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SummitTIMES

Vol 05 | Issue 191 | Gangtok | Tuesday | 21 July 2020

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

With 35 NEW CASES, SIKKIM'S ACTIVE COVID COUNT RISES TO 226

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 JUL:

Sikkim's tally of coronavirus cases has crossed 300-mark on Monday with 35 fresh cases being detected across the State. With these 35 new cases, the total of numbers COVID-19 positive cases reported in Sikkim thus far has climbed to 318, of which 226 are still active cases. 92 people have made full recoveries and have been discharged from hospital while two have migrated out. On Sunday, two more people beat the virus and were discharged.

In his daily health bulletin on Monday, Health Department Secretary, Dr Pempa T Bhutia, informed that 111 samples were tested through RT-PCR at the VRD Lab at STNM Hospital on Sunday from which two returnees currently in quarantine tested positive.

He informed that while one person was quarantine at a paid facility, the other was currently admitted at the Triage facility after developing symptoms.

Meanwhile, 883 people were screened through Rapid Antigen Testing yesterday



at Rongli, Rangpo, Mamring and Timberbong, most of them primary contacts from the Rangpo funeral from where the first case was detected on 18 July and the remaining at risk of exposure because of their proximity to the GREF camp at Rongli.

At Rangpo, 14 tests returned positive, nine at Mamring, two at Timberbong and seven at Rongli.

Testing was also being held at Chan-

atar near Rangpo today and the time of filing this report, three positive cases had been detected. These will be included in tomorrow's count.

Of the nine cases detected at Mamring, the Health Secretary shared that two were cause for special concern since one worked at the Wai Wai the other at Zydyus pharma unit.

He informed that teams have already started contact tracing of these

new positive patients.

Dr Bhutia added that 70 samples of contacts of police personnel from Singtam, which includes 40 primary contacts of the cops and 22 from Singtam PS and eight from Singtam Fire Station personnel, have all returned negative.

He informed that out of Rapid Antigen Testing of 412 samples at Rongli in East Sikkim seven reported positive while RAT of 243 samples at Rhenock, contacts of positive patient from Golden Cross company, tested negative.

Also on Sunday, a driver from Sangkhol, who was brought to the flu clinic at STNM hospital tested positive through TrueNat screening. However, he added that primary contact of the driver has tested negative and testing of three more contacts will be carried out after seven days.

Meanwhile, testing of 12 persons from two teams of catering at Rangpo Transit Camp for drivers was carried out this morning and two tested positive, he informed. He mentioned that seven patients at Chujachen isolation facility

were shifted to STNM hospital after developing symptoms.

"Many people have been coming to us for rapid antigen testing but it is important to note that to test after six days of any exposure would be more effective and accurate," the Secretary said further.

Meanwhile, Dr Bhutia informed that the indoor gymnasium hall at Paljor Stadium has been finalized to lodge asymptomatic patients and STNM hospital kept exclusively for symptomatic patients.

Likewise, he added that other facilities have also been identified in case of any emergency in the State.

He mentioned that the decision has been taken to use the old STNM hospital complex for routine OPDs and directions have been given to get the complex ready. He further mentioned that a decision has also been made to create a War Room and a control room at STNM hospital and MS and AMS of the hospital have already been directed to immediately take necessary steps.

Sikkim goes into lockdown



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 JUL:

With a sudden spike in COVID cases in the State and recognizing the apprehension in the minds of the people, the State Government today decided to put the entire state under lockdown starting 21 July till the 27th.

The "complete lockdown" will see all shops, offices and business closed. Like always, emergency services and shops selling essential commodities and food items will be allowed to remain open even as all normal vehicles, including taxis, will remain off the roads.

In an additional order issued after the original notification ordering the lockdown, the Chief Secretary exempted pharmaceutical companies from the purview of the lockdown. While pharma units outside the containment zones can continue operations with minimum required staff brought to work ensuring social distancing, those in the containment zone will have to bring in the required personnel and lodge them at the factory for the duration of the containment orders.

The notification on the lockdown also informs that educational institutions in the State will now remain closed at least till 31 August.

West Bengal banks to remain closed on all Saturdays

KOLKATA, JUL 20 (PTI): In view of an increasing number of bank employees getting infected by coronavirus, the West Bengal government on Monday directed that all bank branches in the state will remain closed on Saturdays.

Presently, the banks remain closed only on second and fourth Saturdays and all Sundays.

"the Governor is pleased to declare that all Saturdays shall be public holidays under the Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881 in respect of all bank branches working in the State of West Bengal, in addition to the existing holidays on 2nd and 4th Saturdays," the finance (audit) department said in a notification.

"This will take immediate effect and will remain in force until further notification," it said.

Over 2,000 employees of state-run and private banks of West Bengal have been affected by COVID-19, All India Bank Officers Confederation (AIBOC) state secretary Sanjay Das said.

Earlier in the day, the information and cultural department issued an advisory to the banks urging them to close branches on all Saturdays and Sundays and provide services to customers on weekdays between 10 am and 2 pm.

The bank unions have been demanding for a five-day working week for long and held several rounds of discussions with the Indian Banks Association.

Incomplete information results in Jholungey residents blocking access to pharma buses

BIKASH CHETTRI

NAMCHI, 20 JUL:

The residents of Jholungey in South Sikkim, a short distance above Mamring, the town on the East-South district border, made headlines early Monday morning when they came out in strong numbers and refused buses ferrying pharma company employees to pass.

They were going by a government notification of Saturday which had declared their area a containment zone and directed that people remain indoors and that all shops and factories in the area be shut.

Only the previous day, people in the area had been allowed by officials to barricade entry points to the district at the Mamring bridge and at the bridge for pedestrians

at 20 Mile to block access. These areas were contained because they were uncomfortably close to the Rangpo which has been building up to be a hotspot.

In fact, when one of the barricades was taken down by some people, block officials had arrived at the spot on Saturday evening to help reinforce it.

The people went to bed convinced that the containment zone was to remain watertight to people from "outside." Hence, when pharma buses arrived, they came out and stopped them.

They were not completely wrong and their action was caused by lack of communication. Apparently, after the notification directing all businesses to remain closed had been passed, the district administration,

sources inform, issued another notification exempting pharma units for 72 hours. Apparently, medicines already in the process of being made needed this much time to become finished products. Shutting the factories down would mean that the entire batch would go to waste.

Word of this exemption had however not been passed down and resulted in the situation which required senior officials from police and the district administration to come down. Eventually, it was decided that the pharma units will be allowed to operate for another three days with workers coming in from green zones. Residents of the containment zone, since they have been ordered indoors, will not go to work and will receive paid holiday.

Record single-day spike of 40,425 COVID-19 cases; India's tally crosses 11 lakh

NEW DELHI, JUL 20

(PTI): India saw a record single-day jump of 40,425 COVID-19 cases, pushing its tally past the 11-lakh mark on Monday, while the total number of recoveries crossed 7 lakh, according to the Union Health Ministry data.

The death toll due to the disease rose to 27,497 with 681 fatalities reported in one day.

The data updated at 8 am on Monday showed that the total number of COVID-19 cases stands at 11,18,043.

India's COVID-19 tally crossed the 11-lakh mark, just three days after it crossed the ten-lakh mark.

There are 3,90,459 active cases in the country, while 7,00,086 people have recovered and one person has migrated. The recovery rate stands at 62.61 per cent.

The total number of confirmed cases includes foreigners.

This is the first time that the single-day spike has crossed the 40,000-mark.

According to the ICMR, a cumulative total

of 1,40,47,908 samples have been tested up to July 19 with 2,56,039 samples being tested on Sunday.

Of the 681 deaths reported in the last 24 hours, 258 were reported from Maharashtra, 91 from Karnataka, 78 from Tamil Nadu, 56 from Andhra Pradesh, 38 from Uttar Pradesh, 36 from West Bengal, 31 from Delhi, 20 from Gujarat and 15 from Madhya Pradesh.

The total fatalities in one day include nine from Bihar, eight each from Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, six each from Rajasthan and Telangana, five each from Haryana and Odisha, four from Assam, three from Jharkhand, two from Kerala, and one each from Goa and Ladakh.

Of the total 27,497 deaths reported so far, Maharashtra accounted for the highest 11,854 fatalities followed by Delhi with 3,628 deaths, Tamil Nadu 2,481, Gujarat 2,142, Karnataka 1,331, Uttar Pradesh 1,146, West Bengal 1,112, Madhya Pradesh 721 and Andhra Pradesh 642.

So far, 559 people have died of COVID-19 in Rajasthan, 415 in Telangana, 349 in Haryana, 254 in Punjab, 244 in Jammu and Kashmir, 217 in Bihar, 91 in Odisha, 57 in Assam, 52 in Uttarakhand, 49 in Jharkhand and 42 in Kerala.

Puducherry has registered 28 deaths, Chhattisgarh 24, Goa 22, Chandigarh 12, Himachal Pradesh 11, Tripura 5, Arunachal Pradesh 3, while Meghalaya, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, and Ladakh have reported two fatalities each.

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

Maharashtra has reported the highest number of cases at 3,10,455 followed by Tamil Nadu at 1,70,693, Delhi at 1,22,793, Karnataka at 63,772, Gujarat at 48,355, Uttar Pradesh at 49,247, Andhra Pradesh at 49,650 and Telangana at 45,076.

The number of COVID-19 cases has gone up to 42,487 in West Bengal, 29,434 in Rajas-

than, 26,164 in Haryana, 26,569 in Bihar, 23,999 in Assam and 22,600 in Madhya Pradesh.

Odisha has reported 17,437 infections, Jammu and Kashmir 13,899, Kerala 12,480, while Punjab has 10,100 cases.

A total of 5,535 have been infected by the virus in Jharkhand, 5,407 in Chhattisgarh, 4,515 in Uttarakhand, 3,657 in Goa, 2,878 in Tripura, 1,999 in Puducherry, 1,911 in Manipur, 1,483 in Himachal Pradesh and 1,178 in Ladakh.

Nagaland has recorded 988 COVID-19 cases, Chandigarh 717, Arunachal Pradesh 740 and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu together have reported 605 cases.

Meghalaya has reported 450 cases, Mizoram 284, Sikkim has registered 283 infections so far, while Andaman and Nicobar Islands has recorded 203 cases.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the ICMR," the ministry said, adding, state-wise distribution is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

Bengal announces 2-day lockdown every week

KOLKATA, JUL 20 (PTI):

Stating that community transmission of COVID-19 has been recorded in a few areas in West Bengal, the Mamata Banerjee government on Monday announced a complete lockdown across the state for two days every week to stem the spread of the disease.

The decision was taken following a high-level meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, at the state secretariat, Home Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay said.

"There are a few places in the state where community transmission of COVID-19 has been detected. After talking to ex-

perts, doctors, enforcement authorities, and the police, we have decided to impose complete lockdown for two days every week in the entire state to break the chain (of transmission)," he told reporters at the secretariat.

All offices, transport services will be shut down on those two days, he said.

"This week, the total lockdown will be in force on Thursday and Saturday. Next week, the shutdown will be clamped on Wednesday (July 29)," the home secretary said, adding that a review meeting will be held next Monday for further discussions on the matter.

AP hikes tax on petrol, diesel to mop up revenue

AMARAVATI, JULY 20

(PTI): Citing resource crunch, the Andhra Pradesh government on Monday revised the tax structure on petrol and diesel, thereby increasing their prices by Rs 1.24 and Rs 0.93 per litre respectively to mop up an additional revenue of about Rs 600 crore per annum.

As per the new structure, issued vide a Government Order amending the provisions of Andhra Pradesh Value Added Tax Act, 2005, the revised rates for petrol and diesel will be 31 per cent (tax) plus Rs 4 (additional levy) and 22.25 per cent plus Rs 4 per litre respectively.

The states own resources have totally dried up because of reduction in revenues on account of the (Covid-19-imposed) lockdown.

