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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Unchecked entry through Melli puts govt in a bind

CM CONVENES HIGH-LEVEL MEETING, SEEKS EXPLANATION FROM DGP; DC-SOUTH AND SECRETARY [COORDINATION] TO CONDUCT INDEPENDENT ENQUIRIES

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

When an administration which has been excessively strict in controlling the movement of people, especially when it comes to allowing entry into the State, is accused of subverting its own rules, public outrage is expected. And this is how allegations that a group of five people entered Sikkim through Melli check post on Wednesday without registration, securing a permit or going to quarantine was greeted in Sikkim. The indignation grew stronger as allegations were levelled that the seniormost officials of the State, those who sit on COVID task forces and frame rules, used their offices to bend the rules.

The group of five is reported to have come in from Siliguri to Jorethang to attend a funeral. They did so without entry permits or even registering at Melli checkpost and after some people noticed the recklessly special treatment extended to them, they complained.

Reports suggest that it was only after rather belligerent complaining that an FIR was registered on the incident at Jorethang Police Station under relevant sections of the Disaster Management Act on Wednesday.

By Thursday morning, allegations were flying drawing the offices of the Chief Secretary and DGP into the incident. By mid-day, there were too many WhatsApp forwards and Facebook winks in circulation to either wish the episode away or dismiss them off-handedly as sensationalism.

First, a press release arrived from the Chief Secretary's office denying his role in this incident and announcing an official enquiry into the allegations.

Later, and more significantly, the Chief Minister's Office issued a press communiqué as well, and this one was in a markedly sterner note.

The Chief Minister, this press release informed, has directed the Chief Secretary to seek an explanation from the Director



General of Police, Sikkim Police, A Shankar Rao, for his alleged role in the incident.

A press communiqué received from the CMO informs that the CM convened a high-level meeting with the Chief Secretary and Secretaries to the Departments of Transport, Coordination COVID-19, Land Revenue and CMO to discuss the incident.

The issue was discussed in detail, the release informs, and the Chief Minister gave strict instructions to the CS to investigate the matter in depth and submit a report to the Government for further action on those involved in the "illegal access."

Secretary, Coordination for COVID-19, Rinzing Chewang Bhutia, who has been despatched on a fact-finding task to Melli, Jorethang and Namchi has been directed to submit a report on the incident as soon as possible.

"Accordingly, on receipt of the said report the Government shall take appropriate action against those involved

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With 12 faujis testing positive, COVID breaks 100-mark in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

Twelve Army personnel stationed in Sikkim have tested positive for COVID-19. They were reportedly the primary contacts of an army jawan who had tested positive in Gangtok recently. All 13 have been shifted to the Army Hospital at Bagdogra, which is the COVID-19 dedicated hospital for the Army.

In his daily health bulletin on Thursday, Health Department DG-cum-Secretary, Dr Pempa T Bhutia informed that out of 174 samples tested on Wednesday, these 12 had tested positive.

He added that there were 19 primary contacts of the Army personnel who was the first from the force to test

positive in Sikkim and the 89th COVID patient detected here. Of these, 12 have tested positive.

Dr Bhutia further informed that the Army has also traced the secondary contacts of the patient and testing will be carried out on them as well. Meanwhile, he added that according to the Army all secondary contacts have already been shifted to the Army Hospital at Bagdogra as well.

With these 12 additions, Sikkim's tally of COVID-19 cases has risen to 101. Of these, 53 have already recovered and have been discharged from hospital.

He mentioned that there were 35 active cases admitted in isolation wards in Sikkim.

Google temporarily blocks access to banned apps in India

NEW DELHI, JUL 2 (PTI): Google on Thursday said it has temporarily blocked access to those apps that were still available on the Play Store in India even after the government banned on 59 apps this week.

"While we continue to review the interim orders from the Government of India,

we have notified the affected developers and have temporarily blocked access to the apps that remained available on the Play Store in India," a Google spokesperson said.

However, the spokesperson did not disclose details of the apps that Google had blocked.

According to sourc-

es, developers of many of the 59 banned apps had taken down their apps from Google Play Store voluntarily.

India on Monday banned 59 apps with Chinese links, including TikTok, UC Browser, SHAREit and WeChat, saying they were prejudicial to sovereignty, integrity and security of the country.

Five-bed Dialysis Unit inaugurated at Gyalshing District Hospital



GYALSHING, 02 JUL (IPR):

The District Hospital Gyalshing is now well equipped with the much awaited medical facilities for kidney dialysis. The Minister for Health and Family Welfare Dr. M. K. Sharma officially inaugurated the newly established Dialysis Unit in special presence of the Deputy Speaker (SLA) Sangay Lepcha, Minister-cum-Area MLA of Gyalshing Bermiok constituency Lok Nath Sharma; Minister PWD, Samdup Lepcha; Minister PHE, Bhim Hang Limboo; Minister Buildings and Housing, Sanjit Kharel; Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), Indra Hang Subba; Chairman State Bank of Sikkim, D. B. Gurung; Dr. Pempa T. Bhutia, DG-cum-Secretary; Karma R. Bonpo DC West; Tashi Wangyal, SP West and other dignitaries.

The newly established Dialysis Unit within the District Hospital Gyalshing

is comprised of five bedded unit along with the separate cabins for Doctors, Nurses, Isolation Room, Dialyzer Washing Room, Changing Room, Oxygen Plant and Reverse Osmosis Plant.

After the inauguration, a meeting was held at the conference hall of District Hospital Gyalshing. Health Minister Sharma expressed his happiness and congratulated the entire medical team for the new achievement of Dialysis Unit. Viewing the increasing numbers of patients of kidney dialysis, the State Government has initiated the genuinely required medical facilities and upgradation for basic medical services. Dr. Sharma also recalled the series of developmental works in District Hospital including the upgradation of services, improvement in basic medicine supply, establishment of life saving Blood Transfusion etc. ...

turn to pg 03

DC-East felicitates frontlines volunteers



GANGTOK, 02 JUL (IPR): District Collector, East, Raj Yadav, who also chairs the District Disaster Management Authority, felicitated volunteers who worked on the frontlines as sanitizer team during the COVID-19 pandemic in the district at the DC Office today.

The volunteers were provided with the certificates and cash awards on behalf of the entire State of Sikkim and were also conveyed with huge appreciation to the team for their excellent work done to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the district.

The teams who worked on the frontlines were Sikkim Organic Pest Control Sales and Services led by Suraj Gurung; Reshma Gurung and her team; and the Quick Response Team members from District Disaster Management Authority, East District.

DC-East felicitates frontlines volunteers

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VIEWPOINT

Rebuilding India involves Paradigmatic Leadership

VIEWPOINT

JIWAN RAI

History is replete with tragic incidents of self-congratulatory mankind bumping into the harsh reminder that our climactic feats are completely inadequate to tackle sudden catastrophes. However much we prepare, nature springs an ugly surprise, catching us off guard every single time. The brightest of human prospects pale into a feeble yellow flame when the darkness of unexpected catastrophes hit us. Soon we begin to grope about, trying frantically to find something to latch onto for help.

The 2020 Coronavirus pandemic has exposed our human downside in the same manner that a smart journalist blows the whistle on the defective side of a decidedly dishonest politician. Reeling under the deathly blow of the pandemic, we have repented of our incompetence. A microscopically tiny virus came along asking a few questions and we realized our political system was too complicated. Our scientific advancements were not up to the required standard. Our social and moral life was irredeemably hypocritical. Ironically, the

most advanced countries were the worst hit ones. India has its own humbling story. Just when we were celebrating the courageous countrywide blanket lockdown decision of our government, the infection rate began to soar, catapulting the country to the fourth position of the worst hit countries in the world.

Now, after 100 days of social isolation, here we are with over 6 lakh confirmed cases and almost 8000 Covid-19 deaths. The collateral damage in terms of the slumping economy, untold suffering of migrant workers, crumbling education, intensifying unemployment rate, massive hindrance in general developmental projects, etc. are ridiculously colossal. How long we will take to restructure and repair these damaged areas of national life is a question that needs to be answered dispassionately. India is one of the most badly damaged countries in the entire world and let us not forget that the border tensions with China and Nepal are intensifying our problem. India, right now, needs even stronger and wiser leadership than the one she needed at the dawn of Independence in

the late 40s to 50s.

For the Indian Congress party, the Nehruvian leadership was the hallmark of statesmanship. In a sense, post-colonial India is the outcome of Nehru's persistent push for socialism and secularism. Not that the twin ideas of socialism and secularism are passionately loved by contemporary India. We can forever debate the pros and cons of these ideas. But the feat of achieving a sustainable democracy in a country like India with its rich monarchical legacies has been one of the biggest Nehruvian legacies. The fact that people from the lowest socio-economic classes can become Prime Ministers and Presidents of the country is proof that democracy has worked in the country.

India has now come a long way. Despite being a country with one of the world's highest poverty and illiteracy rates, India is globally known for many other good reasons. Our IT, militaristic and diplomatic presence are nothing to be taken lightly. With all that we have today, India, under the Covid-19 pandemic is at a critical stage needing massive and

urgent rebuilding. The Modi leadership has a huge challenge before it. How he will lead from here on will decide how big this nation can grow to become. He will have to be wiser and stronger than Nehru.

Nehru, despite being too big a leader, had the privilege of working alongside political and intellectual giants of the likes of Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Gulam Nabi Azad and BR Ambedkar. Nehru was aware of his obsession with his ever-expanding leadership image. The counter-perspectives brought about by these leaders often did allow for a check and balance. Does the Modi leadership have the same kind of privilege?

Nehru has been criticized for not treating his ministerial colleagues and chief ministers with respect. By the same token, Modi is not very well known for sharing credit with others either. Nehru loved giving speeches and lecturing the West. Thankfully, Modi is not an anglophile but his passion to address the nation is no less. Speechifying does take up a lot of his time.

In hindsight, one wishes Nehru had given more serious thought to Patel's criticism of his socialism. He was too stubborn about his apparently failing economic policy. No wonder that, under his Prime Ministership for over 17 years, India's Compound Annual Growth Rate was a mere 1.68%, which was lower than that of Myanmar. The Modi administration, despite repeated criticism in regards to its economic policies, does not seem to be able to rethink things.

One of Nehru's egregious mistakes was his incapacity to take hard and courageous decisions in relation to diplomacy with China. How the present government will fare in this area is India's most consuming interest now - and rightly so. The worsening diplomatic relations with Nepal is unprecedented. That a divisive spirit is raising its ugly head within the nation is also a disturbing reality. Whether the Modi leadership will take us through this dark period alright or not is a question that will be answered by the generation coming after us.

20 Swachh Sewaks provided safety gear



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

Contractor cum Social Worker, U Narayan Sharma provided work uniforms, gumboots, gloves, bags and face mask to

20 Swachh Sewak of Rangpo Nagar panchayat today. The items were presented to the Swachh Sewaks by Municipal Executive Officer, Prakash Chandra Kharel.

