



FARHAN AKHTAR'S BOSS REPLY TO TROLL WHO CALLED HIM "VIP BRAT" GETTING VACCINE OUT OF TURN
pg 08

MEDIA KO Khabar
pg 04

YES, PLEASE, PLEASE REMAKE DIL CHAHTA HAI WITH WAHEEDA REHMAN, ASHA PAREKH AND HELEN
pg 08



Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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8 more succumb to Covid, Sikkim's toll reaches 177

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 MAY:

Eight COVID-19 related deaths were reported in a single-day in Sikkim, the most that the State has lost to the virus in a span of 24 hours thus far. The State has now lost 177 lives to Covid. While four Covid patients passed away at STNM Hospital, four deaths among Covid patients were reported from Central Referral Hospital, Tadong.

Meanwhile, Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 crossed the

10,000-mark today and now stands at 10,165 with 241 new cases of novel coronavirus reported in the last 24 hours.

The figure for active cases of coronavirus in the State now numbers 2,739, of whom nine are currently admitted in ICU facility of STNM hospital and another nine at the ICU facility of CRH, Tadong.

The 241 new cases were detected in the testing of 707 samples on Monday.

A total of 168 samples returned positive in RT-PCR testing of 539 sam-

ples, while two more were picked up in CBNAAT screening of four samples and 71 persons tested positive for Covid-19 in rapid antigen testing of 164 samples.

Of the 241 fresh cases, 189 cases were registered in East District, 35 in South, 12 in West District and five in North Sikkim.

34 more formerly Covid-positive people were also discharged from home isolation after completing their isolation period on Monday and with this the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim has reached 7042.

Vaccination for 18+ to begin 16 May CM announces at coordination meeting with ADCs and BDOs

GANGTOK, 11 MAY [IPR]: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang chaired a coordination meeting with ADCs (Development) and BDOs of the State at Samman Bhanwan, today.

The meeting was held to understand the grievances and problems faced by the public at the block and district level due to the pandemic and to take feedback and provide necessary suggestions to the ADCs and BDOs.

Present along with the Chief Minister was the Minister for Rural Development Sonam Lama, Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, BS Pant, Political Secretary to the Chief Minister, Jacob Khaling, Principal Secretary Rural Development Department, CS Rao, Secretary CMO Tenzin Kizom and the officers of the CMO.

The Chief Minister, in his address expressed happiness that he could have direct dialogue with the ADCs and BDOs.

He stated that it is of utmost importance that ADCs and BDOs update and inform him about their predicaments at their respective blocks and districts.

He said that they are the medium through which the grass root level and the rural public can communicate directly with the government.

He directed them to work diligently and efficiently, especially in gen-

erating awareness, not only regarding COVID-19 but also on information disseminated by the government via notification and orders.

He also asked them to ensure that the rural public are made aware of their rights and privileges. He said that all Sikkimese must unite to combat the pandemic as well as other social challenges.

He asked the officers present to work towards implementing 'Government on Doorstep' quickly and efficiently at their respective blocks and headquarters. This will help in providing government services to the public right at their doorsteps.

With technology advancing and connectivity improving, he said that all paper/form details could be filled online and the officer-in-charge will instruct his/her staff to deliver the documents applied for to the houses of the people.

Entrusting the ADCs and BDOs with the task of providing COVID-19 medical kit (containing medication prescribed for COVID-19 with dosage and instructions written in both English and Nepali) to asymptomatic patients under home isolation as well as providing ration to the BPL, he asked them to carry out these duties responsibly.



He stated that through such service and system, the government would be strengthened overall.

He instructed the officers to make sure that COVID-19 protocols and SOPs are being adhered to strictly, especially during weddings. He also suggested that teachers could offer their services in spreading awareness among the rural population and in combating the disease.

He asked the officers to coordinate with the Education Department and increase their work force with the help of these teachers who are equipped to command and also motivate and create confidence in people.

He also stated that Chief Minister's Task Force would be established at every Gram Panchayat along with a data operator, who would keep constant communication with the Chief Minister's Office directly.

The Chief Minister also read out the progress report of Sikkim

Garib Awaas Yojana so far, which was launched last year. He asked the officers in charge to complete the assigned and remaining projects by 2022.

Addressing the problems of those in the rural areas, he informed that the BDO office will soon have an assistant from the Social Justice Department who will assist and work towards efficient implementation of Old Age Pension Scheme. He advised them to work in tandem with their respective MLAs so that the State Government benefits reach to the needy on time.

The Chief Minister announced to provide 7 lakhs to ADC and 5 lakhs to BDOs as discretionary funds, which can be utilised during emergencies. He also announced an instant budget of Rs. 50,000 each to all the ADCs and BDOs.

He also announced that from May 16, the vaccination drive for 18 years and above will start in the State.

The Minister for RDD in his address said that

the policies and schemes are the collective decisions of the Government and that, they are designed to bring about maximum benefit to the public. He stated that this meeting was of utmost significance as the Chief Minister could talk directly to the heads of the rural areas and districts. He also spoke about the rural development as well as development in the health and education sector under the leadership of the Chief Minister.

Principal Secretary RDD in his welcome address briefed the gathering on the health status and vaccination drives being carried out by Panchayats and rural development functionaries in coordination with health officials at various blocks and GPUs. He also informed that Panchayats have been provided with online training to manage and handle the covid crisis.

An open discussion also held during the meeting, wherein grievances and suggestions were put forth to tackle COVID-19.

CS reviews Covid situation, directs Health Deptt to use public reps to ramp up vaccination



GANGTOK, 11 MAY [IPR]: A meeting to review the COVID-19 situation in the State was held at the Conference Hall of Tashiling Secretariat this morning under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary SC Gupta.

During the meeting, which was attended by HoDs and representatives of all the concerned departments, the Chief Secretary was briefed about the availability and supply of oxygen and vaccines by the officials from the Health Department.

He was also appraised about the low turnout of elderly people for the vaccination at rural areas

and a significant number of vaccine hesitancy groups in the State that has caused delay in the completion of the first dose of targeted groups.

The meeting also discussed on the status of testing and tracking to curb the pandemic in the State.

The Chief Secretary directed the Health Department to take all necessary measures to ramp up the vaccination drive with the active participation of public representatives at the grassroots.

He also urged them to augment the availability of hospital beds for COVID patients and

COVID ICUs and asked them to strictly monitor the supply of oxygen in the State for emergency preparedness.

The Chief Secretary also took stock of the affairs at Rangpo and Melli Check Posts whereby the Home Department officials informed that the entry rate at Melli Check Post has been minimum as compared to Rangpo Check Post.

The Chief Secretary directed the concerned departments to work in close coordination and scale an efficient and strategic roadmap for emergency preparedness plans.

Unstable slope at Dambudara remains a worry



BIKASH CHETTRI

NAMCHI, 11 MAY: More than 20 houses located in the lower belt of Dambudara are likely to be evacuated during monsoons this year as well.

Last year, during monsoons, families here were helped by different organizations to relocate after the fear of being

swept away by landslides due to heavy rainfall grew too real to be ignored.

The meeting point of two drains coming from Masjid Line and Mount Caramel School on Gangtok Road 'jhoras' add to the worry while the steep slope above the village has already begun showing signs of

slippage.

Last year, the evacuation was done with the goodwill of churches, NGOs and Sai Samiti of Namchi.

This year, it is not yet clear where the support will come from or who will ensure a more durable solution for the problem and its attendant risks.

Thunderstorm, heavy rain in Kolkata and South Bengal; 3 Dead



KOLKATA, 11 MAY [PTI]: A thunderstorm accompanied by heavy rainfall hit Kolkata and the other districts of south Bengal on Tuesday afternoon. According to officials, three people were killed in rain-related incidents.

Lightning and gusty winds with speed reaching up to 30-40 km per hour hit Kolkata, parts of North 24 Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad, Bankura, Purba Bardhaman, Paschim Medinipur, Birbhum and Purulia districts, accord-

ing to an official of the India Meteorological Department.

Heavy rainfall led to waterlogging in several areas across Kolkata, including the arterial Central Avenue.

In Birbhum, two persons were killed when a car collided head-on with a truck at Nanoor during the thunderstorm.

In Murshidabad, a farmer died in a lightning strike in while working in the fields, officials said.

India records 3.29 lakh fresh COVID-19 cases, 3,876 fatalities

NEW DELHI, MAY 11 (PTI): New cases of coronavirus in India fell to 3.29 lakh after 14 days taking the total tally of COVID-19 infections to 2,29,92,517, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

A total of 3,29,942 infections were reported in a span of 24 hours, while the death toll climbed to 2,49,992 with 3,876 fresh fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

After registering a steady rise for two months, the active cases have reduced to 37,15,221 comprising 16.16 per cent of the total infections, while the national

COVID-19 recovery rate was recorded at 82.75 per cent.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,90,27,304, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.09 per cent, the data stated.

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

crossed the grim milestone of 2 crore on May 4.

According to the ICMR, 30,56,00,187 samples have been tested up to May 10 with 18,50,110 samples being tested on Monday.

The 3,876 new fatalities include 596 from Karnataka, 549 from Maharashtra, 319 from Delhi, 278 from Uttar Pradesh, 232 from Tamil Nadu, 198 from Punjab, 172 from Chhattisgarh, 168 from Uttarakhand, 161 from Haryana, 160 from Rajasthan, 134 from West Bengal, 129 from Jharkhand, 117 from Gujarat.

A total of 2,49,992 deaths have been reported so far

in the country including 76,398 from Maharashtra, 19,663 from Delhi, 19,372 from Karnataka, 15,880 from Tamil Nadu, 15,742 from Uttar Pradesh, 12,461 from West Bengal, 10,742 from Chhattisgarh and 10,704 from Punjab.

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

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

SKM team visits Covid-affected village, reaches relief



RANGPO, 11 MAY: Following up on instructions from Chief Minister PS Tamang, a team comprising of Dechen Phigu Bhutia [Advisor, Sikkim Medicinal Plant Board],

Bishnu Sharma [SKM's CLC president, Barfung], Kesangla D Lhasungpa [CLC Advisor-I] and Maita Singh Tamang [CLC, General Secretary-II] visited Lingzoo Ward under

Kewzing Bakhim GPU where COVID-19 cases have been reported in recent days.

The team took stock of the prevailing situation at Lingzoo and also provid-

ed necessary relief items, masks, gloves and hand sanitizers to the COVID-affected households.

The relief items were contributed by the SMPB advisor and Lob-

zang Bhutia [VP, CEC] and Barfung CLC body.

The team conveyed the message of the Chief Minister reiterating Covid protocol that should be followed. [from SANJAY AGARWAL]

Nepal says its Covid response is under control – everyone can see it's not true

SUBINA SHRESTHA KATHMANDU, 11 MAY [THE GUARDIAN]: Waiting for India's Covid wave to break over Nepal has been as painful as it was inevitable. Now that it's happening, this country of 30 million people is even more hapless and unprepared than India seems to have been.

My friend, Dr Rakshya Pandey, a pulmonary care doctor in Kathmandu, says that during her long shifts, the thought sometimes enters her mind: "Where would I go if I get sick? Where would I take my mother if she gets the virus?"

There are no hospital beds available, even for doctors and their families. Covid has exposed everybody's vulnerability, except our leaders. Hospitals have run out of oxygen, and desperate calls on social media appealing for healthcare fill everyone's feeds. Oxford University's data tracking site shows a staggering 668% increase in confirmed Covid cases in the two weeks to 1 May, compared with the previous fortnight. On that day, the Red Cross reported that, nationally, 44% of all tests were positive.

