



**KRISTEN BELL REUNITES
WITH HER PARENTS FOR
THE FIRST TIME IN A YEAR**
pg 08

CAUGHT IN QUOTAS
pg 04

**DANCE MOMS STAR
ZACKERY TORRES SHARES
THEY'RE TRANSITIONING**
pg 08



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Pages 8 | RS. 5

Covid is flattening in Sikkim, for now; Test Positivity Rate falls nearly 20% in a week

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 01 JUN:**

While the number of Covid-fatalities continue to remain a worry for Sikkim [with four more deaths], infections are clearly coming down. The 309 new cases recorded in the past 24 hours might appear a high number on first glance, but when tempered with information that these cases were detected from the screening of a record 2,672 samples on Monday, the context should bring some solace. Today's statistic returns a Test Positivity Rate of 11.56%, a major climb down from the 30+ TPR Sikkim reported in the peak of the second wave over the past few weeks.

Even exactly a week back, on 25 May last

Tuesday, Sikkim was returning a 30% Test Positivity Rate with 278 cases being reported from much fewer tests - 940.

The focus on mass testing and a noticeable ramping up of the number of samples screened at the two VRD Labs in the State has ensured that cases are detected faster and thus the chances of the virus spreading reduced substantially.

To provide some more perspective, the TPR yesterday was 16% against the 25% rate reported last Monday. Bear in mind, on Mondays, the numbers are usually lower since the VRD Labs are closed on Sundays and no RT-PCR tests are conducted. On 24 May, the report was for the barely 400 samples screened the previous day. This



Monday, the TPR was 16% even though a much higher, 932, samples were tested for Covid via Rapid Antigen Testing.

What is also reassuring is that despite the high number of new cases in absolute terms, the number of complete recoveries reported over the same 24 hours was

still higher. As per the daily Covid Report put out by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme, a total of 334 formerly Covid-positive patients made full recoveries and were discharged from home isolation today and returned to their normal lives.

With this large num-

ber of new recoveries, Sikkim's count of active cases has also come down to 3,992. Thus far, Sikkim has reported 15,626 confirmed cases of Covid, of whom 11,163 have already made full recoveries.

At present there are 33 Covid patients under treatment at ICU facilities in the State. While there are a total of 220 Covid patients admitted in hospitals here, 3776 are in facility or home isolation across the State.

While 210 of the new cases were registered in East District, 50 were in West District, 27 in South District and 22 in North District.

A total of 200 cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 624 samples, two more were reported in TruNat testing of seven samples and 107 people tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 2,041 samples.

In a sad note, the State also recorded four more COVID deaths in the last 24 hours taking Sikkim's Covid death toll to 257. All four deaths were reported from STNM Hospital.

CBSE Class XII board exams cancelled

NEW DELHI, 01 JUN [NDTV]: Class 12 board exams of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) have been cancelled, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has said.

The decision has been taken in view of the "uncertain conditions" due to Covid-19 and based on feedback obtained from different stakeholders, it said.

The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CICSE) has also cancelled Class 12 exams. The students will be given an opportunity to appear in the examinations at a later date. The evaluation criteria for Class 12 students will be released soon.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met higher and school education secretaries and other key education officials today to discuss the board exams.

Stressing that the health and safety of students is of utmost importance to the government, the Prime Minister said that all stakeholders need to show sensitivity for students. The PMO said the CBSE will announce results for Class 12 students "as per a well-defined objective criteria in a time-bound manner."

While the board exams are cancelled and results will be prepared based on the alternative method of assessment, students who want to take the exams will be given an opportunity when the situation improves, the PMO said.

"Government of India has decided to cancel the Class XII CBSE Board Exams. After extensive consultations, we have taken a decision that is student-friendly, one that safeguards the health as well as future of our youth," PM Modi tweeted.

PM Modi said the decision to cancel Class 12 CBSE board exams has been taken in the interest of students.

The Covid-19 has affected the academic calendar and the issue of board exams was causing immense anxiety among students, parents and teachers, which must be put to an end, the Prime Minister said.

The Meeting was attended by Union Ministers of Home, Defence, Finance, Commerce, Information and Broadcasting, Petroleum and Women and Child Development; and Principal Secretary to PM, Cabinet Secretary and Secretaries of School Education and Higher Education Departments.

GMC meets to discuss registration of workers under Sikkim Labour Protection Act

GANGTOK, 01 JUN (IPR):

A coordination meeting with line departments regarding registration of workers under the Sikkim Labour Protection Act, 2005, was convened at the conference hall of Gangtok Municipal Corporation (GMC), Deorali today.

The meeting was chaired by Gangtok Mayor, Nell Bahadur Chhetri in presence of Deputy Mayor GMC, Tshering Palden Bhutia, Councilors of various wards under GMC, Secretary Labour Department, Namrata Thapa, Commissioner GMC, HK Chhetri, Additional Commissioner Labour Department and officials from Labour Department, Rural Development Department and



UPHC Health.

The agenda of the meeting was to deliberate on the need to formalize authentic data of labourers under unorganised sector in Sikkim.

The meeting decided to execute immediate action for collection of data of individual workers under unorganised sector, registration of workers

with the Labour Department under The Sikkim Labour Protection Act 2005, areas to be identified for registration, vaccination of individual worker/porter and sensitisation of workers on COVID-19 protocols.

It is to be mentioned that individual labourers under Sikkim Labour Protection Act 2005 are

bazar porters, carpenters, masons, rag pickers, quilt makers, plumbers, fitters, cooks, waiters, chanawalas, electricians, drivers (other than government drivers), cattle rearers (gothals), domestic servants, mechanics, barbers, cobblers, hawkers, umbrella repairers, scrap paper and bottle collector, etc.

Sikkim Police tours West dist villages to generate COVID awareness

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 JUN:

Sikkim Police West District has been visiting rural parts of West District to create awareness on COVID appropriate behaviour with an objective to curb the rise of coronavirus cases in the district, a press release informs.

Seeing the rise in COVID cases in West

district, police stations under Soreng sub-division, West district has taken up rural outreach mission for COVID-19 awareness with utmost seriousness.

Regarding the same, a team of police led by Senior SP [West], Tashi Wangyal Bhutia along with SDPO Soreng, Mahendra Pradhan con-

ducted village patrolling and making public announcements on Monday in villages falling under Soreng Police Station, Sombaria Police Station and Nayabazar Police Station.

The team also visited isolation centres in various wards and GPUs in these areas and checked safety and security of the

ones under quarantine and urged the people of villages to stay indoors, avoid gatherings and follow COVID safety protocol and lockdown guidelines as directed by the State government.

Senior officials were also accompanied by SHOs, II-SHOs, ICs of OPs with their team including village guards.

Petrol, diesel prices hiked again, rates at new high

NEW DELHI, JUN 1 (PTI): Petrol and diesel prices on Tuesday scaled new highs across the country after they were hiked for the 17th time in a month.

Petrol price was increased by 26 paise per litre and diesel by 23 paise a litre, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

In Delhi, petrol hit an all-time high of Rs 94.49 a litre, while diesel is priced

at Rs 85.38 per litre.

Fuel prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes such as VAT and freight charges. Rajasthan levies the highest value-added tax (VAT) on petrol in the country, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The price of petrol, which had already crossed the Rs 100-mark in several cities in Rajas-

than, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, breached the psychological barrier in Mumbai on Saturday. Tuesday's price increase was the second since then.

Petrol now costs Rs 100.72 a litre in Mumbai and diesel comes for Rs 92.69 per litre.


The increase on Tuesday is the 17th increase in prices since May 4, when state-owned oil firms ended an 18-day

hiatus in rate revision they observed during assembly elections in states like West Bengal.

In 17 increases, petrol price has risen by Rs 4.09 per litre and diesel by Rs 4.65 a litre.

Oil companies revise rates of petrol and diesel daily based on the average price of benchmark fuel in the international market in the preceding 15-days, and foreign exchange rates.

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|  STATE BANK OF SIKKIM (A Government of Sikkim Undertaking) RECRUITMENT OF ASSISTANT MANAGER IN STATE BANK OF SIKKIM | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| NOTIFICATION NO. SBS/AM/2021/01 Dated: 25th May 2021. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Applications are invited from eligible Indian Citizens of Sikkimese origin having Sikkim Subject certificate/Certificate of Identification for appointment as Assistant Manager(AM) in the State Bank of Sikkim. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Minimum qualification A. Degree of Bachelor and above from a recognized university with any one of the following as a major subject; (i) Business Economics, (ii) Accounting, (iii) Commerce, (iv) Financial Management/Finance, (v) Banking, (vi) Mathematics B. Minimum of one year of Certificate Course in Computer Application. OR A Degree of Bachelor or above in any discipline from a recognized university with minimum experience of five years of working in clerical cadre and above in any Banks in India. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Age Limit As on 01.04.2021 minimum age of the candidate should be minimum 21 years and maximum of 40 years for all category of candidates in accordance with the orders issued by the State Government from time to time. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Other Qualifications (a) Should have knowledge of any of the Sikkim State Languages. (b) Should be conversant with the customs and usages of Sikkim. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Number of Vacancies | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <table><tr><td>UR</td><td>BL</td><td>OBC (CL)</td><td>OBC (SL)</td><td>ST</td><td>SC</td><td>PT</td><td>TOTAL</td></tr><tr><td>5</td><td>5</td><td>5</td><td>5</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td><td>26</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">out of which</td><td colspan="2">out of which</td><td>out of which</td><td>out of which</td><td colspan="2">out of which</td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td>BPL</td><td>W</td><td>BPL</td><td>W</td><td>BPL</td><td>W</td><td>BPL</td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td>1</td><td>1</td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>1</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>8</td><td>3</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Abbreviation: UR-Unreserved BL-Bhutia Lepcha OBC(CL)-Other Backward Class Centre List OBC(SL)-Other Backward Class State List ST-Scheduled Tribe SC-Scheduled Caste W-Women BPL-Below Poverty Level | | UR | BL | OBC (CL) | OBC (SL) | ST | SC | PT | TOTAL | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 26 | out of which | | out of which | | out of which | out of which | out of which | | W | BPL | W | BPL | W | BPL | W | BPL | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 3 | | | | | | |
| UR | BL | OBC (CL) | OBC (SL) | ST | SC | PT | TOTAL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 26 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| out of which | | out of which | | out of which | out of which | out of which | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | BPL | W | BPL | W | BPL | W | BPL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prospective candidates will have to apply after carefully reading the notification regarding the process of examinations and interview, eligibility criteria, online registration processes, payment of prescribed application fee/intimation charges, pattern of examination, issuance of call letters etc. and ensure that they fulfil all stipulated criteria and follow the prescribed processes. To download notification and apply online, candidates should visit our official website www.statebankofsikkim.com . | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| THE TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| <p>sd/- (S.R.Karki) CHIEF GENERAL MANAGER</p> <p>GANGTOK THE 25TH MAY 2021.</p> <p>Scanned by CamScanner</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |



LUPIN FOUNDATION DONATES PPE KITS

Gangtok, 01 Jun: Lupin Foundation of Lupin Limited under its CSR initiative presented masks, hand gloves, sanitizer spraying machine, and PPE kits to District Collector East Sikkim today, a press release informs.

