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# Summit TIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## 209 new cases and two more Covid deaths in Sikkim

### SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 18 MAY:

Sikkim recorded 209 fresh cases of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours taking the state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 11,689. There are now 3,050 active cases of coronavirus in Sikkim, only 20 of whom are in ICU facilities at STNM Hospital and CRH-Tadong.

Also over the same 24 hour period, two more Covid-positive people succumbed to the virus taking the state's COVID-19 death toll to 212. While one COVID death was reported from CRH-Tadong, one was reported from District Hospital, Gyalshing.

The 209 samples which returned positive for COVID-19 were from the testing



of 580 samples in the State on Monday - 143 in RT-PCR testing of 402 samples and 66 more tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 172 samples.

Out of these 209 new cases, 165 were reported from East District, 32 from West District, 11 from South District and one

from North District.

On the other hand, 94 more formerly Covid-positive people were discharged from home isolation

after completing their isolation period to further improve the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 to 8,217.

## Importance of self-acceptance by queer people in Sikkim underlined at Intl Day Against Homophobia meet



### SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 18 MAY:

Rainbow Hills Welfare Association [RHWA] observed International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia [IDAHOBIT] through a virtual meeting on Monday evening, a press release informs.

RHWA is an organization working for the welfare of LGBTQIAP+ people in the Sikkim-Darjeeling Himalayan region. The main purpose of observing IDAHOBIT is to raise awareness

about violence, discrimination and repression of LGBTQIAP+ communities worldwide, which in turn provides an opportunity to take action and engage in dialogue with the media, policymakers, public opinion, and wider civil society, the release explains.

Homophobia or queer phobia refers to the violence, oppression and discrimination faced by homosexual and/or gender non-conforming (including transgender) people across the world.

IDAHOBIT was initially conceived in 2004 as International Day Against Homophobia and 17 May was specifically chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization's 1990 decision to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. Transphobia was added to the name of the campaign in 2009, and Biphobia in 2015.

As of 2019, 69 countries still criminalize same-sex relationships, and in 26 countries, **turn to pg02**

## Former IMA president dies of COVID-19

NEW DELHI, MAY 18 (PTI):

Padma Shri awardee and eminent cardiologist Dr K K Aggarwal, who gained more prominence in recent months by posting informative videos about COVID-19 on social media, has died of the same disease, a statement posted on his Twitter handle said.

Aggarwal, 62, who was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here and was on ventilator support since last week, died at 11.30 pm on Monday after a lengthy battle with COVID-19, according to the statement.

The former Indian Medical Association (IMA) president is survived by wife Dr Veena Aggarwal, son Nilesh and daughter Naina.

Aggarwal was one of the first frontline workers to take the first dose of the anti-COVID vaccine in January, which he revealed during a live video broadcast from his car. The broadcast, however, was the subject of gossip because it was interrupted by his wife's call and their personal conversation was heard by the general public.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal described his death as a "setback for the whole nation". "Passing away of Dr. KK Aggarwal is a setback for the whole nation. He acted all his life for the health rights of common people especially poor, deprived and marginalized. A great human being. RIP! (sic)," he wrote on Twitter.

A statement posted in the early hours of Tuesday on Aggarwal's Twitter handle said he wanted his life to be celebrated and not mourned.

## GJM CONDEMNS CBI ACTION IN KOLKATA

### Unfortunate that instead of managing the pandemic, BJP Govt is 'managing' opposition parties: Bimal Gurung

SMRITA KHAWAS

DARJEELING, 18 MAY:

Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha [GJMM] today condemned the CBI action in Kolkata where it arrested Ministers of the newly formed State Government in connection with the Narada case.

Addressing a press conference here today, Bimal Gurung, who heads his own faction of the GJM, argued that the BJP Government at the Centre was obviously using the CBI to try and extract revenge for its humiliating defeat in the Assembly elections in the hands of TMC recently.

"When any Government fails to respect people's mandate and tries to sabotage peaceful growth, it is a threat to the country's democracy,"



Mr Gurung lashed out.

He added, "The role of CBI is questionable in the Narada Case as the two main accused, Mukul Roy and Suvendu Adhikari, are roaming free under the protection

of BJP but leaders who are with TMC are being targeted and arrested. My question is, does this mean any accused person who joins BJP earns immunity?"

BJP at the Centre must understand and accept that the people of Bengal have rejected them, he stressed.

He also condemned the BJP for ignoring the pandemic and busying itself instead with settling scores and going after parties which have defeated its divisive politics.

On a parting note, he also had advise for the CBI. He said: "To the CBI, my humble request is that they work within the framework of the Constitution of India and stop working like a BJP party functionary."

## CBSE Class 10 results delayed, now expected in July

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

[NDTV]: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will likely now declare the results of cancelled Class 10 board exams in July. CBSE had earlier announced that the entire exercise of tabulation of marks will be completed by June 11 and the result will be declared by the third week of June.

However, now when the board has extended the date to upload the CBSE Class 10 marks by the schools till June 30, students can now expect their Class 10 results of

the cancelled board exams in July. The decision to extend the timeline has been taken in view of the lockdown in several states due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure safety of teachers and staff members. UPDATE: AAKASH iACST - Get Instant Scholarship up to 90% CLICK here

While announcing the extension Sanyam Bhardwaj, Controller of Examinations, CBSE said: "CBSE accords highest priority to safety and health of teachers. Keeping in view the situation of pandemic, lockdown

in states and safety of teachers and other staff members of affiliated schools, the board has decided to extend the dates."

"The marks will have to be submitted to the board by June 30. For rest of the activities, the result committees can make their own schedule based on the scheme provided by CBSE," he added.

A CBSE statement issued earlier said: "All schools have been requested to upload the marks of Internal Assessment **turn to pg02**

## DRDO's new Covid drug 2-DG: All You Need To Know

New Delhi, 18 May [NDTV]: As India battles the second wave of Covid infections, an anti-Covid drug found to help speed up recovery and reduce oxygen dependence has been launched by the government.

The drug, named 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG), has been developed jointly by Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences, a lab of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in collaboration with Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Hyderabad.

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) earlier this month granted permission for emergency use of the drug as an adjunct therapy in moderate to severe Covid patients.

How does the drug work?

A government release said it accumulates in the virus-infected cells and prevents viral growth by stopping viral synthesis and energy production. What makes this drug unique is its selective accumulation in the infected cells, the release said.

It should also work against various strains of the Covid virus, DRDO chairperson Dr G Sathesh Reddy has said.

How were the trials conducted?

In April 2020, INMAS-DRDO scientists conducted experiments with the help of Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology and found that this molecule works effectively against Covid and inhibits viral growth. Based on the results, DCGI's Central Drugs Standard Control Organization permitted Phase-II trials.

In Phase-II trials conducted on 110 pa-



tients between May and October 2020, the drug was found to be safe. Covid patients who were administered the drug showed faster symptomatic cure than patients in the standard care group.

The DCGI then permitted Phase-III trials that were conducted on 220 patients between December 2020 and March 2021 at 27 Covid hospitals across several states. The results showed that a significantly higher proportion

of patients in the 2DG group improved symptomatically and became free from supplemental oxygen dependence in comparison to those in the standard care group, said the government release. A similar trend was observed in patients aged more than 65 years.

What about the price and availability?

The government release said that being a generic molecule and analogue of glucose, the drug can be easily produced. It is also easy

to consume as it comes in a powdered form in a sachet and can be taken orally by dissolving it in water.

Asked about the pricing of the drug, Dr Sudhir Chandna of DRDO has said it will depend on the scale of production. "Those factors are with Dr Reddy's Laboratories who are our industry partners," he was quoted as saying by news agency ANI. He added that efforts are being made to ensure that the drug is available in the market in the next few days.

Where does the drug fit in?

The drug has been launched at a time when the country is battling a devastating second wave that has triggered a race for medical oxygen and hospital beds in most parts of the country. In this situation, a drug found to expedite recovery and reduce oxygen dependence would ensure better availability of beds for patients requiring critical care. At the same time, it would prevent the rampant black marketing of oxygen equipment that has started in the wake of the crisis.

"Ram Bharose (At God's Mercy)": High Court on rural UP healthcare system

ALLAHABAD, 18 MAY [NDTV]: With Uttar Pradesh battling a second Covid wave, the Allahabad High Court on Monday used a famous Hindi saying - "Ram Bharose" (at God's mercy) - as the health infrastructure in villages and small cities was discussed.

A two-judge bench of Justices Siddharth Varma and Ajit Kumar were hearing an ongoing petition, demanding better care for Covid patients in the state, when they made the observation - UP's "entire medical system", pertaining to smaller cities and villages, can only be taken to be like a famous Hindi saying "Ram Bharose" (at the mercy of God) ".

The court noted the submissions of a three-member committee that looked into the alleged disappearance of a patient from the district hospital in western Uttar Pradesh's Meerut town in April.

The patient, Santosh Kumar, the court observed, was indeed admitted to the hospital and had collapsed in a restroom. He was then "brought upon a stretcher and efforts were made to revive him, but he succumbed".

It was further observed that his body was disposed of by doctors and medical staff as that of a person who was "unidentified".

"It comes out to be a case of high degree (of) carelessness on the part of the doctors who were on night duty," it has been underlined.

The court also made observations on the state of medical care in Uttar Pradesh, saying: "So far as the medical infrastructure is concerned, in these few months we have realised that in the manner it stands today, it is very delicate, fragile and debilitated."

The court also added: "When it cannot meet the medical requirements of our people in normal times, it definitely had to collapse in the face of the present pandemic."

In its hearing, the court also used an example from western UP's Bijnor district.

Taking note of the state government's submissions, the court said: "To our utter surprise there is no level-3 hospital in district Bijnor. The three government hospitals have only 150 beds, whereas the total of number of BIPAP machines is 5 and High Flow Nasal Cannula is only 2".

"If we take the population of rural areas to be 32 lakh, since there are only 10 Community Health Centers or CHCs, so one health centre has the load of 3 lakh people and against 3 lakh people it has only 30 beds. Meaning thereby, one CHC can cater the need of health care to only 0.01 per cent population and there is no BIPAP machine (a type of ventilator) or High Flow Nasal Cannula available."

"Only 17 oxygen concentrators are available with 250 oxygen cylinders against 300 beds.

## Gyalshing's Covid Management Committee meets, resolves to deliver on roles and responsibilities

GYALSHING, 18 MAY [IPR]: A virtual meeting of the COVID Management Committee of Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat was held today in the presence of Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Nepal, who is also the area MLA, DC-West Karma R Bonpo, Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat councillors and Municipal Executive Officer Bhumika Pradhan.

A COVID Management Committee has been formed for all the wards of the GNP led by the respective councillors and comprising of ASHA workers, Municipal staff and volunteers.

Addressing the virtual meeting, the Minister stated that COVID-19 was continuing to affect the state and a well coordinated effort is required to bring the pandemic under control.

The State Government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, is leaving no stone unturned towards the management of the pandemic, he added and informed that as per the directives of the State Government, ward level management groups are to be formed now in all the blocks and municipal areas for effective control of the pandemic.

The Minister added that he has personally



taken up the initiative to provide ration to the poor and needy families to tide over the pandemic and the ward level members are to work with Municipal Executive officer to provide relief.

He further stated that the early diagnosis was the key and directed the members to ensure that all medical care and attention is provided to people with COVID symptoms.

The role of the management committee will be crucial as many people tend to deny COVID symptoms as mere flu and do not come for tests. Regular monitoring and early testing and diagnosis would reduce the mortality rate and for this the management

committee has to play a very vital role.

The Minister added that State Government is now providing medicine packets containing all essentials for the management of COVID-19 at home.

The ward level committee was directed to ensure that all affected persons were provided with such kits.

The Minister also thanked the volunteers and stated that their support was extremely valuable to tide over the COVID-19 pandemic.

The District Collector, while addressing the committee members, detailed the roles and responsibilities of the committee.

He stated that COVID-

19 has to be dealt collectively by the community and every member of the society should step forward to help the people affected by the disease. He also stated that currently the COVID-19 cases in the district are under control and all required treatment is being provided to COVID-19 patients.

