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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## 266 new cases, 222 new recoveries and 2 more Covid deaths

**SAGAR CHHETRI  
GANGTOK, 19 MAY:**

A total of 266 new cases of novel coronavirus were reported in the last 24 hours in Sikkim. While the daily case load appears to have plateaued at around this mark, reassuringly for Sikkim, the number of daily recoveries are also showing an uptick. Over the same 24-hour period, 222 more people made full recoveries upon completion of their home isolation. Unfortunately, two more Covid deaths were reported in the State today, both from STNM Hospital, taking the Covid toll here to 214.

While the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 has reached 11,955 in the State, the recoveries number 8,492.

There are currently 218 Covid patients admitted in hospitals here, 61 convalescing in Covid Care Centres and 2,813 in home isolation across the State. Of the 3,092 active cases of Novel Coronavirus here, 19 are currently in the ICU facility of STNM Hospital while four are admitted in the ICU at Central Referral Hospital at Tadong.

Of the 266 new cases, 158 were reported from East District, 71 from West District and 37 from South Sikkim.

The new cases were picked up from the testing of 838 samples on Tuesday - 188 returning positive in RT-PCR testing of 658 samples, one in TruNat testing of 12 samples and 77 in rapid antigen testing of 168 samples.

## IT Ministry orders WhatsApp to withdraw controversial privacy policy

**NEW DELHI, 19 MAY [PTI]:** The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has directed WhatsApp to withdraw its new privacy policy, according to sources.

The IT Ministry believes that the changes to WhatsApp privacy policy and the manner of introducing the said changes undermines the sacrosanct values of informational privacy, data security and user choice and harms the rights and interests of Indian citizens, government sources told news agency Press Trust of India.

The government has given seven days to WhatsApp to respond to the notice and if no satisfactory response is received, necessary steps in consonance with law will be taken, sources informed Press Trust of India. In a communication to WhatsApp on May 18, the Ministry has once again told the messaging platform to withdraw its privacy policy 2021, they said.

The Ministry, in its

communication, has drawn attention of WhatsApp as to how its new privacy policy is a violation of several provisions of the existing Indian laws and rules.

In fulfilment of its sovereign responsibility to protect the rights and interests of Indian citizens, the government will consider various options available to it under laws in India, sources added.

The Ministry has also strongly taken up the issue of WhatsApp's 'discriminatory treatment' to Indian users vis-a-vis users in Europe.

It has stated that: "As you are doubtlessly aware, many Indian citizens depend on WhatsApp to communicate in everyday life. It is not just problematic, but also irresponsible, for WhatsApp to leverage this position to impose unfair terms and conditions on Indian users, particularly those that discriminate against Indian users vis-a-vis users in Europe."

It is pertinent to men-

tion here that WhatsApp had faced severe backlash over user concerns that data was being shared with its parent company, Facebook.

Sources noted that WhatsApp had earlier claimed that it officially deferred its new privacy policy beyond May 15, 2021.

However, the Ministry in its communication has asserted that deferral of the privacy policy beyond May 15, does not absolve WhatsApp from respecting the values of informational privacy, data security and user choice for Indian users.

It has highlighted that the changes to the privacy policy and the manner of introducing the changes including by way of FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) undermines the values of privacy, data security and user choice.

The Ministry has also taken the same stand in the Delhi High Court, where this matter is sub-judice, the source pointed out.

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 19 MAY:**

On the vaccination front, a total of 1,472 doses were administered at the 32 vaccination sites opened today. For some reason, only 14 of these vaccination sites received any footfalls with 18 of the sites reporting not even one vaccination.

Thus far, a little over 2.29 lakh doses have been administered in the State - 1,64,478 people have received at least the first dose and 59,619 people having completed their vaccine schedule with both the doses.

Interestingly, everyone received the first dose today, the drop in dose-2 administrations clearly resulting from the Government of India's decision to increase the gap between the two doses and tweaking the registration process to not allow early administration of the second



dose. What this means is that there now already nearly 1.10 lakh people here awaiting the second dose.

The other aspect of the vaccination process that needs closer scrutiny is that substantially more men have received the vaccine compared to women. While 91,299 males have received at least the first dose, only

78,157 females have received the vaccine thus far in Sikkim.

A lion's share of the vaccines given today were in East Sikkim where 1,246 people received their first jab of Covishield, with South Sikkim coming a very distant second with only 147 people receiving the shot and 79 in North Sikkim. No vaccines

were administered in West Sikkim today even though nine vaccination sites were open there.

Although there were 12 vaccination sites open in East Sikkim today, most of shots were administered at Urban PHC [Thakurbari] where 758 people received the shot [although the data on this is slightly confusing on the Cowin

## Karmapa donates medical aid for Sikkim's Frontline Workers



**GANGTOK, 19 MAY (IPR):** On behalf of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, Managing Trustee of Kung Kong Charitable Trust, Rumtek Monastery, Karma Gelay Chungyalpa called on Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang and presented essential items and equip-

ment for Frontline Covid Warriors and the patients at Mintokgang today.

The items included N95 masks, pulse oximeters, PPE sets, sanitisers, gloves, surgical masks, medicines etc and were eventually handed over to the Central Medical Store under

Health Department for optimal use.

The Chief Minister thanked the Karmapa for his concern and the representatives who personally presented the items in the hour of the pandemic.

He also enquired about the health and wellbeing of the Karmapa and was informed by the trustee that the Karmapa was keeping well and was praying for peace and a healthy environment for Sikkim.

Minister Sonam Lama, ACS (Health Department), Secretary to the CM, Secretary (Health Department), Acharya Norbu Passang and Office In-charge of KKC Trust, Kunga Palden were also present on the occasion.

## 270 doctors died of COVID-19 in 2nd wave of pandemic: Top Medical Body



**NEW DELHI, 19 MAY [PTI]:** The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Tuesday said 270 doctors across the country have succumbed to the coronavirus infection in the second wave of the pandemic so far.

The list of the doctors who died includes former IMA president Dr KK Aggarwal, who died to the deadly COVID-19 virus on Monday.

Bihar saw the maximum number of 78 deaths of medical practitioners, followed by Uttar Pradesh (37), Delhi (29) and Andhra Pradesh

(22). According to the Indian Medical Association's COVID-19 registry, 748 doctors died to the disease in the first wave of the pandemic.

"Last year, 748 doctors across India succumbed to COVID-19, while in the current wave, in a short period, we have lost 270 doctors," the IMA said.

"The second wave of the pandemic is turning out to be extremely fatal for all and especially for the healthcare workers who are at the forefront," IMA president Dr JA Jayalal said.

## Haunted by HIV, top WHO scientist on Covid management says, "Learn From History"

**GENEVA, 19 MAY [AFP]:** Two decades ago, Soumya Swaminathan watched her HIV-infected patients suffer often horrific and unnecessary deaths. There was a treatment for their disease, but they simply could not afford it.

The World Health Organization's chief scientist told AFP the inequalities in accessing Covid-19 vaccines today hark back to the late 1990s, when she helplessly watched HIV patients in India wither away when drugs were saving lives in the West.

Effective treatments for HIV were first produced in the mid-1990s, but they carried a prohibitively high price tag of over \$10,000 per patient per year.

It would take nearly a decade before they became available to poorer populations. "I had pa-

tients that I was watching die... horrible prolonged deaths, when treatments were already available in the West," Ms Swaminathan said in a recent interview.

"I lost so many patients and children were orphaned. Those images still haunt me."

**'MORALLY, ETHICALLY WRONG'**

The Indian paediatrician and clinical scientist, who is one of the top WHO officials leading global efforts to coordinate the pandemic response, said it was disappointing that the world was repeating past mistakes.

"You have to learn from history, but we don't seem to," she said.

To date, only 0.3 percent of Covid vaccine doses have been administered in the world's poorest countries, which are home to

nearly 10 per cent of the global population. "That is very difficult to witness, and it is morally and ethically wrong," Swaminathan said.

The glaring unevenness in vaccine access comes despite a concerted effort to address the historical inequities.

The WHO and others have created Covax, a global vaccine-sharing programme, but it remains severely underfunded and has faced significant supply shortages, delaying efforts to roll out vaccines in poorer countries. Still, Ms Swaminathan said she believed Covax was slowly making a difference and hoped it would eventually be "a success story."

The persisting inequities have meanwhile been an added frustration as Swaminathan and her team have battled to understand

Covid-19 and to provide the information needed to rein it in.

**'EXTREMELY DIFFICULT'**

The first months of the pandemic were "extremely difficult," the 62-year-old acknowledged.

As the WHO's chief scientist, she said she felt "an enormous sense of responsibility".

In addition there is the personal strain for Swaminathan, who moved on her own to Geneva for the job, leaving behind her husband, grown children and the rest of her family in India, which is now in the grip of an explosive outbreak.

"At the back of your mind you're worrying about family," she said, adding she was particularly concerned for the wellbeing of her elderly parents.

Her father, the famous ge-

neticist MS Swaminathan known for his role leading Green Revolution, is 95, while her mother, renowned educationalist Mina Swaminathan, is 88. Ms Swaminathan, who usually starts her day before 7:00 am and works until late in the evening, said she had strived to "maintain a work-life balance" to avoid burn-out.

**'WORLD NOT DOING ENOUGH'**

Long daily walks near her home on the outskirts of Geneva, through lush and pristine greenery, are part of her routine.

"Nature has been therapeutic for me," she said.

That therapy has been welcome as her team worked tirelessly to keep up with and communicate the constantly-evolving science around Covid-19. "We

were building the ship and sailing it, as they say, and that is always stressful," she said.

"There are days when you feel terribly depressed and sad and upset," she admitted, "especially when you see the images of people impacted around the world, the healthcare workers who have died, my own colleagues and classmates whom I've lost." One of the biggest frustrations, Ms Swaminathan said, has been constant pushback from a large "anti-science movement". "There are not only sceptics, but there are people who wilfully plant conspiracy theories," she said.

She added that it has been tough fighting misinformation while striving to provide science-backed guidance on the virus and its spread.



# East Coast may see formation of cyclone likely to hit Bengal, Odisha by May 27

**NEW DELHI, 19 MAY [PTI]:** After the west coast, another cyclone is likely to hit the east coast by May 26-27, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Wednesday.

A low pressure area is very likely to form over north Andaman Sea and adjoining east-central Bay of Bengal around May 22.

"It is very likely to intensify gradually into a cyclonic storm during the subsequent 72 hours. It is very likely to move northwestwards and reach West Bengal - Odisha coasts around 26th May evening," the Cyclone Warning Division of the IMD said.

It added that the southwest monsoon is very likely to advance over south Andaman Sea



and adjoining southeast Bay of Bengal around May 21 in association with the likely strengthening and deepening of southwesterly winds over the region.

Other atmospheric and oceanic conditions like conducive environment for convection, sea surface temperatures are also favourable for persistent cloudiness over

Andaman Sea and adjoining areas of east-central and southeast Bay of Bengal around May 22.

These conditions will help in formation of a low pressure area over

north Andaman Sea and adjoining east-central Bay of Bengal around May 22.

Under the influence of these systems, Andaman and Nicobar Islands

are likely to witness light to moderate rainfall at most places with heavy to very heavy falls at isolated places on May 22 and 23.

Odisha, West Bengal and adjoining Assam and Meghalaya are likely to receive light to moderate rainfall at most places with heavy falls at isolated places are very likely to commence from evening of May 25. The intensity of the rainfall will increase substantially. April-May, the pre-monsoon months, usually witness formation of cyclones on the eastern as well as the western coast.

May 2020 saw two cyclones -- super cyclonic storm Amphan and severe cyclonic storm Nisarga -- which hit the eastern and western coast, respectively.

## Manipur asks ambulances to mute sirens amid rising COVID-19 anxiety

**IMPHAL, 19 MAY [PTI]:** The Manipur government has called for muting sirens of ambulances across the state in a bid to reduce anxiety and panic caused by the COVID-19 gloom, officials said.

The state's medical directorate, in a memorandum, urged chief medical officers, medical superintendents, staff of private hospitals and ambulance operators to "silence sirens as they are panicking people and causing social anxiety".

"Only if roads are blocked, sirens should be activated," it added.

