



**BILLY PORTER REVEALS  
HE WAS DIAGNOSED HIV  
POSITIVE 14 YEARS AGO**  
*pg 08*

**HOW LOCKDOWN HAS AFFECTED  
CHILDREN'S SPEECH – AND WHAT  
PARENTS CAN DO TO HELP**  
*pg 04*

**FOUNDER OF TIKTOK'S CHINESE  
OWNER STEPPING DOWN AS CEO**  
*pg 08*



# SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue 131 | Gangtok | Friday 21 May 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | Rs. 5

*Cyclone Yass likely to hit WB, Odisha coast by May 27*

**NEW DELHI, MAY 19 (PTI):** After severe cyclonic storm Tauktae in the west coast, another cyclone -- Yass -- is likely to hit the east coast on May 26-27, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Wednesday.

A low pressure area is very likely to form over north Andaman Sea and adjoining east-central Bay of Bengal around May 22, it said.

"It is very likely to intensify gradually into a cyclonic storm during the subsequent 72 hours. It is very likely to move northwestwards and reach West Bengal-Odisha coasts around 26th May evening," the Cyclone Warning Division of the IMD said.

It added that the southwest monsoon is very likely to advance over south Andaman Sea and adjoining southeast Bay of Bengal around May 21 in association with the likely strengthening and deepening of southwesterly winds over the region.

Other atmospheric and oceanic conditions like conducive environment for convection, sea surface temperatures are also favourable for persistent cloudiness over Andaman Sea and adjoining areas of east-central and southeast Bay of Bengal around May 22.

These conditions will help in formation of a low pressure area over north Andaman Sea and adjoining east-central Bay of Bengal around May 22, the IMD said. Under the influence of these systems, Andaman and Nicobar Islands are likely to witness light to moderate rainfall at most places with heavy to very heavy falls at isolated places on May 22 and 23, it said.

Odisha, West Bengal and adjoining Assam and Meghalaya are likely to receive light to moderate rainfall at most places with heavy falls at isolated places are very likely to commence from evening of May 25. The intensity of the rainfall will increase substantially, the IMD said.

It said the west coast, especially Gujarat and Maharashtra, are still assessing the damage done by extremely severe cyclonic storm Tauktae.

## 1,860 Covishield jabs administered; 30 of 44 vaccination sites receive no visitors

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 20 MAY:**

Those in the 18-45 age group, an impressive number of whom are waking up early to book a vaccination slot which opens every morning at 6AM for the next day, received a lion's share of the 1,860 Covishield jabs administered across the State on Thursday. While 1,503 of the 18-45 year-olds were among those returning from the vaccination sites with sore arms, the 45-60 year-olds numbered 203 and only 154 in the 60+ age-group got their shots today.

Given the high number of young receiving vaccines today, it is understandable that it was primarily dose-1 that was administered today, statistics uploaded on the CoWIN [Covid Vaccine Intelligence Network] website, only four shots of dose-2 were administered today. Given that there were 154 people aged 60 and above who received the jab today, this means that 150 of them had delayed their shots till today even though vaccination for this age-group had opened on 01 March.



In the 80 days that vaccination has been available for the 60+, a total of 54,979 of them have received the shots. Even a modest projection from the 2011 Census figures for Sikkim post this age-group to number at least 80,000. What the current vaccination coverage reveals is that there

are at least 25,000 Sikkimese in this age-group who have still not received even their first shot of Covidshield. This defeats the whole idea of having opened vaccination early for them given that they were counted in the high-risk category for Covid-19.

It is hoped that the Central government stops confusing the states with their direc-

tions and control and allows them the time to focus on wider coverage at least of the high-risk groups. It cannot take much for the remaining 25K of so above 60 year olds in Sikkim to be contacted and convinced or inconvenienced, whichever is the reason they have not taken the vaccine thus far, to visit a vaccination site near them.

The 45-60 age-group is represented much better in the vaccination stats with 91,657 of them having received at least the first dose. But they are also many more in number than the above-60. In this 15 year age-band, there are 1.09 lakh Sikkimese, of whom a reasonably high number - 91,657 - have received at least the first shot.

Vaccinations have only just opened for the 18-45 year olds who form a bulk of Sikkim's population. counting in at around 1.52 lakh. Of these, 24,635 have received the vaccine thus far. One must bear in mind that many in this count, those recognised as Frontline Workers, would have received the vaccine before it opened for the lay citizens in this age-group.

Sikkim's less than 7 lakh population appears on surface to be a manageable number to extend effective vaccination cover for. Reduce it to the 4.5-5 lakh population in the above-18 age category, and the challenge looks even more manageable. However, with the Centre controlling the vaccine supply despite whatever it claims, throws a spanner in the works. It will take much better planning and genuine coordination to ensure that the doses that are available are better deployed and the vaccination effort prioritised in a way that minimises wastage of doses and human resource.

*turn to pg02*

## 249 new cases and three more Covid deaths in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 20 MAY:**

Sikkim recorded 249 new cases of novel coronavirus and three COVID-deaths in the last 24 hours. In the meantime, the state also recorded another big rash of recoveries on Wednesday when 216 more formerly Covid-positive people were discharged from home isolation.

With Sikkim already three weeks deep into its second wave, the number of recoveries reported every day is also picking up as more and more people who tested positive in the early days of the this round of infection complete their isolation. The State has already recorded 756 recoveries in the four days that have passed of this week.

Sikkim's count of recovered cases of COVID-19 now stands at 8,655 recording a recovery rate of around 71%. This calculation, however, is not representative of the ground situation since the number of new cases continue to be added to those who have already tested positive and are now on their way to recovery.

For instance, there are currently 3,122 active cases of Covid in Sikkim, 2,902 of whom are either in facility quarantine or home isolation, which means that they do not have symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation and are on their way to recovery.

Despite the high number of new cases today, there were only 26 new admissions in hospitals today taking the total number of Covid patients in hospital to 220, of whom 22 are in ICU. Out of the 249 new cases, 121 were reported from East District, 40 from West District, 75 from South District and 13 from North Sikkim.

These 249 cases were picked up from the testing of 676 samples on Wednesday, a noticeable dip in the number of tests which had consistently been in the high 800's of late.

That said, the number of Rapid Antigen Tests being conducted has also seen a jump and one hopes that this is because of the random sampling underway at different places. In the past 24 hours for instance, 89 of the 217 samples screened via RAT returned positive.

Also today, Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 crossed the 12K mark to now number 12,204. Sikkim's COVID related death toll now stands at 217 with three more patients losing their lives to coronavirus in the last 24 hours. While one COVID death was reported from STNM Hospital, one patient passed away at Central Referral Hospital, Tadong, and another at the District Hospital, Singtam.

## Land Revenue Deptt provides Smartphones to begin tele-counselling of 'vulnerable individuals'

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 20 MAY:**

Land Revenue & Disaster Management Minister, KN Lepcha, handed over 40 smartphones from his department to the Health Department to be used for tele-counselling services being extended to "vulnerable individuals" in light of the prevailing pandemic. Trained counsellors at the State, District and PHC level will be implementing this outreach programme in a bid to mitigate the stress and fear among "vulnerable individuals," a press communique from Health Department informs. The Department has also thanked the Govt of Sikkim, the Land Revenue Department and Minister Lepcha for supporting the effort.

## 120 media personnel vaccinated

**SAGAR CHHETRI  
GANGTOK, 19 MAY:**

A total of 120 press and media personnel were vaccinated for COVID-19 during a special vaccination drive held for journalists here at the Thakurbari vaccination site on 19 May (Wednesday).

Scribe guilds have expressed their gratitude towards the State government and Chief Minister PS Tamang for having provided this special vaccination drive for



journalists here.

A press release from Journalists Union of Sikkim informs that the vaccination drive which was also attended by Confidential Secretary to the

CM, Bikash Basnett, yesterday.

The release adds that last Sunday, the CM had announced that media personnel will be given

*turn to pg02*

## Sikkim Cannot Afford another Mistake

**JIWAN RAI**

In the classic children's story, The Three Little Pigs, three pigs leave their parental home to seek their fortune. The youngest pig makes his house of beautiful, golden hay. It is quick and easy and he spares himself a lot of free time to play and rest.

His second brother makes his house of sticks with the same logic of sparing extra time for fun. The oldest pig makes his house of bricks – a tedious and long process. In the end, the nasty wolf comes and asks the first pig to let him in. The little pig says, "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin". Wolf replies, "Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in". Sure enough, he huffs and puffs and eventually both the hay and stick houses are blown in. Both the hapless little pigs run and take refuge in the brick house of their brother which was, of course, strong

enough to withstand the 'huffing and puffing of the wolf'.

The Covid pandemic has exposed our house of hay. The coronavirus huffed and

puffed and our house was blown in. But what makes our fall mightiest is our denial. Unlike the little pigs scurrying for cover after the wolf's attack, we keep saying,

*turn to pg02*

*ViewPoint*

**OMAS**  
Organisation of Musicians and Artists of Sikkim  
in collaboration with  
**SARATHI**  
presents  
**ONLINE MUSICAL CONTEST**  
In Solidarity with all the **NURSES and COVID WARRIORS.**  
"It's Time to  
**SHINE**  
and spread  
**HUMANITY**"  
Result Declaration on 21st June 2021, on the **WORLD MUSIC DAY.**  
Donate  
Mask, Hand Sanitizers, Gloves, PPE kits, Oximeters and essential medicines.  
Drop points  
1. APS to HCM office -DAC EAST  
2. Thuendel, Sichey  
3. CITI NEWS, Gangtok.  
SIKKIM EXPRESS  
Sikkim Together  
Send your Entries at - +91 97759 86620 | +91 70015 35806  
1st Prize - ₹50,000  
2nd Prize - ₹20,000  
3rd Prize - ₹10,000





## CCKs and rations reached to Covid patients in Khamdong Block

**GANGTOK, 19 MAY:** Covid Care Kits from the Health Department and Chief Minister's Relief Food packages were distributed to Covid patients from the BPL category at Sirwani, Dungdung Thasa and Chisopani GPU of Khamdong Block on Wednesday. During the drive, PPE kits were also provided to all volunteers, ambulance drivers and ASHA workers under Khamdong Block by BDO, Khamdong, Tikendra Sharma.

## Deadline for filing Income Tax returns extended till Sept 30 amid COVID-19

**NEW DELHI, 20 MAY [NDTV]:** Amid the severity of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government extended the due date of filing income tax returns (ITR) for the financial year 2020-21 by two months till September 30, to provide relief to taxpayers. The Finance Ministry also extended the timelines for various tax compliances under the Income-Tax Act, 1961, to address difficulties faced by taxpayers during the pandemic.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), the apex body which heads the Income Tax (I-T) department, also extended the ITR filing deadline for companies by a month till November 30. According to a statement released by the Ministry of Finance on Thursday, May 20, the deadline for issuing Certificate of Tax



Deducted at Source in Form No 16 by employers to employees is extended by a month till July 15, 2021.

The timelines for various other tax compliances that have been extended by the government are as follows:

- According to the income tax law, the deadline to file ITR for those taxpayers whose ac-

counts are not required to be audited and who usually file their returns on income using ITR-1 or ITR-4 forms is July 31.

- The deadline for taxpayers, such as companies or firms, whose accounts are required to be audited is October 31.

- The due date for filing the tax audit report as well as the transfer pricing certificate is ex-

tended by a month till October 31 and November 30, respectively.

- For filing belated or revised return of income, the deadline is now set as January 31, 2022.

- The deadline for financial institutions to furnish the Statement of Financial Transaction or SFT report is extended till June 30, 2021, from May 31, 2021.

## Third wave of Covid possible if vaccination not ramped up: Scientist

**NEW DELHI, 20 MAY [PTI]:** If the vaccination drive against coronavirus is not ramped up and COVID-19 appropriate-behaviour is not maintained, there is a possibility of a third wave of the pandemic in 6-8 months, said M Vidyasagar, a scientist involved in the Sutra Model which uses mathematics to project the trajectory of COVID-19.

He, however, stressed the Sutra model has not predicted any third wave and it is working on it.

