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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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ONE MORE COVID-POSITIVE PERSON PASSES AWAY, TOLL RISES TO 143

After record rise in daily cases, Sikkim's active count goes past 1000

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 28 APR:

Record surge in daily cases of Covid with 151 people testing positive for Coronavirus across the State today. The previous record was 149 cases registered on 14 August, 2020. The second wave had come with in a whisker of break this record a few days back on Sunday when 148 new cases were reported.

The number of active cases in the State has also commensurately bloated to 1,106. Of these, 98

Covid-positive people are currently in hospital, and worryingly, nine of them, the highest in recent months, are in the ICU at STNM Hospital here.

Today, there were only 15 new hospital admissions and the rest of the cases prescribed home isolation since they had only mild or no symptoms.

Of the patients in hospital, 79 are admitted at the Covid-dedicated STNM Hospital, 13 at Central Referral Hospital [where a Covid ward was appointed earlier this week], 5 at Mangan Dis-

trict Hospital and one at Namchi District Hospital.

Of the 151 new cases, 114 were detected in tests carried out in East District, nine in West District, 23 in South District and five in North District.

These new cases were picked up from the testing of 515 samples on Tuesday. This gives Sikkim a Test Positivity Rate of slightly over 29%, a worryingly high number. It needs to also be borne in mind that the Test Positivity Rate is expected to be high under the present conditions since a major-

ity of the samples being collected are of primary contacts of people who have already tested positive in this, the second wave of Covid in the State.

It is informed that 113 samples returned positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR testing of 352 samples, while two new cases were detected in TruNat testing of seven samples and 36 in rapid antigen testing of 156 samples.

The State also lost one more life to Covid when a patient admitted at CRH-Tadong passed away today. This was

the second death of a Covid-positive patient at CRH in as many days.

The number of Covid-related deaths in Sikkim now stands at 143. Today's fatality takes the number of lives claimed in the past two weeks by the second wave to seven.

On the other hand, the number of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim further improved to 6,154 with the discharge of 21 more persons from home isolation upon completion of their prescribed isolation period.

Lachung Dzumsa requests Govt to restrict tourist entry

WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 28 APR:

In the wake of the second wave of Covid-19, Lachung Dzumsa in North Sikkim has requested the state government to restrict entry of both domestic and foreign tourists into Lachung for two weeks starting from 29 April.

This was decided in a meeting of the Dzumsa today which was attended by Lachung Pipon, Pema Wongyal Lachungpa and Nima Lachungpa, Chultimpa

and village elders.

A written petition was also submitted to the DC North and the area MLA today.

The lifting of restrictions will be decided as per the COVID situation, the petition mentions.

Lachung Pipon, Pema Wongyal Lachungpa while speaking to SummitTIMES informed that Lachung does not have proper health facilities to combat Covid-19 and has to depend on the Army and GREF for

medical purposes.

He requested the state government to prioritize health facilities in Lachung since the PHC there does not even have an ambulance to ferry patients during medical emergencies.

The Pipon also requested for one fire tender service for emergencies at Lachung.

Lachung Dzumsa also contributed and provided Rs. 28,000 to Lachung PHC as an emergency medical fund today.

As Covid ravages Delhi, 2 Sikhs arrange funerals for those without support

SAURABH SHUKLA NEW DELHI, 28 APR

[NDTV]: On Wednesday morning the centre said 3,293 people died in the past 24 hours after being infected by the COVID-19 virus. In Delhi, the national capital, 381 people died in that time.

AN Yadav, 70, was one of those people.

A Covid-positive patient who died at his home in the city's Ranibagh area, his family consisted of a wife, who is also infected, and a young daughter, who told NDTV she'd tried desperately, and failed, to have her father admitted to a hospital for treatment.

For people like Neelam - who are unable to arrange a funeral either because they are scared, exhausted or cannot leave home because they too are Covid-positive - help arrives in the form of two young men, young Sikhs, who collect the bodies and make all the arrangements. The

images from Mr Yadav's home leave you in tears - two men in PPEs lowering Mr Yadav's body, wrapped in cloth and lying on the couch of a modest living-room, on to a plastic sheet on the floor.

There is no one else. Neelam is standing helpless outside the apartment building.

As Devender, one of the men arranging Mr Yadav's funeral, and his partner, Pritam, struggle with body, they call out for help - to move it down flights of narrow stairs and into a waiting vehicle.

There is no help forthcoming because everyone is scared.

"How will two people take a body down two floors? This virus has killed our humanity... no body is ready to help. We are here, no? Do we not have family at home?" Devender asks.

Eventually the two manage to carry the body down and into a waiting ambulance. Devender

and Pritam, who work with a relief organisation called United Sikh, have done this more than 300 times - 322 times, to be precise.

They follow Covid protocol and do not charge so much as Re 1 for all their help.

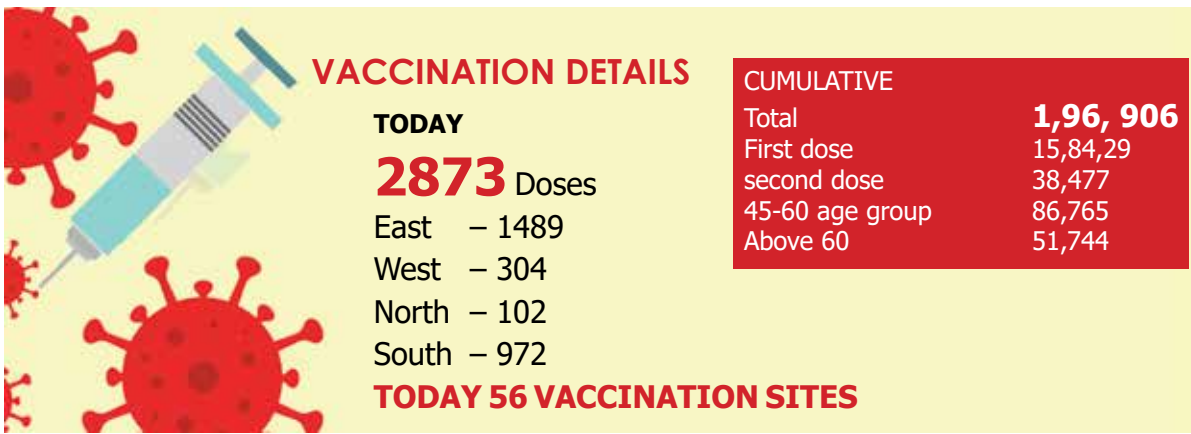
"We cremate people who are not in government statistics... who died at home and whose families need our help. Maybe they don't even have family," Pritam explains.

Devender is a photographer by trade. Pritam a businessman. They ensure a dignified funeral for those who may otherwise not be afforded one - whether Hindu, Muslim or otherwise.

And they aren't the only ones to step forward as the novel coronavirus destroys lives and souls. Dozens of young men and women across the country have stepped up in this time of crisis.

turn to pg02

2,873 more Covishield jabs administered



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 28 APR:

A total of 2,873 Covishield vaccine jabs were administered across the State today and Sikkim edged closer to the 2 lakh milestone when it comes to the number of vaccine doses administered here. With today's stats, as posted

on the cowin website of the Govt of India, the Health Department has injected nearly 1.97 lakh doses of the vaccine here. Only Covishield is being offered to people here.

Of the total number, while 38,477 people have completed their vaccine schedule with both the doses, 1,58,429 people

have received only the first dose thus far.

Today, vaccines were administered from 56 vaccination sites in Sikkim.

51,744 jabs have been administered in the above 60 year old age-group while a majority of the shots have gone to the 45-60 age-group in which 86,765 doses have

been provided.

Yesterday, 27 April, 3,642 vaccinations were carried out in the State. While Sikkim consistently records reasonably more than two thousand vaccinations in a day, this number falls on Sundays. This Sunday, 25 April, for instance, only 428 vaccinations were carried out

India's coronavirus deaths cross 2 lakh mark after record surge in cases

NEW DELHI, 28 APR [REUTERS]:

India's toll from the coronavirus surged past 200,000 on Wednesday, the country's deadliest day, as shortages of oxygen, medical supplies and hospital staff compounded a record number of new infections. The second wave of infections has seen at least 300,000 people test positive each day for the past week, overwhelming healthcare facilities and crematoriums and fuelling an increasingly urgent international response.

The last 24 hours brought 360,960 new cases for the world's largest single-day total, taking India's tally of infections to nearly 18 million. It was also the deadliest day so far, with 3,293 fatalities carrying the toll to 201,187. Experts believe the official tally vastly underestimates the actual toll in a nation of 1.35 billion, however.

The world is entering a critical phase of the pandemic and needs to have vaccinations available for all adults as soon as possible, said Udaya Regmi, South Asia head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

(IFRC). "This is both an ethical and public health imperative," he added. "As variants keep spreading, this pandemic is far from over until the whole world is safe."

Ambulances lined up for hours in the capital, New Delhi, to take the bodies of COVID-19 victims to makeshift crematorium facilities in parks and parking lots, where bodies burned on rows of funeral pyres.

Coronavirus sufferers, many struggling for breath, flocked to a Sikh temple on the city's outskirts, hoping to secure some of its limited supplies of oxygen. Hospitals in and around the capital said oxygen remained scarce, despite commitments to step up supplies.

"We make hundreds of calls and send messages every day to get our daily quota of oxygen," Dr Devlina Chakravarty, of the Artemis hospital in the suburb of Gurgaon, wrote in the Times of India newspaper.

The Mayom Hospital nearby has stopped new admissions unless patients brought oxygen cylinders or concentrators with them, its chief



executive, Manish Prakash, told television channel NDTV.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said people were falling sick more severely and for longer, stacking up the pressure.

"The current wave is particularly dangerous," he said. "It is supremely contagious and those who are contracting it are not able to recover as

swiftly. In these conditions, intensive care wards are in great demand."

Supplies arriving in New Delhi included ventilators and oxygen concentrators from Britain, with more sent from Australia, Germany and Ireland, while Singapore and Russia pledged oxygen cylinders and medical supplies. "First shipment of oxygen generators from #Taiwan

to #India is leaving this week," Kolas Yotaka, a spokeswoman for Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen, said on Twitter. "We are all in this together."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed \$10 million, adding on Twitter, "We stand ready to donate extra medical supplies, too."

turn to pg02

Trinamool candidate dies of Covid, wife accuses election body of murder

KOLKATA, 28 APR [NDTV]: The wife of a Trinamool Congress candidate who died of Covid, has filed a murder case against the Election Commission.

Kajal Sinha, the party candidate from Khardah, died on April 25. His wife Nandita Sinha has now accused Deputy Election Commissioner Sudeep Jain and other officials of "careless and negligent" behaviour that led to the death of husband and several other candidates.

Accusing the Commission of "self-serving blind motives", Nandita Sinha, in her complain to the police, wrote while the entire nation was "struggling to cope with the coronavirus crisis" the EC decided on a staggering eight-phase polls in Bengal that stretched from March 27 to April 29.

"In comparison, elections in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry were held and completed in one day in one phase... And Assam saw voting in three phases in a span of three days," she wrote.

In the complaint, she also mentioned that the Trinamool Congress had requested the Commission twice -- on April 16 and April 20 -- to club the remaining phase of polls citing the "massive flare-up of Covid cases" in the state.

The Commission had "frivolously replied (citing) its illusory and cosmetic safeguards in the form of prohibition of campaign after 7 pm and extension of the silent period from 24 to 72 hours," she wrote.

The Commission, she said, had "deliberately ignored all evidences of the impending catastrophe" even after an alarm was sounded by the Calcutta High Court.

Nandita Sinha's move came two days after the Madras High Court's stinging criticism of the Commission's handling

of the elections in five states.

On Monday, the court had said the Election Commission was "singularly responsible for the second wave of Covid". "Your officers should be booked on murder charges probably," the judges had observed.

In a statement yesterday, the Commission said enforcing Covid safety measures is the job of state governments and not that of the Election Commission. The poll body, it indicated, is only responsible for conducting free, fair and safe elections. In her complaint, Nandita Sinha pointed out that the Election Commission was in control of the law and order in Bengal and the Central paramilitary forces during the election, and was in a position to ensure that Covid protocols are maintained.