There is no stress on the healthcare infrastructure at present as cases are under control, he said.

Oxygen supply in the district is currently sufficient and efforts are being made to further augment oxygen supply. The District Collector requested that the management committee provide continuous awareness

and mental support to those household affected by the disease. He stated that it was necessary to constantly monitor the patients on home isolation.

The Municipal Executive Officer, Ms Pradhan stated that a database of patients under home isolation will be maintained by the group and everyday phone calls by volunteers will be made to the patients to monitor and provide support.

She thanked the Minister for providing Ration kits which will be reached to the needy families and patients under isolation. She also stated that a community effort is required to tackle the pandemic and thanked all the volunteers for coming in the forefront.

## Doorstep delivery of Covid Care Medical Kits at Yangang



SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 MAY:

The Village Covid Management Committee of Yangang in South Sikkim began its a doorstep delivery of Covid Care Medical Kits today to Covid-positive people who are currently undergoing

home isolation at the different GPUs under Yangang Block.

The distribution programme was carried under the guidance of BDO-Yangang, BishnuThapa, Sripatam, HWC Sister, Asha Workers, Anganwadi Workers,

NYK Youths and SKM Party functionaries, YurbaSubba and Hem Rizal, a press release informs.

The Covid Care Medical kit are being distributed on the instructions of Chief Minister PS Tamang.

## Covid-patients in home isolation in Namchi Block receive CCKs

NAMCHI, 18 MAY [IPR]: As instructed by Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, the door to door distribution of Covid Care Kits to all the Covid-positive patients of Namchi Block started today

The distribution of Covid Care Kits was led by the Block Development Officer (Namchi) Babita Rai along with the Village Covid Management Committee (VCMC) of Namchi GPU.

As informed by the BDO, there are currently 23 home isolation cases in Namchi Block and the patients are in the recovering stage.

She also informed that from 54 ward last case was registered on 14 May and on 17th only 3 new positive cases were registered. She has requested people not to panic as the patients are recovering and are receiving all the



necessary treatment.

The BDO apprised that Relief Ration is also being distributed to Covid patients who fall into the BPL category.

She informed that the Chief Minister has conveyed his well wishes and healthier recovery to all the Covid patients.

## KK Shailaja, ex-Minister who won by biggest margin, not in Kerala cabinet

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 18 MAY [NDTV]: KK Shailaja, who was praised for her handling of the coronavirus outbreak as Kerala's Health Minister, will not be a part of the Left-led government's new cabinet. The LDF, which defied tradition and won a second straight term in recent elections, will have a new-look cabinet in which Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will be the only repeat.

"No one from the earlier LDF ministry is part of the new ministry except for the Chief Minister. This is our party decision. Only our party has the courage to do so. Many top performers were also not allowed to contest elections. We want new faces," AN Shamsheer, a CPM MLA, told NDTV. Reports suggest those picked for the new cabinet are MV Govindan, K Radhakrishnan, KN Balagopal, P Rajeev, VN Vasavan, Saji Cherian, V Sivankutty, Mohd Riyas, Dr R Bindu, Veena George and V Abdul Rahman.

KK Shailaja's exclusion has drawn sharp reactions on social media, even from rivals like Congress leader Shashi Tharoor.

"Sorry to see Shailaja Teacher leave the Kerala cabinet. Aside from her reputed competence and efficiency, I always found her helpful, responsive and accessible as Health Minister, especially during the #Covid crisis. She will be missed," Mr Tharoor, a Congress MP from Kerala, wrote on Twitter.

Many posts attacked the Left for dropping a minister whose performance likely contributed to its election victory.

KK Shailaja aka "Shailaja Teacher" came to be seen as a "rockstar" health minister for her handling of the Covid outbreak in

Kerala, a state that scored early successes in checking the spread of the virus in the first wave. She had also been appreciated for her role in checking the Nipah virus. In September, the UK-based Prospect magazine selected KK Shailaja as the "Top Thinker of the Year 2020".

In the Kerala election, she had won from her constituency Mattannur by the highest margin ever in any Kerala election.

Speaking to NDTV on the day of her win, the 64-year-old CPM leader had told NDTV: "Whether I will be the health minister again is something that will be decided when a decision by the cabinet is taken. So I cannot be sure at the moment."

She added: "What I want to highlight is that we faced many challenges during our tenure. We had a devastating hurricane, floods, the Nipah virus, and COVID-19 pandemic but we rose to the occasion each time. The people saw this and were happy with the model of governance in Kerala and hence we have been voted to power again for the work we have done."

The CPM said there was no question of singling out Shailaja.

"There are many other first-time ministers, senior party leaders who performed very well. None have been included in the new government. It's a uniform principle being applied to all. Many new faces will have the opportunity to perform as well as their predecessors. Remember, the last Pinarayi Vijayan government had all new ministers, except Thomas Isaac and G Sudhakaran," CPM politburo member MA Baby told NDTV.

## Badminton World Federation members to vote on proposed five-game scoring system

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY [PTI]: Replacing the current three-game format with a best of five scoring system will once again be put to vote by the Badminton World Federation during its AGM on Saturday. The game's governing body, under president Poul Erik Hoyer Larsen, had floated the idea in 2014 for the first time but it didn't receive the support. The 11x5 system, which was criticised by players and coaches alike, couldn't gather enough votes in last year's AGM. This time, a joint proposal to "amend the Laws of Badminton relating to the Scoring System" came from Badminton Indonesia and Badminton Maldives, and was seconded by Badminton Asia, and associations from Korea and Chinese Taipei.

"One of the key topics that will be voted on by the Membership is the proposal ... to amend the Laws of Badminton relating to the Scoring System," BWF said on Tuesday.

"BWF Council decided to express its support for this proposal as it aligns with the objectives of the

BWF Strategic Plan 2020-2024." According to the BWF strategic plan, it wants to "include new and innovative elements of the game to ensure this continues to evolve over time and excite, engage and enhance global fan base through inspirational performances at world-class events."

During the meeting, "related changes regarding change of ends and continuous play" will also be motioned. However, BWF made it clear that it "not to be introduced until after the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games."

India chief national coach Pullela Gopichand and former coach and current director at the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy (PPBA) Vimal Kumar have been in favour of the current 21x3 system which requires a player to win a minimum of 42 points.

The BWF council, however, had articulated the proposal for a new scoring system in March 2014 as "it was felt that matches were getting longer, while the shuttle was in play for much shorter periods than earlier."

## Importance of self-acceptance...

transgender individuals are subjected to punishments and are disproportionately at risk of violence across the globe.

In the virtual meet, invited guests Nuhang Rai, Dr Anmol Pradhan, Lhamu Dukpa and Dichen Ongmu spoke on issues related to sexual and mental health among the LGBTQIAP+ community and about how the media can help in raising public awareness and reporting on queer issues.

Likewise, RHWA members Ktien, Phintsong, Mesh and Shradha shared some of their life experiences and views and some from the audience also raised insightful questions that the invited speakers addressed.

The virtual meeting asserted upon the need of forming a network among the LGBTQIAP+ community in the state and the importance of self-acceptance by queer people.

The meet also stressed the need to break the personality stereotyping of queer persons and the support from the media fraternity and how organisations like RHWA can work with the administrative and judicial organs of the state in an organized manner to lobby for the welfare of the community and the individual responsibility of every person to make a Queer friendly environment in the society. The event concluded with a beautiful poem penned and performed by Mesh.

## CBSE Class 10 results...

latest by 11th June, 2021..adhere to the timelines for submission of marks of internal assessment for the purpose of compilation and declaration of results tentatively by the third week of June 2021."

Due to COVID-19, CBSE had earlier announced the cancellation of Class 10th board exams taking students' safety and well-being into consideration.

The students of Class 10 will be assessed out of maximum of 100 marks for each subject. As per the CBSE assessment policy, 20 marks are for internal assessment and 80 marks are for year-end board examinations.

If any candidate did not appear in any of the assessment tests conducted by the school, the school may also conduct an offline/online or a telephonic one to one assessment and record documentary evidences. The student, the board said, may be assessed objectively on that basis by the school out of maximum marks of each subject.

## ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

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



All relatives, friend and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence. We also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude towards all those who extended their support during the time of bereavement.

Gopal Thapa (husband) kamal Thapa (son) Bimla Thapa (son) Som Maya Thapa (daughter) Dumber Kumari Thapa (daughter) Khem Kumari Sharma (dauhter-in-law)

Contact No: 97333 96231,  
9002548203, 9002533458

# Union Education Minister meets Education Secretaries and SPDs through VC

**GANGTOK, 17 MAY (IPR):** The Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' took a video conferencing meeting of the State and UT Education Secretaries and State Project Directors on Covid-19 Action Plan of the Education Ministry at the national level and preparedness of States and UTs. The meeting was attended virtually by the Education Secretaries of different States and UTs.

Additional Chief Secretary, GP Upadhyaya represented Sikkim in the meeting in which he apprised the Union Minister about the initiatives of the Sikkim Education Department in reaching out to the students of Sikkim during the lockdown.

Sikkim has been conducting online classes for senior level through



several social media and other platforms. The Sikkim Edutech App is being widely used for online education, administering assessment and continuity of education of mid-level and senior students. Sikkim Edutech App Version 2 now has the facility of video classes and assessment, added

this year and launched on 27 Apr, 2021. Apart from this, the concept of Home Schooling is also in practice in which the school has been doing all efforts to reach out to the children if they are not able to come to school. The concept of Home Schooling started by Sikkim with the motto "If

the child cannot come to the school, let the school go to the child" was very much appreciated. It has now been adopted by most of the States. There was a clear consensus that both online and offline strategies have to be adopted. The ACS, Education Department also mentioned that Sikkim

has already constituted the State Education Reforms Commission and several activities under the NEP 2020 are already underway.

The Department is currently working on Covid Action Plan which comprises management of the education system during Covid-19 pandemic, strategies for online learning in schools and implementation of NEP 2020. A roadmap stretching from April 2021 to March 2022 has been designed to undertake several activities in this regard.

The VC was also attended by Special Secretary and SPD SamagraShiksha, BhimThatal, Special Secretary and Director, HondalaGyaltsen, Secondary Education and Director, Rabin Chhetri, SCERT.

# Harkamaya College of Education hosts webinar on mental health

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 18 MAY:**

Harkamaya College of Education organised a webinar on "Mental Health" on 15 May under the guidance of Alumni Association of Harkamaya, Assistant Professor Magdelyn Karthak and online moderators, BEd 4th Semester students Roshni Chettri and Rani Roy, a press release informs.

Three speakers - MD Psychiatry, Dr Satish Rasaily, Dr Nandita Ghimirey from Kathmandu, and Dental Surgeon Dr Reena Subba fleshed out the topic of the day.



# Bombay High Court likely to hear activist Stan Swamy's bail plea in Elgar case on Wednesday

**Mumbai, 18 May [PTI]:** The Bombay High Court is likely to hear the medical bail plea of Jesuit priest and tribal rights activist Stan Swamy, an accused in the Elgar Parishad Maoists Links case, on Wednesday.

The 84-year-old activist, arrested in October 2020, is currently lodged in the Taloja prison in Navi Mumbai and is suffering from ill health.

Stan Swamy's advocate, senior counsel Mihir Desai, has submitted a note in the high court detailing the lack of medical aid at the Taloja prison, the impossibility of social distancing (required during COVID-19) in the overcrowded jail, and his client's deteriorating health condition amidst all of this.

Earlier this month, Mr Desai was granted permission by a high court bench, led by Justice SS Shinde, to move the vacation bench seeking hearing on Stan Swamy's bail plea on medical grounds.

Accordingly, Mr Desai is likely to mention the plea for an urgent hearing before the vacation bench on Wednesday.

Stan Swamy had approached the HC earlier this year challenging a special court's decision in March. In the order, the special court had re-

jected his bail sought on medical grounds as well as on merits.

