



RURAL DEV DEPT HOLDS COORDINATION MEETING

pg 03

THE FUNDS HAVE DRIED UP, AND SO HAS CONCERN IT APPEARS

pg 04

SDF ACCUSES SKM GOVT OF NEPOTISM

pg 02



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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CM inaugurates Viral Research and Diagnostic Lab at STNM

ARPAN PRADHAN
GANGTOK, 21 MAY:

Chief Minister of Sikkim, Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) inaugurated the Viral Research and Diagnostic Lab (VRDL) established at the STNM hospital, Sochyangang, Gangtok, today. The STNM Hospital is the only indetified COVID-19 Hospital in the state and the Viral Testing Lab is on the 9th floor of the Hospital.

It may be mentioned here that the 7th, 8th and 9th floor of the STNM Hospital has been designated and dedicated for COVID-19.

The inaugural function had the presence of Minister of Health, Government of Sikkim, Dr MK Sharma, Principal Secretary Health Department, Dr K Srinivasulu, Secretary cum Director General of Health, Government of Sikkim, Dr Pempa T Bhut-

ia, Medical Superintendent, Dr Passang Bhutia and other concerned officials.

After the inauguration, the Chief Minister along with other officials present visited and inspected the Viral Testing lab where the concerned officials briefed the CM about the functioning of the lab and introduced various machines that are installed in the lab.

After the official inauguration the CM while addressing the media persons said that now onwards Coronavirus tests will be done in Sikkim and samples will not have to be sent outside the state for testing.

"Sikkim has its own Viral Testing Lab now and testing will be conducted in the state. The establishment of the Viral Testing lab is one of the major achievements of the State," said the Chief Minister.

He congratulated Sik-



kimese people for this achievement and expressed his gratitude towards each and every frontline worker who has been tirelessly working in the setting up of the laboratory. He has thanked Doctors, Nurses, Health Workers and other frontline workers.

The Chief Minister informed that the VRDL will be functional from Monday and during the initial stage a total of 90-100

samples will be tested at the lab which will be gradually increased to 200-300 in days to come.

"As of now Sikkim is safe from Coronavirus but even if we get a positive case, the state is fully prepared and ready to treat COVID-19 patients," said Mr Golay.

He informed that the State Health Department

..Turn to page 2

One check-in bag to fare control: Govt issues guidelines for domestic flight operations from May 25

NEW DELHI, MAY 21 (PTI): A day after announcing resumption of domestic commercial passenger flights from May 25, the Civil Aviation Ministry on Thursday issued detailed guidelines for airlines, airports, passengers and other stakeholders.

The ministry said it will prescribe lower and upper limit on air fares and airlines will have to adhere to it "during the period of COVID-19 pandemic".

"On the day of commencement (May 25), limited operations

(about one-third) would be permitted," it said.

It said passengers will have to report at airport two hours prior to their flight's scheduled departure time and only those who have done web check-in will be allowed to enter the terminal building.

Only one check-in bag would be allowed and airlines will not provide any meal services in flights, the ministry said.

Boarding for a flight will commence 60 minutes before depar-

ture and boarding gate will be closed 20 minutes before departure, it said.

All scheduled commercial passenger flight operations have been suspended since March 25, when the Modi government announced the nationwide lockdown to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri had announced on Wednesday that domestic flights will resume from May 25 in a calibrated manner.

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ViewPoint

Why Being a Certain Kind of Indian is not Glorious?

JIWAN RAI

An unverified rumour had it that Mahatma Gandhi, in his only visit to Darjeeling in 1925, was a bit concerned about the "laid-back" lifestyle of the Gorkhas. He supposedly told them to avoid too much drinking and gambling (card playing). This could merely be a joke self-crafted by the Gorkhas and intended for self-admonition. Real or unreal, Indian Gorkhas have struggled with some of their cultural flaws - as is true of any other culture group globally. There are many flaws inbuilt into human cultures.

However, in a country like India, with its several cultural divides like Northeast (NE) versus Desi, South versus North and so on, the tendency to inordinately overemphasize the cultural flaws of the other culture is too strong to restrain. We do that to gloss over our own striking cultural shortcomings. The war for cultural superiority goes on. India is a country that looks hopelessly locked into its cultural hypocrisy.

Whatever the cultural divide, contrasted against the backdrop of the so-called mainstream Indian cultural background, Indian Gorkhas stick out like a sore thumb. The same can be said about the rest of NE Indians. But diversities within the NE itself are staggering. Often the diversities within the NE regions are antagonistic. The Nepalis in many NE states have been on the wrong side of identity conflicts. They will always be treated as outsiders in many NE states. The

tricky concept of 'Nepal roots' will be used desperately to make them feel politically shaky.

In this article I want to look at the Nepali cultural identity crisis at the national level (India) and that necessitates lumping Indian Nepalis with the rest of NE Indians.

A subtle narrative has been spun in India, the core message of which is that being NE Indian is not glorious. There is a spirit within the 'self-proclaimed mainstream Indians' which is manically inclined to dismiss NE Indianness as a perverted or inferior version of original Indian-ness. This denigrating perception of NE Indian-ness is preached using all three megaphones in India - namely politics, academia and media.

Politics: How does Indian politics promote the "othering of NE"? It is simple. By remaining deafeningly silent on some of the core NE cultural issues. This strategic silence makes the NE get effectively alienated culturally. Sometimes they break silence which is even worse. In the past, some "mainstream" leaders have made obnoxious remarks about NE cuisine and their dressing sense.

Academia: Indian academia is entirely unequivocally 'mainstream-oriented'. Schools kids in the NE are fed almost exclusively the history of Maharana Pratap, Tipu Sultan, Jhansi Ki Rani and so on. But, just for example, do the students in UP and Gujarat know how Sikkim became a part of India? Our science textbooks are full of

illustrations that are exclusively familiar to plainspeople. Extrapolate such filtered academic input to the higher level and you will get a clue about where the NE exists in relation to Indian academia.

Media: National media in all its forms are notoriously "mainstream-oriented". Do they ever feel guilty for shamelessly overhyping things like Anushka Sharma scolding a boy who was littering or a celebrity pet dying? The media attention-starved NE has long been accustomed to the national media's practice of remaining decidedly low-key about much more important NE events.

Bollywood, the self-proclaimed definer of the Indian cinematic arts is just as hypocritical as its name is counterfeited. The distinctive Indian heroic looks do not fit NE features, not even when Mary Kom's story was made into a film. A Bihar-born Punjabi girl had to be brought into the lead role to assert Bollywood's idea of a 'single overarching Indian identity'.

The Gorkhas/Nepalis under the Bollywood lens is an underclass- Darwan class to be precise! Now Paatal Lok, a TV series produced by a Bollywood actress goes so far as to link the Nepali community with prostitution. It is nothing less than narrow-minded, primitive and frustrated racism. But the country's media experts would like to differ. They are too artistically immersed to feel the hurt of a community. But on the pretext of

creative expression, they are also furtively expressing their perception of the community's moral standard. If it doesn't represent the perception of Indian media, why is there not a single voice of condemnation from Indian media? It is a triumph of deep-seated racism that has thrived in Indian civilization for centuries.

This matter will soon die. We rant and rave in our corner. Certain of our Nepali elite will say, "I don't feel profiled. We have to think big. Let us not play victim!" Our protest from the NE is not loud enough because it is not consolidated enough. We harbour a latent ethnicity-based contempt among us, totally ignoring that the tiger that ate my neighbour may eat me one day. At the national level, such contemptuous matters sell big time. Aesthetically, it vindicates the fair-skinned obsessed mainstream Indian mindset. Morally, it notionally proves their moral higher ground. Culturally, it affirms their cultural superiority. Diplomatically, it perhaps sends a signal to a country that is seemingly displaying an unprecedented affinity to an enemy country. Politically, it intensifies the othering of the 'less Indian culture'. Historically, it is the wounded voice of the India that was mistreated as a lesser culture by its abusive colonial master for over two centuries. But the burgeoning burden of India's cultural hypocrisy has been weighing ever more heavily on the NE people. This time - Indian Nepalis! Who is next?

Bharat Basnet wants CM to call all-party meet on derogatory reference to Nepali community in web-series

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 MAY:

Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee [SPCC] president, Bharat Basnet, while strongly condemning what he sees as demeaning characterization of Nepalese in web series, has demanded that the Chief Minister immediately call a meeting of all political and non-political organizations and lead a joint action committee to take the matter to its logical end.

Mr Basnet is echoing

the protest which has been gaining ground online against the web series in question, Paatal Lok, streaming on Amazon Prime.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Basnet mentioned that the objectionable language used to pigeonhole the community was an attack on the entire community.

He also urged the Centre to take action against the producers and remove the objectionable scene from the

web series.

He has also demanded legal action.

Mr Basnet asserted that all Nepali-speaking people should protest and condemn the series.

"I have already placed this matter with the All India Congress Committee general secretary in-charge for Sikkim, Gaurav Gogai, and he has promised that the Indian National Congress will stand with the community on the issue if Sikkim takes up this matter sensibly," Mr Basnet said.

Viral Lab to conduct tests from Monday

GANGTOK, 21 MAY (IPR):

Sikkim's own Viral Research and Diagnostic Laboratory (VRDL) is now a reality. The laboratory is situated on the 9th floor of the COVID19 dedicated Hospital and will have the capacity to conduct 90 tests at a time.

Each batch (90 samples) will take five hours to deliver the test results. The initial process of RNA Extraction will take three and half hours, followed by one and half hours of actual testing. The VRD Laboratory will initially be manned by one Microbiologist and two laboratory technicians. Subsequent batches of lab technicians are being trained to replace the present batch in the

stipulated time frame.

With the establishment of the VRD Laboratory in the State, samples for COVID-19 will no longer have to be sent to North Bengal Medical College and Hospital, Siliguri, for RTPCR testing.

The RNA Extraction Kit and all the required consumables to be used in the VRD Laboratory will go for a final round of validation by the ICMR after which the Laboratory will be fully functional. As per information received from senior health officials, the Laboratory should be in a position to start the process of testing from Monday, the 25 May, 2020.

It may be mentioned here that 75% of the cost

of construction and establishment of the Laboratory was funded by ICMR, while 25% of the cost was borne by Alkem Laboratories Pvt. Ltd. from its CSR fund.

The ICMR has procured the equipment and consumables for the Laboratory through the National Institute of Pathology, Noida.

It may be reminded that the STNM Hospital has been conducting regular tests through the TrueNat machines available with the Hospital. Till date, out of 583 samples tested through the TrueNat Testing Machine, 459 samples have tested negative for COVID-19, while the results of the remaining samples is awaited.

In Memory



We thought of you in love today,
But that is nothing new.
We thought about you yesterday
And the days before that too.
We think of you in silence,
We often speak your name
Now all we have are memories
And your picture in a frame.
Your memory is our keepsake,
With which we will never part.
God has you in his keeping
We have you in our hearts!