Health Minister inspects Covid Care Center set up by NHPC

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 JUN:

Minister for Health & Family Welfare of Sikkim, Dr Mani Kumar Sharma inspected the Covid Care Center set up at NHPC, Teesta V Power Station, East Sikkim Dung Dung Guest House on 31 Jun, 2021. He was given a warm welcome by General Manager (In charge), Sanjay Darbari, Teesta-V Power Station in the presence of senior officers and CMO of the Power Station.

HOP Teesta-V Power Station, Sanjay Darbari informed that the Covid Care Center was set up at a short notice pursuant to orders issued by the Chairperson District Disaster Management Authority under section 34 of the Disaster Management Act 2005 for Khamdong block and can accommodate 15 patients.

The Minister checked



the availability of water, electricity and sanitation measures at the Covid Care Center and appreciated the arrangements made by NHPC Teesta-V Power Station, a press release informs.

HOP Teesta-V Power Station, Sanjay Darbari also discussed and finalised the Layout plan of additional 10-bed Covid Care facility being developed by NHPC in a separate facility at Dung Dung with the minister and informed that it would

be completed within 15 days.

The Minister was also apprised about the free ambulance facilities being provided to locals by the Power Station as well as sanitation drive organized from time to time in recent past in the vicinity.

Sanjay Darbari informed that sanitization of the area from Ghotekhola to Sirwani was undertaken today, upon the request of local Gram Panchayat President.

Minister directed BDO Khamdong to prepare a schedule for sanitization of Covid affected nearby areas and requested NHPC to undertake the same for the welfare of the local community.

Upon the request of the HOP Teesta-V Power Station, Minister gave an assurance of providing vaccines for employees, dependents, contract labour and locals between 18-45 years of age as soon as they are received by the State Government.

“Who Is He?": Doctors mark 'Black Day' against Ramdev's allopathy remarks

NEW DELHI, 01 JUN

[NDTV]: Doctors across the country are observing a "Black Day" today in protest against Yoga guru Ramdev's alleged remarks on allopathy where he apparently called modern medical treatments "stupid". Various medical associations have demanded an "unconditional open public apology" for Ramdev's alleged "insensitive and derogatory" comments that more people died of modern medicine during the coronavirus pandemic than the deadly disease itself.

The Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA), that had called for the protest, said that even after raising objections to Ramdev's statements, "no action has been taken yet."

FORDA President Dr Manish said the protest is not against Ayurveda but Ramdev.

"We don't want any kind of debate with Ramdev. Who is he? He is a layman. Ramdev has only made his business in this pandemic,"



Dr Manish told NDTV. "Doctors have worked through the pandemic day and night. They have lost lives. We are expecting more than 10,000 doctors to participate. We will go to any extent, we can go to court also," he added.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) - the country's topmost body of doctors - has also extended support to the protest where doctors will wear black badges at the workplace.

In a widely shared video last week, Ramdev is heard saying at an event, "Lakhs of people have died because of allopathic medicines, far more than those who

died because they did not get treatment or oxygen."

Ramdev's Patanjali group - one of India's biggest Ayurvedic businesses - was prompt to defend its boss and said the video had been edited and the statement "taken out of context". Ramdev has "no ill-will against modern science and good practitioners of modern medicine", the group said.

Facing backlash over his comments and a letter from Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, the saffron-robed Yogi withdrew his statement soon after.

"Received your letter Dr Harsh Vardhan. In that context and to end the whole controversy over

the conflict of different treatments with regrets, I am withdrawing my statement," he tweeted, hours after Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan asked him to take back the remark.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has also sent a notice to the 55-year-old asking him to apologise for the remarks within 15 days. If he fails to do so, the top doctors' body said a compensation of ₹ 1,000 crore will be demanded from him for defamation.

Patanjali has said it will give a "befitting reply" legally to the defamation notice.

The IMA also urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take action against Ramdev under sedition and other charges for allegedly "spearheading a misinformation campaign on Covid vaccination".

Showing little remorse for his remarks, Ramdev was seen in yet another controversial video on social media, challenging calls for his arrest, saying "even their baap(father) cannot arrest Swami Ramdev".

RDD Minister visits landslide-affected BAC Khamdong office

GANGTOK, 01 JUN (IPR):

Rural Development Minister, Sonam Lama, Principal Secretary RDD, Principal Chief Engineer, RDD, Additional CE RDD accompanied by BDO Khamdong and AE, BAC visited BAC Khamdong to inspect the conditions of the office area, post a landslide. They all visited the ongoing Sikkim Garib Awas Yojana projects of Government of Sikkim to assess the development of the projects which are for the betterment of the public.



RDD Minister inspects progress on Eco Park at Sang Khola

GANGTOK, 01 JUN [IPR]:

Minister for Rural Development Department, Sonam Lama, inspected the site for development of Ecological Park at Sang Khola under Beng Phgyong GPU today, duly under the adoption of the Governor of Sikkim. The Minister assessed the progress of the work and examined the plan prepared by the Forest Department. He instructed the Forest Officials to execute the work properly and ensure that



it reflects on the good governance and overall development of the state. He also asked them to ensure the quality of

work to be taken as an example by visitors from other states. The Minister was accompanied by the Pr. Secy, RDD, Chief

Engineer, RDD, Director Panchayat, ADC(Dev) BDO Martam, DFO(T) and Panchayats of Beng Phgyong, GPU.

South DC discusses Covid protocols with heads of manufacturing units

NAMCHI, 01 JUN (IPR):

The District Collector (South), M Bharani Kumar convened a meeting with all Plant Heads of factories & production units of Mamring, Jholungey and Samar-dung area with respect to the order issued by Home Department and an Advisory issued by Labour Department respectively for containing of Covid Cases and management and safety of workers in Mamring, Jholungey and Samar-dung.

Present in the meeting were Sr. Superintendent of Police (South), Thakur Thapa, SDM



(HQ) Chiran Rizal, SDPO (Namchi) Kesang D Bhutia, (SHO Namchi) Dawa Lhamu Pakhrin, DPO Abhishek Kharel and Plant Heads of Pharma and non Pharma Companies.

The DC at the outset directed all the Companies to strictly adhere to guidelines and advisory issued by Home and Labour Department respectively. The directions for in House accommodation

of workers for running the Plants were given. Further, the plant heads were directed to establish a Covid Care Centre as per the advisory issued by Labour Department.

For bureaucrat at heart of PM-Mamata Banerjee row, new warning

NEW DELHI, 01 JUN

[NDTV]: Alapan Bandyopadhyay, the officer in the core of the latest flashpoint between Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been served notice by the Centre for skipping a meeting chaired by the PM.

Mr Bandyopadhyay retired yesterday as Bengal's Chief Secretary and was immediately appointed Chief Adviser by Mamata Banerjee, who had refused to release him after the Centre ordered his transfer on Friday.

A show-cause notice put out last evening asks him to explain his absence from PM Modi's meeting on Cyclone Yaas in Bengal. The Centre has served notice under the Disaster Management Act and asked Mr Bandyopadhyay to respond within three days.

Mamata Banerjee and her team had on Friday

begged off the meeting with PM Modi to review the impact of Cyclone Yaas in Bengal and left after a brief interaction with the Prime Minister at the air base where he had landed after an aerial review. One of her reasons for doing so was the presence of her former aide-turned-BJP MLA Suvendu Adhikari at the meeting.

Mamata Banerjee has since asserted she had other scheduled meetings and due to bad weather had to fly out for those at the earliest. She also said she left only with the Prime Minister's permission.

The Centre later accused her of behaving in an "ugly, disrespectful and arrogant manner" and insulting PM Modi. The same evening, Ms Banerjee's top officer, Mr Bandyopadhyay, received a recall order and was asked to report to the Centre on Monday.

The Centre's show

cause notice steers clear of the fact that Mr Bandyopadhyay did not do so yesterday. Ms Banerjee hit out at the Centre for not giving a reason for summoning Bengal's top bureaucrat to Delhi, calling it "vendetta" and adding that she had never seen anything so "heartless".

The show cause notice to Mr Bandyopadhyay focuses on the review meet controversy and says on Friday, PM Modi and other members of his entourage waited for nearly 15 minutes for the officers of the Bengal government to arrive.

"In view of the absence, the Chief Secretary (Mr Bandyopadhyay) was called by an official as to whether they wanted to participate in the review meeting or not. Thereafter, Chief Secretary arrived along with Chief Minister of West Bengal inside the meeting room and left thereafter immediately," the Centre says.

The notice has been issued on the premise that the meeting that the officer failed to attend involved "affairs of the Centre".

The law says it's the state government that can take disciplinary action against an officer working under the state, but in this case, the notice follows the argument that the Chief Secretary "refused to attend" a review meet called by the Centre.

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7-yr-old wins laurels in Mental Arithmetic Online Challenge

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 JUN:

Seven-year-old Aarush Kar of Gangtok, Sikkim has once again bagged 2nd Runner up title in the Visual Category A2 in the recently held UCMAS International Online Challenge 2021, a press release informs.

This competition is conducted by UCMAS International, a child development program based on Mental Arithmetic and the Abacus that boosts brainpower in children aged 4-13.

Aarush solved 300 mental arithmetic sums in 8 minutes. Earlier, he had won the 3rd prize in the 19th UCMAS India National Abacus & Mental Arithmetic Online Competition 2021 held on 23 to 26 Jan, 2021.



He is the son of Professor, Dr Sumit Kar, Department of Community Medicine, Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical

Sciences (SMIMS) and Asima Kar. He is a Class III student of Mount Zion School, Tadong, East Sikkim.

Darj Police tracks and recover 36 stolen phones, returns them to owners



SMRITA KHAWAS

DARJEELING, 01 JUN:

Darjeeling Police has managed to track and recover 36 Mobile Phones reported stolen from the area. Today, at a function hosted at the

Darjeeling Police town office, in the presence of Darjeeling SP, Dr Santosh Nimbalkar, Darjeeling Police and DIB-Darjeeling handed over the recovered phones to 36 delighted residents.

“Our recovery team is working very well and today because of them we are able to return the mobile phones which was stolen to their respective owners after recovery,” the SP said.

Daily COVID-19 count in India lowest in 54 days



NEW DELHI, JUNE 1

(PTI): India reported 1,27,510 fresh COVID-19 cases, the lowest in 54 days, while the daily positivity rate dropped to 6.62 per cent, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

With the fresh cases, India's tally of coronavirus cases rose to 2,81,75,044.

The COVID-19 death toll climbed to 3,31,895 with 2,795 fresh fatalities, the lowest reported in 35 days, and the active cases were recorded below 20 lakh after 43 days, the data updated at 8 am showed.

Also, 19,25,374 tests were conducted on Monday taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 34,67,92,257.

The daily positivity was recorded at 6.62 per cent. It has been less than 10 per cent for eight consecutive days, the ministry said. The weekly positivity rate has declined to 8.64 per cent.

The active cases were recorded below 20 lakh after 43 days. They have reduced to 18,95,520 comprising 6.73 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has improved to 92.09 per cent.

