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# Summit TIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## 9K-plus 18-44 yr olds jabbed with Covishield in past nine days

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 25 MAY:**

A total of 9,304 in the 18-44 age-group have had internet strong enough and reflexes fast enough at 6AM every morning to book a vaccination slot in Sikkim. This is the number in the age-group to have received a jab of Covishield at vaccination sites across the State since vaccination was opened to them on 16 May. This, as per data uploaded on the CoWin website as of 5PM, 25 May.

20 May saw the highest number of vaccinations for 18 to 44 year olds when 1,513 of them received the shot and the lowest number of them, 351, made it to the short-list on the first day of the exercise on 16 May.

Thus far, 29,739 individuals in this age-group



have received the vaccine in Sikkim, a little over 20,000 of them receiving it earlier when vaccination was opened for frontline workers.

Meanwhile, 1,263 more people received

the vaccine today, 1,064 of whom booked a slot only yesterday. Thus far, a total of 2,36,837 doses have been administered in the State covering a total of 1,77,196 people, 59,641 of whom have

completed their vaccine schedule with both the doses.

East Sikkim continues to dominate the vaccination initiative with 1,050 of the 1,263 doses administered today

being administered at four of 22 vaccination sites opened here today, the remaining 18 receiving no visitors. And most of these sites, save a rare exception in Basilakha PHSC where 24 people received a vaccine shot, were in and around Gangtok – Gangtok's Urban PHC, STNM Hospital and Ranipool PHC.

For some more context, of the 1,77,196 people who have received at least one shot, more than half, 90,540, received their vaccine in East Sikkim. North Sikkim, which is also the least populated, has also vaccinated the fewest number of people, 10,835, of whom 4,541 have received both the doses. No vaccines were administered in North Sikkim today.

## 278 new cases and 5 more Covid deaths recorded in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 25 MAY:**

Sikkim's tally of confirmed COVID-19 cases went past the 13.5K mark today with 278 fresh cases being reported in the past 24 hours and the number now stands at 13,511. Also in the 24 hours leading up to 8AM Tuesday, Sikkim lost five more lives to the virus taking the Covid death-toll here to 237. Thursday was not a day for any good news on the Covid front and even new recoveries, which have been in the high one hundreds and often went past 200 on a daily basis over the

past few days, today numbered only 87.

Of the fatalities, while two were reported from STNM Hospital, two patients passed away at Central Referral Hospital, Tadongas well and one more death was reported from Sombaria Primary Health Centre in West District.

The 278 new cases were detected from the testing of 940 samples on Monday.

If it is any solace, hospitals across the State saw only 14 new admissions – 10 at STNM Hospital, three at CRH-Tadong and one at Sombaria. While there are

currently 205 Covid patients in hospital, 25 of them in ICU, there are a total of 3,161 Covid-positive people isolation across the State, their conditions stable enough not to require hospitalisation.

While 178 samples returned positive in RT-PCR testing of 556 samples, one was detected in TruNat testing of six samples and 99 in rapid antigen testing of 378 samples.

Of the 278 new cases, 178 were registered in East District, 49 in West District, 44 in South District and seven in North District.

## Mamata Banerjee's all-nighter in office as Bengal braces for Cyclone Yaas



**KOLKATA, 25 MAY [NDTV]:**

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has announced she will stay at the state secretariat tonight to monitor the rescue and relief operation linked to Cyclone Yaas, which is expected to make landfall on the Odisha coast tomorrow morning, with wind speeds of up to 185 kilometre/hour.

54,000 officers and relief workers, 2 lakh police and Home Guard personnel, along with National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams, will be deployed to tackle the fallout of the storm, which may severely impact several districts of Bengal, Ms Banerjee said.

"I have spoken to all the district magistrates on Cyclone Yaas. I will stay in Nabanna (the state secretariat) tonight. I will monitor the situation closely," she said. Cyclone Yaas will

make landfall near Odisha's Bhamra Port at around 5.30 am on Wednesday, the weather office told NDTV today.

The cyclone will intensify into a very severe cyclonic storm tomorrow morning, unleashing devastating winds with speeds of 155 km/hour to 165 km/hour, gusting to 185 km/hour, along and off Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Bhadrak and Balasore districts in Odisha and East Midnapore district in West Bengal, the weather office was quoted by news agency PTI as saying.

In Bengal, North and South 24 Parganas districts may experience winds with speeds of 90 km/hour to 100 km/per hour, gusting to 120 km/hour. Several other cities, like Kolkata, Howrah and Hooghly, may also witness devastating wind speeds. Moderate to high rainfall is also expected

in several districts across the state.

Warning that low-lying areas may get flooded, she said the Army will be deployed wherever necessary.

Cyclone Yaas is also expected to cause a storm surge of 2-4 metres along the coastline of Purba Medinipur and 1-2 metres in South 24 Parganas.

The weather office has warned that the rapid winds can destroy houses, bend or uproot electric poles and disrupt railway services in coastal and adjoining interior districts of Bengal.

Ms Banerjee had yesterday said the impact of Cyclone Yaas could be worse than Cyclone Amphan, which had left a trail of destruction in the state last year.

"We have learnt our lessons from (Cyclone) Amphan," she remarked today.

## ShyadirPidar greetings from CM

**GANGTOK, 25 MAY [IPR]:** Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamanghas extended greetings and best wishes to the people of Sikkim belonging to the Sunuwar community on the occasion of ShyadirPidar.

In his message, the Chief Minister states that the festival reinforces our commitment and responsibility towards mother nature who is worshipped as the ultimate source of our happiness, health, and well-being.

He also requests the

people of Sikkim to celebrate the festival with utmost care and responsibility and urges them to always follow COVID-19 appropriate behaviour.

ShyadirPidar, also known as 'Ubhauli Puja' is one of the important festivals celebrated by the Sunuwar community all over the State. On this day, the Sunuwar community pray to mother nature seeking blessings for bountiful harvest and protection from natural disasters in the year ahead.

## CM greets Sikkim on Saga Dawa

**GANGTOK, 25 MAY [IPR]:** Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamanghas conveyed warm greetings and best wishes to the people of Sikkim on the occasion of Saga Dawa.

The Chief Minister, in his message, recapitulates the Buddhist approach of the middle path of non-violence, love & compassion and the power to unite us further to constructive pursuits and that we should follow them.

"May the teachings and ideals of Lord Buddha remain the guiding force in our lives", states the Chief Minister.

He further expresses his concern over the pandemic before us which is formidable and enormous and has urged the people of the State to celebrate the festival following COVID-19 appropriate behaviour and follow the motto of "DabaiBhiKadaiBhi

## One-time incentive for ASHA workers reaches Yuksam-Tashiding



**PRITAM LAMA**

**GYALSHING, 25 MAY:**

The one-time incentive for ASHA workers for their role in Covid management announced recently by the Chief Minister was disbursed here today.

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang had announced this one-time incentive of Rs10,000 for ASHA workers from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund in recognition of their significant contributions towards Covid-19 pandemic related work.

On Tuesday, the SLA Deputy speaker Sangay Lepcha, who is also the area MLA of Yuksam-Tashiding constituency handed out cheques to the ASHA workers of constituency by visiting them at the health centres.

"Our healthcare systems are working tirelessly day-and-night for the people and I appeal to the people for cooperation and support by following

the COVID protocols," the MLA said.

He was accompanied by Additional Political Secretary to the CM, Madhusudan Sharma, Chairperson Transport Department Basant Tamang, SKM District Coordinator, Nandu Gurung and SKM CLC Coordinator, Krsher Kumar Khatiwada.

Speaking on behalf of the 676 ASHA workers in Sikkim, ASHA Facilitator, Lachi Maya Chettri from Yuksamsaid, "We are very grateful to the Chief Minister. Because of him, our service is being recognised this time. ASHA workers work on the frontline risking their own health and even that of their family members. We ASHA workers are the first responder from the grassroots. On behalf of all ASHA workers, I express my immense gratitude to the Chief Minister for recognising our efforts. This gesture has further motivated and inspired us."

## "No evidence" COVID-19 will impact children more in 3rd wave: AIIMS Chief

**NEW DELHI, 25 MAY [PTI]:** AIIMS Director Randeep Guleria said that there is no indication that children will be severely or more affected in the third wave of COVID-19.

Responding to a question on the possible impact of a third wave on children, Mr Guleria said there is so far no evidence that there will be severe infection in children or there will be more cases in them in the upcoming wave of COVID-19.

"Data from the first and the second wave shows that children are usually protected from Covid and even if they get it, they have mild infection," he said.

He, however, said children have suffered collateral damage during the pandemic due to gender gap in education, stress and mental issues, smartphone

dependence/addiction, and interrupted educational opportunities.

Schooling of the children in rural areas has also been affected.

"If we see the data of the first and second waves, it is very similar and it shows that children are usually protected and even if they get it, they only have mild infection. And the virus hasn't changed so there is no indication that children will be more affected in the third wave," he said.

And there is this hypothesis that the virus enters through ACE receptors in the body and these receptors are relatively less in children as compared to adults.

This is a hypothesis on why the infection has been less amongst children, he said.

"Those who floated this theory said



that children have so far not been affected, so perhaps they will be most affected in the third wave. But there is so far no evidence that there will be severe infec-

tion in children or there will be more cases in them in the upcoming wave," Mr Guleria said.

The comments come in the backdrop of some experts highlighting the need for preparation warning that children could be affected by the third wave more than adults.

The Indian Academy of Paediatrics recently said that though children appear as susceptible as adults it is "highly unlikely that the third wave will predominantly or exclusively affect children".

The country's child rights body National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has said that with a third

COVID-19 wave projected to hit the country, the Centre and states should ramp up their preparations to protect children and neonates.

In a letter to Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan, NCPCR chairperson Priyanka Kanoongo said the ongoing second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting a slightly greater number of younger people and a third wave is projected to hit the country, will affect children too.

Underlining the urgent need to reorganise the National Emergency Transport Service (NETS), Priyanka Kanoongo requested the health ministry to issue necessary directions for the service and ambulances to prepare specifically for neonates and children.



## Second cyclone in 10 days to slam into India amid Covid misery

**NEW DELHI, 25 MAY [BLOOMBERG]:** A powerful cyclone is set to slam into India on Wednesday, the second in less than two weeks, with authorities gearing up for relief operations at a time when the nation is facing the world's worst outbreak of Covid-19.

Cyclone Yaas, equivalent to a category 3 hurricane, will cause heavy rains in West Bengal and Odisha, with wind speeds as high as 185 kilometers per hour, according to the India Meteorological Department. Sea levels may increase 4 meters above regular tides and inundate low-lying areas, it said.

The latest storm follows a severe cyclone that hit the west coast last week -- the worst in over two decades in Gujarat -- killing dozens after a barge sank in the sea. The eastern region was hit by a cyclone in May 2020 with similar wind speeds, while another one in 2019 prompted authorities to evacuate millions of people.

The timing of the storm poses several challenges for already stressed authorities in the country, which is battling a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. The infections have strained the country's health system and overwhelmed crematoriums and hospitals. They have also spread to rural areas, where about 70% of the nation's 1.3 billion people live. Union Home Minister Amit Shah asked the state governments to ensure adequate power backup for hospitals, laboratories, vaccine cold stores and other medical facilities, the ministry said in a statement.

Ports, refineries and plants were on alert. Indian Oil Corp., the biggest refinery, stopped unloading crude oil at Paradip in Odisha and asked ships to move 250 nautical miles away from the path of the cyclone, according to a spokesman. The weather department advised fishermen to suspend operations in the area and return immediately to the coast. The storm could damage houses and roads, disrupt movement of trains and disrupt power and telecommunication services, it said in a statement.

Evacuation Plan

The Odisha government has identified more than 6,500 pregnant women with delivery dates before June 1, and is moving them to hospitals as a priority, according to Pradeep Jena, the state's additional chief secretary. The government will intensify the evacuation process after getting further clarity from the weather office on the time and location of landfall, he said by text.

