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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Sikkim breaks daily spike record with 264 more cases; 3 more fatalities

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 06 MAY:**

Sikkim recorded its highest single-day surge in Novel Coronavirus infections with 264 fresh cases being reported in the last 24 hours taking the number of active cases to 2,256 on Thursday. This is the highest single-day spike in caseload since the 259 cases which were recorded on 01 May. It needs to also be added here that many more than usual samples were tested over these 24 hours with 903 samples being processed when the State rarely went past 800 over the past few weeks.

Also over the same 24 hours, three more Covid-positive people passed away in the State taking the Covid toll in the State to 158. Of the three deaths, one has been recorded

ed at Mangan District Hospital [reported in this newspaper in yesterday's edition], one at Namchi District Hospital and one at Central Referral Hospital, Tadong.

Meanwhile, out of the 264 new cases, 148 were recorded in East District, 90 in South District, 19 in West District and seven in North Sikkim. These cases were returned from the testing of 903 samples on Wednesday, of which 217 new cases were picked up in RT-PCR testing of 710 samples, one in CBNAAT and 46 more in the rapid antigen testing of 188 samples.

Ten patients are currently admitted in the ICU facility of STNM hospital and 04 in the ICU facility of Central Referral Hospital, Tadong. 20 more Covid patients were hospitalised today and there are now



181 Covid patients in hospital. As per data maintained by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, there are 256 dedicated Covid-beds in hospitals across the State

at present.

Of the active cases, 1,880 Covid-positive people are under home isolation across the State at present.

Meanwhile, Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of

COVID-19 now stands at 9,183. On the other hand, the number of recovered cases has reached 6,565 with the release of 50 more persons from the home isolation upon completion of their isolation period.

Petrol price hiked by 25 paise, diesel by 30 paise



NEW DELHI, MAY 6 (PTI): In one of the steepest increase since daily price revision was started, petrol price on Thursday was hiked by 25 paise per litre and diesel by 30 paise as oil companies raised rates for the third straight day to pass on to consumers the increase in international oil prices.

Petrol price in Delhi was increased to Rs 90.99 per litre from Rs 90.74 while diesel rates went up to Rs 81.42 a litre from Rs 81.12, according to a price notification by state-owned fuel retailers.

Rates have been increased across the country and vary from state to state depending on the local incidence of taxation (VAT).

This is the third straight day of increase in petrol and diesel prices since state-owned fuel retailers ended an 18-day hiatus in rate revision during assembly elections in states like West Bengal.

In three days, petrol price has increased by 59 paise per litre and diesel by 69 paise - neutralising most of the reduction that came between March 24 and April 15.

After raising petrol price by a record Rs 21.58 per litre and diesel by Rs 19.18 since the government raised excise duty to an all-time high in March last year, state-owned fuel retailers, IOC, BPCL and HPCL had reduced petrol price by 67

paise a litre and diesel by 74 paise per litre effected between March 24 and April 15.

Oil companies, who have in recent months resorted to unexplained freeze in rate revision, had hit a pause button after cutting prices marginally on April 15. This coincided with electioneering hitting peak to elect new governments in five states including West Bengal.

No sooner had voting ended, oil companies indicated an impending increase in retail prices in view of firming trends in international oil markets.

Despite the concerns about rising COVID-19 cases in India denting demand, crude oil prices in the international market have risen primarily on account of strong US demand recovery and a weak dollar.

Prices have been on a continuous uptrend since April 27, an industry official said adding crude oil prices are near USD 70 per barrel mark.

Central and state taxes make up for 60 per cent of the retail selling price of petrol and over 54 per cent of diesel. The union government levies Rs 32.90 per litre of excise duty on petrol and Rs 31.80 on diesel.

In Mumbai, the petrol price was hiked to Rs 97.34 a litre on Thursday from Rs 97.12, while diesel rates were increased to Rs 88.49 from Rs 88.19, the price notification showed.

Pope hails "tireless" work of Indian Medics, urges them to stay strong

VATICAN CITY, 06 MAY [AFP]: Pope Francis hailed Thursday the "tireless" work of medics in India and urged them to stay strong, in a message of support for the coronavirus-plagued country.

In a message to the Catholic Bishops' Conference in India, the pontiff offered his "heartfelt solidarity and spiritual closeness to all the Indian people".

"My thoughts go above all to the sick and their families, to those who care for them, and in particular to those who are mourning the loss of their loved ones," he said.

"I think too of the many doctors, nurses, hospital workers, ambulance drivers and those

working tirelessly to respond to the immediate needs of their brothers and sisters.

"With deep appreciation I invoke upon all of them God's gifts of perseverance, strength and peace."

India is battling a wave of COVID-19 infections that has seen patients die in streets outside hospitals due to shortages of beds and oxygen.

The country on Thursday reported almost 4,000 Covid-19 deaths and more than 412,000 infections -- both new records -- dashing hopes that the catastrophic recent surge may have been easing following several days of falling case numbers.

Constitutional authorities, stop complaints against media reports: Supreme Court

NEW DELHI, 06 MAY [NDTV]: Constitutional authorities can do better than to complain and ask for fetters on the media, the Supreme Court said today on the Election Commission's petition complaining about media reports on the Madras High Court telling the poll body it should be booked for murder for not stopping political rallies amid Covid.

"Article 19 does not give right to freedom of speech and expression only to people, but also confers this right to the media. It would be retrograde for the Supreme Court to gag media," the Supreme Court

said.

"We find no substance in prayer of EC to restrain media from reporting court proceedings. It is essential to hold judiciary accountable."

The Justice DY Chandrachud-led bench did say the remarks made by the Madras High Court were "harsh and the metaphor improper" and judicial restraint was necessary.

"There is a need for judicial restraint for off the cuff remarks which is open for misinterpretation. Judicial language is important for constitutional ethos. Power of judicial review

is so high that it forms a basic structure," the top court observed. The Election Commission had been conducting free and fair polls, it added.

However, the High Court was faced with rising Covid cases and the task of protecting the lives and liberty of people, the court said.

"Open access to courts is a valuable safeguard to constitutional freedom. Freedom of the press is a facet of constitutional freedom of speech and expression," said the Supreme Court.

The Election Commission had complained about being

"castigated without any evidence" when the Madras High Court reprimanded it on campaigns in the middle of a Covid surge.

The Madras High Court, on April 26, said the Election Commission "should probably be booked for murder" for allowing crowded election campaigns and was "singularly responsible" for the current Covid spike. But these observations did not make it to the final order, which said "at no cost can counting become a catalyst for a further surge".

The Election Commission last week approached the Su-

preme Court against what it called "blatantly disparaging remarks" and said the media should be stopped from reporting observations. It also said it was the government under the Disaster Management Authority that had to manage the rallies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Chief Minister (E Palaniswami) and "they committed the breach".

The Supreme Court said: "Something is observed in the larger public interest. The Election Commission should treat it as a bitter pill in the right spirit."

ViewPoint

Didi's Victory and Indian Politics

JIWAN RAI

The Mamata Banerjee-led TMC's win in the West Bengal election 2021 has become the second most talked about subject in India after the Covid-19 pandemic. At least that is the impression we have in this part of the country. If one has to consider the involvement of Union leaders including the Prime Minister and Home Minister in this state election, it definitely hogged a larger share of governmental concern than the second wave of Coronavirus. Covid protocol defying people swarmed around their maskless leaders everywhere in West Bengal. The TMC and BJP rallies were equally defiant. This was a sad commentary on Indian politics which is solely a frantic fight for a 'chair'. Fundamental human value is to Indian politics what the 12th man is in a cricket match. It is there and not there.

Now, the TMC's victory is being interpreted to make three major pronouncements. One, Mamata Banerjee has knocked down a notion that the Modi-Shah juggernaut is invincible. The BJP can be defeated even when the party can range all its resources against its opponent. Why has the TMC's victory been projected as the most remarkable one when the BJP had been defeated by other parties in other states like Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh? One reason could be the manner in which the TMC trounced the BJP. But the BJP had received even more severe defeats in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. That brings us to another reason which is the importance that the BJP had accorded to the Bengal elections. They fought it as

if it was a battle for their prestige. The BJP had used every available resource to defeat Mamata. The timing was equally critical. When the country was gripped by a second wave of the coronavirus, the top union leadership was campaigning in West Bengal elections. Also, Mamata's victory came on the heels of the heavy hemorrhage her party received when her party colleagues joined the BJP one after the other.

The second pronouncement is closely related to the first. The TMC has now shown that an alternative national leadership is possible. If non-BJP parties join forces (which has been Mamata's cry since 2019), they can replace the BJP at the Centre. To the TMC's advantage, the CPI (M) has become a spent force in West Bengal. Congress doesn't have many takers either. Also, the Congress party's low key election campaign helped Mamata consolidate anti-BJP votes in her favour. Can the UPA replicate such political strategies at the nation level?

The third pronouncement the anti-BJP camp is making is that the TMC's victory saved the Indian soul. Their argument is that this loss of the BJP has strengthened secular ideals in India. These anti-BJP political forces oppose the idea of making India a Hindu Rastra. They believe that India has always been inclusive and secular and therefore the idea of a Hindu Rashta runs against the grain of the soul of India.

However, all the three pronouncements do not hold much water in the national context. The BJP Hindutwa politics may not have worked in West Bengal, but it may continue to effective-

ly work in BJP ruled states in the future. The Hindutwa narrative has been very well nurtured and promoted in these BJP ruled states.

Also, joining forces against the BJP is one of most complicated political exercises in contemporary Indian politics. There is no opposition equivalent to Narendra Modi who has a wide appeal nationally. Currently, there is no party as well organized as the BJP in India. The command the BJP enjoys over its NDA allies is massive. The Congress doesn't have the same command over its UPA allies. Also, there are too many opportunist contenders for the position of PM in the anti BJP camp. Moreover, the BJP has been the most dominant force in electoral politics in India. The Congress may have created some records in toppling the governments formed by its opponents, but no one can beat the BJP in this game.

Finally, the debate on the soul of India is a hot potato. A religiously sensitive country like India does well to leave aside the task of defining the soul of India. Any definition that downplays the Hindu connotation of the Indian soul will fall short of the favour of the majority Hindu population. Also, the massive post poll violence in West Bengal hasn't helped the TMC to promote its prominence as a political force in the national arena. Several allegations against the TMC workers involved in post poll violence has dented Mamata Banerjee's image as a potential national alternative leader. The politics of criminality that the TMC is alleged to be involved with, can hardly save the soul of India.

