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## Third wave may not happen if strong steps taken: Scientific Advisor

# U - TURN

"If we take strong steps and measures, the third wave may not happen in all the places or indeed anywhere at all. It all depends on how much the guidelines are effectively implemented at local level."

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Two days after warning that the third wave of Covid is inevitable, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government, K. VijayRaghavan on Friday stepped back, saying that it may not happen if strong steps and measures are taken.

Asked about reports of mucormycosis among Covid-19 patients, NITI Aayog's Member, Health, Prof V.K. Paul said: "Mucormycosis (Black Fungus) is detected mostly in diabetic patients. We want to reassure that there is no major outbreak and we are doing proper surveillance of the situation."

He pointed out that there are three factors triggering this fungal infection: uncontrolled diabetes, immunosuppression because of steroids or any other disease and exposure to a wet surface. "Mucormycosis is absolutely preventable and if one's diabetes is under control, there is no reason to worry," Paul said.

Meanwhile, Additional Secretary, Health, Arti Ahuja said: "States and UTs, including Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, are showing early signs of plateauing or decrease in daily new Covid cases."

### INDIA RECORDS 4.14L NEW COVID CASES, 3,915 DEATHS

**New Delhi:** India has recorded 4,14,188 fresh Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours -- the highest so far, along with 3,915 fatalities, taking the total number of cases in the country to 2,14,91,598, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Friday. It is the third time after May 1 that India has crossed the four lakh mark of active cases in last 24 hours. On Thursday, India recorded 4,12,262 cases. It is the 15th straight day when India recorded more than three lakh cases while over 3,000 casualties have been reported for the last nine days. India's total tally of Covid-19 cases now stands at 2,14,91,598 with 36,45,164 active cases and a total of 2,34,083 deaths, so far.

### REMDESIVIR ALLOCATION MADE TILL MAY 16 ACROSS THE COUNTRY: GOWDA

**New Delhi:** Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers D. V. Sadananda Gowda on Friday said that the allocation of Remdesivir vials across the country has been made up to May 16, so that no patient faces any difficulty amid the pandemic. Considering the requirement of Remdesivir in every state and ensuring its adequate availability, allocation of Remdesivir made up to May 16, said a letter written to all the states by the Department of Pharmaceuticals and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

### CENTRE HAS TO SUPPLY 700 MT OXYGEN TO DELHI DAILY: SC

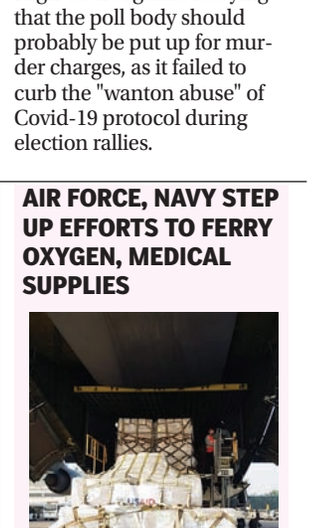
New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday said the Centre has to supply 700 MT of oxygen to Delhi every day till further orders. A bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah said: "We want 700 MT to be supplied to Delhi and we mean business. it has to be supplied and we don't want to be coercive." Senior advocate Rahul Mehra, counsel representing the Delhi government, submitted before the bench that the Delhi government has received 86 MT on Friday till 9 a.m. and 16 MT of oxygen is in transit.

### TELANGANA TO GIVE ONLY SECOND DOSE OF COVID VACCINE

**Hyderabad:** In view of shortage of the Covid-19 vaccines, health authorities in Telangana on Friday decided to vaccinate only those awaiting their second dose. From Saturday, vaccine will be given to only those due for second dose, Director of Public Health Dr G. Srinivasa Rao told reporters. This arrangement will continue till May 12. However, there will be no vaccination on Sunday.

## My values not in consonance with EC: Poll panel counsel resigns in SC

"It was an honour to represent the Election Commission of India (ECI). However, I have found that my values are not in consonance with the current functioning of the ECI; and hence I withdraw myself from the responsibilities of its panel counsel before the Supreme Court of India."




**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Advocate Mohit D. Ram, who was on the Panel Counsel for the Election Commission before the Supreme Court has tendered his resignation from the position.

The letter dated May 6, and was addressed to the director of law of the Election Commission. His association with EC started in 2013 when he was appointed as standing counsel for the poll body. Ram later became one of its panel counsel.

In the letter, Ram said he will undertake to ensure smooth transition of files, NOC and vakalatnamas in all pending matters with his office. On Thursday, the Supreme Court had dismissed a plea by Election Commission, which sought a gag on media from reporting oral observations made by judges during court proceedings. However, Ram was not part of this matter.

The Election Commission had moved the top court against the strong observation made by the Madras High Court against it saying that the poll body should probably be put up for murder charges, as it failed to curb the "wanton abuse" of Covid-19 protocol during election rallies.

## RaGa writes to NaMo, criticises Covid, vax strategy

**"I am compelled to write to you once more as the Covid-19 tsunami continues to ravage our country unabated. In such an unprecedented crisis, the people of India must be your foremost priority. I urge you to do everything in your power to stop the needless suffering that our people are going through."**

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi on Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying his government's lack of a clear and coherent Covid and vaccination strategy, as well as its hubris in declaring premature victory as the virus was exponentially spreading, has placed India in a highly dangerous position.

He also said that government's failures have made another national lockdown almost inevitable, and to prevent a repeat of the manifold suffering caused by last year's lockdown, the government must act with compassion and provide critical financial and food support to "our most vulnerable people".

This is his second letter to the Prime Minister within a month. He has earlier written to Modi on April 9 calling for vaccinations to be opened up to "everyone who needs it" and an immediate halt on vaccine exports, predicting "catastrophic effects" on the economy if inoculations continued at the current pace. He further said that but it is also important to understand India's responsibility in a globalised and interconnected world.

## RURAL WESTERN UTTAR PRADESH GRAPPLES WITH COVID-19

**Lucknow:** After the spread of Covid-19 in urban pockets, the infection is gathering pace across rural areas in western Uttar Pradesh with villages in Muzaffarnagar district being the worst-hit. However, the number of villages impacted is yet to be officially included in the data compiled by the state government. After the recent UP panchayat elections, the situation in the villages has worsened resulting in a large number of deaths. Most of the people are suffering from high fever. People are also facing breathing problems in certain areas. Patients infected with the virus have not yet been tested in most rural areas. Their overall health condition would be known only after undergoing testing.

## UNSC must include India for credible global leadership: Govt

**New Delhi/New York:** | New Delhi

The government on Friday reiterated that India should be included in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) if the international body wants to be seen as a credible global leader.

In his statement at the high-level meeting of the UNSC on 'Maintenance of international peace and security: upholding multilateralism and the United Nations-centered international system', Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla said, "At the core of India's call for reformed multilateralism, lies the reform of the UN Security Council, reflective of the contemporary realities of today."

When power structures continue to reflect the status quo of a bygone era, they also start reflecting a lack of appreciation of contemporary geopolitical realities, he said."Multilateral institutions must be made more accountable to their membership, they must be open and welcoming to a diversity of viewpoints and cognisant of new voices," Shringla added.

"The Council must be made more representative of developing countries if it is to continue to engender trust and confidence in its ability to provide leadership to the entire world. It can deliver effective solutions only if it gives a voice to the voiceless rather than zealously guarding the status quo of the mighty," he added.

### AIR FORCE, NAVY STEP UP EFFORTS TO FERRY OXYGEN, MEDICAL SUPPLIES

**New Delhi:** The C-17 aircraft of Indian Air Force have conducted 400 sorties from within the country, including 351 to airlift 252 oxygen tankers of a total capacity of 4,904 Metric Tonnes (MT), till Friday.

Both the Air Force and the Indian Navy have intensified their efforts to aid the civil administration in tackling the grim Covid situation in the country by ferrying oxygen containers and medical equipment. The cities the Air Force has covered include Jamnagar, Bhopal, Chandigarh, Panagarh, Indore, Ranchi, Agra, Jodhpur, Begumpet, Bhubaneswar, Pune, Surat, Raipur, Udaipur, Mumbai, Lucknow, Nagpur, Gwalior, Vijaywada, Baroda, Dimapur and Hindan.

The IAF aircraft also conducted 59 international sorties to airlift 72 cryogenic oxygen storage containers of 1,233 MT total capacity along with 1,252 empty oxygen cylinders.The containers and cylinders were procured from Singapore, Dubai, Bangkok, the UK, Germany, Belgium and Australia. In addition, the C-17 and IL-76 aircraft have been tasked to airlift cryogenic oxygen containers, oxygen generators and ventilators from Israel and Singapore. The Indian Navy deployed its ships -- INS Talwar, INS Kolkata, INS Airavat, INS Kochi, INS Tabar, INS Trikand, INS Jalashwa and INS Shardul -- to ferry oxygen containers, cylinders, concentrators and related equipment from friendly foreign countries.

### SC REFUSES TO INTERFERE WITH CENTRAL VISTA, ASKS HC TO GRANT EARLY HEARING

**New Delhi:** Citing that the Delhi High Court is already seized of the matter, the Supreme Court on Friday declined to interfere with the Central Vista redevelopment project.

A bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and Dinesh Maheshwari granted the petitioner liberty to mention the matter before the Chief Justice of Delhi High Court for early hearing.

The bench also asked the high court to preferably consider the plea for an early hearing. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, submitted that the high court has kept the matter for hearing on May 17.

Senior advocate Sidharth Luthra, representing the petitioners, argued: "We are facing a humanitarian health crisis. If this project is deferred by four to six weeks nothing will happen." He added that the IPL has already been suspended and we are facing an unprecedented Covid-19 crisis.

Mehta submitted that the petitioner coming to court by way of a PIL and filing a Special Leave Petition (SLP) against an adjournment order of the high court raises serious doubt.

Mehta said that an appeal against an adjournment would set a wrong precedent. The bench responded that it is aware of the situation, but the court cannot make comments about the deaths, as it may be taken otherwise.

## *Covid crisis poses economic risk in Q1 FY22; 'muted impact' likely: FinMin*

- The 'Monthly Economic Review' for April 2021 published by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) said that learning to "operate with COVID-19" provides a silver lining of economic resilience amidst the second wave.

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

As states take to lockdowns amid the severe Covid crisis, the Finance Ministry in a report has said that second wave of the Covid-19 poses downside risk to economic activities during April-June, although the impact is expected to be muted compared to that in the first wave.

Noting that the global economy recovered further in March and April, powered with vaccination drives and fiscal stimuli by few large economies, it said that in India the momentum in economic recovery since the first wave moderated in April due to the second wave of coronavirus.

It said that agriculture continues to be the silver lining with record food grain production estimated in the ensuing crop year on the back of predicted normal monsoons.Rural demand indicators like tractor sales recorded a growth of 172 per cent and 36 per cent compared to a low base in March 2020 and even the pre-Covid month of March 2019 respectively.

Industrial production showed mixed trends. While Index of Industrial Production (IIP) in February 2021 registered a broad-based decline of 3.6 per cent (YoY) and 3.9 per cent compared to January 2021, the eight-core index posted a growth of of 6.8 per cent (YoY) in March 2021 and 11.1 per cent compared to February 2021.In FY 2020-21, the core sector contracted by 7 per cent compared to 0.4 per cent growth in FY 2019-20 with fertilizer being the sole growing sector and electricity recovering steadily in the second half.

The Purchasing Managers Index for manufacturing rose further to 55.5 in April with consumer goods as the strongest-performing category, followed by capital goods and then intermediate goods. The rebound was also reflected in RBI's survey estimates on capacity utilization and manufacturers' optimism for the current year, the report said.

In the second half of FY 2020-21, GST collections registered a good growth and collections exceeded Rs 1 lakh crore in each of the last six months owing to economic recovery. GST collections registered another record high of Rs 1.41 lakh crore in April, indicative of continual economic recovery.

**"The second wave of COVID-19 has posed a downside risk to economic activity in the first quarter of FY 2021-22. However, there are reasons to expect a muted economic impact as compared to the first wave. Learning to "operate with COVID-19", as borne by international experience, provides a silver lining of economic resilience amidst the second wave."**

# CM STALIN AND HIS 33 MINISTERS TAKE OATH

**Chennai** | Agencies

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) President Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu by Governor Banwarilal Purohit at Raj Bhawan on Friday.

After a gap of 10 years, the DMK with Stalin at the helm comes back to power for a sixth time in its history by winning the 2021 Assembly elections securing a comfortable majority on its own.

The 68-year-old Stalin wearing white shirt and dhoti came to Raj Bhavan at about 9 a.m. Purohit administered Stalin the Oath of Office and Secrecy. The Governor also administered the oath to 33 other lawmakers as the Ministers. On Thursday, Purohit released the list of lawmakers who will be appointed as ministers and their portfolios. Stalin's Cabinet has two women Ministers. The Chief Minister's son Udhayanidhi Stalin who has won from Chepauk-Thiruvallikeni constituency is not included in the Cabinet. Stalin's wife Durga, son Udhayanidhi and other family members, former Deputy Chief Minister and AIADMK Coordinator O.Panneerselvam, leaders of Congress and other parties attended the swearing in ceremony.

## CASH PAYMENTS ABOVE RS 2 LAKH ALLOWED FOR PATIENTS IN COVID HOSPITALS

**New Delhi:** The Centre has relaxed rules, to allow hospitals and nursing homes accept cash payments in excess of Rs 2 lakh for treatment of Covid patients from April 1 to May 31, 2021.

A notification by the Department of Revenue states that under Section 269 ST of the Income Tax Act, 1961, hospitals, nursing homes, dispensaries, Covid care centres or similar other medical facilities are allowed to take benefit of the provision.

The hospitals will have to obtain the PAN or Aadhaar of the patient and the payee and the relationship between the patient and the payee for this provision.

# Congress' poll performance unfortunate, disappointing: Sonia Gandhi

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Friday termed her party's performance in the state assembly elections "unfortunate, disappointing and unexpected".

In the recently concluded assembly elections, results of which were declared on May 2, the Congress could not register win in any state, and its only consolation was in Tamil Nadu where the party contested along with DMK as its partner, and managed to win 18 seats.

Addressing the party MPs on Friday during a virtual meeting, she said: "Most unfortunately, our own performance in all the states was very disappointing and if I may say, unexpectedly so. The CWC is meeting shortly to review the results but it goes without saying that we as a party collective must draw the appropriate lessons from this setback in a spirit of humility and honesty."

Sonia Gandhi also congratulated Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

The Congress had on May 2 had said that the party will "study" the results, correct mistakes and do a course correction.

Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala read out a statement on the same day, and said: "The Congress will definitely study the results and all the reasons diligently and we are committed to correct our mistakes and do appropriate course correction."

"We recognize that the election results are not as per our expectations, particularly those of Assam and Kerala," he added.

Surjewala said the people's mandate is the final word in a democracy. "People of West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have given their democratic mandate for the next five years. We accept the verdict with humility and a sense of responsibility."

# Earth mover, bicycle cart used to shift Covid patients' bodies in Bihar

Patna: Amid the coronavirus pandemic, human sensitivity is also declining with a case emerging from Bihar's Araria where family members refused to perform last rites of a woman who succumbed to the disease, and social activists finally removed her body with an earth mover, two days after her death.

Radha Devi, 52, a resident of Jumman Chowk in Forbesganj city of Araria, was undergoing treatment in her house. She died on Tuesday night due to severe lung infection.

"Following the death of Radha Devi, her husband and other family members refused to cremate the dead body. They were not touching it in fear of infection. The deceased had four daughters and a minor son who urged neighbours for help but none of them came forward," said Dimple Chaudhary, a local social activist.

"When I learnt about the incident, I informed the local administration. By the time, the body had reached a decomposed stage. The officials of the municipal committee finally sent a team, and workers in PPE kits, took out the dead body, put it on a JCB machine and took it for cremation," Chaudhary said.In another similar incident, the body of a 40-year-old man, who died due to corona in Bakhtiyarpur area of Patna district, also languished at his home.

Dimple Kumar, who had high fever for five days, was living with his elderly parents and wife in ward no 4. After his death, his wife informed relatives and requested them to help in the last rites but none of them came forward. Eventually, the neighbours raised funds and gave them to the municipal committee for cremation.

Municipal officials, wearing PPE kits, came with a bicycle cart to take the body to the cremation ground, where his wife performed his last rites.

# 3 of family commit suicide after man dies of Covid in Gujarat

Gandhinagar: In a shocking incident, three members of a family committed suicide in the wee hours of Friday after cremating the head of the family who succumbed to Covid-19 in Gujarat's Devbhumi Dwarka district. The police have registered a case of accidental death and further investigation is underway.

After the head of the family died of Covid in Dwarka City, the remaining three members of the family took the extreme step, the police said.

Businessman Jayeshbhai Vasantbhai Jain (60), who fell prey to Covid on Thursday evening, was the head of the family comprising his wife Shardaben (55) and sons Mukesh (38) and Durgesh (35).

After cremating Jain at the Dwarka crematorium, his wife and two sons returned to their home in the TV Station area at around 5 am on Friday. Soon after, all three of them consumed some poisonous substance and died, the police said.

"The family originally belonged to Nashik in Maharashtra and their Aadhaar card details show their residence in the Halol area of Vadodara. The incident came to light only after the milkman came to the house at around 8 am, following which the neighbours called the police," Inspector P.B. Gadhavi told reporter.

# Punjab sets up new SIT to probe 2015 firing incident

**Chandigarh** | Agencies

Consequent to the orders of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, the Punjab government on Friday set up a new three-member Special Investigation Team (SIT), comprising of senior IPS officers, and directed it to complete the investigations into the 2015 Kotkapura firing incident, preferably in six months, as per the court's orders.An official spokesperson said that the newly constituted SIT, comprising ADGP, Vigilance Bureau, L.K. Yadav, Ludhiana's Commissioner of Police, Rakesh Agarwal, and DIG, Faridkot Range, Surjit Singh, would investigate the two FIRs (dated October 14, 2015 and August 7, 2018) registered in connection with the Kotkapura firing incidents.As per the orders issued by the Home Department, the SIT would ensure meticulous compliance of the directions of the Punjab and Haryana High Court stipulating that there would be no interference from any quarter; internal or external, in the investigations.