The IIT-Hyderabad professor cited a paper by Italian researchers on infected people with decreasing antibodies, which give some sort of immunity, in six months. "If the antibodies are lost, then there is a chance of immunity going down. In this case, vaccination has to be ramped up and COVID-19 appropriate-behaviour must be practiced. If not then there is a possibility of a third wave in 6-8 months," Mr Vidyasagar said.

"We are also adding the aspects of immunity and vaccination in our model for our future forecasts," he added.



According to a study by the San Raffaele hospital in Milan, antibodies against coronavirus remained in the blood of patients with COVID-19 for at least eight months after they were infected.

A recent sero-survey by the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) suggested that the neutralising antibodies declined significantly after five-six months, making people prone to reinfections.

The coronavirus cases in the country peaked in September 2020 and there was a nationwide decline of new cases starting in October.

"Using more stringent

measures (more than 30 per cent inhibition of surrogate receptor-spike protein binding), the loss of neutralisation may be even higher. We speculate that this may be related to recurrence of outbreaks in March 2021, after the peak in September 2020," the IGIB paper said on the second wave that started raging from late March and has claimed thousands of lives since then.

K VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser, had said on May 5 that as the virus mutates further, a third wave of COVID infection is inevitable and it is necessary to be prepared for new waves. Two days later he said there

may not be a third wave of coronavirus in the country, if strong measures are taken and effectively implemented at the state, district and city-level.

"If we take strong measures, the third wave may not happen in all places or indeed anywhere at all. It depends on much how effectively guidance is implemented at the local level in the states, districts and cities everywhere. The guidance about precautions, about surveillance, about containment, about treatment and about tests. This insidious asymptomatic transmission can be stopped if we follow the guidelines.

## Milkha Singh tests positive for COVID-19

**NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH, MAY 20 (PTI):** Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh has tested positive for COVID-19 and is in isolation at his Chandigarh residence.

The 91-year-old, popularly known as Flying Sikh, is asymptomatic and claims to be in "high spirits".

"A couple of our helpers tested positive and so all the family members did the tests. Only I returned positive on Wednesday and I am surprised," Milkha told PTI. "I am fine and there

is no fever or cough. My doctor told me I will be alright in three-four days. I did jogging just yesterday. I am in high spirits," he added.

The legendary athlete is a five-time Asian Games gold medallist but his greatest performance was the fourth place finish in the 400m final of the 1960 Olympics.

Milkha's son and ace golfer Jeev Milkha Singh is in Dubai and said he would be returning to the country this week itself. "I will be flying back home on Saturday," said Jeev.

## HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

email us: [news@summittimes.com](mailto:news@summittimes.com)

### 1,860 Covishield...

For instance, 44 vaccination sites were opened across the State today, on 14 received any people coming in for vaccination, and one of them was the State Prison at Rongyek which is not a regular vaccination site and is not open to the lay public. A little coordination with local ASHA workers or staff at the PHC and local community organisations can ensure that no vaccination site draws a blank because it is unlikely that there is any site which has covered the entire population cleared for vaccination. Most BDOs or ward panchayats should have at least a rough estimate of populations in their jurisdiction broken up into age categories. Reaching out to the still unvaccinated should not be a very complicated process from thereon.

This is only one of the possible options that could be explored and better minds could up with better courses. Don't do this, and between the confusion here and New Delhi's misplaced priorities, Sikkim will have a major vaccination challenge at hand.

It has now been 124 days since vaccinations were opened in the State, and as of 5PM Thursday, a grand total of 2,30,970 doses have been administered. Covishield is a two-dose vaccine schedule. The 18+ age-group in Sikkim numbers between 4.5 to 5 lakh so this means up to 10 lakh doses will need to be administered to cover this population, a coverage which will hopefully keep the under 18 year olds safe as well.

The daily average for vaccination in Sikkim, including even Sundays when vaccination sites are closed here, works out to 1,862 doses per day. If Sikkim stays with the same average, then it will take another 412 days [with no off-days for the vaccination sites] for it to cover the entire 18+ population. Since not much can be done about the number of doses Sikkim receives given that the Central Government still controls that stream, it becomes necessary for the State to direct and administer the vaccines it has in the most effective way possible.

### 120 media personnel...

priority in the vaccination drive now that its opened for the 18+ category. He was responding to a demand placed by JUS and Press Club of Sikkim seeking such a consideration.

JUS president, Bhim Rawat, thanked the CM for organising the special vaccination camp and also thanked the health workers on duty for the smooth execution of the vaccination process.

Likewise, Press Club of Sikkim general secretary, Puran Tamang, also expressed gratitude towards the CM and the state government and shared that this will bolster the war against coronavirus. He also thanked health officials for executing the special drive and shared how this had boosted the morale of journalists here.

Notably, several states including Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and others have declared journalists as 'frontline workers' and Journalist Union of Sikkim and PCS had also placed a similar demand and CM Prem Singh Tamang has assured that journalists will officially be declared 'frontline workers' by the Cabinet soon.

### ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

The Anthyesti Kriya of Late Kumari Thapa W/o Gopal Thapa of Lower Ghurpisey Namchi (SAKHA) who left for heavenly abode on 12th May falls on 21st May December 2021 Friday.

All relatives, friend and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence. We also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude towards all those who extended their support during the time of bereavement. Gopal Thapa (husband) kamal Thapa (son) Bimla Thapa (son) Som Maya Thapa (daughter) Dumber Kumari Thapa (daughter) Khem Kumari Sharma (dauhter-in-law)



Contact No: 97333 96231, 9002548203, 9002533458

### Mamata Banerjee reviews preparation for Cyclone Yaas in West Bengal



**KOLKATA, 20 MAY:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee held a high-level meeting on Thursday with secretaries and officials of disaster management authority to discuss about the preparations after the India Meteorological Department (IMD) alerted that cyclone Yaas may hit West Bengal coast by May 26. Chief Secretary, Health Secretary and officials of disaster management authority attended the meet.

According to the national forecasting agency, Yaas is likely to hit the West Bengal coast by May 26. The cyclone's formation is likely to commence by May 22.

National Weather Forecasting Centre IMD's senior scientist RK Jenamani on Thursday informed about the deciphered facts by the weather department and said, "The forma-

tion of cyclone Yaas will be forming by May 22 in the north of Bay of Bengal. It is likely to move in northwest direction and will form into a complete cyclonic storm by May 26. By the evening of May 26, it will hit Odisha and West Bengal coast."

However, further details about the wind speed and the landfall of the cyclone will be given by May 22, he added.

Earlier, Mr Jenamani had notified that Odisha and West Bengal will experience heavy rainfall from May 22 to 26.

"Low pressure of the new cyclonic storm is expected to start forming in the Bay of Bengal by May 22. May 23 should mark the depression stage, and the final cyclonic storm is expected to hit by May 24-25," he had said.

Meanwhile, cyclone Tauktae has significantly weakened, informed the senior scientist.

### Sikkim Cannot...

"Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin" - even after losing so much. At least those pigs learnt their lesson. Not us. We have continued to build our hay houses and the second wave huffed and puffed and blew it in. Now the third wave is lurking and we are still repeating our denial mantra with legendary stubbornness.

"We" here is the citizenry and the administration. They are the mirror image of one another. Much of this Covid mess is of our own making. The public callousness in terms of ignoring the basic principles of wearing masks, socially distancing and sanitizing has been utterly frustrating. The increasing rate of infection and deaths might have made us feel scared for ourselves and sympathetic towards the victims but it didn't change our behaviour and actions in the slightest. We kept defying every Covid protocol that there was. Up until a minute before the present lockdown was implemented, people were swarming the roads, bazaars and every available public space. This pandemic of such a vast proportion has always had the factor of human behaviour behind it. But human behaviour is not only reflected in public actions - it is also reflected in administrative decisions. Our country's administration - Center and

State - both have failed us miserably. Let me highlight some of these failures.

Fortification against an unforeseen tragedy is too much to ask of a developing nation. Even the world's most advanced countries were caught off guard and were found wanting. But the failure to prepare for the existing and ongoing pandemic is an egregious weakness of any administration. India began a premature celebration by foolishly ruling out the possibility of a second wave. What followed was a series of tragedies of cosmic proportions.

When the second wave was swirling in the bigger cities and plains of India, Sikkim was still safe. On April 14, I wrote a Facebook post, "The second wave is spreading at its craziest pace down in the plains which is our tourist source. The daily positive cases in the last 24 hours were a staggering 1,84,372 which may increase to 3 lakh per day according to some experts... The second wave may continue till May end. Why not restrict tourist inflow till May end?" The response was mixed and those who disliked the idea expressed their concerns about the economy. To me it indicates two things. One, we have not matured as a society to place life before the economy. Two, we thought that Sikkim, unlike the rest of India was

fully equipped to prevent the spread of the virus. We eventually put on hold our tourist inflow but only after allowing the daily infections to cross 200 and losing many lives. Sikkim also allowed congregational programs to continue for far too long. The decision to ban crowding came quite late in the day.

The poor preparation of hospitals highlighted by the High Court of Sikkim has been just as alarming for the people as it has been embarrassing for the administration. The leaked Instagram audio message of a nurse in which she informs her friend of the acute shortage of Covid healthcare manpower added insult to injury. A senior doctor apparently admitted that the leaked audio message is a true description of the ground reality. Shocking but true.

The vaccine shortage is possibly the biggest issue which, if not solved soon enough, could have a far-reaching impact on Sikkim's attempt to journey back to normalcy. Every morning we wake up to hundreds of Facebook posts by people failing to register digitally. Apparently, the slots get taken in a matter of seconds. Some are justifiably suspecting some tricksters of illegally pre-registering. Also there have been just as many concerns raised about digitally unequipped citizens. The acute vaccine



# World's largest iceberg breaks off Antarctica: European Space Agency

**BERLIN, 20 MAY [AFP]:** A huge iceberg, the world's largest, has broken off from an ice shelf in Antarctica and is floating through the Weddell Sea, the European Space Agency said.

Called A-76 and roughly the shape of Manhattan but more than 70 times bigger, it was picked up on satellite images and is "currently the largest berg in the world", the ESA said Wednesday.

The iceberg is around 170 kilometres (105 miles) long and 25 kilometres wide, with an area of 4,320 square kilometres, slightly larger than the Spanish island of Majorca.

The berg, which broke off the western side of the Ronne Ice Shelf, was originally spotted by the British Antarctic Survey and confirmed using images from the Copernicus satellite.

It takes the place as the world's largest from the A-23A iceberg - approximately 3,880 sq km in size - which is also in the Weddell Sea.

In November last



year, what was then the world's largest iceberg appeared to be on a collision course with a remote South Atlantic island home to thousands of penguins and seals, threatening to impede their ability to gather food.

The iceberg, known as A68a, had also broken off from the Larsen Ice Shelf, which has warmed faster than any other part of Earth's southernmost continent.

A68a, which was 160

kilometres long and 48 kilometres across, broke apart before it could cause any damage to the abundant wildlife in the British Overseas Territory of South Georgia.

Earth's average surface temperature has gone up by one degree Celsius since the 19th century, enough to increase the intensity of droughts, heat waves and tropical cyclones.

But the air over Antarctica has warmed more than twice that much.

Major chunks of the Peninsula's Larsen Ice Shelf - which had been stable for more than 10,000 years - disintegrated within days in 1995, and again in 2002. This was followed by the breakup of the nearby Wilkins Ice Shelf in 2008 and 2009.

A process known as hydrofracturing was likely the main culprit in both cases, earlier research has shown.

Hydrofracturing occurs when water - which

is heavier than ice -- pours through cracks in the surface of ice shelves caused by surface warming, violently forcing the fractures to zip open, causing an iceberg to break off.

Icebergs are traditionally named after the Antarctic quadrant in which they were originally detected, then a sequential number.

If they break apart more letters are added to differentiate the fragments.

## AIIMS Delhi reporting over 20 cases of Black Fungus daily: Doctor

**NEW DELHI, 20 MAY [PTI]:** All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, is reporting more than 20 cases of 'Black Fungus' (Mucormycosis) disease on a daily basis, said Dr MV Padma Srivastava, Head, Department of Neurology.