SRP demands committee to investigate Jorethang incident



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

Sikkim Republican Party president, KB Rai has demanded that the State Government should constitute a committee to investigate the entry of five persons into Sikkim via Melli check post without following proper procedures on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, Mr Rai mentioned that such incidents can render useless all efforts to protect Sikkim and its people from COVID-19.

"We have enquired into the matter from our

side and found that they entered Sikkim with verbal permission from the DGP level," he said.

Mr Rai mentioned that

Even the Chief Minister says his family members and relatives will not be allowed to enter Sikkim without permission then how were these 5 people allowed to enter Sikkim and mix with locals at Jorethang.

He said that In-charge of Melli Police Station and Melli Checkpost should be held fully responsible in case the virus spreads in Jorethang.

BJP holds protest rally in Siliguri



SUMMIT REPORT SILIGURI, 02 JUL:

Bharatiya Janata Party organized a protest rally in Siliguri today against Trinamool Congress workers misbehaving with BJP state president, Dilip Ghosh in Kolkata on Wednesday.

District president of BJP, Pravin Agarwal said, "Today the protest rally was organised in Siliguri but the state government involved the police administration and ar-

rested some of our party members, while they were just demonstrating in front of the SDO office."

Even in this pandemic situation, TMC is busy blaming BJP for everything, he added.

"State government has been consistently failing in COVID19 management. We got to know that many families of COVID patients were not informed about the death of their loved ones," alleged Mr Agarwal.

BJP-Sikkim welcomes Centre's commitment to One Nation, One Ration Card scheme

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

Bharatiya Janata Party's Sikkim unit has welcomed the centre's commitment to implement One Nation One Ration Card scheme and remarked that this would also help thousands of people from Sikkim who are working and studying outside the State.

The state unit has also expressed gratitude towards the Centre and the Prime Minister for having extended the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana till November.

The BJP state unit has also urged the State government and the Food & Civil Supplies Department to ensure that the benefit of the scheme reaches the economically weaker section of the State.

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SKM trade cell holds meeting at Rangpo



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha trade cell held a meeting at Rangpo today which was attended by more than 100 business persons from various regions of the state, a press release informs.

The meeting was conducted by the Sikkim State SKM Trade Cell president, Sajjan Agarwal,

and was chaired by senior businessman of the area, Sukdev Prasad.

The meeting started with welcome address by West Pendum Central Level Committee president, Hari Prasad Dangal.

Addressing the meeting, vice president of the Trade Cell, Shankar Agarwal said that during the previous government the business community

had to face problems in various fields but under the SKM government, all problems will be solved.

The state level Chief Convener of the trade cell, Amar Agarwal, after understanding all the problems mentioned that RC to many old businessmen was delayed but the present government will solve this problem.

In the meeting, 25

families under the leadership of Swaminath Prasad left SDF and joined SKM.

Swaminath Prasad, in his address mentioned that the SDF party did not do satisfactory work, causing great injustice to the businessman. Therefore, they have decided to join SKM, and have been inspired by the new policies and principles of SKM government.

SDF mourns passing away of senior party worker

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

Sikkim Democratic Front has conveyed condolences on the demise of one of its senior-most party worker's, Purna Bahadur Rana from Ramabong village, South Sikkim. He passed away yesterday at the age of 68 while undergoing treatment at Central Referral Hospital, Tadong. He was the office secretary of South District party office.

An SDF press re-



lease informs that Mr Rana was born in 1952

at Ramabong village in South Sikkim and had retired as a Hawaldar from Gorkha Regiment in 1997.

SDF convened a condolence meeting at its head-office and district office on Thursday and mourned the passing away. The meeting also observed a two-minute silence to pay respect to the departed soul and remembered his contributions to the nation, state and the party.

Ministers and MPs inspect damage caused by road at Omchung

Gyalshing, 02 JUL [IPR]: PWD Minister Samdup Lepcha along with Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba, and Minister LN Sharma, who is also the area MLA, conducted an intense inspection of the ongoing construction of a Fair Weather Road from Gyalshing 8th Mile to Omchung School today.

The area MLA, seeing the plight of the people of Omchung area, had urged the PWD Minister to visit the area where the proposed fair weather road has caused damage which needs to be inspected and resolved at the earliest.

The PWD Minister during his visit expressed that the road condition of Omchung needs to be properly reassessed and that the department would enquire about the people in connection to the

project of the 2 kilometre long road connecting 8th Mile Gyalshing to Omchung School which is in a very bad condition and could be an agent of catastrophic disaster during the monsoon seasons.

The PWD Minister also mentioned that the proposed road was unfit for vehicles to ply, not properly in alignment with the standards of road constructions and needs immediate intervention. He reassured the public of Omchung that the matter would be dealt in a serious manner and immediate steps would be taken by the department. He also extended his gratitude towards the Minister cum Area MLA for his zeal towards the issue.

Minister-cum-Area MLA, LN Sharma, stated that the works done for the 2kms road of Omchung was not satisfac-



tory and that the PWD Minister has seen it and deemed it to be unfit. He further requested the PWD Minister to take proper action against those involved so that the public can avail better facilities in the coming times. He also mentioned that the level of carelessness should not be tolerated as the Government has vowed to work for the people's benefit and prosperity.

The grievances of the public of Omchung were heard and the PWD Minister along with Minister-cum-Area MLA Gyalshing Bermiok and

MP (Lok Sabha) gave their assurances to them that the matter would soon be resolved.

The 2kms long stretch of road connecting many houses in the Omchung area were toured by the PWD Minister and MP guided by the Minister-cum-Area MLA Gyalshing Bermiok. On the way, they also interacted with the public affected by the construction of the road who put forward their grievance to the Area MLA who in turn gave the letters of grievances to the PWD Minister.

Govt must formulate proper education policy: Nawin Kiran



SAGAR CHETTRI GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

Sikkim Subject Committee vice-convenor, Nawin Kiran Pradhan has asserted that it is high time for the State government to take Krantikari decisions for the betterment of education in the State. He further stressed upon the need of proper education policy for Sikkim.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Pradhan welcomed the decision of the State government to reinstate 124 Sanskrit Teachers, whose service was discharged earlier, from the month of August. However, he asserted that the government should publish an official notification immediately on the decision.

He further stated

that the appointment of Sanskrit teachers is not enough but the State government should work on preservation and development of Sanskrit language.

Mr Pradhan demanded that the government should take a decision on the cancellation of the interview of 172 language teachers and contract renewal of adhoc teachers. He further urged the government to immediately resolve all pending issues related to teachers of Sikkim.

Mr Pradhan also demanded a judicial enquiry into the entry of 5 persons into Sikkim via Melli without following proper procedures. When some people from Sikkim are being denied entry into the state, how can people from outside be allowed entry, he questioned.

SDF delegation reaches relief to Tikpur fire victims



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

A Sikkim Democratic Front delegation called on Tshering Tenpa Sherpa and Nima Doma Sherpa of Tikpur GPU in West Sikkim on Wednesday and handed over rice, oil, blankets and other essential materials

to them, an SDF press release informs. The two families, it may be recalled, had lost their houses and all belongings to a fire on 29 June. The SDF team was led by Daramdin constituency in-charge, PN Norbu Sherpa, and included senior leaders and party workers.

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

Contact: 9800201335

LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Roadside just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

LAND FOR SALE

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

ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

In loving memory of our beloved MOTHER Late SHANTI DEVI who left for her heavenly abode on 27.06.2020 fall on 13.07.2020.



All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to attend for last offering of prayers for the departed soul at our own residence at Rangpo-Chanatar, Oppt. to Rangpo Sec. School, East Sikkim.

Dhiraj Prasad (Son)
Raju Prasad (Son)
Ravi Prasad (Son)
Roshan Soni (Grand Son)
Deepak Soni (Grand Son)
And Entire Prasad Family...

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PIB Webinar discusses "Effective COVID Management in Sikkim-An exemplary effort"

GUWAHATI, 02 JUL (PIB): Sikkim is doing a commendable job in combating COVID-19, said Head of Department, LR Vishwanath, Directorate General, North East Zone, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. He was addressing a webinar highlighting the good practices on COVID management done by states like Sikkim, so that the other states may implement such strategies to fight against the pandemic. The Webinar was organized by Press Information Bureau, Guwahati today on the topic "Effective COVID Management in Sikkim-an exemplary effort".

key people like policy decision makers, people who develop communication strategy and people who implement policies as well as the journalists come together and discuss various issues related to the current crisis situation which helps further to disseminate those to the common people. He also informed that PIB is organizing a series of webinars on COVID-19 to sensitize the journalists that how effectively the North Eastern states are managing the crisis situation. During this COVID-19 pandemic all necessary precautionary measures were taken by the Sikkim Government from the very beginning which helped the state to handle the crisis situation effectively to large extent, said Shri Sunny Kharel, Under Secretary, Coordination (COVID-19), Government of Sikkim, while delivering his keynote address in the webinar. He spoke extensively on the strategies taken by the Sikkim Government to control the spread of the COVID-19. He informed that more than 6 lakh 50 thousand screenings have been done so far in the state. As a preventive measure Sikkim Government also stopped entry of tourists to the state in the very beginning which helped a lot in the fight against the pandemic. Assistant professor, Dr C Lalmuansangkimi, Indian Institute of Mass Communication enlightened the participants



about the Communication Strategy for effective COVID Management. Editor, SummitTIMES, Puran Tamang, President of Press Club of Sikkim, Joseph Lepcha and Editor, Kishore Moktan, Nepali Daily were also the key speakers in the webinar who spoke about "Utilization of Social media in spreading awareness on Covid-19 in Sikkim", "Proper management of returnees help in controlling spread of Covid-19 in Sikkim" and "Farmers Support in managing supply chain during the lockdown period in Sikkim" respectively. Joint Director, Keerti Tiwari, Press Information Bureau, Guwahati delivered the welcome speech and Media & Communication Officer, Gopajit Das, PIB, Shillong moderated the Webinar.

Marwari Yuva Manch felicitates health workers



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

Marwari Yuva Manch Prerna Branch, Gangtok felicitated DG cum Health Secretary, Dr Pempa Tshering Bhutia along with Dr Yudok Bhutia, Dr Chintamani Sharma, Dr Devkinandan Joshi, Dr Dheeraj Khatri,

Dr Renu Verma, Dr Hanuman Prasad Marda, Dr Neeti Nepal, Dr Ramesh Gola today to mark the occasion of National Doctor's Day which falls on 01 July. The women's branch of Marwari Yuva Manch, Sikkim thanked all doctors and Corona warriors for their contribution to the State.

Transport Department announces online services

GANGTOK, 02 JUL (IPR): A press conference on the e-Governance initiatives taken by the Transport Department, Government of Sikkim was held at the Conference Hall of Yatayat Bhanwan in Gangtok today.



