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Summit TIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Record testing deliver record spike but lower positivity rate

SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 27 MAY:

Sikkim recorded its highest single-day spike in Covid cases with 408 new cases of novel coronavirus being detected in the last 24 hours. The record spike was on the back of record testing when Sikkim screened nearly 60% more samples than it has done even on its most busy testing days thus far.

A staggering 1,495 samples were screened in 24 hours to return 408 positive samples. Sikkim has averaged between 800-850 tests per day and has only in rare occasion gone past 900. What should also help calm nerves a bit is the indication that a bulk of the new cases have been detected in clusters, hence



will be easier to contain, and are not spread out, which makes contact tracing and containment more difficult.

While the numbers are high and still worrying, most of the cases continue to asymptomatic and the Test Positiv-

ity Rate which had hovered in the mid-30% for the past week, has also slipped to sub-30 level and registers at 27% today.

Sikkim also lost one more life to Covid over the same 24 hours, when a Covid patient passed away at

Central Referral Hospital here. Sikkim has now lost 240 lives to the virus.

On the other hand, the number of recovered cases in Sikkim crossed the 10,000-mark today and stands at 10,158 with the discharge of 225 more formerly Covid-positive

people from home isolation on Wednesday.

The number of active Covidcases has also increased to 3,604 in the State, of whom 24 are currently in ICU facilities [13 in STNM hospital and 11 in CRH, Tadong]. Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 has now reached 14,214.

Out of the 408 new cases, 216 were registered in East District, 97 in West District, 75 in South District and 20 in North District.

A total of 296 samples returned positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR testing of 763 samples, while 110 persons were found COVID-19 positive in rapid antigen testing of 721 samples and two more cases were detected in TruNat testing of 11 samples.

CM calls on Governor to mark Govt Formation Day



GANGTOK, 27 MAY [IPR]:

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang called on Governor Ganga Prasad at his official residence at Raj Bhan here today.

During the call on, the

Chief Minister extended his greetings on the occasion of the second Government Formation Day.

The CM also enquired about the health of the Governor and Madam

Governor after their recovery from Covid-19.

The CM thanked the Governor for his concern towards the well-being of Sikkim and theSikkimese people and for his valuable guidance.

Bengal Covidrestrictions extended till June 15

KOLKATA, 27 MAY [NDTV]: Bengal has extended Covid-related restrictions on services and movement till June 15. Restrictions currently in place were announced on May 15 and were due to expire at the end of the month.

Mamata Banerjee said Covid numbers in the state - one of those worst affected by the second wave - were declining and, for the economy's sake, she was not announcing a "total lockdown".

"Please don't call this a lockdown. Covid numbers have come down and

for the sake of the economy there will be no total lockdown," the Chief Minister said, adding, "The pandemic situation in the state has eased a little because of existing restrictions."

Restrictions announced earlier this month will carry over into the new 'near-lockdown' period.

All offices and educational institutions will be shut, as well transport services, including the Metro.

Emergency services will be allowed, turn to pg02

Tourism stakeholders resolve to support Govt's battle against Covid

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 MAY:

Sikkim Hotels & Restaurant Association [SHRA] has appealed to all stakeholders to come together to support the State government in combating the pandemic.

SHRA president, Roshan Raj Shrestha, asserted that it is not the time to criticize but to come forward with constructive and cooperative action to overcome the pandemic.

Addressing a press conference here today, he stated that although the government has the adequate infrastructure to tackle the situation, everyone needs to still come together to extend a helping hand if the government needs assistance the near future.

On the same, he appealed to all hoteliers to turn to pg02

2/200 in surprise Rapid Antigen Testing at Lall Bazaar

AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 27 MAY:

Vegetable vendors at Lall Bazaar here were caught by surprise when a medical team in PPE kits arrived at their gates at around 11AM today to carry out an unannounced random sampling test among them to screen for Novel Coronavirus. The process did not begin well and the vendors shut the gate and refused to get screened for Covid.

The altercation stretched for a while with the two sides shouting their arguments from either side of the grill gate. The administration was clearly at the location as part of its random sampling drive at areas which have developed as Covid clusters and because Lall Bazaar, ever since vegetable and ration shops were allowed to open for



three hours every day, has been receiving a lot of footfalls and was seen as a venue where the virus could spread.

The shopkeepers, meanwhile, were upset with the surprise element and raid-like approach of the administration and also worried at the prospect of stocks of vendors who test positive rotting while they were sent to isolation.

Gangtok Mayor, Nell BahadurChhetri, was also at the site and tried to convince the shopkeepers to get screened. He also rued that while

the "discussion" raged, "around 50%" of the vendors slipped away from the back. He also announced today that only vendors with a negative Covid report will be allowed to open for business from Friday onwards. These will obviously have to be Rapid Antigen Tests since RT-PCR takes up to 48 hours to deliver results and the shopkeepers will want to open their shops at the earliest.

Eventually, around 200 samples were screened for Covid at Lall Bazaar today, only two of which returned positive.

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Time for Sikkim to re-strategize Covidgame-plan

JIWAN RAI

The government is not God. Covid-19 exposed the governmental frailty as much as it underscored human fragility. Governments everywhere failed with the exception of extremely few. New Zealand has triumphed, so far. India bungled the management of the second wave in a spectacular manner. We became the global example of how not to handle a global pandemic. Remember the self-praise that went on at the beginning of the first wave in 2020. BJP supporters were proclaiming that world leaders must learn from Mr. NarendraModi how to tackle Co-

vid-19. That was last year.

Sikkim's story is not any different. We were self-congratulatory last year. The government was guarded by some hyper-passionate defenders who would dismiss any Covid related suggestions as a ploy to 'create a panic situation'. Now there are custodians of positivity who take it upon themselves to dispel any heads-up on the Covid-19 pandemic. They basically say three things. First, they say that the lockdown was not necessary, tourism activities and other programs were. Two, the situation is not really so bad.

Three, criticizing the administration will create confusion among people and everybody has a responsibility to partake in the battle.

ViewPoint

It is the people who defied the protocols and created the present mess.

I find the third argument the most dangerous. Honestly speaking, there are hundreds of irresponsible people who defy Covid-19 protocols but many of them have been those in responsible positions of power. People go

turn to pg02



STATE BANK OF SIKKIM

(A Government of Sikkim Undertaking)
RECRUITMENT OF ASSISTANT MANAGER
IN STATE BANK OF SIKKIM

NOTIFICATION NO. SBS/AM/2021/01 Dated: 25th May 2021.

Applications are invited from eligible Indian Citizens of Sikkimese origin having Sikkim Subject certificate/Certificate of Identification for appointment as Assistant Manager(AM) in the State Bank of Sikkim.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

1	<u>Minimum qualification</u>	<p>A. Degree of Bachelor and above from a recognized university with any one of the following as a major subject;</p> <p>(i) Business Economics,</p> <p>(ii) Accounting,</p> <p>(iii) Commerce,</p> <p>(iv) Financial Management/Finance,</p> <p>(v) Banking,</p> <p>(vi) Mathematics</p> <p>B. Minimum of one year of Certificate Course in Computer Application.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>A Degree of Bachelor or above in any discipline from a recognized university with minimum experience of five years of working in clerical cadre and above in any Banks in India.</p>												
2	<u>Age Limit</u>	As on 01.04.2021 minimum age of the candidate should be minimum 21 years and maximum of 40 years for all category of candidates in accordance with the orders issued by the State Government from time to time.												
3	<u>Other Qualifications</u>	<p>(a) Should have knowledge of any of the Sikkim State Languages.</p> <p>(b) Should be conversant with the customs and usages of Sikkim.</p>												
4	<u>Number of Vacancies</u>													
	UR	BL	OBC (CL)		OBC (SL)		ST		SC		PT	TOTAL		
	5	5	5		5		3		2		1	26		
	out of which		out of which		out of which		out of which		out of which		out of which			
	W	BPL	W	BPL	W	BPL	W	BPL	W	BPL	W	BPL		
	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	8	3
Abbreviation: UR-Unreserved BL-Bhutia Lepcha OBC(CL)-Other Backward Class Centre List OBC(SL)-Other Backward Class State List ST-Scheduled Tribe SC-Scheduled Caste W-Women BPL-Below Poverty Level														

Prospective candidates will have to apply after carefully reading the notification regarding the process of examinations and interview, eligibility criteria, online registration processes, payment of prescribed application fee/ intimation charges, pattern of examination, issuance of call letters etc. and ensure that they fulfil all stipulated criteria and follow the prescribed processes. To download notification and apply online, candidates should visit our official website www.statebankofsikkim.com.

THE TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF EVENTS:

Activity	Dates
On-line registration including Edit/Modification of Application by candidates	01.06.2021 to 30.06.2021
Payment of Application Fees/Charges	01.06.2021 to 30.06.2021
Dates for downloading of admit card, date of written exam shall be notified in due course through email, newspaper advertisement and bank's website etc. Candidates are advised to regularly keep in touch with the official SBS website www.statebankofsikkim.com and respective emails for details and updates.	

sd/-
(S.R.Karki)

CHIEF GENERAL MANAGER

GANGTOK THE 25TH MAY 2021.

Scanned by CamScanner

SPYF STATEMENT ON VACCINATING SIKKIM

Amid Pfizer talks, Centre reiterates policy change for foreign vaccines

NEW DELHI, 27 MAY [NDTV]: The government stressed that it has scrapped local trials for "well-established" foreign vaccines to fast-track imports, soon after Pfizer said it is ready to offer five crore doses this year but sought relaxations including indemnity from liability.

In a statement, the government said it is in talks with Pfizer for "earliest possible" imports of its shots and that it had also had discussions with Johnson & Johnson and Moderna. "We reiterate our request to all international vaccine makers to come and make in India - for India and for the world," it said.

The government last month announced fast-track approvals for foreign vaccines, removing the need for local safety trials before emergency approval.

The insistence on local trials was said to be a key reason for stalled discussions with Pfizer. "The provision has now been further amended to waive the trial requirement altogether for the well-established vaccines manufactured in other countries," the government said in its statement.

Pfizer has reportedly told the government that its vaccine has shown "high effectiveness" against the mutant strain dominant in India and on people of Indian ethnicity or nationality. The company has also said its shots are suitable for all above 12 years and can be stored for a month at 2-8 degrees.

The US-based vaccine maker has said it is ready to offer 5 crore doses to India between July and October this year, but has sought relaxations including indemnity in a series of recent interactions with the government, according to Press Trust of India.

"The current situation in India, and across the world, is not 'business as usual' and we must not respond to it with processes as usual too," Pfizer told the government, according to a source quoted by PTI.

Time for Sikkim...

to meet their leaders. They go to attend government programs and civil functions graced by leaders. There has been a series of meetings and congregational programs conducted right under the nose of the administration. Public defiance has its roots in the failure of the administration to set an example and curb crowding.

The Covid war is the people's war but the commander is the government. It is the government who has the authority, resources and manpower. That's why the government takes the credit for victory and must take responsibility for loss. That's why we need to ask the government the questions we ask. They are in the driver's seat. We are now coming to the end of a 2 week long complete lockdown and the outcome leaves much to be desired. What will the post 31 May strategy be? It is time to revisit our Covid strategy. Here are my observations:

The lockdown failed us big time. A huge sacrifice was made for no gain. Hundreds of families in urban areas have been caged in two room or single room, poorly lit and damp rental apartments for too long. There are hapless small children and adolescents there. We cannot subject them to such confinement without any encouraging outcome anymore. There could possibly be two major reasons behind the lockdown's failure. It should have been replaced by the vernacular word "Gharbandi" emphasizing the need to stay inside our homes. Many fools thought that it was fine to roam outside their homes, in the streets and open spaces so long as they were not 'swarming'. Second, the present lockdown came too late. I am surprised that we were the first state to implement a lockdown during the first wave and the last one to do so in the second wave. Can you explain to me why?

