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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Frontline and health workers felicitated on Doctors' Day

404 MEDICAL EMPLOYEES RECRUITED DURING PANDEMIC, 30 GDMOS IN PROCESS OF BEING RECRUITED: CM

GANGTOK, 01 JUL (IPR): A Felicitation Function was organized at Raj Bhawan today to mark National Doctors' Day 2021. The function was graced by the Governor, Ganga Prasad, Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang, Cabinet Ministers, Chief Secretary, Director General cum Secretary Health, senior officers, doctors, and awardees.

The Governor, Ganga Prasad, in his address, mentioned that Doctors Day is observed across the country to acknowledge the work and effort of doctors in saving lives. He mentioned that Doctors Day is celebrated to commemorate the birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, who was also a freedom fighter of India and Chief Minister of West Bengal, whose great contributions in the field of medicine is unparalleled.

He mentioned that doctors, nurses, paramedics, ASHA workers and other front line workers have relentlessly devoted their service to fight against COVID-19 pandemic. They have not only treated patients but have put their own lives at stake to give a new life to others, and that all the appreciation and honour in words will always fall short.

He mentioned that about 800 doctors lost their lives to COVID-19 in India, and on this occasion, he paid his tribute to those lives lost and offered his heartfelt condolences to their families.

The Governor said that like the saying goes 'need is the root of invention', likewise in Sikkim, during the pandemic, testing labs were set up, oxygen plant was established and various other works in the health sector were carried out.

He also mentioned that Sikkim has very good medical facilities, good doctors, good hospitals and the way they served the Sikkimese citizens is beyond commendable.

He concluded his address by extending his heartfelt gratitude and warm greetings to all the doctors and frontline workers who have proved that there is no greater duty than service during the course of pandemic. He extended his warm greetings to the doctors on the occasion of National Doctors' Day.

The Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang congratulated and greeted the doctors on the occasion of National Doctors Day and Felicitation Function. He thanked the Governor, Ganga Prasad for hosting this first-of-its kind-function to felicitate the doctors and frontline workers.

The Chief Minister highlighted the significance of the day and said that Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy is one of the greatest sources of inspiration of India and his life is one to imbibe from. He is not only inspirational for doctors and politicians, but for every citizen of the country.

The Chief Minister mentioned that amidst the greatest challenge brought on by COVID-19, the State Government did not falter in fighting it. He extended his



heartfelt gratitude to every department of the State Government and the Health Department for its relentless and selfless service to the people of Sikkim.

He mentioned that the health sector went beyond its capability, showed strength during the weakest period and for which he is wholeheartedly proud and grateful. He also proudly informed the new establishments of ICUs, rooms, ventilator, dedicated COVID Hospital amongst other infrastructure development in the health sector.

The Chief Minister extended his gratitude towards the Governor, for his concern and guidance to tackle the difficulties brought on by pandemic in the State.

The Chief Minister informed that despite the Pandemic the State Government established Dialysis Centre in District Hospitals, and aims to set up a cancer hospital with the latest facilities at Karfectar, for which the budget has been allocated for the year 2021-22.

He informed that during the pandemic, 404 medical employees that include doctors, specialists, super specialists, nurses, dentists, dental surgeons were recruited and 30 GDMOs are in the process of being recruited with relaxation in the roster, to increase the manpower in the medical field.

The Chief Minister mentioned that he is proud of the doctors, nurses, paramedics and urged the citizens to trust the healthcare facilities of their homeland, now more than ever.

The Governor joined the Chief Minister in conferring awards and felicitations to doctors, front line workers and officers of the State Government.

FELICITATIONS

HoD Medicine STNM Gangtok - Dr. Yogesh Ghimirey
Medical Officer STNM Gangtok - Dr. Alin Subba
Medical Officer IC Urban PHC Gangtok - Dr. Kunzang Lepcha
Medical Officer STNM Gangtok - Dr. Bhavna Rai
ANS STNM Gangtok - Sumitra Sharma
Data Entry Operator STNM Gangtok - Pushpa Rai
Medical Attendant STNM Gangtok - Sameer Chettri
Safai Karmachari STNM Gangtok - Binod Balmiki

Senior Resident, Deptt of Anesthesiology, CRH - Dr. Vinay DM CRH - Dr. Sandeep Kashyap
Resident CRH - Dr. Amanda Lipkashi Pradhan
PG Resident CRH - Dr. Manish Ranwa
Intern CRH - Dr. Bidya Laxmi
Intern CRH - Dr. Shaumik Bhattacharya.

EAST HOSPITALS

Dental Surgeon, Samdong PHC - Dr. Chumipa Bhutia,
Dental Surgeon, Dist Hospital Singtam - Dr. Insha Pradhan,
ANM Pangthang PHSC - Thinley Ongmu Bhutia,
T.O Sang PHC - Yadhu Prasad Poudyal
Counselor District Hospital - Pinkey Bhutia

SOUTH HOSPITALS

MOIC/ Temi PHC - Dr. Kamala Pariyar
MOIC/ Ravangla PHC - Dr. Pallavi Pariyar
Staff Nurse Namchi - Suja Hang Subba & Buddha Lohar
Aganwadi Worker, Lower Mamring - Nirmala Pradhan

WEST HOSPITAL

Dist. Surveillance Officer, Gyalshing - Dr. Leezum Foning Lepcha

MO, Gyalshing - Dr. Rajesh Subba
Dental, Mangalbarey PHC - Dr. Abhishek Pradhan
Asst. Nursing Superintendent, Gyalshing - Padma K mari Chettri
MLHP Nurse, Pakkigaon PHSC, Soreng - Tenzing Daduen Bhutia

NORTH HOSPITALS

GDMO/MS ENT, Mangan - Dr. Rinzing Chopel Dadul
Health Educator, Mangan - Rinchen Namgyal Bhutia
ANM flu clinic, Mangan - Sangay Palmu Bhutia
GNM isolation ward, Mangan - Alsonmit Lepcha
Safai Karmachari, Mangan - Rodick Rai

District Collector, East - Raj Yadav [Secretary, Raj Bhawan] & K. Ragul

District Collector South - Bharani Sharma
District Collector West - Karma R Bonpo
District Collector North - Tenzing T. Kaleon

Superintendent of Police East, Dr. Siva Prasad Yellasiri
Superintendent of Police West - Tashi Wangyal Bhutia
Superintendent of Police South - Thakur Thapa
Superintendent of Police North - Ongmu Bhutia

Re-interview for same ad hoc job is injustice: SRP

SAGARCHETTRI

GANGTOK, 01 JUL:

Sikkim Republican Party president, KB Raitoday said that the interview process for any job is very important but to make people sit again for an interview for the same post and that too for a job on ad-hoc basis was not acceptable. Mr Rai was referring to the protest by ad-hoc teachers who had passed an interview last year and are being asked to sit for interview again.

Criticizing the circular of the Education Department which said that applicants will have to sit for interview in order to get appointed on ad-hoc basis, Mr Rai said that it is an injustice to the protesting ad-hoc teachers. Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Rai mentioned that the new circular has affected the 860 ad-hoc teachers who appeared and cleared their interview in February 2020. They received their appointment letters in October 2020 and worked only for six months and got an extension of three months which

ended on 30 June 2021.

On the same, he questioned the government on delaying their appointment for six months even after the interview. He also questioned why some other ad-hoc teachers were provided extension till March 2022.

Mr Rai alleged that the earlier government did the same injustice to ad-hoc teachers and now the present state government is doing the same.

He stressed that the government should be answerable to the people who brought it to power and bureaucrats should not play with the future of the people of Sikkim. He added that bureaucrats will understand the power of people only when the real Parivartan comes in Sikkim.

SRP president mentioned that Sikkim Krantikari Morcha should also fulfill its promise to regularize ad-hoc teachers. He suggested that the government either extend the service of these 860 ad-hoc teachers till March 2022 without interview or hold interviews to appoint ad-hoc teachers for at least eight years.

LADY DAIRY FARMER CONFERRED 'MILKMAN OF THE YEAR' AWARD

Sikkim on verge of becoming Aatma-Nirbhar in dairy farming: CM on 1st Gwala Diwas



GANGTOK, 01 JUL (IPR): "The 1st of July every year will be celebrated as 'Gwala Diwas' in Sikkim from today onwards," - this announcement was made by Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang in a function organised at Manan Kendra today.

The function marked the first edition of 'Gwala Diwas' in the State of Sikkim. The Chief Minister cut the ceremonial cake and declared the day as 'Gwala Diwas'.

This year, the pres-

tigious 'Milkman of the Year' Award was conferred upon Suk Maya Tamang of Melli Dara Ward Number 2 for highest milk supply to Sikkim Milk Union in the financial year 2020-21. The cash award of Rs.2 lakh along with trophy and certificate was handed over to Smt Tamang's husband by the Chief Minister. Suk Maya Tamang was successful in contributing around 30,000 litres of milk during the year to the

Sikkim Milk Union.

It may be recalled that the 'Milkman of the Year' award was constituted in the year 2020 under the auspices of the Chief Minister. The first edition of the Award was grabbed by a progressive dairy farmer from Bermiok, West Sikkim. The Award will be a regular feature of the Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services Department, and will be presented every year on the occasion of 'Gwala Diwas'.

A host of other Awards were presented to progressive dairy farmers on the occasion by the Chief Minister. The list of awardees is as follows:

1. Meena Rai of Suntaley Milk Producers Co-operative Society bagged the Highest Milk Producing Dairy Entrepreneur Award for the year 2021. The dairy entrepreneur was successful in managing a total of 180 litres per day and 5442 litres per month. ...turn Pg3

122 new cases and one more Covid death in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 JUL:

Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached 20,666 with 122 new cases of novel coronavirus reported in the last 24 hours. Out of these, 59 were reported in East District, 32 in West District, 23 in South District and eight in North District. Meanwhile, one more person succumbed to novel coronavirus infection over the same period taking Sikkim's COVID death toll to 308. This fatality was reported from a person under home isolation in South District. On the other hand, 36 more persons, recoveries down to double digits after a long while, were discharged from facility and home isolation after making full recoveries to further improve the number of recovered cases of COVID-19 to 17,998.

This is after nearly a fortnight that Sikkim is seeing fewer recoveries than new cases. Hopefully this is because the number of new cases had started dipping substantially a fortnight back and this would auto-

matically reflect as fewer discharges now. Covid-positive people usually spend 11 days in home of isolation facility before being discharged provided their symptoms have gone away. There are now 2,107 active cases of coronavirus in Sikkim.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, the 122 new cases were picked up from the testing of 773 samples on Wednesday, giving Sikkim a test positivity rate of 15.7%.

In RT-PCR testing of 289 samples, 49 people were found positive for COVID-19 and 73 new cases were detected in rapid antigen testing of 477 samples. The 122 new cases notwithstanding, only 14 COVID patients were hospitalized over this period. There are around 96 Covid patients in hospital from among the more than two thousand positive cases. Seven Covid patients currently have symptoms severe enough to require admission in ICU.

Balurghat MP and Bihar Minister call on Governor



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 01 JUL:

MP of Balurghat, West Bengal, Dr. Sukanta Majumdar and

the Minister, Government of Bihar, Nitin Navin called on Governor, Ganga Prasad at Raj Bhawan this eve-

ning, a press release from Raj Bhavan informs.

It was a courtesy call on by Dr. Sukanta Ma-

jumdar and Nitin Navin. They were accompanied by the Advisor of the State Forest department, D B Chauhan.

80 RT-PCR samples collected from Samardung and Mamring

NAMCHI, 01 JUL (IPR): A team led by Medical Officer, In-charge, Namthang PHC, Dr Mingyur D Lassopa collected a total of 80 RT-PCR samples from Samardung and Mamring today. During the collection there were 15 pregnant women who were given counselling on how to combat the Covid wave.