"I am trained not to sleep for 48 hours, but I am not trained to send patients away without help," Pandey says. "And we know that things are just going to get worse."

For the first time in years, I've been away from Nepal as a crisis hit. As time got suspended in what seemed to be an endless lockdown here in the UK, I watched my friends back home with envy; my social media feed was full of people dining in crowded restaurants, and attending parties maskless. While schools remained closed for most of the year, everything else opened: crowded markets and jattras, festivals where communities gather to celebrate everything, from the rain to the harvest. Nepalis even travelled to India to participate in jattras; thousands of Hindus visited the now infamous Kumbh mela in India's northern state of Uttarakhand.

Pictures of Gyanendra Shah, the former king of Nepal, bathing in the Ganges with Hindu religious ascetics hailing him as the only Hindu king of the world did the rounds on social media. The ex-royal couple returned with the virus, and many of their connections have also tested positive. Another meaning of jatra in Nepali is chaos.

Or you can translate jatra as "carnival". For several months now Nepal's leaders have been conducting their own jatra, which has kept the Nepali media and citizens absorbed. Instead of protecting public health, Nepal's prime minister, Khadga Prasad Oli, has been busy with his own theatrics. In between spreading falsehoods – such as telling Nepalis to manage Covid with herbal remedies such as turmeric water or guava leaf tea – he dissolved parliament, which was later restored by the supreme court. In his latest act of his solipsism, he called a confidence vote in his own government amid convoluted power struggles which would embarrass Byzantium. This week he lost that vote, with 124 members of the lower house of parliament voting against him and just 93 voting for him on 10 May.

There are fewer than 600 ventilators for the entire country. The University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation predicts that Nepal will need well over 10,000 ventilators by 24 May. Health officials confirm that the resources to operate ventilators are equally limited.

"Even if we have the ventilators, what can we do without oxygen?" said one official, as his phone kept ringing with pleas for more oxygen. My social media feed is also full of calls for ICU beds and the therapeutic drug Remdesivir. From 12 May, Nepal joins India on the red list for travellers from England.

"Besides ambulances, we hear helicopters now, coming to evacuate the rich," says Kanchan Jha, from Birgunj, a town near the Indian border.

Karnataka logs highest Covid cases in 24 Hours, overtakes Maharashtra

BENGALURU, 11 MAY [PTI]: Karnataka has overtaken Maharashtra to become the state reporting the highest number of coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours. The numbers have put a strain on health workers, hospital infrastructure and oxygen availability.

The southern state reported 39,305 infections, followed by Maharashtra at 37,236 cases in a day.

An Oxygen Express, carrying 120 metric tonnes of liquid medical oxygen, arrived in Whitefield on the outskirts of Bengaluru on Tuesday morning, marking the state's first such supply.

It came from Tananagar and was given the highest priority to reach the state where people have died for want of oxygen.

"Normally when you run a goods train, you

stop them at many places for allowing mail express trains or high speed trains. In this case, the highest priority was given to this train. And this train was not supposed to stop anywhere because of any operational reason. That is why this train has reached earlier," Ashok Kumar Verma, DRM, Bengaluru told NDTV.

Many hospitals in the state have been struggling with shortage of oxygen, a critical component in the treatment of critically ill Covid patients, in districts and in capital Bengaluru.

Visiting a Covid war room, with hospital beds still hard to come by, Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa said doctors should ask patients getting better to go home to free up precious hospital beds.

His brother, a doctor, has been getting calls to visit villages "where there is at least one sick person in each family". The poor have already been left to their own devices.

The relationship between India and Nepal is familial and dysfunctional. In January, India donated 1m doses of AstraZeneca vaccine and Nepal bought another 2m from the Serum Institute of India. But, just as 1% of Nepal's population got fully vaccinated, Covid overwhelmed India. As India was gasping for breath, Nepal, in a move that embarrassed many, still looked to India to provide oxygen.

Over a million people, including my parents, who are in their 70s, don't know when or if they will get their second shot. News of businessmen close to the prime minister allegedly derailed vaccine imports earlier this year after a disagreement over kickbacks has shocked many people. But others are not surprised.

"It has come to the surface because some in power did not get a share of the pie," a friend said.

Nepal's health minister, Hridayesh Tripathi, announced last week: "As the number of infections has increased beyond the control of the health system, it has become tough to provide hospital beds for care."

The ministry has appealed to citizen bodies to help. On social media, a senior government official sent an urgent plea to Nepali embassies to start vaccine diplomacy. Then, on Saturday, the prime minister went on CNN and said that the Covid-19 situation in Nepal was under control. Everyone can see it's not true.

"People are carrying oxygen on scooters and there are others who are still holding wedding parties," my relative complained. We get the leaders we deserve, I think.

"One of the electrical crematoriums that is broken needs some Indian technicians," a senior government official tells me.

"And we'll soon run out of wood to cremate bodies."

ViewPoint

Nepal's Lack of Confidence in the Government: History Repeats Itself

DR CHUNKU BHUTIA

The political history of Nepal has been a witness to several chapters of crisis and upheavals. It would be fascinating to know that this South Asian country in the past had seven constitutions drafted in different years starting from 1948 followed by 1951, 1959, 1962, 1990, 2007 and the latest being the one in 2015. The country has to its political baggage two Constituent Assembly with the First Constituent Assembly being dissolved in the year 2012 and the Second Constituent Assembly being formed in the year 2013.

Nepal's political journey has often been associated with adjectives like chaotic, crisis ridden starting from the mid-19th century when this Eastern Himalayan state got its first Prime Minister J.B. Rana followed by the early 1950's democratic movement that replaced Prime Minister Rana with then Monarch King Tribhuvan as the Head of the State. Thereafter, Nepal received its new constitution in the year 1959 and the first democratic assembly election was held which declared the leader of Nepali Congress Party B.P. Koirala victorious. But unfortunately this victory was short lived with King Mahendra (son of King Tribhuvan) dissolving the first democratic party in 1960.

Post- 1960 Nepal witnessed people's movement in 1990, then after a year it had its first Parliamentary election under the Kingship of King Birendra. Then after a decade the country had its mourning phase with the massacre of the entire royal family except King Birendra's brother Gyanendra and his family. As expected Gyanendra was crowned as the next King of Nepal who then later dismissed the elected Parliament but as a result of the Peoples movement by the democratic parties, King has no option but to reinstate the Parliament in the year 2006. The year 2006 also marked the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the then Prime Minister G.P Koirala and Maoist Chairman Prachanda. Two years later, Nepal elected its new Constituent Assembly which also marked the complete abolition of monarchy and the birth of Nepal as a Federal Democratic Republic.

However, yet again the political crisis resurfaces itself with the dismissal of the Constituent Assembly due to several disagreements in 2012 and then the formation of new Constituent Assembly in the year 2013. Finally, the country was able to gift itself its seventh Constitution in the year 2015.

The present crisis was triggered with the present Prime Minister K.P Sharma Oli who formed the government after winning the 2017 general elections, made a nation-wide declaration on 20th December, 2020 about the dissolution of the lower house of the Parliament i.e. the House of Representatives and the

same was received well by the current President Bidhya Devi Bhandari. He further added that the next election will be held on April 30 and May 10, 2021 with him leading a caretaker government. This decision led to the upsurge of discontentment in the country on the pretext that it violates the Constitution. As per the 2015 Constitution Article 76 (7) states, "In cases where the Prime Minister appointed under clause (5-relates to a member of the House of Representative claiming that he or she can get the required majority vote) fails to obtain a vote of confidence or the Prime Minister cannot be appointed, the President shall, on recommendation of the Prime Minister, dissolve the House of Representatives and appoint a date of election so that the election to another House of Representatives is completed within six months."

In the contrary it is argued that Oli's government has at its disposal 2/3rd majority as it had won 170 seats out of 275 seats in the lower house of the Parliament. So, the decision taken by Prime Minister was considered as ill-founded. This then called for nation wide reaction in the form of protests by people, the student union also took to streets, civil society activists, the opposition parties Nepali Congress and Janata Samajbadi party also protested against the decision. It needs to be known that the Nepal Congress Party was formed initially with the merger of K P Sharma Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (UML-United Marxist Leninist), the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), led by former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Prachanda's Nepal Communist Party (Maoist).

The major setback to this decision was met with the Supreme Court dismissing the decision of the Prime Minister as "unconstitutional" and on February 23rd, 2021, a five-member constitutional bench of the Nepal Supreme Court decided unanimously to reinstate the lower house of the country's parliament.

Following the decision made by the Prime Minister, the Maoist party under Prachanda withdrew its support to Oli's government thereby leaving the Oli's party without a majority, thereby leaving no option to the Oli government but to seek for vote of confidence in the Parliament on 10th May, 2021.

The outcome of the vote of confidence proved to be unfortunate for the Oli government as it received only 93 votes out of 271 votes in the lower house of the Parliament.

The question here is WHAT NEXT? Few parameters as per the Constitution can be listed considering the political situation in Nepal after the Oli losing the vote of confidence;

1. As per Article 100 (6) of Nepal Constitution "The Prime Minister shall be deemed to be relieved of his/her office if the no-confidence motion tabled

under clause (4- One-fourth of the total number of members of the House of Representatives may table in writing a no-confidence motion against the Prime Minister) is passed by a majority of the total number of members of the House of Representatives."

2. As per Article 76 (2) of Nepal Constitution "If there is not a clear majority of any party according to clause (1-The President shall appoint the parliamentary party leader of the political party with the majority in the House of Representatives as a Prime Minister, and a Council of Ministers shall be formed in his/her chairmanship.), the President shall appoint as Prime Minister the member of the House of Representatives who can have the majority with the support of two or more political parties represented in the House of Representatives." So, the Nepali Congress, Maoist Centre and the Janata Samajbadi Party will have to come together to form a coalition government.

3. As per Article 76 (3) of Nepal Constitution "If there is a situation wherein it is not possible to make the appointment of the Prime Minister as provided for in clause (2) within 30 days of the final result of the election of the House of Representatives, or if the appointed Prime Minister, as provided for in clause (4), fails to receive a vote of confidence, the President shall appoint the leader of the party with the highest number of members in the House of Representatives as the Prime Minister." This could give Oli a second chance.

4. As per Article 76 (4) of Nepal Constitution "The Prime Minister appointed according to clause (2) or (3) shall have to receive the vote of confidence of the House of Representatives within 30 days of his/her appointment."

5. As per Article 76 (5) of Nepal Constitution "If a Prime Minister appointed according to clause (3) fails to receive a vote of confidence pursuant to clause (4), the President shall appoint a member as Prime Minister, who produces bases that he/she may win the vote of confidence of the House of Representatives as provided for in clause (2)."

6. As per Article 76 (7) of Nepal Constitution "If the Prime Minister appointed according to clause (5) fails to get the vote of confidence or if any member fails to be appointed as Prime Minister, the President shall, on the recommendation of Prime Minister, dissolve the House of Representatives and fix a date to conduct another election within six months."

Thus, in Nepal the political history seems to have repeated itself with the resurfacing of unstable government, weak leader, breach of constitution and the chaos during the pandemic. Nepal seems to have its hand with political, social, economic and health crisis.

[the writer is Assistant Professor, Sikkim Government College, Burtuk]

Letter to Editor

SANG PHC NOT ON COWIN

As we are passing through an unprecedented situation reeling under the second wave of Covid-19, the talks about vaccination have become a part of household conversations. Everybody is eagerly waiting to get vaccinated and the news of vaccination starting for 18+ from 16 May has made everyone visit the CoWin website today.