SKM distributes masks and awareness literature to drivers in Rabong

**SUMMIT REPORT
RABONGLA, 06 MAY:**

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's CLC unit for Barfung, led by their president, Bishnu Sharma, and vice president, Passang Lepcha, general secretary-II, Maita Singh Tamang and South District Chalak Vice Convenor, Laxuman Pradhan, distributed masks and Covid-19 awareness notes to drivers here today. This was in follow-up to directions received from the party president, Chief Minister PS Tamang, a press release informs.

Drivers play a vital role in our society as they transport our doctors, nurses, public servants and lay people to their destinations

in spite of the risks involved, the release highlights.

Considering the seriousness of the prevailing situation, the SKM party has been distributing masks, hand sanitizers and other Covid precautionary kits to all the citizens of Sikkim especially to the drivers through the current second wave of Covid-19, the release adds.

"We humbly appeal to all the respected citizens to take necessary Precautions, follow SOPs, Stay Safe and in doing so keep our Sikkim and our fellow citizens safe. Stay Safe from Corona, Jai Sikkim" the SKM CLC president has appealed.



46 arrested for taking out procession to "Eradicate Covid" in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 06 MAY [PTI]: Police have arrested 46 people for taking out a religious procession at a village in Gandhinagar district to "eradicate coronavirus", an official said on Thursday.

This is the second such incident in Gujarat in the last few of days.

All COVID-19 prevention norms were allegedly violated during the latest procession taken out in Raipur village of Gandhinagar on Wednesday, Deputy Superintendent of Police MK Rana said.

In a video that went viral on social media platforms on Thursday, around 100 men and women, many without masks, were seen participating in a procession in the village.

While women were carrying water pots on their heads, several men were leading the procession while beating



drums.

"After being alerted about the incident, we have arrested 46 men involved in taking out the procession," Mr Rana said.

A section of people from the village believed coronavirus could be eradicated by pouring water on a local temple of their deity, he said.

All the 46 accused were booked for violating police notification regarding gatherings under section 188 of the

Indian Penal Code and provisions of the Disaster Management Act and the Epidemic Diseases Act, the official said.

On May 3, a similar incident took place at Navapura village in Ahmedabad where a large number of women carrying water pots on their heads took out a procession to a local temple, believing that pouring water on the temple would eradicate COVID-19.

Police had arrested

23 people, including the village sarpanch, for organising the event.

The Gujarat government has already imposed a ban on all kinds of gatherings in the state in the wake of a surge in coronavirus cases.

On Wednesday, Gujarat reported 12,955 new coronavirus cases, raising its tally to 6,33,427, while 133 fatalities pushed the death count to 7,912, as per the state health department.

COVID spreading in rural India; record daily rises in infections, deaths

NEW DELHI, 06 MAY [REUTERS]: Hopes that India's deadly second wave of COVID-19 was about to peak were swept away on Thursday as it posted record daily infections and deaths and as the virus spread from cities to villages across the world's second-most populous nation.

India reported a record 412,262 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours and a record 3,980 deaths. COVID-19 infections have now surged past 21 million, with a total death toll of 230,168, health ministry data show.

Government modelling had forecast a peak in second wave infections by Wednesday.

"This temporarily halts speculations of a peak," Rijo M John, a professor at the Indian Institute of Management in the southern state of Kerala, said on Twitter.

With hospitals scrambling for beds and oxygen in response to the surge in infections, the World Health Organization said in a weekly report that India accounted for nearly half the coronavirus cases reported worldwide last week and a quarter of the deaths.

India has 3.45 million active cases.

Medical experts say India's actual figures could be five to 10 times the official tallies.

India's COVID-19 crisis has been most acute in the capital, New Delhi, among other cities, but in rural areas - home to nearly 70% of India's 1.3 billion people - limited public healthcare is posing more challenges.

"The situation has become dangerous in villages," said Suresh Kumar, a field coordinator with Manav Sansadhan Evam Mahila Vikas Sansthan, a human rights charity.

In some villages where the charity works in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh - home to about 200 million people - "there are deaths in almost every second house", he said.

"People are scared and huddled in their homes with fever and cough. The symptoms are all of COVID-19, but with no information available many think it is seasonal flu."

India's Goa state, a hugely popular tourist destination on the western coast, has the highest rate of COVID-19 infections in the country, with up to one in every two people testing positive in recent weeks, government officials said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been widely criticized for not acting sooner to suppress the second wave, after religious festivals and political rallies drew tens of thousands of people in recent



weeks and became "super spreader" events.

The surge in infections has also coincided with a dramatic drop in vaccinations because of supply and delivery problems, despite India being a major vaccine producer. Several states have imposed various levels of social restrictions to try and stem infections, but the federal government has refused to impose a national lockdown. India's southern state of Kerala, which has 376,004 active cases, announced it will impose nine days of curbs on movement from Saturday.

LIFE AND DEATH DECISIONS
In the capital Delhi, fewer than 20 of more than 5,000 COVID-19 intensive care beds

are free at any one time.

Student doctors like Rohan Aggarwal, 26, recruited to fight the second wave, are being forced to make life and death decisions.

His Holy Family Hospital in Delhi normally has a capacity for 275 adults, but is currently caring for 385.

"Who to be saved, who not to be saved should be decided by God," Aggarwal told Reuters during a grim overnight shift.

"We are not made for that - we are just humans. But at this point in time, we are being made to do this."

In the office of a Hindu crematorium in Delhi, the floor and shelves are overflowing

with earthen pots, plastic packets and steel containers filled with the ashes of the city's many COVID-19 victims who have been cremated.

Practising Hindus collect the ashes of the dead a few days after the funeral for immersion in a river or sea, one of the many rituals that they believe lead to salvation of the soul.

"Our lockers are full. We cannot store any more ashes. We used to get around 40 COVID-19 bodies a day. We are now telling relatives to take the ashes with them on the same day," Pankaj Sharma, a manager at the crematorium told Reuters.

Bangladesh provides over 10,000 Remdesivir vials to India

DHAKA, 06 MAY [PTI]: Bangladesh on Thursday handed over 10,000 vials of antiviral injection Remdesivir to India as part of its medical assistance amid deteriorating Covid-19 situation in the neighbouring country.

India is struggling with a second wave of the pandemic with more than 3,00,000 daily new coronavirus cases being reported in the past few days, and hospitals are reeling under a shortage of medical oxygen and beds.

Bangladesh's Deputy High Commissioner in Kolkata Toufique Hasan handed over 10,000 vials of Remdesivir to the representative of the Indian government at the Indian border port of Petrapole.

These 10,000 injections manufactured locally were sent as medical assistance on behalf of the people of Bangladesh at the instruction of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the Covid-affected people

of India, according to an official statement.

This was the first consignment of medical assistance by Bangladesh.

Last week, Bangladesh had offered to send emergency medicines and medical equipment supplies to India to combat the massive surge in the coronavirus cases.

The supplies include about 10,000 vials of injectable anti-viral, oral anti-viral, 30,000 PPE kits and several thousand zinc, calcium, vitamin C and other necessary tablets.

"Bangladesh stands in solidarity with its close neighbour India at this critical moment and Dhaka is ready to provide and mobilise support in every possible way to save lives there," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

The government said that if needed Dhaka would provide further support to India.

"The Government of Bangladesh expresses

deep sorrow and condolences at the loss of lives in India due to the recent spread of the COVID-19 pandemic," the statement said, adding thoughts and prayers of Bangladeshis were with the people of India for alleviating their sufferings.

Over 40 countries have committed to provide India urgently required medical supplies like oxygen-related equipment and critical medicines to help it deal with an unprecedented second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said in New Delhi last week.

New coronavirus cases and deaths in India hit a record daily high with 4,12,262 new infections and 3,980 fatalities being reported, taking the total tally of COVID-19 cases to 2,10,77,410 and the death count to 2,30,168, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

Mumbai to go big with drive-in vaccination, civic body gives 24 hours

NEW DELHI, 06 MAY [NDTV]: Mumbai will have drive-in vaccination centres, maybe as soon as within 24 hours. That is the deadline given by the city's civic body to its officials, who were told to have it ready in each administrative zone. The civic body has decided to keep the blueprint ready even though the state, like many others, is struggling with limited supply of the vaccine.

Drive-in vaccination centres will be set up in big open grounds -- such as the Andheri Sports Club ground, Cooperage ground, Shivaji Stadium, Oval Maidan, Brabourne stadium, MIG ground, MCA ground, Reliance JIO garden or even the Wankhede stadium, the Brihanmumbai Corporation has said.

Adequate and proper temporary shelter shall be provided for in

the vaccination area to accommodate vaccination staff, arrangement for patients of AEFI, ambulance etc, the civic body has said.

Maharashtra got its first drive-in vaccination centre this week at Dadar. The success of the project pushed the civic body to adopt it for the country's financial capital.

The centre has the capacity to vaccinate nearly 5,000 people in a day with minimum risk of infection that would have been present in crowded places and long queues.

While the first drive-in vaccination centre was meant for senior citizens and specially-abled people, the authorities feel that with the central government opening up vaccination for the 18-45-year age group, the rush will be difficult to cater to at the hospitals and health

centres in terms of maintaining all safety protocols.

Mumbai, which bore the brunt of the first wave of Covid, has made a remarkable turnaround and fended off the second wave.

Where other metros -- starting with national capital Delhi -- has landed in deep crisis amid skyrocketing daily surge and an overstretched healthcare system, Mumbai has brought its positivity rate down to one of the lowest in the country. Its oxygen management has been held up as exemplary by the courts even though the rest of Maharashtra has been struggling.

Now the Maharashtra government wants to push ahead with the vaccination programme, which has been flagged by health experts as one of the surest ways of increasing the safety quotient.

Summit Times in Nepali



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Watch our Nepali broadcast every evening on Facebook at Summit Times Daily Page, Please like, Share, Comment and let us know we can improve.

Thank You!



ANTHYESTI KRIYA (AARGHU)

The 21 days Anthyesti Kriya of Late Shri Prem Kumar Gurung S/o Late Shri B.B. Gurung, who left for his heavenly abode on 24th of April, 2021 (Saturday) falls on 15th of May, 2021 (Saturday).