Earlier, the Calcutta High Court had censured the Election Commission on the same lines. "The Election Commission is empowered to act, but what is it doing about polls in these Covid times? The EC is just passing circulars and leaving it to the people. But the EC has implementing authority," the court had said.

The Trinamool Congress has vehemently criticised the Election Commission for the unprecedented eight-phase polls. It has also accused the Commission of being a stooge of the BJP, which is hoping to capture power in the state.

Concerns about violence had been voiced the loudest by the BJP and the Commission, while announcing the polls, had indicated that security played a role in the decision.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has said after the elections, she will approach the Supreme Court over the issue.

Darj police penalize public for violating Covid protocol



SMRITA KHAWAS

DARJEELING, 28 APR:

Many people in Darjeeling district were detained today by police officials for not wearing masks in public spaces.

Addressing the media, DYSP of Darjeeling, Arindam Adhikari said, "The second wave of

Covid-19 is more dangerous compared to the first wave, and to stay safe we all have to follow the protocols of the government strictly. We have to wear mask, we have to keep social distancing and also use sanitizers."

He informed that the police are checking ve-

hicles and making the public as well as drivers aware about social distancing, wearing masks, using sanitizers even in vehicles.

"We can see nowadays that there is a trend wherein people keep their masks on their chin rather than covering

their mouth and nose, and so from now on we have also decided to file a case against them. I want to appeal to the public not to violate the protocols of the government so that every individual can remain safe and healthy," said Traffic OC Darjeeling, Dorje Sherpa.

Awareness on vaccination for 18 years and above



Summit Report

Gangtok, 28 Apr:

A coordination meeting was held at Radiant Star Academy, Chisopani Ward Singtam, East Sikkim regarding COVID-19 vaccination drive for those who are 18 years and above from 01 May

2021. The initiative was taken by Tshering Sherpa, Programme Officer, District Hospital Singtam, a press release informs.

The program was attended by Dr. Prabat Tamang, Kokila Sharma (ANS), Suresh Kumar Ta-

mang, Councillor, Kikila Lepcha (ANS), SB Gurung (SHO Singtam PS), Sunder Rai (AEO) and others.

The main objective of this program is to ensure smooth vaccination drive and help the underprivileged during the vaccination drive.

Karnataka logs new high in covid cases

BENGALURU, APR 28 (PTI):

In the biggest single day spike, Karnataka recorded 39,047 COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, taking the tally to 14.39 lakh, while fatalities crossed the 15,000 mark with 229 deaths.

The previous high in the state was 34,804 cases on April 25 this year.

Bengaluru Urban alone accounted for 22,596 infections, the health department said in a bulletin. The state-wide toll stood at 15,036.

The day also saw 11,833 patients getting discharged. Cumulatively 14,39,822 COVID-19 positive cases have been confirmed in Karnataka, which include 15,036 deaths and 10,95,883 discharges, the bulletin said.

As states prepare for phase 3 vaccinations, some say not enough doses

NEW DELHI, 28 APR [NDTV]: Several states have said they will not be able start vaccinations of the 18-44 age group against the coronavirus from Saturday because of a shortage of vaccine doses, sources say. The centre, which has been inoculating frontline workers and those aged 45 and above, this month announced expansion of the national vaccination drive from May 1 after the rapid second Covid wave triggered spurts of cases and deaths across the country. Per the revised rules, the centre will receive 50 per cent of the vaccines supplied; states and private hospitals will get the remaining doses. Many states have said they will vaccinate people for free.

MAHARASHTRA Maharashtra is the worst-affected state in the country. It had been asking the centre to open inoculations for all adults. The Udhav Thackeray government today announced that it will provide free Covid vaccinations to those aged between 18 and 44. The government will buy vaccine doses worth ₹ 6,500 for this purpose; it is in touch with Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech - the manufacturers of two of the three vaccines approved for use in India.

In Mumbai, people aged 45 and above will be vaccinated at the existing 63 facilities. 227 new vaccination centres will be opened for the 18-44 group. The number of private facilities will be increased to 100-plus. Sources, however, say the city may not be able to start

vaccinations from Saturday because of lack of vaccine doses.

TAMIL NADU Tamil Nadu has ordered 1.5 crore doses of vaccines ahead of the third phase of the vaccination drive. So far, 55.5 people have been vaccinated against the virus in the state.

KERALA Kerala crossed the 30,000-cases mark for the first time on Tuesday. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan today announced that the state will purchase 1 crore doses of the vaccines from the open market. "70 lakh doses of Covishield and 30 lakh doses of Covaxin will be procured for the next 3 months, May-July, for ₹ 483 crore," he tweeted. He said those waiting for their second doses will be given priority. Sources say the state has vaccinated around 16 per cent of its population.

RAJASTHAN Rajasthan may not be able to start vaccinations from May 1. The state needs 7 crore doses. It has demanded at least 3.75 crore doses to begin with. It is unlikely that Rajasthan will get the supply before mid-May. Hence, the state will only continue the vaccinations of those aged 45 and above, sources said.

ASSAM Like Rajasthan, Assam will have difficulties in starting inoculations of the 18-44 group. It has placed orders for 2 crore doses - one crore each from the two companies. However, they say the sup-

ply has been erratic.

PUNJAB

Punjab will not be able to start vaccinating all adults from May 1. The state had booked 30 lakh doses with Serum Institute. The Pune-based company, however, has told the state government that it will not be able to deliver before mid-May.

"It is very uncertain as of now to say whether we will be able to launch the vaccination for all adults from May 1. Today 2 lakh doses of Covishield are expected to arrive from the centre. We received 1.5 lakh doses of Covishield yesterday. We have 15,000-20,000 doses of Covaxin with us," a senior officer told NDTV.

DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has said all eligible residents of Delhi will be vaccinated for free in the third phase of the drive. His government has approved purchase of 1.34 crore doses. "We will make an effort to ensure that it is purchased soon and administered at the earliest to people," Mr Kejriwal announced this week.

The centre today opened vaccine registrations for all adults on its dedicated website for the drive - CoWIN. However, users said they were experiencing glitches.

"More Appointment slots will soon be offered. If slots are not currently available, please check again after sometime. We request your patience and understanding," said government sources.

Covid explodes in Bihar; 13,374 new cases, 84 deaths

PATNA, APR 28 (PTI): Bihar gasped with an active caseload that sniffed at the six-digit mark on Wednesday when a jittery state government also came out with more stringent restrictions in a desperate bid to contain the contagion that has been spreading at an alarming rate.

According to the state health departments bulletin, the number of active cases now stood at 98,747, a nearly 50 times increase since the beginning of the month when the active caseload was less than 2,000.

The severity of the outbreak of the second wave which has been blamed on new, mutant strains which are said to be much more contagious and lethal can also be gauged from the fact that the active caseload happens to be more than

one fifth of the total number of 4.41 lakh cases reported in Bihar since COVID-19 struck the world in March last year.

The state has been clocking fresh cases in five digits, on a daily basis, for quite some time and the number of people testing positive in the last 24 hours was 13,374. Patna, with 17,187 active cases and 683 casualties, remains the worst affected district.

Altogether 2391 people have lost their lives to the dreaded coronavirus across the state so far and 84 casualties have taken place in the last 24 hours alone.

Total 1,03,895 tests were conducted in the state since Tuesday, while over 2.62 clinical examinations for the virus have been done in the state since the outbreak of the pandemic last year.

As Covid ravages Delhi...

Meanwhile, as Delhi's Covid death toll rises, the city has less and less space for proper funerals.

Nearly two lakh people have died in India since the first case was reported in January last year. The first recorded death was in Karnataka's Kalaburagi - a 76-year-old man.

Mr Yadav, like tens of thousands, of others, may be forgotten to the rest of the country but, thanks to Devender and Pritam, his daughter can rest easy knowing that at least he had a proper funeral.

India's coronavirus...

Credit rating agency S&P Global said India's second wave of infections could impede its economic recovery and expose other nations to further waves of outbreaks.

The Asia-Pacific region, in particular, was susceptible to contagion from the highly infectious variants in India, given the region's low ratios of vaccination, it added. read more

Tech firms in the southern city of Bengaluru and elsewhere set up "war rooms" as they scrambled to source oxygen, medicine and hospital beds for infected workers and maintain backroom operations for the world's biggest financial firms. read more

Epidemiologist Bhramar Mukherjee called for much larger lockdowns to slow the spread.

"At this point, lives are so much more important than livelihoods," the University of Michigan professor said on Twitter. "Provide assistance to the poor, but please lockdown and vaccinate."

Vaccinations in a national campaign begun in January have averaged about 2.8 million doses a day since an April 5 peak of 4.5 million, government data shows.

More than 121 million people have received at least one dose, or about 9% of the population.

Later on Wednesday, India will allow all above 18 to register for vaccination, starting from May 1. About 800 million are estimated to become eligible.

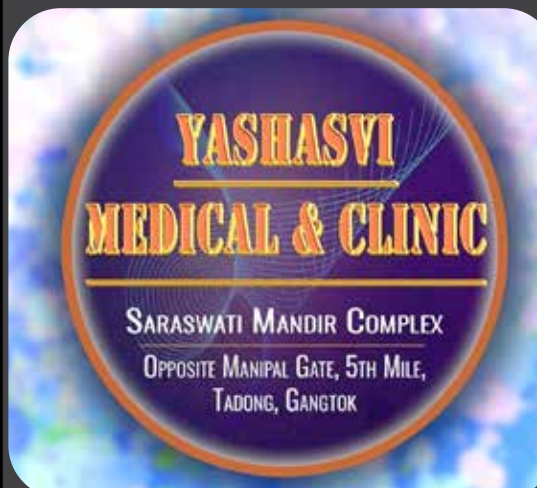
U.S. President Joe Biden said he had spoken at length with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on issues such as when the United States would be able to ship vaccines to the South Asian nation, and added that it was his clear intention to do so.

"I think we'll be in a position to be able to share, share vaccines, as well as know-how, with other countries who are in real need. That's the hope and expectation," he told reporters at the White House on Tuesday

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Karnataka Minister asks farmer to "go die", then a bizarre defence

BENGALURU, 28 APR [NDTV]:

A farmer's query about cuts in PDS rice allotment has led to a harsh, insensitive response from a minister in Karnataka. Umesh Katti, the state's Food and Civil Supplies Minister, lashed out when a farmer quizzed him about the staples being offered to the poor by the government, citing Covid-induced lockdowns and poor income. The audio conversation is being widely circulated in the state.

"Sir now you made it 2 kg rice (in PDS). How will it be sufficient for us?" the farmer had asked. When the minister replied that the government is also giving 3 kilos of raagi, the farmer argued it was not available in north Karnataka. Mr Katti said in North Karnataka, the government is distributing made jowar and Rice.

This was how the conversation went then:

Farmer: Sir, will that be sufficient? Lockdown now and we don't earn our livelihood. Will that be sufficient, Sir?

Minister: Every month, the Central Government is giving 5 kg

(wheat or rice) during lockdown. In the month of May and June...

Farmer: When are you giving?

Minister: Next month.

Farmer: Till then, should we starve or die?

Minister: It is better to die. Actually, that is the reason we have stopped giving. Please don't call me.

The Minister's response shocked many, who suggested that Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa immediately drop him from his ministry.

Congress's DK Shivakumar tweeted: "BJP Minister Umesh Katti has abused a citizen & asked him to 'go die' just because he asked him why Karnataka Govt has cut Rice under PDS to just 2 kgs! CM @BSYBJP must immediately throw him out of the cabinet for this most insensitive statement. Does this Govt have any shame?"

Mr Katti, however, defended his statement.

"If he is asking whether he should die, what should I tell him? When you are asking properly, I can respond to you in a proper manner. The way you are asking me now, I can answer you in the same manner and tone.

Covishield price for states reduced from ₹ 400 to ₹ 300 per dose

NEW DELHI, 28 APR [NDTV]: Serum Institute of India's Covishield will cost states ₹ 300 instead of ₹ 400, CEO Adar Poonawalla tweeted today, calling it a "philanthropic gesture".

"As a philanthropic gesture on behalf of Serum Institute of India, I hereby reduce the price to the states from Rs.400 to Rs.300 per dose, effective immediately; this will save thousands of crores of state funds going forward. This will enable more vaccinations and save countless lives," Mr Poonawalla wrote

in his tweet. The higher prices of vaccines for states and private hospitals have provoked anger and debate since Serum made the announcement weeks ago.