-Love Always,
Roma
Annapurna, Puran
Ahaan & Jed
Santa Bhawan, Gangtok

SDF accuses SKM Govt of nepotism

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 21 MAY:**

Sikkim Democratic Front spokesperson, Krishna Kharel lambasted the State government on the recent appointment of Rajendra Dhakal, the son of Political Advisor to the CM, TN Dhakal, as Assistant Scientific Officer on 15 May. Mr Dhakal was appointed on adhoc basis on a consolidated pay of Rs 25,000 per month under Science & Technology Department for a period of two years.

While accusing the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha government of nepotism, he asserted that there should be transparency and impartiality in the recruitment process and every unemployed youth of the State should get equal opportunity.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Kharel expressed that the prime responsibility of the government is to protect the rights and privileges of its people and to provide security to them in all areas.

"When people are



already terrorized by the present situation of COVID-19 pandemic such practice of the government is creating more fear among the people," he said.

Mr Kharel mentioned that the recent cabinet meeting held on 08 May decided to ban the appointment under regular/work-charged/muster roll/adhoc/consolidated pay/ temporary basis for six months as part of austerity measures during this pandemic period. On the same, he asserted that the government has gone against its own cabinet decision with the appointment of Mr Dhakal

on 15 May.

He added that the appointment also shows that the government decisions are only for general public and is not meant for the people in power.

The SKM spokesperson had announced to provide jobs to 30,000 youths of Sikkim during elections but not a single promise has been fulfilled almost a year after government formation.

"If the announcement was made just to come to power then SKM should tell the truth to the youth of Sikkim," he said. Such direct appointment without exams or inter-

view is great injustice to the unemployed youth, he added.

Mr Kharel further talked about hike taxi fares since taxis are not being allowed to carry passengers to its full capacity. On the same, he asserted that it is the responsibility of the government to take up the matter seriously as people from rural areas have been facing problems due to overcharging.

He added that the state government should provide economic package to drivers to provide them relief and to stop overcharging.

Another SDF spokesperson, Ash-

it Rai alleged that the present government is denying people the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression given by the constitution.

SDF functionaries have been arrested by the police in the last six months for just sharing posts on social media, he said further alleging that action is being taken only against SDF functionaries.

SDF spokesperson, JB Darnal alleged that the state government's response towards providing relief to working class is unsatisfactory. He added that the government has not taken any effective measure to provide relief to workers in private companies during the lockdown period.

Mr Darnal mentioned that a recent notification by Rural Development Department has allowed for bureaucrats to head committees to select beneficiaries for schemes which is an insult to people's representatives.

Laptops distributed to Chungthang SHGs

MANGAN, 21 MAY [IPR]: Roads & Bridges Minister, Samdup Lepcha, distributed laptops to nine Self Help Groups and Village Administrative Assistant (Panchayat Secretary) of Chungthang Block at the Panchayat Bhawan, Chungthang, today under the Sikkim Rural Livelihood Mission or the Rural Development Department.

The Minister was accompanied by the SDM, SDPO, BDO and RO of Chungthang Subdivision. He explained that the



main objective behind the laptop distribution programme was to establish a digital working culture through digital tools and wider use of ICT tools by SHGs.

Speaking about the

COVID-19 pandemic, he complemented the people of the Chungthang for following all guidelines of the government during the lockdown and appealed to the people to continue doing so.

Anti-Terrorism Day observed by Teesta-V



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 MAY:**

NHPC Limited-Teesta-V Power Station observed Anti-Terrorism Day today to mark the death anniversary of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who was assassinated on this day

in 1991. Administering the pledge, Sahadev Khatua, General Manager (I/c), Teesta-V Power Station & Teesta-IV HE Project & CEO of Teesta-VI HE Project spoke on the importance of the day, a press release informs.

The Anti-Terrorism Day pledge was administered by respective Heads of Departments of Teesta-V Power Station & Teesta-IV HE Project & Teesta-VI HE Project in their rooms/offices following social distancing norms.

Central forces deployed in Dharavi, other Mumbai areas

MUMBAI, MAY 21 (PTI): Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) personnel were deployed in Dharavi and some other areas of Mumbai on Thursday to help the city police enforce lockdown to contain coronavirus, an official said.

A company of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was deployed at Dharavi along with local police, the police official said.

Earlier, on Wednesday night, personnel of the Central Industrial Security Force conducted a flag march in Bhendi Bazaar in south Mumbai to enforce a strict lockdown.

On Thursday, CRPF personnel met police officers in Dharavi, a COVID-19 hotspot, and discussed deployment plan for the area, the official said.

Five companies of

CAPF, including personnel of CISF, arrived in Mumbai on Monday, he said.

Armed with weapons, batons and shields, CISF personnel conducted a flag march in Bhendi Bazaar on Wednesday night, he said.

The Maharashtra government had said that it had sought Central forces so that the overstretched police force could get some rest.

CM inaugurates...

and the COVID-19 Hospital of the State is ready with all the necessary preparation, infrastructure, equipments, ICU, Isolation wards, Ventilators and now the lab too, he said.

Due to the lock down it was not easy to establish the viral lab as most of the equipments and machineries had to be brought from outside the state and some from outside the country but with the help and support from the Central Government, Prime Minister, Union Home Minister, Union Health Minister and Ministry it was possible for the state to set up the viral testing lab in a short period of time, said the CM.

He informed that the Health Department, Government of Sikkim has been successful in establishing the Viral Research and Diagnostic Lab in less than a month.

The opposition leveled various allegations with regard to the delay in the establishment of the lab, but former CM, Pawan Chamling had no right to make allegations since it was his government's failure to develop the health sector in the state, said Mr Golay.

He informed that the Lab has been established following various guidelines and standards of the ICMR and the concerned health workers, officials and technicians are well trained.

~ SummitTIMES ~ CLASSIFIEDS

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General land 30X40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College. Flat Land no cutting required. Price 27 Lakhs (negotiable).

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LAND FOR SALE

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LAND FOR SALE

An area measuring 1 acre at Sadam South Sikkim near Loretto Convent School at Gupti road. Price negotiable any one interested can contact: 78640-04501,62970-03235, 98320-48410

SRM-AP student develops low-cost face shield

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 MAY:**

Mohan Aditya, a 2nd-year Mechanical Engineering student at SRM University- AP, has developed a face shield that costs less than a plate of snacks.

A press release from SRM informs that this new face-shield, christened "Face Shield 2.0" by Aditya, is very lightweight, easy to wear, comfortable yet durable and protects the person's entire face from hazards with a thin layer of transparent plastic film that serves as an outer de-

fence.

It is a piece of protective equipment to guard the face against exposure to potentially infectious materials. This face shield is biodegradable as the headband is made of cardboard(paper) which is 100% degradable material and the plastic can be reused.

Face Shield 2.0 was manufactured using the CNC (Computer Numerical Controlled) machine through which Aditya designed a headband, and the shape of the transparent plastic film was created using CAD (Com-

puter-Aided Design) software.

"I gave this CAD model as an input to the CNC machine. Now the CNC machine software analysed the CAD model and started to cut the cardboard and transparent sheet according to the drawing provided as an input. Thus, I managed to bring down the production time for manufacturing and assembling the Face shield in less than 2minutes," explained Aditya.

This Face Shield prepared by Aditya was unveiled at the Velagapudi Secretariat on Tuesday evening, the release adds.



Apple, Google release technology for pandemic apps

WASHINGTON, MAY 21 (AP): Apple and Google on Wednesday released long-awaited smartphone technology to automatically notify people if they might have been exposed to the coronavirus.

The companies said 22 countries and several U.S. states are already planning to build voluntary phone apps using their software. It relies on Bluetooth wireless technology to detect when someone who downloaded the app has spent time near another app user who later tests positive for the virus.

Many governments have already tried, mostly unsuccessfully, to roll out their own phone apps

to fight the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of those apps have encountered technical problems on Apple and Android phones and haven't been widely adopted. They often use GPS to track people's location, which Apple and Google are banning from their new tool because of privacy and accuracy concerns.

Public health agencies from Germany to the states of Alabama and South Carolina have been waiting to use the Apple-Google model, while other governments have said the tech giants' privacy restrictions will be a hindrance because public health workers will have no access to the data.

The companies said they're not trying to replace contact tracing, a pillar of infection control that involves trained public health workers reaching out to people who may have been exposed to an infected person. But they said their automatic exposure notification system can augment that process and slow the spread of COVID-19 by virus carriers who are interacting with strangers and aren't yet showing symptoms.

The identity of app users will be protected by encryption and anonymous identifier beacons that change frequently.

User adoption is key to success and we believe that these strong privacy

protections are also the best way to encourage use of these apps, the companies said in a joint statement Wednesday.

The statement Wednesday also included remarks from state officials in North Dakota, Alabama and South Carolina signaling that they plan to use it.

"We invite other states to join us in leveraging smartphone technologies to strengthen existing contact tracing efforts, which are critical to getting communities and economies back up and running," said North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, a Republican.

North Dakota had already launched a lo-

cation-tracking app that about 4% of state residents are using, higher than other U.S. states with similar apps but falling far short of the participation rate that experts say is needed to make such technology useful.

Tim Brookins, the CEO of ProudCrowd, a startup that developed North Dakota's app, said Wednesday that North Dakotans will now be asked to download two complementary apps his model, to help public health workers track where COVID-19 patients have been, and the Apple-Google model, to privately notify people who might have been exposed to the virus.

Train of fortune: 21 good news from Shramik Specials

ANANYA SENGUPTA

New Delhi, May 21 (PTI): Mamta Yadav boarded a Shramik Special train on May 8 at Gujarat's Jamnagar. She was travelling single. But, by the time her destination station in Bihar arrived she had a companion in her arms.

Since Shramik Special trains started operating, they have witnessed births of 21 babies on-board, officials say.

Mamta had decided to board the train in very difficult times: everybody was battling a coronavirus outbreak, her husband had lost his job as a factory worker in Jamnagar due to the

lockdown, she was in advance stage of pregnancy and the home was hundreds of kilometers away. But she made the tough choice, and on May 8 decided to take the Jamnagar-Muzaffarpur Shramik Special train to be with her mother at her village in Chhapra district of Bihar for the birth of the baby.

Officials say the train left the Jamnagar stations at 8 pm. Mamta, 35, began to experience the labour pain around the midnight.

Though the Railways had said that Shramik Special would be non-stop, this train was stopped at the Agra Fort

station so that she could get the medical attention she needed.

Officials said that doctors were alerted by the on board staff as the train approached Agra Fort station around 4.30 am. Mamta's compartment was turned into a labour room of sorts with other passengers moving out. A team of doctors along with railway staff supervised Mamta's condition as she delivered a healthy baby girl, official said.

"We have a well-oiled system to deal with medical emergencies," said railway spokesperson RD Bajpai.

Whenever a passen-

ger needs help, our on-board staff alerts the station where medical aid is available next and the doctors who live in railway colonies around the station are always there to deal with any emergency, he said.

We are happy that we managed to provide help in time every time and in each case the baby and the mother have been healthy,"

Mamta and her little one were allowed to continue their journey, officials said.

On May 13, the 20-something Pinky Yadav gave birth to a baby boy on board the Ahmedabad-Faizabad Shramik

Rural Dev Dept holds coordination meeting



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 MAY:

A departmental co-ordination meeting

chaired by the Rural Development Minister was

convened in the Conference Hall of RDD Gangtok on 19 May, 2020 in the presence of the Principal Secretary, RDD Special Secretary Commissioner SRLM, Chief Engineer I PD, MGNREGA and Addl District Collector (Dev), a press release informs.

