion and to humanity."

The Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh is now facing flak for removal of saffron shrouds from shallow buried bodies in sand on the banks of rivers in Prayagraj. Sharing a video clip that showed workers pulling off saffron shrouds from the bodies buried in sand, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra slammed the government. The state government has come under severe criticism after a large number of bodies were found buried in shallow sand graves or washed up on the Ganga river banks in the state as people found it difficult to bear the expense of such cremation. In Prayagraj, photos showed hundreds of bodies

buried in the sand along the banks of Ganga as rain exposed shrouds. The discovery caused panic among people living in nearby areas as many complained that dogs were digging the graves and feeding on the bodies on river banks.

A drone footage, shot by a foreign news agency, showed hundreds of bodies, separated by bamboo sticks and covered with saffron cloth, buried along the banks in Prayagraj.



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India reports 1.96L Covid cases, lowest since April 14

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's daily coronavirus cases fell below 2-lakh mark for the first time since April 14. The country reported 1,96,427 fresh Covid cases on Tuesday and 3,511 fatalities, Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry said.

On April 14, India had recorded 2,00,739 cases. This is for the first time after April 14 that the cases have gone below two-lakh mark.

On Monday, India crossed three-lakh mark of fatalities due to the coronavirus infections, thus becoming world's third country after the US and Brazil to cross three-lakh deaths.

India's overall tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,69,48,874 with 25,86,782 active cases and 3,07,231 deaths so far. In the last 13



days India has recorded over 50,000 deaths.

According to the Health Ministry, a total of 3,26,850 people have been discharged in the last 24 hours, with 2,40,54,861 being cured from Covid till date.

The Health Ministry said that a total of 19,85,38,999 people have been vaccinated so far in the country, including 24,40,236 who were administered vaccines in the last 24 hours.

Mass vaccination during pandemic historical blunder: Nobel laureate

Vaccinating during a pandemic is "unthinkable" and is causing deaths, the winner of the 2008 Nobel Prize for Medicine said.

"The history books will show that, because it is the vaccination that is creating the variants," the report said. Many epidemiologists know it and are "silent" about the problem known as "antibody-dependent enhancement."

Team Absolute | New Delhi

French virologist and Nobel Prize winner Luc Montagnier called mass vaccination against the coronavirus during the pandemic "unthinkable" and a historical blunder that is "creating the variants" and leading to deaths from the disease, LifeSite News reported.

"It's an enormous mistake, isn't it?"



A scientific error as well as a medical error. It is an unacceptable mistake," Montagnier said in an interview translated and published by the RAI

Foundation US. "It is the antibodies produced by the virus that enable an infection to become stronger," he said in an interview with Pierre Barnerias of Hold-Up Media earlier this month.

While variants of viruses can occur naturally, Montagnier said that vaccination is driving the process. "What does the virus do? Does it die or find another solution?" "It is clear that the new variants are created by antibody-mediated selection due to the vaccination." "The new variants are a production and result from the vaccination. You see it in each country, it's the same: in every country deaths follow vaccination," he said, as per the report.

Petrol and diesel get dearer, retail prices rise by 25 P/L

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A day after holding back a hike, the oil marketing companies (OMCs) on Tuesday increased the pump price of petrol and diesel across the country with global oil showing signs of firming amidst reports that Iranian oil may not hit the markets soon.

Accordingly, petrol prices increased by 23 paise per litre to Rs 93.44 per litre and diesel by 25 paise per litre to Rs 84.32 per litre in Delhi.

Across the country as well the fuel prices increased between 20-27 paise per litre but their retail prices varied depending on the level of local taxes. In Mumbai, petrol is now being sold at Rs 99.71 a litre just one increase short



of crossing another milestone of Rs 100. This mark has already been breached in few other cities in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Premium petrol prices have been hovering over Rs 100 a litre for past few couple of months now.

With Tuesday's fuel price increase, petrol and diesel prices have now increased on 13 days so far in the month of May. This has taken up petrol prices by Rs 3.04 per litre in Delhi. Similarly, diesel have increased by Rs 3.59 per litre in the national capital.



SC: CBI CAN ACT AGAINST MAMATA, BENGAL MINISTER FOR 'SUBVERTING RULE OF LAW'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that the CBI is free to take action against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, her law minister or anyone who attempted to subvert the rule of law.

The apex court was hearing the CBI's appeal challenging the house-arrest of four TMC leaders in the Narada case by the Calcutta High Court.

According to the CBI, the West Bengal chief minister had rushed to its office on May 17 and passed several derogatory and defamatory comments about the probe agency. She sat on dharna for six-long-hours, while an unruly mob continued to swell in an organized way, causing obstruction to the



proceedings that were to be carried out by the investigating officer post arrest of the accused persons, the agency said. The CBI added thousands of followers of Trinamool Congress laid siege on the CBI building at Nizam Palace in Kolkata last

Monday, constantly trying to disrupt the process of law by engaging in stone pelting.

A bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and B.R. Gavai told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the CBI, it did not approve of the conduct of the

chief minister and law minister in laying siege of the CBI office, and also supporters thronging the trial court.

The bench noted that there is ample remedy in the Constitution to address such situations, and remarked, "We are not here to advise the government or CBI."

The bench told Mehta: "Why should the accused persons be made to suffer because of a dharna by the chief minister and law minister?...Proceed against them if you wish to."

The bench noted it does not appreciate such dharnas by the chief minister to pressurize the agency, but can the accused be made to suffer? The bench said: "We do not like to mix liberty of citizens with whatever illegal acts of politicians. We will not do that."

However, the top court

queried CBI, who is more in a position to influence the witnesses, those who were chargesheeted or those who have not been?"

On CBI's contention to move the matter to another state, the bench observed that it may demoralize the High Court.

The top court insisted that Calcutta High Court's five-judge bench was already hearing the matter, and queried CBI whether it would want to withdraw its appeal.

Mehta submitted "it is happening periodically in the state that the CM barges into investigating agency office to help the accused". The bench reiterated, "if chief minister or law minister has taken law into their hands, proceed against them".

However, the CBI withdrew its appeal from the top court.

BJP MLA's aide held in B'uru cash for bed scam, party left red-faced

Team Absolute | Bengaluru

Much to the embarrassment of Karnataka's ruling BJP, a purported close aide of its Bommanahalli MLA Satish Reddy was arrested on Tuesday by the Bengaluru police's Central Crime Branch police in connection with the alleged bed scam - exposed by the ruling party members earlier this month with much fanfare.

On May 4, Bangalore South MP Tejasvi Surya, accompanied by his uncle and Basavangudi MLA, L.S. Subramanya, Bommanahalli MLA Reddy and Chickpet MLA Uday Garudhachar stormed into Bengaluru south Covid war room of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike to flag the scam.

Surya, who had also read out a list of 17

Muslims working there and questioned their appointment, had alleged that hospitals in Bengaluru "blocked" beds in fake names to make money, at a time when Covid cases were rising in Karnataka. He claimed that officials of the BBMP "colluded" with private nursing homes and hospitals to block beds and allocate them for exorbitant fees.

The CCB police statement said that Babu, 34, a resident of Roopena Agrahara in Bommanahalli, was arrested on Monday evening after his role of blocking beds and selling them at higher price for Covid patients came to light. A senior police officer, who did not want to be identified, said that the arrested is a personal assistant of Bommanahalli MLA Reddy.

Babu's role of blocking beds in BBMP hospital came to light when they

examined the CCTV footage of the war room and the statements given by the staff members, the police said.

The Karnataka government had ordered reserving 80 per cent of the beds in the private hospitals for Covid patients. The BBMP was assigned to allot beds for the Covid patients seeking treatment in private hospitals. However, due to the alarming rise in Covid cases, most of the beds were fully occupied even as the demand was growing manifold.

The CCB police has already arrested five people -- Nethravathi, Rohith, Venkat Subba Rao, Manjunath and Punith -- in connection with the case. The sleuths had conducted searches in the war room and obtained technical data. Doctors, who are in charge of each zone war room, had also been questioned.

Cong leaders get notice from Delhi Police in alleged toolkit case



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Two Congress leaders, who filed complaint against BJP leaders, have been served notice by the Delhi Police's Special Cell in connection with alleged toolkit case.

Congress Research Department Chairman Rajeev Gowda and Rohan Gupta, Chairman Social

Media department of the party were served notice by the Special Cell on May 21, the day when a similar notice was served to Twitter India.

Speaking to reporter, Gowda said, "We have received a notice from Delhi Police on May 21, and we responded to it on May 22 stating that similar complaint has been filed in Chhattisgarh and police there

has registered an FIR there, so we will proceed with the case there."

His remarks came a day after the sleuths of the Special Cell arrived at the offices of Twitter India at Lado Sarai in south Delhi and in Haryana's Gurugram to serve notices. However, the offices of the Twitter were found shut.

Aman Panwar, Advocate for Congress Party in the fake Toolkit case against BJP, told IANS, "First, even though on May 18 itself my clients filed a detailed complaint for the forgery committed by the BJP leaders to spread the fake Toolkit document, the Delhi Police failed to register an FIR."

Panwar said that thereafter my clients approached the Chhattisgarh Police and an FIR has been registered there.

SC stays Rajasthan High Court's 'no arrest' order

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed a Rajasthan High Court order, issuing direction to its Registrar General and district courts not to list pre-arrest bail applications in cases where the maximum jail term is of three years.

A bench of Justices Vineet Saran and B.R. Gavai stayed the single judge's order passed on May 17. The plea filed by the High Court, through its Registrar General, said the single judge, erroneously by a blanket direction, directed not to list pre-arrest bail applications before the High Court as well as the Sessions courts.

"The single judge further erred by passing blanket order directing not to arrest in an offence in which punishment is up to 3 years and the offence is triable by First Class Magistrate. This shall create a situation of lawlessness," said the petition.

Senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, representing the HC's registrar general, challenged the validity of the High Court order, which also gave blanket



direction to state DGP not to arrest an accused till July 17, 2021.

The petition, which was supported by the state government, argued that the single judge erred in law by not

giving notice to the High Court in administrative side before passing the order affecting the administration of the High Court and the people at large of the Rajasthan. The petition

contended that the single judge exceeded his jurisdiction and illegally and erroneously interfered with the exclusive administrative domain of the Chief Justice of the High Court.

PROVIDE VACCINE TO ALL BEFORE CLASS 12 EXAMS: PUNJAB MINISTER

Chandigarh: Punjab School Education Minister Vijay Inder Singla on Tuesday said the Union government should provide required Covid vaccines to all states before taking decisions on examinations of Class 12 students. Conveying the feedback to the Union Education Minister on the behalf of Amarinder Singh-led Punjab government, Singla said there was a dire need of vaccinating the students appearing in the board examinations along with the teachers. The minister said the examinations of only selected and essential subjects may be held in each discipline and question papers may be for exams of lesser duration. He said due consideration may also be given to pre-board examinations and internal assessment.

While raising the concerns of students and parents, Singla said the examinations should not be conducted until the safety of all stakeholders is ensured. He said the Centre should issue directions to all universities and colleges to cope with the time loss of students.



Gang rape in Bihar's Saharsa, one nabbed

Patna | Agencies

A woman in her early 20s was abducted and gang raped by 4 men in Bihar Saharsa district.

The incident occurred on Monday night when the victim, along with her friend, was returning home from a marriage function on a motorcycle. The four accused spotted them travelling on a deserted road, and intercepted them in a car. They thrashed the victim's friend and kidnapped her in the car near Baluaha canal under Sadar police station. The accused took her to an isolated area in Saharsa and raped her one by one. After committing the crime, the accused threatened her with dire consequences and released her.



The victim reached home in the morning hours and revealed her ordeal to her parents. The victim's parents immediately contacted Sadar police station and filed a written complaint against them. "We have raided the houses of all four accused by four separate teams but managed to arrest only one

accused -- Upendra Yadav alias Santosh, a resident of ward 13 in Saharsa," said Santosh Kumar, DSP of Saharsa (Sadar). "We have identified other three accused named Mohamad Hasim, Prabhsh Kumar and Vijay Yadav. They are absconding. We have constituted separate teams to

nab them," the officer said.

In another incident, a 6 year old minor girl was raped by a 22-year-old youth in Bhagalpur district on Monday evening. The incident took place in Champa Nagar under Nath Nagar police station. The accused took her to an under construction three-storey building and raped her. The victim was recovered bleeding profusely. Her mother spotted her and when she enquired, the victim revealed the identity of the accused. Mohamad Sahjad, the SHO of Nath Nagar police station said: "We have conducted the medical of victim which confirms rape. An FIR under POCOA act has been registered and efforts are on to nab the accused."

CONG URGES TWITTER TO LABEL 'MANIPULATIVE' ON TWEETS OF 11 MINISTERS

New Delhi: The Congress on Tuesday urged Twitter to affix 'manipulative media' tag to 11 Union Ministers for spreading false and malicious propaganda. Congress Chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala

said, "Urgent need to affix 'Manipulative Media' tags to the tweets of Union Ministers in the Modi Government for spreading false and malicious propaganda." The Congress alleged that the forged Toolkit document is created by certain BJP leaders to gain undue and wrongful political advantage by spreading potentially dangerous, false and fabricated material through their Twitter handles, against the Indian National Congress and its leaders. The Union Ministers against whom Congress wants manipulative media tag include Ravi Shankar Prasad, Smriti Irani and nine others. The congress gave the list of Twitter handles of various Union Ministers along with the specific URLs of the Tweets made by them on May 18.



Domino's India hires global forensic agency to probe hacking

Team Absolute | New Delhi

After a hacker made 13TB data of nearly 18 crore orders of Domino's India with key details public on the Dark Web, Jubilant Foodworks that owns the master franchise for Domino's Pizza in India sent a letter to users on Tuesday, saying that it has hired a global forensic agency to investigate the matter.

Domino's India said it suffered an information security incident on March 24, 2021 wherein its systems were attacked by a hacker.

"We moved quickly to contain the breach and hired an external agency to do an impact assessment. Domino's, as a policy, does not store financial details of users such as complete credit card number, CVV, passwords etc and therefore, no such information was compromised," the company said in the open letter.



Independent cyber security researcher Rajshekhara Rajaharia first reported that Domino's India has been hit by a hacker again, after Alon Gal who is CTO of cyber security firm

Hudson Rock, claimed in April that credit card details of nearly 10 lakh people who purchased online on Domino's Pizza India were allegedly being sold for over Rs 4 crore on the

Dark Web.

According to Rajaharia, data of 18 crore orders from Domino's Pizza in India has now become public, that contains name, email, phone number and even the GPS location of the users.

"We have lodged a formal complaint with the relevant authorities and also filed a complaint with the cyber crime cell, and has hired a global forensic agency to investigate the matter, to try and identify the perpetrators behind the attack," Jubilant Foodworks said.

According to Rajaharia, the same person who earlier hacked financial services company MobiKwik has compromised Domino's India.

"The earlier hacker failed to receive ransom and sold the data to some unknown hacker, who has now posted the 13TB data of Domino's India on the Dark Web," Rajaharia had told reporter.

Delhi HC seeks reply on compensation for Covid victim due to 'medical negligence'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday sought response from the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and the Delhi government on a plea seeking compensation for the next of kin of a Covid-19 patient, who allegedly died without getting proper medical attention. In the plea, the family members of the deceased person sought compensation due to the "complete mismanagement" and "criminal negligence" of the authorities. The plea claimed that the victim's oxygen level was very low and his condition was critical, yet the doctor at the hospital did not recommend admission and due to his negligence, the man died while waiting for an ambulance.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh also asked the Delhi government-run Rao Tula Ram Hospital to respond to the plea. After going through the Supreme Court order, which noted that the authority has fixed minimum ex gratia compensation payable to the next of kin of the deceased on account of the Covid-19 pandemic, the high court made NDMA a party in the petition. Senior advocate Rahul Mehra, appearing for

Delhi government, submitted that it is proposing to give ex gratia relief to families of Covid-19 victims and it will be placed before the Cabinet next week. The plea was filed by the parents and wife of Naveen, who died of Covid-19 on the intervening night of April 26-27, allegedly due to doctor's negligence and want of medical attention.

The petitioners, represented through advocates Anuj Chauhan and Anand, submitted that the deceased person's oxygen level was recorded at 60 in the Rao Tula Ram Hospital, yet he was denied medical treatment. The family kept waiting for an ambulance to shift the deceased to another hospital after he was denied admission. The family claimed to have dialled 100 seeking police help and also the Delhi government's cab service, but it did not get any response, even as the patient succumbed to the disease.

The high court asked the Delhi government, the hospital and the NDMA to file counter affidavits on the plea and scheduled the matter for further hearing in July.

The petitioners also sought the court's direction to the authorities to bring on record whether oxygen was available at hospital on April 26.

