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# SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue 111 | Gangtok | Tuesday 27 April 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

*Mamata demands withdrawal of central forces who may be infected with Covid, accuses PM of insensitivity*

**KOLKATA, APR 26 (PTI):**

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday demanded withdrawal of central forces in the next phase of polling in a bid to contain Covid spread in the state, while welcoming Madras High Courts observations that the Election Commission could not avoid blame for the spread of pandemic.

She also accused the prime minister of insensitivity, alleging "while mass pyres were lit at crematoriums, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was busy delivering speeches.

"I welcome the Madras High Court order, which clearly said the EC cannot escape its responsibility. Both Prime Minister Modi and EC are responsible for the (current) situation (of Covid spreading in the state)," Banerjee alleged at a workers meeting in North Kolkata where party candidates and workers were present.

"While mass pyres were lit at crematoriums, Modi was busy delivering 'Mann ki baat' speeches," the chief minister claimed.

Earlier on Monday, Madras High Court had lashed out at the Election Commission over the conduct of assembly polls amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice S Ramamoorthy termed the EC as most irresponsible while hearing a public interest writ seeking directions to ensure fair counting of votes on May 2 in Karur by taking steps to ensure adherence to Covid-19 protocols.

"I am requesting please withdraw the around 2 lakh- strong central forces drawn from covid-hit states, who are camping in schools and colleges and safe homes hampering covid management operations 75 per cent of them may be infected by the virus. Please withdraw them in the last phase," she said.

Banerjee said the Trinamool Congress will move the Supreme Court after the elections against the EC on the manner in which the body was conducting polls in West Bengal. "We will tell Supreme Court. The EC did not club the poll phases despite the spike in Covid-19 cases," she said.

The number of confirmed Covid cases in West Bengal has risen from 81,466 on April 1, to over 3.52 lakh on April 25. **turn to pg02**

## Covid claims two more taking second wave's 2-week toll to 4

**1,89,953 VACCINE DOSES ADMINISTERED IN SIKKIM THUS FAR, 3824 TODAY ALONE**

### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 26 APR:**

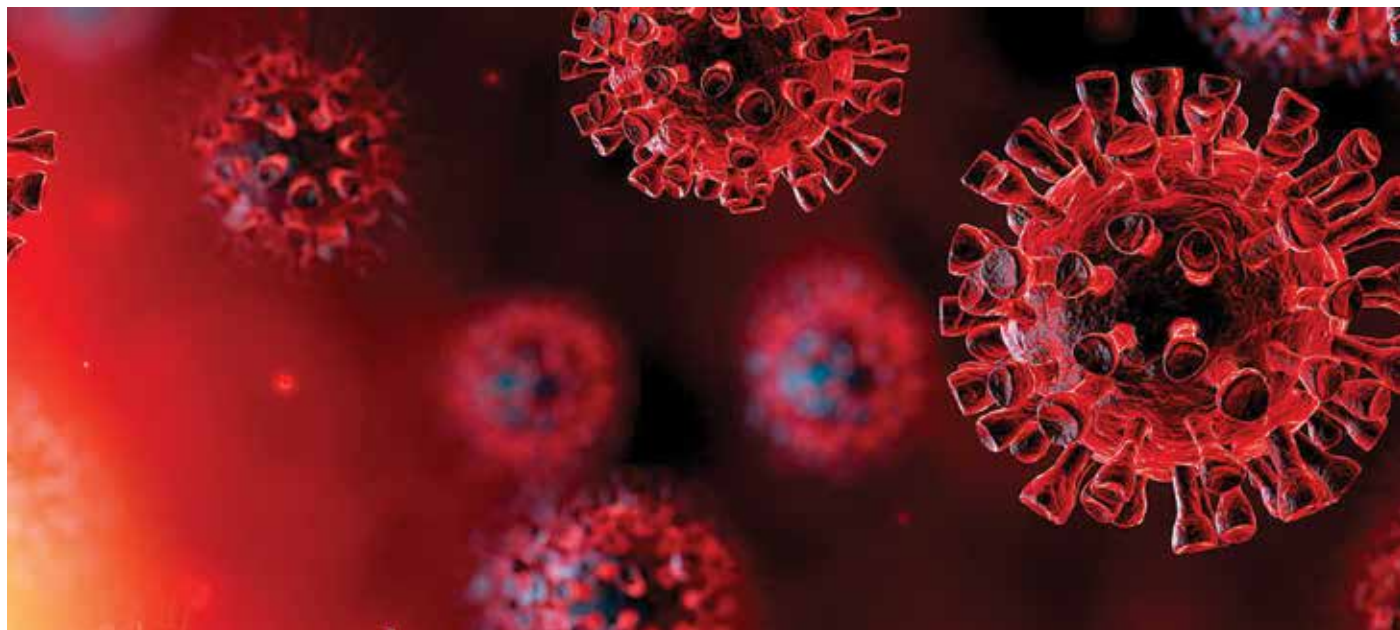
Two more Covid-positive patients passed away in Sikkim today taking the State's cumulative death toll due to the virus to 140. In as far as Covid's second wave in Sikkim is concerned, this surge, which is now two weeks old in the State, has claimed four lives thus far.

Both the deaths were reported from STN Hospital, the primary Covid-dedicated hospital in Sikkim.

As per data released by the Health Department, there are 78 Covid patients currently admitted at STNM Hospital at present, two of whom are in the ICU. Six Covid patients are currently admitted at District Hospital, Mangan, as well.

Accepting that the second wave began in Sikkim on 12 April, in the two weeks that have passed since, Sikkim has detected 901 new cases.

A new week began today with only 23 new cases being picked up. This was, howev-



er, not because infections are down but because fewer tests were conducted on Sunday, a day when both the VRD Labs in the State - the ones at STNM Hospital and CRH-Tadong - are closed on Sundays.

15 of the new cases were reported from East Sikkim, four from South, three from West and one

from North Sikkim.

It will not be surprising to learn that the administration, which has been less than effective in finding real solutions to the Covid challenge, has not done enough to manage the human resource required to keep the VRD Labs in operation seven days a week at least during a surge

like the present one.

One also recognizes that personnel at the VRD Labs need rest, but given that this is an emergency situation, couldn't one of the officials tasked with devising the State's Covid-response have ensured that the two labs take their weekly off on different days of the week so

that RT-PCR tests - the gold standard for Covid detection - could continue without pause through the week? Or does the executive not agree that knowing the extent of Covid's spread is important to know as quickly as possible?

The 23 new cases reported on Monday were from 95 samples screened via Trunat/

CBNAAT and Rapid Antigen Testing on Sunday. For context, sample this - on Saturday, the VRD Labs screened 552 samples, 120 of which [out of 148 reported yesterday] had returned positive.

Meanwhile, as per data at hand, the second wave of Covid in Sikkim has registered a Case Fatality Rate of 0.43% [percentage of deaths from number of cases detected]. While every loss of life is traumatic, it needs to also be mentioned here that the national CFR for the second wave is substantially higher at 1.12%.

On the vaccination front, 3,824 doses of Covishield were administered at 63 vaccination sites established across the State. With this, Sikkim has now administered nearly 1.90 lakh vaccine shots - of these, while 34,257 people have completed their vaccine schedule having received both the shots while 1,55,696 people have received only the first shot thus far.

## CM meets recently elected Councillors, assures collaboration



### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 26 APR:**

Chief Minister PS Tamang today met the recently elected councillors of Sikkim's urban local bodies at a special function hosted at Samman Bhawan here.

In a post on his official Facebook page, the CM explains that he could not meet the councillors earlier owing to

his prior commitments and reiterated that his government's decision to make the ULB elections non-partisan was because it "prioritised independent election" and wanted to provide an opportunity to all.

He congratulated them on having won the elections "because of their ability and hard work" and shared his de-

light at seeing a comprehensive number of women representatives.

He also assured them that the State Government has prepared in advance for the second wave of Covid-19 and had procured adequate supplies of equipment and medicines.

"I stated that the Councillors and the

**turn to pg02**

## Retired military medics recalled to work at Covid facilities

**NEW DELHI, 26 APR**

**[NDTV]:** All medical personnel who retired from the armed forces in the last two years will be recalled to work in Covid facilities near their homes, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat told Prime Minister Narendra Modi today. Briefing the PM about the preparations made by the armed forces to help in the country's fight against the pandemic, General Rawat said oxygen cyl-

inders available with the military will be diverted to the hospitals that desperately need the live-saving gas amid the rapid second wave of Covid infections.

Other retired medical officers have been urged to provide consultations through emergency help lines, according to a government statement.

General Rawat told PM Modi at the review meeting that all medical officers on staff appointments at the military headquarters will be deployed at hospi-

tals to support the overburdened health workers.

Nursing staff will also be deployed to help the doctors, he added. The CDS also said the military was creating medical facilities in large numbers and wherever possible, the infrastructure will be opened for civilians.

PM Modi also reviewed the operations being undertaken by the air force to ferry oxygen and other essentials in India and abroad.

## Minister takes stock of Horticulture and Animal Husbandry activities

**GANGTOK, 26 APR [IPR]:**

Minister for Agriculture and Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Departments, Lok Nath Sharma, chaired two review meetings with officials of Horticulture and Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services departments in his chamber at Tashiling Secretariat today.

The first meeting organised with officials of Horticulture Department was attended by the Additional Chief Secretary-cum-Agriculture Production Commissioner AK Yadav, Secretary Horticulture Department, MT Sherpa, CEO, Sikkim Organic Farming



Development Agency (SOFDA) Dr. S. Anbalagan, Principal Director Padam Subba, Director, Additional Directors, Scheme heads and senior officials.

The Minister took stock of detailed activ-

ities taken up by the department during the financial year 2020-21 and also outlined an Annual Action Plan for the financial year 2021-22.

He also stressed upon time-bound implementation of schemes, utili-

sation of allocated fund and execution of quality works at all levels.

Further, the Minister directed the concerned scheme heads to work with renewed vigour and proactiveness and to

**turn to pg02**

## India seeks Remdesivir, Oxygen from EU, aid expected soon: EU Official

**BRUSSELS, 26 APR [REUTERS]:** India has asked the European Union to send medical oxygen and Gilead's antiviral drug remdesivir to fight a surge in COVID-19 cases, an EU official said on Monday, adding that the aid could be made available soon.

India's new coronavirus infections hit a record high for a fifth straight day on Monday, as countries around the world pledged to send urgent medical aid to help battle the crisis overwhelming its hospitals.

"The Indians have asked for medical oxygen and antivirals, notably remdesivir," a spokesman for the EU Commission told a news conference.

The EU signed a contract in October with Gilead which allowed its 27 member states and



10 partner countries including Britain to order up to 500,000 remdesivir courses over six months. However, it is unclear how many doses have actually been bought by EU states after a trial conducted by the World Health Organization suggested

remdesivir had little or no effect on mortality or length of hospital stays among patients with the respiratory disease.

The drug is considered more effective for patients in less serious conditions.

The EU spokesman added that so far, among EU states, Ireland has offered to send oxygen, which is crucial for patients with breathing problems, while Germany and France have also indicated they will help. "We can expect that in the next hours and days we can confirm more help," the spokesman added.



## Civil Society of Sikkim submits memorandum to CM

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 26 APR:**

Civil Society of Sikkim (Sikkim Nagarik Samaj) submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Sikkim today. A press release informs that the memorandum consists of the four resolutions adopted on 04 April on the occasion of the 98th Birth Anniversary of Late Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal.

## SBS opens new branch at Sombaria

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 26 APR:**

Labour Minister, Mingma Norbu Sherpa, inaugurated the new branch of State Bank of Sikkim at Sombaria in West Sikkim today.

A press release informs that the branch was earlier located in a small and congested building and is now shifted to a new and spacious building with modern furnishing.

The Minister expressed his happiness and hope that the people of the area will now get convenient banking facility and congratulated the Bank's management and the people of the area.

The program was also attended by Chairman SBS, DB Gurung, Advisor, Mohan K Rai, SBS, Managing Director, Phurba Wangdi Bhutia, Chief General Manager, SR Karki, other Senior Officials of State Bank of Sikkim, BDO, Daramdin Sombaria BAC, Gram Panchayats with limited guests of the locality following strict Covid 19 protocol.

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# Seasonal virus putting exotic puppies and unvaccinated dogs at risk

**PRIKSHA GURUNG**  
**GANGTOK, 20 APR:**

Rachel has been shattered ever since her first pet Leo, passed away after one week of taking ill.

Leo was lethargic and suffering from violent diarrhoea and vomiting. When Rachel took Leo to the vet, it was diagnosed to have contracted the dreaded Parvo Virus disease. Sadly, despite the best of efforts to contain the disease with antibiotics, saline drips and other medicines, Leo did not make it.

Parvo Virus was first discovered in India around 1980. The main symptoms of Canine Parvovirus include bloody diarrhoea, vomiting, loss of appetite, lethargy that can lead to dehydration.

Veterinarians in Gangtok are cautioning pet owners of a severe outbreak of Parvovirus, a virus which is specially dangerous for pups and exotic breeds.

