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**SOME FULLY VACCINATED PEOPLE WILL
STILL GET INFECTED – HERE'S WHY**

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**SALMAN KHAN WARNS OF ACTION
BY CYBER CELL AFTER 'RADHE'
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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON VACCINATION FROM HEALTH DEPARTMENT

It has been decided that from the morning of 18 May, for this week except Sunday, the vaccine slots will be increased. On Tuesday morning, the slots opening will be for Wednesday...

**UPHC GtK- 600
UPHC Ranipool - 200
Sochyangang STNM - 200**

For Thursday, Friday and Saturday this week two new COVID Vaccination Centre will also be opened

1. Sikkim University Health Centre

2. Lingding Outpost (vaccine will be administered at CRH Vaccination Centre)

Sunday CVC will remain closed.

GOC Black Cat Div calls on CM, offers to support Covid battle

GANGTOK, 16 MAY (IPR): On the occasion of State Day, General Commanding Officer, Black Cat Division Major General Rohit Sawhney called on the Chief Minister of Sikkim at his official residence, Mintokgang, on 16 May. It was a courtesy call by the GCO.

During the call on, they discussed the current COVID situation in the state and proposed a collective approach to fight the COVID pandemic.

The armed forces offered the assistance of a 40-bed isolation centre for mild cases, repair of civil medical equipment, including ambulances and assisting civilian authorities for vaccination in high altitude areas in East Sikkim.

Taking the initiative further, the army also proposed to provide temporary employment to locals in high altitude areas as porters and sponsorship for 30 boys and girls possessing Sikkim domicile for a fully sponsored course in Hospitality in the month of July.

The Chief Minister

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GANGTOK, 17 MAY [IPR]: A high-level review meeting on combating Covid-19, under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang was held at Samman Bhawan today. The meeting was attended by Cabinet Ministers, Political Secretary to HCM, Chief Secretary, DGP, ACS, Principal Secretaries, Secretaries and officers of the Covid-19 Management Group.

The meeting took stock of the present situation of Covid-19 in the State, especially issues regarding the availability of oxygen, transportation and prompt assistance to the patients. The Chief Minister enquired about the management of patients vis-a-vis prompt supply of oxygen and other critical health service at STNM Hospital as well as District Hospitals.

The CM instructed the Power Department to



be very alert and ensure uninterrupted electricity supply to the oxygen plant at Makha, East Sikkim. Similarly, Transport Department was directed to ensure timely transportation of the Oxygen Cylinders.

He directed the officials to deploy required security and technical manpower for assistance at Makha Oxygen plant,

in tandem with the plant management. He called for the constitution of a Vigilant Committee to oversee the proceedings with a helping hand for the Oxygen plant at Makha.

The Chief Minister further issued directives to decentralize the management system and deploy health workers in a comfortable ratio, e.g., one staff

nurse to look after and treat maximum ten Covid patients, so that their duty would not result in stress and burden.

CM further advised the Health Department to ensure healthy food to the patients and attendants.

Apart from that, CMO Task force has been constituted to be vigilant to help the system and the

patients in every nook and corner of the state, informed the Chief Minister.

Cabinet Ministers and the area MLAs were advised to monitor their respective constituencies meticulously. Administration to be alert regarding ensuring social distancing and avoiding gatherings as per the protocol.

He added that the

Government is ready to assist with financial support wherever needed to the Health Department in the process of combating Covid pandemic.

In turn, everyone in the department is to be dedicated and work with mutual understanding. In this perspective, HCM called for effective coordination between the authorities at the at-

tached Control Room (War Room) and the health workers, thereby leaving no grumbles and deficiencies.

It was informed in the meeting that the Chief Minister is continuously communicating with the Union Ministers and the Central authorities for adequate supply of oxygen and other equipment for Sikkim.

Recently, Central Government has granted 1000 litres of oxygen which will be set up at STNM as soon as possible. Similarly, 500 cylinders will be arranged very shortly and kept as spare stock at STNM to meet the necessity in case of an emergency.

Earlier, Chief Secretary, SC Gupta in his opening address presented a brief overview of the current situation in the State, and the steps being taken by the administration.

Sunday break for RT-PCR testing gives Sikkim more recoveries that new cases after a long while

SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 17 MAY:

News from the Covid front has been gloomy for so long that even partially positive updates bring welcome relief.

After a very long gap, Sikkim today reported more recoveries than new cases. This, however, comes tempered with news that five more lives were lost to the virus in Sikkim on Sunday.

The balance swinging in favour of recoveries over new cases is admittedly prompted because no RT-PCR tests were conducted in the previous 24 hours, but the substantial number of recoveries is still reassuring in itself. Now that Sikkim is at least three weeks deep into the second wave, the number of daily recoveries can be expected to remain high and since the number of tests possible per day range between 800-900, the number of positive cases can also be expected to plateau at their present average for

a while before tapering away once the effect of the lockdown starts reflecting the data.

What still remains worrying though are the consistently high number of Covid fatalities that the second wave has wreaked on Sikkim.

Sikkim recorded 224 recoveries of COVID-19 cases in a single-day on Sunday to further improve the number of so recovered cases in the State to 8,123.

In the meantime, 70 new cases of novel coronavirus were reported in the last 24 hours taking the state's tally of confirmed Covid cases to 11,480.

As mentioned earlier, the low number of new cases are because no RT-PCR tests were conducted on Sunday as both the VRD Labs remain closed on Sundays.

The 70 new cases were picked up from the testing of 190 samples through TruNat and Rapid Antigen Testing.

Of the 70 new cases,

32 were registered in East District, 13 in West District, 23 in South District and two in North Sikkim.

With the substantial number of recoveries the previous 24 hours, the number of active cases also witnessed a noticeable decline and slipped below 3k to now stand at 2,937.

17 Covid patients are currently admitted in the ICU facility of STNM hospital and four in the ICU facility of Central Referral Hospital, Tadong.

Also over the same 24 hours, five more lives were lost to coronavirus taking the state's COVID-19 death toll to 210. While four Covid patients passed away at STNM hospital, one fatality was reported from Rangpo Primary Health Centre.

A day earlier, Sikkim had recorded its highest surge in daily cases with 340 people testing positive in the 24 hours ending 8AM Sunday.

turn to pg02

Chamling calls on SDF office bearers to take leadership roles in protecting democracy in Sikkim



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 MAY:

Sikkim Democratic Front party president, Pawan Chamling, called on the party's office bearers to take on leadership roles and play an active part in protecting democracy in Sikkim.

Mr Chamling gave this call in an online meeting with the newly appointed office bearers of the party's West Sikkim unit.

He contended that the present State

Government has been found wanting in its handling of the pandemic and stressed that SDF party workers must engage with the crisis and help the society wherever they are.

Pointing to the failures of the State government in handling this crisis and to the deterioration of democratic values in present-day Sikkim, Mr Chamling alleged that democracy has been hijacked in Sikkim by the SKM government.

An SDF press release informs

that Mr Chamling also cautioned that democracy was no longer in the hands of the people of Sikkim and was being "controlled by outside forces."

He also informed that once the COVID crisis has settled, he will tour West District.

Congratulating the newly appointed office bearers, he encouraged them to take leadership of West district and ensure strong activities of the party at every level.

What Is Narada Case? The Tapes, The Leaders And The Politics Explained

KOLKATA, 17 MAY [NDTV]: The controversy over the Narada tapes made waves on Monday as West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee reached the CBI office in Kolkata and courted arrest after two ministers in her government, Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee, were taken into custody over the case.

WHAT IS THE NARADA CASE?

The case relates to sting operations by Narada news portal that showed several West Bengal ministers and senior officials accepting bribes. Those conducting the sting operation approached the ministers as representatives of a fictitious firm and offered bribes in return of favours.

The sting operations were carried out over two years and were to be published in Tehelka magazine. However, Mathew Samuel, who conducted the sting operations, quit Tehelka and launched the Narada portal.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT WHEN THE FOOTAGE WAS RELEASED?

The footage was released just before the 2016 Assembly elections and put the ruling Trinamool Congress on backfoot. The sting operations featured footage of several state ministers and Trinamool leaders. Earlier, names of several Trinamool leaders had come up during the Saradha chit fund scam and the sting operations gave the Opposition more am-

munition to target the ruling party on the issue of corruption. Despite the uproar, the Trinamool returned to power in the state polls.

WHICH LEADERS WERE INVOLVED IN THE NARADA CASE?

Trinamool leaders Subrata Mukherjee, late Sultan Ahmed, Aparupa Poddar, Sougata Ray, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, Prasun Banerjee, Madan Mitra, Firhad Hakim and Iqbal Ahmed were seen in the Narada footage. BJP leaders Mukul Roy and Suwendu Adhikari, then with the Trinamool, also featured in the footage. So did former Kolkata mayor Sovan Chatterjee, who quit the Trinamool to join BJP before quitting it too. IPS officer MH

Ahmed Mirza also featured in the sting.

HOW DID THE INVESTIGATION PROCEED?

After the footage emerged, the state government registered a case against Samuel under charges of forgery and defamation. The high court stayed the probe. In 2017, the high court ordered a preliminary investigation by the CBI.

The CBI on April 16, 2017, filed an FIR against 12 Trinamool leaders for criminal conspiracy and corruption.

In January this year, the CBI sought sanction from Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar to move against Subrata Mukherjee, Firhad Hakim, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee. Three of them were ministers then and one was an MLA. The

Governor last week gave his sanction. The matter is also being investigated by the Enforcement Directorate.

WHAT IS THE TRINAMOOL CONGRESS'S STAND ON THE NARADA TAPES?

The Trinamool has maintained that the centre is using agencies to pursue political vendetta against the opposition party leaders. They have also pointed to the lack of progress in the complaints against the accused who subsequently joined the BJP -- Mukul Roy and Suwendu Adhikari. The party has now questioned the timing of the arrests today, in view of the pandemic and weeks after the Trinamool won a decisive victory over the BJP in the recent state polls.

First batch of anti-COVID drug 2DG rolled out

NEW DELHI, MAY 17 (PTI): The first batch of anti-COVID oral drug 2-DG, developed by the DRDO, was rolled out on Monday as a severe wave of the coronavirus pandemic continued to ravage large parts of India.

Releasing the drug along with Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG) has brought a "new ray of hope" in the treatment of COVID-19 patients and exuded confidence that it would be effective.

The Drugs Controller General of India (DGCI) approved 2-DG for emergency use as an adjunct therapy in moderate to severe coronavirus patients earlier this month.

"This is a great example of the scientific prowess of our country," Singh said in his brief remarks.

The defence minister also listed the efforts of the armed forces in helping the civilian authorities deal with the pandemic across the country, but asserted that their deployment has not impacted the military's operational preparedness at the borders.

"Even after going through all these difficulties, we have ensured that our preparedness at the border does not have any impact. There is no shortage of enthusiasm of our forces anywhere. We know this very well, no matter how big the difficulty is, we will overcome it," he said.

About the coronavirus crisis, Singh said it is not the time to relax and get tired as there is nothing definitive about the course of the pandemic.

"We do not need to be relaxed nor should we get tired, because this wave has come for the second time and there is nothing definite about this. We have to take steps with full caution," he said at the event at the DRDO headquarters here.

Singh said the government has taken the overall situation seriously, whether it is the matter of oxygen supply or ensuring ICU beds or the arrangement of cryogenic tankers for the transportation of liquid oxygen.

"I am happy to say that the Medical Corps has also decided to take back its retired doctors so that our health system can be strengthened further. I heartily commend such physicians who are joining this campaign even after their service," he said.

The anti-COVID-19 therapeutic application of 2-DG has been developed by the Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), a leading laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in collaboration with Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL) in Hyderabad.

"I was told that by using it (2-DG), people have recovered two-and-a-half days earlier than the usual treatment period. Oxygen dependency has also been reduced by about 40 per cent in the patients. Its powder form is also a major feature as people will be able to use it very easily like the ORS solution," Singh said.