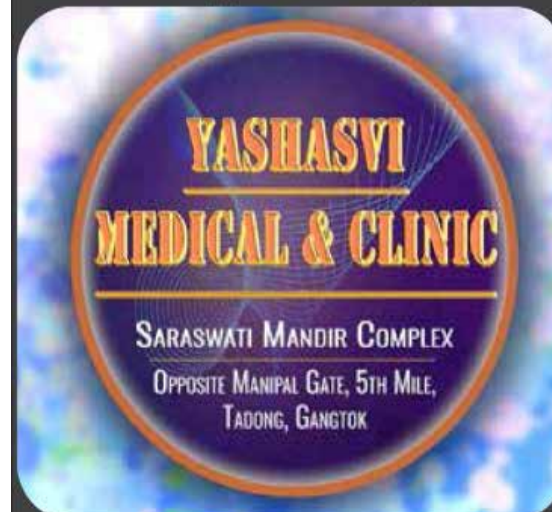
All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join the bereaved family in offering prayers for the departed soul at their Ancestral Home, Nalam, Namthang, South Sikkim while keeping in mind the prescribed CoVid-19 protocols.

The family members also express gratitude to all those who stood by them during the time of bereavement.

RSVP

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DRCHO appeals to all above 45 year olds to get vaccinated

**BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 06 MAY:**

DRCHO, South Sikkim, Dr Junita Yonzon, has appealed to all above 45-year-olds in the district to get their Covishield vaccines being provided by the State Government free of cost. This segment of the population has still not been fully covered in the district, she adds.

She also highlighted that those in 18-44 age-group should also get registered for the vaccine and informed that they will be updated as soon as the vaccination process opens for them.

She adds that while vaccination is offered



every day at the District Hospital and Primary Health Centers, at Primary Health Sub-Centers vaccination is carried out

only on scheduled dates. There are 7 PHCs, 39 PHSCs and one District Hospital in South Sikkim. Thus far, 52,883 vac-

cine doses have been administered in South district, with 129 people receiving the vaccine jab today.

Covid patient goes to Karnataka Assembly for protest, finally gets a bed

BENGALURU, 06 MAY [NDTV]: A coronavirus patient's family in Bengaluru had to sit on a protest outside the Karnataka assembly before they managed to get a hospital bed in yet another sign of the crisis unfolding in several parts of the country overwhelmed by the surge in COVID-19 infections.

Not able to find treatment in any hospital, the ambulance carrying the patient, a woman, and her daughter was taken to the Vidhan Soudha building in search of a bed.

Stopped by the police, her relatives launched

a protest in front of the building. Later, Youth Congress leader Nalapad also reached the spot and joined their protest.

After around half an hour, Chief Secretary Ravi Kumar arranged a bed for the patient at the government's Victoria Hospital.

While the patient was shifted to the hospital, the Youth Congress leader was taken into custody by the police.

Karnataka has been battling a massive spike in infections over the past few weeks and on Wednesday reported more than 50,000 new coronavirus cases for

the first time, with nearly half of them in capital Bengaluru, as patients and hospitals were left scrambling for medicines and oxygen.

The state is among the 10 worst hit in the current wave of the pandemic according to the Union Health Ministry which account for over 70 per cent of the cases.

India saw record new jumps in COVID-19 cases and deaths on Thursday, dashing tentative hopes that a catastrophic recent surge that has stretched hospitals to the limit might be easing.

Health ministry numbers showed 3,980

deaths in the past 24 hours, taking the national total to 2,30,168, and 4,12,262 new cases, taking India's caseload since the pandemic began over 2.1 crore.

Many experts suspect that with low levels of testing and poor record-keeping for cause of death -- and crematoriums overwhelmed in many places -- the real numbers could be much higher.

Until now the worst-hit areas have been Delhi and Maharashtra but other states including West Bengal, Kerala and Karnataka are now reporting sharp rises.

Burtuk college hosts webinar on psycho-social care during disasters

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 06 MAY:**

The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of Sikkim Government College, Burtuk, in collaboration with National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), organized a national webinar on the topic, "Psycho-social care during disaster with special reference to college students" on Thursday, a press release informs.

The webinar began with a welcome address by co-ordinator, Dr Chunku Bhutia, and included four panelists: Principal, Dr Iyatta M Upreti; Major General Manoj Kumar Bindai, Executive Director, NIDM; Dr Shekhar Chaturvedi and Arun Verma.

The objective of the webinar was to provide a platform for the students to express their emotional and psychological dif-

ficulties they have been encountering since the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The webinar aimed to remove the stigma attached with the expression of one's mental health crisis thereby encouraging the young minds to analyze and discuss any such emotional and mental issues that they have been facing personally or have witnessed in others.

The webinar was at-

tended by the undergraduate students of II/IV and VI semesters of Sikkim Government College Burtuk along with the faculty members of the college.

There were several other participants from New Delhi and other parts of Sikkim and India. The webinar concluded with the vote of thanks delivered by Dean of Student Welfare, Dolma T Ethenpa, Sikkim Government College Burtuk.

Dhoni said will leave hotel last after all CSK players get home safe

NEW DELHI, 06 MAY [NDTV]: Chennai Super Kings skipper MS Dhoni will wait for the rest of the squad to reach home safely before leaving the bio-bubble and boarding the flight back to his home in Ranchi.

According to a report in the Indian Express, Dhoni has informed the management that he wants the foreign players to reach home safely and he will be the "last person" to leave the team hotel.

"Mahi bhai said that he will be the last person to leave the hotel. He wanted foreigners to leave first, then the Indian players. He will be taking the last flight tomorrow when everyone reaches their home safe and secure," a CSK member was quoted as saying



by the newspaper.

Dhoni-led CSK were in Delhi when several positive Covid cases inside the bio-secure bubble forced the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to postpone the T20 tournament indefinitely.

"CSK organised a charter flight for its

players from Delhi. A ten-seater flight carrying CSK players went to Rajkot and Mumbai in the morning while the evening charter plane dropped players from Bangalore and Chennai. Dhoni is scheduled to fly on Thursday evening to his home in Ranchi,"

the report further mentioned.

Among the CSK camp, bowling coach Lakshminath Balaji, batting coach Michael Hussey and a member of the support staff contracted the virus.

CSK's Australia pacer Jason Behrendorff, who replaced Josh Hazlewood in this year's IPL, shared a picture of himself in a PPE kit and captioned it as "travelling in style" in his Instagram story. CSK, after a forgettable season last year, looked like the team to beat in the first-half of the tournament this season.

Before the 14th edition was postponed, CSK were sitting pretty at the second position on the points table with five wins from seven games.

Pleas for help in India as COVID-19 leaves children without carers

NEW DELHI, 06 MAY [REUTERS]: When an Indian children's rights group tracked down two boys aged 6 and 8 after it was told that their parents were both severely ill with COVID-19 and unable to care for them, the children had not eaten for days.

The case, reported by the Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) group which located the boys in a small town in India's rural heartland, was one of a growing number of emergencies involving children affected by India's devastating coronavirus crisis.

The exponential rise in infections and deaths has led some children, particularly in poor communities, without a carer because their parents or other relatives are too ill to cope or have died.

"Because the number of deaths has increased, the crisis is that either children are losing their parents, or their caregivers are hospitalised, and there is no one to take

care of them," said Dhananjay Tingal, executive director of BBA.

India's underfunded social services are struggling to cope, and in certain parts of the country there is still stigma surrounding people who contract the virus, leaving some children isolated.

"Neighbours and extended family do not want to help because they are afraid of infection, treating these families almost like outcasts," said Tingal.

He did not share further details of the two boys because of concern for their privacy.

Tingal said BBA, which is headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Kailash Satyarthi, started receiving calls about children in dire situations linked to the COVID-19 outbreak in early April. The volume of calls increased after Satyarthi posted a helpline number on Twitter on April 29.

BBA now receives about 70 calls a day seeking help for children whose parents are dead or seriously ill, and a greater number of calls from parents who have tested posi-

tive and want to know if the group can take care of their children if their health fails.

"NEED A BREAST MILK DONOR"

With 3.57 million active cases of COVID-19, India recorded more than 400,000 new infections over the last 24 hours - the highest daily tally reported globally - while deaths rose by a record 3,980. read more

Experts say actual numbers could be five to 10 times higher. Citizens across the country, the world's second most populous, are struggling to find beds, oxygen, or medicines needed for treatment, and many are dying for lack of treatment.

Desperate pleas to help children have been appearing on social media.

"Need a breast milk donor for a one-day-old baby in Delhi. Her mother passed away due to COVID," read one Tweet. The person later said help had been found.

Protsahan India Foundation, a children's rights NGO, said its frontline workers recently attended to children who had gone with-

out food for days after their mother, the main caregiver, passed away.

"The father is a daily wage worker and is in a state of shock and trauma himself. We are helping with food and immediate care, education and protection needs of those kids," said Sonal Kapoor, founder-director at Protsahan.

In the state of Karnataka, home to the tech city of Bengaluru and an epicentre of the second wave, the government has appointed an official to identify children orphaned by COVID-19 ensure they receive appropriate support.

The state this week also ramped up messaging around children's safety and appealed to citizens not to seek help online from unknown groups.

In the capital New Delhi, the city-state's child protection arm this week wrote to the police asking them to investigate posts on social media calling for urgent adoptions.

"They may also be cases of trafficking and sale-purchase of the children," the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights warned.

65 foreign doctors unpaid for a year: AIIMS Doctors to PM

NEW DELHI: The Resident Doctors Association (RDA) of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) said that 65 foreign nationals, including those from Nepal, training at the institute have not received their salaries.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the RDA recalled that in May of 2018, he had assured the Prime Minister of Nepal that the matter regarding the release of stipend to Nepalese Foreign National doctors would be looked into expeditiously by the Indian

Government.

They stated that the Ministry of External Affairs had inter-alia informed the MOHFW "to ensure concrete progress with the directive of the Prime Minister by mid-September 2018".

Out of the 151 Nepalese doctors training at AIIMS in New Delhi, PGI in Chandigarh and JIPMER Puducherry, 65 working at AIIMS are yet to receive their salaries.

"All of these 65 foreign national Doctors in AIIMS New Delhi, over and above their regular

clinical duties are also performing Covid duties since March 2020. They are performing such duties even by putting their own life ... They are not being paid a single penny towards a stipend, despite explicit and clear directions in ... July 2018," the letter read.

Additionally, the letter stated that not a single doctor, out of 65 working at AIIMS were distinguishable or severable in the eyes of law with the Nepalese doctors working in PGI Chandigarh and JIPMER.

"...Even undergraduate and intern doctors are also being allowed honorarium. Whereas throughout the civilised world, it is not permissible to draw a distinction between the duties and responsibilities of a professionally trained doctor undergoing post-graduate training and interns," it added.

The RDA requested that the health minister or the Director of AIIMS be asked to release emoluments of the 65 Foreign National Doctors immediately.