In April 2020, the state's own revenues realised were only Rs 1,323 crore as against Rs 4,480 crore in April 2019, which was just 29.5 per cent of the total expected revenue.

"Similar trends were observed in May and June as well, Special Chief Secretary (Revenue) Rajat Bhargava said in the order.

Under these circumstances and in order to overcome the financial crisis, the government after due consideration decided to revert to the earlier tax regime prevailing between 2015 and 2018.

We are also ensuring that the overall rates do not exceed those prevailing between 2015 and 2018. Several states are facing a similar situation and they too made upward revision of taxes to offset the loss of revenue, Rajat Bhargava said.

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Tangzi and Phongla villagers block out outsiders



SUMMIT REPORT
RANGPO, 20 JUL:

Villagers of Tangzi and Phongla under

Rateypani Namthang constituency in South Sikkim today blocked off access to their areas

to outsiders. Using bamboo and stones, they have blocked the road to ensure that no outside

can enter their villagers. Their worry is the spike in COVID-19 cases in Sikkim.

Arrested animal rights activist being brought to Kohima

KOHIMA, JUL 20 (PTI): Mumbai-based Animal rights activist Hema Chaudhary, arrested by Nagaland Police for allegedly making objectionable remarks against the people of the state, would be brought to Kohima late on Monday night, officials said.

Choudhary had made the alleged remarks in a YouTube vid-

eo following which an offence was registered against her by the cyber-crime police station in Nagaland.

She was charged with promoting enmity between different groups, making imputation prejudicial to national integration and issuing statements conducive to public mischief.

She was arrested from her Mumbai home on Friday.

The state police team along with the accused landed in Imphal from Mumbai and they are coming to Kohima by road from the Manipur capital, officials said.

On reaching Kohima, swab samples of the members of the police

team and Choudhary would be collected for COVID-19 tests.

She would be put up in a COVID-19 quarantine lock-up, and the police officers who had gone to arrest her would also stay within the quarantine complex, they said adding that Chaudhary would be produced before a court by Tuesday.

Sebi comes out with guideline to verify upfront collection of margins

NEW DELHI, JUL 20 (PTI): Markets regulator Sebi on Monday released framework to enable verification of upfront collection of margins from clients in cash and derivatives segments.

The new framework will come into effect from December 1, 2020, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a circular.

The regulator has reiterated that the applicable upfront margins will be collected from the clients in advance of the trade.

Sebi said clearing corporations will send minimum four snapshots of client wise margin requirement to trading member (TM) or clearing member (CM) for them to know the intra-day margin requirement per client in each segment.

It further said number of times snapshots need to be sent in a day may be decided by the respective clearing cor-

poration depending on market timings subject to a minimum of four snapshots in a day. The snapshots would be randomly taken in pre-defined time windows.

For commodity derivatives segment, Sebi said last snapshot for commodity derivatives will be generated at 5 PM.

The client wise margin file provided by the clearing corporations to trading or clearing member will contain the end of the day (EOD) margin requirements of the client as well as the peak margin requirement of the client, across each of the intra-day snapshots.

The member will have to report the margin collected from each client, as at EOD and peak margin collected during the day, in a manner prescribed by the regulator.

EOD margin obligation of the client will be compared with the respective client mar-

gin available with the TM/CM at EOD and peak margin obligation of the client, across the snapshots, will be compared with respective client peak margin available with the TM/CM during the day.

With regard to penalty, Sebi said higher of the shortfall in collection of the margin obligations at the two prescribed manner will be considered for levying of fine.

The verification of availability of margins with TM/CM will be done by exchanges or clearing corporations on a weekly basis by verification of the balances in the books or of the TM/CM in respect of the client.

Sebi said peak margin obligation of client across snapshots will be adopted in a phased manner.

For three months from the date of implementation, Sebi said 25 per cent of peak margin

obligation of the client across the snapshots will be compared with respective client peak margin available with the TM/CM during the day. This will be 50 per cent for subsequent three months and thereafter 75 per cent for subsequent three months and finally 100 per cent.

It further said shortfall in collection of margins will be calculated by taking into consideration the phased adoption of peak margin obligation of client.

During the period of phased adoption, the member should be able to demonstrate that the balance peak margin obligation has been funded from the member's own funds and not from any other client.

In a separate circular, Sebi said it has modified the eligibility criteria for selection of underlying commodity futures for options on commodity futures.

The former players cannot wait forever: ICA chief says BCCI must act quickly on demands

NEW DELHI, JUL 20 (PTI): Asserting that "nothing has happened" in the past 10 months, Indian Cricketers' Association president Ashok Malhotra on Monday urged the BCCI to look into the body's long-standing demands, saying the ageing former players cannot wait "forever".

Malhotra, who has been accused by the ICA directors of making public statements and approaching BCCI on important matters concerning the players' body without discussing them internally, said it is high time the Board pays heed to ICA's demands.

The demands include pension for former players who have played less than 25 first-class games, pension for widows of former cricketers, increase in medical insurance from Rs 5 lakh to 10 lakh and a benevolent fund to Manoj Prabhakar, whose BCCI ban ended in 2005 for match-fixing charges against him.

"It has been close to 10 months (since the Sourav Ganguly-led BCCI took charge) but nothing has happened for the former players. The ICA after all, is for the welfare of for-



mer cricketers and some of them who are as old as 70, cannot wait forever," Malhotra told PTI.

"I request the BCCI again to look into our demands. There are three former cricketers on the BCCI Apex Council (Ganguly and ICA representatives Shantha Rangaswamy and Anshuman Gaekwad. I am sure they understand the plight of the former cricketers. Four meetings (Apex Council) have taken place but nothing has happened," he said.

In his latest video

sent to ICA members, Malhotra courted controversy by saying that he was not concerned about domestic cricket and the current administrative mess in Bihar cricket.

"I had simply said that my concern and focus is on ICA and welfare of former cricketers. It is natural as I am the ICA president. What have we done in the last 10 months? Nothing, apart from raising money for former cricketers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic,"

said Malhotra.

The ICA, India's first ever players' association formed as per recommendations of the Supreme Court-appointed Lodha panel, was granted Rs 2 crore by the BCCI earlier this year to kick-start its operations. However, it is expected to sustain itself in the long-run.

Talking about the fighting in the ICA, Malhotra added: "Whenever I make a point, it is objected to more often than not. At the end of the day, we are all there to take care of former players."

Vikas Dubey encounter: SC asks UP to consider having ex-judge of top court in inquiry committee

NEW DELHI, JUL 20 (PTI): The Supreme Court Monday asked the Uttar Pradesh government to consider adding a former apex court judge and a retired police officer in the inquiry committee which is probing the encounter of gangster Vikas Dubey.

The top court also said it was "appalled" that the gangster got bail despite so many cases against him.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde, hearing a batch of pleas seeking court-monitored probe into the encounters of Dubey and his alleged associates, told the Uttar Pradesh government that they have to uphold rule of law.

You as a state have to uphold the rule of law. It is your duty to do so, the top court said.

The bench said it can-

not spare a sitting top court judge to become a part of the inquiry committee.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for Uttar Pradesh, sought some time to take instruction and get back to the court on the issue.

We are appalled to the fact that a person like Vikas Vikas Dubey got the bail despite so many cases, the bench said.

This is the failure of the institution and the person, who should have been behind the bars, got bail, the bench observed during the hearing which is going on.

Eight policemen, including DSP Devendra Mishra, were ambushed in Bikru village in Chaubeypur area of Kanpur when they were going to arrest Dubey and fell to bullets fired from rooftops shortly after midnight on July 3.

WNBA players adjusting to life in their Florida bubble

FLORIDA, JUL 20 (AP): Sue Bird has seen a lot in her storied playing career in the WNBA, overseas and the Olympics. While nothing the 39-year-old Seattle Storm guard experienced has prepared her for life in the WNBA bubble, she is making the best of the situation.

The WNBA put all 12 of its teams at a single site the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Florida in hopes of playing the full 22-game season amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"The bubble is part summer camp, mixed in with the Olympic village, playing overseas and an AAU tournament with a little bit of college life thrown in," Bird said in a phone interview.

Two weeks into the experiment, players and coaches have been adjusting to their temporary homes.

"It's like overseas, but a little bit easier as far as access to things as you

can order in and it's less isolating since you have so many of your friends around," Bird's teammate Breanna Stewart said.

"In the end, getting here and seeing how everything has come to fruition, I know it's going to work, as long as everyone's smart and continues to be safe. We're trusting everyone that's here is going to be safe."

Stewart is living in a villa with some of her Storm teammates while Bird is staying at the hotel on site. Players were given the option of where they wanted to live.

The street where the villas are located a few minutes from the hotel has the feel of a sorority row.

Each team was given two golf carts and they are usually parked in front of the villas where the players or operations staff are staying. Atlanta glossed up its carts with



the team's new logo on the front.

"You say hello to people and could bump into someone a few times a day from another squad," New York guard Sabrina Ionescu said.

"It feels like the Nike Nationals AAU Tournament. You could be eating next to a team or hanging out at the pool with players that you're going to be playing against later

that day."

While a few players voiced their concerns the first few days about the quality of food and accommodations, the league quickly addressed those issues.

With their quarantines concluded, players and staff now have a robust array of food options offered daily at the hotel. Or players can get groceries delivered

and cook for themselves in the villas. The hotel is also where the league does its daily virus testing.

"Food has been great. Service has been great. People have had issues with their housing, but there is no protocol for this, and the league took care of it," Phoenix Mercury veteran Diana Taurasi said.

"This is the first time

anyone has done this. The WNBA has gone far and beyond what I thought would happen."

Even with the WNBA in the bubble, the virus is still on everyone's mind. Players wear masks unless they are eating. When they line up for food and testing, marks on the ground remind them to stand at least 6 feet apart.

People can hang out in the hotel lounge, which has tabled spread apart to maintain social distancing. The pool has become a popular spot during the day and at night.

Even with the leisure activities, many players spend their free time relaxing in their rooms.

"There is a lot of sitting in your room, FaceTime with your family," Taurasi said.

"It's not ideal, but everyone's trying their best to make sure they we are comfortable mentally and physically."

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ANTHYESTI KRIYA

The Anthyesti Kriya of our beloved father, Lt DB Shrestha who left for his heavenly abode on 10 July falls on 22 Jul, 2020 (Wednesday).

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all our friends, relatives and well wishers who have stood by us during our time of bereavement and request all to pray for the departed soul of our beloved father.

The Anthyesti Kriya will be held at Shrestha Building (our residence), Below Janta Bhawan, DPH Area, Gangtok.

Shanti Shrestha

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Singtam hawkers decide on lockdown before official notification

YOGEN THATAL
SINGTAM, 20 JUL

The secretary of hawkers association of Singtam bazaar, Santosh Prasad, announced that the all their businesses will be shut for one week from today itself. He made this announcement before the State Government notified a one-week lockdown for the State. Their decision was prompted by the spike in COVID cases in Sikkim and to avoid further spread that keeping their businesses open could result



in. Impromptu barricades have also come up in several places here.

Muzaffarpur shelter home: Brajesh Thakur moves HC against jail for life for sexual assault

NEW DELHI, JUL 20 (PTI): Brajesh Thakur, who was sentenced to life imprisonment till his last breath for sexually assaulting several girls in a shelter home in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district, has approached the Delhi High Court challenging his conviction and jail term.

The high court is likely to take up this week his appeal seeking to set aside trial court's January 20 judgment convicting him in the case and February 11 order sentencing him to life imprisonment till his last breath.

A trial court here had sentenced Thakur to "rigorous imprisonment till remainder of his life" and imposed a hefty fine of Rs 32.20 lakh on him, saying he was the "king-pin" of a "meticulously planned" conspiracy and "displayed extreme perversity".

Besides him, the trial court has also sent others to jail for life in the case.

Advocate Pramod Kumar Dubey, who represented Thakur before the trial court, confirmed that the appeal has been filed on his behalf.