SBS employees donate Rs 8.5 lakh to CM's Relief Fund

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 JUL:

The employees of the State Bank of Sikkim have donated a sum of Rs 8,50,522 to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund towards the fight against COVID-19, a press release from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

The release states that it was a collective effort from the employees of SBS including temporary staff who contributed one day's salary as



a sign of solidarity and support for the Government's effort to tackle the pandemic in the state. The Chief Minister expressed his gratitude to the

SBS family for their kind gesture in these difficult times.

The cheque was handed over by the Chairman SBS, DB Gurung accompanied by Advisor SBS,

Mohan Kr. Rai, MD SBS, P Wangdi Bhutia, CGM, SR Karki, GM, Kuncheok Tenzing, President SBSEA, Sunil Tamang, Gen. Secy SBSEA, Rapden Bhutia and other officials.

National Doctors' Day Soreng CHC

SORENG, 01 JUL (IPR):

A simple celebratory event was held on the occasion of the National Doctors' Day for Doctors and Health workers at the Soreng Community Health Centre today. The program was graced by the MLA, Aditya Golay along with the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Soreng, Ranjan Rai, BDO Soreng, Sabina Subba and other officials.

Since 01 July marks the birth & death anniversary of the renowned physician Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the day was commemorated by individual felicitation of the Doctors by the MLA. He gave a few words of encouragement to the health workers and also



thanked them for their courage & relentless effort during the on-going pandemic & their immense contribution in the hour of crisis. He added that since Soreng will soon be a new district, better health facilities will be available for the public along

with new & improved infrastructure. He also encouraged all the health workers to come forward with suggestions in providing better health services.

The program ended with a vote of thanks by the SDM, Ranjan Rai wherein he thanked the

frontline workers for their undying spirit & dedication towards saving human lives. The SDM also expressed his gratitude to the Chief Minister for his continuous & tireless support towards the betterment of the health facilities.

Transasia Bio-Medicals donates critical equipment to govt

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 JUL:

Transasia Bio-Medicals Ltd. supports COVID-relief efforts in Sikkim by providing critical equipments, a press release informs.

To help the state of Sikkim in its fight against the second wave of the pandemic, Transasia has provided 3 BiPAP machines, 1 three part differential hematology analyzer (H 360), 2 five part differential hematology analyzers (H 560 and Elite 580) and 2 coagulation analyzers (ECL 105) for deployment in various COVID-dedicated hospitals all over Sikkim. Transasia procured the BiPAP machines from its global vendors.

Dr. M K Sharma, the State Health Minister and Sanjit Kharel, the State Transport Minister, received the medical equipments from Arun Sharma, General Manager of Transasia Bio-Medicals Ltd.



As a part of its COVID-relief efforts, Transasia has provided critical equipment including 200 BiPAP machines for oxygen support, and more than 43 hematology analyzers for monitoring disease severity and 32 coagulation analyzers for D Dimer testing. These equipments, worth more than Rs. 3.30 crore, have been donated to several state governments to aid in the treatment of COVID patients.

Expressing his gratitude to the Vazirani Foundation and Transasia for extending their

support to the Sikkim government, the Health Minister, Dr. M K Sharma, said, "It's a timely donation and essential in the fight against Coronavirus. Transasia's efforts to deliver non-invasive ventilation will benefit many COVID-19 patients struggling to breathe while trying to fight off this virus."

Minister Sanjit Kharel lauded Transasia's ongoing efforts in Sikkim in preventing, detecting, and responding to the pandemic.

Suresh Vazirani, Founder Chairman, Transasia-Erba Group, said,

"The second wave is devastating and is taking a toll on the healthcare system of our country. While we are hopeful that things will turn around for India soon, we realized that just hope is not enough. Transasia remains committed to the health of Indians and through our small effort, we intend to reach out to those severely impacted and in urgent need. This is one of the several initiatives that we, through the Vazirani Foundation, intend to continue to use our resources and technology, to aid the Central and state health ministries."

Rotary Club of Gangtok South installs Gopal Chettri as new president

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 JUL:

Rotary Club of Gangtok South, celebrated Rotary New Year today and also held an installation ceremony for new office bearers, a press release informs. The outgoing president, Geeta Sapkota handed over the charge to newly installed President, Gopal Chettri at the ceremony conducted by Beena Sharma. Prakash Sundas, the

outgoing Secretary handed over charge to Dr Sujata Upadhyay. Others who participated in the ceremony included Mala Rana Patro continuing as the Treasurer.

Oath of office was administered to the new office bearers by Beena Sharma. Addressing the members President Gopal Chettri said he would do his best during his tenure and expressed gratitude for being selected as the President.

Prakash Sundas presented the annual report wherein he informed that almost 10 to 12 projects were completed last year for 2020-21. Tree plantation at Jalipool temple in memory of Late RC Mangla, Gifting Sanitary Napkin vending machine to hospital, Shikshak Samman ceremony, Sanitary napkin vending machine to PNGSS School, felicitation of 3 COVID Warriors and con-

tribution of funds to Rotary foundation, and more.

Those allotted responsibilities in the administration include Nita Nirash as PRO. Earlier, the programme started with the National Anthem followed by 2 minutes silent tribute to the members who have left for heavenly abode during the past year.

Dr Sujata thanked her seniors for mentoring her and proposed the vote of thanks.

'BJP providing support but not an integral part of Sikkim government'

SAGARCHETTRI

GANGTOK, 01 JUL:

"We are supporting SKM government from outside and BJP is not an integral part of the government in the State. We have been providing suggestions and positive feedback to bring out beneficial policies in the interest of people of Sikkim," said Sukanta Majumdar who is Sikkim in-charge of Bharatiya Janata Party and a Member of Parliament in West Bengal.

BJP Sikkim election in-charge and Roads & Bridges Minister of Bihar, Nitin Navin and Mr Majumdar are currently on a visit to Sikkim. They held series of meetings with leadership

and functionaries of BJP state-unit on Thursday and discussed various issues and agendas of the party.

Addressing a press conference after the meeting, BJP state president, DB Chauhan mentioned that the Centre has been reaching out to the people of the country with vaccines and ration free of cost in this pandemic. On the same, he stated that state in-charges of the party are currently in the state to see the progress of free ration distribution provided by the Centre and vaccination drive in the State. He mentioned that state in-charges also met lead-

ers and functionaries of the state unit and discussed various issues of the State.

Responding to media queries, Sikkim in-charge, Mr Majumdar mentioned that they are also scheduled to meet the Chief Minister and would place their observations and suggestions to the government.

"We have listened to various issues placed by the state functionaries of the party and we will work together to strengthen the party organization in the State," he said.

On questions about the status of alliance between BJP and SKM in the State, he responded by saying that both SKM and BJP state

units are very young in alliance politics and both are working on taking the alliance forward in the State.

On other queries, BJP state president, Mr Chauhan said that BJP state unit has been working on the pending political demands of the state and had also passed resolutions on these issues and sent to the Centre.

He added that there are three more years for the government to fulfill these demands.

"It is also a challenge for us as we have to go to the public after three years with the report card of our work. We are sensitive and serious about these issues," Mr Chauhan said.

Gyantok develops free CBSE class XII study material

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 JUL:

Gyantok, an online platform which aims to provide free access to high-quality holistic education to students of Sikkim and the neighbouring hills, has announced the development of a platform which will provide high-quality CBSE Class XII content in Nepali-English for free. This can be accessed at www.gyantok.com.

"We have started with content for Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics. We are in the process of developing content for Biology. In the near future, we will be adding content for CBSE Class 10, CBSE Class XII Commerce, ICSE Class XII Sciences, ICSE Class XII Commerce, ICSE Class X, NEET, JEE, Olympiad and Foundation Courses," a press release informs.

The release informs that to get started with

Gyantok, students should visit www.gyantok.com to register or login directly through Facebook or Google and then enrol in a course of their choice.

In the near future, the organisation envisions scaling this scope and including content for competitive exams, K-12, and also diversifying into other sectors including sports, music, theatre, skill development and literature.

"We want Gyantok to be a go-to platform for students for mentorship, learning any skills in the field of their interest and getting the right kind of exposure before deciding on their career choice. We want our students to be able to compete at the national level. We want them to choose a career of their interest and break from the chain of taking career options which they are not in-

terested in," the release adds.

"In addition to this, we also realized that the internet connectivity in our region is not always stable. Therefore, live classes are not an option for them. Hence, the ideal option would be to Gyantok," it is added. The platform as pre-recorded lectures which can be accessed by students to suit their convenience.

"We grew up like any other kid of this region. We had limited access to information, finite exposure and little knowledge. We didn't have mentors to guide and show us the direction. We often stumbled, made mistakes, failed and learned about life and career the hard way. We are determined to change this. We aspire to provide budding young minds easy access to information, proper guidance, diverse experience

and varied exposure, and empower them to choose correct and informed paths," the release adds.

Gyantok team members are alumni of Sikkim Manipal Institute of Technology batch of 2016, and professionally, all are working in different sectors around the globe. Team members are Aditya Chhetri [Teacher-Physics], Opendar Shekhawat [Teacher-NEET and JEE], Raj Kumar [Teacher-Chemistry], Uday Chhetri [Teacher-Mathematics], Hemant Neopane (Strategy) - Manager, 9dot9 Education, Mahesh Bista (Product/Operations) - Founder, Lime India Coaching, Siksha Rai (Product/Marketing) - MBA, IIM Visakhapatnam, Sumit Prasad (Tech) - Senior Engineer, Myntra and Swarnim Pradhan (Project Management) - Evaluation Engineer, Analog Devices Inc.

International Plastic Bag Free Day and the Plastic Crisis: Are mountain states doing enough?

ROSHAN RAI, PRIYADARSHINEE SHRESTHA & RAJENDRA P GURUNG

“Annually, approximately 500 billion plastic bags are used worldwide with more than one million bags used every minute.” “A plastic bag just has an average ‘working life’ of 15 minutes” - Plastic Oceans International

Plastic bags epitomise the use and throw culture that we have embraced, one that focuses on individual existence superseding our communal well-being. Among a long list of single-use plastic products that pile up in landfills and pollute our soil and water; plastic bags may be the most visible and vilified. It must have seen the most number of campaigns launched against it, a poster child of environmental movements, and yet it refuses to go away. The fallout of the rampant use of plastics is highly evident in our mountains, with choked drains and waterways leading to innumerable life taking landslides, agricultural fields getting clogged and wildlife getting seriously impacted. Plastic litter is also widespread in the mountains and is impossible to retrieve.

Many state governments and local authorities have notified complete bans on plastic carry bags but almost all have failed in implementation. What does this inability to stop plastic bag use then say about the mountain states’ will and ability to tackle the plastic crisis?

On Plastic Bag Free day, 3 July, we reflect on mountain states’ actions in responding to the plastic crisis. How effective have plastic bag bans been, what does it mean for the vision of single use plastic eradication in the country, and the possible pathways to progress towards single use plastic free Himalaya?

An online survey on plastic bag bans and its effectiveness across the Indian Himalaya Region was undertaken by the Zero Waste Himalaya and Integrated Mountain Initiative with 315 responses representing Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and UTs of Ladakh and J&K.