In neighbouring Bangladesh, the government has readied three times more storm shelters than are usually needed to accommodate people evacuated from coastal areas, said Enamur Rahman, state minister for disaster management. But the country sees no major damage from the cyclone as it's likely to move toward's Odisha, he said.

# Co-ordination meeting deliberates Jorethang's rising COVID-19 cases

**NAMCHI, 25 MAY (IPR):** A co-ordination meeting to deliberate about the rising cases of COVID-19 in Jorethang was held at the conference hall of Green Park on 24 May, 2021. The meeting was chaired by DC (South), M Bharani Kumar present amongst others were and SSP (South), Thakur Thapa, SDM (Jorethang), CB Sapkota alongside officials Panchyat President, Pabitra Sharma and Ward Panchayet Member of Jorethang Nagar Panchayat.

Addressing the gathering, DC (South) spoke about the COVID-19 cases in the district, its recovery rate and other aspects related to combat this disease. He informed that the district resources and manpower must

be utilized aggressively in order to fight the ongoing pandemic. Mr Bharani urged the health department to constitute a strategy to minimize the spread of the disease in Jorethang and its surrounding area and underlined that utmost medical and transportation attention should be given to COVID-19 positive patients and to their primary contacts as well. He also added that if needed extra venues and supplementary vehicles will also be identified.

Speaking, during the meeting SSP, Thakur Thapa urged everyone to co-operate and effectively handle the COVID-19 crises. He informed about the directives issued by the State Government with regards to lockdown and maintained that



one and all should follow these rules and said that the Police Department has made adequate law and order arrangements during the lockdown.

The Medical Officer pre-

sented a brief overview of the Covid-19 status and highlighted various initiatives being undertaken by the administration in combating the Covid-19 outbreak at Jorethang

and its surrounding areas.

During the meeting it was decided that the Sunday vegetable market to be shifted to Jorethang playground for maintaining proper social dis-

tance. The panchyat President with all ward panchyat members ensured during the meeting that they will give their full support and help the COVID 19 patients in their area.

## Greenko donates 2 Oxygen Concentrators and PPE kits to Penlong PHSC



**GANGTOK, 25 MAY (IPR):** The Greenko Group donated two numbers of large medical grade Oxygen Concentrators and PPE kits to Penlong PHSC and Pangthang PHSC at Penlong-Panchayat Bhawan today.

On behalf of Greenko Group, General Manager, Karma Lepcha along with

Senior Manager, Krishna Pradhan handed over the equipment to Minister cum Area MLA, Karma Loday Bhutia in the presence of Panchayats of Navey Sotak GPU and health workers.

Minister Bhutia expressed his gratitude towards the company for the generous contribution.

## Fire guts Ekra house in Ringhim Nampatam GPU



**WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 24 MAY:** The Ekra house of Ram Bahadur Chettri of Tangtang, Lower Singhik, Ringhim Nampatam GPU, in North Sikkim, was completely gutted in a fire that broke out on the night of 24 May at around 12.30 am.

Additional Political Secretary to the CM

[North], Tshering Wangyal Bhutia, ADC-North, Sonam Lepcha, Mangan Nagar Panchayat Inspector, Palden Bhutia, MEOTempo Bhutia, BDO Mangan BAC, DS Subba along with Councilors, Zilla Panchayat, visited the spot and have assured to provide all necessary help to the affected family.

## Delhi to get 1st drive-through Covid vaccination facility at Dwarka Mall

**NEW DELHI, 25 MAY [NDTV]:** The Delhi government, in association with the Akash Healthcare Super Hospital, is set to open a drive-through Covid vaccination booth, the national capital's first, at Vegas Mall in Dwarka locality. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is expected to inaugurate the facility on May 26.

Facing an acute shortage of vaccines, the city administration has put on hold the drive to inoculate those aged above 18 years, forcing vaccination centres to remain closed.

Vegas Mall is located in Sector 14 of Dwarka, a South-West Delhi locality.

Delhi today recorded 1,550 fresh cases of COVID-19 and 207 fatalities, even as Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said his government has begun preparing for what is being termed the "third wave".

This is the lowest number of daily cases recorded since March 27 (1,558 cases) and the count has gone below the 2,000-mark for the second consecutive day.

The positivity rate in the national capital stands at 2.52 per cent.

"We've spoken to Pfizer and Moderna for vaccines, and both the manufacturers have refused to sell vaccines directly to us. They have said they will deal with the central government. We appeal to the centre to import vaccines and distribute to the states," Mr Kejriwal told reporters this afternoon.

The city has been reeling under a brutal second wave of the pandemic that is sweeping the country, claiming a massive number of lives daily, with the oxygen supply shortage issue at various hospitals adding to the trouble.

## Mangalbaria PHC provided third ambulance

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 25 MAY:**

Secretary to the Chief Minister, SD Dhakal, handed over an additional ambulance for Mangalbaria PHC to Director General-cum-Secretary Health & Family Welfare, Dr Pempa Tshering Bhutia at Samman Bhawan today, a press communiqué from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

At present, there are two ambulances in service at the Mangalbaria PHC. However, because of urgent requirements,



the Chief Minister immediately sanctioned the procurement of an additional ambulance.

The release adds that four ambulances were

procured for Soreng, Ranipool, Melli PHCs and one for Mangan District Hospital a few days ago on the behest of the Chief Minister.

## Lakshadweep changes, blamed on new administrator, trigger outcry

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 25 MAY [NDTV]:**

A large section of Kerala, including celebrities, politicians, social media users, and the general public, is angry or wary about some of the changes brought about by the Lakshadweep's newly-appointed Administrator Praful K Patel.

The tweaks he has made since taking over in December 2020 are destructive and "target" its largely Muslim population, many of them allege, seeking his recall. The BJP has, however, said they were only meant to end "corrupt practices" of politicians.

Several leaders from Kerala have written to the Centre and even President Ram Nath Kovind, citing the traditional ties between the island group and Kerala.

"The news from Lakshadweep is very serious. The situation there poses a challenge to the life and culture of the people inhabiting in the island. Such moves are unacceptable," Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said on Monday during his daily press briefing.

"We know Lakshadweep and Kerala have a connection since long. All over Kerala, we can see students from Lakshadweep. As per news reports, now there is a deliberate, malicious attempt to distort this connection. This is part of narrow interest. It is condemnable," he said.

Mr Vijayan was referring to, among other things, the decision of Mr Patel's administration to ensure that boats and dhows from Lakshadweep will now only head for Mangalore in neighbouring Karnataka instead of their traditional destination of Beypore harbour in Kerala's Kozhikode district.

Lakshadweep has traditionally been part of the inheritance of the Arrakal royal family of Kannur in Kerala, even though only nominally.

"Implementing the Goonda Act in a region where law and order and crime are non-existent, opening up alcohol trade among a people who do not consume it... they may seem like Tughlaqian changes, but, clearly, it is an anti-Muslim anger that is sweeping like a cyclonic storm," former Finance Minister Thomas Isaac said in a Facebook post.

In a tweet, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said Mr Patel's changes were "destroying a peaceful part of the country".

Among the first to write to President Kovind, seeking the "recall" of the new Administrator, was CPI(M) MP Elamaram Kareem, alleging that Mr Pa-

tel's authoritarian rule was "increasing unrest among the people" of Lakshadweep.

"According to the people of the island, the unplanned and unscientific altering of the standard operating procedure has led to the current surge in Covid cases in Lakshadweep, where not even a single case was reported in the year 2020," he wrote.

"The undemocratic and anti-people regulation in the name of 'Animal Prevention' which intends to ban slaughter, transportation, selling or buying of beef products is one among such orders."

The Congress's Ernakulam MP, Hibi Eden, too, wrote to both the President and Prime Minister Narendra Modi raising concerns over job losses and even loss of representational governance.

He alleged that one of the new proposals, "makes any person with more than two children ineligible to contest Panchayat Elections." Lakshadweep has a fertility rate of 1.4, one of the lowest among all states and Union Territories of the country, according to the National Family Health Survey 2019-2020.

He also said the decision to eliminate non-vegetarian food from the menu of anganwadi children was harsh and unwanted.

Malayalam movie stars Prithviraj-Sukumaran, Saleem Kumar, and Geetu Mohandas, among others, too, voiced their concern.

In his Facebook post, shared by many top leaders, Prithviraj Sukumaran said he had been getting desperate messages from people in Lakshadweep, "pleading" to bring public attention to what is going on there.

"What I do know for sure though, is that none of the islanders I know, or none of those who've spoken to me are happy with what's happening," he wrote.

Ms Mohandas, whose critically acclaimed 2019 directorial venture "Moothon" is shot mostly in the island group, wrote: "My heart goes out to each and every one who reached out to me. Their cries were desperate, real."

#SaveLakshadweep trended through the day on Twitter.

BJP national Vice President AP Abdullakutty, the party's in-charge of Lakshadweep, however, alleged that the opposition MPs were protesting because Mr Patel had taken certain steps to end the "corrupt practices" of politicians, PTI reported.

## 'Yaas' intensifies into cyclonic storm, likely to cross Odisha-Bengal coasts on May 26

**BHUBANESWAR/KOLKATA, MAY 24 (PTI):** A deep depression over the Bay of Bengal has intensified into cyclonic storm 'Yaas' and is likely to cross the Odisha-West Bengal coasts on May 26 after turning into a very severe cyclonic storm, the MeT Department said on Monday.

'Yaas' is likely to cross the Odisha-West Bengal coasts between Paradip and Sagar Islands around noon on May 26 as a very severe cyclonic storm with wind speeds of 155-165 kmph, Kolkata's Regional Meteorological Centre Deputy Director Sanjib Bandopadhyay said.

The system lays 540 km south-southeast of Paradip in Odisha and 630 km south-southeast of Digha in West Bengal on Monday morning and is very likely to move north-northwestwards and intensify into a severe cyclonic storm by Tuesday and into a very severe cyclonic storm by Wednesday morning, the MeT Department said.

The West Bengal government has opened control rooms at state secretariat Nabanna to monitor the cyclone and its fallout, an official said.

The coastal districts of Purba and Paschim Medinipur, South and North 24 Parganas, along with Howrah and Hooghly will experience light to moderate rainfall in most places with heavy to very heavy downpour at one or two places from May 25 owing to the system, the weatherman said.

On May 26, the spread and intensity of rain will increase with the possibility of extremely heavy rainfall in Jhargram, Purba and Paschim Medinipur, North and South 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly and Kolkata, according to the MeT Department.

Meanwhile, the Odisha government on Monday relaxed the coronavirus-induced lockdown and allowed shops to remain open in 10 coastal districts from 7 am to

1 pm on May 24 and 25 so that people get more time to buy essential items before the impact of the cyclone.

The shops were earlier allowed to remain open between 7 am and 11 am on weekdays due to the lockdown.

The Odisha government has deployed rescue teams and is chalking out plans to evacuate people from vulnerable areas, a senior official said.

The state government has deployed National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF) and Fire Services personnel anticipating maximum impact in Balasore and Bhadrak districts, Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) P K Jena said.

IMD Director General Dr Mrutunjay Mohapatra, better known as the 'Cyclone Man of India', said, "Four coastal districts of Odisha -- Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara and Jagatsinghpur -- are likely to be most impacted by the cyclonic storm."

Mohapatra said that apart from wind blowing at 120-165 kmph velocity, Odisha will also experience heavy rain.

Jena said residents of low-lying areas will be evacuated to safer places and the district administrations have been asked to be prepared for a large-scale evacuation of people. The SRC, who personally supervised preparedness in Balasore and Bhadrak districts, instructed authorities to take more buildings into possession to maintain social distancing among evacuees.

He said 22 teams of NDRF, 60 ODRAF teams and Fire and Forest officials have been deployed in vulnerable areas.

