



**NEW BOOK TELLS STORY
OF INDIA THROUGH
ITS LANGUAGES**

pg 08

**HOW TAIWAN BEAT COVID-19 –
NEW STUDY REVEALS CLUES TO ITS
SUCCESS**

pg 04

**EQUAL PAY HAS BEEN MY
BIGGEST STRUGGLE: WONDER
WOMAN GAL GADOT**

pg 08



SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue 104 | Gangtok | Monday 19 April 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

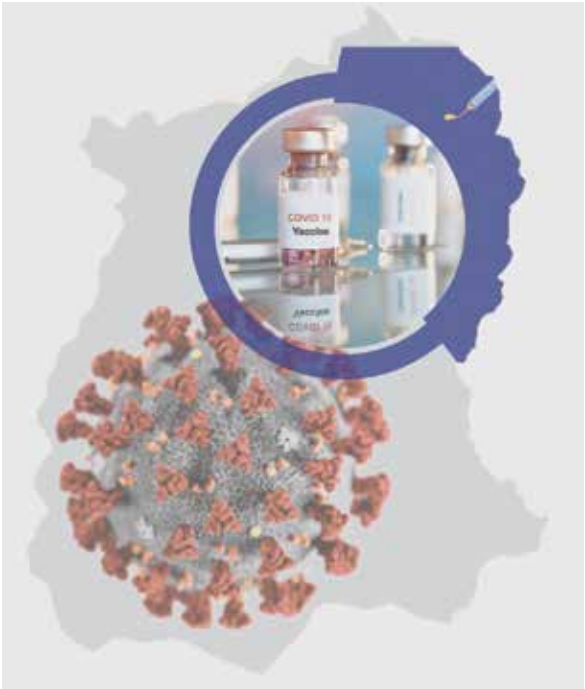
Sikkim breaks century mark of daily cases after four months

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 18 APR:**

The second wave of Covid-19 has crashed into Sikkim in earnest with 105 fresh cases being reported in the State on Sunday. This is the fifth time that daily cases have broken the 100-mark and four months since the last time it had crossed triple-figures, something which has not happened since 19 December, 2020. There are now 399 active cases of Novel Coronavirus in the State.

Of these 105 new cases, only eight had symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation.

South district edged past East Sikkim [the most populous district of the State] in daily cases today with 53 of the new cases coming from there.



46 of South Sikkim's 53 cases have come from Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya at Rabong alone. 105 samples were tested at

the school after a teacher tested positive for Covid-19 shortly after returning to his home outside the State. When two

of his primary contacts at JNV-Rabongla also tested positive, a wider testing was ordered and 105 samples collected.

Of these 105 samples, 46, which included 44 students, a staff member and a family member of this staff, returned positive.

East Sikkim recorded 43 new cases while North had 5 new cases and West Sikkim four.

The first time that Sikkim had posted more than 100 cases in a day was on 22 July when 108 cases were detected. Next, it was on 14 August with 149 cases, a record, and then 105 new cases on 05 September and the 19 Dec surge.

In his daily health bulletin, Health Department State IEC Officer,

turn to pg05

COVID-19 positivity rate has doubled to 16.69% in 12 days

NEW DELHI, 18 APR

[NDTV]: The daily coronavirus positivity rate in India in the last 12 days has doubled to 16.69 per cent, while the weekly positivity rate has increased to 13.54 per cent in the past one month, the Health Ministry said on Sunday.

India reported a record 2,61,500 new coronavirus cases and 1,501 deaths on Sunday, while active cases have surpassed the 18-lakh mark, the ministry data stated.

Ten states -- Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan -- reported 78.56 per cent of the new infections, it said.

"The daily positivity rate in the last 12 days has doubled from 8% to 16.69%," the ministry said in a statement. "The national weekly positivity rate has increased from 3.05% to 13.54% in the last one month."

Chamling condemns CM's intimidating tone against bureaucrats

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 18 APR:**

Sikkim Democrat-ic Front president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, has condemned what he has tagged as an "objectionable speech" by Chief Minister PS Tamang on Ambedkar Jayanti when he lashed out against bureaucrats and admitted to breaking rules to promote government employees and then intimi-

dating them with threats of vigilance enquiries in the same breath.

The CM, it may be recalled, had pulled up lack of punctuality in government offices in his Ambedkar Jayanti address and while warning government officers to get serious about their jobs or face action, had also invited them to apply for voluntary retirement if being diligent was too much for them to deliver.



File Photo

Asked on his Facebook page to comment of this episode, Mr Chamling writes, "What happened in Sikkim on that auspicious day [Ambedkar

turn to pg02

Two sisters and a thrift store

An interview with YisheyLanzom and TashiLhaden from Sikkim who run an online thrift store called Bhumos Closet which has close to 16,000 followers on Instagram.

THINLAYCHODEN BHUTIA

Thrift shopping has always been popular, with places like Delhi's Sarojini Nagar market and Mumbai's Fashion Street garnering a cult following. Online thrift stores are now becoming a trend owing to the increased time spent online as well as the realization of a more mindful life during these Covid-19 times.

While there's no official data on the growth of these stores, a look at the recent 46,000-plus posts with #thrifindia on Instagram gives an idea of the rise in interest in second-hand items. Bhumos Closet is an online thrift store based in Sikkim which has been doing really well ever since they



started on 02 October 2020. While there are many other online thrift stores started by Sikkimese, Bhumos Closet is one of the more popular ones.

turn to pg02

India records highest single-day rise of 2,61,500 cases, 1,501 deaths

NEW DELHI, APR 18 (PTI):

A record single-day rise of 2,61,500 coronavirus infections has taken India's total tally of COVID-19 cases to 1,47,88,109, while active cases have surpassed the 18-lakh mark, according to Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

The death toll increased to 1,77,150 with a record 1,501 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed Registering a steady increase for the 39th day in a row, the active cases stand at 18,01,316, comprising 12.18 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has dropped to 86.62 per cent, the ministry said.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,28,09,643, while the case fatality rate has further dropped to 1.20 per cent, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed 20 lakh on August 7, 230 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 750 lakh on September 16.

It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, 26,65,38,416 samples have been tested up to April 17 with 15,66,394 samples being tested on Saturday. The 1,501 new fatalities include 419 from Maharashtra, 167 from Delhi, 158 from Chhattisgarh, 120 from Uttar Pradesh, 97 from Gujarat, 80 from Karnataka, 66 from Madhya Pradesh, 62 from Punjab and 39 from Tamil Nadu.



CHAITI CHHATH PUJA

rituals by the devout at the Druga Mandir, Tadong, Gangtok, on Sunday, 18 April. The festival is celebrated on Shukla Paksha Shashthi Tithi in the month of Chaitra (March-April) and falls during Chaitra Navratri. It is believed that by performing rituals and keeping fast on this festival, devotees can wash away all their sins and guilt. It is a four-day festival which began on 16 April and ends on 19 April. Devotees worship and offer prayers to the Sun. On the third day today, devotees offered prayers to the setting sun while on the fourth and final day, prayers are made to the rising sun. Chhath Puja is observed twice a year, once in the month of Chaitra and then in the month of Kartik after Diwali. **[from SANDEEP PRASAD]**

The obscure maths theorem that governs the reliability of Covid testing

TOM CHIVERS

LONDON, 18 APR [THEGUARDIAN]:

Maths quiz. If you take a Covid test that only gives a false positive one time in every 1,000, what's the chance that you've actually got Covid? Surely it's 99.9%, right?

No! The correct answer is: you have no idea. You don't have enough information to make the judgment.

This is important to know when thinking about "lateral flow tests" (LFTs), the rapid Covid tests that the government has made available to everyone in England, free, up to twice a week. The idea is that in time they could be used to give people permission to go into crowded social spaces – pubs, theatres – and be more confident that they do not have, and so will not spread, the disease. They've been used in secondary schools for some time now.

There are concerns over LFTs. One is whether they'll miss a large number of cases, because they're less sensitive than the slower but more precise polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test. Those concerns are understandable, although defenders of the test say that PCR testing is too sensitive, able to detect viral material in people who had the disease weeks ago, while LFTs should, in theory, only detect people who are infectious.

But another concern is that they will

tell people that they do have the disease when in fact they don't – that they will return false positives.

The government says – accurately – that the "false positive rate", the chance of a test returning a positive result in a person who does not have the disease, is less than one in 1,000. And that's where we came in: you might think that that means, if you've had a positive result, that there's a less than one in 1,000 chance that it's false.

It's not. And that's because of a fascinating little mathematical anomaly known as Bayes's theorem, named after the Rev Thomas Bayes, an 18th-century clergyman and maths nerd.

Bayes's theorem is written, in mathematical notation, as $P(A|B) = (P(B|A)P(A))/P(B)$. It looks complicated. But you don't need to worry about what all those symbols mean: it's fairly easy to understand when you think of an example.

Imagine you undergo a test for a rare disease. The test is amazingly accurate: if you have the disease, it will correctly say so 99% of the time; if you don't have the disease, it will correctly say so 99% of the time.

But the disease in question is very rare; just one person in every 10,000 has it. This is known as your "prior probability": the background rate in the population.

turn to pg02

Ojhal... Timi

CAST - LEEZUM LEPCHA | PURAN TAMANG | BIJAYATA PRADHAN | VOCAL / LYRICS / COMPOSE / CONCEPT - BIKASH RAI
MUSIC ARRANGE / PROGRAMMING - AJNISH RAI | RECORDING & MIXING AT - MATRIX SOUND LAB (DARJEELING)
GUITAR / BASS - VEDANTA RAJ BARAILY | DOP/EDIT - NIMESH PRADHAN | ASST. DOP / POSTER DESIGNED BY - UJJAL RAI SHAMPANG
2ND ASST. DOP - KARAN KHALING RAI | ADARSH PRADHAN | PRAYAG PRADHAN
SUPPORTED BY - NABIN MANI PRADHAN | ANU NAIBEDHYA RAI | DIRECTION - NIMESH PRADHAN (FUTURE - I)
PRODUCED BY - LEEZUM LEPCHA (NAMCHI, SIKKIM)

SummitTIMES future-i production/Ojhal...timi

Two sisters and...

SummitTimes caught up with the duo that is behind the store to know more about their journey so far.

Can you tell us a little about yourself and your business?

Yishey/Tashi: So we're basically a store run by two sisters, YisheyLanzom and TashiLhaden and we deal with the sale of imported denims or vintage denim pieces. They usually consist of jeans that are from international brands like vintage Levi's, Calvin Klein, Topshop, and if one gets lucky we're able to source vintage Versace and other top notch brands as well. Although we wouldn't term our store to be a complete thrift store, but yes the idea of starting it did emerge from our interest in thrifting and how engrossed we were in it since our college days. We believe to provide the best quality at the most reasonable rates for everyone out there!

How did you come up with the name "Bhumos Closet" and what does it mean?

Yishey/Tashi: "Bhumos" means "daughter/ woman" in Tibetan, hence it pretty much explains the concept behind the name of our store.

Considering the fierce competition in today's thrift trend, what makes it stand out?

Yishey/Tashi: Yes, there is immense competition in the thrift community too, but to be honest we're not here to stand against anyone or outdo the other store. We believe in being original and transparent, and that should pretty much make us stand aloof from the rest of the crowd.

Where do you get your clothes from?

Yishey/Tashi: As we mentioned, our jeans are usually imported and factory surpluses. They're usually from foreign countries.

In these parts, "JB" or Jai Bangla used to be what "thrifting" is now. It was also something that was looked down upon. What do you have to say about that?

Yishey/Tashi: Yes, I believe how people used to and some still term "thrifting" as "jai bangla", but honestly it is so great to see how the thrifting culture being a huge trend in the west has slowly spread its wings in the east too, and as long as people thrift and pro-

mote their best towards sustainability, I don't think there's anything wrong with terming "thrifting" as "Jai bangla". To each her own I guess!

Are you planning to continue doing this in the long term?

Yishey/Tashi: Yes, as for now we would love to continue it in the long term too.

Are you completely living off this business or is it part time?

Yishey/Tashi: Earlier when we started on 2nd October 2020, we were doing it as a part time thing as we never expected our business to blow up this way. We are now running it as a full time business because running an online business store is not a piece of cake. It really needs a lot of time and attention if you want to come up with great quality content.

Do you think someone can earn a living solely on such a business?

Yishey/Tashi: Yes, of course why not. You just need to put in a lot of effort and it'll surely pay off gradually.

Is there any need for trade license? If not, then does that make this kind of online business easier to do?

Yishey/Tashi: If the need arises in the future then we need to abide by the rules and we will make a trade licence too for our store.