Sector-wise discussion took place during the meeting with special reference to convergence of schemes and 15th Finance Commission Grant allocation with new guidelines for PRIs were elaborated.

Action taken by Zil-

la Panchayats and Gram Panchayats during the COVID-19 pandemic was also taken up followed by the Minister appreciating the works of the ZPs, GPs and the Department in handling the situation during the pandemic as well executing all the Department works.

He emphasized on the convergence of schemes with better coordination of Zilla and Gram Panchayat members as well as with the other Departments in the State Government.

Dr Dhakal joins SMIMS as Associate professor

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 MAY:

Dr Bhim Prasad Dhakal, MD (Ophthalmology), recently joined Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medial Sciences (SMIMS) and Central Referral Hospital (CRH) as Associate Professor, Department of Ophthalmology

Dr Dhakal has rendered 34 long years of service to the government of Sikkim since

1985 in various capacities as Medical Officer, District Immunization officer, Sr Ophthalmologist, Consultant-cum-State Program Officer of National Programme for Control of Blindness, Consultant, Disability Cell, Department of Health Family Welfare, Government of Sikkim.

Dr Dhakal will be available for consultation at Department of Ophthalmology, Central Referral Hospital.

Health officials inspect cleanliness levels at Mangan shops

SUMMIT REPORT
MANGAN, 21 MAY:

Today, a team of Health Department officials led by District Medical Superintendent and including the Health Inspector, Ward Master and Civil JE, inspected shops and public spaces in and around Mangan town.

The team also visited the slaughter house and upon discovering the lack of hygiene at the facility, instructed the butchers to keep the surroundings clean, a press release informs.

They were asked to do the needful within seven days.

Then the team inspected the main market and checked on tobacco sales and whether No Smoking provisions were being observed.

Team also inspected



the vegetable market, saloons, godowns and im-

provement notices were served to four shops.

Miscreants smash glasspanes of two buses

KOZHIKODE, MAY 21 (PTI): Miscreants smashed glasses of two private buses that resumed services in tune with the Kerala government's decision to ease lockdown restrictions, prompting authorities to assure operators of adequate protection, sources said on Thursday.

A senior police official said the incident happened last night and both the buses, operating on the Kozhikode-Mukkom route, were parked on the roadside after resuming service on Wednesday.

Services had resumed after being suspended for over 50 days due to

the COVID-19 induced lockdown.

Sources said there has been opposition from among a section of the bus operators for conceding the state government's demand to resume operations by following social distancing norms.

The marginal hike in busfares offered by the government was far from adequate to compensate cost, leave alone profit, they alleged.

However, a section of the bus owners agreed to operate services on conditions prescribed by the government.

Police said the own-

ers of the two buses, which were attacked, were among the ones who responded positively to the government's request to start operations.

Police said the owners had been cautioned against operating services against the decision of their association.

However, they ignored this and resumed operations, they said.

Despite the attack, more buses were seen on roads on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Transport Minister A K Saseendran said necessary protection would be provided to buses operating as per government directive.

Printing and Stationery Dept observes Anti-Terrorism Day



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 MAY:

Anti-Terrorism Day was observed by the Printing and Stationery Department today at the office premises. Secretary and Additional Director read out the pledge maintaining social distance in each section, a press release informs.

Tone down Eid celebration this year, appeals Anjuman-E-Islamia

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 MAY:

Anjuman-E-Islamia, Rangpo, president, Md Khalid has appealed to the Muslim community of Sikkim to tone down the Eid celebration this year.

In a press release, Mr Khalid has said that Eid celebration this year should only be about prayers and people should avoid wearing new clothes, inviting people and preparing special dishes on Eid so as to pay homage to those who have lost their lives due to COVID-19 and also to the migrants who have suffered while returning home.

Due to the lockdown, he has urged people to



offer Eid Namaaz in their homes as "Eid-ul-Fitr" special prayers cannot be conducted in Mosques and Eidgahs. He has also requested people to pray

"Nafl Rakat as Sulat-Ush-Sukr" or "Salat-UL-Ishraq" at home on the day of Eid and offer Al-bida Jumma (last Friday Prayers of Ramadan).

Woman claims her virus positive husband missing from hospital, authorities say he was cremated

HYDERABAD, MAY 21 (PTI): A woman here has alleged that her COVID-19 positive husband was missing from hospital, but health authorities on Thursday clarified that the man had died during treatment and his cremation was performed by government staff as the family was in hospital after testing positive.

The woman reportedly informed state Municipal Administration Minister K T Rama Rao through a tweet that her husband has gone missing from the state-run Gandhi hospital.

State Health Minister E Rajender, who responded on the issue, told reporters on Thursday that the whole family was in hospital after testing positive for

COVID-19 and that the news of the man's death could not be conveyed as per the advice of the well-wishers of the family.

The 42-year-old man, who was suffering from pneumonia, was admitted to hospital on April 30 and put on ventilator but he died on May one.

The family's well-wishers felt that the man's wife might suffer a shock if the news of the death was conveyed to her, he said.

The man's father had died on April 30 after being admitted to hospital for COVID-19 treatment, official sources said.

Though information about the man's death could not be conveyed to the family at that moment, it was informed

to police and municipal administration departments, Rajender said.

As the entire family was in hospital, the cremation was done by municipal personnel, official sources said.

Observing that the doctors are treating patients risking their lives, Rajender said it is not good to describe the man as having gone "missing" from the hospital.

He said shocking news like deaths are not immediately conveyed to family members in the interest of their well-being.

Even in developed countries like the US, the funeral was performed by government personnel during the COVID-19 outbreak when family members were not in a position to perform it, he added.

CISF conducts flag march in Mumbai to enforce lockdown

MUMBAI, MAY 21 (PTI): Personnel of the Central Industrial Security Force conducted a flag march in an area of south Mumbai on Wednesday night to enforce strict implementation of the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

Five companies of the Central Armed Police

Forces, including personnel of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), reached Mumbai on Monday for deployment in areas severely affected by COVID-19, including slums of Dharavi, an official said on Thursday.

Armed with their weapons, batons and

shields, the CISF personnel conducted a flag march in Bhandi Bazaar area on Wednesday night, he said.

More than 700 Mumbai Police personnel have so far contracted the coronavirus infection. Of them, 10 have died of the disease till now.

With the deployment of central forces, the Mumbai Police personnel will get some relief in lockdown duties, the official said.

The central forces will assist the Mumbai Police in maintaining law and order and to prevent any untoward incident in

the city during the lockdown.

Personnel of the central forces have been deployed in zones 1,3,5,6 and 9 of the city covering some areas of south and central Mumbai and parts of eastern and western suburbs, the official said.

24 new cases in Kerala, over 80,000 under observation

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 21 (PTI): Kerala registered 24 COVID-19 cases for the second consecutive day on Thursday, all returnees from abroad and other states, taking the tally to 690 while over 80,000 are under observation.

With eight people recovering from the infection, the active cases stood at 177 and they are presently under treatment at various hospitals, according to an official release.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had on Wednesday expressed concern at the growing numbers of cases on Wednesday saying the state was inching towards

a "more serious situation".

Of the fresh cases on Thursday, Malappuram accounted for five, Kannur four, Kottayam and Thrissur three each, Thiruvananthapuram, Kolam and Alappuzhatwo cases each while Idukki, Palakkad and Kasaragod have one case each, the release quoting state Health Minister K K Shailaja said.

While 14 people had come from abroad, including eight from UAE, the other 10 returned from other states -- Maharashtra (5), Tamil Nadu (3), Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh one each.

Totally 510 people,

including eight on Thursday, recovered from the infection.

At least 80,138 people are under observation with 527 in various hospitals and others in homes, the release said.

Samples of 49,833 people have been sent for testing so far and results of 48,276 which have been received are negative.

The maximum number of positive patients are at Malappuram (35) followed by Kannur (21) and Palakkad (21).

According to Police, a total of 749 cases were registered in the state on Thursday for lockdown violations and 881 arrested while 287 vehicles were seized.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

The Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is new strain of Coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China. Notorious for mutating quickly and acquiring new qualities, it is a rising epidemic that was previously not identified in humans.

Symptoms of nCoV

- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia - like symptoms

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.
- Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccinations available as of now.
- Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected.

If you seek help, you may call :

-Toll free no. 104

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WEST : 9593297809

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SOUTH : 7407691463

New STNM

AMS : 9434711402



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Minors Puff Because Elders are all Fluff

The funds have dried up, and so has concern it appears

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

It is all very well to ensure that tobacco products cannot even opt for surrogate advertising, and even awareness programmes are fine, but not if these remain the only interventions. Boring hours spent detailing the harmful effects of tobacco is hardly the intervention that will scare too many of the young from trying the first puff; in fact, the exercise might actually end up increasing nicotine's appeal among the young for the flirtation with danger that is flagged to an age-group which thinks it is invincible and in an aggressively defiant phase. This disconnect was unfortunate because before the policy-makers started trying to save lungs already addicted to nicotine, they should have first tried and dissuaded more people from taking to smoking in the first place. Since most people experiment with cigarettes young, and since a law is already place disallowing sale of such products to them, this is what should have been focused on first. There is not one shop, not in Sikkim, not in the country, which will refuse to sell a packet of cigarettes to a minor. What everyone forgets is that of all the showboating about appearing to discourage smoking, the one that came closest to meaning anything, especially in these parts, was the legislation banning sale of cigarettes to minors. What happens often in the Hills - where children are introduced to cigarettes very early in life since everyone around them, from their parents, to teachers to elder siblings, seems to be smoking, is that they too take that first puff rather early in life. First, they get inured to the idea of buying the ‘adult stuff’ because they are made to run errands for the elders, buying cigarettes coming as casually as buying stationery or sweets. Most times, they end up taking the first puff between the neighbourhood paan shop and home.

The ban (on paper) on selling to minors at least served as a deterrent towards this end because the society and the ‘elders’ still don't see anything wrong in a 10 year old walking up to a paan shop and picking up a packet of cigarettes ‘for dad’. It would not be wrong to suggest that if the concerned authorities [since the society is not doing it] can take a person through the teen years without access to cigarettes, the odds that s/he will go through the rest of his/ her life as a nonsmoker are very strong. Given this obvious benefit, the inconvenience of having to prove your age before purchasing cigarettes is a small price to pay. But as things stand, the one legislation that might have worked is the only one that no one implements.

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As collective memory fades, so will our ability to prepare for the next pandemic

SEAN DONAHUE

THECONVERSATION.COM

Just below the Japanese village of Aneyoshi, there's a stone carved with a warning: “Remember the calamity of the great tsunamis. Do not build any homes below this point.”

Placed there after a tsunami devastated the area in 1933, it helped those who listened to it remain safe from a similar disaster in 2011, almost 80 years later.

When the last wave of the coronavirus recedes, what kind of guide stone will exist for future generations?

This question is not just about recording history for history's sake. As a political philosopher, I see it addressing an ancient problem of my field: how to ensure societies remain stable over time. Tangible reminders – anything from stone tablets to digital artifacts storing information about an event – help sustain collective memory of risk.