A net decline of 1,30,572 cases has been recorded in the COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

Recoveries continue to outnumber daily new cases for 19 successive days. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 2,59,47,629, while the case fatality rate has increased to 1.18 per cent, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one crore mark on December

19. India crossed the grim milestone of 2 crore on May 4.

The 2,795 new fatalities include 500 from Maharashtra, 478 from Tamil Nadu, 411 from Karnataka, 174 from Kerala, 151 from Uttar Pradesh, 131 from West Bengal, and 118 from Punjab.

A total of 3,31,895 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 95,344 from Maharashtra, 29,090 from Karnataka, 24,237 from Delhi, 24,232 from Tamil Nadu, 20,497 from Uttar Pradesh, 15,541 from West Bengal, 14,550 from Punjab and 13,048 from Chhattisgarh.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

“Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research,” the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

SRM tops Hotel Management Institution in India survey by GHRDC

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 JUN:

SRM Institute of Hotel Management has ranked number one in the top hotel management institutes in the private institutes' category in a survey conducted by GHRDC, New Delhi (Global Human Resource Development Center), a press release informs.

SRM Institute of Hotel Management has been ranked first under the category of 'Top Hotel Management Institutes of Super Excellence'.

The Institution has

also come on top in the “Top Hotel Management Institutes of Private in the State of Tamil Nadu”. The rating has been done on the basis of various parameters like Infrastructure, Faculty research, Consultancy, Curriculum and Placement.

“SRM Institute of Hotel Management has been contributing for the development of students and society since its inception in 1993. The institute strives hard in achieving pursuit of excellence in every sphere,” the release states.



Homes damaged and imperilled by landslides at Thangbong

SUMMIT REPORT

GYALSHING, 01 JUN:

A landslide has damaged the wooden house of Sobin Subba at Thangbong under Daramdin constituency, West Sikkim.

A huge block of stone slipped from the slope above and crashed into the home. The incident occurred early on Tuesday morning.

Fortunately, nobody



was home at the time.

BDO Ongdi Sherpa and his team visited the affected site today and took stock of the damage and assured the affected family of all necessary assistance after proper assessment of damages.

The house of Som Tshering Lepcha at Lower Tikpur is meanwhile imperilled by a landslide which has already swept away a section of the property.

Mamata Banerjee had threatened to “boycott” PM, Bengal Governor tattles

KOLKATA, 01 JUN [PTI]:

West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar today stirred fresh controversy by saying “ego prevailed over public service” on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee skipping Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting to review post-cyclone damages on May 28.

Terming the Governor's comment “unfortunate”, the ruling Trinamool in Bengal asserted that the Chief Minister is involved in public service 24/7 and all her actions are prompted by her concern for the interests of the state.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar said the Chief Minister had called him up before the meeting at Kalaikunda in Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district and indicated that she won't attend it if Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari is present in it.

“Constrained by false narrative to put record straight: On May 27 at 2316 hrs CM @MamataOfficial messaged ‘may I talk? urgent,’” Mr Dhankhar tweeted.

“Thereafter on phone indicated boycott by her & officials of PM Review Meet #CycloneYaas if LOP @SuwenduWB attends it. Ego prevailed over Public service,” he said in the Twitter post.

Besides Suwendu Adhikari, Governor Dhankhar and BJP MP Debasree Chaudhuri were present in the meeting.

The Chief Minister said she had skipped the meeting because “a BJP MLA has no locus to be present in a PM-CM meeting”. Mr Adhikari has defeated Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram seat in the recent assembly elections.

In a letter to the Prime Minister on Monday, Mamata Banerjee had written, “I wanted to have a quiet word with you, a meeting between the PM and the CM as usual. You, however, revised the structure of the meeting to include a local MLA from your party and I am of the view that he had no locus to be present in a PM-CM meeting.”

Ms Banerjee had also mentioned in the letter



that she had no objection to the presence of the governor and other Union ministers in the meeting.

Reacting to Mr Dhankhar's tweet, senior Trinamool leader and Lok Sabha MP Saugata Roy said, “The governor has no right to say such things. The CM is working round the clock for the interest of the state. She knows what to do.”

Senior Trinamool leader and state minister Chandrima Bhattacharya had on Monday claimed that the chief minister had to wait for 30 min-

utes to meet the Prime Minister on May 28.

“After she met him, Mamata Banerjee submitted details about the damages caused by cyclone Yaas and then sought his permission to leave for a pre-scheduled programme in Purba Medinipur district,” Ms Bhattacharya had said.

However, after the Kalaikunda episode, a fresh Centre-state tussle was witnessed over the services of the then Chief Secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay, who had accompanied the Chief Minister to the meeting.

On May 28, the Union government sent a letter to Mr Bandopadhyay recalling him for central deputation. Mamata Banerjee strongly protested, saying it contradicts the Centre's approval for extension of Mr Bandopadhyay's services as the Chief Secretary by three months due to the cyclone and COVID-19 situation in the state.

Mamata Banerjee sent a letter to the Prime Minister over the issue on Monday and appointed Mr Bandopadhyay as her chief adviser for three years, after allowing him to retire.

Monsoon likely to be normal this year, predicts weather office

NEW DELHI, 01 JUN

[NDTV]: India will receive normal rainfall during this year's monsoon season, the India Meteorological Department said today.

Monsoon seasonal rainfall (June to September) over the country as a whole is likely to be 101 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA) - which means the average rainfall recorded in the last ten years. A monsoon season is considered

‘Normal’ when the average rainfall recorded is between 96 to 104 per cent of the LPA.

Earlier, the Met Department had forecast that monsoon seasonal rainfall is likely to be 98 per cent of the LPA. The LPA of the season rainfall over the country as a whole for the period 1961-2010 is 88 cm.

Rainfall is likely to be normal in north (92 to 108 per cent) and south In-

dia (93 to 107 per cent), above-normal in central India (over 106 per cent) and below-normal in east and northeast India (less than 95 per cent), the Met department added.

The onset of the annual monsoon over the Indian subcontinent, that was delayed by two days, is expected to hit the Kerala coast on June 3, Met Director General M Mohapatra told NDTV.

“Situations are

now gradually improving for the monsoon to hit,” he said. Monsoon is expected to progress well after its entry.

Rainfall over the monsoon core zone, which consists of most of the agriculture regions receiving rainfall in the country, is most likely to be above normal.

Nearly half of India's farmland has no irrigation and depends on the annual June-September

rains to grow crops such as rice, corn, cane, cotton, and soybean.

Last month, IMD had said the monsoon would be average this year, raising expectations of higher farm output, which is central to the country's economy.

Monsoon last year was 109 per cent of its LPA. It was the third highest after 112 per cent in 1994 and 110 per cent in 2019.

Caught in Quotas

The challenge is more nuanced than politicians can understand

It is never out of season to talk about the near obsessive ambition of communities across the board to get included in some reserved category or the other. We have, in our country, quite a wide range of categories to choose from – there is the ST list, the SC recognition, the OBC, now even MBC, Bihar introduced us to the EBC grouping – and one can rest assured that more such segregations will be dreamed up in the coming years. Communities vie to fit in somewhere, speculate to move across reservation-enjoying groups and seek out more quotas in newer avenues.

Why these categorizations and why this keenness for reservations?

Given the history that India emerged from in 1947, where caste alienation was extreme and jan-jatis genuinely underprivileged, a policy was required to overcome a legacy of injustice and to provide all in this country with a broad measure of equal opportunities. Since equal opportunities would not have been willingly granted and communities with centuries of oppression behind them could not be expected to benefit from an equal footing standpoint, reservations were eked out. Over the years, the reservation were extended to include more communities and even women. The idea was to provide these communities/ genders with the first stepping stone to equality – access. Access to education, to jobs, to positions of power and wider exposure. This target has been met relatively well and as far as access is concerned, a wide swathe has been covered. That said, new elites have emerged within the reserved groups, from those who benefitted first from the ‘quota’ and thus became the more privileged among the disadvantaged. The obvious next step would have been to pull communities which have benefited enough out of the reserved categories and make more room for those which still lag behind. Or at least extending the creamy layer segregation for reserved categories which currently have no such differentiation. This, obviously, is easier said than done. For one, there is no easily quantifiable way to decide when a community has developed enough to make it on its own steam sans reservation, and for the other, there is the vote-bank politics in which saner decisions in genuine public good would be political hara-kiri. So, the nation is left with an ever overflowing baggage of reserved sections and shrinking opportunities. Admittedly, there is also the primary aim behind reservations, which is social equality, and that, one needs to accept is still awaited since the traditionally sidelined groups continue to be stereotyped and under-represented, including those among them who now occupy creamy layer positions in society. This complicates the situation since reservations were never about economic upliftment but aimed to deliver social change. Guaranteed access was only one way towards achieving that, not the only route.

The reservation policy also failed in other ways. Instead of making people competitive with improved access, it has made them lazier with increased quotas. Where social reform and social support should have complemented the reservation system, the walls became even more impregnable and differences reinforced. Little wonder then that more and more communities want to carve out some reserved category or the other for themselves. In fact, in the present times, when jobs are rare and competition even for education tough, it would be foolish of community leaders not to work for a quota for their people. And so the demands keep pouring in. This is not to belittle the aspirations of any community to find a new grouping for itself, but just a suggestion that maybe it is time the country and Sikkim paused to re-read the principles why reservations and special categories were first created, whether its expressed aims are being met, and also whether the people who genuinely require reservations are receiving it or not.

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Covid Has Shown That Following the Same Road Will Lead the World Over a Precipice

IAN GOLDIN

THECONVERSATION.COM

Despite the tragic deaths, suffering and sadness that it has caused, the pandemic could go down in history as the event that rescued humanity. It has created a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reset our lives and societies onto a sustainable path. Global surveys and protests have demonstrated the appetite for fresh thinking and a desire not to return to the pre-pandemic world.

The devastating consequences of COVID-19 have led to a deepening recognition that business as usual is highly destabilising and the source of our darkest fears. It has shattered the mental mirrors that have prevented us from breaking from the past and embracing new horizons.

In “Rescue: From Global Crisis to a Better World I show how the coronavirus rupture has demonstrated that citizens are prepared to change their behaviour when required to do so. And that governments are able to break out of their economic strait-jackets.

My work on globalisation and development has led me to believe that while flows across national borders – trade, people, finance, medicines, and most importantly ideas – are a very good thing, they also can lead to growing risk and inequality unless properly managed. What I think of as the Butterfly Defect of globalisation has created a new form of systemic risk. It was the source of the global spread of the 2008 financial crisis, is evident in escalating climate change and inequality, and has now overwhelmed us with the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have been predicting that a global pandemic was likely and would inevitably lead to an economic meltdown. The only question is why more effort hasn’t been put into managing this underbelly of globalisation and the reluctance to depart from the business as usual. My book shows why we urgently need to.

Old excuses for inaction are no longer credible. The task now is to turn the reactive response to the health and economic emergencies into a proactive set of policies and actions to create an inclusive and sustainable world of shared prosperity. Before the pandemic this may

have seemed unattainable, even idealistic. Changes that would have taken a decade or more to emerge have taken place almost overnight.

INTO SHARP RELIEF

Among the positive changes have been a deeper recognition of the importance of nature, the role of essential workers, the contributions of science and experts, and having supportive family, friends and colleagues.