Why only denims?

Yishey/Tashi: Denims are something which will never go out of fashion and now we have now become a go-to denim shop for people all across India for both men and women. They rely on our measurements and the quality of our denims. We have already launched our second store too where we have dropped a couple of items recently and we'll be coming up with mixed drops there. Something for everyone.

What are you planning for the future? Maybe, a physical store?

Yishey/Tashi: For now we haven't thought about opening a physical store as we're really engrossed on our online IG store currently. We'll be it running an online business or anything in life, just go for it. If you succeed, don't just stop there but try to get better day by day. If you fail then that's not an issue because you'll surely learn something out of it. Just work hard and stop procrastinating. Do it for yourself.

courts, the "prosecutor's fallacy", which hinges on it too.

In 1990, a man called Andrew Deen was convicted of rape and sentenced to 16 years, partly on the basis of DNA evidence. An expert witness for the prosecution said that the chance that the DNA came from someone else was just one in 3m.

But as a professor of statistics explained at Deen's appeal, this was mixing up two questions: first, how likely would it be that a person's DNA matched the DNA in the sample, given that they were innocent; and second, how likely would they be to be innocent, if their DNA matched that of the sample? The "prosecutor's fallacy" is to treat those two questions as the same.

We can treat it exactly as we did with the cancer screenings and Covid tests. Let's say you have simply picked your defendant at random from the British population (which of course you wouldn't, but for simplicity...), which at the time was about 60 million. So your prior probability that any random person is the murderer is one in 60m.

If you ran your DNA test on all of those 60 million people, you'd identify the murderer – but you'd also get false positives on about 20 innocent people. So even though the DNA test only returns false positives one time in 3m, there's still about a 95% chance that someone who gets a positive test is innocent.

Of course, in reality, you wouldn't pick your defendant at random – you'd have other evidence, and your prior probability would be greater than one in 60m. But the point is that knowing the probability of a false positive on a DNA test doesn't tell you how likely it is that someone is innocent: you need some assessment of how likely it was that they were guilty to begin with. You need a prior probability. In December 1993, the court of appeal quashed Deen's conviction, saying it was unsafe – precisely because the judge and the expert witness had

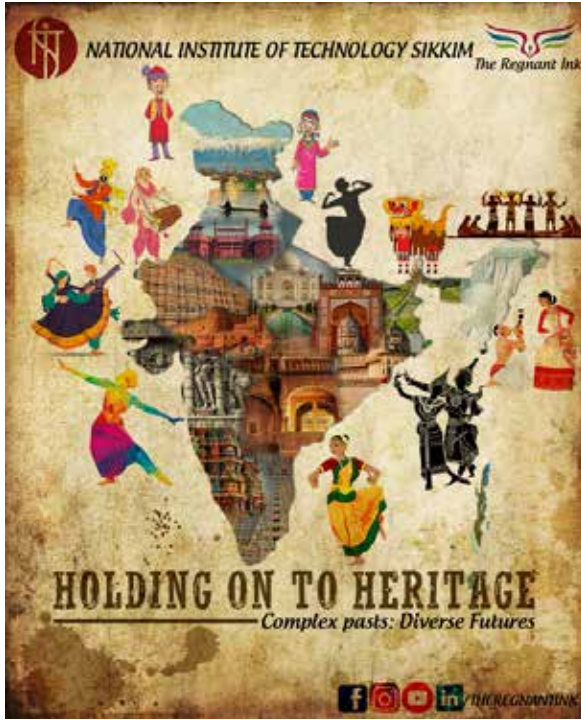
World Heritage Day at NIT-Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 18 APR:

Regnant Ink, the literary club of the National Institute of Technology Sikkim, organized an online event, "Holding on to Heritage," on Sunday to mark World Heritage Day with the objective to cherish the rich and diverse culture of Indian and to make the youth aware about their cultural heritage and its diversity, a press release informs.

The event had Additional Chief Secretary, Education Department, GP Upadhyaya, as chief guest and included presentations on UNESCO declared Indian heritages by students of the Institute.

A total of 11 presentations on various cultural and historical heritag-



es of India were made on the day including one the UNESCO world heritage of Sikkim, Khangchend-

zonga National Park.

The Institute also organized an online essay and quiz competition.

Need Vaccine, Medicines: Mamata Banerjee flags Bengal's Covid spike to PM

Kolkata, 18 Apr [NDTV]: Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking help to contain the surge of coronavirus in the state, which she said, has been brought in by "outsiders" coming to campaign for "some political parties". In her letter, she outlined three areas -- including the supply of vaccines and crucial drugs like Remdesivir -- in which the Centre's help was needed.

Citing her letter of February 24, in which she sought clearance for direct purchase of vaccines with state funds to inoculate the entire state, she wrote the state has not received it yet.

"In the meantime, the number of cases in the state has also begun to increase sharply, particularly in view of coming of a large number of outsid-

ers to the state for election campaign and other purposes at the behest of some political parties. As such, in the present situation, we have to significantly scale up our capacities to tackle the pandemic on war footing," she wrote.

Mentioning vaccination as the first stop to this goal, she wrote, "We have to vaccinate around 2.7 crore (people) and we need 5.4 crore doses".

She also wrote that the supply of essential medication like Remdesivir and Tocilizumab is "extremely scarce and uncertain", which is a matter of grave concern.

The state only has 1000 vials of Remdesivir and none of Tocilizumab. It needs 6000 vials of Remdesivir and 1000 of Tocilizumab a day, she wrote.

The Chief Minister also flagged the issue of

oxygen, which has been a matter of concern in several states, including Maharashtra and national capital Delhi. "SAIL is meeting out need at the moment, and we shall be grateful if you kindly instruct them for steady supplies," she wrote.

Ms Banerjee has blamed the BJP for the spread of Covid in parts of the state.

"Do you know, they have got a whole lot of people into the state. In the name of election campaign, they have got so many outsiders and they have spread the disease here and run away," she had said at a rally this week.

Earlier this week, she had also requested the Election Commission to club the remaining phases of the ongoing assembly elections into a single phase -- a possibility the poll body had negated earlier in the same day.

To book ad-space, contact

SummitTIMES at

GANGTOK:

For circulation details Contact: (Sandeep) 9734152451
& for Advertisement booking at 9933427505 or at office no 03592 208698. Mail us at advertise@summittimes.com

SILIGURI:

Mr. Mani Rai, M/s. Space Ads, B.R. Ambedkar Building, Room No.7, 1st floor. Opp. Gangga Hotel. Hill Cart Road. Siliguri – 03. Ph. 9832318644/ 9800682989/ 9153035100 or mail at mani_siliguri@yahoo.co.in.

KOLKATA OFFICE:

Irshad Ali/ Imteeyaz. Synapse, 6, Madan Street, Mezzine – 2, 2nd floor. Kolkata – 700072. Ph. 033-22124348/ fax 033-22124337/ mob. 9830547774/ 983108397. E-mail: contact.synapse@gmail.com/ irshad_ali123@rediffmail.com



TREE FALLS ON ROAD NEAR CRH

TADONG, BIKER INJURED: A biker, reportedly a Sikkim Police personnel, was injured when a tree fell on NH31A near CRH-Tadong. It is learnt that the biker was rushed to CRH for treatment. The incident occurred at around 5 pm on Sunday. Traffic was held up at the spot by the fallen tree. [from DEEPTI SUBBA]

Chamling condemns...

Jayantil] made a mockery of our constitution, which safeguards the lives of our people. The citizens of Sikkim received open threats and intimidation from the one who heads the state government. I felt ashamed as a Sikkimese citizen. What a disgrace to the nation, people and our national hero, the late Shri BR Ambedkar!"

While stressing that the post of Chief Minister requires the occupant to "rise above petty, undignified and inappropriate thinking, language and behaviour," he says that he was horrified when Mr Tamang "openly declared that he has promoted many bureaucrats by breaking laws."

Apart from shuddering at the impropriety of such admissions, Mr Chamling also wonders aloud whether this was "really the best they [Sikkim Krantikari Morcha] can offer?"

The former CM has also taken exception to the crude manner in which Mr Tamang is alleged to have threatened to use "vigilance" or open enquiries and issue veiled threats when he said, "...I will make you know who I am, who PS Goley is...I am educated and I know how to write with a pen and I also know how to write with other things...I know how to use other 'things' and I have done that earlier also".

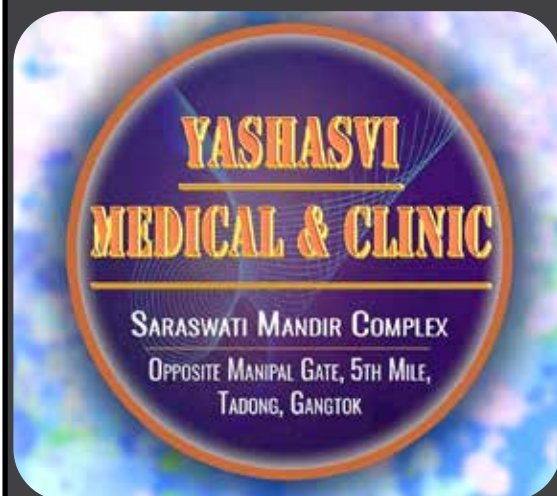
While accepting that the CM has a responsibility to demand accountability from government employees, Mr Chamling stresses that even a Chief Minister "has no right to terrorize and intimidate them by bragging about vigilance, other inquiry agencies, compulsory retirement, writing with pen and using 'other tactics', etc."

"I demand an unconditional apology from him to all government employees and the people of Sikkim," Mr Chamling concludes.

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

4 katha land available for sale at Middle Palas, Siliguri. Price negotiable. Interested buyer may contact: 9647889596

YASHASVI MEDICAL & CLINIC, 5th Mile, Opposite Manipal Gate.



NEW CLINIC TIMING.

Doctor Available: (Monday- Saturday)

- 1.General Physician: 7 AM-9AM,
- 2.OBG & Gynecologist: 9-10AM.
- 3.Pediatrician: 8:30-9:30 AM.
- 4.Skin Specialist: 5-7PM.
5. Orthopaedic : 5-7 PM.
- 6.Cardio Specialist: 4-6PM.
- 7.Medicine (Gastrointestinal Specialist) :5-6PM.

Call For Appointment : 6294683018 / 7908242665

The obscure maths...

So now imagine you test 1 million people. There are 100 people who have the disease: your test correctly identifies 99 of them. And there are 999,900 people who don't: your test correctly identifies 989,901 of them.

But that means that your test, despite giving the right answer in 99% of cases, has told 9,999 people that they have the disease, when in fact they don't. So if you get a positive result, in this case, your chance of actually having the disease is 99 in 9,999, or just under 1%. If you took this test entirely at face value, then you'd be scaring a lot of people, and sending them for intrusive, potentially dangerous medical procedures, on the back of a misdiagnosis.

Without knowing the prior probability, you don't know how likely it is that a result is false or true. If the disease was not so rare – if, say, 1% of people had it – your results would be totally different. Then you'd have 9,900 false positives, but also 9,990 true positives. So if you had a positive result, it would be more than 50% likely to be true.

This is not a hypothetical problem. One review of the literature found that 60% of women who have annual mammograms for 10 years have at least one false positive; another study found that 70% of prostate cancer screening positives were false. An antenatal screening procedure for foetal chromosomal disorders which claimed "detection rates of up to 99% and false positive rates as low as 0.1%" would have actually returned false positives between 45% and 94% of the time, because the diseases are so rare, according to one paper.

Of course, it's not that a positive test would immediately be taken as gospel – patients who have a positive test will be given more comprehensive diagnostic checkups – but they will scare a lot of patients who don't have cancer, or foetal abnormalities.

A misunderstanding of Bayes's theorem isn't just a problem in medicine. There is a common failure in the law

been taken in by the prosecutor's fallacy. (It's worth noting that he was convicted in the retrial.)

And in 1999, the heartbreaking case of Sally Clark turned on the prosecutor's fallacy. She was convicted of murdering her two children, after another expert witness said that the chance of two babies dying of sudden infant death syndrome (Sids) in one family was one in 73m. But the witness failed to take into account the prior probability – that is, the likelihood that someone was a double murderer, which is, mercifully, even rarer than Sids. That, taken with other problems – the expert witness didn't take into account the fact that families which have already had one case of Sids are more likely to have another – led to Clark's conviction also being overturned, in 2003.

Let's go back to the LFT tests. Assume that the one-in-1,000 false positive rate is accurate. But even if it is, and you get a positive result, you don't know how likely it is that you have the virus. What you need to know first is (roughly) how likely it was, before you took the test, that you might have had it: your prior probability.

