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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## FEWER TESTS = FEWER CASES Sikkim loses one more life to Covid; Sunday off for VRD Labs delivers only 27 new cases

### SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 MAY:

Sikkim lost one more life to Covid in the past 24 hours, taking the State's Covid toll to 150.

Meanwhile, the two VRD Labs in Sikkim, the only facilities where RT-PCR tests can be conducted, continued to remain closed on Sundays due to which no samples were screened for Novel Coronavirus through RT-PCR yesterday despite the State being in the grips of COVID-19's second wave. Only Rapid Antigen Testing and Trunat screenings were conducted yesterday due to which only 27 new Covid cases were reported in the State in the official "Daily Report of COVID-19" released today.

For some context, while 230 new cases were reported on Saturday, on Friday there were 259 cases. The 27 new cases were picked up from the 111 samples screened via RAT and Trunat yesterday. On the days when the VRD Lab is open, Sikkim averages nearly 800 tests a day. On Saturday, for instance, 799 samples were tested and on Friday, 797.

Sikkim has so far tested 95,254 samples for COVID-19.

Since there are now two VRD Labs in Sikkim - one at STNM Hospital and another at CRH-Tadong - the Covid management teams should perhaps consider working a schedule for them so that they take their weekly off-days on different days at least till the current wave has subsided.

As much as such a move will help the State keep better track of the cases on a daily basis, patients with Covid-like symptoms requiring admission into hospital will not have to waste up to two days on weekends for their test reports which decide which treatment they should be put on depending on their Covid status.

Be that as it may, with the 27 new cases detected on Sunday, Sikkim's cumulative COVID-19 tally rose to 8,468.

Of these, 13 cases were registered in East District, 10 in West District and 04 in South District. While two samples were found positive for COVID-19 in TruNat testing of eight samples, 25 people were found positive in rapid antigen testing of 103 samples.

The one more death was reported from STNM Hospital.

On the other hand, the figure of recovered cases showed a remarkable improvement with the release of 100 more persons from home isolation. This number can be expected to remain for the next few weeks since the hundreds who were sent to home isolation with the start of the second wave [which has been among us for three weeks now] will now be completing their mandatory 11-day home isolation schedule in quick succession.

While 32 more Covid patients were admitted into hospitals today - 18 at STNM Hospital and 14 at CRH - there are currently 14 such patients in the ICU - 10 at STNM Hospital and 4 at CRH.

## 'Vaccine Prince' Adar Poonawalla exposes India's best and worst

### NEW DELHI, 03 MAY [REUTERS]:

Adar Poonawalla should be a walking advertisement for India's pharmaceutical prowess. Instead the billionaire owner and chief executive of the Pune-based Serum Institute, the world's largest vaccine maker, has become a symbol of India's fraught ties with its private sector.

Before Covid-19, Serum wasn't a household name even inside the country. Now the unlisted company is India's best hope to get out of its Covid-19 crisis. New cases tallied 392,488 in the past 24 hours; in Goa state 40% of tests are returning positive. The manufacturer's monthly production of up to 70 million doses of Covishield, the local name for AstraZeneca's vaccine, accounts for 90% of nearly doses administered.

That makes complaints from the 40-year-old Mr Poonawalla, son of the company's founder, particularly distressing. In an interview with The Times newspaper, he claimed that tycoons and politicians are threatening him in order to secure jabs. India had given



Mr Poonawalla security protection days before the Times interview was published on Saturday, in which he said the pressure made him want to remain in London for an extended period. He's since indicated he will return within a few days.

The root of the problem is New Delhi's vaccine procurement strategy. India decided in April to allow state governments and private hospitals to purchase up to half of the vaccines stocks, although under the new plan they could end up paying double or more what government has paid. That effectively foists the unenviable responsibility of rationing a limited supply of life-saving vaccines onto private companies. It would be better if the government centralised distribution.

Politicians in some rich countries placed ear-

ly orders for more jabs than they needed, giving manufacturers greater confidence to ramp up production. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration ordered slowly and only after vaccines were approved. Now India's attempt to accelerate its vaccination drive will come at other's expense. The COVAX facility, backed by the World Health Organization for example, was counting on Serum to help supply jabs to lower-income countries where case counts are also rising. Those export deals are now on hold.

Mr Poonawalla hasn't helped his image by describing smaller profit margins as philanthropy. But a man charged with saving Indian lives is living in fear, and planning further overseas expansion. It's a terrible look for India.

## More than 20% positivity rate forces Sikkim to shut down partially 18-HOUR DAILY CURFEW FOR 10 DAYS STARTING 06 MAY

### SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 MAY:

The State Government today announced fresh restrictions that will come into effect from 06 May and stay in place, for now, till 16 May. While it is not a complete lockdown, the state has put a ban on inter-state and inter-district movement of people and non-emergency vehicles starting this Thursday.

As per the order issued by the Home Department today, the restrictions come in light of the advice of the Ministry of Home Affairs that states which have more than 10% positivity rate should impose "intensive containment measures".

The order explains that Sikkim has been recording more than 20% positivity rate for the past 10 days, therefore it was decided to impose restrictions to contain the spread of the virus.

Under the new measures, only security personnel, emergency vehicles, commercial goods vehicles, and those carrying construction materials will be allowed into the state from outside. Same applies to inter-district movement although health, police and fire personnel will also be allowed to move between districts.

For those who need to enter for medical or other emergencies, a permission from the concerned SDM will be required.

An 18-hour curfew will also come into effect from 06 May



onwards - from 5PM till 9AM - but relaxations have been extended for loading-unloading of milk supplies, vegetables and other goods and construction materials which will be allowed from 5AM till 8:30AM.

Closure of Government offices has been further extended till 16 May while commercial establishments will be allowed to open from 10AM till 4PM on weekdays. They will continue remain shut on Saturdays and Sundays. However, chemists, ration shops and those selling milk or meat will be exempted.

In this regard, the State Government follows the advisory issued earlier today by the Sikkim Chamber of Commerce that shops open for business from 10-4 in a bid to contain the spread of Covid. In fact, there are reports that people also went around MG Marg at 4 this afternoon directing shop-

keepers to down shutters which most of them promptly did. As far as the government order is concerned though, this timing comes into effect only from 06 May onwards.

Section 144 CrPC prohibiting assembly of more than 5 persons will also come into force on 06 May with "reasonable exemptions for funerals", the order states.

These options were explored earlier in the day at a State Level Review Meeting regarding COVID-19 management chaired by the Chief Minister at Samman Bhavan.

In a Facebook post about the meeting, the CM informs that the recent situation of COVID-19 in the state was discussed and concerned officials updated the house about the preparations and the stock of necessary equipment and medicines in the state.

Similarly, they briefed us

on the current scenario in the health facilities and provided suggestions to further strengthen them, he adds.

Inter-state and inter-district movement and increasing manpower in health facilities were also discussed.

Significantly, extension and enhancement of emergency medical services and facilities were also considered, including setting up a non-stop communication medium between patients and their families through the hospital administration, the CM informs.

"We also reviewed the vaccination programme, the possibility of a separate centre for the same purpose, the timings for the curfew and the transport of essential goods and commodities in the state. A 24-hour helpline will be set up to cater to the queries of the public, especially during emergencies," he adds.

## COUNCILLORS CHOOSE WOMEN TO LEAD GMC

*Kala Rai elected Gangtok Mayor; 'Machila' is Deputy Mayor*

### SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 03 MAY:

With two days still left on the countdown to elect the heads of urban local bodies, the elected councillors of Gangtok Municipal Corporation today unanimously resolved to elect Kala

Rai, elected from Lower Sichey, as the new Mayor of Gangtok and Tshering Palden Bhutia, popularly known as "Machila," the Deputy Mayor. Ms Bhutia represents Development Area in the GMC.

As per the resolution passed today, Ms Rai has been elected Mayor for two and a half years.

## Medical interns for Covid duty, PMO directs

### NEW DELHI, 03 MAY [NDTV]:

Medical interns and final-year MBBS students can be deployed in the fight against the novel coronavirus, the centre said Monday afternoon, as it announced a series of measures to increase availability of human resources.

Interns can be used for Covid management duties and final-year students can be deployed in tele-consultation roles and to monitor mild cases, the Prime Minister's Office said in its statement.

Both interns and students can only work under supervision of senior doctors or faculty members.

Similarly, nurses with B.Sc or GNM (General Nursing & Midwife) degrees or certifications can be deployed on Covid duties, so long as they too are supervised by senior doctors or nurses.

The centre has also postponed, for a second time, the NEET-PG medical entrance exam. It will now not be held before August 31, and candidates will be given a month's notice before it is held.

It was first postponed last month "in light of the surge in COVID-19 cases".

The centre said this will make qualified doctors and medical students available for Covid duties.

In addition, medical personnel completing 100 days of Covid duties will get the Prime Minister's Distinguished Covid National Service Samman and given priority when applying for government posts.

These decisions come as India faces a devastating new wave of coronavirus infections - one which has left an already-battered healthcare system on its knees.

## Single Covid jab effective against variants in previously infected: Study

### NEW DELHI, 03 MAY [PTI]:

A single dose of COVID-19 vaccine boosts protection against SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus variants, but only in those previously infected with the disease, according to a study.

The researchers looked at the UK and South Africa variants, however, they think it possible that the findings will apply to other variants in circulation, such as the Brazil (P.1) and India (B.1.617 and B.1.618) variants.

The findings, published in the journal Science, show that in those who have not previously been infected and have so far only received one dose of vaccine, the immune response to coronavirus variants of concern may be insufficient.

The researchers at Imperial College London, Queen Mary University of London and University College London, looked at immune responses in UK healthcare

workers at Barts and Royal Free hospitals following their first dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

They found that people who had previously had mild or asymptomatic infection had significantly enhanced protection against the Kent and South Africa variants, after a single dose of the mRNA vaccine.

In those without prior COVID-19, the immune response was less strong after a first dose, potentially leaving them at risk from variants.

"Our findings show that people who have had their first dose of vaccine, and who have not previously been infected with SARS-CoV-2, are not fully protected against the circulating variants of concern," said Rosemary Boyton, Professor of Immunology and Respiratory Medicine at Imperial College London, who led the research.

"This study highlights

the importance of getting second doses of the vaccine rolled out to protect the population," Boyton said.

The researchers analysed the blood samples for the presence and levels of immunity against the original strain of SARS-CoV-2, as well as the Kent (B.1.1.7) and South Africa (B.1.351) variants of concern.

Along with antibodies, the researchers also focused on two types of white blood cell: B-cells, which "remember" the virus, and T cells, which help B cell memory and recognise and destroy cells infected with coronavirus.

They found that after a first dose of vaccine, prior infection was associated with a boosted T cell, B cell and neutralising antibody response, which could provide effective protection against SARS-CoV-2, as well as the Kent and South Africa variants.

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# SIKKIM PROGRESIVE YOUTH FORUM ON DEATH DUE TO SHORTAGE OF ICU BEDS AT STNM HOSPITAL

*People are cooperating, the Govt should not fail them*

## RUPEN KARKI

The first death due to the shortage of ICU bed in Sikkim registered on Saturday. According to reports of media, there are just 100 covid patients admitted to the Govt hospitals, additionally 19 I the CRH and the patients have already started facing death due to shortage of bed. It shows how ill prepared we are to face this pandemic.

WHY ARE WE NOT PREPARED TO FACE THE PANDEMIC EVEN AFTER ONE YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC?

