



**ALMA WAHLBERG,
MOTHER OF MARK, DONNIE
WAHLBERG, DIES AT 78**
pg 08

**NEW BUSINESS SKILLS CAN IMPROVE
LIVELIHOODS AMONG POOR PEOPLE.
HOW TO AVOID THE PITFALLS**
pg 04

**CHRIS EVANS RESPONDS
TO LIZZO'S DRUNK DM AND
HER REACTION IS PERFECT**
pg 08



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Pages 8 | ₹ 5

Chamling should not forget his own speeches: SKM

**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 19 APR:**

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha today held a press conference to condemn the recent comments made by former Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling and Sikkim Democratic Front president, Pawan Chamling on the Chief Minister, PS Tamang's directions to government employees regarding punctuality.

Addressing the press meet, SKM spokesperson, CP Sharma, who is also the Press Advisor to the Chief Minister, said that Pawan Chamling should recall his speeches before accusing the CM of terrorizing government employees.

"People have fully supported and stood by



the statement of the CM so Pawan Chamling is trying to instigate people by showing fake support to the government employees. 90% of government employees are working sincerely and

are happy with the statement of the CM," he said.

On Sunday, Mr Chamling had released a statement accusing the Chief Minister of terrorizing and intimidating government employees just

because he was personally upset with them. The statement was a criticism of the CM admonishing government employees for their lack of punctuality during a speech made on Ambedkar Jayanti.

Mr Sharma stated that the speech of the CM on Ambedkar Jayanti did not come from anger but from concern to ensure that people do not suffer in their administrative works.

turn to pg02

Sunday off for RT-PCR testing gives Sikkim only 9 new cases

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 APR:**

Despite a climbing graph of fresh daily cases as Sikkim joins the nation in getting swept up by the second wave of Covid-19, a Sunday off for both the VRD Labs in Sikkim - at STNM Hospital and CRH-Manipal - provided the artificial relief of new cases registering in single-digits on Monday.

Only nine new cases were reported in the State in the 24 hours ending 8AM Monday. These were picked up from Rapid Antigen Testing of 48 samples on Sunday. No RT-PCR tests were carried on

Sunday continuing the weekly day off for the VRD Labs. A day earlier, on Saturday, 326 samples had been screened through RT-PCR, 84 of which had returned positive for Novel Coronavirus. On the day, Sikkim had recorded a total of 105 cases.

With the nine cases detected today, the number of active cases of coronavirus in Sikkim has inched up to 404. Today, seven Covid patients were admitted to STNM Hospital and there are now 40 such patients convalescing in hospital here. No one is in the ICU.

Meanwhile, the fig-

ure of recovered cases further improved to 6,017 with the release of three more persons from home isolation after completing their isolation period.

Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported so far has now reached 6,705.

In his daily health bulletin on Monday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia, three people who had tested positive a few days back continue to remain incommunicado and after announcing their names, called on people

turn to pg02

India logs record surge of 2,73,810 new cases, 1,619 fatalities

NEW DELHI, APR 19 (PTI): India's total tally of COVID-19 cases crossed the 1.50-crore mark with around 25 lakh cases being added in just 15 days, while active cases surpassed the 19-lakh mark, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The nationwide tally of COVID-19 cases mounted to 1,50,61,919 with a record single-day rise of 2,73,810 coronavirus infections.

The death toll increased to 1,78,769 with a record 1,619 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The country's total COVID-19 infections had surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19 after which it took 107 days to cross the 1.25 crore on April 5. However, it only took 15 days for the cases to cross the 1.50-crore mark.

Registering a steady increase for the 40th day

in a row, the active cases increased to 19,29,329, comprising 12.81 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has dropped to 86 per cent.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,29,53,821 and the case fatality rate has further dropped to 1.19 per cent, the data stated India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on 28 September, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the ICMR, 26,78,94,549 samples have been tested up to April 18 with 13,56,133 samples being tested on Sunday.

Fish Mela to begin at MG Marg from 20 April



GANGTOK, 19 APR (IPR): The Directorate of Fisheries, Government of Sikkim, is organising the first Fish Mela in the State at MG Marg, Gangtok on 20 and 21 April. In this regard, the Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Departments, LN Sharma convened a Press Conference at the Conference Hall of Tashiling Secretariat today to inform general people about the upcoming event.

In his address, the Minister stated that the

Directorate of Fisheries is organising the first two days Fish Mela in the State at MG Marg Gangtok, duly maintaining COVID 19 appropriate behavior. The local fish farmers and entrepreneurs will be displaying and selling varieties of cultured fish including ornamental and local indigenous fish in the Mela. The purpose of organising the Fish Mela is to encourage the youth to take up fisheries as an entrepreneurship, with the objective to promote fish

farming and also to meet up growing demands of fish in the State. The Directorate is also in the process of encouraging and supporting the fish farming in an extensive manner for optimum utilisation of the available water resources, which in turn expected to maximise the domestic fish production.

He also appealed the youth and progressive farming community to participate in the event and avail the knowledge, inputs and technicalities on fish farming being provided by the experts. He emphasized on the importance of farming in our daily lives and the contribution of farmers who toil day in and out to provide variety of products to the people.

turn to pg02

India's double mutant jumps to 10 countries. All you need to know

NEW DELHI, 19 APR [BLOOMBERG]: With India's daily tally of Covid-19 infections surging by records, public health experts worry that a new -- possibly more virulent -- coronavirus variant could be racing through the crowded nation of more than 1.3 billion people.

The new variant, which has a so-called double mutation, is thought to be fueling India's deadlier new wave of cases that has made it the world's second worst-hit country, surpassing Brazil again, and has already begun to overwhelm its hospitals and crematoriums. India has reported more than 14.5 million Covid cases so far and more than 175,600 fatalities.

"This is a variant of interest we are following," Maria Van Kerkhove, the World Health Organization's technical lead officer on Covid, told reporters Friday. "Having two of these mutations, which have been seen in other variants around the world, are concerning," she said, adding that there was a similarity with mutations that increase transmission as well as reduce neutralization,

possibly stunting the ability of vaccines to curb them. The new strain underscores the insidious nature of viruses and threatens to thwart containment efforts in India, despite measures such as the world's largest lockdown last year. An exploding outbreak in India risks undoing a hard-won victory over the pathogen for others, too, especially as this strain has now jumped to at least 10 other countries.

Here's what we know so far:
HOW DID THE "DOUBLE MUTATION" VARIANT EMERGE?

The new variant, called B.1.617, was initially detected in India with two mutations -- the E484Q and L452R. It was first reported late last year by a scientist in India and more details were presented before the WHO on Monday, according to Van Kerkhove.

Viruses mutate all the time, as part of evolutionary biology. Some mutations weaken the virus while others may make it stronger, enabling it to proliferate faster or cause more infections.

turn to pg02



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 APR:**

Transport Minister Sanjit Kharel today handed over ex-gratia relief cheques of Rs 5 lakh each to the next of kin of six drivers who met with fatal accidents in 2020-21.

A press release from the Transport De-

partment informs that cheques were handed over at a sombre function held at Yatayat Bhawan which was also attended by Transport Secretary PN Sherpa, STA Secretary Karma Namgyal Bhutia, RTO-East Roshan Pradhan and members of the six bereaved families.

The cheques were

handed over of the next of kin of Tula Ram Chettri of Naya Mangzing, South Sikkim, Dechen Bhutia of Ben-Nambung, South Sikkim, John Alias Sunar of Lower Sichey, Gangtok, Bishal Darjee of Melli, South Sikkim, Makal Tamang of Ranipool Bazar, East Sikkim, and Kumar Giri of Lower Syari.

States can buy Covid vaccines directly from manufacturers: Centre

NEW DELHI, 19 APR [NDTV]: States can buy Covid vaccines directly from manufacturers - who can release up to 50 per cent of their supply for this purpose - at a pre-declared price, the centre said Monday evening as it announced a series of massive changes to the country's vaccination policy.

The biggest of these changes is that all those above the age of 18 will be eligible to get the shot from May 1. Specifically, vaccine manufacturers will supply 50 per cent of their monthly Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL) released doses to the central government, and will be free to supply the remaining 50 per cent doses to state and in the open market at a "pre-declared price".

Manufacturers will declaration prices in advance for the vaccines supplied to state governments and in open market.

Based on this price, state governments, private hospitals, industrial establishments can buy vaccine doses from the manufacturers.

Vaccinations at central government centres, provided free of cost, will continue for previous categories - health workers, frontline workers and those above 45.



Cleanliness drive in Gyalshing



GYALSHING, 19 APR [IPR]:

Following directions received from Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, a cleanliness drive was carried out at Gyalshing Bazar and its surrounding areas today.

Present during the drive were MEO, Gyalshing, Bhumika Pradhan, along with the staff from the Fire Station and Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat.

The drive was carried out in coordination with Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat, Fire Department and the shopkeepers of Gyalshing.

The main objective of the cleanliness drive was to inculcate the value of cleanliness, discipline, sanitation and respect towards environment and to sensitize every individual about the importance of healthy living.

Sunday off for...

who might know them to convince them to get in touch with the concerned authorities.

Of the nine new cases, eight were reported from East District and one in West Sikkim.

While giving details of new cases, Mr Bhutia informed that two persons from Chalisey in Rhenock, one from Ranipool, one from Dhajey in Ranka, one from near SNT colony [Tadong] and one from Lumsey 5th Mile [Tadong] in East District were found positive for COVID-19.

He added that a resident of SGMI quarters at Baluwakhani has also tested positive. On the same, he informed that one of two central government officials who had arrived at SGMI for training has tested positive.

A tourist from Kolkata also tested positive for COVID-19 during rapid antigen testing at Rangpo gate and returned in the same vehicle after receiving the report.

The one case from West Sikkim is from Tikjek, it is informed.

While providing details of vaccinations carried out on Sunday, he informed that a total of 902 persons were vaccinated for COVID-19 on Sunday of whom 696 received their first dose while 206 completed their vaccine schedule with the second dose.

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India's double...

India's health ministry first acknowledged the presence of a "double mutant" at the end of March, but has downplayed it since. While it's a variant of interest, it "has not been stamped as a 'variant of concern' so as to say that it is more lethal or more infectious," Aparna Mukherjee, a scientist at the Indian Council of Medical Research, which works under the nation's health ministry, told Bloomberg TV on Friday.

The double mutation has been found in several countries like Australia, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Namibia, New Zealand, Singapore, the U.K. and the U.S., according to an April 16 statement from the Indian government. "Higher transmissibility of this variant is not established as yet," it said.

IS IT CAUSING THE RECORD SURGE IN INFECTIONS IN INDIA?

Genome sequencing indicates the variant as a possible culprit, although the Indian government hasn't confirmed it.

The average prevalence of the variant surged to as high as 52% of samples sequenced in April from almost nothing in January, according to website tracker outbreak.info, which uses data from global repository GISAIID.

In some districts in Maharashtra state -- home to Mumbai and epicenter of the current wave that's triggered fresh lockdown-like rules -- the prevalence of this variant was more than 60%, according to Anurag Agrawal, director of the state-run Council of Scientific and Industrial Research's genomics institute that's conducting sequencing. The B.1.617 was present in samples from about 10 Indian states and while the percentage may vary, it

was expected to rise as "it has two critical mutations that make it more likely to transmit and escape prior immunity," Mr Agrawal said.

Both mutations are known to decrease -- although not completely eliminate -- the binding of the antibodies created by infection and vaccination, according to Jesse Bloom, an associate professor for genome sciences and microbiology at the University of Washington.

"Mutations at sites E484 and L452 have been observed separately, but this is the first major viral lineage that combines the two," said Bloom. "I do think that this new viral variant is important to monitor."

"We did the math -- we do believe that a lot of the increase in the reproduction number can be explained by these mutations," Nithya Balasubramanian, the head of health-care research at Bernstein India, told Bloomberg TV this week. "So, yes, the mutations are a big cause for worry."

After being complacent in mapping virus genomes in recent months -- India did sequencing for less than 1% positive samples as of last month -- the country is now scrambling to cover lost ground. "We are attempting to do at least 5% of whatever samples are there," said ICMR's Mr Mukherjee.

"It looks like that it is spreading faster than pre-existing variants," said Rakesh Mishra, the Hyderabad-based director of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology -- another Indian lab doing genome sequencing of Covid samples. "Sooner or later, it will become prevalent in the whole country, given the way it is spreading."