In the last hearing in the high court on May 4, the bench led by Justice Shinde had directed the authorities in Maharashtra to file a report on Stan Swamy's current health condition by May 15.

At the time, advocate Desai had told the bench that Stan Swamy, since his arrest seven months ago, had remained in the Taloja prison hospital, which has just three Ayurveda doctors and no other physicians or trained medical staff.

He had said that Stan Swamy was in advanced stages of Parkinson's disease, a brain disorder that gets worse over time. The octogenarian activist has lost the ability to hear, and given the raging COVID-19 pandemic, the court must at least grant Stan Swamy temporary bail, advocate Desai had said.

Mr Desai, in his note filed on May 17 in the HC, has stated that Stan Swamy's health condition has further deteriorated.

As per the note, Stan Swamy's colleagues have said that in the last phone call with them, he had complained of fever and weakness.

He is currently taking several allopathic medi-

cines, including antibiotics prescribed by the Taloja hospital's Ayurveda doctors, the note said.

It stated that Professor Hany Babu, Stan Swamy's co-accused in the case, is also lodged in the Taloja prison and has tested positive for COVID-19.

The note said given his ill health and severe co-morbidities, Swamy is at risk of contracting COVID-19 and that his life is under imminent threat due to his medical condition, his advanced age, and the lack of medical facilities at the Taloja prison.

The case because of which he is in prison relates to alleged inflammatory speeches delivered at the "Elgar Parishad" conclave, held at Shaniwarwada in Pune on December 31, 2017, which the police claimed triggered violence the next day near the Koregaon-Bhima war memorial located on the city's outskirts. The Pune police had claimed the conclave was backed by Maoists.

The probe in the case, in which more than a dozen activists and academicians have been named accused, was later transferred to the National Investigation Agency.

# Village Covid Management Committees on-boarded for new role



**GANGTOK, 18 MAY [IPR]:** As per the directions of the Government a Village Covid Management Committee was formed in all 28 GPUs under Additional District Collector (D) Gangtok to tackle COVID-19 at the micro level.

In order to equip the newly formed VCMC in dealing with COVID-19, a daylong virtual meeting was organized by SIRD on the request of Radha Pradhan, ADC (D) Gangtok, today with Prabhakar Rai, Director Panchayat as chairper-

son and Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia, State IEC Officer, Health Department and ADC(D) Gangtok as the resource person.

The Virtual Meeting also had the attendance of Block Development Officers of Ranka, Duga, Khamdong, Nandok, Rakdong, Tintek, Martam and VCVC members.

In the second half, an open discussion was held and VCVC members put forward many important issues which was addressed by the IEC Officer and ADC (D) Gangtok.

# 2 WB Ministers spend night in jail, 2 TMC leaders in hospital

**New Delhi, 18 May [NDTV]:** Four leaders including two Bengal ministers were moved to jail in Kolkata late last night after a day of dramatic developments that started with their early morning arrest in the Narada bribery case, followed by bail, which was finally put on hold by a court.

After their bail, challenged by the CBI, was stayed by the Calcutta High Court, Ministers Subrata Mukherjee and Firhad Hakim, Trinamool MLA Madan Mitra and former leader Sovan Chatterjee were taken to the Presidency correctional home late last night.

Around 4 am, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee were shifted to hospital after they complained of breathlessness.

Subrata Mukherjee was also taken to hospital briefly for a medical examination and then sent back to jail.

All four were taken on Monday morning to the CBI by central forces. To challenge their arrest, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee spent six hours at the CBI office and dared the investigators to arrest her.

In a brief interaction with reporters outside the CBI office at Nizam Palace,

Madan Mitra raised the question that his party has been raising ever since the arrests yesterday - why no action against Suwendu Adhikari and Mukul Roy, former Trinamool leaders who were also caught in the Narada sting but later joined the BJP.

"I have full faith in the judiciary. The BJP can employ anybody to harass me," said Firhad Hakim, who wept on camera saying he "could not finish his job of helping people of the city in the pandemic".

Sovan Chatterjee lashed out: "I am not a dacoit. I have not done anything wrong that the CBI could enter my bedroom to arrest me?"

"We all are bad men but not Mukul (Roy) and Suwendu (Adhikari)," said Madan Mitra.

The spotlight is now on Suwendu Adhikari, former Trinamool MP and currently BJP MLA. He is one of 13 people named in the Narada sting operation that went public in 2016.

In 2014, a journalist of the Narada news portal, Mathew Samuel, posed as a businessman planning to invest in Bengal, gave wads of cash to seven Trinamool MPs, four ministers, one MLA and a police officer as bribe and taped the entire operation.

# Mount Distilleries' Doctor Safe team sanitizes Majhitar

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 17 MAY:**

The Mount Distilleries Doctor Safe team carried out sanitization work in Majhitar area on 17 May, a press release informs.

The sanitization drive was led by Gyanu Kashyap Sharma and Lal Rahut under the supervision of Councillor, Sanju Mangar, and social worker Dharba Chhetri Chauhaan. WLC President, Robin Subba and Munna Mangar were also present during the sanitization.

The voluntarily sanitization drive by the MDL Doctor Safe has been carried out at various instances in different parts of the State since the beginning of the pandemic.



# Third-quarter financial reports of Nepal's luxury hotels show record catastrophe losses

**SANGAM PRASAIN**  
**KATHMANDU, 18 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]:**

Two of Nepal's luxury hotels have posted their third-quarter reports showing the highest-ever catastrophe losses, a legacy of the Covid-19 lockdown as tourism disappeared into thin air.

Insiders say the first wave of the pandemic in 2020 was a catastrophe for tourism which brought the hospitality industry to near collapse.

The second wave, which started in Nepal in mid-April 2021 with the daily infection rate shooting up to almost 10,000 daily from 300 within a month, could well sound the death knell for several hotels teetering on the brink.

Among the three hotels listed on the Nepal Stock Exchange, two have published their financial reports for the third quarter of 2020-21 ended March 31; and one has come out with the second quarter report which has painted a gloomy picture.

The Soaltee Crowne Plaza, which was recently rebranded as The Soaltee Kathmandu, said in its unaudited third-quarter report that it suffered a net loss of Rs136.63 million, compared to a net profit of Rs140.45 million in the same period in the last fiscal year 2019-20. The hotel said its revenues plunged by 73.54

percent. Its third-quarter earning in 2020-21 amounted to Rs308.74 million, a steep drop from Rs1.16 billion in the same period of the last fiscal year.

After the government imposed a two-week-long second lockdown on April 29 to prevent the spread of the virus, and extended it by another two weeks till May 27, the hotel said it expected further debacles ahead.

Oriental Hotel Limited, which operates the five-star Radisson Hotel in Kathmandu, was the top loser as the property was closed for almost a whole year.

The hotel reported a net loss of Rs221.14 million in the third quarter of this fiscal year, a 284 percent plunge from the profit earned in the same period in the last fiscal year. The hotel's third quarter revenue dropped 90.70 percent.

The hotel's third-quarter revenue stood at a meagre Rs55.9 million in the review period as compared to Rs690 million in the same period in the last fiscal year.

The government allowed hotels to reopen in July last year, but they remained closed because there were no visitors, and the result was zero income. They have pinned their hopes on the vaccination drive in Nepal that it will bring back tourists and help

the tourism industry to rebound. "The industry was brought to its knees last year, but we had seen a glimmer of hope this year due to an increase in bookings for spring trekking and expeditions," said Pawan Rajbhandari, director of sales and marketing at the Radisson Hotel Kathmandu. "But the second wave started and everything is uncertain."

According to the Department of Immigration, Nepal welcomed 8,874 foreign tourists in January. The number grew slightly to 9,146 and 14,977 in February and March respectively. In April, the expedition season, particularly Mt Everest, drew 22,450 tourists showing a sign of a tourism rebound. But the second wave which started in mid-April 2021 reversed the few gains that the tourism industry had made.

"We were one of the first industries impacted by the virus... and it's becoming clearer and clearer that we are going to be the last industry to recover. Obviously, we are in the red zone. And it will be a challenging year ahead. We don't know how long," said Rajbhandari.

Taragaon Regency Hotels Limited, which operates the Hyatt Regency Hotel, has not unveiled its third-quarter financial report.

**What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?**

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

<p><b>Symptoms of nCoV</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Fever</li> <li>■ Difficulty in breathing</li> <li>■ Dry Cough</li> <li>■ Shortness of breath</li> <li>■ Fatigue</li> <li>■ Loss of taste or smell</li> </ul>	<p><b>Precautions to Prevent nCoV</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Wash your hands often with soap.</li> <li>■ Avoid close contact with others.</li> <li>■ Avoid going to crowded places.</li> <li>■ Avoid touching your face with unclean hands.</li> <li>■ Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.</li> <li>■ Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.</li> <li>■ Avoid travels to hot affected areas.</li> <li>■ Wear a mask if you have respiratory symptoms.</li> <li>■ Avoid your work with coughing or sneezing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Treatment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Treatment is symptomatic and supportive.</li> <li>■ No vaccination available as of now.</li> <li>■ Most recover from symptoms detected.</li> </ul>	<p><b>If you seek help, please contact:</b></p> <p>-Toll-free No. 104</p> <p>District Surveillance Officer SART, 1000704 WEST - 1000704 EAST - 1000704 SOUTH - 1000704 NORTH - 1000704 JAN - 1000704</p>

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE**  
**GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**

## Information Inspires Involvement

*Don't do that, and resentment follows*

Officialdom in Sikkim continues to cling to anachronistic notions about sharing information. And it is not even sensitive documents that one is talking about here; it is as simple a matter as coming on record when approached. Officials take the easiest way out by ignoring reporters with excuses of being on tour or engaged in a meeting or not being authorised, and in these pandemic times, not willing to confirm specifics since that could trigger panic.

What most of them don't realise is that every time a scribe arrives on their WhatsApp for information, they are not expected to spill the beans on the latest red-tape goof-up in the corridors of power. Most of the times, they are being sought either to confirm or deny information or present their side of the picture to an allegation. While journalistic ethics demand that views of all sides be reported, it is only for so long that a story can be kept waiting for want of views or context from the other side. What these officials don't realise is that news reports cannot warm the "in" tray endlessly. There is a Right to Information Act now, and is often invoked by officials as the route for information. RTI is essentially for the masses to seek information on individual issues, and it would be best if it was not crowded by 'vested' interests and journalists pursuing stories. And even that experiment has now been compromised rendered more or less toothless.

When it comes to news reporting, the procedures and processes involved under RTI are too long and cumbersome and hence should be used sparingly and for stories requiring deeper details and more extensive data. Day-to-day reporting remains old school but it is time that those who sit on information realised that the times have changed and that it makes more sense to share information when contacted because news has a way of leaking, especially nowadays in these times of smartphones and call recording options. Leaked news is however invariably incomplete and hence more damaging because the information technology tools and the contagion of social media have a way of amplifying that which is scandalous. Frankly, there were always laws and rules making information accessible to the people, just that the people with the information were not confident enough to share it. RTI forced their hand.

Sharing information automatically makes one accountable and accountability could lead most officials on to sticky wickets. Information, after all, is not just about knowing but also about reacting to what is learnt. Information also means power and empowering the people might be a pet project of the politicians, but still does not appear high enough on the agenda of the bureaucracy which draws its strength from the control it wields over the people, a control which has reached discomfiting levels because of SARS CoV2. Now that the urban local bodies have returned for a third innings, the powers-that-be should perhaps look at access to information before they proceed with further delegation of power to the local bodies. Share all the developmental information of each ward with the people there and see how they respond to it. Empower the people with this information in time and then see the maturity with which they keep an eye on all the funds that have come their way and that it is wisely spent. Compulsory disclosure of project and contract details, as is being practiced now, comes too late for any effective control. Announce these proposals enough in advance and see how the people get more involved.