Dr Shivani Pradhan at the government veterinary hospital in Gangtok informs that they have been attending to an average of 38 days per month over the past three months at their hospital.

The numbers for the rest of the state will obviously be just as severe, and not every pet is brought to hospital, so the disease could even be more widespread.

Dr Pradhan stresses that they have been treating Canine Parvo Virus every day. In most cases, people being their pets to the vet too late into the infection. Doctors advise that pet owners keep an eye to catch symptoms early and make a doctor's appointment at the earliest symptoms.

Canine Parvo Virus is very usually very common in Gangtok during winters, but appears to have lingered on longer this year. The virus pri-



Leo receiving treatment after being diagnosed with Canine Parvovirus.

marily attacks the stomach of dogs, with young puppies, unvaccinated and exotic breeds at much higher risk. Exotic breeds, it is informed, are more sensitive to infection and their mortality rate is also higher.

Contact with infected faeces or through direct contact with infected dogs are the primary modes of transmission. Indirect transmission occurs when a person who has been recently exposed to an infected

dog touches the puppy or when a puppy encounters a contaminated object like food or water bowls, collars and leashes or the hands and clothing of people who have handled infected dogs. The virus is so resilient that it can remain potent for up to a year even outdoors.

De-worming for Puppies within 2-3 weeks of birth is very important and after de-worming vaccination has to be done to prevent Canine Parvovirus. Although there is no vaccine for Parvovirus, properly vaccinated pets are known to have milder infections.

As for treatment, Canine Parvovirus is treated with supportive therapy in which pets are prescribed multivitamins to boost their immune system against Parvovirus.

It is a complicated and traumatic virus. Best of pet-owners took adequate precautions.

## Centre promises action as INOX flags Oxygen Tanker diversion by Rajasthan

**NEW DELHI, 26 APR [NDTV]:** The Centre has promised exemplary action against Rajasthan, where, according to oxygen supplier INOX, four of their tankers were seized. The Central government should appoint a nodal officer whom suppliers can approach in such cases, the Delhi High Court said today as states fought for their share of oxygen amid a savage second wave of Covid.

"Consequences will follow on Rajasthan seizing tankers. Action will be taken. This will be an example for other states," said the Centre, which has been repeatedly pulled up by the court last week over its inaction despite reports of oxygen tankers being blocked or diverted while on way to their destination.

"Whichever government stops you, let us know. We will file a criminal case. The Home Minister has said no one should touch a tanker and a green corridor should be provided," the Centre said, assuring that yesterday, a GPS tagging system was also rolled out which would help the government track the tankers.

At a meeting with the Chief Ministers of the 11 worst Covid-hit states last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also asked states to ensure that tankers carrying oxygen to other states not be stopped or delayed.

The High Court has said if anyone is found obstructing oxygen supply, "we will hang that man".

Today, INOX told the court, "Our four tankers with Haryana number

plates have been seized by Rajasthan". This was the reason why they could not send those tankers for transporting oxygen from Air Liquide and Linde for Delhi, said INOX, which has been put in charge of transporting part of the oxygen supply to Delhi from other firms.

The Rajasthan government has responded that they were short of tankers and that's why they were forced to take such action, the Centre later told the court. The Union Home Secretary has spoken to the Rajasthan Chief Secretary, asking that the tankers be released, the Centre said.

Not just production, the transportation of oxygen has become a huge challenge as fresh cases of Covid multiplied across the country since the beginning of April.

With no medication for the coronavirus available, critical Covid patients cannot breathe unless pure oxygen in high pressure is administered. Over the last weeks, hospitals found themselves buckling under pressure as beds fell short and patients in ambulances and wheel-chairs queued up at the door.

The Centre has criticised the Delhi government for not organising enough oxygen tankers. "People are arranging tankers. Let the Delhi government appoint a nodal officer so that people can approach him with tankers. Many states are doing this," the Centre told the court today.

The Delhi government agreed that the issue now is not the oxygen but its transportation.

## MUSS provides financial aid for ailing child



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 27 APR:**

Manav Utthan Seva Samiti, East Sikkim, Gangtok Tehsil handed over cash support for treatment of Yankila Pradhan today, a press release informs.

Sadhvi Mahatma Gyan Baiji, in-charge of Gangtok Tehsil handed

over Rs 52,030 to father of Yankila, Yabesh Pradhan, resident of Shyari, Gangtok in a small program organised by Sambhala Ashram located at Tibet Road.

The release informs that 11-year-old Yankila is undergoing treatment in Vellore.

## Mega Blood Donation Camp at Siliguri

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 26 APR:**

Lions Club of Siliguri Uday in association with Marwari Yuva Manch Siliguri Branch organized a "Mega Blood Donation Camp" with the support from Siliguri Terai Lions Blood Bank at Jajodia Market, SF Road, Siliguri, today, a press release informs.

Vishal Jain (President of Lions Club of Siliguri Uday) and Manoj Agarwal (President of Marwari Yuva Manch Siliguri Branch) were present during the camp.

A total of 100 units of blood were collected in the camp.

Lions Club of Siliguri Uday has become the 1st club to contribute 1160 units in just 10 months.

## Minister takes stock...

keep regular monitoring on implementation of schemes, so as to ensure adequate benefits to the farmers.

He also advised to give top most priority on quality works in terms of purchase of seeds, required resources and execution of works.

The meeting also thoroughly discussed on various schemes under Horticulture Mission for North Eastern and Himalayan States (HMNEHS) and National Bamboo Mission in the State of Sikkim.

Similarly, the Minister also convened a review meeting with the officials of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Department( AS&VS). The meeting had the presence of the Secretary AH&VS Dr. Sang-ey D. Bhutia, Director BM Chhetri, Additional Directors and Schemes heads of piggery, sheep, goatery, feed and fodder, poultry, dairy, veterinary services, statistics, accounts and senior officials.

The Minister reviewed on the activities taken up by the department in previous financial year and discussed on the public oriented programmes and Annual Action Plan for the financial year 2021-22.

He also instructed the concerned officials for proper utilisation of funds in carrying out various activities within stipulated time period. He also directed the officials to conduct field visit in order to monitor proper implementation of the schemes in the field.

The Minister also stressed upon stock maintenance of medicines and required resources in Stockman Centres/ Veterinary dispensaries. He further stressed on strengthening of dairy, piggery, poultry, goat farming and other allied sectors and also advised to conduct motivational programmes to encourage farmers towards livestock farming.

During the meetings, the officials thoroughly discussed various programmes and future course of action of the departments and also gave their invaluable inputs.

## CM meets recently...

Nagar panchayats are an integral part of the government mechanism and encouraged them to work as one. They have also been requested to submit a list of essential projects and works in their areas for allocation of funds in the upcoming budget session," the CM writes.

The councillors also put forth their experiences and grievances of the people in their respective wards with issues like drainage, drinking water and traffic management being mentioned, the CM shares.

The CM also informed the councillors about his government's plans to start the process of "Governance at the doorstep, to provide basic facilities online or delivered to their home to expedite basic government facilities."

"I extended my best wishes to all and assured them that our government will lend every possible support and asked them to approach me if required," the CM adds.

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## Mamata demands withdrawal...

The chief minister claimed BJP influenced the eight-phase vote schedule drawn up by EC and that the schedule was based on the 'mondals' (organisational zones earmarked by the saffron party) and not on any rationale. "Different areas in Kolkata (alone) went for polls on different dates," she pointed out.

"I had to visit North Bengal nine times as adjacent areas went to polls on different days (this was done) to ensure maximum coverage for BJP leaders and to prevent me from campaigning. Kolkata was split into three parts for holding polls in three phases," she alleged, adding However, I still managed to campaign for 50 days with my injured leg.

Flagging an alleged WhatsApp conversation among EC Special Observers and District Magistrates and Superintendents of Police, she said "they are describing TMC as trouble makers and our men as TMC goons. They do not use such epithets about the BJP in the chats."

"By nominating some Superintendents of Police close to BJP, the EC might help the BJP to win six-seven more seats than the projected 70, but the Trinamool is set to cross 200 seat mark," she asserted.

Banerjee alleged EC has prepared a list as directed by BJP which instructed police to arrest key party members from Entally and Belgachhia areas ahead of the April 29 polls in north Kolkata constituencies and instructed her party functionaries "just refuse to go."

"At Raninagar (in Murshidabad district) the (central) force went on a rampage at the residence of our (local) leader. We are lodging an FIR," she claimed.

Repeating her charge that the Centre mismanaged the Covid situation, she said "PM and Home Minister literally camped in Bengal for three months and put the looming Covid-19 crisis on the backburner."

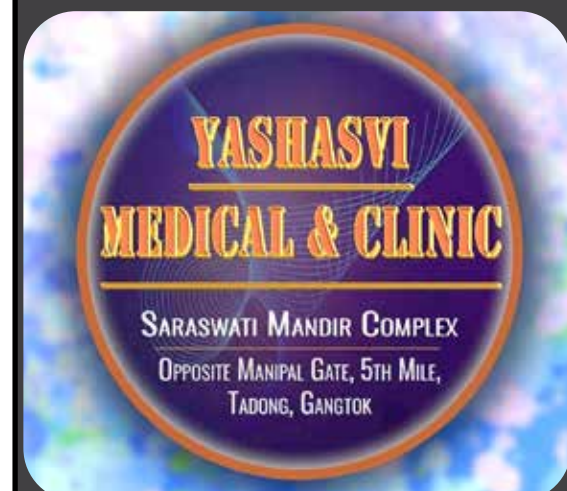
"They did not firm up a plan to bolster oxygen supply network in those months but spent money from PM Cares fund to bribe people. I was told that some were offered even Rs 25 crore to campaign for BJP," she alleged.

"I wonder if the institution (EC) is capable of protecting democracy with retired government servants looking for plum postings as Governors. There has to be people, still in service, at the helm (of EC)," she said.

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## Centre's rules for states on lockdowns: "Containment to flatten curve"

**NEW DELHI, 26 APR [NDTV]:** The Centre has put out guidelines for states on enforcing lockdowns and containment zones in order to flatten the curve amid spiralling Covid cases. The rules say it is time for such restrictions when the positivity rate is 10 per cent or more for a week and more than 60 per cent hospital beds are occupied.

States have been urged to go for an intensive, local and focused containment network focused on districts, cities and areas based on criteria specified by the Union Home Ministry.

Where or when to go for a lockdown or what the home ministry calls a "large containment zone" has to be evidence-based and done after analysis based on the population affected, the geographical spread, hospital in-

frastructure, manpower and the ease of enforcing boundaries, says the home ministry note.

But states have been given a broad framework for an "objective, transparent, and epidemiologically sound decision-making" on imposing a lockdown. If the positivity is 10 per cent or more for a week - meaning one in 10 samples are testing positive - and if more than 60 per cent beds, either oxygen-supported or ICU, are occupied by Covid patients.

Restrictions will be enforced for 14 days.

Once identified for containment, the next steps, according to the home ministry are:

- Night curfew - Movement banned at night except for essential activities. The local administration will decide the duration of curfew.

- Banning social, political, sports, entertainment, academic, cultural, religious, festival-related and other gatherings -- the guidelines say "the spread of the infection has to be controlled by restricting the mingling of people, the only known host for the COVID-19 virus".

- Weddings are to be limited to up to 50 and funerals, 20.

- Shopping complexes, movie theatres, restaurants and bars, sports complexes, gym, spas, swimming pool and religious places will be closed.

- Only essential services should continue in both the public and private sector.

- Public transport like railways, metros, buses and cabs can operate at up to half their capacity.

- No restrictions on inter-state and intra-state movement in-

cluding transportation of essential goods.

- Offices can function with up to half their staff.

- Industrial and scientific establishments can be allowed subject to distancing rules. They will be tested through Rapid Antigen Tests from time to time.

- But the Centre says states should make careful analysis of the local situation, areas to be covered, and probability of transmission and decide on their own.

States have been instructed to appoint senior district officials in charge for Covid-dedicated hospitals and create a mechanism for seamless shifting of patients.

They are to coordinate the availability of oxygen, other related logistics and drugs in collaboration with state officials and ensure their rational use.



# ATTC hosts online induction prog for NBA accreditation

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 26 APR:**

A three-week long online AICTE-ISTE sponsored induction programme for National Board of Accreditation [NBA] accreditation started at Advanced Technical Training Centre [ATTC], Bardang on Monday. The inaugural function of the programme, which is being conducted by ATTC, Bardang, had Special Secretary-cum-Director [Technical Education] of Education Department, Yishey D Yongda as the chief guest.

An ATTC press release informs that the three-week online workshop seeks to familiarize participants to the entire process of NBA accreditation with topics like development of Vision and Mission of the Institute, Programme Educational Objectives, Program Outcomes, Course Outcomes and other guidelines necessary to achieve NBA accreditation being covered.

Some of the resource persons slated to present at the webinar are from organizations such as



NITTR-Kolkata, NIT-Kurukshetra, Mahila Engineering College-Ajmer, Guwahati University, MANUU-Hyderabad, Takenaka India Pvt Ltd, ATTC and CCCT, Sikkim.