Govt was one of reasons counted by the SKM spokesperson behind the alliance. However, about 20 months have passed since the alliance but no such 'coordination' has been felt by the people. A private hospital, CRH Manipal, has acquired 21,000 dosages of vaccine whereas the State Govt (a BJP alliance) with the supposed excellent 'coordination' with the centre Govt has only 11,000 dosages for the month of June. It is a matter of embarrassment for those responsible for acquiring vaccines for the state that the state with the highest positiv-

ity rate and death rate in the country has acquired just half the number that a private hospital has acquired. As termed by the High Court of Sikkim, in the 'lottery of vaccination' conducted in Sikkim only 9,304(excluding frontline workers) in the age group 18-44 have had the lucky draw so far. The portal remains open for the ridiculously short time of a few seconds. Strangely, for the reason best known to Govt, the vaccination has been carried out only in Gangtok. This step-motherly treatment to the people beyond capital is strange.

Merely, extending lockdown at the cost of poverty and starvation of the common population is only a way to shift the burden of the pandemic to the shoulder of the common people. Govt must act responsibly to restore normalcy as soon as possible.

We request the Govt to expedite the process of acquiring more vaccines to the state through diplomatic talk and negotiation with the central Govt and the Serum Institute of India(SII). Before the Govt acquires sufficient dosages to inoculate the entire population, the 11,000 dosages that the

Govt has acquired for the month of June be provided to the 3 districts where the vaccination for the age group 18-44 has not begun. Govt should utilize the 20,000 vaccines Manipal has acquired inoculate the population of East District. The workers of pharma companies are the most vulnerable as they are continuously working in crowded factories even in the lockdown, the Govt should order the companies to acquire the vaccines by themselves and inoculate all the workers urgently.

[Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum]

Councillor heads Covid relief and management in Tathangchen



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 MAY:

In view of the current Covid-19 pandemic, the newly elected councillor of Tathangchen, PemaLhamuLamtha, convened a meeting yesterday with local stakeholders during which a resolution was passed to form a ward-level Covid-19 management committee with the ward councillor as its chairperson.

The committee will work in close coordination with the State authorities for taking care of Covid-19 patients and their families in terms of medical assistance, food security and other requirements, it is informed.

The committee will

also work to sensitize the residents about Covid-19 safety rules and ensure that the guidelines of the Government of Sikkim are duly followed in the ward with the cooperation of the local public, Ms Lamtha informs.

"At the moment, all our efforts and focus are on tackling the Covid-19 pandemic but we must also not lose sight of the developmental needs of the ward and its people. For this, planning and consultations are essential in advance so that when normalcy returns, we are in a good position to immediately start the developmental works," she adds.

With this in view, the meeting discussed devel-

opmental requirements of Tathangchen Ward and how to coordinate with the State Government to reach developmental schemes to eligible families and youth of the ward.

The ward level committee functionaries and members will work and coordinate with the Government of Sikkim for developmental projects and schemes for Tathangchen ward and its people.

Since 26 May, the Tathangchen councillor has been overseeing distribution of essential items as support to the families in need who have no regular source of income during the lockdown and to Covid patients in home isolation in the ward.

NHPC lights up streets at Singtam and Adarshgaon

SUMMIT REPORT

SINGTAM, 27 MAY:

NHPC, Teesta-V Power Station, carried out "Electrification and Illumination" works in Singtam and Adarshgaon areas of East Sikkim on Wednesday in association with Singtam Nagar Panchayat and Singtam Police Station.

As part of the program, LED lights were installed at the walkways and streets of Singtam and Adarshgaon, an NHPC press release informs.

Speaking on the occasion, Head of the Power Station, Sanjay Darbari said that this measure has been taken as part of emergency preparedness

for the ensuing monsoons to provide proper lighting facilities to the residents of Singtam and Adarshgaon living on the banks of Teesta, the release adds.

This was reportedly done as cyclone preparedness with Yaas expected affect these parts as well.

Lockdown disrupts Nepal's dairy sector as sales suffer, feed becomes scarce

LP DEVKOTA, DIPLA VBHATTARAI&CHANDANIKATHAYAT

KATHMANDU, 27 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]:

Dairy farmer ChudamaniDhakal of Lekbeshi Municipality-10 used to sell 300 litres of milk daily to dairies in Birendranagar. His buffalo farm houses 50 buffaloes, 27 of whom give milk. After the government issued prohibitory orders putting Surkhet district under lockdown, Dhakal's milk sales plunged to 100 litres daily.

With hotels and restaurants shut and people gone back to their villages, farmers can't sell their milk because there are no buyers.

Residents don't want to come out of their houses to buy milk either because of the risk of catching the infection. "People are too scared to go to the grocery stores," Dhakal said.

"Dairy owners ask us to bring only a small quantity of milk because they think they may not be able to sell it," he said. Dhakal is also having a hard time finding feed for his buffaloes because of the stay-home order. Dairy owner Krishna Chalise of Birendranagar-5 said selling milk had become difficult with the hotels closed and fewer consumers. "Due to the slowdown in sales, we have told farmers to bring less milk," he said.

Even though some dairy farmers are having difficulties selling their milk, TirthaPara-

juli of Darnakot, Birendranagar-14 says his problem is not being able to produce enough to fulfil demand. Parajuli's cows and buffaloes are giving less milk as they do not have enough grass to feed on due to a drought.

"We have not been able to obtain nutritious feed for our cattle due to the restriction order," he said. "I used to take 650 litres of milk to market daily, but now I have been taking only 150 litres."

While some farmers are complaining that their milk is remaining unsold, Parajuli says he has been selling milk to seven dairies in Birendranagar.

In Jumla, farmers have not been able to sell their milk for the past three weeks due to the second wave of the coronavirus. Sales came to a stop after the District Administration Office imposed a prohibitory order due to the pandemic.

Commercial farmers of Guthichaur Rural Municipality-5 had been delivering 40-50 litres of milk daily to the district headquarters Khalanga. But after all dairies in Khalanga shuttered, the sale of milk has stopped.

"The local administration has prevented people from even walking around," said BishnuDhital, a buffalo farmer. "People are afraid to buy milk because of the pandemic," he said. Dhital has been rearing buffaloes commercially in the village for seven years.

Onetime incentive reached to ASHA at RakdongTintek



WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 26 MAY:

As per the directions of the Chief Minister, a programme on distribution of one-time incentive for ASHA workers under Samdong PHC was held at BAC Rakdong-Tintektoday.

The programme was conducted on the initia-

tive of the Additional Political Secretary (East) to CM, TsheringWangchuk Lepcha and was attended by the SKM area in-charge of TuminLingeeconstituency, Samdup Bhutia as the chief guest.

A total of 30 cheques were handed over to ASHA workers attached with PHSCs here.

Sherhang reaches medical kits to frontline workers in Dentam

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 MAY:

SherhangSubba, introducing himself as an SKM party worker from Maneybong-Dentam constituency in West Sikkim, donated medical kits and goods and financial support to frontline workers at Dentam PHSC today.

He also interacted with doctors and medical personnel stationed there and enquired about their problems, a press

release informs. Their interactions focused on the spike in Covid cases at Begha village, Uttarey Bazaar and Hee GPU, it is informed.

MrSubba also highlighted that the Chief Minister has not spared any efforts in keeping the people safe from Covid and expressed his gratefulness towardsall frontline workers of Dentam PHSC for their hard work and service.

Bengal Covidrestrictions...

as will home deliveries and other online services. Grocery stores and shops selling essential items will stay open between 7 and 10 am. Shops selling sweets, including traditional Bengali sweetmeats, can open from 10 am to 5 pm.

Banks are open from 10 am to 2 pm. Jewellery and saree shops are open from 12 noon to 3 pm. Petrol pumps are open. Industries will be closed but tea gardens can function, although at 50 per cent strength only. Earlier, the number of workers allowed for the jute industry was 30 per cent. That has been hiked to 40 per cent.

No cultural, political, academic, administrative or religious events and functions will be allowed during this period. No outdoor congregations will be permitted between 9 pm and 5 am.

Weddings can have a maximum of 50 guests. Shopping complexes, beauty parlours, cinema halls, sports facilities and restaurants are shut indefinitely.

This morning Bengal reported over 16,000 new COVID-19 cases and 153 deaths in 24 hours. Active cases are over 1.23 lakh - which is marginally lower than the record 1.32 lakh from May 18.

Nearly 15,000 Covid-related deaths have been reported from Bengal since the pandemic began in December 2019.

Tourism stakeholders...

come forward voluntarily and offer their conference halls or other spaces for conversion into COVID Care Centres and quarantine centres if required in the future.

Mr Shresthapointed out that April to June was the peak tourist season for Sikkim but there was no business due to the pandemic again this year.

On the same, he appealed to owners of properties to relax rents for hotels and restaurants and urged hotel and restaurant owners to provide their staffatleast ration even if they are not able to pay their salaries because of the loss in business.

All Sikkim Luxury Vehicle Owners cum Drivers Welfare Association president, BhuwanPradhan, also mentioned that although luxury vehicle owners and drivers have been badly affected by the pandemic,this was not the time for blame-game but for everyone to come together and support the government.

On the same, he appealed to owners of luxury vehicles to voluntarily give their vehicles as ambulances to serve the people of their respective areas.

SHRA advisor, PemaLhamuLamtha, who is also the TathangchenCouncillor, added that it was a hard time for everyone but also the time to gather ranks and combat Covid.

She stated that the government has been working hard to provide relief to the people but organizations and individuals should also come to support the economically weaker section of the society in this pandemic.

Likewise, SHRA general secretary, Raj Lama, who is also the chief coordinator of SEED Cell, mentioned that SEED Cell has also been delivering service to the people by delivering ration, medicines and food free of cost at the door steps of COVID patients in need and also providing lunches to frontline workers on duty.

The press conference was also addressed by All Sikkim Luxury Vehicle Owners cum Drivers Welfare Association vice-president, BinodSuij.

DC convenes virtual meet for monsoon preparedness

NAMCHI, 27 MAY (IPR):DC (South), M Bharani Kumar held a virtual monsoon preparedness meeting today. This meeting was joined by SSP (South), Thakur Thapa, ADC (South), Satyan Kr Pradhan, CMO (South), DC Sharma, SDM (HQ), Chiran Rizal, General Manager (NHIDCL), AK Singh and Officials from Line Departments of South District Administration Centre.

DC informed the aim of the meeting is to review the arrangements being made and the precautionary measures being taken to handle the situation which may arise due to the monsoon season in the district. He underlined the importance of smooth communication between the line departments so as to avert unfavourable circumstances. He also issued clear directives to PWD, Roads & Bridges, Forest & Environment and many more departments to undertake clearance work at the earliest and underlined that necessary permission needs to be taken in case of excavation work especially during this ongoing monsoon season. He further elaborated about the required intervention needed in AdarshGaon area and exhorted BDO Temi to



monitor the vulnerable areas and equip the standby officials in case of emergencies. Similarly, he urged the concerned department to clear drainage and prevent inundations into habitations. Power Department has been asked to organise teams on standby for power supply related issues during heavy rains.

The Roads and Bridges Department has been asked to update the road status everyday for convenience of the public. Further, the Forest and Environment Department staffs were directed to ascertain trees vulnerable to storms and rains and clear them at the earliest so as to tide through any potential

disaster. It was also informed by the official's from Namchi Municipal Council and Naya-Bazar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat that they have started to clean the town and unclog drains in most of the wards for better drainage during the rainy season.

The meeting also saw a brief discussion with the Officials about the COVID-19 status in the district, the isolation centres, sanitization procedures and disposing of bio - medical waste as per the Standard Operating Procedures. Various aspects such as vaccination process, distribution of Covid Care Kit, data management and other facilities were also deliberated. It was also emphasized by DC and Health Department to clear the roads in this season as it is very important especially for the ambulances transporting COVID-19 positive patients to reach the nearest health care centre.

Khamdong's ASHA workers receive one-time incentive



KHAMDONG, 27 MAY (IPR):In a function organized at Khamdong BAC, the one-time financial incentive of Rs10,000 each from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund was presented to all the ASHA workers of the Upper belt of Khamdong today.