Some time back, the State Government had announced a policy decision for every developmental project to be preceded by a proper public discussion [on a public hearing format]. This idea was flirted with for a while but sidestepped the moment the involvement and sense of ownership so far lacking in Sikkim began manifesting. Had such an initiative been sustained, Covid management would have progressed much better than the present model in which the people are informed about decision already taken, supposedly for their benefit, but are never consulted. Diktats need to be enforced, and because of the limited state resources and the even more limited instinct for empathy, the blunt force approach not only fails at implementation stage, but also seed resentment. Not a good combo. If information was shared more spontaneously, people taken into confidence more often and consulted earnestly, even the unknowns of a pandemic can be managed and contained more efficiently and with less harm.

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# Many Questions, Few Answers, as Conflict Deepens Between Israelis and Palestinians

TONY WALKER  
*theconversation.com*

What's next in the latest Middle East convulsion? Will a ceasefire between the Hamas militant group in Gaza and Israel be brokered by Arab mediators in coordination with western powers, or will the situation continue to deteriorate?

Are we witnessing the beginning of an intensifying conflict in which Israelis find themselves enveloped in a bloody confrontation with Palestinians across the occupied territories and, more threateningly, inside Israel itself?

Will Israel become enmeshed in widespread communal unrest on its own territory in Arab towns and villages?

In short, are we witnessing the early stages of a third intifada, in which casualties mount on both sides until the participants exhaust themselves?

We've seen all this before – in 1987 and 2000. Then, as now, violence spread from territories occupied in the 1967 war into Israel itself.

There are no simple answers to these questions as the crisis enters its second week, with casualties mounting.

In part, the next stage depends on the level of violence Israel is prepared to inflict on Hamas. It is also conditional on Hamas's tolerance of Israeli airstrikes and artillery fire.

It will also rely on the extent to which Israel feels its interests continue to be served by court-ing widespread international opprobrium for its offensive against Hamas, as the militant group's leadership is embedded in a densely packed civilian population in Gaza.

This is far from a cost-free exercise for Israel, despite the bravado from its leadership, embroiled in a lingering internal crisis over the country's inability to elect majority government.

Political paralysis is not the least of Israel's problems.

As always, the issue is not whether Israel has a right to defend itself against rocket attacks on its own territory. The question is whether its response is disproportionate, and whether its chronic failure to propagate a genuine peace process is fuelling Palestinian resentment.

The short answer is "yes", whatever legitimate criticisms might be made of a feckless Palestinian leadership divided between its two wings: the Fatah mainstream in Ramallah and Hamas in Gaza.

Israel's continued provocative construction of settlements in the West Bank, and the daily humiliations it inflicts on a disenfranchised Palestinian population in Arab East Jerusalem, contribute to enormous frustration and anger among people living under occupation.

If nothing else, the latest upsurge of violence between Israelis and Palestinians should persuade the international community that occupation and subjugation of one population by another is a dead-end street.

Further complicating things for the Israeli leadership are the circumstances that led to the latest conflagration. This has lessened international sympathy for the extreme measures Israel is using, aiming to bomb the Hamas leadership into submission.

Israeli authorities' attempts to evict Palestinian families in East Jerusalem from homes they had occupied for 70 years, accompanied by highly provocative demonstrations by extremist Jewish settlers chanting "death to Arabs", has contributed to a sharp deterioration in relations.

This was followed by a heavy-handed Israeli police response to Palestinian demonstrations in and around Al-Aqsa mosque, Islam's third-holiest shrine. In turn, this prompted Hamas rocket strikes into Israel itself from Gaza.

The International Crisis Group has identified the issue that should be most concerning to Israel and its supporters:

This occasion is the first since the September 2000 intifada where Palestinians have responded simultaneously and on such a massive scale throughout much of the combined territory of Israel-Palestine to the cumulative impact of military occupation, repression, dispossession and systemic discrimination.

In a global propaganda war over Israel's continued occupation of five million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the issue of who started this latest convulsion is relevant.

So, too, are questions surrounding Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's attempts to cling to power as a corruption trial winds its way through the Israeli court system.

Collateral damage to Israel's reputation is an unavoidable consequence of the use of a heavy bombardment against Hamas targets in one of the world's most densely populated areas.

There are two million Palestinians in Gaza, a narrow strip of land between Israeli territory and the Mediterranean Sea. Many are living in refugee camps their families have occupied since they fled Israel in 1948, in what Palestinians refer to as the nakba, or catastrophe.

The deaths of an extended Palestinian family at the weekend whose three-storey home was demolished by an Israeli airstrike is a grating reminder of fallout from the use of weapons of war in civilian areas.

This is the reality of a population held hostage to an unresolved – and possibly unresolvable – conflict involving Palestinians living under occupation.

So far, international reaction has been muted. The United States and its allies have gone through the motions in condemning the violence.

US President Joe Biden, in a phone call with Netanyahu, seemed to endorse Israel's heavy hand. Biden's conciliatory tone has drawn widespread criticism in view of the shocking images emanating from Gaza. These include live footage of a building housing foreign media being destroyed by an

Israeli airstrike.

Belatedly, the US has sent an envoy to the region. In Australia, politicians from both sides have called for a de-escalation.

Regionally, Arab states have expressed their support for the Palestinian cause, but remarks by their leaders have been restrained.

However, circumstances leading to the outbreak of violence, notably Israeli policing of demonstrations in places sacred to Muslims, have left Arab leaderships no choice but to condemn Israel's actions.

A hitherto limp US response reflects the Biden administration's hope that the Israel-Palestine issue would not be allowed to intrude on Washington's wider Middle East foreign policy efforts. Biden is trying to entice Iran back to the negotiating table to re-energise the nuclear peace deal ripped up by former President Donald Trump.

Part of this strategy has been to calm Israel's concerns about renewed US efforts to re-engage Iran. Those efforts have been complicated by the violence of recent days.

Washington has been reminded, if that was necessary, that the toxic Palestinian issue could not simply be shoved aside, however much the US and its moderate Arab allies would like it to go away. This was always an unrealistic expectation.

Israeli violence against Palestinians in retaliation for rocket attacks on its territory is an embarrassment for Arab states that had established diplomatic relations with Israel under pressure from the Trump administration.

The so-called Abraham Accords, involving an exchange of ambassadors between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, is at risk of being discredited in the eyes of the Arab world by the latest conflagration.

Other Arab states that established diplomatic relations with Israel, brokered by Trump officials, include Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. Sporadic demonstrations in support of the Palestinians have occurred in the latter two countries.

Finally, this latest conflict between Israelis and Palestinians exposes the failure of various parties to advance a peace agreement based on a two-state solution.

That prospect appears further away than ever, and may even be dead given Israel's declared intention to annex territory in the West Bank. Such action would end any possibility of compromise based on land swaps to accommodate Israeli settlements in areas contiguous with Israel itself.

These are bleak moments for those who might have believed at the time of the Oslo Declaration in 1993, and subsequent establishment of relations between Israel and the leadership of the Palestinian national movement, that peace might be possible at last.

We are now a very long way indeed from Oslo.  
*[the writer is Vice-chancellor's fellow, La Trobe University]*

## Four Health Benefits of Hugs – and Why They Feel so Good

FRANCIS MCGLONE & SUSANNAH WALKER  
*theconversation.com*

For many people, the thing they've missed most during the pandemic is being able to hug loved ones. Indeed, it wasn't until we lost our ability to hug friends and family did many realise just how important touch is for many aspects of our health – including our mental health.

But now that vaccine programmes are being rolled out and restrictions are beginning to ease in much of the UK, many people will be keen to hug again. And the good news is that not only do hugs feel good – they also have many health benefits.

The reason hugs feel so good has to do with our sense of touch. It's an extremely important sense which allows us not only to physically explore the world around us, but also to communicate with others by creating and maintaining social bonds.

Touch consists of two distinct systems. The first is "fast-touch", a system of nerves which allows us to rapidly detect contact (for example, if a fly landed on your nose, or you touched something hot). The second system is "slow-touch". This is a population of recently discovered nerves, called c-tactile afferents, which process the emotional meaning of touch.

These c-tactile afferents have essentially evolved to be "cuddle nerves" and are typically activated by a very specific kind of stimulation: a gentle, skin-temperature touch, the kind typical of a hug or caress. We see c-tactile afferents as the neural input stage in signalling the rewarding, pleasurable aspects of social tactile interactions such as hugging and touching.

Touch is the first sense to start working in the womb (around 14 weeks). From the moment we're

born, the gentle caress of a mother has multiple health benefits, such as lowering heart rate and promoting the growth of brain cell connections.

When someone hugs us, the stimulation of c-tactile afferents in our skin sends signals, via the spinal cord, to the brain's emotion processing networks. This induces a cascade of neurochemical signals, which have proven health benefits. Some of the neurochemicals include the hormone



oxytocin, which plays an important role in social bonding, slows down heart rate and reduces stress and anxiety levels. The release of endorphins in the brain's reward pathways supports the immediate feelings of pleasure and wellbeing derived from a hug or caress.

Hugging has such a relaxing and calming effect that it also benefits our health in other ways.

It improves our sleep: From the benefits of co-sleeping with infants to cuddling your partner, gentle touch is known to regulate our sleep, as it lowers levels of the hormone cortisol. Cortisol is a key regulator of our sleep-wake cycle but also increases when we're stressed. So it's no wonder high levels of stress can delay

sleep and cause fragmented sleep patterns or insomnia.

It reduces reactivity to stress: Beyond the immediate soothing and pleasurable feelings provided by a hug, social touch also has longer-term benefits to our health, making us less reactive to stress and building resilience.

Nurturing touch, during early developmental periods, produces higher levels of oxytocin receptors and lower levels of cortisol in brain

and wellbeing – with oxytocin levels increasing in both the pet and the owner.

It could help us fight off infections: Through regulation of our hormones – including oxytocin and cortisol – touching and hugging can also affect our body's immune response. Whereas high levels of stress and anxiety can suppress our ability to fight infections, close, supportive relationships benefit health and well-being.

Research even suggests that cuddling in bed could protect us against the common cold. By monitoring hugging frequency among just over 400 adults who were then exposed to a common cold virus, researchers found the "huggers" won hands-down in being less likely to get a cold. And even if they did, they had less severe symptoms.

**HUG IT OUT**

While it's important we continue to keep ourselves safe, it's equally as important that we don't give up hugs forever. Social isolation and loneliness are known to increase our chances of premature death – and perhaps future research should investigate whether it's a lack of hugs or social touch that may be driving this. Touch is an instinct that is all-around beneficial for our mental and physical health – so we should celebrate its return.

Of course, not everyone craves a hug. So for those that don't, there's no reason to worry about missing out on the benefits of hugs – as giving yourself a hug has also been shown to regulate emotional processes and reduce stress.

*[Francis McGlone is Professor in Neuroscience, Liverpool John Moores University; Susannah Walker is Senior Lecturer, Natural Sciences & Psychology, Liverpool John Moores University]*

# The inclusivity problem with Nepal's census

ANKIT KHADGI

**KATHMANDU, 18 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]:** Last year, just a month before the nationwide lockdown, Nepal made news in the international media.

Nepal was preparing for its national census, which takes place every ten years and the country received praise from the international media and communities for making the census inclusive. Central Bureau of Statistics informed that it will add an option of 'others' beyond the two genders (male and female) to count the queer population.

But even though the country was being celebrated, for many of Nepal's queer population, this news wasn't a progressive one.

The adding of 'others' as a gender option, say activist, makes it compulsory for the queer population to select the 'others' category even if they didn't identify with the gender marker.

This forceful decision to count them under 'others' category is discriminatory, they say, since it takes away their right to self-determine their gender identity and sexual orientation.

"This decision of CBS is reflective of the widespread misconception and lack of awareness of gender identities among policymakers," says Rukshana Kapali, a trans rights activist.

Since Nepal does not conduct any periodic surveys on a large scale, it's the decennial census data, the accuracy of which has always been contested, that the government and non-government organisations rely on to distribute economic, social and political resources.

In 2011, the Nepal government did make an attempt to count 'third gender' people but their efforts were futile as only 1,500 people identified as the third gender, a number that didn't reflect the ground reality. Similarly, since the census excluded queer people beyond third gender identities, it wasn't able to paint the realities and collect accurate data.

