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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## Darj dist reports 424 new Covid cases, 3 deaths

**SMRITA KHAWAS  
GANGTOK, 27 APR:**

A total 424 fresh cases of Covid-19 were reported in Darjeeling district today, with the most, 269 being reported from the Siliguri municipal area and adjacent parts of Jalpaiguri while Darjeeling town contributed 21.

Of this number, four were reported from Kurseong, five from Mirik and two from Takdah.

Unfortunately, the neighbouring district also reported three Covid deaths today.

As per officials, the district has lost ten lives to the virus. Meanwhile, 54 Covid-positive people were discharged from home and facility isolation today. This number does not include people discharged from private hospitals and defence establishments.

## Mirik shuts down

**SUMMIT REPORT  
DARJEELING, 27 APR:**

The administration and civil society organisations of Mirik came together today and decided to shut down the parks and tourist spots in this popular holiday destination in a move aimed to contain the second wave of Covid-19 in the area. This town of barely 11,000 residents reported five new cases of Novel Coronavirus today.

The decision to shut down the public spaces was taken at a meeting held in the Mirik Sub-Division office yesterday attended by the SDO, representatives from the Mirik municipality, driver association, Fire department, police and social organisations.

The municipal council chairperson, LB Rai, further informs that while the gardens and parks have already been closed, the principal secretary, GTA, has also been requested to close tourist spots which fall under the jurisdiction of the GTA in Mirik.

# Govt offices shut for the week as Sikkim records 97 new cases and 2 more Covid deaths

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 27 APR:**

The State Government has shut down government offices and public sector undertakings for the week in a move which it hopes will "break the chain of transmission" and slow down the runaway second wave of Covid-19 in the State. The number of daily cases have remained high, frequently breaking the 100 mark, for the past two weeks and today, even the Governor was among the 97 new cases reported in the State.

Also today, the State reported two more Covid-related deaths, a second consecutive day that Sikkim lost two lives to the virus. The State has

now lost 142 lives to the virus, six of these having fallen the second wave which set in two weeks back in as much as the numbers are concerned even though infections would have picked up at least a week or ten days prior.

Meanwhile, a Home Department order announces that all govt offices and public sector undertakings will remain closed from 28 to 30 April. The shutdown will not apply to essential services like health, police, fire services etc and does not extend to private businesses and shops.

In effect, Tuesday was the last working day of the week and govt offices will now reopen only on



## COVID IN SIKKIM

Positive Cases to date : **7,426**  
Total Deaths : **142**  
Cases detected on 27 April : **97**  
Active Cases at present : **982**  
New Recoveries : **40**

Total tests  
**91,591**

03 May since 01 May is a Saturday and govt offices are already on a 5-day week schedule.

In a video message to the people posted on his Facebook page, Chief Minister PS Tamang, while calling on the peo-

ple to diligently follow prescribed Covid protocols, has also clarified that the State was not contemplating a lockdown just yet.

Among the two COVID casualties, one died at STNM hospital,

while another death was recorded at Central Referral Hospital, Tadong.

The number of active cases of coronavirus in Sikkim has increased to 982 with another surge of 97 fresh cases reported in the last 24 hours.

On the other hand, the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 of Sikkim has further improved to 6133 with the release of 40 more persons from home isolation after completing their isolation period.

Sikkim's tally of con-

firmed cases of COVID-19 has now reached 7426 with these 97 new cases.

It has to be mentioned here that 97 samples were found positive for COVID-19 during the testing of 613 samples in Sikkim on Monday. A total of 74 samples returned positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR testing of 408 samples, while 23 more persons were found COVID-19 positive in the rapid antigen testing of 194 samples.

Of the 97 new cases, 82 have been reported in East District, 10 in West District, 04 in South District and 01 in North District. Out of 982 active cases of coronavirus in Sikkim, one is currently admitted in the ICU facility of STNM hospital.

## CM chairs DISHA meeting to discuss central schemes



**GANGTOK, 27 APR [IPR]:** A State-level District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA) meeting was organised by the Rural Development Department at Samman Bhawan in the capital today. It is formed to cover non-statutory schemes covering upto 42 programs.

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang addressed the congregation and encouraged them to generate awareness about the various central projects and schemes and provide

training to the field related officials of the departments to increase their efficiency. The HODs, Secretaries and officials of the line departments gave comprehensive presentations regarding the schemes under their respective departments which was followed by discussions.

They individually updated the gathering on the progress of the schemes and also discussed ways to overcome obstacles that have hampered the pace of some of these projects.

The Chief Minister

directed all the departments to be prompt with the implementation of schemes for the benefit of the people and the development of the state. He further urged them to regularly update themselves to be more effective, resulting in swift execution.

The Minister Sonam Lama, Member of Parliament, Indra Hang Subba, MLAs, Pintso Namgyal Lepcha, Sunita Gajmer and Sonam Venchungpa were also present during the meeting.

## Rush to hospitals, big gatherings worsening India's Covid crisis: WHO

**Geneva, 27 Apr [Reuters]:** The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tuesday it was stepping up efforts to help India as hospitals there struggled to cope with a huge surge in coronavirus cases, including bringing in oxygen and other essential supplies.

India's death toll is now nearing 200,000, and some hospitals are turning away coronavirus patients as they do not have enough oxygen supplies and beds.

WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said the crisis had worsened due to mass gatherings of people, more contagious variants and low vaccination rates, creating a "perfect storm".

"We are working with the government to bring in essential supplies like oxygen and alleviate the immediate situation," Jasarevic said.

The WHO was providing 4,000 oxygen concentrators, which only require an energy source, he said. Mobile field hos-



pitals are being set up and laboratory supplies provided for testing. He urged people not to stockpile essential supplies. Wider distribution of high-quality masks was also key to control transmission, he said.

More than 2,600 WHO experts already working in the country on other health programmes have been deployed to respond to the pandemic, the U.N. agency has said. The problem

has been exacerbated by some people going to hospital when home care would suffice, Jasarevic said. Less than 15% of people infected with COVID-19 actually need hospital care and even fewer will need oxygen, he said.

Community-level centres should screen and triage patients and provide advice on safe home care, he said.

Studies continue into virus variants circulat-

ing there, including the B.1.617 variant with two mutations, first detected from samples collected last December, he said, citing some evidence that they may be more contagious. "The extent to which these virus changes are responsible for the rapid increase in cases in the country remains unclear, as there are other factors such as recent large gatherings that may have contributed to the rise," he said.

## In India's Covid crisis, anger over Centre's ₹ 20,000 Cr Delhi makeover

**NEW DELHI, 27 APR [BLOOMBERG]:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is rebuilding part of New Delhi, but the mammoth undertaking is drawing fire because it's estimated to cost billions at a time when the nation is grappling with a devastating coronavirus outbreak and the economic fallout of local shutdowns.

The planned changes will cement PM Modi's legacy in one of the world's oldest cities by reconstructing central Delhi, which houses the legislature and other historical buildings. The project covers an area as large as 50 football fields. India will get a new parliament building. The present 94-year-old structure, built during British colonial rule, will become a museum. Open spaces are poised to be repurposed for government offices. While many details haven't been announced, media reports have said a new prime minis-

ter's residence is likely to be built. All of it is to be readied for 2024, when PM Modi faces Lok Sabha elections for a third term.

The massive project - which the media have estimated could cost about 200 billion rupees (\$2.7 billion) - has grown more controversial as India's coronavirus cases have exploded. On social media, some questioned the need for spending on new government structures at a time when the nation is dealing with severe fallout from the pandemic. One cartoon doing the rounds on Twitter depicted Indians without jobs, food and ambulances alongside a picture of PM Modi announcing a new parliament.

"The PM in his speeches since the pandemic broke, has repeatedly asked Indians to sacrifice - their time, job, lifestyle, their human and cultural tendencies to be gregarious," historian Ramchandra Guha said

via text message. "Now the citizens must ask the PM to sacrifice something for the nation as well. His project to redesign central vista was always controversial. It is now absolutely untenable. He should drop it. He still can and should."

Spokespeople at the housing and urban affairs ministry and the prime minister's office didn't respond to emails seeking comment.

In recent weeks, a fresh wave of the coronavirus has roiled India, leaving hospital beds, medicines and oxygen in short supply. Crematoriums are overrun, and India has reported several days of more than 300,000 new daily infections. Families are putting out desperate pleas on social media, begging for medicines and aid for relatives sickened with the virus. India has had more than 195,000 deaths since the start of the pandemic, and its economy

plunged into recession last year, leaving millions of daily wage earners and others without jobs.

Construction on the project has already begun in New Delhi, with cranes and building equipment blocking entire sections in the center of the capital city. The government has said the architectural revamp is necessary because of the age and deterioration of current buildings. When laying the foundation stone for the new triangle-shaped parliament building in December, the prime minister called it a "landmark opportunity to build a peoples' parliament for the first time after Independence." That hasn't stemmed criticism from opposition parties, historians, architects, environmentalists and even former bureaucrats.

"Given the other needs of the economy right now, and the government's strained

fiscal situation, it does raise questions about the priorities of the government and whether the money could be better spent elsewhere," Akhil Bery, Washington-based South Asia analyst at risk consultancy Eurasia Group, said via email. "Infrastructure is needed throughout India, and investing this money into roads and railways might be more beneficial, especially in the short-term."

Delhi is a city that's been plundered, conquered and rebuilt many times in the past. It's borne witness to the rise and fall of age-old empires like the Tughlaqs and the Mughals. There are references to it in the 5,000-year-old ancient Hindu text Mahabharata. As a result, the planned changes have been evoking sharp emotions for months, even before the pandemic worsened in India.

*turn to pg02*



## Oxygen tankers from Thailand arrive in India

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** Another consignment of containers for the transportation of medical oxygen has arrived in India from Thailand, the Union Home Ministry said on Tuesday.

This is the third consignment of empty oxygen containers flown to the country in the Indian Air Force's (IAF) transport aircraft by the home ministry amidst a surge in COVID-19 cases and a subsequent increase in demand for medical oxygen.

"Some glimpses of airlift of oxygen containers from Bangkok by IAF last night. The airlift is being coordinated by MHA. It will enhance oxygen availability amid current COVID19 surge," a home ministry spokesperson said in a tweet, sharing pictures of the oxygen containers being loaded into an IAF aircraft.

The first consignment of empty oxygen containers was airlifted from Singapore on Saturday. Another batch of containers was brought from Dubai on Monday.

All three aircraft carrying the containers landed in West Bengal. From there, they were taken to oxygen generating sites to be filled up and for onward transportation to the high-demand areas, mostly through special trains. India is struggling with the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic and hospitals in several states are reeling under a shortage of medical oxygen and beds as the number of cases rises.

The country's COVID-19 caseload mounted to 1,76,36,307 on Tuesday with 3,23,144 more people testing positive for the viral disease. The death toll climbed to 1,97,894 as 2,771 more fatalities were reported, according to Union health ministry data.

Since Friday, the home ministry has been coordinating efforts to deploy empty oxygen tankers and containers at various filling stations across the country to speed up the distribution of life-saving oxygen.

The central government is trying to source oxygen from different parts of the country and making it available to the worst-hit states by running special trains.

## In India's Covid crisis...

Critics cast the project as an attempt to erase institutional memories and point to the absence of public discussions around repurposing the heritage buildings.

"It is ill thought out, the necessity of the project has not been established, the environmental clearances have been problematic," said Anuj Srivastava, a former architect in the Indian Army's Corps of Engineer, who filed a petition in the court against the project last year. "Nobody builds a new parliament unless you can't re-purpose the old one, like the way Westminster is being restored and refurbished."

