



**WITH KING KONG, A LITTLE SWAGGER RETURNS TO THE BOX OFFICE**  
pg 08

**MONITOR AND EVALUATE, THEN HOLD ACCOUNTABLE**

pg 04

**NEPALIS LOSE LIVELIHOODS AFTER CHINA CLOSES BORDER**  
pg 08



# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Pages 8 | ₹ 5

## Bojoghari's losing candidate accuses Area MLA of interference and election officers of incompetence

SURAJ LIMBOO

GANGTOK, 03 APR:

The 2nd Mile-Bojoghari ward candidate Bhaichung Tshering Bhutia who lost to Palzor Lepcha by one vote has accused Kabi Lungstok MLA, Forest Minister Karma Loday Bhutia, of interfering in the Municipal elections in the ward and also significantly, officials in-charge of counting of incompetence in their handling of tendered votes and rejection of postal ballots.

Bhaichung Tshering Bhutia and his supporters today also announced that they will not support SKM if the party fields Karma Loday Bhutia from the constituency again in the next Assembly elections.

Mr Bhaichung Tshering has questioned the counting process and alleged that 7 postal ballots were rejected. This, he insists, was wrongfully done and his supporters insist that he had eight postal ballots from family members, but officially received only one postal ballot vote.

The third candidate from Bojoghari, Ongden Bhutia alleged that the tendered votes have not been counted.

Mr Bhaichung Tshering got 666 votes while Palzor Lepcha won with 667 votes.

What the final chart on the vote count for the ward also reveals is that Mr Bhaichung Tshering won in the EVM votes, with Mr Lepcha pulling ahead when the postal ballots were counted. Against the 645 votes polled by Mr Lepcha in the EVMs, Mr Bhaichung Tshering received 665.

In the postal ballot count, however, Mr Lepcha pulled ahead receiving 25 of the valid postal ballots while Mr Bhaichung Tshering received only one postal ballot and seven postal ballot votes were rejected.

Interestingly, while the Final Result Sheet for the ward released immediately after the result was announced shows that there were no tendered votes, later in the evening, the IPR Department forwarded another Final Result Sheet issued by the Municipal Returning Officer [the DC-East] which records one tendered vote.

According to Section 49P of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, if a voter realises that someone has already voted in her name, she can approach the presiding officer at the polling booth and flag the issue.

Upon answering the presiding officer's questions about her identity satisfactorily, the voter will be allowed to cast a "tender vote." Tender votes are cast on ballot papers and sealed and locked away. These votes are useful when the margin between the winning candidate and the runner-up is slim. However, if the difference is large, tender votes are not counted.

## Also on Results Day!

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 APR:

A grandson defeated his grandfather in Byadong ward of Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat of West Sikkim in this Municipal election, perhaps the only ward where family contested against family in Sikkim.

The grandson, Praveen Darjee, won with 94 votes to become the next Councillor of Byadong while the grandfather received 61 votes. Proud of his grandson and despondent at the loss, Sandu Darjee is sure to have some 'mixed feelings' about this election.

In another interesting incident, at the DAC-East, a supporter flung her gold ring along with flowers at the winning candidate.

What ensued was a gathering of supporters trying to look for the ring amidst the chanting of 'Zindabads', informs Summit Times reporter, Suraj Limboo.

## 6 new Covid cases detected in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 APR:

Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached 6251 with six new cases of coronavirus reported being reported in the last 24 hours.

In his daily health bulletin on Saturday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia, informed that among the new cases reported in the capital is one person from near Baha'i School, Tadong, one from Tadong Senior Secondary School, one from 5th Mile-Tadong, one from Tashi Namgyal SSS and one from near the Forest check-post at Sichey.

He added that the sample of one person from Ranipool in East District was also tested COVID-19 positive.

Mr Bhutia informed that the list of primary contacts of the TNA student who tested positive for COVID-19 on Friday has 107 names.

turn to pg02

# Gangtok elects 15 new councillors, few surprises and some close contests

SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 03 APR:

The District Administrative Centre [East] were a festive air on Saturday as counting for the three urban bodies of East Sikkim began here early in the morning. By the time counting ended a little before 4PM, there were very few surprises in the results sheet, some close contests and only one controversy.

Among the supporters, there was much apprehension, but even this dissipated early as the more keenly watched wards were among the first few to be counted and while the early counts allowed for much excitement, as the list wore on, the surprises too dimmed away.

The counting for 24 municipal



wards under East District was held at the counting hall of District Administration Centre

[East]. The Strong Room was opened in the morning under the supervision of Municipal

Returning Officer [East], Ragul K in the presence of Election

their election agents and then the polled Electronic Voting Machines were shifted to the Counting Hall. The counting procedures began with postal ballots followed by counting of votes recorded in EVMs and compilation of data.

Out of the 19 wards in Gangtok Municipal Corporation, four had already been bagged uncontested and elections were held for 15.

The counting of votes of municipal wards under Gangtok Municipal Corporation started with Bojoghari-2nd Mile Ward. Here, Palzor Lepcha won by a solitary vote, his 667 votes one more than Bhaichung Tshering Bhutia who received 666. The third candidate in the ward, Ongden Bhutia received 320 votes.

turn to pg02

## Gyalshing counts municipal votes



SUMMIT REPORT

GALSHING, 03 APR:

The counting of votes pertaining to the third Municipal Election for Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat was completed at the Conference Hall of the Emergency Operation Centre here at Rabdentse today, a press release from IPR Department informs.

Gyalshing, it may be recalled, was a municipal council thus far and was demoted to Nagar Panchayat status for these elections. This issue did not however feature anywhere during the campaign even though the matter has not been explained in any detail.

Meanwhile, today, the counting process began at 8AM amid tight security

in a peaceful environment, IPR informs.

After the counting, this is the picture that has emerged:

Byadong: Praveen Darjee won with 94 of the 276 votes polled.

Naya Bazaar: LakiDoma Bhutia won with 208 votes out of 526.

Central Gyalshing: Khina Maya Tewari won with 286 votes of the 835 votes polled.

New Gyalshing: Devendra Prasad Sharma won with 284 votes out of 512.

The Certificates of Election were handed over to all the winning candidates by the Municipal Returning Officer (West) in the presence of Election Observer (West) and other officials, it is informed.

## Results for 5 wards of Mangan Nagar Panchayat

MANGAN, 03 APR (IPR):

The counting of votes for the Municipal Elections 2021 for 7 Mangan Nagar Panchayat took place at the Conference Hall of Zilla Bhawan today in the presence of the Municipal Returning Officer (North), TT Kaleon, Election Observer (North), DB Rawat, Assistant Municipal Returning Officer (North), Sonam Lepcha, officials from Election Department, candidates and the election agents.

There are five wards under 7 Mangan Nagar Panchayat, out of which, ward 2- Pentok stood uncontested. The results for the four wards are stated below:



For ward 1- Upper Mangan Bazar (ST), the winner is Ugen Palzor Kazi, who received 188 votes.

For ward 2- Pentok (ST-W) the winner is Norkit Lepcha (uncontested).

For ward 3- Power Colony (UR-W), the winner is Premkit Lepcha, who received 91 votes.

For ward 4- Rinzing Namgyal Marg (ST), the

winner is Hangu Lachenpa, who received 168 votes.

For ward 5- Lower Mangan Bazar (UR-W), the winner is Tshering Doma, who received 215 votes.

The Municipal Returning Officer thanked all the officials and staff along with Police Personnel for being instrumental in conducting the elections smoothly.

## South dist's two towns get new councillors



BIKAS CHETTRI

NAMCHI, 03 APR:

The festival of Municipal Elections 2021 ended in the two urban towns of South Sikkim with counting today.

The total votes per candidates were announced and winning candidates handed over certificates of election for the four wards in Namchi Municipal Council and four wards of Nayabazar-Jorethang Nagar Panchayat at the DAC here.

The strong room where the electronic voting machines were stored was opened at 8AM in the presence of the candidates and their election agents

at the DAC and closed by 11AM after the counting was over.

The list of winner candidates for each of the municipality wards and the votes they received are as follows:

Gangyap: NimaChoden Lepcha with 368 votes;

Dambudara: Sailendra Chettri with 468 votes;

Upper Ghurpisey: Pema Norbu Bhutia with 350 votes

Upper Boomtar: Sabitri Tamang with 384 votes;

And for Nayabazar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat:

Trikaleshwar: Manjari Rai with 355 votes;

Daragaon: Pabitra Kumar Sharma with 626

votes; Majhigaon: Samten Moktan (Tamang) with 903 votes;

and Nayabazar: Uma Sunar Biswa with 503 votes.

The election team of Municipal Election 2021 South Sikkim handed over a token of appreciation and a bouquet to the Municipal Election Returning Officer, M Bharani Kumar, after the counting and announcement of the votes and winning candidates were over.

Three wards of NMC and one ward of NJNP had already been declared uncontested during the nomination.

## Singtam and Rangpo Nagar Panchayats



Winners of Singtam Nagar Panchayat polls [from left to right] Yad Kri Kami, Bindhya Subba, Suresh Tamang, Kishor Chettri and Mukesh Agrawal. [Photo courtesy: Yogen Thatal]

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 APR:

The counting of votes of municipal elections in five wards of Singtam Nagar Panchayat and four wards of Rangpo Nagar Panchayat in East District was held here at District Administrative Centre [East], Sichey on Saturday. It has to be mentioned here that Larishna Tamang from Chanatar ward under Rangpo Nagar Panchayat had won uncontested.

In Pipal Dara ward under Singtam Nagar Panchayat, Yad Kumari Kami emerged victorious with 298 votes, while Rajani Singh Cintury came close

with 233 votes. Ranjana Lamichaney secured only 48 votes.

Mukesh Agarwal won Daragaon ward with 285 votes, while his closest contender was Rupesh Kumar Prasad with 202 votes. Similarly, Pranay Sharma secured 85 votes, Ta Tshering Lepcha got 71 votes, Manoj Gupta and Ram Naresh Giri got 18 votes each and Ram Narayan Prasad secured only 12 votes.

In Mandir Line ward, Bindhya Subba emerged victorious with 348 votes, while her contender Rajani Pradhan secured 170 votes and Anu Darjee got 115 votes.

turn to pg02



## Neighbourhood Youth Parliament at Niz Rammeng



### SUMMIT REPORT NAMTHANG, 03 APR:

Neighbourhood Youth Parliament was held at Niz Rammeng under Namthang BAC, South Sikkim, today. The Parliament was organized by Nehru Yuva Kendra Namchi under the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs Government of India.

A total of eight youths of the locality participated in the Youth Parliament. The programme was attended by Panchayat President, Rammeng Gram Panchayat Unit, Dolma Tamang, along with other panchayat members. Also present were Deputy Secretary

Mines and Geology Department Sikkim, AB Gurung, Bharat Excellence Awardee, Som Bahadur Rai of Karek, South Sikkim along with Sushma Subba and Sushmita Tamang National Youth Volunteer of Namthang Block under Nehru Yuva Kendra Namchi as guest speakers.

## Upper Ghurpisey's new councillor thanks party and well-wishers



### SUMMIT REPORT NAMCHI, 03 APR:

Pema Norbu Bhutia, popularly known as "Norbu Sir", the new ward councillor of Namchi Municipal Council elected from Upper Ghurpisey, thanked the Chief Minister's wife, Krishna Kumari Rai, after his victory

today and heralded her as a pillar of strength. He also thanked SKM functionaries and cadre, supporters and well-wishers for his triumph.

Mr Bhutia registered a convincing victory securing 68.76% of the votes polled.

He also dedicated the

victory to the ideology and vision of the SKM party and the people of his ward.

He assured that he will work tirelessly for the welfare and betterment of his Ward and was accorded a grand reception by his supporters at Upper Ghurpisey.

## Gangtok elects 15 new councillors,....

This started the day on an interesting note for the vote count watchers and also led to some controversy [read accompanying report for details].

In another contesting fight, Nell Bahadur Chettri won Burtuk with his 1,068 votes defeating the nearest contestant, Durga Bahadur Chettri who got 1019 votes. The winning margin was slim 48 votes for a constituency which has among the largest electoral roll and with its nine candidates, all in active campaign mode throughout, the most keenly contested of wards even if the voteshare of other candidates does not reflect it.

In Burtuk, Kishore Tamang got 296 votes, Suk Bahadur Gurung received 221 votes, Palmu Sherpa got 100 votes, Saroj Gurung got 79 votes, Sunita Chettri got 58 votes, Chandra Bahadur Gurung received 35 votes and Ram Giri secured 18 votes.

Kala Rai emerged victorious from Lower Sichey, a ward which was much in the news in the run-up. Her 1179 votes put her comfortably past her closest competition, Bandana Rai who secured 619 votes, Bimala Gurung got 278 votes, Anugrah Rai received 204 votes and Srijana Rai secured 32.

It was an easy victory for Chungkela Lepcha from Chandmari as well with 1050 votes, while her nearest contenders Tenzing Ongmu Bhutia got 265 votes and Dikila Bhutia secured 256 votes. Likewise, Doncee Lama got 184 votes and Diki Bhutia secured 111 votes.

The two-way contest at Tathangchen went in favour of Pema Lhamu Lamtha who received 856 votes to get past Tashi Lhamu Lepcha who got 385 votes.

In another contesting one-on-one contest in Development Area, Tshering Palden Bhutia got 1434 votes to beat Susan Tamang who polled 843 votes.