At the peak of the second wave, something like one person in every 50 (2% of the population) in England was infected with the virus, according to the Office for National Statistics' prevalence survey. That was carried out with PCR tests, not LFTs, but let's use that as the standard.

Say you tested 1 million people, chosen at random, with LFTs (and, for the sake of simplicity, say that they detect all the real cases – that definitely won't be true in reality). About 20,000 people would have the disease, and of the 980,000 who don't, it would wrongly tell about 980 that they do, for a total of 20,980 positive results. So if you tested positive, your chance of a false positive would be 980/20,980, or nearly 5%. Or, to put it another way, it'd be almost 95% likely that you really had the disease.

Now, though, the prevalence has dropped enormously – down to about one person in every 340 in England. If we run through the same process, we get a very different picture: of your million people, about 2,950 will have had it. Again assuming your test identifies all of them (and again remembering that won't be true in reality), you'll have 2,950 true positives, and about 997 false ones. Suddenly your false positive rate is 997/3,947, or about 25%. In fact, last week government data showed that the false positive rate for LFTs since 8 March was 18%. This rate will rise if prevalence falls – which might become problematic if, for instance, it means an entire class of children has to take time off school.

These sums only apply, of course, if you're truly testing the population at random. If people are using the tests because they think there's a good reason why they might be positive – perhaps they have symptoms, or were recently exposed to someone who had the disease – then your prior probability would be higher, and the positive test would be stronger evidence.

Even doctors struggle with Bayesian reasoning. In one 2013 study, 5,000 qualified American doctors were asked to give the probability that someone had cancer, if 1% of the population had the disease and they received a positive result on a 90% accurate test. The correct answer was about one in 10, but even when given a multiple-choice answer, almost three-quarters of the doctors answered wrongly.

None of this means LFTs are a bad idea – I think, cautiously, that they will be useful, especially since positive results will be confirmed by PCR, and if the PCR comes back negative the patient can return to work or school or whatever. But it's worth remembering that, if you read that a test is 99.9% accurate, it doesn't mean that there's a 99.9% chance that your test result is correct. In fact, it's much more complicated than that.

TN's daily coronavirus tally crosses 10,000-mark

CHENNAI, APR 18 (PTI): Tamil Nadu on Sunday recorded an all time high in daily COVID-19 cases by adding 10,723 more infections, pushing the total caseload to 9.91 lakh.

The toll mounted to 13,113 with 42 fatalities in the last 24 hours.

According to a medical bulletin, total recoveries climbed to 9,07,947 with 5,925 patients being discharged, leaving 70,391 active infections.

Testing of samples stood at 1,10,130, pushing the cumulative number of specimens examined to 2.11 crore so far.

Railways to run Oxygen Express trains via green corridors to fight Covid

NEW DELHI, 18 APR [NDTV]: Stepping up the fight against the novel coronavirus pandemic, Railways is all set to operate "Oxygen Express" trains, Union Minister Piyush Goyal said today, adding that it will help to "to get oxygen in bulk and rapidly to patients".

Green corridors are being created to ensure fast movement of these trains.

"Railways is leaving no stone unturned in the battle against COVID-19. We will be running Oxygen express trains using green corridors to get Oxygen in bulk and rapidly to patient," the Railways Minister said in a tweet. Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) and oxygen cylinders will be transported on these trains.

Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra had "approached Ministry of Railways to explore whether Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) tankers could be moved by Railways," a government statement read.

Availability of oxygen is "a key element in the treatment of certain medical conditions in the Covid infection," the statement further said.

The government is also working towards increasing the number of isolation of beds in the trains, the Union Minister said in another post. More than three lakh isolation beds can be set up - depending on the states demand - he explained.

"Govt under PM @NarendraModi leading the fight against COVID-19: 50 COVID-19 isolation coaches with 800 beds ready at Shakur Basti Station & 25 coaches will be available at Anand Vihar Station in Delhi. Railways can setup >3 lakh isolation beds across the country on States' demand," he posted.

The measures come as India - hit by the second Covid wave - sees an alarming spike in Covid cases. This morning, the country's tally surged to 1.47 crore cases with 2.61 lakh fresh cases - the biggest spike so far.

visit us at:
www.summit-times.com



LOCKED DOWN SINGTAM: With the weekend "lockdown" of shops, except those selling essential items, the usually bustling town of Singtam wore a deserted look on Sunday. [from YOGEN THATAL]

Protesting farmers show black flags to BJP MP in Haryana



KURUKSHETRA, 18 APR [PTI]: Farmers staged a protest and showed black flags to BJP MP Nayab Singh Saini in Haryana's Kurukshetra when he came to participate in an event on Sunday.

The protesters raised slogans against the Haryana government and Mr Saini, and showed black flags to him on his arrival at the event.

Earlier, the farmers, who have been protesting against the Centre's new farm laws, assembled at the Theme Park situated near the Saini Bhawan, where police officers tried to persuade them not to stage a demonstration.

Subsequently, they marched towards the

venue. A large number of police personnel swung into action and detained many of the protesters.

Before being detained, farmer leader Jasbir Singh Manumajra accused the state government of curbing the right of people to hold a peaceful demonstration.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Ravinder Tomar, who was on duty at the site, said the police acted when the farmers violated the condition of staging a peaceful demonstration at the assigned place and broke down the police barricades in a bid to enter the venue of the function.

He said 70 protesting farmers were detained for a brief period. About

two weeks ago, a group of protesting farmers had blocked Mr Saini's car and smashed its windscreen as he was leaving a BJP worker's home at Shahabad Markanda, about 20 km from here.

Farmer leaders have said they would continue with their "peaceful social boycott" of the leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies.

The Centre says the new laws will free farmers from middlemen, giving them more options to sell their crops.

The protesting farmers, however, say the laws will weaken the minimum support price (MSP) system and leave them at the mercy of big corporates.

Private vehicle would not come within expression of 'public place': SC

NEW DELHI, APR 17 (PTI): A private vehicle does not come within the expression of a public place as per the explanation given under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, the Supreme Court has said. A bench comprising justices UU Lalit and KM Joseph made the observation while deciding an appeal challenging an order passed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court affirming their conviction and sentence under the NDPS Act.

Two bags of poppy straw were recovered from the accused while they were sitting in a jeep at a public place. The trial court, after considering the evidence on record, acquitted accused Major Singh but convicted accused Boota Singh, Gurdeep Singh and Gurmohinder Singh, under the NDPS Act and sentenced them to rigorous imprisonment for 10 years.

They were also asked to pay a

fine of Rs 1 lakh, failing which they were directed to undergo further rigorous imprisonment for two years. The accused argued before the top court that the vehicle in question was a private one belonging to accused Gurdeep Singh and was not a public conveyance, though it was parked on a public road.

The apex court held that the evidence in the present case clearly shows that the vehicle was not a public conveyance but a private one belonging to Gurdeep Singh, and acquitted the accused as they were charged under the wrong section.

The Registration Certificate of the vehicle, which has been placed on record also does not indicate it to be a Public Transport Vehicle.

The explanation to Section 43 shows that a private vehicle would not come within the expression 'public place' as explained in Sec-

tion 43 of the NDPS Act.

"On the strength of the decision of this court, the relevant provision would not be Section 43 of the NDPS Act but the case would come under Section 42 of the NDPS Act, the bench said.

It is an admitted position that there was total non-compliance of the requirements of Section 42 of the NDPS Act, the top court said.

Total non-compliance of Section 42 is impermissible... In the circumstances, the courts below fell in error in rejecting the submissions advanced on behalf of the appellants.

We, therefore, allow this appeal, set aside the view taken by the High Court and acquit the appellants of the charge levelled against them.

"The appellants be released forthwith unless their custody is required in connection with any other offence, the bench said.

"Thank you for sparing time for Covid": P Chidambaram's dig at PM Modi

NEW DELHI, 18 APR [PTI]: Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram today took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, thanking him for sparing "a little time" amidst the "urgent war to conquer West Bengal", to review the coronavirus situation in the country.

He also criticised the prime minister for his "Didi-O-Didi" remark, asking if this is the manner in which the prime minister should refer to a chief minister.

"Thank you Prime Minister for sparing a little time for Covid amidst the urgent war to conquer WEST BENGAL and annexe it to the BJP's empire," Mr Chidambaram said on Twitter.

His remarks came after Modi chaired a COVID-19 review meeting with government officials on Saturday, amid a big surge in infection cases in the country, with over 2 lakh cases being reported everyday for the past four days.

Referring to the PM's remarks on West Bengal



Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, the Congress leader asked, "Is this the manner in which a prime minister should refer to a chief minister?"

"I cannot imagine a Jawaharlal Nehru or a Morarji Desai or a Vajpayee speaking that language," he said.

In another tweet, Mr Chidambaram said while "no vaccine" boards hang on the doors of most hospitals, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan claims that "there is no shortage in the supply of vaccines".

"Believe the minister, there is no shortage of

vaccines, oxygen, Remdesivir, hospital beds, doctors and nurses. There is only a shortage of patients!," he said, taking a dig at the health minister.

The former Union minister alleged the central government which assumed all powers and authority, failed to ensure adequate production and supply of COVID-19 vaccines.

"Central government is solely responsible for the catastrophe faced by the nation," he said after the prime minister's review meeting on Saturday.

The spread of the in-

fection can only be contained with massive vaccination, he noted.

Tragically, vaccines are in short supply and states have run out - or are running out - of vaccines, Mr Chidambaram claimed.

"Media is reporting that PM said we defeated Covid last year, we can do it again', WRONG. Covid was not defeated in 2020. Covid exacted a heavy toll and waned on its own, no thanks to the central government, because the central government did little or nothing," he said in another tweet on Saturday.

Mamata holds roadshow in south Kolkata

KOLKATA, APR 18 (PTI): In a show of strength, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday held a roadshow in parts of south Kolkata considered to be her backyard.

Sitting in a wheelchair with her bandaged left foot, she led the padyatra from Dhakuria Bridge to Kalighat Crossing, covering a distance of over 5 km.

She was accompanied by TMC candidate for Rashbehari assembly constituency, Debashis Kumar, and other senior party leaders.

Hundreds of party workers who took part in the rally raised slogans like 'Didi tumi egiye cholo, amra tomar sange achhi' (Didi, you move forward, we are with you) and 'Dangabaaj BJP dur hato' (Down with ri-

ot-mongering BJP).

Banerjee was seen greeting people with folded hands.

Carrying posters and placards hailing Banerjee as the 'daughter of Bengal', TMC workers called for "defeating outsiders" in the assembly elections and raised slogans like 'Bhanga Paye Khela Hobe' (will play with broken leg), in reference to Banerjee's leg injury.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

email us: news@summittimes.com

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

Do not believe in rumours being spread about the vaccine

Focus on the 5 fold strategy

Follow COVID-19 appropriate behaviour

GANGTOK
COVID-19 Vaccine

#SikkimFightsCorona

#VaccineSavesLives

#Unite2FightCorona

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

GANGTOK SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT LIMITED
Sokaythang, Nगतok,
Sikkim – 737102
e-mail: gangtoksmartcity@gmail.com CIN – U9309090WB2017SGC223807
FILE NO. 229/GSCDL/2019-20

Memo NO: 28/GSCDL/2021-22 Dated: 07/04/2021.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Gangtok Smart City Development Limited (GSCDL) is undertaking the work 'Construction of Multi Level Car Park cum Shopping Hub' at old STNM Complex (below NH). The preliminary Drawings of the project is uploaded in our website <https://smartcitygangtok.com>
Architects, Urban Planners and the General Public are requested to give their valuable feedback and suggestions for improvement of the drawing. Changes that are feasible within the scope of the work shall be incorporate at the time of finalizing the Drawings. However, GSCDL reserves the right to incorporate the changes. Comments and suggestions may be sent by email to ae3smartcity@gmail.com within one month of issue of this public notice, please.

Sd/-
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER.

Road Rage

To make roads safer, prioritise policing against rash driving

A colleague driving to Gangtok recently was nearly run off the road by a speeding taxi raging to overtake. The road was broad and there was no incoming traffic, hence the reason why the taxi missed brushing against the colleague's car by a whisker made no sense. And then there was another close shave, this time with a private SUV. Talk to others who drive on the highway, or even the capital roads at night, and many more of such anecdotes will tumble out. But pause with the episodes a while, and it all makes sense. It is born from the power of engines which have too many more horse-powers than the hands on the wheels can control. Add the knowledge of too many traffic jams on the roads and the race to rush gets explained, not justified though. Combine this with the less than adequate training most people receive before they become drivers, and safe driving is no longer about just your driving skills and depends as much on the proficiency controlling vehicles all around you. This also still being tourist season, when it comes to passenger vehicles, the stress of traffic jams and the opportunity to squeeze in an extra trip or getting to destinations before the curfew further contribute to the rashness that is becoming too common on the roads here.