"In Delhi's AIIMS, there are more than 20 cases of mucormycosis reported in emergency today. Mucormycosis was always there in those who are immunocompromised, diabetic, high steroid dose, but it was never in this number," she said.

She said earlier, the number was in single-digit. "But, now we have crossed the three-digit mark and are getting more than 20 cases of the infection every single day. We have made mucor wards separately at AIIMS Delhi, AIIMS Trauma Centre, and AIIMS Jhajjar," Dr Padma added.

If COVID-19 happens to diabetic people, sugar should be strictly controlled and there should be rational use of steroids.

"Cases of mucormycosis began being reported two months ago and states like Gujarat and Maharashtra have, so far, reported more

than 1,800 cases. Now, Delhi is also reporting a high number of cases and a maximum of those are the ones who have taken high doses of steroids or are diabetic," she added.

Max hospitals across India have reported 50 cases of black fungus, and in Delhi alone, the numbers are 25.

"COVID-19 strain may also be the reason and we need to do genome sequencing to understand this disease more," Dr Padma said.

Dr DS Rana, Chairperson, Sri Gangaram Hospital, informed that the hospital has as many as 48 Black Fungus patients and 16 are on the waiting list.

The rare fungal infection called "mucormycosis" or "black fungus" is on the rise in several parts of the country, including Delhi.

As per the Union Health Ministry, mucormycosis or black fungus is a complication caused by a fungal infection.

People catch mucormycosis by coming in contact with the fungal spores in the environment. It can also develop on the skin after the fungus enters the skin through a cut, scrape, burn, or other type of skin trauma.

2-28016/2021-PMSSY/IV  
Government of India  
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare  
(PMSSY Division)  
\*\*\*\*\*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Indian Red Cross Society Building,  
New Delhi- 110001

ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE POST OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR EACH IN AIIMS AT  
(i) BHOPAL (MADHYA PRADESH), (ii) BHUBANESWAR (ODISHA), (iii) PATNA  
(BIHAR), (iv) RISHIKESH (UTTARAKHAND), (v) GUWAHATI (ASSAM), (vi)  
AWANTIPORA (JAMMU & KASHMIR) and (vii) DARBHANGA (BIHAR)

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (PMSSY Division) invites applications from  
eligible candidates for filling up the post of Executive Director on deputation/short term  
contract/contract basis in the Level 15, Rs. 182200-224100/- in the Pay Matrix (as per  
7<sup>th</sup> CPC) each in All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) at (i) Bhopal (Madhya  
Pradesh) (ii) Bhubaneswar (Odisha) (iii) Patna (Bihar) (iv) Rishikesh (Uttarakhand) (v)  
Guwahati (Assam) (vi) Awantipora (Jammu & Kashmir) and (vii) Darbhanga (Bihar).  
For further details, please visit Ministry's Website and Division's Website at  
www.mohfw.gov.in and http://pmssy-mohfw.nic.in

Detailed advertisement will be published in the Employment News. The closing  
date of receipt of application will be the 45<sup>th</sup> day from the date of publication of  
advertisement in Employment News.

(S.M. Roudray)  
Deputy Secretary to the Govt. of India  
Tel : 011-23355005

davp 17101/11/0002/2122

## India conducts 20.55 lakh COVID-19 tests in single day

**NEW DELHI, MAY 20 (PTI):** More than 20.55 lakh COVID-19 tests were conducted in a span of 24 hours, the highest-ever conducted in a single day in India, while the daily positivity rate stands at 13.44 per cent, the Union Health Ministry said on Thursday.

Cumulative, 20,55,010 tests were conducted on Wednesday in the country.

India's daily COVID-19 recoveries outnumbered the daily new cases for the seventh consecutive day. A total of 3,69,077 patients recuperated in a span of 24 hours as against 2,76,110 infections being reported during the same period, the ministry said.

India's cumulative recoveries have reached 2,23,55,440.

Besides India recorded less than 3 lakh new cases for four consecutive days now.

Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Hayana reported 77.17

per cent of the 2,76,110 new cases registered in a span of 24 hours.

Tamil Nadu has reported the highest daily new cases at 34,875, followed by Karnataka with 34,281 new cases.

The ministry said India's total active cases have decreased to 31,29,878 with a decline of 96,841 cases being registered in the total active caseload in a day.

It now comprises 12.14 per cent of the country's total cases.

Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh cumulatively account for 69.23 per cent of India's total active cases.

The National Mortality Rate currently stands at 1.11 per cent, the ministry said.

A total of 3,874 deaths were reported in a span of 24 hours.

Ten states account for 72.25 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (594). Karnataka follows with 468 daily deaths.

## Delhi receives highest rainfall for May since 1951

**NEW DELHI, 20 MAY [NDTV]:** Delhi received the highest rain for the month of May in 70 years between yesterday morning and this morning, the Met department said. The capital saw non-stop rain yesterday due to the impact of Cyclone Tauktae and a western disturbance.

At 119.3 mm, this is the highest ever rain since 1951. Previously, such a record was seen on a May day in 1976 when Delhi say 60 mm, almost half of yesterday's figures.

"A record 119.3 mm rain fell in Delhi between 8:30 am on Wednesday and 8:30 am on Thurs-

day, which is a new record for May," Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the weather office's regional forecasting centre, was quoted as saying by news agency PTI.

The capital's maximum temperature for May too dipped to the lowest in 70 years, with a record 23.8 degrees yesterday. This was 16 notches below normal and the lowest in the month of May since 1951. In between, a low of 24.8 degrees was recorded on May 13 1982, Mr Srivastava said.

Delhi's maximum temperature during the day yesterday was less than that of Srinagar

(25.8 degrees) and Dharamshala (27.2 degrees). The rain and the drastic dip in temperature was welcomed by residents who posted comments of surprise and delight as well as pictures of rain from their homes on social media. Parts of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand too received rain yesterday.

This morning, the skies remained cloudy in Delhi, with the weather department saying that "rainfall activity is very likely to decrease" today and "scattered to fairly widespread" rainfall is forecast in the capital.

## Pandemic pushing more families into poverty as unemployment soars in Nepal

**BINOD GHIMIRE & ANUP OJHA**

**KATHMANDU, 20 MAY [KATHMANDU-POST]:** Sabita Ghimire, 29, originally from Musikot Municipality in Gulmi, used to make a living as a daily wage worker in the Kupandole area of Lalitpur. A mother of two children, she was working as a part timer at a fast-food restaurant in the mornings and washed dishes at a house in the afternoons.

The restaurant, where she prepared ingredients for fast food, has been closed since April 29 after the government imposed prohibitory orders to stem the spread of Covid-19. She lost her morning job the day the eatery was closed. The restaurant owner has said she will be called back when the restaurant reopens. But they don't know when.

But her day job as a dishwasher was continuing even after the imposition of the prohibitory orders. However, since last Saturday, she along with her younger son developed a fever and dry cough. After knowing about her illness, the family where she worked asked her not to come until the pandemic was over.

Her husband who used to work as a security guard at a corporate house has been staying at home on unpaid leave after the office was closed due to the prohibitory orders. "All our income sources have stopped," Ghimire, who lives in a rented room at Kupandole, told the Post. "We don't have enough savings even to buy food for a few more days, not to talk about the treatment. More than myself, I am worried about my son," she said. The Ghimire family pays Rs 5,000 in rent alone.

A sharp spike in the coronavirus cases prompted the government to impose the prohibitory orders as an attempt to break the chain of transmission. The decrease in the mobility of people certainly helps lessen the spread of the contagion but it also stops most of the economic activities and as a result, the people working in the informal sector, like Ghimire, suffer the most.

An assessment by the United Nations Development Programme last year had found that 60 percent of the employees in the micro and small businesses had lost their jobs while they saw a fall of 95 percent in average monthly income during the lockdown. The report showed the tourism and the hospitality industry where Ghimire was engaged suffered the most.

It showed that the crisis affected women, especially from lower income groups, differently than men. According to the report, 28 percent men lost their jobs during the lockdown compared to 41 percent women.

No source of income means, neither will they get to feed themselves and their children properly, nor will they get to afford the health services and

education for their children, according to human rights activists. Ghimire, for instance, hasn't gone to hospital for their checkup as she knows the government hospitals, which are cheaper, are already overwhelmed with Covid-19 patients and she can't afford treatment at private hospitals.

"The pandemic has an overarching effect on human rights," Gauri Pradhan, a former member of the National Human Rights Commission, told the Post. "The people have been deprived of their fundamental rights to health, education and even livelihood."

Various reports have suggested that a significant number of people would slip into extreme poverty due to the pandemic. In its report in September last year, UNICEF said the number of Nepali children living in poverty rose from an estimated 1.3 million before the pandemic to about 7 million in August last year. "Many of these children are suffering from multiple deprivations including a lack of access to nutritious food and to an education," it said.

That people are dying in lack of oxygen supply or beds at hospitals is a very unfortunate situation, according to Pradhan. There were reports last year that a person died of starvation after he lost the source of income. Similarly, different reports show millions of students were deprived of their right to education last year.

The students couldn't engage in the teaching-learning activities as the virtual learning platforms were either non-existent or ineffective. The situation is no different even this year. "Nepal has guaranteed several rights of the citizen as the fundamental rights while it is also a party to a majority of international human rights conventions," Pradhan said. "The state has an obligation to fulfill them."

Human rights defenders say it is true that even the developed nations have borne the brunt of the pandemic. But they learnt lessons in the first wave and prepared themselves for the second wave but the Nepal government wasted crucial time and did nothing to improve the health and economic sector among others.

"People from the poor and marginalised communities suffer the most during crises. The pandemic has proved that," Mohana Ansari, a former member at the National Human Rights Commission, told the Post. "The government should have come up with special programmes for such communities, but it didn't." Over 70 percent of the country's population earn their livelihoods in the informal sector.

Among them is Ganesh Nepali, 40, who lives in a squatter settlement at Sinamangal, Kathmandu. Nepali is a painter and mason.

  
**What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?**

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

**Symptoms of nCoV**

- Fatigue
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Fever, muscle aches, symptoms

**Precautions to Prevent nCoV**

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unclean hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid respiratory secret affected places.
- Place a mask if you have respiratory symptoms, and wear your mask while coughing or sneezing.

**Treatment:**

- Treatment to support vital and supportive
- Based on the patient's clinical condition
- No vaccine is available as of now
- But there is a need to detect and isolate

If you seek help, please approach:

- Toll-free no. 104
- District Surveillance Officer
- SANITIZATION
- HEAT - DISINFECT
- WASH - HANDS
- COUGH - COVER
- STAY HOME
- WASH - HANDS

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE  
GOVERNMENT OF BIHAR**



## Trigger Involvement by Respecting Rural Pragmatism

*Everything else will then fall into place*

One of the better initiatives of the recent years has been the revitalisation of panchayati raj institutions in the country. One says revitalisation because village level bodies were always effective and progressive in India until the British centralised administration and Independent India continued with the Centre retaining decision-making powers. Look at the handling of the pandemic, Disaster Management is true on in the name of the Act which gives the Central Government all powers to direct management and at the State level, babus whisper to netas what the State should do. Had villages and towns, both of which have local representation been allowed the freedom to implement safety protocols, they would have succeeded much better than the workforce tied to hierarchies and bound to the wrong masters.

Returning to panchayats, these institutions lost important centuries which have compromised their relevance and effectiveness and which perhaps explains the slower than expected pace at which PRIs are gaining significance in the country. If one takes up Sikkim's case, the situation gets slightly more complicated because although even India had a feudal setup until the British arrived, Sikkim was much smaller and the village level institutions had that much lesser room for independent thinking during the monarchy. That being said, conversations with the older generation will bear out that the villagers acquired significant influence in getting things done through collaborative efforts, and at times, even lobbied strongly and had unpopular mandals replaced. But these must have been only on rare occasions and by and large, in Sikkim's case, much damage was caused by the regressive tendencies which did not allow the village-level organisations to evolve and keep pace with time. The hangover is still with us in how political space continues to be dominated by descendants of the formerly privileged class.

