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# Summit TIMES

Vol 06 | Issue 132 | Gangtok | Saturday 22 May 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | Rs. 5

## Oxygen leakage at Siliguri hospital triggers panic

**SILIGURI, MAY 21 (PTI):** Oxygen leakage at the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital in Siliguri triggered panic among COVID patients and their families on Friday morning, officials said.

The incident happened around 9.15 am when the leakage was detected in a pipe supplying oxygen to the COVID block of the hospital, they said.

The oxygen clouded the room where the leak was detected, triggering panic among the patients who thought that fire may have broken out.

The COVID patients started running out in panic amid the chaos, while large number of people, including their family members, gathered outside the block.

Soon, the fire brigade was informed and two fire tenders were rushed from the Matigara fire station, officials said.

The situation was brought under control after stopping the oxygen supply for some time, they said.

No one was injured and no other sorts of damage were reported due to the incident, they added.

The leakage was repaired and normalcy returned, officials said.

## Noted environmentalist Sunderlal Bahuguna passes away

**DEHRADUN, MAY 21 (PTI)** Noted environmentalist Sunderlal Bahuguna died of Covid-19 at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Rishikesh on Friday. Bhuguna breathed his last at 12.05 pm, AIIMS Director Ravikant said.

He is survived by his wife Vimla, two sons and a daughter.

The 94-year-old environmentalist known for his pioneering role in the Chipko movement was under treatment for Covid-19 at the hospital for over a week.

Admitted at the hospital on May 8 after testing positive for the infection, Bahuguna had been critical since last night with his oxygen level dropping drastically.

He was on CPAP therapy in the ICU of the premier hospital.

Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat condoled his death describing it as a big loss not just for Uttarakhand and India but for the entire world.

"It was he who made the Chipko movement a movement of the masses," Rawat said.

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# Spike in detection of new Covid cases is not necessarily a bad thing

## SIKKIM RECORDS 317 NEW CASES AND TWO MORE DEATHS

**SAGAR CHHETRI**

**GANGTOK, 21 MAY:**

Sikkim broke the 300-mark for the second time in its year-long struggle with Covid today when 317 new cases were reported from the testing of 931 samples on Thursday. While the number of new cases might appear alarming at first glance, they also point to some things being done right by the administration.

Consider this, 37% of the fresh cases were picked up in Rapid Antigen Testing carried out yesterday. While there are many who are not convinced about the efficacy of RAT, it remains the quickest way screen people for Novel Cor-

onavirus and especially useful when carrying out random sampling or screening symptomatic patients.

Thus far, Sikkim had deployed RAT in a limited capacity to screen interstate movement and at some hospitals when patients presented themselves with Covid symptoms. Over the last few days, however, the Health Department has deployed Rapid Antigen Testing teams to areas which has seen a surge in Covid cases. In Gangtok, they have stationed RAT testing teams at five locations - Arithang, Syari, Sichey, Tadong and Swastik - to make testing more convenient for

primary contacts, mostly family members, of people who has already tested positive.

This is akin to random sampling at places which have reported a surge and ensures that cases are detected early and medical intervention provided in time.

The increase in Rapid Antigen Tests conducted in a day reflect this approach. 118 of the new cases were picked up from the screening of 285 samples by RAT yesterday. This is among the highest number of Rapid Antigen Tests carried out in Sikkim.

What such focused screening by location can achieve is arrest the spread of the virus

by screening areas pro-actively instead of waiting to people to come for tests. Doing it during the ongoing lockdown and while most primary contacts have been advised quarantine is something the authorities should have explored at least three weeks back. Now that it has begun, one hopes that the initiative is sustained and even pre-emptively deployed.

Meanwhile, with the 317 new cases, Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 has reached 12,512. The last time that Sikkim had broken the 300-mark was on 16 May when 340 cases were reported.

What cannot be lost sight

of is that a large number of people are also making full recovering on a daily basis and yesterday, 261 COVID were discharged from home isolation across the State. The number of recoveries stands at 8,916.

What cannot also be lost sight of is that while 317 new cases were detected, there were only 31 new hospitalisation of Covid patients over the same period.

There are currently 3,175 active cases of coronavirus in the State, of whom only 216 are in hospital. That said, 18 Covid patients are currently admitted in the ICU facility of STNM Hospital and six in the ICU at

Central Referral Hospital.

Of the 317 new cases, 151 were reported from East District, 74 from West District, 90 from South District and two from North District. While 198 cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 643 samples, one was found in TruNat testing and 118, as already mentioned, in Rapid Antigen Testing of 285 samples.

On a more sombre note, three more persons lost their lives to Covid in the last 24 hours. While one death was registered at STNM hospital, two were reported from CTH-Tadong. Sikkim's COVID related death toll now stands at 220.

## Sikkim bags Eco Agriculture Award



**GANGTOK, 21 MAY [IPR]:**

The State of Sikkim has been conferred with Eco Agriculture Award 2021 by Agriculture Today Group, the national agriculture magazine, today. Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim, Lok Nath Sharma, received the prestigious award during a virtual seminar and award function organised on Eco Agriculture Revolution at the conference hall of National Information Centre, Tashil-

ing Secretariat.

It may be mentioned here, the eminent jury of Agriculture Today has selected the State of Sikkim for the 1st edition of the Eco Agriculture Awards 2021 of States/UTs with Sustained Focus on Eco Agriculture Revolution.

After receiving the award, Hon'ble Minister Sharma expressed gratitude to the Agriculture Today Group on behalf of Hon'ble Chief Minister, the State government and the farmers of Sikkim for selecting the State of Sikkim for the

prestigious Eco Agriculture Award 2021 and for acknowledging the State's achievements, initiatives and sustainable focus being mobilised by the State government.

Sharma also elaborated on the journey of Sikkim Organic Mission and underlined post declaration initiatives including the ongoing establishment of Sikkim IFFCO Organic Limited at Rangpo to support farmers in the fields of processing, packaging and marketing of agricultural products in the near future.

The Minister at-

tended the programme along with Secretary, Agriculture, Rinzing C. Bhutia, and Chief Executive Officer, Sikkim Organic Farming Development Agency (SOFDA), Agriculture Department, Dr. S. Anbalagan, at NIC, Gangtok.

Chief Executive Officer, National Rainfed Area Authority (NRAA), Dr. Ashok Dalwai, who is also the Chairman of Task Force on Doubling Farmers Income, virtually presented the award to the State of Sikkim.

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## SPYF thumbs down Govt turnaround on 50% limitation in shifts at pharma units

### WANTS PHARMA WORKERS TO BE DECLARED FRONTLINE WARRIORS

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 21 MAY:**

Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum has pulled up the State Government for its of clarity in managing the pandemic as was reflected its recent turnaround [within 24 hours] in the order to pharmaceutical companies to reduce workforce to 50% in its shifts to ensure social distancing at workplace.

In a press statement issued today, SPYF has

interpreted the govt reversal as its "true face" being "unmasked."

"At a time when the state is leading the country in Covid-19 cases, when the daily deaths are surging and when the entire state is on lockdown mode the workers in companies are forced to go to their work without ensuring adequate safety of the workers, compromising with the lives of the workers and their families," the release states.

This, SPYF adds, in a scenario when cases have spiked among pharma workers with even deaths being reported among them and "no step

has been taken to protect the lives of the workers."

The "disregard" for the workers was especially disheartening for SPYF since one of the promises made by the SKM in the run-up to the elections was a minimum salary of Rs 20,000 for factory workers, abolition of labour contractual system, implementation of equal pay for equal work, implementations of important labour laws like Trade Union Act, Bonus Act, Industrial Dispute Act etc in the state.

"But after coming to the power it has become the most loyal servant of the factory owners," the release states.

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## India records 2.59 lakh fresh cases, 4,209 fatalities

**NEW DELHI, MAY 21 (PTI):** The daily rise in coronavirus cases in India remained below 3 lakh for the fifth consecutive day with 2.59 lakh new cases recorded in a single day, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Friday.

With a total of 2,59,551 fresh cases, India's total tally of COVID-19 cases climbed to 2,60,31,991.

The death toll climbed to 2,91,331 with 4,209 daily deaths, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The active cases further reduced to 30,27,925 comprising 11.63 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate improved to 87.25 per cent.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 2,27,12,735, while the

case fatality rate has increased to 1.12 per cent, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. India crossed the grim milestone of 2 crore on May 4.

According to the ICMR, 32,44,17,870 samples have been tested up to May 20 with 20,61,683 samples being tested on Thursday.

The 4,209 new fatalities include 984 from Maharashtra, 548 from Karnataka, 397 from Tamil Nadu, 236 from Uttar Pradesh, 233 from Delhi, 191 from Punjab, 162 from West Bengal, 159 from Uttara-

rakhand, 129 from Haryana, 128 from Kerala, 127 from Rajasthan, 114 from Andhra Pradesh and 113 from Chhattisgarh.

A total of 2,91,331 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 85,355 from Maharashtra, 23,854 from Karnataka, 22,579 from Delhi, 19,131 from Tamil Nadu, 18,588 from Uttar Pradesh, 13,895 from West Bengal, 12,716 from Punjab and 12,295 from Chhattisgarh.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

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# Up to 300% more antibodies when second dose delayed, says Study

**NEW DELHI, 21 MAY [BLOOMBERG]:** Faced with a limited supply of shots and anxious populations waiting their turn, more countries are turning to an initially controversial strategy that's now been vindicated by scientific studies: doubling or tripling the intervals between the first and second Covid vaccine dose.

A delay in getting the second shot not only allows the existing supply of shots to be more widely distributed, it boosts their protective power by giving the immune system more time to respond to the first inoculation. Levels of antibodies produced to fight off the virus are 20% to 300% higher when the follow-up vaccine comes later, new research shows.

That's welcome news for places like Singapore, which is grappling with a rare, albeit small, rise in cases after strict mitigation measures contained the virus last year. The city-state is now extending dose intervals -- previously three to four weeks -- to six to eight weeks, in order to reach a goal of covering its entire adult population with at least one shot by the end of August. India, facing a catastrophic outbreak, is advising 12 to 16 weeks between shots.

Other nations in similar straits - with few vaccine doses and antsy populations - are likely to follow.

"If I could, I would push a button that says right now, this second, we give one dose to everybody we can reach," Gregory Poland, a virologist and director of the Mayo Clinic's Vaccine Research Group. "We'll get



around to second doses later."

"In the midst of a world on fire, you put out as many fires as you can, as quickly as you can," Poland said.

The reassuring evidence on longer dosing intervals wasn't available when the vaccine rollout first started at the end of 2020. Then, countries limited their use to the highest-risk people and guaranteed a second shot was waiting for those segments. The U.K. was the first to abandon those constraints amid a massive outbreak in late 2020 - a move that was initially criticized but has now proved prescient.

**More Powerful**

The research suggests that the first shot primes the immune system, allowing it to start making protective antibodies against the virus. The longer that response is allowed to mature, the better the reaction to the second booster shot that comes weeks or months later.

The benefits from longer dose intervals

is being seen across all types of vaccines.

People over 80 given a powerful mRNA vaccine from Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE had an antibody response that was 3.5-fold higher if the second shot came after three months, rather than three weeks. Other studies concluded that delaying the final shot for nine to 15 weeks averted more hospitalizations, infections and deaths, while one from Canada suggested the biggest benefit came from a six month delay.

There are drawbacks. The additional time between doses means it will take longer for countries to protect their populations. While one shot offers some level of benefit, people aren't considered fully immunized until several weeks after their second dose.

The interval is particularly dangerous when less potent vaccines are being used or more transmissible variants of the virus are circulating.

Some countries are pushing the boundaries.

India's delay of three to four months between doses, among the longest in the world, means those scrambling to get vaccinated amid its current outbreak won't be fully protected until the summer or the fall.

While studies suggest the optimal spacing between AstraZeneca shots is 12 weeks, there is scant data on the impact of stretching that to 16 weeks. The British drug-maker's shot accounts for the majority of inoculations in India now.

The greater delay can also increase the logistical hurdles involved in getting millions of people to return to complete the series, especially if they feel they already have some coverage from the first shot. It's already difficult to get people in developing countries to return given transportation and communication challenges.