The conference was addressed by Secretary, Transport Department, Raju Basnet, wherein he apprised in detail about the various e-Governance initiatives implemented by Motor Vehicle Division and Sikkim Nationalised Transport under Transport Department, Government of Sikkim in collaboration with National Informatics Centre, Government of India. Mr Basnet further informed that the general public has availed for e-Governance facilities fairly well as of now and in the month of June, 2020 out of the 1.78 crores of tax collection 81.67 lakhs was collected through the online portal. He also apprised the gathering that there is an increase in accountability, efficiency and trans-

parency, and the revenue collected will positively impact the economic growth of the State that has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. He also informed that with the support from Chief Minister, P. S. Tamang (Golay), Minister of Transport, Sanjit Kharel, and the efficiency of the team officials has made it easier and all the more efficient in execution of the online portals. The Secretary requested the general public to make utmost use of the eGovernance facilities and hoped that this measure will positively benefit the people of Sikkim.

development and expected to be available by 15th July 2020 which are as follows:

1. Online driving license application, fee payment and trial slot booking through Sarathi Application.
 2. Online Commercial vehicle fitness fee payment and inspection slot booking.
- For all the other services not covered by online services, the Department will be receiving applications and attached documents by email and process for the services requested. The applicant may be required to be present for the verification of original documents, etc., for communication with proper time and date slot by the concerned officer or staff, it is informed. Likewise, the Sikkim Nationalised Transport has also implemented an Online Supervision Charge Collection System that will help ease traffic congestion as time spent at Rangpo and Melli check posts will be substantially reduced. This system

will also help the check posts staff of SNT, MVD, and Bank to avoid unnecessary exposure during these trying times. It has been made live from the 1st of July 2020 and can be accessed via the website www.snt.in, it was informed.

Further, the SNT is also developing an online bus booking portal 'SNT ONLINE' in collaboration with the National Informatics Centre (NIC) Sikkim and NIC Uttarakhand. The portal 'SNT ONLINE' is in the final stages of production and will soon be online. The online system of bus booking shall include facilities like the choice of seat number, place of pick up and journey booking in advance. The Department also aims to launch the Passenger Bus Booking Portal by 15th July, 2020. This will also increase the occupancy rate of SNT buses thus increasing the business and will help in maintaining social distancing and exposure of the staff during and post COVID-19 period.

Change of guard at Rotary Club of Gangtok

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 JUL:

Rajesh Somani took over as President of the Rotary Club of Gangtok on 01 July with Manoj Agarwal as Secretary. On the occasion, the club felicitated Sikkim Aakraman FC for arranging emals for corona warriors in Gangtok and Let Us Feed Group which fed street animals throughout the lockdown.



Five-bed Dialysis Unit...

He also applauded the medical team of West Sikkim for working consistently, confidently and augmented capacity, which is also proven by recovery of eleven COVID-19 Positive cases from the District Hospital and further encouraged them to work more aggressively right from community level. Minister-cum-Area MLA, Lok Nath Sharma marked the establishment of dialysis unit as a remarkable achievement for the people of aspirational West District and the entire medical scenario as well. He also extended gratitude to the Chief Minister of Sikkim for the new development and congratulated the medical staff and the people. Further, he added that the present Government believes in work delivery and encouraged everyone to work collectively as a team. He also thanked everyone involved in the establishment of the Dialysis unit. He mentioned that the State Government is always keen to help them so that their works can be better. He also mentioned that critical issues of health department will be worked upon on priority basis and resolved also. CMO West Gyalshing, Dr. Anusha Lama briefed on the medical potential of the West District and anticipated to achieve status of inspirational district from aspirational district with relentless efforts and performance in near future. She further thanked the HCM and the State Government for their active role and support to the District Hospital Gyalshing. She also thanked the DC West and the District Administration for the constitution of the isolation center at Ayush Hospital Kyongsa.

Unchecked entry...

in giving illegal passage to Mr Gauri Shanker Gupta of Jorethang and four others. The Government has taken the issue very seriously," the release underlines. Earlier in the day, a press release from the Chief Secretary's office informed that the DC South has been tasked to conduct an inquiry into how these 5 people entered Sikkim through Melli check post "in violation of rules without getting either registered, securing a permit or going to quarantine." Meanwhile the Secretary (Coordination) of Home Department has also been deputed to visit Melli, Jorethang and Namchi and submit a separate and "independent" factual report. The two inquiry reports are to be submitted by 3 July. The Chief Secretary's office has promised strict action against all those found responsible for any lapse or negligence in this incident. The release goes on to refute allegations of the entry of the five people having been managed by the CS. The Facebook post which had exposed the incident has alleged that the five were related to the CS. The release, while refuting this allusion, goes on to counter that the post was "deliberately and mischievously designed to spread misinformation among gullible Facebook users who have seen and already shared it without knowing or verifying the truth." Although the communiqué from the CMO makes no mention of action being proposed against the circulation of this episode, the press release from the Chief Secretary informs that the Crime Branch of Sikkim Police has been directed to investigate the matter and "bring to book the persons responsible for spreading the fake news in most irresponsible manner and trying to create panic and mistrust among the Sikkimese people."

India crosses nine million COVID-19 tests

NEW DELHI, JULY 2 (PTI): India has crossed the nine-million mark in conducting COVID-19 tests, with 90,56,173 samples having been examined till July 1, officials said on Thursday. The officials of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) also said there are now 1,065 testing labs in the country -- 768 in the public sector and 297 in private. The daily testing capacity is also growing fast, they said, adding it

was around 1.5 lakh per day on May 25 and is more than three lakh per day now. As many as 2,29,588 samples were tested on Wednesday, which took the cumulative number to 90,56,173, the country's apex health research body said. Starting with just one laboratory, the National Institute of Virology (NIV) in Pune, and having 100 in the beginning of the

lockdown, the ICMR on June 23 validated 1000th testing lab, it said. The Union Health Ministry, meanwhile, said the total number of people being tested for COVID-19 in the country will soon touch one crore. "This has been (made) possible due to the removal of all bottlenecks by the government of India. Various steps taken by the Central government have paved the

way for enhanced testing for COVID-19," the ministry said. Through a significant step announced by the Central government on Wednesday, COVID-19 testing can now be done on the prescription of any registered practitioner, and not exclusively of a government doctor. The Centre has strongly advised states and Union Territories to take immediate steps to facilitate testing at the earliest by enabling all

qualified medical practitioners, including private ones, to prescribe COVID-19 test to any individual fulfilling the criteria for testing as per ICMR guidelines. Reiterating that "Test-Track-Treat" is the key strategy for early detection and containment of the outbreak, the Centre on Wednesday advised them to take all possible steps to ensure full capacity utilization of all COVID-19 testing laboratories.

Over 19K COVID-19 cases push India's tally above 6 lakh, 5 days after crossing 5-lakh mark

NEW DELHI, JUL 2 (PTI): India's COVID-19 tally zoomed past six lakh cases on Thursday with a single-day increase of 19,148 cases, just five days after it crossed the five-lakh mark, while the death toll rose to 17,834, according to the Union health ministry data. The COVID-19 case load increased to 6,04,641 while 434 people have succumbed to the disease in the last 24 hours, the data updated at 8

am showed. With a steady rise, the number of recoveries stands at 3,59,859 while one patient has migrated. There are 2,26,947 active cases of coronavirus infection presently in the country. "Thus, around 59.52 per cent of patients have recovered so far," an official said. The total number of confirmed cases include foreigners. Of the 434 deaths reported in the last 24

hours, 198 are from Maharashtra, 63 from Tamil Nadu, 61 from Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, 15 from West Bengal, nine from Madhya Pradesh, eight from Rajasthan, seven each from Telangana and Karnataka, six from Andhra Pradesh, five from Punjab, four each from Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir, three from Bihar and one each from Chhattisgarh and Goa.

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SummitTIMES

Rediscover the Value of Translations

In the build-up to Bhanu Jayanti, expand the reach of language

Bhanu Jayanti, the annual celebration of a language which deserves much more attention, is coming up, and given that the lockdown regulations are relaxed in secret only for the extremely nepotistic and repulsively hierarchical [which no one wants to be in public], chances are that the celebration will be low key even if it is held. And that might be a good thing. Shorn of protocol, politics and politicking, may be the focus can return to language. It has now been more than two hundred years that Nepali-speakers and readers have been thanking God for sending Bhanu Bhakta among them, thank Bhanu Bhakta for teaching them about the cohesive power of language and celebrate his memory as the Adi-Kavi, the first people's poet. If the day is observed, expect most commentators to, like always, focus on language and on Bhanu Bhakta's Nepali rendition of the Ramayana, and rightfully so, but the defining trait of the man is getting increasingly sidelined and needs to be pulled back into focus.

Bhanu Bhakta did not create the Nepali language, but he did make it more relevant by translating the Ramayana from Sanskrit into the language of his people. He flattened the hierarchy of knowledge by making information [in this case, Faith] accessible to the people. When he translated the epic, he made it possible for his people to appreciate their Faith and its stories better. It is heartwarming to see young students recite with confident fluency what Bhanu Bhakta wrote more than a century and half back. Maybe now it is time to take the homage a step further; by providing a fresh impetus to translations, both, from and into the Nepali language.

Since students form the backbone of the Bhanu Jayanti Samarohs, let's speak of them. To share a thought, the Harry Potter series recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary, two decades through which it created publishing history and was translated into 73 languages. It has still not arrived in a Nepali version to Nepali readers wherever they reside. The first book in the series was reportedly translated by a publisher in Nepal in 2012, but one is yet to see copies in Sikkim or Darjeeling. What is more, only the first book was translated. The Harry Potter series has seven books. Or, take Arundhati Roy's God of Small Things, which is available even a bootlegged Mandarin edition, but not yet in Nepali. If a reader in China can appreciate the Booker winning novel, why should a Nepali reader in Tumin not get the same opportunity? In the same vein, why should the Chinese who picked up God of Small Things in Mandarin, not be able to pick up a translation of Indra Bahadur Rai's Jarr or Guru Prasad Mainali's Paral ko Aago? This is important, and, by not concentrating enough on translations, especially relevant children's literature and the seminal literary works, we are denying an entire block of readers for a chance to part of world events and progressive thoughts.

Language provides a people with their identity and literature is their introduction to the world. Translations bridge the gap between people, and Bhanu Bhakta understood this about two centuries ago... time we did too.

WRITE US:

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How Brazil became the second worst Corona-affected country in the world

ALFREDO SAAD FILHO
THECONVERSATION.COM

The COVID-19 pandemic has stress-tested countries, economies and political systems like never before. Nowhere has the outcome been more devastating than in Brazil, arguably the country with the worst pandemic response in the world.

Brazil's vulnerabilities are visible in the mass graves in São Paulo and Manaus. The country is competing with the USA for the largest number of diagnosed COVID-19 cases (more than one million) and the highest number of fatalities (above 50,000 – but likely to be a vast undercount). Disturbingly, there's no sign that Brazil's cases or deaths have peaked yet.