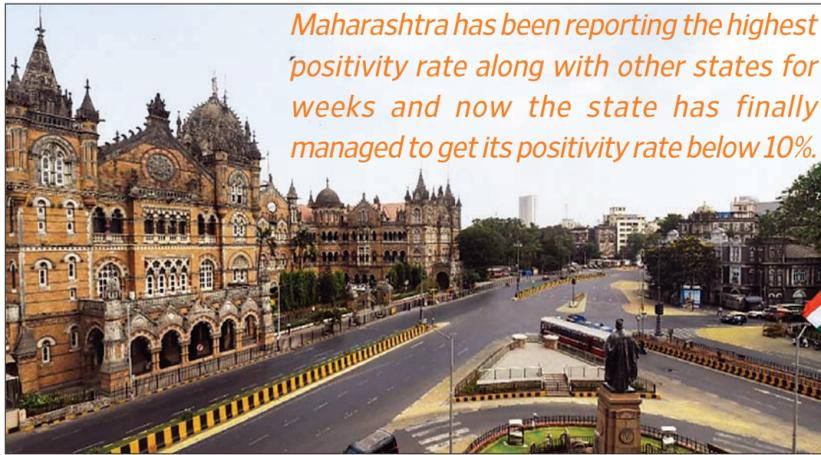


MAHARASHTRA LOCKDOWN TO BE EXTENDED BY A WEEK? GOVT TO DECIDE TODAY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government is considering extending the state-wide lockdown by a week, sources informed Absolute India.

The state cabinet is currently mulling over two propositions. One, whether phased unlocking should start from June 7 or June 1.



Maharashtra has been reporting the highest positivity rate along with other states for weeks and now the state has finally managed to get its positivity rate below 10%.

June 1. Authorities claimed that they have adequate health infrastructure and medicines.

Maharashtra has been reporting the highest positivity rate along with other states for weeks and now the state has finally managed to get its positivity rate below 10%.

down-like curbs after cases exponentially surged. The positivity rate is currently more than 10% in 23 districts in Maharashtra.

As Black Fungus cases rise, Maha to get 60K injections in June

Team Absolute | Mumbai

With the number of Mucormycosis or Black Fungus cases on the rise in Maharashtra, the state will get 60,000 vials of the Amphotericin B injection early June.

The government has issued a global tender for this injection and it is expected to be available by June first week, said Tope after a review meeting of the Covid-19 and Mucormycosis situation in the state presided over by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

He said that presently, the state has recorded 2,245 patients with the Black Fungus and there are over 100 deaths till date.

The cost of the Amphotericin-B injection used to treat this disease is very high and its distribution is controlled by the Centre.

However, the state government has issued a global tender to make these injections widely available in Maharashtra, and the batch of 60,000 vials will reach here within a few more days.

Presently, Amphotericin B injection is being supplied by the Central Government and is being distributed to the districts according to the number of Black Fungus patients.

He pointed out that Mucormycosis has been declared as a notifiable disease by the Maharashtra government last week and now



each patient would be recorded. The state has announced it will cover the treatment costs of all Black Fungus patients under the central and state schemes at designated hospitals in all districts.

Cabinet nod for one post of director at Nagpur NDRF academy

The death toll in the Arabian Sea tragedy caused by Cyclone Tauktae earlier this week has shot up to 66, while around 10 persons are still reported missing.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved creation of one post of Director in Senior Administrative Grade (SAG) at National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) academy, Nagpur.

TADOBA-ANDHARI TIGER RESERVE NEEDS EXPANSION: CM



Mumbai: Uddhav Thackeray said there were 312 tigers in Chandrapur, over 850 kilometres from here, which in turn had increased instances of man-animal conflict.

post of Director, NDRF academy, the command and control of the organisation will be entrusted to a senior and experienced officer, who can steer the institution as per the intended objectives.

The academy will impart skill based practical training to over 5,000 personnel annually, from NDRF, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), CD volunteers, other stakeholders and disaster response agencies of SAARC and other countries.

It will also cater to analyzing and improving the training programmes as per changing needs and requirement of the Stakeholders. It will immensely improve the standard of training imparted on disaster response to NDRF, SDRF personnel and other stakeholders. The

Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, took the decision taking cognisance of the proposal submitted before it by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

NDRF academy was established in 2018 at Nagpur by merging with it National Civil Defence College (NCDC). The main campus of the academy is under construction, till then it is functioning from the existing campus of NCDC. The academy presently imparts training to NDRF, SDRF and Civil Defence volunteers and other stakeholders, and is envisaged to grow into a premier training institution of international repute.

In 18 Maharashtra districts, quarantine center stay now must for Covid patients

'We have decided to stop home isolation for patients of 18 districts where the positivity rate is high,' says Maharashtra health minister

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amid attempts to check novel coronavirus surge in the state, Maharashtra government has shunned the option of home isolation for patients and instead made institutional quarantine must in areas that have a high Covid positivity rate.

'We have decided to stop home isolation for patients of 18 districts where the positivity rate is high. The patients from these districts will have to go to a quarantine center, won't be allowed

home isolation," said Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope.

Officials also said that a long-term rehabilitation policy for people affected by natural disasters is being worked out. Separately, Maharashtra Relief and Rehabilitation Minister Vijay Wadetiwar on Monday said the government was contemplating easing COVID-19-induced lockdown-like curbs in districts outside the "red zone" after June 1.

22,122 new cases of coronavirus, 361 deaths in a span of 24 hours, taking the caseload and death toll to 5,602,019 and 89,212 respectively, according to the state health department's bulletin.

With 42,000 Covid-19 patients getting discharged during the day, Maharashtra's overall count of recoveries rose to 5,182,592, leaving the state with 3,27,580 active cases, it said, adding that the case recovery rate improved to 92.51% while the fatality rate is now at 1.59%.

Mumbai reported 1,057 new Covid-19 cases on Monday, down 374 from a day ago, taking the tally to 6,98,867, while 48 patients succumbed to the infection and more than 1,300 recovered, the city civic body

Meanwhile, in terms of rising cases of mucormycosis or black fungus across the country, the health ministry informed that as many as 5,424 cases of mucormycosis or black fungus have been reported from 18 states, with a majority of them in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Speaking at the 27th group of ministers (GoM) meeting on COVID-19, he said that Gujarat reported 2165 cases, Maharashtra 1188, Uttar Pradesh 663, Madhya Pradesh 590, Haryana 339 and Andhra Pradesh 248 cases.

COVID-19: Maharashtra vaccination tally crosses 2.1 crore mark

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The ongoing COVID-19 vaccination drive, vaccination tally in Maharashtra on May 25 crossed 2.1 crore.

As per the data released by the health ministry, Maharashtra, as of 7 am on May 25, inoculated 2,10,13,742 people.

Maharashtra tops the states with a total of 2,10,13,742 inoculations followed by Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat with 1,65,43,234, 1,61,83,750 and 1,57,02,276 doses respectively.

While 44,06,325 people got second dose, 1,66,07,417 got their first dose.

Maharashtra recorded 22,122 new COVID-19 cases on Monday, taking the state's infection tally beyond the 56-lakh mark to 56,02,019, while 361 more deaths pushed the toll to 89,212, the health department said.

Recoveries outnumbered the fresh cases. A statement from the health department said 42,320 patients were



discharged from hospitals during the day, taking the count of recoveries to 51,82,592. The state's COVID-19 recovery rate is 92.51 per cent, while the case fatality rate is 1.59 per cent, the department said.

Mumbai saw 1,049 new COVID-19 cases and 48 deaths, taking its tally to 6,97,959 and the toll to 14,613. In the

wider Mumbai division, comprising the city and its satellite towns, there were 2,713 new cases and 69 more deaths. The caseload in the Mumbai division rose to 15,11,376 and the death toll to 26,935, the department said.

The Nashik division reported 3,245 fresh cases, including 1,965 in Ahmednagar district. The Pune division recorded 5,269 new cases, including 1,056 in Pune district and 2,470 in Satara district. The Kolhapur division registered 3,434 fresh cases, including 1,044 in Sangli district.

Maharashtra's COVID-19 figures are as follows: Positive cases 56,02,019; new cases 22,122; deaths 89,212; recoveries 51,82,592; active cases 3,27,580; tests so far 3,32,77,290.

Vaccinate kids aged under 5 against influenza: Tribal panel head to Maharashtra government

Former MLA Vivek Pandit said he has written a letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, urging that children below the age of five years be administered the vaccine against influenza in all tehsils and district collectors be made the monitoring authority.



to administer anti-influenza vaccine to all children below the age of five years in the state's tribal region before the upcoming monsoon season. Talking to reporters on Monday, he said health experts have indicated that during the rainy season, the influenza, also known as the common flu, may spread among children.

The country is already facing the COVID-19 crisis, he

noted. Pandit said he has written a letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, urging that children below the age of five years be administered the vaccine against influenza

in all tehsils and district collectors be made the monitoring authority.

He said the poor tribals cannot afford the anti-influenza vaccines, which are priced between Rs 1,500 and Rs 2,000.

Therefore, the government should undertake a drive to administer the vaccines to all children free of cost before the commencement of the monsoon season, he said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Former MLA Vivek Pandit, who heads a state committee on tribal welfare, has appealed to the Maharashtra government

Give wide publicity to free mucormycosis treatment for poor: HC to Maharashtra

The bench also asked the state to restrain the private hospitals from charging "astronomical bills" to mucormycosis patients.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government on Monday told the Bombay High Court's Aurangabad bench that treatment of mucormycosis or black fungus infection is now covered under the Mahatma Jotiba Phule Jan Arogya Yojana (MJPAY) and the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) for eligible underprivileged beneficiaries at selected hospitals.

The bench then directed the state government to give "wide publicity" to its decision so that poor, illiterate/semi-literate people and those living in remote and tribal areas will be benefited from the scheme. It also asked the state to restrain the private hospitals from charging "astronomical bills" to mucormycosis patients and ensure that the cost of treatment and daily con-



sumption of antifungal medicines is monitored. "This would prevent unscrupulous elements (hospitals) from fleecing poor people by overcharging for the treatment of mucormycosis. Needless to say, the list of hospitals identified for such treatment and through which the medicines would be made available should also be given wide publicity so that patients do not land in the wrong hospital for availing treatment," the HC noted in its order.

The state said 130 hospitals across Maharashtra have been identified to

treat the infection and 1,000 more facilities would be empanelled. Also, 19 medical and surgical packages have been identified for treatment of mucormycosis under the MJPAY, it added. A division bench of Justice

Ravindra V Ghuge and Justice Bhalchandra U Debadwar was hearing a suo motu PIL, based on media reports, to address issues of funeral rites of Covid-19 patients, shortage of medical oxygen supply and black marketing of remdesivir among others.

The state government further said that antifungal medicines required for treatment of the ailment will be made available "free of cost" to patients admitted in pre-identified hospitals.

The HC will hear the PIL next on Tuesday.

Third Maharashtra village achieves 'zero-Covid' status this month

Initially, barely 3 or 4 Covid-19 cases were detected in the village after which the Gram Panchayat and Health Department launched a full-fledged drive to test the families of the infectees, suspects and symptomatic patients were immediately isolated.

Team Absolute | Ahmednagar

After the success of Hivare Bazaar, another small village in Ahmednagar, Bhojare Khurd has achieved 'zero-Covid' status after practicing isolation and other Covid-appropriate behavior, officials said here on Tuesday.

The development comes close on the heels of Nanded's Bhoji village earning the Centre's laurels after its 6,000-strong population managed to isolate the coronavirus and notched success as the country is battling the second wave of the pandemic.

Bhojare Khurd, with 1,500 people, on the outskirts of Ahmednagar town is located in



a hilly, drought-hit region of the otherwise prosperous and green district. A majority of the villagers are migrants working in Mumbai, Pune and other big cities, but after the lockdowns were imposed many chose to return home. Initially, barely 3 or 4 Covid-19 cases were detected in the village after which the Gram Panchayat and Health Department launched a full-fledged drive to test the families of the infectees, suspects and symptomatic patients were immediately isolated. Not wanting to become scourge-hit, the villagers resolved to keep themselves safe and the village itself free of the virus with a series of initiatives.

Accordingly, all families were checked regularly with the help of

ASHA and Anganwadi workers, any found infected were immediately isolated and other treatment was continued. "If they were found with symptoms of fever, cough or fatigue, they were subjected to Antigen tests and quarantined," said Dr. Savita Kute, the village medico involved in the effort. The village authorities also launched a widespread awareness campaign at the temple loudspeakers to convey Covid-appropriate behaviour daily in the morning and evening, they were informed about the disease, how to take care of self and families, stressing on wearing masks, physical distancing, washing hands, hygiene, regular checkups, etc, said Dr. Kute. In fact, after the state-wide lockdown was announced last month, Bhojare Khurd Gram Panchayat implemented its own 'Gaon Band' campaign to prevent any further spread of the virus, said the Sarpanch Rajendra Ambekar. "The suspected persons were persuaded to stay at the isolation centre in the village which helped break the virus chain and now we have become a 'Corona-free' village. If other villages adopt our village's examples, they can also quickly drive away the virus," said Ambekar.



DELHI RECORDS LESS THAN 2,000 COVID CASES FOR 3RD CONSECUTIVE DAY

The number of daily recoveries outnumbered the new cases by a significant margin again on Tuesday. A total of 4,251 patients recovered from the deadly disease, taking the total recovery figure to 13,74,682 in the national capital. The recovery rate was 96.8 per cent.



according to a health bulletin issued by the Delhi government.

The city recorded 156 deaths in the last 24 hours, which was lowest number of fatalities since April 16. The overall toll has now reached 23,565. The number of daily recoveries outnumbered the new cases by a significant margin again on Tuesday. A total of 4,251 patients recovered from the deadly disease, taking the total recovery figure to 13,74,682 in the national capital. The recovery rate was 96.8 per cent.

The active cases dropped below 22,000. The number is at a eight-week low. The active cases declined to 21,739 from 24,578 on the previous day.

The number of new cases reported came out of 73,406 tests conducted on the previous day. So far, a total of 1,88,62,103 tests have been conducted in the national capital. Delhi reported 1,550 new coronavirus cases on Monday, 1,649 on Sunday, 2,260 on Saturday, 3,009 on Friday, 3,231 on Thursday and 3,846 on Wednesday.

Delhi HC dismisses PIL seeking direction to ICMR, Niti Ayog regarding modification of Covid treatment protocol

The court showed displeasure with the petition and said the respondents have enough experts to take a decision regarding protocols.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday dismissed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking direction to the Central India, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and NITI Aayog regarding reconsideration of the prevalent treatment protocol for a mild case of COVID-19 and modify the treatment protocol in COVID-19.

The Bench of Justice DN Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh dismissed the petition and also imposed a fine of Rs 25,000 on the petitioner.

The court showed displeasure with the petition and said the respondents have enough experts to take a decision regarding protocols.



Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Chetan Sharma, appearing for the Central government, also opposed the petition and said various petitions are coming to the respondents and giving suggestions.

Vivek Sheel Aggarwal (Chairman, Niramaya Research) along with Dr Sanjay Jain (MS, Orthopaedics), Dr Anu Garg (MD, Paediatrics) and Bhasvar Aggarwal (Independent Researcher) are the petitioners in the PIL filed through advocates Praveen K Sharma and Amitesh Bakshi.

The plea stated that expert also has

suggested that use of Paracetamol, Antibiotics and Steroids in the treatment of COVID-19 should be restricted as rampant use of these medicines is wreaking havoc on the immune system of the body of any individual thereby leading to the deterioration of cases from mild to moderate and severe. Appearing for petitioners, senior Advocate Sachin Puri mentioned that there has been no clinical trial on the efficacy and safety of antipyretics usage in the treatment and management of viral infections especially COVID-19. It also states that all the

medical literature and also clinical trials in animals, suggest against the use of it and appeal to hold clinical trials.

"The new hypothesis by Niramaya Research suggests that the immunomodulatory effects of the medication being prescribed tamper and damage the homeostatic mechanism of the human immune system leading to complications and shows the correlation of the same complications in COVID-19 related Mortalities," the plea stated.

The petition sought direction to ICMR to investigate and hold clinical trials and change the treatment protocols, if necessary. It also stated that the treatment protocol issued by the ICMR and practiced by doctors is totally in contrast to what the researchers in top medical journals suggest that "disruption of Homeostatic Mechanisms of Immune system is caused due to the treatment protocol in mild to moderate cases in Covid-19: High Dosage of Paracetamol leads to GSH depletion, increase in oxidative stress and disruption of Homeostatic mechanisms of the immune system".

Ensure Delhi Fair Price Shops dispensing free ration: Minister

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Food and Supply Minister Imran Hussain on Tuesday directed officials to ensure that free ration (food grains) is being distributed at the scheduled times from all Fair Price Shops across the capital.

The officials in the Food and Supply Department, who are field in-charges, have been directed to visit all these shops under their jurisdiction and ensure that food grains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) are being distributed to the beneficiaries at free of cost in May and June.

The directives came during a meeting with the senior officials, wherein the Minister expressed his displeasure on the process of distribution of food grains from Fair Price Shops. Hussain has been regularly inspecting these shops and has found several of them in areas such as Shalimar Bagh, Sultanpuri and Mustafabad closed even during the scheduled time. "In case FPSs are found closed during prescribed working hours (from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.), strict action will be taken against not only the erring FPS dealers but also against the officials concerned," he said. The Minister also asked senior officials to ensure that FPS dealers do not indulge in other malpractices such as misbehaviour, diversion of foodgrains, hoarding, black-marketing, short dispensing of ration etc. "If any of the dealers is found indulging in such malpractices, strict and swift action shall be taken against the erring FPS dealers as per law." Hussain also informed that Delhi government will shortly start distribution of 5 kg of foodgrains (4 kg wheat and 1 kg rice) per person, free of cost, for the months of May and June 2021, to non-PDS beneficiaries who do not possess any ration card.



2 HELD FOR BLACK MARKETING AMPHOTERICIN INJECTIONS IN DELHI

New Delhi: Delhi Police on Monday said that they have arrested two persons for black marketing of Amphotericin B injections and recovered 20 vials of the same from their possession.