"Have to shut everything till May 15": Madhya Pradesh declares lockdown

BHOPAL, 06 MAY [PTI]: The Madhya Pradesh government has announced a complete lockdown in the state till May 15 to bring under control the coronavirus surge that has overwhelmed health infrastructures across the country. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the state can't remain open with an 18 per cent case positivity rate.

"To break the chain of transmission of the coronavirus in the state, we have to completely shut everything till May 15 -- strict 'Janata Curfew'," he said.

"We can't shut things for too long but with more than 18% positivity, we can't remain open," he added.

On Thursday, Madhya Pradesh reported 12,421 coronavirus cases and 86 fatalities in 24 hours.

A total of 12,965 pa-

tients were discharged from hospitals in 24 hours, taking the count of recoveries to 5,42,632, according to official data.

The number of active cases in the state is 88,614.

Several states, including Delhi, Bihar and Maharashtra, have imposed lockdowns or lockdown-like restrictions to bring down active caseloads brought on by the rapid second wave of infections. Many of these states had been reluctant to impose severe restrictions as they could severely harm their economies.

However, acute shortages of hospital beds and life-saving medical supplies because of the rapidly growing caseloads forced them to make the tough choice between lives and livelihoods.

India has been constantly reporting more than

three lakh daily cases and thousands of deaths every day. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had last month urged states to use complete lockdowns as the last

resort. However, with the surge causing mayhem in several parts of the country, many politicians are now demanding a nationwide shutdown.



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Join the Dots

For real empowerment, demand information and process it

What does one do with information?

Use them as dots to draw the larger picture. Information empowers not because it informs, but because this information provides the basis on which opinions are made. The process of joining the dots has to be done by the receivers of the information and if they become lazy and cede the task to others, they run the risk of being shown a picture which is not necessarily the one that the dots would have inked. They run the risk of becoming recipients of projections manipulated by the draftsmen presenting it. That is a risky proposition and actually quite inexcusable in these times of substantial literacy and reasonably good access to authentic updates. People have to stop remaining passive recipients of interpretations and seek out information, demand reliability and then distill an understanding out of the information. Don't demand authenticity and accountability, and you tempt the providers of information to infect information with their biases and projections. And that is where the crumble begins because once the medium carrying information starts inflecting information with its preferences, biases and suspicions, it is only a matter of time before the medium also starts 'censoring' information, passing on only what its deems right and useful.

That cannot be good because the compromise and colouring begins too early in such a process. What the people at large should endorse is information as untouched by opinion as possible because an opinion is for them to make, because once public opinion has formed, the public representatives are required to come up with matching policy decisions and course corrections.

This exercise has worked well for Sikkim in the recent past. The Sikkim Anti-Drugs Act, for instance, evolved from a joining the dots process when policy-makers responded to increased media coverage of addiction and of over-dose deaths in the State and decided that a new law was required to keep a generation safe. Conscious reporting on suicides has also at least succeeded in convincing Sikkim that suicides are a worry. Unfortunately, these were top-down initiatives and not policy interventions brought about by social consciousness. That is unfortunate because if these policy interventions had come about because of civil society pressure, they would have definitely been more effective initiatives. Ask any recovering addict whether SADA has helped combat substance, and you will most likely be greeted with a scoff. Look at the suicide figures for Sikkim and they have shown no reduction despite Sikkim-wide realisation that this was an area of concern.

The failure is not the government's, but the people's because although they have received the 'dots' [with the daily coverage of these issues], they are not joining them themselves.

When one says stop being passive, one means, start thinking after you read, say, even a mundane report about a co-ordination meeting. Most coordination meetings are still scratching the basic levels about directing who should be doing what when one would expect more refined levels to have been attained by now. For instance, when one reads of directions having been passed for officers to make more site visits and tours of the 'districts', more people should wonder why this was not already being done. Ditto for the still continuing awareness programmes for organic farming. The continuing cycle of awareness camps repeating routine information should have people wondering about their effectiveness. Once people start doing this, the quality of service delivery will be forced to improve. Once they develop a more enquiring attitude, they will also receive the respect of being served more effective delivery by government servants and more intelligent political debates, not routine charades of crying wolf by one side and claims and denials by the other. The march to empowerment would have begun.

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COVID Crisis in India: Why its Public Health Strategy Failed

ANKUR MUTREJA

THECONVERSATION.COM

Most countries have used what's known as the Swiss cheese model in planning their COVID response. In this risk-management model, each preventative measure is represented by a slice of cheese. No slice on its own can stop the virus from spreading because it has holes (flaws). But many slices, stacked one in front of the other, are enough to stop the contagion. In India – to continue the analogy – some of the holes were too big in three of the most important layers.

The first layer (as shown in the diagram below) is physical distancing – a tall order for India. India's cities are densely populated and made denser by the daily arrival of millions of migrant workers who do most of the menial work.

The second layer is the proper use of masks and enhanced sanitation. This was always expected to be unreliable because of India's low literacy rates and patchy social compliance. Excruciatingly hot weather in parts of the country, which can get to 48°C-50°C in peak summer, doesn't help either.

SWISS CHEESE RISK MODEL

The final layer is mass vaccination. This measure has been severely dented from the beginning. High rates of vaccine hesitancy and, more recently, vaccine shortage are to blame. India has partially or fully vaccinated just 12% of its population. The challenge of vaccinating the vast majority of people in such a large, populous and demographically complex country was always going to be difficult.

During the first wave, India's lockdown was one of the strictest in the world. And the stigma of dying from a new unknown disease encouraged people to wear masks. So two of the three primary layers of protection mentioned above, worked well to protect India from widespread infection.

In the second wave, however, the prolonged and harmonious failure of all the three basic layers resulted in a catastrophic blow to India's already



ready busy infectious disease landscape and strained healthcare system.

A study known as a serosurvey, conducted in February 2021 in New Delhi, showed that over 56% of the population had antibodies to the coronavirus. This number could have only increased in the months that followed. However, it's not clear if the antibodies are as effective against the new circulating variants.

The limited viral genomic sequencing in India makes it difficult to conclusively blame either of the two most reported circulating variants B117 (first detected in the UK) and B1617 (first detected in India) or any other yet unknown variant.

TOO RELAXED BY FAR

With other contributors, such

as the government's relaxation of restrictions on holding religious gatherings, election rallies, sporting events (until just before the new surge) and social and festive celebrations, it is not surprising that the COVID response layers were torn apart by this highly opportunistic virus, causing the devastation we are seeing today.

India is now reporting the highest number of cases in the world, with over 1 million recorded every three days. This has put an enormous strain on the mostly privately run diagnostic industry. The diagnoses that used to be made available in less than 24 hours are now taking up to five days in some cases.

This has resulted in several patients dying without even consider-

ing a trip to the hospital. And those lucky enough to get to a hospital are fairly sick by that point, making recovery all the harder, or already on the mend and don't need to be in hospital.

This crisis in India reminds us how an out-of-control public health situation and healthcare infrastructure failure can lead to a much higher mortality rate than would otherwise be the case. It is an important lesson for every country that healthcare systems should be prepared, poised for another potential surge, until we are all safe as one world.

[the writer is Group Leader, Global Health (Infectious Diseases), University of Cambridge]

How the Trees in Your Local Park Help Protect You From Disease

JAKE M ROBINSON, MARTIN BREED & ROSS CAMERON

THECONVERSATION.COM

On your next visit to the park, try and count all the different species you can see. Away from the closely mown grass, you might spot wildflowers attended by pollinating insects, like bees, wasps and hoverflies. Overhead there are the gnarled branches of mature trees, some of which will have lived for hundreds of years, providing food and refuge for generations of fungi and insects.

You may find yourself immersed in the chorus of songbirds fervently competing for mates. There will undoubtedly be fleet-footed mammals scurrying in the bushes and amphibians hiding under logs.

But there's also another world of wildlife floating all around you. This is the biodiversity that we can't see with the naked eye – the secret life of the air we breathe.

INVISIBLE NATURE

The air is full of microscopic life forms: dense clouds of bacteria, tiny fungi and algae which surround us. There are single-celled organisms called protozoans and vast quantities of viruses, moss spores and plant pollen. There may even be a few microscopic moss-dwelling animals called tardigrades, also known as water bears or moss piglets because of their mammal-like appearance (under the microscope, at least).

Humans are bombarded by all these tiny organisms on a daily basis. Studies have shown that up to a million microbial cells can be found in a single cubic metre of air, and people can inhale a whopping 100 million bacteria each day.

But where does all this invisible life come from? And what does our exposure to it mean for our health? Together with colleagues, we set out to discover the kinds of microbes people are likely to encounter during walks in urban parks.

Our recent study in Scientific Reports suggested that many of the life forms floating in the air actually originate in the soil beneath our feet. This makes a lot of sense. Soil is arguably the



most biodiverse habitat on Earth, and a single gram of it can contain more microbes than there are humans on the planet.

Microbes are incredibly light, so they become airborne really easily and are carried far and wide on the wind. They can be lifted from the soil in air bubbles that form in raindrops and clump together on dust particles which fall from the atmosphere.

Our study showed that distinct layers of bacteria form in the air, with different species and quantities of microbes occurring at different heights. At the average head-height of a standing adult, there were fewer but also different kinds of bacteria compared with those in the air lower down at the head height of a child or sitting adult.

This means that we may be exposed to different kinds of microbes – some good for us, some bad – depending on our height and posture. Exposure to lots of different types of microbial life, particularly in childhood, is generally considered to be a good thing, because it allows our immune systems to build up a strong army of cells that protect us from pathogens. The greater number of microbial species we detected closer to the ground could be vital in ensuring children develop robust immunity later in life.

But it also matters which environments we spend time in. After collecting 135 samples, we

found that the air in the wooded areas of an urban park near Adelaide in Australia contained more bacterial species but fewer potential human pathogens than nearby sports fields. Trees appear to filter the microbial communities in a given airspace, reducing the risk of exposure to microbes that cause disease. Because trees also seem to increase microbial diversity in the air, allowing more of them to grow in urban areas could provide an important health benefit by enhancing our immune systems.

This wouldn't only benefit human health. Although we can't see the microbes and the other members of the microscopic world around us, they're fundamental to the proper functioning of ecosystems, plant health and communication (yes, plants talk to each other), and even climate regulation.

We still know relatively little about the unseen life in the air we breathe, but our preliminary findings reveal a few of their secrets. We would be wise to learn and encourage them in the important roles they play.

[Jake M Robinson is Ecologist and PhD Researcher, Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield; Martin Breed is Lecturer in Biology, Flinders University; Ross Cameron is Senior Lecturer, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Sheffield]

Ladakh reports 251 fresh COVID cases, 131 recovered

LEH, MAY 6 (PTI): Ladakh has reported 251 fresh COVID-19 cases, taking the overall tally to 14,811, while 131 people have recovered from the infection, officials said on Thursday.