# 73 MORE DIE OF COVID IN ANDHRA PRADESH

*Covid-19 claimed 73 more lives in Andhra Pradesh while the state reported 17,188 new cases.*

**Amaravati** | Agencies

The fresh fatalities pushed the state's cumulative death toll to 8,519 while the case tally rose to 12,45,374.

Ten people each succumbed to the virus in Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam district. East Godavari reported eight deaths followed by seven in Chittoor, six each in Guntur, and Krishna, five each in Kurnool, Prakasam, and West Godavari, two each in Nellore, and Srikakulam and two in Anantapur district.

According to state health officials, the government and private laboratories in the state tested 1,00,424 samples during 24 hour period ending 10 a.m. on Friday. The state has so far conducted 1,71,60,870 tests. The period saw 12,749 people recovering from the virus. The cumulative number of recoveries has gone up to 10,50,160. The number of active cases in the state now stands at 1,86,695. During the last 24 hours, Chittoor reported maximum number of cases at 2,260. Visakhapatnam saw 1,868 new infections followed by 1,823 in East Godavari, 1,779 in Anantapur, 1,632 in Srikakulam, 1,530 in Nellore, 1,515 in Guntur and 1,342 in Kurnool

# Hand oxygen plants over to military: Haryana minister

- Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij on Friday said the work of administration and arrangement of oxygen plants should be handed over to the military and the paramilitary for their safe and smooth functioning.

**Chandigarh** | Agencies

Vij said this step should be taken to deal with oxygen-related problems being faced at present, adding that such a step would be immensely helpful as even if one plant stops, then it may adversely affect the health of Covid patients.

"The state government is continuously making efforts to distribute oxygen as per requirement in all hospitals of the state. With the assistance of the Central government, 60 oxygen plants will be set up in government hospitals with a capacity of 30, 50, 100 and 200 beds in the state," he said in a statement.

The minister said work is presently going on to set up six oxygen plants in government hospitals. After Ambala, oxygen plants will soon start functioning in Panchkula, Faridabad and Hisar towns.

# *Deal stringently with farm activists for lockdown violation: Punjab CM*

**Chandigarh** | Agencies

Acting tough owing to Covid-19 surge, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Friday issued directions to deal stringently with violations in view of the Kisan Sangharsh Morcha's anti-lockdown agitation on Saturday.

He authorised the Deputy Commissioners to impose any new and harsher restrictions, as needed, within their respective districts, but made it clear that no dilution of the existing curbs would be allowed, except for opening of non-essential shops and private offices on rotation. He directed the DGP to strictly enforce the weekend lockdown in the state.

Asserting that the Kisan Morcha, an amalgamation of 32 kisan unions, cannot dictate terms to the state government, Amarinder Singh warned of strict prosecution in case of violation of any restrictions. He said if any shops are opened in violation of the restrictions, the owners will be prosecuted.

Chairing a virtual high-level Covid review meeting, the Chief Minister authorised the Deputy Commissioners to take any decision on opening of non-essential shops or private officers on rotation, after taking the local MLAs and other stakeholders into confidence.

However, the DCs cannot impose any restrictions on inter-district movement, he said, underlining the need to allow free flow of people and goods on the highway network of the state. The new curbs, if any, and the opening of shops on rotation will come into effect from Monday, he said.

# Gauhati High Court stays termination of 252 NRC workers

The Gauhati High Court has stayed the termination of 252 Junior Assistants engaged on contract basis to update Assam's National Register of Citizens (NRC), as monitored by the Supreme Court.

**Guwahati** | Agencies

The JAs were served a termination notice on March 26, three days after the Registrar General of India ordered the closure of the NRC office in Assam and refused to sanction funds after March 31.

The JAs were engaged in February 2015 at the district, sub-division and circle levels with fixed monthly remuneration for NRC-related works.A High Court official on Friday said that hearing the petition filed by Biplab Kumar Medhi and 251 others JAs, Justice Prasanta Kumar Deka ordered the continuation of their service.

"Status quo as on date shall be maintained in respect of the service of the present petitioners," the judge said in his 47-page judgement.

Justice Deka has ordered to serve notice, returnable in two weeks, to the Centre, the RGI, Assam's Chief Secretary, Home Secretary and State NRC Coordinator Hitesh Dev Sarma."Prima facie I am satisfied that though admittedly the petitioners were engaged on the basis of specific terms of contract, however, keeping in view that the service of the petitioners are governed under Service Regulations, 2014, there is a case to be heard as to whether the issuance of the impugned notice of March 26, 2021 is proper in terms of the Service Regulations, 2014 and various terms and expression under the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003," the judge said.The draft of the NRC was published in August 2019, excluding 19.06 lakh people out of 3.3 crore applicants. Each of the 19.06 lakh people was to have been issued rejection slips, citing the reasons for their exclusion soon after the publication of the draft. However, the rejection slips are yet to be issued for the excluded people to approach a Foreigners' Tribunal within 120 days of receiving them. Around a 100 tribunals are tasked to scrutinise the documents of the excluded people and to decide if they would remain debarred or make it to the NRC.

# DELHI'S DAILY COVID POSITIVITY RATE BELOW 25% FOR 2ND DAY

The positivity rate was reported at 24.29 per cent on May 6 - the first time since April 17 that it fell below 25 per cent. The highest daily positivity rate was reported at 36.2 per cent on April 22.

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Delhi's daily Covid positivity rate remained below 25 per cent for the second consecutive day, at 24.92 per cent while 19,832 new cases were reported in the last 24 hours, taking the total tally to 12,92,867, according to the health bulletin issued on Friday.

This is the fourth time in the last five days that Delhi reported new cases below 20,000.

The positivity rate was reported at 24.29 per cent on May 6 - the first time since April 17 that it fell below 25 per cent. The highest daily positivity rate was reported at 36.2 per cent on April 22.

Delhi witnessed 341 new deaths due to Covid infection in the last 24 hours, taking the total toll so far to 18,739. A total of 79,593 samples were tested on Thursday, of which 65,663 by the RT-PCR method and 13,930 by Rapid Antigen.

Meanwhile, 19,085 people infected with Covid were reported recovered, taking the total recovery in the national capital so far to 11,83,093.

Active cases in the national capital rose to 91,035, of which 50,424 are in home isolation.

# Kejriwal calls for meeting to review Covid situation in Delhi

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Hours after the Supreme Court directed the Centre to ensure that Delhi gets 700 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen supply every day, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal called for a meeting to review the Covid situation in the national capital.

This order has come as a relief to the people of Delhi. For over two weeks Delhi's hospitals have been fighting for oxygen supply. Delhi had received 730 MT of oxygen on Wednesday and had requested the Centre to continue supplying 700 metric tonnes of oxygen every day.

Kejriwal on Thursday said that the Delhi government is capable of increasing around 9000-9500 beds for Covid infected patients at it existing Covid care centres including hospitals.The Apex Court on Friday morning directed the Centre: "When we say 700 MT, it means (the amount of medical oxygen to be supplied) every day to Delhi. Please do not drive us to a situation to take coercive steps. We are clarifying that it will be 700 MT every day."

According to the Delhi government's data, out of 1919 ICU beds with ventilators available in Delhi's hospitals, only four are vacant (till 2.30 p.m. on Friday).

# SC declines to entertain DJB plea on water shortage against Haryana

If you want us to pass an order on merits which may not be in your interest, we will hear you, otherwise we'd suggest please go to the Upper Yamuna River Board and make your suggestions. If you still insist, we will hear you and pass orders.

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain the Delhi Jal Board's (DJB) plea against the Haryana government in connection with the shortage of water supply to the national capital, and asked it to approach the Upper Yamuna River Board.A three-judge bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao, A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian granted liberty to the DJB to approach the Upper Yamuna River Board, with their prayer relating to allocation of water to Delhi. It asked the board to consider the representation made by the DJB, clarifying that the top court is not expressing any opinion on merits of the case.

The observations were made by the top court during the hearing of an application by the DJB seeking directions to the Punjab and Haryana governments to stop the discharge of untreated pollutants causing rise of ammonia levels into the Yamuna river, and also ensure there is enough supply of water from Haryana side to the national capital.At the beginning of the matter, the top court informed the DJB's counsel that it has seen the committee's report.

"If you want us to pass an order on merits which may not be in your interest, we will hear you, otherwise we'd suggest please go to the Upper Yamuna River Board and make your suggestions. If you still insist, we will hear you and pass orders."

The DJB has maintained that shortage in water supply may affect supply to hospitals. and urged the top court to fix a specific timeline in which the board may decide their grievance, preferably within 10 days, as beyond that, there may be difficulty. The counsel insisted that there is a genuine problem of water in the national capital and the top court could at least direct that Haryana side should provide whatever maximum they can provide.At this, the top court responded: "Whatever they have to, they are providing, and they are providing more according to the report."

During the hearing, the bench noted that the DJB should go to the monitoring body and make a request to it. "You can't keep coming here and telling us there is no water in Delhi. You asked us to appoint a committee, and we did. The ground reality appears to be different," it noted.

# By May 20, Delhi shall have calmed down in significant ways: Dinesh Singh

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Leading mathematics scholar and former Vice Chancellor of the Delhi University, Dinesh Singh has predicted that Covid infections being reported in Delhi will show a perceptible easing up between May 10-15.

Singh has triangulated three sources of data and predicted that Delhi will see a perceptible easing up between May 10-15.

By May 20 Delhi shall have calmed down in significant ways, Singh told IANS.

He said Covid infections have eased in the last four days which is pointing to a similar trend.

Singh also conducted telephonic interviews with 100 families which showed that almost everyone in these families has been infected and are now recovering.

There were many mild to serious cases reported in this instance but no deaths.

Singh has also noted a perceptible decline in ambulance sirens on the roads which also shows a decline in cases.

Keeping all these factors in mind, Singh predicts a decline in cases by May 10-15 and by May 20, there will be a significant decline.

There is some anecdotal evidence to show that doctors are corroborating that the affluent have been more affected by the Covid pandemic and more serious cases are being reported amongst the affluent.

Amid spike in Covid cases in many parts of the country, the national capital received respite at some extent as daily positivity rate was reported below 25 per cent. The national capital reported 19,133 new Covid cases and 335 deaths in the last 24 hours, according to the Delhi government's health bulletin on Thursday.

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

Delhi had reported highest daily positivity rate - 36.2 per cent on April 22. This is the fifth consecutive day that the positivity rate has remained below 30 per cent in the national capital. On May 4, the capital had registered a positivity rate of 26.73 per cent, on May 3, positivity rate was reported at 29.56 per cent, on May 2 it was reported at 28.33 per cent while on May 1, it was 31.6 per cent.

## DELHI'S RAJINDER NAGAR GETS ANOTHER VACCINATION CENTRE

**New Delhi:**Days after the Delhi government set up a vaccination centre with a capacity of inoculating around 3,000 people daily in the national capital's Rajinder Nagar area, it claimed to have started another such facility at Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya.

"Delhi Government kickstarts another vaccination facility in our Rajinder Nagar constituency. Hassle free, hygienic Covid vaccination in a Delhi overnment school. Come one, come all! Location - Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, C block, NarainaVihar," Raghav Chadha, AamAadmi Party (AAP) leader and MLA from Rajinder Nagar constituency, said on Twitter on Friday.

# 2 held for selling oxygen concentrators at inflated prices

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Cracking its whip against the black marketeers, the Delhi Police on Friday said it has arrested two persons.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) South Delhi Atul Bhatia said, that the Greater Kailash Police station team has arrested two persons, and also seized 10 medical oxygen concentrators and 82 plastic pipes used in concentrators, 3,486 digital thermometers, 263 digital gun thermometers, 684 oximeters and 10 nebulizers.

He said that on May 5, an information regarding a person selling Covid-related medical equipments at a higher price than market price, in M Block Market GK-1 area was received.

"Acting swiftly on the information, a team comprising Inspector Jai Prakash Nagar, Sub Inspector Anil Kumar and several others was constituted under the leadership of Inspector Ritesh Kumar, SHO Greater Kailash and overall supervision of ACP CR Park Lakshay Pandey, to nab the accused. "Around 9 p.m., one Alto car was noticed coming towards M Block Market parking GK-1. The informer signalled towards the hoarder and team apprehended him," Bhatia said. The accused was identified as Saeed, a resident of Jamia Nagar and four medical oxygen concentrators, 10 infrared machines, 20 oximeter and 40 thermometer were found in his possession. During questioning, he stated that he works with one Muqueem and shares profit."On further raid, six medical oxygen concentrator and 82 plastic pipe used in concentrators were seized... 3,446 digital thermometer, 253 digital gun thermometer, 664 oximeter and 10 nebulizers were found from the warehouse of accused Muqueem located in Shaheen Bagh area of South Delhi," he said.The official said that both the accused disclosed that they were selling essential life savingequipments on higher rates than the market price.

A case has been registered against both the accused.

# Delhi received 577 MT oxygen on May 6, AAP Govt says not enough

"We are demanding oxygen supply to provide all beds with oxygen. At present there are around 21,000 beds (including ICU beds with ventilators) which the government has decided to increase up to 40,000 in the coming days and for that Delhi would need oxygen supply accordingly."

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Delhi received 577 metric tonnes of oxygen on May 6 against its demand for 700 metric tonnes per day, said AAP MLA Raghav Chadha on Friday.Sharing the oxygen bulletin with the press digitally, Chadha said Delhi received only 577 metric tonnes of oxygen from the Centre on May 6. On May 5 Delhi had received 730 metric tonnes of oxygen.

Chadha said Delhi's oxygen demand has risen to 976 metric tonnes per day of which only 69 per cent was supplied to Delhi on hursday."Delhi government will make all efforts to cater to the oxygen demand from hospitals across the national capital and will request the Centre to continue adequate supply of oxygen to Delhi to save people's lives," Chadha said. Delhi needs regular and uninterrupted oxygen supply to protect Covid infected patients. "We are demanding oxygen supply to provide all beds with oxygen. At present there are around 21,000 beds (including ICU beds with ventilators) which the government has decided to increase up to 40,000 in the coming days and for that Delhi would need oxygen supply accordingly."The Centre on Friday morning told the apex court that the Delhi government is demanding oxygen supply more than its actual needs.

# 'Gurugram hospitals with over 50 beds capacity to set up oxygen plants'

**GURUGRAM** | Agencies

Gurugram Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg has asked all the hospitals with more than 50 beds capacity to manage their own liquid oxygen requirements.

For this, they can either set up a liquid oxygen plant or arrange a Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA), he said.

Garg chaired a virtual Covid review meeting on Friday.

"To fulfil oxygen needs in Gurugram it is planned to set up 6 oxygen plants in the district. Besides, the administration is also trying to set up an oxygen plant under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

"Till such time these plants are operational, the administration is also arranging oxygen concentrators to increase the supply of oxygen. The administration has already got about 50 concentrators and efforts are on to arrange 250 to 300 concentrators in the next 7 to 8 days," Garg said.

Gurugram Civil Surgeon Virender Yadav who also attended the meeting informed that PSA based 1,000 LPM oxygen plants will be set up at the Civil Hospital in Gurugram. In addition, PSA based LPM plants will be set up at Sub Divisional Hospitals, Sohna and Pataudi.Garg assured that the Covid patients currently admitted in the city's hospitals registered with the district administration will not face oxygen shortage. Regarding the supply of the injections Remdesivir and Tocilizumab, Garg informed that the state government has decided that it will issue the quota of Remedesivir injections for each district which will be distributed to the hospitals by the civil surgeon according to the number of patients. For injection Tocilizumab, the government has constituted a 3-member committee under the chairmanship of Dr Dhruv Chaudhary, senior physician at PGIMS Rohtak.This committee will release an injection after seeing the patient's prescription which will come from PGIMS Rohtak itself. These injections will not be available with the private stockists.

Garg said that temporary hospitals are being constructed in the district, in which about 400 beds will be arranged in the next one week. Around 100 beds are being arranged at Tau Devi Lal Stadium, which will be run by Medanta Hospital. In collaboration with Hero MotoCorp, in addition to 100 beds in Sector 27, 150 beds are being arranged jointly with the Indian Air Force and M3M. A 50-bed temporary hospital is being built in collaboration with DLF. THe DC stated that a plan has also been prepared for patients in home isolation in the district who need oxygen. "A portal will soon be made where such patients or their attendants will be able to register. After that, cylinders of oxygen will be distributed to the needy people by making 25 - 30 decentralized points in the city.

# Delhi Police recover 96 02 concentrators from popular Khan Market eatery

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

A day after the Delhi Police arrested four people and seized 419 oxygen concentrators, on Friday continuing their search-op recovered 96 concentrators from South Delhi's famous Khan Chacha Restaurant. Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) South Delhi Atul Bhatia said: "We have recovered 96 oxygen concentrators from Khan Chacha Restaurant in Khan Market area." Earlier in the day, Bhatia said that the police have recovered nine more concentrators. The police action comes a day after it seized 419 concentrators being sold at exorbitant rates online. As per the police, after back to back incidents of illegal marketing of oxygen concentrators, "major outlets in Delhi are on Delhi Police's radar and the investigation against the nexus of restaurants is under way," said sources in Delhi Police. On Thursday, police recovered 419 oxygen concentrators after conducting raids at Nege Ju Restaurant and Bar in the central market of Lodhi Colony. The owner of the two restaurants is the same and is yet to be brought for questioning as his whereabouts remain unknown.

Police said during the raid on Thursday invoices of recovered oxygen concentrators were found in the laptop. Stickers of maximum retail price (MRP) indicating prices of Rs 69,999 per concentrator were also recovered. Police sources say they are probing into what could possibly be a larger nexus of multiple restaurants. As per police sources, the arrested accused have claimed that they imported the Oxygen Concentrators from various countries in large numbers and then sold them at a marked up price.

