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SummitTIMES

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Sikkim opts for weeklong "complete lockdown"

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 MAY:**

The State Government has announced a "complete lockdown" in Sikkim from 17 to 24 May, starting at 5AM on Monday and ending at the same time a week later.

The order, issued by the Home Department today, a day when the partial lockdown ended, explains that the Covid situation needed to be reviewed since case positivity rate has consistently remained above 20% for the past few weeks.

An "urgent need" was hence felt to "impose stricter restrictions on the movement of people within the State."

Come Monday, all government offices, shops [including ration shops], commercial establishments, institutions, gyms and markets will remain closed except those engaged in "production of medicines,



SIKKIM LOCKDOWN

medical equipment, oxygen and allied sectors shall remain closed."

The lockdown does not extend to central government offices which will operate as per GoI instructions and its staff will be allowed to move around on production of

valid Govt ID cards.

All "activities/ congregations and movement of people, goods and passenger vehicles, including two wheelers, will be prohibited" as well except for those engaged in essential services and supplies.

While medicine shops will be allowed to remain open, milk vending shops will be permitted to remain open only from 7AM to 11AM.

Vaccination will continue and despite the restrictions on movement, these will be allowed on

presentation of relevant medical papers.

Given the past experience of such notifications, one can expect clarifications and amendments to this notification in the coming days as well since there is still much confusion in the minds of the people.

Dr Reddy's launches Sputnik V vaccine in India at around Rs 995.4 per dose

NEW DELHI, MAY 14 (PTI): Drug firm Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Friday said it has launched COVID vaccine Sputnik V in the Indian market with the first dose being administered in Hyderabad, as part of a limited pilot.

The company said the imported doses of the vaccine are presently priced at a maximum retail price of Rs 948, with 5 per cent GST per dose, amounting to Rs 995.4 per dose. "The imported doses of the vaccine are presently priced at an MRP of Rs 948 + 5 per cent GST per dose, with the possibility of a lower price point when local supply begins," Dr Reddy's Laboratories said in a statement.

The first consignment of imported doses of the Sputnik V vaccine landed in India on May 1, and received regulatory clearance from the Central Drugs Laboratory, Kasauli, on May 13, 2021, it added. As part of a limited pilot, the soft launch of the vaccine has commenced and the first dose of the vaccine was administered in Hyderabad, Dr Reddy's said.

"Further consignments of imported doses are expected over the upcoming months. Subsequently, supply of the Sputnik V vaccine will commence from Indian manufacturing partners," it added. The company is working closely with its six manufacturing partners in India to fulfill regulatory requirements to ensure smooth and timely supply, Dr Reddy's said. The Hyderabad-based firm said that it will work

closely with stakeholders in the government and private sector in India to ensure the widest possible reach of the Sputnik V vaccine, as part of the national inoculation effort.

"With the rising cases in India, vaccination is our most effective tool in our battle against COVID-19. Contributing to the vaccination drive in India is our biggest priority right now to help Indians be healthy and safe," Dr Reddy's Co-Chairman and MD G V Prasad said.

Till now, only two vaccines were being administered in India for COVID-19 -- Covaxin manufactured by Bharat Biotech and Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute of India.

On Thursday, the Centre said that over two billion doses of vaccines will be made available in the country in five months between August and December, enough to vaccinate the entire population.

VK Paul, Member (Health), Niti Aayog at a Health Ministry briefing, said that the estimated 216 crore doses that are likely to be produced

between August and December include 75 crore doses of Covishield and 55 crore doses of Covaxin.

Further, Biological E is expected to produce 30 crore doses, Zydus Cadila 5 crore, Serum Institute of India 20 crore doses of Novavax, and Bharat Biotech 10 crore doses of its nasal vaccine, while Gennova will make available 6 crore doses and Sputnik V 15.6 crore doses, he had said.

Upper Tadong forms Constituency-level Covid Action Task Force



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 MAY:**

Upper Tadong constituency in East District today constituted a COVID Action Task Force as a pilot project to work towards containing and eradicating SARS-CoV2 infections in the constituency.

Area MLA, GT Dhungel, informed media-persons today that the task force was formed in follow-up to directions received from the Chief Minister and will primarily work on four areas.

There were four municipal wards in Upper Tadong constituency

and various activities will be taken up by the task force to support the people in the area with the help of the recently-elected ward councilors.

COVID patients in home isolation will be provided medical tool kits, counselling and other essential items, he informs.

Mr Dhungel stated that the main objective of the initiative was to contain and eradicate COVID-19 from the State to make Sikkim the first COVID free State in the country.

He appealed to the people to properly follow all COVID SOPs of social

distancing and proper masking and not to venture out unnecessarily.

He urged the people to support the initiative of the government to contain the coronavirus infection in the State.

Dr Remon Chettri further mentioned that the COVID Action Task Force will work in four sectors - which includes 24x7 helpline numbers for the people in case of any emergency, mental health and counselling, transport and ambulance

and medicine kits having set of separate medicines
turn to pg02

6 more Covid fatalities even as active count goes past 3K

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 MAY:**

The number of active cases of novel coronavirus crossed the 3000-mark in Sikkim on Friday and now stand at 3002 with 232 new cases reported in the last 24 hours.

In the meantime, six more COVID-19 related deaths were reported in the last 24 hours in Sikkim taking the death toll to 198.

Of the six deaths, three were reported from STNM Hospital, two from Central Referral Hospital, Tadong and one person passed away while under home isolation in North Sikkim.

Of the 232 new cases, 155 were reported from East District, 30 from West District, 40 from South District and seven from North Sikkim.

A total of 748 tests were carried out to detect these 232 cases - 181 samples returning positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR testing of 578 samples, two in TruNat testing of four samples and 49 in rapid antigen testing of 166 samples.

Nineteen persons are currently admitted in the ICU facility of STNM

hospital and 12 in the ICU at CRH-Tadong.

Over the past 24 hours, 27 patients were admitted into hospitals and there are now 221 Covid patients in hospital.

There are another 38 people in free covid care centres being managed by the State Government while another 18 are in paid quarantine centres.

312 more people were sent to home isolation [with those discharged from hospital or sent to precautionary isolation adding to the numbers who tested positive]. There are currently 2,725 Covid-positive people under home isolation across the State at present.

On the other hand, the number of recovered cases of COVID-19 of Sikkim further improved to 7,446 with the release of 169 persons from home isolation after completing their isolation period. The number of recoveries will continue showing an uptick in the coming days since more and more of the hundreds who tested positive on a daily basis during the second wave will be completing their home isolation periods.

Petrol, diesel prices rise again, reach record highs

NEW DELHI, MAY 14 (PTI):

Petrol and diesel prices on Friday touched record high levels across the country after rates were increased for the fourth time this week.

Petrol price was hiked by 29 paise per litre and diesel by 34 paise a litre, according to a price notification by state-owned fuel retailers.

The increase propelled rates in Delhi to climb to an all-time high of Rs 92.34 a litre for petrol and Rs 82.95 per litre for diesel.

Rates had already crossed the Rs 100-mark in several cities in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and with the latest increase, prices in Mumbai too were inching towards that level.

A litre of petrol in Mumbai now comes for Rs 98.65 and diesel is priced at Rs 90.11 per litre.

Fuel prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes such as VAT and freight charges. Rajasthan levies the highest value-added tax (VAT) on



petrol in the country, followed by Madhya Pradesh.

This was the fourth increase in prices this week and eighth hike since May 4, when the state-owned oil firms ended an 18-hiatus in rate revision they observed during assembly elections in states like West Bengal.

Sri Ganganagar district of Rajasthan had the costliest petrol and diesel in the country at Rs 103.27 per litre and Rs 95.70 a litre respectively.

In eight increases, petrol price has risen by Rs 1.95 per litre and diesel by Rs 2.22.

Since March last year when the government raised excise duty on fuel to an all-time high, petrol price has increased by a record Rs 22.75 per litre (after accounting for

a handful of occasions when rates fell) and diesel by Rs 20.66.

Oil companies, who have in recent months resorted to unexplained freeze in rate revision, had hit a pause button after cutting prices marginally on April 15. This coincided with electioneering hitting a peak to elect new governments in five states including West Bengal.

No sooner had voting ended, oil companies indicated an impending increase in retail prices in view of firming trends in international oil markets.

Central and state taxes make up for 60 per cent of the retail selling price of petrol and over 54 per cent of diesel. The union government levies Rs 32.90 per litre of excise duty on petrol and Rs 31.80 on diesel.

West Sikkim villages opt for self-imposed lockdown

**PRITAM LAMA
GEYZING, 14 MAY:**

Fearing the spread of COVID-19 in their villages, the Gram panchayat and civil society members have decided to go under lockdown for at least four days as a precautionary measure in Mangalbaria block in West Sikkim.

A spurt in Covid cases has prompted this move. Villagers inform that as of today, at least 64 villagers have tested positive for Covid during the second wave underway at present.

Villagers have voluntarily closed all business establishments

and are not allowing anyone into the village. This lockdown began yesterday and people there have decided to continue till 16 May.

The decision was taken at a meeting held among the residents of Mangalbaria, shopkeepers and Drivers Association as a means to contain the spread of virus.

During these four days, no shops, including grocery shops, taxis, private vehicles or two wheelers will be allowed to ply unless in the event of an emergency. The bank branch here is also to remain closed. All construction works have also been stopped for the four days.

Only chemists have been allowed to remain open.

"Lockdowns have proved to be effective in breaking the chain of transmission around the world. Therefore, as responsible citizens let us unite to keep ourselves and our village safe from the virus," Sabin Rai, Panchayat Accounts Asst. Mangalbarey, has appealed.

Mangalbaria BDO Robin Dong also confirmed this over the phone.

Suldung-Kamling is among the more affected GPU under Mangalbaria block with 34 of the 64 cases having been reported from this GPU alone.



Centre orders 53 lakh Remdesivir injections, 46,000 ventilators: RTI

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY [PTI]: Amid the grim COVID-19 situation in the country, the Union government has ordered the procurement of 53.70 lakh Remdesivir injections and 46,386 ventilators to tackle the calamity.

Out of the order placed till Wednesday, various manufacturers, however, have been able to supply only a little over 38.05 lakh injections and only 43,979 pieces of ventilators to various states, Union territories and the central government's facilities, says the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in response to a plea under the transparency law.

Out of 43,979 ventilators supplied to various anti-Covid facilities, only 38,958 have been installed, the reply to the plea under the Right to Information Act added.

Out of the Remdesivir injections, allotted or ordered to be procured for various states, Maharashtra has been allotted 11.57 lakh injections but has been able to secure a supply of merely 7.99 lakh, the reply said.

After Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh has been able to procure over 3.63 lakh doses of the injection against an allotment of 4.95 lakh doses, while Gujarat has been able to procure 3.54 lakh injections against allotment of 4.19 doses.

The Union Ministry has given its response in reply to a plea by RTI activist Sujeet Swami.

Karnataka for which an order for procurement of 5.75 lakh injections had been placed has been able to procure only 3.26 lakh vials, the reply to RTI plea revealed.

Similarly, an order for the supply of 2.20 lakh injections had been placed for the national capital Delhi which has managed to secure over 1.81 lakh of its doses, the reply added.

Some other states which managed to procure significant supplies of the injection though less than what they had been allocated are Madhya Pradesh (2.14 lakh vials against an order of 2.60 lakh injection), Rajasthan (1.57 lakh against 2.48 lakh), Bihar (92,000 against an order of 1.5 lakh vials), West Beearly one lakh against an order of 1.60 lakh) and Punjab 60,000 against an order of 85,000.

Curiously, among various states, Telangana has got the unique distinction of securing more vials of Remdesivir than what it had ordered for – 1.98 lakh against an order of 1.45 lakh vials.

The RTI reply further revealed that two Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep have till now failed to procure a single vial of the injection despite having been allocated merely 2,000 injections.

MLA leads inspection of Pakyong's preparedness to grow into district

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 14 MAY:

Namcheybong MLA, Em Prasad Dulal, today led an inspection of government infrastructure in Pakyong sub division to understand whether the existing government infrastructure and infrastructure currently being developed were adequate to meet the requirements of Pakyong being elevated to district status.