It was again a two-way contest at Diesel Power House ward, where Bindhya Cintury secured an easy victory with her 1055 votes against former GMC councillor, Srijana Khati, who received 370 votes.

Among the six candidates in Arithang-II ward, Raju Tamang emerged victorious with 1187 votes, while Rajeney Gurung got 698 votes, Prakash Thapa secured 231 votes, Navraj Tiwari got 34 votes, Shabir Ahmed Khan received 18 votes and Indra Kumar Gurung got 13 votes.

At Lower MG Marg-Lall Bazaar ward, Ashok Kumar Prasad beat six other contestants securing an easy victory with 1041 votes compared to his closest contender, Lakpa Sherpa who got 472 votes and Surja Chettri who received 346 votes. Similarly, Kanayalall Gupta secured 122 votes, Kailash Chandra Pradhan got 67 votes, Kunga Bhutia got 59 votes and Ajay Kumar Agarwal secured 29 votes.

Sandeep Malu emerged victorious with 336 votes in another contesting ward, that of Upper MG Marg which had nine candidates but only eight actually in the fray. Kailash Agarwal came second with 269 votes, while Prem Prakash Goyal secured 191 votes, Prahlad Agarwal got 108 votes, Mohan Lal Sarda received 57 votes, Sunita Sirohia got 53, Ramesh Kumar Agarwal 48 votes, Kailash Chandra Pradhan secured 25 votes and AmritSinghi got just 09 votes.

The close contest at Tibet Road ward went in favour of Diki Lhamu Lepcha with 586, while her contenders also did respectably well with Hissey Doma Bhutia receiving 437 votes and PempaLhamuTamang securing 385 votes.

In a two-contest for Pani House ward, NorbuTamang secured 576 votes to defeat Mingma Lhamu Bhutia who got 244 votes.

It was a close contest at Daragaon-Lumsey ward as well where Milan Gautam emerged victorious with 1465 votes and his close contender YogeshChettri securing 1121 votes. Daya Ram Bhattarai, the third candidate secured 88 votes.

Chewang Thendup Lepcha won Tadong ward with 659 votes, while Sonam Pintso Bhutia gave a keen fight with 516 votes and Gyamtso Bhutia secured 345 votes and Tsewang Rinzing Bhutia got 189 votes.

In another one-on-one contest, Ranipool ward went in favour of AshaChettri who secured an easy victory with 1467 votes against her contender Yashoda Chettri who polled 525 votes.

The candidates who are already in the GMC after having won unopposed are: , which includes Karma Tempo Rapgyal from Arithang-I, Sabita Pradhan from Deorali-Upper Syari, Rubina Gurung from Lower Tadong-6th Mile and Aruna Chettri from Upper Sichey ward.

## Union Foreign Secretary calls on Governor

### SUMMIT REPORT

#### GANGTOK, 03 APR:

Foreign Secretary of India, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, called on Governor Ganga Prasad at Raj Bhawan today.

It was a courtesy called on by the Foreign Secretary who was here to attend the inaugural session of "Kanchenjunga Dialogue" organized by Sikkim University.

The Governor stated that Sikkim, despite being a small state, holds a lot of potential in organic farming, tourism industry, hydro power, horticulture and floriculture, etc.

The Foreign Secretary spoke about the importance of the Look East Policy and India Act East Policy for development in the northeast region.

Mr Shringla said that



Northeast India will play an important role in India's Act East policy.

The Central government is building infrastructure so that the Northeast emerges as an important hub in India's engagement with South East Asian countries, he said.

He also stated that the main focus of the government is to extend connectivity through rail, roads, and air in order to improve cultural and trade exchange between

NE states and neighbouring countries.

The Foreign Secretary appreciated the State government for its efforts to run the state in smooth manner and extend best possible assistance for developmental project.

The Foreign Secretary was accompanied by Joint Secretary Policy Planning and Research, Dr Anupam Ray and Director FSO of Ministry of External Affairs, Satwant Khanalia.

## PEER Educators Training for students by SAATHI



### SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 03 APR:

SAATHI an NGO supported by Titan Company Ltd. organised three-day non-residential Peer Educators Training for Students on different aspects of substance abuse and various Life Skills at Namthang Government Senior Secondary School, South Sikkim, from 01-03 Apr, a press release informs.

Students from 6 different Government Schools of Sikkim attended the training in which 62 students and 6 teachers participated. Schools that participated were Kabrey Secondary School, Phong Secondary School, Kateng Secondary School, Maniram Secondary School, Bikmat Senior Secondary School & Mamring Junior High School.

During the camp, the

students were trained on physical, emotional and social effects of alcohol, marijuana, tobacco and other substances; Effects of drugs and alcohol abuse in education, goals and future success; How to say "no" to drugs in practical situations and to have a positive attitude.

Various resource persons covered various topics during the training like ASI

Namthang Police Station, TB Gurung took session on Legal Aspects on Substance Abuse, Psychologist Roshni Chhetri took session on Decision Making, Problem Solving & Critical Thinking, Kavyaswari Rai covered the topic on Coping with emotion and stress/peer pressure.

Dr Kulzan Lama took session on Medical As-

pects of substance abuse. Similarly, Udai Rai, Counselor, SRDS Nimitar shared his life experience with students, Kalden Gyatso Bhutia, Novelist & Storyteller took the session on Story Telling and techniques of writing and final session was on Awareness on usage of social media covered by Advocate, Pragya Parama, Co-founder Accelerator & Eastern Himalayan News Service.

A talent show was also organized to encourage and motivate children, wherein they presented various programs. The training camp concluded with thank you note to the students for attending and teachers for helping in organising the training successfully. A feedback was done through Google form and certificates were distributed to the students.

## BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma's campaign ban reduced to 24 hours

### NEW DELHI/ GUWAHATI, 03 APR [PTI]:

The Election Commission has halved Assam minister and senior BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma's 48-hour campaign ban - which was handed down late Friday night for threatening to send BPF chief Hagrama Mohilary, an opposition leader whose party had formerly allied with his, to jail.

With his ban reduced to just 24 hours, Mr Sarma will now be able to campaign tomorrow - the final day before the third and final phase of Assembly elections take place on Tuesday.

In a letter to Mr Sarma the Election Commission said it had taken note of "your unconditional apology and assurance/undertaking" and would modify its earlier order "and reduce the period of debarment from election campaign from 48 hours to 24 hours..."

"You have also pleaded on the grounds that you are yourself a

candidate in the constituency that is scheduled to vote on April," the letter added.

Mr Sarma - who is the BJP's main poll strategist and has been listed as a 'star campaigner' - petitioned the top poll body earlier today, and offered his "sincere regret and assurance of abiding by the MCC (Model Code of Conduct) in the future..."

Mr Sarma had asked the Election Commission to cut his ban from 48 hours to 24 hours.

The halving of his ban comes after reports this morning that Mr Sarma had approached the Gauhati High Court to challenge the Election Commission's order. However, sources close to him soon denied this. They said Mr Sarma had accepted the top poll body's order.

Himanta Biswa Sarma, the BJP's go-to man in the northeast, is a four-time MLA (the first two of those terms were as a Congress leader) from the Jalukbari constituency.

The Election Commis-

sion issued its original ban order late Friday night, after it upheld a complaint by the Congress; the party said Mr Sarma threatened to send Hagrama Mohilary - whose Bodoland People's Front is part of the opposition alliance - to jail by misusing the National Investigation Agency.

Mr Mohilary was once an ally of the BJP but switched to the Congress after the BJP joined hands with the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) to form Bodoland Territorial Council in December.

The election to the 126-member Assam Assembly has been spread over three phases with 77.2 per cent of the electorate exercising their franchise in 39 constituencies in the second phase on April 1. In the first phase on March 27 around 76 per cent of voters in 30 constituencies cast their vote.

The third and final phase will be held April 6, with votes to be counted May 2.

## ICAR-NRCO interactive meeting with SHGs of Takchang village



### GANGTOK, 03 APR (PIB):

Scientists of ICAR-NRCO had an interactive meeting with the Self-Help Group members of Takchang villages on the implementation of project on "Augmenting Farmers' Income through Horticulture Technological Interventions in Takshong Village in Sikkim".

The interactive meeting was chaired by Dr Rampal, Director, ICAR-NRCO and presided over by Yamuna Basanth, Takchang Panchayat ward member. Kalaivanan, NS, Nodal officer of the project put forward the number of technologies that are taken for implementation and number of beneficiaries under each technology.

Dr Rampal sensitized the gathering about the technologies and the benefits that can be reaped at the end of successful implementation of the project. Detailed discussion of the project was made and name of the beneficiary for each technology was collected from each SHG.

The project was implemented by ICAR-NRCO, funded by NABARD, RO, Sikkim. Technologies of vermicomposting, mulching, mushroom production, vegetable nursery and orchid production units are taken for implementation. Total of 30 members from Kasthuri, Durga and Sunakari SHG attended the meeting.

## Singtam and Rangpo Nagar Panchayats

Kishore Chettri won Lall Bazaar ward with 160 votes followed closely by Navin Pradhan with 132 votes and Rahul Pradhan with 120 votes. Likewise, Pranay Sharma got 76 votes and Raman Das Chettri managed to secure 52 votes.

In Chisopani ward, Suresh Kumar Tamang emerged victorious with 415 votes and his contenders Bhasker Haang Thebey managed to get 113 votes and Tashi Tamang secured only 08 votes.

In Rangpo Nagar Panchayat, Sanju Manger won Majhitar ward with 616 votes to defeat her only contender Aiti Maya Gurung who secured 510 votes.

In another one-to-one contest in Mining ward, Radha Pradhan got an easy win with 341 votes against Sunita Sharma who got only 87 votes.

Sanjeev Kumar Khati won in Mandi Bazaar ward with 474 votes against her close contender Suraj Sunar with 391 votes. Rajesh Kumar Rasaily got 18 votes and Mala Darjee secured 14 votes in the ward.

Among the 9 candidates of Upper Rangpo Bazaar ward, Pinku Kumar Prasad emerged victorious with 353 votes. Sajjan Kumar Agarwal secured 232 votes, Sudhir Kumar Chettri with 189 votes and Bal Bahadur Sarki with 131 votes.

Likewise, Sanjib Kumar Gupta secured 82 votes, Dev Nath Sharma got 65 votes, Bikash Kumar Prasad got 44 votes, Md Haider Ali Ansari secured 40 votes and Madan Kumar Karki secured 37 votes.

### 6 new Covid cases detected in Sikkim...

He mentioned that the student was from Class XII commerce and urged other students who came in close contact to go for testing at the Flu Clinic of STNM hospital on Tuesday.

He added that those persons who did not come in close contact with the students should still quarantine themselves for 11 days as a precaution.

Mr Bhutia informed that the testing team will also visit TNA to collect samples of primary contacts who were currently contained at the school itself.

Meanwhile, with the release of two more persons from isolation facilities, the number of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim has improved to 5967.

There are currently 48 active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim, of whom one patient is admitted in the ICU facility of STNM hospital.

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## Delhi records over 3,500 COVID-19 cases for second consecutive day

**NEW DELHI, 03 APR [PTI]:** Delhi recorded over 3,500 coronavirus cases for the second consecutive day today, while the positivity rate rose to 4.48 percent, according to the health department. With 3,567 new infections, the number of cumulative cases rose to 6,72,381, while 10 more deaths took the count to 11,060 in Delhi. The city had reported 3,594 cases on Friday, the highest daily count this year.

The positivity rate rose to 4.48 percent from 4.11 per cent a day before, amid a massive surge in cases recorded over the past few weeks.

On December 3, the city had recorded 3,734 cases while on December 4 the count was 4,067, according to official data.

Delhi had reported 2,790 cases on Thursday, 1,819 on Wednesday, 992 on Tuesday, 1,904



cases on Monday and 1,881 cases on Sunday. It had reported 1,558 cases on Saturday, 1,534 cases last Friday, 1,515 cases last Thursday, 1,254 cases a day before that and 1,101 cases last Tuesday, when it had crossed the 1,000-mark for the first time since December 24.

The number of active cases rose to 12,647

from 11,994 a day before. A total of 79,617 tests, including 57,296 RT-PCR tests, were conducted a day ago, the bulletin said.

The number of people under home isolation rose to 6,569 from 6,106 a day ago. The containment zones rose to 2,618 from 2,338 on Friday, it said.

The number of cumulative cases as on January

1 had stood at over 6.25 lakh and the total fatalities were 10,557.

The number of daily cases had started to come down in February. On February 26, the month's highest daily count of 256 cases was recorded. However, the daily cases began to rise again in March and have been steadily increasing since then.

## BJP's youth wing behind attack on convoy in Rajasthan, alleges farmer leader Rakesh Tikait

**GHAZIPUR, 03 APR [PTI]:** A day after his convoy was allegedly attacked in Rajasthan's Alwar, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) chief Rakesh Tikait today alleged that the BJP's "youth wing" is responsible for the attack.

"The Centre is responsible, who else can it be? It's their (BJP's) youth wing. They were saying, 'Rakesh Tikait, Go Back'. Where should I go? They hurled stones, used lathis," said Mr Tikait.

"Why are they fighting us? We're farmers. We are not a political party," he added.