NDRF Director General S N Pradhan said, "We already have 22 NDRF teams in Odisha and 10 more are being airlifted from other parts of the country as per the requisition made by the Odisha government."

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# ATTC hosts final phase of induction programme for NBA accreditation

## SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 25 MAY:

Advanced Technical Training Centre [ATTC], Bardang, convened the third and final phase programme of the three-week online AICTE-ISTE sponsored induction programme for NBA accreditation from 17 to 22 May.

An ATTC press release informs that the webinar was attended by over 160 participants from all over the country and some of the more prominent resource persons were Dr Ranjit Sawant, Chairman ISTE Goa-Maharashtra, Dr Vivek M Nanotia, Principal, PIET, Nagpur, Prof (Dr) G Varaprasad, BMS College of Engineering, Bangalore, Dr Vikash M Phalle, VJIT, Mumbai, Dr. Habiba Hussain and Dr Urmila Kar from NITTTR, Kolkata and other senior faculty members from ATTC, Sikkim.

The release adds that the inaugural programme was attended by eminent personalities from all over the country.

Addressing the panel, Chairman AICTE Prof (Dr) Anil Shastrabuddhi, emphasized on the philosophy of "Learning to learn" in a world when



technology is continuously changing rapidly and so, life-long learning, critical thinking and innovation are the key for students to cope with the same.

Sr Scientist, DRDO, Bangalore Ajit Kumar talked about importance of laboratories for efficient hands on training for students, aligned with current trends and technologies on how to make our country self-reliant. Likewise, President, ISTE Dr Pratapsinh Kasaheb Desai urged all participants to encourage research attitude of students to connect the cycle of engineering and innovation and hoped teachers would continue

to inspire students ahead for the betterment of our country.

Special Secretary cum Director, Technical Education, HRDD, Yishey D Yongda, highlighted how these kinds of webinar helps train our workforce better and wished good luck to all participants for taking technical education to the next level and Principal ATTC Sonam Palden Brafungpa also encouraged all participants to keep learning, to be good role models and spread the knowledge to the next generation.

The release further informed that the webinar covered topics such as Program Curriculum

and Teaching Learning process, Outcome Based Education as well as two sessions with international speakers from Dubai and Atlanta, Georgia, USA which explored on Indian Engineering Curriculum vs international expectations. The third phase concluded the third week of the training programme sponsored by AICTE-ISTE on the process of how to get engineering institutes accredited by NBA, it is informed.

National Board of Accreditation (NBA) is one of the prestigious accreditation programmes which was established by the All India Council of Technical Education

(AICTE) to assess the qualitative competence of the programs offered by educational institutions from Diploma level to Post-Graduate level in the fields of engineering and technology, management, pharmacy, agriculture and related disciplines, which are approved by AICTE.

ATTC is one of the first Polytechnic in North-East India to have its Diploma programs NBA accredited in the year 2017. The Chief Coordinator of the program was Shri Lochan Kumar Adhikari, Vice Principal of ATTC who is also Honorary Secretary as well as Fellow of the Institution of Engineers, India.

## CS chairs Yaas-preparedness review meeting

GANGTOK, 25 MAY [IPR]:

A review meeting was held today under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary SC Gupta to discuss issues relating to building up of the severe Cyclone Storm 'Yaas' over the Bay of Bengal. The meeting was attended by concerned Secretaries and Heads of Departments and was joined online by the District Collectors and Superintendents of Police of all four districts.

The meeting discussed in detail on matters pertaining to maintenance of power supply, road & communication infrastructure during this period.

It was decided that alternate power supply

arrangements would be ensured at District Hospitals, STNM Hospital, and various Covid Care Centres so that power supply is not disrupted in case of heavy rainfall.

The Chief Secretary also reviewed the situation of power supply to the Oxygen Generation Plant. It was reported that the alternate arrangements are already in place.

It was informed that the Roads & Bridges Department has put all its field engineers on alert and due coordination is being maintained with GREF and NHIDCL to ensure that disruption to road communication is minimum, and vulnerable points are covered with necessary equipment

and manpower.

Likewise, the State Disaster Management Agency has alerted the NDRF and SDRF to be on alert and a warning has been issued for low lying vulnerable areas by the respective District Collectors. It was informed that constant vigil is being maintained by the Police all along the river banks to ensure timely alert.

It was emphasized in the meeting that people in general are advised to refrain from entering the low-lying river bank areas for the next 72 hours. Evacuation plans have been chalked out by the respective District Disaster Management Authority in case of heavy rainfall.

## Bharat Biotech confident of WHO nod for Covaxinamid travel concerns

NEW DELHI, 25 MAY

[NDTV]: As countries prep to gradually restart travel and tourism after prolonged Covid restrictions, there is nervousness among students with the World Health Organisation not approving Bharat Biotech's Covaxin.

Nations like the US, Canada, Australia, Ireland and the EU do not recognize Covaxin on their approved list of vaccines for now. Top universities are only allowing those who have received vaccines approved by their countries or the WHO.

"Covaxin is not on the approved list, which means students will not be exempt from mandatory hotel quarantine which is very expensive - to stay in a hotel for 14 days," said Soumya Pandey, Country Advisor, University of Limerick.

The WHO has Pfizer, Moderna and Covishield on its approved list but for Covaxin, it says "more information required". Bharat Biotech, in a detailed statement today addressing the concerns, said the company was

on track to get approvals and had submitted "90 per cent of the documentation required" for WHO's authorization for Emergency Use Listing.

"The remaining is expected to be submitted in June," said the company, adding that it is confident of getting clearance subsequently, "given its experience of getting its other vaccines pre-qualified by WHO".

Academic sessions are set to begin by August-September in foreign universities.

Bharat Biotech also said it was in the final stages of submitting documents for Covaxin's regulatory approvals in Brazil and Hungary after "extensive bilateral consultations" with both countries. "BBIL is also in the final stages of negotiations with FDA of the USA for conducting small-scale phase-III clinical trials in the US," the company said.

Bharat Biotech released the statement after a meeting with the government on the status of its application before the WHO. Covaxin has received regulatory approvals from 11 countries and 11 companies in seven countries have shown interest towards the technology transfer and production of the Covid shot.

"It is important to note that no country has instituted a vaccine passport. Countries have their own requirements for approval, which in most cases involves travel by carrying a negative RT-PCR report," Bharat Biotech said.

Covaxin and Serum Institute of India's Covishield are the two vaccines being used to inoculate people in the country. Russia's Sputnik will become the third. Covaxin was approved for emergency use in January without full clinical data, which caused a lot of controversy and was linked to vaccine hesitancy in the initial stages of the nationwide vaccine drive.

In April, Bharat Biotech and the government's top medical body ICMR claimed that Covaxin had shown overall interim effectiveness of 78 per cent and was 100 per cent effective against severe Covid.

## Covid vaccination drive concludes at Sikkim University



GANGTOK, 25 MAY

(PIB): The Health Centre of Sikkim University conducted the special COVID-19 vaccination drive at the Health Camp set up at premises of Department of History, Sikkim University, 6th Mile, Tadong from 10 to 22 May, 2021.

The vaccination was conducted in two sessions - one for the people

in the age group of 18+ years and other for 45+ years/health workers/ frontline workers following the strict COVID-19 protocols.

A total of 477 beneficiaries were vaccinated including 40 healthcare workers, 29 frontline workers, 78 (45 + years), 330 (18 + years).

Vice-Chancellor Prof

Avinash Khare extended their full support and applauded the efforts of the entire medical team headed by Senior Medical Officer, Dr Manjushree Thapa including Medical Officer, Dr LB Limboo, Ms Chungchung, Ms Mingma, Ms Anjana, Ms Jonat, Sanjib Barman, Security Inspector and security guards of Sikkim University.

## Govt College Burtukorganizes webinar on Financial Literacy Program

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 25 MAY:

A webinar on "Financial Literacy Program" was held on 24 May by the Commerce & Economics Department of Sikkim Government College, Burtuk, in collaboration with Banking Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI), Mumbai, a press release informs.

The webinar began with a welcome address by Head of the Department, AC Lepcha, and was chaired by Principal, Driyatta M Upreti. The webinar had National Trainer-BFSI, Dr Raghu-

nandan Pattnaik, of Mumbai as resource person.

The objective of the webinar, the release adds, was to create awareness on financial management which is often neglected by the lay people and was aimed to enable people make better financial choices, become more aware of financial risks and opportunities and plan realistically for the future.

The webinar was attended by faculty members and the students of the college and ended with a vote of thanks by Assistant Professor, Narendra Kharel.

## Covid-positive Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee hospitalised as health worsens

KOLKATA, 25 MAY [PTI]:

West Bengal's former Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, who tested positive for COVID-19 last week, was admitted to a hospital in Kolkata today after his health condition deteriorated, officials said.

"His oxygen level slipped below 90 per cent this morning, following which doctors advised him to get admitted to a medical facility," they told news agency Press Trust of India.

"Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was in home isolation and is now put on BIPAP support. His oxygen level dropped be-

low 90. We did not take any chance," a doctor at the private hospital, where he was admitted, told news agency PTI.

The 77-year-old politician also suffers from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and needs to go to hospital for other clinical examinations, the health department officials said.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was not willing to go to hospital after he tested positive for COVID-19 on May 18. His wife Mira Bhattacharjee had also contracted the disease last week and was admitted to a medical facility in the city.



## Assam mob kills 50-year-old man in alleged "witch-hunt", 5 arrested: Cops

GUWAHATI, 25 MAY [NDTV]:

A 50-year-old man was brutally beaten to death by villagers in Assam allegedly on suspicion of practicing witchcraft. Five accused have been arrested in the case so far, police sources added.

The shocking incident took place in Bagribari village in Baksa district on Monday. The victim has been identified as 50-year-old Biren Boro. Police say that it appears to be a case of witch-hunting however only investigation will reveal if there was a different motive.

Police sources added that a Kangaroo court had allegedly first 'branded' the victim of practicing witchcraft and then he was attacked by a mob. Policemen who came to rescue the victim were also attacked by the angry mob.

"We received information that villagers are assaulting a man on suspicion that he practiced witchcraft. When the police reached the spot, they saw that a meeting was going on and some

villagers were assaulting a person. When we tried to rescue the man, the villagers attacked us and vandalised the police car. We had to use force to bring the situation under control. We have arrested five people allegedly involved in the brutal attack," Baksa Superintendent of Police Rajen Singh told NDTV.

The victim who was badly injured in the attack was taken to a hospital for treatment where he died of his injuries, police added.

At least 161 people were killed in "witch-hunting" and other superstitious practices between 2001 to 2019 in Assam. According to official records, 133 cases have been registered since 2001.

The Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act, which implements stringent punishment and fines for branding and killing people for being "witches" is in effect in the state since 2018.

### What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

#### Symptoms of nCoV

- Fatigue
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Loss of taste
- Loss of smell

#### Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Avoid close contact with people who have been infected.
- Avoid touching your face with unclean hands.
- Avoid contact with people who have respiratory symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid traveling to affected areas.
- Place a mask if you have respiratory symptoms.
- Wash your mouth with soap and water.

#### Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive.
- There is no specific treatment for nCoV.
- No vaccine is available as of now.
- Most cases recover completely.

If you seek help, please contact:

24x7 Helpline No. 104

District Surveillance Officer

SAF - DISTRICT

PH: 1020000

MO: 9434000000

FO: 1020000

SAF - DISTRICT

SAF - DISTRICT

### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE

### GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM



## Firm Up Better. Monsoon's Almost Here

*About time we started getting some things right*

Evening drizzles [okay, they are more intense than just drizzles] have become a regular occurrence now. And for those live along the highway, as well as those who need to travel by road to anywhere [yes, a very privileged few currently enjoy that luxury], which would be just about everyone now, will have noticed that the storm-water drains are still not performing any better. Along with the surface runoff, the highway in Gangtok is also inundated at several places after a heavy shower by effluents which smell offensively dangerous and move like sludge no one should be wading through. Occasionally, some efforts are made to unclog the drains, but the experience ever since they were commissioned bears out that they will block immediately with the next rain. The point being made here is that even as all conversations and obsessions continue to remain centered around the election results and the latest conspiracy theories and projections, life is still going on in Sikkim and the monsoons are building up. The calling cards have been served with the evening showers and how they have unraveled civic infrastructure, so it is important that the concerned officials and agencies make time from their political gossip to address the reality of approaching monsoons.

