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SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue124 | Gangtok | Thursday | 13 May 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | RS. 5

Second wave has claimed 47 lives in 37 days

SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 12 MAY:

Novel Coronavirus claimed six more lives in Sikkim today. Yesterday, eight deaths were reported from Covid wards at two hospitals. The State has now lost 183 lives to Covid. If ever there was a doubt that the second wave has been more devastating - here are at statistics to underline the situation. Taking the second wave fatalities as having begun on 05 April last month when the State recorded its 136th Covid fatality after having gone two months without such a death, Sikkim has seen 47 fatalities in the 37 days that have

passed since. The first Covid fatality in the State was reported on 26 July, 2020.

While three patients passed away at STNM Hospital, three succumbed at CRH-Tadong.

Meanwhile, the number of active cases of novel coronavirus here increased to 2,866 on Wednesday with 227 new cases reported in the last 24 hours.

Of the 227 cases, 190 were recorded in East District, 14 in West District, 19 in South District and 04 in North District.

The 227 samples returned positive in the testing of 730 samples in



the State on Tuesday.

Of the active cases, eight are currently admitted in the ICU facility of STNM Hospital and nine in ICU facility at

CRH, Tadong.

On the other hand, the figure of recovered cases also further improved to 7,135 with the release of 93 more persons from home isolation upon completing of their isolation. Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 has now reached 10,392.

India's new Covid cases have peaked, shows Cambridge Tracker

NEW DELHI, 12 MAY [BLOOMBERG]:

The number of new coronavirus infections in India has peaked, according to a new tracker developed by researchers at Cambridge Judge Business School and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

"But there is substantial variation among states and union territories in their trajectories, with cases continuing to increase over the next two weeks in areas such as Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Tripura," the researchers wrote.

The projections are based on reported numbers and are in line with those from some other experts, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi's advisers. India reported a record 414,188 new cases on May 7 --

about 32% higher than the world's previous peak reported by the U.S. last year but with just a fraction of the testing and vast undercounting -- and official data suggest daily deaths could continue near the unprecedented 4,000-level.

Health services remain overwhelmed and several hospitals face a shortage in oxygen supplies. With the state being criticized for failing to ensure critical needs including oxygen and medicines, businesses are suspending operations and offering employees time off "to heal."

A variant of the virus first identified in India appears to have higher rates of transmission and preliminary evidence suggests potentially reduced effectiveness of certain antibodies, the World Health Organization

said in its latest report.

The nation has reported more than 300,000 new infections for more than 20 straight days. The numbers are probably vastly undercounted, experts say.

"A recent risk assessment of the situation in India conducted by WHO found that resurgence and acceleration of COVID-19 transmission in India had several potential contributing factors, including increase in the proportion of cases of SARS-CoV-2 variants with potentially increased transmissibility; several religious and political mass gathering events which increased social mixing; and, underuse of and reduced adherence to public health and social measures," it said.

SKM delegation visit Rabong PHC to thank nurses on their Day



SUMMIT REPORT
RANGPO, 12 MAY:

Advisor, State Medicinal Plants Board, Dechen Phigu Bhutia, accompanied by Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's CLC president for Barfung, Bishnu Sharma, CLC Advisor-I,

Kesangla D Lhasungpa, CLC Advisor II, Ram Prasad Chettri, Upper Barfung WLC president, Karma Sherap Bhutia and Bhawani Shankar Gurung visited Rabong Primary Health Centre today on occasion of Inter-

national Nurses Day today.

The SKM delegation presented sweets and conveyed their best wishes to the nurses on duty and thanked them on behalf of SKM president, Chief Minister PS Tamang.

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Dear PM: Major Opposition Parties Send Joint Letter With 9 Points

NEW DELHI, 12 MAY [NDTV]:

Twelve major opposition parties have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding that the Centre take immediate action as the ferocious second wave of Covid rips through the country, leaving hospitals overwhelmed and hundreds of thousands dead.

Calling it an "apocalyptic human tragedy", the opposition parties suggested a series of measures that included distribution of free vaccines, a stop to the work on the Central Vista project and a repeal of farm laws. "We have repeatedly in the past drawn your attention, independently and jointly, to the various measures that are absolutely imperative for the Central government to undertake and implement. Unfortunately, your government has either ignored or refused all these suggestions. This only compounded the situation to reach such an apocalyptic human tragedy," the letter read.

The list of do-s they sent included:

* Central procurement of vaccines from all available sources

- global and domestic.

- * Immediate free, universal mass vaccination campaign
 - * Compulsory licensing to expand domestic vaccine production
 - * Spending the ₹ 35,000 crore budgetary allocation for vaccines
 - * Stopping the Central Vista construction and using the money for oxygen and vaccines
 - * Releasing all money held in the "unaccounted private trust fund", PM Cares to buy vaccines, oxygen and medical equipment
 - * ₹ 6000 per month for the unemployed
 - * Free distribution of foodgrain to the needy
 - * Repeal of farm laws to protect farmers falling victim to Covid
- The letter was signed by representatives of all key political parties except Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party and Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party. The parties also sought a response. "Though it has not been the practice of your office or government, we would appreciate a response to our suggestions in the interests of India and our people," the letter read.

On Tuesday, BJP chief JP Nadda had given a stinging response to Congress chief Sonia Gandhi's criticism of the government's handling of the Covid crisis.

"Your party, under your leadership, is doing no favours to itself by opposing lockdowns and then demanding for the same (sic), ignoring the Centre's advisories on the second wave of Covid and then saying they did not get any information, holding massive election rallies in Kerala causing a spike in Covid cases while grandstanding about election rallies elsewhere, supporting protests but speaking about following Covid guidelines," Mr Nadda wrote.

"Even when the second wave was on the rise, your party leaders were happier being seen in super spreader political events in north India, where there was no regard for masks or social distancing. This is not an era when such information can be erased from public memory,"

he had added, flinging back the criticism of PM Modi's huge political rallies in Bengal.

The letter came amid huge criticism of the government at home and abroad, which the Centre, along with the BJP and its ideological mentor Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, is trying to offset with a mega push of "positivity". Union ministers have been tweeting efforts like the movement of Oxygen Express and stories and articles on the government's outreach. and Central government officials have been briefed on better communication highlighting of the government's "positive work", sources have said.

The Congress, a key signatory of today's letter, has dismissed it as "propaganda".

"The false assurance of 'positive thinking' is a joke on those families and health workers who have lost their loved ones and are suffering a crisis of oxygen, hospitals and medicines. Burying one's head in the sand is not positive - it is a betrayal of our citizens," Rahul Gandhi had tweeted.

Covid Catastrophe "could have been prevented": Independent global panel

GENEVA, 12 MAY [AFP]: The catastrophic scale of the Covid-19 pandemic could have been prevented, an independent global panel concluded Wednesday, but a "toxic cocktail" of dithering and poor coordination meant the warning signs went unheeded.

The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPPR) said a series of bad decisions meant Covid-19 went on to kill at least 3.3 million people so far and devastate the global economy.

Institutions "failed to protect people" and science-denying leaders eroded public trust in health interventions, the IPPPR said in its long-awaited final report.

Early responses to the outbreak detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019 "lacked urgency", with February 2020 a costly "lost month" as countries failed to heed the alarm, said the panel.

To tackle the current pandemic, it called on the richest countries to donate a billion vaccine doses to the poorest.

And the panel also called on the world's wealthiest nations to fund new organisations dedicated to pre-

paring for the next pandemic.

'DELAY, HESITATION AND DENIAL' The report was requested by World Health Organization (WHO) member states last May.

The panel was jointly chaired by former New Zealand prime minister Helen Clark and former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a 2011 Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

The report, "Covid-19: Make it the Last Pandemic", argued that the global alarm system needed overhauling to prevent a similar catastrophe.

"The situation we find ourselves in today could have been prevented," Sirleaf told reporters.

"It is due to a myriad of failures, gaps and delays in preparedness and response."

The report said the emergence of Covid-19 was characterised by a mixture of "some early and rapid action, but also by delay, hesitation, and denial."

"Poor strategic choices, unwillingness to tackle inequalities and an uncoordinated system created a toxic cocktail which allowed the pandemic to turn into a catastrophic human crisis."

The threat of a pandemic had been overlooked and countries were woefully unprepared to deal with one, the report found.

VACCINE ULTIMATUM

The panel did not spare the WHO, saying it could have declared the situation a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) -- its highest level of alarm -- on January 22, 2020.

Instead, it waited eight more days before doing so.

Nevertheless, given countries' relative inaction, "we might still have ended up in the same place", said Clark.

It was only in March after the WHO described it as a pandemic -- a term that is not officially part of its alert system -- that countries were jolted into action.

As for the initial outbreak, "there were clearly delays in China -- but there were delays everywhere", she added.

Without the lag between the first identification in Wuhan and the PHEIC declaration -- and then the "lost month" of February 2020 -- "we believe we wouldn't be looking

at an accelerating pandemic, as we have for the last 15 or 16 months or so. As simple as that", said Clark.

The panel made several recommendations on how to address the current pandemic.

Rich, well-vaccinated countries should provide the 92 poorest territories in the Covax scheme with at least one billion vaccine doses by September 1, and more than two billion by mid-2022, it said.

The G7 industrialised nations should pay 60 percent of the \$19 billion (\$15 billion euros) required to fund vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics via the WHO's Access to Covid Tools Accelerator programme in 2021, it added.

Fellow G20 nations and others should provide the rest.

The WHO and the World Trade Organization should also get major vaccine-producing countries and manufacturers to agree voluntary licensing and technology transfers for Covid-19 vaccines, the panel said.

"If actions do not occur within three months, a waiver of... intellectual property rights should come into force immediately."

INVEST BILLIONS, SAVE TRILLIONS

To tackle future outbreaks and pandemics, the panel called for a Global Health Threats Council made up of world leaders, plus a pandemic convention.

The G20 should also create an International Pandemic Financing Facility, able to spend \$5-10 billion a year on preparedness, with \$50 to \$100 billion ready to roll in the event of a crisis.

"Ultimately, investing billions in preparedness now will save trillions in the future, as the current pandemic has so clearly illustrated," Clark told reporters.

The panel also proposed an overhaul of the WHO to give it greater control over its funding and more authority for its leadership.

Its alert system needed to be faster and it should have the authority to send expert missions to countries immediately without waiting for their green light, it added.

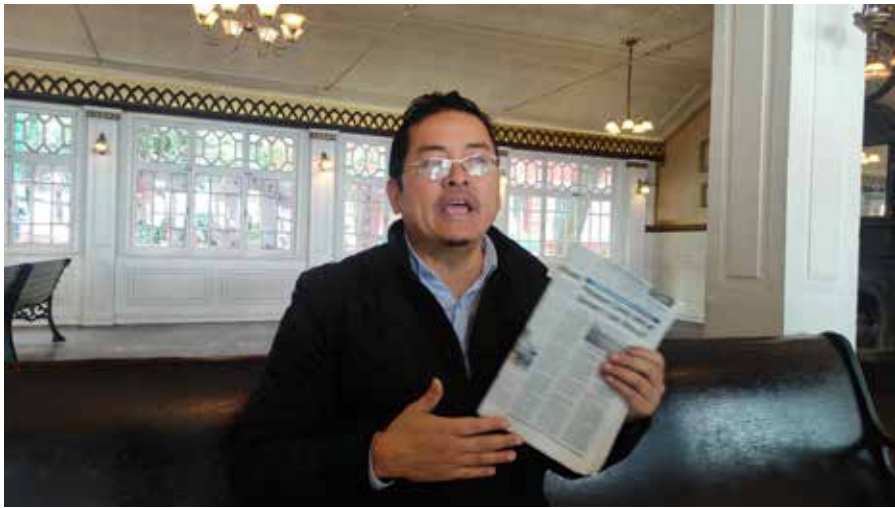
The panel believe their recommendations would have stopped Covid-19 from becoming a pandemic, had they been in place before the outbreak.