# MADHYA PRADESH SEES 11,708 FRESH COVID-19 CASES; 84 CASUALTIES

- Coronavirus figures in MP are as follows: Total cases 6,49,114, new cases 11,708, death toll 6,244, recovered 5,47,447, active cases 95,423, number of tests so far 81,92,183.

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh on Friday saw 11,708 fresh COVID-19 cases and 84 fatalities that took the tally of infections to 6,49,114 and toll to 6,244, an official from the state health department said.

At least 4,815 patients were discharged from hospitals in the last 24 hours, taking the count of recoveries in the state to 5,47,447, the official said.

With the addition of 1,753 new cases, Indore's caseload went up to 1,23,447, while Bhopal"s tally rose to 1,01,215 after 1,576 persons tested positive for the infection, he said.

Indore reported six deaths taking its toll to 1,190 and the fatalities in Bhopal stood at 781 with five more casualties, the official said.

Indore is now left with 13,546 active cases, while Bhopal's currently has 12,117 patients, he said, adding that the number of active cases in the state stands at 95,423.

With 65,262 swab samples tested during the day, the total number of tests conducted in the state has crossed 81.92 lakh.

Coronavirus figures in MP are as follows: Total cases 6,49,114, new cases 11,708, death toll 6,244, recovered 5,47,447, active cases 95,423, number of tests so far 81,92,183.

## *Class 10, 12 Practical Exams Scheduled From May 20, postponed*

- The Madhya Pradesh School Education Department has deferred the Class 10 and Class 12 practical examinations. The new dates for the postponed practical exams will be announced later.

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh School Education Department has deferred the Class 10 and Class 12 practical examinations. Along with the practical exams for High School, or Class 10, and Higher Secondary, or Class 12, the practical exams for Higher Secondary Vocational Courses, Physical Education Training and Diploma in Pre-school Education (DPSE) exam have been postponed till further notice. The decision to postpone the practical exams has been taken after considering the COVID-19 situation in the state.

Recommended: Choose the right stream (Arts/ Science/ Commerce) after Class 10th. Click here to know

The School Education Department took to Twitter to announce the postponement of MP Board Class 10 and Class 12 practical exams. It said: "Keeping in view the COVID-19 crisis and the Curfew (lock down) in the state till May 15, 2021, the practical examinations of the Board are postponed till further orders."

"The dates for conducting the postponed practical examinations will be announced separately," it added.

Earlier, on April 26, the board has postponed the Class 10 and Class 12 board exams. The Classes 10 and 12 Madhya Pradesh Board exams were scheduled to be held from April 30 and May 1.

The board is also considering alternative ways for Class 10 and Class 12 exams and will announce any decision with respect to conducting the Class 10, 12 board exams soon, an official statement released in this regard said.

The Madhya Pradesh School Education Department has already cancelled the Class 9 and Class 11 exams. The students will now be evaluated on the basis of their performance in the revision test held in November 2020 and the half-yearly exams that were held in February this year.

As per an official statement, the final results of Classes 9 and 11 will be calculated on the basis of best of five subjects. Students who fail to secure 33 per cent marks in more than one subject, a maximum of 10 grace marks will also be provided. However, the grace marks will be given in more than one subject as well, if required. And for those students who are unable to obtain the minimum required marks will be provided an option to take the exams once the situation arising out of COVID-19 improves.

# CM CHOUHAN TRANSFERS 15 HUNDRED CRORES IN THE ACCOUNT OF 75 LAKH FARMERS

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that there is a Kisan Mitra government in Madhya Pradesh. One grain each of the crop of the farmer will be earned. Earnings and payback deadlines have been extended. The farmer will not be allowed to be disturbed. He appealed to farmers and farmer organizations to cooperate in the ongoing fight against Corona. The government cannot win on its own due to infectious diseases. Chouhan was addressing farmers from the Chief Minister's residence through a video conference by depositing Rs 1500 crores in single bank accounts of 75 lakh farmers with a single click. On this occasion, Minister for Farmers Welfare and Agriculture Development Mr. Kamal Patel also joined the web link along with the farmers of the state.

Chouhan said that small farmers use the produce only to fulfill their needs. They do not get the benefits of the purchase schemes. Arrangements have been made to give Rs 4 thousand under the Chief Minister Kisan Kalyan Yojana since last year. In this scheme, 75 lakh farmers were transferred to the account of 1500 crore farmers today.

Chouhan said that Prime Minister Kisan Samman Nidhi is a boon for small farmers. He informed that there are 78 lakh farmers in the state, out of which only 24 lakh farmers get the benefit of minimum support price. Under the Prime Minister's scheme, farmers of half an acre also get 6 thousand rupees in a year from the central government. Under the scheme, 77 lakh farmers have received about 8 thousand 465 crore rupees so far.

Chouhan informed that more than 90 lakh metric tonnes of wheat and more than one lakh metric tonnes of gram have been purchased. Lentils are also being purchased. The date of purchase for Indore division has been extended from May 5 to May 15. Will be purchased in other divisions by 25 May.

Chouhan said that funds should be transferred in the account of farmers on time. Despite the difficulties, trying relentlessly. He said that the last date for repaying the loan received at zero percent interest has been extended till May 31. With this decision, the government will have to pay 31 crore rupees as interest to the banks.

Chouhan requested the farmers that procurement center should be required only. The person should go with a mask with great care. Work with social distance. Continue to sanitize hands. Chouhan congratulated the officers and employees of Cooperatives, Food, Mandi laborers, Hammals and other departments for continuing their procurement work by putting their lives in jeopardy. Chouhan said that the government of the state is Kisan Mitra government. The relief has been distributed by the government to make up for the damage caused to the Kharif crops. The amount of crop insurance will also be deposited in the accounts of the farmers soon. The whole effort of the government is that the farmer should not be disturbed.

## MP extends ban on inter-state bus movement till 15 May amid Covid-19 crisis

- As per the order issued by the state transport department, the ban on the movement of buses between Madhya Pradesh and the COVID-19-affected states has been extended till May 15

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

In a bid to curb the spread of Covid-19, the Madhya Pradesh government on Friday extended the ban on the movement of passenger buses to and from Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan till 15 May.As per the order issued by the state transport department, the ban on the movement of buses between Madhya Pradesh and the COVID-19-affected states has been extended till May 15, additional commissioner transport Arvind Saxena said.

The ban also covers vehicles that have All India tourist permits, he said, adding that the orders were issued in view of the current COVID-19 situation. Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh has reported 12,421 fresh cases of COVID-19 and 86 fatalities that raised the tally of infections to 6,37,406 and the txll to 6,160 on Thursday. At least 12,965 patients were discharged from hospitals in the last 24 hours, taking the count of recoveries in the state to 5,42,632, the official said. With the addition of 1,792 new cases, Indore's caseload went up to 1,21,694, while the tally in Bhopal rose to 99,639 after 1,584 persons tested positive, he said. Indore reported eight casualties that took its toll to 1,184 and fatalities in Bhopal rose to 776 after six patients died of the infection, the official said. Indore and Bhopal are now left with 12,017 and 10,829 active cases, respectively, he said, adding that the state currently has 88,614 active cases. With 68,102 swab samples tested during the day, the total number tests conducted in the state crossed 81.26 lakh.

# MADHYA PRADESH UNIVERSITY EXAMS IN JUNE, JULY, IN OPEN-BOOK MODE

***Exams for undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students in Madhya Pradesh will be held in June and July, in open-book format.***

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

View of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, exams for undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students in Madhya Pradesh will be held in June and July, in open-book format, the state's Higher Education Department said on May 4.

For UG final year and PG fourth semester students, exams will be held in June 2021, and results will be announced in July, the Higher Education Department said.

UG first and second year, and PG second semester final exams will be conducted in July. Results of these exams will be declared in August, it added.

The education department further said that practical exams for these students will be held after the theory exams.

Madhya Pradesh government earlier canceled offline exams for college, university students, considering the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the state.

"Amid increasing COVID cases, there will be open-book exams for final year students of UG and PG courses, just like it was during 1st and 2nd-year exams. There won't be any exam in college", State Higher Education Minister Mohan Yadav had earlier said.

The MP government had also postponed board exams for Classes 10, 12 students.

The School Education Department is considering alternative ways for Class 10 and Class 12 exams and will announce a decision in this regard soon, an official statement said.

Class 1 to Class 8 students will be promoted to their next classes on the basis of class project and Class 9 and Class 11 students will be evaluated on the basis of their performance in the previous tests, the government had earlier announced.

# Sarang inaugurates Oxygen Gas Plant at RKDF Medical Hospital

Sarang said that oxygen is a major element in treating the second wave of corona. There is a limit to the production of liquid medical oxygen throughout the country.

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Minister of Medical Education and Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Shri Vishwas Kailash Sarang inaugurated the Oxygen Gas Plant of 175 Cylinder Capacity set up in the RKDF Medical Hospital campus today.

Sarang said that oxygen is a major element in treating the second wave of corona. There is a limit to the production of liquid medical oxygen throughout the country. Recently, there was a challenge regarding oxygen, then we decided that oxygen plants should be set up at different places and at every district headquarters. We have also encouraged private sectors to set up oxygen plants. 50 percent subsidy will be given to the private institution which will set up the oxygen plant. In this series, RKDF Medical Hospital has done a good job by setting up an oxygen plant in its campus.

On this occasion, Dr. Sunil Kapoor Chairman of RKDF Group, Dr. Sadhana Kapoor Chancellor of RKDF University, Siddharth Kapoor Managing Director of the Group, Ruchi Kapoor Chairman, Sathya Sai Bank were present.

## *Crash-Landing Of Remdesivir-Carrying Plane In Madhya Pradesh To Be Probed*

**Gwalior:** Aviation experts will conduct a probe into the crash-landing of a Madhya Pradesh government plane carrying a stock of anti-viral drug Remdesivir at Gwalior airport following a technical snag, a senior official said today. The plane had crash-landed around 8:30 pm on Thursday, in which the pilot and co-pilot had suffered minor injuries. "The plane had skidded off the runway at the airport during landing. Aviation experts will probe the incident," Gwalior collector Kaushlendra Vikram Singh told news agency Press Trust of India. Gwalior airport is the civil enclave airport at the Maharajpur Air Force station. Indian Air Force's Central Command spokesman Shantanu Singh said that the pilot, co-pilot and a crew member were given first-aid and handed over to the local administration for further medical treatment along with the boxes of Remdesivir. Sub divisional magistrate Anil Banwaria said the state plane had arrived in Gwalior from Indore. "Its main pilot S Majid, co-pilot Shivshankar Jaiswal and naib tehsildar Dilip Dwivedi suffered injuries in the incident and they are being treated at a hospital in Gwalior," he said. "The boxes of Remdesivir injections are safe," he added. According to another official, the plane was carrying 74 boxes of Remdesivir.In view of shortage of Remdesivir injections which are being widely used for the treatment of COVID-19 patients, the Madhya Pradesh government has deployed its aircraft for the medicine's transportation, officials said.

**Mukhya Mantri Covid Upchar Yojana**

# CM orders free Covid treatment for economically weak families

- Ayushman card will be made for all members of each family
- Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan instructed all the collectors for implementation along with information about scheme

**Team Absolute** | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the state government is committed to provide free treatment for Covid to all the economically weaker families of the state. In this sequence, the Mukhya Mantri Covid Upchar Yojana has been implemented. Under this scheme, important decisions have also been taken for free Covid treatment of families possessing Ayushman cards.

Secretary, Public Health and Family Welfare Akash Tripathi has issued a letter to all collectors and chief medical and health officers for information and implementation of the scheme. He informed that by increasing the rates of Ayushman package by 40 percent, it has been brought at par with the rates of private hospitals for treatment at present. In this, the maximum limit of special tests like CT scan, MRI etc. which was earlier Rs 5 thousand per family per year, it has been revised to treat Covid-19 in the year 2021-22.

At present, only 288 hospitals with medicine expertise, out of 579 hospitals identified for Covid treatment are expanelled under the Ayushman Yojana in the state. Therefore, the District Health Committee has been authorized to provide temporary affiliation for three months in Ayushman Bharat Yojana to the private hospital registered on the Sarthak portal for treatment of Covid-19 at the district level.

Tripathi said that due to the said decision, free Covid treatment will be provided to the financially weak families with Ayushman cards, which is also a top priority of the state government. Therefore, it must be ensured that all the private hospitals providing Covid treatment in the district, which specialize in medicine and are registered on Sarthak portal are provided temporary affiliation for three months soon so that free Covid treatment of Ayushman card holders can be ensured under the new package of Ayushman scheme in all those hospitals. This affiliation should not be given to very small hospitals.

The state government is committed to provide Ayushman cards to every member of eligible families under the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. This work should be undertaken as a campaign. A special campaign should be launched for free treatment of Covid-19 to ensure that every member of Ayushman eligible families gets a separate card and can avail free Covid treatment. If any eligible family does not have the Ayushman card and needs treatment of Covid, then free treatment must be ensured.

If any member of Ayushman card holder family whose Ayushman card has not been made reaches the hospital for Covid treatment, then he will be able to get admission in the hospital in three ways including that Ayushman card and food slip of a member of the family, will be proof that he is a member of the family of the Ayushman card holder. Presentation of the Ayushman card of a member of the Ayushman cardholder family along with Samagra ID, through which can prove that he is a member of the Ayushman cardholder family and the Ayushman card of a member of the family as well as the certification of the gazetted officer of any government department, that he is a member of the family of the Ayushman card holder. For this, government officials can verify through the Samagra portal that he is a member of the Samagra ID family of the Ayushman card holder.

Tripathi said that within three days after the Covid patient is admitted for treatment, the patient's family will have to get the Ayushman card of the patient made and presented in the hospital. For this, a convenient arrangement for making cards will be ensured by the District Collector and Chief Medical and Health Officer and for this, permanent arrangement will be made to make Ayushman cards in government hospitals.

Under the scheme, admission and treatment of Ayushman card holders in Ayushman affiliated Covid hospitals will be ensured easily without any hindrance. For this an officer of a lower level than the Additional Collector of the district, will be made the nodal officer and a government official will be made the officer in charge for each Ayushman affiliated hospital authorized for Covid treatment. These nodal officers and in-charge officers will work continuously and will be available on call for easy admission and treatment in Ayushman hospitals identified for Covid treatment of the card holders of Ayushman Yojana. Any Ayushman card holder can contact the Nodal or Officer-in-Charge for assistance in admission or in case of any problem. For this, the D.C.C.C. telephone number or the number of other control room of the district should be widely publicized.

# MAHARASHTRA MAY SUSPEND VACCINATION FOR 18-44 YEARS DUE TO SHORTAGE

Maharashtra is on the verge of suspending its drive to vaccinate those between 18-44 years so that people above 45 can be given their second dose after the state has been hit by vaccine shortage.

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Maharashtra is on the verge of suspending its drive to vaccinate those between 18-44 years so that people above 45 can be given their second dose after the state has been hit by vaccine shortage. Several people in the state above 45 have not been able to get their second dose of Covaxin. Unlike Covishield's second dose, which can be taken 8-12 weeks after the first dose, Covaxin's second dose has to be taken within 42 days.

Health minister Rajesh Tope on Thursday said that the government has asked the Centre to send Covaxin doses for those who have not received the second dose. "We are going to insist that we need supplies today or tomorrow, and we would try our best to get it from them. However, if they don't give, then we would have to divert our current supplies meant for vaccinating 18-44," said Tope. The state had enough supplies of Covishield and there were no issues with people looking for the second dose of Covishield. This is not just because of more supplies but also because its second dose can wait up to 12 weeks after the first dose. Tope said that the shortage of Covaxin was also discussed in the state cabinet meeting on Wednesday. "Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had a meeting with experts on the issue and if we don't get a supply from the Centre then a policy decision on the suspension of the drive to vaccinate 18-44 will be taken by the CM," Tope said.

Some members of the Maharashtra government Covid-19 task force had told the state not to begin vaccination for 18-44 age group unless the state had enough supplies, ET has learnt "We had given two options either to vaccinate those between 35-44 or just allow those with comorbidities within 18-44," said a task force member. He added that the state government had taken a 'political decision' to vaccinate the 18-44 group even though there was no clarity on supplies. "They were stuck between the devil and deep sea. If they didn't begin vaccination from May 1, then the opposition would have criticised it. However, this may not have been the most prudent decision," the member said.

The Maharashtra government is irked by the Centre's decision to reduce 50 tonnes of oxygen supply to Maharashtra from Karnataka. The 50 tonnes of oxygen supply from Karnataka's Bellary was going to hospitals in western Maharashtra districts like Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur, Sindhdhurg and Ratnagiri. "We will have to face some problems. Our allocation should not have been stopped in this manner. The CM would take the issue up with the Centre. We would appeal to the Centre against this injustice to the state," health minister Rajesh Tope said.

# Maharashtra Sets Up Child Covid Care Centres As It Preps For Third Wave

- A paediatric task force will be made. As third wave will be hitting small kids more. If a child is positive, they can't stay alone. The mother has to be there with the child. Also children need special paediatric ventilators which need to be procured

**MUMBAI** | Agencies

Maharashtra is setting up child Covid centres and a pediatric task force to prep for a third wave of infections that is likely to be worse for children, the state Health Minister said on Friday.

"The third wave could be deadly for small children below 18. We are in process of making child Covid care centers. Children need different ventilator beds and other medical equipment," Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope told reporters.

Covid-infected children needed to be with their mothers and required special paediatric ventilators, the minister pointed out.

"A paediatric task force will be made. As third wave will be hitting small kids more. If a child is positive, they can't stay alone. The mother has to be there with the child. Also children need special paediatric ventilators which need to be procured," Tope said, adding that these steps were discussed in a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

Earlier this week, the Principal Scientific Adviser to the government, K Vijay Raghavan, said the third wave of the virus is inevitable."Phase three is inevitable given the higher levels of circulating virus, but it is not clear on what timescale this phase three will occur. We should be prepared for new waves," he said.