It is only a matter of time before the national highway, which has remained an expansion work in progress for far too long, collapses under the weight of pre-monsoon inundation. Higher up along the same axis, the pipelines carrying water to the Selep reservoir will also eventually snap, as will the road to Tsomgo and Nathula. The weather pattern suggests that 2021 will record a normal, if not heavier, monsoon and the crumbling tendency of civic infrastructure should have everyone worried. Both, the highway expansion and the Ratey Chu supply line repairs are projects which make headlines every monsoon. Shouldn't these have stabilized by now, and if not, isn't it now that preventive measures need to be undertaken. Granted, the rains can be very devastating, but surely, a State that has lived with rains and slides since forever should have learned to prepare better by now. But maybe we are over-speculating. Maybe the concerned departments and offices are on the job already firming Sikkim up better for the monsoons. Do you think that is the case?



# Coronavirus: So Many Variants, but Vaccines are Still Effective

LUKE O'NEILL  
theconversation.com

Viruses are constantly changing. This is because errors sometimes occur when they copy their genetic material. Some errors have no effect at all. Some might make the virus less viable. Some make it more benign, which means it can survive but doesn't cause disease. The errors to watch for are those that might make the virus more infectious, or better able to avoid the immune system that is trying to counter them, either driven by natural infection or stimulated by a vaccine.

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is no different. Each time it divides, it rolls the dice, which could give rise to a more malign virus. This can happen anywhere, anytime. So it's important to track variants and to see if they are spreading more easily from person to person, causing more mild or more severe disease, might avoid detection with current tests, or might respond less well to current treatments. Perhaps the biggest concern is breakthrough infections, where a fully vaccinated person still gets COVID.

Once a variant is spotted, it is classified as being either a variant of interest, a variant of concern or a variant of high consequence. Mercifully, we have yet to see a variant of high consequence, which are variants against which current medical measures are failing. But we have at least four variants of concern.

That designation means there is evidence of increased transmissibility, more severe disease, a significant reduction in antibody neutralisation or reduced effectiveness of vaccines or treatments. These are B117 (first identified in the UK), B1351 (first identified in South Africa), P1 (first identified in Brazil) and B16172 (first identified in India).

There is evidence that all of these have increased transmissibility and there is a good molecular understanding of why that is.

Increased transmissibility can be observed epidemiologically (in the population), but it's also important to confirm in a lab why that particular variant of concern can transmit more

readily. The spike protein, which is the part of the virus that latches onto a receptor on human cells called ACE2, has changed in each of these variants of concern, and the change has been shown in some of them to increase the virus's ability to bind to ACE2.

Some lab studies have shown that antibodies made to target the original spike protein are less able to neutralise the spike protein in the variants of concern. But, more important, so-called real-world data (which, in this case, means assessing a situation where a vaccine against the older SARS-CoV-2 has been used, but a variant of concern is the main virus in circulation) has indicated that this doesn't have a big effect on vaccine effectiveness against some of the variants.

A very hopeful study from Qatar showed that the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine was 90% effective against B117 and 75% effective against B1351. The AstraZeneca vaccine showed 75% effectiveness against B117.

VACCINES HIGHLY EFFECTIVE AGAINST B16172

Public Health England has reported that both the Pfizer/BioNTech and AstraZeneca vaccines are highly effective against B16172. Pfizer/BioNTech reached 88% effectiveness, while AstraZeneca achieved a level of 60%. This lower effectiveness for AstraZeneca might be because the rollout of the second shot of AstraZeneca was later than Pfizer/BioNTech. This study is important because it looks as though the B16172 variant may well become the dominant variant globally, replacing B117.

These analyses are all concerned with the risk of infection. The most important question, however, when it comes to the possibility of variants breaking through a vaccine is not whether someone gets infected, but whether that infection progresses to severe disease or death.

A vaccine's job is to stop severe disease – and so far it is a reasonable prospect that the main vaccines in use should be able to do that against the variants of concern. This is probably partly due to the strong antibody response elicited by each vaccine. Even though the quality of the antibodies

might be less, antibodies can make up for that with quantity. Think of antibodies as Blu-Tack. They can stick to the spike protein, and although they can get less sticky, the more there is, the more will stick.

And even if the power of antibodies were to be diminished, the immune system has another trick up its sleeve: T cells. T cells will recognise many parts of the virus (these are called epitopes). One recent analysis has concluded there are around 1,400 of these targets on SARS-CoV-2. On recognising a part of the virus, T cells can do two things: they can help the B cells to make lots of antibodies, or they can kill the infected cell. The killer T cell response might well kick in after the infection has started. The chances of T cells failing against variants is low. All of this should give us confidence.

Scientists are also trying to predict how much of an antibody response is needed to ensure protection against variants, to get a good idea of the risk of vaccine failure. Perhaps most importantly of all, it will be possible to vaccinate with booster shots with spike protein or mRNA from variants of concern, and there are even moves afoot to come up with a vaccine to protect against all coronaviruses. The pharmaceuticals company Novavax is even testing a combined flu/COVID vaccine.

There is always the chance of other variants of concern emerging. More malign ones may crop up, although that is difficult to predict, so it's critical that we get vaccines to the countries that need them most, to forestall the possibility of more dangerous variants cropping up. What we're also learning is it's important to have the second shot of the vaccines that require them. The one-shot Johnson and Johnson vaccine might well need a booster, too. A third booster shot for the other vaccines might work too, as that will bring out a huge antibody and T cell response.

It's clear what needs to be done when it comes to these variants: keep hunting for them, ensure universal vaccination and get ready for booster shots.

*[the writer is Professor, Biochemistry, Trinity College Dublin]*

# Why do I need anything other than Google to answer a question?

CODY BEHLES  
theconversation.com

Why do I need a scholar to answer a question if there is Google? – Harrison F., age 13, Brookline, Massachusetts

Imagine you're researching something. Whether you're a fourth grader who needs to find out how volcanoes erupt or you're an adult looking for more information regarding a news article, you might want to quickly look something up on the internet. What could go wrong?

Google's search engine may seem to have all the answers to your questions. But where does that information come from? Who selects the websites that display when you enter "volcanic eruption" in the search box? Who decides which item shows up first and in what order the rest will follow?

I think about these questions a lot because of what I do for a living: helping University of Memphis scholars communicate about their work with academic peers and the public.

These scholars are experts who have worked and studied for a long time to learn all they can about a topic. They answer questions by combining their knowledge with the scientific method to discover new things.

PAGE, BRIN AND PAGERANK

When Larry Page and Sergey Brin created Google's search engine in 1996 as Stanford University computer science students, they were trying to establish a fast way to easily find things on the internet. At the time, searching through the web was

slow and difficult, making it hard to find the best information.

They invented an algorithm, a detailed step-by-step instruction set or formula, called PageRank. It works by estimating the quality of a webpage by measuring the number and quality of other pages that link to it. When you search on Google, its search engine returns the highest ranked pages related to what you're looking for.

SOME DRAWBACKS

Googling became so fast it can seem instantaneous.

But the results you see when you do a Google search can be influenced by other things besides PageRank, including whether advertisers are paying Google to make their websites show up higher than they otherwise might. Google's algorithms factor in hundreds of other variables, including what sites you've clicked on in the past and how recently a page was updated.

Unlike scholars, Google's search engine can't automatically decide which sources are the most important, most accurate or most significant. That is, Google searches don't necessarily identify objective and reliable information.

You may consider switching to another search engine like Microsoft's Bing or one that specifically promotes the privacy of your information like DuckDuckGo. But many of these alternatives have the same shortcomings.

HOW SCHOLARS COMMUNICATE

Scholars often communicate by publishing research papers. Each paper emphasizes a single idea that adds something to a discussion. It may be the new result

from an experiment or a new observation. Other scholars then read that paper and discuss it.

Knowledgeable people can take stock of the same set of facts and still have dif-



ferent perspectives, which means there isn't necessarily one right answer to a question. Over time this back and forth leads to some generally accepted principles and concepts.

This cycle of research, review and discussion has been around since the first academic journals were published in 1665. As new discoveries are made, ideas can change.

One way researchers show what other ideas they consider in their work is

through scholarly citations. You've surely seen them before – they are in the reference section at the back of nonfiction books or at the bottom of Wikipedia articles. Each points to another work.

These citations tell you what other books and sources the author of what you're reading considered – and how they came to form the ideas. If multiple scholars use the same ideas as building blocks for their own concepts, and then their ideas, in turn, are used as building blocks for other ideas, it continually leads to a cycle of innovation.

This discovery process isn't influenced by advertisers – even if it can be partially shaped by whether or not scholars can get

funding to pursue a particular kind of research.

Many of the ideas you find on the internet originate from scholarship but are vulnerable to bias and advertising pressure

in a way most scholars are not. We need scholars because they provide a complete picture, the most up-to-date information, derived from their wisdom and deeply considered perspective.

The internet makes locating information easier than at any other point in human history. But as Albert Einstein said, "Information is not knowledge. The only source of knowledge is experience."

*[the writer is Director of Innovation & Research Support, University of Memphis]*



### Meghalaya reports 25 more COVID deaths, 811 fresh cases

**SHILLONG, MAY 24 (PTI):** Twenty-five more people succumbed to COVID-19 in Meghalaya on Monday, taking the death toll to 483, while 811 new cases pushed the tally to 30,492, a senior health department official said here. The state currently has 7,788 active coronavirus cases, Health Services director Aman War said.

During the same period 679 persons also recovered from the infection, the highest single day recovery recorded so far, increasing the total number of cured people to 22,221, the senior health official said.

Altogether 5.98 lakh samples have been tested for COVID-19 in the state to date, he said.

Over 4.35 lakh people have been inoculated in the state so far and 83,000 have received both doses of the vaccine, War said.

### Ladakh daily COVID-19 recoveries outstrip new infections

**LEH, MAY 25 (PTI):** Ladakh recorded more COVID-19 recoveries on Tuesday than new infections as 184 people got discharged from hospitals after battling coronavirus, while 125 new cases were added.

Officials said the latest update takes the Union Territory's overall tally of cases to 17,532, while the number of active infections stands at 1,463 with 1,249 in Leh district and 214 in Kargil.

A total of 178 people have died due to COVID-19 in the union territory so far which includes 130 in Leh, 48 in Kargil. Of the new cases reported during the past 24 hours, the officials said 92 were detected in Leh and five in Kargil.

They said a total of 184 patients -- 147 in Leh and 37 in Kargil -- were also discharged during the period after successful treatment, taking the number of recoveries to 11,891 or over 90 percent of the total cases.

### West Bengal reports 17,883 new COVID cases, 153 deaths

**KOLKATA, MAY 24 (PTI):** West Bengal on Monday reported 17,883 new COVID-19 cases and 153 more deaths, as per a bulletin issued by the Health Department.

The new cases were detected after testing 66,288 samples in the last 24 hours. There are 1,28,585 active cases in the state at present, while 19,670 patients recovered during the day.

The state has so far reported 12,84,973 cases and 14,517 deaths.

North 24 Parganas accounted for 47 deaths, while there were 35 deaths in Kolkata.

Of the latest deaths, 56 were caused by comorbidities where COVID-19 was incidental.

North 24 Parganas registered a maximum of 3,793 cases, while Kolkata accounted for 3,121 fresh cases.

