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SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue144 | Gangtok | Friday | 04 June 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | RS. 5

Sikkim records 289 new case and three deaths



**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 03 JUN:**

A total of 289 people tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 24 hours, taking Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 16,165. These 289 new cases were detected from the testing of 1,717 samples on Wednesday. Of these, 136 cases were reported from East District, 90 from West District, 49 in South District and 14 in North District.

While 185 cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 826 samples, 103 more persons were found positive for COVID-19 in rapid antigen testing of 881 samples and one

through TruNat testing of 10 samples.

On the other hand, Sikkim registered another big recovery of 205 COVID patients in the last 24 hours to further improve the figure of recovered cases in the State to 11,504.

In the meantime, Covid has claimed three more lives in the State.

All three COVID deaths were reported from STNM Hospital. Sikkim's COVID death toll now stands 263.

There are 4,184 active cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim, of whom 34 are currently under treatment in the ICU facilities.

18-44 yrs Priority Group to be allowed on-site registration for vaccination

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 JUN:

Following a high level meeting held on 30 May, the State Government has come up with a State Specific Priority Group for on-site registration for vaccination of 18-44 years age group.

In an order issued by the Health Department today, it is mentioned that on-site registration will now be allowed for 13 categories of 18-44 age group which means people falling under these categories can directly go to the vaccination centre and register on the spot. The categories for on-site registration are:

1. Persons with comorbidity

2. Differently-abled persons

3. Government drivers and taxi drivers

4. Teachers [both government and private institutions]

5. Staff of old-age homes and destitute centers

6. Family members of health workers directly dealing with patients and residing in the same house

7. Employees of State Bank of Sikkim

8. Staff of Judicial Courts

9. Electricians, linemen, meter readers of Power Department

10. Water and Sewerage fitters of RDD and PHE Department

11. Staff of Food and Civil Supplies Department working in food godowns

12. Elected representatives

13. Employees of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Department

I. Para veterinary staff/stockman

II. Staff of veterinary polyclinic

Vaccination for these 13 categories can be done through on-site registration or facilitated cohort registration. In order to facilitate on-site registration, the following documents will be required: Service Identity Card issued by Home Department, Government of Sikkim

or identity cards issued by any Competent Authority; Valid driving license along with proof of driving taxi from concerned syndicate in case of taxi drivers; Authorization letter from the concerned health worker in case of family members residing in the same household; Relevant medical documents for comorbidity and; Disability certificate for Differently-abled persons issued by the Competent Authority.

Those not falling in the 13 categories can avail free vaccination at Govt vaccination centres after registering online or at Central Referral Hospital on payment.

Deptt steps up vigil against overpricing of essential commodities; Minister inspects quality of stock

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 JUN:

The Food & Civil Supplies Department has stepped up its vigil against overcharging by ration shops even as the Minister in-charge has been inspecting food godowns to check on the quality of rice being lifted from FCI depots at Jorethang and Rangpo, a press release from the Secretary, Food & Civil Supplies Department informs.

The Department was reportedly alerted to shopkeepers "over pricing" essential commodities by irate consumers calling up the State Consumer Helpline.

The Secretary informs that officers of the Legal Metrology Unit of the Department have begun inspecting ration and grocery shops [the only shops allowed open during the lockdown] and "regularly warning the shopkeepers that stringent action will be taken against them if they are found selling goods above the printed MRP and the rates fixed by the department vide its Press Release dated 28/05/2021 in respect of essential commodities."

Its officers are also inspecting shops to ensure that people are receiving quality ration under the PDS, the Secretary adds.

He also informs that under PMGKAY, Phase-III, the Government of India has allocated 5KG per person additional free rice to 57,843 AAY and 3,15,806 PHH beneficiaries.

He has also assured that the Department is committed to provide quality rice to ration card holders and stop overpricing and hoarding of essential commodities.

Complaints, he adds, can be filed during office hours on working days on the State Consumer Helpline number - 03592-202675 or 1800345-3209.

Two of three damaged water supply pipes for Namchi restored



**BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 03 JUN:**

The restoration of two of the three water supply pipes to Namchi damaged at Rabongla Bye-pass were on the verge of being completed at the time of filing of this report on the evening of 03 June.

The pipes were damaged last week due to the back-cutting work being irresponsibly carried out by NHDCIL on this stretch. The restoration could begin only after a massive supporting/ retaining wall was constructed to the level of the supply lines.

PHE Department's Namchi office is confident that these lines can carry water supplies to Namchi from 6AM to 4PM every day for a week. They plan to close them overnight to avoid further damage in case the rains affected the retaining wall. What is also a worry is that in the pipelines get damaged and spill wa-

ter unmonitored, villages downhill could be imperiled.

For now, supporting iron frames have been used as bridges to stabilize the water pipes on the unstable axis above the landslide. The three pipes of 10 inches, 6 inches and 4 inches diameter were damaged due to the landslide, of which, the first two will be restored by Thursday evening, informed a PHE official.

The two alternate water sources for Namchi, that have water only in monsoon months, are in Gaddi Khola near Damthang and Ghattey Khola near Ghurpisey in South Sikkim.

These alternate water sources had water pipes connected to them upto the storage tank but these alternate water sources have been dry for the past few days.

Therefore, for the past two days, PHE Department has been deploying water tankers to meet the town's demand.

Southwest Monsoon makes onset over Kerala: IMD

NEW DELHI, JUN 3 (PTI): The Southwest Monsoon made an onset over Kerala on Thursday after a delay of two days, the India Meteorological Department said.

The monsoon onset over Kerala marks the commencement of the four-month rainfall season in the country.

The Southwest Monsoon has made an onset over southern parts of Kerala, said IMD Director General Mrutunjay Mohapatra.

The normal onset date for Southwest Monsoon over Kerala is June 1.

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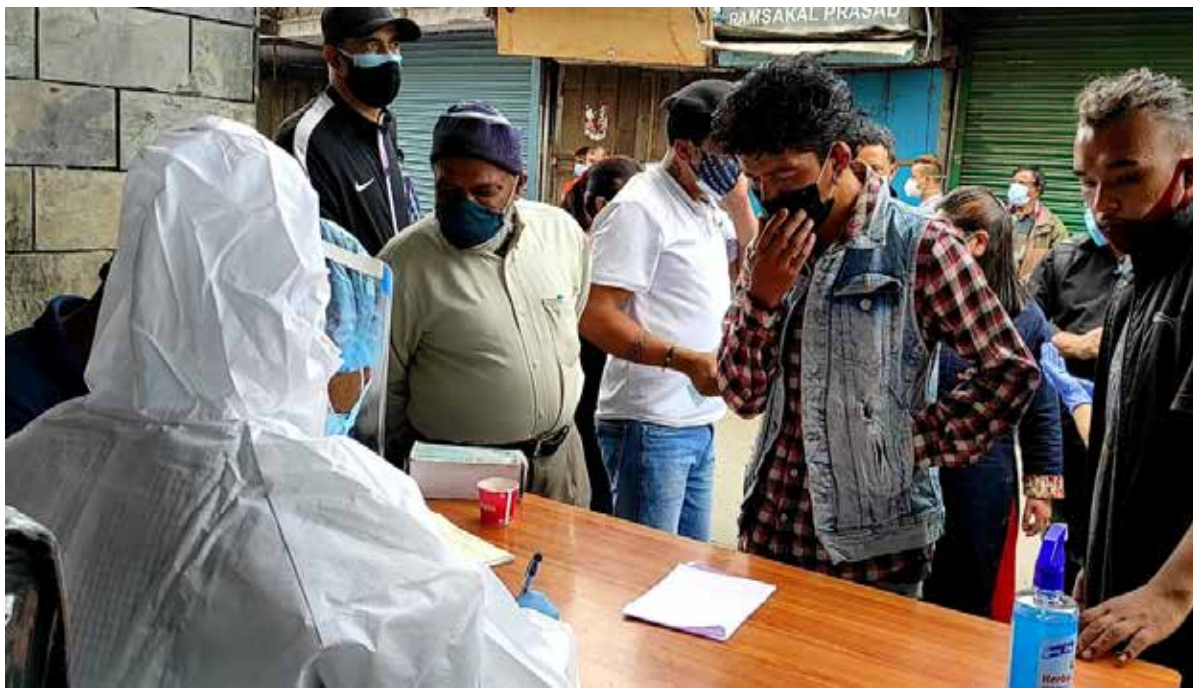
GJM-Binoy organises medical camp in Darj

DARJEELING
3/06/2021

SMRITA KHAWAS.

Gorkha Janmukti Morcha [Binoy faction] organised a free medical camp for the underprivileged and orphans here today.

Sagar Tamang, town committee member of GJM-Binoy, said, "As the Covid-19 second wave has hit every citizen of our country really hard, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (Binoy Faction) started distributing food to the needy and also to those coming for vaccination. The latter because no refreshments are possible in the lockdown. There are also homeless people here and their health required checking, so we organised this free medi-



cal camp for them today in front of our GJM (Binoy faction) town office

at Chawk Bazaar." The Darjeeling DMOM deputed doctors

and medical staff to facilitate the camp and GJM has also resolved to procure

the prescribed medicines for the underprivileged families.

Deptt assures North is adequately stocked with essential supplies to tide over all exigencies

WANGCHUK BHUTIA
MANGAN, 03 JUN:

The Department of Food, Civil Supplies & Consumers Affairs, has been exploring ways to ensure sufficient availability of essential commodities, including MS, HSD (Petrol, Diesel) and

LPG in the open market in North Sikkim and is keeping a vigil to ensure strict regulation and enforcement of prices notified by the Department.

The Department is also working to ensure timely lifting and distribution of all the com-

modities under the Targeted Public Distribution System to Ration Card holders followed by frequent monitoring and supervision at all levels, it is informed.

District Civil Supplies Officer (DCSO),

North, Palden Lachungpa, while speaking to SummitTimes, informed that considering the vulnerability of the district to monsoon disruptions in connectivity, a comfortable buffer stock of rice has been stored at Mangan, Chungthang and

Tingvong.

The DCSO has called on the people not to fall for panic buying and assured that the Department and the State Government have put systems in place to ensure that there was no shortage in the markets.

CM's APS chairs meeting to take stock of SGAY constuctions in North Sikkim

Mangan, 03 Jun [IPR]: Under the instructions of the Chief Minister, a series of meetings for three GPUs under Mangan Block - Toong Naga, Singhik Sentam and Ringhim Nampatam - to expedite work under Sikkim Garib Awas Yojana was held at the respective Gram Prashasan Kendras today.

Additional Political Secretary to CM (North District), Tshering Wangyal Bhutia, chaired the meetings in the presence of the respective Panchayat Presidents, Zilla Panchayats and Ward Panchayats, along with the beneficiaries of SGAY of the respective GPUs.

ADC (Dev) Mangan, BDO/Mangan, AE (RDD SGAY), AE (BAC), concerned Junior Engineers,



representative from MTL Pvt. Ltd. along with Project Manager and Site Engineers of MTL were also present at the meetings.

Various aspects of the construction of SGAY

houses were discussed with the beneficiaries during the meeting.

So far, the process of geo-tagging and survey of the houses have been completed.

Instructions were issued to complete the houses under the GPUs by March 2022.

APS (North) to CM directed all the parties concerned along with

government officials to work hand in hand so as to achieve the required target set by the Government. He also added that he will personally be monitoring the progress of SGAY houses on a regular basis.