DISHA South holds quarterly meeting

NAMCHI, 19 APR (IPR):

The Quarterly Meeting for District Development Co-ordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA) was convened at the Conference Hall of Ngadak Monastery today.

The meeting was chaired by Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) cum Chairperson of DISHA, Indra Hang Subba. Present amongst others were Additional Political Secretary (South), Anjita Rajalim, ADC (South), Satyen Kr Pradhan, ADC (Development) Namchi, Dr Chandra Prakash Rai along with HoDs of line departments, Officials and other dignitaries.

Addressing the meeting, MP Indra Hang Subba spoke about the importance of smooth and effective coordination between the stakeholders and government officials for effective execution and timely completion of various schemes and



projects under DISHA.

With regards to concerning generic issues namely that of land and other matters relating to the schemes under DISHA, he advised the officials to co-ordinate with concerned stakeholders for smooth functioning of the schemes. Furthermore, he also urged the officials to work with zeal and to inculcate the spirit of efficiency while implementing government

related developmental work, so that the masses can gain optimum benefits from these types of pro-people work.

ADC(South), Satyen Kr Pradhan spoke about the importance of DISHA, which is to ensure better co-ordination among nodal departments for proper implementation of Government flagship programmes in the district. He also underlined the schemes need to be completed in a time-

bound manner.

The representatives from various departments highlighted their undergoing schemes. They also put forth issues related to the schemes and discussed in detail its present status. Schemes such as MGNREGA, SBM RURBAN Cluster, PMAY, PMGSY, DDU-GKY, PMKVY, PMEGP, PMUY, IPDS, PMFBY, RKVY, NHM, National Highway and Smart Cities Mission were also deliberated.

Vaccine for all above 18 starting May 1

NEW DELHI, 19 APR [NDTV]: Vaccinations will be widened to everyone above 18 in the next stage beginning May 1, the government announced today after Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a series of meetings today.

All adults will be vaccinated in "a liberalised and accelerated Phase 3 strategy of COVID-19 vaccination", the government said in a statement on a day India reported a new record high of 2.73 lakh cases in a day.

India began inoculating people in January using two Covid vaccines - Serum Institute of India's Covishield developed by Oxford-AstraZeneca and Bharat Biotech's made-in-India Covaxin. So far, the government had allowed vaccinations only for frontline workers and those above 45.

"Government has been working hard from over a year to ensure that maximum numbers of Indians are able to get the vaccine in the shortest possible of time," PM Modi said.

Pricing, procurement, eligibility and administering of vaccines will be flexible in the latest round of the world's largest vaccination drive, the government said.

Vaccine manufacturers have been incentivized to scale up their



production and release up to 50 per cent of their supply to state governments and in the open market at a declared price.

States can now get additional vaccine doses directly from the manufacturers.

Here are key points in the liberalized vaccination rules:

- Vaccine manufacturers will supply 50 per cent of their monthly Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL) released doses to the central government and will be free to supply the remaining 50% doses to state governments and in the open market.
- Manufacturers will declare prices in advance for the

vaccines supplied to state governments and in open market.

- Based on this price, state governments, private hospitals, industrial establishments can buy vaccine doses from the manufacturers.

- Vaccinations at central government centres, provided free of cost, will continue for previous categories - health workers, frontline workers and those above 45.

- The Centre will allocate vaccines from its share to States or Union Territories based on the number of cases. Vaccine wastage can affect the quota of a state.
- The second dose for existing priority groups will be priority.

Chamling should not...

Pawan Chamling should remember his speeches against government employees and termination and suspension of government employees for writing against him, he alleged.

While extending full support to the CM's statement that government employees should take voluntary retirement if they do not want to work, Mr Sharma said there were lots of unemployed and able youth to replace them but work of the people should not stop.

SKM spokesperson and Political Secretary to CM, Jacob Khaling said that the party is ready to face any allegation while working sincerely in the interest of the people of Sikkim.

He said that the recent appeal of the CM to government employees was not for personal or other benefits but was in the interest of the people of Sikkim. However, Mr Khaling stated that a handful of government employees who were not sincerely delivering their duties are the ones who are unhappy with the CM's appeal.

"If someone tries to tag us as Atankari for working for the people of Sikkim then also we are ready to take this tag for the people of Sikkim," he said.

Mr Khaling alleged that it was the SDF government that kept government employees in fear while the SKM government has been working to create a suitable working environment in the State.

Second wave upon us, take precaution: Chamling

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 APR:

Former Chief Minister and Sikkim Democratic Front president, Pawan Chamling, has urged people of Sikkim to strictly follow COVID protocol in view of the second wave of COVID-19 spreading again in Sikkim.

Mr Chamling informed that he has put on hold all state wide social programs and meetings and requested others to do the same as well.

"If we act on time, then we can safeguard

Sikkim from the fast spread of the virus," he said.

He urged all SDF workers to spread this message and alert the people of Sikkim to take precaution.

"I pray to the almighty to protect Sikkim and to safeguard the lives of the people of Sikkim. Please stay safe and take care of yourself and your loved ones. Together, we can get through this Covid-19 crisis. Stay healthy. Stay safe," Mr Chamling has said.

Fish Mela to begin...

The Minister reiterated the incentives being provided by the State Government in terms of dairy and other crops to augment the farmers in the State. He also added that the vision of State Government to transform Sikkim into a sustainable and self-sufficient State will only be achieved if the people have focus and determination in their respective fields and also urged the farming community to take pride in this profession. He also extended gratitude to the National Fisheries Development Board, Hyderabad for their support and encouragement in organising this event.

The Minister also informed that under the ambitious programme of Pradhan Mantri Matshya Sampada Yojana, the Directorate of Fisheries aims at encouraging educated unemployed youth for taking up fish farming in order to generate employment.

Director of Fisheries, N Jaswant informed that approximately 40 fish farmers across the State are expected to attend the event. He also informed that approximately 16000 metric tonnes of fish is being consumed annually in the State while the production stands at approximately 465 metric tonnes.

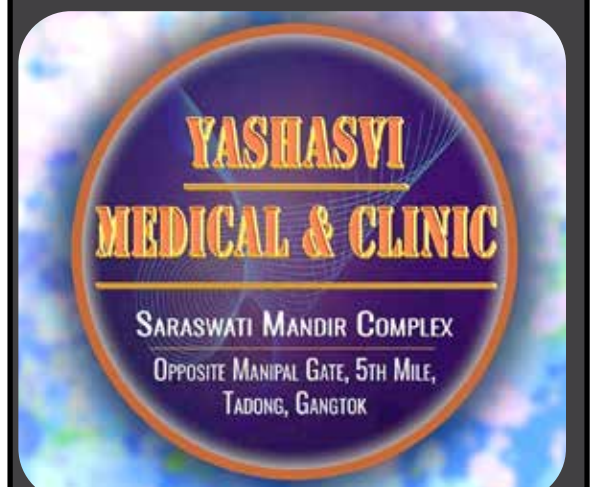
The upcoming Mela aims to encourage and motivate the youth to come forward and take up the fish farming through various technical and financial assistance and other schemes of the State Government and to respond to demands being created in the State, he added.

The Press Conference was also attended by Secretary Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Department, Dr Sangay D Bhutia and officials of Directorate of Fisheries.

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TB Haarega Desh Jitega program held in Gyalshing

GYALSHING, 19 APR (IPR): District Health Society (NTEP/National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme), District Hospital, Gyalshing organised a program on District Tuberculosis Forum on the theme "TB Haarega Desh Jitega" at the Conference Hall of West District Zilla Panchayat Bhawan, Kyongsha, Gyalshing today.

Addressing the house, ADC (West) focused on collaborative approach to control the threat of disease and directed to involve all the concerned departments to generate massive awareness. He suggested to involve TB champion as a volunteer to create awareness, adding that TB champion should be able to generate effective awareness among others regarding the programme. He said that community participation is an essential component to achieve the target. Further, he suggested that the data should be updated regularly and shared with the concerned stakeholders at the ground level. He further stressed on four factors related to fight against



Tuberculosis namely prevention, screening, treatment and stigma.

District TB Officer (West), presented the PowerPoint presentation on the following topics in details:

1. TB Elimination Target 2025.
2. Case finding of 2020, total case notification rate (162/L).
3. DS-TB case finding of 2020, total case notification rate (138/L).
4. New case outcome 2020, COHORT of 2019.
5. Outcome in retreat-

ment case 2020.

6. Smear positivity rate 2020.

7. Success rate (All TB case) 2020.

8. Percentage of DS-TB patients ethnicity in NTEP West District as per 2020.

9. DR-TB detection status 2019 and 2020.

10. Percentage of DR-TB patients ethnicity in NTEP West District as per 2020.

11. Total case notified and outcome of DR-TB in 2019.

12. Financial report for the year 2020-21.

During the presentation, he updated the gathering regarding present scenario of tuberculosis and target of tuberculosis elimination. He informed about the TRUENAT machines access at various PHCs in West District. He also highlighted the various kinds of services being provided by the Government to the masses under the National Tuberculosis Elimination. He further spoke about the best performing award won by the State recently

on World TB Day in Delhi.

The program also saw the group discussion wherein feedback and valuable suggestions were discussed at length. One of the TB champion, Bimal Subba shared his coping experiences to the house as well.

The program was attended by ADC (West), Agawane Rohan Ramesh, CMO (West), Dr Anusha Lama, District TB Officer (West), Dr Bikash Pradhan, CDPO, HB Sangkher, SDMs, BDOs, Officials from NGOs and public at large.

Chaiti Chhath puja concludes at Rangpo Chhath Ghat



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 APR:**

The four-day Chaiti Chhath festival ended with the morning worship of the Sun God today. The puja had started from 16 April and today was the last day at the Chhath Ghat of Rangpo, East Sik-

kim. Special prayers were offered by the devotees to end the COVID-19 pandemic in the world.

On the other hand, for the convenience of Rangpo's Chhath devotees, the facility was provided by the state government and the devotees have

expressed heartfelt gratitude to the government.

Sikkim Bihari Jagran Manch Central Committee president, Swaminath Prasad thanked the ruling Government and Chief Minister, PS Tamang for providing permanent address to the devotees of Rangpo.

Delhi Govt advances summer vacation in schools, to begin tomorrow

NEW DELHI, 19 APR [PTI]: The Delhi government on Monday advanced the summer vacation in all schools in the national capital in view of the COVID-19 situation. The vacation which was scheduled from May 11 to June 3 has now been rescheduled from April 20 to June 9. "In view of

the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic situation, the summer vacation has now been rescheduled and will be observed from April 20 (tomorrow) to June 9," the Directorate of Education (DoE) said in an official order.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had announced

a six-day lockdown from 10 pm on Monday till 5 am on April 26 which he said was necessary to deal with the rising number of COVID-19 cases as the city's health system was stretched to its limit.

Delhi has been reporting around 25,000 COVID-19 cases daily in the past few days.

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Voice celebrates second anniversary



**BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 19 APR:**

Voice, a group of youth working for environmental protection and conservation, celebrated its second anniversary today.

Senior vice-president of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, Bhojraj Rai, was present as the chief guest for the special function hosted at the Officers Club here. Although the anniversary falls on 17 April, the weekend lockdown caused the day to be marked today, Voice members inform.

In keeping with the organisation's focus on environmental conservation, the guests, instead of lighting ceremonial lamps, planted a sapling each to initiate the day's proceedings.

Bijay Rai, one of the founder members of Voice, presented an introduction to the organisation while Dr Kamal Poudyal, a member of the disciplinary committee, conveyed his best wishes to the young group.

The annual report was presented by Re-

nuka Limboo, publicity secretary of VOICE, while Sanjay Rai, the chief coordinator, made a power point presentation on the activities of the organization and its journey thus far.

Also present for the function were Satish Chandra Rai, Advisor, Skill Development Board, Phurden Lepcha, Chairperson, Farmers Welfare Board, Bhagirath Rai, Advisor, Land Use & Environment and Babita Limboo, SKM's Nari Shakti Convenor for South District.

Britain adds India to travel 'Red List' after Covid surge

LONDON, 19 APR [PTI]: Britain on Monday imposed its strictest travel curbs on India after an explosion of coronavirus cases there, hours after Prime Minister Boris Johnson called off a trip to New Delhi.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said that effective from 0300 GMT on Friday, India was being added to Britain's "red list" of countries, banning all arrivals from India except for UK or Irish nationals.

Those nationals, as well as foreigners resident in the UK, must pay hefty amounts to stay in a government-approved quarantine hotel for 10 days on their return from red list nations, which include Pakistan and Bangladesh.