And that's why many queer activists say they had their hopes pinned on the 2021 census to make their presence felt and make the whole country realise the diversity within the queer spectrum.

"Data are not just numbers. They also mean recognition. If we are able to collect desegregated data of queer population acknowledging its diversity, it will benefit the whole queer movement and also its advocacy," says Esan Regmi, an intersex activist.

Queer activists say they had actively advocated at the govern-



ment level to include multiple options for sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics in the census so people could actually choose an identity they agree with.

But the CBS, they say, didn't pay heed to any of their concerns.

According to Nebin Lal Shrestha, director general at CBS, including 'others' as a gender option is the only way through which the population of the queer community will be counted in the census.

"We have included the 'others' as a gender option to count the population of the queer community in the upcoming census. All those people who fall under the queer spectrum will be counted under the 'others' category," says Shrestha.

But not every queer person identifies as 'others'. There are queer people who identify as male, female, and non-binary. Every person's sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) are different, and they can't be categorised into one single category, which the institution is doing in the census.

"Using 'Others' as terminology to refer to gender identity is highly contested and even considered derogatory for many. There are people who identify within the non-binary spectrum, and people who identify as third genders. Not acknowledging different identities is failing

to realise the different forms of oppression, marginalisation, exclusion, discrimination, violence and non-representation of those distinct social groups," says Kapali.

But that's not the only issue with the current census.

In August, last year CBS published two official questionnaires for the 2021 census.

"Only a single question in one of the questionnaires has mentioned three gender options—male, female, others. The rest of the questions have only male and female as gender options. To be honest, it feels that they have added 'others' as a gender option just to show they are being inclusive, but in reality, they aren't," adds Kapali.

However, Shrestha argues that CBS did make consultations with queer organisations, before adding the 'others' option in the census.

"We held multiple meetings with queer activists and it is only after consultation with them that we decided to add the 'others' option," says Shrestha.

According to Bibek Sushling Magar, program officer at Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities Nepal, the majority of people from the LGBTIQ+ community who attended the meetings were third genders.

"Within Nepal's queer community, third-gender people are

the majority. It is this majority that often shapes policies related to the country's LGBTIQ+ community, which also happened with the CBS's decision to include 'others' gender option," says Magar.

But many efforts were made by activists to explain to CBS how the boxing of the queer community into a single category and mixing of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), could actually affect the population and their movement.

"Our group was invited to the meetings with the CBS as well as other parties who were involved in the census. We tried hard to explain the necessity of collecting desegregated SOGIESC data and the fact that it won't be justifiable to count the queer community within one category, as not everyone wants to identify as 'others'. We also submitted various practices from the UK, New Zealand, Kenya and their documentation as well as reports to help CBS find ways to be inclusive to the whole queer community. But our voices weren't entertained," says Regmi.

But according to activists, it's because of the country's problematic laws that led the CBS to impose the 'others' gender option for the whole queer community.

Although Article 12 of the Constitution of Nepal enshrines the provision of getting citizenship as

per the gender identity an individual prefers, in 2012, a directive was issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, that went against this provision. As per the directive, which was based on the Supreme Court's 2007 hearing of the Sunil Babu Pant & Others vs Government case, in Nepal LGBTIQ+ individuals will only be granted citizenship with 'others' as a gender marker.

And since CBS is also required to follow the legal categorisation, this could have led them to use 'others' as a gender marker in the census, as even though it's problematic, it is legally accepted.

Although the 2007's Supreme Court decision popularised the narrative that all queer people are 'others', many efforts have been made by young activists like Kapali, Regmi, and Magar to protest against the forceful imposition of 'others' as gender identity.

Kapali along with a few other activists have challenged the 'other gender' legislation by filing a complaint against the directive at the National Human Rights Commission and writ petitions at the Supreme Court.

The 2021 census, says activists, could have been a great time for CBS to reflect and rectify the mistakes the state has made by allowing people to identify with gender identities and sexual orientations of their choice.

"However, neither the civil so-

ciety groups nor the government agencies paid heed to our concerns regarding this problematic categorisation of 'others,'" says Kapali.

Regardless of all the efforts made by queer activists to aware CBS of the negative impacts the 'other' category can lead up to, according to Shrestha, it is almost finalised that the queer population of the country will be counted under the 'other' category in the census.

"We finalised everything only after consultations. Although we agree that we won't be able to collect exact data because of the limitations, we have tried our best to be inclusive. When the counting will take place, we will also have supervisors from the queer community and we have also planned to do sample surveys with queer organisations to find comprehensive data later," says Shrestha.

And with Nepal in the midst of a devastating second wave of COVID, all census-related works have been postponed and there's no confirmation regarding when the census will take place.

However what is sure is that whenever the census takes place, it's not going to be inclusive to all queer people. And according to activists, this will negatively impact them and the whole queer movement.

"This incorrect data collection process of the census will lead to a misrepresentation of data," says Kapali. "This will mean that the already marginalised, excluded and discriminated groups will be further removed from the national, regional and local level planning process and their concerns will not receive the needed attention."

And that's why activists believe that CBS needs to rectify their mistake and change the definition of 'others' gender, they say.

"Even if they won't include the whole queer spectrum, they can only include those people under the 'other' category who identify beyond male or female. They cannot use the 'other gender' box to count what is not even gender and those queer who identify as male or female," says Kapali.

"Sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics are three different things. Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) are not even genders. Transgender men are men and trans women are women. And being intersex (I) is a sex characteristic and they can have any gender identity. It is a blunder to define LGBTI as 'others gender'."

"If CBS fails to rectify such a definition, we will challenge this at the court," she adds.

## High Court asks Tripura to ensure maximum Covid testing in state-run orphanages, jails

AGARTALA, 18 MAY [NDTV]:

The High Court of Tripura today observed that the state government needs to ensure maximum testing for Covid infections in government-run orphanages and jails.

The court was hearing a suo motu case on the Covid preparedness in the state. During the hearing, the state government submitted details regarding the availability of infrastructure. The court sought additional information on May 24, when the matter will be heard next.

Taking note of the details provided in the state government's affidavit, the division bench of Chief Justice Akhil A Kureshi and Justice Subhash Talapatra said the court would like to touch on two aspects that require immediate attention -- the high infection rates in state-run orphanages and jails.



Speaking about the jail inmates, it said that if the state has restricted movement of a citizen, the onus to ensure that his health is not jeopardised on account of being kept confined is on the state.

"We are sure the state administration shall take into account all the observations and directives of the committee specially constituted by the Su-

preme Court by its order dated 23rd March 2020," the court said.

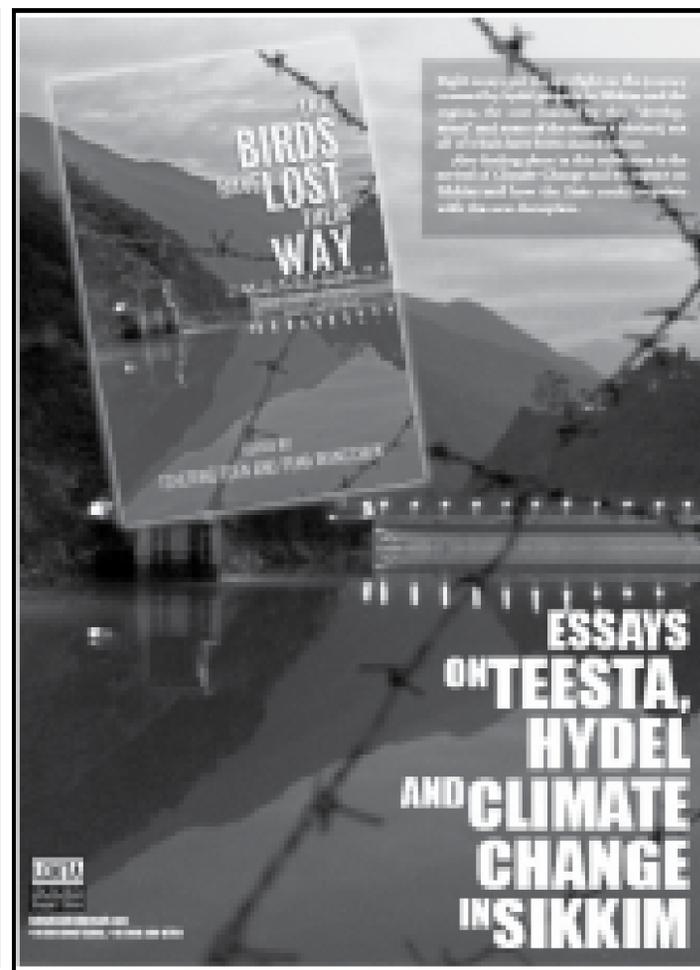
The Supreme Court had last year directed states and Union Territories to constitute high-level committees to consider which prisoners can be released on parole or interim bail for a specific period in an attempt to decongest pris-

ons during the pandemic.

The court also said that the Tripura government may consider setting up a round-the-clock helpline that provides necessary information to the relatives of patients.

"In particular, the state may think of devising a system by which the availability of hospital beds with and without oxygen supply and ventilators is constantly made available in the public domain. This will help the relatives of the Covid patients who require urgent hospitalization and oxygen support to identify the proper place without loss of time," the court said.

Tripura currently has 5,367 active Covid cases and 746 new cases have been reported over the past 24 hours. The state on Sunday announced a nine-day curfew in Agartala Municipal Corporation areas to bring the Covid situation under control.



# Australian bowlers call for end to Sandpapergate 'innuendo'

**SYDNEY (AP):** Four bowlers in the Australian cricket lineup embroiled in a 2018 cheating scandal in South Africa issued a joint statement Tuesday rejecting renewed speculation they were aware a teammate was using sandpaper to change the condition of the ball.

The so-called Sandpapergate rocked world cricket, resulting in lengthy suspensions for Australia captain Steve Smith, vice-captain David Warner, opening batter Cameron Bancroft and the exit of senior officials.

Speculation that other players were aware of the ball-tampering plot in a test match in Cape Town was revived on the weekend when a British newspaper quoted Bancroft saying it was "self-explanatory", when asked if the bowlers were aware of it.

Pace bowlers Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and spinner Nathan Lyon released a statement, addressed to the Australian public, calling for an end to "rumor-



mongering and innuendo." "We pride ourselves on our honesty. So it's been disappointing to see that our integrity has been questioned by some journalists and past players in recent days," the statement said. "We have already answered questions many times on this issue, but we feel compelled to put the key facts on the record again.

"We did not know a foreign substance was taken onto the field to alter the condition of the

ball until we saw the images on the big screen."

Bancroft's attempt to scuff the red leather ball with sandpaper were captured by a South African TV broadcaster. Making one side of the ball rough is one way of potentially helping it move through the air in an unconventional way and assist the bowlers.

Smith and Warner were banned for 12 months and Bancroft was suspended for nine months following an

emergency investigation by Cricket Australia in 2018 that cleared other members of the team.

Cricket Australia's interim chief executive Nick Hockley on Tuesday told Australian Associated Press that Bancroft had been asked for clarification on the media reports and there were no plans to launch another investigation.

"He confirmed he has no new information," Hockley said. "We can only deal with the facts

that we have and there's nothing further that has been raised. "So as far as we're concerned, that investigation was closed and the sanctions were served."

In their open letter, Starc, Hazlewood, Cummins and Lyon rejected suggestions that they must have been aware of the cheating plot because as test bowlers they're experts at assessing the condition of a cricket ball.

"Nigel Llong and Richard Illingworth, both very respected and experienced umpires, inspected the ball after the images surfaced on the TV coverage and did not change it because there was no sign of damage," the four bowlers wrote. "None of this excuses what happened on the field that day. It was wrong and it should never have happened."

Bancroft is in England playing for Durham in the county competition. He has only played two tests for Australia since returning from his ban. Smith and Warner are back as regular members of the national team.

# Hodgson, 73, stepping down as Crystal Palace manager



**LONDON (AP):** Roy Hodgson, the Premier League's oldest manager at 73, is leaving his role at Crystal Palace at the end of the season after four years at the club.