That said, things are being pushed towards improvement. At the policy level, significant powers and responsibilities have been devolved to panchayati raj institutions and Sikkim has outperformed many other states with longer histories of village level autonomy and some panchayats in Sikkim have delivered exceptionally well. However, when it comes to institutional level competence across the board, much obviously needs to be still be done. But the whole PRI rejuvenation effort is still young, which is perhaps why even though the policy has changed and the political will expressed, the executive's superiority complex continues to dictate activities on the ground. It does not help that they are allowed too much leeway why their political masters. This attitude does not necessarily manifest from any ulterior motives and is probably a carryover of the mistaken, but widely held, urban conviction of knowing better. This approach needs to be corrected. It is offensive to think that mindsets trained in urban settings can teach anything to folks groomed on rural pragmatism. But the hand-holding instinct continues and this has atrophied the people's ability to collaborate and devise solutions by themselves or plan with commitment because they have come to expect the government to do everything for them.

This lethargy is now hurting Sikkim because although infrastructure is being created and opportunities opened, the masses, by and large, have not extended the enterprise required to make these investments worthwhile. That requires involvement and a good place to spark such engagements would be for the powers-that-be and the powers-that-execute to convince the villages that they are free to agree, dissent, criticise and refuse not only what has been decided for them, but also what they have commissioned themselves. Once the people at the grassroots know that they are required for more than just meeting the quorum for workshops and meetings, they will take deeper interest in their own affairs and with that rediscover the strength of collaboration and deliver more instinctively on their responsibilities. Everything else – proper planning, proper gram sabhas, transparency and exact book keeping – will automatically fall into place and from that involvement could be born the civil society that Sikkim so desperately needs.

### WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/ indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: [news@summittimes.com](mailto:news@summittimes.com)



# How Lockdown Has Affected Children's Speech – and What Parents Can do to Help

YVONNE WREN  
*theconversation.com*

The pandemic means many children will have spent the best part of a year interacting much less than normal with teachers, friends and family. One of the big questions is how this will have changed the way they have learned to speak. Have lockdown and other COVID-19 measures affected how children acquire the speech and language skills so vital to their academic and social development? And if children's speech has been held back, what can parents do about it?

A recent survey of schools and parents, conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation, has found that children who started school in autumn 2020 needed more support than in previous years.

The findings suggest that the greatest area of concern was communication and language development, in which 96% (55 out of 57) of schools said they were either "very concerned" or "quite concerned". Close behind were personal, social and emotional development (91%) and literacy (89%), skills which are heavily reliant on the development of strong speech, language and communication abilities.

#### IMPACT OF LOCKDOWNS

Parents have done an amazing job through the pandemic to keep their children safe and healthy. Having few activities available to them and restrictions on seeing extended family has been a challenge for many.

But this has reduced children's exposure to new vocabulary – to words we might use when we visit the farm, say, or go to see grandma. This is important as we know that vocabulary levels at age two predict children's performance at school entry, which itself is predictive of later outcomes.

#### IMPACT OF MASK WEARING

Widespread mask wearing during the pandemic has also made us realise how much we rely on lipreading. Not being able to see lips move during

speech, combined with the dampening effect that wearing a mask has on the sound produced, has made it difficult for us to understand what other people are saying. This is particularly a problem for the many children who experience glue ear, which can lead to temporary hearing loss, in early and middle childhood.

In school and pre-school, children may struggle to differentiate between similar sounds, such as "p" and "t", when their teacher is wearing a mask. That can impact on a child's speech development or their phonological awareness, which is the ability to break down words into speech sounds to assist with early reading and spelling acquisition.

Masks also obscure facial expression, which contributes to how we understand the meaning behind the words we hear. When this is taken away, not only is the potential for misunderstanding (and mislearning) increased but there can also be an impact on children's development of social and emotional skills.

#### ACCESS TO THERAPY

While lockdown has affected opportunities to promote speech and language development for all children, those who were already most at risk are likely to have been disproportionately affected. Many of these will be children who require speech and language therapy.

A report by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists found that 62% of children who needed speech and language therapy (from a survey of over 400 parents) received none during the first lockdown. Where possible, services were provided remotely. However, the same survey found that 19% of children did not like having speech and language therapy on video, while 12% could not cooperate with it.

Children born with cleft palate are one of several groups at high risk of problems with speech development. To investigate the impact of the first lockdown, researchers at the University of Bristol asked parents of children affected by this condition about how effective remote speech and language

therapy provision had been.

Of 212 responses, 26% reported it was very effective while the remainder said it was somewhat effective (67%) or not at all effective (8%). Some parents reported that they felt the video appointments were "better than nothing".

#### WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP?

There are several key things that parents can do to support their child in learning to speak. From day one, talk to your baby about whatever they show an interest in. Use simple sentences and make your voice sound interesting by using lots of intonation and facial expression. Babies and toddlers like and need lots of repetition so if your child is looking at a bus then say lots about the bus, describing what it looks like, talking about how it moves and saying the word "bus" over and over again.

The same principles apply as children get older. Talk to them about the things which interest them. Respond to what your child says and does, so that they start to link words and sentences with meaning. Now that restrictions are easing, look for opportunities to develop your child's vocabulary by visiting places such as libraries, city farms, parks and gardens and meeting up with friends and family.

For more ideas and support, organisations such as I CAN, the children's communication charity, of which I am a trustee), have developed resources for parents to help pre-schoolers and primary-aged children with their speaking and listening. The Talking Point website is another source of information for both parents and professionals who may be worried about a child's speech and language development.

Most children will respond quickly. But for those who continue to struggle, talking to a health visitor or teacher and a speech and language therapist will help determine whether more support is needed.

[the writer is Senior research fellow and director, Bristol Speech and Language Therapy Research Unit, University of Bristol]

# COVID-19: Which Countries Will Be the Next to See a Big Spike in Cases?

MICHAEL HEAD  
*theconversation.com*

Beneath the many complexities of the marathon that is the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a simple hypothesis: if the coronavirus is introduced into a susceptible population, and those people are able to mix, then there will be significant community transmission. Across 2020 and 2021, we have seen this happen around the world, including, recently, in India.

Could we see further situations like those in India, with cases rapidly spiking and health systems being overwhelmed? The short answer, sadly, is yes.

Globally, there's been an encouraging downturn in daily new cases in May 2021, but despite this, cases are still at a very high level overall, with worldwide statistics masking huge differences across countries and areas. The global vaccine rollout is also progressing slowly, with most of the world still susceptible to COVID-19. These factors mean there's potential for further spikes like those seen in India.

We only need look to Nepal to see a similar situation unfolding. Other countries have rising caseloads too, with many eyes looking nervously at Latin America, south-east Asia and some of the smaller island nations.

#### WHO ELSE IS AT RISK?

In terms of where cases are increasing most quickly (at time of publication), the website Our World in Data highlights Laos, Timor, Thailand, Cambodia, Fiji and Mongolia as the countries where numbers have recently doubled in the shortest period of time (ranging from 16 to 23 days for these countries; for comparison, the doubling rate for India ahead of

its second wave was 43 days). When looking at the countries whose reported deaths are currently doubling most quickly, it's Timor, Thailand, Mongolia, Cambodia and Uruguay (range: four to 31 days).

For countries such as Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and also Vietnam (highly praised so far), it's high susceptibility to COVID-19 that's the problem. They've had few cases in the past, so there's little natural immunity, and they're now experiencing outbreaks amid an inability to procure a large vaccine supply. Vaccine coverage therefore is low. Thailand and Vietnam have given a first dose to just 2% and 1% of their populations respectively.

Elsewhere, it's the mixing part of the equation that's more of a concern. Japan, for example, is soon to host the Olympics, attracting athletes, dignitaries, coaches and media from every corner of the globe. Despite a ramping up of vaccine distribution over the past month, the programme has been sluggish, with less than 4% of the population having received a first dose. In this author's view, the Olympics should not go ahead this year.

Latin America continues to experience a huge burden of COVID-19 disease and so is also at risk. Argentina, Uruguay, Costa Rica and Colombia are all still in the top ten countries in terms of daily new confirmed cases per million people. On the other hand, sub-Saharan Africa has on the face of it – with some exceptions – handled the pandemic relatively well, with countries praised for an early and decisive response, having learned lessons from the west African Ebola outbreak of 2013-16.

WORKING WITH UNCERTAIN DATA

Of course, our conclusions must be cautious. Creating high-quality real-time data during a public health emergency is complicated, and data is patchy and slow in most parts of the world. The extent of transmission within refugee camps and in conflict settings, for instance, is very much unknown. Some vulnerable areas may slip under the radar.

The reporting of data may also be influenced by local politics. Some countries, such as Tanzania, have chosen to downplay the severity of COVID-19. The former Tanzanian president, John Magufuli, died in March 2021 – and news coverage suggested he may have died of COVID-19 amid reports of uncontrolled outbreaks around the country and sharp increases in deaths. However, officially the impact of COVID-19 in Tanzania has been low.

Similarly, Belarus is reporting low death rates (27.8 per 100,000), having refused to consider COVID-19 a serious threat. But the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) has modelled the country's actual death rate to be one of the highest in the world, at 472.2 per 100,000 people. IHME modelling puts Azerbaijan at the top of that list, with a death rate of 672.7 compared with official numbers of 46.3 per 100,000.

#### POLITICS AND MIXING

The timing of elections and volatility of political governance may be interesting factors to observe when trying to predict future spikes in cases. Political mass gatherings in India are likely to have contributed to the extensive recent transmission. The prime minister and health minister encouraged people to attend, wrongly believing earlier in the spring that

India had reached the end stages of the pandemic.

Elsewhere, Donald Trump's campaigning events caused numerous super-spreading events in the US, while in Myanmar there were reported breaches of COVID-19 protocols due to electioneering and mass gatherings. Myanmar's elections in October 2020 were preceded by the highest spike in cases the country had experienced. Soon after the election, stricter policies were put in place and case rates lowered. Countries that engage in similar behaviour – or, like India, declare success too early – could well be the next hotspots.

Of course, the next outbreak may prove difficult to spot. Few of us could easily point to Timor on a map. This lack of knowledge influences our perception over local situations and also the news coverage that countries get. Compare Nepal and Timor to Brazil and India, on which public reporting has been extensive. Plus, some countries might not be reporting good-quality data – Belarus, Azerbaijan or indeed Russia may have much bigger burdens of COVID-19 than appears to be the case.

The "next big outbreak" will be reliant on a perfect storm of a few variables coming together. At the core of this storm will be a slow vaccine rollout and susceptible populations mixing freely. Political rallies, large-scale festivals and protests are examples of mass gatherings that can seed new outbreaks and facilitate sufficient spread to rapidly overwhelm a health system. But depending on where this happens, we may not even notice.

[the writer is Senior Research Fellow in Global Health, University of Southampton]



Andamans reports 35 new COVID-19 cases, 3 more deaths

**PORT BLAIR, MAY 20 (PTI):** Andaman and Nicobar Islands COVID-19 tally rose to 6,709 as 35 more people tested positive for the infection while three new fatalities pushed the death toll to 95, a health department official said on Thursday. The union territory now has 229 active COVID-19 cases, the official said. Twenty-six more people were cured of the disease during the period, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 6,385. The COVID-19 recovery rate in the union territory now is 95.28 per cent. The Andaman and Nicobar administration has so far tested more than 3.80 lakh samples for COVID-19. More than 1.17 lakh people have been inoculated in the archipelago so far, he said.

Mukul Roy suppressed Narada Case information in poll affidavit, claims Trinamool Congress

**KOLKATA, 20 MAY [PTI]:** The Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Wednesday alleged that while filing nomination for the recently held assembly election, BJP vice-president and West Bengal MLA Mukul Roy suppressed in the affidavit that he was an accused in the Narada sting tape case. Another BJP MLA Suvendu Adhikari mentioned the Narada case in his affidavit, but he did not specify the sections under which it was filed, TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh claimed. While two TMC senior ministers and an MLA, besides a former party leader, were arrested by the CBI in the Narada sting tape case on Monday, Mr Roy and Mr Adhikari were not, though they too were accused in the case. The CBI also filed the chargesheet against the four in a special court on May 17. The TMC has claimed that the BJP is behind the episode. "It is necessary for a candidate to mention cases against him or her in the affidavit. Mukul Roy has suppressed the Narada case completely in his affidavit," Mr Ghosh said. The TMC spokesperson wondered whether Mr Roy had got the BJP's assurance beforehand that he would not be touched in the Narada case. "In sharp contrast, our three arrested candidates - Subrata Mukherjee, Firhad Hakim and Madan Mitra - had referred to the Narada case in their affidavits," he said. Mr Ghosh said that the party will soon decide what steps would be taken on Roy's "suppression of information in the affidavit", but the BJP leader should resign from the assembly on moral grounds.