46th State Day observed

GANGTOK, 16 MAY (IPR): In a brief function held here at ChintanBhawan premises, Sikkim observed its 46th Statehood Day in the presence of Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang as chief guest on 16 May, 2021.

The Chief Minister along with Deputy

Speaker (SLA), Cabinet Ministers, MLAs and other dignitaries and guests offered garlands and khadas and paid floral tribute to the statue of the first Chief Minister of Sikkim, Padma Vibhushan Late KaziLhendupDorjiKhangsarpa.

On this day in 1975, our Himalayan State of Sikkim became the 22nd State of India.

The State level function was scaled down and shortened this year due to the current Covid-19 situation.

SJA hosts online conference on Administrative & Financial Management, Sanctions



SUMMIT REPORT GNAGTOK, 17 MAY: Sikkim Judicial Academy organised a programme on Administrative Management, Financial Management, Sanctions, etc. via video conference on 15 May, a press release informs.

The participants were District and Sessions Judges and the Resource Persons were Consultant, Govind Kaushik, Finance Department, Government of Sikkim and Director, Norbu Dadul, Forest Department, Government of Sikkim.

The first session was taken by Mr Dadul. He apprised on the struc-

ture of the Finance Service wherein he gave an overview of the Finance Department. He also spoke about the main divisions and structures of accounts. Classification of transaction in Government Accounts was also discussed. He informed the participants about Revenue receipts and Capital Receipts. The duties and responsibilities of a Drawing & Disbursing Officer as well as the powers and responsibilities of the Head of Department were discussed in great detail.

The second session was taken by Mr Kaushik. He made a broad discussion on Finan-

cial Management in the Government Sector. The Constitutional provision under which the State Government makes the draft rules for conducting the business of the Government of the State was discussed.

He also went through some of the important definitions contained in the Sikkim Financial Rules, 1979 and discussed Consolidated funds in detail. Standard of Financial Propriety as well as the responsibility of the Head of the Department and his Controlling Officer in respect of Budget Allocation were also discussed.

SRMIST donates Rs 1.10 Crores to Tamil Nadu CM's Public Relief Fund



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 17 MAY:

The SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST) has donated Rs 1.10 crores to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Public Relief Fund (TNCMPRF) in an effort to effectively support efforts of the Government of Tamil Nadu to contain the spread of the second wave of CO-

VID-19 pandemic.

SRMIST's Pro Chancellor (Academics), Dr P Sathyanarayanan, Chairman of Ramapuram campus, Dr R Shivakumar and Co-Chairman, S Niranjana met the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Thiru, MK Stalin and handed over the contribution of Rs 1.10 crores on behalf of SRMIST to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

'Paid Suvendu Adhikari too, why no arrest?': Mathew Samuel, man behind Narada sting

New Delhi, 17 May [NDTV]: Mathew Samuel, a senior journalist and the complainant in the 2016 Narada Tapes case, today expressed happiness at some politicians like the Trinamool's Subrata Mukherjee and Firhad Hakim being arrested by the CBI based on the sting operation he conducted. However, he also remains dissatisfied because there's been no action against others like BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari despite the evidence against them in the same case.

"It's a day of happiness...it's been years. The sting tapes were released in 2016...the politicians could not be touched by the CBI. It had the charge sheet ready three years ago," Mr Samuel, an investigative journalist and founder of Narada News, said in a video message.

In 2016, shortly ahead of the West Bengal assembly polls, Narada News published video recordings of various Trinamool leaders receiving cash allegedly in exchange for some favours. These recordings soon came to be known as the Narada Tapes.

The CBI today arrested four of those leaders: Subrata Mukherjee, Firhad Hakim, Madan Mitra, and Sovan Chatterjee.

While Mr Mukherjee and Mr Hakim are cabinet ministers in West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's newly-formed government, Mr Mitra is an MLA of her party. Mr Chatterjee is a former Trinamool legislator.

However, some other big names allegedly exposed by the Narada Tapes include Ms Banerjee's former close aides Mukul Roy and Suvendhu Adhikari, both of whom later joined the BJP and turned fiercely against her. There has been no action against them till now, something Mr Samuel regretted in his message.

"I had gone and given the money to Suvendu Adhikari in his office. His name is not on the list. What happened? A forensic was conducted and it was proven...the CBI took a statement from me too," he said. "I even go to know that Suvendhu Adhikari admitted that he received the money from me."

CBI sources informed NDTV that the agency was awaiting clearance from authorities to move against Mr Adhikari and others. The agency had sought the Lok Sabha Speaker' prosecution sanction against him on April 6, 2019, since he was then a member of the lower house.

SDF demands transparency in Govt's Covid management plans

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 17 MAY:

Sikkim Democratic Front has demanded that the State Government make public the requirement for medical oxygen and the oxygen supply plan to ensure that there is no shortage at the COVID health facilities or for non-COVID essential services in the hospitals of Sikkim.

SDF Chief Spokesperson, MK Subba, in a video conference today, has also demanded that a proper vaccination plan be put in place to inoculate everyone in Sikkim.

The party has also demanded that a sub-committee of the National Task Force be instituted as directed by the Supreme Court on 06 May to augment the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic in Sikkim and brace for the possible third wave.

Mr Subba also tore into the SKM Government's management of the current Covid crisis

and contends that the government has failed on multiple fronts because it completely failed to undertake sustained planning for containment and mitigation of the virus despite the year it had at hand since the first wave.

The current lockdown was also much delayed since the argument given by the state government - of case positivity rate being above 20% - had been breached since the second week of April itself.

"This knee jerk reaction of the order of a complete lockdown on the pretext of the Daily Positivity Ratio being above 20% clearly shows the lackadaisical attitude and planning failure of the government," he states.

He also shares statistics to highlight that Sikkim was among the worst-performing states when it comes to Covid management and rejects the claim that testing cannot be ramped up due to shortage of manpower.

India registers 2.81 lakh fresh COVID-19 cases, 4,106 deaths

NEW DELHI, MAY 17 (PTI): India's COVID-19 tally mounted to 2,49,65,463 on Monday with 2,81,386 fresh cases, the lowest in 27 days, while the death toll climbed to 2,74,390 as 4,106 more people succumbed to the disease, according to Union health ministry data.

However, 2,11,74,076 patients have recuperated from the disease, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.10 per cent, it stated.

The number of active cases stands at 35,16,997, accounting for 14.09 per cent of the total infections. The national recovery rate has improved to 84.81 per cent, the data updated at 8 am showed.

India's COVID-19 tally crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 750 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 770 lakh on October 11, 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and

surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. India's caseload crossed the grim milestone of 2 crore on May 4.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, 31,64,23,658 samples had been tested up to May 16 with 15,73,515 tested on Sunday.

The 4,106 new fatalities include 974 from Maharashtra, 403 from Karnataka, 311 from Tamil Nadu, 308 from Uttar Pradesh, 262 from Delhi, 202 from Punjab, 188 from Uttarakhand, 156 from Rajasthan, 147 from West Bengal, 144 from Chhattisgarh, 139 from Haryana and 101 from Andhra Pradesh.

Of the total 2,74,390 deaths reported in the country, 81,486 were from Maharashtra, 21,837 from Karnataka, 21,506 from Delhi, 17,670 from Tamil Nadu, 17,546 from Uttar Pradesh, 13,284 from West Bengal, 11,895 from Punjab and 11,734 from Chhattisgarh.

GOC Black Cat...

appreciated the offer provided by the army and assured every possible support from the Sikkim Government towards their endeavour and also expressed gratitude. The Chief Minister also informed that the ongoing vaccination drive has been made free for the people in Sikkim.

Sunday break for...

Of these 340 cases, East District contributed 193 cases and 99 were reported from South District and 48 from West District. Two COVID deaths were also recorded over the same period - one at STNM Hospital and one at District Hospital, Singtam.

ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

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

All relatives, friend and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence. We also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude towards all those who extended their support during the time of bereavement. Gopal Thapa (husband) kamal Thapa (son) Bimla Thapa (son) Som Maya Thapa (daughter) Dumber Kumari Thapa (daughter) Khem Kumari Sharma (dauhter-in-law)



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Lockdown enforced peacefully in South Sikkim



NAMCHI, 17 MAY [IPR]: The first day of the statewide lockdown imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19

was observed in the urban and rural areas of South District. Officials of the district administration along

with police personnel peacefully enforced the lockdown which started today and will continue till 24 May, 5 a.m.

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Labour Deptt hands over two ambulances to Health Department

GANGTOK, 16 MAY (IPR): The Labour Department, Government of Sikkim, has extended a helping hand to the Health Department by offering two new ambulances as assistance in managing the ongoing COVID-19 situation in the State.

The keys of the two ambulances were handed over to Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department, K Sreenivasulu, through the hands of Minister of Labour Department, MN Sherpa, in the presence of Secretary, Labour Department, Namrata Thapa and other officials at the official residence of the Labour Minister at VIP Colony in Gangtok on 16 May, 2021.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister, MN Sherpa informed that



the two ambulances registered under Sikkim Building & Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board (BOCWW), Labour Department have been handed over to the Health Department as an initiative to

assist the department in addressing the emergency medical need of the people of Sikkim during the outbreak. He appealed to all to extend any possible help and support to the Health Department

and healthcare workers in combating issues of supply shortage and encourage protection of the public. He urged for unity, strength and resilience among the people of the State amidst the ongoing

second wave of Covid-19.

Additional Chief Secretary, Health, K Sreenivasulu, extended immense gratitude to the Labour Department for their kind gesture and encouragement during this hour of crisis.

50 doctors reported dead in one day from Covid across India: Medical Body

NEW DELHI, 17 MAY [PTI]: Anas Mujahid, 26, a junior Resident Doctor at Delhi's Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital -- a dedicated Covid specialty -- died within hours of testing positive due to Covid. He is the youngest of 244 doctors who have lost their lives to Covid this year in India's second wave. Last year, 736 doctors had lost their lives during the first wave. A total of nearly 1,000 doctors across India have lost their lives due to Covid so far.

Mujahid is survived by his parents and four siblings.

A week has gone by, but his friend and colleague Dr Aamir Sohail is still struggling to come to terms with the loss.

Mujahid had minor symptoms like sore throat and tested positive in an antigen test at the hospital. In a rare case of sudden progression, he collapsed soon after and died due to intracranial bleeding. He had not been vaccinated. "It was shocking. He had no comorbidity. His parents also told us that he has never faced any health issue. We just could not understand how it happened," Dr Aamir Sohail said.

"He had not been vaccinated. Many colleagues here, including me, have not taken the jab. Our process of getting vaccinated while being on Covid duty, is long. We have to inform superiors and get their signature etc. He was planning to get the jab in the next few days."

Dr Sohail added that he got infected last month and had moderate symptoms and is now doing fine. But he said it was hard to comprehend how his friend, who seemed perfectly

fine hours ago, suddenly faced such severe issues and died.

According to the Indian Medical Association, 244 doctors have lost their lives due to Covid in the second wave. Of them, 50 deaths were recorded yesterday. The highest number of fatalities have been reported from Bihar (69) followed by Uttar Pradesh (34) and Delhi (27).

Only 3 per cent of these doctors were fully vaccinated.

Five months into India's vaccination drive, only 66 per cent of India's healthcare workers have been fully vaccinated. The IMA said it is making all possible efforts to encourage doctors to take the jab.

Dr Jayesh Lele, the General Secretary of IMA, told NDTV, "It is very unfortunate that we lost 50 doctors yesterday across India and 244 in the second wave since the first week of April".

The IMA, he said, has found that many doctors have not taken the vaccine and the organisation will do everything it can to ensure that all doctors who are on the frontline take the jab.