Thakur, in the appeal,

contended that the trial was conducted in a hurried manner by the special judge (POCSO), Saket, which was a flagrant violation of his right to a free and fair trial as guaranteed under the Constitution.

He claimed that his applications and submissions were dismissed in a mechanical manner without due application of judicial mind with a view to somehow conclude the trial.

The appeal, filed through advocates Nishaank Mattoo, Anurag Andley and Shreed Krsna, claimed that the conviction judgement and sentencing order were passed by the trial court in a prejudiced and mechanical manner having been swayed by the gruesomeness of the allegations levelled against Thakur and the public perception.

The appeal also raised the issue that potency of an accused is one of the foundational facts which the prosecution has to establish in a case related to rape and said neither the Bihar Police nor CBI had conducted the potency test of Thakur.

The trial court has

failed to appreciate that in a case relating to rape, the prosecution must first and foremost establish that an accused is potent and thereby capable of committing the alleged act

The trial court has failed to appreciate that there is no presumption under law that a person who is more than 50 years of age and admittedly suffering from high blood sugar has to be potent. Without establishing the potency of the accused specially one who is more than 50 years of age the accused cannot be convicted of the offence of rape, it contended.

The Special Judge, (POCSO), Saket while convicting the appellant (Thakur) has relied upon legally inadmissible evidence and has assumed the role of a prosecution witness by giving possible explanations which have neither been stated by the prosecution witnesses nor have been recorded in evidence and have further not even been argued by the prosecution during the course of final arguments, it alleged.

The appeal claimed that the trial court's verdict was illegal, incorrect, perverse and contrary to the evidence on record and hence liable to be set aside.

Bus fares hiked by 25 per cent in Himachal

SHIMLA, JUL 20 (PTI): The Himachal Pradesh government on Monday decided to increase the bus fare by 25 per cent, an official spokesman said.

The decision of hiking the bus fare was taken in the state cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister

Jai Ram Thakur here, he added.

The cabinet also decided to increase minimum bus fare for the first three kilometres from Rs 5 to Rs 7, the official added.

There will be an increase of 25 per cent in the present per kilometre

SGC batch of 1993 donates mineral water for docs and patients at STNM Hospital



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 JUL:**

Denz'93, the alumni of Sikkim Government College Batch of

1993, handed over 150 cartons of Mineral water to Medical Superintendent, STNM Hospital, Dr CS Sharma, here today.

Keeping on view of total lockdown across the state from tomorrow, Denz'93 donated mineral water for the patients and front-

line warriors attending to them at the hospital. Members Dhiraj Pradhan and Swagat Pradhan represented the Denz'93 group.

West Bengal Guv Jagdeep Dhankar meets HM Amit Shah

NEW DELHI, JUL 20 (PTI): West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Monday met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and discussed with him the "worrisome situation" in the state.

During the meeting, the governor apprised the home minister about the prevailing law and order, political and COVID-19 situation in West Bengal, officials said.

Dhankhar before the meeting had tweeted:

"Would be discussing with Union Home Minister at noon today West Bengal worrisome situation."

"Also state of affairs and affairs of State @MamataOfficial. Welfare of people of West Bengal is ever uppermost in my mind. All my actions are inspired to mitigate woes of WB people," he tweeted.

The governor had also said that he would discuss with the home minister about his constitutional duties provided under Article 159

that includes to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution, and will "devote myself to the service and well-being of the people".

"I PLEDGE TOTAL COMMITMENT FOR WB PEOPLE," Dhankar said in another tweet.

On Sunday, the governor had said there was no room for complacency for the state government when it came to dealing with rising COVID-19 positive cases and deaths in West Bengal.

Second plasma bank in Kerala set up in Wayanad

WAYANAD (KER), JUL 21 (PTI): Kerala's second plasma bank has been set up at the Wayanad district hospital at nearby Mananthavady, close on the heels of a similar facility being launched at Manjeri in Malappuram.

The District Medical Officer DrR Renuka, who inaugurated the plasma bank on Sunday, said the convalescent plasma therapy has been found

effective for treating the critical COVID-19 patients.

Health authorities said the donors of plasma should have tested negative for the virus twice and the donation should be within 14-120 days of the final test result.

The donor should be between 14-50 years of age, and be healthy with a minimum weight of 55 kgs.

Family of 3 killed, 6 injured in cloudburst in U'khand

PITHORAGARH, JUL 20 (PTI): A family of three was killed and six others injured as a cloudburst hit two adjacent villages in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district on Monday, officials said.

Eleven people are also reported missing, they said.

Sher Singh, his wife Govindi Devi and daughter Kumari Mamta were killed after their house in Gaila village caved in due to heavy rains triggered by the cloudburst. The incident took place around 2 am, when the family was fast asleep, Pithoragarh District Magistrate (DM) V K Jogdande told reporters.

Two of the bodies have been recovered,

while the search for the third is underway, he said.

Five others were injured in the village, he said.

One person was rescued in Tanga village and he told authorities that 11 others were washed away in a swollen rivulet, Jogdande said.

The two villages fall in the Bangapani sub-division of the district.

Relief and rescue operations have been launched by police and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel with help from locals, the DM said.

Two other villages were also hit by the cloudburst, resulting in damage to five houses, he said.

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SummitTIMES

Sanitiser - a fire HAZARD!

Hand sanitisers, now part of everyday life, can also be a fire hazard if used carelessly. There are different types.

One comes with Isopropyl alcohol base and the other with ethyl alcohol base. Many are a mixture of both. They readily evaporate at room temperature into an ignitable vapour. When sanitiser evaporates in a confined area, like a car, it only takes a spark to start a fire. They are inflammable and people should be aware. They should be kept in safe and cool places. Exposure to extreme heat can alter the chemical composition. Alcohol-based hand sanitiser should be rubbed over hands and other surfaces until it evaporates and dries up. Even a small quantity of alcohol on your hands exposes yourself to fire risks while cooking or smoking.

While sanitizing your vehicle, never use alcohol based sanitisers on hot or running vehicles, they can be sanitized with hypochlorite solutions type sanitisers.

-Sikkim Fire & Emergency Service-

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia - like symptoms

Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccinations available as of now.
- Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected.

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.
- Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome, and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

If you seek help, you may call :
-Toll free no. 104
District surveillance Officer
EAST : 7029372100
WEST : 9593297809
NORTH : 9641957468
SOUTH : 7407691463
New STNM
AMS : 9434711402

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

A Pandemic of Fear

Consult, collaborate and communicate. Don't panic

With the arrival of Novel Coronavirus into the resident population, the valid fear that COVID invokes in the general population took over. Towns went into voluntary lockdown, in some areas barricades were erected to keep outsiders, out. WhatsApp scaremongering took off. Social media went into rapturous joy over the people's initiative, and while one can understand the worry, it is also worrying that no one noticed the potentially dangerous direction that such attitudes can take a society in.

The short-sightedness of such moves, the othering of "outsiders," the insularity that such knee-jerkism promotes and how anarchic responses cannot deliver anything good were clearly lost in the mad scramble to keep areas "safe." There were instances of communication breakdown [not rare in Sikkim] and administrative disconnectedness, which, too, the State has seen often of late. The state machinery, which no one expects to be perfect, disappointed once again.

While community mobilization is always welcome, it is important that people make informed decisions and understand that mass panic needs to be calmed down, not fanned further as some extreme measures can end up doing. It is important to recognize that when people are encouraged/ allowed to barricade their localities against outsiders, the administration is shirking its responsibility towards the people's safety during this health crisis. A barricade is an aggressive signal, and when managed by scared people can lead to situations down the line which can be distasteful when mild and criminal in extreme cases. It is important for everyone to realize that the COVID pandemic is an unprecedented challenge, hence it becomes even more important for decisions to be weighed carefully. The unanimous decision of the Lall Bazaar [Gangtok] shopkeepers to shut shop for 10 days after Thursday needs to be discussed here. This was immediately problematic. A public announcement was made and people told to stock up in the two days still at hand before the capital's main market for vegetables and other kitchen provisions shuts down for 10 days. Where the lockdown announcement had only teased the instinct for panic buying, this unilateral decision of Lall Bazaar shopkeepers forced it out. Lall Bazaar, which had seen reduced footfall on Sunday Haat, was flooded with people on Monday, everyone jostling to stock up for 10 days. When NCoV is in the air, any decision which encourages people to gather in a crowd should be discouraged. This announcement ended up urging people to rush to Lall Bazaar. And they did. Ideally, visits to Lall Bazaar and other places where big gatherings cannot be avoided should be spread out at least while wider testing is undertaken and those at risk of exposure themselves and infecting others are traced and cleared or quarantined. In fact, to make this possible, one should consider keeping shops and vegetable markets open for longer so that there is no rush hour. What we got instead was an announcement, clearly born of good intentions, but one which delivered a potential health hazard.

The only agency which could have avoided this situation, the district administration, did nothing. It is regretful that this potential disaster was not foreseen by the district administration. People are put under lockdown so that the virus does not keep getting new hosts. Because a lockdown has been imposed, the authorities probably know more about how much the virus has spread than the lay people do. Shouldn't it have then stepped in to reassure the people that there will be no shortage? If people are expected to look out for themselves, are allowed to go in for bandhs on their own and stop people from entering their localities, then why does Sikkim need a State Task Force or even a police force? If decisions taken by people at dawn are so clear and well-reasoned that the entire top-brass makes it official after a proper meeting later in the day, the State Government might as well consider disbanding the STF and following the comments section of Facebook posts and doing whatever the majority of smartphone users want.

The incident at Jhorlungey in South Sikkim when people stopped busloads of pharma company workers from reaching their factories could also have been avoided if the administration could just make up its mind and not keeping issuing and amending its notifications. A pandemic requires clear thinking, not panic decision-making; it requires clear and consistent communication, wider consultations and it requires for the government to take the people into confidence and win their trust. To combat COVID, Sikkim needs to work together and through its government, not in silos or through notifications alone.

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

LGBTQ+ conversion therapy in India: how it began and why it persists today

RIANNA PRICE

THECONVERSATION.COM

India is facing a prolonged backlash from its LGBTQ+ community over the continued use of conversion therapies to "cure" homosexuality by changing people's sexual orientation. In May, the tragic suicide of Anjana Harish, a 21-year-old bisexual woman in Goa, sparked online protests. Harish had posted a video online before her suicide describing how she had been subjected to conversion therapy by her family in her home state of Kerala. Her death revitalised efforts by activists to call for an outright ban on the practice.

In June, the UN Human Rights Council received a report on conversion therapy by an independent expert on gender and sexuality, Victor Madrigal-Borloz. Based on research in over 100 countries that use conversion therapy, 8,000 respondents who had endured it were interviewed, with 98% reporting that it had caused them psychological or physical damage.

Despite this, the UN Human Rights Council has yet to officially support Madrigal-Borloz's call for a global ban on conversion therapy for minors. Currently, only five countries have a ban in place: Malta, Brazil, Taiwan, Ecuador and Germany.

Homosexuality in India was criminalised under colonial-era legislation in 1861. This law was repealed in 2018, after which the Indian Psychiatric Society stated unequivocally that homosexuality was not a mental disorder. However, divisions exist within the medical community.

After Harish's death, the Kerala branch of the society released a statement arguing that "any attempt to treat a person to change sexual orientation or gender identity is unjustifiable and illegal". But some practitioners, even in Kerala, still consider homosexual desire to be a perversion that can be medically corrected.

The ease of access in finding professionals who practice conversion therapy on LGBTQ+ people has become a cause for concern. In early June, two apps which help people

find medical clinics and treatments removed pages allowing users to look for "sexual orientation counselling" after a viral Twitter campaign.

IMPORTED BY THE BRITISH

In the west, the history of psychiatric understandings of homosexuality hinged on the notion that devi-



ant sexuality was something which could, and should, be changed. The idea of homosexuality as a disorder that could be "treated" was then imported to various European colonies via medical, legal and sociological institutions from the 19th century onwards.