The release adds that the webinar will help participants enhance their knowledge on how to implement NBA accreditation for their respective departments and thereby maintain their national and international standard of Technical Education in their institutions.

The chief guest wished her best to all participants and hoped for a fruitful webinar.

Director Faculty Development Cell, AICTE, Col B Venkat and Executive Secretary, Indian Society for Technical Ed-

ucation (ISTE), New Delhi, Dr Vijay Vaidya were present as the guests of honour.

The release mentioned that DrVaidya emphasized on the need for educational institutions to adapt to latest emerging trends in order to make their students placement-ready for all future jobs and Col Venkat also appreciated the abilities of the faculty members of ATTC for the organization of a national level workshop on the much-needed topic of NBA accreditation.

He also reiterated the importance of NBA accreditation especially for all aspiring polytechnics who had applied for the same and how this programme would help to prepare them to secure

the accreditation for their own organizations.

Principal ATTC, SonamPaldenBarfungpa thanked all dignitaries for attending the webinar and introduced the Institute to the fellow participants. He also briefed how ATTC was able to achieve NBA accreditation for its departments with a lot of hard work and team work in 2017.

The release mentioned that National Board of Accreditation is one of the prestigious accreditation programmes which was established by the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) to assess the qualitative competence of the programs offered by educational institutions from Diploma level

to Post-Graduate level in the fields of engineering and technology, management, pharmacy, agriculture and related disciplines, which are approved by AICTE.

ATTC is one of the first Polytechnic in North-East India to have its Diploma programs NBA accredited in the year 2017.

The Chief Coordinator of the program was Vice Principal of ATTC Lochan Kumar Adhikari, who is also Secretary as well as Fellow of the Institution of Engineers, India. The online webinar was well attended by over 100 participants from ATTC, CCCT, SIST, SMIT, Sikkim as well as from other states all over India, the release informed.



## GIRLS HOSTEL FOR BURTUK COLLEGE:

The pandemic might have put many projects on hold, but there are thankfully some which are showing signs of getting off the ground. This dug up tract above the Government College, Burtuk, is moving earth and materials for a four-storeyed Girls Hostel for the College. The hostel is projected to accommodate 100 students and work is projected to get completed in 18 months. Hopefully, the pandemic too would have played out by that time. The project is being implemented jointly by the Social Welfare and Education Departments, sources inform. [from TENZING YANZOM BHUTIA]

## Delhi's Sir Ganga Ram Hospital waiting 3 days to refill oxygen cylinders for ambulances

**NEW DELHI, 26 APR [PTI]:**

Delhi's Sir Ganga Ram Hospital has been waiting for three days to refill its oxygen cylinders that are used to transport critically ill COVID patients and is currently on 'beg and borrow' mode, sources said on Monday.

They said the hospital has, however, received 10 tonnes of liquid oxygen around 11:40 am. In the morning, the hospital said it has 4,000 cubic metres of oxygen left that will last eight hours. The hospital has 104 oxygen cylinders which are used to move extremely ill COVID patients in cases of emergency - happening quite frequently now, an official said.

"All the cylinders were sent three days ago to different locations for



an emergency refill. For the last three days our staff is camping there but to no avail," he said. The official added the elite hospital is on "beg and borrow" mode.

"The hospital has arranged two cylinders which are also going to be empty soon," a source said, adding it is getting extremely difficult and risky to shift patients. Sir Ganga Ram Hospital

requires a minimum of 11,000 cubic meter liquid oxygen daily and has a consumption of 10,000 cubic meter per day. By 11:40 am today, a tanker with 10 tonnes of oxygen was sent from Jindal Steel plant in Odisha's Rourkela by industrialist Naveen Jindal for the hospital, it said.

The vehicle took over 48 hours to reach Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.

## Governor's greetings on Hanuman Jayanti



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 26 APR:**

On the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti, Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad has extended warm greetings to the people of Sikkim, a Raj Bhavan communiqué informs.

In his message the Governor has said, "Ram-

Bhakt Lord Hanuman being a source of immense wisdom and energy, also teaches us the values of dedication, patience and to be selfless in our endeavours. May Lord Hanuman bless us all with strength and may his grace carry us through the tough times and protect us from pandemic Coronavirus.

The Governor stressed on the use of masks, social distancing, personal hygiene and avoiding unnecessary movement to win the battle against the second wave of Covid-19.

## Delhi running out of space for funerals amid record Covid deaths

**NEW DELHI, 26 APR [NDTV]:** With over 350 deaths being recorded every day in recent days, Delhi has less and less space to cremate its dead. So much so that new facilities, even if temporary, sites are being developed to cater to the pandemic's increasing number of victims.

Today, Delhi recorded 350 deaths, yesterday it was 357, and 348, the day before that. The average number of COVID-19-related deaths in the past week was 304.

At the Sarai Kale Khan cremation site, for instance, around 60-70 dead bodies are being handled every day, because of the deadly second wave. The facility, however, has capacity for only 22. Now, at least 100 new platforms are being raised in the green space near it in anticipation of an even higher caseload.

"There is a lot of pressure to complete the construction of these new platforms," said a person connected to the facility.

Pashupati Mandal, a contractor in charge of raising the new platforms said, "Some 20 of these will be ready by night. Another 80 will

come up in some more days."

The staff at the crematorium is overworked. So much so that the relatives of the dead have to lend a hand in seeing through the processes, including by doing some manual work like moving firewood and making other arrangements.

The situation is as sombre in Delhi's other 25 crematoria and burial grounds run by three of its municipal corporations.

Many cities and administrative bodies in India are facing this land crunch in the wake of a tidal wave of Covid-related deaths. A few days ago, the Revenue Minister of Karnataka R Ashoka told NDTV that the government had initiated the process of identifying and developing land to set up temporary crematoria, especially on the outskirts of state capital Bengaluru.

This shortage of land for last rites only adds to the already dark conditions wrought by the pandemic, with key commodities and items like oxygen, medicines, vaccines, and even hospital beds in an acute short supply across the country.

## Kerala announces Covid curbs; Malls, movie halls, gyms to remain shut



**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 26 APR [NDTV]:** Announcing stringent curbs to control the unprecedented coronavirus surge, the Kerala government has ordered that cinema halls, malls, gyms, sports complexes, swimming pools and bars in the state will remain shut indefinitely. The Pinarayi Vijayan government has said all social, political, cultural and religious gatherings will also remain banned until further orders.

The government said only essential and emergency services will be allowed on Saturdays and Sundays. It said Saturdays will remain a holiday for all government officials until further order. Marriages will have

to be completed within 2 hours with not more than 50 guests. Only 20 people will be allowed at funerals. Shops and restaurants will have to be closed by 7.30 pm, but home deliveries can continue till 9 pm.

"All shops/restaurants shall minimise interaction with customers...Only bare minimum time will be allowed for the customers in shops. Takeaways and home deliveries may be encouraged," the statement added.

Control rooms to help migrant labourers will be set up in all districts.

Religious places will remain open. However, no more than 50 people must be present at any given time inside the

premises of religious places. On May 2, all officials on the vote-counting duty must either be vaccinated with both the doses or should be carrying Covid-negative certificates not older than 72 hours. All agricultural, industrial and construction activities will be allowed with Covid-appropriate behaviour.

India has been logging over three lakh daily coronavirus cases for several days amid the rapid second wave of infections. On Monday, it reported 3.52 lakh fresh cases and over 2,800 deaths in 24 hours.

Kerala, which reported 21,890 Covid cases and 28 deaths today, is one of the worst-affected states.

## Karnataka lockdown from Tuesday for 2 weeks, essentials from 6-10 AM

**BENGALURU, 26 APR [NDTV]:** Karnataka has announced a two-week lockdown from tomorrow, a day after reporting the biggest rise of over 34,000 new cases in 24 hours.

"COVID curfew will be implemented in the state from tomorrow 9 pm for the next 14 days," Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa said, using the phrase "close down".

Essential services will be allowed between 6 am and 10 am and shops will close after that. There will be no public transport during the curfew,

the Chief Minister said.

Only construction, manufacturing and agriculture sectors are allowed to work. Travel within the state and to other states will also not be allowed, except for emergencies.

"People will have to cooperate. If they do, we can achieve our target," Mr Yediyurappa said.

The Chief Minister said government hospitals would provide free vaccinations for those between 18 and 44 years; the Centre has announced that those over 45 will be given shots free of cost.

The state yesterday reported 34,804 new COVID-19 cases, which takes its total cases to 13.39 lakh. A total of 143 deaths were reported, taking the tally to 14,426.

IT hub Bengaluru, a city of 12 million, reported more than 20,000 new infections on Sunday, its highest 24-hour rise, second only to Delhi.

Karnataka's previous single-day record was 29,438 cases on Saturday.

The state has a positivity rate of nearly 20 per cent, which means one in five samples are testing positive.




**GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**  
**DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**  
Secretariat Annexure - I, Sonam Tshering Marg  
Gangtok, Sikkim

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

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

Sd/-  
Additional Director  
Department of Information technology  
Government of Sikkim

**R.O. No. 37/IPR/Pub./Classi./21-22**  
**Date: 26.04.2021**



Government of Sikkim  
Department of Information & Public Relations


**"I appeal to everyone to get vaccinated for the safety of oneself and others against COVID-19"**  
- Ganga Prasad  
Governor of Sikkim

Do not believe in rumours being spread about the vaccine

Focus on the 5 fold strategy

Follow COVID-19 appropriate behaviour

**GANGTOK**



Thankyou Govt. of India for making this possible

I did not hesitate

#SikkimFightsCorona

#VaccineSavesLives

#Unite2FightCorona

Let's come together to make the Hon'ble Prime Minister's initiative "Dawai Bhi Kadai Bhi" successful and beat COVID-19



## Cultures Survive

*...provided we don't stifle them*

Because some things need reiteration from time to time, we return here to arguments that have been tabled often and worries that have been raised frequently because the deliberations continue remain open, and will for some more time.

Turn to any corner of the world and one comes across voices of protest or groans of concern from a culture under threat, a way of life nearing extinction, a lifestyle on the brink. While there are always external elements like the influence of globalisation and the pressure to homogenise which eat away at the edifice of cultural uniqueness, the biggest threat comes from those who refuse to let cultures breathe - those who view it as a relic which needs to be preserved in the purest form as imagined or decided by them. Unfortunately for such groups, cultures are living systems which need to be nurtured, not pickled. But 'preserving' is easier since nurturing would entail allowing a culture to grow and that would go against ill-informed beliefs that cultures are perfect on which any growth is a blemish. Such mindsets refuse to accept that culture is not something that can be pickled and preserved as a museum piece for posterity. Culture, because it is about a people, is vibrant, alive and contemporary. It is spontaneous, almost instinctive, and not something that is learnt; it is imbibed. Since culture forms a part of evolution, it is also subject to fresh interpretations, nuances and relevance.

Because culture is about people, it cannot survive on state patronage alone - that would be relegating it to the status of a museum display. Some years ago, members of the Museums Association of India conferred in Gangtok. The focus of that conference was "Intangible Heritage - Preservation & Portrayal." In layman's terms, they were speaking of ecomuseology, the science, or rather the attempt, to allow cultures to breathe and thrive unencumbered in their natural habitats. But even this comes with its pitfalls. In the Journal of Indian Museums released at the conference, the editorial spoke of the "very amateurish and vulgar commercialisation" of culture that one sees in the tourism sector of Rajasthan. What was true of Rajasthan is true for Sikkim as well. The message - preservation of cultures should not come at the cost of reducing vibrant lifestyles into caricatures. Preservation can happen only if the people to whom the culture belongs want to nurture it. For the same reason, if a people reject their Culture as ripe for extinction, no amount of preservation helps. Yet, a culture should not be dismissed even before one has understood it. It is important that the repository of culture is passed on to the next generation to nurture and craft as it feels right. And yes, people can discard a culture if they want to, but only after they have understood it and decided that it does not serve their purpose any more. What the current holders of culture can do is pass it on to the next generation in an as unadulterated a form as possible. What the younger generation, equipped with its better education, can do is research deeper into their roots. Then, even if the physical form of cultures dwindles away, at least the records will survive for future generations, if it feels so inclined, to revive.

What is required of the establishment is to provide the support which allows these aspirations to manifest.

### WRITE US:

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

# Shakespeare's Musings on Religion are Like Curious Whispers – They Require Deep Listening to be Heard

ANTHONY D. BAKER  
*theconversation.com*

William Shakespeare's role as a religious guide is not an obvious one.

While the work of the bard, whose birthday is celebrated on April 23, has been scoured at various times over the past four centuries for coded messages about Catholicism, Puritanism or Anglicanism, the more common view is that his stunning explorations of humanity leave little space for serious reflection on divinity. Indeed, some Shakespeare scholars have gone further, suggesting that his works display an explicit atheism.

But as a scholar of theology who has published a book exploring Shakespeare's treatment of faith, I believe the playwright's best religious impulses are displayed neither through coded affirmations nor straightforward denials. Writing at a time of great religious polarization and upheaval, Shakespeare's greatest pronouncements on faith are more like curious whispers – and, like whispers, they require deep listening to be heard.