Refused Covid care center permission, Glenary's begins organising essentials

SMRITA KHAWAS
DARJEELING, 12 MAY:

Ajoy Edward, the owner of Glenary's and founder member of Edwards Foundation, today shared that they were expecting the authorities to reject the proposal to convert the Glenary's restaurant into a covid care centre as he had proposed.

While sharing that this rejection was reported in a newspaper even before they had received an official response to



their offer, Mr Edward said that they were not going to let this derail the Foun-

dation's effort to serve the people of Darjeeling during this pandemic.

"We had expected something like this so we had a plan-B and C ready. We are now delivering oximeters, medicines, food and also paramedical assistance to people at their homes. I had promised five things: beds, oxygen, ambulance, food and oxygen concentrator. Our target is to keep 50 to 100 oxygen concentrators in the Darjeeling Hills," he said.

SRMJEEE 2021 to be held in May and July

SUMMIT REPORT
KATTANKULATHUR, 12 MAY:

SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST), earlier known as SRM University will be conducting SRMJEEE 2021 in two phases for its various B'Tech programs.

Aspirants may either take up SRMJEEE - Phase I to be held on 23 and 24 May, 2021 or/and SRMJEEE - Phase II to be held on 25th and 26th of July 2021. For more details visit www.srmist.edu.in.

Examinations will be conducted through remote proctored online mode (RPOM). The last date of application for



SRMJEEE will be 15th May 2021 and 20th July 2021 for Phase I and Phase II respectively.

SRMIST has an enviable track record of 5500+ Job Offers with 1300 Super Dream and

Dream offers for the graduating batch 2020-21. Around 625+ Top-notch companies, includ-

ing Microsoft, Amazon, IBM, CISCO, Siemens, PayPal, Accenture, Capgemini, Hewlett Packard, TCS, Infosys, Cognizant, Wipro, ABB, L&T, Ford, TVS, Schneider, Renault Nissan, Cerner, GT Strategies, Ford, Bioclinica, and Zifo among many others, visit SRMIST every year to recruit our students.

SRMIST offers a wide range of scholarships making studying in the Institution affordable. Scholarships will be provided to meritorious students on enrolment. To apply and for more details, kindly visit www.srmist.edu.in.

Oxygen concentrators prices should be fixed to prevent black marketing: Court

NEW DELHI, 12 MAY [NDTV]: The Delhi High Court Wednesday told the Centre it was "high time" that Maximum Retail Price of oxygen concentrators and other equipment in demand for COVID treatment was fixed to immediately stop their hoarding and black marketing.

The high court made the observation while issuing contempt notices to all the persons named in the cases filed after May 2 in connection with hoarding and black marketing of medicines and equipment required for treating COVID-19, and directed them to appear before it virtually on May 19.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said the notices

would be served to the accused through the police stations where the cases have been registered.

It said the notices would also go to those persons whose names were added in the 40 odd cases during the course of the investigation.

The high court passed the direction after it was informed by advocate Sanjeev Sagar that in the hearings before the trial courts, in connection with these cases, the public prosecutors as well as the judicial officers appeared to be unaware of the May 2 order of the bench to book those engaged in hoarding and black marketing.

The high court in its May 2 order had also said that such individ-

uals, booked for black marketing and hoarding be brought before it for taking contempt of court action against them.

The bench was then informed that a trial court has said that offences cannot be "made up" against such individuals and the option was to book them for contempt of court if they are selling medicines or equipment at exorbitant rates.

The bench was shown media reports which said that the concerned trial court, while hearing the anticipatory bail filed by businessman Navneet Kalra in connection with the seizure of oxygen concentrators from his upscale restaurant, had said that first a law has to be made to

regulate the prices and people cannot be penalised in a hurry because the high court wanted steps to be taken.

Amicus curiae and senior advocate Rajshekhar Rao said the trial court cannot be blamed as Maximum Retail Price has not yet been fixed for a majority of the imported equipment and the central government has to inform the high court what steps it has taken.

Mr Rao said a lot of people will escape prosecution in the long run as no maximum retail price has been fixed for the imported medicines and equipment for COVID treatment.

The lawyer for the central government said the issue was under consideration and sought

time to inform the bench as to what decision has been taken.

The high court said that as early as June last year the process to fix prices of domestic and imported oxygen concentrators and other equipment was started, but was left unfinished.

"It is high time that MRP of oxygen concentrators and all of the other equipment in demand (for COVID treatment) be fixed so that black marketing and hoarding is immediately stopped.

The court asked Mr Sagar to prepare a note on the issue of price fixation, for informing public prosecutors and judicial officers in the subordinate courts, and said it will be circulated by the Delhi government.

MLA visits Pakyong PHC



SUMMIT REPORT
PAKYONG, 12 MAY:

Area MLA, Em Prasad Dulal, visited Pakyong PHC today to take stock of the prevailing situation and to inquire about preparations for the vaccination drive which will open for the 18+ from 16 May, 2021.

He was accompanied by Advisor, Inchung Bhutia, ADC (Dev) Pakyong, Tenzing Denzongpa, SDM/ Pakyong, Milan Rai, BDO/ Pakyong, Nilkantha Bhandari, Bazaar ASI, Chandra Prasad Regmi, Bimal Hyonzon, Dukpa Bhutia and others, a press re-

lease informs.

During his visit, the MLA also assured to provide an X-ray machine to the PHC and handed over a sum of Rs 50,000 for doctors and nurses' lunch. He also provided hand sanitizers, face masks and medicines to the PHC.

Bengal Governor's violence survey spawns duel with Mamata Banerjee

KOLKATA, 12 MAY [NDTV]:

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and governor Jagdeep Dhankhar once again found themselves in disagreement on Wednesday - this time over his plans to visit Cooch Behar district to meet, as he put it in several tweets, people affected by post-poll violence.

As per his tweets, Mr Dhankhar is to visit the Cooch Behar district tomorrow. On Friday, he plans to visit camps in Assam where alleged victims of violence in Bengal have fled for shelter.

In a letter to the governor today, Mamata Banerjee requested him not to break "well-established norms" and go off on unilateral visits across the state.

Ms Banerjee virtually warned him against going anywhere without state clearance.

"I find from social media that you are unilaterally proceeding to the district of Cooch Behar on 13.5.2021 and sadly I find that to be violative of the long-standing norms as evolved over several decades," Ms Banerjee

wrote.

"I therefore would expect that you will kindly follow the well-established norms of protocol and desist from abrupt decisions with regard to field visits," she added.

Within an hour or so of her letter becoming public, the governor responded with his own two-page letter in which he wrote of "elementary ignorance of constitutional provisions", that he was "appalled" she thought he needed her government's permission to go anywhere and that he was "not persuaded" by her stance for which "there would be no sane takers".

The letter does not categorically spell out whether the governor will continue with his visit to Cooch Behar tomorrow or not.

Mamata Banerjee and governor Dhankhar have faced off on post-poll violence from the day she was sworn in as Chief Minister of Bengal for the third time. After the ceremony, Mamata Banerjee made brief comments about her government's immediate priority which, she

said, was Covid management.

The governor then took the microphone and said post-poll violence should be addressed immediately.

Mamata Banerjee took the mic back from him and said the post-poll violence had taken place at a time when the Election Commission was in charge of law and order in the state.

In an interaction with the media sometime later the same day, the governor insisted that Mamata Banerjee was in charge when clashes erupted.

On Monday, after swearing-in 43 ministers of the Mamata Banerjee government, the governor addressed the media and said he had told the government he wanted to travel to the violence-hit areas but the government's response was "non-responsive". He then announced he would therefore be making his own arrangements.

On Tuesday, the governor announced he would be taking a BSF helicopter to Sitalkuchi and other areas in Cooch Behar, landing at 11 am.

"A hell out here": COVID-19 ravages rural India

NEW DELHI, 12 MAY [REUTERS]:

India's coronavirus death count crossed 2,50,000 on Wednesday in the deadliest 24 hours since the pandemic began, as the disease rampaged through the countryside, leaving families to weep over the dead in rural hospitals or camp in wards to tend the sick.

Boosted by highly infectious variants, the second wave erupted in February to inundate hospitals and medical staff, as well as crematoriums and mortuaries. Experts still cannot say for sure when the figures will peak.

State leaders clamoured for vaccines to stop the second wave and the devastation that it has wrought, urging Prime Minister Narendra Modi to help them procure urgent supplies from overseas.

Deaths grew by a record 4,205 while infections rose 3,48,421 in the 24 hours to Wednesday, taking the tally past 23 million, health ministry data showed. Experts believe the actual numbers could be five to 10 times higher.

Funeral pyres have blazed in city parking

lots, and bodies have washed up on the banks of the holy river Ganges, having been immersed by relatives whose villages were stripped bare of the wood needed for cremations.

Lacking beds, drugs and oxygen, many hospitals in the world's second-most populous nation have been forced to turn away droves of sufferers, while tales of desperate relatives searching for someone to treat dying loved ones have become sickeningly commonplace.

Although the infection curve may be showing early signs of flattening, new cases are likely to fall off slowly, according to virologist Shahid Jameel.

"We seem to be plateauing around 400,000 cases a day," the Indian Express newspaper quoted him as saying. "It is still too early to say whether we have reached the peak."

Indians need vaccines "here and now", West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, said in a letter to PM Narendra Modi. India has fully vaccinated barely 2.5% of the popu-

lation.

Delhi had run out of its reserves of shots and had to close down several centres, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia told reporters.

India is using the AstraZeneca vaccine made at the Serum Institute in the western city of Pune and Covaxin by Bharat Biotech but production is well short of the millions of doses required.

The country accounts for half of COVID-19 cases and 30% of deaths worldwide, the World Health Organization said in its latest weekly report.

The full impact of the B.1.617 variant found in India, which the WHO has designated as being of global concern, is not yet clear, it added.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said his government was looking at all possible solutions to tackle a surge in cases of the coronavirus variant first detected in India, including in the northern English town of Bolton.

"It may be more transmissible ... maybe even considerably more transmissible," he told parliament.

Shift vaccine centres to avoid crowding, says Madras HC

CHENNAI, MAY 12 (PTI):

The Madras High Court on Wednesday suggested to the Tamil Nadu government to relocate Covid-19 vaccination centres from hospitals elsewhere in order to prevent crowding. The state government also submitted a status report on various aspects including availability of beds, oxygen and vaccine stocks.

The first bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthil Kumar Ramamoorthy, said that "to reduce the fear, stress and crowding among the people, we are asking to shift the vaccination centers from the hospital and set up at other places of public convenience."

The court was hearing a case taken up on its own on issues, including shortage of beds and ventilators, besides diversion of oxygen.



In its status report submitted before the court, the government said it has received 2.05 lakh vials of Remdesivir from the Centre "as against the pending orders of 3.5 lakh."

Further, over 43,000 beds were available across the state and the government has taken up creation of an additional

12,500 of them with oxygen supply.

Additional Solicitor General R Sankaranarayanan submitted that the Centre has increased the oxygen allocation to Tamil Nadu from 419 tonnes a day to 519 tonnes a day but the bench pointed out that the demand could soon touch 800 mt in the back-

drop of sharp increase in covid cases.

The ASG also said the DRDO oxygen facility set up in New Delhi was done based on a state government request.

The court had earlier made a suggestion in this connection.

Meanwhile, an advocate moved the court with a plea to quash the

government order providing Rs 2000 as financial aid to all during the pandemic period.

The assistance should not be provided to state government, central government and other pensioners, he contended.

Admitting the plea, the bench ordered notice to the state government.

International Nurses Day at Central Referral Hospital

SUMMIT REPORT

Gangtok, 12 May:

International Nurses Day, marking the birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale, was observed today on the theme, "Nurses: A Voice to Lead - A vision for future healthcare," here at Central Referral Hospital today.