But the pandemic has also exacerbated health and economic inequalities within countries and between them, devastating the lives and livelihoods of many and greatly increasing isolation and mental illness. A world that functions online is more atomised and may lead to a hardening of social and political silos. Unless the negative consequences of the pandemic are urgently addressed, they will cast a long, dark shadow.

The idea that there is no such thing as society, only selfish individuals, can now be relegated to the dustbin of history. We have witnessed an outpouring of solidarity, not least of the young for the old and of essential workers for others. The young sacrificed their social lives, education and jobs and took on enormous debts to help the elderly get through COVID-19. Essential workers placed themselves at daily risk to staff our care homes and hospitals and ensure that food was delivered, rubbish collected and that lights stayed on. Many sacrificed their own health for others.

The intolerable costs of austerity and a culture that celebrated individualism and undermined the state has been starkly revealed.

The world wars forever changed global politics and economics; the economist John Maynard Keynes argued that it was necessary to “snatch from the exigencies of war positive social improvements”.

The pandemic too will change everything, from personal priorities to global power. It marks the end of the neoliberal era of individualism and its primacy of markets and prices, and heralds a swing of the political pendulum

back to state intervention.

As Nobel Laureate economist Angus Deaton has argued, “we now face a set of challenges which we cannot duck” which threaten the fabric of society, providing a “once-in-a-generation opportunity to tackle the disadvantages faced by many that this pandemic has so devastatingly exposed”.

MORE, NOT LESS, GLOBAL CO-OPERATION

Globalisation has caused universal health and economic emergencies. And yet, to address it we need more globalisation, not less. We cannot stop a global pandemic without more global politics.

Nor can we stop climate change or any of the other great threats by political deglobalisation.

Economic deglobalisation would condemn to continuing poverty the billions of people in the world who are yet to benefit from the jobs, ideas and opportunities that globalisation brings. It would mean that citizens of poor countries would not have access to the international vaccines, solar power panels, investment, exports, tourism and ideas that are urgently needed to rebuild countries and create a future of shared prosperity.

If isolating ourselves and stopping globalisation could insulate us from risk it may be a price worth paying. But far from reducing risk, it will only increase it. What we need is better managed and more regulated and coordinated global flows, so the benefits of connectivity can be shared and the risks stopped.

The greatest threat to our lives has historically come from internal or external conflicts. Now the threat comes from forces that are beyond the control of any one country and which require international cooperation, rather than assertions of supremacy. It is in every country’s self-interest to cooperate to contain global threats. Similarly, it is in each of our own self-interest to contribute to the creation of more cohesive and stable societies.

COVID-19 has tested us. By passing the test we will have

proved we can also conquer climate and other threats.

HOW TO AVOID THE PRECIPICE

Nothing should be taken for granted. The virus is not only changing our possibilities and actions, but also the way we think, our dreams and our imaginations. Every crisis creates an opportunity, and it behoves us to explore the silver linings. By highlighting the significance of systemic risks, the pandemic has raised awareness of other threats, including those posed by future pandemics and climate change, and has given us the means to rescue our lives and the future.

COVID-19 has caused the biggest development setback of our lifetimes, reversing 70 years of progress. Low- and middle-income countries suffered negative growth for the first time since the 1950s

Many more people will have died of starvation and poverty-related causes than from the direct health impact of COVID-19.

The pandemic has resulted in as many as an additional 150 million people falling into extreme poverty, and acute hunger doubling from 130 million people in 2019 to 260 million in 2020. In many poor countries education and health systems have collapsed and government safety nets are threadbare, where they exist at all.

It is business as usual which allowed the world to be overwhelmed by COVID-19. The pandemic has revealed and exacerbated inequalities within countries and between them.

It forcefully demonstrates why bouncing back or forward along the same road we are on is leading us over a precipice. Without systemic change we are all condemned to a more unequal and unstable future. COVID-19 has generated the potential to create a fairer and more inclusive world.

[the writer is Professor of Globalisation and Development; Director of the Oxford Martin Programmes on Technological and Economic Change and Future of Development, University of Oxford]

Endurance got us through multiple lockdowns, and it’ll help us coming out of the pandemic too

FELIX RINGEL

THECONVERSATION.COM

The coronavirus, or rather the measurements taken against it, changed our perception of time. For many, the attempts to prevent the spread of the virus resulted in a feeling that time had come to a standstill.

When the pandemic first hit, this notion of stopped time was at the core of a widespread sense of crisis. For a while, many existed in survival mode, reacting to the demands of the day while unable to plan ahead. However, around the world, humans also began to deploy what in my work as a social anthropologist I call temporal agency – the ability to deliberately restructure, speed up or slow down the times we are living in.

Many of us learnt how to trick time in order to get through the new COVID-19 way of life. People restructured their daily lives by establishing new routines. Many had to navigate the differences between home and home office time, when both were spent in the same place. Some of us even learned how to tentatively plan ahead in a reality where the future was uncertain.

Many lockdowns (at least in the UK) later, I’m still impressed by the creative responses to the pandemic, particularly the many ways in which families and friends learned to share time at a distance. However, the one feature I particularly believe we should carry into the post-pandemic future is not that COVID creativity, but perseverance itself.

Endurance, maintenance and tenacity – the ingredients that make up perseverance – are under-appreciated even in times without crisis. However, they kept us going when life was hardest. Humanity surprised itself by quickly adapting to the new pandemic normal, but what counted more was the perseverance we deployed for more than a year without giving up. Creating a sustainable post-pandemic future will depend on it, too.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

The pandemic taught us to appreciate, and even celebrate perseverance, not least the continuous daily work of all the heroic frontline workers (whose everyday work we’d taken for granted for too long). It also provided us with a chance to reconsider what’s important in our lives and how we want to organise our societies in the future. Many of us were made aware of what counts and what was missed the most.

Prominent amongst those things are the social relations that make us who we are -- with family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues, even those we had all those unnecessary fights with during lockdown.

In the post-pandemic future, we should never again take them for granted, nor all the hugs, kisses and handshakes. We avoid doing that by appreciating the work that goes into maintaining these social relationships.

Apart from time for family and friends, we also yearned for other times -- for travel and lei-

sure, for example. We’d taken for granted the distinction between work and leisure, office and home time, and we’ll have to take time again to renegotiate these distinctions. Whatever we come up with in the end, this new work-life balance will also have to stand the test of time – whether it can endure in the future and we in it.

ENDURANCE AND EXHAUSTION

During the pandemic, many people had to come up with new ideas and change their behaviour. But once that change had happened, we were forced to maintain and endure our response to the pandemic.

The daily exercises, weekly Zoom calls with relatives or prolonged homeschooling efforts were all examples of endurance. In many places, perseverance shaped the latter part of the pandemic – it was all about making it through a few more dark winter days and resisting general exhaustion and lockdown fatigue.

Endurance is important to society in general. In a recent paper, I looked into why this matters in the context of urban decline in postindustrial cities.

As cities change, their inhabitants are forced to adapt their behaviour to new social, economic and political circumstances. Through this change, the fight to keep something you love alive requires endurance. Sustaining a social club that struggles to find new members or preserving your local community centre from clo-

sure entails plenty of perseverance. Maintaining part of your urban infrastructure that suffers from funding cuts – your youth club or local park – is a revolutionary act, because it withstands the change others intended for it.

This work of maintenance and repair is at the core of our societies. It might look less interesting than attempts at making a difference, but without it everything around us would collapse.

The end of this pandemic will not be a sharp cut. It will be gradual and, as humanity will have to pace itself, there will be more need for endurance. In the best case, the experiences of the pandemic will help us determine what this future should look like.

Although the pandemic will at some point be over, there are enough crises yet that demand our attention: economic, social, ecological and political ones as well as potential future pandemics. The same sense of endurance, sustainability and perseverance will have to characterise our responses to those, too.

It is not enough to wait for a shortcut out of climate change or a cure-all for economic decline. A truly sustainable solution to these crises will have to be maintained in new everyday lives and routines. It will have to work with a different understanding of what human agency is all about.

Like during the pandemic, we not only have to establish new ideas, but make them work in the long run.

[the writer is Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Durham University]

Environmentalists warn Nepal’s plan to export quarry can spell ecological disaster

CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL
KATHMANDU, 01 JUN [KATHMANDUPOST]: The government’s plan of extracting construction materials and exporting them has come under widespread criticism from conservationists, calling the move shortsighted, counterproductive and catastrophic for the environment and guided by ill-intentions. “Based on environmental impact assessment, mine-based stones, pebbles and sand can be exported to minimise trade deficit,” said Finance Minister Bishnu Prasad Paudel, on Saturday while announcing the budget for the fiscal year 2021-22 on Saturday.

The announcement means revoking the existing ban on the export of river and mine-based construction materials.

After immense lobbying for the conservation of the Chure region, the fragile zone that stretches east to west below the Mahabharat hills, which is significant for its environmental services like water to downstream districts, the government in 2014 had imposed a ban on the export of such items. The region had been bearing the brunt of unabated mining of sand, pebbles and boulders from its rivers and hills and their export to India.

“There is no doubt that without utilising available resources, in our case which is sand, stones and water, among others, as a mountainous country, we cannot develop. We must convert these resources into capital,” said Prabhu Budhathoki, an environmentalist and former member of the National Planning Commission. “However, the manner the plan has been an-

nounced in the budget makes it suspicious for multiple reasons.”

He feels that there is a reason to cast doubt over the plans because it looks too specific as if it was pre-planned, and the sites for mining these materials have also been already identified and serves some vested interest.

The doubt originates from the fact that the government plan also includes a concession in importing materials required to construct a ropeway for ferrying construction materials from the mining site to the export point.

“Transportation of such materials can happen by any other means too but mentioning of ropeway for carrying them raises suspicion as if construction of ropeway has already started,” said Budhathoki. “It seems everything is already fixed behind the scenes. It looks like an instance of policy corruption.”

Apparently, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the central agency responsible for natural resources management, environment and biodiversity conservation, was not consulted about the plan of removing the ban on the export.

“The Environment Ministry was not aware of any such plan,” said an Environment Ministry official requesting anonymity. “The ministry had not proposed this plan, neither in the government’s policies and programmes nor in the budget.”

Illegal and uncontrolled mining of construction materials from riverbeds under political protection has been a major environmental challenge for several years. Crush-

er plants and their heavy equipment vehicles are seen operating unhindered along the highways and riverbanks across the country.

But according to Buddi Sagar Poudel, a newly appointed spokesperson with the Environment Ministry, the collection of these materials will not take place haphazardly, as the budget announcement said the EIA should guide it.

“There have been long discussions in the past that we should move from riverbeds to mining-based exports. The plan must have come considering the demand for such materials at home too. Besides, it has not said it should be extracted from the Chure range,” he told the Post. “Shifting to mining-based export was already envisioned for making things more managed as they will be registered and there will be regular monitoring and extraction will be limited to a few places.”

But environmentalists are not convinced.

“The government might have the right intention behind excavating these resources, but there are reasons for doubt. What is concerning is when, how and how much collection of these resources will happen,” said Binod Bhatta, an environmentalist and leader of the Chure-Tarai Madhes Conservation and Management Master Plan Preparation Team. “Although the government has said that EIA will be conducted, my experience says EIAs are conducted merely as rituals. How can we be assured that a similar trend will not follow while collecting these materials?”