Now the death of the people due to such negligence from the part of the Govt even more than a year after the start of the pandemic is not acceptable. SPYF has been telling the Govt about the urgency to uplift the face of Govt hospitals in the state. Right in the beginning of the pandemic last year we had sent a letter to the Chief Minister regarding the urgent need of the increase ICU beds, upgrading the subsidiary hospitals like district hospitals, PHCs, CHCs etc, increase doctors, nurses, staffs etc to handle the possible crisis due to covid-19 in the future. We also reminded the Govt several times through various press conferences and releases. However, all

our suggestions fell to the deaf ears. There are just over a hundred patients requiring hospital attention and the crisis has started to surface already. It shows how ill-prepared we are to handle the pandemic.

NO STONE MUST BE LEFT UNTURNED TO SAVE PEOPLE'S LIVES

The situation in the mainland India has been covered extensively by the national and the foreign media. People are dying uncared like animals. There is an acute shortage of oxygen. We must be prepared for the worst. Amid chest thumping and self-aggrandization of the Govt by the leaders of the ruling party and parroted by its IT cell, it is the people whose lives are at stake. The Govt must not leave any stone unturned to save the lives of the people.

WE MUST NOT LET THE HEALTH WORKERS TO EXHAUST, QUARANTINE LEAVE MUST BE RESTORED

The workload of the health workers must also be considered. Initially, the Govt was giving facility quarantine leave of two weeks to the nurses, doctors and other support staffs, which was reduced to a week later. And now no such leave has been granted

to them. Exhausted health workers cannot perform optimum to their potential, their fatigues and exhaustion must also be considered. They must be given at least a week off, not just to keep them afresh but to avoid the potential spread of virus as well.

NEED TO PREPARE DISTRICT HOSPITALS TO FACE THE CRISIS

If the situation worsened, which appears likely at the moment, STNM alone will not be able to bear the burden. Moreover, for many patients living in remote villages STNM is too far. Therefore, all district hospitals must be equipped to handle the covid cases. Oxygen, ventilators, and ICU beds must be stalled, and sufficient manpower must be appointed in all district hospitals, which will help saving lives of the common people.

SUGGESTIONS MUST BE HEARD NOT MUFFLED

Rather than muffling the voice of those who speak truth the Govt must show seriousness to discharge its duty honestly. In December 2020, when the then Medical Superintendent of the STNM exposed the grim condition of the STNM through an interview the govt, instead taking a cue from the inter-

view and improving the condition in the hospital, fired him from his post. There are alarming reports of some social media journalists being treated for showing truth to the public. Instead of resorting to such shameful activities, the ruling party must exert all its energy in preparing our hospitals to face the ongoing pandemic.

COMMON PEOPLE HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY CO-OPERATIVE DESPITE TREMENDOUS LOSS

People have been extremely cooperative to the Govt. All its orders and notifications have been religiously obeyed by the people. When the Govt was financially unprepared to face the pandemic, people donated generously. Whenever inadvertently people forget to keep their noses closed by masks, people have been paying hefty fines even compromising even their basing needs at times. Many have happily sacrificed their livelihoods; many will fall into poverty owing to the pandemic. When people are cooperating in every way to fight against the crisis, a single death of the common people due to shortage of beds, staffs etc is the failure of the Govt.

*[The writer is with Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum]*

## Govt lifts additional rice for PMGKAY

**GANGTOK, 03 MAY [IPR]:** The Department of Food and Civil Supplies, Government of Sikkim has lifted 37,318.80 quintals of rice for the months of May and June, 2021 as additional allocation

received from the Government of India for free distribution under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojna (PMGKAY) to AAY and PHH beneficiaries under TPDS to ameliorate the

hardships being faced by them due to economic disruption caused by spread of Corona Virus. The scale of rice for distribution is 5 kgs per month per beneficiary.

## Supreme Court directs Centre to revisit current vaccine policy, says it may create disparity

**NEW DELHI, 03 MAY [NDTV]:** The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to revisit its COVID-19 vaccine pricing policy, saying it would prima facie result in a detriment to the right to public health.

A bench headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud said as of date, the manufacturers have suggested two different prices, a lower price which is applicable to the Centre and a higher price which is applicable to the quantities purchased by state governments.

The top court said that compelling state governments to negotiate with manufacturers on grounds of promoting competition and making it attractive for new vaccine manufacturers will result in a serious detriment to those in the age group of 18 to 44 years, who will be vaccinated by state governments.

The social strata of this age group also comprises persons who are Bahujans or belong to other underprivileged

and marginalised groups, like many in the other population age groups. They may not have the ability to pay.

"Whether or not essential vaccines will be made available to them will depend upon the decision of each state government, based on its own finances, on whether or not the vaccine should be made available free or should be subsidised and if so, to what extent. This will create disparity across the nation. The vaccinations being provided to citizens constitute a valuable public good," the bench said.

The bench, also comprising Justices L Nageswara Rao and Ravindra Bhat said, discrimination cannot be made between different classes of citizens who are similarly circumstanced on the ground that while the Central government will carry the burden of providing free vaccines for the 45 years and above population, state governments will discharge the responsibility of the 18

to 44 age group on such commercial terms as they may negotiate.

"Prima facie, the rational method of proceeding in a manner consistent with the right to life (which includes the right to health) under Article 21 would be for the Central Government to procure all vaccines and to negotiate the price with vaccine manufacturers," the court said.

The top court said that once quantities are allocated to each state government, the latter would lift the allocated quantities and carry out the distribution.

"While we are not passing a conclusive determination on the constitutionality of the current policy, the manner in which the current policy has been framed would prima facie result in a detriment to the right to public health which is an integral element of Article 21 of the Constitution."

"Therefore, we believe that the Central Government should con-

sider revisiting its current vaccine policy to ensure that it withstands the scrutiny of Articles 14 (equality before law) and Article 21 (Protection of life and personal liberty) of the Constitution," it said.

At present, the two coronavirus vaccines -- Covishield and Covaxin -- are in use.

The directions were passed in a suo motu case for ensuring essential supplies and services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bench has taken up issues such as the projected demand for oxygen in the country at present and in the near future, how the government intends to allocate it to "critically affected" states and its monitoring mechanism to ensure supply.

The Supreme Court had earlier made clear that any attempt to clamp down on the free flow of information on social media, including a call for help from people, would be treated as contempt of the court.

## VIT-AP University's Merit Scholarships for UG/PG Non-Engineering Programmes

### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 03 MAY:**

Founder & Chancellor, Dr G Viswanathan, VIT, today announced the GV Merit Scholarship and Rajeswari Ammal Merit Scholarship aimed at supporting candidates enrolling in non-engineering programmes such as BBA, BCom, Law, BSc and BA and Post Graduate programmes for the academic year 2021-22.

Vice Chancellor, Dr SV Kota Reddy, VIT-AP explained that the GV Merit Scholarship is for any Board Topper across the country. Under this scholarship, the admitted candidate will get 100% scholarship for all years of the UG programme. He also stated the eligibility criteria to avail Rajeswari Ammal merit scholarship, the candidate must be a District Topper from any state across the



country. The admitted candidate is eligible for a 50% scholarship on the Tuition Fee for all the years of the degree programme. If the District Topper is a girl, she will get an additional 25%

scholarship making it as 75% scholarship.

Vice President, Dr Sekar Viswanathan, VIT-AP said that the PG Merit Scholarship for all PG Programmes with 100% Scholarship to all admit-

ted candidates who have secured CGPA of 9.0/90% or above (whichever is applicable) in the qualifying UG examination and Merit scholarship of 50% to the admitted candidates who have secured CGPA of 8.0/80% or above (whichever is applicable) in the qualifying UG examination and under this category, an additional 25% of Scholarship will be given for a girl candidate making it as 75% Scholarship.

Registrar, Dr CLV Sivakumar, VIT-AP said that these Merit Scholarships can be availed in Non-Engineering programme from the academic year 2021-22. The last date to apply for admission is 31 May, 2021. For more details, may please visit [www.vitap.ac.in](http://www.vitap.ac.in) or e-mail to [admission@vitap.ac.in](mailto:admission@vitap.ac.in) or call 7901091283, he added.

## Mamata Banerjee to take oath as West Bengal CM on May 5

**KOLKATA, 03 MAY [PTI]:** Mamata Banerjee will be sworn in as the chief minister of West Bengal for the third time on May 5, her party announced on Monday.

The newly-elected MLAs of the Trinamool Congress unanimously elected Ms Banerjee as the legislative party leader at a meeting here, its

secretary-general Partha Chatterjee said.

The TMC legislators elected the speaker in the outgoing House, Biman Banerjee, as the pro-tem speaker in the new Assembly.

"The newly-elected members will take oath in the Assembly from May 6," Mr Chat-



terjee told reporters here after the meeting of the legislators.

## Some states showing early signs of decrease in daily Covid cases: Centre

### SIKKIM AMONG STATES WITH SURGE CASES!

**NEW DELHI, 03 MAY [PTI]:** As the second wave of coronavirus continues to engulf several parts of the country, the centre on Monday said some states are showing very early signs of plateauing in daily new COVID-19 cases, while some remain a cause of concern.

Addressing a news briefing, Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said 13 states, including Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Punjab, are showing early signs of plateauing, while states like Bihar, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura and West Bengal are showing an increasing trend in daily cases.

Amid a shortage of medical oxygen in the country, he said

the government is exploring the feasibility of converting existing nitrogen plants to produce oxygen.

"There are some early signs of plateauing or decrease in new COVID-19 cases in some states," Mr Agarwal said.

Chhattisgarh, where 15,583 cases were reported on April 29, recorded 14,087 fresh cases on May 2. Similar was the case with Delhi, Daman and Diu, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

With regards to districts, Mr Agarwal said Durg, Gariyaband, Raipur, Rajnandgaon in Chhattisgarh; Chhindwara,

Guna, Shajapur in Madhya Pradesh, Leh in Ladakh; Nirmal in Telangana are showing signs of decline in cases in the last 15 days. Mr Agarwal said 12 districts of Maharashtra are also showing signs of a decline since the last 15 days.

"However, these are very early signals and this is too early to analyse the situation. It is important to have continued efforts of containment at district and state level so that we can preserve these gains and reduce cases further," he said.

"There are some causes of concern," Mr Agarwal cautioned.

He said there are 12 states where active cases are more than a lakh. They are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, Haryana, Ut-

tar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu. There are seven states where the active cases are in the range of 50,000 to 1 lakh cases and 17 states where the active cases are more than 50,000.

There are 22 states where the positivity rate is more than 15 per cent and in nine states the positivity rate is between 5 to 15 per cent and five states it is less than five per cent.

He said states and union territories like Andaman and Nicobar, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Odisha, Pud-

cherry, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura and West Bengal are showing an increasing trend in daily cases.

"Today, it is important to analyse the cases at micro-level and continue with the efforts in the areas from where the cases are being reported," he said.

On vaccine coverage, he said so far 12.07 crore (first dose for 10.53 crore people and second dose for 1.54 crore) above the age of 45 years have been vaccinated.

AIIMS Director Dr Randeep Guleria warned against rushing for CT scans in cases of mild COVID-19, saying there are side effects and it can end up doing more harm than good.

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**Shantinagar Gaon Sudhar Samiti undertakes cleanliness drive at badminton court and surrounding areas on Monday.**

## Harassment over Covid help to result in coercive action: Supreme Court to Centre

**NEW DELHI, 03 MAY [PTI]:** The Supreme Court has directed the Centre and states to inform their chief secretaries and police chiefs that any clampdown on information on social media or harassment to individuals seeking help on any platform in relation to COVID-19 would result in coercive action.

