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Summit **TIMES**

Vol 06 | Issue 56 | Gangtok | Sunday 28 February 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

India records 16,488 new COVID-19 cases, 113 deaths

NEW DELHI, FEB 27 (PTI): India registered a single-day spike of over 16,000 COVID-19 cases for the third day in a row on Saturday, pushing the infection tally to 1,10,79,979, while the recoveries surged to 1,07,63,451, according to Union Health Ministry data. A total of 16,488 novel coronavirus cases were reported in a day, while the death toll rose to 1,56,938 with 113 new fatalities, showed the data updated at 8am on Saturday.

The active case count has further increased to 1,59,590, which comprises 1.44 per cent of the total infections, the data stated.

The number of recoveries reached 1,07,63,451, which translates to a national COVID-19 recovery rate of 97.14 per cent and the case fatality rate stands at 1.42 per cent.

A total of 16,577 new COVID-19 cases were reported in India on Friday, while 16,738 fresh infections were registered in the country on Thursday.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7; 30 lakh on August 23; 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28; 70 lakh on October 11; crossed 80 lakh on October 29; 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed one crore on December 19.

The 113 new fatalities include 48 from Maharashtra, 15 from Punjab and 14 from Kerala.

The death toll from the pandemic stands at 52,041 in Maharashtra, 12,488 in Tamil Nadu, 12,320 in Karnataka, 10,906 in Delhi, 10,263 in West Bengal, 8,725 in Uttar Pradesh and 7,169 in Andhra Pradesh.

For the first time, a coronavirus-linked death has been reported in Lakshadweep. The Health Ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths were caused due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)," the ministry said on its website, adding state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

CM's Facebook page hacked

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 27 FEB:

Chief Minister, PS Tamang's official Facebook page, "Prem Singh Tamang-Golay," which is an FB verified account, has been hacked.

Sources inform that the page was hacked at around 5 pm on Saturday and the profile picture was changed.

Apart from changing the profile picture, the person who has taken over the account has also deleted some recent posts from the page. The page used to carry posts on a regular basis,

sometimes multiple times in a day, but now, the most recent post on the page after the update on the change in profile picture is from 26 December, 2020.

A simple Google image search of the profile picture used by the hacker throws up a series of obviously fake social media accounts on Twitter and some apps and services which have scant following in these parts. Most of the accounts using this specific profile-photo are apparently not based in India, the language in which they post and the addresses

provided by them locating them in distant countries like Venezuela, Brazil, and yes, even one from Pakistan.

The Information & Public Relations Department, in a notice released at around 10:30PM on Saturday night, while confirming that the page has been hacked, has also directed that "any update from this page may not be entertained till the issue is resolved, please."

The IPR Department "information" has been issued by the District Information Officer, East.

Generally, celebri-

ty accounts are well secured most of the apps and websites have developed two-factor authentication. However, celebrity social media accounts are targeted often. Most recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Twitter account was hacked in September last year, it may be recalled. Still bigger names Jeff Bezos, Barack Obama, Michel Bloomberg, Joe Biden, Bill Gates, Kanye West, Wiz Khalifa, Elon Musk, and Kim Kardashian have been hacked as well in recent times.

While "password guess-

ing" has been detected as one of the ways hackers take over accounts, the more nefarious tricks involve SIM-jacking in which attackers trick the victim's phone service provider into porting the number into a new SIM card. The new SIM can then be used for logging into accounts or accessing accounts. Phishing is a term social media users are now familiar with and connecting to open wifi connections also leaves users open to hacking since data transferred on an open Wi-Fi connection is often unencrypted and unse-

cured. Sensitive information entered while on public wifi is easily accessible to anyone on the same wifi.

Of late, people using outdated operating systems or those who have not updated their apps and phones regularly, and celebrities are known not to update regularly, have fallen prey to new hacking technologies since their devices are vulnerable because they have not been updated.

Sikkim Police now has a cell dedicated to cyber security and pressure must be high on them to resolve this issue at the earliest.

2 primary contacts are Sikkim's only new Covid cases on Saturday

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 27 FEB:

Two new cases of novel coronavirus were reported in the last 24 hours taking the State's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 6,137 on Saturday. Both the persons are primary contacts of the JP Company employee who has tested positive a few days back at Sirwani, Singtam in East District.

Meanwhile, the number of recovered Covid cases improved to 5,861 with the discharge of

three more COVID patients from isolation facilities.

There are now 44 active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim.

In his daily health bulletin on Saturday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia informed that the two positive cases were picked up from the testing of 133 samples on Friday.

He added that both the cases were picked up in the RT-PCR testing of 94 samples, while the 18 samples screened by

TrueNat and 21 through rapid antigen testing, all returned negative for COVID-19.

He mentioned that an employee of JP Company, who had returned recently from Hyderabad, developed Covid symptoms a few days back and was found with the virus when tested.

During the testing of his primary contacts, two more were found positive for COVID-19.

The vaccination drive, meanwhile, will resume on Monday after a weekend break.

Covid vaccine jab capped at ₹ 250 at private hospitals

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB [PTI]:

Coronavirus vaccines will be capped at ₹ 250 per shot at private hospitals and health centres, the Health Ministry said today. Vaccines will be free in all government hospitals and centres.

The government on Friday had said it will let people choose their coronavirus vaccination centres when the campaign expands tomorrow to cover those over 60 and those over 45 with illnesses.

They can register through the government's CoWIN 2.0 portal, the Aarogya Setu app, or walk into vaccination centres; states will also actively mobilise people.

There are more than 10,000 private hospitals

in the country that are cleared to give out vaccines apart from all government hospitals and health centres.

Those over 60 will have to only show their identification with age while those over 45 with chronic illnesses will have to get a form signed by a registered medical practitioner.

The country has halted vaccinations this weekend to upgrade software used to coordinate its campaign, as it prepares to widen coverage beyond the 1.15 crore health and front-line workers immunised since January 16.

But the inoculation campaign has progressed slower than expected due to a reluctance of health

and front-line workers to take the home-grown COVAXIN shot that was approved without late-stage efficacy data.

Only 11 per cent of vaccinated people have opted for the product developed by Bharat Biotech and the state-run Indian Council of Medical Research.

With the world's highest tally of infections after the United States, India wants to vaccinate 30 of its 135 crore people by August. The decision to give people a choice to choose centres, effectively being allowed to choose vaccines could speed up the roll-out, officials believe.

"The fundamental shift in this phase is that

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SRP celebrates 5th foundation day

AARON RAI GANGTOK, 27 FEB:

The fifth foundation day of Sikkim Republican Party was celebrated at the River View Hotel in Ranipool, East Sikkim today. The party came into existence five years ago at the Jorethang playground.

Party president KB Rai addressed the gathering at the River View Hotel in the presence of party workers from all four districts. He congratulated all the party workers on a successful five-year journey.

He shed light on the party's objectives aims, issues and future plans. In his address, Mr Rai said that only the Sikkim Republican Party has come forward with the aim of saving the identity of Sikkim.

Mr Rai stated the state was given Article 371F after its merger with India to protect itself but this Article is riddled with bullets now.



He further said that the entire state could have got tribal status if it were not for the foolishness of previous governments.

The present government should now aim to give not only the tribal identity but also restore the lost Nepali reserved seats in the State Assembly.

Speaking on the issue of Gyalshing College, Mr Rai termed the present government's Education Minister as irresponsible. He urged the gov-

ernment to reinstate the four expelled students of Gyalshing college.

He questioned the college principal's decision to expel students for demanding a college campus.

If the Sikkim government does not immediately reinstate the students, there is a strong possibility of public outcry which, he said, the police administration might not be able to control.

He accused the cur-

rent government of not fulfilling its election promises.

Mr Rai also criticized statements made by Economic Advisor to Sikkim Government, Mahendra P Lama in a program held in West Sikkim.

"It does not suit an intellectual like Mahendra P Lama to laud a government which has just come to power and is yet to deliver all its responsibilities," said Mr Rai.

SRP passed 6 resolutions in today's program.

Assam BJP ally joins Congress alliance before polls

GUWAHATI, 27 FEB [NDTV]: In a boost for the Congress-led coalition before next month's elections in Assam, the Bodoland Peoples' Front or BPF on Saturday announced that it was quitting the alliance headed by the ruling BJP and joining the opposition front.

"To work for Peace, Unity, and Development and to bring a stable government, free from corruption in Assam, the Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF) has decided to join hands with MAHAJATH. BPF shall no longer maintain friendship or alliance with BJP. In the forth-

coming Assam Assembly Election BPF shall work hand in hand with Mahajath," BPF leader Hagrama Mohilary said in a statement on Facebook.

Formed in 2005 in Assam, the Kokrajhar-based BPF had won 12 of the state's 126 seats in the last assembly elections and joined the BJP-led alliance. Before that, it had allied with the Congress twice - making it a part of the winning side for the last three elections.

But late last year, the BJP dumped the BPF and picked up a new partner to gain a majority

and rule the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), a self-governing body in the Bodo-dominated areas of Assam.

The BPF, which has three ministers in the Sarbananda Sonowal-led coalition government in the state, emerged as the single-largest party in the BTC polls in December, winning 17 seats in the 40-member body.

BJP leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, however, congratulated the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) for winning 12

turn to pg02

Innovator Sonam Wangchuk who inspired '3 Idiots' develops solar heated tent for army

SRINAGAR, 27 FEB [PTI]: Innovator and educationist Sonam Wangchuk, the real life Phunsukh Wangdu of Bollywood blockbuster "3 Idiots", has developed an eco-friendly solar heated tent that Army personnel can use in extremely cold places like Siachen and Galwan valley in the Ladakh region.

Mr Wangchuk, who has many environment friendly innovations to his name, said the solar heated military tent, besides saving on use of fossil fuel and its ill effects on environment, increases the safety of the military personnel.

"This tent uses the solar energy

trapped during day time to keep the soldiers' sleeping chamber warm during night. Since there is no use of fossil fuel, it saves on money and also is emission free," he said.

The innovator said the temperature inside the sleeping chamber of the military tent can be increased or decreased by the corresponding increase or decrease in insulation layers.

"The sleeping chamber has four layers of insulation and it gave a temperature of 15 degrees Celsius at a time when outside temperature was minus 14 degrees Celsius. The number of layers can be reduced

for warmer places," he added.

Mr Wangchuk said the temperature inside the tent should not be too cozy as the soldiers have to be ready to fight the enemy in the open where temperature can be as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius in places like Galwan valley.

While Mr Wangchuk extensively referred to last year's India-China stand off in Ladakh, he said he had made an earlier version of solar heated tent 15 years ago for shepherds who were engaged in rearing of Pashmina goats which produce high-quality Cashmere wool.

Referring to new prototype, Mr Wang-

chuk said the tent is portable and can accommodate 10 soldiers.

"No component of the tent weighs more than 30 kg which makes it easily portable. The tent is disassembled into 30 to 40 components," he said.

Wangchuk said the weight of components can be brought down to 20 kg each by using superlight aluminium material.

"That version will be more expensive than the current prototype," he said. He acknowledged the support provided by the Army in developing the solar-heated tent, saying "it has been designed keeping in mind the requirements

of the Army". The innovator said it took his team at Himalayan Institute of Alternatives Ladakh (HIAL) one month to make the prototype of the solar-heated tent.

The tent has been designed keeping in mind the places like Siachen glacier and Black Top Hill, the 55-year-old innovator said. Mr Wangchuk on Friday visited Zojila Top test a "crazy idea" of making low coat ice tunnel for keeping the approach road to Zojila tunnel open.

"It will save 500 tonnes of carbon dioxide and crores annually," he said, while asking his one million subscribers on YouTube channel to "stay tuned for the video".

Vice Prez expresses concern over HP assembly happenings

CHENNAI, FEB 27 (PTI):

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Saturday expressed concern over the "recent happenings" in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly, where Governor Bandaru Dattatreya was allegedly manhandled by some Congress MLAs.

The Leader of Opposition and four other opposition party legislators were suspended.

Dattatreya was allegedly manhandled by some Congress members in the Assembly complex in Shimla on Friday, following which the five MLAs were suspended for the remainder of the Budget session.

In his address at the 11th Convocation of the Dr Ambedkar Law University here, Naidu said people in public life and high positions must set an example to others by maintaining high standards.

"I was distressed by the recent happenings in Himachal Pradesh legislature and a few other states. I urge upon all public representatives to conduct themselves in a decent and dignified manner in every forum. Otherwise, the people might get disillusioned with our polity soon," Naidu said.

Frequent disruption and stalling of legislative proceedings would not serve any purpose and everyone must realize that the only way forward for every problem is to discuss, debate and decide and not disrupt, the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha added.

Further, issues like delay and "huge pendency" of cases in the courts across the country have to be addressed to ensure speedier delivery of justice, he said.

"The cost of legal processes is a major impediment in making justice accessible to all. A common perception is that there are many hidden costs in availing the legal route to resolve disputes," he said.