From May 1, as vaccinations open to all adults, states and private entities can buy doses directly from manufacturers under the Centre's liberalized policy to tackle the explosion of Covid cases.

State governments and private hospitals can order up to 50 per cent of Serum's Covishield and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin to inoculate the young-

er population, while the centre will buy the other half to continue vaccinating those above 45 free of cost. Serum said it would continue to provide vaccines to the centre at ₹ 150 a shot.

While Serum announced a price of ₹ 400 rupees for states and ₹ 600 for private hospitals, Bharat Biotech set the prices at ₹ 600 and ₹ 1,200 a dose. These, according to reports, would mean the highest price at any private hospitals across the world for Covishield - the Indian name for the vaccine developed

by Oxford-AstraZeneca.

Serum CEO Adar Poonawalla had said the subsidized rate of ₹ 150 per dose to the government was only for a "limited" period of time.

"We're supplying in India at approximately ₹ 150-160. The average price is around \$20 (Rs 1,500)... (but) because of the Modi government's request, we are providing at subsidised rates... It is not that we're not making profits... but we are not making super profits, which is key to re-investing," he told NDTV earlier this month.

Maruti Suzuki shuts down plants to make oxygen for medical needs

NEW DELHI, 28 APR [NDTV]: Maruti Suzuki, the country's largest car maker, will shut down its manufacturing units in Haryana to make oxygen gas available for medical needs, the company said in a stock exchange filing. Suzuki Motor has also decided to shut down its manufacturing unit in Gujarat, Maruti Suzuki added.

The company advanced its annual maintenance shutdown to May 1 through May 9 from earlier plan of June, Maruti Suzuki said while adding that it is committed to support government in diverting oxygen for saving lives.

"As part of the car manufacturing process, Maruti Suzuki uses a small amount of oxygen in its factories while relatively much larger quantities are used by the manufacturers of components. In the current situation, we believe that all available oxygen should be used to save lives," Maruti Suzuki said in a press release. The company has been informed that Suzuki Motor Gujarat has taken the same decision for its factory, Maruti Suzuki said.

India's new Covid deaths hit an overwhelming peak with 3,293 people dying in the last 24 hours. New cases rose by over 3.6 lakh, a global high, pushing the total cases to over 1.79 crore. The crisis has left India grappling for oxygen and medicines.

This is the seventh straight day that over three lakh cases have been recorded in India, the second worst-hit country after the US. The fresh deaths, marking the deadliest day of the pandemic in the country, take its total fatalities to 2,01,187. Maruti Suzuki shares traded 0.44 per cent higher at ₹ 6,587 after announcing its decision to shut down plants, underperforming the Sensex which was up 1.6 per cent.

Record 985 Covid deaths in Maharashtra, 63,309 new cases in 24 hours

MUMBAI, 28 APR [PTI]: Maharashtra on Wednesday night reported a record high of 985 COVID-19 deaths - a ten per cent increase from yesterday. The state also reported 63,309 new cases - a five per cent drop from yesterday - to take its active caseload to over 6.73 lakh.

The positivity rate - the number of tests per 100 that are confirming COVID-19 - is 16.86 per cent and the case fatality rate - the ratio of deaths compared to total infections - is 1.5 per cent. The state's recovery rate is 83.4 per cent; 61,181 people were discharged today.

Pune remains the worst-affected district, recording 9,472 new cases and 169 deaths, followed by Nagpur (7,984 cases and 83 deaths), Mumbai (4,966 cases and 78 deaths), Nashik (4,739 cases and 40 deaths), Thane (1,933 cases and 92 deaths) and Aurangabad (1,472 cases and 81 deaths).

Of the 985 deaths reported today, only 392 occurred in the last 48 hours.

251 took place in the last week and the rest - 342 - are from the period before last week. Of those 342, the major-

ity (82) were from Pune, Aurangabad (80), Thane (53), Nagpur (23) and Nashik (17).

Officials said the process of reconciling mortality data had been completed till April 23. This had led to a slight increase in the total number of deaths - by 50 - officially linked to the virus.

The state is likely to extend existing Covid-related restrictions by 15 days, Health Minister Rajesh Tope told news agency PTI earlier today, as the deadly wave of infections continues. The final decision on this, however, will be taken by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Mr Tope said.

Last week the Chief Minister announced a series of measures to combat the spike in cases. These measures, which included limiting attendance at non-essential private and government offices, and use of public transport - were to stay till 7 am on May 1.

Restrictions were also imposed on weddings and social events, and shops selling groceries, dairy products and vegetables were allowed to open for only four hours - 7 am to 11 am per day.



NHIDCL donates ambulance to Health Dept

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 APR:

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Government of India, donated an ambulance fully equipped with lifesaving equipment to the Health Department, Government of Sikkim, a press release informs.

General Manager, NHIDCL, Shankar Bhowmik, handed over the ambulance to the Health Department officials today in the presence of Executive Director of Regional Office, Sikkim, MS Sodhi, MD, NHIDCL, NHIDCL officials and Health Department officials during a programme at Tata Motors, Rangpo.

Manipur reports 259 new COVID-19 cases

IMPHAL, APR 28 (PTI):

Manipur's COVID-19 caseload rose to 31,001 after 259 more people tested positive for the virus in the past 24 hours, officials of COVID-19 Common Control Room said on Wednesday.

Imphal West district reported 95 new cases, followed by 77 from

Imphal East, while Churachandpur and Bishnupur district reported 28 and 20 new cases respectively, they said.

Besides, Thoubal reported 11 new cases, Ukhrul eight, Kakching seven, Senapati six, Kangpokpi three, Chandel two and one each from Jiribam and

Tengnoupal districts.

Two persons - a 76-year-old man from Imphal East and another man from Imphal West districts died due to corona taking the toll in the disease to 395, the officials said.

Fifty-nine 59 patients were discharged from hospitals in the past 24

hours, taking the number of recoveries in the state to 29,376, they said.

The state's recovery rate on Wednesday was 94.75 per cent.

The number of active cases currently stands at 1,230 in the state, while 1,47,012 people vaccinated so far, the officials added.



SIKKIM STATE TEACHER'S RECRUITMENT BOARD

(Constituted Vide Notification No. 933/HRDD, 2015)

Upper Syari, Gangtok, East Sikkim

Memo No. 40/SSTRB/Adm

Date: April 27, 2021

(ADDENDUM to Memo No. 38/SSTRB/ADM Dated 12/04/2021)

Reference Notice inviting applications from In-service eligible Post Graduate Teachers and Headmasters/Headmistresses of Secondary Schools serving in the Government Schools of Sikkim for filling up the posts of Principals, following addendum are issued:

01. At para 1 Sl. No. 1, No of posts mentioned as 30 may be read as **31**.

02. Para 2 may be read as below:

Candidates must have possessed the following minimum educational and professional qualifications:

Sl. No	For Principal	Qualifications		Teaching Experience	Age limit
		Academic	Professional		
1	From PGT	a) Post Graduate Degree in any subject from a recognized University	a) B Ed degree from an institute recognized by the NCTE	a) Eleven (11) ** years of uninterrupted regular service as a Post Graduate Teacher as on March 31, 2021	No age bar
2	From HM, Secondary School	b) Post Graduate Degree in any subject from recognized University	b) B Ed degree from an institute recognized by the NCTE	b) Five (05) ** years of regular service as Headmaster / Headmistress of Secondary School as on March 31, 2021	

Note: Service period on deputation to any Department shall not be counted as regular service for the post of Principal.

**** Reduced as one-time relaxation under provision of Rule 6 of the Education Department, (Principals of Senior Secondary Schools and Headmasters of Secondary Schools) Recruitment Rules, 1992**

03. At para 3, the last date for submission of forms online and offline both may be read as **May 13, 2021, till 4:30 pm.**

04. At para 6 after (g), following are added:

(i) Applicants are also required to upload the documents mentioned in the Memo No. 38/SSTRB/ADM Dated 12/04/2021 in the link given in the website latest by **May 13, 2021.**

(ii) Applicants who have already submitted the online forms are also instructed to visit the website and upload the required documents online through the link provided till **May 13, 2021, 4:30 pm.**

05. Kindly visit the website www.sikkimhrdd.org for application form and uploading the documents.

06. Educational and professional qualifications and syllabus for the examination to the post of Principal shall remain the same as per the Memo No. 38/SSTRB/ADM Dated 12/04/2021.

R.O. No.: 40/IPR/PUB/Classi/21-22

Date: 27/04/2021

(Secretary)

Sikkim State Teachers' Recruitment Board

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Secretariat Annexure - I, Sonam Tshering Marg
Gangtok, Sikkim

Notice Inviting Tender for "Supply, Installation & Commissioning of Servers, Server Operating Systems & Tablets and Maintenance for a period of 5 (Five) Years" for implementation of e-Cabinet Project.

Department of Information Technology, Government of Sikkim invites Tenders for "Supply, Installation & commissioning of Servers, Server Operating Systems & Tablets and Maintenance for a period of 5 (five) years" for the implementation of e-Cabinet Project. The last date of receipt of Tender is 17th May 2021. For further details please visit www.sikkim.gov.in.

Sd/-

R.O. No. 37/IPR/Pub./Classi./21-22

Date: 26.04.2021

Additional Director
Department of Information technology
Government of Sikkim

GANGTOK SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT LIMITED

Sokaythang, Gangtok,

Sikkim - 737102

e-mail: gangtoksmartcity@gmail.com CIN - U930909WB2017SGC223807

FILE NI. 229/GSCDL/2019-20

Memo NO: 28/GSCDL/2021-22

Dated: 07/04/2021.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Gangtok Smart City Development Limited (GSCDL) is undertaking the work 'Construction of Multi Level Car Park cum Shopping Hub' at old STNM Complex (below NH). The preliminary Drawings of the project is uploaded in our website <https://smartcitygangtok.com>

Architects, Urban Planners and the General Public are requested to give their valuable feedback and suggestions for improvement of the drawing. Changes that are feasible within the scope of the work shall be incorporate at the time of finalizing the Drawings. However, GSCDL reserves the right to incorporate the changes. Comments and suggestions may be sent by email to ae3smartcity@gmail.com within one month of issue of this public notice, please.

Sd/-

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER.



Ref No. 51/GSCDL/2021-22

Dated: 19/04/2021

NOTICE INVITING APPLICATION FOR THE POST OF CITY DATA OFFICER UNDER GANGTOK SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT LIMITED

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for filling up one post of City Data Officer (CDO) on contractual basis for a period of 6 months (Probation) + 1 Year (Full Time Contract with renewal) under Gangtok Smart City Development Limited. The job specification details along with qualification requirement, technical and professional skills may be downloaded from official website <https://smartcitygangtok.com>. Applications by eligible and willing candidates matching all the required criteria may be submitted to Nodal Officer, Gangtok Smart City Development Limited on or before 30th April 2021, 1600 hours.

Nodal Officer
Gangtok Smart City Development Limited

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

email us: news@summittimes.com

Going Green

Inspire the Young to Develop 10-Minute Dedication into Life-long Pact

The State Green Mission was a wonderful idea, pleasantly imaginative and reassuringly evocative of the need to recognize Green as The Colour for the next generation and underscored as the mission to ensure sustenance. It was a mission launched by the State Government, but it was not just a government programme. It might have ended up there, but the original idea was to catalyze public participation in ecological conservation; no, not the government ‘approved’ joint resource management assemblies, but a more from-the-people initiatives.

Tree plantations should have been the trigger that reintroduced Sikkim to greenery and nature and the need to nurture it and not just ‘organise’ plantation drives to get photos taken and press releases drafted. The act of planting trees should have ideally led to understanding Sikkim’s ecology more intimately than the token ‘biodiversity hot-spot’ introduction that completes most understandings of what the State contains. This obviously did not happen because most plantation drives were undertaken with saplings that the ‘volunteers’ neither recognized, nor even bothered to enquire about, leading to a situation where the survival rates of planted saplings remain anybody’s guess. The fault was not with the idea though. Maybe, the people’s participation which might have been cultivated gradually was compromised by eager-to-please and prompt-to-be-counted organizations and departments which usurped the initiative, and as is wont, distanced the people from the idea with their fawning and obsession for hierarchies. Do plantation drives need a chief guest, for instance?