There is abundant evidence from other countries that inequality leads to worse outcomes and that strong leadership implementing clear policies works best. Brazil has failed on both counts. The coronavirus has taken advantage of Brazil's preexisting fractures and inequalities, corroding an already afflicted society. Here, I take a look at how we've reached this point.

INEQUALITY IS A KILLER

With the ninth largest GDP in the world and yet one-quarter of its population living in poverty, Latin America's largest nation is one of the most unequal countries on Earth. This is especially true when it comes to health: compared to wealthier citizens, poorer Brazilians are less likely to have health insurance and are less likely to use health services, despite needing them more.

In the past two decades, Brazil has suffered repeatedly from dengue, chikungunya, Zika, H1N1 and other intractable plagues that invariably afflict the poor disproportionately. It is little surprise to see coronavirus doing the same.

The illness reached the country through rich tourists returning from Italian holidays but, significantly, the first person to die was one of their domestic workers. COVID-19 has spread from the rich downwards, within households and across them, starting in São

Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and eventually reaching the poor in the north and north-eastern regions – where its impact has, unsurprisingly, been devastating, given the precarious housing, health, nutrition and other circumstances of the poor.

It did not have to be this way. Brazil's 1988 constitution designed a Scandinavian-style welfare state in the tropics, including a universal health system (SUS) free at the point of use. Nevertheless, the SUS remains incomplete and, during the pandemic, there have been insufficient resources in the public health sector, from actual hospitals to staff, ventilators and other equipment.

This is despite Brazil's large and diversified manufacturing base and impressive GDP. Arguably it had the resources to address the pandemic effectively, but the political will was lacking. For example, Vietnam's GDP per capita is less than one-third of Brazil's, yet it has managed to avoid any COVID-19 deaths by acting decisively to combat the virus.

INSTITUTIONAL CONFUSION AND PERVERSE LEADERSHIP

Brazil's response to COVID-19 has been limited by institutional paralysis driven by its president, Jair Bolsonaro. It would be easy to imagine a smart and ambitious politician demonstrating empathy with the people, blessing deprived communities with love and resources, commanding the government to do more and reporting progress to the nation daily. Since every pandemic wave must pass, this would be a one-way ticket to glory.

Bolsonaro did the opposite. Various he has referred to the disease as "just a little flu", "hysteria" and something that Brazilians won't catch.

In the absence of a coronavirus vaccine, experience shows that the public health response must include a lockdown – and, seemingly, the earlier it is imposed, the lower the death toll. Bolsonaro refused to impose one, and abandoned the matter to governors and

mayors. This inevitably created a patchwork of incoherent rules: shopping centres closed in some cities but open in neighbouring others, only some municipalities requiring masks on public transport, and rule changes according to local pressures instead of medical evidence.

Rules ended up making little sense even in the same city – for example, in São Paulo, shopping centres are currently open but parks are closed.

As other countries enforced social distancing, Bolsonaro never stopped meeting his supporters while, at the same time, plotting against his own health minister after disagreeing over the pandemic response. He promoted using hydroxychloroquine to fight the pandemic regardless of technical advice (studies have since found it doesn't protect against or treat COVID-19).

Bolsonaro also picked daily fights with the media. As his popularity tumbled, he escalated his attacks against Congress and the Supreme Court, and has increasingly relied on authoritarianism to galvanise support.

Since the pandemic began, one minister of health has been sacked and a second has resigned. Brazil's response to the pandemic is being led by a non-specialist general who is unaware that the country is the southern hemisphere and cannot name the small states in the federation. Amid this chaos, mass testing never took off. Contact tracing never even started.

THINGS SET TO GET WORSE

As disastrous as Brazil's numbers are, the health crisis has been accompanied by a significant undercounting of victims, suggesting the reality is much worse. For every ten deaths due to COVID-19, another eight have been attributed to acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). This condition took off in March, and has been identified as a complication of COVID-19. ARDS has been recorded as the cause of 23,400 deaths in Brazil in the first six months of 2020 (in contrast with an average

of 1,800 during the same period in the previous five years).

Severe delays to testing have also meant that thousands of deaths due to COVID-19 were not recorded as such. In addition, family members have been rumoured to object to the word "coronavirus" on death certificates, and there are reports of pressures on local administrators to minimise numbers.

In early June, Bolsonaro's government also stopped publishing its daily totals of cases and deaths, arguing that the figures it had been releasing were inaccurate because they were too high. The worldwide reaction was vociferous, and before the government had the chance to revise any of its previously released data, Brazil's Supreme Court ordered the Ministry to Health to resume publishing. The president duly backtracked.

A second concern is Brazil's insufficient economic policy response, which has worsened the impact of the pandemic by leaving millions with zero income and firms with zero sales or credit. This has pushed the poor to stay inside crowded homes lacking water, sewerage and – with rising unemployment – also food.

Even though Congress passed an emergency budget early on in the crisis, Bolsonaro's proposed grant to the poor, unemployed, aged and starving was so low that parliament overruled him. More generous support has since been provided through lower interest rates, cheap loans and Central Bank support to financial institutions. Brazil has also done a currency swap with the USA, aiming to stabilise its currency.

Nevertheless, Brazil's GDP is bound to contract heavily. Output declined by 15-20% in April alone, suggesting an unprecedented economic crisis yet to be felt in full.

[the writer is Professor of Political Economy and International Development, King's College London, and Professorial Research Associate, SOAS, University of London]

What primates can teach us about managing arguments during lockdown

NICOLA F. KOYAMA
THECONVERSATION.COM

The world may be reopening in some places, with people looking forward to pubs, restaurants and haircuts. Many of us will no doubt also be looking forward to some time away from home – alone – once more.

Spending such prolonged time in close quarters with others puts strain on relationships and increases social tension. Tempers can flare and arguments erupt. But we can increase our understanding about how to cope in these situations by looking at how our closest relatives – non-human primates – manage social relationships during similar periods.

For many different animals, forming friendly relationships that endure can influence health, survival and reproduction. Though of course, living in a group where individual needs differ inevitably brings group mates into conflict. But behavioural strategies have evolved that can minimise the risk and costs of conflict.

Many studies have investigated what happens after an aggressive conflict. Indeed, reconciliation is well documented across primates and functions to calm opponents, restore contact and minimise the costs of aggression. Though far fewer studies have investigated what happens before a conflict.

But our research has found that when space is at a premium and conditions become a little crowded, primates engage in a variety of pre-conflict strategies.

COPING STRATEGIES

A temporary reduction in living space, can cause a surge in social tension for primates – and behavioural indicators of anxiety such as scratching increase. But primates also use several coping strategies during such times to prevent or reduce conflict.

One such approach is a conflict avoidance strategy – whereby individual primates lessen how much they actively seek interactions with others. They reduce friendly behaviour and aggressive escalation, even though mild threats still occur.

Another option is a tension reduction strategy. This sees individual primates increase friendly behaviours such as grooming and appeasement. This alleviates tension by increasing tolerance, and minimising the likelihood of conflict occurring or escalating.

Alternatively, individual primates can show a blanket reduction of behaviours – be it friendly,



submissive or aggressive – with an inhibition strategy. This means individual primates will spend a bit more time on their own.

Different species and even different groups of the same species adopt these strategies during short-term space restriction. Some rhesus monkeys, for example, display a conflict avoidance strategy to reduce the likelihood of intense fights.

Other monkeys increase friendly behaviour, consistent with a tension reduction strategy. And brown capuchin monkeys and some chimpanzees adopt an inhibition strategy.

PUT TO THE TEST

Our study of a zoo chimpanzee group, took place during a month of space restriction when the group was confined indoors for health reasons.

We found that during this time of restriction, aggression rates decreased. But this was only between individuals with a history of more frequent aggression. Individual chimps were also less likely to join in conflicts. Though the amount of friendly and appeasement behaviour didn't change – suggesting chimpanzees were using a type of selective inhibition.

We also found that female chimpanzees had a less cohesive grooming network and fewer grooming partners during space restriction. By grooming fewer partners, females adopted an avoidance strategy and focused on their strongest friendships. On the other hand, the most aggressive individuals reduced how often they

attacked others – and so adopted a selective inhibition strategy.

PREPARING FOR CONFLICT

These pre-conflict strategies are not only geared toward preventing or deescalating conflict. Primates can also minimise the costs of future aggression by strengthening bonds with allies.

We found, for example, that on the day before a conflict, chimpanzees who groom a friend are more likely to receive support from them in a following conflict. By maintaining good friendships, chimpanzees can further reduce the costs of future aggression by ensuring help is there when needed.

Conflict management strategies are widespread across primate species and are part of our evolutionary history. As social, cooperative beings, we have evolved coping strategies to use in such situations and there are many practical resources out there to remind us how to deal with a conflict before it happens.

Though lockdown may be lifting – and fewer people will be spending all their time in the house, there are those who will likely remain at home for some time to come due to underlying health conditions. These are unusual times but our primate heritage equips us to deal with unpredictable social situations and the challenges imposed by enforced close proximity.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Biological & Environmental Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University]

Assam reports 548 coronavirus cases; total count 8,955

GUWAHATI, JUL 1 (PTI):

Assam reported 548 new COVID-19 cases, pushing the total number of infections in the state to 8,955, Minister for Health and Family Welfare Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Wednesday. So far, 12 people have died from the infection in the state.

In the past 24 hours, 378 cases were reported from Guwahati City alone, which is under a complete lockdown for 14 days since June 28 following a surge in the number of cases.

This is so far the second highest daily increase in infections. On Tuesday, the state had reported 613 cases, the highest in a day so far.

"In the past 24 hours, 378 cases were reported from Guwahati City. We request all to follow lockdown rules sincerely", the minister tweeted.

Meanwhile, 184 patients were discharged from hospitals in the state, taking the number of recovered patients to 5,831.

The state has 3,109 active cases as of now.

Meanwhile, the Regional Medical Research Centre in Dibrugarh has become the fourth laboratory in the country to successfully isolate the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)

virus, Sarma said.

The minister had earlier in the day announced at a press conference that Union Home Minister Amit Shah has directed the Assam government to adopt a new model to conduct 10,000 COVID-19 tests daily in Guwahati City.

The new model, COVID-19 AG Test, will be a nasal swab test, the minister said.

A training programme for the medical staff that will conduct the tests will be held on Thursday and it will be launched either on Friday or Saturday in the 31 coronavirus screening centres in the city, the minister said.

Around two lakh testing kits have already arrived here and these "will take testing to the next level", he said.

Meanwhile, the National Health Mission, Assam, launched a website where results of swab tests will be available and those tested can access these with the help of specimen reference numbers given to them during testing, he said.

Sarma said the primary reason for the community transmission of COVID-19 in Guwahati can be attributed to peo-



ple moving around after giving their samples and not staying in home quarantine.