In these “trying times”, those desperately seeking help for their loved ones on these platforms should not have their misery compounded through the actions of the State and its instrumentalities, the supreme court said.

It said it was “deeply distressed” to note that individuals seeking help on such platforms have been targeted, by alleging that the information posted by them was false and posted on social media to create panic, defame the administration or damage the “national image”.

A bench headed by Justice DY Chandrachud said such targeting of individuals should not be condoned, and the Centre and state governments should ensure that they immediately cease direct or indirect threats of prosecution and arrest to citizens who air grievances or those that are attempting to help fellow

citizens receive medical aid.

The top court, in a 64-page order uploaded on its site on late Sunday night, said that if this keeps happening even after the current order, it would be constrained to use the powers available to it under its contempt jurisdiction.

“The Central Government and State Governments shall notify all Chief Secretaries/Directors General of Police/Commissioners of Police that any clampdown on information on social media or harassment caused to individuals seeking/delivering help on any platform will attract a coercive exercise of jurisdiction by this Court.”

“The Registrar (Judicial) is also directed to place a copy of this order before all District Magistrates in the country,” said the bench, also comprising Justices L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat.

The top court said the clampdown on information sharing must be absolutely stopped immediately because sharing information widely is in itself an important tool in combating public tragedies and it will help in the creation of a “collective public memory” of this

pandemic.

“As such, preventing clampdowns on sharing of information on online platforms is not just in the interest of individuals sharing the information, but the larger democratic structures of our nation. Without the ready availability of such information, it is entirely possible that the COVID-19 pandemic may turn into a tragedy worse than what it already is,” the bench said.

The bench also referred to its Right to Privacy judgement and said, “Academic literature documenting the widespread availability of information and the resultant acknowledgement of the problem is what prevented the drought in Maharashtra in 1973 from becoming as bad as the Bengal Famine of 1943, where the British tried to deny the problem even existed.”

The top court said that widespread sharing of information by individuals living through the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial and the role of Courts in creating and preserving this collective public memory cannot be understated.

“Hence, in the present proceedings, we hope to not only initiate a dialogue so as to better tackle the current COVID-19

pandemic but also to preserve its memory in our public records, so that future generations may evaluate our efforts and learn from them,” it said.

The directions were passed in a suo motu case for ensuring essential supplies and services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bench has taken up issues such as the projected demand for oxygen in the country at present and in the near future, how the government intends to allocate it to “critically affected” states and its monitoring mechanism to ensure supply.

The Supreme Court had earlier made clear that any attempt to clamp down on the free flow of information on social media, including a call for help from people, would be treated as contempt of the court.

“There should be free flow of information; we should hear voices of citizens. This is a national crisis. There should not be any presumption that the grievances raised on the Internet are always false. Let a strong message be sent to all the DGPs that there should not be any kind of clampdown,” the bench had said while reserving its order on April 30.

## BJP has won 33.21 per cent votes in Assam

**GUWAHATI, MAY 3 (PTI):** BJP, which has emerged victorious in the Assam assembly elections for the second successive time, has garnered 33.21 per cent share of the votes, according to the Election Commission.

Its alliance partner Asom Gana Parishad got 7.91 per cent, while UPA major Congress registered 29.67 per cent and AIUDF 9.29 per cent.

The saffron party won 60 of the 126 seats, its allies Asom Gana Par-

ishad nine and United Peoples Party (Liberal) six. Congress bagged 29 seats, its partner All India United Democratic Front 16 and Bodo Democratic Front four.

CPI-M won one seat, and another went to an independent.

As per the party wise vote share data of the EC, the BJP contested in 92 seats and secured 6,84,538 (33.21%) of the total votes polled.

Regional party AGP contested in 26 seats and garnered 1,519,777 (7.9

%) votes.

The EC website did not speak of the vote share of UPPL which had contested in eight seats.

The Congress contested in 94 seats and won 5,703,341 votes (29.7 %). AIUDF was in the fray in 14 constituencies and got 1,786,551 (9.3 %) votes, while CPI(M) fought in two seats had secured just 160,758 (0.84 %) votes.

Others secured 13.7 per cent share with 2,628,518 votes and NOTA was the choice of

1.14 per cent voters - or 219,578 of them.

The major winners are Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, his cabinet colleagues Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chandra Mohan Patowary, besides Speaker of the outgoing assembly Hitendra Nath Goswami, AGP chief Atul Bora jailed anti-CAA movement leader Akhil Gogoi.

The prominent losers are Assam Pradesh Congress president Ripun Bora and minister Pramila Rani Brahma of BPF.

## Indian Army cancels Common Entrance Exam scheduled for May 30

**NEW DELHI, 03 MAY [NDTV]:** Indian Army has cancelled the common entrance exam scheduled to be held on May 30 in view of the COVID-19 crisis. The exam was to be held for Soldier General Duty, Soldier Technical, Soldier Nursing Assistant, Soldier Clerk/Store Keeper Technical, Soldier

Tradesman (All Arms) 10th Pass and Soldier Tradesman (All Arms) 8th Pass posts.

“Conduct of common entrance exam (CEE) 30 May 2021 for sol gd, sol (tech), sol tdn 10th and 8th, sol (na/vet), sol (clk/skt) and sol pharma has been cancelled due to covid-19 situation fresh

dates will be intimated later,” it has notified.

Before this, it had postponed entrance exams scheduled on April 25.

Meanwhile, the army is currently inviting applications for recruitment rally which is scheduled to be held from June 7 to June 30

at Rajput Regiment Centre, Fatehgarh for candidates of districts Bahraich, Balrampur, Bareilly, Budaun/ Badaun, Farrukhabad, Hardoi, Lakhimpur Kheri/ Lakhimpur, Pilibhit, Sambhal, Shahjahanpur, Shravasti and Sitapur. Candidates can apply on or before May 22.

# Rotarians promote vaccine awareness



**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 03 MAY:**

Rotary Club of Gangtok has donated flex banners to the Health & Family Welfare Department to help educate the masses about Covid-19. Appropriate

Behavior and Vaccination Readiness.

These banners will be put up in different parts of the State to make people of the State aware and encourage vaccination.

A press release

from the Rotary Club states that the organisation has been on the frontlines since the pandemic started last year. The Club distributed materials during peak pandemic times last year to the underprivi-

leged at different parts of the State and the country and extended other assistance and aid.

The Club has been working with the State Government in fighting the pandemic, the release adds.

## ‘Media Must Report Fully’: Supreme Court on Election Commission’s protest

**NEW DELHI, 03 MAY [NDTV]:** The media cannot be stopped from reporting any court hearing and “must report fully” what happens in court, the Supreme Court said today as the Election Commission complained about being “castigated without any evidence” when the Madras High Court last week remarked that the poll body should be “booked for murder” for not stopping political rallies in the Covid emergency.

“Something is observed in the larger public interest. The Election Commission should treat it as a bitter pill in the right spirit,” the judges said.

The Election Commission last week approached the Supreme Court against what it called “blatantly disparaging remarks” by the Madras High Court over holding polls amid the

deadly second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

The Election Commission’s petition before the Supreme Court says the remarks “denied the institution” and asks that the media be stopped from reporting observations. It also points at the role of the government, which is significant as the government has often shifted the responsibility of enforcing Covid safety rules to the election body.

“Without any oppor-

tunity (given) to the Election Commission or any reply being sought from officers responsible under the Disaster Management Act, we have been castigated,” the election body argued today.

Lawyer Rakesh Dwivedi, representing the Election Commission, said it was the government under the Disaster Management Authority that had to manage the rallies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Chief Minister (E Palaniswami) and “they committed the breach” but the Commission had been castigated even though its officials suffered Covid and had the tough task of conducting elections.

The Supreme Court replied that the Election Commission is the constitutional authority to conduct elections. “We cannot in today’s time say that media will not

report the contents of court hearing. Discussions taking place in the High Court have equal public interest as the final order of the court,” it said.

Justice DY Chandrachud said: “We don’t want to demoralise our High Courts. They are vital pillars of the judiciary. Sometimes a free-flowing dialogue takes place in the court and judges make observations... You cannot control how judges will conduct proceedings.”

High Court judges are at liberty to ask inconvenient questions, Justice Chandrachud asserted. But he added: “Speaking for myself - I would not have used the words of Madras High Court.”

The Election Commission countered that it was “a conclusion not a dialogue” and the observations were not in the final order.



### SIR THOTUB NAMGYAL MEMORIAL HOSPITAL GANGTOK SIKKIM 737101 WALK IN INTERVIEW

A walk-in interview will be held for local eligible candidates for filling up two (2) post of Laboratory Technician on contractual basis under the project “Establishment of Network Of Research Laboratories for Managing Epidemics and Natural Calamities” in the Dept. of Microbiology STNM Hospital Gangtok.

Details of the Post is as furnished under:

Sl no	Name of post	No of post	Essential qualification	Preferential qualification	Monthly emolument
1.	Laboratory technician	02	Intermediate/12 <sup>th</sup> pass in science stream with two-year Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technician from recognized Institute	Experience in working in a Microbiology Laboratory	Rs. 18,000/-

The following documents (attested by the competent authority) should be submitted on the day of the interview

1. Age proof: birth certificate/Class X mark sheet
2. Degree certificates of Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technician (DMLT)
3. Sikkim Subject/Certificate of identification
4. Employment card (renewed) in case of unemployed candidate.
5. No objection Certificate (NOC) in case of in-service candidate
6. Two recent passport size photos

No TA/DA will be admissible for attending the interview.

Date: 18<sup>TH</sup> May 2021 (Tuesday)

Reporting Time: 9:30 AM

Venue: Seminar Hall, Department of Medicine, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, STNM Hospital, Sochakgang, Gangtok.

**Principal Investigator  
VDL Network (ICMR Project)  
Department of Microbiology  
STNM Hospital, Gangtok**

**RO NO. 43/IPR/Pub/Classi./2021-22  
Date. 03.05.2021**



## Celebrate Diversity

*Even though clichéd, it is the right choice*

In the current times of overbearing rightwing mono-culturalism, the fact that Sikkim has begun celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi and will next week be celebrating a recently introduced [albeit ageold as far the community is concerned] festival and then a unique-to-Sikkim worship a day later, comes as welcome relief. Some continue to see such individuality at the community level as somehow diluting a larger identity, but they are clearly hamstrung by regressive narrow-mindedness which continues to see empowerment and confidence as somehow detrimental to cultures and identities. Thankfully, such mindsets remain in minority in Sikkim. In an India where boorish religious heads want to hound certain idols out of temples, the fact that Sikkim made space at MG Marg for Ganpati and will have many interpretations of the worship of its Guardian Deity in expression next Tuesday, is a display that should never be allowed to dim. Clichéd as it may sound, Sikkim should never stop celebrating its diversity, its people should never hesitate from supporting expressions of cultural diversity by other groups, and even as such cultural expressions are made by individual groups and communities, the celebrations should be joined by all. Make it a habit and an instinctive response, and troublemakers keen to sow differences by fanning paranoia will find themselves out of jobs. And make no mistake, agent provocateurs, if given the chance, will tease out hesitations and feed on suspicions thereby weakening the collective society.

Agreed, “unity in diversity” is an overused line, a phrase which has accompanied us for far too long as a topic for essay-writing contests and argument for debates; and since everyone has heard it so often that it fails to elicit either pride or passion anymore, perhaps it is time to turn the approach on its head and reinforce unity. “Diversity in unity”, as some thinkers have proposed for the country in the past, carries a nice spin to it and also acknowledges the fact that confident diversities mean self-assured identities which was the best safeguard for unity. Unencumbered diversity inspires confidence which powers empathy; forced identities and ideas on the hand fan fear which breeds intolerance which is a debilitating, self-defeating handicap.