### RELIGIOUS NOISES

I see an invitation to this deep listening in one of Shakespeare's most unusual plays, "The Tempest." "Be not afeared," the half-man, half-beast Caliban tells his companions as they arrive on the island where the play is set, "the isle is full of noises, sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not."

It is a striking passage, made all the more so coming from a foul-smelling creature accused of attempted rape and repeatedly called "monster." But in it, Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that there are dimensions of reality that many of us miss – and we might be surprised to find out who among us is paying attention.

Subtleties like this show up differently across Shakespeare's plays. "Romeo and Juliet" is not in any overt sense a theological play. But as the tragedy comes to a somber denouement, we have the line "See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate, That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love."

While there is no clear naming of gods or fates, Shakespeare implies that some great power tran-

scends the destructive feud between the Montagues and Capulets, the families of the two lovers. He calls into question the earthly power of the two houses – heaven, he implies, is also at work here.

### TUMULTUOUS TIMES

Shakespeare was, I believe, in constant search of subtle ways to imagine divine intervention within the human realm. This is all the more impressive given the fraught religious times in which he lived.

The late 16th century witnessed religious and political polarization greater, even, than our own. Decades earlier, King Henry VIII had separated the Anglican church from Rome and created a Protestant England. His daughter Elizabeth, who sat on the throne for the first half of Shakespeare's writing career, was excommunicated by Pope Pius V for continuing in her father's footsteps. The queen responded by making the practice of Catholicism a crime in England.

So even before Elizabeth's successor, James I, outlawed overt theological humor or criticism on stage, artists hoping to engage in religious themes were under considerable restrictions.

These upheavals affected Shakespeare directly. Shakespeare's family had deep ties to Roman Catholicism, as likely did some of his closest associates. For any one of them to express doubts about the Anglican prayer book, or even to avoid the Anglican parish on Sunday, was to put themselves under suspicion of treason.

There is little in the way of biographical detail to help scholars looking for Shakespeare's religious beliefs. Instead, they have generally relied on explicit references to familiar religious language or character types – the Catholic priest in "Romeo and Juliet," for instance – in speculating about Shakespeare's faith. Some have suggested that clues and codes in his play suggest the playwright was a closeted Catholic. But to me it is more in what he doesn't say, or where he finds new ways of saying something old, that Shakespeare is theologically at his most interesting.

### 'GOD'S SPIES'

Shakespeare's faith and how he expresses it are explored in a 2017 play by poet Rowan Williams, a theologian and former head of the Church of

England. In it, Williams imagines a young Shakespeare in search of a new language for things religious, and dissatisfied with the heavily politicized options before him.

In a pivotal scene, "young Will" explains to his Jesuit mentor that, despite the attractiveness of their radical Catholic cause, he cannot join: "The old religion is the only, the only – picture of things that speaks to me, yes, but it's as if there were still voices all around me wanting to make themselves heard and they don't all speak one language or tell one tale, and all that – it would haunt me if I tried what you do, and it would make me turn away from the pains and the question, because I'd know that there'd always be more than the old religion could say and it still had to be heard."

In other words, while Catholicism "speaks" to young Will, he believes there is more that "still had to be heard."

The voices that Williams' Shakespeare wants to hear are similar, I believe, to those that Caliban talks of in "The Tempest." So young Will does not join the Catholic cause; instead, he goes off in search of ways to stay with "the pains and the question." Williams is suggesting that Shakespeare's subsequent plays are an attempt to let all these complex and difficult voices "be heard."

They are his attempt to give voice to religious noise beyond the range of the religious certainty of his age.

We see this in "King Lear." Lear spends the entire play cursing the gods for the lack of love and respect his children show him. But when the heaven-cursing rants finally subside, the play gives its audience a beautiful and painful reconciliation scene with his daughter Cordelia. He discovers in his daughter's forgiveness a kind of higher vantage point, one from which they might both "take upon's the mystery of things, As if we were God's spies."

Like Caliban in "The Tempest," Lear learns to hear those voices just out of human range.

Similarly, Shakespeare asks his audience to listen and watch differently, as if we too are God's spies or Earth's monsters.

*[the writer is Professor of Systematic Theology, Seminary of the Southwest]*

# Somalia's Toxic Political and Security Order: the Death Knell of Democracy

ABDI ISMAIL SAMATAR  
*theconversation.com*

By the mid-1990s, it was clear to the world that Somalia had become Africa's first failed post-colonial state. But this vast country of just 10 million people had had a glorious history before this calamity. It was the first to enjoy a democratic transfer of power on the continent, in 1964 and 1967.

In the 1960s, Somalia developed a reputation for running the most democratic elections on the continent. At the time the continent was mired in dictatorships, suffering under bloody military coups and lumbering under single party rule.

This glorious history is little known. Better known is the chaos of the last 30 years. In these years, Somalia has endured the most retrogressive and violent civil war engineered by one of the most sectarian African political elite in the continent today.

Is there any chance that this might change? Can the Somali people rise from the ashes?

I believe not, unless two of the key drivers to the Somali disaster are understood – and acted on. The first is that the political and security order – which numerous foreign actors have been investing in – has produced marginal benefits for ordinary people. And it has failed to defeat Al-Shabaab.

Second, this order is built on the reification of a divisive apartheid-like political formula based on ethnic lines.

### INDIGENOUS REVOLUTION SNUFFED

In 2006, after a decade-and-a-half of cruel civil war, the Union of Islamic Courts, a home grown alliance of religious leaders, terminated 15 years of warlords' terror and tyranny. They pacified Mogadishu and surrounding areas and were about to set up local administration for the city and the surrounding settlements.

But the initiative was short lived. The international community, led by the US, reversed this local initiative, and empowered a government dominated by warlords.

US (and foreign) influence was

further consolidated after 2008 – the year Washington listed Al-Shabaab as a terrorist organisation. Since then, the US and its allies have spent billions of dollars on illusive security and superficial development that has failed to improve the capacity of Somalis to take charge of their future.



In addition, they have endorsed a tribal-based federal system advanced by the sectarian factions of the Somali political elite. This political cocktail has produced a context in which violence has become part of the population's daily life under the shadow of a thoroughly corrupt and hopelessly inept government.

The African Union force in Somalia, fully financed by the US and the European Union, claims to have pushed Al-Shabaab from Mogadishu and other major cities. But it has failed to defeat the terrorist organisation. This is due to the conventional warfare strategy it has adopted as well as its inability to mobilise the local population for self-defence.

As a result, Al-Shabaab, which has about 5,000 combatants, controls most rural areas. The group efficiently collects ransom (taxes) from all businesses, most notably in the capital city. This is due to the absence of a strong and effective police force in the capital.

Al-Shabaab's resilience is undergirded by the international community's disorganised efforts at rebuilding a unified and integrated Somali defence and police forces.

### ETHNICITY AS POLITICAL IDENTITY

Foreign actors, including the African Union, back a political scheme that segregates Somalis into exclu-

sive genealogical units in all spheres of political and public life. The country is divided into tribal regions. Parliamentary representation, ministerial appointments and employment in civil and security services (as well as the judiciary) are all based on tribal identity.

Each region is the preserve of a particular genealogical group. And each government department is the fiefdom of a certain tribe. The fundamental political effect of these divisions has been that Somalis cohabit the same national territory, but share little common civic agenda that can guide rebuilding their country.

Such reinvention of colonial and apartheid-like political order has created superficial and short term stability in pockets of the country. But this has been at the cost of country-wide insecurity, and economic and social progress.

This tribal-based political scheme is accepted under the false notion that it reflects Somali tradition. But it only fits the designs of a sectarian faction of the Somali political elite, and their erstwhile ally in Ethiopia, the late prime minister Meles Zenawi. The current order is an amalgam of two totally contradictory systems. A public sector that is supposed to be inclusive and democratic, and an exclusive tribal-based politics. This mixture has produced a dysfunctional order inept in all of its operations except in looting public resources and alienating Somalis from each other.

### THE HOPE?

The grand designs of the major political and military actors lack an important ingredient: the views and

the hopes of ordinary Somalis. Most Somalis have consistently rejected political tribalism as they so clearly recognise that such politics and policies are the root causes of their privations.

Over 70% of the Somali people are under 30 years of age. Yet this group has had no say in redesigning the country's reconstruction strategy. But the imminent political transition due to the expiration of the current leadership's term of office will reproduce past disasters.

The most recent political conflict between the president and the opposition is about the rule of law and the sanctity of the provisional constitution. The president wants to extend his term of office for two more years after his tenure expired in February while the constitution forbids it. In addition, the president has been stoking ethnic sentiments to boost his illegal and illegitimate effort to stay in power.

Fortunately, the people of the capital clearly understand transforming political conflict into an ethnic one will be catastrophic and have refused to take the president's bait.

The African Union, whose troops guard the presidency and much of the capital, has a moral and political obligation to thwart the president's unconstitutional gerrymandering. Without a decisive AU intervention, the country appears destined to return to mindless civil strife.

Thus, the African Union has a fleeting opportunity at this eleventh hour to honour its motto of "African solutions for African problems". It should challenge the president's attempt to cling to power, and other sectarian Somali actors. Rather than endorsing a divisive agenda the AU must insist that conflating ethnic and political identity is disastrous not only for Somalia, but anywhere in the continent.

Such a stance will inspire young Somalis to aspire differently. They have shown willingness to jettison political tribalism and could yet rediscover the golden roots of Africa's first democrats. Young Somalis are ready for the challenge – is the AU?

*[the writer is Research Fellow, University of Pretoria]*



## Mamata casts vote in Bhabanipur

**KOLKATA, APR 26 (PTI):** Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday cast her vote at a polling booth in south Kolkata's Bhabanipur.

Banerjee, a resident of Harish Chatterjee Street, exercised her franchise at a polling booth in Mitra Institution school around 3.50 pm.

On a wheelchair, she briefly paused before photojournalists while coming out amid shouts of "Didi, Didi", before boarding her car.

She also showed a victory sign towards the cameras.

Banerjee is a two-term MLA from Bhabanipur, but is contesting the elections this time from Nandigram in the Purba Medinipur district, taking on BJP's Suvendu Adhikari.

Earlier in the day, senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee, who is the chief minister's nephew, also voted at the same booth.

TMC has fielded veteran politician Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay from Bhabanipur against BJP's celebrity candidate Rudranil Ghosh. The Left-led Sanjukta Morcha has fielded Congress's Md Shadab Khan.

Bhabanipur was voting in the seventh phase of the assembly elections in West Bengal.

Polling to the 294-member assembly is being held in eight phases, beginning on March 27. The votes will be counted on May 2.

## EC transfers more police officers in Bengal

**KOLKATA, APR 26 (PTI):** The Election Commission transferred a few police officers as West Bengal voted in the seventh phase of assembly polls on Monday, officials said. Shantanu Sinha Biswas, an inspector at the Directorate of Economic Offences, was transferred to the office of the DIG Jalpaiguri Range as a crime inspector, they said.

Sinha was accused by the BJP of manipulating postal ballots.

Srimanta Kumar Bandopadhyay, the Assistant Commissioner of Asansol-Durgapur Police, was named the new Sub-divisional Police Officer of Bolpur, as per an order issued on Sunday night. Shubhendra Kumar, the present SDPO of Bolpur, was diagnosed with COVID-19.

Nihar Ranjan Roy, the circle inspector of Krishnaganj in Krishnanagar police district, was made the new inspector in charge of the Murshidabad police station, replacing Atish Das, the order said. Das was moved to the Police Directorate, it added.

The Election Commission has been making a slew of transfers as the state voted.

West Bengal is voting in eight phases for the 294-member assembly. The votes will be counted on May 2.

# After Nepal Court verdict on sting operations, questions arise over sub judice cases

**PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA**

**KATHMANDU, 26 APR [KATHMANDUPOST]:** After the Supreme Court's verdict last Wednesday to bar the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority from conducting sting operations, questions have been raised from various quarters about the fate of the sub judice court cases and people already convicted of corruption based on previous sting operations.

According to officials at the Supreme Court and the Special Court, over 600 corruption cases that were filed on the basis of sting operations are sub judice in the Special Court and the Supreme Court. Devendra Dhakal, information officer at the Supreme Court, said over 300 such cases are at different stages in the apex court. Likewise, Special Court Spokesperson Pushpa Raj Pandeya said 313 such cases are pending at the court while 57 have been settled so far during this fiscal year. The commission said it has so far conducted 61 sting operations and filed 56 cases in the current fiscal year.

It is still unclear what will happen to these cases as the Supreme Court had issued a brief verdict on April 21 and its full text is still awaited.

Besides nullifying Clause 30 of the Regulations of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority Act-1991 that allowed it to conduct sting operations by providing its own cash to arrest corruption-suspect public



officials red-handed, the court also said evidences collected based on the same clause for cases that are currently under investigation or are sub judice will not be valid.