Creation of two new districts - Pakyong and Soreong - it may be recalled were announced by the present Government shortly after taking office. Mr Dulal, chairs the district formation committee for Pakyong.

The MLA directed to all HoDs stationed in Pakyong Sub-Division to prepare plans and projects for the



upcoming Pakyong District at the earliest, an SKM press release informs.

The main objective of the joint inspection, the release details, "was to en-

quire the under construction offices and other projects of Pakyong Sub-Division as well as feasibility of areas for infrastructural development for upcom-

ing Pakyong District."

The inspection team included Advisors Inc-hung Bhutia and JB Bassnett, Chairperson Ganza Bhutia and Sonam Sher-

pa, ADC (Dev) Pakyong Tenzing Denzongpa, SDM Pakyong Milan Rai, BDO Nilkantha Bhandari and officials from different departments.

Rangpo Police Station, PHC and SDM Office sanitized



SUMMIT REPORT RANGPO, 14 MAY:

A team of Echo Force Pest Control India Limited personnel, led by Team Manager Sachin Sharma, started sterilization/ fumigation at Rangpo Police Station, Primary Health Centre, SDM Office and other

Public Places today.

The work has been initiated voluntarily by the company, a press release informs.

Mr Sharma informs that their company is the only local unit certified by the Health Department which has been sterilizing the

STNM Hospital, CRH, Gangtok Municipal Corporation, District Disaster Management Authority etc facilities. The sterilizing mission at Rangpo was joined by Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's West Pandam Constituency Level president, HariDangal.

Three more die of COVID-19 in Ladakh, toll rises to 161

LEH, MAY 14 (PTI): Three more patients died of coronavirus in Ladakh, taking the death toll in the union territory to 161, while the infection count reached 15,916 with 109 fresh cases, officials said on Friday.

Of the 109 new cases, 86 were reported in Leh district and 23 in Kargil district, they said.

There are now 1,547 -- 1279 in Leh and 268 in Kargil -- active corona-

virus cases in the UT, the officials said.

As many as 82 patients in Leh and 24 in Kargil were discharged after they were cured of the infection in the past 24 hours, they said.

A total of 14,208 persons have been cured in Ladakh so far, the officials added.

The total fatalities in the UT included 117 in Leh and 44 in Kargil, they said.

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Nepal allows 'special flights' to evacuate stranded foreigners

SANGAM PRASAIN

KATHMANDU, 14 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]:

Nepal on Thursday permitted a number of "special flights" as requested by foreign embassies to evacuate their citizens, a week after it suspended all international flights, except the two weekly bubble services to India, as it fought to check the rising number of Covid-19 cases.

More than 7,000 foreigners are estimated to be stranded in Nepal.

Tourists from abroad have been anxiously waiting to get out of Kathmandu after the government extended the lockdown by two weeks, and cancelled all flights following a surge in coronavirus infections.

Foreign embassies have stepped up efforts to repatriate stranded trekkers and mountaineers.

"We have allowed a few evacuation flights based on the request of foreign embassies in Nepal," said Rajan Pokhrel, director general of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal.

The evacuation flights will begin on Friday when Nepali private carrier Shree Airlines will fly several Thai nationals and Nepali students to Bangkok.

"There are around 11 passengers, including Nepali students," said Anil Manandhar, corporate manager of Shree Airlines. "We will return with cargo and 24 oxygen concentrator machines gifted by the Thai government and non-resident Nepalis in Thailand."

According to Pokhrel, the United States Embassy has been permitted three special repatriation flights on May 16, 17 and 25 which will be operated by Qatar Airways and Turkish Airlines.

Qatar Airways will operate flights on May 16 and 25 while Turkish Airlines will operate on May 17.

The Russian Embassy has requested a landing permit for Aeroflot Airlines, the flag carrier and largest airline of the Russian Federation. "We will approve the

landing permit once it fixes the arrival date," said Pokhrel.

The government has also allowed the Indian Embassy to evacuate its stranded citizens who were using Kathmandu as a transit point to go to Saudi Arabia for employment after a number of countries banned direct flights from India after it was overwhelmed by a second wave.

On April 28, the government had banned all foreign nationals from using Nepal to fly to third countries following criticism in the wake of revelations that a rising number of Indian travellers were using Kathmandu as a transit point.

According to Pokhrel, there are 2,000 Indian nationals stuck in Nepal. "The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal has permitted Nepal Airlines and Himalaya Airlines to conduct seven flights to evacuate Indian nationals to Saudi Arabia."

Many other embassies may request the government for evacuation flights, according to Nepal Tourism Board officials.

They said their mobile hotlines were ringing constantly with calls from frantic tourists asking about repatriation or charter flights.

Nepal's tourism promotional body, which has activated its crisis management and communications unit to help tourists, said the visitors were worried they might be stuck in the country while it faces the brutal second wave of the pandemic that has left a trail of sickness and death.

Nepal has called for international assistance as it grapples with oxygen shortages and soaring infections threaten to push the healthcare system to breaking point.

Nepal on Thursday reported 8,842 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours taking the nationwide infection tally to 431,191. The Health Ministry reported 214 Covid-19-related fatalities on Thursday.

Nepal ordered a second lockdown on April 29 for two weeks as a public health measure to prevent the spread of Covid-19. International flights to and from Nepal were suspended from May 6 midnight.

On Tuesday, the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal extended the restriction on scheduled international commercial passenger flights to and from Nepal until May 31 midnight.

Two weekly flights on the Kathmandu-Delhi sector—one by Nepal Airlines and another by Air India—will continue under an air bubble arrangement between Nepal and India.

The prohibitory orders in the Kathmandu Valley that have been in place since April 29 have been extended until May 27.

As per the Nepal Tourism Board, there are around 2,000 foreign nationals currently in Kathmandu who are waiting for immediate evacuation.

Another 5,000 tourists are estimated to be in different trekking and mountaineering destinations, and they are likely to return in the next two weeks before the monsoon season begins in Nepal, the board said.

Nepali citizens and foreigners entering the Kathmandu Valley from any entry point are required to stay in quarantine for five days in any of the hotels approved by the Tourism Ministry.

After the five-day quarantine, a PCR test should be done. The cost of accommodation and three meals daily has been fixed as Rs 3,000 net per day.

There are currently 1,437 European nationals who arrived in Nepal between January 1 and May 5 and have not returned to their country, the board said.

According to the Department of Immigration, Nepal received 22,450 foreign tourists by air in April. Among the total arrivals, 13,202 came from India, 2,740 from the United States, 803 from China and 685 from Russia.

Palestinians flee as Israeli artillery pounds northern Gaza

GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP (AP): Palestinian families grabbed their children and belongings and fled neighborhoods on the outskirts of Gaza City on Friday as Israel unleashed heavy artillery fire at what it said was a large network of militant tunnels ahead of a possible ground invasion.

Israel has massed troops along the border and called up 9,000 reservists as fighting intensifies with the Islamic militant group Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip. Palestinian militants have fired some 1,800 rockets, and the Israeli military has launched more than 600 airstrikes, toppling at least three high-rise apartment buildings, and has shelled some areas with tanks stationed near the frontier.

As Israel and Hamas plunged closer to all-out war despite international efforts at a ceasefire, communal violence in Israel erupted for a fourth night. Jewish and Arab mobs clashed in the flashpoint town of Lod, even after Israel dispatched additional security forces.

The Gaza Health Ministry says the toll from the fighting has risen to 119 killed, including 31 children and 19 women, with 830 wounded. The Hamas and Islamic Jihad militant groups have confirmed 20 deaths in their ranks, though Israel says that number is much higher: Seven people have been killed in Israel, including a 6-year-old boy and a soldier.

Palestinians living outside Gaza City, near the northern and eastern frontiers with Israel, fled the intense artillery bombardment Friday. Families arrived at the U.N.-run schools in the city in pick-up trucks, on donkeys and by foot, hauling pillows and pans, blankets and bread.

"We were planning to leave our homes at night, but Israeli jets bombed us so we had to wait until the morning," said Hedaia-Maarouf, who fled with her extended family of 19 people, including 13 children. "We were terrified for our children, who were screaming and shaking."

In the northern Gaza Strip, RafatTanani, his pregnant wife and four children were killed after an Israeli warplane reduced a building to rubble, residents said. "It was a massacre," said SadallahTanani, a relative. "My feelings are indescribable."

Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman, said tanks stationed near the border fired 50 rounds. It was part of a large operation that also involved airstrikes and was aimed at destroying tunnels beneath Gaza City used by militants to evade surveillance and airstrikes, which the military refers to as "the Metro."

Upper Tadong forms

for symptomatic and asymptomatic patients, proper masks, set of sanitizers and disinfectants and PPE kits for those who cannot afford it.

He informed that ward Councilors will lead initiatives in their respective wards and will be assisted by conveners and a team under the conveners.

He thanked the CM and the area MLA for taking proactive action and asserted that society members should also support the initiative and help Upper Tadong emerge as a model constituency in Covid management.

"As always, the aim is to strike military targets and to minimize collateral damage and civilian casualties," he said. "Unlike our very elaborate efforts to clear civilian areas before we strike high-rise or large buildings inside Gaza, that wasn't feasible this time."

The strikes came after Egyptian mediators rushed to Israel for cease-fire talks that showed no signs of progress. Egypt, Qatar and the United Nations were leading the truce efforts.

The fighting broke out late Monday when Hamas fired a long-range rocket at Jerusalem in support of Palestinian protests there against the policing of a flash-point holy site and efforts by Jewish settlers to evict dozens of Palestinian families from their homes.

Since then, Israel has attacked hundreds of targets in Gaza, causing earth-shaking explosions across densely populated areas. Of the 1,800 rockets Gaza militants have fired, more than 400 fell short or misfired, according to the military.

The rockets have brought life in parts of southern Israel to a standstill, and several barrages have targeted the seaside metropolis of Tel Aviv, some 70 kilometers (45 miles) away from Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to continue the operation, saying in a video statement that Israel would "extract a very heavy price from Hamas."

In Washington, U.S. President Joe Biden said he spoke with Netanyahu about calming the fighting but also backed the Israeli leader by saying "there has not been a significant overreaction."

He said the goal now is to "get to a point where there is a significant reduction in attacks, particularly rocket attacks." He called the effort "a work in progress."

Israel has come under heavy international criticism for civilian casualties during three previous wars in Gaza, which is home to more than 2 million Palestinians. It says Hamas is responsible for endangering civilians by placing military infrastructure in civilian areas and launching rockets from them.

Hamas showed no signs of backing down. It fired its most powerful rocket, the Ayyash, nearly 200 kilometers (120 miles) into southern Israel on Thursday. The rocket landed in the open desert but briefly disrupted flight traffic at the southern Ramon airport. Hamas has also launched two drones that Israel said it quickly shot down. Hamas military spokesman Abu Obeida said the group was not afraid of a ground invasion, which would be a chance "to increase our catch" of Israeli soldiers.

Ayurvedic Centre distributes Ayush-64 to mildly symptomatic Covid-positive people

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 MAY:

Regional Ayurvedic Research Center, Tadong, distributed AYUSH-64 medicines to students of Sikkim University who have tested positive for Covid. The distribution was facilitated through the hostel warden Dr Sudeep Ghatani on Wednesday, a press release informs.

On the occasion, Regional Ayurvedic Research Institute, Gangtok in-charge and Director Dr Sriprakash gave instructions about the use of the drugs and suggested that if a person facing problem in his breathing or experiencing lack of oxygen level should immediately contact to the nearby COVID or general Hospital for COVID test, informs a press release.

The release adds that the Ministry of AYUSH has started a campaign for free distribution of AYUSH 64 to Covid patients having mild or moderate symptoms.

Under the scheme, the Ministry has launched distribution of AYUSH 64 and Kaaba Sura Kodi Neer on 10 May through their 84 centres of all the con-



cerned institutions, it is added.