When asked about the possibility of a dialogue between farmers and the Centre, the



BKU leader said, "If the government was run by a party, then dialogue would have concluded by now. This government is run by companies (Corporates). They only look at their businesses and profits. They don't care about anyone. They will profit more if there are more hungry people in the country."

Rakesh Tikait's con-

voy was allegedly attacked in Alwar's Tatarpur Chowk on Friday. According to the police, four persons have been detained in connection with the incident.

After the incident, Rakesh Tikait said that goons of BJP tried to attack him. He tweeted in Hindi, "Tatarpur intersection of Alwar district of Rajasthan near Bansur

road --- attacked by BJP goons -- killing our democracy."

Following the attack, the BKU chief's supporters blocked National Highway 9 at the Ghazipur border. The Highway was opened for traffic movement later on.

Farmers have been protesting at the different borders of Delhi since November last year against the three farm laws -- Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; the Farmers Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

## 8 states account for 81.4% of all Covid cases reported in last 24 hours: Centre

**NEW DELHI, 03 APR [PTI]:** Eight states witnessed a steep rise in daily new COVID-19 cases and accounted for 81.42 per cent of the infections reported in the last 24 hours, the Union Health Ministry said.

These eight states are Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh.

India's tally of COVID-19 active caseload also increased to 6,58,909 and now comprises 5.32 per cent of the total infections. In a day, there has been a net rise of 44,213 active cases.

Ten districts - Pune, Mumbai, Nagpur, Thane, Nashik, Bengaluru Urban, Aurangabad, Delhi, Ahmednagar and Nanded - account for 50 per cent of the total active caseload of the country.

Maharashtra has shown a nine-fold jump, the maximum increase in the number of active cases in the last two months. In percentage terms, Punjab has reported the maximum increase in active cases.

Five states - Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Kerala and Punjab - cumulatively account for 77.3 per cent



of the total active cases in the country. Maharashtra alone accounts for 59.36 per cent of the total active caseload of the country.

India on Saturday recorded 89,129 new COVID-19 cases in a day, the highest daily rise in around six-and-a-half-months, taking the nationwide tally of infections to over 1.23 crore, according to the Union Health Ministry data on Saturday.

The number of deaths increased to 1,64,110 with 714 more fatalities in a day, also the highest since October 21.

Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 47,913, followed by 4,991 in Karnataka and 4,174 in Chhattisgarh.

Twelve states - Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Karnataka, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala - are displaying an upward

trajectory in daily new cases, the health ministry said.

Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba chaired a high-level review meeting on Friday with chief secretaries, directors general of police and health secretaries of all states, with a focus on 11 states and Union Territories that have been reporting a very high rise in daily cases and fatality because of COVID-19 in the last two weeks.

These states and union territories "of grave concern" were advised to take up immediate and effective measures to ensure containment of active cases and daily deaths through enhanced testing, strict containment, prompt contact tracing and enforcement of COVID-appropriate behaviour, and adherence to the standard clinical management protocol shared earlier with all states and UTs.

India's cumulative

recoveries stand at 1,15,69,241 with 44,202 recoveries being registered in a day.

Of the 714 fatalities were reported in a day, six states account for 85.85 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw a maximum of 481 deaths, followed by 57 in Punjab.

Thirteen states and UTs have not reported any COVID-19 deaths in a day. These are Odisha, Assam, Ladakh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Sikkim, Lakshadweep, Mizoram, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Arunachal Pradesh.

In a significant development in the fight against COVID-19, the cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 7.3 crore mark.

Cumulatively, 7,30,54,295 vaccine doses have been administered through 11,53,614 sessions, according to the provisional report till 7 am on Saturday. The cumulative vaccination figure includes over 6 crore first doses, while the second dose numbers are also nearing the 1 crore mark, the ministry said.

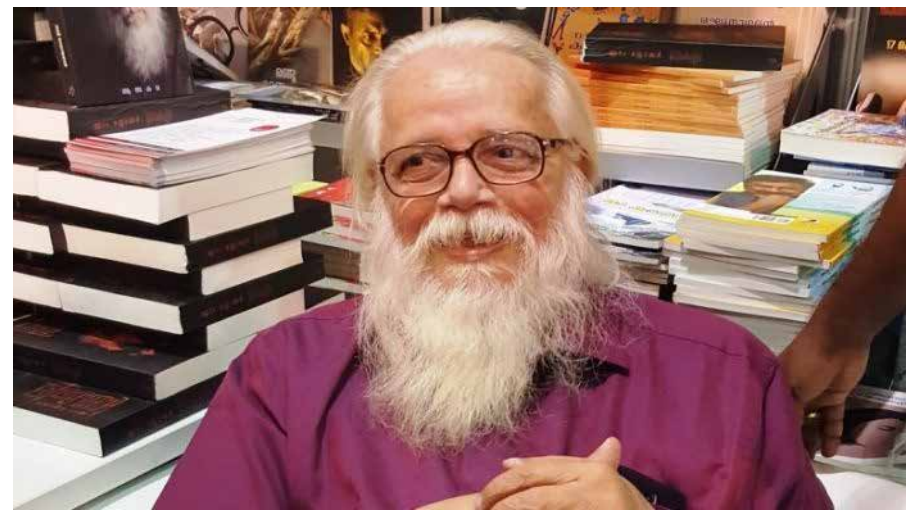
## Panel submits report to top court in ISRO scientist's illegal arrest case

**NEW DELHI, 03 APR [PTI]:** A high-level probe panel appointed by the Supreme Court to take erring cops to task for causing "tremendous harassment" and "immeasurable anguish" to ISRO scientist Dr Nambi Narayanan in the 1994 espionage case has submitted its report to the top court, sources told news agency Press Trust Of India.

The Supreme Court had on September 14, 2018 appointed the three-member panel headed by its former judge D K Jain while directing the Kerala government to cough up ₹ 50 lakh compensation for compelling Mr Narayanan to undergo "immense humiliation".

The scientist was arrested when the Congress was heading the government in Kerala. The panel, after investigation, submitted its report in a sealed cover to the top court recently.

The Central Bureau of Investigation, in its



probe, had held that the then top police officials in Kerala were responsible for Mr Narayanan's illegal arrest.

The case also had its political fallout, with a section in the Congress targeting the then Chief Minister late K Karunakaran over the issue, that eventually led to his resignation.

Over a period of almost two-and-a-half years, the panel headed by Justice Jain examined the circumstances leading to the arrest.

The espionage case,

which had hit the headlines in 1994, pertained to allegations of transfer of certain confidential documents on India's space programme to foreign countries by two scientists and four others, including two Maldivian women.

The 79-year-old former scientist, who was given a clean chit by the CBI, maintained that the Kerala Police had "fabricated" the case and the technology he was accused to have stolen and sold in the 1994 case did

not even exist at that time.

Mr Narayanan had approached the top court against a Kerala High Court judgement that said "no action needed to be taken" against former DGP Siby Mathews, who was then heading the SIT probe team, two retired superintendents of police, K K Joshua and S Vijayan, and the then Deputy Director, Intelligence Bureau, R B Shreekumar, who were later held responsible by the CBI for the scientist's illegal arrest.

## After bank issue, Mumbai bus operator pays salary in coins, staff protest

**MUMBAI, 03 APR [PTI]:** A banking issue with the civic-run Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) Undertaking has left around 40,000 of its employees getting a sizable portion of their salaries in the form of coins over the past few months, giving their remuneration an unwanted heft.

The undertaking, which operates a 4,000-bus strong transport system as well as supplies electricity to some 10 lakh consumers in the metropolis' island district, has been getting massive quantity of coins from passengers by way of ticket fare, as well as cash for power bills.

Senior BEST committee member Sunil Ganacharya said the BEST has a huge amount of money lying in its coffers, but no bank is willing to take it from the undertaking's 100-150 collection points after a contract with a leading private sector bank ended last year.

Some BEST employees, who did not wish to be named, said that getting a small part of the remuneration in coins was always prevalent.

"However, the ratio has grown now. I got ₹ 11,000 in cash and coins in my last salary, while the coin-cash amount was ₹ 15,000 the previous month. We generally get ₹ 1,000 each, mostly in ₹ 2, ₹ 5 coins and ₹ 10 denomination notes, and some part in ₹ 10, ₹ 50, ₹ 100 and ₹ 500 notes. The rest is deposited directly into our bank accounts," an employee said.

Mr Ganacharya rued the state of affairs and said this 'coins as salary' mechanism has even led to some employees defaulting on their EMIs, among other things.

"Several BEST employees stay in areas like Ambarnath, Badlapur, Panvel or Virar-Vasai and travel by suburban locals. It is very inconvenient and risky to carry so much cash, that too in coins," he said.

## With 23 rallies till now, PM Modi leads BJP's campaign for Assembly polls



**NEW DELHI, 03 APR [PTI]:** Spearheading his party's campaign in the ongoing polls to elect five assemblies, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has addressed 23 rallies so far, 10 of them across four states over the last three days, including some today.

With the BJP pulling out all the stops to oust Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee from government in West Bengal and to retain power in Assam, these two states have been the focus of PM Modi's campaign.

He has addressed rallies in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the union territory of Puducherry too.

The prime minister also travelled to Bangladesh recently for two days and attended a number of programmes,

an exercise that was criticised by Ms Banerjee alleging they were held with an eye on the polls in West Bengal, a charge rejected by the BJP.

While driving his party's campaign, PM Modi has also kept a tab on the coronavirus situation and vaccination programme in the country, official sources said.

With assembly polls getting over in Puducherry and all states except West Bengal on April 6, PM Modi is expected to address a number of public meetings in the eastern state in the coming days as the BJP works to capture power there.

The state will be left with five more phases of polls after April 6 with the last phase scheduled for April 29.

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**PAEDIATRIC CLINIC & O P D**

8.00 am And 6.00 pm

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## Monitor and Evaluate, Then Hold Accountable

*There will be fewer complaints and less resentment*

Monitoring & Evaluation have always been part of governance. The least paid-attention-to part, but a part nevertheless. Their presence is token and piecemeal, extended by pick and choose when it should have been institutionalized and extended at all levels. Occasionally, one hears of moves underway to elevate this aspect of administration to the hierarchal prominence it deserves – right at the top – but nothing really moves beyond the talk of such things. M&E, however, should be prioritised. It is high time, especially now when those who control the release of funds and opportunities are demanding achievement records in black & white and funds have been scarce because utilization certificates have been inconsistent.

Too many doles, projects, funding and sponsorship have been invested in Sikkim without a scientific, unbiased or transparent appraisal of how far the buck travels in the State or what this investment has achieved.

Frankly speaking, monitoring & evaluation is a simple science. Projects get drafted, funds get allocated, the release of payment requires numerous NOCs and clearance certificates to endorse that the work was done – that’s monitoring. People look at roads carpeted a few months ago disintegrate with the first showers – that’s evaluation.

So, when the government spends precious funds training its officers on monitoring and evaluation, it is expected that they bring something more to the table than the thumb rule by which people have been monitoring and evaluating already.

What is it that ‘training’ can deliver that one does not already know?

Definitely the science to be able to monitor and evaluate so well that when things go wrong, the figures align themselves in a way that a shortlist of those responsible for the bungle is ready even before the Vigilance Police wakes up.

That said, M&E exercises can be carried out endlessly without delivering any results unless the most important follow-up to the monitoring & evaluation process – accountability - is codified. And one does not speak of fixing criminal culpability and corruption charges on failed or compromised projects here. The M&E exercise should lead to pulling up lethargic officials who contributed to failed projects, those who compromise the impact of good initiatives with their poor delivery and those who routinely fail to see the larger picture. These can be departmental action leading to a red-inked ACR or a compulsory enrolment into re-learning school so long as action is seen to have been taken after the ‘culprit’ has been correctly identified.

That would be true monitoring and evaluation because it would be delivering accountability. Such follow-up will also ensure that people do not have a reason to grow too resentful, because that is a common condition among the lay people who see expansive promises get processed with shallow intentions, and then tall claims being made without even a token gesture to evaluate or hold agencies to account.

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# Ayn Rand-Inspired ‘Myth of the Founder’ Puts Tremendous Power in Hands of Big Tech CEOs

JERRY DAVIS  
THECONVERSATION.COM

Coinbase’s plan to go public in April highlights a troubling trend among tech companies: Its founding team will maintain voting control, making it mostly immune to the wishes of outside investors.

The best-known U.S. cryptocurrency exchange is doing this by creating two classes of shares. One class will be available to the public. The other is reserved for the founders, insiders and early investors, and will wield 20 times the voting power of regular shares. That will ensure that after all is said and done, the insiders will control 53.5% of the votes.

Coinbase will join dozens of other publicly traded tech companies – many with household names such as Google, Facebook, DoorDash, Airbnb and Slack – that have issued two types of shares in an effort to retain control for founders and insiders. The reason this is becoming increasingly popular has a lot to do with Ayn Rand, one of Silicon Valley’s favorite authors, and the “myth of the founder” her writings have helped inspire.

Engaged investors and governance experts like me generally loathe dual-class shares because they undermine executive accountability by making it harder to rein in a wayward CEO. I first stumbled upon this method executives use to limit the influence of pesky outsiders while working on my doctoral dissertation on hostile takeovers in the late 1980s.

But the risks of this trend are greater than simply entrenching bad management. Today, given the role tech companies play in virtually every corner of American life, it poses a threat to democracy as well.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Dual-class voting structures have been around for decades.