It has been already told that the vaccination for 18+ will require mandatory registration and pre-scheduling an appointment in CoWin portal. However, I was left wondering when I didn't see the vaccinating center near me on the list. Sang PHC has been vaccinating people ever since the start of the vaccination drive, but it isn't included in the list of centres in East district in the CoWin portal.

Given the condition for getting vaccinated, this kind of issue will create anxiousness amongst the people of this area and it needs to be resolved asap. Through this letter, I would like to request the editor to raise this issue and inform the concerned officials to take appropriate actions immediately.

As I am not aware about the vaccinating centres of other areas, the CoWin portal must be rigorously cross checked and there shouldn't be any problem to the public due to such a minor issue.

For many reasons, I wish to remain anonymous.

As 44 die of Covid at Aligarh University, calls for genome sequencing

ALIGARH/NEW DELHI, 11 MAY [NDTV]: Forty-four employees of the Aligarh Muslim University - 19 professors and 25 non-teaching staff - have died after contracting the Covid virus, sparking concern over yet more cases, and deaths, emerging from the prestigious educational institution.

AMU Vice Chancellor Tariq Mansoor wrote to the ICMR (Indian Council for Medical Research, the central government's nodal body in this crisis) to say the deaths were from a "lethal" variant, and asked for genome sequencing.

"This is giving rise to suspicion that a particular viral variant may be circulating in the Civil Lines area of Aligarh, in which AMU and many ad-

joining localities are situated," the Vice Chancellor wrote.

Samples have been sent to Delhi's CSIR's (Council of Scientific and Industrial Research) Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology to conduct genome sequencing to identify the particular strain(s).

"The university's cemetery is now full. This is a huge tragedy. A lot of big doctors and senior professors, including a dean and a chairman, have died. Young people - who are fit and healthy - have also died," Dr Arshi Khan, a professor of political science, said.

The press officer at AMU pointed out that

the university played an important role in helping the local community when the first Covid wave struck.

"This time it is worse... the mortality rate is much more this time, and it is a matter of huge concern," Shafey Qidwai, the university's spokesperson, said.

Some of those who have died over the past few days are Dr Shadab Khan and Dr Arif Siddique from the Medicine Department and Professor Humayun Murad from Zoology.

Professor Jamshed Siddiqui from the Department of Computer Science and Professors Saeeduz Zafar and Sajid Ali Khan from the Psychology Department, have also died.

The History, Political Science, Law and Theology departments have also lost professors, and the impact is not just on the faculty.

Around 30,000 students study in AMU, of which around 16,000 stay in 19 hostels. Earlier, even when the university was shut, some students stayed on but now even the hostels are emptying.

"Now 50-60 students are compelled to stay because they are working on or submitting their thesis. They're getting daily calls from worried parents, asking them to come home... but the students say they cannot leave without finishing their work," Salman Qamar, a research scholar, said.

CM's greets Sikkim on International Nurses Day

GANGTOK, 11 MAY [IPR]: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang has extended warm greetings and best wishes on the occasion of "International Nurses Day" to the people of Sikkim, especially to all the nurses of Sikkim and the world over.

Termining nurses as the personification of rich compassion and care, the Chief Minister, in his

message, expressed his heartfelt gratitude towards the nurses of Sikkim for tirelessly working for the health of the people.

"They are doing an excellent work towards overcoming COVID-19 and we are extremely grateful to our nurses and their families for their stellar performance," he conveys, while adding, "On In-

ternational Nurses Day, we salute all our nurses across all sectors of health care in our state. They are a vital gear in the wheel of our health care system and we are all fully aware of their sacrifices on daily basis, to ensure that our health system is not compromised.

"Let me take this opportunity to assure them that our government

stands firmly behind them and are ready to extend every possible help and support."

Further, he states that the dedication and sincerity of the nurses cannot be disputed in these difficult times and thanked them for their work in the hospitals, health centres, private medical facilities, on the field, and for always putting patients first.

Somebody has to be made accountable: High Court on Gujarat Hospital Fire

AHMEDABAD, 11 MAY [PTI]: The Gujarat High Court today criticised the state government over the recent fire at a COVID-19 hospital in Bharuch, saying it was contemptuous on its part to not remain vigilant and avoid such incidents, and cited many orders passed in this regard in the past.

A division bench expressed surprise over Advocate General Kamal Trivedi's submission that the COVID-19 facility at the trust-run Bharuch Welfare Hospital, where the fire on May 1 killed 18 people, was set up "surreptitiously, without intimating the authorities".

Sixteen COVID-19 patients and two nurses were killed in the blaze.

The bench of Justices Bela Trivedi and Justice Bhargav D Karia said that "somebody has to be made accountable" for the deadly fire.

The bench was hearing a petition filed

by advocate Amit Panchal seeking a direction to hold government officials accountable and punish them for failing to comply with the court's previous directions related to fire incidents in COVID-19 hospitals.

"The anxiety of the court is what are you supposed to do to prevent such incidents in the coming days... Ultimately, what are the measures that you are going to take?" the court asked.

The judges said the government failed to take action on the court's previous orders pertaining to all hospitals in the state so that fire incidents do not occur again at these medical facilities.

"It amounts to the contempt of courts of all the orders passed by the courts in the past. Ultimately, it amounts to the contemptuous action on the part of the state for not being vigilant so that such incidents are not repeated again and

again," the bench said.

The court said the government's affidavit, filed in the matter, only talks about letters issued by top authorities but was silent on actions taken by lower-level officials pursuant to previous orders passed by the court.

Mr Trivedi said the fire-hit COVID-19 facility in Bharuch town was set up "surreptitiously, without intimating the authorities," and hence no-objection certificate (NOC) on fire safety could not be issued by local authorities to the new unit.

The court expressed surprise over Mr Trivedi's submission and said if the state was not intimated about a COVID-19 facility, how was it possible for it to compile data on coronavirus patients who are hospitalised.

The bench also issued notices to the Bharuch municipality, the trust which runs the hospital, its nodal officer for fire safety

and the government, and kept the matter for hearing after two weeks.

On the petitioner's plea to make public, the DA Mehta Commission of Inquiry report on fire incidents at two Gujarat hospitals, the government told the HC the report was submitted late in the evening on March 31 this year and could not be tabled in the Assembly as its session got over on April 1.

The Mehta commission had probed the fire incidents at two hospitals - one in Rajkot (November 11, 2020) and the other in Ahmedabad (August 2020) - in which altogether 13 COVID-19 patients were killed.

"As per the provisions of the Commission of Inquiry, the report is required to be studied, prepared, and thereafter tabled before the Assembly. There is no question of keeping the report under carpet or else we should not have appointed a commission," Mr Trivedi told the court.

Bahrain Prince scales Mt Everest's new height, 1st foreign team to do so

KATHMANDU, 11 MAY [PTI]: A 16-member Bahrain Royal Guard team led by prince Mohammed Hamad Mohammed Al Khalifa today became the first international team to conquer the new altitude of Mount Everest.

The Bahrain Royal Guard team successfully reached the peak of Mt Everest early this morning. The Himalayan Times quoted officials as saying.

The team stood atop the peak between 5:30

am and 6:45 am local time, said Mingma Sherpa, chairman at Seven Summit Treks which organised the royal expedition.

This is the first international team to conquer the new altitude of Mt Everest, said Mira Acharya, Director at the Department of Tourism.

Nepal and China in December last year jointly announced that the revised height of the world's highest peak was 8,848.86 metres, about 86 centimetres

more than the previous measurement done by India in 1954.

The Nepal government decided to measure the exact height of the mountain amid debates that there might have been a change in it due to various reasons, including the devastating earthquake of 2015.

The Bahrain team arrived in Kathmandu on March 15 to begin its Everest expedition.

Climbing leader Tashi Lakpa Sherpa,

who is the youngest person to climb Everest without oxygen support in 2013, said that the team members are now descending from the top.

They are the first Bahrain nationals to stand atop Mt Everest, he said.

The team earlier successfully climbed Lobuche peak (6,119 metres) and Mt Manaslu (8,156 metres) -- both in Nepal -- in October 2020.

The Royal Guard of Bahrain is a unit of the Bahrain Defence Force.

Covid cases double in world's most-vaccinated nation, raising concerns

SEYCHELLES, 11 MAY [BLOOMBERG]: Seychelles, which has vaccinated more of its population against Covid-19 than any other country, saw active cases more than double in the week to May 7, raising concerns that inoculation is not helping turn the tide in some places.

The World Health Organization said vaccine failure couldn't be determined without a detailed assessment and that it was working on evaluating the situation.

Kate O'Brien, director of the the WHO's department of immunization, vaccines and biologicals, told a briefing Monday that the body was in direct communication with Seychelles and that a detailed assessment was needed looking at factors like strains of the virus and the severity of cases.

bled since last week to 2,486 people, and 37% of those have received two vaccine doses. Cases are also surging in the Maldives, another Indian Ocean island nation that's a popular tourism destination.

In Seychelles, Sinopharm shots were issued to 57% of those who were fully inoculated and the rest with Covishield, a vaccine made in India under a license from AstraZeneca Plc. As of May 8 no one who had contracted Covid while being vaccinated had died, Seychelles News Agency reported, citing the minister for foreign affairs and tourism.

The Seychelles, a group of palm-fringed tropical islands, last week re-imposed curbs including closing schools, canceling sports events and banning mingling of households.

The country had raced to vaccinate its population of just under 100,000 -- first with a donation of doses from China's Sino-

pharm and then with a gift of Covishield, so it could reopen to the tourists who are the lifeblood of its economy.

Daniel Lucey, clinical professor of medicine at Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine, said in a blog last week that data on genetic sequencing are not yet available for infections in Seychelles in April.

Still, the B.1.351 variant, first identified in South Africa late last year, was found in the Seychelles in February, he said. AstraZeneca's vaccine appeared to be less effective against that variant in a study, and South Africa halted plans to use those injections.

A comparison between Sinopharm, Covishield and unvaccinated people who caught the coronavirus could be done using genetic sequencing and data on the severity of their infections, Lucey said.

Cases in the Maldives, which has seen a surge in visits from affluent Indians, have

also shot up. The country has the most new cases per 100,000 people in the past five, seven and 14 days. Active cases jumped from 4,978 to 9,423 on May 9.

As of May 8, over 300,000 people in the Maldives had received at least one dose of a vaccine and 35% of the population had received two, according to the Health Protection Agency. The country has been using Sinopharm and Covishield.

Positive test results in Greater Male, the area in and around the capital of the Maldives, are about 60% of the total. As of May 7 the government closed gyms and cinemas and imposed a curfew from 9 p.m. until 4 a.m., the agency said.

The government is also now requiring that arrivals to the islands, including those who have been vaccinated, have a negative Covid-19 test administered four days before their departure.

Mumbai records 1,717 new Covid cases, lowest in nearly 2 months

MUMBAI, 11 MAY [PTI]: Mumbai in Maharashtra reported its lowest single-day COVID-19 case count in nearly two months by recording 1,717 new cases and 51 deaths due to coronavirus in the last 24 hours.

The fresh cases took the overall caseload to 6,79,986 while the death count rose to 13,942 in the city.

A total of 6,082 patients recovered from coronavirus today, bringing the active number of cases down to 41,102.

The Covid positivity rate in Mumbai stands at 6 per cent at present while the doubling rate has improved to 170 days and the recovery rate reached 92 per cent.

Maharashtra, which was one of the worst Covid-hit regions when the second wave hit the country, has shown a continuous decline in the daily COVID-19 cases. It recorded 24,920 new cases and 549 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Mumbai on Monday also recorded a steep drop in new cases at 1,794.