"When you have any kind of a two-dose schedule, it's hard logistically," said Gigi Gronvall, a senior scholar at the Center for Health Security at the

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "You worry about when people will come back for a second shot, or if you will lose them entirely."

It's a tradeoff many places are willing to make, particularly given the limits on vaccine availability. With a new variant first identified in India already spreading in Singapore, officials want to administer a first dose to about 4.7 million people by the end of the summer.

"We're vaccinating 40,000 people a day at the moment, so you can do the math and work out how long that'll last," said Dale Fisher, an infectious diseases professor at the National University of Singapore. "And that's a fairly rigid pipeline. It's not like you can just order more."

By delaying the second dose, several hundred thousand people will get their first injection sooner, he said.

"We're comfortable that there's no downside to this."

## Greenko donates 10 Oxygen Concentrators to State Govt

**GANGTOK, 21 MAY [IPR]:** The Greenko Group donated 20 large medical grade oxygen concentrators with 10 litres per minute capacity to the State Government at Samman Bhawan today.

On behalf of Greenko group, General Manager Karma C Lepcha along with Krishna Pradhan (Senior Manager) handed over the equipment to Health Minister Dr MK Sharma in the presence of DG-cum-Secretary (Health) Dr Pempa T. Bhutia, Secretary (Chief Minister's Office) SD Dhakal, and Secretary (CMO) Tenzen Kizom. Greenko assured further



ther assistance to the State Government for any necessary requirement such as N95 masks, PPE kits etc. The same shall be handed over to the State Health Department. Similarly, the company has recently contributed

essential equipments to the Disaster Management Department in the state as well.

The 96 MW Dikchu HEP, Sneha Kinetic Power Projects Pvt. Ltd. is a subsidiary of Greenko Energies Private Limited.

## UGC issues concept note on blended learning for universities



**NEW DELHI, 21 MAY**

**[NDTV]:** The University Grants Commission (UGC) on May 20 released a concept note for implementation of a blended mode of learning - a mix of online and offline - in universities. The commission said that higher education institutes (HEIs) will be allowed to teach up to 40 per cent of each course, other than SWAYAM courses, online and the remaining 60 per cent syllabus of the course can be taught offline.

Exams for subjects taught in the blended

mode can be conducted offline, the commission said.

The UGC had constituted a committee to draft a concept note on the blended mode of teaching. It has asked stakeholders to send their suggestions on or before June 6.

In March, the UGC had allowed universities and colleges to offer up to 40 per cent of the syllabus of a programme in a semester online through the e-learning platform Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM). The UGC had

asked institutions to amend their rules and regulations within four weeks for "seamless integration through SWAYAM based online courses."

The new provision of offering a blended mode of learning will be in addition to the 40 per cent course that universities are allowed to offer through SWAYAM.

"This provision may be created over and above up to 40 per cent of online education permissible for SWAYAM courses," the commission has said in its notification.

## BJP wants pharma workers recognised as Frontline Workers

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**RANGPO, 21 MAY:**

BJP Majdoor Morcha general secretary, Bikash Prasad, has demanded that the Sikkim Government declare pharma company workers as Frontline Workers

and vaccinated on top-most priority. He argues that these workers have to report for work despite the ongoing pandemic and lockdown and that this qualifies them for such recognition.

## Southwest Monsoon arrives over Andaman and Nicobar Islands: Met Office

**NEW DELHI, 21 MAY [PTI]:**

The Southwest Monsoon has arrived over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday, an indication that it will soon reach the mainland.

"The Southwest Monsoon has advanced into some parts of South Bay of Bengal, Nicobar Islands, entire south Andaman Sea and some parts

of north Andaman Sea today," the IMD said.

Last week, the IMD had said that the monsoon is likely to arrive in Kerala on May 31st, a day ahead of its normal schedule.

The development also marks the beginning of the four-month rainy season. The IMD has already predicted that the monsoon is expected to be normal this year.

## WhatsApp may soon let you transfer chat history between Android and iPhone when changing phone numbers



**NEW DELHI, 21 MAY**

**[NDTV]:** WhatsApp is working on a way to let users transfer their chat history when migrating to a new phone that is using a different phone number, according to a report.

The new development seems to be an extension of the ability to transfer WhatsApp chat history from one platform to another — from Android to iOS and vice versa — through a Chat History Migration tool, which is currently said to be in testing phase.

The Chat History Migration tool could allow users to transfer media from one platform to another. This will help users who are looking to switch their WhatsApp accounts between Android phones and iPhones.

WABetaInfo, WhatsApp beta-tracking site, reports that WhatsApp is testing an updated Chat History Migration tool that would allow users to transfer their chat history to not just

a new device on a different platform but also when the new device has a different phone number. So, for instance, if you are changing your phone number alongside switching from an existing Android phone to a new iPhone, you will be able to transfer your existing WhatsApp chat history to the new device.

WhatsApp currently allows users to change their phone number without losing any chats. It also lets you transfer your chat history if you're switching to a new device and phone number. But in this particular case, the new device should be based on the same platform as your old handset. This means that you will be able to transfer your chat history if you are switching between two iPhone models or two Android phones. However, WhatsApp does not have the ability to transfer chats between Android and iPhone, which is what

the messaging app could change with its Chat History Migration tool.

A screenshot shared by WABetaInfo suggests that WhatsApp may have a link to provide you with a way to transfer your chat history when switching your device and phone number. However, it is important to note that users will only get the option of migrating their chats when signing in to your WhatsApp account on the new phone for the first time and not later. In addition to transferring chats, the tool could also be used to migrate media available in WhatsApp from one device to another.

WABetaInfo reports that the feature is currently under development on both WhatsApp for Android and iPhone. A couple of references about the Chat History Migration tool were also spotted last month. However, there are no details on when it will be available to users — even in beta testing.

## Noted environmentalist...

The void created by his passing away in the field of environment conservation can never be filled, the chief minister said.

He prayed for peace to the departed soul and strength to the bereaved family to bear the loss.

Born on January 9 in Tehri district, Bahuguna is considered the pioneer of the Chipko movement of the 1970s which he had launched along with dedicated environment conservationists like Gaura Devi to save forests.

Conferred with the Padmavibhushan and many other honours for his pioneering work in the field of environment protection, Bahuguna also led the protests against the construction of the Tehri dam.

He had observed an 84-day fast and got his head tonsured in protest against the project which displaced a huge population rendering them homeless.

## SPYF thumbs down...

It has demanded that the State Government take steps to ensure worker safety without causing any loss to the earnings of the workers. It wants pharm workers to be declared Frontline Warriors and provided vaccination on priority basis.

"If any worker is found covid posi-

## Sikkim bags Eco...

Congratulating Sikkim and the other awardees, Dr. Dalwai stated that the honour and recognition will further motivate and inspire all recipients to reach new heights in various dimensions of agricultural progress and development.

The award function was also addressed by Chairman, Indian Chamber of Food and Agriculture, Dr. M.J. Khan.

Earlier, Minister Sharma also attended a technical session on 'Eco Agriculture Revolution, The Blue Print'.

The session was also joined by Dr. MH Mehta, Chairman, ICFA Working Group on Eco Agriculture; Dr. Sudhanshu, Secretary APEDA, Ministry of Com-

He dug in his heels in protest against the project till the last minute. He had lost his own ancestral home due to the construction of the dam.

He also protested against the erstwhile Tehri royals which landed him in jail. He was also one of the most vocal critics of luxury tourism in the Himalayas and the construction of hotels which according to him did irreparable harm to the fragile Himalayan ecology.

He undertook several 'padyatras' to create awareness among people about conserving the Himalayan ecology and environment.

He was a big critic of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

Expressing his condolence at Bahuguna's death, another noted environmentalist Chandi Prasad Bhatt described him as a "brilliant social worker". "His demise is painful for all of us," Bhatt said.

tive, they must be treated, quarantined by the company under which they are working without cutting their wages. If any worker dies due to covid, adequate compensation must be provided by the companies to the family of the deceased," SPYF has further demanded.

merece; Rajeev Ranjan, Director General, Namami Gange; Sanjay Nath Singh, Secretary General, All India Farmers Association; Dr. PVSM Gouri, Executive Director, Association of Indian Organic Industry; Bharat Bhushan Tyagi Organic Farmer Leader, Prafull Gadge, Managing Director, Biome Technologies and others.

The panel discussion was followed by another technical session on 'Bio Inputs and Agro-Waste Management'. The session featured tremendous contemplation on enormous range of Eco Agriculture and its development delivered by the participants from various States of India.

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# Healing Touch in the time of Pandemic

NAMRATA CHATURVEDI

What would you do if you were to wake up and find you have become blind? Or lame? Or deaf? These were common trick questions at beauty pageants, family gatherings, mock interviews when I was growing up. What if someone had asked me, “what would you do if you woke up to find out you cannot touch anything or anyone?”. This pandemic has brought home the importance of the most underrated faculties- of touch and taste.

A major corollary of the current pandemic is the propagation of the discourse of the fear of touch. From stigmatization to categorization, from outright rejection to euphemistic denials, there is a whole discourse of no-touch that is being felt and practiced at individual and collective levels. In communication theory, this is known as haptic communication- nonverbal communication through the sensory perception of touch. Haptic communication as a concept is taught in all technical communication courses at the undergraduate level throughout the country. Perhaps at no other time will its importance be recognized as much as now when the field itself needs a close rethinking with respect to health communication, end of life communication, sexual communication and social communication, all crucial aspects of the afterlives of the pandemic.

Last week, I was reading a social media post by the journalist Ravish Kumar who had expressed a keen desire to touch and be touched during his quarantine period. He had written how he was craving for a human touch- a hand on his shoulder or one over his head, the touch of the family members living, breathing, talking right outside his room whose walls he dares not climb. In another Facebook post this week, a friend shared that she dared to take a walk in Delhi and actually ‘touched’ the summer glory Amaltas flowers. It reminded me of a poem by Nagarjuna where he writes in the persona of a poor, migrant labourer sharing space in a public transport with the motif “Hope you don’t feel disgusted?”. It also made me imagine a quarantine for myself and the various kinds of touch that I would crave. The touch of one’s sexual partner, though overexposed in today’s times, is highly underrated. These days, there are many healing workshops going on with respect to the battered sexual drive of individuals recovering from the infection. One can easily imagine the importance of sexual touch as an integral part of healing. As a society, we must collectively acknowledge the need for cultivating and refining the language of desire itself, especially when this new variant is majorly affecting people in the sexually active age groups. Going back to Nagarjuna’s poem, it made me closely think about stigmatization, something that is genetic in the Indian society. Having practiced the discourse of discrimination on grounds of caste, ethnicity, language and gender, Indian society has adapted this new kind of discrimination with ease. The superstructures change while the base remains essentially the same. When mobility was restrained, the Indian middle class naturally sought no-touch consumerism with delivery ‘boys’ dropping packets at the gate in scorching summers or fierce winters and pizza outlets taking sensitive

and personalized care to create pizzas with no-touch cooking methods. The logic of late capitalism is capable of packaging humanity as consumerables and making you feel so good about it that you can conveniently stop thinking and continue binging.

I started thinking about the last time I touched my son, my students, my niece and my father. In the classroom, touch is the faculty that can soothe, encourage, guide, control and heal, all without words. I was reminded of a day when I put my hand on the head of an agitated young man, my student in a college of Delhi University. With that one gesture, his breathing changed, the problem was resolved and he began to hand in his assignments. The last time I touched my father was when he was set to drop his body. How many daughters must be longing



to do the same with their fathers admitted in isolation wards in hospitals or confined to claustrophobic spaces in apartments? How do we send our loved ones away without touching them? The visuals of mass graves and street lined funeral pyres on mass media had numbed the viewers before floating bloated corpses began to appear on the Ganga river with shores in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar witnessing a tussle between vultures, hyenas, dogs and chemicals on who gets to the flesh first. In more fortunate scenarios, bodies no longer alive are being ‘handed over’ wrapped in plastic, sanitized multiple times and disposed of immediately. There are reports coming in where Muslim men and women are cremating Hindu dead bodies and Hindus are hurriedly making graves in river sands to send off their dead. The discourse of death and rituals in Hinduism as well as other religions is centered on categorizing and staging the sensory faculty of ‘touch’- who can touch the dead body, who will carry the bier, who will offer the fire, who will be purified by abstaining from touch, who will serve the priests and it goes on. When the sixteenth century bore the plague epidemic in Europe, Catholic rituals and discourse had to change. The need for democratizing death rituals was felt acutely and Protestantism stepped in to fulfil it. Priests began to visit homes, even the deathbeds of women, books like The Rules and Exercises of Holy Dying(1651) by Jeremy Taylor became bestsellers, the genre of Ars Moriendi developed and people began to take their spiritual afterlives in their own hands. It is only natural that religions, espe-

cially Hinduism, are set for a healthy reorientation this time.