The Chure range, which occu-

pies about 12.78 percent of the country’s total area as the inner Tarai, the Chure hills and the Bharvar plains, has suffered years of deforestation due to migration from the hills, overgrazing, logging, and excessive mining of construction materials like boulders and gravel.

Degradation of the Chure range and its nearby areas has also been blamed for annual flooding in the districts below. Growing population and unchecked human activities have only affected the region further, impacting the livelihoods of the people living downstream. The water table is fast depleting the region, which could trigger a water shortage in the future.

The ecological degradation of the Chure range necessitated the government to come up with a 20-year Chure-Tarai Madhesh Conservation and Management Master Plan, which has identified a total of 164 rivers in 36 districts of the Chure belt for conservation activities.

While the 2021-22 budget calls for digging up of construction materials, it has also earmarked Rs1.53 billion for the Chure conservation programme to construct 200 ponds for recharging groundwater and controlling soil erosion in 164 rivers in the Chure region.

However, the latest plan also clashes against the government’s own commitment to conserving the zone, according to environmentalists.

“The master plan was envisioned stopping the degradation of the region and preventing washing down of stones, sand, pebbles and

debris from Chure hills to downstream along with the river. Such materials still kept coming to the rivers and could be taken out as per the need without tampering with the structure of the rivers,” said Bhatta. “The master plan is a government document and if the government has made this its long-term vision, then it should be rechecking its own commitments before announcing such schemes.”

Despite the earlier ban, collection of construction materials is still happening, according to him.

“We can only imagine the scary situation once the ban is relaxed,” said Bhatta. “Floods and inundation will take place in the downstream Tarai districts.”

Despite criticism against the proposed plan of exporting construction materials extracted from the womb of nature, stakeholders, be it government officials or environmentalists, do not deny the need for utilising these resources.

Their concern, however, is that it should happen in a managed manner rather than simply exploiting the resources.

“The budget should have said that the government will utilise these resources by promoting a mining industry, by identifying some areas for collection of these materials where sand mining or stone quarry industry can be allowed on competitive bidding,” said Budhathoki. “But the plan revolved around merely exporting sand and stone rather than doing it through a full-scale industry.”

He also stressed on the need to allow such extraction only in

limited areas rather than across the country from east to west so that it will be easier to monitor and impact will be limited.

Such a massive excavation endeavour for export of construction materials, however, faces yet another risk, according to environmentalists.

They fear the country itself might face a shortage of such items for meeting its own development needs.

“While our road and railway projects are yet to be built, sending them out may mean we will not have them when we need them for ourselves,” said Bhatta. “There should be a clear assessment of demand and supply before moving ahead with the plans. Only if we have a surplus we should sell them outside. Besides, we have had the experience of losses from the sale of these materials outweighing profits.”

According to a UNDP study in 2011, the total revenue from the riverbed materials in the fiscal year 2009-10 was Rs 1 billion, whereas the repair and maintenance cost of the road was Rs 11 billion.

Budhathoki, a former member of the National Planning Commission and country chief of IUCN Nepal, also warns that the export plan could turn out to be a counterproductive move for the country in future.

“Sand, pebbles and stones are non-renewable resources. It takes millions of years for them to emerge,” said Budhathoki. “If we sell them hurriedly now, we might face shortage when our development is at its peak.”

In Nepal, online crimes like sexual exploitation and blackmailing spike amid lockdown

ANUP OJHA
KATHMANDU, 01 JUN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Three days before the prohibitory orders were enforced in Kathmandu Valley on April 29, Kanchan (name changed) sent his wife and five-year-old son to his village.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he stopped going to his office at a Kathmandu-based diplomatic mission. He had little work and he was working from home.

He spent most of his spare time on social media sites, mainly Facebook.

One day Kanchan, who is in his late 30s, got a friend request from a woman on his Facebook page. Since he did not know the girl, he ignored it at first. But after getting repeated requests, he accepted it. The woman had an appealing look.

Soon he started to chat via text with his newfound friend, and during the nights she

started sending voice messages to which he started replying to her. Then she started sending nude pictures of herself and asked Kanchan to do the same.

“For the sake of fun he complied,” said Superintendent of Police Anand Aryal who is also spokesman of the Central Cyber Bureau of Nepal Police.

But a week later, in mid-May, the woman, who was abroad, asked him to send her \$700. She threatened him that if he did not she would expose his pictures and the racy conversations he had with her on social media.

He soon realised that it was a fake Facebook account.

Distressed and panicked, Kanchan called Nepal Police’s Central Cyber Bureau for help last week and shared everything requesting the police that his identity not be disclosed.

This was one among

nearly three dozen cases of cyber harassment registered via the phone call at the cyber bureau in the past one month since prohibitory orders were enforced at the end of April, according to Aryal.

“We have got complaints of online sexual exploitation and harassment including threats and blackmailing after the second wave of Covid-19 in which offenders have been from inside the country as well,” said Aryal.

In the case of offenders outside the country, Nepal Police has been consulting with Interpol for investigation.

According to the bureau, it has been getting over five phone calls and at least two emails a day from people being blackmailed for large amounts of money for lack of judgement like Kanchan’s.

“Before the prohibi-

tory orders, the bureau would hardly get such complaints,” said Aryal. “Earlier, we used to get complaints mostly from women but during the current lockdown, the trend has changed and there are many men complaining of being blackmailed.”

He said they are asked for amounts ranging from Rs50,000 to up to Rs500,000.

Complaints are being registered by high profile persons including businessmen, corporate house owners, high ranking people working for NGOs and INGOS.

“They are worried that they may be exposed and their family relationships may be endangered if the cases become public,” said Aryal.

On Sunday, the bureau issued a press release alerting the public not to accept friend requests from unknown persons.

“Some people with

criminal mindsets have been misusing technology and with the use of social media they are manipulating the social media users by sending inappropriate pictures, messages and videos to lure them in indecent activities to blackmail them,” said the statement. “We request everyone to keep away from such temptations and not to be involved in indecent voice calls, video calls or texting.”

According to Aryal, people with a criminal mindset are using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Viber and Imo to blackmail their victims.

Former deputy inspector general of police Hemant Malla Thakuri sees a number of reasons behind the increasing number of crimes online.

“People in Nepal and most other countries are indoors, and most of them have easy access to the internet,” said Mal-

la. “People are in need of money and with mobile banking, it is easy to transfer money. The pandemic has made many youths jobless, and for youths with criminal mindsets, the best way to make money is to create fake identities on social media and blackmail people.”

He said cybercrime has increased due to prohibitory orders, monotony and overindulgence in social media.

“The best way not to become victims of such crimes is to be aware and not to be in touch with unknown persons and not to accept friend requests from or reply to unknown persons,” said Malla.

He warned that the issue could bring about a trigger effect whereby the emotional state is affected, often significantly, by causing extreme anxiety and distress especially because everyone is indoors.

Odisha reports record 37 COVID deaths in a day



BHUBANESWAR, JUN 1 (PTI): Odisha reported the highest single-day COVID-19 deaths on Tuesday as 37 people lost their lives, taking the toll to 2,791, a Health Department official said.

The state also reported 8,735 new COVID-19 cases, pushing the tally to 7,73,732. These cases were detected after testing 62,293 samples.

At present, there are 89,956 active cases in Odisha.

In the last 24 hours, 10,405 people have recovered.

The total recovery stands at 6,80,932.

In all, 711 people have died of COVID-19 in the state in May. Khurda district, where state capital Bhubaneswar is located, has alone accounted for 471 deaths, followed by Ganjam (284), Sundergarh (270) and Cuttack (165).

Five of the latest deaths were reported

from Angul and four people each died in Cuttack and Kalahandi.

Of the new infections, 4,892 were detected at quarantine centres, while the rest 3,843 were local contact cases.

Khurda district reported the highest 1,222 new cases, followed by Cuttack (673) and Balasore (566).

Among those who died was noted football coach Nanda Kishore Patnaik.

Patnaik, 65, died at a private COVID-19 hospital in Bhubaneswar.

Born in Baripada town in Mayurbhanj district, he had represented Odisha twice in Junior Football Championship, in 1977 and 1978. He became coach in 1992-93 and trained women footballers.

International women footballers Sradhanjali Samantray, Ranjita Mohanty and Prasanti Pradhan were trained by him.

West Bengal govt transfers 52 police officers

KOLKATA, MAY 31 (PTI): The West Bengal government on Monday evening transferred as many as 52 police officers, an official said. DIG, Midnapore Range, Kunal Aggarwal was sent on compulsory waiting, while V Solomon Nesakumar was made the Joint CP of the Special Task Force (STF) of Kolkata Police and Prasun Bandyopadhyay the DIG, Barasat Range, an order said.

Praveen Kumar Tripathi will be the new DIG Malda Range while DN Goswami, Joint CP Special Branch of Kolkata Police was appointed the DIG of the state STF. Sudheer Kumar Neelakantam replaced Goswami.

N i l a d r i Chakraborty would continue as the ADG, state fire services, the order stated, adding that Anoop Jaiswal will be the new DIG,

Raiganj Range.

Swati Bhargava was made the DC South-West (Behala) of Kolkata Police while Priyabrata Roy was named the DC ESD of the Force and Arindam Sarkar as DC of Kolkata Armed Police, the order said.

Biswajit Ghosh will be the new SP of Jhargram Police District while Dhritiman Sarkar appointed the new SP of Bankura, it added.

Assam to distribute sanitary napkins as flood relief

GUWAHATI, JUN 1 (PTI): The Assam government has added sanitary napkins to the list of relief materials to be distributed among women and adolescent girls affected by floods and other natural disasters, a notification said.

The order was recently issued by Revenue and Disaster Management Department Commissioner and Secretary M S Manivannan.

Drawing the attention of all district deputy commissioners and sub-divisional officers (civil), it said menstrual management during emergencies faced by women and adolescent girls living in flood-prone areas have till now remained unattended as a relief measure.

“It also brings out various cultural, logistical and health issues

faced by women and adolescent girls in taking care of their menstrual hygiene needs during floods,” the order stated.

Considering the maintenance of the dignity of women and adolescent girls during flood etc., the DCs and SDOs have been asked to include sanitary napkins in the list of relief items from GR (Gratuitous Relief) fund, it added.

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Embiid leaves with sore knee, 76ers lose to Wizards 122-114

WASHINGTON (AP): After the Philadelphia 76ers lost NBA MVP finalist Joel Embiid to what the team called a sore right knee late in the first quarter Monday night, they lost their lead — and their chance at the franchise's first play-off sweep in 36 years.

With Embiid gone for most of Game 4, Bradley Beal's 27 points, Russell Westbrook's 12th career playoff triple-double and Washington's strategy of fouling Ben Simmons whenever possible down the stretch all helped the Wizards beat the 76ers 122-114 to cut Philadelphia's series edge to 3-1.

"Each guy thought they had to win the game for us," 76ers coach Doc Rivers said about what happened to his team's offense after Embiid departed. "You've still got to play right. ... Tonight we didn't play right, on either end."

Asked for more information about Embiid's knee, Rivers said, "I really don't know," and added that some "precautionary" tests will be done Tuesday.