The findings reveal that a very high 82% of respondents were aware of a plastic bag ban in their region with awareness higher in Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura and Mizoram. Yet, the responses highlighting the short lived or partial effectiveness of the ban across all regions is not encouraging. Only 19% mentioned high effectiveness of bans, 35% felt bans were not effective at all while 31% mentioned they were effective only for some time. Plastic bags are still in use in all types of markets, from grocery stores,



Name of state	SUP ban status*	Remarks*	Awareness among people**	Effectiveness of ban**
Arunachal Pradesh	Complete ban	Only Carry bags	Medium	Low
Assam	Complete ban	Plastic carry bags, banners, buntings, cups, cling films, flex, flags, plates, sheets (used for spreading on dining tables - irrespective of thickness. Items made of thermocol and plastic which use plastic microbeads.	High	Low
Himachal Pradesh	Complete ban	Carry bags (irrespective of size), polythene, non biodegradable material, disposable plastic, cups, plates and glasses	High	Medium
J and K	Complete ban	Carry bags, plastic sheets or like, cover made of plastic sheet, plastic packaging and MLPs less than 50 microns in thickness	High	Low
Ladakh	Partial ban	Plastic water bottles and other plastic made objects in Government Offices and other institutions	High	Low
Manipur	No ban		Medium	Low
Meghalaya	No ban		Medium	Low
Mizoram	No ban		High	Low
Nagaland	Complete ban	Only Carry bags	High	Low
Sikkim	Complete ban	Carry bags and Styrofoam products in eateries	High	Medium
Tripura	Complete ban	Carry bags incl. non-woven pp	High	Low
Uttarakhand	Complete ban	Only Carry bags	High	Low
West Bengal	Partial ban	In religious and historical places	High	Low

Source * – Notification for banning, manufacture, use, sale, import and handling of single use products. (Parliamentary Response from MoEFCC - 12/2/21). Does not represent data from district or local bodies ** Study on status of plastic bag bans, 2021

to local vegetable markets, to larger supermarket stores as enumerated by the responses.

The Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016 has prescribed a minimum thickness for plastic bags with only 50 microns bags or more being allowed (now proposed to be increased to 120 microns). But the survey has revealed that thin plastic bags less than 50 microns are still pervasive with 52% respondents indicating this.

Increased use of non-woven polypropylene (PP) bags, the new avatar of plastic bags which looks like cloth were also reported in the survey. Sikkim and Tripura had a higher number indicating use of the PP bags. Sikkim’s plastic bag ban

is perhaps the oldest, coming into effect way back in 1998 with strict enforcement for some years. The ban came about in response to choked drains that resulted in landslides and deaths. However, the use of polypropylene bags flooding the market in recent years has made the ban ineffective, and the Sikkim Government is considering inclusion of the non-woven pp bag under the plastic bag ban.

The black garbage bag has seen rapid escalation and indiscriminate use mainly among hotels and restaurants. The opaque nature of these bags is a deterrent to segregation of waste and biodegradables have poor chances of decomposing.

A new line of bags labelled as biode-

gradable, compostable, oxo-biodegradable, etc. are the latest addition to the plastic bag alternatives. The use of these types of plastic bags was represented in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Tripura and J & K responses. Promoted as the ‘greener’ alternative, they are at times more problematic as some of these are just plastic with additives that accelerate the disintegration into micro-plastics. Compostable claims made are also false, as our landfills where these bags invariably end up, do not provide adequate conditions to biodegrade. CPCB’s stamp of authority on some of these bags is not helping the cause and there is a serious need to re-look at such approvals.

Charging for plastic bags is shown to be a good deterrent and even though the rules are explicit on charge for use, 45% respondents mentioned there were no charges.

Beyond bags and bans: The big picture

Bans on plastic bags have been ineffective in the Indian Himalayan Region and the survey reiterates that they are still rampantly used. A Toxics Link report of 2014 <https://toxicslink.org/docs/Full-Report-Plastic-and-the-Environment.pdf> has stated that ‘Ban’ is just one part of the larger solution and in isolation is not as effective as it was thought to be.” Most bans have been promulgated without long term vision and people’s participation, clarity in implementation procedures and institutional capacities to vigorously and continuously monitor the ban.

The measure of the success of the ban lies in its execution and citizens need to hold their Governments accountable. Institutions have to diligently work towards implementation of the notifications with a long-term vision and action.

Globally, awareness on plastic pollution and specifically single use plastics have gained great momentum with coun-

tries and cities actively working to turn the tide against the use and throw culture. The debate is no longer only around plastic bags, but much expanded, one that encompasses all single use plastics and questions single use.

Half of the plastic ever manufactured has been produced in the past 15 years and over 50% of plastic produced today goes into making single use plastic (What a Waste 2018). The fossil fuel industry still plans to increase their plastic production by 40% over the next decade. Finite resources being designed into products that are used briefly and trashed instantaneously is simply not sustainable, least of all for a product that pollutes throughout its life cycle.

While the visible and immediate impacts of plastic pollution have become everyday conversations, a deeper crisis of micro-plastics formed by breakdown of plastics, is also unfolding. Found in rain, water, soil, salt and human placenta, micro-plastic is all pervasive and a serious threat to human and planetary wellbeing.

A Reuse Revolution in the mountains

On August 15, 2019 Prime Minister Modi declared that India would be free from single use plastics by 2022. This vision can be made possible only by bringing in a reuse revolution to replace all single use plastics and open up avenues for local groups to engage through green skills and services.

There is a powerful message conveyed through the simple act of carrying your own reusable bag. It is a message that rejects the use and throws mind-set while embracing a sustainable lifestyle choice of reuse. Plastic bag free day is an opportune moment to talk about reuse, and reflect on our lifestyles to take steps towards a plastic pollution free planet. It is an action that changes the narrative in redress of the waste crisis by not producing waste in the first place.

But for change to happen, we need to do much more. Multitudes of people need to embrace the reuse revolution for our individual actions to add up to a larger whole. People in positions of power and influence must lead by example for others to emulate.

Plastic pollution is a real crisis. This needs to be recognised by the Governments and Local Bodies through policy strengthening and implementation with the strong will, commitment and urgency that this crisis demands.

Plastic bag eradication is the stepping stone to single use plastic eradication in the mountains.

[The writers are core members of the Zero Waste Himalaya platform that works on the issue of waste in the mountains. They are also active members of the Integrated Mountain Initiative.]

Sikkim on verge of becoming Aatma-Nirbhar...

The incentive she received from the Government (Rs.8 litre) alone amounted to Rs.43000 per month.

2. Award for Highest Milk Producing Constituency for 2020–21 was won by Rinchenpong Constituency, West Sikkim. The Award was received by MLA KS Lepcha. The constituency was successful in producing 99402 litres of milk per month and 12,00,000 (Twelve Lakh) litres per year.

3. Award for Highest Milk Producing District was won by West District. The district managed a record production of Four Lakh Eighty-Eight Thousand litres per month and Fifty-Eight lakh litres per year.

4. Award for Milk Producers Cooperative Society (Milk PCS) with the highest milk collection was bagged by Begani MPCS, Melli, South Sikkim. The dairy cooperative produced a total of 22,000 litres of milk per month and two lakh seventy thousand litres per year. It may be mentioned that there are a total of 457 (four hundred and fifty-seven) Milk Producers Cooperative Societies in the State.

5. Award for Highest Milk Rate Fetching Dairy Farmer was won by Kisan Gurung of Upper Parakha MPCS, East Sikkim. He has managed to fetch up to Rupees 68 per litre (excluding the additional incentive of Rs. 8/- per litre by the Government).

6. Award for Regular/Consistent Milk Supplier was conferred upon 72-year-old Dilli Ram Biswakarma of Central Pendam, East Sikkim. It was informed that Shri Biswakarma has been a dairy farmer all his life and has never left the profession even after his children have progressed in various other fields.

7. Budding Dairy Entrepreneurs Award was conferred upon Ananta Lal Dhamala, Pramila Chettri, Tika Khanal, Rudra Nepal and Om Nath Adhikari.

8. The Award for Cleanest and Well-Maintained Cow Shed was conferred upon Arun Rai of Pabuk MPCS.

9. Award for Cleanest and Well-Maintained MPCS was bagged by Bikmat MPCS.

10. Award for Best Management and Adherence to

Covid-19 Norms and Guidelines was conferred upon President of Upper Gaucharan MPCS, Saroj Rai.

11. Award for Most Innovative Dairy Entrepreneur was conferred upon Pranita Pradhan Tiwari, for introducing modern methods for milking and producing subsidiary dairy products.

12. Award for Most Promising Dairy Farmer was won by Bishal Basnet of Malbasey, Soreng, West Sikkim. He is known to have started production of A2 milk in his dairy farm.

13. Award for Youngest Dairy Entrepreneur was won by 27 years old Vivek Timsina of Lingmoo, South Sikkim. He is an engineer turned dairy farmer/entrepreneur.

14. Award for Most Innovative Cow Names was conferred upon Dharma Das Upreti, Balam Dhamala, Raju Thapa and CP Sharma.

15. Award for Best AI (Artificial Insemination) Workers was conferred upon Dilli Ram Regmi and Chabi Lal Chettri.

The following Officers of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services Department were felicitated for their exemplary performance and for their constant support to dairy farmers and entrepreneurs:

1. Dr Tilotama Bajgain, Additional Director, South.
2. Dr Karma Tenzing Bhutia, Additional Director, North.
3. Dr Narad Muni Cintury, Additional Director, West.
4. Dr TB Ghatani, Additional Director, East.
5. Dr Thinley Bhutia, Joint Director, Planning.
6. Dr Phurba Lepcha, Deputy Director, Karfectar.
7. Birkha Bahadur Subba, Joint Director, Dairy.

On the occasion, Tumin Milk Producers Cooperative Society was granted an Automatic Segregation Machine to check adulteration etc. The President of the MPCS received the Machine from the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang in his address

congratulated all the Awardees and urged them to continue with the same zeal. He expressed happiness that the State Government has been successful in incentivizing dairy farming in the State, as a result of which more and more people are embracing this field. He dedicated ‘Gwala Diwas’ to the hard-working dairy farmers and entrepreneurs who have realized the vision of the Government and have made the most of the opportunity on offer. He termed the day as historic as it marked a unique shift of dairy farmers towards prosperity. The Chief Minister congratulated all the officers and staff of the Animal Husbandry Department and the Sikkim Milk Union for their commitment towards uplifting the dairy farmers and entrepreneurs in the State. He said that the State is now on the verge of achieving the target of ‘Atmanirbhar Sikkim in Dairy Farming’.

The Chief Minister expressed happiness that educated youth are also embracing the agricultural sector and dairy farming. He reiterated that this is one profession which is always in demand and is highly lucrative.

Stressing on the importance laid by the Government on dairy farming sector, the Chief Minister shared that special focus has been laid on this sector in this year’s budget allocation. Aspects like ex-gratia payment to meet up losses due to natural calamity, 50% support on insurance premium, and establishment of milk collection centres in backward constituencies have been incorporated in the budget, he informed.

Apart from dairy farming, the Chief Minister also shared the Government’s plans to incentivize pig farming, which he said has a huge market in the North Eastern States.

Minister, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services Department, Lok Nath Sharma in his address said that the Government has, in true sense, valued and honoured the contribution of dairy farmers or ‘gwalas’ in

the State by declaring 1st of July as ‘Gwala Diwas’. He added that this is an expression of the farmer-friendly policy of the State Government. He profusely thanked the Chief Minister for his constant motivation and support. The Minister thanked the dairy farmers from all the four districts for their valuable presence and participation in today’s programme. He also congratulated all the awardees, and lauded the effort of all the officers and staff of the Animal Husbandry & VS Department and the Sikkim Milk Union. The Minister concluded his address by mentioning the visible progress made by the present government in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry in a span of just two years.

The programme was also addressed by Principal Director cum Secretary, Animal Husbandry & VS Department, Dr Sangay D Bhutia.