"We have to find ways to reduce this out-of-pocket expenditure to the common citizen," he added.

"There is also a serious issue of protracted litigation.

Timeliness in rendering justice is a major concern. As the maxim goes, justice delayed is justice denied. This delay is often attributed to huge pendency in courts, frequent adjournments and long leaves of courts."

"We have to address this problem of inordinate delay and do whatever is possible in our own purview to ensure speedier justice," Naidu said.

While there was no silver bullet to solve all these problems, "we must find systemic solutions to these challenges," he noted.

For better access, more courts, special benches and adequately staffed courts with all posts filled up are required. Innovations like Lok Adalats and mobile courts have to be leveraged upon wherever feasible, he said.

Fashion and Lifestyle Expo at City Center Mall Siliguri

SUMMIT REPORT

SILIGURI, 27 FEB:

A unique Mini Market - Fashion and Lifestyle Expo, 2021 was inaugurated at City Centre Mall, Siliguri on 26 Feb, a press release informs.

The day-one of the Expo witnessed high footfall. People from different parts of Siliguri and North Bengal visited the Mall to experience the exhibition. The exhibition aims at promoting the art and culture of different parts of the country.

The Fashion and Lifestyle Expo 2021 is being held from 26 Feb to 17 Mar, 2021 from 11.00am to 9.00pm. It is a 20-day Expo which is being organized by Mini Market in Siliguri. The Education Partner for this Expo is JD Institute of Fashion Technology, Siliguri.

The Exhibitor Categories at Fashion and Lifestyle Expo 2021 are: Leather Bags, Artificial Jewellery, Designer



Dresses, Lucknowi Kurtis, Bhagalpuri Sarees, Kashmiri Shawl and Dresses, Punjabi Jutti, Carpets & Home Decor, to name a few.

Snigdha Dutta, Organizer of Mini Market Fashion and Lifestyle Expo 2021, said, "We are really excited to organize this Expo here in Siliguri. North Bengal has always

been a place for new fashion and trends. People love to try and enjoy the current trends. We are hopeful that people of this region would like the Expo. There are several categories to choose from which includes Leather Bags, Artificial Jewellery, Designer Dresses, Lucknowi Kurtis, Bhagalpuri Sarees, Kashmiri Shawl

and Dresses, Punjabi Jutti, Carpets & Home Decor, to name a few."

Snigdha Dutta said, "I also thank City Centre Mall for this opportunity. We are looking forward to this mega Expo. We would also be organizing such Expos in coming days in other parts of the state."

As it is being organized in City Center Mall

which is located in the heart of Siliguri, the Mini Market - Fashion and Lifestyle Expo 2021 expects high footfall. City Centre is a shopping hotspot for all generations with a footfall of over 20 thousand on a daily basis. It is one of the most visited tourist destinations in the entire region.

Odisha down East Bengal in 11-goal thriller



BAMBOLIM, FEB 27 (PTI): Odisha FC prevailed over SC East Bengal 6-5 in a crazy 11-goal thriller as the Indian Super League on Saturday recorded the most goals in a match through teams whose season was blighted by their inability to score.

Doubles from two Indian youngsters Paul Ramfangzauva (49', 66') and Jerry Mawihmingthanga (51', 67') enabled Odisha to end the season on a high, with S Lalhezuala (33') and Diego Mauricio (69') chipping in.

Goals from Anthony Pilkington (24'), Aaron Joshua Holloway (60', 90'), Jeje Lalpekhlua (74') and an own goal from Ravi Kumar (37') made up East Bengal's tally.

East Bengal who started brightly scored first. Pilkington showed some great skill, striding forward into the box and unleashing a shot past Odisha keeper Ravi.

SCEB dominated play soon after the goal and it looked like Odisha was in for another long night.

However, they managed to turn the narrative on its head when S Lalhezuala found the net. The goal came from a corner that the East Bengal defence failed to deal with properly, something that has cost them all season.

But they were soon to retake the lead and the goal, which came just minutes later, was Odisha's season in a nutshell.

Their defence failed to clear a corner properly and the ball fell to Manuel Onwu near the goalline. His clearance, though, smacked keeper Ravi in the face and went right in.

East Bengal would carry the lead into the half-time break, but it would not last too long afterward.

The equaliser was a magnificent individual effort from Ramfangzauva, who bent one in past SCEB keeper Subrata Paul. Then it was another Indian youngster's turn to hand Odisha the lead, Jerry headed in Onwu's well-crafted cross.

SCEB though weren't behind for long and it was Holloway who found the net for them. His low shot from outside the box eluded Ravi and trickled into goal after hitting the upright.

But Ramfangzauva was not done yet. After an Odisha shot was blocked at the edge of the box, the youngster got the ball and unleashed a shot that went through the legs of a couple of defenders before beating Subrata.

Jerry was not to be undone by his teammate though. A wonderful chipped pass from Mauricio found Jerry free in the box and the youngster smashed a shot past the hapless Subrata.

Any hopes of an SCEB comeback was quickly killed by Mauricio, who converted a freekick, driving a low shot past Subrata. Odisha had scored three goals in three minutes for a remarkable turnaround.

There was still time for more drama as SCEB pulled one back. Jacques Maghoma found Pilkington at the far post and the latter squared it to Jeje, who scored his first Hero ISL goal in East Bengal colours. Holloway, then scored again in injury time, but it was too late for East Bengal.

Community outreach by SAATHI at Ranka GPU



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 FEB:

SAATHI organized a community outreach program today with the support of Titan Company Ltd at Sajong ward, Ranka GPU with 25 participants. The objective

of this program is to educate people on the ill effects of substance abuse, a press release informs.

Coordinator of Sikkim Drug Users Forum, Prashant Sharma was the resource person for the program who

spoke about addressing the problem of substance abuse in order to bring change in society. He shared his personal experience with the participants and the role of community in solving the substance abuse problem.

Senior police officer replaced in Bengal a day after poll dates announced

KOLKATA, 27 FEB

[NDTV]:

A day after it announced Bengal election dates - spread over eight phases starting March 27 - the Election Commission has replaced the top cop in charge of law and order for the state.

Jag Mohan, who was previously DG (Fire Services), has been named as the new ADG and IGP (Law and Order), replacing Jawed Shamim "with immediate effect and in the interest of public service".

Mr Shamim will now take over the DG (Fire Services) position.

On Friday the Election Commission said elections would be spread over eight phases because over concerns - voiced loudly by the opposition BJP - of electoral violence.

The poll body, however, declined to say if voting had been stretched out because of the BJP's very public comments on the matter, but suggested that security had played a role in its consideration.

"We avoid taking names of political parties. We had an assessment of law and order on several factors. Last time it was seven

phases, so eight is not a big deal," outgoing Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has questioned the move.

"Bihar has 240 seats and had elections in three phases. Tamil Nadu has 234 seats and will have election in one day. Why eight phases here? Who is benefitting?" she said.

"This is as per BJP requisition. My question to the Election Commission is, tell me why half a district will elections on one day and the other half on another day? Because we are strong in South 24 Parganas, they are holding elections in three phases," Ms Banerjee said.

"Has this been done at the instance of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah? Why give them 23 days here? We will defeat you still. We are grassroots people. The daughter of Bengal has one thing to say, I know Bengal very well. I will defeat all your conspiracies. People of Bengal will respond to this insult," she said.

Kailash Vijayvargiya, the BJP's Bengal in-charge, said, "All parties had wanted he elections

to be stretched out this time so that central forces can have enough time to plan their deployment. I also appeal to the Election Commission to depute additional officers apart from security forces to enable fair elections."

Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora in his news conference said the election body will be sending two observers to keep an eye on police operations and a third one can be sent if needed.

West Bengal is geared up for a closely-watched contest between a surging BJP and the state's ruling Trinamool Congress.

The BJP has pulled out all the stops, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and others holding frequent rallies, to unseat Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

While the BJP has gathered remarkable momentum in the run-up, investing money, time, and energy, the Trinamool has strived to dub it an "outsider" party that doesn't understand West Bengal. The poll campaign, till now, has been largely vitriolic.

TMC forms 12-member committee for Bengal polls

KOLKATA, FEB 26 (PTI):

The Trinamool Congress on Friday announced a 12-member election committee that will look into the selection of candidates and plan a campaign for the upcoming assembly polls.

The panel will be headed by West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee, party's secretary-general Partha Chatterjee said after its core committee meeting.

Senior party leaders, MPs and MLAs are other members of the committee, he said.

Subrata Bakshi, Abhishek Banerjee, Sudip Banerjee, Derek O'Brien, Sougata Roy and C M Jatua are members of the election panel.

Firhad Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, Partha

Chatterjee Chandrima Bhattacharya and Aroop Biswas are also part of the team. According to party sources, the TMC leaders had extensively discussed the issues related to the selection of candidates and planned for the campaign.

"Selection of the candidates will be an important thing this time and inputs from election strategist Prashant Kishor and his team I-PAC will play an important role in it," a party leader said.

Elections for the West Bengal assembly will be held in eight phases, up from seven last time, beginning with polling for 30 seats on March 27, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said while announcing the poll schedule.

What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV	Precautions to Prevent nCoV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever • Difficulty breathing • Dry cough • Loss of taste/smell • Fatigue • Sore throat • Headache • Diarrhoea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often with soap • Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer • Observe good personal hygiene • Avoid touching your face with uncleaned hands • Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms • Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats • Avoid travel to nCoV affected places • Wear a mask if you have respiratory symptoms and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing
Treatment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment to symptomatic and supportive • Avoid self-medication • Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms • Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats • Avoid travel to nCoV affected places • Wear a mask if you have respiratory symptoms and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing 	<p>If you seek help, you may call:</p> <p>Toll free no. 184</p> <p>District surveillance Officer</p> <p>EAST : 763077100</p> <p>WEST : 96920900</p> <p>NORTH : 964957469</p> <p>SOUTH : 7407891463</p> <p>New STBII</p> <p>AMB : 964711402</p>

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Covid vaccine jab...

citizens in the identified age groups, as also those healthcare workers and frontline who have been missed out or left out of the present phase of vaccination, can select vaccination centres of their choice," the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said in a statement.

Bharat Biotech has said efficacy data from a late-stage trial on nearly 26,000 volunteers who took COVAXIN shot will be out soon. The company, along with India's drug regulator, says COVAXIN is safe and effective, based on early and intermediate studies.

More vaccines are likely to be approved for use in the world's second most populous country in coming months, including Russia's Sputnik-V and Cadila Healthcare's ZyCoV-D.

Apart from vaccine hesitancy, initial glitches in CoWIN had also slowed India's immunisation drive, forcing many states offline. The software forms part of a government contact-tracing app "Aarogya Setu", or Health Bridge, downloaded so far by nearly 17 crore people.

India's infections rose 16,488 in the past 24 hours to stand at 1.10 crore, health ministry data shows, while the number of deaths rose 113 to reach 1,56,938.

Assam BJP ally joins...

seats and termed the party an "ally" in his tweet. Mr Sonowal announced that UPPL chief Pramod Boro will be the new Chief Executive Member (CEM) in the BTC.

Earlier this month, Assam Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma made it clear that the ruling BJP will not have any alliance with the BPF in the upcoming assembly polls in the state.

"We have been telling it many times that our alliance with BPF was for five years only and both sides were committed to it. They are still in our government and it is healthy politics," the BJP leader said.

The BJP is currently the single largest party in the 126-member Assam house with 60 MLAs, while its allies Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and BPF now have 13 and 11 lawmakers respectively. The ruling coalition also has the support of an Independent MLA.

Assam will see three-phased assembly polls from March 27 to April 6 with results on May 2. For the first time, the Congress is not going solo against the BJP. The party has allied with once arch-rival - Badaruddin Ajmal-led AIUDEF, a smaller regional outfit - Anchalik Gana Morcha (AGM) and three Left parties.

Turning it into a three-way battle is an alliance of two regional parties born out of the anti-CAA protests in Assam - the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) formed by former members of All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and other civil society groups and the Rajgor Dol, formed by the supporters of noted activist Akhil Gogoi who is in jail for over a year on sedition charges over the anti-CAA protests.

LOST

I, Mentsho Lepcha, s/o Gyatsho Lepcha, resident of Chumbung, West Sikkim and student of Govt Sec Secondary School Chumbung West Sikkim have lost my COI and Migration certificate CBSE (Class X) certificate while travelling from Hyderabad to Sikkim on 15/02/21.

Career guidance for Class X & XII students at Dikling School



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 27 FEB:

A career guidance program facilitated by the Zilla Panchayat of Chhalthang-Pacheykhani, Leela Sharma, for students of classes X and XII was held at Dikling Senior Secondary School on 26 Feb, a press release informs.

The event was supported by Wandering

Souls of Sikkim, a social initiative working in the field of education and youth.