Experts believe while the first wave affected the elderly the most, younger people have been infected in the second wave and the third wave could be deadly for children.

# `Serum unable to supply Covishield doses to Maharashtra till May

Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope urged Centre to release Covaxin doses for beneficiaries waiting for their second dose

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Serum Institute of India chief Adar Poonawalla has told the Maharashtra government they would be unable to supply Covishield doses till May 26.

"Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had a telephonic chat with Poonawalla, currently in London, on the issue and was informed they

could not give doses till May 26," Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said at a media conference on Friday.There should be no doubt Covid-19 vaccination is our top-most priority and no stone is left unturned to purchase Covid 19 vaccines directly from the manufacturers, Tope said. The state has shown readiness to purchase a maximum number of doses. We have the capability of vaccinating across 5-7000 centres and at least 8-10 lakh doses daily, he added. Till May 6, the state has administered the vaccine to 1.73 lakh beneficiaries.

Tope also flagged the need for an urgent supply of doses of Covaxin for beneficiaries waiting for their second jabs.

"Here we have urged the Centre time and again to release doses of Covaxin as a sizable chunk of four to five lakh beneficiaries are waiting for their second doses across the state," Tope said. "The state has written several letters to the Centre for the Covaxin doses. However if the supply does not come on time we have no other option but to divert the doses purchased by the state for the age group 18-44 group for this group of beneficiaries who need the second shot of Covaxin," Tope said.

# Maharashtra Top Cop Disguises As Common Man To Test Police Staff

- Krishna Prakash himself gave information about the sequence of events that unfolded during the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday.

**Team Absolute** | Pune

Disguised as a common man, Pimpri Chinchwad police commissioner Krishna Prakash paid surprise visits to three police stations under his jurisdiction to check the promptness and efficiency of the personnel on duty there.

Prakash himself gave information about the sequence of events that unfolded during the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday.

As part of the exercise, he visited Hinjawadi, Wakad and Pimpri police stations. In order to change his appearance, the commissioner sported

a fake beard and wore a Pathani dress as well as a skull cap. Assistant Commissioner of Police PrernaKatte also accompanied him by posing as a common citizen. Prakash said that instructions were issued to all the police stations to treat common citizens nicely and get their complaints lodged. "To test the ground reality, I along with ACP Katte disguised as common citizens and visited three police stations and a couple of nakabandi points in the jurisdiction at night," he said. "During the visits to Hinjawadi and Wakad police stations, we found that the staff on duty there were prompt in listening to our woes and were seen taking efforts in registering their complaints," he said.

But during the visit to Pimpri Chinchwad police station, he found that the staff was seen evading their duties by asking them to go to a police chowky attached to the police station. "It was found that the staff there initially did not give the kind of treatment that was expected from them, although they treated well later. It might be because one of the duty officers recognised me," he said.At Hinjawadi Prakash complained about some anti-social elements harassing them, while at Wakad, he told the police personnel that the gold chain of his wife was snatched away by a motorcyclist.

# Row over MLA hostel in Maharashtra

BJP questions MVA government's decision of allocating tenders worth ?900 crore for the hostel, Congress shoots back saying decision to revamp hostel taken in 2018 under Devendra Fadnavis.

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

As Congress questions the central government's expenditure on central vista project in Delhi, Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Maharashtra has now questioned the decision of Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government to issue ?900 crore tenders for Manora MLA hostel in the time of the pandemic.

Congress shot back at the BJP saying the hostel was demolished by the previous BJP-led State government and the delay in redevelopment has already cost the State exchequer ?700 crore as every month around ?3.5

crores was being paid to MLAs, including those of the BJP.

On May 6, BJP MLA Atul Bhatkhalkar tweeted, "Rs 900 crore tender has been issued by the Thackeray government for the MLA hostel. This seem to have slipped the eyes of those advising the Prime Minister to focus on vaccination rather than the construction of the parliament complex. Tell the Chief Minister to focus on corona pandemic. He will get the percentage there as well."

Congress general secretary Sachin Sawant shot back saying, the decision to revamp the MLA hostel was taken by the Devendra Fadnavis government in 2018. "Agency NBCC appointed by them demolished structure. Due to delay govt has already lost more than ?700 cr - as every month around ?3.5 crs are being paid to MLAs, even BJP MLAs are paid ?1 lakh each," he said.

He said a high-power committee comprising the Chief Minister, Chairman of legislative council and Speaker of legislative assembly took the decision of handing over work to State Public Works Department (PWD) last year and a provision of ?875 crore was made for it.

"Deadline was kept to start work in March 2021. Can't be any comparison between Central Vista & on-going process. PM already has a lavish house, we have parliament and residential premises for MPs but here MLA hostel is demolished and needed (sic)," he said.

The MLA hostel with two towers - one with 42 floors and the other with 28 floors - is expected to be completed in three years. It will have a total of 675 flats.After the demolition of old Manora MLA hostel, the State government has been paying ?1 lakh to each MLA every month to facilitate alternative accommodation in the city.

# BMC doctors protest 'on-duty' seeking arrears of stipend

The frontline medicos, working 24x7 for Covid-19 patients started a social media campaign and carried placards bearing slogans like 'BMC Betrayed Us', 'Betrayed, Still Working' in various city hospitals.The doctors from the BMC's Sion, KEM and Nair hospitals are taking part in the protests which started last week symbolically by wearing black badges on duty.

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Accusing the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) of 'betrayal', hundreds of resident doctors have launched a protest 'on-duty' demanding payment of arrears of their increased stipend announced last year, here on Friday.

The frontline medicos, working 24x7 for Covid-19 patients started a social media campaign and carried placards bearing slogans like 'BMC Betrayed Us', 'Betrayed, Still Working' in various city hospitals.

The doctors from the BMC's Sion, KEM and Nair hospitals are taking part in the protests which started last week symbolically by wearing black badges on duty. At the height of the Coronavirus pandemic and lockdown in August 2020, the Maharashtra government had approved a proposal of increased stipend of Rs 10,000 per month.

The resident doctors have demanded that the stipend arrears must be cleared in full and not adjusted with the incentives given for Covid duty as the BMC has planned. If their demands are not met, the doctors plan to launch an 'on-duty' indefinite hunger strike from Monday, as per a statement by Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors (MARD).

Despite repeated attempts by IANS, top BMC officials were not available on Friday to comment on the MARD's ultimatum of hunger-strike from May 10.

# Bodies swapped, COVID-19 victim buried by another family

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Bodies of two COVID-19 patients were swapped at a government hospital at Latur in Maharashtra at the time of handing over to their families, local officials have said. The incident took place at Vilasrao Deshmukh Government Medical and Sciences Institute on Thursday, they said.

The body of one of the victims was buried by the family members of another deceased, but it was later exhumed and given to the kin after the goof-up came to light. Dhondiram Sadashiv Tondare (65) of Shelgaon, who was undergoing treatment for COVID-19 at the hospital, died on May 5. However, his relatives were given the body of another victim. Without realising the mistake, they performed the last rites and buried the body, the officials said.

Meanwhile, AbasahebSakharam Chavan (45), a resident of Hatola village in Ambajogai tehsil of Beed district had also passed away at the same hospital. But when his family members reached the hospital to receive body, they were shocked to find that it was somebody else's body. Chavan's family later found out that it was Tondare's body. They traced the whereabouts of Tondare's family and reached Shelgaon village. They explained to Tondare's relatives what had happened and demanded that the body erroneously buried by them be handed over to them. Accordingly, the body was exhumed using a JCB machine and handed over to Chavan's relatives, they said.

# *More than 18,000 Covid deaths in Maharashtra during second wave, fatality rate lower than first wave*

During the second wave of the pandemic, Maharashtra has registered more than 18,000 Covid deaths in just four months. However, the state's case fatality rate is lower than what it was during the first wave.

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

During the second wave of the pandemic, Maharashtra has registered more than 18,000 Covid-related deaths in just four months. However, the case fatality rate in the state was higher during the first wave in 2020.

Between January and April 2021, the state recorded 18,959 Covid deaths. On the other hand, Maharashtra reported a total of 50,637 deaths due to Covid over ten months between March and December 2020.

In the first wave, the case fatality rate

in the state was 2.7 per cent, which means that for every hundred positive cases, Maharashtra witnessed around three deaths. During the second wave, the mortality rate has fallen to 0.71 per cent. "During the second wave, we are seeing that deaths in absolute numbers have risen sharply as the number of Covid patients also increased rapidly. We are seeing this trend in all age groups," said Dr Pradip Awate, surveillance officer in Maharashtra's epidemic control department. As compared to the first wave, the second wave of the pandemic has seen more positive cases among people aged 31 to 40 years in Maharashtra. In 2020, 4.1 lakh cases were recorded in this age-group. During the second wave, in just four months, more than 6 lakh Covid cases in this age-group have already been recorded. During both waves of the pandemic, the maximum mortality rate has been recorded in the age-group of 81 to 90 years. In 2020, this group saw a fatality rate if 11.67 per cent. This time, the rate has fallen to 3.58 per cent.

In the 61-70 years age-group, 5,491 deaths have been recorded in the state during the second wave of the pandemic. In 2020, more than 15,000 Covid deaths in this age-group were registered.

Last year, Covid-19 cases first began to emerge in Maharashtra in March and the peak was reached in September before it started subsiding. The second wave in the state began in February 2021 and it is being said that it has now reached its peak.

# More than 50% e-pass applications rejected in state, 73% in Mumbai

The rejection percentage is much higher in Mumbai, with 73 per cent applicants being denied permission to travel by the city police.

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Since April 22, of the over 6.8 lakh people who had submitted online applications to the state police seeking e-passes to travel to or within Maharashtra, 54 per cent were denied permission.

The rejection percentage is much higher in Mumbai, with 73 per cent applicants being denied permission to travel by the city police.According to the state police, there are two major reasons for denying e-passes - the applicants did not have an essential reason or emergency to travel and many did not upload necessary documents to prove they are traveling for an emergency and essential reason. To tackle the second wave of Covid-19, the state police, like last year, had started issuing e-passes from April 22 to all those motorists who are not part of essential services but need to travel to Maharashtra from other states or those who need to travel outside their cities and districts within Maharashtra due to an emergency or an essential reason. Even those engaged in essential services need an e-pass if they are not traveling for official work. E-passes are not required for anyone traveling within their city for an emergency or essential reason.

## HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY

# MY WISH FOR EVERY MOTHER THIS MOTHER'S DAY

**Ayesha Takia** | Mumbai

I recently read the true story of a cow named Clarabelle. She had endured the loss of every one of her children. On a dairy farm, thats life for cows and buffaloes: youre artificially inseminated to keep your body producing milk, you give birth, they take your baby away so humans can steal as much of the infants milk as possible, and the process starts all over. Most male calves are marked for death by dairy farms around the world because they cant produce milk. In India, theyre often left to starve, abandoned, or sent to slaughter. Abroad, theyre typically crammed in a crate to be killed for veal. When her milk production started to wane and the farm was preparing to send her to slaughter, Clarabelle was rescued by a sanctuary. But she had a secret. She was pregnant. When sanctuary staff discovered that they would have a new baby to love, they were delighted. But a week before her due date, Clarabelle began sneaking off, avoiding them, and acting strangely. A search revealed why: she had already given birth and hidden her baby in a faraway patch of grass to save the infant's life. She was slipping away to nurse and running back so as not to arouse suspicion. But Clarabelle was at a sanctuary now, and she would never have to suffer the pain of losing a child again. As a mother reading Clarabelle's story in the book Animalkind, I thought about this gentle, loving cow finally getting to celebrate Mother's Day with her child. I was filled with happiness for her and, at the same time, with grief for all of the other cow and buffalo mothers who will never know that joy. That's the main reason I've been vegan for years: I respect other species. However, just as the dairy industry considers male calves of no use since they cannot produce milk, the egg industry considers male chicks of no use because they can't lay eggs. These days, the chickens used for eggs are bred for higher egg production, while those used for meat are bred to grow fast and have bulkier bodies, so they are not the same. But I believe that cows, buffaloes, and chickens have the right to raise their babies, the right to be free from abuse and suffering, and the right to their own lives. As humans, I know that we can do better than exploiting them for our own ends. My decision to eat vegan was solidified when I came across the books Skinny Bitch by Kim Barnouin and Alicia Silverstone's The Kind Diet. They helped me understand the important relation between food and our body, and once I went vegan, I started noticing wonderful changes: I dropped a few kilos, my skin felt great, my hair became healthier, and I had a lot more energy. Vegan foods like greens and lentils are some of the most affordable -- and healthiest -- foods you can buy in India. Tofu makes an excellent egg replacer, and it's a good source of protein with no cholesterol. And the options for non-dairy milks, such as soya, almond, and oat, are becoming so numerous it's hard to keep up. Cows' milk is suited to the nutritional needs of calves, who have four stomachs and gain hundreds of kilos in a matter of months. Just like all mammals, we do not need to drink milk after weaning age, and we certainly do not need to drink the milk of another species.

## KRITI SANON GETS CANDID IN HER SOCIAL MEDIA POST

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

In these grim times, one is often left alone with their own thoughts and so is Kriti Sanon. In her latest social media post she gets candid by sharing what's on her mind. Beautifully putting in words the current situation she says, "What breaks us also unites us".

Kriti took to her social media to share a video where she has a heart to heart with her fans. She captioned it, "I try and see a silver lining in everything.. a ray of light in the dark, good in the bad.. Ya.. I am that person.

Main aur meri tanhayi aksar baatein kiya karte hain.

Just felt like sharing my today's bedtime thought.. ?? Thank you for being my "Dear Diary" for the night. Kriti

## "Dear Diary" for the night'

Sanon is one of the top actresses in B-town today and has an exciting lineup. Her fans have a lot to look forward to, as the actress will be venturing into so many different genres with her upcoming films.

The actress had recently wrapped shoot for her Horror comedy Bhediya with Varun before the second lockdown imposed.

She also has the Pan-India film Adipurush opposite Prabhas, Mimi, Bachchan Pandey, Ganpath, Hum Do Hamare Do in the pipeline.

## Rasika Dugal: Beauty of the Nilgiris will always remain with me

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Actress Rasika Dugal says shooting in the Nilgiris for her new web series "Out Of Love 2" was an exhilarating experience, and that the beauty of the place, as well as the creative exchange she had with her co-actors during the shoot, will always remain with her. "The beauty of the Nilgiris and the creative exchange with my co- actors that I had during the shoot of season 2 will always stay with me," says Rasika. She is happy about the response that the show has seen upon release. "It's always heartwarming when viewers appreciate a piece of work that you have been a part of creating. I am so grateful for that warmth, especially in times like these," she adds.

Rasika's upcoming projects include "Delhi Crime Season 2" and "Lord Curzon Ki Haveli".

## Arjun Bijlani: Want to keep trying new things

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Actor Arjun Bijlani loves the romantic genre, but he confesses being more excited about trying out action on screen lately.

The fact is not surprising, perhaps, considering Arjun flies off to Cape Town for the shoot of the stunt-based reality show "Khatron Ke Khiladi 11", after featuring in the romantic music video "Mohabbat phir ho jaayegi".

"As much as I love the romantic genre, it's the action genre that has got me really kicked of late. I want to keep trying new things, stay ahead of time and entertain my audiences with the best of my abilities," Arjun asserted, while speaking to reporter.

## ADITYA CHOPRA LAUNCHES DRIVE TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THE INDUSTRY'S DAILY WAGE EARNERS AFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC

## 'Yash Chopra Saathi Initiative'

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

The deadly coronavirus pandemic has plagued the entertainment industry since last year and again the Hindi film industry has come to a halt, given the huge spike in COVID-19 cases due to the second wave of infections. Last year, during the lockdown, Aditya Chopra lent his support to thousands of daily wage earners of the film industry by crediting money directly into their bank accounts. The biggest production house of India, Yash Raj Films, has again decided to come forward in this moment of need and is launching the 'Yash Chopra Saathi Initiative' to provide support to thousands of daily workers in the film industry.

Aditya Chopra has taken cognizance of the massive socio-economic and humanitarian crisis that the daily workers of the industry are currently facing and The Yash Chopra Foundation - is rolling out the 'Yash Chopra Saathi Initiative' so that thousands of daily wage earners can tide over these turbulent and highly unpredictable times.

As part of the initiative, the foundation will initiate a direct benefit transfer of Rs 5000 to the women and senior citizens of the industry as well as distribute Ration kits to workers for a family of 4 for an entire month through their NGO partners Youth Feed India. Through an online application process at https://yashchoprafoundation.org, those in need can apply immediately to avail this support from YRF.

Akshaye Widhani, Senior Vice President, Yash Raj Films says, "The Yash Chopra Foundation is committed to constantly and relentlessly being a support system to the Hindi film industry and its workers who have been an integral part of our 50 year journey. The pandemic has pushed the backbone of our industry, the daily workers, to a breaking point and YRF wants to support as many workers and their families who are in need due to the loss of livelihood. Yash Chopra Saathi Initiative is aiming to provide support to the pandemic hit workers of our industry who we urgently need to focus on."

## Shilpa Shetty's family tests positive for Covid, actress tests negative

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Shilpa Shetty Kundra took to Instagram on Friday to share that her husband Raj Kundra, children Samisha and Viaan, and her mother Sunanda, as well as in-laws, have tested Covid positive. The actress, who has tested negative, added everyone in the family is quarantined and is recovering.

"The last 10 days have been difficult for us as a family. My parents-in-law tested positive for Covid-19, followed by Samisha, Viaan-Raj, my mom, and lastly Raj. They've all been in isolation in their rooms at home as per the official guidelines and have been following the doctor's advice. Two of our in-house staff members have also tested positive and they are being treated at a medical facility. By God's grace, everyone is on the road to recovery. My tests came back negative. All safety measures have been followed as per protocol, and we're grateful to the BMC & authorities for their prompt help & response. Thank you for all your love & support. Please continue to keep all of us in your prayers. Please mask up, sanitise, stay safe; and whether Covid positive or not...STILL stay POSITIVE, MENTALLY," Shilpa wrote on Instagram.