However, the global scope and relative infrequency of pandemics like the coronavirus make them especially challenging to collectively remember.

BURDENS OF BIAS

An unprecedented effort is underway to fill vast digital archives with information related to the pandemic. Researchers at the University of Arizona, for example, have started a project called A Journal of the Plague Year: An Archive of Covid-19 that invites the public to contribute everything from personal videos to Instagram posts and internet memes about life during the coronavirus.

But simply storing information in a repository isn't enough; people will neither be able to access nor interpret it without the proper social and technological infrastructure.

For a reminder to be truly effective, huge swaths of the population must recognize the risk and be able to adequately prepare.

Motivating people to achieve this latter aim is the biggest challenge. We are biased in many ways toward our personal experience, and we tend to underestimate or dismiss risks unless we encounter them firsthand.

Take the town of Eilenburg, Germany, which sits along the Mulde River. Residents had lived through many small floods, so they knew that



water posed a hazard. They were nonetheless unprepared when, in 2002, a flood event of a kind that hits Europe about once every 100 years inundated the town. Because the smaller floods hadn't been a big deal, they had a warped understanding of the true risk of a major flood. Many consequently doubted official warnings that the river was about to rise as high as it did. The same pattern of bias has been observed in other disasters, such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

Challenges from this bias grow over time. All events eventually disappear from living memory – a process that takes about 90 years. Once this happens, later generations have fewer opportunities to have compelling conversations with eyewitnesses. These interactions are important motivators for taking the threat of recurrence seriously. The disappearance of vivid personal memories of polio, whooping cough and measles has plausibly contributed to the rise of anti-vaccination sentiment, in spite of the well-documented danger of these diseases.

CHALLENGES FROM TECHNOLOGY

Perhaps bias can be overcome to some extent through technology. Watching videos of life in quarantine or interviews of those impacted by the coronavirus is the closest that future generations can get to experiencing the pandemic firsthand or having conversations with those who did.

But video and other media ultimately

don't provide conversation – only monologue. There were videos of eyewitness testimony and prudent accounts from historians about the last comparable global pandemic, the 1918 Spanish Flu. And yet tangible reminders like these do not seem to have caused the public to form an accurate perception of risk.

Counterintuitively, technology can interfere with this effort. Digital media makes spreading misinformation easier. And the emergence of deep fakes suggests that there will be unforeseeable ways that people in the future might doubt convincing evidence about the coronavirus. In fact, many today continue to downplay the threat in spite of the high death toll or dismiss other realities of the pandemic as a hoax.

There remains a more basic problem. By enabling us to better preserve and spread information, technology has overloaded us with it. The amount of attention given to any topic is decreasing as the amount of information produced grows. A global pandemic might be at the forefront of everyone's minds now. But can we assume that the reminders left behind will automatically get the attention they deserve from people living in an information saturated world?

THE HOPE OF INSTITUTIONS

In the long run, actively remembering the coronavirus cannot be everyone's job; perhaps it's best to depend on a relatively small number of people. They would, in effect, have to form a living guide stone with the power of warning the rest of the

world when necessary.

Existing institutions don't look like they're up to this task. Universities broadly focus on creating new information and preparing students for the job market, not selectively spreading old warnings. Libraries are great at storing information but not at interpreting and communicating it to the public.

Government agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization seemingly have the power to capture the public's attention. Yet even well-intentioned agencies can become manipulated for other purposes. Among the reminders to keep alive is that these institutions must be guarded from corruption, and the prospect of defunding or reorganizing them cannot be taken lightly.

Meeting the challenges described above perhaps requires new institutions of memory that are resistant to corruption and that both the government and the public would be generally expected to consult. These institutions would have to provide a certificate of authenticity for the information they preserve by earning and keeping the public's trust. Furthermore, those who maintain them would have to be experts at communicating these reminders in a way that grabs the public's attention and overcomes bias.

One of the institutions that fulfills some of these criteria is the Museum of the City of Volos, in Greece. Originally built to house general information about the region – including facts about earthquakes and floods from the 1950s – the museum has recently increased its focus on promoting disaster risk awareness. It consulted with disaster preparedness experts and civil authorities to identify and reach at-risk groups, develop cultural memory games, and play a more visible role in the life of the city. Today, it serves as a case study in how institutions can help preserve collective memory about risk.

Future generations deserve to be in the best position possible to deal with the next inevitable pandemic. This preparation includes regular reminders about what happened in 2020.

[the writer is PhD Candidate in Philosophy, University of Southern California – Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences]

Napping helps preschoolers unlock their full potential for learning

REBECCA SPENCER

THECONVERSATION.COM

For many parents of young children, the highlight of their day is nap time – not for them, but for their little ones. Especially now, with most preschools closed, getting a child to nap is the golden ticket. Not only can it mean uninterrupted work or self-care time for parents, but their unrecognizable tyrants often wake as happy campers after a nap.

Researchers have validated this experience. One study presented 3-year-olds with an unsolvable puzzle, one with a missing piece, either after they napped or after they missed their nap. They found the nap-deprived children showed more negative emotions – sadness, worry and anger – when faced with the puzzle than rested children did.

As a cognitive neuroscientist, I study sleep. My research shows that naps help young children regulate their emotions and solidify memories that accumulate so quickly at this age.

EMOTIONAL SENSITIVITY

My colleagues and I recently demonstrated that nap-deprived preschoolers not only showed more negative emotions, but paid closer attention to the emotions around them than rested children did.

We presented young children with pairs of faces on a computer screen, a neutral face and an emotional face – either happy or angry. Those faces were then removed to reveal a star hiding under one of them. The children were asked to identify which side of the screen the star was on by pressing a button.

This task measures whether a child is paying special attention to emotion stimuli or not. If a child is biased toward the emotional face, she will be quicker to press the button when the star is behind the emotional face than when it is behind the neutral face.

We found nap-deprived children were biased toward the emotional faces, responding 22 milliseconds faster than if they were rested. After a nap, however, children showed no bias. They responded equally whether the star was behind an emotional

or neutral face. So a child who doesn't nap is quicker to respond to emotional stimuli in his environment.

A GROWING PRESCHOOL AGENDA

Although these results come as no surprise to parents, it is important to provide scientific backing of the nap benefit.

Most preschools offer a nap opportunity. However, the length of this period has been shortened in recent years because studies have found a preschool education not only improves school readiness but is also associated with long-term academic performance and even health outcomes such as reduced obesity and improved cardiovascular health.

To capitalize on the advantages of preschool during this fertile learning period, regulatory agencies have added expectations such as socio-emotional curriculum and even dental hygiene to the preschool day. Sleep is often viewed as optional and is an easy target to cut when making room for more educational opportunities.

However, naps make it possible to reach these early education goals. Beyond the emotional regulation payoff, naps also provide a direct benefit to learning. Research shows when preschool children were read storybooks introducing new words, the children who napped after hearing the stories learned more of the new words than the children who did not nap. Following learning opportunities with a nap enhances memory.

STORING MEMORIES

The reason napping enhances learning has to do with the way brains process new information.

Research in rodents suggests that while we sleep, memories are replayed. Just as if you wanted to learn all the words to your favorite movie scene, you might replay that scene repeatedly, sleep is a time to replay memories without interference from ongoing learning. Furthermore, the research suggests memories are replayed in fast-forward during sleep, allowing them to be replayed repeatedly during the night.

This replay happens in the hippocampus, an

area of the brain where memories are processed in the short term. As memories are replayed in the hippocampus, they are moved (or copied) to unique areas of the cortex, making them more stable and easier to retrieve later. In the cortex, the memories can be sorted and stored with other similar memories.

Imagine the hippocampus as your desk at the end of the day, with stacks of papers and mail from different sources. Sleep moves these “papers” to the cortex, which is much more like a filing cabinet. Not only is there more space, but now when you want to find something, you can do so more quickly because of its organization.

In children, the hippocampus is less mature – think of it as a smaller desk – so fewer memories can be held before there is catastrophic interference. This explains why naps are critical at this young age, and memories must be more frequently moved to the filing drawers.

NAPS IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

To parents still learning to implement a nap time, a few pointers:

- Maintain a consistent pre-nap routine. After lunch, give your child time to unwind, then join them in a quiet activity such as reading.
- Maintain a consistent overnight sleep schedule. Keeping bedtime and wake time within a stable 30-minute window day to day will allow for an appropriate and predictable amount of sleep pressure to build up.
- If you are out of the nap routine, you may need to retrain your child to nap consistently. Stay with them as they fall asleep (soothing with back rubbing) initially, and leave the room earlier and earlier over the following days.

Not only is napping key to early education objectives, it is central to the emotional and cognitive development of young children. And it goes without saying, whether in school or at home, turning unrecognizable tyrants into happy campers is good for everyone.

[the writer is Professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Massachusetts Amherst]

First COVID-19 lab inaugurated in Nagaland

KOHIMA, MAY 21 (PTI): Nagaland on Thursday got its first state-of-the-art laboratory for testing of suspected COVID-19 samples, officials said. Samples from the state were till now sent to Assam and Manipur for testing. Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio inaugurated the bio-safety level 3 (BSL-3) laboratory at the Naga Hospital Authority Kohima (NHAK).

A BSL-3 laboratory includes work on microbes that are either indigenous or exotic, and can cause serious or potentially lethal disease through inhalation.

"It is a milestone in the history of health care delivery services, particularly in the fight against COVID-19 in the state," said Rio in his inaugural speech.

With two machines



90 tests can be conducted in the laboratory per day. The tests will begin from Friday.

"By the grace of God, our state is free from any positive case of COVID-19.

"We have been sending the suspected COVID-19 samples to Assam and Manipur for testing, and I want to express my

gratitude to the governments of the neighbouring states for helping us during the time of crisis," Rio said.

Till Wednesday, a total of 985 suspected samples were tested in Assam and Manipur. Of the 985, 952 have tested negative while results of 33 are awaited, he said.

The chief minister expressed hope that

the laboratory would not only deal with COVID-19 but also conduct research on any kind of virus.

The state government started the process for setting up the laboratory at the NHAK on April 17, while all protocols were completed on May 12 and documents for validation were sent to the Indian Council of Medical Research

(ICMR) on the same day.

Rio said, as many as 1,672 people of Nagaland stranded in other parts of the country have already arrived and are in government quarantine facilities in Dimapur and Kohima and other district headquarters.

More people will be returning to the state on Thursday night.

Till now, 18,622 people of the state stranded across the country have registered their names for returning to the state, he said.

"We welcome them but all returnees have to abide by the directive of the government to remain in quarantine facilities.

"We are team Nagaland and it is because of the united effort that the virus has not entered the state till date," the chief minister said.

Assam Speaker inaugurates Jorhat tea auction platform



JORHAT, MAY 20 (PTI): Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly H N Goswami on Wednesday inaugurated the Jorhat e-auction platform for tea launched by the Tea Board of India.

He said with the launch of the e-auction platform, the board has fulfilled a long-felt need of tea producing districts of Assam.

"I sincerely express my gratitude to the Tea Board of India for addressing the long-pending demand of the people of upper Assam in general and Jorhat in particular," Goswami

said.