The Supreme Court allowed the project to proceed, saying it didn't violate environmental or land-use norms. However, one of the three judges on the panel expressed concern over the lack of public consultation before the project's clearance.

There are also apprehensions that the new buildings will erase historical memories, which should be preserved to better understand the past even when it's difficult, said Najaf Haider, a professor of history in Jawaharlal Nehru University. "These memorials are a great reminder of what happened in the past and by preserving those we are

# Officers visit Memen Tso water supply project site

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 27 APR:**

As per direction of Speaker cum-area-MLA (West Pendum), LB Das and Area MLA (Rhenock), Bishnu Kumar Khatiwara a team headed by Chairman (Sikkim Housing Board), Karma Tashi Bhutia made a preliminary visit to the Memen Tso water source for upcoming water supply project for Budang Kamarey GPU and Central Pendum in East Sikkim, a press release informs.

The team also had Sikkim Krantikari Morcha CLC president (West Pendum), Hari Dangal, Principal Chief Engineer RDD, Mr Lamtha, AE, JE and other officials.

The people of Budang Kamarey GPU and Central Pendum, East Sikkim have been facing acute shortage of drinking wa-



ter for the past 25 years.

During the course of survey, the team decided that overflow from the Memen Tso water source is suitable and reliable source for this project. Accordingly, Chairman Karma Tashi

Bhutia instructed the officials to execute the project as early as possible.

The release alleges that in previous governments several demands were placed but the SDF government failed to provide

a proper water project. After formation of the SKM government, in the last visit of the Chief Minister, PS Tamang, the local public of Budang Kamarey GPU and Central Pendum had placed a demand for

proper drinking water project. The CM immediately directed officials of the concerned department to come up with an appropriate water supply project for the said area, the release adds.

## Over 1,000 Covid deaths 'missing' in Delhi data, reveal civic records

**NEW DELHI, 27 APR [NDTV]:** Aerial photographs of cremations in Delhi - innumerable pyres in a row that even landed on the front pages of foreign publications - have been indicating since last week that the actual number of deaths from Covid might be different from the official figures. After visiting the city's civic body and seven cremation grounds, NDTV found that at least 1,150 deaths did not make it to the official Covid list.

Data collected from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi for 26 crematoriums it runs, shows that 3,096 cremations of Covid victims were conducted between April 18 and April 24.

The total figure of Covid deaths released by the Delhi government in the same period show 1,938 deaths - indicating that 1,158 Covid deaths in Delhi may have gone uncounted.

MCD counts as Covid deaths only the bodies that are brought from hospitals. The reason for the mismatch of its data with official figures is not yet known.

A visit to the city's crematoriums revealed

another uncharted territory - people who die of Covid at home.

At the overflowing Ghazipur Crematorium on the outskirts of Delhi - where families of Covid victims were seen waiting to complete paperwork - a staff member said people who died of Covid at home are not recorded as Covid cremations.

"People who come from hospitals, come in ambulances. Others bring (bodies) from home. But if we look at their reports we will find that it is respiratory failure," said Anuj Bansal, a staff member of the Ghazipur crematorium. "We put down their cause of deaths as Covid or normal. If the death happened at a hospital, we know if it's Covid. When death happened at home, we don't know for sure, so we always put it as normal," he added.

The MCD does not count these deaths as Covid deaths either. If the family says at the crematorium that the victim was battling Covid, it is counted in a separate category called "suspected". The cremation, though, takes place with Covid protocol.

At Ghazipur, Manish and Neel Gupta have spent four hours waiting to cremate their father, who died of Covid. Manish Gupta said says his father died at home as they failed to get him admitted to any hospital.

"My father died because of lack of oxygen. In Mandavali," he said. "He died at home. We went to so many hospitals - government and private. They didn't treat him anywhere. They have beds but still won't give treatment," he added.

Asked how long he has been waiting, he said since 8.30 in the morning. "We came at 4 am and 6 am also. And 9:30 pm yesterday... Desperate for oxygen and now desperate to cremate. This government is useless," he added.

Delhi government is yet to respond to our request for a comment.

At Delhi's biggest and oldest crematorium ground, Nigambodh Ghat, plumes of thick black smoke can be seen from afar. The number of cremations here has gone up from 15 per day to over 30 and families have to sometimes wait for 4-5 hours for their turn.

## India adds 3,23,144 COVID-19 cases in single day

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** With 3,23,144 people testing positive for coronavirus infection in a day, India's total tally of COVID-19 cases has climbed to 1,76,36,307, while the national recovery rate has further dropped to 82.54 per cent, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

The death toll increased to 1,97,894 with 2,771 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

Registering a steady increase, the active cases have increased to 28,82,204 comprising 16.34 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has further dropped to 82.54 per cent. The number of peo-

ple who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,45,56,209 while the case fatality rate has further dropped to 1.12 per cent, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. India crossed the grim milestone of 1.50 crore on April 19.

According to the ICMR, 28,09,79,877 samples have been tested up to April 26 with 16,58,700 samples being tested on Monday.

## EU member countries rushing medical supplies to India

**NEW DELHI, APR 27 (PTI):** Several member nations of the European Union are rushing in medical supplies like oxygen concentrators and ventilators to India in line with an announcement made by the bloc to support the country in its fight against a devastating second wave of coronavirus infection. EU member countries France, Ireland, Belgium, Romania, Luxembourg, Portugal and Sweden are sending medical supplies to India through the bloc's Civil Protection Mechanism.

"This support has been made in line with the coordinated effort by EU member states currently underway to pool their resources in responding rapidly to tackle the alarming epidemiological situation in India," the EU said in a statement.

It said that more EU support from other member states, including Germany, is expected in the coming days.

Under the Civil Protection Mechanism, Ireland is sending 700 oxygen concentrators, one oxygen generator and 365 ventilators to India while Belgium is supplying 9,000 doses of antiviral medicine Remdesivir and Sweden is providing 120 ventilators, according to the EU. Similarly, Romania is supplying 80

oxygen concentrators and 75 oxygen cylinders while Luxembourg is sending 58 ventilators to India. On its part, Portugal is in the process of shipping 5,503 vials of Remdesivir and 20,000 litres of oxygen per week.

France has already announced that it is sending to India oxygen generators, liquid oxygen containers, ventilators and other medical supplies by air and sea to support the country.

As part of its Civil Protection Mechanism, the EU plays a central role in coordinating its responses to emergencies in Europe and beyond.

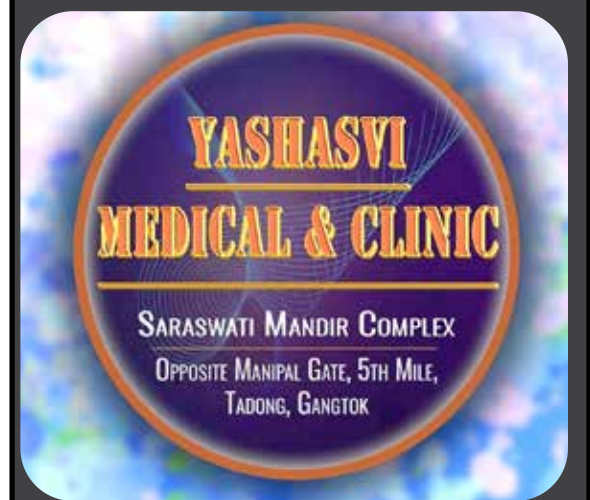
Janez Lenarcic, Commissioner for Crisis Management of the EU, said the grouping stands in full solidarity with the Indian people and is ready to do its utmost to support them at this "critical time". "I would like to thank our member states that came in numerously with generous offers of help, showing that the EU is a trusted partner and a friend at times of need," he said.

"The reach of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism goes well beyond the EU's borders. Our Emergency Response Coordination Centre is facilitating the logistical arrangements and the EU will cover the brunt of the transport costs," he added.

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remembering both atrocities, survival and possibilities of future."

Construction on the new parliament will continue during the lockdown announced by the Delhi government, The Hindu newspaper reported on April 19.

While the existing parliament was initially used by the nation's British rulers, it has witnessed landmark events such as the passionate debates around the framing of India's constitution and the historic speech of the nation's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, announcing India's independence from the British in 1947.

Now, despite the mayhem caused by the pandemic, PM Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party wants to leave its "stamp by constructing a new parliament building, redesigning the central vista which is sort of the heart of Indian powerdom," said Manish Tewari, a member of parliament who is affiliated with the opposition Congress Party.

Part of the Modi government's plan is to redevelop the central vista - a 3-kilometer stretch beginning from the Rashtrapati Bhawan to India Gate - with 10 multi-story modern office complexes to provide more modern facilities for civil servants.

Current plans suggest that many

open spaces around India Gate that are visited by thousands daily may no longer be accessible to the public. "We common mortals will have no reason to go there, as government offices replace the quiet spaces of art, history, performance, leisure," Narayani Gupta, a Delhi-based historian said.

PM Modi's government is also finalizing the future of other buildings built after India's independence, such as Udyog Bhawan, Krishi Bhawan, and Shastri Bhawan - which are decades old and house key ministries.

But the corner stone is the new parliament, which the government estimates will cost 9.7 billion rupees (\$130 million). The aim is to complete it by 2022 in time to mark the 75th year of India's Independence. The proposed building's aesthetics will include references from the present parliament and the nation's traditional arts and crafts, according to Indian architectural firm HCP Design, Planning and Management Pvt., which is designing the Central Vista project. "The constitution hall and constitution gallery will symbolically and physically put the Indian People at the heart of our democracy," the firm said in an email. Subterranean tunnels will connect the parliament

building with the chambers of members of parliament.

The existing parliament, which cost 8.3 million rupees and has a circular perimeter and 144 columns, was conceived of about 100 years ago. In 1911, the British colonial rulers announced they were shifting the capital from Kolkata (then Calcutta) to Delhi - the seat of power for many rulers before them.

British architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker were roped in. Lutyens designed parts of the central vista in European classical architecture, with gigantic colonnades, cupolas and domes, while Baker brought in Indian architectural elements such as chattris (canopy-like structures), and jalis (lattice screens). After a wait of 20 years, in 1931, a new Delhi was finally unveiled. After independence India used the buildings for its government.

These days, India's government is facing a variety of geopolitical and economic challenges that deserve greater attention, said Aparna Pandey, director of the Hudson Institute's Initiative on the Future of India and South Asia. "It behooves Delhi to focus on building India's military and economic capabilities, instead of seeking to rewrite history."



## Governor briefs Defence Min on Sikkim's COVID-19 status

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 27 APR:**

The Union Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh reviewed the status and preparations for COVID-19 management with the Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad in view of the surge of Coronavirus cases all across the country today.

In a telephonic conversation with the Defence Minister, the Governor apprised about Covid-19 situation in the State as Sikkim has witnessed an increase in the number of cases. The Governor informed that full-fledged Covid bed facility, oxygen and other infrastructure is adequate in the State.

The Defence Minister stated that the doctors and paramedical staff of the Indian Army, Navy and the Air Force can be directed to join the government to fight against Coronavirus.

Discussing the surge in Covid cases, the Governor informed Union Defence Minister about various urgent measures taken by the State government to fight the second phase of COVID-19 challenge and further said that the State is fully prepared to tackle Coronavirus cases.

The Governor has also assured the Union Defence Minister that the Sikkim government is vigilant.

The Governor extended his gratitude to the Defence Minister for extending the Indian Army, Navy and the Air Force support in the battle against Covid-19.

Further, the Governor mentioned that as per the guidelines of the Centre, Covid-19 vaccination programme was held effectively in the State.