Tobias Harris, who led the Sixers with 21 points and 13 rebounds, summed up his club's situation this way: "It's not the end of the world."

Simmons' take?

"Obviously," Simmons said, "we need Joel to win. He's a big part of this team."

Game 5 of the best-of-seven

Eastern Conference first-round series is Wednesday at Philadelphia.

Won't be easy for that one to be as eventful as this one was, including the third-quarter sight of a spectator running out of the stands and onto the court before being slammed to the ground by a security guard — the latest example of NBA Fans Gone Wild.

"It's actually embarrassing," Wizards coach Scott Brooks said. "Unacceptable."

Nothing had as much of an effect on the outcome and, potentially, the rest of this postseason for Philadelphia, the East's No. 1 seed, as what happened to Embiid, who came into the night averaging better than a point per minute in the series.

In Game 3's 29-point win for the 76ers, for example, he produced a playoff career-high 36 points in 28 minutes against the Wizards, who needed to go through the play-in round just to get the No. 8 seed.

But the center headed to the locker room late in the first quarter after taking a hard fall behind the baseline when his shot was blocked by Robin Lopez. Embiid tried to play on, wincing and leaning over during breaks in play, before checking out eventually and limping off.

He never returned and finished with eight points and six rebounds in 11 minutes.



"We took advantage of what was on the floor," Beal said.

Philadelphia led by as many as 11 in the opening period but that was down to 61-60 at halftime.

And Washington took over briefly in the third quarter, leading by as much as 92-78 in its final minute. A back-and-forth fourth quarter was tight down the stretch after Danny Green's layup with under 4 1/2 minutes to go made it 106-all.

That's when Washington ba-

sically took the ball out of Philadelphia's hands, sending Simmons to the line repeatedly down the stretch with a version of the old Hack-a-Shaq strategy that Shaquille O'Neal used to face.

"Obviously that's what they're going to do. That's what they should do," Rivers said. "And I'm OK with that."

Simmons came into the night 0 for 9 on free throws in the series and was 1 for 3 for the night before

Hack-a-Ben went into full effect — he made 1 of 2 tries each of the final four times he stepped to the line to end up 5 for 11.

Tobias Harris led the 76ers with 21 points and 13 rebounds. Simmons had 13 points and 12 rebounds.

Asked by a reporter about keeping Simmons in the game while Washington repeatedly fouled him, Rivers replied: "You want me to take Ben Simmons off the floor? No. He's pretty good. I'll

pass on that suggestion."

Rui Hachimura had 20 points and 13 rebounds for the Wizards, including a corner 3 off an assist from Beal to put the home team up 118-112 with 45.6 seconds left.

"He's growing up, right in front of our eyes," Brooks said about 2019 first-round draft pick Hachimura.

As the clock wound down, a chant of "Wiz in 7!" arose from some in the crowd of 10,665 — about 50% of capacity and the most allowed under current coronavirus restrictions.

NO SWEEP

The Sixers last swept a playoff opponent in 1985 against Milwaukee; the Wizards last were swept in 2007 by Cleveland.

TIP-INS

76ers: Embiid missed 10 games during the regular season after getting a bone bruise on his left knee while playing against Washington in March. ... Mike Scott, who used to play for the Wizards, took Embiid's spot in the lineup to begin the second half.

Wizards: Beal surpassed 1,000 career postseason points. ... Hachimura was called for a technical foul in the third quarter. ... Bertans left in the second half with a strained right calf. He scored 15 points. ... Daniel Gafford replaced Alex Len in the starting lineup and scored 12 points.

Le grand retour: Federer wins return to Paris, Slam action

PARIS (AP): They feted Roger Federer with as loud as applause gets from a crowd capped at 1,000 people in Court Philippe Chatrier — when he walked out with a wave, when he hit one of his 48 winners, even when he attempted a back-to-the-net 'tweener and hit the ball out.

This match bathed in sunshine Monday meant Federer finally was back at the French Open and back in Grand Slam action and he gave the excited fans what they wanted perhaps as much as he did: a victory.

Federer's first competition at any major tournament in 16 months ended with him on the right side of a 6-2, 6-4, 6-3 score against qualifier Denis Istomin at the French Open as fans chanted "Ro-ger! Ro-ger!"

It was a case of many happy returns — and serves, forehands, backhands, volleys and drop shots, too.

"What a pleasure to be back," Federer said.

Making a stunning departure was Naomi Osaka, who announced her withdrawal from the tournament. The four-time major champion said on Twitter she has suffered long bouts of de-

pression since winning the 2018 U.S. Open.

Osaka had earlier declared she would not speak to the media during Roland Garros and was fined \$15,000 after she skipped the post-match news conference following her first-round victory Sunday.

Serena Williams won in the first scheduled night session in French Open history, erasing two set points to beat Irina-Camelia Begu 7-6 (6), 6-2 under the lights.

Federer showed no signs of rust or trouble with the right knee that needed two operations last year. He produced more than twice as many winners as his 20 unforced errors and never faced a break point while improving to 8-0 against Istomin over their careers.

"Always great to be on court with this legend. To play against him is always a big (deal)," Istomin said. "I was expecting all the spectators to cheer for him."

They sure did, with one voice from the stands shouting, "A delight, Roger! A delight!" as Federer went up 4-2 in the third set.

Federer, whose 40th birthday is Aug. 8, hadn't appeared on the Grand Slam stage since Jan.



30, 2020, when he lost to Novak Djokovic in the Australian Open semifinals.

This was just Federer's second trip to the French Open since 2015. In addition to last year's absence because of the knee issues, he withdrew in 2016 citing a bad back, then sat out the clay-court circuit each of the next two years to focus on the grass-court portion of the season.

He acknowledged recently he has zero chance of claiming the trophy this time around in Paris; instead, he is hoping to tune up

his game to be ready to challenge for a championship at Wimbledon, where play begins in late June.

"In a way I like this situation — that I don't know what's next, how my next match will be. I don't even know who I play, to be honest," said Federer, whose second-round opponent will be 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic. "I take it round by round, match by match."

After rhythmic clapping accompanied Federer's trot to the baseline for the match's open-

ing point, he got off to the perfect start against Istomin, who is ranked 204th and now is the owner of a seven-match Grand Slam losing streak but did upset Djokovic at the 2017 Australian Open.

Federer used a drop shot to earn a break point in the opening game, then converted it with a forehand winner, before holding to go up 2-0.

Just 1 1/2 hours later, it was over for Federer, who won the 2009 French Open for one of his 20 Grand Slam titles.

He shares that men's record with rival Rafael Nadal, who is scheduled to play his first-round match Tuesday to open his bid for a 14th championship in Paris and tiebreaking 21st major overall. Djokovic also is slated to make his debut on Day 3 of the clay-court tournament.

Williams and Begu took the court in the twilight at 9 p.m. with the stadium stands empty. Fans are being admitted for day matches this year, but not for night sessions.

Matches at the tournament in September 2020 stretched into the night on courts with new lights, but scheduled night play is

new this year.

Williams wasn't sharp with her serve but played aggressively, charging forward when she had the chance. Facing a set point in the tiebreaker, she dashed in and from the service line ripped a nervy swinging volley for a winner.

At 39, she seeks her fourth French Open title and a record-tying 24th Grand Slam singles title.

Bianca Andreescu, the 2019 U.S. Open champion, departed in the afternoon with a 6-7 (1), 7-6 (2), 9-7 defeat against 85th-ranked Tamara Zidansek of Slovenia.

The reigning women's champion, Iga Swiatek, picked up right where she left off last year: running yet another opponent this way and that in a 6-0, 7-5 victory over her best friend on the tennis circuit, Kaja Juvan.

Daniil Medvedev proved that perseverance pays, finally winning a French Open match on his fifth attempt. The second-seeded Russian, twice a runner-up at other majors, beat Alexander Bublik 6-3, 6-3, 7-5, after starting 0-4 for his French Open career.

AP Tennis Writer Howard Fendrich in Washington and AP Sports Writer Steven Wine in Miami contributed to this report.

Mitchell scores 30, Jazz beat Memphis 120-113 to go up 3-1

MEMPHIS, TENN. (AP): The Utah Jazz have put themselves in position to help erase a very bad memory from last year's Florida bubble.

Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points, and the top-seeded Jazz grabbed a 3-1 lead Monday night by holding off the Memphis Grizzlies 120-113.

That's the same lead the Jazz blew in losing their first-round series in seven games to Denver in the bubble. This time around, the team with the NBA's best record in the regular season is going home trying to close out this first round, best-of-seven series on Wednesday night in Salt Lake City.

"We obviously remember that feeling that we had last season, and it's not something we want to experience again," Jazz guard Mike Conley said.

This is a different Utah team with Bojan Bogdanovic available and Derrick Favors back on the bench. Conley also is more comfortable in his second season.

"We'll hopefully be able to get our minds focused on business and not let this one slip away like we did last year," Conley said.

Mitchell said another difference is the Jazz aren't satisfied being up 3-1.

"We have to go there and take care of homecourt back in Utah, and I think that's where our head is at," Mitchell said.

All-Star Rudy Gobert scored 13 of his 17 points in the third quarter. Jordan Clarkson, the NBA's 6th man of the year winner, scored 24. Bogdanovic added 13, Conley had 11.

Ja Morant, who averaged 33.7 points through the first three games, scored 23 and had 12 assists for Memphis. Dillon Brooks and Jaren Jackson Jr. each added 21, De'Anthony Melton had all 15 of his points in the fourth quarter and Jonas Valanciunas finished with 14 points and 12 rebounds.

Memphis opened the fourth quarter on a 12-2 run, taking advantage as the Jazz missed their first nine shots from the floor.

Melton hit 5 of 7 shots in the period — including a trio of 3s. His 3 with 5:30 left got the Grizzlies within 106-104.

Conley, with former Grizzlies teammates Zach Randolph and Tony Allen on hand, ended the Jazz's scoring drought with a 3. He also blocked a jumper by Morant and then hit another 3.

"He's kind of sneaky quiet," Utah coach Quin Snyder said of Conley. "He whispers, but you can hear him. I think he impacts the game so many ways."

The Jazz went 3 of 16 in the fourth but 11 of 12 at the free-throw line. Mitchell hit all six and finished 12 of 13 at the line.

"They've been playing with each other for a long time," Jackson said of the Jazz. "They have a little bit more playoff experience than us. So, they've got a good feel right now."

Memphis had another raucous, loud crowd waving growl towels that proclaimed "I'm On My Grizzly," quoting rapper J. Cole.

The Grizzlies had their best



start to a game in this series, scoring the first four points and leading by as much as four. Better yet, Utah never led by more than five and was up only 34-31 after the first quarter.

Yet Memphis, the youngest team in this postseason, never led by more than four. Utah showed off its talent and experience answering each Grizzlies' run.

"There's nothing to be frus-

trated about when you're giving great fight against the best team in the NBA," Memphis coach Taylor Jenkins said. "They just have a response for everything. We're giving everything we've got."

The teams swapped the lead 11 times with seven ties in the first half. The Jazz used a 13-2 run to take their biggest lead at 59-50 on back-to-back 3s by Mitchell before Morant scored

the final four of the half to trim Utah's lead to 59-54.