# "Cyclone Yaas To Be More Severe Than Amphan": Mamata Banerjee

**KOLKATA, 25 MAY [PTI]:** Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Monday that the West Bengal government has made all necessary arrangements in dealing with the aftermath of cyclone Yaas, which might affect 20 districts of the state.

Addressing a press conference, Ms Banerjee said the state is targeting to shift at least 10 lakh people to safer places in a bid to avoid any loss of life.

"Cyclone Yaas's impact is going to be much more than Amphan, according to the information we have received so far. This is going to affect at least 20 districts in West Bengal. The districts of Kolkata, North and South 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur will be severely affected," she said.

The districts of Howrah, Hooghly, Bankura, Birbhum, Nadia, Paschim and Purba Bardhaman, Paschim Medinipur, Murshidabad, Jhargram, Purulia would also be affected by the cyclone, she said.

In Malda, Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur, Darjeeling and Kalimpong there is a forecast of rain, Ms Banerjee added.

The calamity will continue for 72 hours, she said.

"The state government has banned all forms of tourism in the coastal areas as well as fishing activities in the sea," the chief minister said.

"District administrations and police have been asked to deal with violations strictly to prevent any loss of life," she said.

At least 51 disaster management teams have been readied, keeping in view the



possible devastation predicted by experts, Ms Banerjee said.

Ferry services at 13 places have been shut, she said, assuring that the state has sufficient stock of relief materials that are kept ready at the block level.

"From Tuesday, we will continue surveillance for the next 48 hours from the control room at the state secretariat. Control rooms have also been made operational at district and sub-division levels," the chief minister said.

Extensive plans have been adopted for hospitals and vaccine centres, Ms Banerjee said, adding that all types of medicines -- on diarrhea, fe-

ver, snake bites -- have been asked to be kept ready.

At least 1,000 power restoration teams have been kept on stand-by and once the cyclone subsides, they will start working, she said.

"We have asked the Army, NDRF, SDRF to be on alert. All the agencies have been asked to be on stand-by so that we can use them when needed. We are ready for the cyclone," Ms Banerjee said.

"There is nothing to be scared of. We have taken all forms of precautionary measures. I will ask the people to cooperate and wear masks and maintain physical distance," she said.

The Kolkata port said it

will suspend all operations from May 25 till the cyclone subsides. Kolkata Port Trust chairman Vinit Kumar said the decision was taken as a precautionary measure. Entering of ships has been halted, while cargo handling will be stopped at 2 pm on Tuesday and workers will be shifted to safety, he said. The movement of goods-carrying vehicles on the port roads will be halted at 6 pm.

The Kolkata airport authorities said all precautionary measures are in place to deal with any eventuality in the wake of the cyclone. Airport director Pulla Hezejah told PTI that the arrow bridges are being locked, while the

high-mast lamps are unin-

stalled. Pumps have been kept ready to remove water from the low-lying areas in the airport compound, he said.

The small planes will be kept tied to the ground, while precautions are also being taken to prevent any damage to the large planes that were severely affected during Amphan, Mr Hezejah said.

So far, Air Vistara has cancelled two flights on the Kolkata-Mumbai and Kolkata-Delhi routes on May 26, he said.

"A meeting was held during the day to take stock of the preparations and another meeting will be held on Tues-

day to decide on the future course of operations," Mr Hezejah said.

Several trains run by the South Eastern Railway have also been cancelled in the wake of the cyclone from Monday to Thursday. Among them are the Rourkela-Bhubaneswar special of May 25 and the Malda Town-Digha special of May 27, officials said.

CESC Ltd, which supplies power to Kolkata and adjoining areas, said it has engaged 2,500 men on the ground who will work round the clock for power restoration, following the cyclone.

"This year, we are better prepared than Amphan. At that time, we had a shortage of manpower as they had gone to their hometowns due to the lockdown. This time, we have 2,500 people on the ground, which is more than double that of last year," CESC Vice-President (Distribution) Avijit Ghosh said. The utility issued emergency helpline numbers (033) 3501-1912/ 4403-1912 and 18605001912.

State-run WBSedCL that supplies power to the rest of West Bengal also issued helpline numbers 8900793503 and 8900793504 to report disruptions.

Cyclonic storm Yaas is very likely to make landfall near Balasore in north Odisha along the West Bengal border with a speed of 155 kmph to 165 kmph, gusting to 185 kmph, around noon on May 26, the Met department said.

## Infection fears force Nepal's farmers to do it alone

**AGANDHARTIWARI & PRAKASHBARAL KATHMANDU, 25 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]:** Farmer Ananda Hamal of Kushma Municipality-9, Parbat is afraid to step out of his house after two of his neighbours died due to Covid-19 two weeks ago.

For farmers like him in Gandaki province, this is a busy season when they sow paddy seeds and remove weeds from the corn fields, and so they have to help each other

But it is a different situation now. Farmers are not seen in the fields because almost all villages in the province have been impacted by the pandemic. The situation in the villages paints a gloomy picture of how the pandemic may affect food security and also the country's economy which is already reeling under severe stress.

The farm sector, which employs around 60 percent of the national population, contributes one-fourth to the country's gross domestic product.

"As everyone is getting infected, the old tradition of exchanging farm workers has been discontinued this year," said Sita Adhikari of Kushma-10, Piplaltari. "After helping one family, the group rotates to all the farmers' houses. That's no more the case now."

Although there are no records of the number of infected villagers and those who recovered from the virus, the situation is dire in every village, said Manrupa Lamichhane of Phalebash-4.

"There is no way to go to other people's homes. Most of the farmers are forced to work on their own," he said. "Due to the fear of Covid-19 transmission, we have not invited any outsider," she said.

Working together in the fields not only meant sharing the work, but it was also an effective way to build bonds and help solve economic and social problems faced

by the farmers. "The labour sharing culture has solved the labour crisis to some extent in many villages," said Jagat Parajuli of Kushma-9. "But the coronavirus broke all the social relations and the years-long tradition," he said.

Bhavikala Roka of Argal, Tarakhola Rural Municipality-2, Baglung requires a huge number of farm labourers, but the farm labour exchange system had made her task easy. She had more than 20 neighbours helping her to remove the weeds from her maize fields last year. Roka also goes to other farms to return the favour.

But this year, only her family members are working in the fields. "The neighbours that helped us last year are infected. Many were notified during contact tracing, so we did not invite them," said Rokka. "Besides, due to the prohibitory order, people cannot gather in one place. So, this year, we are forced to do the work by ourselves."

"We are also keeping distance between ourselves while working in the field," she added.

It is time to weed the Chaite paddy or spring paddy fields in Basaha Phant, Aagkhet and Charaundi Phant of Galkot in Baglung, but farm hands are not easily available.

According to Jhabindra Budhathoki, a local of Badigad Rural Municipality, the farmers in his village have been suffering a lot due to the high number of infections and deaths. "We have been taking care of the livestock of those families who have been infected with the virus."

Farmers who used to take their animals away for grazing are now forced to keep them at home.

Farmer Ram Bahadur Gharti-Magar said people in Dhorpatan Municipality-9 fear to go out of their homes. "We have not been able to graze the animals," said Gharti-Magar.

Farmers in Gorkha have al-

ready started weeding the spring paddy and maize fields, and started sowing paddy seedlings in the nurseries; but this time they are forced to do it alone.

Laxman Kumal of Bhimsen Thapa Rural Municipality-7 has just finished weeding his 10-ropani field where he has planted spring paddy. "This year, our family members did all the work," he said.

Gita Shrestha of Mailung in Gorkha said that farmers are unwilling to work in other people's fields even if they are offered a lot of money. "Those who own oxen can plough their fields, but others have to hire farm labourers. And it's not easy to get them this year. Everyone is scared."

According to locals, some infected people from Mailung and Kyamuntar have been forced to work in the fields because they don't have alternatives like before. "We need to work in the fields even though we are scared. But we will not be helping others like we used to before," Shrestha said.

Ramhari Kumal of Kymuntar said he used to work at construction sites, but he has stopped doing so now. Nowadays, he has been weeding his own maize and paddy fields.

Parashuram Adhikari, chief of the Agriculture Knowledge Centre, Gorkha, said due to the impact of the lockdown, they were not able to provide help to the farmers this year.

In Myagdi, farm work is progressing, but the traditional way is no more. "There is no situation to invite other farmers to work in one's fields. Our family members are supporting each other," said Raju Garbuja of Annapurna Rural Municipality-8, Ramche. "With the infection spreading rapidly, marriages and other social functions have stopped totally in the hilly area."

## Nagaland logs 191 new COVID-19 cases, 12 more fatalities

**KOHIMA, MAY 24 (PTI):** Nagaland's COVID-19 tally rose to 20,259 on Monday as 191 more people tested positive for the infection, Health Minister S Pangnyu Phom said.

"191 +ve cases of COVID-19 reported today. Kohima-67, Dimapur-53, Tuensang-28, Mokokchung-25, Wokha-6, Zunheboto- Mon-4 each, Peren-2, Kiphire-Phek-1 each, 137+ve patients have recovered. Dimapur-53, Kohima-38, Tuensang-13, Mon-10,

Kiphire-9, Zunheboto-8, Mokokchung-4, Peren-2," the minister said in a tweet.

A total of 14,637 persons have recovered from the disease, and currently, there are 4,714 active patients.

The recovery rate in the state is 72.25 percent.

The demise of 12 patients 6 in Dimapur and one each in Kohima, Mokokchung, Longleng, Phek, Mon, and Zunheboto district -has increased

the coronavirus death toll in the state to 297, of whom 12 had comorbid conditions, he said.

A total of 611 patients have migrated to other states, he said.

So far, a total of 1,84,709 samples have been tested for COVID-19.

Meanwhile, as of Sunday, a total of 2,53,400 doses of COVID-19 vaccines were administered to 1,99,460 persons, said State Immunisation Officer Dr. Ritu Thurr.

## 9 new cases push COVID-19 tally of Andamans to 6,853

**PORT BLAIR, MAY 25 (PTI):** At least nine more people have tested positive for COVID-19 in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, taking the tally in the Union Territory to 6,853, an official said on Tuesday.

The death toll rose to 104 as one more person succumbed to the disease in the last 24 hours, he said.

Twenty-two people were cured of the disease during the period, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 6,495.

The Union Territory now has 254 active cases.

The local administration has been strict to contain the spread of the disease and has adopted an approach of tracking, testing and treating, he said, adding that people arriving here from the mainland are mandatorily required to undergo rapid antigen test. "The



administration is relentlessly working to protect citizens from being infected with coronavirus," Information, Publicity and Tourism secretary Sunil Kumar Singh said. He also stated that all the flights were cancelled on Monday due to cyclonic weather. As many as 18 passengers at Ferrargunj underwent rapid antigen tests, none of them was found positive.

In a bid to break the chain of the coronavirus infection, the administration has imposed a lockdown from May 24 in South Andaman district which accounted for the

maximum number of active cases at 247. The restriction will be in force till May 31, the official said. All shops selling essential items remain open between 6 am and 8 am daily during the period.

Altogether, 1,21,211 people have been inoculated in the archipelago till Monday, with 17,358 of them having received both doses of the COVID vaccine.

At least 2,921 people in the age group of 18 to 44 years have been vaccinated in Andaman and Nicobar Islands so far, the official said.



# Jokic scores 38, Nuggets beat Blazers 128-109 to even series

**DENVER (AP):** Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets played with an unspoken sense of urgency.

“Because if you’re going to talk about it, you’re not going to do it,” the big man reasoned.

So no talk, just a much more physical mentality.

Jokic scored 38 points to overcome a 3-point shooting barrage from Damian Lillard and the Nuggets evened the first-round series by beating the Portland Trail Blazers 128-109 on Monday night in a chippy Game 2.

“They picked up the aggressiveness and we did it, too,” Jokic said. “We met their aggressiveness, maybe even a little bit higher.”