Last week the Supreme Court praised

Mumbai's response to the spread of Covid-19, proposing that the Mumbai model be replicated in Delhi.

In late April, Maharashtra announced a series of restrictions - titled "Break the Chain" - to combat the deadly spike in coronavirus cases in the state.

The total active COVID-19 cases in the country dipped to 37,15,221 today with a net decline of 30,016 cases being recorded in a span of 24 hours for the first time after 61 days, the Union health ministry said.

Maharashtra is among 13 states besides Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh that cumulatively account for 82.68 per cent of India's total active cases, the ministry said.

Meanwhile, the vaccination process in Maharashtra has slowed down with the government today saying it will focus on those over 45 due to a shortage of doses.

ANTHYESTHI KRIYA



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

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

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



ANTHYESTHI KRIYA (AARGHU)

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

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

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

RSVP

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

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Media ko Khabar

...because, sometimes some media musing is also prescribed

When the internet exploded on to personal computers and commentators around the world started sounding the death knell for the printed word and television [we are talking news here], there were a few sane minds who pointed out that this would not happen since the worldwide web did not have a business model to translate eyeballs into revenue. No media can survive, leave alone wipe out another, without a revenue model.

Two decades of the web having flattened the world and having now even reached telephones, newspapers and television channels continue to print and broadcast. They might be losing audience, and of late even revenue, but unless on-line platforms return to classical journalism that newspapers still prioritise, it will not matter whether newspapers survive or not, because pandering to the lowest common denominator will have wiped out access to information and context.

To return to the earlier point. The reason why advertisements, which still sustain newspapers and television even if not to extravagant scales any more, did not migrate on industry-killing scale to the internet is because even though Facebook pages offer free information and hence are seen as more accessible, they demand not only technology and some level of tech-savvy aptitude, but more importantly, constant engagement – you cannot be brewing yourself tea while also browsing [at least not properly], but you could be reading or cooking and washing even as you catch the news on television playing in the background. Because the television does not demand unbroken attention, it attracts advertisements which play on a spool and a few decibels louder than regular programming, until, in their covert assault they command the top of the mind recall that advertisers crave. And then again, you cannot take the television around everywhere with you unlike a newspaper which you could roll under your arms and read whenever you want. Also, an advertisement on print, despite publications being timebound, have a longer shelf life than an advertisement on TV which runs to fixed slots and can be avoided. But then, there are so many channels to choose from, so many claiming breaking news all the time, that to retain advertiser portfolios, it becomes necessary to acquire viewerships. Because television is chosen as a medium of information sometimes to catch news [a lathicharge or budget announcements] as it breaks and most of the times because this form of imbibing information makes no demands on attention spans, given the competition in this segment, the need to entertain takes priority over the responsibility to inform responsibly. The need for authenticity is sidestepped because television viewers do not get a chance to rationalise – the rapid barrage of sound-bites and visuals, presented by excitable presenters, jumping from one story to another, leaves viewers no time to mull over the information provided. We are unfortunately seeing this model move online as well. It's different with newspapers, where the reader is engaged in the process, questioning, doubting and analysing the information provided as s/he reads. The distractive nature of moving pictures and sound makes audiences sit through half an hour specials on a cow that walks in circles or political siblings feuding across TV channels; of television debates becoming more about the skills of star anchors to instigate noise and violence. Television does not allow viewers time to think and visual images have a way to 'leading' viewers, something not as easily achieved by print. And they have been exploiting this power rather shamelessly and now that entertainment is winning, news is suffering even in print.

Print, the dinosaur of information, has been dribbling an awkward game of late as it strives to add zing to the printed word. This is admittedly not easy. Succumbing to sensationalism or exploitative journalism is easy and simultaneously, as journalistic responsibilities towards authenticity are getting dangerously de-prioritised in the race to garner viewer/ readership, media finds itself in a confounding muddle. And while these are our problems to wade through and negotiate, it is a collective worry because not just individual reputations, what is also at stake in this pressure to entertain [and nothing entertains more than gossip] is the audience's need to be informed, and informed correctly. As the bar for basic journalistic ethics to verify gets lowered, the media becomes that much more susceptible to plants and directed misinformation; and this will provide only momentary euphoria in some camps, anger in others, but serve no purpose save to titillate...

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Mounting Evidence Suggests COVID Vaccines do Reduce Transmission. How Does This Work?

JENNIFER JUNO & ADAM WHEATLEY

THECONVERSATION.COM

Since COVID-19 vaccines began rolling out across the world, many scientists have been hesitant to say they can reduce transmission of the virus.

Their primary purpose is to prevent you from getting really sick with the virus, and it quickly became clear the vaccines are highly efficient at doing this. Efficacy against symptoms of the disease in clinical trials has ranged from 50% (Sinovac) to 95% (Pfizer/BioNTech), and similar effectiveness has been reported in the real world.

However, even the best vaccines we have are not perfect, which means some vaccinated people still end up catching the virus. We call these cases "breakthrough" infections. Indeed, between April 10 and May 1, six people in hotel quarantine in New South Wales tested positive for COVID-19, despite being fully vaccinated.

But how likely are vaccinated people to actually pass the virus on, if they do get infected? Evidence is increasing that, not only do COVID-19 vaccines either stop you getting sick or substantially reduce the severity of your symptoms, they're also likely to substantially reduce the chance of transmitting the virus to others.

But how does this work, and what does it mean for the pandemic?

VACCINATED PEOPLE ARE MUCH LESS LIKELY TO PASS ON THE VIRUS

Early evidence from testing in animals, where researchers can di-

rectly study transmission, suggested immunisation with COVID-19 vaccines could prevent animals passing on the virus.

But animals are not people, and the scientific community has been waiting for more conclusive studies in humans.

In April, Public Health England reported the results of a large study of COVID-19 transmission involving more than 365,000 households with a mix of vaccinated and unvaccinated members.

It found immunisation with either the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine reduced the chance of onward virus transmission by 40-60%. This means that if someone became infected after being vaccinated, they were only around half as likely to pass their infection on to others compared to infected people who weren't vaccinated.

One study from Israel, which leads the world in coronavirus vaccinations, gives some clues about what's behind this reduced transmission. Researchers identified nearly 5,000 cases of breakthrough infection in previously vaccinated people, and determined how much virus was present in their nose swabs. Compared to unvaccinated people, the amount of virus detected was significantly lower in those who got vaccinated.

More virus in the nose has been linked to greater infectiousness and increased risks of onward transmission.

These studies show vaccination is likely to substantially reduce virus transmission by reducing the pool of people who become infected, and reducing virus levels in the

nose in people with breakthrough infections.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

If COVID-19 vaccines reduce the chances of transmitting the virus, then each person who is vaccinated protects not only themselves, but also people around them. Breaking chains of transmission within the community and limiting onward spread is critical to help protect people who may respond poorly to immunisation or may not be able to get vaccinated themselves, such as children, some older people, and some people who are immunocompromised.

This also greatly increases the opportunity to achieve some degree of population (or "herd") immunity, and a faster easing of social restrictions.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE LIMITS OF VACCINES?

Reducing the risk of transmitting the coronavirus relies on developing strong immunity against the virus. But immunity, even from the vaccines, fades over time. Scientists are actively monitoring people who've had COVID-19 vaccines to understand how long vaccine immunity is likely to last, and if and when booster shots will be required.

Variants of the coronavirus are also concerning. These are strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that carry changes which make them harder to control by immunisation. Such variants present two major challenges: they can evade vaccine immunity and, in some cases, are also more transmissible.

Although variants have spread widely throughout the world, there are several pieces of good news on

this front. Countries with advanced vaccine rollouts are maintaining good control over the virus. For example, Israel began its mass vaccination campaign during their third wave, and quickly saw a decline in new cases.

What's more, companies like Moderna are developing updated vaccines to specifically target these variants, with positive early results.

VACCINES DON'T MEAN WE SHOULD STOP PREVENTATIVE BEHAVIOURS

Right now, the global pandemic is complex. Many countries are quickly rolling out available vaccines, and there are a wide variety of lockdowns and social measures in place.

Yet, the number of new infections each day across the world is at an all-time high and concerning variants are circulating.

As people are vaccinated, there's a temptation to stop or reduce some important social behaviours such as mask wearing or physical distancing. But, importantly, less transmission is not no transmission.

While vaccinated individuals most likely have a smaller chance of passing on the virus, it's still important to keep up responsible behaviours into the immediate future to protect those who have not, will not, or cannot be immunised.

[Jennifer Juno is Senior research fellow, The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity; Adam Wheatley is Senior Research Fellow, Department of Microbiology and Immunology, The University of Melbourne]

Huawei's Ability to Eavesdrop on Dutch Mobile Users is a Wake-Up Call for the Telecoms Industry

GREIG PAUL

THECONVERSATION.COM

Chinese technology provider Huawei was recently accused of being able to monitor all calls made using Dutch mobile operator KPN. The revelations are from a secret 2010 report made by consultancy firm Capgemini, which KPN commissioned to evaluate the risks of working with Huawei infrastructure.

While the full report on the issue has not been made public, journalists reporting on the story have outlined specific concerns that Huawei personnel in the Netherlands and China had access to security-essential parts of KPN's network – including the call data of millions of Dutch citizens – and that a lack of records meant KPN couldn't establish how often this happened.

Both KPN and Huawei have denied any impropriety, though in the years since the 2010 report, Huawei has increasingly found itself labelled a high-risk vendor for telecoms companies to work with, including by the UK's National Cyber Security Centre.

To better understand this story, and to consider whether other telecoms networks may have had similar security vulnerabilities to KPN's, we need to look at how complex mobile networks are run. KPN essentially granted Huawei "administrator rights" to its mobile network by outsourcing work to the Chinese firm. Legislation is only now catching up to prevent similar vulnerabilities in telecoms security.

COMMERCIAL PRESSURES

Huawei is one of the three dominant radio equipment providers in the world, alongside Ericsson and Nokia. These giant technology companies provide the base stations and equipment that deliver mobile phone signals. Operators like KPN increasingly pay these companies not only to buy the equipment, but also for them to support and maintain it.

The telecoms market in which KPN operates is one of the most price-competitive in the world. European mobile operators saw average revenues per user in 2019 of €14.90 (£12.85) a month, compared with €36.90 a month in the USA. European spend on telecoms services are also reducing year-on-year as operators compete to offer the best deals to consumers.

Lower revenues force operators to carefully manage costs. This means that operators have been keen to outsource parts of their businesses to third parties, especially since the late 2000s.

Large numbers of highly skilled engineers are an expensive liability to have on the balance sheet, and can often appear underused when things are running smoothly. Such jobs are often outsourced, with personnel transferring to the outsourced provider, to help operators to cut their payroll costs.

OUTSOURCING GONE TOO FAR



When everything is working, very few people notice outsourcing. But when things go wrong, outsourcing can often significantly complicate recovery, or create a large "single point of failure" or security issue.

In the UK, for instance, mobile operator O2 has seen at least one outage which has been linked to the use of outsourced functions. Where large numbers of operators rely on the same outsourcing partner, any issue or security breach affecting the outsourced provider can have a wide-spread impact.

Still, outsourcing by mobile operators is widespread. And firms in the UK and across Europe have often turned to Huawei to provide IT services and to help build core networks. In 2010, Huawei was managing security-critical functions of KPN's core network.