The art of healing rests primarily on ‘touch’. In this, touch is no longer a tactile perception or a sensory experience, it becomes a means of spiritual and emotional fulfilment. The dargahs and altars of saints are sites of tactile spiritual regeneration where the remains of the saints are approximated physically and experienced subtly. Shamanistic practices, yogic initiations, cult rituals and new age spirituality also recognize the power of touch. In our present context, acknowledging this power in everyday practices can help in generating and sustaining a movement of healing that will have to be carried out on world scale and practiced in intimate and collective ways as the intensity of the onslaught abates. While practicing



the new normal of social distancing, hand and surface sanitization, wearing layered masks and restricting mobility, the haptics of everyday practices has to be developed and disseminated. If not directly with one’s hands, for instance, how many other ways of touching can we think of? How do we make people feel loved and welcome, within fami-

## ViewPoint

lies, workspaces, public spaces and virtual spaces? Mothers and children have to transmit love, elderly parents crave touch from their children, colleagues need reassurance, students need motivation, lovers need to express desire and siblings deserve jokes. And all these need ‘touch’ to be practiced in safe, creative and even unimagined ways. The day we decide to free ourselves from the fear of ‘touch’, we can begin to heal ourselves and others who are looking to us even when we may not be aware of it. The mental health breakdown is a direct result of the absence of ‘touch’ from quarantines, isolation wards, lonely deaths, graceless rites and painful recoveries. However much we may zoom call, the warmth of a hand cannot be substituted. In University classrooms, training workshops, corporate meetings and other organizational gatherings, it is time to incorporate haptic communication as the urgent need of the hour. Through collective reflection, we can find ways of containing the mental health pandemic that has not even begun to unfold yet.

(The writer is Associate Professor in the Department of English, SRM University Sikkim)

# "Will be a strong message": Only 11 guests for Jharkhand MLA's wedding amid Covid

**RANCHI:** At a time when wedding bells have stopped chiming amid exponential surge in COVID-19 cases during the deadly second wave, this Jharkhand legislator chose it an opportune moment to tie the nuptial knot.

For Naman Bixal Kongari, who took the solemn wedding vows in Ranchi Thursday, this was to show the rural masses that marriage can be conducted with such simplicity within the confines of one’s home without any fanfare.

The restrictions enforced by the Jharkhand government to rein in coronavirus surge make it clear that not more than 11 persons shall attend the marriage, including the bride/bridegroom. It has prohibited the use of loudspeakers, DJ, firecrackers etc and has made it mandatory to provide information regarding weddings at the nearest police station at least three days prior to wedding.

The 48-year-old MLA said the event was held after due permissions by a pastor from Church at home and only five people were there from the bridegroom’s side- his daugh-



ter, two sisters, a witness and a friend. Bride Madhu had six guests from her side and it was all a simple affair, he told PTI. He says he chose to drive to Ranchi to bride’s place at Dibdih to solemnise his wedding. Unique was that his daughter Archie (15) was a witness to the pious bond ceremony. This is the second wedding for the MLA who lost his first wife. "During a meeting of MPs and MLAs with the Chief Minister Hemant Soren recently to chalk out a strategy to contain the surge of the virus, many

were of the view that marriages should not be allowed during these times. "But the people in remote and far-flung areas of Jharkhand do not follow such restrictions and it was decided to allow weddings with restrictions," Mr Kongari, who got elected from Kolebira (ST) constituency in 2019 on a Congress ticket, said. He said many whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian or any other community think it inauspicious to extend the dates for weddings once finalised. "Under the circumstances, I

chose to go for it on a given date, which is today, with a message to the masses, especially the rural masses. "I wanted to show them that when a person who has resources and can afford it in a lavish manner later, can solemnise weddings with such simplicity, why can’t they...And I think this will be a strong message for people in rural areas," he said. Battling severe surge in cases, Jharkhand which has announced lockdown-like restrictions till May 27 has reduced the number of people attending weddings to 11.

# Sanju FA ties up with Ultimate Fitness

SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 21 MAY:

Sanju Football Academy, Sombaria, has tied up with Ultimate Fitness Gym as its fitness partner. The understanding was reached online today. The online mode adopted because of the ongoing pandemic and lockdown.

"In today's time footballers need to be fit and build muscles by weight training, so it's really nice that we have got Ultimate Fitness Gym as our Fitness Partner, I am sure our Academy boys will benefit a lot as they have very experienced trainers", says mentor of Sanju Football Academy and International footballer, Sanju Pradhan.

Ultimate Fitness Gym was launched in 2013 and currently has five



centres in and around Gangtok and one at Rongli. It also runs an Academy where future trainers are trained.


"It's really exciting for us to be the fitness partner of Sanju Football Academy and we are sure this relationship will grow even stronger in future. After this Covid situation improves we will welcome the boys into our Gym and plan a

good schedule for them", says founder of Ultimate Fitness Gym, Rupendra Mukhia. "We might not be able to use their facilities immediately due to the Covid-19 pandemic but once the situation improves our boys can "Hit the Gym". It'll also be useful for them when they play Sikkim League matches in Gangtok." added Sanju Pradhan.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF DAD

KAMAL PSD. ALLEY

[16.07.1938 - 22.05.2014]



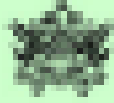
He never looked for praises  
He was never one to boast  
He just went on quietly working  
For the ones he loved the most.

His dreams were seldom spoken  
His wants were very few  
And most of the time his worries  
Went unspoken too.

He was there... a firm foundation  
Through all our storms of life  
A sturdy hand to hold on to  
In times of stress and strife.

A true friend we could turn to  
When times were good or bad  
One of our greatest blessings  
The man that we called Dad.

With Love  
Roma, Annapurna, Puran, Ahaan & Jed



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

**Symptoms of nCoV**




- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia-like symptoms

**Precautions to Prevent nCoV**

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Wear a cloth mask if you have a cough.
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unclean hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid traveling to affected areas.
- Place a mask if you have respiratory symptoms and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

**Treatment**

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccines available as of now.
- No clear evidence of person-to-person transmission.



If you seek help, please contact:-

Toll-free no. 104

District Surveillance Officer

SANJIV KANTHIA

MOB: 9436008

EMAIL: SANJIV@GOV.SK

GOVT. HOSPITAL

JEJU, GANGTOK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE  
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM



## Knee-Jerk is Not Enough

*Monsoon preparedness should be a year-round engagement*

Here are the basics- in Geographical terms, the South-East quadrant of Sikkim, its footprint spreading across the alignment from Mangan to Dikchu to Gangtok up to Rongli, is the maximum rainfall zone of the State. The South-West corner around Hilley in West Sikkim is the other wetter zone and between the two sits the dry-to-the-extent-of drought-prone spread of Namchi and its immediate surroundings. This much, anyone who has lived in Sikkim for a decent stretch of years will know instinctively. Ironically, this obvious fact has remained blindsided for far too long in the State catching its people and planners on the wrong foot every time the skies open up. Readers of this newspaper would have noticed how the connectivity and supplies situation is being addressed reasonably in advance by the concerned departments. These reports are included as much to inform people of the preparedness plans as for them to check back when the slides begin in earnest. The Department's getting into monsoon readiness mode is a welcome sign, but what cannot be ignored is that monsoons become a challenge essentially because the drier months are allowed to pass without enough preparedness work getting done. For example, meteorological data informs that Gangtok has an average of 184 days of rainfall every year. That is a staggering number of wet days, but the data also records that the capital has almost as many days without rain and for a region kept on tenterhooks with what the clouds bear, the dry months need to be used well – to reinforce, repair, rebuild and restore. And yet, planners in the various civil works agencies of the State and Central governments refuse to make use of the dry months to get done with their digging and scrapping. It goes without saying that any work which, in any way, weakens slopes and alignments should be banned safely ahead of the monsoons because Sikkim's slopes have a tendency to come down like dominos at the slightest disruption once the monsoon sets in. With slightly over half the year spent with rainfall [albeit of varying intensities], planning here should be with wet weather in mind. In these days of climate change, this becomes even more important because while the number of days with rainfall might come down, the intensity is projected to increase and that is even more destructive.

One needs to also bear in mind is that the rash of freak weather that Sikkim has been experiencing in recent years is no longer 'freakish' because it is consistent with climate change patterns. Sikkim now has a Department of Science & Technology with a longer name which includes "Climate Change". The policy-makers should realign the focus of this department away from making people "aware" of climate change, to counsel other arms of the government on climate change adjustments and preparedness. Any student who has prepared for an essay/ debate competition on climate change will tell you that the intensity of climatic phenomenon is projected to reach extreme levels with climate change. Sikkim has already experienced it with the searing heat a few weeks back to the wet and humid discomfort of late. There might be fewer days of rainfall, but the days when it rains, it will pour. Departments working on civil projects like roads, hydel projects or construction should be the ones who get briefed on what to expect in the coming years and adjust their designs and work schedules accordingly. Storm drains, for example, should not be designed to receive 8 cm of rain over an entire day in May, but to evacuate this much inundation within an hour. Having been caught off-guard should not be accepted as an excuse anymore.

The role hills and slopes play in water conservation might be too dense for most tastes, but it still needs to be taken seriously. Water conservation, an important issue around the word as in Sikkim, needs to be approached in a more pragmatic and interdisciplinary manner with intelligent and informed plantation efforts because a hill/ slope which conserves water well is also less prone to slip away. Done right, the spring rejuvenation mission should not only address the future needs of water supply, but also stabilise the slopes of Sikkim which have been debased by too much 'development' and too little respect for traditional knowledge...

### WRITE US:

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

# Israel and the Palestinians Celebrate a Ceasefire — but Will Anything Change?

ANTHONY BILLINGSLEY  
*theconversation.com*

While details are sketchy, Israel and Hamas have agreed to a ceasefire. That is good news for everyone involved. The dying can hopefully end and further destruction be avoided — at least for now.

Both sides can also claim victory. Hamas can claim to have defended the interests of Palestinians in Jerusalem in contrast to its rivals in the Palestinian Authority, while Israel's embattled prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, can claim significant military and political achievements.

But that is about as far as the good news goes. As the smoke clears, the vast devastation of Gaza becomes apparent and the slow and frustrating process of rebuilding must resume.

The economy of Gaza has long suffered under an Israeli blockade and has been struggling to rebuild after the last war between the two sides in 2014.

The devastation caused by the current Israeli air attacks has added massively to Gaza's infrastructure problems and vast amounts of foreign aid will be necessary over the coming years. It is not clear who will provide the funding. The Gulf states, especially Qatar, can be expected to provide considerable assistance, but aid from the European Union and elsewhere is more problematic.

### PEACE PROCESS ON ICE

Equally as important, there seems to be no interest in reviving a peace process that has been effectively moribund since the Clinton administration in the US in the late 1990s.

The fighting does not seem to have inspired any desire on the part of the Israelis or their steadfast allies in the US to break the stalemate and pursue a solution to this long-standing problem.

The Biden administration has continued the approach of its predecessors in working to monopolise and control any attempt to promote a settlement of the dispute. Its goal is to prevent other actors, including the UN Security Council, where Russia and China have a voice, from playing a part in helping Israelis and Palestinians to establish a basis for cohabitation.