The first tea auction centre in Assam was set up in Guwahati in 1970.

"In these last 50 years, the tea production of Assam increased three times and hence the people of Upper Assam and the Assam-based tea associations demanded a new age auction centre at Jorhat," Goswami said.

Assam produces about 716 million kg of tea annually, accounting for 52 per cent of the country's production.

Six contiguous districts of Assam -- Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar,

Charaideo, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia -- produce about 450 million kg of tea annually.

The Jorhat e-auction platform is an initiative of the Tea Board of India and M-junction services is the implementing agency.

Mjunction is a B2B e-commerce company promoted by SAIL and Tata Steel as a 50:50 venture.

With Jorhat, there are now eight tea auction centres in the country. The other seven are Kolkata, Siliguri, Jalpaiguri, Guwahati, Coimbatore, Coonoor and Kochi.

Bihar reports 10th COVID-19 fatality, positive cases reach 1,872

PATNA, MAY 21 (PTI): A 55-year-old migrant from Delhi, who died in Begusarai district a couple of days ago, is Bihar's tenth COVID 19 casualty, officials said here on Thursday.

The health department said the total count of coronavirus positive cases has risen to 1872 in the state.

According to State Epidemiologist, Ragini Mishra, the deceased belonged to Khagaria district and he had died at a hospital in Begusarai on May 17 where he

was admitted upon a deterioration in his health.

"His test reports came out late Wednesday night, confirming that he was infected with the coronavirus, she told PTI-Bhasha

The districts health society programme convener Shailesh Chandra said the cause of the death was a cardiac arrest suffered by the 55-year-old at the Sadar hospital in Begusarai.

The state has previously witnessed deaths of nine COVID-19 patients two each from

Patna and Vaishali and one each from Munger, East Champaran, Sitamarhi, Rohtas and Khagaria.

Meanwhile, the state health department said 96 fresh cases have been reported, raising the states aggregate to 1872.

Katihar district, situated in the states north-east corner and sharing its borders with Jharkhand and West Bengal, reported 19 cases.

Rohtas and Gopalganj accounted for 17

cases each. Two girls, aged three and four years and residents of Kalyanpur village in Rohtas, were among those who have tested positive.

Other districts with a noticeable number of fresh cases are Gopalganj and Samastipur (16 each), Lakhisarai and Sheikhpura (09 each), Purnea (05) and Munger (03).

All the 38 districts in the state have reported COVID 19 cases and Patna, Munger and Rohtas happen to be the three

worst affected, each of them having tallies in three digits.

More than 1,000 cases have been reported in the state in the last three weeks, which has been attributed mainly to the large-scale influx of migrants who have been returning to Bihar from places they had been stuck in during the lockdown.

Till Wednesday, the number of migrants testing positive to coronavirus, as stated by the health department, was 788.

Will help goldsmiths in returning to WB from Indore: BJP

BHOPAL/INDORE, MAY 21 (PTI): The BJP on Thursday said that it would provide assistance to the goldsmiths from West Bengal, who work in Indore's jewellery market in large numbers, for their safe return to their home state.

Among other things, Indore is famous for its jewellery market. However, the district has emerged as one of the COVID-19 hotspots in the country.

As the jewellery shops in the city are shut due to coronavirus-induced lockdown, most of the 20,000 goldsmiths of West Bengal origin have decided to go back to their home state.

Talking to PTI on Thursday, BJP general

secretary in-charge of West Bengal, Kailash Vijaywargiya, said, "These goldsmiths have approached me. My party will provide assistance to them, especially in terms of arranging e-passes and transport facilities."

He urged West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to take necessary steps for the safe return of these goldsmiths who are working in the city in large numbers.

"We have also provided ration to them with sufficient quantity of rice, which is their staple food. We were told that their families have been facing hardships because of lockdown," Vijaywargiya said.

Talking to PTI, Kamlesh Bera, president of

the Indore Bengali Swarnakar Loksewa Samiti, an association goldsmiths from West Bengal, said, "Everyday, a number of Bengali goldsmiths are calling us over phone as they are facing difficulties in going back to their home state."

"Most Bengali goldsmiths are sure that their business will not be back on track till Diwali in November. That is why they want to return home immediately," Bera said.

He said that at least five special trains should be run between Indore and Kolkata to take these goldsmiths home.

Bera also said that in the last 10 days, after the introduction of the e-pass facility, about 1,000 goldsmiths have left for their

home in West Bengal by arranging buses and other vehicles at their own expense.

"Every Bengali goldsmith had to pay Rs 5,000 to Rs 6,000 to reach home in these vehicles. This cost is high during this difficult time," he said.

Sources said that there are around 20,000 goldsmiths from West Bengal living in Indore, of whom 2,500 are shopkeepers and another 17,500 are jewellery-makers.

Most of these people are from Hooghly, Midnapore and Vardhman districts.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had earlier written a letter to

his counterpart in West Bengal, requesting her to take necessary steps for the safe return of Bengali workers employed in different sectors.

In a letter written to Banerjee on May 17, Chouhan said, "During the lockdown, these migrant workers want to return to their home place (West Bengal). But due to the long distance and no official means of transport, some migrant workers from private vehicles left for West Bengal which is expensive, inconvenient and unsafe option."

According to official information, 2,774 COVID-19 patients have been found in Indore district so far, of whom 107 have died during treatment.

Locusts attack crops in western MP, agri centres alerted

BHOPAL, MAY 21 (PTI): Huge swarms of locusts from Rajasthan have entered parts of western Madhya Pradesh, posing a threat to crops in the central state, an official said on Thursday.

An advisory has been issued to 22 agriculture science centres on how to fight the menace, Jabalpur-based Jawaharlal Nehru Krishi Vishwavidyalaya extension services director Dr Om Gupta told PTI.

The locusts initially entered Rajasthan from Pakistan where they flew in from Iran last year.

From Rajasthan, lo-

custs entered Madhya Pradesh via Neemuch and have advanced to Ujjain and Dewas. The insects are likely to further move towards Harda, the official said.

Six swarms of locusts have so far been noticed in Madhya Pradesh, she said, adding that they move according to the direction of wind.

"We have issued an advisory to 22 Krishi Vigyan Kendras coming under our university on how to fight the locust menace," the official said.

The insects eat up all crops in a field they attack, inflicting 100 per cent damage, she

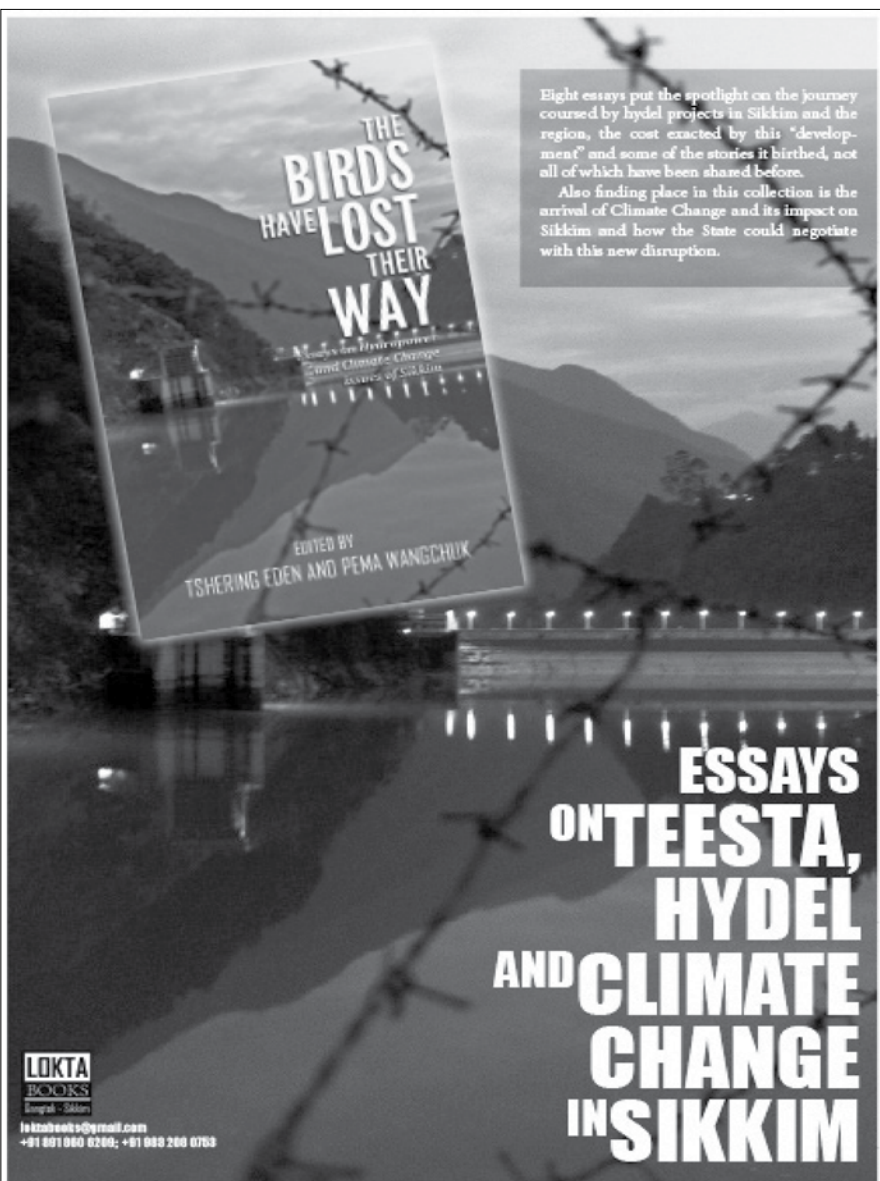
said.

However, right now fields in Madhya Pradesh have minimum crops since it is summer time, Gupta said.

Crops may have been currently sown only in areas where there are irrigation facilities, she said.

In December last year, locusts from desert areas of Pakistan descended in Gujarat districts like Banaskantha, Mehsana, Kutch, Patan and Sabarkantha and attacked several crops.

The Gujarat government had then announced a compensation for farmers whose crops were damaged.



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N'Golo Kanté granted compassionate leave by Chelsea over Covid-19 fears



JACOB STEINBERG
LONDON, 21 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]: N'Golo Kanté was granted compassionate leave to miss Chelsea's second day of phase one training because of the midfielder's fears over the coronavirus.

While Kanté took part in Chelsea's return to small group training on Tuesday after registering a negative coronavirus test, the France World Cup winner has concerns regarding attempts to resume the Premier League season. The 29-year-old is not convinced that it is safe to train while the UK remains in the grip of the pandemic and was given full consent to miss Wednesday's session by Frank Lampard and the club.

Lampard fully supports Kanté's stance and it is not known when the Frenchman, who trained at home yesterday, will return. Kanté's elder brother Niamh died of a heart attack shortly before the 2018 World Cup and he lost his father when he was 11 years old.

Kanté, a quiet character who is understood to have largely remained indoors with one of his brothers since the suspension of the season, also experienced a health scare when he collapsed in front of his teammates at Chelsea's training ground two years ago. Tests did not reveal any heart concerns but the former Leicester player missed Chelsea's next game.