WSOS members Pranay Khatiwara, Nawraj Gurung, Chleopus Subba, Jigme Gurung and Albert Gurung conducted interactive sessions as a part of the programme.

Awareness about Job prospects and career opportunities and scholarship schemes for taking up various courses in

different streams of studies were the main highlight of the daylong event. Students were visibly elated after the sessions and enormously thanked the Zilla panchayat and Wandering Souls of Sikkim for facilitating the event.

The event was also attended by school vice principal Deepak Sharma, teachers, panchayats and others.

SRM University hosts annual fest Meraki



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 27 FEB:

SRM University Sikkim hosted Meraki, its annual culture and art festival for students, on 25 and 26 February. The event had Chairperson, Pooja Sharma, Sikkim Film Promotion Board, as the chief guest, a press release informs.

In her address, Ms Sharma commented on the significance of the name Meraki. She also spoke about the importance of developing and introducing avenues of art and culture in Sikkim for the upcoming generation.

Vice Chancellor Ch Satish Kumar, formally opening the event, said, "University is not meant

only for studies and exams. We aim at the holistic development of our students and Meraki is one of our most effective and enjoyable means of doing so."

A total of eleven events ranging from poetry recitation, Western and Indian music and dance performances, photography and sketching were held as part of the festival. However, the event that all students most looked forward to was the competition for the titles of Ms and Mr Meraki 2021.

While the events happened offline, they were live streamed so that the audience could attend and participate remotely.

Globes org says it will recruit Black members after outcry

LOS ANGELES (AP): The organization hosting the Golden Globes says it is developing a plan to recruit Black members after falling under sharp criticism for lacking diverse members.

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association said in statement Friday that an "action plan" is under development to admit Black members. The group currently has 87 members who are journalists, but none are Black.

Former HFPA president Meher Tatna Friday in an interview that the organization hasn't had a Black member in nearly two decades. The Mumbai-born board chair said she couldn't recall when there had been a Black member, but she says the organization will keep trying.

Some including Time's Up and presenter Sterling K. Brown are among those who have criticized the HFPA's lack of inclusion and diversity. The criticism comes just days before the Globes air live on Sunday.

An HFPA spokesperson said it welcomes the opportunity to meet with groups such as Time's Up and prospective Black members who are interested in joining the orga-

nization.

"We are fully committed to ensuring our membership is reflective of the communities around the world who love film, TV and the artists inspiring and educating them," the HFPA statement read. "We understand that we need to bring in Black members, as well as members from other underrepresented backgrounds, and we will immediately work to implement an action plan to achieve these goals as soon as possible."

Time's Up took aim at the HFPA in a tweet saying "a cosmetic fix isn't enough." The activist organization also included the hashtag #TimesUpGlobes.

Brown, an award presenter, posted the Time's Up photo on social media with his own criticism.

"For any governing body of a current Hollywood award show to have such a lack of voting representation illustrates a level of irresponsibility that should not be ignored," he said.

Brown said the HFPA must do better. He said the organization has a responsibility to show its "constituency is fully reflective of the world in which we live."

Felicitation cum farewell programme by BAC Duga



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 27 FEB:

A felicitation cum farewell programme was organized by the Education Department BAC Duga in coordination with all the school heads of the block for retired Dy Director and 22 retired Teachers from different schools on 26 Feb, 2021, a press release informs.

OSD to CM, BB Pradhan was the chief guest with Chairperson RMDD, Sunita Gautam and Joint Director East, AD Chettri as special guests.

The program was organised at The Eco Paradise Resort in Rangpo and hosted by Headmistress of Majhitar SS, Tshering Tshedam Bhutia.

Children from Majhitar SS presented a colourful welcome dance to kick off the program. Chief guest, Ms Bhutia congratulated the retirees and requested them to devote the rest of their life for social causes.

Joint Director suggested that the teachers should remain in touch with the students

and school and help the management with their vast experience. He also thanked all for their meritorious service on behalf of the Department and applauded BAC and school heads for organizing such a program.

Chairperson Sunita Gautam expressed her happiness and highlighted the importance of teachers in the development of a society.

This is the seventh such program organised by the BAC in coordination with school heads.

Thieves dig tunnel into Jaipur house, steal silver buried under basement



Jaipur, 27 Feb [PTI]: In a daring heist, thieves allegedly stole huge quantity of silver kept in a box buried in the basement of a Jaipur house by digging a 20-foot-long and 15-foot-deep tunnel, according to police.

The owner of the house, who is a doctor by profession, has not disclosed the exact quantity of silver.

Police said the accused had purchased a house right behind the doctor's house for ₹ 87 lakh in January and covered its wall with tin sheds

to block the view and started the digging work.

The accused dug the tunnel from the newly purchased house and reached the exact location where the box was buried. They cut open the box and stole the silver.

Dr Sunit Soni, who runs a hair transplant clinic, came to know about the theft when he found the flooring of the basement uneven and dug it on Wednesday. Mr Soni informed police on Wednesday evening.

"Primary investigation indicates the in-

volvement of Dr Soni's friend who knew about the silver. We have detained him and he is being interrogated. Four more accused are also there in the case," police official Ajaypal Lamba said. The prime accused is a bullion trader.

There were three big boxes buried in the basement. Soni informed police that the accused stole silver from one box while the rest were empty. However, he could not give an answer why empty boxes were concealed there.

Trucker beaten to death on highway in Tripura's Dhalai

AGARTALA, FEB 27 (PTI): A trucker was allegedly beaten to death on the national highway at Lalcherri in Tripura's Dhalai district, police said on Saturday. The truck was stopped by a gang, which is yet to be identified, on Friday evening and the trucker was thrashed badly, Sub-divisional Police Officer (SDPO) of Am-

bassa, Asish Dasgupta, said. The trucker, identified as Pradip Debnath of Teliamura in Khowai District, was found lying in a pool of blood when some Fire Services personnel spotted him, he said. They took him to a hospital where doctors declared him brought dead.

The gang also robbed him of Rs 4,000, police

said. Serious injuries were found on Debnath's head and ears, they said. The incident happened on the highway that connects the state to Assam. "The attackers still remain unidentified and the reason for the attack is yet to be known. A case has been registered and investigations are underway," Dasgupta said.

SSLA felicitates international strength lifters



SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 27 FEB:

Sikkim Strength Lifting Association [SSLA] felicitated international strength lifters from Sikkim for winning medals and laurels for the Country and the State here on Saturday. The association honored international strength lifter, Ganesh Kumar Subba with the Life Time Achievement Award for his contribution towards the association and for promotion of strength lifting in the State.

Likewise, the association felicitated 14 international strength lifters from Sikkim for making the country and the state proud with outstanding performances in the international arena.

International strength lifters, Ranju Sundas, Edu Tshering Kaleon, Manisha Tewari, Kalpana Chettri, Madhu Mahal Majhi, Pempa Tamang, Prakash Basnet, Homnath Shiwakoti, Thinlay Wangdi Bhutia, Bhim Raj Gurung, Chandra Kumar Chettri, Ongdup Tamang, Palden Tamang and Kishor Dungal were felicitated by the association.

The felicitation function was chaired by Advisor to Sports & Youth

Affairs Department, Meg Nath Subba as the chief guest, who was accompanied by SKM sports wing state president, Rinzing Wangyal Chopel among other dignitaries. On the occasion, Kiran Rasaily was appointed chief advisor and Allen Targain as working president of SSLA.

In his address, Advisor to SYA Department, MN Subba congratulated all strength lifters for making the state and the country proud with their achievements in international platforms. He also congratulated SSLA and its team for bringing out lots of national and international lifters from Sikkim in a very short span of time.

He further encouraged the SSLA team to continue with their hard work to bring out more lifters from the State to lead the young generation on healthy and productive path. The Advisor assured to provide all possible support to the association and its members to produce more national and international lifters from the State.

Newly appointed chief advisor, Kiran Rasaily and working president, Allen Targain assured to give their full

support to take the association to the next level and to lead young generation towards health and sports.

Earlier, SSLA president, Tenzing D Denzongpa mentioned that the association was formed in 2013 and registered with the government only in 2018 but has already produced more than 300 strength lifters from different parts of the State. He added that local lifters from Sikkim have already impressed people in national and international competitions by winning medals and setting new records. He stressed upon the need for support from all sides to engage the young in sports and fitness through strength lifting.

SSLA chief coach, Pema Dorjee Bhutia, stated that Sikkim has already produced numerous national and international lifters which was the result of hard work and dedication of the founding members and entire team of SSLA. He mentioned that national and international medalists in strength lifting have also received cash incentives for the first time in the present SKM government.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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Fire at warehouse in Kolkata's Bowbazar

KOLKATA, FEB 27 (PTI): A fire broke out at a warehouse in a building in central Kolkata's Bowbazar area on Saturday afternoon, police said.

The warehouse, located adjacent to a computer store and an eatery on Khetra Das Lane, was used for storing comput-

er goods, they said. Four fire tenders brought the blaze under control, police said.

Nobody was injured in the incident, they said.

"At the moment, the cooling process is underway," an officer of the Fire Department said.

Senior Fire Depart-

ment officials visited the spot amid apprehensions that the fire could spread as the area is congested.

The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained, officials said.

Local MLA Nayana Bandyopadhyay of TMC also visited the area.

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9.30 am

ORTHO AND GYNEA

CLINICS & O P D

3.00 pm

PAEDIATRIC CLINIC & O P D

8.00 am And 6.00 pm

VACCINATION CLINIC

Road Safety

Slogans and documents do not make travel safer, better driving does

Mountain roads are rarely safe roads, but that should not mean that consistent efforts are not made to make them safer.

Sikkim's roads are notoriously accident-prone, and not because the roads are treacherous, but more so because the hands that control the wheels are not always the surest. The State Government had moved a legislation some years ago which aspired to ensure that those driving passenger vehicles on Sikkim roads have the skills required to justify the task of ferrying lives from destination to destination. This proposal had sought to reconfirm the skills of people with taxi driving licences procured from outside the State. It is unclear whether this rule was ever notified or implemented, but had such an over-watch been undertaken, the roads could have become safer. This approach appears to be returning at the policy level again and the coming times will bear out how effectively it is implemented and abided by.

For now, all that Sikkim can do is join the nation in observing Road Safety Weeks and play with newer models of breath analysers and more frequent checking of vehicle documents. What it should actually do instead is re-initiate a practice attempted for too short a time - also several years ago - involving the passengers. The focus here is on taxi services although even private driving needs special attention. Some years ago, following a slew of accidents triggered by rash driving, the cops had started a massive highway checking routine in which, apart from checking on the health of the vehicles, like the brakes and general engine road-worthiness, they enquired on the driving habits of the drivers. Passengers were encouraged to lodge complaints if the driving was rash.

Admittedly, Sikkim Police is too understaffed and too busy with keeping city roads jam free to make such patrolling a regular affair, but it could use the surprise element to its benefit by springing it every now and then.

The monsoons will soon be upon us and although the landslide zones along the highways do not witness accidents unless slopes collapse unannounced, the delay caused while waiting the turn to cross troublespots and the anxiety of completing the to-and-fro runs or making good time over diversions can make driving on the rest of the stretch dangerous. All it takes for disaster to strike on a hill road is for the concentration to slacken for a split second. It could happen to the best of drivers on the safest of roads. If passengers are encouraged to keep the driving safe, the roads will automatically become safer.

With the tourist season and its tremendous demand for vehicles already upon Sikkim, what the drivers associations and the traffic police should also perhaps work on is a guideline which ensures that the drivers are not overworked. It is not rare for drivers to make multiple trips, stretching both, the engine and their own faculties, to dangerous levels. They would not do this if the rules did not allow it. A tired driver operating a tired vehicle is a combination that does not lend itself too well to safe roads.

These are some initiatives one hopes will be attempted.

WRITE US:

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

COVID-19 Has Sparked New Relationships Between Academia and Policymakers – we must maintain them

STEPHEN REICHER
theconversation.com

In the aftermath of the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-19, the New York Times stated that "science has failed to guard us". This was hardly unfair, given that scientists were unsure what had even caused the pandemic, let alone how to treat it - beyond basic public health measures such as fresh air and quarantining the sick.

A century on and things couldn't be more different. Within weeks of the new disease emerging, the coronavirus genome had been sequenced and specific tests for SARS-CoV-2 developed. Within a year, new vaccines have been tested, licensed and rolled out to the public.

What's more, the science has not remained confined to the scientists. Discussion of false positives and negatives, of antigens and antibodies and mutation and evolution has become the currency of the evening news and the radio phone-in - not least because they are the basis of policy decisions that are transforming our everyday lives.

COMING TOGETHER

All that is true of the life sciences is equally true of the behavioural sciences. COVID-19 flourishes through human sociability, so limiting its spread depends on reshaping fundamental patterns of human action. Here too, what was once the preserve of the tutorial room has migrated to the talk show. We are all amateur epidemiologists and virologists and psychologists and anthropologists now.