# Self-medication proving fatal for Covid-19 patients, health experts say

**SANJU PAUDEL, MADHAB ARYAL & KAMAL PANTHI KATHMANDU, 20 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]:** It had been two weeks since a 56-year-old man from Butwal-3 in Rupandehi district was suffering from common cold, fever and body aches. He consulted a local pharmacy and took medicines for a couple of days but his health did not improve. A couple of days later, he got his swab sample tested for Covid-19 infection. He tested positive and chose to stay in home isolation, his family members say. But on May 15, his health condition worsened and his family rushed him to the Corona Hospital in Butwal.

The critically ailing man was admitted to the High Dependency Unit at the hospital. "He was shifted to the Intensive Care Unit the next day but we could not save him," said one of his family members. The patient died the same day. Another infected man, aged 58, from Siddharthanagar-6, Rupandehi, also suffered from similar health problems. He had been suffering from fever and cough since May 3, so he visited a local pharmacy and bought antibiotics upon suggestion from the pharmacist. "But I didn't get any better. I went for a PCR test and the result showed I was Covid-19 positive," said the man. "I took medical oxygen for days at home as my oxygen saturation was low. But it was not enough. I went to Bhim Hospital after I couldn't breathe properly," said the man. He received treatment ly-



ing on a mattress on the hospital floor since all the beds at the Covid-19 unit of the hospital were occupied. "I returned home after my oxygen level crossed 92." According to Dr Sudarshan Thapa, senior consultant of Lumbini Provincial Hospital, Covid-19 patients choosing to self-medicate or relying on local pharmacies for treatment over visiting a hospital is proving fatal for them. In the past year, multiple reports have surfaced of people buying self-prescribed medicines relying on information shared on social media platforms and messaging apps. Thapa, who has been involved in the treatment of Covid-19 patients for the past one year, says most people are taking antibiotics for illnesses

with Covid-19-related symptoms. "Around 70 percent of Covid-19 patients visit hospitals only after their self-medication fails to cure them. They purchase medicines for fever and common cold from the medical stores," he said. "It is wrong to treat Covid-19 as typhoid, flu or other bacterial diseases." "Wrong medicines may lead to bacterial infection and make the patients more sick," said Thapa. "One should visit a hospital if one develops fever, cough, body ache, common cold or any other health-related problems." A woman from Rainadevi Chhahara Rural Municipality-4 in Palpa district recently visited a local pharmacy, where she bought

paracetamol, zinc tablets, vitamin C and vitamin D. She did not have a doctor's prescription. "The prescription shared on social media recommended these medicines and vitamin tablets for those who show symptoms similar to that of the coronavirus," she said. Nanda Kishor Badhai, aged 34, of Kapilvastu-4 had all the symptoms of Covid-19 but did not want to undergo a PCR test. He bought medicines from a local pharmacy but his health worsened on the fifth day of suffering from fever and cold. He was taken to Taulihawa Hospital on Monday evening. He passed away the next morning. Similar incident took place at Shivaraj Municipality-5, Kapilvastu. A 48-year-old

man took medicines for fever and sore throat for a week but his health did not improve. On Sunday, he was rushed to Shivaraj Basic Hospital after his condition worsened. "His oxygen level was just 42 when he was taken to the hospital. He passed away on Monday," said Chudamani Bhattarai, the health unit chief of Shivaraj Municipality. According to Dr Subhash Pandeya, medical superintendent of the District Hospital in Bardiya, the rate of Covid-19-related deaths has increased as patients have been taking medicines without consulting a doctor. "Most of the patients do not visit health facilities for treatment. They only visit hospitals if they face breathing problems," said Umesh

Gupta, the health coordinator of Kapilvastu Municipality. "This is also why Covid-19-related deaths are on the rise." "Most are in denial of having contracted Covid-19. They want to put off treatment as long as possible because they don't want to accept that they have been infected, fearing worst-case scenarios," he said. A 63-year-old man from Tilotama-5, Rupandehi, who also took self-prescribed medicines from a local pharmacy for fever and common cold, is currently admitted to the ICU at the Corona Hospital in Butwal. "We took him to the Corona Hospital in Butwal after the lab test confirmed Covid-19. He is now in the ICU," said his eldest son.

Dr Jhapendra Dhakal of Sancho Health Care Pvt. Ltd in Tansen, the district headquarters of Palpa, says most Covid-19 patients in the district have become heavily reliant on pharmacies for treatment, especially in the rural areas, since there are hardly any medical officers available at medical clinics or local health posts outside Tansen. Medical stores in both the cities and rural areas of Palpa have run out of paracetamol among other essential medicines after a surge in the number of people buying the tablets. Indra Baral of Himalaya Model Pharmacy in Rainadevi Chhahara Rural Municipality, Palpa, said, "There's a shortage of paracetamol, zinc and vitamin C tablets, among other medicines. The flow of people purchasing such medicines has surged in recent days."

## "One Nation, All Humiliation": Mamata Banerjee on meeting with PM

**KOLKATA, 20 MAY [NDTV]:** Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee today accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of bypassing the federal structure and humiliating Chief Ministers of states at a meeting today. The Prime Minister, she said, did not offer any financial support or even allow any Chief Minister to speak. "This was not a one-way communication... it was one way humiliation... One nation, all humiliation," said Ms Banerjee who was part of several meetings on Covid and had skipped a few.

"Is the Prime Minister so insecure that he didn't want to listen to the Chief Ministers? Why is he so scared? If he didn't want to hear the Chief Ministers why call us? He let some District Magistrates speak and insulted the Chief Ministers," said Ms Banerjee, who came to power in Bengal for a third straight term recently after an all-out battle that was seen as a direct fight between her and the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister, she said, never asked about the availability of beds, vaccine or oxygen or about the status of the black fungus infection in Covid patients. "We are embarrassed, ashamed," she repeated, pointing out that she had gone to meeting prepared to flag several issues. Accusing the Prime



Minister of being "arrogant" and "casual", she said: "So many states were represented. No one was allowed to speak. What do they think? Are we bonded labourers or puppets? Only they matter? They are completely demolishing the federal structure." The 66-year-old, seen as one of the most powerful opposition leaders after her stupendous victory in the assembly elections in face of the BJP's mighty election machinery, repeatedly underscored what she called "insult" to the country's federal structure. "I am not speaking on behalf of all chief ministers. But what is happening is... dictatorship, like martial law is going on," added the Chief Minister, who, in an unprecedented step by the Central Bureau of Investigation, was made party to the Narada bribery case and accused of creating "terror". Two of her ministers were arrested in the case on Monday after Governor Jagdeep Dhankar had given a clearance to put them on trial. Ms Baner-

jee and her party have accused the CBI of ignoring proper procedures. The Chief Minister alluded to the issue today, saying, "When some things happened in our state, they sent central teams. How many central teams were sent to Uttar Pradesh?" "The UP situation... with bodies flowing in rivers... is a very serious situation," she said, adding "We are a riverine country. To keep no record (of Covid) they polluted the Ganga... and they say nothing has happened in UP. What they have done is demolishing Ganga Mai. Nature will not forgive you". She also accused the Central government of "making buildings and statues, breaking this, building that" - seen as a reference to the Central Vista project in the heart of Delhi -- when "young people are dying". "On this day 10 years ago, I took oath as the Chief Minister for the first time to serve the people of West Bengal as we embarked on a new path for the state's de-

velopment... I'm grateful to Maa-Mati-Manush for always blessing me with their trust. I pledge to take Bangla to even greater heights," added Ms Banerjee. The rebuttal came quickly from Suvendu Adhikari, Ms Banerjee's aide turned arch-rival who has bested her in the battle for Nandigram. "Today, our respected CM @MamataOfficial has once again shown her total disinterest in administration. True to her style, she has politicised a meeting Hon'ble PM @narendramodi held with District Officials, where grassroots level practices to fight COVID-19 were being discussed," Mr Adhikari tweeted. In another of a series of tweets, Mr Adhikari said, "To state clearly, PM @narendramodi has held numerous meetings with Chief Ministers in the last few months, how many did @MamataOfficial attend? ZERO. Now, she hijacks a PM-DM meet to say she was denied a chance to speak. Shameful!" "5 out of the 7 District Officials who spoke today belonged to non-BJP ruled states of Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and AP.Cooperative federalism is the firm commitment of PM @narendramodi unlike CM @MamataOfficial who only believes in confrontational federalism," read another tweet.

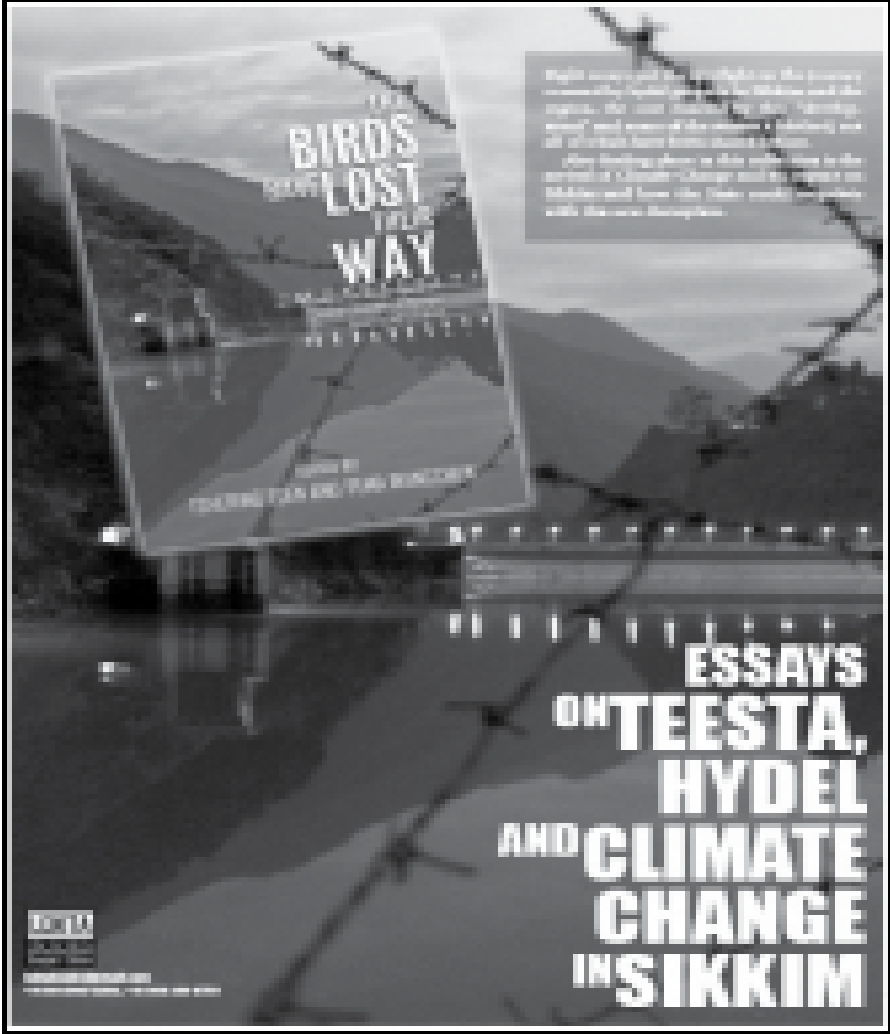
## 134 fresh COVID cases reported in Ladakh, one more dies

**LEH, MAY 20 (PTI):** Ladakh recorded 134 fresh COVID-19 cases that took the total infection tally to 16,918 while one person died taking the number of fatalities to 171, officials said on Thursday. As many as 127 people were discharged from hospitals after recovering from the infection, pushing the total number of recoveries to 15,158 in the union territory, officials said. Of the 134 new cases, 124 were reported from Leh and 10 cases from Kargil, they said. With the death of one



patient from COVID reported from Kargil, the total number of deaths in Ladakh has reached 171, which includes 123 in Leh and 48 in Kargil. Out of the total discharged cases, 96 patients were

from Leh and 31 from Kargil, officials said. With this, the total number of active cases in Ladakh has come down to 1,589, which includes 1,328 in Leh district and 261 in Kargil district, they said.