Managing Director, Sikkim Milk Union, Dr AB Karki conducted the programme and highlighted the progress made by the State Government in the field of dairy farming. He also threw light on the role of Sikkim Milk Union to bridge the gap between the dairy farmers and the Government. He said that Sikkim Milk Union has completed 41 years today, since its establishment in the year 1980. He informed the audience that ‘Gwala Diwas’ is being celebrated simultaneously in several Milk PCS and collection centres throughout the State.

Earlier, the welcome address was delivered by Vice Chairman, Sikkim Milk Union, Shri Mangal Jit Rai.

The audience were treated to a song (gwala geet) written and composed by Dr AB Karki. A short video on ‘Gwala Diwas’ prepared by the IPR Department was also screened on the occasion.

The programme had the presence of Ministers, MLAs, Advisors, Chairpersons, Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Political Secretary to CM, Chief Secretary, Heads of Departments, Counsellors, senior officers, and dairy farmers and entrepreneurs.

Still Swirling Haze

Share facts to save lives; Perpetuate stereotypes to keep problem alive

It was International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking recently. The United Nations Secretary-General, in his address for the day, said: “Investing in balanced prevention as well as control of drug use and drug use disorders produces solid returns — saved lives, healthier populations, improved workforce participation and productivity, and reduced criminal justice costs.” The Day was marked this year on the theme, “Share Facts on Drugs, Save Lives.” The theme was clearly at spreading facts to fight misinformation regarding drug abuse. Accepting that addiction spikes in an environment of societal disinterest, it becomes necessary for a state like Sikkim to pay special attention to the UN’s appeal to stop processing addicts as criminals and focus the criminal justice efforts on those involved in supply instead. If everyone focused on sharing and appreciating facts and not stereotypes, a lot more can be achieved. This approach becomes especially required since the culture of favouritism, so ingrained in Sikkim, ensures that the law snares only the underprivileged, the already marginalised, who are immediately seen problems and this delivers an imbalanced crackdown which, even if not too many people are talking about it, is also shredding the fabric of society here. Despite this self-inflicted damage, the problem of drugs continues to grow.

Much remains to be understood about this malaise in Sikkim, and even as the concerned agencies and people at large blunder through the situation, addiction continues to strike ever deeper roots here. Admittedly, the state’s role cannot be limited to apportioning funds for some rehabilitation centres and playing the strict cop. The State Government has shown initiative and drafted a state-specific law to address the nature of substance abuse here, but this first step, taken back in 2006, ended up remaining the only step, with the civil society engagement which would have ensured that the state agencies stayed the true course in the battle against drugs never materialising. Where a wider collaboration was required to address addiction, Sikkim received only a new law being implemented by the police. When it comes to cops, empathy, unfortunately, is not a necessary virtue and the line between addicts/ victims and peddlers/ suppliers starts blurring fast. For cops, anyone caught with substances of abuse is a criminal, and this approach is not helping. This would not have happened if people’s organisations and recovering users had been involved in the effort. The Sikkim Anti-Drugs Act had envisaged such collaborations, but while the legislative had worked such engagements into the Act, the executive left them out during notification and the police preferred to go it alone when it came to implementation. So, while convictions under SADA are high, neither supply nor the spiral of addiction has been affected.

While peddling might a criminal activity, addiction is a social challenge. The problem of drugs is not a cut & dried, black & white situation and yet extant prejudices can find no compassion even for the victims, and instinctive repulsion and shallow moralising sees people condemn before they have even understood. People have to realise that addicts are not just drug users and that there is more to them than just their addiction. Given how widespread substance abuse has become in Sikkim, the State needs to prioritise counselling and rehabilitation even over police action. More people need to be sent to the rehab than the jails, but it appears that SADA offers such easy convictions that alternatives are not even being considered. Of course, before Sikkim can progress any further with combating drug abuse, it will first have to understand the fundamental and essential questions about drug abuse and addiction, which range from understanding how drugs act on the brain; to identifying and minimizing the triggers which are catalysing addiction here; to detecting and responding to emerging drug use trends. Understanding addiction will help Sikkim understand victims of substance abuse better and then it will find the faculties to address the problem better. The UN’s recommendation to “share facts on drugs” to “save lives” would have helped.

Unfortunately, so poorly are even literate parents informed about addiction that they fail to understand that the dependence is chemical and requires professional help. Denial is expected in addicts, but there is no excuse for the denial the rest of the State remains in when it comes to recognising that it is failing an entire generation by not responding effectively enough to address the problem of ‘drugs’. Parents who have lost children to drugs and those who are battling addiction in the family need to come together and collaborate on reinforcing Sikkim’s defences against substance abuse. They need to tell more parents that jail, tantrums and threats don’t work as deaddiction tools. If anything, they aggravate the situation. Only professionals can help, and now Sikkim has some in the State and more are willing to devote time and energy for professional training if the government or corporate sponsors can spare the funds for it. As already mentioned several times, Sikkim needs wider collaborations in its fights against drugs, the sooner it joins more hands the less painful the rehabilitation will be...

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Structural Racism: What it is and how it works

VINI LANDER

THECONVERSATION.COM

From the moment it was published, the UK’s Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities’ report was met with a media storm driven by both its supporters and detractors. Months later, amid continued division over the report’s position that racism isn’t pronounced in the UK, there’s still some confusion about what exactly some of the report’s buzzwords mean.

The terms “structural racism” and “institutional racism” are among many of the concepts that have been mentioned in relation to the report’s position on whether or not racism is ingrained in the UK.

But assessing the truth behind the Commission’s suggestion that these forms of racism aren’t factors in driving racial inequality first requires decoding these terms.

STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Defined initially by political activists Stokely Carmichael and Charles Vernon Hamilton in 1967, the concept of institutional racism came into the public sphere in 1999 through the Macpherson Inquiry into the racist murder of Black teenager Stephen Lawrence.

Institutional racism is defined as: “processes, attitudes and behaviour(s) which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people”.

As Sir William Macpherson, head of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, wrote at the time, it “persists because of the failure ... to recognise and address its existence and causes by policy, example and leadership”.

Institutional and structural racism work hand in glove. Institutional racism relates to, for example, the institutions of education, criminal justice and health. Examples of institutional racism can include: actions (or inaction) within organisations such as the Home Office and the Windrush Scandal; a school’s hair policy; institutional processes such as stop and search, which discriminate against certain groups.

Structural racism refers to wider political and social disadvantages within society, such as higher rates of poverty for Black and Pakistani groups or high rates of death from COVID-19 among people of colour.

In plain terms, structural racism shapes and affects the lives, wellbeing and life chances of people of colour. It normalises historical, cultural and institutional practices that benefit white people and disadvantage people of colour. It also stealthily replicates the racial hierarchy established more than 400 years ago through slavery and colonialism, placing white people at the top and Black people at the bottom.

Structural racism is enforced through institutional systems like seemingly neutral recruitment policies, which lead to the exclusion of people of colour from organisations, positions of power and social prominence. It exists because of white supremacy: a pattern of beliefs, assumptions and behaviours which advance the interests of white people and influences decision-making to maintain their dominance.

White supremacy lies at the heart of how systems in society work. It’s the main reason behind inequalities such as the ethnic pay gap across many institutions, as well as fewer judges

and university vice chancellors of colour.

HOW DOES STRUCTURAL RACISM WORK?

Structural racism exists in the social, economic, educational, and political systems in society. Many of the issues that come with it have been escalated by the pandemic, including the disproportionate deaths of people of colour from COVID-19.

These challenges have worsened because of existing structural racial inequalities which mean that Black and Pakistani communities are more likely to work in unskilled jobs. As a result, many have had to work through the pandemic as key workers, increasing their exposure and susceptibility to catching or dying from the virus.

In fact, large numbers of health workers of colour reported being too afraid to complain about the issues they faced, with some being “bullied and shamed” into seeing patients, despite having no PPE. Their exposure to these inequalities can’t be blamed on pessimism or class or culture, but the structures within which they worked.

Structural and institutional racism account for underrepresentation in many fields. These barriers are responsible for everything from the 4.9% ethnic pay gap between white medical consultants and medical consultants of colour, a lack of teachers of colour in schools, the 1% of Black professors in universities and the absence of medical training about skin conditions and how they present on black and brown skin. The examples are endless.

It would be easy to blame the people affected, but that would ignore how structural racism works. Black people, for example,

can work exceptionally hard but still encounter significant barriers that can be directly traced to issues of structural racism.

It’s also tempting to believe that the success of a small selection of people of colour means that the same opportunities are available to all. The suggestion being that these gains are evidence of a meritocracy (the idea that people can gain power or success through hard work alone). But this ignores the invisible hurdles that on average make the likelihood of achievement for various communities of colour much slimmer than for white people.

Critical Race Theory (a concept devised by US legal scholars which explains that racism is so endemic in society that it can feel non-existent to those who aren’t targets of it) also debunks the idea that we live in a meritocracy. It describes meritocracy as a liberal construct designed to conceal the barriers which impede success for people of colour.

If structural and institutional racism can’t be explained away by the idea that people of colour simply don’t work hard enough, or are “overly pessimistic” about race, it’s apparent that society needs alternative solutions. One of which is accepting not only that racism exists, but that it’s much more far-reaching than it seems to white people. We can’t eradicate these forms of racism without courage, commitment and concerted efforts from those in positions of power, which in the UK especially includes action from the white majority.

[The writer is Professor of Race and Education and Director of the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality in the Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University]

Human Behaviour: What scientists have learned about it from the pandemic

STEPHEN REICHER

THECONVERSATION.COM

During the pandemic, a lot of assumptions were made about how people behave. Many of those assumptions were wrong, and they led to disastrous policies.

Several governments worried that their pandemic restrictions would quickly lead to “behavioural fatigue” so that people would stop adhering to restrictions. In the UK, the prime minister’s former chief adviser Dominic Cummings recently admitted that this was the reason for not locking down the country sooner.

Meanwhile, former health secretary Matt Hancock revealed that the government’s failure to provide financial and other forms of support for people to self-isolate was down to their fear that the system “might be gamed”. He warned that people who tested positive may then falsely claim that they had been in contact with all their friends, so they could all get a payment.

These examples show just how deeply some governments distrust their citizens. As if the virus was not enough, the public was portrayed as an additional part of the problem. But is this an accurate view of human behaviour?

The distrust is based on two forms of reductionism – describing something complex in terms of its fundamental constituents. The first is limiting psychology to the characteristics – and more specifically the limitations – of individual minds. In this view the human psyche is inherently flawed, beset by biases that distort information. It is seen as incapable of dealing with complexity, probability and uncertainty – and tending to panic in a crisis.

This view is attractive to those in power. By emphasising the inability of people to govern themselves, it justifies the need for a government to look after them. Many governments subscribe to this view, having established so-called nudge units – behavioural science teams tasked with subtly manipulating people to make the “right” decisions, without them realising why, from eating less sugar to filing their taxes on time. But it is becoming increasingly clear that this approach is limited. As the pandemic has shown, it is particularly flawed when it comes to behaviour in a crisis.

In recent years, research has shown that the

notion of people panicking in a crisis is something of a myth. People generally respond to crises in a measured and orderly way – they look after each other.

The key factor behind this behaviour is the emergence of a sense of shared identity. This extension of the self to include others helps us care for those around us and expect support from them. Resilience cannot be reduced to the qualities of individual people. It tends to be something that emerges in groups.

THE PROBLEM WITH ‘PSYCHOLOGISM’

Another type of reductionism that governments adopt is “psychologism” – when you reduce the explanation of people’s behaviour to just psychology. But there are many other factors that shape what we do. In particular, we rely on information and practical means (not least money!) to decide what needs to be done – and to be able to do it.