The state government had earlier imposed curfew in the districts of Imphal West, Imphal East, Bishnupur, Ukhrul, Thoubal, Kakching and Churachandpur on May 8, which has been extended till May 28. Manipur on Tuesday reported 624 fresh COVID-19 cases, pushing the tally to 40,683. The number of deaths climbed to 612 with 20 more fatalities.

## SBI postpones recruitment exams scheduled on May 23

**NEW DELHI, 19 MAY [NDTV]:** The State Bank of India (SBI) has postponed the recruitment exams scheduled on May 23 for Pharmacist and Data Analyst posts. The bank has not announced any new exam dates.

"In view of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Online Examination scheduled to be held on 23.05.2021 has been deferred till further notice," it has notified. The admit cards of all the candidates who had registered for the exam have already been released. For both the posts, candidates will be selected on the basis of the written exam and interview.

Candidates who qualify the written exam will be shortlisted for the interview. "Outstation candidates, who may be

called for interview after short-listing will be reimbursed the cost of Train fare (3 A/C) for the shortest route in India OR the actual travel cost (whichever is lower) on the basis of actual journey. Local transportation will not be reimbursed. A candidate, if found ineligible for the post will not be permitted to appear for the interview and will not be reimbursed any fare," the Bank has said in the job notice.

Meanwhile, the deadline for SBI junior associate recruitment registration ends tomorrow. A total of 5,000 regular vacancies and 237 backlog vacancies will be filled through this recruitment. Graduates, between 20-28 years of age as on April 1, are eligible for the post.

## Spain's African enclave struggles to handle migrant influx

**CEUTA, SPAIN (AP):** Thousands of migrants who have become pawns in a diplomatic spat between Morocco and Spain awoke to an uncertain future on Wednesday, after sleeping where they could find shelter following their massive border breach to reach the European country's north African enclave of Ceuta.

Social services for the small city perched on an outcropping in the Mediterranean buckled under the strain after more than 8,000 people crossed into Spanish territory during the previous two days.

Exhausted by either scaling a double-wide border fence or risking their lives by swimming around a breakwater to reach a beach on the European side, many migrants spent the night in overcrowded warehouses under the gaze of Spanish police.

Spain's Interior Ministry said that it had returned roughly half of the migrants, but there were many unaccompanied minors which Spanish law says must be taken into care by authorities.

"We have never seen such an arrival of this magnitude," Red Cross spokeswoman Isa Braser told The Associated Press. "The city has the means to take care of all the people that arrive to its shores, but you never imagine that you will face this type of situation."

While Morocco tightened its frontier controls, some people kept coming, forcing Spanish authorities to increase their criticism of counterparts in Rabat.

"This is an act of defiance," Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez told Spain's Parliament, a day after he visited Ceuta. "The lack of border control by Morocco is not a show of disrespect of Spain, but rather for the European Union."

Over the decades, Spain has built a close relationship with Morocco to crack down on illegal border crossings, but also to increase economic ties and fight extremism.

But on Wednesday,

Foreign Minister Arancha González Laya said for the first time in public that Spain believes Morocco loosened its border control to retaliate for Spain having given medical assistance to the head of the Western Sahara liberation movement, a disputed territory to Morocco's south.

"It tears our hearts out to see our neighbors sending children, even babies... (because) they reject a humanitarian gesture on our part," González Laya told Spanish public radio.

Morocco's loosened border watch came after Spain decided to grant entry for medical treatment to the chief of a militant group that fights Morocco for the independence of Western Sahara. Morocco annexed the sprawling region on the west coast of Africa in 1975.

Morocco's Foreign Ministry had said Madrid's move to assist BrahimGhali, head of the Polisario Front, was "inconsistent with the spirit of partnership and good neighborliness" and vowed there would be "consequences."

In the first public comments on the situation in Ceuta by a Moroccan official, Mostapha Hamid, minister for human rights, said in a Facebook post Tuesday night that Spain's move to receive the Polisario leader was "reckless, irresponsible and totally unacceptable."

"What was Spain expecting from Morocco when it hosted an official from a group that is carrying arms against the kingdom?" he asked.

Hamid told The Associated Press on Wednesday that he posted the comments as a Moroccan citizen and senior official upset by Spain's decision to host Ghali, but not on behalf of the Moroccan government.

But Moroccan lawmaker Youssef Gharbi, who serves on the parliamentary foreign affairs committee, told the AP on Wednesday that the decision to allow Ghali to receive medical treatment: "was the drop that made the cup spill over."

## Russian lawmakers vote to abandon overflight treaty



**MOSCOW (AP):** The Russian parliament's lower house voted Wednesday to withdraw from an international treaty allowing surveillance flights over military facilities following the U.S. departure from the pact.

The Russian exit from the Open Skies Treaty is yet to be endorsed by the upper house of parliament and needs to be signed by President Vladimir Putin to take effect. Moscow has signaled its readiness to reverse the withdrawal procedure and stay in the treaty if the U.S. returns to the agreement.

The withdrawal vote comes hours before U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov were to hold their first meeting on the sidelines of a gathering of top diplomats from the Arctic countries in Reykjavik, Iceland. They are expected to focus on setting the stage for a planned summit next month between U.S. President Joe Biden and Putin.

The Open Skies Treaty was intended to build trust between Russia and the West by allowing the accord's more than three dozen signatories to conduct reconnaissance flights over each other's territories to collect information about military forces and activities. More than 1,500 flights have been conducted under the treaty since it took effect in 2002, aimed at fostering transparency about military activity and helping monitor arms control and other agreements.

Then U.S. President Donald Trump pulled out of the pact last year, arguing that Russian violations made it untenable for Washington to remain a party. Washington completed its withdrawal from the treaty in November.

Moscow has deplored the U.S. withdrawal, warning that it will erode global security by making it more difficult for governments to interpret the intentions of other nations, particularly amid heightened Russia-West tensions.

Moscow's ties with Washington and its NATO allies have sunk to post-Cold War lows after the 2014 Russian annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

The European Union has urged the U.S. to reconsider its exit and called on Russia to stay in the pact and lift flight restrictions, notably over its westernmost Kaliningrad region, which lies between NATO allies Lithuania and Poland.

Russia has insisted that the restrictions on observation flights it imposed in the past were permissible by the treaty and noted that the U.S. imposed more sweeping restrictions on observation flights over Alaska.

As a condition for staying in the pact after the U.S. pullout, Moscow has unsuccessfully

pushed for guarantees from NATO allies that they wouldn't hand over the data collected during their observation flights over Russia to the U.S.

The upper house, the Federation Council, is expected to follow suit on the bill on June 2 and once Putin signs the withdrawal bill it takes six months for the Russian exit to take effect.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told lawmakers Wednesday that if during that period the U.S. declares its intention to return to the pact, a "new diplomatic process will start." He added, however, that he considers that unlikely.

Leonid Slutsky, the head of foreign affairs committee in the lower house, has said that the upper chamber initially planned to vote on leaving the pact on Wednesday, but pushed it back on Putin's suggestion to offer the U.S. more time to consider a comeback.

## 36 new COVID-19 cases push Andamans tally to 6,674

**PORT BLAIR, MAY 19 (PTI):** Andaman and Nicobar Islands reported 36 new COVID-19 cases, pushing the tally in the union territory to 6,674, a health department official said on Wednesday.

The COVID-19 death toll in the archipelago

rose to 92 as three more persons succumbed to the disease in the last 24 hours, he said.

The union territory now has 223 active COVID-19 cases of which 217 are in South Andaman district and six in North and Middle Andaman district. The

Nicobar district has no active COVID-19 case at present, the official said.

Thirty more people were cured of the disease during the period, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 6,359.

The Andaman and

Nicobar administration has so far tested 3,80,395 samples for COVID-19, and the positivity rate is 1.75 per cent.

Altogether, 1,17,748 people have been inoculated in the archipelago with 17,354 of them having received both doses of vaccine, he said.

## Black fungus declared an epidemic in Rajasthan

**JAIPUR, MAY 19 (PTI):** Mucormycosis (black fungus), which is primarily affecting people recovering from COVID, has been declared an epidemic in Rajasthan, officials said on Wednesday.

Currently, the state has around 100 black fungus patients and a separate ward has been made at Sawai Man Singh (SMS) Hospital in Jaipur for their treatment.

Mucormycosis has been notified as an epi-

dem and a notifiable disease in the state under the Rajasthan Epidemic Act 2020, according to a notification issued by state's Principal Health Secretary Akhil Arora.

He said the step was taken to ensure integrated and coordinated treatment of black fungus and the coronavirus.

According to experts, people with diabetes are more prone to getting the black fungus infection.

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### ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

The Anthyesti Kriya of Late Kumari Thapa W/o Gopal Thapa of Lower Ghurpisey Namchi (SAKHA) who left for heavenly abode on 12th May falls on 21st May December 2021 Friday.



All relatives, friend and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence. We also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude towards all those who extended their support during the time of bereavement. Gopal Thapa (husband) kamal Thapa (son) Bimla Thapa (son) Som Maya Thapa (daughter) Dumber Kumari Thapa (daughter) Khem Kumari Sharma (dauhter-in-law)

**Contact No: 97333 96231, 9902548203, 9902533458**



# Accepting failure not in veins of politicians, bureaucrats: High Court on Covid situation

**NEW DELHI, 19 MAY [PTI]:** Politicians and bureaucrats find it very difficult to accept their failure and inability as it is not in their veins, the Delhi High Court today said while expressing concerns over the condition of subordinate judiciary's judicial officers who are at risk of contracting COVID-19 owing to the nature of duties.

The high court said three judicial officers have already died after contracting the virus in the national capital and it was of the prima facie view that they should be treated akin to frontline workers like armed forces and police forces personnel and asked the government to consider it.

In Supreme Court and High Court, we hold constitutional positions. Our protocols are different but that is not the case of subordinate judiciary. The judicial officers' exposure is different and you should take steps for good reasons. You examine it and then decide, a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said.

The bench was not impressed with the submissions of the Delhi Government that high court had earlier passed an order by which the Delhi district judges were to coordinate with

district magistrates to address the medical concerns of judicial officers and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic and nodal officers were appointed in each district.

The bench said, "Let us not get into this. That has not delivered. They are here because it didn't bring about any satisfactory results. It is very difficult for bureaucracy and political leaders to accept their failure or inability. They will never accept their failure. This is not in their veins."

It said the system has to be put in place now and can't wait for the crisis to arise and have to be prepared for the worst as nobody knows how the situation would be in future.

The bench observed that judicial officers are working and exposing them to the risk, the way armed forces and police forces are doing.

We have lost three judicial officers already. Look at the number of judicial officers and their families being infected, it's staggering. Because of the nature of their job, they have to expose themselves so we need to protect them.

You don't expect a judge to discharge his duty when his son, daughter, wife or any

other family member is seriously ill. Take steps on your own, you (government) don't need to wait for orders on this, it said.

The court noted the submissions of senior advocate Rahul Mehra, representing Delhi government, that the state shall consider whether judicial officers rendering services to keep the wheels of justice moving and are exposed to the risk of COVID-19 on account of nature of duties, can be declared as frontline workers.

The counsel also said that Delhi Judicial Services Association, which has filed an application raising certain issues including that facilities on ground are an eyewash, may submit the representation to the Delhi Chief Secretary who shall consider it and also convene a virtual meeting with the members of the association.

Taking the statement of Mr Mehra on record, the court said, Let the Delhi government address these issues and a status report be filed. List it on May 27.

The application by the association was filed in a pending petition by a group of lawyers, including Shobha Gupta and Rajesh Sachdeva, seeking a coordination mecha-

nism for judicial officers are they were unable to get COVID-19 medical treatment and beds in hospitals.

Senior advocate Dayan Krishnan, representing the association, said he district nodal officers facility is not working in case of emergency and there is a need for a centralised nodal officer of Delhi government.

He also said there is a need to attach COVID-19 care facilities to hospitals and added that as of now 852 judicial officers and staff have been infected with the virus.

Delhi government standing counsel Santosh Kumar Tripathi submitted the high court had earlier passed an order by which the Delhi district judges were to coordinate with district magistrates to address the medical concerns of judicial officers and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic and nodal officers were appointed in each district.

During the hearing, Mr Mehra conceded that it's a very serious issue raised in the plea and the COVID care centres are equal to home isolation beds and not for moderate to severe patients and stressed on the need for vaccination.