The conversion therapies that persist today grew out of a set of aversion techniques that were developed by psychiatrists. These aversion techniques – in which people are pushed to associate a behaviour with discomfort – were initially used for alcoholism and other addictive and destructive behaviours. But from the 1950s through to the 1980s they began to be used globally on people with same-sex attraction as a form of conversion therapy.

In India, the earliest documented medical use of aversion techniques were in the 1970s, following a renewed global interest in scien-

tific cures for homosexuality, and was reported in the Indian Journal of Psychiatry. In the same period, some Indian medical professionals noted that their subjects "showed a desire to develop heterosexual behaviour", as they were "much concerned about their future marital life".

In my ongoing research on this period, I'm looking at how the expression of homosexual desire, private inclination and public propriety collided in India – and how the pressure of social tradition and familial duty to marry and procreate overruled same-sex desire for those who sought treatment.

The emphasis on traditional marriage remains a critical factor in the continuation of conversion therapies in India. In Indian post-colonial society, heterosexuality is often portrayed as the only acceptable form of sexual desire, despite long traditions of same-sex eroticism.

AVERSION THERAPY

When aversion therapy was introduced in India, it involved using electro-convulsive therapy as well as a programme of behavioural therapy to remove fear or anxiety of the opposite sex. Patients would attend sessions with a range of erotic or

pornographic same-sex photographs they had chosen themselves. While viewing them, they would receive an electric shock, creating a negative association of pain with their own feelings of arousal.

The photographs would then be replaced with a heterosexual image and the electric shock would subside, assigning a sense of relief to opposite-sex attraction. While visual aids were the primary stimuli, Indian practitioners also included sensory materials, such as women's perfume, to elicit stronger positive relations with opposite-sex stimuli. Women's perfumes are still being used today according to recent accounts of conversion therapy.

While their western counterparts in the 1970s and 1980s primarily used a combination aversive techniques with some behavioural therapy alongside, Indian practitioners relied more heavily on a set of "additional behavioural programmes" to develop "social skills" which would help patients navigate their newfound heterosexuality. The main point for western practitioners was the eradication of same-sex desires, whereas in India they wanted to redirect the sexuality and make it heterosexual and capable of procreation.

Male patients underwent therapy for "passivity", while female patients were encouraged to become more feminine through clothing choice. This practice reflected binary ideas of sex and gender which arose via colonial intervention, as pre-colonial India had long accepted the existence of the hijra or a "third gender".

The law which criminalised homosexuality in India was a colonial imposition. Homophobic narratives and those which try to medicalise same-sex attraction can also be traced back to colonial ideology. Yet some powerful post-colonial institutions and individuals adopted these narratives and incorporated them into an anti-LGBTQ+ agenda, which continues among some practitioners today.

[the writer is PhD Candidate in History, Lancaster University]



FILIPPO MENOZZI

THECONVERSATION.COM

The COVID-19 crisis has had a grave impact on jobs, wellbeing, mental health and the economy worldwide. But it has also prompted public expressions of hope – people have come together to sing on balconies and clap in the streets. Communities have been joining forces, with a surge in people donating to local food banks and looking out for their neighbours and elderly relatives.

In many ways, the pandemic has also shown how hope and optimism can appear in dark times – and how, in some instances, this can even become a force for social change. Indeed, as a recent poll from the strategy consultancy BritainThinks shows, just 12% of people want life to return to "exactly as it was before" once the pandemic is over.

The idea that living optimistically can lead to beneficial changes at a societal level was a key philosophy of German thinker Ernst Bloch. Known as "militant optimism", Bloch proposed that this was the active side of hope: a form of social commitment that turns hope into a concrete decision and intervention.

In this way, militant optimism fights the idea that history is what happens to us. Instead, it shows that history is what everyone actively makes every day – hence it can be addressed, contested and remade.

PHILOSOPHY OF HOPE

Bloch was a Marxist philosopher, described as the "philosopher of hope". His writings radically reimagined utopia, religion and daydreams

as positive forces for social change.

Bloch's three-volume work, *The Principle of Hope*, originally published in the 1950s, has been described by French-Brazilian philosopher Michael Löwy as "one of major works of emancipatory thought in the 20th century."

Always on the side of the oppressed and the defeated, Bloch's work is a struggle against the status quo and aims to revive unrealised possibilities of social justice. And the book's notion of "militant optimism" can offer some points of reflection for the world today.

Militant optimism should not be confused with a belief that "everything will be alright". Indeed, this naive optimism and unquestioning faith in history and progress can paradoxically lead people to accept the world and that there is no alternative – rather than changing things for the better. Similarly, militant optimism overcomes pessimism by fighting hopelessness and showing the role of human action and work in changing the course of history.

Take this current era as an example – with the global pandemic, environmental destruction, racial, class and gender inequalities, the exploitation produced by capitalism, ongoing wars and displacement of communities. A pessimist would look at the world around us and dispel any illusion of progress. But as the recent wave of anti-racist protests or the continuing fight against inequality and state violence in countries like Chile show, this isn't actually the case.

Pessimism may imply a cold and lucid analysis of the wrongs, losses and uncertainty of

Militant optimism: a state of mind that can help us find hope in dark times

the world around us. As Bloch notes in the first volume of *The Principle of Hope*: "at least pessimism with a realistic perspective is not so helplessly surprised by mistakes and catastrophes". Thinking pessimistically, Bloch reflects, is better than any false or uncritical optimism that blindly believes that things will be OK, because it is more realistic. But pessimism still falls into the same trap as naive optimism, in that it neglects human beings' active role in history – along with the fact that the world can, indeed, be changed.

OPTIMISM AND POLITICS

In this sense, militant optimism can help us channel what could appear as an individual and naive feeling of hope into a collective, concrete and participatory knowledge of and involvement into the material reality of the world around us.

Indeed, optimism is always required because the outcomes of social engagement are always uncertain. And, as Bloch famously put it, "hope can be disappointed".

Militant optimism is a force driving human action and opening real possibilities. It involves imagining what has not yet taken place rather than fixating on the defeats of the past – as the mobilisation of thousands of people against racism around the world demonstrates. In this way, militant optimism can guide and inspire us towards social liberation.

[the writer is Lecturer in Postcolonial and World Literature, Liverpool John Moores University]

2 arrested in Manipur's Thoubal districts with drugs



IMPHAL, JUL 20 (PTI): Two persons were arrested with drugs worth lakhs of rupees in Manipur's Thoubal district, police said on Monday. A vehicle and a weapon were also seized in two separate operations to nab them on Sunday, they said.

Acting on a tip-off, police along with members of All Lilong Anti-Drugs Association raided the

house of Md Aslam Khan in Lilong Haoreibi Sambukhong and arrested him with 542 Yaba tablets, Superintendent of Police Soibam Ibomcha Singh said.

The seized drugs are worth over Rs 5 lakhs in the international market, officials said.

A car used was also seized, the officer said, adding that it is yet to be confirmed if the vehicle

was stolen.

In another raid, police arrested Md Wahidur Rahaman from his house in Lilong Haoreibi Awang Leikai.

Six grams of heroin and a 12 bore double barrel gun were seized, officials said.

Two separate cases have been registered at the Lilong police station in connection with the arrests.

Lightning kills 5 in West Bengal's Jhargram



JHARGRAM (WB), JULY 20 (PTI): Five people died and 27 others injured in lightning strikes in West Bengal's Jhargram district on Monday, police said.

Several parts of the district witnessed lightning strikes accompanied by heavy rain during the afternoon.

Two persons each died in Jambani and Beliabera areas and one in Gopiballabhpur, police said.

A paddy field was struck by lightning in Parihati village under

Jambani police station area leaving one person dead and two others working with him injured.

Fourteen other workers who are on an adjacent piece of farmland were also injured in the lightning strike.

Several others who had been working in nearby fields had gone to a bus passenger shelter after the rain started, police said.

However, the shelter was hit by lightning that left one person dead and six others, including two

children, injured.

In Dhanghari village under Beliabera police station area, two women in their mid-30s lost their lives and five others were injured when lightning struck the paddy field in which they were working, police said.

A 48-year-old man also died in lightning strike in Mahuli village under Gopiballabhpur police station when he was going to fetch his cow from a field, police said.

All the injured people were hospitalised.

Priests hit hard as income dries up amid COVID-19 crisis



KOLKATA, JUL 20 (PTI): With several weddings and religious functions being put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many Hindu priests in Kolkata and its vicinity are in dire straits, some even looking for an alternative source of income to make ends meet.

Sushanta Chakraborty, a priest in Agarpara on the northern outskirts of the city, is selling vegetables in his locality, something that he said his "ancestors couldn't have thought of, no matter what the circumstances".

"Some households which I had been visiting for decades to perform rituals on auspicious occasions wouldn't invite me anymore. Since March, I have been sitting idle. With four mouths to

feed -- my aged parents, daughter and wife -- I finally decided to sell vegetables on a cart.

"Before March, I used to earn anything between Rs 35,000 and Rs 40,000 every month. Now, I barely manage to take home Rs 800 per day," Chakraborty said.

Vijay Upadhyay, a priest in the city's Kestopur area, has taken to Facebook to urge people that they be allowed to perform household rituals.

"Narayan puja rituals are now taking place without the presence of a priest in many households. I appeal to all of you to remove the misgivings and allow priests conduct the rituals," he said.

Vinod Jha, a committee member of a Hanu-

man temple in Kamarhati, said the management has decided to retain just one of the three priests on its payroll.

"The number of devotees has declined and so have the earnings. We have decided to let go of two priests and retain only one for performing the daily rituals," Jha said.

Montu Chakraborty, a priest in south Kolkata's Chakraberia area, believes that the situation will change for better during Durga puja.

"Some Durga puja committees have assured me that they would invite me. I am pinning my hopes on them. My earnings per month have come down to Rs 6,000 from Rs 11,000. But I know Maa (Durga) will set things right," he said.

Assam flood: Barpeta village faces uncertain future

BARPETA (ASSAM), JUL 20 (PTI): The annual floods and erosion by Brahmaputra had eaten away their landed properties over the years and this time the people of Bhogerpar village in Assam's Barpeta district have been forced to take shelter on embankments, relief camps and nearby villages.

The small village, situated 15 km from Barpeta district head quarter town and measures just about one sq km, has been facing the ruthless assault of the river every monsoon so much so that every immovable property standing on it -- homes, schools, places of worship for its 150 Hindu and Muslim families has been destroyed.

As a result of the annual flooding the number of families living in Bhogerpar has decreased to 95 - 75 of them Hindus and the rest Muslims.

Says Ratul Pathak, a 46-year old teacher at a private school who had to flee when flood waters washed away his home in the village, "In 2007-08, the Brahmaputra eroded a massive portion of the village. Since then, we are losing our lands every year to the mighty river and our sufferings are growing".

Like many others in the village, he has with him bare minimum ne-

cessities from his home at Bhogerpar.

"Today there is no cropland in our village," Pathak, who has now taken shelter at Baradi near here, told PTI.

Most of those who live at Bhogerpar village have become cattle farmers and some have even turned daily wage labourers, while many left for nearby villages and towns to eke out their living, he said.

According to the Assam water resources department, flood and erosion is a serious issue in the state as more than 4.27 lakh hectares or 7.4 per cent of the state's total area have already been eroded by the Brahmaputra and its tributaries since 1950.

The annual average loss of land is nearly 8,000 hectares and the width of Brahmaputra has increased up to 15 km at some places due to erosion, it said.

The surveys carried out during different periods reflect an alarming picture regarding widening of the Brahmaputra, whose total area in the state has gone up to 6,080 sq km in 2006 from 4,850 sq km during the survey conducted between 1963-1975. In the first survey conducted during 1912-28, the river had 3,870 sq km of area.