"If people, who may be positive, roam around after giving their samples, they become super spreaders and this amounts to a criminal offence", he said.

The minister informed that Governor Jagdish Mukhi, his wife and 176 officials, security personnel and other staff deployed at the Raj Bhawan have also given their swab samples for testing after two personal security officers (PSO) tested positive for the infection.

Assam has so far tested 4,19,878 samples and is next to Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in

the country as far as the number of tests is concerned.

The minister also inaugurated a testing laboratory in the state at Mahendra Mohan Choudhury Hospital here.

The state will get seven more laboratories by July 15, Sarma said.

A plasma bank will be set up at the Guwahati Medical College Hospital by next week. A plasma separator has already been installed in the hospital.

The hospital will collect plasma strains from cured patients from next week, he said.

Guwahati City has currently 1,538 hospital beds, of which 987 have been occupied.

The minister inau-

gurated a 900-bedded COVID-19 care hospital at the Khanapara field, Guwahati, and it has individual rooms with attached bathrooms for patients.

A 450-bedded COVID-19 care hospital is also coming up at the Maniram Dewan trade centre in Guwahati and this will become functional soon.

"These measures shall strengthen our treatment capacity amid rising number of positive cases", he said.

The minister also announced that henceforth home-cooked food in disposable containers can be given to patients with a family member depositing it at a collection centre.

SFI demands relaxation in school fee



SUMMIT REPORT

SILIGURI, 02 JUL:

Student Federation of India (SFI) submitted a memorandum to the SDO Siliguri demanding that the government provide relaxations in school fee for students in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

President of Student Federation of India (SFI), Siliguri, Sagar Sharma, said, "This is the third time that we have submitted the memorandum to the government of West Bengal regarding the problems faced by the guardians

regarding fee."

Previously they had submitted the memorandum to DM as well but no solution was offered by the Government of West Bengal to solve this issue, he said.

"We demand that the government should look into this problem as soon as possible because many of the guardians are not in the state to pay even tuition fee of the school because of this pandemic. And if this problem is not resolved then we will have to take other measures," stated Mr Sharma.

Former Mizoram Assembly speaker Rokamlova dies at 79

AIZAWL, JUL 2 (PTI): Former Mizoram Assembly speaker Upa Rokamlova died at a hospital here due to prolonged illness. He was 79.

He is survived by his wife and two children.

Rokamlova died at the Ebenezer medical centre in Aizawl on Wednesday evening, his family sources said.

The veteran Congress leader was admitted to the hospital on May 12 as he was suffering from kidney disorder, they said.

He joined politics in the early

1980s after he left the teaching profession and was instrumental to the signing of the historic Mizo Peace Accord in 1986.

He won the state assembly elections three times between 1984 and 1993.

Rokamlova became the speaker of the Mizoram Assembly in 1990.

He also served as rural development and transport minister in Lal Thanhawla's government. He left politics in 1994.

He was ordained as church elder of Dawrpui church in 1970 and had held various posts under Mizoram synod.

Lord Jagannath's return car festival held with fanfare



KOLKATA, JUL 1 (PTI):

Rituals inside the makeshift Gundicha, where Lord Jagannath and his divine siblings Baladev, Subhadra stayed for the past eight days, marked the return car festival on Wednesday as the usual sight of pulling of chariots by a large number of devotees was again missing across West Bengal after the Rath Yatra day due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The situation was similar in the temples of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) at

Mayapur in Nadia district and Kolkata, and the famous Rath Yatra at Mahesh in Hooghly district.

ISKCON Mayapur spokesman Subroto Das said unlike around 2 lakh people pulling three chariots on road, only monks, priests and some resident devotees participated in the programme.

He said 40 resident devotees from 30 countries painted colourful rangolis, flowers and prepared 'Chappan bhog' to mark the return journey of the deities to

the Jagannath temple from the temporary Gundicha structure built within the same temple complex.

Close to a million devotees across the world watched it on various digital platforms.

At the ISKCONs Kolkata temple, monks brought Lord Jagannath and his siblings from the temporary Gundicha on the ground floor to the original place of the deities on the upper floor in the temple premises, spokesman Radharaman Das said.

Three small chariots were symbolically pulled

in the temple compound to mark the return trip of the Lord.

Trinamool Congress MP Nusrat Jahan and her husband were present for sometime when rituals were performed and offered their prayers.

The ceremony was telecast live on the ISKCON Kolkata's Facebook and YouTube channels.

At Mahesh, the 624-year old Rathayatra in Hooghly district, three shaligram shila representing the deities inside the temple were taken back from the Gundicha temple to the Jagannath temple one km away, a temple committee spokesman said.

All rituals were performed "but we rue the fact that people couldn't pull the chariot on road during the Rath Yatra and as well the Ulto Rath (return journey) unlike previous years. Coronavirus took away the enthusiasm of the ceremony this year," he said.

The festival passed off sans any fanfare in the rest of the state.

Morning walkers back on track in Kolkata

KOLKATA, JULY 2 (PTI):

Morning walkers in Kolkata breathed a sigh of relief as the administration here reopened Rabindra Sarobar and Subhas Sarobar -- two lakes surrounded by vast stretches of greenery - with certain curbs in place.

Both the lakes will throw open gates for three hours every day from 5.30 am.

Several people were seen stretching themselves or taking a stroll by the two lakes early on Thursday.

Sudhin Nandy, the

executive engineer of KMDA, said, "Around 1,500 people had visited Rabindra Sarobar on Thursday morning, 700 more than what it was on the first day. The figures were more or less the same at Subhas Sarobar, too."

Security personnel and KMDA staff are continuously manning the two lakes to ensure people abide by the safety guidelines, Nandy added.

Over the past two months, many green activists and fitness enthusiasts had been pleading

with the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority - the custodian of the two lakes - to allow morning strolls by the waterside for a restricted period of time, official sources said.

"We have decided to give them a three-hour window every day, after having ensured that necessary safety measures were in place," KMDA CEO Antara Acharya told PTI.

Environmentalist S M Ghosh, a local resident and a regular at Rabindra Sarobar, said, "We carried sanitiser bottles

during our walks by the lake, which had been out of bounds since the lockdown began. Morning walk will boost our immunity system."

He, however, rued that Cyclone Amphan had uprooted several trees in the 73-acre premises, home to a variety of bird species.

"Several broken branches are still lying inside the park. Those have to be removed. Air quality has substantially improved in the city, amid the lockdown. And that is a welcome change," he added.

251 fresh COVID-19 cases in Odisha; tally now 7,316

BHUBANESWAR, JUL 1

(PTI): Odisha recorded 251 fresh COVID-19 cases, including that of 43 frontline health workers and an NDRF personnel, taking the state's tally to 7,316, a health department official said on Wednesday.

One COVID-19 patient died in Ganjam district, but the state government attributed the death to terminal lung cancer.

"A 52-year-old male COVID-19 patient of Ganjam district passed away due to terminal cancer of the lungs with brain metastasis," the department said in a statement.

In seven cases earlier, deaths were attributed to "non-COVID reasons", the official said.

The state has so far confirmed 25 deaths due to coronavirus.

Ganjam, the worst-hit district, accounts for 14 fatalities, followed by five in Khurda, four in Cuttack, and one each in Bargarh and Puri, he said.

Of the total 251 fresh COVID-19 cases, 208 have been detected from quarantine centres, where people returning from different states are lodged for preliminary observation and care. Their

contact tracing is underway, he said.

Ganjam district reported the highest of 102 new cases, followed by 32 in Cuttack, 26 in Khurda, 14 in Nayagarh, 12 each in Puri and Bargarh and 10 in Malkangiri. Twelve other districts reported single digit cases.

Ganjam District Collector V A Kulange said that of the 102 positive cases reported on Wednesday, 43 were COVID Warriors -- health workers and those looking after coronavirus patients.

With another National Disaster Re-

sponse Force (NDRF) personnel contracting the infection, the number of disaster response personnel testing positive for the deadly virus has risen to 294. The number of infections in the Border Security Force (BSF) is 53, the official said.

On Wednesday, 164 patients recovered from the disease and discharged from hospitals.

The number of active cases in the state now stands at 1,930.

The state tested 5,247 samples in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of tests conducted so far

to 2,70,678.

Meanwhile, the authorities issued directions to operate government offices with 50 per cent of the staff starting from the Lok Seva Bhavan, the highest administrative building in the state capital to the panchayat-level.

The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation on Wednesday sealed the Bhubaneswar Development Authority office building for two days after two of its employees tested positive for COVID-19.

"We will sanitise the entire BDA building," BMC Commissioner PC Chaudhury said.

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Boardroom turmoil, troubling finances and Messi's influence: why Barcelona are a mess

SID LOWE

LONDON, 02 JUL [THEGUARDIAN]: Leo Messi was the first off the pitch, heading down the tunnel alone as Barcelona's anthem began echoing around a stadium as vacant as the look in the team's eyes. It was almost midnight on the last day of the financial year and it was over.

Looking down at the scene were the club's directors who had made it to July, surviving another season, but only just. Any lingering hope of winning La Liga had gone. Ten days before Gerard Piqué said it would be "very difficult". Now, held 2-2 by Atlético Madrid, a third draw in four, it was virtually impossible.

At the side of the pitch Sergio Busquets said something about mathematical possibility, which is what players say when they have nothing else. Barcelona had decided to sack manager Ernesto Valverde when they were top and without a replacement ready; six months on, they are second, a point behind Real Madrid having played a game more. There are five left and no one is looking forward to those much. That is not the worst of it, either. Defeat, not definitive yet, is one thing; decline is another. Capitulation had been coming for a long time; they were flawed when they were first and well before that.

When the final whistle went Quique Setién turned to the bench, picked up some papers and stood there for a moment. A disciple of Johan Cruyff, this is not how he imagined managing Barcelona. And yet nor can he have been entirely surprised, not least be-

cause Cruyff fought battles too and Setién knew he had not been Barça's first choice. He has problems of his own but most of his team's precede him. Not least because they are not just the team's problems; they are the club's.

Against Atlético, Antoine Griezmann, Barcelona's third most expensive player in their history, had been on the pitch four minutes. Ousmane Dembélé, their second most expensive, was not there: injured again, his career in Catalonia slipping from his control or anyone else's. And as for their most expensive signing, Philippe Coutinho is in Munich on loan because they couldn't sell him. He will be back soon and they will try to get rid of him again, another plan in pieces.

Coutinho was supposed to replace Iniesta, just as Arthur Melo was supposed to replace Xavi. But on Monday Arthur joined Juventus, travelling to Turin still in his Barça tracksuit. They were in a hurry, after all. Juventus paid €72m plus €10m in add-ons Barcelona said but this was effectively a swap deal with Miralem Pjanic, an act of accountancy more creative than the players and driven by finance not football. Driven, above all, by the board's determination to escape liability for the budgetary shortfall, their short-term survival secured at the cost of deepening and postponing problems until another day.