The release mentions that if anyone has symptoms of COVID positive, they can ask for AYUSH 64 medicine for recovery of their health. It is informed that other

three districts of Sikkim which having branches of Regional Ayurveda Research Institute, where medicine will be available soon and if any person needs information related to AYUSH 64 or willing to use AY-

USH 64 then must send their scan copy of Aadhar card or any other ID card issued by the competent Authority, with COVID-19 test report in given WhatsApp number- 9451865403, 7066104329.

The release mentioned Dr Shriprakash invited to Hemant Yadav [National Youth Award-ee], a PhD Scholar of Sikkim University and Social Worker to develop a social platform 'Youth Against COVID-19' where NYKS & NSS Volunteers, youth and Students of Universities & Colleges and other social workers, NGOs and Government organisations to join together to fight against COVID-19. The Volunteers of 'YOUTH AGAINST COVID-19' will keep AYUSH 64 medicine in the front of isolation houses and quarantine centres.

On this occasion, Mr Yadav said youth can play important role to stop spreading of COVID-19 and can aware people and help to those family who affected by COVID-19. Apart from these youth can deliver food and others necessary groceries to the needy people. During the distribution of medicine Dr Rahul, Research Officer ((Ayurveda) & Nodal Officer of the said programme and Dhanraj Tamang driver helped and actively participated in the campaign.

Singtam Nagar Panchayat sanitized



SUMMIT REPORT
RANGPO, 14 MAY:

The councillors of Singtam Nagar Panchayat began a sanitization drive covering different

wards of Singtam today. SNP president, Suresh Kumar Tamang, informs that the drive will cover every ward and also appealed to the people to

strictly follow the Covid guidelines issued by the State Government.

The drive is being supported by Shantinagar Gaon Sudhar Samiti.

CBSE, ISC 12th Board Exam Updates: Recent developments students must know

NEW DELHI, 14 MAY [NDTV]: A PIL (Public Interest Litigation) was filed earlier today in the Supreme Court demanding cancellation of CBSE and ISC Class 12 board exams, in view of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. On the same day, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), in response to media reports, clarified it has not made any decision regarding Class 12 final exams yet. UPDATE: Admissions are open at Manipal (MAHE) CLICK here to start your application.

The CBSE in its statement said any decision, when taken, will be communicated officially.

"It is clarified that no such decision has been taken regarding CBSE class 12 examinations as being speculated in certain sections of the media. Any decision taken in this matter will be of-

ficially communicated to the Public," the board said.

Both Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE), which conducts ISC exams, and CBSE had earlier said a decision for Class 12 students will be taken in June.

"Objective Methodology" For CBSE, ISC (Class 12) Students

The petition sought an "objective methodology" instead of exams to declare the results of Class 12 students, as exams in any form - both online and offline - are not feasible considering the current situation.

The petition, filed by advocate Mamta Sharma, argued delay in Class 12 exams will also affect the university admission process.

"Conducting 12th Examination is not possible because of surging COVID cases. Even online

or offline examinations are not feasible because of the unprecedented pandemic. Delay in declaration of 12th results will hamper students taking admission in foreign universities CBSE and ISC must devise an objective methodology to declare the results within specified time otherwise it will affect around 12 lakh students," the petition said.

Class 10 Exams Already Cancelled

Both the boards have already cancelled Class 10 final exams. The CBSE had earlier announced the alternative method it will use for announcing results of Class 10 students. Following CBSE, many states have cancelled Class 10 final exams and announced alternative promotion criteria.

The final decision on CBSE Class 12 and ISC board exams are expected in the first week of June.

Vice President, Lok Sabha Speaker veto Parliamentary Panel virtual meets

New Delhi, 14 May [NDTV]: Rejecting calls from the opposition as well as some parties that support Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, Vice President Venkaiah Naidu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla have refused to allow parliamentary committees to function virtually because of the pandemic.

With legislative work at a standstill, the presiding officers of the two houses of parliament have rejected requests to allow virtual meetings, citing technicalities and confidentiality clauses.

They suggested that once the situation returns to normal, physical meetings can take place - otherwise, it will take for an amendment in the rules, a note from the Rajya Sabha secretariat said.

The move has upset opposition parties which have questioned how the government can carry on the construction of a new parliament building as an essential activity but has ruled that legislative oversight is not essential.

"I am not surprised. In spite of repeated requests for almost a year, virtual meetings of Standing Committees have been inexplicably disallowed. The PM has all his meetings virtually, but 30 odd MPs cannot. Nowhere in the world

has Parliament run away from its duties like in India," Congress MP Jairam Ramesh tweeted.

Across the world, from the United States to the United Kingdom, democratic countries have allowed their parliaments and committees to function via video conferencing and other systems.

Several MPs across party lines that NDTV spoke to say they are all concerned with the lack of legislative oversight.

While the courts and the executive have been functioning even during the pandemic, the legislature's role is being undermined and this has serious consequences especially during a public health emergency, they say. The decision to amend the rules was also not considered last year.

Opposition members have questioned the double standards since cabinet meetings and important matters of national security have been discussed in virtual mode and yet parliamentary committees which allow the opposition to oversee government decisions have been paralysed.

"The move to block parliamentary committees to run virtually is an attempt to not allow the opposition to function," one parliamentarian said.

India's Covid cases above 24 million as mutant spreads across globe



NEW DELHI, 14 MAY [REUTERS]: The number of recorded Covid-19 infections in India climbed above 24 million on Friday amid reports that the highly transmissible coronavirus mutant first detected in the country was spreading across the globe.

The Indian B.1.617 variant of the virus has been found in cases in eight countries of the Americas, including Canada and the United States, said Jairo Mendez, a WHO infectious diseases expert.

People infected by the variant included travellers in Panama and Argentina who had arrived from India or Europe. In the Caribbean, cases of the Indian variant have been detected in Aruba, Dutch St Maarten and the French department of Guadeloupe.

The mutant strain has also been detected in Britain, as well as in Singapore.

"These variants have a greater capacity for transmission, but so far we have not found any collateral consequences," Mendez said. "The only worry is that they spread faster."

Public Health England said the total number of confirmed cases of the variant had more than doubled in the past week to 1,313 across the United Kingdom.

"We are anxious about it - it has been spreading," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson

said, adding that there would be meetings to discuss what to do. "We're ruling nothing out," he added.

According to health ministry data, India recorded 4,000 deaths and 343,144 infections in the last 24 hours. It was the third consecutive day of 4,000 or more deaths but daily infections have stayed below a peak of 414,188 last week.

While the total number of recorded infections crossed 24 million, the number of people confirmed to have died from Covid-19 stood at 262,317 since the pandemic first struck India over a year ago.

But a lack of testing in many places meant a lot of deaths and infections were omitted from the official count, and experts say the real numbers could be five to ten times higher.

Bhramar Mukherjee, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Michigan, said most models had predicted a peak this week and that the country could be seeing signs of that trend.

Still, the number of new cases each day is large enough to overwhelm hospitals, she said on Twitter on Thursday. "The keyword is cautious optimism."

The situation is particularly bad in rural areas of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state with a population of over 240 million. Television pictures have shown

families weeping over the dead in rural hospitals or camping in wards to tend the sick.

Bodies have washed up in the Ganges, the river that flows through the state, as crematoriums are overwhelmed and wood for funeral pyres is in short supply.

The second wave of infections, which erupted in February, has been accompanied by a slowdown in vaccinations, although Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that vaccinations would be open to all adults from May 1.

India is the world's largest vaccine producer but has run low on stocks in the face of the huge demand. As of Thursday, it had fully vaccinated just over 38.2 million people, or about 2.8% of a population of about 1.35 billion, government data shows. More than 2 billion doses of coronavirus vaccines will likely be available in India between August to December this year, top government adviser V.K. Paul told reporters amid criticism that the government had mishandled the vaccine plan.

Those doses would include 750 million of AstraZeneca's vaccine, as well as 550 million doses of Covaxin, made by Bharat Biotech.

"We are going through a phase of finite supply. The entire world is going through this. It takes time to come out of this phase," Paul said.

2 killed in Assam grenade blast, Home Minister calls up CM



GUWAHATI, 14 MAY [NDTV]: Two persons were killed and two others seriously injured in a grenade blast in upper Assam's Tinsukia district on Friday.

The blast took place at the Tingrai market area under the Digboi police station, police sources told NDTV.

The dead have been identified as Sanjit Singh and Surajit Talukdar. The injured, Manojit Das and Ganashyam Agarwalla, are undergoing treatment at a government hospital.

Police sources said two motorcycle-borne persons threw the grenade in front of a hardware shop owned by a

man named Turan Agarwalla.

"Two persons were killed in the grenade blast and two were seriously injured. They were rushed to the hospital for treatment. Right now, we cannot ascertain the motive behind the blast. We have started the investigation," a senior police officer said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah called up Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to take stock of the situation. "Hon HM Sri @AmitShah called me to enquire about grenade blast at Tingrai Market in Tinsukia District. He condoled death of two civilians. I apprised HM on the matter and informed

that @assampolice has been asked to take stern measures against perpetrators & nab them immediately," Sarma tweeted.

Following the blast, there was speculation over the possible involvement of ULFA(I), led by Paresh Baruah, which is active in the region. The insurgent group has put out a release, denying any role in the grenade blast.

The grenade blast comes days after a minor boy was killed in a suspected grenade blast at Jagun in the same district. Twelve-year-old Suraj Hajong was killed in the blast at Khota Sema village on Tuesday.

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Make Better Introductions

State's issues on eve of State Day

The rest of the nation knows very little about Sikkim. The State's two most recognisable faces – Danny Denzongpa and Bhaichung Bhutia – are in semi-retirement and hence not much in the news or posters. And Sikkim politics, despite all its passion and spite, carries no national-level interest, and the sports, including football, in which Sikkim consistently does well, find no space on TV news, hence, unless the Chinese act up in the Fingertip area or something of the scale of 18 September 2011 happens, the rest of the country does not get to hear of Sikkim. Few in the mainstream can point Sikkim out in the map of India and even this number of those who can has been boosted by the fact that China started showing Sikkim as a part of India on its maps. Even as cartographical knowledge might have improved slightly, fewer Indians will know when Sikkim joined the nation. Generalisations are rarely accurate, but when it comes to claiming that India does not know Sikkim, the generalisation is uncomfortably precise. It is reasonably established then that the mainstream is fuzzy when it comes to Sikkim, and while such ignorance need not always be a worry, in Sikkim's case, it needs redressal because the ignorance often imposes avoidable heatburn in the State.

What compromises Sikkim's introduction rather severely is the fact that even people in the important ministries are unclear about even Sikkim's geography which makes it impossible for them to comprehend the State's unique political identity. The mainstream, it appears, developed partial amnesia with regard to Sikkim almost immediately after Sikkim merged with India in 1975 and corrective surgery is still awaited. Who should be playing the surgeon here? Obviously, Sikkim's elected leaders and its bureaucrats. In the 46 years since merger, Sikkim has achieved only partial success in reintroducing itself to those who matter in Delhi. Coalition governments in the Centre have also gone against Sikkim's interest because Delhi is either busy scheming or keeping its too many constituent partners happy to be able to understand Sikkim in any detail. But again, the responsibility to demand their attention and time is Sikkim's. It has to get itself better understood. It hasn't.

The continued failure to do so has cost Sikkim heavily since 1975.

To expand some of the points mentioned earlier, has anyone noticed that the first elections in Sikkim as a democracy were held in 1979 on the basis of an Act that was passed in 1980, in retrospect? The first Chief Minister of Sikkim was elected in 1974, a year before the merger, following elections called on the basis of Representation of the Sikkim People's Act, 1974. It was only when the government elected after this election had already run out its term that Delhi realized that fresh elections could not be held on the basis of an Act passed under a monarchy, a system which the people had supposedly voted out in a referendum five years back. The LD Kazi government had to be given an extension because there was simply not enough time to get the constitutional processes required for 'proper' elections completed in time. Eventually, a hastily drafted Representation of Peoples [Amendment] Bill, 1979, was tabled in the Parliament. Before it could be debated, the Janata government in Delhi collapsed. In Sikkim, the fallouts of Bill continue to remain sore. The 1979 elections were held on the basis of an Ordinance passed by the Vice President. Elections were held and a new government elected, but this was ratified only after the Ordinance was brought to the Parliament, very close to its expiry date of 6 months, and passed despite reservations registered by those who participated in the debate. If Delhi could become so casual about a Protectorate that had become a full-fledged State by choice within five years of the history-making moment, then its inclination to study and understand Sikkim 38 years down the line would be that much more depressed. It thus becomes the responsibility of everyone who ever gets a chance to address any occasion that offers a larger national audience to highlight what Article 371F is and what makes it special.