## Himachal reports 851 fresh cases of COVID-19, 13 deaths

**SHIMLA, APR 27 (PTI):** Thirteen more people died due to coronavirus in Himachal Pradesh which reported 851 fresh cases of the infection, taking the state's virus tally to 90,044, an official said on Tuesday.

COVID-19 has claimed 1,363 lives in the state so far, Special Health Secretary Nipun Jindal said, citing the official data updated till 7 pm.

Jindal said the number of active COVID-19 cases in the state stands at 13,856.

Kangra has the highest number of active cases at 3318 followed by Solan (2259), Shimla (1606), Sirmour (1376), Mandi (1166) and Hamirpur (1165), he added. As many as 1305 coronavirus patients have recovered from the infection, taking the total number of recoveries in the state to 74,783, he said.

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## SAAA felicitates seven athletes



**SAGAR CHETTRI  
GANGTOK, 27 APR:**

Sikkim Amateur Athletic Association [SAAA] felicitated seven athletes from Sikkim for their outstanding performance in the recent national, zonal and state level athletic competitions.

During a felicitation function at Khel Gaon in Reshithang on Tuesday morning, the association felicitated Ranjana Tamang on qualifying for Khelo India and winning gold medal in zonal competition along with Sabina Rai, Sapna Khanal, Divya Pandey, Jharna Thatal, Buddha Sherpa and Kunga Nima Kazi for their outstanding performance in the recent competitions. Likewise, the association also felicitated athletics coach, RB Subba for his guidance and training to these

long-distance runners.

The felicitation function had the Chairperson to Sikkim Khadi & Village Industries Board, Chung Chung Bhutia as the chief guest, who handed over khadas and cash incentives to these athletes. It is informed that the cash incentives have been provided by Transport Minister, Sanjit Kharel, who is also the patron of SAAA.

In her address, the chief guest congratulated all athletes for their achievements and also thanked the Minister Sanjit Kharel for his support and encouragement to young athletes of Sikkim. Ms Bhutia stressed upon the need of discipline, hardwork and consistency in athletes to reach their desired levels.

Earlier, in his wel-

come address, SAAA president, Hari Chettri mentioned that the association has been working to support local athletes to take them to regional and national levels. He also appreciated efforts of local athletes for making Sikkim proud by winning medals in the regional levels and outstanding performance at the national level.

SAAA general secretary, Thupten Rapgyal expressed gratitude to the Minister Sanjit Kharel for his support and guidance to the association and athletes. He stated that athletics is the mother of all sports and is also the best to stay healthy and fit. He encouraged athletes to continue with their efforts and hardwork to win medals and laurels for the state in future competitions.

## Governor tests positive for COVID-19

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 27 APR:**

Governor Ganga Prasad has tested positive for COVID-19 and is isolating at home.

Sharing the news on his Facebook page, the Governor informed that he was having mild

symptoms and tested positive for the virus today.

"I was having mild symptoms and tested positive for Covid-19 today. I request everyone who came in close contact with me over last few days to isolate them-

selves and get tested. I am stable and under the supervision of doctor at home isolation," he wrote.

It may be mentioned that the Governor had received the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine on 13 April.

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Dated: 07/04/2021.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

Gangtok Smart City Development Limited (GSCDL) is undertaking the work 'Construction of Multi Level Car Park cum Shopping Hub' at old STNM Complex (below NH). The preliminary Drawings of the project is uploaded in our website <https://smartcitygangtok.com>

Architects, Urban Planners and the General Public are requested to give their valuable feedback and suggestions for improvement of the drawing. Changes that are feasible within the scope of the work shall be incorporate at the time of finalizing the Drawings. However, GSCDL reserves the right to incorporate the changes. Comments and suggestions may be sent by email to [ae3smartcity@gmail.com](mailto:ae3smartcity@gmail.com) within one month of issue of this public notice, please.

Sd/-  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER.



File No.208/GSCDL/2020-2021  
Gangtok Smart City Development Limited  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor Kissan Bazaar Building  
Lal Bazaar Road  
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CIN – U930909WB2017SGC223807

Ref No. *51/GSCDL/2021-22* Dated: 19/04/2021

**NOTICE INVITING APPLICATION FOR THE POST OF CITY DATA OFFICER UNDER  
GANGTOK SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT LIMITED**

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for filling up one post of City Data Officer (CDO) on contractual basis for a period of 6 months (Probation) + 1 Year (Full Time Contract with renewal) under Gangtok Smart City Development Limited. The job specification details along with qualification requirement, technical and professional skills may be downloaded from official website <https://smartcitygangtok.com>. Applications by eligible and willing candidates matching all the required criteria may be submitted to Nodal Officer, Gangtok Smart City Development Limited on or before 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021, 1600 hours.

Nodal Officer  
Gangtok Smart City Development Limited

## AK Films debuts with Tutea Ko Mann music video

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 27 Apr:**

The debut music video of Gangtok-based AK Films Production, 'Tutea Ko Mann', was released here on Tuesday. The music video is set to a song by young upcoming singer, Raiba Subba and features debut performances by Anil Kumar Tamang and Kreepa Chettri.



The video has been directed by Prakash Basnett and cinematography and editing has been done by Deepak Pandey.

The launch function of the music video was chaired by Chairperson of Sikkim Film Promotion Board [SFPB], Pooja Sharma as the chief guest, while founder of Sushma Production, Sushma Gurung was present as the guest of honour.

In her address, the chief guest congratulated the entire team for bringing out a quality music video using local artists and expressed best wishes to the team for future projects.

The Chairperson mentioned that around 10 films are in the pipeline and the board has been trying to accommodate more local artists from Sikkim in these projects. She stated that auditions for the same would be conducted as the COVID situation normalizes in the State.

Likewise, the guest of honour mentioned that new music videos have been coming up almost every week in Sikkim which shows the growth of the music video and film sectors in the State.

She appreciated the efforts of the entire team of 'Tutea Ko Mann', for a wonderful music video.

Ms Gurung stated that while the State government and SFPB have been working tirelessly to promote Sikkim as a film destination, everyone needs to work together with the government to develop the film industry in the State.

The function has also witnessed an interaction session with the cast and crew of the music video, who shared their experiences of working in the music video. On the occasion, AK Production also felicitated young singer, Raiba Subba for giving some hit songs in a short period.

AK Production founder and lead artist, AK Tamang urged the people to love and support the first project of the production house. He added that 'Tutea Ko Mann', is a gift of AK Production to the people after lots of hard work and dedication and it needs the support and encouragement to continue with more such projects.

He mentioned that the music video would be available on the official YouTube channel of AK Production. He further added that the production house is planning its next project in the month of September later this year.

## UP panchayat poll candidate killed in Bhadohi

**BHADOHI (UP), APR 27 (PTI):** A candidate in the Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls was beaten to death at a village here, police

said. Lalji Gautam (51) was attacked by members of his rival group at Dudwa Dharampuri village on Monday night,

Circle Officer Prayank Jai said. He died on Tuesday at his house, the officer said, adding that Gautam was a candidate for the

post of village head.

Four persons have been detained in the case and a probe is on in the matter, Jai said.

### SIKKIM STATE TEACHER'S RECRUITMENT BOARD

(Constituted Vide Notification No. 933/HRDD, 2015)

Upper Syari, Gangtok, East Sikkim

**Memo No. 40/SSTRB/Adm**

**Date: April 27, 2021**

**(ADDENDUM to Memo No. 38/SSTRB/ADM Dated 12/04/2021)**

Reference Notice inviting applications from In-service eligible Post Graduate Teachers and Headmasters/Headmistresses of Secondary Schools serving in the Government Schools of Sikkim for filling up the posts of Principals, following addendum are issued:

01. At para 1 Sl. No. 1, No of posts mentioned as 30 may be read as **31**.

02. Para 2 may be read as below:

Candidates must have possessed the following minimum educational and professional qualifications:

Sl. No	For Principal	Qualifications		Teaching Experience	Age limit
		Academic	Professional		
1	From PGT	a) Post Graduate Degree in any subject from a recognized University	a) B Ed degree from an institute recognized by the NCTE	a) <b>Eleven (11)</b> ** years of uninterrupted regular service as a Post Graduate Teacher as on March 31, 2021	No age bar
2	From HM, Secondary School	b) Post Graduate Degree in any subject from recognized University	b) B Ed degree from an institute recognized by the NCTE	b) <b>Five (05)</b> ** years of regular service as Headmaster / Headmistress of Secondary School as on March 31, 2021	

**Note: Service period on deputation to any Department shall not be counted as regular service for the post of Principal.**

**\*\* Reduced as one-time relaxation under provision of Rule 6 of the Education Department, (Principals of Senior Secondary Schools and Headmasters of Secondary Schools) Recruitment Rules, 1992**

03. At para 3, the last date for submission of forms online and offline both may be read as **May 13, 2021, till 4:30 pm.**

04. At para 6 after (g), following are added:

(i) Applicants are also required to upload the documents mentioned in the Memo No. 38/SSTRB/ADM Dated 12/04/2021 in the link given in the website latest by **May 13, 2021.**

(ii) Applicants who have already submitted the online forms are also instructed to visit the website and upload the required documents online through the link provided till **May 13, 2021, 4:30 pm.**

05. Kindly visit the website [www.sikkimhrdd.org](http://www.sikkimhrdd.org) for application form and uploading the documents.

06. Educational and professional qualifications and syllabus for the examination to the post of Principal shall remain the same as per the Memo No. 38/SSTRB/ADM Dated 12/04/2021.

(Secretary)  
**Sikkim State Teachers' Recruitment Board**



## For Labour

*Because not enough is being said on their behalf*

We see them around often, but don't always notice them. They labour on tasks which are necessary, but would not have the necessary work-force had it not been for their privations which draw them away from home at worksites across the country. They power development with their sweat, plod away, are often humiliated and yet they persevere. Had it not been for them, the planners who chart development for the country would have seen their projections stuck to the drawing board and never on ground. Take a look around, the sewage line does not get laid only because there is a budget for it, but because there are stomachs desperate enough to work through cold, wet nights to lay them. Cardamom is not a cash crop because Sikkim has progressive farmers, but because there are backs willing to take the load by the maund after they have harvested a crop which, let's accept it, few here have any actual understanding of. Gangtok's highways would not be neatly parted of their overnight sludge, had an entire army of labourers not been at hand to begin clearing the debris at the break of dawn. Trekking is possible not only because Sikkim is pretty, but because realities are quite ugly for some making them carry loads wearing slippers and plastic shoes up trails where even the tougher trekkers slip despite their better shod feet.

And still, they do not figure anywhere in the pecking order and in most cases, don't even get to enjoy the infrastructure they build. Unfortunately, they also make easy targets, often denied even of their due remunerations. We read reports of Indian stuck in the Middle East, not paid their dues and unable even to afford an air ticket home, and we offer them the wrong response – clucking our tongues in sympathy when we should have been raging against the systems which allow such denials. Sikkim got a taste of such inhumanity in the wake of the 18 Sept earthquake when choppers evacuated the management and officers, but labourers at hydel and other construction sites had to foot it across dangerous terrain. Many of them complained of not having received their dues and only few of them had any plans of returning. They fled with their lives, leaving behind their earnings. It is unlikely that anyone even attempted to trace them down and clear their dues. They are probably being exploited somewhere else now.