Jokic also had eight rebounds and five assists, which was four more than he dished out in Game 1 when the Blazers made sure the big man didn’t beat him with his pinpoint passing.

The third-seeded Nuggets had few answers for Lillard early on as the dynamic playmaker scored 32 of his 42 points in the first half. His eight 3-pointers before intermission tied an NBA playoff record for most in a half. Lillard finished 9 of 16 from 3-point range.

A change of plans at halftime helped slow down Lillard. Denver put the 6-foot-9 Aaron Gordon on the 6-2 guard.

“I looked at the coaching staff and said, ‘I got him,’” said Gordon, who was acquired from Orlando in late March. “It could be a point guard or it could be a center — I’m there for it all.”

Lillard’s already



thinking ahead to Game 3 in Portland on Thursday and what he will do to counteract Gordon’s defensive tenacity.

“Just moving around more off the ball, getting some more off-ball sets,” Lillard said. “Things like that, you can typically get a little bit of space.”

It was a physical affair, with four technical fouls being issued (three on Denver, including one on Jokic) and two flagrant-1 calls (CJ McCollum and Carmelo Anthony).

“It was chippy and that’s the way it should be,” Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. “I loved it. That’s my kind of game right there.”

Up by 20 points midway through the fourth quarter, the Nuggets withstood a mini-rally from Portland before Facundo Campazzo sealed the win with a 3-pointer.

Monte Morris also had a

big block on Lillard.

Michael Porter Jr. found his rhythm and finished with 18 points. He was 3-of-6 from 3-point range after going 1-of-10 from long distance in Game 1.

The usually sure-handed Blazers committed 21 turnovers. They also were outscored 54-32 in the paint, 16-4 in fast-break points and 21-4 in second-chance points.

“They outplayed us top to bottom — other than Dame’s (42),” Blazers coach Terry Stotts said. “We have to be more aggressive, there’s no question.”

While Lillard lit it up — and McCollum added 21 — the Nuggets kept Anthony (five points) and Anfernee Simons (three) in check. They hurt the Nuggets coming off the bench in the series opener with a combined 32 points.

The game turned physical early in the first, with Jusuf Nurkic and Jokic getting tangled up and Jokic falling to the floor. At the next timeout, the teams started jawing near midcourt, leading to technical on Porter and Portland assistant coach Nate Tibbetts.

The tempers escalated as Anthony pushed Jokic down and drew a flagrant-1 foul. Just when things began to settle down, Morris picked up a technical right after the halftime horn. Lillard shot the free throw to start the second half.

“They just brought energy to the game with that physicality and the deflections and things like that, which once again was expected,” Lillard said. “Obviously, we didn’t allow that to happen on purpose. But that’s what happens.”

TIP-INS

Trail Blazers: Nurkic

fouled out on a charge with 9:58 remaining. The Blazers unsuccessfully challenged the play. ... Lillard’s eight 3s matched the playoff mark for a half held by Toronto’s Vince Carter, who hit that many in the first half against Philadelphia on May 11, 2001. ... Lillard had 10 assists.

Nuggets: G/F Will Barton (right hamstring) missed his 15th consecutive game. ... G Jamal Murray once again played the role of enthusiastic cheerleader on the bench as he recovers from a torn ACL.

NO COMPARISON

The Blazers took a 1-0 series lead last season on the eventual NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers, before losing in five games.

“We really don’t make any comparisons to last year,” Stotts said. “Denver’s a different team than the Lakers.”

## Bad dream stopped Everest guide from climbing peak 26th time

**KATHMANDU, NEPAL (AP):** A record-holding Sherpa climber halted his attempt to scale Mount Everest for a 26th time because of a bad dream but plans to try again next year.

Kami Rita already reached the summit of the world’s highest mountain for a record 25th time earlier this month but stopped his most recent climb more than halfway to the top.

“I was making (the 26th) attempt and had reached up to Camp Three but the weather turned bad and I had a really bad dream,” Rita said on return to Kathmandu on a helicopter from the mountain on Tuesday.

“The gods were telling me not to go and because I really believe in God, I decided to return,” he said but would not elaborate on the dream.

Sherpas believe Everest to be a goddess and have a religious ceremony before stepping on the mountain to make their climbs.

Rita said he would certainly return next

year to try to scale the peak a 26th time. His wife, a few of his friends and government officials greeted him at the Kathmandu airport, but there was no celebratory parade like in the past because the capital is under lockdown due to spiking cases of coronavirus.

Rita and 11 other Sherpa guides reached the summit on May 7 and fixed ropes that enabled hundreds of other climbers to use the icy route to the top.

Rita did not comment about the current virus situation on Everest after an prominent Austrian outfitter over the weekend said at least 100 climbers and support staff on the mountain were infected.

Nepalese mountaineering officials have denied there were any active cases at the base camps for climbing the country’s Himalayan mountains.

Foreign guide Lukas Furtenbach halted his Everest expedition due to virus fears and said

the outbreak was obvious because he could see sick people at base camp and hear them coughing in their tents.

A total of 408 foreign climbers were issued permits to climb Everest this season, aided by several hundred Sherpas and support staff who’ve been stationed at base camp since April.

Rita, 51, first scaled Everest in 1994 and has been making the trip nearly every year since then. He is one of many Sherpa guides whose expertise and skills are vital to the safety and success of the foreign climbers who head to Nepal each year seeking to stand on top of the 8,849-meter (29,032-foot) mountain.

His father was among the first Sherpa guides, and Rita followed in his footsteps and then some. In addition to his 25 times to the top of Everest, Rita has scaled several other peaks that are among the world’s highest, including K-2, Cho-Oyu, Manaslu and Lhotse.

## Nepal woefully short on human resources for Covid-19 treatment

**ARJUNPOUDEL**

**KATHMANDU, 25 MAY [KATHMANDU-POST]:** Manmohan Memorial Medical College and Teaching Hospital at Swayambhu in Kathmandu started intensive care for Covid-19 patients a week ago.

The hospital, which has been providing general intensive care for years, was unable to provide the service to Covid-19 patients because it did not have sufficient critical care experts.

The service has now been started not because it has hired the experts but with the support from an organisation that provides tele-intensive care service. The private teaching hospital, named after Nepal’s first CPN-UML prime minister elected in 1994, has set aside 13 intensive care beds for Covid-19 patients. And they are already full.

“Our intensive care unit beds are full with infected patients and their conditions are serious,” Dr Sulochan Lohani, who works at the intensive care unit of the hospital, told the Post. “We have sufficient doctors but do not have critical care and intensive care specialists.”

Tele-intensive care involves experts instructing doctors and nurses on taking care of patients via the internet.

Besides oxygen, hospital beds in the general ward, intensive care unit beds, ventilators, and critical care medicines, Nepal also lacks human resources for the treatment of infected patients.

In some hospitals health equipment like ventilators remain unused because there are no anesthesiologists to operate them.

Tikapur Hospital in Kailali has seven ventilators but all remain unused and if patients need to be put on ventilator support they have to be taken elsewhere. According to the hospital it has been asking provincial and federal authorities since a year back for anesthesiologists but there has been no response. It too has been trying to hire one but to no avail.

According to Nepal Society of Critical Care Medicine, technical human resources with years of experience are needed to run critical care and intensive units but they are not available in most of the hospitals throughout the country.

“Equipment can be purchased and received through donations but what will we do with such equipment when we do not prepare the manpower needed to operate the equipment and hire technical human resources to provide care to those placed in the intensive care units and ventilator support,” Hem Raj Paneru, general secretary of the society, told the Post.

Some like Manmohan Memorial Medical College and Teaching Hospital have turned to Danfe Health Care for support during the second wave of the pandemic.

“Not only private hospitals, but a state-run hospital also has been providing intensive care to the infected with the help of our tele-intensive care services,” Kabin Maleku, programme head at Danfe Health Care, told the Post. “A state-run hospital in Hetauda, which has equipment for intensive care units but lacks experts, has been providing the intensive care with our support.”

The organisation provides the service for a charge.

As the second wave of the pandemic continues to stretch Nepal’s fragile health system, the number of people needing critical and intensive care has increased several folds.

According to the Ministry of Health and Population, on Monday 1,697 were in intensive care and 467 on ventilator support.

On Monday, Nepal recorded 7,220 new coronavirus infections and 185 deaths taking the total death toll to 6,531. The total number of infected since the pandemic began is now 520,461 of which 115,447 cases are still active.

Of the currently infected over 92 percent are in home isolation, according to the ministry. Authorities have conceded that patients are going to hospitals only after they reach a critical stage despite the fact that the pressure on hospital beds has lessened compared to the situation two weeks ago.

Many have died due to lack of oxygen, sufficient intensive care unit beds and ventilators.

Several countries have provided the equipment for intensive care units including ventilators but doctors say without sufficient human resources such equipment cannot be used.

According to Paneru, a big team of technical manpower comprising intensivists trained in critical care medicine, anesthesiologists trained in intensive care medicine, nurses trained to work in intensive care units, microbiologists, pharmacists, dieticians, physiotherapists, radiographers, biomedical engineers and cleaning staff are needed to run intensive care units.

Apart from this, equipment like a hemodialysis machine, a proper heating and ventilation system, and a central air conditioning system with appropriate filters for sterile air circulation, are needed for a proper critical care facility.

The effect of the coronavirus infections on people vary, different patients need different kinds of care.

Recovery of seriously ailing patients placed on ventilator support depends on the availability of trained human resources, according to doctors.

The recovery rate of those placed on ventilator support is very low in Nepal, according to hospitals treating infected patients.

## Athletes to be vaccinated in Miami for Olympics

**MIAMI, MAY 25 (AP):** The president of the Pan American Sports Organization (Panam Sports) is concerned about the health of athletes at the Tokyo Olympic Games and is encouraging them to travel to Miami to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

Olympic athletes from different Latin American countries began to get vaccinated in Miami on Monday as part of an agreement between Panam Sports, the Consulate of Mexico and the Marsoni Foundation, which works on the prevention of migrant diseases.

Neven Illic spoke to

the Associated Press from his brand-new office overlooking Miami’s financial district. The official explained that one of the biggest challenges will be finding athletes who live and train in third countries.

The other, he said, will be the quarantine that some countries require for people returning from international travel that could mean two weeks without the athlete’s training routine.

However, Illic hopes that at least 1,000 athletes and members of his delegations would travel to Miami to get vaccinated under the program.

## Ronaldo promises changes at Valladolid after relegation

**MADRID, MAY 25 (AP):** Former Brazil great Ronaldo is planning big changes at Valladolid to make sure the team secures a quick return to the first division in the Spanish league.

Ronaldo, who became the club’s majority owner in 2018, said on Monday he will announce the changes in the coming days and weeks to try to make the team stronger for next season. Ronaldo fired coach Sergio Gonzalez after it lost to Atletico Madrid on Saturday to seal its relegation to the second division.

“We are considering several names,” Ronaldo said.

“We will be announcing the changes as they happen.” Valladolid finished second-to-last in the 20-team standings with 31 points from 38 matches. It went winless in its last 12 matches, losing four in a row to close the season, being outscored 11-2 during that stretch.

“It was a very bad season considering the investments we made,” Ronaldo said. “It was a very tough blow.”

He said he expected fans to be even more upset than they were with the club’s demotion, and dismissed criticism about him not being present as a club owner.

## US warns against all travel to Japan as Olympics loom

**WASHINGTON, MAY 25 (AP):** US health officials and the State Department has warned Americans against travel to Japan because of a surge in coronavirus cases in the country, which is preparing to host the Olympics in just two months.

The twin alerts don’t ban US citizens from visiting the country, but they could have an impact on insurance rates for travellers may factor into decisions by Olympic athletes and spectators on whether to compete in or attend the games, which are due to start in July. There was no immediate indication as to what effect the warnings might have on would-be Olympic-goers.

“Travellers should avoid all travel to Japan,” the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a new COVID-19 update on Monday.