If you reduce people to just psychology, it makes their actions entirely a consequence of individual choice. If we get infected, it is because we chose to act in ways that led to infection: we decided to go out and socialise, we ignored advice on physical distancing.

This mantra of individual responsibility and blame has certainly been at the core of the UK government’s response throughout the pandemic. When cases started rising in the autumn, the government blamed it on students having parties. Hancock even warned young people “don’t kill your gran”. And as the government envisages the total removal of restrictions, the focus on what people must do has become even stronger. As the prime minister recently put it: “I want us to trust people to be responsible and to do the right thing.”

Such narratives ignore the fact that, at various critical points in the pandemic, infections rose not because people were breaking rules, but rather heeding advice, such as “go to work” and “eat out to help out”. And if people did break the rules, it was often because they had no choice. In many deprived areas, people were unable to work from home and needed to go to work to put food on the table.

Instead of addressing these issues and helping people to avoid exposing themselves and others, the individualistic narrative of personal responsibility blames the victim and, indeed, fur-

ther victimises vulnerable groups. As the delta variant took hold in UK towns, Hancock took the opportunity to stand in parliament and repeatedly blame people who had “chosen” not to have the vaccine.

This brings us to a critical point. The fundamental issue with the government’s distrust and its individualistic psychology is that it creates huge problems.

CREATING A CRISIS

The UK government assumed that people’s cognitive fragility would lead to – and explain – low adherence with the measures necessary to combat COVID-19. But the evidence showed that adherence was high due to a sense of community among the public – except in areas where it is hard to adhere without adequate means. Instead of emphasising individual responsibility and blame, then, a successful response to the pandemic depends on fostering community and providing support.

But here’s the rub. If a government constantly tells you that the problem lies in those around you, it corrodes trust in and solidarity with your fellow community members – which explains why most people (92%) state that they are complying with the rules while others are not doing so.

Ultimately, the greatest threat to controlling the pandemic is the failure of people to get tested as soon as they have symptoms, and to provide their contacts and self-isolate. Providing adequate support for isolation is critical to all of these. And so, by deprioritising the case for support, blaming the public fuels the pandemic. The government’s psychological assumptions have, in fact, squandered the greatest asset we have for dealing with a crisis: a community that is mobilised and unified in mutual aid.

When an inquiry is eventually held about the UK’s response to COVID-19, it is essential that we give full attention to the psychological and behavioural dimensions of failure as much as the decisions and policies implemented. Only by exposing the way in which the government came to accept and rely upon the wrong model of human behaviour can we begin to build policies that work.

[The writer is Bishop Wardlaw Professor in the School of Psychology & Neuroscience, University of St Andrews]

SC seeks Centre’s response for imposing President Rule in West Bengal due to post-poll violence

NEW DELHI, JULY 1 (PTI)

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to hear a plea seeking direction to the Centre to impose President’s Rule in West Bengal in view of deteriorating law and order situation due to the post-poll violence which started on May 2, the day of assembly election results. The plea also sought direction to the Centre to deploy armed/paramilitary forces in the aid of the administrative authorities to bring normalcy in the state and to save it from internal disturbances.

Besides, the PIL has sought setting up of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) for probing the causes and reasons of post-poll violence in West Bengal.

A bench of Justices Vineet Saran and Dinesh Maheshwari issued notice to the Centre, West Bengal and Election Commission of India on the plea, which also sought to central and state governments to award compensation to the victims and their family members after ascertaining the nature of loss sustained by them in post-poll violence in the state.

Advocate Hari Shankar Jain -- appearing for petitioners Ranjana Agnihotri, a UP based practicing lawyer and social worker Jitender Singh -- said that the plea is against post-poll violence in West Bengal.

The bench said, We are issuing notice to respondent number 1, (Union of India), respondent number-2 (West Bengal government) and Respondent number 3 (Election Commission of India)."

The bench, however, did not issue notice to respondent number 4 -- Mamata Banerjee as the president of Trinamool Congress Party (TMC).



The plea filed through advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain said that the PIL has been filed in extraordinary circumstances as thousands of residents of West Bengal are being terrorized, penalised and tortured by the workers of TMC for supporting the opposition party- Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) during the assembly polls.

The petitioners are espousing the cause of thousands of citizens of West Bengal who are mostly Hindus and are being targeted by Muslims to take revenge for supporting BJP as they want to crush Hindus so that for years to come the power may remain with the party of their choice, the plea said.

The plea sought from the court directing the central government to exercise its power conferred by Article 355 and Article 356 keeping in view the deteriorating condition posing a threat to sovereignty and integrity of India .

It said that soon after the declaration of assembly polls result on May 2, the TMC workers and supporters started creating chaos, unrest and set-

ting the houses and properties of Hindus on fire, looting and plundered their belongings for the simple reason that they had supported BJP in assembly polls.

The plea said that in an attempt to create terror and disorder in the society at least 15 BJP workers/ sympathisers/supporters have lost their lives and a number of them were seriously injured.

The government and administration remained silent spectators and no protection was provided to the victims by them. The government, officials and the administration and the police are supporting workers of TMC, due to which the life, liberty, prestige, dignity and modesty of women are being taken away as is evident from the fact that number of persons were harmed and mercilessly murdered and no steps were taken for their safety, the plea said.

It added that no appropriate action was taken against the culprits, due to which the life, liberty, dignity of the women and chil-

dren are in peril and the future of Hindu residents is in jeopardy.

In these circumstances, immediate intervention of the court is required and the court may issue command to the opposite parties is required and the court may issue command to the opposite parties so that the government of West Bengal functions in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and in case of continued violation the government of India may be directed to take appropriate action under Article 355 and 356 of the constitution, it said.

The plea alleged that during the assembly elections which were held in April, the TMC party had contested the polls purely on communal basis arousing the feelings of the Muslims and appealing to them to remain united and vote for their party for their better future .

It said that subsequently BJP made a complaint to ECI against the communal appeal made by TMC party and the poll panel failed to hold free and fair election

conforming the democratic norms and failed to enforce the mandatory provision of section 123 of Representation of People Act which has to be implemented during the election.

The plea said that a seven-judge bench of the top court had in 2017, in the Abhiram Singh case, ruled that no person can be allowed to contest election by making religious appeal.

The election commission remained a silent spectator and the provision (of RP Act) was flagrantly violated , it said, adding that the Muslim population is about 30 per cent in West Bengal due to illegal Bangladeshi migrants and Rohingia Muslims have been registered as voters without making any proper scrutiny and enquiry and in about 100 constituencies Muslims votes decide the fate of the candidates.

The top court is already hearing a batch of pleas related to post-poll violence in the state and seeking probe by an independent agency into the alleged killing of BJP workers and sympathisers.

Lumbini turns to bamboo to tame rivers



KATHMANDU, 01 JUL

[KATHMANDUPOST]: The Lumbini provincial government has started a bamboo plantation campaign in all 12 districts of the province to create biological embankments along the banks of various rivers.

The Ministry of Industry, Forest and Environment has initiated the campaign through 14 Division Forest Offices of the 12 districts.

"The objective of planting bamboo on the riverbanks is to form biological embankments to prevent erosion and floods," said Mohan Paudel, division forest officer in Palpa.

Rudra Bahadur GC, a resident of Jhyangla in Tinau Rural Municipality-2, recalls the devastating floods of 1981 in the Dobhan stream that wreaked havoc in riverbank settlements. The calamity had killed 15 people and rendered around 45 households homeless.

Floods in the Dobhan stream continued to

cause huge destruction in Akkaleghat, Chisapani, Dol and Dobhan Bazaar for many years.

The construction of the biological embankments is underway with the coordination of the local Bandelpokhari Community Forest Users' Committee, Tinau Sub-Division Forest Office and the Division Forest Office in Palpa.

"Bamboo saplings are being planted along the Dobhan stream now," said GC.

According to Ramdhyani Sah, the assistant forest officer at the Tinau Sub-Division Forest Office, works are underway to plant around 600 bamboo saplings along a 1.5-kilometre section of the Dobhan and Tinau streams.

"This is a sustainable approach to building embankments. Once the biological embankments are formed, it will help reduce flood damage along the riverbanks and nearby settlements," said Sah.

Incidents of erosion and inundation near riv-

ers and streams have increased in various districts of Lumbini Province of late.

Padam Shakya, chairman of Tinau Forest Coordination Committee, said that the risk of floods and landslides can be controlled with biological embankments. "Bamboo plantations can save both human lives and properties," said Shakya.

Paudel, the division forest officer in Palpa, said bamboo plantation works in Purbakhola and Arunkhola bank areas have been completed.

"Bamboo saplings are growing there," he said.

The Ministry of Industry, Forest and Environment has allocated Rs 14 million for the campaign in the current fiscal year.

"The budget is being used by 14 Division Forest Offices of the province to plant bamboo on around 110 kilometres of riverbank areas," said Rajendra KC, secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Forest and Environment.

SC stays NGT order forming committee on fire incident in Assam’s Baghjan oil well

NEW DELHI, JUL 1 (PTI):

The Supreme Court Thursday stayed a National Green Tribunal order constituting a fresh six-member committee to fix responsibility for the failures of the concerned individuals in the fire incident in Assam’s Baghjan oil well.

A bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and M R Shah issued notice to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Ministry of Petroleum, Oil India and others while seeking their response on the appeal.

Expressing surprise at the NGT order, the top court said Oil India Ltd (OIL) was accused of polluting the wetlands, but its MD was made a member of the inquiry Committee.

We are wholly disappointed by the manner in which the NGT has pushed this issue out of its hand. It’s the National Green Tribunal. It Should not have done this, the bench said.

The top court stayed February 19 the NGT order which said OIL cannot disown its responsibility on the fire incident in Assam’s Baghjan oil well by shifting the blame on the contractor and constituted a fresh six-member committee to fix responsibility for the failures of the concerned individuals in the present incident.

The apex court was hearing an appeal filed by activist Bonani Kakkar challenging February 19 order.

Well number 5 at Baghjan in Tinsukia district, had been spewing gas uncontrollably and it caught fire on June 9 last year, killing

two of OIL’s fire fighters on the site.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice A K Goel had said it “prima facie” agrees that there was failure of OIL in taking safety precautions and there is need for ensuring that such incidents do not recur.

"We direct this aspect to be gone into by a six-member Committee headed by the Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in consultation with the DG Hydrocarbon and DG Mines Safety, DG Oil Industry Safety and PESO (Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization), Chief Controller of Explosives, New Delhi within three months," the NGT bench had said.

The said Committee may review the situation and take appropriate remedial measures, including fixing responsibility for the failures of the concerned individuals in the present incident, the NGT said.

"It may also lay down the road map for ensuring compliance of safety protocols by all similar installations. Effective execution of such road map may be ensured by the Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. The Committee may also suitably take into consideration the observations in the reports of the Committee earlier appointed," it said.

With regard to the issue of accountability for the past compliances and the remedial action, the NGT had also formed a seven-member joint committee comprising MoEF (Ministry of Environment and Forest), CPCB (Central Pollution Control

Board), State PCB, State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) Assam, Chief Wildlife Warden, Assam, Member Secretary, Biodiversity Board, Assam and Member Secretary, State Wetland Authority Assam.

"Last aspect is assessing the damage to the environment and remedial restoration plan, including Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, the Maguri-Motapung Wetland.

"We direct this aspect to be looked into and remedial measures planned by the ten-member Committee headed by the Chief Secretary, Assam, nominees of MoEF&CC and CPCB, Assam Wetland Authority, State Biodiversity Board of Assam, SEIAA Assam, State PCB, Chief Wildlife Warden Assam, District Magistrate, Tinsukia, and Managing Director, OIL," the bench had said. The tribunal had said that while floor level compensation can be directed to be paid even on some guesswork, higher compensation claims require adjudication, based on evidence of loss.