Callum Hudson-Odoi was also absent from Wednesday's session after falling ill. The winger's condition is not related to coronavirus or his arrest last weekend. He has been prescribed a course of medication.

Olivier Giroud and Willy Caballero have both signed contract extensions which will keep them at Stamford Bridge for another year. Giroud had been linked with Internazionale and Lazio but the striker regained his place in the team side before the lockdown and Chelsea have decided to trigger a one-year option in the Frenchman's current deal. Lampard has been impressed with Giroud's attitude and the manager is also a fan of Caballero, the 38-year-old goalkeeper.

Tying Giroud and Caballero down to new deals represents good business for Chelsea, who could yet lose Pedro and Willian on free transfers this summer.

In a new documentary, Lance Armstrong shows plenty of rage but little regret

AARON TIMMS
NEW YORK, 21 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]: "It's a miracle I'm not a mass murderer," Lance Armstrong, reflecting on his mother Linda's laissez-faire approach to parenting, muses in the opening scenes of Lance, the new two-part ESPN documentary whose first half screens in the US on Sunday night. In the 10 minutes that follow, director Marina Zenovich assembles a tableau of reminiscences that make that shocking admission seem somehow understandable.

We see Armstrong's stepfather, Terry Armstrong, claim that "Lance would not be the champion he is today without me, because I drove him. I drove him like an animal." ("He beat the shit out of me," Lance recalls.) We hear Armstrong explaining how he forged his birth certificate to pass himself off as a 16-year-old and enter his first triathlon, rationalizing the deception with cool command: "Forge the certificate, compete illegally, and beat everybody." We watch as cycling contemporary Bob Julich recalls how, at the end of his first head-to-head race against Armstrong, when they were both still teenagers, Armstrong yelled at him: "Come on you fucking pussy, let's keep going – I'm not done yet."

The casual violence, the callous disregard for rules and the feelings of others: Armstrong did not come to any of these late in life, once his course as a professional cyclist was set. He was practically marinating in insensitivity from the womb. Born into a rotten system, Armstrong stayed rotten. What emerges at the

end of these four hours is the story not so much of a single bad apple as a profoundly bad batch – a comprehensive, cradle-to-gallows account of the downfall of an elite athlete performing exactly in line with his surrounding incentives. Amid the brutality, competition, and insecurity of life in post-Reagan America, is it any wonder a man like Lance Armstrong was able to lie, cheat and bully his way to the top? The problem is not this man in particular, Zenovich seems to invite us to conclude, as men in general: their incurable ambition and violence, the fragility of their morals.

This structural explanation for Armstrong's wrongdoing sounds exculpatory, and to a degree it is. It's certainly one that Armstrong himself appears eager to embrace. Zenovich sat for eight interviews with Armstrong, between March 2018 and August 2019, and it's those conversations that form the core of Lance, which takes in the full sweep of the Armstrong saga, from his childhood and breakthrough world cycling championship at the age of 21, to cancer, his first experiences with cortisone and growth hormones, the seven consecutive Tour de France victories, his belligerence in the face of doping allegations, and the final unravelling of his career, from 2010 to 2013, as the full extent of his drug use came finally to light. Zenovich says Armstrong set no ground rules for their discussions ("Nothing is off limits," he told her) but she cannot identify, even after two years of work on Lance, exactly what his motivation for participating in the doc-



umentary was. Was it an exercise in image rehabilitation? An attempt, in the cliched language of sporting redemption, to "tell his story"? "I don't really know," says Zenovich. "But I came to it with an open heart. I tried to straddle the good and the bad."

In Lance we see Armstrong combative, defensive, distracted and restless, the coiled fury that propelled him – back arched, eyes dead-ahead, through all those time trials and mountain stages – still very much visible. What we don't see much of is remorse or self-reflection. Armstrong's preferred pronouns throughout the documentary are "you" and "we." "I" does not get much of a workout: "The only way you can dope and be honest is if nobody ever asks you, which is not realistic. The second somebody asks you, you lie. We all lied."

Doping, Armstrong maintains, "was just ingrained in the sport, right up until the time that I got there from Plano, Texas." His basic thesis is that he was a blameless naif, thrust into the maw of an evil sport. Here he is, for instance, on the development of EPO and his

own turn to doping, under the tutelage of the notorious drug doctor Michele Ferrari, from the mid-1990s: "The performance benefits were so great. The sport went from low octane doping, which had always existed, to this high octane rocket fuel. So that was the decision we had to make."

Cheating, in other words, was the work of a collective, which makes it easy to resist personal responsibility – as Armstrong clearly still does. Derek Bouchard-Hall, the former CEO of USA cycling and a contemporary of Armstrong, tells Zenovich that "there were no morals and ethics" around doping in the 1990s, that people "were still figuring things out, and we forget that now" – as if the history of drug use at the Olympics, anabolic steroids, Ben Johnson and all the rest had somehow passed the world of cycling by. This is, of course, an assertion as ludicrous as it is unbelievable – but it offers an insight into the intensity of the delusion that pervaded the sport that Armstrong came to dominate.

Armstrong reveals himself, throughout Lance, to be a master at

evading the question – at reframing it, redefining it, and stacking it with caveats in order to cast himself in a better light. It's Not About the Bike, his 2000 autobiography, he tells Zenovich with a completely straight face, was unfairly picked apart, because "everything in that book was true, except for when I address doping". The accusation that he used Livestrong, his cancer foundation, as a "shield" to protect himself from doping allegations is "unfair", he maintains – "though I used cancer occasionally as a shield".

Despite the pantomime of self-examination that Armstrong performs, reluctantly, throughout Lance, what comes across most convincingly is his lack of regret. "I wouldn't change a thing", he tells Zenovich – and it seems true that for Armstrong the most critical injunction of living is still, as he says repeatedly, to "get your hate on".

The scale of Armstrong's remorselessness can be grasped in the intensity of the venom and contempt he maintains for many of his contemporaries. Former competitors who now greet each other warmly, he says, are "wimps". Floyd

Landis, the former teammate whose testimony provided the impetus for the US Anti-Doping Agency investigation that eventually brought Armstrong down, is dismissed as a "piece of shit". Armstrong describes Julich, in virtually the same breath, as both a "friend" and a "whiner". Ironically it's left to Landis himself to offer the most telling appraisal of Armstrong's character. Reflecting on his own attempts to deflect doping allegations after he failed drug tests in the wake of his 2006 Tour victory, Landis says: "It's hard lying to people, I'm not very good at it. Lance is very very good at it ... He's very uncomfortable being himself."

The documentary's only real moment of vulnerability comes when Armstrong reflects on his friendship with Jan Ullrich, the 1997 Tour winner who spent the early 2000s in second place on the final-day podium in Paris, before succumbing to his own drug-borne fall from grace the year after Armstrong retired. In 2018 Armstrong travelled to Germany to visit Ullrich, who'd just been released from the psychiatric hospital to which he'd been admitted after a series of assault charges. Zenovich asks why he went to see Ullrich. "The reason I went to see him is I love him," Armstrong replies, before breaking down in tears. "It was not a good trip. He was the most important person in my life."

Within moments, however, that vulnerability is gone and Armstrong has re-armored himself in a carapace of sneers. A rant about how Ivan Basso, Erik Zabel and George Hincapie are household names in It-

aly, Germany and the US – are they? – while Marco Pantani, Ullrich and Armstrong are dead or disgraced follows, and then it becomes clear: this moment of emotional authenticity is really an exercise in self-pity. If me, Armstrong seems to say, why not them as well?

Coming as it does on the heels of The Last Dance's uncomplicated celebration of success and competition, Lance offers a welcome study in the corruption of the male athletic ego. The line between Michael Jordan – brash, insensitive, gifted, wildly successful – and Lance Armstrong – brash, insensitive, gifted, wildly successful, and a drug cheat – is syringe-thin. If Lance, like its subject's career, proves the ease with which that line can be crossed, the road to self-recognition, for Armstrong at least, appears far more demanding. In the opening minutes of the documentary, Armstrong recounts a scene at a restaurant, shortly after his exposure as a drug cheat, at which he was assailed by a crowd of angry patrons yelling, "Fuck you!" Armstrong comments with a shrug: "Some people just can't chill the fuck out. They're pissed still, and they'll be pissed forever." What's obvious is that Armstrong himself, even after years to reflect on his misdeeds and manipulations, still can't see that he's exactly the same: an angry man, who will probably never be quite himself without his rage.

Part one of Lance premieres on 25 May, with part two showing on 1 June. It can be viewed on ESPN in the US, and ESPN's streaming platform in the rest of the world.

Gambhir picks Tendulkar over Kohli in ODIs; considers longevity, rule changes



MUMBAI, MAY 21 (PTI): Former India opener Gautam Gambhir has chosen legendary Sachin Tendulkar over current skipper Virat Kohli as a better batsman in the ODI format, considering the changed rules of the game and the Mumbai-baiker's longevity of career.

Tendulkar, who retired in 2013, played 463 ODIs and amassed 18,426 runs with 49 hundreds at an average of 44.83.

Kohli, on the other hand, has played 248 ODIs and scored 11,867 runs with 43 tons at an average of 59.33.

"Sachin Tendulkar, because probably with one white ball and four fielders inside the circle, not five fielders outside, it will be Sachin Ten-

dulkar for me," Gambhir said on Star Sports show 'Cricket Connected'.

Nowadays, a one-day innings is played with two white balls and with three powerplays.

In the first power play (overs 1-10), two fielders are allowed beyond the 30-yard circle, while in the second powerplay (overs 10-40) four fielders are allowed. In the last powerplay (overs 40-50), five fielders are allowed outside the 30-yard circle.

Gambhir, who was the star performer in 2011 ODI World Cup final which India won, feels that the change in rules has helped batsmen.

"It's difficult because Virat Kohli has done phenomenally well but I think the rules have changed as

well, which has helped a lot of new batters," elaborated Gambhir, who played 58 Tests and 147 ODIs.

"The new generation, with 2 new balls, no reverse swing, nothing for the finger spin, five fielders inside for the 50 overs, probably that makes batting much easier.

He said he would also go with Tendulkar, considering his longevity and flow of the ODI cricket format at that time.

"Probably I'll go with Sachin Tendulkar if we see the longevity and flow of the one-day cricket format.

"Look at how Sachin Tendulkar has played, different rules, that time 230 to 240, was a winning total," Gambhir signed off.

England women footballers prove big social media hit during lockdown

SUZANNE WRACK
LONDON, 21 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]: England Women have reached the World Cup semi-finals, won the SheBelieves Cup and attracted a crowd of more than 77,000 to Wembley. But rarely, it appears, has their popularity been greater than during lockdown.

Players have swapped pitch-side selfies and signings for substantial social media interaction and the forward Beth England is far from alone in having enjoyed producing content and engaging with fans. "They are the voice for us when we're on the pitch, we can help be the voice for them off it," she said.

England has been part of the Football Association's "#FootballsStayingHome with the Lionesses" social media campaign that has reached millions since its launch at the end of March and has brought a faster increase in positive engagement than any other FA channel.

Positive engagement analyses the reaction to a post, and on this measure the Lionesses' channels have increased from 33.7% to 55.3% in a year,

a faster rise than for the senior men's team and FA Cup, among others.