This verdict has, however, not clearly stated whether the corruption cases currently under consideration at the Special Court and the Supreme Court would be scrapped automatically. Officials at both the courts said things would be clear only after the Supreme Court publishes the full text of the April 21 verdict.

"I cannot say anything immediately about the implications of the April 21 verdict," said Bhadrakali Pokharel, spokesperson at the Supreme Court. "Everything will be

clear once the full text of the verdict is released."

According to judicial and legal experts, most of the cases are likely to be scrapped as the commission had used its own cash to arrest the defendants red-handed.

"Most pending cases are likely to be scrapped," said Former Special Court Chairperson Gauri Bahadur Karki. "And the verdict has opened the door for them to return to their previous government jobs and receive salaries, pensions and other benefits."

Legal experts however said the corruption cases based on sting operations in which the commission had not used its money and staff to pay bribes, will not be af-

fectured by the April 21 verdict.

Karki, however, said the court's silence about whether the evidences other than the ones collected through sting operations against a suspect would also be valid in courts, could cause confusion and may lead to the scrapping of strong cases.

"There can be telephone call details and other evidences that may corroborate the evidences collected through sting operations. In my view, the court should have clearly stated that such materials would be recognized as evidence to subject public officials concerned to corruption trials," he said.

Senior Advocate Balkrishna Neupane also said that after the Supreme Court

scrapped the provision relating to sting operations involving the commission's cash, the court may not recognize the secondary evidences as primary evidences collected from sting operations would not be recognized.

But advocate Om Prakash Aryal however thinks that the Supreme Court verdict has not fully negated the evidences collected from sources other than sting operations.

With regard to the sub judice corruption cases, Aryal ruled out the possibility of automatic scrapping. "I think judges will decide on a case by case basis," he said. "The judges however can put all such cases in a single basket and fix a single hearing date for all such cases before making

a judgement on case by case basis."

After the latest court verdict, the government however does not have the authority to withdraw such corruption cases.

Section 59 (F) of the Corruption Prevention Act-2002 states that "no cases filed under this Act shall be withdrawn or compromised." After the latest court verdict, most of those who are facing trial based on sting operations are likely to return to their previous jobs sooner or later, according to legal experts.

But, the court has not spoken about the fate of those who have already been convicted of corruption on the basis of sting operations. The verdict has not stated whether it is retroactive.

Former chief of the commission, Surya Nath Upadhyay said: "The commission's regulations were valid until the latest court verdict so the earlier convictions based on evidences collected through sting operations will not be overturned," he told the Post last Wednesday.

Officials at both the Supreme Court, Special Court and the commission could not immediately confirm how many public officials have so far been convicted on the basis of evidences collected through sting operations.

"But after this new verdict, those who feel they were unjustly convicted can move the Supreme Court," said Karki.

## Assam Congress, allies complains to election body about Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal

**GUAHATI, 26 APR**

**[NDTV]:** The Congress-led alliance in Assam has complained to the Election Commission about the alleged violation of the model code of conduct by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma "in the guise of COVID-19 management".

Sources in the Election Commission told NDTV that the complaint will be probed to check if there is a violation or not.

In a letter, the 10-party alliance has asked the election body to bar the leaders from travelling to different districts to hold meetings. Pointing out the model code of conduct is still in effect in Assam with the results of the three-phased state

elections yet to be declared, the alliance says that during the "political transition period, where the status of the government is a care taker government, no minister should visit any district."

"But the Chief Minister and Health Minister are deliberately violating the MCC of the Election Commission of India. Since last week (April 23), Sarbananda Sonowal has been visiting a number of districts like Nagaon, Morigaon, Majuli etc and holding discussions there with the officials of different departments," it said.

Similarly, Mr Sarma and Minister of State for Health Pijush Hazarika are also making visits to districts like Nagaon, Morigaon and Dima Hasao and holding meet-

ings with government officials there, the complaint stated.

"This is not only violating the MCC of the ECI, but also grossly violates the Covid protocol," the letter claimed, adding that Mr Sarma has announced many government policies related to the management of the pandemic in the state.

Referring to some reports of "manipulation and looting" of electronic voting machines from strong rooms, the signatories of the 10 parties claimed that frequent visits by Sonowal and Sarma have created doubt in the minds of the public.

"Therefore, we urge upon you to restrain the Chief Minister, Health and Finance Minister or any other minister of Assam government to make

official visit to any place," the complaint to read.

It also urged the Election Commission to bar the two leaders from making any official comment on policy matters in the interest of maintaining transparency.

The Congress, after being handed a defeat after three consecutive terms in 2016, has forged alliance with its old ally Bodoland People's Front, former arch enemy All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) three Left parties, Lalu Prasad Yadav's the Rashtriya Janata Dal and regional parties such as Anchalik Gana Morcha (AGM), Adivasi National Party (ANP) and Jimochayan (Deori) Peoples Party (JPP) for the state against the BJP-led NDA. Results will be out on May 2.

## Police holds 370 people from Kathmandu and Lalitpur for not wearing a mask

**KATHMANDU, 26 APR**

**[KATHMANDUPOST]:** Police held a total of 370 people for not wearing masks from Kathmandu and Lalitpur on Monday.

As the second wave of Covid-19 takes hold, the government has asked the public to strictly observe safety protocols wearing masks and maintaining social distance when they are out in public places.

"We have started this drive [to hold people] from Monday as people didn't heed the call to follow safety measures," said Superintendent of Police Sushil Singh Rathore, spokesperson of the Metropolitan Traffic Police Office, Ranipokhari.

According to the police, Kathmandu has 82 holding centres and Lalitpur over a dozen to

hold people not wearing masks. "Now onwards there will be regular monitoring of people on the road, as the number of cases is growing exceedingly high," said Rathore.

On Sunday the country reported 28 more Covid-19 related fatalities with 3,032 news cases. Kathmandu Valley recorded 1,498 new infections. Of them, 1,132 cases were confirmed in Kathmandu, 270 in Lalitpur and 96 in Bhaktapur.

Rathore said those not wearing masks are kept in the holding centers and made to attend a 20-minute class on the new virant of Covid-19, its effects and precautionary measures.

Although Kathmandu Metropolitan City is just limited in miking to call on

people to wear masks and maintain social distancing, and keep elderly at home, Lalitpur Metropolitan City has been distributing masks in public places and even in public vehicles through its city police. "In the past four days we have distributed masks to 2,100 people for free," said Sitaram Hachethu, chief of Lalitpur Metropolitan City Police.

"Only those who come from villages are found not wearing masks but the majority of people have started wearing masks," said Hachethu.

He also informed that 40 city police personnel are going around the city area wearing masks, making people aware of the need to wear masks and maintain social distancing and following other health protocols to avoid the coronavirus.

## Prohibitory orders in Kathmandu Valley from Thursday



**KATHMANDU, 26 APR [KATHMANDUPOST]:** Chief district officers of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur have decided to impose prohibitory orders in Kathmandu Valley effective from Thursday in the wake of rising numbers of the coronavirus cases.

"Vehicular movements, both public and private ones, will be barred. Similarly, shops would be allowed to open from 5am to 10am," said one of the chief district officers. Emergency service vehicles, however, will be allowed to

operate. Basically, the prohibitory orders will be in the same pattern like last year."

A meeting of the chief district officers on Monday took a decision to that effect, a day after the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre decided to allow local administrations to take measures to contain the virus spread.

"We are finalising the list of services to be restricted," he said. "An announcement will be made soon consulting the Home Ministry."

Nepal's new daily Covid-19

count on Sunday reached 3,032. Of them, Kathmandu Valley recorded 1,498 new infections-1,132 cases were confirmed in Kathmandu, 270 in Lalitpur and 96 in Bhaktapur.

Nepal's total coronavirus tally crossed the 300,000 mark on Sunday, hitting 300,119. So far, 3,164 people have died of Covid-19-related complications. Nepal reported 28 deaths on Sunday.

The number of active Covid-19 cases across the country stands at 19,382.

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## Aussies Leishman and Smith win Zurich Classic in a playoff

AVONDALE, LA. (AP): Cameron Smith's aggressiveness on the TPC Louisiana's water-lined 16th hole appeared to doom his team's chances of winning the Zurich Classic when his 294-yard drive bounced off an embankment near the green and into the water.

Smith's teammate, fellow Australian Marc Leishman, then flipped the script with a deft chip.

Leishman made birdie after a penalty drop in the rough, about 23 feet from the pin, pulling him and Smith into a tie with the South African duo of Louis Oosthuizen and Charl Schwartzel that wasn't broken until the Aussies won the first playoff hole Sunday.

"(Smith) hit a really good shot. It was the right club and the right shot, just drifted a little in the wind," Leishman said. "I was just concentrating on my game and I was lucky enough to be on the up slope.

"It wasn't the hardest chip in the world, but under the conditions, well, I won't say it was a must-make, but it was certainly very helpful that it went in."

Smith and Leishman ended it with a par on their second trip up the par-5 18th after Oosthuizen pushed his tee shot into the water and narrowly missed an 11-foot putt for par.

"Disappointed, but I felt we played well, gave ourselves loads of opportunities," said Oosthuizen, who was seeking his first win since the 2010 British Open. "We have a second. I feel next time we'll come back and get the first. But so a disappointing way to finish like that. ... It could have gone any way, the way we played in regulation."

The Australians forced the playoff by shooting a 2-under 70 in alternate-shot play at the PGA Tour's lone regular-season team event for a four-round 268. Oosthuizen and Schwartzel began the round with a one-stroke lead, but shot a 71 with three pars and two bogeys.

"It was really tough," said Smith, whose previous victory came at the Sony Open in Hawaii in 2020. "That back nine was brutal, but we hung in there."

It's Smith's third career victory and second at the Zurich, which he won with Jonas Blixt in 2017, the first year New Orleans' PGA Tour stop switched from a traditional individual format to an event featuring 80 two-man teams. That first victory also came in a playoff.

"I guess I'm good at picking good partners," Smith said. "We had such a good week on and off the golf course."

It was Smith's best result since tying for second at the pandemic-delayed 2020 Masters last November. It's also was his sixth top 10 since the current tour season started.

It was Leishman's sixth career victory, his best result since tying for fifth at the Masters this month and his first win since the 2020 Farmers Insurance Open.

The climactic finish capped off a compelling duel between two teams that teed off together in the final grouping and took turns holding leads that never grew to more than two strokes.

Smith made birdie putts of 9 feet on the par-5 seventh and 7 feet on the par-3 ninth to pull his team even atop the leaderboard. The Aussies went in front on 10, when Schwartzel's approach landed in the bunker and his team two-putted for bogey.

Smith and Leishman took a two-shot lead on the par-5 11th, where Leishman drove 307 yards into the fairway and Smith sent the team's second shot 265 yards to the green, setting up a birdie.

But they gave a stroke back on 13 when Leishman's drive went into the TPC Louisiana's trademark, towering old-growth cypress three that stands alone like a monolith in the fairway. That forced the team to take a drop that led to a bogey.

The South Africans moved back into the lead on 15, where Schwartzel followed up Oosthuizen's 205-yard approach shot with a nearly 15-foot putt for birdie, while Smith, whose approach had fallen short of the green, narrowly missed a 13-foot putt for par.

"But in this game, we have been around long enough to know it's not over until it's over at the end," Schwartzel said. "It was a roller coaster of emotions, though."

After the eventful 16th left both teams at 21 under, they each bogeyed the par-3 17th and parred the par-5 18th to finish regulation at 20 under. Peter Uihlein and Richy Werenski shot a 67, with six birdies and one bogey, to shoot up the leaderboard from 18th to third. Billy Horschel and former LSU player Sam Burns shot a 69 to tie for fourth with Brandt Snedeker-Keith Mitchell and Brendan Steele-Kegan Bradley.

Ryan Palmer and Jon Rahm, the defending champions from 2019, closed with a 70 to finish seventh at 17 under.

Smith and Leishman each earned \$1.07 million for the victory — a result that also forced Smith to address a promise he'd made to cut his mullet hair style when he won a tournament.

"I would have to apologize to my girlfriend; it's not going away," Smith said. "I feel like it's part of me now." Leishman affirmed Smith's decision, noting that Smith "has got a cult following now" because of his hair.

"You should hear the fans out there," Leishman said. "They're all over it. It's awesome."

# Curry sets NBA record for 3-pointers in a month with 85

SAN FRANCISCO (AP): Greeted by more "M-V-PI!" chants, Stephen Curry dazzled again in one of the most dominant stretches of his career.

Curry scored 37 points and set an NBA record for 3-pointers in a month at 85, leading the Golden State Warriors past the Sacramento Kings 117-113 on Sunday night.

"Obviously when I'm out there I definitely feel like I'm the best shooter in the world," Curry said good-naturedly when asked if he's not the best, who possibly could be. "But it still means I still got to put the work in."

Kelly Oubre Jr.'s jumper with 1:42 left put Golden State ahead 112-111 before Richaun Holmes missed a pair of free throws at the 1:25 mark, then Draymond Green scored moments later.

Curry shot 11 of 21 with seven more 3-pointers after the two-time MVP rolled his right ankle during Friday's win against Denver but didn't consider it serious or seem hobbled. His April total surpassed James Harden's NBA record of 82 in November 2019.