Until and unless everyone is safe, none is

safe, he said, adding that the next wave could be coming from Singapore or some other country.

To this, the bench said, there is no wave from Singapore and we don't need any other country, we have our own variants.

Mr Mehra replied the second variant is from India only.

He said there is a need to declare officers of the courts as frontline persons and it is important to protect and save the members of the institution and vaccination process of judicial officers, their families and staff should be prioritized.

The court also said like Delhi government's officials, judicial officers can also be provided with proper facilities as they are also performing an important duty.

The petition said, the petitioners are specifically concerned about the health and life of the judicial officers in Delhi. The judicial officers in Delhi in order to maintain law and order and ensure speedy and effective delivery of justice resumed physical hearings in Courts. It is pertinent to mentioned that due to nature of work in courts, COVID protocol is not being followed in courts and judicial officers are exposed immensely.



## Sangrila Pharma provide 10 Oxygen cylinders to Singtam Nagar Panchayat

**SUMMIT REPORT RANGPO, 19 MAY:**

Singtam-based entrepreneur, Gajanan Agarwaland, his brothers, on behalf of Sangrila Pharma, donated 10 oxygen cylinders in

Singtam Nagar Panchayat area today.

Hand sanitizers were also provided by the group, and the consignment handed over to Singtam Nagar Panchayat councillors today.

## Delhi High Court pulls up Centre for not replying to activist Disha Ravi's plea

**NEW DELHI, 19 MAY [PTI]:** The central government was rapped by the Delhi High Court on Tuesday for not filing its response to a plea by climate activist Disha Ravi for restraining the police from leaking to the media any probe material in relation to the FIR lodged against her in the toolkit case, despite granting a last and final opportunity to it in March this year.

"For Union of India is there no last and final opportunity? This is very bad. Then what is the meaning of the court saying last opportunity, I cannot understand that? What is the sanctity of (the court saying) last and final opportunity," Justice Rekha Palli said to the Centre.

The strong remarks by the court came after it was told the Centre has not filed a response to Disha Ravi's plea yet.

The court on March 17 had granted a final opportunity to the Centre to file its reply to the petition.

On Tuesday, it was inclined to impose costs on the Centre, but the court did not do so after central government standing counsel Ajay Dignipaul said that due to COVID-19, officials were not coming to office and therefore, the response could not be filed. The court, thereafter, gave the Centre six more weeks to file its reply and listed the matter for hearing in August.

Ms Ravi was arrested by Delhi Police on February 13 for allegedly being involved in sharing on social media a "toolkit" related to the ongoing farmers' protest against the Centre's three new agri laws, and was grant-

ed bail by a trial court in Delhi on February 23.

The high court was hearing her plea to restrain police from leaking to the media any probe material in relation to the FIR lodged against her.

The petition has also sought to restrain the media from publishing the content or extract of any private chats, including those on WhatsApp, between her and third parties.

Ms Ravi, in her plea, has said she is "severely aggrieved and prejudiced by the media trial surrounding her arrest and the ongoing investigation, where she is being viscerally attacked by the respondent 1 (police) and several media houses". She has claimed that her arrest from Bengaluru on February 13 by a Cyber Cell team of Delhi Police was "wholly unlawfully and without basis".

She has also contended that in the present circumstances, it was "highly likely" that the general public will perceive the news items "as being conclusive as to the guilt of the petitioner (Ravi)".

She has claimed that the police first "leaked investigative material" -- like alleged WhatsApp chats -- the substance and details of which were only in the possession of the investigating agency.

The high court had on February 19 said certain media coverage of investigation into the FIR against Ms Ravi for her alleged involvement in sharing a toolkit backing farmers' protest indicates "sensationalism and prejudicial reporting", but declined to order removal of any such content at this stage.

## Assam vaccinated only 15% residents, young struggle to book slots



**GUWAHATI, 19 MAY [NDTV]:** Babul Dhar is a pharmacist in Guwahati's Adabari locality, who cannot stay indoors despite Assam's ongoing Covid-linked curfew. The 37-year-old is a pharmacist and has to continue working. Pharmacies are essential services, but pharmacists like Mr Dhar are not considered frontline workers.

Ever since vaccination has been allowed for 18-44-year-olds in the state on May 7, he has been trying to book a slot. But he has had no success yet.

Though the Assam government claims they are keeping more than one lakh vaccines always for the 18-44-year-olds, people like Mr Dhar who desperately need it, are yet to get a shot.

"I have been trying every day to book a slot. Even when I am at work, family members keep trying. It is not clear what we should do. How will we get vaccinated?" he said.

Pointing to his profession, he said they have to work every day from 7 am. "People come for medicines and we don't even know who carries the virus. We should es-

entially get the vaccine, but the government has done nothing for us," Mr Dhar told NDTV.

Till May 17, Assam has vaccinated 27.29 lakh people with the first dose of the vaccine.

Assam had estimated it has to vaccinate about 70 lakh people above the age of 60 years, and there will be around 1.08 crore people between the age of 18 and 60 years.

Till Monday, the state vaccinated more than 21 lakh people above the age of 60 years and around 7 lakh people from the other group. Overall, that amounts to only 15.33 per cent of the eligible population.

Only 6.48 per cent people have been vaccinated in the 18-44-year age group so far.

"Vaccines are not available easily. We have a small supply. Each district is getting around 6,000 to 7,000 doses a day. In Guwahati alone, we have 60 vaccination centres for the above 45-year group and 50 centres to vaccinate the 18-44-year-olds. So we are allocating 200 vaccines per centre," Munindra Nath Ngatey, Director of Health Services (Family Welfare) told NDTV.

This scarcity of vaccine from the manufacturer's end has led to a major rush among the 18-44-year-olds.

"I have been trying to get an appointment for myself for more than a week now. All I am getting is disappointment. Every day I have been trying for about 45 minutes to get a slot but no luck. Sometimes the site freezes, sometime OTP does not come -- it is a mess. If this is the case in Guwahati, how would the rural folks get a slot?" said Riya Nath, who works with a Guwahati-based non-profit.

There is a growing concern about whether online booking will work in rural and remote areas of Assam and the rest of northeast.

"The moment the vaccine slots are opened, it shows green and before you blink the slots are all booked. This is a serious concern. In this situation, what would happen to the rural parts of the northeast, which have poor 4G network or weak broadband? It will become near impossible for young people in those areas," said Subhrajit Choudhury, a resident of Guwahati.

**NEW DELHI, 19 MAY [PTI]:** Delhi on Wednesday reported 3,846 new coronavirus cases, the lowest single-day spike since April 5, as the national capital's more virulent wave of infections showed signs of receding.

At 235, the city's daily death count has also dropped. The national capital had been reporting over 300 deaths for several days. Today's death count figure is the lowest since April 18, when it had reported 161 deaths.

As the Covid surge ravaged the country, causing deaths and

overwhelming health infrastructures, Delhi's positivity rate had shot up. It had consistently recorded over 25 per cent positivity last month. Its highest positivity figure was over 35 per cent. In a massive relief, the positivity rate in the last 24 hours was 5.78 per cent, lowest since April 6.

For the first time since April 13, the national capital's active caseload has dropped below the 50,000 mark.

Compared to April, the city's daily testing has also declined. The city had been conducting be-

tween 80,000-1,00,000 tests per day last month. It tested 66,573 people in 24 hours.

In the last 24 hours, 9,427 people recovered, over two times the cases. The recovery rate has improved to 95.2 per cent.

Delhi on Tuesday logged 4,482 cases and 265 fatalities at a positivity rate of 6.89 per cent.

Experts have attributed the decline in coronavirus cases to the city's strict containment measures. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has extended the lockdown till May 24.

## HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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### What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

#### Symptoms of nCoV

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

#### Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unclean hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid respiratory secret affected places.
- Place a mask if you have respiratory symptoms, and wear your mask while coughing or sneezing.

#### Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccines are available as of now.
- Most likely to have symptoms detected

If you seek help, please contact:

Helpline No. 104

District Surveillance Officer

SANJIV KUMAR

HEALTH INSPECTOR

WEST - MICKHONG

EAST - BARBANG

SOUTH - THUPHANG

North Office

JAY / BARBANG

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE**

**GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**



## Non-Governmental Interventions

*...that should always be the preferred route to behavioural change and social challenges*

There is something definitely wrong with the picture when governments, their parties and even project developers float their own organisations to do “social work” which should ideally be undertaken by well networked “local” NGOs. Without taking anything away from the efficacy of the former kind of “NGOs” or the “social workers” who front them, a fact which cannot be ignored is that under such structures, the NGOs become extensions of the bureaucratic system of chakari in which political masters [or funding companies] gain primacy over the people among whom the organisations should be working. This subverts the whole role of a social engagement from being one of linking aspirations and concerns from the grassroots-up to becoming handling agents of dole trickling down from above. For all the negativity which the term “NGO” or “social worker” might have begun to now attract, there are many problems and challenges which only non-governmental volunteers can resolve. Take the present pandemic for instance, social distancing and mask wearing was left to the cops to enforce and they cannot be everywhere, but community organisations can be because they are more trusted and better equipped to bring about behavioural change. Unfortunately, they were not taken into confidence or leveraged, and all that the police delivered was brow-beating of the lay people and random stragglers while the super-spreader events - social gatherings - were given a pass. Local organisations would have delivered better on this count if they had been convinced and taken on board.

Let's accept it, discomforting situations, especially the ones that are social in nature, require agencies from outside the government to find deliverance. The State can at best play the role of a facilitator by putting in place the right laws and policies and making available the required support to aid the process. In contrast, when the government takes on the role of the NGO, there is too much tokenism and too much enforcement which does not end up helping anyone as one year of struggling with the virus has proven. This is not for want of intent, but more a fallout of the lack of commitment caused by the lopsided prioritisation mentioned earlier. Also, government officials are bound by protocol and hierarchies and have other considerations weighing on their minds to get too involved with the social cause they might presently be only ex officio involved in. Without complete involvement, social situations cannot be addressed and this commitment can only be guaranteed by committed workers of community organisations or other social groups. Government functionaries will be satisfied with “World Day” observance and issuing notifications or the odd workshop and awareness programme. Real work involves getting the hands dirty and understanding situations which are too much to expect from a person with only temporary responsibility of the problem and permanent satraps to obey. The government is also handicapped by the red tape it wraps itself in.

Work on the field demands instant decisions and improvisation which government officials are either not trained for or unwilling to risk. The NGO network has become so big in our country that at one extreme, it has become an unsavoury nexus of funds and socialite hobbies, even as at another end, very effective engagements are underway. In Sikkim, however, the NGO culture is still nascent and because of this the government-NGO relationship is still not one of mutual respect. Since most NGOs here are completely dependent on the State for funds and even directions, their independence is also restricted. It is time the NGO culture developed into a viable deliverer of services and information to the Sikkimese, especially those in the rural areas. Many changes are afoot at present and NGO involvement in cushioning their impact is an urgent need. It is not rare to find a fatalistic streak among the people who have almost lost faith in their ability to solve problems on their own. If this notion is allowed to take roots, very soon, a society mistakenly convinced of its incompetence will even stop trying too hard to improve its situation. A responsible network of NGOs will go a long way in combating this defeatist trait and help in reacquiring the confidence which slips away fast in a welfare state...

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# COVID-19 Could be the End of ‘Global Health’ As We Know It

COLIN MCINNES  
*theconversation.com*

The pandemic has made us painfully aware of our common vulnerability to disease outbreaks. New communicable diseases originating in one part of the world can spread quickly and widely, underlining that health is a global concern. But this is old news.

The advent of the concept of “global health” is well established in both the academic literature and policy discussions, reflecting the consensus that we have seen a fundamental change in the nature of the causes and outcomes of ill-health in recent decades.

This change is rooted in the effects of globalisation and seen not only in the spread of communicable diseases, but in other developments – the globalised pharmaceutical market, the emergence of global civil society, new international health actors with a global perspective (such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), and the migration of health professionals. These developments combined to create a powerful sense of change, such that as long ago as 2008, the UK government declared that “health is global”.

COVID-19 appears to reinforce this narrative. Most striking, of course, is the spread of the disease. It has touched almost everyone. Within 18 months of its appearance, the WHO has identified only 14 countries reporting zero cases, 12 of which were Pacific Islands which had implemented strict travel restrictions, reinforcing sea borders.