Amid this global pandemic, Central Referral Hospital Nursing department took a moment to celebrate International Nurses Day by lighting lamps and distributing goodies by Nursing admin team to express deep gratitude for nurses as most of them are working tirelessly and relentlessly taking utmost care of Covid-19 patients.



Like doctors and other health care workers, nurses are at the forefront of fighting the Covid-19 pandemic. We thank all the nurses and their families & friends who support them in this trying times.

Verdict in rape case against journalist Tarun Tejpal on May 19

PANAJI, 12 MAY [PTI]:

A sessions court in Goa will on May 19 pronounce its verdict in the 2013 rape case registered against Tarun Tejpal, former Editor-in-Chief of Tehelka magazine.

The verdict was scheduled to be pronounced today but was adjourned.

Earlier, speaking to media persons, Special Public Prosecutor Francisco Tavora had informed that if the accused is convicted then there might be a sentence of a "minimum of 10 years to a maximum life sentence" depending on the "discretion of the judge".

Tarun Tejpal was arrested on November

30 in 2013 after being accused of raping a colleague at a five-star resort in North Goa. He is currently out on bail.

On September 29, 2017, the court had charged him under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including rape, sexual harassment, and wrongful confinement.

He, however, pleaded not guilty.

Following the framing of charges, Tarun Tejpal moved the Supreme Court seeking quashing of the charges levelled against him. In August, the top court refused to quash the charges and directed the trial to be concluded within six months.

Kremlin-imposed cuts at US Embassy leave thousands adrift

MOSCOW (AP): Under Kremlin orders, the U.S. Embassy has stopped employing Russians, forcing the embassy to cut its consular staff by 75% and limit many of its services.

The order went into effect on Wednesday, bringing the sharply deteriorating U.S.-Russia relationship to an intensely personal level.

Because of the cuts, the embassy can offer only very limited services, such as considering "life-and-death" visa applications. That leaves Russian businessmen, exchange students and romantic partners adrift because they won't be able to obtain visas. Even Americans will be unable to register their newborns or renew their passports.

For Anastasia Kuznetsova, a 20-year-old engaged to marry a Californian, it's a crushing blow. She had already spent about two years seeking a fiancée's visa. The notoriously laborious process for Russians to get U.S. visas had already been slowed by COVID-19.

"I felt destroyed, much more depressed than I was before," said Kuznetsova, who last saw her fiancé in January on a trip to Mexico. "We have no idea when it's going to continue working and if we will be able to see each other even during these years."

Thomas H V Anthony, an American living in Russia, was already frustrated because of a delay in registering the birth of his daughter, a record of the child's claim to U.S. citizenship.

"My expectation was as things get better with the situation with the pandemic, gradually the consulate would open more and more and

more," he said. "It was a big shock to suddenly get an email from them, about two weeks ago, saying effective on the 11th we will no longer be offering any consular services."

For Anthony, this means his daughter, who was born before the pandemic, will not be able to travel to visit her grandparents in the United States in the foreseeable future.

The embassy has made no statements on whether it is taking measures to beef up the consular staff with new employees from the United States.

Embassy spokespeople could not be reached for clarification on how the mission will handle other jobs also filled by locals, such as security.

An order signed last month by President Vladimir Putin called for creating a list of "unfriendly" countries whose missions could be banned from hiring Russians or third-country nationals. The list includes the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Poland and several other European countries, but the United States is the first for which the ban is being enforced.

The move followed U.S. sanctions imposed over Russian interference in the 2020 U.S. presidential election and involvement in the SolarWind hack of federal agencies. Each country expelled 10 of the other's diplomats.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the ban on local employees is in line with convention.

"We rarely employ any local personnel in the country where our diplomatic mission is. And thus we have the full right to transfer this practice onto the regula-

tions which manage the work of the U.S. Embassy and their general consulate in the Russian Federation," he said last month.

YuliaKukula, a university student who was accepted for a PhD program in sustainable energy at Arizona State University, may have found a laborious and costly way around the problem of getting her visa to attend university.

After searching online for advice from others in her situation, Kukula was able to sign up for an interview for a visa at the U.S. consulate in neighboring Kazakhstan. But that's a 2,300-kilometer (1,400-mile) trip from Moscow, and the interview isn't until October.

The United States once had three other consulates in Russia — in Yekaterinburg, Vladivostok and St. Petersburg — which somewhat eased the travel burden for people seeking visas. But those consulates have closed or stopped providing visas amid diplomatic spats in recent years, in what Alexis Rodzianko, head of the American Chamber of Commerce in Russia, called "a visa war."

That had already placed a burden on the companies in his chamber whose executives needed to travel. "Now it looks like it's impossible for the indefinite future," he said.

The travel restrictions of the pandemic have shown that video-conferencing can't entirely replace the in-person contact of business travel, he said.

"They're especially good for people who already know each other and they're much less effective for people getting to know each other," he said.

Supreme Court refuses bail to Gautam Navlakha in Bhima Koregaon case

NEW DELHI, 12 MAY

[PTI]: In a setback to civil rights activist Gautam Navlakha, the Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed his plea seeking bail in the alleged Elgar Parishad-Maoist link case of Bhima Koregaon in Maharashtra.

The top court examined the technical grounds raised by Navlakha for the default bail as the charge sheet in the case was not filed by the NIA within the stipulated period of 90 days which also include 34 days of his house arrest.

The activist had challenged the Bombay High Court order denying him bail on the same grounds.

While deliberating with his appeal, the top court said that the personal liberty perhaps is the most important of all values recognized as such under the constitution and "it is to be jealously guarded from any encroachment, save where such intrusion has the clear sanction of law".

A bench of Justices U U Lalit and K M Joseph in its 206 page-verdict said, "In view of the fact that the house arrest of the appellant was not purported to be under Section 167 (of CrpC) and cannot be treated as passed thereunder, we dismiss the appeal."

Under CrPC, section 167 provides for procedures when investigation cannot be completed in twenty four hours and powers of magistrate to authorise custody of a person.

The bench, which

dealt with various aspects of custody and its impact said that the right to life and personal liberty is essentially also based on the principle that men in regard to fundamental rights be treated equal and that no man or a group of men, even organized as a state under which he lives can deprive him except without infringing the right to be treated equally unless there is a legitimate sanction of law.

"Personal liberty of its members must continue to remain the most cherished goal of any civilized state and its interference with the same must be confined to those cases where it is sanctioned by the law and genuinely needed. The court would lean in favour of upholding this precious, inalienable and immutable value," it said.

Dealing with earlier orders of the top court and the High Court, it said, "That house arrest, in turn, involved, deprivation of liberty and will fall within the embrace of custody under Section 167 of the CrPC, was not apparently in the minds of both this Court and the High Court of Delhi. This is our understanding of the orders passed by the court."

The bench said that it is confronted with a clash between the two values as on the one hand; there is the deprivation, in law, of the liberty of Navlakha, by way of house arrest for 34 days, while on the other hand, it does not fall ac-

tually in the facts of this case within the ambit of Section 167 of the CrPC.

"While, the Right to default bail is a Fundamental Right, it is subject to the conditions, obtaining in Section 167 of the CrPC, being satisfied. It must be purported to be passed under Section 167 CrPC.

The right to statutory bail arises dehors the merits of the case. The fundamental right arises when the conditions are fulfilled," the bench said.

The top court also held that if the remand is absolutely illegal or the remand is afflicted with the vice of lack of jurisdiction, a Habeas Corpus petition can be filed.

"Equally, if an order of remand is passed in an absolutely mechanical manner, the person affected can seek the remedy of Habeas Corpus. Barring such situations, a Habeas Corpus petition will not lie," it ruled.

The bench said that the nature of detention, being one under Section 167 is indispensable to count the period.

"We are of the view, that in the facts of this case, the house arrest was not ordered purporting to be under Section 167. It cannot be treated as having being passed under Section 167 of CrPC," the top court said.

Dealing with house arrest, the top court said that the High Court in the impugned order has itself found that the period of 34 days spent in house arrest by the appellant amounted to custody.

The top court also referred to "fairly alarming" conditions of jails and prisoners of the country and cited National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data of 2019.

"A perusal of the executive summary would reveal an alarming state of affairs as far as occupancy rate is concerned. It has climbed to 118.5 percent in 2019 as on 31st December. The occupancy rate is alarming for male prisoners. In fact, during 2019, a total of 18,86,092 inmates were admitted in the jails," it said.

It said that "there is a tremendous amount of overcrowding in jails in India" and "Delhi had the highest occupancy rate of 174.9 percent followed by Uttar Pradesh which came second with 167.9 percent.

This means that in Delhi a prison which was meant to be occupied by 100 persons, was used for accommodating 174 persons. We cannot also be oblivious to the fact that the figures represent the official version."

The bench said that when a citizen is placed on house arrest, which has the effect of depriving him of any freedom, it will not only be custody but it would involve depriving citizens under custody of the fundamental freedoms unless such freedoms are specifically protected.

The FIR against him was re-registered in January 2020, and Navlakha had surrendered before the NIA on April 14, last year.



Government of Sikkim Health & Family Welfare Department STNM Hospital Sochakgang, Gangtok

Re-NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION

The sealed quotations are invited from the interested and Registered Medical shop located within a radius of 1(One) KM from STNM Hospital. Sochakgang. Sichey for the supply of Emergency Medicines and Allied items for the Year 2021-22.

Date of issue of Quotation : 19th may to 21st May 2021
Date of submission of Quotation : 27th May within 12.00 PM
Date & Time of tender opening : 27th may 2021 at 2.00 PM

Terms and condition:

- The quotation form can be obtained from the office of Senior Accounts Officer, STNM Hospital on any working days from 19th May to 21st May 2021 from 11 AM to 3 PM on production of State Bank of Sikkim Challan of Rs.2000/- duly signed by Senior AO, STNM Hospital credited under head 0210-01-800 other receipt from 11AM to 3PM
 - The interested Firm should produce COI/Sikkim Subject/Residential Certificate, Valid Drug License, Valid Registration Firm, Valid Trade License, GST Registration and clearance certificate, Experience certificate and full address of the shop at the time of submission of quotation form.
 - The quotation should accompany TDR of Rs.1,000,00/- (One Lakh) against the supply of Emergency medicines and consumables from the State Bank of Sikkim in favour of Senior Accounts Officer, STNM Hospital, Sochakgang. The department will not be liable to pay the interest on the said amount.
 - The Tender Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any or all quotation without assigning any reason of reasons thereof and reserve to award the work to any bidder found competent.
- For further information, visit or contact to the office of the undersigned.

PCC cum Medical Superintendent
STNM Hospital, Sochakgang

PCC cum Medical Superintendent
New STNM Multi Speciality Hospital
Sochakgang, Gangtok

Ro No. 46/IPR/PUB/Classi/21-22
Date: 12/05/21

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ANTHYESTHI KRIYA



The anthyesthi kriya of our beloved mother Late Bishnu Khawas who left for heavenly abode on 2nd May 2021 falls on 14th May 2021. All relatives, family, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at Hotel Chowtaro, Deorali Bazaar (Near flyover). We also express our gratitude to all those who stood by us during the time of bereavement.

Bishal Khawas (Son)
Bidesh Khawas (Son)
Ashok Khawas (Kaka)
Bikash Khawas
Srijana Subba
(Daughter-in-law)
Entire Khawas family.
Contact No. 9593383797, 9775417549,
9832686611

(All Covid-19 safety protocols will be strictly followed. All visitors are requested to kindly wear masks and follow social distancing).



ANTHYESTI KRIYA (AARGHU)

The 21 days Anthyesti Kriya of Late Shri Prem Kumar Gurung S/o Late Shri B B Gurung, who left for his heavenly abode on 24th of April, 2021 (Saturday) falls on 15th of May, 2021 (Saturday).