"We've made the difficult but vital decision to add India to the red list," Hancock told parliament, after the government had faced days of criticism for holding off the decision, pending Johnson's trip.

The decision was in light of surging case numbers and the emergence of a new Covid-19 variant in India, the health minister said, after the capital New Delhi entered a week-long lockdown.

In the event, the UK and Indian governments earlier Monday called off Johnson's visit, which was set for next

week after already being postponed in January. It would have been Johnson's first major foreign visit since he took power in 2019. "In the light of the current coronavirus situation, Prime Minister Boris Johnson will not be able to travel to India next week," the two governments said in a joint statement.

They said that Johnson and Prime Minister Narendra Modi would instead speak later this month "to agree and launch their ambitious plans for the future partnership between the UK and India".

"They will remain in regular contact beyond this, and look forward to meeting in person later this year."

Johnson's office had last week announced the visit would be shortened. It was originally organised to span three days and set to begin on April 26. It had initially been heralded as an opportunity for Britain to refocus its international trade policy in the wake of Brexit as it pursues a so-called "global Britain" strategy. But spiking coronavirus cases, hospitalisations and deaths in Britain earlier this year led to its delay. Now, surging infections in India -- where officials have recorded five consecutive days of more than 200,000 cases -- have led to its entire cancellation.

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Advisory Note

1. It is for the information of General Public residing on the banks of Teesta River and people going to the Teesta River banks for the purpose of Picnic/Excursions/Rituals etc downstream of Balutar to Rangpo in East Sikkim, not to enter the river waters any day especially after 04:00 PM in the evenings in order to avoid endangering their lives during periods of Power Generation or cause safety issues.

2. Teesta-V Power Station (510 MW) is a hydroelectric plant located Balutar, East Sikkim and generates electricity at full load for a minimum of 3 hours during evening peak demand hours (6 PM to 9 PM) every day utilizing the available water inflow in Teesta river. Around 300 Cumecs of water is discharged in Teesta river from the Power House located at Balutar, East Sikkim continuously during the period. Similarly, in the mornings, Teesta V Power Station generation starts at 4 AM onwards. During such period, which can cause considerable rise in river water level takes place in otherwise dry stretch of Teesta river downstream of Power House stretching from Balutar to Rangpo.

3. In order to warn locals of impending rise in river water level prior to start of generation, Teesta-V Power Station follows established safety protocol of blowing high-decibel sirens/hooters in entire stretch of river from Balutar to Rangpo, before start of generation and intermittently thereafter.

4. General public is therefore requested to pay special attention to the sound of sirens/hooters in the river stretch from Balutar to Rangpo (East & South Sikkim) and desist from any activities in this river stretch during the period of generation for the Power Station and generally avoid any such behavior which may have personal safety issues.

Issued in public interest by
(Sanjay Darbari)
Head of the Power Station
Teesta-V Power Station, Sikkim
03592-247226/247401

Public Notice

Gangtok Smart City Development Limited (GSCDL) is undertaking the work 'Construction of Multi Level Car Park cum Shopping Hub' at old STNM Complex (below NH). The preliminary Drawings of the project is uploaded in our website https://smartcitygangtok.com

Architects, Urban Planners and the General Public are requested to give their valuable feedback and suggestions for improvement of the drawing. Changes that are feasible within the scope of the work shall be incorporate at the time of finalizing the Drawings. However, GSCDL reserves the right to incorporate the changes. Comments and suggestions may be sent by email to ae3smartcity@gmail.com within one month of issue of this public notice, please.

Sd/-
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER.

Arvind Kejriwal says "Main Hoon Na", but migrant workers head home

NEW DELHI, 19 APR [PTI]: Thousands of migrant workers gathered at Anand Vihar ISBT here to catch a bus home, hours after Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced a week-long lockdown and appealed to them with folded hands not to leave Delhi while sounding a word of assurance -- "Main hoon na" (I am here for you).

Police officials said over 5,000 people gathered at Anand Vihar including at ISBT as well as the railway station and the numbers were rising.

Earlier in the day, Mr Kejriwal appealed to the migrant workers to not leave Delhi, saying the short period of lockdown would need not be extended.

"I assure you, the government will take full care of you. Main hun na,

mujh par bharosa rakho (I am here for you, have faith in me)," Mr Kejriwal said, announcing the lockdown from 10 PM tonight to 5 AM next Monday. A senior police officer said after the sudden announcement of the lockdown, thousands of migrant workers thronged the ISBT Anand Vihar area.

The police were also in talks with civil administration officials to either arrange transport for them or shelter homes for their temporary stay, the officer said.

However, migrants feared that the lockdown could be extended as the situation of COVID-19 was deteriorating day by day.

In an online briefing, the chief minister said, "I would like to appeal to them(migrants), with

folded hands, this is a short lockdown of six days. Please do not leave Delhi. You would lose a lot of time, money, and energy in travelling. Stay in Delhi."

Mr Kejriwal said it was not an easy decision to impose lockdown because it hurt the poor people most.

"I understand how people lose their jobs and wages during the lockdown. This is especially difficult for the poor people and daily wage workers," he said.

During the nationwide lockdown last year, a large number of migrant workers from Bihar, UP and other states living in Delhi had moved to their home states, through whatever means available and often on foot.

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

Memo No: 465/PHED/CE

Dated: 16.4.21

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

NIT for the scheme "Augmentation of Gyalshing Water Supply Scheme in West Sikkim".

The Chief Engineer, PHED, on behalf of the Governor of Sikkim, invites tender on Percentages Basis for the above named scheme from the eligible contractors. The details of the tender may be found on the website www.sikkimtender.gov.in.

R.O.No. 27/IPR/Pub/classi./21-22
Date: 19.4.2021

Sd/-
Chief Engineer
PHE Department

Government of Sikkim
Department of Information & Public Relations

"I appeal to everyone to get vaccinated for the safety of oneself and others against COVID-19"
- Ganga Prasad
Governor of Sikkim

Do not believe in rumours being spread about the vaccine

Focus on the 5 fold strategy

Follow COVID-19 appropriate behaviour

GANGTOK

Thankyou Govt. of India for making this possible

I did not hesitate

#SikkimFightsCorona

#VaccineSavesLives

#Unite2FightCorona

Let's come together to make the Hon'ble Prime Minister's initiative "Dawai Bhi Kadai Bhi" successful and beat COVID-19

GANGTOK SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT LIMITED

Sokaythang, Nगतok,
Sikkim – 737102

e-mail: gangtoksmartcity@gmail.com CIN – U9309090WB2017SGC223807
FILE NI. 229/GSCDL/2019-20

Memo NO: 28/GSCDL/2021-22

Dated: 07/04/2021.

PUBLIC NOTICE

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Sd/-
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER.

Passenger Safety

Look under the bonnet also, and also check the tyres and brakes

A person driving to Siliguri recently was flagged down by road labourers to stop while the dozers cleared nor'wester debris from NH10. As the person waited, a mainline taxi bumped into his vehicle from behind. When the person got out to check the damage and find the cause, the apologetic taxi driver explained that his vehicle's brakes were not in top shape. The vehicle had bumped itself to a stop! The damage was not much, but the real worry was the utter disregard for human lives.

The taxi-jeep was loaded to full capacity with 10 passengers on board. And no brakes! It soon transpired that all that the driver could present by way of documents was a year-old General Diary police complaint recording that the documents of the vehicle were lost. As for a driving licence, the driver claimed that he had applied for one in Siliguri and was yet to receive it. What is more, he was not even the actual driver of the said vehicle and was filling in for the regular driver who had decided to take a day off and requisitioned his services for the day! Just about every prescribed rule for passenger vehicles was being flouted in this case. What is frightening is that it was not even a rare aberration as is being discovered by the ongoing checking by the Motor Vehicles Division of the Transport Department.

Little surprise then that in the past year, 2017, there were 198 accidents reported on Sikkim's roads which claimed 68 lives and left 471 injured. This number is lower than the number of accidents reported in 2016, but only marginally so and given the comparatively small pool of vehicles and limited road length, even one accident less can reflect high percentage differential.

Suffice to say that it is time that more earnest efforts to be initiated to address road safety - the pointlessness of the road safety week tokenism [observed in the first week of May] will just not do any more.

It is important to bear in mind that very few of the 180 accidents in 2018, the last year for which authenticated data is available, can be attributed to bad roads or landslides. All the remaining accidents and fatalities were caused by driver error. Here, one may add that the blame for even mechanical failures leading to accidents has to rest with the drivers for having ignored the warning signs or delayed servicing and repairs. One should not be surprised if it transpires that most of the accidents involved vehicles which were not road-worthy, either because of faulty brakes or ineffectually traction due to bald tyres or inept hands on the wheels [a poor driver, after all, makes even the best maintained rides dangerous]. The reason why the opening anecdote was shared is because it is a copy-book illustration of all that is wrong with passenger/road safety in Sikkim. Unfortunately, none of real reasons which are making travelling unsafe for people who opt for jeeps and taxis is being addressed.

This section has often spoken of the need for traffic regulators to focus more on the road worthiness and driving skills than documents and licences. But this aspect continues to remain ignored. Here is a checklist of what could be considered. For one, the State Government needs to ensure that the "T" [Taxi] driving licenses are issued only after proper verification of the applicant's driving skills. If this is done conscientiously, then the government can return more strictly to its policy decision of allowing on people with taxi driving licences issued in Sikkim to drive passenger vehicles here. Each time Motor Vehicle Inspectors or Traffic personnel stop a vehicle for 'document check' they should also inspect the road worthiness of the vehicle [at least the tyres and brakes] and pull the vehicles off the roads until the vehicles in question are brought back to health. A rule, mandatory in all metros now, that all passenger vehicles prominently display the ownership and driver details for all passengers to see clearly should also be considered [This board should also include contact details of agencies to contact in case of rash driving or rude behaviour by drivers]. This will ensure that the regular drivers do not play truant and put the lives of passengers in the hands of unauthorised and potentially unsafe drivers and will also encourage more passengers to complain against dangerous driving. This is important because with the increase in the number of passenger vehicles, too many people with scant respect for traffic rules or human lives are being let loose on the highways.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

Being Skeptical of Sources is a Journalist's Job – but it doesn't always happen when those sources are the police

DANIELLE K. KILGO
theconversation.com

The death of 13-year-old Adam Toledo might well have made international headlines on March 29, 2021 – the day he was shot and killed by a police officer – had the emerging narrative been different.

Instead, early news reports of the incident relied on a police statement which said Toledo died in an "armed confrontation." An image of a gun recovered at the scene was also released. During a bond hearing for the man who had been with Toledo when the chase began, prosecutors said a gun was in Toledo's hand when police shot him dead.

Body camera footage released a full two weeks later now casts doubt on the accuracy of that narrative. A short video clip shows a chase which ends with Toledo turning his body toward the officer, arms raised. There is no gun in his hands when the shot is fired.

The Cook County state's attorney's office has since said the prosecutor "failed to fully inform himself" before speaking. Others go further, saying the prosecutor lied.

Either way, the body camera footage shifted the narrative.

As a scholar who researches media coverage of police and protests, I believe Toledo's death exposes a blind spot in journalism: a tendency to go with the "police said" narrative without outwardly questioning if it is right.

UNRELIABLE SOURCES?

Journalists are responsible for creating the first draft of history, quickly. To do this, the profession has routines and norms that help it produce news in a systematic way. Breaking news reporters often rely on the accounts and statements made by official sources. This often includes the narratives and statements put forward by official sources – politicians, police and official spokespeople.

These are people journalists may work with regularly; they are often more accessible under the pressure of a deadline – especially if a victim's friends and family are hard to reach or less willing to speak to the press. And even if officials are wrong or say something defamatory, a journalist can often report what they say with legal impunity.

All of this gives police an opportunity to shape the initial version of the event – and it gets their version of the story into the public consciousness before victims, families and their supporters are able to.

But often they do so in a way that is incomplete, misleading or presented for strategic reasons. Offi-

cial statements may, intentionally or not, withhold or omit information. In Toledo's case, the original statement given to media on the day of the shooting mentioned that "one armed offender," a "male," fled from police and a "confrontation" took place. "The officer fired his weapon striking the offender in the chest."

There is no mention that, as later emerged, it appears that the gun was tossed and Toledo was raising his hands. The incident report listed Toledo as a "John Doe" and between the ages of 18 and 25 – and thus failed to reveal that Toledo was a child.