After completion of the meeting at the three GPUs, the team visited ongoing works for SGAY for the houses of Suk Raj Limboo (Ralak) and Buddha Hang Limboo (Lower Jushing) under Mangshila Tibuk GPU and found that they were under steady progress.

Meetings regarding the same will be conducted in the remaining GPUs in the coming days. SOPs pertaining to COVID 19 were followed during the meetings

156 Namchi shopkeepers tested, all test negative



NAMCHI, 03 JUN (IPR):

As per the State Government's direction Covid-19 random testing drive for shopkeepers was held at Dambudara Municipal Ward today.

The test was conducted with the medical team of District Hospital Nam-

chi also present during the drive were Chairman Namchi Municipal Council, Ganesh Rai, SSP (South), Thakur Thapa, MEO (Namchi), Lakpa Sherpa and other officials.

A total of 156 shopkeepers with business of liquor, fruits, vegetables

and other essential items were tested for Covid-19, out of which all of the report were covid negative. It may be mentioned that a Covid negative report is mandatory for any shopkeepers to run the shop so as to contain the disease.

Looking at the Post Pandemic Utopia

Viewpoint

JIWAN RAI

It is more than interesting to predict our post-pandemic shape. One funny Facebook post said that we have four options to aim at becoming after the lockdown - monk, hunk, chunk or drunk. However, I felt like adding one more - "broke/bankrupt". When the Covid pandemic is over, it is going to be a new beginning for the world. For many of us, we will have to start all over again, from scratch, as they say. In a solemn sense, to be able to be on the other side of the pandemic itself will be reason to be grateful. However, for many, the post-pandemic problems will be too overwhelming to be grateful.

There will be two massive post pandemic issues, which we would do well to start thinking about. Namely: mental and economic issues.

According to Azim Premji University, around 23 crore Indians have become poor since last year due to Covid lockdowns. The poorest 20 percent of households have been rendered entirely incomeless in April and May. The rural poverty rate increased by 15 percent. Around 1.5 crore workers had no work by the end of 2020. The nationwide lockdown in April-May 2020 caused the loss of jobs of about 10 crore people. The report sounds grimmer as we keep going down the lines. But what makes it sound even more worrisome is what Vice-Chancellor of Azim Premji University, Anurag Behar says "The pandemic has revealed a systemic and moral failure that makes the most vulnerable always pay the greatest price for everything. We have to change this from the core." It simply means this: what the pandemic itself could not finish, our systemic and moral failure did. The poorest people had to bear the heaviest cost.

Now add to the poverty, inflation, unemployment and the lack of relief package from the government. Retail inflation has remained consistently high since October of 2019. The ever rising prices of essential commodities make the lives of poor Indians even more difficult. India's unemployment had reached the nadir in 2018, which was its worst in 45 years, much before the Covid pandemic hit us. The ever declining GDP growth of the country will continue to hit unemployment for some time in the future too.

What does that mean for us in Sikkim? It is obvious that we are staring down the barrel of a huge economic crisis. We will soon wake up to the reality of a massive livelihood crisis in the state. A huge chunk of the Sikkimese population is employed in the government sector and their families are relatively immune to the impending economic crisis. But that exerts a heavy financial burden on the government which has been faced with an unprecedented fiscal crunch. Government contract work, another major source of income for Sikkimese people may shrink a bit. Sikkim's major private sector income sources are tourism and other entrepreneurship, both of which will take a long time to revive fully. MGNREGA is perhaps one activity that may remain robust. Construction related jobs like masonry, tiling, plumbing, wiring and carriage benefit people from outside Sikkim and thus drain money outside the state. Sikkim must have a clear roadmap based on ground realities and drawn up by competent experts. One wonders what is happening to the report that was supposed to have been complied by the state's Economic Revival Committee. The committee has promised public hearings/ consultative meetings with civil stakeholders of the economy in the state. That will be a helpful exercise if and whenever done.

Another challenge will be studying post-Covid stress disorders. The advanced world has been taking extremely serious note of this issue. Various countries are studying and measuring the impact of various Covid-19 related traumatic stresses. It has been found that it has led to sundry mental health problems such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety and other trauma and stress-related disorders.

Our drawback in relation to this problem is that we are culturally dismissive about mental health issues. We not only do not have adequate healthcare facilities to treat mental health problems, we also have a lingering stigma attached to it. People say that substance use and alcohol use have increased during the pandemic, particularly during the lockdowns. These are purely anecdotal pronouncements, devoid of statistics to back them up. But the implications are compelling. The government has the onus to take the traumatizing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic seriously and initiate a process to deal with it.

Finally, we are not yet out of the Covid pandemic. It took us a three-week lockdown to bring a narrow decrease in the infection rate. The death rate remains high. The infection rate may not have really decreased as hundreds of people in rural Sikkim are rumoured to have been avoiding tests, fearing hospitalization. One irksome reality of this lockdown has been too many people sneaking out. The roads are still busy with traffic. Our public behaviour leaves much to be desired.

At the cost of sounding pessimistic, I dare say the post pandemic utopia is a misplaced notion. We are not suddenly going to land in an amazing post-pandemic world. That world will be wounded, distressed and very sick. Covid-19 will probably be defeated but the issues the coronavirus will leave will need a much longer and harder effort to overcome. Much will depend on how the government will prepare to fight.

Welfare Dept clarifies issues related to Scholarship schemes

GANGTOK, 03 JUN (IPR):

Secretary, Social Justice & Welfare Department, Tshewang Gyachho held a press conference today to clarify issues concerning the post-metric and pre-metric scholarship schemes of the Government.

The Secretary informed that the Department has been consistently receiving enquiries from Sikkimese students studying within and outside the State on various stipulated Scholarship Schemes of the Government. The enquiries relate to the non-receipt of the scholarship amounts for the financial year 2020-21.

The Secretary said that the press conference was organized with the objective to clear the doubt and confusion from the minds of the students and their parents. He explained that the Department has disbursed 100% Schol-

arship amount totalling Rs 13,37,48,000 earmarked for the students under Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Class and Economically Backward Class. However, for the Scheduled Tribe category, only 66% of the Scholarship fund was received from the Government of India, which was then disbursed to the beneficiaries, he informed. He added that the remaining 34% of the fund would be disbursed immediately after it is received from the Government of India.

The Secretary explained that the instances of non-receipt of the stipulated scholarship amount by some students is due to certain technical issues concerning the banks, and at the same time due to technical error from the students' side while processing the registrations etc. He said that in due course of time, the country witnessed the



phenomena of merger of different banks. In the process, the clients had to face certain hardships as it involved updation of accounts and other such formalities. In this context, the Secretary explained that funds transferred to such individuals through Direct Benefit Transfer are reflected as failed transactions, as the IFSC Code and Account Number do not match. He said that this was due to the delay from the students' side to update their bank details to be compatible with the new bank. This has resulted in failed transactions, he stressed.

The Secretary further said that in some instances, the beneficia-

ries may have changed details such as the email address, contact numbers, etc. and have failed to update the same during the process of registration/renewal of the Scholarship. In some cases, incorrect or incomplete details have been fed into the registration portal, resulting in anomalies. Using other people's bank accounts and incomplete KYC seeding is also one of the reasons, he said. The Secretary reiterated that the registration process has to be completed every year in the form of renewal to ensure continuation of the Scholarship Scheme. He stressed that it is not a one-time process. He also highlighted

the eligibility criteria for such Scholarships, that is, minimum 75% attendance in the academic session and promotion to the next class/standard. A student who is detained in a class will not be eligible for the Scholarship.

The Secretary also elaborated on the detailed breakup of the fee and allowance structure and the allocation for each of the categories of students covered by the Scholarship Scheme.

The Secretary appealed to the students and their parents to ensure that all of the above-mentioned criteria are fulfilled to avail of the Scholarship Scheme of the Government. He urged them to be vigilant of the norms and guidelines laid down and strictly comply with them.

The Secretary was joined in the press conference by senior officers of the Department.

ADB signs agreement with GoI to support road upgradation project in Sikkim

DELHI, 03 JUN (PIB):

The Asian Development Bank and the Government of India today signed a \$2.5 million project readiness financing (PRF) loan to support project preparation and design activities to upgrade major district roads in Sikkim that will help improve connectivity to important towns, rural areas, and pilgrimage and tourist destinations in the northeastern state.

The signatories to the PRF for the proposed Sikkim Major District Road Upgradation Project were Additional Secretary, Rajat Kumar Mishra, Department of Economic Affairs in the Ministry of Finance, who signed for the Government of India, and Country Director of ADB's India Resident Mission, Takeo Konishi who signed for ADB.

After signing the loan agreement, Mishra said that the PRF will support the state government's priority in improving road connectivity in the hill state through planning and designing of major district and other roads and bridges that will help boost the state's economy and improve accessibility for people in remote villages.

"The PRF project aims to ensure implementation readiness through feasibility studies, preparing detailed engineering designs of selected sub-projects and building capacity of state agencies so that the ensuing project gets completed in a timely manner," said Mr Konishi. "It will also help incorporate elements of road safety, maintenance, and climate adaptation and mitigation in the ensuing project for long-term sustainability of created assets," Mr Konishi added.

Sikkim's road network requires upgradation to all-weather roads as frequent landslides and erosion damage roads and disrupts intra-state connectivity. The PRF will help the state upgrade identified major district and other roads to improve linkages to the national and state highway network connecting important towns and commercial centers.

Some of the priority roads identified for upgradation are included in the state's master plan for transport management that was formulated with ADB technical assistance in 2012. The ADB-funded North Eastern State Roads Investment Program launched in 2011 had earlier supported road improvements in Sikkim.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

Virtual meet checks on East Sikkim's preparedness for monsoons

GANGTOK, 03 JUN [IPR]: District Collector, East, Ragul K, who also head the District Disaster Management Authority, chaired a monsoon preparedness meeting through virtual mode today.

The meeting was attended by officers of all the line Departments and concerned agencies such as GREF, NHIDCL, NHPC, and officials of Private Hydel Power Projects. The meeting deliberated in detail the steps being taken by each line department to take immediate measures wherever necessary, before the onset of the monsoons.

After taking detailed stock of the preparedness, the District Collec-



tor cum Chairman DDMA appealed to all the line departments and concerned agencies to lend all possible support to the DDMA to address issues that may arise.

He said that the Police force and the BDOs

are the first responders in case of any disaster situation, and urged them to be vigilant. He directed the BDOs to submit the post-monsoon assessment report to the DDMA immediately after the retreat of

the monsoons.

The Chairman also expressed concern about the traffic issue that might arise due to the ongoing restoration work at Sisa Golai Gangtok.

He called for a systematic plan to divert the

traffic at specific points, thereby reducing public inconvenience. He urged the Roads & Bridges Department to engage maximum manpower and complete the restoration work at the earliest.

The Chairman also urged the GMC to coordinate with SDM Gangtok to clear all the drains in and around Gangtok before the onset of the monsoons. Likewise, line departments and hydel power projects were directed to check flooding in low lying areas and ensure that the early warning systems are in place.

The meeting concluded with vote of thanks proposed by ADC East, Tushar Nihare.

Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine launched at Urban Health Centre Tadong

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 JUN:

Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) programme was launched in the Urban Health Center, Tadong, East Sikkim under the Department of Community Medicine, Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences (SMIMS), Sikkim Manipal University (SMU) today, a press release informs.

The programme was inaugurated by Professor and Head, Department of Community Medicine, SMIMS, Dr Dechenla T Bhutia, in the presence of other faculty members from the department, the medical officers in charge of the Urban Health Center along with nurses and supporting staffs.