All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join the bereaved family in offering prayers for the departed soul at their Ancestral Home, Nalam, Namthang, South Sikkim while keeping in mind the prescribed CoVid-19 protocols.

The family members also express gratitude to all those who stood by them during the time of bereavement.

RSVP

Sainu Gurung (Wife) : +91-9474350770
Anakha Gurung (Daughter) : +91-7908045388
Ashim Gurung (Son) : +91-9064079336
Ashok Kr. Gurung (Brother) : +91-9434445494

Education Matters

Yes, despite the pandemic discussions on quality education should not stop

From a time when it as a one-college state, Sikkim sure has come a long way. All the four districts of the State have at least a degree college each apart from the State having an interestingly high number of colleges offering professional courses and a slew of institutes preparing children not only for board exams but also for competitive examinations. There are also more universities than anyone could have anticipated even a decade and a half back for a population of seven lakh. And then there is the state sponsored enrolment at coaching institutes in Delhi for Sikkim students wishing to compete in UPSC and other national level exams. Safe to say then that students now have more options, more opportunities and bigger challenges to aspire for. Yes, the pandemic, the rolling lockdowns and the remarkable disinterest in education and learning among those who frame policy, has thrown a spanner in the works, but like every is saying nowadays, even this shall pass. Of course, none of this necessarily guarantees quality; but before one starts tearing apart the quality of institutions of higher education [or vocational courses], Sikkim needs to collectively look into how it educates its young in school, and even earlier, in pre-primary and primary levels. Inspire learning in the children and they will extract phenomenal results even from mediocre institutions. That has to be the priority, and good place to begin would be with a clearly spelled out educational policy. In the current times when education has suffered, this becomes an even more important discussion to have.

Like any place else, Sikkim needs affordable and quality education. This is not always possible elsewhere in the country, but in Sikkim, a combination of state and public investment could subsidize education substantially and should be attempted. The State is already doing a lot with its visionary scholarship programmes, but even more can be attempted with some corporate backing. The private sector will get interested if they were invited into campuses some years ahead of the head-hunting season [the campus job-placement events] when they can meet students when they are still fresh and then offer scholarships and accompanying internship opportunities. The less business and more academically inclined students can be supported with grants to attend seminars and conferences [not study tours, please] outside the State. Initiatives such as these will infuse some excitement among the students, put some perspective into how they approach studies and also introduce them to the world that awaits them after college.

As for education, it needs to be fashioned to deliver students with sound logic and reasoning skills, not necessarily high marks and definitely not learning by rote. Do this, and the young will grow with stronger survival skills, more adaptive traits and as prepared as anyone from anywhere for the job market. The present format of education fails us because instead of opening the minds of the students it ties them down to the curriculum. While a syllabus is required for the discipline that is a part of education, it has unfortunately been allowed to become supreme. A syllabus is designed to present a clear outline, and should not be seen as a fixed boundary wall within which education should be limited. Students nowadays have little time to pursue interests beyond the learning of their books. Sikkim needs institutions of learning that open the mind, not bolt it in; schools that let the young minds breathe. This approach becomes more important now than ever before because now such schools, colleges and institutes are coming up in Sikkim itself; earlier, the young had to go out of the State to receive such education/ training, and if nothing else, gained at least from the experience of living outside their comfort zone. At least in the cities, they are exposed to more stimuli even if the college they go to is the same as the one back home. And that brings us back to basics of starting them on the learning curve early, inspiring them towards learning, stimulating a learning environment from kindergarten itself and abandoning spoon-fed, hand-held classroom lessons. The young will grow better lettered in the real sense and will make even mediocre institutes deliver quality products. Won't that be nice...

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KOLKATA OFFICE:

COVID during pregnancy poses a low risk to newborns, new research shows

MIKAEL NORMAN

THECONVERSATION.COM

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been great concern about how to protect the most vulnerable – particularly newborns. In past pandemics, newborn babies and young people have been at an increased risk of disease and death. This has probably influenced COVID-19 guidelines in hospitals and healthcare systems.

A recently published global survey found that newborns were being separated from their mothers in half the world's countries last year as a precautionary measure if the mother had tested positive for COVID-19. Separating a baby from its mother at birth can have negative consequences for the health of both the mother and baby. This must be weighed against the possible benefits of keeping them apart.

Yet more than a year into the pandemic, the outcomes for babies born to mothers who have had COVID-19 remain largely unknown and unreported, putting great stress on families and healthcare providers.

With this in mind, my colleagues and I – working with the Public Health Agency of Sweden – tried to gain a better understanding of the potential risks to babies whose mothers tested positive for coronavirus during pregnancy or child-birth.

We were able to do this because, during the pandemic in Sweden, the separation of mothers and infants at birth has only been practised if either was unwell, with breastfeeding allowed if following strict hygiene procedures.

ANALYSING A YEAR'S DATA

Our study looked at daily reports made to three Swedish registries: the National Quality Register for Pregnancy, the National Quality Register for Neonatal Care, and the Communicable Diseases Register. By cross-referencing these, it was possible to monitor and report outcomes for babies during both the first and second waves of COVID-19.

Altogether, we captured the outcomes of 92% of all babies born in Sweden between March 11 2020 and January 31 2021. This accounted for almost 90,000 births, making this one of the largest datasets on this subject to date. We found that 2,323 babies were born during this period to mothers who had tested positive for COVID-19 during pregnancy, with 642 mothers (28%) testing positive at the time of delivery.

All babies born to mothers who had tested positive were themselves tested between 12 and 24 hours after birth. For babies admitted to a neonatal unit, COVID-19 tests were repeated at 48 and 96 hours after birth. Only 21 babies (0.9%) tested positive for COVID-19, most of them without displaying any symptoms. A few babies were treated for reasons other than COVID-19.

However, babies born to mothers who had had COVID-19 were more likely to be admitted to neonatal care and to experience respiratory problems. This, though, can be explained by the higher number of preterm births in the COVID-19 group than in the comparison group. We found no direct link between maternal infection and neonatal respiratory infection or pneumonia.

That said, our study adds to the evidence that women testing positive for COVID-19 are at increased risk of preterm birth. In our study, 8.8% of women who were COVID-positive during pregnancy delivered preterm, compared with 5.5% of those who were COVID-negative. We also found that COVID-19 in the mother was not associated with the death of the child. Seven infants born to mothers who had had COVID-19 died, all from causes unrelated to COVID-19, with none of these infants testing positive for the disease.

There was also no difference in the mortality rate of those babies born to mothers who were COVID-positive and COVID-negative during pregnancy.

NO NEED TO SEPARATE

Our study, therefore, supports a recommendation that babies born to women who have tested positive for COVID-19 while pregnant or during delivery do not need to be routinely separated from their mothers at birth. Babies are very unlikely to be infected or to suffer ill health as a result of their mother having or having had COVID-19.

Our research also showed that breastfeeding seems to be safe: 94% of women in the COVID-19 group were breastfeeding their babies at hospital discharge, with 99% of their infants testing negative. The small number of infants that were infected showed no signs of infection.

Although not all countries are like Sweden – there are population differences as well as country-specific differences in healthcare and COVID-19 levels – our work should reassure pregnant women in other countries (and their families) that a coronavirus infection during pregnancy poses a low risk.

[the writer is Professor of Paediatrics and Neonatal Medicine, Karolinska Institutet]

Poor Sleep Linked to Inability to Focus – New Study

DAVID JAMES ROBERTSON & CHRISTOPHER B. MILLER

THECONVERSATION.COM

The morning after a difficult night's sleep, it can feel impossible to wake up. You might press the snooze button just one more time in an attempt to gain a bit more of that restorative slumber.

Later that day, you might notice it's harder to stay focused. Distractions that would normally go unnoticed – such as the phone ringing in the office next door – can more easily disrupt your concentration when you've slept poorly.

Research has shown poor sleep is linked to increased risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes as well as worsening mental health and a weaker immune system. But much less research has focused on assessing the daytime effects of poor sleep on cognitive processes, such as the ability to stay focused on a given task.

In our new study we investigated the effects of poor sleep on participants' ability to focus. We did so in a group of people diagnosed with insomnia.

In a collaboration with researchers at the University of Sydney in Australia, we assessed 23 people with chronic insomnia and 23 people without sleep difficulty (the controls). They stayed in a sleep laboratory overnight, and in the evening we gave them an attention test.

THE ATTENTION TEST

We asked participants to focus on a circle of letters at the centre of a computer screen, as seen in the picture below. They had to respond as quickly and as accurately as they could to a target letter (X or N) while ignoring any distracting letters that appeared outside the circle. We gave them three types of task – easy, medium and hard – to mirror the different levels of focus needed for different daytime tasks.

Those with insomnia found it harder to focus on the task and ignore distractions compared with those in the control group who slept well. This finding adds to previous results that found impairments to daytime functioning in those with poor and limited sleep.

BRAIN PROCESSES

We wanted to assess whether the lack of focus in those with insomnia might be due to a reduction in the effectiveness of the core attention mechanism – the brain process that allows us to focus on a task and ignore distractions. To test this, we used a well-established attention task in which we manipulated how challenging the task is.

Research has shown that when we're focused on an easy task, our brain will automatically process distractions – we can't prevent that. However, when focusing on a hard task all of our brain power is used by the task at hand and the



distractions are eliminated from our awareness – such as when you miss your phone notification when gripped on a TV show. This is what happens when our attention mechanism is intact and working as it should.

Reassuringly, we found the attention mechanism appeared to be working as it should in those with insomnia. However, those with the condition showed a higher baseline level of distractibility – the distracting letters were more intrusive to the insomnia group when they could be perceived.

It could therefore be a compromised cognitive control mechanism – the brain process that controls what we should focus our attention on – that might be driving the effect. That is, poor sleep could be reducing our brain's ability to correctly decide which stimuli in the environment we should be attending to, resulting in more attention being given to distractions than would otherwise be the case.

It's important to note that such impairments to frontal cognitive processes, however temporary, can make monotonous tasks such as driving a well-known route more difficult and dangerous, as a moment of inattention, say, to a new billboard, could

prevent a driver from noticing a pedestrian stepping into the road. All the more reason for any driver to be well-rested before a journey.

Future research will be needed to find out if treatment for insomnia helps people to better concentrate their attention. This is an exciting area of research because previous reports have only found small improvements in subjective measures of performance after treatment for insomnia.

Our study also found those with the most severe symptoms of insomnia were the least able to focus their attention on the task and ignore the distracting letters. With further research, our task could potentially be used to assess the extent to which poor sleep impairs people's ability to stay focused.

We should all be aware of the potential for impairments to our attention caused by poor sleep, whether that be in relation to productivity in the office or focusing on the road while driving. All the more reason to grab a good book and head to bed at a decent hour this evening.

[David James Robertson is Lecturer in Psychology, University of Strathclyde; Christopher B. Miller is Honorary Senior Research Fellow, University of Oxford]

Nepal’s health system cracks under the strain of rising Covid-19 cases

SHUVAM DHUNGANA & PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA

KATHMANDU, 12 MAY [KATHMANDU-POST]: Two days after he said that the Covid-19 situation in Nepal was under control in an interview to the CNN, which invited widespread ridicule, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli reached out to the international community on Monday. This time he seemed to be in damage control mode for his earlier chest-thumping.

In an opinion piece for the The Guardian newspaper titled, “Nepal is overwhelmed by Covid. We need help”, Monday Oli wrote, “Nepal’s history is one of hardship and struggle, yet this pandemic is pushing even us to our limits. The number of infections is straining the healthcare system; it has become tough to provide patients with the hospital beds that they need.”

He went on to claim that his government has “tried to make sure that those needing interventions such as oxygen support and ICU care get access to the treatment they need.”

Those attempts of the Oli government so far seem to have fallen flat. Oli, however, is right in saying Nepal’s healthcare system has collapsed.

Suraj Shrestha, 32, was admitted to Vayodha Hospital, Balkhu for Covid-19 treatment two days ago, but as his oxygen level sharply dropped, the hospital asked his family to get oxygen for him.