Of course, it is very possible that the general public has grown too lethargic even to engage in an initiative which conserves their own future, but hopefully, the generation still in the making is more open and willing. Ideas like the State Green Mission, then the 10 Minutes to Earth Initiative and now the Mith-Mithni connect being established with trees should address them directly by informing them in schools and colleges and inviting them over to power the Mission. It is in this light that the “10 Minutes to Earth” initiative had brought fresh hope. The expressed intent was to unite the entire population of the State in a simultaneous plantation drive across the State. It was a huge task, and would have succeeded not if all the 6 lakh residents of the State actually plant a sapling each at the same time, but if, for those 10 minutes, Sikkim came together to acknowledge the environment and stood together to recognize that they have a responsibility towards it.

Many have seen the 10-Minute dedication as a gimmick, and they would not be completely wrong, because a gimmick it is. And a gimmick is what is prescribed to shake loose the propensity acquired by Sikkim to lie to itself and simply pretend that all is well. The Batti-Bandh campaign in Sikkim several years ago was a gimmick as well, a global one at that, but it worked, because it reminded the people of the need to conserve energy. The 10-Minutes to Earth needs to be seen in similar light – as a means to compel all of Sikkim to notice all they have lost, what they still retain and what they could nurture and conserve in the environment they inhabit. For the dedication to lead to commitment, the young will need to be roused, not the departments and Panchayats. The young, if they are adequately inspired, will keep the pace for life where the official arms will only keep the date. It is the former that the 10 Minutes to Earth and every other initiative aimed it public engagement and conservation should seek to establish.

WRITE US:

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

COVID-19: 2020 was horrendous for health workers – early 2021 was even worse

TOM WINGFIELD & MIRIAM TAEGTMEYER
theconversation.com

We are two infectious disease hospital doctors working in the city of Liverpool. Over the past year, we have witnessed first hand the devastating impact of COVID-19 – on us, our families, our colleagues and the people under our care.

During the first wave, we wrote about the risk of mental illness and moral injury among healthcare workers. During the second wave, we reported on the realisation of our fears of healthcare worker fatigue and burnout.

At the start of the UK’s most recent wave, the most severe and arduous yet, we did not find the time to write.

While 2020 was a horrendous year for healthcare workers, the first few months of 2021 were worse. It is clear there have been both national and global failures to respond to the pandemic. These failures require both reckoning and redress.

In January and February 2021, the NHS was overwhelmed. As the third wave rolled on, exhausted healthcare workers up and down the country carried on. We tried our hardest to provide the best care in dire circumstances. There wasn’t an alternative.

As we write, COVID-19 infections, hospitalisations and deaths in the UK are in continued decline. A damaging yet necessary national lockdown coupled with rapid vaccine rollout have succeeded in turning the tide. For now.

SCENES ON THE FRONTLINE

During a “typical” weekend on-call shift in January at the peak of hospital admissions in our region, we experienced a bewildering array of medical, social, and ethical challenges.

The following is a journal extract describing the scenes:

“This was the busiest weekend of the pandemic for me so far. It came, predictably, a few weeks following household mixing over Christmas. Our hospital had over 500 people with COVID-19. Over 40 had been admitted in the preceding 24 hours. Twenty-two were so sick they needed review by the intensive care team.

I was on call for two infectious disease wards that had been converted into critical care areas offering “CPAP” ventilators. These areas are staffed by infection and respiratory specialists and are an adaptation to cope with COVID-19. Although they offer an enhanced level of care with specialist CPAP service, the staffing levels are much lower than ICU and the shifts intense.

The morning started badly with a 44-year-old man collapsing unresponsive on the floor. Simultaneously, a confused older man and a man with learning difficulties in his 30s were pulling their CPAP masks off causing their oxygen levels to drop to dangerously low levels. This set the tone for the rest of the weekend.

Throughout the day, across the two wards, I was moving constantly from patient to patient as people deteriorated. Two younger people in their 30s needed to be intubated and go to intensive care. After being cleaned, their beds and rooms

were immediately taken by more sick people who needed review.

The team worked tirelessly that day to keep everyone on the ward safe. Not to mention the myriad calls received and made to update people’s relatives and loved ones.

It was impossible to do all we would have wanted to for everyone and for their relatives waiting at home and unable to visit the hospital due to COVID-19.

Across our two wards, about a third of our pa-



tients had family members admitted elsewhere in the hospital with COVID-19. These were husbands, wives, sisters, a heavily pregnant daughter. Organising wheelchairs, portable oxygen and staff time for family members to safely see each other, getting translators, face-timing loved ones, and picking people up were small things that mattered.

It felt like juggling. Constant juggling. And it was hard. Too hard.

And yet, despite the challenges, it was also a weekend full of compassion. Full of compassionate individuals and actions. Nurses, healthcare assistants, cleaners, porters, junior doctors, radiographers – we all somehow found time to give every patient attention and kindness.”

Scenes like this played out across the UK in early 2021. The impact of these experiences on people with COVID-19, their families, and healthcare workers has been traumatic and the repercussions will continue to be felt for some time to come.

This also raises individual issues around the prevention, treatment, and care we offer to people with COVID-19. Is a compassionate approach to COVID-19 – and to any other illness for that matter – even possible within our understaffed, resource-constrained health system? And will that system show compassion not only to those for whom it cares but also the carers who work within it?

A MORTAL BETRAYAL

During this pandemic, the lack of protection from harm for the world’s healthcare workers has been described as “a mortal betrayal”.

There have been reports of restricted access to

personal protective equipment. Meanwhile, infection control measures against airborne transmission have been inadequate.

These shortcomings have had a real impact on our health. In 2020, sickness absence rates were much higher than previously seen, with doctors particularly affected.

Among doctors, those who had the highest risk of death due to COVID-19 were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

In a survey by the British Medical Association,

less than a third of black, Asian and minority ethnic doctors reported feeling fully protected from the risk of coronavirus infection compared to nearly two-thirds of white doctors. Even more tellingly, one third said they had either not been risk-assessed at all for the virus or that a previous assessment needed updating.

This cannot continue and COVID-19 vaccination strategies must ensure improved access for black, Asian and ethnic minority healthcare workers. Indeed, we need an objective review of infection prevention and control guidance.

The disregard for healthcare worker welfare leads to an ethical conflict between our sense of duty towards our patients and our understanding of our own risk of contracting a life-threatening illness.

Alongside the legal obligation to keep healthworkers safe at work, wouldn’t it be refreshing if governments also felt a moral obligation to do so?

If that is not enough reason, improving the working lives of people who deliver care can also improve the outcomes of the health system itself.

As the third wave abates, the country emerges from lockdown and healthcare workers like us come up for air, we can start to reflect on what care for people with COVID-19 and their carers might look like beyond 2021. It has to be better than it has been so far.

[Tom Wingfield is Infectious Diseases Physician and Senior Clinical Lecturer, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and Honorary Research Associate, University of Liverpool; Miriam Taegtmeier is Professor of Global Health, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine]

‘Strategic Lies’: Deliberate Untruths Used as a Political Tactic

IVOR GABER
theconversation.com

It’s Boris Johnson’s word against that of his former alter ego, Dominic Cummings. And, depending where you have read or heard about the accusations and counter-accusations flying between the pair, one or both are being a trifle “economical with the truth”. The fact that most of what people see will have originated in either leaks from unnamed witnesses, or via the as yet unsubstantiated claims on Cummings’ blog, will have only further muddled the waters.

But the biggest problem the prime minister and his erstwhile chief adviser have is that a growing number of people, whether inside or outside the Westminster bubble, are finding it increasingly difficult to take either men at their word.

It’s their own fault, really. They have both long been devotees of what I and my colleague Caroline Fisher describe in a new journal article as “strategic lying”. This is a technique – honed by Cummings himself during the Brexit campaign and played masterfully during the 2019 election campaign – in which a politician tells a deliberate lie with the purpose of shifting the news agenda onto his or her preferred territory.

It doesn’t matter if the lie is easily rebutted. Indeed in one sense rebuttals are part of the plan because they result in the subject of the lie being amplified and kept on, or near, the top of the news agenda. The ultimate goal of strategic lying is to have an impact on the salience of issues.

As American media scholar Spiro Kiouisis and colleagues explain in a

2010 study of US election coverage, this is a central objective for all political public relations messaging, particularly during an election.

Agenda-setting theory is useful for understanding this strategy, especially in the digital age. It is, if it ever was, not just a top-down activity but involves messages moving from politicians, to the media, to the public and back up again with the message being tailored at every point.

The related concepts of “priming” and “framing” come into play here – often seen as extensions of agenda-setting, they look at not at just what issues are being discussed in the media, but how they are discussed, the context and emphasis – in plain language, “spin”.

‘BRILLIANT’ BREXIT PLOY

The classic strategic lie was the slogan painted on the side of the Leave campaign’s bus during the Brexit referendum that claimed that the UK sent £350 million a week to the EU. It was a figure that was easily, and frequently, rebutted – not just by Remain campaigners but by all the reputable fact-checking organisations.

But that didn’t matter. Cummings, made no attempt to defend the figure in his blog about the campaign but instead described it as “a brilliant communications play” saying that it “...worked much better than I thought it would”.

Cummings’ ploy could be seen up and running within days of the Leave campaign’s launch, when ITV’s News at Ten devoted a full eight minutes to an interview in which Johnson was repeatedly and robustly challenged over the truth of the £350 million

claim. The more naïve might have thought that the interview had effectively destroyed the Leave campaign’s key slogan. But far from it. The interview, and similar ones on other news bulletins, meant the issue of the UK’s payments to Europe was seen by millions of viewers as the most important issue of the campaign.

In addition, once a statement – or lie for that matter – has found a sympathetic ear, then no amount of rebuttal will convince people that it is not true. This is because the lie fits their worldview and to believe anything else would create a sense of cognitive dissonance, something we all seek to avoid. Furthermore, people’s memories of corrections fade rapidly, but the memory of the original lie remains.

Hence, Remain campaigners found that every time they sought to rebut statements such as the £350 million claim – or, for example, the notion that Turkey was about to join the EU (it wasn’t, but it kept the issue of immigration front and central) – they found themselves inadvertently rebroadcasting the lies. This has been described by media scholar Caroline Jack as “unintentional amplification”, which in turn leads to another phenomenon which she identifies as “inadvertent legitimisation” – the act of giving credibility to “strategic lies” simply by repeating them.

MUD STICKS

Striking quick and hard is one of the key components of the strategic lie playbook, as the Brexit referendum demonstrated and could also be seen during the 2019 general election. In the first week of the campaign, the Conservatives posted a doctored video clip showing Labour’s

then EU spokesperson, Keir Starmer, apparently stumbling over a question about the party’s Brexit stance. But in the original Starmer had not stumbled at all.

Challenged about the doctored clip, Conservative party chairman James Cleverly sought to laugh it off by telling BBC Breakfast that, “Everyone could see the video was ‘obviously edited’ because of the music underneath.”

Notwithstanding this, the doctored clip was viewed over a million times in the days immediately following and Labour’s subsequent disavowal posts were seen by many more – just one BBC report of the incident received 1.1 million hits on Twitter.

Clearly, strategic lying raises a number of major ethical issues, but there is also an important practical one. What do journalists, particularly those working for the regulated public service broadcasters, do when faced with the conflict between disseminating what they know to be a lie and their legal responsibilities to exercise “due impartiality”?

Do they challenge the lie on-air, quote an opponent, quote a fact-checking organisation or just not broadcast the lie? All are, or could be, problematic in the current regulatory environment. The quality of our democracy depends on the quality of the political debate within the public sphere. New campaigning techniques represent a real threat to both the debate and our democracy and something needs to be done urgently to address this problem.

[the writer is Professor of Journalism, University of Sussex]

Nepal govt's effort to diversify vaccine procurement falls flat

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA & ARJUN POUDEL

KATHMANDU, 28 APR [KATHMANDUPOST]: If things had gone according to plan, Nepal would have received an additional one million doses of Covishield vaccine from Serum Institute of India in early March, allowing the government to continue the country's vaccination campaign that began in January.

But there is uncertainty over when they will be delivered.

With cases soaring in India, the government there has put restrictions on the export of Covid vaccines although Nepal had made down payment for two million doses of Covishield but received only one million.