Negative comments about women's football are a regular feature of social media, as shown by replies to the BBC Sport tweet on Monday about the likely cancellation of the Women's Super League and Women's Championship. The vitriol provoked replies from frustrated players and the fact that positive interactions are on the rise in the FA campaign is therefore welcome.

Twenty-nine of the England Women's team have taken part in producing content, starting with a message to fans from Steph Houghton, Lucy Bronze, Nikita Parris and Leah Williamson that had more than 500,000 views across Twitter and Instagram, 341,686 impressions and more than 20,000 engagements.

Jodie Taylor, the OL Reign forward and England's top goalscorer at Euro 2017, has taken part in the "Keeping up with the Lionesses" series, which provides a weekly update from players in lockdown, and the weekly "Coffee

Club" hosted by Jill Scott and Karen Bardsley, who are Manchester City teammates.

"The impact of Covid-19 has been tough on everyone," Taylor said. "It has been quite uplifting being actively involved as a team to help bring support and a bit of laughter to others during this time.

"As footballers we have a huge responsibility as role models to those who follow our sport, as well as for wider society. Many of us have the reach and profile that allows us to help promote positive messages and words of thanks. It's the least we can do to help people through these times."

England, who has scored 14 goals in the WSL this season, said: "I feel it's been extremely important to engage with the fans and the public during this time to make sure they feel they aren't alone in all this. As professional players we're still human of course, and go through similar struggles to everyone else in our personal lives.

"Like myself, alone during this time, it's

nice to have other [social media] conversations with people and not to get too down about being alone ... I've loved doing the Lioness content, it's definitely kept me busy."

The first seven #ObviouslyJill Jill Scott skill sessions gained 145,296 views across Twitter and Instagram, and Bardsley's TikTok challenge, for fans to show themselves "celebrating the small wins", was viewed more than 350,000 times. The hashtag it spawned had 6.2m views, 4.2m likes, 221,000 shares and 124,000 comments.

Ellen White, one of three players to have taken part in calls to key workers, described the experience as "truly inspiring".

The Manchester City striker said: "I feel extremely honoured and privileged to have spoken to Kristen. She's not only working as a nurse for the NHS but looks after her family as well during these uncertain times. I can't thank Kristen and all the NHS and frontline services enough during this pandemic in helping to look after and care for the nation."

Biden warns of 'abuse of power' in measured Trump critique

Washington, May 21 (AP): Joe Biden has warned that those tasked with enforcing the law are abusing their powers, offering a measured critique of the Trump administration a day after he declined to respond to President Donald Trump's attacks directly.

Speaking on Wednesday to Columbia University Law School graduates via video, Biden urged them to protect the very foundations of democracy.

"Trust in self-governance. Because right now, it's under attack," the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee said. "The very people tasked with enforcing the rule of law are abusing their powers, protecting their friends, weakening the very principles that make our country work."

His comments come amid escalating rhetoric from Trump and his al-

lies pushing conspiracy theories and alleging improper behaviour during the Obama administration.

Asked on Tuesday night how he'd respond to the allegations, Biden said, "I don't want to get down in the mud with these guys."

Speaking at a Yahoo News virtual town hall on Tuesday, Biden said Trump was trying to distract voters from his inadequate response to the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed more than 90,000 Americans.

Trump has said the virus will disappear "like a miracle".

Broadly dubbing his allegations "Obamagate", Trump has pointed to the legal case of his former national security adviser Michael Flynn, suggesting that the "unmasking" of Flynn's name as part of legal US

surveillance of foreign targets was criminal and motivated by partisan politics.

There is no evidence of that, and Trump's accusations misrepresent the facts of the case. The "unmasking" of people in surveillance reports is a routine, legal activity in government - the Trump administration made 10,012 such requests in 2019.

But they don't often become public, and in the Flynn case, Trump supporters point to it as evidence that Obama loyalists were out to undermine Trump from the start. The president himself has called it the "biggest political crime and scandal in the history of the USA".

"This is his pattern. Diversion, diversion, diversion," Biden said on Tuesday. "The greatest crime? I mean, my Lord.

Trump's cries of scandal come as the president and many top Republicans have used increasingly harsh rhetoric against Biden - hoping to foment doubt in voters' minds as election season begins to heat up.

On Wednesday, a Senate committee led by Wisconsin Republican Ron Johnson will vote on whether to issue a subpoena as part of an investigation into Biden's son Hunter and his work for a Ukrainian natural gas company that grew out of Trump's impeachment earlier this year.

Over the weekend, Trump's two adult sons appeared to spread baseless, online conspiracy theories suggesting other criminal activity by Biden.

Asked about that Tuesday, Biden called online posts about the matter sick.

People know me. The good news is the bad

news. They know me. They know my faults, they know my talents, Biden said.

Pointing to his decades in the Senate and eight years as vice president, he continued, "It's hard to lay on me some of the things that are just totally out of sync with anything in my whole life that anyone has ever said about me."

Also on Tuesday, Biden was asked about Trump's firing of Steve Linick as the State Department's inspector general. Some Republicans have defended the move, arguing that it was within the president's rights, but Biden and other Democrats say it is part of a larger White House effort to undermine government oversight.

Biden promised not to fire any inspector general should he be elected, saying those positions were "designed to make government honest".

Pak conducts highest number of coronavirus tests over 24-hour period as cases cross 48,000-mark

By SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, MAY 21 (PTI): Pakistan conducted the highest number of tests per day during the last 24 hours as the coronavirus cases crossed 48,000-mark on Thursday, the health ministry said.

Pakistan recorded 2,193 new cases, taking the total number of infections to 48,091. The death toll stands at 1,017 with 32 new fatalities.

As many as 15,346 coronavirus tests, the highest in a single day, were conducted in the



last 24 hours, health officials said.

The authorities have conducted 429,600 tests so far.

Sindh reported the maximum number of 18,964 cases, followed by 17,382 in Punjab, 6,815 in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa,

2,968 in Balochistan, 1,235 in Islamabad, 579 in Gilgit-Baltistan and 148 in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

As many as 14,155 patients have recovered so far, the officials said.

The number of daily testing increased after Planning Minister Asad Umar on Tuesday said that 30,000 tests per day would be sufficient for Pakistan to control the spread of the deadly virus.

Pakistan is in a position to conduct over 25,000 tests per day, he said, expressing hope that by May-end or early June the country would be able to conduct 30,000 tests per day.

Trump threatens funds for states easing voting in pandemic

WASHINGTON, MAY 21 (AP): President Donald Trump on Wednesday threatened to hold up federal funds for two election battleground states that are trying to make it easier and safer to vote during the coronavirus pandemic.

He backed away from that threat but stuck with his unsupported claim that widespread voting by mail promotes a lot of illegality.

The president targeted Michigan with an inaccurate tweet on its voting plans and also went after Nevada in the latest and the most confused episode in his campaign against mail-in voting.

As states have shifted to remote voting, following health officials recommendations on safety,

Trump has denigrated the practice and sought to limit access. He has said repeatedly, without evidence, that mailed ballots allow widespread fraud and has worried publicly that wide availability could lead so many people to vote that Republicans would lose in November.

His GOP allies, meanwhile, have fought changes to voting in court and opposed funding to expand mail-in voting in Congress.

Wednesday marked the first time Trump has tried to use federal aid money to beat it back.

Trump began by going after Michigan, misstating Democratic Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson's announcement that she

would send applications for absentee ballots to every voter in the state. Though Republican secretaries of state have taken this step elsewhere, Trump pounced on the move in a state key to his reelection hopes.

Michigan sends absentee ballots to 7.7 million people ahead of Primaries and the General Election, Trump tweeted Wednesday morning.

That brought strong criticism from Democrats in Michigan and elsewhere, pointing out that the state was sending applications, not actual ballots, an error the president corrected in a subsequent tweet six hours later. He stuck with the rest of his

tweet: This was done illegally and without authorization by a rogue Secretary of State. I will ask to hold up funding to Michigan if they want to go down this Voter Fraud path!

Trump later tweeted a similar threat to pull back funds from Nevada, which has sent ballots to voters for its June 9 state primary. A federal judge recently cleared Nevada's decision to mail ballots, which were sent by the Republican secretary of state.

It was not clear exactly what funds Trump was referencing, but the states are paying for the voting changes with federal aid intended to support elections during the pandemic. By Wednesday

evening, Trump told reporters he had spoken with Democratic Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and did not think funding would have to be cut.

I don't think it's going to be necessary, he said, adding that he stood by his opposition to mail voting. Voting is an honor. It shouldn't be something where they send you a pile of stuff and you send it back."

Trump himself has requested an absentee ballot to vote in Florida.

Trump's tweets and statements came the day before he is slated to visit Michigan to tour Ford's ventilator assembly plant in Ypsilanti. The state is one of three Rust Belt states that helped deliver his 2016 victory.

Building a genocide case for IS crimes against Yazidis

QASR AL-MIHRAB (IRAQ), MAY 21 (AP): It was clear he was in charge when he entered the wedding hall-turned-slave pen in the Iraqi city of Mosul, where dozens of Yazidi women and girls huddled on the floor, newly abducted by Islamic State militants.

He beat them at the slightest sign of resistance. At one point, he dragged a girl away, picking her for himself, a Yazidi woman who was 14 when the incident occurred in 2014 recounted to The Associated Press.

This was Hajji Abdullah, a religious judge and a key architect of the IS slave system.

He later became deputy to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Many believe he is the late al-Baghdadi's successor, identified by the pseudonym Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi. The U.S has a 5 million bounty on his head.

Investigators with the Commission for International Justice and Accountability are amassing evidence, hoping to prosecute IS figures for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide including Hajji Abdullah.

Bill Wiley, executive director and founder of CIJA, said fighters didn't just decide to enslave and rape Yazidi women; it was a carefully executed plan by the group's leadership.

They put all of the apparatus of their so-called state behind carrying it out in practice," he said.

And in doing so, they were going to eradicate the Yazidi group by ensuring there were no more Yazidi children born.

The investigators, who shared some of their findings with AP, say that through IS documents and interviews with survivors and insiders, they have identified 49 IS figures who built and managed the slave trade, and nearly 170 slave owners.

The AP interviewed former slaves, rescuers and imprisoned militants to build a picture of how slavery became central to IS structure.

The group's cab-

inet constructed the slave system, security agencies enforced it, and Islamic courts supervised it. Still, it devolved into a free-for-all with fighters enriching themselves selling women amongst themselves and back to their families.

CIJA's aim is to build cases so IS suspects can be prosecuted for crimes against humanity or genocide, not only charges of material support or membership in a terrorist group.

In the first prosecution on charges of genocide against the Yazidis last month, a German court brought an Iraqi to trial for enslaving a Yazidi woman and her 5-year-old, who was chained and left to die of thirst. U.N. investigators say they have collected evidence from Iraq, including 2 million call records, that can strengthen cases against perpetrators of crimes against the Yazidis.

IS launched its attack on the heartland of the Yazidi community at the foot of Sinjar Mountain in August 2014.

The fighters killed hundreds and abducted 6,417, more than half of them women and girls. Most of the captured adult men were likely killed.

Initially, the women and children were handed out as gifts to fighters who took part in the offensive.