To its credit, the current dispensation in Sikkim, despite rather loud criticism by individual leaders, has consistently supported the aspiration of the respective communities to express their individualities. And such an approach is also in perfect sync with the current focus on decentralization, empowerment and going back to the roots [as one can see in the revival of organic farming]. Endorsing diversity, once it becomes a habit, is no longer limited to cultures, and would also mean supporting free expression, accepting differing views, living with divergent traits and allowing free thought – if that is not the empathy and tolerance that a people need to thrive as a community, unencumbered by factionalism or hate, then what is?

Diversity, once ingrained, provides diverse people with the ability to be okay with and open to those things that set them and others apart – religion, culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, language (the list goes on) and understanding and accepting of people for who they are. Being culturally aware provides an opportunity to stand back and consider that there are certain backgrounds, personal values, beliefs and upbringings that shape the things we all do. Something that is considered inappropriate behavior in one culture may be perfectly appropriate in another. Learning about other cultures helps people relate to one another and be okay with different perspectives. Everyone and every community can benefit from such attributes...

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# Remote Working: Why Some People Are Less Productive at Home Than Others

STEPHEN BEVAN  
THECONVERSATION.COM

Has working at home during lockdown made people more productive or not? This has been the subject of some lively debate recently. Many companies do not routinely measure productivity. A large number will have traditionally assumed that they get the highest output when staff work longer hours or under close supervision, but remote working is clearly causing some to re-evaluate this. Major firms, for instance professional services group PwC, have been sufficiently impressed to make remote working a permanent option for their staff.

On the other hand, some business leaders insist that remote working is compromising productivity and is therefore not workable in the long term. Goldman Sachs CEO David Solomon, for example, has dismissed it as an “aberration that we’re going to correct as soon as possible”. So who is right?

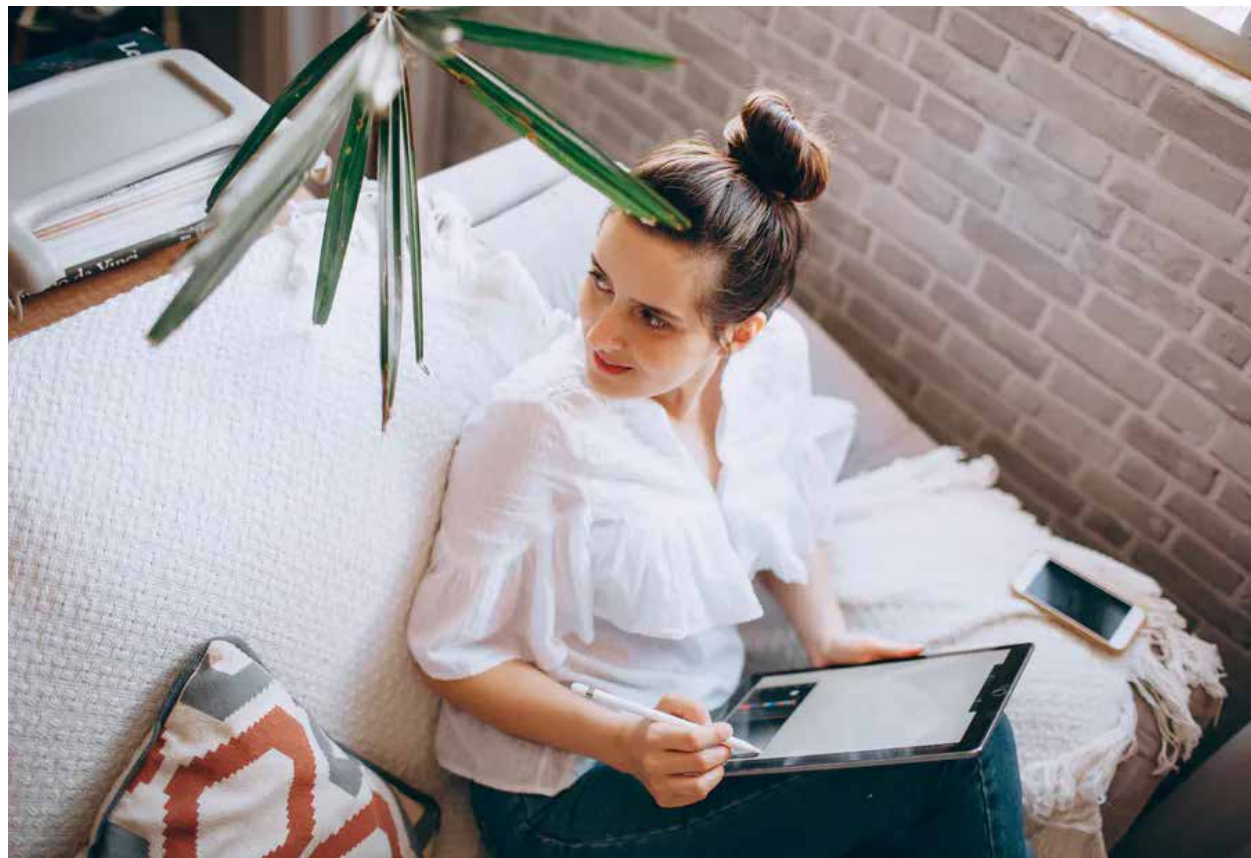
Surveys tend not to be good at measuring productivity objectively. The research partnership Work After Lockdown, on which I’m a co-investigator, has been trying to improve on this. We have just published the results of an ESRC-funded survey in which we asked 1,085 respondents working from home in the UK about their productivity.

We chose to use standard measure of labour productivity used by economists, output per hour worked, where output refers to the value of the goods or services in question. Using this meant we weren’t just measuring whether people were working longer hours.

We asked our respondents whether they felt that their self-reported productivity was the same, better or worse compared with the pre-lockdown period. From the results, 54% thought they got “a little more” or “much more” done per hour worked than before the lockdown.

Combined with those who reported that their productivity was the same as before lockdown, it meant that almost 90% reported that productivity had been maintained or improved – echoing the results of other UK

studies. In other words, barely one in ten people reported that their productivity had gone down during lockdown. So why would working from home have made most people more produc-



tive, but some less so?

PRODUCTIVITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

We also questioned our respondents about their mental health, and scored them using the World Health Organization’s WHO-5 index. From plotting the results on the graph below you can see a very clear pattern, with higher productivity associated with better mental health. In fact, the mental health scores for the most productive workers in our survey were twice as high as the least productive.

It is not clear from our data whether poor mental health causes or contributes to a decline in productivity or whether being productive helps to boost mental health. It seems reasonable to think that both are probably true.

To explore this relationship, we looked at people’s ability to adapt to changing circumstances and their capacity to overcome setbacks or interruptions – referred to in the literature as self-regulation. We might expect people with such abilities to remain focused on a task, and

be more productive as a result. Sure enough, this was supported by the data.

Over 90% of our respondents reported that they could concentrate on one activity

haps especially among workers who thrive on interacting with colleagues and clients to swap and shape ideas. The outgoing chief economist of the Bank of England, Andy Haldane, has ex-

pressed concerns about this, and 73% of our survey respondents reported that they ideally wanted working patterns that allowed them to vary their place of work to reflect the tasks they were performing.

With this in mind, it has become very fashionable for companies to talk about “hybrid” working lately. But it’s an imprecise concept, and if businesses are to give employees clarity around what can be done at home and what needs to happen at a traditional workplace, they will need to decide which jobs truly need to be done at a particular time or location.

Getting this wrong may risk compromising the mental health of employees – for example, if prolonged remote working increases isolation or increases work intensity. It may also mean that companies never quite manage to deliver the long-term productivity gains they are hoping to secure once lockdown is over.

[the writer is Head of HR Research Development, Institute for Employment Studies, Lancaster University]

## Why we can still recognise people in face masks

EILIDH NOYES, KATIE GRAY & KAY RITCHIE  
THECONVERSATION.COM

The average person knows about 5,000 faces – from family and friends to the cashier at the local store. Most people can recognise familiar faces with ease, even from low quality images, or from photos that are many years old. We often recognise familiar faces even if we can’t remember a person’s name or how we know them.

Most of us take this ability to recognise familiar faces for granted – but when public health issues require our friends to mask up, covering their chins, lips, cheeks and noses, are our facial recognition skills scrambled?

We investigated this question in our recent study and compared the impact of masks (which cover the lower portion of the face) with that of sunglasses (which cover the eye region). Despite face masks covering a large proportion of our faces, we found that people find it surprisingly easy to recognise familiar faces behind masks – speaking to the remarkable versatility of this human skill.

FAMILIAR FACES

Identifying familiar faces is a useful day-to-day skill, but the identification of unfamiliar faces is also important in the context of forensic investigations and security scenarios. Our study measured the recognition of both familiar and unfamiliar faces.

We presented our participants with pairs of face images, and asked them to decide whether the faces belonged to the same person or different people. One image of the pair was always presented with no concealment, and the other showed either no concealment, an image in sunglasses, or in a face mask. Participants completed the task for familiar faces (images of celebrities) and for unfamiliar faces.

Even though face masks cover a significant part of the face, we found that our participants

identified familiar faces in masks with around 90% accuracy – no worse than the results for faces wearing sunglasses, and only slightly worse than unconcealed faces.

These results demonstrate just how robust familiar face recognition can be. And our task only involved comparisons of still images of faces. It’s possible that in the real world, information from the body or gait or from clothing may supplement the reduced information from the masked face, increasing accuracy further.

For unfamiliar faces, both masks and sunglasses reduced recognition accuracy further. Face masks reduced performance the most, but only a little more than sunglasses. But with or without masks and sunglasses, recognising unfamiliar faces generally tends to be difficult and error-prone.

Still, some people are highly adept at this task. Super-recognisers – people who excel at recognising faces – were also recruited to complete the tasks by Professor Josh Davis from the University of Greenwich Face and Voice Recognition Lab database. Super-recognisers were also impaired by masks, but they performed far better than regular people in all concealment conditions.

Given that familiar face identification ability was barely impaired when faces were masked, why is it that humans recognise familiar faces so well? Humans may be born with an innate preference for face-like stimuli. We are so attuned to seeking out faces in our environment that we often pick out face-like patterns within objects or clouds – a phenomenon known as “face pareidolia”.

It has been suggested that face processing is adaptive – that our ancestors had an evolutionary advantage if they could tell the difference between a friend and a foe, which would help them decide who to approach and who to avoid.

The ability to recognise familiar faces is attributed to learning the different ways that the same face can look over different encounters, and learning how the face differs to other known faces. This makes unfamiliar face identification far more challenging, as these factors are unknown for a face that we have little experience with. For unfamiliar faces, we don’t know how a face varies across changes in pose, expression, lighting, or age – or how the face differs from other unknown faces.

EXPERT RECOGNISERS

How can this explain our surprisingly adept performance for identifying faces covered by masks? For familiar faces, we likely have enough experience with the face that we can make an identification based on the limited available information. We may have seen the face obscured before, or our representation of the full face is so strong that we can handle the reduction in visible features.

In contrast, for unfamiliar faces, we cannot rely on experience with the face. Super-recognisers are the anomalies here and, while it’s unclear why they’re so good at identifying faces, there is evidence that face recognition abilities may be genetic.