"We are not in a position to say anything about the supply of vaccines from the Serum Institute of India," Dr Tara Nath Pokhrel, director at the Family Welfare Division of the Ministry of Health and Population, told the Post.

But despite the uncertainty, the government is yet to take any meaningful steps towards procuring alternative vaccines amid surging coronavirus cases in the country, officials admitted.

On Tuesday, Nepal reported 4,364 new cases from polymerase chain reaction tests and 160 from antigen tests. In the last 24 hours 18 deaths have been recorded pushing the total toll to 3,194. Active cases stand at 26,225.

Of the total infected in the last 24 hours 1,966 are from the Kathmandu Valley.

This is the first time since October 23 the single-day Covid infections surpassed the 4,000 mark. It is also the third highest single-day



tally ever. All Health Ministry officials, meanwhile, can say about procuring vaccines from other countries is "efforts are underway."

"Diplomatic efforts are currently underway to see if we can get Chinese and Russian vaccines," said Jageshwar Gautam, spokesperson for the ministry.

But these will not be of any use for the 1.3 million people over the age of 65 who have received the first dose of Covishield between March 7 and 15.

Besides Covishield, developed by the University of Oxford and pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca, the Department of Drug Administration has also granted emergency use authorization to Covaxin developed by India's Bharat Bioshield, BBIBP-CorV developed by China's Sinopharm and Sputnik V vaccine developed by Russia's Gamaleya National Center of Epi-

demiology and Microbiology.

Nepalis are being inoculated with 800,000 doses of Chinese BBIBP-CorV that Nepal received as a grant besides Covishield.

With its failure to procure vaccines the government is now pinning its hopes on vaccines from the COVAX facility which is providing vaccines to poor countries. So far it has received 348,000 doses of Covishield from the facility.

"We are told that additional doses will be supplied between May-end and June," said Pokhrel. "We are expecting that the COVAX facility will provide sufficient vaccines to administer the second dose to those above 65."

The government is also trying to procure the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from other sources.

"We have sent diplomatic notes to various vaccine-producing countries including South Korea, which

produces the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine," Dr Roshan Pokhrel, chief specialist at the Health Ministry, told the Post.

As far as the Chinese vaccine is concerned, spokesman Gautam said, the Chinese vaccine was not procured at an earlier date as it was not feasible to procure the vaccine by fulfilling the conditions set by the Cabinet for procurement of Covid-19 vaccine.

The Cabinet had set conditions such as the vaccine to be procured should have been approved by the World Health Organization for emergency use, one that can be stored at temperatures between 2-8 degrees as far as possible, one that can be supplied as demanded by Nepal, and the price should be reasonable, according to Gautam.

He refused to divulge whether diplomatic efforts to procure Chinese and Russian vaccines were

centred on price. Nepal had bought 2 million doses of Covishield from Serum Institute of India at \$4 per dose. "Chinese and Russian vaccines are more expensive than the Covishield vaccine," Dr. Dipendra Raman Singh, director general at the Department of Health Services said. "Therefore we are currently discussing whether to buy those."

The Chinese and Russian companies, however, are yet to make an official statement about the pricing of their vaccines. But, The New York Times reported on March 12 that Hungary agreed to buy five million doses of the Sinopharm vaccine, priced at 30 euros (\$36) per dose which makes the Sinopharm shot among the most expensive in the world. This price far surpasses what the European Union has agreed to pay for vaccines from Western manufacturers. According to The Express Tribune, a Pakistan-based news outlet, the Pakistan government capped the maximum selling price at Pakistani Rs8,449 (equivalent to \$55) for two doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine.

But by admission of Nepal's Health Ministry officials money should not be an issue while procuring vaccines.

"We don't lack resources to purchase vaccines," said Pokhrel, director at the Family Welfare Division. "The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have assured us to provide funds for procuring vaccines but we haven't been able to procure due to an acute shortage."

The Health Ministry has also decided to allow private suppliers to import the jabs but none of

the suppliers have been able to do so. Officials at the Department of Health Services said they are also interested in purchasing Johnson & Johnson's vaccine but their attempts haven't been successful.

Bangladesh, which is waiting for delivery of Covishield vaccines from Serum Institute of India, is also working to procure vaccines from China and Russia. Russia has even asked Bangladesh to produce the Sputnik V vaccine, according to reports.

Bangladesh had signed a deal with India on December 13 last year to purchase 30 million doses of Covishield on an installment basis. But until now, Dhaka has received only 7 million doses in two installments while Delhi sent another 3.2 million doses as a gift.

With the number of Covid cases soaring rapidly in the country, experts have warned that the worst has yet to come.

Nepal's R, or reproduction number, defined as how easily it spreads in the population, is 2 while that of India is 1, which is battling one of the biggest humanitarian crises, according to Dr Krishna Prasad Paudel, director of the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division. Public health experts say as there is no known cure for Covid-19, vaccination is the only hope to contain the spread of the virus.

"We have to explore all options to inoculate our people as there is no other way to fight Covid," Dr Shyam Raj Upreti, former director general at the Department of Health Services, told the Post. "Authorities must explore all available options."

4 patients flee Assam hospital after testing Coronavirus positive

GUWAHATI, 28 APR [NDTV]: Guwahati: Four COVID-19 patients fled from a hospital in Assam soon after testing positive for the highly infectious coronavirus.

The incident occurred at the JSB Civil Hospital in Chirang district's Kajal Gaon area. An official of the hospital said the patients fled the hospital at around 1.30 pm after their test reports came in positive.

They have been identified as Malik Seikh (48), Madan Mahato (41), Sarbeswar Mahato (25) and Basudev Mahato (26). All of them are from Bongaigaon district.

"Four Covid-19 patients have fled from our civil hospital. We don't know why they have fled. We tried to contact them through the mobile numbers given by them, but nobody responded. We have informed the matter to police," an official of the hospital said.

Due to the massive surge in coronavirus cases, the state government has imposed night curfew from 8 pm to 5 am till April 30.

"It is very tough to control the cases if people don't understand the gravity of the situation. People should follow the guidelines issued by the government," a health official said.

6.4 earthquake in Assam, aftershocks; tremors in Northeast, North Bengal



GUWAHATI/NEW DELHI, 28 APR [NDTV]: An earthquake of magnitude 6.4 struck Assam this morning, the National Center for Seismology said. Strong tremors were felt in parts of the northeast as well as north Bengal. While there are no reports of anyone being injured, photos have emerged of broken walls and windows, and walls developing cracks.

Strong tremors were repeatedly felt in sever-

al parts of the northeast and neighbouring Bhutan, forcing people to run out of their homes, according to a Reuters witness.

The epicentre of the earthquake was near Dhekiajuli town, 140 km (86 miles) north of Guwahati. The earthquake struck at 7:51 am at a depth of 17 km from the surface.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he spoke with Assam Chief Minis-

ter Sarbananda Sonowal and promised help from the centre.

"Big earthquake hits Assam. I pray for the well being of all and urge everyone to stay alert. Taking updates from all districts," Mr Sonowal tweeted.

Assam Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who tweeted minutes after the earthquake, also shared photos of broken walls inside a building and

of a broken boundary wall, showing the impact of the quake.

The earthquake in Assam comes weeks after an earthquake of magnitude 5.4 struck near Sikkim's capital Gangtok.

The National Disaster Management Agency was assessing reports of destruction and casualties, if any, after the quake, said an official at the agency who asked to remain unidentified, Reuters reported.

Manipur declares summer vacation for all schools from May 1 to 31

NEW DELHI, 28 APR [PTI]:

In view of the "unprecedented surge" in the number of new COVID-19 cases in the state, the Manipur government on Monday announced summer vacation for all schools under the state board and higher secondary council from May 1 to 31, 2021.

All the government, aided and private schools affiliated to the Board of Secondary Education Manipur and Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur will remain closed for the entire month. In this regard, the School Education commissioner of Manipur, T Ranjit Singh released an official notification on April 26.

Manipur Government has directed all heads of institutions—principals, vice-principals, headmaster, headmistress to make an arrangement for detailing at least four to five staff members by making an appropri-



ate daily roster of them (teaching and non-teaching). The order has further instructed authorities to ensure their attendance in the institutions and to render unavoidable official duties during the period of vacation.

The official order also stated to ensure necessary arrangement for the commencement of online classes till summer vacation starts. "To ensure that necessary arrangement/preparations are made for commencement/resumption of online teaching/learning exercise on re-opening of classes of the summer vacation or

until further order which-ever is earlier." Several state governments including Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Telangana and West Bengal also have announced early summer vacation this year for their respective government and private schools after considering the rising COVID-19 cases. Usually, most of the schools in these states declare their summer vacation from May and continue till early July. Though, as the virus cases have surged in the states, their education departments have already announced summer vacations.

Book explores politics, its future in India

NEW DELHI, APR 28 (PTI): A new anthology discusses Padma Bhushan winning political scientists Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph's exhaustive study of India and how it produced seminal insights about the country's politics.

"Interpreting Politics: Situated Knowledge, India, and the Rudolph Legacy" is edited by John Echeverri-Gent and Kamal Sadiq and published by the Oxford University Press. The volume assembles a group of distinguished scholars like Christophe Jaffrelot, Ronald Herring, Rina Agarwala, Kalaiyaran Arumugam and Niraja Gopal Jayal among others to provide a thought-provoking and rigorous engagement with the Rudolphs' groundbreaking analysis as they relate to contemporary political issues.

Each contributor addresses a seminal concept or analytical approach developed by the Rudolphs

and then assesses its implications for their own research.

The resulting chapters do not attempt to address all the normative and empirical questions that arise from the Rudolphs' work and the broad topics and themes they covered. Instead, they collectively demonstrate the theoretical and empirical power of the Rudolphs' arguments in ways that advance political science analysis.

The book includes analysis of trends in political mobilisation in India and elaborates how 'situated knowledge' shapes discourse, moral imagination, political strategies, and institutional change.

It further sheds light upon how the interaction of caste, class, gender, and religion structures political mobilisation; how changing social and political relations affect education policy and civil-military relations; and how political leadership is forging the future of politics

in India. The Rudolphs, between them, published more than 20 books and dozens of articles. They co-authored or co-edited eight books jointly, starting with "The Modernity of Tradition", a seminal formulation of the problem of tradition and modernity that shaped the study of India past and present over the next 50 years.

It turned out to be one of the most enduring interpretations of modernization not just of Indian society but of non-Western nations around the world.

At a time when reigning theories of the 1950s blamed the 'backwardness' of India on the tenacity of her 'traditional' institutions such as caste, the Rudolphs showed how traditional-seeming institutions had actually changed through the colonial period to take on functions similar to political parties that one could only see as 'modern'.

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Com

Australian Olympians to be given COVID-19 vaccine priority

SYDNEY (AP): Australian athletes and support staff preparing for the Tokyo Olympics will be given priority for vaccines.

The Australian government announced after a special National Cabinet meeting that Olympic participants would be vaccinated under a priority group which includes health-care workers, Indigenous people aged over 55 and people older than 70.

The vaccination program for athletes and support staff will include about 2,000 people, including an estimated 450- 480 Olympic athletes, and could start as early as next week.

Richard Colbeck, the government minister for aged care, senior Australians and for sports, said the decision would not come at the cost of at-risk Australians.

“While vulnerable Australians remain an absolute priority as the vaccine rollout continues, National Cabinet understands the pressure our high-performance athletes have been facing as the Tokyo Games draw closer,” Colbeck said in a statement.

Some 1,969,337 vaccine doses have been administered in Australia, 205,203 of which were given in aged and disabil-



ity care facilities. Members of the Olympic contingent aged over 50 will receive the AstraZeneca vaccine, while those under 50 will be given the Pfizer vaccine.

Australian Olympic Committee chief executive Matt Carroll said the team would be vaccinated by a private provider “to ensure the vaccination of our athletes does not place any additional load on the public system.”

“It’s a weight off their minds — (athletes) know with a vaccination they’ll be safer from a health point of view and they’ll now be able to really concentrate on the games,” Carroll told the

national broadcaster on Wednesday. There was some public backlash to the overnight announcement, with critics saying healthy young athletes shouldn’t get priority over scarce vaccination stocks ahead of more vulnerable citizens.

But with all Australians aged over 50 eligible for the AstraZeneca vaccine from next week, Carroll said vaccinating the Olympic contingent wouldn’t create any big extra burden on the overall system.