"Secondly we want to highlight that doctors are understaffed and overworked. They sometimes work for 48 hours at a stretch without any rest. This adds to the viral load and they ultimately succumb to the infection. The government needs to take measures to boost the healthcare workforce," he added. While the IMA says that a thousand doctors have died due to Covid so far, the actual numbers may be far higher. The IMA only keeps a record of its nearly 3.5 lakh members. India, however, has more than 12 lakh doctors.

Covid vaccination begins for 18+



GANGTOK, 16 MAY (IPR): The Vaccination for Covid-19 for people above 18 years of age has commenced in the State from 16 May, 2021.

The vaccination drive was launched by Chief Min-

ister, Prem Singh Tamang at Thakurbari Temple Hall at MG MargGangtok.

The first day of the vaccination drive saw a good turnout of people belonging to the eligible age group.

It may be recalled that the CM had made the announcement recently and all the required preparations were made by the Health Department in coordination with the District Administration.

4 including Mamata Banerjee's Ministers arrested in Narada Case get bail

KOLKATA, 17 MAY [NDTV]: Two of Mamata Banerjee's ministers and two other leaders were granted bail today after nearly seven hours of drama and confrontation as the Bengal Chief Minister spent much of the day at the CBI office in Kolkata challenging their arrests.

Bengal Ministers Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee were arrested early this morning in the Narada bribery case. So were Trinamool MLA Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee, who went from the Trinamool to the BJP but quit that party too.

Central forces arrived at their homes and took them to the CBI office. Within an hour, a furious Mamata Banerjee also landed at the CBI office in Nizam Palace and dared the investigating agency to arrest her too.

"The way they have been arrested without due procedure, CBI will have to arrest me also," the Bengal Chief Minister reportedly said during her extraordinary stake-out at the CBI lasting more than six hours.

All four were ministers in the previous Mamata Banerjee government and were seen taking bribes in the Narada bribery tapes shot in 2014.

But the Trinamool questioned why Suvendu Adhikari and Mukul Roy, former Trinamool leaders who were also on the Narada tapes, have escaped action till now.

Both were Trinamool MPs at the time but have since joined the BJP and recently became BJP MLAs.

Mamata Banerjee has repeatedly held them up as examples of the "BJP washing machine effect", a term she uses while accusing defectors of joining the BJP to escape prosecution.

Last December, a day after Suvendu Adhikari joined the BJP triggering a mass exodus from the Trinamool, his photos disappeared from the Narada tapes floating around on social media.

The Trinamool Congress has also

once again accused Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar of playing a partisan role, saying he is not authorized to sanction the arrest of the three Trinamool MLAs; the assembly Speaker is. But Mr Dhankhar said he had the right to clear their prosecution as he had sworn them in as ministers when the crime was committed.

"The governor is doing whatever he pleases against the Trinamool," said Trinamool MP Kalyan Banerjee, using terms like "bloodsucker".

Mathew Samuel, the journalist who carried out the Narada sting, said he was happy at today's developments but surprised that some were left out.

"I had gone and given the money to Suvendu Adhikari in his office. His name is not on the list. What happened? A forensic was conducted and it was proven...the CBI took a statement from me too. I even got to know that Suvendu Adhikari admitted he received the money from me," Mr Samuel said.

All the arrested leaders are accused of accepting ₹ 4 to 5 lakh as bribe in a sting operation by the Narada news portal, which was released in 2016.

Mr Samuel posed as a businessman planning to invest in Bengal, gave wads of cash to seven Trinamool MPs, four ministers, one MLA and a police officer as bribe and taped the entire operation.

Sultan Ahmed, another accused MP, has died. The CBI had also asked for permission to prosecute Sougata Roy, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, Prasun Banerjee and Aparupa Poddar. The Lok Sabha Speaker has not granted sanction for any of them.

The Trinamool and other parties have questioned the timing of the arrests at the height of Bengal's Covid surge and right after Mamata Banerjee's landslide victory in polls that turned into a fierce prestige fight between her and the BJP.

UCWSS resolves to support govt's Covid management initiatives

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 17 MAY:

United Christian Welfare Society of Sikkim [UCWSS] convened a virtual meeting under the chairmanship of its president, Elder Patrus Gurung, on 15 May (Saturday).

The meeting discussed various issues related to how churches can help and support the people in the present situation.

The meeting discussed the free vaccination being offered by the State Government even for those aged between

18 to 44. Since the government was paying all costs, the organization appealed to churches to extend support to the government.

The meeting also decided to start an ambulance service, the release adds.

UCWSS has also appealed to the management of different churches to provide space if they have any apart from the main church hall to set up COVID vaccination sites.

UCWSS has also appealed to churches to extend support to COVID

patients and families and persons in facility and home isolation.

UCWSS also thanked MLA, GT Dhungel, Horticulture Department Secretary, MT Sherpa and senior pastor, Rev Joseph Tamang for their suggestions at the meeting.

The UCWSS press release adds that on behalf of all churches, the organization expressed its gratitude to all workers along with State government and the Chief Minister for working in the frontlines in this pandemic period of COVID-19.

Delhi's 3 iconic buildings set to be demolished for Central Vista project

NEW DELHI, 17 MAY

[NDTV]: Delhi's three iconic buildings - the National Museum, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), the National Archives Annexe - emblematic of its history and culture are set to be demolished as part of the centre's ₹ 20,000 crore Central Vista project that envisages a new Parliament building, and new residences for the Prime Minister and the Vice President.

The other buildings marked for demolition are: Shastri Bhavan, Krishi Bhavan, Vigyan Bhavan, Vice President's Residence, Jawahar Bhavan, Nirman Bhavan, Udyog Bhavan, Raksha Bhavan. The total area to be demolished is 4,58,820 square metres.

The National Museum has thousands of invaluable rare idols, original sculptures, priceless coins, paintings and jewellery that connect several points of political and cultural history. These include the famous dancing girl of Harappa, Nataraja in Chola Bronze, relics of Buddha, Ganjifa cards, Tanjore paintings and wood carved doors. All these objects will be shifted to North or South Block.

While the main building of the National Archives will remain intact, the annexe building will be demolished and a new building will be con-

structed.

The archival records kept here include 45 lakh files, 25,000 rare manuscripts, more than 1 lakh maps and 1.3 lakh Mughal documents. The transferring of documents is fraught with risk of loss or mishandling.

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts has an extravagant collection of heritage pieces, manuscripts and an impressive library. All of this will be temporarily shifted to the Janpath hotel, which has been renovated for the purpose.


Last week, in an open letter addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a group of over 70 public intellectuals and scholars from India and abroad, including historian Romila Thapar, critic and scholar Gayatri Spivak and Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk, called for a halt and reconsideration of the government's Central Vista redevelopment project, and said: "It is especially troubling that this extravagant project is moving ahead in the midst of a devastating pandemic. The current escalating health crisis calls for a pause and a reset. In the short term, all priorities and resources should be directed at combating the pandemic. In the long term, there should be public consultations so that the future of India's institutions, heritage architecture, and

historical collections can be determined through a democratic process...The details of the Central Vista demolition are opaque. It is unclear, for example, how the National Museum art objects will be stored and eventually displayed."

Earlier this year in February, the centre told the Lok Sabha that all listed Heritage buildings, precincts in the Central Vista region will be protected and any renovation work will be taken up after approval of Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC); architects, however, question these claims.



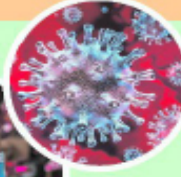
AG Krishna Menon, who is an architect, urban planner and conservation consultant, said, "It is wrong from a town planning point of view that the original intent of the capital is being changed. The government claims that it is still conserving the heritage. Again it is wrong because it is conserving a few buildings and that also the skeletons of the buildings. So in other words, what they're doing is the heritage is being conserved by conserving the building but hollowing out its meaning."

Facing criticism, the government recently told the Delhi High Court that petition against the Central Vista is "sheer abuse of the process of law" and yet another attempt to block the project, requesting that the petition be scrapped with a fine.



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

<p>Symptoms of nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<p>Precautions to Prevent nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash your hands often with soap. ● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer ● Observe good personal hygiene. ● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. ● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. ● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. ● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. ● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
<p>Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now. ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected. 	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">    </div> <p>If you seek help, you may call :</p> <p>-Toll free no. 104 District surveillance Officer EAST : 7029372100 WEST : 9583287809 NORTH : 9541957468 SOUTH : 7407691463 New STNM AMS : 9434711402</p>
<p>DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM</p>	

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Kirtey Posts Debase Public Discourse

...and still they are nurtured

Pamphlets have a history in political activism. These cheaply produced tracts were used extensively in the times before mass-media to convey ideologies and infiltrate public opinion. In all their political manifestations though, pamphlets have always been about propaganda - communicating essentially one-sided arguments and foisting a one-sided world-view. As mentioned, this was before the mass-media industry became what it is now – a more effective plank to hold forth and get heard. In its earlier avatar, pamphlets at least had an ideological grounding, and even though biased, attempted to at least make a point. This space is now offered by the contemporary forms of media. But to address people from that forum, one needs to attest what is being claimed; not prove it, but claim it. Anonymity won't do. Anonymous pamphlets are thus taken recourse to when the allegations and tone are too noxious and spiteful for even political opponents to be seen making. Its intent thus, is limited to providing voyeuristic entertainment to recipients of the pamphlets. Anything substantive needs to be conveyed on record. One may also add here that even some recent public addresses by some leaders have been offensive and criminally defamatory, but then, a pandering to "supporters" offers a limited audience, and hence the recourse to offensive Kirtey posts [let's accept it, Kirtey Parchas gave way to fake FB IDs and their drivel a while back]. Such options are routinely taken by most political outfits, at least those with skin in the game to defame and subvert. This applies as much to Sikkim as it does to the rest of the country and the State is currently witnessing a fresh bout of such exchanges.

What no one can deny anymore in Sikkim is that every hue of the political landscape now has access to presenting its version of a situation and communicate its allegations and defences. When this recourse is available, why then are there still so many anonymous posts? The answer is obvious; because their contents are unsubstantiated, unverified and libellous. Its creators and circulators, even if they have mediums through which they can address their respective constituencies, do not want to come on record with such offensive drivel. Of course, the Kirtey Posts do not proclaim their anonymity, and invariably appropriate an identity, almost always claiming to be 'concerned citizens'. What is obvious though is that they are agent provocateurs instead, instigated by personal stakes and ambitions and not necessarily the greater common good. The cover of anonymity allows them room to vent their frustrations in acerbic tones and repugnant simulation that offend all recipients of their vitriol, save those who relish voyeuristic muck-raking. Even while agreeing that many fall in the latter bracket, fact also remains that even though they might see these pamphlets as 'entertaining', they do not ascribe any authenticity to its contents. The problem sets in when people start circulating the contents of such anonymous contentions by word of mouth. Sikkim has consistently proven its weakness for rumours and whispers. The ease with which con-artists have cheated Sikkimese with clumsily-designed promises solely on the strength of word-of-mouth promotion presents itself as an apt example of the scale of damage the grapevine can wreck on the society. It is in this light that the proliferation of such drivel needs to be roundly condemned. The condemnation should be strong, but not violent or via the muscle of the machinery at the State's disposal because when that happens, the focus gets diverted. Those who indulge in the tit-for-tat of pamphleteering invariably see their posturing as a political show of strength, but what is really required is a social condemnation of kirtey post politicking because that debases public debate; in Sikkim, where political engagement is still far short of refinement, further perversion of this dialogue should be discouraged... by the people.

WRITE US:

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Some Fully Vaccinated People Will Still Get Infected – Here's Why

TARA HURST
theconversation.com

The development of several COVID vaccines in less than a year has given us all hope of a release from the pandemic. Now the goal has shifted to ensuring widespread vaccine coverage is achieved as quickly as possible around the globe.