Similarly, on May 26, 2020, a day after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the city's police released a statement to media under the subject line "Man Dies After Medical Incident During Police Interaction." It noted the "suspect" had "physically resisted" and died after "suffering medical distress." It does not say that an officer had Floyd pinned to the ground with a knee on his neck for more than nine minutes.

Just months before, in the police incident report documenting the 2020 death of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, officers didn't include crucial details. It listed her injuries as "none" and suggested that there was no forced entry to her building. In fact, a battering ram was used and Taylor was shot multiple times.

And in June 2020, when a 75-year-old man fractured his skull during a protest in Buffalo against police brutality, the initial official response was he "tripped and fell." Video quickly circulated showing he was shoved to the group by police in riot gear.

In the Buffalo case, the police version of the story was quickly and easily countered. It took place in the presence of witnesses, including journalists, some of whom took video. When, in the case of Toledo, the incident is away from the cell phones of bystanders, it can take longer to establish precisely what happened.

THE VICTIM'S STORY

Police do not typically release body camera footage immediately – if it is released at all. Most footage is classified for weeks for internal investigation before becoming accessible to the public.

By that time, the public may have already been fed a narrative about what happened and the backgrounds of those involved.

Journalists have been criticized for being too quick to rely on police to tell the stories of victims. That is why the public tends to know more about the criminal histories of victims and their families, especially soon after an incident, than it does about the histories of the police officers who shot them.

I recently analyzed media coverage of the pro-

tests following the 2018 death of Stephon Clark, who was holding a mobile phone when police shot him in his grandmother's backyard. The people close to Clark, like his family and friends, weren't the key sources providing information about Clark's character in coverage.

Instead, over the six months of news coverage analyzed, news stories most often relied on police accounts and records that profiled Clark in stereotypical and stigmatizing ways. They were helped along by the district attorney, who released personal text messages and internet searches from Clark that detailed relationship difficulties and apparent suicidal thoughts.

'FAILURE OF JOURNALISM'

After presenting incomplete, misleading or downright wrong police reports as fact too often, reporters and editors are now speaking up about the problem. It was notable that journalists were among those most critical of the media response to Toledo's killing.

"This is why journalists must stop reporting law enforcement accounts as fact," tweeted The New York Times' Nikole Hannah-Jones.

Chris Geidner, the executive director of The Appeal, a media site on law and criminal justice, went further: "... any narrative reliant on 'police said' is a failure of journalism. At best, police should be treated as one source for a story – an unreliable narrator in instances like officer shootings – and thus not sufficient to establish the story."

This fits within a broader media reassessment of policies and practices that traditionally misrepresent and inaccurately represent people of color. It includes initiatives to diversify newsrooms that have a long history underrepresenting people of color.

And it comes at a time when the wider public's trust in the police is waning. A Gallup poll in August 2020 found confidence in police had fallen to its lowest levels since the survey began recording the issue in 1993. Just 48% of respondents said they had a great deal of confidence in police. Likewise, trust in the media has hit a new low.

Treating police sources with necessary and appropriate skepticism could provide news audiences with a more complete picture of incidents such as police shootings and disrupt a process that has privileged some voices over others.

And it isn't a radical idea: Questioning and verifying information has always been a part of the journalist's job.

[the writer is John and Elizabeth Bates Cowles Professor of Journalism, Diversity, and Equality, University of Minnesota]

New Business Skills Can Improve Livelihoods Among Poor People. How to avoid the pitfalls

JODY DELICHTE
theconversation.com

Traditionally, there is no word for business among the pastoralist communities of the arid Marsabit County, in northern Kenya. Nor do they have words for any of its most common terms, such as profit. Instead, they have a lexicon associated with a different set of principles: mutual aid, generosity, sharing.

These deeply rooted values have shaped their sense of self and community for generations, determining both individual and collective behaviour.

But this is changing. In recent years, the people in this region, which borders Ethiopia, have started to grapple with a new reality -- that of becoming business people. Aid agencies have started to work with them and help them build more sustainable livelihoods through business. Pastoralists are now increasingly engaging in businesses such as livestock trade and retail trade of small items such as sugar, tea leaves, and washing powder.

Building business skills to improve livelihoods is increasingly being recognised and promoted as a mechanism to lift communities out of extreme poverty. The logic goes that if you give people the tools they need to understand the basics of business, they can become more self-confident, autonomous, resilient, and skilled at turning a profit. In short, to move from survival to success.

So far so good. But the difficulty is that in many survivalist communities the principles of business can clash with the existing values of the community, as I found in my recently published research. My study followed 51 participants of a livelihood improvement programme in Marsabit County from May 2016 to February 2019.

For people with a strong collectivist identity founded on generosity and caring, the idea of selling goods for profit or of saving money for oneself for instance can be hard to implement.

The friction between these two identities can generate both individual frustration and conflict in the community as people struggle to simultaneously fulfil the demands associated with both identities.

For many, becoming a business person is more than a personal jour-

ney towards prosperity. It is a complex process of individual and social identity change. And while this has immense potential to help lift people out of extreme poverty, such a transition has inherent difficulties.



There's greater potential to make it work if prevailing identities are honoured and care is taken to ensure that the entire community is respectfully included.

HELPING PEOPLE FORGE NEW IDENTITIES
Building business skills to improve livelihoods is increasingly recognised as bringing value to the fight against poverty. But it can also set up identity conflict and community-level tension, unless care is taken to address prevailing ways of being and behaving.

Fortunately, identity is not a unitary construct, nor is it static. Part of identity formation is dealing with conflicting ideas and the continued integration of new roles. What's more, this process is critical. My research has shown that the way people respond to this identity conflict will shape what type of business person they become – and, by ex-

pansion, what kind of community they co-construct.

Typically, when the collectivist identity collides with the business people identity, participants choose one of three scenarios.

- Those for whom helping neighbours in need is most important

Those for whom helping neighbours in need is most important

Those for whom helping neighbours in need is most important

FOUR INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS

To ensure greater success in such initiatives, development practitioners need to focus on four elements, which emerged from my research. First, it is important to incorporate the notion of identity into the programme model. Whether intentionally or not, practitioners are helping participants construct new identities through training, mentorship, examples of success, and even through the questions they ask.

Therefore, it is important to think about the types of identities they are helping participants construct (such as the business person identity) or reconstruct (such as the prevailing community member identity).

Second, take time to understand what identities potential participants already have before you start. And how these may shape behaviour on an individual and collective level. What does it mean to be a member of the community, woman or man, mother or father, in that context? What are the important religious or other related beliefs? Is there a strong collectivist or individualist culture at play?

In addition, think about what tensions may arise with the introduction or reinforcement of certain identities.

Third, tailor programmes to address existing identities and potential identity dynamics. This can include building on existing identities. Or it could help participants navigate identity tensions and community resistance to new behaviours and expectations.

Finally, think about how to bring communities up together. Resistance to new behaviours and expectations can be exacerbated when some members of a community receive training and others do not. Community-level learning and enterprises will limit the likelihood of collective resistance to new behaviours and expectations. It also discourages in-group and out-group formation, and community stratification.

[the writer is Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town]

Bengal: BJP candidate's house

attacked

BARRACKPORE (WB), APR 19 (PTI): A BJP candidate's house was attacked with crude bombs in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, police said on Monday.

The house of Sanmoy Bandyopadhyay, BJP's Panihati candidate, was attacked late on Sunday, they said.

The incident happened in the Khardaha police station area where Bandyopadhyay lives, they added.

A person was arrested in connection with the incident, a senior officer of the Barrackpore Police said.

There was no report of any injury to anyone, he said.

Further investigations are underway, he added.

Ladakh records 60 new COVID-19 cases

LEH, APR 19 (PTI): Ladakh recorded 60 new COVID-19 cases on Monday, taking the infection tally to 12,131, an official bulletin said.

The COVID-related death toll in Ladakh stands at 133, while 10,351 people have recovered from the infection since the outbreak of the pandemic last year, it said.

As per the bulletin issued by Directorate of Health Services, 50 new cases were detected in Leh district and 10 in Kargil district.

The bulletin said 78 COVID patients were discharged in Leh and six others in Kargil on Sunday, bringing down the number of active cases in Ladakh to 1,647 1,567 in Leh and 80 in Kargil.

Chairman of the District Disaster Management Authority in Leh, Shrikant Balasaheb Suse, designated Tourist Dak Bungalow situated at Upshi Market here as COVID care centre with immediate effect.

The decision to convert the Tourism department's Dak Bungalow into COVID care centre was taken in view of the surge in the COVID-19 cases, an order issued by Suse said.

Leh had recorded over 1,400 cases of COVID-19 this month alone, with majority of them being migrant labourers who have reached Ladakh in search of jobs.

Suse, who is also Leh's district Magistrate, directed Senior Superintendent of Police, Leh to ensure deployment of security personnel, while chief medical officer was tasked to ensure deployment of medical staff at the new COVID care centre.

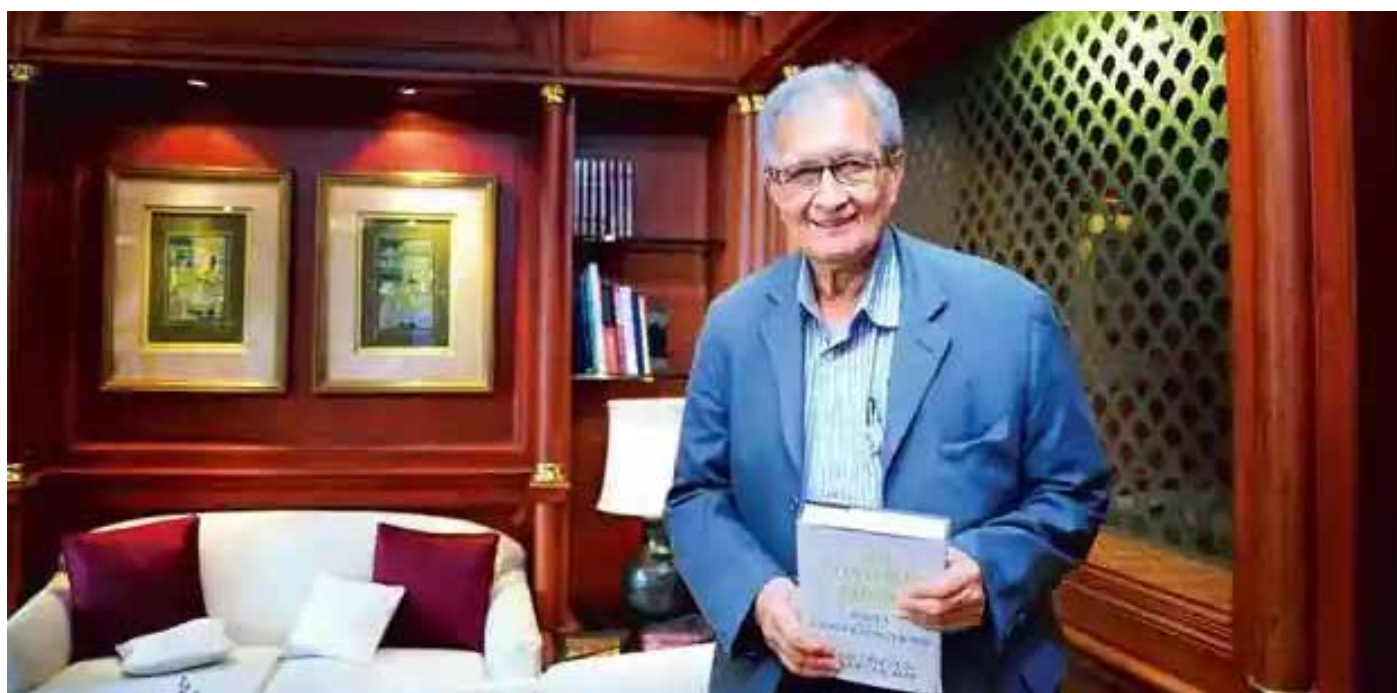
Bengal should not be party to "national degeneration": Amartya Sen

KOLKATA, 19 APR [PTI]: Bengal should not be a party to the "national degeneration" by choosing to be governed by central leaders instead of the local ones as that would strengthen the concentration of power in the hands of those whose record on economic policy and social justice are "seriously defective", Nobel laureate Amartya Sen said.

Lauding the Mamata Banerjee government for its welfare programmes, especially the ones meant for girls, the beneficial expansion of rural infrastructure and assurance of food security, the renowned economist, however, stressed that corruption issues in the state have to be addressed.