There are currently 7.4 billion faces on the planet. Though we’ll only ever encounter a tiny fraction of them, our ability to remember and recognise familiar faces is an evolutionary skill hundreds of thousands of years in the making. Our research shows it’s a skill barely affected when the faces in question are hidden by a mask.

[Eilidh Noyes is Senior Lecturer in Cognitive Psychology, University of Huddersfield; Katie Gray is Associate Professor, School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences, University of Reading; Kay Ritchie is Senior Lecturer in Cognitive Psychology, University of Lincoln]



# What's it like to be a health worker in a pandemic?

## Bheri Hospital nurses and doctors share their stories

MADHU SHAHI

**KATHMANDU, 03 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]:** Preeti Khadka, a staff nurse at Nepalgunj-based Bheri Hospital, had her night shift on Friday. She didn't feel like clocking in. She was feeling a bit under the weather. She was on her period too. The thought of putting on her Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and working her shift made her feel sicker. But she persevered.

She, along with four other staff nurses, Kamala Nepali, Sunita Sahakari, Nisha Pun and Yam Kumari Thapa, was on duty in the Covid-19 ward. One nurse is assigned to 30 to 40 coronavirus patients at the hospital given the shortage of staff.

The pressure under which they work is immense, says Khadka. After a night of taking care of coronavirus patients, the nurses look forward to taking off their PPEs and resting. Each day is a new battle won.

Saturday morning, Khadka, exhausted from the night on duty, had to wait a little longer to take off her PPE and get a change of clothes since the next shift workers were delayed. The nurses, exhausted from the overnight duty, threw themselves on a sofa placed just outside the ward.

The photo taken that very moment found its way to social media, says Khadka.

Yam Kumari Thapa knew who took that photo.

"I couldn't open my eyes. I was so tired and we all just collapsed on the couch. Dr Chandra Prasad Sahu, who came for his check-up round, teased us and said he would take our photo," said Thapa. "We all burst into laughter when the doctor said that."

Laughter, she says, doesn't

come easy to them these days.

The health workers deployed at the Covid-19 hospital are simply overwhelmed with the massive surge of Covid-19 cases. As cases continue to soar across hospitals, health workers are themselves at high risk of getting infected.

According to Bimala Acharya, an administrative staff at Bheri Hospital, more than 90 health workers have tested positive for coronavirus at the hospital in the past few weeks.

Khadka, the staff nurse, said she has been commuting to and from the hospital from her house every day, as there's no place to stay at the hospital.

"I have isolated myself in my house. I stay separately from my family, fearing I might carry the virus and infect them," said Khadka.

The physical distance she has maintained from her family members is a necessity but it has left her feeling alienated.

"I don't get to see my family. I don't remember the last time I sat with them for a meal or a laugh," said Khadka. "At the hospital too, we are too overwhelmed by our work to even smile at each other. The only time we laugh or show happiness is when we see patients recovering from the virus."

In the photo that Dr Sahu took, Khadka can be seen leaning on the couch between two of her colleagues; she looks unwell.

"I was on my period. I was sweating inside the PPE," she said. "I had just taken a painkiller and my friends were trying to soothe me after seeing me in so much discomfort and pain."

Twenty-three-year-old Yam Kumari Thapa, who got married two years ago, is currently staying



at her parent's house in Banke. Her husband, who stays in Kathmandu, arrived at her home a few days ago. But Thapa has had no time. Neither for her family nor for her husband.

"Even when I'm home with my husband, I'm busy on the phone," she said. "We get updates on our group chat of staff nurses. We discuss our patients' health even when we are off duty so that we can take better care of them when we get back to the hospital for our shift."

Sunita Sahakari, one of the four staff nurses on duty with Khadka, is from Kalikot.

She lost her husband to blood cancer two months ago. But hasn't

been able to mourn her husband since she is one of the few health workers available for the care of Covid-19 patients at the hospital. A mother of a six-year-old son, she tested positive for Covid-19 a few days ago but is still on duty. When someone loses their loved ones to Covid-19, she is reminded of her husband.

"I know what it feels like to lose someone dear to you. I empathise with the family members of the patients who don't recover," she said.

Kamala Nepali from Dailekh says her family has been asking her to quit her job at the hospital and return home. But she's adamant to continue with her work.

She also got infected while at the hospital.

"My mother is worried. She wants me to return home but I can't leave. The patients here need me and their families depend on us to see them through this," Nepali said.

Health workers deployed in other coronavirus-specific hospitals share similar stories of suffering and hope.

Dr Purushottam Barma, medical officer at Nepalgunj Medical College, has continued working at the hospital even though he's showing symptoms similar to that of Covid-19. But he can't take a day off since the hospital is receiving a massive flow of patients since Saturday.

urday.

Two medical officers are already in home isolation after they tested positive for Covid-19 a few days ago, leaving the hospital severely short-staffed.

A photo of Barma flipping the pages of a patient's report while being hooked on to an IV drip also found its way into various social media platforms. "I wasn't feeling particularly well that day. I was very weak due to diarrhoea. But our work doesn't stop even when we fall sick," he said. "So I was going through a patient's file while taking medicine myself when the photo was taken by a staff nurse at the hospital."

It has been around six months since Barma, a resident of Phultekra in Nepalgunj, met his friends. "We are so busy. Forget about meeting friends, we don't even have the time to ask each other how we're doing," he said.

Shila Sharma, nursing in charge at Bheri Hospital, stays at the hospital most of the time but she frequently thinks of her two-year-old son who tested positive for the virus nine days ago. She hasn't been able to take care of him as much as she would like to because most of her time is spent at the hospital.

"He's already asleep when I reach home late in the evening. I try to breastfeed him whenever he's awake," said Sharma. "His health is improving slowly."

She is looking forward to taking some time off to take care of her son, as she heard that 22 additional health workers have been deployed at the hospital.

"We will have less work pressure with the additional human resources," she said. "I will finally be able to look after my son."

## Nepal decides to halt all domestic and international flights as coronavirus infections continue to surge

KATHMANDU, 03 MAY

**[KATHMANDUPOST]:** Nepal on Sunday decided to halt all domestic flights from Monday midnight and all international flights from Wednesday midnight until May 14 to check the rapidly growing spread of the Covid-19.

"The decision on flight restrictions are in place until May 14," Health Minister Hridayesh Tripathi told the Post. "However, charter flights will be allowed."

According to statistics of Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport, domestic airlines saw an all-time one-day record of passenger numbers of 15,263 on April 28, a day before the prohibitory orders came into force enforced in Kathmandu Valley, as people scrambled to leave the Capital city.

Passenger numbers, however, started to drop gradually and stood at 7,225 on Sunday.

Bus services have been halted since Thursday (April 29).

Before the Cabinet's decision, the country's civil aviation regulator—Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal—had decided to introduce a fixed quo-

ta system for airlines to restrict the number of flights.

"The whole country is going into lockdown and the two-week circuit-breaker is a wise decision," Birendra Bahadur Basnet, managing director of Buddha Air told the Post. "We will regret it if we don't act now."

On April 29, Nepal enforced two-week prohibitory orders in Kathmandu Valley as the three districts of the Valley—Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur—are the most affected ones by the pandemic in terms of the number of daily cases.

The three Valley districts were reporting more than half of the total new infections across the country.

Many districts have been following suit, and more than a third of the districts have prohibitory orders in place now.

Nepal has also made quarantine mandatory for everyone arriving in the country.

Foreigners flying into the Kathmandu Valley are subject to a mandatory 10-day quarantine in hotels upon arrival. A negative polymerase chain reaction test result obtained within 72 hours

prior to departure from the country of origin is required for entry into Nepal.

Earlier in March, Nepal had enforced new travel rules removing the quarantine requirement for foreign tourists in a bid to boost arrivals during the spring season, which is by far the most popular time that foreigners climb the 8,848.86-metre tall Mt Everest.

According to an official at the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, it has already become too late to discontinue the air bubble arrangements with India because of the "extraordinarily high" Covid-19 cases.

According to Reuters, India on Sunday reported 392,488 new cases and a record 3,689 deaths, pushing the total cases to 19.56 million and the death toll to 215,542. India had reported a record 401,993 new coronavirus cases on Saturday.

In December last year, Nepal and India entered into an air bubble agreement, a dedicated flight service between the two countries following strict health and safety protocols set by the au-

thorities of the respective countries.

As per the agreement, currently, only Air India and Nepal Airlines are permitted to operate flights between Delhi and Kathmandu.

Nepali authorities have been struggling to contain the rapid rise of virus cases as experts fear that tens of thousands of people may have caught the more infectious mutant strains emerging out of Nepal's immediate neighbour, India.

Nepal on Sunday reported the highest-single day surge of coronavirus cases since the beginning of the pandemic in January last year. The country recorded 7,137 new cases in polymerase chain reaction tests and 74 in antigen tests. With 27 new fatalities from Covid-19-related complications, the death toll has reached 3,325.

The countrywide infection tally has reached 336,030, with the number of active cases at 48,711. The highest number of daily cases prior to Sunday was recorded on October 21 last year when the country reported 5,743 Covid-19 infections on a single day.

Banerjee had said.

The results in Bengal have come as a shock for the BJP, which had invested its best efforts this time to bring the state under its control.

In a short, angry Facebook post, party MP Babul Supriyo -- who contested from Kolkata -- said Bengal's voters have made a "historic mistake".

## Akhil Gogoi first in Assam to win election from jail

SIBSAGAR (ASSAM), MAY 3 (PTI):

Jailed anti-CAA activist Akhil Gogoi became the first Assamese to win an election without hitting the campaign trail, as he clinched the Sibsagar constituency, defeating his nearest rival Surabhi Rajkonwari of the BJP by a decisive 11,875 votes.

The founder of the newly floated Rajior Dal -- arrested in December 2019 over sedition charges -- bagged 57,219 votes as an Independent, garnering support from 46.06 per cent of the electorate.

The Congress, which had initially backed the Rajior Dal chief, ended up giving ticket to Subhramitra Gogoi, who came third in the contest.

The RTI activist, in an attempt to reach out to the people of the state, wrote several open letters from jail, highlighting problems that need to be addressed.

What might have struck a chord with the electorate was his 85-year-old mother's efforts to campaign for his imprisoned son along the narrow lanes of Sibsagar, despite the frailties of old age.

Moved by Priyada Gogoi's determination, renowned social activists Medha Patkar and Sandeep Pandey flew down to the Upper Assam town and joined the octogenarian in her campaigns.

Hundreds of youth volunteers and members of the Rajior Dal also took to door-to-door electioneering to woo voters ahead of the three-phase polls.

Notwithstanding the entire election machinery of the BJP, which put all its weight behind Rajkonwar as top leaders such as Union Minister Smriti Zubin Irani addressed the people of the constituency, Gogoi, a greenhorn, emerged victorious with absolutely no cash in hand and Rs 60,497 in deposits.

A graduate from Cotton College in Guwahati, the 46-year-old Rajior Dal chief is not new to electoral politics. He had served as general secretary of the Cotton College

Students' Union in 1995-96.

Over the years, the anti-corruption activist, who also helms the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), had been at the forefront of numerous agitations.

He had fought for the land rights of indigenous people, and led a statewide movement against construction of big dams in the ecologically sensitive regions.

Dozens of cases have been slapped on him by successive state governments.

The National Inves-

tigation Agency (NIA) arrested him in 2019 for his alleged involvement in the violent anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests across the state.

Political analyst Atiqur Rahman Barbhuiya said Gogoi will go down in history as the only political prisoner to have set such a precedent after former union minister George Fernandes, who won the 1977 Lok Sabha election by over three lakh votes from a jail in Bihar's Muzaffarpur.