Atul Kumar Thakur, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South Delhi, said, "We have arrested two persons -- Rajnish Srivastava and Murtaza Khan -- who were black marketing black fungus-related life saving drugs Amphotericin B at exorbitant prices." Thakur said the police recovered 20 Amphotericin B Injections, three mobile phones and one car from the accused persons. The DCP said that on Sunday, the police got a secret tip-off that some persons were selling Amphotericin B Injection for a black fungus patient at an exorbitant price of Rs 11,300 per jab.

Covid containment zones in Gurugram down to 50

GURUGRAM | Agencies

As Covid-19 cases decline in Gurugram, the city now has 50 containment zones compared to the earlier 107 as on May 21, according to the district administration order.

The health officials said the numbers of containment zones will soon come down further as the number of Covid cases have been decreasing in Gurugram. During the screening in rural areas of Gurugram since May 15, the district health department workers have visited 28,129 houses, nearly 1,49,810 Covid tests were done and nearly 41 people tested positive for Covid-19.

Meanwhile, 212 fresh coronavirus cases were reported in Gurugram on Monday. Nine deaths were also reported from the city taking the district's Covid toll to 763, said health officials.

The Covid-19 tally in Gurugram has now risen to 1,78,849, of which 1,74,150



have recovered, including 1,252 on Monday, according to an official daily health release. On Monday there were overall 3,936 active Covid-19 cases in the city. The Health department said of the 763 deaths, 514 died of co-morbidities.

According to the health officials, nearly 14,77,823 tests have been conducted in Gurugram district of which 12,89,724 have tested negative for the infection. Nearly 9,250 tests were conducted in the district during the last 24 hours. Nearly 5,656 vaccine doses were given in the district on Monday. With this nearly 6,34,270 people have received corona vaccine in Gurugram.

The Covid helpline (1950) service started by the district administration last year during the pandemic giving information related to Covid-19 has also received a good response.

An official said when this pandemic started in March last year, they received nearly 1,20,000 calls from needy people and appropriate help had been provided to them. Most of the calls were received during April and May. This year, the number of calls received were 29,168 from April 18 to May 24.

Crime Branch brings Sushil to Chhatrasal Stadium, flat in Delhi for investigation

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Crime Branch of the Delhi Police on Tuesday took two-time olympian Sushil Kumar to Chhatrasal Stadium and his flat in the national capital to further probe the case of the death of wrestler Sagar Dhankar.

The Crime Branch sleuths took the wrestler first to the Chhatrasal Stadium here and questioned him. The police sleuths asked Kumar about the chain of events on May 4, when their brawl took place, in which Dhankar was badly injured.

Dhankar had succumbed to his injuries in the hospital later.

The police also took Kumar to the parking lot, where the brawl took place.

Later, the forensic team joined the Delhi Police sleuths and collected material from the spot.



The Crime Branch team then arrived at Kumar's Model Town flat and questioned him again.

Kumar was arrested on Sunday morning along with his aide Ajay Kumar, on the run for more than 18 days in several states after the death

of wrestler Dhankar after the brawl on May 4 at Chhatrasal stadium here.

According to Delhi Police officials, Kumar had travelled to Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Haryana during the 18-day-long cat and mouse chase game. He was finally

arrested from Delhi's Mundka area on Sunday morning, when he had come to collect some cash and also borrowed a scooter from a national level player. The Delhi Police had also announced a reward of Rs 1 lakh on Kumar and Rs 50,000 on his aide Ajay Kumar was sent to six days' custody by a Delhi court.

On May 18, Kumar had moved an anticipatory bail plea in New Delhi's Rohini court, but the court rejected it.

On May 4, two groups of wrestlers clashed with each other at Chhatrasal Stadium leading to the death of 23-year-old Dhankar due to injuries he sustained during the brawl. A Delhi court had also issued a non-bailable warrant (NBW) against Kumar.

The Delhi Police had also issued a lookout notice for Kumar who won a bronze medal in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and silver in the 2012 London Olympic Games.

Gurugram police roll out 'oxygen concentrator bank' service

Team Absolute | Gurugram

The Gurugram police have rolled out an 'oxygen concentrator bank' facility for Covid patients under an initiative called 'Support Covid Patient'.

Commissioner of Police K.K. Rao said that the Gurugram police have turned 20 PCR vans of its fleet into temporary ambulances and have begun a 24x7 helpline number 999999953 to help the Covid patients.

Rao said till now around a dozen oxygen concentrators have been delivered to Covid patients who are in home isolation.

"This facility will be operated for 24 hours for the general public. Under this facility, the needy corona-infected patient will get free oxygen concentrator at their doorstep. To avail this facility, a person has to submit the necessary documents such as medical report, SPO-2 level and their local address etc," Rao told IANS.

"To prevent Covid infection, an initiative called 'Support Covid Patient' has been started by Gurugram police so that people can be cured in home isolation as soon as possible," he added.



"We appeal to the people not to step outside unnecessarily. People should follow the Covid protocols seriously and take care of their health and that of their families," he said.

Meanwhile, the district police have issued 6,656 challans for not wearing face masks from May 1 to 24. Also, a number of 133 First Information Report (FIRs) have been registered under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) including the Disaster Management Act. With these challans, a fine of Rs 33,28,000 has been imposed on those who did not wear masks between May 1 and 24 in the district.

PEOPLE SUFFERING DUE TO AAP'S FAILURE TO CAP PRICES OF MEDICAL FACILITIES: DELHI BJP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi BJP on Monday slammed the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in the national capital, saying that in the absence of price capping by the AAP government, patients are robbed in the name of treatment.

The BJP also put five demands in front of the city government. Addressing a press conference here, Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta said, "The common people in Delhi are being cheated and looted for the past 15 months due to the mismanagement and negligence of the Arvind Kejriwal-led government, which has been patronising these people overtly and covertly." He said that even as the whole of Delhi is searching for precious oxygen, ventilators, medicines, ambulances etc., the AAP government is only busy politicking without caring for the pain and agony of the common man.

Gupta said, "As the Chief Minister and a servant of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal should be ashamed that while people are losing their lives, he is busy doing petty politics and shining his own face."

"This led to Delhi seeing what it had not witnessed before, all because of Kejriwal's petty politics and greed," he alleged. Besides Gupta, Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri and west Delhi MP Parvesh Verma also addressed the mediapersons.

Gupta said when the matter pertaining to private hospitals fleeing people in the name of treatment came to the fore at the intervention of the Centre, the AAP government issued a



circular fixing rates for beds in the hospitals.

"The circular clearly said that ordinary an isolation bed should be charged at Rs 8,000-10,000 a day, ICU bed without ventilator at Rs 13,000-15,000 daily, and with ventilator Rs 15,000-18,000 per day. But people were forced to pay Rs 1

lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh a day for ICU beds," he claimed, adding that if only Kejriwal administration had followed its own guidelines, people would not have ended up paying through their nose.

He also slammed the AAP government for not implement-

ing the Centre's Ayushman Bharat scheme in Delhi.

"If this would have been implemented here, many poor people would have got financial help from it and many precious lives could have been saved," Gupta said.

Firing salvos at the Kejriwal government, the BJP leader said, "Why no price capping was done and orders were issued to that affect?"

"There is a nexus between Kejriwal and private hospital owners," he said, adding that this can be gauged by the fact that despite common people paying hefty bills of Rs 10-15 lakh in the name of Covid treatment to these hospitals, no action has been taken against them.

He also alleged that it's clear that a large part of this money must have been given to Kejriwal's ministers and officials.

Gupta also demanded an audit to be done on the issue of price capping. Meanwhile, Bidhuri said that the people of Delhi are facing a two-pronged difficulty, Covid on the one hand, and the black marketing being done in the name of treatment on the other. "Even the nodal officers appointed by the Chief Minister to help people have been of no use and are only helping to further the cause of Kejriwal himself," he alleged. He also said that Kejriwal has taken no action against the officials indulging in corrupt practices in the name of providing treatment, which shows the Chief Minister is hand in glove with the hospitals owners.

Bidhuri also said that instead of improving the oxygen supply position, Kejriwal's focus is on its black marketing, which the people of Delhi have seen.



CM CHOUHAN ANNOUNCES UNLOCK FROM JUNE 1

Chairing a cabinet meeting, Chouhan said, "We will start the process of unlocking in the state from June 1 but Covid testing will also continue so that no Covid-infected person becomes a carrier of the infection."

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said the process of unlocking will start in the state from June 1 for which a team of ministers will be formed.

Chairing a cabinet meeting, Chouhan said, "We will start the process of unlocking in the state from June 1 but Covid testing will also continue so that no Covid-infected person becomes a carrier of the infection."

He said we have to be prepared well in advance to stop the third wave of the pandemic. We have to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour and encourage others to follow it as well as trust the medical system, he added.

"A team of ministers will be formed to assess the process of unlocking. This team will be in touch with the scientists and decide how we will lift the lockdown."



Referring to the opposition to the vaccines at many places, Chouhan said a vaccination campaign committee would be formed to create awareness among the people. We cannot eliminate coronavirus completely unless there is full public support behind the government. Therefore, at the lower level the Covid Crisis Management Committee will be involved in assessing the process of unlocking the state, he added.

All cabinet ministers must visit the districts under their charge each day and concentrate on

managing them at the block level. There should be a meeting of the Crisis Management Committee of every village and ward and they must decide how to unlock the state. This will involve the people and will encourage them to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour, the Chief Minister added.

'A Janata curfew' has been imposed till May 31 to curb the spread of Covid-19 in the state. There are five districts which have been exempted from the Janata curfew while the lockdown will be relaxed from June 1 across all districts.

State govt aims at 0% corona positivity rate by May 31

Chouhan has said the Covid management strategy implemented for prevention and controlling the infection is turning out to be a success. Public participation played an important role in this direction. The spread of Covid-19 is slowly reducing.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Covid-19 situation in Madhya Pradesh is improving gradually as the positivity rate in the state has reached below 10 per cent across all districts. The state government has, however, set a target to further bring the positivity rate to zero by May 31.

A meeting with a core group set up for controlling Covid-19 in the presence of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the state's positivity rate was 3.9 per cent on Monday. Indore's positivity rate was 8.1 per cent while that of Bhopal was 7.6 per cent.

Chouhan has said the Covid management strategy implemented for prevention and controlling the infection is turning out to be a success. Public participation played an important role in this direction. The spread of Covid-19 is slowly reducing.

Those villages and gram panchayats which will be completely free from the



infection, the public representatives or members of the Covid Crisis Management Committee would declare them Covid-free. The Disaster Management Committees which performed well would be rewarded on August 15, he added.

The Chief Minister said the campaign to eradicate Covid-19 must continue so that people with symptoms of Covid-19 are identified and appropriate treatment

could be provided to them. Chouhan said the 'Corona curfew' should be strictly followed till May 31 so that zero per cent positivity rate could be achieved.

Citizens can avoid contracting the infection by following Covid-appropriate behaviour. The pandemic will still remain while economic activities will also remain operational with necessary precautions. Micro containment zones must be created.

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS ENCOURAGING RURAL PEOPLE TO GET VACCINATED



Team Absolute | Dhar

To overcome vaccine hesitancy among the rural population, a non-government organisation 'Youth For Children' has launched a door-to-door campaign across all villages in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh.

This youth group has been spreading awareness among the common people encouraging them to get themselves vaccinated as it is the only potent weapon to combat coronavirus.

Nalchha village in Dhar district is a tribal dominated area and the people living here fear coronavirus infection but are still not ready for vaccination.

There are various misconceptions among people here. To prepare the tribal popula-

tion for vaccination, the volunteers of 'Youth for Children' have been visiting the village.

The volunteers are going door-to-door in every village to check the oxygen level of the people, distributing face masks as well as spreading awareness to frequently wash their hands. They have been encouraging people to get vaccinated and their efforts are yielding positive results as people are now getting vaccinated.

The villagers are being advised not to panic in case of a fever, cough or common cold and must consult an auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM) or a doctor. They must take the medicine at the right time, receive two vaccination doses and take special care of their children along with their eating habits.

The 'Youth for Children' team visited the fields in Malipura, Kimapura and Bhibarkhedha as well as 'Chaupals' to spread awareness among people about following Covid-19 protocols and discussed the benefits of vaccination with them.

Gayatri Parmar of 'Youth for Children' said she is engaged in the vaccination campaign with the cooperation of Dhar Collector Alok Singh, Anil Gulati of UNICEF and Dr Arora of Nalchha Health Department. Along with the team of Seva Bharati and state Health Department, the volunteers are trying to change the outlook of the people towards vaccination. A doctor Mahesh Yadav says that people are now coming forward for vaccination.

Blood testing labs should be established in universities: Governor

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Anandiben Patel has instructed to set up blood test labs in all universities. She has said that the lab should have testing facility for Novel Corona. She has also instructed to make effective arrangements for health examination of all the employees of the university and get blood tests done every month. The Governor was holding an online discussion with the Vice Chancellors of the Universities at Raj Bhavan today. Higher Education Minister Mohan Yadav also attended the meeting online.

Patel said that the ongoing Covid vaccination work in universities should be conducted effectively. Not a single vaccine should go waste, vaccination work should be fullproof.



The vaccination vial should be opened only when the person is present at the center for vaccination in multiples of ten or ten. For this, work should be based on a clear action plan. She instructed to arrange for 100 percent vaccination in the villages adopted by the universities. She said that vaccination should be done after

discussion with sarpanchs. She directed to complete the construction work going on in the universities within the time limit.

Patel said that the time table of the examinations should be displayed on the website. Along with the time table of the examinations, it should have the dates of the examination results

also so that students get proper time for preparation of exams. They were told that the examinations of students studying in universities will also be held online in the months of June and July. Their results will be declared in the month of July and August respectively. During this period, examinations will be conducted in the colleges affiliated to the university through the open book system. Students will give online examinations. Answer books have to be submitted at the collection center. Examination evaluation will be arranged in the lead colleges.

On this occasion, it was informed that in most of the universities of the state, teachers, officers, employees of the university and their families who are more than 45 plus have been vaccinated.

WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT WITH CORONA AND WILL ALSO DO WORK: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that Corona curfew will be lifted gradually from June 1 in the state. In such a situation, you have to be very careful. Wear mask, maintain distance from each other, do not go to crowded places and wash hands repeatedly. Everyone has to get vaccinated. By following all these precautions, we will continue to fight the corona and will also continue to do the work.

Chouhan was speaking with the construction workers of the state through video conferencing from the Mantralaya. Chouhan transferred the amount of Rs 112 crore 81 lakh under Covid-19 assistance scheme into the account of 11 lakh 28 thousand construction workers of the state through a single click. Labour and Mineral Resources Minister Shri Brajendra Pratap Singh and concerned offi-

cials were present on the occasion. Chouhan said that all the poor, including construction workers, are being given free ration of five kg per member for five months, the state government has provided three months ration and the Central government is giving two months ration. He directed the officials to ensure that every poor gets this ration.

Chouhan said that the government is providing free treatment of corona under Covid Upchar Yojana. The person holding Ayushman card and his family have been provided free treatment facility in private hospitals for up to five lakh rupees in a year. Apart from this, corona is being treated free of cost in all government hospitals and contracted hospitals. On the death of parents from the corona in the state, a scheme for giving monthly pension of five thousand rupees to the children has also been started.

The government is fully with you at the time of crisis. Your brother is standing with you.

Chouhan also interacted with construction workers on the occasion. He asked if they were angry with their brother for imposing restrictions during Corona. If the corona curfew had not been imposed then the corona infection in the region could not have been controlled. This was necessary. Now the corona is under control, so we will end the restrictions gradually. Local Crisis Management groups will decide whether to open and when to open. Everyone said that the Corona curfew was necessary. If it had not been imposed then corona would not have been controlled. Chouhan said that you will have to protect your village and city from Corona. Follow all precautions. Also get the vaccine dose. This is the safety cycle of protection from the corona.

WOMAN CONGRESS LEADER ARRESTED FOR ENTERING CM'S HOUSE

Bhopal: Dhar District Women Congress president, who was trying to enter chief minister's house, was detained by police here on Tuesday. She was protesting against FIR registered against former chief minister Kamal Nath. Dhar District Congress president Vijeta Tripathi was carrying bangles and said she will hand them over to chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. According to information, Tripathi reached chief minister's house alone and tried to enter it when she was stopped by security personnel. As a result, she created ruckus, claiming that she will not return home without handing over bangles to the chief minister. She was later detained and handed over to Shyamla Hills police station. Police said a case under Section 188 of IPC has been registered against Tripathi and one of her supporters. They were later released by police. Talking to journalists, Tripathi said she lost her father due to Covid-19. "The government is hiding records of deaths due to Covid-19. Now that our leader Kamal Nath raised question, they registered case against him. Chief minister is responsible of Covid-19 deaths. He should be held responsible for all deaths," she added.

