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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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CM marks Tika Utsav by getting himself vaccinated EDUCATION DEPTT MAKES VACCINATION FOR ABOVE-45 YR OLD OFFICERS AND TEACHERS COMPULSORY

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 11 APR:

Chief Minister PS Tamang joined the Tika Utsav today by himself receiving his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at STNM Hospital here, and IPR press release informs. The CM is 54 years old and the vaccination drive is currently available for all aged above 45 years.

Also today, the Education Department issued a circular making Covid vaccination compulsory for all above 45 year old personnel of the Department and teaching and non-teaching staff of all schools, including private schools, compulsory.

Meanwhile, on the start of the Tika Utsav, the CM's wife, Krishna Kumari Rai, Rural Development Minister Sonam Lama, Secretary to the CM, SD Dhakal, and other officials also accompanied him to the hospital and received the COVID-19 vaccine.

In his brief address to media, the Chief Minister appealed to the above 45-year-olds to come forward and participate in the Tika Utsav by getting themselves vaccinated.



The Tika Utsav was announced by the Prime Minister as a move to ramp up Covid vaccination. In the same manner, the CM

also urged everyone to strictly adhere to COVID-appropriate behaviour which includes frequent hand-washing, wearing of masks and following physical distancing to curb transmission of the virus.

The Chief Minister also extended gratitude towards the Prime Minister for providing COVID-19 vaccine free of cost and reiterated the 'Dawai Bhi, Kadai Bhi' slogan.

He stated that Sikkim was well equipped with COVID-19 testing and treating equipment and supplies and has the support of experienced Doctors, Nurses and other Front Line Workers.

Moreover, he appealed to the people to abide by the COVID-19 preventive measures and stick to the guidelines at all times.

He also requested the public to restrict unnecessary travel to prevent the spread of the second wave of the virus.

Meanwhile, on a day that the state recorded its largest spike in daily Covid cases in a long while, the Education Department issued a circular

making it compulsory for all officers and employees of the Department, including teaching and non-teaching staff at all schools, aged above 45 years to get vaccinated against Covid-19.

While the circular does not clearly specify by when the first dose should be taken by the officers and teachers, it appears that this has to be achieved by 20 April.

The Circular states that "in order to achieve this vaccination," all educational institutions in the State have been ordered to remain closed from 12 to 20 April.

Online classes will however continue this period.

Given that the CBSE Board exams are round the corner, the Education Department circular further directs that all activities related to the CBSE examinations slated for the period that the schools have been shut for be taken up after 20 April "as per the convenience of the CBSE Centre Superintendents."

Sikkim records 54 new Covid cases, only 14 of whom are tourists

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 11 APR:

Sikkim registered a single-day surge of 54 new cases of novel coronavirus today taking the total number of active cases in the State to 169. These cases were picked up in the testing of 323 samples on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the number of recovered cases has inched up to 5,983 with only one new recovery in the State. Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases reported so far now stands at 6,405.

In his daily health bulletin on Sunday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia informed that while 52 of the new cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 303 samples, two more were found in rapid antigen testing of 20 samples.

Among the cases reported from in and around the capital, there is a staff of Tashi Namgyal Academy [a primary contact], one person from Arithang, one from DPH, one from Lingding, one from VIP colony, one near old STNM hospital, one from Development Area, one from Middle Tadong, one from Lower MG Marg, one from Lower Shyari, one from Baha'i School Road and one from Sichey.

Likewise, four people from Mamring, three from NHPC, one person from Luing Road-Thamidara, one from Pachey, one from Duga, one from Reshi, one from Rangpo, another from the NHPC colony-Baluwatar, one from Singtam, one from below the SSB camp at Ranipool and one from Adampool in East District also tested positive for COVID-19.

Elsewhere, a person from Yangyang, Namphok and one from Chanday, Mangan have also been found COVID-19 positive. Mr Bhutia informs that two Army personnel have also tested positive and are following the COVID protocol of the Army. Meanwhile, a class X student of Tashi Namgyal Senior Secondary School has also tested positive for COVID-19 but remains traceable on the phone number provided by him.

Similarly, a 23-year-old male from 5th Mile-Tadong, a 29-year-old man from Lower Daragaon, a 58-years-old male from Rangang, a 55-year-old lady from Rabongla, a 24-year-old man, who has given address as "Manipal student," and two persons who have given the Culture Department as their address have also tested positive but could not be contacted over the phone numbers provided by them. The IEC officer has urged them to immediately contact the concerned authorities. While providing details of tourists who have tested positive in Sikkim, Mr Bhutia informs that two tourists checked into a hotel in Development Area and two tourists from Rajasthan from a hotel near PNG School have tested positive and their rooms been contained. He added that two tourists from Maharashtra, two from Kolkata and another two from Bangalore have tested positive but were not responding to phone calls made by the contact tracing teams. He added that a tourist from Gujarat was also ignoring phone calls from the Department.

He added that three tourists were also not picking up their phones and what is more, they were not found booked at the hotel they claimed to have been staying in. On the other hand, a total of 2,662 persons were vaccinated for COVID-19 at different parts of Sikkim on Saturday. Of there, 2,440 persons received their first dose of the vaccine and 222 completed their vaccine schedule with the second shot.

Category-wise, 24 healthcare workers [01 first dose & 23 second dose], 161 frontline workers [22 first dose & 139 second dose] and 2,477 persons in age group of 45 years & above [2417 first dose and 60 second dose] have vaccinated for COVID-19.

Chamling admonishes govt for robbing children of their dreams by expelling them from college

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 11 APR:

Sikkim Democratic Front president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, returned to the episode which has disturbed everyone who does not have a political reason to support the decision - the expulsion of four Gyalshing College students after they led a protest demanding answers for the delay in preparing adequate infrastructure for their college.

In a Facebook post in response to a question posed to him, Mr Chamling admonished the administration for being insensitive to the students in general and the four Gyalshing college students in particular

and has appealed to students and the people to never give up and ensure justice.

The question posed to Mr Chamling highlights that the expulsion attracted widespread criticism not only within Sikkim but also from outside, and yet, "shockingly," the Chief Minister has justified the expulsion as a "disciplinary case."

What has worried the person asking the question is that the incident was fading from public memory already and if allowed to fall into oblivion, will signal that the Sikkimese will "slowly lose the courage to question the government" and leave a "lasting impact on the minds of students."

In response, Mr Chamling, while accepting that there "can be a huge gap" between students and the people who run the administration given that they belong to different generations, there was no excusing how the government has treated students who were not making any unreasonable demands.

"Instead of listening to them, this cruel government tortured them, arrested them and finally expelled them from the college for which they were fighting," Mr Chamling writes and goes on to wonder aloud whether "anything can be more cruel and harsher than robbing children of the very dreams for which they

sacrifice everything?"

Criticising the government's decision to expel the students as a "brutal" move, Mr Chamling has called on the students at large to not get demoralised by the "pettiness of these immature so-called leaders."

"Never give up. Never say 'never'. We are with you. The more they suppress us, the louder our voices should be. I appeal to the people of Sikkim to support students in their cause and let us not allow their dreams to wither under this repressive leadership. We will fight for students' rights and make this government realize that our students' futures are more important than

their egos. Justice will prevail and truth will prevail," he reassures.

Sharing that he was "completely aghast" by the insensitive government, he also admits that the students' agitation of 2014 during his government was bungled by the administration.

"But we did our utmost to rectify that mistake by giving much more in the end than what they demanded," he adds.

While on the "immaturity" of the present government, he contends that it even considered discontinuing the "nationally-acclaimed innovative scheme called the Chief Minister Meritorious Scholarship".

Amid PM's "Tika Utsav", states say running low on vaccines

NEW DELHI, 11 APR

[PTI]: India started its four-day special vaccination drive "Tika Utsav" announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi today amid declaration by several states that they are running low on vaccines. A landmark 10 crore people have been vaccinated so far.

Besides Maharashtra, Punjab, Delhi and Rajasthan states have said they are running low on vaccines.

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said his state had only five days of vaccines left.

In Rajasthan, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot

said his state has enough vaccine only for two days.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the national capital had between seven and 10 days of stock left. Aam Aadmi Party's Raghav Chadha has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding "urgent need for vaccine universalisation and vaccine nationalism". He said: "Several states have run out of stocks of vaccines & remaining states have stocks left only for three to five days."

Overall, the country has vaccinated 10 crore people. Eight states --

Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala -- account for 60.62 per cent of the doses.

Maharashtra, which has the maximum number of Covid cases among states, has been saying since Tuesday that it is running low on vaccines. The state has said it needs 40 lakh doses a week on account of its huge population.

Last week, it has to temporarily shut vaccine Centres in Mumbai, Satara, Panval and other towns as vaccine supply ran out.

"Decided To Resist": Kerala students' #RasputinChallenge against hate

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 11 APR

[NDTV]: In Kerala, an Instagram Reels video of two medical students - Naveen K Razak and Janaki M Omkumar - has inspired a dancing movement against hate.

The two students received a lot of love and encouragement after they posted a 30-second clip of them dancing to Boney M's cult song Rasputin. But amid all the appreciations, the video also received some hate comments from users drawing attention to their religion.

Naveen K Razak, refusing to verbally reply to the hate comments, responded by releasing another video along with other students of "Vikings" - the dance group of Thrissur Medical College. The new video has more dancers dancing to the same song and the same moves as the original Reels video along with a message of 'unity in diversity'. It was posted on social media post with the caption: "If you've decided to hate,

we've decided to resist".

Several student bodies have begun launching online dance video competitions, including the students' wing of Indian Medical Association (IMA) which launched #RasputinChallenge and Student Federation of India (SFI) wing of Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT) which launched #Step-AgainstCommunalism.

The video responses have been fun and youthful with a strong message against hate.

"We were concerned about two statements on social media. One, that doctors shouldn't dance. And second is about communal hatred, a deeper concern. We strongly condemn both these statements and have started a #RasputinChallenge. We are getting a lot of inquiries from people not even associated with medical colleges", Vishnu Gopan, the state convenor of IMA's Medical Students Network (MSN) told NDTV.



अपील

देशमा कोरोनाको दोस्रो लहर बढिरहेछ। त्यसकारण म तपाईं सबैसित कडाइका साथ सुरक्षाका उपायहरू अपनाउँदै होसियारसित बस्ने अपील गर्न चाहन्छु। म सिकिमवासिीसित आफू लगायत अन्यको सुरक्षाका लागि कोभिड १९ खोप लगाउने अनुरोध गर्नका साथै टीकाकरणमाथि फैलाइने अफवाहमा विश्वास नगर्न आग्रह गर्दछु। म तपाईंहरूसित अनुरोध गर्दछु कि कोभिड १९ उचित व्यवहार जस्तै सामाजिक दुरी, नियमितरूपमा हातको स्वच्छता अनि मास्कको प्रयोग गर्नुहोस्। हामी सबैले दवाई पनि कडाई पनि-को प्रधानमन्त्रीले दिनुभएको महामन्त्रलाई अपनाएर जाँच, पहिचान, उपचार, कोभिड उचित व्यवहार अनि टीकाकरण जस्ता बढ्दो कोभिड संकटसित जुनका निम्ति रहेका पाँचवटा कुरामाथि ध्यान दिन अत्यन्त आवश्यक छ। सुरक्षाका सबै उपायहरू अपनाउँदै पैतलीस वर्षदेखि माथिको उमेरका सबै मानिसहरूसित निसङ्कोच खोप लगाउन पनि म अनुरोध गर्दछु। खोप लगाउँ, आफू पनि बाँची अरूलाई पनि बचाउँ। कोरोना हार्नेछ हामी जित्नेछौं।

प्रेमसिंह तामाङ (गोले)
मुख्यमन्त्री, सिकिम सरकार

Sri Krishna Katha concludes at Yuksam



**PRITAM LAMA
YUKSAM, 11 APR:**

A five-day Sri Krishna Katha concluded today at Yuksam with a spiritual discourse and hawan. The prayers had begun on 07 April.