In an interview with PTI, Sen rued the fact that identity politics has reared its ugly head in Bengal's political landscape and blamed the flag-bearers of Hindutva for sharpening the communal divisions something that Bengali luminaries -- from Rabindranath Tagore to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose -- had "worked hard to replace with a peaceful understanding".

"If Bengal ends up being governed by central rulers, not local leaders, it will vastly strengthen the concentration of power in India in the hands of those whose conception of minority rights is extremely limited and whose record on economic policy and social justice seems seriously defective.



tive.

"Bengal should not have to be a party to that national degeneration," Mr Sen said when asked whether the outcome of the assembly elections will have a bearing on national politics.

He emphasised that Bengal wants unity, not divisions.

"It is not surprising that identity issues will tend to come into electoral propaganda. However, the focus has often been much narrower than the Indian identity or the Bengali identity. It has gone further than Bengali sub-nationalism.

"The fanning of the dangerous flames of communal divisions has not occurred as

strongly in Bengal since 1946, as it is happening now."

Mr Sen, a fierce critic of the Narendra Modi government, further said, "What Mahatma Gandhi did in the 1940s can be undone with a huge cost and sacrifice in Bengal, and this evil negation has unfortunately received much encouragement in this election. Bengal wants unity, not divisions -- as Gandhiji so clearly explained."

Asked to comment on the "insider-outsider" debate launched by the TMC, Sen said it is "certainly a bad thing" as Bengal has had, historically, been tolerant to outsiders.

"There have never been movements against, say, Tamil

or Malayali immigration into Bengal, unlike what happened in, say, Bombay. It is always unfortunate if anti-outsider criticisms have to be used -- it is certainly a bad thing," he said.

In the same breath, Mr Sen slammed the BJP for "trying to portray Bengali Muslims as less deserving while deriving their strength from the support of Hindu activists who are not originally from Bengal".

"When one of the major political contenders in the electoral battles portrays a part of the "insider" population of Bengal - in particular, Bengali Muslims - as less deserving of support, while

deriving their strength from the support of Hindu activists coming originally from outside Bengal, the dividing lines are hard to be kept pure," he asserted.

The "outsider-insider" issue demands a fuller political analysis, and it is important to understand that "excluding resident outsiders is always a bad thing, but excluding resident insiders is far more illegitimate", Mr Sen explained.

"The Mamata Banerjee government has taken a number of good initiatives, including the launch of its welfare programmes, especially the ones for girls. Also, the beneficial expansion of rural infrastructure (including much-

needed rural roads), and very importantly a workable system of food security are worth appreciation," the Nobel winner said.

He, however, pointed out that there remained gaps in governance and that have to be taken care of for the overall advancement of the state.

"The fact that Bengali children, despite their families having smaller incomes than, say, Gujarati families, seem to have better health conditions than Gujarati children is a tribute to the governance in Bengal. But there are gaps too that need to be addressed, including corruption check," he insisted.

Referring to the enormous national attention that West Bengal polls have gathered, Mr Sen said, "The interest seems to be arising from rather narrow political concerns, particularly the conviction of the BJP that it would win the state".

Noting that "the BJP-rule has not been particularly good for the country, with its huge neglect of the poor, mistreatment of minorities, messing up of the economy and mishandling of the COVID-19 crisis", Mr Sen said there are reasons for scrutinising sharply the priorities of the ruling party in India that makes them so single-mindedly concerned about winning the elections in West Bengal.

In Nepal, lightning strikes getting deadlier each year as govt remains unprepared

CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL KATHMANDU, 19 APR [KATHMANDUPOST]: On Thursday, an elderly woman at Shadananda Municipality in Bhojpur was critically injured by a lightning strike. The 60-year-old succumbed to her injuries at a local health facility.

On the same day, a nine-year-old girl from Asine village of Chhathar Rural Municipality-6 in Terathum also died after being hit by lightning.

On Friday, a man in his forties was struck by a lightning bolt at Tarakhola Rural Municipality in Baglung district.

These are the three casualties reported by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority in the period of 24-hours between Thursday and Friday.

The Authority also reported several lightning-related incidents in different parts of the country including the Kathmandu Valley.

Lightning is one of the deadliest natural disasters in Nepal. Every year, several dozens of people are killed by lightning strikes during the pre-monsoon season.

A study published earlier this month has shown that 1,927 people lost their lives and 20,569 others were affected— injuries or property damage — to lightning strikes in Nepal between 1971 and 2019.

The findings of the study published in Weather, Climate and Society, a journal published by the American Meteorological Society, analysed lightning fatality events, fatality rates, and economic loss from 1971 to 2019, relying on data collected from the UN's DesInventar dataset and the Disaster Risk Reduction portal of the Nepal government.

The analysis revealed that the overall countrywide lightning fatality rate of the entire period was 1.77 per million per year.

"This means, in every million people, there are two deaths attributed to lightning in the country," said Basanta Raj Adhikari, the researcher involved in the study.

The report found that the district lightning fatality rates range from 0.10 to 4.83 per million people per year. The fatality rate was high in Dolakha district (4.83) fol-

lowed by Okhaldhunga (4.72), Ramechhap (4.69), Nuwakot (4.62), and Makawanpur (4.62). Likewise, the fatality rates were lower in Baitadi (0.10), Dang (0.16), Kathmandu (0.24), and Surkhet (0.51).

The fatality rate in Dolakha district was the highest where the population is relatively small (0.2 million). With 94 deaths, the largest number recorded during the period, Makwanpur district was the most affected district in Nepal. However, Bhaktapur district has the highest fatality density (0.067).

In 2019 alone, a total of 2,884 people were affected with a loss of over \$110,00, and the fatality was the highest (94) in reported lightning events since 1971.

The latest data with the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority showed at least 70 people and 717 cattle were killed in 247 lightning incidents in the last one year (April 13, 2020 to April 13, 2021). Property losses due to lightning also totalled over Rs 7.2 million.

"In 2019, casualties due to thunder strikes were the highest for the year," said Adhikari, an engineering geologist who is also an assistant professor at the TU's Institute of Engineering, Pulchowk.

Government data show that around 100 people lost their lives every year in lightning strikes during the past decade. Casualties due to lightning/thunder strikes in Nepal have often surpassed that of other disasters like landslides and floods.

Seven years' data between 2011/12 and 2018/19 have attributed 773 deaths and 1,695 injuries to thunder strikes, making the phenomenon the second deadliest catastrophe in the country after the 2015 earthquakes that killed nearly 9,000 people.

During the seven-year period, other disasters like landslides and floods claimed 730 and 665 lives, respectively.

Despite such devastation, lightning/thunderbolt has received less attention from the state and the country remains ill-prepared to minimise the associated losses.

"The reason behind lightning disasters, despite being a leading hazard, not getting adequate at-

tention is because it doesn't cause mass casualties like other disasters," said Adhikari. "While floods and landslides can engulf entire villages, leaving behind trails of destruction, lightning kills people by ones and twos — for example, a farmer working in the field. Although it claims a significant number of lives, lightning occurs in isolated and small patches hence it is not in the priority of the authorities."

According to Adhikari, the reporting of lightning incidents and fatalities due to thunder strikes have increased over the years with better access to communication technology. Yet, the parallel development has not been witnessed in the early warning system and preparedness for preventing damages.

"Our level of preparedness against lightning strikes through early warning system is almost nothing," said Adhikari. "All we have is nine lightning detection systems at different airports."

In 2017, the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology has installed lightning detection network sensors at nine places: Tribhuvan International Airport, Tumglintar Airport, Biratnagar Airport, Simara Airport, Bhairahawa Airport, Pokhara Airport, Nepalgunj Airport, Surkhet Airport, and Attariya in Kailali district. This network collects lightning data, location, and time, which are very useful for the analysis of past events and future possibilities.

However, these stations have not been of full assistance in lack of adequate data on thunder strikes across the country.

"We could provide a trend analysis of lightning incidents in the country only when we have enough historical data. As it has been only two years since these stations were installed, we do not have enough data for such analysis," said Bikram Shrestha Zoowa, an information officer with the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology.

"We have just started collecting lightning data. Hopefully, we can do a trend analysis and also make predictions based on the data in the next few years."

Night curfew in Manipur from 7 pm to 5 am



IMPHAL, APR 19 (PTI): The Manipur government has decided to impose night curfew in the state from 7 pm to 5 am in view of the rise of COVID-19 cases, an official said.

The order issued by chief secretary Rajesh Kumar said the consultative committee of COVID-19 chaired by Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Sunday decided that night curfew will

be imposed in the state from 7 pm to 5 am in view of the rapid rise in COVID-19 cases in the country.

The order did not specify for how many days the night curfew will be in force.

It said media persons and those engaged in telecom services and essential services will be exempted from the curfew.

The meeting also decided to ban all gath-

erings with immediate effect except unavoidable gatherings like funerals, marriages. Such gatherings will be strictly limited to 20 persons, with COVID appropriate behaviour like wearing of face mask to be ensured by the host.

The order also said deputy commissioners and state police should enforce COVID appropriate behaviour and impose penalty on vi-

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Super League clubs tell FIFA legal action already started

LONDON (AP): The 12 European clubs pursuing a Super League have told the leaders of FIFA and UEFA that legal action is already being pursued to stop them from action intended to thwart the launch of the breakaway competition, according to a letter obtained Monday by The Associated Press. The letter was sent by the group of English, Spanish and Italian clubs to FIFA President Gianni Infantino and UEFA counterpart Aleksander Ceferin saying the Super League has already been underwritten by funding of 4 billion euros (\$5.5 billion) from a financial institution.

UEFA warned the Super League clubs, including Barcelona, Real Madrid, Juventus and Manchester United, after leaks of their plans on Sunday that legal action would be taken against rebel clubs and saying they would be barred from existing domestic competitions like La Liga in Spain and the Premier League in England and international competitions.

"We are concerned that FIFA and UEFA may respond to this invitation letter by seeking to take punitive measures to exclude any participating club or player from their respective competitions," the Super League clubs wrote to Infantino and Ceferin "Your formal statement does, however, compel us to take protective steps to secure ourselves against such an adverse reaction, which would not only jeopardize the funding commitment under the Grant but, significantly, would be unlawful. For this reason, SLCo (Super League Company) has filed a motion before the relevant courts in order to ensure the seamless establishment and operation of the Competition in accordance with applicable laws."

The courts were not named.

"It is our duty, as SLCo's board members, to ensure that all reasonable actions available to protect the interests of the Competition and our stakeholders are duly taken, given the irreparable damage that would be suffered if, for any reason, we were deprived of the opportunity to form promptly the Competition and distribute the proceeds of the Grant," the Super League letter continued. The Super League intends to launch a 20-team competition with 15 founding members but only 12 have currently signed up. They are also Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City and Tottenham from England. Atletico Madrid and Milan rivals AC and AC are also part of the plan.

The breakaway was launched just as UEFA, which runs European football, thought it had agreement on an expansion of the Champions League from 2024. Now, the same officials who backed the plans have decided to go it alone while claiming the existing competitions could remain — despite losing their most successful teams, including record 13-time European champion Real Madrid and six-time winner Liverpool.

"The Competition is to be played alongside existing domestic league and cup competitions, which are a key part of European football's competitive fabric," reads the Super League letter to Infantino and Ceferin. "We do not seek to replace the UEFA's Champions League or the Europa League but to compete with and exist alongside those tournaments."

I was worried about my technique after getting dropped in Australia: Prithvi Shaw

MUMBAI, APR 19 (PTI): The promising Prithvi Shaw says he had started "worrying" about his technique after being dropped in Australia before roaring back to form in domestic cricket, thanks to a few technical changes he made in his game.

Shaw, 21, was dropped after his twin failures in the opening Test at Adelaide last December.

However, the Mumbai batsman dominated the Vijay Hazare Trophy like no other in the history of the tournament, amassing a whopping 827 runs in eight matches. Then, Shaw made a blistering 72 off 38 balls in Delhi Capitals' first match of the season against Chennai Super Kings.

"After getting dropped from the Test side after the first Test in Australia, I started worrying about my technique on why I was getting bowled. Even if it was a minor mistake, I wanted to minimize that. I started working on it there itself," said Shaw after Delhi Capitals' win over Punjab Kings on Sunday night. He smashed 32 off just 17 balls against Punjab Kings, hitting three fours and two sixes.

"I worked on my initial movement -- getting more stable and more ready before the bowler has bowled. "After returning from Australia, I worked with my coach Prashant Shetty sir and also Pravin Amre sir before going to the Vijay Hazare Trophy, and it worked quite well. I played my natural game in Vijay Hazare Trophy, but I made a small technical change. After that, it's going well."