The anonymity in which the labour force works and fades away is still an unfortunate reality, and one that needs to be addressed. Not just because they deserve better, but also because we need to be better. The maltreatment is not just a governmental failing, but more a societal shortcoming. It is because we, as consumers, do not pay enough heed to basic human rights that the labour, as a class, gets denied. The West now has the luxury to pay attention to such issues which the developing world still looks at as distractions. When we celebrate laws banning bonded labour and child labour in India, we should perhaps thank buyers in the West who put pressure on manufacturers to become more humane. The pressure for better protections and more genuine safeguards have to come from the lay people, who themselves have to deliver better as well. The government fixes the minimum wage, but apart from government employ, how many other workplaces offer them? How many domestic servants, even discounting meals, are volunteered such remuneration? And yet there are people willing to work for less, willing to look the other way despite a law [of minimum wage] being broken. The labour force does not require a more compassionate government, it requires fellow citizens who notice them, listen to them, respect them and when the situation demands, speaks for them.

### WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/ indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: [news@summittimes.com](mailto:news@summittimes.com)



## Somalia: Toxic Elite Politics and the Need for Cautious External Mediation

CLAIRE ELDER  
*theconversation.com*

The current government's decision on April 12th to seek a two-year extension has thrown Somalia's fragile political process into disarray.

In November last year the opposition and the government had agreed to an indirect election model. But no consensus was reached on how the process would be managed. The opposition is concerned about its fairness, given the government's gross violations of regional elections since 2018. These resulted in the installation of leaders allied with the president, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (known as Farmaajo), in South West, Galmudug and Hirshabelle states.

Since his election, Farmaajo has restricted the political space for the opposition. The president and his close advisers have also been implicated in assassination attempts.

For all of these reasons the extension suggests a power grab. This is the first time a presidential term has ended without agreement about how to proceed with an election. It is also the first time since Siad Barre's tyrannical regime (1969-1991) that a Somali president has tried to capture a second term in office.

But, there are many dimensions that don't fit an authoritarian takeover, as some are suggesting. Rather, recent events in my view point to a government taking its last breath during a political showdown over high stakes.

### FRAGMENTATION AND OPPORTUNITY

Open fighting between security forces is evidence of a fragmented security apparatus. It does not show the force and authority needed for an authoritarian takeover that would include command of security forces. It shows rather the power struggles already underway over the carcass of the government and the renegotiation of what comes next.

In seeking the extension Farmaajo was taking advantage of certain opportunities made available. He did not coerce parliamentarians – 149 out of

275 supported the resolution for their own self-interest. Many parliamentarians feared losing their seats in any upcoming election and would benefit from the extension. He took advantage of other gaps in the system. Firstly, the absence of a constitutional court. Secondly, loopholes in the electoral law.

Another opportunity for Farmaajo to seek an extension was provided by international silence on the government's other executive actions. Inconsistency, mixed signals and competing priorities around democratisation and security seemingly gave Farmaajo the green light to secure an extension. Farmaajo learned from his authoritarian neighbours how to use national security and economic development goals to disparage democratisation efforts.

The opposition has also not been a strong leader or trusted democratic ally out of the crisis. The group of "recycled" politicians that constitute the National Salvation Council have changed the benchmarks and terms of negotiations and suffer from a legitimacy crisis. The opposition also engaged in risky behaviour to defend its interests that cannot go without mentioning.

### WILL SANCTIONS WORK?

Donors, concerned that the extension was part of a wave of militarised authoritarianism, immediately threatened sanctions. In an unprecedented show of unity, the US, UK, United Nations, African Union, European Union, and Intergovernmental Authority on Development all denounced the extension calling for immediate resumption of talks.

Donors discussed a strong "package" of military and financial sanctions that will target Ethiopia and Eritrea, and may include Somalia. The kinds of sanctions being discussed for Somalia include freezing assets and visa restrictions. Farmaajo and his close advisers are likely to be targeted.

But will these sanctions address what is a violent escalation of toxic elite politics over control of sovereignty? The evidence for where culpability lies is heavily disputed. For its part, the govern-

ment claims the opposition is equally to blame.

Sanctions also send an inconsistent message. After all, the increase in military and aid resources have emboldened Farmaajo. As recently as March of last year the country received large foreign aid injections to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has also qualified for debt relief from multilateral creditors despite allegations of widespread corruption and mismanagement.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

External mediation is required as toxic elite politics take root and the political window for the Somali-led process closes. There is mounting pressure from the opposition to move towards a caretaker government that also serves its interests. The opposition, which is not sure to win in any upcoming election, wants Farmaajo removed from the top post.

Farmaajo's days are numbered. Opposition calls for Mogadishu businesses to stop paying taxes would be a final nail in the coffin. The government will struggle to hold on without significant outside assistance and quick fortifications from its authoritarian neighbours.

The immediate concerns include the acute risks for violence as the next steps are decided and as elements of an existential war have already been ignited. Many estimate that conflict will be confined to skirmishes, but there's definitely the potential for more larger-scale violence.

The open fighting within the security apparatus should serve as a caution for any AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) withdrawal. It demonstrates the ways in which security rents (like development finance) are deployed within the political market by competing factions.

Moving forward, there needs to be realistic consensus on the prospects for holding "direct" elections in two years to avoid further chaos. They seem unlikely given the unresolved security and political issues that include the role of Mogadishu in leading any system of devolved governance.

*[the writer is Lecturer, London School of Economics and Political Science]*

## Why Some People Don't Experience Vaccine Side-Effects, and Why it's Not a Problem

VEENU MANOHARAN  
*theconversation.com*

Most vaccines have side-effects and COVID vaccines are no different. The public are being reassured that if they experience a sore arm where the needle went in, or tiredness, a headache, fever or nausea, these are merely signs that the immune system is working as it should. This has left some people wondering: if that's the immune system doing what it's supposed to do, does a lack of side-effects mean my immune system hasn't been primed to protect me?

Rest assured, it means no such thing. The vaccine clinical trials conducted by Pfizer show that 50% of the participants did not experience significant side-effects during the trial, yet 90% of the participants developed immunity against the virus. And the advice on the Moderna vaccine says that common side-effects may be experienced by one in ten people, yet the vaccine protects 95% of those who take it.

This can be explained by considering the way the immune system develops protective immunity against viruses when triggered to do so by a vaccine. Most COVID vaccines, including several that have been authorised, use a viral protein found on the outer envelope of the coronavirus, known as the spike protein, to mimic a natural viral infection and initiate an immune response.

The branch of the immune re-

sponse known as innate immunity responds almost immediately to the viral spike protein. It launches an attack against it by initiating inflammation, the cardinal signs of which are fever and pain. So it's the innate immune response that causes the common side-effects that people ex-



perience a day or two after they've had the jab.

Long-lasting specific immunity, which is the ultimate goal of any vaccination, is achieved only by activating the second branch of the immune response: adaptive immunity. Adaptive immunity is triggered with the aid of the innate immune components and results in the generation of T cells and antibodies, which protect against infection on subsequent exposure to the virus.

Unlike innate immunity, adaptive

immunity can't initiate inflammation, though recent studies suggest that it can contribute to it significantly. In some people, this inflammatory response by both the innate and adaptive immune systems is exaggerated and manifests as a side-effect. In others, although it is working normally, it

study, 79% of reports of side-effects were from women. This sex bias could have something to do with testosterone. Testosterone tends to dampen inflammation and hence the side-effects associated with it. Men have more testosterone than women, which might contribute to fewer reports of side-effects in men.

People suffering from chronic inflammatory diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease and multiple sclerosis, who are on immunosuppressive drugs to control their symptoms, may experience fewer side-effects due to a dampened inflammatory response. Although the immune response is dampened, it does not mean that it is nonexistent. In a 2020 study that compared antibody levels in people who were on immunosuppressive drugs to those who were not, it was determined that people on

immunosuppressive drugs produced lower levels of antibody but none of them were devoid of antiviral antibodies.

Vaccine side-effects shouldn't be taken as a measure of the effectiveness of the vaccine. Despite the varied immune response to vaccines, most people achieve immunity against the coronavirus on vaccination, regardless of the presence, absence and severity of side-effects.

*[the writer is Lecturer of Immunology, Cardiff Metropolitan University]*

is not at levels that can cause noticeable side-effects. Either way, immunity against the virus is established.

### WHAT CAUSES A DIFFERENT IMMUNE RESPONSE?

Scientists have noticed that people above the age of 65 are having fewer side-effects to the vaccine. This can be attributed to the gradual age-related decline in immune activity. Although this has can be related to lower antibody levels they still have immunity against the virus.

Sex can also play a role. In a US



# Low pay, excessive work and poor morale leave Nepal Police with staff shortage

SHUVAM DHUNGANA

**KATHMANDU, 27 APR [KATHMANDUPOST]:** With the government's appeal to the general public to observe safety measures to check the spread of the pandemic, Nepal Police on Monday detained hundreds in Kathmandu Valley and gave them a 20-minute awareness class on the dangers of not wearing a mask in public.

Prohibitory orders in the Valley have been announced from Thursday midnight. This too will be enforced by the police.

But Nepal Police is short staffed.

Of the 9,440 positions vacant in the 72,000-strong police force, most are for new recruits, whether they are constables or higher ranking officers.

According to both serving and former police officials the primary reason for such a huge number of vacant posts in Nepal Police is that people do not wish to join the force as they are compelled to do excessive work for a limited salary.

"Police officers are supposed to maintain law and order in the country by protecting members of the public and their property, preventing crime, reducing the fear of crime; however in Nepal, police officers' job is not limited to maintaining peace; they are given many other tasks which do not fall under policing," said former Deputy Inspector General Hemantha Malla.

He said the police are the first responders when there is a fire, they clear roads during landslides and floods, they relocate victims of natural disasters and enforce lockdowns and prohibitory orders.

"They basically do what other government agencies do not," said Malla.

When the Post contacted some lower ranking police officers to get their views about their job many agreed with Malla.

"I joined the police force two years ago in the hope of becoming a good investigator by solving crimes. However, after joining I realised police work is not



just limited to solving crimes, we have to do many other works too," a police constable told the post on condition of anonymity because he feared retribution for speaking out. "From clearing blocked roads during the monsoon to controlling forest fires in summer, we are mobilised in all these activities."

"We have to work 24/7 in case of an emergency but the salary provided to us is very meager," said the officer.

He has thought of quitting but he does not see better alternatives, given the pandemic.

The lowest rung recruit makes only Rs25, 930 and this includes food and beverage allowance. The top cop—the inspector general of police—draws a monthly salary of Rs65,930.

The shortage of staff is not a new issue for Nepal Police. But at present call for new recruitments has not been made.

"The process for recruitment has not been started for a long time now because of the Covid-19 pandemic which has resulted in a staff shortage," said Senior Superintendent Basanta Bahadur Kunwar, spokesperson for the Nepal Police. "The vacancies have somehow hindered the operation and work of the police, as the low-ranking officers could feel more pressure due to insufficient manpower."

One of total vacancies, one is for the post of deputy inspector general, four for senior superintendents, three for superintendents, 17 for deputy superintendents, 200 for inspectors, 140 for sub-inspectors, 1,176 for assistant sub-inspectors, 166 for head constables, 7,617 for constables, and 116 for office assistants.

"To fill the vacancies, we promote junior officers after evaluating their performance and recruit new people in the vacant places," Kunwar said.

Though Kunwar claimed that the vacancy was due to Covid-19, in February last year when the country was not under lockdown, over 11,000 positions in Nepal Police were vacant. "Nepal Police work has become very overloaded, as they are often mobilised to finish other tasks which are not related to policing due to which not many people wish to join the force," said Malla. "Low-ranking officers follow the orders of their seniors very sincerely and do the duties assigned without questioning due to which they have to work beyond their range."

During the lockdown last year, police personnel were deployed to locate suspected Covid-positive cases and bring them to the designated health facilities for testing and treatment, all of which were apparently not their work, said Malla.