India loses one child to pneumonia every four minutes. Pneumonia is the single largest cause of death in children worldwide. Pneumococcal Pneumonia in particular is a major public health concern for children



globally. This infection accounts for 18% of all severe pneumonia cases and 33% of all pneumonia deaths worldwide. In India, Pneumonia caused by streptococcus pneumoniae is responsible for 30% of pneumonia deaths in children under five years of age. Pneumonia is closely related to the most severe forms of acute respiratory infections (ARI's). NFHS -4 recorded a 2.7% preva-

lence of ARI in children less than five years of age.

Pneumonia is a vaccine preventable disease and vaccination is undoubtedly one of the most cost effective child survival public health measures which are more affordable and accessible to community in preventing diseases. Government of India has undertaken several initiatives to strengthen ma-

ternal and child health services in the country and child immunization being an important part of child healthcare system in India.

Introduction of PCV is the newest change, a milestone in National Immunization schedule. It protects children against diseases like pneumonia, sepsis and meningitis. It is given as two primary doses at 6 weeks and 14

weeks and one booster dose at 9 months of age in alignment with the National Immunization schedule.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Dechenla T Bhutia, stated that the Urban Health Center, Tadong, under Department of Community Medicine, SMIMS has been catering to the health needs of the population in and around Tadong by providing immunization against vaccine preventable diseases as per the National Immunization schedule.

She informed that PCV earlier was in use in private sectors, however these were expensive and therefore not affordable by a large portion of the population. With its incorporation in the Universal Immunization programme, it is now free of cost. The immunization days of the UHC are on Tuesday and Thursday every week. She urged all mothers to bring their children to get vaccinated in the aforesaid dates.

Woman accuses Meghalaya MLA of rape, FIR filed

SHILLONG, JUN 3 (PTI):

An FIR has been lodged against ruling NPP MLA Thomas Sangma in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills district, after a woman accused him of rape on the pretext of marriage, a police officer said.

According to the complainant, Sangma, who befriended her three months ago, was now forcing her to abort the child she has conceived,

East Khasi Hills district Superintendent of Police Sylvester Nongtynger said.

The woman has sought lawful action against the accused MLA and protection from the state police, the SP noted.

She also said in her complaint that she was aware that the North Tura legislator, who is also the chief adviser to CM Conrad K Sangma,

is married, but took forward the relationship, nevertheless, as the MLA had promised to divorce his wife and marry her, Nongtynger explained.

The complainant further added that earlier, too, she had lodged a complaint, but was forced to retract it after coming under pressure from the former MP.

"We have registered

a case in the matter on June 1. An investigation is underway," the SP stated.

Slamming Thomas, Opposition Congress leader and chairperson of the state Assembly panel for women empowerment, Ampareen Lyngdoh, has written to Speaker Metbah Lyngdoh, seeking the accused MLA's dismissal from all House commit-

tees.

"The allegation of sexual assault is very disappointing... As the chairperson of the Assembly committee for empowerment of women, I am committed to ensure that justice is not denied to both parties, especially to the woman," she said in a letter to Speaker.

Efforts to contact the North Tura MLA did not yield any result.

Delhi reports less than 500 new Covid cases, 45 deaths in 24 hours

NEW DELHI, 03 JUN [NDTV]:

Delhi recorded 487 fresh cases of coronavirus today, lowest since March 16. The positivity rate, number of positive cases identified per 100, stood at 0.61 per cent. 45 patients died due to the disease in the last 24 hours in the capital.

While the recovery rate stands at 97.67 per cent, the death rate was at 1.71 per cent. There were 80,046 tests conducted over the last 24 hours.

As the deadlier second wave of the infections spread across the country, Delhi began witnessing a rise in the number of daily cases and deaths from April 19. It reported the

highest single-day spike of 448 deaths on May 3.

However, there is a declining trend in the number of cases and deaths over the last several days.

On Wednesday, the city reported 576 Covid cases, lowest since March 17, and a positivity rate of 0.78 per cent. 103 patients died yesterday.

Delhi reported 623 fresh COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, the lowest in two-and-a-half months, and 62 deaths as the positivity rate remained below one per cent.

The city reported 648 fresh COVID-19 cases and 86 more fatalities on Monday, while the positivity rate was 0.99 per cent.

CBGC committee to continue for another term



SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 03 JUN:

Christian Burial Ground Committee [CBGC] convened a meeting here on Thursday which was chaired by Upper Tadong MLA, GT Dhungel.

The meeting started with the welcome address by CBGC secretary, Milan Rai and was followed by an opening prayer by United Christian Welfare Society of Sikkim secretary, Pastor Peter Samsher.

A press release from

CBGC mentions that the meeting discussed various agendas of the committee and passed various resolutions. The meeting unanimously decided that the present committee, whose tenure will end this June, will continue for the next term to carry out all upcoming works.

The meeting ended with vote of thanks by CBGC treasurer, Ayub Tamang and closing prayer by UCWSS treasurer Pastor Jigmi Dorji Lepcha.

Kerala retains top rank in Niti Aayog's SDG India Index 2020-21, Bihar worst performer

NEW DELHI, JUN 3 (PTI)

Kerala has retained the top rank in Niti Aayog's SDG India Index 2020-21, while Bihar has been adjudged as the worst performer, according to a report released on Thursday

The Index for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) evaluates progress of states and union territories on social, economic and environmental parameters

Kerala retained its rank as the top state with a score of 75. Both Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu took the second spot with a score of 74

Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam were the worst performing states in this year's India index

The third rendition of India's SDG Index was launched by Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar on Thursday

Further, Chandigarh maintained its top spot among the UTs with a score of 79, followed by Delhi (68)

Mizoram, Haryana and Uttarakhand are the top gainers in 2020-21 in terms of improvement in score from 2019, with an increase of 12, 10 and 8 points, respectively

While in 2019, 10 states/UTs belonged to the category of front-runners (score in the range 65-99, including both), 12 more states/UTs find themselves in this category in 2020-21

Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Punjab, Haryana, Tripura, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh graduated to the category of front-runners (scores between 65 and 99, including both)

The country's overall SDG score improved by 6 points - from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2020-21. This positive stride towards achieving the targets is largely driven by exemplary country-wide performance in goal 6 (clean water and sanitation) and goal 7 (affordable and clean energy), where the composite goal scores are 83 and 92, respectively

"Our effort of monitoring SDGs through

the SDG India Index and Dashboard continues to be widely noticed and applauded around the world. It remains a rare data-driven initiative to rank our states and union territories by computing a composite index on the SDGs," Kumar said

Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said, "The report reflects on the partnerships we have built and strengthened during our SDG efforts. The narrative throws light on how collaborative initiatives can result in better outcomes and greater impacts."

On the theme of partnerships which is central to goal 17, Niti Aayog Member (Health) V K Paul said, "It is clear that by working together we can build a more resilient and sustainable future, where no one is left behind."

First launched in December 2018, the index has become the primary tool for monitoring progress on the SDGs in the country and has simultaneously fostered competition among the states and union territories by ranking them on the global goals.

The index, developed in collaboration with the United Nations in India, measures the progress at the national and sub-national level in the country's journey towards meeting the global goals and targets and has been successful as an advocacy tool to propagate the messages of sustainability, resilience, and partnerships, as well.

From covering 13 goals, 39 targets, and 62 indicators in the first edition in 2018-19 to 17 goals, 54 targets and 100 indicators in the second; this third edition of the index covers 17 goals, 70 targets, and 115 indicators.

The SDGs, constituted through an unprecedented consultative process, have 17 goals and 169 related targets to be achieved by 2030.

The goals are an ambitious commitment by world leaders which set out a universal and an unprecedented agenda which embraces economic, environmental and social aspects of the wellbeing of societies.

Information Inspires Involvement

...and that explains the resistance to transparency

Officialdom in Sikkim continues to cling to anachronistic notions about sharing information. And it is not even sensitive documents that one is talking about here; it is as simple a matter as coming on record when approached. Officials take the easiest way out by ignoring reporters with excuses of being on tour or engaged in a meeting [too many of which are happening nowadays] or not being authorised [which no one seems to be any more].

What most of them don't realise is that every time a scribe arrives in their office for information, they are not expected to spill the beans on the latest red-tape goof-up in the corridors of power. Most of the times, they are being sought either to confirm or deny information or present their side of the picture to an allegation. While journalistic ethics demand that views of all sides be reported, it is only for so long that a story can be kept waiting for want of views from the other side. What these officials don't realise is that news reports cannot warm the "in" tray endlessly even if that is all that the officers most comfortable with.

There is a Right to Information Act now, and is often invoked by officials as the route to take for information. RTI is essentially for the masses to seek information on individual issues, and it would best if it was not crowded by 'vested' interests and journalists pursuing stories. When it comes to news reporting, the procedures and processes involved under RTI are too long and cumbersome and hence should be used sparingly and for stories requiring deeper details and more extensive data. Day to day reporting remains old school but it is time that those who sit on information realised that the times have changed and that it makes more sense to share information when contacted because news has a way of leaking. Leaked news is however invariably incomplete and hence more damaging especially in these days of advanced information technology tools even in the most basic of mobile handsets. Frankly, there were always laws and rules making information accessible to the people, just that the people with the information were not confident enough to share it. RTI forced their hand.

Sharing information automatically makes one accountable and accountability could lead most officials on to sticky wickets. Information, after all, is not just about knowing but also about reacting to what is learnt. Information also means power and empowering the people might be a pet project of the politicians, but still does not appear high enough on the agenda of the bureaucracy which draws its strength from the control it wields over the people. Now that the urban representatives have been elected and panchayats will return for a new term in a year's time, the powers-that-be should perhaps look at access to information before they proceed with further delegation of power. Share all the developmental information of each ward with the people there and see how they respond to it. Empower the people with this information in time and then see the maturity with which they keep an eye on all the funds that have come their way and that it is wisely spent.

Compulsory disclosure of project and contract details, as is being practiced now, comes too late for any effective control. Announce these proposals enough in advance and see how the people get more involved. Some time back, the State Government had announced a policy decision for every developmental project to be preceded by a proper public discussion [organised in a public hearing format]. This is already being implemented and as the initiative gets improved with regular tweaking, the involvement and sense of ownership so far lacking in Sikkim, will definitely manifest. And this paradigm shift also depends finally on how willingly information is shared and offered.

Why countries best placed to handle the pandemic appear to have fared the worst



RACHEL M GISSELQUIST & ANDREA VACCARO
THECONVERSATION.COM

During the first year of the pandemic, it was wealthier countries, with their comparatively stronger health systems, civil services, legal systems and other public services, that suffered the highest rates of COVID-19. Indeed, countries rated to be best prepared to respond to public health threats such as pandemics – those with the greatest “global health security” – had the most COVID-related fatalities.

On the face of it, this makes no sense. Poorer countries with weaker, less effective state institutions wouldn't be expected to fare better in a pandemic. So in a recent working paper, we took a deep dive into the statistics to find out what might explain this unusual situation.

We looked at three core dimensions that tend to describe how effective states are at doing things. If states are effective, they usually have greater authority to provide order and security, greater capacity to provide public services, and greater legitimacy (which is a measure of how accepting citizens are of the state's fundamental right to rule over them). So when preventing or dealing with COVID-19, we expected states with high authority (such as China), high capacity (Finland) and high legitimacy (Canada) to have an advantage over those with low authority (Honduras), low capacity (Liberia) and low legitimacy (Uzbekistan).