She captioned the post as saying: "Stay safe, everyone."

On the work front, the actress has two films lined up. She will be seen in "Hungama 2", the sequel to the 2003 hit "Hungama". Besides this, Shilpa will also be seen in the film "Nikamma" which stars Abhimanyu Dassani and Shirley Setia.

## Jacqueline helps feed people, interacts with Covid warriors

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Actress Jacqueline Fernandez on Thursday pitched in to serve food amidst the Covid crisis, and later in the day posted a video where she is seen interacting with people from across India who are trying to help others cope with the pandemic. Jacqueline's initiatives are a part of her foundation You Only Live Once (YOLO), which she had launched on Tuesday. Posting pictures on Instagram that show her serving food, the actress said she was "honoured" to help. She carried out her act of charity at the Roti Bank Foundation. "Mother Teresa once said, 'Peace begins when the hungry are fed'. I was truly humbled and inspired to visit Mumbai @rotibankfdn today, which is run by former Mumbai police commissioner Mr. D Sivanandan. Roti Bank has prepared and distributed meals to millions of hungry people till date, even during the pandemic. They are the perfect example of what #kindnessbrigade aspires to do and I am honored to be of help to them during these times. We only live once! Let's make this life worth it by helping others in need and sharing the #storiesofkindness of those around us!" she wrote. Jacqueline is also going to distribute masks and sanitisers to Mumbai Police Force and help feed stray animals. Later in the day, the actress posted a video where she can be seen interacting with people who are trying others cope with the Covid situation in the country. Sharing snippets from the interaction, she wrote: "Yolo's 'sharing stories of kindness' Had an amazing chat with these 100 inspiring Covid Warriors who set out to help in their own unique ways! There is no such thing as a small act of kindness, each act adds up to something much greater! Thank you for taking the time out to talk to Yolo Foundation and motivating us to do more in our own ways. Pls tag us in your stories of kindness and help spread the love!!"

MARK WAHLBERG UPS FOOD INTAKE TO 7,000 CALORIES DAILY TO GAIN WEIGHT FOR ROLE

# INTO THE CHARACTER

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Actor Mark Wahlberg's current food intake is over 7,000 calories daily, to gain weight for his role in the upcoming film "Stu".

According to his personal chef Lawrence Duran, the 49-year-old star is making a big commitment to his weight gain.

"So, morning usually starts about 3 a.m. and his first breakfast is four eggs -- that's the pre-breakfast. Then, he does his workout and then after the workout, which is usually around 5 to 6 o'clock in the morning, we do eight eggs, six strips of bacon, a cup of rice, two tablespoons of olive oil and a protein shake," Duran said, according to a report in femalefirst.co.uk. The chef said it is a protein-inspired, mass weight-gainer programme to help build a little more muscle.

He added: "Then, three hours later, we do some kind of ground beef or ground turkey, whether it's been made into a hamburger patty or a meatloaf, with another cup of rice. And then, three hours later, I usually do half of a roasted chicken, another cup of rice, I'll do about a cup of cooked spinach and a cup of cooked beets as well."

"Three hours after that, we'll go into either a veal chop or a pork chop - I'll do about eight ounces of that and then a small, four-ounce piece of salmon with another cup of rice, olive oil and beets as well. And then we'll do another meal, which is usually eight ounces of some type of steak, eight ounces of some kind of white fish," the chef summed up.

Wahlberg also has one more meal before bed to help him pile on the weight.

He told E! News: "It's one cup of cooked oatmeal, two tablespoons of apple sauce, two tablespoons of jelly or jam, two tablespoons of almond butter and a tablespoon of molasses. He has to take that down right before he goes to bed. It's just another mass gainer to put on weight during his sleep."

# Jamie Lee Curtis praises Will Smith for flaunting his 'worst shape'

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Actress Jamie Lee Curtis has given a motivating response to Hollywood star Will Smith's social media post saying he is currently in his "worst shape", post-pandemic.

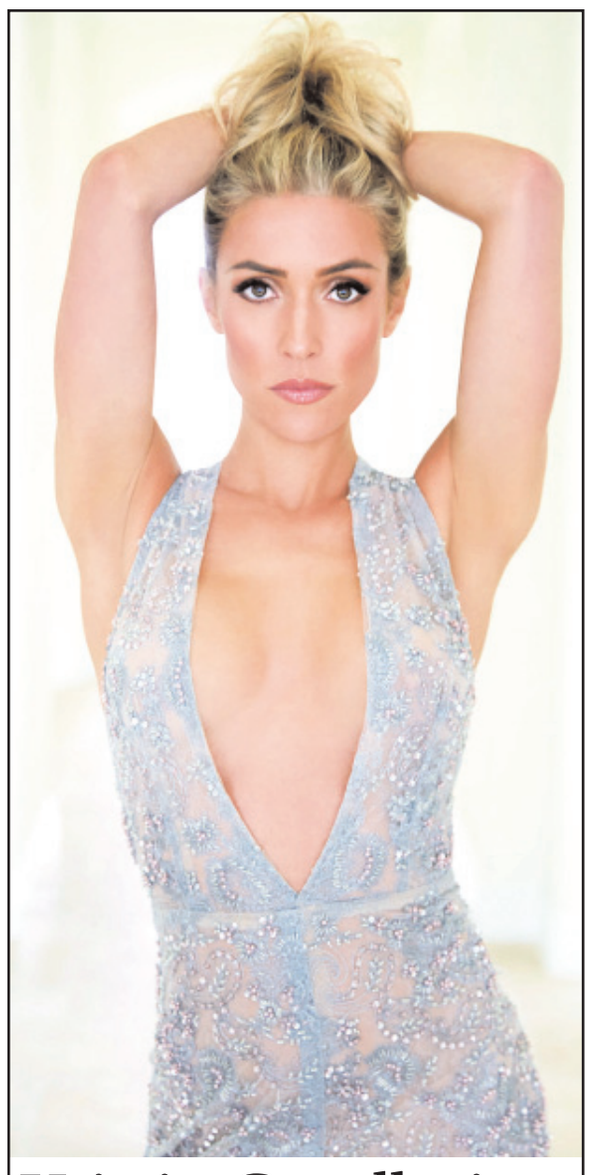
Curtis reinforced his positive message by reminding people to set their own realistic self-acceptance goal.

In a now-deleted Instagram post, Curtis, 62, shared an unedited photo of herself from an old More Magazine photoshoot alongside the 52-year-old Smith's shirtless image, reports aceshowbiz.com.

"Acceptance of the way things are is the first step to any change," she wrote alongside the picture.

She added: "My old MORE @_moremagazine story was both a testament to 'The way things were for me' as well as a way to show the artifice of magazine advertising and airbrushing but also a chance to look in the mirror and make some changes. None of us should be unhealthy. We ALL have fallen into bad habits."

"The GOAL is self acceptance, self love. Realistic, attainable self acceptance. In recovery we say 'compare and despair', 'nothing changes unless something changes'," Curtis, quoted sayings she collected during her drug and alcohol addiction recovery.



# Kristin Cavallari to launch beauty line

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Actress Kristin Cavallari will soon start her own line of beauty products called Uncommon Beauty. "I live a very clean lifestyle. Everything I'm putting in my body is clean. I want to make sure everything I'm putting on my body is just as clean. So we decided, let's do a line that really is clean, to our standards, that's still really effective," she told People, according to contactmusic.com.

The line will just have five products, so that the customers are not confused. "We wanted to strip it down, so instead of having 20 different products, we wanted to give you five that really check every box and get the job done, so that it's not overwhelming and it's not stressful. We live in a modern time. We're modern women. We don't want to be spending 30 minutes every morning getting ready. I like things quick and easy," said Kristin.

KENDALL JENNER OPENS UP ABOUT HER ANXIETY BOUTS AND PANIC ATTACKS

'I HAD PANIC ATTACKS'

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Reality TV star and model Kendall Jenner has opened up about her experiences with anxiety, saying that she struggled with heart palpitations and couldn't breathe during such attacks.

"Two or three years ago I genuinely started having very, very bad panic attacks. I was having frights in the middle of my sleep, literally felt heart palpitations. I couldn't breathe. I was pretty bad," Kendall shared ahead of her four-part series with Vogue called "Open Minded", reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She earlier shared that she has "struggled a bit" with her mental health.

Kendall said: "I was really, really young and I remember not being able to -- feeling like I couldn't breathe and venting to my mom and being like, 'Mom, I feel like I can't breathe. Something must be wrong'."

She added: "She took me to a bunch of doctors just to make sure that I was okay physically, and I was. No one ever told me that I had anxiety. Maybe three or four years ago it came back completely full-on. I would have crazy panic attacks. I finally kind of got the information that I needed about it." Once Kendall knew what she was struggling with, she found new ways to cope.

**Kim Kardashian proves she's back on the market as she poses in racy bodysuit while working out in a blonde wig amid Kanye West divorce**

# Blonde and SINGLE

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

Newly-single Kim Kardashian left little to the imagination on Thursday when she shared a stunning photo on Instagram.

The Keeping Up With The Kardashians star, 40, showed off her svelte figure in the middle of a workout at home while wearing a revealing monokini, as she kept her social media accounts red hot as she continues her divorce proceedings.

In February, she announced the end of her marriage to Kanye West and the couple are currently in the throes of legalities to settle custody of their kids - North, seven, Saint, five, Chicago, three, and Psalm, who turns two in May. Kim departed from her usual looks by trading out her lustrous raven locks for long platinum blonde hair all the way down her back.

The skimpy black suit showcased her bust and put her toned tummy on full display thanks to a significant cut-out.She appeared to be working out her arms on a piece of gym equipment while pulling down on weights.

However, the photo appeared to be part of a shoot and not a real workout photo, as her elegantly made-up face likely wouldn't have stood up to her working up a sweat.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Eiza Gonzalez

MEGAN FOX TALKS RAISING THREE SONS DURING HER KELLY CLARKSON SHOW APPEARANCE

# 'It's like UFC Fight Night all day, everyday'

**Los Angeles** | Agencies

She shares three young sons with her ex-husband Brian Austin Green. And Megan Fox opened up about how much energy it takes to raise her three boys during an appearance Thursday on The Kelly Clarkson Show.

'For me, it's like UFC Fight Night all day, everyday,' the 34-year-old actress joked of trying to keep her 'rambunctious' children in line, especially since they've spent almost all their time at home amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Kelly opened the segment by complimenting Megan's outfit, a plunging black mini dress with thick padded shoulders.

Megan also apologized for her 'gait,' which she said was off thanks to her sky-high black stilettos. The topic turned to family life, with Clarkson saying it must be 'crazy' to be raising three young boys.

She compared that to having 'a little bit of even energy' in her own home, where her six-year-old daughter River Rose and her five-year-old son Remington Alexander seem to cancel each other out.

EDITOR'S SPECS

# Hospitals needs to be self relient

***As Covid-19 pandemic moves from the urban centres to the hinterlands ravaging the over-burdened healthcare system, the medical fraternity on Saturday urged the government to install oxygen plants in all hospital premises as oxygen cylinders and concentrators are unable to meet the surge in demand for the life-saving gas. The fact is that oxygen concentrators/cylinders cannot reach every nook and corner of the country and hospitals with their own oxygen-generating infrastructure can only supply oxygen to critical patients in this dire situation. In a life-saving measure, a oxygen generator donated by the French government was installed in record 18 hours at Narayana Super Specialty Hospital in East Delhi, which is helping the hospital fill 48 cylinders weighing 40 litres to 60 litres each in 24 hours. According to Dr V Ramana Prasad, Senior pulmonologist, KIMS hospital Hyderabad, installing oxygen plants is the need of the hour and the "government must ensure that it is implemented to avoid oxygen deprivation to the needy patients in smaller cities and towns where the pandemic is surging". The demand for oxygen has soared "seven-fold" in India amid the rising daily Covid-19 cases. According to the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry, the demand for life-saving gas spread from 12 states on April 15 to as many as 22 states on April 24. In nine days, the demand for medical oxygen increased 67 per cent. According to reports, India so far only has 1,224 tankers with a capacity of 16,732 MT to carry medical oxygen and the central government is in the process of manufacturing more cryogenic tankers. The problem is that liquid medical oxygen is flammable and, in most cases, can't be flown and has to be moved via road, rail or sea, which takes longer time to reach the hospitals. An oxygen plant within the premises can quickly deliver the live-saving gas to patients. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said that they will set up 48 oxygen plants, including 21 that are being imported from France, across the capital. "Medical collage hospital and large corporate hospitals can have permanent plants, but this is not possible for small hospitals/nursing homes," Dr Sumant Mantri, Senior Consultant, Pulmonologist at Apollo Hospital, Bangalore told. Dr Pratibha Dogra, Senior pulmonologist from W Pratiksha Hospital Gurgaon said that the hospitals in the country urgently need their own oxygen plants.***

*AN OXYGEN PLANT WITHIN THE PREMISES CAN QUICKLY DELIVER THE LIVE-SAVING GAS TO PATIENTS.*

# NEARLY ONE-THIRD OF BJP MLAS IN BENGAL DEFECTED FROM OTHER PARTIES

**Reality check**

The Bharatiya Janata Party won 77 of the 292 seats in the recently concluded Assembly elections in West Bengal, way below the expectations of the party that was eying to wrest power from the ruling Trinamool Congress in the state.

But there is more that might bother the saffron brigade, which used all its resources in the run-up to the high-octane elections in its bid to breach the Trinamool citadel in Bengal.

A closer look into the winning seats of the BJP shows that nearly one-third of the party MLAs who made it to the state Assembly owed their political existence to other political parties before jumping ship to the saffron camp.

A lot has been said about Suvendu Adhikari, Nisith Pramanik and Mihir Goswami, who successfully retained their fort even after changing camps.

Adhikari was even more appreciated because he single-handedly dwarfed the mighty Mamata Banerjee, who was successful in retaining power in the state, but failed to combat son of the soil Adhikari in Nandigram, where she lost to her one-time close aide by a slender margin of 1,953 votes.

There are 18 more MLAs -- bulk of them who defected to the BJP from the Trinamool Congress -- who successfully retained their mass support even after changing their political ideology.

A close analysis of the winning BJP MLAs shows that 14 BJP candidates who won this time came from the Trinamool, including some big names like Adhikari in Nandigram, Pramanik in Dinhata, Goswami in Natabri and Mukul Roy in Krishnanagr North.

There are six more MLAs, including two former ministers in the erstwhile Left Front government in the state, who won on a BJP ticket this time. One came from the Congress while another one joined the BJP from the Gorkha National Liberal Front (GNLF).

The big names who came from the Trinamool and won on BJP tickets include Satyendra Nath Roy from Gangarampur in South Dinajpur, a former Trinamool minister, Tanmoy Ghosh from Bishnupur, Sreerupa Mitra Chowdhury from English Bazar and Sikha Cahtterjee from Dabgram Phulbari in North Bengal. Chatterjee defeated the all-powerful state Tourism Minster Goutam Deb in the elections.

Mukul Roy, who is considered to be a master political strategist and was the second in command in Trinamool, switched over to the BJP years back but he never contested any election. In the recent polls, Roy won from the Krishnanagar North constituency.

Pawan Singh, who won from the Bhatpara constituency in North 24 Parganas, switched over to the BJP from Trinamool along with his father Arjun Singh, who is also a BJP MP form North 24 Parganas.

The list of Trinamool turncoats who won on a BJP ticket this time also includes Biswajit Das from Bagda, Subrata Moitra from Berhampur, Tanmoy Ghosh from Bishnupur, and Partha Sarathi Chatterjee from Ranaghat NorthWest.Apart from these, there are six other BJP MLAs who switched camps form the Left Front including two ministers in the former Left Front ministry.

Bamkim Ghosh -- a former CPM legislature and a minister in the Left Front government -- switched over to the BJP and won the election form Chakdah in Hooghly district.

Similarly, Narahari Mahato -- a major Forward Block leader in the tribal belt and a minister in the Left Front government -- won from the Joypur Assembly constituency in Purulia district. Former Forward Block members Biswanth Karak won from Goghat, Tapasi Mondal won from Haldia, ex-RSP man Monoj Orao won from Kumarganj while former CPM leader Sankar Ghosh won from Siliguri ï¿½ all on a BJP ticket this time.

Interestingly, Ashoke Lahiri, who was appointed CEA by the Government of India in 2002 during the prime ministership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and continued even when Manmohan Singh took the reins of the country, won from Balurghat. Lahiri never had any political background and was projected as the finance minster if BJP came to power. Similarly, actor-turned-politician Hiran, who won from Kharagpur Sadar, also didn't have any political allegiance before.

# CREATE THE PERFECT ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUR KIDS TO ACE THEIR EXAMS

**Erik Jan Middelhoven**

Whenever exam times are around the corner, parents tend to turn into superhumans to provide the best study environment for their kids. As we spend more time at home due to pandemic, we all have come face to face with some of the stress and restrictions homes present us. Especially when it comes to finding a quiet corner to study and ace those multiple tests and final exams. From skewed sleep cycles to a noisy surrounding, studying from home is not easy on the kids, but strong planning and building a favourable study environment can change the apprehension around exams.

To ensure your child has the perfect environment to prepare for the upcoming exams, follow these effortless tips by IKEA India and make their exam time a little less stressful and a lot more fun.

**Where to begin -- tidy up and organise**

The cleaner and more organised a study table is, the better your child can concentrate and make way to absorb new concepts and ideas. Having a tidy space around study area can help concentrate when it's time to sit down and study. An organised desk laden with storage boxes and desk organisers like TJENA can be your saviour while they comfortably jot down all the answers, concepts and ideas on a SVENSAS memo board. Want to take an extra effort? Don't forget to use pegboards like SKADIS to their study desk to hold all the little things they need while working on problems or formulating answers.

