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Summit TIMES

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CM directs constitution of dedicated teams to manage Sikkim's Covid challenge

Rs 10K ONE-TIME GRANT FOR ASHA WORKERS IN RECOGNITION OF THEIR SELFLESS SERVICE THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 MAY:**

Chief Minister PS Tamang has directed the Health Department to immediately set up a Technical Expert Committee to oversee and streamline the procurement of anti-Covid-19 drug, 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG) and Covid-19 self-testing kit, CoviSelf.

This committee will also be monitoring and mobilising measures to tackle Mucormycosis or black fungus that critically affects a section of patients recovering from Covid-19.

An official press communique from the IPR Department informs that these directions were passed at a Covid-19 review meeting chaired by the Chief Minister at Samman Bhawan today and attended by Cabinet Ministers, Gangtok's Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Chief Secretary, DGP, ACS, Prin-



cipal Secretaries, Secretaries, Confidential Secretary to CM, and officers of the Covid-19 Management Group.

The meeting also assessed the present situation of Covid-19 in the State with the main focus on the State's preparedness for screening, diagnosis and management of any possible cases of Mucormycosis, commonly known as black fungus, in the State.

The release adds that the CM applauded the efforts of

the Transport Department towards ensuring timely transportation of oxygen cylinders in the State.

He further directed the institution of an Oxygen Plant Set-up Committee headed by Transport Minister, Sanjit Kharel, along with Secretary-Transport, Secretary-Health, GM-Transport and DE-Health.

This committee will be auditing and monitoring the supply of oxygen cylinders while also deliberating on setting

up of Oxygen Plants in various locations in the State, it is informed.

The CM further issued directives to the Rural Development Department to set up dedicated Covid Care and isolation centres at every GPU in the State in close coordination with the DCs and BDOs in order to extend proper Covid care to people in poor living circumstances, thereby mitigating the challenges at the local level.

He also directed the Sikkim

Police to make adequate law & order arrangements to ensure strict vigilance during the lockdown.

He also urged all the HoDs and officers to be present at their respective stations and be available at all times.

During the meeting, the CM also announced a one-time incentive of Rs 10,000 to be granted to ASHA workers from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund in recognition of their significant contribution towards Covid-19 pandemic related work.

**'LOCKDOWN'
EXTENDED TILL 31 MAY**

Shops selling essential items allowed to open for 3 hours every day, Covid-free villages to resume MGNREGA works

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 MAY:**

When the State Government announced a weeklong lockdown last week, the two-day heads up received by the people had witnessed a mad scramble at ration shops as people stocked up. The shelves of ration shops were left empty, but vegetables can last only so long and even last Sunday, reports had come in from many parts that tomatoes had run out before people could purchase enough of them.

While WhatsApp groups have remained busy speculating over how long the lockdown will be extended for - because accept it, it was no secret that it was being extended - several theories circulated on whether the notification drafters knew that kitchens required restocking.

These worries were laid to rest today the Home Department issuing a fresh notification. Yes, the "lockdown," a word government agencies are consciously shying away from, has been extended till 5AM 31 May. But there are relaxations. Shops selling essential items - rations and vegetables and other kitchen supplies - will open for a three-window from 8AM to 11AM every day.

The decision, an official press release informs, was taken at a Covid-19 review meeting chaired by Chief Minister PS Tamang at Samman Bhawan earlier today. The meeting was attended by Cabinet Ministers, Gangtok's Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Chief Secretary, DGP, ACS, Principal Secretaries, Secretaries, Confidential Secretary to CM, and officers of the Covid-19 Management Group, the release adds.

The Chief Minister has appealed to all to shop for rations and vegetables in their respective areas while following Covid-appropriate behaviour in a "conscious effort towards extending support to the State administration in the fight against Covid-19 outbreak."

Meanwhile, in what must come as a relief for the rural folk, MGNREGA works have also been left out of the "stricter restrictions on the movement of people." These works will, however, be allowed only in villages with no Covid cases subject to permission by the concerned DCs based on reports from the concerned BDOs.

This will be welcomed by the rural economy which has taken an as severe a hit at businesses in urban areas. It will be interesting to see how many wards currently have a Covid-free status.

The Home Department has also noticed that this is the last week of the month and salaries need to be disbursed shortly. Hence, "movement" of officials on duty, "including Head of Departments, Drawing and Disbursing Officer, Pay and

turn to pg02

Dalai Lama condoles death of environmentalist Bahuguna



DHARAMSHALA, MAY 22 (PTI): Tibetan religious leader the Dalai Lama on Saturday expressed grief over the death of renowned environmentalist Sunderlal Bahuguna and said he had made non-violence the core of his campaign to protect environment.

Bahuguna, who had pioneered the Chipko movement, died of COVID-19 at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences in Rishikesh on Friday. He was 94.

The Dalai Lama in a message on Saturday said, I offer my condolences to his family as well as his many admirers and friends, and I will offer prayers for him.

I deeply admired the way he made 'ahimsa' (non-violence) the core of his tireless campaigns to protect the environment. Having grown up in Garwhal in Uttara-

khand, he was not only acutely aware of the need to preserve the rivers, forests and hills of the Himalayan region, but felt it was his mission to draw other people's attention to it, the Dalai Lama said.

The Tibetan religious leader said on one occasion, Bahuguna had asked him to spread the word about the importance of planting trees and caring for them.

I agreed and when I visit Ladakh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and other places, I urge people to go out of their way to care for the environment, which has ramifications far beyond the regions where they live, he added.

The Dalai Lama said the best tribute to the environmentalists will be to continue to support the movement he began to plant trees protect the earth.

Covid in Sikkim: 287 new cases, one death and 267 recoveries

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 MAY:**

Sikkim recorded 287 new cases of novel coronavirus and 267 new recoveries of COVID patients in the last 24 hours. Hopefully this will keep balancing out and Sikkim will have more recoveries than infections in the coming days.

In the meantime, Sikkim's COVID death toll reached 221 today with one more person

succumbing to Covid at STNM Hospital.

Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 now stands at 12,808.

The 287 samples which returned positive for COVID-19 in the screening of 1,003 samples in the State on Friday.

A total of 193 persons were found positive in RT-PCR testing of 671 samples, while one more

reported positive in CB-NAAT of five samples and 93 samples tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 327 samples.

Out of these 287 new cases, 200 were registered in East District, 25 in West District, 55 in South District and 07 in North District.

On the other hand, Sikkim's number of recovered cases of COVID-19 has further improved to 9183

with the release of 267 more persons from home isolation after completing their isolation period on Friday. The state has recorded 1284 recoveries in the last six days.

There are currently 3194 active cases of coronavirus in the State, of whom 18 are admitted in the ICU facility of STNM hospital and seven are in ICU at Central Referral Hospital, Tadong.

Ministry of Education calls meeting on pending Class 12 board exams

NEW DELHI, MAY 22 (PTI): The Ministry of Education has called a crucial meeting on Sunday to discuss the issue of pending Class 12 board exams, which were postponed in view of the second wave of COVID-19, Union minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' said.

The meeting will be chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Union Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani and Minister for Information and Broadcasting Prakash Javadekar will be in attendance.

"I recently held a meeting with the state education secretaries in this regard. The consultative process will be further strengthened through a high-level meeting to be chaired by Hon'ble Defence Minister Shri @rajnathsingh Ji," Nishank tweeted on Saturday.

"All the state government education ministers and secretaries have been requested to attend this meeting and to

share their valuable views with regards to upcoming examinations. This virtual meeting will take place at 11.30 am on 23rd May, 2021," he added.

In a letter to states and union territories, the Union education minister has stated that the Department of School Education and Literacy, Minis-



try of Education, and the CBSE are exploring options regarding the conduct of examinations, keeping in mind the safety and security of the students and the teachers.

"The Department of Higher Education is also deliberating upon the finalization of the dates of examinations for institutions of higher learning. COVID-19 pandemic has affected various areas including the Education sector, particularly the board exams and entrance exams," the letter noted.

"In view of the prevailing situation, almost all the State Education Boards, CBSE and ICSE have postponed their Class XII examinations, 2021. Similarly, the National Testing Agency (NTA) and other national exam conducting institutions have also postponed the entrance exams for admissions to professional courses," it added.

Children get Covid, must ensure they don't become part of chain: Centre

NEW DELHI, 22 MAY [NDTV]: Children do get COVID-19, contradictory to popular assumptions, although they usually show only mild symptoms, NITI Aayog member - health Dr VK Paul said today. The attempt on the part of the government now is to ensure that minors do not become part of the chain through which the disease spreads, he said.

The second wave of the pandemic, in which number of children affected have seen a rise, has alerted the country's health experts to stress on ways to handle children, with pre-existing co-morbidities, who have been infected with the deadly virus, ANI had reported earlier.

"The matter of children is more important... They do get Covid. But the symptoms are minimal. They are largely asymptomatic," Dr Paul told reporters today.

"However, the task is to make sure that they do not become part of the chain through which the disease spreads among people," he said.

In India, 26 per cent of the population is less than 14 years of age and nearly seven per cent are less than five-years-old.

Earlier, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights wrote to the Union Health Ministry and Indian Council of Medical Research alerting that a third COVID-19 wave may affect children in large number as suggested by health experts.

Dr Paul today also revealed that in the second wave of the pandemic in India, rural areas have been more affected than urban. He, however, reassured the country that the situation was stabilising.

"The pandemic is stabilising in a major part of the country. The positivity rate is going down and the number of active cases is going down," the NITI Aayog member said, repeating the message he gave out a week before.

Asked if a person can get inoculated with a vaccine different from the one received in the first dose, Dr Paul said it was not possible.

"But...this is an evolving situation. No robust scientific evidence, only time will tell," he said, adding a caveat.

India yesterday reported over 2.57 lakh fresh cases and almost 4,200 deaths related to Covid.

Deputy Speaker visits government health centres and police stations in his constituency

PRITAM LAMA

GYALSHING 22 MAY:

Sikkim Legislative Assembly Deputy Speaker, Sangay Lepcha, who is also the area MLA of Yuksam-Tashiding, visited government health centres and police stations to take stock of situation and challenges being faced by the people and frontline warriors during the Covid pandemic and lockdown on Saturday.

The Deputy Speaker visited Melli-Aching Primary Health Sub-Centre (PHSC) in the morning where he interacted with the staffs there and enquired about the requirements at the PHSC. He handed over various medical items and essentials to Melli-Aching health centre.

MLA Sangay Lepcha then visited Khechuperi Primary Health Sub-Centre (PHSC) where he handed over essentials to the health centre. He also met the local villagers and provided essentials to the needy families.

Similarly, the MLA visited the Yuksam PHC where he enquired about



the status and Covid crisis. He handed over essentials to the medical centre and also provided incentives to the frontline workers.

MLA Sangay Lepcha, during his tour, also met NGOs and clubs who are actively taking part as Covid warriors and supporting the Government's initiatives.

The MLA interacted with Yuksam SDM, Tshering T Bhutia about the prevailing situation in the subdivision. He asked

the authorities to be vigilant and at the service to people at this time of pandemic induced crisis.

Speaking to this correspondent, the Deputy Speaker said: "I have been visiting health centres across the constituency with an aim to take stock of situation. The State government is doing its best to serve the people of State during this tough time. To keep people safe and secure, the government has taken various measures

and precautions to ensure that the people are protected from the virus. I am visiting the health centres and people at their doorsteps to know about the problems being faced by them so that the Government can solve and serve. Administration is kept alert at service to people round the clock."

He appealed people need not to panic as the State government is at their service and the government is fully prepared

to meet any situation. He also appealed people to follow Covid protocols issued by the Government.

Sangay Lepcha has been providing rations and essentials to the needy families of his constituency from his side.

The MLA was accompanied by SKM West District Coordinator Nandu Gurung, SKM CLC Coordinator, Keshar Kumar Khatiwada and SKM Sports Wing General Secretary Sonam Chewang Bhutia and others.