They are not the only successors lost, the only plans gone awry. Neymar, the man who would play alongside and eventually replace Messi, should be taking the lead now. But



he became impatient and Barcelona were powerless to prevent him leaving in 2018. They have become locked in a spiral of loss and nostalgia ever since, desperate to make amends to the point where they tried to bring him back again but did not have the money.

Worse, the €222m had long been spent, even though one director had insisted that doing so would be an irresponsibility for which they would have to resign. No one did. Not for that, anyway: this spring, six directors walked out, meaning 11 of the 21 board members who began Josep Maria Bartomeu's mandate have gone. There have also been four sporting directors and as many directors of communication. And it goes back further. In 2014, Luis Suárez, Ivan Rakitic and Marc-André ter Stegen signed. Since then, Barcelona have brought in 28 players for almost €1bn. Those are the ones who did come - the failed pursuit of a striker ended up being comic - and none are an unqualified success.

None were easy to shed either, so they

sold those they could, not always those they should. Arda Turan was a Barcelona player until Wednesday morning. He has not played for the club in three years. Griezmann eventually came a year later than planned and with no natural slot in the team, early hope floating off with the confetti.

Asked why he introduced the Frenchman only in the 90th minute on Tuesday night Setién said the alternative was not to put him on at all. He talked through the other players, the desire to keep Messi and Luis Suárez on, and concluded it was difficult to introduce Griezmann without "destabilising" the team.

A more telling line is hard to imagine.

The side grow old together and weaker, on the pitch at least. Off it they are powerful still. Ansu Fati is 17, Riqui Puig is 20. They may well be Barcelona's future; too many of those alongside them are Barcelona's past. Piqué, Suárez, Messi, and Vidal are 33, Rakitic is 32, Busquets and Alba are 31. And still responsibility lies with them.

It lies with Messi

most of all, a weight he does not always welcome but one he will not, and should not, renounce. He has watched the peak of his career slip by without a European Cup in five years. Sometimes he must look around and wonder what he has done to deserve this. Actually, perhaps that is a more pertinent question than it first appears. There is a deference to him that dominates everything and is not without problems that will take a brave man to broach. Soon, though, someone must.

Problems dominate everything, so many they cannot fit on this page, so bad that Messi's exasperation has been made public. Confrontations between players and board over pay cuts. The Barçagate scandal, the club accused of being behind sock accounts attacking opposition figures and their own players. Messi calling out the sporting director Eric Abidal for blaming the players over Valverde - a man whose ability to keep a lid on tension was not apparent until he had gone, a man some miss now.

His charisma may have been quiet but it was there; coaching this team - this club - is not as simple as many imagined. "It is what it is," ran Valverde's now infamous phrase, drawing intense criticism, but what if he was right? What if Xavi, Koeman, and Pochettino were right when they said no?

Setién stepped into the middle. He had seen what Valverde did; soon, perhaps, he saw why Valverde did it. Fault lines open easily at Barcelona, widened by the pressure

that surrounds everyone. At Celta, footage showed Messi, Suárez and Rakitic apparently ignoring Setién's assistant, Eder Sarabia. Reports alleged discussions in the dressing room. On Monday night, the president visited Setién's house.

During an unexpectedly revealing and startlingly introspective press conference, Barcelona's manager said: "I wasn't an easy player to handle either," adding: "I have to free my conscience."

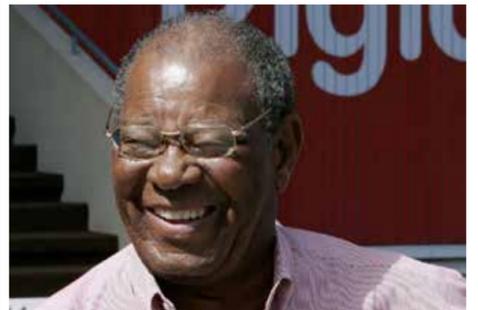
"I have no problem admitting this is a new situation for me and I'm in one of those moments when you're finding out many things. Bit by bit you do what you want to do. We all have to give a bit of ourselves, players included, for the good of the team. This is a team and it has to act as one."

It may be facile, opportunistic, but a photo from Tuesday night brought that comment to mind once more, perhaps offering a portrait of where they are. During a drinks break, Atlético's players are pictured gathered around Diego Simeone, as one. Barcelona's are dispersed.

Some substitutes linger, others sit in the stands. Among them is Arthur, just sold to Juventus to save the board from a crisis of their own making on the eve of meeting Atlético, a game the president does not attend. One that starts with the league title at stake and ends with it virtually gone, each player going their own way at the full-time whistle.

Messi was the first off. The humiliation burning, Griezmann was the last. He had friends to talk to on the other team.

Former West Indies cricketer Everton Weekes dies aged 95



BRIDGETOWN, JUL 2 (AP): Everton Weekes, who formed one of the famous three "Ws" of West Indian cricket as part of a formidable batting lineup for more than a decade, has died. He was 95.

West Indies Cricket said the Barbados-born Weekes died Wednesday. He played alongside Frank Worrell and Clyde Walcott, with all three players making their Test debuts in 1948.

He was also a highly respected coach, analyst, team manager, match referee for the International Cricket Council, and a member of the ICC Hall of Fame.

Weekes made his Test debut at the age of 22 against England at Kensington Oval. His final match was against Pakistan in Trinidad a decade later.

In his career, Weekes played 48 test matches and made 4,455 runs at an average of 58.61 per innings. That included a world-record five consecutive centuries in 1948 scores of 141 against England in Jamaica, followed by scores of 128, 194, 162 and 101 in

India. In his next innings, he made 90 when he was run out.

Worrell died in 1967 and Walcott in 2006.

His average of 58.61 runs places Weekes, along with George Headley, in the top 10 Test averages of all time.

"Everyone at MCC and Lord's are saddened at the news of Sir Everton Weekes' passing," the Marylebone Cricket Club said in a statement.

"He will forever be remembered as one of the West Indies' finest cricketers."

Cricket West Indies president Ricky Skerritt said Weekes was "a gentleman and quite simply a wonderful human being."

"I got to spend a couple hours with him last year just sitting at his home and talking with him, at a time when he was recovering from a serious illness," Skerritt said of Weekes' heart attack in June 2019.

"I grew to appreciate his sense of humour and his love of people, and witnessed the love and respect that so many held for him in Barbados and across the entire region."

Rohit is one of greatest ever ODI openers: Srikanth

NEW DELHI, JUN 30 (PTI): Stylish India batsman Rohit Sharma is one of the greatest ever ODI openers, considering his ability to score daddy hundreds, says former captain Krishnamachari Srikanth.

Out of his 29 ODI centuries, 11 times Rohit has scored in excess of 140, including three double hundreds.

Srikanth, who himself was an explosive opener during his playing days, said Rohit will be in the top-3 or top-5 in the list of all time great ODI openers.

"I would rate him as one of the greatest all-time one-day openers in world cricket. What's the greatest quality in Rohit Sharma is that he goes

for these big hundreds and double hundreds, that is something amazing," Srikanth said on Star Sports show 'Cricket Connected'.

"In a one-day match, you will go 150, 180, 200, just imagine where you are going to take the team to, that's the greatness about Rohit," said the 60-year-old Srikanth, who played 43 Tests and 146 ODIs between 1981 and 1992.

The 30-year-old Rohit has so far played in 224 ODIs, scoring 9115 runs at an average of 49.27 with 29 hundreds and 43 fifties. His highest score is 264, which is a world record.

He has also played in 32 Tests, scoring 2141 runs.

Cricket Australia to not use Dukes ball in first-class cricket from 2020-21 season

MELBOURNE, JUL 2 (PTI): Cricket Australia has decided to not use the Dukes ball from this summer's Sheffield Shield, having used it alongside Kookaburra for four seasons.

CA has confirmed that the Kookaburra ball will be used for the entire 2020-21 first-class season.

Australia has been using Dukes ball since the 2016-17 season in Shield matches with an aim to help its cricketers

prepare for the hostile English conditions.

CA's Head of Cricket Operations, Peter Roach, said the decision to axe the Dukes was the right call.

"The introduction of the Dukes ball has been a worthwhile exercise, particularly in the lead up to overseas Ashes series where the Dukes is used so well by our English opponents," Roach said.

"We have been happy with how the ball has



performed when used in Australian conditions over the past four seasons.

"We do, however, feel that reverting to one ball

for 2020-21 will provide

the consistent examination of our players over a full season that CA and the states are presently seeking. The Kookabur-

ra is the ball used for international cricket in Australia and many parts of the world and we see benefits this season of maximising our use of it," he added.

Roach said the ineffectiveness of spinners in first-class cricket in recent times played a role in CA's decision to do away with the Dukes.

"We have noted that spin bowlers in the Sheffield Shield have been playing less of a role in recent seasons, most no-

tably in games when the Dukes ball is in use.

"We need spinners bowling in first-class cricket and we need our batters facing spin. We hope that the change to one ball will have a positive benefit here," he said.

The CA official, however, didn't rule out the possibility of re-introducing the it later.

"We see a definite opportunity to reintroduce the Dukes ball at some stage in the future."

Fulton quits as NZ batting coach, to take up head coach job in Canterbury

AUCKLAND, JUL 2 (PTI): Peter Fulton has quit as New Zealand's batting coach to take up the job of head coach of the Canterbury men's team, the country's cricket board said on Thursday.

Fulton, a former international player who featured in 23 Tests and 49 ODIs for New Zealand, took up the position with the national team in August 2019 and travelled to Sri Lanka and Australia besides being part of the home tours against England and India.

Fulton said he had enjoyed his time with the national team but the Canterbury offer was hard to ignore.

"It's been an honour to get back involved with the national team



and I'd like to thank the players and staff for making me feel so welcome," the 41-year-old former right-handed batsman said in a statement on New Zealand Cricket (NZC) website.

"The Canterbury role appealed to me in terms of my aspirations to be a head coach and further

my development in the game.

"The chance to spend more time at home with my young family and coach my home province were also motivating factors in applying for the job," he added.

NZC general manager, high performance, Bryan Stronach congratulated

Fulton on the appointment and wished him success.

"Pete's a respected figure who has contributed a lot to the BLACK-CAPS set-up and built strong relationships in his time with the team," he said.

"He's carved an impressive pathway as a coach, from the New Zealand Under 19s to the winter training squads and now moving into a head coach role, which we're fully supportive of."

"With the BLACK-CAPS entering a winter period at home we'll take some time to consider our options in terms of a replacement for Pete."

Fulton will begin his stint with Canterbury Cricket on August 1.

Simmons' job is not threatened in any way, he is still the best man: CWI president

ST JOHN'S (ANTIGUA), JUL 2 (PTI): West Indies coach Phil Simmons is in no danger of losing his job as he has the "full backing" of the country's cricket board with its president Ricky Skerritt insisting that he had taken permission to attend his father-in-law's funeral.