The cheques were presented by Minister, Health & Family Welfare Department, Dr M.K. Sharma in the presence of ADC Development (Gangtok), Radha Pradhan, BDO Khamdong, Tikendra Sharma and CLC President, Mohan Khatiwara.

The Minister expressed his gratitude towards the ASHA Workers for their commendable service and urged them to continue with the same spirit. The Minister also reviewed the status of Covid-19 in the constituency.

Kerala Likely To Pass Joint Resolution Supporting People Of Lakshadweep

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 27 MAY (PTI): The Kerala Assembly is likely to pass a joint resolution expressing solidarity with the people of Lakshadweep where the recent actions of the islands' administrator have drawn flak from various quarters.

MB Rajesh, the newly elected Speaker of the Kerala Assembly, today said Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has proposed the resolution in the wake of recent developments in the archipelago.

"The government will move the resolution in the ongoing session. I hope the opposition also will not have any objection and they will support it as many of its members have already raised such a demand. So, there is unanimity on the matter," he told news agency PTI.

However, the date of the presentation of the resolution is yet to be decided, the Speaker added.

Soon after assuming the new office on Tuesday, MB Rajesh, also a two-time Parliamentarian, had said the present developments in the archipelago are a cause for concern.



chipelago are a cause for concern.

Earlier, Congress legislator Shafi Parambil had sent a letter to the Speaker and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan urging them to move a joint resolution in the House expressing the state's solidarity with the islanders.

"What is happening in Lakshadweep is a cultural invasion to implement the Sangh Parivar agenda of the Central government," the Palakkad legislator alleged in the letter.

The administrator was just an instrument to implement the fascist agenda, he further alleged.

"The Kerala Assembly has been an exemplary platform for anti-fascist struggles," he said, adding that as in the past, a united voice against what was happening in Lakshadweep should be heard from the House on this issue also.

Leaders of ruling CPI(M) and opposition Congress in Kerala have hit out against what they termed as "anti-people" measures initiated by Praful Khoda Patel, the Lakshadweep administrator.

However, the BJP's state unit has rejected the charges.

The first session of the 15th state Assembly began with the swearing-in of newly elected MLAs on May 24. Governor Arif Mohammed Khan will present the policy address of the government on Friday. The session will conclude on June 14.

Sikkim's Rishal Pandey wins ABVP's Quiz Mania



RISHAL PANDEY CHETTRI-SIKKIM

Winner of Quiz Mania - Organised by ABVP Ludhiana, Punjab.

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 MAY:

Rishal Pandey Chettri, a Class XII student at Delhi Public School, Siliguri, and a resident of Gangtok has won 'QUIZ MANIA' - an Online open quiz competition organised by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) - Ludhiana, Punjab.

Rishal was successful in defeating 200+ participants from all over India to win the contest organised on 22 May, results for which were declared today, it is informed.

He was also the only participant from the North-Eastern States and the only school going student among the participants. Most of the participants were college students since it was an open quiz.

The quiz competition had three rounds of quizzing and the winners were felicitated on a virtual platform 27 May, 2021 by State President-ABVP, Dr Rajen Bhandari, Punjab. He mentions, "It is very welcoming to see students from North East India competing with zeal and enthusiasm. Mr Chettri being the only one from Northeast has won the competition and this shows his active interest in quizzing."

ASHA workers in Singtam and Rangpo receive incentive

GANGTOK, 27 MAY (IPR):A total of thirty seven ASHA workers from Singtam and Rangpo area were handed over a one-time financial incentive of Rs.10,000/- each from Chief Minister's Relief Fund here at the conference hall of Singtam District Hospital today.

Chairperson, Rural Development Department (RDD), Sunita Gautam was the chief guest of the programme. She was accompanied by Additional Political Secretary to CM (East), Tshering Wangchuk Lepcha, Block Development Officer, Duga, IK Chettri, Chief Medical Officer, East, Dr Tempo Gyaltzen, ASHA workers and health officials.



The main objective of the programme was to appreciate the efforts of ASHA workers for tackling Covid-19 in rural areas at multiple levels.

Chairperson, RDD, Sunita Gautam praised the efforts of ASHA workers in combating the pandemic. She encouraged them to continue rendering their valuable service

with the same zeal.

In his brief address, APS, Tshering Wangchuk acknowledged the work done by ASHA workers in the district. Further, he informed that there is a total number of 233 ASHA workers in the East District who will be receiving the one-time incentive from the Government.

If laws can be made amid Covid, why can't they be repealed: Tikait

GHAZIABAD, 27 MAY (PTI): If laws can be made amid the Covid pandemic, why cannot they be repealed, BKU leader Rakesh Tikait said on Wednesday, underlining that farmers camping at Delhi border points will leave after the three contentious Central agri laws are withdrawn.

His remark came on a day when farmers protesting against the legislations at the Tikri, Ghazipur and Singhu border points observed "black day" to mark six months of their stir. "The movement will continue for a long time," the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader said while addressing hundreds of protestors at Ghazipur on the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border.

The call to observe "black day" was given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella organisation of protesting farmer unions, which is spearheading the stir against the laws that were enacted in September last year.

Hundreds of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, are encamped at the three Delhi border points since November last year. Besides demanding that the legislations be repealed, they have also sought a new law guaranteeing minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

The protestors claim that the laws will hurt their livelihoods and leave them at the mercy of corporations. However, the government, which has officially held multiple rounds of dialogues with the protestors, has maintained that the laws are pro-farmer.

Groups of protestors converged at the UP Gate on the Delhi-Meerut Expressway as part of the "black day" demonstrations and burnt an effigy symbolising the Centre, amid heavy police deployment. This led to a brief scuffle between the two sides in which the BKU claimed one farmer got "a little burnt" when security officials tried to "snatch away" the effigy. "The movement will continue for a long time. If laws can

be made during the Covid pandemic, then why cannot they be repealed during the pandemic," Tikait, the BKU national spokesperson, said.

"The government has been trying to crush the movement and will do so in the future also. But the farmer is not going to leave Delhi borders. The farmer can return home only on the same condition -- repeal all three new laws and make a new law guaranteeing MSP for crops," he was quoted as saying in a BKU statement. The influential farmer leader from western Uttar Pradesh also said that he does not know what will be the fate of the movement but knows for sure that "if the movement fails, then the government will do as it pleases".

"If the movement is successful, the future generations of farmers will get its benefit," remarked Tikait, who is credited with reviving the protests after it lost its sheen post the January 26 violence in Delhi.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV	Precautions to Prevent nCoV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fatigue Difficulty in breathing Dry Cough Severe acute respiratory syndrome Prolonged, slow symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wash your hands often with soap. Wear a cloth mask or face shield. Observe good personal hygiene. Avoid touching your face with unclean hands. Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. Avoid respiratory secret affected places. Place a mask if you have respiratory symptoms, and wear your mask while coughing or sneezing.
Treatment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treatment is symptomatic and supportive. There is no specific antiviral treatment. No vaccination available as of now. Most likely to recover symptoms detected. 	



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District Surveillance Officer

SANJIB KUMAR

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

M&E is About Communication, Not Confrontation

Start by listening, and collaborations will happen

On paper, and in their speeches, all leaders assure development of a new scale and promise quality delivery [before elections and demand it later]. The present government is now two years old and these have been difficult two years, unprecedented in what was being demanded of the government, and it also had the pressure of being a first-time government. Unfortunately, it did not get the time to warm up to its responsibilities and was thrown from one emergency to the other, landing to the present grip of the pandemic. That said, its commitment to complete underway initiatives and deliver quality remains on the table even as it tries to get a clearly challenged goes, the pandemic has thrown this along with a lot else into the twilight zone, that phase during which nothing new or substantial can be undertaken, but this period should have been utilised for honest reflections, new action plans and appraisals. Such meditations are never wasted.

It is a no-brainer then to suggest that Monitoring & Evaluation need to be included as governance essentials if the expressed aims and objectives are to be met and challenges met with more than just bluster. This much everyone realises and accepts, but routinely decides to ignore. This aspect of governance should now be elevated to a position it deserves – right at the top. Too many doles, projects, funds and sponsorships have been invested in Sikkim without a scientific appraisal on how far the buck travels here. And accept it, monitoring & evaluation is a simple science. Funds get allocated, the release of payment requires numerous NOCs and clearance certificates to attest that the work was done – that’s monitoring. People look at roads carpeted last winter disintegrate with the first showers – that’s evaluation. Well, that’s the thumb rule at least. When it comes to the complicated processes by which initiatives get conceptualised and sanctioned, a slight refinement will be required, but the basics remain unchanged. The new crop of MLAs, who interacted extensively with their constituents, are already familiar with the street-appraisal of ongoing schemes. They know what the people believe to be wrong and what aspects have been endorsed by them. What they need to do now is to approach the concerned departments with these grassroots appraisals and seek explanations. Ditto for the manner in which the pandemic has been managed. We have had heard only claims by those in office, applause by those who live off the sarkar and criticism by those who have been kept out by the people. It is important for those in government to hear how its management is being appraised. That is important because the pandemic, accept it, cannot be contained with enforcement, it will require collaborations and that will not happen until you hear out the people and address their concerns and misgivings and respect their appraisal.

This is not about confrontation, but communication. There may be genuine reasons compromising quality and delivery, and it will be through such deliberations that the executive and the legislative arms of governance can confer, discuss, evaluate and resolve the hindrances that challenge delivery in Sikkim. Of course, the easier thing to do would be to blame the people themselves, find new scapegoats even as new coteries are created; but that is neither advisable, nor desirable, nor even safe.

To what extent are we ruled by unconscious forces?

MAGDA OSMAN
theconversation.com

Sometimes when I ask myself why I’ve made a certain choice, I realise I don’t actually know. To what extent we are ruled by things we aren’t conscious of? – Paul, 43, London Why did you buy your car? Why did you fall in love with your partner? When we start to examine the basis of our life choices, whether they are important or fairly simple ones, we might come to the realisation that we don’t have much of a clue. In fact, we might even wonder whether we really know our own mind, and what goes on in it outside of our conscious awareness.

Luckily, psychological science gives us important and perhaps surprising insights. One of the most important findings comes from psychologist Benjamin Libet in the 1980s. He devised an experiment which was deceptively simple, but has created an enormous amount of debate ever since.

People were asked to sit in a relaxed manner in front of an adapted clock. On the clock face was a small light revolving around it. All people had to do was to flex their finger whenever they felt the urge, and remember

the position of the light on the clock face when they experienced the initial urge to do so. At the same time as that was all happening, people had their brain activity recorded via an electroencephalogram (EEG), which detects levels of electrical activity in the brain.

What Libet was able to show was that timings really matter, and they provide an important clue as to whether or not the unconscious plays a significant role in what we do. He showed that the electrical activity in the brain built up much earlier than people consciously intended to flex their finger, and then went on to do it.

In other words, unconscious mechanisms, through the preparation of neural activity, set us up for any action we decide to take. But this all happens before we consciously experience intending to do something. Our unconscious appears to rule all actions we ever take.

But, as science progresses, we are able to revise and improve on what we know. We now know that there are several fundamental problems with the experimental set up that suggest the claims that our unconscious fundamentally rules our behaviour are significantly exaggerated. For example, when correcting for biases in subjective estimates of conscious intention, the gap between conscious intentions and brain activity reduces. However, the original findings are still compelling even if they can’t be used to claim our unconscious completely rules our behaviour.

UNCONSCIOUS MANIPULATION

Another way of approaching the idea of whether we are ultimately ruled by our unconscious is to look at instances where we might expect unconscious manipulation to occur. In fact, in my research I asked people what those were.

The most common example was marketing and advertising. This may not be a

surprise given that we often come across terms such as “subliminal advertising”, which implies that we are guided towards making consumer choices in ways that we don’t have any control over consciously.

James Vicary, who was a marketer and psychologist in the 1950s, brought the concept to fame. He convinced a cinema owner to use his device to flash messages during a film screening. Messages such as “Drink coca-cola” flashed up for a 3,000th of a second. He claimed that sales of the drink shot up after the film ended. After the significant furore around the ethics of this finding, Vicary came clean and admitted the whole thing was a hoax – he had made up the data.