**Go ergonomic all the way!**

Distance does matter. Especially between your child and the tables, chairs they use while studying. None of us are a huge fan of posture-related pains, for either ourselves or our kids. So the study surface distance should be about waist-height. When your child sits down to read or study, she/he should be able to rest her/his elbows on the table without hunching up their shoulders. They can try the BESTABURS desk or something similar that works best for keeping away that posture pain. The key is to not have everything close to hand, and allow them enough room to move, reach around for their books and other study material. When they are sitting at their desk, look for a chair like ORFJALL swivel chair, it gives back support, is adjustable and swivels allowing for that all-important movement. Investing in an ergonomic chair has multiple benefits and sitting in the right posture to study is one of them.

**Make the space comfortable**

For a productive study session, create a space around your child that moves as per their convenience. A flexible setting allows them to study comfortably, while giving room to move around and break the monotony. Pick a spot that will help you keep your child relaxed, focused, and alert. If they like studying in the comfort of their bed, a bed tray like KLIPSK along with a NAVLINGE spotlight clamped to it can save your day. Grab a cushion to keep them comfy and a pencil case to keep them well-equipped.

**Light it up**

A well-lit environment also helps concentration and relieve eye strain. Especially using light levels similar today light. If you can, setting up a study space next to a window is ideal. But you can also recreate daylight using SKURUP lamps that have a similar light spectrum to natural sunshine. Task lighting on the desk helps provide focused lighting while studying.

**Let the nature in**

Letting in nature around the study area can drastically help with your child's concentration, if you don't have a window, plants are great for filtering stale air and oxygenating their study environment. Keeping indoor plants in your kid's room can help purify the air and brighten up their room. You can add hanging pots like the elegant SKURAR or the self-watering SOMMARFEST -- you can simply fix them to a wall if there's not enough floor space!

**Importance of good sleep**

A good night sleep is your child's best friend. Creating a right environment to get a good night's sleep to recover the energy needed for a new study day is important. It is important for your child to wake-up refreshed everyday so that she/he can concentrate better and for that they need a comfortable sleeping solutions like BEITO mattress and ergonomic pillows like SKOGSLOK. Afterall, being comfortable when you're asleep is key for making the most of your waking hours.

**Don't forget the healthy meals**

Prepare and serve healthy/nutritious food to your kids in OFTAST, so it gives them instant energy whenever it is required during exam time. Nutrition plays an important role in keeping energy levels up. Keep their daily dose of Vitamin C in check by including SPRITTA in your kitchen. Finally, make sure to keep your child hydrated. Drinking water has been shown to help with focus when they're stuck in the middle of preparation. With all these tips and solutions, you become a partner for building the required environment to ace exams.

# Has Vijayan's glorification upset CPI-M?

**Sanu George**

There's a buzz going around that the CPI-M is a bit upset with the way Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is being glorified after he led the party to a historic win.The assumption gained strength after their editorial in the latest edition of the People's Democracy, that came out, on Friday."There is an effort by sections of the media and some political commentators to reduce this historic victory solely to the personality and role of Pinarayi Vijayan.

"According to them, it is the emergence of a 'supreme leader' or 'strong man' that was the main reason for the electoral success of the LDF. They claim that one man dominates the government and Party".

It goes on to state that, "there is no doubt that Pinarayi Vijayan, as chief minister, set a new standard in providing political guidance to policy-making, always keeping the people's interests in mind and displaying administrative ability in getting policies implemented.

"Nevertheless, the victory is the result of both individual and collective efforts."As far as the CPI(M) and the LDF are concerned, the incoming ministry will continue the tradition of collective work and individual responsibility," reads the editorial.Incidentally, none has a doubt that Vijayan has become the last word not just in the government, but also in the party and it surfaced when there was not a whimper of protest, when the decision came not to field all those who have had two successive electoral wins and also dropped a few legislators who had only one term taking the total to 33 sitting legislators being dropped.Now all eyes are on his choice of cabinet ministers from the party and the word is that, here again it will be his call.

Incidentally, both the Congress-led UDF and BJP-led NDA leaders have been for a while been attacking Vijayan and describing him as an autocrat in the 'mould of Stalin and Hitler'.

# IPL POSTPONEMENT: INDIAN CRICKET NOT A COMPLETE LOSER

**Yajurvindra Singh**

The show must go on' was what one had hoped would have been the way forward. Unfortunately, the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic struck the progress of the second half of cricket's most popular entertainment, the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2021.

The safety net of the bio-secured bubble burst and was broken into, making it impossible for the tournament to continue. This was always an area of concern and this is the thought that lingers in the minds of every sport administrator involved in hosting any event at present. One is aware that just one mistake or blemish could jeopardise the sports event completely and the IPL became a victim of it.

In retrospect, one can dwell on the fact that the six months earlier the IPL tournament that took place in the UAE without a blemish would have been the ideal venue. However, in order for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to prove that India could conduct a major tournament, it was imperative for them to do so in India. The IPL was just a precursor to the T20 World Cup, scheduled to be held in India at the end of the year.

The second wave of the pandemic has blown the lid off and exposed the weak and disorganised healthcare and welfare system prevalent in India. The dire situation that the country is going through became the corner stone for the IPL as well.

India has failed on both accounts. One in safeguarding its millions of people from being infected by the virus as well as being able to conduct a fool proof, safe and secure environment to host a major sporting event. The reality one perceives is the lack of infrastructure, planning, and understanding of the situation that was prevalent as one faced the dreaded virus.

The BCCI, one thought, had mastered the situation well, having successfully conducted and controlled an IPL in the UAE, a full cricket series against England and two domestic cricket tournaments without adverse issues.

One does regret the failure of the BCCI to complete what looked to be a well-run and structured IPL 2021 until the first phase of the tournament. It all crumbled so quickly, like a gush of wind that blew ones bails away, calling it a 'dead ball'. The IPL 2021 is still at an uncertain situation of whether it would be entirely cancelled or would be played on another dates.

However, there were some positives that came forth for India. The IPL did give the Indian selectors a good opportunity to assess many of the Indian players, especially as they will need to finalise the squad for the T20 World Cup.

The batting looks formidable with Shikhar Dhawan, K.L. Rahul, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Suryakumar Yadav, Prithvi Shaw, Shubman Gill, Devdutt Padikkal and Ruturaj Gaikwad. There are also Manish Pandey and Ambati Rayudu, both experienced batters in the wings as well. The problem that India may face is to choose correctly as the surfeit of options could prove difficult.The sterling performance of Ravindra Jadeja who returned after the injury with a bang is a big plus for the side. He is after all at present India's premier all-rounder. However, the concern is that of Hardik Pandya, whose powerful batting is essential for India but without his contribution as a bowler, his place becomes uncertain.

The lack of another genuine all-rounder could be the Achilles heel for India at the T20 World Cup, so Hardik needs to get his bowling into play soon. The cupboard of pace bowling options is full and so is the leg-spin variety. Selecting the most effective combination of bowlers could prove to be another worrisome issue for the selectors.

Another positive aspect of the IPL was that the tournament was not a complete washout and that at least half of the schedule was completed. Although the expected revenue may not be received, even a 50 per cent collection is a sum that cannot be ignored easily.The absence of spectators may have been a concerning factor for players. However, for millions of cricket fans and followers of the IPL, watching it on TV was a much-needed break and entertainment from the lockouts and lockdowns that all are facing. The gloom of the world around one was forgotten during those engrossing moments and one is grateful to cricketers, support staff, and the administrators who took it upon themselves to give us those precious moments.

Curtains may have come down on the second act of the IPL but the first act itself showed how important the tournament was for Indian cricket and for the unknown domestic players to get heard. Some lucky ones may shortly be wearing the Indian colours soon. Indian cricket has definitely not been a complete loser.

***(Yajurvindra Singh is a former Test cricketer. Views expressed are personal)***

# 25 KILLED IN RIO POLICE OPERATION

According to the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police, one police officer died as a result of the shootout on Thursday, while the other 24 victims were allegedly members of a criminal organisation that dominates the Jacarezinho favela, reports Xinhua news agency.

**Rio de Janeiro** | Agencies

At least 25 people were killed and another five injured on Thursday in an intense shootout in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro between police and suspected drug traffickers.

According to the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police, one police officer died as a result of the shootout on Thursday, while the other 24 victims were allegedly members of a criminal organisation that dominates the Jacarezinho favela, reports Xinhua news agency.

The incident occurred during a Civil Police operation against drug trafficking and organized crime in the area.

Audio and video pieces circulating on social media networks showed intense gunfights and gas bomb explosions in several parts of the favela, and images taken from helicopters showed armed people fleeing across the rooftops and terraces.Jacarezinho is dominated by the so-called Red Command, the largest criminal faction in Rio de Janeiro.

Unlike many of the city's populous slums that sit on the hills, Jacarezinho is in a flat area where criminals have set up barricades to make it difficult for security forces to access.

The Red Command is allegedly behind several homicides, robberies, trains hijackings and recruitment of minors for drug trafficking in Jacarezinho, according to the police.

## UK CONSERVATIVES WIN OPPN-HELD SEAT

**London:**The UK's ruling Conservative Party has snatched a historically left-wing seat from the opposition Labour in a tense by-election in England.

Conservative party candidate Jill Mortimer won the north-east England seat of Hartlepool with a large majority, beating opposition Labour party candidate Paul Williams, reports dpa news agency. She described it as a "truly historic" result.

It is the first time since its creation in 1974 that the seat has been won by a Conservative politician.

Previously it had only been held by Labour, at one point, a candidate who ran as an independent.

The result is a boost for Prime Minister Boris Johnson despite a rocky few months for the premier, with the country's successful vaccine campaign appearing to be a key factor.

It is equally a blow for Labour party leader Keir Starmer, who has only been chief for a year.

# Afghan forces launch counter-offensive in Baghlan

According to the security officials, the Taliban has intensified activities in Helmand, Zabul, Baghlan, Herat, Farah, Faryab, Takhar and Badakhshan provinces, and scores of militants and security personnel have been killed.

**Kabul** | Agencies

Scores of militants have been killed in Afghanistan's Baghlan province as government forces launched a counter-offensive to repel Taliban attacks, a police official said on Friday.

"Scores of the armed insurgents have been killed over the past 48 hours and the Taliban attacks on Nahrin, Baghlan-e-Markazai and Dahn-e-Ghori districts have been repulsed," the official told Xinhua news agency.He also added that reinforcement had been reached and the situation would be soon brought under control.

Taliban militants in have seized parts of the restive Baghlan province over the past few days.In the meantime, Brigadier SafihullahMohammadi who serves as a member of the reinforcement forces in Baghlan, told reporters on Friday that some 100 Taliban fighters had been killed and injured over the past two days during operations backed by fighting planes.

However, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid has rejected the claim, saying fighting has been continuing and the militants are defending their positions. Taliban militants have intensified their activities since the start of the US-led forces's withdrawal on May 1.According to the security officials, the Taliban has intensified activities in Helmand, Zabul, Baghlan, Herat, Farah, Faryab, Takhar and Badakhshan provinces, and scores of militants and security personnel have been killed.

# 15 arrested after clashes in EJerusalem

The status of Jerusalem is one of the central disputes in the Middle East conflict.Israel claims Jerusalem as its "eternal and indivisible capital," while the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as their capital.

**Jerusalem** | Agencies

Israeli police said on Friday that they have arrested 15 people in clashes in eastern Jerusalem.

Early on Friday morning, stones were thrown at officers and vehicles in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, dpa news agency quoted the police as saying.

Fireworks were also set off.

Sheikh Jarrah is located in the Arab eastern part of Jerusalem, north of the Old City.The neighbourhood has been the focus of attention for decades because of property disputes.

Both Israeli settlers and Palestinians claim ownership there.Forced evictions of Palestinian homes have repeatedly provoked protests, some of them violent, in recent years.A Supreme Court decision in a case involving four Palestinian families was expected next week.For days, supporters of the families have been meeting in Sheikh Jarrah to break their Ramadan fast with the sunset iftar meal together outdoors.

According to the media, there have already been repeated clashes.As the portal ynet wrote, settlers also sat down at a table on a street on Thursday evening.

Among them was the far-right politician Itamar Ben-Gvir.

The status of Jerusalem is one of the central disputes in the Middle East conflict.Israel claims Jerusalem as its "eternal and indivisible capital," while the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as their capital.

## GETTING INOCULATED MANDATORY TO ATTEND WORKPLACE IN SAUDI

**Riyadh:**Saudi Arabia said on Friday that getting vaccinated against Covid-19 would be mandatory for all employees to attend their workplaces in an effort to curb the spread of the virus. Saudi Arabia's state news agency SPA, citing the Ministry of Human Resources, reported that vaccination would be a "mandatory condition" for employees of the private and public sectors to be present in their place of work. The Ministry said it would clarify soon the procedure and date of implementation, dpa news agency reported.

# Chinese emissions exceeded developed world in 2019: Study

**Beijing** | Agencies

A study published on Friday revealed that China's annual emissions of greenhouse gases in 2019 exceeded the emissions of all developed countries combined for the first time.

In a comparison with European Union countries, the US and the other members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the study by US think-tank Rhodium Group estimates that China alone contributed 27 per cent of global emissions of CO2 equivalents that year, reports dpa news agency.

CO2 equivalents are a unit of measurement used to standardise the climate impact of different greenhouse gases.

The study said that global emissions reached 52 gigatons of CO2 equivalent in 2019, a 11.4 per cent increase over the past decade. China's 27-per-cent share of global emissions was far larger than that of the US, which took second place with 11 per cent.

According to the calculations, India climbed to third place for the first time with 6.6 per cent of global emissions of CO2 equivalents.The study also indicated that China's emissions have tripled since 1990. They have increased by 25 per cent over the past decade. But due to its large population, China's per capita emissions have remained considerably lower than those in the developed world. Rhodium's study indicates that in 2019, China's per capita emissions reached 10.1 tonnes, just below average levels of 10.5 tons per capita across the OECD bloc in 2019.This was still significantly lower than the US, which has the highest per capita emissions in the world at 17.6 tons per capita."While final global data for 2020 is not yet available, we expect China's per capita emissions exceeded the OECD average in 2020, as China's net GHG emissions grew around 1.7 per cent while emissions from almost all other nations declined sharply in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic," the authors write. The study also noted that "China's history as a major emitter is relatively short compared to developed countries, many of which had more than a century head start." Strong economic growth and a large proportion of coal in China's energy mix are considered to be the main reasons for the increase in its carbon dioxide emissions.As the world's largest coal consumer, China has promised new efforts in terms of climate protection.At the virtual climate summit at the invitation of US President Joe Biden, Chinese President Xi Jinping promised two weeks ago that he would first "strictly limit" the increase in coal consumption by 2025 and then "gradually reduce it" by 2030.

# Colombian Prez rejects violent acts during protests

**Bogota** | Agencies

Colombian President Ivan Duque rejected the "acts of violence" that have taken place in the past week during a national strike, including looting and damage to state and private property.

"We have to categorically reject violence and all manifestations and expressions that threaten the life, honour and property, rights and liberties of citizens," Duque said after meeting with high court representatives on Thursday.

On April 15, Duque sent a tax law initiative to the Congress that would reform the national tax system, which will raise taxes on the middle class, who took to the streets in protest throughout the country, reports Xinhua news agency.

For the last eight days, there have been heavy clashes in several cities between authorities and protesters,

as well as damage to state and private property. So far, 24 people have died in the protests and 46 others injured, according to El Tiempo newspaper.The President stressed that all acts against citizens and public servants in the last few days must be investigated and punished.

Meanwhile, Duque and Vice President Marta Lucia Ramirez announced on Thursday they hope to meet with strike organisers to negotiate their demands."We want to announce that the President and Vice President are willing to meet with all social actors in the country, including members of the strike committee, to meet urgently," Labor Minister Angel Custodio Cabrera said.

## KABUL HIT BY BLACKOUT AS 2 POWER PYLONS DAMAGED

**Kabul:**Kabul was hit by a blackout as two power pylons were destroyed in explosion on Friday, Afghanistan's Breshna Sherkat, the national power company, confirmed. The incident took place at 4.45 a.m. in Kalakan district, some 30 km outside Kabul city, the company said, adding that another power pylon was partially damaged in the attack, reports Xinhua news agency.Without providing more details, the company said in a short statement: "A technical team has been sent to the area to repair the power pylons and resume power transmission to Kabul and other provinces."Some individuals in the past years targeted power transmission pylons to get ransom from power authorities but had been arrested.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack on power pylons.

The Taliban which has been fighting the government had in the past attacked power pylons, telephone towers, roads and bridges, according to officials.

# 'Florida moving in wrong direction after enacting voting law'

**Washington** | Agencies

The White House slammed Florida after its Republican Governor signed into law a bill that will make it more difficult for certain residents of the US state to vote.

"The 2020 election was one of the most secure elections in American history. There's no legitimate reason to change the rules right now to make it harder to vote. That's built on a lie," Xinhua news agency quoted Deputy Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre as saying to reporters aboard Air Force One on Thursday.

"The only reason to change the rules right now is if you don't like who voted, and that should be out of bounds," she said.

"There are some states with bad laws that are trying to make them good and some states with good laws, trying to make them even better. That's moving forward."Florida is moving in the wrong direction," Jean-Pierre said.

Jean-Pierre reiterated the White House's support for the House-passed legislation, H.R.1, that would expand access to mail-in ballots, early voting and automatic registration, among other provisions.

The bill is unlikely to pass in the Senate.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis earlier Thursday signed the state's new voting legislation into law.

The new law, Senate Bill 90, will restrict the use of absentee ballot drop boxes; implement additional requirements for voters to sign up for mail-in ballots; impose additional voter identification rules; prohibit volunteers and organisations from returning ballots on behalf of voters; and ban counties from accepting grants or private funds to pay for election-related expenses.DeSantis said during the signing ceremony that "Floridians can rest assured that their votes count and that Florida will continue to conduct elections that are efficient, transparent and secure".