CABINET APPROVES MUKHYA MANTRI COVID-19 ANUKAMPANIYUKTI YOJANA

- High-level committee constituted to purchase one crore vaccines
- Cabinet met under chairmanship of Chief Minister Chouhan

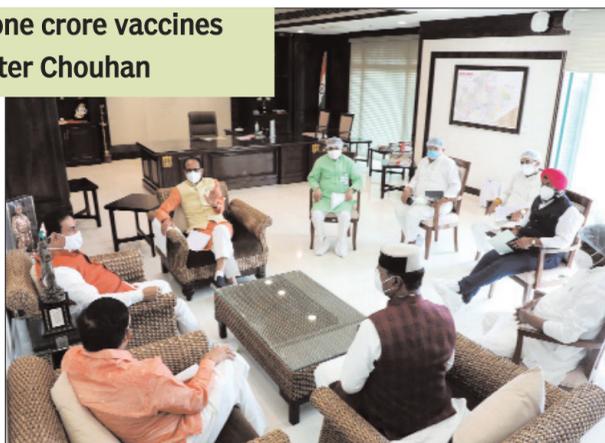
Team Absolute | Bhopal

A virtual meeting of the Cabinet was held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. During the Cabinet meeting it was decided to implement 'Mukhya Mantri Covid-19 Anukampaniyukti Yojana' to provide compassionate appointment to eligible dependents of those who died while serving in government service during Covid-19 pandemic including regular permanent workers, workers on workload and contingency fund, daily wage earners, ad hoc, contractual, collector rate, outsource, government servants working on honorarium, government servants working as outsourced employees.

The cabinet authorised Madhya Pradesh Health Corporation to purchase one crore vaccine doses through global tender to provide Covid-19 vaccine to persons aged between 18 and 44 years. The formation of a high-level committee was taken to conduct technical examination of the tender process of vaccine purchase and to approve the financial proposal. After technical examination, the financial proposals of the tenderers will be examined and a proposal for fixing rate for the purchase of the vaccine will be presented before the Cabinet for approval.

The cabinet approved immediate / contingent expenditure to deal with the Corona epidemic, which could not be anticipated and the expenses for the transportation of migrant workers from outside the state.

The Cabinet provided ex-post facto approval to instructions issued for expenditure permission to 52 districts for the unexpected expenses in prevention of the Covid-19 epidemic, which were not permissible in the SDRF norms such as for the operation



of relief camps (excluding the permissible expenditure in the SDRF) for instance the transport arrangements of the workers.

The Cabinet gave ex-post facto approval for the action taken to bring the trapped workers in other states through trains in Madhya Pradesh during the lockdown in the year 2020. The Cabinet gave post-facto approval to the MukhyamantriPravasi

Madzoor Sahayata Yojana launched for a provision to transfer Rs 1000 into the bank account / e-wallet of the labourers of Madhya Pradesh state who were trapped in other states keeping in mind their basic needs during the nationwide lockdown to prevent corona virus infection.

The cabinet has given approval to the action taken for the acquisition of hotels by the district administration for the purpose of operating as quarantine centres for the stay of doctors, paramedical staff, police officers and other officers and employees doing duty during lockdown due to Covid-19.

The Cabinet approved amendment in the provision related to the departmental recruitment rules under Madhya Pradesh Public Health and Family Welfare Department related to 100 percent promotion of first class specialists on the sanctioned posts, and approved the filling of 25 percent posts by direct recruitment and the remaining 75 percent by promotion as before. After incorporating the above provisions in the departmental recruitment rules, the process of recruitment of experts will be done through direct recruitment to provide expert services to the general public of the state.

To provide services of specialist doctors to the general public, to attract class two PG physicians in the state for the services in the department the subsequent grade pay (5400 to 6600) would be given as promotion after taking charge as medical officer to postgraduate degree holder physicians after two years and postgraduate diploma holder physicians after three years of regular service.

If the doctors already working in the department are selected for the post of specialist in the direct recruitment process, their prior services will be included in the qualifying service calculation for pension.

The Cabinet decided to have farmers registered in the state in Rabi 2020-21 (Rabi Marketing Year 2021-22) for procurement of gram, lentil and mustard under the PSS of the Government of India by the State Procurement Agency 'Madhya Pradesh State Cooperative Marketing Association.'

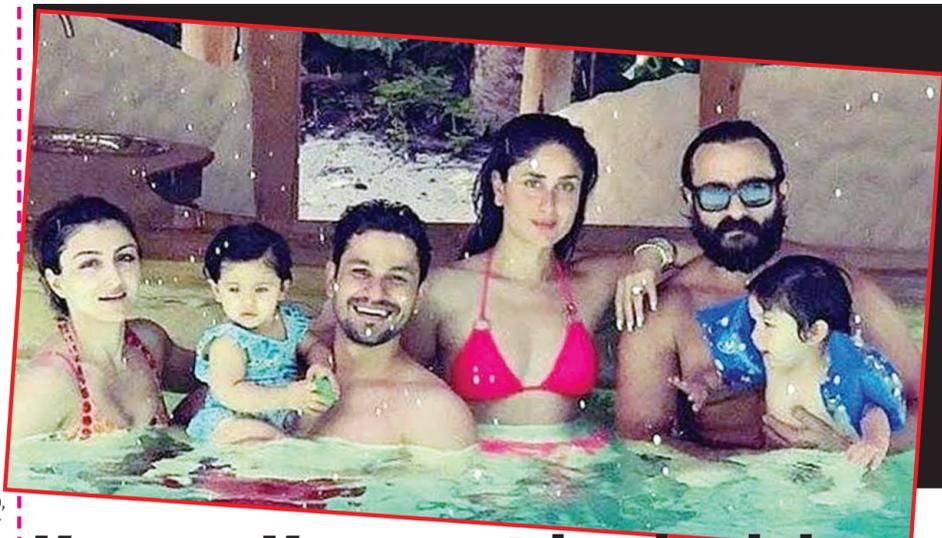
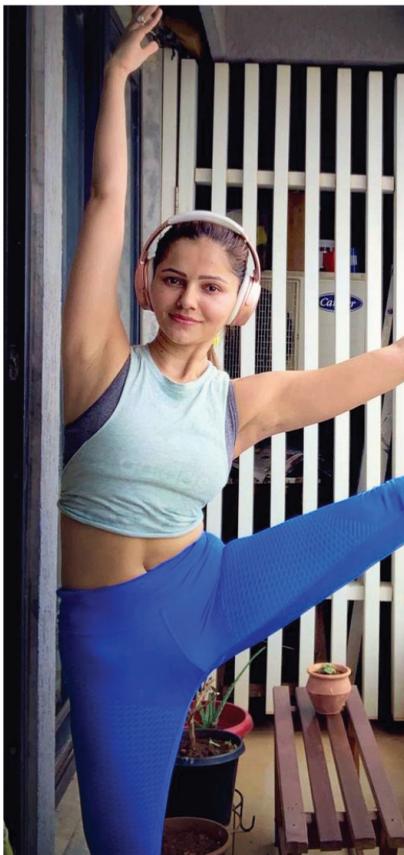


RUBINA DILAIK ON BATTLING COVID: YOGA DID WONDERS FOR ME

Team Absolute | Mumbai

"Big Boss 14" winner and television star Rubina Dilaik, who has recovered from Covid-19, says yoga helped her maintain a slow but steady recovery process. "Since yoga is a very slow and structured practice, I was able to keep up a routine throughout my Covid phase, and yoga really did wonders for me. It has primarily helped me with essential lung exercises, which helped me normalise my oxygen levels," Rubina said. She added that on days that she was feeling low or out of focus, practicing just a bit of yoga helped build a calm aura that kept her composed without panic throughout the last weeks. "Yoga helped me achieve the balance between my mental and physical wellbeing in no better way than through this time, which I am so grateful for. Never did I imagine that a simple practice like Yoga would benefit me in so many ways throughout a tough period like Covid," Rubina added. Rubina had tested positive for Covid a few weeks back. She was in Shimla and had quarantined herself there. The actress has kept her fans updated about her health.

Her husband Abhinav Shukla is currently in Cape Town, shooting for the stunt-based reality show "KhatronKeKhiladi" season 11.



Kareena Kapoor wishes birthday to 'brother-in-law' Kunal Kemmu

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Kareena Kapoor penned a note for her brother-in-law Kunal Kemmu on his 38th birthday on Tuesday along with a throwback picture on Instagram.

The photograph features Kareena in a hot-pink bikini posing along with her husband Saif, son Taimur, niece Inaaya and sister-in-law Soha Ali Khan.

"Happy Birthday, brother in law... I promise we will recreate this picture soon... have a lovely one," she wrote as

the caption. Earlier this year, Kareena was blessed with her second son on February 21. Kareena and Saif tied the knot on October 16, 2012 and had their first child Taimur on December 20, 2016.

Kareena will be next seen with Amir Khan in the film "Laal Singh Chaddha".

KARISHMA TANNA SHARES HER 'LOCKDOWN POSE'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Karishma Tanna shared her lockdown pose on Instagram on Monday. In a set of four images, Karishma is dressed in a tie-dye T-shirt paired with blue denims. In one of the photos, she sits on the edge of a sofa, playing with her hair. "Lockdown Pose," she wrote as caption.

Karishma was last seen in "Lahore Confidential", Kunal Kohli's spy drama that dropped digitally earlier this year. Last year, her dance number "Basanti" comedy release "SurajPeMangalBhari" became popular.



SONALI BENDRE SUGGESTS FANS TO INDULGE IN SELF CARE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sonali Bendre uploaded a motivational post on her Instagram account on Monday. The actress advised followers to pick happiness over everything else. Sonali, who has battled cancer and emerged victorious in the past, often posts on social media on the importance of choosing a healthy and happy life. Putting up a montage of some of her pictures on Instagram, the actress captioned: "Find what makes you happy, do what keeps you sane... Be with the ones you love. Sending you love and light. #onedayatatime." The actress also engages her followers in discussions around books every weekend, hence constantly giving updates about her life through social media.

Why personal hygiene matters in summers?

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Two in three adolescents are not practising appropriate hand hygiene, a shocking recent global study involving University of Queensland researchers has found. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the conclusive role of sanitation and hygiene, be it physical, oral or sexual hygiene, in our personal lives once again. The personal care industry has been very vocal about men's intimate hygiene in the recent past, says Sarthak Taneja, Co-Founder, Skin Elements, adding that maintaining body hygiene is equally important for both

the sexes, especially the genitals. Personal and intimate hygiene, especially in high temperatures, is not just crucial for comfort and freshness all day long, but to keep sexual and dermatological health concerns at bay. "Intimate care during summers is an essential addition to the daily hygiene check of your body. Not only does it keep your sensitive areas away from pathogens like bacteria and fungus, it also keeps them sweat-free." As the temperature increases, the hot and humid weather can accelerate intimate discomfort and even genital infection in both the sexes.

Therefore, specialists suggest not to wear body fitted clothes as they can impact the ventilation around your genitals and become a favourable environment for bacteria and yeast to grow. Hygiene care products such as intimate washes, chafing products and even wipes are very useful during summers. They help in keeping the area clean, dry, and fresh. Sweat becomes apparent in this scorching hot weather. If you are fortunate enough, you may perspire less otherwise it can generate an awful scent," says Taneja.



Importance of Nutricosmetics

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Health is wealth, and healthy skin could be a self-explanatory display for itself. According to Stephen Defelice, any food or part of a food that provides medical or health benefits could be defined as Nutraceuticals. He coined the term 'Nutraceuticals' from the words 'nutrition' and 'pharmaceutical'. This coined term also gave birth to a new derivation known as Nutricosmetics.

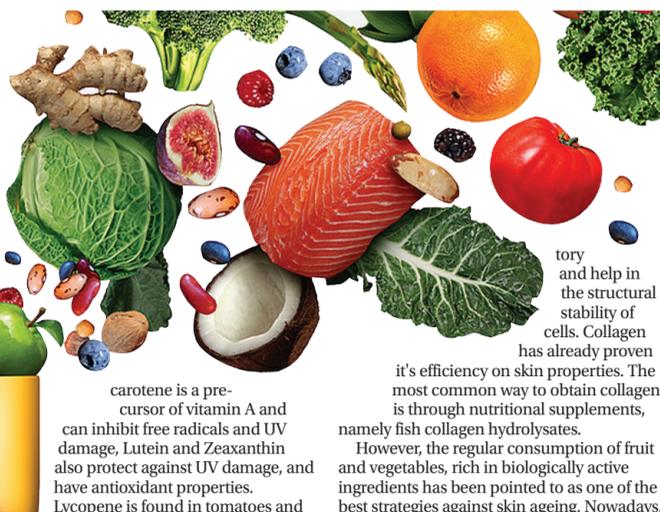
As stated by Anunciato and da Rocha Filho in the year 2012 and Pearson, 2018, Nutricosmetics can be described "as the consumption of food or oral supplements to produce an appearance benefits, and are also called "beauty pills", "beauty from within", and even "oral cosmetics". The beauty industry today has seen a fierce growth which has led to hyper-awareness about aging, pigmentation, and skincare.

Nutraceuticals are generally available as supplements containing molecules such as collagen, omega fatty acids, peptides, vitamins, proteins, etc. They are usually available as over-the-counter products. Sunlight (UV radiation), Infrared light, and a persons' cellu-

lar metabolism creates 'reactive oxygen species or ROS'. These ROS in turn lead to oxidation of DNA, proteins, and fats in ones' body and lead to skin aging. However, the body also produces antioxidants that can combat these ROS.

Although results from some studies remain controversial in the literature, the main and generally accepted antioxidants include elements such as --

Vitamins, where Vitamin C is found in raw red and green peppers, oranges, acerola, grapefruits, kiwi, strawberries, broccoli, and brussels sprouts. Vitamin E is found in nuts, seeds, vegetables, corn, soy, and margarine. The consumption of both has shown a reduction in the damage on skin due to UV rays. Carotenoids also provide UV protection. They are obtained from vegetable sources and are usually present in orange, red, and yellow foods, and are not synthesised in our body. These include -- Beta-carotene, Lutein, Zeaxanthin, and Lycopene. Where Beta-



carotene is a precursor of vitamin A and can inhibit free radicals and UV damage, Lutein and Zeaxanthin also protect against UV damage, and have antioxidant properties. Lycopene is found in tomatoes and provides some degree of photoprotection, and can reduce UV damage.

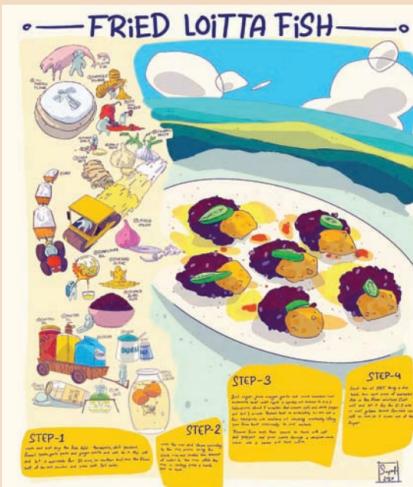
Polyphenols include Curcumin, Tea polyphenols, Grape polyphenols, have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties to protect the skin. Minerals like Copper help in skin rejuvenation and involve in the formation of Collagen, whereas Zinc is anti-inflammatory and protects against UV radiation. Selenium on the other hand protects cellular DNA damage Omegas including Omega3 and Omega6 are found in canola oil, cold-water fish, nuts, and seeds. They are anti-inflamma-

tory and help in the structural stability of cells. Collagen has already proven its efficiency on skin properties. The most common way to obtain collagen is through nutritional supplements, namely fish collagen hydrolysates.

However, the regular consumption of fruit and vegetables, rich in biologically active ingredients has been pointed to as one of the best strategies against skin ageing. Nowadays, beauty can no longer be dissociated from health and consumers consider nutrition an important pillar in skin beauty.

A study in Thailand compared the efficacy of a combined nutraceutical (containing the combination of soy isoflavones, chaste berry, black cohosh, and primrose oil) on volunteers. The placebo effect took 12 weeks to start showing effects. The volunteers receiving the nutraceutical significantly improved skin elasticity, skin roughness, and wrinkles; yet no visible effect on pigmentation, skin hydration was noticed.

A melting pot for comics, food and travel



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Launched in 2020, 'Graphic Travelogues' proves to be a remarkable stage for comics and graphic novels portraying travel. Their culinary section is a trans-regional platform that documents the travel experiences of comic artists across geographies and highlights and identifies recurring topics and new artists, thus presenting and creating treasures in this field of art.

The 'Graphic Travelogues Culinary', a project by the Goethe Institut, uses ingredients to serve the most flavour-some dish that will feed your soul, nourish your mind, and delight your palate. The immersive project presents travel experiences of artists from India, Bangladesh and Germany.

Stories of travel and food are documented on this globally accessible platform, facilitating intercultural experiences through comics and graphic novels.

As travel blogs become increasingly popular, garnering millions of hits every second -- it taps the potential of comics to engage with graphic travel blogs on social media.

According to Goethe Institut, GT Culinary is a one of its kind expedition where professional chefs and avid travel bloggers from different cultures and cities come together for a tryst with gastronomy, travel, and comics.

Through vivid experiences and resulting sketches, the project demonstrates graphic cooking and delivers the most amazing recipes artistically. At the forefront of the culinary journey are teams comprising a chef or an influencer and an illustrator that give life to the cooking, exploring and illustrating aspects of the project. It also urges the public to follow the teams' cookery and artistic expedition and see the world through their eyes -- from shopping for ingredients to preparing the dish step by step in times when physical travel seems like a distant reality.

The website gives an interesting sneak peek into Team India: "The famous Indian blogger-duo Delhi FunDos has seen that food of a region reflects the local culture, the life-philosophy of the people. With illustrator Krutika Susarla, they embark on the GT #Culinary journey together in Delhi. The adventure begins at a Bengali market in Mini Kolkata. There they shop for Shukto and Methi Chicken -- one dish from Punjab, and one from Bengal."

Team Germany (Berlin Biryani) consists of cjege Felicitas Then, Chef and food blogger; and Alexandra Klobouk, Author and culture and content Illustrator. Whereas Team Bangladesh (Fried Loitta Fish) consists of Sameera Hussain Wadood, Chef; and Sayeef Mahmud, Illustrator.