In fact, it is notoriously difficult to show in laboratory experiments that the flashing of words below the conscious threshold can prime us to even press buttons on a keyboard that are associated with those stimuli, let alone manipulate us into actually changing our choices in the real world.

The more interesting aspect around this controversy is that people still believe, as has been shown in recent studies, that methods such as subliminal advertising are in use, when in fact there is legislation protecting us from it.

UNCONSCIOUS DECISION-MAKING?

But do we make decisions without consciously thinking? To find out, researchers have investigated three areas: the extent to which our choices are based on unconscious processes, whether those unconscious processes are fundamentally biased (for example, sexist or racist), and what, if anything, can be done to improve our biased, unconscious decision-making.

To the first point, a pivotal study examined whether the best choices made in consumer settings were based on active thinking or not. The startling findings were that people made better choices when not thinking at all, especially in complex consumer settings.

Can people vaccinated against COVID-19 still spread the coronavirus?

SANJAY MISHRA
theconversation.com

TAKEAWAYS:

- *Vaccines can be great at preventing you from getting sick, while at the same time not necessarily stopping you from getting infected or spreading the germ.*
- *Preliminary evidence seems to suggest the COVID-19 vaccines make it less likely someone who’s vaccinated will transmit the coronavirus, but the proof is not yet iron-clad.*
- *Unvaccinated people should still be diligent about mask-wearing, physical distancing and other precautions against the coronavirus.*

When the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention changed its guidelines about mask-wearing on May 13, 2021, plenty of Americans were left a little confused. Now anyone who is fully vaccinated can participate in indoor and outdoor activities, large or small, without wearing a mask or physical distancing.

Anthony Fauci, chief medical adviser to President Biden, said the new guideline is “based on the evolution of the science” and “serves as an incentive” for the almost two-thirds of Americans who are not yet fully vaccinated to go ahead and get the shot.

But some people cannot be vaccinated because of underlying conditions. Others with weakened immune systems, from cancer or medical treatments, may not be fully protected by their vaccinations. Children aged 12 to 15 became eligible for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine only on May 10, 2021. And no COVID-19 vaccines are yet authorized for the nearly 50 million children in the U.S. younger than 12.

As restrictions are lifted and people start to leave their masks at home, some people worry: Can you catch COVID-19 from someone who’s vaccinated?

VACCINES DON’T ALWAYS PREVENT INFECTION

Researchers had hoped to design safe COVID-19 vaccines that would prevent at least half of the people vaccinated from getting COVID-19 symptoms.

Fortunately, the vaccines have vastly outperformed expectations. For example, in 6.5 million residents of Israel, aged 16 years and older, the Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA COVID-19 vaccine was found to be 95.3% effective after both shots. Within two months, among the 4.7 million fully vaccinated, the detectable infections fell by 30-fold. Similarly in California and Texas, only 0.05% of fully vaccinated health care workers tested positive for COVID-19.

Vaccine developers often hope that, in addition to preventing illness, their vaccines will achieve “sterilizing immunity,” where the vaccination blocks the germ from even being able to get into the body at all. This sterilizing immunity means someone who’s vaccinated will neither catch the virus nor transmit it further. For a vaccine to be effective, though, it doesn’t need to prevent the germ from infecting an immunized person.

The Salk inactivated polio vaccine, for instance, does not completely stop polio virus from growing in the human gut. But it is extremely effective at preventing the crippling disease because it triggers antibodies that block the virus from infecting the brain and spinal cord. Good vaccines provide effective and durable training for the body’s immune system, so when it actually encounters the disease-causing



pathogen, it’s ready to mount an optimum response.

When it comes to COVID-19, immunologists are still figuring out what they call the “correlates of protection,” factors that predict just how protected someone is against the coronavirus. Researchers believe that an optimum amount of “neutralizing antibodies,” the type that not only bind the virus but also prevent it from infecting, are sufficient to fend off repeat infections. Scientists are also still assessing the durability of immunity that the COVID-19 vaccines are providing and where in the body it’s working.

CAN A VACCINATED PERSON SPREAD CORONAVIRUS?

Immunologists expect vaccines that protect against viral illnesses to also reduce transmission of the virus after vaccination. But it’s actually tricky to figure out for sure if vaccinated people are not spreading the germ.

COVID-19 poses a particular challenge because people with asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic infections can spread the disease – and insufficient contact tracing and testing mean those without symptoms are rarely detected. Some scientists estimate that the number of asymptomatic COVID-19 infections in the overall population could be 3 to 20 times higher than the number of confirmed cases. Research suggests that undocumented cases of COVID-19 in people who either were asymptomatic or experienced very mild disease could be responsible for up to 86% of all infections, though other studies contradict the high estimates.

In one study, the CDC tested volunteer health care personnel and other front-line workers at eight U.S. locations for SARS-CoV-2 infections weekly for three months, regardless of symptoms or vaccination status. The researchers found that fully immunized participants were 25 times less likely to test positive for COVID-19 than were those who were unvaccinated. Findings like this imply that if vaccinated people are so well protected from getting infected at all, they are also unlikely to spread the virus. But without contact tracing to track transmission in a larger population, it’s impossible to know if the assumption is true.

What we know for sure is that if someone does get sick with COVID-19 after vaccination, in what is called a “breakthrough infection,” symptoms will be milder. Studies have found that people who tested positive for COVID-19 after getting just their first vaccine dose had lower levels of virus in their bodies than unvaccinated people who tested positive. The researchers believe the decreased viral load hints that vaccinated people who do contract the virus will be less infectious because they will have much less virus that could be spread to others.

The researchers argued that this is because our unconscious processes are less constrained than conscious processes, which make huge demands on our cognitive system. Unconscious processes, such as intuition, function in ways that automatically and rapidly synthesise a range of complex information, and this gives an advantage over thinking deliberately.

As with the Libet study, this research motivated intense interest. Unfortunately, efforts to replicate such impressive findings were extremely difficult, not only in the original consumer contexts, but beyond into areas where unconscious processes are thought to be rife such as in unconscious lie detection, medical decision-making, and romantically motivated risky decision-making).

That said, there are of course things that can influence our decisions and steer our thinking that we don’t always pay close attention to, such as emotions, moods, tiredness, hunger, stress and prior beliefs. But that doesn’t mean we are ruled by our unconscious – it is possible to be conscious of these factors. We can sometimes even counteract them by putting the right systems in place, or accept that they contribute to our behaviour.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

But what about bias in decision-making? A highly instructive study showed that, through the use of a now widely adopted technique called the “implicit association test (IAT)”, people harbour unconscious, biased attitudes towards other people (such as racial or gender discrimination). It also suggested that these attitudes can actually motivate biased decisions in employment practices, and legal, medical and other important decisions that affect the lives of those on the receiving end.

However, the alarm can be muted when looking more closely at research on the topic, since it shows two critical problems with the

A preprint study which has not yet been peer-reviewed suggests that the Moderna mRNA COVID-19 vaccine can produce coronavirus-fighting antibodies in the oral and nasal fluid. Since that’s where SARS-CoV-2 makes its entry, antibodies in the mouth and nose should block the virus from getting into the body, effectively providing “sterilizing immunity.” This would also mean vaccinated people probably wouldn’t spread the

virus through respiratory droplets.

These bits of evidence are promising. But without more studies, scientists cannot yet conclude that COVID-19 vaccines really do protect against all transmission. Studies attempting to directly answer this question through contact tracing are just beginning: Researchers will track COVID-19 infections among vaccinated and unvaccinated volunteers and their close contacts.

PROTECTION AND PREVENTION GO HAND IN HAND

Vaccines help slow down the spread of an infectious disease by breaking the chain of infection. Those who are infected eventually have fewer and fewer unprotected people to pass the virus on to. This is how a vaccine increases herd immunity – susceptible and not-yet-immunized people are surrounded by a “herd” of people who have become immune, thanks to vaccination or previous infection. But studies suggest that, for a combination of biological and social reasons, vaccination alone is unlikely to achieve herd immunity against COVID-19 and fully contain the coronavirus.

In fact, vaccination alone can take a long time to eradicate any disease. Even diseases that are nearly “eliminated” – such as chickenpox, measles and pertussis – can resurface with waning immunity and declining vaccine rates.

The recent outbreak of infections among the vaccinated New York Yankees shows that vaccinated people not only can still get infected, they might also transmit the coronavirus to close contacts. Highly tested groups, such as professional sports teams, spotlight the fact that mild, asymptomatic infections among the vaccinated in the general population might actually be more frequent than reported. A similar outbreak in airport workers in Singapore shows that, even among the fully vaccinated, new and more infectious variants can spread fast.

The CDC’s relaxed guidelines on masking are meant to reassure vaccinated people that they are safe from serious illness. And they are. But the picture is less clear-cut for the unvaccinated who interact with them. Until near herd immunity against COVID-19 is achieved, and clear evidence accumulates that vaccinated people do not spread the virus, I and many epidemiologists believe it is better to avoid situations where there are chances to get infected. Vaccination coupled with continued masking and social distancing is still an effective way to stay safer.

[the writer is Project Coordinator & Staff Scientist, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Vanderbilt University]

IAT. First, if you look at an individual’s test scores on the IAT at one time, and get them to do it again, the two don’t match consistently; known as limited test-retest reliability. Also, it has been shown that IAT results are a poor predictor of actual decision-making behaviour, which means that the test has low validity.

NUDGE

There have also been efforts to try to improve the way we make decisions in our day-to-day lives (such as healthy eating, saving for retirement) where our unconscious biased processes might limit our ability to do so. Here the work by Nobel laureate Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein has been revolutionary. The basic idea behind their work comes from cognitive scientist Daniel Kahneman, another Nobel prize winner, who argued that people make rash decisions which are primarily unconsciously motivated.

To help improve the way we make decisions, Thaler and Sunstein contend, we need to redirect unconsciously biased processes towards the better decision. The way to do this is through gently nudging people so that they can automatically detect which option is the better option to take. For example, you could make sweets less easily accessible in a supermarket than fruit. This research has been adopted globally in all major public and private institutions.

Recent research shows that nudge techniques often dramatically fail. They also backfire, leading to worse outcomes than if they weren’t used at all. There are several reasons for this, such as applying the wrong nudge or misunderstanding the context. It seems that more is needed to change behaviour than nudging.

That said, nudgers lead us to believe that we are more easily influenced than we think, and than we are. A fundamental aspect of our

Experts fear virus surge in Kathmandu after decision to close groceries triggers panic buying

ANUPOJHA KATHMANDU, 27 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]: When Kabita Sigdel learnt on Tuesday evening about the government decision to extend the prohibitory orders in Kathmandu Valley with more restrictions and big fines, she hurriedly jotted down a list of essentials she needed to stock up on for a week.

On Wednesday morning, she left her flat at Kupondole at 7:30 for shopping and it was already 9am when she was back. But she couldn't buy all the items on the list.

"I had to stand in queue for nearly an hour to buy the daily essentials and another half an hour for green vegetables," said Sigdel, 37, who lives in a six-member family that includes her husband, two children, and parents-in-law.

"This morning, all the grocery shops were crowded. I had 10 items on the list, but when my turn came, the shop had already run out of sunflower oil and red pulse," said Sigdel.

She returned after the shopkeeper assured that oil and pulse would be available on Thursday.

When Sigdel returned home she was more worried, fearing Covid-19 infection because the shoppers were not maintaining social distance. "And everyone seemed to be in a hurry and was jostling



for essentials," said Sigdel.

Sigdel's is a representative case of how panicked people have become with the new prohibitory orders.

Dr Baburam Marasini, former director at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division, called the new orders idiotic as they have caused unnecessary crowding and shortages in the market.

But Kathmandu's chief district officer Kali Prasad Parajuli says the new restrictions are in line with the new Covid-19 Crisis Management Ordinance and introduced with the sole aim of controlling the pandemic.

But Marasini fears infections in the Valley could go up again.

"In the coming two

weeks, Covid-19 cases could rise in the Valley because of the crowding in the market caused by the government's idiotic decision," said Marasini.