But this wasn't the case. Simple

correlations between these three core dimensions of the state and COVID-19 health outcomes are puzzling: countries with higher state effectiveness – no matter the dimension used to measure it – have had higher rates of COVID-19 infections and fatalities. And an initial look at national policies to contain the disease similarly reveals the unexpected: greater state effectiveness seems to be linked, weakly but still, to lighter restrictions.

Moreover, countries rated as having high authority and high capacity have also been slower than those with lower assessments to enact containment policies. Some “weaker” states – for instance, the Central African Republic, Somalia and Yemen – closed and cancelled public events more quickly than states considered to be more effective.

DATA CAN BE DECEPTIVE

At a first look, then, the data seems to confirm that typically more effective states were generally less effective in their pandemic response. However, drawing such conclusions from simple correlations is misleading.

There are several factors that can explain differences in pandemic outcomes. For instance, countries bordering others with high infection rates are at a higher risk. This made southern Europe, made up of typically highly effective states, a high-risk area during the first wave of the pandemic, as it was an early place the virus took hold.

And because the elderly are more vulnerable to the virus, coun-

tries with older populations are also more susceptible to COVID-19. In some countries with highly effective state institutions, like Japan and Germany, over 20% of the population is 65 and above. In Uganda or Mali, for instance, it's only around 2%.

We also know that with higher rates of COVID-19 testing, more infections and deaths are detected – and this detection typically happens more in countries with stronger health systems and public services. To get an accurate picture of the relationship between the state and COVID-19, such factors must be controlled for.

A completely different picture emerges once economic development, the age structure of the population, population density, testing rates, and proximity to badly affected countries are taken into account. When these relevant factors are analysed, it appears more effective states have mounted more effective pandemic responses. There are, though, some differences in outcomes according to the three different dimensions of the state that we mentioned previously.

When controlling for the above factors, states with a greater capacity to provide public services have had fewer COVID-19 infections and deaths, as well as a lower ratio of infections leading to deaths (what's known as the case-fatality rate). States with greater authority have also had lower case-fatality rates – consistent with our expectations – though not infections and

deaths. On the other hand, there is no clear relationship between state legitimacy and pandemic outcomes.

WEAKER STATES REMAIN VULNERABLE

Such findings should remind us that having strong state institutions does really matter – even if on the surface it looks like these institutions have failed.

This isn't to say that many countries with “weaker” and less well-funded state institutions have not performed admirably in the pandemic. Prior experience with infectious diseases, public support for restrictions, and strong community action, among other factors, have all been important.

But admiring the resilience of communities and the skill and resourcefulness of (some) public officials should not distract us from the fact that those who live in weaker states remain, on average, more vulnerable to the pandemic in health and economic terms. As the COVID-19 crisis continues, we mustn't let deceptive data hide the fact that those living in countries with less effective state institutions remain at a huge disadvantage, and that truly the pandemic has both reflected and exacerbated existing inequalities.

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We Performed Magic Tricks on Birds to See How They Perceive the World

ELIAS GARCIA-PELEGRIN
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Magic tricks can teach us about how the brain works. Magic capitalises on very specific blind spots in people's attention and perception so the techniques that magicians use to trick audiences are particularly interesting to psychologists like me.

Misdirection, for example, relies on the control of the audience's attention to fool them. A magician will divert the audience's attention away from things that show how the trick is done, towards the effect they want them to see. This and other magic techniques can reveal important characteristics of how our minds work.

But magic tricks might also be a good tool to investigate the non-human animal mind. The study of how animals perceive magic effects that fool and surprise humans can help us understand how their minds experience the world around them, and whether such experiences are in some way like ours.

That's why, in a recent study, my colleagues and I tried to perform magic tricks to birds. We tested sleight of hand on Eurasian jays, and found they were fooled by some tricks and not by others.

Misdirection is not totally new to some birds. Corvids – large-brained birds in the crow family including jays, ravens and magpies – hide food they can retrieve later, a behaviour known as caching. But if another corvid is watching them hide the food, they run the risk of their cache being stolen.

To get around this, this clever family of birds use intricate and highly elaborate protection tactics that are comparable to the misdirection used by magicians. For example, corvids can hide food discreetly in one spot while pretending to hide it in many other places, making it difficult for the observer to spot the real cache.

THREE TRICKS

In our study, we performed three different sleight of hand tricks to six Eurasian jays and a 80 human participants. Known as palming, French drop and fast pass, they are all used in magic routines to make objects appear and disappear.

Palming involves hiding an object in your palm while pretending the hand is empty. The French drop – shown in the gif below – involves pretending to pass something from one palm to the other, without actually moving the object. Finally, the fast pass involves moving an object be-

tween your hands so quickly it's not seen by the audience.

They all involve misleading the observer into thinking an object has or hasn't been transferred from one hand to the other.

For the first two of these tricks – palming and French drop – to succeed in misleading the average audience member, the observer needs some inherent understanding of what a typical transfer of objects entails. It's this knowledge that certain movements usually produce particular outcomes that leads a spectator into assuming there was no foul play.

Little is known about corvids' preconceptions of human hand motions or whether they have similar expectations as us when observing transfers of objects between hands. Birds don't have hands, so we wanted to find out whether they understand what hand movements should mean.

The third sleight of hand effect we used doesn't rely on such expectations. Fast pass is based on the magician's ability to performed very fast motions, which aren't usually perceived by the observer.

Birds have different visual perception than people, with a much wider field of view. If our jays fell for similar sleight of hand techniques that magicians use to deceive humans, it might mean that they had similar blind spots.

CLEVER JAYS

Unlike our human sample, which was significantly fooled by all three



of the magic effects we performed, Eurasian jays didn't seem to be fooled by the first two tricks. This could be because jays lack the expectations about hand mechanics that makes us humans liable to these techniques of deception.

But our sample of jays was significantly fooled by the third technique – as shown in the gif below – suggesting that their visual system can be exploited with similar methodologies as the ones used in humans.

It is possible that the effect might be exploiting different blind spots in attention and perception to those in people. Further research should be conducted to fully investigate the blind spots, and whether these are similar to our perceptive failures or explained by something else.

[the writer is Researcher in Comparative Cognition and Evolutionary Psychology, University of Cambridge]

Even in Nepal, police misbehaviour with citizens under scanner, thanks to social media

SHUVAN DHUNGANA

KATHMANDU, 03 JUN [KATHMANDUPOST]: On Tuesday, a video clip showing a policeman caning a woman went viral on social media, sparking criticism, once again, over excessive use of force by police against civilians during the pandemic.

The video, which was originally posted on the social media app TikTok on Monday, was also shared on Twitter and Facebook drawing widespread condemnation of the police action.

In the video, a woman can be heard questioning the policeman if the government has authorized him to charge batons. And immediately after this the policeman gives her a thrashing with a cane hectoring, "Go away." Then the policeman tells the woman to go to the police station if she has any complaints after which the woman asks if he had the authority to hit her with the stick. The policeman retorts, "Yes."

According to Senior Superintendent of Police, Basanta Bahadur Kunwar, who is also the Nepal Police spokesperson, the incident took place in Nuwakot district on Monday when the policeman was heading for the woman's home after receiving complaints from villagers about

frequent fights between the woman and her husband. "After their recent fight, the husband was hospitalized and the police had gone for an investigation," said Kunwar.

"The officer should have taken a female officer with him and dealt with the woman," said Kunwar. "After conducting an investigation, action would be taken against the officer."

After watching the 24-second clip, many people on social media condemned the police action.

"Maybe not all police personnel would be like him, but there is some problem in their basic training. They need to shed the mentality that they have the right to beat up civilians immediately after donning the police uniform," wrote a Twitter user.

"Another example that shows majority of policemen don't deserve any respect from THE COMMON PEOPLE ! She has the right to question ! Appropriate action needs to be taken against that policeman who misused his authority for physical violence against woman!," wrote another twitter user.

Barely a week ago, in a similar incident, a policeman was caught on camera assaulting a civilian. An em-



ployee at a surgical supplies store in Birgunj was assaulted by Deputy Superintendent of Police Prahlad Karki.

The video clip of Karki kicking Ahamad was shared on various social media platforms triggering a widespread condemnation of the action. After the incident, the Province 2 Police Office had formed a three-member team led by Superintendent of Police Krishna Prasai to investigate the incident.

Even last year, after the government enforced a nationwide lockdown on March 24 to prevent the spread of Covid-19, numerous images and video clips of Nepal Po-

lice personnel using excessive force against lockdown violators were shared on social media. From assaulting a man on a bicycle to beating up doctors who were returning to their quarters, police had used force unnecessarily and in excess while enforcing the lockdown.

According to Kunwar police personnel should not use force against civilians unless extremely necessary.

"Police personnel found using excessive force can be suspended and even laid off," Kunwar told the Post. "Acknowledging the problem of aggressive behaviour among our officers, we have been

training them to behave in a polite and respectful manner with everyone."

According to Kunwar, even now thousands of officers are enforcing the prohibitory orders and they have been instructed to interrogate the persons found violating the restrictions and avoid physical action. "Rather than taking physical action, we have told our officers to either detain the rule violators or to fine them as per law."

According to Nepal Police, in the last 24 hours 511 people were fined a total of Rs95,100 for defying the prohibitory orders while 4, 381 people were detained.

According to former Deputy Inspector General Hemantha Malla, Nepal Police using excessive force on civilians is not a new issue but unlike in the past such incidents become public now because everyone uses social media.

According to Malla, such incidents happen because many police officers after donning the uniform wrongly think they are more superior than the ordinary citizens.

"Not only this, the individual character of officers also has an effect on their behaviour. Similarly, due to overwork and the stress related to family and work could also have a role in their aggressive behaviour," Malla told the Post.

However Malla believes that such incidents have declined compared to the past as everyone now has a camera [smartphone] in their hand and they can easily film police wrongdoings and post such clips on social media.

Meanwhile, Nepal Police has urged the general public to contact it on the toll-free numbers 100 or 01-4412780 or 9851283273, or call the police spokesperson on 9851292111, or email at ecomplain@nepalpolice.gov.np if anyone has any complaint against police.

Mizoram logs 228 new COVID-19 cases, 1 more death

AIZAWL, JUN 3 (PTI): Mizoram reported 228 new COVID-19 cases, pushing the tally to 12,859, officials said on Wednesday.

The COVID-19 death toll in the state rose to 45 as one more person succumbed to the disease.

A 92-year-old woman from Aizawl died of the infection at Zoram Medical College (ZMC) on Wednesday night, the state information and public relations department said in its official Twitter handle.

Of the fresh 228 cases, Aizawl district registered 153, Lunglei (25), Lawngtlai (21), Kolasib (17), Siaha (6), Mamit (5) and Champhai (1), an official statement said on Thursday.

More than 43 children were among the newly infected people, it said.

Three patients have travel history, while the rest were found to have locally contracted the infection, it said, adding that 151 patients have developed symptoms of COVID-19.

Mizoram now has 3,320 active COVID-19 cases, while 9,494 people have recovered from the infection.

At least 147 people were discharged from various Covid-19 Care Centres on Wednesday.

The recovery rate is 73.84 per cent and the death rate is 0.35 per cent.

The state has so far tested 4,00,698 samples for COVID-19, including 3,267 on Wednesday.

According to state immunisation officer Dr Lalzawmi, as many as 2,60,105 people have been administered the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine of which 52,129 have received both doses till Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the state spokesperson on COVID-19 Dr Pachuau Lalmalsawma said at least 8,158 coronavirus cases were reported in two months in the ongoing second wave since April this year against 6,131 cases reported in over 12 months between March 2020 to March 2021, the period labelled as the first wave of the pandemic.