"Incredible, man," Green said of the Splash Brother. "It looked like the rim is the size of the ocean, literally."

Green had 14 rebounds and 13 assists in the Warriors' fourth straight home win. That matches the team's longest winning streak of the season at Chase Center, where Golden State drew 3,252 fans — up from 1,935 on Friday in the first game fans returned. Curry even hit from way back.

"It really is crazy. He hit a couple tonight, even for him ... he came right across half court and Sacramento knew he was going to shoot, Luke Walton's



yelling on the sidelines, the whole team comes out to try to defend him and he steps over half court and knocks down about, I don't know, a 38-footer," coach Steve Kerr said. "It's incredible. I don't know what to say."

Harrison Barnes had 23 points and seven rebounds against his former team and Buddy Hield scored 25 to lead the Kings, who had won four of five in the series.

Golden State beat the Kings 137-106 at Chase Center on Jan. 4, but had lost four of seven in the rivalry at home.

Sacramento center Holmes returned from a five-game absence with a strained right hamstring and contributed 11 points and five rebounds.

"We had our chances," Walton said. "We missed some free

throws. We had some looks that we could have scored on, but overall a really good game by our team tonight."

TOUGH ON THOMPSON Klay Thompson is close to beginning to run again as he rehabs from surgery for a torn right Achilles tendon. He stayed home from the recent road trip to work with Warriors director of sports medicine and performance Rick Celebrini.

Kerr spoke to Curry's injured Splash Brother at half-time of Friday's game against the Nuggets on a special night with fans returning to Chase Center. Kerr sensed it was especially hard for Thompson given how badly he wanted to be out on the floor.

Thompson looked emotional on the sideline at one

moment and Curry could be seen speaking to him.

"He did have a tough game. I think it was in large part because the fans were back and my observation anyway is just it hit him really hard how much he's missing, and how much he has lost over the last year and half," Kerr said. "It's not an easy thing to deal with. The good news is rehab's going really well. ... Klay has had his passion and his love for the game just ripped away from him now for almost two years. It's crazy. That's not easy to deal with."

TIP-INS Kings: Holmes started, though on minutes restriction — the plan had been for him to play about 20 minutes and he wound up at about 22. ... The Kings are 5-9 on the road

against the West. Warriors: Green had five assists in the first quarter and is leading the NBA at 3.2 assists per game in the opening 12 minutes. Green picked up a technical 3:26 before halftime. ... F Eric Paschall (left hip flexor strain) has resumed playing some 3-on-3 in practice. ... Golden State also won four in a row at home from Feb. 15-Mar. 14.

FRONTLINE FAN Last spring, Curry placed a FaceTime video call to ICU nurse Shelby Delaney and her colleagues at Oakland's Alta Bates Summit Medical Center after learning she was wearing his No. 30 jersey under her scrubs as inspiration to get through each trying day of the pandemic.

Delaney wore the uniform again — inside it reads 'I Can Do All Things' — as she and husband Robert Crowley sat on the floor for Sunday's game after a season ticket holder who couldn't attend gifted her the seats.

"It really uplifted a lot of folks, like all the other nurses, the other staff members, everyone got a lot of joy out of that," Delaney shared of that call with the two-time MVP. "People told me, they actually said that helped boost morale around here a lot."

Curry took the game-worn uniform off his back Sunday night, signed it and gave it to Delaney.

UP NEXT Kings: Host Dallas on Monday night having won the last two at home in the series before the Mavericks go to Golden State.

Warriors: Host Mavericks on Tuesday night having lost six of eight to Dallas and the last three at home.

## ICU nurse finds inspiration in Curry's motivational verse

SAN FRANCISCO (AP): Intensive care unit nurse Shelby Delaney has depended on Stephen Curry's "I Can Do All Things" go-to motivational verse so many times over the years.

Those words from the Bible are written inside the No. 30 jersey of Curry's that she has worn beneath her scrubs day after day to get through each daunting moment of the pandemic. Now, she has another incredible option: Curry took the game-worn uniform off his back Sunday night after scoring 37 points in a win over Sacramento, signed it and gave it to this extra-special essential worker. He then scurried down the tunnel shirtless heading to the locker room. Delaney's husband, Robert Crowley, threw his hands in the air urging fans to cheer.

"So cool. He's an incredible human being," Delaney said afterward. "One of the greatest nights of my life hands down." Last spring, Curry made a FaceTime video call to Delaney and her colleagues at Oakland's Alta Bates Summit Medical Center after learning she was wearing his uniform.

"That was a great full-circle moment, from being able to talk to her back when the pandemic had just started when things were really ramping up and understanding the sacrifice that her, her colleagues were going through on the front lines," Curry said. "And knowing what the Warriors mean, what I mean, what some motivation and inspiration she's gotten from my story and how she's carried that into her world means so much. To have an opportunity for her to come to a game and meet her in person was pretty awesome." Delaney had the jersey on again as she and Crowley sat on the floor for Golden State's game with the Kings. A season ticket holder at Chase Center who couldn't attend gifted them the courtside seats.

"I'd always dreamed of talking to him, mostly to thank him, because he really has made such an impact on my life and how I carry myself," said Del-

aney, a former high school basketball player who later did some coaching.

"It kind of helped me, the whole 'I can do all things,' but also the way he believes that and the way he lives his life is through that, with joy and love. So he really inspired me. Watching him when I started nursing, in my early 20s, which is a hard time to be alive, when you're in your early 20s it's difficult, but doing it in the ICU, I was always like, 'I can't do this,' so he carried through that and stuff I had going on personally with my family."

Those minutes Curry spent with Delaney, her fellow nurses and the other medical personnel provided a lift they all needed during the most challenging stretch of COVID-19.

"It really uplifted a lot of folks, like all the other nurses, the other staff members, everyone got a lot of joy out of that," Delaney shared of that call with the two-time MVP. "People told me, they actually said that helped boost morale around here a lot, and it got us a lot of donations. And, it got us a lot of donations. It got us a lot of face masks, a lot of surgical masks, it got us a lot of food. And enough food that we were able to share with everyone in the hospital. ... Everyone got to feel loved and feel appreciated because everyone is putting their lives on the line, not just the ICU nurses."

The 28-year-old Delaney moved to the music upon reaching her seat across from the Warriors bench before tipoff. She and Crowley cheered when Curry was introduced.

"It's really nice for our organization to be able to honor people who have helped so much during the pandemic," coach Steve Kerr said. "I think that's one of the most important roles that our organization plays in the community is to honor those who deserve to be honored, so it's a great way for that to happen, especially because we've got plenty of fans out there who have been on the front lines during the pandemic. So, the more we can honor the better and it's a nice thing to be able to do."

## Durant scores 33 points in return, Nets beat Suns 128-119

NEW YORK (AP): Long a superstar, Kevin Durant is turning into a super sub.

Durant came off the bench to score 33 points in his latest return from injury, and the Brooklyn Nets beat the Phoenix Suns 128-119 on Sunday in a matchup of two of the NBA's top teams.

Durant missed three games after bruising his left thigh early in a loss to Miami last Sunday. He played 28 minutes and shot 12 for 21.

"It was a good start. Hopefully, I'll build on this game and keep going," Durant said.

Kyrie Irving scored 34 points and Blake Griffin had 15 to help the Eastern Conference leaders improve to 25-7 at home and 20-6 against West teams.

Devin Booker scored 36 points and Deandre Ayton had 20 points and 13 rebounds for the Suns, the No. 2 team in the West who have lost consecutive games for the first time since a three-game skid in January.

"I thought we started off pretty well, they just continued to make shots," Booker said. "I think we had a lot of miscommunications on a lot of our switches and that's that."

Phoenix led for much of the first half but Brooklyn pulled away after halftime, when Durant played his normal minutes after not coming into the game until the

second quarter so the Nets could keep his minutes down and he could play down the stretch if it was close.

The Nets used the same strategy when Durant returned from a lengthy layoff with a hamstring injury on April 7 against New Orleans, scoring 17 points in 19 minutes. He has played just 25 games this season and had never come off the bench in an NBA game until this year.

"The thing I love the most is that we all know, one of my favorite things about him is how much he just loves to play basketball," Griffin said. "So you know when he's sitting out it's just like killing him, so just to see that joy of just being able to play basketball again is fun for us."

The Nets were 2-2 while playing almost entirely without Durant in their previous four, but things change when the four-time scoring champion is on the floor.

"How you guard away from him is different than how you would have guarded before on another guy who couldn't shoot from 40 feet from the basket, is 7-foot-1 and dribbles like a guard," Phoenix coach Monty Williams said before the game.

Durant scored 10 points in the third quarter, then had the first five of the fourth to give Brooklyn its first double-digit lead at 102-92.

With Ayton getting 10 points and 10 rebounds in his first 14 minutes, the Suns led by 13 in the second quarter and 61-59 at halftime.

Irving was just 4 for 19 Friday against Boston, but made his first four shots Sunday and never really cooled off. He had 24 points on just seven field goal attempts in the first half, tying his highest-scoring half of the season, and added 12 assists.

TIP-INS Suns: Jae Crowder missed his second straight game with a sprained right ankle. Dario Saric sat to rest his left ankle. ... Frank Kaminsky played for the first time on the road trip and had five points.

Nets: Tyler Johnson scored eight points after the former Suns guard missed 10 games with right knee soreness. ... The Nets swept the season series, having coming from 24 down to win at Phoenix without Durant and Irving on Feb. 16.

ROUGH ROAD The Suns are 2-2 on a five-game trip that started with wins at Milwaukee and Philadelphia, the Nos. 3 and 2 teams in the East, before a loss at Boston. It ends Monday at New York, which has won nine straight.

"Like, these last three games have been playoff games for us in atmosphere, so I think they're great," Williams said.



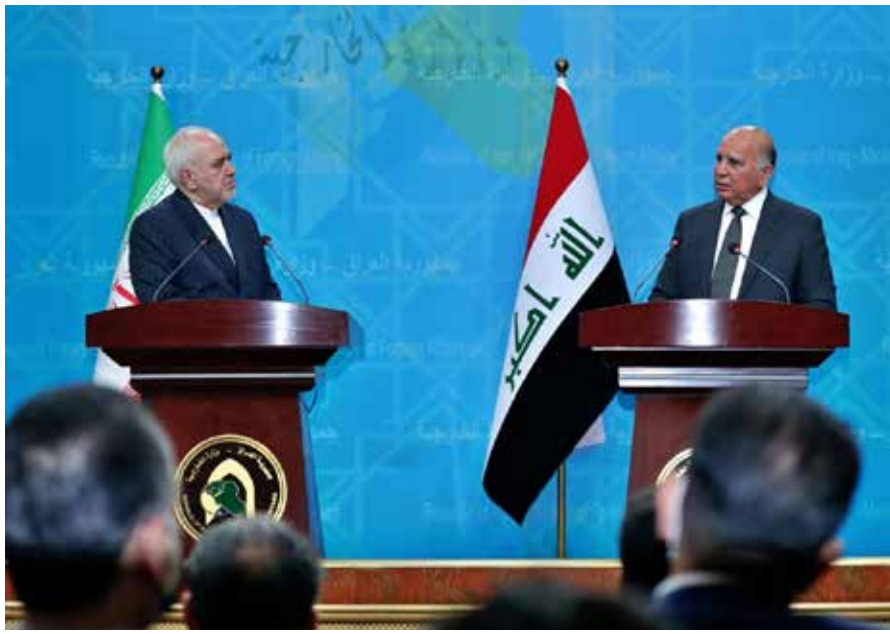
# Iran's top diplomat praises Iraq efforts as regional broker

**BAGHDAD (AP):** Iran's foreign minister on Monday praised Baghdad's efforts aimed at bolstering regional stability, saying he hopes they would lead to "more negotiations and understandings" in the region.

Mohammad Javad Zarif spoke to reporters during a visit to the Iraqi capital, which earlier this month hosted the first round of direct talks between regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran. The talks signaled a possible de-escalation following years of animosity that often spilled into neighboring countries and at least one still-raging war.

Zarif also extended Iran's condolences after a massive fire at a Baghdad hospital for coronavirus patients over the weekend killed 82 people. Officials said the blaze, which also injured 110 people, was set off by an exploding oxygen cylinder.

Riyadh has been trying to end its years-long



war in Yemen against Iran-backed Houthi rebels who have increasingly launched missiles and bomb-laden drones at the kingdom to targeting crucial sites and oil infrastructure. Ending that war could be a bargaining chip for the Iranians as they seek sanctions relief from nuclear talks in Vienna.

"We welcome Iraq's vital role in the region and we hope that day af-

ter day that strengthens Iraq's role for the stability of the region," Zarif said during a joint news conference with his Iraqi counterpart, Fouad Hussein.

"We thank the Iraqi government for exerting its efforts," Zarif said, without confirming the Saudi-Iran talks were indeed held in Iraq. "We hope that these efforts will lead to more negotiations and understandings in the region." All

foreign powers will eventually leave, Zarif added, but "we will stay here and we should base our relations on good neighborhood, no interference and mutual respect." Iraq, which has ties with both the U.S. and Iran, has often borne the brunt of Saudi-Iran rivalry.