The US still enjoys a significant military, economic and political advantage over Russia and China in the Middle East based on its long engagement with the region, though its standing has been in decline in recent years. And Israel, in particular,

is suspicious of the motives of the other states.

As a result, the US remains the only power capable of bringing change to the current stalemate. This makes Biden's approach both disappointing and puzzling.

Despite Netanyahu's bravado in publicly defying Biden's requests for an end to the fighting, the sudden achievement of Israeli objectives in Gaza underscores the continued and significant influence the US has over Israeli governments.

No one is suggesting the US will abandon its solid support for Israel.

But the nature of Biden's response to the fighting has been effectively to endorse Netanyahu's approach, which has been to promote the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and refuse to contemplate any solution to the dispute, be it one state or two states.

Biden's handling of this latest outbreak of violence has effectively seen the US treating Netanyahu's and Israel's interests as the same. While the US does not want to interfere directly in Israeli politics, its close identification with Netanyahu does little to encourage hopes for progress.

### HAMAS'S APPEAL LIKELY STRENGTHENED

It should be remembered violence had been roiling the West Bank for weeks — including Jerusalem — before spilling over to Gaza.

The ceasefire seems to ignore that aspect of the current crisis, which could be reignited when the Israeli Supreme Court eventually releases its decision on the eviction of Palestinians from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem.

West Bank Palestinians may be powerless to prevent the evictions and Hamas may be less inclined to intervene again for some time, however, the frustrations and tensions have not gone away and can be expected to boil over again.

While the Americans have designated Hamas a terrorist organisation, it is seen quite differently in Palestine. It comfortably won the last Palestinian elections in 2006 and was expected to win again in the elections scheduled for this month before they were cancelled by the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas.

Hamas had just conducted internal elections in preparation for the national vote and, despite the pain and suffering of this latest conflict, it has reinforced the organisation's image among Palestinians as the one group that understands their con-

cerns and is ready to defend their interests.

Hamas's strength extends to the West Bank and to Israeli Palestinians. It reflects the great desire for change among young Palestinians and their frustrations with the leadership of Abbas and his party, Fatah.

One of the consequences of the ill-fated Oslo Accords was the Palestine Authority pledged to maintain security in the areas it controlled, which is currently limited to parts of the West Bank.

As a result, the authority is seen by many Palestinians as working for Israeli interests rather than the concerns of Palestinians. It is also seen as deeply corrupt.

### A CEASEFIRE ... BUT FOR HOW LONG?

The unrest inside Israel over the past week highlights how Israeli Palestinians are equally frustrated with their status, a concern that has grown with Netanyahu's promotion of the Jewish nature of Israel — as they see it, at their expense.

The shock to Jewish Israelis of the widespread violence between the two communities in many Israeli cities, as well as the violence in the occupied territories, highlights the need for a serious commitment by all parties to come together to seek a solution to the relationship between Palestinians and Jews.

Such a prospect remains possible, albeit quite dim at this point. When then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, began working toward a peace deal in the 1990s, they inspired dramatic changes in attitudes among Israelis and Palestinians. Suddenly, peaceful coexistence seemed possible.

Circumstances have, of course, changed dramatically since then, but that is no reason to abandon hope and do nothing.

Like previous ceasefires between Israel and Hamas, however, this one will hold as long as it suits both parties. And there is nothing to suggest the agreement contains any more substantial elements which might lead to a settlement of their long-term conflict.

The 2014 ceasefire lasted seven years but during that time, nothing was done to build on it. We can expect a similar lack of action this time and without such action, it is only a matter of time before violence breaks out again.

*[the writer is Senior Lecturer, School of Social Sciences, UNSW]*



## How theater can help communities heal from the losses and trauma of the pandemic

JOEL CHRISTENSEN  
*theconversation.com*

President Joe Biden began his presidency by memorializing the 400,000 American lives that had been lost up to that point to COVID-19. The ceremony, held on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, was arguably the first official moment of nationwide public mourning in the U.S.

"To heal, we must remember," Biden said. "It's important to do that as a nation."

But how do we acknowledge our collective suffering as the toll of the pandemic continues to grow, with hundreds of thousands possibly undercounted? How do we talk about healing or justice when the mortality rates in communities of color are so much higher?

As a scholar of Greek literature, I argue that ritual practices from ancient Athens, particularly its plays and communal theatrical events, may have some answers to these questions.

### MOURNING MASS TRAGEDIES

In ancient Athens, leading politicians commemorated military deaths by offering an annual "epitaphios" — a funeral speech for those who died fighting for the city. But these official speeches were not the only public forms of mourning and remembrance. Ancient Athenians also held annual competitions in which playwrights responded to events "in real life" through myth and storytelling.

For example, the story of Oedipus and the plague on Thebes, describing how the mythical king struggled to cope with the plague caused by his own murder of his father, was performed as the city reeled from a siege and a plague of its own in 429 B.C.

For ancient Greeks, this ritualized storytelling, or "tragic performance," had a therapeutic effect. It created a context to explore and process individual and collective experiences of loss and trauma. Psychologist Peter Kellerman has described this sort of experience as a "milestone event."

Indeed, the Greek philosopher Aristotle suggests something like this in his "Poetics," a treatise on tragedy and performance. By identifying with characters and experiencing vicarious pain and fear, he argues, audiences achieve "catharsis." Catharsis is a difficult thing to define, but philosopher Martha Nussbaum has described it as a "clarification of who we are."

STORYTELLING, COMMUNITY AND GRIEF

Even though we live our lives in relationships with others, traumas are often not shared. But collectivizing emotion through storytelling can be a critical step in recovering from traumatic events. Experiencing and processing grief together provides

people with the emotional capacity to articulate how trauma has changed them.

I and some fellow scholars of ancient Greece — including Paul O'Mahony, founder of Out of Chaos Theatre, and with the support of Harvard University's Center for Hellenic Studies — have experienced this ourselves over the course of the pandemic. We began producing the series "Reading Greek Tragedy Online" to keep busy and connected during lockdown. But in the process, it has taught us a lot about the tangible impacts of tragic performance.

Participants have found that their lived experiences of the pandemic reshaped the meanings of the plays. Euripides' "Helen," a story about an alternative Helen who never went to Troy, became a narrative of isolation and loss of control. The political concerns of participants on the day following the U.S. presidential election sharpened the performance of Aeschylus' "Eumenides," which tells the story of the uneasy compromise between the goddesses of vengeance and the gods of law in the creation of trial by jury.

### THE BIOLOGICAL BASIS FOR CATHARSIS

For a few decades now, both neurobiologists and literary theorists have talked about "mirror neurons" that fire in the same places in the brain when one is either performing

an action or watching someone else perform it. The understanding has grown that "vicarious emotion" — like crying over the death of a fictional character — creates some of the same neurological feedback as real-life experiences. This echoes Aristotle's idea that something therapeutic really happens when we watch a tragic performance.

This effect is no surprise to practitioners of drama therapy such as psychodrama or playback theater, and some have turned to ancient Greek theater and myth to address contemporary traumas and social ills. Bryan Doerries' Theater of War applies Greek tragedies to help veterans cope with PTSD. Rhodessa Jones' Medea Project applies Greek myths, like Medea's betrayal by Jason and the murder of her children, to the lives of incarcerated women.

It has been nearly a year and a half of mass deaths, lockdowns and social distancing, punctuated by social and political upheavals. Now that America's top elected leaders are openly acknowledging these enormous losses and traumas, perhaps more people can begin talking openly about what they have faced during the pandemic. Communal theater can offer a template for how to do that — just as it did for the Athenians, even in their worst years.

*[the writer is Professor of Classical Studies, Brandeis University]*



# Nepal's Opposition parties discussing impeachment motion against President

**KATHMANDU, 21 MAY [KATHMANDUPOST]:** Opposition parties Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center) and the Upen-dra Yadav faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party as well as the Madhav Kumar Nepal group of the CPN-UML are holding a meeting to discuss initiating an impeachment motion against President Bidhya Devi Bhandari.

The parties are mulling registration of an impeachment motion against the President and a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli.

"We are not going to stake a claim to the new government. Instead we are discussing impeaching the President," a senior Nepali Congress leader told the Post.

Maoist Centre Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal has also hinted that an impeachment motion is likely to be registered against the President.

"We are in discussion with other parties," Dahal told reporters on Friday morning ahead of a meeting of the opposi-

tion parties that is underway at the residence of Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba in Budhanilkantha.

Likewise, opposition parties are also discussing forming a new government and waiting for the decision of the Madhav Nepal faction of the UML.

Leaders say the Madhav Nepal group has assured that around 20 of its lawmakers will resign, which will reduce the strength of the House from 271 to 251, thereby bringing the magic number down to 126.

"The Madhav Nepal faction left the meeting saying it would give its decision by 2pm," a leader of the Nepali Congress, who did not want to be named, said.

Yadav, one of the chairs of the Janata Samajbadi, is also confirming the numbers of lawmakers that can support the opposition.

Friday's exercise follows President Bidhya Devi Bhandari's invocation of Article 76(5), asking parties to form a new government on the recommendation of

Prime Minister Oli. They have termed both Oli and Bhandari's acts unconstitutional.

The President, on the Cabinet's recommendation, had called for the formation of a new under Article 76 (5) bypassing Article 76 (4) as per which Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, appointed prime minister as the leader of the largest party in Parliament under Article 76 (3) on May 13, should seek a vote of confidence within 30 days.

Article 76 (5) is invoked only when the prime minister appointed Article 76 (3) fails a vote of confidence.

Article 76 (5) says in cases where the prime minister appointed under Article 76 (3) fails to obtain a vote of confidence and any member presents a ground on which he or she can obtain a vote of confidence in the House, the President shall appoint such member as prime minister.

Experts of constitutional affairs have also criticised Oli's move for recommending the for-

mation of the new government without putting the resignation. Oli who is the Prime Minister under 76(3) has yet to win the vote of confidence from the house. Without taking a vote of confidence or resignation from the post, the process of government formation can not begin under 76(5), experts said.

Following his reappointment on May 13, after losing a trust vote in the House on May 10, Oli is constitutionally bound to prove in the House within 30 days—by June 14—that he has the confidence of the House.

After his trust motion failed in Parliament on May 10, President Bhandari had given the political parties until 9pm of May 13 to form a new government as per Article 76 (2). But the parties failed. President Bhandari then appointed Oli prime minister as per Article 76 (3) as the leader of the party with the highest number of members in the House.

As per Article 101 (1) of the constitution one-fourth of the members of the

House of Representatives can register an impeachment motion against the President on grounds of serious violation of the constitution and federal law. A meeting of Nepali Congress office-bearers Friday morning has also discussed the registration of an impeachment motion against the President.

Party President Deuba had called a meeting of present and former office bearers and senior party leaders on Friday morning in order to discuss the President's move and possibilities of government formation under 76(5).

"The President calls for the formation of the new government as a totally unconstitutional move," Prakash Sharan Mahat, joint secretary-general of the party said after the meeting, "We discussed all possible means to stop the President and the prime minister to form a new government and further tamper with the constitution and are thinking about registering an impeachment motion against the President."

## Mamata Banerjee set to contest from earlier seat After Losing Nandigram

**KOLKATA, 21 MAY [NDTV]:** Mamata Banerjee, who swept the Bengal election but lost her own contest in Nandigram, is set to return to the seat she gave up in favour of challenging her former aide Suwendu Adhikari in his stronghold.

The Trinamool MLA who won from Bhawanipore, Shobhandeb Chattopadhyay, resigned from the Bengal assembly this afternoon to enable his party boss to contest from the seat.

"Mamata Banerjee will fight from Bhawanipore in the coming six months," Mr Chattopadhyay told NDTV before handing in his resignation to Assembly Speaker Biman Bandopadhyay. He will continue as state Agriculture Minister for six months, during which time he will contest from another seat to return to the assembly.

Mamata Banerjee's landslide victory in the

Bengal election to win a third straight term was tempered by her own loss in Nandigram by a narrow margin to the BJP's Suwendu Adhikari, her former lieutenant.

To stay Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee has to contest by-polls within six months and become a member of the state legislative assembly. Article 164 of the constitution says a minister who is not an MLA within six months has to resign.