“Our Indigenous athletes have already been vaccinated. Many of our officials and medical staff have also been vaccinated because they’re

front-line workers. A number of our Paralympians have already been vaccinated, so we’re not dealing with great, large numbers here,” Carroll told the ABC. “No Australians ... will be put out of the queue, because we’re managing the process ourselves to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Nearby New Zealand announced last month that athletes competing in events of national significance could get early access to a coronavirus vaccine.

Athletes traveling to Japan for the Tokyo Olympics will be required to stay within a “bubble” consisting of the official accommodation, venues and training areas and

will be tested for the coronavirus before and during their stay, but there is no requirement to be vaccinated ahead of competition.

All travelers arriving in Australia must undertake a mandatory 14-day hotel quarantine, and there’s a backlog in applications.

Carroll said with Australian Olympic participants vaccinated and athletes using charter flights, he’s hoping to negotiate a bespoke 14-day quarantine program — similar to that used for tennis players and officials before the Australian Open earlier this year — that doesn’t burden the public system.

Zoysa banned from cricket for 6 years for corruption

DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (AP): Former Sri Lanka fast bowler Nuwan Zoysa has been banned from all cricket for six years after being found guilty of violating the International Cricket Council anti-corruption code. The ICC issued a statement Wednesday saying the ban for Zoysa is backdated to Oct. 31, 2018, when the former test left-arm paceman was provisionally suspended.

An independent anti-corruption tribunal last November found Zoysa guilty of breaching three counts that included failing to disclose full details of any approaches or invitations received to engage in corrupt conduct under the code.

The charges related to the T10 League in the United Arab Emirates in 2017 when Zoysa was a Sri Lanka bowling coach.

“Contriving to fix a game betrays the basis of sporting principles. It will not be tolerated in our sport,” Alex Marshall, general manager of the ICC’s integrity unit, said in a statement. “Nuwan played 125 matches for Sri Lanka, attending a number of anti-corruption sessions during a decade-long international career.

“In his role as a national coach, he should have acted as a role model. Instead, he became involved with a corrupter and attempted to corrupt others.”

Zoysa, who will turn 43 next month, played 30 tests and 95 one-day internationals over a decade until 2007.

Durant, Nets rally past Raptors 116-103, clinch playoff spot



TAMPA, FLA. (AP): Kevin Durant scored seven of his 17 points in the fourth quarter, Jeff Green had 22 points and the Brooklyn Nets clinched a playoff spot Tuesday night by rallying late to beat the Toronto Raptors 116-103.

Trailing 90-84 early in the fourth period, Brooklyn used a game-turning 16-2 run to grab control. Later, Durant hit a 3-point-er with 1:47 remaining and glared at the Toronto bench after putting his team up 111-101.

Durant, who was playing his second game after returning from a thigh injury, added 10 rebounds in 33 minutes for his eighth double-double.

“Just all of the adversity that we’ve fought through this year with injuries, protocols, trade situations and guys being in and out of the lineup, I’m very proud of everybody in the organization top to bottom,” Durant said.

Kyrie Irving finished with nine points, six rebounds and four assists. Seven other Nets scored in double figures on the night Brooklyn became the first Eastern Conference team to lock up a playoff spot.

“Tonight was a night where our connectivity really showed because Toronto put us under duress. When things weren’t going our way we could have started to splinter, but our guys stuck with it,” said Brooklyn coach Steve Nash, whose Nets made 13 of 19 shots in the fourth quarter.

The Nets won for a third straight time and the fourth time in five games to prevent Toronto from pulling off the season sweep. The Raptors, who were led by Kyle Lowry’s 24 points, had their five-game home winning streak end. One of those victories was a 114-103 defeat of Brooklyn last week.

On Tuesday, Toronto got outscored 31-24 in the fourth quarter after making just 7 of 21 shots.

“I don’t think 116 is an outlandish number for that (Brooklyn) team, but we’ve just got to score a little bit more,” Toronto coach Nick Nurse said. “The opportunities were there.”

Newly signed guard Mike James scored all of his 11 points in the fourth quarter as the Nets rallied from an 83-80 deficit to start the final period. Blake Griffin shot 6 of 11 and scored 17 points off the bench.

“It seemed like there was a lot of back and forth for the majority of the game, but we were able to wear them down by the end of the game,” said Joe Harris, who had 16 points.

It was just the 19th time all season that Durant has been on the floor with Irving because of injuries. The Nets are 12-7 in those games.

Toronto was in action less than 24 hours after beating Cleveland 112-96 in Tampa on Monday. Back-to-back sets of games have been a problem all season for the Raptors, who are 2-12 on the second night

of consecutive games.

NO TIME TOGETHER

Nash said he’s come to grips with the Nets not having James Harden, Durant and Irving on the floor together prior to the playoffs, if even then. Remarkably, Brooklyn’s trio of superstars have played just seven games together all season because of injuries and COVID protocols. “We recognize now that we’re not going to have the luxury of a run of games with everyone available, and we may not have that to start the playoffs,” Nash said. “It’s been like an avalanche of relentless injuries, games and travel and it’s just part of the challenge for this team.”

Harden, who has been out April 5, is back with the team and Nash said the guard went through light drills on Tuesday. “He’s not doing any high-intensity stuff, but he’s shooting and doing all the strength and rehabilitation work. Positive signs, but still a ways to go.”

TIP INS

Nets: Brooklyn started a stretch of playing seven of the next eight on the road.

Raptors: Toronto was once again without Chris Boucher, Gary Trent, Paul Watson and Jalen Harris. ... Lowry made his first three 3s and 5 of his first 7 after missing 13 of 14 attempts in his previous two games.

UP NEXT

Nets: Play at Indiana on Thursday night.

Raptors: Play at Denver on Thursday night.

Tokyo Olympics, IOC push ahead during state of emergency

TOKYO (AP): Local organizers and the International Olympic Committee pushed ahead Wednesday with plans to open the postponed Tokyo Olympics in just under three months, unveiling the latest set of rule books to show how the games can be held during a pandemic.

The timing of the second edition of the “Playbooks” is not ideal. The version for Olympic athletes is out Wednesday, with similar guides for other participants out on Friday.

Tokyo, Osaka and several others areas came under a third state of emergency this week, and the death toll in Japan from COVID-19 has passed 10,000. The numbers are good by global standards, but poor compared with other places in Asia such as Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand or South Korea.

The state of emergency has closed department stores, theme parks, and bars and restaurants serving alcohol. It also has forced baseball games to be played in empty stadiums after having allowed fans for much of the pandemic.

Polls consistently show 70-80% in Japan think the Olympics should not be held.

Only 1% of the Japanese population has been vaccinated and that number will still be small when the Olympics open on July 23. So far, officials say Japanese athletes have not been vaccinated.

This contrasts with many of the 15,000 Olympic and Paralympic athletes entering Japan who — encouraged by the IOC — will have shots. As will thousands of judges, officials, sponsors, media and broadcasters.

This version of the Playbooks will offer more details than the first edition in February, but much of the specific planning will remain in flux until the final update comes out in June.

Though vaccines are now available, the strategy for the Olympics is geared around holding the games in a “bubble” as if there were no vaccines.

Organizers are not expected to announce until June if fans will be allowed into venues — and if so, how many. Fans from abroad have already been banned. The decision on venue capacity was promised to come to this month by organizing committee President Seiko Hashimoto, but has been pushed back.

Taro Kono, the minister in charge of vaccination, suggested earlier this month that empty venues seemed likely. Ticket sales were to account for \$800 million in revenue.

Organizers are expected to announce daily testing for athletes, up

from once every four days in the early edition. They are also expected to drop a 14-day quarantine, allowing athletes to train upon arrival. Athletes will be required to stay in the Olympic Village on Tokyo Bay, and venues and training areas.

Japan’s Kyodo news agency, citing unnamed sources, said athletes and staff will have to be tested twice within 96 hours before leaving home. They will also be tested upon arrival in Japan.

Toshiro Muto, the CEO of the Tokyo organizing committee, said this week that 500 nurses were being requested for the games. Japanese television TBS on Tuesday, without citing a source, said organizers had contacted 30 hospitals to care for athletes who fall ill.

The British Medical Journal earlier this month, under an editorial titled: “Reconsider this Summer’s Olympic and Paralympic Games,” said mass gatherings such as the Olympics are still neither “safe nor secure.”

The editorial read in part: “Holding Tokyo 2020 for domestic political and economic purposes — ignoring scientific and moral imperatives — is contradictory to Japan’s commitment to global health and human security.”

The cost of the Olympics is officially \$15.4 billion although several government audits suggest it is much larger. All but \$6.7 billion is public money.

The IOC depends on selling broadcast rights for 73% of its income, and the postponement has stalled payments. Broadcast income amounted to about \$4 billion in the latest four-year Olympic cycle, at least half from the U.S. network NBC.

IOC President Thomas Bach is expected to be in Hiroshima on May 17 to greet the torch relay, although he said last week his plans were still tentative.

Bach’s arrival would come just days after the latest state of emergency ends on May 11. Opposition lawmakers in Japan’s national legislature have suggested Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga scheduled the state of emergency to accommodate Bach.

The torch relay, which began on March 25 in Fukushima in northeastern Japan, has been detoured several times this month and was forced to run in an empty city park in Osaka. It was also rerouted in Matsuyama City Ehime prefecture.

It will be banned altogether this weekend on the Okinawa island of Miyakojima. The small island has only one hospital. The relay will run through other locations on Okinawa.

Džeko leads Roma against old rival United in Europa League

ROME (AP): Edin Džeko has been linked with so many different destinations and involved in so much controversy this season that it’s been hard to keep track.

In September, he was so close to joining Juventus that he momentarily stopped playing for Roma. In January, there was a supposed swap deal set up with Inter Milan for Alexis Sánchez.



Then came a falling out with coach Paulo Fonseca that resulted in him being stripped of Roma’s captaincy.

But Džeko never left the Italian capital, and now he’s going back to his former home city in England to lead the Giallorossi against Manchester United in the first leg of the Europa League semifinals on Thursday.

“There have been a lot of highs and lows this season. I had some tough times personally due to a lot of things but I don’t like to look back. What happened happened,” Džeko said recently. “We need to look forward. We’re in the semifinals, which a lot of people didn’t expect. We’ve got to enjoy ourselves, because it’s not every week that you get to play at Old Trafford.” Džeko, though,

knows what it means to visit United as an opponent. He did it for five seasons with Manchester City before joining Roma in 2015 — and scored six goals in the Manchester derby. “Since I left Manchester City six years ago, I’ve never been back,” Džeko told UEFA.com. “It will be a special game for me, since it was a derby for me until a few years ago.”

Two other Roma players, defender Chris Smalling and midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan, previously played for United. Smalling joined Roma on loan in 2019 after nine years with Manchester United. He made the move permanent last year after a strong first season at Roma but has struggled with injuries this campaign.

Smalling and his family were also recently the target of an armed rob-

bery inside their home in Rome, after which he said they were “very shaken up.” While Smalling missed the quarterfinals against Ajax, he’s expected to take over in defense for the suspended Gianluca Mancini in the first leg in Manchester.

Smalling and the rest of Roma’s defenders will have the task of containing high-scoring United forwards Edinson Cavani and Marcus Rashford.

As for Mkhitaryan, who like Smalling played on the United team that won the Europa League in 2017, he also is working his way back into form following injury. For Roma fans, the game presents a chance for revenge following a 7-1 rout by United at Old Trafford in the 2006-07 Champions League — a game that current United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjær played in.

German intel agency starts observing COVID conspiracy groups

BERLIN (AP): Germany's domestic intelligence agency has put under observation some adherents of a disparate group that has attacked the country's lockdown measures, and whose ranks have become increasingly radicalized as the pandemic has worn on, the Interior Ministry said Wednesday.

The so-called Querdenker movement has held regular protests against lockdown measures, bringing together a broad range of demonstrators, including people opposing vaccinations, others who deny the existence of the coronavirus, mask opponents, conspiracy theorists and others.

The protests have also attracted neo-Nazis and other right-wing extremists, and authorities have warned that the loose-knit movement is growing increasingly radical.

Some demonstrators have taken to wearing Stars of David, suggesting that they are being persecuted by the government like Jews were under the Nazis — a practice slammed by Germany's leading Jewish group as "disturbing."