Hussein said Iraq's foreign policy is to build "balanced relation with everyone and calm things." Neither Iran

nor Saudi Arabia have confirmed the talks took place, though Iranian officials have alluded to them and welcomed them.

Iran-Saudi relations worsened considerably in 2016, when Riyadh removed its diplomats after protesters attacked the kingdom's embassy in Tehran and consulate in Mashhad in retaliation for its execution of Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr. Those posts have remained closed. At the time, Iraq offered itself as a possible mediator between the two countries.

During his Iraq visit, Zarif is scheduled to meet top officials, visit the holy Shiite city of Najaf and also the Kurdish region in the north.

The visit coincided with a firestorm within Iran set off by a leaked recording of Zarif speaking in an interview to a well known economist. Zarif took no questions from journalists after giving his brief statement in Baghdad and did not address the issue.

## Leaked recording of Iran's top diplomat offers blunt talk



**DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (AP):** A recording of Iran's foreign minister offering a blunt appraisal of diplomacy and the limits of power within the Islamic Republic has been leaked, providing a rare look inside the country's theocracy.

The release of the comments by Mohammad Javad Zarif set off a firestorm within Iran, where officials carefully mind their words amid a cut-throat political environment that includes the powerful paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, ultimately overseen by the country's supreme leader. Zarif has been suggested as a possible candidate for Iran's June 18 presidential election as well.

Outside of Iran, Zarif's comments could also affect talks in Vienna aimed at finding a way for Tehran and the U.S. to both come into compliance with Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. Already, sabotage targeted Iran's nuclear facility at Natanz during the talks as Tehran has begun enriching a small amount of uranium up to 60% purity, which edges the country closer to weapons-grade levels.

After the leak became public, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh did not dispute the tape's authenticity. He told journalists on Monday that the recording represented just a portion of a seven-hour interview Zarif gave to a well-known economist that was to be held for posterity by a think tank associated with the Iranian presidency.

Khatibzadeh called the release of the recording "illegal" and described it as "selectively" edited, though he and

others did not offer opinions on how it became public. Zarif, visiting Iraq on Monday after a trip to Qatar, took no questions from journalists after giving a brief statement in Baghdad.

Portions of the leaked interview first aired overnight on Iran International, a London-based, Farsi-language satellite news channel once majority owned by a Saudi national. Tehran has criticized Iran International in the past for its airing of a militant spokesman who praised a 2018 militant attack on a military parade in Ahvaz that killed at least 25 people, including a child. British regulators later rejected an Iranian complaint over the segment.

Iran International shared a file with a little over three hours of the interview with an Associated Press correspondent based in the United Arab Emirates on Monday.

In the interview, Zarif describes Russia as wanting to stop the nuclear deal, something apparently so sensitive that he warns the interviewer: "You definitely can never release this part." Russia had a frosty relationship with then-President Barack Obama, whose administration secured the deal with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. Russia and Iran also at times have strained relations, despite being battlefield allies in Syria.

"If Iran hadn't become Mr. (Donald) Trump's priority, China and Russia would have become his priority," Zarif said. "If, because of hostility with the West, we always need Russia and China, they don't have to compete with anyone, and also they can always en-

joy maximum benefits through us."

Both China and Russia have been vocal proponents of returning to the nuclear deal. Their missions in Vienna did not immediately respond to a request for comment Monday.

The recordings also include Zarif offering criticism of Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani's separate relations with Russia as well. A U.S. drone strike in 2020 killed Soleimani in Baghdad, an attack that at the time brought the U.S. and Iran to the brink of war. Soleimani's funeral processions in Iran drew millions of people to the streets.

"I have sacrificed diplomacy for the battlefield more than the price that (those on) the battlefield (led by Soleimani) ... paid and sacrificed for diplomacy," Zarif said. He added that Iran gave up much of what it "could have achieved from the nuclear deal" for the sake of advancement on the battlefield.

He added that Soleimani refused to stop using the national carrier Iran Air for Syrian operations despite Zarif's objections. Iran Air has been sanctioned by the U.S., exasperating a long-running crisis that forced it fly decades-old aircraft, often lacking parts for repairs.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who pushed the Trump administration's pressure campaign on Iran, later linked to a story about the leaked tapes on Twitter. He described it as an "exquisite strike" that "had a massive impact on Iran and the Middle East."

"You don't have to take my word for it," Pompeo wrote, noting Zarif's comments.

## Thailand imposes fines of up to \$640 for not wearing masks

**BANGKOK (AP):** Authorities in Thailand are imposing fines of up to 20,000 baht (\$640) for people who fail to wear face masks in public in 48 provinces, as the government struggles to cope with a new wave of coronavirus cases that is straining the medical system.

The capital, Bangkok, which has the largest number of cases, is also closing more than 30 types of businesses and services, including cinemas, parks, zoos, bars, pools and massage parlors. Gatherings of more than 20 people are banned. Shopping malls and department stores may continue operating, but with abbreviated hours.

Despite rapidly rising numbers, there currently are no nationwide lockdowns, curfews or travel bans, though individual provinces have been allowed to issue their own restrictions, including mandatory quarantines for visitors from other provinces. Forty-eight of the 76 provinces have imposed fines for not wearing face masks.

Thai health authorities on Monday announced 2,048 new infections and eight new deaths, the fourth day in a row with more than 2,000 new cases. That brought the country's totals to 57,508 cases and 148 fatalities. The high number of cases has created shortages of hospital beds and intensive care units. It has also underlined the government's failure to obtain adequate supplies of vaccines. Less than 2% of Thailand's 69 million people have been vaccinated.

Thailand has struggled to cope with the new outbreak, which originated in March in nightspots in and around Bangkok, as Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's government has been reluctant to impose harsh restrictions that would further hurt businesses already battered by the pandemic.

## Italy's Draghi presenting 'epochal' virus recovery plan



**ROME (AP):** Italian Premier Mario Draghi is presenting a 222.1 billion euro (\$268.6 billion) coronavirus recovery plan to Parliament on Monday, aiming to not only bounce back from the pandemic but enact "epochal" reforms to address structural problems that long predated COVID-19.

Italy has the biggest share of the EU's 750 billion euro (\$907 billion) recovery pot, with 191.5 billion euros (\$231.6 billion) of its six-year plan financed by EU funds. Draghi, the former European Central Bank chief, was put in the premier's office specifically to make sure the money isn't wasted since Italy has long had one of the worst records in the EU of making use of available funds.

The plan is heavy on investments to modernize and digitize Italy's economy and bureaucracy and encourage environmentally sustainable development. Both are directed particularly at the all-important tourism industry — think Venice, the Colosseum and Amalfi coast resorts — which accounts for 13% of Italy's gross domestic product and was devastated by pandemic-related closures.

Employment options for women and young people are prioritized, given youth unemployment tops 30% and Italy has long ranked at the bottom of the EU in terms of the percentage of women in the workforce. Women accounted for more than half the 456,000 jobs lost in Italy last year.

Here's a look at Italy's plans, which were announced on the same day that most of the country began emerging from its latest coronavirus lockdown, with museums reopening and restaurants and bars open for outdoor service.

**DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

About 27% of the plan is directed at digital transformation of the Italian economy and public administration, broadening access

to high-speed internet service, especially in schools, and providing incentives to the private sector to digitize.

Around 22.4 billion euros (\$27 billion) are aimed at "social inclusion" investments and programs to boost training and employment opportunities for women and help cities improve access and opportunities for disabled people. The aim of both, coupled with increased day care spots, is to remove obstacles that have traditionally kept Italian women at home caring for the young, old, sick and disabled.

The plan envisages the Italian economy, which shrank 8.8% last year, will grow 3.6 percentage points beyond base forecasts in 2026 and that its employment rate will grow 3.2 percentage points.

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**  
The EU required that at least 37% of its funds be directed toward climate-related investments, part of the bloc's aim for a cut of 55% of greenhouse gases by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2050.

Italy's plan is directing 40% overall, or 68.6 billion euros (\$82.9 billion), to green-related investments and initiatives: boosting recycling, overhauling public transport systems to favor low-emission vehicles, and reducing water waste through improvements to waterways.

The plan calls for some 31.4 billion euros (\$37.9 billion) in transportation infrastructure improvements and extending high-speed rail lines across the peninsula, especially in the underserved south.

**EDUCATION AND RESEARCH**  
Among other things, the plan aims to create 152,000 more day care spots for babies and 76,000 for preschoolers, addressing a structural shortage that has long dissuaded parents from having children and women from working. Other destinations for the 31.9 billion euro (\$38.5 billion) invest-

ment in education and research is to spiff up dilapidated school buildings and get them better wired, and revamp the higher-education curriculum to encourage more students to pursue higher degrees.

Italy has long been beset by brain drain, with its brightest students pursuing advanced degrees and jobs abroad, and not coming back.

**HEALTH CARE**

The structural weakness of Italy's national health system was on full display during the pandemic, when hospitals in northern Lombardy were overwhelmed and general practitioners were largely left on their own to care for sick patients as Italy became the epicenter of Europe's outbreak.

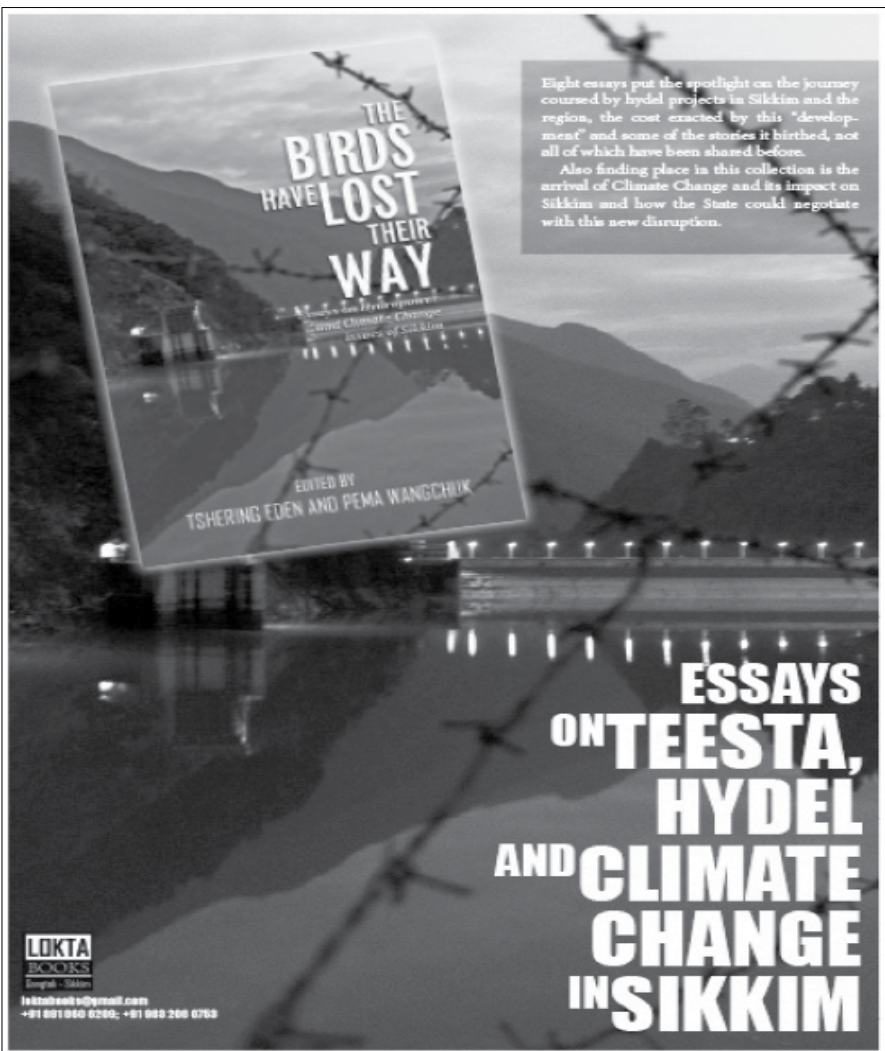
The 18.5 billion euro (\$22.3 billion) investment in health care aims to reinforce in particular the general medicine and preventive care provided at the local level, with a strengthening of home care and telemedicine. Digital infrastructure improvements aim to improve data analysis.

**REFORMS**

Italy's lethargic justice system and cumbersome bureaucracy have long been accused of discouraging foreign investment, since lawsuits and criminal trials can last for years and securing permissions to do just about anything can take a similarly long time.

The justice system reform aims to reduce the backlog of court files with temporary hires, while revising norms and procedures to encourage more recourse to mediation.

Other reforms are focused on modernizing Italy's old and outdated public administration, aiming to increase turnover to get more young people hired, digitize systems, simplify procedures for permits and boost competition particularly in public services and utilities.