The total number of active cases in the union territory has reached 1,494, including 1,264 in Leh district and 230 in Kargil district, they said.

A total of 151 people have died due to the infection in Ladakh, including 107 deaths in Leh and 44 in Kargil since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Of the new cases reported during the past 24 hours, the officials said 182 were detected in Leh and 69 others in Kargil.

They said a total of 131 patients - 115 in Leh and 16 in Kargil - were discharged after successful treatment, taking the number of recoveries to 13,166, which accounted for over 89 per cent of the total cases.

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SANGAM PRASAIN KATHMANDU, 06 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]: Four sherpas who were evacuated from the Dhaulagiri base camp to Kathmandu after developing Covid-19 like symptoms on Tuesday tested positive for the virus on Wednesday, raising concerns if it has spread to the Everest base camp too.

"Four have tested positive. Nine other climbers will be evacuated from Dhaulagiri on Thursday for tests in Kathmandu," said Mingma Sherpa, chairman of Seven Summit Treks, Nepal's largest expedition outfitter. "There are no reports of Covid-19 infections at the Everest base camp this week, but we can't say that Everest is virus-free. We don't know if climbers are hiding the disease."

The first summit bid on Everest has been planned for Sunday (May 9).

An official at the Himalayan Rescue Association said at least two dozen climbers had been found suffering from "serious coughing" at the Everest base camp. But they don't know if it is due to "Khumbu cough" or Covid-19, as in both cases the lungs fill with fluid and the sufferers have similar symptoms.

"We are not sure. Tests are not done at the base camp," Lakpa Norbu Sherpa, who has been coordinating rescue missions on Everest since 2003 as the base camp manager of the Himalayan Rescue Association, told the Post.

Khumbu cough is a high-altitude cough and is caused by a combination of high altitude and low relative humidity. It can be severe enough in some instances to result in broken ribs.

Spanish climber Kilian Jornet said on his Facebook page that "... Even if in the mountains the situation is much better, the base camp has a high concentration of people and has seen some cases."

"It's important for all to remember to keep the



sanitation measures and distance even up there..." wrote Jornet who is currently acclimatising on the foothills of Everest.

On April 15, a Norwegian climber Erlend Ness reportedly complained of cough and fever, also symptoms of Covid-19, at Everest base camp; and was immediately airlifted to a hospital in Kathmandu. He was later diagnosed with Covid-19. Ness quit the expedition because he could not be exposed to high altitudes again.

Another climber, Steve Davis, a member of the Elite Himalayan team, also tested positive for the virus.

The incident stoked concerns among the mountaineering community if the coronavirus had made it to the Everest base camp, where around 2,000 people have gathered.

But the government and mountaineering officials dismissed reports of a Covid-19 outbreak on Everest.

On Wednesday, Alan Arnette, a prominent Everest chronicler and climber, wrote in his blog that there was "good news" on Everest.

"Again, I can confirm firsthand that several, if not many, of the 44 teams on Everest haven't had a single case," he wrote in his blog.

"Good luck or good planning, probably a bit

of both. I know of cases where well-intentioned individuals have become infected through no wrongdoing or poor judgment; it happens," added Arnette. "I have no idea how I got infected since I was following all the rules to the letter. It happens. Of course, some teams have been lax in following protocols, allowing visitors, no masks, poor hygiene, and they have become infected in large ratios compared to others."

He further wrote, "But the good news is that teams are reacting quickly to isolate individuals and evacuate those showing symptoms to Kathmandu for treatment. In some cases, people are returning to base camp to continue their climb; however, I would go home if it was me!"

This year, 408 climbers, including one from the "other gender" category, have received Everest climbing permits. This is the highest number of permits authorities have issued since the peak was first climbed in 1953.

"As of Wednesday, everything is normal at the base camp," Mira Acharya, director of the Department of Tourism, told the Post from the Everest base camp.

Nepal on Wednesday reported another highest single-day toll of 58 Covid-19 deaths and a

new daily record of 8,605 infections.

The country saw record high daily coronavirus cases and deaths for two consecutive days. This is the first time since the beginning of the pandemic last year that Nepal has recorded over 8,000 new cases. The total death toll now stands at 3,475.

While some rescue officials said that more than two dozen climbers had been evacuated from the Everest base camp as of last week, everything is 'ok' this week.

Pratap Jung Pandey, director of Kailash Air, said they made several evacuation flights from the Everest base camp in the past week, including one on Wednesday.

"But we have not been informed by any hospital for contact tracing," Pandey told the Post. "Even when hospitals do not tell us about contact tracing, we send our staff for tests if we suspect an infection."

Nepal Mountaineering Association, the country's top mountaineering body, ruled out a Covid-19 outbreak on Everest.

"That there is a Covid-19 outbreak on Everest is just a rumour," said Santa Bir Lama, president of the association. "Some cases of Covid-19 were reported among the climbers evacuat-

ed from the base camp three weeks ago. But now, everything is fine. There is nothing to worry about."

Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks said they have their 12 camps at the Everest base camp which house altogether 500 people, including 130 Everest aspirants.

"None of my clients has developed Covid-19 symptoms," he said.

Dawa Steven Sherpa, CEO of Asian Trekking, said his agency was handling 60 groups of Everest and Lhotse climbers, and all were fine.

"Everything is fine in my camp. We have isolated ourselves and have followed all health safety measures," he told the Post from the Everest base camp.

Two weeks ago, the Department of Tourism had issued a circular to all expedition outfitters asking climbers not to mix with other groups.

Acharya, who is also the head of the mountaineering division at the department, said they had issued orders to fix ropes separating the tents.

It costs \$40,000 to \$90,000 per person to reach the highest point on earth, depending on the extent of support the climber needs in terms of guides and supplies. This amount includes the climbing permit cost of \$11,000.

'Government not 24 hours old, but...': Mamata Banerjee on central team

KOLKATA, 06 MAY [NDTV]: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee today took a swipe at the centre over sending a team to look into violence in the state after the results of the assembly election were announced last week. The Trinamool Congress, which won the election for a third term, and the BJP have accused each other as behind clashes reported from across the state.

Ms Banerjee, in an allusion to frequent confrontations it often had with the centre in the last few years, asked the BJP-led centre to refrain from sending central teams over matters that may not exist.

"It's not yet been 24 hours since the government took over and they are sending teams and ministers here," said Ms Banerjee, who took charge as Chief Minister for a third time. "Anyone who comes from outside, even by special flights, we want RT-PCR tests and there will be no discrimination with anyone."

The Home Ministry has sent a four-member

team to assess the ground situation in Bengal. Reports from across the state and posts on social media have alleged Trinamool workers of attacking BJP workers and supporters. The Trinamool has pointed out many of them are fake reports. The Home Ministry had asked the Bengal government to take necessary measures to stop such incidents "without any loss of time".

Ms Banerjee has announced ₹ 2 lakh compensation for the families of anyone who died as a result of political violence.

"Some central ministers are instigating riots in Bengal even after elections. We have banned all political gatherings. They (BJP) cannot accept the people's verdict, so they are indulging in this. Violence is happening in places where the BJP has got votes," Ms Banerjee said today.

BJP chief JP Nadda, who is also in the state on a two-day visit to look into the violence, has claimed that 14 BJP workers have been killed and nearly one lakh people have fled their homes.

Bank of England maintains rates, voices optimism on recovery

LONDON (AP): The Bank of England will keep interest rates on hold and has grown more optimistic about the economic recovery in the U.K. this year as a result of the rapid rollout of coronavirus vaccines.

In a prepared statement Thursday, the nine-member Monetary Policy Committee said it will maintain the bank's main interest rate at 0.1%. The unanimous and widely anticipated decision means that interest rates will remain at the lowest level in the bank's 327-year history.

Alongside its decision, the bank's rate-setting panel said growth is likely to be greater than it previously thought in the coming quarters largely due to the rapid rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, and that the easing

of lockdown restrictions should spur consumer spending.

"A fast and effective vaccine rollout meant that many individuals might feel safe to return to pre-COVID spending behaviour, supplemented by considerable pent-up demand from the earlier periods of restrictions," the committee said, according to minutes of their meeting.

In updated forecasts accompanying the rate decision, the bank is now projecting U.K. economic growth of 7.25% in 2021, up from its previous forecast of 5%. Because it anticipates growth being brought forward, it has revised down its forecasts for next year. It is now expects 5.75% growth in 2022, instead of the 7.25% previously predicted.

Book highlights legacy of Assamese polymath Sankaradeva

NEW DELHI, MAY 6 (PTI): A new book seeks to highlight the uniqueness of Assam's medieval polymath Srimanta Sankaradeva's multifaceted contributions in various fields and how he shaped the sociocultural fabric of the state.

"Essays on Srimanta Sankaradeva" by Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti, who has carried out extensive research on Assamese hagiographies, particularly Sankaradeva and different aspects of Sankari culture, contains several analytical articles, a few of them that have already been published in different journals or websites.

These articles deal with the Vaishnavite saint's contributions, which are quite relevant for knowing Assam's remarkable contributions in the spiritual and literary ecosystems, says Borkakoti.

"The social structure

as well as the literature and culture of Assam were deeply enriched by him. His contributions pervade all the spheres," he writes in the book, published by Authorspress.

Though many diverse issues mentioned in the book apparently seem not to be linked together, they actually are interlinked as Sankaradeva worked in all these areas, according to the author.

"The diverse aspects also reflect on the lives and culture of Assam, the characteristic contributions of its people as shaped by Srimanta Sankaradeva. Study of the contributions of Srimanta Sankaradeva gives us a holistic understanding about the Assamese society," the book says.

It features the institutions created by Sankaradeva and also does comparative studies. Matters like aesthetics, feminism, philosophy,

sustainable development etc, as seen by Sankaradeva, are covered in the analyses.

Borkakoti, however, rues that strangely very little is known about Sankaradeva outside Assam and his pivotal contributions have been almost forgotten for lack of research.

He says Sankaradeva should be reckoned as an unusual genius among all saints of India.

"The ideology of 'Eka Sarana' (meaning refuge in one entity alone) preached by him is not found in any other religious leader of India. It was a unique contribution of Srimanta Sankaradeva to the spiritual lore of this great nation," argues Borkakoti.

Sankaradeva was a pioneer in the resurgence movement of the Indian regional languages and can be considered the first playwright in all the modern Indian lan-

guages.