What we are seeing is an unprecedented coming together, reflecting what has happened more generally during the pandemic. Faced by a common threat and experiencing a common fate, we have seen the emergence of a sense of shared identity which in turn has been the basis of widespread social solidarity. Neighbours who had lived for years in ignorance of each other have come together in street-level WhatsApp groups and community-level mutual aid groups.

Similarly, academic neighbours who passed each other daily on campus have come together in countless advisory groups - and realised how much more they can achieve in combination. The life scientists can tell the behavioural scientists (like me) what behaviours must change to contain the pandemic. In return, the behavioural scientists can tell the life scientists how to shape and reshape behaviour.

Equally, academics as a whole have come together with policymakers, policy advisors and practitioners to an unprecedented degree. In general terms, there has been an understanding of the need to collectivise the pandemic response - stressing the need to act for the "we" not the "I".

More specifically, behavioural scientists have - often for the first time - come together with government communications teams. The former's theoretical understanding of the bases of social influence has been allied to the latter's technical skill and artistry in turning concepts into compelling products.

This renewed spirit of collaboration is one of the few positive things to come out of these terrible times. This is hopefully something we can preserve as the pandemic recedes. But in order to do so, we must avoid any temptation to romanticise crisis in retrospect - as in the one-sided myths of a "Blitz spirit" - and be candid about the problems of collaboration.

OVERCOMING ASSUMPTIONS

COVID-19 has highlighted the need to address

the different cultures of academia and policymaking. To do this, we must expose some assumptions that often impede communication and collaboration between the two.

The first, and simplest, is time. You ask an academic a question, they will go away and think for a bit, plan a research proposal, submit it, do the research, write up the publication, have it peer-reviewed and accepted for publication. Only then can they give you an answer - in five or six years.

In contrast, a minister who needs to make a pol-

knowledge - but this time, what forms of knowledge are most valued. As an academic social psychologist, my interest lies in the general processes that shape human behaviour.

I have run plenty of studies looking at the way in which a person's beliefs about what others in their group believe shape what they think and do. I am less interested in the specific area - such as group beliefs on climate change - in which I address this process, than the general relationships between group beliefs and individual beliefs.



icy decision might grant you five or six months, if you are lucky. Sometimes it is more like five or six days. What must academics do if they are to oblige such policy requests?

They must be careful, certainly. Academics take time to produce answers for a very good reason: they want these answers to have sufficient heft to stand the test of time. Research which delivers predictable and specific short-term benefits can be easily monetised and done by market-led research institutions. What universities uniquely provide is more unpredictable, long-term understanding and benefits. To compromise this would endanger their very raison d'être.

Having said that, must we always set the long term against the short term - endurance against responsiveness? And if not, what does greater responsiveness require in terms of academic research practices, research funding and ethics procedures? While I am not committed to any specific changes, I believe we would do well to interrogate all aspects of academic research through the prism of time.

A second area of difference between academics and policymakers is the criteria for defining knowledge and acting on it. Academics assume they know nothing unless they know something beyond reasonable doubt. Yet for a policymaker who has to make a decision as to whether to act or not - where not acting is as consequential as acting - this approach would skew their outcomes dramatically. This is the case, for instance, when making decisions such as whether to keep pubs open or closed in the pandemic.

Here it may make sense to go on the balance of evidence - or even go to the opposite extreme and, using a precautionary principle, decide that even if there is only an outside chance of an effect (for example, that pubs impact community infection rates), to act as if it were a reality. Once academics engage directly with the policy world, we cannot escape from the way that politics shapes even our most basic assumptions.

VALUING KNOWLEDGE

The final area of difference also relates to

However, for those involved in policy, the opposite is the case. They aren't so interested in the generality as in the specific problem area. So when I tell these policymakers about studies on norms in (say) climate change behaviour, they are somewhat bemused - and I am equally bemused when they seemingly reject my offering while asking: "But are there any studies of norms in terms of adherence to mask wearing?"

I am not suggesting that the differences between academic and policy approaches are insuperable. Indeed, the problem is less the differences in assumptions as the fact that these assumptions are accepted in each particular world, and so don't need to be discussed.

Unfortunately, when these worlds come together, that silence no longer functions as a sign of common understanding, and instead becomes a potential source of mutual misunderstanding. If we don't understand the different starting points that lead us to different conclusions, we may begin to regard the other as obtuse, obstructive and unreasonable. It is only by realising and acknowledging our different needs and demands that we can work together more effectively.

In conclusion, the challenge of COVID-19 has produced a range of new and productive relationships between the academic and policy worlds. It has demonstrated the huge potential for bringing together government with a much wider range of disciplines than has traditionally been the case. But the future of these relationships is far from assured.

Whether they thrive or wither after the pandemic will be at least partly dependent upon our examination of the very basic assumptions - and not only those raised here - which frame our work and guide our practices, but which may differ from those of our would-be partners. Self-examination is never a comfortable exercise, since it reveals contingencies where once we assumed certainties. But the payoff is considerable - not only in terms of understanding the other, but also ourselves.

[the writer is Bishop Wardlaw Professor in the School of Psychology & Neuroscience, University of St Andrews]

Can Vaccinated People Still Spread the Coronavirus?

DEBORAH FULLER
theconversation.com

So you've gotten your coronavirus vaccine, waited the two weeks for your immune system to respond to the shot and are now fully vaccinated. Does this mean you can make your way through the world like the old days without fear of spreading the virus? Deborah Fuller is a microbiologist at the University of Washington working on coronavirus vaccines. She explains what the science shows about transmission post-vaccination - and whether new variants could change this equation.

1. DOES VACCINATION COMPLETELY PREVENT INFECTION?

The short answer is no. You can still get infected after you've been vaccinated. But your chances of getting seriously ill are almost zero.

Many people think vaccines work like a shield, blocking a virus from infecting cells altogether. But in most cases, a person who gets vaccinated is protected from disease, not necessarily infection.

Every person's immune system is a little different, so when a vaccine is 95% effective, that just means 95% of people who receive the vaccine won't get sick. These people could be completely protected from infection, or they could be getting infected but remain asymptomatic because their immune system eliminates the virus very quickly. The remaining 5% of

vaccinated people can become infected and get sick, but are extremely unlikely to be hospitalized.

Vaccination doesn't 100% prevent you from getting infected, but in all cases it gives your immune system a huge leg up on the coronavirus. Whatever your outcome - whether complete protection from infection or some level of disease - you will be better off after encountering the virus than if you hadn't been vaccinated.

2. DOES INFECTION ALWAYS MEAN TRANSMISSION?

Transmission happens when enough viral particles from an infected person get into the body of an uninfected person. In theory, anyone infected with the coronavirus could potentially transmit it. But a vaccine will reduce the chance of this happening.

In general, if vaccination doesn't completely prevent infection, it will significantly reduce the amount of virus coming out of your nose and mouth - a process called shedding - and shorten the time that you shed the virus. This is a big deal. A person who sheds less virus is less likely to transmit it to someone else.

This seems to be the case with coronavirus vaccines. In a recent preprint study which has yet to be peer reviewed, Israeli researchers tested 2,897 vaccinated people for signs of coronavirus infection. Most had no detectable virus, but people who were infected had one-quarter the amount of virus in their bodies as

unvaccinated people tested at similar times post-infection.

Less coronavirus virus means less chance of spreading it, and if the amount of virus in your body is low enough, the probability of transmitting it may reach almost zero. However, researchers don't yet know where that cutoff is for the coronavirus, and since the vaccines don't provide 100% protection from infection, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people continue to wear masks and social distance even after they've been vaccinated.

3. WHAT ABOUT THE NEW CORONAVIRUS VARIANTS?

New variants of coronavirus have emerged in recent months, and recent studies show that vaccines are less effective against certain ones, like the B1351 variant first identified in South Africa.

Every time SARS-CoV-2 replicates, it gets new mutations. In recent months, researchers have found new variants that are more infective - meaning a person needs to breathe in less virus to become infected - and other variants that are more transmissible - meaning they increase the amount of virus a person sheds. And researchers have also found at least one new variant that seems to be better at evading the immune system, according to early data.

So how does this relate to vaccines and transmission?

For the South Africa variant, vac-

cines still provide greater than 85% protection from getting severely ill with COVID-19. But when you count mild and moderate cases, they provide, at best, only about 50%-60% protection. That means at least 40% of vaccinated people will still have a strong enough infection - and enough virus in their body - to cause at least moderate disease.

If vaccinated people have more virus in their bodies and it takes less of that virus to infect another person, there will be higher probability a vaccinated person could transmit these new strains of the coronavirus.

If all goes well, vaccines will very soon reduce the rate of severe disease and death worldwide. To be sure, any vaccine that reduces disease severity is also, at the population level, reducing the amount of virus being shed overall. But because of the emergence of new variants, vaccinated people still have the potential to shed and spread the coronavirus to other people, vaccinated or otherwise. This means it will likely take much longer for vaccines to reduce transmission and for populations to reach herd immunity than if these new variants had never emerged. Exactly how long that will take is a balance between how effective vaccines are against emerging strains and how transmissible and infectious these new strains are.

[the writer is Professor of Microbiology, School of Medicine, University of Washington]

Mamata prays for peace as Bengal goes to polls

KOLKATA/ PURI, FEB 26 (PTI): A puja was held at the residence of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Kalighat in south Kolkata on Friday as the schedule for the assembly elections in West Bengal was announced.

Abhishek Banerjee, the nephew of the chief minister, performed the rituals, which were led by Jagannath Swain Mohapatra of the Lord Jagannath temple in Puri.

Mohapatra is Lord Jagannath's 'badagrahi' or bodyguard when the deity is brought out of the temple on Ratha Jatra or Snan Jatra.

A group of priests from Puri travelled to Kolkata for the puja.

The chief minister also took part in the rituals as the priests performed a yagna.

"I have been performing puja at the chief minister's residence for long. It is an annual ritual at her home," Mohapatra said.

"Mamata Banerjee prayed for peace in Bengal during the elections. I have blessed her -- 'Vijaya Bhaba', meaning be victorious. The lord will bless her in life and also in the elections," he added.

Mohapatra said it was auspicious that the poll dates were announced just on the day the puja was held. The Trinamool Congress chief and her family are known to be devout worshippers of Lord Jagannath.

Lakhs of Bengalis travel to Puri in Odisha every year for visiting the Lord Jagannath temple.

Huge price differential triggers cross-border fuel smuggling from Nepal to India

KRISHANA PRASAIN KATHMANDU, 27 FEB [KATHMANDUPOST]: Gasoline station owner Mukesh Kumar of Adapur in the Indian state of Bihar said he was being undercut by cheap contraband fuel from Nepal, with his daily petrol sales plunging from 1,300 to 200 litres.

According to Indian media reports, many motorists, particularly in Bihar, are filling up at roadside vendors who get their supply from border-hopping locals who smuggle petrol and diesel in jerry cans from Nepal because of the huge price differential.

Residents owning a motorcycle or car are engaged in the lucrative trade, the report said, dashing back and forth across the border throughout the day.

Fuel prices in India are currently the highest in South Asia. Petrol costs upwards of Rs100 (Rs160 Nepali currency) per litre in India while it is available in the Nepali border town of Birgunj for Rs112.50 per litre.

Diesel costs Rs86.57 (Rs138.51) in India and Rs97 per litre in Kathmandu.

The Post's calculation, based on Friday's price lists in Nepal and India, shows that petrol is cheaper by Rs46 per litre in Nepal than in India. Likewise, diesel costs Rs41 less in the Nepali market.

According to The Times of India, petrol pump owners in Raxaul, Adapur, Chauradano, Ghorasahan and Kundwa-Chainpur in Bihar are claiming heavy losses due to smuggling of petroleum products from Nepal.

Smugglers are particularly active in two dozen Indian border villages—like Bhiritarwa, Basantpur, Semarwari,



Bhaluwahiya and Bhagha in Uttar Pradesh—where there is no checking.

According to reports, in Ghorasahan and Chauradano villages alone, there are more than three dozen boys acting as couriers, each earning Rs1,000 daily. They buy petrol at Rs113 per litre in Nepal, and sell it for Rs145 per litre across the border in India.

There is rampant gasoline smuggling from Nepal, but Nepal Oil Corporation says they have recorded 'no huge' sales trends at petrol pumps on the southern border.

Nepal and India share an 1,800-km open border with more than three dozen motorable crossing points.

Surendra Poudel, executive director of the state-owned oil monopoly, denied there was widespread smuggling of petroleum products.

"We have compared the data. We don't see vast differences in sales compared to last year at the southern bor-

der points," he told the Post. "If there was rampant smuggling, it would be reflected in the sales figures."

Poudel said that smuggling was not happening in an organised way, but said owning of two- and four-wheelers were engaged in gasoline peddling.

Consumer rights activists said smuggling could create a fuel shortage in the Nepali market. They said that if the illegal trade was not checked immediately, the corporation's losses could balloon as it would need to purchase more oil which it has been selling at subsidised prices.