Farmers Welfare Board chairperson places personal vehicle for emergency use

BIKASH CHETTRI

NAMCHI, 22 MAY:

Chairperson, Farmers Welfare Board, Phurden Lepcha, has offered his personal vehicle for COVID-19 emergency service to the people of Poklok-Denchung GPU.

Mr Lepcha is also a

resident of the same GPU and has now placed his vehicle [bearing registration number WB74 AF 3779], for emergency transfer of patients from Denchung BAC.

The fuel and other expenses towards the travel will be met by the

Chairperson himself, he has assured.

He is also planning to visit the farmers of Poklok-Denchung and reach ration - 15KG rice, salt and cooking oil as soon as the current lockdown is relaxed and movement of people allowed.

Have to shut vaccination sites for 18-44 age group as vaccine stocks are over: Delhi CM



NEW DELHI, MAY 22 (PTI): Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday said COVID-19 vaccination centres for those in the 18-44 years age group are being closed in the national capital due to lack of doses and appealed to the Centre to provide more vaccines.

From Sunday, all vaccination centres for youths in Delhi will be closed as stocks have run out, he said in a press conference.

Delhi requires 80 lakh doses a month to vaccinate its youth. But it only received 16 lakh doses in May. The Centre has further decreased Delhi's quota in June to 8 lakh doses, Kejriwal said.

The national capital needs 2.5 crore doses to vaccinate all adults, he said, urging the Centre to raise the quota and supply to the city.

Kejriwal said that the speed of spread of the coronavirus has significantly

slowed down in Delhi. In the past 24 hours, around 2,200 cases were reported and the positivity rate is 3.5 per cent, he said.

The chief minister extended four suggestions to the Centre to enhance vaccine availability in the country.

The central government should within 24 hours direct all capable companies in the country to start manufacturing Covaxin as Bharat Biotech has agreed to share its formula, he said.

Vaccines manufactured abroad should be used in India and the Centre needs to buy vaccines on the behalf of states, Kejriwal said.

Foreign companies should be allowed to manufacture vaccines in India and the Centre should try to get vaccines from such countries that have more doses than what they need, he added.

Assam plans to introduce Cow Protection Bill in next Assembly Session

GUWAHATI, 22 MAY [PTI]:

Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi on Saturday said the government is planning to introduce a cow protection bill in the next assembly session to ban transport of the animal outside the state.

Addressing the first session of the 15th Assam Legislative Assembly, Mr Mukhi said people revere and worship

cows, considering it a sacred animal.

"I am happy to inform you that my government plans to introduce the Cow Protection Bill in the next assembly session. The proposed bill envisages imposition of complete ban on transport of cattle outside the state," he said.

The government will adopt a zero-tolerance

policy for protection of the animal and enforce stringent punishment for those found transporting it outside Assam, the governor said.

"Once passed, Assam will join other states which have passed similar bills," he said.

Mr Mukhi also said cows nurture people as the animal gives them "life-sustaining milk".

12 Covid Deaths, Over 1,800 Positive At Assam Tea Gardens

GUWAHATI, 22 MAY

[NDTV]: Despite the efforts of the Assam government to tackle COVID-19 spread in the tea gardens of the state, some 1,800 positive cases have been reported from tea gardens in the second wave of the pandemic. 12 patients from tea garden areas have died of Covid.

Till May 19, a total of 1,851 have been tested positive in 229 tea gardens of Assam, government data shows. So far 214 tea estates have opened Covid care centres on the government's instructions. But they have limited facilities.

"Last year, tea gardens were not much affected by Covid, but this time we are seeing a spread of the virus in the tea gardens. My department and the Health Department are closely monitoring every tea garden," Assam Labour and Welfare of Tea Tribes Minister Sanjoy Kishan told NDTV.

"Wherever we are getting positive cases, we are not allowing home isolation in tea gardens as the facilities could be inadequate. So we have Covid care centres. And since most gardens are open and work is continuing, we might have to shut down more tea gardens to break the chain of transmission," Mr Kishan said.

There are 850 major tea gardens in Assam. Their staff accounts for 18 per cent of Assam's population. The gardens that account for 20 positive cases will be declared as containment zones. The state government said if the spread of the virus continues, they will have to close several tea gardens.

"I feel the situation might actually turn serious in future and so the government is on alert. A separate safety SOP has been issued for tea garden areas," said Assam BJP MP Kamakhya Prasad Tassa.

Odisha reports 11,108 new COVID cases, 26 more deaths



BHUBANESWAR, MAY 22

(PTI): Odisha on Saturday reported 11,108 new COVID-19 cases and 26 more deaths, a Health Department official said.

The new cases were detected after testing 60,759 samples on Friday, taking the day's positive rate to 18.28 per cent.

So far, the state has reported 6,79,530 COVID-19 cases and 2,456 deaths, the official said.

Of the new infections, 6,219 were detected at quarantine centres while the remaining 4,889 were local contact cases.

There are 1,09,639 active cases in the state at present.

On Friday, 10,881 patients recovered, taking the total number of recoveries to 5,67,382.

Khurda district, of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, reported the highest 1,451 cases, followed by Cuttack (944), Angul (864), Sundergarh (708) and Balasore (509).

Kalahandi (39) is the lone district that reported new cases in double digits.

Of the 26 fresh fatalities, Khurda alone

accounted for six deaths. Four people died in Kalahandi, three deaths each happened in Ganjam and Puri district, while Angul, Sundergarh and Balasore districts reported two deaths each.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik inaugurated a 150-bed district COVID hospital at Puri's Jagannath Medical College.

The facility, built in collaboration with Bhubaneswar's SUM Hospital, has 90 general oxygen beds, 40 HDU and 20 ICU beds. It is also equipped with a high-quality laboratory and diagnostics facility.

The chief minister said on Thursday that the hospital will be helpful in providing better medical care to critical COVID-19 patients of the district and they won't have to search for beds in Bhubaneswar or Cuttack.

The entire operational expenditure of the COVID hospital will be borne by the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF), Patnaik announced, adding that all the beds have been connected with oxygen pipeline, and their number will increase, if required.

'LOCKDOWN' EXTENDED...

Accounts Officials, Judicial officers and staff shall also be permitted on production of valid ID Card."

Also joining the list of exempted from the lockdown people and activities are examiners and students for examinations at Sikkim Manipal Medical College provided they follow Covid-19 protocol.

Today's order also allows Temi Tea Estate to begin operations with a 50% workforce.

Emergency services and personnel, chemists and petrol pumps were already exempted from the lockdown, it may be recalled.

Interestingly, as mentioned earlier, while the covering letter for the notification does not call this a "lockdown" any where and refers to it as "restrictions on the movement of people," the copy-paste nature of such government orders sees the word "lockdown" surface in the section of Penal Provisions [which have remained unchanged since they were first issued a year back]. The Home Secretary warns that: "Any person violating these lockdown measures and the National Directives for COVID-19 Management..."

CONTACT

SUMMIT TIMES
REPORTERS

SINGTAM

8170070813

MANGAN/ DIKCHU

9832612485/

9434011213

GANGTOK

9800571148

8116388176

9832424750

8016270440

DC chairs coordination meeting for North Sikkim



MANGAN, 22 MAY [IPR]: A coordination meeting was held at the conference hall of the District Administrative Block Mangan today, regarding the rise of COVID 19 cases in the North District.

The meeting was chaired by DC (North), Tenzing T Kaleon and the meeting was attended by Additional Political Secretary to CM (North), Tshering Wangyal Bhutia, SP (North), Ongmu Bhutia, ADM (North), Sonam Lepcha, CMO (North), Tempo T Kaleon, all SDMs and

BDOs from North District and HODs and Officers from all departments of North District.

The DC(North) addressed the gathering by reviewing the current scenario in the North District and the rise of Covid-19 positive cases.

He stated that all district resources and manpower must be utilized aggressively in order to combat the pandemic, especially regarding transportation for those who test positive and medical attention for the

patients as well as primary contacts.

He asked the district administration and the health sector to form a holistic system in order to manage the spread of the disease so that everyone is responsible for the assigned tasks and can deliver the required results. He informed that the Vaccination drive has been conducted in District Hospital Mangan and 5 PHCs till date.

He also stated that if the positive cases rise, arrangement for more

venues for the testing and vaccination drive will be identified. He instructed that departments that have more than one vehicle, to provide the remaining and off-duty vehicles along with the driver, for Covid duty, if required.

He also requested for more manpower for the registration process for vaccination, if needed. Analysing the situation so far, he also stated that at least 5 employees from each department should be available for Covid

duty. ADC (Dev) has been given the charge and responsibility to coordinate with the NGOs from North District for manpower, if required.

The DC (North) requested all the HODs to work towards spreading awareness and to contain rumours or false information that could cause chaos among the public. He informed that the Covid Care Centre in Chungthang has been equipped with 10 beds, Zilla Bhawan Mangan with 25 beds and Dzongu with 16 beds for Covid patients.

Additional Political Secretary to CM (North) thanked all the BDOs of North District for their continuous effort to prevent the disease.

He suggested that Oximeters could be made available to ASHA workers, so that during emergency they could be able to maintain records of the patients.

SP(North) urged everyone to work sensibly and also sensitively in handling the Covid-19 crisis.

26 workers brought home to Jharkhand after getting stranded in Nepal



RANCHI, 22 MAY [PTI]: Twenty-six Jharkhand migrant workers stuck in Nepal due to COVID-induced lockdown there on Saturday reached India-Nepal border and boarded a bus for their home in Dumka, a top official said.

These migrant workers from Jharkhand, engaged in a project in Nepal by Larsen & Toubro, had been stranded due to lockdown in the Himalayan country to rein in coronavirus surge and had been sending SOS messages including video messages to the Jharkhand government for rescue.

The workers reached Viratnagar on Bihar-Nepal border and boarded the bus to travel to Dumka, around 245 km away. "Our worker brothers have reached India-Nepal border. Soon they will depart for Dumka. Team of officers and paramedics are at Viratnagar on Bihar-Nepal border to bring them home safely."

"RAT kits, dry ration, oxygen cylinder equipped ambulance have all been sent from Dumka," said Deputy Commissioner Dumka, Rajeshwari B, who had flagged off a bus from Indoor stadium to Nepal border along with officials for the ferrying workers Friday.

A migrant worker coming home thanked Hemant Soren-led government for their rescue.

"We are sitting in a bus sent by the Jharkhand government. We have been provided food. Apart from Subh Sandesh Foundation, Indian Youth Association, Nepal too helped us besides Chief Minister Hemant Soren,

legislator Basant Soren and DC among others. Nepal people also helped us including media persons ...," Narayan Das, a migrant worker, said in a video message.

The migrant workers hailing from Dumka district had appealed to the government for rescue, saying they were unwell and held up in Sindhupalchok district of Nepal.

Former legislator Kunal Sarangi, JMM Legislator Basant Soren took up their cause and chief minister Hemant Soren as well as Indian Embassy in Nepal also intervened.

"A prompt action was initiated for the return of migrant 26 workers stuck in Nepal at the instance of chief minister Hemant Soren. The state government took up the issue with the Nepal government."

"As a result of the initiatives, the workers will be returning to Jharkhand on Saturday," a state government official had said.

Mr Sarangi said members of Janata Samajwadi Party Nepal helped in locating the workers and also in their return back home.

Chief Minister's office said a bus and an ambulance were rushed to the Indo-Nepal border to bring back workers.

Approval from Nepal government had already been sought for this, the official added.

On their return, the workers will undergo health check and COVID tests, the official said.

The Jharkhand government has imposed lockdown-like restrictions that mandate compulsory seven-day quarantine for people coming

to the state. The workers will be brought to Dumka's indoor stadium first.

Former legislator and BJP leader Kunal Sarangi among others had escalated the matter urging the Ministry of External Affairs besides Indian Embassy in Nepal and others thanked the Indian Embassy in Nepal too for swinging into action.

A Larsen & Toubro spokesperson confirmed that the workers were engaged by the company at a project site through a contractor.