67-year-old villager



Ramani Pathak said her family has decided to settle permanently at Baradi as flood and erosion have become an annual affair at Bhogerpar and alleged that no step is being taken by the government to check it.

"It is known to all that none can prevent the mighty Brahmaputra, but at least some measures should have been taken. We have no one but the Almighty. Our only namghar (place of worship for Vaishnavites in Assam) was also taken away by the river," she said with tears in her eyes.

Dhananjay Bayan too turned emotional speaking about the village, which is his birthplace and where he had spent his childhood.

"My forefathers had lost their farmland due to the erosion. We were making a living by cattle farming. I used to get 15-20 litres of milk per day which I sold in the market at Barpeta to meet my daily needs. But this time, the flood has taken

everything. My livestock is gone. I don't know how I am going to survive," he said.

His brother Kulen has taken shelter on an embankment with his cattle. He said the herd has not got proper feed for days even though the district administration officials have claimed that enough foodgrain has been distributed for both men and animals.

Sabur Khan, who is a daily wage earner and a seasonal fisherman, said he is clueless how to earn his living once the flood water recedes as this year's deluge has been very severe and has destroyed everything in the village.

"I do not have any cattle nor any cropland. After this flood, my family has to starve. This Brahmaputra has finished our life... It is inexplicable pain to leave one's birthplace and live in a tent on an embankment," he said.

Mridul Pathak said the village has become almost inaccessible from

Barpeta town as a dilapidated wooden bridge between Suha and Oumura villages has to be crossed.

"There is no option but to take that bridge. No vehicles can pass through it and many people have been hurt due to accidents on it. Even the sick have to be carried through the risky bridge to reach the hospital," he added.

Pathak alleged that the authorities had "turned a deaf ear" to the villagers pleadings for a concrete bridge.

"We all know that today or tomorrow our village will cease to exist and we will lose our existence and identity," said Satyen Medhi, another inhabitant.

The flood prone area of the state as assessed by the Rashtriya Barh Ayog is 31.05 lakh hectares, which is about 39.54 per cent of the total land in Assam. This is about 9.4 per cent of the total flood prone area of the country.

The flood prone area of the country as a whole stands at about 10.2 per cent of the total area, the water resources department said on its website.

"It signifies that the flood prone area of Assam is four times the national mark of the flood prone area of the country," it added.

Nagaland's Hornbill Festival unlikely this year

KOHIMA, JUL 20 (PTI): The famed Hornbill Festival in Nagaland is unlikely to be held this year in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, a senior official said on Monday.

The 10-day Hornbill Festival that usually starts on December 1 celebrates the culture and heritage of different tribes of the state. It is attended by lakhs of people from across India and abroad.

The tourism industry is in a dire condition due to the pandemic and if the situation doesn't improve, the state government may not be in a position to host the Hornbill Festival, Tourism Advisor H Khehovi Yephthomi told reporters.

The tourism industry in Nagaland is largely dependent on the mega

event with the festivities starting as early as mid-October at local levels and culminating in December.

The festival enables tour operators, hoteliers, guides, transporters and a myriad of handicraft artisans and restaurant owners to earn enough to sustain them through the lean monsoon season, Yephthomi said.

We have absolutely no tourist traffic since February and we are certain that if this dire situation continues then the entire industry will collapse in another six months," he added.

The festival, for which thousands of people make travel plans not only to Nagaland but also several other states in the Northeast, is being held over the last 20

years.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for Aatma Nirbhar Bharat, Yephthomi said small-scale theme-based events can be organised in district headquarters like Made in Nagaland, Flowers of Nagaland, etc so as to manage crowding and this will also act as the right platform in giving opportunities to local entrepreneurs in rebuilding a community towards sustainability, which has always been the goal of Hornbill Festival.

The state's tourism industry will also get an opportunity to revive itself, he said.

The scale and the type of the festival may be considered after studying the ground real-

ities in October- November, he said.

Stating that the Tourism Department is working out a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for a steady reopening, Yephthomi said the sector will have to redesign its services and utilities and institute certain protocols, including social distancing rules, contactless payment, besides management of the number of people within a facility.

The department is working to set up Destination Management Organisations in coordination with representatives from key departments of the state such as Health, Home, Transport and Municipal Affairs to ensure efficient flow of tourists, and safe and sustainable

use of tourism services and infrastructure, he said.

Yephthomi, an MLA, said the Tourism Department would hold a consultative meeting with Kohima-based tribal hohos for their views before taking any decision on the Hornbill Festival.

He said the government has started gathering details of around 20,000 people who came back to the state from other parts of the country due to the lockdown to conduct training for skill enhancement so that they can be provided employment in the hospitality sector.

We are trying to provide employment opportunities to these people and will come out with the modalities within a couple of weeks, he said.

Second policeman dies of COVID-19 in Assam

GUWAHATI, JUL 20 (PTI): Another policeman succumbed to COVID-19 in Assam on Monday, taking the death toll due to the disease in the state to 58, according to the state police.

NK Rajesh Narzary is the second person in the force to die of coronavirus infection after Harewar Nath who lost his life on July 10.

"We are saddened to inform that NK Rajesh Narzary, 9th APBn, who was battling #Covid19, made the supreme sacrifice today. Our deepest condolences are with the family and colleagues of NK Rajesh Narzary," Assam Police tweeted.

"We stand in solidarity with all the brave #CoronaWarriors of Assam Police," it added.

Assam Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) G P Singh tweeted that Narzary was admitted at Gauhati Medical College

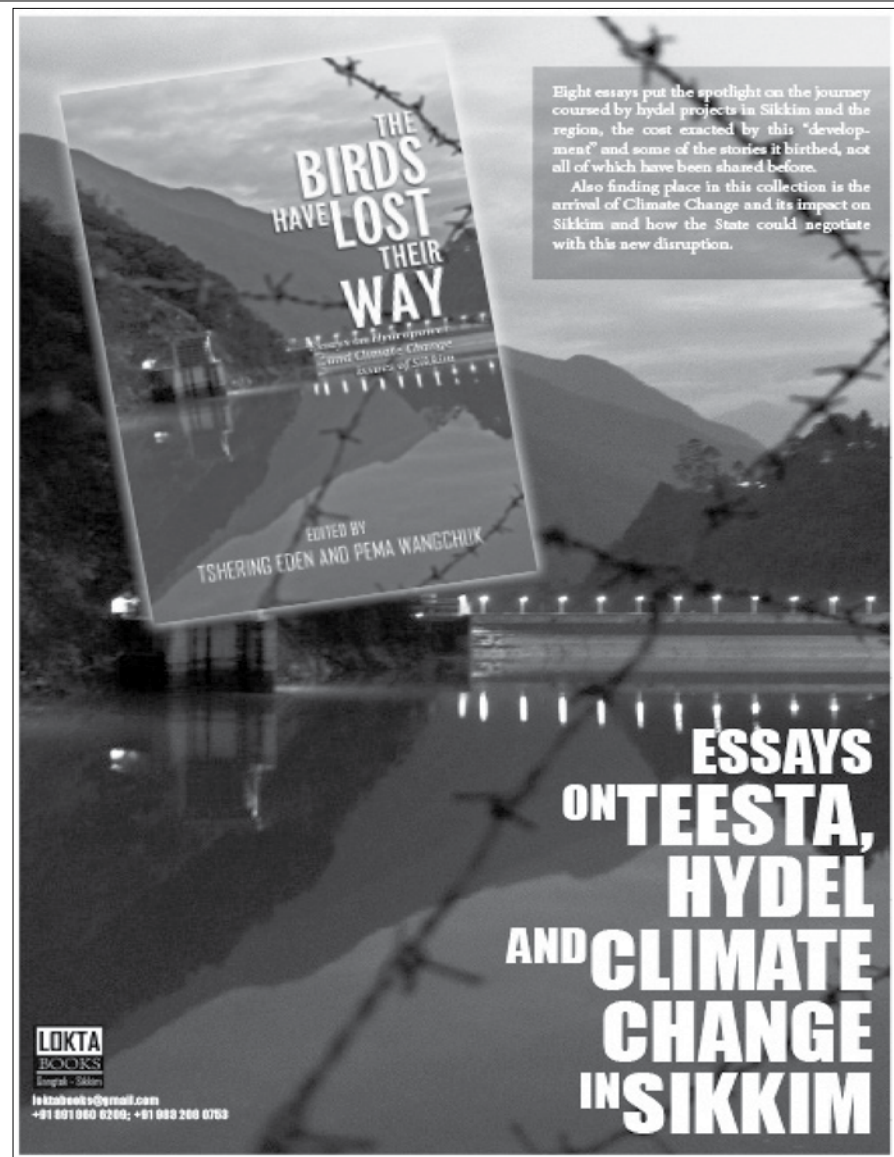
and Hospital (GMCH) on July 4 for treatment of COVID-19 related ailments and he was in the ICU.

Condoling his demise, Director General of Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta said that all assistance will be extended to the family of the "brave corona warrior".

The Assam government on its official Twitter handle said, "#CoronaWarriors are making supreme sacrifice for the citizens. Let's NOT DISHONOUR them by taking #COVID19India protocols casually."

"As on today, a total of 869 of our personnel have tested positive for #Corona, out of which 484 have recovered... After fighting bravely, 50 of our #CoronaWarriors have already joined back for duty," Assam Police tweeted on Sunday night.

Assam has recorded a total of 23,999 COVID-19 cases so far.



Messi wins record 7th scoring title in Spanish league

VITORIA (SPAIN), JUL 20 (AP): Lionel Messi won a record seventh top scoring title in the Spanish league after netting twice in Barcelona's 5-0 rout of Alav s in the final round.

Messi ended with 25 goals, four more than Karim Benzema, who did not score in Real Madrid's 2-2 draw at Legan s.

Messi is the first player to finish as the league's top scorer in seven different seasons. He reached the milestone despite missing games because of an injury early in the season. The Argentine's 25 goals came in 33 matches.

Messi was tied with Telmo Zarra with six scoring titles. He has also now equaled Hugo Sanchez's feat of four straight top-scorer trophies.

"Individual achievements are always secondary," Messi said on Sunday. "I wished it could



have come along with the league title."

This is also the third successive season that Messi finished with the most assists 21 in the league.

Ansu Fati, Luis Suarez and Nelson Semedo also scored Sunday for Barcelona, which had already secured second place behind Madrid.

Fati opened the scor-

ing in the 24th minute, Messi added to the lead 10 minutes later and Suarez closed the first-half scoring in the 44th. Semedo got on the board in the 57th and Messi in the 75th to help Barcelona rebound from a 2-1 home loss to Osasuna.

"Today things were different," Messi said. "The team showed better attitude and com-

mitment. It was an important step forward for us ahead of what's left in the season."

Barcelona now turns its focus to its Aug. 8 home game against Napoli in the round of 16 of the Champions League.

The first leg, played before the break, ended 1-1.

Barcelona coach Quique Seti n finished under pressure after

the team relinquished a two-point lead over Madrid when the league resumed following the pandemic break. It was four points back before Madrid's match at Legan s.

Barcelona defender Clement Lenglet had to be substituted early in the second half because of an apparent muscle injury.

Alav s, sitting in 15th, had already done enough to stay up.

BAR A "B" TEAM

American winger Konrad de la Fuente scored twice as Barcelona's "B" team beat Valladolid B to keep alive its hopes of reaching the second division next season. The victory put Barcelona in the second round of the promotion playoffs.

The 19-year-old De la Fuente, who recently had his contract with Barcelona extended through the 2021-22 season, scored in each half.

Inter left to lament what might have been in Serie A as doubts resurface

NICKI BANDINI

MILAN, 20 JUL [THEGUARDIAN]:

If Romelu Lukaku had been a little more selfish, then perhaps there would be life in the Serie A title race yet. He stepped up in a high-pressure situation on Sunday night, burying an 88th-minute penalty to bring Inter to 2-2 at Roma. It was the sixth he had taken this season, and the sixth he had converted.