Madhav Timalina, president of the Consumer Rights Investigation Forum, said that smuggling could create an artificial fuel shortage in Nepal, and it should be controlled by the local administration.

As Nepal is going through a fluid political situation, a short supply in the domestic market could create another

problem, he said. "The smuggling needs to be controlled immediately."

The state-owned oil supplier has already hiked fuel prices thrice in one month, based on the tariff sent by its sole supplier India Oil Corporation.

On January 18, Nepal Oil raised the price of diesel by Rs2 per litre to Rs93 per litre. In February, the price was raised twice—Rs2 per litre each time on February 10 and February 17. Diesel now costs Rs97 per litre.

Similarly, the price of petrol has been increased from Rs108 per litre to Rs114 per liter in one month.

While Nepal imports all petroleum products from India, based on five-yearly supply agreements between the two neighbours, why are they so expensive in India compared to Nepal?

Rising international crude oil prices is one factor. Crude oil crossed \$60 per barrel for

the first time this year. Another reason is India's heavy taxation policy, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to Indian media reports, taxes on petrol and diesel are higher than 61 and 56 percent respectively.

Indian Union Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan explained that the central and state governments rely heavily on collections from taxes on crude oil 'for meeting their developmental and welfare priorities'.

"They need some resources... (and) this (taxing petrol and diesel) has been a proven and substantial route by all the governments, whether state governments or the central government," he said. "Both the states and the central government are raising taxes according to their developmental needs."

According to Poudel, the tax structure is very high in India. In Nepal, petrol and diesel are taxed at the rate of 48

and 39 percent respectively.

Nepal Oil Corporation estimates that its fortnightly losses on the sale of petroleum products amount to Rs867.8 million. That means, the subsidies on petrol and diesel come to Rs5.82 and Rs4.13 per litre respectively.

In a bid to stop the illegal flow of fuel to India, the government enterprise issued a work plan on February 19 and circulated it to all its regional offices in Biratnagar, Amlekhgunj, Thankot, Bhairahawa, Surkhet and Dhangadhi; fuel depots in Nepalgunj and Janakpur; and branch offices in Birgunj and Charali.

As per the work plan, each regional office has to conduct sales inspections of petrol pumps located up to 5 km north of the Nepal-India border. Company officials are required to inspect at least five petrol pumps in the border areas.

Further, its depots are barred from selling fuel exceeding their capacity; and if they do so, they need to obtain permission from the head office in Kathmandu.

The work plan also says that petrol and diesel should not be sold in drums, jerry cans or other fuel containers in the border areas.

Gasoline stations located on the Nepal-India border can refill an automobile's fuel tank only, and sales to large Indian vehicles have been capped at 100 litres. Petrol pumps violating the rules will face action under the Petroleum Product Bylaw 2018.

Consumer rights activists and even Nepal Oil Corporation officials say that despite these measures, the lucrative oil smuggling business has not stopped.

Myanmar police crackdown on protests after envoy appeals to U.N. to stop coup

MYANMAR, FEB 27 [REUTERS]: Myanmar police moved decisively on Saturday in a bid to prevent opponents of military rule gathering throughout the country after Myanmar's U.N. envoy urged the United Nations to use "any means necessary" to stop a Feb. 1 coup.

The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since the army seized power and detained elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and much of her party leadership, alleging fraud in a November election her party had won in a landslide.

Uncertainty has grown over Suu Kyi's whereabouts, as the independent Myanmar Now website on Friday quoted officials of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party as saying she had been moved this week from house arrest to an undisclosed location.

The coup has brought hundreds of thousands of protesters to Myanmar's streets and drawn condemnation from Western countries, with some imposing limited sanctions.

Police were out in force early in the main city of Yangon and elsewhere, deployed at usual protest sites and detaining people as they congregated, witnesses said. Several media workers were detained.

But people still gathered, some for a march by ethnic minorities in Yangon, their numbers building through the day.

Crowds chanted and sang, then melted into side streets as police advanced, firing tear gas, setting off stun grenades and firing guns into the air, witnesses said.

Similar scenes played out in the second city of Mandalay, and



several other towns including Dawei in the south, witnesses and media reported.

A protester in the central town of Monywa said police had fired water cannon as they surrounded a crowd.

"They've blocked all the ways out," Aye Aye Tint told Reuters from the town. "They used water cannon against peaceful protesters, they shouldn't treat people like that."

Junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing has said authorities were using minimal force. Nevertheless, at least three protesters have died. The army says a policeman was also killed.

'PREVAIL'

At the U.N. General Assembly, Myanmar's Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun said he was speaking on behalf of Suu Kyi's government and appealed to the body "to use any means necessary to take action against the Myanmar military and to provide safety and security for the people".

"We need further strongest possible action from the international community to immediately end the military coup, to stop oppressing the innocent people ... and to restore the de-

mocracy," he told the 193-member group, receiving applause as he finished. Kyaw Moe Tun appeared emotional as he read the statement on behalf of a group of elected politicians that he said represented the legitimate government.

Delivering his final words in Burmese, the career diplomat raised the three-finger salute of pro-democracy protesters and announced "our cause will prevail".

Reuters was not immediately able to contact the army for comment.

Opponents of the coup hailed Kyaw Moe Tun as a hero and flooded social media with messages of thanks.

"The people will win and the power-obsessed junta will fall," one protest leader, Ei Thinzar Maung, wrote on Facebook.

U.N. Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews said he was overwhelmed as he watched the ambassador's "act of courage".

"He spoke up for the people of Myanmar and against an illegal coup. It's time for the world to answer that courageous call with action," Andrews said on Twitter.

China's envoy did not criticise the coup and said the situation was Myanmar's "internal affairs". China supported diplomacy by Southeast Asian countries, he said.

'LOSS OF RIGHTS'

A lawyer acting for Suu Kyi, Khin Maung Zaw, told Reuters he had also heard from NLD officials that she had been moved from her home in the capital, Naypyitaw, but could not confirm it. Authorities did not respond to a request for comment.

The lawyer said he had been given no access to Suu Kyi ahead of her next hearing on Monday, adding: "I'm concerned that there will be a loss of rights to access to justice and access to legal counsel".

Protesters have been demanding the release of Suu Kyi, 75, and recognition of the result of last year's election.

A Nobel Peace laureate and daughter of Myanmar's independence hero, Suu Kyi spent nearly 15 years under house arrest during military rule. She faces charges of illegally importing six walkie-talkie radios and of violating a natural disaster law by breaching coronavirus protocols.

The army has promised an election but not given a date. It has imposed a one-year state of emergency.

The question of an election is at the centre of a diplomatic effort by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, of which Myanmar is a member.

Indonesia has taken the lead but coup opponents fear the effort could legitimise the junta and what they see as its unlawful bid to annul the November election.

Andamans reports one new COVID-19 case

PORT BLAIR, FEB 27 (PTI): The coronavirus tally in Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 5,017 as one more person has tested positive for the disease in the union territory, a health department official said on Saturday.

The new case was detected during contact tracing, he said.

The archipelago now has three active COVID-19 cases and all the patients are in the South Andaman district. The other two districts of the union territory - North and Middle Andaman and Nicobar - are COVID-19 free as they don't have any active coronavirus case at present.

The overall COVID situation is under control in the archipelago as the local administration has been strict to ensure that health safety protocols are followed to contain the spread of the disease, he said.

The administration has made it mandatory for passengers arriving by flight to produce a negative COVID-19 test report before they are allowed entry into the islands.

The COVID-19 death toll remained at 62 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported in the last 24 hours.

No one was cured of the disease on Friday, and the total number of recoveries in the archi-

pelago stood at 4,952, the official said. Altogether, 6,451 health professionals and frontline workers have been vaccinated till Friday of which 2,565 health care workers have received the second dose of the vaccine, the official said.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 2,65,852 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the positivity rate stands at 1.89 per cent, he added.

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'Do what you're good at': Ibrahimovic tells LeBron James to stick to sports

LONDON, 27 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: The Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic said sportspeople like Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James should quit sticking their nose into politics.

Four-time NBA champion James, who Ibrahimovic described as a phenomenal basketball player, has been one of the NBA's leading voices against racial injustice and police brutality in the United States.

A frequent critic of former US president Donald Trump, James also helped form a group aimed at battling voter disenfranchisement in predominantly black communities last year.

"I like him (James) a lot. He's phenomenal, but I don't like when people with a status speak about politics. Do what you're good at doing," Ibrahimovic told Uef and Discovery+ in Sweden.

"I play football because I'm the best playing football, I'm no politician. If I'd been a politician, I would be doing politics."

"This is the first mistake famous people do when they become famous: for me it is better to avoid certain topics and do what you're good at doing, otherwise you risk doing something wrongly."

James' longtime activism on racial justice issues and his criticism of Trump prompted white Fox News commentator Laura Ingraham in 2018 to tell him and fellow black NBA player Kevin Durant to "shut up and dribble".

The comment by Ibrahimovic, whose two-year spell with LA Galaxy overlapped with James's time in Los Angeles,

were criticized by American sprint great Michael Johnson.

"Okay Ibra, based on your position @King-James is great at basketball and shouldn't voice his opinion about politics," Johnson tweeted.

"You're really good at football so you shouldn't voice your opinion about LeBron using his platform for good. Or your opinion on anything outside football!"

James's entry into the social justice arena has been careful and measured over the past decade: a 2012 tweet that declared #WeAreTrayvonMartin; the I CAN'T BREATHE shirt worn before a 2014 game; and the opening of a public school in his hometown of Akron.

But the four-time NBA Most Valuable Player winner has taken his activism to new heights since Trump began picking fights with prominent black US athletes to score political points.

With the sports world at a standstill due to the coronavirus pandemic and amid nationwide unrest over the police killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, James teamed up with a group of prominent athletes and entertainers to launch More Than a Vote, a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization aimed at informing, protecting and turning out African American voters.

"We never told anyone who to vote for or who not to vote for," he said. "We never said anything about one candidate or another candidate. We just wanted people to exercise their opportunity to vote and create change."

Grandmaster Levon Aronian says he's leaving Armenia and will represent US

LONDON, 27 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Chess grandmaster Levon Aronian said on Friday he was leaving Armenia and would represent the United States, citing what he said was Armenian officials' indifference to chess as one of the reasons. The 38-year-old, who is ranked sixth in the world, announced his decision on his Facebook page.

"The past year has been very difficult for all of us with a pandemic, a war and in my case there was personal adversity and the state's absolute indifference towards Armenian chess," he wrote, referring to six weeks of fighting between ethnic Armenian and Azeri forces over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave.

"I was faced with a choice: quit my job or move to where I am valued," he wrote.

Smbat Lputian, deputy head of the Armenian Chess Federation, said he regretted Aronian's decision. "This is a big loss for Armenian chess," he told Reuters.

The Saint Louis Chess Club said Aronian was relocating to the US city to continue his career and would represent the United States at future competitions. US Chess

Federation president Mike Hoffpauir said the organization would welcome Aronian pending the approval of the International Chess Federation (Fide).

"The US Chess Federation welcomes the news of Super GM Levon Aronian's intent to relocate to the United States," Hoffpauir said in a statement. "Until such time that he is living in the United States, the US Chess Federation has no jurisdiction with regard to his status with Fide. As with all transfer matters, the US Chess Federation does not allow for inviting or paying for the transfer of any player. Our role is to process the player's administrative paperwork as required by Fide." Fide told Reuters it could not comment on Aronian's intentions and plans.

"A player can represent the country/federations where he resides," Fide said. "That doesn't necessarily imply that he changes his nationality."

Aronian's move follows political unrest in Armenia, where prime minister Nikol Pashinyan condemned what he said was an attempted coup on Thursday after the army demanded he quit.

Lionel Messi may be heading towards his Vegas stage but the fire still burns

BARNEY RONAY

LONDON, 27 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Of all the many Elvis Presley incarnations – Vegas Elvis, Leather Elvis, Super-Handsome Young Elvis – my favourite is probably Karate Elvis.

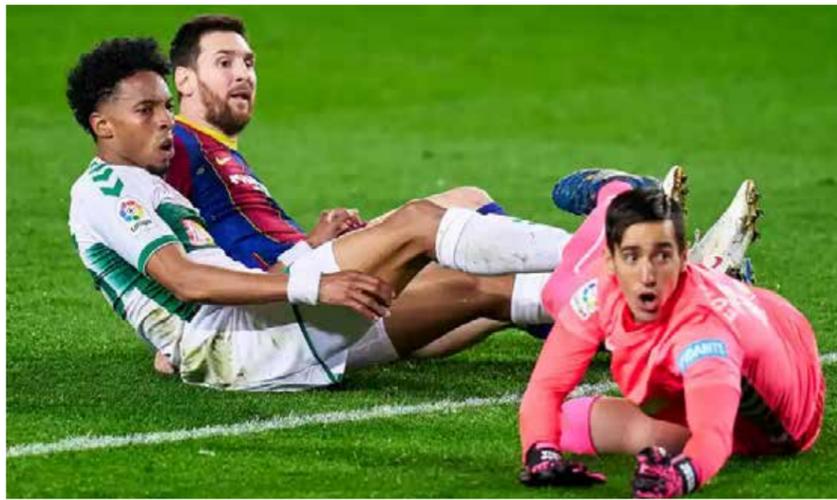
Elvis loved karate. He often appeared in public dressed in karate gear, and spent years planning his own starring role in a karate-based blockbuster movie. The problem was, he kept on doing karate as he grew older and vaguer, encouraged by dependant body guards whose duties included humouring Elvis in the belief he remained a deadly fighting machine.