"I didn't get a lot of practice for IPL, the T20 format. But I got good practice sessions with Ricky Ponting sir, Pravin Amre sir and Prashant Shetty sir," he added. The talented batsman also said that Delhi Capitals head coach Ponting has given him the freedom to express himself.

"He (Ponting) just says go there and play freely without thinking a lot of things. Partnerships are quite important in the first six overs. "We (him and Shikhar Dhawan) do plan about all this (having targets and looking at the scoreboard) before we go to bat."

Alex Palou scores 1st career IndyCar win in Ganassi debut

BIRMINGHAM, ALA. (AP): Fernando Alonso is winless so far this season in Formula One. Same with Carlos Sainz.

Over in IndyCar, though, Alex Palou scored a victory for Spain.

Palou picked up his first career win — in his first race with Chip Ganassi Racing — by holding off a pair of series champions in Sunday's season-opening race at Barber Motorsports Park. The affable 24-year-old raised his fists in the air when he realized he'd reached victory lane before his fellow countrymen, who both raced 5,000 miles away in Italy earlier Sunday.

Palou is only the second Spaniard to win in the IndyCar Series, joining Oriol Servia, who won in 2005 at Montreal.

"It's just amazing but I think it was part of the job," he said. "When you are part of a big team and a successful team like Chip Ganassi, they give you all the tools. You have everything you need to win, and that's why you see so many successful drivers."

Palou then vowed to find the best fried chicken in Alabama to celebrate his achievement.

"I think that 80% of the drivers will tell you that after a race we need something that is not good for our body and that's what I'm going to take tonight if I can, fried chicken. And fries. Lots of fries," he said.

Palou used a two-stop strategy on the picturesque permanent road course to take control of the race but still had to hold off hard-charging Will Power and Ganassi teammate Scott Dixon over the closing laps. He beat Power by .4016 seconds to claim his first win in his first race driving for the



storied Ganassi organization.

Dixon, the six-time and reigning IndyCar champion, finished third and was followed by pole-sitter Pato O'Ward, who was on a three-stop strategy.

Palou was the quieter off-season signing of the Ganassi organization, which also added seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson to the four-car lineup. But Ganassi also took a gamble on Palou, who had spent one season driving for Dale Coyne Racing with one podium finish and one lap led all year.

He'd raced in Japan and Europe previously but introduced himself to Ganassi last August at the Indianapolis 500 in hopes of landing a job with an elite team.

"One of the dreams was to come here to the U.S. and once you are in the U.S. you want to be more and you want to be competitive, and to be competitive I wanted to be part of Chip," Palou said. "I actually in-

troduced myself to Chip at the Indy 500 because I wanted to be part of that team. I saw the spirit of the team. To be part of Chip Ganassi is 50 percent of another dream, which is to become a champion."

Ganassi had been impressed through preseason testing and warned Palou would be a force this season.

"We did some testing over the winter and he was quick all day long at the tests, at one test he was quicker than Dixon," Ganassi said. "So we knew the potential was there but you don't know where you are relative to other teams."

Ganassi finished with three drivers in the top eight as Marcus Ericsson finished eighth, and Dixon has enjoyed this young new teammate who won't stop following him around both at the shop and at the race track.

"He's actually one of those really nice guys. There has to be some underlying thing go-

ing on there somewhere. None of us have found it yet," Dixon said. "It's great to see somebody that's easy to work with."

"Some drivers that we all get to work with can be somewhat difficult, but he is extremely willing and wanting to learn, asks a lot of questions, sends a lot of text messages to try and just do a better job. He's been a real pleasure."

Still most of the attention leading into the race was on the stacked rookie class of Johnson, former Formula One driver Romain Grosjean and three-time and defending Australian Supercars champion Scott McLaughlin.

Johnson, who at 45 is older than Palou's father, is learning every session and taking small gains. He celebrated not qualifying last on Saturday and was satisfied with his 19th-place finish Sunday.

Johnson had a developing blister on his hand after the race, avoided a first-lap crash and recovered from an early

spin. "Just a ton of learning experiences throughout the day," Johnson said. "I just can't say too many times how different this is and how specialized this craft is."

Grosjean, in his first race since a fiery November crash in Bahrain, finished 10th for Dale Coyne Racing. McLaughlin was 14th for Team Penske.

Three-time Barber winner Josef Newgarden triggered an uncharacteristic opening-lap crash that collected Colton Herta and Ryan Hunter-Reay, a pair of Andretti Autosport championship contenders, as well as Felix Rosenqvist.

Rosenqvist, who briefly went airborne, also crashed in practice and had his qualifying lap disqualified, but was able to get his car back on track. Herta, Newgarden and Hunter-Reay were done without completing a single lap.

"I got loose coming over the hill and then touched the grass. I think once I touched the grass I'm basically sideways," said Newgarden, the two-time series champion who was runner-up last season. "I feel really bad for anyone who got involved in that. Obviously my mess created a bigger mess, so any of the cars that got involved I'm really sorry because it was us that tipped it off."

Herta, who crashed during Saturday practice, wasn't concerned about the hit he'd take in the championship fight.

"This sucks, man, and I'm ready to get out of here," Herta said. "It's such a competitive year and guys are going to have bad races and guys aren't going to do well everywhere. It obviously sucks for us because now we're on the back foot but we have plenty of races left to get back in it."

European soccer split as 12 clubs launch breakaway league

LONDON, APR 19 (AP): A group of 12 elite English, Spanish and Italian clubs dramatically split European soccer by announcing the formation of a largely-closed Super League.

They are leaving the existing UEFA-run Champions League structure despite warnings they could be kicked out of their domestic competitions and face legal action.

The seismic move to shake up the world's biggest sport is partly engineered by the American owners of Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester United who also run U.S. franchises in closed leagues a model they are trying to replicate in Europe.

The power-play came after the rebel clubs reneged on a promise on Friday to back the plan by UEFA European football's governing body to expand the Champions League beginning in 2024.

The deal was designed to appease their wishes for more games, seemingly because they couldn't control the sale of rights to the existing competition.

The Super League plan was first leaked in January but re-emerged this weekend.

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez would be the founding chairman of the SL, which said it "intended to commence as soon as practicable" as a 20-team competition playing in midweek like the current Champions League and Europa League.

"We will help football at every level and take it to its rightful place in the world," Perez said in a statement.

"Football is the only global sport in the world with more than four billion fans and our responsibility as big clubs is to respond to their desires."

No evidence was presented that supporters want a Super League. Fan groups across Europe last week criticized even the current Champions League expansion plan as a "power grab."

Only 12 clubs have signed up for now with none from France or Germany but the SL hopes for three more as permanent members.

Barcelona and Atletico Madrid are the other founding members, along with Juventus, AC Milan and Inter Milan. Five slots would be left open to be determined each year based on the previous season's results.

UEFA warned clubs that joining the cynical project" based on self-interest would see them banned from playing in any other competition domestic, European or global. It said their players could be denied the opportunity to represent their national teams.

The statement was issued jointly with the leagues and national governing bodies from England, Spain and Italy.

England has the most clubs with the six including Chelsea and Manchester City, who are due to contest a Champions League semi-finals this month.

Also included is Tottenham, which is outside of the Premier League's top four to qualify for the Champions League next season.

"By bringing together the world's greatest clubs and players to play each other throughout the season, the Super League will open a new chapter for European football, ensuring world-class competition and facilities, and increased financial support for the wider football pyramid," said Joel Glazer, co-owner of Manchester United and SL vice chairman.

Another vice chairman of the

new competition would be Andrea Agnelli who on Sunday night quit his role as chairman of the European Club Association, which was working with UEFA on enlarging the Champions League to 36 teams.

Agnelli also resigned as a member of the executive committee of UEFA rupturing his previously-close friendship with the governing body's president, Aleksander Ceferin.

The UEFA leader has been determined not to grant more control of the sale of television and commercial rights to the clubs.

"We have come together at this critical moment," Agnelli said, enabling European competition to be transformed, putting the game we love on a sustainable footing for the long-term future, substantially increasing solidarity, and giving fans and amateur players a regular flow of headline fixtures."

The rebel clubs are all members of the ECA which has a working agreement with UEFA, signed in 2019, which commits all its members to take part in and respect the Champions League and other European competitions through the 2023-24 season.

While FIFA issued a statement in January warning that players in a Super League could be banned from the World Cup, the world governing body has not denied that its president, Gianni Infantino, has been involved in the breakaway talks with officials, including Real Madrid's Perez.

"FIFA can only express its disapproval to a closed European breakaway league' outside of the international football structures," the world body said in a statement on Sunday while not answering questions about any role by Infantino.

De Villiers is on a different level, South Africa you need this man: Yohan Blake



NEW DELHI, APR 19 (PTI): A cricket enthusiast, Jamaica's star sprinter Yohan Blake wants AB de Villiers to come out of international retirement and represent the South African national team in its upcoming assignments, including the T20 World Cup.

De Villiers himself is keen to play the T20 World Cup in India later this year, and is supposed to discuss the subject with national team head coach Mark Boucher towards the end of the IPL. "Wow de Villiers is on a different level. South Africa come on you need this man," Blake tweeted after the versatile South African's breathtaking innings in the IPL in Chennai on Sunday.

Olympic silver medalist Blake, who is also the youngest 100m world champion, had earlier expressed his desire to play for Royal Challengers Bangalore because of Virat Kohli and de Villiers' presence in the side.

"We are lined up to have a chat sometime during the IPL. But yes, we've been talking about it already," de Villiers, who retired from international cricket in May

2018, said after leading the Royal Challengers Bangalore to victory over the Kolkata Knight Riders.

The 37-year-old added, "If there's no space for me, so be it. If I can slot in there, it will be fantastic if all those things fall in place. Waiting for (the chat with) Boucher towards the end of the IPL, and we will then plan accordingly."

Recently, after South Africa's 3-1 T20I series defeat to Pakistan, Boucher said he had spoken to de Villiers before the IPL on a possible comeback.

"I did chat to him before he went to the IPL," Boucher had said.

"The conversation is still very much open. AB being the person he is, he wanted to perform very well at the IPL, to prove to himself and everyone else that he is still a very key figure in world cricket and could dominate at that level," Boucher had said.

In May 2018, de Villiers had announced his retirement from international cricket. He had played 114 Tests, 228 ODIs and 78 T20Is before announcing his surprise retirement.

Australia-New Zealand travel bubble opens with joy, tears

WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND (AP): As the passengers walked a little dazed through the airport gates, they were embraced one after another by family members who rushed forward and dissolved into tears.

Elation and relief marked the opening of a long-anticipated travel bubble between Australia and New Zealand at the Wellington Airport on Monday. Children held balloons and banners and Indigenous Maori performers welcomed the arrivals home with songs.

The start of quarantine-free travel was a long time coming for families who have been separated by the coronavirus pandemic as well as to struggling tourist operators. It marked the first, tentative steps toward what both countries hope will become a gradual reopening to the rest of the world.

Danny Mather was overcome to see his pregnant daughter Kristy and his baby grandson for the first time in 15 months after they flew in from Sydney for a visit on the first flight after the bubble opened. What did they say to each other?

"Not a thing," he said, laughing. They just hugged. "It's just so good to see her and I'm just so happy to have her back."

Kristy Mather said it was overwhelming to be reunited with her family and it was amazing the bubble had opened. "I



wished it had happened earlier, but it's happened now," she said. "I just wanted to get on that first flight because you never know, it may go south. Let's hope it sticks around."

Danny Mather said he wanted to keep New Zealand safe from the virus but also thought the time was right to open the bubble.

The idea of a travel bubble between Australia and New Zealand had been talked about for months but faced setbacks because of several small virus outbreaks in both countries, which were eventually stamped out.

To mark the occasion, Wellington Airport painted an enormous welcome sign near its main runway and Air New Zealand ordered some 24,000 bottles of

sparkling wine, offering a complimentary glass to adult passengers.

Air New Zealand's Chief Operating Officer Carrie Hurihanganui said the carrier had previously been running just two or three flights a day between the two countries but that jumped to 30 flights on Monday carrying 5,200 passengers.

She said the day marked a turning point and people were excited.

"You can feel it at the airport and see it on people's faces," she said.

The leaders of both countries welcomed the bubble, saying it was a world-leading arrangement because it aimed to both open borders and keep the virus from spreading.