While 11 people have died due to COVID-19 during the first wave, as many as 34 people have so far succumbed to the infection since April this year, he said.

The majority of the COVID-19 victims had comorbid status, he said.

He said that 6,268 COVID-19 cases were detected in last month (May) with Aizawl district contributing the highest cases at 4,363, which accounted for 69.62 per cent of the total cases found in the state during last month.

The state reported more than 1,650 COVID-19 cases in April.

While the infection rate in April was 3.10 per cent, it was 7.20 per cent in May.

Of the 6,268 COVID-19 patients detected in May, only 26 per cent have travel history while the rest were locally infected, according to Pachuau.

376 new COVID-19 cases push Arunachal Pradesh's tally to 28,018

ITANAGAR, JUN 3 (PTI):

The COVID-19 caseload in Arunachal Pradesh rose to 28,018 as 376 more people tested positive for the infection, a senior health department official said here on Thursday. The COVID-19 death toll in the state increased to 118 with two more persons succumbing to the disease in the past two days, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

A 56-year-old woman from the Capital Complex region died at the Dedicated Covid Hospital (DCH) Chimpu near here, on Monday due to acute respiratory distress syndrome. Another woman aged 51-years from Lower Siang died at DCH Pasighat in East Siang district on Wednesday due to Covid Pneumonia, the official said.

The Capital Complex region continued to witness highest spurt in fresh cases with 82, followed by



Tawang (51), Lower Subansiri (36), Namsai, Changlang and West Kameng at 28 each, Lohit (19), Leparada (18), East Kameng (16) and Upper Siang at 12.

Nine new cases were also reported from Upper Subansiri, eight each from Pakke Kessang and Lower Dibang Valley, seven from East Siang, Papumpare (6), four each from Anjaw and Longding, two each from West Siang,

Tirap, Kra Daadi, Kamle and Dibang Valley and one each from Kurung Kumey and Shi-Yomi district respectively, the SSO said.

Of the fresh cases 360 were detected through rapid antigen tests, 12 through RT-PCR and 4 through TrueNat method, the official said, adding that 135 patients have symptoms of COVID-19. Arunachal Pradesh

now has 3,817 active COVID-19 cases.

At least 329 more people were recovered from the disease on Wednesday, taking the total number of recoveries in the state to 24,083.

The COVID-19 recovery rate now is 85.95 per cent while the active percentage stands at 13.62 and the positivity rate at 5.23 per cent, Jampa said.

The Capital Complex Region - comprising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas - has the highest number of active cases at 709, followed by Tawang (436), Changlang (352), Lower Subansiri (306), Namsai (298), Lower Dibang Valley (235), West Kameng (225) and Lohit with 201 cases.

Altogether, 5,99,605 samples have been tested for COVID-19 in the state so far, including 7,181 on Wednesday, Jampa said.

Meanwhile, State Immunisation Officer Dr Dimong Padung said that a total of 3,51,155 people have been administered COVID-19 vaccine so far in the state since the inoculation drive began in January.

Dr Padung said that the state as on June 2 has a total of 1,56,580 doses of vaccines available, which includes 1,28,390 supplied by the Centre and 28,190 doses purchased by the state government from Serum Institute.

Assamese litterateur Lakshminandan Bora dies at 89

GUWAHATI, JUN 3 (PTI):

Eminent Assamese litterateur Lakshminandan Bora died on Thursday due to post-COVID complications at a private hospital in Guwahati, doctors said.

He was 89 and survived by wife, two sons and a daughter.

Bora, a Padma Shri awardee, had tested COVID-positive on May 20 and was admitted to the hospital. He had recovered from COVID-19 but had comorbidities and was undergoing treatment.

An author of more than 60 books, mostly novels and short story collections, Bora served as the faculty member of Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat. He retired in 1992 as the head of the Department of Physics and Agrometeorology.

His first novel 'Gonga Silonir Pakhi' was translated into eleven languages and was made into a film by noted Assamese filmmaker

Padum Barua in 1976.

Some of the well-known books of the Sahitya Akademi-winning author are 'Patal Bhairavi', 'Kayakalpa', 'Bishesh Eraati', 'Sehi Anurag', 'Kal Dingaare Pal', 'Matsya Kanya' and Preyashi.

Bora was a former President of the Asam Sahitya Sabha.

He also received the Saraswati Samman and the Assam Valley Literary Award for his works.

He was also honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Assam Publication Board.

Bora has also served as the editor of the Assamese literary magazine 'Goriyoshi' and also as the chairman of the Assam Pollution Control Board.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed his grief at Bora's death and said that with his passing a glorious chapter of Assamese literature has come to an end.

Book shares spiritual secrets of Quran

NEW DELHI, JUN 3 (PTI): A new book offers heartfelt perspectives on Islamic theology and also walks readers through practical exercises that inspire love, strengthen faith, and increase reliance on and intimacy with God.

"Secrets of Divine Love: A Spiritual Journey into the Heart of Islam" by A Helwa draws upon the inspirational words of the Quran and Prophet Muhammad and shares lessons through stories from the world's greatest spiritual masters.

The author-poet says though her book is about Islamic spirituality and practices, she believes God is bigger than any one religion or philosophy.

"I choose Islam as my faith, but I offer you these words from the Quran not to change you, but to remind you how much you are loved by God. I believe that just as wisdom teachings from other faiths have enriched my relationship with God, the deeper dimensions of Islam may also in-



spire you, regardless of what path you choose to walk," she says.

Helwa believes that every single person on earth is deeply loved by the divine. She started her blog while obtaining her masters in divinity as a means of helping others overcome personal and spiritual struggles on their journey of experiencing divine love.

According to the author, "Secrets of Divine Love" was written for the longing heart, for the one who is searching for something they have not been able to find.

"For the one who sometimes spirals into hopelessness and cannot help

but feel too imperfect for a perfect God to love."

This book is for the one who is at the edge of their faith, who has experienced religion as a harsh winter instead of the life-bearing spring it was sent to be by God, she says.

"Whether you are on the path of Islam or just seeking to know God, 'Secrets of Divine Love' uses the language of spirituality to transform your relationship with God, yourself, and the world around you," Helwa writes in the book, published by Penguin Random House.

She says her book takes readers on a journey through the mysterious

nature of God and His unconditional mercy and love for all.

"It then delves into who you are and how the Quran can be used as a map for manifesting your greatest potential. By unveiling the spiritual secrets that are hidden in the heart of Islam's pillars, principles and practices, this book calls you to contemplate the divine beauty that is imbedded in every atom of existence," she writes.

For her, awakening to faith is not a one-time event, but a continuously unfolding reality.

"The journey of faith is not a race, but a marathon of love that each person walks at a different pace."

Although each person's experience of God is unique to them, Helwa says in writing this book, she felt guided to share her story, as a testimony that God's love and mercy have the power to change every heart they touch.

She says she visited mosques around the world, lived in a monastery, had spiritual experiences medi-

tating with Buddhist monks, studied Taoism and Kabbalah, but still couldn't find the inner peace she was seeking.

"In my early twenties, I was travelling through a small town in Turkey called Cappadocia, when the divine spark of faith reignited within me like lightning. All it took was my eyes to fall upon a woman who was drowned in her worship of God. I watched her pray in an old 17th-century animal barn, as if nothing in the world existed but her divine lover.

"She did not robotically repeat words of prayer like a formula; rather, every word she uttered came with a silent 'I love you, my beloved Lord.' Her words were like synchronised dancers swimming in unison in the ocean of love that poured out of her. She was the first person I had ever seen in my life that not only prayed but she herself became the prayer. I knew instantly that she had everything my soul had been seeking..." Helwa writes.

CA should make ball-tampering investigation report public: Saker

MELBOURNE, JUN 3 (PTI): Former Australia bowling coach David Saker wants the country's cricket board to make its investigation into the 2018 ball-tampering scandal public as he feels releasing that report might end the questions surrounding the incident.

The ball-tampering issue resurfaced when Cameron Bancroft recently hinted in an interview that the bowlers in the team might have been aware of the plot to use sandpaper to alter the ball's condition.

Saker was the bowling coach of the side at that time and had earlier stated that even he could be held accountable for what happened.

The scandal led to bans on Bancroft, then skipper Steve Smith and his deputy David Warner.

"I can't see any point why it wouldn't be released, but that's, yeah that's up to them the way they want to handle that," Saker was quoted saying by the local media here.

He was unveiled as the coach of the Big Bash League side Melbourne Renegades on Thursday.

Asked why the CA should release the information, Saker said, "Because these questions keep coming up, maybe if it's released, then maybe questions might stop but I don't think they will and the questions will keep getting asked."

After Bancroft's comments, the bowlers, including top pacer Pat Cummins, had insisted that they had no prior knowledge of the plot.

However, former skipper Michael Clarke had said it was difficult to believe that bowlers were not aware.

Saker himself has denied any knowledge of the plot.

"Well, there's no doubt I had no idea there was any sandpaper involved. As far as we knew that we were using normal tactics to get the ball reverse-swinging so that's as far as I know.

"We've all gone in and did our bit so I can't see it going any further, but the questions will keep coming. There's no doubt about that, but that's just a part of life, you got to deal with that but it's never going to go away, that's for sure," he said.

CA chief Nick Hockley had said last month that they do not intend to make the investigation report public.

After England debut, Robinson says sorry for abusive tweets

LONDON, JUN 3 (AP): For Ollie Robinson, the day should have been all about the joy of taking two wickets on his test debut for England at Lord's.

Instead, he'll remember the biggest moment of his cricket career for the wrong reasons.

Soon after stumps on Day 1 of the first test against New Zealand, the 27-year-old fast bowler was close to tears as he apologized for a string of sexist and racist messages that he posted on Twitter from 2012-14 and which surfaced over social media while the game was being played.

"I deeply regret my actions, and I am ashamed of making such remarks," Robinson said in a statement he read out firstly to broadcasters and then to other media on Wednesday.

"I was thoughtless and irresponsible, and regardless of my state of mind at the time, my ac-

tions were inexcusable."

Robinson said the tweets were sent during a tough period in his life after he'd been fired by English county Yorkshire as a teenager.

"I didn't know they were still there," he told a news conference. I just want to apologize to everyone. I regret it hugely."

The old tweets were shared online while he was on the field at the home of cricket, where he took 2-50 and claimed the wickets of New Zealand batsmen Tom Latham and Ross Taylor.

"Today should be about my efforts on the field and the pride of making my test debut for England, but my thoughtless behavior in the past has tarnished this," Robinson said.

"Over the past few years, I have worked hard to turn my life around. I have considerably matured as an adult."

Robinson said he will continue to educate my-



self, look for advice and work with the support network that is available to me to learn more about getting better in this area.

Tom Harrison, chief executive of the England and Wales Cricket Board, said he did not have the words to express how disappointed I am that an England men's player has chosen to write tweets of this nature.

"Any person reading those words, particularly a woman or person of color, would take away

an image of cricket and cricketers that is completely unacceptable," Harrison said. We are better than this.

England's players began the day by sharing a so-called moment of unity with their New Zealand counterparts, wearing T-shirts designed to show a collective stance against discrimination of all kinds.

I don't want something that happened eight years ago diminish the efforts of my team-

mates and the ECB as they continue to build meaningful action with their comprehensive initiatives and efforts, which I fully endorse and support," Robinson said.

Harrison said a "full investigation" was underway and that rules were in place to deal with conduct of this nature.