Speaking to this correspondent, Keshar Kumar Khatiwada, secretary of the organizing committee, said that the main objective

behind holding these special prayers [reportedly a first for Yuksam] was to bring unity, harmony and positivity in the society.

Area MLA, Deputy Speaker Sangay Lepcha, chairperson Transport Department Basanta Tamang, Advisor of the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs, RS Bhutia, PHE chairperson Hari Narayan Subedi were also present on the occasion.



JAN UTTHAN SAMAJ of Lower Pachak, Rhenock, met today to discuss plans for the development of the village and society, a press release informs. The meeting was chaired by the organisation's president, Chandra Kumar Giri, who invited suggestions on how the Samaj could work more effective for the village. Pawan Khatiwada, PS to the Rhenock MLA, also addressed the meeting and spoke about the schemes and policies of the State Government. [from SANJAY AGARWAL]

5 states account for over 70% of India's active COVID-19 cases: Centre

NEW DELHI, 11 APR

[PTI]: The five states of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala cumulatively account for 70.82 per cent of India's active COVID-19 cases which have breached the 11-lakh mark for the first time since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Union Health Ministry said on Saturday.

India's total active caseload has increased to 11,08,087 and it now comprises 8.29 per cent of the country's total infections.

A net increase of 61,456 cases has been recorded in the total active caseload in a span of 24 hours.

Maharashtra alone accounts for 48.57 per cent of the total active caseload of the country, the ministry said.

Besides, the ten states of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have shown a steep rise in the daily new COVID-19 cases accounting for 80.92 per

cent of the new infections reported in a span of 24 hours, the ministry highlighted.

India's daily new cases continue to rise, the ministry said as 1,52,879 new cases of coronavirus infections were registered in a span of 24 hours, the highest single-day rise so far.

Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 55,411. It is followed by Chhattisgarh with 14,098 while Uttar Pradesh has reported 12,748 new cases.

Sixteen states -- Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab and Kerala -- are displaying an upward trajectory in daily new cases.

India's cumulative recoveries stand at 1,20,81,443 with 90,584 recoveries being registered in a span of 24 hours.

Daily deaths continue to show an upward trend with 839 fatalities being reported in a span of 24

hours.

Ten states account for 86.41 per cent of the new deaths, the ministry said. Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (309) and Chhattisgarh followed with 123 daily deaths.

Ten states and UTs have not reported any COVID-19 deaths in a span of 24 hours. These are D&D & D&N, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Mizoram, Manipur, Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Arunachal Pradesh.

Meanwhile, the cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 10 crore.

Cumulatively, 10,15,95,147 vaccine doses have been administered through 15,17,963 sessions, as per the provisional report till 7 am, the ministry said.

These include 90,04,063 HCWs who have taken the first dose and 55,08,289 HCWs who have taken the second dose, 99,53,615 FLWs who have received the first dose, 47,59,209

FLWs who have taken the second dose.

Besides, 3,96,51,630 and 18,00,206 beneficiaries more than 60 years old have been administered the first and second dose respectively, while 3,02,76,653 and 6,41,482 beneficiaries aged 45 to 60 have taken the first and second dose respectively.

Eight states account for 60.27 per cent of the total doses given so far in the country

Over 35 lakh vaccination doses were administered in a span of 24 hours.

As on Day-85 of the vaccination drive (April 10), 35,19,987 vaccine doses were given. Out of which, 31,22,109 beneficiaries were vaccinated across 42,553 sessions for first dose and 3,97,878 beneficiaries received the second dose of the vaccine.

"In terms of the number of daily doses administered globally, India continues to remain at the top with an average of 38,34,574 doses administered per day," the ministry said.

BJP'S Gorkha leaders from Assam arrive in Kalimpong to counter GJM claims

SUMMIT REPORT

DARJEELING, 11 APR:

Three BJP Gorkha leaders from Assam arrived in Kalimpong today on a clear mission to counter claims being floated against their party by heads of the two GJM camps, both of whom are aligned with the TMC for the Assembly elections in West Bengal.

Chairperson of the Assam Development Council, Prem Tamang, Assam MLA Bhaskar Sharma and BJP-Assam secretary Kishor Upadhyay, while addressing media-persons in Kalimpong, explained that they were here to counter the false allegations being levelled by GJM leaders against the BJP government in Assam.



"They [Bimal Gurung and Binoy Tamang] are misguiding people here by making false claims in how the Gorkhas are being treated in Assam. They are doing this because they have no agenda for the people of the Hills of their own," they claimed.

This was in response to allegations by leaders of the two GJM factions that the BJP Government in Assam has thrown many Gorkhas [as many as 1.19 lakh] in detention camps after they could not produce documents to get included in the National

Register of Citizens exercise there.

The three BJP leaders from Assam claimed that there were no detention camps in Assam even as they invited people here to welcome NRC since it was offering people to get identified as genuine Indian citizens.

India's active cases breach 11 lakh-mark for first time; PM takes break from campaigning to promote 'Tika Utsav'

NEW DELHI, APR 11

(PTI): The active COVID-19 cases in India breached the 11 lakh-mark for the first time after a record high of 1.52 lakh new infections while a massive vaccination push, dubbed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the beginning of another major war against coronavirus, was launched on Sunday in a bid to abate the surge

The active caseload till now was at its lowest at 1,35,926 on February 12 and at its highest at 10,17,754 on September 18, 2020

India's COVID-19 tally of cases climbed to 1,33,58,805, and the death toll increased to 1,69,275 with 839 daily new fatalities, the highest since October 18, 2020, the data updated by Health Ministry on Sunday morning showed

While the cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 10 crore after 85 days, the 'Tika Utsav' or a special 'vaccination festival' was started

till April 14

"Anyone eligible for the vaccine should get the jab, and for this the society and administration have to make full efforts," Prime Minister Modi said pitching for "zero vaccine waste" and urging the people to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour

"This festival is, in a way, the beginning of another major war against corona. We have to lay special emphasis on personal hygiene as well as social hygiene," he said

As the number of active cases reaches a new high, states are grappling with the pressure on health facilities

The Chhattisgarh government has directed that 80 percent of the total oxygen produced will be supplied for medical purposes to hospitals

The state health department on Sunday issued a notification in this regard under the Epidemic Diseases Act

On Saturday, Chhattisgarh recorded 14,098 new cases of coronavirus, the high-

est single-day spike

Several areas in Madhya Pradesh have been witnessing harried people queuing up outside medical stores for Remdesivir, a drug used in the treatment.

Delhi government hospitals have been directed to engage fourth and fifth year MBBS students to meet the increased demand for manpower, while the tenure of senior and junior residents is being extended and vacant posts will be filled, officials said

The Punjab Health Department has asked private hospitals to defer elective surgeries till April 30 to meet the increasing demand for beds and charge government-fixed rates for the treatment of coronavirus patients

The latest surge of COVID-19 has also sparked concerns of a repeat of migrant workers' exodus from the worst affected states

A severe spike in COVID-19 cases

in Mumbai and talk of a "complete lockdown" like last year, has made the national highway number 3 skirting past Madhya Pradesh's commercial hub Indore a prime route for wary migrants returning home to states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar

The number of motorcycles, black-and-yellow mini trucks and autorickshaws, teeming with migrants, have been on the rise over the past few days on a bypass road connected to this route, popularly known as Mumbai-Agra road

While there are no clear answers to the COVID flare-up, top scientists say the complex interplay of mutant strains, a hugely susceptible population made more vulnerable by elections and other public events and the lowering of guard are primarily to blame

In a statement, the prime minister on Sunday urged people to keep four things in mind -- "each one, vaccinate one", "each one, treat one" and "each one, save one"

Dilip Silal flexes his way to Mr Sukhim title

THINLAY CHODEN BHUTIA

GANGTOK, 11 APR:

Dilip Silal is the 3rd Mr Sukhim. The bodybuilder won the champion of champions title on Saturday at the 3rd Mr Sukhim and 2nd Jr Mr Sukhim Body Building Open Men's & Women's Physique Championship held here at Mannan Bhawan on 10 April.

The competition was organised by Body Builders' Association of Sikkim.

Sumit Gupta, a student at SRM University, Sikkim, won the 2nd Jr Mr Sukhim title while Chandra Rai from Namchi won the Open Women's Physique Championship.



Also yesterday, Ajim Ali from Kurseong, an electrical engineer by training, won the Open

Men's Physique Championship. The title holders will now proceed to the national's. BBAS is affiliated to Indian

Body Builders Federation.

The event Forest Minister Karma Loday Bhutia present as the chief guest.

Pema WD Bhutia and Yogesh Rai of BBAS inform that the competition was organised to promote bodybuilding and inspire more youngsters to adopt healthier lifestyles and keep them away from vices like addiction and bring them to a mentally healthier space. And towards this end, the Jr Mr Sukhim segment of the competition was more actively promoted.

The organisers were satisfied with the response to the competition which attracted the participation of 50 bodybuilders, who had registered.

Sikkim chemists convene AGM, discuss problems



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 APR:

The Sikkim Chemists Association convened its 13th annual general meeting at Rangpo in Saturday. A record number of 116 delegates from all over Sikkim attended the meeting, an SCA press release informs. While this was the 13 AGM of the association, SCA

completes 21 years of existence this year.

The meeting was primarily held to provide details about the latest changes in the Anti-Drug Rules, misuse of Antibiotics, Drug License rules, Clinical Establishment Rules, basic Pharmacy ethics and availability of medicines during epidemics and other emergencies.

The house also discussed other matters relating to daily problems faced by the Chemist Stores, the release adds.

Senior Drug Inspector, Health Department, Martin Targain, was present as the chief guest

SCA president, Ramesh Periwal, briefed the meeting about activities of the association.

Negative Covid report must for entering Himachal from 7 states

SHIMLA, 11 APR [PTI]:

The Himachal Pradesh government on Sunday made it mandatory for people coming from seven states which have witnessed a spike in coronavirus cases to show a COVID-19 negative test report on entering the state.

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur said people coming from Punjab, Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh need to carry a negative RT-PCR report not earlier than 72 hours while visiting Himachal Pradesh from April 16.

He made the announcement while presiding over a meeting with senior officers to review the coronavirus situation in the state.

Mr Thakur said the decision has been taken to check the spread of COVID-19 in the state and an advisory in this regard will be issued soon.

The Himachal Pradesh government has already closed all educational institutions till April 21 and restricted gatherings at marriage ceremonies to 50 people indoors and with a maximum of 200 for outdoors.

Besides, only 50 people have been allowed to attend funerals.

Expressing concern over the surge in COVID-19 cases in the

last 45 days, the Chief Minister said 10,691 new infections and 120 deaths had been reported in the state from February 23 to April 10, pushing the tally to 69,114 and fatality count to 1,102.