When Ford Motor Co. went public in 1956, its founding family used the arrangement to maintain 40% of the voting rights. Newspaper companies like The New York Times and The Washington Post often use the arrangement to protect their journalistic independence from Wall Street’s insatiable demands for profitability.

In a typical dual-class structure, the company will sell one class of shares to the public, usually called class A shares, while founders, executives and others retain class B shares with enough voting power to maintain majority voting control. This allows the class B shareholders to determine the outcome of matters that come up for a shareholder vote, such as who is on the company’s board.

Advocates see a dual-class structure

as a way to fend off short-term thinking. In principle, this insulation from investor pressure can allow the company to take a long-term perspective and make tough strategic changes even at the expense of short-term share price declines. Family-controlled businesses often view it as a way to preserve their legacy, which is why Ford remains a family company after more than a century.

It also makes a company effectively immune from hostile takeovers and the whims of activist investors.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

But this insulation comes at a cost for investors, who lose a crucial check on management.

Indeed, dual-class shares essentially short-circuit almost all the other means that limit executive power. The board of directors, elected by shareholder vote, is the ultimate authority within the corporation that oversees management. Voting for directors and proposals on the annual ballot are the main methods shareholders have to ensure management accountability, other than simply selling their shares.

Recent research shows that the value and stock returns of dual-class companies are lower than other businesses, and they’re more likely to overpay their CEO and waste money on expensive acquisitions.

Companies with dual-class shares rarely made up more than 10% of public listings in a given year until the 2000s, when tech startups began using them more frequently, according to data collected by University of Florida business professor Jay Ritter. The dam began to break after Facebook went public in 2012 with a dual-class stock structure that kept founder Mark Zuckerberg firmly in control – he alone controls almost 60% of the company.

In 2020, over 40% of tech companies that went public did so with two or more classes of shares with unequal voting rights.

This has alarmed governance experts, some investors and legal scholars.

AYN RAND AND THE MYTH OF THE SUPERHUMAN FOUNDER

If the dual-class structure is bad for investors, then why are so many tech companies able to convince them to buy their shares when they go public?

I attribute it to Silicon Valley’s mythology of the founder — what I would dub an “Ayn Rand theory of corporate governance” that credits founders with superhuman vision and competence that merit deference from lesser mortals.

Rand’s novels, most notably “Atlas Shrugged,” portray an America in which titans of business hold up the world by creating innovation and value but are beset by moochers and looters who want to take or regulate what they have created.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Rand has a strong following among tech founders, whose creative genius may be “threatened” by any form of outside regulation. Elon Musk, Coinbase founder Brian Armstrong and even the late Steve Jobs all have recommended “Atlas Shrugged.”

Her work is also celebrated by the venture capitalists who typically finance tech startups – many of whom were founders themselves.

The basic idea is simple: Only the founder has the vision, charisma and smarts to steer the company forward.

It begins with a powerful founding story. Michael Dell and Zuckerberg created their multibillion-dollar companies in their dorm rooms. Founding partner pairs Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak and Bill Hewlett and David Packard built their first computer companies in the garage – Apple and Hewlett-Packard, respectively. Often the stories are true, but sometimes, as in Apple’s case, less so.

And from there, founders face a gauntlet of rigorous testing: recruiting collaborators, gathering customers and, perhaps most importantly, attracting multiple rounds of funding from venture capitalists. Each round serves to further validate the founder’s leadership competence.

The Founders Fund, a venture capital firm that has backed dozens of tech companies, including Airbnb, Palantir and Lyft, is one of the biggest proselytizers for this myth, as it makes clear in its “manifesto.”

“The entrepreneurs who make it have a near-messianic attitude and believe their company is essential to making the world a better place,” it asserts. True to its stated belief, the fund says it has “never removed a single founder,” which is why it has been a big supporter of dual-class share structures.

Another venture capitalist who seems to favor giving founders extra power is Netscape founder Marc Andreessen. His venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz is Coinbase’s biggest investor. And most of the companies in its portfolio that have gone public also used a dual-class share structure, according to my own review of their securities filings.

BAD FOR COMPANIES, BAD FOR DEMOCRACY

Giving founders voting control disrupts the checks and balances needed to keep business accountable

and can lead to big problems.

WeWork founder Adam Neumann, for example, demanded “unambiguous authority to fire or overrule any director or employee.” As his behavior became increasingly erratic, the company hemorrhaged cash in the lead-up to its ultimately canceled initial public offering.

Investors forced out Uber’s Travis Kalanick in 2017, but not before he’s said to have created a workplace culture that allegedly allowed sexual harassment and discrimination to fester. When Uber finally went public in 2019, it shed its dual-class structure.

There is some evidence that founder-CEOs are less gifted at management than other kinds of leaders, and their companies’ performance can suffer as a consequence.

But investors who buy shares in these companies know the risks going in. There’s much more at stake than their money.

What happens when powerful, unconstrained founders control the most powerful companies in the world?

The tech sector is increasingly laying claim to central command posts of the U.S. economy. Americans’ access to news and information, financial services, social networks and even groceries is mediated by a handful of companies controlled by a handful of people.

Recall that in the wake of the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection, the CEOs of Facebook and Twitter were able to eject former President Donald Trump from his favorite means of communication – virtually silencing him overnight. And Apple, Google and Amazon cut off Parler, the right-wing social media platform used by some of the insurrectionists to plan their actions. Not all of these companies have dual-class shares, but this illustrates just how much power tech companies have over America’s political discourse.

One does not have to disagree with their decision to see that a form of political power is becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of companies with limited outside oversight.

*[the writer is Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford and Professor of Management and Sociology, University of Michigan]*

## Race Commission Report: the Rights and Wrongs

RAMINDER KAUR & GILL MARGARET HAGUE  
THECONVERSATION.COM

Confusion and outrage greeted the UK government’s Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report. As opponents grapple with some of the more alarming findings, such as its assertion that there is little evidence of institutional racism in the UK, critiques and questions about the validity of its claims have begun to circulate widely on social media.

So, what does the report get wrong about racism in the UK, and does it get anything right?

THE MAIN ARGUMENTS

From start to finish, the race commission puts huge emphasis on the “agency” of people from racial and ethnic minority groups, explaining away racial inequalities based on the choices of certain groups, or in favour of other social factors like class.

Despite the findings of other reports, it suggests that hate crime isn’t worsening but that perceptions of an increase have been influenced by internet trolling. It claims that the term “BAME” should be abandoned because it obscures specific issues among different groups; and that structural racism in work, education and elsewhere is hard to prove.

This finding on structural racism runs contrary to earlier findings such as the 1999 Macpherson inquiry report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence and other more recent evidence that is yet to be adequately addressed.

Perhaps the most blatant issue is the report’s reliance on tactics that the government appears to have employed time and again: using Black and Asian representatives to minimise the credibility of racism in its many forms.

The commission was handpicked by Munira Mirza, the director of the Number 10 Policy Unit, who has been said to dismiss institutional racism as “a perception more than a reality”.

The commission’s chair, Tony Sewell, has previously dismissed the existence of systemic racism. Co-author Samir Shah has expressed similar views, and so has Mercy Muroki. Another member, Dambisa Moyo, is in favour of ending foreign aid to Africa because it creates a dependency culture. And Kemi Badenoch, the minister for equalities that the commission directly reports to, has also previously denied the existence of systemic racism. It is of little surprise

then than institutional racism has been dismissed in the evaluation of the commission’s findings.

A SELECTIVE VIEW

Certain racial and ethnic groups have become wealthier in the UK in recent decades, and the commission is right to highlight that. Calls to prioritise social class are also important. But while the report appears to back an approach that looks at how class, race, gender and other social identities overlap, it stops short of accounting for how race intersects with gender, sexuality and disability.

Singling out white underachievement in education throughout the report is striking. Yet it doesn’t account for what happens afterwards in terms of employment and increasing wealth (long-term outcomes tend to be better for white graduates, for example).

Pitting white underachievement against outcomes for ethnic minority groups also echoes arguments often touted by the extreme right. Race equality think tank, the Runnymede Trust, describes this as playing “into cultural readings of inequality, which pitch [white people’s] interests squarely against those of ethnic minorities, and simultaneously allows middle class commentators to blame the ‘underclass’ for their own misfortunes”.

The report focuses on comparing different groups’ health, education, criminal justice and employment with what it claims is a data-driven approach. But we contend it’s ideologically driven. For instance, while high levels of COVID-19 among racial and ethnic populations are acknowledged, the roots of inequity are said to lie in socio-economic factors like living in higher population density and deprived areas and working in higher-risk occupations.

While this is undeniable, the report also stresses that disproportionate COVID-19 levels aren’t down to systemic racism, overlooking the fact that race and ethnicity significantly affect the jobs and housing some groups can get in the first place.

There are several other shortcomings. There’s hardly any mention of the racialisation of religion in Islamophobia; one mention of the “glass ceiling”; nothing on white dominance in the upper echelons of society; and no attempt to critically examine or expunge the British empire’s legacies, for example the names of national honours. Rather,

the report vaguely refers to the “inflows and outflows” that connect the British empire with Commonwealth countries, along with one controversial reference to the effects of the “slave period” on the “re-modelled African/Britain”.

Campaigner Patrick Vernon said the report’s efforts to belittle slavery, colonisation and the resulting injustices to millions of people as “the equivalent of a Holocaust denier being asked to develop a strategy on antisemitism. Half the people on the commission do not understand the history of Britain, the impact and implications of enslavement, or modern-day racism”.

POLICING LANGUAGE

The report erases the language used to understand how race works, such as recommendations to stop using the term “white privilege” and to replace it with “affinity bias”, because it’s “alienating” to white people who don’t accept that they’re “privileged by their skin colour”.

It supports a divide-and-rule approach that propagates tensions within and between groups, such as suggestions that “minorities who have been long established in a country ... in a context of racial and socio-economic disadvantage”, are held back because of a lack of optimism about social mobility and education, whereas “immigration optimism” from groups newer to the UK means they’re less likely to face prejudice.

In response, Dr Halima Begum, director of the Runnymede Trust, has said that it seems that for ethnic minority groups, “if we succeed it’s on us. If we fail, it’s on us. The state has no collective duty of care on our outcomes if they are disproportionate”.

The timing of the report’s release couldn’t be more opportune in the wake of widely reported accusations of racism within British royalty and the establishment at large. Such rumblings threaten Brexit Britain’s international standing, especially with Commonwealth countries, with some reconsidering their continuing membership.

All this just a few days before Boris Johnson makes his trip to India to cement alliances in the east. As widespread criticism mounts, the bottom line is that although it gets a handful of things right, overall the commission’s report lacks credibility.

*[Raminder Kaur is Professor of Anthropology and Cultural Studies, University of Sussex; Gill Margaret Hague is Professor Emerita of Violence Against Women Studies, University of Bristol]*



# Nepalis lose livelihoods after China closes border due to Covid-19

**BASANTA PRATAP SINGH**

**KATHMANDU, 03 APR [KATHMANDU-POST]:** If things had been normal, Karsang and her husband Anga Thapa of Talkot village in Bajhang would be busy serving guests in their hotel at this time of the year. The couple from Sudurpaschim province in far western Nepal own a hotel in Taklakot, Tibet, 30 km across the international border.

Taklakot or Purang is the first city in Tibet travellers encounter after leaving Nepal. Located at an altitude of 4,755 metres, it is popular among Indian pilgrims going on the holy journey known as Kailash Manasarovar Yatra for acclimatising for one or two days.

It is also the time of the year when people from Humla used to hop across the border to Taklakot to work as seasonal labourers. They earned up to Rs350,000 in three months.

The Thapa couple normally travel down to Nepalgunj in March to buy pulses, rice and spices for their hotel. They would be back in Taklakot with the provisions by mid-April.

The Kailash Manasarovar Yatra season begins in May and lasts till September. The arrival of Indian pilgrims and Nepali workers would keep hoteliers like Thapa busy for months.

"I used to make a profit of around Rs1.5 million during the pilgrim season," said Thapa. The couple saved enough to even buy a house in Surkhet. They normally return to Nepal after it starts snowing in mid-October.

"After 10 years, I was forced to shutter my hotel because of Covid-19," said Thapa. They arrived in Nepal in mid-November 2019 and have not been able to return after Chinese authorities closed the border in January 2020 to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

It's been nearly one and a half years since the pandemic began, and the situation has not changed. The Thapas are wondering when Taklakot will reopen.

Before Covid-19, more than 20,000 pilgrims were visiting the sacred mountain and lake during the spring season, accord-



ing to tour operators.

The Nepalgunj-Simikot-Hilsa-Manasarovar route is the shortest for Indian visitors, and the itinerary is affordable and easy.

Travellers usually fly from Nepalgunj to Simikot by fixed-wing aircraft and then take a helicopter to Hilsa on the border with Tibet, China.

As Nepalgunj has become a major gateway, more than a dozen luxury hotels have sprung up to cater to Indian visitors.

After crossing Karnali, pilgrims are taken by motor vehicle to China. Due to the high altitude, pilgrims acclimatise for one to two days in Taklakot. Lake Manasarovar lies at an elevation of 4,556 metres.

The Thapas are facing a financial crisis due to the prolonged closure of their hotel. "We have admitted our three children in a boarding school in Surkhet. We have to pay Rs40,000 in school fees monthly," Anga said.