Chief minister Soren had on Thursday retweeted a message by a non-profit body Shubh Sandesh Foundation: "Doing our best to assist 26 Jharkhand migrants stuck in Nepal. Our friends in Nepal are in touch coordinating food, travel pass, medicine etc for them."

Earlier, former legislator Sarangi Mr had tweeted: "I sincerely request @DrSjaishankar Sir & @IndiaInNepal to get it looked into. These poor migrant labourers from Jharkhand are stuck in Nepal and they are very unwell. Pls rescue them."

In earlier video messages the migrant workers were seen appealing to the Jharkhand government to rescue them while saying that they are stranded in Nepal due to the lockdown and most of them have fallen sick but are not getting any medical attention and food.

In a separate message later, the workers said that they have received a communication from the Shubh Sandesh Foundation that arrangements are being done for their safe return.

Interschool Quiz on International Day for Bio-Diversity



WINNER
Mr. Rishal Pandey Chettri
Class XII, Delhi Public School, Siliguri
R/o- 5 th Mile Tadong, Gangtok, East Sikkim



2ND POSITION
Ms. Megha Bareilly Class XII, GD Goenka Public School, Siliguri
R/o- Arithang, Gangtok, East Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAY:

Sikkim Biodiversity Board, in collaboration with Sikkim ENVIS Hub, organised an online Inter-School Quiz Competition on 22 May, 2021 to celebrate International Day for Biological Diversity.

Rishal Pandey Chettri (class XII), studying in Delhi Public School, Siliguri, was declared the winner of the competition and has won a cash

prize of Rs. 6000.

Megha Baraily (Class XII), studying in GD Goenka Public School and Reeksal Tenzing Bhutia (Class VIII) studying at Holy Cross School won the 2nd and 3rd positions respectively winning a cash prize of Rs 5000 and Rs 4000.

The quiz competition was open for students from classes 6-12 for students from Sikkim. A total of 475 students participated in the competition.

Delhi reports 3.5% Covid positivity, lowest cases since March 31

NEW DELHI, 22 MAY [PTI]: Delhi's positivity rate has dropped to 3.58 per cent, lowest since April 1, as the more contagious and dangerous wave of the coronavirus infections continued to recede. The national capital on Saturday logged 2,260 new Covid cases, lowest since March 31. At 182, even the single-day spike in deaths saw a major dip.

"These are the lowest numbers after 31 March. Still need to take all precautions and follow Covid appropriate behaviour," Delhi Health Minister Satyendra Jain said.

Delhi's active case-load has come down to 31,308, lowest since April 10. The recovery

rate has surged to 96.16 per cent.

6,453 people were discharged in a day, almost three times the cases reported during the period.

Delhi had been conducting between 80,000-1,00,000 tests daily last month - when it had been reporting case positivity figures in the excess of 25 per cent. The number has dropped this month, but the city is still conducting over 60,000 cases daily.

Yesterday, Delhi recorded 3,009 cases and 252 deaths, with a positivity rate of less than 4.76 per cent.

Saturday is the fourth consecutive day that the city has logged less than 4,000 daily cases.

Resigned because I was anguished: Hemaram Choudhary, Rajasthan MLA

BARMER, MAY 22 (PTI): Congress MLA Hemaram Choudhary on Saturday said he was anguished over some issues and that was why he sent his resignation to the assembly speaker.

The MLA who was among 19 legislators who rebelled last year against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot under former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot's leadership, is also said to be dissatisfied with the government over the alleged stoppage of the develop-

mental work in his assembly constituency.

Choudhary, however, did not elaborate on what caused anguish to him.

The legislator said the Rajasthan unit president of the Congress, Govind Singh Dotasra had spoken to him and it is now for him how he sorts out the issue.

I have sent my resignation and now the speaker has to look into it. Party's state president talked to me and said it is a family matter of the

party. He is head of the party in the state and it is for him to sort out the issue, he told reporters here.

Gudhamalani MLA Choudhary said he has resigned but talking about it is not his top priority.

The Covid-19 pandemic is there and people are dying. I visited anti-covid centres in my constituency and took stock of the situation and arrangements there. This is the top priority for me at present, he said.

Arvind Kejriwal has 4 suggestions for PM to increase vaccination

NEW DELHI, 22 MAY [NDTV]: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal this afternoon wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and gave him four suggestions on boosting vaccine production as he underlined the national capital has "paused the rollout" for the 18-44 age group due to a shortage of doses. "To protect the country from a third Covid wave, it's important to speed up the vaccination drive," he said in an appeal to the centre earlier today.

"All the doses that we received from the government (for 18-44 age group) have been used. A few doses were left, which will also be used by the evening. This is sad. We have written to the centre about this...as soon as we receive supply, we will reopen the centres," said the Chief Minister during a video address.

Every month, Delhi needs 80 lakh doses but it received only 16 lakh doses in May, Mr Kejriwal told the Prime Minister in his letter. "For June, our share has been reduced further to eight lakh doses," he underlined.

If the city gets 8 lakh doses every month, it will take at least 30 months to vaccinate the entire city, his letter read.

"It's hard to imagine how many more Covid waves will hit the city by then and how many more lives will be lost," the Delhi Chief Minister appealed to the centre.

Giving the four suggestions to the Prime Minister, Arvind Kejriwal said: "All vaccine makers in India, within

24 hours, should be ordered to manufacture Bharat Biotech's Covaxin to ramp up stocks." Foreign vaccine makers should be allowed to rollout their vaccines within 24 hours, Mr Kejriwal stressed. "The centre should speak to international vaccine manufacturers, buy from them and distribute to states. States and union territories are fighting with each other," he stressed.

Some countries "have stocked more vaccines than they need and the centre should request these nations to give the excess to India," the Chief Minister further added.


International vaccine manufacturers should be given permission to manufacture in India, he underlined as his final suggestion.

Earlier this week, the Health Ministry said that the government has shared a forward plan till June 15 on vaccine doses and supply as it asked the states to prepare calendars on Cowin app, the government's digital platform for booking slots.

Over 1.6 crore doses are still available with states and union territories, an official statement this morning said.

India was hit by a deadly second Covid wave in March. In the last two months, the daily cases soared, burdening the hospitals. While Delhi witnessed a surge in cases and deaths too, the positivity rate dropped below 5 per cent for the first time since April 4 on Friday. The city has been under a lockdown since April 19.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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<p>Symptoms of nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fever ■ Difficulty in breathing ■ Dry Cough ■ Severe acute respiratory syndrome ■ Pneumonia, other symptoms 	<p>Precautions to Prevent nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Wash your hands often with soap. ■ Wear a cloth mask if you have a cough. ■ 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 infected places. ■ Place a mask if you have respiratory symptoms, and wear your mask while coughing or sneezing.
<p>Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Treatment is symptomatic and supportive. ■ Based on the patient's clinical condition. ■ No vaccines are available as of now. ■ Most likely to recover symptoms detected. 	<p>If you seek help, please contact:</p> <p>1. Toll-free no. 104</p> <p>2. District Surveillance Officer</p> <p>SANJAY KUMAR</p> <p>MOB: 9800000000</p> <p>MOB: 9800000000</p> <p>MOB: 9800000000</p> <p>MOB: 9800000000</p> <p>MOB: 9800000000</p>

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Reconnect With the Land

Only then will climate change mean something to the young

It will not be too off the mark to suggest that the spate of hailstorms which visited parts of East and North Sikkim over the past month was unprecedented in recent memory. Thunder-squalls and the attendant hail are not rare at that time of the year, but the consistency and ferocity with which the weather pounded parts of Sikkim, especially areas along the Teesta valley, is unusual [to put it mildly]. While extreme weather phenomenon can be expected in these days of Climate Change, a worrying flag that the latest round of extreme weather condition raises is not in the amount of precipitation, but the general lack of concern it has evoked.

The last round of thunder-squalls, wherever hail has joined the rain has destroyed the orange crop [which was flowering], levelled standing fields of maize, pulverised the large cardamom plantations [which were also flowering] and will also ensure that the supply of local vegetable produce will be constricted in markets here by the weather, as much as by lockdowns ordered by people who have no understanding of how kitchens are supplied. Unfortunately, around Gangtok, where all decisions are made, the talk around the evening showers is limited to what it means for the water supply status. The concern which one would expect from an economy which is still essentially rural for a majority of the people, is missing. This is a looming sign of the increasing disconnect between the people and nature in Sikkim, and also increasingly, the administration, but we leave that rant for some other time. The urban areas ceased being dependent on the land some decades ago, and even in rural areas, this organic relationship is fraying. This gap renders Sikkim extremely unprepared for the challenges which Climate Change will mount of people in the not very distant future. It is important for this communication to be resumed, not only to ensure that Sikkim respects its natural endowments better, but also to prepare it better for natural disasters which are always a present danger in these hills.

A frank appraisal of how much the younger generation knows about the land and how much the elder generation cares will not hand out a very good report card. While these can be explained to the changing lifestyles, they cannot be excused, because in this disconnect seeds not only the abuse of natural resources, but also unpreparedness for disasters which are natural for hills like the ones found in Sikkim. There is already enough evidence of these, and now, perhaps it is time to step back and return traditional knowledge base to the place of prominence in planning it should always have enjoyed.

This urgency is brought home by what has visited the Seti Gandaki valley in Nepal which was hit by a flash-flood on Saturday causing extensive damage. Pokahara, the tourist town at the end of this flashflood was itself settled over a flashflood debri of a cataclysmic flood on the Seti Gandaki some 800 years ago [Teesta, experts suggest, flooded so massively about 300 years ago that it changed its course beyond what is now the Coronation Bridge]. The terrain there lends itself well to natural damming due to landslides and these eventually break into massive flash-floods. Flash-floods were always a worry, but the scale of the Nepal incident should ensure that these occupy the same priority positioning as Glacial Lake Outburst Floods do in the Himalayan region. Given the intensity of pre-monsoon showers, it can be safely speculated the monsoon rains will be falling on already saturated slopes, which, one may add, are already weakened by the earthquake. When these slopes fail in the higher reaches, where the rivers are still streams which slides can dam, unless these are spotted in time, they will catch infrastructure and people downstream by surprise when they break. Unfortunately, as new laws and ever-popular issues like security, push even residents away from their natural environs and force people away from living with the land to living off doles, the intimacy which people have enjoyed for generations with nature is distanced. In such a scenario, weather phenomenons like the present round of thunderstorms which would have warned people enough about which crops not to expect this season and how to prepare better for the months ahead are lost to complaints about snapped water supply lines. While on water supply lines, Gangtokians should also start preparing for a future when the clutch of lakes which provide the headwaters for the Rately Chu which keeps Gangtok supplied stop getting recharged fast enough due to changing climate patterns and uninformed landuse habits of the armed forces stationed there. A lot of money is being spent on helping Himalayan states like Sikkim 'prepare' for climate change; some of these funds could be judiciously spent on reintroducing the students to the land here and reviving traditional landuse practices which have been edged out by central laws and rules...

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Seven Modern Philosophers to Help Us Build a Better World After the Pandemic

VITTORIO BUFACCHI
theconversation.com

When will things go back to normal? That's what everyone seems to be asking, which is understandable given the pain and sacrifice many endured over the past 18 months. But should things go back to normal? Some would reasonably argue that "normal" is a failed economic model responsible for producing unacceptable levels of inequality that have dented the social and moral fabric of our society.

As old and new challenges confront us, there are a handful of philosophers who can guide us through the next stage of the pandemic and beyond, some of whom I cover in my recent book on the philosophical lessons of lockdown. Here are seven of them whose ideas can help us build a better world by tackling inequality, reversing privatisation and strengthening democracy.

BRIAN BARRY

A disproportionate number of the 3.4 million people worldwide who have died from COVID-19 were also the victims of inequality. After the pandemic, building a more just society, where equality is a precondition of freedom, must be our priority. Brian Barry is a good place to start.

In *Why Social Justice Matters* (2005), he takes issue with the way equality of opportunity is understood today, in which personal responsibility is seen as the most basic and essential of all individual virtues. But Barry argues that the modern mantra of personal responsibility and meritocracy is a myth – an ideology used to punish the more disadvantaged members of society.