Sunil Dahal, a grocer at Kupondole, said he had never seen his shop so crowded in several months. "People are panicked by the suddenly announced new restrictions. I am not sure if they will allow me to open my shop from Friday," said Dahal, 30, who has been in the business for the past seven years.

The decision to close all groceries and department stores for a week from Friday has triggered panic buying. Throughout Wednesday morning, department stores and grocery shops were overcrowded.

"The decision to

close the groceries is absurd and it should be scrapped," said a customer, who was in a queue at a mart in Bakhundole on Wednesday morning.

The infection rate in Kathmandu Valley has been gradually slowing down in recent weeks.

Two weeks ago, on May 11, Kathmandu Valley had reported 3,607 new infections. On Tuesday, 2,613 cases were recorded and on Wednesday the number of new cases in the Valley had come down to 1,493, according to the Health Ministry.

With the number of cases falling, health experts say there was no need for the authorities to further tighten the lockdown, which seems to be already working effectively.

If anything, Marasini, the former director at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division said, by tightening the curbs the authorities have increased the risk of virus transmission.

"There is a high risk of more people getting infected as they will be out to shop in hordes on Thursday also since the government has decided to completely close grocery shops for a week," said Marasini.

Dr SherBahadur Pun, chief of the Clinical Research Unit at the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital agrees with Marasini.

"Instead local authorities could have enforced strict safety protocols in grocery shops and department stores," said Pun.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's health condition stable

KOLKATA, MAY 27 (PTI): The health condition of former West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is stable though he continued to have shortness of breath and be in a state of drowsiness, an official said on Thursday.

Bhattacharjee (77), who is undergoing treatment at a private hospital after being diagnosed

with COVID-19, is presently conscious, alert and talking, he said.

"Mr Bhattacharjee is stable but continues to be on BiPAP, requiring four litres of oxygen. His oxygen saturation is at 92 per cent and his blood pressure is also stable and his heart rate is 54 per minute," the hospital official said in a statement. "Doctors are con-

tinuing to inject Remdesivir and other supportive measures. He is taking food orally. His urine output is also satisfactory," he added.

The veteran CPI(M) leader's wife Mira Bhattacharjee, discharged from the hospital on Monday after recovery from COVID-19, was fine and stable, a senior official said.

23 new COVID-19 cases, 2 fresh fatalities in Andamans

PORT BLAIR, MAY 27 (PTI): The COVID-19 tally of Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 6,901 on Thursday as 23 more people tested positive for the infection, while two fresh fatalities pushed the Union territory's coronavirus death toll to 108, a health official said. Twenty-nine more people were cured of the disease, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 6,573, he said.

The Union territory now has 220 active cases, the official said.

The administration has so far tested over 3.84 lakh samples for COVID-19, in which the positivity rate was 1.8 per cent, he said.

A total of 1.22 lakh people have received the first dose of the COVID vaccine, while 17,359 have been administered the second dose, the official added.

One new case takes mucormycosis count in Bengal to 13

KOLKATA, MAY 26 (PTI): One more case of mucormycosis was detected in West Bengal, taking the total number of people diagnosed with the fungal infection in the state to 13, a health department official said on Wednesday.

Two more persons, suspectedly died of the fungal infection while undergoing treatment in medical facilities, he said.

"A 47-year-old woman from Alipurduar and a man, aged 58, from Nadia district have symptoms of mucormycosis and died at hospitals. Their test results are awaited," the official said.

The state has recorded two deaths due to the fungal disease so far.

The new mucormycosis patient, a

resident of Pradhannagar in Darjeeling, has been undergoing treatment at the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital, the official said.

During the day, three more suspected cases of the fungal infection have also been reported from various places in the state, he said. "The state currently has 13 confirmed cases of mucormycosis, while 11 more patients are suspected to have contracted the fungal infection but their tests results are awaited," the official added.

The West Bengal government has declared mucormycosis as a 'notifiable disease' considering the gravity of the situation and following the advice of the Union health ministry.

Assam reports 5,699 fresh COVID-19 cases, 90 deaths

GUWAHATI, MAY 26 (PTI): Assam reported 90 COVID-19 fatalities and 5,699 fresh infections on Wednesday, raising the death toll and the caseload to 3,005 and 3,86,870, respectively, a health bulletin said.

The northeastern state now has 52,884 active cases, while 3,29,634 people have so far recovered from

the disease, including 6,266 since Tuesday, it said.

The recovery rate stood at 85.21 per cent.

Assam conducted 1,16,119 sample tests in the last 24 hours, taking the total to 10,503,538 such clinical examinations, the bulletin said. Altogether, 39,33,884 people have been vaccinated in the state, officials said.

To what extent are...

psychological experiences is the belief that we are the agents of change, be it personal circumstances (such as having a family) or external ones (such as anthropogenic climate change).

On the whole, we would rather accept that we have free choice in all manner of contexts, even when we perceive it is under threat from mechanisms unconsciously manipulating us. However, we still strategically believe we have less agency, control and responsibility in certain areas, based on how consequential they are. For example, we would rather claim conscious control and agency over our political voting than over what breakfast cereal we are purchasing. So we may argue that our poor breakfast choice was down to subliminal advertising. However, we are less inclined to accept being duped into voting a certain way by big tech social media forces.

Headline-grabbing scientific findings in psychology often don't help because they add to some of the extreme intuitions that we are fundamentally ruled by our unconscious. But the more robust scientific evidence indicates that we are more likely governed by conscious thinking than by unconscious thinking. We might get the sense that we aren't always fully aware of why we do what we do. This might be because we aren't always paying attention to our internal thoughts and motivations. But this isn't equivalent to our unconscious ruling our every decision.

While I don't think so, let's say that we are actually ruled by the unconscious. In this case, there is an advantage to entertaining the belief that we have more conscious control than not. In cases where things go wrong, believing that we can learn and change things for the better depends on us accepting a level of control and responsibility.

In cases where things go well, believing that we can repeat, or further improve on our successes, depends on accepting that we had a role to play in them. The alternative is to submit to the idea that either random, or unconscious forces dictate everything we do and in the long run that can be devastating mentally.

So why did you fall in love with your partner? Maybe they made you feel strong or secure, challenged you in some way, or smelt nice. Just like any other matter of importance, it is multifaceted, and there is no single answer. What I would argue is that it's unlikely that your conscious self had nothing to do with it.

[the writer is Reader in Experimental Psychology, Queen Mary University of London]

Kim vows to build N. Korea socialism amid US nuclear impasse

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has vowed an "uncompromising struggle" against anti-socialist elements at home, state media reported Thursday, as he tries to fortify his power amid pandemic-related difficulties and U.S.-led economic sanctions.

The comments by Kim, the third member of his family to rule the impoverished nuclear-armed country, come as doubts increase about both North Korea's economy and whether it will engage in serious disarmament talks with Washington. There are also worries that the North is continuing to build a strengthened atomic arsenal that directly threatens the United States.

The Biden administration, which took over after dramatic, but ultimately unsuccessful, direct diplomacy between Kim and former President Donald Trump, has described its recent North Korea policy review as "calibrated and practical."

But some experts say Washington won't relax sanctions — a step North Korea badly wants — until the North first takes denuclearization steps. That may be growing increasingly unlikely because Kim is seen by many outside analysts as viewing his weapons as his government's only guarantee of survival.

In a letter to participants at a meeting this week of labor organizations, Kim said "the struggle against the anti-socialist and non-socialist practices is a do-or-die battle to defend the working-class purity and lifeline of our style of socialism," the official Korean Central News Agency reported.

"Anti-socialist and non-socialist practices" likely refer to citizens pursuing capitalism, perceived selfishness and other things that Kim sees as running counter to socialism and collectivism and posing a threat to his family's rule. KCNA quoted Kim as saying it's important to "wage (an) uncompromising struggle against (the anti-socialist and non-socialist practices) and resolutely smash them."

Kim also ordered participants to "firmly maintain the principle of producing everything needed for economic construction and people's living with our own raw and other materials."

Kim, who took power in late 2011,

has said his country faces "the worst-ever" situation because of sharply reduced trade caused by coronavirus-caused border closings, the U.S.-led sanctions and natural disasters last summer. He has called for stronger unity at home and urged the United States to abandon hostility against North Korea, an apparent reference to the sanctions. He warned he would enlarge his nuclear arsenal if U.S. hostility persists.

In March, Kim ordered his country's first short-range ballistic missile tests in a year. But he still maintains a moratorium on long-range missile and nuclear tests, which would pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland, as President Joe Biden's government shapes a new U.S. policy on North Korea.

During a summit between Biden and South Korean President Moon Jae-in last week, the two leaders said in a joint statement that the Biden administration's North Korea policy review "takes a calibrated and practical approach that is open to and will explore diplomacy" with North Korea. The two also emphasized their shared commitment to "the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." Biden announced the appointment of a new special envoy on North Korea affairs, and Moon expressed his hopes that North Korea would respond positively.

U.S. officials have suggested Biden would seek a middle ground between Trump's direct meetings with Kim and former President Barack Obama's "strategic patience" as a way to deal with Kim's advancing nuclear program. Moon said Biden would take gradual, phased steps.

But details of Biden's North Korea policy haven't been publicly disclosed, and it's unclear if his administration has contacted North Korea to explain the policy. North Korea, for its part, has remained silent about the Biden-Moon summit and the U.S. policy review.

"As there is little chance for Kim to get sanctions relief within this year, he would view boosting his internal control as more important because he would think his grip on power might be shaken at a time when he's facing other domestic difficulties," said Nam Sung-Wook, a professor at Korea University who served as president of the Institute for National Security Strategy, a think tank affiliated with South Korea's main spy agency.

Cyclone-triggered heavy rain lashes north Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, MAY 27 (PTI): Heavy rain pummelled several districts of north Odisha under the impact of Cyclone 'Yaas', the meteorological department said on Thursday.

Joda in Keonjhar district recorded extremely heavy rainfall of 268.6 mm over the past 24 hours, followed by 254.8 mm in Jashipur area of Mayurbhanj district, the Bhubaneswar Meteorological Centre said.

Lathikata in Sundargarh registered very

heavy rainfall of 213 mm, while Basudevpur in Bhadrak recorded 195 mm of precipitation. Chandikhol in Jajpur and Deogarh received 177 mm and 131 mm of rain, respectively, it said.