With the hotel closed, their revenues dried up; and they were forced to mortgage their house to raise cash for household expenses and school fees. "Our income is almost zero."

But the Nepal-China border is not

reopening anytime soon. Thapa says he has paid more than Rs600,000 as rent for the hotel in Taklakot, and the landlord has been reminding him repeatedly to settle the dues. "If the border does not reopen this year too, I will be ruined."

The closure of the border in early 2020 has affected a large number of Nepali entrepreneurs and seasonal workers from Bajhang, Humla, Dolpa, Darchula and Mugu.

High wages are the major reason why youths like to go to the Tibetan market to work. The money they make in Taklakot is enough to meet their expenses for the entire year. They earn 100 to 200 yuan (Rs1,800 to Rs3,600) per day working as a labourer.

Nepalis have been running hotels and selling Nepali products, wooden utensils, handicrafts, Nepali carpets, bamboo, reeds, leather and other handicraft items for many years in Taklakot.

Honey, ghee, hard cheese, chilli, pepper and herbs besides agricultural goods produced in Nepal are also traded.

Dan Bahadur Lama, a wooden utensil trader from Namkha Rural Municipality in Humla, said they have a turnover of more than Rs2 billion annually.

People from Mugu, Humla and Ba-

jhang have opened more than 40 shops in and around Taklakot to sell wooden utensils. "All the shops are closed and business is dead," he said.

"We all are in trouble. Wooden utensils made last year for the Taklakot market are piled up in Surkhet and Humla," Lama said.

Wooden utensils are considered to be auspicious items and are used during birth, death and wedding ceremonies and also in daily life.

Making utensils out of the wood found in various forests of Nepal is the main occupation of the Tamang community in Humla and Bajhang.

People here have been engaged in making wooden utensils for a long time, but it was not easy to sell them till a few years ago. Business started booming after 2015 when the Nepal government removed export duty.

Sonam Lama, a wooden utensil trader from Humla, said they spend Rs20,000 to Rs30,000 to prepare one wooden utensil. They can sell it for Rs50,000 to Rs1.5 million in Taklakot, depending on the size and quality.

"Many people have started trading wooden utensils in recent years due to the high return," he said. Demand for wooden utensils was picking up well until Covid-19 came and ruined everything, she said.

More than 300 Nepali traders are engaged in the small markets of Tibet, including Khocher, Lukot and Lukpul.

Thoten Lama of Namkha Rural Municipality of Humla said that most of the Nepali traders went bankrupt after they lost their businesses. They are still not allowed to enter Tibet.

Hundreds of seasonal workers from Bajhang, Humla, Dolpa, Darchula and Mugu districts who used to work in construction, agriculture and other sectors in Taklakot are out of work.

Nepali workers used to harvest and thresh the crops grown in the highlands of Tibet and work in sheep and goat farms.

"Everything stopped after Covid-19,"

said Kinthya Rokaya of Saipal Rural Municipality in Bajhang.

He said seasonal workers in Tibet earn from 150 to 250 Chinese yuan (Rs2,550 to 4,000) daily. Demand for workers increases during the period April to August before the winter sets in.

Nepali workers normally bring home around Rs500,000 per person, after deducting their living expenses.

"Taklakot was like South Korea and Dubai for us. After working in Taklakot for four or five months, we could live on the earnings for a whole year," Rokaya said.

The Chinese government is investing heavily in building state-of-the-art infrastructure in Taklakot, and it has become an attractive destination for Nepali job seekers.

Jayabhakta Shahi of Humla said that around 3,000 people from the border districts travel to Taklakot for seasonal employment every year. The local administration of Tibet was giving them three-month work permits and renewing them for another three months.

"Taklakot is many times better for them than the Gulf countries as they earn good money and can return home whenever they want," said Gopi Singh of Humla, Syada. "Six months' wages were enough to pay for the family needs for one year," he said. "But everything is closed now," he said.

Even though Nepali traders have been barred from entering Taklakot, trade activities are still going on there.

The Kerung and Tatopani border points have been opened, but there has been no initiative from the government to open Taklakot, Nepali traders said.

"The government has ignored this border point despite being linked to the livelihoods of many people in the five districts," said Yogesh Bohara of Chhangru, Darchula, who has been trading curio goods in Taklakot.

He said that a diplomatic initiative should be launched to reopen the border soon. "If the border is not reopened this year too, many people will be ruined," he said.

## Assam Minister summoned by police for allegedly threatening journalists

**MORIGAON, 03 APR**

**[PTI]:** Assam minister Pijush Hazarika, who allegedly threatened two journalists, has been issued a notice to appear before police and his call recordings have been sent to forensic lab for examination, officials said today.

Two cases filed at Jagiroad police station by the journalists have been merged, and Mr Hazarika has been booked under Sections 500 (defamation), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 341 (wrongful restraint) of the IPC.

The minister, who is contesting from the Jagiroad constituency where polling took place in the second phase on Thursday, had allegedly threatened the two journalists for reporting about a controversial campaign speech by his wife.

"The statements of the journalists were recorded and a notice was



issued to the minister in connection with the case. He has been asked to come to Jagiroad PS for recording his statement," Morigaon District Superintendent of Police Nanda Singh Borkala said.

Mr Hazarika, the Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, said he will come to the police station on Sunday to give his statement, the official said.

Mr Borkala said the

mobile phones of the scribes and that of Mr Hazarika have been seized and the voice recordings of the conversation sent to a forensic laboratory in Guwahati.

"As per law and procedure, we will proceed in the case," he added.

In the first information report, the two journalists - Nazrul Islam and Tulsita Manta - of Assamese news channels claimed that Mr Hazari-

ka had threatened them with dire consequences at 1 pm on Thursday, when they were busy in poll coverage of the second phase in Morigaon district.

The police have also provided personal security cover to both the journalists. Meanwhile, the IG (Law and Order) Deepak Kumar Kedia, who is the nodal officer of the state police for the ongoing Assam assembly elections, has sought a report from the district police on the case.

Assam Congress chief Ripun Bora has also filed a complaint with the state's chief electoral officer, demanding Mr Hazarika's disqualification from the polls.

Other opposition parties like the AIUDF, Rajior Dal, Assam Jatiya Dal, AASU, AJYCP and several social groups also called for immediate disqualification of Mr Hazarika

from the elections.

The Gauhati Press Club (GPC) condemned the "act of intimidation" by Hazarika.

In an audio clip telecast by an Assamese news channel on Thursday, the minister can be heard threatening the scribes of dragging them out of their homes and making them "vanish".

The minister also said in the telephonic conversation, which has now gone viral, that he was "sad" because the news was related to his wife Aimee Baruah, who while campaigning for her husband a few days ago had made a controversial comment on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Ms Baruah, at a recent public meeting in Jagiroad, had allegedly said the people from the Bengali community will be thrown out of the country if the CAA is not implemented.

## BJP engineering communal strife to win polls: Mamata Banerjee

**RAIDIGHI (WB), 03 APR**

**[PTI]:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday accused the BJP of engineering communal strife in the state to win the assembly elections.

The Trinamool Congress chief, while addressing an election rally in Raidighi in South 24 Parganas district, also called upon Muslims not to "fall in the trap of a BJP-aided party from Hyderabad and its Bengal ally that are out to polarise votes."

Her jibe was apparently aimed at Asaduddin Owaisi-led AIMIM and Abbas Siddiqui's Indian Secular Front. Both Mr Owaisi and Mr Siddiqui had earlier denied the Trinamool's allegations.

The Mr Siddiqui's ISF is fighting the elections in alliance with the CPI(M) and the Congress.

The TMC supremo also urged Hindus to be on the guard against the BJP's attempts to "instigate communal clashes" and called upon them to chase away outsiders sent to foment trouble in their respective localities.

Affirming her Hindu identity, in an apparent attempt to counter the minority appeasement charge against her, Ms Banerjee said, "I am a devout Hindu who recites Chandi mantra every day before leaving home. But I believe in our tradition of giving respect to every religion."

Taking a dig at BJP leaders having lunch at houses of Dalits, she said, "I am a Brahmin woman. But my all-time associate is a Scheduled Caste woman who takes care of all my needs. She

also cooks food for me."

"I need not advertise this as those bringing five-star hotel lunch to eat at the courtyard of a Dalit home are anti-Dalit, anti-backward caste and anti-minority in nature," she said.

Ms Banerjee claimed that if elected to power in West Bengal, the BJP will implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), forcing "many citizens to leave".

"They will divide West Bengal and its people. Remember how they deleted the names of 14 lakh Bengalis and 2 lakh Biharis in the updated NRC in Assam," she said.

Ms Banerjee alleged that central forces are terrorising people at every home 48 hours before polling, asking them to vote for the BJP.

## Assam Polls: After ban on BJP's Himanta Sarma, poll body removes brother, a senior cop

**GUWAHATI, ASSAM:** After barring Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma from campaigning in the assembly elections for 48 hours, the Election Commission has also transferred his brother and Goalpara Superintendent of Police Sushanta Biswa Sarma from the district.

An order issued by the Commission on Friday said that Sushanta Biswa Sarma shall be transferred to some suitable post in the state headquarters and IPS officer Veera Venkata Rakesh Reddy

shall be posted with immediate effect as the new Superintendent of Police of Goalpara district, which will go to polls in the third and last phase on April 6.

The order, signed by the Election Commission Under Secretary Luv Kush Yadav, also stated that the compliance report shall be furnished to the Commission immediately.

The Election Commission on Friday barred the senior Assam minister from campaigning for 48 hours for allegedly making threatening remarks

against Bodoland People's Front Chief Hagrama Mohilary.

The Commission barred him from holding any public meetings, processions, rallies, roadshows, interviews and utterances in media (electronic, print, social media) in connection with ongoing elections for 48 hours with immediate effect on April 2. Campaigning for the third and final phase of the Assembly elections ends on April 4 at 6 pm.

Following the Election Commission order,

the minister tweeted, "I am asked by ECI to stop campaigning for the next 48 hours. Therefore, all my meetings scheduled for tomorrow stand cancelled." The Congress had filed a complaint with the Election Commission on March 30 alleging that Himanta Biswa Sarma had openly threatened the BPF chief, an alliance partner of the Congress, violating the provisions of the Model Code of Conduct.

The minister replied on Friday to the show cause issued to him, which

he released on his Twitter handle, but the Commission did not find his reply satisfactory.

AIUDF chief Badrudin Ajmal, the prime target of the BJP's verbal attacks in the ongoing polls, reacted on Twitter, "Threatening, spreading hatred, bullying leaders, stealing EVMs..there is nothing that the BJP won't do." He welcomed the Election Commission of India's decision in support of Hagrama Mohilary who was "threatened with retribution through state agencies".

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## Italian 19-year-old Jannik Sinner reaches Miami Open final

**MIAMI (AP):** Former junior skiing champion Jannik Sinner has joined some fast company at the Miami Open.

On Friday, the 19-year-old Italian became the fourth teenager to reach the Miami men's final. The others: Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Andre Agassi.

"It's nice, but it doesn't mean anything," Sinner said. "The road to have a big name is long. It's not done in one week of a tournament."

Sinner, who chose tennis over skiing at age 13, is playing in only his third top-level ATP event. He rallied in the semifinal to beat Spanish counterpuncher Roberto Bautista Agut, 5-7, 6-4, 6-4.

Sinner will next face No. 26-seeded Hubert Hurkacz of Poland, who advanced to his first ATP Masters 1000 final by beating No. 4 Andrey Rublev 6-3, 6-4. Hurkacz, 24, improved to 9-0 in Florida this year, including his second career ATP title in Delray Beach in January.

Djokovic, Nadal and Roger Federer skipped the tournament, creating opportunities for the four semifinalists.

"We knew many players were not coming here, especially the big three," Sinner said. "I have a good team, and we approached this tournament to go very, very far."

On the women's side, No. 1-ranked Ash Barty will play for her second consecutive Miami title Saturday against No. 8 Bianca Andreescu, who edged No. 23 Maria Sakkari in a three-setter that ended at 1:35 a.m. Friday.

"I love a challenge," Andreescu said, "and I know she's going to challenge me on Saturday."

The lanky Sinner, seeded 21st, has improved his ranking from 78th at the start of last year. He created a buzz by reaching the quarterfinals in his French Open debut in September and is projected to climb to at least No. 24 next week.

"He has everything, no?" Bautista Agut said. "He has a big serve, he's big, he moves well, he has very good groundstrokes. Mentally he's also great and improving. He has a great future."

Sinner's matchup against the No. 7-seeded Bautista Agut was a contrast in styles, with Sinner's overpowering groundstrokes gradually wearing down his dogged opponent.

Sinner caught a break at 3-all in the second set, when Bautista Agut let a ball go on break point, and it landed on the line.

"I thought that ball was going out, and it touches the line by one millimeter," Bautista Agut said. "Tennis, sometimes it's crazy, no? One ball can make a big difference in the match."

Sinner went on to hold and broke in the final game of the set to even the match.

Down a break in the final set, Sinner rallied again and closed out the win with one last crushing groundstroke to break at love.

# Arizona reaches NCAA title game with 69-59 win over UConn

**SAN ANTONIO (AP):** Aari McDonald and Adia Barnes have marched Arizona out of the basketball desert to the doorstep of a national championship.

McDonald scored 26 points and led a smothering defensive effort as the Wildcats beat UConn 69-59 Friday night to advance to the women's NCAA Tournament championship game for the first time in school history.