However, it is unlikely that any of the vaccines will be 100% effective at stopping transmission or infection. There is a small risk that some fully vaccinated people will get infected. This is known as a "breakthrough infection" – and it's entirely expected.

It is important to realise the limitations of vaccines. No vaccine offers full protection to everyone who receives it. The measles vaccine has been highly effective at preventing infection, leading to the virus being nearly eradicated in some countries.

Yet there are infections reported even in populations with widespread vaccination. These infections occur not only in the unvaccinated; there are cases of breakthrough infections in fully vaccinated people.

The seasonal flu vaccine offers protection from the circulating viruses. But the circulating flu viruses vary, and vaccinated people may still get ill but have less severe illness.

This is possibly because different arms of the immune response produce different defences, namely antibodies, which are Y-shaped proteins that lock onto germs and neutralise them, and T cells, which find and destroy infected cells. Antibodies are typically raised against the more variable proteins on the surface of the virus, while the more consistent proteins inside the virus are targeted by the T cells. T

cells are important for limiting the severity of illness.

For SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) there is anecdotal evidence, including from Seychelles, of breakthrough infections, but little has yet been published in scientific journals. A recent report in the New England Journal of Medicine described two COVID-19 cases following vaccination, with both showing mild symptoms that resolved within one week.

And a study from Stanford University, which is yet to be reviewed by other scientists, describes 189 post-vaccination COVID cases out of 22,729 healthcare workers, but attributes at least some of these to partial vaccination. Vaccination will probably make the disease less severe should such breakthroughs occur.

SEVERAL EXPLANATIONS

There are several possible explanations for breakthrough infections. The human immune response is encoded in our DNA and varies from person to person. This variability helps us to respond to an array of germs. But the effectiveness of these responses is also variable. This could also be due to several things, including poor health, medication or age.

The ageing immune system does not respond to new antigens (foreign substance that causes your immune system to produce antibodies against it) and vaccines as well as younger immune systems. For one COVID vaccine, there was a measurable difference in the concentration of neutralising antibodies in the elderly compared with younger adults. Some of the elderly participants had no neutralising antibodies at all after both doses of the vaccines.

Another reason for breakthrough infections is due to viral variants that escape immune detection

and flourish even in vaccinated people. A virus, especially an "RNA virus" such as SARS-CoV-2, is expected to mutate and give rise to variants, some of which may be more easily transmitted. These variants may also be more or less effectively neutralised by the immune system since the mutations could alter the parts of the virus that are recognised by antibodies and T cells.

A new SARS-CoV-2 variant identified in India (B16172) is thought to make the virus more transmissible and this is a cause for concern in light of the COVID crisis unfolding there. Despite the absence of scientific studies, there are many reports in the media of frequent breakthrough infections and the B16172 variant is blamed, but this has yet to be proved.

In the one study, done on post-vaccine infections with SARS-CoV-2 in California, there was no significantly higher risk of infection due to the variants circulating in that region. Despite the evidence that the vaccines work well against the variants, the rapid increase in the proportion of cases in the UK that are due to B16172 as compared to the dominant Kent strain (B117) has meant that it has been raised to a variant of concern by Public Health England.

While widespread vaccination remains the pandemic end game, it bears mentioning that this is unlikely to prevent all infections. Those who develop COVID after vaccination will probably have a milder illness, and so the risk of breakthrough infections should not deter us from using the current vaccines. Further study into the causes of breakthrough SARS-CoV-2 infections could help scientists to refine COVID vaccines or the schedule of booster doses.

[the writer is Lecturer, Biomedical Science, Birmingham City University]

As the Palestinian Minority Takes to the Streets, Israel is Having its Own Black Lives Matter Moment

JAMES L. GELVIN
theconversation.com

The images and reports coming from Israel, Jerusalem and Gaza in recent days are shocking. They are also surprising to those who thought the 2020 Abraham Accords and subsequent agreements to normalize relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan would place the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians permanently on the backburner.

As someone who has been writing and teaching about the Middle East for more than 30 years, I had no such illusions. The reason for this is that at its heart, the so-called "Arab-Israeli conflict" has always been about Israelis and Palestinians. And no matter how many treaties Israel signs with Arab states, it will remain so.

In a phone call on May 12, President Joe Biden assured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of his "unwavering support for Israel's security and for Israel's legitimate right to defend itself and its people." Biden was referencing the rocket attacks on Israel launched by Hamas, the Islamist group that governs Gaza. By targeting civilians, Hamas is committing a war crime. In all probability, so is Israel, by bombing and shelling Gaza.

Despite the carnage the Hamas rocket attacks and Israeli retaliation inflicts on Israelis and Gazans, the Biden administration is focusing on a sideshow, not the main event.

That main event is an unprecedented conflict taking place on the streets of Jerusalem, Haifa, Lod and elsewhere. It's what scholars call an "intercommunal conflict," pitting elements of Israel's Jewish population against elements of Israel's Palestinian population who have had enough and have taken to the streets.

Hamas could not maintain its credibility as a movement if it sat by while Palestinians in Israel battled Jewish Israelis there. The reality is that Israel is having its Black Lives Matter moment.

As in the United States, a brutalized minority group, facing systemic racism and discriminatory acts, has taken to the streets. And, as in the United States, the only way out starts with serious soul-searching on the part of the majority.

But after the spate of Palestinian suicide bombings in the early 2000s that horrified Israelis and hardened their attitudes toward Palestinians, this is unlikely to occur.

MANY REASONS, ONE SOURCE

Palestinian anger can be attributed to multiple issues. In April, Israel attempted to impede access to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem for Palestinians living in the West Bank. Israeli police then raided the Muslim holy site, reportedly after Palestinians threw stones at them, injuring 330. At the beginning of May, Mahmoud Abbas, the current president of the Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank, cancelled the first Palestinian legislative elections in 15 years. Finally, when the current conflict spilled over into the West Bank, the Israeli occupation and continued colonization of Palestinian territory were thrown into the mix.

These significant issues explain Palestinian anger. However, the intercommunal nature of the ongoing conflagration is due to two other issues.

First, Jewish settlers attempted to evict eight Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency had settled the families in the neighborhood during the 1950s. Jewish settlers filed suit in 1972

claiming their right to the homes where those families lived. They argued that Jews had owned the Palestinians' homes before the division of the city in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. By right, they argue, the homes belong to their community.

Jewish neighborhoods housing more than 215,000 encircle the predominantly Palestinian eastern part of Jerusalem, where Sheikh Jarrah is located. For Palestinians, the attempt to evict the families is representative of Israel's overall policy of pushing them out of the city. It is not only a reminder that in a Jewish state Palestinians are second-class citizens, but a reenactment of the central tragedy in the Palestinian national memory: the Nakba of 1948, when 720,000 Palestinians fled their homes in what would become the state of Israel, becoming refugees.

GROWING ANTI-ARAB RACISM

The second reason for the intercommunal nature of the current conflict is the emboldening of Israel's extreme right-wing politicians and their followers. Among them are latter-day Kahanists, the followers of the late Meir Kahane. Kahane was an American rabbi who moved to Israel. Kahane's anti-Arab racism was so extreme that the United States listed the party he founded as a terrorist group. Kahane proposed paying Israel's Palestinian population \$40,000 each to leave Israel. If they refused, Israel should expel them, he argued.

Kahanism and like-minded movements are on the rise in Israel. A Kahanist was recently elected to the Israeli Knesset, or parliament, and Netanyahu courted his support when the prime minister was attempting to form a government in February, 2019. Kahanists and other ultranationalist thugs — the "Proud Boys" of Israel — march through Palestin-

ian-Israeli neighborhoods chanting "Death to Arabs" and assault them.

The current crisis began on May 6, 2021. Pro-Palestinian protesters in Sheikh Jarrah had been breaking the Ramadan fast together each night of the holiday, a custom called iftar. On this particular night, Israeli settlers set up a table opposite them. In the settlers' group was Itamar Ben-Gvir, the Kahanist deputy. Rocks and other objects began to fly. Then the violence spread.

In the coastal city of Bat Yam, a Jewish mob marched down the street busting up Palestinian businesses, while another mob attempted to lynch a Palestinian driver. The same scene was replayed in Acre, only this time it was a Palestinian mob that assaulted a Jewish man. Another Palestinian mob burned a police station to the ground in the same city. And in a Tel Aviv suburb, a man presumed to be a Palestinian was pulled from his car and beaten.

Lod is a city south of Tel Aviv with a mixed Palestinian and Jewish population. Not only was it the site of a Hamas missile strike that killed two Palestinians, it was where heavy fighting took place between Palestinian and Jewish mobs.

The fighting began after a funeral of a Palestinian man who was killed by an assailant presumed to be Jewish. It was so heavy at times that the Israeli government brought in border guards from the West Bank to quell the unrest. The mayor characterized what was happening in his town as a "civil war."

The mayor also reminded the residents of Lod, "The day after, we still have to live here together."

He did not explain how this was to happen.

[the writer is Professor of Modern Middle Eastern History, University of California, Los Angeles]

Authorities continue to fumble around amid Covid-19 surge in Nepal

TIKA R PRADHAN
**KATHMANDU, 17 MAY [KATHMAN-
DUPOST]:** It took Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli 11 months and close to 5,000 deaths to realise that Nepalis don't have a strong immunity against Covid-19 and that he was under an impression that the virus would not hit the country as hard as it has.

On Saturday evening, speaking at a meeting with different sections of society, Oli said that he "thought" Nepalis' immunity against diseases was strong, hence he did not expect the virus crisis to deepen to this extent. On June 10 last year, when Oli was mocking a lawmaker in Parliament for questioning his statement claiming Nepalis have strong immunity, the country had reported 15 deaths and the number of active cases stood at 3,675. On Saturday, when he appeared to be retracting his immunity claim, the total deaths had reached 4,856, with the number of active cases at 109,740.

What, however, does not seem to have changed is the response—like last year, there are hardly any sincere efforts from the Oli administration to deal with the virus situation.

Last week, on May 8, Oli told CNN that the virus "situation is under control", only to plead before the world, just two days later, for help, saying his country is overwhelmed by Covid-19 through an opinion piece in The Guardian.

Unprepared still, the Oli administration is now groping in the dark. Instead of trying to step up some fundamental measures—contact tracing, testing and treating—and ensure enough beds and oxygen supply, it now thinks it's the lack of laws that is hindering its Covid-19 fight.

"We have decided to bring an 'integrated' law for effective coordination among various agencies and tackling some problems in purchasing medical supplies immediately," Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Gyawali, who is also the government spokesperson, told reporters after Sunday's meeting of the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre.

Gyawali is also a member of the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre, known as CCMC, which is chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Ishwar Pokhrel.

Prime Minister Oli was also present at the meeting.

CCMC, the task force set up by the government to deal with Covid-19 on March 29 last year, how-



ever, is a mechanism which does not have a single expert or doctor as its member. Over the past year or so, it has served as a club of government ministers and officials, with no "empowered" role to take a decision on anything. All its decisions are subject to the prime minister's nod.

A senior doctor at the Health Ministry, who did not wish to be named fearing retribution, said that there is a serious problem when it comes to taking decisions.

"Political leaders as well as the leadership and those who are at the policy-making level act as if they know everything," the doctor told the Post. "They think they can deal with the current Covid-19 crisis without the need of experts' advice."

After logging steadily rising numbers of new cases and new deaths since the second wave hit the country in early April, the country, however, has not hit the 10,000 mark yet. After recording 5,743, the highest number of new cases on October 21 last year, there was a dramatic decline in the number of new infections. On May 11, the country saw its highest single-day spike with 9,317 new cases. But the country on Sunday reported 7,316 new cases. The Health Ministry said 145 had died of Covid-19 across the country based on the data provided by the Nepal Army which manages the bodies. The death toll stands at 5,001.

Experts say the threat is not over yet and what is concerning is the Oli government might get into a complacent mode, claiming that

Covid-19 cases have plateaued.