The number of active cases has risen from just 218 on February 23 to 5,223 on April 10, he added.

"The virus is now spreading with more pace as compared to last year and several school

going students were being infected by the virus," he said, appealing to people to stick to COVID protocols.

Devotees are allowed to visit temples in the state during Navratri festival, but holding "langars", "bhandaras" and "jagran" has been completely banned, he said

Mr Thakur said the laxity shown by people has resulted in a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases in the state.

Nepali translation of Indian poems released at Chiya Kavita



TENZING YANGZOM & NIMA DONKA

GANGTOK, 10 APR:

Bharatiya Kavita, a collection of poems translated into Nepali by Sudha Rai, was released at an event hosted by ChiyaKavita at Rachna Books here on Saturday.

The anthology has 44 poems translated into Nepali from 22 languages.

The launch event was hosted by Pravin Khaling and coordinated by Anurag Basnett.

During the event, Ms Rai spoke about the collection and her journey into translation sharing that while she had planned to complete the book in 2011, but due to various reasons that could not happen.

Also present at the event were Amar Baniya Lohoro, Usha Sharma, Binashree Kharel amongst others.

CBSE refuses to reconsider board exam dates, claims it will be with students throughout exams

NEW DELHI, 11 APR

[NDTV]: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will be with the students throughout the exam, board's controller of exam Dr Sanyam Bhardwaj has assured.

Highlighting the measures adopted by the board to stop the spread of COVID-19, Dr Bhardwaj said the number of exam centres has been increased this year and strict COVID-19 protocols will be maintained at all centres.

Dr Bhardwaj's statement has come in a time when CBSE students across the country are demanding cancellation or postponement of board exams. Congress'

Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra have also questioned CBSE's decision to conduct exams amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Dr Bhardwaj was addressing the session "CBSE Board Examinations - Demystified" at an online conference organised by the SAI International Education Group.

"We will not leave any stone unturned for the students. For students, focus on your studies, do not listen to any rumor and false pretense," he advised.

Addressing parents, the official has asked for their continued support.

"It is so difficult for you all, it's a risk to send them to the examination,

but kindly continue to support us. Ensure that your child follows all the given precautionary measures. Teachers, our most important stakeholders, we cannot do anything without your support, and it is known to me that they are working extremely hard. My sincere request to them is to devote time sincerely in the evaluation process and help us declare the results as soon as possible," the CBSE official said.

Dr Bhardwaj requested parents to keep an eye on the status of coronavirus and their children's preparation.

"We will start taking the advice of the doctors

into making a proper plan for conducting the examination smoothly," he said.

According to Dr Bhardwaj, CBSE students will perform "much better" in the board exam compared to the previous batch as they got a lot of time for self-study.

"You must work hard and take responsibility for performing well. Your school, the chairman, principal and the entire nation is with you...my blessing is with all the students. We are in constant touch with the government and other sister concerns and we are all making sure that everything is correlated

in such a manner that exams are conducted smoothly," Dr Bhardwaj said.

Addressing a question on the pattern of the question paper in the exam Dr Bhardwaj said, "We are actually very transparent from the exam point of view, and it comes from the curriculum hosted in the website. We have also uploaded the sample question paper. The design of the question paper will be the same as the sample question paper only."

"Additionally, we have also introduced competency-based questions. If the students are cautious about the surroundings, they would be able to answer," he added.

Journalist charged with cyber-terrorism in Haryana over social media post

HISAR, 11 APR [PTI]:

A journalist, based in Haryana's Hisar, has been charged with "cyber-terrorism" and "promoting enmity between classes" over one of his social media posts.

A case was registered by the Haryana Police against Rajesh Kundu, who runs a news portal, on Friday under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Information Technology (IT) Act.

Opposition leaders, including Randeep Singh Surjewala, Kumari Selja, Deepender Singh Hooda of the Congress and INLD's Abhay Singh Chautala, have condemned the action taken against Rajesh Kundu and demanded that the case be immediately withdrawn.

The journalist has

been charged for promoting enmity between different classes, assertions prejudicial to national integration and cyber-terrorism for one of his social media posts, the police said.

According to the FIR, in the social media post, Rajesh Kundu had said Hisar will witness caste-based violence in a week and this will be the blueprint for an experiment in the state and then in the country.

The FIR was lodged on a complaint filed by a Hisar police official.

District police spokesperson Vikas stated in his complaint that inflammatory messages, which could incite the public, were allegedly sent to WhatsApp groups and over Facebook from Rajesh Kundu's mobile

phone number and this can have an impact on maintaining peace.

Therefore, a case should be registered against him, the complainant sought.

On the basis of the complaint, a case has been registered under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code for "promoting enmity between classes", "imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration" and that of the IT Act for "cyber-terrorism" on April 9.

Rajesh Kundu has been extensively covering the ongoing farmers' agitation against three new agriculture laws of the Centre.

The FIR triggered a strong reaction from Haryana journalists as well as opposition par-

ties, who criticised the police action.

The opposition leaders claimed that the case was lodged against Mr Kundu because he was raising the farmers' voice through his social media handles.

"When the government could not break the ongoing farmer agitation, it lodged an FIR against journalist Rajesh Kundu, who has become a voice of the farmers. Neither this voice can be suppressed nor the farmer agitation," Randeep Singh Surjewala said in a tweet.

Journalists in Hisar held an emergency meeting at the Public Works Department Rest House on Saturday evening and criticised the police for lodging a case against Mr Kundu.

The Chandigarh Press Club also condemned the

registration of the FIR against the Hisar-based journalist.

"Kundu was vocal in raising the farmers' voice during the ongoing agitation against the three farm laws. Now, Hisar police have charged him for "cyber terrorism" and "promoting communal disharmony" over an alleged message that he posted on a WhatsApp group and Facebook," Press Club secretary general Saurabh Duggal said in a statement.

The statement mentioned that Mr Kundu has maintained that he was "just performing his duty as a responsible citizen and as a journalist by sharing a post regarding his apprehension of violence on the basis of information received through sources".

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Memorial Service



Dhurva Rai (DOB-15 Jul, 1987), son of JB Rai and Shova Rai, bid his final adieu on 09 Apr, 2021. The memorial service for the deceased will be kept at his residence: Lingding Basti, ICAR Road, Tadong, Gangtok, Sikkim on 13 Apr, 2021 from 11:00am onwards.

Kindly contact the following numbers for further information:

Baunty Rai: 8348688367 (Brother).

Shova Rai: 9593883387 (Mother)

Joshua: 8170875419 (Sister in law)

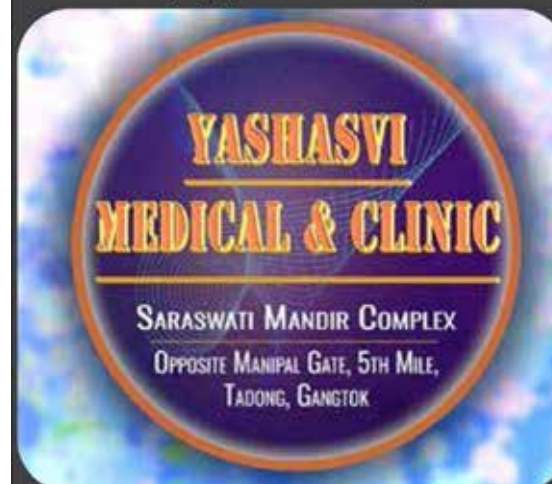


ANTHEYSTHI KRIYA

Smt Jas Hang Subba W/O Late Bir Hang Subba R/O Upper Singithang Below Namchi Fire Station has left for her heavenly abode on 5/4/21. The bereaved family deeply thankful to those who graced the final rites and would request your presence for antheystri kriya falling on 13th April 2021 in residence at namchi singithang.

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Yes, Health Concerns Need More Than Funds

But in the absence of funds, even concern dissipates

For anyone following the news, it would appear as if Tuberculosis is a new worry for Sikkim. The hoardings are up and an award has also been announced for villages, GPUs and districts which eradicate TB. The concern is welcome because TB has been a vexed challenge for the State and the country for a while now and has seen other schemes and “missions” to contain it. Past initiatives have met with only limited success, so it would be advisable for Sikkim to work out why previous efforts have been less than successful and then ensure that the latest drive avoids the limitations of the previous attempts because TB is a big problem which has had the upper hand for far too long.

It is important that lessons are not just learnt from the past TB-eradication schemes but also other funds-driven interventions which surged in engagement when a project was around and now flounder with the task unfinished and un-sustained. Take the anti-smoking campaign of some years ago for instance, which blustered strong in Sikkim as it did across the country. There were awareness sessions, stickers announcing no-smoking zones everywhere, rallies, quizzes, events etc. There was clearly some major funding happening which made “stakeholders” realize the harm that cigarettes were causing. The only impact that has sustained are the warnings on screen every time a character lights up in a movie or a TV serial. The ban on smoking in public places remains largely forgotten, but yes, most restaurants no longer have smoking zones. There has been no study on whether the whole exercise had any, repeat any, impact. Unfortunately, even at the time when the no-smoking campaign was in its most “active” phase, the real concern – of smoking among minors – remained largely unaddressed. Pushed by babus who cannot see beyond DPRs and funds, the entire initiative was too focused on interventions for which bills could be drawn up. So, while too many awareness sessions intruded on classes in schools, and lakhs were spent printing stickers and posters and organizing events, nothing on ground was attempted to ensure that the young could not buy the Cancer Sticks as easily as they can in Sikkim. And this, despite the fact that there is a law in place which makes it an offence to sell cigarettes or tobacco products to under 18 year olds. Don't laugh, there is such a law in place. And all that the campaign had to do was convince sellers that they would be booked if they peddled cigarettes to children.

It is all very well to ensure that tobacco products cannot even opt for surrogate advertising, and even awareness programmes are fine, but not if these remain the only interventions. Boring hours spent detailing the harmful effects of tobacco is hardly the intervention that will scare the young from trying the first puff; in fact, the exercise might actually end up increasing nicotine's appeal among the young for the flirtation with danger that is flagged to an age-group which thinks it is invincible and in an aggressively defiant phase. This disconnect was unfortunate because before the policy-makers started trying to save lungs already addicted to nicotine, they should have first tried and dissuaded more people from taking to smoking in the first place. There is not one shop, not in Sikkim, not in the country, which will refuse to sell a packet of cigarettes to a minor.

And now, even the tokenism of the anti-smoking campaign is not around anymore. That cannot be allowed to happen to the TB-Free Mission. Sikkim has already lost too much to the scourge to allow a repeat of superficial engagement this time as well. It is welcome that TB has been flagged as a major health concern, but it would be more apt if wider engagements were attempted, collaborations which look not just at treatment, but also lifestyle and living conditions which leave people vulnerable.

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India prepares for Kumbh Mela amid COVID-19 fears

TULASI SRINIVAS
THECONVERSATION.COM

Massive crowds are expected to gather at India's northern city of Haridwar throughout April 2021 for the religious festival of Kumbh Mela, despite the country's grappling with a COVID-19 surge.

The Kumbh Mela is a Hindu pilgrimage held every 12 years at sacred tirthas, or river-ford sites, along the Ganges River in India.

This year the government expects over a million pilgrims a day to bathe in the sacred river. Over 5 million people are expected per day on the most auspicious days – April 12, 14 and 21 – for a total of a 100 million celebrants.