The Wildcats never trailed against the favored and fabled Huskies, who have made the Final Four 13 consecutive times, but haven't made the championship game since 2016 when UConn won its 11th title.

And Barnes, who led Arizona to the NCAA Tournament as a player two decades ago, is now just the third coach to lead her alma mater to the championship. It comes five years after she took the job to rebuild one of the worst programs in the Pac-12.

Arizona will face Stanford on Sunday in the first all Pac-12 final. Barnes got there by beating UConn and Geno Auriemma, who coached all of UConn's 11 championships.

"No one thought we'd win, no one thought we'd be here," Barnes said. "We don't care. We believed in each other. We believed, our team believed."

McDonald, who stands just 5-foot-6, has led the way on the court since transferring from Washington and sitting out her first season when Arizona won just six games.

She did it all for the Wildcats against UConn



with slashing drives, pinpoint shooting from long range, and a defensive intensity that held UConn's star freshman Paige Bueckers in check for long stretches.

Arizona held UConn to a season-low in points and led by 14 late in the third quarter before holding off a late push. At the final buzzer, McDonald threw the ball high in the air and was mobbed by her teammates near center court. Then she shared a long hug with Barnes.

The small, but mostly pro-Arizona crowd at the Alamodome — the NCAA put limits on attendance because of the pandemic — chanted "U of A!" Arizona players came over to the loud rooting section, pointing to jerseys and waving hands up to get them to get louder.

"It was that grit," McDonald said of the Wildcats' defensive lockdown. "We didn't want to go home once again, and we're proving it. We're locking down and we're playing team defense. This is our identity, and we're best at defense. Defense wins games and

we did that tonight."

Bueckers, The Associated Press player of the year, finished with 18 points and her 3-pointer got UConn within 60-55 in the final two minutes before Arizona closed out the win with free throws. Christyn Williams led UConn (28-2) with 20 points before fouling out.

UConn has no seniors in the lineup and started slow as the Huskies looked tentative in the role of favorite. McDonald and the Wildcats looked primed for their moment after being left out of the NCAA's Final Four promotional video on Twitter that had featured the three other teams but not them.

UConn had four early turnovers and missed its first five shots before Bueckers made a 3-pointer to settle the offense, but only temporarily. McDonald, opened the game with a 3-pointer, made another two minutes later, and scored eight as the Wildcats led 16-10 after the first quarter.

"I think we came out with the wrong mentality. I thought we thought

it was going to be easy, I guess, and we got flustered," Williams said. "They had great ball pressure, it wasn't like anything we've seen before this season. And we just couldn't get in a flow offensively."

McDonald pumped in two more from long range in the second quarter and the Wildcats led 32-22 at halftime. Bueckers was struggling to get any looks at the basket and finished the half with just four shots and three points.

McDonald cooled off in the third with just two points on two free throws. But she delivered big points late, and her 3-point play in the final four minutes of the fourth put Arizona up by 10.

Auriemma, who has coached the national player of the year 12 times at UConn, gushed over McDonald's performance.

"Aari McDonald, I said going into the game that I don't think we've had to play against a guard as good as she is, and she proved it tonight. She just dominated the entire game, start to finish," he

said.

### LEARNING CURVE

After the loss, Bueckers was already looking to the future and the lessons that might be learned from the Huskies' fourth consecutive defeat in the national semifinals.

"There shouldn't have to be a loss for that to happen, but obviously we lost so we're trying to get the positives from it and just learn from it," Bueckers said. "I think just having a killer mentality no matter who we're playing, whether we're playing, it's the first game of the season or its the last game of the season is going to be huge for us going forward."

### STAT LINE

UConn had nine turnovers in the first half and just eight made field goals. The 10-point half-time deficit was their largest in the NCAA Tournament since 2007 when the Huskies lost in the Elite Eight by 23 to LSU. When Arizona's Helena Pueyo made a jumper in third to put the Wildcats up 14, it was UConn's largest deficit this season.

## UCLA's Juzang could be first Asian American NBA lottery pick



**INDIANAPOLIS (AP):** Johnny Juzang's impact at UCLA has been immediate since he transferred from Kentucky, giving the Bruins the scorer and dynamic player they had been missing in recent years.

The junior guard is playing his best at just the right time, leading the Bruins into the Final Four for the first time since 2008.

Juzang also has had a much broader impact, even if it has been unintentional.

Projected to be the second Asian American NBA first-round pick, possibly in the lottery, he has become an inspiration for younger players at a time when hate crimes against Asian Americans are on the rise.

"It's not something that's on the top of my mind or really think about. I'm just Johnny," said Juzang, whose mother is Vietnamese. "I will get messages or hear stories about how I inspire people, regardless of their heritage. Sometimes there are people of Asian decent. But just being able to inspire people is something that's touching and inspires me and something I don't take lightly."

Juzang's older brother Christian played at Harvard and led the Saigon Heat to the 2020 championship in the Vietnamese Basketball Association.

Christian was the top pick in the VBA draft, and the younger Juzang looks like he has an even brighter professional future. He has thrived on the court since transferring to Westwood. A former five-star recruit, the 6-foot-6 guard was a role player on a loaded Kentucky team, averaging 2.9 points and 1.9 assists in 28 games as a freshman.

Not long after the coronavirus pandemic shut down the season, Juzang announced he was transferring and later picked UCLA to be closer to his family in Tarzana, California.

Juzang missed the first four games of the 2020-21 season with a foot injury, but he is a big reason the Bruins were able to overcome senior Chris Smith's season-ending knee injury in early January.

Juzang was the Bruins' leading scorer at 15.5 points per game while shooting 34% from the 3-point arc and seemed to get better as the season progressed. He scored at least 20 points three times in the NCAA Tournament, including 28 against Michigan to clinch a spot in the Final

Four.

And he's done it on an ankle that's been bothering him for weeks.

"He's more of a scorer than a shooter and I think that's what he got labeled at Kentucky," UCLA coach Mick Cronin said. "I wanted him to get rid of that mindset. We really worked hard on his mid-range and him going to the basket. He's grown immensely."

Juzang's length and skill set have him projected as a possible NBA lottery pick. It will be history if he is.

Rex Walters, whose mother is Japanese, was a first-round NBA draft pick in 1993. Jeremy Lin was a standout at Harvard before his Linsanity days in the NBA and lengthy professional career.

Kihei Clark, who's Filipino American, made one of the biggest plays during Virginia's run to the 2019 championship and just completed his junior season.

Arizona State's Remy Martin had a stellar four-year career in the desert and Jordan Clarkson, who is also Filipino American, has a steady NBA career going after playing at Tulsa and Missouri.

Rui Hachimura of Gonzaga was a lottery pick, but he is a native of Japan. Yao Ming never played college basketball, going straight from the Chinese national team to the NBA.

Juzang is a rarity as an Asian American in college basketball with clear NBA potential.

"I think it'll be a really significant moment and I think the more that it can just be felt where that is normal, I think is what can make it even more significant," Miami Heat coach Erik Spoelstra, whose mother is Filipino, said without talking specifically about Juzang. "It doesn't matter what your race is or what your background is. As long as you can hoop, then people can see you in that way."

High draft pick or not, Juzang has been an inspiration for players, particularly young Asian Americans. Hate crimes against Asian Americans have spiked during the pandemic, as has the vitriol on social media and beyond toward people of Asian decent.

Juzang's success and UCLA's run into the Final Four has drawn positive reactions from Vietnam and all over the world.

"That's always a good feeling to hear from people, but I wouldn't say it's on the forefront of my mind," he said.

Maybe not, but it's helping — at least a little.

# California OKs indoor sports, concerts as COVID cases plunge

**SACRAMENTO, CALIF. (AP):** Sports, theater and music fans will be able to take their seats again in California as the state's coronavirus cases plummet and vaccinations jump.

After a year-long ban on most indoor seating, the state Friday set the stage for a literal stage-setting that could see resumption of NBA games and live entertainment performances in most counties beginning April 15.

Most of the state's 58 counties will be permitted to allow at least some indoor seating because they fall into the lower three levels of California's four-tiered COVID-19 restriction plan. Big population centers like San Francisco, Santa Clara County and Los Angeles County are in the second-least restrictive orange tier. Only three counties — San Joaquin, Merced and Inyo — remain in the highest purple tier, indicating "widespread" COVID-19 risk.

The others will be permitted some indoor seating "with capacity limits and modifications including physi-

cal distancing, advance ticket purchases, designated areas for eating and drinking, and attendance limited to in-state visitors," according to a state public health announcement.

In the red tier, venues of up to 1,500 people can operate at 10% capacity and grow to 25% if all guests provide evidence of vaccination or a negative test. Venues of 1,501 people or more can operate at 20% capacity in the red tier, but guests must show proof of vaccination or a negative test. Capacity increases for tiers where the virus is less widespread.

State officials won't require testing or proof of vaccination for some of those events. Events that do require testing and vaccinations will be allowed to have more paying customers than those that don't. Only people who live in California can attend these live performances.

The Los Angeles Lakers announced that fans will be allowed back into Staples Center for an April 15 game against the Bos-

ton Celtics.

"Obviously we don't know exactly how many fans will be there yet, but just having some in there will bring us great energy," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. "It's one of everybody's favorite things to do is go to Lakers games, and they haven't been able to do that during this pandemic."

Ben Bleiman, a San Francisco nightlife activist and chairman of the California Music and Culture Association, said venues need full capacity to make any money — but members will take the change, albeit with trepidation.

"On the one side you have the thrill and the joy of reopening," he said, adding on the other, "there's some dread that something's going to go wrong."

California has been easing COVID-19 restrictions as it recovers from a deadly winter surge, although public health officials still urge people to follow social distancing and mask-wearing protocols. Rates of hospitalizations and deaths have plunged, and the rate of people testing

positive for the virus is at a near-record low.

California's rules are different for private indoor gatherings, including weddings, meetings or conferences. Those are only to be allowed if all guests test negative for the coronavirus at least 72 hours in advance or show proof of full vaccination. The changes do not mention requiring proof of vaccination and put much of the enforcement on business owners and operators.

"Allowing some of these activities and opportunities to vaccinated individuals is an incentive," said Dee Dee Myers, director of the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development. "If they can return to some of their favorite activities because they're vaccinated, then hopefully a few more people will go and get vaccinated."

The new rules seem to nudge California toward a system of vaccine verification, a hotly debated issue across the country. New York has launched a digital pass residents can use to show proof of vaccination or a negative

COVID-19 test that is accepted at major entertainment venues. But Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis issued an executive order on Friday banning businesses from requiring so-called "vaccine passports."

President Joe Biden's administration has said the federal government won't come up with a national vaccine passport app, leaving that to the private sector. But the federal government is devising regulations for how and when those passports can be used.

California Public Health Officer Dr. Tomás Aragón said Friday the state will follow the federal government's lead but said vaccinations won't be required for essential services.

California's new rules come as the state has administered nearly 19 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccines. Nearly 6.9 million people are fully vaccinated in a state with close to 40 million residents. Only people 50 and over are eligible statewide to get the vaccine now, followed by those 16 and older on April 15.



# Christians mark Good Friday, Holy Week under virus woes

JERUSALEM (AP): Christians in the Holy Land marked Good Friday without the mass pilgrimages usually seen in the days leading up to Easter because of the coronavirus, and worshippers in many other predominantly Christian countries where the virus is still raging observed their second annual Holy Week with tight restrictions on gatherings.

In Jerusalem, many holy sites were open, thanks to an ambitious Israeli vaccination campaign. It was a stark contrast to last year, when the city was under lockdown. In neighboring Lebanon, Christians observed Good Friday under a lockdown and suffering a severe economic crisis.

In Latin America, penitents from Mexico and Guatemala to Paraguay carried tree branches covered with thorns and large crosses in Passion Plays reenacting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. At the Vatican, Pope Francis presided over a torch-lit Way of the Cross ceremony in St. Peter's Square, foregoing for a second year the traditional Colosseum procession that draws thousands of pilgrims, tourists and Romans.

Worshippers in the Philippines and France marked a second annual Holy Week under movement restrictions amid outbreaks fanned by more contagious strains. In the U.S., officials urged Christians to celebrate outdoors, while social distancing, or in virtual ceremonies.

In Jerusalem's Old City, Franciscan friars in brown robes led hundreds of worshippers down the Via Dolorosa, retracing what tradition holds were Jesus' final steps, while reciting prayers through loudspeakers at the Stations of the Cross. Another group carried a large wooden cross, singing hymns and pausing to offer prayers.

Religious sites were open to limited numbers of faithful. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site where Christians believe Jesus was crucified, died and rose from the dead, was open to visitors with masks and social distancing.

Despite one of the world's most successful vaccination campaigns, air travel to and from Israel is still limited by quarantine and other restrictions, keeping away the foreign pilgrims who usually throng Jerusalem during Holy Week. In past years, tens of thousands of pilgrims would descend on the city's



holy sites.

"In regular years we urge people to come out. Last year we told people to stay at home," said Wadie Abunassar, an adviser to church leaders in the Holy Land. "This year we are somehow silent."

"We have to pray for those who can't be here," said Alejandro Gonzalez, a Mexican living in Israel. "Those of us who can be here have a responsibility to keep them in mind and to go in this Way of the Cross that they are going through as well."