Safurat Balogun, Project Manager and Head of Library Services, Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi, says, "When we launched Graphic Travelogues last year in the middle of the pandemic, we imagined that the next phase of the project would include bringing artists together through residencies. We quickly realised that it couldn't happen anytime soon so we had to brainstorm alternatives. This is how Graphic Travelogues #Culinary was born. Food, travel and comics -- is what we are holding on to this year to bring together the finest chefs, travel bloggers and comic artists for a unique culinary adventure. Three cities, three teams, three recipes -- one experience."

The culinary and artistic journey can be accessed at www.goethe.de/India/graphictravelogues/culinary.



LINDSAY LOHAN TO MAKE A COMEBACK IN CHRISTMAS ROM-COM

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Lindsay Lohan is all set to make her acting comeback with a Christmas romantic comedy, about an heiress who has a skiing accident and suffers from amnesia.

Lohan's role has been described as a "newly engaged, spoiled hotel heiress", reports contactmusic.com. According to Variety, the protagonist "finds herself in the care of a handsome, blue-collar lodge owner and his precocious daughter in the days leading up to Christmas".

The film will release on Netflix. Meanwhile, Lindsay had earlier said that she would love to be part of a "Mean Girls" sequel.

"I mean, I know that they're going to do something, but I just don't know exactly what yet. And it would be an honour to be a part of it. Obviously, it was really fun to do, you know, the catching up altogether the reunion, because it felt like, and then they didn't air part of this, but it felt like it was, we'd all just seen each other the day before. It still feels like we know each other so well because we spend so much time with each other and we discussed how it's been working with each other," she had said.



KIM KARDASHIAN SUED FOR 'FAILING TO PAY STAFF'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Kim Kardashian was hit with a lawsuit accusing her of mistreating her staff, The Sun can report.

The mom of four, 40, allegedly failed to pay her employees' wages, cover their expenses and provide meal breaks.

A representative for Kim told TMZ: "Kim is not responsible for how the vendor manages their business and the agreements they have made directly with their staff."

The Sun first reported the staff's plans to take legal action earlier this month.

Meanwhile, Kim is coping with the May 24 anniversary of her over-the-top Italian wedding to now estranged husband Kanye West.

The pair wed in 2014, and split in February 2021.



Los Angeles | Agencies

Star Kelly Osbourne has denied her new look is an outcome of plastic surgery, in a new video post she shared with fans.

She shared a video clip captioned: "Let's squash these stupid rumours!! Can't you just be happy for me?"

"Good morning everyone. I'm currently in hair and makeup right now. I just want to bring up a topic that you guys are all talking about because I'm always really honest and really upfront about what I've done to my body and who I am," she told fans.

Osbourne added, "And I have not done plastic surgery. I've never done anything to my face other than a couple of injections in my lip, in my jaw, and in my forehead. I do not lie, but thank you for the compliment."

She previously shared that a weight loss surgery gave her a "fighting chance" at restarting her life, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Kelly Osbourne denies having had plastic surgery

MARIANNE FAITHFULL WAS UPSET TO KNOW THAT BOB DYLAN TORE POEM HE WROTE ON HER

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Marianne Faithfull says she was upset when she got to know that Bob Dylan tore a poem that he wrote about her after she did not reciprocate to his advances. However, she says the two moved on from there and became friends.

"I first met Bob at the Savoy in 1965. There's a clip of me and Joan Baez singing 'As Tears Go By' in the hotel room while Bob is hammering away on a typewriter. Later when I turned him down, he told me that it had been a poem about me, but he'd torn it up. I was so upset, but we got over that and have been friends for 56 years. I really like him," she said, according to a report in femalefirst.co.uk.

She has also spoken about her favourite Dylan song, "It's all over now, baby blue".

"I think 'It's all over now, baby blue' is about those times in life where you just have to say, 'okay, we tried, it didn't work', but it's a much sleeker way of saying it. It's very loving, but obviously it's all over. I don't really know why I love it so much but I've been in many situations where I would have liked to have time stop and have a band playing and sing that song to people. I've recorded it twice. The second time, I'd had more experiences and really felt it. I love the way his songs change octaves," she told The Guardian newspaper.



'Money Heist' to end in 2 instalments of 5 episodes each on Sep 3 and Dec 3

Los Angeles | Agencies

The globally popular Spanish web series "Money Heist" is all set to come to an end in two instalments of five episodes each. Volume 1 of the finale will release on September 3 while Volume 2 drops on December 3 this year, according to an announcement that was launched with a teaser on Monday.

So far, there have been four Parts to the show. While Parts 1 and 2 released in 2017, Parts 3 and 4 dropped in 2019-2020.

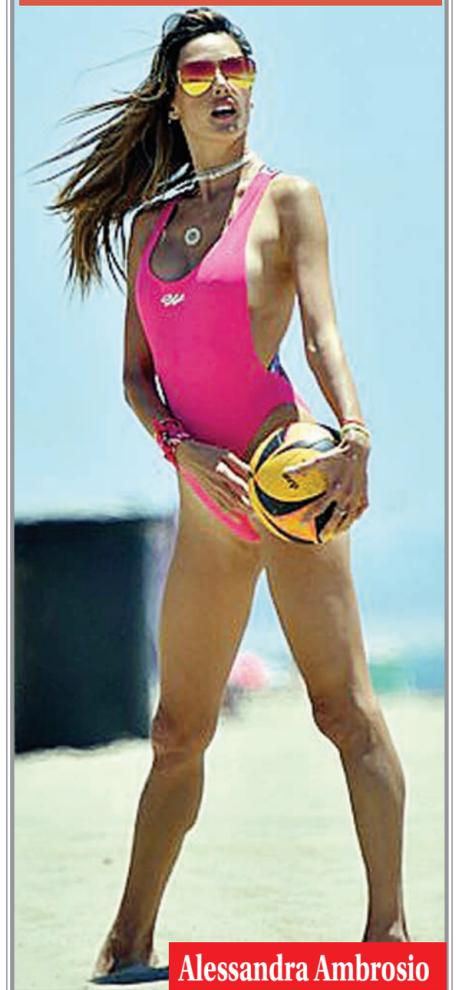
"When we began to write Part 5 in the midst of the pandemic, we felt we had to change what was expected from the 10-episode season and used every tool we could, to create the sensation of a season finale or series finale in the first volume itself. We decided to work in an extremely aggressive genre, putting The Gang on the ropes," said creator of the series, Alex Pina.

"In Volume 2, we focus more on the emotional situation of the characters. It is a journey across their sentimental map that connects us directly to their departure," he added.

Originally titled "La Casa de Papel" (The House Of Paper), the Netflix series stars Ullsula Corbero, Alvaro Morte, Itziar Ituno, Pedro Alonso, Paco Tous, Alba Flores, Miguel Herran, Jaime Lorente, Esther Acebo, Enrique Arce, Maria Pedraza, Darko Peric and Kiti Manver among others.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Alessandra Ambrosio

'Boss Baby 2' to Hit Theaters and Peacock on Same Day



Los Angeles | Agencies

In a first, a Universal Pictures movie - The Boss Baby: Family Business - will debut simultaneously in theaters and on sister streaming service Peacock Premium. The animated film will now be made available to audiences on July 2, in time for Fourth of July fireworks. It was previously set to hit the big screen on Sept. 17, followed by a debut on premium VOD sometime in October. The news was revealed in a joint statement from Universal Filmed Entertainment Group and Peacock, and follows similar moves made by Disney and WarnerMedia to grow Disney+ and HBO+ subscribers, respectively, while the box office attempts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The family film will be made available to Peacock Premium customers at no extra charge. Theater owners can opt whether or not to carry Boss Baby 2. The film is a sequel to the hit 2017 DreamWorks Animation original The Boss Baby.

The sequel will begin its international theatrical rollout in select markets timed to the North American release on July 2.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Health care workers are in danger

The study, published in ERJ Open Research, included a total of 2,063 health care staff, who were tested for antibodies against Covid-19, between May and September 2020. The presence of these antibodies is a very accurate indication that someone has been infected with

HEALTH CARE WORKERS WERE THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BECOME INFECTED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC COMPARED TO THE GENERAL POPULATION, ACCORDING TO A STUDY. AROUND ONE IN FIVE OF WORKERS WHO WERE INFECTED WERE ASYMPTOMATIC AND UNAWARE THEY HAD COVID-19.

Covid-19. The blood tests showed that 14.5 per cent of the health care workers had been infected. This is more than three times higher than the proportion of people infected in the local population. The highest rates of infections among the workers were in dentistry (26 per cent), health care assistants (23.3 per cent) and hospital porters

(22.2 per cent). The rate among administrative staff was the same as that of doctors (21.1 per cent). About 18.7 per cent did not think they ever had Covid-19 and were completely asymptomatic. The researchers say this is important since people without symptoms are likely to go to work and could potentially infect other people. "A lot of attention during the pandemic has been around PPE for doctors and nurses but we found that dentists, health care assistants and porters were the staff most likely to test positive," said lead researcher Professor James Chalmers, a consultant respiratory physician from the University of Dundee, UK. However, health care workers who had been infected were very unlikely to contract Covid-19 a second time in the following six months, the study showed. In the months following their blood tests, 39 workers developed a symptomatic Covid-19 infection, but only one of these was a worker who had previously tested positive. This equates to an 85 per cent reduction in risk, which is similar to the protection provided by Covid-19 vaccines. "This is really good news for people who have already had Covid-19, as it means the chances of a second infection are very low," Chalmers said. The team hopes to continue the research to see how long immunity lasts and how vaccination affects infections among health care workers.

The Powerful message of Buddha for a healthy world

Lalit Garg

Gautama Buddha is an illuminator, his birth anniversary is celebrated as Buddha Purnima, his attainment of knowledge was fulfilled on the full moon night and his 'Nirvana Day' was also accomplished on the full moon day. That's why Buddha has lightened up the human race. It was the day when Buddha was born, got knowledge, sacrificed the body and attained salvation. Buddha is also called 'Tathagata', which means to attain the ultimate truth through the practice of enlightenment. Two and a half thousand years ago, the knowledge which he imbibed, the preaching of that knowledge which he shared among his followers, the relevance of that message still has significance in today's time and it has a solution to cope up with this pandemic. Whether the grief is of corona epidemic or any other sorrow; the negative impact of both cannot ruin the integrity of humans. For this, he gave the mantra of 'Appo Deepo Bhava', that is, to become light yourself, one cannot reach the destination through the other's support. Self realization is important.

Buddha Purnima is an important day not only for the followers of Buddhism but also for the entire human race. Buddha became the most popular Indian spiritual saint, social-reformer, spiritual teacher with his high values and knowledge. He touched the hearts of not only many effective personalities but also the common people and brought positive changes in their lives. We can also call him the person and ideologue along with the spiritual revolution. His ideologies are not only a reflection of his revolutionary personality, but also an inspiration of intense sarcasm and change on religious, social distortions and blind people, which

changed the life direction of innumerable human beings. His inspirations have problem solving ability in this tough time of pandemic. He preached about 'sorrow prevention' and said that this world is full of sorrows, but the end of sorrows is possible; which he called Nirvana.

Siddhartha was the prince of Kapilavastu before becoming a monk. In search of peace, he left home at the age of 27, leaving the royal life. While traveling, Siddhartha reached Sarnath near Kashi, where he converted into a monk. Here he meditated hard under the Bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya. After rigorous penance, Siddhartha attained enlightenment, and he came to be known as the great monk Gautama Buddha. With his knowledge he lit up the whole world. When Buddha saw the people of his era engulfed in ignorance about religious-social, spiritual and other sacrificial rituals, found ordinary people in ignorance in the name of religion, saw women being humiliated, and atrocities against Shudras, he felt pity.

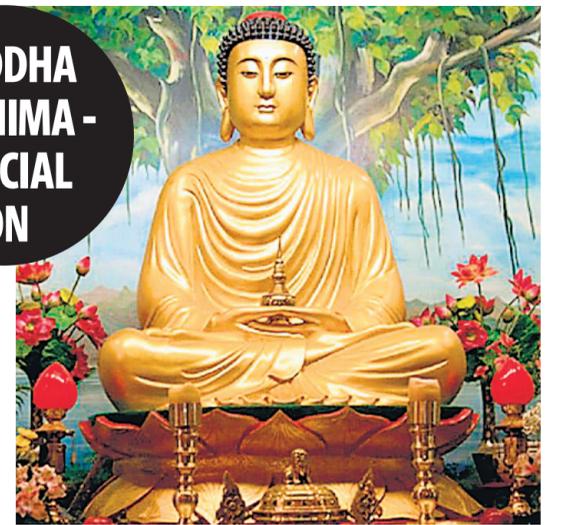
He himself took the fast for the attainment of the first knowledge and, after wandering in the forests for years, did penance and enlightened the soul with knowledge. The enlightenment and light with which he has lived each moment of his life is an important chapter in the history of the Indian sage tradition. He himself received the light of truth, lived an inspiring life and then raised the voice against the evils in the public. The efforts he made to elevate folk life are amazing and surprising. Expressing the essence of his knowledge, he said that there is a reason for every grief. The most important reason for the Corona epidemic being so widespread on the world stage is human ignorance, indulgent lifestyle, indiscipline and perverted food. Buddha says that in the core of the things in which people seek happiness, sorrow ultimately comes out of grief. Presently,

even in the transition phase of the Corona crisis, the person who finds himself drowned in pleasures, convenience and narcotics in search of happiness, the end of it is sure to be more sad and painful. Therefore, it is important for a person to make his lifestyle eco-friendly and intoxicated.

In this way, by becoming a monk, Gautam Buddha paid more attention to social welfare than to get himself trapped in the fruitless disputes of the soul and the divine. His teachings became the means of liberating human beings from sorrow and suffering, as well as inspiring the solution of social and worldly problems, which have their own special place in making life beautiful and transmitting honorable values in public opinion. This is the reason that his words started coming into the understanding of the people easily. While Mahatma Buddha propagated the ten pupils with non-violence while adopting the middle Way, people found them easily connected to his words. He believed that if a man conquers his desires, he can attain nirvana. Thus he attacked the priesthood and established the importance of the person.

Gautama Buddha practiced Buddhism and very efficiently organized Buddhist monks and developed a sense of unity among them in a democratic form. Its doctrine of non-violence and compassion was so intriguing that after two thousand years, Emperor Ashoka, influenced by it, accepted Buddhism and stopped the wars. In this way, Buddhism crossed the boundaries of the country and spread its light to every corner of the world. Even today, the humanistic, intellectual and populist hypotheses of this religion cannot be denied and through them a strong system of discrimination can be attacked. This Buddhism is able to provide peace and well-being to

BUDDHA PURNIMA - SPECIAL ON



the grieved, afflicted and restless humanity even in the Corona crisis. It is developing religious unity in the mind of the people by attacking high, low, discrimination, casteism. It has an important role in paving the way for the development of art, literature and culture by creating an environment of world peace and mutual brotherhood.

Mahatma Buddha was the pinnacle of the social revolution.

His philosophy is not only a philosophy of non-violence and compassion, but a philosophy of revolution. Not only did he enforce the pilgrimage culture but he also created new values and standards for an advanced and healthy society. He not only gave the right direction to progressive ideas, but he broke the stagnation in them and heralded a new revolution. Buddha said - hurry up and do great deeds as soon as possible, otherwise sins overlap the good deeds. It is a great expectation of the present era to highlight his contribution in the context of social revolution. Only by doing this will we be able to build a healthy society. The Buddha preached an egalitarian society. Asymmetry arises where there is attachment and malice. A person wanders in the corridors of inequality to nurture his selfishness, display ego, degrade others, and grab power and property. The Buddha made himself alone, empty, before coming among the

people, before sharing his life experiences, before performing rigorous penance and knowing the truth of life. Then he said, do not let anything inside you pollute the inner world. Look neither bad, nor listen bad, nor say bad. This is the message of emptiness, the path to happiness, peace and good health. He spoke of 'Appo Deepo Bhava' - becoming your own lamp. Because, surrounded by day-night resolutions-choices, happiness-sorrow, joy and sorrow, scorching in the anxiety of tomorrow, carrying the load of stress, how can the mind be empty in such a situation? How can it be balanced? How can it be grasped? How to be able to get rid of corona? The practice of living in the present is necessary to cope with these conditions. Neither the memory of the past nor the worry of the future. One, who learns to live today, must understand that he has attained the meaning of human life and only a society made of such human beings can be balanced, healthy and equitable. There is a need to introduce the teachings of Mahatma Buddha in life for the liberation of corona and building a balanced society. It's a need of time to establish Buddhism qualities among the masses. Do not limit Buddha in only preaching, but make Buddha a part of life, shape your life with Buddhism culture.

PANCHAYAT RESULTS HOLD KEY TO UP BJP MLAS' TICKETS IN 2022

Legislators, in whose constituencies the party has performed poorly in the recent panchayat elections, may end up losing their tickets in the upcoming assembly elections in 2022.

According to party sources, the BJP leadership sees the party's defeat in panchayat elections as a direct consequence of the poor performance of the legislators.

"This means that more than 50 per cent of the legislators could be changed.

"The party lost in places like Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi which are known as our strongholds and there can be no explanation for this other than the inadequacies of our legislators," said a senior party functionary.