As a scholar of Hinduism, I celebrate this peaceful mammoth congregation of humanity. Shaped by mythology, astrology and society over the long course of history, this festival is the largest religious gathering of its kind in the world.

Rooted in Hinduism's ancient theological texts, the bathing ritual has survived wars, revolution and famine – but its biggest threat has been epidemic diseases. Authorities from the colonial British government of the 19th century to the Indian government today have had to contend with the challenge of managing the spread of contagion during this huge gathering of people.

FESTIVAL OF IMMORTALITY

The festival celebrates the Hindu myth of Samudra manthan – the churning of the cosmological ocean by the gods and demons to get the nectar of immortality, known as amrita.

In the fight that ensued for the amrita, several drops of the elixir fell to Earth, sanctifying the waters where they landed. The word Kumbh refers not only to the pot of nectar spilled on its way to the heavens, but also to the astrological sign of Aquarius, the water carrier, the time when the Kumbh Mela takes place. Hindus believe that bathing in the sacred Ganges on the auspicious days of the festival leads to salvation from the endless cycle of reincarnation.

The traditional start date of the Kumbh, Makara Sankranti, or the winter solstice, is in January. However, this year the festival was delayed by the Indian government because

of fears of the spread of COVID-19.

COLONIAL KUMBH

The festival is mentioned in British colonial records. In 1812 the archives of the British East India Co., a joint stock company that had been formed in 1600 to engage in trade with India, mention a “great” congregation of people at the “melah” that had not occurred in 28 years. Historians of religion have noted that the British conflated another ancient fair, which went by the name Magha Mela, with the Kumbh Mela.

At the time, the East India Co. imposed a “pilgrim tax” on participants, even though it did not provide infrastructure or amenities.

The East India Co. ruled India for the British Crown from 1757, and the company-crown alliance lasted a century until the Indian rebellion of 1857. During that time the British administration, in collaboration with the local police and heads of pilgrim organizations, made attempts to improve the infrastructure of the Kumbh Mela, including laying new railway lines, widening the access roads and building bigger bathing platforms, or ghats. They hoped to increase access, prevent pilgrim stampedes near the waters edge and garner better revenue.

Inadvertently, the British helped legitimize and popularize the Kumbh Mela as the supreme sacred festival. At the same time, they believed the Kumbh was a political gathering where revolutionary and nationalistic ideas took birth.

POLITICS OF KUMBH

Until 1801, before the colonial rule in the state, the Kumbh Mela was controlled and managed by sects, or “akharas,” of militant ascetics who fought for the privilege of bathing first, as going first conferred power and status. These were often violent battles of alarming scale in which thousands died.

But the akharas skillfully managed the logistical challenge of the massive pilgrimage and festival. They organized hostels and food, provided policing, and oversaw the arbitrating of disputes over congregant living facilities. They also instituted and collected pilgrim taxes. The ascetics of the akharas engaged in religious discourses and philosophical lectures. Their

presence was an attraction for ordinary pilgrims who sought their audience and blessings.

But by 1858 the British Crown controlled all of India and attempted to take over the logistics and rules for the Kumbh Mela, particularly for pilgrims' movement at the site, to avoid stampedes and upgrade the sanitary conditions. At the time legal agreements over the bathing order ensured an end to the violence between the akharas.

The British allowed and instituted an order for the ascetics of 14 akharas to bathe on the three auspicious bathing days of the mela. Following Indian independence, subsequent Indian governments have also tried to control the crowds and organize the akharas' bathing schedule.

FEAR OF CONTAGION

The first British reference that specifically mentioned the Kumbh Mela was made in an 1868 report that stated the need for increased and tighter sanitation controls at the “Coomb fair” to be held in January 1870. Recognizing the threat of rapid spread of contagion among the crowds, the British government attempted to sanitize and control the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims at the Kumbh.

In 1870 the Pioneer newspaper, the voice of the British in the northern city of Allahabad, said that the control of crowding was seen as a “well-directed activity towards averting, or at any rate mitigating, the ravages of disease” among pilgrims. The spread of disease was viewed as a threat to the possible collection of taxes and governance.

Between 1892 and 1908, when major famines, cholera and plague epidemics struck in British India, the colonial government controlled entry to the Kumbh, citing hygiene concerns. Pilgrims dropped to a low of around 300,000 as reported by the Imperial Gazetteer. In 1941, the British government banned sale of tickets amid rumors that Japan, in advance to entering World War II, was to bomb Allahabad where the Kumbh was slated to take place.

RISING RELIGIOSITY

In the past century the Kumbh has become so popular that “half” versions – Ardh Kumbh – are held

every six years.

The dramatic arrival of the akharas – that includes 14 sects of Hindu and Sikh ascetics as well as warrior monks often illustrated with exoticized photographs – has become the signature visual of the Kumbh.

These tens of thousands of ascetics, some dressed in saffron robes, some nude and covered in ash, with wild dreadlocks, come riding on horseback, or in golden seats on elephants. The processions are accompanied by loud drumming, conch blowing and the sound of gongs as they enter the sacred water, in wave upon wave of humanity.

COVID CONTROLS

This year's event takes place amid fears that a massive gathering like this could turn out to be a COVID-19 superspreader event. According to Johns Hopkins University, by April 1, 2021, the start of the Kumbh Mela, India had reported 12 million cases and 162,900 deaths.

The Indian government has issued several directives to control the spread of the disease: Thermal screening checkpoints have been set up, and efforts are being made to sanitize all restrooms and sleeping quarters. Strict protocols for participation in the Kumbh have been issued, including a limited time period of half an hour for each akhara to bathe. Furthermore, the government has stated that after April 1 all visitors to the Kumbh have to produce evidence of a recent negative COVID-19 test.

However, even before the Kumbh began, the city and neighboring areas had already emerged as COVID-19 hot spots. As the festival began, seven living Hindu saints in the city of Haridwar tested positive, and 300 pilgrims were found positive during the first few days of the festival.

Images emerging from Haridwar of millions of the faithful, praying, eating and bathing, often maskless and in close proximity with one another, are raising fears about how the desire for the divine nectar of immortality might turn out in a pandemic year.

[The writer is Professor of Anthropology, Religion and Transnational Studies, Institute for Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies, Emerson College]

When Can Kids Get the COVID-19 Vaccine?

JAMES B. WOOD
THECONVERSATION.COM

A big question among parents and teachers as more schools reopen is when their kids will be vaccinated against COVID-19. Some have wondered whether the vaccine is even necessary for children.

A vaccine for children is getting closer. Pfizer on April 9, 2021, became the first vaccine maker to formally ask the Food and Drug Administration for emergency use authorization that would allow its COVID-19 vaccine to be given to adolescents ages 12 and older. Pfizer has said its vaccine trials in children show the vaccine is as effective in ages 12-15 as it is in young adults, however those results still have to be reviewed by the FDA.

Dr. JAMES WOOD, a pediatrician and assistant professor of pediatric infectious diseases, explains what doctors know today about the risk children face of getting and spreading the coronavirus and when vaccines might be available.

DO KIDS REALLY NEED TO GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

The short answer is yes. A lot of studies have shown that COVID-19 isn't as severe in children, particularly younger kids – but that doesn't mean kids aren't at risk of getting infected and potentially spreading the virus.

Children under 12 who get COVID-19 do tend to have mild illnesses or no symptoms, while teenagers seem to have responses somewhere between what adults and younger kids have experienced. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that teens were about

twice as likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 as children ages 5-11.

Researchers are still trying to understand why we're seeing these differences between older and younger kids. Behavior probably plays a part. Teenagers are more likely to engage in social or group activities, and they may or may not be wearing masks. Immune differences and biologic factors may also play a role. Non-SARS-CoV-2 coronaviruses are common in children, often resulting in upper respiratory infection. Is their frequent exposure to other coronaviruses helping protect them from severe COVID-19? That is one hypothesis. We know younger kids' immune responses in general are different from adults, and likely play a role in protection.

To keep schools as safe as possible, continuing schoolwide mask and social distancing policies will be important. With teenagers in particular, mask rules can't hinge on whether the person has been vaccinated or not. Until herd immunity within the whole community is at a good level, social distancing and masking is still going to be the recommendation.

SO, WHEN CAN KIDS GET VACCINATED?

Right now, the Pfizer vaccine is the only one in the U.S. authorized for teenagers as young as 16. Before kids under 16 can be vaccinated, clinical trials need to be completed in thousands of young volunteers to assess the vaccines' safety and efficacy, and the results must be fully reviewed and then authorized by the FDA.

Results from Pfizer's adolescent

trials are expected to be reviewed in the coming weeks. Vaccine manufacturer Moderna has trials underway with adolescents. And Johnson & Johnson – maker of the third vaccine authorized for adult use in the U.S. – announced in early April that it had also started trials in adolescents. If their vaccines are shown to be safe and effective and regulators authorize them, kids 12 and up could be vaccinated before school starts in the fall. Vaccine supply will partly determine how soon that happens.

Realistically, younger children probably won't be eligible for the vaccine until late fall or winter at the earliest. Moderna announced in mid-March that it had started testing its vaccine in children ages 6 months to 11 years. Pfizer said it is also starting testing in young children, but these trials take time.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THE VACCINES KIDS WILL GET?

The composition of the COVID-19 vaccines for children is the same as used in adults – the difference is that children may require a different dose.

The first step in vaccine trials is to figure out the right dose. The companies want to find the lowest possible dose that is both safe and produces a target level of antibodies. For example, Moderna uses a 100-microgram dose in adults. It is testing three different doses for children under age 2 – 25, 50 and 100 micrograms – and two doses for children over age 2, at 50 and 100 micrograms.

Once the company determines the optimal dose, it will launch a placebo-controlled trial to test its effectiveness, in which some children

will get a placebo and some will get the vaccine.

A rigorous system for pediatric vaccine trials is well established in the U.S. These trials are key to assessing the safety and efficacy of vaccines in children, which can differ from adults.

I am optimistic that a safe and effective vaccine will be available for children. Thus far, there have not been any safety signals from either the adult or adolescent studies that have been worrying to me as a pediatrician, but the studies still need to be done in children.

HOW CAN PARENTS CREATE SAFE PLAYDATES FOR KIDS?

When I talk to parents, I explain that it's a risk-versus-benefit question. Each family has a different tolerance.

From a medical standpoint, the mental health of kids and having them play with other kids is an important part of childhood.

I would say that unvaccinated kids playing indoors without masks on is still not a great idea. The risk is just too high at this point. As weather warms up, I would encourage kids to play outside. Ride bikes, play and socialize – just do it in a safe manner.

We all have pandemic fatigue, including medical professionals. As the weather gets warmer, I think everyone just wants to get back to normal. The worst thing we can do, right as we start to see a light at the end, is fall backward again – because that would just make it that much longer for everyone.

[The writer is Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics, Indiana University School of Medicine]

Pandemic? It's not there on Everest

SANGAM PRASAIN

KATHMANDU, 11 APR [KATHMANDUPOST]: Everest, which 'grew' by more than two feet last year, is all set to see yet another rush of hopeful summiteers.

While the world is witnessing a resurgence of Covid-19 including in India, which has been breaking records for new cases every day in the past week, for Everest enthusiasts, it's not a cause for concern.

And the Everest region is humming back with tourism activities after a painful 2020.

Yaks and ponies are transporting supplies on their backs up to the base camp at 5,380 metres from Lukla's Tenzing Hillary Airport, a small landing strip carved into the side of a mountain at 2,860 metres where expedition members usually fly into.