# Hamilton, Verstappen continue F1 rivalry at Monaco GP

**MONACO, MAY 20 (AP):** After four close races between Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton and title rival Max Verstappen, the tension looks set to keep rising at this weekend's Monaco Grand Prix.

Hamilton is aiming for a record eighth F1 title to move one ahead of Michael Schumacher, and he leads the championship by 14 points ahead of Verstappen, who is seeking his first.

Hamilton leads Verstappen 3-1 in wins so far, but each race has seen them finish 1-2. Verstappen could have won the first in Bahrain only to give position back after going outside of track limits near the end.

At the next one, Hamilton damaged his Mercedes trying to fend off Verstappen's superb start into the first corner of the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix.

The nature of the wheel-to-wheel racing has thrilled fans, but also prompted Hamilton to say he's been fortunate to avoid crashes with the daredevil Verstappen.

"I think I have done well to avoid all the incidents," Hamilton said on Wednesday.

"But we have 19 more (races left) and we could connect. He feels he perhaps has a lot to prove. I'm not in the same boat."



Hamilton has already sealed a record-extending 100th pole position and is aiming for his 99th win. He puts his longevity down to a calm approach.

"I am more long-term, it's a marathon-not-a-sprint sort of mentality, which is ultimately why I have the stats I have," the 36-year-old British driver said.

"I will continue with that and do everything to make sure we avoid connecting (on the track)."

But as the youngest winner of an F1 race at 18, and with 11 race wins already at the age of 23, Verstappen did not take

very kindly to Hamilton's claim that he's trying to impress people. "I have nothing to prove and avoiding contact goes both ways. So we have (both) done well," the Dutch driver said.

"We race hard, we avoided the contact both sides. Let's hope we can keep doing that and keep racing hard against each other."

Verstappen has never won the Monaco GP but expects Red Bull to be strong in Saturday's qualifying on a track where taking pole is crucial, since overtaking is extremely hard on the sinewy 3.4-kilometer

(2.1-mile) street circuit. "We've had a competitive start, so I just hope that it's going to be the same here," Verstappen said.

"I'm sure that we will have a competitive car."

Hamilton expects a strong challenge from Red Bull, which won in Monaco three years ago and has increased its speed since then even though it still falls short of Mercedes.

"This is a track that has always been strong for them and given how close the gap is between us, you can imagine this weekend they could be ahead," Hamilton said. "But we are going to do ev-

erything we can to make sure that is not the case."

Hamilton's teammate Valtteri Bottas has taken one pole position but has yet to challenge for a win this season, and the Finnish driver's title hopes already look bleak in what could be his last season with Mercedes.

He is third overall with 47 points, exactly half the tally of Hamilton, who won the previous race here in 2019.

It was cancelled last year because of the coronavirus but some fans will be allowed in this time, starting at Thursday's two practice sessions.

## Govt to provide medical and accident insurance to more than 13,000 athletes and coaches

**NEW DELHI, MAY 20 (PTI):** The government has decided to widen its medical insurance cover for sportspersons by increasing the number of beneficiary athletes and including coaches and support staff from this year in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said on Thursday.

The SAI said with this decision, the coverage would increase to more than 13,000 athletes, coaches and support staff.

Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said the well-being of athletes, coaches and support staff are his ministry's priority and the decision is in line with that objective.

"We want to ensure that all our athletes and contractual staff have health cover during these difficult times and even after," he said. "They are

our national assets."

All national campers, probable national campers, Khelo India athletes and junior campers training at SAI Centres of Excellence across the country will be provided an insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh each. Earlier the cover was limited to only the elite athletes.

"This is new because this is for all contractual coaches and staff who were not covered before," an official source told PTI.

The health insurance also includes Rs 25 lakh accident or death coverage.

"Through this initiative, we are ensuring that all national-level athletes have insurance cover not just during the national camps but throughout the year," Rijiju said.

"We have significantly raised the insurance cover for Khelo India

scholars and junior athletes up to Rs 5 lakh per athlete each year," he added.

This policy will come into effect irrespective of the dates of a national camp and even if camps have not been in operation this year.

"This will ensure continuity in the insurance and will provide much needed support to national-level athletes, coaches and support staff associated with National camps."

SAI has asked the National Sporting Federations (NSFs) to identify athletes and support staff for inclusion in the insurance scheme.

Data of those covered under this insurance scheme will be stored in the National Sports Repository System to "create a transparent, easy to access process which can be monitored regularly."

## Shkodran Mustafi among 10 to leave relegated Schalke



**GELSENKIRCHEN, GERMANY (AP):** World Cup-winning defender Shkodran Mustafi is among 10 players who will leave relegated Bundesliga club Schalke in a clearout at the end of the season.

Schalke said Thursday that Mustafi is one of four players with expiring contracts that won't be renewed. The Germany defender was signed from Arsenal in January with a short-term contract after failing to get

game time in the Premier League. He was the replacement for central defender Ozan Kabak, who was loaned to Liverpool.

The other Schalke players with expiring contracts are former Tottenham midfielder Nabil Bentaleb and wingers Alessandro Schöpf and Steven Skrzybski. Relegation activates clauses allowing defender Bastian Oczipka and former Paris Saint-Germain

midfielder Benjamin Stambouli to leave. Schalke said four more players will depart when their loan deals end.

The list of on-loan players leaving did not, however, include defender Sead Kolasinac, who is owned by Arsenal. He has been captain for the second half of Schalke's season and German media have reported the club is hoping to keep him for next season in the second division.

## Indian women to play maiden pink ball Test in Australia later this year

**NEW DELHI, MAY 20 (PTI):** The Indian women's cricket team will compete in its maiden day-night Test when it tours Australia later this year, BCCI secretary Jay Shah said on Thursday.

Shah made the announcement on his twitter handle, stating that the move was part of the BCCI's commitment to promoting the women's game.

"Taking forward our commitment towards women's cricket, I am extremely pleased to announce that Team India @BCCIwomen will play in their first-ever pink ball day-night Test later this year in Australia," Shah tweeted.

The Indian women's team, which will play its first Test in seven years from June 16 in England, will compete in another one during the tour of Australia. The team will also play ODI and T20 International matches Down Under.

While the dates of the tour are yet to be announced, it is likely to be in mid-September.

India last played a Test against Australia in 2006.

The pink ball Test between India and Australia will be only the second such match to be held in the history of women's cricket.

The only day-night women's game played so far was between Australia and England at Sydney in November 2017. The match ended in a draw.

## Liverpool back in Premier League's top 4 with 1 round left

**LONDON, MAY 20 (AP):** There was no need for a goalscoring goalkeeper this time.

Liverpool's latest win in the Premier League 3-0 at Burnley on Wednesday was far more routine than the one secured by goalkeeper Alisson's sensational stoppage-time header at the weekend.

It was no less vital, though.

Liverpool will head into Sunday's final round back in the top four, if only on goal difference, as last season's run-away champions look to clinch qualification for the Champions League a possibility that looked so unlikely a month ago.

With two qualifying spots up for grabs to join Manchester City and Manchester United, Chelsea is in third place on 67 points, one more than both Liverpool and fifth-place Leicester.

Liverpool has a superior goal difference to Leicester of four, so any kind of victory over Crystal Palace should be enough for Jurgen Klopp's team to finish in the top four. Leicester closes the season at home to Tottenham and will need to pile up the goals if Chelsea and Liverpool win.

Chelsea is away to Aston Villa.

Since a 1-1 home draw with Newcastle on April 24 that left Klopp fearing the worst, Liverpool has won four straight games against Southampton, Manchester United, West Bromwich Albion and now Burnley



to reel in Leicester. Three days after Alisson's winner at West Brom, it was another Brazil international Roberto Firmino who put Liverpool ahead at Turf Moor by converting a cross from Andrew Robertson in the 43rd minute.

Nat Phillips, the reserve center back filling in so admirably amid a glut of injuries in that position, scored the second goal with a header from Sadio Mane's cross in the 52nd. Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain added a third in the 88th.

The other thing to be decided on the final day of the season will be which teams qualify for UEFA's minor European competitions, the Europa League and the newly created Europa Conference League.

West Ham is in a good position to finish sixth and qualify for the Europa League after beating West Brom 3-1.

Seventh-place Tottenham lost 2-1 to Aston Villa, in what could be Harry Kane's final home game for the club, and

is now tied on points with Everton, which beat Wolverhampton 1-0 at home thanks to Richarlison's header.

Arsenal is a point further back in ninth after a 3-1 win at Crystal Palace.

Newcastle won 1-0 at home to Sheffield United in Wednesday's other game.

**KANE FAREWELL?** Kane looked emotional after the final whistle of the Villa game as he walked around the field away from his teammates at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, applauding the fans who had stayed behind.

The England captain has reportedly asked to be sold after becoming unhappy with the lack of progress at the club. The manner of the defeat to Villa highlighted that, with the team jeered by supporters who were back in the stadium in small numbers after an easing of pandemic restrictions.

Villa recovered from conceding an eighth-minute goal by Steven Bergwijn to score twice

before halftime, with Tottenham left back Sergio Reguilon slicing in a comical own-goal and then twice failing to clear to allow Ollie Watkins to run through and finish.

There was worse to come Wednesday for Tottenham, with Arsenal winning at Palace an hour later to close within a point of its north London rival. Tottenham visits Leicester and Arsenal hosts Brighton on the final day.

Gabriel Martinelli and Nicolas Pepe, with his second of the match, scored in second-half stoppage time to secure the win for Arsenal. Christian Benteke netted for Palace for the fourth straight game.

**CLOSE TO EUROPE** West Ham only needs a point at home to Southampton to secure sixth place and a spot in the Europa League. That would mark the team's highest position in the league since 1999. West Ham came from behind thanks to goals by Tomas Soucek, Angelo Ogbonna and Michail Antonio.

## Women's International Champions Cup pairings announced



**PORTLAND, MAY 20 (AP):** Barcelona and Lyon will meet to open the Women's International Champions Cup in August, while the host Portland Thorns will play the Houston Dash.

The winners of both matches will also meet, with the losers playing in a third-place game at Portland's Providence Park.

The tournament, to be held August 18-21 and broadcast on the ESPN networks, will be the

third WICC. Last year's event was cancelled because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Lyon, the 2020 UEFA Champions League winner, is the defending champion from the 2019 WICC. The Thorns qualified for the tournament as winners of the NWSL's fall series, while the Dash won last summer's Challenge Cup in Utah.

Barcelona, the 2020 Spanish league leaders, won this year's Champions League final against

Chelsea. New York-based Relevant Sports Group, which puts on the International Champions Cup for men's club teams each summer, added the women's competition in 2018. The 2019 edition was held in Cary, North Carolina, and hosted by the North Carolina Courage. The inaugural event was held in the Miami area.

Relevant plans to add two additional teams to the women's tournament next year and eight clubs in 2023.



## Israel unleashes strikes after vowing to press on in Gaza

**GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP (AP):** Israel unleashed another wave of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Thursday, killing at least one Palestinian and wounding several, as it pushed ahead despite U.S. calls to wind down the offensive against Gaza's militant Hamas rulers, who have fired thousands of rockets at Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing mounting pressure from his country's closest ally but appears determined to inflict maximum damage on Hamas in a war that could help save his political career. Still, diplomatic efforts to negotiate a ceasefire gathered pace, and a senior Hamas official said he expected a truce soon.

Explosions shook Gaza City and orange flares lit up the pre-dawn sky, with bombing raids also reported in the central town of Deir al-Balah and the southern town of Khan Younis. As the sun rose, residents surveyed the rubble from at least five family homes destroyed in Khan Younis. There were also heavy airstrikes on a commercial thoroughfare in Gaza City.