ADMINISTRATOR ACCESS

At the same time, equipment suppliers like Huawei are trying to move away from merely selling equipment and towards providing a managed service, including installation, maintenance and support. This helps them create recurring revenue in an industry that has generally been dominated by large five-year or ten-year purchasing cycles.

But as these vendors add services to their repertoire, they gain wider access to the mobile networks they work with. This could include certain security-critical parts of telecoms networks, which are often designed to work in trusted, secure environments.

In the scenario where a vendor like Huawei also provides a managed service, they find themselves sitting in a uniquely privileged position, with inside knowledge of their own equipment, and with direct access to trusted management interfaces.

This creates the high-tech equivalent of putting all your eggs in one basket. It's akin to giving the combinations of the bank vault to the same security guard in charge of the CCTV camera footage. It's difficult to reliably monitor operations carried out by the vendor without relying on that vendor's own software.

In cases where a vendor has been designated as high-risk as a result of their own product security practices, it's very difficult to know whether that vendor didn't do anything untoward. This is the situation KPN apparently found themselves in with Huawei back in 2010.

ARE CHANGES NEEDED?

With at least one operator aiming to reduce European operating expenditure by €1.2 billion, and 5G deployments bringing new opportunities for managed services and software-based solutions to be used in networks, decisions around outsourcing will continue to play an important role for mobile operators going forwards.

But legislation is rapidly catching up. The UK has proposed a telecoms security bill, and associated draft secondary legislation includes requirements for network operators to monitor all activity carried out by third party providers, to identify and manage the risks of using them, and to have a plan in place to maintain normal network operations if their supplier's service is disrupted.

For some operators, it's conceivable this might mean bringing key skills back in-house to ensure there's someone watching the (outsourced) watchmen. In the case of KPN, these measures would likely have prevented Huawei from having seemingly unchecked and privileged access to its customers' mobile data.

[The writer is Lead Mobile Networks and Security Engineer, University of Strathclyde]

Tripura CM orders inquiry into attack on CPI(M) leaders

AGARTALA, MAY 11 (PTI): Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb on Tuesday ordered a probe into the attack on Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Manik Sarkar, and other CPI(M) members in South Tripura district a day ago, allegedly by workers and supporters of the ruling BJP.

Deb has given directions for formation of an inquiry committee, headed by South Tripura Superintendent of Police Kulwant Singh, and sought a report on the incident within 48 hours, a statement issued by the chief minister's office said.

Sarkar, also a CPI(M) Politburo member and former chief minister, had on Monday said that "hooligans patronised by the ruling BJP" attacked him and other leaders when they visited Shantirbazar to meet party workers and supporters,



who were "roughed up" during a programme last week.

Recounting his experience, the veteran CPI(M) leader said he and his party colleagues were shown black flags and slogans such as 'Go back, Sarkar' were raised.

He further claimed that Left supporters were last Wednesday "assaulted by BJP goons" when

they were celebrating the birth anniversary of social thinker Karl Marx.

The police, however, stated that unidentified youths hurled stones at Sarkar and the other CPI(M) delegates, including deputy opposition leader Badal Choudhury.

Nirupam Datta, the sub-divisional police officer of Shantirbazar, said the agitators were "mild-

ly lathicharged" when they tried to intercept the entourage.

No one suffered any injury, Datta clarified.

Sarkar pointed out that the state director general of police was informed about the visit well in advance.

"It was a pre-mediated attack, which could not have happened without indul-

gence from the state leadership. The law and order has collapsed in the state and attacks on CPI-M party workers are increasing by the day," he added.

State education minister and cabinet spokesperson Ratan Lal Nath, however, asserted that BJP workers had nothing to do with the entire episode.

"The attackers must be former CPI(M) activists, who were exploited during the 25-year-long misrule of the Left party. They must have wanted to take revenge," Nath said.

BJP MLA Sudip Roy Burman condemned the incident.

In a Facebook post, he wrote, "Shocked to hear about the attack on the Leader of Opposition and other leaders in Shantirbazar. I strongly condemn and demand the arrest of the hooligans.

Andamans reports 31 new COVID-19 cases, 2 more deaths



PORT BLAIR, MAY 11 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands COVID-19 tally rose to 6,398 as 31 more people tested positive for the virus, while two new fatalities pushed the death toll in the union territory to 78, a health department official said on Tuesday.

Twenty-nine of the new COVID-19 cases in the archipelago were detected during contact tracing and two were airport arrivals, the official said.

Passengers arriving by flight from other places have to undergo mandatory Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) before they are allowed entry into the islands.

The union territory now has 195 active COVID-19 cases, of which 188 are in South Andaman district and seven in North and Middle Andaman district.

The Nicobar district has no active COVID-19 case now, the official said. The

union territory has three districts.

Thirty-seven more people recuperated from the disease, taking the total number of recoveries to 6,125.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has so far tested 3,77,293 samples for COVID-19 and the test positivity rate is 1.70 per cent.

More than 1.12 lakh people have been inoculated in the union territory so far, the official added.

Odisha logs 9,793 new COVID-19 cases, 18 more fatalities

BHUBANESWAR, MAY 11 (PTI): Odisha's COVID-19 caseload on Tuesday rose to 5,54,666 after 9,793 more people tested positive for the disease, while 18 fresh fatalities pushed the state's toll to 2,215, a health department official said.

Accordingly, the number of active cases climbed to 94,829, he said.

Of the 9,793 new cases, 5,534 were reported from various quarantine centres and the rest detected during contact tracing, the official said.

Khurda district, of which state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, reported the maximum number of new cases at 1511, followed by Sundergarh at 1,018 and Cuttack at 641.

Barring Malkangiri, Dhenkanal and Bhadrak, all 27 other districts reported over 100 new cases.



Taking to Twitter, the health department said, "Regret to inform about the demise of eighteen Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

Four fatalities were recorded in Angul, three in Khurda, two each in Kalahandi, Rayagada and Sundergarh.

One each succumbed to the infection in Boudh, Deogarh, Gajapati, Malkangiri and Puri.

This apart, 53 other COVID-19 patients in the state have died due to comorbidities.

As many as 4,57,569 patients have so far recovered from the highly infectious disease. Odi-

sha's positivity rate currently stands at 5.23 per cent.

Over 1.06 crore samples have been tested in the state thus far, including 46,241 on Monday, the official said.

Meanwhile, vaccination for people in the 18-44 years age brack-

et began in four municipal corporation areas of Odisha -- Cuttack, Rourkela, Sambalpur and Berhampur.

The inoculation drive for the younger population is already underway in areas managed by the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), the official added.

12-yr-old boy in Assam killed in grenade blast

TINSUKIA (ASSAM), MAY 11 (PTI): A 12-year-old boy was on Tuesday killed in a grenade blast in Tinsukia district of Assam, a senior police officer said.

The victim, identified as Sujoy Hajong, was riding a bicycle when he found a grenade ly-

ing on the road at Hajong village in Jagun police station area of the district, he said.

"As he tried picking up the grenade, it went off and critically injured the boy," the officer said.

Hajong was immediately rushed to Mar-

gherita Civil Hospital, where doctors declared him brought dead, he said.

"We do not know yet how the grenade landed there. We have launched an investigation and will find out the details soon. We will nab the culprit at the earliest," he added.

Assam reports 5,803 new COVID cases, 77 more deaths

GUWAHATI, MAY 10 (PTI): Assam reported record 77 COVID-19 deaths on Monday, besides the highest single-day spike of 5,803 new cases, according to the National Health Mission.

There are 37,500 active cases in the state at present, it said. The state has so far reported 2,98,171 cases and 1,753 deaths. Kamrup (Metro) reported the highest of 30 new deaths, followed by ten each in Kamrup (Ru-

ral) and Dibrugarh, four in Bongaigaon, and three each in Golaghat, Nagaon, Sivasagar and Nalbari.

There are 1,347 COVID-19 patients in the state who died due to other diseases.

Most of the new cases were detected in Kamrup Metro where 1,481 people tested positive, followed by 486 in Kamrup (Rural), 392 in Dibrugarh and 275 in Nagaon.

The new cases were

detected out of 72,197 tests conducted, taking the positivity rate to 8.04 per cent.

The number of patients discharged during the day is 4,231 and the total recoveries so far are 2,57,571. The recovery rate in the state is 86.38 per cent.

Total 24,30,843 people received the first dose of a COVID vaccine in the state. Of them, 6,85,489 have received the second dose.

7-day total lockdown in Nagaland from May 14

KOHIMA, MAY 11 (PTI): The Nagaland government on Tuesday decided to clamp total lockdown in the state for seven days from May 14 amid the surge in COVID-19 cases.

State government spokesperson on COVID-19 and Minister Neiba Kronu said that the High Powered Committee (HPC) on COVID-19 decided to impose a state-wide total lockdown for one week starting from 6 pm on May 14 till May 21.

The decision was taken during the HPC meeting held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Tuesday, he said.

The HPC decided that the week-long total lockdown will be enforced with a view to break the chain of COVID-19 transmission, said Kronu.

He also said that existing restrictions will continue till total lockdown is in place while New SOPs would also be issued.

However, Kronu said

that essential services including agricultural activities will be exempted from the purview of the lockdown.

Nagaland government on May 3 announced containment zones in some areas of the state capital Kohima and commercial hub Dimapur for seven days from 7 pm of May 5 following surge in COVID-19 cases, which will end at 7 pm on Wednesday.

However, there has not been any respite in the positivity rate as

there has been an increase of 1,279 COVID-19 cases in five days. As on May 5, the state had 15,004 positive cases with 2,038 active cases but the positive cases have gone up to 16,283 and active cases to 2,884 till May 10.

In the five days 32 COVID-19 positive patients also died increasing the death toll in the state from 118 on May 5 to 150 on May 10.

State government departments will continue to function with a

core team formed by the Heads of Department, he said.

Construction activities may be permitted by contractors or firms adhering to all the SOPs for the workers, the HPC decided.

During the total lockdown period, the HPC decided that the Health and Family Welfare department would pursue aggressive testing by utilising the testing capacity of the COVID-19 labs, Kronu added.

173 new COVID-19 cases push Mizoram's tally to 7,796

AIZAWL, MAY 11 (PTI): Mizoram's COVID-19 tally rose to 7,796 on Tuesday as 173 more people, including nine policemen, who had returned from West Bengal after election duty, have tested positive for the infection, an official said.

Of the 173 fresh COVID-19 cases, 142 were reported from Aizawl district, Khawzawl (9), Lunglei (8), Saitual (5), Siaha (3), two cases each from Champhai

and Mamit districts and one case each was reported from Kolasib and Lawngtlai districts, he said.

While 29 patients have travel history, the rest were found to have locally contracted the infection.

Fifty-nine patients have developed symptoms of COVID-19 and the rest 114 are asymptomatic, he added.

Mizoram now has 1,854 active COVID-19 cases, while 5,920 people



have recovered from the infection.

The COVID-19 death

toll in the state rose to 22 with the death of a 58-year-old man from

Aizawl on Monday.

The state has tested 3,33,363 samples for COVID-19 till date, including 3,558 on Monday.

Meanwhile, State immunisation officer Dr Lalzawmi said that 2,27,481 people, including 57,077 senior citizens have been administered the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine till Monday.

Of this, 49,650 people have received both doses of the vaccine, she said.



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Liverpool's Sadio Mané admits to enduring 'worst season of my career'

LONDON, 11 MAY [PA MEDIA]: Sadio Mané has described this season as the "worst" of his career and admits he was so concerned about his form at one stage that he underwent medical tests to check there was nothing physically wrong with him.