"As already observed, in absence of relevant data, we are unable to determine the claims for higher compensation, beyond the amounts already paid or conceded by the OIL.

"It is made clear that this order will not debar any victim of the occurrence who is aggrieved by denial of compensation or inadequacy of compensation to take remedies for such claim before any appropriate forum in accordance with law," the NGT had said.

Jamia students win GoI’s Toycathon competition

NEW DELHI, JUN 30

(PTI): A team of three students from Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) have won the government’s Toycathon competition for this year.

The winning team Evident that comprised three students of JMI’s civil engineering department - Sarthak Kumar, Nikhil Yadav and Alziyan Ansari, bagged the prize for designing a mathe-

matical board game for children above the age of 12 years, a statement by JMI said.

They were mentored by Shamsad Ahmad, HoD, Civil Engineering, it added.

Since its inception the university has been playing an important role in nation building. JMI always promotes innovation and endeavours to bring out the hidden

talent of its students to shape them to become successful and responsible citizens, JMI Vice Chancellor Najma Akhtar said, congratulating the winners.

This year, around 1.2 lakh participants from across the country registered and submitted more than 17,000 ideas to compete in the competition.

The Toycathon competition is an inter-minis-

terial initiative organized by the Ministry of Education’s Innovation Cell with support from All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of MSME, Ministry of Textiles and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Conceived under the Aatma Nirbhar Bharat

Abhiyan’ initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the competition aims at challenging India’s innovative minds to conceptualize novel toys and games based on the bharatiya civilization, history, culture, mythology and ethos, while providing students, teachers and start-ups in the country an opportunity to win prizes worth Rs 50 lakh.

One new case takes COVID-19 tally of Andamans to 7,467



PORT BLAIR, JUL 1 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands reported just one new COVID-19 case, which took the tally in the Union Territory to 7,467, a health department official said on Thursday.

The fresh case was detected during contact tracing, he said.

The death toll remained at 128 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported in the last 24 hours, the official said.

At least 12 more people were cured of the disease during the period, taking the total number of recoveries in the

archipelago to 7,308.

The Union Territory now has 31 active cases.

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

Altogether, 1,77,605 people have been inoculated with 22,047 of them having received both doses of the vaccine.

Of the total number of immunised people, 51,561 beneficiaries in the age group of 18-44 years have been vaccinated till date.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 4,09,890 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the positivity rate stands at 1.82 per cent, the official added.

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I worked on how to vary pace after SA series, says spinner PoonamYadav



TAUNTON, JUL 1 (PTI): Senior India spinner PoonamYadav, who endured a dry spell in the previous series against South Africa, says she has learnt to vary her pace that helped her snare two wickets in the second ODI against England.

England beat India by five wickets in the second women's ODI to take a 2-0 series-clinching lead here on Wednesday.

Yadav was the pick of the bowlers for the visitors as she registered the figures of 2/63.

The wickets of captain Heather Knight and wicketkeeper Amy Jones were the 29-year-old's first since November 2019.

In the home series against South Africa earlier this year she had failed to strike even once in four matches.

"I have worked on my field placements and just my general approach. Players were playing me off the back foot, what matters is the pace and how the wicket is acting," Yadav, said during the post-match virtual press conference.

"I worked on varying my pace and I had time between these two series to work that out.

"I got a wicket after a long time. For any bowler, it matters to get among the wickets and contribute to the team and complete the spell. I was a little expensive today, I could have done better," she added.

Trailing the series 0-1, India were all out for 221 as England pacer Kate Cross took a five-wicket haul (5/34.) Skipper Mithali Raj (59) and ShafaliVerma (44)

RCB appoints senior Diageo executive Mishra as new chairman

BENGALURU, JUL 1 (PTI): IPL franchise Royal Challengers Bangalore on Thursday announced the appointment of senior Diageo executive Prathmesh Mishra as the team's new chairman.

Mishra is currently the chief commercial officer of Diageo India and has taken on the additional responsibility.

Royal Challengers Bangalore is owned by Royal Challengers Sports Private Limited, a subsidiary of liquor giant Diageo India.

Mishra takes over the role of RCB chairman from Anand-Kripalu, who ended his tenure as managing director and chief executive officer of Diageo India on June 30.

provided valuable contributions for the tourists.

In reply, Sophia Dunkley (73 not out) and Katherine Brunt (33 not out) shared 92 runs for the unbroken sixth wicket to chase down the target.

India put up a much improved show in the second ODI compared to the series opener earlier this week, but suffered a batting collapse once again.

"We lost wickets but still managed a decent total. We could have restricted them. Our bowlers did well too but we could have restricted them a little more. Our fielding was better this time.

"We are seeing collapses often, but I think they'll do better going forward," Yadav said.

Yadav felt that despite the loss, the Indian team's body language had improved compared to the previous outing.

"It was a bad day for the bowlers in the first ODI, but today we fought till the end and even though we lost, our body language was so better. Hopefully, we'll take that momentum forward and definitely register wins the coming matches," she said.

With the ODI World Cup in New Zealand scheduled to be played next year, Yadav said, We're experimenting with bowling plans and field positions for all bowlers in the matches we get now. We tried today too and some of those plans worked for us. This will be very important as we get closer to the World Cup.

Commenting on his expanded role, Mishra said, "Royal Challengers Bangalore is an integral part of Diageo India, and all of us share a profound passion for the team.

"I am excited about adding my shoulder to ViratKohli, Mike Hesson and Simon Katich and playing bold in everything we do, on and off, the field. I would also like to thank Anand for his tremendous contribution to RCB."

Mishra leads the commercial function at Diageo India and is part of its executive committee. He joined Diageo India in 2014 as the chief operations officer responsible for the Western region.

Williams, Paul emotional after Phoenix reaches NBA Finals

LOS ANGELES (AP): Monty Williams wasn't named NBA Coach of the Year, but he has something more monumental — a trip to the NBA Finals.

While Chris Paul was emotional Wednesday night after the Phoenix Suns eliminated the Los Angeles Clippers 130-103 in Game 6 of the Western Conference finals, Williams was taking joy in seeing his players celebrate.

"I really enjoyed watching him and his emotions after the game. I was like, I must be getting old now because I'm enjoying watching other people," Williams said. "It used to be about me. Now, I'm looking at everybody else having a good time and I'm like, man, I'm getting old."

Williams and Paul hugged after the game and took in the moment. Even though there were plenty of tears from Paul, there were none from Williams.

"It's just authentic. I just felt like hugging him. I think his parents were right behind us and he was emotional," Williams said. "I felt for him. I had my emotional time before the game."

Before the Suns took to the Staples Center court, Williams and assistant coach Randy Ayers were in the locker



room reflecting on their journey together — five years in New Orleans and the last two in Phoenix.

"Today about 2:30 we were in the locker room. It was just Randy and I. I was like, 'Man, Randy, we're so close.' And then Randy starts telling me what he felt about me, because he's been with me since day one in New Orleans. And I broke down before the game," Williams said.

"So I understood the emotions that Chris was dealing with. I just ran out of tears. I used all mine up about 2:30, 3 p.m. today. "I was gone, because Randy had just spoke from the heart to me about some things that we have been through. He's been with me every step of the way since New Orleans and now."

While Paul's 16-year journey to his first NBA

Finals will be one of the integral storylines, Williams also deserves his plaudits. When he was named coach on May 3, 2019, the Suns had just come off a 19-63 season in which they tied for the league's second-worst record.

Two years later, Phoenix broke a 10-year playoff drought by finishing with the league's second-best mark (51-21) in a pandemic-shortened season. Phoenix is just the third team in the last 45 years to improve from having one of the league's two worst records to a top-two mark in two seasons or less.

The Suns eliminated the defending champion Los Angeles Lakers in the first round in six games, swept league MVP Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets in four in the semifinals and dispatched the Clippers in

six to reach the NBA Finals for the third time in franchise history.

"He respects the position. And that's really gratifying for me, to see how much work he puts into it," Ayres said. "I told him today, like we'll have a situation that we want to talk about at the end of the day before we all go home. I know the next day he's put in the time to come up with a solution for that situation. And you respect that. I've seen that for seven years."

Williams showed last season he had a good nucleus of young talent with Devin Booker and Deandre Ayton after improving by 15 wins. By adding Jae Crowder and Paul, it put them over the top, along with an additional improvement of 17 wins.

"Monty coming in, building the culture,

him leading us with the preparation meets opportunity. That was these moments right here, and we took it and we ran with it," Booker said.

Along with having home-court advantage, the Suns should be plenty rested going into the NBA Finals. If the Eastern Conference finals between the Milwaukee Bucks and Atlanta Hawks ends in six games, the series will begin on Tuesday. If it goes the distance, it starts on July 8.

Phoenix should also be favored to capture its first championship. It last made the NBA Finals in 1993, losing to Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls in six games.

The Suns only other appearance was in 1976, a loss to the Boston Celtics in six games. That series still goes down in NBA Finals lore for the Celtics triple overtime win in Game 5.

"I'm happy and proud of our team. Monty not winning Coach of the Year, but we know who he is," Paul said, "They won two games in this series without me, and it just shows you how crazy it is. First series got the nerve thing. Win the second series, end up with COVID. It's been a lot and I want it not just for myself, but for everybody in that locker room."

It's time that rest and rotation policy is put behind us: England Test skipper Root



LONDON, JUL 1 (PTI): England Test skipper Joe Root says it's time that they set aside the much-debated rotation policy to field the strongest possible teams against India and later in the Ashes so that they can compete for the WTC title instead of watching the marquee contest on TV.

England and Wales Cricket Board's (ECB) rotation policy became a hot topic in world cricket when they did not travel to India with their full strength squad earlier this year and lost the series 1-2 to got out of the WTC final race.

The new cycle of the World Test Championship (WTC) will begin with the five Test

series between India and England from August 4 in Nottingham.

"We are coming into a period of time now where rest and rotation is put behind us," Root was quoted as saying by 'ESPNcricinfo'.

"Hopefully, if everyone is fit, we are going to have our best team available for what is to follow. That's really exciting and something I'm very much looking forward to."

Jonny Bairstow and Mark Wood did not compete in the first two Tests against India but took field in the fourth test. Their first-choice keeper Jos Buttler also returned home after the series-opener.

Root is hoping it won't be same story this time.

"We have ten very hard Test matches against two brilliant opposition coming up but it is a great opportunity for us to play some strong cricket and if everyone is fit and available we will have a good team ourselves."

Root contended that the tough series against India will be ideal preparation for the Ashes and therefore they need to have the best players available.

"I'd like to think that, over the next five Test matches, we'll be trying to play our strongest side or have our strongest squad available for those games. This is, I suppose, what you do it for: to ready yourself for this lead-in and for in partic-

ular that Ashes. To make sure everyone's peaking for that, and these big games.

"Watching the WTC final and not being part of it, it makes you want to be a part of something quite special like that. We have an opportunity now to go a bit further and better than we did the first time out. I'm looking forward to hopefully starting well with a full squad of players to pick from."

Many former England cricketers including Kevin Pietersen, Ian Bell and Michael Vaughan had flayed the ECB for not fielding their best side for an important series against India.

Another issue that worried Root was that the players are allowed

to travel to Australia with their families.

It is understood that it would depend largely on Cricket Australia since they have to get exemptions and if they fail to procure that, ECB will be forced to continue with their rotation policy to keep giving players enough family time.