He propagated the Ankiya plays which comprised dance, music and story-telling. Just like dance, he created a new classical school of music, in association with his foremost disciple, Madhavadeva. This school, which came into being with the songs Bargeet composed by them, is termed as Sankari music.

"This Sankari school of music was developed even before the other two classical schools of music in India, the Hindustani school and the Carnatic school, were evolved," says Borkakoti.

A new school of painting was also developed by Sankaradeva, just like his dance and music.

"He initiated this new form of painting with his epoch-making drama 'Chihn-Yatra', which was enacted in 1468 AD at Tembuwani.

Incidentally this happened to be the first play in any modern Indian language," the book says, adding it launched the regional drama movement in medieval India.

"Sankaradeva depicted seven 'Vaikuntha' (heaven) in scrolls, which were used as backdrops there. It was the first recorded instance of Sankaradeva's painting work and it laid the foundation of the Sankari art form.

"This new school of painting found expressions in the illustrations of his manuscripts, in the costumes and masks worn by the actors in his plays, and in the illustrations of the altar Gurua-sana placed in the unique prayer-house, Kirttanghar," the book says.

It also discusses in detail about the xatras and how these Vaishnavite institutions created by Sankaradeva stand out as unique models of self-sufficiency.

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Canadian boxer Many Bujold fighting for Olympic berth

TORONTO, MAY 6 (AP): Mandy Bujold would have preferred fighting this battle in the ring. Instead, the Tokyo Olympics fate for Canada's best boxer lies in the hands of the Court of Arbitration for Sport after her qualifying tournament was scrapped due to the pandemic.

Bujold and her lawyer, Sylvie Rodrigue, lost their appeal to the International Olympic Committee earlier this week, leaving CAS as her last chance to box in what would be her final Olympics.

"I had been hopeful (about the IOC's decision)," Bujold told The Canadian Press on Wednesday.

"But they did not even address the issues in our letter, which is really unfortunate, right? You think of the Olympics and the principles of Olympism, you think about fairness, you think about sportsmanship, you think about all these things that make the Olympics what they are, and make me proud to be an Olympian and to get this response was really tough."

After a competitive year erased by COVID-19, the 11-time national fly-weight champion had been confident she'd clinch a berth at the qual-



ifying tournament this month in Buenos Aires. The event was recently canceled amid coronavirus cases in Argentina.

With no remaining international competitions for boxers from the Americas, athletes were selected on a revised ranking system using three events between 2018 and 2019 events Bujold didn't compete in because they conflicted with her maternity leave. Bujold's daughter Kate was born on Nov. 5, 2018.

Rodrigue calls Bujold's situation a human rights violation and discrimination case. In the Olympic Boxing Task Force's revised ranking system for Tokyo, "it's

like Mandy has never been ranked in the world," Rodrigue said.

"What we say is the fact that they do not accommodate pregnant or postpartum athletes by recognizing their rankings pre-pregnancy, they are violating the rights of the athletes from a gender equity and from a discrimination standpoint," she said.

The 33-year-old Bujold had planned to retire after the Tokyo Games, and had already pushed back her departure for a year after the Olympics were postponed to 2021.

"I've been training for this opportunity, for this final moment

to kind of close this chapter of my career, and now not even being able to have that opportunity, that's really tough," she said.

Both the Canadian Olympic Committee and Boxing Canada wrote letters in support of her appeal to the IOC, Bujold said.

The continental qualifiers were originally scheduled for last March, but were scrapped due to the pandemic. Adding to the frustration, the European qualifying event is still happening next month in Paris.

Bujold said a European boxer with an identical story she had a baby and took maternity leave around the same time

is just one fight from punching her ticket to Tokyo.

Whatever the CAS rules, there was never a doubt Bujold would pursue this battle to the end.

"I think about when I'm preparing for a fight in the ring, I make sure that I do everything possible to give myself the opportunity to win. And, that's exactly what we're doing right now, in a different type of fight," she told CP.

Bujold, a two-time Pan American Games champion who was previously ranked No. 2 in the Americas, would be the first Canadian woman to box in back-to-back Olympics. Her Rio Olympics ended in heartbreak due to illness; hours before her quarterfinal bout she was in hospital on an I.V.

Her goal was to close her career with a medal in Tokyo.

Now with everything in doubt, it's not easy some days to go to the gym.

"At the end of the day, I'm trusting Sylvie, I'm trusting her team to fight for me," she said.

"So, I need to be prepared and do my part by staying ready, and staying in shape. So until there's a final conclusion, at the end of all of this, I need to just stay ready."

COVID-19 positives Hussey and Balaji flown to Chennai in air ambulance



CHENNAI, MAY 6 (PTI): Chennai Super Kings batting and bowling coach Michael Hussey and L. Balaji, who were diagnosed with COVID-19, have been flown into the city from Delhi in an air ambulance, a top franchise official said on Thursday.

Hussey and Balaji were among the prominent non-playing staff to test positive when the IPL was "indefinitely suspended" on Tuesday, following multiple COVID-19 cases inside the bio-bubble.

"We decided to bring Hussey and Balaji to Chennai by an air ambulance as we have better contacts here and wanted to ensure better medical facilities in case of any

need," the CSK official told PTI.

He further said the duo were "asymptomatic and doing fine."

The CSK official said Hussey would have to wait for a COVID-19 negative report to be able to leave the country.

"Hussey has to wait and get a COVID negative report before he can leave India. We will make arrangements for a charter when it is safe for him to fly," the official added.

While Hussey will have to wait, rest of the Australians participating in the IPL on Thursday left for Maldives to serve out the waiting period before they can board a flight to Australia.

lia.

The CSK official said the franchise made arrangements for the foreign players of the team to leave by charter planes.

The official also informed that CSK skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni would leave for his hometown in the afternoon once all his team members head for their respective hometowns.

The 2021 edition of the IPL was suspended after four players -- Sun Risers Hyderabad batsman Wriddhiman Saha, Delhi Capitals' spinner Amit Mishra and KKR's Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep Warrier -- tested positive for COVID-19 in the bio-bubble.

Pfizer and BioNTech to donate vaccines for Olympic athletes



LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND (AP): Vaccine developers Pfizer and BioNTech will donate doses to inoculate athletes and officials preparing for the Tokyo Olympics, the IOC said Thursday.

Delivery of doses is set to begin this month to give Olympic delegations time to be fully vaccinated with a second shot before arriving in Tokyo for the games, which open on July 23.

It's the second major vaccination deal for the International Olympic Committee. An agreement was announced in March between the IOC and Olympic officials in China to buy and

distribute Chinese vaccines ahead of the Tokyo Games and next year's Beijing Winter Games.

The new Pfizer offer gives the IOC greater coverage worldwide ahead of Tokyo with most countries yet to authorize emergency use of Chinese vaccines.

"We are inviting the athletes and participating delegations of the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Games to lead by example and accept the vaccine where and when possible," IOC President Thomas Bach said in a statement.

The Pfizer donation followed talks between the firm's chairman and

CEO, Albert Bourla, and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

"Following this conversation, the Japanese government had a meeting with the IOC and now the donation plan has been realized," Pfizer said in a statement.

The IOC said any vaccination program must be done "in accordance with each country's vaccination guidelines and consistent with local regulations."

The IOC-China vaccine deal includes two doses being made available to the general public for each dose received by an Olympic participant in that country.

IPL departures: Aussies fly out, New Zealand contingent leaves on Friday

NEW DELHI, MAY 6 (PTI): The Australians flew off to Maldives, the South Africans headed home and the ones from New Zealand waited to be sent back on Friday as the suspended IPL's foreign cricketers bid adieu to India, hoping that the country recovers from the mayhem unleashed by a second wave of COVID-19 cases.

The 40-strong Australian contingent, except for a COVID-positive Mike Hussey, left for Maldives on Thursday to serve out the waiting period before they can board a flight to Australia once the travel restrictions end on May 15.

"We can confirm that Australian players, coaches, match officials and commentators have been safely transported from India and are en route to the Maldives," Cricket Australia stated in a press release.

"The Australians will remain in Maldives until the conclusion of the travel pause pertaining to flights from India to Australia," it added.

The IPL was suspended on Tuesday after four players and two coaching staff members from three different teams tested positive for COVID-19 inside the bio-bubble.

Of the 40 Australians involved in the league after three early pull-outs, 14 were players, including mega-stars such as David Warner, Pat Cummins, and Steve Smith among others.

The 11 South Africans in the league boarded flights for Jo-



hannesburg as their country has not imposed any restrictions on travel from India, which recorded more than 4 lakh COVID-19 cases on Thursday and close to 4,000 deaths.

"My constant prayers is with the people from India to get through this. Pls Take care of yourselves," Proteas star Faf du Plessis, who turned up Chennai Super Kings, posted on Instagram.

Hussey, the batting coach of Chennai Super Kings, was brought to Chennai from Delhi in an air ambulance and will be in a quarantine there to recover from the infection.

"Mike is experiencing mild symptoms and is in the care of his franchise Chennai Super Kings," Cricket Australia (CA) stated.

The body thanked the BCCI for its assistance in ensuring that players

were able to leave India within two days of the league's suspension owing to COVID-19 cases inside its bio-bubble.

"CA and the ACA extend their sincere thanks to the BCCI for their responsiveness in moving the Australians from India to the Maldives...", the statement read.

On the wait-list were the Black Caps. Four members of their Test contingent, including captain Kane Williamson, will head for the United Kingdom on May 11 while the rest will make their way back home on Friday, the country's cricket board announced.

New Zealand are scheduled to play hosts England in a two-match Test series, beginning on June 2, before facing India in the World Test Championships final at Southampton from June 18.

"We've worked closely with the BCCI and the IPL franchises on the various departure strategies and we're very appreciative of their support during what is, clearly, a very challenging time," New Zealand Cricket (NZC) chief executive David White said in a statement on Thursday.

Williamson, pacer Kyle Jamieson and spinner Mitchell Santner, as well as physio Tommy Simsek, will remain in a mini-bubble in New Delhi before departing for the UK, ahead of preparations for the Test series against England, and the WTC final against India.

There were 17 New Zealanders involved in the IPL, including 10 players.

NZC said May 11 is the earliest date it could obtain for the team's arrival in the UK.

However, pace

spearhead Trent Boult will return home briefly to see his family before joining the Test squad in early June, for the second match against England and the WTC final.

"...Boult will leave MIQ (Managed Isolation and Quarantine) on May 22 and will spend a week at home with his family, training at Mt Maunganui before departing for the UK in early June," NZC stated.

White said IPL players, support staff and commentators returning to New Zealand would adhere to all regulatory protocols, including pre-departure COVID-19 tests.