"After more than 45 years of coaching, I have

decided that the time is right for me to step away from the rigors of top-flight Premier League football," Hodgson said Tuesday.

Hodgson did not disclose what the next step in his career would be, but said he is ready to

stop being a "full-time manager."

The former England manager's last game in charge of Palace, which is safe from relegation, will be against Liverpool — one of his many old clubs — at Anfield on Sunday.

# Marchand scores in OT, Bruins beat Capitals to even series



**WASHINGTON (AP):** All Brad Marchand had to show for the first 60 minutes of Monday night's game was two penalties for post-whistle antics.

He needed less than a minute to make up for it.

Marchand scored 39 seconds into overtime and the Boston Bruins rallied to beat the Washington Capitals 4-3 Monday night, tying the East Division first-round playoff series at a game apiece.

After a hard-fought victory in which Marchand played a significant role, the Bruins will almost certainly take the good and the bad of their leading scorer who likes to get under the skin of his opponents.

"There's way, way more good than bad, and I think he wanted to drag us into the fight — and we needed it," coach Bruce Cassidy said. "I think he's matured enough now to not take himself out of the game. Maybe that would have been a game in the past he would've let it get to him and he wouldn't have been an effective player, but he found his game and certainly a big part of the win with the overtime winner."

Marchand ripping a one-timer past Craig Anderson to send the series back to Boston tied will be remembered far more than him jabbing Capitals defenseman Brenden Dillon below the belt at the end of a scrum in the first period or slashing Anthony Mantha when they got into it in the second. But those won't be forgotten, and could have derailed him.

"It's about just being able to kind of get back into the game," said Marchand, who ranked third in the NHL with 69 points during the regular season. "We're obviously

on the biggest stage right now and got to stay out of the box in these games, so I've got to do a little bit better job there."

The Bruins are at their best when Marchand is toeing that line and also producing. So it was captain Patrice Bergeron's job to grab him, reel him in and get Marchand re-focused on the task at hand. It worked, and Boston doesn't want Marchand any other way.

"That's who he is," said Bergeron, who scored in the first along with Jake DeBrusk. "He competes at all times. His will and his want to be the difference is there every time."

This series has helped the NHL playoffs get off to a roaring start with five consecutive one-goal games, including four reaching overtime. The Capitals and Bruins are certainly no strangers to it. They've now played nine consecutive one-goal games in the post-season dating to their 2012 series.

Game 3 is Wednesday night in Boston.

"I think we'll be there with a response," Capitals coach Peter Laviolette said. "Our guys have always responded in game and through the course of the season, so we'll be ready to play."

The Bruins were less than three minutes away from pure desperation mode in the series.

Two penalties early in the third period took Boston out of rhythm as Garnet Hathaway scored his second of the game to give Washington the lead with 12:56 left. Anderson — who made 38 consecutive saves after allowing two goals on the first five Bruins shots — was a rock until Taylor Hall whacked a loose

puck past him with 2:49 left in regulation.

"It was a greasy goal, for sure," said Hall, who joined the Bruins at the trade deadline. "It wasn't a perfect game for me. I still have another level to get to personally, but as a team we came together and won a game and that's all you can ask for."

Boston got 36 saves from Tuukka Rask, who was beaten twice by deflections. Hathaway scored twice and T.J. Oshie redirected a shot in for Washington, which played without goaltenders VitekVanecek and IlyaSamsonov and center EvgenyKuznetsov, and lost center Lars Eller to a lower-body injury in the middle of Game 2.

"(Rask) certainly played well, gave us a chance to win," Cassidy said. "The game was always close. You don't want it to get away from you. I thought both goalies were good. I thought their guy was excellent, too, but we were one better."

### MAJOR ABSENCES

While Vanecek is considered day-to-day with a lower-body injury, Kuznetsov and Samsonov remained out after clearing league COVID protocol Sunday. Each missed the final five games of the regular season, and there's no definitive timeline for when they'll be available to play.

The Bruins played without defenseman Jeremy Lauzon, who was replaced on the blue line by Connor Clifton, a right shot playing his off side.

### UP NEXT

Capitals defenseman ZdenoChara plays as a visitor in the playoffs at TD Garden in Boston for the first time after 73 games there as Bruins captain. Puck drop on Game 3 is 6:30 Wednesday night.

# Contreras homers off Lester as Cubs beat Nationals 7-3



**CHICAGO (AP):** Willson Contreras and the Chicago Cubs heaped praise on Jon Lester and Kyle Schwarber in their return to Wrigley Field on Monday. They even shared some of their candy.

That was about as far as they were willing to go when it came to their warm welcome for their former teammates.

Contreras, Jason Heyward and Javier Báez homered off Lester in his return to Chicago, leading the Cubs to a 7-3 victory over the Washington Nationals.

Lester and Schwarber, two key members of Chicago's 2016 World Series championship team, heard loud cheers all night long in their first game against their former team. Contreras put his arm around Schwarber's shoulders before he batted in the first inning, and the catcher gave Lester a brief hug when the pitcher was at the plate in the third.

"We created a really good relationship," Contreras said. "Those two guys are really friendly. They were great teammates. They are really great persons, on and off the field, and it was so good to see them back at Wrigley Field. I wish they both were here, but we never know what the future holds."

Schwarber went out to his position in left field and found some candy that Kris Bryant left for his former teammate. Schwarber said he had a Twix bar out on the field, and then connected for a two-run homer in his next at-bat in the fourth.

"It was really pretty good,"

Schwarber said. "I looked at him like, 'Are you crazy, man?' It was a funny gesture."

Schwarber's sixth homer landed in the bleachers in center. Per the custom at Chicago's iconic ballpark — even for old friends like the affable Schwarber — the ball was thrown back onto the field.

"I was like, 'They threw it back?' But I was able to get the ball and I'm going to get it authenticated," Schwarber said. "Definitely keep that as a keepsake."

In between the standing ovations, sweet treats and all the cheering for Lester and Schwarber, the Cubs were mostly business during their third win in four games.

AdbertAlzolay (2-3) pitched five innings of three-run ball in his first win since April 29. Second baseman NicoHoerner robbed Starlin Castro of a bases-loaded hit with a terrific diving stop in the eighth. Eric Sogard and Heyward tacked on run-scoring singles to help Chicago close it out. Trea Turner hit his 10th homer for Washington, which had won three of four. Josh Bell reached three times on two singles and a walk.

The crowd of 11,144 — a season high for Wrigley — saluted Schwarber with a long ovation after the Cubs paid tribute to the slugger with a pregame highlight video. It was more of the same when Schwarber walked to the plate in the first.

The 37-year-old Lester (0-2) got the same treatment when he took the mound for the bottom of

the first. The left-hander took his cap off briefly in appreciation, and then quickly went back to his routine.

"Coming back with fans and seeing those faces was great," Lester said. "I think you have to kind of toe that fine line of trying to enjoy the moment but at the same time, you know, compete and try to win."

The pregame cheers for Lester quickly gave way to a series of hard-hit balls for the Cubs, who scored in each of the first three innings. Heyward's two-run shot made it 3-0 in the second, and Contreras connected for his eighth homer in the third.

After Schwarber trimmed Chicago's lead to 4-3 with his homer, Báez chased Lester with an opposite-field shot with one out in the sixth. Lester heard another loud ovation as he trudged off the field and into the visitor's dugout.

### TRAINER'S ROOM

Nationals: RHP Stephen Strasburg (shoulder inflammation) is scheduled for an extended bullpen Tuesday. Manager Dave Martinez said Strasburg will throw around 50 pitches. "I just want to make sure that he's completely healthy," Martinez said. "So far, so good."

### UP NEXT

Left-hander Patrick Corbin (2-3, 6.19 ERA) pitches for Washington on Tuesday, and right-hander Zach Davies (2-2, 5.60 ERA) starts for Chicago. Corbin is 2-0 with a 2.70 ERA in three May starts. Davies also has pitched well this month, allowing two earned runs in 16 1/3 innings.

# French rugby federation allows transgender people to compete

**PARIS (AP):** The French rugby federation is allowing transgender people to take part in all France's domestic competitions from next season in a move going against recommendations from World Rugby.

The French federation issued a statement saying its executive board unanimously voted in favor of the proposal from its Anti-Discrimination and Equal Treatment Commission.

In October last year, World Rugby recommended that transgender women should not play in women's elite or international teams for safety reasons, becoming one of the first major world sports to do so. But the governing body's guidelines were recommendations only and are not binding on national unions in their domestic competitions.

"Rugby is an inclusive, sharing sport, without distinction of sex, gender, origin or religion," said Serge Simon, the vice-president of the French rugby federation. "It is important to allow all our members to practice their passion while respecting everyone's rights." With two years to go before the World Cup in France, the French federation said the vote sends a "benevolent and resolute signal that respect for minorities is an irrefutable right in our sport."

Under the new recommendations, the French federation said that transgender people "physically reassigned and recognized in their current gender" can play in all its official competitions. Those transitioning to their new sexual identity need to provide proof their civil record has changed.

## Report says Myanmar internet a 'virtual battlefield'

**BANGKOK (AP):** Myanmar's military rulers are seeking to limit access to the internet to an internal network of only "whitelisted" sites to quash opposition to their seizure of power, according to a report by the International Crisis Group.

It likened the internet to a "virtual battlefield" where the military is struggling to gain an edge because it lacks technological capacity, while social media companies like Facebook have banned military officials and many government agencies.

The report released Tuesday noted a narrowing of the leeway for on-line dissent and abuses of social media to spread hatred toward minority Muslim people in western Myanmar's Rakhine under Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government, which was ousted in a Feb. 1 coup. Since then, authorities have imposed nightly internet outages and sought to limit access to social media platforms.

International telecoms companies such as Norway's Telenor and other businesses have protested the moves, which they say are crippling business activity and have undone years of progress toward integrating Myanmar into the world economy.

The coup interrupted a faltering, decade-long move toward a civilian, democratically elected government after decades of military rule that began soon after the country, also known as Burma, gained independence from Britain.

It incensed a generation of young Myanmar people who grew up in relative freedom, with access to cell phones, social media and the internet as the country leapfrogged into the mobile age, with heavy reliance on internet services commonly found in wealthier countries.

The junta has ordered mobile operators and internet service providers to restrict access to certain websites and virtual private networks, or VPNs, that can skirt internet filtering. It is gradually ramping up shutdowns, limiting access to only fiber data connections which are available to only a fraction of the population.

Many tech-savvy young people are involved in the civil disobedience movement against the coup and the military lacks the sort of capabilities that China has developed over the past several decades, enabling it to police the internet and ban access to certain sites, the International Crisis Group report says.

So instead the military, also known as the Tatmadaw, is developing an "intranet" for inside the country that allows mobile access only to approved, or "whitelisted" applications, it says. Those might include online banking, for example. That "inevitably limits its ability to offer anything more than the most basic services, with a major impact on the economy," the report says.

# Palestinians go on strike as Israel, Hamas trade fire

**GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP (AP):** Palestinians across Israel and the occupied territories went on strike in a rare collective action against Israel's policies on Tuesday as Israeli strikes rained down on Gaza and militants fired dozens of rockets from the Hamas-ruled territory.

With the war in Gaza showing no sign of abating and truce efforts apparently stalled, the general strike and expected protests could again widen the conflict after a spasm of communal violence in Israel and protests across the occupied West Bank last week.

Tuesday's airstrikes toppled a six-story building that housed libraries and educational centers belonging to the Islamic University, leaving behind a massive mound of rebar and concrete slabs. Desks, office chairs, books and computer wires could be seen in the debris. Residents sifted through the rubble, searching for their belongings.

Israel warned the building's residents ahead of time, sending them fleeing into the predawn darkness, and there were no reports of casualties. Israel said it was targeting militants, their tunnels and rocket launchers across the territory.

"The whole street started running, then destruction, an earthquake," said Jamal Herzallah, a resident of the area. "This whole area was shaking."