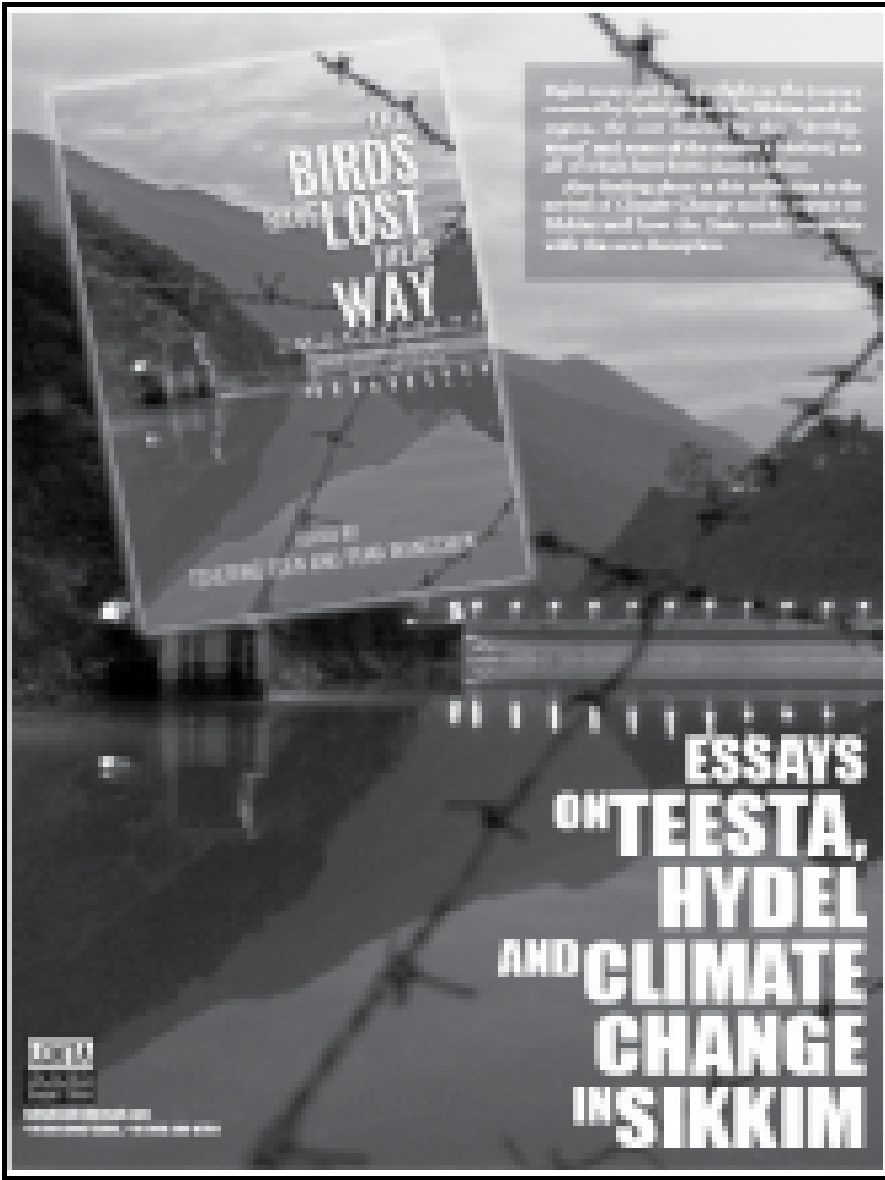
There was downpour of 112 mm at Pallahara in Angul.

Soro in Balasore recorded rainfall of 99 mm, while Bamra in Sambalpur logged 98.4 mm rain, the Met office said.

The IMD had on Wednesday issued a red warning for nine districts

for the next 24 hours. The Bhadrak district administration said the water level of Baitarani river at Akhuapada was 18.37 metres, above the danger mark of 17.83 metres, at 2 pm on Thursday.

Cyclone 'Yaas' wreaked havoc in the beach towns in north Odisha and neighbouring West Bengal, as it hit the coast on Wednesday morning with wind speeds of 130-140 kmph, inundating low-lying areas amid a storm surge, officials said.



FIFA survey: 70% of women's soccer clubs operate at a loss

GENEVA, MAY 27 (AP): A comprehensive survey of women's soccer has found that 70% of women's soccer clubs internationally operate at a loss. Just 13% of clubs generate revenue over 1 million, and more than half of those revenues come from sponsorship deals, according to FIFA data released Wednesday. Soccer's global governing body surveyed 30 leagues and 282 clubs for the FIFA Benchmarking Report, which seeks to identify how to best grow the women's game.

The report focuses on governance, finance, fan engagement, players, on-field issues and some of the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. It builds on FIFA's Global Women's Football Strategy released in 2018.

Women's football is the single biggest growth opportunity for football today. And to meet these conversations, it's really important that we have data, we have facts, we have analysis on the financial, the commercial context, the governance structures, on all the aspects of the professional football ecosystem, said Sarai Bareman, FIFA's chief women's football officer.

Some of the survey's findings were unsurprising. Players on championship teams were paid better than other teams in 73% of the leagues surveyed. Better facilities



ties translated to better performance, with 50% of the teams that had the most facilities winning a league title in the past five years.

Clubs in Japan and China average more than 1 million in revenue, while the average in England is 996,000. The National Women's Soccer League in the United States declined to share financial data, which was self-reported by the clubs surveyed.

While based on the 2018-19 season, the report did include some data related to COVID-19. The FIFA financial relief plan has aided 70% of the leagues and 58% of

the clubs surveyed. Under a quarter of teams expect no financial fallout from the pandemic, while 76% expect varying degrees of impact.

Bareman said the aim is to conduct the survey annually, so the impact of the pandemic on women's soccer could be more completely explored.

Anecdotally, 100%, we've seen evidence that there has been further impacts of COVID-19 on both leagues and clubs. And we're simply seeing that through things such as competitions having to be canceled, to be postponed, in some cases, unfortunately, resources having to be cut back, that there will

be impacts. And I think what's important for us is that next report, Bareman said.

She noted that when FIFA released its global strategy, it aimed for each of the 211 member associations to adopt similar long-term strategies to grow the game. Now FIFA has data to support that.

I think what's important to note here is that, for those of us that have been working in the game, we do know these things anecdotally, but now we actually have data and statistics to back up the knowledge that we have, which is very, very important when it comes to hav-

ing, certainly, discussions around key decisions that need to be made at club and league level, Bareman said. It's also very important when we look to the future of the game, and we're making decisions that will impact on the future of the game, that we are able to have real data and statistics to back that up.

The data could also help guide FIFA decisions on the competition schedule and developing a Women's Club World Cup. There has also been talk of holding both the men's and women's World Cup every two years, rather than the current four.

Langer under pressure to change coaching style after end of season review

SYDNEY, MAY 27 (PTI): Australia head coach Justin Langer must change his coaching style if he wants to continue in his role, an end-of-season review of cricket Down Under has warned.

A source-based report in the 'Sydney Morning Herald' said, the 50-year-old was given a "strong and straightforward" feedback -- taken from 40 players and support staff -- about his coaching style as part of the team's regular end-of-season reviews.

Earlier this year, after an under-strength India came back from behind to hammer Australia 2-1 in their own den, some players had expressed dissatisfaction over Langer's management style because of his intensity and mood swings.

Langer was appointed as the head coach on a four-year contract in 2018 after Darren Lehmann had stepped down in the wake of the ball-tampering scandal.

The players also expressed discontentment towards team manager

Gavin Dovey. Langer's response to the feedback across the rest of the year will decide whether he will be handed a new contract. "This is effectively identical to the process undertaken before the last World Cup and the 2019 Ashes where the team performed strongly," CA's national teams boss Ben Oliver said in a statement to the publication.

"It's part of our ongoing commitment to on-and off-field improvement and we expect it will have a similar benefit in the team's preparation for the upcoming T20 World Cup and home Ashes," he added.

The report stated that leadership consultant Tim Ford, who oversaw the reintegration of Steve Smith and David Warner to the team two years ago after the ball-tampering bans, also conducted a second review process.

"Ford interviewed players virtually towards the end of the home season, with their responses to be kept anonymous."

"...in a wide-ranging

review, which checked on player welfare at the end of a difficult season, he asked for their thoughts on the team's values and what needed updating since they last underwent the process with him two years ago."

He will handover the findings of the report to team leaders Tim Paine, Pat Cummins and Aaron Finch next week.

"Langer will also receive the feedback from Ford's report though the comments were not as hard as the player review from the end of the season," the media report stated.

Assistant coach Andrew McDonald received good reviews with players, saying he was more approachable.

"In contrast to reports from the dressing room during the Australian summer, players spoke glowingly in public of the mood and team environment under McDonald, whom members of the Test side had gravitated towards due to his more approachable manner.

Argentina offers to host Copa America after Colombia's exit

BUENOS AIRES, MAY 27 (AP): Argentina offered to stage the entire Copa America after Colombia was dropped as a tournament co-host last week.

Argentinian President Alberto Fernandez introduced a strict protocol so Copa America is held in this country to Alejandro Domnguez, the head of South American soccer's governing body CONMEBOL, both parties said in a statement.

The tournament is set to kick off June 13 with a final scheduled for July 10. It was initially scheduled for 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced its postponement.

Last week, CONMEBOL rejected a request from the Colombian government to again postpone Copa America to the end of the year. The request came at the same time protests against President Iv n Duque are rocking the country.

Argentina is facing a surge of coronavirus infections, with strict lockdown measures imposed last weekend amid a 7-day average of 35,000 cases and 500 deaths.

The meeting between took place at the presidential residence of Olivos. The statement said Fernandez and Domnguez analysed organizational and logistical aspects with the possible inclusion of additional host cities - and all that regards health protocols.

It felt like I beat the virus: Shiva Thapa talks about record 5th Asian medal



NEW DELHI, MAY 27 (PTI): Shiva Thapa still can't quite believe that securing a fifth successive medal at the prestigious Asian Boxing Championships is "some sort of an unparalleled achievement". All he felt after being assured of it was a "sense of triumph over that wretched coronavirus."

The 27-year-old became the most successful Indian male boxer in the history of the tournament by advancing to the semifinals of the ongoing edition in Dubai. His first was a gold in 2013, followed by a bronze in 2015, a silver in 2017 and another bronze in 2019.

"Wow! I didn't really know that it would mean so much statistically," the seasoned boxer told PTI from Dubai as he geared up for the 64kg category semifinal clash against defending champion Bakhodur Usmonov of Tajikistan on Friday.

"I never thought I would be the first to do something like this. It is a good record to have against your name. Also

makes me realise how time has flown. Is it that long since I first competed at Asian championship?" he wondered.

So which among the five is his favourite?

"Every medal has its own story, there can't be favourites. Through these medals, I have been part of different teams, worked with different coaches. I am the constant along with a handful of people who have stood by me through everything," he said.

And when asked about the story of this medal, he said, "The pandemic. This whole situation that the world is in. To be able to compete and win medals in such a time. Psychologically, it felt as if I have beaten the virus for once."

He can't be faulted to have felt that. Last year, at the Cologne World Cup in Germany, Thapa was forced to withdraw midway into the tournament and placed in quarantine after a support staff member tested positive for COVID-19 and he was deemed a close contact.

Those were "difficult" days for him.

"This Asian medal was like an assertion that we won't give up. That's what it meant to me this time. It is quite overwhelming actually," said the Assamese boxer, one of the just six world championship medallists from the country.

The only other pugilist with five Asian championship medals is Kazakh legend Vassiliy Levit, an Olympic silver-medallist and two-time world bronze-winner.

But even he does not have five on the trot like Thapa at the continental meet. Women's legends M C Mary Kom (7) and L Sarita Devi (8) have more Asian medals than Thapa with the latter having the distinction of claiming six successive, five of them gold, at the peak of her prowess.

"To be anywhere close to these women's achievements is in itself humbling. I am honoured, they are remarkable athletes," he said.

Thapa has endured a couple of topsy-turvy

years. A two-time Olympian, he will not be there at the upcoming Tokyo Games after Manish Kaushik secured the 63kg category quota. He is disappointed about it but also able to see the brighter side of circumstances.

"Perhaps it's a sign that I have to keep going, try harder, that's what an athlete is supposed to do. We can't give up. Obviously nothing compares to the Olympics, it is the biggest but you have to give your best in the opportunities you get, I am trying to do that," he said.

"You keep giving your best and eventually the results come. Every moment is a blessing, I live by that," he asserted.

Thapa is also grateful for how India's sports administration has "worked round the clock" to ensure that athletes are well taken care of during a difficult time.

"The Sports Authority of India, the boxing federation and the sports ministry, they have all done an unbelievable job in ensuring that we get to train and compete. It's a privilege quite frankly," he said.

"The circumstances are such that we have been in lockdown, training in a bubble with no contact with outsiders. It can all get very draining mentally but we have been looked after quite well. There is a robust support system, which is very reassuring in an individual sport," he added.

Rashford faces racist abuse on social media after final loss



GDANSK, MAY 27 (AP): Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford said Thursday he faced "at least 70 racial slurs" on social media after his team's loss on penalties to Villarreal in the Europa League final.

Villarreal won its first major trophy 11-10 on penalties after a 1-1 draw following extra time in Wednesday's final.

"At least 70 racial slurs on my social accounts counted so far," Rashford wrote on Twitter less than 90 minutes after the game finished.

"For those working to make me feel any worse than I already do, good luck trying," Rashford added he was outraged that he was sent a mountain of monkey emojis in a message from a person using a profile which identified them as a teacher. In January, police in

Britain investigated abuse on social media aimed at a number of United players. Rashford and two teammates said they had been targeted. "Yes I'm a black man and I live every day proud that I am, he wrote at the time.