A penalty he chose not to take, however, continues to linger in the memory. Inter were already a goal and a man up at home to Bologna on 5 July when they won a spot-kick in the 61st minute. Lukaku handed the ball to Lautaro Martinez, kissing his strike partner on the head in encouragement. The Argentinian's weak shot was saved, and Inter collapsed to a 2-1 defeat.

Lukaku could not have known that his gesture would backfire so dramatically. To the contrary, he likely considered that a goal for Martinez in that moment would have done Inter's title bid the world of good. His strike partner had scored only once in five games following the restart, and was in need of a confidence boost.

Still, in a season of 'what ifs' for so many teams, that will be the one that haunts Inter the most. It seemed at the time that their title challenge was over, as they fell 11 points behind Juventus. But the Old Lady has since suffered her own mid-summer swoon, losing to Milan before drawing with Atalanta and Sassuolo.

Inter had a chance to pull within three if they could win in Rome – piling pressure on Juventus before Monday night's game against Lazio. The Nerazzurri got off to a positive start, Stefan De Vrij heading them in front from a corner in the 15th minute. But on the stroke of half-time, the same player deflected Leonardo Spinazzola's shot into his own net. The goal should not have stood. Replays showed Aleksandar Kolarov kicking the heel of Martinez as he won possession at the start of the attack. Yet referee Marco Di Bello declined to overturn his decision after an On-Field Review.

Inter had controlled the tempo for most of the first half, but Roma came out sharper after the interval. Jordan Veretout went close, before Henrikh Mkhitaryan put

them in front. The ball fell to him via a fortunate ricochet between two defenders, but Inter's midfield had been far too slow to check his advance when he brought the ball forward from the centre-circle to begin.

Mkhitaryan's goal arrived in the 57th minute. Antonio Conte waited another 10 before making his first substitutions. Lukaku, Cristiano Biraghi and Victor Moses were first on, followed swiftly by Christian Eriksen. The change of personnel made little difference. Roma were defending well, Paulo Fonseca's recent switch to a back three continuing to pay dividends.

An equaliser did not seem to be on the cards until Spinazzola gifted Inter a penalty. He had been attempting a clearance, but the ball bobbed off his standing leg. The defender swung through into Moses's thigh. Lukaku sent Pau Lopez the wrong way from the spot.

Inter needed another goal to keep their slim title hopes alive. They could not find it. Conte lamented the decision not to overturn Roma's first goal, but his greatest ire was reserved for the fixture list which he believes to have undermined his team. "Our schedule, which is mad, is going unobserved," he said. "It seems to have been made to put us in difficulty, against teams who have always had one day more of rest, with us playing away from home and kicking off at 9.45pm. That means getting home at 4am and barely being able to train the next day. Other teams rest for five days."

He finished with a classic Conte rejoinder that, "I don't want to stir up a controversy", having just done precisely that. His anger was not just directed at the league but his own club's directors, with a suggestion that Inter clearly had not been as "present" as they needed to be when the calendar was made. His words were interpreted as a dig at the CEO Beppe Marotta, with whom he previously worked at Juventus.

The substance of his claim merits scrutiny. If Inter's title bid has died prematurely, it is not because of a creditable draw away to Roma but because they have thrown away second-half leads against Bologna, Sassuolo and Verona. As Eurosport's Enrico Turcato observed, they were given the same amount of rest

as their opponents coming into all three of those games.

To blame the schedule, in any case, is a cop-out. It is not the fixture list that has caused Martinez's form to drop off so sharply since the restart, nor can that explain why Eriksen – who sparked briefly in games against Napoli and Sampdoria – looks once again like a foreign object in this team.

The true concern is that Conte and Marotta may not share a vision for how to proceed. The expectation was never that Inter should win the Scudetto this season – even if the manager himself has confessed he would not have taken the job if he thought there were no chance. Sunday's draw secured their place in the Champions League with four games to spare: clear progress after late scrambles in each of the past two seasons.

Yet more will be expected next term. Inter have been aggressive again in the transfer market, completing the permanent sale of Mauro Icardi to Paris Saint-Germain and signing Achraf Hakimi from Real Madrid. They are understood to be close to a deal to sign another bright young talent, Sandro Tonali, from Brescia.

Yet when Conte discusses what he believes to be missing from his team, he speaks always of a need for experience and veteran know-how. He wanted Arturo Vidal in January, and his admiration for Edin Dzeko is well known. As Sunday night ticked over into Monday morning, sports radio shows in Italy were alive with speculation as to what Lukaku might have said as he threw an arm around the Bosnian at full-time.

And then there is Alexis Sanchez – a player whose seven post-lockdown assists are second only to Leo Messi across Europe's top five leagues. Conte, plainly, is enamoured. But are Inter as enthusiastic about investing long-term in a 31-year-old whose Manchester United contract pays £390,000 a week? They have covered less than half of that during this season's loan.

These are the questions that come next for Inter, as those last hopes of dethroning Juventus recede. A sense of frustration at opportunities thrown away too cheaply can only be dispelled by making sure it does not happen again next year.

De Gea mistakes see Chelsea beat Man U to reach FA Cup final

LONDON, JUL 20 (AP): At least David De Gea was spared having a crowd inside Wembley to witness his latest mistakes in the Manchester United goal.

Gifted goals to beat United 3-1 on Sunday, Chelsea will be returning to the national stadium on Aug. 1 to face Arsenal in an all-London FA Cup final.

De Gea's first mistake came in the 11th minute of first-half stoppage time. Olivier Giroud's close-range deft touch from Cesar Azpilicueta's cross was pushed into his own goal by De Gea.

United, which was rocked by Eric Bailly being hospitalized with a first-half head injury, returned to the field early for the start of the second half but was just as sloppy.

Diving to his left, De Gea let Mason Mount's long-range strike go through his gloves. There was shared United culpability for the 46th-minute goal since Brandon Williams gave the ball away around the halfway line with a misplaced pass that Mount seized on.

"David knows he should have saved the second goal but that's done now," United manager Ole Gunnar Solskj r said.

"It's hard for a keeper to make amends, apart from David making two or three fantastic saves

after.

"But you see Brandon ... probably feels a bit responsible and the rest of the half he was absolutely outstanding."

It summed up United's misfortune that the third goal in the 74th came from captain Harry Maguire accidentally turning the ball past De Gea at the near post when under pressure from Chelsea's Antonio Riger.

Usually Sergio Romero plays in goal for United in the FA Cup. De Gea hadn't played in the competition since the 2018 final when Chelsea beat United.

With three years remaining on De Gea's contract, United has a quandary over the future of one of its highest-paid players who was once considered one of the world's top goalkeepers.

United can so often rely on winning a penalty. But even earning a 19th spot kick of the season converted by Bruno Fernandes in the 85th after Anthony Martial was fouled by Callum Hudson-Odoi could not spark a late comeback.

It means Frank Lampard's first season as Chelsea manager will end with a cup final. It will be a harder route to a second final in August, with Chelsea trailing 3-0 to Bayern Munich in



the Champions League round of 16.

"We don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves," said Lampard, who won the FA Cup four times as a Chelsea player.

"But we can certainly enjoy the performance and the result."

In this pandemic-delayed conclusion to the season, which prevents fans attending games, Solskjaer is also chasing continental glory through the Europa League with United.

Chelsea and United will be hoping to secure Champions League spots in the upcoming final week of the Premier League season and not be relying on winning continental competitions to qualify.

LEICESTER COLLAPSE

Leicester's 3-0 loss at Tottenham in the Premier League on Sunday means the 2016 champions risk dropping out of the top four after being there since September.

Fifth-place United remains only behind Leicester on goal difference and has a game in hand against West Ham on Wednesday before playing Brendan Rodgers' side on Sunday.

Chelsea is a point ahead of Leicester going into Wednesday's game at newly crowned champion Liverpool and Sunday's finale against Wolverhampton.

KANE DOUBLE

Tottenham's victory over Leicester was secured by Harry Kane setting up the opener before netting twice to take his tally to 23 goals in this injury-restricted season.

Tottenham, which moved up to sixth place in its pursuit of a Europa League place, took the lead in the sixth minute after Son Heung-min ran onto Kane's pass before sending in a shot that was deflected in by James Justin.

Lucas Moura played

in Kane for a low finish in the 37th and the Brazilian set up the striker again three minutes later for a shot curled into the far corner.

RELEGATION

Bournemouth is in relegation trouble after being beaten 2-0 by Southampton, remaining in next-from-last place.

Bournemouth is three points below 17th-place Watford, with an inferior goal difference and having played a game more ahead of next weekend's season finale at Everton.

Trailing to Danny Ings' opener, Bournemouth thought it had secured a point in second-half stoppage time. But Sam Surridge's goal was ruled out by VAR for offside against Callum Wilson.

And Bournemouth's frustration was compounded in the ninth minute of stoppage time by Southampton substitute Che Adams scoring a second.

Selfless Granit Xhaka completes unlikely Arsenal redemption

JONATHAN LIEW

LONDON, 20 JUL [THEGUARDIAN]:

When Granit Xhaka stalked off the pitch against Crystal Palace in October, flinging off his shirt and swearing at the fans booing him down the tunnel, it felt like the sort of yarn that normally has only one ending. And so it was no surprise to see him here nine months on, putting in a statement performance against one of the world's great midfields in a resounding FA Cup semi-final victory at Wembley. Hang on. May have got my lines mixed up there. Will get back to you.

Perhaps we should no longer allow ourselves to be surprised by things like this. After all, players mature and

wither. Form comes and goes. Momentum shifts. Stars periodically align. But as Mikel Arteta's Arsenal improbably stared down Pep Guardiola's Manchester City with a display of clinical, gutsy counterattacking football, it was hard not to feel quietly flabbergasted at how quickly Xhaka seems to have earned his redemption.

At Wembley, Arsenal's cup overflowed with heroes. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang should probably have scored a hat-trick. David Luiz put in a monstrous performance, the sort that feels as much expiation for past sins as exhibition of current qualities: revenge, but against himself. Kieran Tierney has probably managed

to surprise even himself at centre-back. But keeping the whole show on the road was the extraordinary Xhaka: not so much the beating heart of the side but its emergency defibrillator, a player who seems to have become so much more of a leader without the armband than he ever seemed to be with it.

For all the justifiable deluge of acclaim that will accompany Arteta's counter-punching triumph, their second in the space of three days, Arsenal were fortunate here, too. Not remotely as fortunate as they were against Liverpool on Wednesday night, but any victory achieved with 29% possession and four shots against 16 is invariably going to

owe something to happenstance. And it might easily be forgotten that Arsenal could have been out of the game without 15 gasping minutes. That they were not was almost entirely Xhaka's doing.

Arsenal really were a strange colour of fish in those opening minutes, trying to pass themselves into a game that City were intent on taking by force. First Shkodran Mustafi was dispossessed by Raheem Sterling inside his own penalty area, with Xhaka steaming in to clear. Next Riyad Mahrez's header across goal was desperately hooked off the line. Five minutes in, and Xhaka had already saved Arsenal twice. And as Arsenal took the lead, it was Xhaka who

did more than anyone to consolidate their advantage: plugging the gaps in defence, throwing himself into the path of a Kevin De Bruyne piledriver, spreading play unfussily and economically. Not until the 78th minute, with Arsenal already 2-0 up and beginning to entrench themselves, did he put his first pass astray.

So what, exactly, has happened here? Xhaka could easily have gone back to Germany in the January transfer window. Hertha Berlin were interested. His agent had given a fairly pointed interview to a Swiss newspaper along similar lines. Arteta, as a new coach looking to put his own imprint on the squad, could easily

have let him. Certainly few Arsenal fans would have mourned. And given Arteta's risk-taking, no-compromises style of play, a football reliant on players you can trust and mould to your principles, you wondered just where a player of Xhaka's on-field and off-field discipline would fit in.