What has instead happened so far is that only the Sikkimese keep getting reminded about this path-breaking inclusion to the Constitution of India. It does not help for the Sikkimese to learn that they are special, Delhi has to be educated about this Constitutionally guaranteed special status. Half of Sikkim's problems will fade away if this is achieved.

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COVID Vaccine Hesitancy: Spell Out the Personal Rather Than Collective Benefits to Persuade People

DANIEL FREEMAN
theconversation.com

Approximately 10% of UK adults say they will never get vaccinated against COVID-19 or will avoid doing so for as long as possible. Scientists call this group the "vaccine hesitant", though hesitancy may not seem the right term to describe views often held with clear conviction. People who are vaccine hesitant have often thought long and hard about whether to take a COVID-19 vaccine.

How can such views be shifted? Ideally, one would sit down with people, listen and discuss. In reality, public health campaigners have only mass messaging at their disposal: information disseminated through billboards, TV slots and social media. These are crude tools for tackling sometimes deeply ingrained personal beliefs. What messages delivered through them might really make a difference?

Over the past year, the Oxford Coronavirus Explanations, Attitudes and Narratives Surveys (OCEANS) team has tried to answer this question. We've worked to form a psychological explanation for vaccine hesitancy by canvassing the views of people for, against and undecided about vaccines.

We've found that hesitancy emerges from a nexus of beliefs, the most important being scepticism about the collective benefits of vaccination. The hesitant don't accept that taking a vaccine means we're all better off. They also tend to believe that COVID-19 isn't a big danger to their health. And they worry that vaccines may be ineffective or downright harmful. The rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines reinforces these concerns.

Behind these specific ideas often lies mistrust. People who are hesitant tend to be suspicious of authority. But while it's wise to make judgements based on evidence rather than blithely accepting what we're told, in many cases we've found that the vaccine hesitant are susceptible to misinformation.

Fuelling this may be a sense of marginalisation. Vaccine-hesitant people are a little more likely to believe that they're of lower social status. Feeling

that society doesn't care about them, they are unwilling to trust what they're told by politicians and scientists.

GETTING PERSONAL

Equipped with these insights, we decided to see whether we could craft messages that might shift negative attitudes. If people don't appreciate the collective benefits of vaccination, let's persuasively set out the case. Let's explain that vaccines make it less likely we'll pass on the virus, helping to protect others, particularly those especially vulnerable to the virus. And let's make it clear that by reducing the risk of getting severely ill, we can help the country bounce back as quickly as possible. That should help shift attitudes, right?

To find out, in early February we surveyed nearly 19,000 UK adults, carefully selected to be representative for age, gender, ethnicity, income and region. Participants were then randomly asked to read one of ten texts about COVID-19 vaccines.

Some texts focused the collective benefits of vaccination, some on the personal benefits, some on safety and some a combination of messages. One text contained only basic information about the vaccine and didn't provide any detail on benefits, and was used as a control. After reading their allocated text, participants completed a questionnaire on their willingness to be vaccinated for COVID-19.

The results were surprising. Previous surveys had suggested beliefs about the collective benefits of vaccination were pivotal to driving uptake. The extent to which people bought into this narrative seemed to determine their willingness to take a vaccine.

But the text that was most likely to change the minds of the vaccine hesitant (when compared to the control) emphasised not the collective but the personal benefits of vaccination. It pointed out that you can't be sure that you won't get seriously ill or struggle with long-term COVID-related problems, and that vaccination will minimise your chances of falling ill.

Months of media coverage in the UK has instead

focused on collective responsibility – that we owe it to our fellow citizens to get vaccinated. But for the sceptical 10%, this hasn't cut through, which is perhaps to be expected. If you think vaccines are unsafe, then you'll be worried about what getting the jab will do to you. Your decision making then becomes dominated by personal risk.

The best way to counter these concerns, therefore, is to highlight the opposite: personal benefits – and our new research suggests this could well work. It's also probable that for a group that's more likely to feel socially excluded, messages that focus on the personal rather than collective ramifications of COVID-19 will be more compelling.

What about the view that the vaccines have been developed too quickly? It's an understandable fear: these vaccines have been produced with unparalleled speed. In response to this, one text in our study explained that the speed of development reflects the exceptional commitment, investment and cooperation of scientists, governments, public health organisations and pharmaceutical companies – as well as of the tens of thousands of members of the public who volunteered to test the vaccines.

This text noted too that side-effects that affect a significant proportion of people don't suddenly appear months and years after vaccination. Because of the way vaccines work – quickly training the body's immune system to fight off a virus – any issues arise within a month and usually much sooner. Happily, this information did seem to reassure people and helped reduce hesitancy.

COVID-19 is unlikely to disappear in the foreseeable future, which means vaccination messaging will remain of critical importance. When it comes to persuading the vaccine hesitant, our research shows that we need to listen, understand concerns and address them seriously. No message will be truly effective if the messenger has not earned trust, nor if it doesn't account for the desires and worries of those receiving it.

[the writer is Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Oxford]

How quickly do we become unfit?

DAN GORDON & JUSTIN ROBERTS
theconversation.com

Getting in shape isn't easy. But after all that hard work, how long do we actually maintain it? Turns out that even the great effort we put into training, taking a bit of time off can mean that we become "unfit" much faster than it took us to actually get in shape.

To understand how the body becomes "unfit", we first need to understand how we become fit. The key to becoming fitter – whether that's improving cardiovascular fitness or muscular strength – is to exceed "habitual load". This means doing more than our body is used to. The stress that this has on our body makes us adapt and become more tolerant, leading to higher fitness levels.

The time it takes to get fit depends on a number of factors, including fitness levels, age, how hard you work, and even environment. But some studies do indicate that even just six sessions of interval training can lead to increases in maximal oxygen uptake (VO2 max) – a measure of overall fitness – and improve how efficiently our body is able to fuel itself using the sugar stored in our cells during exercise.

For strength training, some gains in muscle force can be shown in as little as two weeks, but changes in muscle size won't be seen until around 8-12 weeks.

CARDIOVASCULAR FITNESS

When we stop training, how quickly we lose fitness also depends on many factors – including the type of fitness we're talking about (such as strength or cardiovascular fitness).

As an example, let's look at a marathon runner, who is in peak athletic fitness and can run a marathon in two hours and 30 minutes. This person spends five to six days a week training, running a total of 90km. They've also spent the last 15 years developing this level of fitness.

Now let's say they stopped training completely. Because the body no longer has the stresses of training forcing it to stay fit, the runner will start to lose fitness within a few weeks.

Cardiorespiratory fitness – indicated by a person's VO2 max (the amount of oxygen a person can use during exercise) – will decrease around 10% in the first four weeks after a person stops training. This rate of decline continues, but at a slower rate over longer periods.

Intriguingly, though highly trained athletes (like our marathon runner) see a sharp decline in VO2 max in the first four weeks, this decline eventually evens out, and they actually maintain a VO2 higher than the average person's. But for the average person, VO2 max falls sharply, back to pre-training levels, in less than eight weeks.

The reason VO2 max declines is due to reductions in blood and plas-

ma volumes – which decrease by as much as 12% in the first four weeks after a person stops training. Plasma and blood volume decrease due to the lack of stress being put on our heart and muscles.

Plasma volume may even decrease by around 5% within the first 48 hours of stopping training. The effect of decreased blood and plasma volume leads to less blood being pumped around the body each heart beat. But these levels only drop to where we started – meaning we won't get worse.

Of course, most of us aren't marathon runners – but we're also not immune to these effects. As soon as we stop exercising the body will start to lose these key cardiovascular adaptations at a very similar rate as highly trained athletes.

STRENGTH TRAINING

When it comes to strength, evidence shows that in the average person, 12 weeks without training causes a significant decrease in the amount of weight we can lift. Thankfully, research shows that you maintain some of the strength you gained before you stopped training. What is intriguing is that despite the significant decrease in strength, there's only a minimal decrease in the size of the muscle fibres.

The reason we lose muscle strength largely has to do with the fact that we're no longer putting our muscles under stress. So when we're no longer working our muscles hard,

the muscles become "lazy", leading the number of our muscle fibres to decrease, and fewer muscles being recruited during an activity – making us less able to lift the heavy loads we used to.

The number of muscle fibres used during exercise decreases by around 13% after just two weeks of no training – though this appears not to be accompanied by a decline in muscular force. This implies that the losses observed across the longer periods of detraining are a combination of both this initial decline in the number of muscle fibres we use, but also the slower decline in muscle mass.

For the average gym goer who lifts weights, they would experience a drop in the size of their muscles – over time finding it harder to lift heavy loads as they have less muscle fibres being recruited.

So even after all that effort to get fit, we start losing cardiovascular fitness and strength within 48 hours of stopping. But we don't start to feel these effects for at least two to three weeks for cardiovascular fitness and around 6-10 weeks for strength. Rates of "de-training" are similar for men and women, and even for older athletes. But the fitter you are, the slower you'll lose your gains.

[Dan Gordon is Associate Professor: Cardiorespiratory Exercise Physiology, Anglia Ruskin University; Justin Roberts is Associate Professor, Health and Exercise Nutrition, Anglia Ruskin University]

40 new cases take COVID-19 tally of Andamans to 6,510

PORT BLAIR, May 14 (PTI): The COVID-19 caseload in Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 6,510 as 40 more people tested positive for the disease in the Union Territory, a health department official said on Friday.

Thirty-nine new cases were detected during contact tracing and one fresh patient has a travel history, he said.

The death toll rose to 83 as two more persons succumbed to the disease in the last 24 hours, the official said.

At least 38 people were cured of the disease during the period, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 6,213.

The Union Territory now has 214 active cases. Altogether, 1,16,586 people have been inoculated in the archipelago with 16,917 of them having received both doses of vaccine, he said.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 3,78,462 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the positivity rate stands at 1.72 per cent.

Assam sets up inquiry into elephant deaths, to build memorial too

GUWAHATI, 14 MAY [NDTV]: The Assam forest department has initiated an inquiry after 18 wild elephants were found dead on Thursday at Kundali proposed reserve forest in Nagaon district.

It is suspected that the elephants were killed after lightning struck them during rain in the area on Wednesday night.

State Environment and Forest Minister Parimal Suklabaidya and senior forest department officials visited the site of the incident today to take stock of the situation.

Earlier, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had asked the forest minister to visit the spot to assess the situation.

"We are immensely pained by this tragic incident. We are getting the post-mortem conducted and after that, we will arrange for their burial. We will investigate it. It appears like lightning but other reasons cannot be ruled out," said Mr Suklabaidya.

The minister also announced that a memorial would be built for the elephants. KK Deori, Deputy Conservator of Forest (Publicity), has been appointed as the inquiry officer and he will investigate the matter along with a team of veterinarians.

"The veterinary team should submit a preliminary report within three days and the final report within 15 days from the date of the issue of the order. The investigation officer should make the investigation under relevant provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972," said MK Yadava, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden.

A tale of two Nepals

TIKA R PRADHAN & ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, 14 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]: When Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on May 2 made a sudden dash for Sheetal Niwas, the presidential palace, after holding a party meeting early in the morning, many thought he was discussing the goings on in Lumbini, where the chief minister, his close aide, had resigned. Without even returning to Baluwatar, his official residence, Oli called a meeting of his Cabinet from Sheetal Niwas itself. Oli told his Cabinet ministers that he would seek a vote of confidence, to the surprise of many. The biggest shock anyone possibly got was the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre).

President Bidya Devi Bhandari, accordingly, called a House session for May 10.