The Senegal striker has scored 13 goals for Liverpool this season, with only nine of those coming in the Premier League. The one he scored against Southampton at the weekend was also only his third league goal at Anfield.

Mané scored 10 times in his first season in English football, with Southampton in 2014-15, and then against in his first season with Liverpool, in 2016-17, but on both occasions he made fewer appearances than he has this campaign, and in general he has been incredibly poor for the champions, certainly in comparison to last season when the 29-year-old scored 22 times in all competitions and was consistently outstanding for Jürgen Klopp's side.

"This is the worst season of my career. I have to admit it," Mané told the French television channel Canal+. "If you ask me what is wrong I will struggle to give you an answer. Personally I don't know. I have always tried to be positive, whether things are going well or badly. I question myself all the time. I even underwent a test to take a look at my body. Am I eating the right foods, or has everything changed? But they checked the test results, and everything is fine.

"I need to understand that in life there are ups and downs. I will keep on working hard - and perhaps in time this situation will pass."

In contrast, Mané's teammate Mohamed Salah has maintained his consistency. The Egypt forward has 20 Premier League goals and is on course for his second-best goalscoring campaign, behind his record-breaking 32 in 36 matches during his first season at Liverpool - 2017-18.

Salah, who has 29 goals in all competitions, is poised to make his 200th appearance for Liverpool against Manchester United on Thursday.

Liverpool's assistant manager, Pep Lijnders, said: "For me, bigger than the achievement of all these decisive goals so far is his everyday presence in our club: his character is special, a true example. This club has the capability to turn good players into legends and he is one more of them."

Eden Hazard out of place at super-serious super-club Real Madrid

JONATHAN LIEW LONDON, 11 MAY [THEGUARDIAN]: Zinedine Zidane gets Real Madrid. What he gets above all is that the institution is not really interested in him as a person, even one as decorated and venerated as he is. The machine is the thing, and your importance extends only as far as your immediate usefulness to it. The part of you that is not Madrid is not relevant. Perhaps this is why Zidane cuts such an inane, inobtrusive figure on the touchline: like a man who possesses the secret to life, but is permitted to communicate it only via handclaps.

Sergio Ramos gets Real Madrid. On Sunday night, as Real strove for a late equaliser against Sevilla, Ramos was leading his troops into battle: screaming, fists pumping, heading every ball, crunching into every tackle. The fact that he was injured and watching from the stands was but a minor inconvenience: what Ramos gets above all is that even if you are not wearing the uniform, when you are a Madrid player you are never anything else.

Eden Hazard came on for the last 10 minutes of that game. It was, charitably, a mixed bag. He jogged around a little. He played a nice flick to nobody. Once, he had a chance to shoot, but couldn't control the ball. Another time, the ball ran under his foot and out for a throw. In the 95th minute, he scored an entirely accidental equaliser when a hopeful shot hit his heel and bobbed in. It was a goal that kept Madrid in the title race. And yet after another turbulent, contested week in Hazard's Madrid career, it was tempting



to wonder whether anything had really changed. It was Hazard's fifth Madrid goal in two injury-plagued seasons.

Frustration at his lack of games has long since given way to anger: stoked most recently by the photograph of Hazard laughing with his former Chelsea teammates after the Champions League defeat on Wednesday. And so the familiar questions bubble away. Can Hazard save his Madrid career? Will he ever rediscover his best form? Is he in physical decline? Can Madrid afford to replace him in the summer? Can they afford not to? These are all pertinent and interesting questions, and yet somehow entirely the wrong questions.

The real issue here, surely, is what on earth Hazard is doing at Madrid in the first place, the answer to which is a good deal more complex than it first appears. "I'm not a galactico, I'm just a very good football player," Hazard announced on his arrival, and somehow this encapsulates the essential tension between a player for whom

football is simply a job, a game, a buzz, and a club for whom it is the alpha and omega of the universe.

This is not to suggest Hazard doesn't care. Clearly he does. But I can think of no other footballer of his level so determined to define his own terms of success, of happiness. He doesn't have an agent, has no desire to be famous, plays the game not by rote but by feel, instinct and a desire to please. In a way, he's football's answer to Ronnie O'Sullivan: an athlete who you suspect operates primarily on the plane of their own boredom/interest.

This is a player who, according to his former Chelsea teammate Filipe Luis, "didn't run to defend much, didn't train well and five minutes before games he'd be playing Mario Kart in the dressing room". Who returned to pre-season training several kilos overweight and declared: "When I'm on holiday, I'm on holiday." Who said of his injury troubles: "It's not the end of the

world for me, because I can spend time with my kids." Who joined Madrid not because he had to, or because it was what was expected of him, or because Mino Raiola thought it was the right move, but because he'd always thought they were cool. This alone renders Hazard an outlier in elite football, which reveres the single-minded pursuit of success at all costs. Want this. Bleed for this. Die for this.

What did we think was going to happen when this fun-loving figure of human complexity and human sensitivity collided with the most supercilious, super-serious super-club machine on Earth? Ramos left Sevilla 16 years ago in circumstances so acrimonious that his parents are still not welcome at the stadium. That is a proper Madrid departure. Madrid could forgive Hazard his injuries, his loss of form, even its own folly in paying £130m it couldn't afford for a 28-year-old whose game relies on explosive sharpness. But it never forgives

irreverence. The furore over the Chelsea photo is understandable only when you realise the cardinal rules that Hazard broke. The part of you that is not Madrid is not relevant. And when you are a Madrid player, you are never anything else.

Football feels like an impossibly angry place at the moment: a place of disenchantment and disenfranchisement, of schism and sneering, of protest and existential crisis. And in the middle of it all, this flawed, smirking, abundantly talented footballer, who amid all the derision and white-hot rage simply carries on being Eden Hazard: playing a little football, earning good money, spending time with his family, eating whatever he wants. And perhaps there is a wider resistance here: against the idea that a person must be defined by their work, that a human can be reduced to their productive output, against the basic po-faced sanctimony of sport.

You see a squandered talent and a £130m transfer flop. I see a hero for our times.

Edinson Cavani signs one-year contract extension with Manchester United



LONDON, 11 MAY [AFP]: Edinson Cavani will remain at Manchester United next season after the on-form Uruguayan signed a one-year contract extension on Monday. The 34-year-old Uruguayan has scored 15 goals in his first season in England, including eight in his last seven games, to help United to second place in the Premier League and to the final of the Europa League. "Over the season I have developed a great affection for the club and everything that it represents," Cavani said in a United statement.

"I have been touched with how much the supporters have wanted me to stay, and I will give everything to bring them happiness and joy with my performances on the field.

"I've not yet been able to play in front of the Old Trafford crowd and that is something that I cannot wait to do."

United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer had repeatedly stressed his desire for Cavani to remain at Old Trafford despite reports the striker was keen to return to South America.

"I said when Edinson signed, that he would bring energy, power and leadership to this group and I haven't been proved wrong, he has been everything I thought he would be and more," said Solskjaer.

"As coaches, we knew about his goalscoring record. However, it is his personality that has brought so much to this squad, he has a winning

mentality and has an unequivocal attitude to everything he does."

United could end a four-year trophy drought when they face Villarreal in the Europa League final on May 26 and are set to match their best Premier League finish since legendary former manager Alex Ferguson retired in 2013.

Cavani's form in recent months has played a major part in that success, after a slow start to his time in Manchester.

He was banned for three games in December after an exchange on Instagram in which he addressed a friend, Pablo Fernandez, using the commonly used Spanish term "negrito" (small black person).

Although a disciplinary panel found Cavani had not intended to cause offence with the remark, he was still sanctioned -- triggering an outcry in Uruguay.

Cavani's father, Luis Cavani, told Argentine media in March that the suspension was a "nonsense" and would play a part in whether his son decided to stay in England.

United are in action twice in the next three days at home to Leicester and Liverpool in the Premier League.

Defeat in either game or two draws would end the Red Devils' small chances of catching Manchester City at the top of the table for a first league title in eight years.

City are 10 points clear, but have played a game more than their local rivals.

Iniesta to stay with Japan's Vissel Kobe for two more years

TOKYO, 11 MAY [AFP]: Spanish football legend Andres Iniesta celebrated his 37th birthday on Tuesday by signing a contract extension that will keep him at J-League side Vissel Kobe for two more years. The former Barcelona midfielder maestro joined Kobe in 2018 in a deal worth a reported USD 30 million a year and recently recovered from a serious thigh injury.

"I will continue on my quest to make Vissel Kobe a stronger club," said the World Cup-winning midfielder, speaking through a Japanese translator. "I am determined to contribute as much as possible to bring this team to a higher level," he added sitting alongside Kobe's tech-billionaire owner Hiroshi Mikitani.

Iniesta's debut at Kobe in July 2018 ended with an embarrassing home defeat, but he helped lead the team to their first Japanese Super Cup title in 2020.

Iniesta has enjoyed huge popularity in Japan with analysts estimating he has generated more than \$100 million in ticket sales and merchandising revenue. He has appeared in TV commercials for Japanese sake and mobile phone

Tokyo Olympics: Naomi Osaka "not sure" games should go ahead

TOKYO, 11 MAY [AFP]: Japanese tennis star Naomi Osaka has said she is "not really sure" the delayed Tokyo Olympics should go ahead as the city battles a surge of coronavirus cases less than three months before the start of the Games.

A virus state of emergency in the Japanese capital and other parts of the country was extended last week as organisers

weigh up whether to press ahead in the face of mounting pressure to cancel the global spectacle.

When asked if it was correct to host the Games in the middle of a global pandemic, the 23-year-old reigning US and Australian women's champion told the BBC "to be honest, I'm not really sure" if they should be held as planned from July 23.

"I'm an athlete, and of course my immediate thought is that I want to play in the Olympics," the four-time Grand Slam winner said at the Rome WTA tournament.

"But as a human, I would say we're in a pandemic, and if people aren't healthy, and if they're not feeling safe, then it's definitely a really big cause for concern."

More than 10,000

athletes from 200 countries and regions are set to travel to Tokyo for the Games, with a decision expected in June on how many domestic fans, if any at all, can attend.

"I've never played an Olympic event, so it's not like I would have anything to compare it to," Osaka said of the possibility of no spectators.

Despite fewer number of deaths than

side's of 2008 and 2012.

Iniesta was the driving force behind four Champions League wins with Barcelona and helped the Catalan club secure domestic trebles in 2009 and 2015.

He also won nine La Liga titles, two European Super Cups and three FIFA Club World Cups, leaving Barcelona as the most decorated Spanish player of all time, with more than 30 trophies for club and country.

His decision to join Kobe after 22 years at Barcelona, 16 of them as a first team player, was seen as a coup for Japanese football, which had

been struggling to attract big names tempted by cash-rich Chinese clubs in the twilight of their careers.

Kobe owner Mikitani said Iniesta's decision to stay will help the team's ambition to be the top club in Asia while elevating the standard of football in Japan.

Iniesta "has not just improved Vissel's status, but he has improved the global recognition of the J-League," Mikitani said.

Iniesta said he wanted to stay engaged with Vissel Kobe once his playing days were over, although he did not say in what capacity.

Betis defeats Granada to move closer to Europa League spot



MADRID, MAY 11 (AP): Borja Iglesias scored twice, including in the 87th minute, as Real Betis defeated Granada 2-1 to move closer to a Europa League spot in the Spanish league.

The victory moved Betis to sixth place with three rounds remaining, two points in front of Villarreal. The teams in fifth and sixth places qualify for the Europa League next season.

Fifth-placed Real Sociedad, two points ahead of Betis, visits league leader Atletico Madrid on Wednesday.