Public health experts and doctors told the Post last week that even if the new infections hover around the 9,000 mark, the number of deaths could continue to rise if the authorities fail to ensure treatment, oxygen and beds.

On Friday, the World Health Organisation said that Nepal has emergency needs.

"India remains hugely concerning, with several states continuing to see a worrying number of cases, hospitalisations and deaths," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus while addressing a regular media briefing on Covid-19 on Friday. "But it's not only India that has emergency needs. Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Egypt are just some of the countries that are dealing with spikes in cases and hospitalizations."

The United Nations in Nepal in its Friday situation report pointed to an urgent need for vaccines and essential life-saving commodities, including oxygen, critical care medicines and supplies, testing kits, personal protective equipment and temporary hospitals.

"Current messaging around self-care and caring for loved ones is generic and ineffective," said the UN. "Contextualized, locally relevant messages are critically needed."

Analysts and experts say that an integrated law is fine, but without stepping up basic requirements, laws only won't be of help in the fight against the virus.

Experts had suggested last year

that Nepal could have done better had it brought an integrated law and not relied totally on the decades-old Infectious Disease Act.

At that time, government authorities were indifferent to such calls, saying existing laws were sufficient.

Since the government paid little attention to contact tracing and testing and did nothing to increase hospital beds, ventilators and oxygen production capacity, authorities found themselves on the backfoot in the last week of April, as the country posted new records for virus cases.

The government once again resorted to "prohibitory orders" in Kathmandu Valley on April 29. The orders are still in place, and all but three of the 77 districts are under prohibitory orders.

According to Gyawali, the government is mulling over an "integrated law" so that concerted efforts could be made to fight the pandemic.

"We have also faced some problems when it comes to coordination between hospitals, as they are under different ministries—some are under the Health Ministry while others under the Education Ministry as academies," Gyawali told reporters after the meeting. "Besides, some are run by provincial and local governments. An integrated law would be useful in running them in an effective manner."

Officials could not provide details as to what all such an integrated law entails.

An official at the CCMC told the Post that such a law could be in

place within "a few days".

"Such laws are called sunset laws, and they are automatically terminated after their purpose is over," said Khagaraj Baral, member secretary of the CCMC. "We are expecting the law within a few days given the pressure, and it will be introduced even through an ordinance."

With no details available, there are, however, concerns about what the government actually is aiming at. Since there is no Parliament session, the law would come into effect as soon as the President promulgates the ordinance, as suggested by Baral.

Tika Ram Bhattarai, an advocate, said that such integrated laws can be brought in the times of crises to achieve certain objectives like acquiring public properties providing compensation to the owners, purchasing medical supplies immediately and coordinating with all three tiers of the government.

"We had suggested that the government introduce an integrated law last year but it did not pay heed to our advice," Bhattarai told the Post. "If the law had been in place, maybe the country's fight against the pandemic would have been more effective and many lives could have been saved." The government is also discussing if a health emergency should be declared. Officials, however, said Sunday's CCMC meeting did not take any decision in that regard.

"This has been an agenda for quite a while," said Gyawali, the government spokesperson. "[We

believe] if a health emergency is declared, it needs to be done in such a way that it indeed yields results."

The Health Ministry in September last year had suggested a health emergency should be declared if the number of active cases cross the 25,000 mark.

A month later, Nepal's active cases crossed 25,000 on October 7, but the government did not make any move to declare a health emergency.

As of Sunday, the number of active cases stood at 110,263.

Doctors say if a law is indeed needed to smoothen procurement processes to make the battle against the pandemic stronger and more effective, authorities should have done so long ago.

"Now trying to bring laws in the name of making procurements easier does raise suspicion, given the corruption controversies that were reported last year," said a doctor who has worked in the public health sector for decades and led various government hospitals successfully. "After failing to deal with the crisis, authorities are coming up with more excuses and half-hearted plans."

Public health experts and doctors say the Oli administration must set its priorities right if it is really serious about saving the lives of the people rather than wasting time on multiple things.

Now that the virus seems to have reached villages—unlike in the first wave when cases started to decline after heating the peak in urban centres—there are concerns about more deaths due to lack of health facilities, beds, ventilators and oxygen.

Experts say the only way to reduce the number of patients needing hospitalisations—beds, oxygen and ventilators—is increasing testing and tracing.

On Sunday morning, Dr Anup Subedee, an infectious disease expert, described the situation succinctly in a Twitter thread.

"There's too little happening in terms of public health response to the pandemic surge—test/trace/isolate & quarantine/vaccinate—the only interventions that can reduce the number of new cases in the community and the number of those needing hospital beds, oxygen or ICU care," Subedee wrote. "There's just too much reluctance, incomprehension, sheer lack of interest on the government's side to work in mitigating the community spread."

No hospital, people get Covid care on cots under tree in UP village

MEWLA GOPALGARH (UP), 17 MAY [REUTERS]: In a village in Uttar Pradesh engulfed by COVID-19, the sick lie on cots under a tree, glucose drips hanging from a branch. Cows graze all around, while syringes and empty medicine packets are strewn on the ground.

There is no doctor or health facility in Mewla Gopalgarh, a 90-minute drive from the national capital Delhi. There is a government hospital nearby but it has no available beds and the villagers say they cannot afford private clinics.

Instead, village practitioners of alternative medicine have set up an open-air clinic where they distribute glucose and other remedies to patients with symptoms of COVID-19.

Some believe lying under the neem tree, known for its medicinal properties, will raise their oxygen levels. There is no scientific basis for this belief or for some of the other remedies being offered.

"When people become breathless, they have to go un-



der trees to raise their oxygen levels," said Sanjay Singh, whose 74-year-old father died a few days ago after developing a fever. Singh said his father was not tested and died in two days.

"People are dying and there is nobody to look after us," he said.

The devastating second wave of infections, which has brought even hospitals in big cities such as Delhi to breaking point, is rip-

ping through the country's vast rural hinterland where health-care is threadbare.

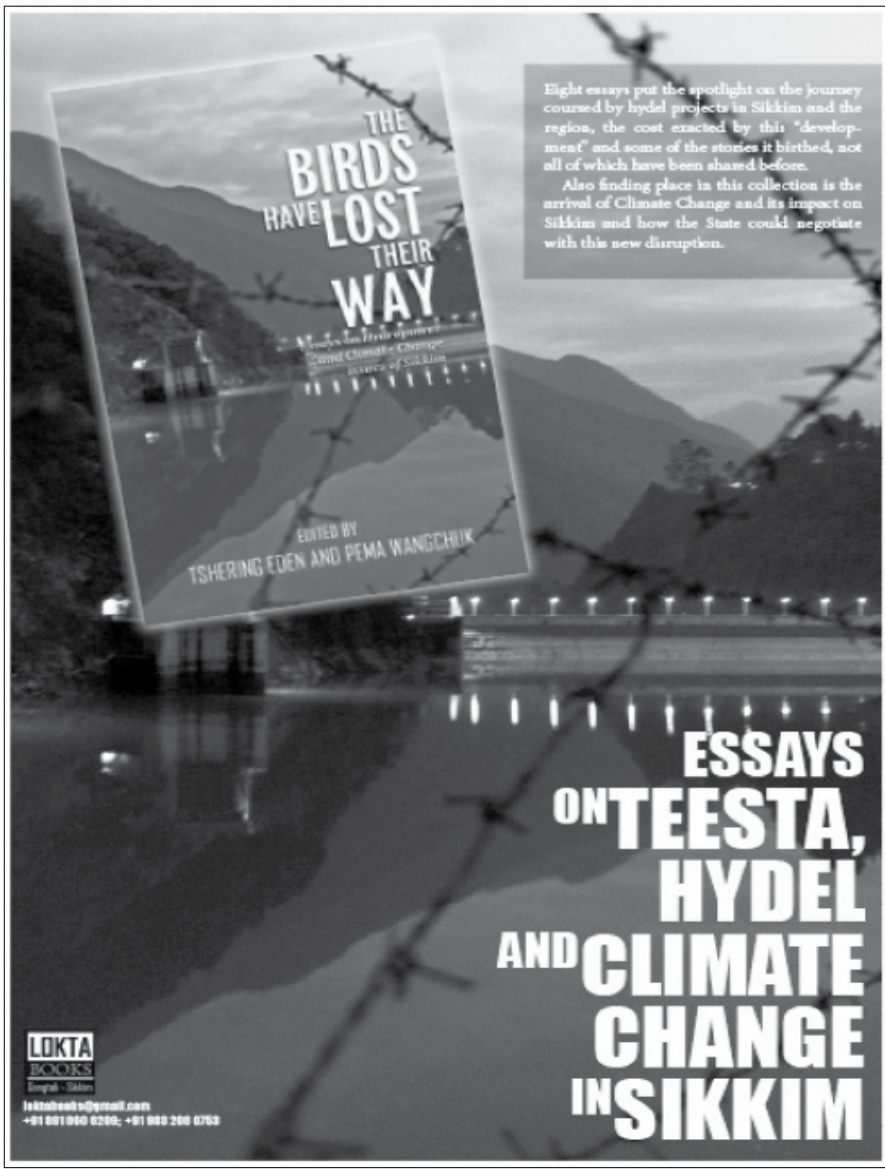
Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is facing criticism for failing to prepare for the second wave, said in a speech last week that the pandemic was spreading fast in the villages and urged people not to ignore the symptoms.

"Get the test done, isolate yourself and start medication on

time," he said.

But in this village, people are making do as best they can. One woman had borrowed an oxygen cylinder from a neighbour whose condition had improved slightly, her family said.

"Truth is, there has been no COVID-19 testing. We have tried but they told us they don't have enough staff," said 48-year old Yogesh Talan, a former headman of the village.



Milan has to wait until final day for Champions League fate

MILAN, MAY 17 (AP): AC Milan, Napoli and Juventus will have to wait until the final day of the season to see which two teams qualify for next season's Champions League.

Milan, which is bidding to return to Europe's elite after an eight-year absence, could only draw 0-0 against Cagliari on Sunday to leave it level on points with Napoli after Gennaro Gattuso's side won 2-0 at Fiorentina.

The two teams are a point above fifth-place Juventus, which beat Serie A champion Inter Milan 3-2 on Saturday.

Milan next plays at Atalanta, which has already qualified for the Champions League. Napoli hosts Hellas Verona and Juventus visits Bologna. The top four qualify for Europe's premier club competition.

Milan knew a win would guarantee it a return to the Champions League for the first time since the 2013-14 season.

Cagliari would have needed a point to secure safety but earlier results meant it was already guaranteed another season in Serie A.

Milan was without star forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who has also been ruled out of the upcoming European Championship because of a knee injury.

It was reduced to long-range shots in the first half. The Rossoneri went closer in the second period but were denied on several occasions by Cagliari goalkeeper Alessio Cragno.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DREAMS

Napoli knew that a win would ensure it heads into the final weekend of the season in the top four.

Lorenzo Insigne's free kick came off the crossbar in the first half but the Napoli captain broke the deadlock 11 minutes after the break.

Napoli was awarded a penalty when Nikola Milenkovic tugged Amir Rrahmani's shirt on a corner. Insigne's spot kick was saved by Pietro Terracciano but the Italy international tucked away the rebound.

Insigne hit the woodwork again before Napoli doubled its lead 11 minutes later after Piotr Zielinski's shot was deflected in by Fiorentina defender Lorenzo Venuti for an own-goal.

FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL Benevento's survival chances are out of its hands after the team could only draw 1-1 against 10-man Crotone.

If Torino avoids defeat against Lazio in Tuesday's rescheduled game, then Benevento will be relegated. If not, Benevento has to beat Torino in their final match.

Crotone played for more than an hour with 10 men after defender Vladimir Golemic was sent off for a cynical challenge on Gianluca Lapadula. But it still managed to snatch an equalizer in stoppage time through Simy.