Heavy fighting broke out May 10 when Gaza's militant Hamas rulers fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem in support of Palestinian protests against Israel's heavy-handed policing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint site sacred to Jews and Muslims, and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers.

At least 213 Palestinians have been killed in heavy airstrikes since, including 61 children and 36 women, with more than 1,440 people wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not break the numbers down into fighters and civilians. As the fighting drags on, medical supplies, fuel and water are running low in Gaza. Ten people in Israel, including a 5-year-old boy and a soldier, have been killed in the ongoing rocket attacks launched from civilian areas in Gaza



toward civilian areas in Israel.

The fighting is the most intense since a 2014 war between Israel and Hamas, but efforts to halt it have so far stalled. Egyptian mediators are trying to negotiate a cease-fire, but the U.S. has stopped short of demanding an immediate stop to the hostilities and Israel has so far vowed to press on.

With no end in sight to the fighting, Palestinians in Israel, east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank observed a general strike on Tuesday. It was a rare show of unity among Palestinian citizens of Israel, who make up 20% of its population, and those in the territories Israel seized in 1967 that the Palestinians have long sought for a future state of their own. Life had already ground to a halt in Gaza when the fighting began.

The strike was intended to protest the Gaza war and Israeli policies that many activists and some rights groups say constitute an overarching system of apartheid that denies Palestinians the rights afforded to Jews. Israel rejects that characterization, saying its citizens have equal rights. It blames the war on Hamas, the Islamic militant group that controls Gaza, and accuses it of inciting violence across the region.

Leaders of the Palestinian community in Israel called the strike, which was embraced by the internationally-backed Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank, where ministries and schools were closed. Most businesses appeared to be observing the strike, and protests were expected.

Muhammad Barakeh, one of the organizers of the strike, said Palestinians are expressing a "collective position" against Israel's "aggression" in Gaza and Jerusalem, as well as the "brutal repression" by police across Israel.

The war has also seen an unusual outbreak of violence in Israel, with groups of Jewish and Palestinian citizens fighting in the streets and torching vehicles and buildings. In both Israel and the West Bank, Palestinian protesters have clashed with Israeli forces.

The Israeli military said Tuesday it fired at 65 militant targets, including rocket launchers, a group of fighters and the homes of Hamas commanders that the army said were being used for military purposes. It said more than 60 fighter jets took part in the operation.

The military said it also shot down a drone "approaching the Is-

raeli border" in the northeast, far from the Gaza fighting. It did not say where the unmanned aircraft originated, but it's possible the drone came from Syria.

The military said Palestinian militants fired 90 rockets, 20 of which fell short into Gaza. Israel says its missile defenses have intercepted about 90% of the rockets.

Israel's strikes have leveled down several buildings and caused widespread damage in the narrow coastal territory, which is home to more than 2 million Palestinians and has been under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade since Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007.

The attacks have damaged at least 18 hospitals and clinics and entirely destroyed one health facility, the World Health Organization said in a new report. Nearly half of all essential drugs in the territory have run out.

It said the bombing of key roads, including those leading to the main Shifa Hospital, has hindered the movement of ambulances and supply vehicles. Over 41,000 displaced Palestinians have sought refuge in U.N. schools in Gaza, which was already struggling to cope with a coronavirus outbreak. Gaza is also

running low on fuel for its electricity supply and water.

Israel has vowed to press on with its operations, and the United States signaled it would not pressure the two sides for a cease-fire even as President Joe Biden said he supported one.

"We will continue to operate as long as necessary in order to return calm and security to all Israeli citizens," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said after meeting with top security officials on Monday.

The Biden administration has declined so far to publicly criticize Israel's part in the fighting or send a top-level envoy to the region. On Monday, the United States again blocked a proposed U.N. Security Council statement calling for an end to "the crisis related to Gaza" and the protection of civilians, especially children.

Since the fighting began, the Israeli military has launched hundreds of airstrikes it says are targeting Hamas' militant infrastructure. Palestinian militants in Gaza have fired more than 3,400 rockets into Israel.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad say at least 20 of their fighters have been killed, while Israel says the number is at least 160 and has released the names of and photos of more than two dozen militant commanders it says were "eliminated."

Israel's airstrikes have leveled a number of Gaza City's tallest buildings, which Israel alleges contained Hamas military infrastructure. Among them was the building housing The Associated Press Gaza office and those of other media outlets.

Netanyahu alleged that Hamas military intelligence was operating inside the building and said any evidence would be shared through intelligence channels. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he hasn't yet seen any evidence supporting that.

AP President Gary Pruitt reiterated the organization's call for an independent investigation into the attack.

"As we have said, we have no indication of a Hamas presence in the building, nor were we warned of any such possible presence before the airstrike," he said in a statement. "We do not know what the Israeli evidence shows, and we want to know."

## Russia's northernmost base projects its power across Arctic

**NAGURSKOYE, RUSSIA (AP):** During the Cold War, Russia's Nagurskoye airbase was little more than a runway, a weather station and a communications outpost in the Franz Josef Land archipelago.

It was a remote and desolate home mostly for polar bears, where temperatures plunge in winter to minus-42 Celsius (43 degrees below zero Fahrenheit) and the snow only disappears from August to mid-September.

Now, Russia's northernmost military base is bristling with missiles and radar and its extended runway can handle all types of aircraft, including nuclear-capable strategic bombers, projecting Moscow's power and influence across the Arctic amid intensifying international competition for the region's vast resources.

The shamrock-shaped facility — three large pods extending from a central atrium — is called the "Arctic Trefoil" and is painted in the white-red-and-blue of the national flag, brightening the otherwise stark vantage point on the 5,600-kilometer (3,470-mile) Northern Sea Route along Rus-

sia's Arctic coast. Other buildings on the Island, which is called Alexandra Land, are used for radar and communications, a weather station, oil storage, hangars and construction facilities.

Russia has sought to assert its influence over wide areas of the Arctic in competition with the United States, Canada, Denmark and Norway as shrinking polar ice from the warming planet offers new opportunities for resources and shipping routes. China also has shown an increasing interest in the region, believed to hold up to one-fourth of the Earth's undiscovered oil and gas.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has cited estimates that put the value of Arctic mineral riches at \$30 trillion.

Tensions between Russia and the West will likely loom large over Thursday's meeting of the Arctic nations' foreign ministers in Reykjavik, Iceland, where Moscow is set to take a rotating chairmanship in the Arctic Council.

The base, which sits about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) south of the geographic North Pole, was built using new construction technologies as part of Kremlin efforts to

bolster the military amid spiraling tensions with the West following Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

The following year, Russia submitted a revised bid for vast territories in the Arctic to the United Nations, claiming 1.2 million square kilometers (over 463,000 square miles) of Arctic sea shelf, extending more than 350 nautical miles (650 kilometers) from shore.

While the U.N. pondered that claim and those from other nations, Russia has said it sees the Northern Sea Route as its "historically developed national transport corridor," requiring authorization from Moscow for foreign vessels to navigate along it. The U.S. has dismissed Russia's claims of jurisdiction on parts of the route as illegitimate.

Moscow has declared its intention to introduce procedures for foreign ships and assign Russian pilots for guidance along the route, which runs from Norway to Alaska.

As part of that effort, Russia has rebuilt and expanded facilities across the polar region, deploying surveillance and defensive assets. A

base in the similar trefoil shape and patriotic colors to the one in Nagurskoye is on Kotelnik Island, between the Laptev Sea and the East Siberian Sea on eastern end of the shipping route, also with missiles and radar.

Adm. Alexander Moiseyev, chief of Russia's Northern Fleet, said last week that Moscow has the right to set navigation rules along the shipping lane.

"Practically the entire Northern Sea Route goes through Russia's territorial waters or the country's economic zone," Moiseyev told reporters aboard the Peter the Great missile cruiser. "The complex ice conditions make it necessary to organize safe shipping, so Russia insists on a special regime of its use."

NATO is increasingly worried about the growing Russian military footprint in the Arctic, and Washington sent B-1 bombers to Norway this year.

"Increased Russian presence, more Russian bases in the High North, has also triggered the need for more NATO presence, and we have increased our presence there with more naval capabilities, presence in the air, and not least, the

importance of protecting transatlantic undersea cables transmitting a lot of data," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said.

Moiseyev fretted about the U.S. military assets in Norway, saying it has led to an "increase of the conflict potential in the Arctic."

The Russian Foreign Ministry last week fumed at a U.S. nuclear submarine calling at a Norwegian port, saying it reflected what it described as "Oslo's course for the militarization of the Arctic." On the sidelines of this week's Arctic Council meeting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is set to hold talks with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken -- an encounter intended to lay the groundwork for Putin's meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden planned for next month.

Blinken has pointed out that with the Arctic warming at twice the rate of the rest of the global average, Russia has moved to increase its presence in the region.

"Russia is exploiting this change to try to exert control over new spaces," he said last month. "It is modernizing its bases in the Arctic and building new ones."

## Irish health system struggling to recover from cyberattack

**LONDON (AP):** Ireland's health system was still struggling to restore its computers and treat patients on Tuesday, four days after it shut down its entire IT system in response to a cyberattack.

Thousands of diagnostic appointments, cancer treatment clinics and surgeries have been canceled since a ransomware attack on Friday.

Health Service Executive chief clinical officer Colm Henry said Tuesday that the attack had had "a profound impact on our ability to deliver care" and has also shut down the system used to pay health care workers.

He told Irish broadcaster RTE that the disruptions would only "mount in the coming days and weeks."

Ransomware attacks are typically carried out by criminal hackers who scramble data, paralyzing victims' networks, and demand a large payment to decrypt it. Irish officials say a ransom has been demanded but they will not pay it.

"There are serious concerns about the implications for patient care arising from the very limited access to diagnostics, lab services and historical patient records," the Health Service Executive said in a statement late Monday.

The health service said it was working methodically to assess and restore "approximately 2,000 IT patient-facing systems, each supported by infrastructure, multiple servers and devices."

"Our priority is keeping our patients safe and maintaining essential care and support services," it said.

Conti, a Russian-speaking ransomware group, was demanding \$20 million, according to the ransom negotiation page on its darknet site viewed by The Associated Press. The gang threatened Monday to "start publishing and selling your private information very soon" if the money was not paid.

Ransomware attacks are an increasing problem for private companies and public bodies around the world.

The Thai affiliate of Paris-based insurance company AXA and a public health provider in New Zealand were both dealing with ransomware attacks on Tuesday.

In the U.S., the nation's largest fuel pipeline was hit with a ransomware attack earlier this month. The disruption of the Colonial Pipeline caused long lines at gas stations due to distribution problems and panic-buying, draining supplies at thousands of gas stations.

# New Dutch exhibition takes unflinching look at slavery

AMSTERDAM (AP):The delicacy of one of the first objects in new exhibition at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum belies its brutality. At the end of a thin iron rod are the artistically interwoven letters GWC — used to brand the initials of a Dutch trading company into the skin of enslaved workers.

The stark contrast between finery and brutality, wealth and inhumanity is a recurring pattern at the museum's unflinching exhibition titled, simply, "Slavery," that examines the history of Dutch involvement in the international slave trade. Nearby, a huge wooden set of stocks and heavy iron chains and locks used to constrain enslaved people stands close to a small box, intricately decorated with gold, tortoiseshell and velvet celebrating some of the valuable commodities traded by the Dutch West India Company in the 18th century: Gold, ivory and human beings.

The exhibit, being opened Tuesday by King Willem-Alexander, tells the story of slavery by drilling down into the personal stories of 10 people, ranging from enslaved workers to a wealthy Amsterdam woman.

"We wanted to make the case,

that this is a history that speaks to anybody in the Netherlands. It belongs to all of us, so that's why we chose a personal approach," ValikaSmeulders, head of the museum's history department, told The Associated Press.

The exhibition opens — belatedly and mainly online because of the COVID-19 pandemic — at a time when scrutiny of many nations' brutal colonial history has been spurred by the Black Lives Matter movement that swept the world last year after the death of Black man George Floyd.

School children will be able to visit the museum beginning this week, but the exhibition will not open to the general public until the Dutch lockdown eases further, possibly in June.