During the lockdown 'Hazard Allowance Management Order for Human

Resources Involved in the Treatment of Covid-19 Infection' was announced by the government, which was also published in the Nepal Gazette, promising risk allowances, up to 100 percent of the salary, to frontline workers including security personnel, doctors, nurses, paramedics, lab workers, ambulance drivers and helpers. However, when the Post talked to multiple officers to know about the allowance they denied having received anything besides salary.

Low pay, excessive work and poor morale has not only resulted in staff shortage in Nepal Police but also led to resignations by police officers. According to the data provided by the Nepal Police, in the past 33 months, a total of 5,792 police officials resigned their posts. Majority of resignations involved junior officers, data show.

"I left my job after I saw no future in it," said Kailash Karki, a former sub-inspector with the Central Investigation Bureau of Nepal Police who resigned in 2014 after working for eight years. "Despite working for eight years, I only got a promotion once. My salary was not enough to provide a good education and basic comforts to my children, so hoping for a better future, I applied for a dependent visa for Australia, where my wife lives."

"Not only me, many of my friends resigned due to reasons like discrimination in promotion, and meager salaries."

Police personnel stuck in low-level positions think looking for other careers is a better option than waiting for a promotion, which might never come. Many turn to work in the private sector, as security guards or bouncers, as a history in the police force tends to lend them credibility in their new jobs including jobs in foreign lands.

According to Karki, timely promotions, competitive salary, transfers, and training abroad could serve as motivational factors for police personnel to continue in their jobs.

## Minor fire breaks out in Kolkata Raj Bhavan

**KOLKATA, APR 27 (PTI):**

A minor fire broke out inside a hall on the third floor of Raj Bhavan here early on Tuesday, and it was doused in a matter of 20 minutes, a senior police officer said.

No one sustained any injury, the officer said.

One fire tender, which remains on standby outside the governor's house, was pressed into service to put out the fire in the south-western portion of the 19th century majestic building, he explained.

"The fire broke out in a hall on the third floor of the governor's house around 5.30 am. One fire tender was pressed into service and five other engines were readied for exigency, if any. It took just one fire tender to douse the flames. Nobody was injured," the officer said.

Some pillows, bed sheets and mattresses kept inside the hall were damaged, he said, adding, a preliminary probe has suggested that an electrical short-circuit led to the fire.

## United Nations special rapporteurs urge Nepal to rectify the appointments in the National Human Rights Commission



**KATHMANDU, 27 APR [KATHMANDUPOST]:** The United Nations special rapporteurs on the different thematic groups have urged the Nepal government to rectify the appointments in the National Human Rights Commission.

Issuing a joint statement on Tuesday the nine special rapporteurs said the recent appointment of the chairperson and the members in the commission is inconsistent with international standards.

"We are deeply concerned that the appointment process is not in line with international standards and that it undermines the independence, integrity and legitimacy of the NHRC, which restricts the ability of the people of Nepal to access appropriate remedies for alleged human rights violations," the rapporteurs said in the statement. "This will have a chilling effect on civil society actors."

The statement comes a month after the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions raised similar concerns.

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights serves as the secretariat of the alliance which has 127 members.

"This appointment process has failed to implement the essential requirements of the Paris Principles, including the need for an open, transparent and participatory process with broad consultations," they said.

Adopted in 1993 by the United Nations General Assembly, the Paris Principles set six criteria that national human rights institutions need to follow. These include autonomy from the government and the independence guaranteed by the constitution besides adequate competence, pluralism and the availability of resources and powers to canary out investigations.

Those issuing the statement includes Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, special rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association; Tae-Ung Baik (Chair), Henrikas Mickevicius (Vice-Chair), Aua Balde, Bernard Duhaime and Luciano Hazan, Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Mary Lawlor, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Diego García-Sayán, special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; Nils Melzer, special rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

On February 3, President Bidya Devi Bhandari administered the oath of office to the chair and the four commissioners of the Human Rights Commission along with 27 other appointees to various constitutional bodies.

The Constitutional Council, headed by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, had made a total of 38 recommendations on December 15 after amending the Constitu-

tional Council (Functions, Duties, and Procedures) Act through ordinance, allowing the council to recommend names in the presence of its majority members.

Speaker of the House of Representatives Agni Sapkota and Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, the leader of the opposition in the House, had boycotted the meeting that made the recommendations.

The constitutional provision that parliamentary hearings must be conducted for the appointments was not followed as Oli went on to dissolve the House on December 20.

In the absence of hearings, the candidates could be appointed 45 days after their names were recommended to the President.

The rapporteurs said the recent appointments had also failed to adhere to domestic law as enshrined in the Constitution of Nepal and noted that authorities had shown unwarranted haste in avoiding crucial processes such as the parliamentary hearing.

"We call on the Government to reverse the appointments to the Constitutional bodies and facilitate a new process marked by openness, transparency, broad consultation and participation," they said. "The independence and impartiality of the Commission are vital for the effective functioning of a democratic State based on the rule of law."

## Night Curfew imposed in Assam from tonight amid rise in COVID-19 sases

**GUWAHATI, 27 APR [NDTV]:**

A night curfew has been imposed in Assam from 8 pm to 5 am, starting today, to control the surge of the coronavirus cases. The curfew will be in place till May 1, an order by the state authority said.

"The COVID-19 situation in Assam has been reviewed... In view of the rapid increase in the number of active cases, it's felt that night curfew needs to be imposed in all districts of Assam, except for essential and emergency activities/services," an order by the Assam State Disaster Management Authority said.

Barring a few exceptions, movement of individuals will not be allowed during the curfew period. The order further stated there won't be any



restrictions on the movement of people involved in essential services and commodities like groceries, fruits, vegetables, milk, meat and fish, fodder and medicines.

The state government has also ordered all market places and shops to shut by 6 pm, and face mask has been made compulsory for everyone. The order further

said that legal actions will be taken against any covid-norms violators under relevant sections of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and IPC.

Assam reported 15 fresh fatalities due to COVID-19 on Monday, while the total number of cases rose to 2,40,670 with 3,137 more people testing positive for the disease.

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## Australian Olympians to be given COVID-19 vaccine priority

**SYDNEY (AP):** Australian athletes and support staff preparing for the Tokyo Olympics will be given priority for vaccines.

The Australian government on Tuesday said members of the Olympic team would be vaccinated under a priority group which includes health-care workers, Indigenous people aged over 55 and people older than 70.

The vaccination program for athletes and support staff will include about 2,000 people, including an estimated 450- 480 Olympic athletes.

Richard Colbeck, the government minister for senior Australians and aged care, said the decision would not come at the cost of at-risk Australians.

“While vulnerable Australians remain an absolute priority as the vaccine rollout continues, National Cabinet understands the pressure our high-performance athletes have been facing as the Tokyo Games draw closer,” Colbeck said in a statement.

Some 1,969,337 vaccine doses have been administered in Australia, 205,203 of which were given in aged and disability care facilities.

Members of the Olympic contingent aged over 50 will receive the AstraZeneca vaccine, while those under 50 will be given the Pfizer vaccine.

Australian Olympic Committee chief executive Matt Carroll said the team would be vaccinated outside of the public health program “to ensure the vaccination of our athletes does not place any additional load on the public system.”

“There will be hundreds of very grateful athletes, coaches and their families relieved to know that their hard work over five years has been worth it,” he said in a statement. “This added layer of assurance is what they were seeking.”

Nearby New Zealand announced last month that athletes competing in events of national significance could get early access to a coronavirus vaccine.

Athletes traveling to Japan for the Tokyo Olympics will be required to stay within a “bubble” consisting of the official accommodation, venues and training areas and will be tested for the coronavirus before and during their stay, but there is no requirement to be vaccinated ahead of competition.

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# Timberwolves beat Jazz for 3rd time this season, 105-104



**MINNEAPOLIS (AP):** D'Angelo Russell had a season-high seven 3-pointers and scored 27 points, and Karl-Anthony Towns had 21 points and 11 rebounds as the Minnesota Timberwolves rallied to beat the Utah Jazz 105-104 on Monday night.

Mike Conley gave Utah a 104-103 lead with 6.4 seconds left, but Ricky Rubio found Russell for a layup on the ensuing possession. Conley then lost the ball in a scramble on the Jazz's final possession as time expired.

“We got the job done,” Towns said. “Our physicality was there. The discipline was there. Execution was there. The defensive effort keeping them to 104 points tonight. I think last game it was 98, I believe. You can't ask for much more on the defensive end.”

Minnesota, which started the day tied for the second-fewest wins in the NBA, handed the league-leading Jazz another loss. The Timberwolves (18-44) went 3-0 against Utah (44-17) this season.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, it's the first time in NBA history a team with a win percentage below .300 swept a series of at least three games against a team with a win percentage of at least .700.

Anthony Edwards added 14 points for Minnesota,

which has won four of its last six games.

“We're building, gives us something to build on,” Russell said. “We got all the excuses in the world to say why we're not what we're supposed to be. But just the taste of us winning here and there, us executing down the stretch, something to build on, just taking those small positives out of each game, especially when we win.”

Conley had 26 points and Rudy Gobert added 18 points

for Utah. The Jazz, playing their fifth straight game without leading scorer Donovan Mitchell, have lost three of five. Utah shot 38.9% from the field and 16 of 57 (28.1%) from 3-point range against Minnesota.

“I don't know if concern would be the word that I would choose to use, but certainly you want to win,” Jazz coach Quin Snyder said. “I'd be concerned if we didn't compete. I'd like to have executed better on the two possessions.

But again, that's something we have to do the same way I mentioned the other night; we have to rebound and we have to take care of the ball.”

The Jazz looked set to avenge a 101-96 loss to the Wolves in Utah on Saturday. They closed the first quarter on a 30-12 run and led by 18 points early in the second period. Then, just like it did Saturday, Minnesota came back in the second.

Russell got the cold-shooting Wolves started. He scored

15 points in the second and hit six 3s in the first half. He connected on three straight from beyond the arc to finish off a 32-9 run that gave Minnesota the lead.

The Wolves led by as many as 13 in the fourth before the Jazz closed strong.

“It's never going to be all good and all bad,” Gobert said. “We just got to find ways to put ourself in position to win every night. I thought we did that tonight. I thought we did that last game.”

### TIP-INS

Jazz: Mitchell missed his fifth straight game with a right ankle sprain. Utah is 5-3 without Mitchell this season. ... Joe Ingles started the day with a league-best 48.7% shooting percentage from 3. He finished 3 of 13 from beyond the arc on Monday.

Timberwolves: Russell's six 3s tied a franchise record for most 3s in a half. The franchise record for made 3-pointers in a game is eight, last done by Kevin Love in 2013. ... Minnesota came back from down 17 points on Saturday in Utah, its third-largest comeback of the season. The Wolves have come back from at least 15 points five times since the All-Star break.

### RUSSELL'S RETURN

Russell missed two months as he recovered from knee surgery and he's come off the bench since his return. In the 12 games since returning, Russell is scoring 20 points per game. He's shooting 48.5% from the field and 44.7% from 3.

His 20 points and 11 assists on Monday make him the third Wolves player to have a 20-point, 10-assist game off the bench.

### UP NEXT

Jazz: Continue their three-game trip on Wednesday at Sacramento.

Timberwolves: Travel to Houston to finish a back-to-back on Tuesday.

## Suns snap Knicks' nine-game win streak with 118-110 victory

**NEW YORK (AP):** Playing for the second straight day to finish a cross-country trip featuring the toughest tests in the East, Devin Booker told his coach he was ready to play the whole fourth quarter.

“We wanted this one. We wanted this one bad, just for ourselves,” Booker said. “I mean obviously we knew about the streak that they had going on and we knew that this was going to be a dogfight.”