Those returning to New Zealand on Friday from India also include Stephen Fleming, Brendon McCullum, Kyle Mills, Shane Bond, Mike Hesson, Tim Seifert, Adam Milne, Scott Kugeleijn and James Pamment.

Shikhar Dhawan receives first dose of COVID-19 vaccine

NEW DELHI, MAY 6 (PTI): Indian cricket team's senior opener Shikhar Dhawan on Thursday said he has received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

The 35-year-old batsman was part of the Delhi Capitals squad in the Indian Premier League that was indefinitely suspended on Tuesday due to multiple COVID-19 cases in its bio-bubble.

"Vaccinated. Can't thank all our frontline warriors enough for their sacrifices and dedication. Please do not hesitate and get yourself vaccinated as soon as possible. It'll help us all defeat this virus," Dhawan tweeted.

Head coach Ravi Shastri was the first from the Indian cricket team to receive the vaccine. He got his first jab in the first week of March, when vac-

cination was made open for all senior citizens.

In order to ramp up the coronavirus vaccination drive in the country, the Indian government had last month announced a "liberalised and accelerated" Phase 3 strategy of COVID-19 vaccination from May 1.

Everyone above the age of 18 to be eligible to get COVID-19 vaccine, said the government.

Ramadan in China: Faithful dwindle under limits on religion

KASHGAR, CHINA (AP): Tursunjan Mamat, a practicing Muslim in western China's Xinjiang region, said he's fasting for Ramadan but his daughters, ages 8 and 10, are not. Religious activity including fasting is not permitted for minors, he explained.

The 32-year-old ethnic Uyghur wasn't complaining, at least not to a group of foreign journalists brought to his home outside the city of Aksu by government officials, who listened in on his responses. It seemed he was giving a matter-of-fact description of how religion is practiced under rules set by China's Communist Party.

"My children know who our holy creator is, but I don't give them detailed religious knowledge," he said, speaking through a translator. "After they reach 18, they can receive religious education according to their own will."

Under the weight of official policies, the future of Islam appears precarious in Xinjiang, a rugged realm of craggy snow-capped mountains and barren deserts bordering Central Asia. Outside observers say scores of mosques have been demolished, a charge Beijing denies, and locals say the number of worshippers is sinking.

A decade ago, 4,000 to 5,000 people attended Friday prayers at the Id Kah Mosque in the historic Silk Road city of Kashgar. Now only 800 to 900 do, said the mosque's imam, Mamat Juma. He attributed the drop to a natural shift in values, not government policy, saying the younger generation wants to spend more time working than praying.

The Chinese government organized a five-day visit to Xinjiang in April for about a dozen foreign correspondents, part of an intense propaganda campaign to counter allegations of abuse. Officials repeatedly urged journalists to recount what they saw, not what China calls the lies of critical Western politicians and media.

Beijing says it protects freedom of religion, and citizens can practice their faith so long as they adhere to laws and regulations. In practice, any religious

activity must be done in line with restrictions evident at almost every stop in Xinjiang — from a primary school where the headmaster said fasting wasn't observed because of the "separation of religion and education," to a cotton yarn factory where workers are banned from praying on site, even in their dormitory rooms.

"Within the factory grounds, it's prohibited. But they can go home, or they can go to the mosque to pray," said Li Qiang, the general manager of Aksu Huafu Textiles Co. "Dormitories are for the workers to rest. We want them to rest well so that they can maintain their health."

By law, Chinese are allowed to follow Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Roman Catholicism or non-denominational Protestantism. In practice, there are limits. Workers are free to fast, the factory manager said, but they are required to take care of their bodies. If children fast, it's not good for their growth, said the Id Kah mosque's imam.

Researchers at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a think tank, said in a report last year that mosques have been torn down or damaged in what they called the deliberate erasure of Uyghur and Islamic culture. They identified 170 destroyed mosques through satellite imagery, about 30% of a sample they examined.

The Chinese government rejects ASPI research, which also has included reports on Beijing's efforts to influence politics in Australia and other Western democracies, as lies promoted by "anti-China forces."

The government denies destroying mosques and allegations of mass incarcerations and forced labor that have strained China's relations with Western governments. They say they have spent heavily on upgrading mosques, outfitting them with fans, flush toilets, computers and air conditioners.

Xinjiang's biggest ethnic minority is Uyghurs, a predominantly Muslim group who are 10 million of the region's population of 25 million people. They have borne

the brunt of a government crackdown that followed a series of riots, bombings, and knifings, although ethnic Kazakhs and others have been swept up as well.

The authorities obstruct independent reporting in the region, though such measures have recently eased somewhat. AP journalists visiting Xinjiang on their own in recent years have been followed by undercover officers, stopped, interrogated and forced to delete photos or videos.

Id Kah Mosque, its pastel yellow facade overlooking a public square, is far from destroyed. Its imam toes the official line, and he spoke thankfully of the government largesse that has renovated the more than 500-year-old institution.

"There is no such thing as mosque demolition," Juma said, other than some rundown mosques taken down for safety renovations. Kashgar has been largely spared mosque destruction, the Australian institute report said.

Juma added he was unaware of mosques being converted to other uses, although AP journalists saw one turned into a cafe and others padlocked shut during visits in 2018.

The tree-lined paths of the Id Kah Mosque's grounds are tranquil, and it's easy to miss the three surveillance cameras keeping watch over whoever comes in. The imam's father and previous leader of the mosque was killed by extremists in 2014 for his pro-government stance.

About 50 people prayed before nightfall on a recent Monday evening, mostly elderly men. A Uyghur imam who fled China in 2012 called such scenes a staged show for visitors.

"They have a routine of making such a scene every time they need it," said Ali Akbar Dumallah in a video interview from Turkey. "People know exactly what to do, how to lie, it's not something new for them."

Staged or not, it appears Islam is on the decline. The ban on religious education for minors means that the young aren't gaining the knowledge they should,

Dumallah said.

"The next generation will accept the Chinese mindset," he said. "They'll still be called Uyghurs, but their mindset and values will be gone."

Officials say those who want to study Islam can do so after the age of 18 at a state-sponsored Islamic studies institute. At a newly-built campus on the outskirts of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, hundreds train to become imams according to a government-authored curriculum, studying a textbook with sections like "Patriotism is a part of faith" and "be a Muslim who loves the motherland, abide by the national constitution, laws and regulations."

"Continue the sinicization of Islam in our country," the foreword reads. "Guide Islam to adapt to a socialist society."

Though Islam lives on, the sinicization campaign has palpably reduced the role of religion in daily life.

Near Urumqi's grand bazaar, several dozen elderly men trickled out of a mosque during an unannounced visit by an AP journalist. Prayers continue as usual, the imam said, though attendance has fallen considerably. A jumbo screen showing state media coverage of top Chinese leaders hung above the entrance.

Down the street, the exterior at the Great White Mosque had been shorn of the Muslim profession of faith. On a Wednesday evening at prayer time, the halls were nearly empty, and worshippers had to go through x-rays, metal detectors and face-scanning cameras to enter.

Freedom of religion in China is defined as the freedom to believe — or not believe. It was a mantra repeated by many who spoke to the foreign journalists: It's not just that people have the right to fast or pray, they also have the right not to fast or pray.

"I really worry that the number of believers will decrease, but that shouldn't be a reason to force them to pray here," Juma said.

His mosque, which flies a Chinese national flag above its entrance, has been refurbished, but fewer and fewer people come.

Thailand assures foreign residents they can be vaccinated

BANGKOK (AP): Thailand sought Thursday to assure its foreign residents that they can get COVID-19 vaccinations, countering comments by some officials suggesting they would be at the end of the line for inoculations.

OpasKarnkawinpong, director-general of Thailand's Department of Disease Control, made the pledge as Thailand fought to control an outbreak in the heart of its capital that has sickened thousands of people in the past month, Thais and foreigners alike.

He said at least 70% of Thailand's population has to be inoculated to create "herd immunity" and that Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha "mentioned clearly that everyone on Thai soil, both Thais and foreigners, can access the vaccines."

"Foreigners and diplomats will have the same criteria as Thais," Opas said, adding that the country had a population of 67 million Thai nationals and 3 million foreigners.

More than 2.5 million foreigners in Thailand are from neighboring countries, including Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Many work on construction sites and in factories. The rest, about 200,000, are mostly professionals legally living in Thailand and retirees — from Australia, China, Britain, Europe, the United States and elsewhere.

Opas' comments came after some health



authorities had said foreigners legally living in the country would have to wait until the entire Thai population was inoculated to get shots.

With strict travel restrictions in place, many foreign residents would need to make time-consuming and expensive trips abroad to get the shots.

"We have followed international practice," he said. "Thais and foreigners including diplomats will be treated equally."

Thailand has been very slow and haphazard in its vaccination rollout and showed no sense of urgency until early April, when new infections began sweeping through slums and low-income areas located in and around Bangkok's central business district.

Less than 2% of all Thais have been inoculated for COVID-19, mostly health workers, but the government says it intends to vaccinate 70%

by the end of the year.

Until recently, Thailand had relatively few cases and less than 100 deaths. It only signed deals for the local manufacturing of AstraZeneca vaccines in late 2020, choosing at first only to import China's Sinovac vaccine.

The effort gained urgency as new cases surged to about 2,000 a day and deaths began escalating.

On Thursday, Thailand reported 1,911 new cases and 18 new deaths, bringing the total number of confirmed infections to 76,811, with 336 deaths. Of the total cases, 47,948 cases were since April 1, along with most deaths.

Thailand closed its borders to almost all travelers for months last year and it has been requiring visitors to the country to present tests showing they are not positive for COVID-19 and spend up to 14 days in mandatory

quarantines.

The latest outbreaks are a big setback for plans to allow fully vaccinated foreign visitors to enter the country with no quarantine to help revive the devastated tourism industry. Nearly 40 million tourists visited Thailand in 2019, compared to almost none after the government ordered the airports closed to most international travel in April 2020.

Critics of Thailand's handling of the crisis assert that local business interests played a role in delaying and limiting vaccination efforts.

Only three vaccines have been authorized for use in Thailand and only two have been administered so far: the AstraZeneca and Sinovac vaccines. The government now says it is trying to import U.S. and Russian-made vaccines, but they likely face a lengthy authorization process.

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SummitTIMES
PUBLISHED BY THE EDITOR

Palestinian arrested over West Bank attack after 3-day chase

JERUSALEM (AP): Israel's military and the Shin Bet security service said Thursday that they arrested a Palestinian suspect in a weekend drive-by shooting in the West Bank that left one Israeli dead and two injured.