According to Shrestha’s friend Sanjeev Dhakal, they have been trying hard to get oxygen but without success.

“We tried to contact oxygen distributors on numbers we got from social media but no one responded,” Dhakal told the Post. “When we tried to reach out to the government through their helplines, the numbers were constantly busy. When someone finally picked up the call, the patient’s information was asked and we were told they would get back to us.”

But there has been no response since then, he said.

On Saturday, the Ministry of Health and Population directed 10 manufacturers not to sell or distribute oxygen without the government’s recommendation. The ministry said the step was taken to curb the ongoing shortage of oxygen cylinders and make an equitable distribution.

Hospitals, however, say that they have not been getting enough oxygen.

On Tuesday, Jorpati-based Nepal Medical College published a notice telling its Covid-19 infected patients to get discharged from the hospital as it was short

of oxygen and the government has been informed of the decision.

“The hospital does not have an adequate amount of oxygen supply and it’s not getting oxygen from anywhere,” it said in a statement.

Kathmandu’s premier private hospital, Nepal Mediciti Hospital, is also facing a shortage of oxygen.

“The hospital needs 450-500 oxygen cylinders a day. However, the government

government has ordered manufacturers not to provide oxygen without its permission,” Pandey told the Post. “The government’s helpline numbers are busy most of the time. If anyone is lucky, they pick up, but they obviously won’t provide you ICU beds or oxygen anytime soon.”

The government has been operating a Covid-19 hotline to assist the general public. As per the Health Ministry, people can reach out to 1133 round-the-clock, while



has allocated only 100 cylinders,” said Dr Raj Rana, medical superintendent and spokesperson for the hospital. “The oxygen allocated by the government is not enough to treat the admitted patients, and with limited supply, hospitals cannot admit more patients.”

According to a statement the hospital issued Tuesday, it is providing treatment to over 120 Covid-19 patients and of them, 40 are on ventilator support.

Nepal Medical College is treating 16 Covid-19 patients, said Dr Qamran Ansari, a medical officer at the hospital. “Every day we get innumerable calls to admit virus-infected patients, but we can’t, as we are facing trouble to supply oxygen even to those who are already admitted,” said Ansari.

Relatives struggle in panic trying whatever way they can.

Suraj Raj Pandey, one of the founders of Covid Connect Nepal which connects assistance seekers and providers, said since the government’s decision on the need for recommendation, the number of people demanding oxygen has soared.

“We have over 357 oxygen requests on our site but we can’t assist them as the

1115 from 6am to 10pm, and 9851255834 and 9851255837 from 8am to 8pm for support.

When the Post tried to reach out on these numbers, they were either busy most of the time or not reachable. After several attempts, 1115 received the Post’s call. When asked how to get oxygen, the operator directed to 1140 or 01-4271730, hotline numbers of the Covid-19 Crisis Management Committee.

The Covid-19 Crisis Management Committee, or CCMC as it is known, has been managing the oxygen-related issues since the Health Ministry’s decision Saturday.

“If a hospital needs oxygen supply, it can visit the CCMC website and fill up the demand form and send an email,” said the operator who answered the hotline 1140. “The CCMC will give permission to the hospital and they will receive the required amount of oxygen from the suppliers everyday.”

Even individuals who are in home isolation need recommendations from hospitals and respective District Covid-19 Management Centres, according to him, who refused to provide his name.

“The process of getting oxygen is

time-consuming,” he admitted, nonetheless.

On its website, the CCMC has listed names of 83 hospitals and the amount of oxygen they are receiving everyday.

According to the official who answered the CCMC hotline, the amounts allocated were determined after evaluating the need of the hospitals per day.

“Oxygen is a life-saving component at these difficult times,” said Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, chief of the Clinical Research Unit at the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital. “If only we can ensure high flow oxygen therapy, we can save over 50 percent of the people who are at risk.”

Nepal on Tuesday reported 9,317 new infections, the highest-ever single day spike, taking the nationwide tally to 413,111. Of these 97,008 cases are active. The Health Ministry said there were 225 deaths. The figure includes deaths from the last few days and has been updated with data from the Nepal Army which manages the funeral of those who died of the disease.

According to Samir Kumar Adhikari, joint spokesperson for the Health Ministry, more than 100 died in the last 24 hours.

The country’s death toll stands at 4,084.

With the government’s failure to check the spread of the virus as well as make arrangements for the supply of oxygen and treatment since the second wave hit the country in mid-April, the Supreme Court on Tuesday told authorities to ensure oxygen supply, medicines and well-equipped hospitals with adequate human resources immediately.

“To manage facilities which are directly related to human life, an interim order has been issued in the name of defendants [federal and provincial governments] to ensure that people’s problems are effectively resolved even if there is need to form a working committee including all the stakeholders,” states the interim order issued by a single bench of Justice Bam Kumar Shrestha.

However, there seems to be no plan in place to ensure the smooth supply of oxygen as cases and deaths continue to rise exponentially. A number of health officials the Post spoke to said they were not sure exactly how much oxygen is needed now or will be needed in future.

“The current production has been insufficient and there must be a significant rise in availability of oxygen,”

Pandemic further pushes already 14-month long academic session in Nepal

BINOD GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, 12 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]: The government in February extended the ongoing academic session by two months till June, making it a 14-month long session.

Normally, the academic session concludes in April. The decision to extend the session was taken to make up for the school time lost to the months-long Covid-19 lockdown last year.

Still, catching up with the courses was not possible. So the government reduced the course load for students by 30 percent.

As per the decision, the Secondary Education Examination was to be held from May 27 and grade 12 board examinations from June 6. However, the National Examinations Board on Monday decided to postpone the two national level tests until further notice.

Similarly, except for some city-centric private schools, a majority of the schools across the nation haven’t held the final examinations for other grades as well as the most part of the country is un-

der prohibitory orders following a spike in the infections in the second wave of the coronavirus. The government which decided to postpone the tests is not sure when they would be conducted.

“It’s hard to say when those tests would be conducted,” Keshab Dahal, spokesperson at the Centre of Education and Human Resource Development, told the Post. After deciding to postpone the tests until further notice, the examination board said the new dates will be announced at an appropriate time. Janga Bahadur Aryal, spokesperson at the examination board, said as per the decision of the Cabinet, their priority is on conducting the examinations in person.

The examination board has already readied the question papers for the Secondary Education Examination for in-person tests. After an assessment that the schools inflated the obtained marks in the SEE last year when they were allowed to give marks to the students based on internal evaluation, the Cabinet in Janu-

ary had decided that in-person tests would be conducted this year. As many as 517,000 students have registered for the examination this year. Around 7 million students study upto grade 10 while around a million study in grade 11 and 12.

The continuous spike in the coronavirus cases and extension of the prohibitory orders show conducting in-person tests is not possible anytime soon increasing concerns among the students and the guardians that the already lengthy academic session would be postponed further. On Tuesday, the chief district officers of the three districts in the Kathmandu Valley have decided to extend the prohibitory orders till May 27. Nepal on Tuesday reported 9,317 new cases, the highest single day spike, in 24 hours and 225 deaths.

“The uncertainty about the test has worried me,” Samyak Gautam, an SEE examinee from Padmodaya School, Putalisadak told the Post. “The government should give an alternative if in-person tests are not possible.”

Assam imposes more Covid restrictions, all offices shut in urban areas for 15 days

GUWAHATI, 12 MAY

[PTI]: The Assam government today ordered shutting of all offices, religious places and weekly markets for 15 days in urban and semi-urban areas of the state, besides banning movement of people from 2 pm to 5 am in the wake of rising COVID-19 cases.

Issuing a new set of guidelines for the urban and semi-urban places in the periphery of 5 km of municipal areas, Chief Secretary Jishnu Barua said all standalone shops and commercial establishments shall shut down at 1 pm on all days.

“Complete lockdown is an option, but we are going gradually in a phased manner. We hope these measures will work in the next two-three days,” he said at a press conference.

The new restrictions will come into effect from

tomorrow.

As per the restrictions notified by the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), weekly haats, bazaars, educational institutions and all government and private offices have been ordered to shut for the next 15 days.

“Government officers of deputy secretary and above rank and senior executive in private sector along with their key support staff will be allowed to attend office up to 1 pm only for emergency and essential works,” the order stated.

However, these restrictions will not be applicable for organisations rendering essential and emergency services, law enforcement services and election works.

“All religious places shall remain closed for 15 days... Funeral/last rites related gatherings

shall not be more than 10 persons,” the order said.

Likewise, weddings and religious functions will be only private affairs and be allowed with the presence of a maximum of 10 persons and no reception parties will be allowed after or before weddings.

“In case the test positivity of COVID-19 in any area reaches five per cent or more in the last one week, District Magistrate will notify such areas as containment zone and ensure necessary containment measures for COVID-19,” the ASDMA said.

All public transport will be allowed with 30 per cent of seating capacity, while auto-rickshaws, cycle-rickshaws, taxis shall operate with one driver and two passengers only.

“Pillion riding will be totally prohibited in

two-wheelers except with women and children.”

“All vehicles other than government vehicles will be allowed to ply in accordance with an odd-even formula to be decided by the jurisdictional district disaster management authority between 5 am to 2 pm,” the order stated.

ASDMA further said that there shall be a total ban on the movement of individuals from 2 pm to 5 am daily.

For the rest of the state, all restrictions announced earlier such as night curfew from 6 pm to 5 am with total ban on movement of persons at public places on all days will continue, except for those engaged in essential and emergency services.

When asked why the government is not considering imposing a com-

plete lockdown, Barua said that any such drastic measures adversely affect the poor people and that will be considered as the last resort.

Director-General of Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta said the police will implement the restrictions very strictly if the people do not follow them.

“If we see people crowding at any place, say in front of a permitted shop, police will be ruthless. We will use force and lathi-charge them. You may go and file cases against us, but we don’t care.

“If someone organises any function secretly at home and invites people, then it will be considered as cheating and betrayal. We will not only file a case under Disaster Management Act, but also lodge an attempt to murder case,” Mr Mahanta said.

50 cases of ‘Black Fungus’ in Covid-hit Madhya Pradesh

Bhopal, 12 May [PTI]: Fifty cases of mucormycosis fungal infection or “black fungus” have been reported in Covid patients in Madhya Pradesh and are of huge concern for the state government, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said today.

“Cases of black fungus in-

fection are emerging which are very horrific. They are a cause for concern. So far, 50 cases have been confirmed,” Mr Chouhan said.

A rash of cases of rare black fungus infection has been reported among people who have either recovered or are recov-

ering from COVID-19. The infection is caused by exposure to mucor mould and it affects the sinuses, the brain and the lungs and can be life-threatening.

The symptoms of this rare infection include headache, fever, pain under the eyes, nasal

or sinus congestion and partial loss of vision. In extreme cases, the affected parts have to be surgically removed.

In neighbouring Maharashtra, the government says there could be over 2,000 cases of black fungus. Two people died in Thane near Mumbai yesterday.

Warriors rally for second straight night, beat Suns 122-116

SAN FRANCISCO (AP): Facing the Western Conference's two winningest teams on back-to-back nights, the Golden State Warriors pulled off a pair of impressive victories with superstar Stephen Curry struggling with his shot. Jordan Poole hit a go-ahead 3-pointer with 1:43 left, Andrew Wiggins scored the next time down and finished with 38 points, rallying the Warriors past the Phoenix Suns 122-116 on Tuesday night.

Draymond Green notched his sixth triple-double of the season and 29th of his career with 11 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds as the Warriors made it two straight clutch wins during the playoff push.

"It was incredible, a lot of guys stepped up," Green said. "For us to get that win and Steph to struggle shows a lot about the growth of this team. We've got two more games. It's important that we finish those two games strong and try to head into the playoffs rolling."