“Because of the current situation in Japan even fully vaccinated travelers may be at risk for getting and spreading COVID-19 variants and should avoid all travel to Japan.”

The State Department’s warning, which followed the CDC alert, was more blunt.

“Do not travel to Japan due to COVID-19,”



it said in the announcement, which raised the department’s travel alert from Level 3 Reconsider travel to Level 4 Do not travel. The previous alert was issued on April 21.

The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee said it still anticipates that American athletes will be able to safely compete at the Tokyo Games.

“We feel confident that the current mitigation practices in place for athletes and staff by both the USOPC and the Tokyo Organizing Committee, coupled with the testing before travel, on arrival in Japan, and during Games time, will allow for safe participation of Team USA athletes this summer,” the committee said in a statement on Monday.

Earlier on Monday, Japan mobilized military doctors and nurses to give shots to older adults in two major cities, as the government tried des-



## European planes skirt Belarus amid fury at dissident arrest

**MOSCOW (AP):** European airlines began skirting Belarus on Tuesday at the urging of the European Union, which also imposed new sanctions to punish the ex-Soviet nation's forced diversion of a passenger jet to arrest an opposition journalist.

In unusually swift action at a summit in Brussels, EU leaders agreed Monday to ban Belarusian airlines from using the airspace and airports of the 27-nation bloc, imposed sanctions on officials linked to Sunday's flight diversion, and urged the International Civil Aviation Organization to start an investigation into the episode some described as state terrorism or piracy.

On Sunday, Belarusian flight controllers told the crew of a Ryanair jetliner flying from Greece to Lithuania that there was a bomb threat against the plane as it was crossing through Belarus airspace and ordered it to land. A Belarusian MiG-29 fighter jet was scrambled to escort the plane in a brazen show of force by President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled the country with an iron fist for over a quarter-century.

Belarus authorities then arrested 26-year-old journalist and activist Raman Pratasevich and his Russian girlfriend, Sofia Sapega. Pratasevich was later seen in a brief video clip shown on Belarusian state television, speaking quickly and saying that he was giving testimony about organizing mass disturbances.

Pratasevich, who left Belarus in 2019 and ran a popular messaging app that played a key role in helping organize huge protests against Lukashenko, has been charged in absentia with staging mass riots and fanning social hatred. Those charges carry a prison sentence of up to 15 years.

The Telegram messaging app's Nexta channel that he co-founded has been labeled as "extremist" by the Belarusian authorities, and some fear Pratasevich could face more serious charges, including some that carry the death penalty. U.S. President Joe Biden said late Monday that he asked his team to develop appropriate options to hold accountable those responsible, in close coordination with the European Union, other allies and partners, and international organizations.

"This outrageous incident and the video Mr. Pratasevich appears to have made under duress are shameful assaults on both political dissent and the freedom of the press," Biden's statement said.

Belarus has been rocked by months of protests, which were triggered by Lukashenko's reelection to a sixth term in an August 2020 vote that the opposition rejected as rigged. More than 34,000 people have been arrested in Belarus since then, and thousands beaten.

# Factory boss defiant as sanctions bite in China's Xinjiang

**AKSU (CHINA), MAY 25 (AP):** A backlash against reports of forced labor and other abuses of the largely Muslim Uyghur ethnic group in Xinjiang is taking a toll on China's cotton industry, but it's unclear if the pressure will compel the government or companies to change their ways.

Li Qiang, general manager of the Huaifu Fashion yarn factory in Xinjiang, told reporters that even though the company lost money in 2020 for the first time in its 27-year history, it bounced back by shifting to domestic orders.

This is now in the past, Li said. We've turned things around in the first quarter of this year.

Li blamed a sharp fall in foreign orders, as customers including Adidas and H&M cut ties, on fake news" in a 2019 Wall Street Journal story that said brand name apparel makers and food companies were entangled in China's campaign to forcibly assimilate its Muslim population. Huaifu also cited U.S. sanctions and the coronavirus pandemic.

In a crackdown since 2017 after a series of militant attacks, the Chinese government has detained a million or more people in Xinjiang, a major cotton-producing region in China's northwest that is home to the Uyghurs and other ethnic groups.

Critics also accuse it of torture, forced sterilization and cultural and religious suppression.

Apart from cotton, much of the world's polysilicon for photovoltaic cells comes from Xinjiang. The U.S. is now weighing sanctions over the alleged use of forced labor in the production of solar panels.

Xinjiang officials deny the charges and brush off Western criticism. They recently took about a dozen foreign



journalists to the sprawling Huaifu complex in Aksu city, where 780,000 spindles churn out 100,000 tons of colored yarn annually for sportswear and other items.

The company said in a preliminary estimate last month that it earned 120 million-150 million yuan (about USD 20 million) in the first three months of this year, after a 405 million yuan (USD 63 million) loss in 2020 as sales fell 10 percent.

Evidence of forced labour comes from people who have left China and government documents, but it is difficult to prove definitively at specific factories since human rights experts and others are unable to investigate freely.

Diplomats and journalists travelling independently to Xinjiang are followed, and most residents, wary of getting in trouble, are unwilling to talk critically.

The government doesn't want information flowing out of the region and they've done a good job of making that difficult, said Scott Nova, the ex-

ecutive director of the Worker Rights Consortium in Washington.

An ethnic Kazakh woman from Xinjiang who fled to Kazakhstan said she was forced to work for a week sewing uniforms in a factory in 2018 after spending almost a year in detention.

Dina Nurdybai ran a clothing business with 30 employees before she was detained. She said the factory work was not voluntary. She was released after authorities realized she was not on a list of long-term detainees.

If they say they are taking you to a factory, you say yes," she said. If you don't go, they'll say you have problematic thoughts and persecute you.

Others also have said they or their relatives were coerced to work in factories.

The government says such testimonies are fabrications. One worker, PaziliyaTursan, said above the hum of spindles at Huaifu that reports of forced labor are nonsense.

As officials listened in,

she said people at the factory stick together like pomegranate seeds, echoing a metaphor used by President Xi Jinping to describe ethnic unity in China.

The U.S. decided last year that the evidence was strong enough to ban imports of clothing, cotton, hair products and computer parts from about a half dozen companies.

In January, it expanded the ban to all cotton and tomato products from Xinjiang, which produces processed foods such as tomato paste and about one-fifth of the world's cotton.

U.S. customs denied a request this month from Japanese retailer Uniqlo to release a shipment of men's shirts that had been stopped at a southern California port under the sanctions.

Guixiang, a Communist Party spokesperson in Xinjiang, said companies may lose customers in the short run but eventually become stronger as they and their employees work harder and find new markets.

## Threats mount up against top European beauty spot in Hungary



**SZIGLIGET, HUNGARY (AP):** Fishermen in small, wooden boats drift among the reeds and placid waters of Lake Balaton, the largest lake in Central Europe and one of Hungary's natural treasures.

Like many of the villages dotted along the shoreline of what is popularly known as the "Hungarian sea," the quaint village of Szigliget has against the odds maintained and nurtured its traditional character for centuries.

Its towering fortress, white-washed peasant homes and small vineyards on gentle slopes have remained virtually unchanged despite two world wars, 45 years of Communism, and Hungary's transition to a market economy.

New and formidable threats are looming, however. Real estate speculation, clearance of the countryside to improve access for tourists and climate change are combining to cast a shadow over this whole area.

Many of the lake's settlements have already fallen prey to speculative property development. The mayor of Szigliget, Daniel Balassa, says a recent surge of construction makes him fear his village's idyllic atmosphere could soon make it the next target.

"We don't need huge buildings here, or for the whole shoreline to be built upon. We have a beach and a marina, we don't need anything else," Balassa told The Associated Press beside a reed bed on the lakeshore.

The lake is nearly 50 miles (80 kilometers) long and has

120 miles (200 kilometers) of shoreline. With its silty bottom and shallow waters — the average depth is only about 10 feet (3 meters) — the lake is home to a delicate ecology that provides a seasonal destination for a variety of migratory birds.

But Hungary's government views the lake as a potential goldmine for domestic and international tourism.

In 2016, it designated the region as a priority tourism development area, and earmarked 365 billion forints (\$1.27 billion) of Hungarian and European Union funds for railroad improvements, roads, marinas and the renovation and construction of hotels and guesthouses.

According to the Hungarian Tourism Agency, 232 such projects have been undertaken in 56 settlements in recent years.

"There is huge destruction of the environment. Trees are being cut and good quality reeds are disappearing, threatening the whole ecosystem," Angela Badzso, co-chair of citizens' action group Unity for the Balaton,

told the AP. The reeds serve to maintain a healthy balance in the water and ensure a vibrant habitat. "As the reeds are disappearing, they are less able to filter Lake Balaton's water. This is one of the reasons why algae growth is higher and fish die," Badzso says.

Zoltan Kun, a conservationist and environmental protection expert, said that while Balaton's water quality has significantly improved since the 1990s, the decreased reed coverage threatens to throw the complex ecosystem into imbalance.

"The unfortunate truth in Hungary ... is that we measure the success of development in the square meters of concrete, rather than the number of certain birds or square meters of reeds around the lake," Kun said.

After Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban and his ruling Fidesz party took power in 2010, the government dissolved the country's environmental protection ministry. Kun says that significantly reduced the state's ability to look after its

natural resources. The conservation regulations that do exist are often selectively enforced, Kun said, or involve meager fines only after damage has already been done.

IstvanBoka, chairman of the Lake Balaton Development Council and a governing party lawmaker, contends that existing environmental regulations are enough to prevent the destruction of untouched portions of the lake. Recent developments, he says, "have all taken place on shoreline that is already developed."

During Hungary's socialist era, Lake Balaton was a popular getaway for many workers who could enjoy vacations subsidized by their labor unions. Citizens of both East and West Germany could also visit the lake, making it a common meeting place for families with members living on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Since then, it has remained an affordable destination for Hungarians of nearly all economic backgrounds, though much of the infrastructure built during the socialist period has become dilapidated and requires renewal.

But now luxury accommodation is on the rise and plans are afoot to increase sailboat traffic on the lake, directed at wealthier tourists. Balassa, the local mayor, said that while the magic of the lake and its villages makes a growth in tourism and development to some degree unavoidable, it should be conducted on a "human scale" that respects the area's natural and cultural integrity.

In some sense, the stress can be transformed into a driving force for the companies, he said.

China has a huge domestic market and demand is growing in Southeast Asia, the Mideast, Africa and Eastern Europe, said Peng Bo, a senior vice president at Founder CIFCO Futures, a financial derivatives firm in Beijing. Chinese manufacturers also have gained market share as the pandemic hobbled competitors in other countries.

Though the international market is important to domestic brands, it is not irreplaceable, particularly the European and American markets, he said.

On top of import bans, the U.S. Commerce Department has blocked the sale of U.S. technology and parts to more than two dozen companies linked to human rights abuses in Xinjiang, including Huaifu. That adds to pressure to stop dealing with the company.

Technology companies have also been targeted. Commerce added Nanchang O-Film Tech, whose customers have included Apple and Lenovo, to the blacklist last July. The company has employed Uyghur workers brought to Nanchang from Xinjiang, some 3,000 kilometers (1,900 miles) away, under restrictive conditions.

Its parent OFILM Group said it lost 1.9 billion yuan (USD 300 million) last year because overseas customers dropped contracts. It did not say which customers.

The forced labour allegations extended to cotton picking late last year with a BBC story and a report by U.S.-based researcher Adrian Zenz.

His study, based largely on publicly-available Chinese government documents, found strong indications of coercion and concluded that

it must be assumed that any cotton from Xinjiang may involve coercive labour, with the likelihood of coercion being very high.

China accused Zenz and the British public broadcaster of anti-China bias. Foreign journalists were taken to a 40-hectare (100-acre) cotton field that was being planted by machine, and officials said mechanization has eliminated the need for most workers.