"Today's milestone is a win-win for Australians and New Zealanders, boosting our economies

while keeping our people safe," Australian Prime Scott Morrison said. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said her country was welcoming the new arrivals.

"The bubble marks a significant step in both countries' reconnection with the world and it's one we should all take a moment to be very proud of," she said.

Travelers who lined up at Sydney and Melbourne airports early Monday said they were excited or relieved to finally fly to New Zealand after more than a year. Some were visiting family and friends, while others were attending funerals.

Both countries have managed to keep out the virus by putting up barriers to the outside world, including strict quarantine requirements for travelers returning from

other countries where the virus is rampant.

"They did very well with the precautions and everything, better than all the world. Everywhere else cannot go anywhere safely," said Ameera Elmasry, who was at the Wellington airport to greet her son Shady Osman, a doctor who she hadn't seen in 16 months. "It's very good what's happened now."

Australia had previously allowed New Zealanders to arrive without going into quarantine but New Zealand had taken a more cautious approach, requiring travelers from Australia complete a quarantine.

The start of the bubble comes ahead of the New Zealand ski season and is welcome news for many tourist towns, including the ski resort of Queenstown.

Japan journalist arrested in Myanmar, govt asks for release

TOKYO, APR 19 (AP): Japan's government said on Monday it is asking Myanmar to release a Japanese journalist who was arrested by security forces in its largest city of Yangon the previous day.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato told reporters Monday that his government is asking Myanmar authorities to explain the arrest and provide other details while asking for his release as soon as possible.

He did not identify the detainee, but Japanese media identified him as Yuki Kitazumi, a former Nikkei business newspaper reporter currently based in Yangon as a freelance journalist.

We will continue ask-

ing the Myanmar side for his early release, while doing our utmost for the protection of the Japanese citizens in that country, Kato said. Japan's NHK public television quoted witnesses as saying that they saw Kitazumi being arrested and taken from his home.

Kitazumi had been detained briefly in late February by police while covering pro-democracy protests in Myanmar, where the military ousted the elected government February 1.

Japan has stepped up its criticism of Myanmar's deadly crackdown on opposition but has taken a milder approach than the United States and some other coun-

tries that imposed sanctions against members of the military junta. On Saturday, the junta released more than 23,000 prisoners to mark the traditional new year's holiday. At least three had been political prisoners, but it wasn't immediately clear if any activists detained during the post-coup crackdown had been freed.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors casualties and arrests, government forces have killed at least 728 protesters and bystanders since the takeover. The group says 3,141 people, including ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, are in detention.

Sale of Chinese painting shows art value rising in pandemic

HONG KONG (AP): A Chinese painting from 1924 is expected to fetch at least \$45 million in an auction in Hong Kong, as collectors' appetite for art continues to rise even amid economic uncertainty brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

The painting by influential Chinese modern artist Xu Beihong depicts a slave hiding in a cave and a lion. It is based thematically from ancient Roman mythology and Aesop's Fables, according to Christie's auction house, which unveiled the painting Monday.

Xu frequently uses the lion in his work to exemplify his faith in the rise of the Chinese nation. The lion in the painting is wounded, but remains dignified, righteous and proud – a symbol of the Chinese spirit, the auction house said.

The "Slave and Lion" painting is considered a groundbreaking work

that inspired Xu's later paintings and one of the most important oil paintings in Chinese art history.

"Xu Beihong himself is one of the most important modern artist in China who has influenced generations of painters and artists," said Francis Belin, President of Christie's in Asia Pacific. "That kind of work and that kind of size, and that kind of prestige, does not come to the market very often."

The painting is estimated to fetch between \$45 million to \$58 million in a single-lot auction on May 24.

Belin said there is a diverse appetite for modern and contemporary masterpieces and the market is expected to remain strong.

Last year, a 700-year-old Chinese painted scroll titled "Five Drunken Princes Returning on Horseback" from the Yuan Dynasty fetched \$41.8 million at a Sotheby's auction in Hong Kong.

Wasn't too stressed about low scores, stuck to what worked in 2020: Mayank

MUMBAI, APR 19 (PTI): Back in form with a scintillating half-century, Punjab Kings' Mayank Agarwal says he wasn't too stressed about not firing in the first couple of IPL matches and tried to stick to the things that worked for him in the last edition.

Mayank, who had amassed 424 runs in the last season in the UAE, had scored 14 and 0 against Rajasthan Royals and Chennai Super Kings to make a dismal start to the ongoing season.

However, the 30-year-old from Bangalore found his touch on

Sunday as he smashed a sizzling 36-ball 69 to help Punjab post 195 for four against Delhi Capitals. "I wasn't thinking too much, I planned to do and keep the midset that worked for me last year. I thought last match I had a good ball, I didn't want to stress too much about it and wanting to look forward and so stuck to what worked for me," he said during a virtual press-conference.

"I was batting well in the nets, I was getting into good positions, it was about holding shape and I don't want to live in the previous games and I am happy how I batted."

The total, however, didn't prove enough as last year's runners-up Delhi Capitals romped home in 18.2 overs, riding on opener Shikhar Dhawan's 49-ball 92.

"I thought it was a good total. It wasn't as easy in the first innings and I thought dew played a factor coming in the second innings," Mayank said.

"I thought Delhi Capitals batted exceedingly well, also there was a dew factor. Credited to Delhi bowlers how they executed after the 12 overs, they went into death bowling and executed it beautifully."

Israeli police clash with Palestinian crowd in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, APR 19 (AP): Israeli police clashed with hundreds of Palestinian protesters outside Jerusalem's Old City, firing stun grenades and a water cannon to disperse the crowd, Israeli media said.

Similar clashes have occurred nightly since the Muslim holy month of Ramadan began last week. Palestinians say they typically gather on the stairs outside the Old City's Damascus Gate each evening during Ramadan but that this year Israeli police put up barriers to keep away the crowds.

The move has angered Muslims who like to meet at the plaza to pass the Ramadan nights after the daily dawn-to-dusk fast ends. Police accuse the crowds of disorderly conduct and throwing stones at security forces.

Israel's public broadcaster Kan showed videos of large crowds clashing with police, who used stun grenades and sprayed water to disperse the gathering. Police said they had made at least three arrests, and the Palestinian Red Crescent medical service said four people were injured in the clashes. There were no immediate details on their conditions.

Israeli police also reported clashes with Arab crowds in Jaffa, on the southern edge of Tel Aviv. Police said crowds threw stones at police, slightly injuring two officers.

Biden pressed on emissions goal as climate summit nears

WASHINGTON, APR 19 (AP): When President Joe Biden convenes a virtual climate summit on Thursday, he faces a vexing task: how to put forward a nonbinding but symbolic goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that will have a tangible impact not only on climate change efforts in the US but throughout the world.

The emissions target, eagerly awaited by all sides of the climate debate, will signal how aggressively Biden wants to move on climate change, a divisive and expensive issue that has riled Republicans to complain about job-killing government overreach even as some on the left worry Biden has not gone far enough to address a profound threat to the planet.

The climate crisis poses a complex political challenge for Biden, since the problem is harder to see and far more difficult to produce measurable results on than either the pandemic relief package or the infrastructure bill. The target Biden chooses is setting the tone for the level of ambition and the pace of emission reductions over the next decade, said Kate Larsen, a former White House adviser who helped develop President Barack Obama's climate action plan.

The number has to be achievable by 2030 but aggressive enough to satisfy scientists and advocates who call the coming decade a crucial, make-or-break moment for slowing climate change, Larsen and other experts said.

Scientists, environmental groups and even business leaders are calling on Biden to set a target that would cut US greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

The 50 per cent target, which most experts consider a likely outcome of intense deliberations underway at the White House, would

nearly double the nation's previous commitment and require dramatic changes in the power and transportation sectors, including significant increases in renewable energy such as wind and solar power and steep cuts in emissions from fossil fuels such as coal and oil. Anything short of that goal could undermine Biden's promise to prevent temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, experts say, while likely stirring up sharp criticism from international allies and Biden's own supporters.

The target is significant, not just as a visible goal for the US to achieve after four years of climate inaction under President Donald Trump, but also for leveraging other countries,' Larsen said.

That helps domestically in the battle that comes after, which is implementing policies to achieve that target. We can make a better case politically at home if other countries are acting at the same level of ambition as the US? The 2030 goal, known as a Nationally Determined Contribution, or NDC, is a key part of the Paris climate agreement, which Biden rejoined on his first day in office. It's also an important marker as Biden moves toward his ultimate goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Clearly the science demands at least 50% in reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, said Jake Schmidt, a climate expert at the Natural Resources Defense Council, a leading environmental group.

The 50% target is ambitious, but it is achievable,' he said in an interview. It's also a good climate message, he said: People know what 50% means it's half.'

Whatever target Biden picks, the climate summit itself proves the U.S. is back in rejoining the international effort? to address climate change, said Larsen, now

a director at the Rhodium Group, an independent research firm. The summit is the starting gun for climate diplomacy after a four-year hiatus under Trump, she said. John Kerry, Biden's climate envoy, has been pressing global leaders in person and online ahead of the summit for commitments and alliances on climate efforts.

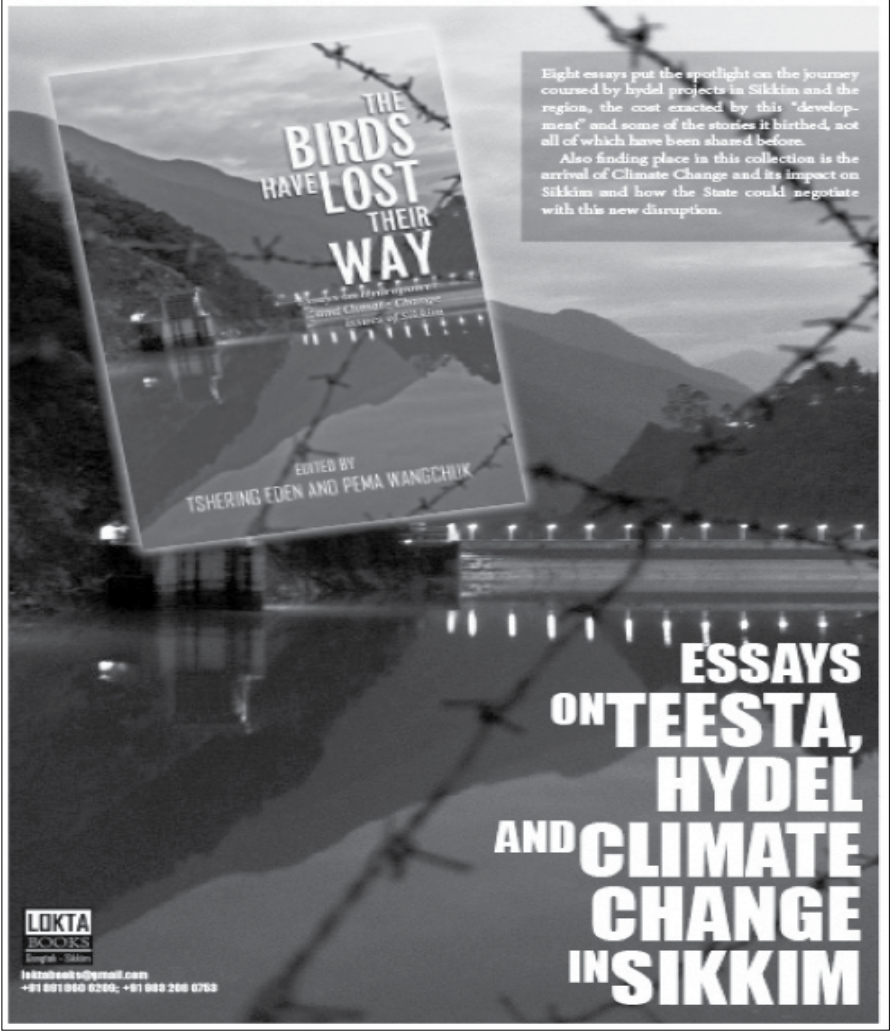
Nathaniel Keohane, another former Obama White House adviser and now a vice president at the Environmental Defense Fund, said experts have coalesced around the need to reduce emissions by at least 50 per cent by 2030.

The number has to start with 5, he said, adding, We've done the math. We need at least 50%.'

The 2030 target is just one in a sometimes overlapping set of goals that Biden has outlined on climate. He also has said he expects to adopt a clean energy standard that would make electricity carbon-free by 2035, along with the wider goal of net-zero carbon emissions economy-wide by 2050.