The Grizzlies got within 72-71 with 7:03 left in the third. Gobert's three-point play started a 13-2 spurt, and Utah led 100-87 after three.

TIP-INS

Jazz: Gobert missed the only shot he took in the first quarter, missed his second attempt in the second quarter and picked up his second foul at 9:50 left. He had just one point and two rebounds by halftime. ... Clarkson helped Utah finish with a 40-30 edge in bench scoring. ... They shot 17 of 34 (50%) on 3-pointers. ... They also had a 20-19 edge in fast-break points.

Grizzlies: They're now 4-11 all-time in Game 4. ... Valanciunas started this game much better than Game 3 when he scored all 10 of his points in the third quarter. This time, he had six points and two rebounds in nine minutes. ... Jackson's season high was 20 points against Toronto on May 8 after missing most of the season recovering from knee surgery.

Australian court upholds ban on most international travel

CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA (AP): An Australian court on Tuesday rejected a challenge to the federal government's draconian power to prevent most citizens from leaving the country so that they don't bring COVID-19 home.

Australia is alone among developed democracies in preventing its citizens and permanent residents from leaving the country except in "exceptional circumstances" where they can demonstrate a "compelling reason."

Most Australians have been stranded in their island nation since March 2020 under a government emergency order made under the powerful Biosecurity Act.

Libertarian group LibertyWorks argued before the full bench of the Federal Court in early May that Health Minister Greg Hunt did not have the power to legally enforce the travel ban that has prevented thousands of Australians from attending weddings and funerals, caring for dying relatives and meeting newborn babies.

LibertyWorks lawyer Jason Potts argued that Australians had a right to



leave their country under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that Australia had ratified.

But the three judges ruled that submission was based on the "erroneous premise that the right is absolute."

LibertyWorks' lawyers also argued that such a biosecurity control order could only be imposed on an individual rather than an entire population. The order could only be imposed if that individual had symptoms of a listed human disease, had been exposed to such a disease or had failed to

comply with travel requirements.

The judges ruled that that interpretation of the law would frustrate Parliament's clear intentions when lawmakers created the emergency powers in the Biosecurity Act in 2015.

"It may be accepted that the travel restrictions are harsh. It may also be accepted that they intrude upon individual rights," the judges said in their ruling. "But Parliament was aware of that."

LibertyWorks President Andrew Cooper said he was considering

an appeal to the High Court.

"We are very disappointed in the judgement today. We continue to believe that the outbound border closure is defective in law and, perhaps more importantly, unjust on human rights grounds. We must remind ourselves also that often things that are legal are not necessarily just," Cooper said in an email.

"While Europe and most of the world open up their borders, only North Korea and Australia stubbornly continue with strict controls over their citizen's ability to leave their country," Cooper added.

per added.

He had expected hundreds of thousands of Australians to fly within weeks if he had won.

Critics of the emergency order argue it is harshest for the 30% of Australians who were born overseas.

The government says tough border controls have played an important part in Australia's relative success in containing COVID-19 spread.

Surveys suggest most Australians applaud their government's drastic border controls.

The Australian newspaper published a survey last month that found 73% of respondents said the international border should remain closed until at least the middle of next year.

Australian Broadcasting Corp. last week reported its own survey had found 79% of respondents agree the international border should stay shut until the pandemic is under control globally.

Critics of the Australian travel restrictions argue that decisions on who can travel and why are inconsistent and lack transparency.

Esther and Charles

Baker, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish couple from Australia's second-largest city, Melbourne, were twice refused exemptions to fly to New Jersey to attend their youngest son's wedding in June last year.

They appealed to the Federal Court, citing religious and cultural reasons among their exceptional circumstances. But a judge dismissed their case and ordered the couple to pay the government's legal costs for their challenge.

A person at the center of a coronavirus cluster in Melbourne had been allowed to attend a wedding in India. He was not infected in that country but rather during the required 14-day hotel quarantine upon his return. Authorities say he was infected by a traveler in another room on his floor and that the virus was carried in the air.

Melbourne began a seven-day lockdown on Friday due to the cluster that by Tuesday had grown to more than 50 cases.

Australia and New Zealand opened a quarantine-free travel bubble in April and hope to create such bubbles with other countries in time.

China rejects Australian writer's torture claim in trial

BEIJING (AP): A Chinese government spokesperson on Tuesday rejected an Australian writer's complaint that he was tortured during interrogation before being put on trial on spying charges.

The Foreign Ministry spokesperson also accused Australia of "unfounded provocation" after its foreign minister said Yang Hengjun's incarceration since January 2019 was arbitrary detention.

"There is no arbitrary detention or forced confession with torture on Yang Jun," said spokesperson Wang Wenbin, referring to Yang by the name used by Chinese officials.

"We advise the Australian side to stop finger-pointing and unfound provocation against China's rule of law, stop hyping the issue or exerting pressures to grossly interfere with China's judicial sovereignty," Wang said.

The case has added to strains in Chinese-Australian relations that are at their chilliest in decades following disputes over technology, security and the coronavirus.

Yang, a crime novelist and blogger, said he asked the judge ahead of his trial last week to exclude records of his interrogation because he was tortured, according to a copy of his account seen by The Associated Press.

"It's illegal. Torture," Yang said in the account circulated to his supporters. He didn't say how the judge responded.

The court held a closed trial on Thursday and gave no indication of when a verdict would be released.

Chinese authorities have not released any details of the charges against Yang, who reportedly formerly worked for the country's Ministry of State Security as an intelligence agent.

Yang said the judge refused his request to

submit evidence and call witnesses during the trial, but agreed to include almost 100 pages of defense documents in his file.

Yang has denied the allegations. A conviction is virtually certain.

Chinese law prohibits use of confessions forced by torture or threats.

Yang's account said he was "tired and confused" during the hearing and "didn't have the spirit to speak enough." He said he spoke for less than five minutes in his own defense, but that the hearing "gave me a sense that things are OK."

Possible penalties range from three years in prison to the death penalty.

Beijing has blocked imports of Australian beef, wine, coal and other goods in retaliation for enacting legislation against foreign interference in politics, excluding telecom equipment giant Huawei from Australia's next-generation phone network and calling for an investigation into the origin of the coronavirus that emerged in China in late 2019.

Australia warned its citizens of a risk of arbitrary detention in China in July 2020.

Australian diplomats have visited Yang in detention, but Ambassador Graham Fletcher was denied entry to last week's trial.

In September, reporters Michael Smith of the Australian Financial Review and Bill Birtles of the Australian Broadcasting Corp. left China following demands by police to question them. That left Australian news outlets without any reporters in China.

Before their departure, Chinese police questioned both journalists about Australian citizen Cheng Lei, a business news anchor for CGTN, the English-language news channel of Chinese state television, who was detained a month earlier.

New Zealand latest nation to sign space agreement with NASA

WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND (AP): New Zealand announced Tuesday it was the latest country to sign a space agreement with NASA, just as New Zealand's nascent space industry begins to take off.

New Zealand became the eleventh signatory to the Artemis Accords, a blueprint for space cooperation and supporting the U.S. space agency's plans to return humans to the moon by 2024 and to launch a historic human mission to Mars.

Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta said New Zealand was one of only a handful of nations able to launch rockets into space.

"New Zealand is committed to ensuring the next phase of space exploration is conducted in a safe, sustainable and transparent manner and in full compliance with international law," Mahuta said.

New Zealand said it's particularly interested in making sure that minerals taken from the moon or elsewhere in space are used sustainably.

California-based company Rocket Lab, which specializes in putting small satellites into orbit, made history in New Zealand four years ago when it launched a test rocket into space from the remote Mahia Peninsula. It began commercial launches in 2018.

Rocket Lab founder Peter Beck, a New Zealander, said signing the accords was testament to the country's growing role in the space industry and opened the door for collaboration and mission opportunities with NASA.

There could also soon be a second New Zealand launch site. The government announced Tuesday it was partnering with Indigenous Maori to buy land in the Canterbury region to develop a space launch site.

Estimates indicate the New Zealand space industry is worth 1.7 billion New Zealand dollars (\$1.2 billion) and that space manufacturing generates about NZ\$250 million a year.

Biden to honor forgotten victims of Tulsa race massacre

WASHINGTON (AP): President Joe Biden will take part in a remembrance of one of the nation's darkest — and largely forgotten — moments of racial violence when he helps commemorate the 100th anniversary of the destruction of a thriving Black community in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Biden's visit Tuesday, in which he will grieve for the hundreds of Black people killed by a white mob a century ago, comes amid a national reckoning on racial justice. And it will stand in stark contrast to the most recent visit to Tulsa by a president, which took place last year.

Biden will be the first president to participate in remembrances of the destruction of what was known as "Black Wall Street." In 1921 — on May 31 and June 1 — Tulsa's white residents and civil society leaders looted and burned to the ground the Greenwood district and used planes to drop projectiles on it.

Up to 300 Black Tulsans were killed, and thousands of survivors were forced for a time into internment camps overseen by the National Guard. Burned bricks and a fragment of a church basement are about all that survive today of the more than 30-block historically Black district.

America's continuing struggle over racial justice will continue to test Biden, whose presidency would have been impossible without overwhelming support from Black voters, both in the Democratic primaries and the general election.

Biden has pledged to help combat racism in policing and other areas of life following nationwide protests after George Floyd's death a year ago that reignited a national conversation about race. Floyd, a Black man, was killed by white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes.

After Chauvin was convicted in April, Biden said the country's work was far from finished with the verdict, declaring, "We can't stop here."

He called on Congress to act swiftly to address policing reform. But he has also long projected himself as an ally of police, who are struggling with criticism about long-used tactics and training methods and difficulties in recruitment.

Despite its horror, the Tulsa massacre has only recently entered the national discourse — and the presidential visit will put an even brighter spotlight on the event.

"This is so important because we have to recognize what we have done if we are going to be otherwise," said Eddie Glaude, chair of the Center for African American Studies at Princeton University. Biden's visit, Glaude said, "has to be more than symbolic. To tell the truth is the precondition for reconciliation, and reconciliation is the basis for repair."

Biden, while visiting the Greenwood Cultural Center, is set to announce new measures to help narrow the wealth gap between Blacks and whites and reinvest



in underserved communities by expanding access to homeownership and small-business ownership.

The White House said the administration will take steps to address disparities that result in Black-owned homes being appraised at tens of thousands of dollars less than comparable homes owned by whites as well as issue new federal rules to fight housing discrimination.

The administration is also setting a goal of increasing the share of federal contracts awarded to small disadvantaged businesses by 50% by 2026, funneling an estimated additional \$100 billion to such businesses over the five-year period, according to the White House.

Biden will also discuss ways his jobs plan — still a subject of negotiation with Congress — can help create jobs and build wealth in communities of color.

Historians say the massacre in Tulsa began after a local newspaper drummed up a furor over a Black man accused of stepping on a white girl's foot. When Black Tulsans

showed up with guns to prevent the man's lynching, white residents responded with overwhelming force.

A grand jury investigation at the time concluded, without evidence, that unidentified agitators had given Tulsa's African Americans both their firearms and what was described as their mistaken belief "in equal rights, social equality and their ability to demand the same."