Even as late-stage Elvis was being wheeled from sleep chamber to toilet complex – occasionally gorging on his favourite snack, an entire loaf hollowed out and filled with bacon, peanut butter and jam – he retained his karate nickname, "the Tiger Man".

As the Tiger Man he made a habit of appearing at odd times of day dressed in karate suit and sunglasses, insisting his guests point a gun at him so he could disarm them with his lightning-fast drugged-up hands. Naturally Elvis was able to achieve this every time, to awed applause from his dependents.

It was hard not to think about this, just a little bit, watching the opening 47 minutes of Barcelona against Elche on Wednesday night, as Lionel Messi strolled, skulked and generally ambled around the Camp Nou pitch.

This is, of course, a kind of heresy. Messi may be an ageing supernova, but he isn't on the Karate Elvis spectrum. Even through a slough of despond



at Barcelona he has more shots and more passes a game than any attacking player in Europe. He's still a goal machine, with 13 in 13 games since the winter break. This is one seriously well-preserved 33-year-old.

Still, though, it is also Messi, an athlete who inspires the most exacting, protective feelings. Any sense of shrinking reach, the loss of those delicate illuminations, is a kind of agony. You can't help looking, scanning for cracks in the icon.

Plus there's the gloom, the deathliness of this Barcelona iteration, the heavy air around its dying star. This is one way of saying Messi spends a lot of time walking these days. And not even walking quickly. For much of the opening 47 minutes against Elche, Messi wandered around like a man strolling off to buy a sandwich.

Dark thoughts can intrude at times such as these. There is the continued suggestion the Messi Industrial Complex may be about to decamp to the

Premier League, a signing that would, even at this late stage, overshadow everything in his eyeline. Manchester City already have a beautifully high-functioning midfield and attack. But they are, it has been reported again, ready to hand a five-year £450m commitment to the most overwhelming presence in world football, unavoidably colouring the spectacle, the club's entire modern identity.

The question keeps nagging away. How much of this late-stage Messi supremacy is simply star momentum, a supertanker on its final lap into port? The 4-1 defeat at home to Paris Saint-Germain last week was a shiver of something. Surrounded by younger, better organised opponents Messi wasn't only outrun. He looked vulnerable. He looked touchingly exposed. How close are we to this being real?

Does it even matter? It has been suggested the most compelling reasons for signing Messi are extraneous things:

the chance to become the men who signed The Man, for the club to reap the generational marketing rewards, the step-change in global status. These were some of the dark thoughts on Wednesday night.

At which point, the Event happened. In isolation it was no different from so many other Messi events, but this time around it came like a breaking wave. With 46 minutes on the clock and the score 0-0 Messi was still walking around. At 46:37 he gave the ball away and watched as Ousmane Dembélé ran to fetch it. At 46:50 he was literally standing still, looking vaguely interested as some other people took part in a football match.

Finally Pedri received the ball in midfield and Messi saw an angle. As the clock ticked to 47 minutes he ran to take the pass and turned to face the Elche goal. Freeze-frame the moment, and it seems clear Messi knows what's about to happen. Somehow he has

found a weird little channel of space between the two defensive midfielders, Guti and Omekuru Mfulu. By 47:02 suddenly everyone is running backwards, chasing this ferretty figure in a rush of panic, like first responders hurtling towards a burning scout hut.

Josema the left-sided centre-back cracks first, sliding out in a full-length lunge. But Messi is gone, gliding past on parallel rails. The ball is released to Martin Braithwaite, who has that shared picture airdropped into his head and nudges the ball back. From there, Messi eases past Gonzalo, evades the run of Johan Mojica, and is now right in front of goal, stretching out to slip the ball past Édgar Badía as the clock hits 47:06.

From a standing start Messi has beaten five players, conjured a moment of footballing telepathy, left two defenders on their backs and scored the game-breaking goal. There he goes, wheeling off with a bashful little wave. Yeah, so that's me. Wait, you didn't ... doubt me? Karate who?

Messi scored again on 68 minutes with a finish so brilliantly casual it made you want to laugh out loud, eventually placing the ball in the net like someone posting a letter. He helped make the third. You get the idea. He may be drained, irritated, energy levels dampened. But this is still The King.

All of which is another way of saying the thing that is always said. There is a temptation to worry away at what Messi can still mean. But if there's a chance to get him you have to take it, because we may not see his like again.

ISL: NorthEast United FC beat Kerala Blasters FC 2-0 to book semi-finals spot

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB [PTI]: NorthEast United FC sealed a semi-finals berth with a 2-0 win over Kerala Blasters FC in an Indian Super League (ISL) match at the Tilak Maidan on Friday. Needing just a point to qualify for their second-ever semis, the Highlanders showed no signs of stopping as they attacked from the first whistle. They scored both their goals in the first half through Suhair Vadakkepeedika (34th) and Lalengmawia (45th).

Khalid Jamil also created history by becoming the first Indian to coach three or more league games and guide a side to the semi-finals.

Jamil fielded an un-

changed XI from their previous game while Kerala Blasters had one change with Sandeep Singh preferred over Subha Ghosh.

The Highlanders got a great opportunity soon after the start. Luis Machado sent in a delivery into the box, which was headed out straight back to him. His cross from the right found Dylan Fox but he shot wide. At the other end, it was Kerala who missed getting ahead in the game. Bakary Kone managed to evade his marker and to get to the end of a Jessel Carneiro corner, but his header missed the target.

Though NorthEast were clearly the better side in the first session,

Kerala Blasters did have their chances. But the Highlanders' defence stood strong. Then, in the 34th minute, North-East took the lead. Khasa Camara slipped in a through ball which Kone failed to deal with.

Suhair Vadakkepeedika got on to the ball and got past Sandeep Singh, before rounding off an advancing Albino Gomes, to put his side ahead.

Jamil's men increased their lead just before the breather through an astonishing Lalengmawia strike. Fox set up Lalengmawia, whose well-struck long-ranger bounced off the underside of the bar into the net. Jamil's ecstatic look at the touchline showed

just how good the goal was. Kerala Blasters had a better start to the second session. They created chances through Rahul KP and Gary Hooper, but a finish eluded them.

At the other end, Gomes was forced into a fine save when Machado showed his brilliance and on entering the box, tried his luck at goal.

Then Deshorn Brown, missed a great opportunity, striking the crossbar.

Despite their chances, NEUFC just couldn't get their third. Their best chance came when Federico Gallego played a weighted pass to Brown, who managed to evade Gomes. However, his shot from a tight angle found the side netting.

Jürgen Klopp happy to do the 'dirty work' to spark Liverpool revival

ANDY HUNTER

LONDON, 27 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Jürgen Klopp has conceded it would be a big achievement for Liverpool to finish in the top four this season but insists his squad is not in urgent need of an overhaul.

Liverpool are five points adrift of fourth-placed West Ham after a run of four successive defeats that has left the champions sixth. Klopp claims he relishes the challenge of rescuing Liverpool's campaign. "I am not here only for the big celebrations," he said. "I am here for the work. And if it is the dirty work, the hard work, no problem."

That task has been further complicated by the loss of Jordan Henderson for six to eight weeks after the Liverpool captain underwent surgery on an adductor injury sustained in the defeat by Everton. Henderson will miss at least five Liverpool matches plus England's World Cup qualifying triple

header next month. Klopp accepts that, given Liverpool's problems on and off the pitch, it would be an accomplishment for a squad that cruised to the title to qualify for next season's Champions League via the domestic route.

"It would be big, absolutely," the manager said. "You can see the competitors. It is not about the possible performance, it is about what we can bring on the pitch still. It is all about results. The table doesn't lie. Never. We know that points-wise we are not that far away but results-wise we are."

"That is what we have to change and for all the different reasons it was a difficult season so far for us. We try with all we have to sort it and while we try and sort one problem another problem occurs. That is how it is."

Liverpool's fall has invited scrutiny regarding several established first-choice players and the depth of

Klopp's squad. But he insists it is inaccurate to judge a squad severely weakened by injuries all season, and denies a major rebuild is necessary. "What is a 'rebuild' exactly?" Klopp said. "Ten out and 10 in? Changes to what starting XI? I don't think it is time for a massive rebuild like how I understand it: six, seven out, running contracts but trying to get rid of them and bring in all the new faces. The squad of this year didn't have the chance to play together one time really."

"I think it would make sense to have a look at that but on top of that of course little adjustments will happen. We need to react on the situation but at the same time plan for the future. I am not sure we can do that in the summer but that is what we will try."

Klopp could have Diogo Jota back for the visit to Sheffield United on Sunday after the Portugal international resumed full training on Wednesday after a knee injury.

Chris Gayle, Fidel Edwards return to West Indies squad for T20I series vs Sri Lanka

KINGSTON, 27 FEB [AFP]: Chris Gayle was called into the West Indies Twenty20 squad on Friday for the first time in two years as the 41-year-old eyes a place in the World Cup later this year. Gayle, one of cricket's global superstars, was named in the 14-man squad for the three-game series against Sri Lanka which starts in Antigua on Wednesday.

The charismatic Gayle wants to help steer West Indies to a successful defence of their World Twenty20 title in India in October and November. The Jamaican opening batsman played the last of his 58 T20 internationals against England on home turf in March 2019. He has made 1,627 runs in the format with a highest score of 117 at an average of over 32.

"As we build towards the defence of the T20 World Cup, the opportunity is being taken to determine our best team and squad as we go forward," said chief selector Roger Harper.

"Chris Gayle has performed very well in recent tournaments and the selection panel thinks that he can still add great value to our team."

Gayle has been playing in the Pakistan Super League but will break off to resume his international career in the three games against Sri Lanka taking place on March 3, 5 and 7.

Also back in favour is 39-year-old fast bowler Fidel Edwards, who

hasn't played for the West Indies since 2012.

"Fidel Edwards has been selected to give the bowling the potent firepower needed," Harper added.

The three-game floodlight series will be the first T20 internationals to be played at the Coolidge Cricket Ground in Antigua. Three ODIs will also be played in Antigua at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium on March 10, 12 and 14.

All-rounder Andre Russell is recovering from contracting COVID-19 earlier this month, and despite testing negative over a week ago has been ruled out of the T20I series.

A West Indies spokesman added that fast bowlers Sheldon Cottrell and Oshane Thomas, along with batsman Shimron Hetmyer and all-rounder Roston Chase have all failed to reach the minimum fitness standard in time to be considered for selection.

T20 squad: Kieron Pollard (captain), Nicholas Pooran (vice-captain), Fabian Allen, Dwayne Bravo, Fidel Edwards, Andre Fletcher, Chris Gayle, Jason Holder, Akeal Hosein, Evin Lewis, Obed McCoy, Rovman Powell, Lendl Simmons, Kevin Sinclair.

ODI squad: Kieron Pollard (captain), Shai Hope (vice-captain), Fabian Allen, Darren Bravo, Jason Holder, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Evin Lewis, Kyle Mayers, Jason Mohammed, Nicholas Pooran, Romario Shepherd, Kevin Sinclair.

42 Abducted from Nigerian school 2 weeks ago freed

LAGOS, NIGERIA (AP): An official says 42 people including 27 students who were abducted two weeks ago from a school in northern Nigeria have been freed.

The chief press secretary for the Niger state governor, Mary Noel-Berje, told The Associated Press on Saturday that those released have arrived in the state capital, Minna. "We have received them," she said.

The students, teachers and family members were abducted by gunmen from the Government Science College Kagara.

Their release was announced a day after police said gunmen had abducted 317 girls from a boarding school elsewhere in northern Nigeria, in Zamfara state. One resident said the gunmen also attacked a nearby military camp and checkpoint, preventing soldiers from interfering with the mass abduction.

Several large groups of armed men operate in Zamfara state, described by the government as bandits, and are known to kidnap for money and to push for the release of their members from jail.

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said Friday the government's primary objective is to get all the school hostages returned safe, alive and unharmed.

"We will not succumb to blackmail by bandits and criminals who target innocent school students in the expectation of huge ransom payments," he said. "Let bandits, kidnapers and terrorists not entertain any illusions that they are more powerful than the government."