Icefall doctors, the dedicated team of high-altitude experts who fix the ropes and ladders up to Camp 2 to make the path easy for climbers, are already on their jobs. Hundreds of porters, high-altitude workers and staff at hotels and restaurants who had been laid off have got their jobs back.

Expedition outfitters, restaurants and hotels and logistic suppliers are back in business.

In other words, the 2021 spring Mount Everest climbing season is underway.

Although the actual climb towards the summit takes place in May, climbers get to the mountain as early as March to acclimatise to the high altitude.

"This year, even in the midst of the pandemic, the climber numbers are expected to reach near-record levels," said Ang Tshering Sherpa, former president of Nepal Mountaineering Association.

To reach the highest point on earth at 8,848.86 metres (29,031.69 feet) costs \$35,000 to \$90,000 per person depending on the extent of support the climber needs in terms of guides and supplies. This amount includes the

climbing permit cost of \$11,000.

According to the Department of Tourism, the state agency that issues the climbing permits, 244 climbers—193 men and 51 women—have already been given permits to climb Everest as of Friday.

The attraction of Everest is good news not only for the workers and businesses but also for the government since royalty collection is significant.

This year, the department has so far collected \$2.64 million as fees for Everest permits.

"Given the trend, the number of climbers seeking Everest permits could rise to 350, or near the 2019 level," said Mira Acharya, director at the department. "The number is better than expected in this current situation."

In 2019, Nepal had issued Everest permits to 381 climbers, the record number so far.

According to Acharya, potential climbers have been complaining about the difficulties of air connectivity to Nepal as more countries are enforcing lockdowns and restriction measures.

Nepal too has employed extra measures during these extraordinary times. The Department of Tourism has set up a health camp with two doctors—a first—at Everest base camp.

The department is also piloting fitting GPS devices on some government employees deployed as liaison officers to support expeditions to see whether climbers can be traced to prevent false claims of reaching the Everest summit.

"If it is successful, the department will implement it in a full-fledged manner from next year," said Pradip Raj Poudel, an engineer at the Tourism Ministry.

Another technical innovation this year is the setting up of biometric attendance for the liaison officers at least at two locations—in the department office at Bhrikutimandap and



Lukla—to prevent false claims by government officials that they have been doing their duty.

Liaison officers will first have to log in on the biometric attendance system installed at the Department of Tourism before heading to the mountains.

"It will show whether they reached their duty site and how many days they spend on duty," said Poudel.

Then there are the climbers. There are those eyeing records of all sorts, according to sources within the mountaineering industry.

Zhang Hong, 46, from Sichuan, China aims to become the first blind person from Asia and third in the world to climb Everest.

China has closed Everest to expeditions this year too.

"He will be assisted by four climbing guides directly," said Dawa Steven Sherpa, CEO of Asian Trekking. "The Chinese climber is confident."

American Erik Weiheymayer, on May 25, 2001 had reached the summit of Everest from the Nepal side and became the first blind man ever to do so.

On May 21, 2017, Andy Holzer of Austria, visually impaired since birth, became the second blind man to successfully summit Everest via the North Col route, or the

China side.

Industry insiders say that Colin O'Brady plans to climb Everest and the 8,516-metre Lhotse, the world's fourth-highest peak, in one go.

The summit to the two peaks diverges at the South Col situated at 7,906 metres.

This double-summit feat was achieved by American guide Michael Horst on May 14, 2011. Horst climbed Everest and Lhotse in under 21 hours.

While Horst had used supplementary oxygen during the two climbs and his recuperation in the South Col camp, according to alpinist.com, O'Brady plans to achieve the feat of back-to-back ascents of Everest and Lhotse without bottled oxygen.

Spanish climber Kilian Jornet plans to explore the dangerously difficult West Ridge of Everest without supplemental oxygen. Willi Unsoeld and Tom Hornbein, two members of an American team, had climbed Everest using the West Ridge in 1963, a decade after Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary had reached Everest by the South Col route.

Arijun Vajpai of India, who had climbed Everest in 2010 at the age of 16, becoming the youngest Indian climber to do

so, is back on the mountain after 11 years and this time, he is climbing without the supplementary oxygen.

"A dream which I had since the first time I stood on top of Everest as a 16 year old! [sic] I head back to Mt. Everest after 11 long years but this time without oxygen!" he wrote on his Facebook page.

A Qatari woman is on a quest to complete the Explorers Grand Slam—reaching the summits of the seven highest mountains in all seven continents and the two poles.

After reaching the North Pole, climbing the 6,959-metre (22,831 feet) Mount Aconcagua in South America and the 5,895-metre (19,340 feet) Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa, Sheikhha Asma Al Thani's sight is now set on Everest. If she climbs Everest, she will also be the first woman from her country to climb the mountain and 472nd from the world, from the Nepal side.

Another 16-member royal Bahraini team, who controversially arrived with 2,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccines for the people of a village in Gorkha, is also acclimatising in the Everest region.

Record holder Kami Rita Sherpa has announced he is climbing Everest for the 25th time this year. But he may do a double climb.

"That's on my mind. It will depend on the weather condition," Kami Rita told the Post.

According to him, his first job with Seven Summit Treks is to fix ropes and ladders above Camp 2 to the summit. The expedition outfitter won the contract to fix ropes and ladders up to the summit this spring.

"I may come back to base camp and head to the summit with the Bahraini team. It will be the 26th time if that happens," he told the Post.

According to Guinness World Records, the site that

records ultimate record-breaking facts and achievements, the most number of people to reach the peak of Everest on a single day is 354, with 212 climbers from the Nepal side, as recorded on 23 May 2019. This is considerably more than the previous record of 266 people, set on 19 May 2013.

A total of 6,507 mountaineers have climbed Everest from the Nepal side.

The unprecedented—and some would say alarming—number of climbers during the 2019 spring season was highlighted in a photograph taken on May 22 by Nirmal "Nims" Purja showing a serpentine line of climbers all the way along Hillary Step, below the summit, with some 100 people attempting to descend as around 150 pushed up the narrow ridge, the Guinness World Records said.

"The increase in the number of ascents was attributed to a narrow window of opportunity as the weather cleared on 22-23 May, forcing hundreds of climbers to tackle the last part of the ascent. Despite the successes, at least three people died during this busiest of days," it said.

Overall, in 2019, 11 people died on Everest, 10 from the Nepal side.

"There are tragedies on Everest every year, but it doesn't seem to have deterred adventure enthusiasts," said Sherpa, the former president of Nepal Mountaineering Association.

In fact, according to him, the number of potential climbers would have been higher than it is so far this year if the government had not delayed easing the quarantine provision and resumption of on-arrival visa.

"Otherwise, the mountaineering industry would be on its pre-Covid-19 levels this spring," he said. "But despite the delay, things are on track. The industry is optimistic to recover from such a deadly financial blow."

Nepal's Health Ministry recommends school closure for at least three weeks

KATHMANDU, 11 APR [KATHMANDUPOST]: The Ministry of Health has recommended the closure of schools for three weeks in densely populated areas like Kathmandu, Pokhara and Parsa, among others, in light of rising Covid-19 cases among schoolchildren and their family members.

"We have recommended shutting down schools for at least three weeks immediately in high risk areas and big cities," Dr Samir Kumar Adhikari, joint spokesperson for the Health Ministry, told the Post.

According to Adhikari, of the total cases reported in recent days, 14 percent are children. Last year, only four percent of the total infections were children.

About two weeks ago, the Nepal Army-run Sainik Awasiya Mahavidyalaya in Bhaktapur was shut down after some of its students and teachers tested positive for the coronavirus. At least 23 students and some teachers of the school had tested positive.

Covid-19 cases were detected in 40 students at an engineering college in Pokhara a month ago, according to the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division.

School operators, however, are yet to agree on closing the schools.

On Friday, the Covid-19 Crisis

Management Centre held consultations with the representatives of private and public schools and guardians where they pushed for classes with physical presence by adopting strict health guidelines.

According to a school representative who attended the meeting, stopping classes would hamper students' studies.

"We said a blanket closure of the academic institutions will affect children's learning," Ritu Raj Sapkota, chairperson of National Private and Boarding Schools' Association, Nepal, told the Post. "We are for running schools by strictly following health guidelines. The officials from the centre had agreed to our proposal."

School operators say as the last year's experience has shown, most of the schools and children are not equipped for virtual classes and the government shouldn't opt for a blanket closure of schools.

As the Covid-19 pandemic severely affected the teaching-learning process, the government has extended the academic year by two months.

The academic session that normally concludes in April has been pushed until June.

Sapkota said the blanket closure could further affect the cur-

rent academic session.

Over 7 million students study in around 30,000 private and public schools across the country.

"We are for allowing the respective local governments to decide on the matter as the effect of the pandemic is not uniform across the country," Deepak Sharma, spokesperson for the Education Ministry, told the Post. "However, the schools that continue physical classes must abide by the health protocols."

The government in September last year had endorsed a directive allowing the respective local governments to make decisions on the closure of the schools.

Although children are at a relatively low risk of developing a severe form of the infection, health experts warn that they could pass on the virus to other vulnerable groups at their homes and communities.

Moreover, the Health Ministry has confirmed that the fast-spreading variant of the coronavirus, the one first detected in the United Kingdom, is responsible for the recent spike in new cases in Nepal, whose infection rate, severity and death rate are very high compared to the variant first detected in the country.

"Even children and youths are becoming seriously ill," Dr Sagar Rajbhandari, director at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, told the Post.

Scientists in the United Kingdom have said that the UK variant, known as B.1.1.7, is 40 to 70 percent more transmissible than the one that caused the first wave of coronavirus infection.

They have also said that the virus is 64 percent deadlier than the previous strains.

"We have also recommended that public vehicles carry passengers only 50 percent of their capacity and enforce safety measures strictly," said Adhikari.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Health Ministry had issued 10-point recommendations urging agencies concerned to take utmost caution, as the infection rate has been found high among schoolchildren in big cities like Kathmandu and Pokhara.

In a statement, the ministry called for strictly enforcing safety measures in public transportation of big cities and in other public places—shopping malls, bars, cinema halls, party

palaces, health clubs, swimming pools and temples, among others.

The ministry has urged the local level and local administrations to encourage people to stay in home quarantine following their return from abroad and monitor if they are following safety measures properly.

"Increase contact tracing, antigen tests, and polymerase chain reaction tests as per the need," the statement reads.

Nepal has so far reported 279,725 cases of coronavirus infections, with 3,039 deaths.

The Health Ministry said on Saturday that 337 people were infected and one died in the last

24 hours. Apart from this, 26 people tested positive during antigen tests performed at health desks set up at Nepal-India border points. The number of active cases stands at 2,800 throughout the country.

Public health experts have warned that health facilities could be overwhelmed within a few days, as new variants of the virus are more infectious.

"We may not get much time for preparation," Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, chief of the Clinical Research Unit at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, told the Post. "We should start necessary preparation for the worst-case scenario."

Chinese vaccines' effectiveness low, official admits

BEIJING, 11 APR [ALJAZEERA]: In a rare admission of the weakness of Chinese coronavirus vaccines, the country's top disease control official says their effectiveness is low and the government is considering mixing them to give them a boost.

Chinese vaccines "don't have very high protection rates", said the director of the China Centers for Disease Control, Gao Fu, at a conference on Saturday

in the southwestern city of Chengdu.