In our current world, people are seen as responsible for their poverty, their misery, their lack of resources. If they succumb to COVID, that is also seen as their fault. For Barry, there can only be equality of opportunity if there is equality of access to resources, which is what we need to work towards in a post-COVID world.

THOMAS SCANLON

COVID-19 has exposed the structural injustice underpinning our society, which manifests in galloping social and economic inequalities and relentless exploitation. During the pandemic the very rich have become even richer and more powerful, while the poor are living more precariously.

We are running the risk of turning our democracies into plutocracies – governments by the wealthy. The multiple harms of inequality are analysed by Thomas Scanlon, one of the most influential living moral philosophers, in his book *Why Does Inequality Matter?* (2017).

JOHN RAWLS

Rebuilding society on more just foundations

will require a radical rethink of the role of the state in society. During the pandemic, people have looked to their governments for salvation, and COVID-19 is a reminder that a strong case can be made for the need to organise politics around public institutions. Never before have key institutions like an extensive, nationalized, public health service been more appreciated, and needed.



The way forward is to have more state, not less. COVID-19 has confirmation that we ought to organize our social and political affairs around the political philosophy of John Rawls, who argued that a just society demands that resources are redistributed across society.

CHIARA CORDELLI

Over the past 40 years, we have seen important state functions ceaselessly being handed over to the private sphere, with devastating consequences. The time has come to reverse this trend. In liberal democracies around the world, the private sphere has encroached on the public sphere, undermining the foundations of democracy, so much so that, today, private industries are doing the jobs that historically were done by public institutions.

It is not just the case of government ministers handing out contracts to private firms with whom they have personal connections (in the UK one-fifth of all government COVID contracts require investigation for possible corruption, according to campaign group Transparency International UK). There is also the fact that the public sphere and its institutions has been increasingly privatized.

As Chiara Cordelli highlights in her book, *The Privatised State* (2020), many government functions today, from the management of prisons and welfare offices to warfare and financial regulation, are outsourced to private entities. Even education and healthcare are funded in part through private philanthropy rather than taxation. In the post-COVID world, constitutional limits on privatisation should be a priority.

MARTIN O'NEILL and SHEPLEY ORR

Unfair distributions of income, or dangerously unequal accumulations of wealth, can and ought to be rectified by taxation. Inequality is one of the reasons why COVID-19 has been so devastating in India and other parts of the world.

Taxation remains one of the most effective tools to reverse this growing, social malignancy, and for engendering social justice. The pivotal role of taxation

in the modern polity cannot be overstated, as Martin O'Neill and Shepley Orr remind us in their edited volume *Taxation: Philosophical Perspectives* (2018).

MARIA BAGHRAMIAN

Throughout this pandemic, scientific experts were at the forefront of our battle against COVID-19, and the life-saving importance of research became evident to everyone. In the future, we will need more experts. We have also learned to distinguish between truth and post-truth, and how deadly the latter can be during times of crisis: just ask the hundreds of thousands of people who died from COVID-19 in the US, Brazil, India and the UK, only because their governments did not take expert advice seriously.

But from lockdowns to mask-wearing to international travel, experts don't always agree on COVID (or anything else). Maria Baghramian, a philosopher at University College Dublin, is a world authority on making sense of when experts disagree. She is project leader of PERITIA, a project investigating public trust in expertise, and has written extensively and persuasively on the overlapping questions of relativism, trust, and experts.

Indulging in nostalgic reminiscences about the "good old days" pre-COVID may not be wise. There are many lessons we must learn from the present crisis, and we could do worse than to listen to the philosophers who have been imagining better, fairer, healthier worlds since long before the pandemic began.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University College Cork]

The 2021 World Food Prize recognizes that fish are key for reducing hunger and malnutrition

BEN BELTON
theconversation.com

Fish and other aquatic foods are integral to diets for more than 1 billion people worldwide. Most of these people live in low- and middle-income countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, close to rivers, lakes or the sea.

In these regions, foods like fresh and dried fish are central to local cuisines, and are often cheaper or more available than alternatives like eggs, dairy products and fruit. These "aquatic superfoods" pack an outsized punch as rich sources of micronutrients that are essential to human health and cognitive development.

Nonetheless, aquatic foods are often on the margins of mainstream agricultural research, nutrition policies and development strategies. Traditionally, global development thinkers have focused on staple crops and livestock as solutions to hunger.

On May 11, 2021, the World Food Prize Foundation announced that its 2021 laureate is Shakuntala Haraksingh Thilsted, a nutrition scientist who in my view has done more than anyone to draw attention to the essential but often overlooked role of aquatic foods in sustainable healthy diets. This US\$250,000 prize is often referred to as the Nobel Prize for food and agriculture. It was established by Norman Borlaug, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his work in global agriculture.

This year's award recognizes Thilsted's four decades of work to improve nutrition and health for millions of malnourished children and their mothers in Asia and Africa. As an aquaculture researcher who works closely with Thilsted, I believe this award spotlights the need to pri-

oritize fish and aquatic foods in nutrition policies and actions, nationally and globally.

A LIFE AQUATIC

Shakuntala Thilsted was born in Trinidad and Tobago, where she started her pathbreaking career as the only woman employed in the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries. After moving to Denmark, she completed a Ph.D. at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, where she later went on to lead the Department of Animal Physiology.

Moving to Bangladesh in the late 1980s, Thilsted worked at the icddr, an institute formerly known as the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, which treated more than 6,000 malnourished children annually. As a young mother of two children, she was instinctively concerned about child health and nutrition and began investigating measures to prevent malnutrition using locally available and culturally acceptable foods.

Extensive time in the field designing and implementing a nutrition rehabilitation program allowed Thilsted to understand what foods people were eating and how. Listening to women talk about the importance of eating small fish for good health and eyesight piqued her interest in their nutritional value. This insight provided the catalyst for the next three decades of her research career.

On returning to Denmark, Thilsted began teaching graduate students at the University of Copenhagen to analyze micronutrients in fish from Bangladesh. This research revealed that many species of small fish are rich in nutrients that are important for human health.

One fish in particular, mola (Amblypharyngodon mola), was found

to contain extremely high levels of vitamin A, which is important for vision, the immune system and reproduction. Armed with this growing body of evidence, Thilsted set out to increase consumption of small fish, especially for mothers and children.

SCALING UP INNOVATIONS

Aquatic foods are particularly important from conception to a child's second birthday. Not consuming enough micronutrients such as iron, zinc, vitamin A and vitamin B12 increases the risk of illness, maternal and infant mortality, stunting and poor cognitive performance. Under-nutrition accounts for up to 45% of all preventable child deaths.

In 2010, Thilsted joined the international research institute WorldFish. She returned to Bangladesh to work at scaling up "nutrition-sensitive approaches" to fish production, building on insights from her earlier research.

Her previous work showed that small fish like mola grow well in farm ponds alongside larger fish such as carp. Simple changes to the way small fish were harvested from ponds, such as using different types of fishing net, increased women's role in their production. Raising small fish in this way proved be a highly cost-effective way of reducing the burden of malnutrition.

Thilsted also began investigating ways to deliver micronutrients to mothers and children using fish-based products such as powders, chutneys and wafers as a culturally appropriate way to enhance their diets. WorldFish has promoted these innovations widely to countries including Cambodia, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Malawi, Sierra Leone and Zambia.

FROM RESEARCH TO POLICY

Thilsted has worked tirelessly to translate key insights from her re-

search into public policy. This has included partnering closely with governments, such as the State Government of Odisha, India, which recently began including dried fish in food rations that it provides to vulnerable groups.

She also has advised an array of high-profile international organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and UNICEF. Her efforts have raised awareness of the value of aquatic foods in healthy food systems and fostered broader commitments to supporting this transformative role.

Thilsted has lived for many years in the countries where she seeks to create positive change. She is passionate about spending time in the field, observing carefully and asking the right questions.

This spirit of inquiry and extensive hands-on experience, combined with high standards of academic rigor, have given rise to many of her most important insights. For example, she found that wild capture fisheries and fish farming can both make highly complementary contributions to food and nutrition security.

As I have seen firsthand, Thilsted also has a unique ability to connect with people irrespective of their social status, from women farmers in rural Bangladesh to high officials at the United Nations. Generations of young scientists, myself included, have flourished under her mentorship and have been inspired by her remarkable vision, persistence, generosity and commitment to nourishing people and the planet.

[the writer is Associate Professor of International Development, Michigan State University]

In a midnight drama, Nepal President dissolves House and calls polls for November 12 and 19

ANIL GIRI, TIKA R PRADHAN & BINOD GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, 22 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]: President Bidya Devi Bhandari on Friday night dissolved the House of Representatives and announced mid-term elections for November 12 and 19.

A midnight Cabinet meeting had made the recommendation to dissolve the House.

The move followed a notice from the Office of the President that it could appoint neither KP Sharma Oli, the incumbent prime minister, nor Sher Bahadur Deuba, Nepali Congress president, as claims made by both to form a new government were insufficient.

In a notice issued at around 2am, the Office of the President said Bhandari dissolved the House of Representatives as per Article 76 (7) and declared elections in two phases—on November 12 and November 19—on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers.

This is the second time the House was dissolved in five months. On December 20 last year, Oli had suddenly dissolved the House and called for snap polls for April 30 and May 10, throwing the country into political uncertainties. However, the Supreme Court overturned his decision on February 23, calling it unconstitutional.

But a dramatic verdict by the Supreme Court on March 7, the day the meeting of the restored House was scheduled, revived the CPN-UML and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), invalidating the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), which the two parties had formed in May 2018. That led to more political confusion.

Oli tried his best to justify that the House had become irrelevant. He, however, ignored calls from opposition parties to step down.

Oli's Machiavellian tricks continued and President Bhandari

played complicit roles.

Oli on Thursday attacked the constitution one more time and made Sheetal Niwas initiate the process for forming a new government under Article 76 (5)—without resigning or going for the constitutionally mandated floor test after being reappointed the prime minister under Article 76 (3).

The President complied and gave the parties until Friday 5pm to stake their claim to a new government.

But in a spectacular display of brinkmanship, Oli himself reached out to the President to demand that he be appointed prime minister again.

Earlier in the day, the Congress-led alliance, backed by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), a section of the Janata Samajbadi Party and the Madhav Nepal-Jhala Nath Khanal faction of the CPN-UML, presented the signatures of 149 lawmakers, requesting President Bhandari to appoint Deuba as new prime minister.

But Oli too presented his claim before the President, saying he had the support of 153 lawmakers and that he be appointed the prime minister.

President Bhandari on Thursday, on the recommendation of the government, had invoked Article 76 (5) for the formation of a new government.

In a statement late on Friday night, the Office of the President said though Oli had claimed to have the backing of 121 lawmakers from the CPN-UML and 32 from the Janata Samajbadi Party, 26 lawmakers of the UML had signed the letter presented by Deuba to stake claim to the new government.

According to lawyers, Oli's claim was not legitimate and it made a mockery of the constitution, parliamentary system, democracy and the rule of law.

Shambhu Thapa, a senior advocate, said the incumbent prime minister cannot make a claim to form a new government under Article 76 (5).

"It is for any member of the Parliament... who needs to prove a majority to form a government," Thapa told the Post. "Our constitution is clear on this. Oli cannot claim the post of prime minister under Article 76 (5) as he has already been unseated as per Article 100(2) and Article 100 (3) after he refused to go for a floor test."

Oli was reappointed prime minister on May 13, four days after he lost a confidence vote in Parliament, under Article 76 (3) as the leader of the party which has the highest number of members in the House.

Constitutional provisions required Oli to secure a vote of confidence within 30 days from the date of his appointment. But instead of following the mandatory constitutional process, Oli went on to make an unconstitutional move to request the President to invoke Article 76 (5), robbing the House of its prerogative.

In a statement on Thursday, the Office of the President said since the prime minister believes there is no political ground to secure a trust vote, the government has recommenced invoking Article 76 (5). Hence, the Office of the President gives until 5pm Friday to stake claim to a new government, the statement read.