The pandemic has also demonstrated the global nature of the marketplace for health products. From the often desperate search for PPE in the early months of the pandemic to the development, production and supply of vaccines in 2021, it is clear that states cannot rely on national suppliers alone.

### THE LIBERAL VISION

But the global health narrative was always more than simply an analysis of a new reality. It was also a call for new ways of working to address both new diseases, like COVID-19, and existing health inequalities. Underpinning this was the argument that if health was global, then responses needed to be global too, and that a consequence of globalisation was that the health of one state or population group was linked to the health of all.

This liberal vision of global health – one which held that the rich had responsibilities to the rest of the world, and progress was possible through co-operation – was already in trouble prior to COVID.

For all of the stated concerns about inequalities from the G7 and others, the global health agenda originated in high-income countries and reflected their concerns (especially over the spread of disease from other countries).

As a result, proposed responses prioritised their interests, including an emphasis upon dealing with the effects of disease – through pharmacological solutions – rather than addressing the causes, which might have been disruptive to their economic interests. That is why there were so many calls

to decolonise global health before COVID emerged.

### UNASHAMED NATIONALISM

COVID-19 has thrown into sharp relief the current weaknesses of the global health project. During the most serious pandemic in living memory, the response has been dominated by national concerns and policies.

In the years leading up to the pandemic, the emergence of unashamedly nationalist governments in G7 and G20 states challenged visions of globally shared interests. Most obviously, Trump’s “America first” stood in stark contrast to the Obama administration’s global health security initiative and the Bush administration’s massive programme for AIDS relief, which helped transform the course



of HIV infections in Africa.

During this time, optimists pointed to the continued engagement of other countries in global health initiatives, and argued that this new nationalism might only be a transitory phase, with business-as-usual returning post-Trump. Pessimists suggested that what we have seen is a more fundamental shift in the zeitgeist, with the global “haves” turning away from the humanitarianism and cosmopolitanism of the 2000s. The jury may be out as to who is correct, but at the very least the consensus of that era over the benefits of globalisation appears much less convincing now.

### GLOBAL HEALTH GONE MISSING

In contrast to the 2002-3 SARS outbreak and the 2009-10 swine flu pandemic when the WHO was central to a global response, or the 2014-15 West African Ebola outbreak when the organisation was widely criticised for not playing a leading role, this time around there has been no question that leadership on COVID-19 would come from anywhere except national governments.

Stark policy differences between states have appeared over basic issues such as face masks, lockdowns and social distancing. The WHO has criticised high-income countries for a “catastrophic moral failure” over allocation of vaccines, and questions of safety have been largely addressed at the national level despite clear advice from the WHO.

Although COVAX, the global vaccine sharing facility, had delivered more than 38 million doses to 100 economies in the first quarter of 2021, by mid-April it was warning that supplies were tight and additional stocks were unlikely to be available to it beyond those already reserved. This was despite accelerating production of vaccines, and appeared

to be because of prior agreements by manufacturers with (usually high-income) states on supplies for their national needs. Joe Biden’s recent announcement of an additional 20 million doses for the rest of the world, although welcome, is but a drop in the ocean given the billions likely to be needed in India alone.

The catastrophic increase in COVID cases in India was exacerbated by the lack of critical health products, from PPE and oxygen to vaccines. If there ever was a global health system, then it had gone sadly missing when we needed it most.

COVID-19 has demonstrated that, in a time of crisis, the rich and powerful fell back to national approaches with only secondary concerns for the global health good. But since national health outcomes appear still to be inextricably linked to global developments, the need to rebuild global health after COVID is more pressing than ever.

*[the writer is Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation, Aberystwyth University]*

# Gaza Conflict: No Matter How Powerful Israel's Military Becomes it Still Can't Win

PAUL ROGERS  
*theconversation.com*

Israel is the most powerful state in the Middle East. Its military forces may not match the likes of Egypt or Turkey in numbers, but the might of its training, equipment, technologies and nuclear weapons make it unsailable. Given its long-developed capabilities in public order control, such a position should also apply to its control of radical dissent within its own borders, as well as in the Palestinian occupied territories.

Gaza may not be occupied in the conventional sense but it is a small territory with 2 million people living behind borders controlled by Israel. It lacks a port, its sole airport was destroyed many years ago and its Mediterranean coastline is patrolled by Israelis at all times. It is essentially an open prison.

The Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has persistently claimed that his country is indeed safe, that it has nothing to fear from the Palestinians, and that the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, especially in East Jerusalem, can and should expand, not least as Israel has established good relations with key Gulf states.

With all this – and US president Joe Biden’s continuing assertion that “Israel has the right to defend itself” – the country should feel safe and secure. But in practice it doesn’t. Instead, an apt summary is of a state that is impregnable in its insecurity. It is impregnable in the sense that it cannot be defeated, but insecure in that the underlying threats will not go away – as is evident in the current

violent confrontations.

### UNDERLYING ANGER

The key element of recent weeks has been the repeated incursion of the Israeli police into al-Aqsa mosque. That will have a far deeper and more longer-lasting effect than is currently recognised in the west.

The Israeli actions at al-Aqsa were extensive and stretched over a month starting on April 13, the first day of Ramadan, when police reportedly entered the mosque’s courtyard and cut the cables to loudspeakers in its four minarets. It has been suggested this was to prevent the call to prayer interfering with a speech due to be given by Israeli president Reuven Rivlin nearby.

This contributed to increasing Palestinian anger and more demonstrations especially at the Damascus Gate and the mosque itself. As tensions rose and Hamas threatened rockets in response, the violence escalated to the evening of Friday May 7 when, as the New York Times put it, “police officers armed with tear gas, stun grenades and rubber-tipped bullets burst into the mosque compound shortly after 8pm, setting off hours of clashes with stone-throwing protesters in which hundreds were injured, medics said.”

Three days later the police repeated the operation as the violence escalated further. Later that day the first of the Hamas rockets were fired from Gaza.

Israel’s problem in Gaza is that it cannot prevent the rockets being fired without a military ground force intervention. However, the last time it sent in troops, during “Operation Protective Edge” in July 2014, they came up against determined paramilitaries who knew the urban areas intimately

and had long trained in urban guerrilla warfare.

Over the course of that 2014 conflict, the Israelis lost 68 troops, while several hundreds were left wounded, some maimed for life. Yet, when a ceasefire was eventually agreed, IDF sources accepted that Hamas still had 3,000 rockets available, an arsenal that will have increased massively in the past seven years.

IDF leaders may believe that they have since prepared their forces much more effectively for ground operations. However, that same belief after the 2008 “Operation Cast Lead” conflict didn’t stop them failing six years later.

### IMPREGNABLE BUT INSECURE

Prior to the events of the past month, Netanyahu had worked hard to convince Israelis that the Palestinians had been defeated and Israeli Jews could feel secure. This narrative was supported by a 40-year shift to the right in Israel, propped up by the influx of close to a million migrants from Russia and Ukraine in the 1990s, who were understandably determined to be secure in their new country. It was also aided by the near-wholesale privatisation of the Kibbutz and Moshav cooperatives across Israel that had often provided a more liberal outlook.

Furthermore, the idea that the Palestinians had lost and had to get used to it was promoted vigorously by sectors of the Israeli lobby in the US, most notably the Middle East Forum. And the many millions of Christian Zionists in the US are an ever-present influence on aspiring politicians, both Republican and Democrat.

Whatever happens now, three elements must be factored in. One is that Netanyahu is fighting for his political life and he therefore presents himself as the only politician who can protect Israel. What is happening is very useful for him, even if some of his coalition partners are angered and even afraid of the consequences, not least the serious civil disturbances within Israel and the growing political power of Arab Israelis.

The second is that the mosque incursions are already having an impact across the Islamic world from Indonesia to Morocco and beyond, increasing public support for the Palestinians even if autocratic rulers across the Middle East prefer to deal directly with Israel and ignore the Palestinian predicament.

The final element is something you won’t often see discussed, but is my reading of the situation as it stands now. The Israeli government is reluctant to undertake any direct occupation of Gaza, however short-term. It will therefore use its current military actions as an essential opportunity to learn how to maximise the impact of strike aircraft, armed drones and artillery – but not ground troops – putting into practice what it learnt from its failures in 2014.

The blunt reality is that weapons designers, strategists and corporations throughout the world will also be watching and learning. In my view this is all part of the global transition to remote warfare, and from that perspective, Gaza, with all its deaths and injuries, is little more than a useful experiment.

*[the writer is Professor of Peace Studies, University of Bradford]*



# Zoo attendant mauled to death by tigress

**ITANAGAR, MAY 19 (PTI):** A 35-year-old zoo attendant was mauled to death by a Royal Bengal tigress at the Biological Park here, an official said.

Poulash Karmakar, a native of Dhekiajuli in Assam's Lakhimpur district was killed by the tigress when he was entering her cage to clean the water pond on Tuesday, zoo curator Raya Flago said.

"The incident occurred at 2.30 pm on Tuesday. I was informed of the incident by one of our animal attendants. When I reached the zoo along with a doctor and other staff, Karmakar was already dead. He was found bleeding from the face," Flago said.

"There are three gates that lead to the cage and all of them were left open. We are assuming that this led to the tigress attacking



the zoo attendant," Flago said, adding that a police investigation has been launched in the case.

Itanagar Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Kamdam Sikom informed that a case of unnatural death has been



lodged at the police station here and the body of the deceased had been sent for post mortem at R K Mission Hospital.

"Police did not see anything suspicious and it seems to be a case of negligence as per pre-

liminary investigation," Sikom said, adding, the body would be handed over to the family members on Wednesday after post mortem.

'Chippi' the Royal Bengal tigress, who mauled Karmakar to

death was rescued as an orphan along with another 'Ipra' when they were around eight months old from Anini in Dibang Valley district. They were shifted to the Biological Park in 2013 and staying in the zoo since then.

## "Terror created by Mamata Banerjee's presence...": CBI in Narada case plea



**KOLKATA, 19 MAY [NDTV]:** Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, her law minister Moloy Ghatak and party leader Kalyan Banerjee have been made party to the Narada bribery case by the Central Bureau of Investigation during a hearing in Calcutta High Court today.

The agency, which sought transfer of the case out of the state, has asked that the four accused, who were arrested earlier this week and are now in jail, be placed in police custody.

In its plea before the High Court, the CBI said it could not seek their custody on Monday "as a result of the terror created by and at the behest of the arrested accused persons" by the presence Chief Minister and the others.

Bengal Ministers Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee, Trinamool MLA Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee -- who went from the Trinamool to the BJP but quit that party too -- were arrested in the Narada case on Monday after the Governor gave clearance for their prosecution.

Soon after the arrests, a huge crowd of Trinamool workers had gathered outside the CBI's Kolkata office. The Chief Minister, who had gone there, had held a dharna at the spot, contending that the way the ministers were arrested "without due procedure", the CBI "will have to arrest me too".

The Chief Minister, the CBI said, had remained present outside its office "along with a well-engineered crowd of thousands of miscreants and after ensuring media presence".

This, the agency said in its petition, was "part of the larger and well thought of design to terrorize the investigating agency and preventing

it from discharging its statutory functions freely and fearlessly".

In the circumstances, asking for their custody and their movement would have led to serious law and order problem, and it refrained from doing so out of prudence, the agency said.

The four arrested leaders had got bail after a seven-hour drama on Monday but it was put on hold by the High Court the same evening following an appeal by the agency. The issue also reached the Supreme Court with a caveat filed by the CBI after the ministers asked the High Court for a revocation of its order.

The Trinamool Congress has questioned the timing of arrests -- days after Mamata Banerjee's sweeping victory in the assembly elections, which had turned into a battle between her and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The party also questioned why no sanction has been given for the prosecution of Suwendu Adhikari -- a former Trinamool Congress minister who is now a BJP MLA from Nandigram -- and Mukul Roy, who has also joined the BJP.

Both are accused in the same case and Ms Banerjee has alleged that their shift in allegiance has absolved them of their role in any crime in the eyes of the BJP.

The Narada case involves a sting operation conducted in 2014 by a journalist from Narada news portal, who posed as a businessman planning to invest in Bengal. He gave wads of cash to seven Trinamool MPs, four ministers, one MLA and a police officer as bribe and taped the entire operation.

The tapes were released just before the 2016 assembly elections in the state.