In Lebanon, Christians observed Good Friday amid a severe economic crisis exacerbated by the massive explosion that demolished parts of the capital last year. Even traditional Easter sweets are a luxury few can afford.

"People are not even talking about the feast," says Majida Al Asaily, owner of a sweets shop in Beirut. "We haven't witnessed anything like this year, despite the war and other difficulties that we had faced before."

At the Vatican, candles flickering in a breeze were placed in a circle around St. Peter's Square's central obelisk and along a path leading to steps outside St. Peter's Basilica. There, Francis sat under a canopy in the darkness on a warm evening, listening to children reading meditations composed by other children that recounted sorrowful episodes in their lives.

One child wrote of loneliness in the COVID-19 pandemic, not being able to visit grandparents to keep them safe from contagion and missing schoolmates and teachers since schools in Italy have been closed for long stretches due to lockdown. Another wrote about grandpa dying of COVID-19 without family members in a hospital.

At one point, Francis prayed that God would give people his hope so that "we will be able to recognize you even in the darkest moments of our life."

Anti-pandemic measures have devastat-

ed tourism in Italy and largely reduced religious pilgrimages to a trickle. Only a few hundred participants, including prelates, were allowed to attend.

In the U.S., faithful of all denominations were urged to abide by COVID-related capacity restrictions at houses of worship, to observe online services and to take mask-wearing and social distancing precautions at outdoor ceremonies.

The congregation of First Baptist Church in Medford, Wisconsin held graceful, low-key and socially-distanced indoor services that were livestreamed.

George Myers, pastor of student ministries, focused their attention on the final thing Jesus said on the cross: "It is finished." Those words were not about His death, but about His completion of the work He was sent to do, Myers said.

"So FBC, don't miss this. This is the moment when Jesus undid the curse of sin and the curse of death," Myers assured his congregants.

At St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Denver, celebrants wearing face masks staged an elaborate outdoor reenactment of the Stations of the Cross featuring Roman soldiers on horseback and jeering onlookers using fake leather whips on a condemned Jesus Christ carrying a cross. Police officers escorted the entourage through the neighborhood as church workers handed out face masks to those not wearing them in the crowd of onlookers.

In New York, Archbishop Timothy Dolan presided over a Celebration of the Passion of the Lord at St. Patrick's Cathedral attended by mask-wearing clergy and worshippers. That service, an evening Stations of the Cross ceremony and a reflection on the passion and death of Christ were broadcast on the Catholic Channel on Sirius XM and livestreamed on the cathedral's YouTube channel

and website.

"We may be separated by distance, but we are united in Faith," the archdiocese said in its invitation to Holy Week celebrations.

In France, a nationwide 7 p.m. curfew forced parishes to move Good Friday ceremonies forward in the day, the traditional Catholic night processions drastically scaled back or cancelled. Nineteen departments in France are on localized lockdowns, where parishioners can attend daytime Mass if they sign the government's "travel certificate."

Fire-ravaged Notre Dame did not hold a Good Friday Mass this year, but the cathedral's "Crown of Thorns" was being venerated by the cathedral's clergy at its new temporary liturgical hub in the nearby church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois.

In Spain, there were no traditional processions for a second year in a row. Churches limited the number of worshippers. Many parishes went online with Mass and prayers via video streaming services.

In the Philippines, streets were eerily quiet and religious gatherings were prohibited in the capital, Manila, and four outlying provinces. The government placed the bustling region of more than 25 million people back under lockdown this week as it scrambled to contain an alarming surge in COVID-19 cases.

The Philippines had started to reopen in hopes of breathing life into its suffering economy, but infections surged last month, apparently because of more contagious strains, increased public mobility and complacency.

In Kenya, all churches were ordered to close as part of a ban on large gatherings to contain a worsening outbreak. Joseph Karinga went to his church anyway and prayed outside the shuttered doors, in a garden near a shrine to Mary.

"I will just say my rosary here and go home," he said.

Authorities initially reported 51 deaths but revised the count down by one on Saturday. Among those killed was a U.S. citizen. Another U.S. citizen who was on the train was reported missing, according to a statement by Taiwan's Foreign Ministry.

Yu Hsiu-duan, chief prosecutor in eastern Hualien County where the train derailed, said they were seeking an arrest warrant for the truck's owner, who was questioned along with several

others. She didn't offer details citing an ongoing investigation.

The Hualien district court allowed the truck owner to post bail of 500,000 new Taiwan dollars (US\$17,516) but he must stay in the county and avoid contact with any witnesses, Taiwan's Central News Agency reported.

President Tsai Ing-wen visited hospitals near the crash instead of the site itself so as not to interfere with rescue work, her spokesperson said.

# Germany faces 'crisis of trust' in pandemic, president says

FRANKFURT, GERMANY (AP): Germany's president says the country is enduring a "crisis of trust" and urged people to "pull together" as they weather a second Easter amid pandemic restrictions and dissatisfaction over the government's response.

In the text of an address to be broadcast Saturday, Frank-Walter Steinmeier conceded that "there were mistakes" regarding testing, digital solutions and vaccinations.

"Trust — in a democracy it rests on a very fragile understanding between citizens and the state: 'You, state, do your part, I, citizen, do mine,'" he said. "I know that you, the citizens,



are doing your part in this historic crisis. You have done much and you have gone without much."

"Your expectation for those in government is, 'Get it together.'"

Steinmeier said the country had swung from self-satisfaction over lower infection numbers

in the early stage of the pandemic to excessive pessimism today.

He urged Germans to "pull together" and put aside "constant indignation over others or over people in high places." He said that vaccine deliveries would increase sharply in the coming weeks,

Europe was building up its production capacities, and general practitioners would join the vaccination effort in addition to large vaccine centers.

"The truth is, we're not world champion, but we're not a failure either," he said.

Germany, along with the European Union as a whole, has lagged behind the U.S. and the U.K. in the speed of its vaccination effort amid slower procurement of vaccines and complaints about excessive bureaucracy and paperwork. Poll numbers for Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative party have slipped as the country faces a national election on Sept. 26. Merkel isn't running again.

# Myanmar death toll mounts amid protests, military crackdown

YANGON, MYANMAR (AP): Security forces in central Myanmar opened fire on anti-coup protesters on Saturday in violence that a human rights group said has left 550 civilians dead since the Feb. 1 military takeover.

Of those, 46 were children, according to Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Some 2,751 people have been detained or sentenced, the group said.

Threats of lethal violence and arrests of protesters have failed to suppress daily demonstrations across Myanmar demanding the military step down and reinstate the democratically elected government.

Government forces fired at demonstrators in Monywa city in central Myanmar, according to social media posts. One video showed a group of protesters carrying away a young man with what appeared to be a serious head wound, as gunfire sounded. His condition wasn't immediately known.

Late Friday, armed plainclothes police took five people into custody after they spoke with a CNN reporter in a Yangon market, local media



reported, citing witnesses. The arrests occurred in three separate incidents.

Two women reportedly shouted for help as they were being arrested, Myanmar Now news service reported. One police officer, who was carrying a gun, asked if "anyone dared to help them," a witness told the news service.

"They pointed their pistols at everyone—at passersby and at people in the store," a witness said of two police officers who forcibly took away two other women in the market.

Meanwhile, the Karen National Union representing the ethnic minority rebel group that has been fighting the government for decades condemned "non-stop bombings and airstrikes" against the villages and "unarmed civilians" in their homeland along the border

with Thailand.

"The attacks have caused the death of many people including children and students, and the destruction of schools, residential homes, and villages. These terrorist acts are clearly a flagrant violation of local and international laws," the group said in a statement.

In areas controlled by the Karen, more than a dozen civilians have been killed and over 20,000 displaced since March 27, according to the Free Burma Rangers, a relief agency operating in the region.

About 3,000 Karen fled to Thailand, but many returned under unclear circumstances. Thai authorities said they went back voluntarily, but aid groups say they are not safe and many are hiding in the jungle and in caves on the Myanmar side of the border.

More than a dozen minority groups have sought greater autonomy from the central government for decades, sometimes through armed struggle. Several of the major groups — including the Kachin, the Karen and the Rakhine Arakan Army — have denounced the coup and said they will defend protesters in their territories.

After weeks of overnight cutoffs of internet access, Myanmar's military on Friday shut all links apart from those using fiberoptic cable, which was working at drastically reduced speeds. Access to mobile networks and all wireless — the less costly options used by most people in the developing country — remained blocked on Saturday.

The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar, which for five decades languished under strict military rule that led to international isolation and sanctions. As the generals loosened their grip, culminating in Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to leadership in 2015 elections, the international community responded by lifting most sanctions and pouring investment into the country.

# Taiwan prosecutors seek arrest in deadly train crash

HUALIEN COUNTY, TAIWAN (AP): Prosecutors in Taiwan on Saturday sought an arrest warrant for the owner of an unmanned truck that rolled onto a train track and caused the country's worst rail disaster in decades, killing 50 people and injuring 178.

The train was carrying 494 people at the start of a long holiday weekend on Friday when it smashed into the construction truck, the Taiwan Railways Ad-

ministration said. The truck's emergency brake was not properly engaged, according to the government's disaster relief center.

The crash occurred just before the train entered a tunnel, and many passengers were crushed inside the mangled train carriages. With much of the train stuck inside the tunnel, some survivors were forced to climb out of windows and walk along the train's roof to safety.

Authorities initially reported 51 deaths but revised the count down by one on Saturday. Among those killed was a U.S. citizen. Another U.S. citizen who was on the train was reported missing, according to a statement by Taiwan's Foreign Ministry.

Yu Hsiu-duan, chief prosecutor in eastern Hualien County where the train derailed, said they were seeking an arrest warrant for the truck's owner, who was questioned along with several

others. She didn't offer details citing an ongoing investigation.

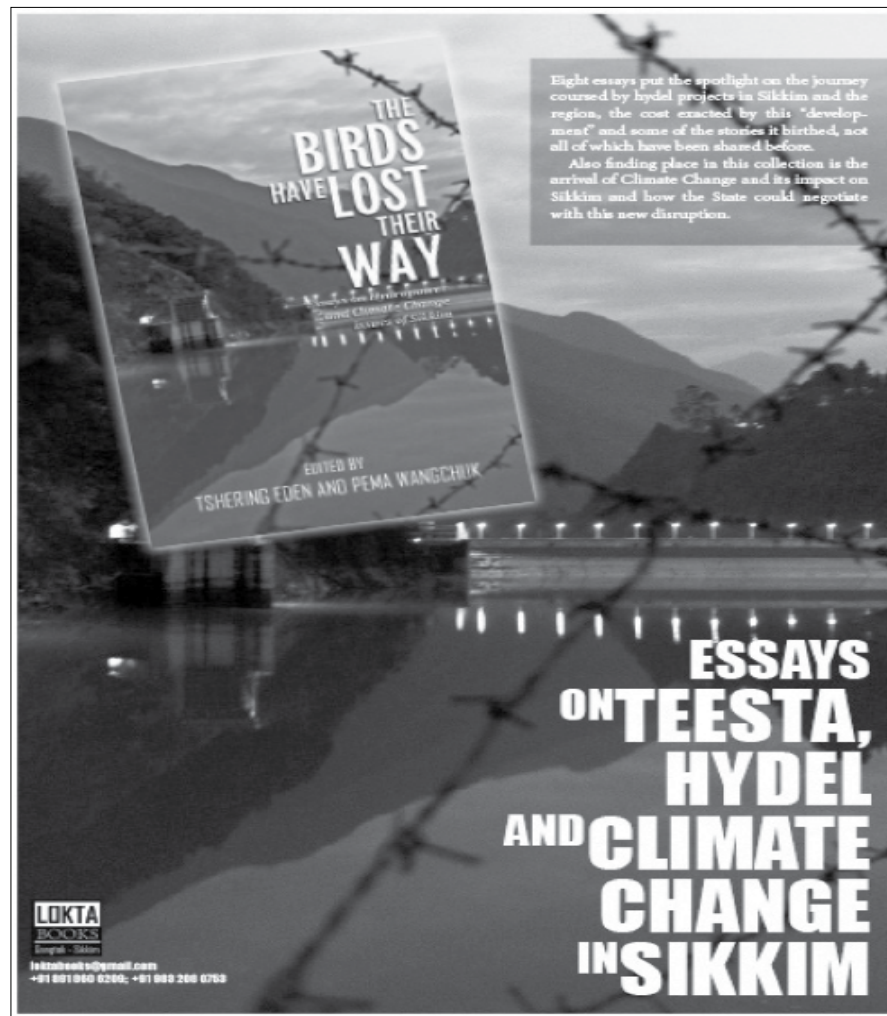
The Hualien district court allowed the truck owner to post bail of 500,000 new Taiwan dollars (US\$17,516) but he must stay in the county and avoid contact with any witnesses, Taiwan's Central News Agency reported.

President Tsai Ing-wen visited hospitals near the crash instead of the site itself so as not to interfere with rescue work, her spokesperson said.

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# With King Kong, a little swagger returns to the box office



**NEW YORK (AP):** Once again, mayhem and mass destruction is back at the box office. It's almost like old times.

"Godzilla vs. Kong," one of the few tent-poles to dare release during COVID times, is poised this weekend to set a new high in ticket sales during the pandemic. It won't be the kind of blockbuster business such a big-budget release would typically manage, but experts forecast a launch of at least \$25 million. Opening-day ticket sales on Wednesday for "Godzilla vs. Kong" totaled \$9.6 million, Warner Bros. said Thursday — a single-day pandemic record and more than most 2020-2021 opening weekend hauls. Last weekend, the monster mash pulled in an impressive \$123.1 million internationally. In China, where moviegoing is close to pre-pandemic levels, the movie made about \$70 million, double the debut of 2014's "Godzilla."