Analysts wondered how a prime minister who a day ago said he lacked the votes to win the House confidence suddenly garnered the support of 153 lawmakers. And if he had the support of those many lawmakers, why did he trample upon the constitution to ask the President to invoke Article 76 (5), according to them.

Earlier on Friday, hours before

he claimed before the President to have the support of 153 lawmakers, Oli, at a press conference, which was broadcast live, said that he had paved the way for the formation of a new government because there was no condition for him to win the trust vote. The Post was not invited to the presser.

Opposition parties expressed doubts how Oli had gone on to claim that he had the support of 153 lawmakers—27 more than their required number to win the trust vote. They described Oli's Friday move as exceptional, illegal, unconstitutional and politically incorrect.

"When Oli recommended that the President initiate the process to form a new government, it was a clear admission that he was not able to secure a vote of confidence," said Ramesh Lekhak, a Congress leader. "If Oli again goes to stake his claim to the new government, it is wrong politically, constitutionally, legally and morally."

Moral grounds, however, do not seem to mean much for Oli, as had he followed that principle, it would have required him to step down in February—when the Supreme Court overturned his December decision to dissolve the House, calling it unconstitutional.

Constitutional experts say both the prime minister and the President colluded to trick everyone. Though the statement from the President gives a sense that a call has been made to form a new government under Article 76 (5), it goes on to call for forming a new government under Article 76 (2) based on Article 76 (5).

Though Article 76 (5), in essence, is an extension of Article 76 (2), there is a fundamental difference, according to the experts.

While Article 76 (2) calls on any party to seek to form a government with the support of two or

more parties, Article 76 (5) calls on an individual lawmaker to do so with the support of the majority lawmakers.

When a party stakes its claim to the government under Article 76 (2), according to experts, the decision of the Parliamentary Party is as good as the decision of all the lawmakers of the concerned party. But in case of Article 76 (5), a lawmaker who wants to claim the government leadership must prove that he has the support of individual lawmakers, and a party whip is not applicable in this case.

Oli presented his claim to lead the government with signatures of his, as he is the party chair and leader of the UML Parliamentary Party; Rajendra Mahato, who is the Parliamentary Party leader of the Janata Samajbadi Party, and Mahantha Thakur, chair of the Janata Samajbadi. On this basis, he claimed to have the support of 153 lawmakers—121 from his party and 32 from the Janata Samajbadi.

But the Upendra Yadav-Baruram Bhattarai faction of the Janata Samajbadi stood against Oli and its 13 lawmakers threw their weight behind Congress President Deuba, by providing their signatures to him.

"It's a given that President Bhandari has been complicit in Oli's unconstitutional actions over the years," said Raju Chapagain, chairperson of the Constitutional Lawyers' Forum. However, in essence, the call to form a new government was under 76 (5), he added.

The opposition alliance claimed that it presented the signatures of 149 lawmakers, unlike Oli, who said he had the "support" of 153 lawmakers.

The situation itself was impossible in a parliamentary system, as the total number of lawmakers exceeds the strength of the House,

which has 271 members, including the Speaker. Oli's political drama comes at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has engulfed the country. When Oli was reappointed on May 13 even after losing the confidence vote, political parties and analysts had said it would be better for him to focus on the fight against Covid-19, which has claimed 6,024 lives so far.

Nepal on Friday reported 8,407 new Covid-19 cases. The Health Minister said 177 deaths were reported from across the country. The number of active cases stands at 116,192.

The country currently has no stock of vaccines to inoculate its population.

Hospitals have been turning away patients for the lack of beds and oxygen. Nepalis at home and abroad have been filing online petitions to call on the global powers to provide Nepal with vaccines, oxygen, therapeutics and other medical supplies.

The Oli government has faced widespread criticism for its poor handling of the pandemic.

Only on Friday, the United Nations in Nepal called for international support to fight the pandemic.

Oli, however, after his reappointment on May 13, stoked a political storm, taking the focus away from the pandemic.

Experts, however, say who remains the prime minister is not the question, rather the question is whether both the implementer and the protector of the constitution maintain the dignity of the country's top law.

"Oli is clearly playing the games of deceit and trickery and the President, as she has been in the past, is complicit with him," said Thapa, the senior advocate. "What they are doing is tantamount to committing fraud."

Kuwait allows flights to Nepal but restrictions at home leave migrant workers exasperated

CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL

KATHMANDU, 22 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]: Sangita, a Nepali migrant worker in Kuwait, had planned on returning home this month.

She has been working as a domestic help for a family in the Kuwaiti city of Al Sabahiya, some 33km away from the capital, for the last two and a half years, and was excited to reunite with her family.

"My employer had bought the air ticket on May 10 unaware of the travel restrictions in Nepal," Sangita told the Post from Al Sabahiya.

Nepal enforced international flight suspension starting May 6 amid a surge in Covid-19 cases.

Initially, the flight suspension was imposed until May 14 and since Sangita's flight was on May 23, she had hoped there would be no disruption in her travel plans.

But, before she could return home, the Nepal government on May 11 extended the international flight suspension until May 31.

"I was expected to take my flight on Sunday. Back home, everyone was happy that I was coming home," Sangita, who hails from Kailali district in western Nepal, said. "Now I cannot fly back home."

As Kuwait had suspended direct flights to Nepal, Sangita was to first fly to Dubai and catch another flight to Kathmandu. Kuwait has since removed Nepal from its outgoing flight suspension list.

The Kuwaiti authorities allowed the resumption of direct outgoing flights to Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka starting May 18, according to Arab Times. Incoming flights from these countries are



still banned.

"Even the Kuwaiti government has allowed direct flights to Nepal, but I still cannot travel," said Sangita.

Like Sangita, many other Nepali migrant workers have been affected by the international flight suspension enforced by the Nepali authorities.

"The Kuwaiti government has lifted the ban on direct outgoing flights to countries like Nepal. This means flights from Kuwait carrying Nepali passengers can go to Nepal," an official at the Nepal Embassy in Kuwait told the Post over the phone. "If only international flight suspension was not in place in Nepal, or had our government allowed flights from Kuwait, many Nepali migrant workers would have returned home by now."

While many labour destination countries have prohibited entry for Nepali nationals over Covid-19 scare, Kuwait has become the second country to ease its travel restriction to Nepal.

Earlier on Sunday, Saudi Arabia had announced that it would be reopening its land, sea and air routes after its months-long

travel restriction. The announcement made it possible for Nepalis to enter the Gulf kingdom and also return home. But with both domestic and international flight services suspended in Nepal, the reopening of flights has meant little for Nepalis.

The halting of international flights has already affected Nepalis seeking overseas jobs as well as those stuck abroad after the expiration of their employment contracts.

The Nepal Embassy official in Kuwait says the Kuwaiti government's decision to allow one-way flight to Nepal could at least help migrant workers return home.

"Direct flights from Kuwait had been in operation until the first week of this month before the international flights suspension was enforced. If Nepalis want to go back, they can still return home, provided our airport is open," the official said. "There is a large number of Nepalis who would rather return home than stay back, as their income has been affected with the pandemic. Permission given to operate one-way flights to Nepal

from Kuwait can provide relief to such Nepalis."

Labour migration to Kuwait has remained affected for more than a year, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. Even when Kuwait eased its travel restrictions in a phase-wise manner, first in August last year and then in February, Nepali nationals were still prohibited from entering the country.

"When direct flights from Kuwait to Nepal were in operation, those flights used to be full. The outflow of Nepalis leaving for Kuwait was huge," the official said. "Jazeera Airways flights, which would carry passengers from Kuwait and return empty from Nepal, would see an impressive number of passengers. There are still many Nepalis who want to return home."

While the Nepal government is mulling to resume a limited number of regular commercial flights from some countries, it has not announced any decisions yet.

Meanwhile, Sangita, the Nepali domestic help in Kuwait, does not know what will happen to her plan of flying back home.

Andamans reports 31 new COVID-19 cases, 2 more deaths

PORT BLAIR, MAY 22 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands COVID-19 tally rose to 6,789 as 31 more people tested positive for the infection while two new fatalities pushed the death toll to 98, a health department official said on Saturday.

The union territory now has 274 active COVID-19 cases, of which 267 are in South Andaman district and seven in North and Middle Andaman district, the official said.

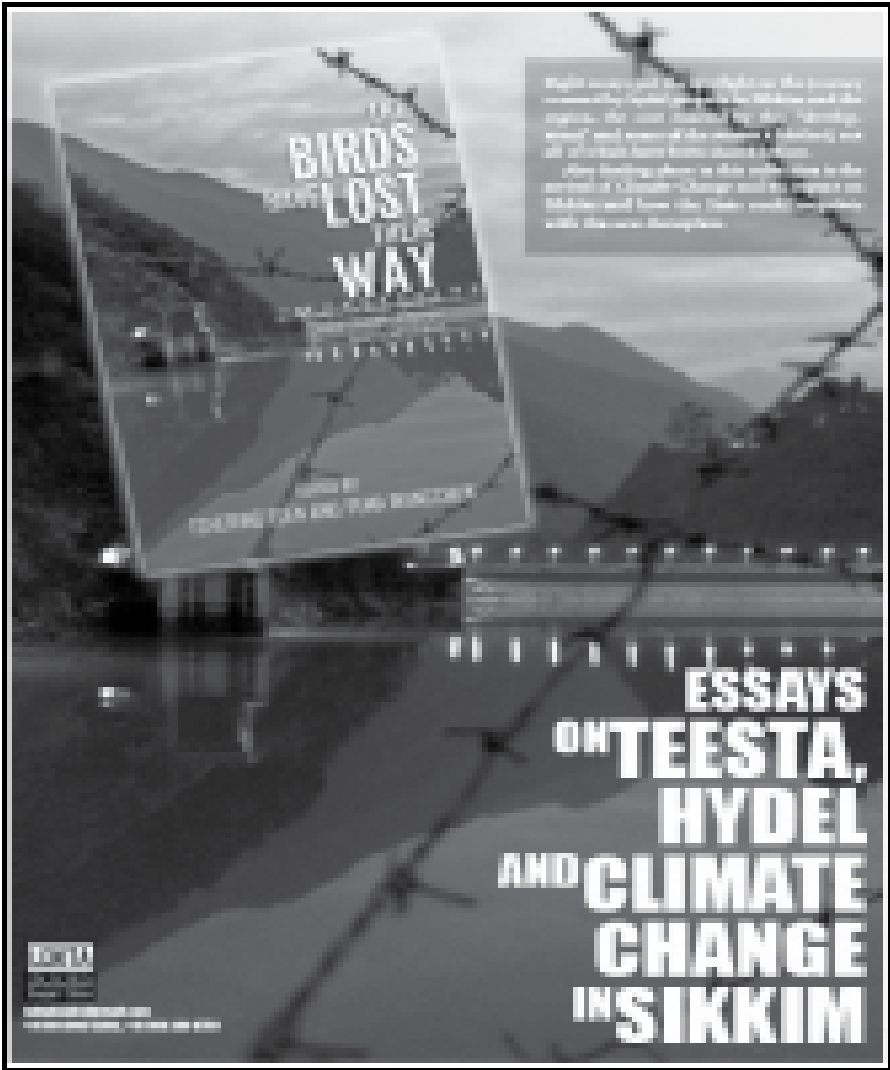


Sixteen more people were cured of the disease during the period, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 6,417.

The Andaman and

Nicobar administration has so far tested 3,82,015 samples for COVID-19.

More than 1.19 lakh people have been inoculated in the archipelago so far, he said.



Shapovalov, Ruud advance to final at clay-court Geneva Open

GENEVA, MAY 22 (AP): Denis Shapovalov will face Casper Ruud in the Geneva Open final after both advanced with straight-set wins.

The second-seeded Shapovalov beat Pablo Cuevas 6-4, 7-5 and the third-seeded Ruud won 6-3, 6-2 against Pablo Andujar as the two 22-year-olds both defeated 35-year-old opponents.