The Israeli military said it struck at least three homes of Hamas commanders in Khan Younis and another in Rafah, targeting "military infrastructure," as well as a weapons storage unit at a home in Gaza City.

An Israeli airstrike smashed into the Khawald family's two-story house in Khan Younis, destroying it. The 11 residents, who were sleeping outside of the home out of fear, were all wounded and hospitalized, said Shaker al-Khozondar, a neighbor.

Shrapnel also hit own home, killing his aunt and wounding her daughter and two other relatives, he said. Al-Khozondar spoke from his aunt Hoda's bedroom where she had died. The windows were shattered and the bed pillows and rubble were stained with blood.

Weam Fares, a spokesman for a nearby hospital, confirmed the death and said at least 10 people were wounded in strikes overnight.

Heavy airstrikes also pummeled a street in the Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza, destroying ramshackle homes with corrugated metal roofs nearby. The military said it struck two underground launchers in the camp used to fire rockets at Tel Aviv.

"Never in my life have I seen such destruction," said Ibrahim Afana, 44. "We didn't even have three minutes to put a slipper on our foot," he said, describing his family's panicked flight after they were awakened by the bombing. He said the army had called some residents to warn them about the impending strikes. There were no reports of casualties.

The current round of fighting between Israel and Hamas began May 10, when the militant group fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem after days of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint site sacred to Jews and Muslims.

**BANGKOK (AP):** Chinese citizens living in Thailand began being vaccinated on Thursday as part of China's global campaign to inoculate its nationals living and working abroad.

China recently donated 500,000 vaccine doses, and Thailand agreed in turn to inoculate Chinese nationals as it slowly rolls out shots for its own citizens to contain a coronavirus surge that has sickened tens of thousands in the past two months.

It was unclear how many of the 150,000 Chinese citizens living in Thailand will be inoculated under Beijing's "Spring Sprout" program in this round of inoculations. China has so far supplied millions of doses to the country, most of which Thailand purchased.

The Thai government has said it will vaccinate Thais before inoculating most other foreigners, regardless of risk factors or age.

Just over 2% of Thailand's 70 million people have received a first vaccine dose and about 1% have received a second. The government hopes to inoculate 70% of its people by the end of the year, but has been criticized for taking too long to start vaccinating.

China's official People's Daily newspaper says more than 500,000 Chinese citizens in more than 120 countries have benefited from the "Spring Sprout" vaccine program since it was launched in March.



In downtown Bangkok, a Chinese volunteer with a white mask, transparent shield and blue gloves stood in front of a red banner reading "Spring Sprout Action" flanked by the flags of China and Thailand at a vaccination center.

A dozen people waited to get a cursory medical check as nurses, accompanied by a translator, gave Chinese-made Sinovac shots in another room.

"I am happy and proud to be able to get a vaccine on day 1 organized by my government," said Zhang Xiaohong, 40, who runs a logistics company in Thailand. He said he believes the Chinese government cares about its people.

Qin Qing, a 39-year-old real estate broker in Bangkok, said she was a bit nervous before getting the shot and felt slightly dizzy afterward.

"I am grateful for my country and the embassy, and people who help to make it happen, from airline staff who fly the vaccines here to Thai medical workers," she said.

Thailand had largely contained coronavirus cases last year by closing its borders, enforcing mandatory quarantines and actively tracing contacts of those found to be infected. The measures devastated its lucrative tourism industry but kept the pandemic at bay, for the most part, until early April.

Then a surge that began in high-end nightspots in central Bangkok spread rapidly as people were allowed to travel during a mid-April national holiday.

On Thursday, health authorities reported 2,636 new

cases and 25 deaths for a total of 119,585 infections and 703 deaths since the pandemic began. Of that number, 90,722 confirmed cases and 609 deaths have been recorded since April 1.

A partial lockdown in recent weeks has made limited headway in containing outbreaks, especially in Bangkok and in prisons.

The capital has been hit especially hard, with thousands of cases surfacing in slums, crowded low-income housing and camps housing construction workers.

Thailand has a population

of about 70 million. More than 2.5 million are from neighboring countries, including Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Many are employed on construction sites and in factories.

Chinese nationals are the most numerous foreigners living in Thailand who are not from neighboring countries. They are the only foreigners being vaccinated under the "Spring Sprout" campaign.

NatapanuNopakun, deputy Foreign Ministry spokesman, said Thursday there are around 1.3 million legal migrant workers in Bangkok and its vicinity and more than 1 million illegal ones across the country. The Labor Ministry intends to inoculate them as well because their high mobility is a risk factor in curbing infections.

Another 200,000 foreigners — from Australia, Japan, Europe, the United States and elsewhere — are mostly professionals and retirees. For now, they can only obtain COVID-19 shots by traveling overseas and would face lengthy, expensive quarantines on their return.

Groups representing Americans living in Thailand sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week asking the government to supply some of the millions of unused vaccine doses available in the U.S. to inoculate American citizens in Thailand.

# Chinese authorities order video denials by Uyghurs of abuses

**URUMQI, CHINA (AP):** China has highlighted an unlikely series of videos this year in which Uyghur men and women deny U.S. charges that Beijing is committing human rights violations against their ethnic group. In fact, a text obtained by the AP shows that the videos are part of a government campaign that raises questions about the willingness of those filmed.

Chinese state media have published dozens of the videos praising the Communist Party and showing Uyghurs angrily denouncing former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for declaring a genocide in the far west Xinjiang region. The videos, which officials have insisted are spontaneous outpourings of emotion, have also featured prominently in a series of government news conferences held for foreign media.

But the text obtained by AP is the first concrete confirmation that the videos are anything but grassroots. Sent in January to government offices in the northern city of Karamay, the text told each office to find one Uyghur fluent in Mandarin to film a one-minute video in response to Pompeo's "anti-China remarks." "Express a clear position on Pompeo's remarks, for example: I firmly oppose Pompeo's anti-Chinese remarks, and I am very angry about them," the text said. "Express your feelings of loving the party, the country and Xinjiang (I am Chinese, I love my motherland, I am happy at work and in life, and so on)."

While it's not impossible officials were able to find Uyghurs willing to be in such a public relations campaign, China's track record in Xinjiang and its documented abuses of Uyghurs have led many experts to conclude it's more likely those in the videos were forced to take part.

"There's something instinctive about these videos which feels ingenuine, but the significance is that there's hard evidence here that the Chinese government is requesting these kinds of videos," said Albert Zhang, a researcher at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute who recently coauthored a report on Beijing's disinformation campaign on Xinjiang.

Xinjiang spokesperson XuGuixiang did not directly deny the authenticity of the text, but said it didn't follow the usual format of state orders and that his understanding was that "the government has never issued this kind of notice or made this kind of request." He suggested the videos were made volun-

tarily. "This didn't require government organization. Many among the masses made this totally spontaneously," Xu said in a recent interview. "Pompeo's anti-China remarks arose the intense resentment of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang."

Beijing is increasingly under fire for its campaign of mass detention, cultural destruction and forced assimilation of Uyghurs and other largely Muslim minorities native to Xinjiang. Western governments have levied sanctions against top Chinese officials, while the U.S. government has banned imports of cotton and tomatoes from Xinjiang, citing concerns over forced labor.

TahirImin, a Uyghur activist who fled China in 2017, said the videos are almost certainly state-orchestrated and coerced, given that information in Xinjiang is heavily censored.

"People don't know who Pompeo is or what he's saying," Imin said. "How would they know what Mike Pompeo is saying about the Uyghurs?"

The AP was unable to authenticate the text independently. However, friends of FirdavsDrinov, the man who sent a screenshot of the text to the AP, said he had obtained it from a friend with family working for the Karamay government. Three days after he sent it, police detained Drinov and the friend, holding a special meeting on how to punish him, two other friends said.

In a fax, the Xinjiang government confirmed that Drinov had been arrested, saying he was suspected of "fabricating and posting fake information" and "poisoning and bewitching ignorant groups and instigating splittism." Referring to Drinov by his legal Mandarin name, Chen Haoyu, it said he is awaiting trial in a detention center and that his "rights will be protected according to the law." The fax did not answer a question about whether Drinov's detention was linked to the screenshot.

His friend Vincent Gao called the charges nonsense, saying Drinov, who is biracial, opposed Xinjiang independence and believed in friendship between Uyghurs and Han Chinese, the country's dominant ethnic group. Gao added that Drinov was very wary of fanatic extremism.

"He's never said or done anything to split the country," said Gao, a PhD student in Italian at Yale University in the U.S. "He was very proud of his Han heritage. There

is no rational reason why he would support separatism." Drinov is a linguist who harbored dreams of obtaining a doctorate in the United States despite never having gone to college. Fluent in Mandarin, English, Uzbek, Uyghur, Russian, and French, he had at one point trained to represent China at the International Linguistics Olympiad in 2015.

Drinov maintained an open presence on Western social media platforms banned in China such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. He had run into trouble with authorities before.

In December 2019, he was put in a detention center for 15 days for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," a vague charge often used against people the ruling Communist Party sees as threatening. Police grilled him after he posted internal documents about the government's crackdown in Xinjiang from a New York Times story on one of his Chinese social media accounts, according to texts he sent to Wang Tonghe, a computational linguist who befriended Drinov online.

Experts say the videos of supportive Uyghurs ordered up by authorities are part of a broader state-coordinated disinformation campaign aimed at whitewashing their policies in Xinjiang.

Dozens of new Twitter and Tiktok accounts promoting those policies have cropped up. Some purport to be run by Uyghurs from Xinjiang, even though merely downloading those apps has landed others in detention. The accounts share videos promoting Xinjiang's lush landscapes and snow-capped mountains, depicting an idyllic, carefree life at total odds with accounts from hundreds of Uyghurs and Kazakhs who have fled the region in recent years.

Zhang's Australian Strategic Policy Institute report traced some of the social media videos to a company funded by the Xinjiang government. It found that many of the accounts were likely to be inauthentic and state-linked, though it could not prove so definitively.

"I think it's interesting, the amount of resources the Chinese government is willing to use to produce this content and disseminate it," Zhang said. "The scale and the persistence of it is new and sort of concerning."

Many of the glowing Uyghur social media posts have been shared by a slew of new accounts opened by Chinese officials and state media outlets in recent years.

## EU ministers seek to cement trade ties with Biden team



**BRUSSELS (AP):** European Union and U.S. top trade officials on Thursday will seek to further cement recent advances in settling some key differences that have soured trans-Atlantic relations over the past few years.

EU trade ministers will have a virtual meeting with U.S. trade representative Katherine Tai in the wake of breakthroughs in the longstanding dispute over airplane production subsidies and a fight over steel tariffs.

"It is spring here in Brussels and there is a spirit of optimism," German Trade Minister Peter Altmaier said. It stood in sharp contrast with the four years of divisive relations under President Donald Trump.

U.S. President Joe Biden will visit the EU next month seeking to further increase cooperation on anything from battling the COVID-19 pandemic and confronting a surging China as a disruptive rival.

"We have the chance to put global trade policy on a new footing," Altmaier said.

Germany's optimism was boosted further when the Biden admin-

istration on Wednesday spared the German company overseeing a natural gas pipeline from Russia into the EU, underscoring how Biden wants to mend relations with a key ally that were unsettled during the Trump administration.

Even if Germany is the juggernaut of the EU's economies, France is its strategic partner in dealing with Washington, and French Foreign Trade Minister Franck Riester equally lauded "the very positive signals coming from the United States."

And the European Union has done its part too. Just on Monday, it hit the pause button and temporarily suspended some upcoming measures at the heart of a steel tariff dispute. With it, the bloc wouldn't increase some tariffs targeting U.S. products, including Harley-Davidson motorcycles and bourbon.

And they agree to address together the global steel and aluminum excess capacity, where they see China as a common adversary.

It already followed the four-month suspension of tariffs used in the longstanding Airbus-Boeing dispute.