Beijing has distributed hundreds of millions of doses in other countries.

"It's now under formal consideration whether we should use different vaccines from different technical lines for the immunisation process," Gao said.

The effectiveness rate of a coronavirus vaccine from Sinovac, a Chinese developer, at preventing symp-



tomatic infections has been found to be as low as 50.4 percent by researchers in Brazil. By comparison, the vaccine made by Pfizer-BioNTech has been found to

be 97-percent effective.

Beijing has yet to approve any foreign vaccines for use in China, where the coronavirus emerged in late 2019.

Gao gave no details

of possible changes in strategy but mentioned mRNA, a previously experimental technique used by some Western vaccine developers while China's drug-makers used traditional technology.

"Everyone should consider the benefits mRNA vaccines can bring for humanity," Gao said. "We must follow it carefully and not ignore it just because we already have several types of vaccines already."

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Dhoni fined for slow over rate in CSK’s opener

MUMBAI, APR 11 (PTI): Chennai Super Kings skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni has been fined Rs 12 lakh for maintaining a slow over rate during his side’s Indian Premier League opener against Delhi Capitals here.

Three-time champions CSK witnessed a poor to its IPL 14 campaign, losing by seven wickets to Rishabh Pant-led Delhi Capitals at the Wankhede stadium here on Saturday night.

“Chennai Super Kings captain MS Dhoni has been fined after his team maintained a slow over-rate during their IPL 2021 match against Delhi Capitals at Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai on April 10,” the IPL said in a media statement.

“As it was his team’s first offence of the season under the IPL’s Code of Conduct relating to minimum over-rate offences, Mr Dhoni was fined Rs 12 lakh,” the statement added.

Delhi Capitals made short work of the stiff 189-run target, riding on Shikhar Dhawan (85) and Prithvi Shaw (72) brilliant 138-run opening stand.

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Mbappe nets 21st league goal as PSG wins 4-1 at Strasbourg



PARIS, APR 11 (AP): Kylian Mbappe struck his league-leading 21st goal of the season as defending champion Paris Saint-Germain won 4-1 at Strasbourg to stay three points behind leader Lille.

Coach Mauricio Pochettino defended his decision to play Mbappe for 88 minutes even though PSG has a big game coming up against Bayern Munich in the Champions League on Tuesday.

“The best preparation for him is to be playing. He’s a very intelligent lad, very mature in the way he thinks about what he does,” Pochettino said.

“Our medical staff gives us a lot of information, which allows us to analyze the form of the players. We didn’t take any risks with him, nor with any other player.”

The jet-heeled forward put PSG ahead in the 15th minute.

Mbappe latched onto a pass, cut inside a defender and slotted the ball through the legs of goalkeeper Matz Sels, who could have done better.

Moments earlier, Strasbourg midfielder Adrien Thomasson hit the post with a fine shot from just outside the penalty area, with goal-

keeper Keylor Navas well beaten.

PSG took control after Mbappe’s goal.

Sels was beaten again in the 26th when winger Pablo Sarabia beat a defender on the edge of the area and drilled a low shot into the bottom corner, and Mbappe set up striker Moise Kean just before the break.

Pochettino replaced Navas at halftime with Sergio Rico as a precautionary measure, ahead of the quarterfinal return leg against Bayern with PSG leading 3-2.

Rico was well beaten by 19-year-old striker Moise Sahi’s first league goal as he clipped an excellent half-volley into the top corner from a cross in the 62nd.

Pochettino took the

risk of keeping Mbappe on, even though the match already looked won after Leandro Paredes hit a fine free kick 10 minutes earlier for 4-1.

“Kylian is the first person who wants to play. He’s a World Cup winner, one of the best French players in the Champions League, a forward of great class,” Pochettino said.

“I like his mentality, he wants to play in every competition and it shows his level of investment in the team. He’s an excellent player, but also a very endearing one who has great humility.”

In the other match Saturday, seventh-place Montpellier scored right at the start, just after halftime, and with

seconds left in a 3-3 draw against sixth-place Marseille.

Marseille coach Jorge Sampaoli was denied a fourth win in five games since taking charge when striker Gaetan Laborde scored for the hosts with a diving header in the fourth and final minute of injury time.

Marseille fell behind after just 28 seconds when striker Andy Delort latched onto midfielder Jordan Ferri’s pass over the top and expertly lobbed goalkeeper Steve Mandanda.

Poland striker Arkadiusz Milik equalized in the 42nd minute when he collected a quick pass from Boubacar Kamara, shrugged off one defender, poked the ball through another’s legs and neatly

swept the ball inside the post.

Marseille went ahead on the verge of halftime when Dimitri Payet picked out Florian Thauvin near the penalty spot. His effort was blocked by 43-year-old Brazilian defender Vitorino Hilton but the loose ball rolled to midfielder Pape Gueye and he finished confidently.

Ferri again played a long ball behind Marseille’s defense in the 46th, and Laborde took it down expertly before slotting through Mandanda’s legs for 2-2.

It got worse for Marseille when central defender Duje Caleta-Car was shown a red card in the 62nd, yet Marseille took the lead when substitute Lucas Perrin headed in Payet’s cross in the 70th.

Laborde had the last word.

Monaco and Lyon play their games on Sunday, with third-place Monaco hosting last-place Dijon, and fourth-place Lyon facing midtable Angers.

Coach Niko Kovac’s Monaco side is in fine form, having lost just once in the last 19 games.

Lille’s defense held firm Friday in a 2-0 win at Metz.

Impressive Madrid beats Barcelona 2-1 to go top in Spain

MADRID, APR 11 (AP): Keeping Lionel Messi in check again in what could turn out to be his last Spanish league clash, Real Madrid continued the impressive run which has put it at the heart of the title race.

Four days after beating Liverpool in the first leg of the Champions League quarterfinals, Madrid defeated Barcelona 2-1 on Saturday to return to the top in Spain.

“We have to enjoy what we’ve been doing. We got two very good results and it wasn’t easy,” Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane said. “Being in the lead won’t change anything for us. We have to keep working hard.”

The victory in pouring rain in the Spanish capital left Madrid tied on points with Atletico Madrid, which on Sunday can return to the top when it visits sixth-place Real Betis. Madrid is ahead of its city rival on the head-to-head tiebreaker.

Barcelona, which had been unbeaten in 19 straight league games, stayed one point off the lead.

The 33-year-old Messi, who reached seven straight clashes without a goal, has his contract with Barcelona ending this season. The Argentine star expressed his desire to leave the Catalan club last year but had the request denied.

Karim Benzema and Toni Kroos scored first-half goals to give Madrid its sixth straight win in all competitions. The defending league champions were coming off a 3-1 win over Liverpool in the Champions League on Tuesday.

“It was a very important victory for us,” Madrid defender Nacho Fernandez said after the Barcelona match.

“It’s always special to win a clash, and even more when we are so close together at the top in the fight for the title. You could say today was a final, but there is still a lot left in the league.”

Barcelona got on the board in the second half with a goal by scar Mingueza. It nearly equalized with a shot from young substitute Ilaix Moriba that struck the crossbar in the final play of the match.

“We tried until the end but it wasn’t possible. We almost had it in that final play,” Barcelona’s Sergi Roberto said. “We depended on our own results had we won, but now we need to hope that our rivals stumble. We will keep fighting until the very end.”

This was the first time Madrid has taken the league lead since the early rounds of the competition, and it trailed Atletico by 11 points at one stage.

The result ended Barcelona’s six-match winning streak in the league. It had won nine away matches in a row in the competition.

It was an even start at the Alfredo Di Stefano Stadium in Madrid’s training center, but the hosts opened the scoring in the 13th minute with Benzema’s superb flicked shot from close range after a low cross by Lucas Vazquez.

The French striker,

who has scored 10 goals in his last nine matches, got in front of Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo and flicked the ball toward the net with his back foot. He hadn’t scored against Barcelona in nine consecutive clashes.

The Catalan club complained of a foul by Vazquez on Messi just moments before the opening goal.

Kroos added to the lead in the 28th from a free kick following a foul on Vinicius Junior, who was coming off an outstanding performance in Madrid’s win over Liverpool.

Kroos shot from just outside the area and the ball was deflected by American defender Sergi Dest before going into the net.

Madrid almost added to the lead in the 34th when Federico Valverde hit the post after a breakthrough led by Vinicius Junior, who also hit the post in the second half.

That was after Barcelona pulled one back in the 60th with a shot from inside the area by Mingueza after a low cross by Jordi Alba.

Madrid played the final minutes a man down after Casemiro was sent off with a second yellow card.

One of Messi’s best chances was with a corner kick that curled across the area and hit Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois’ far post in first-half stoppage time.

Messi’s free kick in second-half stoppage time was easily stopped by Courtois.

The visitors complained about being denied a penalty in the final minutes, with Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman saying it was “a clear penalty.”

“I don’t know why there is VAR in Spain,” he said.

Madrid got the win despite a depleted defense with the absence of central defenders Raphael Varane and Sergio Ramos. Barcelona was without the injured Gerard Pique.

Right back Vazquez, who has been key for Madrid in recent games, had to be replaced due to an injury before halftime.

Barcelona’s next match is the Copa del Rey final against Athletic Bilbao on Saturday, while Madrid travels to England to play Liverpool again in the Champions League on Wednesday.

CALA PLAYS
Juan Cala, who last weekend was accused of racially insulting Valencia defender Mouctar Diakhaby, played from the start in C diz’s 1-0 win at Getafe.

Cala denied any wrongdoing and the Spanish league said Friday it had not found evidence to support Diakhaby’s accusation against the C diz player.

OTHER RESULTS
Athletic Bilbao was held 0-0 at home by second-to-last Alavés to extend its winless streak to five matches in all competitions. The winless run of last-place Eibar reached 14 matches after a 1-0 home loss to eighth-place Levante.

Losing Hazlewood a blow, Ngidi and Jason also not available for next game: Fleming

MUMBAI, APR 11 (PTI): Losing Josh Hazlewood was a big blow as it left the team bereft of overseas pace bowling options with Jason Behrendorff and South Africa’s Lungi Ngidi also not available for the next game, said Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming.

Australia pacer Hazlewood had withdrawn at the last moment to keep himself fit for upcoming international assignments. Behrendorff was named his replacement last Friday and is yet to arrive, while Ngidi is serving his quarantine after returning midway from South Africa’s ODI series against Pakistan.

“(Lungi) Ngidi won’t be

available. He won’t be arriving in time for the next game. So losing Josh Hazlewood, which was the plan to have him available for these games, is a blow simply as an option upfront,” Fleming said in the post-match press conference.

“Ngidi will be arriving soon. (Jason) Behrendorff would obviously be following that. Its (bowling) an area that we are probably short on.

“But we still look at the Indian bowlers and we have international bowler Sam Curran and probably expect a little bit more.”

CSK went down by seven wickets in its opening match of IPL-14 after the Delhi Capitals

chased down a target of 189 in the 19th over with openers Prithvi Shaw and Shikhar Dhawan providing the platform with a rollicking century stand.

One of the highlights of this edition is that all teams will play in neutral venues amid the rise in COVID-19 pandemic.

Fleming pointed out that Mumbai Indians also struggled to adapt to Chennai conditions in the tournament opener against Royal Challengers Bangalore on Friday and said teams will have to find ways to adapt to neutral conditions.