While addressing the session, Oli delivered a convoluted speech, reiterating what he has been saying all along, and counted his government's achievements.

"There is no reason why I should not get the confidence of this House," Oli roared.

But it looked like Oli knew very well that he would fail the confidence motion. He did. As lawmakers from the Madhav Nepal-Jhala Nath Khanal faction of his own CPN-UML party decided to abstain, Oli could secure just 93 votes. As many as 124 votes were cast against his confidence motion. Fifteen lawmakers stayed neutral. Apart from 28 lawmakers from the Nepal-Khanal faction, four others were absent. Four lawmakers are suspended.

As soon as President Bhandari called on the parties to form a new government as per Article 76 (2) by Thursday 9pm, the numbers game started.

On Thursday, politics took a turn just the way Oli had wanted.

Hours before the deadline set by the President, the Nepali Congress and the Maoist Centre declared that they were not going to stake claim to the government.

"After the Mahantha Thakur-led faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party declined to support us, chances of forming a coalition government under the leadership of the Nepali Congress have come to an end," Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba told his party's office bearers after a meeting.

Later on Thursday, President Bhandari appointed Oli as prime minister as per Article 76 (3) as the leader of the party having the highest number of members in Parliament. Oli's UML has 121 seats.

The 15 lawmakers who stayed neutral during the May 10 vote were from the Thakur-led faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party. Thakur and Rajendra Mahato of the Janata Samajbadi have stood in support of Oli. The other faction led by Upendra Yadav and Baburam Bhattarai was willing to support the Congress-Maoist alliance.

"The Thakur-led group of the

Janata Samajbadi wished to support Oli and Madhav Nepal also failed to take any decision. So there was no situation to lay claim to a new government," said Prakash Sharan Mahat, joint general secretary of the Nepali Congress, after the meeting of the party's office bearers. "Yadav was ready to support us but he could not bring in the numbers."

The Congress and the Maoist Centre, with 61 and 49 votes, respectively, needed 26 more to claim the majority to form a coalition government. The two parties were also ex-



pecting that as many as 20 lawmakers from the Nepal faction would resign, which would have brought the House strength down to 251, thereby taking the magic number to 126. In that case, with around 15 votes from the Upendra Yadav faction of the Janata Samajbadi and one vote from any of the three parties, which have one seat each in Parliament, the Congress-Maoist Centre alliance had a chance of forming a new government.

Oli, however, made his moves from early morning on Thursday. He decided to withdraw the action initiated against Nepal and other leaders from his group—Surendra Pandey, Bhim Rawal and Ghanashyam Bhusal. Oli had suspended them all for six months from the party's ordinary membership. He activated some second-rung leaders to set up a meeting with Nepal.

After an hours-long meeting in Chapali, on the northern rim of Kathmandu, with Oli, Nepal declared that his faction's leaders would not resign as lawmakers "at least for a few days." "The issue of resignation has been postponed for a few days as talks are headed in the positive direction," Nepal told reporters after the meeting.

Meanwhile, Thakur and Mahato had their lawmakers lodged in a resort in Bhaktapur so as to pre-empt anyone from breaking away.

The Congress and the Maoist Centre that had been holding a series of inter- and intra-party meetings realised that they were not going to muster the number.

By Thursday evening, there were as many as 19 lawmakers from the Thakur-Mahato faction in support of Oli. With Nepal faction lawmakers stepping back, Oli now has 140 votes

in his kitty, four more than needed when he has to secure a vote of confidence.

Oli now needs to secure a vote of confidence from the House within 30 days—by June 14.

"If he fails, the country would head towards elections, as by that time all available provisions would have been exhausted," said Raju Chapagain, an advocate and chair of Constitutional Lawyers' Forum.

Analysts say for the Congress party, there is not much to lose. The party was never keen to take the

lawmakers en masse earlier this week, just a day before Oli's trust vote. But the plan was postponed until Monday morning after Oli activated his confidants to "convince" the Nepal faction. The Nepal faction said it had given Oli until Monday morning to "correct his mistakes". Oli did not bother. The Nepal faction decided to abstain from voting rather than resigning.

On Thursday also, the Nepal faction set a deadline of 4pm for Oli to "correct" his mistakes before they resigned to facilitate the opposition



to form a new government.

Almost two hours past the deadline, the Nepal faction chickened out.

"Nepal won't be trusted at the political level anymore," said Gautam.

Right after the Congress meeting on Thursday evening decided that it was not going to stake claim to a new government, the Maoist Centre too called an emergency meeting of its Standing Committee.

The meeting concluded that there was no possibility of proving a majority.

"We were actually expecting the Madhav Nepal group's support but that did not happen," Ganesh Sah, a Standing Committee member of the Maoist Centre, told the Post. "Now Oli will become more powerful and he will run the government as a dictator."

During the Standing Committee meeting, according to leaders who were present, Dahal said that democracy as well as the left and communist movements would be in danger now under Oli. "There is a need for the opposition forces to contain him as circumstances do not allow mass protests," a leader quoted Dahal as telling the meeting.

Ever since Oli dissolved the House on December 20, his one constant refrain has been—the country needs to seek a fresh mandate of the people. Even after the court restored the House, Oli kept on trying to justify that the House had become irrelevant. The restored House could hardly sit even once to deliberate on the pressing issues, as the Oli government would not provide any business.

While Oli eyed early elections, so did the Nepali Congress. For the Congress party, the 2017 election was a disaster, for it had not faced such a

drubbing in its history. It was itching to go to polls. Leaders of the Janata Samajbadi did not have much choice, but they were convinced that they did not have anything to lose in case of early polls. The Maoist Centre, however, was clearly not in favour of elections.

The party was once even considering changing its name, and there seems to be a deep realisation, according to insiders, among the top leadership that there is no specific agenda to sell during the elections.

By being reappointed three days



after losing the House confidence, Oli has now pulled off a coup, consolidating his position to assert even loudly that if there is any leader who calls the shots then it's him.

Hari Roka, a political economist, however, said it's not about who lost or who won but the important question rather is how Nepal has seen an erosion of political morality in politicians.

"The way Oli and Nepal settled their dispute, which had reached a tipping point, in a dramatic way is telling," Roka told the Post. "It clearly shows the UML lacks an ideological base. Today's development has given Oli carte blanche to do what he wants."

Many say the way Nepali politicians indulged in dirty politics in the midst of a pandemic, which has been infecting thousands and killing hundreds of people every day, is just beyond anyone's comprehension and sickening.

Nepal on Thursday reported 8,842 new coronavirus infections. The Health Ministry reported 214 new deaths. The country's number of active cases stands at 105,207. Health experts have warned that the situation can go even worse.

Roka said if the opposition parties fail to keep Oli in check, the country is in for multiple serious crises.

"It's incumbent upon the opposition parties to step up to the plate and ensure the checks and balances. Until Oli is comfortable, he will try to govern with an iron fist and close his eyes to corruption by his cliques," Roka told the Post. "Whenever he feels his position is untenable, he will play the election card. But elections are simply impossible in the near future given the pandemic."

Assam's Covid death rate has spiked in past 10 days, higher than first wave

GUWAHATI, 14 MAY [NDTV]: The COVID-19 situation in Assam has worsened over the past 10 days, with higher fatality rates and lower recovery rates when compared to the August-September peak from the first wave.

Some experts believe the beginning of May is when the second wave peaked in Assam.

Close to 550 deaths have been recorded in the past 10 days - more than a quarter of all Covid-related deaths since the pandemic broke - at an average of more than 50 a day, compared to the seven-day average of 17 deaths recorded in mid-September.

The state reported its highest single-day fatalities on Tuesday - 85 people died. On Thursday 75 people died. The peak from the first wave was on September 13, when 23 people died. Data shared by the National Health Mission (Assam) shows most of the deaths are from the Kamrup Metro district, where the state's largest city and de facto capital, Guwahati, is located.

Nearly half of the deaths - around 47 per cent - were between 51 and 70 years old.

Data also suggests that if fatality rates are not checked Assam will record over 3,000 Covid-related deaths by the end of May; this will place the state among 20 states with the worst fatality rates.

At present, Assam is 22nd on that list.



The cumulative recovery rate is 85.74 per cent, as of Wednesday. The recovery rate for the past 10 days, though, is a relatively abysmal 66.8 percent. Assam reported 51,125 new COVID-19 cases in the past 10 days, of which only 34,157 were categorised as 'recovered'.

Last year's peak saw a recovery rate of 81 per cent.

Overall Assam has recording over 5,000 new cases per day in six of the past seven days. The seven-day moving average for new cases has been over that mark since Wednesday. By

comparison, during the first wave the seven-day average for new cases peaked at 2,876 on September 6. The state reported 6,258 cases on Tuesday - the most ever in a single day.

As of Friday morning Assam has over 43,000 active cases - 26 per cent more than the peak from the first wave, which was 34,496 cases on October 1.

As of Tuesday 5,660 people have been admitted to hospital, of whom 421 are in ICU. The remaining active cases are in home isolation.

NHM (Assam) data shows 10,844 free iso-

lation beds, which includes oxygen support for 1,751, including 686 in ICUs. This also indicates the state only has 245 vacant ICU beds available.

Assam witnessed a rapid surge in COVID-19 cases beginning April 6 - the final phase of polling.

The positivity rate was 2.14 per cent for the April 14-20 period but that rose to 8.61 per cent for May 5-11, with the highest two figures - 15.56 and 14.18 per cent - reported in in Kamrup Metro and Kamrup districts.

Never count him out: Nadal rallies past Shapovalov in Rome

ROME, MAY 14 (AP): When it comes to long, grueling clay-court battles, nobody is better than Rafael Nadal.

Nearing his 35th birthday, the Spanish great showed he's still got the stamina to withstand much younger challengers in a 3-6 6-4 7-6 (3) comeback win over 22-year-old Denis Shapovalov on Thursday that secured him a spot in the Italian Open quarterfinals.

Nadal roared back from 3-0 down in the second set and then saved two match points on his serve at 6-5 in the third.

It seems and it's been this way since Nadal started dominating back in 2005 that the Spaniard gets tougher and tougher to beat the longer matches wear on.

"That's why he's won so many matches on clay," Shapovalov said.

"It's not the first time Rafa's done this. I'm not the first person to lose with match points. He does well with the pressure in those moments."

Nadal, who will be aiming for a record-extending 14th French Open title next month, was also pushed at times in a straight-set win over 19-year-old Jannik Sinner that ended late Wednesday.

Then there was his long three-set victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas another 22-year-old in the Barcelona Open final last month.

"To be able to win these kind of matches against young players give me confidence with my body," Nadal said.

Nadal struggled to



hold serve at the start, while Shapovalov was blasting aces and winners with his one-handed backhand. Nadal dug in, though, and started to win the longer rallies.

Shapovalov missed a backhand to conclude a long rally on his first match point then shanked a forehand on his second. A costly double-fault handed Nadal a 3-1 lead in the tiebreaker and the Spaniard quickly closed it out after 3 hours, 27 minutes.

Nadal, a nine-time champion in Rome, will next face Alexander Zverev, the 2017 Rome champion and the winner of last week's Madrid Open.

Zverev also won in a comeback, beating Kei Nishikori 4-6 6-3 6-4.

"I have to do things better for tomorrow," Nadal said.

Earlier, top-ranked Novak Djokovic cruised past Spanish qualifier Alejandro Davidovich-Fokina 6-2 6-1. Djokovic

will next face Tsitsipas, who eliminated Matteo Berrettini 7-6 (3) 6-2 in a matchup of top-10 players.

"It's going to be a battle," said Djokovic, who has reached the quarterfinals in each of his 15 Rome appearances.

After spectators were banned from the opening rounds because of the coronavirus pandemic, capacity was at 25% as part of the Italian government's re-opening plan.

"I missed the crowd as much as anybody else one of the biggest reasons why I keep on playing," Djokovic said.

A five-time champion in Rome with his last title coming in September when the tournament was moved amid the pandemic Djokovic has had a rough start to the clay season.

He lost in the third round loss to Daniel Evans in Monte Carlo followed by a defeat to Aslan Karatsev in the semifinals of his home

tournament, the Belgrade Open.