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**KOLKATA OFFICE:**  
Irrahad Ali/Imteyaz, Synapse, 6, Modan Street, Marine - 2, 2nd floor, Kolkata - 700072, Ph. 033-22124348/ fax 033-22124377/ mob. +91-9830547774/ +91-983083997, E-mail: contact.synapse@gmail.com/irrahad.ali123@gmail.com

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## "Spine is Straight": Mamata Banerjee on Bengal voters after poll victory

KOLKATA, 03 MAY

**[NDTV]:** Bengal's soon-to-be three-time Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who pulled off a stupendous victory yesterday in face of an all-out fight by the BJP, today declared that the party, which rules at the Centre, is "not shahenshah" (emperor) and the people of Bengal have put them in their place.

"The people have stopped the ruination... the spine is straight," added the Chief Minister, who ahead of the election had repeatedly told people that the BJP will use money power to buy their votes. "Take their money but vote as you please," she had declared in rally after rally.

Yesterday, the 63-year-old -- who had

to battle the entire might of the BJP complete with huge funds and a battery of star campaigners -- had termed her hard-fought victory a "victory of democracy".

"Bengal has saved India. This is a victory of democracy. They said they would win 200-plus seats but they have been decimated. Bengal has decimated BJP's ego," Mamata



## Sri Lanka clinches series with 2nd test win over Bangladesh

**PALLEKELE, SRI LANKA (AP):** Praveen Jayawickrama took a match haul of 11 wickets on debut to help Sri Lanka clinch a series win over Bangladesh on Monday with a 209-run victory in the second test.

Sri Lanka needed five wickets for victory on the final day and Jayawickrama accounted for three of them to finish with combined figures of 11-178.

It was the 10th-best return by a test bowler on debut and the best by a Sri Lankan, improving on AkilaDananjaya's 8-44 against Bangladesh three years ago. He was voted player of the match.

After trapping Liton Das for 17 in his second over of the morning with an arm ball, the 22-year-old left-arm spinner claimed the last two Bangladeshi wickets in the space of three deliveries to finish with 5-85 in the second innings to back up his first-innings effort of 6-92.

Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne, who was voted player of the series after scoring 428 runs including a double-century, century and a half-century in three innings, described the performance of inexperienced spinners Jayawickrama and Ramesh Mendis as "fantastic."

"At a time when we didn't have anyone experienced, they came and bowled like experienced players, and performed their roles as they should," he said. "Praveen did his job perfectly well. He played like a bowler who had more than his 10 first-class matches.

"It's a great sign for the future of our test cricket. The seniors just gave them confidence. Some players can panic at times when they come into the test arena (but) Praveen absorbed pressure really well."

Bangladesh lost its last three wickets within eight balls with the total

on 227.

Off-spinner Ramesh Mendis finished with four wickets, complementing the orthodox spin of Jayawickrama, who flighted the ball, found drift and lot of assistance from a crumbling wicket.

The two front-line spinners shared the bulk of the bowling, sending down 60 overs in the second innings and claiming nine wickets between them.

Jayawickrama said the test call up came as a surprise.

"It was childhood dream to play for Sri Lanka one day. Playing the test match was a dream come true and to get 11 wickets in the game is simply unbelievable," he said. "There was a bit of pressure leading into the game but there was lot of support from the skipper and the senior players."

Bangladesh's batters struggled, with nobody scoring a half-century. Mushfiquur Rahim top scored with 40.

Bangladesh had been bowled out for 251 in its first innings in reply to Sri Lanka's 493-7. Despite a first-innings lead of 242, Sri Lanka did not enforce the follow-on, instead batting again and declaring on 194-9 to set Bangladesh a target of 437.

It was Sri Lanka's first test win in more than a year, ending a run of eight tests without a victory. The first test in this series had ended a draw.

Bangladesh skipper Mominul Haque said the outcome of the toss proved crucial.

"If we had batted first, it would have been a different story. Maybe they would have been in our position, and us in theirs," he said. "But having said that, we should have scored more than the 251 we managed in the first innings. If we could have batted for three or four sessions, things would have been different."

## Antetokounmpo scores 49 points as Bucks beat Nets 117-114

**MILWAUKEE (AP):** Giannis Antetokounmpo played how he wants to play, and it was enough to overcome a terrific effort by Kevin Durant.

Antetokounmpo scored 49 points and Khris Middleton had 26 points and 11 rebounds, leading the Milwaukee Bucks to a 117-114 victory over Durant and the Nets on Sunday.

Antetokounmpo also had eight rebounds, four assists and three blocked shots. The two-time reigning NBA MVP went 21 for 36 from the field, including a 4-for-8 performance from 3-point range.

"I've been working on a jump shot my whole life," Antetokounmpo said. "I know eventually one day it's all going to click.

"Tonight that picture I created, that's who I want to be moving forward. It doesn't matter if I score 49 points. I don't care about that. What I care about is how I slowed down, how I was able to find my teammates. How if I missed one, missed a second one, missed a third one and still be able to come down and shoot another one. This is what I believe I can be."

The Bucks (40-24)

won for the third time in four games to pull within 2 1/2 games of the Nets (43-22) in the three-way battle for the top spot in the Eastern Conference. Philadelphia is on top at 42-21 heading into its matchup with San Antonio on Sunday night.

Milwaukee hosts Brooklyn again on Tuesday night.

"Every day you wake up is about your craft," Durant said. "We've just got to stay locked in mentally to what we're trying to do as a group."

Durant had 42 points and 10 rebounds for the Nets, but he missed a difficult fadeaway 3-pointer at the buzzer. Kyrie Irving scored 20 points, and Landry Shamet finished with 17.

Durant was 7 of 13 from 3-point range and 16 of 33 overall while playing a game-high 40 minutes.

"You've got a guy who is pretty much the same size as Giannis, with unlimited range," Middleton said. "KD is a guy who will just pull up in your face like you're not there."

Antetokounmpo finished three points shy of his career high, set against Philadelphia in March 2019.

# Man United fans storm stadium, force game to be called off

**MANCHESTER, ENGLAND (AP):** Anti-ownership protests by Manchester United fans forced the postponement of a Premier League game on Sunday against Liverpool after the stadium was stormed and thousands more supporters blocked access into Old Trafford as they demanded the Glazer family sell the club.

The unprecedented cancelation of a game in the world's richest soccer league due to fan protests is the culmination of long-running anger against the American owners that began with a 2005 leveraged takeover that loaded debt onto the club. But the wrath of supporters has boiled over in the two weeks since the New York Stock Exchange listed club was part of the failed European Super League break-away that collapsed amid a groundswell of condemnation.

Supporters gaining access to the pitch — before the two teams even traveled to Old Trafford — was even more startling given the strict coronavirus measures in place around the stadium that keep games closed to any spectators. One of the flares set off by fans was launched into the stands where the Sky Sports television team was already broadcasting more than two hours ahead of the scheduled kickoff.

Although the protest had been announced in advance, the stadium forecourt on Sir Matt Busby Way was still able to be accessed by thousands of fans — many chanting "We want Glazers out" as flares were set



off.

The crowd was only dispersed after baton-wielding police and officers on horseback charged fans as clashes erupted under a shower of flying glass bottles about 20 minutes before the game was due to have started. Two police officers were injured and one required emergency treatment for a "significant slash wound to his face" after being attacked with a bottle, the Manchester force said.

United said the game was postponed "due to safety and security considerations around the protest" after discussions with police, authorities and the league.

"Our fans are passionate about Manchester United, and we completely acknowledge the right to free expression and peaceful protest," United said in a statement. "However, we regret the disruption to the team and actions which

put other fans, staff, and the police in danger. We thank the police for their support and will assist them in any subsequent investigations."

The Premier League, which has yet to announce a new date for the match, expressed concern about the disorder. Protesters had also gathered outside the United team hotel in central Manchester.

"The security and safety of everyone at Old Trafford remains of paramount importance," the Premier League said in a statement. "We understand and respect the strength of feeling but condemn all acts of violence, criminal damage and trespass, especially given the associated COVID-19 breaches. Fans have many channels by which to make their views known, but the actions of a minority seen today have no justification.

"We sympathize with the police and stewards

who had to deal with a dangerous situation that should have no place in football."

Supporters wore green-and-gold scarves and also set off flares in the colors of the club's 1878 formation. It was a club without any debt until the Glazers arrived and the latest half-year accounts showed it had soared 16% year-on-year to 455.5 million pounds (around \$630 million). Payments on interest, debt and dividends to the Glazers have cost United more than 1 billion pounds.

The Glazers, who also own the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers, have declined to engage with fans or media since buying United in 2005.

Former Manchester United defender Gary Neville, who was inside Old Trafford preparing to commentate on the game for Sky Sports, called on the Glazers to put the club up for sale.

"There's huge discontent, not just across Manchester United fans, but I think for football fans up and down the country and I think they are just saying enough is enough," Neville said. "The Glazer family have been resilient and stubborn for many, many years. I think they are struggling to meet the financial demands that this club needs and have done for some time.

"This stadium, if you go behind the scenes, is rusty and rotting. The training ground is probably not even in the top five in this country."

Although co-owner Joel Glazer pledged on the club website two weeks ago that he was "committed to rebuilding trust with our fans," there is no sign of that happening yet.

"They have never met the fans once," 33-year-old fan Jack Evans said. "It's time for them to go."

United and Liverpool were among six Premier League clubs that tried to form an exclusive European Super League along with three clubs each from Spain and Italy. Widespread opposition quickly ended the project, with all six English teams backing out within 48 hours of the announcement.

The "Big Six" clubs have been in damage control since, offering various forms of apologies and statements of regret, while fans long frustrated with billionaire owners have called for wholesale changes.

"This could be an important moment to change football for the better," Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham said. "We should all condemn violence of any kind and keep the focus on the behavior of those at the top of the game."

United fans' protests against the Glazers have been sporadic as United became the record 20-time champions of England. While they erupted in 2010, the dissent lessened as Alex Ferguson delivered more trophies.

But the last Premier League title was won as he retired in 2013 and since then neighbor Manchester City has become the dominant force in England — funded by an owner in Sheikh Mansour who is concerned about prestige and image for Abu Dhabi rather than draining cash from the club.

If United had lost the planned game against Liverpool, City would have won the Premier League title for the third time in four seasons.

## Lowry leads depleted Raptors past Lakers; LeBron exits early

**LOS ANGELES (AP):** **THE LOS ANGELES LAKERS WERE DEALT ANOTHER DISAPPOINTING LOSS, THIS TIME BY THE SHORT-HANDED TORONTO RAPTORS. BUT SEEING LEBRON JAMES HEAD** TO the locker room early served as a reminder it could have been much worse.

James left with 6:42 to play as the Raptors defeated the Lakers 121-114 on Sunday night. Los Angeles coach Frank Vogel said it was a precautionary move to pull James in his second game back after missing 20 because of a sprained right ankle.

James said he would wait to see how his ankle felt before deciding if he could play against Denver on Monday, but acknowledged it has yet to hold up for an entire game.

"The first half, it feels really good. Obviously warming up for the game, everything is going well," said James, who had 19 points, seven rebounds and six assists. "Last two games at halftime, you know, after the break, it's kind of gotten a little sore on me — a little tight.

"And obviously Coach decided not to put me back in towards the end because of that, so that's pretty much it."