For the first time in a long time, there's the faint hint of a hit at the box office.

"It's a good omen that the tastes of the consumer have not shifted so much that there's no possibility of restarting the movie business," says Joshua Grode, chief executive of Legendary Entertainment, which produced "Godzilla vs. Kong." "This tells everybody: the moviegoing business is here, and, yes, it may be different post-pandemic. But there is a viable industry there."

Huge challenges remain to the revival of moviegoing. With so many cinemas shuttered for nearly an entire year, many moviegoers are out of the habit. Some are unlikely to return to sitting indoors with strangers until they're vaccinated or the pandemic has ebbed. And even those who have been convinced of the safety of moviegoing by theaters' health protocols, they now have only more in-home options. "Godzilla vs. Kong" is streaming simultaneously on HBO Max in North America.

But few scream big screen as much as King Kong and Godzilla. To help kick-start moviegoing and bring back a little chest-thumping swagger to theaters, the industry is counting on two of the movies' most iconic, long-running leviathans. Laying another metropolis to waste might help movie theaters build themselves back up.

"The issue is less convincing consumers to go to the movies than it is convincing studios to open their movies," says Rich Gelfond, IMAX's chief executive. "There's been a hesitancy on the part of Hollywood studios to release movies because they haven't been convinced the demand is there. What I really hope this weekend shows is that there is a lot of demand there and it convinces

them to open a lot of movies that have been sitting on the shelf."

Since the launch of "Tenet" fizzled last August, and virus cases soared, most studios have been postponing or rerouting their biggest releases to streaming services. But as vaccinations have ramped up and restrictions have eased, more theaters have opened. About 60% of theaters will be open this weekend, according to data firm Comscore. On Monday, Los Angeles County will expand cinema capacity from 25% to 50%. For the first time since last winter, wide release will mean playing in more than 3,000 theaters. That's still about 1,200 shy of typical for a title like "Godzilla vs. Kong."

Recently, ticket sales, while still far below their usual levels, are ticking upward. The best debut of 2021 was "Tom & Jerry," with \$13.7 million in late February. The pandemic-high belongs to "Wonder Woman 1984," which launched with \$16.7 million in December. Each were Warner Bros. releases that landed simultaneously on HBO Max — a once controversial release plan that has helped theaters stay afloat and proved an interesting test case for how viewers prefer to see, and pay for, a movie.

Nevertheless, the Walt Disney Co. recently delayed the planned summer-kickoff of "Black Widow" to July, while pushing a number of titles to its streaming platform, Disney+. Part of what's holding blockbusters back is the need for a global release to make back their sizable production budgets and marketing spend. ("Godzilla vs. Kong" cost about \$160 million to make.) While moviegoing in much of Asia is rejuvenated, rising cases in Europe and in countries like Brazil have, for now, made a full worldwide rollout impossible.

Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore, believes "Godzilla vs. Kong" will be "another building block in our education in where the industry is heading."

"The theatrical experience will prove to be viable and resilient as it always has," says Dergarabedian. "But it's going to be a different world, no question. I think it's going to be a leaner, meaner business going forward."

## Avant-garde publisher Giancarlo DiTrapano dead at 47

**NEW YORK (AP):** Giancarlo DiTrapano, an avant-garde magazine and book publisher who as the founder of New York Tyrant worked with Atticus Lish, Sam Lipsyte and Padgett Powell among others and proudly defied mainstream trends, has died. He was 47.

A spokesperson for DiTrapano's family, Lauren Cerand, told The Associated Press that he died Tuesday in New York City. She did not immediately have further details. DiTrapano had a small, but devoted following, and was praised for his willingness to take on writers that the larger publishers shunned.

"He was who you should have wanted to impress, a real person in a world



where there are vanishingly few," the novelist and critic Lauren Oyler tweeted Friday. "He was exactly what a publisher should be and was going to do so much more."

A native of Charleston, West Virginia, and graduate of Loyola University New Orleans, he founded New York Tyrant

Some of the old standard practices that have governed blockbusters aren't coming back. Studios like Warner Bros. and Universal Pictures have made deals to shorten exclusive theatrical windows. Warner Bros. next year will hold movies in theaters for a minimum of 45 days, or half of the traditional window, before moving releases to at-home platforms. Such new models mean a recalibrating of what movies get greenlit and how much they're worth.

"The value of those streaming/pay-TV rights are more valuable now because you're getting access to them much, much earlier than you did before," says Grode. "So you kind of have to rerun your model of how the movie is going to perform over its lifetime."

It's also meant some tense negotiations over profit participation. When Warner Bros. surprised with its hybrid release plans for 2021, Legendary — whose highly anticipated "Dune" is to be released in the fall by Warner Bros. — considered legal action before arriving at an agreement.

"We obviously didn't like the way they announced what they were doing in 2021, and I think they would admit they didn't handle it perfectly," says Grode. "But when you look at the state of the world, the facts as we all knew them at the time, their decision made a lot of sense."

"You get over that pretty quickly and you get back to business," he added.

Helping theaters get back to business, Gelfond believes, are large-format screens "that differentiate the couch as much as they can." IMAX accounted for 14% of the Chinese box office for "Godzilla vs. Kong." This weekend, the film will be playing on 1,170 IMAX screens worldwide. Showings in New York and Los Angeles, Gelfond said, are already sold out, albeit at lower capacity.

The box office might not quite roar again this weekend, but "Godzilla vs. Kong" may show it has a little bite left. Says Grode: "In years from now, when people write about coming back to the movies, I'm very proud that 'Godzilla vs. Kong' will be in that history."

Magazine in 2006 and three years later began Tyrant Books, which he ran out of his kitchen in Hell's Kitchen. Releases from what became New York Tyrant ranged from a book of photographs of Iggy Pop to Scott McClanahan's raw "The Sarah Book" and Marie Calloway's "what purpose did I serve in your life," a work so explicit that a printing company refused to produce copies of it.

"Tyrant stuff isn't for everyone, but nothing should be for everyone," DiTrapano once said.

In 2015, the publisher received broader attention with Lish's "Preparation for the Next Life," which won the PEN/Faulkner prize for fiction.



**MIAMI BLISS!** The model, Olivia Culpo looks vibrant in a flowing Valentino pink dress while visiting the Rubell Museum.

## Dionne Warwick Says What We're All Thinking About Regé-Jean Page's Bridgerton Exit

After Netflix broke hearts with the revelation that Regé-Jean Page would not return for season two of Bridgerton, Dionne Warwick took to Twitter with a message for Lady Whistledown.

Dionne Warwick has some beef with Lady Whistledown, and she's going to bat for all of us.

Perhaps no one was more disappointed than the queen of Twitter herself that Regé-Jean Page is not returning for season two of Bridgerton. (Yes, we're crushed).

Dionne expressed her deep disappointment that our reigning internet boyfriend won't appear again in the Netflix series, meaning we won't be able to hear Simon telling Daphne, "I burn for you" anymore, except maybe on SNL.

On Friday, April 2, the "Heartbreaker" singer tweeted, "No, @regejean! You CANNOT leave me like that. I WILL NOT have it!"

She followed it up with, "I demand a retraction, @bridgerton!!!! I need to hear this news straight from @regejean if this is true," along with a bunch of unimpressed emojis.

Dionne, 80, included an audio message that addressed Lady Whistledown directly. The Grammy winner can be heard saying, "Now tell me you are lying with that letter you just wrote? About my, uh uh, he cannot be leaving. No way! I will not have it. And I want him to know it. I want you to know it. So I want you to make a retraction of what I just read, OK? I'm serious. I need to hear from him, out of his mouth, OK? Thank you."

Sadly, the Duke of Hastings himself has confirmed the exit. Regé-Jean wrote on Ins-

tagram, "It's been an absolute pleasure and a privilege to be your Duke. Joining this family—not just on screen, but off screen too. Our incredibly creative and generous cast, crew, outstanding fans—it's all been beyond anything I could have imagined."

The actor, who is slated to star in The Gray Man with Chris Evans added, "The love is real and will just keep growing."

But regardless of Regé-Jean's upcoming projects, Dionne wants him on Team Bridgerton. Jill Hopkins told her, "You gotta let him go! He's got James Bond shoes to fill." Dionne simply responded with an angry emoji, a unicorn emoji and one word: "No."

Earlier in the day, the show's infamous gossip character announced his departure in a written statement. "While all eyes turn to Lord Anthony Bridgerton's quest to find a Viscountess, we bid adieu to Regé-Jean Page, who so triumphantly played the Duke of Hastings," the statement from Lady Whistledown read. "We'll miss Simon's presence onscreen, but he will always be a part of the Bridgerton family."

Fortunately, Daphne (Phoebe Dynevor) is staying in Shondaland a bit longer and will return for the second season.

But if you're already missing Regé-Jean, just know his exit is not as shocking as you might have originally thought.

As fans of the books are aware, the first installment, The Duke and I, obviously centers around Daphne and Simon. However, the second tale, The Viscount Who Loved Me, focuses on Daphne's brother Anthony (Johnathan Bailey) and his search for love.

### ARIES:

You knew this relationship was toxic from the word 'go, Aries. Yet, you wanted to give them a fair chance, and that's okay. However, it's important for you to recognize that this is not a healthy space and that \*your\* future will be in jeopardy if you resist what the Universe is showing you at this moment. Word for the wise: honour the natural progression of life and cut the cords where you need to.

### TAURUS:

It's a 'count your blessings' kind of day in the Taurus HQ. You're feeling the love for your friends and family who in turn are providing you with endless love and support. There's fantastic news for single bulls too. Somebody from your tribe is in the mood to play matchmaker. So, break up with your inner skeptic and say yes to any and all opportunities to mix and mingle.

### GEMINI:

If you keep telling yourself that you'll be by yourself for the rest of your life, guess what, you may just end up attracting circumstances that confirm your belief. It's time to cancel this pity party for one, Gemini. It's time to

change out of those sweatpants you clearly haven't washed in a while! Something tells us the opportunity to get risky and a little bit frisky is just around the corner.

### CANCER:

What if we said that the divine plan is better than the one you and I could pen down? Trust in what's taking place for you, and trust what isn't too. There's a reason your life is unfolding the way that it is. If you're trying to revive a certain romance, let go of any and all expectations. You cannot make somebody commit unless they're ready to. It's time to honour their journey as you redirect the focus towards your own.

### LEO:

We all have our fears, Leo. Fears that manifest in different ways when we're triggered. Pay attention to how they are manifesting in \*your\* life at this moment as you consciously replace fear with faith. Remember, you don't have to do this alone. Have an open and honest conversation with your beloved about what you are struggling with. Let them hold your hand through this one and trust that you will find a solution.

### VIRGO:

When you mean business, you mean business. If there's something the world can count on you for, it's to get work done around here. So, when your fellow warriors refuse to do their bit, it triggers you in ways you cannot put in words. The bad news is, yes, there is something shady going on behind your back, and no, you may or may not be able to convince others to get things done as per your plan. The good thing is, you're fully capable of doing it all by yourself.

### LIBRA:

When you commit to something (or someone), you tend to go all in, Libra, and that's one of the most wonderful things about you. Quick question, though: is the other person willing to meet you where you are? Something tells us you already know the answer to this one. So don't shy away from calling them out in their BS or asking for more accountability in this relationship. Those who truly love you will never expect you to be anybody but your true self.

### SCORPIO:

There's a part of you that is rooted in this

reality and there's another part of you that loves taking flights of fantasy to parallel realities. You are both of this world and not from it. You're both sensual and a little bit of a mystery, and that's what makes you oh-so-beautiful, Scorpio! Today, you're being asked to observe the many contradictions within and give them all space to co-exist harmoniously.

### SAGITTARIUS:

It's time for a check-in, Sagittarius: how much of your past relationship(s) are you carrying into this one? In what ways are you constantly acting from a space of fear? When you project disappointment into the future, chances are, that's what you will end up attracting into your Universe. Word for the wise: it's time to get raw and honest and vulnerable. It's time to show them who you really are. When you drop the non-committal act, trust that you will inspire a change in the other.

### CAPRICORN:

So, you've had your heart broken a few times, Capricorn. Then again, who hasn't? Stop repeating the story that good things do not come your way, and open yourself up to the magic that surrounds you at this moment.

Something tells us an online romance is on the cards! Couples who've been away from each other are being encouraged to get creative about how they stay connected. PS: There's nothing like a handwritten letter to profess your love.

### AQUARIUS:

What if we're all in a simulation, Aquarius? What if our journey on the earthly realm is no more than a play orchestrated for the celestial beings? Word for the wise: step into the role of the observer, especially when you find yourself in the midst of a chaos. Remember, what is yours will never be taken away from you. Allow for the cleanse and purge to take place as it must.

### PISCES:

You've been doing the 'one step forward, two steps backwards' tango for a while now, and it's getting exhausting, Pisces! It's time to get real with yourself so you're able to express your truth to those around you. Yes, withdrawing without saying a word is an option too. What you need to keep in mind is that this will keep you stuck exactly where you are.