Djokovic said he played at least 20-30% better than he did against Taylor Fritz in his opening match in Rome.

"So I'm on a good trajectory," he added.

Also reaching the quarterfinals was 6-foot-11 (2.11-meter) American Reilly Opelka, who eliminated Karatsev, an Australian Open semifinalist, 7-6 (6) 6-4.

Opelka served 18 aces to record his third consecutive straight-set win after entering Rome on a six-match losing streak that included dealing with a bout of COVID-19. He has yet to drop his serve this week.

Opelka next faces Argentine qualifier Federico Delbonis, who beat Felix Auger-Aliassime 7-6 (3) 6-1.

Another quarterfinal will feature Andrey Rublev against local hope Lorenzo Sonego. Rublev dispatched Roberto Bautista Agut 6-4 6-4 and Sonego overcame Domi-

nic Thiem 6-4 6-7 (5) 7-6 (5).

Sonego had loud vocal support from the crowd during the opening two sets and was also able to maintain his focus in the third after the crowd was sent home due to a 10 pm nation-wide curfew.

In the women's tournament, top-ranked Ash Barty beat Veronika Kudermetova 6-3 6-3 and will next face American teenager Coco Gauff, who defeated Madrid champion Aryna Sabalenka 7-5 6-3.

The 17-year-old Gauff said she learned how to stay relaxed by watching the Japanese anime series Demon Slayer.

"The main character, Tanjiro, he has this breathing technique right before he fights. When I get nervous, I notice that slowing down my breathing helps me a lot," Gauff said.

"At least five to 10 times it was in my head. You got to do the total concentration breathing that Tanjiro does.

Anti-Olympics protesters submit petition demanding cancellation of Tokyo games

TOKYO, MAY 14 (AP): An online petition calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be cancelled has been submitted to the Tokyo government with over 350,000 signatures on Friday morning.

The rollout of the petition comes with Tokyo, Osaka and several other areas under a state of emergency with coronavirus infections rising particularly new variants.

The state of emergency is to expire on May 31 but expected to also expand to other prefectures in the country.

The postponed Olym-

pics are to open in just under three months on July 23rd.

The petition will also be sent to International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach, who cancelled a planned trip to Japan this month due to surging cases of COVID-19 in the country, and to International Paralympics Committee President Andrew Parsons.

Although 70-80% of Japanese citizens in polls say they want the Olympics cancelled or postponed, there is no indication this will happen. Japanese Prime Min-

ister Yoshihide Suga, Tokyo organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto, and Bach have repeatedly said the games will go on as scheduled.

The petition was organised by Kenji Utsunomiya, a lawyer who has run several times for Tokyo governor. It registered about 50,000 signatures in the first 24 hours after being launched on May 5th.

Utsunomiya said athletes are the victim here and says the Tokyo and the Japanese government should have decided to cancel the games earlier.

Bumrah says Bond played a major role in shaping his career



MUMBAI, MAY 14 (PTI): India's star pacer Jasprit Bumrah has said that former New Zealand speedster Shane Bond, who is currently the bowling coach of Mumbai Indians, has played a major role in shaping his career.

The Mumbai Indians fast bowler, who will lead India's attack in the upcoming World Test Championship (WTC) final against New Zealand, expressed his views in a video shared by his IPL franchise.

"I always try to talk to him even when I am not here and with the Indian team. So, it's been a good journey, and hopefully, every year I keep learning something new and try to add new things to my bowling.

"He has played a major role in that. It's been a great relationship so far, and hopefully, this

continues for many many years to come," Bumrah said.

He said he was always fascinated by how Bond bowled in his playing days and tries speaking to the MI bowling coach even when he is on India duty.

"I met him (Bond) for the first time in 2015. As a child, I had seen him bowl and was always very fascinated by how he used to bowl for New Zealand, and how he used to operate," the India pacer said.

Bumrah, who has so far played 19 Tests, said that Bond assisted him a lot in broadening his horizon which in turn helped him blossom as a cricketer.

"When I met him over here, it was a good experience. He helped me a lot to open my mind to different things that I

could try on the cricket field. So that was very good and that relationship has only gotten better each and every year," added the Gujarat pacer.

Bond, on his part, termed Bumrah as the best death bowler in the world.

Seasoned New Zealand left-arm pacer Trent Boult also had words of praise for his compatriot, saying that Bond was a "tremendous thinker of the game and a pretty good tactician."

"He has been here for a long time, he knows what he is doing and he puts in a lot of work into making sure that the bowlers are well equipped and have got enough information to make some decisions on the day. Yeah, really enjoy working with him," said Boult, who has played 71 Tests.

Olympic champion Biles returning to competition on May 22

INDIANAPOLIS, MAY 14 (AP): Simone Biles is back to competing. The reigning Olympic gymnastics champion will return to competition for the first time in more than 18 months at the US Classic next week in Indianapolis. The 24-year-old Biles a heavy favorite to defend her Olympic title in Tokyo this summer hasn't taken the floor since winning her fifth world all-around championship in October 2019.

The event set for Saturday, May 22 is the first in a busy stretch for the top American gymnasts. The national championships are scheduled for the first weekend in June in Fort Worth, Texas, with the U.S. Olympic trials set for St. Louis at the end of next month.

The Classic will also mark the return of 2008 Olympic silver medalist Chellsie Memmel. The 32-year-old Memmel retired in the fall of 2012 but began planning a comeback last summer.

The stacked field also includes two-time Olympic medalist Laurie Hernandez, 2017 world all-around champion Morgan Hurd and world gold medalists Sunisa Lee, Jade Carey, Kara Eaker, Grace McCallum, Riley McCusker and MyKayla Skinner.

Protests outside, struggles inside: Man U loses to Liverpool

MANCHESTER, MAY 14 (AP): The beefed-up defense outside Old Trafford was more robust than Manchester United's on the pitch inside.

While United supporters again protested against the owning Glazer family facing riot police and new steel barriers to guard the entrances the game against Liverpool went ahead as planned after being called off 11 days earlier when some fans were able to storm the pitch.

United might have wished it hadn't, losing 4-2 for its first home defeat against its fiercest rival since Jürgen Klopp took charge of Liverpool six years ago after Roberto Firmino scored twice.

Not only was this United's third game since Sunday with this rearranged fixture squeezed into the week but the players had to get to the stadium much earlier than usual after being unable to leave their hotel on May 2 due to the protests at Old Trafford. "The players handled the situation well," United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjær said.

"None of them have been complaining. They have got on with it. The preparations have been different. We're not go-

ing to make an excuse of that."

He also downplayed the sloppy defensive display, which was more demoralizing than impactful given United has a four-point cushion in second place with two games remaining.

"Football would be really boring if no one made a mistake," Solskjær said.

"You try to eradicate them and work on them."

For Liverpool, which was playing its first game since its reign as champion was officially ended by Manchester City, the win means the reset target of just making the Champions League is still a possibility. With three games remaining, Liverpool is four points behind fourth-place Chelsea with a game in hand.

"I like the timing. We needed it tonight the most," Klopp said of finally winning at United.

"We always play to win, we just didn't see it often this season."

While United is unbeaten on the road, this was a sixth loss of the Premier League season at a home that will have the fans back inside next week for the first time since before the pandemic in March 2020. Never before in the Premier League has United

conceded as many as 27 home goals in a season.

It was a Liverpool defender, though, who helped United go ahead when Nat Phillips accidentally helped to divert the shot from Fernandes into the net.

"We started quite slow," Phillips said.

"We knew, despite the things that were happening at the start, we had an extra gear. So I didn't feel too worried."

But from a corner, Mohamed Salah's blocked shot was not cleared and a follow-up effort from Phillips was flicked in by Diogo Jota in the 34th minute.

"It was only a matter of time because we turned it around," Phillips said, "got ourselves together and started to play the way we should do."

And Liverpool entered halftime in the lead after Firmino rose above Paul Pogba to meet a free kick from Trent Alexander-Arnold.

"We conceded goals at very bad times of the games," Solskjær said.

"Conceding before halftime was a kick in the teeth."

There was another one inside two minutes of the second half.

Fred was exposed playing out from the back

and the errors continued with Luke Shaw dispossessed before Alexander-Arnold had a shot spilled by Dean Henderson and Firmino took advantage to score his eighth of the league campaign.

Just when United looked to be capitulating, Marcus Rashford pulled one back in the 68th minute. After initially passing to Edinson Cavani, Rashford made the run to receive the ball back and then slide a shot past goalkeeper Alisson Becker.

There would be no United comeback, though.

Nemanja Matic gave the ball away in the 90th minute and Curtis Jones passed down the middle for Salah to run onto and then curl a low shot past Henderson.

"We have a very intense period now, we play the next three games in a week," Klopp said.

"West Brom, which is tough, Burnley with supporters and then Crystal Palace at home. Obviously we are looking forward to that, because our supporters are there but very intense. We have to recover quickly and go again."

In Thursday's other game, Everton moved into eighth place with a 0-0 draw at Aston Villa.

Patients waiting for admission in Bengal hospitals to get free Oxygen in bus

KOLKATA, 14 MAY [PTI]: A non-profit organisation has started a free service to provide oxygen support inside a specially designed bus to needy patients waiting for admission in government hospitals of Kolkata, as the demand for the life-saving gas escalated with the spike in COVID-19 cases.

At any given time, up to four underprivileged patients will be able to get the service in the bus, christened "Oxygen on Wheels", a spokesperson of the Jain International Trade Organisation (JITO) said on Thursday.

The bus will be stationed at one of the state government hospitals and patients will get free oxygen after being referred by a doctor of the medical establishment, the spokesperson of JITO's Kolkata chapter said.

A technician is provided by the hospital concerned for giving



oxygen support to the patients inside the bus which has fans, redesigned seats to make patients feel comfortable and four oxygen concentrator machines.

The spokesperson said that the non-profit body of the Jain community is working closely with the state government's Department of Health and Family Welfare and the Oxygen on Wheels will move from one hospital to another.

Patients will get oxygen in the bus but whether they would get admission or not will be the sole discretion of the

hospital concerned.

The service was launched on May 11.

"We believe that this is the time for the entire community to come together as one and support the activities of the government in whatever way possible. We are all in this fight against Covid-19 together," JITO Kolkata Chapter Chairman Rajesh Bhutoria said.

The organisation has plans to upgrade the infrastructure in the Oxygen on Wheels to provide service to six patients at a time and roll out similar facilities in the districts.

K P Sharma Oli sworn in as Nepal Prime Minister

KATHMANDU, MAY 14 (PTI): K P Sharma Oli was sworn in as Nepal's Prime Minister for the third time on Friday, days after he lost a vote of confidence in Parliament.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari administered the oath of office and secrecy to Oli, 69, at a ceremony at ShitalNiwas, after he was reappointed to the post on Thursday night as the Opposition parties failed to secure majority seats in Parliament to form a new government.

Oli, the Chairman of CPN-UML, lost a crucial trust vote in the House of Representatives on Monday.

Oli will now have to take a vote of confidence at the House within 30 days, failing which, an attempt to form a government under Article 76 (5) of the Constitution would be initiated.

He previously served as prime minister from October 11, 2015 to August 3, 2016 and again from February 15, 2018 to May 13, 2021.

The president had asked the Opposition parties to come up with the support of majority lawmakers to form a new government by 9 pm on Thursday after Oli lost the vote of confidence in the House on Monday.

Until Thursday, Nepali Congress president SherBahadur Deuba, who got backing from CPN-Maoist Centre chairman Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" was hopeful to get sufficient votes in the House to stake his claim as the next Prime Minister.

But as Madhav Kumar Nepal took a U-turn after his last-minute meeting with Oli, Deuba's dream to become the next Prime Minister was shattered.

The CPN-UML is the largest party with 121 seats in the 271-member House of Representatives.

At present 136 votes are needed to form a majority government.