It is obvious that the National Highway and the side roads is in desperate need for an extra helping of tar, but our drivers, especially those of taxi vehicles, seem to be in even more urgent need of an extra class on driving etiquette and a reintroduction to road safety. The spate of accidents, most minor and the occasional fatal crashes, point to a total lack of concern for driving rules, traffic rules and most importantly, pedestrian and passenger safety. Available technology ensures that engine failure, that favourite excuse of "steering lock," can no longer be blamed for mishaps, every single one of them occurs due to rash and reckless driving. And then there are the many close shaves that every commuter experiences on a regular basis. Every single one of them could have ended much worse, and many of the involved drivers will eventually become of part of a pile up eventually. The noticeably high number of head-on collisions bears out that most accidents occur due to reckless speeding. And this applies to the recklessness which rides on two wheels as well.

One cannot ignore the fact that all recent accidents have involved either taxis of two wheelers. It is thus advisable that we tighten our seat belts and snap on the helmets more snugly and they tease out the reasons for such frequent road mishaps. Accidents are the culmination of "bad habits", and we are not speaking drugs here although that is also a factor in many cases. That drivers do not observe basic traffic rules unless there is a cop around is common knowledge. Overtaking from the wrong side of the road, failing to signal when stopping or stopping abruptly, stopping at 'unauthorised' points... By themselves, these do not lead to major mishaps, but once the keenness to avoid traffic and safety rules becomes instinctive, larger risks are run once the city limits are crossed. The above mentioned reasons would suggest that our drivers tend to manifest a casual approach to their task and/ or are oblivious to the rules of the road – which are hard to digest. The motor vehicles department, after all, issues licenses to the drivers after some tests and checks which are now mandatory. How come drivers still emerge from their training wet behind the ears?

If we are to feel safe on the roads we must all make a conscious effort at righting our wrongs. Drunken or rash driving should be heavily penalised and not just those vehicles parked on the wrong side of the road. The issuing of driving licenses should be made stricter and cracking down on rash driving prioritized because once this becomes a habit everyone around is put in harm's way.

WRITE US:

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



How Taiwan beat COVID-19 – new study reveals clues to its success

PATRICIA FITZPATRICK
theconversation.com

Taiwan has been widely applauded for its management of the pandemic, with one of the lowest per capita COVID-19 rates in the world and life on the island largely returning to normal.

Just 11 people have died from COVID-19 in Taiwan since the pandemic began, an impressive feat for a country that never went into lockdown.

At the start of the pandemic, Taiwan was considered a high-risk country for COVID-19 due to its proximity to China and the frequent travel that takes place between the two countries.

With a history of SARS in 2003, which was not considered to be handled particularly well, the Taiwanese government acted quickly to close its borders this time around. It set up a Central Epidemic Command Centre on January 20 2020 to coordinate cooperation across different government ministries and agencies, and between government and businesses.

A new study in the Journal of the American Medical Association has examined further just why Taiwan did so well at conquering COVID-19. The study's authors, from a range of health institutes and hospitals in Taiwan and the US, compared the estimated effectiveness of two types of COVID-19 policy in the early months of the pandemic: case-based and population-based measures.

Case-based measures include the detection of infected people through testing, isolation of positive cases, contact tracing and 14-day quarantining of close contacts. The population-based measures included face mask policies, personal hygiene and social distancing.

The effects of these policies were quantified by estimating the effective reproduction number (R number).

The R number is a way of rating an infectious disease's ability to spread – it represents the average number of people that one infected person will pass a virus onto. An R number of greater than 1 means the virus will continue to spread and outbreaks will continue. An R number below 1 means

that case numbers will start to reduce.

While previous studies in other countries have simulated hypothetical scenarios, this paper combined transmission modelling with detailed real data to estimate effectiveness.

The authors collected data on 158 cases between January 10 and June 1 2020 from the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, and all cases were confirmed by PCR testing. The data related to locally acquired cases, confirmed clusters, and imported cases in people who entered Taiwan before March 21 2020.

They then compared the outcomes they found in Taiwan with an estimated R number of 2.5, based on the estimated equivalent number in nearby China at the beginning of its COVID-19 outbreak.

THE WINNING COMBINATION

The study found that the case-based policies alone, like contact tracing and quarantining, could lower the R number from 2.5 to 1.53. Quarantine contributed the most to lowering the R number.

Case-based interventions could not substantially prevent transmission from one person to another, but could reduce transmission onwards from those secondary cases to a third or fourth person, as long as close contacts quarantined.

Population-based policies like social distancing and face masks, meanwhile, reduced the R number from 2.5 to 1.3.

The authors concluded that it was the combination of case-based and population-based policies, along with widespread adherence, that led to Taiwan's success in containing COVID. Combining both approaches led to an R number estimated using two different methods to be 0.82 and as low as 0.62. They also found that considerable population-based policies were needed to achieve containment even though the number of circulating infections was small.

Neither approach would have been sufficient alone, even in a country with an effective public health system and sophisticated contact tracing.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OTHER COUNTRIES?

Acknowledging that all models make assumptions, and this analysis is no different, this paper does confirm that the full suite of public health measures we have been using fairly consistently across the world – to varying degrees of length and stringency – have been necessary. Though it's worth noting that the results in the study reflects a time when new variants with greater transmissibility were not a problem.

The authors assumed that testing and isolation occurred simultaneously. This was the case in Taiwan, but not in other countries, for example England, where delays between testing, results and isolation diminish the effectiveness of case-based measures.

Taiwan is an island nation with the ability to control the introduction of new cases through border control, and the authors acknowledge the findings of this study may not be fully applicable to other countries. This is the reason the authors focused on the effectiveness of case-based and population-based interventions on local transmission, rather than on border controls on the number of introductions of COVID-19.

The authors conclude that intensive contact tracing is not possible when public health systems are overwhelmed. This never happened in Taiwan due to the success of its strategies, but it did, for example, take place in Ireland in January 2021, which experienced a damaging third wave of COVID-19.

This paper also found similar results for seven-day and 14-day quarantine and suggest that the quarantine period could be shortened. This is being considered by some countries, including the USA, but it has not been introduced on a widespread basis to date.

We already knew there was much to be learned from Taiwan's success in preventing COVID-19 from taking hold. Now, as vaccines roll out and new variants emerge, we have more information about the comparative and combined contributions of public health measures.

[the writer is Full Professor of Epidemiology & Biomedical Statistics, University College Dublin]

Learning to live with COVID – the tough choices ahead

JONATHAN PUGH, DOMINIC WILKINSON & JULIAN SAVULESCU
theconversation.com

As mass vaccination continues to be rolled out, the UK is beginning to see encouraging signs that the number of COVID deaths is reducing, and that the vaccines may be reducing the transmission of coronavirus.

While this is very welcome news, a mass vaccination programme is unlikely to be enough to eliminate the virus, so we need to turn our thoughts towards the ethics of the long-term management of COVID-19.

One strategy would be to aim for the elimination of the virus within the UK. New Zealand successfully implemented an elimination strategy earlier in the pandemic and is now in a post-elimination stage.

An elimination strategy in the UK would require combining the mass vaccination programme with severe restrictions on international travel to stop new cases and variants of the virus being imported. However, the government has been reluctant to endorse an elimination strategy, given the importance of international trade to the UK economy.

One of the main alternatives to the elimination strategy is to treat coronavirus as endemic to the UK and to aim for long-term suppression of the virus to acceptable levels. But adopting a suppression strategy for the long term will require us to make

a societal decision about the harms we are and are not willing to accept.

THE LIBERTY, EQUALITY AND MORTALITY TRILEMMA

The first year of the pandemic has taught us that, without suppression measures, coronavirus will lead to significant death and harm, including long COVID. But evidence suggests that mitigation measures, such as lockdowns and effective test, trace and isolate systems, may be effective in reducing transmission of the virus.

These measures have their own costs. Lockdowns significantly restrict civil liberties and cause a wide range of other harms, including significant non-COVID mortality and morbidity. Recent models suggest that in the long term, the mitigation of the pandemic could lead to 100,000 non-COVID deaths. On the figures from this model, deaths from the virus itself may come to only account for about 54% of the overall death toll of the outbreak in the UK.

The extent of some of the costs of mitigation measures could be lessened by targeting these interventions at certain groups, such as those who have not been vaccinated, or those who have a particularly high risk of death from COVID, such as those over the age of 65. However, these targeted strategies involve forms of unequal treatment and possible discrimination.

This is the fundamental trilemma of the long-term suppression strat-

egy. The societal decision we make about the acceptable level of viral suppression involves a choice about which of three competing values we should prioritise and which we must compromise. We can maximise one or two of these values, but we can't have all three.

We might be able to reduce COVID deaths while safeguarding equality, but only if we are willing to accept the potential need for future lockdowns, severe travel restrictions, and the costs to freedom and general health that entails. We might be able to reduce COVID deaths while protecting the freedom of those who do not pose a transmission risk by introducing COVID certificates or passports, but only if we are willing to accept the inequality that such schemes involve.

Finally, we can give everyone in society as much freedom as possible, but only if we are willing to accept the increased COVID deaths it will probably involve if the virus has not yet been sufficiently suppressed in other ways.

The moral question about the suppression strategy has been framed as one concerning how many COVID deaths we should be willing to accept each year. This invites comparisons between COVID and annual deaths from other infectious diseases, such as influenza, which has caused fewer than two deaths per 100,000 people per year in European countries since 2000, and those that we have lived

with in the past, such as tuberculosis, which caused around 100 deaths per 100,000 people per year in England and Wales at the beginning of the 20th century.

These comparisons are illuminating because they provide a baseline for the number of deaths from an infectious disease that we have historically found acceptable to live with. If we accept a bad flu year with over 22,000 deaths in England without imposing significant societal restrictions, then perhaps we will come to accept the same number of deaths with COVID.

But these comparisons are relevant to only one of the key ethical values. In the context of COVID, we might have to risk a higher number of COVID deaths in the absence of significant societal restrictions or inequality.

To decide what is acceptable on the suppression strategy, we have to confront the fundamental conflict between values in the COVID trilemma.

[Jonathan Pugh is Research Fellow in Applied Moral Philosophy, University of Oxford; Dominic Wilkinson is Consultant Neonatologist and Professor of Ethics, University of Oxford; Julian Savulescu is Visiting Professor in Biomedical Ethics, Murdoch Children's Research Institute; Distinguished Visiting Professor in Law, University of Melbourne; Uehiro Chair in Practical Ethics, University of Oxford]

Covid curbs shouldn't stop those going to vaccination sites: Centre

NEW DELHI, 18 APR [NDTV]: With restrictions returning to many parts of the country to check the spread of coronavirus as cases continue to soar, the government today told the states to make sure that vaccination efforts are not hampered.

While tough restrictions were announced in Maharashtra earlier this week for 15 days as the state government stopped short of announcing a lockdown, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and other states have also announced fresh curbs to break the chain of transmission.

However, cases are still on a rise. This morning, India recorded the biggest-ever daily spike as 2.61 lakh cases were recorded in the previous 24 hours, taking the caseload to 1.47 crore infections.

Even as many states have flagged vaccine shortage, the Health Ministry today asserted that



over 12 crore doses have been administered in three months after India began "the world's largest COVID-19 drive"

"In view of rising COVID-19 cases across many states and union territories, various measures are being undertaken to control the spread of COVID-19 which also include COVID-19 curfews and

partial or complete lockdown in some states or districts for variable periods. Similarly, for management of COVID-19 cases, certain hospitals are being earmarked as dedicated COVID-19 hospitals for management of only COVID-19 cases," a government statement read today.

"In this regard, it is advised that COVID-19

vaccination services should not be affected by COVID-19 curfews or lockdowns and the movement of beneficiaries to and from COVID-19 Vaccination Centres (CVCs) should not be restricted during such interventions," the statement further read.

Vaccination services "should be provided in a separate

building or block in these hospitals that is distinctly separated from the building or block where management of COVID-19 patients is being done," it further said. "This will ensure that beneficiaries of vaccination are not inadvertently exposed to COVID-19 at these hospital," the centre has suggested.

42 new cases push Andamans COVID-19 tally to 5,331

PORT BLAIR, APR 18 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands COVID-19 caseload surged to 5,331 as 42 more people tested positive for the virus, a health department official said on Sunday.