Booker and Chris Paul made sure the Suns won it.

Booker scored 33 points and Phoenix capped its trip with a 118-110 victory Monday night that snapped the New York Knicks' nine-game winning streak.

Paul scored the final seven Phoenix points as the Suns held on to finish 3-2 on their trip that included visits to the top four teams in the Eastern Conference.

Beaten a day earlier by Brooklyn, they fell down by 15 quickly inside Madison Square Garden but refused to stay down.

“Everybody was messing with the young guys before the game like, this ain't just a regular game,” Paul said. “With the way that team's playing over there, this was a fun game.” Mikal Bridges added 21 points, Paul had 20 and Cameron Johnson hit three 3-pointers in the final period after the game was tied at 87 through three.

But even after going ahead by nine with 2:53 to play, the Suns couldn't finish it off until Paul hit a couple jumpers — the second to barely beat the shot clock — and then a

3-pointer with 14.5 seconds remaining to close out the win.

Derrick Rose had 22 points, six rebounds and six assists for the Knicks, who were on their longest winning streak since a 13-game run late in the 2012-13 season. Julius Randle scored 18 points but was off his form from most of the streak, shooting just 6 for 17 with six rebounds and four assists.

The Suns started their trip by beating Milwaukee and Philadelphia, but then fell in Boston and Brooklyn, giving them consecutive losses for the first time since a three-game skid in late January.

It appeared they might be headed for another when the Knicks made 18 of their first 25 shots, taking a 44-29 lead. Phoenix didn't lead until 1:31 remained in the third quarter, but Bridges and Johnson got hot in the fourth to send the Suns in front and Paul kept them there.

“You can't have the type of record that they have without being a high-quality team, so you're not going to beat them just playing well for 12 minutes. That's not going to get it done,” Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. “So it's going to be a street fight and you've got to compete.”

### TIP-INS

Suns: Phoenix was again without Jae Crowder and Dario Saric because of ankle injuries. ... For the second straight day, Suns coach Monty Williams wore an FDNY hat before the game. He said he purchased it on a visit to the city's 9/11 Memorial over the weekend. He said he's always

been a fan of firemen. “I just wanted to get a hat so I can remember and never forget what they do for us every day, but especially what happened in our country years ago,” Williams said.

Knicks: RJ Barrett and Reggie Bullock each scored 17 points. ... Randle averaged 30.1 points, 9.1 rebounds and 6.2 assists during the streak.

### COACHING COLLEAGUES

Thibodeau and Williams coached against each other for the first time since they served as assistant coaches to Mike Krzyzewski on the 2016 U.S. Olympic team. Williams said they became good friends during their stint, which also included the 2014 Basketball World Cup in Spain, adding that Thibodeau gave him a favorite gift, without specifying what it was.

“We just had a really good time together and I learned a ton from him,” Williams said. “He's a brilliant basketball coach.”

### PAUL AND THE PRESIDENT

Paul chatted before the game with Knicks President Leon Rose, his former agent. Asked about the Knicks' interest in acquiring Paul last offseason before he ended up in Phoenix, Thibodeau joked: “Well, I don't think he liked the president here.”

“A player like that, look at what stage he's at in his career,” Thibodeau added. “He's looking at what might be the best fit for him and he's earned it. He's had an incredible career.”

### UP NEXT

Suns: Host the Clippers on Wednesday.

Knicks: Host Chicago on Wednesday.

## Bayern appoints Leipzig coach Nagelsmann to replace Flick

**MUNICH (AP):** Bayern Munich hired Leipzig coach Julian Nagelsmann on Tuesday to replace the departing Hansi Flick starting next season.

The 33-year-old Nagelsmann will move to Bayern on July 1 with a contract that runs through 2026. Bayern said it agreed to terminate Flick's contract after he asked to be released early.

Leipzig didn't say how much it received as compensation from Bayern, but CEO Oliver Mintzlaff said the club was “successful in obtaining our financial goals.”

Nagelsmann grew up near Munich and came through the youth system at another club in the city.

“The position at FC Bayern is a unique opportunity for me. I would therefore like to thank Oliver Mintzlaff and the rest of the board at RB Leipzig for finding a solution with FC Bayern and making this possible for me,” Nagelsmann said.

Nagelsmann has been with Leipzig for three years and led the team to the Champions League semifinals in 2020. Leipzig is in second place behind Bayern in the Bundesliga standings and has reached the semifinals of the German Cup.

Nagelsmann was the youngest head coach in league history when he took over at Hoffenheim at the age of 28 in 2016. The team then qualified for the Champions



League for the first time in its history. Nagelsmann was a professional player but moved into coaching when his career ended early because of knee injuries.

“Julian Nagelsmann signifies a new generation of coaches,” Bayern president Herbert Hainer said. “Despite his young years, he has already built an impressive career. We are convinced that we will build on the great successes of recent years together with Julian Nagelsmann.”

Bayern was forced to look for a new coach after Flick said this month he wanted to leave the club despite having a contract through 2023. Flick won the league, German Cup and Champions League last season with Bayern and is on the verge of another league title.

Bayern will secure the Bundesliga title if it wins its next game on May 8 against Borussia Mönchengladbach or if Leipzig loses to Borussia Dortmund the same day.

Bayern initially appointed Flick

## Liverpool reports losses of \$64M as pandemic takes effect

**LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND (AP):** Liverpool reported a pre-tax loss of 46 million pounds (\$64 million) for the last financial year, mainly because of the impact the coronavirus outbreak had on the English champion's media revenue and matchday income.

The losses for the financial year ending May 2020, a period covering the first three months of the pandemic when the Premier League was suspended, equated to a negative swing of 88

million pounds (\$122 million) from Liverpool's position a year ago.

Media income dropped by 59 million pounds (\$82 million) and the four fewer Premier League home games during this period saw matchday revenue decrease by 13 million pounds (\$18 million).

Commercial revenue rose by 29 million pounds (\$40 million) to 217 million pounds (\$300 million) on the back of eight new partnerships being an-

nounced. In March 2020, Liverpool announced a profit of 42 million pounds (\$58 million), the fifth time in the previous six years the club had been in the black under its American ownership, Fenway Sports Group.

“We were in a solid financial position prior to the pandemic and since this reporting period we have continued to manage our costs effectively and navigate our way through such an unprecedented period,” Liverpool

managing director Andy Hughes said. “We can now look ahead to the conclusion of this season and hopefully a more normal start to next season.”

FSG, which has been heavily criticized by Liverpool fans for its involvement in helping to form the ill-fated European Super League, sold a 10% share of its business to private investment firm RedBird Capital for 543 million pounds (\$750 million) last month.



# Hungarian traveling circus stays fit for post-COVID opening

**BUDAPEST, HUNGARY (AP):** Human and four-legged performers alike are preparing to bring Hungary’s largest traveling circus back on the road after the COVID-19 pandemic halted its shows for more than a year.

From its offseason home in Sada, a small village just outside the capital, Budapest, the Florian Richter Circus is holding rehearsals in cautious anticipation of when performances may begin again.

A state of emergency was declared in Hungary only a day before the troupe was to begin its spring season last year, and pandemic restrictions limiting events and public gatherings have meant the circus hasn’t brought in any income since.

“It has been almost a year and a half now with nothing. Obviously I have to think as a businessman, as an artist, and as a father at the same time,” said Florian Richter, the circus’ owner. “I’m the motor of this circus, so



can’t give up, I can’t get emotional.” In addition to human performers, nearly 50 different animals, including Indian elephant Sandra, eight camels, five zebras, three ponies and 32 horses, make up the members of the troupe. Feeding the animals and paying their handlers has used up almost all of the circus’ financial reserves, and Richter said he still don’t know when pandemic rules will allow performances to resume.

“It’s all money, money, money. Lots of money has to be spent because a ranch of this size costs a lot to maintain,” he said.

The human performers must also remain fit, both physically and mentally, so they can jump into action as soon as restrictions are lifted. Circus artist Kevin Richter, Florian’s son, said he and the troupe’s other acrobats have held rehearsals throughout the pandemic “to be ready for any opening.”

“It’s very difficult for all the members. It is

not easy to train without knowing what will happen tomorrow or even next month,” he said during a break in his acrobatic group’s training. “We used this time to practice new acts, to keep ourselves fit for any possibility of a premiere.”

Hungary in recent weeks has started lifting its pandemic restrictions following a successful vaccination campaign. A further relaxation of rules is expected in coming days, even as deaths and infections remain high.

While the circus troupe hopes to be able to go forward with its traditional July 1 summer premiere, its two-legged members realize that the course of the pandemic could result in yet another lost season.

“The virus situation may be such that it will be canceled, but not being ready isn’t an option for us,” Richter said. “This is what gives the whole team the energy and the motivation to stay united. Our aim is to present the country’s best traveling circus show.”

# Islamic State degraded in Afghanistan but still poses threat

**KABUL, AFGHANISTAN (AP):** Tribal elder Dawlat Khan still has nightmares about fighters from the local affiliate of the global Islamic State terror network who swept across his and other villages in eastern Afghanistan five years ago.

The extremists, including Afghans, Pakistanis, Arabs and men from Central Asia, quickly imposed a reign of terror. They kidnapped some locals who worked for the Afghan government, later dropping off their decapitated corpses in public places. In one instance, villagers were summoned to a beheading where some fainted while others froze as they watched in horror.

Militants of the Islamic State group have since been driven back into the mountains by blistering U.S. and Afghan bombing raids and a fierce ground campaign by the Taliban, Afghanistan’s homegrown insurgents. The Taliban, eager to expand their domestic political power, pledged to the Trump administration last year they would prevent any attacks on the West from Afghan soil after foreign troops leave.

Recent success in containing IS is central to the calculus of President Joe Biden, who decided earlier this month to pull all remaining U.S. troops out of Afghanistan by the summer. Biden argues that threats to the West, whether by IS or remnants of the al-Qaida network, can be defused from a distance.

Yet there are concerns that in the potential chaos of a post-withdrawal Afghanistan, IS “will be able to find additional space to operate,” said Seth Jones, senior vice-president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Some note that it took more than three years to dislodge and degrade IS fighters, many of them ethnic Pashtuns from Pakistan’s tribal regions and Afghans from the northeastern Nangarhar and Kunar provinces. The retreating militants left behind mined roads and fields.

Khan, the tribal leader, fled his village of Pananzai with his six brothers and their families at the height of the battles against IS. They’re not rushing home, even though the family of 63 people is crammed into nine small rooms in Nangarhar’s provincial capital of Jalalabad.

“We are afraid they will return,” Khan, a father of 12, said of IS fighters.

Biden has said he will hold the Taliban accountable for their commitment not to allow terror threats against the U.S. or its allies from Afghan soil. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan 20 years ago after al-Qaida militants, hosted by the Taliban, staged the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

In recent years, Washington has come to see the Taliban as a national force, with no ambitions beyond their borders, according to a U.S. defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

The Taliban, familiar with mountain caves and dirt paths in remote terrain, are a useful ally against IS, which is viewed by the U.S. as the greatest threat emanating from Afghanistan, the official said.

In justifying his withdrawal decision, Biden noted that terror threats are “metastasizing around the globe” and that “keeping thousands of troops grounded and concentrated in just one country, at the cost of billions each year, makes little sense to me and our leaders.”

The withdrawal is under way, with the final phase starting Saturday. By Sept. 11, America will have withdrawn its last 2,500 to 3,500 troops, and about 7,000 allied forces from NATO are following the same timetable.

But there are concerns about IS re-emerging, particularly if the Taliban and the Afghan government can’t reach a power-sharing deal. Intra-Afghan peace talks remain stalled, despite U.S. efforts to jump start them.