"The emergence of these comments from Ollie's past reiterates the need for ongoing education and engagement on this issue," Harrison said.

I am working to acquire new technique, skills for Olympics: Sindhu

NEW DELHI, JUN 3 (PTI): India's top badminton star P V Sindhu says she is working to acquire new skills and techniques to surprise her rivals, who are at the same level with distinct playing styles, at the Tokyo Olympics.

The Rio Olympics silver medallist and world champion feels the coronavirus pandemic-induced break has given her the much-needed time to rectify mistakes in her game and add something new to her repertoire.

Her nemesis and reigning champion, Carolina Marin, will not be there due to a knee injury, but Sindhu knows the field still remains tough.

"In women's circuit the players in top-10 are of same standard. You can't take it easy, if one player is not there," Sindhu, the world number seven, said in a virtual interaction, organised by the Sports Authority of India (SAI).

"There is Tai Tzu Ying, Ratchanok Intanon, (Nozomi) Okuhara and (Akane) Yamaguchi. They are all good players. You can't say, it will be easy if one player is missing. I can't relax and need to be focussed and give my best," the 25-year-old said.

Sindhu had lost the



2016 Olympics final and 2017 World Championship summit clash to Marin.

"There are a couple of tricky players like Ratchanok, she is very skilful. We have to look after them.

"For me, it's a very good time to improve my technique and skill. I have improved. It's good that I have got so much time. Usually we don't get time to rectify mistakes or learn new skills.

"It takes time. So this was the time and I am using it. I hope, in the Olympics, there will be some new techniques and skills."

Sindhu said she and others have to watch out for the Chinese players as well since they have been missing from the circuit for some time.

"They have not

played for a long time. We have not seen them. Chen Yu (Fei) and He Bing Jiao, the left hander, her skills are good. In Olympics, it's completely different, the game, the pressure. You can't expect easy (rivals)."

Asked about her own strong points that may give her advantage over others, Sindhu said her game is always about relentless attacks.

"Attack is my strong point. The rivals know my game so I am working on my defence as well. I am tall, so my attack is good. I have to be prepared for all strokes, for everything," she said.

The Hyderabad said training at the Gachibowli Stadium is ideal preparation for the Games since the facility is huge and gives her the feel of stadiums where

big-ticket events like the Olympics are held.

"We might not know each other's game now because we have not played for the last two months. I have been playing at Gachibowli after the Thailand Open and it has been really helpful because it is international standard.

"When you play in a big stadium, you have to make sure you control the shuttle and drift which is very very important. When you go abroad, shuttles drift, there's is AC and shuttle might (travel) fast. So when you have the facilities why not use them," she said.

Talking about Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth missing out on the Olympics due to cancellation of the qualifying events, Sindhu sympathised with her com-

patriots.

"It would have been good if they were there. No one knew that there will be such a situation. Everyone tried hard but the tournaments were unfortunately cancelled because of the safety of the athletes. Life comes first.

"At Olympics also, we will be tested everyday."

Sindhu said she does not feel any pressure of being the lone woman shuttler from the country but is aware of the expectations.

She also said that she is much more experienced and can handle the big stage better since the Rio Olympics.

"Last time around I did not even know how the Olympic village would be but now I know how it is there."

Sindhu said while she has empathy for Japanese tennis star Naomi Osaka, who pulled out of French Open after being fined for missing a mandatory press conference, she also spoke about the pressure media interactions put on her. However, she herself has not felt the same.

Sindhu also praised her Korean coach Park Tae Sang for understanding what's going on in her head and for his consistent support.

With 136 in Lord's debut, Conway betters Ganguly's long-held record

LONDON, JUN 3 (PTI): New Zealand batsman Devon Conway has broken former India captain Sourav Ganguly's 25-year-old record of registering the highest Test score on debut at Lord's when he went past the stylish southpaw's 131 during the first Test against England.

Conway, who is also a left-handed batsman, remained unbeaten 136 as New Zealand finished the first day at a solid 246 for three

With his opening day exploits, the South African-born 29-year-old became the sixth cricketer to hit a hundred on debut at the iconic venue.

Ganguly, who is now the BCCI president, had

scored 131 on his Test debut at what is referred to as the Mecca of cricket in 1996.

Interestingly, both Conway and Ganguly share their birthday -- July 8 -- but are separated by nearly 20 years in age.

Speaking to Sky Sports at the end of the day's play, Conway said, "I'll have some time to let that settle in. The job's not done but I'm very happy.

"I had a conversation with (skipper) Kane (Williamson) a couple of days ago and asked him what it feels like to go on that honours board; the first thing he said to me was: now you're on it, boy."



With his century, Conway became only the third non-English batsman to score a century on Test debut at Lord's.

Australian batsman Harry Graham had

scored 107 against England on his Test debut in 1893.

Debutant Conway reached the three-figure mark in style, smashing fast-medium bowler Ol-

lie Robinson for a six in the 61st over of the innings.

Conway struck 16 fours and faced 240 balls during his stay in the middle.

Trevor Bayliss leaves England, returns to coach in Aus



SYDNEY, JUN 3 (AP): Trevor Bayliss is leaving England and will return home to take charge of the Sydney Thunder for the next three Twenty20 Big Bash League seasons.

The 58-year-old Bayliss led England to the ODI Cricket World Cup at Lord's in 2019 and twice won the Indian Premier League while in charge of the Kolkata Knight Riders. He also led the Sydney Sixers to the title in the inaugural season of the BBL a decade ago.

The Thunder returned to the finals last

season after missing out three years in a row since their title win in 2016.

Bayliss, who also coached New South Wales to Sheffield Shield and one-day titles between 2004 and 2007, will replace Shane Bond, who stepped down from the role for family reasons in April.

"It's great to be home and involved in New South Wales cricket," Bayliss said on Thursday.

"The Thunder have done well over the last few years... Hopefully we can go one or two steps further this summer."

Top European court faults Germany for high air pollution

BERLIN (AP): The European Union's top court ruled Thursday that Germany "systematically and persistently" exceeded limits on nitrogen dioxide, a harmful gas produced by diesel engines, in many regions between 2010 and 2016.

The European Court of Justice faulted Germany for exceeding annual limits on NO2 in 26 out of 89 areas assessed — including the Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Duesseldorf, Munich and Stuttgart areas. It found that hourly limits also were exceeded in Stuttgart and the Rhine-Main area, which includes Frankfurt.

The court, which was acting on a suit filed by the EU's executive Commission in 2018, also said Germany failed to ensure that air quality plans provided for measures to keep the periods in which the NO2 limits were exceeded as short

as possible.

More recently, many German cities have introduced piecemeal bans on older diesel cars in areas or even individual streets where emissions are particularly high. It wasn't immediately clear whether Thursday's ruling would have practical consequences, though it could in principle lead to more such restrictions on diesel cars.

Official figures, however, show that air quality in Germany has improved since 2016.

A study released by Germany's Federal Office for the Environment three years ago found that almost 6,000 people died prematurely in 2014 from illnesses that are known to be caused or aggravated by NO2. It compared deaths from diabetes, asthma and other diseases with emissions records in cities and the countryside.

Oil refinery fire near Iran's capital burns into second day

TEHRAN, JUN 3 (AP): A massive fire at an oil refinery near Iran's capital burned into a second day Thursday as firefighters struggled to extinguish the flames.

The fire began at the state-owned Tondgooyan Petrochemical Co. to the south of Tehran on Wednesday night, sending a huge plume of black smoke into the sky over the capital.

The Oil Ministry's SHANA news agency said the fire broke out over a leak in two waste tanks at the facility. Authorities initially suggested the flames affected a liquified petroleum gas pipeline at the refinery.

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh visited the scene overnight. While seeking to as-

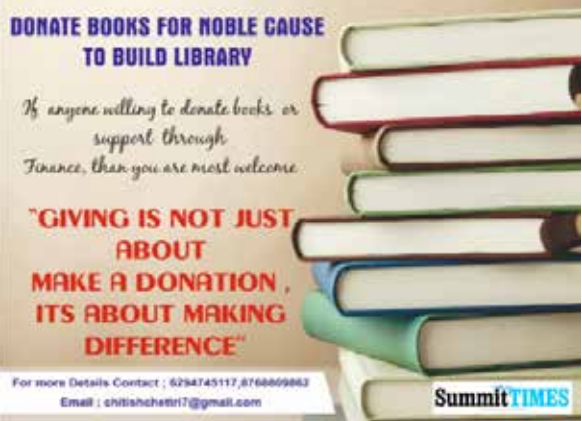
sure the public the fire wouldn't affect production, Iranians queued up for gasoline on Thursday morning, the start of the weekend in the Islamic Republic.

SHANA also quoted refinery spokesman Shaker Khafaei as saying authorities hoped the fire would extinguish itself after running out of fuel in the coming hours.

It wasn't immediately clear what started the blaze. Temperatures in Tehran reached nearly 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) on Wednesday. Hot summer weather in Iran has caused fires in the past.

The blaze came the same day a fire struck the largest warship in the Iranian navy, which later sank in the Gulf of Oman.

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Belarusian journalist in prison video after flight diversion

KYIV, UKRAINE (AP): A dissident journalist arrested when Belarus diverted his flight said in a video from prison that he has been set up by an unidentified associate. The footage of Raman Pratasevich was part of an hour-long TV program aired late Wednesday by the state-controlled ONT channel. In the film, the 26-year-old Pratasevich is also shown saying that protests against Belarus’ authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko are now pointless amid a tough crackdown and suggesting that the opposition wait for a more opportune moment.

A top associate of Pratasevich said the journalist was clearly speaking under duress.

The TV program claimed that the Belarusian authorities were unaware that Pratasevich was on board the Ryanair jet en route from Athens to Vilnius when flight controllers diverted it to Minsk on May 23 citing a bomb threat.

No bomb was found after the landing, but Pratasevich was arrested along with his Russian girlfriend. The flight’s diversion outraged the European Union, which responded by barring the Belarusian flag carrier from its skies, telling European carriers to skirt Belarus and drafting new

bruising sanctions against key sectors of the Belarusian economy.

Lukashenko, who has ruled the ex-Soviet nation of 9.3 million with an iron fist for more than a quarter-century, has accused the West of trying to “strangle” his country with sanctions.

Belarus has been rocked by months of protests fueled by his reelection to a sixth term in an August 2020 vote that was widely seen as rigged. Lukashenko responded with an increasingly harsh crackdown. More than 35,000 people have been arrested since the protests began, with thousands beaten.

Pratasevich, who left Belarus in 2019, has become a top foe of Lukashenko. He ran a widely popular channel on the Telegram messaging app that played a key role in helping organize the huge anti-government protests and was charged with inciting mass disturbances — accusations that carry a 15-year prison sentence.

Lukashenko last week accused Pratasevich of fomenting a “bloody rebellion.”

Speaking in the ONT film, Pratasevich acknowledged that the protests have fizzled and argued that the opposition should



wait until economic problems foment broad public discontent.

“We need to wait until the economic situation worsens ... and

people take to the street for a mug of soup, to put it bluntly,” he said.

Lukashenko has defended the Ryanair flight diversion as a legitimate response to the bomb threat. The ONT program appeared designed to back that contention by claiming that the Belarusian authorities were unaware that Pratasevich was on the plane when they diverted it.

In the video, the journalist said he put a notice about his travel plans on a chat with associates 40 minutes before his departure. He alleged that the bomb threat could have been issued by someone with whom he had a personal conflict. His remarks didn’t elaborate on the conflict.