Betis is at last-placed Eibar on Thursday, while Villarreal visits relegation-threatened Valladolid on the same night.

Betis' first win followed six consecutive league draws. It hadn't defeated Granada in the competition in five straight matches.

Iglesias opened the scoring in the 39th and Granada evened the match through Darwin Machs in the 66th.

Iglesias netted the winner off an indirect free kick inside the area prompted by Granada goalkeeper Aaron Escandell picking up a pass from a teammate with his hands.

Granada was 10th in the 20-team standings.

Israel launches new air raids on besieged Gaza Strip

FARAH NAJJAR
GAZA, 11 MAY [ALJAZEERA]: The Israeli military renewed its bombardment of the beleaguered Gaza Strip on Tuesday morning, targeting several areas after rockets were fired from the enclave.

The new attacks come hours after at least 24 Palestinians – including nine children – were killed in overnight Israeli air strikes on the strip after Hamas launched rockets from the coastal territory towards Israel, according to the health ministry in Gaza.

The rocket fire came after Gaza's rulers Hamas issued an ultimatum demanding Israel stand down its security forces from the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem after days of violence against Palestinians.

Israeli police stormed the compound on Monday for a third consecutive day, firing rubber-coated steel rounds, stun grenades, and tear gas at Palestinian worshippers inside the mosque in the final days of the holy month of Ramadan.



madan.

More than 700 Palestinians were hurt in Jerusalem and across the occupied West Bank over the past 24 hours.

Al Jazeera's Nida Ibrahim, reporting from the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, said Hamas' armed wing fired their "largest barrage" yet from the enclave towards Israel.

"That's more than 70 rockets in less than 30 minutes," Ibrahim said, according to a statement released by Hamas' armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qasam Brigades.

In total, more than 300 rockets have been fired from the Gaza Strip towards Israel since Monday.

The al-Qasam Brigades earlier said Israel crossed "all red lines" in Al-Aqsa, and that it is its duty to respond.

Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said maintaining peace and stability in Jerusalem is "key".

"Our focus right now on ensuring that the escalation stops, and for that to happen we do believe that all illegal and provocative measures ...

must stop," he said, referring to Israel's actions in Sheikh Jarrar and in the Al-Aqsa mosque.

"The status quo needs to be preserved, and the rights of the Palestinians need to be respected."

Sami Abu Shehadeh, Palestinian Knesset member and leader of the Balad party, said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu allowed for an "escalation" in a bid to remain in power.

Speaking to Al Jazeera, he said: "In order to survive this political crisis he finds himself

in now, and in order for him not to lose control and not to lose his seat as prime minister ... he is ready to do anything."

"All the escalation we are seeing now has a clear political target from Netanyahu's point of view, and he is ready to do anything to keep himself in power including this massacre that we are going to see in Gaza," Shehadeh said.

"What is happening here is a clear political decision that Netanyahu is responsible for to keep power."

Ethnic groups step in as Myanmar's COVID response falls apart



NU NU LUSAN & EMILY FISHBEIN
YANGON, 11 MAY [ALJAZEERA]: Ethnic groups step in as Myanmar's COVID response falls apart

The vaccines, produced by the Chinese company Sinovac Biotech, were supplied and administered with assistance from the Red Cross Society of China, a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The KIO is one of approximately 20 ethnic armed organisations operating along Myanmar's borders with China, Thailand and India. Several of them have run their own COVID-19 responses from early on in the pandemic.

Although the turmoil and intensifying civil war since the coup have disrupted their efforts, the KIO and Karen National Union (KNU), two of the country's most well-established ethnic armed organisations, told Al Jazeera that they were continuing as much as possible.

Their ongoing COVID-19 responses come as Myanmar's national healthcare system – already one of the weakest in the world before the coup – falls apart. Days after the coup, government health workers initiated a Civil Disobedience Movement, which has now swept the country, in an attempt to paralyse military rule and starve the generals

of resources. Many hospitals are closed or barely functioning.

On May 5, the United Nations in Myanmar warned that attacks on medical personnel and facilities were jeopardising the COVID-19 response.

"At a time when Myanmar needs them the most, health workers fear arrest or detention for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly," it said in a news release.

According to the UN, the military has committed at least 158 attacks on medical personnel and facilities, in which more than 60 people have been injured or killed. Additionally, it has arrested and charged more than 139 doctors and occupied at least 50 health facilities.

Dr Khin Khin Gyi, head of the health ministry's infectious diseases unit, told Voice of America in early April that national testing rates had fallen to less than 2,000 a day, from as many as 25,000 daily tests before the coup.

Reported cases have subsequently plummeted.

As of January 31, the country had documented more than 140,000 cases and 3,131 deaths, and was reporting hundreds of new cases daily. Since the coup, however, only 2,700 new cases – averaging about 30 a day – and 79 deaths have been announced.

The International

Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies warned in an April 1 statement of a possible "perfect storm" in which a coronavirus outbreak could coincide with the country's ongoing humanitarian crisis. Although no outbreak has been detected in Myanmar since the coup, India and Thailand are currently experiencing major new waves of the virus.

On Myanmar's south-eastern border with Thailand, the KNU, which was established in 1947 and joined a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, has operated a Pandemic Emergency Response Team across its seven districts since March 2020.

According to Saw Dima Khin, who heads the KNU's Karen Department of Health and Welfare, testing capacities are limited – up to 18 tests a day, and only at one location – but of those tested, only three cases have been identified since the beginning of the pandemic.

He told Al Jazeera that population movement had been minimal until the coup. "People have not travelled much during the pandemic except for to and from their farms. Our area is mountainous; people only leave the village to buy items like salt."

The coup, however, has dramatically increased movement into KNU areas.

Army of fake fans online boosts China's global messaging

ERIKA KINETZ
BRUSSELS, MAY 11 (AP): China's ruling Communist Party has opened a new front in its long, ambitious war to shape global public opinion: Western social media.

Liu Xiaoming, who recently stepped down as China's ambassador to the United Kingdom, is one of the party's most successful foot soldiers on this evolving online battlefield. He joined Twitter in October 2019, as scores of Chinese diplomats surged onto Twitter and Facebook, which are both banned in China.

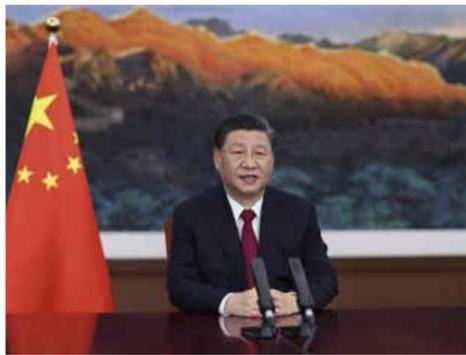
Since then, Liu has deftly elevated his public profile, gaining a following of more than 119,000 as he transformed himself into an exemplar of China's new sharp-edged wolf warrior diplomacy, a term borrowed from the title of a top-grossing Chinese action movie.

As I see it, there are so-called wolf warriors' because there are wolves' in the world and you need warriors to fight them, Liu, who is now China's Special Representative on Korean Peninsula Affairs, tweeted in February.

His stream of posts principled and gutsy ripostes to Western anti-Chinese bias to his fans, aggressive bombast to his detractors were retweeted more than 43,000 times from Jun. through Feb. alone.

But much of the popular support Liu and many of his colleagues seem to enjoy on Twitter has, in fact, been manufactured.

A seven-month investigation by the Associated Press and the Oxford Internet Institute, a department at Oxford University, found that China's rise on Twitter



has been powered by an army of fake accounts that have retweeted Chinese diplomats and state media tens of thousands of times, covertly amplifying propaganda that can reach hundreds of millions of people -- often without disclosing the fact that the content is government-sponsored.

More than half the retweets Liu got from June through January came from accounts that Twitter has suspended for violating the platform's rules, which prohibit manipulation. Overall, more than one in ten of the retweets 189 Chinese diplomats got in that time frame came from accounts that Twitter had suspended by March 1.

But Twitter's suspensions did not stop the pro-China amplification machine. An additional cluster of fake accounts, many of them impersonating UK citizens, continued to push Chinese government content, racking up over 16,000 retweets and replies before Twitter permanently suspended them for platform manipulation late last month and early this month, in response to the AP and Oxford Internet Institute's investigation.

petite for guiding public opinion covertly, if necessary extends beyond its borders and beyond core strategic interests, like Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

Twitter's takedowns often came only after weeks or months of activity. All told, AP and the Oxford Internet Institute identified 26,879 accounts that managed to retweet Chinese diplomats or state media nearly 200,000 times before getting suspended. They accounted for a significant share sometimes more than half of the total retweets many diplomatic accounts got on Twitter.

It was not possible to determine whether the accounts were sponsored by the Chinese government.

Twitter told AP that many of the accounts had been sanctioned for manipulation, but declined to offer details on what other platform violations may have been at play. Twitter said it was investigating whether the activity was a state-affiliated information operation.

We will continue to investigate and action accounts that violate our platform manipulation policy, including accounts associated with these networks, a Twitter spokesperson said in a statement.

If we have clear evidence of state-affiliated information operations, our first priority is to enforce our rules and remove accounts engaging in this behaviour. When our investigations are complete, we disclose all accounts and content in our public archive.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said

that it does not employ trickery on social media. There is no so-called misleading propaganda, nor exporting a model of online public opinion guidance, the ministry said in a statement to AP.

We hope that the relevant parties will abandon their discriminatory attitude, take off their tinted glasses, and take a peaceful, objective and rational approach in the spirit of openness and inclusiveness.

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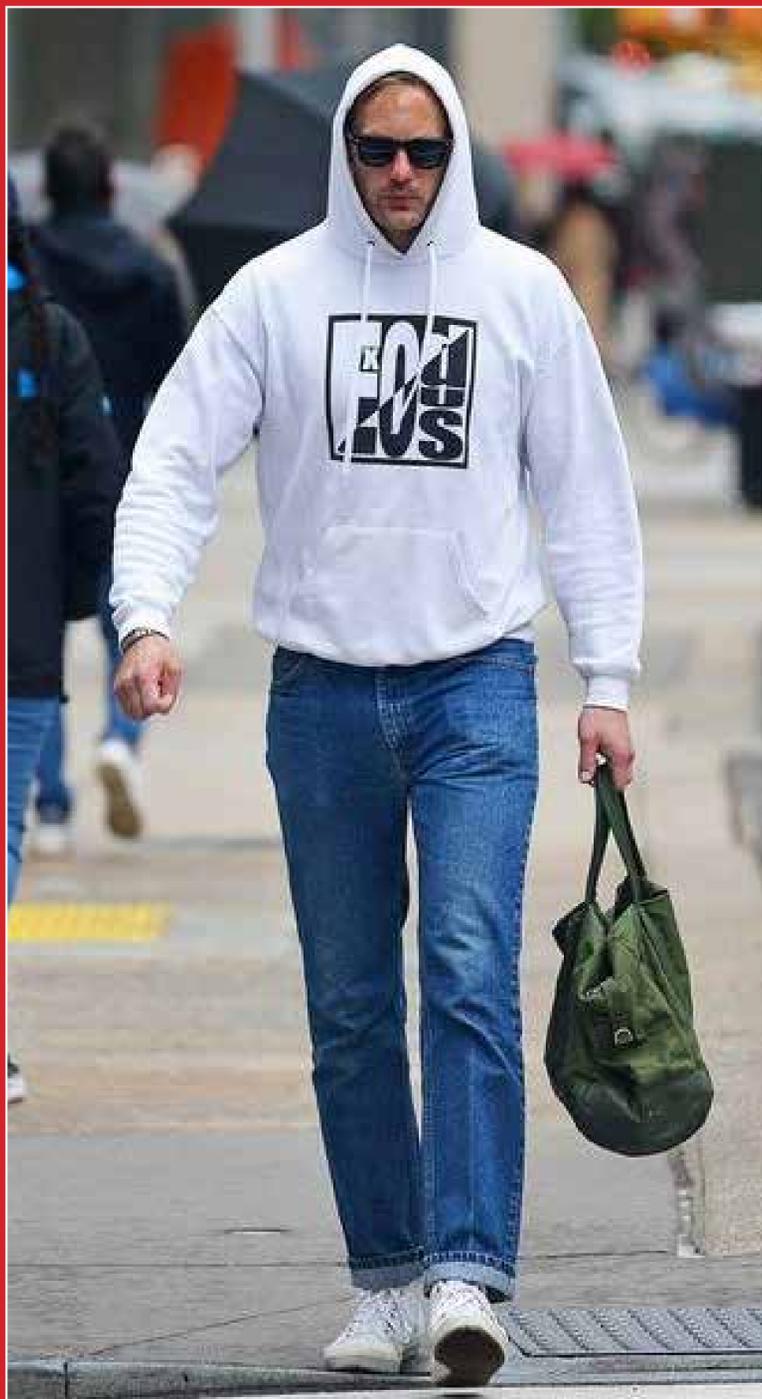
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SummitTIMES



KEEPING WARM! Actor Alexander Skarsgard is out and about staying warm in his hoodie in New York.