Simmons found himself in a soup after Cricket West Indies board member Conde Riley, who also heads the Barbados Cricket Association (BCA), had sought his "immediate removal" for moving out of the team's bio-secure location in the UK to attend his father-in-law's funeral ahead of the three-Test series against England beginning July 8.

But CWI chief Skerritt made it clear that Simmons' job is "not in any way threatened".

"I want to assure West Indies cricket fans that Phil Simmons still has the full backing of Cricket West Indies no matter what has been said. When all is said and done, Phil's job is not in any way threatened by that letter," Skerritt said during a conference call.

"He went through a very vigorous recruitment process nine months ago and was the best man we could have found for the job. He's still the best man."

Simmons is currently in self-isolation at the team's on-site hotel at Old Trafford ahead of next week's first Test in Southampton



after being granted a request for compassionate leave before the squad left for Britain.

Simmons, who is in his second stint as West Indies coach, said he had no second thoughts about attending the funeral.

"This has not been an easy time for my family. My wife was very close to her father and his passing has hurt us. There was no question of me

not going to the funeral," said the 57-year-old former cricketer.

"My wife, my daughters and my son needed that support. Family is a huge thing for me."

"It won't disrupt us, it will just make us a little stronger going into the Test series. Our focus is still on the series," added Simmons, who first took up the position of West Indies coach in March 2015.

Myanmar jade mine landslide kills 120

At least 126 bodies have been found after a landslide at a jade mining site in northern Myanmar, officials say.

Rescue work is continuing for people still missing at the site in the Hpakant area of Kachin state.

A wave of mud and rock triggered by heavy rain engulfed those collecting stones, the fire service said.

Myanmar is the world's biggest source of jade but its mines have seen numerous accidents, many involving people who scavenge for stones.

The country's fire service department said in a Facebook post: "The jade miners were smothered by a wave of mud, which hit after heavy rainfall."

Police said some people had defied a warning issued on Wednesday not to work in the area after the rainfall, although the advice may also have saved many lives.

The BBC's Jonathan Head in Bangkok says video of the incident shows a massive landslide pouring into a large flooded pit. The sides then collapse sending water surging into the valley below.

Fire service department images showed rescuers carrying away bodies wrapped in tarpaulins.

Maung Khaing, a 38-year-old miner, told Reuters he saw a towering pile of waste close to collapse and people were shouting "run, run".

He said: "Within a minute, all the people at the bottom [of the hill] just disappeared. I feel empty in my heart... There were people stuck in the mud shouting for help but no-one could help them."

Hundreds of people gather at mines to sift through rubble discarded from lorries, hoping to find jade stones.

The rubble creates large slopes that can be dangerous in an area denuded of trees and resembling a moonscape.

More than 100 people died last year alone at mining sites.

Myanmar's jade trade is reported to be worth more than \$30bn (£24bn) a year. Hpakant is the site of the world's biggest jade mine.

Our correspondent says a new gemstone mining law was passed last year, but critics say the government has too few inspectors with only limited authority to stop illegal practices.

A landslide at a jade mine in Kachin in 2015 killed at least 90 people.

Critics say Russian vote that could allow Putin to rule until 2036 was rigged

Only one region voted against reforms, with results appearing to contradict independent exit polls

The Kremlin and its supporters have won a controversial vote to amend the constitution and reset Vladimir Putin's term limits, potentially allowing him to rule as president until 2036. Critics have challenged the result, saying that the voting was rigged to produce a blow-out win.

The ad hoc vote, which did not fulfil legal criteria to be classed as a referendum, saw 77.92% of voters endorse constitutional amendments, with 21.26% against the changes, after all the ballots were counted. Turnout was nearly 68%, the election commission said.

The results will allow the Kremlin to say that a vast majority of Russians back Putin's continued rule beyond 2024, the year that until now marked the end of his fourth and final term as president. Ads for the vote on constitutional changes barely men-



tioned that it would reset term limits for Putin, whose ratings recently hit their lowest level in 20 years, according to some recent polling.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, called the vote "a triumphal referendum on confidence in President Putin".

"It was very difficult to predict the extremely high turnout and the extremely high support we have seen today," he said.

In a single up-or-down vote, Russians also chose to support a package of amendments that include pension and minimum wage boosts, a modest reorganisation of

government, a constitutional mention of "faith in God", a ban on gay marriage, exhortations to preserve Russian language and history, and a ban on top officials holding dual citizenship.

The vote was the final step to incorporating the amendments into the constitution. They have already been reviewed by Russia's supreme court and backed by regional lawmakers. Putin has said he may or may not run in the next election in 2024, but justified the vote by saying he wanted to stop a search for a successor that could leave him a

lame duck.

Only one of Russia's 85 regions, the Nenets Autonomous Okrug in the far north, voted against the amendments, with 55% of locals joining a protest vote fuelled by plans to merge the autonomous region with its neighbour. Chechnya, where the strongman leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, recently said Putin should be elected "president for life", voted nearly 98% in support.

The official returns showed stronger support, often in excess of 80%, in western Russia, where most of the pop-

ulation lives, and slightly weaker backing beyond the Ural mountains, through Siberia and into the country's far east, which has a track record for protest voting.

The returns were still considerably more favourable to the Kremlin than polls before the vote, as well as independent exit polls held by opponents, and critics of the government said the results had been manipulated.

"The updated 'results' are a fake and a massive lie," said Kremlin critic Alexey Navalny, who had said he would sit out the vote. "They have nothing in common with the opinion of Russia's citizens."

Golos, an elections monitoring NGO, said in a scathing report that the "unprecedented" vote could not accurately reflect the public mood because of its ad hoc design.

Hundreds of opponents of the amendments protested against the results in Pushkin Square, in Moscow, on Wednesday evening.

New Zealand's health minister resigns after virus blunders



WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND), JUL 2 (AP): New Zealand's health minister resigned Thursday following a series of personal blunders during the coronavirus pandemic.

David Clark had earlier described himself as an idiot for breaking the nation's lockdown measures and then last week appeared to blame a beloved health official for border lapses, generating an angry response from the public.

Announcing his resignation, Clark said he'd put all his energy into the job.

But it has become increasingly clear to me that my continuation in the role is distracting from the government's overall response to COVID-19," he said.

Clark said he intended to remain in the parliament as a lower-ranking lawmaker.

New Zealand's health response has been praised around the world after the country managed to eliminate community transmission of the virus. But Clark himself has been widely ridiculed.

His latest gaffe came last week when he appeared to place the blame for allowing some returning travelers to leave quarantine without being tested with his top official, Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield.

Bloomfield, who was standing behind Clark while he spoke, appeared stung by the criticism as he frowned and looked away in a video captured by Newshub and viewed tens of thousands of times.

Bloomfield has been the nation's trusted medical expert and public face of the virus response similar to Dr. Anthony Fauci in the United States.

Many people were angered by Clark's words, and a Twitter campaign dubbed Blooms for Bloomfield" was launched to buy flowers for Bloomfield.

As hundreds of dollars poured in, Bloomfield asked that the money be donated instead to charities, which it was. It was just the latest in a series of missteps by Clark.

In April, he was stripped of some of his responsibilities after defying the country's strict lockdown measures.

He drove 19 kilometers (12 miles) to the beach to take a walk with his family as the government was asking people to make historic sacrifices by staying at home.

I've been an idiot, and I understand why people will be angry with me, Clark said at the time.

He also earlier acknowledged driving to a park near his home to go mountain biking, also in defiance of the rules.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said at the time she normally would have fired Clark but that the country couldn't afford massive disruption in its health sector while it was fighting the virus.

Instead, she stripped Clark of his role as associate finance minister and demoted him to the bottom of the Cabinet rankings.

But on Thursday, Ardern said she was ready to accept Clark's resignation.

It's essential our health leadership has the confidence of the New Zealand public," Ardern said in a statement.

As David has said to me, the needs of the team must come before him as an individual.

Ardern appointed Education Minister Chris Hipkins to temporarily take over the role.

The move comes less than three months before New Zealanders vote in a general election.

Ardern, who leads the liberal Labour Party, saw her popularity soar during the early stages of the virus response, although recent opinion polls indicate the conservative National Party, under new leader Todd Muller, is making inroads into Labour's lead.

If elected, will revoke H1-B visa suspension: Joe Biden

WASHINGTON, JUL 2 (PTI) Democratic presidential candidate and former US vice president Joe Biden has said that he will lift the temporary suspension on H-1B visas, the most sought-after by Indian IT professionals, if he wins the November presidential elections.

On June 23, in a huge blow to Indian IT professionals eyeing the US job market, the Trump administration suspended the H-1B visas along with other types of foreign work visas until the end of 2020 to protect American workers in a crucial election year.

Biden, in a digital town hall meeting on Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) issues organised by NBC News, praised the contribution of H-1B visa holders.

He (US President Donald Trump) just ended H-1B visas the rest of this year. That will not be in my administration, Biden, 77, said responding to a question during the town hall. He was referring to the temporary suspension of the H-1B visas and other foreign work visas by Trump for the rest of the year.

The people on the company visa have built this country, Biden said when asked what his administration will do in the first 100 days of his presidency.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.



The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

On day one, I'm going to send the legislative immigration reform bill to Congress to provide a roadmap to citizenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants who contribute so much to this country, including 1.7 million from the AAPI community.

My immigration policy is built around keeping families together, modernising an immigration system by keeping families, unification and diversity as pillars of our immigration system, which it used to be, Biden said.

He alleged that Trump's immigration policies are cruel and humane. Biden said that he will take immediate action to protect dreamers, including more than 100,000 eligible dreamers from East and South Asia.

The former vice president also said that he will rescind Muslim travel ban and immediately restore refugee admis-

sion in line with the values and historic leadership of the United States.

Biden also told town hall participants that he will make it easier for qualified Green Card holders to move through this backlog.

Trump, in April, gave an executive order to suspend green cards for 90 days. In June, he issued a proclamation which extended the suspension till December 31, 2020.

The US every year allocates only 1,40,000 green cards for all employment-preference immigrants, including accompanying family members.

Currently, there is a backlog of almost 10 lakh foreign nationals and accompanying family members lawfully residing in the United States. These applicants have been approved but are yet to receive employment green cards.

In his policy paper on immigration, Biden says that his high skilled temporary visas should not be used to disincentive recruiting workers already in the US for in-demand occupations.

As president, Biden will work with Congress to increase the number of visas awarded for permanent, employment-based immigration and promote mechanisms to temporarily reduce the number of visas during times of high US unemployment, it said.

He will also exempt from any cap recent graduates of PhD programmes in Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields in the US who are poised to make some of the most important contributions to the world economy.

Biden believes that foreign graduates of a US doctoral programme should be given a Green Card with their degree and that losing these highly trained workers to foreign economies is a disservice to our own economic competitiveness, the policy paper said.