Picking cotton is more difficult than planting it, though, and where it is mechanized in Xinjiang, it often depends on American technology in the form of John Deere machines. Deere said in a statement that U.S. sanctions have affected its business but declined to provide specifics.

The government says 70 per cent of harvesting is mechanized, but that varies from place to place.

Use of machine picking is more common in the north. In southern Xinjiang plots tend to be smaller and more scattered, with 53 per cent of total acreage harvested by machine in 2020, up from 35 per cent in 2019, according to the government. It acknowledged that farmers still plant and harvest by hand in many places.

Nova of the Workers Rights Consortium said companies should not buy from Xinjiang because of the substantial risk of forced labor at any factory and the inability to conduct a proper inspection.

A Uyghur worker cannot speak freely and candidly about forced labour, particularly if they are a victim of forced labour, he said.

And so when you've got a combination of risk and the inability to manage that risk via labor rights due diligence, the only responsible approach ... is not to source from that particular place.

## HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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news@summittimes.com





## AnupamKher clocks 37 years in films, credits 'Saaransh' for his longevity in industry

**MUMBAI, MAY 25 (PTI):** Veteran star AnupamKher on Tuesday completed 37 years in the film industry and the actor said if not for his debut movie "Saaransh", he wouldn't have reached the milestone in his career.

The 1984 Mahesh Bhatt-directed drama revolved around an old couple who lends a room on rent after the death of their only son.

Kher, who was 28-year-old when he starred in the film, portrayed the role of a retired middle-class teacher B V Pradhan who loses his son.

In an Instagram post, the actor said "Saaransh" was the best debut an artiste could have.

"My 37th birthday in cinema. My first film #Saaransh completes 37 years today. It was the best debut an actor could dream of. Certain scenes are still part of my soul.

"I had no idea what will (be) my fate after the film! I just wanted to give my everything to it. If I am still around it is because #Saaransh was my first film," he wrote.

The 66-year-old actor said he is thankful to Bhatt, Rajshri Films and the

audience for their love and support.

"Saaransh" was India's official entry for the 1985 Academy Awards for the best foreign language film Oscar.

The film won the National Award for best lyrics for Vasant Dev.

The Untold Story".

Some of his international projects include movies "Bend It Like Beckham", "Bride and Prejudice", "Silver Linings Playbook", "The Big Sick" and "The Boy With The Topknot". He has also starred



In his almost four decade long career, Kher, a National School of Drama (NSD) graduate, has appeared in 518 films predominantly in Hindi language like "Ram Lakhan", "Lamhe", "Khel", "Darr", "DilwaleDulhaniya Le Jayenge", "Daddy", "Maine Gandhi KoNahin Mara", "Vijay", "A Wednesday" and "M S Dhoni:

in series "Sense 8" and "New Amsterdam".

The critically-acclaimed actor ventured into direction with 2002 film "Om Jai Jagadish".

He is a recipient of two National Film Awards for his performance in "Daddy" and "Maine Gandhi KoNahin Mara".

## Sanjay Dutt remembers father and mentor Sunil Dutt on 16th death anniversary

**MUMBAI, MAY 25 (PTI):** Actor Sanjay Dutt on Tuesday paid tributes to his father, celebrated actor-politician Sunil Dutt, on his 16th death anniversary and said he misses him. Sunil Dutt died of heart attack on May 25, 2005 at his Bandra residence at the age of 75. In a social media post, Sanjay Dutt, 61, said his father was also his mentor and friend.

"A parent, an idol, a friend, a mentor - you were everything to me. Love you Dad, miss you," he captioned the post on Instagram, alongside a throwback picture of him and Sunil Dutt.

Sanjay Dutt's daughter Trishala commented on the post with a heart emoji.

His younger sister, politician PriyaDutt, also shared a photograph of a young Sunil Dutt on her Instagram. "That smile lights up my day.... #sunildutt #love #dad," she captioned the post.

Sunil Dutt made his acting debut with director Ramesh Saigal's 1955 film "Railway Platform" opposite Johnny Walker and NaliniJaywant. But it was Mehboob Khan's

classic "Mother India" in 1956 which catapulted him to stardom. Two years after the film, Sunil Dutt tied the knot with his co-star



Nargis and the couple had three children -- Sanjay Dutt, NamrataDutt and PriyaDutt.

He was one of the most popular Hindi film stars of the 1960s-1970s and appeared in hits like "Gumraah", "Waqt", "Humraaz", "Khandaan", "Milan" and "ReshmaAurShera".

Sunil Dutt took a break from the film industry in the early 1990s to enter politics, but returned to play reel-life father to son Sanjay Dutt in 2003 hit "MunnaBhai M.B.B.S".

## TimothéeChalamet to play Willy Wonka in origin story

**NEW YORK (AP):** TimothéeChalamet will play Willy Wonka in a musical based on the early life of Roald Dahl's eccentric chocolatier.

Warner Bros. and the Roald Dahl Story Co. announced Monday that the 25-year-old Chalamet will star in "Wonka." The studio said the film will "focus on a young Willy Wonka and his adventures prior to opening the world's most famous chocolate factory."

Paul King ("Paddington," "Paddington 2") will direct from a script he wrote with Simon Farnaby, with "Harry Potter" producer David Heyman producing. Warner Bros. earlier this year set a release date in March 2023.

Gene Wilder starred in 1971's "Willy

Wonka and the Chocolate Factory," based on Dahl's celebrated book. In Tim Burton's 2005 reboot, Johnny Depp played Wonka in a Warner Bros. release that grossed \$475 million worldwide.

TaikaWaititi ("Jojo Rabbit," "Thor: Ragnarok") is separately making a pair of animated series for Netflix, one centered on the world of "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and one based on the Oompa-Loopmas.

Chalamet, the Oscar-nominated star of Luca Guadagnino's "Call Me By Your Name," has a number of high-profile projects upcoming, including Denis Villeneuve's "Dune," Wes Anderson's "The French Dispatch," Adam McKay's "Don't Look Up" and Guadagnino's "Bones & All."



**BUSINESS MODE!** The Pretty Little Liars alum, Ashley Benson looks chic as she arrives for a meeting in Hollywood.

## Jonah Hill to play Hollywood fixer Sidney Korshak in new limited series



**LOS ANGELES, MAY 25 (PTI):** Actor Jonah Hill is set to headline a limited series about Hollywood fixer Sidney Korshak and studio executive Lew Wasserman.

The show is created by William Monahan, who won the best adapted screenplay Oscar for "The Departed", reported Deadline.

Hill, known for starring in films such as "Superbad", "21 Jump Street", "Moneyball" and "The Wolf of Wall Street", will essay the role of Korshak.

According to the outlet, Wasserman was the visionary who in the 1940s liberated ac-

tors from film studio control by creating MCA, the modern talent agency. He straddled both lines until the government made him choose and Wasserman shed talent representation for producing. Wasserman's empire building was abetted by Korshak, an attorney now famous for providing a bridge between organised crime and Hollywood.

In addition to starring in the project, Hill will also executive produce the show along with Matt Dines and Ali Goodwin.

The show, which is currently untitled, is being shopped to studios and TV outlets.

Aries:

Let go with love. Let go with grace. Let go with a song in your soul and a smile on your face. Aries, trust that you will look back at this breakdown as your biggest breakthrough yet. For those who have been suffering on the physical front, consider this as a reminder to seek professional support. Taking your health lightly is not a privilege you have at a time like this.

Tip: How and where are you holding on when the Universe is urging you to let go?

Taurus:

We've officially stepped into eclipse season, Taurus, and the frustration is real. You may find that despite your best efforts to move forward, you are facing opposition from all corners. What's adding to the confusion is the fact that the people around you seem to have no idea what they're doing right now. Here's the thing: you won't be able to heal, fix or resolve everything in one go. Accept that some things are just not in your control. Choosing the path of least resistance will help you sail through.

Tip: You're being guided to choose the path of least resistance.

Gemini:

You've been pushing yourself to your limits, Gemini. But there's only so much you can accomplish when your body is running out of fuel. The cards are reminding you

to prioritise self-care and give your body what it deserves in terms of rest, nourishment, movement and therapy. The balance between giving and receiving is also something you're likely to be pondering over today. How and where are you being called to restore balance on the interpersonal front? Remember, it's okay to ask for help when you need it.

Tip: Pause and breathe, beautiful.

Cancer:

Cancer, you're a master manifestor, one who is blessed with the ability to call in miracles. Today, the cards are urging you to work with the law of attraction with the help of these five simple steps: 1. Tell the Universe exactly what you want. 2. Be specific. Visualise the details. 3. Trust in your power. 4. Take inspired action. 5. Express gratitude for the many blessings that are pouring in. PS: Trust that what is meant to be yours will make its way into your existence.

Tip: You're a master manifestor and you're just beginning to realise your power and potential.

Leo:

Given how close you are to the situation, it will be easy for you to dive deep into the murky realm of emotions. Get some distance, Leo. Changing the vantage point will give you the perspective you need at the moment. When it comes to decisions, make a conscious effort to

be fair, and to maintain the scales of justice that have been placed in your hand. Remember, if the law of cause and effect is anything to go, everything you put into the multiverse comes back to you manifold.

Tip: Get some distance.

Virgo:

When it comes to spirituality, there is no right or wrong way. We all have our methods of connecting with the Divine, and you're being asked to honour yours. Remember, dancing around your altar with chrysanthemums in your hair and a song in your soul is just as sacred as sitting with your spine erect and awakening the sleeping serpent within.

Tip: We all have our own ways to connect with the Divine.

Libra:

Uh-oh! Things are getting murky around here and your usual tactfulness is failing you miserably. Prolonging the argument isn't doing you or the other party any good, though. Word for the wise: step back and assess the situation. Maybe there is no wrong or right answer. Agreeing to disagree (for now) may just be the best way forward.

Tip: Look within.

Scorpio:

Truth tea, Scorpio: when you're convinced you're right, it's hard to get through to you. Have you ever considered that there is no right or wrong way, though? Accept that

the other person is at a different point in their journey and that they may never share the same views as you. Besides, peace is always better than war, is it not? The cards are also bringing the balance between giving and receiving to your attention. If you feel like you're the only one playing the role of the "provider" and "nurturer", it's time to have a conversation about how you would like to be supported in return.

Tip: Peace is always better than war.

Sagittarius:

What do you do when Plan A, B, and C fall apart? What do you do when things are not in your control anymore? Do you continue to walk the path of resistance or surrender to the flow? Something tells us that the ability to loosen the grip will liberate you like nothing else will. The cards are also reminding you that this is a time of non-action, Sagittarius.

Tip: This is a time of non-action.

Capricorn:

We all have our stories, Capricorn. Stories that we hold onto with our dear lives. But not all of these stories have their basis in reality. Some of them are mere lies that, by way of repetition, we come to believe as our truth over a period of time. Today, the cards are urging you to ponder over all that is false within and without. The beliefs that have you convinced that you are a limited being, held

back by your circumstances. It's time to remember who you are, beautiful. It's time to realise that you are a magician and alchemist energy in a human costume.

Tip: It's time to tap into your infinite potential.

Aquarius:

It's one of those days, Aquarius. One of those days when you feel inspired to put on your most magical robe, adorn yourself with stars, spray on some perfume, brew a cup of lavender, and watch the show unfold. The bad news: you have no control over what is taking place or what is about to take place right now. The good news: you have a front row ticket to devour it all, and with mild interest, take a few notes.

Tip: Observe.

Pisces:

Given that we're stepping into retrograde season, you're being called to pause and look back at what you have created. Reassessment and re-evaluation is the need of the hour—a process that will provide you with the perspective that's required right now. There are certain methods that have brought in abundance, and there are certain methods that have not yielded good results. Knowing what you need to let go of before you enter into the new phase is an integral part of the growth and evolution process.

Tip: Think of this as a time to reassess and re-evaluate.