Pratasevich charged that the perceived ill-wisher — whom he didn’t name — had links with opposition-minded hackers who have attacked Belarusian official websites and issued bomb threats in the past.

“The first thing I thought was that I have been set up,” he said.

“When the plane was on a landing path, I realized that it’s useless to panic,” Pratasevich said. Once the plane taxied to a parking spot, he described seeing heavily armed special forces waiting.

“It was a dedicated SWAT unit — uniforms, flak jackets and

weapons,” he said.

Last month, Pratasevich noted he had a rift with Franak Viachorka, an adviser to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the main opposition candidate in the August presidential election who left after the vote for Lithuania under official pressure. Viachorka and Pratasevich both accompanied Tsikhanouskaya on a visit to Greece in May.

Asked about the video, Viachorka told The Associated Press that Pratasevich now is “a hostage under pressure” and insisted they have maintained friendly ties.

A day after his arrest, Pratasevich appeared in a video from detention that was broadcast on Belarusian state TV. Speaking rapidly and in a monotone, he said he was confessing to staging mass disturbances. His parents, who now live in Poland, said the confession seemed to be coerced.

In the ONT film, Pratasevich said he tried to stay away from his girlfriend after the landing, hoping that the authorities wouldn’t arrest her. Sofia Sapega didn’t feature in the new TV program but she was shown in a video from prison last week, confessing to running a channel that revealed personal data about Belarusian security officers.

In Syria camp, forgotten children are molded by IS ideology

AL-HOL, SYRIA (AP): At the sprawling al-Hol camp in northeast Syria, children pass their days roaming the dirt roads, playing with mock swords and black banners in imitation of Islamic State group militants. Few can read or write. For some, the only education is from mothers giving them IS propaganda.

It has been more than two years since the Islamic State group’s self-declared “caliphate” was brought down. And it has been more than two years that some 27,000 children have been left to languish in al-Hol camp, which houses families of IS members.

Most of them not yet teenagers, they are spending their childhood in a limbo of miserable conditions with no schools, no place to play or develop, and seemingly no international interest in resolving their situation.

Only one institution is left to mold them: remnants of the Islamic State group. IS operatives and sympathizers have networks within the camp, and the group has sleeper cells around eastern Syria that continue to wage a low-level insurgency, awaiting an opportunity for a revival.

Kurdish authorities and aid groups fear the camp will create a new generation of militants. They are pleading with home countries to take the women and children back. The problem is that home governments often see the children as posing a danger rather

than as needing rescue.

“These children are ISIS’s first victims,” said Save the Children’s Syria Response Director Sonia Khush. “A 4-year-old boy does not really have an ideology. He has protection and learning needs.”

“The camps are no place for children to live or grow up,” she said. “It does not allow them to learn, socialize or be children ... It does not allow them to heal from all that they have lived through.”

In the fenced-off camp, row after row of tents stretch for nearly a square mile. Conditions are rough. Multiple families are often crammed together; medical facilities are minimal, access to clean water and sanitation limited; the tents flood in the winter, and fires have broken out from use of gas stoves for cooking or heat.

Some 50,000 Syrians and Iraqis are housed there. Nearly 20,000 of them are children. Most of the rest are women, the wives and widows of fighters.

In a separate, heavily guarded section of the camp known as the annex are housed another 2,000 women from 57 other countries, considered the most die-hard IS supporters, along with their children, numbering 8,000.

The IS influence was clear during a rare visit by The Associated Press to the camp last month. Around a dozen young boys in the annex hurled stones at the team, which was accompanied by Kurdish guards. A few waved sharp

pieces of metal like swords.

“We will kill you because you are an infidel,” screamed one child who looked around 10. “You are the enemy of God. We are the Islamic State. You are a devil, and I will kill you with a knife. I will blow you up with a grenade.”

Another child slid his hand across his neck and said, “With the knife, God willing.”

At a market inside the annex where women sold shampoo, bottled water and used clothes, one woman looked at a reporter and said, “The Islamic State endures” — a slogan of the group.

During its nearly 5-year rule over much of Syria and Iraq, IS made a priority out of indoctrinating children in its brutal interpretation of Islamic law, aiming to entrench its “caliphate.” It trained children as fighters, taught them how to carry out beheadings using dolls, and even had them carry out killings of captives in propaganda videos.

A Russian-speaking woman in the annex, who identified herself as Madina Bakaraw, said she feared for the future of the children, including her own son and daughter.

“We want our children to learn. Our children should be able to read, to write, to count,” said the 42-year-old, who was fully covered in black, including her face and hands. She said her husband was dead but refused to say how. “We want to go home and want our

children to have a childhood.”

The women in the camp are a mix. Some remain devoted to IS, but others became disillusioned by its brutal rule or by its defeat. Others were never ideologically committed but were brought into the “caliphate” by husbands or family.

The camp began to be used to house the families of IS fighters in late 2018 as U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces recaptured territory in eastern Syria from the militants. In March 2019, they seized the last IS-held villages, ending the “caliphate” that the group declared over large parts of Iraq and Syria in 2014.

Since then, the Kurdish administrators running eastern Syria have struggled to repatriate camp residents in the face of local opposition to their return or because of the residents’ own fears of revenge attacks. Earlier this year, hundreds of Syrian families left the camp after a deal was reached with their tribes to accept them. Last month, 100 Iraqi families were repatriated to live in a camp in Iraq, but still face sharp opposition among their neighbors.

Some former Soviet Union states have let back some of their citizens, but other Arab, European and African countries have repatriated only minimal numbers or have refused.

“Those children are there through no fault of their own, and they should not pay the consequences of their parents’ choices,”

Ted Chaiban, Mideast and North Africa director of the U.N. children’s agency, UNICEF, told the AP. Chaiban visited al-Hol in December.

The Kurdish-led administration says it doesn’t have the resources to maintain and guard the camp.

If home countries won’t repatriate, at least they should help set up facilities to improve children’s lives, said Shixmus Ehmed, head of the administration’s department for refugees and displaced.

“We have suggested schools be opened, as well as rehabilitation programs and fields to do sports,” Ehmed said. “But so far, there is nothing.”

In the camp’s main section, UNICEF and Kurdish authorities had set up 25 learning centers, but they have been closed since March 2020 because of COVID-19. UNICEF and its partners have distributed books for kids to study on their own.

In the annex, authorities have been unable to set up learning centers. Instead, children there are largely taught by their mothers, mostly with IS ideology, according to U.N. and Kurdish officials.

Though the annex residents are considered the strongest IS supporters, the group has a presence in the main section housing Syrians and Iraqis as well.

In late March, the Kurdish-led forces assisted by U.S. forces

swept through the camp, seizing 125 suspected IS operatives, including Iraqis and Syrians.

Those sleeper cells had been carrying out a campaign of killings against residents suspected of abandoning the group’s ideology, working as informants or defying its rules by, for example, working as prostitutes for survival. At least 47 people were killed this year, according to Kurdish-led forces, while U.S. officials put the number at 60.

A Syrian woman who left the camp with her five grandchildren earlier this year told the AP she knew of several women killed for alleged prostitution. In each case, a masked man appeared at the woman’s tent, identified himself as an IS member and shot the woman in front of neighbors or even her children, she said.

“The next morning, news spread around the camp,” she said, speaking on condition of anonymity for her security.

She said it was common even in the main part of the camp to see children chanting “the Islamic State endures” and carrying a stick with a black bag tied to it to symbolize an IS flag.

Amal Mohammed, a 40-year-old Iraqi in the camp, said her wish is to return to Iraq where her daughters can live a normal life.

“What is the future of these children?” she said. “They will have no future ... Here they are learning nothing.”

Military leaders wary of changes in sexual assault policy

WASHINGTON (AP): Military service leaders are privately expressing reservations about removing sexual assault cases from the chain of command, The Associated Press has learned, striking a note of caution as momentum builds toward changing a military justice system that has come under increasing criticism.

In memos to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, the service leaders laid out their concerns about the growing push to shift prosecution decisions on sexual assault and possibly other major crimes to independent judge advocates. They said the shift could decrease the number of prosecutions, delay cases and potentially provide less help for victims.

While they indicated they are open to changes and improvements in the justice system, most were worried about how that would be done while ensuring no unintended harm is done to unit leadership or readiness. Several said it would create additional burdensome bureaucracy, according to officials familiar with the

memos.

Several officials described the memos to the AP on the condition of anonymity because they have not been made public. The memos submitted to Austin were from the civilian secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force and from the National Guard.

The reservations expressed by service leaders could provide a measure of ammunition for those in Congress who oppose taking the chain of command out of sexual assault prosecutions. Supporters of change, however, argue that the current system has failed to address to a problem that has long plagued the military.

Officials said that all service leaders recognize that change is virtually certain and that they agree more needs to be done to improve and professionalize the judge advocate corps. But they are concerned about how quickly changes are being made and whether there is room for negotiation about how they are implemented.

Earlier this year, an indepen-

dent review commission created by Austin recommended that the prosecution of sexual assaults be shifted to judge advocates reporting to a civilian-led Office of the Chief Special Victim Prosecutor. The independent judge advocates would decide two key legal questions: whether to charge someone and whether that charge should go to a court martial.

Members of Congress are also pushing for a similar — and in some respects more expansive — change. Because any such change would amend military law, it will require an act of Congress and cannot be done unilaterally by Austin.

A longtime advocate for changing the policy is Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, a New York Democrat, who now has bipartisan, filibuster-proof support for a bill that would take prosecution decisions out of the chain of command for major crimes, including sexual assault, rape and murder. The legislation has been stalled in a procedural struggle in the Senate that supporters see as an effort to delay and water down the bill.

In testimony on Capitol Hill last week, Austin said the military must not be afraid to change how it addresses the problem of sexual assault. He added: “Clearly what we’ve been doing hasn’t been working.”

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, previously opposed removing commanders from the process, but he told the AP and CNN recently that he had changed his mind. While he has not publicly endorsed any specific change, he said the time had come to try something different because “we’ve been at it for years, and we haven’t effectively moved the needle.”

Austin sought input from the service leaders on the review board’s recommendations, and he is now assessing their memos before he reaches a conclusion on his own, final recommended change. He met with service secretaries and chiefs on Tuesday to discuss the issue. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Austin held a “listening session” to hear their concerns in person.

Officials said the Army expressed doubts about the accuracy of any data suggesting that removing commanders from the process will result in more sexual assault prosecutions. The acting Army secretary, John E. Whitley, in the memo, said that the change could reduce commander effectiveness and accountability and may reduce criminal convictions, officials said.

As a result, Whitley said, more cases may be settled with administrative discipline, and that can erode victims’ trust in the system.

The Navy offered some support for the change. Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Harker, in his memo, said the Navy agrees with the concept of having an independent judge advocate. But he said there are a number of questions and concerns about how the change is implemented. A key Navy and Marine Corps concern is that the shift may cause delays in prosecutions, particularly since many sailors and Marines are deployed overseas or on ships for monthslong tours.

Acting Air Force Secretary John Roth also said the force was open to new approaches, including removing cases from the chain of command, officials said. But he cautioned that the change could inadvertently have a negative impact on commanders’ leadership or accountability. The Air Force said commanders play a critical role in prevention, victim support and creating a respectful command climate, and any changes must not erode that.

Several expressed opposition to the recommendation that the new special victim prosecutor office be under the jurisdiction of the Defense Department, rather than having offices overseen by each military service.

The military service memos were signed by the three men serving as acting secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force — all holdovers from the Trump administration. Since then, Christine Wormuth has been confirmed as the Army’s new secretary, but she took office after the memos had been finalized.