"No one, or no one comment, is going to make me feel any different. So sorry if you were looking for a strong reaction, you're just simply not going to get it here."

English soccer clubs and players boycotted social media for four days in April and May to protest against racist abuse and push for more action from the companies which run the platforms. Figures from other sports including Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton and the International Tennis Federation also joined the boycott.

Real Madrid says Zidane stepping down as team's coach



MADRID (AP): Zinedine Zidane is stepping down as Real Madrid coach, again.

The club said Thursday the Frenchman is leaving his job, four days after a season in which Madrid failed to win a title for the first time in more than a decade.

"Zidane is one of the great myths of Real Madrid and his legend goes beyond what he has been as a coach and player of our club," Madrid said in a statement. Zidane

had a contract through June 2022. Zidane left the club for the first time after leading Madrid to one of its most successful runs from 2016-2018, with three consecutive Champions League titles. In his two years and five months in charge, Madrid won a total of nine trophies, including two Club World Cups, two UEFA Super Cups, one Spanish league and one Spanish Super Cup.

He only won the league title once and a Spanish

Super Cup in his second stint. He quit the first time less than a week after leading the team to its third straight Champions League title, saying it was time for a change and that he didn't see it clearly that the club would keep winning with him in charge.

Zidane had been dismissing talks about his future recently, saying that he would discuss it with the club. He said he believed that Madrid could do well without him as coach.

Afghan forces struggle, demoralised, rife with corruption

KABUL, MAY 27 (AP): Abdullah Mohammadi lost his two legs and an arm below the elbow in a ferocious battle with the Taliban. As a young Afghan soldier, he had been eager to fight for his country, but now he's furious at a government he says ignores him and hasn't paid his veteran's pension for nearly a year.

Afghanistan's National Defense and Security Forces, meant to be the bulwark against advancing Taliban insurgents, are rife with corruption, demoralized and struggling to keep territory. The government says the army can hold its own, but military experts warn of a tough fight ahead for poorly trained, ill-equipped troops whose loyalties waver between their country and local warlords.

By September 11 at the latest, the remaining 2,300-3,500 U.S. troops and roughly 7,000 allied NATO forces will have left Afghanistan, ending nearly 20 years of military engagement. Also leaving is the American air support that the Afghan military has relied on to stave off potentially game-changing Taliban assaults, ever since it took command of the war from the U.S. and NATO in 2014.

Without U.S. military support, it is a matter of time before the Taliban consolidates its gains, particularly in the south, east and west, said Bill Roggio, senior fellow at the American Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and editor of its Long War Journal, which tracks militant movements.

At least half the country is believed to be contested ground, often with the government holding



only the main towns and cities in local districts and the Taliban dominating the countryside.

In the last two weeks, the Taliban seized control of four district centers, including a strategic town southwest of Kabul, on the main highway linking Afghanistan's north and south.

This week, the Taliban briefly entered Mehtar Lam, the capital of Laghman province, after police and army abandoned several outposts protecting the city, government officials said. The Taliban were driven out but later showed off weapons and equipment allegedly left behind at the outposts. More than 100 military personnel were brought to Kabul to be reprimanded for abandon-

ing their positions.

Once U.S. military support is gone, the Taliban should be able to take and hold several provincial capitals and hold them indefinitely, said Roggio.

Within the Afghan army, soldiers complain of substandard equipment, even shoddy basic items like army boots that fall apart within weeks because corrupt contractors used inferior material. The Associated Press witnessed boots with gaping holes being worn, insufficient helmets available and weapons that often jammed.

At a police outpost seen by the AP earlier this month, eight men lived in a partially built bunker that looked big enough for only

half that number. They had only a few rifles as they watched sentry from two turret-style posts on the outpost's high brick walls. They overlook a busy road where the Taliban frequently attack security convoys.

The commander, who wore sandals, said the outpost is occasionally hit by rocket or gunfire and would have a hard time fending off a full-fledged attack.

There's no other option but peace, he said, asking not to be identified because he did not have permission to allow media into his compound.

The Afghan government long ago stopped releasing casualty figures among its security forces. But a former senior security offi-

cial deeply familiar with the cost of war over the past two years told the AP that about 100-110 security personnel are killed or wounded every day. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk about casualties.

Mohammadi, the wounded veteran, said he was injured six years ago in Zhari district in southern Kandahar province, once the spiritual heartland of the Taliban until their ouster in 2001 by U.S.-led coalition forces.

He led a company of 18 men airlifted into battle in a grape field, about 5 kilometers (3 miles) from their nearest base. The fight went on all day and night until eventually the Taliban surrounded them.

I was the commander. I had to do something. I stood up and aimed my RPG (rocket propelled grenade launcher). That was the last Mohammadi remembered. He stepped on a land mine. The Taliban had littered the fields with mines, and higher-ups had not warned him or his men.

For a year he recovered in hospital. He received two wooden legs and an artificial plastic hand. The legs are painful to wear and he can manage them only for 15 minutes at a time. It takes two people to help him get them on, and he sometimes pays a neighbor to help.

I am proud of what I have sacrificed for this country. What I gave for my country I gave with pride, he said.

But Mohammadi is fuming at the government. For years, his veteran's pension, around 16,000 Afghanis (200) a month, has been erratic, and for the past 11 months he hasn't received it at all. They tell me to wait, he said.

Mohammadi says he has had to borrow from family and friends. It wounds his pride, but it's better than begging, he said.

I am angry. I feel like my dignity has been insulted. My life is a struggle, he said, wrapping his lower body in a wool blanket. The cold and damp cause him pain in his missing limbs.

The Defense Ministry's deputy spokesman, Fawad Aman, promised to look into the complaint. He said that corruption, while it exists, is not widespread and efforts are being made to tackle it and that the spirit of the fighting force was high.

Hong Kong bans Tiananmen crackdown vigil for 2nd year



HONG KONG (AP): Hong Kong authorities for the second year have banned the June 4 candlelight vigil to commemorate the bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, organizers said Thursday.

The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, which organizes the candlelight vigil annually, said in a statement that the police had objected to the event in light of social distancing restrictions, which prohibit large gatherings.

For years, Hong Kong and Macao were the only cities in China where people were allowed to mark the 1989 anniversary of Beijing's crushing of the Chinese democracy movement.

The ban on the vigil comes as Beijing has tightened control over the semi-autonomous Chinese city, after months of anti-government protests in 2019.

Beijing and local authorities have cracked down on dissenting voices, launching mass arrests of pro-democracy activists and imposing a sweeping national se-

curity law to penalize crimes like secession and subversion.

On Thursday, the legislature passed a bill amending electoral laws that drastically reduces the public's ability to vote, while increasing the number of pro-Beijing lawmakers making decisions for the city.

Last year, the June 4 vigil was banned for the first time, with police citing public health risks from the coronavirus pandemic. Still, thousands turned up at Victoria Park — where the vigil is held each year — singing songs and lighting candles. No arrests were made at the time.

More than 20 people, including activist Joshua Wong, media tycoon Jimmy Lai and Lee Cheuk-yan, a leader of the alliance, were arrested later and charged for taking part in an unauthorized assembly. Wong and three district councilors were sentenced on May 6 to between four and 10 months in jail after pleading guilty.

Organizers this year have urged people to light a candle no matter where they are on June 4.

China says politics behind US call for virus origin probe

BEIJING (AP): China on Thursday accused the Biden administration of playing politics and shirking its responsibility in calling for a renewed investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic that was first detected in China in late 2019.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said at a daily briefing that President Joe Biden's order showed the U.S. "does not care about facts and truth, nor is it interested in serious scientific origin tracing."

Biden told U.S. intelligence officials to redouble their efforts to investigate the origins of the pandemic, including any possibility the trail might lead to a Chinese laboratory.

After months of minimizing that possibility as a fringe theory, the Biden administration is joining worldwide pressure on China to be more open about the outbreak, aiming to head off Republican complaints the president has not been tough enough to press China on alleged obstruction.

Republicans, including former President Donald Trump, have promoted the theory that the virus emerged from a laboratory rather than naturally through human contact with an infected animal in the central Chinese city of Wuhan.

Zhao also said the U.S. must open itself up to investigations into its biological laboratories, including at the Naval Medical Research Center's Biological Defense Research Directorate at Fort Detrick in the state of Maryland.

"The U.S. side claims that it wants China to participate in a compre-



hensive, transparent, evidence-based international investigation," Zhao said. "We would like to ask the U.S. side to do the same as China and immediately cooperate with the World Health Organization on origin tracing research in a scientific manner."

Biden on Wednesday asked U.S. intelligence agencies to report back within 90 days. He directed U.S. national laboratories to assist with the investigation and the intelligence community to prepare a list of specific queries for the Chinese government. He called on China to cooperate with international probes into the origins of the pandemic.

Republicans, including former President Donald Trump, have promoted the theory that the virus emerged from a laboratory accident rather than naturally through human contact with an infected animal at a traditional wet market in Wuhan.

Biden in a statement said the majority of the intelligence community had "coalesced" around those two scenarios but "do not believe there is sufficient information to

assess one to be more likely than the other." He revealed that two agencies lean toward the animal link and "one leans more toward" the lab theory, "each with low or moderate confidence."

Prior to the president's statement, his administration had sought to avoid public discussion of the lab leak theory while privately suggesting it was farfetched.

In another sign of shifting attitudes, the Senate approved two Wuhan lab-related amendments without opposition, attaching them to a largely unrelated bill to increase U.S. investments in innovation.

Biden still held out the possibility that a firm conclusion may never be reached, given the Chinese government's refusal to fully cooperate with international investigations.

"The failure to get our inspectors on the ground in those early months will always hamper any investigation into the origin of COVID-19," he said.

Administration officials continue to harbor strong doubts about the lab leak theory, viewing China's refusal to cooperate in the investigation

more as emblematic of other irresponsible actions on the world stage.

Andy Slavitt, Biden's senior adviser for the coronavirus, said Tuesday that the world needs to "get to the bottom ... whatever the answer may be."

"We need a completely transparent process from China; we need the WHO to assist in that matter," Slavitt said. "We don't feel like we have that now."

Zhao said the administration's position came in "in total disregard of facts and science ... while totally ignoring the doubts over the origin-tracing work and failure of pandemic response in the U.S."

"This fully shows that the U.S. side does not care about facts and truth, nor is it interested in serious scientific origin tracing, but wants to use the epidemic to engage in stigmatization and political manipulation, and to shirk responsibility," Zhao said. "This is disrespectful to science and irresponsible to people's lives, and moreover, it undermines the global unity of efforts to fight the epidemic."

France's Macron visits Rwanda as relations improve

KIGALI, MAY 27 (AP): French President Emmanuel Macron made a key visit to Rwanda on Thursday as his country tries to mend relations with the central African country 27 years after the genocide. Macron arrived in the Rwandan capital, Kigali, early Thursday and is due to hold talks with Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

Macron's trip builds on a series of French efforts since his election in 2017 to repair ties between the two countries.

He will visit a memorial to the frenzied 1994 slaughter that left an estimated 800,000 people

dead, mainly minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus who tried to protect them from Hutu extremists. Two reports completed in March and in April that examined France's role in the genocide helped clear a path for Macron's visit, the first by a French president in 11 years.

The previous visit, by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2010, was the first by a French leader after the 1994 massacre sent relations into a tailspin. Rwanda's government and genocide survivor organizations often accused France of training and arming militias and former government troops who led the genocide.

CORONAVIRUS PRECAUTIONS & SAFETY TIPS

DON'T LOWER THE GUARD

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

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

WEAR A MASK

Always wear a mask to prevent droplets from going outside.

GET A FLU VACCINATION

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

WASH YOUR HANDS

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

MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING

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

GET TESTED

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

COVER YOUR MOUTH & NOSE WHILE SNEEZING, OR COUGHING

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

FOLLOW PRECAUTIONS BEFORE STEPPING OUT

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

CHECK YOUR TEMPERATURE

Monitor your temperature on a regular basis.