The COVID-19 death toll in the archipelago rose to 64 as one more person succumbed to the infection in the last 24 hours, he said.

Of the 42 new coronavirus cases, 31 were detected in South Andaman district during contact tracing and the rest 11 tested positive for COVID-19 during rapid antigen test at the airport upon arrival, he said.

The union territory now has 121 active CsO-

VID-19 cases and all the patients are in South Andaman district. The other two districts - North and Middle Andaman and Nicobar - have no active COVID-19 cases, the official said.

Thirty-six more COVID-19 patients recovered from the disease, taking the total number of recoveries to 5,146, he said.

The union territory administration has so far tested 3,49,739 samples for COVID-19 and the test positivity rate is 1.52 per cent.

The official further said that so far more than 61,000 people in the archipelago have received the COVID-19 vaccine.

Post-poll violence in Bengal's Dabgram-Phulbari seat



JALPAIGURI (WB), APR 18 (PTI): Post-poll violence has allegedly taken place in Dabgram-Phulbari assembly constituency in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district, with both the TMC and the BJP claiming that its members were attacked by activists of the rival party.

The alleged incidents happened in Porajhar village in Phulbari I gram panchayat on Saturday night after voting took place in the fifth phase of the assembly elections in the state.

As per an FIR lodged by BJP candidate Sikha Chatterjee with New Jalpaiguri

police station on Sunday, TMC "goons" thrashed two members of the saffron party and molested the women in their houses. BJP members staged a demonstration outside the police station in protest against the alleged incident.

On the other hand, TMC candidate and state minister Goutam Deb alleged that BJP workers hurled stones on a ruling party worker's house and Chatterjee visited the village on Sunday and "terrorised" the residents, including women. He said a police complaint will soon be lodged against Chatterjee.

Will not hold any major rally amid rise in COVID-19 cases: Bengal Minister

KOLKATA, 18 APR [PTI]: Days after the Left Front stated that it would not hold any large-scale public meetings in Bengal amid the steep hike in COVID-19 cases, state minister Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay, fielded by the TMC from the prized Bhawanipur seat, said on Sunday that he, too, would desist from organising any major rally.

Mr Chattopadhyay, who has been entrusted with the job of retaining the Bhawanipur seat after its sitting MLA and TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee decided to contest the polls from Nandigram, is the first candidate from the ruling party to have taken such a decision. "With the rise



of Covid cases, I have decided not to hold any Central Rally in Bhawanipur AC for the upcoming Election Campaign, which I have always held in previous elections. Requesting everyone to Wear Mask & stay safe," he tweeted.

Bhawanaipur is set to go to polls to April 26.

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has also cancelled his public rallies in West Bengal in view of the worsening

COVID-19 situation.

Taking to Twitter, he wrote, "In view of the Covid situation, I am suspending all my public rallies in West Bengal. I would advise all political leaders to think deeply about the consequences of holding large public rallies under the current circumstances."

He advised all other politicians to think about the consequences of holding large public rallies.

Assam logs 876 new COVID cases, 2 fresh deaths

GUWAHATI, APR 17 (PTI): Assam on Saturday reported 876 new COVID-19 cases taking the tally to 2,23,816, the National Health Mission said in a bulletin.

Two fresh fatalities registered in Kamrup Metro and Kamrup Rural districts also took the death toll to 1129, it said. The bulletin said that

1,347 coronavirus positive patients have died of other reasons.

The number of active cases in the state is currently 4,794.

Altogether 149 patients recovered from the disease during the day, taking the total number of cured people to 2,16,397, the bulletin said. The 876 new cases

included 360 from Kamrup Metropolitan and 56 from Kamrup Rural districts.

The new cases were detected out of 43,268 tests conducted during the day, while the total number of tests in the state so far is 78,07,560.

Altogether 15,60,059 people were inoculated in Assam till date.

Amid Covid surge, Rahul Gandhi announces cancellation of poll rallies in WB

NEW DELHI, APR 18 (PTI): Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday cancelled all his public rallies in poll-bound West Bengal following a rapid rise in COVID-19 cases in the country.

He also advised all other politicians to think about the consequences of holding large public rallies.

"In view of the Covid situation, I am suspending all my public rallies in West Bengal. I would advise all political leaders

to think deeply about the consequences of holding large public rallies under the current circumstances," he said on Twitter.

The Congress has been critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for holding political rallies amid the rise in coronavirus cases in the country.

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram has accused the prime minister of shocking callousness for holding big political rallies in poll-bound Bengal amid the rise in COVID-19 cases.

He said the prime minister should be at his job, sitting at his desk and coordinating with chief ministers

in handling the COVID pandemic.

Prime Minister Modi has been addressing public rallies in West Bengal for the eighth-phase assembly elections in the state.

India has been witnessing a massive surge in coronavirus cases.

A record single-day rise of 2,61,500 coronavirus infections has taken the country's total tally of COVID-19 cases to 1,47,88,109, while active cases surpassed the 18-lakh mark, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

BJP member found dead at Chakdah

CHAKDAH (WB), APR 18 (PTI): The body of a BJP member was found at Chakdah in West Bengal's Nadia district in the early hours of Sunday, police said.

After the body of Dilip Kirtania (31) was found, BJP activists in the area started protest demonstrations staging roadblocks alleging that he was murdered by miscreants belonging to the rival TMC, the police said. Kirtania's family members alleged that he had gone out in the night to attend to nature's call, but did not return home, police said quoting the complaint lodged.

"As he did not return home for a long time they started a search and found him lying injured a few metres away from



his residence. Doctors declared him brought dead when he was rushed to Chakdah state General hospital. He had several injuries in his private parts," a police officer added.

BJP party activists started protests as the news of Kirtania's death spread in the area.

Demanding arrests of those behind the murder, the BJP activists also

staged protests putting up a blockade on NH 34, police said.

Polling for the Chakdah seat was held on Saturday during the fifth phase of the West Bengal Assembly election.

Police had arrested one Independent candidate Koushik Bhowmick for carrying a country-made pistol outside a polling booth during Saturday's polling.

Case lodged over fake Twitter accounts of Meghalaya Guv

SHILLONG, APR 18 (PTI): A case was registered and investigation started after several fake Twitter accounts of Meghalaya Governor Satya Pal Malik were detected, officials said on Sunday.

The case was lodged after Raj Bhavan took up the matter with the Director-General of Police on Friday, they said.

Raj Bhavan secretary Pravin Bakshi submitted a list of the fake Twitter accounts created in the name of Malik.

"The imposters posted derogatory and offensive materials which are prejudicial to the high office of the Governor of Meghalaya and which in no way reflect his views," Bakshi said.

The Twitter accounts were made with the intentions of cheating, committing fraud, harming and maligning the reputation of the governor in violation of the Information Technology Act, he added.

Malik had on March

24 created a Twitter account, having the username of @SatyapaMalik6, and that is his official Twitter handle, the official said.

At least eight fake Twitter accounts using Malik's name and photos were reported to the police, Bakshi said.

A senior police officer told PTI that a case has been registered and an investigation started to nab those behind the fake accounts.

Sikkim breaks century...

Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that the 105 cases were picked up from the testing of 435 samples in the State on Saturday.

While 84 persons were found positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR testing of 326 samples, 21 more were found positive in rapid antigen testing of 102 samples.

Among the new cases reported from in and around Gangtok are three persons from Sichey, three from Greendale School Road [Daragaon], three from Lumsey, one from Arithang, one from Lingding, one from Rongneck, two from 5th Mile-Tadong, one from Phewa Basti [Tadong], One from Baha'i School Road, Tadong, one from Upper Shyari, one from Bojoghari and one from Lower Burtuk. Similarly, one person who presently admitted in STNM hospital also found COVID-19 positive.

Likewise, four persons from NHPC, Singtam [with travel history outside the State], two from Rongli, one person from Samdong, one from Singtam, one from Channatar, Rangpo, one from Majhitar, one from West Pendam, one from Ranipool and one from Padamchey in East District were also reported positive for COVID-19.

He added that one person from Darjeeling presently residing near Selep Tank, Upper Nandok has also tested positive for COVID-19.

The State IEC Officer mentioned that four persons from Chungthang and one from Singhik-Mangan in North District have also been tested COVID-19 positive.

In South District, three from Jorethang who are primary contacts of a Channatar patient, two from Namchi, one from Damthang, one from Rabongla and one from Rong were reported positive for COVID-19.

He added that a health department staff posted at Gyalshing District Hospital, two from NHPC, Legship [having travel history to Odisha] and one from Rupsang, Barboley in West District were found positive for COVID-19.

Mr Bhutia mentioned that a tourist booked at a hotel in Sisha Golai and two tourists from Kolkata have also tested positive.

Likewise, a 17-year-old lady from Shyari, an 18-year-old boy from Deorali, and one a 32-year-old male who has given his address as Shiva Shakti Nagar, Vadodara, were found positive for COVID-19 but not traceable over the given phone numbers and urged them to immediately contact the authorities.

In the meanwhile, five more persons were released from the home isolation after completing the full period of home isolation to further improve the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim to 6014. Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 is presently stands at 6696.

On the other hand, 4,586 people received the COVID vaccine at different parts of the State on Saturday. Of these, 3576 persons got the first dose and 1,010 completed the vaccine schedule with the second dose.



BHUBANESWAR, APR 18 (PTI): Odisha's COVID-19 caseload mounted to 3,68,258 on Sunday after 3,664 more people tested positive for the infection, while two fresh fatalities pushed the coastal state's toll to 1,944, a senior health department official here said.

Of the 3,664 new cases, 2,127 were registered in quarantine centres and the rest detected during contact tracing, the official said.

At least 10 districts recorded more than 100 new cases each, he stated.

Khurda district -- of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part -- reported the highest number of fresh cases at 704, followed by Sundergarh at 340, Kalahandi at 324, Nuapada at 221, Bargarh at 210, Sambalpur at 199, Cuttack at 198, Jharsuguda at 183, Puri at 143 and Mayurbhanj at 119. Malkangi-

ri district recorded the least number of new cases at four.

Taking to twitter, the Health and Family Welfare Department said, "Regret to inform about the demise of two Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

Both the victims are women - one from Bargarh district, aged 75 years, and the other from Sundergarh, aged 32 years, the health department official said.

Odisha currently has 21,436 active cases, while as many as 3,44,825 patients have so far recovered from the highly infectious disease. Fifty-three other COVID-19 patients have died due to comorbidities. The positivity rate stands at 3.84 per cent.

Over 95.99 lakh samples have been tested for COVID-19 thus far, including 34,450 on Saturday.

Messi nets 2, Barcelona beats Bilbao 4-0 to win Copa del Rey

Barcelona, Apr 18 (AP): If Lionel Messi isn't happy at Barcelona, it was impossible to tell when he scored two goals in another masterful performance to brush aside Athletic Bilbao and win the Copa del Rey.

Messi climbed into the tribune after leading the 4-0 win and lifted the trophy high above his head and turned to his team on the pitch below.

For his teammates, coach, and millions of anxious fans, it was easy to read so much into that broad grin, that vigorous shake of the huge cup.

Was Messi finally seeing the folly of ever thinking he could find a better home?

Or was the club's all-time leading scorer relieved that he could give Barcelona at least one more title before saying goodbye?

Messi did not mention his future after he received the trophy from Spain's King Felipe VI, one of the few dignitaries along with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in attendance at a stadium closed to fans due to coronavirus restrictions.

Instead, Messi focused on those who were not able to share in the celebration.

This is a very special cup for me to lift, Messi said.

It is too bad we cannot celebrate it with our family and fans. But that is the situation we have to accept.

Even though Messi avoided the burning question of his plans, his great game will raise hopes for



Barcelona fans of the soccer great staying at Camp Nou.

And for Joan Laporta, who returned to the club's presidency last month, Messi should have an easy choice ahead of him.

Leo is the best player in the world, Leo has deep roots in this club, and I am convinced that he wants to stay, Laporta said.

We will do all we can for him to stay with us. That is what we most want. And today Messi gave a master class of soccer while being supported by a great team.

Barcelona's record 31st cup comes at a crucial junction for Messi and Barcelona. Barcelona has seen its finances badly

damaged by the pandemic and its former president Josep Bartomeu was forced to resign after the team's poor performance last season when it failed to win a title and alleged administrative irregularities. Bartomeu has denied any wrongdoing.

But the peak of the club's crisis came last summer when Messi said that he wanted to put an end to his highly successful two decades with Barcelona. Since then, he has only said he will make a decision when his contract is up at the end of this season.

The cup, however, puts an end to a title drought since Barcelona won the 2019 Spanish league.