# China mutes reaction to Zhao's Oscars as S. Korea lauds Youn

**TAIPEI, TAIWAN (AP):** Chloé Zhao's history-making Oscars sweep, winning best director and best picture, is being met with a muted response in her country of birth, and even censorship. Zhao's "Nomadland" is the second film directed by a woman to win a best picture Oscar. She is the first woman of color and second woman ever to win the Oscars for best director.

Yet, in China, where Zhao was born, her history-making success has not been trumpeted or celebrated. State media in China remained silent as of Monday afternoon, with no mention of her win by either CCTV and Xinhua, the two main state-run outlets.

Instead, there was even censorship. A post announcing Zhao's directing win by film magazine Watch Movies, which has over 14 million followers on the ubiquitous Weibo microblog, was censored a few hours after it appeared Monday morning. A hashtag called "Chloe Zhao wins Best Director" was also censored on the platform with users coming across an error message saying, "according to relevant laws and regulations and policies, the page is not found."

Some users resorting to using "zt" to post about Zhao, using the initials of her full name in Chinese, Zhou Ting. Typing in Zhou's name in Chinese on Weibo brought up only unrelated posts from the beginning of April. A search for "Oscars" showed only official posts from the South Korean and U.S. embassies.

Douban, an app popular with film buffs, banned searches for "Nomadland" and "Zhao Ting" saying that "the search results could not be displayed in accor-

dance to relevant laws and regulations." Multiple discussion threads about Zhao's win were deleted on the app as well. A news article on WeChat, the largest messaging app in the country, was also deleted.

Still, the news of her wins spread

celebrities quickly offered their congratulations. Lee Byung-hun, a South Korean actor known abroad for his role as "Storm Shadow" on the "G.I. Joe" series, posted a photo of Youn clutching an Oscar trophy. "Impossible is just an opinion," he wrote on the post. Bae Doona



onto the Chinese internet, with individual web users and bloggers cheering Zhao. Many took note of her acceptance speech, in which Zhao quoted a line from a poem written in the 13th century that she, like many other Chinese children, had memorized as a child, which translates as, "People are good at birth."

In stark contrast, South Korea's Youn Yuh-jung, who won over audiences playing the grandmother in "Minari" could still be searched on the Chinese internet. Youn nabbed best supporting actress award, becoming the first Korean performer to win an Oscar.

And in Youn's home of South Korea, "Actor Youn Yuh-jung" topped Twitter's trending list while other South Korean

from the acclaimed Netflix series "Kingdom" and a well-known South Korean actor Kim Hye-soo also congratulated Youn on their social media accounts.

Zhao faced a nationalist backlash in March when she won a Golden Globe for best director, with internet users in China questioning whether she could be called Chinese and some saying she had insulted her home country in comments on the political system. China's press, television and social media are tightly controlled by the ruling Communist Party, either directly or through self-censorship, and online criticism can frequently result in calls for boycotts of entertainers or name brands.

## Daniel Kaluuya wins supporting actor, his 1st Oscar

**LOS ANGELES (AP):** Daniel Kaluuya used a lead role to win a best supporting actor Oscar. He'll take it.

Kaluuya won his first Academy Award on Sunday night for playing one of the two title roles in "Judas and the Black Messiah."

In a quirk of the nominating process, LaKeith Stanfield, who played the "Judas" of the title — William O'Neal who betrayed Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton to the FBI — competed in the same category. "I share this honor with the gift that is LaKeith Stanfield," Kaluuya told the small audience gathered at Union Station in downtown Los Angeles. The London-born Kaluuya portrayed the fiery Hampton, who was killed in an FBI raid in 1969. He already earned Golden Globe, BAFTA and Screen Actors Guild awards for the role.

"To Chairman Fred Hampton, what a man. How blessed we are that we lived in a lifetime where he existed," Kaluuya said, clutching his trophy. "He was on this Earth for 21 years and he found a way to feed kids breakfast, educate kids, get free medical care against all odds."

Kaluuya name-checked Hampton's fellow Black Panthers Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale.

"They showed me how to love myself," he said. "With that love, they overflowed into the Black community and into other communities.

They showed us the power of unity." Kaluuya admonished his fellow nominees, saying, "There's so much work to do guys and that's on everyone in this room. This ain't no single-man job." The 32-year-old actor was cheered by his Ugandan mother, Damalie, and his sister, who sat socially distanced in seats away from the nominees at tables.

"I'd like to thank my mom," Kaluuya said, as she teared up. "Thank you for pouring so much into me. You gave me everything. You gave me your factory settings so I could stand at my fullest height."

He got laughs — and a confused look from his mother — with a light-hearted comment before leaving the podium. "My mom and my dad, they had sex. It's amazing," he said, crediting them for his existence.

In the virtual backstage, Kaluuya said his mother wouldn't mind his cheekiness.

"She's got a sense of humor," he said. "We give it to each other."

Kaluuya broke out in 2018 after starring in "Get Out," which earned his first Oscar nod. It led to roles in the Marvel superhero film "Black Panther" and "Queen & Slim."

The other nominees were Paul Raci of "Sound of Metal," Leslie Odom Jr. for "One Night in Miami..." and Sacha Baron Cohen as Hampton contemporary and 1960s activist Abbie Hoffman for "The Trial of the Chicago 7."

## Frances McDormand a double Oscar winner for 'Nomadland'

**LOS ANGELES (AP):** Frances McDormand has two more Oscars. She may hang on to them a little more tightly. She won best actress Sunday night for her performance in "Nomadland," which also nabbed best picture. As a producer on the movie, she collected a trophy as well. McDormand kissed her director-husband, Joel Coen, and rose from their table inside Union Station in downtown Los Angeles to make her way to the stage for one of the shortest speeches of the night.

"I have no words," she said. "My voice is in my sword. We know the sword is our work and I like work. Thank you for knowing that and thanks for this." In "Nomadland," McDormand plays Fern, who hits the road after the death of her husband and loss of her job at a plant that is shut down. She buys a van and seeks seasonal work, meeting fellow nomads and learning survival skills along the way.

"My happiest moment tonight is when Fran won," said Chloé Zhao, who became the second woman and first of color to win directing honors. Zhao credited McDormand for being "open and vulnerable" in helping her make the movie, as well as making the non-professional actors feel comfortable on set.

"She really is 'Nomadland,'" Zhao said in the virtual media room. McDormand did not talk to the virtual media, although she ducked in when Zhao and the other producers were talking, apparently to switch out trophies before leaving just as quickly. McDormand made her biggest noise on stage after the movie won best picture. She tossed her head back and cut loose with a howl and yelps in honor of Michael Wolf Snyder.



**ME TIME!** American dancer, Julianne Hough relaxed in Venice Beach, California.

## 'Another Round' wins best international film at the Oscars



**LOS ANGELES (AP):** After his film "Another Round" won the best international feature Oscar, director Thomas Vinterberg wiped away tears while dedicating part of his acceptance speech to his late daughter who died a couple years ago. "We ended up making this movie for her, as her monument," a tearful Vinterberg said from the stage at Union Station in Los Angeles on Sunday night.

Vinterberg said his daughter, Ida, died in a highway accident four days into the project. He said his daughter shared her excitement about film's story with him in a letter after she read the script a couple months before filming the movie. He added that she was supposed to be a part of the project. "So Ida, this is a miracle that just happened," he continued. "You are a part of this miracle. ... This one is for you."

"Another Round" is the fourth time a film from Denmark has won in the category. The last

was "In a Better World" in 2010. The film stars Mads Mikkelsen as one of a group of Danish school teachers who attempted to stay slightly drunk all day to break out of their malaise.

"This is a film about letting go of control in life as I lost control of my own," he said.

Before Vinterberg accepted the award, he skipped onto the stage with excitement. He called his wife for being the "angel" of the project and thanked several others including his children and the film's co-writer Tobias Lindholm.

"This is beyond anything I could ever imagine," Vinterberg said. "Except this is something I've always imagined." Vinterberg was also nominated for best director, but lost to Chloé Zhao in the category on Sunday night. Vinterberg became internationally popular as the co-founder of the filmmaking movement called Dogme 95. He started the movement in 1995 with fellow Danish director Lars von Trier.

**Aries:**  
In the bestseller 'Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life', Hector Garcia Puigcerver writes, "The grand essentials to happiness in this life are something to do, something to love, and something to hope for." That dazzling smile on your face reveals you've got this formula down pat, Aries. On the cards for you this week: pursuing your passion, expanding your empire into newer territories, and inspiring those around you to abandon mediocrity in favour of magnificence. PS: Something tells us you are going to be remembered for all the right reasons.

**Tip:** The week ahead sees you pursuing your passion and inspiring others to do the same.

**Taurus:**  
The Universe always has a plan—one that's flawless and designed to perfection. When things don't go as per the plan in our heads, we tend to blame those around us and go into a downward spiral. Today, the cards are urging you to change the game a little. To stay in your centre despite the fluctuations in your emotional landscape. This will help you recognise that everything is taking place as per the law of divine timing, despite what your physical reality is showing you in this moment.

**Tip:** Trust in the law of divine timing, Taurus.

**Gemini:**  
Sharing space isn't always easy, especially when you're

"this" different from each other. The good news is, you're bringing the energy of love, harmony, and togetherness into the room, which in turn is helping you work through the differences. Remember, there's nothing you cannot transform when you're working as an A-team, Gemini. The good news is, things on the work front are about to take a turn for the better as well. After a period of feeling creatively blocked, you're back in your element and are feeling ready to take over the world.

**Tip:** You're in your element!

**Cancer:**

The road that has brought you to this juncture has been anything but easy. Cancer. It has challenged you in more ways than you can count. It has also left you feeling bruised and bemused. But that doesn't mean it's time to give up yet. All you need to do is step away, recalibrate, and get some perspective. Everything is working out in divine time. The more you stay in your centre, the easier it will be for you to understand why you attracted certain experiences.

**Tip:** Take time to recalibrate.

**Leo:**

The trouble is, you believe you have to do everything on our own. That you're solely responsible for making things happen in your reality. What you tend to forget is that you are a part of a divine matrix, one that is supporting your dream-weaving process to perfection. So, practice the

art of co-creation, Leo. Allow that which is meant to be yours to flow into your existence. What the cards want you to remember is that you are so loved and so supported.

**Tip:** Practice the art of co-creation.

**Virgo:**

The idea you're sitting on is a million dollar one. So what's keeping you from making your vision a reality, Virgo? What's keeping you from putting your plan into action and taking over the world? The cards want you to remember that the tools you require are already within you. So, eat the demons of self-doubt for breakfast and jab your self-negating patterns.

**Tip:** It's time to take over the world.

**Libra:**

Libra, you're a treasure trove of good vibes. The whole room lights up every time you walk in with that million dollar smile. The real question, though, is: Do you see yourself through the same lens of love that everybody else sees you through? If not, it's time to fix your gaze, just a little. To remember at least three things that make you tremble proud of who you are today. Remember, there is no shift in the outside world that does not begin with you coming into a space of wholeness within yourself.

**Tip:** Look at yourself through the lens of love.

**Scorpio:**

Here's the thing, Scorpio: not everybody is going to like what you have to say. They don't have to. It's "your" truth, and it's time for you to honour it. Honesty is showing up as a big theme for you this month. So, work through those throat chakra issues, come into a space of wholeness, and break up with that people-pleaser within. Boundary issues are also likely to resurface for some of you. How and where do you need to reaffirm them? Start by taking stock of your closest relationships.

**Tip:** Work through those chakra issues.

**Sagittarius:**

In his list '49 Ways to Get Inspired', leadership expert Robin Sharma says, "Remember that for every one masterpiece, Picasso painted 1000 paintings." These are just the words of wisdom you're being asked to reflect upon today, Sagittarius. It's true that you've tripped and fallen several times along the way. It's also true that you're going to have a few more uh-oh moments. But there's nothing you cannot achieve as long as you practice patience and persistence. What the cards want you to remember: that breakthrough moment you've been working towards may be a lot closer than you think.

**Tip:** Let 'patience' and 'persistence' be your magic words.

**Capricorn:**

Uh-oh! We've got trouble in paradise, Capricorn. Looks like it's not just Plan A, but Plans B, C, and D that are falling apart too. What do you do when things are not in your control any-

more? Do you continue to practice resistance or surrender to the flow? Something tells us that learning to loosen the grip will come in handy at a time like this. For some of you, the paradigm shift could manifest on the work and money front. If you've been thinking about giving it all up in order to get back to your books, the time is now.

**Tip:** Instead of choosing the path of resistance, surrender to the flow.

**Aquarius:**

You've vision-boarded to your heart's content, Aquarius. It's now time to put your magnificent plan into action. The cards are urging you to reach out your fellow warriors. You already know who's way of execution will be complementary to yours. Be mindful about how much money you invest in the given project, though. It's a good idea to cut corners for now and make do with existing resources.

**Tip:** It's time to collaborate and co-create.

**Pisces:**

The rules of sharing space are different for different people. What may be sacred to you, may be insignificant to the other person. What's sacred to the other person may not be in your line of vision at all. However, in order to coexist harmoniously, it's important to communicate (now more than ever) how you would like to be cared for as you hold space for others to do the same.

**Tip:** Yes, there is a way to co-exist harmoniously!