Kyle Lowry had 37 points and 11 assists,

Pascal Siakam had 39 points and 13 rebounds and Toronto ended a three-game losing streak despite not having Fred VanVleet, OG Anunoby, Chris Boucher or Gary Trent Jr. available because of injuries or to rest after losing at Utah on Saturday.

DeAndre' Bembry had 14 points off the bench and the Raptors led by as many as 21 to hand the defending NBA champion Lakers another baffling defeat.

The Raptors held off a late charge after Kyle Kuzma hit a 3 with 58.8 seconds to play to cut their lead to six before Bembry and Siakam hit free throws to seal it.

Siakim said being able to close out the win after failing to do so in other games recently represented a positive step.

"I think we've got to take care of the ball. Obviously, that's the most important (thing in the fourth quarter)," Siakam said. "Staying solid, continuing to follow the game plan on defense, and I think that's all we can do. Obviously, we know what's happening and we talk amongst each other and then Coach (Nick Nurse) puts an emphasis on it too, so we've got to go out there and execute it."

Despite seeing his



team lose for the sixth time in seven games, James was more concerned with making sure the Lakers are at full strength for the playoffs. Although Anthony Davis and James were available, starting guard Dennis Schroder did not play after being placed in the league's health and safety protocols.

"I think our team is predicated on health," James said. "That is the No. 1 thing for our ball-club. We're a team that we need to be healthy and we need to be full, and if it's not one thing, it's the other. We show up today and our starting point guard is not in the lineup, so it's like another blow for us."

Kuzma had 24 points for Los Angeles, Davis

chipped in with 12 and

Andre Drummond had 19 points and 11 rebounds. After trailing by as many as 12 points in the first quarter, the Raptors led 72-59 at the half after blitzing the Lakers for 40 points in the second. A rampaging Lowry had 13, including seven points in the final 70 seconds, and Bembry chipped in with 11.

The Lakers got back within 10 points early in the fourth quarter, but Lowry responded with a personal 8-2 run.

Lowry was 8 for 13 from 3-point range and 12 for 20 overall. Although he was linked to the Lakers at the trade deadline, Lowry said it didn't factor into his dominant performance.

"There's no extra

motivation," Lowry said. "I didn't care about anything other than winning this game."

**SOFT TOUCH**

Against the length of Davis and Drummond, Siakam had to rely on his jumper to create offense. He was 4 for 8 from 3-point range and just as effective with his floater in the lane.

"I've always felt like taking that," Siakam said. "I'm just trying to get to the spot that I feel like it's comfortable."

**WORK TO DO**

Davis was more blunt when assessing the Lakers' recent struggles.

"This is the lowest we've been in a while, at least in the past two years," he said. "But the only way is up and we really can't get any lower

than this, so we've just got to set a course, stay together."

**TIP-INS**

Raptors: Freddie Gillespie had 11 points and seven rebounds. ... Siakam had 17 points in the first quarter. ... Toronto has used 30 different starting lineups in 65 games.

Lakers: While Kuzma was 8 for 16 from 3-point range, the rest of the Lakers were 5 for 13. ... It is Schroder's second stint in the protocols. He missed four games in February after being exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19.

**UP NEXT**

Raptors: At the Clippers on Tuesday.

Lakers: Host Denver on Monday.



# Pandemic leaves Kosovo without printed daily newspapers

**PRISTINA, Kosovo (AP):** Ibrahim Gashi sold daily newspapers in downtown Pristina for 35 years, until they didn't come anymore.

Azem Qerkini, an accountant and newspaper collector, misses the time when he went to Skopje, the capital of neighboring North Macedonia, in search of a copy he needed.

Imer Mushkolaj, a journalist, dreams of once more drinking his morning coffee while flipping through the daily papers.

Until March last year Kosovo had five daily newspapers, though they all had small circulations. One of them, Koha, sold about 10,000 copies a day at times when the news was most interesting.

Since the start of the pandemic, there have been no more newspapers physically printed in Kosovo, only online versions. The pandemic was "the final straw, unfortunately turning Kosovo into the only country in Europe, maybe wider, without a daily paper," said Mushkolaj.

Agron Bajrami, editor-in-chief of Koha Ditore, would like to get back to printing. "Many, probably more older-generation people still would like to read the newspaper physically, to touch it as a paper," he says. "But at this moment, it's not possible economically."



Online newspapers are a different business model, however, that has tested Koha Ditore. The newspaper is facing an uphill struggle trying "to educate the people that they need to contribute by paying for the news that they get," Bajrami says.

It was the lockdown that brought an end to printing. For months, people were stuck at home, unable to go into the streets in search of news, and advertising accordingly reduced. People turned to smartphones and TVs.

Newspapers had to focus on training journalists for the online media.

"The technology has made many newspa-

pers, formerly traditional newspapers, try to behave as if they were broadcasting live," says Bajrami. He added: "It comes with a cost, a huge cost to professional standards."

Very often, online portals pay more attention to the speed of the news rather than its accuracy, according to Mushkolaj who heads the Print Media Council association.

People, especially older ones, find it harder to distinguish a real story from fake news, he said.

"Older generations are deprived of their primary source of information ... and entertainment," says Mushkolaj.

Qerkini, the collector,

believes that younger generations in Kosovo are not learning their young country's history well because of the lack of print newspapers.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, a decade after a brutal 1998-1999 war between separatist ethnic Albanian rebels and Serb forces. The war ended after a 78-day NATO air campaign that drove Serb troops out, and a peacekeeping force moved in. Most Western nations have recognized Kosovo's sovereignty, but not Serbia and its allies Russia and China.

"The book, the newspaper cannot be replaced by anything, be that a computer, the internet,

Facebook, Twitter or any technological program," said Qerkini.

"Kosovo has stopped writing its early history and unfortunately there is no longer a written history — at least for a year," adds Mushkolaj.

Without government support — which is unlikely to be forthcoming in these hard times — it is hard to see how the newspapers can start printing again.

As for Gashi, the newspaper seller, even though he hasn't had anything to sell for more than a year now, people are still coming to him to find out if he has any news — on when the printing presses might start rolling again.

## Russia lags behind others in its COVID-19 vaccination drive

**MOSCOW (AP):** While at the Park House shopping mall in northern Moscow, Vladimir Makarov saw it was offering the coronavirus vaccine to customers, so he asked how long it would take.

"It turned out it's simple here — 10 minutes," he said of his experience last month.

But Makarov, like many Muscovites, still decided to put off getting the Sputnik V shot.

Russia boasted last year of being first in the world to authorize a coronavirus vaccine, but it now finds itself lagging in getting its population immunized. That has cast doubt on whether authorities will reach their ambitious goal of vaccinating more than 30 million of country's 146 million people by mid-June and nearly 69 million by August.

The vaccine reluctance comes as shots are readily available in the capital to anyone 18 or older at more than 200 state and private clinics, shopping malls, food courts, hospitals — even a theater.

As of mid-April, over 1 million of Moscow's 12.7 million residents, or about 8%, have received at least one shot, even though the campaign began in December.

That percentage is similar for Russia as a whole. Through April 27, only 12.1 million people have gotten at least one shot and only 7.7 million, or 5%, have been fully vaccinated. That puts Russia far behind the U.S., where 43% have gotten at least one shot, and the European Union with nearly 27%.

Data analyst Alexander Dragan, who tracks vaccinations across Russia, said last week the country was giving shots to 200,000-205,000 people a day. In order to hit the mid-June target, it needs to be nearly double that.

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"We need to start vaccinating 370,000 people a day, like, beginning tomorrow," Dragan told The Associated Press.

Waiting lists for the shot remain long in places. In the Sverdlovsk region, the fifth most-populous in Russia, 178,000 people were on a wait list by mid-April, regional Deputy Health Minister Yekaterina Yutyaeva told AP.

On April 28, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there are enough vaccines available in Russia, adding that demand was the defining factor in the country's vaccination rate.

Another factor in Russians' reluctance over Sputnik V was the fact that it was rolled out even as large-scale testing to ensure its safety and efficacy was still ongoing. But a study published in February in the British medical journal The Lancet said the vaccine appeared safe and highly effective against COVID-19, according to a trial involving about 20,000 people in Russia.

A poll in February by Russia's top independent

pollster, the Levada Center, showed that only 30% of respondents were willing to get Sputnik V, one of three domestically produced vaccines available. The poll had a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

Dragan, the data analyst, says one possible explanation for the reluctance is the narrative from authorities that they have tamed the outbreak, even if that assessment might be premature.

With most virus restrictions lifted and government officials praising the Kremlin's pandemic response, few have motivation to get the shot, he said, citing an attitude of, "If the outbreak is over, why would I get vaccinated?"

Vasily Vlassov, a public health expert at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, echoed Dragan's sentiment and also pointed to inconsistent signals from officials and media.

"Russians in 2020 were bombarded with contradictory messages — first about (the coronavirus) not being dangerous and being just a cold, then that it was a deadly infection," he told AP. "Then they were banned from leaving their homes."

Another narrative, he said, was that foreign vaccines were dangerous but Russian-produced ones were not. State TV reported adverse reactions linked to Western vaccines while celebrating Sputnik V's international success.

A proper media campaign promoting vaccinations didn't begin on state TV until late March, observers and news reports note. Videos on the Channel 1 national network featured celebrities and other public figures talking about their experience but didn't show them getting injected. President Vladimir Putin said he received the shot about the same time, but not on camera.

## Northern Ireland marks centenary in low key fashion

**LONDON (AP):** Queen Elizabeth II stressed the need for "reconciliation, equality and mutual understanding" as she sent her "warmest best wishes" to the people of Northern Ireland on Monday to mark what is widely considered to be its centenary.

Northern Ireland was created on May 3, 1921, when the Government of Ireland Act came into effect and partitioned the island of Ireland into two separate entities. Northern Ireland became part of the U.K. alongside England, Scotland and Wales.

Much like the day that Northern Ireland was founded 100 years ago, there will be no huge celebrations or grand ceremonies given the sharply differing views on its creation and subsequent history. Restrictions related

to the coronavirus pandemic have also led to commemorations this year being scaled back.

Since its creation, Northern Ireland society has been split between those who want to remain in the U.K. and those who wish to see Northern Ireland become part of the Republic of Ireland. For decades, that fissure fueled sectarian violence. The so-called Troubles resulted in around 3,500 deaths.

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 formalized power-sharing arrangements between unionists and nationalists. It's not always been a smooth process politically with the two sides often unable to reach agreement on how to govern. There have also been sporadic outbreaks of violence.

"This anniversary reminds us of our complex

history, and provides an opportunity to reflect on our togetherness and our diversity," the queen said in a statement.

"It is clear that reconciliation, equality and mutual understanding cannot be taken for granted, and will require sustained fortitude and commitment," she added.

The queen also referred to "treasured" memories she shared in Northern Ireland with her late husband, Prince Philip, who died last month at the age of 99.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson also marked the date, describing it as a "very significant" anniversary and stressed the importance of reflecting on the "complex history" of the past 100 years.

"People from all parts of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, the

United Kingdom and across the globe, will approach this anniversary in different ways, with differing perspectives," he said.

Though there will not be any major celebrations on Monday, there are plans to mark the centenary this year, including tree-planting projects.

Every school will be presented with a native tree to plant in their grounds, while an extensive young people's program will explore what the future will look like in the next 100 years.

"Across generations, the people of Northern Ireland are choosing to build an inclusive, prosperous, and hopeful society, strengthened by the gains of the peace process," the queen said.

"May this be our guiding thread in the coming years."