## 52 inmates at Assam prison test positive for Covid, isolated on premises

**GUWAHATI, 19 MAY [NDTV]:** As Assam battles a surge in Covid cases, 52 inmates of the Dibrugarh Central Jail have tested positive for the infection.

The prison currently has 530 inmates. Out of them, 223 were tested for the infection. Over the past two days, 52 have been found to be infected by Covid. These include ULFA-I leader Jibon Moran, who is in judicial custody at the Dibrugarh prison and tested positive for Covid on Monday.

Sources from the prison said tests would be conducted for the remaining inmates soon.

The inmates who have tested positive for the infection have been kept in isolation on the

premises. There are 31 jails in Assam, including six 6 central jails and 22 district jails. In the first wave of Covid infections last year, over 2,500 inmates in the prisons across the state had tested positive for the infection.

To prevent a repeat of that situation, prison authorities recently took a series of steps. These included conducting Rapid Antigen Tests in all the prisons in the state and setting up isolation facilities on the premises.

Dibrugarh is among the districts worst affected in the second Covid wave in Assam. As per the data released on Tuesday, the district reported 445 new cases and six deaths over the

past 24 hours. The district administration has enforced strict restrictions to stem the surge in cases.

Assam has reported 5,835 new Covid cases and 73 deaths over the past 24 hours. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma yesterday said the impact of the second wave has been "extremely severe" in Assam and the state's medical infrastructure needs to be strengthened.

Through his social media platforms, he has appealed to the public to contribute to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund or the Assam Arogya Nidhi account to support the government's fight against the pandemic.

## Bengal Governor upset over Raj Bhavan gate protests. There Were Sheep Too, he complains



**KOLKATA, 19 MAY [NDTV]:** Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar has taken serious offence at protests at the gates of his residence - Raj Bhavan in Kolkata - on Monday and Tuesday. He tweeted this morning to demand an explanation from the city's police chief by 5 pm.

The protests - against the arrests of members of the ruling Trinamool in connection with the Narada bribery case - were unremarkable on Monday were routine and did not invite his immediate wrath.

On Tuesday they were decidedly more remarkable - eight sheep, of which six were white and two black, were involved. They were brought by a young man wearing a kurta and jeans. The repeated offence irked Mr Dhankhar.

"State of law and order even at the main entry gate of Raj Bhavan worrisome with stance of police leaving all to be

desired and all this when the area is subject to prohibitory orders," the governor tweeted, tagging Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Kolkata Police in his tweet.

The young man who brought the sheep later identified himself as Suman Mitra and said he was a member of CADPC (Citizens Against Dirty Politics and Corruption) and was protesting the governor's indifference to the COVID-19 crisis in the state.

"There are no beds no hospitals in this crisis and there is no sign of the governor," he said.

Covid cases in Bengal have skyrocketed since the first week of April, when it was reporting fewer than 1,500 new cases per day. The state now has over 1.3 lakh active infections.

On-duty police, initially taken aback by the sudden arrival of Mr Mitra and his four-legged retinue, soon responded

and hustled them away within minutes. Nevertheless, the governor has now sought an explanation from the police chief for both events - the 'protesting' sheep and the officers' reaction to the event. In a letter he shared on Twitter, the governor claimed the police gave "a free hand to unruly elements" and there was no attempt to ascertain the motives of the man who arrived with the sheep; "... this person was simply allowed to leave the spot," Mr Dhankhar wrote.

The arrest of the Trinamool leaders came after the governor last week approved the CBI's request to prosecute ministers Subrata Mukherjee and Firhad Hakim and MLA Madan Mitra.

The arrest of former Trinamool leader Sovan Chatterjee who left the party in August 2019 to join the BJP, which he quit in March, was also approved.

# Super Blood Moon in Easter sky on May 26 evening

**KOLKATA, MAY 19 (PTI):** A rare Super Blood Moon will be seen in the eastern sky on May 26 evening, just after a total lunar eclipse.

Kolkata had seen its last total lunar eclipse, 10 years ago, on December 10, 2011, Director of M P Birla Planetarium and renowned astrophysicist Debiprasad Duari said Wednesday.

"On the night of May 26, the sun, earth and moon alignment will be such that from earth it will be viewed as a full moon and also eclipsed for some time. Moon on its journey around the earth will be passing through earth's shadow for a few moments and will be totally eclipsed," Duari said.

The total lunar eclipse will be visible mostly from Eastern Asia, Pacific Ocean, most parts of North and South America and Australia.

The partial eclipse of the moon will start at around 3:15 pm and end at 6:22 pm.

For most of India, the moon will be below

the eastern horizon during the total eclipse and so people of the country cannot observe a blood moon, but in some parts, mostly from eastern India, people will see only the very last part of a partial lunar eclipse, that is also very close to the eastern horizon when the moon is just rising.

On that evening, the "moon rise in Kolkata will be at 6:15 pm and the interested people will just possibly get a few minutes glimpse of the partial eclipse which will end at around 6:22 pm," he said.

For the other metropolises like Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai the eclipse will not be seen as during the eclipse phase moon will be below the horizon at these places.

"Most of the country will have to be satisfied with a penumbral eclipse, which is not very much discernible with naked eye, when moon passes through a slightly shadowed region of the Earth and is not very spectacular," Duari said.

"But, forgetting the

critical COVID-19 situation, people can then see a bright and bigger full moon on that night. At perigee a full moon looks 30 per cent bigger and 14 per cent brighter than an average full moon. That is the reason the full moon will shine brighter and also look bigger on that night," he said.

Moon will be at its perigee on that day exactly at around 7:23 pm, at a distance of 3,57,309 km from Earth.

Explaining the reason behind calling it a blood moon, Duari said as the totally eclipsed moon takes a dark blackish red colour (it) is called a blood moon. "This happens because of the comparatively less deviation of the red part of the moon light through the earth's atmosphere and falling on the moon's surface," he said.

The next total lunar eclipse will occur on May 16, 2022, but, it will not be visible from the Indian subcontinent.

But on November 8, 2022 a lunar eclipse will be seen from India.

# Sherpa falls to death on Everest while descending

**KATHMANDU, 19 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]:** A 27-year-old climbing guide Pemba Tashi Sherpa died on Everest on Tuesday morning, becoming the third casualty of the season on the world's tallest peak.

He fell into a crevasse between Camp 1 (6,065 metres) and Camp 2 (6,600 metres) while descending.

Mira Acharya, director of the Department of Tourism, told the Post on Tuesday that Pemba Tashi's body has been brought to Lukla and will be taken to his hometown in Sankhuwasabha on Wednesday. He was working as a climbing staff for TAGnepal Trekking and Expedition Company.

On May 13, an American and a Swiss climber died on Mt Everest reportedly due to exhaustion while descending from the mountain.

In 2019, 11 people

had died on Everest, 10 from the Nepal side. The number of Everest climbing permits issued this spring—408—is an all-time high since Everest was first conquered in 1953, and with each climber hiring at least one climbing guide, the number of total climbers is estimated to be over 800.

On May 7, twelve sherpas who fixed ropes to the top of Everest became the first climbers to summit the mountain this year, making it the earliest spring climb in two decades.

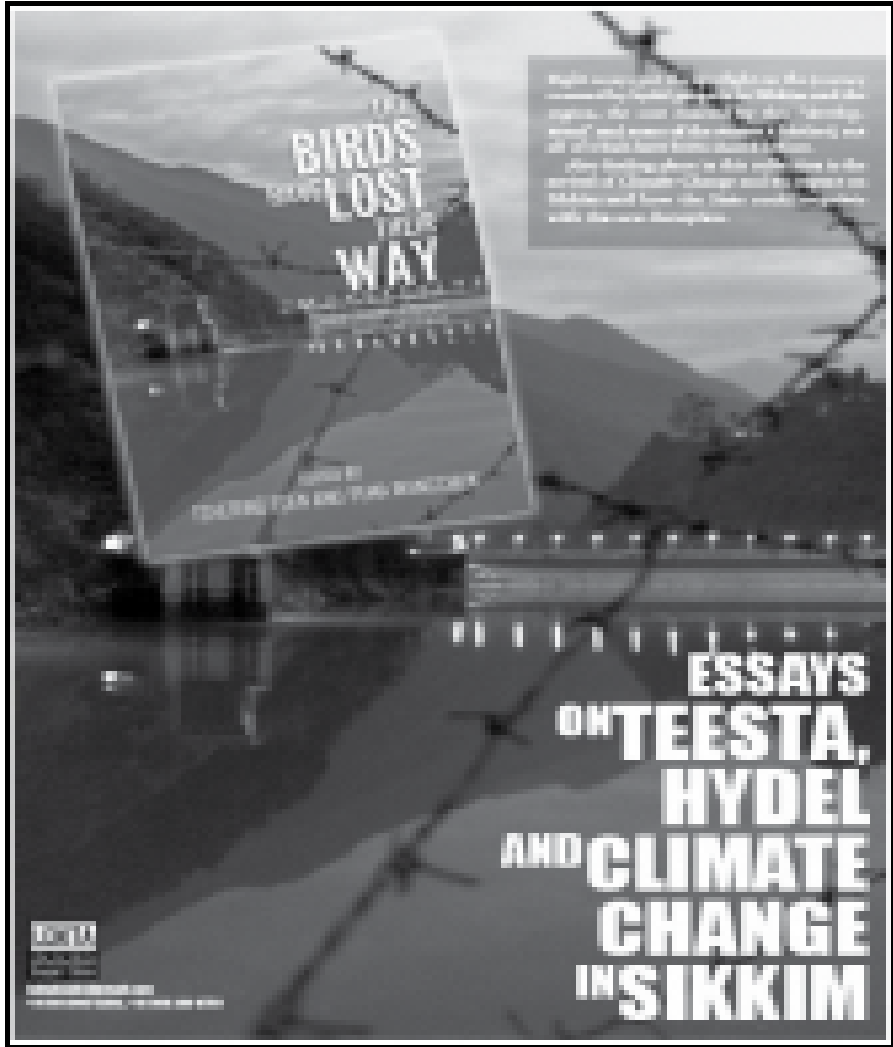
The first good weather window opened on May 11 and 12 when more than 150 climbers reached the summit.

"The second window was forecast for May 20-21 but a new report on weather forecast has shown a good weather window for May 22-23," said Mingma Sherpa, chairman of Seven Summit Treks, Nepal largest

expedition outfitter. According to Gyanendra Shrestha, the government's liaison officer stationed at the Everest base camp, based on the earlier forecast, more than 200 climbers have reached Camp 2 to begin their summit push on May 19. "As the weather forecast has been revised, they [climbers] will spend an additional day at Camp 2, one day at Camp 3 and another day [on May 21] at Camp 4 before they begin the summit push at midnight."

On Monday, the Department of Tourism alerted mountaineers trying to summit different mountains about the potential risk of a strong Tauktae cyclonic storm that originated from the east-central Arabian Sea.

"We have told the climbers to remain on alert about the risk and take precautionary measures," said Acharya.





## Mithali, Sthalekar extend condolences to bereaved PriyaPunia

NEW DELHI, MAY 19 (PTI):

The women's cricket fraternity, including India ODI captain Mithali Raj, has extended its condolences to the bereaved PriyaPunia, who is part of the UK-bound squad, after she lost her mother to COVID-19.

Veteran Mithali led the way on behalf of her team.

"In this hour of grief, we (and I speak on behalf of the team) stand right beside you. We have your back. Be strong kid," Mithali wrote on her Twitter handle.

Another national teammate PunamRaut also tweeted her condolence message for the 24-year-old Punia.

"Please accept my heartfelt condolences. I'm really sorry to hear about your loss. Please stay strong in these difficult times. She will always be in our hearts and our prayers," Raut said.

Also posting her condolences was former Australian women's team captain Lisa Sthalekar.

"Sorry to hear of your tragic loss. Om Shanti," Sthalekar wrote.

The Women's T20 Challenge also reacted to the tragic death of Punia's mother.

"PriyaPunia's mother passed away yesterday. Deepest condolences to Priya and her family. May her soul rest in peace," the women's league tweeted.

On Tuesday, the cricketer from Rajasthan wrote a heartfelt post on social media after her mother succumbed to the deadly virus.

"Today I realised why you always told me to be strong. You knew that one day I would need the strength to bear the loss of yours. I miss you so mom! No matter the distance I know you are always there with me. My guiding star, my mom.. Love you always," Punia wrote on Instagram.