Ongoing fighting between the Taliban and the government could further erode the morale



of Afghanistan’s 300,000-plus security forces who sustain heavy casualties daily and are plagued by widespread corruption. It’s unclear how the troops can be a bulwark against new terrorist threats.

At the same time, IS continues to recruit among radicalized university students and disgruntled Taliban, said a former Afghan security official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters.

IS has also resumed a campaign of targeted killings of minority Shiite Muslims, many of them ethnic Hazaras, as well as women’s rights activists and media workers. They claimed attacks last year on two educational facilities, including Kabul University, that killed more than 50 students. Washington blamed IS for a brutal assault last year on a maternity hospital in a largely Hazara neighborhood of Kabul. Infants and pregnant women were killed.

In March, seven Hazaras who worked in a stucco factory in the eastern city of Jalalabad were killed in an attack claimed by IS. The assailants tied their victims’ hands behind their backs and shot each with a single bullet to the back of the head.

Some residents there are afraid to point the finger at IS, fearing they might be targeted next.

IS operatives are said to occupy an entire neighborhood near the central Talashi roundabout. They have infiltrated the motorized rickshaw business and use the vehicles for targeted killings, said taxi driver Said Jan.

Evan Kohlmann, a terrorism consultant, said for a while it appeared the IS presence in Afghanistan and surrounding regions “was all but dead,” but the group’s operations “have since resumed in earnest.”

“They represent a significant terrorist threat, but their tactics remain in the realm of assassination and sabotage,” said Kohlmann, who has worked with the FBI and the Nine Eleven Finding Answers Foundation that emerged following the assaults on America.

“They don’t seem to be in a strong position of conquering and holding territory,” or of threatening the U.S., he said.

The Taliban say they have made good on promises to the U.S. by ordering fighters to keep non-Afghans from their ranks, and telling al-Qaida to leave the region. Some analysts say they’re not convinced the Taliban have distanced themselves from groups like al-Qaida.

U.S. officials, meanwhile, acknowledge the withdrawal will reduce Washington’s intelligence gathering capacities, even if IS and al-Qaida aren’t in a position to attack U.S. targets from Afghanistan.

Asfandiyar Mir at Stanford University’s Center for International Security and Cooperation said the U.S. will be able to continue technical eaves-dropping from a distance, while on-the-ground intelligence gathering will weaken further.

“The U.S. campaign in Afghanistan has been notoriously poor at getting good information and being played by rent-seeking actors, the cost of which is borne by innocent civilians in raids and strikes gone wrong,” said Mir.

“With U.S. forces out, and unable to provide security to potential informers, existing sources will dwindle and opportunities for bad actors to dupe the U.S. will grow,” he said.

# In Africa, vaccine hesitancy adds to slow rollout of doses

**KAMPALA, UGANDA (AP):** Some Africans are hesitating to get COVID-19 vaccines amid concerns about their safety, alarming public health officials as some countries start to destroy thousands of doses that expired before use.

Malawi and South Sudan in recent days have said they will destroy some of their doses, a concerning development on a continent where health officials have been outspoken about the need for vaccine equity as the world’s rich nations hold the bulk of shots.

Africa, whose 1.3 billion people represent 16% of the world’s population, has received less than 2% of the COVID-19 vaccine doses administered around the world, according to the World Health Organization.

The continent has confirmed more than 4.5 million COVID-19 cases, including 120,000 deaths, a tiny fraction of the global fatalities and caseload. But some experts worry that the 54-nation continent will suffer in the long term if it takes longer than expected to meet the threshold scientists believe is needed to stop uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 — 70% or higher of the population having immunity through vaccination or past infection.

Africa seeks to vaccinate up to 60% of its people by the end of 2022.

Achieving that goal will require about 1.5 billion vaccine doses for Africa if the two-shot AstraZeneca vaccine continues to be widely used. But safety concerns relating to that vaccine, often the main shot available under the donor-backed COVAX program to ensure access for developing countries, have left some Africans worried.

Vaccine-related suspicions have been spread widely on social media, driven partly by a general lack of trust in authorities. Uganda’s health minister had to refute allegations she faked receiving a shot, even posting a video of herself getting the jab on Twitter, along with the admonition: “Please stop spreading fake news!” Some have raised the untrue claim that the shots can cause infertility on sites such as WhatsApp. Others openly question the speed with which COVID-19 vaccines have been developed.

“The world has failed to find a vaccine for AIDS all these years, but they quickly found a vaccine for COVID? I am not going to go for that vaccine,” said Richard Bbale, an electrician in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, voicing fear that an experimental vaccine could be harmful. “Even if the government forces us to get the vaccine as if it’s a national ID, I will not go.”

Austin Demby, Sierra Leone’s health minister, told reporters last week that a third of the 96,000 doses the country received in March will likely not be used before they expire, citing a lack of urgency among some people who decided that COVID-19 is “not as bad as Ebola,” which ravaged the country several years ago.

“People are worried this is another public experiment they want to make on our people,” he said.

The World Health Organization and the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have urged African governments to continue rolling out the AstraZeneca vaccine, saying its benefits outweigh any risks after European countries limited its use over concerns about rare blood clots in a small number of recipients. “Anything you take has a risk. Any medication,” Africa CDC director John Nkengasong told a briefing last week, citing some essential drugs that can cause blood clots in rare cases. “That’s the way we should be looking at these vaccines.”

The Africa CDC said in a statement last week it had received guidance from the Serum Institute of India recommending a three-month “shelf life extension” on the April 13 expiration date of at least a million AstraZeneca shots delivered to Africa.

Africa nations “don’t have a choice,” Nkengasong said, urging Malawi to use all its shots after authorities in the southern African nation said they would burn 16,000 AstraZeneca doses that expired earlier in April.

It is unclear if Malawi will follow that advice. The country has administered less than half of more than 500,000 doses it received via COVAX, leading Victor Mithi, head of the Society of Medical Doctors in Malawi, to blame vaccine misconceptions.

“We are continuously assuring Malawians that the vaccine is safe and that once they feel anything abnormal beyond the usual post-vaccination symptoms, they can always come to the hospital and report,” he said.

An additional 1.26 million doses expected from COVAX at the end of May may be wasted if people continue shunning the vaccine, said Shouts Simeza, president of the National Organization of Nurses and Midwives in Malawi, adding that a possible solution is making vaccinations mandatory for all who are eligible.

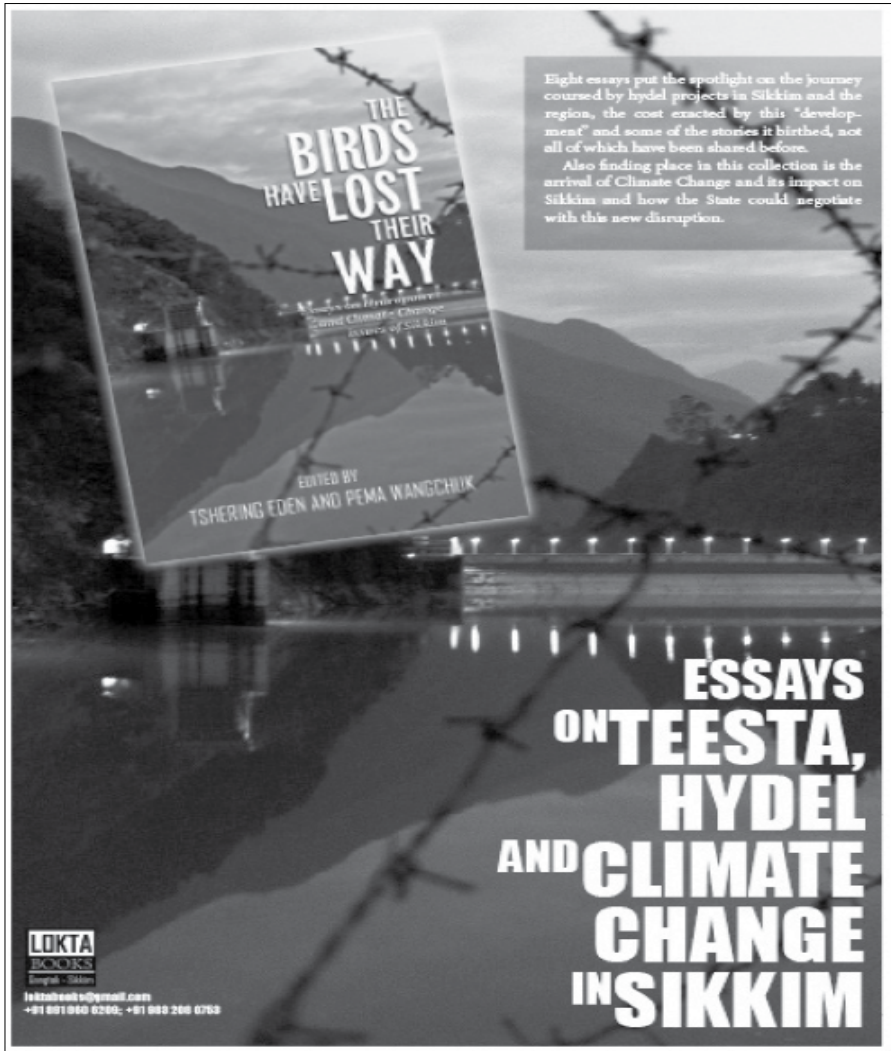
Trying to increase coverage, Malawi’s government has relaxed vaccine eligibility rules to include everyone aged 18 and older after initially focusing on priority groups such as health workers.

The East African nation of Uganda, which also is struggling to increase vaccine rollout among priority groups, may soon act similarly, said Emmanuel Ainebyoona, spokesman for the Ministry of Health. Ugandans under age 50 have shown interest in getting vaccinated, raising hope that doses will not expire unused, he said.

Uganda has received 964,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, the only one available in the country. But just over 230,000 doses have been administered since March 10.

Health authorities had planned to give at least 500,000 people their first shot in a first round of vaccinations targeting front-line workers, people with underlying health conditions and those 50 and older. But, amid a slow rollout, they are now reaching out to popular “influencers,” celebrities such as a kick-boxer who was photographed getting a shot last week.

“The uptake is gradually improving,” Ainebyoona said, noting that “communications interventions” have proved necessary to get more Ugandans to embrace the vaccination campaign.







**AND THAT'S THE TEA!** The Games of Thrones actress, Sophie Turner enjoys a lunch date with hubby Joe Jonas at San Vicente Bungalows in LA.

## Justin Bieber Accused of Cultural Appropriation for Wearing Dreadlocks

Justin Bieber is facing renewed accusations of cultural appropriation after debuting dreadlocks this weekend, a hairstyle he previously sported in 2016.

Justin Bieber is facing accusations of cultural appropriation after he shared photos of himself sporting dreadlocks.

The singer debuted the look in a picture shared to Instagram on Sunday, April 25. The next day, Justin shared another photo of himself in a checkered shirt and a pink pearl necklace.

After Justin shared the photos, fans voiced disapproval of the hairstyle, with one Instagram user writing, "This is not it Justin."

Another person remarked on Twitter, "so @scooterbraun you and your client @justinbieber post BLM for days and talking about being an ally or educating y'all's selves but turn around to do this foolery very performative i'm sick of y'all."

Dreads, also known as locs, are historically worn by members of the Black community, who have faced discrimination for the hairstyle.

And this isn't the first time Justin has been called out for wearing locs.

In 2016, Justin faced heavy criticism for wearing his hair in dreadlocks at the iHeartRadio Music Awards. Shortly after, he shaved his hair down to remove the dreads, but not

without issuing a statement.