Nigeria has seen several such attacks and kidnappings over the years, notably the mass abduction in April 2014 by jihadist group Boko Haram of 276 girls from the secondary school in Chibok in Borno state. More than a hundred of the girls are still missing.

In December, 344 students were abducted from the Government Science Secondary School Kankara in Katsina State. They were eventually released.

Experts notice pandemic's mental health toll on German youth

BERLIN (AP): Pollina Dinner returned to school in Berlin for the first time this week after two months of lockdown. The 9-year-old third-grader was thrilled to see her classmates and teachers again but frets about the coronavirus pandemic's effect on her life.

"I'm not afraid of the coronavirus, I'm afraid that everything will continue like this — that my school will close again, I won't be able to see my friends, and that I can't go to the movies with my family," the girl said, fingering her blue medical mask and sighing deeply. "And wearing this mask is even worse than all the shops being closed."

Psychiatrists, psychologists and pediatricians in Germany have voiced growing alarm that school closings, social restrictions and other precautions are magnifying the fear, disruption and stress of the pandemic among Germany's 13.7 million children and teenagers, raising the prospect of a future mental health crisis.

"We don't have any long-term studies yet, but there's lots of anecdotal evidence of a crisis-driven rise in hospitalizations and overflowing psychologists' practices," Julia Asbrand, a professor of child and youth psychology at Berlin's Humboldt University, told The Associated Press.

A recent survey by the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf found that about one child in three is



suffering from pandemic-related anxiety or depression or is exhibiting psychosomatic symptoms like headaches or stomach aches. Children from poorer and immigrant families are disproportionately affected, according to the survey.

Pollina, who immigrated from Russia with her family in 2019, worries about forgetting much of her German since she only speaks Russian at home. She's one of 150 youngsters from underprivileged families who, before the pandemic, regularly spent time after school at a youth support program on the eastern outskirts of the German capital.

Arche — Ark in English — is based in Berlin's Hell-

ersdorf district, a neighborhood of drab concrete buildings constructed during the former Communist regime of East Germany. Some children are still allowed to come in person, but only once every two weeks. The rest of the time, the social workers and educators try to stay in touch through video chats while helping their young clients with remote learning.

"Many have completely withdrawn and don't want to get out of their rooms anymore. They've gained a lot of weight, are playing online games nonstop and don't have any more structure in their everyday lives," Arche founder Bernd Siggelkow said.

The second major lockdown in Germany started

before Christmas. Students in grades 1-3 were allowed to return to classrooms this week with reduced class sizes and limited lessons. The government hopes to ease further restrictions in coming weeks and has said that the re-opening of all schools is a top priority.

However, there's concern the country is slipping into a third wave of infections due to more contagious variants of the virus. Virologists have repeatedly said it is still unclear to what extent the virus spreads from children attending school into homes and communities. More than 2 million people have contracted the virus in Germany and almost 70,000 have died of COVID-19, although only 10

under the age of 20, according to the country's disease control center.

Even though children are not at as much risk of severe COVID-19 complications as older adults, they may be more vulnerable to the collateral mental health effects of the pandemic, according to experts.

An analysis by German health insurer DAK regarding youth psychological issues confirms the first-person observations of the staff at Arche.

The evaluation, which was obtained by German news agency dpa, showed that the number of children and teenagers hospitalized for psychiatric treatment in Berlin almost doubled during the first half of 2020, when schools were closed for over two months during the country's first lockdown, compared with first six months of 2019.

The statistic underscores the psychological strain the pandemic is putting on young people but does not illustrate the scope of the problem, Christoph Correll, the director of child and youth psychiatry at Berlin's Charite hospital, told dpa.

"Hospitalizations are the tip of the iceberg," he said.

Teenagers, especially girls, are more prone to eating disorders and self-harming, and many children's psychological problems are going undetected while parents are overwhelmed and teachers, social workers and pediatricians

don't have regular contact with students, clients and patients, experts warn.

Psychology professor Asbrand worries that the mental health of children and teenagers has not gotten enough attention during the pandemic. Together with other professionals in the field, she wrote an open letter to the government this month to push for youth needs to get better addressed in the ongoing health crisis and prioritized when society reopens.

An immediate action government authorities could take to help mitigate possible problems would be to allow groups to gather for school and youth sports, in line with hygiene and distancing precautions.

"We all don't know yet how this is going to develop long-term, but we must focus on youth mental health now," she said.

While attending Arche this week for help with homework assigned online, 16-year-old Robin Reyer said not being able to hang out with friends has been one of the hardest parts of the pandemic restrictions.

"I want to celebrate birthdays again, go out and play soccer with my friends in the park or meet them at Burger King," he said while taking a break outside in the spring sun.

"Now, I'm only allowed to meet one friend at most," he said. "That really sucks."

Explosion strikes Israeli-owned ship in Mideast amid tension

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP): An explosion struck an Israeli-owned cargo ship sailing out of the Middle East on Friday, an unexplained blast renewing concerns about ship security in the region amid escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran.

The crew and vessel were safe, according to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, which is run by the British navy. The explosion in the Gulf of Oman forced the vessel to head to the nearest port.

The incident recalled the summer of 2019, when the same site saw a series of suspected attacks that the U.S. Navy blamed on Iran, which Tehran denied. Meanwhile, as President Joe Biden tries to revive nuclear negotiations with Iran, he ordered overnight airstrikes on facilities in Syria belonging to a powerful Iranian-backed Iraqi armed group.

Dryad Global, a maritime intelligence firm, identified the stricken vessel as the MV Helios Ray, a Bahamian-flagged roll-on, roll-off vehicle cargo ship. Another private security official, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, similarly identified the ship as the Helios Ray.

Satellite-tracking data from website MarineTraffic.com showed the Helios Ray had been nearly entering the Arabian Sea around 0600 GMT Friday before it suddenly turned around

and began heading back toward the Strait of Hormuz. It was coming from Dammam, Saudi Arabia, and still listed Singapore as its destination on its tracker.

Israel's Channel 13, in an unsourced report, said the assessment in Israel is that Iran was behind the blast. Israeli officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The Iranian government did not comment on the blast Friday.

The blast comes as Tehran increasingly breaches its 2015 nuclear accord with world powers to create leverage over Washington. Iran is seeking to pressure Biden to grant the sanctions relief it received under the deal that former President Donald Trump abandoned nearly three years ago.

Iran also has blamed Israel for a recent series of attacks, including a mysterious explosion last summer that destroyed an advanced centrifuge assembly plant at its Natanz nuclear facility and the killing of Mohsen Fakhrazadeh, a top Iranian scientist who founded the Islamic Republic's military nuclear program two decades ago.

Capt. Ranjith Raja of the data firm Refinitiv told the AP that the Israeli-owned vessel had left the Persian Gulf Thursday bound for Singapore. On Friday at 0230 GMT, the vessel stopped for at least nine hours east of a main Omani port before making a 360-degree turn and sailing toward Dubai, likely for damage assessment and repairs,

he said.

The vessel came loaded with cargo from Europe. It discharged vehicles at several ports in the region, Raja added, including in Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, with its last port of call at Dammam.

While details of the explosion remained unclear, two American defense officials told the AP that the ship had sustained two holes on its port side and two holes on its starboard side just above the waterline in the blast. The officials said it remained unclear what caused the holes. They spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity to discuss unreleased information on the incidents.

A United Nations ship database identified the vessel's owners as a Tel Aviv-based firm called Ray Shipping Ltd. Calls to Ray Shipping rang unanswered Friday.

Abraham Ungar, 74, who goes by "Rami," is the founder of Ray Shipping Ltd., and is known as one of the richest men in Israel. He made his fortune in shipping and construction.

According to the Nikola Y. Vaptsarov Naval Academy, where Ungar provides support and maritime training, he owns dozens of car-carrying ships and employs thousands of engineers.

The U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet said it was "aware and monitoring" the situation. The U.S. Maritime Administration, an agency of the Transportation Depart-

ment, issued a warning to commercial shippers early Saturday acknowledging the explosion and urging ships to "exercise caution when transiting" the Gulf of Oman.

While the circumstances of the explosion remain unclear, Dryad Global said it was very possible the blast stemmed from "asymmetric activity by Iranian military."

As Iran seeks to pressure the United States to lift sanctions, the country may seek "to exercise forceful diplomacy through military means," Dryad reported.

In the tense summer of 2019, the U.S. military blamed Iran for explosions on two oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most strategic shipping lanes. The U.S. also had attributed a series of other suspected attacks to Iran, including the use of limpet mines — designed to be attached magnetically to a ship's hull — to cripple four oil tankers off the nearby Emirati port of Fujairah.

Since the killing of Fakhrazadeh, the Iranian nuclear scientist, last November, Israeli officials have raised alarms about potential Iranian retaliation, including through its regional proxies like Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels.

Over the years, Iran has been linked to attacks on Israeli and Jewish civilian targets in Latin America, Europe and Asia. Israel has not commented on its alleged role in the scientist's killing.

Myanmar police deploy early to crank up pressure on protests

YANGON, MYANMAR (AP): Police in Myanmar escalated their crackdown on demonstrators against this month's military takeover, deploying early and in force on Saturday as protesters sought to assemble in the country's two biggest cities and elsewhere.

Security forces in some areas appeared to become more aggressive in using force and making arrests, utilizing more plainclothes officers than had previously revealed themselves. Photos posted on social media showed that residents of at least two cities, Yangon and Monywa, resisted by erecting makeshift street barricades to try to hinder the advance of the police.

Myanmar's crisis took a dramatic turn on the international stage at a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Friday when the country's U.N. ambassador declared his loyalty to the ousted civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi and called on the world to pressure the military to cede power.

There were arrests Saturday in Myanmar's two biggest cities, Yangon and Mandalay, where demonstrators have been hitting the streets daily to peacefully demand the restoration of the government of Suu Kyi, whose National League for Democracy party won a landslide election victory in November. Police have increasingly been enforcing an order by the junta banning gatherings of five or more people.

Many other cities and towns have also hosted large protests against the Feb. 1 coup.

Police in Dawei, in the southeast, and Monywa, 135 kilometers (85 miles) northwest of Mandalay, used force against protesters. Both cities, with populations of less than 200,000 each, have been seeing large demonstrations.

Social media carried unconfirmed reports of a protester shot dead in Monywa. The reports could not immediately be independently confirmed but appeared credible, with both photos and identification of the victim. The reports from Monywa also said dozens or more people were arrested.

The military takeover reversed years of slow progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule. Suu Kyi's party would have been installed for a second five-year term in

office, but the army blocked Parliament from convening and detained her and President Win Myint, as well as other top members of her government.

At the General Assembly in New York, Myanmar's U.N. ambassador, Kyaw Moe Tun, declared in an emotional speech to fellow delegates that he represented Suu Kyi's "civilian government elected by the people" and supported the fight against military rule.

He urged all countries to issue public statements strongly condemning the coup, and to refuse to recognize the military regime. He also called for stronger international measures to stop violence by security forces against peaceful demonstrators.

He drew loud applause from many diplomats in the 193-nation global body, as well as effusive praise from other Burmese on social media, who described him as a hero. The ambassador flashed a three-finger salute that has been adopted by the civil disobedience movement at the end of his speech in which he addressed people back home in Burmese. In Yangon on Saturday morning, police began arrests early at the Hledan Center intersection, which has become the gathering point for protesters who then fan out to other parts of the city. Police took similar action in residential neighborhoods.

Security forces also tried to thwart protests in Mandalay, where roadblocks were set up at several key intersections and the regular venues for rallies were flooded with police.

Buddhist monks were prominent in Saturday's march in Mandalay, as they have been regularly, lending moral authority to the civil disobedience movement that is challenging the military rulers. Mandalay has been the scene of several violent confrontations, and at least four of eight confirmed deaths linked to the protests, according to the independent Assistance Association of Political Prisoners. On Friday, at least three people there were injured, including two who were shot in the chest by rubber bullets and another who suffered what appeared to be a bullet wound to his leg. According to the association, as of Friday, 771 people had been arrested, charged or sentenced at one point in relation to the coup, and 689 were being detained or sought for arrest.

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The
BIG
PICTURE

BACK TO SCHOOL! Actresses Zion Moreno and Savannah Smith filmed the Gossip Girl reboot in New York City.

Lady Gaga's dogs recovered safely after theft, shooting

LOS ANGELES (AP): Lady Gaga's two French bulldogs, which were stolen by thieves who shot and wounded the dog walker, were recovered unharmed Friday, Los Angeles police said. A woman brought the dogs to the LAPD's Olympic Community Police Station, just northwest of downtown, around 6 p.m., said Capt. Jonathan Tippet, commanding officer of the department's elite Robbery-Homicide Division.

Lady Gaga's representative and detectives went to the station and confirmed that they were the dogs, Tippet said. The singer is currently in Rome to film a movie.

The woman who dropped off the dogs appears to be "uninvolved and unassociated" with Wednesday night's attack, Tippet said.