“We will learn a lot from being here for another 4 games. But don’t underestimate how much it takes to change the

philosophy of a side. We are very much a Chennai-based side,” the CSK coach said.

“We saw Mumbai struggle to a degree in Chennai the other night. They have got a challenge on how to change their tactics in Chennai and our tactics have to be a little bit better with the ball in Mumbai.

“So, it’s one of the quirks of this competition in this COVID-19 age and we just have to find a way,” he added.

Fleming said “it’s going to be high-scoring games in Mumbai and toss might play a big part.”

The former New Zealand skipper was full of praise for veteran Suresh Raina, who

slammed a 36-ball 54 after re-turning to the IPL.

“It’s really good, considering the cricket and where he has come from. It was an outstanding innings,” Fleming said.

Raina had missed the 2020 edition of the IPL in the UAE owing to personal reasons. He was retained by CSK.

“We put Moeen Ali up as an aggressor and also used Suresh’s aggressive role to get to play some cricket and find some form. But after playing 2-3 boundaries, he really got going.”

Fleming said the way CSK made a comeback after losing early wickets is “a really positive sign for us.”

Colombia’s cartels target Europe with cocaine, corruption and torture

DANIEL BOFFEY
BRUSSELS, 11 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: At 5am on a chilly Tuesday morning last month, 1,600 police officers and balaclava-wearing special forces, bristling with arms and battering rams, were ordered into action around the Belgian port city of Antwerp.

More than 200 addresses were raided in what was the largest police operation ever conducted in the country and potentially one of the most significant moves yet against the increasingly powerful narco-gangs of western Europe.

There are hopes that Operation Sky will herald the downfall of a generation of local bosses, although the Belgian and Dutch “godfathers” largely now hide out in Dubai and Turkey, hoping to be out of reach of the authorities.

An incredible 27 tonnes of cocaine have been seized on Antwerp’s quays, in container ships and safe houses, with an estimated value of €1.4bn (£1.2bn), and many arrests have been made. It has been hailed as a mighty blow against what Belgian federal prosecutor Frédéric Van Leeuw calls “a world where morality has totally disappeared”, but Operation Sky has also highlighted a chilling development. Europe has eclipsed the US as the Colombian cartels’ favoured market, because of higher prices and much lower risks posed by European governments in terms of interdiction, extradition and seizure of assets.

Jeremy McDermott, a former British army officer who is now executive director of the think-tank InSight Crime, said a kilogram of cocaine in the US is worth up to \$28,000 wholesale but that rises to \$40,000 on average in Europe, and nearly \$80,000 in some parts of Europe.

“It is more money for less risk. I see a deliberate decision by some of the top-level Colombian traffickers, based on sources who sat in a series of meetings in 2005-6, where the business decisions were made,”

McDermott said. “It is a business no-brainer. The reason Antwerp and Rotterdam are so attractive is because they are some of the most efficient ports in the world, handling enormous volumes of containers, which allows traffickers to play the numbers game.”

The methods of operation being brought to Europe’s major ports, where Dutch and Belgian criminals are sub-contracted by Colombians to move the product onwards to Italian, Albanian, British and Irish organised crime networks, are bringing a level of corruption and violence never before seen in this part of the world. “We don’t have robberies any more,” said Joris van der Aa, the *Gazet van Antwerpen* newspaper’s respected crime reporter and columnist. “Everyone is working in the drug business.”

Among those dragged from their beds on the first Operation Sky raid on 9 March were serving police officers, an employee of the public prosecutors office, civil servants, tax officials and hospital administrators suspected of feeding desired information to the gangs, as well as those thought to have been responsible for almost daily incidents of gang-related violence in the city in recent months, ranging from drive-by shootings and grenade attacks on homes to punishment beatings. Nearly 50 arrests were made but many more have followed. Only last Thursday, two prisons and 24 homes were searched in Antwerp, Borgerhout, Borsbeek, Essen, Lokeren, Wilrijk and Wijnegem. A further 11 people were read their rights.

Operation Sky had been two years in the making, triggered, in part, by an escalating sense of fear in the city. The mayor of Antwerp, Bart De Wever, has a 24-hour security brief following threats to his life. But the scale of the savagery that has befallen Antwerp was perhaps most acutely felt last summer with the discovery of a torture chamber



in the village of Wouwse Plantage, 30 miles outside the city.

A makeshift prison had been found constructed out of seven shipping containers, six of which were used as holding cells. The final one, complete with dentist’s chair with straps on the armrests and footrests, was fitted out for torture. Shears, saws, scalpels, pliers, tape, balaclavas and black cotton bags to be put over the head provided graphic enough evidence of the scenes that had unfolded.

But for all the calls made by De Wever for a “high-pressure hose” to be put on this stain on the city, Operation Sky was, according to Belgian prosecutors, only possible due to the deciphering of what had been described as an uncrackable encrypted messaging service known as SKY ECC, a Canadian communications company suspected by the prosecutors to be a criminal organisation masquerading as a legitimate business catering for privacy-loving people.

Prosecutors said smartphones fitted with the SKY ECC app, but with microphone and GPS functions removed, had been distributed throughout the city to those within the network of people suspected to

be working for the narco-gangs.

Worldwide, there are 171,000 SKY ECC devices registered, mainly in Europe, north America, a number of countries in central and south America – mainly Colombia – and in the Middle East. But, strikingly, 25% of the active users of these devices are located in Belgium (6,000) and the Netherlands (12,000), and half of those were said to be in use in around Antwerp port.

In “cracking” SKY ECC, the Belgian police claimed they had broken into a communications network used and so wholly trusted by the drug traffickers, and those they blackmailed, threatened and bribed, that images of torture and execution orders were freely sent around, along with insider financial and operational information.

For a period of three weeks, officers were able to view messages live as they were sent, collecting information, acting only where they feared there was a risk to life, and building an unprecedented picture of the increasingly powerful and vicious criminal networks working out of the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam.

SKY ECC has reportedly denied police had compromised their en-

crypted messaging platform, saying instead that a malicious phishing app, illegally distributed under the SKY ECC name, was what the police appeared to have hacked.

“The pictures are worse than what I have seen in some TV series,” Van Leeuw told reporters of the images he had seen on the service. “Settling of scores, contract killings, photos of victims, messages that say if we don’t find a target, we attack the family. It’s absolutely incredible violence.”

Belgian prosecutors said investigators intercepted about 1 billion encrypted messages from SKY ECC in total, of which almost half have been decrypted, but which will take months to work through, likely raising many new avenues of inquiry.

Jean-François Eap, SKY ECC’s global’s chief executive officer, and Thomas Herdman, a former distributor of Sky Global devices, were charged in the US on 12

March with a conspiracy to violate the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (Rico). Both have denied wrongdoing. Eap has said “the unfounded allegations of involvement in criminal activity by me and our company are entirely false”.

The prosecutor’s office is realistic about the impact on the criminal underworld of Operation Sky. “We are aware the criminals will be flexible and will search and find new ways to communicate,” a spokesman said. “We will have to be alert to follow these new technologies”. But Van der Aa, who has been following the repercussions at street level, believes Operation Sky will be a watershed moment – whether for good or bad.

“It is a big blow because, in Belgium and a great part of the criminal underworld in the Netherlands, they really trusted Sky as a system,” he said. “They were so full of confidence, and the police now have so much information on how the underworld was structured, bank accounts, all the corrupt contacts are being arrested. It takes years to build these networks.”

“I think there will be a change of a whole generation of criminals. Twenty seven tonnes of cocaine is a lot to lose. In south America they will be thinking, ‘Let’s not do business with these Dutch and Belgian guys any more’.

“So, it is just very quiet at the moment. Everyone is waiting for the storm and asking themselves what the police know. Eventually, they will go after the guys in Dubai.”

“But the question then is, who will replace them?”

Facebook ‘still too slow to act on groups profiting from Covid conspiracy theories’

JASPER JACKSON, AL-EXANDRA HEAL & TOM HALL

LONDON, 11 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: Covid conspiracy theorists are seeking to profit from the millions of followers they have built up on Instagram during the pandemic by marketing health supplements, wellness courses and juicers to them.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism has identified more than 100 Covid conspiracy accounts promoting products to an audience of almost 6 million people on Instagram, which is owned by Facebook.

Facebook insists that it is taking more action on health misinformation, but conspiracy channels on the platform are nevertheless growing in popularity. In the first three months of this year the 100 accounts gained almost a million followers between them. This potentially puts the US tech giant in breach of its undertaking to the UK government last November that it would work to stop users profiting from coronavirus vaccine misinformation online.

The tracked accounts included a group of Instagrammers called Health Freedom for Humanity (HFFH). The group’s executive director and co-founder is Alec Zeck, a 28-year-old serving US army captain and Olympic-level handball player. Zeck’s 85,000-follower Instagram page hosts a range of misleading claims, including that the Covid-19 virus has never been isolated. His account promotes HFFH, but also points to a page on linktree, a startup used extensively by Instagrammers to direct users to other resources, sponsors and products for sale.

On his linktree page, Zeck promotes a “mind/body/spirit” site selling merchandise and points users to a website for

Coseva “heavy metal detox”, selling \$95 bottles of a spray that claims to cleanse the body and brain of heavy metals. The page names a “sponsor” – Kylee Zeck, Alec’s wife – who takes a cut of sales.

Zeck said: “Our organisation comprises people from all walks of life united in our belief that mandated medical procedures of any kind, medical coercion, or restrictions on health choice violate basic human rights.”

HFFH’s vice-president is Tommy John, a chiropractor who claims the coronavirus does not exist, a line he held to even after his father, a retired baseball star also called Tommy, was hospitalised with Covid. As well as promoting HFFH via his Instagram account, John also links to a site selling T-shirts with slogans such as: “It’s not a pandemic. It’s worse.”

One of HFFH’s board members is Joseph Yi MD, a “holistic psychiatrist” who runs a CBD oil business and is one of four doctors behind a supplement seller called Beyond Recovery. There are links to both businesses on his Instagram page, where he has described the coronavirus pandemic as a “plan-demic” and the “shIRONA charade”. Yi has said he believes masks aren’t effective and that tests for Covid-19 are “a scam”.

HFFH did not respond to requests for comment.

One of the most common ways of making money on Instagram is via affiliate programmes, which provide a cut of sales in return for product referrals. More than a dozen of the accounts investigated promoted heavy metal detox sprays. Many anti-vaccine groups and influencers claim, falsely, that trace amounts of heavy metals such as aluminium used in some vaccines cause health problems.

‘Out of control’: Brazil’s COVID surge sparks regional fears

RIO DE JANEIRO, 21 APR [ALJAZEERA]: Almost a year ago to the day, the jungle city of Manaus grabbed international headlines after a flood of COVID-19 deaths forced gravediggers to dig mass burials – catapulting the city into the centre of Brazil’s coronavirus outbreak.

Those scenes are now being repeated throughout Brazil, where authorities are working day and night to bury the dead, with experts warning that the country’s funeral services could be the next to topple.

Since the start of the year, an uncontrollable second wave has pushed Brazil over the 300,000 death mark. As the country continues to hit grim milestones – a record 4,247 deaths on Thursday alone – the entire South American nation is



now the global COVID-19 epicentre, with experts warning that 5,000 Brazilians could lose their lives in a single day in April.