Curry made a 9-foot jumper with 45 seconds left while falling to the floor, a bright finish to his 21-point performance on another tough outing for him shooting 3-pointers.

Golden State — competing with just eight healthy players — secured a spot in the play-in tournament with Monday's 119-116 win against the Jazz then held on against a talented Suns team.

"These last two games have been so important for us against



the two teams with the best records in the league," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "Tonight felt like a playoff game. Phoenix was very well prepared, they had the day off yesterday, so they came out with a great game plan to take the ball out of Steph's hands."

Devin Booker scored 34 points and knocked down a key 3-pointer with 5:25 left for Phoenix and Paul added 24 points, but the Warriors delivered all the key plays down the stretch.

"It was a tough one, you never want to lose two in a row," Booker said, later adding, "I'm not concerned at all."

Poole hit a 3-pointer with 57 seconds left in the third to get Golden State within 93-88 — a night after his successful half-court heave at the third-quarter buzzer against Utah. The Warriors trailed 98-92 Tuesday to begin the fourth and Poole hit another 3.

Golden State needed his hot hand given Curry's struggles from deep

for a second straight night.

Curry had a 49-point performance with 11 3-pointers in Saturday's 136-97 thumping of the Thunder, but has been off from long range in two games since: going just 4 for 24 on 3s — 1 for 11 Tuesday and 3 of 13 on Monday.

"The thing that's bugging me more than anything is we gave up 29 second-chance points to a team that is not known for offensive rebounding the ball," Suns coach Monty Williams said. "... We did a really good job on Curry but Wiggins had one of those nights."

Poole scored 20 points to wrap up Golden State's final set of back-to-backs as the Warriors won their fourth straight at home.

Phoenix led by as many as 16 and began a sizzling 18 for 26 making 7 of 10 3s to build a 43-30 advantage.

Alex, a therapy bunny that became a social

media hit last month attending a Giants baseball game, made it to Chase Center by season's end to cheer on the Warriors.

Owner Kei Kato and her fiancé, Josh Row, had their seats upgraded to the lower bowl as the team made a special exception so the bunny could attend — saying the bunny was their "lucky rabbit's foot" for the playoff push because rabbits aren't typically allowed in the arena.

He received a big screen bunny welcome from the Warriors during a first-quarter timeout.

"Just to give back and make everybody happy makes us happy," Kato said. "We want to share him with the world."

TIP-INS
Suns: PF Cameron Johnson missed his third straight game with a sprained right wrist. ... The Suns won the first two matchups of the season by 20 or more points, 120-98 on March 4 and 114-93 on Jan. 28. ... The

Suns were 10 for 18 on 3s in the first half. ... Phoenix surrendered 62 Warriors points in the paint.

Warriors: F Damion Lee did more court work a day after shooting for the first time since contracting COVID-19 despite being vaccinated. Coach Steve Kerr spoke to Lee and "he'll ramp it up a little bit today." F Eric Paschall, still sidelined by a strained left hip flexor, played in another three-on-three game as he has been doing in recent days. The hope is he will be ready to return either Friday or in Sunday's regular-season finale against Memphis.**UP NEXT**

Suns: Host Portland in their final home game Thursday before finishing with back-to-back games at San Antonio on Saturday and Sunday.

Warriors: Host the Pelicans on Friday night having won 13 of the last 15 at home vs. New Orleans.

Schalke game versus Hertha goes ahead despite 3rd virus case



GELSENKIRCHEN, GERMANY (AP): Schalke's game against Hertha Berlin on Wednesday is set to go ahead despite a third coronavirus case in the squad.

The third positive was found in samples taken Tuesday and reported by Schalke on Wednesday morning, less than eight hours before kickoff. Four more Schalke players have been ordered to isolate as close contacts, further weakening a squad already diminished by injuries.

Schalke said the local health authority in the city of Gelsenkirchen gave the go-ahead to hosting Hertha despite the cases. Schalke is already assured of relegation, but Hertha can take a big step toward Bundesliga survival with a victory.

The most recent virus case was the first to emerge since Bundesliga clubs entered what the league calls "quarantine training camps" with players and staff living in a closed environment in hotels, leaving only for training and games. The aim is to reduce the risk of the virus spreading and ensure the season can finish on time before players have to leave for the European Championship.

Schalke said it imposed "strict mask and distancing rules" on its players and that they had to eat meals in their hotel rooms.

The game between Schalke and Hertha has already been postponed once because of the virus after an outbreak at Hertha last month with several cases among players and staff.

Hertha goalkeeper Rune Jarstein and defender Marvin Plattenhardt have still yet to return to action after they were infected.

On Saturday, Schalke hosts Eintracht Frankfurt, which is chasing one of the four qualifying spots for the Champions League. On May 22, Schalke visits another team in the relegation zone, Cologne.

Dutch club Ajax melts league trophy into star gifts for fans



AMSTERDAM (AP): Ajax has melted down its Dutch league trophy to give a tiny silver star to all 42,000 season-ticket holders who were locked out of games during the coronavirus pandemic.

The storied Amsterdam club published movie-like videos Wednesday of the Eredivisie trophy -- a wide silver plate — being torched and recast into small stars.

A star weighing 3.45 grams (1/8 ounce) will be sent to supporters, Ajax said.

"After a turbulent year, we are ensuring our fans feel part of our

championship," said chief executive Edwin van der Sar, arguably the club's greatest-ever goalkeeper.

The project slogan is, "A Piece of Victory. A Piece of History. A Piece of Ajax."

"Previously, when we said 'this title is for you', we were expressing how we were doing it for the fans. However, sharing the trophy is the ultimate proof that we really are," Van der Sar said.

The Dutch soccer federation gave Ajax a second silver plate as an exceptional gift to display in its trophy cabinet,

the club said.

Ajax played 30 of its 34 league games in an empty stadium this season.

The team, which plays in a 55,000-seat arena named after Dutch soccer icon Johan Cruyff, also won the Dutch Cup to complete a double.

The stadium is expected to have 12,000 spectators when it hosts each of four European Championship games next month. They include all three of Netherlands' games in Group C, against Ukraine, Austria and North Macedonia.

Netherlands defender Van Dijk out of European Championship

LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND (AP): Netherlands defender Virgil van Dijk ruled himself out of the European Championship on Wednesday, saying he wanted to use the offseason to complete his rehabilitation from a serious knee injury.

The Liverpool center back has been out since October after he damaged his anterior cruciate ligaments in a challenge by Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford in a Premier League game.

"I feel physically it is the right decision that I've decided not to go to the Euros and to go into my last phase of rehab during the offseason," Van Dijk said in an interview with Liverpool's website.

"So, the full focus will be on preseason with the club and that's a realistic goal, so I am looking forward to that. Obviously I am very gutted to miss the Euros, to miss the European Championship and leading out my own country there, but things have been like they have and I have to accept it."

Van Dijk said he is looking at the bigger picture, including helping the Netherlands qualify for next year's World Cup in Qatar.

"I am quite mature and I know by now what could be a good decision," he said, "and I think this decision has definitely been the right one, in my opinion, to give my body and my knee a little bit more extra time to get ready for hopefully a big, big 18 months at least with the club but also with my country because we're trying to go to the next tournament after this as well and that starts in September."

Horton-Tucker comes up big in OT as Lakers edge Knicks

LOS ANGELES (AP): The Los Angeles Lakers are still missing LeBron James and are without a point guard, but Talen Horton-Tucker came up big when the defending NBA champions needed it.

Horton-Tucker made the go-ahead 3-pointer with 21.1 seconds remaining in overtime, and the Lakers improved their hopes of avoiding the play-in tournament with a 101-99 victory over the New York Knicks on Tuesday night.

With James missing another game to get his sprained right ankle as healthy as possible and Alex Caruso departing early due to right foot soreness, Horton-Tucker had to step up and shoulder some of the responsibilities at point guard.

"He's got big guts and he showed that with that shot," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. "He had a young player type of night with good and bad plays. He kept his poise though and remained confident."

Julius Randle's

3-pointer with 1:11 left gave New York a 99-98 advantage. Derrick Rose stripped the ball from Horton-Tucker on the ensuing possession, but the Knicks were unable to take advantage when Randle was called for traveling.

In a game that saw 23 lead changes, Horton-Tucker made the most of his second chance, nailing a pul-lup 3-pointer with Rose guarding him. Horton-Tucker, a Chicago native, said earlier in the season that he grew up idolizing Rose as both went to the same high school.

"Not too many kids from Chicago can say they did that," said Horton-Tucker, who scored seven of his 13 points in overtime.

After Boston lost to Miami earlier in the night, the Knicks were hoping to wrap up their first postseason berth since 2013, but will have to wait at least another game.

New York was out-rebounded 51-39, which

coach Tom Thibodeau said was the difference in the game. The game went into overtime after Wesley Matthews gathered in a rebound and laid it in with 3.1 seconds remaining after Kentavious Caldwell-Pope missed a 3-pointer from the corner.

"Rebounding beat us tonight. All we had to do is get that last rebound — the last shot of the game. Everyone's got to get a body on everyone," Thibodeau said.

Kyle Kuzma, who missed Sunday's game due to lower back tightness, led the Lakers with 23 points and Anthony Davis scored 20.

Los Angeles (39-30) is one game behind Portland and Dallas for the sixth seed in the Western Conference with three games remaining in the regular season. The Lakers are hoping to have James back for the final stretch, beginning Wednesday against Houston.

"We know the position we are in. We are playing desperate. That is

all we can do," Davis said. "This win is a confidence booster for us. If LeBron comes back tomorrow, hopefully we can get him acclimated and back in the rhythm. We want him to get healthy and be ready for the playoffs."

Randle had 31 points and Rose 27. New York, Atlanta and Miami are all tied at 38-31, but only the Heat have secured their spot in the top six of the Eastern Conference.

The Knicks had a 76-73 advantage going into the fourth quarter and scored nine of the first 11 points in the period to go up 85-75 with 7:39 remaining. The Lakers trailed by seven with 5 minutes left before going on a 9-2 run as Andre Drummond's layup off Caldwell-Pope's assist evened it at 89 with 1:56 to go.

Rose's jumper with 1:37 remaining put the Knicks up by two, but they were unable to come away with points on their final three possessions.

The Knicks had a 42-40 advantage mid-

way through the second quarter before the Lakers ran off nine straight points — including six by Kuzma — to go up 49-42 with 3:42 remaining. That was the largest lead by any team the first three quarters.

TIP-INS
Knicks: New York was 3-3 on the road trip and was trying to win both of its games in LA for the first time since the 1996-97 season. ... Alec Burks (bruised left knee) and Immanuel Quickley (sprained left ankle) were out for the third straight game.

Lakers: Drummond (16 points, 18 rebounds) posted his 25th double-double this season, including his seventh since joining Los Angeles on March 28.

UP NEXT
Knicks: Close the regular season with three straight home games, beginning Thursday against San Antonio.

Lakers: Host Houston on Wednesday. Los Angeles will unveil its 2019-20 championship banner before the game

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Escalating Mideast violence bears hallmarks of 2014 Gaza war

GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP (AP): Rockets streamed out of Gaza and Israel pounded the territory with airstrikes early Wednesday as the most severe outbreak of violence since the 2014 war took on many hallmarks of that devastating 50-day conflict, with no endgame in sight.

Gaza's Hamas rulers and other militant groups have fired barrages of hundreds of rockets that at times have overwhelmed Israel's missile defenses, causing air raid sirens and explosions to echo across Tel Aviv, Israel's biggest metropolitan area, and other cities.

Israeli airstrikes have leveled two apartment towers in the Gaza Strip, where 2 million Palestinians have lived under a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade since Hamas took power in 2007. Warning shots have allowed civilians to evacuate the buildings, but the material losses will be immense. Israel faced heavy criticism over the tactic during the 2014 war.