"Some truth in life are hard to accept. Your memories will never be forgotten! Rest In Peace Mom. Please follow the rules and take precautions. This virus is very dangerous," she added.

The Indian squad will assemble in Mumbai on Wednesday and, subsequently, undergo a hard quarantine before its departure with the men's team in the first week of June.

The team plays a Test, its first in seven years, in the UK besides three ODIs and as many T20s.

Another India player Veda Krishnamurthy, who has not been picked for the UK tour, lost her mother and sister to COVID-19.

# Tatum scores 50, Celtics beat Wizards 118-100 in play-in

BOSTON (AP): The Boston Celtics were one of the NBA's worst teams over the final month of the regular season.

Thanks to Jayson Tatum, they'll still have a chance to make a playoff run.

Tatum scored 32 of his 50 points in the second half, and the Celtics rallied to beat the Washington Wizards 118-100 in the play-in round on Tuesday night.

Kemba Walker added 29 points for Boston, which secured the seventh seed for the playoffs and a first-round matchup with second-seeded Brooklyn. That series opens on Saturday.

Tatum has drawn criticism at times for his quiet leadership style. He said Tuesday's performance was how he wants to lead.

"I know that my teammates, I've earned their respect. I've earned the respect of the guys I play against," he said. "I believe in myself. That's all that matters."

The Celtics struggled down the stretch, dropping 10 of their final 15 games of the season. Coach Brad Stevens said having to respond was in line with a season in which they had to fight through multiple players being unavailable because of injuries and stints in the league's health and safety protocols.

"We've been through a lot, so we're hardened in a lot of ways," Stevens said. "We've been backs against the wall for most of the year.



... It takes a lot of togetherness and it takes staying together through tough times."

Washington hosts Indiana, which rolled over Charlotte in Tuesday's other play-in game, for the eighth seed on Thursday. The winner of that game will face Philadelphia, the top seed for the Eastern Conference playoffs.

Bradley Beal scored 22 points for the Wizards. Russell Westbrook added 20 points and 14 rebounds. Ish Smith had 17 points. But the Wizards struggled from deep all night long, going 3 for 21 from the 3-point line.

"We couldn't find it. We couldn't find the basket,"

coach Scott Brooks said. "We haven't shot well all year long but we're not a 3-for-21 shooting team."

The Celtics played without second-leading scorer Jaylen Brown, who had season-ending wrist surgery last week. He sat courtside to support his teammates, but they missed his offensive production in the first half while they struggled to get into a flow.

That changed in the third quarter. Boston opened the second half on a 22-4 run, opening a 74-58 lead.

Boston followed Tatum's lead. The All-Star forward created space for open jump-

ers and drew contact in the lane. He was 17 of 17 from the free-throw line.

Washington closed to 91-84 in the fourth quarter, but Boston responded with a 15-6 run to push the lead to 106-88 with 5:32 to play.

"We just didn't do what we were supposed to do," Westbrook said.

Beal, who is dealing with a tender left hamstring, didn't have his usual explosiveness early on. He did his best to keep pace with Tatum and Walker, but the Wizards struggled with turnovers and cold outside shooting for most of the night.

Washington led 54-52 at

halftime, shooting 50% from the field and getting a boost from its reserves, which outscored its Boston counterparts 22-6 in the opening 24 minutes.

The Celtics didn't help themselves by shooting just 35% in the half, including 29% (7 of 24) in the second quarter.

But Tatum was there to pick up the pieces when it mattered.

"Jayson was special," Walker said. "It's nothing new to me. I've been watching him put this work in for the last two years. ... I'm here for the ride."

TIP-INS

Wizards: Beal and Westbrook both started slowly on offense, combining for six points on 2-of-9 shooting in the first quarter. ... Raul Neto, who didn't play in the final two games of the regular season because of a strained left hamstring, was in the starting lineup.

Celtics: Tatum has scored 50 or more points three times this season. ... Outscored the Wizards 38-26 in the third quarter. ... Scored 14 points off 11 Wizards turnovers in the first half.

BUMPS AND BRUISES

Marcus Smart missed Boston's regular-season finale with a bruised right calf. He got tangled up with Beal late in the second quarter and appeared to injure his ankle. He limped off the court and went straight to the locker room with 3:34 to play. He returned to the bench, stretched it out with a rubber band and returned at the 2:46 mark.

But the Celtics experienced another scary moment just over two minutes later when Tatum and Robert Williams collided near the baseline. Tatum was able to walk it off. But Williams, who had been a game-time decision with turf toe in his left foot, went to the locker room favoring his left leg.

Williams returned to start the third, but he played with a noticeable limp before being pulled less than two minutes into the period.

## Saudis put WC every 2 years back on FIFA's agenda



GENEVA, MAY 19 (AP): Playing the World Cup every two years instead of four is back on soccer's agenda.

Saudi Arabia's soccer federation has formally asked FIFA to look at staging biennial World Cups for men and women, soccer's world body said Tuesday.

The proposal requesting a feasibility study to be carried out on the impact of playing both tournaments every two years will be put to the FIFA annual meeting of 211 member federations. The congress is being held as a remote meeting on Friday.

A biennial men's World Cup was floated by FIFA's then-president SeppBlatter more than 20 years ago.

The idea now returns near the end of the busiest and most congested season in modern soccer.

In Europe, the same number of competitions and games for club and national teams were

played despite several weeks being lost because the previous pandemic-delayed season pushed back the start to September.

Still, the proposal is attractive to FIFA whose president Gianni Infantino has built a close relationship with Saudi Arabia since his election in 2016.

Creating new and bigger competitions is a key theme of Infantino's presidency, though the global players' union FIFPRO warns of players facing burnout and injuries from bigger workloads.

The first year of Infantino's presidency saw FIFA add 16 more teams and 16 more games to the World Cup for the 2026 edition. The 48-team, 80-game tournament will be hosted in the United States, Canada and Mexico and should set attendance and revenue records.

FIFA was to launch a 24-team Club World Cup

tournament in China this year. European soccer officials at first opposed the project, citing Infantino's lack of transparency about the financial backers.

The inaugural tournament was shelved last year when the coronavirus pandemic forced the European Championship and Copa America to be postponed to 2021.

The biennial World Cup idea was revived in 2018 by South American soccer leader Alejandro Dominguez, a FIFA vice president who was then a close ally of Infantino.

Dominguez and the South American soccer body CONMEBOL have since moved closer to officials at UEFA, whose quadrennial European Championship would likely be threatened by playing twice as many World Cups.

Currently, each World Cup earns FIFA up to 6 billion in broadcasting and commercial deals. The Euro 2016 tour-

namment which had 51 games compared to 64 in the 32-team World Cup format earned UEFA around 2.3 billion.

The idea that both the men's World Cup and Euros could be staged every two years was raised in March by coaching great Arsene Wenger, who is now FIFA's head of global development.

Both Wenger and Dominguez used the argument that players deserve more chances to play in World Cups.

Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo both aim to play in their fifth World Cup in Qatar next year.

Infantino has consistently said a Women's World Cup could be held every two years. The next edition in 2023 will be hosted by Australia and New Zealand.

A separate proposal to Friday's FIFA meeting from Jamaica calls for a global women's football competition concept to be prepared.

## Argentinian president considers hosting entire Copa America

BUENOS AIRES, MAY 19 (AP): Argentinian President Alberto Fernandez has said his country would consider hosting the entire Copa America if Colombia is unable to co-host because of social unrest.

It was the first time an Argentinian official publicly acknowledged the possibility of hosting the full tournament, scheduled for June 13 to July 10.

We can analyze organizing all of Copa America in Argentina, Fernandez told radio Diez.

Fernandez' state-

ments came as doubts emerged about Colombia's ability to co-host the tournament amid protests against the administration of President Iván Duque. The Colombian government insists it can.

Last week, police and protesters clashed in the cities of Pereira and Barranquilla, the latter of which is scheduled to hold the Copa America final.

A Copa Libertadores match last week between Colombia's America de Cali and Brazil's Atletico Mineiro was inter-

rupted several times because of tear gas used to disperse the protesters.

The original Copa America plan has Buenos Aires hosting the opening match, a quarterfinal and a semifinal. The cities of Cordoba, Mendoza and Santiago del Estero will hold matches of Group A.

Fernandez added that Copa America will be played without attendance in Argentinian stadia. More than 71,000 people have died of COVID-19 in the South American country.

## Dravid, Ganguly's big hundreds in Taunton had an incredible impact on me: Buttler



LONDON, MAY 19 (PTI): England's swashbuckling batsman Jos Buttler says Indian greats Rahul Dravid and Sourav Ganguly's big hundreds in the 1999 World Cup match against Sri Lanka had an "incredible impact" on him.

The duo of Ganguly and Dravid had stitched together a mammoth partnership of 318 runs for the second wicket to set up an easy victory for India.

That was long before the T20 revolution took the game by storm but, on that day in Taunton, sixes and fours rained

down from the blades of the two Indian batsmen, something the destructive Buttler often does these days.

"Those were my formative years and watching that game with Ganguly and Dravid scoring big hundreds had an incredible impact," Buttler told Cricbuzz.

He was surprised by the massive Indian presence in the crowd for a match in England.

"India versus Sri Lanka in 1999 World Cup was my first experience of seeing Indian crowds and that ignites the fire

of how passionate people are about the game and how cool it would be to play in a World Cup," added Buttler.

Buttler looked in good form for Rajasthan Royals in the now-suspended IPL-14, including scoring a scintillating 64-ball 124 against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Considered one of England's finest limited overs batsman, Buttler was instrumental in guiding them to the 2019 World Cup victory at home, and is expected to play a crucial role in the upcoming T20 World Cup.

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# Gaza children bearing the brunt in Israel-Hamas conflict

**GAZA CITY, GAZA (AP):** Suzy Ishkontana hardly speaks or eats. It’s been two days since the 7-year-old girl was pulled from the rubble of what was once her family’s home, destroyed amid a barrage of Israeli airstrikes. She spent hours buried in the wreckage as her siblings and mother died around her.

Children are being subjected to extensive trauma in Israel’s bombardment of the Gaza Strip. For some, it’s trauma they’ve seen repeatedly throughout their short lives.

This is the fourth time in 12 years Israel and Gaza’s Hamas rulers have gone to war. Each time, Israel has unleashed heavy airstrikes at the densely populated Gaza Strip as it vows to stop Hamas rocket barrages launched toward Israel.

According to Gaza health officials, at least 63 children are among the 217 Palestinians who have been killed in Gaza since the latest conflict between Israel and Hamas began on May 10. On the Israeli side, 12 people have been killed by Hamas rockets, all but one of them civilians, including a 5-year-old boy.

Israel says it does everything it can to prevent civilian casualties, including issuing warnings for people to evacuate buildings about to be struck. As Hamas has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, most of them intercepted by anti-missile defenses, Israel’s military has pounded hundreds of sites in Gaza, where some 2 million people live squeezed into a tight urban fabric.

Videos on social media from Gaza have shown the grief of survivors from families wiped out in an instant.

“They were four! Where are they? Four!” wailed one father



outside a hospital after learning all four of his children had been killed. Another showed a young boy screaming “Baba,” as he ran to the front of the funeral procession where men were carrying his father’s body to burial.

The Ishkontana family was buried under the rubble of their home early Sunday, after massive bombing raids of downtown Gaza City that Israel said were targeting a Hamas tunnel network. The strikes came without warning.

RiadIshkontana recounted to The Associated Press how he was buried for five hours under the wreckage, pinned under a chunk of concrete, unable to reach his wife and five children.

“I was listening to their voices beneath the rubble. I heard Dana and Zain calling, ‘Dad! Dad!’ before their voices faded and then I realized they had died,” he said, referring to two of his children.

After he was rescued and taken to the hospital, he said, family and staff hid the truth from him as long as they could. “I learned about their deaths one after another,” he said. Finally, Suzy was brought in alive, the second-oldest of his three daughters and two sons, and the only survivor.

Though she had only limited physical bruising from her seven hours under the rubble, the young girl was in “severe trauma and shock,” said pediatrician Dr. Zuhair Al-Jaro. The hospital was unable to get her the psychological treatment she needs because of the on-going fighting, he said.