Weeks after Mr Adhikari quit the Trinamool, Mamata Banerjee had declared at a rally on January 18 that she would contest from Nandigram instead of Bhawanipore, which sent her to the assembly in 2011 and 2016.

Mamata Banerjee is also a voter in the Bhawanipore seat.

"I will contest from Nandigram. Nandigram is my lucky place," she had said at the rally and

urged voters of Bhawanipore to understand her decision.

"Nandigram is my big sister, Bhawanipore is my younger sister...I will fight from both if possible. In case I am unable to contest from Bhawanipore, someone else will contest."

During the campaign, several BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, taunted her about "contesting from a second seat" and questioned whether she was nervous about losing in Nandigram. Ms Banerjee strongly rebutted the possibility.

Shobhandeb Chattopadhyay, 80, won in 2016 from the neighbouring Rashbehari seat and was state Power Minister in the previous term. This time round, Ms Banerjee chose him for Bhawanipore against BJP's actor-politician Rudranil Ghosh. He defeated Mr Ghosh by a big margin.

## Arunachal reports 360 new COVID-19 cases

**ITANAGAR, MAY 21 (PTI):** Arunachal Pradesh on Friday reported 360 new COVID-19 cases, taking the tally to 23,159, a Health Department official said.

The toll in the state remained at 89 as no new fatality was reported in the last 24 hours, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

The Capital Complex region recorded the maximum number of fresh cases at 89, followed by Changlang (60), Tawang (40), Lower Subansiri (31) and Lower Dibang Valley (19), the official said.

Of the new cases, 309

were detected through rapid antigen tests, 27 through RT-PCR and 24 through the TrueNat method, Jampa said.

In all, 177 of the new patients have symptoms.

Arunachal Pradesh now has 2,731 active cases.

Total 214 people were cured of the disease on Thursday, taking the total number of recoveries in the state to 20,339.

The new cases were detected after testing 4,602 samples on Thursday, Jampa said.

State Immunisation Officer Dr Dimong Padung said that 3,24,101 people have been inoculated so far in the state.

## House arrest for 2 Bengal Ministers, 2 leaders: High Court in bribe Case



**KOLKATA, 21 MAY [NDTV]:** The Calcutta High Court on Friday denied interim bail for all four Bengal politicians - including two ministers - in jail after being arrested by the CBI earlier this week in connection with the Narada case.

All four will now be placed under house arrest, the court ruled.

The order was passed shortly after a difference of opinion split the two-member bench - acting Chief Justice Rajesh Binal ordered house arrest but Justice Arijit Banerjee ordered interim bail.

The initial order stipulated house arrest while the bail plea was heard by a larger (potentially three-member) bench. The final order makes the same provision but gives no timeframe for the new hearing.

Trinamool MP Kalyan Banerjee - also named by the CBI in the case - asked for the higher bench to be set up by 2 pm, but said there was no order that this will be done.

The court also rejected a CBI request to stay its house arrest order - which will mean the four can now leave jail. The agency had argued the four were influential leaders and could threaten witnesses.

Sources, however, said the CBI can challenge the order in the Supreme Court.

The court also said

the two ministers - Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee - will be allowed to access files and hold meetings (via video conference) while under house arrest. Physical meetings have, however, been banned.

Lawyers for the CBI and the four politicians both opposed the house arrest orders.

Appearing for the central agency Solicitor General Tushar Mehta asked the court to stay its order and keep the four leaders in custody; he said they could threaten witnesses and the system. The agency wants all proceedings to be transferred out of state and to itself - a special CBI court.

Senior advocates Abhishek Singhvi and Sidharth Luthra pressed for interim bail for their clients and asked the larger bench be constituted as soon as possible, preferably today. They argued house arrest, which they said was ordered midway through the hearing, meant their plea was rejected.

"House arrest is no less than arrest. They should be released," Mr Singhvi said, asking that the leaders be released on interim bail till the matter is heard by the larger bench.

"Interim situation should be freedom. These are ministers, MLAs... There is no possibility of flight risk. There

has been no slightest allegation of them not co-operating with investigation," he added.

The four politicians - Mr Hakim, Mr Mukherjee, MLA Madan Mitra and former Trinamool member Sovan Chatterjee - were arrested Monday morning from their residences in the city.

The arrests sparked massive protests and a furious Mamata Banerjee, who has been made party to the case raced to the CBI's Kolkata office, daring investigators to arrest her too.

The Trinamool has questioned the timing of these arrests, which come days after Ms Banerjee's victory in April-May elections that devolved into a battle with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The party has also questioned the decision to not prosecute Suwendu Adhikari - a ex-Trinamool member who is now a BJP MLA - and Mukul Roy - another ex-party leader now with the BJP.

The Narada case involves a 2014 sting op by a journalist who posed as a businessman planning to invest in Bengal. He gave wads of cash to seven Trinamool MPs, four ministers, one MLA and a police officer as bribe and taped the entire exchange.

The tapes were released just before the 2016 assembly elections in the state.

## ULFA-I to free abducted ONGC worker on ceasefire call

**GUWAHATI:** Ritul Saikia, one of three ONGC employees abducted by banned Assam outfit ULFA-I last month, will be released "in a day or two" as a sign of good faith, faction chief Paresch Baruah said Thursday.

News of Mr Saikia's proposed release came after new Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma welcomed Mr Baruah's call for a "unilateral ceasefire" because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have seen a statement from ULFA-I chief Paresch Baruah declaring unilateral ceasefire in view of the pandemic and as goodwill for the new government. We welcome any positive step, but a ceasefire will need ground rules for implementation (and) we look forward to a more solid step," Mr Sarma said.

"If there is a ceasefire then the ultimate intention should be to enter into talks. We are waiting for a more elaborate statement from Mr Baruah to specify what he wants," he added.

Hours after the Chief Minister's message the ULFA-I chief responded via a telephone interview with a local news channel; he said the government's message was a "welcome step".

"It is a welcome step the Assam Government has taken, as its responsibility (is) to ensure oil and petroleum companies do right by the people of the state. Our seven demands were also the same when we abducted Ritul Saikia," he said.

Intel says Mr Saikia is at a ULFA-I camp in Myanmar. A resident of Titabor in Upper Assam's Jorhat district, he was stationed at ONGC's Sivasagar

site when he and two others were abducted in April.

The other two - Mohini Mohan Gogoi and Alakesh Saikia - were released a few days later.

Mr Sarma, who met Mr Saikia's family earlier this week, had also "humbly requested" the ULFA-I chief to release his hostage, and said that action would "initiate common ground for discussion".

Mr Baruah responded: "He (Mr Sarma) didn't have to appeal me as we have already decided to release him in a day or two. He is well and healthy. We regret the emotional trauma his family went through, but I would urge them to think of it as a sacrifice for the greater good of Assam."

Mr Saikia's abduction (and that of his colleagues) is the second by ULFA-I since December last year, when two members of a private company deputed by Oil India Limited were kidnapped from a rig in Arunachal Pradesh. They were eventually released in early-April.

"Assam's finances will be badly hit if the oil and petroleum sector is attacked repeatedly. Such abductions will not help Assam," the Chief Minister has already warned ULFA-I, adding, "Instead direct grievances through the state, which will take it up with ONGC or OIL or the centre, and ensure they invest more in Assam and fulfil their socio-economic responsibilities."

Mr Sarma has said Assam gains around ₹ 14,000 crore from the oil and petroleum sector - through royalty, state goods and sales tax (SGST), and the state's share of central taxes.

## Ladakh reports 107 fresh COVID-19 cases, one death



**LEH, MAY 21 (PTI):** Ladakh reported 107 new COVID-19 cases and one fatality on Friday, pushing the union territory's infection tally to 17,025 and its death toll to 172.

Leh has so far registered 124 deaths due to the disease and Kargil 48.

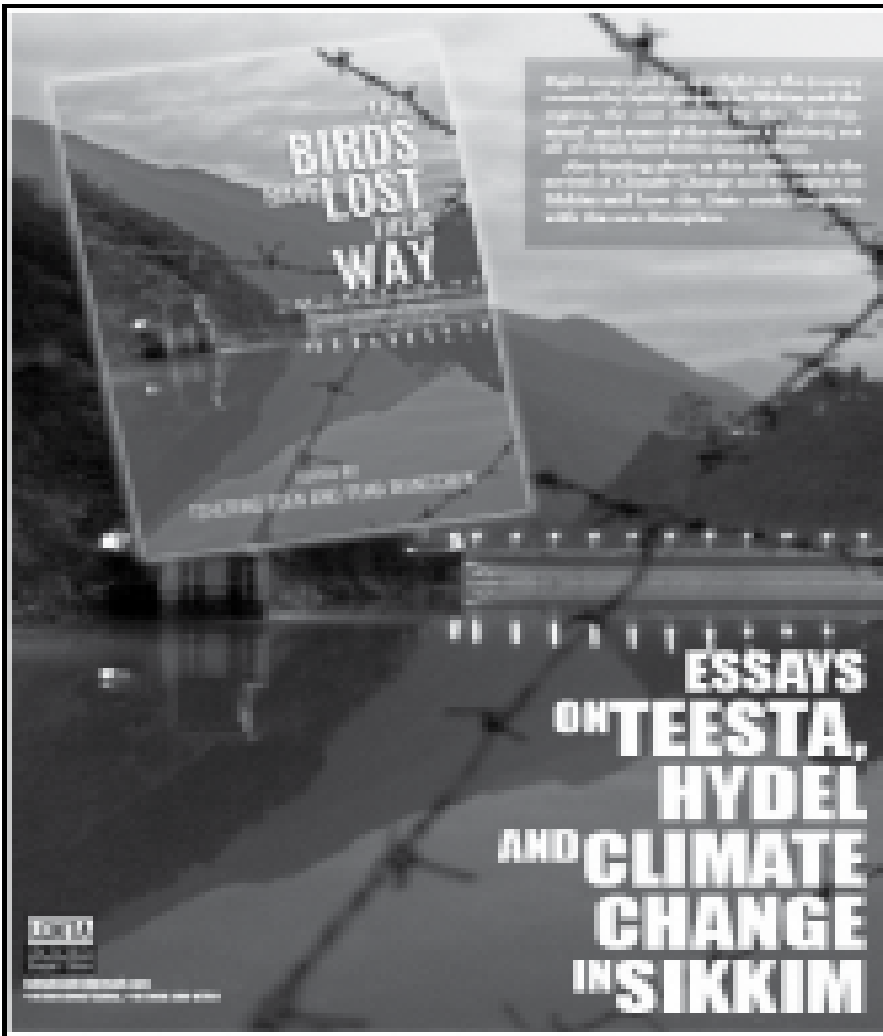
Officials said 82 of the new infections were reported from Leh and 25

from Kargil.

The number of active cases in Ladakh stands at 1,554, they said.

A total of 106 more patients have recuperated from the disease in the union territory, taking the count of recoveries so far to 15,264, which accounts for 90 per cent of the total cases, the officials added.

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7 charged with involuntary manslaughter in Maradona death

**BUENOS AIRES, MAY 21 (AP):** Seven health professionals who tended to Diego Maradona in the days before his death have been charged with involuntary manslaughter.

Maradona, who led Argentina to victory in the 1986 World Cup, died of a heart attack November 25 at a rented residence outside Buenos Aires following brain surgery two weeks earlier. He was 60.

A medical board's report given to prosecutors this month concluded that Maradona was in agony for more than 12 hours, did not receive adequate treatment and could still be alive if he had been properly hospitalised.

Prosecutors on Wednesday charged neurosurgeon Leopoldo-Luque and psychiatrist AgustinaCosachov, the two leaders of Maradona's medical team, and five other health professionals with involuntary manslaughter.

A doctor, a psychologist, two nurses and a nurse coordinator were the others.

The medical panel's report said the patient's signs of risk of life were ignored, adding that Maradona showed unequivocal signs of a prolonged agony period of at least 12 hours.

The care that Maradona received at the rented house, the report said, did not fulfill the minimum requirements for a patient with his medical history, and that he would have survived with adequate hospitalization. Maradona had suffered a series of medical problems, some due to excesses of drugs and alcohol. He was reportedly near death in 2000 and 2004.