James scores 25, tweaks ankle as Lakers top Pelicans 110-98



NEW ORLEANS (AP): LeBron James looked to be in playoff form when he hit deep 3s, delivered an accurate, no-look, behind-the-back pass out of a double team to Alex Caruso under the basket, or flipped an alley-oop lob to Anthony Davis while running a fast break.

But when James used a spin move on the dribble to convert a lay-up against two defenders in the fourth quarter, he landed on Nickeil Alexander-Walker's foot, fell to the floor and remained on his back for several seconds before checking out of the game for good.

"I'll be fine," James insisted after his game-high 25 points led the Los Angeles Lakers to a 110-98 victory over the New Orleans Pelicans on Sunday night.

While the victory was the Lakers' fifth straight, it was not enough to pull them high enough in the Western Conference standings to skip the NBA's new play-in format involving the seventh through 10th seeds.

Portland beat Denver to finish sixth, meaning the Lakers would have to win one of up to two play-in games to secure a regular playoff spot as either a seventh or eighth seed.

James called his latest injury "a tweak" of the high right ankle sprain that sidelined him for 26 of the Lakers' final 30 regular-season games.

"I'll be in the lineup on Wednesday," James predicted, referring to the Lakers' play-in

opener against eighth-seeded Golden State. "The time is now and I'm ready for it."

Davis scored 14 points and Andre Drummond had 13 points and 13 rebounds for the Lakers, who played starters and top substitutes between 21 and 30 minutes in a victory that would have helped them finish sixth had Portland lost.

"I don't look at our seeding. It doesn't matter," James said, noting that he and Davis both missed significant time with injuries this season. "Obviously we know we wanted to play a lot better this season, but injuries took a toll on our

team. We're finally starting to get whole, starting to feel a little bit better about our situation."

Willie Hernangomez had 19 points and 13 rebounds, and Naji Marshall added 18 points — including a turnaround, half-court heave off the glass as the first half ended — for New Orleans.

The Lakers never trailed, but had some trouble pulling away from an undermanned Pelicans squad missing top scorers Zion Williamson (left hand fracture) and Brandon Ingram (left ankle sprain).

"We had some important guys out with injury, so it was

just another opportunity for other guys. Everybody was working really hard," Hernangomez said. "I'm really happy with the opportunity that I had."

With about five minutes left in the third quarter, Pelicans forward James Johnson had a chance to tie it at 76 with three free throws, but missed them all.

Soon after, Davis made a pair of free throws and followed that with a dunk on the next possession, igniting a 16-3 Lakers run to close the quarter in which Davis added a reverse layup and another driving lay-in as he was fouled.

Caruso chipped in with a driving floater from the lane and a 3, and the Lakers took a 91-76 lead into the final period.

TIP-NS

Lakers: Dennis Schroder scored 12 points and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 10. ... Shot 11 of 35 from 3-point range. ... Scored 62 points in the paint. ... Jared Dudley played most of the last five minutes, his first action since March 3, when he elected to rehabilitate a right medial collateral ligament tear without surgery. He grabbed two rebounds but did not score.

Pelicans: Pelicans second-year center Jaxson Hayes,

who had 10 points, hurt his right leg badly enough in the second half that he had to be helped off the court by two teammates while not putting any weight on the injured leg. ... In addition to the absences of Williamson and Ingram, New Orleans also was without starting center Steven Adams (sprained toe) and starting point guard Lonzo Ball (sprained right thumb). ... Alexander-Walker scored 14 and Eric Bledsoe added 13 points. ... Turned the ball over 21 times, leading to 23 Lakers points.

QUOTABLE

Dudley described the Lakers' bid to win an NBA title from a play-in seeding "will be the hardest challenge any team has ever had in NBA history."

But he then added, "We're up for it, man. We're the defending champs. They got to worry about us. We're getting healthy at the right time and no one wants to see a healthy Laker team."

UP NEXT

Lakers: Host Golden State on Wednesday night in the Western Conference play-in with the winner taking the seventh seed and a spot against Phoenix and the loser having to play another game to determine the eighth seed.

Pelicans: Enter the offseason looking for ways to improve a team that played entertaining and competitive basketball, but struggled with injuries to key players and dropped too many close games to make the postseason.

Barcelona routs Chelsea 4-0 to win WCL final for 1st time



GOTHENBURG, MAY 17 (AP): Barcelona's slow start two years ago doomed its European dream so this time it came out firing against Chelsea, scoring after just 32 seconds en route to a 4-0 victory and its first Women's Champions League title.

In a ruthless offensive display, Barcelona's attackers sliced through Chelsea's defense and did all of their scoring inside 36 minutes, beginning with an own-goal.

Bar a is the first team from Spain to win Europe's top club competition, which had been dominated recently by seven-time champions Lyon.

In its only other appearance in the final, Barcelona lost 4-1 to Lyon in 2019 after conceding a goal after five minutes and falling behind 4-0 before halftime in Budapest.

"The idea is to keep dominating European

football, Barcelona coach Lluís Cortes said.

"Winning this game is part of the journey and losing in Budapest was part of it, too."

Making its first appearance in the final, Chelsea was under pressure immediately and went down 1-0 when a clearance ricocheted off Chelsea midfielder Melanie Leupolz and over goalkeeper Ann-Katrin Berger into the net.

Alexia Putellas scored from the penalty spot in the 14th minute after Leupolz was adjudged to have fouled Jenni Hermoso in the box. Seven minutes later, Aitana Bonmati collected a pass from Putellas in front of goal, shot past Berger, and the rout was on for Cortes' side.

Lieke Martens brilliantly set up the fourth goal, dribbling down the left side and crossing to Caroline Graham Hansen, who blasted it into the net from close range in the 36th minute at an

empty Gamla Ullevi stadium.

The 34-year-old Cortes said his side played with confidence right from the start.

"The final is to be won, and that's what we did," he said, adding that it's a victory for all of Spanish women's soccer.

The championship is also a boost for a Barcelona club that is heavily in debt and with a men's side that has stumbled lately. The club could also face sanctions for its support of the ill-fated European Super League.

Chelsea was the first English team to reach the final since 2007, when Arsenal won the competition.

"We didn't have the start to the game that we wanted and in these types of games against these opponents, you can't concede sloppy goals," Chelsea defender Millie Bright told BT Sport.

The loss ended Chelsea's bid to match Arse-

nal's quadruple from 14 years ago. The Blues have won the Women's Super League title and League Cup this season and are still alive in the women's FA Cup.

Chelsea threatened after the own-goal when Pernille Harder caught up to a cross but shot high.

Blues manager Emma Hayes cited inexperience and naivety at times by her side.

"Today was difficult because the game was over before it began, she said. "To concede so early and then we had two good chances, then they got the second through a penalty. The damage was done."

The Blues started the second half with more urgency but barely threatened.

This campaign, Barcelona eliminated Manchester City in the quarterfinals and Paris Saint-Germain in the semis. PSG had earlier beaten Lyon.

Australian IPL cricketers return home after Maldives stop-over

MELBOURNE, MAY 17 (PTI):

Australia's IPL players, including Pat Cummins and Steve Smith, arrived in Sydney on Monday after a stop-over at Maldives due to travel ban from COVID-ravaged India, almost two weeks after the T20 league was suspended due to the health crisis.

Most of the 38 members of the Australian contingent, including players, officials and commentators who participated at the non-suspended league, landed at the Sydney airport this morning after spending 10 days at Maldives.

The lucrative league was indefinitely suspended on May 5 after four players and two

coaches from four different teams tested positive inside the bio-bubble. Australian players, however, couldn't head home immediately as the country had imposed a travel ban from India, which is battling a deadly second wave of the coronavirus.

They will all be spending two weeks in a Sydney hotel for the mandatory quarantine.

According to national broadcaster ABC, Smith, Cummins, batsman David Warner and Ricky Ponting, who coached Delhi Capitals, were among the people on the Air Seychelles flight.

Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey also headed home on Sunday via Doha

after testing negative for COVID-19 on Friday. He had tested positive on May 4 and was brought to Chennai from Delhi in an air ambulance.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Sunday said the players and officials were not given any special dispensation.

"They are happy, for them to come in over the cap. That is something we insisted upon and they were to agree with that, Morrison was quoted as saying by ABC.

"They will come back under their own steam, upon their own ticket, and they won't be taking the spot in quarantine of any other Australian who is returning home under the NSW caps.

Lee wins Byron Nelson in rain; Pride takes 1st senior title

McKinney, May 17 (AP): KH Lee was more than happy to play through a steady downpour in the final round of the AT&T Byron Nelson, and didn't mind waiting out a weather delay of more than two hours. The reward was the final spot next week in the PGA Championship. Lee earned his first PGA Tour victory and the chance to compete on the Ocean Course at Kiawah Island in South Carolina, becoming the second consecutive Nelson winner from South Korea by finishing 25 under, three ahead of third-round leader Sam Burns.

Heavy rain fell most of the back nine for the leaders, with workers using squeegees to clear paths on greens and one ball stuck in the middle of a fast-moving stream on the 18th fairway. The players slogged through the deluge before lightning forced a delay. Most of the standing water was gone when play resumed 2 hours, 23 minutes later. Lee missed a par putt on 16 to cut his lead to two, but answered with two birdies. The sun came out just as Lee was finishing his 6-under 66. Burns (70) fin-

ished at 22 under, a shot ahead of 2011 Masters champion Charl Schwartzel (68), Daniel Berger (64), Patton Kizzire (63) and Scott Stallings (66).

When the delay hit, Jordan Spieth already knew he was going to fall short again in his hometown event, played on its third course in the past four Nelsons at the rain-soaked TPC Craig Ranch in McKinney, about 30 miles north of Dallas. Spieth, three back to start the day, shot 71 and tied for ninth at 18 under.

Korn Ferry Tour

Knoxville: Greyson Sigg made a 6-foot par putt on the 18th hole for a 4-under 66 and a one-stroke victory in the Korn Ferry Tour's Visit Knoxville Open.

Sigg finished at 20-under 260 at Holston Hills for his first tour title. The former Georgia player has eight top 10s this season is No. 2 in the Korn Ferry Tour points standings with more than enough points for a PGA Tour card next season. Stephan Jaeger was second after a 70. Seth Reeves matched the course record with a 61 to finish third at 17 under.

AP’s top editor calls for probe into Israeli airstrike

WASHINGTON (AP): The Associated Press’ top editor is calling for an independent investigation into the Israeli airstrike that targeted and destroyed a Gaza City building housing the AP, broadcaster Al-Jazeera and other media, saying the public deserves to know the facts.

Separately, media watchdog Reporters Without Borders asked the International Criminal Court to investigate Israel’s bombing of a building housing the media organizations as a possible war crime.

Sally Buzbee, AP’s executive editor, said Sunday that the Israeli government has yet to provide clear evidence supporting its attack, which leveled the 12-story al-Jalaa tower.

The Israeli military, which gave AP journalists and other tenants about an hour to evacuate, claimed Hamas used the building for a military intelligence office and weapons development. Israeli military spokesman Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus said Israel was compiling evidence for the U.S. but declined to commit to providing it within the next two days.

“We’re in the middle of fighting,” Conricus said Sunday. “That’s in process and I’m sure in due time that information will be presented.”

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would share any evidence of Hamas’ presence in the targeted building through intelligence channels. But neither the White House nor the State Department would say if any American official had seen it.



Buzbee said the AP has had offices in al-Jalaa tower for 15 years and never was informed or had any indication that Hamas might be in the building. She said the facts must be laid out.

“We are in a conflict situation,” Buzbee said.

“We do not take sides in that conflict. We heard Israelis say they have evidence; we don’t know what that evidence is.”

“We think it’s appropriate at this point for there to be an independent look at what happened yesterday — an independent investigation,” she added.