Many fighters showed a receipt from Hajji Abdullah confirming their participation so they could claim their slave, former captives and CIJA said.

The remaining women were distributed across IS-controlled areas. The group operated centralized slave markets in Mosul, Raqqa and other cities. At the market in the Syrian city of Palmyra, women walked a runway for IS members to bid on.

Others distributed the women by lottery.

The Soldiers' Department, or Diwan al-Jund, recorded fighters who owned slaves. For a time, IS paid fighters a stipend of about 50 per slave and 35 per child.

Managing the robust system turned out to be difficult, however. Chaos abounded.

Slaves were resold for personal profit. Some IS members made tens of thousands of dollars ransoming captives back to their families.

IS officials tried banning separating women from their children and the posting of women's pictures on social media.

They ruled slave sales must be registered by an Islamic court.

One directive set punishments for selling Yazidis to commoners anyone not a fighter or senior IS official and for ransoming them to their families.

A February 2016 edict required the approval of the IS cabinet for any senior figure to own slaves, a sign even top officials were abusing the process.

Laila Taloo's 2 1/2-year ordeal in captivity underscores how IS members continually ignored the rules.

They explained everything as permissible. They called it Islamic law. They raped women, even young girls, said Taloo, who was owned by eight men.

After Taloo, her husband, young son and newborn daughter were abducted in 2014, and she and her husband were forced to convert to Islam, which should have spared them from being enslaved or killed.

But conversion meant nothing. Eventually the men who converted were massacred, and Taloo and the other women enslaved.

What is this all for? They never had a second thought about killing or slaughtering or taking women, she said.

Despite rules mandating sales through courts, Taloo was thrown into a world of informal slave markets run out of homes.

One of her owners, an Iraqi surgeon, had her dress up and put on makeup so four Saudi men could inspect her. A member of the IS religious police bought her for nearly 6,000.

New Zealand PM wants employers to consider four-day work week to promote tourism

WELLINGTON, MAY 21 (AP): New Zealand's prime minister wants employers to consider switching to a four-day work week as a way to promote tourism, which has been hard-hit by the pandemic.

Jacinda Ardern said on Facebook Live people had learned a lot about work flexibility

during the lockdown that was eased last week.

The nation's borders remain closed but Ardern said more flexible working arrangements could allow New Zealanders to travel more within their own country.

I hear lots of people suggesting we should have a four-day week. Ultimately,

that really sits between employers and employees, Ardern said.

She added that she would really encourage employers to think about whether or not that is something that would work for their workplace, because it certainly would help tourism all around the country.

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Michael Bay to co-produce pandemic-themed thriller 'Songbird'



LOS ANGELES, MAY 21 (PTI): Director Michael Bay is collaborating with producer Adam Goodman to back "Songbird", a thriller with pandemic as backdrop. The low-budget film will be directed by Adam Mason of "Into The Dark" fame, who wrote the script with Simon Boyes, reported Deadline.

The makers plan to begin production within five weeks, and it might be the first film to shoot in the city.

Casting is underway and remote training is being provided to the actors.

But none of the participants can pinpoint how they plan to shoot a movie at a time when the guilds are still compiling their own safety protocols so that productions can resume.

The film is set two years in the future, where the pan-

demic persists.

"Lockdowns have been rolled back and then reinstated and it becomes even more serious as the virus continues to mutate. There is governmental conspiracy and paranoia and how it impacts the cast of characters who remain in lockdown," as per the publication.

It is reported that there will never be people in room together and social distancing rules will be carefully followed.

Scenes will be shot after crew has come in to prepare the shots, and there won't be any scenes where actors engage fact to face.

Bay is producing alongside Goodman and Eben Davidson of Invisible Narratives, which is partnered with Catchlight Studios.

'Money Heist' actor Itziar Ituno sets English debut



LOS ANGELES, MAY 21 (PTI): "Money Heist" star Itziar Ituno will make her English-language debut in the short animation film "Salvation Has No Name".

Ituno broke out on the world stage with her performance as Inspector Raquel Murillo aka Lisbon in the hit Netflix series.

According to Deadline, the 16-minute stop motion project comes from producers Delaval Film and is being partly-funded by the British Film Institute (BFI).

The film will also feature the voice of Yasmine Al Massri, who starred in ABC thriller series "Quantico". Joseph Wallace is attached to direct and the team includes animators from Wes Anderson's "Fantastic Mr Fox" and Tim Burton's "Frankenweenie".

The short was being filmed at Aardman Animations, the studio behind "Wallace And Gromit", before the coronavirus pandemic hit. The makers have now launched a kickstarter to help the project resume post-pandemic.

SJ Clarkson to direct Sony's new female-led Marvel movie

LOS ANGELES, MAY 21 (PTI): Sony Pictures is reportedly developing a female-centric movie based on a Marvel Comics character with "Jessica Jones" director SJ Clarkson.

According to Variety, the character has not been disclosed officially but it is rumoured to be Madame Web.

As per Marvel comics, the character is usually depicted as an elderly, clairvoyant blind woman suffering from a chronic neuromuscular disease that makes it difficult to move and breathe, and as such, she's connected to a life support system that looks like a spider web.

Given her frail condition, she does not actively fight any villains.

Sources told the outlet that the studio is planning to rope in an A-list actor for the film and then hire a writer to develop the film around them.

Clarkson is best known for her work on television, where she has directed episodes of Netflix's "Jessica Jones", HBO's "Succession" and Showtime's "Dexter".

Sony is currently has multiple superhero movies lined up for next year. Jared Leto-starrer "Morbis" will release on March 19, 2021, while Tom Hardy's follow-up to his 2018 blockbuster "Venom" will debut on June 25, 2021.

Tom Holland's third "Spider-Man" film, which will be jointly produced by Sony and Marvel Studios, will bow out on November 5, 2021.



TIE DYE IS BACK! The model, Sofia Richie struts in a fun tie dye hoodie as she heads out for a walk.

NASA Scientists Detect Evidence of Parallel Universe

The idea of parallel universes has long been the stuff of science fiction and comic books, but now it turns out that reality could just be stranger than fiction. According to New Scientist, NASA researchers in Antarctica have detected evidence of a parallel universe born from the same Big Bang even that created our world though this parallel universe has a major twist: the rules of physics and time itself appear to run in reverse.

According to the report, evidence of this parallel universe was first discovered in 2016 during an experiment that saw researchers use a giant balloon to lift electronic antennas into the sky above Antarctica. During the experiment, they encountered what was described as a "wind" of particles from space that were "a million times more powerful" than

anything they'd previously seen.

It's the energy level of those particles that seems to be the key to the finding. While low-energy subatomic neutrinos can pass through Earth, higher-energy particles are stopped by solid matter which means that such particles can only be detected if they are falling down from space. However, the experiment detected heavier particles -- so-called tau neutrinos -- that come "up" from Earth. The implication from the finding is that the particles are traveling backward in time and thus, are suggestive of a parallel universe as the only way the tau neutrino could behave as observed was if it had changed into some other type of particle before passing through Earth and then changed back -- something that was described as an "impossible event".

"The simplest explanation for the phenomenon is that at the moment of the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago, two universes were formed -- ours and one that from our perspective is running in reverse with time going backward," the report said.

It's important to note that while the idea of evidence of a parallel universe is fascinating, not everyone is on board with the findings. Peter Gorham, principal investigator on NASA's Antarctic Impulsive Transient Antenna project, said that there were some skeptics and that it's not impossible that there are other explanations for the findings, such as a malfunction with ANITA or the possibility of a new class of subatomic particles.

"Not everyone was comfortable about the hypothesis," he said.

around to uncover the facts, talk about what's on your mind. Ask the other person direct questions. This is the best way to find the answers you are looking for in the most respectable manner.

CANCER: "Dance, when you're broken open. Dance, if you've torn the bandage off. Dance in the middle of the fighting. Dance in your blood. Dance when you're perfectly free." Rumi's words beautifully describe your relationship with movement therapy. So put on some music and allow yourself to flow with the rhythm of the Universe. Watch the emotions that come up without attaching a story to them. Know that you possess the superpower to physically move what no longer serves you out of your sacred vessel.

LEO: You've been seeing the signs for a while now—loud and clear. What's keeping you from taking the next step, Leo? Your guides want you to know that they are aligning you with the chosen path—the life you have always dreamed of. The recurring numbers (222, 555 etc), the book you chance upon in your library, the song on the radio, are all pointing you in the same direction. Silence your mind and listen to your higher wisdom.

VIRGO:

Life in the physical realm of existence is synonymous with suffering. Pain lives in our DNA. Trauma lives in our DNA. But not all of our patterns are a sum total of our own experiences. Some of them have been handed down to us by our parents and their parents. Today, you're being encouraged to reflect upon the ancestral patterns you are carrying in your bones, whether it's the fear of shining too bright, or experiencing the abundance you truly deserve. This story may have served you in the past but it no longer deserves a place in your present. Let go. Let go with love. Your angels and your guides are helping you free yourself from the burden you have been carrying with you.

LIBRA:

Social media is often a lie. Don't buy into the illusion that somebody is doing better than you, making more money or acquiring the kind of fame and recognition that you believe you never will in this lifetime. Besides, snooping around has never been your style. Today, you're being asked to acknowledge your victories and know that you are exactly where you are supposed to be. The only thing that you need to strive towards is being better than your past self.

SCORPIO:

Hello and welcome to retrograde season (that's Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, and Pluto for you)! So what happens when planets appear to move backwards? Themes from the past re-emerge to remind us of that which is unhealed within. Be warned: the temptation to go back to old ways (and toxic people) will be strong. Stay woke. Look at your situation through the lens of awareness.

SAGITTARIUS:

It's never too late to get a bob, change your style, make your passion your profession, learn reiki or unveil your masterpiece. If you're in the mood for all kinds of risks, you have your stars to blame, Sagittarius. We feel inspired to say something we already have: it's never too late! Remember, your age is nothing more than a number. You are allowed to start over when your soul feels ready. So follow your heart knowing that you have nothing to apologise for.

CAPRICORN:

"I'm beautiful in my way, 'cause God makes no mistakes, I'm on the right track, baby, I was born this way!" Lady Gaga is a big mood in the Capricorn HQ. You're learning to look at yourself through the lens of love and forgive yourself for all the times you didn't meet your

expectations. Trust that this self-acceptance will lead to inner alchemy. Remember, people love having opinions about the lives of others. Your task this week is to be your most authentic self despite what they're saying or not saying about you.

AQUARIUS:

To understand the virtues of kindness and compassion in theory and to practice them in each moment are two very different things, Aquarius. Today, you're being asked to take a good look in the mirror and ask yourself the question: do I always practice what I preach or fall prey to the illusions created by my ego-self? Baba Ram Dass's words to awaken your higher wisdom: "Treat everyone you meet like God in drag."

PISCES:

There are times in our lives when we push and push but to no avail. The pathway refuses to reveal itself and assistance is nowhere near in sight. And then there are times when minimal efforts lead to maximum results. What if we said the latter applies to where you are? Watch the doors that were once shut magically open up as people you know little about become a catalyst for positive change. The Universe is aligning you with the life you have always dreamt of. Sit back, relax, and allow things to flow.