Spanish veteran Andujar had previously beaten 39-year-old great Roger Federer and 18-year-old Swiss prospect Dominic Stricker.

Shapovalov and Ruud will be meeting on tour for the first time and both seek their second career title.

"We played in the juniors together and we go way back," said Shapovalov, who let match points slip against Rafael Nadal last week.

Ruud noted that "Denis has also been playing very good on the surface recently and took Nadal to his knees last week in Rome.

148 athletes, mostly Olympic-bound, across sports get COVID vaccine first dose, 17 fully vaccinated

NEW DELHI, MAY 22 (PTI): As many as 148 athletes across all sports, including those who have qualified for the upcoming Tokyo Games, have already received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccination, according to the Indian Olympic Association (IOA). Out of these 148 athletes, 17 have got both the doses and 131 have received their first shot, IOA president Narinder Batra said.

These 148 include potential athletes who can make it to the Tokyo Olympics which is opening on July 23.

Besides this, 13 Tokyo Paralympic-bound athletes have got their first vaccine shot while two have received both doses. The Tokyo Paralympics opens on August 24. The total number of athletes (including para-athletes), who have got at least their first dose till May 20, is 163.

Giving the 'vaccination status of Tokyo-bound Indian athletes and officials in the long list as on May 20', Batra said 87 officials have got single dose of COVID-19 vaccine while 23 are fully vaccinated.

More than 90 Indian athletes across sports have so far qualified for the Tokyo Olympics which was postponed from last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Olympic-bound shooters who are currently training in Croatia will be vaccinated there as they are expected to directly fly to Tokyo from there, the NRAI has said.

Some of them have already got their first jabs in India before departing for Croatia and they will get their second dose in that country.

FIFA head aims to rethink soccer competitions and schedule

GENEVA, MAY 22 (AP): World soccer was put on notice by FIFA president Gianni Infantino on Friday to imagine and maybe expect big changes to its international competitions in the coming years.

FIFA agreed to study whether the men's and women's World Cups could be played every two years instead of four, with Infantino asking out loud if they could alternate with continental championships to fill the calendar with annual national-team tournaments.

Infantino also defended talking with clubs about new projects like the breakaway Super League, which rocked European soccer body UEFA last month before a backlash quickly killed the plan.

After reports that FIFA secretly encouraged storied clubs to rebel against UEFA and its Champions League, Infantino insisted at a news conference people "should look at the facts and not rumors or corridor gossip."

FIFA has declined for more than three months to respond to specific questions from The Associated Press about its president's involvement in talks with Super League clubs, led by Real Madrid.

"To speak with some clubs doesn't certainly mean in any way whatsoever that FIFA was behind or colluding or plotting ... for any Super League project," he said Friday, insist-



ing he never closed his door to talks about new ideas.

"This is the way I live the presidency of FIFA," said Infantino, who won election in 2016 as the official candidate of UEFA where he was a long-time senior staffer.

FIFA and UEFA have often had poor relations since Infantino switched organizations five years ago, and fulfilling his stated ambitions would put European competitions at risk.

Infantino also used the platform of FIFA's online meeting of 211 member federations to say the sport needs to break the domina-

tion on and off the field by Europe and South America.

"There is a concentration of money and player talent which does not serve the global development or interests of the game," he said.

"We cannot simply ignore it." "We do not see equal opportunities throughout the world. We do not necessarily see too much solidarity either, to be honest."

Infantino positioned FIFA as the protector of soccer's worldwide family which is prepared to upend the traditional competition calendar and formats to seek more equality. The chance

for change is there because the FIFA-managed calendar of international competitions which mandates when clubs must release players for national-team duty expires in 2024.

FIFA is now ready to consult widely on redrafting the calendar, after turmoil caused by the coronavirus pandemic delayed the process last year.

"What kind of competitions do we need for the world?" said Infantino, also asking whether the season needed fewer breaks for national-team games.

Earlier, a Saudi Arabian soccer official proposing a

feasibility study into biennial World Cups echoed FIFA's own oft-repeated suggestion of "fewer but more meaningful games" to protect players' health.

A biennial World Cup was first suggested more than 20 years ago by FIFA's then-president Sepp Blatter though was not seriously investigated.

It has been revived in recent years by allies of Infantino, who has consistently proposed more and bigger tournaments. A review of women's and youth competitions was also agreed Friday.

UEFA's popular and lucrative Champions League

could be affected by Infantino's pet project of a 24-team Club World Cup. It was set to launch next month in China until the pandemic forced a postponement.

A biennial World Cup would clearly harm UEFA's second-tier Nations League event, and likely take commercial value from the four-yearly European Championship. In another FIFA move Friday against Europe, a friend of UEFA's Slovenian president Aleksander Ceferin was removed from an oversight position.

Toma Vesel had chaired FIFA's audit committee since 2016 but lost an election to lead the merged audit, governance and compliance panel. The vote was won by Mukul Mudgal, a judge from India, who previously led the governance committee. Mudgal will also replace Vesel chairing the compensation panel which oversees setting Infantino's pay and performance bonuses.

In a rare contribution to debate from the FIFA membership, the six-nation Nordic group from northern Europe urged continued monitoring of human rights protections for migrant workers in Qatar, the 2022 World Cup host.

"It is a priority for FIFA and it is a priority for Qatar as well," Infantino told Finland soccer federation president Ari Lahti.

Cricket gear donation brings joy to migrants stuck in Bosnia



SARAJEVO, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA (AP): Joyful cheers echoed through an asylum-seekers camp in Bosnia this week as dozens of teenagers and young men put their daily struggles aside for a game of cricket.

Players absorbed in the match ran over an improvised pitch clutching wooden bats or throwing balls. Others supported the teams by clapping from the side, their faces radiant.

"It was a good game!" Sifet, an asylum-seeker from Afghanistan, said.

"Tomorrow we have the final tournament!" Mohammad Jahanzeb, who is from Pakistan, chimed in. The opportunity for relaxation and fun at the Blazuj camp in Bosnia's capital, Sarajevo, was made possible by a Rome-based humanitarian group which brought in donated cricket gear for refugees and migrants in the Balkan country.

Andrea Costa, presi-

dent of the Baobab Experience association, told the Associated Press that activists got the idea from the asylum-seekers themselves, particularly those coming from Pakistan, Bangladesh or India, where cricket is a national sport.

Thousands of people fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East, Africa or Asia have been stranded for months, if not years, in Bosnia while waiting for a chance to move toward Western Europe. From Bosnia, migrants try first to cross to neighboring European Union nation Croatia, before continuing on toward wealthier EU countries.

"Speaking with many young people ... it came naturally to ask them what they were missing the most, what would they want," Costa said. "Exactly as an Italian boy would ask for a football, to play some football, they say they are missing cricket."

Costa and his team

drove to Bosnia after collecting donations from the U.K., Indian and Pakistani embassies in Rome and those countries' communities in Italy, Costa said. Along with Sarajevo, gear was delivered to the central Bosnian town of Tuzla.

"Our next step with the cricket will be going back to Italy, going back to Europe, and saying that the migrants were very happy," Costa said.

Among those who waited eagerly for the packages to arrive was Ali Cheema, who said he started playing cricket when he was 7 and used to play for several clubs in his native Pakistan.

Now 24, Cheema has been in Bosnia for two years. As the car carrying the cricket equipment pulled over in Tuzla, he was there to open the bags filled with bats, poles, gloves, jerseys and caps.

"We are going to play a cricket match as soon as possible," he said, ex-

plaining that previously "we cut some wood" to make bats. A day later, Cheema and his friends could be seen practicing on a playground in Tuzla.

"I decided to go from Pakistan to follow my dreams," Cheema said. "I would like to go to England and continue to play cricket, because I was a cricket player in Pakistan and I didn't get enough opportunity."

Costa said his organization plans to do more to help the young foreigners in Bosnia migrants get engaged in sports and "pass the day with the things that they like."

"First of all, we believe it is their right to reach their goal, that it is their right to reach Europe," Costa said. "And second of all, our organization thinks that since while they are transiting these countries, every effort has to be done to help them feel welcome and stay in good condition."

National hockey team midfielder Jaskaran learning tricks of trade from likes of captain Manpreet

BENGALURU, MAY 22 (PTI): Indian hockey team midfielder Jaskaran Singh says he is learning the tricks of the trade from senior players like captain Manpreet Singh as he hopes to make it to the Tokyo Olympics squad.

Jaskaran, son of hockey Olympian and former India coach Rajinder Singh Jr, is currently training with the men's senior core group for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Centre here.

Manpreet, striker Mandeep Singh and Jaskaran all hail from Jalandhar in Punjab.

"Our homes are around 2-3 km apart. They both have been helping me a lot. It's important to have good understanding between a midfielder and a striker, and I feel understanding

comes naturally to us because we have been playing together since a long time," Jaskaran said.

"Even Manpreet along with other senior players in the team also guided me throughout. Whenever I feel I am in doubt, I speak to them to get better clarity," said the midfielder, who made his international debut in 2019.

Reflecting on his third international tour in Argentina recently, Jaskaran said, "I was playing internationally after a very long time, so I was focused on giving my 100%. I had the support of coaches throughout the tour.

"Senior players also motivated me and gave me the confidence to compete against the Olympic champions. They helped me improve on my mistakes

throughout the tour. So, it was a great learning experience for me personally." About the Olympics preparations, Jaskaran said, "We are really in a good shape, and preparing well for the Olympics.

"We are currently putting in the hard work, working on our structure and focusing on covering all the bases. I feel we are giving each other good competition in our training, which I feel is bringing out the best of us," he said.

Jaskaran said his father, who was a part of the 1984 Olympics team, was his biggest inspiration and the reason why he took up hockey.

"My childhood memories are all about hockey. Not only that I grew up watching him, but I also honed my skills under him. He is my first coach and my inspiration.

Pro-Am Japan: Rahul Gangjee tied 11th



IBARAKI (JAPAN), May 22 (PTI): Rahul Gangjee stayed in sight of his first top-10 finish in 2021 as he and his partner shot 4-under 68 at the inaugural Golf Partner Pro-Am tournament in Japan.

Gangjee is currently placed 11th in the table.

The Indian and his partner have shot 12-under even as Tomoharu Otsuki and his partner moved to 19-under. Shota Wada and Kantaro Naito are Tied-second a 16-under.

Ryo Ishikawa, who is credited with having

pushed for this Pro-Am format, slipped from overnight tied 3rd to tied 7th at 13-under.

First round co-leader Shaun Norris was sixth at 14-under. This is the inaugural Pro-Am event with a purse of 50 million yen.

Egyptian mediators work to shore up cease-fire

CAIRO: An Egyptian diplomat says two teams of Egyptian mediators are in Israel and the Palestinian territories to continue talks on firming up a cease-fire deal — and securing a long-term calm.

The diplomat said Saturday discussions include implementing agreed-on measures in Gaza and Jerusalem, including ways to prevent practices that led to the latest fighting.

The official did not elaborate. He was apparently referring to violence at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the planned eviction of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in east Jerusalem.

The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss behind-the-scenes deliberations. The cease-fire took effect Friday. The 11-day war left more than 250 dead — the vast majority Palestinians — and brought widespread devastation to the already impoverished Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip

The diplomat also said Is-



rael has given a green light to Gaza fishermen to return to sea Saturday as part of the cease-fire deal.

The Egyptian delegations arrived in Israel and the Palestinian territories Friday, according to Egypt's official MENA news agency. The delegations met with Palestinian factions in Gaza directly after they arrived, MENA reported.

Hussein Sheikh, a senior aide to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, tweeted that one of the Egyptian delegation planned to hold talks with the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah on Saturday.

CAIRO: Egypt Foreign Minis-

ter SamehShukry has spoken with his Israeli counterpart, Gabi Ashkenazi, about stabilizing the Cairo-brokered Gaza cease-fire deal.

A statement by Egypt's Foreign Ministry said the two diplomats on Friday discussed shoring up the deal, which has mostly brought a halt to fighting between Israel and the Palestinians. They hope that will facilitate the reconstruction of Gaza.