"The observation of the so-called Querdenker movement by the BfV is urgently needed," said Josef Schuster, president of the Central Council of Jews.

"Right-wing extremists use the protests against the coronavirus requirements strategically to win supporters, they use it to spread their ideas deep into the middle of society, it is imperative that this development be stopped."

The Interior Ministry said the movement has repeatedly exploited legitimate protests and demonstrations to provoke confrontations with authorities, and that in some cases have shown "clearly that their agenda goes beyond mere mobilization to protest against the state's coronavirus protective measures."

By putting individuals and groups linked to the movement under observation, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, known as the BfV, will be able to collect more data and details on individuals from the scene.

The BfV typically labels a group "extremist" to put it under observation, but in this case introduced a new category, allowing it to deal with suspected cases in addition to proven extremism.

Former members of Italian Red Brigades arrested in France

PARIS (AP): Seven Italians convicted of left-wing domestic terrorist crimes, including several former members of the Red Brigades, were arrested in France on Wednesday, the French presidency said in a statement.

French police made the arrests on warrants seeking the suspects in Italy for "acts of terrorism," the statement said. The arrested individuals had fled Italy and sought refuge abroad before they could be imprisoned to serve their sentences. Police in France were searching for three others who were not at home.

Crimes for which some of those arrested were convicted in Italy include the 1980 killing of a Carabinieri paramilitary general and the 1980 kidnapping of a judge.

Five of those arrested in what Italian police said was code-named Operation Red Shadows were former members of the Red Brigades, a group active during the 1970s and 1980s that carried out killings, kidnappings and so-called "kneecappings," in which targets



were shot in the legs by attackers who fled. The group later fell dormant.

Also among those detained in France was Giorgio Petrostefani, 77, a militant from the far-left group Lotta Continua (Struggle Continues). Petrostefani was convicted of the 1972 slaying of a Milan Police Chief Luigi Calabresi and sentenced to 22 years in prison.

The police chief's slaying was one of the more notorious crimes during the so-called

"Years of Lead," when acts of terrorism committed by the extreme right and the extreme left bloodied Italy in the 1970s and 1980s.

Calabresi had been leading the interrogation of Giuseppe Pinelli, a suspected anarchist, about the 1969 bombing of a Milan bank that killed 17 people. Pinelli fell to his death from the 4th floor of police headquarters. The police chief was shot three times from behind while he walked to his

car. The bank bombing has never been solved, and Pinelli's death inspired a play and a movie. The other person arrested had belonged to Armed Cells Against Territorial Power, which Italian police described as a subversive group. Narciso Manenti was convicted of the 1979 killing of a Carabinieri police officer. Italian police said he married a French citizen in 1985.

The communication to French prosecutors of the Italian requests

followed "important bilateral work" to prepare for the arrests and the subsequent decision by investigators to focus on "the more serious crimes," according to the French presidency. Italy had initially identified 200 individuals.

"France, also hit by terrorism, understands the need for justice for the victims," the statement said.

France and Italy's justice ministers met on April 9. Italian newspa-

per Corriere della Sera reported that Italian Justice Minister Marta Cartabia formally requested the extraditions on that occasion.

French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said on France Inter radio that it is now up to a French court to decide whether the people arrested will be extradited to Italy.

The French presidency said the definitive extradition decision could take two to three years

depending on the appeal proceedings. A Paris court is expected to decide in the coming days whether those arrested will remain in jail or be freed and placed under judicial supervision.

The expirations of the various European arrest warrants that allowed their capture were set to expire between December this year and 2023, according to Italian police. France established in 1985 a policy known as the "Mitterrand doctrine," named for Socialist President Francois Mitterrand. It said that Italian far-left activists who had fled to France would not be extradited to Italy unless there was evidence that they committed "crimes of blood."

The policy had been an irritant to right-wing politicians in Italy for decades. Italian Premier Mario Draghi expressed satisfaction that France has now agreed to start judicial proceedings for cases that "have left an open wound," a statement from the premier's office said.

"The memory of those barbaric acts is vivid in the conscience of Italians," Draghi said.

8 people dead in building blaze in Latvian capital Riga

HELSINKI (AP): Eight people, some of them foreign nationals, died early Wednesday in a fire at a building housing a hostel that authorities said was operating illegally in the center of Riga, the Latvian capital.

Firefighters and rescuers from the Latvian State Fire and Rescue Service said they were alerted to the scene on the Merkela street in the heart of Riga about 5 a.m.

The building's sixth floor and the roof were on fire, and rescuers found eight people dead. They evacuated a further 24 from the premises, news agency Baltic News Service said. At least six people were hospitalized with

burns and smoke inhalation. Latvian state TV broadcast footage of flames pouring out of the top of the building, multiple fire engines and a ladder extending to the top, from where two firefighters were aiming a hose at the blaze.

Latvian authorities and Riga Mayor Martins Stakis said the state-owned building was housing an illegal hostel the operators of which had recently conducted unauthorized renovation work.

Several of the victims were foreigners, Riga Mayor Martins Stakis told reporters. The building is located in the commercial center of Riga close to

the city's main bus and railway stations.

It wasn't immediately clear how or where the fire started but Latvian authorities said the hostel is at the center of the investigation for the cause of the blaze as the property was technically a private apartment and was being used as a hostel without the necessary fire safety and other permissions.

Stakis said on Twitter that, based on the information he received from police, the hostel was operating illegally without documentation and "the burned building was dominated by foreigners, most likely foreign students, who used the hostel's services."

The website of the hostel, called "Japanese Style Centrum Riga", lists its address as Merkela street, apartment 21. It says it has 22 rooms.

According to the Latvian public broadcaster LSM, the hostel had been on the radar of police and the State Fire and Rescue Service SFRS since March due to concerns about fire safety in the hostel as well as the facility not complying with the existing COVID-19 restrictions.

Martins Baltmanis, SFRS deputy head, said his office had earlier received reports from residents of the building of a possible arbitrary construction in the apartment.

Dubai police arrest attackers in massive brawl that killed 3

DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (AP): Police in Dubai have arrested 10 suspects in a massive knife fight that killed three people, authorities said Wednesday, a relatively rare outburst of violence in the Gulf Arab sheikdom.

The police said the melee stemmed from a dispute over money, with 13 men armed with knives and wooden bats fighting over 5,000 dirhams (some \$1,360). The brawl drew others in, killing three and seriously wounding more. Police did not identify the suspects beyond saying they were of Asian descent, or specify where the fight took place.

Dubai police rarely offer overall crime statistics, but previously have acknowledged similar incidents in low-income expat communities and labor camps,



dormitory-style housing for many of the migrant workers from Asia, Africa and the Middle East who drive the machinery of daily life in the emirate.

The killings come as Dubai suffers from an economic downturn precipitated by the coronavirus pandemic, which has triggered waves of lay-offs in the service-heavy economy. The region's financial hub relies heavily on the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors — all hit hard by the virus. The

city-state has redoubled efforts in recent months to protect and boost its safe and tourist-friendly image. The U.S. State Department has assessed that Dubai's crime rate "appears to be significantly lower" than similarly sized cities worldwide. "However, do not let this lull you into a false sense of security," its 2020 United Arab Emirates security report warned, citing petty theft and "rare incidents of violent assault" in working-class communities.

Pope ousts leadership of Ecuadorian diocese amid complaints

ROME (AP): Pope Francis responded Wednesday to reports of poor governance and moral failings in the Ecuadorian diocese of Riobamba by not only accepting the resignation of the retiring bishop but that of his heir apparent as well.

Francis on Wednesday accepted the resignations of Bishop Julio Parrilla Diaz, who turned 75 last month, and his deputy, Monsignor Gerardo Miguel Nieves Loja, 53.

Nieves had been named "coadjutor bishop" for Riobamba last year and was due to be consecrated bishop in February, to take over when Parrilla retired at 75, the normal retirement age for bishops. But Nieves offered his resignation to Francis



a week before the ceremony. Parrilla confirmed Nieves' resignation in a Feb. 19 letter to his flock, reproduced by the Spanish-language Catholic agency Religion Digital. In it, Parrilla said he understood Nieves' decision and noted that 500 people had signed a letter in support of him.

The resignation came weeks after a longtime Spanish missionary in Riobamba, Julia Serrano, publicly blasted the gov-

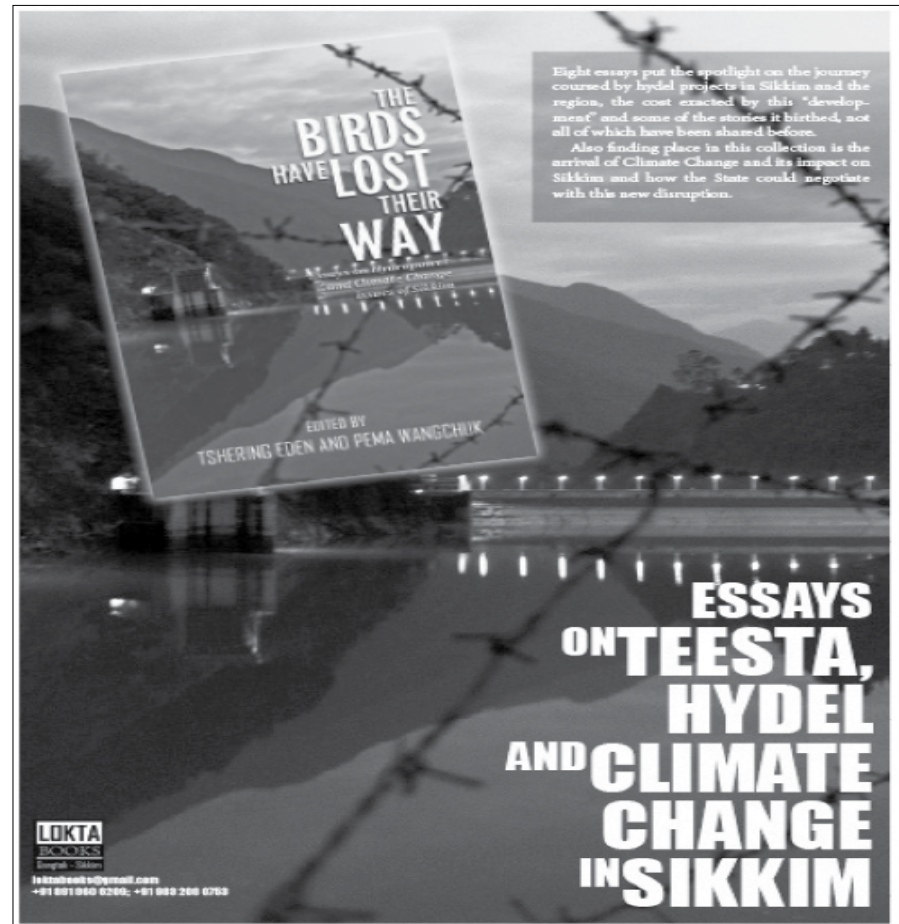
ernance of the dioceses under Parrilla and questioned the "moral quality" of his presumed successor.

In a January essay published in the Catholic blog "Redes Christianas," Serrano wrote that the faithful had to pay for sacraments in the diocese, and that her letters to the Vatican denouncing such practices had fallen on deaf ears. She also cited reports of a culture of homosexuality among its priests as well

as "a number of priests with children in the diocese, some recognized and others not" Parrilla, in his Feb. 19 letter, acknowledged there were some "shadows" and sins in the Riobamba church, but insisted that it was still able to "love and serve the poorest, the farmers and the indigenous."

The Ecuadorian bishops conference said in a statement on its website that Francis had named a temporary administrator for the dioceses, the auxiliary bishop of Cuenca, Bishop Bolivar Piedra. The Vatican, however, didn't announce that nomination in its brief report Wednesday.

The Ecuadorian bishops said they expressed their appreciation for Parrilla for his service and offered prayers for Piedra.



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Kate Upton Reveals Her 2-Year-Old Daughter Is Convinced Dad Justin Verlander Has This High-Profile Job

According to Kate Upton, 2-year-old daughter Genevieve is a bit confused about what dad Justin Verlander does for work, now that he's taking time away from baseball to recover from surgery.

Kate Upton and Justin Verlander both have pretty cool jobs, but it turns out their 2-year-old child hasn't quite wrapped her head around them.