Much of the fear is being directed to the P1 variant, linked to the Brazilian Amazon. If Brazil cannot control its high transmission rate, experts fear the country’s healthcare tragedy could endanger the world. If the virus is left to circulate freely, it could create the ideal breeding ground for new and even

more deadly variants.

Brazil’s neighbours have sealed off their borders to the country in a desperate attempt to prevent new variants from bleeding into the rest of the continent and harming vaccine efficiency.

“We’re very concerned. The staggering amount of deaths in Brazil in just a few months is our biggest worry,” virologist and researcher Humberto Debat, from the National Institute of Agricultural Technology

told Al Jazeera.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is increasingly being blamed for undermining the severity of the virus.

Even in the pandemic’s darkest hour, the far-right leader continues to ignore calls from health officials for a national lockdown, attacks the use of masks, ignores science, peddles unproven remedies and told Brazilians this week “there’s no use crying over spilled milk”, referring to Brazil’s soaring death toll.

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SummitTIMES

Caroline Jurie gives up Mrs World crown following arrest for pageant incident

Mrs. World Caroline Jurie has given up her crown after allegedly injuring Mrs. Sri Lanka World Pushpika De Silva at a recent pageant. On Friday, April 9, Caroline issued a recorded statement to her Instagram, writing that she will “always stand for what I believe is right.”

“Every beauty pageant has a set of rules and regulations. What I was pushing for from the beginning was a fair stage. The rules and regulations are equal to all. Rules aren’t there so that we can find loopholes so that we can win at any cost,” she continued. “The Mrs. World pageant was not created to discriminate divorced or separated women but to celebrate the dreams of the married women.”

Caroline argued that women who are “divorced or separated” may compete in other pageants that do not require a specific relationship status.

As a result of the onstage incident, Caroline, as well as model Chula Padmendra, were arrested on charges of simple hurt and criminal cause on April 8. Since then, they have both been released on bail.



BAFTA 2021: Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom Scores 2 Wins On Opening Night

The 2021 BAFTA Awards - the British Academy Film Awards - announced the winners in eight of the total 25 categories on the opening night on Saturday, ahead of the big night on Sunday.

The opening night winners list included critically acclaimed films such as Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom, Mank, Sound Of Metal and Rocks, among others. Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom scored two wins at the opening night of the BAFTA Awards, winning one each for Costume Design and Make Up & Hair.

While Mank won a BAFTA for Production Design, Rocks won the Best Casting BAFTA. Sound Of Metal won in one of the expected categories - Sound. Christopher Nolan’s Tenet won a BAFTA for Special Visual Effects.

The opening night of the BAFTA Awards also saw The Owl And The Pussycat take the trophy home for British Short Animation while The Present won the British Short Film award. Filmmaker Noel Clarke was honoured with the prestigious Outstanding British Contribution to Cinema award, which was announced last month.



The opening night of the BAFTA Awardss were hosted by British radio and TV presenter Clara Amfo while Joanna Scanlan and Rhianna Dhillon joined the show as guests.

On Sunday, the British Academy Film Awards will be hosted by Dermot O’Leary and Edith Bowman from London’s Royal Albert Hall with virtual at-

tendance from nominees and winners.

The list of presenters includes actress Priyanka Chopra, along with the likes of Tom Hiddleston, Hugh Grant, Felicity Jones, Jonathan Pryce and Renée Zellweger, among others. Celebrated filmmaker Ang Lee will be honoured with the Fellowship, the highest honour bestowed by the British Academy.

Chloe Zhao creates DGA Awards history, becomes first Asian woman to win top prize

Filmmaker Chloe Zhao won the top prize at the Directors Guild of America (DGA) Awards for her feature film “Nomadland”, further bolstering the movie’s frontrunner status for the upcoming Oscars.

The Beijing-born filmmaker became the first Asian woman to win the trophy for best feature directing at the 73rd edition of the awards, which were held on Saturday, reported Deadline.

She is also the second woman to earn the top DGA Award, after Kathryn Bigelow won for her 2009 movie “The Hurt Locker”.

The filmmaker beat out acclaimed directors David Fincher (“Mank”), Aaron Sorkin (“The Trial of the Chicago 7”), Lee Isaac Chung (“Minari”) and Emerald Fennell (“Promising Young Woman”) to win the marquee award.

“Nomadland” features Academy Award winner Frances McDormand as a woman who leaves home to travel around the American West after losing her job.

In her acceptance speech, 39-year-old Zhao gave a shout out to her fellow nominees for their respective films.

Calling Fennell “brilliant” and “daring”, Zhao said the British filmmaker has a unique voice and control over her craft.

“I can’t wait to see what thought-provoking journey you’re going to take us on next,” she added.

To Lee, Zhao said, “Your film touched me on such a personal level. You’re able to show us so much beauty and love in such an honest and authentic way, I think it’s incredible what you’ve done.”

She hailed “The Trial of the Chicago 7” director Sorkin as

a “poet”. “I can feel my heart beating with yours when I watch your film,” she added.

Zhao said that entire filmography of Fincher has been a “masterclass” for her and she feels inspired by him.

“You’re not only a master of the craft, you also have created some of the most nuanced and humanistic performances I’ve ever seen. Your conviction is so inspiring and there’s no one like you,” she added.

The winner of the DGA Awards’ top prize has historically been a strong indicator of which filmmaker will go on to win the best director Oscar.

However, last year saw Sam Mendes bagged the main award for war drama “1917”, but eventually lost the Oscar race to South Korean filmmaker Bong Joon-Ho, who won for his movie “Parasite”.

Darius Marder, the man behind Riz Ahmed-starrer “Sound of Metal”, bagged the first-time feature film directing award.

He was pitted against Regina King of “One Night in Miami”, Florian Zeller of “The Father”, Radha Blank of “The Forty-Year-Old Version” and Fernando Frias De La Parra of “I’m No Longer Here”.

In the television segment, Scott Frank of “The Queen’s Gambit” fame won the directing award for TV movie and limited series.

Susanna Fogel won the best directorial achievement for a comedy series for “The Flight Attendant”, while Lesli Linka Glatter took the drama series award for “Homeland”.

Michael Dweck and Gregory Kershaw won in the best documentary directing category for Sony Pictures Classics’s “The Truffle Hunters”.

Time & Patience:

How COVID-positive Katrina Kaif is dealing with isolation

Hello there, Katrina Kaif.

The Sooryavanshi actress checked into on Instagram on Saturday to greet her fans, who have been eagerly waiting to hear from her. Katrina Kaif tested positive for COVID-19 last week - she revealed her diagnosis in an Instagram story.

In her recent post, Katrina shared just a few selfies, sharing glimpses of her present mood in isolation. Katrina appeared to hint that spending time with herself and being patient are the two essential ways she’s dealing with the lockdown.

“Time and patience,” she captioned her photos, in which Katrina can be seen soaking up the sun on a lazy Sunday afternoon. “Sundar” commented Fatima Sana Shaikh, who too had COVID-29 earlier.

Last week, Katrina shared this statement on social media, confirming she’s tested positive: “I have tested positive for COVID-19. Have immediately isolated myself and will be under home quarantine. I am following all safety protocols under the advice of my doctors.”

Katrina’s statement arrived just a day after her rumoured boyfriend, actor Vicky Kaushal, tested positive.

Meanwhile, actress Alia Bhatt, who also tested COVID-19 positive earlier, checked in on Instagram recently from her home isolation with this update: “Dreamers never wake up.”

Terms of work, Katrina Kaif is looking forward to the release of Rohit Shetty-directed Sooryavanshi, in which she co-stars with Akshay Kumar. She will also be seen in upcoming movie Phone Bhoot, which also stars Ishaan Khatter and Siddhant Chaturvedi. The trio play the role of ghostbusters in Phone Bhoot.



GUTEN TAG! Model and TV host Heidi Klum gives us a wave as she arrives to film America’s Got Talent in L.A.

ARIES:

There are periods of doing and periods of being, and they’re both just as important, Aries. What you’re experiencing right now is the latter. So, slow down. Come back to the present instead of oscillating between the past and the future. Trust that you will have some of the most profound revelations in moments of silence.

Taurus:

It’s now or never, Taurus. If you don’t break away at this point, you may be stuck in the given situation for a long time. So, take a stance—for yourself more than anything. You have what it takes to break the pattern. Remember, it’s not going to be easy. There will be withdrawal symptoms. But, once you get past the initial phase, it’s going to be an upward spiral.

GEMINI:

Everybody is entitled to their opinion, just like you’re entitled to yours. Do you really want to go on an ego trip trying to prove your point, though? Word for the wise: take a step back from the drama. Retreat into that space of silence within yourself. You will soon be able to understand why your peace of mind is more important than winning any argument.

CANCER:

At any point of time, you have two options: to stay

where you are, or to choose the path of expansion. Growth is on the cards, Cancer, and it requires you to say yes to the unknown. Don’t shy away from taking that first step. There are many, many adventures that await you on this journey. Remember, the mysterious forces have your back.

LEO:

Who says your dreams are too big or that what you’re trying to achieve is way out of your reach? Beware of buying into the illusion created by your three dimensional reality. Now is not the time to repeat that old story. The cards are reminding you that there is a parallel reality available to you, where you can create the life you desire for yourself. Be mindful of the choices you make today and ensure they’re in line with that big vision.

VIRGO:

This decision is yours and yours alone. Nobody on the outside can put themselves in your shoes and decide what needs to be done here. So, go into that space of silence. Tune into your inner Oracle. Trust what’s coming through from the unseen realms without letting your logical mind get in the way. Those who practice divination may feel inspired to turn to their tools for guidance.

LIBRA:

We all have an idea of what love should look and feel

like. We all have an idea of what our ideal partner should be like. But what you’re inviting into your reality is far better than all of your wildest dreams put together. So breathe out your inhibitions and breathe in the love. It’s time to make space for magic, Libra. It’s time to make space for what you truly deserve.

SCORPIO:

That the past year has been hard for those who have their own businesses is not news to you, Scorpio. But, that doesn’t mean it’s all downhill from here. There is a new and exciting opportunity on the cards for you this week, and it requires you to play your cards strategically. Word for the wise: do what it takes to make it yours.

SAGITTARIUS:

You’ve got love knocking on your door, Sagittarius, and it is not in any way being discreet. Open your heart and allow. Allow, allow, allow. Allow yourself to receive what has always been yours. Trust that connection is just as magical as you imagine it is. Yes, we know it’s not always easy for you to let your vulnerable side show. Challenge yourself to embrace the virtue of openness nonetheless, and know that it will change your life forever.

CAPRICORN:

They call you when they need something, pretend to be close to you when it serves their fancy, and disappear as soon as you call upon them for help. This friendship had the word ‘toxic’ written all over it from the get-go. The cards are urging you to stop playing nice and recognise the relationships that are not serving you. It’s time to protect your space fiercely and prioritise the most important person in your life—aaka you!

AQUARIUS:

Service is coming up as a big theme for you right now, and requires you to adopt selflessness as a virtue. That does not mean you have to change the course of your life or give up on what you have created. It simply means that it’s time to expand your work in a way that includes and uplifts other people. Remember your soul’s mission, Aquarius. You were sent here to inspire a major change in the collective.

PISCES:

Reality check, Pisces: you are only living a percentage of your potential. There is so much you’re yet to explore within yourself. The cards are urging you to stop playing small, take a deep dive and own the gifts that were given to you at birth. For some of you, this may be a time of stepping into a bigger role. Let ‘lead by example’ become your mantra, wild one.