"I really hope the families will be in Australia. It's a really important aspect of that tour. With the amount of cricket that we've got it's going to be really important that that is the case.

"I can't give you an answer. It's not something I know as fact or not as yet, but I'm very hopeful that will be the case.

Captaincy ambitions of seniors fuelled revolt against me in 2009: Younis

KARACHI, JUL 1 (PTI): Former Pakistan skipper Younis Khan has claimed that the 2009 players revolt against him had its roots in captaincy ambitions of seniors like Shahid Afridi.

Younis claimed that the revolt was not carried out because the players were unhappy with his captaincy style or strong attitude.

"If the players had problems with me they could have spoken to me. They claimed that they didn't want me removed as captain but just wanted the cricket board to speak to me to change my attitude," Younis told a TV channel.

"Then how is it that when the player (s) met with the then PCB Chairman, Ejaz Butt one senior player, apparently Afridi demanded the captain be changed. To me it was about captaincy ambitions," said highest Test run getter for Pakistan.

Younis also confirmed that a player (said to be Umar Akmal) had come to his room to ask for the Holy Quran and took it saying he wanted it because some players wanted to recite some Sarah's before an important match.

The former captain said later the same Holy Quran was used to ask the players to take oath on it that they would not reveal anything that was discussed at the revolting players meeting in South Africa during the Champions Trophy.

Ironically after Younis resigned in late 2009, it was Misbah-ul-haq and Afridi who captained Pakistan in red and white ball cricket.

Younis said he had spent the last four years of his career with Pakistan remaining in his room all the time and just focussing on his cricket.

He was also asked about the infamous incident when in 2016 he abruptly announced his retirement from ODIs on the day before a match against England.

"It was not abrupt at all. I had made a decision beforehand I would retire from ODIs as I was not selected in the ODI eleven for the last two years.

"On the night before the match chief selector, Haroon Rasheed called me and I told him I was thinking about retirement from ODIs and he turned around and told me rudely that it was up to me but he had got me selected for the series against England and I (Younis) should just listen to the team management and play as they wanted.

"I was very upset with his tone and that is why I announced my retirement the next morning.

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Israel scrambles to curb jump in COVID infections

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL (AP): Israel, a world leader in coronavirus vaccinations, reported its highest daily infection rate in three months as it scrambles to contain the spread of the new delta variant.

Authorities are racing to vaccinate children and are considering tighter travel restrictions at the country's main airport.

The Health Ministry on Thursday reported 307 new cases on Wednesday, the highest in nearly three months and a rise from 293 newly-diagnosed cases a day earlier. The health ministry reportedly expects those numbers to jump in coming days, raising concerns that Israel is plunging back toward a crisis.

In recent months, Israel has reopened businesses, schools and event venues, lifting nearly all restrictions after it inoculated some 85% of the adult population. It's now seen as an early-warning system of sorts for other nations.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Tuesday announced a drive to inoculate thousands of children by mid-month.

Though worrying, the trend still shows little uptick when it comes to deaths from the virus. In the past two weeks, the ministry recorded only one. In Israel, 5.1 million people, among its population of 9.3 million, have received the required double dose of vaccinations. Another 400,000 have received at least one dose.

Israel recorded its highest number of vaccinations of children this week and has re-imposed a rule requiring people to wear masks indoors. Bennett for the first time appointed a coronavirus commissioner to manage arrivals at the main gateway into Israel, Ben Gurion International Airport, which he called "a huge national vulnerability."

Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked on Wednesday said officials are prepared to close the airport if the trend worsens.

Israel's Haaretz newspaper reported that officials are considering bringing back the "Green Pass" system that differentiates between vaccinated and non-vaccinated citizens in access to certain venues and activities.

Israel's government last week postponed the planned reopening of the country to vaccinated tourists over concerns about the spread of the delta variant.

Israel was initially set to reopen its borders to vaccinated visitors on Thursday, after having largely closed the country during the pandemic. It had already started allowing groups of vaccinated tourists to enter in May.

But after a rise in infections over the past 10 days, the government pushed that date to Aug. 1.

With so few virus deaths, Australians debate vaccine risks

CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA (AP): Australia has weathered the pandemic far better than many nations — recording just a single coronavirus death since last October — but its success means many Australians are not in a rush to get vaccinated and that could delay the country's return to normalcy.

Concerns are growing about the economic cost to Australia of being left behind by countries that suffered far higher death tolls, but urgently embraced vaccines and are increasingly opening up.

Most of Australia's pandemic success, after all, can be attributed to the continued closure of the isolated continent's border, something that is unlikely to change until far more than the current 6% of the population is vaccinated.

But with relatively few cases of the virus and so few deaths, many in Australia are questioning whether the slight health risks to young adults of the widely available AstraZeneca vaccine make it worth it.

It's a debate that divided politicians and medical experts this week at a time when nearly half of Australia's 26 million people are living under lockdown measures due to the emergence of new virus clusters mostly blamed on the delta variant, which is thought to be more contagious.

The AstraZeneca shot in Australia currently is recommended only for people older than 60 because of the risk of rare blood clotting in younger people. The only alternative registered in Australia is Pfizer,



which unlike the locally made AstraZeneca is imported and in short supply.

AstraZeneca had been recommended for all adults until a 48-year-old Australian died from blood clots in April. The vaccine was then recommended for people older than 50 until a 52-year-old died in May.

That's more than the single death from COVID-19 since last year, an 80-year-old man who died in April after being infected overseas and diagnosed in hotel quarantine.

Many people are refusing to take their second AstraZeneca jab, recommended three months after the first, because of the evolving safety advice. Many have canceled appointments for their first shots.

In most parts of the world, the risk-benefit assessment is stacked in favor of taking AstraZeneca. But that balance is different in Australia.

The Australian government on

Monday gave all adults the AstraZeneca option if their doctors agree to administer the jab. The government also indemnified the doctors who administer the shot against lawsuits.

The leader of the Australian military's pandemic response, Lt. Gen. John Frewen, said Pfizer was restricted to people older than 40 because of limited supplies.

"It's really important that Australians have now got a choice about whether they make an informed decision about accessing AstraZeneca," Frewen said on Thursday.

"We've got AstraZeneca available and I think Australians who want to should be able to have a conversation with their G.P. about whether they access AstraZeneca now or whether they wait for another vaccine later on," Frewen added, referring to general practice doctors.

But fewer than 3,000 adults under 40 had taken up the opportunity for a first dose of AstraZeneca by Thursday.

Queensland state Chief Health Officer Jeannette Young was accused by critics of scaremongering when she said on Wednesday that with only 42 coronavirus cases active in the state, AstraZeneca was not worth the risk for younger adults.

"I don't want an 18-year-old in Queensland dying from a clotting illness who, if they got COVID, probably wouldn't die," Young said.

She was contradicted by former Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Australia Nick Coates, who said younger Australians were at greater risk of dying of COVID-19 than they were from AstraZeneca side effects.

Young was "unfortunately out on a very lonely limb there," Coates told Seven Network.

But Prof. Chris Blyth, the co-chair

of the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunization that advised the government to recommend Pfizer for those younger than 60, said few young adults should take AstraZeneca.

"I do not believe at this stage that young people should be receiving AstraZeneca at this stage unless their circumstances press for that," Blyth told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "There are some situations where that would be warranted, but they are quite small."

The alternative to AstraZeneca is to wait for more Pfizer or an as-yet-unregistered Moderna vaccine contracted to be delivered between October and December.

Australia has been relatively successful in containing clusters throughout the pandemic, registering fewer than 31,000 cases and 910 deaths total.

Australia introduced extraordinarily tough border restrictions in March 2020 that prevent Australian citizens and permanent residents from leaving the country as well as foreigners from arriving except under limited circumstances.

The government forecasts that normal flights won't resume until mid-2022, which frightens business groups.

Those involved in international education, Australia's third-largest export industry, have warned that would mean overseas students would turn to universities in other countries next year and stay with those institutions throughout their courses for years.

Pandemic tourism: Thailand launches Phuket "sandbox" plan

PHUKET, JUL 1 (AP): Thailand embarked on an ambitious but risky plan Thursday that it hopes will breathe new life into a tourism industry devastated by the pandemic, opening the popular resort island of Phuket to fully vaccinated foreigners from lower-risk countries.

As the first flight arrived, airport fire trucks blasted their water canons to form an arch over the Etihad jet from Abu Dhabi as it taxied to its gate.

Leaving the airport, Frenchman Bruno Souillard said he had been dreaming for a year of returning to Thailand and jumped at the opportunity.

I am very, very happy, the 60-year-old tourist said.

The so-called Phuket sandbox program comes as coronavirus infections are surging in Thailand, including a significant number of cases of the Delta variant, and many have questioned if it's too early to woo tourists back, and whether they'll come in significant numbers in any case due to the restrictions they'll still face.

But the number of new cases on the island itself is extremely low, in the single digits daily, and more than 70 per cent of its residents are fully vaccinated.

The government is gambling that travelers will be willing to put up with coronavirus-related regulations for the opportunity for a beach holiday after being cooped up in their home countries for months.

Before the pandemic, the tourism sector made up some 20 per cent of Thailand's economy, and



95 per cent of Phuket's income.

The resort island off the southern coast saw fewer than a half million visitors in the first five months, and almost no foreigners, compared to more than 3 million during the same period last year including some 2 million foreigners.

In a nod to the importance of the sandbox plan, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha flew to Phuket to be on hand in person for the launch.

Last-minute hitches in some of the program details and cautions from authorities that if cases start to rise on the island more restrictions may be needed or it may have to be shut down entirely meant some cancellations before it even began.

Fewer than 250 international travelers were expected on the first day compared to the initial target of 1,500.

But as the kinks are worked out and people report their first-hand experiences, authorities are hopeful for a steady increase in the numbers. From July 1-15, there are currently 1,101 hotel bookings for a total of 13,116 room overnights.

Travelers to other parts of Thailand are subject to a strict 14-day hotel room quarantine, but under the sandbox

plan, visitors to Phuket will be allowed to roam the entire island where they can lounge on the white beaches, jet ski and enjoy evenings eating out in restaurants, although clubs and bars remain closed.

Only visitors from countries considered no higher than low or medium risk a list currently including most of Europe and the Mideast, the U.S., Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand are permitted, and they must fly in directly to Phuket, though plans are in the works to allow carefully controlled transfers through Bangkok's airport.

Following the inaugural flight from Abu Dhabi, passengers were expected to arrive later Thursday from Qatar, Israel and Singapore.

Adult foreign visitors must provide proof of two vaccinations, a negative COVID-19 test no more than 72 hours before departure, and proof of an insurance policy that covers treatment for the virus of at least USD100,000, among other things. Once on the island, they have to follow mask and distancing regulations and take three COVID-19 tests at their own expense about USD300 total and show negative results.

After 14 days, visitors can travel elsewhere in Thailand.

15 killed in Haiti's capital amid spike in violence

PORT AU PRINCE (HAITI), JUL 1 (AP): A shooting rampage down a main street running through a neighbourhood in Haiti's capital killed at least 15 people, including a journalist and a political activist, national Police Chief Leon Charles said Wednesday.

He said the attack late Tuesday was still under investigation and gave no details on whether it was staged by a single per-

son or multiple shooters. Bodies were found scattered on sidewalks along a main road in Delmas 32, which is a bustling community within Port-au-Prince.

Charles said the shootings occurred just hours after a spokesman for a group of disgruntled police officers known as Fantom 509 was slain in that same area. He blamed allies of Fantom 509 for the mass killing but did not

provide any evidence.

The institution cannot tolerate these acts of reprisal in any form, said Charles, who heads Haiti's National Police.