Why Tom Cruise has returned his 3 Golden Globes

The future of the Golden Globes was plunged into jeopardy Monday as NBC canceled its broadcast of next year's prestigious awards, while major Hollywood studios and stars such as Tom Cruise and Scarlett Johansson slammed the organizers' record on diversity and transparency.

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association, comprised of some 90 journalists who vote for Tinseltown's second-biggest annual film and television awards, has been under fire for months following widespread allegations of racism, sexism, bullying and corruption among its ranks.

Last week, the group approved a raft of reforms to become "more inclusive and diverse" by an "overwhelming" margin, hoping to draw a line under months of negative publicity.



But the backlash from Hollywood has been fierce, with A-listers such as Johansson and Mark Ruffalo and powerful executives lining up to condemn the changes as too slow, lacking in specifics and failing to address some of the industry's most fundamental grievances. Tom Cruise on Monday returned his three Golden Globes to the HFPA in protest, according to multiple Hollywood trade outlets.

step. It's the inspired action you take after that will help you move one step closer to the desired destination.

CANCER: Leadership expert and motivational speaker Robin Sharma says, "Smart leaders understand the power of publicly praising excellence in action. So do it often. Coach your teammates as to areas they need to improve in private. So they can save face." Just the words of wisdom you need to follow in order to bring about a change on the professional front, Cancer. Remember, we're all going through hardships at this moment. As a result, it's easy to lose sight of our career goals and slack every now and then. Instead of judging your coworkers, hold space for them to talk their feelings out. Something tells us a pep talk by you, coupled with a few words of encouragement, can help move mountains around here.

LEO: It's never about the flashy cars or the fancy jewels, is it? (Although a little bling here and there never hurt anybody!) So, what then, is the secret to true happiness, Leo? Something you may find yourself pondering this weekend. A good place to start: make a list of five things that you're grateful for and are keeping you sane in the midst of this storm. Don't just note down the points, though. Be as detailed as you can in your description. Make a note of special moments and uplifting conversations.

VIRGO: Some people believe it's easier to communicate your truth to strangers. It gets sticky with those who are close, you know? If this sounds familiar to you, we've got a problem at hand that needs to be addressed, Virgo. So, pay attention to how

you are communicating with your inner circle. Are you being completely authentic here, or relying on half-truths in order to keep things together? Remember, a unicorn dies every time you betray yourself a little. You wouldn't want to rob the world of its magic, would you now?

LIBRA: If the Rule of Three is to be believed, then everything we put into the Universe comes back to us threefold. The real question is: what do *you* feel inspired to create in your reality, Libra, and what are the seeds you are being called to plant consciously? The Universe is offering you a sacred cauldron, bedazzled with jewels and crystals in every colour, for you to brew a magical potion that will change your physical reality.

SCORPIO: Truth tea: You'll always be 'too loud', 'too bossy', 'too ambitious', 'too dominating' and 'too career-oriented' for some people. They're certainly not your people, Scorpio. Those who love and accept you for who you truly are will never ask you to dial down your crazy or dull your sparkle. So, own your brand of magic, baby! Step into your power and go after your dreams with renewed passion. The mysterious forces above and below are applauding your spirit and betting on your big win!

SAGITTARIUS: Now is not the time to second guess the magnificent shift you are capable of creating in the collective—and your life is a living, breathing proof of this miracle. So, slow down, Sagittarius. Take a moment to soak it all in. What a long way you have come since you first embarked upon this journey! Here's something you want to keep in mind, though: this is

merely the first stage of Mission World Domination. You have many mountains to move on this journey. Hard work coupled with focus and discipline will help you achieve the impossible.

CAPRICORN: The Ancients believed that every time humanity shifts into a new era, the transition is marked by natural disasters of all kinds, political and religious wars, and economic challenges. Could this be true for where we are standing today? Are the mysterious forces somehow conspiring to help us usher in the light by moving through the darkness? While we may never have all the answers we seek, Capricorn, it is a comforting thought that we, as a collective, are birthing a New Age.

AQUARIUS: 2020 felt like being stranded at the airport with no flight in sight. 2021 was supposed to be your year—the year of the big change—but here you are, stranded all over again. While the frustration is real, Aquarius, it is also temporary. So, rise above. Rise above the limitations and remember the limitless being that you are. You are the change you have been waiting for and your circumstances ain't got nothing on you, beautiful!

PISCES: It's easy to externalise the problem, Pisces. To blame somebody outside of yourself for what's taking place in the collective. The real question is: what are *you* doing to fix things on a micro and macro level? Take matters in your hands and educate those around you to do the same. On the upside, those who have been fighting a legal battle will find that the scales of justice are tipping in their favour soon. Working with a lawyer you trust (or somebody who is an authority on the given matter) will help you take control of the situation.

Yes, please, please remake Dil Chahta Hai with Waheeda Rehman, Asha Parekh and Helen

Veteran actresses Waheeda Rehman, Asha Parekh and Helen are yet again winning hearts and this time it is not for their reel life performances but their real-life adventures. The three senior actresses are currently enjoying a refreshing vacation in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Film producer Tanuj Garg shared several pictures of Waheeda Rehman, Asha Parekh and Helen, from the tourist destination on Instagram on Monday. In the pictures, all three senior actresses can be seen enjoying the time of their life on the deck of a boat. In one of the pictures, Waheeda Rehman can be seen holding the steering wheel of the boat.

Sharing the pictures on Instagram, Tanuj Garg stated that if 2001 film 'Dil Chahta Hai' was to be remade with "three grand dames," it would be with Waheeda Rehman, Asha Parekh and Helen.

"Picture 1 on 10.05.21: If 'Dil Chahta Hai' were to get remade with three grand dames, it would be with these #legends - Waheeda Rehman, Asha Parekh and Helen. Enjoying their



retirement years, holidaying in the Andamans. Filled with joie de vivre. Put a massive smile on my face. Eventually what we're left with when we're old is youth of the ilk, memories, love and a few good mates," he wrote in the caption of the post.

The holiday pictures of the actresses have sent the Internet into a tizzy. Several fans of the actresses as well as

Bollywood celebrities commented on the post.

"Awww!!! Love them," commented actress Divya Dutta. Actress Sophie Choudry also commented on the post and wrote: "I love this" and added a heart emoji along with it. Saiyami Kher, on the other hand, chose to drop a heart emoji in the comments section of the post.

Farhan Akhtar's boss reply to troll who called him "VIP Brat" getting vaccine out of turn

Actor-filmmaker Farhan Akhtar, who recently received his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at a drive-in facility in Maharashtra's Andheri, was on Monday criticised by a Twitter user, who called him a "VIP brat." The Twitter user criticised Farhan Akhtar for using the drive-in vaccination facility, as he believed that it is "reserved" only for senior citizens.

"Another VIP brat Farhan Akhtar gets out of turn vaccination at the drive in reserved for 60+ years senior citizens," the Twitter user wrote. He further accused the actor for "using his status for vaccination," as he wrote: "Either he is 60+, physically challenged that we do not know off, or used his status for vaccination."

Shutting down the Twitter user, the 47-year-old actor responded to his tweet and clarified that the drive-in vaccination facility has been set up for citizens above the age of 45. "The drive in is for 45 + .. now do something constructive for society with your time like losing your phone," Farhan wrote in his



reply to the user.

The 47-year-old actor, had on Saturday announced on Twitter that he has received his first dose of COVID-19 vaccine at a drive-in facility. He also thanked the Mumbai Police and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for the streamlined process of vaccination drive at

the facility.

"Got my first jab today via drive through at Andheri sports complex. Thank you to BMC and Mumbai Police for the streamlined system. To those waiting their turn, the process does take 2-3 hours (for now) so please be patient. Carry water and a snack, if need be. Stay safe," Farhan Akhtar tweeted.

Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck might be a couple again, 17 years after split

It's not always over when it's over. Bennifer have reunited, by several accounts. Former celebrity couple Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck have reportedly rekindled the romance they ended 17 years ago, according to People.

JLo, 51, and Ben, 48, were spotted together in Montana, it seems, a week or so after they were photographed at her home in Los Angeles. UK tabloid Daily Mail published photos of the former and perhaps current couple in a car in Montana where

Ben has a home. "Jennifer spent several days with Ben out of town. They have a strong connection. It's all been quick and intense, but Jennifer is happy," People quotes a source as saying.

Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck's very high-profile engagement in 2002 ended in a split two years later. Since then, both have been married and divorced - JLo from Marc Anthony and Ben from Jennifer Garner; both have children with their exes. Jennifer Lopez very recently ended



an engagement to former baseball player Alex Rodriguez; Ben Affleck and actress Ana de Armas broke up in January. He's also been in

the headlines recently after allegedly DMing a woman on Instagram after she un-matched with him on a dating app.

ARIES: Sometimes, you've just gotta put on your most magical robe embellished with stars, adorn yourself with jewels, spray on some sultry perfume, brew a cup of lavender, and watch the show unfold. The bad news: you have no control over what is taking place or what is about to take place in this time and space reality. The good news: you have a front row ticket to devour it all, and with mild interest, take a few notes. Remember Shakespeare's immortal words when you feel like somebody's tugging at your heartstrings: "All the world's a stage". That's right! All the world's merely a stage, Aries.

TAURUS: We all have our stories. Stories that we hold onto with our dear lives. But not all of these stories have their basis in reality, Taurus. Some of them are mere lies that, by way of repetition, we come to believe over a period of time. Today, the cards are urging you to ponder over the lies you've been telling yourself. The false beliefs that have convinced you that you are a limited being, limited by your circumstances. You are capable of so much more. Break free from the self-imposed prison, put on that superhero(ine) cape and go forth and conquer. Your kismet is in your hands, beautiful one.

GEMINI: You've been going back and forth on this decision, and it isn't doing you any good. The cards are urging you to close your eyes and tune into your heart space. How do you *really* feel about the given matter? Let your inner compass help you decide which way to go from here. Today, you're also being reminded of the golden rule 'what you sow, so shall you reap'. Setting an intention from a space of clarity is merely the first