It has been a difficult year, but like in life, sometimes you fall down and just have to get back up, said Barcelona defender Gerard Pique, who excelled in shutting down Bilbao's counterattack.

This is like starting anew, a reset I think we have turned this around.

Bilbao has now lost two Copa del Rey finals this month at La Cartuja Stadium in Seville. Bilbao lost 1-0 to Real Sociedad just two weeks ago when they met in the 2020 final that had been postponed due to the pandemic. Sociedad's reign as Copa champion lasted all of 14 days.

We were far from our best,

said Bilbao coach Marcelino Garcia Toral.

And even playing our your best it is tough to beat Bar a.

Only some tenacious defending in its area kept Bilbao in the match until Barcelona erupted with four goals between the 60th and 72nd minutes.

The bombardment started in the fifth when Messi set up Frenkie de Jong, who played a perfect aide to Messi throughout the match, to hit the post.

The second half continued with Messi dictating the pace, and now Unai Sim n had to save Bilbao.

But the Spain goalkeeper could do nothing to deny Antoine

Griezmann in the 60th minute. Griezmann's sliced in a one-touch strike off De Jong's cross from the right after Messi had again taken the ball and forced Bilbao to scramble back into its box.

With Bilbao reeling, Barcelona struck again in the 63rd this time from the left. Messi also played a subtle part in this goal, making a dummy run to open space for De Jong to push forward and head in Jordi Alba's cross.

De Jong then helped Messi slalom through Bilbao from near the middle of the field into the heart of the area by exchanging two quick passing combinations with the star. Messi capped the move by dribbling past the last defender before slotting in his team's third goal in the 68th.

Messi rounded off his stellar performance that earned him a 35th career title for Barcelona when he fired in a pass from Alba.

Messi had again showed, at age 33, that he can still completely dominate a final.

But hanging over the cup was what it truly meant to the inscrutable Argentine.

For coach Ronald Koeman, with his team also in the league title race, nothing has changed. It is up to Messi to decide, while Koeman crosses his fingers.

Messi showed he is a born winner, Koeman said after claiming his first title since the former defender returned to coach the club last summer.

We hope this is not Messi's last Copa. We want him to stay with us.

California mass shooting suspect was barred from buying gun

SACRAMENTO (US), APR 18 (AP): The man accused of going on a shooting rampage at a Southern California business, killing four people, should not have been allowed to buy or own guns because of a California law that prohibits people from purchasing weapons for 10 years after being convicted of a crime.

Aminadab Gaxiola Gonzalez was convicted of battery in 2015, which should have kept him from possessing or buying guns or ammo at stores that conduct background checks. While it's unclear how Gaxiola, 44, acquired the weapons used in the March 31 shooting, the tragedy raises concerns over California's ability to enforce strict gun control laws, the Sacramento Bee reported on Friday.

Police say Gaxiola had targeted Unified Homes, the mobile home brokerage company in Orange, and had personal and business relationships with the victims. His estranged wife had worked in the business for more than 10 years as a broker assistant. The shooting occurred nearly six years after Gaxiola pleaded guilty to misdemeanor battery, which should have put him on the list prohibiting him from owning firearms for the next 10 years. The list is used during the state's gun and ammunition background check process.

Two weeks after the mass shooting, police learned Gaxiola was not on the Prohibited Persons List, though he might still have been blocked from buying a gun during a standard background check, Orange Police Lt. Jennifer Amat said.

Bumrah one of the best death bowlers, makes my job easier: Boult



CHENNAI, APR 18 (PTI): Jasprit Bumrah is "one the best death bowlers" in the game, gushed star New Zealand seamer Trent Boult after the Indian pace spearhead yet again played a key role in Mumbai Indians' triumph against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Bumrah conceded only 14 runs in his four overs and took one wicket as MI bowled out SRH for 137 after setting them a 151-run target.

"It's great to see a guy (Bumrah) like that operate. How clear he is with what he is doing with the ball throughout his whole spell," Boult said after MI beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by 13 runs on Saturday. The dynamic duo of Boult and Bumrah have combined fabulously in the MI set up. The two churned out sensational performance in the last edition to help their side win an unprecedented fifth title.

"But at the death, I personally believe, he is one of the best death bowlers in the world. He makes my job a heck of a lot easier," he added.

"It is always nice being on the right side of those situations. Hopefully, we can get a bit of momentum into this tournament". While spinner Rahul Chahar (3/19) and Boult (3/28) did the heavy lifting with the ball, the Kiwi said it was a team effort.

"It's hard to pin-point one performance there. A lot of credit to the whole side for hanging in there. We knew we

were a few runs short of the par score.

"But we also knew that this is a pitch where you can fight. And you get a couple of wickets, you can really get back in the chase.

"I thought a couple of direct hits from Hardik (Pandya) and the three wickets from Rahul were important when we were bowling. And then Bumrah there, bowling his four overs for only 14 was pretty amazing," he added.

Mumbai has managed to defend sub par scores in the previous two games and Boult feels accuracy is vital while bowling at the Chepauk.

"The contrast between Wankhede and Chepauk Stadium is quite considerable. It looks like its swinging around nicely and it's a perfect surface in Mumbai. "Here as a pace bowler, you got to be extremely accurate. Key has really been our ability to bowl dot balls and keep pushing the run rate."

MI are slated to play their first five matches here before moving to Delhi.

"It gives us a chance to settle at the venue. But the key would be to obviously read the conditions quickly as possible and make the most of them really.

"So, it's a unique situation. We've got five here, four in Delhi, move around a little bit. But, I think especially in the first half of the tournament you obviously get on the right side of a couple of results and it's nice to get those couple of wins in the last two matches," he said.

Youth world boxing: Five Indians enter quarters

NEW DELHI, APR 18 (PTI): Five Indian boxers advanced to the quarter-finals of the youth world championships for men and women after clinching comfortable victories in their last-16 stage bouts in Kielce, Poland.

Among the women, Gitika (48kg) made the last eight on Saturday.

From the men's contingent, Asian silver-medallist Ankit Narwal (64kg), Bishwami-

tra Chongtham (49kg), Sachin (56kg) and Vishal Gupta (91kg) stood just one win away from ensuring a medal for the country. However, the campaign ended for Nisha Gurjar (64kg) after a 1-4 loss to Latvia's Beatrise Rozentale.

Earlier, Gitika defeated Kazakhstan's Arailym Marat 5-0.

Chongtham got the better of Mahdi Kohsroshahi by a similar mar-

gin before Sachin got the better of David Jimenez Valdez. His was also an unanimous victory.

Narwal went past Poland's Oliwier Zamowski 4-1, while Vishal out-punched Croatia's Borna Loncaric in his pre-quarterfinal bout.

India have fielded a 20-member team -- 10 men and as many women -- in the competition, which features 414 boxers from 52 countries.

Fulham denied victory at Arsenal by last-gasp Eddie Nketiah equaliser

NICK AMES

LONDON, 18 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: Fulham were seconds away from a win that would have made survival appear that little bit more realistic and, perhaps, put the wind back in their sails for a great escape. That prospect seems exceedingly remote now and their desolation at full time suggested they knew it. They were leading through Josh Maja's second-half penalty and, largely thanks to a heroic performance from goalkeeper Alphonse Areola, looked to have repelled an Arsenal barrage as the game entered its seventh minute of stoppage time.

Then Mat Ryan, making his home debut in Arsenal's goal, advanced upfield for a corner and managed to flick the ball across goal. It was drilled back in by Dani Ceballos and Areola, who would claim unsuccessfully that he had been unsighted by an offside Rob Holding, pushed the shot away. But the substitute Eddie Nketiah was positioned to stab in an equaliser that leaves nobody especially happy: a draw is a near-fatal blow to Arsenal's remaining hopes of qualifying for European football via the domestic route.

At the end Fulham's contingent sunk to their knees; at the interval they could feel happy enough with parity given Arsenal, who had emerged with their tails up before losing their way, had just been denied the lead by a toe's length. Like many that fall foul of VAR, which is deployed on a weekly basis in such a way as to debase an entire sport, there was nothing wrong with Ceballos's 41st-minute header at first glance. He had been one of three Arsenal players queuing up to convert Héctor Bel-



lerín's precise cross to the far post, succeeding in doing so with a firm finish across Areola. But events on the ground deferred to the lines and angles at Stockley Park, where Simon Hooper determined Bukayo Saka had been offside when controlling Gabriel Martinelli's cross and feeding Bellerín. The end of his right boot had, it turned out, extended a fraction beyond that of Antonee Robinson.

The incident followed a lengthy lull but Arsenal, buoyant after Thursday's resounding victory in Prague, had flown out of the traps earlier on. They should have scored inside two minutes when Alexandre Lacazette, so influential in ensuring their progression to the Europa League semi-finals, showed exceptional vision to loft a pass into Martinelli's path. Martinelli had to dink the ball over the advancing Areola and found height but not direction, the ball running slightly wide of the keeper's left post. Had he scored, VAR might have had a tough time discerning whether or not he was offside by a finger's width.

There would have been no need for a review if, shortly afterwards, Martinelli's first-time shot from 10 yards had beaten Areola. The chance arose after Emile

Smith Rowe had hustled to the byline and, with space at a premium, managed to cut back. Areola was down sharply in a crowded box to save with his left hand and Fulham retained hope of establishing a platform.

Scott Parker had, like Mikel Arteta, made five changes to his starting lineup and opted for speed on the counter. Maja, Ademola Lookman, Ivan Cavaleiro and Bobby Decordova-Reid all have plenty of that and the lineup had a similar look to the one that, five games previously, had earned Fulham a win at Anfield and seemingly a clear path to survival. They stabilised in the period between those misses and Ceballos's frustration, playing patiently around Arsenal's press at times, and had a chance of their own midway through the first half. Decordova-Reid's deflected shot fell kindly for Maja in the box and, via the inside of Holding's leg, his first-time strike dribbled millimetres wide.

That level of penetration would not be enough to improve their fortunes but, from their first moment of menace after the break, they found an unlikely breakthrough. Arsenal had been banging at the door again, Lacazette fizzing wide and Saka rapping the outside of a post with a

cross-shot, but then Mario Lemina led a Fulham charge upfield.

Gabriel cut out his attempted through pass for Ola Aina but, given a second bite as the ball ran free, Lemina nipped in ahead of the Arsenal centre-back. Down he went, the contact perhaps anticipated somewhat as the pair collided, and although Craig Pawson initially seemed reluctant to award a penalty, a glance towards his assistant referee solidified his decision.

This time VAR found nothing to niggle at after again checking for a tight offside call earlier in the move and, eventually, with Parker barely able to watch from the touchline, Maja beat home debutant Ryan from the spot.

Arteta flung on the cavalry but promptly saw Lacazette limp off in a development that may yet bode ill for their European hopes. One of the substitutes, Nicolas Pépé, wondered how he had not equalised after a point-blank header was brilliantly saved by Areola, with Tosin Adarabioyo completing the clearance.

Fulham almost pulled through, the inspired Areola denying Martinelli and Nketiah. Then came the sting that surely makes their survival task too steep.

Jailed Putin critic Alexei Navalny could die at any minute, doctors warn

MOSCOW, 18 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny risks cardiac arrest at “any minute” as his health has rapidly deteriorated, doctors warned Saturday, urging immediate access to Russia’s most famous prisoner.

On 31 March, Vladimir Putin’s most prominent opponent went on hunger strike to demand proper medical treatment for back pain and numbness in his legs and hands.

On Saturday, Joe Biden added his voice to a growing international chorus of protest at the treatment of the activist, describing his situation as “totally unfair”.

Navalny, 44, was imprisoned in February and is serving two-and-a-half years on old embezzlement charges in a penal colony in the town of Pokrov about 100km (60 miles) east of Moscow.

Navalny’s personal doctor Anastasia Vasilyeva and three more doctors, including cardiologist Yaroslav Ashikhmin, have asked prison officials to grant them immediate access. “Our patient can die any minute,” Ashikhmin said on Facebook on Saturday, pointing to the opposition politician’s high potassium levels and saying Navalny should be moved to intensive care. “Fatal arrhythmia can develop any minute.”

Navalny barely survived a poisoning with the novichok nerve agent in August which he has blamed on the Kremlin. His doctors say his hunger strike may have exacerbated his condition.

Having blood potassium levels higher than 6.0 mmol (millimole) per litre usually requires immediate treatment. Navalny’s were at 7.1, the doctors said. “This means both impaired renal function and that serious heart rhythm problems can happen any minute,” said a statement on Vasilyeva’s Twitter account. The doctors said he had to be examined immediately “taking into account the blood tests and his recent poisoning”.