# *3 IS leaders killed near Baghdad*

**Baghdad** | Agencies

The Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) commandos killed three local leaders of the Islamic State (IS) terror group near Baghdad, the military said.

Yahia Rasoul, spokesman of the commander-in-chief of the Iraqi forces, said in a statement on Thursday that the CTS forces attacked an IS hideout in the al-Radwaniyah area, southwest of Baghdad, reports Xinhua news agency.

Rasoul said that the victims had helped the suicide bombers, who carried out twin bombings on January 21 in a bustling outdoor market for second-hand clothes in the Bab al-Sharji area in downtown Baghdad. A total of 32 people were killed and 116 others were wounded in the blasts.

The commandos also raided an IS hideout in south of Baghdad and arrested another local leader, Rasoul said, adding that based on information extracted from the detainee, the troops dseized a cache of weapons in the al-Yousifiyah area.The security situation in Iraq has been improving since the security forces fully defeated IS militants across the country late in 2017.However, deadly incidents still occur sporadically in the war-ravaged country as IS remnants have since retreated into urban areas or deserts and rugged areas, waging frequent guerilla attacks against security forces and civilians.

# *Signs of armed resistance in Myanmar*

**Kolkata** | Agencies

Armed opponents of the Myanmar military junta have killed three administrators appointed by them in the Yangon, Mandalay and Sagaing regions in targeted attacks.

Regime-appointed ward administrators and police informants have been attacked frequently since mid-April, but no one has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

IANS was the first to report the formation of armed resistance groups among ethnic Burmese from the hardline ranks of protesters upset with the random killings of their comrades.

The 'Federal Army' and few other such groups have now merged into the United Defence Force and hundreds of its new recruits have been undergoing weapons training in camps of ethnic rebel armies like Karen National Union (KNU) .

"It seems the first batch of these recruits are back in cities to start armed action," said a former NLD MP who has served in the army. But he was not willing to be identified for fear of being dragged to interrogation by the junta.

Municipal ward administration offices, key to the junta's governance network, have been targeted with bomb attacks to oppose new appointments by the regime.

Newly-appointed ward administrators and police informants are increasingly being targeted for collaborating with the junta in arresting anti-regime protesters, striking government staff and other civilians opposing military rule.

A newly-appointed ward administrator was stabbed to death on Thursday by unknown men in Chanmyathazi Township of Mandalay region, police said.

On Tuesday evening, a Kyeekan village tract administrator in Khin-U Township, Sagaing, was stabbed to death outside the village, according to a military-run newspaper. Motorcyclists also opened fire on the house of Witoke village administrator U Than Myint in Tamu Township, Sagaing, on Monday night.

Tamu is opposite Moreh in India's Manipur state. U Than Myint and his wife were injured and his daughter and grandson were killed, police said.

The attack follows a search operation in the village by security forces looking for traditional firearms. During the raids, two villagers were beaten and detained by troops, residents told local mediapersons.

Communities across Sagaing are resisting the military with homemade firearms and slingshots. On Tuesday, a ward administrator in Thaketa Township in Yangon was stabbed to death at his office by three men posing as informants.

Police stations and government and education offices have been attacked with firebombs and homemade bombs since March 14 when the regime killed more than 110 civilians in a day. The armed resistance have also targeted Chinese business interests.

On Wednesday, three police guards outside an off-take station on the China-installed Rakhine-Yunnan oil and gas pipeline were hacked to death by sword and machete bearing attackers who got away without being identified.

China has expressed deep concerns over the safety of its investments since 32 factories run by its companies were set on fire at the Hlaingtharyar industrial zone on the outskirts of Yangon in March.

Now it has much to worry because the attack on police guards outside the off-take station in Singtaing township in Mandalay section of the 800 km-long pipeline follows social media threats by pro-democracy protesters to blow it up. The crude oil pipeline carries 22 million tonnes of Middle East crude annually to China's Yunnan province after it is brought to Myanmar's western deep sea port of Kyaukphyu.

# JADEJA RETURNS TO INDIA'S TEST SQUAD FOR ENGLAND TOUR

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

A 20-member India squad was named for the tour of England that includes the World Test Championship (WTC) final against New Zealand and five Test matches against England. There are four standby players besides the 20 players named in the main squad, taking the total number of the touring party to 24.

India play the WTC final against New Zealand in Southampton from June 18. That Test will be followed by five Tests against England in August-September. The first Test against England begins on August 4 and the final Test is scheduled to end on September 14.

The squad sees the return of all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja who missed the recent Tests in Australia and against England in India due to injury. Batsman KL Rahul and wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha have also been included, subject to fitness clearance. Pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah who missed the last Test against England in early March due to marriage has also returned.

Rahul had to undergo surgery after he pulled out of the Indian Premier League due to appendicitis while Saha is down with Covid-19.

Following their 3-1 win against England at home, India finished as the No. 1 side with 72.2 percentage points and booked their place in the WTC final.

India's squad: Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (Captain), Ajinkya Rahane (vice-captain), Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), R. Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma, Mohd. Shami, Md. Siraj, Shardul Thakur, Umesh Yadav, KL Rahul (subject to fitness clearance), Wriddhiman Saha (wicket-keeper; subject to fitness clearance). Standby players: Abhimanyu Easwaran, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan, Arzan Nagwaswalla.

## OLY BADMINTON QUALIFIERS:

# Blow for Indians as Malaysia Open postponed

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The chances of several Indian badminton players hoping to qualify for this year's Tokyo Olympic Games were dealt a body blow on Friday as the Malaysia Open Super 750 tournament was postponed.

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) also announced that the tournament would no longer be an Olympic qualification event, leaving June's Singapore Open Super 500 as the only remaining Olympic qualifier where players will have to perform well to qualify.

Reigning world champion PV Sindhu, 2019 World Championships bronze medallist B Sai Praneeth and men's doubles pair Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty are the Indians who are hoping to qualify based on their ranking in the BWF's 'Race to Tokyo' standings. Those placed within the top 16 of the standings in singles gain automatic qualification and in doubles, those within the top eight go through. Sindhu and Praneeth are ranked seventh and 13th respectively while Rankireddy and Shetty are eighth.

Among Indians who remain in contention for qualification are former singles world No.1 players Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth and, to a lesser extent women's doubles pair Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy. Saina is ranked 22nd while Srikanth is 20th. Ashwini and Sikki are 26th, 14 places below the qualification ranking.

The Singapore Open is scheduled to be held from June 1 to 6 while the Olympic qualification period ends on June 15.

"Tournament organisers Badminton Association of Malaysia and Badminton World Federation have jointly agreed to postpone the Malaysia Open 2021, scheduled for 25-30 May 2021," said the BWF in a statement on Friday.

# SPANISH FOOTBALL LEGEND DAVID VILLA JOINS ISL CLUB ODISHA FC

**Bhubaneswar** | Agencies

Indian Super League (ISL) side Odisha FC have brought on board Spanish football legend David Villa to advise the club's coaching staff and guide the senior and youth players.

A statement from the club said, "Odisha FC is glad to announce its association with football legend David Villa, who has joined the club's Football Committee, and will head the global football operations of the club."

The 39-year-old, regarded as one of the best Spanish strikers of all time, will be assisted by a dedicated team called DV7 (David Villa 7), which will have, among others, the former Odisha FC head coach Josep Gombau and Victor Onate.

"I will try to bring my experience. Obviously, I didn't play in India but I played soccer for 20 years as a professional and before that in the academy. And, in all of the projects that we (the team) are involved in, I'll try to give all of my experience that I have in soccer," said Villa after joining Odisha FC.

Villa was a part of the Spanish team that won the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa and the 2008 European Championship in Austria-Switzerland. He was also an integral part of Spanish giants Barcelona FC, who won the La Liga and the Champions League.

# Solskjaer hails Cavani, de Gea after United's win against Roma

**London** | Agencies

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer heaped praise on Edinson Cavani and David De Gea after Manchester United kicked off a run of four matches in eight days by reaching the Europa League final.

Having beaten Roma 6-2 in last week's semi-final first leg at Old Trafford, the Red Devils sealed their shot at glory against Unai Emery's Villarreal on May 26 despite losing the return leg 3-2 on Thursday.

Cavani scored twice in each game while De Gea produced some fine saves as United advanced 8-5 on aggregate.

Cavani, who is out of contract this summer, grabbed the goals but De Gea shone brightest. The long-serving number one flourished at the Stadio Olimpico, staking his claim for a starting role in the final having been displaced by Dean Henderson in the Premier League.

The Europa League final offers United a chance to secure their first silverware since winning the competition in 2017, but they have a lot to deal with before then.

The postponed clash against Liverpool has been rearranged for next Thursday, leaving the Red Devils facing four matches in a mere eight days.

# ENGLAND COUNTY CLUBS EXPRESS INTEREST TO HOST IPL

**London** | Agencies

England's county cricket clubs have reportedly offered to host the 2021 Indian Premier League (IPL). The tournament, which was being held amid the raging second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in India, was postponed earlier this week after multiple positive cases of the coronavirus came up in the tournament's bio-bubble.

The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), Surrey and Warwickshire, who are based at Lord's, The Kia Oval (both London) and Edgbaston (Birmingham), respectively are understood to be part of the group who wrote to the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) inviting them to extend the opportunity to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), according to ESPNCricinfo. The plans would see the tournament completed in around two weeks in the second half of September.

While Lancashire is not one of the signatories in the letter, their home ground Old Trafford in Manchester could be used as one of the stadiums for the tournament should it be held in England.

However, the ECB has received no request from the BCCI to host the tournament. BCCI president Sourav Ganguly said on Wednesday that it remains too early to plan for the tournament to be held at a new venue at a later date.

# ALIK EARNS OLYMPIC QUOTA IN MEN'S 125KG FREESTYLE WRESTLING

**Sofia (Bulgaria)** | Agencies

India's Sumit Malik has won the Olympic quota place in the men's 125kg freestyle wrestling event by reaching the final of the World Olympic Games Qualifying Tournament here.

Malik beat Jose Daniel Diaz of Venezuela 5-0 to set up the title clash with Russia's Sergei Kozyrev. Finalists in each of the weight categories in this tournament are eligible to win a quota place for the Tokyo Olympics.

In his first qualification round, Malik beat Aiaal Lazarev of Kyrgyzstan 2-2 while in his second round he defeated Alexandr Romanov of Moldovan 2-2. In the quarterfinals, he outclassed Rustam Iskandari of Tajikistan 19-5. Malik is the fourth Indian freestyle wrestler to have won the Olympic quota place in the men's category. Ravi Dahiya (57 kg), Bajrang Punia (65 kg), Deepak Punia (86 kg) are the other three wrestlers to have won tickets to Tokyo Olympics from the 2019 Olympic qualification cycle. On Friday, three Indian women will compete with an eye on the Olympic quota.

# *Fifth edition of Abu Dhabi T10 to begin on Nov 19*

**Abu Dhabi** | Agencies

The fifth edition of the Abu Dhabi T10 cricket tournament will take place at the Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium from November 19 till December 4 this year. The tournament, jointly sanctioned by the International Cricket Council (ICC) and the Emirates Cricket Board, will feature an increased number of matches played over 15 days, as against 10 in the previous seasons. Launched in 2017, the Abu Dhabi T10 is played in a round-robin format followed by the eliminators and the final.

"By bringing T10 to the UAE capital we have made Abu Dhabi the home of this truly exciting cricketing format, the potential of which is now reaching ever-growing audiences of 144.2 million worldwide with 800 million video views on social media during Season 4," said Aref Al Awani, general secretary, Abu Dhabi Sports Council."It is a matter of pride that a journey that started in 2017 with just four teams has now reached a stage where the tournament has become an important part of the world's cricketing calendar," said Shaji Ul Mulk, chairman, Ten Sports Management (TSM), which owns the League.

The fourth edition in Jan-Feb this year was safely delivered against a background of strict Covid-19 prevention protocols and gained a global TV audience of 63.9 million, a 79.67% year-on-year increase. Past Abu Dhabi T10 champions include the Kerala Kings, Maratha Arabians and Northern Warriors, who have won the title twice.

# Manchester United cruise into Europa League final, Arsenal lose to Villareal

**Rome** | Agencies

Manchester United lost 2-3 to Roma in second leg of the semi-final of Europa League but cruised through to the final on the basis of an 8-5 aggregate victory.

But it will not be Premier League rivals Arsenal they meet in Poland's Gdansk on May 26, rather Spaniards Villarreal, who are in a first major final after a goalless second leg in London, DPA reports.

The Yellow Submarine, as Villarreal are known, gained revenge for their 2006 Champions League semi-final loss to Arsenal with a 2-1 aggregate triumph while United dominated Roma 8-5. Manchester United's entry to the final means the club could claim both of the major European titles this year as neighbours Manchester City face Chelsea in the Champions League final three days later.

Only the city of Milan has managed this feat, when AC Milan won the Champions League and Inter Milan the UEFA Cup in 1994.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer had lost his previous four semi-finals as United manager but could finally taste victory.

Villarreal also ended a last four hoodoo as they had lost all five of their previous semi-finals in various competitions. Coach Unai Emery, a former Arsenal manager, won three Europa Leagues with Sevilla and is on the brink of glory once more.

They almost repeated their early goal from the first leg but keeper Bernd Leno saved well from Samuel Chukwueze, who was later carried off injured. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang hit the post in the first half for Arsenal with a curling shot and headed onto the woodwork with his last involvement before being substituted 10 minutes from time due to lingering effect of a malaria infection. But Villarreal held on to claim a historic date with United later this month and Arsenal -- a lowly ninth domestically -- face a bitterly disappointing conclusion to the campaign.

# *Rowers win Olympic quota place in lightweight double scull*

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The Indian rowing team comprising Arun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh won the Tokyo Olympic quota place in men's lightweight double scull event at the World Rowing Asia and Oceania Olympic and Paralympic Qualification Regatta in Tokyo on Friday.

The Indian team covered the 2000-metre course in six minutes 36.92 seconds to finish second behind host Japan who clocked six minutes 34.70 seconds.

"A steady pace throughout the 2000m course was key to success. The Indian team, in fact, covered the last 500m of the 2000m course faster than the eventual winners. It was a good performance," an official of the Rowing Federation of India (RFI) told reporter.

Uzbekistan were third while Indonesia won the fourth spot. Hong Kong finished fifth and Kazakhstan sixth. The top three teams won Olympic quota places.

Since Jakar Khan had posted a good time in his Thursday's preliminary round of the men's single scull, he also has a good chance of winning an Olympic quota place, said the RFI official. The semi-finals and final are scheduled for Friday. All the participating teams had to follow strict Covid-19 protocols. A member of Sri Lanka's support staff tested positive for the virus but reports of all other coaches and athletes were negative. "The rowers were tested on Wednesday and again on Thursday for Covid-19 to ensure safety of the competitors," said the Indian team official. More than 75 athletes from Asian countries are participating in the Olympic qualification tournament.

# T20 WC SHOULDN'T BE HELD IN INDIA IF IT DRAINS RESOURCES: CUMMINS

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Australia fast bowler Pat Cummins has said that the 2021 T20 World Cup should be held in India only if it is not going to be a drain on the country's resources in its fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cummins recently left India after the 2021 Indian Premier League (IPL), in which he was playing for Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), was postponed after the raging second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country, breached the tournament's bio-bubble. The T20 World Cup is set to take place in India in October and November this year. However, with the highly infectious strain of Covid-19 stretching the country's healthcare system to its brink, there have been speculation of the tournament being moved out of the country.

# SENSEX ENDS ABOVE 49,000; METAL STOCKS TOUCH RECORD HIGHS

- Sensex closed at 49,206.47, higher by 256.71 points or 0.52 per cent from its previous close of 48,949.76. It opened at 49,169.14 and has touched an intra-day high of 49,417.64 and a low of 49,036.38 points. The Nifty50 on the National Stock Exchange closed at 14,823.15, higher by 98.35 points or 0.67 per cent from its previous close.

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

The key Indian equity indices closed in the green on Friday with the BSE Sensex settling above the 49,000 mark. Healthy buying was witnessed in metal stocks, with several stocks touching their all-time high levels. Shares of Tata Steel touched a 52-week high of Rs 1,192 and SAIL stock touched a 52-week high of Rs 145.85 per share.

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Shrikant Chouhan, Executive Vice President, Equity Technical Research at Kotak Securities noted that during the week, foreign institutional investors sold heavily in the cash segment to the tune of Rs 5,500 crore that should reverse immediately otherwise it would minimize the upside for the market."In the coming week, again our focus should be on metals and pharmaceuticals stocks. From the defensive, we prefer the technology sector over the FMCG sector," he said.

# Covid crisis poses economic risk in Q1 FY22; 'muted impact' likely: FinMin

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

As states take to lockdowns amid the severe Covid crisis, the Finance Ministry in a report has said that second wave of the Covid-19 poses downside risk to economic activities during April-June, although the impact is expected to be muted compared to that in the first wave.

The 'Monthly Economic Review' for April 2021 published by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) said that learning to "operate with COVID-19" provides a silver lining of economic resilience amidst the second wave.

"The second wave of COVID-19 has posed a downside risk to economic activity in the first quarter of FY 2021-22. However, there are reasons to expect a muted economic impact as compared to the first wave. Learning to "operate with COVID-19", as borne by international experience, provides a silver lining of economic resilience amidst the second wave," it said.

Noting that the global economy recovered further in March and April, powered with vaccination drives and fiscal stimuli by few large economies, it said that in India the momentum in economic recovery since the first wave moderated in April due to the second wave of coronavirus.

It said that agriculture continues to be the silver lining with record food grain production estimated in the ensuing crop year on the back of predicted normal monsoons.