In remarks Sunday, Netanyahu repeated Israel’s claim that the building housed an intelligence office of

Hamas. Asked if he had relayed supporting evidence of that in a call with President Joe Biden on Saturday, Netanyahu said that “we pass it through our intelligence people.”

The Paris-based Reporters Without Borders, known by its French acronym RSF, said in a letter to the court’s chief prosecutor that the offices of 23 international and local media organizations have been de-

stroyed over the past six days.

RSF said it had strong reason to believe that the Israeli military’s “intentional targeting of media organizations and intentional destruction of their equipment” could violate one of the court’s statutes. It said the attacks serve “to reduce, if not neutralize, the media’s capacity to inform the public.”

RSF asked the international court, based in the Dutch city of The Hague, to include the recent attacks in a war crimes probe opened in March into Israel’s practices in Palestinian territories.

Buzbee said the AP journalists were “rattled” after the airstrike but are doing fine and reporting the news. She expressed concern about the impact on news coverage.

“This does impact the world’s right to know what is happening on both sides of the conflict in real time,” she said.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke by phone Saturday with AP’s president and CEO, Gary Pruitt. The State Department said Blinken offered “his unwavering support for independent journalists and media organizations around the world and noted the indispensability of their reporting in conflict zones.”

Buzbee and Conricus spoke on CNN’s “Reliable Sources” and Netanyahu was on CBS’ “Face the Nation.”

Assam reports 3,650 new COVID-19 cases, 56 more deaths

GUWAHATI, MAY 16 (PTI): The COVID-19 caseload in Assam mounted to 3,28,629 as 3,650 more people tested positive for the disease, while 56 fresh fatalities pushed the death toll to 2,179, a bulletin issued by National Health Mission said.

Kamrup Metropolitan reported the maximum number of new deaths at 13, followed by Udalguri at five, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Kamrup and Sonitpur at four each, Cachar, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong at three each, Darrang, Hojai and Tinsukia at two each.

One patient each succumbed to the disease in Baksa, Barpeta, Dhemaji, Dhubri, Lakhimpur, Nagaon and Nalbari districts.

The NHM said 1,347 more COVID-19 patients have died in the state till now, but the government’s Death Audit Board has not included them in the toll as they had other ailments.

With the detection of 3,650 new cases from 42,884 sample tests conducted on Sunday, Assam has reported a positivity rate of 8.51 per cent for the day, the NHM bulletin said.

The state capital reported the maximum number of fresh cases at 1,197, followed by 262 in Cachar, 240 in Dibrugarh and 211 in Kamrup.

Currently, the state has 43,377 active cases.

Dogged by Mideast crisis, US envoy Blinken visits Denmark

COPENHAGEN, DENMARK (AP):U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in Denmark on Monday for talks on climate change, Arctic policy and Russia as calls grew for the Biden administration to take a tougher, more active stance on spiraling Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Blinken is seeing Danish leaders as well as top officials from Greenland and the Faeroe Islands in Copenhagen on Monday before he heads to Iceland for an Arctic Council meeting. That gathering will be marked by his first face-to-face talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at a time of significantly heightened tensions between Washington and Moscow.

Russia on Sunday called for an immediate ministerial-level session of the “quartet” of Mideast peacemakers to discuss the escalating Israeli-Palestinian crisis but there was no overt indication that the U.S. would agree. There was also no sign yet that Blinken was changing his travel plans, which currently have him returning to Washington from Reykjavik late Thursday after a brief stop in Greenland.

The Mideast quartet includes envoys from the U.S., Russia, the European Union and the United Nations. With Blinken and Lavrov both attend-

ing the Arctic Council meeting, Iceland could serve as a venue for the group to gather.

The U.N. Security Council held an urgent session Sunday on the Mideast at which U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said the administration was working tirelessly through diplomatic channels to stop the fighting. President Joe Biden spoke with both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas on Saturday, Blinken worked the phones with his counterparts while flying to Copenhagen on Sunday, and a senior U.S. diplomat is in Israel meeting with the parties there.

Yet calls for a greater U.S. response are growing, especially in Congress, where a large number of Biden’s Democratic allies are clamoring for more action, including a demand from the administration for a cease-fire. Biden has thus far resisted such calls, reaffirming staunch support for Israel’s right to defend itself from rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip while maintaining that both Israelis and Palestinians have an equal right to peace and security.

Israel on Monday unleashed a wave of new airstrikes on the Gaza Strip, saying it had de-

stroyed 15 kilometers (9 miles) of militant tunnels and the homes of nine Hamas commanders. Gaza residents described the barrage as the heaviest since the war began a week ago. At least 188 Palestinians have been killed in the strikes and over 1,200 have been wounded, while Hamas rocket attacks have killed eight people in Israel.

In Denmark, Blinken met with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod and Denmark’s Queen Margrethe. He also saw the foreign ministers of Denmark’s semi-autonomous far north territories of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands.

Climate change is expected to dominate the discussions. The Biden administration is seeking to restore U.S. credibility with allies on the topic after four years during which the Trump administration either downplayed the threat posed by climate change or urged other nations to take advantage of the commercial possibilities resulting from a loss of sea ice and melting glaciers.

After their meeting, Blinken and Frederiksen both noted the change.

“It’s a different approach,” Frederiksen told reporters. “That means a desire for cooperation around the Arctic region, where changes are tak-

ing place.”

In a statement, the State Department said Blinken “had emphasized the importance of advancing our mutual goals of combating the climate crisis, developing green technology, and continuing common efforts with the Kingdom of Denmark on the Arctic.”

Former President Donald Trump had also created a stir when he proposed purchasing Greenland from Denmark, an offer roundly rejected by both. Trump then canceled a scheduled state visit to Denmark in 2019, creating more ill feelings.

A senior U.S. official said Blinken hoped to get beyond any lingering doubts on Greenland by highlighting “all of the things that we’re doing with Greenland as a part of the Kingdom of Denmark.”

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Afghans who helped the US now fear being left behind

KABUL, MAY 17 (AP): He served as an interpreter alongside US soldiers on hundreds of patrols and dozens of firefights in eastern Afghanistan, earning a glowing letter of recommendation from an American platoon commander and a medal of commendation.

Still, Ayazudin Hilal was turned down when he applied for one of the scarce special visas that would allow him to relocate to the US with his family.

Now, as American and NATO forces prepare to leave the country, he and thousands of others who aided the war effort fear they will be left stranded, facing the prospect of Taliban reprisals.

We are not safe, the 41-year-old father of six said of Afghan civilians who worked for the US or NATO.

The Taliban is calling us and telling us, ‘Your stepbrother is leaving the country soon, and we will kill all of you guys.’”

The fate of interpreters after the troop withdrawal is one of the looming uncertainties surrounding the withdrawal, including a possible resurgence of terrorist threats and a reversal of fragile gains for women if chaos, whether from competing Kabul-based warlords or the Taliban, follows the end of America’s military engagement.

Interpreters and other civilians who worked for the US government or NATO can get what is known as a special immigrant visa, or SIV, under a program created in 2009 and modeled after a similar program for Iraqis.

Both SIV programs have long been dogged by complaints about a lengthy and complicated application process for security vetting that grew more cumbersome with pandemic safety measures.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters last month that the US is committed to helping interpreters and other Afghan civilians who aided the war effort, often at great personal risk. The Biden administration has also launched a review of the SIV programs, examining the delays and the ability of applicants to challenge a rejection. It will also be adding anti-fraud measures.

Amid the review, former interpreters, who typically seek to shield their identities and keep a low profile, are becoming increasingly public about what they fear will happen should the Taliban return to power.

They absolutely are going to kill us, Mohammad Shoaib Walizada, a former interpreter for the US Army, said in an interview after joining others in a protest in Kabul.

At least 300 interpreters have been killed in Afghanistan since 2016, and the Taliban have made it clear they will continue to be targeted, said Matt Zeller, a co-founder of No One Left Behind, an organization that advocates on their behalf. He also served in the country as an Army officer.

The Taliban considers them to be literally enemies of Islam, said Zeller, now a fellow at the Truman National Security Project. There’s no mercy for them.

Members of Congress and former service members have also urged the US government to expedite the application process, which now typically takes more than three years. State Department spokesperson Ned Price said May 10 that the US Embassy in Kabul had temporarily increased staff to help process the visas.

In December, Congress added 4,000 visas, bringing the total number of Afghans who can come with their immediate family members to 26,500, with about half the allotted amount already used and about 18,000 applications pending.

Critics and refugee advocates said the need to relocate could swell dramatically if Afghanistan tumbles further into disarray.

As it is, competing warlords financed and empowered by US and NATO forces threaten the future along with a resurgent Taliban, which have been able to make substantive territorial gains against a poorly trained and poorly equipped Afghan security force largely financed by US taxpayers.

While I applaud the Biden administration’s review of the process, if they are not willing to sort of rethink the entire thing, they are not going to actually start helping those Afghans who are most at need, said Noah Coburn, a political anthropologist whose research focuses on Afghanistan.

Coburn estimates there could be as many as 300,000 Afghan civilians who worked for the US or NATO in some form over the past two decades.

There is a wide range of Afghans who would not be tolerated under the Taliban’s conception of what society should look like, said Adam Bates, policy counsel for the International Refugee Assistance Project.

Those fears have been heightened by recent targeted killings of journalists and other civilians as well as government workers. The Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan has claimed responsibility for several, while the Taliban and government blame each other.

Biden raised the nation’s overall cap on refugee admissions to 62,500 this month, weeks after facing bipartisan blowback for his delay in replacing the record low ceiling set by his predecessor, Donald Trump.

The US is not planning to move civilians out en masse, for now at least. We are processing SIVs in Kabul and have no plans for evacuations at this time, a senior administration official said.

The White House is in the beginning stages of discussing its review with Congress and will work with lawmakers if changes in the SIV program are needed in order to process applications

as quickly and efficiently as possible, while also ensuring the integrity of the program and safeguarding national security, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Former interpreters have support in Congress, in part because many also have former American troops vouching for them.

Walizada, for example, submitted a letter of support from an Army sergeant who supervised him in dozens of patrols, including one where the interpreter was wounded by Taliban gunfire.

I cannot recall a linguist who had a greater dedication to his country or the coalition cause, the sergeant wrote.

Walizada was initially approved for a visa, but it was later revoked, with US Citizenship and Immigration Services telling him that it had adverse information you may be unaware of, in a letter he provided to The Associated Press.

Walizada said he has appealed the decision and hasn’t received a response.

Hilal, who translated from Dari and Pashto to English for the Army from June 2009 to December 2012, was rejected by the US Embassy, which said he did not meet the requirement for faithful and valuable service, because he was fired by the contracting firm that hired him after 3 1/2 years of service.

It was a stinging response, considering the dangers he faced. If I haven’t done faithful and good service for the US Army, why have they given me this medal? he says, holding the commendation, in an AP interview at an office in Kabul used by the former interpreters to meet with journalists.

Why he was fired by the US-based contractor, Mission Essential, is unclear. Hilal said he had a conflict with supervisors that started with a dispute over a work assignment. The company says it does not discuss current or former employees and declined to comment.

But whatever happened eventually, a November 2019 letter of support from his platoon commander was highly complimentary of stellar service that rivals that of most deployed service members.

Hilal was by his side on hundreds of patrols and dozens of firefights, monitoring enemy radio traffic and interpreting during encounters with locals, Army Maj. Thomas Goodman said in the letter. He was dependable and performed admirably, Goodman wrote. Even in firefights that lasted hours on end, he never lost his nerve, and I could always count him to be by my side.

As it happens, an AP journalist was embedded with the unit for a time, amid intense fighting in eastern Afghanistan, and captured images of Hilal and Goodman, surrounded by villagers as American forces competed with the Taliban for the support of the people.