Julio Rivas, a lawyer for Luque, said earlier this month that medical forensics of the report were flawed and biased... with no scientific foundation.

CONTACT

SUMMIT TIMES REPORTERS

SINGTAM 8170070813

MANGAN/ DIKCHU 9832612485/ 9434011213

GANGTOK 9800571148 8116388176 9832424750 8016270440

# Beal, Westbrook lead Wiz past Pacers 142-115 for East 8 seed

**WASHINGTON (AP):** After one loss back when the Washington Wizards were struggling through a coronavirus-disrupted, injury-depleted and defense-optional stretch of the season that put them 15 games below .500, Russell Westbrook gathered his teammates to speak his mind.

According to coach Scott Brooks, Westbrook delivered a "very passionate, very direct talk" that essentially amounted to: We will not miss the postseason. Might have seemed far-fetched at the time.Turns out Westbrook was true to his word.

Westbrook nearly produced a triple-double Thursday night, Bradley Beal scored 25 points and the Wizards reached the NBA playoffs as the Eastern Conference's No. 8 seed by overwhelming the Indiana Pacers 142-115 in the play-in round Thursday night.

Washington led by as many as 38 and now faces Joel Embiid and the No. 1 seed Philadelphia 76ers in the first round, marking quite a turnaround for Brooks' crew, which was 17-32 before going on a 17-6 run over the regular season's last six weeks.

"Russell has an edge, guys, and I think the world should appreciate that," said Brooks, who also coached Westbrook at the start of the point guard's pro career with the Oklahoma City Thunder. "He gives you everything. He's a hooper. And sometimes, he's an angry hooper. But he's a hooper that just plays the right way and plays hard." Asked about his locker room chat when things



looked bleak, Westbrook said: "We were struggling and everybody was doubting us on the outside and we had to knuckle up."

That they did, thanks in no small part to the 2016-17 league MVP.

A little more than a week after breaking Oscar Robertson's career record for most regular-season triple-doubles, Westbrook finished Thursday with 18 points, 15 rebounds and eight assists, and it was Beal — second in the NBA in scoring two years in a row — whose 3-pointer opened up a 30-point lead at 98-68 with about four min-

utes left in the third quarter.

"We weren't able to sustain some of their punches," Indiana's Doug McDermott said. Beal and Westbrook heard "M-V-P!" chants during trips to the foul line, as did reserve center Robin Lopez in an appreciative if more tongue-in-cheek way, from a giddy crowd capped at 5,333 — a quarter of the arena's capacity — because of COVID-19 concerns.

Beal skipped the last period entirely. Westbrook sat out the last 8 minutes and tossed his shoes to a fan. "They got on a roll. They got two elite players on that

team and they're at home," said Malcolm Brogdon, who led Indiana with 25 points. "Once guys like that get their confidence going in the second quarter and start rolling, there's not much you can do."

Domantas Sabonis had 19 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists before fouling out early in the fourth quarter for the Pacers, whose run of five consecutive playoff appearances ended in coach Nate Bjorkgren's first year in charge.

Asked if he thought he'd be back next season, Bjorkgren said: "My focus is on the players right now, and I'm not thinking about myself. I'm

really not. I want to just do what's best for these guys."

The Wizards lost the 7-vs.-8 game at the Boston Celtics 118-100 Tuesday, and Westbrook was hardly himself.

He shot 6 for 18. He had only five assists, less than half of his league-leading average of 11.7.

"Just wasn't feeling my best when my team needed me the most," he said. "Today I did a better job."

It was close until early in the second quarter, when the score was 34-all.

From there, Westbrook took over for a bit, bullying his way through the lane and

mean-mugging Pacers players. A 16-0 run made it 50-34 and prompted the Pacers to take a timeout. They never recovered.

At one point, Westbrook raised a hand and wiggled his fingers while looking into the stands, pleading for more noise. Later, Beal — who has been dealing with a strained left hamstring — wind-milled his arms while smiling wildly.

Now the Pacers head to the offseason, while the Wizards are back in the postseason after missing out the past two years before acquiring Westbrook in a trade that sent John Wall to Houston.

Washington dealt with a COVID-19 outbreak that affected more than half of its roster and led to a two-week hiatus. The team lost two starters for the season with injuries. Now, though, Westbrook, Beal and Co. get to keep playing.

"We have a lot of noise to make," Beal said.

TIP-INS

Pacers: Were missing CarisLeVert (COVID-19 protocols), Myles Turner (right foot), T.J. Warren (left foot) and Jeremy Lamb (left knee).

Wizards: F RuiHachimura scored 18 points, 10 more than against Boston. ... C Daniel Gafford's five first-half blocks were the most by a Wizards player in a decade. He also had 15 points and 13 rebounds.

UP NEXT

Wizards: At Philadelphia for Sunday's Game 1 of their first-round playoff series against the 76ers.

## Ronaldo highlights talented Portugal squad for Euro 2020

**LISBON, MAY 21 (AP):** Cristiano Ronaldo will lead a talented Portugal squad that will try to defend its European Championship title.

Coach Fernando Santos on Thursday announced his list of 26 players for next month's tournament, when Ronaldo will be supported by the likes of Bruno Fernandes, Bernardo Silva, Diogo Jota and Joao Felix.

Also included in the Euro 2020 squad was 22-year-old Sporting Lisbon forward Pedro Goncalves, who has never played for the national team. Goncalves was key this season in helping Sporting win its first Portuguese league title since 2002.

Back in the squad were Nuno Mendes and Joao Palhinha, who made their debut with the national team in March.

The 36-year-old Ronaldo will be playing in his

fifth straight European Championship. He is six goals from tying the all-time scoring record for a men's national team. The record of 109 goals is held by former Iran striker Ali Daei, the only other male soccer player to surpass the 100-goal milestone.

Portugal will play in a difficult Group F that also includes Germany, France and Hungary. Both Germany and Hungary will have home games against Portugal in the group stage.

"I have great confidence in my players and I have the conviction that Portugal is a title candidate," Santos said.

Portugal's preparations will begin on May 27. Squad:

Goalkeepers: Anthony Lopes (Lyon), Rui Patricio (Wolverhampton Wanderers), Rui Silva (Granada).

Defenders: Joao Cancelo (Manchester City), N

elson Semedo (Wolverhampton Wanderers), Jos Fonte (Lille), Pepe (Porto), Ruben Dias (Manchester City), Nuno Mendes (Sporting Lisbon), Raphael Guerreiro (Borussia Dortmund).

Midfielders: Danilo Pereira (Paris Saint-Germain), Joao Palhinha (Sporting Lisbon), Ruben Neves (Wolverhampton Wanderers), Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United), Joao Moutinho (Wolverhampton Wanderers), Renato Sanches (Lille), Sergio Oliveira (Porto), William Carvalho (Real Betis).

Forwards: Pedro Goncalves (Sporting Lisbon), Andre Silva (Eintracht Frankfurt), Bernardo Silva (Manchester City), Cristiano Ronaldo (Juventus), Diogo Jota (Liverpool), Gonalo Guedes (Valencia), Joao Felix (Atletico Madrid), Rafa Silva (Benfica).

## BCCI has not officially sought any change in Test series schedule: ECB



**NEW DELHI, MAY 21 (PTI):** The BCCI has not made any official request to alter the schedule for India's five-Test series against England for completing the postponed IPL, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Friday.

British media had reported about a possible approach from the BCCI to advance the first Test, starting August 4, by a week so that the remaining 31 matches of the League could be held.

However, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said they plan to follow the original schedule since their Indian counterparts have not yet made any official request for a change.

"We talk to the BCCI on a regular basis about a wide range of issues

especially as we address the challenges of COVID-19 but have had no official request to change dates and are continuing to plan for the five Test series as scheduled," an ECB spokesperson told PTI when asked about the possible change in the schedule.

The BCCI stands to lose revenues to the tune of Rs 2500 crore if the 2021 edition of Indian Premier League (IPL) is not completed.

This year's edition was postponed recently when COVID-19 cases were reported inside the bio-bubble for the League.

Former England captain and renowned cricket writer Michael Atherton wrote in his column for 'The Times' that the BCCI has enquired about

the possibility of moving the final Test of the English summer to make room to complete the postponed IPL.

When approached, a BCCI source said the Board is certainly exploring options but the ECB has not been approached officially. "The situation is pretty fluid now. There are options that are being explored but no official request has yet been sent. Obviously as Atherton wrote in his column, there are some specific enquiries being made. Who said that enquiries mean official communications," a BCCI source said.

The Test series as of now is scheduled to conclude at the Old Trafford. The fifth Test will begin on September 10. The

game match is expected to attract big crowd and the Lancashire county has already started selling the tickets.

If India make a formal request, the ECB will have to tweak the window for their ambitious project 'The Hundred' along with limited overs series against Pakistan.

Pakistan will play three ODIs and as many Twenty20 Internationals between July 8 and 20. The Hundred will be played between July 23 and August 22.

However if BCCI manages to convince the ECB for advancing the dates, it will be interesting to find what kind of quid pro quo is sought -- asking participation of Indian cricketers in the 'Hundred' or hosting the remainder of the IPL in England?

## Olympic triple-jump champ Christian Taylor tears Achilles

**NEW YORK, MAY 21 (AP):** Two-time Olympic triple-jump champion Christian Taylor underwent surgery to repair a torn Achilles and will miss the Tokyo Games. Taylor was injured during a meet in Ostrava, Czech Republic, on Wednesday. He had surgery Thursday morning in Germany.

The 30-year-old Taylor captured gold at the

2012 London Games and again four years later in Rio. He's also earned four gold medals at the world championships, including three in a row.

Taylor has the second-longest leap all time in an event where an athlete attempts to soar as far as possible by performing a hop, step, and then a jump from a running start. His best mark

was 59 feet, 9 inches (18.21 meters) in 2015. The world record is held by Jonathan Edwards of Great Britain when he went just over 60 feet (18.29) in 1995.

Bothered by knee issues, Taylor made the difficult decision around eight years ago to switch from jumping off his left leg to his right. He called it one of the greatest

challenges of his career, but it allowed him to jump even farther.

Taylor is the president of The Athletics Association, whose mission is to help advance and grow the sport with athletes being the priority.

Before going pro, Taylor was a standout at the University of Florida and a 10-time NCAA All-American.



# Israeli media: Cabinet approves cease-fire in Gaza

**GAZA CITY, MAY 21 (AP):** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office on Thursday announced a cease-fire to halt an 11-day military operation against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

A statement said his Security Cabinet unilaterally approved the Egyptian-mediated proposal.

The two sides were still negotiating exactly when it would take effect. Multiple reports said the truce was to go into effect at 2 am, just over three hours after the cabinet's decision.

The political leaders emphasised that the reality on the ground will be that which determines the future of the campaign, the statement said.

The decision came after heavy US pressure to halt the offensive. There was no immediate comment from Hamas.

Since fighting broke out on May 10, Israel has launched hundreds of airstrikes that it says have targeted Hamas' infrastructure, including a vast tunnel network.

Hamas and other militant groups embedded in residential areas have fired over 4,000 rockets at Israeli cities, with hundreds falling short and most of the rest intercepted.

At least 230 Palestinians have been killed, according to Gaza health officials, while 12 people in Israel have died.

Israel unleashed a new wave of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip on Thursday and Hamas fired more rockets into Israel, despite growing signs that the sides were close to a cease-fire that would end 11 days of heavy fighting.

In an apparent sign of progress, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convened an emergency meeting of his Security Cabinet, where the issue of a cease-fire was expected to be debated.

An Egyptian official said Israel has informed his government, which is mediating a truce, that it intends to end its military operations in Gaza.

Speaking on condition of ano-



nymity because he was discussing behind-the-scenes diplomacy, he said an announcement was expected following the Security Cabinet meeting.

The official spoke shortly after Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi talked by phone with President Joe Biden. The two leaders discussed ways to stop violence in the Palestinian Territories, el-Sissi's office said.

In Washington, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said reports of a move toward a ceasefire were clearly encouraging." She said the US was trying to do everything we can to bring an end to the conflict.

With UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urging an immediate cease-fire, a UN Mideast envoy was in the Gulf state of Qatar to help with efforts to restore calm, a diplomatic official said.

Energy-rich Qatar often helps mediate between Israel and Hamas and has donated hundreds of millions of dollars for development and humanitarian projects in Gaza in recent years.

The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the mat-

ter with the media. Osama Hamdan, a top Hamas official based in Lebanon, also said he expected a cease-fire within the coming day.

Biden on Wednesday publicly pressed Netanyahu to wind down the operation. The Israeli leader initially pushed back, appearing determined to inflict maximum damage on Hamas in a war that could help save his political career. But by Thursday evening, Israeli media were reporting that a cease-fire agreement was expected to take effect by early Friday, perhaps sooner.

Despite the signs of progress, fighting continued into the evening, with Israeli airstrikes on targets in Gaza and Palestinian militants firing rockets toward Israeli cities.

In past rounds of violence, fighting has picked up in the final hours, with each side trying to eke out a final achievement before a cease-fire went into effect.

Earlier Thursday, explosions shook Gaza City and orange flares lit up the pre-dawn sky, with bombing raids also reported in the central town of Deir al-Balah and the southern town of Khan Younis. As the sun rose, residents

surveyed the rubble from at least five family homes destroyed in Khan Younis. Heavy airstrikes also hit a commercial thoroughfare in Gaza City. The Israeli military said it struck at least three homes of Hamas commanders in Khan Younis and another in Rafah, targeting military infrastructure, as well as a weapons storage unit at a home in Gaza City.

On Wednesday, Biden told Israel on Wednesday that he expected a significant de-escalation today on the path to a cease-fire but Netanyahu pushed back, saying he was determined to continue this operation until its aim is met.

It marked the first public rift between the two close allies since the fighting began and posed a difficult test of the US-Israel relationship early in Biden's presidency.

Visiting the region, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Israel has the right to defend itself against such unacceptable attacks. But he also expressed concern about the rising number of civilian victims and voiced support for truce efforts.

Even as the diplomatic efforts appeared to gather strength, an Israeli airstrike smashed into the

Khawaldi family's two-story house in Khan Younis, destroying it. The 11 residents, who were sleeping outside the home out of fear, were all hospitalized, said Shaker al-Khozondar, a neighbor.

Shrapnel also hit his own home, killing his aunt and wounding her daughter and two other relatives, he said. Al-Khozondar spoke from the bedroom where his aunt Hoda died. The windows were shattered and the bed pillows and rubble stained with blood.

Weam Fares, a spokesman for a nearby hospital, confirmed the death and said at least 10 people were wounded in strikes overnight.

Heavy airstrikes also pummeled a street in the Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza, destroying ramshackle homes with corrugated metal roofs nearby. The military said it struck two underground launchers in the camp used to fire rockets at Tel Aviv.

The current round of fighting between Israel and Hamas began May 10, when the militant group fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem after days of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa

Mosque compound, a flashpoint site sacred to Jews and Muslims.

Heavy-handed police tactics at the compound and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers had inflamed tensions.

Since then, Israel has launched hundreds of airstrikes that it says have targeted Hamas' infrastructure, including a vast tunnel network. Hamas and other militant groups embedded in residential areas have fired over 4,000 rockets at Israeli cities, with hundreds falling short and most of the rest intercepted.

At least 230 Palestinians have been killed, including 65 children and 39 women, with 1,710 people wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not break the numbers down into fighters and civilians. Hamas and militant group Islamic Jihad say at least 20 of their fighters have been killed, while Israel says the number is at least 130. Some 58,000 Palestinians have fled their homes.

Twelve people in Israel, including a 5-year-old boy, a 16-year-old girl and a soldier, have been killed. The military said an anti-tank missile fired from Gaza hit an empty bus near the frontier on Thursday, lightly wounding an Israeli soldier.

Since the fighting began, Gaza's infrastructure, already weakened by a 14-year blockade, has rapidly deteriorated. Medical supplies, water and fuel for electricity are running low in the territory, on which Israel and Egypt imposed the blockade after Hamas seized power in 2007.

Israeli bombing has damaged over 50 schools across the territory, according to advocacy group Save the Children, completely destroying at least six. While repairs are done, education will be disrupted for nearly 42,000 children.

Israeli attacks have also damaged at least 18 hospitals and clinics and destroyed one health facility, the World Health Organization said. Nearly half of all essential drugs have run out.

## Indonesia Muslims protest at US Embassy over Israel strikes

**JAKARTA, INDONESIA (AP):** More than a thousand Muslims rallied outside the U.S. Embassy in Indonesia's capital on Friday to denounce American support for Israel and demand an end to Israeli airstrikes in the Gaza Strip.

The protesters marched from several mosques after Friday prayers to a major street outside the embassy, which was under heavy police guard. They halted traffic along the way as they chanted "Allahu Akbar," or "God is Great," and "Save Palestinians."

Authorities with loudspeakers warned protesters to maintain social distancing during the demonstration, organized by the Islamic Student Association and several other groups, to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

More than 3,000 police, many wearing hazmat suits, were deployed to secure the embassy and the nearby presidential palace and United Nations mission.

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, does not have formal diplomatic relations with Israel and there is no Israeli embassy in the country. It has long been a strong supporter of the Palestinians, and President Joko Widodo has condemned the Israeli airstrikes.

## Migrant surge on Spain-Morocco border brings more suffering

**FNIDEQ, MOROCCO (AP):** They are desperate teenagers and jobless men. They come from Morocco's coastal towns, its mountainous east or even farther away — from sub-Saharan Africa. And they all converged on the border town of Fnideq this week, part of an extraordinary mass effort to swim or scale barbed-wire fences to get into Spain for a chance at a new life.

More than 8,000 migrants actually made it into the city of Ceuta, an enclave in North Africa that is separated from the rest of Spain by the Mediterranean — but for most of them, it was a short-lived success.

The extraordinary surge of migrants crossing from Morocco into Spain came amid the chaos of a diplomatic spat between the two countries.

Spanish troops forced over half of them back to Fnideq, putting additional strain on the Moroccan town whose limited resources are overwhelmed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"We will keep trying. We will find one way or another, even if the ocean turns into ice!" said 27-year-old Badreddine.

He and his fellow Moroccans — 22-year-old Salah and 24-year-old Hosam — all have diplomas but no jobs. Like most seeking to get into Spain, they spoke on condition their last names not be published for fear of their security because they are risking illegal migration.

Being stuck in Morocco "is like being dead, so why not risk your life anyway? We're currently living on streets, sleeping in the cold. Our parents know that we're here, they pray for us. They told us, 'Go, may God help you,'" Salah said.

They and others sleep in Fnideq's parks, on benches and outside mosques. Some hang out near hotels and restaurants, begging for food and whatever people can spare. Volunteers hand out bread and sandwiches.

Some have fled the impoverished countries of sub-Saharan Africa, but most are from Morocco, generally seen as one of the continent's economic engines that has made strides in lowering poverty in recent years.

Still, inequality is rife, the pandemic has worsened unemployment and average

incomes are a fraction of those in Europe, which sits tantalizingly close — just across the Fnideq-Ceuta fence.

Amid tighter security by Spain in recent years, some would-be migrants have abandoned the effort, but others are determined to find a way around the security checkpoints or battle bad weather at sea.

"We want to leave (Morocco) because there is nothing left for us in the country, nothing to do, no future. We go to school but don't want to stay here," said 15-year-old Khalid.

This week, many of them saw an opportunity as word spread quickly in Morocco about the tensions with Spain.

When the government in Madrid gave medical treatment to a Western Saharan independence fighter that Morocco considers a terrorist, the decision led to chaos in Ceuta. The port city has always drawn those seeking to cross into Europe, but thousands were seen streaming toward Fnideq on highways and through forests and hills.

"Spain, here we come!" a group of Moroccans cried as they marched, singing soccer chants and hurling expletives at their native country. In central Fnideq, thousands lined the corniche that looks towards Ceuta, and they ended up swimming or taking small boats around breakwaters separating the countries.

While Moroccan security forces normally are spread out on the beach and in nearby hills patrolling a wide perimeter, there seemed to be fewer guards earlier this week. As large groups of youths scaled the fence and wrapped clothes on their hands to get over the barbed wire, Associated Press reporters saw border police standing by idly.

While Morocco has said little about the relaxed border controls, it was widely seen as retaliation for Madrid allowing militant leader BrahimGhali, to receive medical treatment inside Spain. Two Moroccan officials made that link in comments Wednesday.

Spain eventually sent in military forces and pushed most of the migrants back to Morocco. The Red Cross says one young man died and dozens were treat-

ed for hypothermia.

Khalid, 15, and Amin, 16, came to Fnideq on Sunday in a bus with about 40 others from Temara, a coastal town outside the capital, Rabat. They said they managed to cross into Spain three times, but were pushed back. The last time, they were forced to swim back along the shore back to Morocco.

By Thursday, Moroccan border guards seemed to be back in their positions, but hundreds of youths have remained, and the men and boys in Fnideq haven't lost hope of crossing over.

"I am the eldest of my brothers, my mother sells vegetable in the market" and can't afford to support them, said Ayoub, in his early 20s, who arrived Thursday from the inland city of Meknes. "I had to try and help my mother."

While Morocco's government has focused on the Western Sahara in its limited public statements this week, it hasn't addressed the poverty and despair that is driving so many to want to leave the country.

Fnideq, meanwhile, is suffering under the sudden influx of would-be migrants.

The town relied heavily on trade with Ceuta before the pandemic, but Morocco's strict border closure since March 2020 has deprived residents of livelihoods and access to Spain. Protests broke out earlier this year by residents demanding government aid or an open border.

Human rights groups and opposition lawmakers accused the Moroccan government of using migrants as pawns instead of solving their problems. The opposition Istiqlal party urged "an economic alternative that guarantees the population their constitutional right to the necessities of a decent living." Despite the scenes of tear gas and troops on the border this week, the dream of getting out of Morocco remains strong for many struggling youths, even in the relatively prosperous capital.

"If you ask anyone in Rabat ... that person will tell you that wants to go to Europe, I mean migrate. This is everyone's obsession," said street vendor Mohammed Ouhaddou. "Politicians are not doing anything. They are asleep and no one listens to us."

## Japan expands state of emergency, approves 2 more vaccines

**TOKYO (AP):** Japan on Friday expanded a coronavirus state of emergency hours after it approved the use of two more vaccines in an effort to contain a worrying surge in infections nine weeks ahead of the opening of the Tokyo Olympics.

Although there's no forced lockdown, the state of emergency allows prefectural governors to demand that shops and public establishments close or shorten their hours. It has expanded from the hotspots of Osaka and Tokyo in late April to other regions earlier this month, currently covering 42% of Japan's population. On Friday, the government announced a decision to add Okinawa, a southern archipelago that hosts most of the U.S. military forces stationed in Japan, starting Sunday.

Earlier Friday, Japan approved the production and use of Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines. Health Minister Norihisa Tamura said the two vaccines will help speed up inoculations. Japan has administered one or more vaccine doses to roughly 5 million people, or just 4% of the population, using the Pfizer shots that were approved in February.

A quicker vaccine rollout is seen as key to Japan's ability to contain a worsening spread of the coronavirus. More than half of Japan's roughly

12,000 COVID-19 deaths have happened since February. The number of COVID-19 patients in serious condition hit a record high this week.

As the government pushes to host the Olympics in July, virus containment is essential to warding off mounting public worry about the safety of the event. Recent polls have found that more than 80% of Japanese oppose hosting the Summer Games.

Prime Minister YoshihideSuga has pledged to finish vaccinating the country's roughly 36 million elderly population by the end of July, when the Games are to be held. However, a government survey of 1,741 municipalities released last week found around 15% will not be able to meet the deadline.

Following local vaccine rollouts at cities and towns across the country, the government on Monday will open mass-vaccination sites in two of the country's biggest metropolitan areas, Tokyo and Osaka, with the goal of administering the shots to up to 15,000 elderly people a day. The sites will use the Modernashots.