Rural demand indicators like tractor sales recorded a growth of 172 per cent and 36 per cent compared to a low base in March 2020 and even the pre-Covid month of March 2019 respectively. Industrial production showed mixed trends. While Index of Industrial Production (IIP) in February 2021 registered a broad-based decline of 3.6 per cent (YoY) and 3.9 per cent compared to January 2021, the eight-core index posted a growth of of 6.8 per cent (YoY) in March 2021 and 11.1 per cent compared to February 2021.

In FY 2020-21, the core sector contracted by 7 per cent compared to 0.4 per cent growth in FY 2019-20 with fertilizer being the sole growing sector and electricity recovering steadily in the second half.The Purchasing Managers Index for manufacturing rose further to 55.5 in April with consumer goods as the strongest-performing category, followed by capital goods and then intermediate goods. The rebound was also reflected in RBI's survey estimates on capacity utilization and manufacturers' optimism for the current year, the report said.

In the second half of FY 2020-21, GST collections registered a good growth and collections exceeded Rs 1 lakh crore in each of the last six months owing to economic recovery. GST collections registered another record high of Rs 1.41 lakh crore in April, indicative of continual economic recovery.

# Rs 50K cr on-tap term liquidity facility opened to ease access to emergency health services

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

In order to boost the provision of immediate liquidity for ramping up COVID-related healthcare infrastructure and services in the country, the Reserve Bank of India on Friday decided to open an on-tap liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore with tenors of up to three years at the repo rate till March 31, 2022.

The on-tap liquidity window for healthcare infrastructure was announced by the RBI governor on May 5 when he announced several other measures as part of a Covid relief package.

Under the scheme, banks will provide fresh lending support to a wide range of entities including vaccine manufacturers; importers/suppliers of vaccine and priority medical devices; hospitals/dispensaries; pathology labs and diagnostic centres; manufacturers and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators; importers of vaccines and COVID-related drugs; COVID-related logistics firms and also patients for treatment.

Banks are being incentivised for quick delivery of credit under the scheme through extension of priority sector lending (PSL) classification to such lending up to March 31, 2022. These loans will continue to be classified under PSL till repayment/maturity, whichever is earlier.

Banks may deliver these loans to borrowers directly or through intermediary financial entities regulated by the RBI.Under the scheme, banks are expected to create a COVID loan book. By way of an additional incentive, such banks will be eligible to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of the COVID loan book with the RBI under the reverse repo window at a rate which is 25 bps lower than the repo rate.

Banks desirous of deploying their own resources without availing funds from the RBI under the scheme for lending to the specified segments mentioned above will also be eligible for the incentives.

The RBI has decided that the on-tap scheme will remain operational from May 7, 2021 till March 31, 2022. All banks eligible under the Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF) can participate in the scheme.Besides, requests from banks desirous of availing funds from the RBI will be subject to availability of funds as on the date of application, i.e., funds cannot be guaranteed in case the total amount of Rs 50,000 crore is already availed.

Furthermore, it has been decided that banks would need to lend such funds within a reasonable period, i.e., not later than 30 days from the date of availing the funds from the RBI. There is no tenor restriction regarding lending by banks under the scheme. However, the banks will have to ensure that the amount borrowed from the RBI should at all times be backed by lending to the specified segments till the maturity of the scheme. Also under the scheme banks would be allowed to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of the COVID loan book in a special 14-day reverse repo window.

# Twitter working with Indian payments providers for Tip Jar

- At the moment, only a small group of people including non-profits, journalists and creators around the world who use Twitter in English will be able to add Tip Jar to their profile and receive tips.

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Twitter is testing a new Tip Jar feature globally including in India where iOS and Android users can send money directly to their favourite accounts with substantial followers.

At the moment, only a small group of people including non-profits, journalists and creators around the world who use Twitter in English will be able to add Tip Jar to their profile and receive tips. The company is also working to bring Indian payment providers to Tip Jar, along with the ability to Tip in multiple languages. Currently, Tip Jar supports a variety of payment options and links like Bandcamp, Cash App (owned by Square, a Jack Dorsey company), Patreon, Paypal and Venmo.

The micro-blogging platform is using those services' external payment processors for transactions. "Now you can do more to support the many amazing voices who add to the conversation on Twitter -- send them tips," Twitter Support said in a tweet on Friday.

# Demand momentum for jewellery continued in Q1

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Consumer demand for gold in India saw robust growth in the first quarter of calendar year 2021.

According to a report by Motilal Oswal Institutional Equities, total consumer demand for gold in India, which includes jewellery, bars, and coins, witnessed a 37.4 per cent year on year growth in 1QCY21 to 140 ton. On a QoQ basis, demand was down 24.8 per cent.

Demand for jewellery remained robust in India, with volumes up 38.3% YoY to 102.5 tons in 1QCY21. Demand was boosted by easing of lockdown restrictions, lower gold prices, magnified by lowering of customs duty, and wedding demand.

Demand for gold bars and coins continued to witness a surge during 1QCY21. With the bottoming out of gold prices, consumers advanced purchases in the form of gold bars and coins. Demand for bars and coins rose 33.8 per cent YoY to 37.5t in 1QCY21.

Net bullion imports, which constitute 85-90 per cent of India's gold supplies, saw a sharp (262 per cent) surge in 1QCY21. Although growth is on a soft base of 1QCY20, it is at the highest level since 2QCY13. This indicates the extent of pent up demand.

## FIIS TURN NET BUYERS OF SOFTWARE & SERVICES, REAL ESTATE STOCKS

**Mumbai:**As foreign institutional investors (FII) largely pulled out investments in April amid the resurgent Covid crisis, software and services and real estate stocks ducked the subdued trend and attracted foreign funds during the second half of April.As per a research report released by Emkay Global Financial Services, the FIIs showed maximum interest in software and services and real estate sector companies. For the fortnight April 16-30, 2021, the software and services and the real estate sector saw buying worth $281 million and $232 million respectively.

On the other hand, FIIs turned sellers for the Materials sector last fortnight, with the highest sectoral outflow of $570 million. FIIs also continued selling in banks and the energy sector, with each seeing outflows in excess of $200 million.Automobiles and components stocks witnessed an outflow of $125 million, followed by $101 million worth of selling in diversified financial stocks.

Overall, FIIs turned net sellers in April, after six months. They pulled out net investments of Rs 12,039.43 crore last month. Over the past one year, FII inflow was unprecedented amid a stock market bull run and liquidity surge both in India and other economies.However, in the past one month the severe Covid crisis and the eventual lockdowns have weakened the investor sentiments.

# Petrol, diesel prices maintain rally, rise again by 28-31 paise/ltr

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Petrol and diesel prices in the country rose again sharply by 28 paise and 31 paise per litre respectively, on Friday as Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) continued to cover for their losses on holding back price rise for past 18 days due to state elections.

This is fourth increase in fuel prices in as many days as petrol and diesel prices rose by 15 paise and 18 paise per litre respectively on Tuesday and by 19 paise and 21 paise per litre respectively on Wednesday and by 25 and 30 paise respectively on Thursday after a 18 days break.

With Friday's increase, petrol is now being retailed at Rs 91.27 a litre and diesel Rs 81.73 a litre in the national capital.Across the country as well the petrol and diesel price increased on Friday but its quantum varied depending on the level of local levies in respective states.

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

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

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

# 'Drop in some food prices will push CPI inflation down to 4.0% in April'

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

A high base and an unseasonal drop in some food prices will push CPI inflation down to 4.0 per cent in April, Barclays said in a research report on Friday.

According to the report, Core inflation will stay elevated, and rising commodity prices globally may pose some challenges in coming months

The CPI inflation data for April is expected to be released by the statistics ministry on May 12.

"We expect CPI inflation to fall to 4.04 per cent y/y in April, below the January low and down from 5.5 per cent in March. The drop in inflation will be driven primarily by two factors - a high base owing to last year's pandemic-related lockdown, and an unseasonal fall in some food prices," Barclays said.

This year, despite the new restrictions, supply chains have not broken down to the same extent as 2020 and hence the effect on perishable prices has been opposite, with reduced traffic in stores causing prices to fall.

Looking at the details, the investment banker said it expect food prices to rise 0.1 per cent m/m, which is significantly below the seasonal trend typically seen in the lean season before sowing.

Prices for cereals, vegetables and dairy products remain in check and are offsetting the increase in prices of non-perishable items, such as cooking oil, pulses and prepared foods.

Still there is a limit to how much perishable prices can fall, and the unusually low prices could pose upside risks to food inflation in H2 21. Overall, we forecast food prices will rise 1.8 per cent y/y in April, the research report said.

Among other sub components, fuel costs likely declined modestly in April, but may rebound in May, as prices have started to rise following the completion of recent regional elections. Barclays has forecast core inflation will ease to 5.4 per cent, from 5.7 per cent in March. In addition to increases in the education and healthcare components, the expectation is that rising gold prices to add to upward pressure on m/m momentum. We believe concerns over the increase in core WPI inflation are overblown and expect the pass-through from higher commodity prices to be limited by weak underlying demand, the report said. Research by the RBI also suggests that the rise in core WPI inflation will pass through only to core goods CPI inflation (22.0 per cent weight in CPI basket) and will amount to just 20bp for every 100bp rise in core WPI in the current environment.

# ALWAYS WISHED I HAD A DAUGHTER : MALAIKA ARORA

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Actress Malaika Arora says she always wished she had a daughter to share her things with.

Malaika opened up on the subject when made a guest appearance in a recent episode of the dance reality show "Super Dancer: Chapter 4". After the performance of contestant Florina Gogoi, the actress picked up the six-year-old in her arms and spoke about how she has always wanted a daughter.

"Main tumhe ghar leke jaun kya? I have a son at home... From a long time, I have been saying, 'kaash meri ek beti bhi hoti'. I have such beautiful shoes and clothes, and no one is there to wear them!" said Malaika and also asked for a hug and a kiss from Florina.

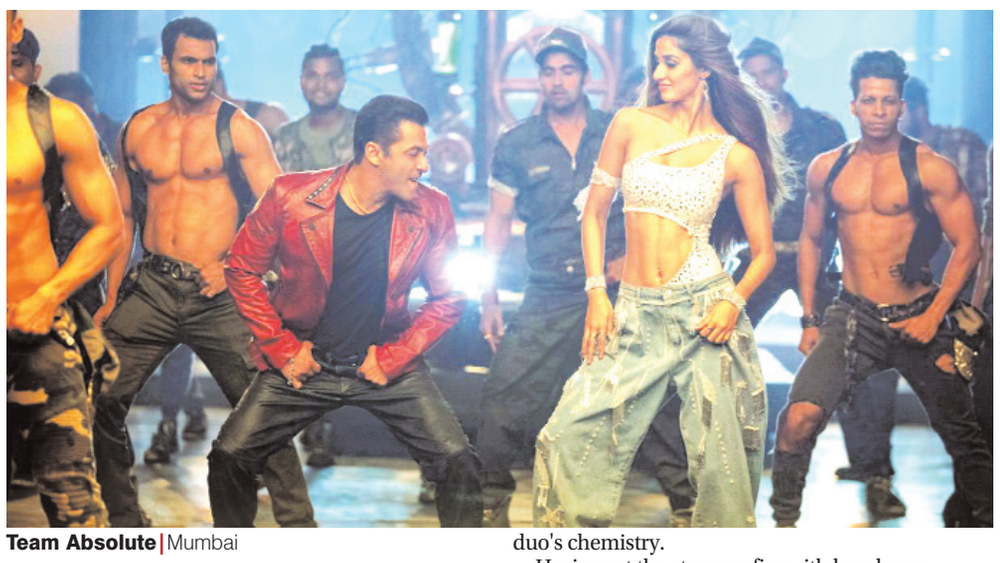
Florina performed to the 1980s' number "Disco Station", sung by Asha Bhosle. Malaika, too, joined Florina on the stage during the dance. "Super Dancer: Chapter 4" airs on Sony Entertainment Television.

# RECORD-BREAKING EPIC 'RAMAYAN' IS BACK ON TV

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

The late Ramanand Sagar's blockbuster mythological show "Ramayan" is back on television. The serial had gained immense popularity upon release on Doordarshan in 1987, and the national broadcaster had re-telecast the show during last year's lockdown. Upon being aired again in 2020, the show once again broke several records of viewership. The cast members of "Ramayan" have become pan-India celebrities over the decades. Arun Govil as Ram, Deepika Chikhalia as Sita, Sunil Lahri as Laxman, Arvind Trivedi as Raavan and Dara Singh as Hanuman are particularly recalled for their performances even today. This time, "Ramayan" is being be aired on Colors channel.

# *Grateful to have opportunity to work with Salman again*



**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Disha Patani will soon be seen as the leading lady in Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai opposite Salman Khan and all the glimpses of the film have the audience raving about the duo's chemistry.

Having set the stage on fire with her dance moves and sizzling chemistry with Salman Khan previously in the song Slow Motion from Bharat, she has now reunited with the superstar for Radhe.

Talking about working with Salman, Disha said, "He's a great human being and always makes everyone comfortable. He's so inspiring and I'm very grateful that I got the opportunity to work with such a superstar of the country once again."

With her song Seeti Maar doing exceptionally well on a global scale and receiving so much love, Disha expressed, "It was pretty difficult prepping for the song because it was the first time I was working with Prabhudeva sir (also the director of Radhe). But he was very patient with me. It was a different choreography but it was so much fun."

Disha Patani is a fantastic dancer as the actress managed to carry out such a difficult choreography by the dance legend Prabhu Deva himself, with such smoothness. She worked with the master of the dance field for the first time and definitely did a superb job. Disha and Salman are already proving to be a fire on-screen couple with just a peek into the film through its songs and trailer, as their chemistry is so perfect and on point. The audience has been showing bouts of excitement for Radhe, and the chemistry of these lead stars is definitely a major reason.

# *The only film Siddhant wants to watch*

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Actor Siddhant Chaturvedi says the only film he wants to watch right now is "2050: A Love Story".

There is no film by that name, of course, and Siddhant was probably playing on the title of the 2008 film, "Love Story 2050". To refresh your memory, this was a film that director Harry Baweja made way back in 2008, to launch his son Harman Baweja. The film, co-starring Priyanka Chopra opposite Harman, came out at a time when the two stars were being romantically linked by the rumour mills. The sci-fi romance fared way below expectations at the box office.

Siddhant posted a picture on Instagram on Friday night, where he looks into the camera and smiles. He wrote: "2050: A love story, is the only film I want to watch right now." The cryptic caption seems to hint at the fact that Siddhant, like all of us, wants to get far away from the current times, to the year 2050.

Siddhant will next be seen in "Bunty Aur Babli 2", "Phone Bhoot", "Yudhra" and an yet-untitled film by Shakun Batra.

# COMPOSER VANRAJ BHATIA PASSES AWAY, B'TOWN MOURNS LOSS

**Team Absolute** | Mumbai

Music director Vanraj Bhatia passed away at his residence in the city on Friday. He was 93.

Bhatia rose to fame scoring music in an array of art-house and middle-of-the-road films in the seventies and eighties, such as "Ankur", "Manthan", "Bhumika", "Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro", "Mohan Joshi Haazir Ho!" and "36 Chowringhee Lane", as well as TV shows "Wagle Ki Duniya" and "Banegi Apni Baat". He was reportedly bedridden due to age-related issues. He had not been well for a while now. The composer won the National Award for his music in Govind Nihalani's acclaimed "Tamas" in 1988 and was a recipient of the Padma Shri in 2012.

Filmmaker Hansal Mehta took to social media to mourn the loss. He wrote: "RIP Maestro." while actor Farhan Akhtar wrote: "RIP #VanrajBhatia... apart from the many other brilliant musical works he created, I vividly remember the theme of 'Tamas' that started with a shriek so filled with anguish, it could send a chill up anyone's spine and break anyone's heart." Musician Ehsaan Noorani of the Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy trio wrote: "Farewell Vanraj Bhatia one of India's finest composers ... was glad to have known you worked with you and been part of your music. There will not be another you."

# PHOTO PREM: SNAPSHOTS OF FEEL-GOOD HUMOUR

**FILM REVIEW**

BY VINAYAK CHAKRAVORTY

**Direction:** Gayatri Patil and Aditya Rathi

**Cast:** Neena Kulkarni, Amita Khopkar, Vikas Hande, Chaitrali Rode, Pradnya Jawle-Edke, Sameer Dharmadhikari

**Ratings: * * * (three stars)**

Fifty-something Maee hates being clicked. Which in turn leads to a peculiar problem. She realises there's no decent photograph of her in the house. That's no petty issue if you consider your primary source of remembrance, when you're no more, will be the picture that hangs in the living room. So, Maee decides she must fix the situation. Debutant duo Gayatri Patil and Aditya Rathi's Marathi film is a bittersweet comedy crafted out of middle-class quirks and the deeper question of identity, without getting too heavy about it. Rathi's script maintains a feel-good rhythm all along, and ends with a spot of black humour.

The storytelling derives its major impetus from the cast, led by a flawless Neena Kulkarni. She is the quintessential lady-next-door, coy and withdrawn in her own world. The story gives her a character arch that moves subtly, as her protagonist Maee plays out a very unlikely coming of age drama. There are two aspects to the narrative, as Maee sets out to figure out a way how to get the perfect image to frame for posterity. First, the film is a plain and enjoyable adventure of a woman, who has been a homemaker all her life, as she sets out to realise her 'dream' for a perfect photo-op. Her interest in the idea is stirred as she starts observing photographs at funerals, and feels most images of the departed seem far from perfect -- not at least in the way she would hope to appear on the walls of her home. Patil and Rathi execute this aspect of the narrative with assuredness. The other aspect that drives the story is Maee's internal journey, unfolding as the film' s subtext. Patil and Rathi go for humour-laced simplicity as Maee makes an important realisation right at the end, about what really defines memories -- a moment's perfect pose before a camera or a lifetime's impression that one may leave behind. Simply photographed (Kedar Phadke) and adequately edited (B. Mahanteshwar and Rohan Sarode), "Photo Prem" is one of those films that leave a message even as it entertains, without forcing you to think too hard about what it has to say.

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Shobhita Rana

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