Just after daybreak Wednesday, Israel unleashed dozens of airstrikes in the course of a few minutes, targeting police and security installations, witnesses said. A wall of dark gray smoke rose over Gaza City. The Hamas-run Interior Ministry said airstrikes destroyed the central police headquarters in Gaza City, a compound with several buildings.

The death toll in Gaza rose to 43 Palestinians, including 13 children and three women, according to the Health Ministry. Nearly 300 people have been wounded, including 86 children and 39 women. Six Israelis, including three women and a child, were killed by rocket fire Tuesday and early Wednesday, and dozens of people were wounded.

An Associated Press journalist at a hospital in Gaza City saw five dead and seven wounded, including women, from an Israeli airstrike that hit a car in the city.

Meanwhile, Gaza militants fired an anti-tank missile across the border, killing an Israeli and wounding two others, who were evacuated under fire, according to Eli Bein, head of the Magen David Adom emergency service. It was not immediately clear if they were soldiers or civilians.

The Israeli military said militants have fired more 1,050 rockets since the conflict began, with 200 of them falling short and



landing inside Gaza. The military said it also shot down a drone that entered Israel from Gaza. Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman, said two infantry brigades were sent to the area, indicating preparations for a possible ground invasion.

Samah Haboub, a mother of four in Gaza, said she was thrown across her bedroom in a "moment of horror" by an airstrike on an apartment tower next door. She and her children, aged 3 to 14, ran down the stairway of their apartment block along with other residents, many of them screaming and crying.

"There is almost no safe place in Gaza," she said.

The destruction of apartment towers was among several tactics used during the 2014 war that are now the subject of an investigation by the International Criminal Court into possible war crimes. Israel is not a member of the court and has rejected the probe.

In a brief statement, ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said she had noted "with great concern" the escalation of violence in the region and "the possible commission of crimes under the Rome Statute" that established the court.

Conricus said Israeli forces have strict

rules of engagement and follow international laws on armed conflict. "We are definitely very mindful of civilian casualties in Gaza and we want to minimize them," he said. "That's the priority."

The latest eruption of violence began a month ago in Jerusalem, where heavy-handed police tactics during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers ignited protests and clashes with police. A focal point was the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a site sacred to Jews and Muslims.

Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since the Islamic militant group seized power in Gaza from rival Palestinian forces in 2007. The conflicts ended after regional and international powers convinced both sides to accept an informal truce.

While the violence has been widely condemned, there is no sign that either side is willing to back down. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to expand the offensive, saying "this will take time."

Still, diplomats are seeking to intervene, with Qatar, Egypt and the United Nations working to deliver a cease-fire.

The U.N. Security Council also planned

to hold its second closed emergency meeting in three days Wednesday on the escalating violence. Council diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity because discussions have been private, said the U.N.'s most powerful body did not issue a statement because of U.S. concerns that it could escalate tensions.

The unrest in Jerusalem has spread across Israel itself, with an outbreak of communal violence in mixed Jewish-Arab communities, as Hamas has called for a full-scale Palestinian intifada, or uprising. The last such uprising also began with violence at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in 2000, and lasted more than five years.

In the Israeli city of Lod, a 52-year-old man and his 16-year-old daughter were killed early Wednesday when a rocket had landed in the courtyard of their one-story home. Their car parked outside was wrecked and the interior of the house was filled by debris. The deceased were reportedly Arab citizens of Israel.

Lod also saw heavy clashes after thousands of mourners joined a funeral for an Arab man who was killed the previous night, the suspect a Jewish gunman. The crowd fought with police, and set a synagogue and some 30 vehicles on fire, Israeli media reported.

"An intifada erupted in Lod, you have to bring in the army," the city's mayor, Yair Revivo, said. Authorities have declared a state of emergency and ordered the re-deployment of paramilitary border police companies from the occupied West Bank as reinforcements.

In neighboring Ramle, ultra-nationalist Jewish demonstrators were filmed attacking cars belonging to Arabs. In the northern port town of Acre, protesters torched a Jewish-owned restaurant and hotel.

Confrontations erupted last weekend at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which is the third-holiest site in Islam and the holiest site in Judaism. Over four days, Israeli police fired tear gas and stun grenades at Palestinians in the compound who hurled stones and chairs at the forces. At times, police fired stun grenades into the carpeted mosque.

On Monday evening, Hamas began firing rockets from Gaza. From there, the escalation was rapid.

In a televised address, Hamas' exiled leader, Ismail Haniyeh, said Israel bore responsibility. "It's the Israeli occupation that set Jerusalem on fire, and the flames reached Gaza," he said.

Hamas has not commented on Israel's claims that it has killed a number of senior militants. Militant group Islamic Jihad confirmed that three senior commanders were killed in a strike on their hideout in a Gaza City apartment building.

The Israeli military on Wednesday released footage of an airstrike on what it said was the house of a "high-ranking operative" in Hamas, where weapons were stored. Earlier, the military said it struck a building where two senior members of Hamas' military intelligence wing, were present. Hamas activists tweeted that the two were killed in the strike, along with a woman and her son.

Netanyahu said Israel had attacked hundreds of targets. The fiercest attack was a set of airstrikes that brought down an entire 12-story building. The building housed important Hamas offices, as well as a gym and some start-up businesses. Israel fired a series of warning shots before demolishing the building, allowing people to flee and there were no casualties.

Israeli aircraft heavily damaged another Gaza City building early Wednesday. The nine-story structure housed residential apartments, medical companies and a dental clinic. A drone fired five warning rockets before the bombing. Israel said the building housed Hamas intelligence offices and the group's command responsible for planning attacks on Israeli targets in the occupied West Bank.

Fighter jets struck the building again after journalists and rescuers had gathered around. There was no immediate word on casualties. The high-rise stood 200 meters (650 feet) away from the AP bureau in Gaza City, and smoke and debris reached the office.

Soon after the bombing, Hamas announced that it would resume its attacks, and fired 100 rockets at the Israeli desert town of Beersheba. Hamas said the renewed barrage was in response to the strike on the building.

Internal emails reveal WHO knew of sex abuse claims in Congo

BENI, CONGO (AP): When Shekinah was working as a nurse's aide in northeastern Congo in January 2019, she said, a World Health Organization doctor offered her a job investigating Ebola cases at double her previous salary — with a catch.

"When he asked me to sleep with him, given the financial difficulties of my family I accepted," said Shekinah, 25, who asked that only her first name be used for fear of repercussions. She added that the doctor, Boubacar Diallo, who often bragged about his connections to WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, also offered several of her friends jobs in return for sex.

A WHO staffer and three Ebola experts working in Congo during the outbreak separately told management about general sex abuse concerns around Diallo, The Associated Press has learned. They said they were told not to take the matter further.

WHO has been facing widespread public allegations of systemic abuse of women by unnamed staffers, to which Tedros declared outrage and emergencies director Dr. Michael Ryan said, "We have no more information than you have." But an AP investigation

has now found that despite its public denial of knowledge, senior WHO management was not only informed of alleged sexual misconduct in 2019 but was asked how to handle it.

The AP has also for the first time tracked down the names of two doctors accused of sexual misconduct, Diallo and Dr. Jean-Paul Ngandu, both of whom were reported to WHO.

Ngandu was accused by a young woman of impregnating her. In a notarized contract obtained by the AP, two WHO staffers, including a manager, signed as witnesses to an agreement for Ngandu to pay the young woman, cover her health costs and buy her land. The deal was made "to protect the integrity and reputation" of WHO, Ngandu said.

When reached by the AP, both Diallo and Ngandu denied wrongdoing. The investigation was based on interviews with dozens of WHO staffers, Ebola officials in Congo, private emails, legal documents and recordings of internal meetings obtained by the AP.

A senior manager, Dr. Michel Yao, received emailed complaints about both men. Yao didn't fire Ngandu despite the reported misconduct. Yao didn't have

the power to terminate Diallo, a Canadian, who was on a different kind of contract, but neither he nor any other WHO managers put Diallo on administrative leave.

The AP was unable to ascertain whether Yao forwarded either complaint to his superiors or the agency's internal investigators, as required by WHO protocol. Yao has since been promoted to be director of Geneva's Strategic Health Operations Department.

Eight top officials privately acknowledged that WHO had failed to effectively tackle sexual exploitation during the Ebola outbreak and that the problem was systemic, recordings of internal meetings show. The revelations come at a time when the U.N. health agency is winding down its response to two recent Ebola epidemics in Congo and Guinea, and is already under pressure for its management of the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHO declined to comment on specific sex abuse allegations, and none of the 12 WHO officials contacted responded to repeated requests for comment. Spokeswoman Marcia Poole noted that Tedros announced an independent investigation of sex abuse in Congo after media reports came out in

October. Findings are due at earliest in August, investigators have said.

"Once we have these, we will review them carefully and take appropriate additional actions," Poole said. "We are aware that more work is needed to achieve our vision of emergency operations that serve the vulnerable while protecting them from all forms of abuse."

WHO's code of conduct for staffers says they are "never to engage in acts of sexual exploitation" and to "avoid any action that could be perceived as an abuse of privileges," reflecting the unequal power dynamic between visiting doctors and economically vulnerable women. But an internal WHO audit last year found some aid workers weren't required to complete the agency's training on sex abuse prevention before starting work during Ebola.

"All of us may have been suspecting for as long as the Ebola response was taking (place) that something like this would be possible," said Andreas Mlitzke, director of WHO's office of compliance, risk management and ethics, during an internal meeting in November. Mlitzke likened WHO officials in Congo to "an invading force" and said, "Things like this have historically happened in wartime."

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PIONEER IN THE NEWS

Elon Musk moves ratings as host of ‘Saturday Night Live’

LOS ANGELES (AP): Elon Musk moved a cryptocurrency’s value and TV ratings with his “Saturday Night Live” appearance.

Last weekend’s show averaged 7.3 million viewers, making it the third most-watched episode for the season behind the ones hosted by Dave Chappelle and Chris Rock, according to Nielsen figures.

A good outcome for the billionaire’s first time hosting “SNL,” although reviews of his attempts at comedy ranged from charitable to meh.

The biggest pan, however, may be the response to jokes mocking the cryptocurrency dogecoin, for which Musk actually has been a steadfast booster: In the hour after the show started, dogecoin’s already volatile price fell 23% and bounced up and down the following day.

“Saturday Night Live” included an opening exchange between Musk and his mother, who grimaced when he said that dogecoin would be her Mother’s Day gift, and an “Update” bit in which Musk appeared as a faux financial analyst, Lloyd Ostertag.

Anchor Michael Che reacts to Ostertag’s convoluted description of dogecoin as the future of currency with deep skepticism, calling it a “hustle.” Musk in character echoes the sentiment: “Yeah, it’s a hustle.”

In prime-time last week, CBS was the most-watched network with an average



4.8 million viewers. NBC had 3.2 million, ABC had 3 million, Fox had 2.3 million, Univision had 1.3 million and Telemundo had 960,000.

Fox News Channel topped the cable networks, averaging 2.1 million viewers in prime time. MSNBC had 1.5 million, HGTV had 1.2 million and CNN had 907,000.

ABC’s “World News Tonight” was first in the evening news ratings contest, averaging 7.95 million viewers. NBC’s “Nightly News” had 6.46 million and the “CBS Evening News” had 4.86 million.

For the week of May 3-9, the top 20 programs, their networks and viewerships:

1. “NCIS,” CBS, 8.68 million.
2. “FBI,” CBS, 8.06 million.
3. “60 Minutes,” CBS, 7.78 million.