In a tweet Friday night, the LAPD said the woman had found the dogs "and reached out to Lady Gaga's staff to return them." Her identity and the location where the dogs were found won't be disclosed for her safety and because of the ongoing investigation, the LAPD said.

The dog walker, Ryan Fischer, was shot once as he walked three of the singer's dogs in Hollywood. Video showed a white sedan pulling up and two men jumping out. They struggled with the dog walker before one pulled a gun and fired a single shot before fleeing with two of the dogs. The third escaped and has since been reunited with Lady Gaga's representatives.

German radio station apologizes for comment on K-pop's BTS

BERLIN (AP): A Bavarian radio station apologized Friday for a host's comments comparing popular South Korean K-pop band BTS to the coronavirus, saying his choice of words had gone too far but was in no way meant to be "hurtful or racist."

The statement came after legions of fans accused the station's Matthias Matuschik of racism for his comments on the band's cover of Coldplay's "Fix You," taking to social media using the hashtags #Bayern3Racist, #Bayern3Apologize and #RassismusBeiBayern3 which translates as "racism at Bayern3."

"Racism is not an option," wrote one user, @Vroseeeee1 in a blunt tweet in English, German, Korean and Spanish.

The uproar came after a live show Wednesday, in which Matuschik derided BTS's version of "Fix You" as "blasphemy" and compared the band to COVID-19, describing them as "some crappy virus that hopefully there will be a vaccine for soon as well."

He then dug his hole deeper as he tried to roll back the comment somewhat, saying "I have nothing against South Korea, you can't accuse me of xenophobia only because this boyband is from South Korea... I have a car from South Korea. I have the coolest car around."

Then he went on to say that in penance for the cover, BTS "will be vacationing in North Korea for the next 20 years."

BTS, which debuted in 2013, became the biggest boy band in the world, selling out stadiums worldwide and delivering a video message at the U.N. General Assembly this year.

Their songs, filled with intimate, socially conscious lyrics, are credited for their success. Unlike other K-pop bands that carefully maintain the personas created by their labels, BTS is known for its active engagement with fans — known as ARMY — through social media. BTS has over 33.1 million followers on Twitter.

Offense at the comments didn't only come from South Korea, with many social media us-

ers in Germany and elsewhere immediately condemning them. "I know which radio station I won't be listening to anymore, bye @Bayern3," wrote user @fairevmns in a German-language post that included audio of Matuschik's comments. "I really don't need racism of this shape and form in 2021."

Many South Koreans living abroad expressed concerns that the remarks could incite anti-Asian violence, already on the rise in many places. "This is not just about #BTS, it



is about so many Asian people who are dealing with extreme racism especially due to pandemic," Hansi Chang, a South Korean who lives in Germany, tweeted.

In the station's apology, it said that while Matuschik was "presenting his opinion in an ironic, exaggerated way and with exaggerated excitement, his words went too far and hurt the feelings of BTS fans."

"But he — and he has assured us of this — in no way intended this. He just wanted to express his displeasure over the aforementioned cover version."

It noted that Matuschik has been involved in helping raise aid for refugees and has a "constant campaign against right-wing extremism" and has shown he is against xenophobia or racism in any form.

"That does not change the fact that many of you found his statements to be hurtful or racist," Bayern3 said. "We apologize for this in every way possible. We will work on the matter with Matthias and the team in detail again in the next few days."

Maren Morris, Chris Stapleton lead ACM Awards nominations

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP): Maren Morris and Chris Stapleton are the leading nominees for the Academy of Country Music Awards, but only Stapleton joined the all-male ballot for the top prize of entertainer of the year.

The academy announced on Friday that Morris and Stapleton both had six nominations ahead of the April 18 awards show, which will air on CBS from Nashville, Tennessee.

Women were left out of the top category after Carrie Underwood and Thomas Rhett tied for entertainer of the year last year, the first time ever for a tie and the first time a woman had won the category since Taylor Swift in 2012. Also nominated for entertainer of the year are Rhett, Luke Bryan, Eric Church and Luke Combs.

This year, Morris' crossover pop hit "The Bones," was nominated for single of the year and earned her two nominations as songwriter and artist for song of the year. She was also nominated for female artist of the year, which she won last year, and music video of the year for "Better Than We Found It." She had another nomination for the all-star collaboration The Highwomen in group of the year.

Stapleton, who released his fourth solo studio album last year, "Starting Over," was nominated twice as artist and producer for album of the year, as well as twice for being the songwriter/artist for the title track for song of the year. He also has a nomination for male artist of the year.

Country star Morgan Wallen, who won new male artist of the year last year, was declared ineligible by the ACMs after he was caught on camera using a racial slur earlier this year. His most recent record, "Dangerous: The Double Album," has spent six weeks at the top of the all-genre Billboard 200 chart, despite being removed from radio stations and some streaming playlists. The album was not eligible for album of the year award because it came out in 2021, but Wallen likely would have been a strong contender for male artist of the year and singles such as "7 Summers" and "More Than My Hometown" would have qualified for other awards.

Miranda Lambert, who is already the most nominated artist in ACM history, stretched her streak with five nominations. Lambert's song "Bluebird" earned her four nominations

total as writer and artist in song, single and video of the year. Lambert is nominated in female artist of the year, a category she has won nine times.

While women are absent from entertainer of the year, all five nominees for the single of the year are performed by women, a first for the ACM Awards.

In addition to Lambert's "Bluebird" and Morris' "The Bones," Gabby Barrett's "I Hope," Carly Pearce and Lee Brice's duet "I Hope



You're Happy Now" and Ingrid Andress' "More Hearts Than Mine" fill out the category.

Four Black artists are also nominated this year across all categories, another first for the ACM Awards. Kane Brown was nominated for album of the year for his record "Mixtape Vol. 1" while Jimmie Allen was nominated for new male artist of the year again after first being nominated in the same category in 2018.

Mickey Guyton was nominated again for new female artist of the year, after first being nominated in 2015. Her 2020 song "Black Like Me," released after the death of George Floyd, never gained traction at radio, but brought her critical acclaim and a Grammy nomination for best country solo performance.

Under ACM award criteria, artists can be nominated more than once in the new artist of the year categories as long as they haven't won it previously and have not yet released a single from their third studio album.

Grammy winner John Legend has his first ACM Awards nomination for video of the year for his duet with Carrie Underwood on "Hallelujah."

The album of the year category also includes Luke Bryan for "Born Here Live Here Die Here," Ashley McBryde for "Never Will" and Brothers Osborne for "Skeletons."

Kellan Lutz and Wife Brittany Welcome a Baby Girl

Kellan Lutz and his wife, Brittany, announced the arrival of their daughter a year after opening up about their pregnancy loss at six months.

The Lutz coven has a new member!

On Friday, Feb. 26, Kellan Lutz and his wife, Brittany, announced the arrival of their daughter, Ashtyn Lilly Lutz. The couple shared the exciting news on Instagram, with Brittany telling her followers, "She's here!!!"

"The day she came into the world it was snowing, raining, and freezing, but that night she was born and we woke up to sun, clear skies, and winter melting away," Brittany reflected. "It was so symbolic considering this time last year was literally winter

for our souls only to be met one year later with the brightest sunshine. She ushered in a new season for us and we love her beyond comprehension."

She added that they welcomed their little girl on Monday, Feb. 22.

Kellan re-posted his wife's statement, saying, "Birth is amazing!!!"

The new mom and dad shared polaroid photos of their first hours with Ashtyn, including a picture of Kellan holding the little one.

Ashtyn's arrival comes almost a year after Brittany shared she suffered a pregnancy loss at six months. The pair was expecting a daughter.

"Baby girl, It was my absolute honor and pleasure

to be your mom these last 6 months," the influencer wrote at the time. "I did my best and it was an absolute joy seeing your little face all those times on that screen and feeling your tiny kicks. I don't know why it happened the way it did, but part of me finds so much peace knowing you never experienced pain or heartache and never will."

The couple recalled the pregnancy loss when they announced they were pregnant with Ashtyn last September, sharing their relief that she could conceive again. They added that Ashtyn would be their "little promise baby."

Now, the pair said their daughter has brought the "brightest sunshine" into their lives.

THE DAY AHEAD

Aries: If there's anything your life has taught you, it's that every day is a gift from the Universe, which is precisely what you are celebrating today—with your soul crew, of course! Speaking of celebration, some of you could be moving closer to D-Day. Alternatively, somebody close to you could be getting engaged soon. PS: You're going to love playing bridesmaid/groomsman!
Tip: It's all about joy and celebration in the Aries HQ.

Taurus: What's the point of playing the coy game? What's the point of beating around the bush? You like them just as much as they like you. It's time to confess your innermost feelings today. In the realm of work, you may find yourself bridging the gap between passion and profession. There was a time you were okay with clocking in the hours simply for the sake of it. But the new you wants to offer the world something that is of value and has the potential to bring about positive change.
Tip: It's time to confess your innermost feelings.

Gemini: "I hope you will go out and let stories, that is life, happen to you, and that you will work with these stories... water them with your blood and tears and your laughter till they bloom, till you yourself burst into bloom." Wise words by Clarissa Pinkola Estés to inspire you to let go of the inhi-

bitions that have been weighing you down, and take life by the horns. There is so much you are yet to discover in your journey towards personal freedom. Let the adventures begin now!
Tip: Let life happen to you, Gemini. It's time to feel oh-so-alive!

Cancer: You can keep updating your vision board to look better than it did before, or you can get your act together and start putting in the work. The choice is and has always been yours, Cancer. If the cosmic cues are anything to go by, you won't shy away from getting your hands dirty today. Remember, you don't have to have the entire plan of action ready. Adopt "one step at a time" as your mantra for now. Everything you need to know will be revealed to you in due course of time.
Tip: One step at a time, honey!

Leo: Doing things the way that you have been doing them is comfortable. But comfort never leads to growth, does it now? Today, the cards are urging you to shake things up a little. To adopt the spirit of play and approach the most mundane tasks in a manner that's different from what you're used to. The more you bring your individuality to the table, the more the quality of your work will improve.
Tip: Bring your individuality to the table.

Virgo: The connection you share is both soulful and sensual. It's a love that awakens the latent passion within you and makes you believe in magic again. This weekend, you're breaking the barriers that stand between you and your beloved and experiencing intimacy on a deeper level. Yes, the fears and insecurities will rear their ugly heads as you choose vulnerability over everything else. You have what it takes to watch the ebb and flow of these emotions without giving into them.
Tip: Stay in the vibration of love, Virgo.

Libra: There are certain rules that apply to all those of us who are experiencing life in the earthly realm, and the law of karma is certainly one of them. Today, you're being guided to act mindfully—to be conscious of the law of cause and effect. Remember, everything you put out there will have a karmic repercussion. When it comes to decision making, find a balance between your head and your heart. Yes, that means not getting carried away by what the emotional landscape is showing you at this moment.
Tip: Keep the law of cause and effect in mind before you act today.

Scorpio: What if you're the only person standing in your way? We repeat: what if you're the only person standing in

your way? Once again, the cards are pointing towards a serious case of impostor syndrome and urging you to work through the self-worth issues that are weighing you down. You were chosen for this mission for a reason and it's time to remember that. Today, no matter how daunting this feels, take the first step. Do something that scares the living daylights out of you and know that you possess the strength, courage, and wisdom to transcend this. PS: Your spirit team is with you, providing you with the help and assistance you need in each moment.
Tip: Address the self-worth issues, Scorpio.

Sagittarius: If you've been at loggerheads with somebody, take a step back. Retreat into your sacred space, Sagittarius, where you can reflect upon what transpired with the other person, and your own BS. We all have our triggers, and there's no shame in that. However, it's important to heal the unhealed parts of our psyche so that we do not continue to repeat the old patterns.
Tip: Self-reflection is key.

Capricorn: Beginning a project is the easy part. It is synonymous with that mad surge of energy that comes from stepping into the unknown. What happens when you enter the second stage of a project, though? Does the same optimism continue to fuel your actions or do you find yourself

stuck in a rut? Word for the wise: stay in the energy of passion, Capricorn. You have a long way to go from here.
Tip: Stay in the energy of passion.

Aquarius: You can sulk about how unhappy you are at this moment, or you can take things in your hands and turn your circumstances around. The choice is and has always been yours. Have the conversation you have been carefully avoiding. That's the only way out of the maze you have found yourself in. Remember, it's not just about what you say, but also about how you say it. The secret to getting through to the other person is by approaching the subject from a space of openness.
Tip: Talk about it.

Pisces: Pay attention to what you are giving your time and energy to. We repeat: pay attention to what you are giving your time and energy to. Not all of these projects are worth your time, Pisces. It's okay to be picky. It's okay to let a few people down. The only person you owe an explanation to is yourself. When it comes to love and other intoxicants, you're being warned about the fleeting nature of a particular romance. So, flirt your way into their heart without expecting any sort of commitment.
Tip: Your time and energy are precious.