AstraZeneca's vaccines will not be distributed to public vaccination sites anytime soon, the health ministry said upon approval. Because of reports of rare blood clots, the regulatory body will continue to examine the risks and usage guidelines.





**BREAK TIME!** The pair, Jordan Alexander & Whitney Peakis spotted having a candid moment while on the set of Gossip Girl in NYC..

## K-pop sensation BTS releases new summer single 'Butter'

**SEOUL (AP):** K-pop band BTS on Friday released their long-awaited single, "Butter," which they described as a lighthearted and fun song for summer.

BTS — composed of J-Hope, RM, Suga, Jungkook, V, Jin and Jimin — held a socially distanced news conference in Seoul to unveil the synth-heavy dance pop track. "As you can see from the title, it's a lighthearted song," said Jimin, adding that the song will "melt listeners' hearts like butter."

The music video of "Butter" racked up over 17 million views on Youtube in less than an hour upon its release. The song also topped iTunes Top Songs charts in multiple countries, including the United States.

"Butter" is the band's second English-language single after "Dynamite," which topped the Billboard Hot 100 chart for the first time ever for a South Korean group last year.

The band's leader, RM, co-wrote the lyrics for "Butter" with a range of musicians including Rob Grimaldi and Stephen Kirk. "We always think about what we want to express and what people want to hear from us," RM said. BTS will perform "Butter" for the first time at the 2021 Billboard

Music Awards on Sunday. Suga said the Billboard Music Awards are very meaningful for the band. BTS is nominated for four categories - Top Duo/Group, Top Song Sales Artist, Top Social Artist, and Top Selling Song. Last year, the band was nominated for two categories and



won the Top Social Artist award.

Since their debut in 2013, BTS has garnered global recognition for their self-produced music and activism, which includes giving a speech at the United Nations and publicly calling out anti-Asian racism. The band topped the Billboard Hot 100 chart three times in 2020, and was nominated for prominent music awards like Billboard Music Awards and MTV Video Music Awards.

alignment with your truth to be burnt away, Gemini. Your ancestors and guides are holding space for this cleanse and purge process—a cleanse and purge that will ultimately make space for bigger and better things to make their way into your existence.

Tip: You are in the midst of a massive transformation.

Cancer:

It's a 'good vibes only' kind of day in the Cancer HQ. Spending time with the little ones in the tribe is going to be a big theme for you. Those who already have children of their own could find themselves redecorating the nursery or playroom. Some may be preparing for delivery, working with a doula or understanding natural birthing processes and how they can be adapted in a modern way.

Tip: Spend more time with the little ones in your tribe.

Leo:

It's all about balance in the Leo HQ. Balance between the yin and the yang, the material and the spiritual, the pursuits of the outer world and the songs of the soul. If you've been caught up in the web for a while, know that the answers you seek can be found by looking inwards. Religion and philosophy may also be important themes for some of you at this point of time. If visiting a sacred site is out of the question at this point, set some time aside to connect with your mentor or guide.

## Lady Gaga Shares She Was Pregnant After Past Painful Sexual Assault Experience

During the first episode of Oprah and Prince Harry's mental health series The Me You Can't See, Lady Gaga emotionally shared about getting pregnant after she was sexually assaulted.

Lady Gaga is getting candid about being a survivor of sexual assault.

The 35-year-old pop star guests on the premiere episode of Oprah Winfrey and Prince Harry's new Apple TV+ unscripted series, The Me You Can't See, which launches Friday, May 21 and features conversations about mental health. During her segment, Lady Gaga shared details from a time when she found out she was pregnant following nonconsensual sex.

"I was 19 years old, and I was working in the business, and a producer said to me, 'Take your clothes off,'" the Oscar winner recalled. "And I said no. And I left, and they told me they were going to burn all of my music. And they didn't stop. They didn't stop asking me, and I just froze and I—I don't even remember." This caused the performer to break down in tears.

Lady Gaga, who explained she has decided not to name the producer because she never wants to face him again, went on to share that the industry is abusive and dangerous. She described a time years later when she went to a hospital for pain and numbness, and she

was surprised when the hospital sent a psychiatrist to see her, rather than a medical doctor.

"First I felt full-on pain, then I went numb," the "Poker Face" vocalist shared. "And then I was sick for weeks and



weeks and weeks and weeks after, and I realized that it was the same pain that I felt when the person who raped me dropped me off pregnant on a corner. At my parents' house because I was vomiting and sick. Because I'd been being abused. I was locked away in a studio for months."

She explained that she felt changed by the pain she had endured, which led to a "psychotic break" that was still going on when she accepted the Oscar for A Star Is Born in 2019.

"I had a total psychotic break, and

for a couple years, I was not the same girl," she said. "The way that I feel when I feel pain was how I felt after I was raped. I've had so many MRIs and scans where they don't find nothing. But your body remembers."

Lady Gaga went on to say she has more recently dealt with impulses toward self-harm. "You know why it's not good to cut? You know why it's not good to throw yourself against the wall? You know why it's not good to self-harm? Because it makes you feel worse," she added. "You think you're going to feel better because you're showing somebody, 'Look, I'm in pain.' It doesn't help."

The star concluded on a hopeful note, explaining that after several years, she "learned all the ways to pull myself out of it. It all started to slowly change."

## Kristin Cavallari Reveals How She Feels About Marriage Following Jay Cutler Divorce

A year after filing for divorce from Jay Cutler, Kristin Cavallari explained she's planning to change her habits a bit regarding dating, and shared whether she intends to remarry.

Kristin Cavallari is single for now, and she's planning to be a bit more careful when dating than she has in the past.

The 34-year-old Very Cavallari alum appeared on the Scrubbing In podcast on Monday, May 17, where she told co-hosts Becca Tilley and Tanya Rad that she doesn't plan to introduce a partner to her three children—Camden, 8, Jaxon, 7, and Saylor, 5—until she's sure the couple is in it for the long haul. Kristin and Jay Cutler, the father of her kids, filed for divorce in April 2020 after 10 years of marriage.

"It's going to take the guy I marry next for me to introduce them to my kids," the reality TV mainstay admitted. "My kids will not meet anybody until I know this is the one."

As for what she's looking for at the moment, she explained, "I do want to date—I do want to have fun." The star added, "I'm really enjoying where I'm at right now, and I'm having a good time. But I am 100 percent single at the moment."

Without naming names, Kristin said that when it comes to dating in the lime-light, there are "ways to be a little more secretive" than she was with a guy she was seeing after Jay.

"I think I got a little lazy last fall," she said. "That was the moment. I was

having fun, you know? It was like, I also want to go out in public as well."

In October 2020, Kristin was photographed kissing comedian Jeff Dye in Chicago, and the pair continued the



relationship into this year. Indeed, the couple was seen packing on the PDA during a Mexico getaway in March 2021 despite reports earlier that month that they had split.

On May 3, Kristin confirmed to E! News' Daily Pop she's now single.

During the Scrubbing In visit, Kristin pointed out she met Jay when she was just 23, so she's planning to take her time before rushing into another serious relationship.

"We filed over a year ago, and then it took me a minute, but then I dated somebody, and it was great," Kristin shared. "He was the perfect guy to date after Jay. He was really sweet, made me feel really good. But now I just want to be by myself. And when it's the time, it'll happen. I'm not gonna force it."

## Tennessee man charged with killing 2 in car crash

**MEMPHIS, TENN. (AP):** A Tennessee man who told police he had been smoking marijuana because he was upset NBA star Kobe Bryant had died has been charged with killing two Mississippi residents in a car crash, prosecutors said.

Charles Robert Jones, 39, has been indicted on charges including vehicular homicide involving intoxication, DUI and reckless driving, the Shelby County district attorney's office said.

Investigators said Jones was speeding when he ignored a red light at a Memphis intersection, crossed the center line and slammed head-on into another car on Jan. 26, 2020.

Sonya Lea Roser, 54, of Ripley, Mississippi, and her passenger, Christopher Allen Hunt, 50, of Horn Lake, Mississippi, were killed.

Authorities say Jones told investigators that he had been smoking "weed" earlier because he was upset over the death of Bryant. The retired NBA player was killed in a helicopter crash that day in California.

Online records didn't show if Jones had a lawyer late Thursday.

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**Aries:** Emotional ups and downs could be a constant in the Aries HQ. Let's just blame the collective energy for this, shall we? But that doesn't change the fact that you'll still have to work through the feelings that are coming up in order to be examined. So, set that time aside to meditate (a guided one if watching your breath is not your jam) or spend a few extra minutes in shavasana on your yoga mat. Working with harmonising crystals such as larimar, aquamarine and moonstone can also help you heal the wounds of the sacred feminine.

Tip: Spend a few extra minutes in shavasana today.

Taurus:

What do you do when Plan A, B, C, \*and\* D fall apart? Uh-oh! We sense trouble in paradise, Taurus. Here's the thing, though: the calamity is likely to seem much bigger than it is. So stay in your centre. Look at the situation from a different vantage point. Rising above the chaos will make creative solutions available to you. PS: Your ancestors and guides are helping you become the eye of the storm, beloved.

Tip: Change the vantage point.

Gemini:

The cards are speaking of a slow burning fire. A fire of transformation that is helping cleanse the impurities within and without. So, allow that which is no longer in

Tip: Finding a balance between the material and the spiritual is a key theme for you right now.

Virgo:

Yes, it's going to be a lot harder than it seems. No, you're not going to be able to find all the answers that you seek. But you've got to do what's right for you at this point of time. You've got to do what it takes to protect your heart, even if that means walking away from a certain person or situation. Even though it feels like you're losing everything in this moment, that is not the case, Virgo. The fire of transformation is burning bright and it's clearing away all the impurities so you can start over with a blank slate.

Tip: This too shall pass.

Libra:

Reality is for rookies (and earth signs!). You're in the mood to peer at what lies beyond the veil, obsess over your favourite crystals, pull oracle cards, call upon your spirit guides, discuss conspiracy theories as a form of therapy, and basically have your third eye lit. Sounds like the perfect way to prep for the weekend! For those who have been drawn towards the world of mysteries for a long time, this is also a time of delving deeper. Find an area of specialisation, Libra, and know that your higher self is guiding all of your decisions.

Tip: You're in the mood to tap into your inner mystic.

Scorpio:

You are a leader par excellence, Scorpio. The kind of person who inspires others simply by being you. It's time to use your influence and your magnetism for the greater good. It's time to inspire your crew to come together in order to spread awareness and mobilise the resources that are required at this moment. This may sound counterintuitive, but shifting the focus from 'me' to 'we' will bring more abundance into your world.

Tip: Wield your power for the greater good.

Sagittarius:

Sag, you may find yourself in a catch 22 situation. There's a lingering feeling that no matter what you say or do, it could be used against you. Word for the wise: become aware of the triggers, both yours and that of the other person.

Tip: Let go of the need to win against all odds.

Capricorn:

There are things we do for love, and then there are things we do for money, power, influence and success in the material world. But, the things we do for joy alone are the things that need your attention today, Capricorn. So, hop, skip and jump around the house. Organise and reorganise your spaces. Try a new recipe. Return to your Vinyasa practice. Experiment with an instrument you feel drawn towards. Make your own lotions and potions. Spend some time

gardening. Give coffee painting a shot. Try your hand at free writing. Remember, engaging in an activity that does not have an end goal is the kind of therapy you need right now.

Tip: What are the things that make you happy?

Aquarius:

It hurts so much, but you have to walk away. It hurts so much, but you have to protect yourself. It hurts so much, but you have to do what's right for you in this moment. Not every connection is meant to last forever, Aquarius. There are some people who come into our life for merely a season, and that's okay. It's important to recognise when a connection has served its purpose in your existence, and cut the cords in a manner that's respectful.

Tip: Do what's right for you in this moment.

Pisces:

There are times we dismiss our opinions or shy away from standing in our truth for the sake of making peace. But this false sense of calm rests on a shaky foundation, one that will give way eventually. Let's not get started on the collateral damage of this catastrophe. What the cards are urging you to do today is own your truth. Become the master of your story. There is nobody who can refute your power when you stand on solid ground.

Tip: It's time to own your story.