## Israeli settlers attack Palestinian village after shooting

**JERUSALEM (AP):** Israeli settlers attacked a Palestinian village in the occupied West Bank overnight, setting brush fires and hurling stones, Palestinian officials and an Israeli rights group said Monday.

It appeared to be a revenge attack after three Israelis were wounded in a drive-by shooting at a nearby traffic junction on Sunday.

The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem said dozens of settlers attacked the village of Jaloud. It circulated videos showing the fires,

with people shouting in the background. Israeli security forces arrested 11 Palestinians and four people were wounded by rubber bullets, B'Tselem said.

Ghassan Daghlis, a Palestinian Authority official who monitors settlement activity in the northern West Bank, provided a similar account, saying the villagers had come out to defend the village after the settlers attacked.

The Israeli military said Israeli civilians and Palestinians hurled rocks at each other out-

side the village and that "a number of locations were ignited." It did not provide details on what triggered the violence. It said around 10 people were detained, but did not identify them.

Radical Israeli settlers have been known to carry out so-called "price tag" attacks on Palestinian communities in response to violence or perceived Israeli plans to restrict settlement activity.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 war, and the Palestinians want it to form the main

part of their future state. Nearly 500,000 Israeli settlers live in more than 100 settlements scattered across the West Bank, which is home to some 2.5 million Palestinians.

The Palestinians view the settlements as illegal and an obstacle to peace, a position with wide international support.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said there would be a harsh response to Sunday's shooting. "We will not allow terrorism to raise its head and we will strike our enemies with force," he said Sunday.

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PIONEER IN THE NEWS





**WEEKEND VIBES!** The Designated Survivor actress, Maggie Q is all smiles as she arrives for dinner at Craig's restaurant in West Hollywood.

## Dilip Kumar discharged from hospital post routine check-up

**MUMBAI, MAY 3 (PTI):** Legendary actor Dilip Kumar has been discharged from a hospital here two days after he was admitted for a regular health check-up, his wife and veteran actor Saira Banu said. The 98-year-old actor was admitted to the suburban Khar-based Hinduja Hospital on Friday afternoon.

"We just came home (from the hospital). Everything is fine. Keep sahab (Kumar) in your prayers," Banu told PTI on Sunday afternoon.

Earlier in the day, Banu said all the tests have been conducted by the team of doctors and the actor is doing fine.

"Sahab is fine. He will be discharged today. We need your prayers," Banu had said.

The screen icon's family friend Faisal Farooqui had said that Kumar was admitted to the hospital for a regular health check-up.

"He was admitted for a routine check-up. There's no (need to) panic or (a) concerning issue. These are routine tests that are required to be done from time to time because



of his age. He is doing fine," Farooqui told PTI.

Last year, the screen icon lost his two younger brothers -- Aslam Khan (88) and Ehsan Khan (90) -- due to COVID-19.

Kumar, who made his debut with "Jwar Bhata" in 1944, has appeared in several iconic films in his career spanning over five decades, including "Kohinoor", "Mughal-e-Azam", "Devdas", "Naya Daur", "Ram Aur Shyam", among others.

He was last seen on the big screen in 1998's "Qila".

# Italian rapper accuses state TV of attempted censorship

**MILAN (AP):** Italian rapper Fedez received a wave of public support Sunday after going public with attempts by RAI state television to censor his planned remarks on homophobia during an annual Worker's Day concert.

Fedez prevailed and made the statement as planned during the Saturday evening concert, saying it was the first time he had ever been asked to submit his remarks ahead of time.

He went on to read homophobic statements by members of Italy's right-wing League party. The rapper's remarks were made in support of legislation that seeks to punish discrimination and hate crimes against gays and transgender people, but which is stalled in parliament by right-wing opposition.

After RAI denied putting pressure on the rapper, Fedez released a recording of a phone call with a RAI executive and co-workers during which he was told that his remarks would be "inappropriate" and discouraging him from using the first and last names of the politicians he was citing.

The head of state-run RAI has promised to investigate.

Among those support-

ing Fedez were two former premiers, Enrico Letta, now head of the Democratic Party, and Giuseppe Conte, who has been tapped as head of the 5-Star Movement. Letta called on RAI to apologized to the rapper.

Gay rights groups mostly welcomed Fedez' words. The president of Arcigay, Gabriele Piazzoni, said he "gave voice to millions of us," while the spokesman of Partito Gay (Gay Party), Fabrizio Marrazzo, said the phone call with the RAI management was "disconcerting" and called on RAI's oversight board to intervene.

The president of Equality Italia, Aurelio Mancuso, was more cautious, warning that polarization could further stall the proposed law, "which must be approved in the Senate, not on Fedez' Instagram page."

League leader Matteo Salvini, meanwhile, went on an offensive, reiterating his reasons for opposing the legislation in television appearances and social media posts and offering to debate the issue on TV with Fedez.

Still, Salvini distanced himself from the remarks by the League members, calling them "disgusting."

The so-called Zan Law,



named for a Democratic Party lawmaker and gay rights activist Alessandro Zan, would add women along with people who are gay, transgender or have disabilities to the classes of those already protected

under a law banning discrimination and punishing hate crimes.

Right-wing politicians object to language they claim would make it a crime to publicly oppose gay marriage or adoptions by gay people.

## Prince Harry, Jennifer Lopez make voices heard at Vax Live

**INGLEWOOD, CALIF. (AP):** President Joe Biden spoke about the COVID-19 vaccination being safe, Prince Harry urged for the vaccine distribution everywhere and Jennifer Lopez embraced her fully-vaccinated mother on stage during one of the largest concert gatherings in Southern California since the pandemic rocked the world more than a year ago.

Celebrities and political leaders gathered Sunday night to talk about the importance of vaccine equity at Global Citizen's "Vax Live: The Concert to Reunite the World" at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California. The taped fundraising event will air May 8 on ABC, ABC News Live, CBS, YouTube and iHeartMedia broadcast radio stations.

The concert included performances by Lopez, Eddie Vedder, Foo Fighters, J Balvin and H.E.R.

Ben Affleck, Chrissy Teigen, Jimmy Kimmel, Sean Penn and David Letterman appeared as special guest speakers.

Everyone in the audience was fully vaccinated. Media and production staff needed to show a negative COVID test before entering the stadium.

"The vaccines are safe.



I promise you. They work," said Biden, who was accompanied in a video message with first lady Jill Biden. Both appeared as part of the "We Can Do This" initiative to increase confidence in COVID-19 vaccines.

"We're working with leaders around the world to share more vaccines and boost production to make sure every country has the vaccines they need," the president continued. "If we get this done, we won't have to miss another moment."

The event was part of a growing chorus seeking wider, more equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Global Citizen said \$53.8 million in philanthropic and corporate commitments helped procure nearly 10.3 million doses, exceeding the goal for the Vax Live campaign.

Prince Harry said providing vaccines across the globe is imperative, particularly those in the poorest countries. He said that he is standing solidarity with India, who is experiencing a "devastating" second wave of the virus.

"The vaccine must be distributed to everyone everywhere," the Duke of Sussex said. He along with his wife Meghan are leading an

effort to raise money for the vaccine-sharing program COVAX, which hopes to produce \$19 billion to pay for the vaccines for medical workers.

"We cannot rest or truly recover until there is fair distribution to every corner of the world," he said. "The virus does not respect borders and access to the vaccine cannot be determined by geography."

The event also highlighted first responders and health care workers efforts during the pandemic. Selena Gomez, the show's host, called essential and front-line workers "reliable" and "brave."

### ARIES:

Not every love story is meant to culminate into a happily-ever-after. To love fully means to risk having your heart broken, over and over. Should that keep you from embracing the many possibilities before you? Should that keep you diving headfirst into the ocean of love? Something tells us you're in the mood to take all kinds of risk without being attached to a specific outcome.

### TAURUS:

The fact that there's a lot going on in the collective is not news to you, Taurus. You cope with the uncertainty by holding onto all things familiar and staying close to your soul family. This may not hold true for your inner circle, though. Those around you may feel the overwhelming urge to retreat into their burrow and allow the sound of silence to provide them with the comfort they need at a time like this. Instead of trying to make sense of their behaviour, accept and allow. This is the only way to get through the storm.

### GEMINI:

You've been to hell and back, Gemini. You've been to hell and back. So go into your sacred space and take a breather. You deserve some time out from the madness just like everybody else. Don't let what's going on in the collective distract you from your soul mission, though. You have committed to completing certain tasks for a reason. Keep showing up for what you love.

### CANCER:

It's easy to glorify change or talk about how it sets the stage for a better world. But what happens when we're faced with situations that require us to let go of the old? Do we accept what's coming our way with open arms or continue to push against the flow? Today, you're being asked to observe your resistance closely, to loosen the grip wherever necessary, and express your gratitude for the glorious lessons learned. As you do, remember the mantra, 'The best is yet to come'.

### Leo:

The cards are bringing your attention to the 'sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll' act. Who and what are you escaping from, Leo? How is numbing your pain doing you any good? Word for the wise: face your demons head on, beautiful. Work with a healer or a therapist if need be. Remember, there are healthier ways to cope with the turbulence you are dealing with at this moment.

### VIRGO:

Virgo, have you considered that you're not exhausted because you're doing too much, but because you're doing so little of what brings you joy? Today, the cards are urging you to change the game a little. To check in with yourself before you put on your superhero cape or say 'yes' to any projects that do not sit right with you. Some of you could be struggling with the unrealistic expectations of your family (or soul family) too. In such a case, it's best to communicate your boundaries in a firm, but gentle manner.

### LIBRA:

You tried your best, but it wasn't enough. It simply wasn't enough, Libra. Open your eyes to what the signs are revealing to you at this moment. It may be time to let this relationship go—for now—and redirect your attention towards the most important person in your life. If you've been pouring and pouring unconditionally from your cup and tending to the needs of those around you, set some time aside for meditation, journaling, and self-care rituals.

### SCORPIO:

When do you feel most in sync with the cosmic currents, Scorpio? The cards are bringing your attention to that state of flow—a time you feel most in alignment with the divine plan written in the stars for you. Allow things to flow into your existence seamlessly. Allow your desires to bear fruit as you let go of your false sense of control. What is meant to be yours will always be yours. Besides, you are so loved and so supported by the cosmos.

### SAGITTARIUS:

On most occasions, it's easier to give than to receive. Having the upper hand can be oh-so-gratifying to the ego. Being the one who has to ask for or accept favours puts us in a compromising position, Sagittarius. Give yourself the permission to reach out for support nonetheless. Remember, they can't really do anything for you and you can't really do anything for them given that everything we possess is ultimately granted to us

by Source.

### CAPRICORN:

It's all about love, compassion and empathy in your world. You are in a space of fullness and are being guided to pour into the cups of others. Blessed are those who can serve unconditionally, Capricorn! But, that doesn't mean everything is picture-perfect in your world. You are dealing with your own share of ups and downs too. Being in a state of flow is allowing you to trust what the Universe is sending your way without indulging in that old game of tug-of-war.

### AQUARIUS:

We all have our own ways of dealing with the turbulence. While some of us reach out for support, others carefully retreat into their burrow. Chances are, you are craving the comfort of your sacred space right now. So, honour the messages you are receiving from your subconscious as you unplug from the outside world. What the cards want you to remember: this too shall pass!

### PISCES:

It's time to call quits on that old game called tug-of-war. It's time to let go of that false sense of control. The cards are urging you to remain in that state of flow and trust what the Universe is sending towards you. In the words of Ramana Maharishi, "Let come what comes. Let go what goes. See what remains." Surrendering is a beautiful practice, Pisces, one that promises to change the course of your life.