Tensions persist 100 years later.

Organizers called off a headline commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre, saying no agreement could be reached over monetary payments to three survivors of the deadly attack. It highlights broader debates over reparations for racial injustice.

Reparations for Black Americans whose ancestors were enslaved and for other racial discrimination have been debated in the U.S. since slavery ended in 1865. Now they are being discussed by colleges and universities

Kristen Bell Reunites With Her Parents for the First Time in a Year

The Veronica Mars star met up with her parents for the first time following the coronavirus pandemic.

Kristen Bell has found her Good Place.

The Veronica Mars actress visited with her parents for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic and it was a cause to celebrate.

“Saw my parents for the first time in over a year,” Bell captioned her post on Instagram with sweet photos of her mask-clad folks, Tom and Lorelei Bell. “It was my dad’s birthday, so we took him out to a nice dinner and he told me that since it was his birthday he absolutely did not have to take his mask off for the pictures I wanted. I get my stubbornness from him. Happy birthday, dad. I’m so glad you’re mine.”

Bell shared two adorable snapshots, the first with her father in the middle with his arms around both Kristen and her mother, followed by a selfie with Bell and her dad. Bell’s style choices were effortlessly chic as she wore a leopard print dress topped with a leather jacket



and monogrammed crossbody clutch.

Bell’s mother Lorelei works as a nurse, and Bell previously shared her gratitude for her mom’s heroism in the face of the pandemic.

“I learned how empowering it is to care for someone else and the importance of recognizing when you have to

put others before yourself,” Bell told People in February 2021. “My mother would come home with stories and I was able to glean that helping a person affects so much more than that one person. It affects their families, their friends, their colleagues... If you help one person, you are actually helping 100 other people. We are like stones thrown in a pond—there is a massive ripple effect.”

The Good Place star also opened up about her quarantine experience during Yahoo’s Reset Your Mindset: Pandemic Parenting live-stream event in March 2021.

“Balancing work and parenting and online learning during the pandemic, and especially supporting mental health, it was really hard,”

Bell admitted. “We explained what COVID was and why it exists and we told [our kids] everything really early on and we just reminded them that we’re luckier than most people and we have to do what we can to help others during this time.”

Dance Moms Star Zackery Torres Shares They’re Transitioning



The Abby’s Ultimate Dance Competition alum publicly announced their “life update” in a Tiktok video shared on May 30.

Zackery Torres is sashaying into a new chapter of their lives.

On May 30, the former Dance Moms star, who uses both they/them and she/her pronouns, took to Tiktok to announce their big “life update.”

With Dua Lipa’s hit song “Levitating” playing in the background, Torres revealed their news while dancing.

“I’m transitioning!” the reality TV personality shared. “That means I’m transgender if you didn’t know. My pronouns are they/she, which means that they or she are totally fine, and I’m just hopping on here to tell you that I’m going to be posting more on Tiktok and I’m excited about it!”

Torres was previously the first male-born contestant on Abby’s Ultimate Dance Competition with coach Abby Lee Miller. They went on to compete with instructor Cathy Stein and the Candy Apples team for Dance Moms.

Since their reality TV

fame, Torres graduated with honors from the University of Southern California in 2021 with a Bachelors of Fine Arts degree in dance. According to their Twitter page, Torres is enrolled in a Masters of Arts program in public relations and advertising to be completed in 2022.

The trans non-binary dancer came out their sophomore year, and revealed to USC student newspaper The Daily Trojan that their time in the spotlight with Dance Moms affected their coming out.

“I started seeing all of the expectations that teachers—well-known dance teachers, and well-known choreographers—had for me as a male dancer growing up and at the time identifying as a boy,” Torres explained in October 2020. “Oh, you’re too feminine, you need to dance like a man.” Just having teachers tell you that on national television, all this stuff, it kind of really got to me.”

Torres continued, “Everyone always talks about how inclusive the arts communities are. But I’m just not really feeling it. I’m not seeing it on an everyday scale.”

They wrote an instructional guide, An Evolving Conversation on Gender: Dance Edition, in August 2020 to advocate for change and guide communities in discussion topics. The book was published in conjunction with the organization Continuum Community, in which Torres is a founder and CEO.

“My goal in some way is to keep growing, keep pushing, so that any little young dancers out there can look up and see a non-binary dancer who went through the convention circuit, who went to college, who is trying to do something better for the community,” Torres previously explained in a conversation with ballet teacher Francisco Gella.

“When I think about gender inclusivity and I think about how we can best move forward as a society and how we evolve and grow, I think about compromise...It’s not about us compromising our identity; it’s about those who feel strong enough and feel comfortable enough to meet in the middle for a minute to then bring everyone over to the side of inclusivity.”

Survivor’s Sierra Dawn Gives Birth, Welcomes First Baby With Joe Anglim

The Survivor alums welcomed their first child together, a baby girl. Find out the sweet name Sierra Dawn and Joe Anglim gave their newborn daughter.

Survivor alums Sierra Dawn and Joe Anglim are ready to take on their next role: Parenthood!

On Monday, May 31, the 34-year-old star took to Instagram to announce the sweet and special news that she welcomed her first child, a baby girl.

“Della Dawn Anglim, our world is forever changed,” the new mom captioned her post, alongside an image of her little one adorably wrapped up in a printed swaddle. “Thanks for choosing us baby girl.”

Additionally, Joe shared the exciting baby news on his Instagram page, writing, “There are no words..We are forever grateful for you and can’t wait for the most exciting and best season yet.”

Sierra sweetly commented, “I already see

her daddy in her.”

Of their newborn daughter’s unique name, the couple tells E! News, “We wanted to give her name that had a strong, powerful meaning. Something that was timeless. We chose Della, meaning noble and Dawn after her mom, sharing middle names.”

Moreover, the pair tells us their little one arrived on May 28, weighing 6 lbs 14 oz.

Earlier this month, the reality TV personality gushed about her pregnancy. As she described the experience, “Being pregnant has been a magical ride and I can wait for the adventure of being parents with this amazing man!”

Last Thanksgiving, the couple revealed they were expecting their first child together.

“The turkey ain’t the only thing in the oven this year,” Sierra cheekily shared at the time. “#grateful #cheers it’s sparkling apple cider from here on out!”

The 32-year-old star took a different approach with the baby announcement.



MULTI-COLORED MAMA! Actor Christine Quinn who gave birth to her first child on May 15, took her dogs for a walk while wearing a multi-colored Gucci tracksuit.

ARIES:

The muggles may be complaining that the network is full of glitches and that staying connected to the stream of creativity is an impossible task. But that does not hold true for you, Aries. This chapter of your life is all about putting your unique ideas into action, inspiring change, and going after your dreams fearlessly. What your spirit guides want you to know: the world is your oyster, baby!

TAURUS:

Sometimes, 2 + 2 equals 4. At other times, it adds up to 22. The world of mysteries cannot be quantified or explained logically. It can only be perceived by those who listen to the rhythm of their hearts and trust the omens that are being sent their way. So, allow yourself to believe in magic, Taurus. Pay attention to the sound of the birds and the movement of the winds. The matrix is rather glitchy and the veil between the worlds is becoming thinner with each passing day.

GEMINI:

The truth is not always pleasant. Yet it must be spoken, Gemini. You have been placed in this position for a reason. Trust your higher wisdom and let go of the need to please people. Given that we’re in the midst of eclipse + retrograde season, a lot of the information you need in order to move forward could be concealed from you. Take the next step with caution. If you can, put off important decisions until clarity prevails.

Tip: The truth must be spoken. You have been placed in this position for a reason.

CANCER:

Mercury retrograde gets a bad rep for causing

miscommunication, but it’s not without a reason. Here’s another way to look at the situation: recognise what’s coming up as an opportunity to address the issues that you shy away from. Trust that this will strengthen your bond instead of derailing it. As such, clarity of purpose is going to be an important theme for you in the weeks to come. If you have been unsure about which way to go from here, prepare to find the answers you’re looking for.

LEO:

It’s true that you’re caught in the midst of a storm, but you’re not a victim in this story, Leo. It’s time to remind yourself that things are happening for you and not to you—that this is a time of burning away the old karma so you can start over with a clean slate. So, integrate the soul lessons that are providing you with the opportunity to evolve. ‘Onwards and upwards’ is a mantra that will serve you, wild one.

VIRGO:

You’ve been pouring unconditionally into the cups of others and it’s time to shift the focus towards ‘the self’. Let inner work become a priority, Virgo. Engage in rituals that make you feel nurtured on a mind, body, and soul level. Yoga, meditation, breathwork, and journaling are some of the ways in which you can refuel your own cup today. What you don’t want to do: let your emotions get the better of you. There are some people who do not deserve a second chance (or a place in your life) and it’s a good idea to walk them to the exit door today.

Tip: Prioritise self-care.

LIBRA:

Dreams, visions, omens and symbols—things are getting wild around here and you’re not complaining. Honour this as a time to look inwards rather than outwards and acknowledge the gifts that were granted to you at birth. If you’re being called to share these gifts on a public platform, take inspired action. When it comes to interpersonal relationships, though, tread cautiously. Focus on what is not being shared as much as what is. This will give you a deeper insight into where the other party is at.

SCORPIO:

There are people who show up for you on joyous occasions in order to be a part of the celebration, but disappear at the first sign of trouble. You know exactly who we are talking about, Scorpio, and it’s time to hit the delete button. Remember, obsessing over them will *not* change who they are on a fundamental level. As such, you’re being asked to tread cautiously and read between the lines today. If you have a feeling that information is being hidden from you, it probably is. Word for the wise: don’t make any big decisions until clarity prevails.

SAGITTARIUS:

You may feel like every time you move closer to the destination, the destination moves further away from you. But, that is far from the truth, Sagittarius. Everything you’ve ever done has been recorded in the Book of Records, and will give you the returns you desire and deserve in due course of time. On your part, be consistent and show up for your big dream, every single day!

CAPRICORN:

When something or somebody is right for you, you’ll know instantly. When it isn’t, the Universe will keep sending you the signs you need. So, pay attention to what is being revealed through the channels. Chances are, it’s time to leave behind something that isn’t a vibrational match for you. When it comes to matters related to work, you’re being asked to be persistent. It’s true that there are certain roadblocks that are preventing forward movement. But when you think about it, you will realise that they too are serving a purpose.

AQUARIUS:

Don’t you love it when the forces hit the accelerator button on your behalf? Now is such a time in your life, Aquarius. A time when projects that have been stuck for a while will begin to move full steam ahead. It’s going to be a wild ride, baby, and you’re going to love every minute of it! Those who’ve been looking for love online could get lucky too. Be present to the suitor at hand and give them a chance to show you who they are. Chances are, you could be pleasantly surprised.

PISCES:

Sometimes, you just need to put on that ball gown, set up a candlelight date with yourself, uncork that vintage mMerlot and sway to your favourite jazz melodies from back in the day. It’s a milk-and-honey kind of day in the Pisces HQ and you’re in the mood to spoil yourself silly. What’s more, you’ll find that the Muse is also close at hand, waiting to be seduced by you. Allow yourself to traverse to that mysterious realm that lies between dream and reality. You’ll be surprised by what you are likely to chance upon today.