“She has entered into a deep depression,” he said. Only today, he said Tuesday, did she eat something after she was allowed briefly outside the hospital and saw her cousins.

As her father spoke to the AP, Suzy sat on the bed next to him, si-

lent and studying the faces of the people in the room but rarely making eye contact. When asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, she turned away. When her father started to answer for her, saying she wanted to become a doctor, the girl began sobbing loudly.

Ishkontana, 42, who recently stopped working as a waiter because of coronavirus lockdowns, said Suzy is smart and tech-savvy and loves smartphones and tablets. “She explores them, she has more experience dealing with them than I do,” he said. She also loves studying and would gather all her siblings into a play “class,” taking the role of their teacher, he said.

The Ishkontanas were just one family destroyed that day.

The strikes Sunday targeted Hamas tunnels running under Gaza City, the Israeli military said. The warplanes pounded al-Wahda

Street, one of the city’s busiest commercial avenues, lined with apartment buildings with stores, bakeries, cafes and electronics shops on the ground floors.

Three buildings collapsed, and multiple people from at least three families were killed. In all 42 people died, including 10 children and 16 women.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, an Israeli military spokesman, called the situation that led to the deaths “abnormal.” He said in one location the airstrikes caused a tunnel to collapse, bringing houses down with it, “and that caused a large amount of civilian casualties, which were not the aim.”

He said the military was analyzing what happened and “attempting to recalibrate” its ordnance to prevent a reoccurrence.

He said the bombing campaign targeting tunnel networks would be expanded to more areas of Gaza

and that the military tries when possible to hit tunnels under roads rather than under houses.

Israel and Hamas have fought similar conflicts in 2009, 2012 and 2014, each time wreaking heavy destruction

The Norwegian Refugee Council said that 11 of the children killed so far in this war had been going through its psycho-social programs helping children deal with trauma — a sign of how children repeatedly are victimized by the violence. Among them was 8-year-old Dana, Suzy’s sister.

“It’s the fourth time for many of them to experience” bombardment around their homes, said HozayfaYazji, the refugee council area field manager.

Parents in Gaza desperately try to calm their terrified children, as bombs rain down, telling the youngest ones it’s just fireworks or trying to put up a cheerful front.

The violence “will of course affect the psychology of these kids,” he said. “We are expecting that ... the situation will be much worse and more children will need more support.”

The refugee council works with 118 schools in Gaza, reaching more than 75,000 students through its Better Learning Program. The program trains teachers to deal with traumatized children and organizes fun exercises to relieve stress. It also does home-checks on children to provide help.

The council’s secretary-general, Jan Egeland, called for an immediate cease-fire, saying, “Spare these children and their families. Stop bombing them now.”

But he said, longer term, an end to the blockade on Gaza and occupation of Palestinian territory is necessary “if we are to avoid more trauma and death among children.”

## Assam reports 73 more COVID deaths, 5,835 fresh cases

**GUWAHATI, MAY 18 (PTI):** Assam reported 73 COVID-19 fatalities on Tuesday taking the death toll to 2,344, while 5,835 new cases pushed the tally to 3,40,858, the National Health Mission (NHM) said.

Currently, the state has a total of 46,393 active cases, the NHM said.

Altogether 4,311 patients recovered from COVID-19 during the day, taking the total number of cured people to 2,90,774 in the state. Of the fresh fatalities, 16 were reported from Kamrup Metropolitan district and seven from Kamrup district. The remaining deaths were registered in several other districts.

The NHM said that 1,347 more COVID-19 patients have died till now, but the government’s Death Audit Board has not included them in the tally of deaths caused by coronavirus as they had other ailments too.

With the detection of 5,835 patients against testing of 90,251 samples on Tuesday, Assam reported a positivity rate of 6.47 per cent.

The state had recorded 6,394 positive cases on Monday against testing of 91,481 samples. Altogether 96,74,434 samples have been tested for COVID-19 so far. Out of the new cases, the highest 921 patients were detected in the state capital, followed by 451 in Nagaon, 445 in Dibrugarh and 410 in Kamrup. The NHM said that a total of 35,30,677 doses of vaccines have been administered. This includes 7,49,130 second dose.

## 'City in transition': New York vies to turn page on pandemic

**NEW YORK, MAY 19 (AP):** More than a year after coronavirus shutdowns sent the city that never sleeps into a fitful slumber, New York could be wide awake again this summer.

Starting Wednesday, vaccinated New Yorkers can shed their masks in most situations, and restaurants, stores, gyms and many other businesses can go back to full capacity if they check vaccination cards or apps for proof that all patrons have been inoculated.

Subways resumed running round-the-clock this week. Midnight curfews for bars and restaurants will be gone by month’s end. Broadway tickets are on sale again, though the curtain won’t rise on any shows until September.

Officials say now is New York’s moment to shake off the image of a city brought to its knees by the virus last spring a recovery poignantly rendered on the latest cover of The New Yorker magazine. It shows a giant door part-open to the city skyline, letting in a ray of light.

Is the Big Apple back to its old, brash self?

Maybe 75%. ... It’s definitely coming back to life, said Mark Kumar, 24, a personal trainer.

But AmeenDeen, 63, said: A full sense of normalcy is not going to come any time soon. There’s far too many deaths. There’s too much suffering. There’s too much inequality.”

Last spring, the biggest city in America was also the nation’s deadliest coronavirus hotspot, the site of over 21,000 deaths in just two months. Black and Hispanic patients have died at markedly higher rates than whites and Asian Americans.

Hospitals overflowed with patients and corpses. Refrigerated trailers served as temporary morgues, and tents were set up in Central Park as a COVID-19 ward. New York’s hectic streets fell quiet, save for ambulance sirens and nightly bursts of cheering from apartment windows for health

care workers.

After a year of ebbs, surges, reopenings and closings, the city hopes vaccinations are turning the tide for good. About 47% of residents have had at least one dose so far. Deaths have amounted to about two dozen a day in recent weeks, and new cases and hospitalizations have plummeted from a wintertime wave.

Large swaths of the country and world are also starting to get back to normal after a crisis blamed for 3.4 million deaths globally, including more than 587,000 in the U.S.

Las Vegas casinos are returning to 100% capacity and no social distancing requirements. Disneyland in California opened up late last month after being shuttered for more than 400 days. Massachusetts this week announced that all virus restrictions will expire Memorial Day weekend.

Summer music festivals like Lollapalooza are back on, the Indy 500 is bracing for more than 100,000 fans, and the federal government says fully vaccinated adults no longer need to wear masks.

France is opening back up on Wednesday as well, with the Eiffel Tower, Parisian cafes and cinemas and the Louvre bringing back visitors for the first time in months.

In New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio has declared it the summer of New York City.

There are other signs New York is regaining its bustle. Some 80,000 city employees returned to their offices at least part time this month, joining the many municipal workers whose jobs never were done remotely.

Subway and commuter rail ridership is averaging about 40% of normal after plunging to 10% last spring, when the subway system began closing for several hours overnight for the first time in its more than 115-year history.

Shakeem Brown, an artist and delivery person who works late in Manhattan, spent up to three

hours a night commuting back to his Queens apartment before 24/7 service resumed Monday. Brown, 26, said it’s refreshing to see things opening up.

At e’s Bar on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, we feel the energy of social life ramping up, co-owner Erin Bellard said. People are so excited to be out.

Still, receipts at the bar and grill have been down about 35% because of pandemic restrictions on hours and capacity, she said. The impending end of the midnight curfew will give the bar two more crucial hours, and the owners are planning to survey patrons to determine whether to regain full capacity by requiring vaccinations.

From other vantage points, normal looks farther off.

The sidewalks and skyscrapers of midtown Manhattan, for instance, are still noticeably empty. Big corporate employers largely aren’t looking to bring more workers back until fall, and only if they feel it’s safe, said Kathryn Wylde, CEO of the Partnership for New York City, a major employers group. Shutting down was easy. Reopening is hard,” Wylde said after a meeting last week with a group of CEOs. “All the employers say that there still is fear and some resistance to coming back.

Besides virus fears, companies and workers are wondering about safety, she said.

Crime in the city has become a growing source of concern, but it’s a complicated picture. Murders, shootings, felony assaults and auto thefts rose in the first four months of this year compared with the same period in pre-pandemic 2019, but robberies and grand larcenies fell. So did crime in the transit system, probably because of the drop in ridership.

Brandon Goldgrub has been back at his midtown office since July, but it’s just in the last few weeks that he has noticed the sidewalks seem a bit crowded again. Now I feel it’s a lot more normal, said Goldgrub, 30, a property manager.

## Israeli airstrikes kill 6, level large family home in Gaza

**GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP):** Israeli airstrikes killed at least six people across the Gaza Strip and destroyed the home of an extended family early Wednesday. Despite growing international pressure for a cease-fire, the military said it widened its strikes on militant targets in the Palestinian territory’s south to blunt continuing rocket fire from Hamas.

Residents surveyed the piles of bricks, concrete and other debris that had once been the home of 40 members of al-Astal family in the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis. They said a warning missile struck the building five minutes before the airstrike, allowing everyone to escape.

Ahmed al-Astal, a university professor, described a scene of panic before the airstrike hit, with men, women and children racing out of the building. Some of the women didn’t even have time to cover their hair with Muslim headscarves, he said.

“We had just gotten down to the street, breathless, when the devastating bombardment came,” he said. “They left nothing but destruction, the children’s cries filling the street. ... This is happening, and there is no one to help us. We ask God to help us.”

The Israeli military said it struck a militant tunnel network around the towns of Khan Younis and Rafah, with 52 aircraft hitting 40 underground targets. Gaza’s Health Ministry said a woman was killed and eight people were wounded in those strikes.

Hamas-run Al-Aqsa radio said one of its reporters was killed in an airstrike in Gaza City. Among the six killed Wednesday were also two people who died when warning missiles crashed into their apartment.

The latest strikes came as diplomatic efforts aimed at a cease-fire gathered strength and Gaza’s infrastructure, already weakened by a 14-year blockade, rapidly deteriorated. Medical supplies, water and fuel for electricity are running low in territory, on which Israel and Egypt imposed the blockade after the Islamic militant group Hamas seized power in 2007.

The Biden administration was privately encouraging Israel to wind down its bombardment of Gaza. Egyptian negotiators also were working to halt the

fighting, and while they have not made progress with Israel, they were optimistic international pressure would force it to the table. Officials discussed the sensitive diplomacy on condition of anonymity.

But it was still unclear if or how soon those efforts would yield results. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel hopes to restore quiet “quickly” but did not exclude the possibility of further escalation.

“You can either conquer them, and that’s always an open possibility, or you can deter them,” he told foreign ambassadors. “We are engaged right now in forceful deterrence, but I have to say, we don’t rule out anything.”

Military officials, meanwhile, said a mysterious explosion that killed eight members of a Palestinian family on the first day of the fighting was caused by a misfired rocket from Gaza. “This wasn’t an Israeli attack,” said Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman.

The fighting began May 10 when Hamas fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem after days of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint site sacred to Jews and Muslims. Heavy-handed police tactics at the compound and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers had inflamed tensions.

At least 219 Palestinians have been killed in the current fighting, including 63 children and 36 women, with 1,530 people wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not break the numbers down into fighters and civilians. Hamas and Islamic Jihad say at least 20 of their fighters have been killed, while Israel says the number is at least 130. Some 58,000 Palestinians have fled their homes.

Twelve people in Israel, including a 5-year-old boy and a soldier, have been killed.

The Israeli military has launched hundreds of airstrikes it says are targeting Hamas’ militant infrastructure, while Palestinian militants have fired more than 3,700 rockets at Israel, with hundreds falling short and most of the rest intercepted. The rockets have reached a number of Israeli cities, including Tel Aviv, and have brought life to a standstill in areas near Gaza.





**ON TOP OF THE WORLD!** The new Miss Universe, Andrea Meza celebrates her win with a trip to the Empire State Building in NYC.

## Jr NTR's appeal to fans ahead of his birthday: Stay home, follow lockdown rules

**HYDERABAD, MAY 19 (PTI):** Popular Telugu actor Jr NTR, who turns a year older tomorrow, urged his fans on Wednesday to refrain from celebrating his birthday as "our country is at war with Covid-19".

In a social media post, the actor said the biggest gift his admirers can give him was by "staying home and following local lockdown rules".