Biden is challenging the 74-year-old Republican incumbent President Trump in the November 3 presidential elections where Trump is seeking his re-election for his second four-year term.

The immigration policy paper also talks about increasing the number of visas offered for permanent, work-based immigration based on macroeconomic conditions. Currently, the number of employment-based visas or Green Card is capped at 140,000 each year, without the ability to be responsive to the state of the labour market or demands from domestic employers, it said.

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Google and Apple boot 59 banned Chinese apps in India from their app stores

Two days after India banned 59 Chinese apps over security and privacy concerns, these apps are removed from the Google Play Store and the Apple App Store. These apps included some major names such as TikTok, WeChat, UC Browser, and SHAREit.

Just after the ban, Bytedance pulled out its apps, TikTok and Helo, from both stores and stopped these services to comply with the government's order.

While Bytedance voluntarily pulled its apps, the latest removal of apps seems to have come from Google and Apple. We've asked these companies for more details, and we'll update the story if we hear back.

Google said in a statement that the company has temporarily blocked access:

While we continue to review the interim orders from the Government of India, we have notified the affected de-



velopers and have temporarily blocked access to the apps that remained available on the Play Store in India.

Out of the list of 59 banned apps, we searched for at least 20 apps on both App Store and Play Store, and found them missing. These titles included UC Browser, Shareit, Shein, Cam Scanner, WeChat, and Bigo Live.

What's more, sites of these apps have also been blocked by internet service providers in India. Strangely, despite not being one of the banned sites, DuckDuckGo was also blocked in India yesterday.

To take advantage of this situation, multiple Indian startups are rushing to ship alternatives to popular apps like TikTok, Helo, and CamScanner.

'Never Have I Ever' renewed for season two by Netflix



LOS ANGELES, JUL 2 (PTI): Netflix has given a second season order for Mindy Kaling's coming-of-age series "Never Have I Ever".

The series, which Kaling co-created with Lang Fisher, has been handed a second, 10-part run by the streamer, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

The show revolves around an academically competitive but hot-headed teenager Devi, played by Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, trying to catch the eye of the school heartthrob while secretly grieving the sudden death of her father.

The first season, which debuted on April 27 this year, has been lauded by the critics for its inclusivity and breaking South Asian stereotypes.

Poorna Jagannathan, Richa Moorjani, Jaren Lewison, Darren Barnet, Lee Rodriguez and Ramona Young also star in the series.

Fisher serves as writer, executive producer, and showrunner with Kaling exec producing alongside 3 Arts Entertainment's Howard Klein and David Miner.

The show is produced by Universal Television in association with 3 Arts Entertainment, Original Langster, and Kaling International.

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Vaani Kapoor to star opposite Akshay Kumar in 'Bellbottom'

MUMBAI, JUL 2 (PTI): Actor Vaani Kapoor will play the female lead opposite Akshay Kumar in the high-end espionage thriller "Bellbottom", producer Jackky Bhagnani announced on Thursday.

The project marks Vaani's first onscreen pairing with Akshay.

Bhagnani said the "War" star has a "meaty" role in the much-anticipated movie.

"Vaani is an intelligent

and an effective actor and I have loved all her performances. The female lead in "Bellbottom" has to be in sync with Akshay Sir's screen persona.

"The role is meaty and I am confident that Vaani will ace this one," Bhagnani said in a statement.

Vaani said she is excited to share the screen space with Akshay.

"I am thrilled to partner with Pooja Entertainment

who have already made me feel at home at this initial stage of our film. Hoping that this excitement will translate beautifully on screen," the 31-year-old actor said.

Directed by Ranjit M Tewari, the story is set in the 1980s and is about one of India's forgotten heroes.

It is written by Aseem Arrora and Parveez Shaikh, and will go on floors later this year.

"Vaani's character in the

film is extremely intriguing. She has a certain flair and we're all very excited to have her on board," Tewari said.

Pooja Entertainment presents in association with Emmay Entertainment, "Bellbottom" is produced by Vashu Bhagnani, Jackky Bhagnani, Deepshikha Deshmukh, Monisha Advani, Madhu Bhojwani and Nikhil Advani.

"Bellbottom" is scheduled to release on April 2, 2021.

LOS ANGELES, JUL 2 (PTI): Theatres may be set to reopen across the US this month, but "Avengers: Endgame" director duo Anthony and Joe Russo are unsure about heading to the cinema halls in the wake of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The brothers, best known for co-directing several Marvel Cinematic Universe films, said being with an audience of hundreds in close proximity at a time when the COVID-19 virus is far from gone from the world will put people at "risk".

Asked whether he would feel comfortable returning to a movie theatre, Anthony Russo told FOX 5 DC's Kevin McCarthy, "It's a very personal question and it depends on people's individual circumstances, but unfortunately I don't see myself getting into a theatre in the foreseeable future."

He said as much as he was "desperate for the theatrical experience" like any other cinema goer, what's more important is "where are you going to put the risk?"

"I think there are more immediate places to put the risk in terms of human connection than a theatre full of strangers, unfortunately," Anthony Russo added.

Echoing similar sentiment, Joe Russo said being in an enclosed space, like a cinema hall, "is a high-risk situation".

"There's the question of where we want that to happen, which we do, but whether that's practical and safe and whether we can recommend it, which I don't think we could," he added.

Russell Crowe-starrer "Unhinged", which is slated to be released on July 10, will be the first feature to be released after the cinema halls reopen.



STYLISH WALK! The fashion guru, Olivia Palermo takes her cute pup out for a walk in Brooklyn, NY.

Zachary Levi to star in NFL quarterback Kurt Warner's biopic



LOS ANGELES, JUL 2 (PTI): "Shazam!" star Zachary Levi will essay the role of NFL legend Kurt Warner in an upcoming biographical movie.

Titled "American Underdog: The Kurt Warner Story", the film hails from Lionsgate and Kingdom Story Company, reported Deadline.

The movie will track Warner's unlikely journey from stocking shelves at a supermarket in Iowa to becoming an NFL Hall of Fame quarterback.

David Aaron Cohen, Jon Gunn, and Jon Erwin have penned the screenplay, which is based on interviews with Warner and his memoir, "All Things Possible: My Story of

Faith, Football and the First Miracle Season".

"Kurt's story is one of relentless faith in his own abilities but even more so in a higher power. When I read Kurt's story, I identified with the quiet strength he found to persevere that's something I think anybody can recognise in their own lives.

"This is the kind of underdog story that sports movies are all about, and the fact that it's true makes it even more special. I'm thrilled to be part of bringing his story to audiences," Levi, 39, said.

Kingdom Story Company's Jon and Andrew Erwin will produce the movie alongside Mark Ciardi and Kevin Downes. Warner and his wife Brenda will co-produce.

ARIES:

Take charge of your destiny, Aries. Stop playing rookie when the Universe wants you to join the big league. This is a time of movement and transition. You have the opportunity to enter into a new dimension, one that comes with a promising position. Trust in your abilities to lead the team. Remember, the key is to empower, rather than disempower them. Your crew will be ready to move mountains when they're reminded of their potential.

TAURUS:

What if we said your words were spells that had the power to not just influence, but also direct your life? Would you speak more mindfully if you knew you were creating your reality? Something to think about when you find yourself cursing your circumstances. We're not saying that circumstances aren't chaotic. We're saying you have the power to choose how much you want to be affected by this. Redirect your energy towards the activities that make you feel good instead of repeating the never-ending story in your head. Your soul crew is ready to offer support. Make space for them.

GEMINI:

Inauthenticity is a big theme right now. But the conversation is between you and you, Gemini. Where are you being dishonest with yourself? What's keeping you from speaking your truth? Don't brush things under the carpet for the sake of maintaining peace. The more you avoid confrontation, the more things will spiral out of control. Today, you're being asked to strip down the masks. Breathe into

the fears and know that the outcome will be in your favour.

CANCER:

What happens when we give without boundaries? We go into a space of depletion ourselves, which disables us from serving ourselves or those around us. Today, you're being asked to confront the demon of codependency, and to set certain rules even with those you love. This will help you differentiate between what's yours and what's not and prevent you from getting enmeshed in somebody else's drama.

LEO:

What if the ideas we channel are not random? What if they are coming through from a higher plane of consciousness? Today, you're being asked to be present to these ideas as they're opening the gateway to what you are meant to be creating over the next six months. Leo, let 'thoughts to things' become your mantra as you go forth. Some of you might feel drawn to creative writing or other forms of communication. Forget about the rules of grammar and pen down that story. There will be plenty of time to edit the script once you're through.

VIRGO:

What happens when we focus on the feeling of not having enough? We end up giving it more power. Virgo, the cards are asking you to become aware of where you are vibrating at. The story of lack you're constantly repeating to yourself. It's time to change that poverty mindset and bring forth the energy of

abundance. You can't make drastic changes overnight, but you can take a step in the right direction—starting now! PS: The Universe is helping you manifest the life you deserve.

LIBRA:

Big manifestation energy surrounds those who are in the mood for love. What do you desire in a partner? How would you like to feel when they're around? Write the five most important qualities on paper and surrender this proposition to the Universe. Remember, to call in the energy of miracles, you must believe the mysterious forces above are co-creating with you. As such, creative projects of all kinds are taking centre stage.

SCORPIO:

"The gates of mystery stand ever ajar, and those who will pass through into the spacious domicile of spirit." These words by Canadian-born author and mystic Manly P Hall accurately describe the inner illumination you are experiencing at this moment. Exploring the space between Spirit and Science is a major theme in the Scorpio HQ. Indulge your inner seeker. Turn to your own library for resources to delve into.

SAGITTARIUS:

Having a plan of action is a good thing. It helps you focus on what's important while keeping the distractions at bay. But, how much is too much? Is your need to follow the road map becoming borderline obsessive? Replace rigidity with flow,

Sagittarius. This will help you move closer to the finish line without experiencing a burnout in the process.

CAPRICORN:

At any point of time, you have two options: to complain about what's on your plate or work that to-do list with a smile. If the signs are anything to go by, you're going to be adopting that sunny disposition as your signature style. So, redirect your attention to what's good in your life, Capricorn. Trust that this will give the good power to grow manifolds. Wellness is also going to be a big theme. But it's not about following fad diets

AQUARIUS:

Aquarius, you're the perfect expression of heaven and earth, made of both stardust and soil. Today, the cards are asking you to worship the sensual and the spiritual aspects of your personality, and celebrate who you are minus the guilt and shame that has been tainting the beautiful canvas of your life. The portal of bliss doesn't lie outside of you. It can be accessed by honouring your own body temple.

PISCES:

Big manifestation energy surrounds Pisceans who are in the mood for love. We are talking about a deep, soulful connection, the kind that gets written about. Open your heart and allow yourself to receive the love that has always been yours. For coupled Pisceans, this is a time of deepening your intimacy and commitment. Tell your partner exactly how you feel knowing that these feelings will be reciprocated by them.