The BJP, for the first time, had declared a list of candidates for the 3,050 zila panchayat ward member seats. It claims to have won over 900 seats, which means BJP-backed candidates have lost more than 2,000 seats.

BJP legislators, on the other hand, blame the Covid anger against the Yogi Adityanath government for the panchayat defeat.

"The Covid management at the ground



level has been deplorable and bureaucrats have ensured that medical care does not reach the common man. The chief minister's best efforts have been diluted by the officers. Why blame us when even the low-ranking officers do not listen to elected representatives," said a senior party MLA.

The party leadership is also said to be upset over the fact that its legislators and MPs have

done precious little to dilute the anger of farmers over farm laws.

"We have been repeatedly asking the MPs and MLAs to reach out to farmers and explain the farm laws to them so that they do not get carried away by opposition propaganda. But, it appears, that most of them did not step out of their homes, citing the pandemic," the functionary said.

Meanwhile, speculations of a cabinet reshuffle in the state have begun after a recent meeting between the chief minister and bureaucrat-turned-MLC Arvind Kumar Sharma, who is known as a close confidant of the Prime Minister.

Reports of Sharma's induction into the council of ministers have been doing the round ever since he joined the BJP in January and was made member of the UP legislative council.

However, party sources, said that there was no chance of a major cabinet reshuffle at the moment since the first priority of the party and the government was to combat the Covid and black fungus infections.

Moreover, there seems to be a strong difference of opinion between the chief minister and central leaders over names of those who are to be dropped from the ministry and those who are to be included.

"However, one or two ministers may be inducted into the cabinet," the party functionary said, indicating that Arvind Sharma could be given a cabinet berth in near future.

MARITIME MILITIA GIVE CHINA THE EDGE IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

Prof. Carl Schuster

The threat to the US has come from China in response to the joint military exercise carried out by the US, Japan, Australia, and France last week amidst tension in the East China Sea. Tension is also mounting in the South China Sea with the Philippines refusing to withdraw vessels from the disputed territory.

China's Maritime Militia are very often a party in these disputes due to its bullying tactics along the maritime boundary with Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan. The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) of China owes its origin to the Communist Party's 1950 consolidation of people's militia groups comprising mainly fishermen and coastal workers of China.

Its initial role was confined to keeping a close eye on People's Republic of China (PRC)'s coastal waters and reporting any suspected activities to the Chinese Army (PLA). These militia were recruited, trained, and equipped by the party's Bureau of Aquatic Products, which authorize former PLA officers [TSI] to train and direct the militias' operations.

These militia groups operated very close to the maritime boundary till the 1960s. However, their activities started expanding in subsequent years. They started bullying South Vietnamese fishermen in Paracel and Spratly islands in the late 1960s. Their first major victory came in January 1974 when they seized South Vietnam's Paracel Islands. They engaged the

According to reports, China recently warned the United States that it will face defeat if the two superpowers go to war. This warning is a testimony to what China thinks about its military might.

South Vietnam Naval unit with 400 militia troops and captured the islands. This island remained with China ever since. The PAFMM have been leading the PRC's bullying in the East and South China Sea from the early 1980s. They threaten the Vietnamese and Filipino fishing ships, which are small, slow, and less robust. The militia threatens these fishing boats with small arms and attacks them with high pressure water cannons, very often sinking them. This is particularly true for Vietnamese fishing vehicles. The Chinese Coast Guards are often seen helping these militia groups in their nefarious activities. In fact, due to the early gains by this militia unit, China built 'fishing shelters' to protect their fishermen in the Spratly islands. Their activities increased further after the US Navy pulled out of the Philippines in 1994. With the help of the PLA, the PAFMM isolated all the neighbouring countries and captured Mischief Reef and Scarborough Shoal. This compelled the US to follow a proactive strategy and support the Philippines in the South China Sea.

Despite all these activities by PAFMM, the Chinese government headed by Chairman Xi Jinping has never accepted any link between

PAFMM and China's military. They claim that they are fishermen. This enables the PRC to deny any involvement of the Chinese government in these scuffles. The PAFMM do not regularly use firearms or other military weapons so their actions cannot be called an 'act of war' which might trigger retaliation. It may also compel Manila to seek US support under the US-Philippine Mutual Defence Treaty. That is why the US calls PRC's actions 'Grey Zone Operations', which means they are acts of aggression, but fall short of military actions that would risk triggering a military response.

The PAFMM still continues with its activities in the East and South China Sea. For occupying an uninhabited island, the PAFMM does the initial seizure posing as fishermen. When other countries confront them with their Coast Guards or other law enforcement agencies, they find themselves confronting an armed militia, which is fully backed by China's Coast Guard or Navy. The situation can escalate into a full-fledged war if the other party insists on vacating the island.

Such is the highhandedness of China that when an International Arbitration held the Chinese occupation illegal, it refused to abide by the judgment saying all nations should

'respect' international law.

At the time of the real war PAFMM may shift to supporting roles like defensive mining. They did this during the PLA Navy exercise in 2014. They would act as one of the many eyes of the fleet, land militia troops in remote areas or covertly land troops before the actual war starts.

A unit of the People's Armed Forces, PAFMM operates under direct military command for carrying out state-sponsored activities. Although they are locally supported but report to the head of China's military -- Commander-in-Chief Xi Jinping.

The exact number of fishing vessels possessed by PAFMM is not known, but estimates put the figure at around 350, out of which 225 are deployed in the South China Sea. Their vessel hulls are made up of reinforced steel, which are very strong. On the other hand, most of the other fishing vessels in the South China Sea are made of wood or other lighter materials. The PAFMM vessels are faster, which puts them at an advantageous position in an encounter.

They can 'bump' the enemy's vessel at will with little risk of damaging their own strong hull.

Most of the fishermen from other countries are unarmed, but PAFMM

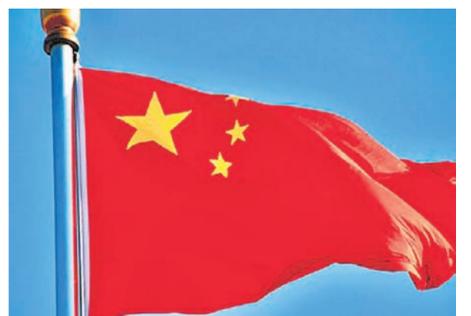
vessels have small arms and, in some cases, Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG) and machine guns. They are rarely used but are available on the vessels.

The PAFMM vessels have water cannons mounted above the pilot house. They aim the spray at the other vessels' pilot house to blind the crew, but sometimes they aim it at the engine exhaust. Cold sea water hitting a hot engine tends to damage the engine, leaving the craft non-functional in the water. The PAFMM vessel can then do what it wants -- bump, ram or just leave. China places greater importance to claims on the South China Sea because of its strategic location. The political and strategic payoff is bigger in the South China Sea compared to the East China Sea and the risks and operational difficulties are less. The South China Sea is easier to dominate. The PAFMM base in Sanya is closer to the disputed territories in the South China Sea than the PAFMM base in Guangzhou to the Senkaku. They must pass through Taiwan to reach Senkaku.

The PRC's military bases and airfields are closer to the disputed territory in the South China Sea than they are from the US bases in Japan. The East

China Sea is not strategically located. The US and Chinese bases are equidistant from Senkaku. Also, Japan's Coast Guard is stronger than those of Vietnam and the Philippines, China's main target in the South China Sea. The PAFMM gets greater support in the South China Sea from the Chinese military establishments compared to the East China Sea.

China wants to dominate the South China Sea because that would give Beijing strategic advantage against Taiwan and Japan, before risking a conflict over the Senkaku. Xi always goes for an easy target that he believes can be achieved with minimal risk and costs. Traditional thought in Chinese military believes in isolating the enemy and establishing an advantageous geo-political and military superiority before engaging in a war. Also, the best leader is the one who achieves 'victory' without fighting. China has secured much of the South China Sea and is using the PAFMM to expand its control without firing a shot. It has worked so far. However, doing that around the Senkaku may prove to be difficult and expensive.





ANTI-PAK SENTIMENTS FUEL AFGHAN PROTESTERS IN LONDON

London | Agencies

Anti-Pakistan sentiments is fuelling anger among the locals in Afghanistan and its nationals living abroad...



(PHC) premises, which is located on the Lowndes Square, Knightsbridge.

The police authorities present at the site could also be seen trying to stop the protesters. The Pakistan High Commission, taking notice of the incident, has lodged a complaint with the UK government...

request for strict security arrangements has been submitted," confirmed the PHC officials. Pakistan has also reminded the UK government of the protest in 2019...

Blinken in Israel for talks to support ceasefire

Tel Aviv | Agencies

Blinken tweeted late Monday night: "Even as we were working with the parties and partners to help reach a ceasefire, we were also focused on the road ahead, including steps we could take to build a better future for Israelis and Palestinians."

Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, reports dpa news agency. Before he left for Israel, Blinken tweeted late Monday night: "Even as we were working with the parties and partners to help reach a ceasefire, we were also focused on the road ahead, including steps we could take to build a better future for Israelis and Palestinians."

During the Middle East trip, which lasts until Thursday, he also plans to meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Jordanian King Abdullah II.

The State Department said before Blinken set off that the goal of the trip was to help cement the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, the de facto rulers of the Gaza Strip.

The Egyptian-brokered ceasefire agreement came into effect on May 21 at 2 a.m. between Israel and Hamas.

Egypt's FM meets Abbas to discuss situation in Palestine

Ramallah | Agencies

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank city of Ramallah and discussed the situation in the Palestinian territories following the Israel-Hamas ceasefire brokered by Cairo.



The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said that during the meeting on Monday, Abbas briefed Shoukry on the latest developments in the Palestinian territories and the contacts that the leadership is holding with the US, reports Xinhua news agency.

Wafa said that Abbas welcomed the Egyptian efforts in cooperation between the Arab states and the US administration "to stop the Israeli aggression on the Palestinian people", reports Xinhua news agency.

Abbas also thanked Shoukry for donating \$500 million towards the reconstruction of what had been destroyed in the recent Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip.

The President also explained to Shoukry that the leadership is in contact with the Hamas on forming a unity government that will abide by the international legitimacy.

He also explained to Shoukry that after stabilising the ceasefire, the Palestinian side wants to start a political process under the supervision of the International Quartet.

"The Palestinians seek a process that ends the Israeli occupation and leads to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of international legitimacy decisions," Abbas said.

Meanwhile, Shoukry said that Egypt will continue supporting the Palestinian cause at all levels and will continue its efforts to achieve a Palestinian unity and end of internal division.

"I conveyed a letter from President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi. It is a letter of solidarity with the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority," the Foreign Minister said.

Russian, US NSAs discuss strategic stability

Geneva | Agencies

Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev met US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in Geneva where the two discussed strategic stability issues despite disagreements.

"The meeting that took place became an important step leading to the preparation of the planned Russia-US summit, the date and venue of which will be announced later," Xinhua news agency quoted the Russian Security Council as saying in a statement on Monday.

mutually beneficial solutions were possible, the Council said. Both sides agreed that the normalisation of Russia-US ties "would not only meet the interests of the two countries but would also contribute to predictability and stability in the global arena", the statement added.

'EU-Russia economic cooperation increasingly difficult'

Brussels | Agencies

Many attempts on our side over many, many years, almost decades to improve [the] relationship with Russia did not have (the) success they deserved," dpa news agency quoted von der Leyen as saying at an EU summit here on Monday.

"Economic cooperation over time has gotten more and more difficult," she said, adding that the Russian economy needs to be modernised.

"What we see today is an economy that is lacking an enormous amount of modernization that would be necessary, an economy that is highly depending on energy revenues, but a regime that is not willing to interact in a constructive way with us."

Von der Leyen said she is planning new proposals for dealing with Russia, including regarding the Nord Stream 2 Baltic Sea pipeline. She said the options



Economic cooperation between Europe and Russia is becoming increasingly difficult, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

would be discussed in a report on relations with Russia at the end of June. The report will present "the different

policy options that will show how we can deal with Russia", she added.

US, Egyptian Presidents discuss regional issues

Washington | Agencies

US President Joe Biden and his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi discussed regional issues in a phone conversation, during which the American leader thanked Cairo "for its successful diplomacy and coordination" with Washington to end the recent 11-day Israel-Hamas conflict.

"The two leaders consulted on the urgent need to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need in Gaza and to support rebuilding efforts in a manner that benefits the people there and not Hamas," a White House readout said referring to Monday's conversation.

During the call, Biden also apprised al-Sisi of Secretary of State Antony Blinken's ongoing "follow-up" visit to

the Middle East, which also includes a stop in Egypt.

Regarding the disputed Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, "President Biden acknowledged Egypt's concerns about access to Nile River waters and underscored the US' interest in achieving a diplomatic resolution that meets the legitimate needs of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia", the readout added.

According to the White House, Biden and al-Sisi also discussed their commitment to upholding Libyan plans for national elections in December and the removal of all foreign military and irregular forces from the war-torn country. They also affirmed their support for the Iraqi government's efforts to strengthen the nation's full sovereignty and independence, it added.

UN stresses need to ensure safety, security of peacekeepers

United Nations | Agencies

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has stressed the need to ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers, while expressing grave concerns about threats and targeted attacks and condemned all acts of violence against the personnel, which may constitute war crimes.



In a statement on Monday, the UNSC expressed deep appreciation for all personnel in peacekeeping operations for their extraordinary efforts in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences, Xinhua news agency reported. It also stressed the importance to ensure that missions are adequately resourced and all peacekeepers in the field are willing, capable and equipped effectively and safely to implement their mandate. The UNSC emphasised

the need for troop- and police-contributing countries to ensure that all peacekeepers in the field are equipped, informed and trained to mitigate the threat posed by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. The Security Council asked the Secretary-General to continue to take all appropriate measures to improve the safety and security of peacekeeping personnel, including by strengthening

the situational awareness of peacekeeping missions and their front-line peacekeepers.

The Council noted ongoing work to better integrate the use of new technologies for the purposes of increasing safety and security, improving situational awareness, enhancing field support and facilitating substantive mandate implementation.

Since January 1, 2021, 15 peacekeepers have lost their lives due to malicious acts.

US JOURNO DETAINED AT YANGON AIRPORT SHORTLY BEFORE DEPARTURE

We do not know why Danny Fenster was detained and have not been able to contact him since this morning. We are concerned for his well-being and call for his immediate release. Our priorities right now are to make sure he is safe and to provide him with whatever assistance he needs," the statement said.

Yangon | Agencies

Authorities in Myanmar detained an American journalist, an employee at a local English-language publication, at the Yangon airport shortly before boarding a flight back home, according to his employer on Tuesday.

Danny Fenster, 37, has been taken to prison, dpa news agency quoted his employer, Frontier Myanmar, as saying in a statement.

The charges against Fenster are unknown. "We do not know why



Danny Fenster had worked at the newspaper since August 2020 and that he had been on his way to the US for personal reasons. The military leaders of Myanmar have cracked down hard on anyone they view as an opponent ever since grabbing power in February. There have been reports of more than 5,400 detentions since the start of their rules, including of many

journalists. Many reporters have already fled the country, though foreign correspondents had been viewed as enjoying a degree of protection. "This unlawful restriction of a foreign journalist's freedom of movement is the latest grave threat to press freedom in Myanmar," read a statement from the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

ETHIOPIA SLAMS US MOVE TO IMPOSE VISA CURBS ON OFFICIALS

Addis Ababa | Agencies

On Sunday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the visa restrictions for any current or former Ethiopian or Eritrean government officials, members of the security forces, or other individuals responsible for, or complicit in, undermining resolution of the crisis in Tigray, reports Xinhua news agency.

The Ethiopian government has slammed the decision by the US administration to impose visa restrictions on officials in connection with the conflict in the East African country conflict-hit Tigray region.



In response, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Monday that the decision came at a time when the government has been engaging positively and constructively with the US administration on issues of common concern.

It said the attempt by the US administration to meddle in its internal affairs, is not only inappropriate but also completely unacceptable.

"Ethiopia should not be told how to run and manage its internal affairs," the statement issued by the Ministry said. Noting that Ethiopia

attaches great importance to its historic and friendly relationship with the US, the Ministry stressed that the implications of the visa restrictions and other related measures taken

earlier will seriously undermine the two countries' longstanding and important bilateral relations.

The latest decision by the US is said to be in addition to its previous

decisions to restrict economic and security assistance to the East African country.

The Ethiopian government further warned that such measures would affect the two countries' relations.

"If such a resolve to meddle in our internal affairs and undermining the century-old bilateral ties continues unabated, the government of Ethiopia will be forced to re-assess its relations with the US, which might have implications beyond our bilateral relationship," the Ministry stressed.

It, however, added that it will not be deterred by the decision and will continue its relentless efforts to overcome current challenges and lead the country on the path of lasting peace and prosperity.

Fighting that erupted in November last year between the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which used to rule the region, and the Ethiopian National Defense Forces has left thousands of people dead and caused immense losses.

Afghanistan vows to ensure security of foreign missions

Kabul | Agencies

The Afghan government is committed to ensuring safety and security of foreign organisations and diplomatic missions, the Foreign Ministry here said on Tuesday following Australia's announcement to close its embassy in Kabul.

"Based on the international laws and conventions, and within the framework of agreements with friendly countries, the Afghan government remains obligated to ensure the security of diplomatic missions and the safety of diplomatic and consular representatives," the Ministry said in a statement.