If the parties fail to form a new government in line with Article 76 (5) or the Prime Minister elected under this provision does not secure the vote of confidence again, the sitting Prime Minister can recommend the President to dissolve the parliament and announce the date to hold general elections within the next six months.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 last year after President Bhandari dissolved the House and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10 at the recommendation of Prime Minister Oli, amidst a tussle for power within the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Oli's move to dissolve the House sparked protests from a large section of the NCP led by his rival 'Prachanda'.

In February, the apex court reinstated the dissolved House, in a setback to Oli who was preparing for snap polls.

Diplomats, donors concerned about sex abuse reports at WHO

LONDON, MAY 14 (AP): British, European and American diplomats and donors have voiced serious concerns about how the World Health Organisation handled sex abuse allegations involving its own staff during an outbreak of Ebola in Congo, as reported this week by The Associated Press.

On Tuesday, the AP published an investigation documenting that senior WHO management was informed of multiple sex abuse allegations involving at least two of its doctors during the epidemic in 2018.

A notarized contract obtained by the AP showed that two WHO staffers signed off on an agreement between WHO's Dr. Jean-Paul Ngandu and a young woman he allegedly impregnated in Congo.

In it, Ngandu promised to pay the young woman money, cover her pregnancy costs and buy her a plot of land.

The contract was made to protect the integrity and reputation of the organization, Ngandu said.

The UK has a zero tolerance approach when it comes to sexual exploitation and harassment and that extends to all international organizations that we fund, said Simon Manley, the UK's ambassador to the UN in Geneva.

We are speaking with WHO and other major donors as a matter of urgency to establish the facts."

Britain is WHO's second



biggest donor, after the US.

The US State Department had no immediate comment.

WHO has declined to comment on the specific allegations reported by the AP and said it is waiting for the results of a panel created last October to investigate sexual abuse during the Congo outbreak involving WHO staffers.

What's alarming is that WHO seems to be keeping this abuse quiet and not publicly condemning these allegations, said Clare Wenham, an

assistant professor of global health policy at the London School of Economics, who has studied gender and funding issues at WHO.

There's a lot of talk about giving WHO more money but I don't think any government should be committing to that until we know it's an organization we can trust."

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the agency's third-largest funder, said it expects UN agencies to conduct thorough investigations

into sexual abuse as quickly as possible.

Our role as a funder is to hold organizations that receive grants from the foundation to the highest standards of transparency and accountability, and to insist that they take steps to prevent misconduct in the future, the foundation said.

Lawrence Gostin, director of the WHO Collaborating Center on Global Health Law at Georgetown University, said the ultimate responsibility

for WHO's Ebola response lies with director-general TedrosAdhanomGhebreyesus.

The AP found that one of the doctors accused of sexual harassment, Boubacar Diallo, bragged about his relationship to Tedros, who mentioned Diallo during a speech in January 2019.

The AP spoke with three women who said Diallo offered them WHO jobs in exchange for sex; Diallo denied the claims.

I find it hard to believe

Tedros would have known about these allegations and done nothing, Gostin said.

The (director-general) must meet the highest ethical standards so we must understand what he knew and when he knew it. ... Dr. Diallo may have used his relationship with Tedros as leverage in sexual exploitation, but it would not be Tedros' fault if he wasn't aware of it.

Gostin said WHO staffers who were aware of sexual misconduct claims but failed to act should be punished.

BalazsUjvari, a spokesman for the European Commission, said it would thoroughly monitor the investigations by the AP.

He said the commission is ready to review or suspend funding "for any partner who is not living up to the required high ethical and professional rules and standards. Last year, the European Commission gave WHO about 114 million euros (USD 138 million).

The World Bank said it is deeply concerned about the new sex abuse allegations at WHO. The bank paused its negotiations with Congolese authorities for new financing to agencies, including WHO, last year when reports of general sex abuse during the Ebola outbreak surfaced.

We review our relationship with any organisation whose standards are in question, the World Bank said in an email.

Israeli tanks pound Gaza ahead of possible ground incursion

GAZA CITY, MAY 14 (AP): Israeli artillery pounded northern Gaza early Friday in an attempt to destroy a vast network of militant tunnels inside the territory, the military said, bringing the front lines closer to dense civilian areas and paving the way for a potential ground invasion.

Israel has massed troops along the border and called up 9,000 reservists following days of fighting with the Islamic militant group Hamas, which controls Gaza. Palestinians militants have fired some 1,800 rockets and the military has launched more than 600 airstrikes, toppling at least three apartment blocks.

The stepped-up fighting came as communal violence in Israel erupted for a fourth night, with Jewish and Arab mobs clashing in the flashpoint town of Lod. The fighting took place despite a bolstered police presence ordered by the nation's leaders.

Masses of red flames illuminated the skies as the deafening blasts from the outskirts of Gaza City jolted people awake.

In the northern Gaza Strip, RafatTanani, his pregnant wife and four children were killed after an Israeli warplane reduced the building to rubble, residents said. SadallahTanani, a relative, said the family was wiped out from the population register without warning. It was a massacre. My feelings are indescribable, he said.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman, said tanks stationed near the border fired 50 rounds. It was part of a large operation that also involved airstrikes and was aimed at destroying tunnels beneath Gaza City used by militants to evade surveillance and airstrikes, which the military refers to as the Metro.

As always, the aim is to strike military targets and to minimize collateral damage and civilian casualties, he said. Unlike our very elaborate efforts to clear civilian areas before we strike high-rise or large buildings inside Gaza, that wasn't feasible this time."

The strikes came after Egyptian mediators rushed to Israel for cease-fire talks that showed no signs of progress. SalehAruri, an

exiled senior Hamas leader, told London-based satellite channel Al Araby that his group has turned down a proposal for a three-hour lull. He said Egypt, Qatar and the United Nations were leading the truce efforts.

The fighting broke out late Monday when Hamas fired a long-range rocket at Jerusalem in support of Palestinian protests there against the policing of a flashpoint holy site and efforts by Jewish settlers to evict dozens of Palestinian families from their homes.

Since then, Israel has attacked hundreds of targets in Gaza, causing earth-shaking explosions across the densely populated territory. Gaza militants have fired 1,800 rockets into Israel, including more than 400 that fell short or misfired, according to the military.

The rockets have brought life in parts of southern Israel to a standstill, and several barrages have targeted the seaside metropolis of Tel Aviv, some 70 kilometers away from Gaza.

The Gaza Health Ministry says the death toll has risen to 119 killed, including 31 children and 19 women, with 830 wounded. The Hamas and Islamic Jihad militant groups have confirmed 20 deaths in their ranks, though Israel says that number is much higher. Seven people have been killed in Israel, including a 6-year-old boy and a soldier.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to continue the operation, saying in a video statement that Israel would extract a very heavy price from Hamas. In Washington, President Joe Biden said he spoke with Netanyahu about calming the fighting but also backed the Israeli leader by saying there has not been a significant overreaction.

He said the goal now is to get to a point where there is a significant reduction in attacks, particularly rocket attacks. He called the effort a work in progress.

Israel has come under heavy international criticism for civilian casualties during three previous wars in Gaza, a densely populated area that is home to more than 2 million Palestinians. It says Hamas is responsible for endangering

civilians by placing military infrastructure in civilian areas and launching rockets from them.

Hamas showed no signs of backing down. It fired its most powerful rocket, the Ayyash, nearly 200 kilometers (120 miles) into southern Israel. The rocket landed in the open desert but briefly disrupted flight traffic at the southern Ramon airport. Hamas has also launched two drones that Israel said it quickly shot down.

Hamas military spokesman Abu Obeida said the group was not afraid of a ground invasion, which would be a chance to increase our catch of dead or captive soldiers.

The fighting cast a pall over the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, normally marked by family gatherings and festive meals. Instead, the streets of Gaza were mostly empty.

The current eruption of violence began a month ago in Jerusalem. A focal point of clashes was Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque, built on a hilltop compound that is revered by Jews and Muslims. Israel regards all of Jerusalem as its capital, while the Palestinians want east Jerusalem, which includes sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, to be the capital of their future state.

The violent clashes between Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem and other mixed cities across Israel has meanwhile added a new layer of volatility to the conflict not seen in more than two decades.

A Jewish man was shot and seriously wounded in Lod, the epicenter of the troubles, and Israeli media said a second Jewish man was shot. In the Tel Aviv neighborhood of Jaffa, an Israeli soldier was attacked by a group of Arabs and hospitalized in serious condition.

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said some 750 suspects have been arrested since the communal violence began earlier this week. He said police had clashed overnight with individuals in Lod and Tel Aviv who hurled rocks and firebombs at them.

The fighting deepened a political crisis that has sent Israel careening through four inconclusive elections in just two years. After March elections, Netanyahu failed to form a government coalition.

Greece joins Mediterranean race to win back tourists

NAXOS, GREECE (AP): In her kitchen, Kyriaki-Kapri has enough food to feed an army. Piles of squid for frying, lemons to be quartered, thumb-thick potato wedges to make oregano-sprinkled French fries, and seafood for the dishes famous on the Greek island of Naxos.

She's done everything she can think of to prepare for tourists at her Naxos beachside restaurant Gorgona — Greek for Mermaid — but customers are still a rare sight.

Greece launched its tourism season Friday amid a competitive scramble across the Mediterranean to lure vacationers emerging from lockdowns.

"We're all vaccinated, the tables are outside and spread out, with hand sanitizers on each one. We're ready. Now we wait," Kapri said, standing beside large display cabinets with fresh fish on beds of crushed ice. During a six-month lockdown, Gorgona closed for the first time in its 50-year history.

The European Union has yet to roll out its cellphone-friendly travel pass system. But southern member-states, driven deeper into debt by the pandemic and highly dependent on tourism revenues, are not waiting.

Croatia has already reopened, as has Cyprus, joined Friday by Greece where residents were allowed to leave home without an electronic

permit for the first time in six months.

Last year, the number of visitors to Greece plummeted by 78.2% to 7.4 million — from a record 34 million in 2019 — according to official data, with a corresponding drop in tourism revenues.

Greece is hoping to claw back half the 2019 visitor level. It's vowed to finish vaccinating its entire island population over the next six weeks and will even waive test requirements for tourists who have received vaccines made in Russia and China that are not approved for use domestically.

Other Mediterranean countries are also looking for an edge.

Malta is promising visitors vouchers to go diving and cash rebates to high-end hotel customers.

In Turkey, visitors from abroad have been exempt from stay-at-home orders applying to Turks, thus enjoying an empty Istanbul, and little-populated beach resorts. Starting Monday, travelers from China, Britain, Australia, and 13 other countries will be allowed in without even having to present a negative COVID-19 test.

Portugal is the only southern European country to so far make Britain's so-called Green List of quarantine-free destinations. Travelers in the UK pounced on the news, according to Emma Coulthurst from holiday price comparison site

TravelSupermarket.

"Week-on-week, if you compare all package holiday price comparison searches via TravelSupermarket, the site has seen an 865% increase in searches for package holidays to Portugal," Coulthurst said.

In neighboring Spain, Trade and Tourism Minister Reyes Maroto said her government was in "constant" consultations with Britain to try to have its travel status upgraded. Some 18 million U.K. holidaymakers traveled to Spain in 2019.

Italy is expected to drop a five-day quarantine requirement for travelers from the EU, Britain and Israel this weekend, but many in the hospitality industry are still bracing for another tough year.

"I think (tourism) is going to increase but very slowly. For this year we have to accept whatever comes," said ElisabettaMenardi, manager of the Ca' Foscolo apartment hotel in Venice.

Just a short walk from the famed Rialto bridge, the hotel is usually fully booked year-round but is currently running at 20% occupancy.

"Normally in January we already get a lot of reservations for the summer. That has stopped. So we don't know what's coming now," Menardi said. "People make reservations, then they cancel. It's kind of a dance." — Gatopoulos reported from Athens, Greece. AP staff from across southern Europe contributed.

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Every individual effort counts: Amitabh Bachchan as he gives details about charity work

MUMBAI, MAY 14 (PTI): Megastar Amitabh Bachchan on Friday shared the "arduous" process of procuring oxygen concentrators and ventilators for donation as he said every individual effort goes a long way in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. Giving an update about the Care Centre at Delhi Rakabganj Gurudwara for which he had donated Rs 2 crore, Bachchan said the facility currently has 300 beds, which will be upgraded to 400. "This facility is giving succour free of cost - bed care, food medicine and medical care all," the 78-year-old actor wrote on his blog.