The statement said the ministers also agreed on the importance of coordination between the two nations, the Palestinian Authority and international partners on securing communication channels to achieve peace. It did not provide further details.

The Egyptian government, meanwhile, said it would send a 130-truck convoy carrying humanitarian aid and medical supplies to Gaza, according to the presidency.

The convoy is expected to enter the territory Saturday

China's Mars rover touches ground on red planet



BEIJING (AP): China's first Mars rover has driven down from its landing platform and is now roaming the surface of the red planet, China's space administration said Saturday.

The solar-powered rover touched Martian soil at 10:40 a.m. Saturday Beijing time (0240 GMT), the China National Space Administration said.

China landed the spacecraft carrying the rover on Mars last Saturday, a technically challenging feat more difficult than a moon landing, in a first for the country. It is the second country to do so, after the United States.

Named after the Chinese god of fire, Zhurong, the rover has been run-

ning diagnostics tests for several days before it began its exploration Saturday. It is expected to be deployed for 90 days to search for evidence of life.

The U.S. also has an ongoing Mars mission, with the Perseverance rover and a tiny helicopter exploring the planet. NASA expects the rover to collect its first sample in July for return to Earth in a decade.

China has ambitious space plans that include launching a crewed orbital station and landing a human on the moon. China in 2019 became the first country to land a space probe on the little-explored far side of the moon, and in December returned lunar rocks to Earth for the first time since the 1970s.

COVID-19 variant identified in Louisiana

BATON ROUGE (US), MAY 22 (AP): A medical centre in Louisiana said Friday that it has identified the state's first two cases of a COVID-19 variant which has spread widely since being first identified in India.

Britain and the World Health Organisation consider it a variant of concern because experts think it may spread more easily than the original virus, LSU Health Shreveport said in a news release Friday.

The health system said the two samples were among more than 2,600 for which its Center for Emerging Viral Threats has decoded the genome. That represents 56 per cent of all viral genomic surveillance data

from Louisiana, the news release said.

Overall, the lab has processed 331,000 tests, and 7,600 were positive. That's less than 5 per cent of Louisiana's total tests and less than 2 per cent of the positive tests in the state. As of Friday, Louisiana has reported 7.3 million tests and 467,800 cases of COVID-19.

At least two other variants have shown up in Louisiana the one first identified in the United Kingdom and the one first found in Brazil.

LSU Health Shreveport said its lab found that the one first found in England remains dominant in North Louisiana, as in the rest of the United States.

Palestinians see victory in Gaza truce as Israel warns Hamas

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP): Palestinians rallied by the thousands Friday after a cease-fire took effect in the latest Gaza war, with many viewing it as a costly but clear victory for the Islamic militant group Hamas. Israel vowed to respond with a "new level of force" to further hostilities.

The 11-day war left more than 250 dead — the vast majority Palestinians — and brought widespread devastation to the already impoverished Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. But the rocket barrages that brought life to a standstill in much of Israel were seen by many Palestinians as a bold response to perceived Israeli abuses in Jerusalem, the emotional heart of the conflict.

Like the three previous wars, the latest round of fighting ended inconclusively.

Israel claimed it inflicted heavy damage on Hamas but once again was unable to halt the rockets. Even as it claims victory, Hamas faces the daunting challenge of rebuilding in a territory already suffering from high unemployment and a coronavirus outbreak, and from years of blockade by Egypt and Israel.

The conflict brought to the surface deep frustration among Palestinians, whether in the occupied West Bank, Gaza or within Israel, over the status quo, with the Israeli-Palestinian peace process all but abandoned for years.

The continued volatility was on display when clashes broke out between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police following Friday prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem sacred to Jews and Muslims. Clashes there earlier this month were one of the main triggers for the war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fended off criticism from his hawkish base who said he ended the offensive prematurely without a more decisive blow to Hamas.

Israel had done "daring and new things, and this without being dragged into unnecessary adventures," he said. Its forces caused "maximum damage to Hamas with a minimum of casualties in Israel," he added.

Netanyahu warned against further attacks, saying, "If Hamas thinks we will tolerate a drizzle of rockets, it is wrong." He vowed to respond with "a new level of force" against aggression anywhere in Israel.

He said Israeli strikes killed more than 200 militants, including 25 senior commanders, and hit more than 100 kilometers (60

miles) of militant tunnels. Hamas and the Islamic Jihad militant group have only acknowledged 20 fighters killed.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said in a televised speech from the Qatari capital of Doha that the war "opened the door to new phases that will witness many victories." He called it a "quantum leap" that will build support among Palestinians for "resistance" rather than failed negotiations.

The Gaza Health Ministry says at least 243 Palestinians were killed, including 66 children, with 1,910 people wounded. It does not differentiate between fighters and civilians. Twelve people were killed in Israel, all but one of them civilians, including a 5-year-old boy and 16-year-old girl.

Celebrations erupted in Gaza, the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem at 2 a.m. when the cease-fire took hold.

In Gaza City, thousands took to the streets, and young men waved Palestinian and Hamas flags, passed out sweets, honked horns and set off fireworks.

At noon prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, hundreds held similar celebrations, waving flags and cheering Hamas. It was unclear what sparked the ensuing violence, in which police fired stun grenades and tear gas, and Palestinians threw rocks. Israeli police said they arrested 16 people. Similar clashes broke out in parts of the West Bank.

Gazans had a day of recovery after 11 days of Israeli bombardment.

Shoppers stocked up on fresh fruit and vegetables at a Gaza City open-air market that reopened after being closed during the fighting. Workers swept up rubble.

"Life will return, because this is not the first war, and it will not be the last war," said shop owner Ashraf Abu Mohammad. "The heart is in pain, there have been disasters, families wiped from the civil registry, and this saddens us. But this is our fate in this land, to remain patient."

Residents in the hard-hit town of BeitHanoun surveyed wrecked homes.

"We see such huge destruction here, it's the first time in history we've seen this," said AzharNsair. "The cease-fire is for people who didn't suffer, who didn't lose their loved ones, whose homes were not bombed."

Rescue workers were still recovering bodies. Five were collected Friday in the town of Khan Younis, including that of a 3-year-old, the Red Crescent emergency

service said.

Tens of thousands returned home after sheltering in U.N. schools. At the peak, 66,000 people were crammed inside, but on Friday the number fell under 1,000, U.N. spokesman SephaneDujarric said.

After the cease-fire, the U.N. sent 13 trucks with food, COVID-19 vaccines, medical supplies and medicines into Gaza. The world body also allocated \$18.6 million in emergency humanitarian aid.

The bombardment struck a blow to the already decrepit infrastructure in the small coastal territory, home to more than 2 million Palestinians. It flattened high-rises and houses, tore up roads and wrecked water systems. At least 30 health facilities were damaged, forcing a halt to coronavirus testing in the territory.

The fighting began May 10, when Hamas militants in Gaza fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem. The barrage came after days of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at Al-Aqsa. Heavy-handed police tactics at the compound and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers had inflamed tensions.

Competing claims to Jerusalem have repeatedly triggered bouts of violence. Israel captured east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 war and the Palestinians want them for their future state.

Hamas and other militant groups fired over 4,000 rockets at Israeli cities. Dozens landed as far north as the bustling commercial capital of Tel Aviv.

Israel, meanwhile, conducted hundreds of airstrikes. A senior Israeli army official said it hit 1,600 "military targets."

The United States, Israel's closest and most important ally, initially backed what it called Israel's right to self-defense against indiscriminate rocket fire. But as fighting dragged on and deaths mounted, the Americans increasingly pressured Israel to stop the offensive, and Egypt brokered the cease-fire.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken plans to visit the region "to discuss recovery efforts and working together to build better futures for Israelis and Palestinians," the State Department said. He spoke Friday with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who asked that Washington follow up on stopping Israeli measures in Jerusalem, like raids on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the planned evictions of Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, Abbas' office said.

Return of Iraqis seen as easing threat from Syria camp

SHADDADI, SYRIA (AP): The Iraqi government for the first time is expected to bring home about 100 Iraqi families from a sprawling camp in Syria next week, a move that U.S. officials see as a hopeful sign in a long-frustrated effort to repatriate thousands from the camp, known as a breeding ground for young insurgents.

On an unannounced visit to Syria on Friday, the top U.S. general for the Middle East, Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, expressed optimism that the transfer from the al-Hol camp will happen. He has repeatedly warned that the youth in the camps are being radicalized and will become the next generation of dangerous militants.

"It would be the first step in many such repatriations, and I think that's going to be the key to bringing down the population in the al-Hol camp, and indeed in other camps across the region," McKenzie told reporters traveling with him into Syria, where he met with troops and commanders. "Nations need to bring back their citizens, repatriate them, reintegrate them, deradicalize them when necessary and make them productive elements of society." A senior U.S. official said the transfer of people from the camp in northeast Syria is one of a number of issues the U.S. and Iraqi governments are discussing as they work out a roadmap for future diplomatic and military relations. It came up during meetings on Thursday, when McKenzie made an unannounced stop in Baghdad. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Iraqi leaders earlier this year talked about repatriating some of their citizens, but did not follow through. So the plans for next week have been met with a bit of skepticism, and it appeared unclear if it would be a

game-changing first step or a one-time deal.

The al-Hol camp is home to as many as 70,000 people — mostly women and children — who have been displaced by the civil war in Syria and the battle against the Islamic State group. As many as half are Iraqis. About 10,000 foreigners are housed in a secure annex, and many in the camp remain die-hard IS supporters.

Many countries have refused to repatriate their citizens who were among those from around the world who came to join IS after the extremists declared their so-called caliphate in 2014. The group's physical hold on territory was ended in 2017, but many countries balk at repatriating their citizens, fearing their links to IS.

In late March, the main U.S.-backed Kurdish-led force in northeast Syria conducted a five-day sweep inside al-Hol that was assisted by U.S. forces. At least 125 suspects were arrested.

Since then, McKenzie said Friday, security has gotten better at the camp. But, he added, security has no real impact on the radicalization of the youth there.

"That's what concerns me," he said, as he stood at a base in northeast Syria, not far from the Turkish border. "The ability of ISIS to reach out, touch these young people and turn them — in a way that unless we can find a way to take it back it's going to make us pay a steep price down the road."

As McKenzie crisscrossed eastern Syria, stopping at four U.S. outposts, his message was short and direct — U.S. forces remain in Syria to fight the remnants of IS, so the militants can't regroup. Pockets of IS are still active, particularly west of the Euphrates River in vast stretches of ungoverned territory that are controlled by the Syrian government led by President Bashar Assad.

CORONAVIRUS

PRECAUTIONS & SAFETY TIPS

DON'T LOWER THE GUARD

LOCKDOWN HAS BEEN LIFTED, BUT UNFORTUNATELY, THE THREAT OF COVID-19 HAS NOT YET SUBSIDED.

As we adapt to the new normal, here is a reminder of the precautions you must take:

WEAR A MASK

Always wear a mask to prevent droplets from going outside.

GET A FLU VACCINATION

Get your flu shot to develop an immune response before flu season begins, particularly if you have comorbidities.

WASH YOUR HANDS

Wash your hands often for about 20 seconds with soap & carry a sanitizer.

MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING

Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms length) from other people.

GET TESTED

Get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19. Stay at home until you get the result.

COVER YOUR MOUTH & NOSE WHILE SNEEZING, OR COUGHING

Before stepping outside, make sure to carry a handkerchief or a packet of tissues.

FOLLOW PRECAUTIONS BEFORE STEPPING OUT

Carry your sanitizer, water bottle and, most importantly, avoid crowded areas.

CHECK YOUR TEMPERATURE

Monitor your temperature on regular basis.



MOVIE NIGHT! The Game of Thrones star, Emilia Clarke attends the gala screening of Rare Beasts at a boutique cinema in London.

Billie Eilish to embark on 'Happier Than Ever' world tour in 2022

LOS ANGELES, MAY 22 (PTI): Singing sensation Billie Eilish has announced that she will go on a world tour in support of her upcoming album, 'Happier Than Ever'.