The 28-year-old model appeared on The Tonight Show on Tuesday, April 27, where host Jimmy Fallon asked what the superstar baseball pitcher is like as a father. Her answer involved not only daughter Genevieve, who they welcomed in November 2018, but also their puppy Norman, who Kate first posted about in January.

"He's the best dad—he really is," Kate replied. "He's always so involved. He's the best partner. He's just not the best dog dad. Like, he has helped almost zero with Norman, but he took almost every night shift with Vivi. So I still am a little bitter about that." She added a chuckle to make it clear there are no canine-related hard feelings between the two.

Kate went on to explain that Justin,

38, has made it a point to show Vivi footage of himself pitching, given that she hasn't been able to watch him live in action recently as he continues to recover from the elbow surgery he underwent in September. As a result, the young girl appears to be a bit confused about which sport the two-time Cy Young Award winner actually plays professionally.

"He has been showing her lots of highlight films," Kate shared. "And I'm not sure if he's showing her highlight films because he's not playing right now, or if it's because—I think she thinks he's actually a golfer. She's seen him golf more than she's seen him play baseball."

She continued with a laugh, "And so, when we were watching the Masters [golf tournament] the other day, she was like, 'Daddy! Daddy!' I was like, 'No, that's not what he does. He's not that good.'"



Michael B. Jordan on protest, power & 'Without Remorse'

NEW YORK (AP): Michael B. Jordan's power on screen has taken many forms. His heavyweight force in "Creed." His capacity to inspire change as Bryan Stevenson in "Just Mercy." His raw fury in "Black Panther."

But Jordan's potency reaches new, muscular heights in "Without Remorse" a Tom Clancy adaptation that recasts Jordan as a globe-trotting action star. The film (which debuts Friday on Amazon Prime Video) is an updated origin story of Navy SEAL John Clark, Clancy's best-known character outside of Jack Ryan. Jordan is hoping it spawns a franchise.

The project has been around Hollywood for decades; Keanu Reeves and Tom Hardy are among those who have previously flirted with it. But Jordan saw the possibility to not only do a big-budget action thriller and perform a lot of his own stunts, but to tailor the film to today. He's a producer on the film via his company, Outlier Society Productions, a leading force in making Hollywood more inclusive.

Jordan spent much of the past year quarantined with his family and friends, a time he says has that has been reflective. "The last few years I've been blessed to have a kind of non-stop career," says Jordan, speaking by phone from Los Angeles. "I kind of had a moment to look at myself and family, spend time with my nephew — things that I probably wouldn't have had as much time to do if I was running from one production to another."

But after the pandemic put a slight pause on one of the movies' biggest stars, Jordan is eager to embark on a new chapter. He recently filmed Denzel Washington's "A Journal for Jordan." He's prepping his directorial debut with "Creed III."

The 34-year-old spoke with The Associated Press the day after the verdict in the Derek Chauvin trial. Remarks have been edited for brevity and clarity.

AP: Last summer at protests following the death of George Floyd, you challenged Hollywood to commit to Black hiring. Have you seen any progress?

Jordan: From the projects that I've been involved with, I've seen a response to that. I'm not in the weeds with every

production across Hollywood but I think there was a significant or meaningful response from the industry on certain levels to be held accountable. But there's a lot of work to be done. We're not content with things we have or things that we see at the moment.

AP: Has anything about the past year changed your priorities?

Jordan: I went through a rollercoaster of emotions. The pandemic, the protests, this steady increase of police brutality and murders — it's been tough, man. You have a moment where things went our way yesterday and then hours later, you have another one. This past year has seen so much of that. Recharging my batteries was something that I didn't know I needed as much as I did. After taking that break, I feel more energized and prepared for the work to come — and that's in all areas. When it comes to being present for my community, my culture, for my business; in front of the camera, behind the camera; in the streets, in my home. It's given me an opportunity to be a better version of myself moving forward. I'm motivated. I'm recharged. I'm ready for all tasks at hand.

AP: In "Fruitvale Station," playing Oscar Grant, you acted out a version of a scene that keeps replaying.

Jordan: When you're Black and brown, it's something that can become a reality any day. Yeah, I had an opportunity to shine a light on a story, on a young man who had his life taken away from him by the hands of law enforcement. When we shot that movie, I guess it wasn't being seen as much as it is right now. The volume of what's been reported has increased, it's more a part of the popular conversation. But it's a lot. I think solidarity amongst our community and culture is at the highest point that I've experienced. It's driving us closer together. And people unified is a powerful thing.

AP: Do you ever find it difficult to balance any responsibility you feel and your own interests? Do you sometimes just want to make a movie without worrying about larger issues?

Jordan: I just made one! "Without Remorse" and "Journal for Jordan." I like all types of movies. From action thrillers

to movies with a purpose. I got "Creed" coming up. I've been blessed to have a healthy balance. It allows me to have that comfortable balance between entertainment and activism. That's life, right? Trying to find a balance. You have moments in your life where you've got to do things for yourself, you've got to do things that feed your soul. And you've got to do things that feed your community, so you know the person looking at you in the morning in the mirror. If you can find a way to balance all those things and be successful and leave an impact — and leave the world a better place. I think making people think is the power of cinema.

AP: "Without Remorse" had been in development hell for years. What drew you to it?

Jordan: I'm a gamer. I love playing videogames. I grew up playing (Tom Clancy adaptations) "Rainbow Six" and "Ghost Recon" before I even got introduced to the films. Man, I got an opportunity to play a character I used to envision myself playing, that I spent hours upon hours (laughs) in my room playing. Being able to step into the Tom Clancy universe and do an action movie where I do my own stunts. I was a kid in the candy store.

AP: You've talked about injecting yourself into a role like a Trojan horse. Was there anything especially that you wanted to bring to "Without Remorse"?

Jordan: It was a great collaboration between the studio, the producers, the director to create an origin story. It was cool to see a character that just is. There's no extra "This character is Black because of this and that." It's a movie about a guy, know what I mean?

AP: Like another upcoming film of yours, a new "Thomas Crown Affair," your character wasn't originally written as Black and had previously been played by white actors (Willem Dafoe and Liev Schreiber). Do you give any significance to that?

Jordan: There's a business behind this, as well. A lot of people don't understand the nuances of how movies get made — what (intellectual property) is at what studio, what IP is available, the value of a reboot versus doing something without that title.



IN GOOD SPIRITS! Duchess Kate was all smiles during an engagement with Prince William.

Game of Thrones' Natalie Dormer Quietly Gives Birth to Baby Girl

On the That's After Life podcast, Natalie Dormer revealed she and partner David Oakes welcomed a baby girl in January. Natalie Dormer is revealing how she spent her time during the coronavirus pandemic, and no, she didn't just bake bread.

Instead, the actress tells the That's After Life podcast that she and partner David Oakes decided to have a baby, because, as she jokes, "What else could people do?"

"Yes, so it was a perfect thing to do during a pandemic is get pregnant and have a baby. I feel like I am probably being a bit of a cliché," Natalie shares, before imagining how her daughter will "probably be sitting in a bar in sort of 30 years time on a date going, 'Yeah, I'm a COVID baby.'"

The 39-year-old actress adds that it's been three months since she gave birth to her little girl and it's been "an absolutely joy," even though she's positively knackered.

"I'm never going to complain about shooting hours ever again because sleep deprivation is something else," Natalie shares. "I completely underestimated it."

The Game of Thrones actress also acknowledges that she underestimated how much becoming a mom would change her as person. She reflects, "You hear people say your whole perspective on life will change

and your whole set of value systems will alter, and you sort of roll your eyes as a childless person and go, 'Yeah, yeah'... And then you have one and you go, 'Oh, wow!'" "It really



does completely alter the lens and things that did matter oh so much, there's a whole new perspective to life, isn't there?" she adds.

And though Natalie did not share her baby girl's name, she says she's "absolutely in love" with her. So much so, the actress says she's "going to find it very difficult" to return to work when the theaters in London reopen. The London-based actress says she appreciates stage work though, because it will allow her to spend "all day" with her daughter and work at night. "I'm just like this is perfect," she notes.

Aries:

The profits are beginning to skyrocket in the Aries HQ. But it wasn't always like this, was it? You stumbled upon many roadblocks on your way to here—roadblocks that taught you how to make your plan of action bulletproof. So, take a moment yet again to assess the high points as you incorporate the things that have worked for you so far. This knowledge, combined with the wisdom shared by your ancestors, could prove to be the secret to turning your fate around.

Tip: Prosperity and abundance are on your side.

Taurus:

If you could don a superhero cape and save the entire world, you would, Taurus! But, even superhumans have their limitations, and it's time for you to accept yours. Instead of focusing on how you are unable to control the situation, step into the role of a lightworker. Hold space for your family and your community. Check in on them often, help them in a manner that's feasible, and lend them a listening ear when things get difficult. Tending to the plants and caring for the animals in your neighbourhood are some of the other ways in which you can contribute.

Tip: Step into the role of a lightworker.

Gemini:

Three words, Gemini: research, research, research. While you're on the right track, the plan needs to be finetuned. Digging deeper into the subject matter will help you add the missing link here *and* give you an edge over your competition. Seeking the guidance of a renowned mentor could also help you take your work to the next level. On the love and romance front, you could be connecting an emotionally unavailable partner.

Tip: Dig deeper into the given subject matter.

Cancer:

You could do everything on your own, but where's the fun in that, Cancer? Today, the cards are urging you to upgrade your social media game. Hiring a manager or seeking guidance from an expert are some of the options available to you at this moment. Don't fall into the trap of doing what everybody else is doing, though. Let your content be authentic to you.

Tip: Choose authenticity over everything else.

Leo:

Today, the cards are reminding you of the quote 'what you sow, so shall you reap'. You are at an important juncture of your career, one that requires you to make focused effort. Don't confuse this with

overworking, Leo. The truth is, you can work for 4-5 hours a day in an intentional manner and make big things happen in your Universe.

Tip: You can work for 4-5 hours a day in an intentional manner and make big things happen.

Virgo:

Here's the thing, Virgo: everybody is going to have an opinion on what is and isn't right for you. But, they're looking at the situation through the lens of their own judgements and biases. So instead of giving into the pressure, rise above. Connect with your inner wisdom.

Tip: Listen to your heart. That's all!

Libra:

The journey to the self is not an easy one. There are many things that you could potentially lose in the process—jobs, friendships, and relationships, for instance. But the pearls of wisdom you will gain along the way will make the sacrifice so, so worth. You are at a turning point, Libra. A point where the old life no longer makes sense to you and the new hasn't revealed itself yet.

Tip: Retreat into the void.

Scorpio:

You're on the right track as far as your ideas are concerned. Yet, there is something that needs to

be finetuned here. The good news is, you won't have to look too far for a sounding board. The cards are urging you to get on a video call with your sibling(s) and figure out the final details. Remember, what you're being presented with now is an opportunity to take your career *and* your life to the next level.

Tip: Get your sibling(s) on the phone.

Sagittarius:

This is a wonderful time in the Sagittarius HQ. Your profits are skyrocketing like never before, bringing in the abundance you truly deserve. Allow yourself to receive the many blessings as this will help you alleviate the suffering of those around you in a tangible manner. Remember to start with your own family or community first before you look further.

Tip: This is your chance to alleviate suffering in a tangible manner.

Capricorn:

Read the signs, Capricorn. Read the many signs that are being shown to you in this moment. If they wanted to be in your life, they would be, and there's no force in the world that could have kept you apart. It's best to accept this situation for what it is and focus on the inner work. In the realm of career and creativity, you're being asked to delve deeper

into the given subject matter. Research is the key that will give you an edge over your competition.

Tip: If they wanted to be in your life, they would have found a way to make things work.

Aquarius:

What do you do when your to-list in itself begins to induce anxiety? Stop and breathe for a moment. Observe what you are being shown. Yes, there is a way to simplify that to-do list. Prioritising is the key, Aquarius. Remember, you cannot do everything on your own even if you wanted to. Allow yourself to reach out for support. Your family and your soul circle will be happy to hold space for you in the best way they can.

Tip: Give yourself the permission to reach out for support.

Pisces:

The journey to the given destination has been an uphill task. But, you made it through, Pisces. You survived the chaos. What the cards want you to know is that your big moment is near and that you will be rewarded for your past efforts. Trust the signs and keep moving forward. A change of location may also be on the cards for some.

Tip: It's all coming together for you!