Howard names College of Fine Arts for Chadwick Boseman

WASHINGTON (AP): While studying at Howard University, young Chadwick Boseman helped lead a student protest against plans to merge his beloved College of Fine Arts into the College of Arts and Sciences.

He failed in that goal, but 20 years later, the acclaimed actor is being posthumously honored as the namesake of Howard's newly re-established Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts.

Boseman, who graduated in 2000 with a bachelor's degree in directing, died in August at 43 of colon cancer. He rose to prominence playing a succession of Black icons in biographical films: Jackie Robinson, singer James Brown and Thurgood Marshall.

The South Carolina native's portrayal of African superhero Black Panther spawned a thousand memes and its cultural impact launched him to broader stardom. At the time of his death, Boseman's character was poised to become an anchor of the Marvel Comics movie machine, with multiple sequels planned.

Howard University President Wayne Frederick said he and Boseman discussed ways of reviving the College of Fine Arts multiple times.

"It was always important to him," Frederick told The Associated Press.

"His commitment was very strong." The announcement comes a few weeks after fellow Howard alum Phylicia Rashad was announced as the fine arts college's new dean. Boseman and Rashad met

to the fight throughout his career, and he would be overjoyed by this development," the Boseman family said in a statement. Boseman's widow, Simone Ledward-Boseman, called him "a very



during his undergrad years, and Boseman publicly cited her as a mentor.

Boseman declared his love for the school in a 2018 commencement speech, praising, "the magic of this place. Almost anything can happen here."

Boseman's family said his student protest proved his passion for his alma mater.

"Chad fought to preserve the College of Fine Arts during his matriculation at Howard and remained dedicated

proud Bison" and said the naming of the school "brings this part of his story full-circle and ensures that his legacy will continue to inspire young storytellers for years to come."

Howard Fine Arts alumni include actors Taraji P. Henson, Oscar-nominated cinematographer Bradford Young, and singers Roberta Flack and Jessye Norman, as well as Rashad and her sister, Kennedy Center Honors recipient Debbie Allen.

Chris Noth to reprise his role of Mr Big in 'Sex and the City' revival

LOS ANGELES, MAY 27 (PTI): Actor Chris Noth, who played the love interest of Sarah Jessica Parker's Carrie Bradshaw in "Sex and the City" series, is officially returning for the show's revival.

Titled "And Just Like That...", the new 10-episode series will also bring back cast members Cynthia Nixon and Kristin Davis.

The show will follow Carrie, Miranda (Nixon) and Charlotte (Davis) as they "navigate the journey from the complicated reality of life and friendship in their 30s to the even more complicated reality of life and friendship in their 50s".

Noth will be reprising his role of Mr Big, which he played in the series as well as its two film adaptations.

"I'm thrilled to be working with Chris again on 'And Just Like That'. How could we ever do a new chapter of the 'Sex and the City' story without our Mr. Big?" executive producer Michael Patrick King said in a statement to The Hollywood Reporter.

The revival, which comes from HBO Max, will also star Sara Ramirez as Che Diaz, a non-binary, queer stand-up comedian who hosts a podcast on which Carrie is regularly featured.

King, who won an Emmy for his work as a director on the series, will executive produce the new take alongside Parker, Davis and Nixon.

The original series, created by Darren Star, was based on a novel of the same name by Candace Bushnell and ran from 1998 to 2004. The film adaptations were released in theatres in 2008 and 2010, respectively.

James Bond films will still get 'worldwide theatrical release', say producers

LOS ANGELES, MAY 27 (PTI): The producers of James Bond movie "No Time To Die" have made it clear that the much-awaited film will release in theatres exclusively, despite Amazon's recent acquisition of studio MGM. The two studios on Wednesday announced that they have entered into a definitive merger agreement under which Amazon will acquire MGM for a purchase price of USD 8.45 billion.

MGM owns the rights to film productions of the James Bond franchise as well as popular movie series like "Rocky", "Legally Blonde" and "Tomb Raider", and television shows such as "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Real Housewives Of Beverly Hills". Eon Productions' Barbara Broccoli and Michael G Wilson, who pro-

duce the films in the James Bond franchise, told Variety that the latest movie as well as future films will debut only in theatres. "We are committed to continuing to make James Bond films for the worldwide theatrical audience," Broccoli and Wilson said.

Eon Productions is owned by the Broccoli family, which has shepherded the James Bond franchise of films dating all the way back to the original 007 film "Dr No" in 1962.

The studio has a unique deal in which Broccoli and Wilson have final say on the franchise's marketing and distribution plans, as well as splitting the profits with MGM and in selecting who will be the next person to portray James Bond whenever Daniel Craig steps away from the role.

'School of Rock' actor Kevin Clark killed in bike accident

CHICAGO (AP): Kevin Clark, who played drummer Freddy "Spazzy McGee" Jones in the 2003 movie "School of Rock" with Jack Black, was killed when he was struck by a car while riding his bicycle along a Chicago street early Wednesday.

Police said Clark, 32, was struck after running a red light in the city's Avondale neighborhood. Clark was riding east on Logan Boulevard when he was struck by a vehicle heading south on Western Avenue, a witness and the driver both told responding officers, according to a Chicago Police Department crash report.

Authorities say emergency responders found Clark partially under the car. Clark was taken in critical condition to Advocate Illinois Masonic Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead a short time later. Authorities say the

20-year-old woman driving the car was issued several citations, but didn't give additional information.

After starring in "School of Rock" with Black, Clark continued pursuing drumming. Most recently, he played in the band Jess Bess & The Intentions, which made its debut performance Saturday at Legendary Wooden Nickel in the Chicago suburb of Highwood.

In a tweet, Black called Clark's death devastating and that he was heartbroken that it came too soon. "Sending love to his family and the whole School of Rock community," Black wrote.

In interviews, Clark said he landed his only movie role by responding to an ad in a local newspaper looking for adolescents who can play drums, keyboards and guitar.



SUMMER READY! The star Diane Kruger looks adorable in a printed mini dress on the streets of New York City.

'ChickaChicka Boom Boom' illustrator Lois Ehlert dies at 86

MILWAUKEE (AP): Lois Ehlert, whose cut-and-paste shapes and vibrant hues in books including "ChickaChicka Boom Boom" put her among the most popular illustrators of books for preschoolers of the late 20th century, has died. She was 86.

Publisher Simon & Schuster said that Ehlert died of natural causes on Tuesday in Milwaukee.

In 1989's "ChickaChicka Boom Boom," Ehlert created the hyper-simple brown-and-green coconut tree and the multicolored capital letters who try to gather at the top of it, threatening to bring it tumbling to the ground as the text repeats, "Chickachicka boom boom! Will there be enough room?"

The book sold more than 12 million copies, according to Simon & Schuster.

She worked primarily by cutting out shapes and pasting them into collages, much like the preschoolers who were her primary audience.

In 1990, she was given a Caldecott Honor as the author and illustrator of "Color

Zoo," which uses basic triangles, rectangles, squares and circles to create images of animals in oversaturated oranges, purples and greens. Its only words are the names of the shapes and creatures themselves.



Ehlert was born in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin and graduated from Milwaukee's Layton School of Art. She worked in graphic design before she began illustrating children's books in her 50s, starting with 1987's "Growing Vegetable Soup."

Her other books include 1988's "Planting a Rainbow," 1989's "Eating the Alphabet" and 2001's "Waiting for Wings."

Aries:

That sultry smile you're wearing reveals you've got big plans on your mind—plans that need to be set into motion immediately. Grounding your energy is a good way to ensure sustained action, Aries. Besides, you've got a whole lot of people relying on you for support right now. The full moon in Sagittarius could also activate the portal of lasting love for those who are seeking a connection that's a little more than just wham-bam. The secret to working in harmony with Cupid? Letting go of any and all judgements.

Tip: The full moon could activate the portal of lasting love. Taurus:

You've got ninety-nine problems, Taurus, and you're in the mood to ignore every single one of them. The energy of the day speaks of rest and play. You're being asked to prioritise rituals that make you feel nurtured and goal-less activities that bring you joy—mandala painting or pottery, for instance. Besides, it's been a wild, wild ride through the multiverse these past few days and you deserve some down time, beautiful.

Tip: Rest and play!

Gemini:

Uh-oh! Did somebody say 'mercury retrograde'? We're not going to give you the usual lowdown on saving your documents and protecting your gadgets. What we are

going to tell you is that the rules are sacred and need to be honoured at this time. You don't want to give anybody a reason to point fingers at you or say that your execution is anything short of flawless. In the realm of love, you're being asked to bring forth the gifts of truth and honesty. If there's something that isn't sitting right with you, it isn't sitting right with you. Find a way to get it out of your system. Tip: The rules are sacred and need to be honoured at this time.

Cancer:

Given that we've officially stepped into retrograde season, you may feel inspired to hit the pause button and lovingly gaze at your creations. There are things that have worked for you and then there are things that haven't. Understanding what has will help you perfect the game plan. Yes, this tedious process will require you to eliminate objects and methods that are not serving you. 'Detachment' will prove to be your power word at this time.

Tip: It's time to eliminate the objects and methods that are not serving you at this time.

Leo:

Given that we've officially stepped into retrograde season, you may feel inspired to hit the pause button and lovingly gaze at your creations. There are things that have worked for you and then there are things that

haven't. Understanding what has will help you perfect the game plan. Yes, this tedious process will require you to eliminate objects and methods that are not serving you. 'Detachment' will prove to be your power word at this time.

Tip: It's time to eliminate the objects and methods that are not serving you at this time.

Virgo:

You have gained so much knowledge and experience over the past years. Don't let it go to waste. The best way to attain mastery of your subject is by sharing your findings with others. Trust yourself to step into bigger shoes, Virgo. Your time to serve has come. As such, you'll find that the full moon is activating the portal of genius ideas. Ensure that you make a note of the downloads. If they don't make sense immediately, they will in the days to come.

Tip: Your time to serve has come.

Libra:

The matrix has us believing that our worthiness is directly proportionate to how we hold space for others. Could that be true for you, Libra? Are you dishonouring yourself in the process of being there for everyone? The cards are urging you to become aware of the self-betrayal that is taking place on so many levels. You've been down this road before. You fully understand how this situation is

detrimental to your physical, mental and emotional well-being. Word for the wise: take care of yourself first.

Tip: Pay attention to how you're being called to show up for yourself.

Scorpio:

The cards are pointing towards a cataclysmic shift, one that could shake the foundation on which you have built your life. Given how much chaos you have experienced in the recent past, it will be easy for you to feel like you will never recover from this loss. But that is far from the truth, Scorpio.

Tip: Be here and now.

Sagittarius:

Roll on the floor like your furry friends. Laugh to your heart's content. Use the walls in your house as a canvas for your art. Let go of the idea of who and what you should be. This is the week to be silly "and" ridiculously happy. Finding the humour in each situation will help you deal with the eclipse drama that's unfolding all around you.

Tip: There are so many ways to be intoxicated with life.

Capricorn:

We all have an idea of who we are and what we can achieve in this lifetime. Ergo, we also have an idea of all the things that are beyond our reach. Here's something to ponder over, Capricorn: could the prison you've found

yourself in be self-imposed? It's time to challenge the old ideas and accept defeat in the process. You are infinite potential in human form, and you're just beginning to see proof of this in your reality.

Tip: You are infinite potential, baby!

Aquarius:

The thing is, we know. We always know what's right for us and what isn't. However, we allow the constant chatter of our monkey minds and the opinions of others get the better of us. Looking inwards is showing up as a big theme for you. So, set that time aside which is just for you and yourself. What you will realise in the process of connecting with yourself is that you are an extension of Source energy and that Source is dancing the dance of life through you, beautiful.

Tip: This is a time of looking inwards.

Pisces:

There comes a point in every seeker's journey where the voice of the guru without interferes with the voice of the guru within. A time when the scriptures, no matter how sacred, cease to be relevant. This is all a part and parcel of the inner illumination, Pisces. The pathway that begins from the self and leads to the self.

Tip: It's time to listen to the voice of the Great Master within.