The statement came after Australia decided to close its embassy in Kabul amid increasingly uncertain security situation. "We hope, as mentioned in the Australian gov-

ernment statement, that this measure will be temporary, and Australia will soon resume its permanent presence in Afghanistan," the Ministry added. Australia's embassy building will close on Friday, with officials in future visiting Afghanistan from a post elsewhere in the region, Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Foreign Minister Marise Payne said in a joint statement.

The government said Australia would revert to diplomats using visiting accreditation for relations with Afghanistan, as was the case before the Kabul embassy opened in 2006, dpa news agency reported.

"It is Australia's expectation that this measure will be temporary and that we will resume a permanent presence in Kabul once circumstances permit," the statement read. Canberra cited the "increas-

ingly uncertain security environment" that has come with the imminent departure of international forces and said the government had been advised security arrangements could not be provided to support an ongoing diplomatic presence.

The move "does not alter our commitment to Afghanistan or its people", Payne and Morrison said.

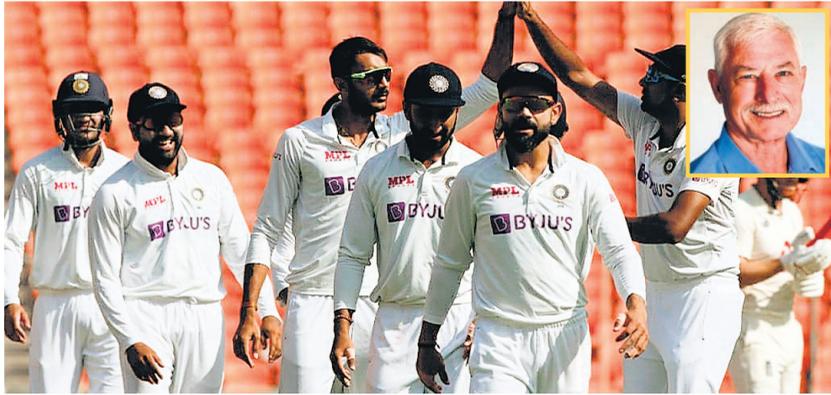
Afghanistan is in a state of uncertainty after US President Joe Biden announced that American troops will pull out from the country by September 11, 2021 after almost 20 years. NATO agreed to follow suit. Almost 10,000 NATO soldiers from the Resolute Support training mission, including 2,500 soldiers from the US and around 1,100 from Germany, the two biggest contingents, are due to leave the country.



INDIA'S PERFORMANCES HAVE KEPT TEST CRICKET ALIVE: HADLEE

Auckland | Agencies

Cricket needs India due to the revenue it generates and also strides it has made in test cricket that has kept longest format of the game alive, said former New Zealand all-rounder Richard Hadlee. "There is no doubt India produces a lot of revenue for cricket. Without India, the face of world cricket would be very different, therefore cricket needs India," said Hadlee, who formed a world-class quartet of all-rounders in 1970s and 1980s along with Imran Khan, Kapil Dev and Ian Botham. "But India has also made an outstanding contribution to Test cricket -- like in all formats. Their Test performances in Australia were outstanding despite that 36 all out blip. They bounced back superbly, and Test cricket came alive again. So many youngsters came into the team and performed. It showed the great depth of talented players India have in all formats." Hadlee added while speaking to the Times of India. The 69-year-old said neither New Zealand nor India will start favourites in WTC final since the match is being played on a neutral venue. Hadlee said adapting to conditions will be key and the fact the match is being played in England will provide help to swing bowlers and make batting a bit difficult if the



bowlers find some help. "It all comes down as to who is better prepared and who adapts better to English conditions the quickest. The weather may also play a part and if it is cold, that will favour New Zealand. The Dukes ball will suit both team's fast bowlers. It will be an interesting game to watch. Too difficult to call a winner at this stage."

'PRESSURE TO WIN JUSTIFIES KOHLI'S ON-FIELD AGGRESSION'

Virat Kohli's on-field aggression is justified as it helps in unsettling opposition, a tactic necessary for India skipper since he faces enormous pressure to win from fans, said former New Zealand all-rounder Richard Hadlee. "I see Virat as being a very passionate and competitive cricketer with a strong desire for himself and the team to succeed. The pressure and expectations on him to 'win' is enormous. There are millions of Indian fans who idolise him which puts great pressure on him. Virat is responsible for ensuring that Indian cricket remains competitive and be one of the best teams in the world."

'BUMRAH VULNERABLE TO INJURIES'

Jasprit fits into the unorthodox bowling category with virtually no run up to the crease. His technique, in some ways, defies belief but has proved to be a highly effective one. He is what I call a shoulder or strength bowler with all his power and pace coming from the final part of his action as he releases the ball."

Japan could call up military doctors, nurses to help at Olympics



Tokyo | Agencies

Japan could call up military doctors and nurses from its Self-Defence Forces to help at this year's Tokyo Olympics, defence minister Nobuo Kishi said in parliament on Tuesday.

Kishi said that his house has received a request to assist with the Games organisers, DPA reports.

The armed forces have started to operate the vaccination centres in Tokyo and Osaka this week to help speed up Japan's extremely slow vaccination process just two months ahead of the planned start of the postponed Olympics.

According to Olympics organisers, up to 230 doctors as well as 310 nurses will be needed daily at the Games. So far, around 80 per cent of the required number of medical staff

has been secured, they said.

Local organisers and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) insist the Games can go ahead safely despite Japan fighting a fourth wave of the pandemic and Tokyo being continually placed in states of emergency -- the latest extending to the end of this month.

Tokyo 2020 coordination commission chair John Coates pointed out that more than 80 per cent of the residents of the Olympic village will have been vaccinated by the time of the Games.

Foreign fans will not be permitted to attend the Games, which were delayed from last year, while the numbers attending from federations, sponsors and media have been cut.

A recent survey conducted by the Kyodo news agency showed that 72 per cent of those polled in Japan want the Olympics cancelled or rescheduled due to the pandemic.

Ankita Raina advances to 2nd round of French Open qualifiers



Paris | Agencies
India's ace woman tennis player Ankita Raina defeated Australian Arina Rodionova 3-6, 6-1, 6-4 in first round of French Open qualifiers and will face Greet Minnen of Belgium in second round on Wednesday. Ankita lost the first set but came back to defeat the Australian in the next two sets to advance. Her opponent Greet defeated Poland's Urszula Radwanska in a three-set battle. The Belgian starts favourite due to her better WTA ranking. She is ranked 125 in singles as against Ankita's rank of 182. Ankita is yet to make the main draw of the singles event at any Grand Slam. Earlier this year, she became the fifth Indian woman to qualify for the main draw of a Grand Slam when played the first round doubles at the Australian Open. Later today, India's ace male tennis player Sumit Nagal will face Roberto Marcora of Italy in the first round of qualifiers. Due to better rank (143), Nagal is favourite to beat Marcora who is 192.

Mohali stadium named after hockey icon Balbir Singh Senior

Chandigarh | Agencies

The Mohali International Hockey Stadium in Punjab near here was dedicated to legendary centre-forward Balbir Singh Senior at a formal ceremony on his first death anniversary on Tuesday.

State Sports Minister Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi said once the COVID pandemic eased out an international hockey tournament would be held in the stadium to mark the hockey stalwart's sporting journey.

He said the sports department would start a scholarship in the name of the three-time Olympian for sportspersons belonging to the state. He said a statue in his memory would be installed at the stadium entrance. The minister planted saplings in the memory of the sportsperson. Balbir was part of the Indian teams that won gold at the 1948 London Olympics, Helsinki 1952 and Melbourne 1956. His record for most individual goals scored in an Olympic men's hockey final remains unbeaten.

He had set this record when he scored five goals in India's 6-1 win over the Netherlands in the gold medal match of the



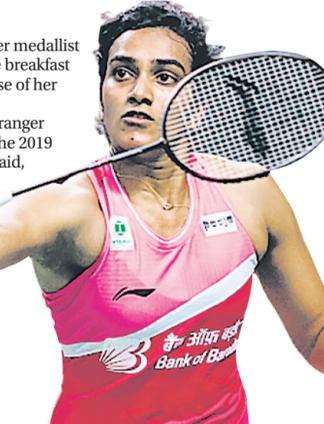
1952 Games. He was the head coach of the Indian team for the 1975 men's World Cup, which India won and the 1971 men's World Cup, where India earned a bronze medal. He was also conferred the prestigious Padma Shri in 1957.

Would like to have breakfast with Serena Williams: Sindhu

Hyderabad | Agencies

Badminton star and 2016 Rio Olympics silver medalist PV Sindhu said that she would like to have breakfast with tennis legend Serena Williams because of her "jovial" and "friendly" nature.

In response to a question on which famous stranger would she like to have breakfast with and why, the 2019 World Championships gold medalist in Basel, said, "Serena Williams. I also like it when people are jovial and friendly and greet you in the morning, ask how you are. I think that is very nice." Talking about her training schedule, Sindhu, who is a medal contender at the Tokyo Olympics in July, told moneycontrol.com that the mornings are reserved for warm-ups and match practice, while she does her running and physical training in the evening.



Dravid never asked me to curb my natural game: Shaw

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Rahul Dravid advised Prithvi Shaw to stick to his natural style of batting, which is aggressive, and not copy the former India captain's manner which included restraint. "It was exceptional. We had toured for about two years (before the 2018 under-19 World Cup) with Rahul sir. He knew that he was different from us but he never forced us to be like him. Temperament is important but he never asked me to change anything, he used to tell me to play my natural game because he knew that if I play the powerplay overs, it becomes difficult to dismiss me," Shaw said on Cricbuzz. Dravid was also head coach of India team that won the under-19 World Cup in 2018 with Shaw as captain.

The right-handed opener said that while Dravid ran a tight ship and insisted on discipline, he was also friendly. "When there was Rahul sir, you had to be disciplined. There was a bit of a fear of him as well but off the field he was very friendly with us," said Shaw.

SHOAB WAS THE FASTEST BOWLER I EVER FACED: CLARKE

Sydney | Agencies

Former Australia captain Michael Clarke called Pakistan's Shoaib Akhtar the fastest bowler he ever faced. Clarke, who played 115 Tests, 345 ODIs and 34 T20is in a 12-year international career, said Shoaib could deliver at a speed of 160 kmph. "Shoaib Akhtar was the fastest I faced. He could bowl 160 [kmph]. Different type of bowler, who could bowl quick for three overs. Flintoff was quick for 12 overs. Lee was quick. Shoaib was quicker. Shaun Tait, Mitchell Johnson, Brett Lee and Jason Gillespie were fast. But Shoaib Akhtar was the fastest," Clarke said on the Uncensored Podcast.

Clarke also praised former Australia spinner Shane Warne for drawing a line between off-field and on-field activities. "He would always leave the things happening off the field, off the field. Generally, Warne would have a smoke as he was walking onto the ground. He will try to hide it somewhere. And when he finished his smoke and put it out, he knew that it was game time. He crossed that line and whatever he had going off the field, he would leave it there, go and do his stuff on the field and when he came back, he knew it was still going to be there," Clarke said.



Challenge awaits Panghal, Krishan in Asian boxing

Dubai | Agencies

India's Olympic-bound boxers Amit Panghal, Vikas Krishan and Ashish Kumar have a tough challenge ahead when they play their quarter-finals in ASBC Asian Championships here on Wednesday.

World Championships silver-medallist and defending champion Panghal will face stiff competition from Mongolia's Kharkhuu Enkhmandakh in 52kg category. When the duo last met, at Asian Olympic Qualifiers in Amman last year, the Indian had to dig deep into his energy reserves to win the bout.

Krishan, the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games champion, will square off against Iran's Moslem Malamir in 69kg, while Ashish Kumar (75kg), who clinched silver

in the last edition of the event, and Narender (+91kg) will also be up against powerful opponents from Kazakhstan.

While Ashish will play World Championships and Asian Games silver-medallist Abilkhan Amankul, Narender is set to fight two-time World Championships silver-medallist Kamshybek Kunkabayev, who is also aiming for his third successive medal at the Asian championships. Current national champion, Punjab boxer Varinder Singh (60kg), is the other Indian boxer who will be looking to confirm a medal as he will take on Jere Cruz of Philippines in light-weight last-eight bout.

In the 81kg opening-round bout played late on Monday night, Sumit Sangwan suffered a 0-5 defeat against Iranian boxer Meysam Gheshlaghi.

A few tweaks still required before Olympics: Nilakanta Sharma

Bengaluru | Agencies

Indian men's hockey team midfielder Nilakanta Sharma said on Tuesday that the team still needed to improve on executing the short passes and maintaining possession for longer periods.

The 26-year-old from Manipur, who is currently training with the national team at the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) centre in Bengaluru for the Olympics, felt that only a "few tweaks" were required before India begin its Tokyo campaign in July. "I think we can

improve on executing our short passes and maintaining possession for a longer period. If we keep the ball with us for a longer period of time, then we can create more opportunities to score. However, everyone in the team is playing well. We just have to make a few tweaks here and there," said Sharma, who has played 57 matches for the national side.

Sharma added that the team's preparations for this year's Olympics were in full swing. He said that the team was confident about achieving its goals in Tokyo. "The Olympics is not far away. Our preparations for the big event are going on in full swing. Everyone is confident and if we play to our potential, we can certainly make

history in Tokyo. It's all about peaking at the right time and that will be our main focus once the Olympics get underway," said Sharma, who was a member of the team that won the junior World Cup at Lucknow in 2016. Sharma said he was fortunate to get the opportunity to play alongside captain Manpreet Singh.

"It's been a great journey with the Indian team so far. We have seen a lot of highs and I feel we can do even better in the coming years. I have been very lucky to have the chance of playing alongside a player like Manpreet Singh in the mid-field. I have learnt a lot from him. And there's a lot more to learn from him. I really want to take my game to the next level this year as it's an important year for us," he said.



INDIA'S GDP MAY GROW FASTER THAN ESTIMATED IN Q4 BUT FY22 GROWTH MAY FALTER

There is both good news and bad news on the economic front for India that is looking to come out from the second and deadlier wave of Covid pandemic.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The good news is that the country's GDP is expected at faster pace than expected in January-March quarter of 2021 as a pick up in economy activity during the period of fading pandemic surge has resulted in higher than expected output from various sectors.

But the bad news is that Covid 2.0 and continuing lockdowns in various parts of the country may push all hopes of faster economic recovery in FY22 downwards with GDP only managing to grow in single digit this year rather than high double digit growth projected earlier.

As per an Ecowrap report prepared by a research team from SBI headed by banks group chief economic adviser Soumya Kanti Ghosh, GDP growth for Q4 (FY21) would be around 1.3% (with downward bias) as against NSO projection of a negative -1%.

With this, the report has projected that GDP decline for the full year would now be around 7.3% (compared to our earlier prediction of -



7.4%.

"However, due to renewed lockdowns in almost all states since April, 21 owing to rise in infections, we believe that real GDP growth for FY22 would be in single digits as against our earlier forecast of 10.4%," the SBI Ecowrap report said.

The report's assertion on higher Q4 growth has also been based on corporate performance during the period. It said that corporate results so far also reinforce the fact that Q4 growth would be much better than the Q3 growth. The corporate GVA of 625 companies has expanded by 62.04% in Q4 as compared to 12.98% growth in Q3 (of 4164 companies).

"However the entire projection for Q4 FY21 is dependent on how much the past data will be revised by NSO. Past experience on data revision indicates that apart from providing data for Q4 NSO also revises quarterly data for present/previous fiscal year and annual GDP estimate," Ecowrap report said.

Though the country-wise real GDP data indicates that the situation has improved over one year (after battling from second/third wave of Covid-19), most of the countries are still in recession and their Q1 2021 (or Q4 FY21) real GDP growth was in contraction mode. The decline of average real GDP for 24 countries has improved

from 2.9% in Q4 2020 to a decline of 0.3% in Q1 2021. Very few countries exited recession in Q1 2021 with contraction ranging from (-)6.1% (UK) to 18.3% (China).

Interestingly, had India's growth rate crossed 1.7% in Q4FY21, India would have been the second fastest growing country after China in terms of GDP growth, and going by Ecowrap reports estimate of 1.3% GDP growth, India would still be the 5th fastest growing country amongst 25 countries (that have released their GDP numbers so far).

"We hope for such optimism in terms of Covid-19 numbers and vaccination soon," the report said.

Indian equities resilient amid 2nd Covid wave on fall in daily cases

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Even as the country goes through a severe second wave of Covid-19 the stock market has been largely resilient. A report by Kotak Institutional Equities said that the resilience can be attributed to the decline in daily confirmed cases of Covid-19 and the eventual possibility of reopening of lockdowns across states.

It noted that the disconnect between the human tragedy and the markets largely comes on the back of difference in the behaviour, which for humans is emotional and for the markets is clinical.

"The resilience of the broad market and 'rotation' among sectors are not surprising in the context of declining confirmed daily and overall active Covid-19 cases and (2) likely gradual easing of restrictions across states over the next few weeks," it said.

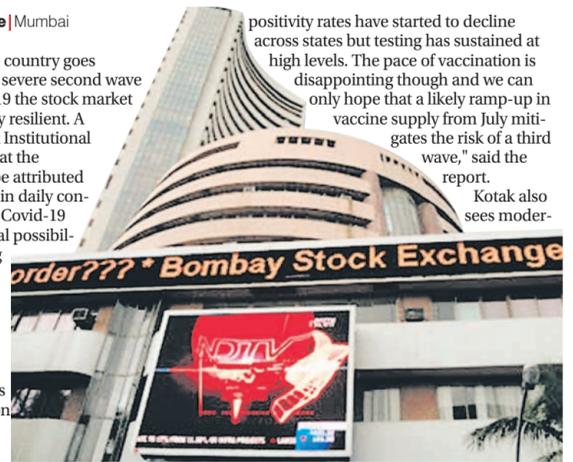
The market has been quite rational over the past few weeks displaying both resilience and rotation. India's Covid-19 daily confirmed and overall active cases have declined sharply over the past 1-2 weeks in many states, which may set the stage for easing of lockdown restrictions across states.