"Dude, are you gonna do anything with your hair or are you just gonna leave it like that, dude?" Yeah, some girl came up to me, like, "I love you Justin, but like, that's like my least favorite of yours," the singer said in a Jeff Spicoli-like surfer accent.

He captioned that video, "Being weird is fun' if u r not weird I don't like you."

The accusations of cultural appropriation come after the pop star was criticized for using the Black Lives Matter movement to promote his album, Justice. Justin opened the project with a recording of Martin Luther King Jr. saying, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," before an instrumental song titled "MLK Interlude" plays.

Listeners of the album struggled to connect the civil rights leader's message to the lyrics of the other songs, particularly the song "2 Much," which is about his love for Hailey Bieber.

However, King's daughter Bernice A. King said that she supports the singer's message of solidarity, writing on Twitter last month, "Each of us, including artists and entertainers, can do something. Thank you @JustinBieber, for your support in honor of #Justice, of @TheKingCenter's work and of our #BeLove campaign, which is a part of our global movement for justice #MLK #EndRacism."

choosing to focus on the silver linings. You're making a conscious effort to power through it all by grounding yourself in spiritual practices, repeating mantras (or affirmations) and sending out waves and waves of gratitude. The good thing is, your soul crew is by your side, holding your hand as you walk through the fire.

Tip: It's time to power through it all.

Cancer:

What you're experiencing right now is so much more than a textbook romance, Cancer. It's the kind that fills you with a zest for life and makes the room reverberate with joy and laughter. You may or may not be able to explain this connection to those around you, and that's okay. The new you has let go of the need to justify your bold choices.

Tip: It's all about soul connections in the Cancer HQ.

Leo:

It's a 'thoughts to things' kind of day in your world. You're watching your desires come to life in front of your eyes, and it's giving you all the feels, Leo. But that doesn't mean everything is picture-perfect. N-uh! It simply means that you're choosing to focus on the silver linings, which is bringing about a magnificent shift in your reality. What's more, your soul connections too are thriving under the influence of this full moon, providing you with a sanctuary

## JoJo Siwa Breaks Down in Tears Over the "Reality of Long Distance" With Girlfriend Kylie

In a video posted to Instagram, JoJo Siwa cried while reflecting on the struggles of her long distance relationship, saying, "It's very very hard, but it's the most worth it ever."

JoJo Siwa loves her girlfriend "to infinity and beyond," but their long distance relationship is proving to be difficult for the young couple.

JoJo, 17, took to her Instagram Story on Monday, April 26, with her eyes full of tears as she explained that she had to say goodbye to her girlfriend of nearly five months, Kylie Prew, after one of their trips.

The Dance Moms alum posted a tearful selfie and wrote, "I. Don't. Like. Saying. Goodbye." After fans worried the pair had broken up, JoJo cleared things up with a series of heartbreaking videos.

"You guys are confused on why I was crying on my last Story," she began. "Nothing happened. We just are long distance and we had to say goodbye today and I'm sad."

She said her emotional reaction isn't anything new: "It happens every time we say goodbye, and I wish we didn't have to ever. But we do. And it just makes the [times] when we get to say hi to each other even more special."

Before the influencer signed off to continue crying in private ("I'm gonna

keep doing this for a lot longer"), she wanted to put fans at ease that there's no trouble in paradise. It was simply a hard goodbye because JoJo lives in Los Angeles, while Kylie appears to call Florida home.



"I know you all were panicking for a second. But no need to panic," JoJo went on. "The reality of long distance: It's very very very hard, but it's the most worth it ever."

They've continued to grow closer during their dates to Disney World over the past few months.

The trips have also included bonding time with the parents. For her visit to Florida this weekend, JoJo was accompanied by her brother Jayden Siwa, dad Tom Siwa and mom Jessalynn Siwa.

Their itinerary included a breakfast

at Waffle House, bowling at Splitsville in Disney Springs and, of course, rides at Disney World with Kylie. JoJo later posted a picture of the partners embracing while sporting matching Buzz Light-year merch. In February, The J Team

star introduced her girlfriend to the world, saying, "I do have the most amazing, wonderful, perfect, most beautiful girlfriend in the whole world. It's not something I'm ashamed of, I just haven't shown the Internet yet. And there's always been speculations, of course, but I was like, I think this is gonna out me."

Kylie posted her own tribute to mark one month together, writing on Instagram, "fall in love with your best friend, guys. it's THE BEST feeling in the entire world. here's to one month with my favorite human :) i love you sharky."

## Judge tosses lawsuit of man who alleged Jackson molestation

**LOS ANGELES (AP):** A judge on Monday dismissed the lawsuit of a man who alleged that Michael Jackson sexually abused him as a boy.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Mark A. Young granted the Jackson estate's request to dismiss the suit brought in 2013 by Wade Robson. The judge said two Jackson entertainment corporations targeted by the lawsuit had no legal duty to protect Robson from Jackson.

"There is no evidence supporting plaintiff's contention that defendants exercised control over Jackson," the judge wrote. "The evidence further demonstrates that defendants had no legal ability to control Jackson, because Jackson had complete and total ownership of the corporate defendants."

The dismissal came after the judge dismissed a similar lawsuit in October by James Safechuck. Both men made their allegations in the HBO documentary "Leaving Neverland."

Vince Finaldi, attorney for Robson and Safechuck, said the ruling has "fatal flaws" and will be appealed. "If allowed to stand, the decision would set a dangerous precedent that would leave thousands of children working in the entertainment industry vulnerable to sexual abuse by persons in places of power," Finaldi said in a statement.

Robson, now a 38-year-old choreographer, met Jackson when he was 5 years old. He went on to appear in Jackson music videos and record music on his label. His lawsuit alleged that Jackson molested him over a seven-year period, and that as Jackson's employee, the two corporations Jackson had started had a duty to protect him the same way the Boy Scouts or a school would need to protect children from their leaders. But the judge found the corporations were merely legal entities that were con-

trolled by Jackson, not organizations that could control him. Another judge previously dismissed the lawsuits by Robson and Safechuck in 2017, finding the statute of limitations had expired. But an appeals court revived the legal actions in 2019 after California Gov. Gavin New-



som signed a new law giving those who allege childhood sexual abuse longer to file lawsuits.

The allegations gained new life when the two men repeated them in detail in "Leaving Neverland," a documentary that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and later aired on HBO. The Jackson estate has adamantly and repeatedly denied that he abused either of the boys, and brought a lawsuit against HBO that is now in private arbitration.

"Wade Robson has spent the last 8 years pursuing frivolous claims in different lawsuits against Michael Jackson's estate and companies associated with it," Jackson estate attorney Jonathan Steinsapir said in a statement after Monday's ruling. "Yet a judge has once again ruled that Robson's claims have no merit whatsoever, that no trial is necessary."

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they were victims of sexual abuse. But Robson and Safechuck have repeatedly come forward and approved of the use of their identities.

## Lizzo Teases More Details From Her Private Instagram Conversation With Chris Evans

Lizzo has blessed her fans with a major update in her and Chris Evans' Instagram exchange. Find out the swoon-worthy responses the Marvel actor wrote. Lizzo continues to bless fans with "good as hell" content.

A week after the Grammy winner revealed she slid into Chris Evans' DMs—and had the screenshots to prove it—she is spilling even more tea about what transpired after she made the first move.

Not only did the Avengers: Endgame actor respond to her cheeky messages, but it appears they had a full-on conversation. How are we so sure, you ask? On Saturday, April 24, the "Juice" singer took to TikTok to update her followers on the content they so desperately desired: Details of her and Chris' private messages.

In the short clip, the 33-year-old star flashed a screenshot of their DMs that seemingly showed a handful of their messages.

"No shame in a drunk DM god knows I've done worse on this app lol," the Knives Out star responded, to which she replied, "Well.. they say u miss 100% of the shots you never take, (and even tho I unsent it like a dork), I'm glad you know I exist now."

**Aries:**  
What to expect today: bold ideas that are emerging from that hidden place in your superconsciousness. These are no ordinary ideas, Aries. They have the potential to change the world and put you in a position of power. So, become a conduit for the forces and know that you were chosen for this mission for a reason. What not to expect, though: a pat on the back for every revolutionary move. If history is anything to go by, geniuses were misunderstood in their own time anyway.

Tip: You were chosen for this mission.

Taurus:

Your relationship is that perfect combination of love, empathy, compassion, and laughter. But that doesn't mean you always see eye to eye on all matters. It simply means that you've learned to prioritise what's really important: the invisible threads that bind you together. For single Taurus, the magic full moon could bring with itself a soulful connection, the kind that makes you believe in old school romance all over again.

Tip: You're honouring the invisible threads that bind you together.

Gemini:

It's a time of joy and laughter in the Gemini HQ. Don't be fooled, though. Things are looking anything but picture-perfect here. You are, however,

to retreat to in the midst of these uncertain times.

Tip: Thoughts to things.

Virgo:

Everything is perfectly imperfect, and you're perfectly okay with that. Sounds paradoxical? Well, isn't that what life is all about anyway? Tuesday sees you coming back to the present, making peace with the uncertainty, and trusting life more than you ever have. You do not know what your efforts are going to lead to, but you're committed towards showing up for your dreams in a manner that's consistent.

Tip: Stay in the present.

Libra:

All the world's a stage, Libra. All the world's simply a stage and you're growing tired of the many roles you have to play. Think of this as a time of introspection. A time of looking within, clearing the false programming, and becoming your true and most authentic self. The inner work is the kind you never get applauded for publicly, and that's okay. This is a journey you've undertaken for yourself.

Tip: Soul-searching is showing up as a big theme for you in this moment.

Scorpio:

Scorpios who've been going through ups and downs on the career front are being reminded that all is not

lost. There is a new opportunity on the cards and it requires you to bring your hustle on. So, work on that CV or application ASAP. It's a good idea to tailor it according to the role you have in mind and be detailed about what you can offer the organisation. Word for the wise: humility is overrated!

Tip: Update your CV, ASAP.

Sagittarius:

Sagittarius, you would put your superhero cape on and save the world if you could! But, you're learning that your goals are a tad bit unrealistic. The good thing is, you have the power to hold space for your tribe, check in on them often, be there for them in the best way possible and lend them a listening ear when things are looking uncertain. PS: The cards want you to stop underestimating all the ways in which you are bringing more light into this world.

Tip: You have the power to hold space for your tribe and check in on them often.

Capricorn:

It's easy to go into a downward spiral when things refuse to go as per our plan. But, you're at a point in your life when you're able to see the good, the bad and the ugly through the lens of neutrality and understand that it is all happening for a higher reason. The full moon in Scorpio is inspiring you to make peace with your past and trans-

mute the heavy emotions into the higher vibrations of joy, abundance, and love.

Tip: Look at what's taking place right now through the lens of neutrality, Capricorn.

Aquarius:

If you had to title this chapter of your life, you would call it 'Silver Linings', Aquarius. You're at a point in your life where you are able to look at the past through the lens of wisdom. You realise that nothing is inherently good or bad—it simply is—and that everything transpired for a higher reason. Today, you are filled with a sense of hope and optimism as you embark upon a new journey. While you do not know what the road is leading you towards, you know that you're about to go places.

Tip: It's all about silver linings, Aquarius.

Pisces:

Stay in your centre when things around you begin to fall apart. Stay in your centre when you cannot make sense of what's going on. Stay in your centre when you feel like the Universe is sending one curveball your way after another. Stay in your centre when it feels like somebody is tugging at your heartstrings in a not-so-gentle manner. You will get through the chaos and commotion, Pisces. Stay in your centre.

Tip: You have what it takes to become the eye of the storm.