Navalny’s spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh, who accompanied him when he collapsed on a plane after the poisoning in August, said the situation was critical again. “Alexei is dying,” she said on Facebook. “With his condition, it’s a matter of days.” She said she felt like she was “on that plane again, only this time it’s landing in slow motion”, pointing out that access to Navalny was restricted and few Russians were aware of what was actually going on with him in prison.

On Saturday, responding to reporters’ questions about Navalny’s plight, Biden responded: “It’s totally, totally unfair, totally inappropriate.”

More than 70 prominent international writers, artists and academics, including Jude Law, Vanessa Redgrave and Benedict Cumberbatch, have called on Putin to ensure that Navalny receives proper treatment immediately.

ROBIN McKIE

London, 18 Apr [theGuardian]: A grim Covid-19 milestone was passed on Saturday when it was revealed that the global death toll from the disease had passed three million.

The news was described as “chilling” by Wellcome Trust director Jeremy Farrar, who warned that the true number of deaths was probably much higher. “Worryingly, this pandemic is still growing at an alarming rate,” he said. “Hundreds of thousands are dying every day.”

According to the Covid-19 dashboard, run by Johns Hopkins University, there have been more than 140 million cases of the disease since the pandemic began last year with the official death toll reaching 3,001,068 yesterday morning. The worst affected country was the US with more than 31 million cases and more than 560,000 deaths.

India and Brazil have also fared badly with the former recording more than 14 million cases and 175,000 deaths, while the latter has suffered just under 14 million cases and almost 370,000 deaths. Britain, which has also been hit heavily by the disease, has had more than four million cases and has a death toll that currently stands at more than 127,000.

“Only when we have tools to detect, treat and prevent Covid-19 everywhere will we be able to stop this pandemic and this senseless, tragic loss of life,” added Farrar, who said



that a small number of rich countries had key roles to play in bringing the pandemic to a halt.

“The UK, the US and other wealthy nations are in a position where they can and should set out a timetable immediately for sharing vaccine doses with the rest of the world, alongside their national rollouts. There can be no more delays.”

In the UK it was revealed that on Friday there were 35 deaths, 2,206 new cases, 120,000 first vaccinations administered and 485,000 second vaccinations administered.

The impact of Britain’s

lengthy lockdown and the fast rollout of vaccines across the country over the past four months has helped the UK to do relatively well recently in terms of declining numbers of deaths and hospitalisations. “I think in our own little world in the UK we’re actually doing pretty well now,” said Sir John Bell, regius professor of medicine at the University of Oxford.

In November Bell predicted on BBC News that Britain would have a near-normal spring this year. “I stand by that,” he told the Observer last week. “We are going to have a spring and a summer that will look pretty close to usual.”

However, there were still issues to worry about, he added. “We have this challenge of getting the world vaccinated and that is not going to happen this summer.

“That means the ongoing creation of some pretty interesting variants will continue round the world and any one of those could turn out to be much more pathogenic or much more infectious than existing strains. We are walking on a tight ridge with all this going on around us.”

On the other hand, there will soon be a broad selection of vaccines available in the UK, and if used in combi-

nation with each other, these could provide deeper and broader protection against new variants, Bell added.

“I think you can expect a little uptick in numbers of cases in the next few weeks because schools are back and lockdown is coming to an end. However, I would really hope that given the level of vaccination that has taken place – particularly for the vulnerable and elderly – that we will see less in the way of hospital admissions and deaths which are already at a very low level. But if those numbers start to go up, we could have something to worry about.” Recent reports have

also suggested plans are being prepared to give Covid jabs to the under-18s in the UK once vaccine trials on youngsters in the US have been completed. These would help limit the spread of the Covid virus and help to build some kind of herd immunity among the population in Britain.

However, Saul Faust, professor of paediatric immunology at Southampton University, told the Observer last week that he thought it was doubtful that a rollout of vaccines for the under-18s would take place this year.

“Although we may soon have the clinical data from US vaccine trials of under-18s, it is unlikely that children and young people will become the highest priority for immunisation – although that could change if circumstances in this country alter,” he said.

“For example, if a new variant affecting younger people begins to sweep schools, there would be a good moral argument for immunising young people for their own benefit to prevent school closures,” added Faust.

“Such a move is only likely to be approved if there was enough vaccine in the country, and with the AstraZeneca vaccine being restricted at present and with the prospect that it may be necessary to give older people a booster jab in autumn, it would seem unlikely that we will be immunising young people in the UK before 2022, when vaccine supply becomes easier.”

Could Marine Le Pen finally triumph with her third tilt at French presidency?

KIM WILLISHER

PARIS, 18 APR [THEGUARDIAN]: In Paris’s symbolic Place de la République, under the watchful gaze of France’s allegorical figurehead Marianne, the skateboarders are not in the mood to discuss politics.

For the young here, as everywhere, life has been paused during a pandemic that has halted studies, jobs, socialising and parties. What they want is their lives back, not to talk about an election.

“Right now, there are more important things to worry about,” says one young skateboarder.

Outside Paris it is a different story. In the provinces, the race to the Elysée has started. This time next year, France will be between rounds of what is set to be another bitterly contested – and hopefully post-Covid – presidential election.

Opinion polls suggest the first-round vote will again feature a colourful range of candidates from across the political spectrum, all of whom will be eliminated, leading to the déjà vu of a runoff between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen.

Like the youngsters in the Place de la République, Macron’s administration has more pressing Covid-related issues to deal with, but Le Pen is in full campaign mode. On Friday, she tweeted that her Rassemblement National (RN) party had found its election HQ in Paris’s chic 16th arrondissement.

In Burgundy, the RN has got a head start on rivals, putting up its posters on municipal noticeboards and posting flyers through letterboxes, urging voters to get behind the RN candidate in June’s regional elections.

Head south to Provence, a far right stronghold, and the RN is being tipped to easily win both rounds of the regionals, though locals stop short of saying they are ready to hand her the keys to the Elysée.

Claude Milleis, 72, who lives in Nice, said he would be voting for Le Pen for president because “it’s time for a change”, but the owner

of a popular coffee shop in nearby Cannes said that while the whole area was “pretty rightwing”, he felt the RN’s moment had passed. “Nobody wants racism and civil war,” he said.

Macron’s popularity is currently hovering at about 37% – low but still considerably higher than that of his two predecessors at the same time in their mandate – 29% for Nicolas Sarkozy and 17% for François Hollande – though both turned out to be one-term presidents.

In the middle of a health crisis that Macron has described as a “war”, presidential advisers believe it would be a disaster for him to even mention next year’s election, let alone announce he is seeking a second term. Le Pen has been less backward in coming forward to make her third bid for the presidency.

Asked if Le Pen could win, Sylvain Crépon, a senior lecturer in politics specialising in the far right at the university in Tours, says a victory is “possible, but not probable”.

“Six years ago, we could be almost certain Marine Le Pen would not win an election. That has changed. She has a better chance than last time but we have to put any potential victory in context,” he said. “A general election will follow the presidential, and the RN has few local or regional representatives, few elected representatives in parliament, very little financial means and not that many voters.

“Of course it would be a revolution if she were to be elected but she doesn’t have the capacity to put her politics into effect by getting a majority in parliament and forming a government.” The most likely result of this would be cohabitation with the mainstream right, resulting in a dilution of her power. However, a President Le Pen would still be head of the armed forces and responsible for defence and foreign policy.

“She could still do a lot of dam-

age,” Crépon says. So far, nine candidates have thrown their hat in the presidential ring, including Jean-Luc Mélenchon for the hard-left party France Insoumise (Un-bowed France). It seems unlikely the Socialist party can come up with a credible presidential hopeful in the next 12 months, and even less likely they will stand a chance of winning. For a brief moment, Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris, seemed the Socialists’ brightest hope, but recent estimates have put her first round result at a disastrous 5-10%.

However, the opposition Les Républicains could pull a charismatic candidate – perhaps the popular former prime minister Édouard Philippe – out of the political hat.

Of the 27 opinion polls published since the beginning of 2021, all suggest it will be a rerun of 2017 with Macron and Le Pen head-to-head in the second round. Of the 12 second-round polls published, none has Le Pen winning.

But political analysts point out that the polls may not be worth the graph paper they are printed on. Alexandre Dézé, a professor at Montpellier university and Sciences Po in Paris, said the polls had become a form of “self-fulfilling prophecy”.

“It’s pure manipulation, and they’re worth nothing at all. How can you ask people what way they will vote when we don’t even know who the candidates are and we have no idea of their programmes?” Dézé told the Observer. He insisted the RN “remains dangerous and anti-democratic”.

“It’s the party of people who are fed up and want to vote for Le Pen as a protest,” he said. Like Crépon, he pointed out that the RN still has few mayors, local councillors or elected representatives in parliament. The party has just one senator in the upper house, and six MPs in the 577-seat Assemblée Nationale. That Le Pen is able to do so well is because the far right has become a “personality cult”, Dézé said.

Rwanda arrests woman deported from US on genocide charges

KIGALI, 18 APR [ALJAZEERA]: A Rwandan woman who was deported by the United States after serving a prison term for lying on her naturalisation application has been arrested upon arrival in Rwanda, where she faces seven charges related to the 1994 genocide.

Thierry Murangira, spokesman for the Rwanda Bureau of Investigation, said Beatrice Munyenyezi will be charged for crimes ranging from murder to complicity in rape, which occurred as she was manning a roadblock in the southern city of Butare.

His comments on Friday evening came after Munyenyezi, who had

secured US citizenship in New Hampshire in 2003, was flown into Rwanda’s capital, Kigali, accompanied by US federal agents.

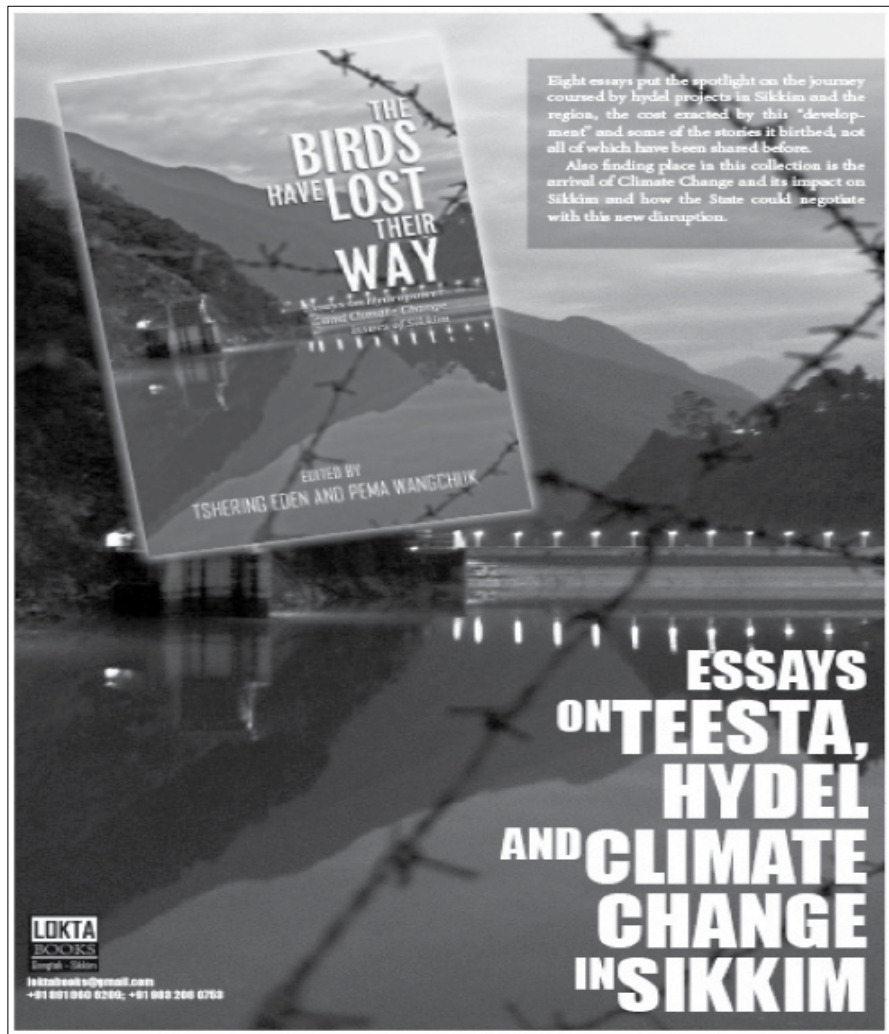
His comments on Friday evening came after Munyenyezi, who had secured US citizenship in New Hampshire in 2003, was flown into Rwanda’s capital, Kigali, accompanied by US federal agents.