Members of Fantom 509 could not be immediately reached for comment. The dead included Diego Charles, who worked for Radio Vision 2000, and activist Antoinette Duclair. The killings shocked many in Haiti and come as gang violence es-

calates elsewhere in the capital in recent months.

The U.S. Embassy condemned the slayings in a statement, saying it was deeply concerned by the loss of life and general insecurity. "The United States urges the government of Haiti to protect its citizens by countering the proliferation of gangs and by holding the perpetrators of violence and their accomplices accountable, the embassy said.

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Heart of 'Toofaan' lies in its relationships: FarhanAkhtar

NEW DELHI, JUL 1 (PTI): "Toofaan" promises a cinematic storm with its high on adrenaline boxing sequences, but actor FarhanAkhtar says the personal relationships of the characters is the core of the sports drama.

Akhtar underwent intense training to prep for the role of Aziz Ali aka AjuBhai, a goon who goes on to become a national level boxer, for his second film with director RakeyshOmprakashMehra, following another sports-based movie, "BhaagMilkhaBhaag" in 2013.

The physical aspect of learning a new discipline like boxing was "very challenging", the preparation for which tested his mental strength to the point that he wanted to throw in the towel.

"Learning a new discipline, a new sport, trying to be good at it requires a lot of focus and training. Fortunately, I had a great team. So they really worked me through all of it. But mentally you have to be really, really strong.

"There are times when you are in the middle of your training, where you are being pushed, where your body is wanting to quit but it's really your mind that's kind of telling you what it is that you're doing this for. Every ounce you give in there is to serve something which is the larger story of the film," Akhtar told PTI in a group interview over Zoom.

The film also stars "Super 30" actor Mrunal Thakur, who plays doctor Ananya and Aziz's love interest, and veteran actor PareshRawal as Nana Prabhu, his boxing coach.Akhtar said the "driving force" of "Toofaan" is the incredible journey that Aziz, Ananya and

Nana Prabhu are on.

"There's a lot that happens. The sport is really the backdrop... it's very exciting, of course, it's cinematic, there's adrenaline, all that stuff. But the heart of the film lies in the relationships between these characters," the 47-year-old actor added.

"Toofaan", produced by Akhtar and his work partner RiteshSidhwani of Excel Entertainment and Mehra's ROMP Pictures, is slated to be released digitally on Amazon Prime Video on July 16.

The actor, who produces acclaimed series like "Mirzapur", "Made in Heaven" and "Inside Edge" for the streamer, said it was about time the film was released.

"Rakeysh, Ritesh and I felt that it was the right time for the film. We found an amazing partner in Amazon that really has pulled all the stops in terms of promoting the film."

The release of the movie was deferred amid the surge in the COVID-19 cases in the country. It was previously scheduled to start streaming on Amazon from May 21.

"What is an artiste most greedy for? You want people to be able to watch your work, irrespective of the medium," Akhtar said.

Given the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital release is giving the audience an opportunity to watch the films from the safety of their home, he added.

"A good film will be a good film if you like it, wherever you watch it. It's the lasting impact of the film that truly tells you what it means to you."

The over-the-top platforms (OTT) and theatres are very different experiences and they will coexist.

"When you go to the theatre, you are on some level serving the social side of you... We are social animals, we enjoy being around other people and community experiences. Be it films, concerts, fairs, people like having shared experiences. That will never go away. I don't think theatres are going to go anywhere. I hope when things open up again, they do really well."

As an audience member, Akhtar said, he likes to have the option of watching a film in a cinema hall or at home on a digital platform.

"As much as I like watching something in the comfort of my home, there is a time I like to go out once in a while and be in that dark room with a crowd. Why can't I have both? Why do I have to pick one? Both will exist."

Post "BhaagMilkhaBhaag", the National Award-winning film based on the life of the late legendary athlete Milkha Singh, does he want to star in the biopic of any other personality?

"The reason it is difficult to answer (this question) is that when you say a name, it kind of negates the many other people who would have incredible stories," Akhtar said, adding as a viewer, he would love to see films on Kishore Kumar, Guru Dutt and Fearless Nadia.

Written by AnjumRajabali and Vijay Maurya, "Toofaan" also features SupriyaPathakKapur and HussainDalal.

The Big Pic



BREAKFAST DATE! Actress Olivia Culpo stepped out in Los Angeles.

James Franco settles for \$2.2M in school sex misconduct suit

LOS ANGELES (AP): James Franco and his co-defendants agreed to pay \$2.2 million to settle a lawsuit alleging he intimidated students at an acting and film school he founded into gratuitous and exploitative sexual situations, court filings made public Wednesday showed.

The two sides first reached a deal to settle the class-action suit in February, but it took several months to resolve details, and the dollar amount was not previously disclosed.

Actresses and ex-students Sarah Tither-Kaplan and Toni Gaal, who first filed the lawsuit in October 2019 that was joined by many others, alleged that at his now-defunct school, Studio 4, Franco pushed his students into performing in increasingly explicit sex scenes on camera in an "orgy type setting" that went far beyond those acceptable on Hollywood film sets.

The two sides also agreed to release a joint statement.

"While Defendants continue to deny the allegations in the Complaint, they acknowledge that Plaintiffs have raised important issues; and all parties strongly believe that now is a critical time to focus on addressing the mistreatment of women in Hollywood," the statement said. "All agree on the need to make sure that no one in the entertainment industry — regardless of sex, race, religion,



disability, ethnicity, background, gender or sexual orientation — faces discrimination, harassment or prejudice of any kind."

It alleged that Franco "sought to create a pipeline of young women who were subjected to his personal and professional sexual exploitation in the name of education," and that students were led to believe roles in Franco's films would be available to those who went along.

Franco's production company Rabbit Bandini and his partners including Vince Jolivet and Jay Davis were also named as defendants.

The settlement includes "non-eco-

nomic" terms that have not been made public.

It has been submitted to a Los Angeles judge for approval.

Before filing the lawsuit, Tither-Kaplan aired her allegations of sexual misconduct against Franco along with other women in the Los Angeles Times after Franco won a Golden Globe Award for "The Disaster Artist" in early 2018, when the wave of the #MeToo movement was first sweeping across Hollywood.

The Associated Press does not typically identify people who say they have been sexually abused, but often will if they come forward publicly.

Michael Stuhlbarg to star in 'The Staircase' series

LOS ANGELES, JUL 1 (PTI): "Call Me By Your Name" actor Michael Stuhlbarg is the latest addition to the ensemble cast of the HBO Max limited series "The Staircase".

The upcoming true crime show revolves around crime novelist Michael Peterson, played by Colin Firth, his sprawling North Carolina family and the suspicious death of his wife, Kathleen (Toni Collette).

According to Deadline, Stuhlbarg will play David Rudolf, Peterson's criminal defense attorney after he is accused of murdering his wife.

The series is based on the docuseries, various books and reports on the case of Peterson, who was convicted in 2003 of murdering Kathleen two years earlier. The charge was reduced to manslaughter in 2017, and Peterson subsequently was released from prison.

He had claimed his wife died after falling down the stairs at their home after consuming alcohol and Valium, but an autopsy concluded she died from multiple injuries, including blows to the back of her head with a blunt object.

Stuhlbarg joins previously announced cast members Juliette Binoche, Rosemarie DeWitt, Parker Posey, Sophie Turner, Odessa Young, Dane DeHaan and Olivia DeJonge in the series.



The eight-part drama comes from director Antonio Campos of "Christine" fame and Maggie Cohn, known for her work on "American Crime Story".

Showrunners Campos and Cohn also serve as writers and executive producers on the series, which is a co-production between HBO Max and Annapurna TV.

Stuhlbarg most recently appeared in the feature film "Shirley" and will reunite with his "Call Me By Your Name" director Luca Guadagnino and co-star TimotheeChalamet in "Bones and All".

ARIES:

We all have a sacred purpose. A reason for living. A reason for being. And sometimes, in order to align our lives with this purpose, we have to make certain sacrifices. Now is such a time in your life, Aries. A time when you will have to let go of something sacred to you in order to cross over to the other side. Don't underestimate the power of non-attachment.

TAURUS:

It's true that things haven't always worked out for you in the past. It's true that the Love Gods have let you down more than once. But, that is not a good enough reason to hold on to the negativity. Open your eyes to what the Universe is offering you. This will help you realise that you have the chance to build a fulfilling relationship today.

GEMINI:

It's one of those days, Gemini. You're one with the flow and are feeling inspired to bring a little more art and little more magic into everything you say and do. So, connect with your inner child in a conscious manner and know that spontaneity is your most sacred gift to Spirit. As such, love and romance are also likely to take centre stage. If you're in the early stages of a relationship, give yourself the permission to express what's in your heart freely, and know that your lover will meet you halfway.

CANCER:

When our karmic ties are thick, we experience pain and suffering through our relationships. Everyday feels like a challenge and there are times we'd rather disengage from the drama by running away to the hills. The good thing is, a lot of the debts are being cleared, making way for healthier relationships. So, let go of the past baggage and allow yourself to bask in the love and affection. We're not saying everything will be picture-perfect from now on. We are, however, reminding you that things will get better from here.

LEO:

There are things we do for love and there are things we do for money, Leo. It's time for you to find a balance between the two. It's natural to feel worried about how this shift will affect you. But the truth is, by doubting the divine plan, you are giving into the lack mentality. By showing up for what you love, on the other hand, you're committing to staying in the energy of passion and inviting the energy of both wealth and abundance into your world.

VIRGO:

Your love is medicine, Virgo. An elixir so sweet that it can bring hope to the lonely and the broken-hearted. But before you pour into the cup of another, fill your own. Making yourself a priority is half the work done. Speaking of which, you're likely to feel drawn towards all kinds of ancient rituals this week, especially the ones that focus on honouring the divine feminine

energy within. So, get creative in your apothecary. Make lotions and potions that make you feel good about yourself. Who knows? This could just turn into a lucrative business opportunity.

LIBRA:

Every time you accept something that's less than what you deserve, you end up dishonouring a part of yourself, Libra. As a result, you create from a place of lack rather than abundance, which in turn negates the quality of your work. What the cards are urging you to do today is observe all the ways in which you could be betraying yourself.

SCORPIO:

There are people who make peace with living a mundane existence, but you are *not* one of those people, Scorpio. Courage has always been your middle name. So, pay attention to the guidance that is coming through from the unseen realms as you take action without delay. The unknown is a scary place, but it's also the void in which you will be able to birth your creations. We believe in your ability to start a revolution. Do *you* believe that for yourself?

SAGITTARIUS:

The future is bright, Sagittarius, and the time to start working towards your long-term goals is now. Not all the actions you are being called to take will make sense on paper, and that's okay. Let go of the need to seek external validation, even from those you admire.

Keeping in mind that the journey you are on is yours and yours alone will help you take a step in the right direction without an ounce of fear.

Capricorn:

We could survive this journey on the earth plane by ourselves, if we wanted to. But where's the fun in that? Today, the cards are bringing your attention to the sacred ties you share with your co-passengers and all the ways in which these ties make your life sweeter. So, take a moment to offer a prayer of gratitude for all of these relationships as you honour them in your own special way.

Aquarius:

The hero's journey is seldom an easy one. There are many, many challenges he is likely to face on the road to greatness. Twists and turns that threaten to throw him off course, for instance. But, this is all a part of the plan. The plan that's helping him become bulletproof and commit to a life of service.

PISCES:

Some calculate their wealth in terms of the digits in their bank, but you're one of those who understands that your true assets are love, abundance and happiness. Not to mention, the soul connections that enhance the quality of your life and inspire you to be a better version of yourself. So, offer a prayer of gratitude for all that you have and all that you are yet to receive from the Universe.