4. “The Equalizer,” CBS, 7.224 million.
5. “Chicago Fire,” NBC, 7.221 million.
6. “Chicago Med,” NBC, 7.09 million.
7. “Young Sheldon,” CBS, 6.64 million.
8. “911,” Fox, 5.91 million.
9. “Blue Bloods,” CBS, 5.87 million.
10. “American Idol,” ABC, 5.74 million.
11. “Chicago P.D.,” NBC, 5.69 million.
12. “The Voice,” NBC, 5.64 million.
13. “NCIS: Los Angeles,” CBS, 5.60 million.
14. “Bull,” CBS, 5.53 million.
15. “FBI: Most Wanted,” CBS, 4.89 million.
16. “Mom,” CBS, 5.29 million.
17. “The Neighborhood,” CBS, 5.19 million.
18. “911: Lone Star,” Fox, 5.11 million.
19. “Magnum, P.I.,” CBS, 5 million.
20. “NCIS: new Orleans,” CBS, 4.96 million.

‘Saboteur,’ ‘St. Elsewhere’ star Norman Lloyd dies at 106

LOS ANGELES (AP): Norman Lloyd, whose role as kindly Dr. Daniel Auschlander on TV’s “St. Elsewhere” was a single chapter in a distinguished stage and screen career that put him in the company of Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, Charlie Chaplin and other greats, has died. He was 106.

Lloyd’s son, Michael Lloyd, said his father died Tuesday at his home in the Brentwood neighborhood of Los Angeles.

His credits stretch from the earliest known U.S. TV drama, 1939’s “On the Streets of New York” on the nascent NBC network, to 21st-century projects including “Modern Family” and “The Practice.”

“If modern film history has a voice, it is Norman Lloyd’s,” reviewer Kenneth Turan wrote in the Los Angeles Times in 2012 after Lloyd regaled a Cannes Film Festival crowd with anecdotes about rarified friends and colleagues including Charlie Chaplin and Jean Renoir.

The wiry, 5-foot-5 Lloyd, whose energy was boundless off-screen as well, continued to play tennis into his 90s. In 2015, he appeared in the Amy Schumer comedy “Trainwreck.”

His most notable film part was as the villain who plummets off the Statue of Liberty in 1942’s “Saboteur,” directed by Hitchcock, who also cast Lloyd in the classic thriller 1945’s “Spellbound.”

His other movie credits include Jean Renoir’s “The Southerner,” Charlie Chap-

lin’s “Limelight,” “Dead Poets Society” with Robin Williams, “In Her Shoes” with Cameron Diaz and “Gangs of New York” with Daniel Day-Lewis.

On Broadway, Lloyd played the Fool opposite Louis Calhern’s King Lear in 1950, co-starred with Jessica Tandy in the comedy “Madam, Will You Walk” and directed Jerry Stiller in “The Taming of the Shrew” in 1957.

He was also part of Welles’ 1937 modern-dress fascist-era production of “Julius Caesar” that has gone down in history as one of the landmark stage pieces in the American theater. Norman played the small but key role of Cinna the Poet, opposite Welles’ Brutus. Stage magazine put Welles on its June cover and proclaimed the production “one of the most exciting dramatic events of our time.”

Born Nov. 8, 1914, in Jersey City, New Jersey, Lloyd jumped into acting as a youngster in the 1920s. On stage, he was a regular with Welles’ Mercury Theater, the groundbreaking 1930s troupe that also featured Joseph Cotton and Agnes Moorehead and formed the basis of Welles’ classic film debut, “Citizen Kane.”

His other plays included “Crime,” directed by Elia Kazan and featuring his future wife, Peggy Craven. The couple were married for 75 years, until Peggy Lloyd’s death in 2011 at age 98.

TV viewers knew him best as the memorable calm

center of St. Eligius hospital on the 1982-88 NBC drama series “St. Elsewhere.” His Dr. Daniel Auschlander was originally only supposed to appear in a few episodes, but Lloyd became a series regular and stayed with the show for the entire run. The series would inspire such shows as “E.R.” and “Grey’s Anatomy.”

Lloyd worked steadily as a TV actor and director in the early 1950s, but the political liberal found his career in jeopardy during the Hollywood blacklist period aimed at communists or their sympathizers.

In 1957, Hitchcock came to his rescue, Lloyd told the Los Angeles Times in 2014. When the famed director sought to hire Lloyd as associate producer on his series “Alfred Hitchcock Presents” but was told “There is a problem with Norman Lloyd,” Hitchcock didn’t back down, Lloyd recalled.

“He said three words: ‘I want him,’” Lloyd said. He was immediately hired and eventually worked as executive producer on another series, “The Alfred Hitchcock Hour.”

His other TV credits include roles in “Star Trek: The Next Generation,” “Murder, She Wrote,” “The Paper Chase,” “Quincy M.E.,” “Kojak” and “The Practice.”

In 2014, in recognition of his 82 years in show business, and reaching the age of 100, the Los Angeles City Council proclaimed that his birthday of Nov. 8, would be honored as “Norman Lloyd Day.”

Dua Lipa wins big at Brits, urges health worker pay raise

LONDON (AP): British singer Dua Lipa called for a “fair” pay raise for U.K. health workers as she was named a double winner at the Brit Awards in London on Tuesday night. An audience of 4,000 witnessed the glitz of Britain’s leading music prize ceremony at the O2 Arena as part of a test return to mass attendance events in the age of the coronavirus.

Among them were 2,500 key health workers and their guests who had received tickets in recognition of their efforts during the pandemic.

Lipa, who took home the British female solo artist and album of the year titles, highlighted the words of nurse and academic Elizabeth Anionwu to say there was a “massive disparity between gratitude and respect” for those on the health front line.

“I think what we should do is we should all give a massive, massive round of applause and give (British Prime Minister) Boris (Johnson) a message that we all support a fair pay rise for our front line,” she said.

In her acceptance speeches, the “Levitating” singer also paid tribute to Anionwu, who has campaigned against racial injustice for decades, as well as Folajimi Olubunmi-Adewole and Joaquin Garcia, who jumped into the River Thames near London Bridge to try to save a woman last month.

Olubunmi-Adewole, 20, did not survive the rescue attempt.

Taylor Swift said it was an “incredible honor” to receive the global icon title, which has previously been awarded to superstars such as Elton John and David Bowie.

“I’m really proud to be part of this musical community especially in a year where we needed music so much,” Swift said. “And what we needed even more was the help and support of the NHS and the key workers that are here for us tonight.”

Little Mix became the first all-female band to win best British group, and called attention to “sexism and a lack of diversity” within the music industry.

Harry Styles took best British single for his song “Watermelon Sugar,” while J Hus received best British male solo artist.

Female singer-songwriters Arlo Parks and Griff took home the British breakthrough artist and rising star awards respectively.

Former U.S. first lady Michelle Obama sent a video message as she presented The Weeknd with the international male solo artist prize.

Billie Eilish was named international female solo artist winner, while Haim were dubbed best international group.

Live performers at the ceremony, which was hosted by comedian Jack Whitehall, included Lipa, Coldplay and a collaboration between Rag’n’Bone Man, P!nk and National Health Service choirs.

It was the largest audience for a live music event in the U.K. since March 2020, when pandemic restrictions were first introduced.

The event is part of the government’s Events Research Program, which has recently seen crowds return to soccer matches, an outdoor concert and a nightclub.



FUN IN THE SUN! Actress Audrina Patridge showed off her fit figure in a nude bikini while on vacation with her daughter, Kirra, in Hawaii.

ARIES:

You’re at crossroads, Aries. A point where you could go back to living the life you were living, or make a drastic change. Something tells us you’re in the mood to leave behind all things familiar and challenge yourself to grow in different ways. The good news is, coupled rams will find that their partner is supporting them on this journey towards self-discovery and holding space for them to become the most magnificent versions of themselves. PS: Your time to shine has come, beautiful!

Tip: Challenge yourself to grow differently.

TAURUS:

Given the state of affairs, you or somebody close to you could have experienced a pay cut in the recent past. But, just because one source of income has been taken away, does not mean you are limited here. The cards are urging you to get creative. What are the things that set your soul on fire? What are the gifts that you feel inspired to share with the world? PS: Something that you’ve been taking for granted could be your gift to existence *and* a steady source of income in the months to come.

GEMINI:

Sometimes, love is practical. But most times it is absurd, ridiculous, and inconvenient, and there is nothing wrong with that, Gemini. Instead of playing into the victim complex or complaining about how you’re not on the same page anymore, make yourself vulnerable. Have an open and honest conversation about how you would like to be supported. If the signs are anything to go by, you will be able to restore balance and harmony in this relationship.

Tip: Sometimes, you’ve just got to make yourself vulnerable.

CANCER:

If there’s one thing you can say with pride, it’s that you loved like there was no tomorrow and did what it takes to make your beloved feel special. However, things didn’t work out the way you imagined, despite your best efforts. That not all love stories have a happy ending is something you learned a long time ago. So, you’re ready to let go of the old story. You’re ready to transmute the hurt and the pain. Your higher self understands that it all transpired for a reason, and you are oh-so-grateful for the soul lessons.

Tip: It’s time to let go of the old story, beautiful.

LEO:

Your circumstances bring Rumi’s immortal words to mind: “What you seek is seeking you” and you are about to see proof. The new moon in Taurus is bringing all kinds of positive changes into your world, helping you open the doors that were once tightly secured. Now, it all comes down to the moves you make. PS: We have no doubt you are going to keep things bold and beautiful around here.

VIRGO:

Here’s the thing about closure: we don’t always get it in the way that we want to. So holding onto the idea of how things should be, or should’ve been, isn’t going to do you or those around you any good. Word for the wise: forgive, forget, and let go. Remember, the other person wasn’t trying to hurt you. They were simply doing what was best for them in that moment.

Tip: Closure is an inside job, beautiful.

LIBRA:

While many talk about showing up on the yoga mat every single day or going for a run no matter what transpires, few talk about the benefits of being consistent in their meditation practice. But you know all about the power of the subconscious mind, don’t you, Libra? You know what it takes to transform thoughts to things. So, make that commitment to yourself and promise to breathe through the distractions, even if your mind tells you you aren’t making much progress. You’re about to go places, beautiful, and this is merely the first step!

Tip: Tap into the power of your subconscious mind.

SCORPIO:

From thoughts to things, Scorpio! Something that you’ve been manifesting on the work front is about to take form soon. Looks like you’ve got your boss or mentor to thank for this one. Employers who are having trouble sustaining their business are being reminded that they don’t have to do it all on their own. If you don’t have the budget to hire somebody full-time, consider bringing a freelancer or consultant on board who can help execute your vision.

SAGITTARIUS:

Not everything works out in the way we like it to, and that’s okay. It’s all a part of the growth and learning process that helps us evolve on a soul level. So, take the failures and the disappointments in your stride, Sagittarius. Remember, you are a sorceress, a magician, and an alchemist. The power to transform your circumstances and walk gracefully down the red carpet of magnificence is already within you!

Tip: It all comes down to what you make of your circumstances.

CAPRICORN:

This is all you’ve ever wanted, yet it’s causing you more anguish than anything in your life ever has. Don’t take this as a bad omen, though. Think of it as a reminder to check your inner alignment and let go of that which has served its purpose in your existence. What the cards want you to remember, Capricorn: the best is yet to come. The new moon in Taurus could also be ushering in love and romance for those who have been patiently (well, somewhat!) waiting for Cupid’s arrow. It’s true that the timing wasn’t quite right when you met them the last time. Looks like things have changed for the better this time around!

AQUARIUS:

We’re never really prepared for the changes that are being sent our way, yet we are. Be grateful for what’s being taken away from you as you prepare for what is being entrusted upon you. It’s all for the greater good, even though you cannot see it just yet, Aquarius. For some of you, the transition could involve enormous amounts of paperwork. Word for the wise: get started now.

Tip: A change in the wind is on the cards.

PISCES:

Remember the time you were struggling to achieve what you now consider one of your core strengths? What a long way you have come, Pisces! So many personal barriers you have shattered along the way. So, instead of giving yourself grief about all the things you cannot do, give yourself a pat on your back for your many breakthroughs. It’s sipping on all that self-love juice that will make you a magnet for miracles, beautiful! Tip: How far you have come since you first started walking this path.