Munyenyenzi denied accusations of involvement in the genocide during her trial in the US. She did not speak to waiting journalists as Rwandan police took her into custody when she arrived.

During the genocide between April and July of 1994, some 800,000 people were

slaughtered, mainly from the ethnic Tutsi minority but also moderate Hutus. The roadblock where Munyenyezi is accused of committing the crimes was situated outside a hotel in Butare that was owned by her in-laws.

Munyenyenzi’s mother-in-law, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, and her husband Arsene Shalom Ntahobali, were convicted and sentenced by the international criminal tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha for their roles in the genocide. Munyenyezi was stripped of her US citizenship and jailed for 10 years in 2013, after she was found guilty by a court of misrepresenting material facts when she secured the naturalisation.



New book tells story of India through its languages

A new book delving into the early history of South Asia reveals how migration -- both external and internal -- has shaped both, Indians and Indian languages from ancient times.

"Wanderers, Kings, Merchants: The Story of India through its Languages", published by Penguin Random House India (PRHI), is written by noted linguist Peggy Mohan. The book, through an incisive study of languages, such as the story of early Sanskrit, the rise of Urdu, language formation in the North-east, presents the argument that "all Indians are of mixed origins".

".. Hindi, Marathi, all the northern languages we call 'Indo-Aryan': they have words that were taken from the Prakrits and Sanskrit, but the way these words string together is strikingly different. There is another parent in this family that we have been ignoring!," said Mohan, who has also the author of "Jahajin" and "Walk in C-Minor".

"There are so many ways to look at history! Now the languages we speak have much to add to the story told by archaeology, the historical record and modern genetics," she added.

Path-breaking in its revelation of the hidden story of Sanskrit, it also explores the surprising rise of English after Independence and how it may be endanger-

ing India's native languages. "Urdu, too, has a story, starting with men who spoke Uzbek coming to Delhi and finding early Hindi, but preferring to speak Persian, the way so many of us opt for English. The north-east has a separate story too, starting near Banaras, where there is a

of Indian history so "ably and accessibly" in this book, Joseph, who is the author of best-selling "Early Indians: The Story of Our Ancestors", called the book a "necessary read".

"Peggy Mohan takes the reader on a fascinating journey into the world of In-



different history and a totally different maternal' substratum no gender, for example.. And English, which took to the Indian landscape like a hardy and determined weed," said the Trinidad-born author. The book also got high praises from eminent historian Romila Thapar and award-winning journalist-author Tony Joseph.

While Thapar commended the book for revealing new dimensions in aspects

dian languages. Weaving linguistics and history tightly together, she explores how waves of migration over millennia have left their mark on what we speak and how we speak. Wanderers, Kings, Merchants is an accessible account [and] a necessary read," said Joseph about the book.

The 360-page "Wanderers, Kings, Merchants", priced at Rs 599, is presently available for sale on online and offline stores.

'Killers of the Flower Moon' probably last Western to be made like this: scriptwriter

Martin Scorsese's Western drama "Killers of the Flower Moon" had generated news when Leonardo DiCaprio switched roles in the movie and Jesse Plemons took over his original part but the film's screenwriter has clarified that the shuffle does not relegate the "Titanic" star into a supporting space.

Screenwriter Eric Roth recently told Collider that DiCaprio's part is "very complicated and very interesting" and a smart part for a "smart actor to play.

I wouldn't say (Plemons is) the lead. I would say that he was the designated hero. But yeah, I think that's fairer because I think the parts are pretty equal and they were always equal to a certain extent, and Leo's part is very complicated and very interesting. It's a smart part for a smart actor to play. I mean, if Montgomery Clift was alive, I think he might think of playing him," Roth said.

Killers of the Flower Moon revolves around the investigation into a series of murders of wealthy Osage people that took place in Osage County, Oklahoma in the early 1920s.

Plemons plays Tom White, the lead FBI agent investigating the murders. The character is the film's traditional hero, which is why it was originally

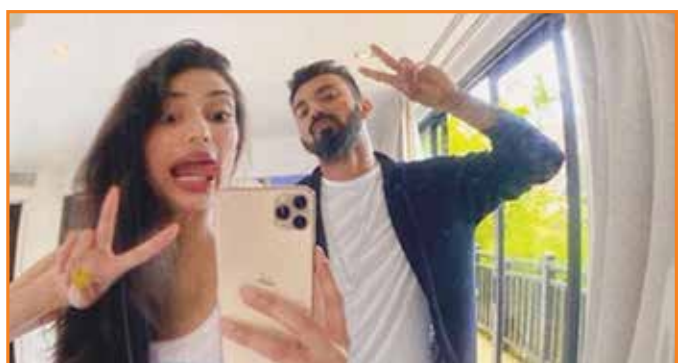
conceived for DiCaprio when Flower Moon was set up at Paramount Pictures, as per the IndieWire. But the actor was more interested in playing Ernest Burkhart, the nephew of a powerful local rancher (De Niro), a decision that reportedly led Paramount to sell the film to Apple for USD 200 million, the publication said.

Roth said he has been working on the script for almost six years and there were some changes when DiCaprio came on board with everyone trying "to figure out how best to portray things because the story is so impactful".

I know Marty's trying to make a movie that's probably the last Western that would be made like this, and yet, with this incredible social document underneath it, and the violence and the environment. I think it'll be like nothing we've ever seen, in a way. And so this one is, to me, one for the ages," he added.

The production on the film is slated to begin in May with an expected release date in 2022. The film marks Scorsese's sixth collaboration with DiCaprio. They previously worked together in "Gangs of New York", "The Aviator", "The Departed", "Shutter Island" and "The Wolf of Wall Street".

Athiya Shetty and KL Rahul are goofing around in her birthday-special post for him



Actress Athiya Shetty's rumoured boyfriend and cricketer KL Rahul turned a year older on Sunday.

Athiya posted a few pictures with KL Rahul on Instagram and wished him a happy birthday. In the pictures, Athiya and KL Rahul can be seen goofing around as they pose together in front of a mirror. The rumoured couple is twinning in their black and white casual outfits. Athiya is standing at the front and KL Rahul is at the back.

In both the pictures, Athi-

ya's expressions are on point. While in the first photo, the actress is sticking her tongue out, the second picture shows her making a cute pout.

In her caption, Athiya Shetty wrote, "grateful for you, happy birthday."

Athiya Shetty has reportedly been dating KL Rahul for quite some time now. While the rumoured couple has kept the relationship a hush-hush affair, both of them frequently feature on their respective Instagram handles.

DEAR READERS, IF YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE GETTING YOUR COPY OF THE SUMMIT TIMES IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD, PLEASE MESSAGE OR WHATSAPP US YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS AT 9832556698 AND WE WILL ENSURE THAT THE NEWSPAPER REACHES YOU.



STRAIGHT FIRE! Megastar Rihanna rocks a red, black and yellow coat along with a zebra-print bucket hat as she steps out for dinner at Giorgio Baldi in Santa Monica.

Equal pay has been my biggest struggle: Wonder Woman Gal Gadot

Even 'Wonder Woman' has to fight for equal pay. Hollywood star Gal Gadot says her biggest struggle as a woman has been against pay disparity between her and her male co-stars.

Gadot, who rose to fame with the 2017 superhero blockbuster "Wonder Woman", is not new to the conversation around pay disparity.

After the film's box office success, there were stories that the actor was paid less than what her male counterparts earned in similar roles.

It reignited the debate around the gender pay gap, something that several female Hollywood actors--from Jennifer Lawrence, Salma Hayek to Emma Watson-- have spoken about.

During a virtual global press conference for her latest National Geographic series "Impact With Gal Gadot", the actor was asked about her biggest struggle as a woman.

"My biggest struggle as a woman has been equal pay as my male co-stars, (all of) whom I love so much. As a woman, that has been the biggest thing. As a human being, I have struggled with many other problems. But the thing

that I fought for the most, was equal pay with my male stars," Gadot replied.

The 35-year-old actor, now an influential Hollywood star, has come on board for National Geographic's "Impact With Gal Gadot" as an executive producer.

The six-part short-form documentary series will highlight stories of resilient women



around the globe.

The series, Gadot said, was born out of her desire to steer her massive global reach towards issues that needed attention which the "cameras won't necessarily aim to cover."

THE DAY AHEAD

Aries: "Nature doesn't hurry, yet everything is accomplished." A Lao Tzu quote to reflect upon as you sip on your morning tonic. Yes, there are certain dreams that have been on hold for a while now. Yes, you have faced rejection despite your best efforts to move forward. What the Universe wants you to know is that you are enough and that dreams matter. Take this redirection in your stride and know that your patience will pay off in more ways than one.
Tip: Show up for your dreams and be patient with the results.
Taurus: Both the past and the future are an illusion, Taurus. The only thing we truly have is this moment. So, why hold onto the by-gones? Why continuously repeat the story that things do not work out? It's time to work the pain out of your system and to hit the refresh button. Trust that what's about to come your way is better than anything you've ever imagined.
Tip: It's time to hit the refresh button.
Gemini: The weekend is going to be anything but easy. There are times you may feel like you're walking

through the fires of hell. Instead of going into that space of victimhood, ask yourself the question, "What is the Universe showing me?" Staying in your centre will help you see the truth, Gemini. If you're looking for a sign to let go, consider this as one. Know that what's coming your way is far greater than what you're saying goodbye to.
Tip: If you're looking for a sign to let go, consider this as one.
Cancer: Just when you were beginning to get comfortable with where you are, the winds of change began to blow in your direction once again. But, this doesn't have to be a bad thing, Cancer. Instead of resisting what the Universe is sending your way, consider it as an opportunity to level up. Yes, that means pushing your boundaries just a little and accepting that magic that lies outside of your comfort zone.
Tip: Push your boundaries a little.
Leo: Being locked down once again isn't easy, especially since you were beginning to get comfortable with the freedom to move around. The good thing is, you are in your safe space and with the people you love. So set some time aside to connect with your tribe in a conscious manner. Choose activities that

awaken a sense of joy and playfulness. Trust that this is the secret to chasing away the dark clouds that surround you right now.
Tip: You are in your safe space and with the people you love.
Virgo: Virgo, you may find that you're at loggerheads with somebody. That no matter how much you try you're unable to find a middle ground. But it doesn't have to continue to be like that. You can restore balance by being the bigger person here. It all comes down to the choices you will make. PS: we do hope that you choose to keep your ego out of this equation.
Tip: It's best to leave your ego outside the door.
Libra: We all have certain goals that we want to achieve in the course of our lives. Some of us are able to achieve these goals in a short duration. For others, this may take a lifetime. Instead of comparing your journey to that of somebody else's, accept where you are and accept what you are being led towards. As you do, celebrate the small victories too, and all of your defining moments. Libra, you are far more successful than you give yourself credit for.
Tip: Accept where you are and where you are being led towards.

Scorpio: Here's the thing, Scorpio: we all have an idea of how we want the people in our lives to be. And these expectations keep us from accepting them as they are. Just for today, consider letting go of the burden of your expectations. Release the judgements and allow others to be as they are in each moment. Trust that this inner shift will help you bring about a massive shift in your outer reality too.
Tip: Allow people to be who they are.
Sagittarius: There was a time you obsessively worried about the future and what it might bring. There was a time when you fixated on the past in the hope that you might be able to fix things. But today, you understand that both the past and the future are an illusion, and that the only thing you truly have is this moment. So, let it go. Let it all go. Your unhealthy attachments and your unrealistic expectations. Thinking of yourself as a blank slate will help you turn your script around.
Tip: All you truly have is this moment.
Capricorn: Here's the thing, Capricorn: we will always have a reason to say "I am the way that I am or I do what I do

because..." and blame our past for the reason things didn't work out. Challenge yourself to snap out of the victim space. To turn life's metaphorical lemons into lemonade. Clearing your browser history (in a healthy manner) will prove to be the secret to turning your life around.
Tip: Take charge of your script.
Aquarius: You've been around this block, Aquarius, where you've been lied to and cheated on. Do you really want to be taken advantage of yet again? Take your rose-tinted glasses off and see this situation for what it is. The truth will piss you off, but it will also ultimately set you free.
Tip: Recognise this situation for what it is.
Pisces: It's time for a vibe check, Pisces: how do you feel about the given situation? Have you been giving yourself grief about how you couldn't be there for a certain person? What the cards want you to remember is that you did what you thought was best, and that is enough. You can't go back into the past and fix things. So, breathe. Free yourself from the baggage and come back to the present moment. "What can I do today?" is the only question you want to ask yourself.
Tip: Forgive yourself from the past.