Yet in a way, his resurrection reflects Arsenal's own trajectory under Arteta: a process of growth and selflessness and machine-learning. Not everything has worked. Not everything has gone to plan. But like

Arteta, Arsenal have made sure they learned something from every setback. By way of illustration, contrast this performance with the supine 3-0 defeat at the Etihad Stadium in the first game after lockdown. The overall approach hasn't changed. What has is clarity of decision-making, sharpness of combinations, familiarity of assigned roles.

Certainly Xhaka seems to have benefited from a little more definition to his assignment. For much of his Arsenal career it wasn't entirely clear

to anyone – possibly including Xhaka himself – what trajectory he was supposed to be pursuing. Was he a box-to-box Vieira type? A deep-lying string-puller? Özil with a slide tackle? Francis Coquelin with a passing range? Under Arteta, and particularly in games such as this, his creative duties appear to have been streamlined in favour of accentuating his main strengths – recycling possession, smelling danger, never giving up on a lost cause.

Thousands to walk off job to protest racial inequality

NEW YORK, JUL 20 (AP): Organisers of a national workers strike say tens of thousands are set to walk off the job Monday in more than two dozen US cities to protest systemic racism and economic inequality that has only worsened during the coronavirus pandemic.

Dubbed the Strike for Black Lives, labor unions, along with social and racial justice organisations from New York City to Los Angeles, will participate in a range of planned actions. Where work stoppages are not possible for a full day, participants will either picket during a lunch break or observe moments of silence to honor Black lives lost to police violence, organizers said.

We are ... building a country where Black lives matter in every aspect of society including in the workplace, said Ash-Lee Henderson, an organizer with the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of over 150 organizations that make up the Black Lives Matter movement.

The Strike for Black Lives is a moment of reckoning for corporations that have long ignored the concerns of their Black workforce and denied them better working conditions, living wages and healthcare, said Henderson, who is also co-executive director of the Tennessee-based Highlander Research and Education Center.

Among the strikers will be essential workers: nursing home employees, janitors and delivery men and women. Fast food, ride-share and airport workers are also expected to take part in planned events.

The strike continues an ongoing global reckoning on race and police brutality set off by the death of George Floyd, a Black man who died at the hands of Minneapolis police in late May.

At noon in each US time zone on Monday, workers are expected to take a knee for about eight minutes the amount of time prosecutors say a white police officer held his knee on Floyd's neck.

Strikers are demanding sweeping action by corporations and government to confront systemic racism and economic inequality that limits mobility and career advancement for many Black and Hispanic workers, who make up a disproportionate number of those earning less than a living wage.

Specifically, they are calling on corporate leaders and elected government officials to use executive and legislative power to guarantee people of all races can thrive.

That demand includes raising wages and allowing workers to unionize to negotiate better health care, sick leave and child care support.

When the strike was announced on July 8, partnering unions included the Service Employees International Union, the International Brotherhood of Team-

sters, the American Federation of Teachers, United Farm Workers and the Fight for 15 and a Union.

Several more worker collectives have since joined, along with social and racial justice groups.

In Manhattan, essential workers will gather outside of the Trump International Hotel to demand the Senate and President Donald Trump pass and sign the HEROES Act.

The House-passed legislation provides protective equipment, essential pay and extended unemployment benefits to workers who have not had the option of working from home during the coronavirus pandemic. Organizers said New York Sen. Chuck Schumer is expected to rally with workers.

Strikers in Minneapolis, where Floyd was killed on May 25, will include nursing home and airport workers demanding a 15-per-hour minimum wage, organizers said.

In Missouri, participants will rally at McDonald's locations in St. Louis and Ferguson, a key landmark in the protest movement sparked by the death of Michael Brown, a Black teenager who was killed by police in 2014. The Ferguson strikers will also march to a memorial site located on the spot where Brown was shot and killed.

Organisers said many strikers are taking particular aim at corporations such as Walmart and McDonald's, which they say should be held accountable for widespread mistreatment and exploitation of hourly workers of color.

In the wake of Floyd protests, McDonald's expressed its support for Black victims of police violence and vigilante attacks.

On Friday, a group of McDonald's workers filed a federal lawsuit against the corporation in Florida, alleging that managers at a corporate-run store in Lakeland subjected them to a racially hostile work environment and also had mistreated Black customers.

The workers alleged that after they reported their concerns to corporate leaders, their managers retaliated by slashing their hours and changing their work responsibilities.

McDonald's, if you really believe Black lives matter, it's time to stop with the lip service and start with real action: treat your Black employees like our lives matter, said Faith Booker, a Black plaintiff in the lawsuit who also plans to join strikers on Monday.

In a statement emailed to the AP, McDonald's said it was taking the claims in the lawsuit seriously."

We stand with Black communities across the globe in our commitment to address unacceptable racial injustices and are disappointed that these allegations do not reflect the high standards we hold ourselves accountable to every day across all areas of our business, the statement reads.

GOP leaders, Trump to discuss virus aid as crisis deepens

WASHINGTON, JUL 20 (AP): Top Republicans in Congress were expecting to meet Monday with President Donald Trump on the next COVID-19 aid package as the administration panned more virus testing money and interjected other priorities that could complicate quick passage.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell was prepared to roll out the 1 trillion package in a matter of days. But divisions between the Senate GOP majority and the White House posed fresh challenges.

Congress was returning to session this week as the coronavirus crisis many had hoped would have improved by now only worsened and just as earlier federal emergency relief was expiring.

Trump insisted again Sunday that the virus would disappear, but the president's view did not at all match projections from the leading health professionals straining to halt the U.S.'s alarming caseloads and death toll.

McConnell and House GOP leader Kevin McCarthy were set to meet with Trump and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to fine-tune the legislation, acting chief of staff Mark Meadows said on Fox News.

The package from McConnell had been quietly crafted behind closed doors for weeks and was expected to include 75 billion to help schools reopen, reduced unemployment benefits alongside a fresh round of direct 1,200 cash payments to Americans, and a sweeping five-year liability shield against coronavirus lawsuits.

But as the White House weighed in, the administration was panning some 25 billion in proposed new funds for testing and tracing, said one Republican familiar with the discussions. The administration's objections were first reported by The Washington Post.

Trump was also reviving his push for a payroll tax break, which was being seriously considered, said another Republican. Both spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the private talks.

The new push from the White House put the administration at odds with GOP allies in Congress, a disconnect that threatened to upend an already difficult legislative process. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi already passed Democrats' vast 3 trillion proposal and virus cases and deaths had only increased since.

Trump raised alarms on Capitol Hill when he suggested last month at a rally in Oklahoma that he wanted to slow virus testing. Some of Trump's GOP allies wanted new money to help test and track the virus to contain its spread.

Senate Democrats were investigating why the Trump administration had not yet spent some of 25 billion previously allocated for testing in an earlier aid bill.

The payroll tax Trump wanted also divided his party. Senate Republicans in particular opposed the payroll tax break as an insufficient response to millions of out-of-work Americans, especially as they tried to keep the total price tag of the aid



package at no more than 1 trillion.

Trump said Sunday in the Fox News interview that he would consider not signing any bill unless it included the payroll tax break, which many GOP senators opposed.

"I want to see it," he said.

Lawmakers were returning to a partially closed Capitol still off-limits to tourists to consider what will be a fifth COVID-19 aid package. After passing the 2.2 trillion relief bill in March, Republicans hoped the virus would ease and economy rebound so more aid would not be needed.

But with COVID-19 cases hitting alarming new highs and the death toll rising, the pandemic's devastating cycle was happening all over again, leaving Congress little choice but to engineer another costly rescue. Businesses were shutting down again, schools could not fully reopen and jobs were disappearing, all while federal emergency aid

expired.

It's not going to magically disappear, said a somber McConnell, R-Ky., last week during a visit to a hospital in his home state to thank front-line workers.

As McConnell prepared to roll out his 1 trillion-plus proposal, he acknowledged it would not have full support.

The political stakes were high for all sides before the November election, but even more so for the nation, which now registered more coronavirus infections and a higher death count than any other country.

Just as the pandemic's ferocious cycle was starting again, the first round of aid was running out.

A federal 600-a-week boost to regular unemployment benefits would expire at the end of the month. So, too, would the federal ban on evictions on millions of rental units.

With 17 straight weeks of unemployment claims topping 1 million usually about 200,000 households were

facing a cash crunch and losing employer-backed health insurance coverage.

Despite flickers of an economic upswing as states eased stay-at-home orders in May and June, the jobless rate remained at double digits, higher than it ever was in the last decade's Great Recession.

Pelosi's bill, approved in May, included 75 billion for testing and tracing to try to get a handle on the virus spread, funneled 100 billion to schools to safely reopen and called for 1 trillion to be sent to cash-strapped states to pay essential workers and prevent layoffs. The measure would give cash stipends to Americans, and bolster rental and mortgage and other safety net protections.

In the two months since Pelosi's bill passed, the U.S. had 50,000 more deaths and 2 million more infections.

If we don't invest the money now, it will be much worse, Pelosi said.

In Arab world's first, UAE successfully launches its spacecraft towards Mars

DUBAI, JUL 20 (PTI): Emiratis brimmed with joy and pride as the UAE made history on Monday by successfully launching its spacecraft "Al Amal" towards Mars from a Japanese launch centre, marking the Arab world's first interplanetary mission, according to media reports.

Al Amal, or Hope Probe, weighing 1.3 tonnes was launched from the H-2A rocket from Japan's remote Tanegashima spaceport at 1.58 am local time.

The probe's telecom system was set up and it transmitted its first signal after it successfully separated from the launch vehicle and its solar panels were deployed with clockwork precision an hour after the launch, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Launch Services, which is the launch operator, confirmed.

The signals were received by the Mission Control team in Dubai's Al Khawanej, the Khaleej Times reported.

The solar panels will charge the batteries of the spacecraft for its

495,000,000 kms journey to Mars, it said.

Omar Sultan Al Olama, Minister of State for Digital Economy, Artificial Intelligence and Remote Working System, said COVID-19 was the "biggest" hurdle that the Emirates Mars Mission team had to overcome.

"The team had to work backwards just to ensure that everything arrives in Japan before the launch period, and so that COVID-19 and the closure of borders do not affect the launch and the mission itself," Al Olama was quoted as saying in the report.

The Dh735-million (USD 200 million) project, which is the first interplanetary mission by any Arab nation, took six years by a team of 135 Emirati engineers, scientists and researchers.

Hope's arrival in February 2021 is set to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the UAE's formation.

The Gulf News reported that around 200 days from now, the spacecraft will reach the Mars orbit and begin its

mission to study the Red Planet's atmosphere.

Thanks to proper planning and "countless sleepless nights", Hope is now on its way to Mars, the minister said, lauding the contributions of the team members.

"It's like a three-way race to Mars this year and the UAE is headed to be the first country to reach Mars before US and China," Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi, Chairman of the UAE Space Agency, was quoted as saying by the Gulf News.

Most Mars missions orbit at a single local time that allows the atmosphere to be measured at only one time of day but Hope Probe will circle Mars for the entire Martian year, which is equivalent to almost two Earth years, the report said.

Dubai's ground control room erupted with joy after the successful lift off.

"As citizens and residents we are proud to be part of this visionary and innovative era of the UAE's growth. No doubt, this will open a new

chapter in the glorious history of the UAE, where new frontiers in space travel will be explored," Mustafa Al Hussein, an Emirati, was quoted as saying by the Khaleej Times.

Al Hussein, general manager of Golden Loaf, said he was particularly looking forward to the launch countdown that was done in Arabic.

"It is a matter of honour that for the first time in history, Arabic numbers were used for such a countdown," he said.

Shaneer Nusrat Siddiqui, former project co-

ordinator at Al Thuraya Astronomy Centre, said, "with the way the UAE is heading towards space science, the country is set to become a key player in the space industry in the coming years. Especially from the education, commercial and business point of view, it is a very new industry and, definitely, the UAE is going to have a major share in this industry."