Jr NTR, who is currently in isolation along with his family after testing positive for the virus, expressed gratitude towards his fans for their prayers.

"My dear fans, a big thank you to each and every one of you. I have seen your messages, your videos and your good wishes. Your prayers have kept me going and I am indebted to you all for this love. I am doing very good and I hope to test negative soon," Jr NTR, 38, said in a statement.

"Every year, the affection shown by you on the occasion of my birthday is something I truly cherish. But in these challenging times, the biggest gift you can give me is to stay home and follow lockdown rules," he added.

This was not a time for celebration, Jr NTR said, adding it was the duty of every citizen to support the frontline and essential workers

who are working round-the-clock amid the raging pandemic.

"Our country is at war with Covid-19. Our medical community and frontline workers



are waging a selfless and tireless war. Many people have lost their loved ones and livelihoods. This is not a time for celebration. This is a time for showing our solidarity with those in need," the "AravindaSametha" actor said.

When the war on the pandemic is won, we shall celebrate together, he promised.

"Please take care of your family and loved ones. Support each other and extend a helping hand to those in need... Wear a mask. Stay at home," he concluded.

# 'The Family Man' season 2 to premiere in June

**MUMBAI, MAY 19 (PTI):** The much-awaited second season of Amazon Prime Video's critically-acclaimed web series "The Family Man" is slated to be released on June 4, the streamer announced Wednesday.

Fronted by Manoj Bajpayee, the series was scheduled to return earlier this year. The new season will see Bajpayee's Srikant Tiwari pitted against a new, powerful and brutal adversary named Raaji, essayed by Samantha Akkineni, who makes her digital debut with the show.

The streamer also released the trailer of the nine-part thriller which will see Srikant continuing to jostle between the duality of being a middle class family man and a world class spy and trying to save the nation from an imminent attack. Packed with exciting twists and an unexpected climax, the upcoming season of the edgy action-drama series will give a riveting glimpse of the two worlds of Srikant.

Creator and director duo Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK said they are delivering on the promise that season two will be out by end of this summer.

"The wait will finally be over on 4 June as Srikant Tiwari will return with a thrilling storyline, and 'danger really

has a new face' Samantha Akkineni, who has done a tremendous job, along with the always-fantastic ensemble cast," the creators said in a statement.

"We are confident we have carved out an exciting season for you all, de-

"We're confident that the viewers will be enthralled to witness the face-off between Srikant and his nemesis. It's a pleasure for everyone here at Amazon to unveil a content gem that connects with audiences in India and beyond and we just



spite having to work through the pandemic. Hopefully the new season will be worth the wait. These are extremely difficult times, and we hope and pray for better times. Please stay safe, mask up, and vaccinate as soon as you can," they further said.

Aparna Purohit, Head of India Originals, Amazon Prime Video, said the new season of "The Family Man" is bigger, more complex and dials up the action.

## T.I., wife Tiny investigated after sexual abuse allegation

**LOS ANGELES (AP):** Rapper T.I. and his wife Tameka "Tiny" Harris are under investigation by police in Los Angeles after a sexual abuse allegation. Los Angeles Police Officer Rosario Cervantes said Tuesday that an active investigation is underway. The investigation comes after a woman in Los Angeles and another in Las Vegas filed a police report that accused the couple of sexual assault.

A report was taken April 8 for a sexual assault involving the couple that occurred in 2005, Cervantes said. The police did not provide any additional details.

Las Vegas police received a report this month of a sexual assault incident in 2010 involving the couple. But the case was closed because it was reported outside the statute of limitations.

Steve Sadow, the attorney for T.I. and his wife, said his clients "steadfastly deny and repudiate" all the allegations. He said the couple has not spoken or been contacted

by police in Los Angeles, Las Vegas or any other jurisdiction in the country.

"The LAPD 'accuser' once again remains anonymous, thereby preventing us from being in a position to disprove or refute her allegations — or even examine them," Sadow said. "Meanwhile, although we now have for the first time a name of an 'accuser,' who apparently filed a police report with (Las Vegas Metropolitan Police), we have essentially no specifics about her or her claim, and her attorney has thus far refused to disclose a copy of the report for public scrutiny." The Associated Press generally does not identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted.

In March, attorney Tyrone A. Blackburn said more than 30 women contacted him accusing T.I. and his wife of "forced drugging, kidnapping, rape and intimidation" in at least two states, including California and Georgia. He said the allegations span more than 15 years.

## Leslie Odom Jr joins 'Knives Out 2'

**LOS ANGELES, MAY 19 (PTI):** Academy Award-nominated actor Leslie Odom Jr is the latest addition to the star-studded cast of the "Knives Out" sequel.

The "One Night in Miami..." star joins fellow newcomers Kathryn Hahn, Dave Bautista, Edward Norton and Janelle Monáe in the Rian Johnson directorial. According to The Hollywood Reporter, plot details are under wraps but the follow-up is set to shoot this summer in Greece.

Daniel Craig, who essayed the role of master sleuth Benoit Blanc in the 2019 original hit, will reprise the part in the sequel which will be another ensemble murder mystery.

Netflix, which took over the franchise from MRC and Lionsgate to develop two "Knives Out" follow-ups for a massive

USD 450 million reportedly, had no comment on the casting. Johnson wrote the script, will direct, and is also producing with Ram Bergman under their T-Street banner.

"Knives Out" follows a family gathering gone horribly awry, after the family patriarch's (Christopher Plummer) death leads master detective Benoit Blanc (Craig) to investigate.

The whodunnit also features Chris Evans, Ana de Armas, Jamie Lee Curtis, Michael Shannon, Don Johnson, Toni Collette, Lakeith Stanfield, Katherine Langford, and Jaeden Martell.

Odom earned two Oscar nominations -- supporting actor and original song -- for his role as 'King of Soul' Sam Cooke in Regina King's directorial debut "One Night in Miami..."

## Kumail Nanjiani to play Chippendales founder in 'Immigrant'

**LOS ANGELES, MAY 19 (PTI):** Actor-comic Kumail Nanjiani is set to star in "Immigrant", based on the true story of Somen "Steve" Banerjee, an Indian-American entrepreneur who started Chippendales.

Nanjiani, who is a Pakistani-American, will play Banerjee in the limited series from Hulu that will detail the insane, darkly comedic, crime-ridden story behind the unique male revue that became a cultural phenomenon.

According to Variety, "Immigrant" is written by Robert Siegel and executive produced by Siegel, Nanjiani, Limelight's Dylan Sellers and Chris Parker, and Emily V Gordon as well as Rajiv Joseph and Mehar Sethi, who will also write on the series.

Writer Gordon, who is Nanjiani's wife, previously collaborated with the actor on the 2017 rom-com "The Big Sick". Loosely based on their real-life romance, the film was nominated for the Academy Award for best original screenplay. Twentieth Television will produce the eight-episode series "Immigrant".

This is the second project on Chippendales in development. Indian-origin British actor Dev Patel is also on board to play Banerjee in a feature film directed by Craig Gillespie of "I, Tonya" fame.

Patel, known for "Lion" and "Modern Love", was announced to headline the film in 2017. It has been in the works for two decades by Permut Productions' David Permut.

Meanwhile, Nanjiani's small screen credits include "Silicon Valley", "Portlandia" and the upcoming "Obi-Wan Kenobi" series. He will next be seen in "Eternals".

**Aries:** Your thoughts are more powerful than you will ever know, Aries, and they are creating your reality as you go along. So, continue to reaffirm all that is grand and glorious in your existence as you add new elements to your vision board. Something tells us it's all coming into being—and it's all coming into being now. The good news is, your siblings are your co-conspirators on this journey, helping you fine tune every last detail of your strategy. Tip: From thoughts to things!

**Taurus:** Your creativity is at an all time high, Taurus. You're in the mood to bring magic into this world, and then some. The good news is, you are not vision boarding all by yourself. You and your bestie (or favourite colleague) are sharing electrifying ideas, fine-tuning each other's strategies and plotting and planning about how to take over the world. Your power words: 'collaboration' and 'co-creation'. Tip: Mission World Domination is in the works.

**Gemini:** It's funny how we talk about external enemies, when the real opponent resides within. Pay attention to all the 'tamasic' qualities inside of you, Gemini. The metaphorical darkness that's keeping you chained to the lower planes of existence. It's time to break free from the old, toxic habits. It's time to light the lamp of awareness. As

such, shifting the focus from 'me' to 'we' is also going to be an important theme. Sync your forces with fellow warriors, who, like you, are feeling inspired to bring about a positive shift in the collective. Tip: It's time to tap into your inner humanitarian.

**Cancer:** We all want to realise our dreams, Cancer, even if they seem "too big" or "too unrealistic" to other people. We all want to be known for what we do best as we leave behind a legacy that will continue to influence future generations. But, the road that leads to the desired destination is seldom a straight one. There are many twists and turns—twists and turns that threaten to distract us from our soul's mission. How committed will you choose to be despite them? Consider this your test, beautiful. Tip: You know what you have come here to do.

**Leo:** You've got that big goal energy about you, and it's making you oh-so-irresistible, Leo. The title of this chapter of your life? 'The impossible is possible'. The mission? To take your work to the next level and have a positive impact on the world. Remember, there is only so much you would have been able to achieve without the guidance of your mentors and the support of your subordinates and co-workers. Ensure you celebrate your big win with all of them, and make them feel like a part of your story.

Tip: The impossible is possible.

**Virgo:** You're feeling rather introspective today, Virgo, and it's making you look back at all the twists and turns that brought you to this point in your existence. Sure, it's been a bumpy ride. But, you would not trade your experiences for anything, and that's what makes the journey so, so worth it. As far as your creative processes are concerned, you are honouring this as a time of incubation. A time of nurturing the ideas before they're ready to go out into the world. This silence is not an empty one. It's potent with possibilities, beautiful. Tip: Allow yourself to be in yin mode.

**Libra:** This physical reality we exist in is paradoxical in so many ways—uncanny in the manner it fulfils our desires, and you're going to witness this first hand, Libra. Just when you give up wanting something that you have been yearning for, it will be presented to you on a silver—nay, gold—platter. Whilst there are many who talk about action and intention in the context of manifestation, there are few who touch upon the subject of 'surrender'. Tip: 'Surrender' is and will always be the magic word. **Scorpio:** Scorpio, you're the kind of person who can smell inauthenticity from a mile away. So why fall prey to the games

those around you are playing right now? This chapter of your life requires you to honour your truth despite the judgements and opposition you may face. Courage has always been your strongest suit anyway. Tip: Come as you are.

**Sagittarius:** If we tried to do everything on our own, there's only so much we would be able to achieve. Collaboration is the key, Sagittarius. So, why not reach out to your network and figure out who you can partner up with? Those who have already formed an alliance with a close friend or sibling will find that they're being able to take their work (and message) to the next level, especially if social welfare is one of the pillars of the given organisation. Tip: If you're looking for co-conspirators, turn to your network.

**Capricorn:** There's a whole bunch of things that "haven't" worked for you in the past, and it's time for you to take stock of them, Capricorn. No, this exercise is not meant to be an excuse to recede into a rabbit hole of negative emotions. It's simply a way of becoming aware of the things that are not in alignment. Plucking weeds out of your garden promises to be a lot more therapeutic than it looks. As far as finances are concerned, you're being asked to practice prudence. Having a budget in place will keep you from

making decisions you could come to regret later.

Tip: Be prudent with your finances.

**Aquarius:** You're in that serene space that lies somewhere in between dream and reality, Aquarius. That space where ideas are airdropped into your subconscious by the mysterious forces above and below. So allow yourself to be in yin mode. Allow yourself to stop and smell the lilies, the hyacinths and the roses too. Trust that this silence is not an empty one. It is the kind that's potent with possibilities and will change the map of your life for the better. Tip: You're floating somewhere in between dream and reality, water bearer.

**Pisces:** You're a power player, Pisces. The room lights up every time you're around. So, zoom out. Take a look at yourself from a higher perspective and be proud of the person you have become. The kind of person who commands, not demands respect. Your spirit team is hooting for you from across the veil right now. For some of you, this may be a time of exploring your magic and delving deeper into the sacred arts. Others may feel drawn towards the study of Philosophy and Spirit Sciences. Trust that your instinct is guiding you in the right direction, wild one. Tip: This is a time of stepping into your magic fully!