The veteran actor also announced that he had contributed for another COVID care facility in Mumbai's Juhu, which is now ready and will be operational in a day.

He expressed his gratitude to the government of Poland, the Mayor of the City of Wroclaw, the Ambassador of India at Warsaw and the LOT Polish Airlines for their support in the procurement of oxygen concentrators. "The general call from the places that were in need of help had been for the urgent need of oxygen concentrators. These are and were difficult to procure. When I was not getting any immediate source to acquire them, my friend and the Indian Consul in Wroclaw stepped forward.

"He at first realising the situation that we were facing was sending a portable O2 concentrator for my personal emergency use, but I dissuaded him. When he insisted I said if you do send it to me I shall donate it to any institute

that was in immediate need," he said.

Bachchan said the Indian Consul in Wroclaw recommended him with the name and details of a Polish Company that manufactures oxygen concentrators and he decided to place an order

has been an arduous task as well, but luckily another agency has stepped forward and is helping me with my order, he said. "Oxygen concentrators have also been ordered from another source and about 60 of them should be coming in a few days," he added.



for 50 units, which will be shipped out on May 15. "This is most humbling and filled with the true spirit of coming together and demonstrating by extending a helping hand for humanity and for those that suffer," he said, adding that he will be buying another 50 oxygen concentrators and donating them to a hospital. Bachchan also said the demand for ventilators has been equally acute and he has placed an order for 20 units.

So far, ten have been delivered to Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and a few municipal hospitals in the city, while the remaining will be received by May 25 and distributed to hospitals in need, he added.

"The BMC, when I said I wished to donate something for the cause, told me to not give money, but to get them ventilators. This

Earlier this week, Bachchan shared a detailed note about some of the charitable work that he has done for COVID-19 relief as well as for farmers and martyrs of the Pulwama terror attack. The note came in response to his detractors who called out celebrities on social media for not helping people amid the grave health crisis in the country. Bachchan said he will continue to offer help and assistance to places where it is most needed.

"This is the FIGHT that we must all fight each hour... This fight we need to win and God willing we shall. The fight in its literal meaning is often looked upon as putting on boxing gloves in a ring or a wrestling bout with this virus. That's a silly approach. The will is the fight," the veteran star wrote.

AlluArjun-starrer 'Pushpa' to release in two parts

MUMBAI, MAY 14 (PTI): Telugu star AlluArjun's much-awaited film "Pushpa" is slated to release in two parts, the film's producers have said. The multilingual action-thriller chronicles the red sanders heist in the hills of Andhra and depicts the convoluted nexus that unfurls in the course of the narrative of a man who is taken by avarice.

Producers Naveen Yerneni and Y Ravi Shankar of Mythri Movie Makers said the first part of the movie is slated to release on August the 13 with the second installment coming out in 2022.

"The storyline and the characters took on lives of their own and grew to a span that required the movie to be released in two parts.

"The excitement we witnessed for 'Introduction ToPushpa Raj' was phenomenal and we are determined to take it all to the next level by releasing the film as a duology," Yerneni and Shankar said in a statement on Thursday.

The producers said they are blessed to have the top stars, artists and technicians on board for the film and they are looking forward to giving the audience a memorable experience in the theatres through this story. Written and directed by Sukumar of "Arya" fame, the film will be released in Telugu along with Tamil, Hindi, Kannada and Malayalam languages.

"Pushpa" will also feature RashmikaMandanna as the female lead opposite Arjun.

Betty Gilpin comes aboard Starz series 'Gaslit'



LOS ANGELES, MAY 14 (PTI): Emmy-nominated actor Betty Gilpin will feature alongside Julia Roberts and Sean Penn in Starz's anthology series "Gaslit".

Based on award-winning podcast "Slow Burn", the first season of the Robbie Pickering-created show will focus on the Watergate scandal that brought down the presidency of Richard Nixon in 1974.

The story will centre on Martha Mitchell (Roberts). A big personality with an even bigger mouth, Martha is a celebrity Arkansan socialite and wife to Nixon's loyal attorney general, John Mitchell (Penn).

Despite her party affiliation, she's the first person to publicly sound the alarm on Nixon's involvement in Watergate, causing both the presidency and her personal life to unravel.

Gilpin, best known for featuring in TV series "Glow", will essay the role of Mo Dean, the wife of former White House counsel John Dean, to be played by actor Dan Stevens, reported Deadline.

Stevens had recently replaced embattled Hollywood star Armie Hammer on the project. Also joining the cast are actors Shea Whigham and Darby Camp.

Whigham will play Gordon Liddy, a former FBI agent and chief operative of Nixon's "Plumbers" unit who spearheads the Watergate espionage operation as part of Nixon's 1972 reelection campaign.

Camp will essay the role of Marty Mitchell, Martha Mitchell's daughter, who spent much of her young life living in her mother's shadow.

"Captain Fantastic" director Matt Ross will helm the series, which will be produced by UCP, a division of Universal Studio Group, for Starz.

Roberts will executive produce under her banner Red Om Films along with Gabriel Roth and Josh Levin, and co-executive producers Lisa Gillan and Marisa Yeres Gill.

Leon Neyfakh, who created the podcast, will consult on the project, which currently in production.



BEACH DAY! The model, Olivia Culpo rocks a white boohoo bikini while playing with her dog Oliver Sprinkles in Malibu.

'Friends' reunion special to premiere on HBO Max on May 27

LOS ANGELES, MAY 14 (PTI): Streamer HBO Max has announced that the long-awaited "Friends" reunion special will drop on its platform on May 27. All six original cast members -- Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry and David Schwimmer -- are coming back for the special, titled "Friends: The Reunion".

The streamer on Thursday released a teaser trailer for the special that showed the core cast walking in a distance with their back towards the camera. An acoustic version of the show's signature theme plays in the background.

"Friends: The Reunion" will debut on the one year anniversary of the launch of HBO Max and exactly one year after it was originally supposed to air, the streamer said in a statement.

However, the special was delayed multiple times due to the production shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was originally set

to film in February 2020 but was only able to begin filming in April this year.

Described as a "real-life unscripted celebration of



the beloved show", the unscripted special will see Aniston, Cox, Kudrow, LeBlanc, Perry and Schwimmer return to the iconic comedy's original soundstage, Stage 24, on the Warner Bros Studio lot in Burbank.

It will feature a variety of special guests including David Beckham, Justin Bieber, BTS, James Corden, Cindy Crawford, Cara Delevingne, Lady Gaga, Elliott Gould, Kit

Harrington, Larry Hankin, Mindy Kaling, Thomas Lennon, Christina Pickles, Tom Selleck, James Michael Tyler, Maggie Wheeler, Reese With-

erspoon and MalalaYousafzai. Ben Winston directed the special and executive produced along with "Friends" executive producers Kevin Bright, Marta Kauffman, and David Crane.

"Friends: The Reunion" comes from Warner Bros Unscripted Television in association with Warner Horizon, Fulwell 73 Productions and Bright/Kauffman/Crane Productions.

Aries:

There are a million reasons why things are unlikely to work out. There are a million reasons why you could come to regret this decision years from now. But, would you be able to look your old self in the eye and make peace with the fact that you didn't even try? Something tells us that living a life of 'what ifs' has never been your style, Aries. So, face your fears head-on and move forward despite them. PS: You'll be so, so glad you did!

Tip: Love: 1. Fear: 0.

Taurus:

Aren't you tired of hiding behind the many masks and filters? Aren't you tired of presenting a curated version of your truth? The new moon in your sign has brought up the theme of authenticity, and it's compelling you to be who you are fully. Remember, there is no such thing as 'perfect'. Those who project it are merely presenting the perfect illusion. So, love them flaws, and the imperfections too. You are beauty and grace personified, Taurus. Tip: Be who you are sans the masks and the filters.

Gemini:

Something to introspect on, Gemini: How are you seeing yourself in light of what's going on? Could you be playing into the victim complex, repeating the tale that things don't work out? Spirit wants you to take charge of where you are. To reclaim the reins that you seem to have rein-

quished for some time now. You have the power to turn this failure into a big win, and you have the power to do it now!

Tip: Own your story, wild one.

Cancer:

Here's a simple exercise for you to begin your day with. Take a piece of paper and make two columns. Title the first one 'Things I have control over' and the second, 'Things I have no control over'. Remember, it's okay to feel powerless every once in a while. We all do. The good thing is, you don't have to have a handle on everything. Your spirit team is looking out for you from beyond the veil and making sure that you have all the support that is needed in this moment. So, let's make a few amendments in the second list, shall we? 'Things I surrender to the Universe' sounds like the perfect title for it.

Tip: You are so loved and so protected.

Leo:

Uh-oh! You're letting your pride do the talking again, and it's only making matters worse. Quick question: What do you think makes the ego come out and play? Could acting like you're in control be a way of masking how out of control you truly feel? It's time to make yourself vulnerable, Leo. It's time to rip off the masks and reveal the brokenness and the imperfections. Bringing realism into this relationship could be the secret to changing the dy-

namics for the better.

Tip: Realness is the key, my love.

Virgo:

Given the state of affairs, it will be easy for you to feel like you're getting the raw end of the deal. That all of your prayers have been lost in the mail. But, this is far from the truth, Virgo, because you are oh-so-loved and oh-so-protected. So, look beyond what your three dimensional reality is showing you, and trust that there is a hope for a better tomorrow despite it. It's all coming together, beautiful! It's all coming together in ways that you cannot even imagine.

Tip: Patience is your magic word.

Libra:

There are so many ways in which you can express your love towards yourself, Libra. So many ways in which you can celebrate the god(less) that you are. So, turn your gaze inward. Give yourself the love, care and nurturing you deserve at a time like this. While you're at it, let go of the toxic mentality that you constantly need to be productive in order to feel worthy. As always, balance is the key!

Tip: Balance the inner world with the outer world.

Scorpio:

Just when you think you've dodged a bullet, you're having to face yet another sticky situation. It never ends, does it? This rollercoaster ride that we call the physical realm. So, instead

of running away from your problems (that never works, does it?), accept what the Universe is throwing at you with beauty and grace. The more grateful you are for the challenges, the more strength you will find to triumph over them. Cliché as it is, remember that it's all happening for a reason.

Tip: Challenges have a special place and purpose in our existence.

Sagittarius:

There's always going to be somebody who is making more money than you or has more Twitter followers than you will ever have in a lifetime. But, the path they have charted for themselves is different from the one you're treading on, and no path comes without its own set of challenges, Sagittarius. So, instead of bringing the energy of envy into the equation, accept where you are with grace. Accept that where you are is a beautiful place. It's true that you have miles to go before you sleep. But, who's to say you aren't already halfway to your desired destination?

Tip: Baby, you have what it takes to take over the world!

Capricorn:

Author Mary Shelley once said, "Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos." Your thoughts exactly, Capricorn. Given the state of affairs, the old you have would have had a complete breakdown. The new you has learned to take it all in their stride

and squeeze them lemons to make some tantalising lemonade. Remember, it's never about our circumstances. It's what we make out of them.

Tip: You're taking the many changes in your stride.

Aquarius:

Rhonda Byrne, in her bestseller The Secret, writes, "There is a truth deep down inside of you that has been waiting for you to discover it, and that truth is this: you deserve all good things life has to offer." And this is a truth you are beginning to understand on a deep level, Aquarius. The next chapter of your life sees you turning your failures into opportunities, projecting a vision for your future into the vision board of the Universe and opening yourself to all the miracles that are yet to unfold. The shift begins with you, and the shift is beginning now.

Tip: You are the creator of your reality.

Pisces:

Those wounds don't make for badges of honour. Those scars are not meant to moonlight as armour. Your past has been anything but simple, Pisces, but that is not a good reason to complicate your future. So, breathe. Breathe into the hurt, and the pain, and the tears. Breathe into all that is broken and beautiful within. You are an alchemist gifted with the power to transmute that which no longer serves you.

Tip: Happy endings only.