Eurovision Song Contest returns despite coronavirus pandemic

ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS (AP): Pounding beats? Check. Uplifting lyrics? Check. Huge, backlit white wings? Check. After last year's Eurovision Song Contest was canceled amid the global COVID-19 pandemic, it is roaring back to life this year with coronavirus bubbles added to its heady mix of music and melodrama.

National delegations traveling to the Dutch port city of Rotterdam are abiding by strict measures to reduce the risk of infections, while the thousands of fans allowed to attend dress rehearsals, two semifinals and May 22's grand final will have to undergo testing to ensure they do not bring the virus into the cavernous venue.

Executive producer Siertse Bakker is glad it's going ahead at all.

"Organizing the Eurovision Song Contest is always challenging because you have less than a year to organize one of the biggest and most complex events in Europe, but to do it in a pandemic is much, much more complicated," he told The Associated Press.

Despite the pandemic measures, the contest that aims to unite Europe in song is continuing its 65-year tradition of upbeat fun.

Fans near the Ahoy arena can get into the swing of the event early. Traffic lights at a pedestrian walkway outside the venue have been transformed so that a green figure dances to Abba's iconic 1974 winning song "Waterloo" when it's safe to cross.

The immensely popular event mixes high camp — at rehearsals, Norway's Andreas Haukeland, known as TIX, performed his song "Fallen Angel" in huge white wings — with lyrics encouraging inclusion and positivity while avoiding political messages.

Belarus was booted out before the contest even started because organizers the European Broadcasting Union said the country's original song "puts the nonpolitical nature of the Contest in question." A replacement song also was rejected.

The theme for this year's Eurovision Song Contest is "Open up." It was actually chosen before the pandemic derailed public life around the globe, but is now very apt as Europe begins to tentatively emerge from the coronavirus pandemic.

"We decided to keep the theme because, especially in these times, it's important that we are open towards each other and that we feel the possibility to open up to one another, to show our true feelings, emotions and thoughts," Bakker said.

The 2019 Dutch winner, Duncan Laurence, says on the event's website

that he sees music as a way of forging links. "That's why we need the Eurovision Song Contest. To feel connected again."

Thousands of fans will be able to

express messages of inclusion and positivity.

Russia's performer, Manizha, sings a song whose lyrics include the lines: "Every Russian Woman. Needs to know.



make the connection in person.

Each event will be open to 3,500 people — only about 20% of the capacity of the arena — who must show a negative test result that is less than 24 hours old.

The top 10 from each semifinal joins France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom — together with host country the Netherlands — in the final. Voting is conducted in each participating country by a panel of music industry experts and viewers.

The pandemic forced the cancellation of last year's event and this year prevented Australian singer Maitine from flying to Rotterdam. The Netherlands is hosting the event because the country won the last time the contest was held, in 2019.

Montaigne is still taking part, but by sending in a recorded live performance.

She's not the only one missing out. The mother of Dutch entrant Jeangu-Macrooy also is unable to attend as she can't travel from her home in Suriname. Swedish singer Tusse's father wants to know if he can vote for him from his home in Congo.

Ukraine had a scare when the lead singer of its band, Go_A, Kateryna Pavlenko, had to skip a rehearsal in Rotterdam and get tested after feeling unwell. The result was negative and she was welcomed back.

She and her band are among 39 national entrants vying for a coveted victory that can be a springboard to a global career or a fleeting taste of fame.

For many, the stage and global television audience of millions is a chance to

You're strong enough to bounce against the wall."

The singer, whose family fled to Russia from Tajikistan, said the message is for women all over the world "because we need to be, we have to be brave. We need to be happier. And I'm happy that I can inspire them on that stage because, you know, Eurovision stage is the one of the hugest stages in the world."

Maltese singer Destiny also has a message of body positivity and is tipped to take it to the final. The 18-year-old's powerful voice helped her win the Junior Eurovision contest and reach the semifinals of Britain's Got Talent in 2017.

Amid the many over-the-top performances, the relatively restrained song "Voilà" by French singer Barbara Pravi has emerged as the bookmakers' favorite. Cyprus' performer Elena Tsagrinou has already been in the spotlight after Orthodox Christian faithful on the Mediterranean island protested that it promoted satanic worship. Tsagrinou says her song, "El Diabolo," which she performs flanked by four dancers in skin-tight red costumes, was misinterpreted and is actually about an abusive relationship between two lovers.

She laughs off the controversy that saw protesters hold up wooden crosses and sing hymns outside of Cyprus' state broadcaster in March.

Tsagrinou said dealing with the COVID-19 restrictions is tough ahead of the contest, "but that's not going to keep us back and we're going to feel the vibe that we want to feel and the smile on our face."



POP STAR! The "Deja Vu" singer, Olivia Rodrigo is dressed in a black and green outfit while heading into rehearsals for Saturday Night Live in NYC.

Salman Khan warns of action by Cyber Cell after 'Radhe' leaks on pirated sites

Mumbai, May 17 (PTI): Days after Salman Khan's much-anticipated film "Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai" was leaked on piracy sites, the Bollywood superstar has warned the miscreants of legal action by the Cyber Cell.

The action-drama had a multi-format release in select theatres and simultaneously on the streaming platform ZEE5 with ZEE's pay per view service ZEEPlay and on DTH services at Rs 249 on May 13 on the festival of Eid.

However, the movie, directed by Prabhudeva, was uploaded online within hours of its release.

Expressing his disappointment, Khan shared a note on his social media accounts late Saturday night and said watching a film on a pirated site was a "serious crime".

"We offered you to watch our film 'Radhe' at a reasonable price of INR 249 Per View. In spite of that pirated sites are streaming Radhe illegally which is a serious crime," he wrote.

The 55-year-old star informed that the Cyber Cell is taking action against these illegal pirated sites and the ones using such platforms. "Please don't participate in piracy or

the Cyber Cell will take action against you as well. Please understand you will get into a lot of trouble with the Cyber cell," he cautioned.

Ahead of the release of the film, Khan had appealed to his fans and followers to shun piracy and watch "Radhe" on the right platform.

The actor had said it takes the hard work



of several people to make a movie and it "hurts a lot when some take the route of piracy to watch the final product".

"I want a commitment from all of you that you will enjoy films on the right platform. So this Eid we want a commitment from the audience - no piracy in entertainment," he had said. "Radhe" also features Disha Patani, Ran-deep Hooda, Jackie Shroff, and Gautam Gulati.

Amitabh Bachchan gets second dose of COVID-19 vaccine

MUMBAI, MAY 17 (PTI): Megastar Amitabh Bachchan on Sunday said he has received the second and final dose of the novel coronavirus vaccine.

The 78-year-old star, who had taken the first jab last month, took to Instagram to give an update to fans

and followers.

"Dusarabhi ho gaya! (second one also done) Covid one, not the Cricket one! Sorry sorry, that was a really bad one." Bachchan captioned a picture of him receiving the shot.

In April, the veteran actor had said that all eligible

members of his family, except actor-son Abhishek Bachchan, have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Abhishek Bachchan was away shooting for his upcoming social comedy "Dasvi".

Last year, Amitabh Bachchan, Abhishek Bachchan, actor and daughter-in-law

Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, and his granddaughter Aaradhya Bachchan had tested positive for coronavirus.

On March 1, the government launched the nationwide drive to vaccinate everyone above 60 years of age and those aged between 45 and 59 with co-morbidities.

Aries:

Being away from your loved ones is hard, especially at a time like this. But, instead of descending into the rabbit hole of negative emotions, you're in the mood to become a magnet of joy and creativity. Monday sees you reaching out to your soul crew and siblings for an intimate soiree online. Some of you may feel inspired to start a dialogue with your school or college friends too. PS: Don't you love how some things only get better with time?

Tip: How about a virtual soiree?

Taurus:

When we create from our small, three-dimensional selves, we face roadblocks at every stage. On the other hand, when we make space for Spirit to step in, the path begins to clear out for us in miraculous ways. Where will you choose to vibrate at, Taurus? Who will you partner up with on your journey to greatness? Remember, you are the creator of your life, and the power to make that paradigm shift is already within you.

Tip: Get ready to summon the forces.

Gemini:

Isn't it strange how we glorify strength and courage and hide our tears in public? We're not saying you have to make a hue and cry about what's going on inside. We're simply asking you to acknowledge the pain and the brokenness without seeing it as a sign

of weakness. Remember, the more vulnerable you allow yourself to be, the more you will give others the strength to open up about what they're going through.

Tip: Accept the experience in all of its hues.

Cancer:

Often, we start off with a certain idea. However, as we go along, the given idea no longer makes sense to us. It's okay to feel disillusioned once in a while, Cancer. Instead of running away from this feeling, sit down with it and pour it a cup of tea. What you will realise in the process is that you have grown in different ways since you first started walking this path, and that it's okay to want to venture into a less familiar territory.

Leo:

We love the challenge that comes with taking on something new. We thrive on the idea of making life an adventure of sorts. But, if we took on new tasks each and everyday, what would happen to the old ones? Something to think about as you sip on your cinnamon latte, Leo. The week ahead requires you to practice patience and persistence. You are already in a good place, and with the right amount of nurturing, you will be able to take your existing projects to the next level.

Tip: 'Patience' and 'persistence' are your power words.

Virgo:

The road to success is paved with failures. Read that again, Virgo. So take both the magnificent and the miserable in your stride, knowing that it's all a part of the process. Despite what your physical reality is showing you, you are on the right track, well on your way to making 'victory' your middle name. PS: How about channeling all that rage into reinventing the game and working harder than you ever have?

Tip: Forward and onwards, beautiful!

Libra:

This is a risky time to start a new venture or business. But you've got all the right tricks up your sleeve, Libra, and you're in the mood to make a big comeback. The mysterious forces above and below are working overtime to make this venture a success for you. Remember, an enterprise that's merely self-serving will only take you so far. Creating a system that supports both you and the local community will prove to be the secret to your success in the long run.

Tip: You're ready for the big comeback.

Scorpio:

Uh-oh! Looks like you've done it again. You've said yes to "everything" and taken on more than you can possibly handle. The cards are urging you to hit the

brakes and rethink your game just a little. As you do, free yourself from unrealistic expectations. You are enough, Scorpio, and you have nothing to prove to those around you. Remember, asking for support where you need it is not a sign of weakness.

Tip: Free yourself from unrealistic expectations.

Sagittarius:

The world may be on hold at the moment. But that doesn't mean your life dreams have to be. The week ahead sees you defy every law in the book, hit the accelerator button and make big things happen. Remember, it's okay to not know what your efforts will lead to. Nobody does. We just have to keep showing up for what we believe in as we surrender the rest to the Universe.

Tip: It's time to hit that accelerator button.

Capricorn:

We love chasing the thrill of the new. But, the truth is, there are older projects that need your time and attention right now. Projects that are on the verge of making you a big success. Word for the wise: adopt 'patience' and 'persistence' as your power words. Remember, there will be days you will feel like you're doing the same thing over and over, or that you're stuck in a rut, and that's okay too. Know that it's all a part of the process that's challenging you to become the

most resilient version of yourself.

Tip: Stay committed. That's all!

Aquarius:

What are your favourite self-care rituals, Aquarius? The practices that help you feel good on a mind, body, and soul level? Is it an aromatherapy session or a guided meditation that helps you tap into the power of your subconscious? It's time to honour the sacred temple and the deity who lives within. While you're at it, free yourself from the belief that your worthiness is directly proportional to how productive you are and the manner in which you hold space for others.

Tip: It's time to honour the sacred temple and the deity who lives within.

Pisces:

The emotions are weighing down on you heavily, Pisces. At the same time, there are so many unanswered questions—questions that you may or may not get the answer to in this lifetime. But, the one thing you are certain of is that your time together has come to an end. So, bid them a bittersweet farewell. Even though it does not seem so from where you are standing, there are a lot of blessings that are coming your way—blessings that only the fortunate have the pleasure of receiving.

Tip: Choose to focus on the silver linings.