Amitabh Bachchan shares photos with Jaya Bachchan on wedding anniversary, thanks fans for wishes

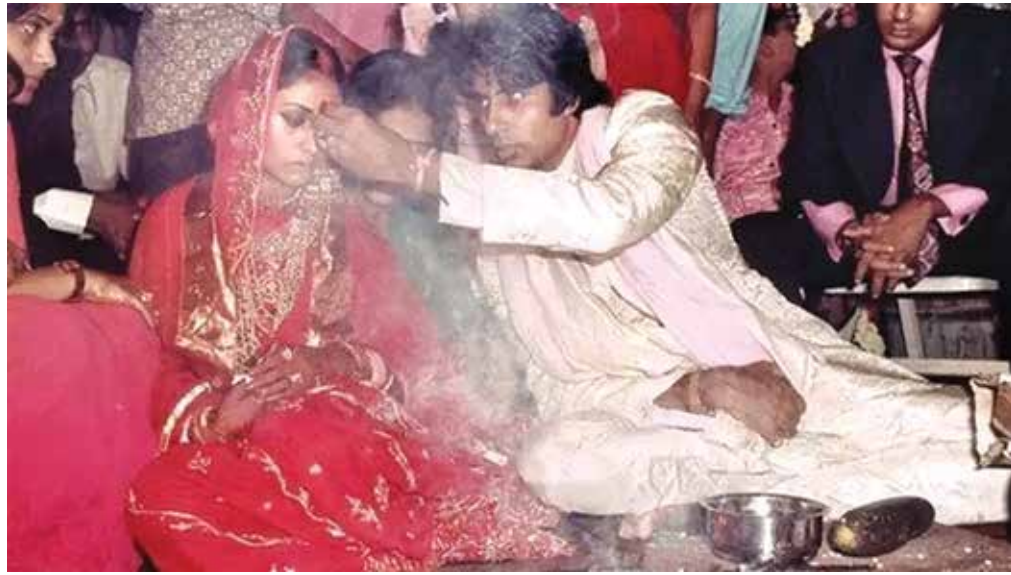
MUMBAI, JUN 3 (PTI): Mega-star Amitabh Bachchan on Thursday expressed gratitude towards fans for wishing him and wife, actor-politician Jaya Bachchan on their 48th wedding anniversary.

The veteran actor married his frequent co-star then Jaya Bhaduri on June 3, 1973. They have two children -- author Shweta Bachchan Nanda and actor Abhishek Bachchan.

Amitabh Bachchan, 78, said he is "moved" by the love of his well-wishers.

"Thank you all with immense gratitude for the wishes for Jaya and me on our Wedding Anniversary .. June 3, 1973 .. now 48 years !!" he wrote on his blog.

"Your wishes and your



gracious words have been most moving and filled with love for us .. and we truly appreciate them .. For today and now .." he added.

Amitabh Bachchan also shared a few pictures from their wedding ceremony on Instagram last night.

The couple has acted

in films such as "Zanjeer", "Sholay", "Abhimaan", "Mili", "Chupke Chupke", "Silsila", and "Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham", among others.

Brother of boy 'possessed' resents retelling in 'Conjuring'

BROOKFIELD, CONN. (AP): The brother of a boy who some thought was possessed by demons has told the Hartford Courant previously that he resents the retelling of his family's trauma, which features as the plot in the new film "The Conjuring 3."

Carl Glatzel, 55, left Connecticut because of the painful events that started when his brother, David, began having hallucinations and delusions as a boy, the newspaper reported Wednesday.

Arne Johnson, the boyfriend and later husband of Deborah Glatzel, Carl and David's sister, alleged that a demon left the boy and entered him during an exorcism and caused him to murder his landlord, Alan Bono, in 1981. Johnson was convicted of manslaughter and served four years in prison.

A defense attorney tried to defend Johnson against the charges, saying the devil had made him do it. The judge did not permit the arguments, which were based on claims by a couple, Ed and Lorraine Warren, who said they were paranormal investigators. The couple feature as the main characters in the film franchise.

Carl Glatzel has said the Warrens exploited his family for monetary gain. He told The Associated Press in 2007 that his brother had suffered from mental illness as a child but has now recovered.



"It was living hell when we were kids," Glatzel told the AP that year. "It was just a nightmare. I'm not going to go through that again. Neither is my brother."

The case was made into a 1983 NBC television movie, "The Demon Murder Case," and was the subject of a book "The Devil in Connecticut," by Gerald Brittle.

Carl Glatzel sued Brittle and Lorraine Warren when the book was reprinted in 2006, though the case was dismissed. Brittle told the newspaper

the book was taken out of print because of the lawsuit.

"I did it because I was fed up with the case, fed up with Carl Glatzel," Brittle said. "It just wasn't worth it to me. It had no bearing on the fact that the book was true."

"The Conjuring 3" opens in theaters on June 4 and will be available on HBO Max for 31 days from theatrical release.

The newspaper could not reach Arne Johnson for comment. Deborah Johnson, Ed Warren and Lorraine Warren have died, the newspaper reported.

Neeti Mohan, Nihaar Pandya welcome first child

MUMBAI, JUN 3 (PTI): Singer Neeti Mohan and her husband, actor Nihaar Pandya, have become parents to their first child, a baby boy.

The couple welcomed the baby on Wednesday.

"Our family, @nihaarpandya and me are ecstatic to have welcomed our baby boy yesterday. To hold this little one in my arms is the most surreal feeling ever! Still sinking in," Mohan shared on Instagram on Thursday.

"We are overjoyed and thank every one for the love and wishes (sic)," the 41-year-old singer wrote alongside a photo with Pandya.

Mohan, best known for songs like "Ishq Wala Love" from "Student of the Year" and "Jiya Re" from "Jab Tak Hai Jaan", had announced the pregnancy on their second wedding anniversary, earlier this year.



Pandya, 37, also took to Instagram and said that both the mother and child were healthy.

"My beautiful wife gives me the chance to teach our little boy everything my father has taught me. She continues to spread more and more love into my life each day. Most importantly, Neeti and our new born are both healthy and fine (sic)," the "Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi" actor wrote.

"With folded hands, the Mohans and the Pandyas sincerely thank God, the doctors, family, friends and all well wishers (who) are very kind for showering immense care, love and support on us always," he added.

Several personalities, including singers Shreya Ghoshal, Harshdeep Kaur, Jonita Gandhi, music composer Vishal Dadlani, and actor Gauhar Khan, congratulated the couple.

Mohan and Pandya tied the knot in February 2019.



MIDGE SPOTTING! The Actress Rachel Brosnahan was spotted filming The Marvelous Mrs Maisel in New York City.

Kirron Kher thanks fans for wishes as she battles cancer, son Sikandar says she's 'a lot better'

MUMBAI, JUN 3 (PTI): BJP MP and actor Kirron Kher has expressed her gratitude to fans for their love and support as she battles multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer.

In April, her actor-husband Anupam Kher released a statement informing that Kirron Kher was undergoing treatment in Mumbai and was on her path to recovery.

In her maiden video appearance since her diagnosis, Kirron Kher, 68, greeted her fans during her son, actor Sikandar Kher's Instagram live on late Wednesday evening.

Sikandar Kher began the live session with a glimpse of his mother's feet as she rested on a couch and asked her to say hello to her fans.

"Thank you for constantly asking me about her... She is doing a lot better," Sikandar



Kher said.

Kirron Kher interrupted him, saying she wanted to show her face and speak to her well wishers directly.

"Hello. Thank you everybody for your good wishes and love. Thank you very much," the veteran, who

looked slightly frail, said with a smile.

A sling could also be seen on her left arm.

The actor, known for films like "Devdas", "Khamosh Paani", "Veer Zaara" and "Dostana", took her second dose of COVID vaccine last month.

to show up for you until you give them a chance to.

CANCER:

You tried your best, but it wasn't enough. It simply wasn't enough, Cancer. It's time to open your eyes gently and become aware of what the signs are revealing to you. It may be time to let this relationship go—for now—and redirect your attention towards self-growth. If you've been pouring and pouring unconditionally from your cup and tending to the needs of those around you, set some time aside for meditation, journaling, and self-care rituals. The key is to engage in activities that help you reset on a mind, body, and soul level.

LEO:

We, as a collective, tend to glorify the fast life, not realising that magic actually begins to take form in the void. That in-between space where the old hasn't quite completed itself, and the new is beginning to show signs of life. You'll find that this is especially true for you right now, Leo. So, surrender to the cosmic currents, and allow yourself to be in yin mode for as long as it takes. For some of you, the past could be returning in a big way. It will be easy for you to get caught up in the illusion that things are different this time around. However, that may be far from the truth. So focus on seeking closure rather than opening the door to chaos.

VIRGO:

Hello, multitasking maven! How's trying to do everything at once working out for you? Today, the cards are urging you to pause, breathe, and reassess matters. There's a good chance you're staggering your progress by going about things in an unfocused manner. So, consider changing the approach a little.

Make a priority listing consisting of no more than five tasks. 'One step at a time' is a mantra that will take you places.

LIBRA:

It's time for a cup of truth tea, Libra. You're not stuck because you're limited by your circumstances. You're stuck because you don't fully believe in your power. It's time to address the imposter syndrome. It's time to address the blocks within that are keeping you from realising your potential. Remember, it's all unfolding as per the plan and you have been chosen for this mission for a reason.

SCORPIO:

The thing is, when we're emotionally attached to something or somebody, our perception of them is usually coloured by our feelings. In such cases, it's easy to dismiss the red flags or to give them the benefit of doubt. But, in doing so, you could be betraying yourself deeply. Words of wisdom by Maya Angelou to give you the perspective you need: "When somebody shows you who they are, believe them the first time."

SAGITTARIUS:

Our conditioning plays an important role in determining the beliefs we hold onto. Not all of these beliefs are healthy, though. Some of them are limiting and keep us from realising our true potential. One of the most common narratives that is repeated is 'money is the root of all evil'. Another one that keeps us stuck in the matrix is that 'wealth and happiness cannot co-exist'. Tip: You possess within you the power to make that paradigm shift.

CAPRICORN:

When we're not in alignment with our truth, it becomes almost impossible to move forward. The challenges and

roadblocks appear as a reminder that we need to reassess our choices, Capricorn. On the other hand, when we're doing what we're meant to be doing, the pathway ahead becomes clearer and clearer. So, consider the clear road as your personal green flag from the Universe. What you need to keep in mind as you move forward: a game plan that's merely self-serving will only take you so far. Shifting the focus from 'me' to 'we', however, will put you directly on the cosmic payroll!

Tip: Shift your focus from 'me' to 'we'.

AQUARIUS:

Two's company. Three's a crowd. But you didn't need us to tell you this, did you? Word for the wise: step away slowly before you get your heart broken for the millionth time, Aquarius. Coupled water bearers who feel like their partner's loyalties have shifted are being asked to get real with themselves about their feelings. Remember, you're not obliged to put up with anything that doesn't feel authentic to you. Hold space for an open and honest conversation and share your thoughts on the given matter.

PISCES:

The thing about the ego is that it is limiting. It convinces us against our own power and keeps us shackled to that which is outmoded. The soul, on the other hand, is committed to our growth, and gives us the signs we need in order to follow our true path. The real question is: what will you choose? Will you give into the fear narrative or empower yourself to take on the impossible? Something tells us you are far more courageous than you give yourself credit for being.

Tip: Tune into the wisdom of your soul.