Biden's climate adviser, Gina McCarthy, acknowledged that the sheer volume of numbers can be confusing. At a forum last week, she and former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg said climate activists should focus on actions in the next decade. Let's stop talking about 2050,' said McCarthy, who is leading White House efforts to develop U.S. climate commitments for 2030. Bloomberg, 79, was even more blunt: 2050 is a good number for people who give speeches, but I don't know anyone giving those speeches who's going to be alive in 2050."

Some Republican lawmakers call the focus on reducing US emissions counter-productive, saying Biden's plan would raise energy costs and kill American jobs while allowing Russia, China and other countries to increase greenhouse gas emissions.



Alma Wahlberg, mother of Mark, Donnie Wahlberg, dies at 78

Alma Wahlberg, the mother of entertainers Mark and Donnie Wahlberg and a regular on their reality series "Wahlburgers," has died, her sons said on social media Sunday. She was 78.

"My angel. Rest in peace," Mark Wahlberg tweeted.

Donnie Wahlberg posted a longer tribute to his mother on his Instagram account.

"It's time to rest peacefully, mom," Donnie Wahlberg wrote. "I love you, miss you, thank you and will celebrate you, today and always."

No information was given about the cause, date or location of her death. Donnie Wahlberg often posted about his mother on his accounts and in July updated his fans on her health, writing that she "didn't remember much and was often confused but somehow she was still Alma."

The Boston-born mother of nine became a household name thanks to her appearances on the A&E series "Wahlburgers," about the family's burgeoning burger chain.

"She made no apologies for who she was, but never put herself above anyone else. She kicked our butts if we messed up, kicked anyone else's butts if they messed with us. Taught us right, made us pay the price when we were wrong," Donnie Wahlberg wrote Sunday. "She was the epitome of the word grace."

He also included a video of them dancing at his wedding to one of her fa-

vorite songs, "If I Could" by Regina Belle. He wrote that she danced to that song at each of her children's weddings, but at his own, he surprised her by having Belle there to perform it live.

On the "Today" show in 2018, Alma

fact has brought many gifts into my life and has afforded me opportunities that may never have been possible otherwise, there is a whole lot more to my story than most people know," Alma Wahlberg said in an interview with Bos-



Wahlberg opened up about her parenting and how hard it was early on. "I invented the craziest meals," she said. English muffin pizzas were among her creations to feed her hungry lot.

More than a few of her children went on to great successes and fame. Her son Paul Wahlberg, who is the chef behind the namesake burger chain, also named the Alma Nove restaurant in Hingham, Massachusetts, after her.

"People know me as being the mother of famous children, and although this

ton's WCVB-TV in 2018. "I've lived with alcoholism and abuse; struggled with poverty and experienced great wealth; lost so many that I've loved; struggle to raise nine children, and I love them more than anything else; watch them suffer, learn and come out on the other side; lost myself; found myself, again and again; and kept moving forward, no matter what."

Alma Wahlberg is survived by eight children. Her daughter Debbie died in 2003.

Jason Momoa Responds to Dwayne Johnson's 3-Year-Old Daughter Wanting to Meet Him for Her Birthday

After Dwayne Johnson marked daughter Tia's third birthday by sharing that she wanted to unveil Aquaman, Jason Momoa was quick to offer his own thoughts. See the exchange here.

Dwayne Johnson's 3-year-old daughter is learning that being related to one of the world's most popular movie stars has its perks.

The 48-year-old Skyscraper actor took to Instagram on Sunday, April 18 to share a sweet birthday message for daughter Tiana Gia Johnson, who had just turned 3 years old. He included an adorable photo of the two of them together just after the girl had seemingly gone for a swim, and he also added a shout-out to wife Lauren Hashian.

"Happy Birthday to my sweetest lil' Tia Giana," Dwayne wrote. "Loving, kind, tenacious and tough (like your mama;) and my greatest joy is being your daddy. I always, 'got you'."

He continued, "Now that she's finally starting to understand that daddy is Maui from MOANA, she has one very important question — 'Daddy do you know AquaMan?'"

The film actor who plays the superhero, a.k.a. Jason Momoa, commented on the post and seemed to be flattered. "happy birthday tia," Jason wrote, adding four heart and four laughing-while-crying emojis.

Evidently, the heartfelt birthday wish wasn't quite enough for Tia. Later in the day, Dwayne shared a pic of

his daughter next to an Aquaman action figure, in addition to her dad's sketch of the superhero's face.

"Now this is getting ridiculous... For Tia's birthday she insisted Aquaman join us for breakfast — and then after we eat, she asked daddy to draw



AquaMan so she can FRAME IT and hang it up in her room," the proud dad wrote. "Black Adam's gonna hand out a fresh Aqua Ass Whuppin' if this disrespect keeps up."

Dwayne shares Tia and Jasmine, 5, with Lauren. He also has daughter Simone Alexandra Johnson, 19, from a previous marriage. As DC Comics fans know, the actor is set to portray comic book character Black Adam in Warner Bros.' upcoming film of the same name, due in July 2022.

Perhaps once that movie comes out, Tia will want her dad to start drawing pictures of his own character? A father can dream, anyway.

'Mad Max' prequel shot in Outback to be released in 2023

SYDNEY (AP): A prequel to the "Mad Max" movie franchise starring Anya Taylor-Joy and Chris Hemsworth will be filmed in Australia, officials said on Monday.

"Furiosa" is slated for release in mid-2023 and is expected to become the biggest film ever made in Australia, New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian said.

Hemsworth said being involved in such a project in his homeland was a dream come true. "This will be my fourth or fifth film here in Australia," the "Thor" star said in Sydney. "It really is, out of everything I've done, the biggest pinch-myself moment, because I've grown up watching it and it's so iconic," Hemsworth said. "It is a huge honor. A lot of pressure, but exciting pressure that is certainly motivating," he added.

Actors and crews will travel to locations across New South Wales, including the mining town of Broken Hill, the surrounds of which have traditionally provided the post-apocalyptic landscapes of the movies.

The latest movie in the franchise, "Mad Max: Fury Road," released in 2015, was mostly shot in Namibia because unseasonal rain left Outback New South Wales unusually green. The lead actor in "The Queen's Gambit" miniseries, Taylor-Joy will star in the film as a younger version of Furiosa, who was played by Charlize Theron in the 2015 installment.

Writer and director George Miller, who with Byron Kennedy started the "Mad Max" franchise starring Mel Gibson in 1979, said he was grateful to shoot the film in his home country, thanks to financial support from the state and federal governments.

"I had friends in England shooting movies that were shut down two or three times," Miller said, referring to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact.

Chris Evans Responds to Lizzo's Drunk DM and Her Reaction Is Perfect

Lizzo posted Chris Evans' response to her drunk DM, along with her absolutely priceless reaction to his message.

Lizzo is proving she's the real superhero after Chris Evans responded to her flirty DM.

A day after posting a TikTok video revealing the DM she sent to the 39-year-old Knives Out star, the 32-year-old singer shared a follow-up video to the platform celebrating the fact that Chris had indeed responded.

"No shame in a drunk DM [face-throwing-a-kiss emoji] god knows I've done worse on this app lol [facepalm emoji]," he sent Lizzo, according to the video she posted, which is below.

In the new video, Lizzo could be seen with her hand on her forehead as she slid her face down to unveil Chris' message and show that he currently follows her on Instagram. After the reveal, the "Truth Hurts" performer went into full-on rejoicing mode, which included her screaming and shaking in delight.

"BITCH," she simply captioned it.

Lizzo did not explain whether Chris said anything else, but his response appears to reference his infamous NSFW social media mishap from September 2020.

In her initial TikTok post about her correspondence with the Avengers: Endgame actor, Lizzo shared that she sent him three emojis: gust-of-wind, woman-playing-basket-

ball and basketball emojis. Her intention was apparently to give the message that she was shooting her shot, as some fans pointed out.



"Don't drink and DM, kids.... for legal purposes this is a joke," she captioned her first video, which showed her lip-syncing to TikTok audio by Tatayanna Mitchell.

The audio message was, "The reason I'm upset about this one is because I know I'm not gonna be able to marry him. And honestly, it hurts me to the core. Because damn papa, he a rare breed, no comparing. Like, Chris..."

In other words, Lizzo just took a DNA test, and it turns out, she's 100 percent our role model.

Aries:

It's one of those days, Aries. You're likely to wake up with a sense of awe and wonder. There's a sense of déjà vu you're feeling through the day. Things that you had previously put on your vision board are now beginning to take form and are turning your life around. You have so much to be grateful for. The abundance you are receiving from the cosmos is just a small part of it.

Tip: Your vision board is taking form.

Taurus:

You've been to hell and back, Taurus. There is no other way to articulate what you have experienced over the past four days. What you need to remember right now is that your higher self is holding space for you to release the pain and start afresh. No, it isn't going to be easy. Giving up will seem like an alluring option at this point. Give yourself the permission to lean on your soul crew, or work with a therapist who can help you through the catharsis.

Tip: You've got this.

Gemini:

Here's the thing, Gemini: there is a hack. There is always a hack. Finding this life-saving method will help you get things done without spending too much money on the given task. Word for the wise: turn to that

one friend who has all the tricks in their book. On the upside, it's a time to make new connections, which could be both romantic and platonic. So, stay open and experience the magic that surrounds you in every moment.

Tip: There is a way to complete the task without spending a lot of money.

Cancer:

What if we said that the Universe is designed to support your dream-weaving process? That the fruition of your desires is essential to the harmony of the Divine Matrix? Trust that you are being supported every day and in every way as you surrender the worries that are weighing you down. The secret to making a paradigm shift: begin to see yourself as a co-creator rather than a 'doer'.

Tip: You are being supported every day and in every way.

Leo:

Leo, when you mean business, you mean business. When you make a commitment, there's no backing down. Monday sees you executing your vision to the tee with the support of your fellow warriors. If you are in a senior position, consider adopting 'lead by example' as your mantra. But that doesn't mean your subordinates will also be motivated in the same way

as you. Make it a point to connect with each of them individually as you share words of encouragement and highlight their strengths.

Tip: Lead by example.

Virgo:

The cards are bringing your attention to your interpersonal relationships. All the people you love and care about so very much. While you want to be there for them unconditionally, this may not always be an option for you, Virgo, given you're going through your own trials and tribulations. So, communicate your boundaries wherever necessary as you remember the importance of filling your own cup first.

Tip: Communicate your boundaries in a gentle manner.

Libra:

What if we said you are not the doer, simply the medium through which things happen around here? Remember your role as a master manifestor and co-creator. Call in the divine forces to assist you in executing your plan of action. You will be surprised at how easily things begin to get done. At the same time, remember to reach out to your fellow warriors as well, and ask them for their support at every stage.

Tip: Tap into your power as a co-creator.

Scorpio:

George Bernard Shaw once said, "Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will create what you imagine, and at last, you create what you will." This is just the frequency you're vibrating at today, Scorpio. While you have the big vision in place, you're scouting for experts to help you make this vision a reality. It's true that the timeline is turning out to be slightly different from what you had previously imagined. However, you trust the law of divine timing and know that everything will turn out just fine.

Tip: It's time to make the big vision a reality.

Sagittarius:

When you began this journey, you were filled with a lot of hope and optimism. However, reality got the better of you unknowingly. Instead of getting caught up in the mental gymnastics, take a step back from your creations. Ask yourself relevant questions. Reconnect with that lost sense of purpose. Time and space will help you realise whether or not this dream is worth fighting for.

Tip: Take a step back from your creations.

Capricorn:

Here's the thing about boundaries: they need to be communicated frequently, especially when the person or organisation in question seems to be

repeating old patterns. Don't be afraid to be assertive, Capricorn. Don't be afraid to ask for what you really want. The Universe is listening in and so are other people.

Tip: Communicate your boundaries in a bold manner.

Aquarius:

What if we said our life is a blank canvas that we can paint in the manner we feel inspired to? What do you want your story to reflect, Aquarius? Do you want to go down the abyss of darkness and choose to look at the bright side despite the pain? The cards want you to remember that you are the co-creator of your reality and that the power has always been in your hands.

Tip: Paint your canvas with colours that evoke a sense of joy.

Pisces:

If you've been house-hunting for a while now, get ready to find that perfect apartment (or villa!)—one that's straight out of your dreams. Those who are looking for a less permanent set-up are also likely to get lucky over the next few days. Remember to keep that manifestation game strong, Pisces. For those who are locked down, this chapter is all about noticing the silver linings and consciously creating with the people you love the most.

Tip: Get ready to find the house of your dreams.