**POWER WALK!** The Bling Empire star, Jaime Xie looks super stylish while heading to a meeting in Los Angeles.

## Founder of TikTok's Chinese owner stepping down as CEO

BEIJING (AP): The founder of TikTok's Chinese owner said Thursday he will give up his job as CEO to focus on longer-term initiatives, a step that comes amid uncertainty over whether the Biden administration will force the sale of the popular short video service's U.S. arm.

Zhang Yiming said Liang Rubo, a co-founder, will succeed him as ByteDance Ltd. CEO. Zhang said leaving day-to-day management will "enable me to have greater impact on longer-term initiatives," but gave no details of his next role.

ByteDance is waiting to find out whether the Biden administration will revive former President Donald Trump's efforts to force the sale of TikTok's U.S. arm. Trump said the service was a security threat because it gathered too much personal information about millions of American users.

Regulators also are stepping up anti-monopoly enforcement against Chinese e-commerce giants and other internet companies, though there is no indication ByteDance has been targeted.

Zhang founded ByteDance in 2012. Its first

short-video platform, Douyin, was launched in 2016. TikTok was launched outside China the following year. The company said last year that TikTok had 700 million users globally.



ByteDance, headquartered in Beijing, says it operates in 150 markets and has more than 60,000 employees.

The Trump administration's plan called for ByteDance to be required to sell TikTok's U.S. arm to the software maker Oracle and retailer Walmart. The Biden administration, which took office in January, suspended that while it reviewed potential security threats posed by Chinese tech companies.

with the yearning to learn and grow. So, where do you feel inspired to pour your time and energy in the coming days? What are the subjects that captivate your interest? Think of this as a wonderful time to take that deep dive into the unknown.

Tip: Use your time away from the matrix to learn and grow in every way.

Cancer:

You've always been a giver and nurturer at heart, Cancer, and the collective needs your services now more than ever before. Think of yourself as a conduit. A conduit for hope, a conduit for love and a conduit for miracles. Removing the 'I' from the equation will help you give back in the best possible way. The good news is, you don't have to do it all by yourself. The Universe is offering you the support of a co-conspirator who is just as invested in the mission.

Tip: You are a conduit for hope, love, and miracles.

Leo:

Often, we externalise the enemy. We perceive the roadblocks without as a hindrance to our growth. But, this is far from the truth, Leo. In most cases, it's the darkness within that continues to blind us and bind us. It is the darkness within that keeps us from bringing more light into the world. But, all of that is about to change in the coming days. The fires of transformation are burning bright

## Billy Porter reveals he was diagnosed HIV positive 14 years ago

**LOS ANGELES, MAY 20 (PTI):** Actor Billy Porter has shared that he has been living with HIV for 14 years and decided to make the revelation now as he hopes to free himself from "that shame in silence". The 51-year-old actor, who made history by winning an Emmy in 2019 for his role as Pray Tell, a character who is HIV-positive, on the acclaimed FX series "Pose", said he used the part as a "surrogate" to tell his real-life story.

"The truth is the healing. And I hope this frees me. I hope this frees me so that I can experience real, unadulterated joy, so that I can experience peace, so that I can experience intimacy, so that I can have sex without shame. This is for me," Porter told The Hollywood Reporter in an interview published Wednesday.

He became the first openly gay black man to be nominated and win in any lead acting category at the Primetime Emmys.

"This is what HIV-positive looks like now. I survived so that I could tell the story. That's what I'm here for. I'm the vessel, and emotionally that was sufficient -- until it wasn't. It's time to grow up and move on because shame is destructive -- and if not dealt with, it can destroy everything in its path," the screen and stage actor added.

He hit rock bottom in 2007, Porter said, when he was diagnosed with Type II diabetes, filed for bankruptcy and then diagnosed with HIV.

"The shame of that time compounded with the shame that had already (accumulated) in my life silenced me, and I have lived with that shame in silence for

14 years," he continued.

As someone who grew up in the Pentecostal church with a religious family, the shame of being different grew manifold by his HIV diagnosis, Porter said.

And that is why it was difficult for him to tell his mother, who had already

something was wrong, so he "ripped the Band-Aid off" and told her.

"She said, 'You've been carrying this around for 14 years? Don't ever do this again. I'm your mother, I love you no matter what. And I know I didn't understand how to do that early on, but it's



been through a lot due to his queer status. "For a long time, everybody who needed to know, knew -- except for my mother. I was trying to have a life and a career, and I wasn't certain I could if the wrong people knew. It would just be another way for people to discriminate against me in an already discriminatory profession."

But during the coronavirus-induced lockdown with his husband, entrepreneur Adam Smith, in Long Island, forced the actor to confront his fears.

"Then I woke up on the last day of (shooting) 'Pose'; I was writing in my gratitude journal and my mama popped into my head. I was like, 'Let me just call her,'" he said.

His mother had an inkling that

been decades now.' And it's all true. It's my own shame," he said.

After telling his mother, the actor told the truth to the cast and crew of "Pose". Porter said he goes to the doctor every three months. "I'm the healthiest I've been in my entire life... So it's time to let all that go and tell a different story. There's no more stigma -- let's be done with that. It's time."

The actor currently stars in the third and final season of "Pose" and will next be seen playing a genderless Fairy Godmother in "Cinderella", starring Camila Cabello in the title role, slated to be released on Amazon Prime in September.

Porter is also writing a memoir and working on a documentary about his life for Netflix.

## ASAP Rocky says he is dating Rihanna

**LOS ANGELES, MAY 20 (PTI):** Rapper ASAP Rocky has announced that he is in a relationship with singer-songwriter Rihanna. The 32-year-old recording artiste, whose real name is RakimMayers, described the multiple Grammy winner as "the love of my life" and "my lady" in an interview with GQ magazine.

Reports of the couple being in a relationship go back to the year 2013, when ASAP Rocky supported Rihanna, 33, on her "Diamonds World Tour". They also featured in the rapper's 2013 video for his song "Fashion Killa". Asked what it was like to be in a relation-

ship, ASAP Rocky said, "When you know, you know." "She amounts to probably, like, a million of the other ones," he said, adding "She's the one." As per the article, the rapper hinted Rihanna, whose full name is Robyn Rihanna Fenty, has listened to and was responding to his new album, which will feature Morrissey.

She also has "absolutely" influenced the new music, ASAP Rocky said. "It's just a different point of view," he added. According to the interview, the couple tries not to be photographed together by the paparazzi. Rihanna is yet to publicly respond to the article.

## A biopic on Cher in the works

**LOS ANGELES, MAY 20 (PTI):** Music icon Cher is getting a biopic with Oscar-winning filmmaker Eric Roth set to pen the script. Cher, who turned 75 on Thursday, shared the news of the biopic on Twitter. Often referred as the 'Goddess of the Pop' in the media, Cher is known for her decades long career in music, television and films with multiple albums and movies such as "Mask", "The Witches of Eastwick" and her Oscar-winning role in "Moonstruck". Producers Judy Graymer and Gary Goetzman,

who backed both "Mamma Mia!" films, are set to produce the project for the Universal. Roth's credits include "Forrest Gump" and "A Star is Born" and the script for Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon". He worked with Cher on 1987 thriller "Suspect".

As one of the world's best-selling music artistes, Cher has already sold 100 million records. Other than her Best Actress Academy Award, she has also won a Grammy Award, an Emmy Award and three Golden Globe trophies.

## Sara Ramirez joins 'Sex and the City' revival



**LOS ANGELES, MAY 20 (PTI):** HBO Max's revival series of "Sex and the City" has cast "Grey's Anatomy" star Sara Ramirez, a non-binary actor, as a series regular.

Ramirez, best known for her role of doctor Callie Torres in "Grey's Anatomy", will join the new series as Che Diaz, a queer, non-binary podcaster in the series titled "And Just Like That". Sarah Jessica Parker's Carrie Bradshaw is regular guests on Diaz's podcast.

Diaz is the first non-binary character featured in "Sex and the City" and Ramirez is also the first openly non-binary actor to appear in the popular franchise, according to Collider.

The actor's other credits include Lady of the Lake in

Broadway's production of "Monty Python's Spamalot" and in the political drama "Madam Secretary" as policy advisor Kat Sandoval.

The new 10-episode revival series will bring back cast members Parker, Cynthia Nixon, and Kristin Davis from the original series with filming slated to begin in New York City this summer.

Kim Cattrall, who famously played Samantha Jones in the original "Sex and the City" series and the two film adaptation, is not returning to the revival.

The original series, created by Darren Star, was based on a novel of the same name by Candace Bushnell and ran from 1998 to 2004. The film adaptations were released in theatres in 2008 and 2010, respectively.

Aries:

Take a good look at the ideas you are streaming directly from a higher source of consciousness. None of these ideas are random. They are all undoubtedly in alignment with your sacred purpose and a part of the soul contract you signed before you made your way to the earthly realm. So, trust your instinct and take the next step without delay. As you do, renounce that cloak of invisibility too. Oh, the places you will go, Aries!

Tip: Become aware of the divine ideas that are coming through.

Taurus:

It's not just about what you say, but about how you say it too. Tap into the gift of the gab, Taurus. Make a strong case for what you stand for and how you would like to be supported. The right dose of assertiveness and compassion will help you make the right impact. Some of you may be thinking about sharing your story publicly (without any filters). Others may feel inspired to take the motivational speaker route. Trust the guidance that is coming through from your higher self in this matter as it is leading you in the right direction.

Tip: The right dose of assertiveness and compassion will help you make the right impact.

Gemini:

You've always been a seeker, Gemini. A curious soul

and they promise to burn down all that is false within and without.

Tip: The fires of transformation are burning bright.

Virgo:

A big victory is on the cards, Virgo! The kind that will put you on the map for all the right reasons. Focus on tying the loose ends (even when you find yourself dragging your feet) and wrapping up the project at hand. This is a big day for those who are awaiting the result of a certain court case. Trust that the law is on your side, and justice will be served in the best possible way.

Tip: This is your big moment!

Libra:

While you are speaking your truth, are you speaking the "whole" truth? Something to think about, dear Libra. Chances are, you're protecting yourself, not the other person. Venusians who are in an open relationship, or something that can be best described as "complicated, are being asked to introspect on the question, 'How much space is too much space?' If this no-strings-attached business isn't working for you, it's best to have that conversation.

Tip: It's time to speak your truth loud and clear.

Scorpio:

Sometimes, the right opportunities come knocking at your door. At other times, you have to put on your

sexiest suit and go woo them into your world. Something tells us you've got all the right moves and you know how to use them to your advantage, Scorpio. Remember, action and initiative will pay off big time. So don't shy away from doing what's right for your career.

Tip: This is your chance to move to the next level.

Sagittarius:

You're a go-getter, Sagittarius. The kind of person who inspires others by simply being "you". Don't let something this insignificant throw you off. You have miles to go before you sleep, beautiful. Those who are on a creative journey will find that inspiration is all around them. It all comes down to harnessing the energy in a manner that serves your highest good. PS: We have no doubt that you will do what's right by you and your audience.

Tip: Stay in the energy of passion.

Capricorn:

There are people who focus on the quality of their product, and then there are people who focus on the package in which it is sold. Ah, the eternal 'book' versus 'cover' debate! But, it doesn't have to be a case of either-or, Capricorn. You can have both these aspects working for you. In fact, you should! Word for the wise: the foundation you have laid is already rock solid. Now, actively

work towards strengthening your public image. Baby, it's time to share your message—loud and proud!

Tip: Your public image needs your attention.

Aquarius:

Could it be, Aquarius, that you've been celebrating one aspect of yourself whilst secretly loathing the other? Could it be that your relationship with yourself can best be described as conditional? Where are you on your journey towards self-love and how do you feel called to hold space for inner transformation? Start by bringing a little more kindness and a little more compassion into the equation. As you do, let go of the judgements, one by one, as they serve no other purpose than to lower your vibration.

Tip: It's time to bring a little more love and a little more tenderness into the equation.

Pisces:

With great power comes great responsibility, Pisces. Nobody understands this better than you. Yes, there is a lot of weight on your shoulders at this moment. But, you'll find a way to do what's right for you and the collective. So, trust what you're being guided towards and take action without delay. As do you do, honour the pre-established rules. Now is not the time to take any kind of risks.

Tip: You have been entrusted with this responsibility for a reason.