Amsterdam had a significant role in the global slave trade — the stately mansions lining its canals attest to the fortunes made by Golden Age traders often with the use of slave labor. That history has led to calls for a formal apology from the current municipality.

"Well, apologies are in the air,

absolutely. And I think that, with this exhibition, as a museum, what we are adding to that is that we bring this story in the most honest way possible for us at the moment," said Smeulders.



The Dutch show is part of a broader movement to re-examine colonial histories. In neighboring Belgium, the Africa Museum near Brussels re-opened a few years ago after a major renovation and shone a light on the country's dark colonial history in Congo.

Germany is returning hun-

dreds of artifacts known as the Benin Bronzes that were mostly looted from West Africa by a British colonial expedition.

The 10 stories featured in the Amsterdam exhibition span 250

years of Dutch colonial history and four continents — Europe, Asia, South America and Africa.

Among the stories is that of Wally, an enslaved man forced to work on a sugar plantation in the colony of Suriname. In an audio presentation, his history is narrated by former kickboxing world

champion Remy Bonjasky, whose ancestors worked on the same plantation. Wally became involved in a conflict with the managers of the plantation in 1707. He and other enslaved people fled before they were recaptured, interrogated and executed.

Wally and his fellow escapees "were to have their flesh torn off with red hot pincers while being burned alive," Bonjasky says in the online narration. "Their severed heads would later be displayed on spikes as a warning."

The "might" shown by Wally and the other enslaved men "is still in my blood," Bonjasky says. "It has been passed down through generations and is one of the reasons why I was able to become kickboxing world champion three times."

Another story in the exhibition that provides a glaring contrast to the horror of Wally's short life is that of OopjenCoppit, the widow of Marten Soolmans, whose father owned Amsterdam's largest sugar refinery, processing crops harvest-

ed by enslaved men and women in South America.

In the exhibition, she is a personification of the wealth generated for a privileged few by enslaved workers. In a full-length portrait painted in 1664 by Rembrandt van Rijn, she wears a long black, lace-trimmed dress accessorized a pearl necklace and earrings.

"That we're able to use Rembrandt to speak about the history of slavery is really exciting and really new," Smeulders said.

Oopjen's second husband, MaertenDaey, also had links to the slave trade. Before their wedding, he served as a soldier with the Dutch West India Company in Brazil, where he kidnapped and raped an African woman called Francisca, fathering a daughter in 1632, according to church records cited in the exhibition.

"The lives of Marten, Oopjen and Maerten are intertwined with the history of slavery," Rijksmuseum Director Taco Dibbits says in an audio tour of the exhibition. "They owed their wealth to the slave labor in Brazil. It is an example of how the history of slavery and the history of the Netherlands are bound together."

## Ariana Grande, Dalton Gomez tie the knot

NEW YORK (AP): Ariana Grande is a newlywed.

A representative for the singer confirmed that she recently married real estate agent Dalton Gomez.

Grande's rep told People that they tied the knot in a small and intimate wedding, where less than 20 people attended. It wasn't clear when the wedding took place.

"The room was so happy and full of love. The couple

and both families couldn't be happier," the rep told People.

Grande, 27, and Gomez, 25, announced their engagement in December. They began dating in January 2020 and quarantined together during the pandemic. Grande is currently on the pop charts with the hits "34+35," "Positions," "pov" and the "Save Your Tears" remix with The Weeknd. She will work as a coach on "The Voice" in the fall.

## Judge to hear evidence on actor Danny Masterson rape charges

LOS ANGELES (AP): Prosecutors on Tuesday are set to begin presenting evidence to a judge as they attempt to show "That '70s Show" actor Danny Masterson should stand trial in the rapes of three women.

Masterson, 45, who has pleaded not guilty and has been free on bail since his June arrest, is charged in a Los Angeles County court with three counts of rape by force or fear.

At his preliminary hearing scheduled to begin Tuesday morning, prosecutors say they will present evidence that he raped a 23-year-old woman sometime in 2001, a 28-year-old woman in April of 2003, and a 23-year-old woman between October and December of 2003. Prosecutors have said all of the attacks happened in his home.

He could face up to 45 years in prison if convicted.

Such hearings generally provide a limited glimpse at the broader evidence that would be presented should the

case be ordered to trial.

At a hearing last year, the actor's attorney Thomas Mesereau, who also represented Bill Cosby and Michael Jackson in their sexual misconduct cases, said Masterson "is absolutely not guilty and we're going to prove it."

He called the case politicized, the charges the result of unfair hype from media outlets and pressure to prosecute his client as Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey faced an election, which she would later lose.

Masterson is accused of rapes at the height of his fame as he starred as Steven Hyde on the ensemble retro sitcom "That '70s Show" alongside Ashton Kutcher, Mila Kunis and Topher Grace. The series ran on Fox TV from 1998 to 2006 and has had a long afterlife in reruns. He was removed from the Netflix show "The Ranch" in 2017 over the allegations that would eventually lead to the charges.

## Jana Kramer Reveals the "Craziest Revelation" About Her Mental Health Amid Mike Caussin Divorce



Jana Kramer shared the "craziest revelation" about her emotional journey amid her ongoing divorce from Mike Caussin after nearly six years of marriage.

Jana Kramer is picking up on signs that let her know she's where she needs to be.

The 37-year-old One Tree Hill alum, who filed for divorce from Mike Caussin after nearly six years of marriage, took to her Whine Down podcast on Sunday, May 16 to describe her surprise that the anxiety she has dealt with in the past has seemingly disappeared in the weeks since the couple split.

As Jana told guest Keo Motsepe, she previously would find herself waking up halfway through the night and struggling with anxiety. "I still wake up in the middle of the night, but I don't have anxiety anymore," she continued. "Since exiting this relationship, I don't have any more anxiety. It's just the craziest thing."

Jana said her therapist told her that "because you had so much fear and doubt, it was just dragging you under."

The country singer added about her calmer state of mind, "It's been like the craziest revelation, like holy

crap—[that's] what was holding me down. I genuinely almost started crying last night because I don't have any anxiety. It's just weird."

As fans recall, Jana took to Instagram on April 21 to announce her split from Mike, who she wed in May 2015 and is the father to her two children. "I've given everything I have, and now I have nothing else to give," she wrote at the time.

Later that month, E! News obtained their divorce filing, in which Jana cited the reasons for the split as "inappropriate marital conduct, irreconcilable differences and adultery."

Throughout their relationship, she and the former NFL player were open with fans about their struggles, including his infidelity. In a March 2019 podcast episode, Mike shared that, in 2016, he "sought treatment for sex addiction in an inpatient treatment facility."

As he explained on the 2019 podcast, "Jana kind of gave me an ultimatum when everything came out, and she discovered everything, and she looked at me and said, 'You need to go somewhere. Basically, you need to figure out what's going on and what this is, or I'm gone, period.'"



**PILATES TIME!** The model, Tess Holliday is seen leaving after hitting up pilates class.

### Aries:

There are too many fish in the sea, Aries, but you want to have nothing to do with any of them. This chapter of your life is about you, you, you. You're honouring the most important person in your life. You're finally seeing yourself as the radiant being of light that you are, with so much to offer the world. Giving your precious time and energy away to paupers simply doesn't cut it anymore, you know?

Tip: What a radiant being of light you are!

### Taurus:

Temptations galore, Taurus! Looks like you could be resisting the urge to seek pleasure outside of your marriage (or relationship). Remember, there is no wrong or right. It's about honouring the rules that you have established with your partner. But we're sure you'll do what's best for everyone. Single Venusians may find themselves connecting with somebody from their past. Somebody they've always had that soft spot for. PS: Don't you love how the passage of time changes everything for the better?

Tip: It's all about love and other intoxicants around here.

### Gemini:

It's all about Project Self-Love in the Gemini HQ, and that divine glow reveals you're in no mood to stop now. Given that the world works inside out, your physical reality is likely to mirror that energy of peace, love, and tranquility

back to you. For coupled Twins, this is a special, special time. You'll find that your relationship is thriving like never before. Yes, we're talking about deeper intimacy, which is bringing about a magnificent shift within and without. Tip: Inner alchemy is a big theme for you right now.

### Cancer:

Given that you've been indoors for a while, you could be missing your soul crew and the intimacy (both physical and emotional) that comes from being surrounded by your loved ones. The good thing is, the virtual world has a plethora of options to help you meet new people "and" stay connected with those who are already in your circle. Consider joining an interactive class, workshop or support group. Cancer: If you've got love and other intoxicants on your mind, give dating apps a shot. Who knows? You may actually end up building something solid with your suitor(s) whilst the world is still on hold.

Tip: You could turn to the virtual world in order to meet new people.

### Leo:

Sometimes, you've got to lead with your heart. At other times, you've got to let your head do the talking. Word for the wise: it's time to make a logical decision this time around, one that will benefit not just you, but also those around you. On the upside, it's going to be all about love and other intoxicants on the personal front. You and your beloved are uncovering

new layers and getting to know each other on a deeper level. PS: you deserve to be happy, Leo!

Tip: It's all about love and other intoxicants.

### Virgo:

You may find yourself at a crossroads, wondering which way to go from here. But the indecision is a result of letting your head get in the way. Leave this matter to your heart, beloved. You won't come to regret a thing—we promise! Things are also taking a turn for the better on the love and romance front, Virgo. The one who got away could be making a comeback. The good thing is, they're in the mood to make things work this time around and won't shy away from making their move.

Tip: It's time to get lucky!

### Libra:

What if we said your words are like spells? Spells that are directing the course of your life in each and every moment? So pay attention to what you're putting out there, Libra. Let go of the 'doom and gloom' narrative as you reaffirm all that is good in your existence. You may or may not be able to sense the shift immediately, and that's okay. Trust that the mysterious forces are working overtime to ensure that you are moving closer and closer to the desired destination.

Tip: There are wonderful things taking place behind the scenes for you.

Your words are like spells. Spells that are creating your reality as you go along. So, reaffirm all that is good in your existence as you continue to dream in HD. Something tells us you're about to witness a magnificent shift powered by the Universe! Things on the love and romance front are also looking good for you. You and your boo are finding new ways to connect with each other. The cards speak of that you water me and I water you kind of soul connection, Scorpio.

Tip: It's time to reaffirm all that is good in your life.

### Sagittarius:

If it's not making you happy, it's not worth the time and energy you are pouring into it. The cards are urging you to change the game around. To follow your true passion no matter how daunting it sounds. Something tells us there is more to that side hustle than meets the eye, Sagittarius. For some of you, this may also be a time of seeking new sources of revenue. Get them creative juices flowing and make them a pitch they cannot refuse. PS: You've got this!

Tip: There's more to that side hustle than meets the eye.

### Capricorn:

While you're not technically lying about things, you're not being completely honest either. We've got a case of half-truths at hand, Capricorn. Half-truths that are neither serving you nor the other person. Word for the wise: challenge yourself to come clean here. What you will realise is that the people in your life are a lot more considerate and generous than you

give them credit for being.

Tip: Just be honest about how you're feeling here. That's all!

### Aquarius:

The week ahead finds you hustling hard, staying committed to your goals, and carefully putting your coins away for the future. You know what you're here to do, Aquarius, and you know that staying focused is the key to having it all. Things on the interpersonal front may or may not be looking so good, though. While you're okay with the occasional flirting, you're shying away from going all-in with your lover. PS: Something tells us the ghost of your past is still hanging around, preventing you from moving forward.

Tip: Looks like we've got a case of baggage clearing to deal with!

### Pisces:

Big manifestation energy surrounds those who are in the mood for love. What do you desire in a partner? How would you like to feel when they're around? Write the most important qualities (and quirks!) on a piece of paper and surrender this proposition to the Universe. Something tells us you're about to call in a miracle soon! Coupled Pisceans, there's a magnificent shift headed your way too—a magnificent shift we like to call va-va-voom! So, bring out your sexiest lingerie, props "and" toys, if you may. The daily weather forecast reads 'Sexy time ahead!'

Tip: Va-va-voom!