The "Bad Guy" singer shared the news in a post on Instagram and also posted a video clip from the new album.

"Going on Tour Again.Finally. 'Happier Than Ever, The World Tour'," the 19-year-old singer wrote in the caption.

Dubbed "Happier Than Ever, The World Tour", the 32-date outing will kick off in February 2022 and wrap with a three-night stand in Los Angeles from April 6 to 9, reported Variety.

During the US tour, Eilish will hit major markets including Atlanta, Montreal, Toronto, Nashville, Detroit, Chicago and Las Vegas.

Afterwards, the 19-year-old singer will head to the UK, where she will perform in cities like Belfast, Dublin, Manchester, Glasgow,

and London.

The overseas leg of the tour will finally wrap on July 2 at Hallenstadion in Zurich, Switzerland.

Eilish will release 'Happier Than Ever' on July 30. So far she has shared a handful of



tracks from the album, including "My Future", "Your Power" and "Therefore I Am".

The LP is a follow-up to her debut album "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go", for which Eilish had bagged multiple Grammys.

Veteran music director Raamlaxman dies at 78

MUMBAI, MAY 22 (PTI): Veteran music director Raamlaxman, best known for his work on Rajshri Productions' blockbuster movies -- "Maine Pyar Kiya", "Hum AapkeHainKoun..!" and "Hum SaathSaathHain" -- died due to a cardiac arrest. He was 78.

The composer, whose real name was Vijay Patil, passed away at his residence in Nagpur in the early hours of Saturday, his son Amar said.

"He had taken second dose of Covid-19 vaccine, Covishield, six days ago. There was no problem at that time... But when he came home he developed weakness. His parameters were dropping. Doctors were attending at home. He passed away at around 2 am on Saturday. He had a cardiac arrest," Amar told PTI.

Patil, known by cinema aficionados as 'Laxman' of duo composers "Raam-Laxman", started his journey in films with Marathi actor-comedian Dada Kondke's 1975 film "PanduHawal-dar". He gave the music for the movie with his collaborator Surendra under the name Raam-Laxman.

Surendra passed away in 1976, but Patil continued to compose under the same name, slightly changing it to Raamlaxman. Patil took his initial lessons

in music from his father and uncle. He later studied music at the Bhatkhande-ShikshanSanstha. In his over four decades-long career, he composed music

Mangeshkar was one of the first film personalities to pay tributes to Patil.

"I got to know now about the demise of the very talented RaamLaxmanji (Vi-



for over 150 films in Hindi, Marathi and Bhojpuri and worked with famous film directors such as Manmohan Desai, Mahesh Bhatt, GP Sippy, Anil Ganguly and SoorajBarjatya.

Some of his other memorable works are "Agent Vinod", "100 Days", "Anmol", "Tarana", "PattharKePhool" and "Hum Se BadhkarKaun".

Legendary playback singer Lata-

pay Patil). I am deeply saddened. He was a very good person. I have sung many songs composed by him which had become quite popular. My heartfelt condolences," she wrote on Twitter. The official Twitter handle of production banner Rajshri also mourn the loss.

"Music Composer Vijay Patil aka Laxman of the iconic #RaamLaxman duo passed away.

Grateful to get the opportunity to choose contrasting roles: RakulPreet Singh

MUMBAI, MAY 22 (PTI): Actor RakulPreet Singh says "experimentation" in movie writing has enabled performers to pick varied and contrasting roles.

The 30-year-old actor made her debut in Hindi cinema with Yaariyan in 2014 and later featured in NeerajPandey-directed Aiyaary and Ajay Devgn-starrer De DePyaarDe .

"I think it's a great time where people are writing different kinds of scripts, that possibly the audiences are looking to watch. The experimentation that's happening is different and that leads us to get that opportunity to be able to choose those different roles," Singh told PTI.

"I am very grateful that I have an opportunity to be able to choose these different kinds of roles. And each character is different and contrasting," she added.

Singh has an interesting slate of films

set for release, including Anubhuti-Kashyap's campus comedy-drama "Doctor G" and Devgn's directorial "Mayday".

She will also reportedly feature in Ronnie Screwvala-produced movie "Chhatriwali" and Indra Kumar's slice-of-life comedy.

Talking about her process of choosing projects, Singh said she just follows her instincts.

"I don't think much as an actor. I just go by my instincts. I feel great that I am getting to do what I want to do. I think about one day at a time. I feel very grateful that I have these films and I am looking forward to having more work," she said.

Singh currently stars in "SardarKa Grandson", alongside ArjunKapoor and Neena Gupta. The film is streaming on Netflix.

Henry Cavill to star in 'Highlander' reboot from Chad Stahelski

LOS ANGELES, MAY 22 (PTI): British star Henry Cavill is adding "Highlander" to the list of his big-budget fantasy projects. The actor, who plays Superman in DC movies, essays the titular character in Netflix series "The Witcher" and a gentle version of Sherlock Holmes in film franchise "Enola Holmes", has been cast in one of the lead roles in Lionsgate's reboot of fantasy action-adventure film "Highlander".

According to Deadline, "John Wick" director Chad Stahelski will be helming the film from a script by Kerry Williamson. Neal H Moritz and Josh Davis are producing the project.

Executive producers are Amanda Lewis, Patrick Wachsberger and Gregory Widen.

The 1986 original movie featured actors Christopher Lambert, Sean Con-

nelly and Clancy Brown as immortal beings, hunting down each other to become more powerful.

The film was followed by four sequels and three television series.

Peter Davis, the original producer of the first film, was also set to produce the new film prior to his death in February.

In an Instagram post on Saturday, Cavill said he has always been a fan of "Highlander" franchise and is elated to get the opportunity to star in the upcoming version.

"Being not shy with swords, and having a director as talented as Chad Stahelski at the helm, this is an opportunity like no other. Deep diving into franchise storytelling with all the tools at our disposal, is going to make this an adventure I (and hopefully all of you) shall never forget," the actor wrote.

NomaDumezweni to star alongside Liam Neeson in 'Retribution'

LOS ANGELES, MAY 22 (PTI): "The Undoing" actor NomaDumezweni has boarded action star Liam Neeson-led upcoming film "Retribution".

A remake of 2015 Spanish film "El Desconocido", the movie will be directed by Nimrod Antal of "Predators" and "Vacancy" fame, reported Deadline

The story follows a businessman (Neeson) who discovers that a bomb has been planted in the car he's driving by an unknown assailant, who tells the driver to execute a series of commands throughout the day or the bomb will be detonated. Making things worse, the businessman is accompanied in the car by his family. Dumezweni will essay the role of an Interpol agent on the hunt to track down Nesson's character.

The actor was recently praised for performance in HBO limited series "The Undoing", in which she played the role of Haley Fitzgerald, the lawyer of Nicole Kidman and Hugh Grant's characters.

"Retribution" has a script by Chris Salzmanpour and Andrew Baldwin.

The movie is a joint production between Studiocanal, The Picture Company and filmmaker Jaume Collet-Serra's Ombra Productions. Vaca Films, which made the original movie, will executive produce along with Atramedia Cine. The project will start shooting in Berlin, Germany next month.

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Aries:

There are people who seek instant gratification, and you're no longer one of them, Aries. You're focusing on the long-term vision and are willing to do what it takes to get to the top. Be rest assured that the desired destination is not very far from where you are. What you want to be mindful of is your impulsive nature. There will be times when hitting the accelerator button will seem more alluring than it actually is. The mantra 'slow and steady..' will come in handy in such moments.

Tip: Slow and steady, beautiful.

Taurus:

Maybe you're not exhausted because you're doing too much. Maybe you're exhausted because you're doing too little of what makes your soul sing, Taurus. Today, the cards are urging you to be mindful of what you are saying yes to. Every time you say yes to something that doesn't resonate with you, you end up saying no to something that does. Word for the wise: let go of the need to please everybody, and focus on what you have come here to achieve. While you're at it, reduce your screen time and eliminate the distractions too.

Tip: It's time to focus on what really matters.

Gemini:

Oversized sweatshirt + messy bun is not a cute look on you, especially if you're trying to pull it off seven days in

a row. The cards are urging you to shake things up a little, pull on your favourite joggers, and cirque du soleil on your yoga mat. Even better, head out to the local park where you can get your daily dose of sunshine. You know what they say! Sometimes, you just need to be in the midst of nature to feel alive again.

Tip: It's time to get some vitamin D!

Cancer:

Not all of us are fortunate enough to have a mentor who provides us with the right guidance and holds space for us to realise our highest potential. What you have is truly a gift, Cancer. So, instead of being bogged down by your current circumstances, ask yourself the question 'What would ____ (insert the name of the person you look upto) do in my place?' Alternatively, find a way to connect with them today. Know that despite how you are feeling at this moment, the creative solutions you seek will come through unexpectedly.

Tip: You've got this, boo!

Leo:

We're all born with access to a psychic hotline, one that connects us to the Divine. In other words, we possess the inner wisdom required to navigate the trials and tribulations of life in the earthly realm. It all comes down to how much we're willing to 'tune in'. So, let go of the need to find the answers outside. This decision

is yours to make, and you know what's best for you, Leo.

Tip: It's time to connect with your inner guidance.

Virgo:

You, or somebody close to you, could be getting ready to experience the miracle of life. It's time to plan that baby shower, Virgo. Think something intimate that involves your inner circle only. If members of your crew are miles away from you, you could consider a virtual soiree too. As such, joy and celebration is going to be a constant around here. Choosing to focus on the silver linings isn't always easy. But you're doing what it takes to be the conduit of hope around here. Tip: The cards speak of joy and celebration.

Libra:

You've got that big goals energy about you that reads 'the impossible is possible'. It's all about commitment and consistency in the Libra HQ, coupled with focus and discipline. Your leadership skills are also coming to the fore this month, and it's changing the way you're inspiring others to live their truth. Word for the wise: finding a 'humanitarian' angle will take your work to the next level and put you directly on the cosmic payroll. For single Venusians, the weeks ahead promise to be an interesting time.

Tip: We love that big goals energy you're exuding.

Scorpio:

Finding a balance between the yin and the yang, the doing and the non-doing, is going to be an important theme in the Scorpio HQ. You are in a space of clarity about your purpose and the actions you need to take in order to achieve your goals. So, honour the divine downloads that are coming through as you actively bridge the gap between where you are and where you need to be.

Tip: Shocking your audience once in a while may not be such a bad idea, beautiful.

Sagittarius:

Leaving something you're "this" attached to is seldom easy, Sagittarius, yet it is what you need to do in order to liberate yourself from this cycle. So let go, and let go with love. Know that your ancestors are by your side, helping you detach from that which no longer serves your highest good. Remember, it is the first step that intimidates us the most. But once you find the courage to take that, the rest of the road will become clearer to you.

Tip: Let go with loving awareness.

Capricorn:

Sometimes, self-care looks like a ritualistic bath complete with essential oils, herbs and flowers. At other times, it involves a glass of vino in one hand

and your favourite self-help book in the other. We all need to do what we need to do in order to feel sane at a time like this, and there is no shame in that. So set that time aside for yourself, beautiful, and remember to unplug as you do.

Tip: It's time to self-care the Capricorn way.

Aquarius:

"Dance, when you're broken open. Dance, if you've torn the bandage off. Dance in the middle of the fighting. Dance in your blood. Dance when you're perfectly free." Ruminates open Rumi's immortal words as you embrace the art of movement as therapy. Remember, there is no right or wrong way.

Tip: Dance until you feel a sense of oneness with the Universe.

Pisces:

We all encounter moments of utter despair. Moments when we feel like everything that's precious to us is being taken away at once, and that there is no light at the end of the tunnel. But, the truth is, nothing that takes place is accidental. Every experience we attract is somehow a part of our pre-birth plan—a test of sorts that's helping us evolve on a soul level. So embrace the given challenge as an opportunity to grow. Know that the resources you need at every step will be provided to you.

Tip: It's all happening for a reason.