"We draw comfort from the fact that (1)

positivity rates have started to decline across states but testing has sustained at high levels. The pace of vaccination is disappointing though and we can only hope that a likely ramp-up in vaccine supply from July mitigates the risk of a third wave," said the report.

Kotak also sees moderate economic impact of the current lockdowns in many states in the first half of FY22 and recovery from the second half.

It said that there are two differences between the economic impact of the current lockdowns in states over April-May 2021 and the national lockdown in March-May 2020. First one being the lower overall economic impact of the second wave given partial nature of lockdowns with no restrictions on manufacturing and limited restrictions on services and also, staggered nature of lockdowns across states. Further, it noted that the second wave has made higher impact on rural India in relation to the first wave. Rural India was largely unaffected in the first wave.



BARCLAYS AGAIN LOWERS INDIA'S FY22 GROWTH FORECAST

Mumbai: As India battles the severe second wave of Covid-19 and the states undergo lockdowns, Barclays has cut its growth estimate for India for the current financial year to 9.2 per cent. Its earlier estimate was 10 per cent.

"We reduce our baseline FY2021-22 GDP growth forecast again, lowering it to 9.2 per cent y/y from 10 per cent earlier, and 11 per cent before the outbreak of the second wave," it said in a report. It noted that although India's second Covid-19 wave has started to recede, the related economic costs have been larger owing to the more stringent lockdowns implemented to contain the outbreak.

Parts of the country are still experiencing an increase in new cases. However, the overall situation appears to be coming under control, reducing burden on the country's healthcare infrastructure, it said. "In our view, this bodes well for a gradual reopening, but only with a lag," it said.

According to the brokerage the economic costs of the recent surge in cases are rising rapidly. After a reasonably stable April, the economy experienced a sharp decline in activity in May, as is evident in high frequency data.

"While we continue to believe the lockdowns will last only until end of June 2021, in our new base case, we now estimate economic losses of \$74 billion, all of it contained in Q2 21 (April-June)." At the same time, it observed that India's vaccination programme has slowed significantly, given persistent supply constraints and logistical challenges. Although the government has provided greater flexibility for states to set their own vaccine strategies, problems persist and supply is only expected to improve in Q3 21. The slow vaccination drive may pose medium-term risks to growth, especially if the country experiences a third wave of Covid-19 cases, said the brokerage report.

In a more pessimistic scenario in which the country is hit by a third wave of Covid-19, Barclays estimates that the economic costs could rise by at least a further \$42.6 billion, assuming another round of similarly stringent lockdowns are imposed for eight weeks.

Under this pessimistic, "bear case" scenario, it estimates that the GDP growth would be lowered by a further 150 basis points, dragging FY2021-22 growth down to 7.7 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

ICEA hails recent amendments to IGCR rules, seeks further changes

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Lauding the recent changes to the Import of Goods at Concessional Rate of Duty (IGCR) Rules, 2017, the India Cellular & Electronics Association (ICEA) has sought further changes to the rules on a urgent basis.

In a statement, the industry body said that the entire electronics sector, especially the mobile phone industry, is encouraged with the amended rules notified in the IGCR rules to boost trade facilitation. ICEA Chairman Pankaj Mohindroo said: "We welcome the clarifications on end use manufacturing in the complex customs rules in the Budget 2021 amend-



ments issued in February 2021. The recently notified CBIC circular will create the necessary confidence in industry and boost the ecosystem for electronics manufacturing." The amended rules have simplified the procedure which will boost manufacturing. ICEA's GST Taskforce &

Indirect Tax Committee Chairman Bibhash Deb, noting that the amendments would go a long way in the ease of doing business, however, suggested few more changes to the norms.

"There are a couple of amendments that have been overlooked and should also be taken into consideration

to benefit the manufacturing fraternity," Deb said.

He said that the timeline for re-export or clearance for home consumption needs to be extended to 12 months from the current six months.

Movement of goods from one plant to another should be allowed, as inter-unit transfer is extremely important for manufacturers as they have more than one manufacturing unit and on clearance of capital goods, the interest payable should not be included since the goods are cleared on depreciated value, Deb suggested.

He was also of the view that the "SION" norms for the goods imported under IGCR Rule should be defined.

High commodity prices to impact auto, consumer staple sectors

The adverse impact on auto, consumer, durables margins would be counterbalanced by an earnings uptick in the metals, cement, oil and gas sectors. The IT sector, which constitutes 15 per cent of the Nifty weight, is broadly insulated from commodity inflation.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Commodity prices have been an upswing of late amid the surge in Covid-19 cases, and this is likely to impact auto, consumer staples and durables sectors, according to a report by Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

The report noted that with the uncertainty in the demand environment, it

would be difficult for companies to pass on the rise in commodity costs.

"The auto, consumer staples, and durables sectors would be highly impacted in such a scenario," it said.

In banking, it said that debt deleveraging by corporates has further impacted credit growth. As per the Motilal Oswal report, the uptick in inflation could signal the end of the monetary

easing cycle, which has aided the steady decline in funding cost for the system, thus driving healthy margins. However, the adverse impact on auto, consumer, durables margins would be counterbalanced by an earnings uptick in the metals, cement, oil and gas sectors. The IT sector, which constitutes 15 per cent of the Nifty weight, is broadly insulated from commodity inflation.

"Earnings in the non-Nifty, non-commerce basket may be adversely impacted given the weak demand backdrop in the economy due to widespread lockdowns," it said.

Covid-19 has sparked innovation across consumer industries: Accenture Research

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way people live, work and socialise, accelerating demand for innovation, as retailers, consumer goods, and travel companies shift from reacting to the crisis to reinventing products and services, according to findings of a new global survey from Accenture.



people in 19 countries including more than 500 people in India, supports Accenture's previous findings that many changes in behaviour will likely be long-term.

"The past year has been a tough one for consumers and consumer-facing industries. Evolving consumer preferences and behaviours have led to huge demand fluctuation, making it imperative for consumer goods and retail companies to stay agile and resilient. As companies shift from reaction to reinvention, they need to harness digital's full potential across the value chain at speed and scale," said Anurag Gupta, managing director and lead - Strategy & Consulting, Accenture in India.

Covid-19 has led to compressed transformation, with companies simultaneously transforming multiple parts of the enterprise

and reskilling people in what previously would have been longer-term step-by-step programmes. Many consumer-facing companies have re-platformed their businesses in the cloud, addressed cost pressures, and continued to build resilience and security, putting the infrastructure in place to enable innovation and position them for future success. Manish Gupta, managing director and lead for Products practice, Accenture in India said, "To succeed in a post-pandemic economy, companies need to digitally reinvent themselves and strategically invest in technology, people and supply chains. Adoption of digital technologies such as cloud, artificial intelligence, advanced analytics, combined with a well-defined purpose, can help companies to not only reach out to consumers in innovative ways but also adapt faster to the evolving market demands."

The pandemic forced a rapid shift to employees working from home, with many expressing that they want flexibility in how and where they work moving forward. More than 87% of respondents in India said they would like to occasionally work from a "third space" - a location other than their home or place of employment. This highlights a

potential opportunity to grow revenue for the hospitality and retail industries.

The desire to work from a "third space" is accompanied by a shift in attitudes towards business travel. Nearly 57% of respondents in India said they have no business travel plans post-pandemic, or they intend to cut previous business travel by half. How long this view will hold firm remains to be seen, but the current outlook indicates that the return to travel will resume principally within the leisure market, pushing the industry to adapt and become even more efficient to make up for lost income.

Not only do people think some of their work habits and travel plans have likely permanently changed, many also think their shopping habits have evolved for the long haul. The latest research supports Accenture's previously released findings that the dramatic rise in e-commerce is likely to remain or accelerate further. For instance, the proportion of online purchases for products such as food, home decor, fashion, and luxury goods by previously infrequent e-commerce users - defined as those who used online channels for less than 25% of purchases prior to the outbreak - has increased 667% since the outbreak in India.



PAYTM BEGINS COVID-19 VACCINATION DRIVE FOR ITS FRONTLINE FIELD STAFF

New Delhi: India's leading digital financial services platform Paytm today announced that it has begun the vaccination drive of its 8,000 plus Field Service Executives (FSEs) who are an integral part of its business development and merchant support network. The company has already completed the first dose of vaccination for over 1000 FSEs in collaboration with leading hospitals across the country. It will extend the drive to the family members of FSEs as soon as the overall supply of vaccines in the country goes up.

Paytm Spokesperson said, "The FSE workforce is the backbone of Paytm. We believe it is our duty to ensure that every FSE & their family members are safe and healthy. We have also increased the flexibility on targets & work deadlines to ensure that employees get time to spend with their families. We will continue to take more measures to ensure that our FSEs come out of this crisis stronger."

SIDHARTH SHUKLA: I HAD 'MANY SIMILAR EXPERIENCES' LIKE MY 'BROKEN BUT BEAUTIFUL 3' CHARACTER

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Sidharth Shukla's character Agastya in the upcoming web series "Broken But Beautiful 3" is a complicated man stuck between love and everything that comes with it. It is a character, the actor says, he could relate to on a personal level.

"As an actor, there are some who look towards method acting. For me, I could relate to Agastya and I feel life is all about experiences. It's those experiences that make you. I have had many similar experiences and hence I reflected to mine and I performed," said Sidharth. "Broken But Beautiful 3" is the third season in the popular franchise produced by Ekta Kapoor. The show will stream on May 29. Sidharth is known for his roles in fiction soaps such as



"BalikaVadhu" and "Dil Se DilTak", and reality shows such as "JhalakDikhhLajaa 6",

"Fear Factor:

Madhuri Dixit: Yash Chopra was a very progressive director

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood's dancing diva Madhuri Dixit Nene feels late filmmaker Yash Chopra a very progressive filmmaker and that he always kept up with the time. Madhuri expressed her opinion recently while interacting with her fans, where her fan club created #MadznessAwards. These are awards created using matchboxes and presented to her as a memento. The categories of the awards were decided based on fan votes. During the interaction, Chopra's "DilTohPagal Hai" was declared Best Film, Best Music and Best Director awards. "Yashji was a very progressive director and he always kept up with times. His films like 'Deewaar', 'Daag', 'Kala Patthar' and many more are all very progressive. Even women characters were very progressive and played an important part in his films," said Madhuri.

She added: "When I got the opportunity to work with him, I heard the script and fell in love with him. The film was about love and how this girl believes she will meet her soulmate, which is exactly what I used to think and the same happened to me when I met Shirram Nene." Madhuri said as a producer and director Yash Chopra was "very professional". "What I liked most about him was he would let the artistes free to do their bit. He would not give directions on how to act, he would just give an outline and let the actors enact, and whatever came out was very natural, which reflected in his films," she said. While on #MadznessAwards, the special event involved fans residing abroad in countries like Mauritius, South Africa, Singapore, USA, Indonesia as well as in parts of India like Jharkhand, Rajkot, Chhindwara, Pune and Mumbai.



Richa Rathore: Storylines on TV make more sense now

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Richa Rathore feels television as an industry has grown a great deal and has evolved with time. Richa, who is seen in "AapkiNazron Ne Samjha", says shows today are more relatable.

"The TV industry has evolved a lot. It is no longer limited to run-of-the-mill stories and mindless plots. Now we have a more realistic approach to shows and storylines that are relatable and make more sense," she told IANS. Richa says she loves being a part of the entertainment industry due to its reach.

"The best thing about the entertainment industry is its extensive reach. There are so many for whom TV provides an escape from their mundane lives and they get to experience the drama, thrill and fun to keep themselves entertained. It's about making people happy and that makes our industry special," she says. Richa says she loves playing Nandini in "AapkiNazron Ne Samjha". "People like Nandini's innocence. That's what I have understood from the feedback and messages that we have received. I hope we would be able to continue keeping the viewers engaged with Nandini's performance and the story in coming times," she says.



SHILPA SHETTY RETURNS AS JUDGE ON 'SUPER DANCER 4'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shilpa Shetty Kundra is back as a judge on the dance reality show "Super Dancer: Chapter 4". The actress was on a break after her family tested positive for Covid-19 a while back.

"I'm happy to be back on the sets of 'Super Dancer 4'. These kids and the entire crew are all my family and I definitely missed them. I'm finally back and we are having a blast. It's an honour for me to be here and watch these incredibly talented bunch of boys and girls," she says. She was accompanied by her "Dhadkan" co-actor Suniel Shetty on the shoot. The actress had informed on social media that her husband Raj Kundra, children -- Viaan and Samisha -- as well as in laws had tested positive for Covid earlier this month. She had put all projects on hold and actress Malaika Arora Khan had filled in for her on the show. Once her family recovered, Shilpa had posted a video of her house being sanitised on Instagram.

"Super Dancer: Chapter 4" airs on Sony Entertainment Television.



Yuvika Chaudhary apologises for casteist remark in video

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Yuvika Chaudhary and her husband Prince Narula individually apologised on Tuesday after the hashtag 'Arrest YuvikaChoudhary' started trending on Twitter. Yuvika drew netizens ire for posting a video featuring Prince on YouTube where she made a casteist remark. In the video, Yuvika can be seen filming Prince as he gets a haircut. She refers to a certain community and says he looks like them. This led to the hash'ag 'Arrest YuvikaChoud'ary' trending on Twitter. A user "aid: "YuvikaChoudhary should be arrested. Example has to be set There are many like her and Munmun "ut" a."

"Hey #yuvikachoudhary you sd be ashamed of your words. The people you addressed are actually keeping this nation presentable. they sd be respected, you senseless people create chaos in 'ociety," another tweeted. The actress has now posted an apology on Instagram.

"She wrote: "H' guys I didn't kw the meaning about that word wt I used in my las' vlog I didn't mean to hurt anyone and I can never do that to hurt someone I apologise to each n every one I hope you understand "ove you all." Prince, too, took to his Instagram stories to apologise to fans. Recently an FIR was filed against @Taarak Mehta K' OoltaChashmah" actress MunMun Dutta for using casteist slur in a YouTube video.

Kailash Kher: I laugh when I think of how much my voice had been rejected

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Singer Kailash Kher is a household name today, but he looks back to recall his share of ups and downs during his early years in the music industry.

Kher says the music industry was headed by MBAs and corporates at the time he joined it, and he recalls how they would give an appointment after months of waiting, only to reject you instantly.

"India was changing 15 to 20 years back, and corporates and MBAs were deciding everything. You can come with degrees from London, Oxford



or Stanford, but the practical world is different. They would make us wait for six months for an appointment. Then we would get a meeting and in that meeting they would say this kind of voice will not work," he tells IANS.

The singer says he would often be left dejected and would question who were they to decide what works and what doesn't.

"I used to think that they don't know about voice and voice culture, and they have a command to decide on which voice to select. It is for their satisfaction," he recalls.

However, he laughs when he looks back at the time because he would go on to become well known thanks to the voice they rejected.

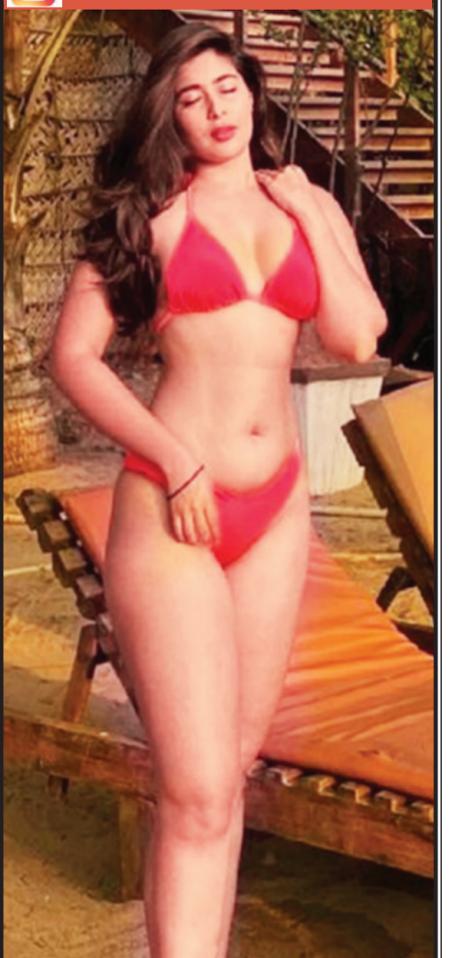
"But then when the same voice came, people said what a soulful voice, a divine voice! I laugh when I think of how much my voice had been rejected," he says.

The singer goes on to talk about the politics in the music industry.

"In films, too, there is politics, there are less songs but the supply is a lot. Where there is demand and supply, there is politics for sure. For example, they will make a newcomer sing a song but you get to know that the record company owner wants someone else to sing, and you are replaced. Actually, the way things should work is that if you have been called, whether you are old or new, and made to sing and they have praised you, that should have value. It should not be that after six months you get to know that someone else is singing. People make fun of you at home and in society," he says.

"For someone like me, this didn't matter, because I had not come to sing in films," concludes Kher, who is currently a mentor on the music reality show Indian Pro Music League.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Nikita Sharma