"This Hope mission will be a push to the business with space-related technology," Siddiquie was quoted as saying in the Khaleej Times report.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman admitted to hospital for tests

DUBAI, JUL 20 (AP): Saudi Arabia's King Salman has been admitted to a hospital in the capital, Riyadh, for medical tests due to inflammation of the gallbladder, the kingdom's Royal Court said Monday in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

The statement said the 84-year-old monarch is being tested at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital.

The brief statement did not provide further details.

King Salman has been in power since January 2015. He is considered the last Saudi monarch of his generation of brothers who have held power since the death of their father and founder of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz.

King Salman has empowered his 34-year-old son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, as his successor. The crown prince's assertive and bold style of leadership, as well as his consolidation of power and sidelining of potential rivals, has been controversial.

With the support of his father, Prince Mohammed has transformed the kingdom in recent years, opening it up to tourists and eroding decades of ultraconservative restrictions on entertainment and women's rights as he tries to diversify the Saudi economy away from reliance on oil exports.

The prince has also detained dozens of activists and critics, overseen a devastating war in Yemen and rounded up top members of the royal family in his quest for power. The Saudi king has not been seen in public in recent months due to social distancing guidelines and concerns over the spread of the coronavirus inside the kingdom, which has one of the largest outbreaks in the Middle East.

He has been shown, however, in state-run media images attending virtual meetings with his Cabinet and held calls with world leaders.

King Salman, who oversees Islam's holiest sites in Mecca and Medina, was crown prince under King Abdullah and served as defense minister. For more than 50 years prior to that, he was governor of Riyadh, overseeing its evolution from a barren city to a teeming capital.

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MALIBU MODE! The model, Kendall Jenner is seen taking a walk on the beach.

Aftab Shivadasani, Nin Dusanj announce production house

MUMBAI, JUL 20 (PTI): Actor Aftab Shivadasani and wife Nin Dusanj Shivadasani on Monday launched their production company Mount Zen Media which aims to create wide-ranging content, including films, online shows and documentaries.

Aftab, who started out as a child actor with sci-fi film "Mr India" (1987), eventually made his debut as a lead with Ram Gopal Varma's musical romance "Mast" in 1999, followed it up with Vikram Bhatt's acclaimed suspense thriller "Kasoor".

The actor went on to star in several multi-starrers, including comedies "Awara Paagal Deewana", "Masti", "Hungama" and turned producer with "Aao Wish Karein" in 2009.

Aftab said both he and Nin were looking forward to getting into full-fledged production for a quite some time.

"Having produced before I am familiar with the business of cinema. These are exciting times to develop content that is cutting edge, contemporary and appealing.

"Being in the industry for over 20 years



has given me a great deal of experience in front of the camera and valuable insight in filmmaking," the 42-year-old actor said in a statement.

Nin said coming from a background of art, design, advertising and branding, it would be interesting to be involved in production where her experience will be put to use.

"I am excited for this new endeavour as there are so many fascinating stories to be told on this creative journey. Always intrigued by the art of storytelling, I look forward to working with a multitude of talent across various projects," she added.

Aftab will be next seen on the webseries "Poison 2".

Kanye West's rambling campaign rally condemned by stars including 50 Cent and Q Tip

Kanye West's rambling campaign rally, which saw him criticise abolitionist Harriet Tubman, has been met with criticism by stars including 50 Cent and Q Tip.

The rapper held the rally in Charleston, South Carolina, where he is seeking to qualify for the state ballot as an independent candidate. His speech, which included boasts about having a "brain too big for his skull", has been met with condemnation from a number of stars.

On Instagram, 50 Cent reposted a clip of West's speech alongside the caption: "What the f*** did he just say? This is all Jay Z's fault. Kanye's first rally. LOL"

West's criticism of Tubman, one of the most respected figures in American history, also came under fire. The rapper made the Tubman comments while condemning white businesses for employing black symbols, saying: "Harriet Tubman never actually freed the slaves, she just had the slaves go work for other white people."

Tubman escaped slavery and subsequently rescued approximately 70 slaves using a secret network of safe houses and rural passage ways known as The Underground Railroad. It is unclear what West was talking about.

On Twitter, rapper Q Tip simply posted an image of Tubman along with the caption "#Hero". Actor Jeffrey Wright tweeted: "Harriet Tubman doesn't give a damn about anybody's k***futurist opinion."

Rapper Noname succinctly tweeted: "KEEP HARRIET TUBMAN NAME OUT YOUR F***ING MOUTH!!!!!!"

The Hate U Give author Angie Thomas tweeted: "If y'all don't stop disturbing Harriet Tubman's spirit with this foolishness..."

Others, however, expressed unease with people taking West's speech seriously, suggesting that the star needed help



rather than condemnation.

Songwriter and producer Finneas O'Connell, the brother of Billie Eilish, tweeted: "Let's completely disregard politics. Kanye is going through an episode and needs love and care from his friends and family."

Rapper JPEGMafia tweeted: "I just hope Kanye is ok. I don't really know what else to say here."

It remains unclear whether West is indeed running for US president, despite his announcement on 8 July that he planned to run as a representative of a new political party known as "The Birthday Party". On 14 July, a member of West's campaign team claimed that he had already dropped out of the race.

The star requires 10,000 signatures by midday Monday (20 July) in order to appear on South Carolina's ballot for the November US election.

Supernanny Jo Frost 'kicked out several times' from family homes during filming for new series as parents turned 'aggressive'

Supernanny Jo Frost has revealed she was kicked out several times from family homes during filming for her new series.

The television personality joined Christine Lampard on today's episode of Lorraine where she discussed the difficulties she faced while helping parents with difficult children.

"It was a journey with respect to travelling around America and helping these families because it wasn't always easy," Jo began.

"I can think of several times I was actually kicked out of the house. They didn't want me there. They got very hostile and aggressive and asked me to leave.

"The truth can be very painful for a lot of families, yet it does set you free if you can surrender to the process," Yikes.

The new series of Supernanny lands on E4 tonight and will feature tweenagers, families who've moved to a different place, and families with parents on the frontline.

Jo last graced UK screens back in 2008 when the final episode of the hit show aired.

The US version continued until 2011, with the nanny gifting her nifty childcare tips and tricks with American families struggling to parent their kids.

"We're looking at families who have older children as well now," Jo said of the new episodes.



"If you think about the first run of Supernanny, predominantly, it dealt with young children whose behavior was naughty.

"The Supernanny that you're going to see is about the whole family, with kids of all different types of ages."

She continued to Good Housekeeping: "We're addressing not just behavior that has spiraled out of control. We're really taking a look at real families, and looking at the issues that they face every day."

And no doubt, Jo will have her work cut out.

Pune Girl Dances Her Heart Out to Welcome Her Sister after Recovering from Covid-19

The dance was not just a welcoming gesture for her, but a message to the neighborhood who didn't come forward to help her in difficult times.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought us all at the time when meeting people has become a huge emotional moment. As thousands and lakhs of people have already been tested positive in India due to the viral disease, people are being isolated to avoid further spread of the SARS-CoV-2.

Twenty three-year-old Saloni Satpute from Dhankawadi in Pune, made sure to welcome her sister, who returned after the isolation period, with a unique gesture. She danced her heart out to the song Hatt Ja Re Chokre as her sibling stepped into the house street.



The dance was not just a welcoming gesture for her, but a message to the neighborhood who didn't come forward to help her in difficult times.

The video has been watched over 2 lakh times, with 17,000 likes so far. Netizens are in love with the performance but what made them fall in awe of the

girl was the story behind the dance. As reported by Pune Mirror, Saloni's father tested positive on July 4, following which her grandparents, sister and mother were also admitted to different hospitals after testing positive.

All the while, Saloni was left alone, isolated at home. However, none of the neighbors came forward to ask her for any help. She had her sister's friends and relatives coming in for assistance.

Her sister Snehal said, "She had not shared what she was going through when we were undergoing treatment. It was only when it became impossible for her to bear the isolation that she briefly mentioned about the neighbour's attitude.

ARIES:

You're always talking about manifesting the big stuff, but what's standing between where you are now and where you want to be? Something to think about, Aries. This phase of your life requires you to stop making excuses and get down and dirty with what needs to be done. The rewards will be magnificent, we promise.

TAURUS:

While there is a voice in your head that's whispering, "You can", there's another that's holding you back from taking the next step. Two opposing forces are at play, Taurus. Whose demands will you ultimately give in to? The cards are pointing towards movement and activity. This may have been a period of lull, but things are finally getting ready to hit the accelerator button. So, don't waste your time thinking and overthinking the plan of action.

GEMINI:

This is a time of deep, soulful conversations, of connecting with your squad in a way you never have before. Skip the small talk and get to the real stuff, Gemini. The cards are also talking about the importance of sharing sto-

ries. Listening to your loved ones share their struggles will prove to be therapeutic in so many ways, and provide you with just the motivation you need to slay "your" demons.

CANCER:

There's a reason certain memories are more distinct in our mind's eye than others. Today, the cards are urging you to explore the unpleasant ones, no matter how painful the process. This will help you understand the wounds that are still bleeding into the present. Yes, we're talking about inner childhood issues that shape us and influence our interactions with the world well into adulthood. Without judging what's coming up, acknowledge the past pain.

LEO:

Prioritise, priorities! Yes, there are deadlines to meet, loved ones to check in on, and loaves of banana bread to bake, but your laundry basket isn't going to clear itself. Let's not get started on the mess that has made a home around you. Your word for the day: declutter. It's time to let go of the things that are adding to the noise or narrating a story of who you used to be, as opposed to who you are be-

coming. As for the things that are precious to you, find a way to arrange them in a way that makes them easy to access.

VIRGO:

Actions speak louder than words, Virgo. Observe what the other person is communicating via their body language. If you feel like they're not as invested as they used to be, chances are, they're not. You need to stop pining for their attention—starting now. Some of you may find out there is a third party involved in this equation. But are your conclusions based on intuition or evidence? Remember, it's best to talk things out in an honest manner before taking any drastic measures.

LIBRA:

The 'always the bridesmaid, never the bride' narrative is getting a little old, Libra. It's time to stop comparing your journey with that of others, which is only making you feel like you've missed your train. The Universe wants you to experience divine union in this lifetime, and if you haven't as yet, it's because you're being prepared for something magnificent.

SCORPIO:

Playing it by the book has its perks. For start-

ers, it's a fail-safe method to achieve your goals and arrive at the desired destination. But does it come with the guarantee of growth? Will it challenge you to expand in a new direction and push your limits? You already have the answer to this one. Today you're being asked to contemplate all the ways in which you have been holding yourself back from walking the path of greatness.

SAGITTARIUS:

The cards are painting a picture of chaos and commotion. Things are unlikely to go according to the plan, and no, a false sense of optimism will not help you salvage the situation. Your killer instinct, however, will. This is the week to channel your inner Buddha and act from a space of awareness. As you do, become aware of what the Universe is showing you.

CAPRICORN:

This is a time of unlearning, Capricorn. Unlearning who you were told to be and the false beliefs you have held onto since time immemorial. You are experiencing a massive awakening, one that is helping you realise you are not your body, you are

your soul. As a result of this, your spiritual beliefs are undergoing a shift too. Today, you're being asked to reflect upon the rituals and practices that make you feel grounded and one with the divine forces all at the same time.

AQUARIUS:

This is a time of truth and freedom in the Aquarius HQ. You're growing weary of the costumes that have provided you with a false sense of security over the years. You're yearning to break free from the prison that's keeping you from meeting your true self. Unlearning the old way of life and bringing forth the gift of acceptance is going to be a big game-changer for you

PISCES:

Set a few minutes aside this morning for a quick body scan. Close your eyes and examine your vessel with the help of your internal gaze. This will help you become aware of the energy blockages, if any. The cards are urging you to take stock of your dietary habits. Remember, food is medicine, and approaching what you put on your plate from a holistic perspective will help restore balance.