Troops and Shin Bet operatives raided a building in the village of Silwad in the occupied West Bank, arresting MuntasserShalaby, 44. Shalaby, a Palestinian from the nearby village of TurmusAyya, had no known ties to militant groups, officials said. Local media reported that he also held U.S. citizenship. The U.S. embassy had no comment on the

report, citing privacy concerns.

The arrest came shortly after Defense Minister Benny Gantz announced that Yehuda Guetta, one of those wounded in Sunday's shooting, had died Wednesday of his injuries.

Guetta was buried Thursday morning in Jerusalem, amid statements of condolences from Israeli leaders.

Attending the funeral was Jonathan Pollard, an American who served a 30-year sentence in the U.S. for spying for Israel. He arrived in Israel to a hero's welcome in December.

"I had hoped and

prayed that my own sacrifice would prevent this type of tragedy," Pollard said at Thursday's service, which was attended by a large crowd. Many people were in tears. "The evil that took Yehuda has a power that is incredible. It doesn't cease, it doesn't stop. It shows no pity, it shows no remorse."

In the attack, a gunman had opened fire from a car at a group of Israelis standing at a busy West Bank intersection.

The death occurred during a recent uptick in violence coinciding with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Late Wednesday, Israeli

troops shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian during a confrontation in the village of Odla near the West Bank city of Nablus. The military said several Palestinians had thrown firebombs toward soldiers.

In recent days, protesters have scuffled with police over the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in east Jerusalem. Several Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah have been embroiled in a long-running legal battle with Israeli settler groups trying to acquire property in the neighborhood.

Ex-49ers player Hayne to spend nearly 4 years in jail

SYDNEY (AP): Jarryd Hayne, a rugby league star who also played briefly in the NFL for the San Francisco 49ers, has been sentenced to at least three years and eight months in jail for the sexual assault of a woman in 2018.

Hayne was found guilty in March of two counts of sexual assault.

A judge ruled on Thursday that Hayne should be jailed for five years, nine months with a non-parole period of three years and eight months. After the sentencing was announced, Hayne was taken away by corrective services officials.

Hayne was found not guilty of the two more serious charges of aggravated sexual assault without consent inflicting actual bodily harm.

The 33-year-old Hayne had denied assaulting the woman in the bedroom of her home in Newcastle, north of Sydney, in September 2018. Court testimony said Hayne had a taxi waiting out front of the woman's home while he was with her.

In handing down the sentence, District Court Judge Helen Syme said she found that Hayne was fully aware that the victim was not consenting and that he proceeded anyway.

"The reliability and honesty of the victim's evidence was tested at length and in my view, her reliability was not in doubt. She said no several times," Syme said. "The use of force was such that the victim had no prospect of stopping him physically. He was at least twice her weight at 100 kilograms (220 pounds) and an athlete at the top of his form. The



offender was fully aware the victim was not consenting."

The 28-year-old woman said in a victim impact statement that she was plagued by constant flashbacks of seeing Hayne's face during the sexual assault, adding that he destroyed her life and she would never be the same again.

"You don't owe somebody your body, nor should they expect it," the woman said. "My body remembers and my mind won't let me forget. This assault has changed me. It changed my direction and who I was. I don't remember the last time I had a proper sleep."

Hayne left the NRL and spent a season with the San Francisco 49ers in the NFL before returning to rugby league via a brief stint with Fiji's

rugby sevens squad in 2016. He has not played in the NRL since his contract with Parramatta expired in 2018.

From his time with the 49ers in 2015, Hayne was involved in a rape-related incident in December 2015. He later settled a civil case in which it was alleged he had assaulted a woman in California.

The case was dropped after the parties reached a "mutually agreeable settlement." The woman launched civil action after authorities failed to gather enough evidence to proceed with criminal charges.

The woman's attorney said "the parties reached a mutually agreeable settlement" but that the terms were private. Hayne at the time said he "unequivocally and vehemently denies the allegations."

Singer Arijit Singh's mother hospitalised

MUMBAI, MAY 6 (PTI): Playback singer Arijit Singh's mother has been admitted to a hospital in Kolkata, actor Swastika Mukherjee said on Thursday.

Mukherjee took to the social media to seek blood donors for the singer's mother, who has been admitted at AMRI Dhakuria in Kolkata.

"Need A- blood for singer Arijit Singh's mother, admitted in Amri Dhakuria. Need it today. Pls contact @swatihihhi with verified MALE DONORS," she wrote in her post on Twitter.

Bengali filmmaker Srijit Mukherjee also shared the news on Twitter and asked his followers to come forward and donate blood for Singh's mother.

"#Copied. Need A donor for singer Arijit Singh's mother in Dhakuria Amri tomorrow. Interested blood donors can contact Nitasha," he wrote.

Singh, known for singing popular tracks such as "Tum Hi Ho", "Channa-Mereya" and "Shayad", has not yet revealed the nature of his mother's ailment.



In his most recent post on Facebook on Thursday, the 34-year-old singer expressed his gratitude to healthcare personnel for leading the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

He also urged his followers to donate plasma for COVID-19 patients.

"Salute to those who are fighting

Covid-19 from the front but apart from them the way you all are helping each other with food, oxygen, beds etc, so much love from me," Singh wrote.

"I request you all who are eligible to donate blood plasma. A lot of people especially those with thalassemia are fighting with life right now. This is all we can do for them," he added.

Comedian, others booked for violating COVID norms at wedding

PHAGWARA (PUNJAB), MAY 6 (PTI): Comedian Sugandha Mishra was booked for allegedly flouting coronavirus norms during her wedding with counterpart Sanket Bhosale at a resort here last week, police said on Thursday. The case was registered on Wednesday night against her, the bridegroom's side, the owner of resort and participants of the marriage after a video went viral showing a large gathering of people at the wedding in violation of COVID-19

norms, Deputy Superintendent of Police Paramjit Singh said.

The marriage ceremony took place on April 26.

The case was registered under Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code and relevant sections of the Disaster Management Act, Singh said.

No arrest has yet been made, the DSP said, adding that an investigation was going on.



SUPER CHIC! The star, Megan Fox is spotted looking fabulous during a taping of The Kelly Clarkson Show in Universal City.

Blake Lively to star in adaptation of 'Lady Killer' comic book

LOS ANGELES, MAY 6 (PTI): Hollywood star Blake Lively has signed on to headline the Netflix feature "Lady Killer", based on the Dark Horse Comic series.

According to Entertainment Weekly, "The Rhythm Section" actor will also serve as producer on the film to be adapted by Oscar-winning writer Diablo Cody.

"Lady Killer" is a comic book series written by Joelle Jones and Jamie S Rich, illustrated by Jones, and coloured by Laura Allred.

In the film, Lively will play Josie Schuller, who, on the face of it, is the perfect 1950's housewife. But when she's not catering to the needs of her family, she leads a secret life as a highly-trained killer for hire.

The picture will be produced by Mike Richardson and Keith Goldberg of Dark Horse Entertainment along with Lively and Kate Vorhoff for B for Effort.

Cody, whose scripting credits include "Juno" and "Tully", most recently wrote the



upcoming Madonna biopic at Universal, which Madonna will direct.

Lively's husband, actor Ryan Reynolds is best known for playing the foul-mouthed Marvel Comics hero Deadpool.

In 2011, the couple co-starred in Warner Bros' "Green Lantern", which was a DC Comics adaptation.

utter despair that made you lose faith in the Universe and everything around you. But you're finding your way back to your centre. You are making peace with the fact that there are some questions that have no answers. On your priority list today: you, you, you. It's time to give yourself the love and nurturing you desire at this moment. Remember, you are an alchemist. You have the power you need to transmute the pain and sorrow into pure gold.

LEO:

We all have to do what we have to do in order to survive at a time like this, and that's okay, Leo. But, if your plate is too full for your own good, it's time for you to check in with yourself. Are the given projects helping you achieve your long-term goals? Are they forming a golden bridge between where you are where you need to be a decade from now? If you answered the aforementioned questions in the negative, it's time for you to carefully eliminate the commitments that are not in alignment with your highest good.

VIRGO:

There are two kinds of people in this world: people who wait for big things to happen and people who make big things happen. We have no doubts about which category you fall into, Virgo. What the cards are urging you to focus on: the big dreams that have been on hold for some time now. It's true the timing wasn't quite right before. However, the challenges that stood in your way have now been cleared, making space for you to move forward. Plan your next move with precision. This is your chance to conquer what has always been yours.

LIBRA:

Aren't you tired of this on-again-off-again romance? Aren't you tired of giving a certain someone yet another chance when they've continuously proved to be unworthy of your love? It's time for you to take a stand for yourself, Libra. Listen to the voice of reason this time around. Remember, you are more powerful than you give yourself credit for being, and that you possess the power to break past patterns that do not serve your highest good.

SCORPIO:

Karma plays an integral role in determining the course of our lives. Before we make our way to the physical plane, we commit to mastering certain lessons. But that doesn't mean we are stuck in an endless loop. We always have the option to become aware of the soul lessons, pay our dues, and make that paradigm shift. It all comes down to how consciously we are willing to walk through the maze. Word for wise: it's time to let go of the old story and realise that there is a parallel reality available to you in each moment.

SAGITTARIUS:

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 mysterious smile you're wearing today reveals you've got this formula down pat. On your to-do list this week: staying in the energy of passion, breaking past your own barriers, and inspiring those around you to abandon mediocrity in favour of magnificence. PS: Something tells you your story is going to go down in history, Sagittarius.

CAPRICORN:

Your worth is not measured by your productivity. We repeat: your worth is not measured by your productivity. So, balance your need to 'do' by allowing yourself to 'be'. Prioritise rest and rejuvenation over everything. The good news is, as you allow yourself to relax, you may find yourself floating in the subtle realms, somewhere between dream and reality. It's a good idea to be receptive to the ideas that come to you in these moments of surrender as they could help you redefine the course of your life.

AQUARIUS:

It's time for a quick check-in, Aquarius: how do you *really* feel about a certain relationship? Do you believe the person in question has changed like they claim they have? Here's what you want to keep in mind when you find yourself oscillating in your head: the signs don't lie. So take a stance for yourself wherever necessary and listen to the voice of reason for a change. Remember, there is no shame in looking out for yourself.

PISCES:

There are people who make a hoo-ha about what they're doing by posting about it on social media and telling everybody they come into contact with about it—and then there are people who do their bit for the collective without uttering a word. You are one of those silent warriors, Pisces, who has been holding space for hundreds around you. All we want to say is that we see you, we hear you, and we appreciate you. Keep shining your light, beautiful, because the world needs more hope and optimism at a time like this.